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Title: Report of Airborne Operations in Dragoon

Author: Allied Force Headquarters

Abstract: This report of Airborne Operations in Dragoon which occurred on 15 August 1944 was an Allied invasion of southern France. The report includes an introduction, organization, planning, training, the operation, ground activities, statistics and a summary.

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30 October 1944

SUBJECT: Report on Airborne Operations in DRAGOON

TO : All Concerned

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No. 5200.9, 27 Sep 58
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on 18 Sep 1960

Attached for your information is copy of Report on Airborne Operations in DRAGOON, dated 25 October 1944.

By command of General WILSON:

R. H. Frese

R. H. FRESE
Captain, AGD
Asst Adjutant General

1 Incl
Report on Airborne Operations
in DRAGOON, dtd 25 October 44

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- 9 - First Airborne Task Force
- 4 - Airborne Training Center
- 2 - Fifth Army
- 1 - 334th QM Depot Co (A/B)
- 1 - G-1
- 1 - G-2
- 5 - G-3
- 10 - G-3 (Major Mulcahy)
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REPORT ON AIRBORNE OPERATIONS IN DRAGOON

25 October 1944

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I - INTRODUCTION

1. Initial preliminary planning for the airborne operation in DRAGOON was begun by the planning staff of Seventh Army in February 1944. The status of airborne units in the theater at that time materially influenced planning at this stage. At this period none of the units, airborne or troop carrier, were actually prepared for airborne operations. The 51st Troop Carrier Wing, composed of three groups, had remained in the theater after the inactivation of the XII Troop Carrier Command. However, only a portion of this Wing was available for airborne training because of the demands for troop carrier aircraft for special operations, air evacuation, and general transport requirements. A few aircraft of this Group were attached intermittently to the Airborne Training Center where a limited program of airborne training was feasible. At the Center the First French Parachute Regiment, two pathfinder platoons and the American replacements received limited airborne training. The British 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade was in the line as infantry with the Eighth Army. The 509th Parachute Battalion, and Batteries "A" and "B" of the 463d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion were similarly in the line with Fifth Army. By May, however, this situation had been improved considerably. These parachute units were withdrawn from the line and given intensive training with a full troop carrier group made available in the Salerno area following the displacement forward of the 51st Troop Carrier Wing from its former base in Sicily to Italy. Subsequently, several plans formulated for the use of the 509th Battalion and the British 2nd Parachute Brigade in the Operations of Fifth and Eighth Armies which would have materially affected airborne planning for DRAGOON, did not materialize and problems which would have arisen therefrom were consequently obviated. The War Department was requested to provide an airborne division for employment in DRAGOON, but in lieu of this, a number of separate units were shipped to the theater. These were: 1st Battalion, 551st Parachute Regiment; 550th Glider Infantry Battalion; and 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team. The two former units were attached to the Airborne Training Center, then located in Sicily, for training. The 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team was attached to Fifth Army for ten days of battle experience in the line.

2. Thus, by the middle of June there were considerable airborne forces in the theater which could be considered available for operations. To secure the utmost cohesion and to obtain the optimum results, it was decided to move the Airborne Training Center with its attached units, as well as the troop carrier

aircraft now increased to two full groups of the 51st Troop Carrier Wing, to the Rome area. Here was established a compact forward base for all our airborne forces.

II - ORGANIZATION

1. Airborne Elements

a. Toward the first of July the plans for Operation DRAGOON were made firm, including the use of a provisional airborne division made up of the available units in the theater. Major General Robert T. Frederick, formerly commander of the First Special Service Force and later commander of the 36th Infantry Division, assumed command of the composite force. Conferences were held immediately to secure the additional supporting units needed to organize such a balanced airborne force. Certain units on the DRAGOON troop list were earmarked for this purpose. Authority was requested from the War Department to activate those units which were not authorized on the theater troop list. By 7 July, initial instructions relative to the organization of the Provisional Airborne Division were issued to General Frederick.

b. Troops to be made available were then as follows:

- (1) Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Provisional Airborne Division
- (2) Detachment of the Third Ordnance Medium Maintenance Company
- (3) 5 Unit Pathfinder Platoons. (Unauthorized, formed from Force personnel).
- (4) British 2nd Parachute Brigade Group
- (5) 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team
- (6) 509th Parachute Battalion
- (7) 1st Battalion, 551st Parachute Infantry
- (8) 550th Glider Infantry Battalion
- (9) 463d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
- (10) 602d Pack Field Artillery Battalion
- (11) Antitank Company, 442d Infantry (Japanese-American)
- (12) 387th Airborne Aviation Engineer Company
- (13) Company "A", 2d Chemical Battalion (motorized)
- (14) Company "D", 83d Chemical Battalion (motorized)
- (15) 512th Airborne Signal Company
- (16) 676th Medical Collecting Company. (Designated 29 July 1944).

