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(506 PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT
IN NORMANDY DROP)

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506 PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT
IN NORMANDY DROP

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THE LOWER CAUSEWAYS

In all, there were four causeways which connected UTAH BEACH with the solid ground of NORMANDY. The 502d Regiment had been given the task of securing the two northernmost exits to facilitate the passage inland of the forces coming by sea—principally from the Fourth Infantry Division. The seizure of the two southern exits was part of the mission of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

The tactical situation and the nature of the ground in the operation against the southern exits were similar to the conditions confronting 502d Regiment farther to the northward.* The mission was considered an ideal one for parachute troops and the operation was thought to be so timed that the sea-borne forces would arrive before the enemy could build up a strong counter force.

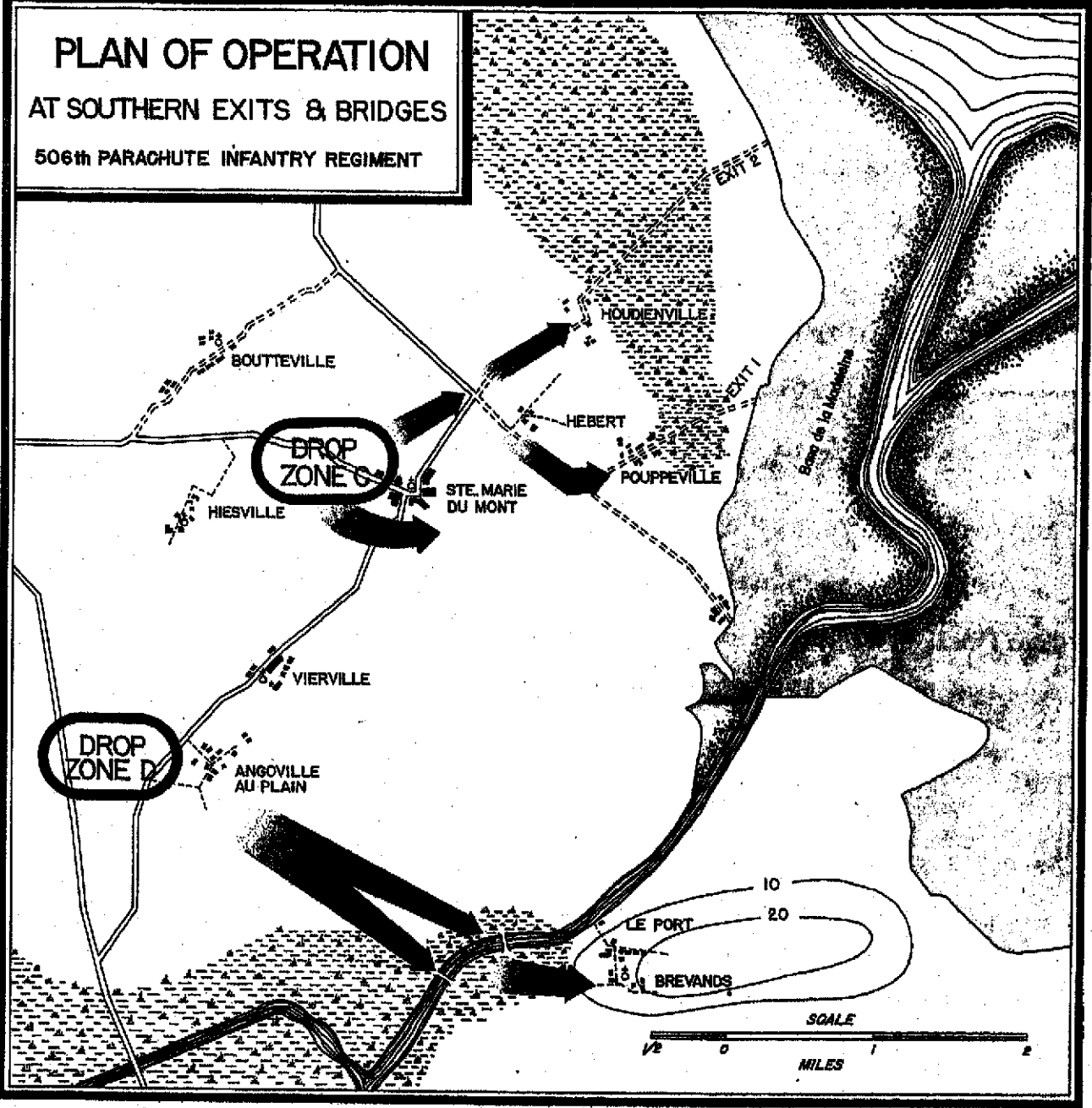
On the extreme left flank of the Beach, the causeway identified in the operations plan as Exit No 1 tied-in with the highway net of the COTENTIN PENINSULA just to the west of POUPEVILLE, a village near the mouth of the RIVER DOUVE about 5 miles northeast of CARENTAN. Exit No 2, a little farther to the north, led from the Beach through HOUDIENVILLE to STE MARIE

*This was the estimate of COL SINK. According to LT GEN W. B. SMITH'S diary, the British air commander estimated that the American parachute (airborne) force would lose 85 percent of its strength. GEN EISENHOWER overrode British objections to the plan because he disagreed with the estimate.

DU MONT. Both of these causeways were built to a height of an average 6 feet above the marsh which was an initial barrier to the westward advance of the forces landing on the Beach. Over most of its area, the marsh could be waded, and it was therefor not a formidable obstacle to the passage of troops. But it was criss-crossed at many points by drainage canals, which though narrow, ran to a depth of 8 feet or more. The presence of these streams composed a very real danger: if the force coming by sea was denied the use of the causeways, many hours would pass before it could link-up with the force which had arrived by air. The time thus lost might determine the fate of the UTAH BEACH operation and finally of the whole invasion.

The plan called for First and Second Battalions of 506th Regiment, supported by Regimental Headquarters Company, to land on DROP ZONE C. This Zone was just to the south of BOUTTEVILLE and to the west of STE MARIE DU MONT, which put it about as close to the western approaches of the two lower causeways as was tactically practicable. As rapidly as it could complete its assembly, Second Battalion, reinforced by one section of demolition men, was to move westward along a line running north of STE MARIE DU MONT toward HOUDIENVILLE. From that point, the Battalion's northern element—composed of Company E and the demolition section—was to launch an attack westward for the purpose of clearing Exit No 2. The southern

PLAN OF OPERATION
AT SOUTHERN EXITS & BRIDGES
506th PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT



element—Company F—would leave the column at HEBERT and attack toward POUPPEVILLE and Exit No 1. Company D and the Battalion Headquarters Company were to set up in HEBERT as the battalion reserve. To divert the Germans and prevent them from taking the causeway forces in rear, First Battalion was to send a reinforced platoon from Company B to the area just south of STE MARIE DU MONT; it would demonstrate strongly enough in that direction to draw the attention of enemy forces stationed in the village. The remainder of First Battalion, supported by Regimental Headquarters Company, would stand at HIESVILLE as the regimental reserve.

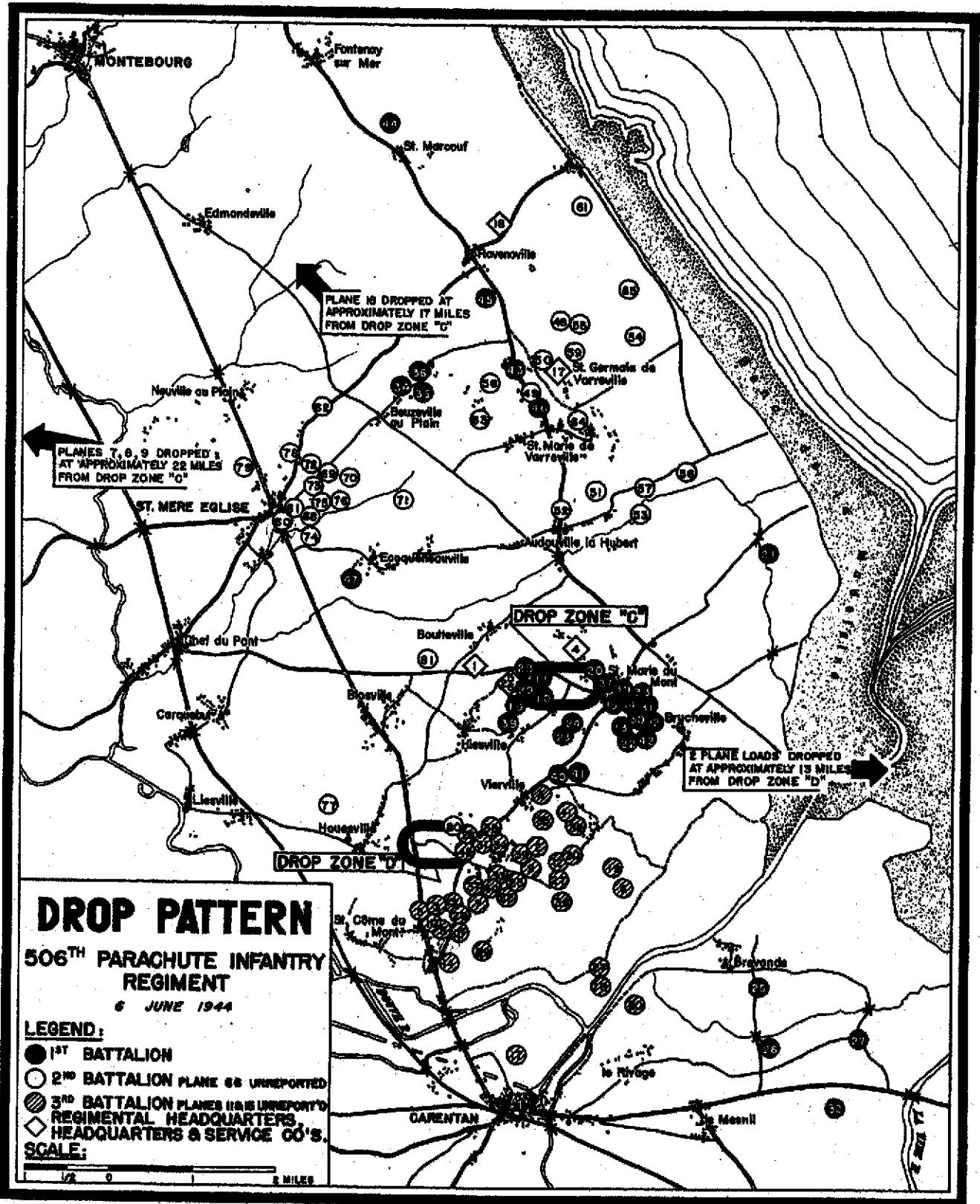
This was the plan for Third Battalion: Supported by one platoon of 326th Engineer Battalion and two demolition sections, it was to land on DROP ZONE D, which was to the south of VIERVILLE and east of ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN. From this ground, the force was to strike southward as soon as possible and seize the two bridges near LE PORT at the mouth of the RIVER DOUVE. The bridges were to be expanded into a bridgehead as rapidly as the tactical situation permitted. By seizing the high ground in the direction of BREVANDS, the Battalion would be reaching toward the American forces which were moving northward from OMAHA BEACH. It was believed that all of these things could be accomplished on the first day.

Things started promisingly enough. The moon was bright when shortly after midnight the serials carrying the three battalions

and attached troops crossed the English Channel and headed toward France. However, almost as soon as the COTENTIN PENINSULA came into view, the planes ran into a heavy fog bank which obscured the ground and disarranged the formation. The planes soon flew out of fog and into flak.* Disobeying orders, some of the pilots took evasive action to get away from the fire. By so doing, they further scattered the formation until nearly all of its essential unity was lost; the chance for a successful concentration of the 506th Regiment thus depended on the accuracy and judgment of a large number of individual airmen who had no identity with the Regiment. In practice the plane pilot is the jump master. It is his task to find the DROP ZONE. Four minutes before the men are to jump, he flashes a red light. When he gives them the green light, that means go. What had already happened to 506th Regiment in the air greatly increased the probability that it would encounter unexpected trouble on the ground; the problem of keeping the Regiment concentrated had been delivered into too many hands.

So it happened that out of 81 planes scheduled to drop their men into DROP ZONE C, only 10 found the mark. First Battalion had a comparatively good drop pattern, only one of its sticks being dropped far distant from the Zone; even so, the pattern was scattered enough that an additional four hours were required to get the Battalion moving toward its objective.

*This comes from COL SINK. It was reported by other officers of his Staff and from the Battalions and is confirmed in the Divisional papers.



