

General Subjects Section
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1948 - 1949

OPERATIONS OF COMPANY "B", 507TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY (17TH
AIRBORNE DIVISION) IN THE AIRBORNE ASSAULT CROSSING OF
THE RHINE RIVER, 24 MARCH, 1945
(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: PARACHUTE INFANTRY RIFLE
COMPANY SEIZING AN OBJECTIVE BY AIRBORNE ASSAULT

Captain John W. Marr, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE NO 2

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INTRODUCTION

As the Allied armies were racing across Europe on the western front, in the autumn of 1944, the Allied high command was preparing to implement the strategic concept for the defeat of the German Armies on the soil of their homeland. This concept was based on an attempt to isolate the huge Ruhr industrial area. It was believed that if this vast war potential were to be taken from the enemy, thus denying him the vital war materials which it produced, he would not long be able to keep the western allies from overrunning and destroying his military might. (1)

The newly organized First Allied Airborne Army, under the command of Lt. Gen. Louis H. Brereton was charged with the planning of airborne operations east of the Rhine river, which would be designed to support crossing operations by elements of the ground armies over this last remaining barrier to the heart of Germany. The planning undertaken by the First Allied Airborne Army involved one operation north of the Ruhr area in support of a crossing of the Rhine river near Wesel, Germany. It was in this area that the main effort was to be delivered in the attempt to encircle the Ruhr. Studies were made in November, 1944 of the terrain in this area and it was found suitable for crossing operations supported by airborne troops. (2)

The plans for the crossing of the Rhine were interrupted by the German counteroffensive in the Ardennes in December, 1945

renewed. It was necessary to defeat the German armies in the Rhineland for he chose to defend west of the river instead of withdrawing into the homeland. In early February, 1945 an all out offensive was directed at clearing the enemy from the west bank of the Rhine in order that the Ruhr encirclement could be effected. By 22 March, 1945 this objective had been accomplished and the Allied armies were prepared to launch the crossings. (3) It was intended that, while the 12th Army group closed to the Rhine river in the central sector of the front, the 21st Army group would close to the river on the north and launch the main effort toward encirclement of the Ruhr, and the 6th Army group on the south would close up, also on the west bank and perform crossings in a secondary effort. It was directed that the 12th Army group would strengthen the 21st and 6th Army groups by the shifting of combat divisions from its sector to control of the armies making the crossings. The 12th Army group would then hold along the Rhine and perhaps later perform crossings in the event the enemy was forced to withdraw troops from this area in order to strengthen the defenses against crossings on the north and south. These plans were carried out in February and March, 1945 with better results than had been originally expected. By 23 March the 12th Army group had succeeded in establishing a firm bridgehead in the Remagen area and effecting crossings at Oppenheim. Meanwhile the armies on the north and south had closed to the Rhine and the entire western bank was held by the Allies. (4) (See Map "A")

GENERAL SITUATION

Kesselring, the German defense expert, who had been so successful in the delaying of the Allies on the Italian front was placed in command of the defense of the western front prior to the crossing of the Rhine. Germany Army group "H" was responsible for the defenses in the north. Opposing the crossings proposed by the Allies north of the Ruhr was the German First Parachute Army. Four parachute and three infantry divisions were disposed in front of the proposed crossing areas of the Ninth U.S. Army and Second British Army. Approximately fifteen miles northeast of Emmerich the XLVII Panzer Corps was in reserve. This corps was composed of one Panzer and one Panzer Grenadier Division. Though the enemy had been able to bring up fresh troops in this area and had been able, also, to build defenses, the short time available to him for preparation resulted in defenses composed mainly of simple earthworks containing little depth. (5)

The width of the Rhine river in the crossing areas of the 21st Army group was approximately 450 to 500 yards. The course of the river was controlled by a highly developed system of dykes. The main dyke, some sixteen feet wide at the bottom and ten to sixteen feet high, formed a formidable obstacle. As mentioned previously, however, the area was considered to be suitable for crossing operations. (6)

