

41-1

82nd AIRBORNE DIVISION

in

NORMANDY

JAMES P. ALCORN

MAJOR, CAVALRY

(1948?)

The airborne invasion of Normandy was made by the 101st and the 82nd Airborne Divisions and by the British 6th Airborne Division.

The preparations for the invasion started as early as November 1943 at which time General James M. Gavin was sent from Italy to England as a member of the Allied Airborne Planning Staff. The plans were approved and the planning for its execution was ready to start. The day that all plans were to be completed was 1 June 1944.

The 82nd Airborne Division, which had been battle tested at Sicily and on the Italian mainland, landed at Belfast, North Ireland 9 Dec. 1943. They occupied an area northwest of that city. In Italy they left the 504th Regimental Combat Team to fight in the mountains north of the Volturno River and spend sixty days on the Anzio beachhead prior to joining the division in England.

The mission given to the division was, in general, to land by parachutes and gliders on D-day in the vicinity of St. Sauveur Le Vicomte, seize, clear and secure this general area. This mission was later changed because of enemy defensive action.

Training for the mission was being hampered in the Belfast, North Ireland area because of the lack of training facilities in general and no facilities at all for airborne training.

The training facilities that were available were further taxed by the attachment of the 2nd Airborne Brigade to the division on 14 January 1944. The 2nd Airborne Brigade included Brigade Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 507th and 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments.

At this time arrangements were made for the division to move to the English midlands as that area offered better airborne training facilities. This move was completed by mid-February 1944.

At this time the division swung into a full training program and the division staff began intensive planning for the operation. A training directive was issued standardizing the use of all aircraft that were to be used by the British and American paratroopers. Methods of marshalling and loading plans were drawn up. The 82nd Airborne Division made highly detailed plans for the operation. These plans were based on the experiences gained in Sicily and Italy.

They paid particular attention to individual and unit loads. Numerous loading plans were prepared, checked and changes were made until the commanders were satisfied that they were correct. Tanks being the main concern of airborne soldiers, bazookas and mines were distributed throughout the flights so that the division would have some of this equipment available in case some loads were lost and did not reach the drop or landing zones. Needless to say, comfort items were eliminated.

While the plans were being completed an intensive training program was placed into operation. A parachute school was opened to train reinforcements. A series of parachute problems were mapped out beginning at battalion size and culminating with the dropping of the three parachute regiments.

The 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, which was previously composed

of two battalions was increased to a three-battalion regiment with the attachment of the 2nd Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry Regiment.

Glider personnel were trained in the use of the CG-4A and British horsa glider. Training rides of two hours duration were taken. Night assembly, sand tables and small unit problems were conducted, and lastly full scale dress rehearsals to check final details. The terrain and road nets around the proposed landing zone in Normandy were memorized.

Y-day, the day that all plans were to be completed, had been set as 1 June 1944 by U. S. First Army and VII Corp to which the division would be attached on landing. Regimental commanders and staffs were briefed on Y minus 60 and battalion commanders and staffs on Y minus 30.

As D-day drew near our reconnaissance agencies began to pick up German anti-airborne obstacles on the Cherbourg peninsula. An example of the anti-airborne defense was the appearance of Rommelspargel. This consisted of poles six to twelve inches in diameter and sunk one to two feet in the ground and separated from each other by seventy-five to one hundred feet. It was normal for these posts to be connected by wire and attached to these wires were anti-personnel mines, artillery shells and different types of explosives. These would denotate when an object came in contact with the wire. To camouflage these defenses the wire connections were high enough in the air to allow the cattle to continue grazing. This was intended to give the

appearance of a peaceful countryside.

Another intelligence report received was that the enemy had increased his forces on the Cherbourg peninsula with the addition of the 91st Infantry Division in the general vicinity of St. Sauveur Le Vicomte. This was the general area in which the 82nd was to land. As these intelligence reports were confirmed the mission of the 82nd Airborne Division was changed by U. S. First Army.

The new mission was for the 82nd Airborne Division to land astride the Merderet River, seize, clear and secure the general area of Neuville Au Plains, St. Mere Eglise, Chef du-pont, Etienville and to destroy the bridges over the Douve River and be prepared to advance west on Corp order. (See o/lay #1)

New orders and administrative details were worked out very quickly and disseminated within four days. The basic plan of movement which was to be in three echelons was not changed. They were:

Force A commanded by Brigadier General James M. Gavin and
to be committed by parachute prior to dawn on D-day.
Det. Hq. and Hq. Co. 82nd Airborne Division
Det. Signal Co.
Det. Hq. Division Artillery
Det. 456 Field Artillery attached to 505th Parachute Inf.
505th Parachute Regiment
507th Parachute Regiment
508th Parachute Regiment

Company of Engineers

Air support party

Naval shore fire control party

Total 378 planes

Force B commanded by Major General Matthew B. Ridgeway and
to be committed by glider before and after dawn on D-day.

Hq. and Hq. Co. 82nd Airborne Division (-)

Hq. and Hq. Battery 82nd Airborne Division Artillery (-)

82nd Airborne Signal Co. (-)

325th Glider Infantry

319th Glider Field Artillery Bn.

320th Glider Field Artillery Bn.

Three batteries of AAA Bn.

