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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "D", 2ND BATTALION, 508TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT (82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION) AT NIJMEGEN, HOLLAND, 17-18 SEPTEMBER 1944.
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN, EUROPEAN THEATRE OF OPERATIONS)
(Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: A PARACHUTE INFANTRY COMPANY SECURING AND HOLDING A GLIDER LANDING ZONE.

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO I

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INTRODUCTION

By the middle of September, 1944, the Allied Armies in Europe had advanced to the line shown on Map A, with the north flank generally along the Holland-Belgium border, and the entire front pressing ever closer to the German border. (1) Hopes were high that the German Army would collapse entirely, and that the war would be ended before the year was out. (2)

However, as the Allies had pushed rapidly across France, their logistical difficulties had increased. The number of troops to be supplied was growing daily, and the supply line was growing ever longer. The port facilities at Cherbourg were working night and day but could not meet the demand. The Germans still held the ports of Calais, Dunkirk, and Boulogne, and controlled the outlet to the sea at Antwerp. LeHavre had been captured on 10 September, but required extensive repairs before it could be used. (3)

The French rail system had been so thoroughly demolished by the Allied Air Force that it could contribute but little to the transportation of the thousands of tons of supplies so necessary to maintain the continued offensive. (4)

Gasoline and food were the two most critical items of supply. "On September 11 and 12, the First Army had to sup-

(1) A-7, p. 57; (2) A-5, p. 69; (3) A-7, Map 11; (4) A-6, p. 223.

plement its ration with seventy-five thousand captured rations." Other units were experiencing similar difficulties, and the prospects for the future appeared to be even worse. (5)

Faced with these discomforting circumstances, the Allied High Command decided to mass its dwindling resources for a quick and what was hoped to be a decisive blow which would lead to the early end of the war in Europe. (6)

OPERATION "MARKET-GARDEN"

The Allied Armies on the western front were to suspend their further advance and divert all possible supplies to the British Second Army, which was to be prepared to drive north to the Zuider Zee, (See Map A) cutting off the German Armies in western Holland, and placing them in position to strike directly into the heart of central Germany. In this way, the formidable Siegfried defenses would not have to be breached, and the entire German right flank would be turned. (7)

To assist in this plan, an Airborne Corps, consisting of two American and one British airborne divisions, and the Polish Parachute Brigade, was placed under the command of Second Army. (8)

"Second Army planned to have this Corps, flying from airfields in England, establish a carpet of airborne troops across the waterways on the planned axis of advance through Eindhoven to Grave, Nijmegen, and Arnhem, culminating in a bridgehead force north of Arnhem." (9) (Map A) This Airborne Corps was to strike at the same time the Second Army

(5) A-5, p. 70; (6) A-5, p. 70; (7) A-5, p. 71-72; A-12, p. 67; (8) (9) A-6, p. 226-227.

launched its drive to the north. It was planned that the linkup should be completed by the evening of D plus 3. (10) The airborne effort was given the code name "Market". The operations of the ground forces, in establishing the all important linking corridor, was given the code name "Garden". Thus came into being Operation "Market-Garden", which was scheduled to be launched 17 September 1944. (11)

1ST AIRBORNE CORPS PLAN

1st Airborne Corps, commanded by Lt. Gen. F. A. M. Browning (British), gave the 1st British Airborne Division and the Polish Brigade the mission of securing the bridge across the Lek River at Arnhem. The American 82nd Airborne Division was to seize the bridges at Grave and Nijmegen, and to organize and defend the high ground between Groesbeek and Nijmegen. The American 101st Airborne Division was given the mission of securing the canal bridges in the vicinity of Eindhoven. (12) (Map A)

Due to insufficient troop-carrier aircraft to lift the Corps in its entirety, the two United States airborne divisions were limited to taking in three regimental combat teams each on D Day, the rest to follow on D plus 1 and D plus 2. The 1st British Airborne Division was to land one parachute brigade and two thirds of the glider brigade on "D Day", the rest to land on D plus 1. The Polish Brigade was scheduled to come in on D plus 2. (13)

