

British Airborne School

CAPTAIN ERIC H. COVNER

The British Airborne School bears little resemblance to its United States counterpart in either organization or training. For one thing, in Britain the Royal Air Force, not the Army, has always been in charge of British military parachuting.

England's Number 1 Parachute Training School (No. 1 PTS) was first formed in July 1940 at RAF Ringway and designated the Central Landing Establishment. It was tasked with training British airborne forces for wartime assaults, which would subsequently include such famous operations as Normandy, Arnhem, and the Rhine Crossing. With the success of the School and the wartime growth of the airborne concept, additional training centers were needed, and schools were then established in India, the Middle East, and Italy.

At today's No. 1 PTS, now located at RAF Brize Norton, parachute jump instructors (PJIs), drawn from the Physical Training Branch of the RAF, conduct all the training. These instructors are also attached to all British airborne forces to perform jumpmaster duties (air dispatching) and conduct refresher training.

The School offers two introductory courses, a two-week course for reservists entering the airborne units of the Territorial Army and a longer basic course for regular soldiers. Administration, discipline, and billeting for all students, regardless of service, is the responsibility of the Parachute Course Administrative Unit (PCAU), which is also located at Brize Norton and commanded by an Army major. The PCAU cadre are on airborne status but are not involved with the training programs.

The students, organized into ten-man sticks, have one instructor who remains with them throughout the course. There is no "harrassment" or physical training at No. 1 PTS, the students having been mentally and physically conditioned in P Company of the Parachute Regiment before attending the School. The result is an atmosphere that is relaxed, yet efficient and conducive to training.

BALLOONS

Except for the mock tower, each training apparatus is located within a single hangar, including an extremely good mockup of a C-130 fuselage. Following three days of ground training, along with several lectures and films, the students make their first jump from a balloon at 800 feet at RAF Hullavington. The balloon, similar to a World War II barrage balloon, has a car suspended underneath that accommodates four jumpers and an instructor. The balloon jump, with the absence of normal sensations such as aircraft flight and engine noise, is a novel experience. It is also a method that permits multiple jumps in a short time. The low drop altitude, coupled with a longer opening than on an aircraft jump, results in a very short descent. Jumpers are graded on each jump by a PJI located on the drop zone and are subsequently debriefed upon returning to No. 1 PTS.

Before its first jump from an aircraft, the class receives an "air experience flight" in a C-130. For this flight the soldiers are rigged with the same parachutes they will use on their

first jump. This flight is the final training the students receive before they jump, and it is designated to familiarize them with every event they will experience on the aircraft jump itself short of the actual exit. All the commands are given (except for "GO," of course), and each soldier moves to the door and places an arm or leg into the slipstream so that he will understand the need for a vigorous exit.

British jump equipment and commands differ from those of their American counterparts, and consequently, result in different procedures. The main parachute, the PX MK IV, can be steered with each lift web and is equipped with an anti-inversion net. The canvas harness, however, is dated and has no capewells that can be opened to quickly collapse the parachute: the jumper must haul in the suspension lines and the canopy to keep from being dragged along the ground. (Although a newer nylon harness has been developed, it is used only for balloon jumping. The harness was designed with capewells, but they have been inactivated for safety reasons.)

The reserve parachute (the same reserve is used on each jump) features a "drive panel" in the rear, which is similar to the cut-out section in an MC1-1B parachute. This modification was made to force the reserve forward and as far away from the main chute as possible to prevent entanglement when the reserve has to be activated. The reserve handle is on the top rather than the side, which means the jumper exits with both arms folded over the top of the reserve.

Aircraft jump commands are as

follows: At "Prepare for Action," the jumpers release and extend their safety belts; at "Stand Up," they stand and hook their static lines onto a metal clip attached to the cable, grip a leather strap attached to it, and do not touch the static line again. The next commands are "Check Equipment," and "Tell Off for Equipment Check." On "Action Stations," each stick moves toward its assigned door with the first jumper turning into the door and placing his leading hand on the door frame, his other arm across the top of the reserve. At the command "Red On," the lead arm is placed over the other, and approximately ten seconds later the green light comes on and the command "GO" is given. The lead jumper takes two steps on exiting. Only the first jumper in a stick touches the aircraft door. Each of the others releases his strap and folds the arm that has been holding the strap over the other arm, which is already on top of the reserve, as he turns into the door. A three-second "compulsory

count" takes place before a jumper checks his canopy and conducts all around observation.

Steering the parachute away from other jumpers is emphasized and practiced on every jump. Also emphasized is looking at the ground during descent and turning the feet in the proper landing attitude, depending on the direction of drift. For example, in a right forward landing the toes are turned upward at a 45-degree angle to the left to facilitate the proper initiation of a right-front PLF (parachute landing fall). For a rear landing, the toes are turned in the direction of drift.

The initial aircraft jumps are made with single sticks of six jumpers; the later ones involve larger sticks and simultaneous exits from both jump doors. During simultaneous exits, the jumpers on one side wear white parachutes while those on the other side wear green, which enables the PJs on the drop zone to observe them better. Eight jumps are offered, in-

cluding night jumps and equipment jumps, with ground training continuing between jumps.

No. 1 PTS teaches all aspects of military parachuting from basic static line through advanced high-altitude free-fall. It has graduated more than one million paratroopers and has served as the model for the airborne schools of numerous nations. The superb training and the international reputation of Britain's Airborne School is a tribute to the professionalism of its cadre and to the soundness of its motto, "Knowledge Disperses Fear."



CAPTAIN ERIC H. COVNER attended the British Airborne School late in 1982. He is now assigned to the U.S. Army Training Center at Fort Dix. A graduate of the University of Massachusetts, he has served with the 1st Infantry Division (Forward) and the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

A Heavy Mortar for A Light Division

CAPTAIN ARTHUR A. DURANTE

The 82d Airborne Division is one of the finest fighting units in the United States Army. It can move rapidly to almost any place in the world and can be ready to fight when it gets there.

But I believe it would be a more effective fighting force if 120mm Tampella mortars were substituted for the 105mm howitzers in the division's field artillery units and for the

4.2-inch mortars in its heavy mortar platoons.

No major organizational changes would be involved. The crew members in the division artillery's nine Tampella mortar batteries, for example, would continue to hold artillery MOSs and to conduct field artillery indirect fire support missions, and the heavy mortar platoons armed with the

Tampella would remain organic parts of the division's nine infantry battalions and its one armor battalion. The Tampella, therefore, would be used in more than the infantry support role the venerable 4.2-inch mortar now performs at the infantry battalion level.

The Tampella, which is produced in Israel, is available in a towed version