307th Medical Co. (-)

82nd Airborne Reconnaissance Platoon (-)

Air Support party

Command Vehicles of Parachute Regiments

Total of 428 gliders

Force C commanded by Brigadier General George P. Howell,
Commanding General of 2nd Airborne Infantry Brigade,
to be committed by sea, to land between D plus 2 and
D plus 7. This force included:

456th Field Artillery Bn. (-)

80th Airborne Anti-Aircraft Bn. (-)

307th Airborne Engineer Bn. (-)
782nd Airborne Ordnance Maintenance Co.
407th Airborne Q. M. Co.
82nd M. P. Platoon
Corp Medical Detachment
87th Armored Field Artillery Bn. Atchd.
899th Tank Destroyer Bn.
Troop B, 4th Cavalry Squadron, Atchd.
Co. C, 746th Tank Bn. (M) Attached
3809 Q. M. Truck Co. Atchd
3810 Q. M. Truck Co. Atchd
1st Plat., 603 Q. M. (GR) Co. Atchd

At this time I would like to point out that airborne operations are sensitive to weather conditions. Expected take off time was 4 June 1944 but due to bad weather the operation was delayed 24 hours and did not begin until 5 June 1944.

Force "A" was to approach the Cherbourg peninsula from the west and drop into three drop zones between the hours of 060100 and 060315 June 1944.

The 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, with its attachment, was to drop east of the Merderet River and about 1,000 yards northwest of St. Mere Eglise.

The 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment was to drop west of the Merderet River about 1,000 yards north of Amfreville.

The 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment and Force "A" headquarters were to drop west of the Merderet River and 1,000 yards north of Picauville. (See o/lay #1)

Force "B" which was to be committed before and after dawn on D-day was to come in and land on the following landing zones: Fifty-two gliders were to land on the 505th drop zone and the rest of Force "B" was to land late on D-day and early on D-plus one on landing zones astride the St. Mere Eglise-Blosville road. In a last minute change of plans General Ridgeway parachuted with Force "A". (See o/lay #1)

There was to be a resupply mission flown on D-plus one automatically and other missions were to be flown on call when needed. The resupply mission for D-plus one was the only parachute mission flown but a small amount of equipment and supplies were received later by glider.

All airborne units to take part in this operation closed and were sealed in special camps at the air fields 24 hours before the scheduled take-off time. The parachute elements were located at seven airfields, as were the glider elements.

All men were thoroughly briefed on the mission. They must be as familiar with the situation as possible in an operation of this type. One reason for this thorough briefing is so that each man will know where to assemble and can become organized and function as a fighting team as quickly as possible on landing. This is an important point because when an airborne unit lands it is at that time most vulnerable

and is least able to protect itself. Another point is, if the men are familiar with the terrain around the drop zone and they are dropped wide of their zone this might aid them in orienting themselves and getting into the assembly area. Great use was made of sand tables to give the men an idea of the terrain that they were to operate in. A silk map was given to each plane leader to aid him in orienting himself in case he should be dropped out of his zone. At this time a recheck of personnel and equipment was made and the gliders and planes were loaded with the equipment that they were to fly.

Force "A" took off at 052315 June 1944. When it was in the sky it looked like a giant sky train. This force was preceded by three regimental pathfinder teams which were to drop one-half hour prior to the first group of Force "A". The pathfinders suffered many casualties but were able to accomplish their mission and set up beacons to guide the three regimental combat teams into their drop zones.

The flight over the English Channel was in good formation, but on crossing the west coast of France the planes flew into a heavy fog bank and this had a tendency to scatter the formation. Flak and some enemy fighters forced the troop planes to take up evasive action and by the time they reached the drop zones the planes were scattered, flying at excessive speeds and altitudes other than those ideal for jumping.

The 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment was the first unit in and they were dropped generally in their drop zone.

The 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment was scattered, one element dropping in the vicinity of Montebourg 7,500 yards from their drop zone, another south of Carentan about 10 miles to the southeast of their drop zone, the remainder astride the Merderet River east of the drop zone.

The 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment likewise was scattered widely, the bulk of its personnel landing east of the drop zone and some as far away as 8 miles south of Cherbourg or 11 miles northwest of the drop zone. Some troopers and equipment were lost in the Merderet River. The parachute force of the 82nd Airborne Division, with the exception of fifty plane loads, were landed in an area five miles by seven.

The 52 gliders containing batteries of the 80th Airborne Anti-aircraft Battalion and detachments and forward parties of artillery, signal and division headquarters began landing at 060404 June 1944. They were scattered and many were damaged upon crashing into the small fields and hedgerows.

Small groups and some units of the division attacked to secure the division zone. Groups of men and individuals who had been scattered in the drop continued to rejoin their unit throughout the day and by nightfall approximately 30% of the division's forces were under control. At the close of the day the division was in the midst of severe fighting and had captured St. Mere Eglise.

On D-plus one the division continued to assemble, organize and

secure its position against the enemy which had been identified as the 91st Infantry Division. This German division was being held west of the Merderet and was driven back to the north and northwest. Contact was established with the American 4th Infantry Division at St. Martin northeast of St. Mere Eglise. Elements of the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiments totaling about 300 men were isolated west of Amfreville.

The 325th Glider Infantry Regiment began landing by glider at 070700 June 1944 about 2,500 yards south of St. Mere Eglise. They had many crash landings and casualties totaled about 7.5%. The regiment assembled rapidly and at the end of the day this regiment was at an estimated eighty-five per cent strength.

By June 8, 1944 the division held St. Mere Eglise. It was also determined that elements of the 507th Regiment were isolated with one southeast of Amfreville and the other west of Amfreville. The 508th Regiment had a unit isolated southwest of Guetteville. (See o/lay #2)

It was decided to relieve these elements by having the 1st battalion of the 325th Glider Regiment contact the element east of Amfreville and have the isolated unit east of Amfreville attack to the west and contact the 1st battalion of the 325th Glider Regiment. The isolated unit of the 508th Regiment was to remain in position.