MONTEBOURG

Pontenoy sur Mer

St. Marcouf

Edmondville

Hovenoville

PLANE 18 DROPPED AT APPROXIMATELY 17 MILES FROM DROP ZONE "C"

Neuville au Plain

Beuzeville du Plain

St. Germain de Varreville

St. Marie de Varreville

PLANES 7, 8, 9 DROPPED AT APPROXIMATELY 22 MILES FROM DROP ZONE "C"

ST. MERE EGLISE

DROP ZONE "C"

2 PLANE LOADS DROPPED AT APPROXIMATELY 13 MILES FROM DROP ZONE "D"

DROP ZONE "D"

DROP PATTERN

506TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT
6 JUNE 1944

LEGEND:

- 1ST BATTALION
- 2ND BATTALION PLANE 66 UNREPORTED
- ◐ 3RD BATTALION PLANES 11 & 12 UNREPORTED
- ◊ REGIMENTAL HEADQUARTERS
- ◇ HEADQUARTERS & SERVICE CO.'S.

SCALE:



CARENTAN

Bréville

le Fivage

St. Meuil

2 JUN 44

Second Battalion didn't even reach the vicinity and only one plane unloaded its stick anywhere near the designated zone. Third Battalion, aiming at DROP ZONE D, had a slightly better pattern than First Battalion but not enough to give it any practical advantage; it, too, had lost hours because of a faulty drop.

The planes carrying Second Battalion had simply overshot the mark; the paratroopers knew when it happened. They saw three large green "T's" formed of electric lights pass under them and they recognized the zone markers which had been set up by the Regiment's Pathfinders. Still, the beacon did not alarm the pilots and they must have flown straight on for several minutes after crossing the Zone, for when the men at last got their jump signal, the Battalion came to earth with its center about five miles from DROP ZONE C. They were thus denied any initial contact with the remainder of the Regiment and they had no way of knowing whether First Battalion and Headquarters had experienced any better fortune in getting into the Zone.

At DROP ZONE D, there was trouble of another kind. The Pathfinders had landed there 30 minutes ahead of Third Battalion and had become engaged at once. The Germans had figured that the invaders might use this area for just such a purpose; they had ringed it with machine guns and mortars and were sitting

at their arms in readiness when the Battalion came in.* Seven of the Pathfinders had knocked out two machine gun positions by hand-grenading them before the arrival of the main body. By that time, however, the field was well illuminated by enemy flares. Floating down into this well-lit and fire-covered area, the Battalion lost about 20 men from enemy action before its first groups could collect themselves. Yet it was an odd kind of action. With all their advantages, these Germans could not get their heads up. They fired from whatever cover they happened to be holding and not one man among them moved out to engage the invaders in personal encounter. All over the COTENTIN PENINSULA, wherever the airborne landed, this held true. The enemy seemed gripped by mortal terror. His men would fire but they would not move out.

The inaccuracy of the enemy fire was a reflection of this fright. Set up as they were, and waiting, the Germans still could not bring any concentrated fire to bear on the Americans as they came down singly or crawled across the fields looking for their comrades. DROP ZONE C had also been strongly covered by the enemy with rifle pits and automatic weapons all around the perimeter. Around the northeast corner especially, the Germans were in strength, though wherever the men dropped, they came in fire contact immediately with small enemy groups. The

*COL SINK learned of this alert and of the German anticipations from interrogating prisoners; it was subsequently confirmed by a study of the position.

majority got out of this deadfall by lying quietly for a few minutes until the attention of the defenders was drawn elsewhere, and then crawling off into the dark. At DROP ZONE C, the assembly areas for Second Battalion, Regimental Headquarters Company and First Battalion were three orchards strung across the Zone from north to south. Second Battalion was supposed to assemble on the northern orchard and from there move off to attack the Exits. First Battalion had planned to assemble on the southern orchard before proceeding on its mission. Regimental Headquarters, after assembling in the center orchard, was to move $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles southward and set up a CP at COULAVILLE.

Had the drop taken place in this manner, it is quite possible that the greater breadth of the target would have given the waiting Germans a greatly enhanced opportunity for killing. As things worked out, the relatively small force that was delivered according to schedule came to earth well strung out among the apple trees. COL ROBERT L. SIMK and a large part of his Headquarters survived in this manner; most of the 10 planes which dropped their sticks on or near the Zone had been loaded with Headquarters men. The cold figures reveal that there was more sound than fury in the reception which met them—only two or three men landing on DROP ZONE C suffered breaks or sprains, and the total loss at that point was not more than 10, including the dead and wounded. Elsewhere, however, the Head-

quarters had already taken losses which seriously crippled its operation. Three of the planes had missed the Zone by 20 miles. Days later, when our forces captured CHERBOURG, some of these men were found wounded in the hospitals there; fresh-marked graves revealed the fate of others. Most of the strayed were communications men, including the commander of the communications platoon, the communications section and all of the operators. Only 5 communications men were at hand when the Regiment began to fight.

Not one of 506th Regiment's battalions had a drop pattern which was as good as the lowest mark which it had established during any training operation. Whether the great spread of the drop pattern contributed materially to the casualty figures is something of a question but it undoubtedly slowed down assembly and acted as a drag on local operation.* But what was lost to tactics by these delays and misadventures was probably compensated for ten-fold in the bewilderment and strategical miscalculation of the enemy which resulted from having parachute drops reported from all parts of the peninsula. The doubts which must have assailed the enemy in the

*COL SINK and his Staff felt that the Regiment suffered greater casualties because of the faulty drop, but this is a random estimate. In hedgerow fighting, as the American Army discovered the hard way, concentration often means heavier loss without proportionate gain. 506th's mission would have been far different had its concentration been effective. The question of whether it would have had greater loss is inscrutable.

critical hours when the defending forces were being redeployed to meet the invasion threat, doubts which were intensified by the inadvertent work of carrier pilots who strayed from their courses, are reflected in the War Diary of the German 7th Army High Command for that period. The earliest entry—0130 on 6 June, 1944—notes that "parachutists have been dropped since 0105 hours in the area east and northwest of CAEN, ST MARCOVE and MONTEBOURG, both sides of the VIRE and on the east coast of COTENTIN" and at 0200 it is repeated that the airborne landing embraces MONTEBOURG and "there is fighting by LE HAM." Some of these were points far outside the sector of invasion; it appears as certain that these reports of irruption resulted from the chance landings of paratroop forces in areas where they were not supposed to be committed as that, in consequence of the reports, the German high command marked time for several hours while trying to determine what these varying thrusts indicated. At 0240, there was still debate as to the measure of the danger, the Commanding General of Group West maintaining that the defenders were not confronted with a "major action" while the Chief of Staff replied that it could be nothing less than that, in view of the depth of the (airborne) penetration in the 84th Army Corps area. It was at 0400 that the Commander of that Corps reported to the Chief of Staff, 7th Army High Command, his conclusion that "the general plan seems to be to tie off the COTENTIN PENINSULA at its narrowest point." Another hour passed before the

Germans knew that they were also about to be hit from the sea.*

In the strained circumstances, the Americans went ahead with their assemblies according to standard procedures. The assembly lights did almost no good; the NORMANDY hedgerows blacked them out on every side, and men coming down in the surrounding fields hardly ever saw them. Collection proceeded by individual soldiers working their way "by guess and by God" to the Drop Zone CPs. Guides were then posted at cross-roads and bridges, and officers and NCOs moved out to gather men wherever they could be found. The cricket signal was the most helpful instrument in the build-up.**

COL SINK, landing in a small field which was a part of DROP ZONE D, thought at first that he was all alone. His harness was extremely tight and was cutting into his flesh. He kept wondering how quickly an enemy bullet would find him and he took his knife out and tried to hack his way out of the harness; the blade was much too dull. He realized then that he would have to stay quiet and work away patiently at his gear. As he got his nerve under control and began to free himself, he saw billowing silk in a far corner of the field. He headed

*From the War Diary of the German 7th Army High Command.

**Every officer and man interviewed by the HC relate this way about it. In the same operation 82d Div did not use the cricket. Its officers said it was an "amateur's device" and not needed by battle-trained paratroops.

for it when he at last broke clear from his harness. Still hitched to the other chute was LT SAMUEL S. BURNS of First Battalion's Headquarters Company. He said that his leg was hurt bad. "See if you can walk on it," said SINK, "and we'll try to find some men." SINK helped him across the field and pushed him through the first hedgerow. There, BURNS dropped; he said he could go no farther, and that he was certain the leg was broken. SINK said: "Then I'll have to leave you." He found a hole in the field and put BURNS in it, telling him to stay there until someone came after him. Then he checked his compass, and decided to move east. After about 300 yards he came to a side road; all of this time he had been walking parallel to the main road into STE MARIE DU MONT, without realizing that he was within 40 yards of the highway. As he turned into it, he met three members of his Regimental Staff and the Headquarters Commandant, CAPT EDWARD A. PETERS. They talked things over and made the correct guess as to what road they were on without having any idea how far they were east or west. So they continued east until they came at last to a small cottage. A dog barked loudly. SINK and PETERS banged loudly on the door. A Frenchman looked out from an upper story window and asked what went on. SINK knew enough French to tell him: "The invasion has begun." The man said: "Tres bien!" and he came on down. Though he shook all over from fright, when SINK handed him a map, he showed them where they were--about 250 yards from the spot where SINK was supposed to set up his CP

on the jump field. SINK asked him about Germans and he said they were all around—that there were many of them in STE MARIE DU MONT. The group then moved to the CP location; they picked up a few men as they went along and were slightly surprised when they reached the jump-field CP and found they were first at the scene. SINK said to them: "This is it! This is the place. Now go out and get more of the boys and bring them in!" But it was all slow work. At the close of two hours, an operation which was supposed to have collected the greater part of a regiment had assembled only 40 men. A few men from First Battalion were present but no radios had been found and no contact had been made with Second and Third Battalions. After two hours the trickle of men ceased and SINK decided to move all hands, including LT COL WILLIAM L. TURNER of First Battalion, and the few men with him, over to COULAVILLE; he figured that by now more of the men would probably be trying to find their way to that location. The force reached COULAVILLE without opposition. To make sure that he was at the right place, SINK asked a Frenchman living in the village to direct him to COULAVILLE. The Frenchman said he had never heard of the place: so did his wife. It mystified SINK until he asked the Frenchman to point out the direction to several other villages in the same general area; the Frenchman was more than willing and he practically boxed the compass before SINK realized that he was at the right place, though the Frenchman didn't know the name of his own community. Enroute to COULA-

VILLE, SINK had passed within 600 yards of the place where COL MOSELEY, commander of 502d Regiment, had broken his leg in the drop. He was told MOSELEY was there but he knew that he had no time to go calling.

Through the hours of dark, SINK sent scouts out and continued to check on the orchard where Second Battalion was supposed to rendezvous. But though they searched the neighborhood, not a man was found. LT COL ROBERT L. STRAYER and most of his men had been dropped well to the northward in 502d Regiment's area; when daylight came, they were still in the vicinity of the northern causeways but were proceeding toward POUPEVILLE. Concerning this, and the situation of all other elements, SINK remained in the dark. He had heard nothing from Division. So far as he knew, he was fighting alone in NORMANDY.* A few minutes before daylight, he made his decision; he called TURNER and told him that he had better take over the mission assigned STRAYER—the march on the southern causeways. However, TURNER

*The average conditions of assembly under the conditions met in NORMANDY can be envisaged from the experience of M SGT LLOYD E. WILLS who landed within 400 yards of the assembly area in the orchard, yet did not reach the CP at COULAVILLE until 1030 on D PLUS 1. He wandered around for several hours without seeing anyone; because of the hedgerows, he could seldom see more than 100 yards in any direction. At last he joined a group of 25 men, some from Headquarters Company and some from 82d Division. The group was never more than a few miles from COULAVILLE but it lost 24 hours in closing the distance. Said WILLS: "You go along and join a group. The group goes along and is fired upon. Then you engage. Everybody has to wait until the road is clear again. The larger the group, the harder it is to get by without fighting."

had only 50 men with him and so he was instructed initially not to spread his force but to drive for POUPPEVILLE and Exit No 1. They started as the dawn broke.

