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OPERATIONS OF THE 2D BATTALION, 506TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY
REGIMENT (82D AIRBORNE DIVISION) IN THE INVASION OF NORMANDY
JUNE 5 - 13 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience and Observation of a Rifle Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: BATTALION IN AIRBORNE ATTACK

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11

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2d Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, 82d Airborne Division in the invasion of NORMANDY, FRANCE 5 - 13 June 1944.

In order to orient the reader it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major events which lead up to this operation.

The broad strategy behind the Allies main effort against the German war machine included as a highly desirable preliminary the successful conclusion of operations in NORTH AFRICA and their extension across SICILY to the ITALIAN mainland. With the Mediterranean "flank" freed for Allied shipping, and with the necessary special equipment built or in sight the Allies were at last in a position to prepare for the final cross - Channel assault which had been agreed upon since April 1942. (1)

Postponements of this invasion had commenced in 1942 when the Allies, notably the Americans and British, felt that an adequate force was not available, in addition to an inability to properly mount the force for seaborne movement.

With the recent successes in the Mediterranean and with the successful build-up of troops and equipment the Joint Chiefs of Staff selected the spring of 1944 as the time to produce the all-out effort. (2)

- (1) A-1, p. VIII
- (2) A-1, p. 3, 4, 5

Selection of the target area passed many problems not the least of which were estimates of enemy capabilities and actions to the vast logistical hurdles. Likewise a target date that would utilize the best weather conditions available, at this season of the year for the Channel crossing and still allow for proper preparation was required. The decision finally agreed upon made the COTENTIN~~E~~ PENINSULA, FRANCE, the target area for Operation Over-Loard with Y-Day selected as 1 June 1944 (all planning completed and troops held in readiness) and D-Day to be shortly thereafter. (3)

GENERAL SITUATION

All units to participate in the NORMANDY assault were based in ENGLAND, where for many months, training programs paralleling assault requirement were introduced. Tremendous quantities of equipment and supplies ^{were} stock piled, marshalling areas prep, ^{and} etc.

The 21st Army Group, under command of General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery would assault the NORMANDY COAST in three main areas, with initial strength of five reinforced infantry divisions landing from the sea and of three airborne divisions. (4)

The objective of the British 2d Army after securing initial landings was to drive east and north along the coast to seize channel ports as far north as ANTWERP. (5)

The first US Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, would land one division of VII Corps at Beach UTTAY U. In the early hours of the morning of D-Day, four to five hours before the assault from the sea, the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions attached to VII Corps upon landing were scheduled to be dropped in the area southeast and west of

- (3) A-1, p. 2, 5
- (4) A-2, p. 3
- (5) A-2, p. 3; A-1, p. 2

STE MERE EGLISE, where their mission was to capture the crossings of the MERDERET RIVER, secure the line of the DOUVE RIVER as a barrier to the south, and assist the landings at UTAH BEACH by preventing enemy reserves from reinforcing their coastal defense. V Corps planned its attack on a 7,000 yard stretch of beach to be known as "OMAHA." (See Map A) The mission of the First US Army securing initial beachheads was to capture CHERBOURG and the BRITTANY ports as supply bases. Capture of these supply ports being essential since it was ultimately intended to supply all UNITED STATES forces engaged in EUROPE directly from ports in the UNITED STATES. (6)

THE ENEMY SITUATION, TERRAIN AND WEATHER

In the general operational area, intelligence sources placed the total number of enemy troops in excess of 75,000. (See Map A) (7)

This force was made up of Marine, Naval, Coast Artillery, and assorted Corps and ground force troops. In addition to these there were approximately 10,000 organization TODT workers. (8) The general quality of the enemy was mixed as to age, morale, physical condition, nationality and battle experience, but these forces were expected to fight well, at least as long as they were manning guns and positions.

The German plan of defense called for the coastal line to be heavily fortified with concrete emplacements, strong points, underwater obstacles, etc.

The most effective and extensive anti-airborne measures constructed by the Germans consisted of the erection of ROMMELSPARGEL or asparagus (stakes) on likely drop or landing zones in a density of approximately

- (6) A-2, p. 5
- (7) A-10, Intelligence Annex
- (8) A-10, Intelligence Annex

1,000 per square kilometers. These stakes were normally wired together^a and booby trapped with mines and shells. One Corps alone erected over 900,000. (9) Behind this line, fifty to two hundred miles from the coast, were the mobile reserves. Key to the German scheme of defense was dependent upon the rapid counterattack commitment of reserves. (10)

It was accepted that every unit would have a definite anti-airborne plan, with personnel designated and appropriate transportation, arms and equipment, allotted and held in readiness.

NORMANDY is known as a hedgerow country and consists of countless small fields averaging in size 250 X 500 yards. In most cases these fields are completely surrounded by hedgerows. Hedgerows are mounds of earth about 3 to 5 feet in height and at the top approximately 3 feet thick upon which heavy vegetation and small trees grow. As a result of this, in many cases it is impossible to see from one field to another. The peninsula of NORMANDY is comparatively level the highest elevation being approximately two hundred meters.