TERRAIN

The area in which the 82nd Airborne Division was re-

(10) Personal knowledge; (11) A-6, p. 229; Personal knowledge; (12) (13) A-6, p. 227.

quired to operate is dominated by a "T" shaped hill system, which extends from the Maas River to the Waal River (See Map B). The bar of the "T" extends from Wyler west to Nijmegen. This hill mass is intersected by a north-south ridge line, which extends to the south of Groesbeek. (14) It is this area that is referred to as the Groesbeek Heights. It enjoyed particular tactical significance due to its being the only high ground in the entire country of Holland. (15) The rest of the division area is generally flat, and is criss-crossed by many small canals. Both areas are generally heavily wooded, with thick, tangled underbrush. East of the ridge, however, there is a large cleared farming area, which affords excellent observation and unobstructed fields for the landing of glider and parachute troops.

An excellent road net extends throughout the entire area.

Three main roads and two railroads converge on the beautiful city of Nijmegen, whose prewar population of nearly 100,000 remained definitely pro-allied despite active occupation by German training forces. (16) Because of the numerous rivers and canals, all bridges in the division area assumed great tactical importance, particularly the huge five-span steel and concrete highway bridge across the Waal River. (17)

MISSION AND PLAN OF 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION

The mission of the 82nd Airborne Division was to seize,

(14) Personal knowledge; See Map Nijmegen; (15) A-9, p. 43; (16) A-9, p. 43; (17) A-12, p. 67.

organize, and defend, the Groesbeek Heights, seize the Grave Bridge across the Maas River, and finally to seize the Nijmegen Bridge across the Waal River. See Map B. Although it was not prescribed by higher headquarters, equally important was the seizure of at least one of the bridges across the Maas-Waal Canal, in order that the division might have interior lines of communication. (18)

A factor which greatly influenced the method by which this mission was to be executed was the fact that the division was limited to bringing in on "D" Day but 50 of the 1002 gliders carrying combat elements of the division. Due to the limited air lift, 450 gliders were to be towed in on D plus 1, and the remaining 402 on D plus 2. This fact also required that, in addition to the missions already assigned, a suitable landing zone would have to be secured and held, pending the arrival of the gliders bearing the 325th Glider Regiment, the division artillery, and the division engineers. (19)

The plan was to drop the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, less one company, on Drop Zone "O", (See Map B) north of the Maas River just east of Grave. Company E of that regiment was to jump south of the Maas River. The Grave Bridge was thus to be attacked from both directions, while the remainder of the regiment attacked the four bridges across the Maas-Waal Canal from the west. (20)

The 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, plus the 50 gliders containing anti-tank guns, signal equipment, and division headquarters personnel, was to drop on Drop Zone "N",

(18) A-1, p. 1; (19) A-1, Part IV Statistics; (20) A-1, Part II, Graphic Plates.

southeast of Groesbeek, as shown on Map B. They were to organize and defend the Groesbeek Heights from Groesbeek south to Mook, and also, to attack the two southernmost bridges across the Maas-Waal Canal in conjunction with elements of the 504th Parachute Infantry, who were to be attacking these same bridges from the west. (21)

The 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment was to drop on Drop Zone "T" (See Map B), northeast of Groesbeek. The Third Battalion was to organize and defend the high ground from Wyler to Nijmegen, a distance of approximately 6 miles. The Second Battalion, less Company "D", was to attack directly west to the Hatert and Honinghutie Bridges, which cross the Maas-Waal Canal, completely clearing all enemy from its assigned sector. (22)

The First Battalion was to initiate an attack on the city of Nijmegen, with De Ploeg as an intermediate objective, and if possible secure the 6000 foot span across the Waal River. (See Map B) The enemy dispositions in Nijmegen were not definitely known, but were expected to be strong, and reaction to the airborne attack could reasonably be expected to be violent and immediate. The division commander therefore authorized the 508th Regimental Commander to halt the 1st Battalion attack, and use this battalion, should the degree of enemy resistance from other directions make it appear that he might not be able to hold the remainder of his sector. The division commander estimated that it would take at least a regiment to take the Nijmegen Bridge, but he could not spare such a force initially. The 1st Battalion was to make the ef-