The fortunes of Second Battalion had been in marked contrast to what had taken place at DROP ZONE D. Dropped far outside of their designated area, the Battalion still had succeeded in achieving a far more rapid and complete assembly than the other elements of the Regiment. CAPT CLARENCE HESTER, S-3 of the Battalion, landed with its leading elements. He figured that the stick had spread over about 1000 yards during the descent; so he walked back 500 yards in the direction which the planes had come, thinking this would put him at about the center of his small group. There, he put up a string of amber bundle lights in a tree. The signal did its work; officers and men began to find their way into the position. HESTER was still in doubt as to his location; so he dispatched LT LEWIS NIXON, S-2, to prowl the nearest village. NIXON routed out a Frenchman and was told that the village was FOUCARVILLE; the village was at that time held in some strength by the Germans as LT HAROLD HOGGARD and his patrol from 502d Regiment had not yet put in their appearance. A considerable group had gathered around HESTER while NIXON was making his reconnaissance; in the passage of little more than one hour, the force included a communications platoon, a machine gun platoon, approximately 80 men from Battalion Headquarters Company, 90 men from Company D, 6

men from Company F and 3 from Company E. By 0330, LT COL STRAYER and the 15 men of 506th Regiment who had initially joined up with COL CASSIDY'S force, came along the road with that column, and STRAYER took over from HESTER. Twenty men from 508th Regiment, 82d Divison, whose carrier had far overshoot the mark and dropped them near FOUCARVILLE, also joined up. This body moved out about 0430—around 200 men altogether. They moved southward along the main road running to the east of DROP ZONE A—the same route which CASSIDY'S column had taken—but they did not move very fast or very far. After the passage of CASSIDY'S men, the enemy had been given just enough time to turn out his forces and harass any late comers. With Company D leading off as advance guard, the force began to meet determined resistance from the moment it cleared the assembly area. During the first stage of advance toward the lower Exits, about 25 enemy were killed and as many taken prisoner. Four machine gun positions were encountered and destroyed, all of this action taking place in the middle ground between CASSIDY'S northern elements at FOUCARVILLE and his southern wing at the W-X-Y-Z position.* At ST GERMAIN DE VARREVILLE, some time between 0900 and 1100, the head of the column was stopped by a German artillery battery which was laying accurate interdictory fire across the road. Part of Company D was passed around the rear

*STRAYER thought this happened around 1100 but CASSIDY was certain STRAYER passed W-X-Y-Z much earlier than that—perhaps around 0900.

of the battery with the mission of hurrying on to Exit No 2. Its objective lay a considerable distance to the south, but nothing had been heard from Regiment, and so far as STRAYER knew, his assignment remained unchanged.

Third Battalion had played in worse luck initially, but a mere handful of its men had set a shining example in initiative for the remainder of the Regiment. When the planes carrying the Battalion passed over the flooded area between CARENTAN and ST COME DU MONT, heavy anti-aircraft fire enveloped the formation and dissolved it, the planes taking evasive action in all directions. This ground fire leaped up at the parachutists as they responded to the jump signal; it had been given them just a flash too early. Despite the interference from the ground batteries, the individual planes kept to their courses fairly well and most of the sticks were delivered a little short of DROP ZONE D, to westward and northward of it. Square on the Zone, the Germans had prepared a giant torch by soaking a house in oil. They lit it as the first planes approached and it blazed fiercely, illuminating the entire countryside.

CAPT CHARLES G. SHETTLE, S-3 of Battalion, landed to south of the canal which ran off from the southwest corner of the jump field. It seemed to him as he came to earth that the whole area was being deluged by machine gun and mortar fire. So he crawled into a ditch and lay there for a few minutes, studying his compass and trying to plot his next move. He felt pretty

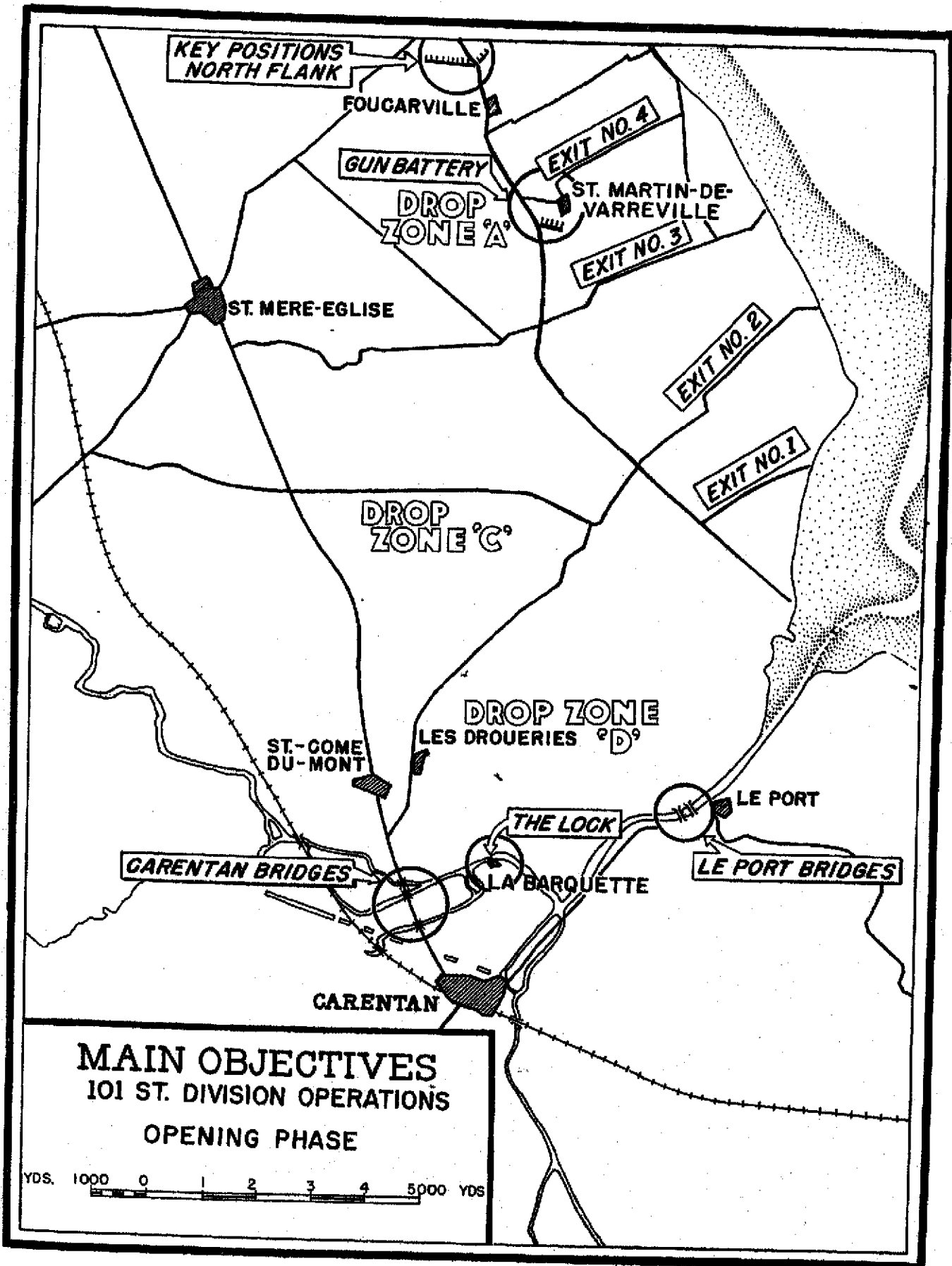
sure that ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN was only a little distance to northwest of him; the heaviest enemy fire seemed to be coming from that direction. He saw no lights and heard no sounds indicating the presence of any other paratroopers in that direction. So he moved southwestward to the edge of the field near LES DROUERIES where he knew elements of 501st Regiment were supposed to assemble. He picked up one man on the way but found no one at 501st's rendezvous. Thereon, he turned back toward ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN and picked up two officers and 12 men while he was walking along; they had come from the assembly area but had seen no other parachutists. The group talked things over and decided to strike out for their objective--Bridge No 37 across the CANAL DE CARENTAN near BREVANDS.* Enroute, they picked up 16 more men and two officers, one of them an engineer officer who cut the CARENTAN power line, the only action taken during the march. The "Battalion"--~~5~~²⁹ officers and ~~30~~ men--reached the canal bridges near LE PORT at 0430. There was fire from the east bank but the party succeeded in closing in on the western approaches and bringing the eastern approaches under temporary domination by their own fire. Five more officers and 15 more men joined them and it was decided to force a crossing of Bridge No 37 and attempt to establish a bridgehead. Two volunteers (names unknown to the Battalion, so it appears probable that they were killed in the subsequent action) crossed the bridge under intense machine gun

*This party traveled on an azimuth, and stayed away from roads.

fire. After that, LTS KENNETH H. CHRISTIANSON and RUDOLPH E. BOLTE of Company H each led 5-man patrols to the far bank, these men crossing on the girders under the bridge flooring. LT RICHARD P. MEASON of Company H followed up with his command group. These groups re-deployed as a body against the enemy positions on the east bank, killed 13 Germans and knocked out 3 machine gun emplacements. They soon found, however, that the Germans were present in such numbers that they could bring up fresh guns faster than the Americans could proceed against them. After engaging for about two hours, the force was compelled to withdraw to the west bank for lack of ammunition. They were still without communications and knew nothing of the situation elsewhere in the Division; they imagined that help might be nearer at hand among the OMAHA BEACH forces to the southeast of them than among their own people to the northward. LT FRED T. BROYHILL of Headquarters Company was sent with two men to attempt to break through the German lines toward help—an extremely vain hope under the circumstances. The men who remained on the east bank took an inventory around noontime and found that they had about 30 rounds of rifle ammunition per man, one light machine gun with 175 rounds, one bazooka with 6 rounds, one bundle with 250 pounds of explosive and one Hawkins mine per man.

It was not an exceptionally favorable situation, but at least, though they did not know it, they could stand on one thing: They were the only element of the Regiment which had succeeded in

reaching their objective and they had done more than their share toward assuring the link-up of the OMAHA BEACH and UTAH BEACH forces.



CAPTURE OF THE SOUTHERN CAUSEWAYS

Despite these early setbacks and disappointments, the southern exits fell into Division's lap like a pair of over-ripe plums, though that was more the doing of Third Battalion of 501st Regiment than the work of 506th. Originally, that Battalion had been set up as Division reserve and was scheduled to drop on DROP ZONE C along with elements of Division Headquarters.

As had been the case with the earlier serials, the formation in which the Battalion had traveled from England kept well spaced until encountering the cloud bank nigh the French coast. Upon emerging into a clear atmosphere near FONT L'ABBE, the men could see that the formation had become well scattered. There was some flak at the time and considerable ground machine gun fire.* It did not seem especially thick as they came near the DROP ZONE; yet three of the Battalion's planes were shot down and 36 men died of the 45 who rode them. These crashes took place somewhat to the south of the DROP ZONE; the drop pattern for the Battalion extended roughly from ST JORES to SAINTE-NAY on the southern limit, as far east as the marshes next to UTAH BEACH and on the northern side only a few men came down far beyond the line of flight which most of the planes had traveled across the peninsula. About 90 of LT COL JULIAN EWELL'S men and about 60 men from Division Headquarters dropped fair on DROP ZONE

*Testimony of COL EWELL and members of his Staff.

C. The descent was uneventful. There were no Germans in the immediate vicinity, and while there was a scattering fire from beyond the distant hedgerows, it did not seem to be bearing on the parachuting force. The assembly was conducted according to SOP—with blue lights and a police whistle. The men in EWELL'S stick all dropped right around him. Some landed in the same field and collected at once. Others were separated from the lights by a few hedgerows; patrols rapidly brought them together. The Battalion remained just south of STE MARIE DU MONT until dawn.

During these same hours another 150 men had been assembling near HIESVILLE; they were the men from EWELL'S battalion who had been assigned to set up the Division CP and maintain it, a duty which kept them on that ground most of the day. At his own position, EWELL had been able to gather plenty of radio equipment. The Division elements had none. EWELL'S battalion therefor proceeded to supply and set-up the facilities for the larger headquarters. In the beginning, however, it did little good; all efforts to raise any other elements from among the parachute regiments met with silence. Fortunately, the general situation was not less quiet. In the HIESVILLE and STE MARIE DU MONT neighborhoods, there was no strong reaction from the enemy at any time while the men were collecting and setting up. Company I did most of the outposting for the Battalion but was never challenged; the Germans had no motorized patrols on the roads and

did not seem to have any sentry posts covering the fields.

