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**Title:** Combat Lessons of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in Operation  
“Market”

**Author:** Headquarters, European Theater of Operations (ETO), United  
States Army, War Department Observers Board

**Abstract:** AGF Report No. 440 – Combat Lessons of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne  
Division submitted by COL Harvey J. Jablonsky, Infantry. The  
report is comments from Major General James M. Gavin,  
Commanding General of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. They  
constitute a resume of the lessons learned as a result of the  
82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division’s combat experiences in Operation  
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Date: 9 Dec 1944

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EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS  
UNITED STATES ARMY

WAR DEPARTMENT OBSERVERS BOARD

APC 887  
9 December 1944

SUBJECT: AGF Report No. 440 - Combat Lessons of 82nd Airborne Div.

TO : The Commanding General, Army Ground Forces, Army War College,  
Washington 25, D. C.  
(Attn: A. C. of S., G-2)

Inclosure No. 1 (SECRET) (in triplicate) report on "Combat  
Lessons of 82nd Airborne Division", submitted by Colonel HARVEY J.  
JABLONSKY, Infantry, is attached.

21992

*C. E. Atkinson*

C. E. ATKINSON  
Colonel, C. A. C.  
President, WD Observers Board

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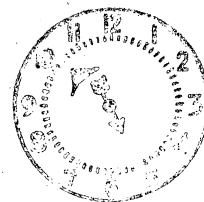
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SUBMITTED BY: COLONEL HARVEY J. JABLONSKY, INFANTRY

The following comments are those of Major General JAMES M. GAVIN, Commanding General of the 82nd Airborne Division. They constitute a resume of the lessons learned as a result of the 82nd Division's combat experiences in operation "MARKET".

1. "General: In general this operation served to emphasize the value of lessons learned in past airborne operations. Most of these lessons are well covered in Training Circular 113, War Department, 1943. The content matter of this circular is believed to be basically sound and it is not recommended that any changes be made in it. All of our past combat experiences and our analysis of our airborne operations and training were drawn upon to provide the background for the planning and execution of operation "MARKET". Although our three previous combat operations were conducted under cover of darkness, training previously conducted enabled us to arrive at a sound plan for reorganization on the ground and prompt initiation of our ground action.

2. Sequence of Planning: On 10 September 1944, at 1800 hours, a conference was held at Headquarters, First Allied Airborne Army. The mission of the 82d Airborne Division to seize and hold the bridges over the MAAS and WAAL Rivers and the high ground dominating these bridges were given to the Division Commander at this time. The following twelve hours were devoted to intensive study of the terrain with a view to arriving at an outline ground tactical plan and the selection of proper landing zones. At 0800 hours, 11 September, Capt. HARRY BESTERBREURITZE, Dutch Commando Officer and native of NIJMEGEN, HOLLAND, became available to assist the staff. At 0900 hours, 11 September, a conference was held at the operational headquarters, IX Troop Carrier Command, at which time the drop and landing zones were selected, full consideration being given to the accomplishment of the ground missions from the landing areas selected; the hostile flak likely to be encountered; capabilities of the

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Troop Carrier Command in delivering us to the desired locations, and the location of the drop zones in relation to the proposed line of flight over the operational area of the Troop Carrier aircraft. A division outline plan was prepared immediately following this and presented to the unit commanders of the division the following day, 12 September 1944. Troops began moving to the take-off airdromes on 15 September and were closed and sealed at the airdromes at daylight, 16 September. The period between 12 September and 15 September was devoted to planning and issuance of orders and preparation of individual unit loads. This time would have been more than adequate for this purpose, however, in this operation a number of changes in the basic plan, each vitally affecting the composition of the divisional lift and the location of units at take-off airdromes, made definite planning extremely difficult. The seven-day period allowed between the time a unit receives its mission until it stages an airborne operation is ample provided all supplies are in the hands of the troops and transportation is available to move troops to the take-off airdromes and provided that when the mission is given to the Division Commander he also be given the available lift, the take-off airdromes, and further that he be given an opportunity to select his drop zones within twenty-four hours after receipt of the mission, which pre-supposes the availability of good map and photo coverage.