(21) A-1, Part II, Graphic Plates; (22) A-5, p. 104.

fort to take this bridge in the hope that it might be found lightly defended. However, though an attacking force, this unit was also considered to be the reserve battalion of the regiment, to be used as such should trouble develop elsewhere. (23)

Company D, of the Second Battalion, was given the mission of expanding and holding Drop Zone "T" as a landing zone for the 450 gliders containing the division artillery and division engineers, scheduled to land at 1400 hours on D plus 1. (24)

The company commander was unable to make detailed plans in advance to accomplish this mission due to the many uncertainties inherent in such an operation. Reconnaissance was not possible, and the disposition of the enemy was not known. It could not be determined in advance, whether the company would be required to attack or defend, in which direction the action would materialize, or even the point from which operations would be launched. Previous operations had proven that it could be considered normal to land far from the designated drop-zone. Faced with these imponderables, the company commander decided to accept the situation as he found it upon landing, and to then take whatever action the situation demanded to accomplish his assigned mission. (25)

"D-Day"

Sunday morning, September 17, 1944, dawned clear and warm, and found the airfields of England literally swarming with men and planes. (26) Bomber and fighter groups had long

(23) A-15; A-5, p. 104-105; (24) A-2, p. 6; (25) A-13; A-14; (26) A-12, p. 1.

been softening up the enemy by the time the troop carrier planes were airborne. Their missions were not all completed, however, as the task of escorting the huge air armada safely into Holland had yet to be accomplished. (27)

By 1110 hours the last of the 508th Parachute Infantry was airborne. (28) The formation encountered no fighter opposition at all, probably due to the splendid air cover provided by Allied fighter planes of all types. Enemy anti-aircraft fire was light and spotty over the route in, but increased as the drop zone was approached. (29) A plane containing elements of the 1st Platoon, Company D, and members of the company headquarters group, had its right motor blown completely from its mounting, and crashed about two minutes out from the drop zone. Paratroopers and crew were seen to parachute safely to earth. (30)

The formation continued on in without further casualties and dropped on Drop Zone "T" at 1332 hrs. (See Map C) (31)

Enemy opposition on the drop zone was light, consisting mainly of 20 mm anti-aircraft gun crews, who for the most part abandoned their guns and fled. (32)

Equipment bundles were recovered, and the regiment assembled on colored smoke grenades according to prearranged plan. By 1500 hr. the entire regiment had cleared the drop zone, and its various elements were moving toward their assigned objectives. (33)

Company D reverted to regimental control upon landing, and less one squad of the 1st Platoon, the company executive

(27) A-4; (28) A-11; (29) A-2, p. 1; (30) Witnessed by author; (31) A-11; (32) A-1; A-2; A-5; A-9; A-11; (33) A-2, p. 1.

officer, the communications sergeant, and the company supply sergeant, who were forced to jump prior to reaching the drop zone, proceeded to the vicinity of Hooge Hof. Here the company command post was established in the wooded draw, as shown on Map C. (34)

The company commander ordered the platoon leaders to prepare defensive positions on the ridge east of the command post, platoons abreast, with the 2nd Platoon on the left in the edge of the woods north of the road, the 1st Platoon south of the road, and the 3rd Platoon on the right. The company observation post was established in an upstairs bedroom of the farmhouse on top of the ridge. (35)

The regimental ammunition officer and four men from the regimental supply section had remained on the drop zone to recover the additional bundles of supplies which had been dropped with the regiment. These bundles contained medical supplies, K-rations, and ammunition, and were scattered over an area five hundred yards wide and one thousand yards long. This supply section attached themselves to company headquarters, and established a regimental supply dump at the company command post. After commandeering a team of horses and a farm wagon from Hooge Hof, they began the immense task of gathering the scattered supplies. (36)

The company commander ordered a patrol to be sent out from the 2nd Platoon to determine if there were any enemy in the vicinity of Voxhill. A similar patrol was dispatched from the 1st Platoon to search Lerkendaal, and one from the

(34) (35) (36) Personal knowledge.