c. The Division was then given a five per cent overstrength in personnel by the assignment of parachute filler replacements from the Airborne Training Center. Meanwhile, the activation of the divisional headquarters and headquarters company, two additional batteries of the 463d Field Artillery Battalion, the 512th Airborne Signal Company and the 552d Antitank Company all proceeded apace. Because of the short time remaining before D-Day, it was decided not to attempt to prepare the 552d Antitank Company for the operation, since the antitank company of the 442d Infantry was available. It should be noted here, however, that it was necessary to re-equip the latter antitank unit (from the Japanese-American Regiment) with the British Airborne six-pounder, since our own 57mm antitank gun will not fit into the Waco glider.

d. Because of the shortage of qualified airborne officers in this theater, it was necessary to ask the War Department to make available a divisional staff for General Frederick. Thirty-six qualified staff officers called for by T/O 71-2 arrived in the theater by air toward the middle of July. Most of these officers came from the 13th Airborne Division and a few from the Airborne Center, Camp Mackall, North Carolina.

e. Certain other organizations were made available to General Frederick on the basis of their being employed in the preparatory stage but not in the operation itself. These units included detachments from a signal operations company, a quartermaster truck company and some four hundred replacements from the Airborne Training Center.

2. Troop Carrier Elements

a. As of the middle of July there were available in the theater for airborne operations, two groups of the 51st Troop Carrier Wing. The third group was occupied with special operations. To provide sufficient lift for DRAGOON, additional troop carrier groups were called for by Allied Force Headquarters. The total minimum of aircraft required for the operation was 450. On 10 July 1944 orders were issued placing the 50th and 53d Troop Carrier Wings of the IV Troop Carrier Command (then located in United Kingdom) on temporary duty with the theater. Each Wing contained four groups of three squadrons each, reinforced by self-sustaining administrative and maintenance echelons and by the IX Troop Carrier Command Pathfinder Unit, a total of 413 aircraft. In addition to the personnel and equipment moved in organic aircraft, the Air Transport Command augmented the movement by transporting the 819th Medical Air Evacuation Squadron, various signal detachments, assorted parpack equipment and 375 organic glider pilots. The move, made in eight echelons via GIBRALTAR and MARRAKECH, required but two days. Two aircraft were lost en route. Brigadier General Paul L. Williams, in command of two wings from the United Kingdom, arrived on 16 July 1944 and activated the Provisional Troop Carrier Air Division. By 20 July, the entire Provisional Troop Carrier Air Division had arrived in the theater and was stationed at its designated airfields, prepared to carry out its missions.

b. Since there were but approximately 130 operational CG-4A and 50 Horsa gliders on hand, hurried steps were taken to secure the additional number required for the Operation. Fortunately, a previous requisition for 350 Waco gliders from the United States had been made. It was necessary only to expedite this requisition in order to provide the glider lift. The British airborne forces had sufficient Horsa gliders on hand in the theater to provide for the needs of their 2nd Para Brigade Group. The shipment from the United States arrived as scheduled and the gliders were assembled in record time. They were ready for operational use ten days before D-Day. After considerable discussions, it was decided to use two glider pilots per glider. Accordingly, on 1 August, a request to United Kingdom was made for approximately 350 additional glider pilots. Previous arrangements made to secure these pilots on three days' notice were carried out and all the glider pilots arrived as requested.

3. Resupply Equipment

Hurried preparations were required to assemble the necessary cargo parachutes and aerial delivery equipment needed to organize and prepare for the contemplated aerial re-supply effort. As late as the 10th of July, the acting staff for General Frederick submitted an overall requisition for this equipment to AAFSC/MTO. By air and special water transport, some 600,000 pounds of these supplies arrived in the theater in time for the Operation. The last large freight shipment was delivered to the 334th Quartermaster Depot on D-4. Every item requested arrived in time and the preparations for the operations were carried out as scheduled.

4. Concentration of Units

As indicated in paragraph 2, Section I, above, the Airborne Training Center and the 51st Troop Carrier Wing had been ordered to the Rome area and established a compact airborne base at CIAMPINO and LIDO de ROMA airfields. By 3 July, an advance echelon of the Airborne Training Center was established at CIAMPINO Airfield, ready to operate. By 10 July 1944, the Center with its attached units, the 551st Parachute Battalion, and the 550th Glider Infantry Battalion were completely located at the airborne base. The divisional staff ordered from the United States for General Frederick could not arrive until approximately 15 July. Therefore, all other American airborne units in the theater were attached to the Airborne Training Center so that its staff could be used to assist in expediting the concentration of airborne troops. The 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team was ordered out of the line from Fifth Army and arrived in the Rome area by 5 July 1944. The 509th Parachute Battalion, already located at LIDO de ROMA was similarly attached to the Airborne Training Center for instructions. The various supporting arms and services which had been placed at the disposal of the Provisional Airborne Division were likewise attached. By 17 July, General Frederick had moved his headquarters to LIDO de ROMA and was ready to proceed with the final organization and training of the improvised unit and the detailed planning of the Operation. On 21 July, General Frederick requested that the name of his provisional organization be changed to the "First Airborne Task Force", since the use of the term "division" was considered a misnomer. This request was granted by the Commanding General, Seventh Army, and the provisional airborne division was redesignated accordingly. Hereafter in this report, all reference to it will be as "First Airborne Task Force".

