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Title: Observer's report, Airborne Phase, Operation Neptune, 1 July 1944

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Abstract: Report is based upon observations made under the following schedule: 1-31 May 1944 – attached to Headquarters, FUSAG, London, England. Visited Airborne Units, establishments and installations. Observed Exercise Eagle, which was U.S. dress rehearsal for Operation Neptune; and 31 May 1944-1 July 1944 – attached to Headquarters 82nd Airborne Division, Leicester, England. Entered combat with this division in leading glider serial. Landed in vicinity of Ste. Marie Du Mont, Normandy, H-2 hours on D-day. Returned to Leicester via Utah Beach, 13 June 1944.

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War Department Observer's Report (Colonel Bidwell) - Airborne
Phase - Operation NEPTUNE.

TO: Assistant Chief of Staff, OPD, Washington, D. C.

1. This report is based upon observations made under the following schedule:

a. 1 May 1944 - 31 May 1944 - Attached to Headquarters, FUSAJ, London, England. Visited airborne units, establishments and installations. Observed Exercise EAGLE, which was U. S. dress rehearsal for Operation NEPTUNE.

b. 31 May 1944 - 1 July 1944 - Attached to Headquarters 82nd Airborne Division, Leicester, England. Entered combat with this division in leading glider serial. Landed in vicinity of STE. MARIE DU MONT, Normandy, H-2 hours on D day. Returned to Leicester via UTAH Beach, 13 June 1944.

OPERATION NEPTUNE

Airborne Phase

2. In accordance with decision made in March, 1944, all airborne troops were used during this operation directly to assist the inland progress of the beach landing assault troops. To accomplish this, the airborne troops were called upon to land in the midst of a well-organized defensive position. Transports and gliders were under practically continuous fire and broke formation. Airborne units were badly scattered and intermingled on landing. The majority of the men had no opportunity to secure their heavy arms and equipment. In spite of all this, the operation was a success. It succeeded, however, only because the airborne troops slugged it out with the defenders and had no thought other than to achieve eventual victory. Two reinforced U.S. Airborne Divisions (82nd and 101st), reorganized for this particular operation, and one reinforced British Airborne Division (6th) were committed.

All airborne units operated under the command of the 21 Army Group (General Montgomery). In the British case, this command was exercised through the British Airborne Command (Lt. Gen. Browning). U.S. Airborne Divisions were assigned to the First Army (Lt. Gen. Bradley) and operated without any central airborne controlling agency.

Air landings in Normandy commenced at 0010 the night of D day. The bulk of all three divisions landed prior to H hour on D day, although final glider serials did not arrive until D+1. Some few units were sea transported and reached their respective division areas after overland movement across beaches, from D day to D+2.

Previously assigned landing areas for both U.S. Airborne Divisions were changed on D-10 day, when it was discovered that the Germans had moved two additional infantry divisions into the Cherbourg Peninsula.

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3. Action, in brief, by division, during the airborne phase of the operation was as follows:

U. S. 82nd Airborne Division

508th, 507th, 508th Parachute and 325th Glider Infantry Regiments. (The Glider Regiment being temporarily reorganized into a three battalion regiment).

a. Assigned Missions: (See Reference Map "A", attached)

- (1) Capture STE MERE EGLISE (505th Parachute Inf)
- (2) Secure bridgehead across MERDRET RIVER (507th and 508th Parachute Inf)
- (3) Destroy DOUVE RIVER crossings at BEUZEVILLE LA BASTILLE and ETIENVILLE (508th Parachute Inf)
- (4) Protect NW flank VII Corps (Division)
- (5) Be prepared to advance to west, on Corps order, to line of DOUVE RIVER (Division)

Note: The 325th Glider Infantry was to initially assemble in Division reserve.