3rd Platoon to search the village of Kamp. (See Map C) The patrol which visited Lerkendaal met no opposition, and returned with a negative report. The patrols which visited Voxhill and Kamp each killed three Germans, who were apparently attempting to hide after having abandoned their 20 mm AA guns on the drop zone. No prisoners were taken, and no casualties were suffered by the patrols. (37)

It was growing dark by the time the last of the patrols was in, and the company settled down for the night maintaining a three man outpost about two hundred and fifty yards to the front of each platoon, and one man awake in each two man foxhole. The night passed quietly without event, and it was beginning to appear as though the enemy was not going to contest our occupation of this particular area. (38)

"D Plus 1"

Shortly after daylight the company commander summoned his platoon leaders to the command post. He explained that the gliders were due in about 1400 hours, and he felt that the only way we could cover their landing and unloading was to occupy positions on the east perimeter of the landing zone. Any enemy sighted would be brought under long range fire and pinned as far from the landing zone as possible. The 2nd Platoon was to occupy positions on Voxhill facing north and east. The 1st Platoon was to dig in east of Lerkendaal along the Kamp - Wyler Road. The 3rd Platoon was to protect the right flank from the nose of the ridge directly west of and

(37) Personal knowledge; (38) Personal experience.

overlooking Kamp. The company command post was to remain in its present location. (See Map D). This placed each of the platoons over a thousand yards from the company command post, and extended the company front to over a mile. There was not sufficient wire available to maintain wire communications over such a great distance, which meant that the company was required to rely entirely on messengers and the SCR 536 for communications. The platoons moved out immediately. (39)

The 3rd Platoon moved down the back of the ridge until opposite the farm buildings south of Hooge Hof, then moved east around the nose and commenced the preparation of its position. A two-man patrol was dispatched to attempt to contact elements of the 505th Parachute Infantry, which were supposed to be in Groesbeek, about one mile south of Kamp. The Platoon Leader, 3rd Platoon, then called the company commander on the SCR 536, and reported that he was on position, digging in, there were no signs of enemy activity, and that a contact patrol had been sent to Groesbeek. The company commander replied with an order for the Third Platoon to reinforce the 2nd Platoon on Voxhill with two rifle squads immediately. He told the platoon leader to stop at the company command post enroute, and he would orient him further. (40)

Leaving the platoon headquarters, one rifle squad, and the mortar squad, on position, the platoon leader moved back up the draw with his two rifle squads as ordered, taking the platoon SCR 536 radio with him. Reporting in at the command post, he found the situation to be extremely vague. The com-

(39) (40) Personal experience.

pany commander had received a radio message from the Second Platoon stating that it was in trouble and needed some help. That was all. The company commander had been unable to raise a response since that time. The Second Platoon had not stated whether it was under attack, or whether it had merely sighted the enemy and anticipated attack. Neither the number of the enemy or the direction of attack had been stated. The company commander had also attempted to contact the 1st Platoon with no success. He was inclined to believe that the 2nd Platoon was just overly nervous, but could not justify the mysterious radio silence from both the 1st and 2nd Platoons since the original message. He had heard only a few scattered shots from the direction of Voxhill about the time of the radio message, and none since. He decided to send the Platoon Leader, 3rd Platoon, with his two squads, to Voxhill, to report back by radio immediately on the existing situation. (41)

He decided to accompany the 3rd Platoon about halfway down the Hooge Hof road to point "X" Map D, taking with him his SCR 536 radio and a messenger. From that point he dispatched his runner to contact the 1st Platoon on the right. The 3rd Platoon left the road, and cut across the fields toward the rear of Voxhill. (42)

As the 3rd Platoon approached within about two hundred and fifty yards of the 2nd Platoon position, it was fired on suddenly by two machine guns from the group of buildings on Voxhill. (See Map D) The fire caught the 3rd Platoon completely by surprise, and two men were killed instantly. The

(41) (42) Personal experience.

