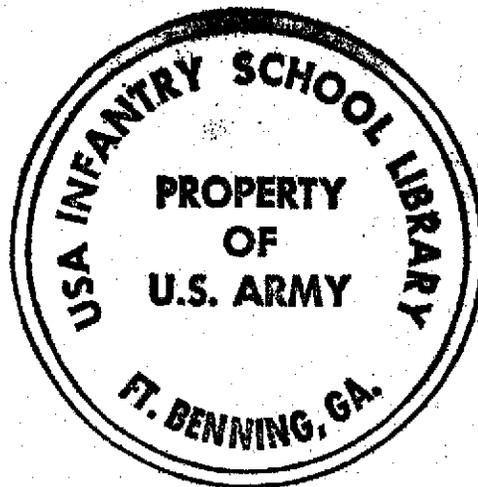


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(THE FIGHT AT THE LOCK)

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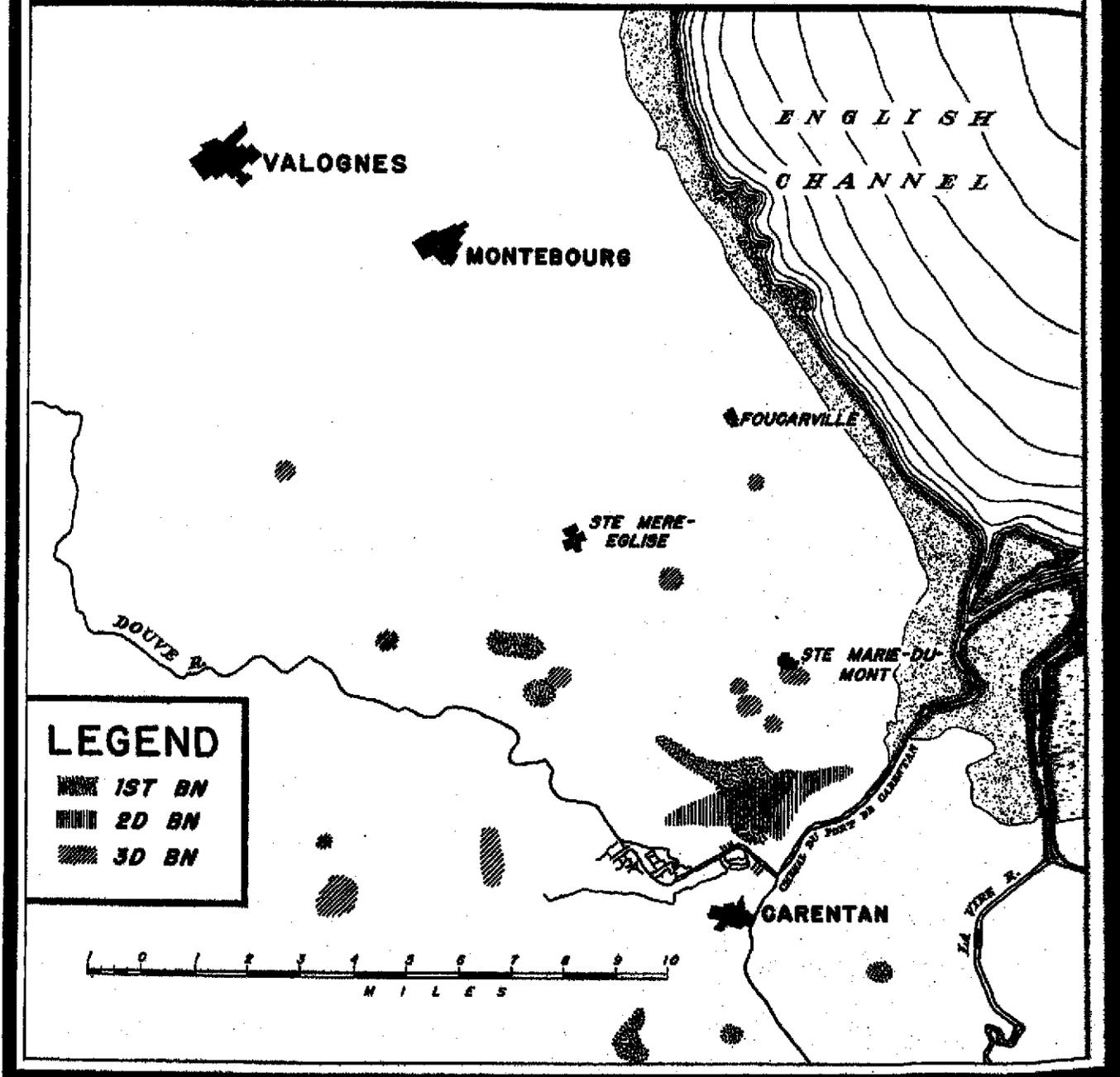
THE FIGHT AT THE LOCK .

According to plan, the D Day objectives of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment were well concentrated. After dropping into NORMANDY a little to the north and east of the city of CARENTAN, the regiment was to press south and westward and establish the defensive position in this direction. In detail, it was to secure the line of the lower DOUVE RIVER, first by seizing the strategic lock on the CANAL DE VIRE ET TAUTE at LE BARQUETTE and then by blowing the river bridges. In that way, it would stand ready either to assist the advance of American forces from out of the UTAH BEACHHEAD and to the westward or to fend off any German counterattack from the eastward.

From the beginning, American attention was directed at the LE BARQUETTE lock. This unique objective and its possible military application appears to have fascinated the imaginations not only of those who planned OPERATION NEPTUNE but of the commanders who were to execute it. To get to the lock first and to make certain that the enemy would have no use of it became an overriding consideration with the planning and tactical forces. Whether that interest was out of proportion to the strategic significance of the lock was a question never fully answered in the doing. American apprehensions as to what might happen if the Germans gained control of the lock superinduced one of the

# CONSOLIDATED DROP PATTERN

## 1ST, 2D, 3D BNS - 501 PRCHT INF



boldest strokes of the NORMANDY campaign, a stroke boldly made and tactically productive. Yet whether the emphasis placed on the position by the Allied planners was justifiable was never confirmed by the attitude of the enemy.

The lock at LE BARQUETTE is below CARENTAN as the RIVER DOUVE flows and near the confluence of the river and the largest of its canals. On 6 June 1944, this was the strategic importance of the lock—that at high tide the low marsh land around CARENTAN are below the level of the sea. The lock holds back the tide. If the lock is opened or demolished, the sea pours into the bottoms and the marshy water barrier to the east and north of CARENTAN become a salt lake.\*

Periodically in the years when the RAF had this area under observation, the Germans had opened the lock. Thereby the flood plain had become inundated so that a long arm of the sea interposed between the ridges of high ground around ST COME DU MONT and the solid but somewhat lower ground skirt-ing CARENTAN on the south and west. Air photographs had shown the extent of these inundations.

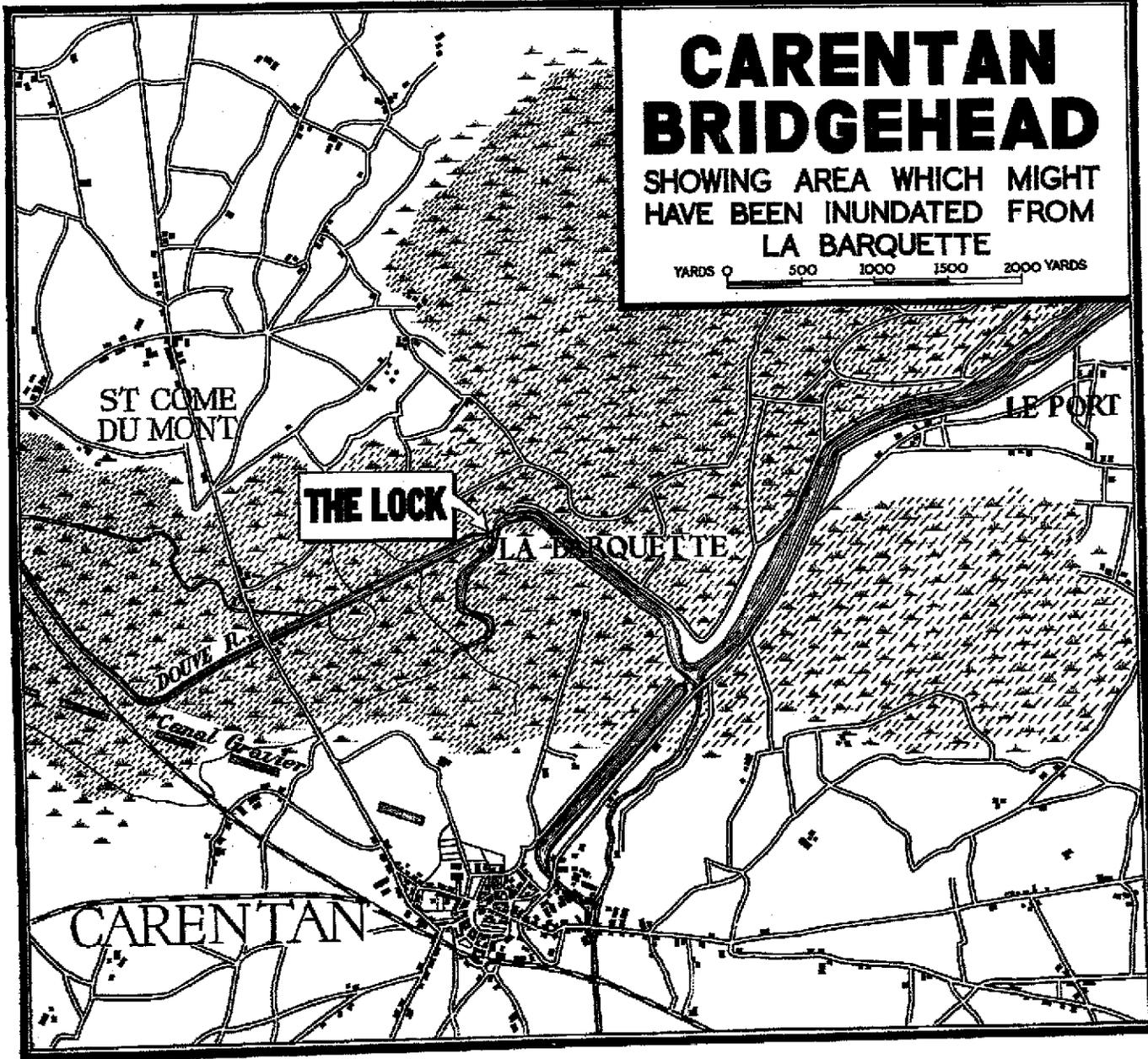
It seemed therefore that the device which the enemy had practiced might be turned against him. If the airborne could seize the lock intact and hold it against all

\*These details were supplied by COL HOWARD R. JOHNSON and his staff and were supplemented by data supplied by Division G-3. This was the theory of the objective as it had been explained to them.