During the period of 9-12 June 1944 the division secured a bridge-head across the Merderet River and relieved two of the isolated elements

east of that river. On 10 June 1944 the 82nd Airborne Division was relieved within the bridgehead which they had established across the Merderet River by the 90th Infantry Division. The 90th Division continued the attack to the west.

The 82nd Airborne Division, despite scattered parachute drops and isolation of some of the battalions, had secured the area Neuville Au Plain-St. Mere Eglise-Chef Du Pont and a bridgehead across the Merderet River from its junction with the Douve River to and including the railroad bridge 1,500 yards north of La Fiere. (See o/lay #3) Although having suffered heavy losses it was given credit for virtually destroying the 91st German Infantry and prevented this German division from gaining contact with the beach assault forces of the First United States Army. Even though the division had been relieved in the Merderet Bridgehead this was not true in the sector to the north around St. Mere Eglise where the division continued to attack and was able to delay the 243rd German Infantry Division from contacting United States beach assault forces.

On 13 June 1944 the division extended its right flank by establishing a bridgehead across the Douve River at Beuzeville La Bastille. The 101st Airborne Division was again contacted at Baupre. The division continued to regroup preparatory to attacking to the west through the 90th Infantry Division. The division command post moved to a point near Picauville.

From 15 June to 18 June 1944 the division continued attacking to the west and protecting the southern flank of Vll Corp in Corps operation to seize Cherebourg. The mission of the 82nd Division was to seize the line of the Douve River and prepare to continue the attack to the west. The division continued attacking in the hedgerows and against the German 77th Infantry Division driving it to the west and across the Douve River. On arriving on the east bank of the Douve River it was obvious that the enemy was in complete confusion. Division requested Corp to be allowed to push on. By the time that this request was granted, which took some time, the division had taken the initiative and had placed two battalions across the river. This established a secure bridgehead for further operations. In these three days of fierce hedgerow to hedgerow fighting the division had driven the enemy steadily westward and made it possible for the 9th Infantry Division to attack through them and drive to the sea. This cut the Cherbourg Peninsula. At this time the division command post was located east of St. Sauveur Le Vicomite. The division re-organized and prepared to attack south of Etienville to extend its southern boundary. (See o/lay #4)

From the period of 19-30 June 1944 a bridgehead was established over the Douve River and extending to the south from Etienville to Pertot. Contact was made with American troops in the Cretteville-Baute area and the division area was cleared of enemy troops. The 90th Infantry Division relieved the 82nd Airborne Division of the responsibility of guarding St. Sauveur Le Vicomite. The division was

relieved from VII Corp and attached to VIII Corp. VIII Corp mission was to protect the southern flank of VII Corp in its drive on Cherbourg. This period was marked by sharp local action with the division holding the general line of Pretot-La Dranguerie-the woods northeast of Varenguebec and to the Douve River. (See o/lay #4)

VIII Corp planned an attack for 22 June in which the division was to seize the high ground overlooking La Haye Du Puits with the 90th Infantry Division seizing the town. The attack was postponed until 3 July 1944 because of a storm on the English Channel which interrupted lines of communications and supplies. This necessitated the restriction of ammunition and ordinance lines. The division continued to reorganize, regroup and patrol aggressively and extensively. Division C. P. was established west of Le Port 286912.

On 1-2 July 1944 the division was still maintaining the line Pretot-La Draugerie-woods northeast of Varenguebec to Douve River. Reorganization had been completed. Plans had been prepared for the attack to the west on 3 July 1944. The division had firm contact with the 79th Infantry Division on the right and the 90th Infantry Division on the left. An advance C. P. was located at Le Ruisseau. (260895) (See o/lay #4)

The division mission on 3 July 1944 was to attack, seize and secure hills 131 and 95 and the high ground northeast of La Haye Du Puits known as La Poterie ridge. They were to be flanked on the right by the 79th and on the left by the 90th Infantry Division.

After many days of waiting, reorganization and preparation the attack jumped off at 030630 July 1944 in a heavy rainfall. Stubborn resistance was offered initially by the Germans' 265th and 353rd Infantry Divisions, reinforced by O. S. T. battalions. The enemy had been given approximately eleven days for reorganization and to work on his defenses and he had made the very best use of his time. His positions were heavily mined and booby trapped. By aggressive action hill 131 was taken by noon and the eastern edge of La Poterie Ridge by dark with the exception of the town. The division command post was moved to Auvraire.

The attack was renewed the next morning at 0800. By the end of the day hill 95 and La Poterie Ridge had been taken. Many severe counterattacks had been driven back. The enemy lost 500 killed and 700 taken prisoners. (See o/lay #5)

The days of 5, 6, 7 July 1944 were spent in mopping up all remaining pockets of enemy resistance, consolidating defensive positions and maintaining contact with adjacent units in their advance. Corp order restrained the division from further advance. Two regiments were placed in reserve during this period.

The division on 8 July 1944 was placed in Corp reserve and relieved of all attachments. The 8th Infantry Division passed through the 82nd Airborne Division to continue the attack to the south. The 82nd Division assembled on 11 July 1944 and withdrew into First Army reserve. From there the move was made to Utah beach preparatory to

its return to base camp in England.

Upon return to base camp the division immediately began an intensive training program preparing for the next mission. The division had not received any reinforcements in France and the infantry losses were particularly heavy. One infantry company came out of the lines with a strength of only 16 officers and enlisted men. Refitting of the division took some time but by mid-August training dominated the activities.

General Ridgeway left the division to become commanding General of XVIII Airborne Corp and General Gavin assumed command.