remainder were pinned rather helplessly in the open field. The fire was not returned immediately because the guns were obviously American LMG'S, and it was believed by all that the "nervous" 2nd Platoon had opened fire on mistaking them for enemy. This hope was short lived however as a third gun opened up, and its high cyclic rate identified it unmistakably as German. Fortunately, the 3rd Platoon was well dispersed, and the field in which it was pinned was planted in sugar beets ready for harvest, with the rows running perpendicular to the line of fire. (43)

The platoon leader called to his two LMG teams to crawl down the rows to the road on which they had left the company commander while the riflemen covered their withdrawal. This road offered from twelve to eighteen inches of defilade. From that point they could fire on the enemy while the remainder of the two squads withdrew in the same manner. This was accomplished successfully with the loss of two riflemen. (44)

As the platoon leader and the last of the riflemen reached the road, the company commander crawled up with more bad news. His runner had been unable to locate the 1st Platoon, and they still did not reply on the SCR 536. (45)

It was obvious that the 2nd Platoon had been surprised and quickly overrun. The whereabouts of the 1st Platoon was entirely unknown. The remainder of the 3rd Platoon, with the badly needed mortar, was a mile away, entirely unaware of the situation, and with no means by which the platoon leader might communicate with them. (46)

(43) (44) Personal experience; (45) (46) Personal knowledge.

At this time a force of Germans estimated at two platoons was observed approaching from the north in attack formation, swinging wide around Voxhill from the direction of Wyler. (See Map E) They had apparently been committed as a maneuver element to flank the 3rd Platoon, in its original position in the sugar beet field west of Voxhill. Due to the change in position of the 3rd Platoon they found themselves making a frontal attack. As the 3rd Platoon took them under fire, they commenced firing, and continued to advance by fire and movement. The fire of the 3rd Platoon was shifted entirely to the advancing force in an effort to pin them before they could assault. At this time a tremendous volume of 20 mm fire was received from Voxhill, and the number of casualties began to rise; one of which was the company commander. The advancing element was finally pinned about two hundred and fifty yards out after taking terrific punishment, but the situation for the 3rd Platoon had become extremely critical, as their position was becoming rapidly untenable. The fire from Voxhill was terrible in its intensity, but could not be returned, because, to lessen the fire on the attacking element would be to invite them to assault. (47) The SCR 300 with which regiment could be contacted for assistance was at the command post, but there was no way the company commander could contact the command post as he had the company SCR 536 with him, and it would have been sheer murder to dispatch his runner (The other company SCR 536 radios were with the group which crashed). Ammunition was running very low and there was no route of with-

(47) Personal experience.

drawal. (48)

However, back at the company observation post at Hooge Hof, the regimental ammunition officer had observed the predicament of the company commander and the 3rd Platoon. He immediately radioed regiment on the SCR 300 that Company "D" was surrounded on the drop zone, that the enemy was threatening to overrun the regimental supply dump, and that the situation was extremely critical. The regimental commander replied that he would have the 1st Battalion launch a counterattack as soon as possible from the vicinity of De Ploeg (See Map B), and that the position was to be held at all cost. The regimental ammunition officer then organized the company headquarters group and the supply section into a defense unit, and occupied the old positions of the 2nd Platoon in the edge of the woods north of the road (See Map E), from which they could bring fire on the enemy. (49) Having the regimental supply dump at their right elbow, they were ~~very~~ naturally not suffering for want of ammunition, and the high and continued rate of their fire eased considerably the pressure of enemy fire on the 3rd Platoon. They sounded like an entire company, and their fire apparently dispelled any notion the Germans might have entertained about continuing their advance. Neither the company commander nor the 3rd Platoon were aware of the regimental ammunition officer's actions, except that they realized that company headquarters had taken up the fight from the edge of the woods about 400 yards on their left flank. (50)

Their first knowledge of the 1st Battalion counterattack

(48) Personal knowledge; (49) A-13; A-2, p. 2; Personal knowledge; (50) Personal experience.