### 3. Lessons Learned:

#### a. Mission:

(1) Objective: The practice of assigning an airborne division frontage far in excess of that normally given a ground division must be weighed very carefully and full consideration given to the probable enemy ground reaction. In this operation the staggering task of seizing crossings over three major waterways and dominating terrain, as well as occupying and holding approximately 25,000 yards of frontage, required the complete and rapid commitment of all the troops at the disposal of the Division Commander. As the battle developed in intensity, weight of German attacks debouching from the REICHSWALD made it impossible to commit a force of any size against the NIJMEGEN Bridge until D + 3. Even then it was an extremely marginal performance. The problem of mopping up the area within the perimeter of defense alone was sufficient to engage a great bulk of the Division. If the civilians were openly hostile the problem would have been immeasurably more difficult. Holding key terrain in an airborne operation by seizing locations of high tactical value and covering the gaps between them with patrols and fire is practicable only so long as the enemy does not throw sufficient weight against the gaps to force an entry into your main battle position. In this operation, when the enemy undertook major attacks and penetrated the division's defensive area to about 1,000 yards, all weight that could be mustered was thrown against them at these points in vigorous, desperate counter-attacks supported by every means available within the division.

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This resulted in wide gaps, over a 1,000 yards in some cases, of the front being unoccupied and undefended. A vigorous, alert enemy, with the proper means at his disposal, could have capitalized on these opportunities to seriously jeopardize the integrity of our defense set-up. Operation "MARKET" was a marginal performance as a ground operation from start to finish and should not necessarily be taken as a yardstick for the capabilities of an airborne division in an average situation.

(2) Weather: Weather again proved to be a most important factor to consider in staging an airborne operation, especially when the accomplishment of the ground mission is dependent upon an airborne lift that is to build up for a period of several days after the initial landing. The failure of the 325th Glider Infantry to land in operation "MARKET" until D + 6 may have well caused the defeat of the entire force if the German counter-attacking forces had been stronger. The late or non-arrival of the air resupply lifts became a very serious matter by D + 3. If the successful execution of the ground mission depends upon troops and supplies that are to arrive subsequent to D-Day, it must be appreciated that several days of bad weather may result in the failure to accomplish the mission and possibly the defeat of the airborne force. Therefore, the present methods of resupply, both troops and supplies, must be modified to permit resupply by infiltration under any weather conditions by bombers or similar type aircraft with especially trained crews held ready for commitment to assist an airborne force on the ground if it becomes necessary in the event of bad weather.

b. (1) Air Support: An airborne operation needs a maximum amount of air support, before, during and after the landings. The success of this operation as a daylight operation was due largely to the excellent pre-landing air support and to the support given during the landing. Friendly fighters accompanied Troop Carrier aircraft all the way into the landing areas and were frequently seen attacking ground flak positions. Spotty flak was received from the time the Troop Carrier aircraft crossed the hostile coast until the landings were made. It is believed that it would have been much heavier, with a consequent heavier Troop Carrier loss, if thorough fighter coverage had not been available. Support after landing in this operation was given by the RAF. Air support missions, therefore, had to be requested through Headquarters, Airborne Corps. The close air support available in operation NEPTUNE, in NORMANDY, could not be obtained. Direct radio communication for the purpose of calling in fighters on hostile targets was not available.

(2) Air Support Parties: Air support parties should be permanently assigned to a division so that they will become fully acquainted with the division personnel and airborne problems. To assign an air support party just before an operation is not a satisfactory solution to the air support problem. These assigned air support parties

should be available to participate in all ground, as well as airborne, operations during training of an airborne division. Just prior to an operation they should be given an opportunity to become acquainted with the air support squadrons that have been assigned the mission of supporting their division. Air support parties need much more experience than they have had to date in handling their particular type of equipment in airborne exercises.