An airborne operation calls for coordination of the very highest type and it must be started very early in the planning. Coordination with the Air Forces must be made so that they will have the proper planes at the proper place and time and they must be ready to fly. In case you are flying over friendly installations you must coordinate with them as to the time you will be over their area so that your planes will not be mistaken for that of the enemy.

The Air Force reconnaissance agencies must be on the alert to spot any enemy attempt to reinforce the area in which you intend to drop. This reconnaissance must be maintained until the last possible moment. Example: Discovery of the 91st German Division moving into the general area where the 82nd Airborne Division was to jump. This caused the 82nd Airborne Division to shift its drop zone.

An airborne operation is sensitive to weather. This was proved when the airborne division was delayed 24 hours because of bad weather.

During this operation there was one resupply mission flown. The bundles were widely scattered with some bundles dropping into enemy hands. Prearranged signals must be made prior to the dropping of the supplies so that they will be dropped in the proper area.

Every man in the unit should be thoroughly familiar with the mission of his unit, the terrain and road net around the drop zone. This is particularly important if an individual lands wide of his drop zone. This division made good use of the sand table to accomplish the above.

Unit and individual loads are very important. As was mentioned earlier in this manuscript you would not place all of the same type of equipment in one plane or glider for the loss of that plane or glider would, in all probability, put an unnecessary strain on the operation of your unit. Although you may have your equipment properly distributed throughout your unit it must still be arranged and so loaded that it will fly.

The number of personnel committed in this operation was 11,770. Total casualties were 5,346, this being a percentage of approximately 46%.

In the glider landings the 82nd Airborne Division used the British horse glider and the American CG-4A. It was found that your chances of becoming a casualty in a glider landing was as follows:

	Daylight	Night
Horsa	10.5	16.2
CG-4A	5.8	10.7

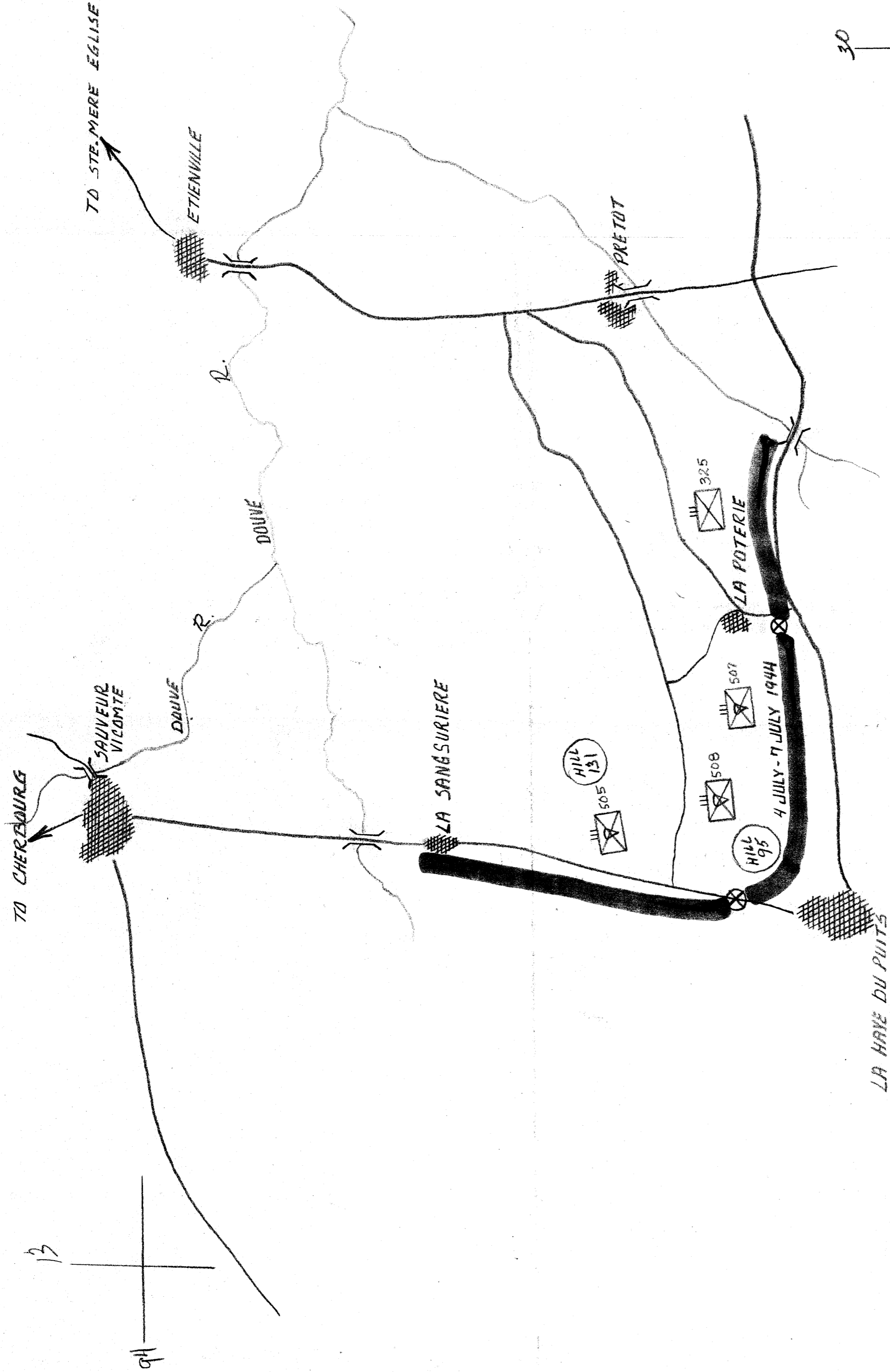
The 82nd Airborne Division was in combat 33 days, every mission accomplished, no ground gained ever relinquished.