The weather at this season of the year proved long hours of daylight. The night being only about 5½ hours in length (from 2300 hours to 0430 hours). There are no seasonal rains; the months of June and September generally have less rain than at any other time of the year. Sea fog may occur at any hour any season. River valleys and coastal areas are particularly subject to drifting land mist. Average temperature for the month of June is 60 degrees. (11)

THE REGIMENTAL MISSION AND PLAN

With a sufficient background knowledge of First Army plans and desires, the 82d Airborne Division outlined its mission as follows:

- (9) A-4, p. 50
- (10) Personal knowledge
- (11) A-1, p. 5

"To land astride the MERDERET RIVER and to seize clear and secure the general area NEUVILLE AU PLAIN - STE. MERE EGLISE - CHEFT DU PONT - ETIENVILLE - AMFREVILLE. In addition, it was to destroy the crossings over the DOUVE RIVER and be prepared to advance to the west on VII Corps Order. (See Map B)

As one of the assault regiments of the 82d Division, the 508th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team, was ordered on D minus 1 - D-Day to land by parachute to: (1) Seize and destroy the crossings of the DOUVE RIVER at BEUZEVILLE - LA BASTILLE and ETIENVILLE. (2) Seize, organize and defend the general area RENOUE - ETIENVILLE. (3) Assemble one battalion without delay in vicinity of GUETTEVILLE as Force A reserve. (Force A consisted of all parachute elements of the 82d Airborne Division committed before dawn of D-Day; Force B, glider elements committed before and after dawn of D-Day and Force C to be committed by sea to land between D plus 2 and D plus 7). (4) Clear and secure the regimental sector and maintain aggressive patrolling to the limits of that sector. (5) Be prepared on Division Order, to advance to the west of the line of the DOUVE RIVER. (12) (See Map B)

The 508th Parachute Regiment Combat Team consisted of: 508th Parachute Infantry (less seaborne detachments), Company B, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion less one platoon, attached upon landing to Force A reserve, Battery B, 80th Antiaircraft Battalion, attached upon landing to Force B. NOTE: An Airborne Infantry Battalion consisted of a Headquarters Company and three Rifle Companies. A Rifle Company (-) ^{minus} seaborne personnel had a strength of approximately 125. (13)

(12) A-11, p. 1; Personal knowledge

(13) Personal knowledge

The 508th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team as part of Force A was directed to approach the CHERBOURG Peninsula from the west, making a landfall in the vicinity of SURTAINVILLE. The force was to drop between 0100 and 0315 hours on the morning of D-Day.

(See Map A) (14)

To accomplish the prescribed task, the Regiment assigned missions as follows:

(1) 1st Battalion with demolition section attached, will constitute Force A reserve and will move to area generally south of GUETTEVILLE.

(2) 3d Battalion with demolition section attached will seize, clear, organize and defend the area generally east and south of RENOUE. One company will be designated as Regimental reserve and will not be committed without authority of Regimental Commanding Officer. Upon arrival of 2d Battalion in Regimental reserve area this company will be released to Battalion Commanding Officer.

(3) 2d Battalion reinforced with demolition section and Company B, 307th Airborne Engineers less one platoon will destroy the bridges across the DOUVE RIVER at ETIENVILLE and BEUZENVILLE - LA BASTILLE. Upon completion of demolitions, the Battalion, less attachments will: a. Revert to Regimental reserve; clear the Regimental area, less the 3d Battalion sector, of all enemy resistance and occupy and prepare for defense; b. Designate one company under battalion control, to protect the southern flank of the Regiment by seizing and defending PICAUVILLE and preventing reconstruction of bridges blown at ETIENVILLE and BEUZENVILLE - LA BASTILLE. (See Map B)

(14) A-5, p. 1, 3

(4) Battery B, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion will place guns at pre-determined positions. (15)

THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK (See Map B) (16)

The Battalion Commander realizing that his mission was complex divided it into two phases, phase one, destruction of the two bridges over the DOUVE RIVER to prevent the enemy from reinforcing his coastal defenses and phase two, mopping-up the regimental area and reverting to regimental reserve. To accomplish phase one the plan of attack was as follows:

Company E reinforced with a platoon of engineers, a machine gun section, and a demolition squad would move ^{west} east and attack ETIENVILLE and destroy the bridge over the DOUVE RIVER.

Reinforced with a platoon of engineers, a machine gun section and a demolition squad Company F would move south and destroy the bridge over the DOUVE RIVER at BEUZEVILLE LA BASTILLE. The third company of the battalion, Company D, would be in support, to reinforce the attack of either E or F Companies with priority to Company E.

Headquarters Company mortars would support the attack companies by fire from vicinity of the Drop Zone.

Upon completion of phase I, the Engineer Company (-) and the Demolition Section would revert to regimental control. To accomplish phase II the 2d Battalion would dispose its forces as follows:

Company F would pull back and seize PICAUVILLE which had been by-passed and would establish a road block south

- (15) A-11, p. 1
(16) Personal knowledge

of ETIENVILLE and one north of BEUZEVILLE LA BASTILLE.

The Battalion (-) as regimental reserve, would occupy and defend HILL 30 and conduct mopping-up operations in the regimental area.

D-DAY MINUS

On 1 June, the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, less base and seaborne echelons moved from its base camp location at WALLATON PARK, NOTTINGHAM, ENGLAND, to marshalling areas established at air fields from which the regiment would emplane. The 1st and 3d Battalions, 508th Parachute Infantry were situated at FALKINGHAM and the 2d Battalion and Regimental Headquarters at SALTBY. Also at the latter field were Force A, Headquarters and Company B, 307th Airborne Engineers. These fields were located in the midlands of ENGLAND in the vicinity of NOTTINGHAM - LEICESTOR Sector. (17)

The entire combat echelon was sealed at the air fields behind barbed wire which also inclosed mess areas, athletic fields, and Headquarter's tents. For living quarters hangers were cleared out and filled with cots. Details were held to a minimum by using base section troops to handle the messes. Interior guard was the only regular obligation other than preparing for the jump. PX rations were issued often, the Regimental Band played frequently and movies were shown in the hanger every night. Morale was at the highest pitch since the activation of the Regiment. (18)