# CARENTAN BRIDGEHEAD

SHOWING AREA WHICH MIGHT  
HAVE BEEN INUNDATED FROM  
LA BARQUETTE

YARDS 0 500 1000 1500 2000 YARDS



counterattack by the enemy, we could use it as we willed. In case the enemy forces to the eastward rebounded strongly against the BEACHHEAD, the marshes around CARENTAN could be turned into a lake, imposing an extra barrier between the Germans and ourselves. Or we could sit on the lock and keep the marsh draining until we were ready to go forward.

The blowing of the bridges along the causeway crossing the RIVER DOUVE and its canals east of CARENTAN was part of the same idea. The causeway provided the one convenient path across the flood plain. Even that path would be denied the enemy if the bridges were down.

Such were the main objectives of the regiment. Once these things were done and the line to the southwestward was made reasonably secure, the regiment was also to capture the town of ST COME DU MONT and blow the railroad bridge across the DOUVE to the west of it. For these tasks, only two battalions were to be present, Third Battaion having been designated as the Division Reserve. Yet due to the misfortunes and miscalculations of the air journey and drop into NORMANDY, even this force was gravely depleted before the combat opened.

First Battalion and the Regimental Headquarters were in the leading serial of the regiment, with Second Battalion coming

next—serials 8 and 9 of the Division formation. By a fluke, a part of the leading serial, including the regimental commander, dropped nearly on the right ground. The rest of the serial was scattered so badly that during the first stage of the operation First Battalion could not function as a tactical unit. A number of the sticks were unloaded south of CARENTAN, much deeper into enemy territory than was supposed to be encompassed by the initial Allied attack. Later the battalion commander was found dead in that area. The battalion executive became missing. All company commanders were missing though one regained the American lines five days later. Vanished also was the battalion staff though the S-1 and S-4 finally found their way back to the regiment. As a result of the drop, the battalion was wholly leaderless and its men far-scattered.

COL HOWARD R. JOHNSON rode in the leading plane of his regiment. All went smoothly as the formation crossed the Channel. In JOHNSON'S plane the men let out a yell as they saw the French coast and most of them stood up and made a final adjustment of their equipment as the planes flew on and crossed the coastline. Halfway across the COTENTIN PENINSULA the formation ran into a scattering flak; it did no damage and the men paid little heed. About two minutes out from the DROP ZONE, there was a strong build-up of enemy

ONE COMMANDER'S  
EXPERIENCE

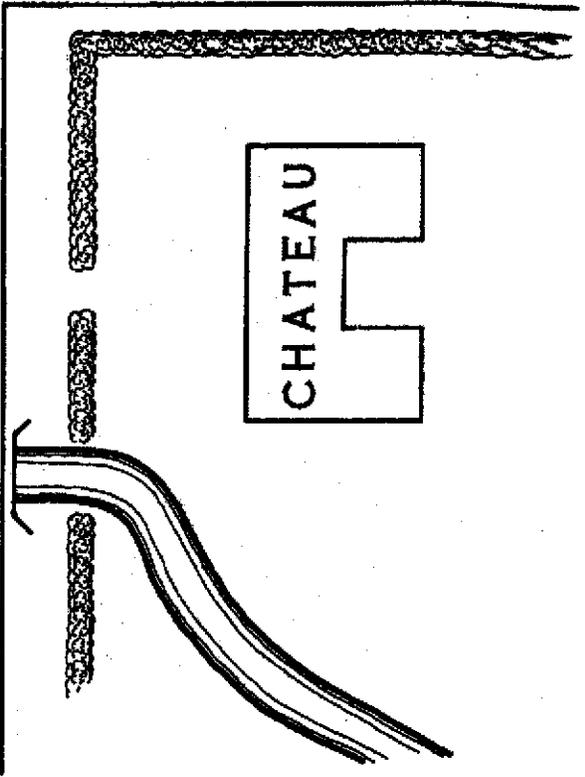
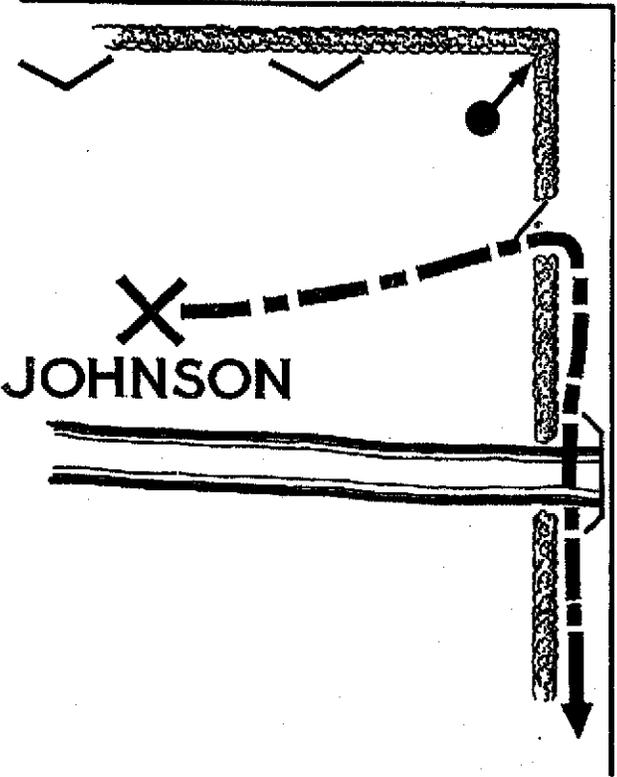
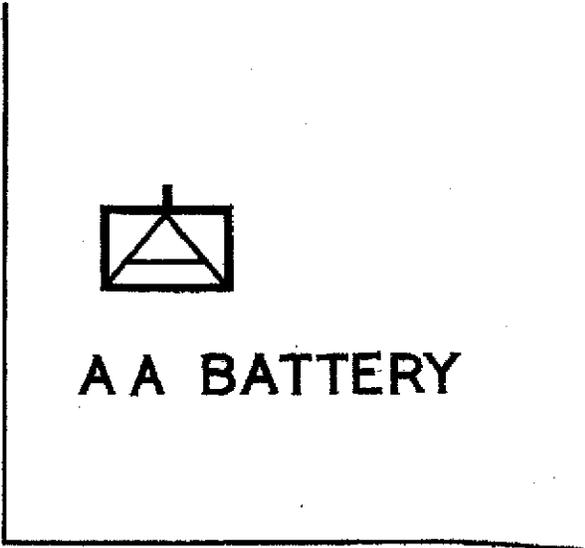
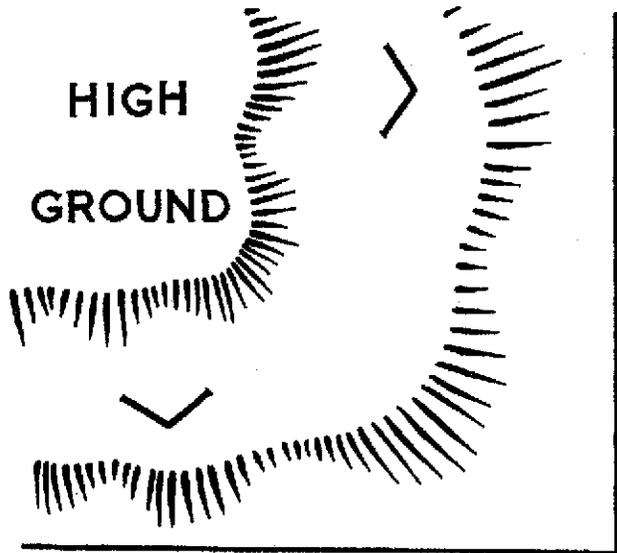
ground fire and the tracers arched up all around the formation. The troops got the first warning signal, then the green light. It flashed back through the astral dome from the lead plane to the others and the men jumped—all except the men in JOHNSON'S plane. At that critical moment a bundle became jammed in the doorway and for what seemed a much longer time but was by JOHNSON'S later estimate about one-half minute, none could get out. They pushed frantically at the bundle. It dropped off into space and the men followed as swiftly as they could, feeling that they had overshot the mark. That 30-second delay was their salvation. For it enabled them to make a bullseye on DROP ZONE D. JOHNSON figured afterward that his men who had jumped at the signal probably landed in the vicinity of ST COME DU MONT and that many of the men who never rejoined the regiment must have come down in the marshes near CARENTAN and drowned before they could come free from their chutes.

Tracer fire was "spouting up like a Roman candle." Almost as he cleared the plane, JOHNSON realized that in some manner his reserve chute had opened. With the amount of fire that was breaking around him, he had become much too good a target. So he pulled out his knife and cut the reserve chute loose. He hit the ground and was immediately fired on by a rifleman covered by a hedgerow 25 yards away.

JOHNSON pulled his pistol and fired twice in the direction where he had seen the flash from the hedge. There was a loud scream but there were no more shots. JOHNSON lay quiet for a moment before cutting his way out of his harness. That done, he rolled over and over until he came to within the shadow of a hedgerow which ran at right angles to the one from which he had received the fire.\*

He found a gate in the hedge and crawled through it on his belly. Then he lay for a few minutes in a roadside ditch, considering. He was next a road intersection. Opposite him, on the far side of the road, was a large building which looked like a chateau. His first impulse was to go over, rouse someone and ask the location. But he thought better of it, and later he learned that it was a proper instinct, for the chateau contained the local German headquarters. JOHNSON had landed right on the top of a well-prepared position. There had been no warning other than the first rifle shots. JOHNSON had heard nothing else. But he felt that he had come down on something hot and that even then he was "fighting for life." He knew he was carrying too much weight for easy movement. Before leaving the ditch he stripped himself of everything he thought he could afford to drop. He then started working down the hedgerow,

\*This experience is recorded in detail for detail as JOHNSON described it and is reported in full because it is believed to be typical. The witness was later KIA in Holland.



crawled along though he heard no other sounds of combat until after another serial had passed overhead. Then mortar fire began falling on all four sides of him as if the Germans were pouring it into the fields broadcast on the chance that someone might be landing there. Above the tumult he heard a loud crash and then another like it somewhere behind him. He knew that two of our planes had come down and looking back, he saw a double glare in the sky. Out of the night came prolonged screaming which died in crescendo as if a man had been bayoneted. He did not know whether it had been friend or enemy but he felt the rising tide of sound and fire, as of many small encounters building up to a general engagement. He was moving down into swampy ground now and though he was still uncertain of his location, he thought that he was working toward a river. He had looked at his compass. He knew that he was crawling south and he figured that he must be coming to the DOUVE. The direction was taking him away from the sounds of the fighting. He kept on going for another 15 minutes, keeping to the ditches and the shadows around the hedges.\* The moon was quite bright. JOHNSON decided to wait where he was and see whether any of the men would come to him. Another 15 minutes passed. Then he heard the chirp of a cricket right near him.