The scale of the map used for this monograph was 1:50,000 map of France.

The material for this monograph was taken from operation Neptune which was distributed by the 82nd Airborne Division, therefore footnotes are not needed.

This monograph is restricted because of the source from which the material was taken.

OVERLAY #5



SCALE - 1:50,000

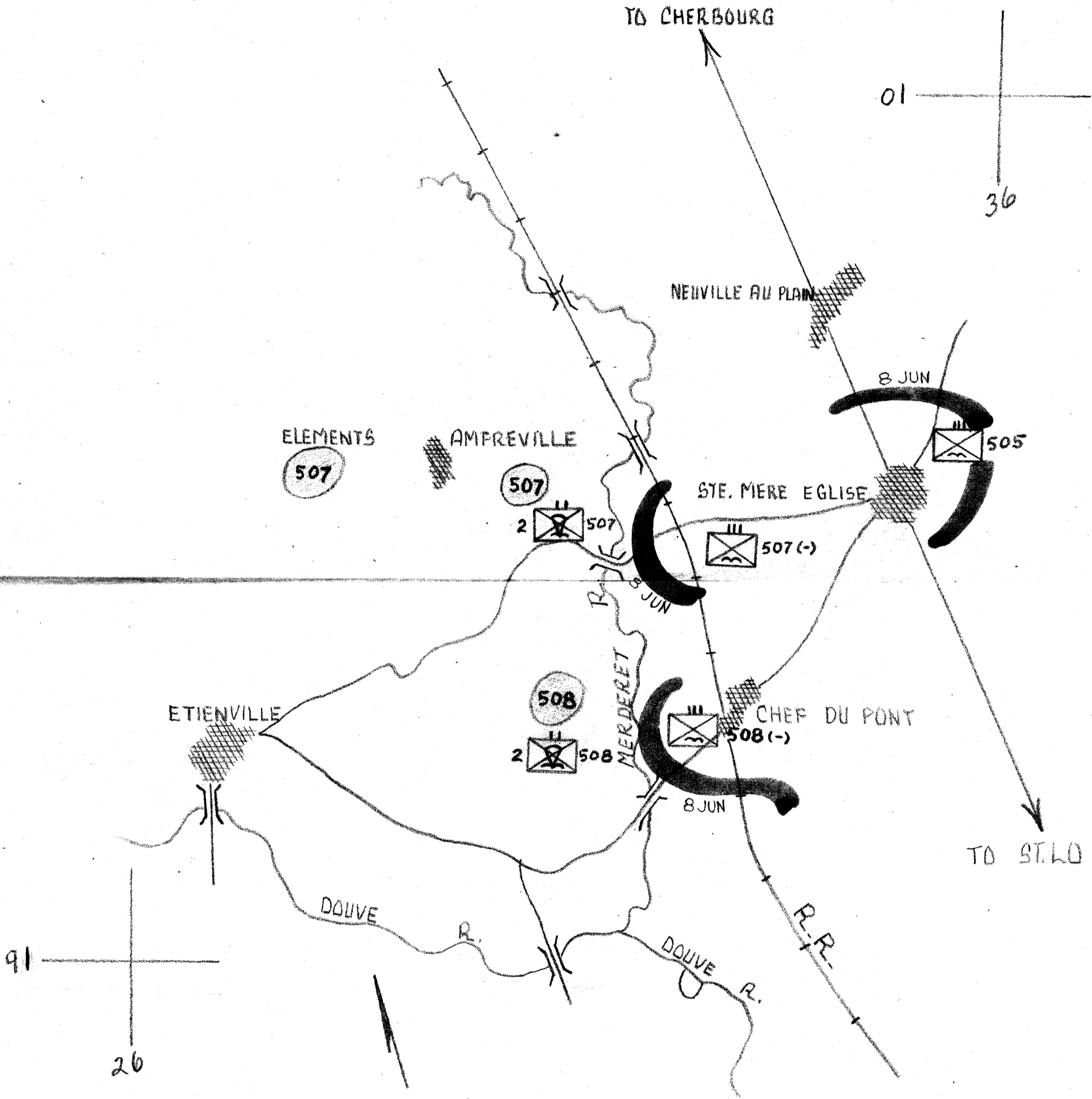
83

30

13

911

OVERLAY #2



SCALE 1:50,000

DISPOSITION 8 JUN 44
D+2

OVERLAY #3

TO CHERBOURG

MONTEBOURG

MONTEBOURG STATION

13 JUN 44

MENDERET R.