III - PLANNING

1. Although continuous planning with regard to the DRAGOON airborne operation had been under consideration since February 1944, no final detailed planning was possible until the First Airborne Task Force and the Provisional Troop Carrier Air Division were organized and prepared to function. Consequently, this final planning could not commence until almost 20 July. On his arrival, the Commanding General, Provisional Troop Carrier Air Division approved the suggested plan of utilizing the previously selected Rome area as the training site. He also concurred in the choice of previously selected take-off airfields, at CIAMPINO, GALERA, MARCIGLIANO, FABRISI, VITERBO, TARQUINIA, VOLTONE, MONTALTO, CANINO, ORBETELLO, OMBRONE, GROSSETO, FALLONICA, and PIOMBINO. Subsequently, the Provisional Troop Carrier Air Division undertook primarily the planning aspects of the Operation involving high level coordination, timing, routes, corridors, rendezvous, and traffic patterns. In general, planning for

the details of the selection of drop zones, (DZs), landing zones (LZs), and composition of lifts were left to the airborne and troop carrier units involved.

2. It was first decided that a pre-dusk airborne assault on D-1 should not be made, as this might jeopardize the success of the entire Operation. Second, it was decided that it would be neither necessary nor advisable to launch the initial vertical attack after the amphibious assault had begun. The latter decision was reached in view of the wide experience of our troop carrier crews in night take-off operations, and because of the marked improvement that had been made in the pathfinder technique. Consequently, the basic plan called for a pre-dawn assault. One proposed plan contemplating an immediate staging in CORSICA was rejected because of lack of available CORSICAN airfields, and also, because those fields available were located on the eastern side of the island, and their use would have necessitated a flight over 9000-foot mountain peaks. Such a flight would be difficult even for unencumbered transport aircraft, and for C-47's towing loaded gliders, it was considered excessively dangerous. A further consideration was the fact that such an intermediate staging would have required the establishment of the airborne corridor south of the main naval channel, and would have necessitated the adoption of a dog-leg course for the flight.

3. After several conferences had been held at Seventh Army headquarters, with all Army, Navy, Air, and Airborne commanders concerned, the rough plan was drawn up and approved about 25 July 1944. This plan envisaged the use of an airborne division prior to H-Hour with the dropping of the airborne pathfinder crews beginning at 0323 on D-Day. The main parachute lift of 396 plane loads was to follow, starting at 0412 hours and ending at 0509 hours. The follow-up glider landings, composed of 38 Waco and Horsa gliders, were to take place at 0814 hours and continue on through until 0822 hours. Later in the same day, a total of 42 paratroop plane loads was to be dropped, followed by 335 Waco gliders, starting at 1810 hours and ending at 1859 hours. The automatic air resupply which was to have been part of the D-Day late afternoon mission, was postponed at a late stage of the planning because insufficient Troop Carrier aircraft were available and because the Troop Carrier Command would not drop supplies from aircraft towing gliders in the afternoon glider lift. The final plan provided that 112 plane loads were to be brought in automatically on D + 1. The remainder of supplies were to be packed and held available for emergency use by either the Airborne Task Force or by any Seventh Army unit which might become isolated. The troop carrier route selected was carefully chosen after due consideration of the following factors:

- a. Shortest feasible distance
- b. Prominent terrain features.
- c. Traffic control for the ten troop carrier groups
- d. Naval convoy routes
- e. Position of assault beaches
- f. Primary aerial targets
- g. Enemy radar installations
- h. Avoidance of excessive dog-legs
- i. Prominent land-falls
- j. Position of charted enemy flak installations.

This route logically followed the Italian coast generally from the Rome area to the Island of ELBA, which was used as the first over-water check point. Then it continued to the northern tip of CORSICA and proceeded on an azimuth course over naval craft check-points to the landfall just north of FREJUS at AGAY. Complete plans were made with the Navy on the position of this airborne corridor, and detailed information concerning it was widely disseminated among the naval forces.