Here at the air field Company grade officers and all enlisted personnel received their briefings on the various missions. By means of maps, aerial photographs, sand tables, etc., personnel were briefed and checked not only on their own particular missions, but were acquainted

(17) A-6, p. 16; Personal knowledge

(18) A-6, p. 16; Personal knowledge

with the missions of other units. (19)

English pounds were exchanged for French francs, escape kits distributed, maps issued and details memorized. Weapons inspected and oiled and hundreds of other details necessary to the success of the mission gone over again and again. (20)

Initially the parachutist is supplied almost entirely by what he carries on his person and what can be safely dropped from an airplane. On most of the individuals were carried one complete K ration consisting of three meals, several D ration, chocolate bars, two Fragmentation grenades, one White Phosphorus grenade, one Antitank Gammon grenade, and an Antitank (10bb) mine, various items of individual clothing, a minimum of two bandoleers of ammunition, gas mask, etc. For the trip across the channel each man was required to wear under the parachute a Mae West life preserver. Including the above and plus the weight of the individual weapon and parachutes, most men weighed between 300 and 350 pounds. (21)

Each aircraft was provided with six electrically operated pack racks located under the fuselage from which containers housing automatic weapons, ammunition, antitank mines, rations and other supplies could be dispatched. Containers provided with additional equipment were placed in the exit door of the aircraft to be dispatched manually by the first few men to leave the aircraft. No shortages existed in the basic load.

The Division plan called for one automatic (to be delivered without request) parachute supply mission, with additional parachute supply missions available on an "on call bases." (22)

- (19) Personal knowledge
- (20) Personal knowledge
- (21) A-6, p. 17; Personal knowledge
- (22) Personal knowledge

By 4 June 1944, all last minute preparations for the invasion had been completed but the Allied D-Day was postponed for 24 hours due to weather conditions.

NARRATION

D MINUS 1, D-DAY 5 - 6 JUNE 1944 (INITIAL LANDINGS)

At 2315 hours 5 June the first aircraft of the Regiment were winging their way to FRANCE. One-half hour prior to take off of the main body, the Regimental Pathfinder Teams had departed to precede the Regiment and mark the Drop Zones, to assist troop carrier in making an accurate delivery. (23)

The aircraft of the Troop Carrier Fleet effected the rendezvous with their air cover near the southern tip of ENGLAND and as the planes were to pass over the seaborne invasion fleet the cabin and wing lights were left on for identification purposes during this period in order to avoid the mistake committed in a previous airborne assault when American parachutists were shot down by friendly naval and ground forces. (24)

The flight across the channel was at low level to avoid alerting enemy Radar. In this connection, there were also diversionary flights and dummy drops to further attempt confusion. The weather was extremely clear and visibility was excellent. A wide swing was made around the tip of the CHERBOURG Peninsula and through the interval between the Channel Islands.

As landfall was crossed the aircraft dropped to an altitude of 700 feet and passed over the town of SURTAINVILLE. (See Map A). Up to this point visibility had been excellent and the formation of aircraft a tight and well controlled V of V's. However between landfall and the drop zone

(23) Personal knowledge

(24) A-4, p. 15

a heavy cloud formation tended to separate the elements of the flight and this dispersion was further aggravated by the evasive action taken by individual aircraft when heavy antiaircraft fire and enemy night fighter activity were encountered. This first taste of fire locked like a Fourth of July celebration. By the time the area of the drop zones was reached the aircraft were well scattered and were flying at excessive speeds and altitudes, higher and lower than those ideal for jumping. (25)

Despite the fact that the majority of aircraft did not see any marked drop zones, when what was thought to be the drop zone was reached the green light "go" signal was given and the Battalion landed in FRANCE between 0208 and 0220 hours 6 June 1944. (26)

The 2d Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, reinforced, now faced the most difficult accomplishment a parachute unit encounters - a night assembly. Fairly heavy small arms fire on the ground, the dispersion of personnel resulting from the aircraft breaking formation prior to reaching the drop zone plus the inability to see because of the hedgerows made a proper reorganization impossible.

Many men upon landing found that because of the tremendous quantity of equipment carried in the pockets of the jump suit and on the person, that it required as much as 10 to 15 minutes to remove the parachute harness (the parachute harness at this time was not provided with a quick release device). This proved fatal to many jumpers who landed in the inundated waters bordering the drop zone and those who landed too near German positions. Little or no equipment was recovered from the containers holding the light crew-served weapons, ammunition, etc., due to enemy resistance on the drop zone and because much of the equipment had landed in the MURDERET and DOUVE RIVERS. (See Map B) The Battalion was divided

(25) A-6, p. 17, 18; Personal knowledge

(26) Personal knowledge

into many small groups, each of which began to fight its way independently to its objective, leaving dead Germans, wrecked German vehicles and disrupted communications behind. (27)

Because of the many small groups that the 2d Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry was divided into, it is impossible in the space provided to cover the actions of each group. It will be our objective to take the largest element comprising the majority of 2d Battalion personnel and follow its action for the first five days.