00

36

NEUVILLE AU PLAIN

505

12 JUN 44

507

LE MOTTEY

325

GUEUTTEVILLE

508

STE. MERE EGLISE

CHEF DU PONT

ETIENVILLE

TO ST. LO

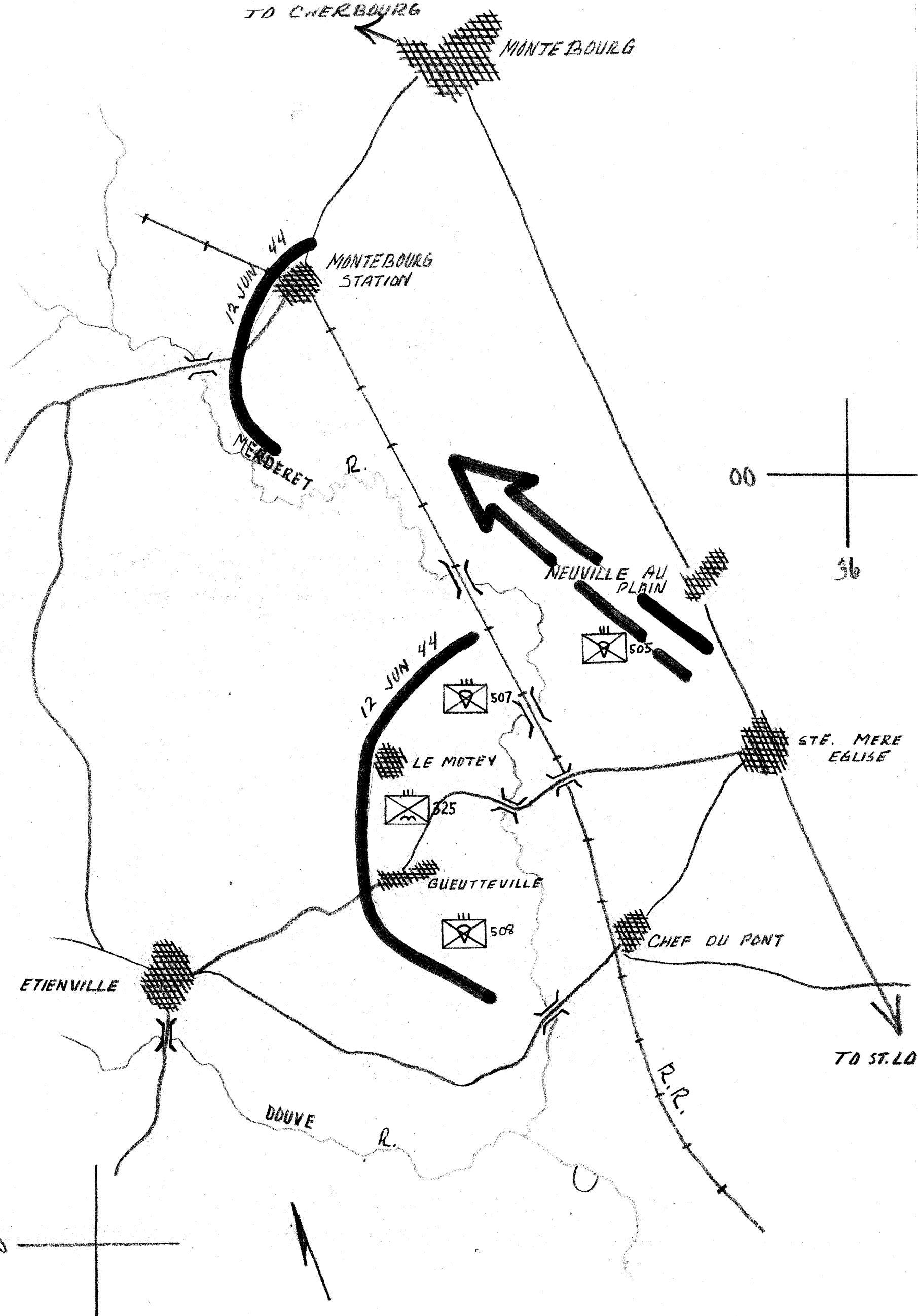
DOUVE R.

R.R.