4. Because of high terrain features in the target area, it was decided to drop the paratroopers and to release gliders at exceptionally high altitudes, varying from 1500 to 2000 feet. Towed glider speeds were set at 120 MPH and dropping speed at 110 MPH. The formation adopted for the parachute columns was universal "V of Vs" of nine ships, in serials of 45 aircraft, each with 5-minute intervals head to head between serials. The glider columns adopted a "pair of pairs" formation echeloned to the right rear with a 1000 feet between pairs in column. Serials made up of 48 aircraft towing gliders in trail were used with eight minute intervals between serial lead aircraft. Parachute aircraft employed a maximum payload of 5430 pounds, Horsa gliders, 6900 pounds, and the CG-4A (Waco) gliders, 3750 pounds.

5. Difficulty in the procurement of maps and models proved to be a serious inconvenience in the planning and preparations for the Operation. Map shipments in many instances were late in arriving or were improperly made up. Terrain models on a scale of 1:100,000 were available but the most useful terrain model, a photo-model in scale of 1:25,000, was available only in one copy, which was wholly inadequate to serve both the Provisional Troop Carrier Division and the First Airborne Task Force. Even more desirable would have been a 1:10,000 photo-model of the DZ-LZ terrain. The blown-up large scale photographs of the DZ-LZ areas in particular were excellent, but these arrived too late for general use. The original coastal obliques were not of much assistance to the Provisional Troop Carrier Air Division since the run-in from the IP (First Landfall) was not adequately covered. It should be noted that these late photographs uncovered the previously unknown element of anti-glider poles installed on the LZs. All previous photographic studies had failed to reveal this pertinent information. An excellent terrain model was turned out by the British Independent Parachute Brigade Group which was of great assistance to that unit during its preparation for the Operation.

IV - PRE-OPERATION TRAINING

1. By the middle of July, nearly all the airborne units to be employed in Operation DRAGOON had been assembled in the Rome area. An intensive final training program had been begun by the First Airborne Task Force in conjunction with the Airborne Training Center. Of the airborne units to be used in the Operation, only the 509th Parachute Battalion and the 2d Parachute Brigade (Br) had received any recent combined airborne training with the troop carriers. The 517th Regimental Combat Team had just come out of the line with Fifth Army as had the 463d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. Other units, such as the 551st Parachute Battalion and the 550th Glider Infantry Battalion had but recently arrived overseas and had been given a course in ground and refresher training at the Airborne Training Center.

2. Particularly urgent was the task of training the newly organized glider-borne troops. A combined glider school was established and instruction in loading and lashing for these troops was begun. The units involved in this difficult last minute procedure were:

- a. 602d Pack Field Artillery Battalion
- b. 442d Infantry Antitank Company
- c. 887th Airborne Aviation Engineer Company
- d. Company "A", 2d Chemical Battalion
- e. Company "D", 83d Chemical Battalion
- f. 512th Airborne Signal Company
- g. Divisional units, such as the Division Ordnance Detachment and the Division Medical Collecting Company.

After these troops had completed the course in loading and lashing, they were given orientation flights and finally one skeletonized practice operational landing on a simulated LZ was conducted.

3. The Pathfinder Unit of the Provisional Troop Carrier Air Division conducted joint training with the three airborne pathfinder platoons and tested the radar and radio aids to be used in the Operation. This training was divided into three phases, the first being concerned with the technical training with "Eureka" sets, M/F Beacons, lights, and panels. Tests were made to locate any deficiencies in either the training or the apparatus to be used. The second phase was devoted to practice by the crews in using the equipment as a team. All teams practiced this procedure until they had perfected their technique and ability in setting up and operating the equipment under all possible conditions. The third phase emphasized actual drops with full equipment in which every attempt was made to secure the utmost realism in the preparatory exercises. Small groups of follow-up parachute troops were dropped on the prepared DZs to test the accuracy of the pathfinder aids.

4. Shortage of time and the difficulty of re-packing the parachutes in time for the Operation precluded the staging of a realistic, large-scale final exercise. The individual organizations did, however, make practice drops to the fullest extent possible, and generally used a skeleton drop of two or three men to represent a full "stick" of paratroopers. On such exercises, the remaining elements of the units were placed on the DZ in order that practice in assembly could be worked out. Despite the lack of time, a combined training exercise with the Navy, however, was scheduled. All vessels carrying waterborne navigational aids were placed in the same relative positions that they were to occupy in the actual Operation. Then a token force of three aircraft per serial was flown by all serial leaders over these aids. The flights were flown on the exact timing schedules, routes and altitudes that were to be used in the Operation. Two serials of 36 aircraft each were flown over this same route during daylight in order that the Naval forces could become acquainted with troop carrier formations. Further practice runs were made by the troop carriers in conjunction with the 31st and 325th Fighter Groups in order to work out the details of the fighter cover plan and the air-sea rescue plan.