In the absence of information about any of his other units, MAJ GEN TAYLOR decided at dawn to send EWELL and a contingent of his men to seize Exit No 1. They moved out at 0600, marching cross country until they came to the main highway leading into POUPPEVILLE. During this time, not a shot was fired and nothing was seen of the enemy. It was in effect an uncovered road march. Because of the heavy cover and the obstruction to movement via the hedgerow-bounded fields, no flank patrols were used but only flankers. The column picked up a few men as it moved along--the Battalion Executive, the Assistant S-3, the Adjutant and a few others who had come down atop the houses of STE MARIE DU MONT and had had to use extreme caution in working their way out of the village. Two parachutists had been caught, beaten and otherwise brutally handled. Another, PFC AMBROSE ALLIE of the Battalion Headquarters Company, told of being lined up against a wall with a companion. His captors were about ready to summarily execute the two men when several of their companions chanced upon the scene and shot the Germans before they could fire.*

First contact with the enemy was made to the west of STE MARIE

*The witness in this case was PFC ALLIE. We could not identify the man who had been with him as ALLIE did not know him; he may have been shot later, or may have been a member of another unit. The incident is unusual but ALLIE'S story convinced EWELL he was telling the truth.

DU MONT. A German sentry yelled and seven men came running out of a dugout. Two of EWELL'S scouts shot six of the men before they could either fire or get away; the others escaped. The column moved on toward POUPEVILLE and was halted by a scattering rifle fire as it got to within short range of the outlying buildings. The village had not been organized for defense. To the southeast of it there was a fairly complete field position with a tall observation tower in the center and a perimeter established with a few machine gun emplacements, foxholes and several dugouts. But there were neither works nor barricades in among the houses and the buildings had not been fitted with fire ports.

The enemy force soon fled the prepared ground to the southeast, the riflemen dropped back to the houses. Even there, they did not stand. As rapidly as the Americans came to the high wall of a house and began moving through or around it, the enemy withdrew from the next house beyond. EWELL was bothered only by his lack of numbers: he had but 40 men present from his line companies and he found that the Headquarters specialists were of slight value in the skirmishing and sometimes got in the way.* The only harassment to the advance was that the enemy kept pushing small patrols around both of his flanks and he did not have enough men to attempt a counter envelopment. Most of his losses came from this cause. His men would be engaging opposition close

*EWELL'S statement.

at hand within the houses; from somewhere far off on the flank an unseen rifleman would pick off one or two of them. It slowed the advance a little without stopping it. The Americans moved along from house to house. After their first few losses, the enemy seemed to lose heart for the contest; the sound of a grenade blowing off outside was enough to make them stampede from one building to another. Having begun the action at 0900, EWELL had worked his way to the enemy CP in the center of the village by a few minutes past noon. That was enough for the German commander and he surrendered the town. EWELL had lost 6 killed and 12 wounded. The enemy losses were 15 killed, 10 wounded and 38 captured; most were non-Germans from the 1058 Grenadier Regiment (91 Division).

The civilians of the village informed EWELL that the road to the Beach was not mined and that only the bridges had been prepared for demolition. A few of the enemy were falling back in the direction of the bridges, and already EWELL'S men could hear the Fourth Infantry Division coming along from the Beach. Judging by the sound of the machine gun fire, EWELL reckoned the column was about 1500 yards distant when POUPEVILLE fell. Germans, who had been at the Beach positions, were falling back westward along the Causeway toward EWELL'S men. EWELL got his machine guns set up and brought these remnants under fire; they turned back toward the Fourth Division column with their hands lifted in surrender.

A short time later, the seaborne column passed through EWELL'S men—the first link-up of the forces which had come over the Beach with the forces which had dropped into NORMANDY. EWELL took an easier route home and got to HIESVILLE about 1600, thereon reporting his position to Division and to COL SINK of 506th Regiment. Some time later he was told to move that night to join SINK'S force between ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN and ST COME DU MONT. The leading elements of the Division were beginning to draw together.

TURNER'S detachment, sent by SINK to do the FOUPEVILLE job after SINK had failed to raise STRAYER, fought a few minor skirmishes enroute to the village and reached there too late to share in its capture. EWELL was already in possession and the troops of the Fourth Infantry Division were proceeding westward without having to fire more than an occasional rifle shot. TURNER'S men got back to COULAVILLE that evening: the day had been easy on them.

That part of Company D, 506th Regiment, which had bypassed the German battery at ST GERMAIN DE VARREVILLE some time around noon and made a dash for Exit No 2, arrived at its objective at 1330.

WITH STRAYER'S
COLUMN

The causeway leading through HOUDIENVILLE was brought under control practically without fighting. STRAYER'S main body caught up with the advance party about 1500 hours. The column had kept the German battery entertained until CAPT R. D. WINTERS of Company E made a trip

to the Beach and returned with a group of tanks from the sea-borne force. The tanks brought the battery under fire and destroyed it. By 1800, Second Battalion was well organized at Exit No 2, with about 300 men on hand, including the strays from other units.

CAPT SHETTLE'S small force at the mouth of the RIVER DOUVE neither improved nor impaired their situation at the bridges as the day wore on. The group of 506th men who had split away from COL JOHNSON'S party at LA BAR-
AT THE LE PORT QUETTE early in the morning, finally
BRIDGES arrived, bringing SHETTLE his first word that a friendly force was engaging over to his right. SHETTLE went to LA BARQUETTE with a two-man patrol during the afternoon but found that JOHNSON'S situation was "little better than" his own and accordingly discounted the chance that he would get help from that source if he became hard-pressed.* However JOHNSON'S SFC radio contact with the fleet was the first channel SHETTLE had found that day which provided a chance to report his situation to a higher headquarters; he sent a report on his position to the Navy for relay to 101st's Division Commander. That night SHETTLE'S group was reinforced by 40 men who had been dropped somewhere near CARENTAN and had taken all day to find their way. Two bundles were retrieved, one loaded with small arms ammunition and the other with K rations. As darkness fell, the seven engineers and two

*SHETTLE'S description

demolitions men who were present worked their way downstream, and in less than one-half hour prepared the bridges for destruction--just in case the enemy strength grew until it could not be held. At about 0200 on D PLUS 1, the Germans tried to make a sortie across Bridge No 37 but were driven back by the American fire.

CONCENTRATION AND MOVEMENT

While these varying actions were taking place, the major concentration of 101st Division's strength was gradually forming around COL SINK, the one commander who had been most thoroughly lost from the larger elements of his own command because of the circumstances of the Drop and his own lack of communications. This result was not entirely a paradox. It will be noted that practically without exception, the vital objectives of Division's operation on D Day were scattered around the perimeter of Division's area of operation. That was true of the causeway exits, the LA BARQUETTE LOCK, the LE PORT bridges and the enemy positions at FOUCARVILLE. The Division was exploding like a bombshell. There was no great menace in its interior position; the situation called for a great deal of out-fighting and relatively little in-fighting, a condition in which the infantry would have been greatly aided by the artillery, had the latter achieved a concentration.

From these operations, SINK was curiously detached, largely by reason of the scantness of his force and his nearly-complete radio isolation. He had made contact with his Second Battalion in early morning and had ordered it to proceed against Exit No 1; but apart from that, he was pretty much alone and he felt that the scratch forces then available to him had best be used in protecting the rear of the causeway-bound parties and in trying to achieve a further concentration of the Regiment. In the

absence of any substantial information as to the location of enemy forces, he decided to send out a number of patrols to feel out his own position and make contact. These patrols all operated as combat patrols, armed and ordered to engage the enemy on sight. One patrol under LT SALVI H. MATHESON, S-1, went through the village of VIERVILLE and moved on through HIESVILLE without finding any enemy. They did not know it but the latter village had already been visited by LT COL HARRY B. KINNARD of 501st Regiment, who had come down seven miles short of his own jump field and had walked from near STE MERE EGLISE, "expecting to find a German behind every tree or at every turn in the road, but finding nothing."* At HIESVILLE, KINNARD had found a dozen paratroopers, representing almost as many different organizations. Instead of taking them along in a body, KINNARD had oriented each man and sent him on his way to his separate mission. Another of SINK'S patrols, under CAPT PETERS of Regimental Headquarters Company, moved southward and ran into an enemy machine gun position. Two of the enemy guns were knocked out; PETERS was killed in trying to get at the third gun. Grenades and sub-machine guns proved to be the most useful weapons in this kind of work, the main purpose of which was the quest for information. The force felt so absolutely in the dark that it extended itself more and more as the day wore on until finally even the Commander was taking inordinate risks. After three officer-led patrols had sought vainly in the vicinity of DROP

*KINNARD'S words.

ZONE D for any sign of Third Battalion, SINK and his S-3, MAJ H. H. HANNAH, started out at 1100 to extend the search, going toward ST COME DU MONT. One mile southwest of VIERVILLE their jeep sped past a large enemy horse park; they were right on top of the encampment before they realized it. There was a sentry standing at the gate and they shot him down as they whipped by. The driver had stepped on the gas, not realizing that he was moving into a cul de sac. Ahead, and alongside, SINK suddenly became aware of Germans rising from out of the ditches on both sides of the road; the jeep was moving right down the center of an enemy column which had just fallen out. SINK and HANNAH fired their pistols; the driver worked his carbine with one hand and held the wheel with the other. The enemy was taken wholly by surprise, and instead of returning the fire instantly, they either ran or dropped into the ditches. But more of the enemy were rising from the ditches up ahead and SINK realized that their luck couldn't last. They had run past troops for about 200 yards, but if they kept going they would surely be killed. There was a crossroads just in front of them. SINK yelled to the driver to get the jeep around as fast as he could. They came back down the line, still firing their weapons. Once again they sped past the horse park. Then they were safely out of it, amazed that they had cleared the danger without one aimed shot being fired at them.* Soon after SINK got back to the CP,

*SINK and HANNAH were the witnesses on this strange episode. SINK is given to under-statement, especially where it concerns his own actions.

a runner brought word that a mixed group of about 70 officers and men, some from the Regiment and others from other units of both airborne divisions, were engaging an enemy force at HOLDY near STE MARIE DU MONT and were not faring too well. The enemy position was organized around a battery of 105 mm guns which no one had expected to encounter in that area.* By this time an additional 75 men from First Battalion had collected at the CP. SINK sent them on to support the HOLDY attack under command of CAPT KNUT H. RAUDSTEIN of Company C and CAPT LLOYD E. PATCH of Headquarters Company; and when a group of 50 men under a lieutenant from 502d Regiment arrived at the CP a few minutes later, SINK sent them to support the PATCH-RAUDSTEIN force.

It was a confused action. The four-gun battery was in a hastily-prepared position with dirt emplacements. Whether there had been infantry covering the guns, SINK'S men never had time to learn; by the time the PATCH-RAUDSTEIN force came up, the 50 or 60 Germans defending the area had all pulled back to within the gun position. The force started a double envelopment, PATCH moving around one flank with half the men while RAUDSTEIN and the remaining men started a sweep around the hedgerows on the other. But while they were busy in this turning movement, a man with a bazooka opened up on the battery, firing from a hedgerow directly in front of the guns. The rockets hit among the men and ammunition with terrible effect; all fight died in the

*The battery's position had not been indicated on any G-2 reports.

survivors and the two groups under PATCH and RAUDSTEIN were able to close in and destroy them with rifle fire. A ditch behind the guns was choked with enemy dead when the ground was overwhelmed.

The 502d group reached the scene in time to mount guard over the guns, PATCH having decided to take his men on against ST MARIE DU MONT where a relatively strong enemy force was still resisting. He got his men a little way into the village, but then had to back away from it, after accomplishing hardly more than a cursory reconnaissance. The Germans were using a great deal of mortar fire and with strong effect. PATCH noted that the fire was pretty well following the movements of his men and he concluded that it was being regulated from an OP in the tower of the village church. He returned with some of his men to the battery at HOLDY, bore-sighted one of the guns and knocked the OP out of the steeple with the first couple of rounds. Then his men pressed back into the village. Help was at hand. Troops from the Fourth Infantry Division were coming in from the other side. Under this double pressure, the enemy withdrew via the flank.*

In the meantime, COL SINK, hearing by runner of the results of the action at HOLDY, decided that he needed the German guns and dispatched four jeeps for that purpose; the crews were to tow

*From PATCH.

the guns back to the CP and bring as much ammunition as the guns could bear. But the plan was thwarted. Even before PATCH had left the battery position, the lieutenant from 502d Regiment had confessed his nervousness over the situation and had said that the guns had better be destroyed, lest the Germans capture them in a counter-attack. PATCH dissuaded him temporarily; after PATCH was gone, a few shells began to fall around the battery (this was probably mortar fire from STE MARIE DU MONT) and the guard detail proceeded to blow three of the guns. SINK'S detail arrived just in time to save the fourth gun.*

During the hours in which these various forces were sent by SINK to their appointed rounds, the CP seemed to become the target of localized counter-attack by the enemy forces. The old stone dwelling which SINK was using for his headquarters was in a disadvantageous position; there were low-lying hills on two sides of it. Too, individual riflemen began to crowd back into the general area; sniper fire became incessant and it was all but impossible for any of the commanders to move far in any direction without drawing fire from the hedgerows.** SINK got a few men up to the high ground but their numbers were such that he knew

*SINK took this gun along on the march to the DOUVE and for several days it augmented the regiment's fire power. Later, an infantry lieutenant was using it along the banks of that river to reply to a German battery which had been harassing 506th. An artillery captain came up to him and said: "Here, let me handle this!" On the second round, the gun blew up, killing the artilleryman. From SINK.