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas B. Shanley, Battalion Commander, landed on the Regimental Drop Zone at approximately 0210 hours on D-Day and with a small group of men (15 - 20) moved to a position north of PICAUVILLE and established the battalion assembly area. (See Map C)

This was accomplished by tying a signal light in the top of a convenient tree. (Note because of the hedgerows surrounding the small fields in this section it was impossible to see the light when more than a short distance from it.) By morning approximately fifty men representing several organizations had filtered into this assembly area. By this time the area was under attack by what was estimated to be a German Battalion reinforced with tanks and artillery. Lieutenant Colonel Shanley was not sure of his exact position on the ground and was also concerned about the bridge crossing the DOUVE RIVER at ETIENVILLE the primary battalion objective. He therefore dispatched a three-man patrol to reconnoiter to the ^{south} north to secure this information. This patrol returned in about an hour reporting the exact location of PICAUVILLE and that it had observed the air force with five P-51s dive bombing and destroying the bridges at ETIENVILLE and at BEUZEVILLE LA RASTILLE. Also that PICAUVILLE and ETIENVILLE was strongly occupied by the enemy. (See Map C)

(28) Additional patrols were sent out in other directions in an attempt

(27) Personal knowledge

(28) Personal knowledge

to locate personnel and equipment containers. During this time the assembly area force was still engaging the enemy, having suffered about 15 casualties among the 50-men present. By noon of D-Day radio contact was established with a group of personnel (approximately 150) located east of PICAUVILLE. Lieutenant Colonel Shanley broke contact with the enemy, because of necessity of leaving a number of wounded men behind, and consolidated forces with the group east of PICAUVILLE, commanded by Sergeant McLain. Later that same evening at about 1900 hours Lieutenant Colonel Shanley's force was joined by another group, (200 men and officers) which brought the total force to approximately four hundred men. Though predominately 2d Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, this group contained personnel from almost every major airborne unit participating in the operation including the 505th, 507th, and 508th Infantry Parachute Regiments plus personnel from the 101st Airborne Division. In addition to individual weapons there were only three IMGs, one BAR, and one 60-mm mortar tube and a minimum of ammunition in the entire group. No other crew-served weapons were available. (29) Because of the lack of antitank and other heavy weapons and in an effort to accomplish at least part of the battalion mission Lieutenant Colonel Shanley on the night of D-Day moved his group to HILL 30, which overlooks the Causeway on the MERDERET and DOUVE RIVERS, and prepared this position for all around defense, and immediately established a road block on the west side of the CHER DU PONT CAUSEWAY. (30) (See Map C)

D PLUS 1 TO D PLUS 3

Throughout D plus 1 and 2 the position on HILL 30 was under almost constant attack, not of a coordinated effort, but more piece-meal, as if in an effort to feel out the position to determine its size and strength. To prevent the enemy from realizing the acute shortage of

- (29) Personal knowledge
- (30) Personal knowledge

crew-served weapons and ammunition, the three IMGs, BAR, and mortar tubes were passed around from sector to sector, firing a few rounds to establish a gun location then moving on to a new position. Reconnaissance patrols were dispatched throughout the day in an effort to locate additional personnel and ammunition, weapon rations, medical supplies, etc. On the night of D plus 2 the road block on the CHEF DU PONT CAUSEWAY was overrun by the enemy and our personnel forced to withdraw. It was reported that the enemy had taken over the road block and with considerable force was occupying the unnamed town at the west end of the Causeway. (See Map C)

Lieutenant Colonel Shanley, realizing that control of the Causeway would enable the enemy to move reinforcements east to the beach landings and would additionally delay a possible link-up with friendly forces from the east ordered Lieutenants Millsaps and Pollette to organize a combat patrol in an effort to reduce this threat.

Collecting twenty-four men together and providing them each with 3 Gammon grenades (a concussion type grenade containing $2\frac{1}{2}$ pounds of C-2) two or three Fragmentation and White Phosphorus grenades, this group left HILL 30 in a column of twos at 0200 hours. As previously planned they maneuvered around the town so as to approach it through an apple orchard from the southeast, they managed to get within ten to fifteen yards from the first building before being challenged. By working in three groups 8 - 9 - 9-men each, the town was systematically worked over. First a Gammon grenade or two would be thrown against the side of a building, knocking a hole in the wall large enough for a man to walk through; this would immediately be followed by a Fragmentation or White Phosphorus grenade, then the men would enter the building and with additional grenades, Tommy guns, or rifles, neutralize any activity left. After about the third house had been worked over in this manner,

Krauts still bare-footed began filtering out of the remaining buildings into the open fields where they were either cut down or escaped. About ~~forty~~ ^{forty-five} minutes later after the road block had been reestablished events proved forty-three Germans had been killed and two captured. Of our men, one was killed and eleven wounded. (30) (See Map C)

while plot
location?
On afternoon of D plus 3 the Platoon Leader, Company E, 2d Battalion, 508th Infantry, arriving at one of his Observation Posts on HILL 30 found enemy infantry milling around a few hedgerows away, apparently preparing for an impending attack. Upon reporting this information to the Battalion Commander it was learned that radio contact had been established with the 319th Glider FA Battalion, 82d Airborne Division. Securing the only SCR 300 on the hill this officer was able to direct effective fire breaking up all semblance of organization among the enemy in the area. Throughout the day as these small probing attacks developed, the availability of artillery fire greatly off-set the acute shortage of crew-served weapons.

In the latter part of the afternoon reports were received that enemy troops in considerable strength were in vicinity of road junction west of HILL 30. 1st Platoon Leader, Company E, again directed artillery fire this time knocking out a complete battery of German 75-mm howitzers that were moving into position to fire on HILL 30. (31) (See Map C)

Shortly after this action Colonel Lindquist, Commanding Officer, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, with approximately two hundred men and officers joined the position on HILL 30. (32)

D PLUS 4 TO D PLUS 5

On D plus 4 the 96th Infantry Division pushed west toward EPIENVILLE. This secured the area around HILL 30 and allowed the entire 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment a badly needed period for reorganization. For

(30) Statement by Captain Hillcapp, June 1947, Personal knowledge

(31) Personal knowledge; A-6, p. 24

(32) Personal knowledge; A-6, p. 25

the next forty-eight hours men were shuffled from unit to unit until tactical integrity was finally regained. With the arrival of the seaborne forces, the much needed crew-served weapons, ammunition and other equipment became available. In the process of reorganization it became apparent time after time that men who had not previously carried an MOS of machine gunner, mortar-men, BAR-men, etc., had to move in and fill these vacancies. (33) The effective personnel strength of the Battalion at this time was approximately 70%.