5. In view of the fact that the Task Force was composed of units that had not previously worked together, training of combat teams, as organized for the Operation, was emphasized to further successful operations after landing. Training of each newly organized combat team was conducted on terrain carefully selected to duplicate as nearly as possible the combat team's sector in the target area.

6. The problem of securing and organizing qualified personnel and then training those units which had to be activated on short notice, proved to be difficult. Such highly specialized personnel as are required for an airborne signal company or for an airborne divisional headquarters were extremely hard to find in an overseas theater. Consequently, this personnel had to be located in the regular replacement depots or at the Airborne Training Center and then had to be trained for the specific positions they were to fill. The highest praise is due General Frederick, his staff, and the Airborne Training Center, for the manner in which this task was accomplished.

7. Fortunately, the larger elements of the command, particularly the combat teams, were already well trained. Some of them were battle-seasoned organizations, and nearly all were accustomed to providing for themselves, since each was basically designed to be a separate regiment, battalion or company. This latter fact allowed the units not only to look after their own requirements, but also permitted them to aid the Airborne Task Force as a whole, in many ways during the period of training.

V - THE OPERATION

1. The night of D-1 was clear and cool in the take-off areas used by the airborne forces in Operation DRAGOON. The troop carrier units were assembled at their stations at ten airfields extending some 150 miles along the Italian peninsula from CIAMPINO near Rome to FALLONICA, north of GROSSETO. Due to the serious lack of ground transportation, it was necessary for the bulk of the Task Force, except for the 2d Parachute Brigade Group, to commence the movement to the dispersal airdromes by D-5. By D-2 the airborne forces had been shuttled from their training and concentration grounds in the Rome area to their designated airfields. The C-47 aircraft had all been deadlined, checked thoroughly and were in excellent mechanical condition for the flight. On the satellite airfields to be used for the glider marshalling, all preparations were complete. A feeling of assurance and confidence as to the outcome of the operation prevailed among all elements.

2. As to be expected in any airborne operation, prevailing weather was to be an extremely important factor and would considerably influence the drop. Once the target date for the entire Operation had been set for 15 August 1944, it could not be changed for the benefit of the airborne troops, even though it necessitated a drop without the assistance of moonlight. It had been hoped, however, that the drop could be made on a clear night so that the troop carriers could identify large hill masses and coastal features as possible check-points. However, on 14 August, all of western Europe was covered by a large, flat, high pressure area centered over the North Sea. A portion of this "high" had broken off and had settled over the main target area. This did preclude the probability of any sizeable storm or heavy winds, and the only threat was one of

accumulating fog or stratus. Consequently, the forecast for the Operation was for clear weather to ELBA, followed by decreasing visibility until the DZs were reached, at which time the visibility was expected to be from 2 to 3 miles. Actually, the haze was heavier than anticipated and the visibility was less than a half mile over the DZs. The valley fog which completely blanketed the early parachute operation, later dispersed by 0800 hours in time for the morning glider mission. Considerable navigation difficulties were to arise from the fact that the wind forecast was almost 90 degrees off the direction initially indicated. Consequently, the navigators could make necessary corrections only by use of check-points over the water route. Fortunately, the wind did not reach high velocity and was less than 6 MPH over the DZ.

3. The Operation was prefaced by a successful airborne diversion designed to serve two purposes in the cover plan. First, it was to create the illusion of a southern airborne corridor; second, to simulate a false airborne drop zone by dropping rubber parachute dummies in selected areas. The six aircraft used on this mission dropped "window" en route to give the effect of a mass flight and at 0205 on D-Day they dropped six hundred dummies as planned on false DZ selected north and west of Toulon. German radio reports indicated the complete success of this simple ruse. The rifle simulators and other battle noise effects used in this diversion functioned well and added to the realism of the feint.

4. The Airborne operation began shortly after midnight 14 - 15 July. Aircraft were loaded, engines were warmed up and the marshalling of aircraft for the take-off was under way at 0030. At the same hour the first troop carriers took off with their load of three pathfinder units. This first phase of the Operation was completely successful. During the entire period of marshalling, only 3 aircraft suffered minor damage while taxiing prior to take-off. One aircraft was completely demolished when it crashed shortly after its take-off. After their take-off, the pathfinder platoons proceeded as a group on a direct line to southern France, making their first landfall just south of CANNES. By means of the P.P.I. sets on each aircraft, the pathfinders proceeded inland as planned, located the drop zones, and dropped their teams at 0323, 0330 and 0334 hours, respectively, on DZs "O", "A" and "C".