**It was the consensus of SINK'S troops that in hedgerow country the source or rather the line of this irregular bullet fire can be determined within an arc of 25° to 30°

he had no chance to hold if the enemy made a determined move in his direction. In mid-afternoon, the CP came under a persistent small arms fire from the hill line, in such volume as to indicate that a substantial enemy force was closing in. SINK cleaned out his headquarters and led all hands up to the high ground: officers and the few wounded men grabbed rifles and took their places in the fire line along the hedgerows. After about 30 minutes of exchanging fires, the enemy attack subsided. Late that afternoon, the Germans crowded in again and SINK made another sally with his headquarters crew and beat them back. But he was certain that they would come on again, probably in greater strength after the fall of dark. He explained the situation to the old Frenchman who lived in the house and advised him for his own safety to go elsewhere. The Frenchman asked: "Where will I go? Where would I sleep?" SINK had no answer. The Frenchman remained.

In the evening, MAJ GEN TAYLOR, BRIG GEN MC AULIFFE and their headquarters party arrived at SINK'S CP, coming from the action around POUPEVILLE.* There was a conference at which tentative plans were made for an advance southward on the following morning. GEN TAYLOR felt that it was essential to push on toward the DOUVE as rapidly as possible to make sure that the bridges

*SINK had gone to HIESVILLE in the morning to contact the Division CP and learn of the general situation; he found only three junior staff members there and could learn nothing.

were blown—a part of 501st Regiment's mission. Unless that were done, there was presumably nothing to keep the enemy from throwing his armor against the American flank. This general advance would have to be preceded by a reconnaissance in force through VIÉRVILLE. Having given this outline of his intentions, GEN TAYLOR went on to his CP.

The night came on with SINK still hearing no word from his Third Battalion. His total strength, ready for the next day's work, included about 225 men from First Battalion, 300 from Second Battalion, a platoon of AT guns, about 40 men from 82d Division and men from various other units to the number of about 100. A large number of prisoners taken during D Day were mainly from the German 6th Parachute Regiment. Many were quite young; some were over-age. They did not appear to be first-class troops physically, though their ammunition supply was plentiful and their equipment was good. The majority were willing to talk.

That night SINK published the order for the movement which was to get underway at 0430. The 401st Glider Infantry Battalion, which had come off the Beach that afternoon, was to be the leading element in the advance through VIÉRVILLE to ST COME DU MONT. The Battalion was attached to 506th Regiment for the operation. First Battalion, Second Battalion, Headquarters and attached AT guns and engineers were to follow, in that order.

But the glider battalion didn't keep its appointment in time, and it became First Battalion's task to lead off in the early morning.

THE GENERAL ADVANCE

Almost from the moment First Battalion stepped off, enemy snipers began to buzz around the force's flanks and front. The hedgerows served them well, particularly in the early morning, before the light grew strong. Their tactics were of the simplest—fire and fade back. The advancing body rarely saw any sign of the enemy but its ranks had to proceed cautiously to escape the searing fire. It became impossible to put the column over the dirt road which led into VIERVILLE. The numbers of the enemy seemed few; they operated from behind the hedges and trees and from within the farm buildings which flanked the line of advance, never continuing the engagement until it became possible for the Americans to close with them. SINK'S worst problem was to keep his men moving into the teeth of this type of opposition. He kept a few men moving via the road, chiefly for the purpose of drawing enemy fire. The greater part of his strength advanced roughly in skirmish lines extended on either side of the road. Because of the nature of an advance through hedgerow country, this necessitated deployment over an exceptionally broad front.*

By 0900, First Battalion had reached VIERVILLE. Its commander, LT COL TURNER was in the VIERVILLE church when COL SINK and GEN TAYLOR arrived and SINK told TURNER that he was to continue to

*From SINK.

attack toward the crossroads to the south of ST COME DU MONT;* TURNER took this to mean that the crossroads was to be his objective for the day. But the Battalion could hardly get in motion again. While still among the VIERVILLE houses, Company C was attacked by enemy riflemen who had crept in close along the hedgerow lines south of the village. These scattering forces were driven back slowly but they refused to disengage. Along each successive hedgerow, they built up a new fire line, giving ground only when the movement of Americans down the southward-running hedges and ditches threatened their death or capture. In two hours the Battalion advanced only 1000 yards. Come to the crossroads below VIERVILLE (389-899) the Battalion paused for reorganization, and at that point things changed somewhat for the better; six Sherman tanks from a unit which had landed on UTAH BEACH came forward to buck the line for the infantry. They improved but did not wholly alter the situation. Company B, which was extended to right of the road, continued to draw sharp fire from enemy skirmishers moving among the orchards and farm buildings beyond their own open flank; it was good cover and the Company had little luck in fighting them off. Paced by two tanks which were traveling via the road, Company A, which was moving through fairly open country to left of the road, moved right along to BEAUMONT, followed by Headquarters Company. At about 1130, the enemy withdrew temporarily from in front of

*The witness on these points was the S-3, CAPT E. H. HOWELL.

Company B, and the line was again straightened. However, COL SINK had already taken stock of the situation and had concluded that First Battalion would need help: at 1100, Company D, then at ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN, got orders to move up and assist First Battalion.

Thus far the Battalion had moved along somewhat under wraps. Despite that it was plentifully supplied with small arms ammunition, SINK had warned his men not to fire into hedgerows or buildings except to return fire. It was a precaution which he thought advisable for the sake of his own people; so many paratroopers were still on the loose and looking for their units through this countryside that indiscriminate fire was as likely to kill Americans as Germans. This special concern cost SINK at least one firstclass opportunity. While he was at VIERVILLE, he had seen several hundred troops milling around in the open about 2,000 yards to the south of him. They were on fairly low ground, which fact enabled him to see them quite clearly, but the distance was so great that he could not make out their uniform. Both SINK and TAYLOR put them under glasses but still could not identify them. The men were moving around quite freely and seemed like a good target for long-range machine gun fire. But SINK couldn't make up his mind. "They MUST be our troops," he said to TAYLOR. "Germans wouldn't be so dumb as to move around like that." So he held his fire and sent a patrol to investigate. The patrol got in close enough to make sure

they were Germans but by then the enemy group was moving off to the southward. SINK had lost them to sight by the time the patrol reported back.*

Second Battalion was also having heavy trouble. Though they were following First Battalion, SINK had shaken them out to the leftward of the main road with the general mission of clearing the enemy from the vicinity of ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN. However, after First Battalion had cleared through VIERVILLE, the enemy filtered back around the flanks of the advancing line, again took up fire positions behind the hedges and in the houses and let loose a demoralizing fire on Second Battalion as it came into the village. There were casualties all along the line, the men took to the ditches and the Battalion remained hung up, until four of the six Sherman tanks which had come forward to SINK'S assistance doubled back from the head of the column and threatened the Germans from the rear.**After several hours of skirmishing, VIERVILLE was cleared for the second time and a "large number" of the enemy (the exact count is not known) was taken prisoner. Second Battalion then moved on to ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN where Company D got its orders to march eastward and

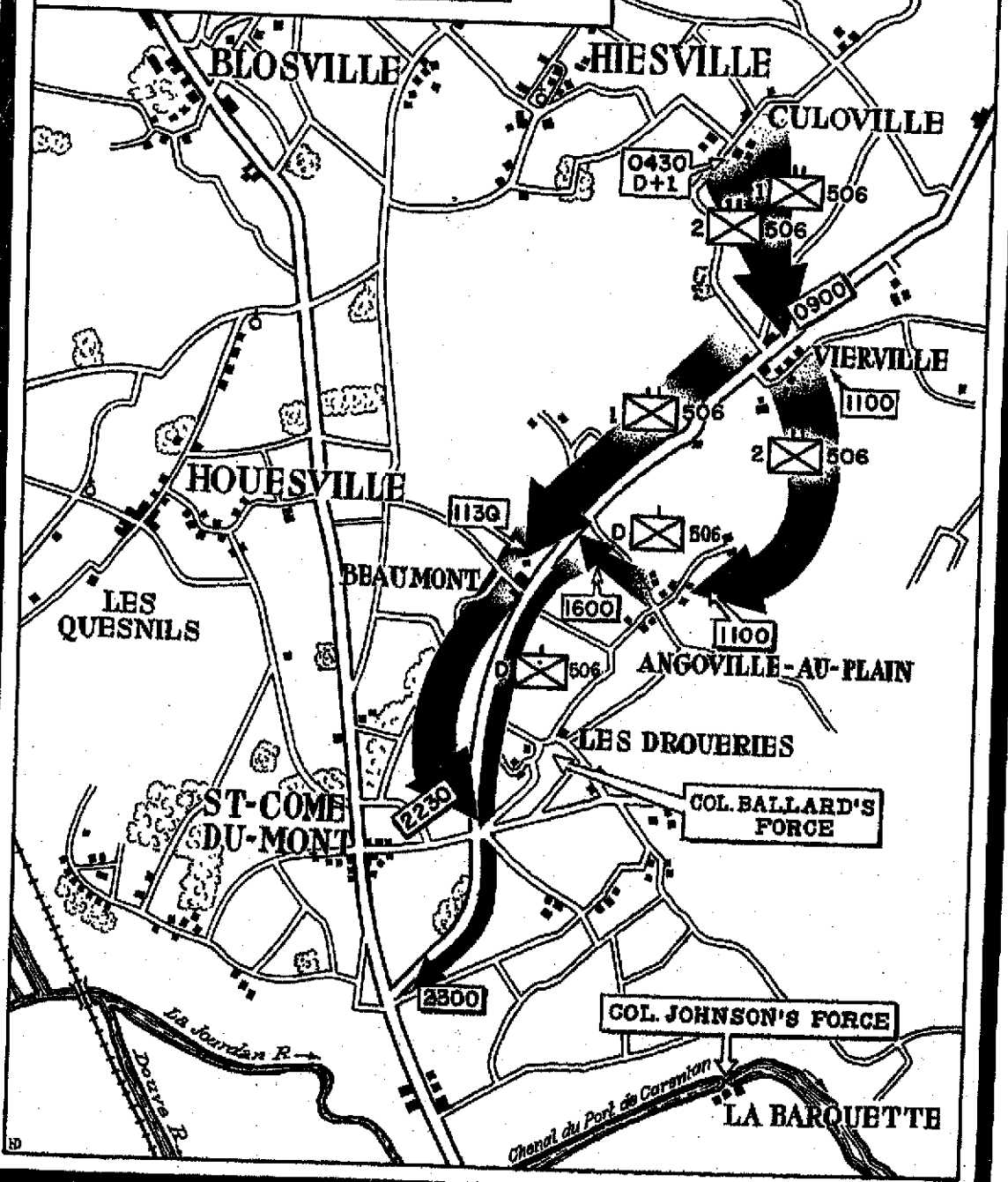
*It seems probable that this was the same German group which bounced off BALLARD'S battalion at LES DROUETTES and was captured by JOHNSON at LA BARQUETIE, although this was never confirmed.

**According to SINK, 4 tanks peeled off to help Second Battalion through VIERVILLE and 2 went forward to First Battalion. However, HOWELL tells of 6 tanks getting forward to First Battalion and then of 2 tanks leading the way into BEAUMONT, which indicates that the action of the tank force was as indicated in this narrative.

COL. SINK'S ADVANCE

D + 1 DAY

Yards 500 9 500 1000 1500 Yds.



strengthen the First Battalion's right flank: it took two hours or more for the Company to get over the ground.