The over-all situation on the peninsula ~~at this time~~ was good. All the beaches had been taken and a sizeable beachhead had been formed. Although the British on the left flank were running into much armor, in the American sector the Germans had been incapable of launching a large scale coordinated counterattack. A bridgehead south of the DOUVE RIVER was the next task of the airborne divisions. After the peninsula had been cleared, the Americans would attempt a break-through to the South. An area had to be prepared from which this attack could be launched.

(34)

D PLUS 6 TO D PLUS 7.

At midnight on 12 June (D Plus 6) Lieutenant Goodale led F Company across the DOUVE RIVER at BEIZEVILLE - LA BASTILLE in assault boats, and radioed the Regimental Commander for artillery. A 15 minute barrage by the 31st Glider PA Battalion reinforced, was fired during which time men from the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion began to bridge a gap in the causeway leading across the river. When the artillery was lifted F Company attacked the town neutralizing enemy resistance including the destruction of two German tanks. The Regiment moved across the river

(33) Personal knowledge

(34) Personal knowledge

1st Battalion leading followed by 3d Battalion, Regimental Headquarters Company, 2d Battalion (-).

The 1st Battalion was to move to a regimental reserve area near COIGNY. The 2d Battalion was to proceed southeast to BAUPTÉ, clear the town and contact elements of the 101st Airborne Division to the southeast on a causeway which bridged a tributary of the DOUVE RIVER and the 3d Battalion was to move ~~due~~ south, from BAIZEVILLE - LA BASTILLE to the TAILLEFER Area on the Regimental right flank. (35) (See Map D)

The 2d Battalion objective BAUPTÉ, proved to be by far the most difficult of those assigned the Regiment. Moving across the DOUVE RIVER at 0500 hours, the battalion was joined by the F Company force which had cleared BEIZENVILLE LA BASTILLE. From this point Company E led the battalion toward BAUPTÉ. The formation utilized placed 2d Platoon of E Company in the fields on the left of the road with 1st Platoon in the fields on the right. The remainder of E Company, D Company, Battalion Headquarters and F Company following on the road. After moving south about a mile, two Renault tanks were encountered. With the 1st and 2d Platoons disposed in the fields adjacent to the road the tanks were allowed to approach until within a few feet of the respective positions then by use of Gammon grenades, bazookas, and grenade launchers, the tanks were stopped cold. Though the tanks were immobilized the Germans inside were not and as they evacuated the vehicles considerable firing followed, while some eleven Germans were killed, several of our men were wounded. Our casualties in this case resulted not from the enemy but from the adjacent platoons firing into each others positions while firing at the Germans. (36)

Since no transportation was available it was necessary to render

- (35) Personal knowledge
- (36) Personal knowledge

first aid to those who had become casualties, place them along a hedgerow, camouflage them with branches, mark the spot on a map and hope to send for them later. (37)

At this point in the same formation the Battalion left the road to proceed cross country to its objective. While still about a mile northeast of BAUPTE, extremely heavy small arms fire was received. Lieutenant Colonel Shanley drew his command into a perimeter defense and sent patrols to reconnoiter to the front. A consolidated consensus of the results of these patrols indicated the area was held by at least a battalion of enemy infantry supported by armor and artillery. (38)

At 1600 hours in the afternoon after the 319th FA Glider Battalion had laid down a preparatory barrage, the 2d Battalion attacked BAUPTE. Companies D and F were in the assault echelon with Company E in reserve. Company F cleared the southern half of the town after a fire fight that lasted more than an hour.

Company D fought its way to the outskirts of the northern end of the town against bitter opposition.

Northeast of BAUPTE D Company encountered a strongly defended vehicle park. Colonel Shanley sent his reserve E Company through the section of town already cleared by F Company. Then D and E Companies joined in a coordinated attack that quickly neutralized this position. The 2d Battalion bazookas accounted for ten tanks in seizing the motor pools which contained over fifty vehicles. F Company knocked out four 20-mm all-purpose guns. By dark the battalion had reorganized and was in complete control of the town and causeways. (39)

On the causeway south of BAUPTE contact was made with the 101st

- (37) Personal knowledge
- (38) Personal knowledge
- (39) Personal knowledge

Airborne Division. (See Map D) Captured German transportation was dispatched to pick up the wounded that had occurred in route, which drew to a close the initial thirteen days of the NORMANDY invasion. (40)

SUMMARY

The 2d Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, did not accomplish any of its missions according to the pre-conceived plan, however with the assistance of the air force the two bridges over the DOUVE RIVER were destroyed. ^{Enemy} Engineer communications were disrupted, and by occupation of HILL 30, enemy reinforcements were prevented from moving east toward the beach landings over the causeway leading into CHEF DU PONT. While operating under severe shortages of equipment this Battalion held on, accounting for the destruction of many German soldiers and their equipment and materially aided in the accomplishment of the over-all operation.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. ANTIAIRBORNE DEFENSE

Even though the enemy took great pains to construct elaborate antiairborne obstacles such as Romelspage his effectiveness was greatly reduced because of his lack of aggressiveness. ~~Especially~~, because of the great quantities of equipment that were taken in by the individual and because of the ineffectiveness of the harness release of the parachute during the first few minutes of the operation the invading forces were the same as sitting ducks. An aggressive enemy conducting spontaneous assaults could have taken a great toll.