\*In checking these data with hundreds of paratroopers, the HO found that they almost invariably tend to move down hill, thus following the lines of drainage. This may be a factor in their collection although they do not recognize it as a working principle.

It was the "most joyful noise" of a lifetime. He felt his own cricket; it was gone. He heard the other cricket again; the sound persisted. JOHNSON decided to take a chance. He called, "Flash!" Someone in the darkness called, "Thunder!" JOHNSON replied, "Welcome." Then they joined. It was a party of 15 men, some of his own, and some from 506th Regiment. They had not yet oriented themselves. All had been moving about, trying to find something which would point the way to their objectives and in their aimless search, they had come gradually together. JOHNSON thought they had better keep moving south. So they went on along the ditches, and more men came to them from out of the shadows as they moved. A good many of them were men from 506th's Third Battalion trying to keep their assignment at the DOUVE bridges near LE PORT. The cricket continued to be the chief means of drawing the men together.

By the dawn of D Day, JOHNSON had 150 men. They had worked their way to within 300 yards of the canal and their main objective—the LE BARQUETTE lock. Without knowing, they had been moving in the right direction all of the time and as the light grew, the men recognized the fall of the land. For two months prior, they had been doing this problem with maps and rubber relief models of the area and now the road and the hedgerow turnings began to seem familiar to them. JOHNSON had brought them along the hedgerows and ditches

for safety, but the worst of their hazards came from the swampy ground. They floundered through streams, sometimes going in up to their waists. When a man slipped down, the others pulled him along. No one said anything and by common consent, they followed the leader and stayed clear of the roadways and fields. As they came down into the bottoms the Germans started pouring mortar fire into the marshes. But it was going high over the party and JOHNSON became confident that his approach was undetected. He had kept his men together regardless of their unit and mission. He felt it was better that way than to let small numbers of men try for separate objectives. He said to them, "Wait till you can be sure where you are. Wait until you have strength." When the country became recognizable with the increased light, a lieutenant with 25 or 30 men from the 506th asked for permission to take them on against the bridges at LE PORT. JOHNSON told him to go. The party split soon after 0400 and the lieutenant led his group on along the canal.

JOHNSON had already put his scouts out. They returned and reported that they had reconnoitered the road intersection which lay just ahead of the party. It was what they had been seeking—the road junction just north of the lock. It

CAPTURE OF  
THE LOCK

checked with what they remembered of the maps. They could see the banks

of the canal on beyond the roadway. There was a group of buildings on beyond the road intersection; JOHNSON figured that the buildings must be clustered around the lock. The light was fulling now and the outline of the canal embankments had become distinct. JOHNSON decided to split his force and attack at once. This was his plan: About 50 of the men were to strike directly for the lock; the others would build up a defensive base on the ground between the main road and the canal.

The lock party made it in one dash. There was a scattering of rifle fire around them as they raced across the flat, open space beyond the road; no one was hit.\* The lock and the ground immediately around it were unguarded, and it wasn't until the men got to the far bank, moving across the top of the lock, that they saw some fire pits and hutments about 50 yards beyond the lock. The enemy may have been asleep except for one or two sentries; at least the reaction of the defenders was extremely slow and uncertain. The Americans held in place on the far bank, digging as fast as they could into the soft clay. The foxholes were down deep and the men were well covered when at last the German position came to life and began shelling the lock area with

\*JOHNSON could not remember who led this party except that it was a junior officer. Check of the other witnesses was equally futile. They did not know who led this particular attack. It seems possible that he was an officer from some other unit.

Some time around 0600 he heard the rattle of a continuing small arms fire building up to the northward. It was the first sign to him that there were other friendly troops operating in the vicinity and he drew some comfort from the thought that they would probably be advancing toward him. The wait was profitless otherwise; no new men came into the position. His grip on the lock seemed secure enough for the time being. On the other hand the small (4-5 man) patrols which were sent to scout the DOUVE bridges and explore the flank toward LE PORT came back and reported that they could not move more than a few hundred yards either way without drawing fire. The causeway leading to CARENTAN appeared to be stoutly defended.

At 0630 a patrol arrived with information that MAJ R. J. ALLEN, the Regimental S-3, was at BSE ADDEVILLE on the high ground north of JOHNSON'S position, with a fair-sized force. The patrol did not know ALLEN'S exact situation or whether he was being engaged; all that they could tell JOHNSON was ALLEN'S location. Feeling that he was not strong enough to attack toward the CARENTAN bridges, JOHNSON decided to take all the maneuver force which remained to him--about 50 men--and march on ALLEN, leaving his defensive force in position around the locks. At 0730 the march started, moving back via the swampy ground and the ditches. The column reached BSE ADDEVILLE at about 0900, having been under enemy fire

most of the way. In coming across one of the last fields, the paratrooper bringing up the rear of the column lagged far behind and was felled by a bullet. LT EDLEY CRAIGHILL of Company A (later killed by artillery fire at CARENTAN) dropped his weapon, crawled back across the wide and fire-swept space and dragged the man to safety.

There were about 100 men with ALLEN. Among them were several of the regiment's key personnel and LT FARRELL of the US Navy who had taken special drop training with the regiment for SFC support. The force was embattled within the houses of BSE ADDEVILLE and

THE FORCES MERGE

was receiving fire from enemy

forces fighting from behind the hedgerows to north and west of the hamlet. While keeping them at arm's length, ALLEN was making the hamlet a rendezvous point in the hope of collecting enough men to go on against ST COME DU MONT. His was an oddly assorted group and included men from practically every unit which had dropped between the MERDERET RIVER and the coast. ALLEN had rounded up a number of carts and draft animals from the farmhouses. Four patrols had then formed, including a driver and five or six riflemen to cover each party, and had moved out to the DROP ZONE to collect arms and ammunition. They returned at noontime. The carts were well-loaded but all four patrols had come under fire frequently during the mission. Meantime more men had come into the position. Jump casualties—men with sprains and breaks—

had begun to find the rendezvous. Bullet and mortar fire was also costing ALLEN not a few men. A first-aid station was set up and was soon filled with the wounded. At the lock things were remaining fairly in balance. From the runners who kept moving back and forth between the two positions JOHNSON learned that there was no increase in enemy pressure against the lock but that the enemy fire was beginning to take toll of the men along the embankment.

That was all JOHNSON knew of the general situation. He had heard nothing from Division. He had no idea whether other American forces had succeeded in forming or whether we had succeeded at the Beaches. A few minutes before 1200 one of his medical men got a small radio into operation, just in time to catch the noon newscast from LONDON. It came over the air that the invasion was proceeding according to plan and that the operation of the American airborne divisions was going strongly.

JOHNSON turned to ALLEN. "I have decided," he said, "if things are going well elsewhere, the thing to do is make ourselves as strong as is necessary at the lock and then get to the bridges as quickly as we can."\* ALLEN agreed.

\*Both JOHNSON and ALLEN said the conversation was just about as quoted and both said that the cheerful news of the broadcast was the determining factor. This is to be compared with GEN RIDGWAY'S extremely dark view of the situation at ST MERE EGLISE which was largely predicated upon his failure to get any intelligence as to how things were going elsewhere.

They planned it this way, that JOHNSON would take most of the force and move back to LE BARQUETTE and from there would try to go on to the bridges, while ALLEN would be left with only enough men to cover his own withdrawal after darkness came. JOHNSON was to set up his CP at the PT DE LESSEAU road junction. LT FRED A. OWENS, the personnel adjutant, with four men went on ahead of the main body to reconnoiter the route and make a quick estimate of the situation at the lock.

The main body was about ready to move when LT GEORGE W. SEFTON, S-2 of Second Battalion, reported in with the information that only a short distance beyond BSE ADDEVILLE, in the vicinity of a large farming establishment called LES DROUERIES, LT COL ROBERT A. BALLARD and about 250 men were being heavily engaged by enemy forces. JOHNSON got BALLARD on the radio—it was his first distance contact with any part of his force—and asked him, "Can you join me at once?" BALLARD replied, "No, I can't. We're pinned by enemy fire and the people we're fighting are between you and me." JOHNSON then told him that he was leading his own force back to the river, that he would leave further instructions with SEFTON and that BALLARD should disengage and join him at the earliest possible moment. It was an order given without much attempt to inquire into BALLARD'S situation or to study whether compliance was possible. Out of the subsequent

stresses put upon JOHNSON'S force and his natural anxiety that BALLARD comply there developed a rift between the two men which caused some bitterness and much misunderstanding.\*

Most of the demolitions platoon had collected at BSE ADDEVILLE and a sufficient store of explosives had been retrieved from the DROP ZONE to accomplish the destruction of the DOUVE bridges. The platoon moved with the main body from BSE ADDEVILLE at 1330. ALLEN remained in the hamlet with 50 men. Once again the column moved along through the marshes and canals, often wading through waist-deep water. They continued in this manner until they had moved out of range of the enemy's small arms fire. Finally, they got back into the dirt lane leading into LE BARQUETTE, a lane well-screened on both sides by thick foliage. The march went along without opposition until the head of the column reached the road intersection west of FENEME. At that moment "all hell broke loose."\*\*

The Germans had apparently observed the column's progress but had reserved their fire. Their weapons were zeroed-in on the point where the lane met the canal road. Machine gun,

\*At the time the HO worked with this regiment JOHNSON still felt strongly that BALLARD had let him down. He had closed his mind and did not wish to personally examine the facts. He asked the HO to do so, however, and report to him. When all the findings were in, the HO reported to JOHNSON that BALLARD could not be considered at fault.

\*\*JOHNSON'S words. The same phrase is invariably used by American soldiers.

rifle, mortar and 88 mm fire all enveloped JOHNSON'S group in a twinkling. The men in the point went flat. The main body tried to find cover alongside the lane. JOHNSON worked his way forward, crawling up to the men in the point. He felt sudden alarm. The fire had broken around him so quickly and with such intensity that he was afraid he had led his men into a deadfall and that the whole force might be wiped out before he could extricate it.\*

\*It will be noted that there is a considerable discrepancy in time between the JOHNSON and BALLARD account of events, with BALLARD putting things much earlier in the day, as a rule. The variation in estimate is shown especially when they discuss the timing of the radio order with respect to other events. Neither man kept a log and both were simply guessing at the time, with the aid of their staff members. The errors are understandable. Soldiers in battle have no idea of time, and as a rule, it goes much faster than they think. It would appear to the HO that BALLARD did not close on LES DROUERIES until some time in the early afternoon and that JOHNSON'S time schedule is more nearly correct.