SINK had been hearing of First Battalion's difficulties on the BEAUMONT road: there was such ample tree and hedge cover off to the westward that scattered enemy forces could come right up to the right of his line and continue to move along and harass it from the high ground paralleling the route of march. The situation, he was told, was getting worse rather than better. There were indications that the Germans were moving around both flanks along the hedgerows. That was how the situation was reported to him and he decided to get forward and look things over.*

In fact, the Battalion was already having a brief respite within BEAUMONT and was reorganizing for another start. Before it could move out, the enemy lashed back at them again in a strong counter-attack. Company B met this thrust and turned it, driving the Germans back along the hedgerows to a distance of about one-quarter mile and killing 15 of them as they withdrew toward the farmsteads over on the right. Once again the Battalion gathered itself in BEAUMONT, then moved forward about 600 yards toward ST COME DU MONT. Again it was counter-attacked, the flankers moving around Company B's right until the Company had to give ground and fall back on the village. The leading Sherman

*From SINK.

was hit by a German rocket and careened backward around a bend in the road.* COL TURNER got in the tank to direct the artillery and machine gun fire. The tank moved around the bend again and was hit two or three times by rockets. For 20 minutes the tank was motionless and apparently disabled; then it backed around the turn in the road again and TURNER got out and phoned for an artillery observer. The latter got there at the same time that SINK reached the forward line and the three men lay in a roadside ditch and talked things over. TURNER said that his men were being hit hard by machine gun fire but that he felt he had a chance to neutralize their guns with tank artillery. SINK told him to go on with the tanks if he felt that he could, then he added: "Be careful!" The tank started forward again.** It went only a little way. TURNER raised up out of the turret suddenly and a sniper shot him dead, in sight of many of the men on the forward line. That misfortune stopped the advance. During all of this play, Company B was being heavily engaged along its right rear, and most of the strength of Headquarters Company were engaged with it. MAJ FOSTER, taking over the command, decided that he was in no position to proceed and Company A was ordered back to BEAUMONT to reorganize again. At 1600 Company B, supported by two Shermans, moved out against the fortified farm buildings on the right flank and assaulted them with grenade and bayonet; the enemy did not fold, and the Company

*From HOWELL.

**From SINK.

recoiled once more on the village.*

The light tanks, Company D and SINK, making a second trip to his forward line, all arrived at one time. SINK had no intention of calling off the advance on ST COME DU MONT and the strength of Company D gave some promise that he was likely to get there. The Company counted 94 men—perhaps the largest assembly of the day.** As they marched into BEAUMONT, they found the men of First Battalion closely clustered together. It was not a healthy situation. Even as they arrived there, they were met by a heavy concentration of mortar fire from a distance mixed with machine pistol fire from close range. Most of it went wide of the courtyard in which the men were gathered. Company D, scarcely checking its stride, moved right out against the enemy skirmishers pressing in from the westward and drove them back until they were beyond rifle shot of BEAUMONT. Until 1830, the Company marked time in BEAUMONT, then led off down the CARENTAN road. Only one light tank paced the Company: the body of the First Battalion was strung out well to the rear, with A, C, HQ and D moving in that order.*** MAJ FOSTER had been wounded in the late afternoon and the Battalion command had passed to CAPT PATCH.

*From HOWELL.

**According to MAC MILLAN, Company D's officers gathered the impression that it was TURNER'S death rather than excessive personnel losses which checked the Battalion.

***From HOWELL.

The men of Company D kept to the hedgerows and ditches but they traveled as fast as they could go. The light tank hugged the road and continued to rake the hedgerows with machine gun fire. Every yard gained was ground which the enemy held and subsequent examination of it showed strongly built fire pits and emplacements on both sides of the road. Yet only one man from Company D was hit. It was because the tank kept moving and firing and the Germans were never given a chance to get their heads up, so the men thought.* But also they fired as they went along.

By now they were getting close to the countryside where COL BALLARD and his men were engaging the enemy at LES DROUERIES. The situation there and its relation to COL JOHNSON'S strained situation at LA BARQUETTE were prime reasons why COL SINK had continued to prod his column along, even after the temporary repulse at BEAUMONT. By direction of the Division commander, he had suspended JOHNSON'S order directing BALLARD to advance to LES DROUERIES. SINK felt that he needed BALLARD'S battalion and the position which he had already established at LES DROU-ERIES as a springboard from which to launch his own attack through ST COME DU MONT toward the DOUVE bridges. By the same token, if he succeeded, the pressure against both JOHNSON and BALLARD would be eased and he would achieve the final objectives around the CARENTAN bridgehead which had thus far eluded 501st Regiment. The sector of 101st Division would then be fairly well

*This came from MAC MILLAN and a group of his non-coms.

consolidated.

But despite the celerity of Company D's advance, the difficulties of the attack were still enormous. The relative freshness of that body as compared with the battle-weariness of the rest of the column, militated against a maintenance of order in the movement. It would have been hard enough in any case to keep forces in juncture and to make sure that the column was reasonably well closed-up from front to rear: the resurgent and irregular character of the opposition and the cut-up nature of the hedgerow country were major interferences which kept the different parts of the column from seeing and feeling one another. The need for speed was such that they moved ahead as rapidly as they could, not worrying about these things. Company D was in very much of a fog about the situation into which it was moving. They knew that friendly troops were supposed to be somewhere on ahead, though exactly where, no one had told them. So as they approached the crossroads east of ST COME DU MONT, they put up orange flares--the friendly signal. Promptly they got orange flares back from both flanks. It cheered them greatly. The word passed around: "Friendly troops on both flanks." They stepped out more freely. Then fire came at them from both sides and they ran through it as rapidly as they could, still figuring that some of their own comrades were making a mistake.* All of

*Said KAC MILLAN and STRAYER: "It had to happen to our men a second time--at the crossroads below ST COME DU MONT--before any of us caught on to the fact that the Germans now understood the orange signal and were using it against us."

this time the men of Company D had been hearing heavy firing over on their left; it continued to mystify them as they did not know anything about the fight BALLARD and his men were having at LES DROUERIES nor did they suspect that they were passing right through the jaws of a German force, part of which was containing BALLARD, and the remainder, including some anti-tank elements, was deployed directly north of ST COME DU MONT.

It remained for CAPT PATCH and his Battalion to uncover what Company D had escaped. That command had already become split by the difficulties of the march. About 30 men from Company A and 40 from Headquarters Company had pushed on ahead of the main body and had closed-up as a sort of appendage to Company D—then well past the crossroads—when on approaching the crossroads the tank which was pacing the Battalion was struck dead-on by a German rocket and completely disabled it. Almost at the moment of the explosion, machine gun fire from the field positions north of ST COME DU MONT broke all around the infantry line. No great damage was done by the machine gun fire. More because of what had happened to the tank than anything else, the men jumped for cover. That ended First Battalion's forward movement for the day. The Battalion went to work with rifles and machine guns on the positions ahead. The local fire fight continued until a decrease in the enemy fire reassured First Battalion that it had at least dented the enemy position. In any case, it was through marching for the day. And so were the

elements of Company A and Headquarters Company which for a time had strung along with Company D. They got as far as the high ground to the south of the crossroads and to right of the main road a little southeast of ST COME DU MONT. There they drew fire from enemy positions on the outskirts of the village; it stalled their movement and they continued to engage on this ground, killing a number of the enemy and taking four prisoners. Company D kept right on going.*

If Company D had been pushing its luck, at least it had been pushing, and thus far velocity alone seemed to have carried it safely through and past the dangers which had stalled the parts of the column which had acted less boldly. That reward remained constant—or very nearly so. The Company came at last to the crossroads south of ST COME DU MONT. This was home base—the far objective given the Company when it had received the attack order back in BEAUMONT.** So the Company halted, waiting for support to come up. At that moment, its fortune changed. The tank which had led the advance all the way from BEAUMONT was struck by a German rocket; the vehicle was disabled and several

*HOWELL is the witness as to the men of Companies A and HQ breaking off from the rest of the Battalion. It is corroborated by PATCH who tells of the rest of the column being stopped by the accident to the tank. PATCH is also the witness as to the action of the "A" and "HQ" men to southeast of ST COME DU MONT. In the original record, it refers to these elements having "caught up" with Company D on this ground. That is correct. But they broke away from them immediately after. HOWELL tells of the Company again picking up these elements on their return march some time around 2330.

**From MAC MILLAN

members of the crew were killed. For several days thereafter, the hull remained there at the intersection, a dead man inside. The place came to be known as "DEAD MAN'S CORNER."** However, the Company took this loss in stride. The mission was already done and the men figured they could hold what they had gained. Too, the company had received unexpected reinforcements—of a kind. At the intersection as the Company came up was a convoy of 8 American trucks loaded with Quartermaster supplies. By some accident, the convoy had become lost, and by some miracle, it had driven right through enemy-held ST COME DU MONT without receiving a bullet. The lead driver had his flashlight out and was looking at a map when MAC MILLAN and his men came along; until MAC MILLAN told him, he and his companions were quite unaware that their trucks represented the spearpoint of the American advance. MAC MILLAN told the truckers that they'd better stay with the Company if they wished to get out alive, and to some of the other officers he remarked: "It looks just like a field problem—trucks waiting here to carry us home."**

SINK, who was now at his CP in ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN, did not know that Company D had gone to the crossroads, though having gotten word that PATCHI had reached ground just north of ST COME DU MONT, he began to suspect that his force was already over-extended.

*From SINK.

**From MAC MILLAN.

PATCH did not know how far Company D's advance had continued but he felt that his own position was strong enough that he could spend the night there; this confidence was greatly strengthened when at about 2330, MAC MILLAN, having failed to receive support at the far crossroads, fell back on PATCH'S position, with Company D escorting the truck convoy.*

Having sized up their situation this way after enjoying just a taste of victory, they were chagrined when at midnight COL SINK ordered them back to BEAUMONT. SINK told them that he could not explain by radio why he wanted the retrograde movement; the fact was that he had been sorely tempted to leave them there but had decided finally that he was unduly exposing and endangering this relatively small body.**

At 0030, the fall-back got underway and by 0130 most of the force was back in BEAUMONT. There was one notable exception: Company D hadn't quite run its course for the day. It was a last touch of irony that when the order for a retirement came through, most of the men of Company D took it that they were relieved and would go back to their own Battalion. Under CAPT GROSS, they marched all the way to ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN and didn't learn until they reached there that they were to attack next morning from an LD just beyond BEAUMONT. So they then doubled back to BEAUMONT, having lost so much time in this unnecessary

*From HOWELL, PATCH and MAC MILLAN.

**From SINK.

detour that they were given less than an hour's rest before forming for battle in the early morning.*

Some reinforcements had arrived late in the afternoon, and during D PLUS 1 night, SINK'S force continued to grow. The greater part of two artillery battalions had come in. EWELL'S battalion of 501st Regiment had come in and BALLARD'S battalion of the same Regiment had at last gotten the upper hand in the fight at LES DROUERIES. The 401st Glider Infantry Battalion had reported a trifle belatedly and a few additional light tanks had arrived from the Beach.

The 101st's battle thus far had been carried along by rather meager forces. The principle of surprise had been re-vindicated by the results. Now for the first time a considerable task force had formed up and concentration was the dominant of operation. That night the plan was published for the attack southward through the town which Company D already had out-flanked but which was thought to be sheltering quite a number of Germans.**

As for SINK'S Third Battalion—or rather that portion of it which was embodied in CAPT SHETTLE'S force at the mouth of the DOUVE RIVER—it continued its solitary battle, unhelped by the others, wholly out of touch with them and deprived of all information as to how things were proceeding elsewhere throughout

*From MAC MILLAN.