In addition during the four days prior to reorganization had the enemy conducted an all-out coordinated attack against the various small

(71) Personal knowledge

badly equipped, isolated groups instead of piece-meal probing efforts, he could most certainly have reduced these positions. *(A quick release device is now incorporated in all standard personal parachute harness.)

2. DELIVERY OF CREW-SERVED WEAPONS

*Inability at this time to deliver crew-served weapons and other special equipment on the individual in leg packs, etc., resulted in an acute shortage of fire power during the most vulnerable phase of an airborne operation. Had individual containers been provided to facilitate dropping the much needed crew-served weapons, and ammunition, more offensive action could have been accomplished instead of the defensive attitude invoked by these shortages. *Suitable detachable containers of this type are now available.

3. ARTILLERY ADJUSTMENT

The ability of 1st Platoon Leader, Company E, to effectively direct the fires of the 319th Glider FA most certainly broke up the efforts of the enemy to launch a coordinated attack against HILL 30. Had this artillery fire not been available or effectively utilized, particularly with the shortage of ammunition and crew-served weapons, this position could not have been held.

4. SMALL UNIT LEADERSHIP

Due to the dispersion of the aircraft formation at the time of the drop, instead of tactical units as had been planned, we find many small widely separated groups operating independently of each other working toward a common goal, the objectives. Men whom previously had commanded a squad were called upon to command groups the size of platoons and companies. It is only high caliber training that provides junior leaders with sufficient background to enable them to effectively execute these responsibilities.

5. REORGANIZATION

Reorganization of the 2d Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, was not completed until D plus 4. *This was provoked by many reasons which include the unsuitability of pathfinder equipment for assisting the troop carrier units in making an accurate delivery. "The use of inadequate assembly aids to effect the assembly of battalion size units; in this case a visable light tied in a tree that could not have been seen for any distance because of the hedgerows. It was not until D plus 4 after tactical unity had been regained that any coordinated action could be attempted." *Vast improvements have been made both in pathfinder navigational aids and in assembly aids.

6. INTERCHANGEABLE PERSONNEL

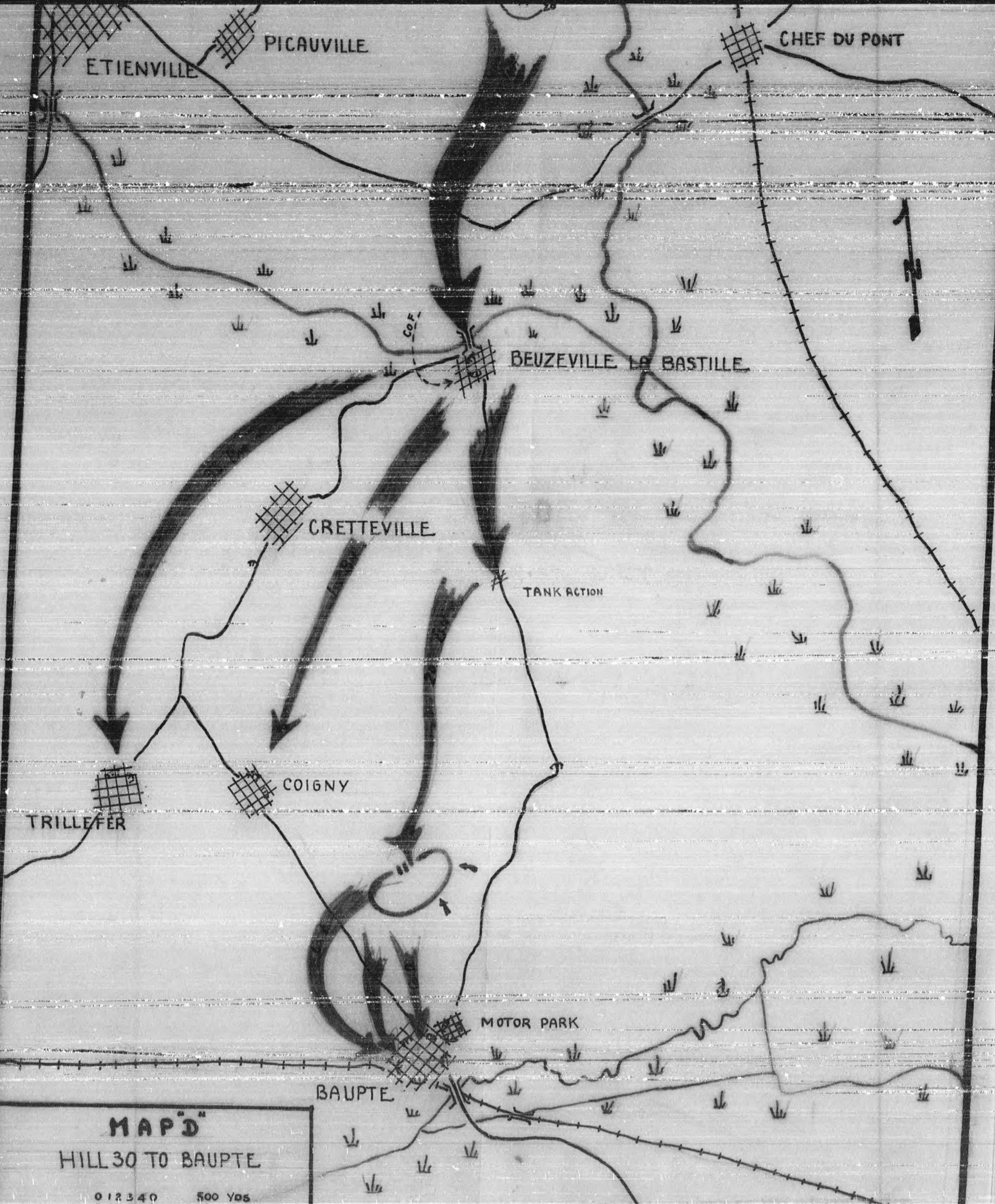
The value of keeping the maximum number of crew-served weapons in operation cannot be over-emphasized as experienced by the personnel defending HILL 30. On D plus 4 when the 2d Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry was relieved by elements from the 90th Infantry Division and supplies, weapons and equipment again became available, it was necessary in many cases to assign men as machine gunners, BAR-men and mortar-men who did not carry this speciality as an MOS. The ability of the individual soldier to effectively place any infantry weapon in operation will determine to a great extent the value of any unit.