b. Movement Plan

- (1) Parachute - All parachute units were committed initially. They were to lead the attack, preceded 30 minutes by three pathfinder crews. Interval between serials was held to the minimum in order to insure continuity of the drop. Flight to the drop zones was over a route across the peninsula from the west and between the Channel Islands. The Division Commander (Maj Gen Ridgeway) and Assistant Division Commander (Brig Gen Gavin) were to drop with the leading regiment (505th).
- (2) Glider - All gliders were to land in an area generally southwest of STE MERE EGLISE. Seven departure fields were utilized. Serials were set up, as follows:

	<u>Commence Landing</u>	<u>Consisted of</u>	<u>Carrying in General</u>
(1)	Dawn, D day	8 - CG4A 44 - Horsa	Hq personnel and AA Bn.
(2)	Dusk, D day	28 - CG4A 122 - Horsa	Transportation, two Glider PA Bns Med & Eng.
(3)	Dawn, D + 1 day	50 - CG4A	Transportation, one Glider Inf Bn and Eng.
(4)	Dusk, D + 1 day	70 - CG4A 30 - Horsa	Transportation and remainder Glider Inf Regt.

Total gliders to be landed - 352

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- (3) Seaborne - The 87th Armored PA Bn, 889th TD Bn and Tr B 4th Cav Sqdn, all attached to the 82d Airborne Division, were to land at UTAH BEACH on D day and proceed to join the Division without delay.

c. Execution

- (1) The Division landed squarely on the German 91st Infantry Division and other enemy defense troops. These enemy units were on maneuvers and were already occupying their assigned defensive positions. Surprise was gained only by the leading parachute units. All subsequent serials found themselves under practically continuous ground and AA fire while crossing the peninsula and upon landing. Heavy caliber AA fire also was delivered against the transports and gliders from batteries located on the Channel Islands.

506th Parachute Infantry - This regiment was scattered but dropped in the STE MERE EGLISE locality as planned. It found itself in the center of an extremely heavily organized area constituting the key enemy defensive position for the entire locality. The regiment promptly defeated stiff resistance in the vicinity of the town but was unable to push the Germans from the ridge south of town or to clean out the town itself. German reinforcements moved against it from all directions but the regiment was able to more than hold its own until joined by elements of the 4th Infantry Division the evening following the landing. On D+1, a general attack by parachute, glider and tank units of the 82nd Airborne Division and the 8th Infantry (4th Division) finally drove the Germans from the ridge and occupied the town.

507th Infantry - This regiment was badly dropped. Two groups, one large and one small, landed west of the MERDE ET RIVER as had been planned, while another group was dropped east of the river. The large group west of the river was surrounded and became completely isolated. Radio messages received on D / 4 indicated that it was being heavily attacked and was running out of ammunition. It was not successfully relieved. The bulk of the 3d battalion of this regiment was apparently dropped several miles southwest of CARENTAN and was completely lost.

508th Infantry - This unit was fairly well dropped in point of mass but only one small group landed west of the MERDERET RIVER as planned, the bulk of the regiment landing east of the river. For this reason it was unable to destroy the two DOUVE RIVER bridges as directed. It was, however able to do some excellent fighting in the CHEF DU PONT area during the initial phases of the battle and thereby indirectly contributed materially to the final success of the STE MERE EGLISE action to its north.

325th Glider Infantry - The bulk of this regiment arrived over its landing area on D / 1 as scheduled. Heavy ground fire scattered the flight formations, however, considerably. It proceeded to attempt to land in accordance with the plan that had been specified in the initial division order. The actual situation on the ground, however, was entirely different than that planned under this order. The result was that many gliders came down right in the midst of the heavy battle in progress in the STE MERE EGLISE area, some even landing well inside the German lines. Considerable equipment was lost, but casualties were on the whole amazingly light and within two hours the battalions of the regiment were under control and were well assembled. They were committed without delay in the attack against the ridge south of STE MERE EGLISE and they played an important part in the final cleaning out of this stubbornly defended area.