Operation "Plunder" was the code name assigned to the 21st Army group's launching of the main effort in the north. It was to be the largest river crossing in history. Assaulting across the Rhine on a two army front of some thirty-five miles, the

Ruhr from the north. The Ninth U.S. Army would cross between Dinslaken and the Lippe river and the Second British Army would cross at Xanten, Rees, and Wesel. (See Map "A") The XVIII Airborne Corps, from the First Allied Airborne Army, was allocated to 21st Army group for the purpose of landing east of the Rhine in support of the ground crossings. (7)

D-day was set at 24 March, 1945. The general plan for the employment of troops on the Second British Army front was as follows:

The 51st British division of the XXX Corps would cross the Rhine near Rees at 2100 hours, D-1.

The 15th British division of the XII Corps would cross near Xanten at 0200 hours, D-day.

The 1st Commando Brigade, also of the XII Corps, would cross at 2200 hours D-1, near Wesel and assault that town. (Note: The Ninth U.S. Army would bridge the Rhine at Wesel at a later date.) The XVIII Airborne Corps would drop, during daylight on D-day, east of the Rhine and north of Wesel. (8) The airborne phase of this operation was given the code name of "VARSITY". (See Map "B")

A smoke screen fifty miles in length was maintained along the 21st Army group front to prevent the enemy from observing the build-up and concentration of troops and supplies necessary to launch PLUNDER and VARSITY. Artillery was massed to support the operations. Over thirteen hundred guns were available in support of the two-corps crossing of the Second British Army. Counterflak plans were arranged so that artillery would deal

which also had the mission of providing close support to ground troops, would undertake to neutralize guns beyond artillery range which could engage troop carriers and gliders. Both the U.S. and Royal Airforces were to carry out extensive bomber attacks to isolate the battle area, and hinder the enemy's defensive preparations. Air operations in support of the crossings included the establishment and maintenance of air superiority over the assault areas and drop zones of the airborne troops, neutralization of flak, provision of fighter protection for airborne forces, the provision of close support to the assault and airborne forces, and the prevention of enemy movement into and within the battle area. (9)

Special operations of this nature entail control and planning procedures which are not peculiar to normal operations and it should be brought to the attention of the reader that the planning of VARSITY was conducted under instructions from First Allied Airborne Army, under planning control of 21st Army group. The Commanding General of First Allied Airborne Army was charged with the responsibility of making the decision as to whether the airborne phase of the operation would be mounted on schedule or delayed because of adverse weather conditions. British Second Army agreed to defer its assault crossing by as much as five days if weather compelled the postponement of the Airborne assault. Tactical control of the XVIII Airborne Corps was to be maintained by First Allied Airborne Army until the Corps landed east of the Rhine, after which Second British Army would gain tactical control. (10)

XVIII AIRBORNE CORPS PLAN

The mission of XVIII Airborne Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgeway, was: "To disrupt the hostile defense of the Rhine in the Wesel sector by the seizure of key terrain by airborne attack, in order rapidly to deepen the bridgehead to be seized in an assault crossing of the Rhine by British ground forces, and in order to facilitate the further offensive operations of the Second Army." (11) (See Map "B")

It has been mentioned previously that the airborne assault was to take place at 1000 hours, D-day. It is of interest to note that in this case the airborne troops would drop after the assault crossings of the river, by ground forces had taken place. This was the first time such a procedure had been followed. It was desirable that the airborne troops drop after the crossings for three reasons:

1. With airborne forces on the ground prior to the crossings it would be impossible to make full use of the artillery in support of the ground assault.

2. To achieve tactical surprise and to disrupt any plans of the enemy for a strong counterattack against the forces crossing the river.