was the sight of an estimated two companies of troops approaching in attack formation from the north, in rear of the pinned Germans. (See Map E) They appeared to stretch from the woods on the left front to beyond Voxhill on the right front. They were deployed in width and depth, and looked like doomsday to the 3rd Platoon, for it was ~~naturally~~ assumed that they were enemy. The platoon leader immediately ordered long range fire on this new threat, but the fire seemed to have no effect on their determined advance except to draw return fire, which increased in intensity as they advanced. The platoon leader suddenly realized that the fires from Voxhill had ceased entirely, and observed that the advancing troops were receiving extremely heavy 20 mm fire from their left flank and from Voxhill. He ordered firing ceased immediately and after studying the troops through field glasses finally recognized the familiar sight of a BAR bipod swinging crazily around the muzzle of a rifle, as one of the men made a quick dash forward. They were now unmistakably American troops, and a cheer went up from every throat. The jubilance was short-lived however, as the 1st Battalion continued its relentless attack, sweeping over Voxhill on the right, over the surprised and helpless Germans to the front of the Third Platoon, and concentrated its fire on the road occupied by the 3rd Platoon. Everyone by now was shouting, "cease-fire its Dog Company". One man attempted to jump to his feet to effect recognition, but was shot down before he could get off his knees. (51)

(51) Personal experience.

Having received fire initially from the road, the 1st Battalion was convinced that it was occupied by the enemy. Orange smoke had been designated in the S.O.I. as identification for friendly troops, but there was not a smoke grenade in the entire group. There was no possible way to effect recognition without committing suicide due to the intensity of their concentrated fire. Each man in the 3rd Platoon was forced to hug the ground flat on his face in the "gutter" defilade until the assaulting force came plunging out onto the road, and recognized them for friendly troops - much to the surprise and disappointment of the 1st Battalion. (52)

The attack of the 1st Battalion was completed at 1400 hours, just as the first gliders cut loose from their tow planes and came in to land. (53) Unfortunately, some of them decided to land quite a bit east of the Kamp-Wyler road. (See Map E) This area was of course in enemy hands, and many of them suffered heavy casualties. (54)

The 1st Battalion, due to the speed of its attack, suffered only 9 wounded in action and 2 killed in action. It killed 50 Germans, captured 149, and neutralized 16 20 mm guns. (55)

Company D had suffered the loss of the entire 2nd Platoon killed or captured. The 3rd Platoon suffered 5 killed in action and 6 wounded in action, not counting the company commander, who had been stunned by a bullet which grazed his head. (56)

The 1st Platoon was later reported in Groesbeek (See Map

(52) Personal knowledge; (53) A-11; (54) A-10; A-1, p. 4; Personal knowledge; (55) A-11; A-15; A-2, p. 3; A-1, p. 3; (56) Personal knowledge; A-13; A-14.

B), where it had joined the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. The platoon leader's radio had apparently been damaged in the jump and failed to function. Believing his platoon to be cut off by the attack which overran the 2nd Platoon, and finding himself without comminications, he decided to attach his platoon to the nearest known friendly troop unit. (57)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The mission of the division as a whole was certainly one of attack. Company "D", however, had a purely defensive role to play after finding itself in undisputed possession of the drop zone. The frontage envolved, which was slightly over a mile, can certainly be considered excessive for a company in defense. This cannot excuse, however, the complete disregard of the principles of defense as exhibited in this operation.

Concessions must be made to organization in depth when defending on such a broad front. But this makes even more important the necessity for mutual support and all around defense. The manner in which this defense was conducted enabled the enemy to attack one platoon of the company at a time. The company commander soon found himself commanding only two squads instead of a company.

The 2nd Platoon was completely surprised and overrun while preparing their positions, due entirely to their failure to post local security. This fact was later admitted by the platoon leader upon his release from a German PW camp in 1945. Their surprise was so utterly complete that many of the men did not have the opportunity to fire a single shot, and the

(57) A-13; A-14.

platoon leader was forced to surrender without having sufficient time to complete his radio message to the company commander. (58)

The utter lack of communications in this operation robbed the company commander of any control he might have been able to exercise over the situation. All of the company headquarter's radio and wire equipment, with the exception of 1 SCR 300 and 1 SCR 536, were with the communications sergeant and company executive officer in the plane which crashed prior to reaching the drop zone. Had the Platoon Leader, 1st Platoon, learned of the damage to his SCR 536 during the assembly, a utility set would not have been available. The inability of the 1st Platoon to establish radio communication with company was not sufficient justification for abandoning its assigned mission. Had its position become untenable, a messenger could have been used to so inform the company commander.