7. CONTROL OF AN AMBUSH

Several men were unnecessarily wounded in the tank ambush conducted by the 1st and 2d Platoons, E Company, 2d Battalion on the march to BAUPTE. While a certain amount of protection was afforded by the hedgerows along the road, had prior coordination been effected between platoons so that only one platoon would fire at any one time, while the other used the hedgerows for protection these casualties could have been avoided.

LESSONS

1. Spontaneous aggressiveness and coordinated attacks on the part of antiairborne defenders can nullify the effectiveness of a vertical envelopment.
2. Parachute troops must be provided with light crew-served weapons and other special equipment, attached to the jumper to insure its ready availability upon arrival on the ground.
3. A knowledge of artillery and its adjustment of fire is a must for all officers and if possible key noncommissioned officers.
4. The value of small unit leadership cannot be over-emphasized in training. In airborne operations where small, isolated groups are compelled to function for extended periods of time without relief or assistance the full and exacting exercise of leadership is essential.
5. Reorganization of an airborne battalion after a night combat drop must be effected prior to the accomplishment of any coordinated action. The development of adequate night assembly aids will greatly reduce this problem.
6. To effectively utilize the fire power available within a unit, all personnel must be capable of manning every weapon in the unit.
7. Coordination and control between small units participating in an ambush is essential if casualties are to be held to a minimum.