## AT LES DROUERIES

It had been the practice of Second Battalion to use a large bell and a green electric lantern for assembly following the drop. Coming into NORMANDY, these two markers were jumped with personnel. But both of the men were lost and so the assembly ground went unmarked. LT COL BALLARD came to earth right on the DROP ZONE which put him about 600 yards to the southeast of LES DROUERIES. His experience was unique among the battalion commanders of 101st Division in that he knew from the beginning that he was in the right spot. He wasn't quite sure why he knew except that the ground looked as he had expected to find it. Too, he had carefully noted the river courses and roads on the flight in, and when he had jumped, he had felt certain that the calculation had been about right.

Now, lying on the ground, he thought back over the drop and he figured he had probably drifted a little bit. But it was still only a question of being a few fields distant from the point he had been seeking. Mortar and machine gun fire was enlivening the neighborhood; the closest shells were dropping 50 to 75 yards away. BALLARD had landed within 25 yards of a hedgerow but he didn't crawl to it immediately. He lay perfectly still for about three or four minutes except for getting a grenade ready while thinking out his next move. He had seen tracer fire follow him during the descent and he

strained to know whether he had been spotted. He freed himself at last and ran to a ditch. There he took out a map and a flashlight and from his reading he knew his location for certain within a few hundred yards: the map checked with what he had remembered of the land picture as he came to earth.

A machine gun began firing lengthwise on the hedgerow next to which he was standing. He moved back a little bit. BALLARD had jumped with a SCR 536 strapped to his leg; he now tried to raise someone on the radio but there was no response. He moved on a few yards more. A cricket sounded near him. It was SGT WILLIAM H. JACKSON of Company D. JACKSON had landed in a large swamp to the southward, oriented himself almost at once and within a few minutes of starting the walk to the objective, had found himself on solid ground. On coming to the last field just before meeting BALLARD, he had found MAJ RAYMOND V. BOTTOMLY, the Battalion Executive, lying beside a hedgerow. His ankle had been badly twisted in the jump. When BALLARD went over to him, BOTTOMLY said he couldn't walk but could "do a damn good job of crawling." They started along. The nettles in the ditches plagued these men—as they did all of the paratroopers—more than all else. They worked into their knees and wrists as they moved along the ditches on all fours. They decided to move down one more field and then split up, seeking other men. A sergeant from Company

E joined them almost immediately and took a leading hand in the ingathering of the force. BALLARD continued moving east to the drop area, collecting a few men as he went along and sending them to the assembly point. All movement was by the ditches and along the hedges except for occasional dashes across an open field. By now the enemy mortar fire and small arms activity was incessant and flares were going up around ST COME DU MONT. The flares were short lasting but very bright. There came more and more of them until finally there were only brief seconds of darkness. The illumination worried BALLARD. A few of his men were being picked off by riflemen. He thought that he'd better conclude his round-up quickly and get set in a defensive position. He was also worried about where his bundles had gone; none of the men seemed to know. A few who had already joined his party had landed in the CARENTAN marshes, east of the town and north of the RIVER DOUVE. Some had swum their way to temporary security but had had to cut loose from all their equipment. They were wringing wet, but were otherwise, and for the most part, unhurt. These men thought that many of the bundles had been dropped in the marshes, also, and would not be retrieved.

BALLARD returned to the assembly area at 0330. By that time, BOTTOMLY had organized the men whom BALLARD and the two sergeants had shunted along, and had checked their weapons. There were four machine guns, 125 rifles, one bazooka and

one 60 mm mortar present. All of the rifle company commanders were missing and the battalion had no radio other than the one strapped on BALLARD'S leg.

Dawn was cracking as the companies moved out of the fields and down the hedgerows toward ST COME DU MONT, which BALLARD proposed to assault immediately. The general fire had quieted somewhat and the column seemed to be moving away from the zone where snipers were active. At 0400 BALLARD sent LT SEFTON and four of his men to the southward. They were given the mission of moving through the swamp and attempting to contact either First Battalion or Regimental Headquarters somewhere around LE BARQUETTE to tell them that BALLARD was moving against ST COME DU MONT. The G-2 information had been that less than a platoon of the enemy would be holding that town. BALLARD and his men had already spotted the approximate locations of three machine guns between them and the town and BALLARD had reached the conclusion that there was a much larger force there than he had bargained on. One of his scouts had seen a German disappear into a large building at LES DROUERIES. They took this as a sign that some enemy strength lay along that flank. The attack order was issued at 0430 by CAPT WILLIAM E. PELHAM, the S-3. The plan was that they would move against LES DROUERIES with two companies abreast. Company E on the right with 30 men was to go after the farm buildings and the road crossing on

that side while Company F with 30 men was to attack toward the crossroads on the left. Company D was to follow Company F.

While they waited, BALLARD sent some of his men from the light machine gun platoon to search the DROP ZONE for weapons and ammunition. Since the platoons did not have enough guns to be in business, he also put four of the gunners into service as runners. He noted that many of his men appeared to be in a dazed condition. The men who had fallen in the swamp were still wet and shivering and they walked or crawled around for warmth. But those who had landed dry dropped in their tracks and were asleep any time that the movement stopped and some even slept standing.\* Many were suffering from sprains or fractures. Only two members of the battalion medical unit (2 officers and 14 men) had assembled with the battalion. But these two were doing a superior job and had begun collecting the wounded and injured as soon as they landed.

The battalion moved out at 0530 in column formation, sticking to the hedgerows. As the light grew, BALLARD noticed an immediate lift in the spirits and energies of his men. They

\*Note by HO: Other battalion commanders noted these same characteristics in their men on this occasion. COLE said he had to actually "boot" his men to keep them going. There is probably something in the fact that the extra amount of adrenalin pumped by the excitement of a combat drop brought on the reaction: a drop is said to be as fatiguing as an eight hour work day. The men didn't want to step out. They tried to huddle together. It required extraordinary exertion on the part of the officers to get them going.

seemed to be filled with a sudden but false sense of well-being as if, now that daylight had found them, they had concluded that their major trials were over and victory was in their hands. They went about 200 yards before a break-out of enemy fire restored their sense of proportion.

Two light machine guns from Headquarters Company arrived just after the attack started and were put along the hedgerow in front of Company E. From this line, they could fire at the farmhouses and against the two lateral hedgerows between the company and its objective. Company E had already worked forward as far as the bend in the road when rifle and automatic fire, seeming to come from enemy positions grouped closely around the houses, broke all around it and stopped the advance. The bullet fire ranged down both sides of the road and was also picking away at the embankment of the forward hedgerows. A curtain of mortar fire dropped down on both roads and the field lying between them. The men of Company E went flat in the ditches almost instantly, and remained there, inert. The volume of the fire was such that after the first surprise shock, they remained pinned to earth and did not raise up even enough to answer fire with fire. Company F got no farther than Company E; in fact, the closest protecting hedgerow on the left flank was a little behind the hedgerow which gave partial protection to the men on the right. BALLARD, who had come along behind his reserve company, was hearing only the vaguest reports from his forward

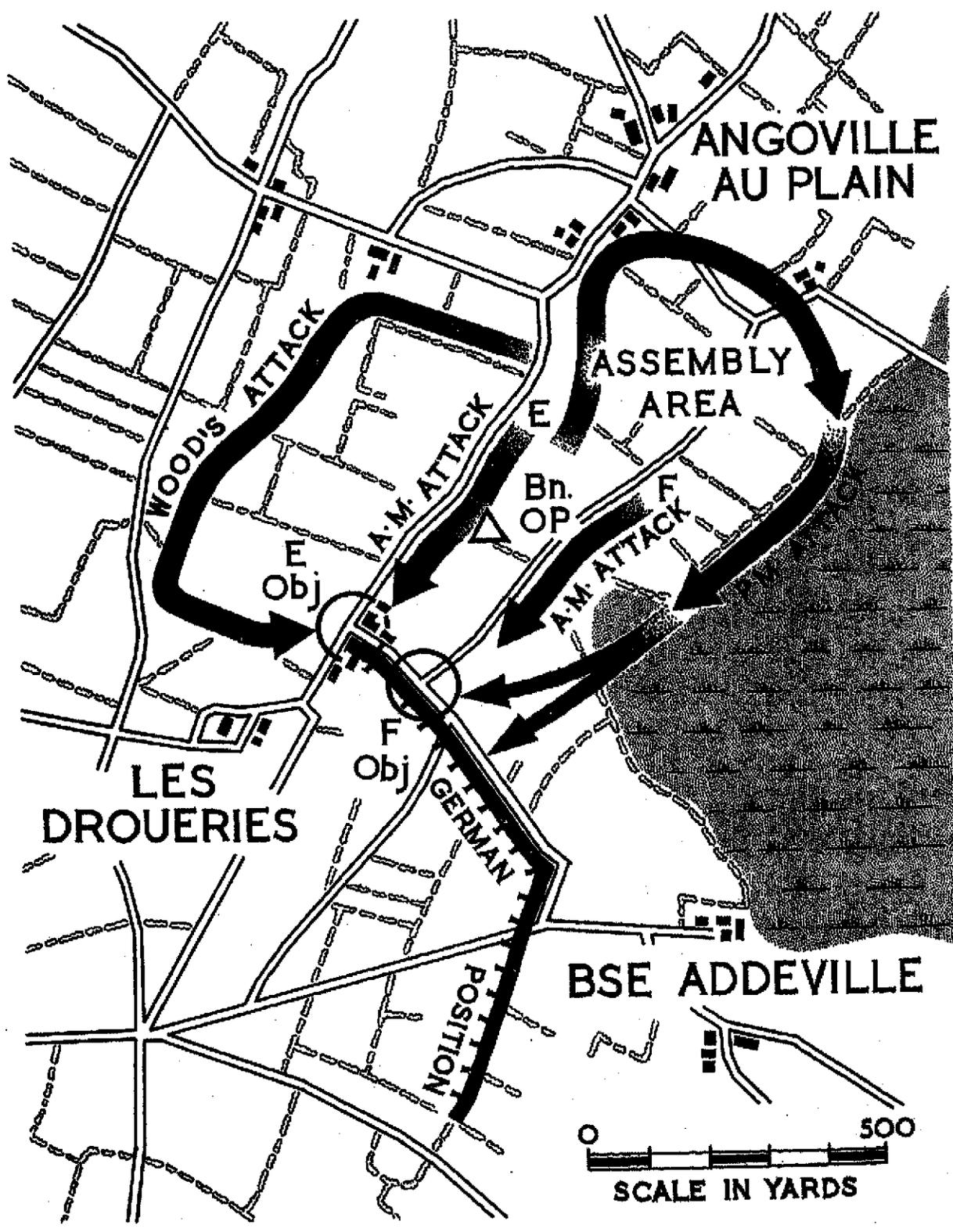
line as to the source of the mortars and machine guns which had stopped the movement. So he moved his Battalion OP up to the hedgerow corner on Company E's flank. From there, he could locate a few enemy riflemen but he could not spot the positions of any of the heavier weapons. By 0700 both companies had 7 or 8 casualties apiece, most of the losses coming from mortar fire. LT EDWARD A. ALLWORTH, the adjutant, was put in charge of evacuating the wounded. He set up a temporary aid station in a church at ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN and the men were taken there by farm cart. The fight at the hedgerows went on one-sidedly, the companies finding no way to rally. With BALLARD at the OP, it was a matter of looking for a few seconds through a break in the hedgerows, dodging back to avoid aimed rifle fire and then moving left or right for about 15 yards and coming up for another look. The enemy rifle pits seemed to be only 60 or 70 yards from him. He noted that elsewhere along his line the men were scarcely attempting to observe through the hedgerows, such was the consistency of the opposing fire.