Had the Platoon Leader, 3rd Platoon, permitted his radio to be retained by the two squads on position, that element could have been effectively employed by the company commander. The platoon leader had no use for it, as the only other radio operative on the net was the company commander's, and the two were together.

It cannot be ascertained how many of the 1st Battalion casualties were inflicted by the 3rd Platoon. It is reasonable to presume however that a large percentage of them were, as the speed and direction of the attack caught the Germans in the rear, and completely by surprise. Had the Platoon Lead-

(58) A-16.

er, 3rd Platoon used his field glasses to establish positive identification prior to opening fire, fewer casualties would have been experienced in both the 1st Battalion and the 3rd Platoon.

The orange smoke grenades designated in the S.O.I. as recognition for friendly troops were distributed on the basis of two per company. Both of these grenades were in the possession of the communications sergeant, and so were of course not available to the company commander or the platoon leader when their use was needed most. Very little consideration for their use had been given up to this time, and they were considered as excess baggage by most companies. This operation, however, pointed up the fact that they could be used to very good advantage by platoon and squad leaders.

The Germans made very good use of 20 mm anti-aircraft gun fire in the support of their ground troops. In the initial stages of the airborne invasion, the Germans were forced to commit whatever troops they had immediately available. They consisted mainly of labor troops, police units, and anti-aircraft artillery battalions. Such units did not have normal artillery support. They were forced of necessity to employ ~~their good effects employing~~ them as direct-fire weapons. Company "D" failed to render unserviceable the guns in the vicinity of the drop zone, which had been abandoned by their crews. Some of these same guns were later employed by the Germans after overrunning the 2nd Platoon.

Following the counterattack of the 1st Battalion, the en-

tire area west of the Kamp - Wyler Road was clear of enemy. The gliders which landed in that area were able to unload without interference from enemy fire. Some of the gliders, however, decided to land east of this road as much as 2000 yards. Of these, many found themselves under heavy enemy fire, and many casualties resulted. The ground troops watched helplessly as these gliders soared unknowingly into the enemy occupied area. Had communications existed between the ground troops and the glider pilots, instructions could easily have been given for them to land in the area west of the road, and the loss of troops and much valuable equipment could have been prevented.

LESSONS

1. Communications are vital to the success of any operation.

2. When assigned a defensive mission, the principles of defense must not be ignored, regardless of frontage assigned.

3. Local security must constantly be maintained.

4. A reserve unit may be initially engaged without losing its identity as the reserve, provided it is prepared to quickly disengage. This principle was ably demonstrated by the 1st Battalion in this operation.

5. An assigned mission must not be abandoned without permission of the next higher headquarters.

6. When smoke or pyrotechnics are designated in the S.O.I., as means of identifying friendly troops, such signalling devices must be distributed at least down to and including squad leaders.

7. Headquarters personnel can be an effective reserve force.

8. Parachute troops can be dropped directly on enemy anti-aircraft installations without suffering unreasonable losses.

9. In a fluid situation, fire must not be opened on approaching troops until positive identification has been made.

10. Anti-aircraft weapons can be used effectively in support of ground troops.

11. Enemy crew served weapons such as anti-aircraft guns, artillery pieces, machine guns, and mortars, must be rendered unserviceable immediately upon capture to prevent their future use by the enemy should the position be retaken.

12. In an airborne operation, communications must be provided between ground troops and glider pilots.

13. In an airborne operation the continual defense of the landing zone must be considered if a build-up by air is contemplated.

14. Airborne units must be trained to recognize that isolation is a normal battlefield condition, and that they must be ready to attack or defend in any direction.