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d. Resupply. This division had a complete parachute resupply serial set up for flight on a prearranged basis for each of the first two days. Thereafter and until ground supply means became operative, supplies were to be "on call". On D + 1, in spite of the actual ground situation, the first serial was flown and the drop completed as pre-planned. The planes, flying at low speed and altitude, were under continuous ground fire and thirteen of them were brought down. Many of the bundles landed in enemy held territory. Location and distribution of the other bundles also presented a very difficult problem.

U. S. 101st Airborne Division

501st, 502d, 506th Parachute and 327th Glider Infantry Regiments (The Glider Regiment being temporarily reorganized into a three battalion regiment).

a. Assigned Missions: (See Reference Map "A" attached)

- (1) Destroy enemy battery west of STE MARTIN DE VARREVILLE (502d Parachute Inf)
- (2) Seize western edge of inundated area back of UTAN BEACH between STE MARTIN DE VARREVILLE and POUPEVILLE. (502d and 506th Parachute Inf)
- (3) Establish bridgehead south of DOUVE RIVER (506th Parachute Inf)
- (4) Destroy bridges and seize locks in CARENTAN area (501st Parachute Inf)
- (5) Defend line of DOUVE and MERDERET RIVERS (506th and 501st Parachute Inf)

Note: The 327th Glider Infantry upon landing (seaborne) was to assemble, prepared for immediate employment in the CARENTAN area.

b. Movement Plan

- (1) Parachute - All parachute units were committed initially to lead the attack, preceded 30 minutes by three pathfinder crews. The drop was scheduled to commence at 0100 night of D day and to be completed in approximately one hour. Route to the drop zones was across the peninsula from the west. The Division Commander (Maj Gen Taylor) was to drop with the leading regiment.
- (2) Glider - The leading glider serial, consisting of 51 CG4A gliders, was scheduled to commence landing two hours after completion of the parachute drop. This serial carried some Headquarters personnel and the AA Battalion. The Assistant Division Commander (Brig Gen Pratt) was to be in the lead glider of this serial. A second glider serial of 32 Horsa gliders was to arrive the following evening (D day). It was to carry mainly communication and medical personnel and equipment, as well as some jeeps for the parachute regiments.

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- (3) Seaborne - One battalion of the Glider Infantry Regiment, along with the bulk of the combat vehicles of the Division, were scheduled to be landed during the first tide at UTAH BEACH. The remainder of the Glider Infantry Regiment and the QM transportation were to be brought in during the second tide.

c. Execution

- (1) This Division was landed without loss of any major group but the parachute elements were extremely scattered and all units were badly intermingled. German positions were found to be well organized and hostile reaction was immediate as soon as the drop commenced. Fighting was confused and severe, particularly along the CARENTAN bridges and around STE JOSEPH DU MONTE.

502d Parachute Infantry - The bulk of this regiment landed in the general vicinity of its drop zones but the men were badly scattered. The 3d Battalion, charged with destroying the enemy battery west of STE MARTIN DE VARRVILLE, succeeded in placing a company in the position before day-break. Resistance at the battery was reported as being light, due primarily to the excellent air force bombing completed just before commencement of the airborne landing. Heavy fighting occurred at all the causeway exits, but contact with the 4th Infantry Division was made prior to noon on D day.

506th Parachute Infantry - This unit was very badly scattered during its drop and it immediately became engaged in a stiff fight along the back edges of the inundated area. Eventually, however, it was able to gain control of the area and was contacted by 4th Infantry Division reconnaissance units by noon on D day. It was not able initially to establish a bridgehead across the DOUVE RIVER, east of CARENTAN.

501st Parachute Infantry - This regiment also had a scattered drop but found itself in the general vicinity of its assigned landing area. It was able to reach the DOUVE RIVER line and seize the CARENTAN locks as ordered but was unable to destroy the nearby bridges because of heavy fire from the opposite high ground across the river. The bulk of its early fighting consisted of taking on enemy groups that had been pushed back from the beach defenses and were attempting to get into CARENTAN. In this manner, it was able to practically destroy a regiment of the German 3d Parachute Division. This regiment had been up forward near the beach on maneuvers when the attack began and was apparently attempting to pull out to the rear.