5. Meanwhile, approximately one hour later, the main parachute lift, composed of 396 aircraft in nine serials averaging 45 aircraft each, took off and proceeded on their courses. The flight toward the designated DZs was marked by no untoward incident. Amber downward recognition lights were employed until the final water checkpoint had been crossed. Wing formation lights were similarly employed and no instance of friendly naval fire on our aircraft was reported. No enemy aircraft was encountered during the flight. Of particular note is the fact that over four hundred troop carrier aircraft had flown in relatively tight formation under operational strain for some five hundred miles without accident. The many hours devoted to training in night formation flying had produced excellent results.

6. The radio, radar and other marker installations were, undoubtedly, responsible for the accuracy achieved in carrying out the flight mission. "Eurekas" had been installed at each wing departure point, the command departure point, the northeast tip of ELBA, GIROGLIA ISLAND (NORTH CORSICA), and on three marker beacon boats spaced 30 miles apart on the coast. The first landfall check-point at AGAY, FRANCE. Those

with an average reception of 25 miles. Holophane lights had also been placed at these positions and aided the navigators in correcting their courses against the contrary wind currents. Their reception averaged 8 miles until the DZs were reached, at which time they became invisible because of the haze and ground fog. MF beacons (the Radio Compass Homing Devices) were installed at ELBA, NORTH CORSICA, and on the center marker beacon boat, and were also dropped on the DZs along with the "Eurekas" and Holophane lights. Many pilots reported that they received these signals up to 30 miles. The MF beacons often kept the aircraft on beam when they occasionally lost the "Rebecca" signal on their "Eurekas". In too many cases, the "Rebecca" signals exhibited a tendency to drift off the frequency despite constant operational checking. It should be emphasized again that the entire parachute drop was accomplished in an absolutely "blind" state by the troop carrier pilots who had to depend entirely on the MF Beacons and "Eureka" sets for their signal to drop the paratroopers. Such evident functional defects in the "Eureka-Rebecca" sets should not and must not be accepted in future airborne operations. Brigadier Pritchard, Officer Commanding, 2d Parachute Brigade, felt that this single deficiency could have jeopardized the complete operation.

7. In general, the parachute drop was fully successful. Approximately 85 per cent, a far greater percentage of troops than has been accomplished in previous operations in this theater, landed on the DZs or in the immediate vicinity thereof, in areas which for all practical purposes can be considered as contiguous to the drop zones, and from which terrain the parachute forces were in positions which allowed them to carry out their assigned missions. This was accomplished despite the handicaps of no moon, general haze, and heavy ground fog. An estimated 45 aircraft completely missed their designated DZs. Some of these dropped their troops as far as 20 miles from the selected areas. Among the aircraft which missed the DZs were twenty in Serial Number 8, which released their troopers prematurely on the red light signal. The only possible explanation that can be offered is that probably a faulty light mechanism in one of the leading aircraft must have gone on green prematurely and the troops in the lead craft jumped according to this signal. The troopers in the following craft, on seeing the leading aircraft's troopers jump, probably did likewise, and jumped even though the red signal still showed in their own aircraft. This group principally comprised elements of the 509th Parachute Battalion and about half of the 463d Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. Two "sticks" of paratroopers landed in the sea off ST TROPEZ, near CANNES. The remainder made ground landings in the vicinity of these two towns. Although far from the designated DZ, these elements organized themselves, made contact with the FFI forces and proceeded to seize and hold ST TROPEZ. Approximately 25 aircraft of another group which missed their DZ, dropped their troops some 15 miles north of LE MUY near FAYANCE. The troops in this instance comprised part of the 5th Battalion of the 2nd Parachute Brigade (Br), and elements of the 3d Battalion, 517th Parachute Combat Team. Although some 20 miles from their DZ, these troops either undertook individual missions or sought to return to their own units in the proper area. By evening of D-Day, most of this group were reassembled on DZs "A" and "O". The Chief of Staff, along with the Division Surgeon and other key staff members, was among this group. DZ "A", generally west of LE MUY had a tendency during the drop to become merged with DZ "O" slightly northwest of this key town on the VARGENNES VALLEY, which caused considerable confusion later on in the day. This inadvertent merging of the two zones also produced confusion and difficulty during the period of bundle recovery. [REDACTED] because the British Parachute Brigade on DZ "O" was using [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from that of the 517th Regimental Combat Team on DZ [REDACTED]

The following
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the poor quality of
the **original**.

8. The terrain of the DZs on which the paratroopers landed was in general excellent for such an operation. DZs "O" and "A" covered an area of small, cultivated farms consisting mainly of vineyards and orchards. There were very few large buildings, telephone wires, tall trees, and other formidable obstacles. The anti-airborne poles established in the zones had not been sharpened or placed in sufficient density to obstruct the parachute landings to any material degree. It was reported that probably not more than a squad of troopers suffered injury from these obstacles. A total of approximately 175 paratroopers, scarcely more than 2%, suffered jump casualties. Probably not more than 100 of these initial jump casualties were breaks or sprains sufficiently serious to take the men out of action for any length of time. DZ "C" on which the 509th Parachute Combat Team jumped was a hill mass more rugged than the ground of the other zones, but even this rougher terrain did not interfere with the success of the jump.