BALLARD thought of using smoke but could find only orange smoke grenades—the friendly signal. Both companies tried at different times to organize a forward rush along the perpendicular hedgerows. But they lost a few men at the start and promptly recoiled. By 0800, BALLARD had felt out the pressure sufficiently that he was certain the enemy force intended to stand its ground and could not be aborted.

That put him between the devil and the sea. He could not go on and attack ST COME DU MONT, for to do so would mean that he would leave an enemy force of unknown size on his left flank and in position to take him in rear. On the other hand, the LES DROUERIES position also blocked the road to where the larger elements of the regiment were supposed to be concentrating around LE BARQUETTE.

He felt that his attack thus far had been largely futile. A few of the enemy in the dug-in positions between BALLARD'S force and the first house had been killed but there had been no abatement of the fire. While BALLARD was considering what to do next, LT WALTER W. WOOD arrived with 20 men. WOOD was from First Battalion of 501st. The men which he had collected were all from 506th Regiment. They had fallen in with him following the drop and had come along under his leadership, looking for a fight. BALLARD talked the situation over with his officers and it was decided to send WOOD and his group on a wide sweep around the right, moving on such a line that a square field entirely enclosed by hedgerows covered their approach.

The maneuver was made that way, WOOD moving his men out to the flank and then back again along the lateral hedgerows. They moved cautiously so as to make full use of the protection of the embankments. Within one hour, they had captured the crossroads and the first house beyond it, over-



whelming the enemy forces at both points. For the first time, BALLARD now had a little leverage. It had cost him something. Company E had pressed forward to assist in the capture of the farmhouse and had lost LT GEORGE E. SCHMIDT, killed, and four others wounded. LT VERN MERZ, commanding the machine gun platoon, took over the company. Company F moved up later after Company E's gains had made it possible to direct a flanking fire ahead of Company F's line. The Germans then came on down the hedgerows in counterattack. The brunt of this assault fell full on WOOD'S men who repulsed it by a concentrated fire after the enemy had closed to within hand grenade range.

Right in the middle of these undertakings, BALLARD got JOHN-SON'S radio order telling him to move via BSE ADDEVILLE, pick up ALLEN'S force and then reinforce the position at LE BARQUETTE. At that moment WOOD'S group was closing in on the Germans from the flank and Companies E and F were going forward along the ditches. BALLARD felt that he could not comply. He reasoned that to order a withdrawal in the middle of an attack would only confuse his men and that in the confusion of disengagement the enemy would likely find him vulnerable to counterattack. There was one other argument for procrastination. LT FRANK GREGG had reported in with the information that CAPT D. A. BROWN of Company E was about two kilometers away with 75 men and had not yet become engaged.

BALLARD had sent GREGG back to bring these men in. They were now marching toward LES DROUERIES.

One-half hour after getting the order, BALLARD made ready to withdraw. He had completed capture of the first group of houses by this time and he was personally quite ready to try his luck somewhere else. Several of his officers bucked at the order, but BALLARD had about concluded that if he had to fight it out on this ground, he would risk baring his flank to the enemy force at LES DROUERIES and would attack straight toward ST COME DU MONT.

LT DENVER R. BENNETT was sent with 15 men of Company D to ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN; from that point, they were to reconnoiter a route across the marshes to BSE ADDEVILLE. The rest of the force pulled out gradually, moving in the same general direction. The worst problem was getting the casualties out. It took almost an hour to clear the ground. Meanwhile, half of each of the two forward companies was left in place to act as a covering force. At some time after the noon hour the force arrived at ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN. All during the morning a group of the enemy and some men from the 326th Airborne Engineers had been fighting for control of the hamlet and it had changed ownership three times. LT ALLWORTH had managed to stay more or less on the job of caring for the wounded by running from the place whenever the Germans came in. His aid men stayed on with the wounded in the church.

The Germans came in, looked them over, noted that a few German wounded were also being attended, and left the Americans unmolested.

About 1400 BALLARD moved his battalion to the edge of the swamp south of ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN. As he reached it, he saw BENNETT ahead of him. He was pinned flat out in the marsh. Machine gun fire from the high ground around LES

BALLARD TRIES CROSSING  
THE SWAMP

DROUERIES was whipping up the water around him. BALLARD

called, "How many men do you have?" BENNETT replied, "Six." Until then, BALLARD hadn't seen the little line of riflemen wriggling along several hundred yards in front of BENNETT. He yelled to BENNETT to keep going and the latter moved on up to his men. BALLARD was using the patrol for a guinea pig. He wanted to see how much fire they'd draw and whether the enemy seemed to have the flat under observation. The results convinced him that he couldn't take the battalion across the swamp without taking terrible losses. He hoped there might be a way around the swamp and he sent his S-3 to scout it toward the rear and left in search of a route. He reported that the ground was all but impassable and that a canal, also under good observation, was a special hazard in that direction.

While considering his next move, BALLARD got the radio message that MAJ ALLEN was about to withdraw from BSE ADDEVILLE

toward LE BARQUETTE. That forced his decision: he would try to move the battalion along the edge of the swamp. Hedges and paralleling ditches came right down to the limits of the solid ground, providing considerable cover. The line of advance would take the battalion straight toward the extreme left of the enemy position on the high ground. But BALLARD thought there was just a chance that he might make the approach unobserved and knock out their forward guns as he reopened the engagement. He estimated there were four machine guns in the German position and he had no idea how many riflemen they counted. In his own force there were six light machine guns and two 60 mm mortars; the machine gun ammunition was running low and there were 20 rounds of mortar.

The battalion moved out at about 1445 and was just beginning to skirt the edge of the swamp when CAPT BROWN came in with about 45 men from various organizations. The men moved along in skirmish line with the scouts leading them about one hedgerow distance in front. At first they moved easily down the ditches; a few bullets sung overhead but they did not seem to be drawing any aimed fire. It was this way for about 200 yards. Then a hail of small arms fire met them from all along a line which seemed to be almost parallel to the angle of approach. Company F, which was leading the column, then found itself fighting for the same crossroads

which it had captured earlier in the day, though coming at it from a different tangent. Mortar fire was now ranging over the battalion and the enemy machine guns spoke more strongly. Company F bounded on to the last hedgerow short of the enemy position and lost four men covering the final stretch of ground. The battalion then became immobilized, checked on its right by the enemy fire line and held on its left by the expanse of the swamp. The mortars were put into action near the edge of the swamp but ran out of ammunition before they could do any apparent good. Company E was put over on Company F's right, both groups being strung out along the hedgerow. The position—a sunken road with ditches and tree cover on both sides—was fair enough and gave them substantial protection, even against the mortar fire. They stayed there, in close contact with the enemy.

A message came from ALLEN at 2200 saying that he had quit BSE ADDEVILLE: there no longer remained any possibility of juncture with his force, and BALLARD heard nothing more about the matter that evening. He was on his last belts of machine gun ammunition and he felt that his next step had to be a round-up of fighting and communications supplies from the DROP ZONE.

This search was started at midnight and by 0300 the party had collected enough supply to see the battalion through another day of battle.

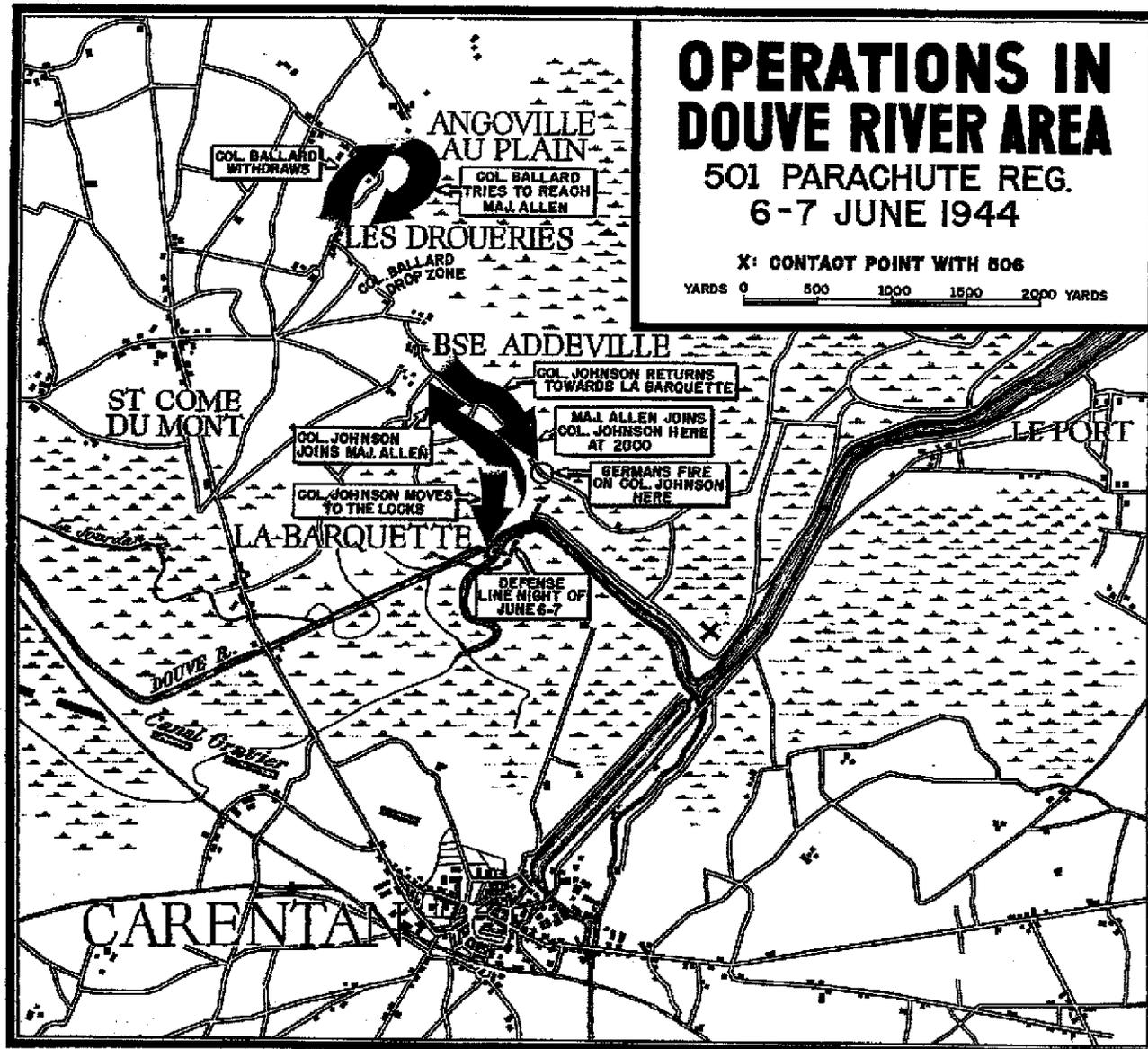
The night was fairly quiet. The force slept in relays,  
half at a time.