ETIENVILLE

PICAUVILLE

CHEF DU PONT

BEUZEVILLE LA BASTILLE

CRETTEVILLE

TANK ACTION

COIGNY

TRILLEFER

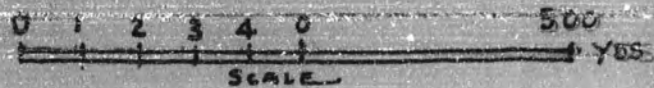
MOTOR PARK

BAUPTÉ

MAP D
HILL 30 TO BAUPTÉ

012340 500 YDS

HILL 30



MAP C

BTRY. ARTY

SHANLEYS INITIAL
ASSEMBLY AREA

HILL
30

200 YDS. OFF

150 YDS. OFF

400 YDS. OFF

PICAUVILLE

Company
PATROL

ETIENVILLE

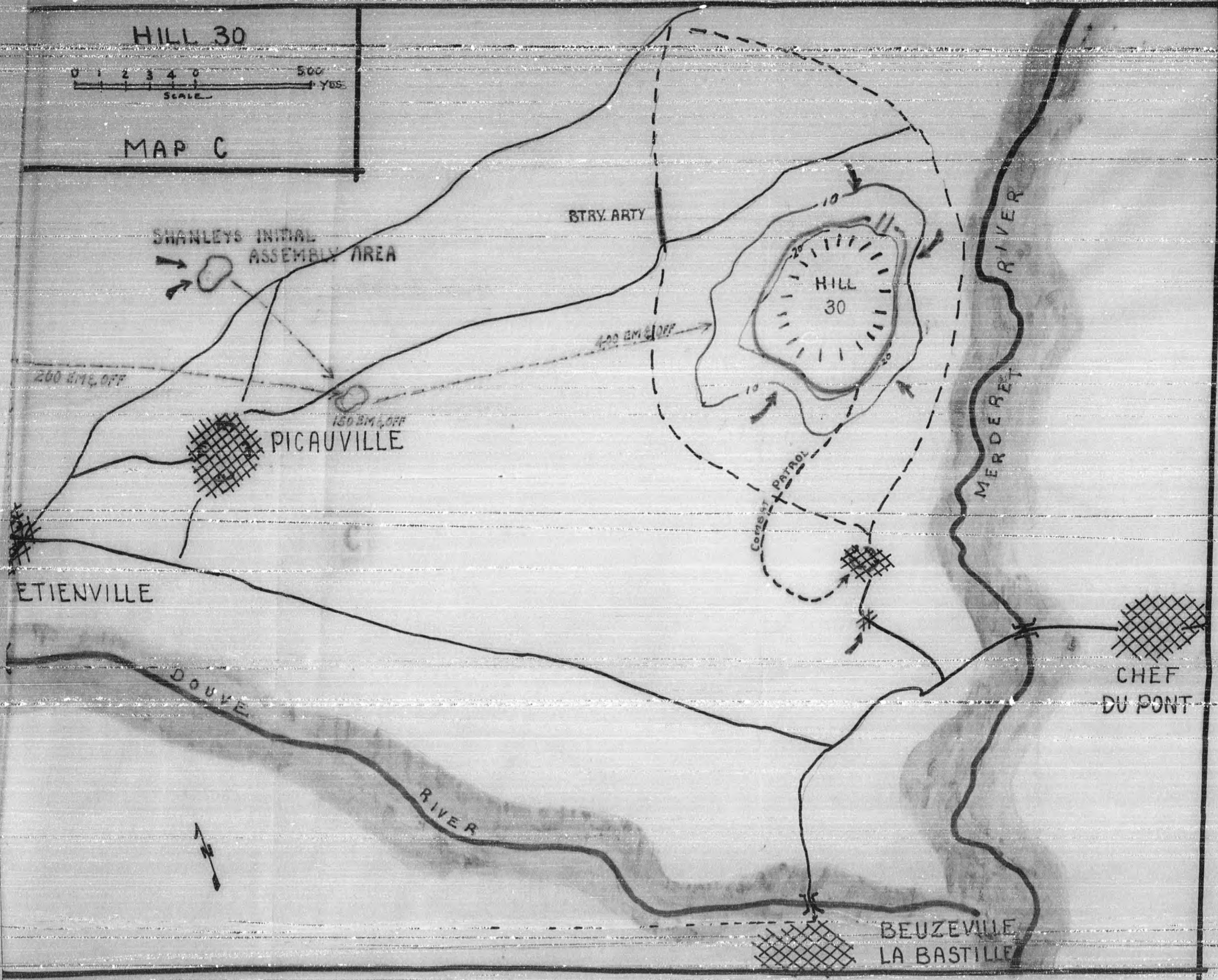
DOUVE

RIVER

MERDERET
RIVER

CHEF
DU PONT

BEUZEVILLE
LA BASTILLE

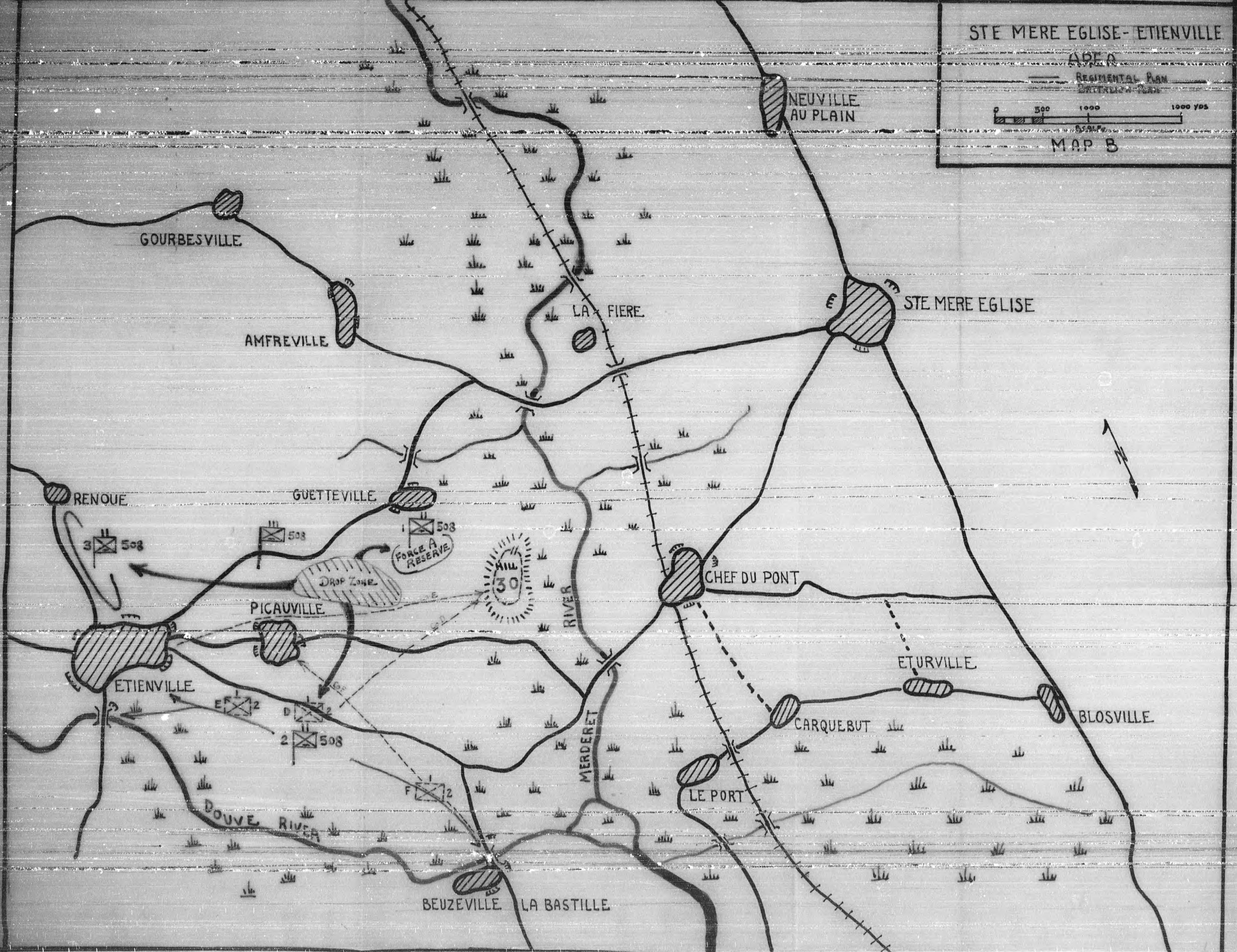


STE MERE EGLISE - ETIENVILLE

AREA
REGIMENTAL PLAN
BATTALION PLAN



MAP B



THE D-DAY BEACHHEADS

6 JUNE 1944

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 MILES

SCALE
MAP A
NORMANDY, FRANCE