Glider Serials - The landing glider serial arrived as scheduled but it had been constantly under heavy ground and AA fire during its trip across the peninsula. It continued to receive more fire as the gliders started to land. The fields that were available proved to be too small and most of the gliders crash-landed. General Pratt was killed when the lead glider struck a tree on landing. The second serial which came in the following day was able to do better but even then the heavily loaded Horsas found the fields to be too small that many of them also crash-landed.

327th Glider Infantry (Seaborne) - This regiment reached the Division combat area on D + 2 and was immediately committed to a cleaning out attack along the DOUVE from the east. It accomplished this mission in an excellent manner and then was ordered to occupy a defense area opposite CARENTAN. It later played an important role in the eventual capture of this key town.

[REDACTED]

d. Resupply. This division arranged to have one day of Class I, III, V, Medical and certain Class II Signal Supplies pre-stocked at resupply departure fields. The Division Administrative Order stated that these stocks were to be available "on call". Actually, however, on D + 1, a full parachute resupply serial was flown for the division on an automatic basis in the same manner as that for the 82d Airborne Division. Only 4 transports were lost, however, during this flight from a total of 118 planes committed.

British 6th Airborne Division

3d and 5th Parachute Brigades, 6th Air Landing Brigade and 6th Air Landing Recce Regiment.

a. Assigned Missions: (See Reference Map "B" attached)

- (1) Seize ORNE RIV R bridges near BENOUVILLE and NAWVILLE (5th Parachute Brigade)
- (2) Establish bridgehead east of ORNE RIVER (3d Parachute Brigade)
- (3) Destroy bridges along DIVES RIVER (3d Parachute Brigade)
- (4) Protect west flank I Corps (Division)

b. Movement Plan

- (1) Parachute - Both Parachute Brigades were committed initially. They were to commence landing at H - 4 hours, preceded 30 minutes by pathfinder groups. Flight to drop zones was to be directly in from the Channel across the beach line.
- (2) Glider - Six gliders were to be independently landed immediately following the pathfinder group to attempt to seize the ORNE RIVER bridges intact. A 68 glider serial, carrying Headquarters personnel and antitank units, was to commence landing at H - 2. The Division Commander (Maj. Gen. Gale) was to lead this serial. The Air Landing Brigade serial of 146 gliders was to come in just prior to dusk on D day. Two large landing zones were designated for this serial, on opposite sides of the ORNE RIVER.

c. Execution

- (1) This division was in general well landed and it succeeded in accomplishing all of its assigned missions. German reaction was prompt but initially not well organized. Hostile pressure, however, continued to increase steadily as the action progressed and not only prevented exploitation, but gradually narrowed the extent of the bridgehead that was being held east of the ORNE. The 51st Infantry Division crossed the ORNE through the bridgehead on D + 4, thus removing any further threat to the position of the airborne troops.
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3d Parachute Brigade - This unit was dropped generally in the area east of the river as planned but was quite scattered. Initial surprise was achieved and it was thereby able to destroy some of the DIVES RIVER bridges before hostile pressure forced it back to the high ground east of the RANVILLE bridge. Here it held firm as part of the eventual bridgehead position.

5th Parachute Brigade - This brigade was well dropped. On landing in zones opposite both ends of the bridges it found that they were intact and had been successfully seized by the six glider loads that had preceded it. The bridges were then held during the movement across the river of the 1st SS Brigade (Commando), after which the Parachute Brigade took position east of the river to assist in holding the bridgehead.

6th Air Landing Brigade - This brigade made an excellent landing, commencing at 2100 on D day. Upon assembling west of ESCOVILLE it became heavily engaged but was able to establish itself in that area as the southern anchor of the bridgehead position and then hold firm.