9. Serial Number 14 (the first of the glider serials) made up of supporting artillery and antitank weapons for the British Parachute Brigade departed as scheduled for its 0800 hours glider landing, but was recalled because of heavy overcast. The flight circled for one hour and landed at 0900, almost an hour later than the scheduled time of 0822 hours. One glider and tug had to turn back. One glider ditched offshore and another disintegrated in mid-air over the water (cause was laid to structural defects). The stakes driven into the ground all over the LZs did not prove to be difficult obstacles, even though the poles did cause considerable damage to the gliders and in some instances, to their loads. They served in many instances as additional braking power for the gliders, since the poles were small, planted at shallow depth, and were too widely dispersed to perform their intended mission. Evidently, the French farmers who were forced to plant the anti-airborne stakes had done the minimum work they could in this forced construction. These poles were on the average of 12 feet high, and six inches in diameter. They had been driven in the ground less than two feet and were generally more than 30 to 40 feet apart. Serial Number 16 was a parachute load made up of the 551st Parachute Battalion. It dropped accurately on DZ "A" at 1800 hours as planned. This drop was followed up rapidly by continuous glider serials numbered from 17 through 23. Nine gliders were reported to have been released prematurely, four of which made water landings. A large percentage of their crews and personnel were saved by prompt action on the part of the Navy. The landing skill of our glider pilots was highly satisfactory. Although the 1000-foot interval adopted for the towing caused considerable jamming over the LZs, these pilots effected excellent landings. Several pilots even ground-looped to avoid obstacles and still brought in their personnel and cargoes safely. Another reason for the crowded conditions over the landing zones was a noticeable tendency on the part of successive flights to seek additional altitude as a result of the normal "accordion movement" of the flights en route. In turn this progressively created a layer effect which resulted in a greater mass of aircraft being over the LZs at any one time than had been contemplated. Further difficulty arose because the pilots of the early glider lifts landed on the best and most obvious sections of the landing zones instead of in their own designated sectors. On their arrival, the later lifts consequently found that their assigned landing areas were almost entirely occupied with gliders which forced them to seek alternate and less desirable areas. All these factors tended to cause many heavy and short landings which seriously damaged the gliders in large numbers. The pilots simply had to "dig in" their landings because of the limited space. Although these abrupt, heavy

damage to the gliders, the glider pilots by presence of mind, prompt action, and skillful maneuver saved many lives and much valuable airborne equipment. It was established by D / 6 that not more than 125 glider-borne personnel were injured in these landings. Although not encountered in the operation, as a matter of general interest, it is worthy of note that in the FREJUS area outside of the Drop Zones, there was a second type of anti-glider obstacle which consisted of small but sturdy sharpened stakes, some eighteen inches high, firmly imbedded in the ground and connected by wire which could easily badly tear up the belly of any gliders landing on such obstructed terrain.

10. In general, the problem of air resupply did not become as urgent as had been expected. Absence of serious enemy opposition caused ammunition expenditure to fall below the anticipated amount. The initial plan for bringing in the first supplies by air on D-Day was consequently changed so that it was not until 1000 hours on D / 1 that two troop carrier groups brought in 116 aircraft loaded with supplies. The aircraft arrived over the DZs on schedule but at an altitude well over 2000 feet which made accurate dropping extremely difficult. A rather stiff breeze, coupled with the high altitude and the merging of DZs "O" and "A", caused much of the dropped equipment to get into the hands of the wrong units on the ground. Well over 95% of the 1700-odd bundles dropped by parachute landed safely, but much of the specialized equipment failed to reach the units which had requested it. Subsequent resupply missions carrying emergency signal and medical supplies were flown again on the night of D / 1. Although these drops had to be made at night by pathfinder aids, the success of these missions was above average, except that again the high altitude caused excessive scattering of equipment. The 334th Quartermaster Depot Company (the US air resupply company), aided by the Parachute Maintenance Section of the 517th Regimental Combat Team, packed over 14,000 parachutes and 1000 tons of equipment for the Operation, and deserves commendation for the superior work accomplished. For the 2nd Parachute Brigade Group, the British Allied Air Supply Base, which worked side by side with the American resupply unit, likewise turned in a very creditable job of packing their rations, ammunition and equipment for resupply by air.