# OPERATIONS IN DOUVE RIVER AREA

501 PARACHUTE REG.  
6-7 JUNE 1944

X: CONTACT POINT WITH 506

YARDS 0 500 1000 1500 2000 YARDS



## AT LE BARQUETTE

When the enemy fire stopped JOHNSON codd at LE BARQUETTE, he found himself between the devil and the sea. He had no counter for their mortar and 88 batteries and if he stayed there he would certainly be destroyed. Too, he felt that the enemy observation was good enough that any attempt to move would be not less fatal.\* Then he happened to remember that one card was still in his hand. On that morning, LT FARRELL, USN, had had the rare good fortune to retrieve his SCR 609 following the drop. JOHNSON crawled on back to FARRELL who was at the rear of the column and asked if he could raise the USS QUINCY, which was supposed to be maneuvering somewhere off the beaches.

Together, they crawled back along the ditch to the road intersection, which was a fair point of observation. JOHNSON told him what he knew. He thought that most of the mortar shells were coming from the high ground around ST COME DU MONT and that the 88 mm battery was firing from a little to the east of CARENTAN.

FARRELL got through to the QUINCY almost immediately. At that time she was steaming in "figure 8's" not far off the coast. The QUINCY promised to go to work. Five minutes later the first salvo of eight-inch shells whistled over LE BARQUETTE toward the German positions. They were in pretty

\*This was JOHNSON'S estimate of situation as he himself explained it.

close; the necessary adjustments were made. Despite the range and the difficulties of SFC under even the most normal operating conditions, the work of the QUINCY'S batteries was uncannily accurate. The shells played right along the ridge at ST COME DU MONT; it impressed JOHNSON that the German mortar fire fell off almost immediately. MAJ ALLEN, watching the results from his position at BSE ADDEVILLE, said to JOHNSON, "That fire would help BALLARD. How about getting some over to him?" It was arranged, but in round-about fashion. BALLARD gave his sensings to ALLEN by radio and in turn ALLEN relayed them to FARRELL who in turn relayed them to the QUINCY.

This naval action was sustained for one-half hour or so. The German fire had already taken toll of about 10 of JOHNSON'S men. After the QUINCY'S guns had spoken emphatically, the Germans went quiet.

CAPT SAMMIE N. HOMAN came forward and joined JOHNSON in his ditch at the head of the column and was given the mission of holding the lock and blowing the DOUVE bridges; LT BILLY A. TURNER was to go along with him to lay the explosives. They didn't know just how to dispose their own forces because of their limited knowledge of the enemy situation. But while they were discussing this problem, LT OWEN returned with his patrol. He said that he thought it would be impossible for JOHNSON to move any large portion of his force to the west.

The patrol had gone that way and had traveled about 500 yards, but it had been under intense small arms fire the whole distance.

The report put caution in JOHNSON. He told HOMAN to strengthen the force at the lock, extend the line to the westward and eastward on the north side of the canal, and, from out of this defensive base, push toward the DOUVE bridge as far as proved practicable. JOHNSON then moved the rest of the force down to a group of farmhouses east of the lock.

FARRELL had been putting ship fire on the CARENTAN area. JOHNSON asked him to try for a hit on the causeway bridges. The shells bracketed the causeway and destroyed some of the houses at PONT DE DOUVE but failed to damage any of the spans.

CAPT SHETTLE of 506th Regiment came in about that time. He was feeling himself hard pressed at the LE PORT position and he asked JOHNSON if he couldn't let him have some men to help out. JOHNSON replied, "We're one force. I'll keep contact. If you're in danger of being overrun, I'll move to your assistance with all available troops." SHETTLE asked that he be given some naval gunfire support and the word was passed along to FARRELL. JOHNSON put a contact patrol of six men out on his own left to keep touch with SHETTLE'S

situation. His own men then started moving to their appointed positions.

Part of them crossed the walk across the top of the lock and built up a bridgehead to about 100 yards depth on the far side of the canal—riflemen, equipped with the usual arms, and supported by three machine guns. The Germans who had been holding the fire pits close to the lock had already gotten out. The position north of the canal was extended east and west for about 200 yards each way, with the flanks curved back in a rough circle. The troops were disposed, also, so as to cover the position from the rear. One large strong point, heavy with automatic guns, covered the northern approach from the direction of the marshes. East of the canal lock, there were a few rifle posts distributed along the northern bank. About 250 men proceeded to the rounding out of this position. They were 30 hands stronger when ALLEN and his force arrived at 2000. There was no food or water supply at hand and not more than a basic load of ammunition.

That night JOHNSON'S men began calling the place HELL'S CORNERS. The label struck thereafter. It remained LE BARQUETTE only on the maps. As night came on JOHNSON instructed his men to dig their foxholes very deep and he sent his officers around to inspect each foxhole individually. He also told them to conserve their ammunition and try to hold it

for body targets. His ammunition supply was quite low; the position was isolated beyond prospect of getting easy re-supply. But JOHNSON noted that the men were calm and unconcerned and that they took the show like veterans. They engaged in no loose firing during the night. Despite that the enemy 88 fire continued throughout the darkness with fairly accurate range, the men spelled one another in taking naps.

HOMAN, TURNER and CRAIGHILL tried one more sortie under cover of darkness, trying for the bridges near CARENTAN. The 50-man patrol didn't get very far before running into a wall of fire from positions along the ST COME DU MONT-CARENTAN road. They took their losses and came on back.

There were about 250 officers and men available for duty when morning came; some men had been lost from artillery fire and sniper activity had been especially vicious around the lock during the night. Also, JOHNSON had sent out a number of patrols—some trying to get to Division and others seeking the 506th Regiment. Contact had been maintained with Third Battalion at LE PORT but the other patrols did not get back, which further pared the force. The wounded were getting along fairly well for the time being though MAJ FRANCIS E. CARREL, the Division Surgeon, who had fallen in with the group and had set up the first-aid station, was worrying about the shortages of medical supply. As for

defense, the inventory showed that there was left one day of fire per man. Within the position were eight machine guns (light), four 60 mm mortars and one 81 mm mortar. The latter was of dubious value. It consisted of tube only, and without the base plate the men couldn't keep it operating in the mud.

Such, in outline, were the characteristics of this seemingly insignificant position. Yet in retrospect it can be seen that the small plot of ground held by JOHNSON and the parcel of earth on which SHERIDAN'S men maintained their tenuous hold were of the particles which, considered together, were the new American front.

That was what had been intended. They had been instructed to take their objectives and then hold. These things they did. While the separate operations, studied at close range, seem isolated and almost eccentric, things were coming together "according to plan." The Germans opposite JOHNSON at this time seemed confused and uncertain as to what the Americans were doing and what should be done about it. JOHNSON gained the impression that their shellfire was aimed to drive the Americans away from the lock rather than to destroy it. Yet there was enough mortar fire in the general vicinity that he could not supplement his one footbridge across the lock. It was the only avenue of contact for the two halves of the force.

During the night, however, the Germans pulled away from the LE BARQUETTE neighborhood. There was no rifle fire when morning came.

### THE FINISH AT LES DROUERIES

At 0430 on D plus 1, BALLARD ordered a stand-to by all hands. During the early morning hours the Germans used small patrols against his front and right flank. These groups came forward firing. But they did not press the action vigorously and they seemed to be punching mainly to determine the extent of the American position. BALLARD used a few small patrols for outposting work to keep these enemy patrols at a distance, but nothing significant came of the actions on either side. The enemy mortars resumed operation shortly after daylight, firing concentrations of six to eight shells. But the fire was not accurate and no hurt was done.

At 0630, BALLARD ordered the battalion to resume the attack. It withered almost at once. The only promising mode of advance was by stealthy movement along the vertical ditches and hedgerows. The Germans had sited their machine guns so as to fire straight down these ditches. Every time any number of BALLARD'S men tried to work down the ditches together, some of them were hit and the others became pinned, from fear of the fire and because the bodies of the casualties partly blocked their path, making greater exposure necessary. Yet gradually during the morning hours a handful of men faced the danger and overcame these hazards; by crawling forward on their bellies and taking every advantage

of the ground, they worked up to a line where only one hedgerow separated them from the ditch containing the enemy machine guns. They hugged the embankment on one side of the hedgerow; from the other side of it, four emplaced machine guns continued to fire against BALLARD'S main line. The exchange of fire continued through the morning under these quite unsatisfactory conditions.

In the early afternoon, BALLARD made radio contact with LT COL HARRY W. O. KINNARD, the Regimental Executive, who was then with COL SINK of 506th Regiment at ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN. KINNARD said he could put artillery fire on the Germans around LES DROUERIES if BALLARD could observe and adjust it. BALLARD told him to let it come on and he gave KINNARD the coordinates of a lone house on the enemy left flank where he had seen a number of Germans passing in and out. He thought it might be their CP. It took 45 minutes to get a satisfactory adjustment of the artillery fire due to the confusion created by mortar bursts and by the 8-inch shells from the USS QUINCY, which was again banging away at ST COME DU MONT.

BALLARD had asked that the first artillery concentration be fired at the house and that the second then be pulled back 100 yards toward his own lines. That gave him a safety margin of about 250 yards. They scored a bullseye at the first try. BALLARD saw the concentration—3 salvos, 12

shells—land square on the target. It was his most heartening sight of the day, for he figured that the artillery would pull him out of it. The next concentration—the same number of shells—landed squarely on his own lines, being pulled back a full 350 yards. The blow fell on Company F. Five men were killed and eight others hard hit. The greater effect might well have been panic and a stampede. Instead, only three men of Company F—light machine gunners—tried to break back from the forward ground. BALLARD ran to stop them. To his amazement, they were neither stunned or demoralized. They laughed when he told them to get back up there and they at once started forward. BALLARD yelled to his officers to tell the men that there wouldn't be any more shorts and that he was again calling for the same concentration and making the necessary adjustment. They told him to fire away. The shelling continued.