6th Air Landing Recce Regiment - This unit was transported in large Hamilcar gliders. The landing was successfully made and 29 out of 30 of the T-9 light tanks were operational immediately following the landing.

d. Resupply. The initial resupply serial for the 6th Airborne Division was set up on a prearranged basis, to be delivered by parachute on the afternoon of D day. This serial was flown as scheduled. The packages were badly scattered and it is estimated that only about 40% of them reached the airborne units. Five planes were lost. Subsequent deliveries were all made in small lots "on call." Good communication existed between the combat area and the British Airborne Command rear base.

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COMMENTS

4. COMMAND

a. For this Operation all airborne units, both United States and British, were placed under command of 21 Army Group, as were all ground forces. The British airborne units operated under this Group through the British Airborne Command, which acted as a central controlling agency for all British airborne matters. The two reinforced United States Airborne Divisions were turned over by the Group to the First United States Army. There was no United States counterpart of the British Airborne Command to control or coordinate United States airborne matters. Each Airborne Division completed most of its many airborne arrangements independently and on its own initiative. The great need for a United States central airborne controlling agency was constantly apparent and lack of such agency handicapped the entire United States airborne effort.

b. Plans are now under way in this theater to form a United States Airborne Corps and a combined British and American Airborne Command under SHA&F. These steps should insure better all around coordination for the next airborne operation.

5. TROOP CARRIER

a. The transport navigation problem, which was so poorly handled in Sicily, was generally solved in a satisfactory manner during this operation. Check points enroute were well sited and apparently picked up by all serials. Specially trained pathfinder crews were also dropped 30 minutes ahead of leading serials in order to assist in locating drop and landing zones. This system worked as well as could be expected in view of the hostile ground situation. One pathfinder crew, however, was forced to make a sea landing and another may have been immediately destroyed by the enemy.

b. Transport serials were in most cases unable to maintain close formation while receiving sustained ground fire. This resulted in badly scattered parachute drops and glider landings. Instances were reported of transport planes, under fire, cutting gliders loose when not near prescribed landing zones, leaving them to get down as best they could.

c. Briefing of individual plane and glider pilots did not appear to be as complete as is necessary for airborne operations. Planes that lost formation while approaching drop or landing zones were unable to re-orient themselves successfully. Ordinary air force briefing procedure is not enough. All pilots, both transport and glider, must be as familiar with the minor terrain near the landing areas as a parachute jumpmaster. Intensive sand table and air photo work will always be essential, to be supplemented by actual reconnaissance whenever practicable.

d. The decision not to equip C-47 planes with self-sealing gas tanks or to provide them with any light vital armor proved to be a costly mistake. Such protection not only would have cut down plane losses but undoubtedly would have served to considerably improve pilot performance while approaching drop and landing zones.

e. United States transports flew 1,656 sorties during the first two days of this Operation. Losses were 46 planes or 2.8%. Many others were badly damaged by small arms fire.

British losses, to include D/L, were 22 planes out of 734 sorties or 3.0%.

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These loss percentages were well under those expected, probably due to the fact that there were no hostile air attacks launched against the transport serials.

6. GLIDERS

a. This Operation marked the first use of gliders on a large scale in military history. 395 - CGMA, 401 - Horse and 34 - Hamilcar gliders were landed during the initial phase. No double glider tows were attempted.

b. The fact that the United States glider phase was generally carried out to a successful conclusion can be considered as being little short of miraculous. It has always been axiomatic that mass glider landings should not be attempted until suitable landing areas have been effectively secured, yet practically every serial during this Operation had to come down in the center of a strongly held hostile position. Furthermore, most of the fields that were available for landing were too small to be suitable for landing of fully loaded gliders. Again, the night serials had to come across the entire peninsula while under practically continuous fire. In spite of all this, the personnel casualty percentage was amazingly low. Considerable equipment, however, was either destroyed on landing or had to be abandoned due to enemy fire.

c. Glider pilots were used by the airborne units until they were evacuated, between D + 2 and D + 4, to assist in local Command Post protection, handle prisoners of war and perform special mopping up operations. They performed all of these duties in a superior manner and proved to be enthusiastic and capable ground fighters.