91-12  
c. Anti-Aircraft Fire: Enemy ack-ack did not prove too serious an obstacle, principally due to our own air support. Ack-ack crews at the drop zones were destroyed by the parachutists immediately upon their landing. It is believed, however, that the effects of enemy ack-ack could be more thoroughly neutralized by further exploitation and development of new preventative measures. It is believed, for example, that smoke could well have been used in the vicinity of NIJMEGEN and in the vicinity of the REICHSWALD on D / 1 to guarantee a more favorable airborne delivery and possibly reduce even further the actual losses suffered.

d. Drop & Landing Zones:

71-IV  
71-IV  
(1) The careful selection of drop and landing zones probably has more bearing on the successful outcome of the ground phase of an airborne operation than any other factor considered in operational planning. Their proximity to the objective, to cover and concealment, to water and similar hazards, and to terrain of high tactical value for dominating the enemy immediately upon landing all must be carefully considered. I believe that the parachute drop zones and the glider landing zones, and resupply drop area, should be identical whenever possible, or very close to each other. Even with a minimum of enemy resistance, it is impracticable to fight a mile outside of the perimeter of a defense in order to secure temporarily a resupply area or glider landing zone.

(2) Ground Glider Communications: Some method must be arrived at without delay for informing the glider pilots of the exact area in which they should land. In this operation D/L zones T and N were freed of all German troops an hour after our initial landings occurred on D-day. However, by daylight, D / 1, German armor, self-propelled guns and aggressive infantry units had overrun both landing zones because of our extensive commitments in other directions, principally cleaning up the area and seizing the three bridges. By 1000 hours, D / 1, every available man was organized into two main counter-attacking forces which, attacking shortly before noon, drove the Germans back to the frontier along the REICHSWALD. Even so, the eastern portions of the landing zones were under small arms fire, sometimes of great intensity, and under artillery and mortar fires of all calibers. It was too late at this time to get information to the glider pilots to land on LZ O. Instructions were therefore sent to the glider pilots to land



on the western side of the LZ's near the woods on the GROESBEEK heights. These areas were entirely free of small arms fire and, in some cases, free of enemy observation and only under occasional artillery fire. It is believed that this information reached only very few of the glider pilots and many gliders and glider troops lost could otherwise have been saved if it had been possible to give them some ground-to-air signal, needed even after their arrival over the LZ's. This is a most important problem and training with a view to its solution will be conducted as soon as the means are available.

71-IV  
71-V

e. Parachute Field Artillery: The employment of the parachute field artillery of this division as a parachute force more than justified the Troop Carrier lift expended in its commitment. The 376th Parachute Field Artillery engaged its targets shortly after landing and on D + 1, prior to the arrival of the gliderborne artillery, contributed, I believe decisively, to the success of the ground fighting.

71-IV

f. Gliderborne heavy anti-tank weapons, such as 57MMs should accompany a parachute infantry regiment whenever possible. In this operation two 57's were present with each parachute regiment shortly after landing.

71-IV

g. Pathfinders: Navigation by Pathfinders under daylight conditions, although not as critically required as at night, still is essential to the success of an airborne operation. Generally, it is believed that daylight Pathfinders should be dropped about ten minutes prior to the arrival of the first serial. A longer time might jeopardize the success of the entire operation. The area in which they drop must be very carefully selected.

h. Daylight operations are much easier to carry through to a successful conclusion than night operations, provided the enemy ground situation is favorable for a daylight operation. Despite the success of operation "MARKET", it is believed however that a daylight airborne operation would meet with disastrous results if a highly organized ground defense, supported by armor, existed in the immediate locality of the landing.

71-IV

i. Air Corps Equipment: Parachutes, parachute containers, and gliders must be safeguarded for future operations. This has not been the case to date. A tremendous and unbelievable public loss occurs in an airborne operation due to the uncontrolled and willful destruction and misappropriation of gliders and parachutes by troops of all branches and nationalities. Generally speaking, it is believed that airborne troops, give greater care to Air Corps equipment than other troops, possibly because of their familiarity with it and their appreciation of its value. It is most important that a theater policy be established and published to all troops as soon as practicable on the safeguarding of equipment in airborne operations.