Again, there was an insistent call from JOHNSON.\* His position at LE BARQUETTE had not yet been put under any unusual stress nor were there yet definite signs of an enemy build-up. But LT HOFFMAN, the assistant S-2 of regiment, told BALLARD that JOHNSON wanted him to bring the battalion to LE BARQUETTE along with ammunition, food and medical supplies. BALLARD got on the radio and told KINNARD, at ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN,

\*The subsequent experience on BALLARD'S front establishes this fact, i.e., the passing of the German Battalion.

about the order. KINNARD in turn informed BRIG GEN ANTHONY C. MC AULIFFE who immediately ordered BALLARD to stay put, adding that a plan was in the making. Five minutes later KINNARD called to tell BALLARD to leave the battalion where it was and in person get back to ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN to talk things over.

It was at just about the time of BALLARD'S starting for ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN that the German battalion, which COL SINK had seen in the distance and which later in the day was to menace JOHNSON at LE BARQUETTE, began to cross the swamp past BALLARD'S left flank. MAJ BOTTOMLY was situated with a small CP group near the spot where BALLARD had paused when first surveying the swamp on the day before. He saw them first, and pointed them out to his 15 men. The Germans were passing directly on his left, their farthest elements being about 600 yards away and the nearest about 200. PELHAM came into the group about this time, saw what was happening and realized that there might be a disaster if the Germans wheeled rightward suddenly and moved against the battalion position through the swamp.

"I'll go back to the battalion and get two machine guns," he said to BOTTOMLY. "No, I'll get four machine guns. No, I guess I won't. They can't spare them at this time."

"Take it easy," BOTTOMLY said, "and we'll give them a little fire."

Most of the Germans were either out of sight or of range across the swamp, but about 20 of them had come right down the edge of it. With rifle fire, the CP group killed about 12; the others came into the lines with their hands up. As the fire broke out, the main body of the German battalion hauled off deeper into the swamp. It is not in the record or in anyone's recollection that the information was sent forward to JOHNSON that a strong body of the enemy was advancing directly toward his lines.

At ANGOVILLE AU PLAIN, SINK told BALLARD that he was to continue the attack. BALLARD asked for tanks and was given six mediums. It was arranged that the 506th Regiment would come approximately abreast of the battalion that night, moving in on its right rear.

The tanks came up and the tank commander went forward with BALLARD for a reconnaissance. BALLARD told him in detail where the four German machine guns were emplaced: his men in the thin forward line had sent back exact information. He told the tank commander also that he was sure there were no tank-stopping weapons along the enemy front. BALLARD asked him to put all four tanks in, and move directly to where they could put point-blank fire on the enemy emplacements. There were low places where the tanks could move through the lateral hedgerows; the infantry would move out abreast of the tanks, advancing for the sake of cover along

the vertical hedgerows. This was the plan except that the two tanks on the right flank were to advance in column along the road in Company E's sector.

The tanks moved out slowly, not through caution, but because the infantry advance was tedious, the men having to foot their way gingerly over the uneven ground next the hedgerow embankments. Together, they went forward at about two miles per hour. But the movement was as positive as it was slow. The tanks remained unbottomed and their example gave the infantry fresh confidence. The hedgerows forward were sprayed from end to end, this constant fire by the tanks being augmented by the fire of BALLARD'S riflemen. Momentarily, the tankers halted to shell the machine gun positions. The extent of their contribution can be measured best in ammunition. Before the advance was over they had expended per tank 10 rounds of 75 mm fire against the indicated strong points and buildings and 15 boxes of machine gun ammunition against the hedgerow lines.

Half of the enemy force fled. The other half attempted to hold their ground. A few tried to surrender but the fight had gone on too long for that. Too, the conditions of the combat were such--with active fighting elsewhere along the line and the enemy so distributed that the surrender of one group did not lessen the menace from another--that the Americans had to take extreme chances with their own lives to take

individual prisoners. So most of those who had stayed were killed. Throughout the combat the action of the tanks dominated the offensive; in BALLARD'S words, they refreshed his infantry "like rainfall on a desert." But they had by no means carried the position unaided. Company F had not recovered from the demoralizing effect of the artillery shelling and just before the attack went off, WOOD'S group of 506th Regiment men and another group of 15 men under LT RICHARD SNODGRASS of Company D were substituted. This body, under the command of BOTTOMLY, advanced against the German right flank.

Company E, hitting on the other side, took the road junction and then came under fire from the same house which it had captured the day before. BOTTOMLY'S scratch force on the left had harder sledding. They moved up to the hedgerow and were driven back by heavy fire. The Germans had tunneled under this embankment and the foxholes and fire pits on the two sides were interconnected; they could fire accurately from the forward side as the Americans came up along the vertical hedgerow and the ditch, then duck back through the tunnels and fire from the cover of the embankment. BOTTOMLY'S men recoiled and then ran to one of the tanks, using it as a shield. Fire splattered all over the sides of it as they advanced again. In the closest fighting of the day, they wiped out this segment of the German line. None of them

used bayonets. The Germans in the foxholes and at the machine guns were shot to death with carbines and rifles, or grenaded, at five or six foot range. The Americans stayed right with the tank until it had delivered them into the position. Then they ducked out from behind it, and in a few minutes they had eliminated the enemy force to the last man. BOTTOMLY lost four men killed and six wounded. His small force captured 8 of the Germans' 15 machine guns.

The battalion was ordered by SINK to hold the road that night and BALLARD was told to report back for further orders: the tanks were released so that they could make their bivouac before dark. Water, rations and ammunition came in to the position about that time--1930. The battalion right flank was still open--the left was protected by the swamp--but firing could be heard about 1000 yards distant on the right rear, as SINK'S men came on from BEAUMONT. KINNARD sent word that about 30 men should be sent along with tanks to reinforce JOHNSON at the lock, but because of a strange turn already taken in the situation at LE BARQUETTE, the word came too late to have any value. However, LT WILLIAM MORGAN was sent along with 30 men. The tanks tried to follow but had to turn back at the edge of the marsh.

The battalion reorganized and prepared to defend for the night. Company F--now composed of about 16 men--was used to refuse the right flank. BALLARD reported to SINK and

spent the remainder of the night showing his front to the  
battalion commander who was to jump off from that point on  
the following morning.

## HELL'S CORNERS

JOHNSON was worried about his ammunition supply. He checked it again and what he found did not reassure him. Then he searched for a panel asking for resupply but found that he had none. Shortly after daybreak he put out an identification (orange) panel to draw the air's attention. A few minutes passed, then an American plane came flying up the DOUVE and unloaded its bombs near CARENTAN. The plane flew low along the canal as if readying to strafe ground installations and as it came above HELL'S CORNERS, apparently saw the orange panel and pulled off.

About 0630 a resupply mission was flown by the Air Corps; the nearest chutes and bundles dropped down into the swamp about 1500 yards away and were so covered by enemy fire that there was no chance to get to them. The position grew hotter as the morning wore along. The 88s continued to bang away at it from the high ground near CARENTAN, though the main effect of this fire was to make all hands feel a little jumpy. What bothered more was that the enemy snipers, having faded back during the darkness, again began to crowd in on all sides. This irregular fire finally became so insistent that it prohibited anyone walking about within the position. The men moved back and forth by running or crawling; even so, about 10 more casualties occurred from this fire. Some time after noon the American planes bombed SHETTLE'S position at LE PORT

and two of them flew on low along the DOUVE canal as if to strafe HELL'S CORNERS. JOHNSON'S men had seen the bombs drop near LE PORT and had figured that SHETTLE was probably taking it on the chin. They got out another panel in a hurry and the planes pulled away.

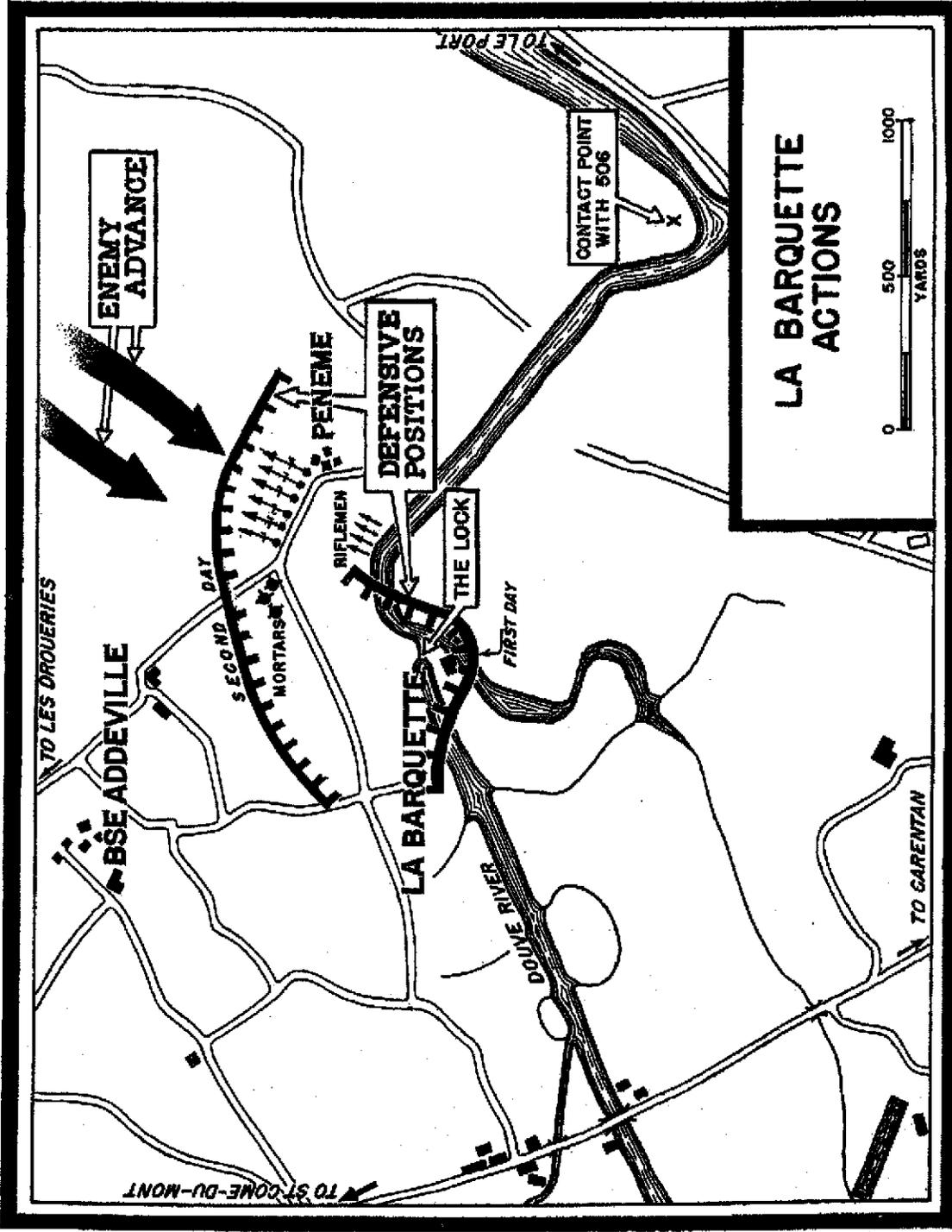
The hour was 1500 or perhaps a little later when JOHNSON saw a large body of troops moving in the open and approaching his position from the north. Their formation was greatly scattered and they came on irregularly as they were advancing through the swamp. The officers looked at them through glasses but couldn't make sure whether they were friend or enemy. JOHNSON continued to study them. It did little good. The uniforms blended with the colors of the swamp and there were no other identifying means or marks. But he decided at last that they were Germans--about one battalion. They were coming on through the fields and swamps which lay directly east of the lane via which JOHNSON'S men had approached HELL'S CORNERS. They seemed to be on a straight march to the river and they acted quite openly, as if they were under no especial apprehension that there were enemy forces in the vicinity.