7. RESUPPLY

a. There seemed to be a tendency for both U. S. Airborne Divisions, particularly the 82d, to cut loose completely from their departure bases and delegate many resupply arrangements to the Army Air Forces. Both Divisions took their 3-4's over to the combat area in initial serials. Again, the 82d Airborne Division was unable to successfully communicate directly with its base. Initial resupply by air is such a vital matter that adequate staff representation with efficient communication forward must be an essential part of all airborne plans.

b. Prearranged air resupply systems are not flexible enough to satisfy the requirements of airborne combat. The situation will seldom develop as planned. Supplies should be accurately delivered in small lots as called for by local combat commanders rather than dropped in mass over a large area.

c. Large scale parachute resupply drops will usually be wasteful and inefficient and this type of delivery should be restricted generally to emergency supply of isolated units. More use should have been made during this Operation of glider resupply methods.

d. More attention should be paid in the supply plans to ground supply matters for the airborne units. The switch-over from an air to ground supply system should occur as soon as practicable. This will require more careful planning by all agencies concerned than was apparent during this Operation.

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8. ORGANIZATION

a. An Airborne Division organization is necessary. No staff lower than a division staff could have successfully functioned during either the planning or execution phases of this Operation.

b. The organization of the Airborne Division for actual combat must remain a flexible matter and should be practically on a "task force" basis. Each particular operation will probably call for a different proportion of parachute and glider troops. The number and type of certain weapons that will be required may also vary considerably. For initial activation and preliminary training, a divisional organization based on two Parachute Regiments and one Glider Regiment of three Battalions, appears preferable to the present standard Airborne Division. There must be no hesitation, however, on the part of any agency concerned, to assist in altering the make-up of any particular Division, whenever necessary to better design it for any specific combat operation.

c. Every suggestion that tends to build-up Airborne Divisions into heavier or ground type Divisions should be strongly resisted so that they will not lose their inherent strategic mobility. They should remain essentially assault fighting units and contain to the greatest possible extent only men and equipment that can be carried in transports and gliders. This means that Airborne Divisions will continue to be severely handicapped by lack of service units and transportation during their preparatory training and rehabilitation periods, or if they are of necessity required to fight on the ground for an extensive period of time. War Department agencies and Theater Commanders must be made fully aware of these deficiencies so that they can plan to remedy same whenever necessary. In this particular theater, formation of the United States Airborne Corps should materially assist in solving this problem.

d. The present Airborne Division organization fails to make any provision for prompt replacement of key division staff officers lost initially as a result of landing accidents. Since accidents of this type can be counted on usually to occur and did occur in this particular Operation, tables of organization should provide for enough extra division staff officers to immediately replace landing losses.

e. Airborne Division headquarters should contain a Liaison Officer Section.

9. AIR SUPPORT

a. No hostile air attacks were made against the transport serials during the air movement phase of this Operation. Fighter protection was ample and effective.

b. No arrangements apparently were made for any air attacks by our planes in order to limit hostile anti-aircraft or ground fire capabilities during the air movement of the transport serials between the Channel Islands or across the peninsula. Provision of this type of support would have materially assisted the transports in retaining a more compact formation during the flights.

c. This Operation showed that we have made no progress whatsoever in solving the all important problem of close air support for airborne troops during the initial combat phase. Such air support simply did not exist. It will always be necessary, due to the inherent lack of fire power, particularly artillery, in airborne units.

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The following steps are recommended to provide for it in the future:

(1) A number of suitable air units should be specifically allotted in the air support plan to perform only support missions on request of the airborne units. Some planes should be on air alert over the combat area during the critical phases, particularly immediately following the airborne landing. Direct air-ground communication, both radio and visual, must be successfully established.