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71-III

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j. Replacements: Opportunity must be given for airborne units to absorb and train replacements before being committed to an operation. It is believed that eight weeks are a minimum for this purpose. All unit commanders and many soldiers of this Division, in a combat questionnaire recently conducted, expressed the desire that more opportunity be given to them to train with their new replacements. The high individual initiative and skill and the superior small unit and battalion teamwork required to carry an airborne unit through to a successful mission requires thorough, intense, realistic airborne training, as well as ground training. The machine-like execution of the missions of each battalion of this division in this operation, it is believed, resulted from thorough training and insistence upon prompt, positive action immediately upon landing. This can only be learned through proper training.

71-V  
k. Glider Pilots: Glider pilots must be well trained ground soldiers or they will not live long. At best they will be a liability to any airborne commander until they can be evacuated from the combat zone. It is recommended that they be put under immediate command of the airborne divisional commanders for full-time ground training, with necessary periods allocated to their glider pilot training.

71-III  
9-II  
1. Weapons, A/B Bar - jump

(1) During the past year and a half of airborne operations unit commanders of this division have, through combat necessity, found it desirable from time to time to augment or otherwise modify the weapons that were authorized in order to meet specific tactical conditions. While this condition may, at first glance, appear unsound and, at best, unwise, it has nevertheless proven necessary and, I believe, an effective contribution to our combat success. It is believed to be sound, therefore, to establish as a guiding principle the fact that airborne units may require, and should have available, different weapons and equipment for different missions. In the dyke country of HOLLAND, BAR'S were at a premium. In this division each parachute rifle squad is now equipped with one BAR over and above its normal complement of weapons. Additional BAR's were obtained while in HOLLAND.

also  
(2) At one time every parachutist was armed with a Cal. 45 pistol. This was later replaced by the carbine. A weapon of this type was necessary because all rifles were dropped in squad containers and it was essential that the parachutists have a weapon on their person to be employed until they could obtain rifles. With the advent of the M-1 rifle container the folding stock carbine has come into disuse except where it is a primary hand weapon for crew-served weapon crews. It is impracticable for a parachutist to drop with both a folding stock carbine, for his immediate protection, and the M-1 or BAR in a container. It has therefore proven advisable in recent operations for the individual parachutist to drop with a pistol for his immediate protection, as

well as his normal hand weapon, either rifle, BAR or carbine. Since authority does not now exist for obtaining these pistols, only a few fortunate individuals have been so armed. It is my belief that a number of lives could have been saved in this operation if the individual had been armed with a pistol upon landing, and it is certain that drops among hostile civilians will result in some loss of life from immediate attack upon landing unless our parachutists are armed with pistols. It is therefore recommended that steps be taken to provide every parachutist with a Cal. 45 pistol.

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also

m. Resupply: Resupply continues to be one of our major unsolved problems. Although a solution exists at the present, it is not believed to be satisfactory as evinced in the accompanying operational report. Presuming that parachute resupply is accurately and compactly delivered in territory occupied by friendly natives, it still would require approximately one-third of the infantry forces of the division to recover and deliver to the firing line a daily resupply. Parachute resupply is an emergency means of resupply at best that can only augment a sound plan for resupply by other means. At present, troops of this division carry on their person sufficient small arms ammunition and rations for several days fighting. With proper training and good supply discipline, an airborne force can exist for several days on the supplies it brings with it, provided enemy resistance is not too intense. The resupply problem, therefore, is not as hopeless as it may first appear, but it is believed that this problem should be given more study and developed in training exercises. It is believed that resupply by glider would be a far more efficient method than by parachute."

Harvey J. Jablonsky  
HARVEY J. JABLONSKY  
Colonel, Infantry  
WD Observers Board

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