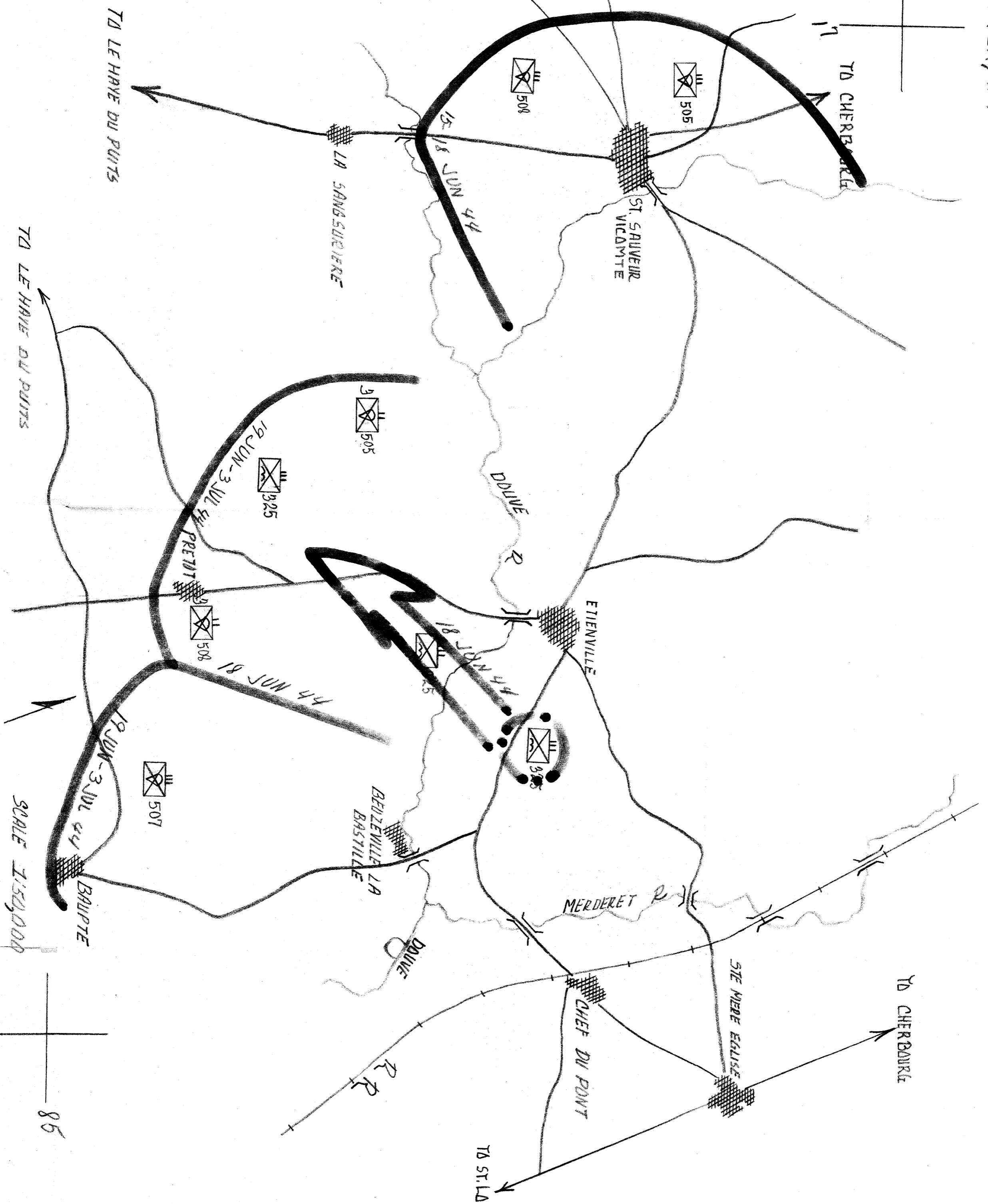
90

26

SCALE - 1:50,000



99



TO CHERBOURG

TO CHERBOURG

TO LE HAYE DU PUIT

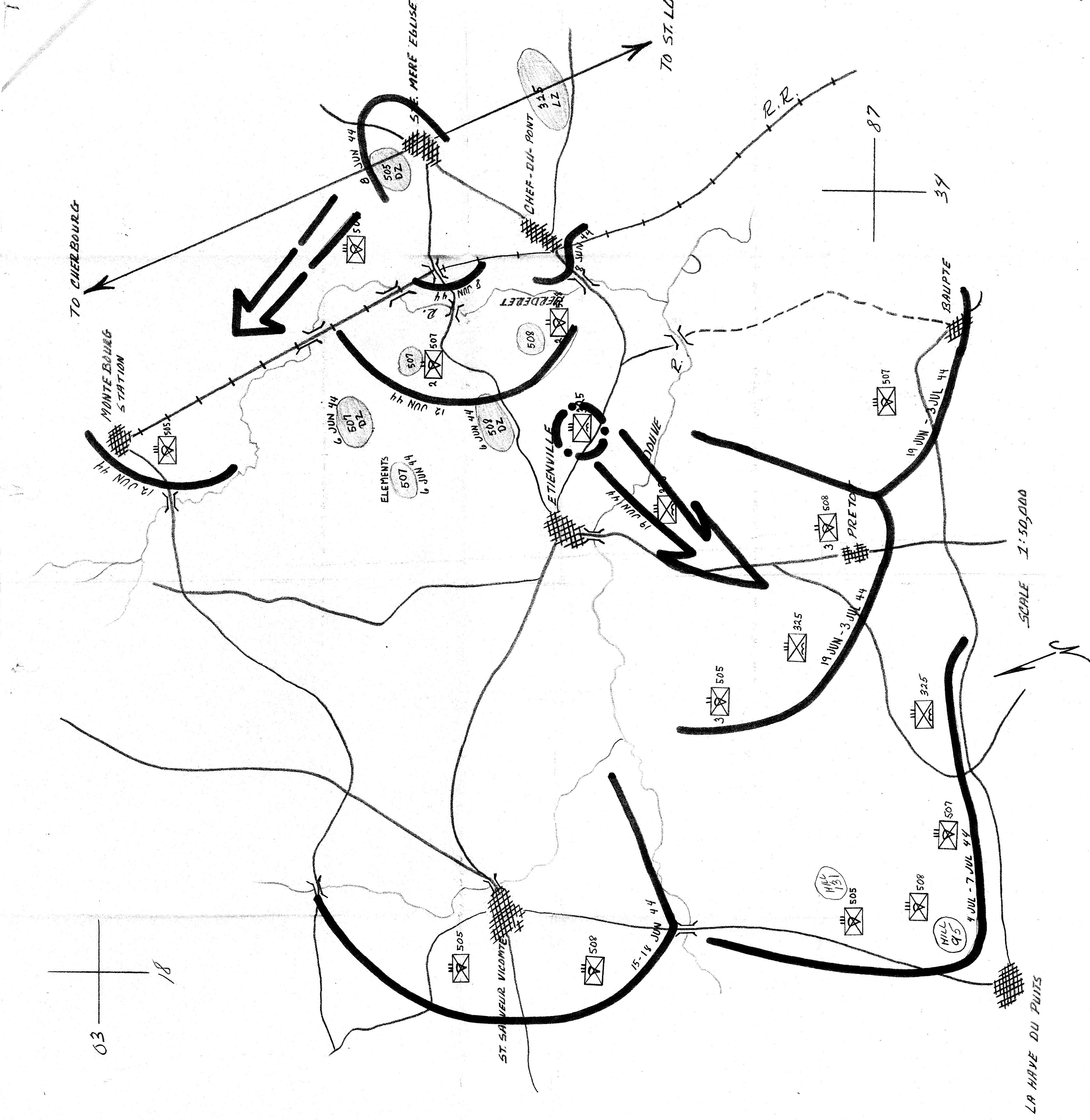
TO LE HAYE DU PUIT

SCALE 1:50,000

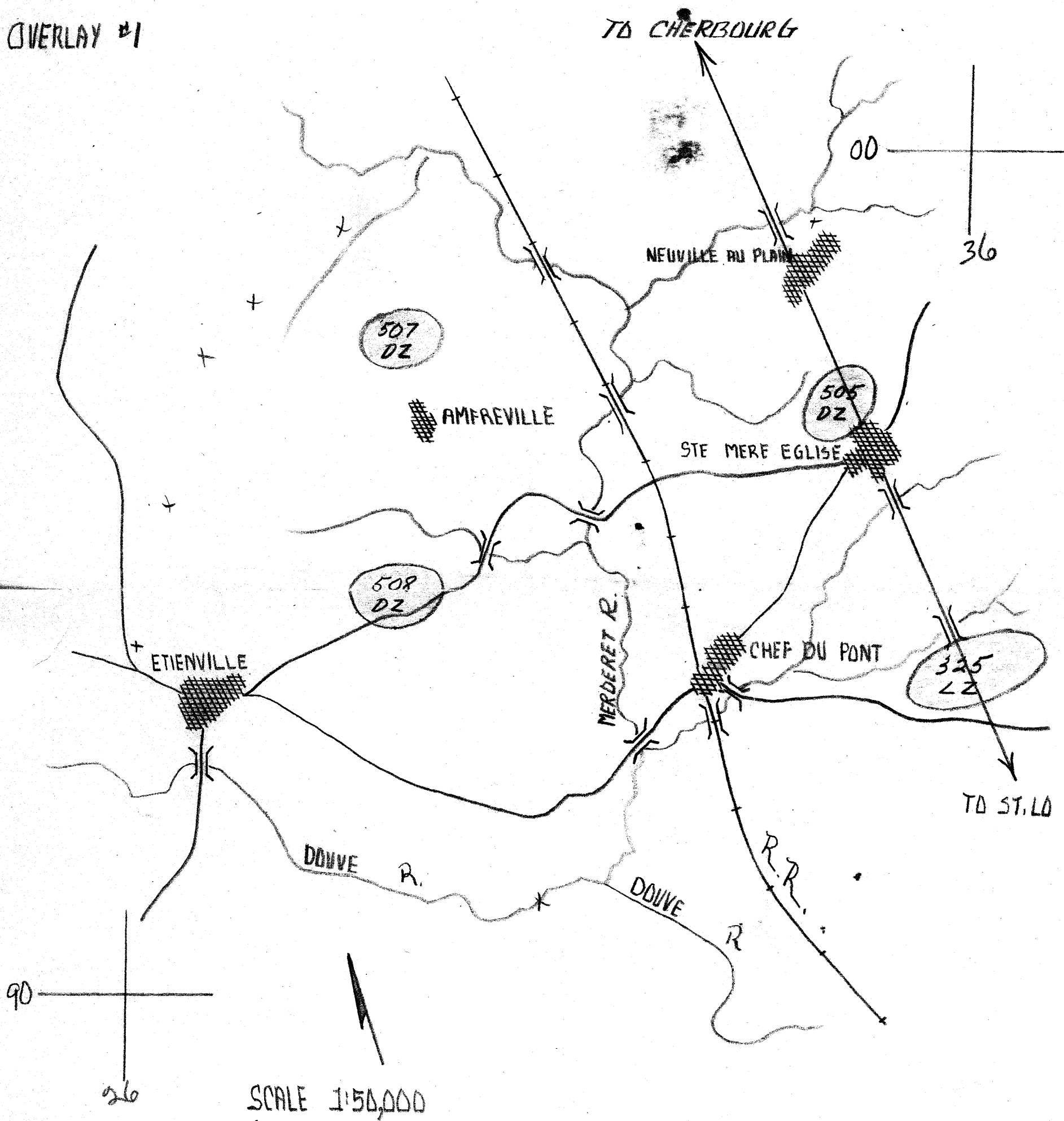
34

86

TO ST. LD



OVERLAY #1



TO CHERBOURG

00

36

NEUVILLE AU PLAIN

507
DZ

AMFREVILLE

505
DZ

STE MERE EGLISE

508
DZ

ETIENVILLE

MERDERET R.

CHEF DU PONT

325
DZ

TO ST. LO

DOUVE R.

DOUVE R.

R.R.

90

26

SCALE 1:50,000

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING DIVISION
 GENERAL INSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT
 THE ARMORED SCHOOL
 Fort Knox, Kentucky

MONOGRAPH CHECK SHEET

NAME OF STUDENT AUTHOR: James P. Alcorn

TITLE OF MONOGRAPH: 82 AB Div in Normandy

DIRECTIONS: Follow these steps in rating the monograph:

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 - c. SATISFACTORY - Although content is limited in value, it does make some contribution to military history and thought. Composition and form acceptable.
 - d. INADEQUATE - Content lacks value. Makes little or no contribution to military history and thought. Poor form and composition.

2. Write your explanation of the adjectival rating and offer any other constructive criticism in the comment column.

REVIEWER Name:	OVERALL RATING	COMMENTS
<i>[Signature]</i>	<i>Sup.</i>	<i>Effort and prep. sup. Readable - content shows planning.</i>
<i>Stafford</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good organization - readable & interesting. Composition & form very good - few grammatical errors.</i>
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REVIEWER	OVERALL RATING	COMMENTS
Name: <i>Fisher</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Content is valuable and interesting. Relative 1st style - Form & construction is excellent. Overall's very commendable.</i>
Name:		
Name:		
Name:		