(2) Air Support Parties, Airborne Units and Air Units that are to work together during the actual combat should train together prior to the operation. Communications should be tested beforehand, under conditions as nearly similar to the contemplated combat conditions as practicable.

d. During this operation the Airborne Divisions were tied into the extremely cumbersome regular system of air support requests that was initially set up for all ground units. This meant a time lag of at least six hours between requests and execution. Such a delay served to nullify any possibility of effective air support during the fluid phase of the combat that occurred immediately after the airborne landing.

e. Air-ground communication to all intents and purposes did not exist. Air Support Parties did not appear to be well trained and their communications failed to function in a satisfactory manner. The 82d Division made three requests for air support during the early combat. None were flown. Two of them were turned down, presumably because the target was within artillery range. At this particular time the division had one 75mm and eight 106 mm guns operating. They were scattered over the entire area, without communications, probably all firing direct fire missions. Nothing was ever heard of the third request made for air support.

10. EQUIPMENT.

a. The specific arms and equipment that airborne units may require for combat must always vary considerably for each particular operation. This means that Tables of Equipment for such troops should be considered as initial guides only. For example, the armament that was needed for this operation may not be the same as that best suited for airborne operations in Burma or the Philippines.

b. This operation once more brought out the great need for a United States quick release parachute harness device. Many lives would have been saved if our jumpers had been able to promptly clear their chutes immediately upon landing. Coming down under heavy fire, as most of them did, they were in a helpless position during the time that they had to struggle to get out of their harness. This time was much too long in most cases due to our present difficult harness release mechanism.

c. The M-1 rifle is preferable to any carbine for use by parachute infantry. Pistols are practically useless and have no place as primary weapons for any airborne individuals.

d. Equipment losses during this operation were much greater than has been the case in any previous airborne operation, due to the fact that hostile fire prevented adequate search for equipment bundles or proper unloading of gliders.

11. GROUND ACTION

a. All of the airborne troops proved themselves to be capable and well trained ground fighters. Even those units not possessing previous battle experience performed in a superior manner. There was no evidence of hesitation to close with the enemy and the initiative shown by individual and small isolated groups was outstanding during the early fighting period. Too much tribute cannot be paid to these airborne soldiers for the manner in which they fought. Handicapped by lack of heavy armament and having already lost considerable personnel during the landing, they were able to gain sufficient control of the area directly inland from the beaches to insure prompt exploitation of any footholds that were secured by the beach assault troops.

b. It soon became apparent that it would not be practicable to relieve the Airborne Divisions from continued ground action as early as had been planned. This means that considerable time will be required to rehabilitate these units. It is estimated that they will not be ready for recommitment for at least 60 days after relief. Casualties reported to date by the United States Airborne Divisions already total nearly 40%.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Transport planes utilized in future airborne operations be equipped with self sealing gas tanks and light armor at vital points to furnish more protection against small arms fire.

2. a. The organization of airborne troops into Divisions be continued.

b. Future Airborne Divisions be organized on the basis of two Parachute and one Glider Regimental Combat Teams, with all Infantry Regiments containing three Battalions. Such initial organization to be regarded, however, as being a temporary training and supply expedient only.

c. Every possible effort be made to reorganize the combat elements of each Airborne Division, in accordance with the expressed desires of the theater commander concerned, as soon as such Division becomes earmarked for any particular theater. All requests, however, that might tend to build-up the Division into a heavy division containing a large proportion of personnel and equipment not capable of being air transported, be denied.

d. Extra staff officers be allotted major airborne unit headquarters in order to furnish replacement for key staff officers lost in landing accidents.

e. A liaison officer section be provided for Airborne Division Headquarters.

3. The entire problem of furnishing prompt direct air support to airborne units during initial combat after landing be immediately restudied jointly by qualified, air, ground and signal personnel, under War Department directives. The results of these studies to be translated into orders without delay.

4. Highest priority be assigned the project of developing and installing a single quick release device for the United States parachute harness.