JOHNSON told his officers that he wanted everyone to keep quiet and remain under cover, and that they were to get back to their men, see them one by one and tell them this. All fire would be held until one machine gun in a strong point on the position's advanced right flank opened up; this gun

would be the signal for everything to cut loose.\* Every man who could be spared from elsewhere over the ground was moved up to the northeast corner and disposed around the machine guns, six of the eight available guns having been shifted to this part of the perimeter. The mortars were already well set in adequately deep pits in the exact center of the position. It required about 30 minutes to complete these dispositions. Then the men waited.

JOHNSON took his post on the left flank of the advanced position, near enough to the signal gun to give the word. The German wave came on slowly, seeming to ripple along as its individuals moved laboriously through the maze of swamp, hummocks, canals and occasional hedgerows. Though they seemed to be zigzagging back and forth to take advantage of the stretches of dry ground, on the whole they remained fairly well bunched. JOHNSON was amazed that they put out no advance security. While about 1000 yards away, a small patrol detached itself from the main body and moved out to the left. JOHNSON at once sent out a counter patrol of five men with instructions to apprehend the German patrol before it could come up even with the American lines. But the two patrols never closed. Before the German patrol had moved far enough to bring JOHNSON'S position under observation, the engagement

\*It is to be noted that the position was now reversed and that what had been the rear now became the front.



had begun and the patrol faded back to the main body.

The hour was about 1600. The forward groups of enemy had come to within 350 yards, still moving along unconcernedly. It was the interval JOHNSON wanted. He was trying to achieve a delicate balance in his fire—to lead the enemy up to the point where the first volley would sweep them with a killing blast and yet not permit them to come so close that they could come on and overwhelm the position by sheer weight of numbers.

He said to the man on the forward gun, "OK now! Let 'em have it!" The signal gun got away not more than two rounds before every weapon along the front of the perimeter was in action. MAJ ALLEN, from a post near the CP, directed the fire. Those who were watching saw many of the enemy fall. But they could not tell how many had been hit and which ones were diving for cover. The force simply faded away. Within 30 seconds the men along the forward line couldn't see a single German. The marsh and the canals gave them good cover right at hand. They made the most of it and began pouring small arms fire into HELL'S CORNERS as quickly as they went to ground. After that, they sent up a rocket signal which was followed by a renewal of the mortar fire from ST COME DU MONT and the artillery fire from CARENTAN upon the American position.

The opening fire fight lasted for about one-half hour. Not

being able to observe the Germans, JOHNSON and his officers could get no idea whether their own weapons were having effect. JOHNSON began to worry about squandering his ammunition on unprofitable targets. But with the action well-

#### THE PARLEYS

joined, there was no way to get his own men to ease their fire. The mortars kept banging away and seemed to be getting into the right ground. S SGT LESTER A. PATTY, a wire sergeant turned rifle grenadier, kept up a continuous fire with his weapon.\* A few weak cries of "Kamerad" were heard from the direction of the swamp. That gave JOHNSON the idea that a way might be found to produce a total surrender of the force. But his men didn't want it. They told him so. They said that they ought to fight it out and kill every last German. But JOHNSON was doubtful that his ammunition supply was equal to the task.

He went on back to the CP and asked for a couple of volunteers to accompany him, one to carry a flag and the other to interpret. PVT LEO F. RUNGE stepped out for one job and TEC 5 WILLIAM F. LENZ for the other. The word was passed down the line for the Americans to cease fire. JOHNSON then started toward the German lines, RUNGE carrying an orange flag lofted on his rifle. The German fire stopped at once

\*PATTY'S work is mentioned because PWs taken by JOHNSON later said that the rifle grenades probably inflicted heavier casualties on them than any other weapon.

except for the shells coming over from CARENTAN and ST COME DU MONT. But as the party advanced, JOHNSON heard fire coming from his own lines. So he stopped the other two men and shifted the orange flag from the rifle to a long pole, and carried it forward high in air. Still, there was a spattering of rifle fire from behind him. JOHNSON didn't know whether his men hadn't heard the order or were suffering from itchy trigger fingers. But it made him apprehensive that the Germans would answer back. RUNGE and LENZ showed no sign. In fact, during the whole episode, they neither flinched nor opened their mouths and JOHNSON said later that their bearing helped his own courage more than all else. The party went on about 100 yards. By then all fire had ceased. A few Germans were standing up and moving toward the American lines. They advanced another 25 yards. In an instant, the people who were standing up on the German side suddenly hit the ground and small arms fire broke out all along the German line. JOHNSON, RUNGE and LENZ went flat, and from behind them the men at HELL'S CORNERS returned the German fire. The three crawled or rolled back to their own lines. RUNGE had been hit in the arm and JOHNSON in the hand.

The fire fight went on for another half hour. There came a lull in the German fire and JOHNSON decided to try again. He told his men to hold their fire and he and RUNGE and LENZ walked out once more toward the swamp. The front grew quiet.

They went about 100 yards and saw two men coming from the German side. JOHNSON and the others waited about 150 yards from their own lines and the two Germans kept coming. Both of them were private soldiers, and wounded, one with a bullet in the groin and the other shot in the arm. They said most of the men wanted to surrender but the officers and NCOs wouldn't have it and that several of the men had already been shot by the officers for talking about surrender.

JOHNSON sent RUNGE back to one of the farmhouses to get a tablecloth. He told the German who had been wounded in the arm to return and tell his commander that he would be given 30 minutes to make up his mind. If he wished to surrender his force, he would ground all arms and helmets. The men would form single file, hands behind their heads, and would come out with their leader carrying the tablecloth aloft. They would file into the American lines and their wounded would be given prompt attention.

"Otherwise," said JOHNSON, "our superior force will annihilate you—to the last man."

The man went on back. JOHNSON'S party returned to HELL'S CORNERS, helping the other German along. Firing was resumed, but from the German side it started sporadically and broke down gradually as if the enemy had lost heart. JOHNSON passed the word around to his men about the results of the parley and

told them not to fire if the Germans began to stand up. In just 30 minutes he saw a few men arise from the swamp and line up one behind the other. As they did so, there was a rifle shot from behind JOHNSON. He whipped around and saw LT OWENS getting ready to fire again. JOHNSON jumped for him and kicked him with all of his might in the butt.

"God damn it!" he yelled, "What are you doing?"

"God damn it, Colonel," OWENS answered, "those bastards have been killing my men all day and now you won't let me shoot them." He broke down and cried like a child. JOHNSON turned him around and told him, "Get your ass in the CP and stay there for the rest of the day."\*

The shot had no ill-effect, the Germans paying no heed to it. Their procession—only a little group at first—came on toward HELL'S CORNERS, reaching the perimeter about 1800. Other enemy groups came filtering in, a handful at a time, until after dark. The battalion commander came in near the last. He was a lieutenant colonel and a typical Nazi. To JOHNSON he insisted that he was not a PW and should not be searched or stripped of his weapons. "I have a right to parley under the Geneva Convention," he said. "I came in to talk with you and decide whether I wish to surrender." JOHNSON didn't

\*This anecdote is not in the original manuscript though JOHNSON related it at that time but asked that it be stricken out as he was afraid that it might reflect on a very competent officer. The HO decided to include it.

DECLASSIFIED.  
DOD DIR 5200. 9

see it that way and he told his men to proceed with the commander as with the others. Altogether there were 350 prisoners. About 150 Germans had been killed or badly wounded. A few got away toward CARENTAN. These were men of the First Battalion of the 6 German Parachute Regiment.

While the last victory round-up proceeded, one more blow fell on HELL'S CORNERS. The prisoners had been formed up along the road to the south of JOHNSON'S CP. It was intended to move them into some of the buildings around PENEME. CAPT ALTUS F. MC REYNOLDS, the Regimental Adjutant, had been detailed to search them. He was proceeding with this task when the German 88s resumed fire from CARENTAN. One of the first rounds landed squarely in the center of the prisoner group, killing MC REYNOLDS, and 20 of the Germans. Many others were wounded. The survivors whimpered and cried and begged JOHNSON to send up a white rocket. He refused, not knowing what a white rocket signified. Then he told the guards to shoot any man who tried to move out. There had been other losses in his own command. One shell hit the CP, killing one man and missing MAJ ALLEN narrowly. MAJ CARREL, the surgeon, was hit in the knee. He dressed his own wound and continued to labor all night among the other wounded.

JOHNSON'S losses during the afternoon fight had been about 10 killed and 30 wounded. All through the night, German casualties continued to drag themselves out of the swamp and into the American perimeter. American patrols were sent forth to

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DOD DIR 5200. 9

DECLASSIFIED  
DOD DIR 5200. 7

search for others. They found many. The German battalion had neither medical supplies nor personnel and the task of succoring their wounded fell wholly on CARREL. The aid station soon ran out of bandages. The men tore up undershirts, sheets and whatever they could lay their hands on. The sulphur and blood plasma supply ran low and was conserved for the more desperate cases.

That evening JOHNSON made radio contact with KINNARD and learned that higher headquarters had countermanded the order for BALLARD to move to JOHNSON'S position. JOHNSON had been hopeful that he could still get enough men together to move on up the canal and blow the bridges. That hope died when he heard that BALLARD couldn't come; it probably would have gone unrealized in any case.\*

JOHNSON told KINNARD of his critical need of ammunition, food, water, medicines and relief of all kinds. KINNARD promised to do what he could.

The force stayed at HELL'S CORNERS through the next day while the attack under COL SINK went forward against ST COME DU MONT.

\*The "hope" mentioned is simply JOHNSON'S explanation of why he continued to press BALLARD. The state of the command, what others had to say about its physical and moral situation that night and the prior repulses by the enemy are all to be weighed against this statement. The fact is that JOHNSON never believed BALLARD had a real fight on his hands. (He said so to the HO.) And the time came when he was fixed with an unreasoned determination to make his subordinate comply with orders.

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DOD DIR 5200. 7