**From SINK.

the beachhead. During the morning of D PLUS 1 day, the enemy had confined his effort to shelling the general area with artillery and mortars. The American force held on. About 1200 a flight of P-47's appeared overhead. With the help of a cut-up signal panel, SHETTLE asked for bombing of the enemy position. Apparently the formation got the signal. At 1430 the P-47's returned and dropped about 12 bombs, three of which landed in SHETTLE'S ground while the others landed on or around the bridges. Further damage was prevented by the quick action of CHAPLAIN MC GEE who waved an identification flag in front of a plane which was coming in low to strafe the position. About one hour later a force of approximately 200 Germans was seen approaching the American position from the rear. SHETTLE and the others built up a defensive line facing rearward and flank patrols were dispatched to keep the enemy force under close observation as it came on. The patrols made contact with the Germans as they began to deploy into a woods about 300 yards to the American rear; they then went into action with whatever weapons they carried. There was a short but brisk fire fight. The enemy, apparently under the impression that they were dealing with superior forces, began to surrender in groups of 25 or 30. By day's end, SHETTLE'S group had taken 255 prisoners and had killed 35 or 40 Germans. The night passed quietly except for a brief period when an enemy group tried to complete the destruction of the bridges. They were driven back by small arms fire. The Americans found some additional small

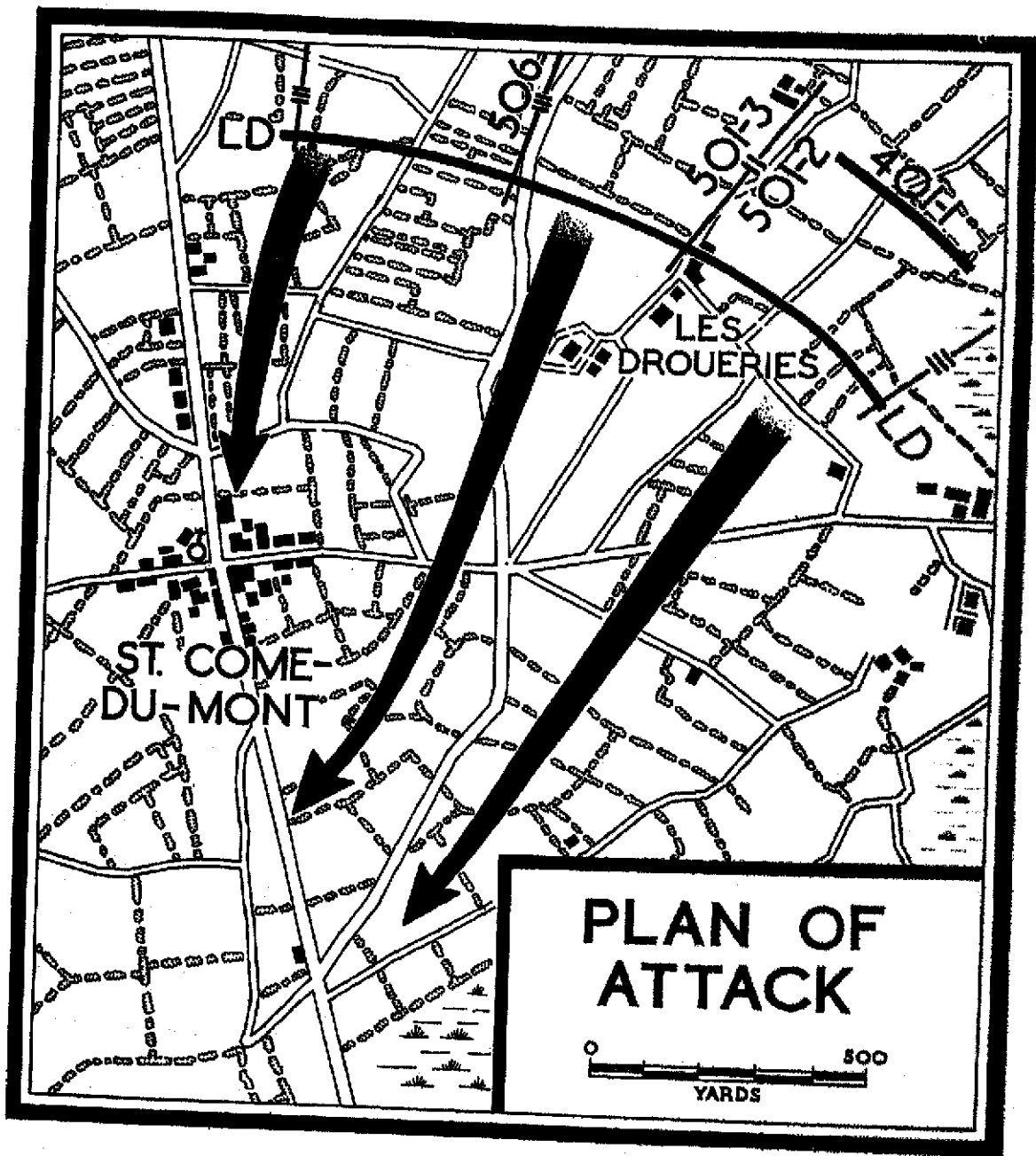
arms ammunition during the darkness. What heartened them most, however, was that they came across another bundle containing a 60 mm mortar and about 80 rounds of HE ammunition.*

*From SHETTLE and a group of his officers.

seemed to be responding only to one main impulse—to get away, if they could, to beyond the CARENTIAN marshes. While every hour had brought greater cohesion in the American force, the rate of disintegration in the enemy was even more rapid. It is indicated that these contrasting effects were due less to heavy German losses in the early hours than to the shock resulting from surprise. The disarrangement of the German plan of defense wrought by 101st Division's attack would account in part for the collapse of well-organized resistance. But beyond the measure of any strictly tactical disadvantage, the enemy appears to have become victim of an acute terror which numbed his movements. Otherwise, BALLARD could scarcely have survived. While his small group was picking away at one corner of the outer defenses of ST COME DU MONT, other enemy forces were going past him which might quickly have broken him in a vise. Some of these enemy elements appear to have been bolting in planless escape.* Others may have been fighting a delaying action at and around ST COME DU MONT to cover the CARENTIAN causeway bridges so that the troops to the north of them would have a chance to come on through.

BALLARD remained where he was, still fighting, and the force under SINK came on down to him from BEAUMONT and ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN. He was holding down the left flank of SINK'S general position when the American force formed up on the night of

*This is not a gratuitous assertion but is simple emphasis on the contrasting action of the force opposing JOHNSON and the force driven back by SINK.



D PLUS 1. But it was for a short time only. His men had been pretty well used up in two days of combat; it was believed that they would be of little use on the next morning except as a general reserve. First Battalion of the 401st Glider Infantry, which had come in over UTAH BEACH, was put behind BALLARD with orders to attack through his position at 0445. The glider infantrymen were to proceed forward from that line, slant off to the leftward of ST COME DU MONT, advance to the main road beyond the town, get to the CARENTAN causeway and blow the bridges--the mission assigned initially to COL JOHNSON and 501st Regiment. Next in line to the right was the scratch force of Third Battalion, 501st Regiment, under LT COL EWELL, which had picked up some additional strength. The Battalion had arrived long past midnight and knew very little of the general situation and problem. EWELL held about a 400-yard sector of the front during the night; at the jump-off, he was supposed to attack straight through, aiming at the main highway just below ST COME DU MONT. Two Battalions of 506th Regiment in column held down the extreme right; they were to move directly upon the town. SINK had put his weight on this flank, figuring that the main enemy resistance would be encountered in and around the houses of ST COME DU MONT. However, in the two companies, A and D, which were carrying the assault for 506th Regiment, the outlook was not too favorable. Company D had wasted most of the night and much of its strength in futile marching. Having marched almost to CARENTAN, the company had been recalled to

ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN and then doubled back to BEAUMONT upon getting the order to join the attack. It was going on toward 0400 and the hour of the attack when Company D finished its circle tour and arrived at the line of departure. Most of the men had no knowledge of the situation. The company arrived too late to get orders, and in the absence thereof, the men talked it over and decided that their mission was to go on to the same intersection where they had been the night before.*

The artillery planning and preparation were as elaborate as the time and circumstances permitted. The guns had registered in on 15 targets around ST JOME DU MONT and LES DROUERIES some time around midnight and the artillerymen were given their orders for the following morning. They were to put a preparatory fire on these selected targets—mainly suspected enemy strong points and the road intersections. Then the fire was to pull back toward SINK'S line, steady and then move forward again with the infantry timing its advance to follow this rolling barrage. The fire would jump forward 100 yards every four minutes. The initial screen would be continued for 10 minutes, however, to give the foot force a fair chance to catch up with it and to

*This is from MAC MILLAN. SINK knew none of these details. HOWELL said he was present with GROSS at BEAUMONT at 0345 and heard him get clear instructions from SINK as to where he was to go during the attack. But the exact line of advance, so far as HOWELL could remember, wasn't specified. SINK couldn't recall the details.

prevent the attack getting off to a ragged start.*

But despite these precise calculations the prospects for the attack were already awry because of circumstances beyond the control of the commanders. The assault battalions in center and on right had reached the LD at nearly the last moment and their men were in a state of near exhaustion. Too little time remained for full coordination even had the command been fresh; as it was, the command was sleep-walking. Officers and men had kept going too long and were now traveling on their nerve. Said CAPT PATCH of the situation on the right: "The men were so tired that we could not understand orders clearly even when they were clearly given. It is possible that we got an order and it made no impression on us." As to whether a clear order had been given, naming the objectives and specifying the lines of advance toward them, there is no answer. Later, COL SINK could not remember his orders in detail and no two of his subordinates could agree on their understanding of the orders and plan. They tried, but they had simply blanked-out on that night.

*No written orders were given the artillery. In fact, the ST COME action was fought without written orders of any kind. What is said here about the artillery is COL SINK'S best recollection of his instructions. He was interviewed on 20-23 July 1944 at the Regimental CP. SINK was hazy on many of the details of the action. (This was true of all of the officers.) It appears to have been the case that most of the participants were by that time so exhausted that they had only vague impressions of what happened. The absence of records in Airborne Normandy is nowhere more disturbing than in the ST COME action. There are many missing pieces—arguments about objectives, disagreements about orders and messages, even disputes as to where certain units were when the action began.

Just as the first light was breaking, the preparatory fire—high explosive shell mixed with white phosphorus—was unloosed on the town and its outworks. Insofar as the watching infantry could judge, it looked quite effective.* At 0445 the rolling barrage got started and about 10 minutes later the first groups of infantry arose and began to move forward along the hedgerows and ditches. The timing of the artillery wasn't well adjusted to the pace of the infantry; it lingered too long. Some of 506th's groups had to halt several times to keep from running into their own fire. After several of these periodic lifts, the artillery fire moved on into the distance beyond the town houses and the advancing men saw nothing more of the effect of their own guns. At 0500 the Germans in ST COME DU MONT put up a heavy smokescreen to north of the town. SINK judged that this was purposed to cover the withdrawal of outpost forces just ahead of his troops.**

By that hour the infantry attack was already twisted out of control though SINK did not yet realize it. On the far right of the line, among Company A of 506th Regiment, some of the men failed to get the order and simply held their ground. The amount of enemy resistance was not formidable in the early stages and there was little fire from the hedgerows north of ST COME DU MONT. Even so, the American advance was taking an oblique shift toward

*These details were given by SINK and his G-3 Section, and supported by EWELL.

**What is said here of the artillery quotes SINK directly.

the left which was throwing the movement out of balance and beginning to stall the operation. This confusion of purpose arose from several factors which combined to make it a most natural drift.

The boundary of the Battalion in the center and the Battalion on the right was the BEAUMONT-CARENTAN road which by-passed ST COME DU MONT on the east. Several fields, screened by stoutly-embanked hedgerows, lay between this road and the town. Thus by this route there was less hazard of direct fire from the main enemy positions and for the troops on the right that prospect was much less forbidding than an assault directly on the town.* CAPT PATCH, who was commanding, went into the attack without having any clear idea of his Battalion objective or which way he was supposed to move. He saw his men move automatically toward the BEAUMONT-CARENTAN road as if they were sure this was what was intended. In the absence of clear orders from the commander, it was an inevitable assumption and action on their part. Company D had been down this same road the night before and had cleared it all the way to the intersection below ST COME DU MONT. Given a choice, they would be certain to gravitate toward the approach which they already knew and where they had reason to believe the going would be fairly easy. Indeed, they found it so. Once again, Company D moved straight on down to DEAD MAN'S CORNER. They were virtually unopposed.

*PATCH'S own statement.

By 0700 the Company's left flank was at the intersection, having reached there before any part of EWELL'S force had hit the main road. Then they moved north along the main road toward ST COME DU MONT, but finding themselves pretty much alone, they made no effort to press on into the town. The Company took up favorable ground some distance south of the houses and continued to sit on it. They attracted no attention from the main forces of the enemy though through the day they received scattering bullet fire from the direction of the CARENTAN marshes.*

The first effect of this leftward movement, and on the subsequent drift of the other 506th elements which it precipitated, was to crowd EWELL, since the circumstances were such that the whole line could not give way to the left. First Battalion of 401st Regiment, which had come through BALLARD'S lines, was held on its own left flank by the swamp and held along its front by the remaining enemy positions along the high ground southeast of LES DROUERIES. EWELL therefor couldn't do any crowding in that direction. He and his Battalion had no choice but to proceed via the road toward the assigned objective--the main road below ST COME DU MONT.