VI - GROUND ACTIVITIES

1. Once on the ground, enemy opposition encountered by the Airborne Task Force was generally light. The objective of LE MUY proved rather difficult to take. The main bridge leading into town was captured well ahead of schedule late on D-Day by the British Parachute Brigade, but LE MUY was not captured until the morning of D / 1, as the D-Day attack by the British Parachute Brigade failed to take the objective and the 550th Glider Infantry Battalion was later ordered to attack and occupy the town, which they accomplished as planned. The Force quickly took LE MITAN, LA MOTTE, CASTRON and LES SERRES by noon of D-Day. Contact was promptly made as planned with the 45th and 36th Infantry Divisions. Elements of the 517th Regimental Combat Team, together with the 551st Parachute Battalion, took DRAGUIGNAN, while the 509th Parachute Battalion assisted the amphibious landing considerably by extending detachments down to the beach following their early landing. Of particular note is the fact that most of the howitzers of the 460th and 463d Field Artillery Battalions were operative and functioning shortly after the drop. Similarly, the 4.2 mortar companies and the 602d Pack Artillery Battalion which came in with gliders were in

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action very promptly. The operation was a strong indication of the feasibility of parachute field artillery. Almost all of the howitzers were in position and firing by noon of D-Day and all were ready for action by dark of D-Day. No other type of artillery could have been used to support the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion due to its isolation and inaccessability of the position by road. The surprise achieved by the airborne landings and the cutting of lines of communication by the airborne forces prevented proper employment of enemy mobile reserves; this fact was brought out only by the results but also by the admission of General Neuling who commanded the German Corps with headquarters at DARGUIGNAN.

2. By 18 August the Force had commenced to reorganize in the vicinity of LE MUY. Following this reorganization it proceeded to advance along the RIVIERA, toward CANNES, NICE, and the Italian border. The British 2nd Parachute Brigade was taken out of action and preparations were made to return it to its base in the Rome area for further possible airborne operational use. The First Special Service Force replaced the British Brigade, and the Airborne Task Force then continued to advance along the coast, meeting determined rear guard opposition. These operations of the Task Force toward the Franco-Italian border were not restricted to the coast, but extended to a point some 65 miles inland. As has always been the case when airborne troops are retained in the line in an offensive role, they experienced back-breaking difficulty in transporting their heavy supporting arms and ammunition. The fluid, rapid advance of Seventh Army as a whole made it difficult for the Army to provide necessary vehicles for the Force. As a result, the paratroopers in many cases hauled their Pack 75's for some sixty or seventy miles over the rugged RIVIERA coastline. Fortunately, a number of captured enemy vehicles, together with the organic transport brought in by gliders, did make the movement feasible.

3. Characteristic of the fighting qualities displayed by the Airborne Task Force was the enthusiastic manner in which its units unhesitatingly attacked successive objectives despite the numerous handicaps which prevailed. The hostile opposition encountered, however, was at no time sufficiently serious to test the full fighting capabilities of the Force.

VII - STATISTICS

1. During Operation DRAGON the Provisional Troop Carrier Air Division flew 987 sorties and carried 9,000 airborne personnel, 221 jeeps, and 213 artillery pieces. The sorties flown also included 407 towed gliders and carried a total of over two million pounds of equipment into the battle area for the First Airborne Task Force. But one aircraft was lost as a result of the Operation itself and the losses in aircraft from the period of movement from the United Kingdom to the conclusion of the operation totalled only nine. No troop carrier personnel other than glider pilots were known to have been killed; 4 were listed as missing, and 16 were hospitalized. The balance of the 746 dispatched on the Operation had returned to their organization.

2. With respect to airborne units, a total 434 U. S. airborne personnel were listed as killed, captured or missing in action on 20 August. In addition, 292 were hospitalized. Early reports indicated that the British Parachute Brigade listed 181 men as missing in action and 130 men hospitalized. Later reports indicated that 52 paratroopers of the British Brigade had definitely been killed. 500 replacements had been requested by the U. S. parachute units and 126 by the British Brigade. In the first two days of action, over 1,000 prisoners had been taken by the American units and nearly 350 by the British Brigade. By the 23d, this figure was well over 2,000. The total jump and glider crash injuries amounted to 283 or approximately 3% of the personnel involved.

3. The recovery of personnel and cargo parachutes can be expected to be very low. As of 1 September, it was apparent that not more than 1,000 parachutes could be sent to the Rome base for salvage and repair. Similarly, the number of gliders which can be used again will be equally small. A canvass of the landing zones indicates that fewer than 50 gliders of the 407 can be salvaged without excessive cost. Since there were no guards left with the gliders, even this figure may be optimistic.

VIII - SUMMARY

The recently completed airborne Operation DRAGOON was without doubt the most successful of its kind yet undertaken by Allied Forces in this theater. The commanders of both the airborne and troop carrier units and their subordinates deserve full credit for the excellent manner in which they executed this mission. The results and experiences of this Operation are believed to be of value to all theaters in order that those few mistakes made in this Operation can be known and avoided in future operations.