That was what they did, and at first, while they were moving through the first fields to get to the road, they were not

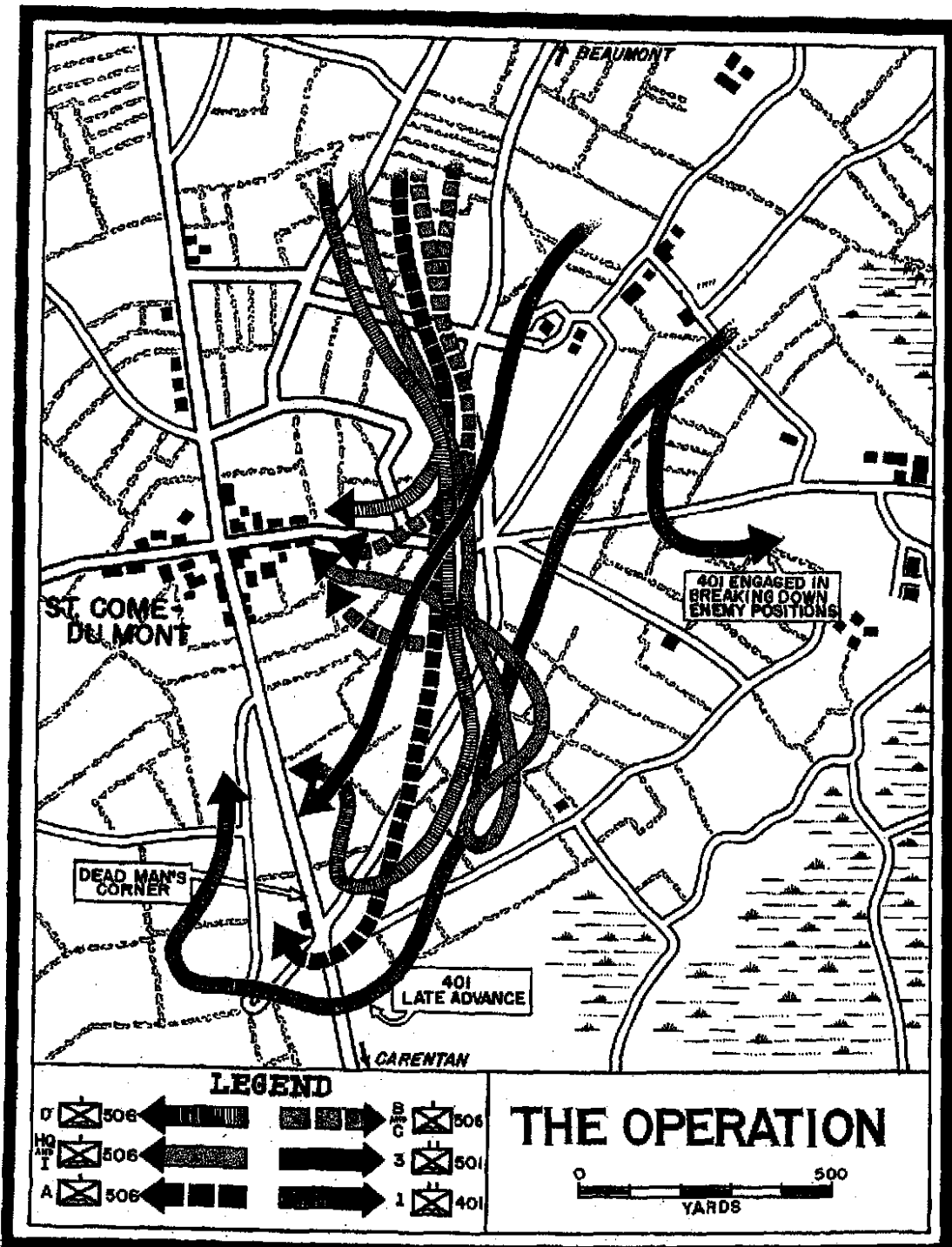
*This was related by PATCH and supported by the company officers.

cramped for maneuver space. The Battalion went forward with two companies in line, each company with its platoons in column. It was the best way to move along the hedgerows. The rolling barrage covered them until they got almost to the large estate buildings at LES DROUERIES. There the assault platoons ran bodily into the first forces of the enemy. The shelling had begun to rout the Germans out of their ground and when they saw the infantry coming on, they tried to pull away completely. EWELL'S men ran on through the field. Because of the intervening hedgerows there was no chance for clear shooting at these fleeing troops. The advance went on brokenly, the paratroopers running a few yards, then stopping to fire from the shoulder as they saw their targets pop out from behind the hedges. The killing distance was anything from 50 yards down to a few feet. Without closing once to bayonet point, the Battalion killed about 35 of the enemy in going through LES DROUERIES. The advance destroyed most of what remained of the prepared German defensive line northeast of ST COME DU MONT, which line had run approximately southward to BSE ADDEVILLE and from there, westward by south toward ST COME DU MONT.* The German paratroopers who had come in the night before had extended the position by moving into a line of foxholes west of LES DROUERIES. They pulled out when the American advance started. Instead of using the position as a pivot for maneuver, the enemy mobile troops tried to back away. So doing, they were destroyed in detail.

*The extent of the German position was shown on a captured overlay.

It was right after that that the complications arose. EWELL and his men continued on to the BEAUMONT-CARENTAN road. On their left, First Battalion of 401st Regiment was being stubbornly contested by the Germans remaining in the prepared positions of the BSE ADDEVILLE line. This pressure against their own left tended to drive 401st's right toward EWELL'S sector and these troops began to crowd toward the road. At the road junction below LES DROUERIES, EWELL bumped for the first time into the right flank of 401st. He made a brief halt for reorganization, then found that men from the 506th were crowding in so along his right flank that he was in danger of being pinched out. He could see some of their men on the road ahead of him. So he had no choice but to halt his own Battalion and try to get some help in straightening out the general situation. He went over and complained to CAPT HOWELL about it. That officer called COL SINK and asked what should be done; by this time, both battalions of 506th had pulled off leftward and were moving past ST COME DU MONT along the road running through EWELL'S sector. The chance for an orderly progression of the attack—through the troops of the right proceeding along the shortest line upon the town itself—was thus already lost. SINK told HOWELL: "Move the Battalion to the right and take up a defensive position to keep the Germans from attacking from the west."*

*This comes from HOWELL. EWELL thought he had directed his remarks to Third Battalion of 506th but HOWELL says that he talked to EWELL and took the action here reported. SINK said that he recalled only that he had told the 506th Battalions to attack toward the town; EWELL said that when he talked later to SINK about the crowding, this was what SINK told him about the orders which had been given. HOWELL said the Battalion had been told to attack toward the crossroads and this was what it did by the shortest route.



But it had become impossible to execute the order as a Battalion. Parts of Companies A and D were already down at the road intersection or moving north from it. Whereas the left flank of Company D had moved via the road to DEAD MAN'S CORNER, the right flank had tried to move through the fields east of the town. As they gained to about even with the houses, they came under enemy artillery fire and were stopped. The Company had been moving right along the hedgerows, routing a few enemy from prepared positions along the edges of the fields. Once immobilized by the artillery fire, they could not get going again. They stayed on the ground east of the town and engaged it with rifles and grenades.*

Companies B and C became immobilized in about the same manner. As they moved through the fields between the town and the road, they became engaged in hedgerow fighting with small groups of the enemy who were widely scattered but well dug in over this ground--the same ground where Company D's right flank had bogged down. There they stayed, so greatly dispersed that it was impossible to collect them and get the attack going again. The head of Company A had followed Company D's left flank to DEAD MAN'S CORNER, and the balance of the Company was strung out along the road.** So when HOWELL got his order to have the Battalion close on the village from the east, the best he could do

*From MAC MILLAN and STRAYER.

**From PATCH.

was to collect a part of Headquarters Company from one of the fields to the east of the road and put it in motion. The men of Headquarters Company moved through the ground where Companies B and C had become immobilized and proceeded to the first line of houses on the east side of ST COME DU MONT. As they went to work cleaning out the buildings, German patrols pushing in from the right (north) began to turn them and threaten their line of retreat. So the Company pulled back. But it had in those brief moments made the only actual penetration of ST COME DU MONT which occurred at any time during the day.*

The artillery which had stopped Company D's right flank had given the sector a pretty general shakedown. CAPT JERRE S. GROSS, Company D's commander, had established his CP in a field to the left of the road below LES DROUERIES. He was standing beside a tree talking to the Battalion Commander, MAJ FOSTER, about the prospect of an advance against the causeway bridges. A shell from one of the CARENTAN guns hit the tree, killing GROSS and an engineer officer and wounding FOSTER. It was about the only real hurt to the Company coming of this day's action.**

EWELL'S battalion took a few losses from the shelling while the men were marking time in the fields waiting for EWELL to get the situation clarified. He was only partway successful. SINK'S order at least cleared the 506th's elements out of EWELL'S path

*From HOWELL.

**From MAC MILLAN.

though it did little to increase 506th's effectiveness. In the fields to east of the town, there continued to be a melee and a mad mixing of companies. Units had crossed and recrossed each other's line of advance and the effect of the hedgerows had scrambled the situation further. The companies had become wrapped around one another and now nobody was moving. On EWELL'S left, too, the situation seemed to be stagnating; the 401st wasn't moving and nobody seemed to know why. About 0800, EWELL decided to move his own Battalion out without waiting for support on his left or the resumption of operations on his right. He started them out again in column of companies. The German artillery continued its fire but did not do especial damage.*

The Battalion moved right on down to the main road and took up position to the east of it. That put EWELL next the German main artery of communication. Yet as he moved his men into this back-stop position, he had the feeling that the Germans in ST COME DU MONT were already beginning to withdraw toward the west. He could see some signs of movement in that direction-- a few wagons getting out, small groups of men moving along the hedges. He knew that he ought to get out to west of the town and try to block the exit but he figured his force was much too weak for that. So he decided to continue on down the road and seize the CARENTAN causeway and the bridges. If they were going to get out anyway, that might at least keep them from surging

*From EWELL.

back. The Battalion started on this mission while the morning was still fresh, got only a little way down the road and ran into heavy fire from the houses around PONT DE DOUVE. EWELL figured that there were at least two machine guns, one AT piece and "quite a few" riflemen covering the causeway approach. He was undecided what to do next; then 88 mm fire from CARENTAN began to fall around him and that forced his decision. He ordered his men to retrace their steps, after first calling for the American artillery to go to work on the PONT DE DOUVE position, only to discover that his wire had gone out.

The Battalion then closed back to the same ground it had held near DEAD MAN'S CORNER. Even while the Battalion was deploying, it was hit from the north by Germans who appeared to be coming down both sides of the ST COME DU MONT road in counter attack. EWELL'S men could see almost nothing of the enemy. The action began with the crackle of rifles and Schmeissers fired from a distance with the bullets flying erratically overhead. The noise became steadily louder, the aim better, as the Germans worked their way forward along the hedgerows and ditches. Curiously enough, the left flank of Company D, 506th, which had deployed on ground to east of the ST COME DU MONT road and to the north of EWELL'S position was not bothered by this thrust, nor by the attacks which came on subsequently, a circumstance which indicates that the pressure against EWELL was coming mainly from infiltrations in the fields to west of the road. The units

sprawled over the ground to east of the town likewise were never pressed. On EWELL alone fell the weight of the German counter effort and in retrospect, it is easy to see why. The Battalion, moving first to the south and then to the northward, had become the chief threat to the German plan for a withdrawal, whereas the other elements of the attack had become static.

The first skirmish opened about 0930. From then until 1600, EWELL and his Battalion were given no quiet. The Germans kept surging back, making six attempts in all to drive EWELL and his men back from the road. Each attack was a little better organized than the one which preceded it. Each time the volume of fire built up more threateningly. Each time, the Germans closed to within one hedgerow of the Battalion's forward line. There they would lose a few men from the fire which EWELL'S men were pouring into the thorn and the embankments. After facing the danger for a few minutes, the survivors would fade back.

In the beginning, EWELL had deployed all of his men to east of the road. They were there when the first counter-attack hit. That part of the German force which came down the fields to west of the road got abreast of EWELL and seized a small hill off the Battalion flank. The hill dominated the road, and once it passed into enemy hands, EWELL immediately recognized the advantages of the position. When the counter-attacking force faded back, it left a detachment holding the hill. It remained in enemy hands for only a few minutes. EWELL put 25 men across the road and

they took the hill by storm, killing the Germans who defended it. The seizure of this ground gave the Battalion a north-facing line straddling the road. For the next few hours the hill position served as a pivot for the general defense. The enemy continued to come on, attacking from three sides. But their movements were not well coordinated and the thrusts were met and beaten down individually.

At 1430 the Germans made their strongest attack, delivering the heaviest fire of the day against the American right flank. The fire became too hot. The right flank dissolved and fell back one hedgerow. EWELL was then to west of the road standing at the base of the hill; it looked to him as if his whole position was about to collapse. He sprinted to the top of the hill, shouting to the men who were positioned there: "Follow me!" then he turned back at a run and they followed him on down the hill. Close together, they ran around the rear of the hedgerow along which his men on the right were engaging the enemy and charged in from the flank against the German force. Three American light tanks had reached the scene in this crisis. They moved in frontally against the German line while EWELL and his men fired from the flank, raking the hedgerows with their machine guns as they advanced. The men from EWELL'S right flank fell in behind the tanks in line of skirmishers. Under this pressure, the Germans faded back, leaving their dead and wounded. That happened at about 1500. There was still no sign of support—