3. Daylight was desirable in order that the airborne forces might have the full advantage of the supremacy of Allied air and artillery. (12)

The XVIII Airborne Corps had available for the operation the 13th and 17th U.S. Airborne divisions and the 6th British Airborne division. The 13th was excluded from the operation

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It has been mentioned previously that the airborne assault was to take place at 1000 hours, D-day. It is of interest to note that in this case the airborne troops would drop after the assault crossings of the river, by ground forces had taken place. This was the first time such a procedure had been followed. It was desirable that the airborne troops drop after the crossings for three reasons:

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3. Daylight was desirable in order that the airborne forces might have the full advantage of the supremacy of Allied air and artillery. (12)

The XVIII Airborne Corps had available for the operation the 13th and 17th U.S. Airborne divisions and the 6th British Airborne division. The 13th was excluded from the operation

however, due to insufficient aircraft in the theater to transport them. (13) The corps plan then was to employ the two remaining divisions as follows:

The 6th British Airborne division would drop in the north portion of the corp zone and seize the high ground in its area, the town of Hamminkeln, the bridges over the Issel river in its sector, protect the north flank of the corps, and establish contact with the XII British Corps and the 17th Airborne division.

The 17th Airborne division would drop in the south portion of the corps zone and seize the high ground in its area, the bridges over the Issel river in its area, protect the south flank of the corps, and establish contact with the 1st British Commando Brigade, 6th British Airborne division, and the XII British Corps. (See Map "B")

Both divisions were to drop at P-hour, D-day. (Note: P-hour is the time designated for the landing of the first airborne personnel in the operation -- in this case, 1000 hours 24 March.) The Corps had in support for the operation, the 12th British Corps artillery which was augmented by one Artillery Group from the Ninth U.S. Army. A preparation would be fired prior to P-hour to neutralize enemy field and antiaircraft artillery and strong points.

Air support plans for the airborne operations on D-day included missions to be flown by the 83d Group, RAF. At P-30 minutes a fighter bomber attack would be made on all known flak installations in conjunction with artillery fires on the same targets. Continuous fighter bomber and rocket attacks would be

and supplies were delivered. This group would also dispatch four fighter bomber aircraft over the airborne area every fifteen minutes, to attack targets designated by the VHF controllers and marked by colored smoke if they were within the bomb line.

All planning was carried out in accordance with directives from First Allied Airborne Army and under the planning control of the 21st Army group. (14)

17TH AIRBORNE DIVISION PLAN

The 17th Airborne Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. William M. Miley, was engaged in combat along the Our river near Clerveaux, Luxembourg in early February, 1945 when the G-2 and G-3 were ordered to Headquarters, First Allied Airborne Army at Maison La Fitte, near Paris. They were briefed on the general plan for VARSITY, and subsequently the 17th was ordered out of the line and proceeded to Chalons Sur Marne, France. The move to Chalons was completed by 14 February. A training directive was published during the period allotted for the division to rest and prepare the new camp area. Included in the training program for the division were:

1. Training of reinforcements (the division was approximately four thousand officers and men understrength.)
2. Familiarization firing with all weapons to include the new recoilless 57mm and 75mm guns.
3. Tactical glider and parachute drops to assimilate, as nearly as possible, conditions expected in VARSITY.

Other training objectives were outlined in the program but those listed above more directly concern the units of the 507th Para-

The mission of the 17th Airborne division in VARSITY was:
"To drop during daylight on D-day; seize and secure the division area with priority to the high ground east of Diersfordt in the general area (coordinates), and the bridges over the Issel river from (coordinates--inclusive); protect the right (south) flank of the corps; establish contact with the 1st Commando Brigade, the XII British Corps and the 6th British Airborne division. Objectives to be held at all costs. (16)

The division was divided into three echelons in order to carry out the assignment, a parachute, glider, and an overland echelon or land tail. The parachute echelon was composed of the 507th and 513th Parachute Infantry Combat Teams, the glider echelon was composed of the 194th Glider Infantry Combat Team. These two echelons composed the assault echelon of the division. The land tail was composed of division and combat team transportation, division service personnel and combat team supply personnel and attached transportation loaded with additional supply and replacement items. Also in the land tail were attached combat supporting units which could not be delivered to the objective area by air. Priorities were established for the crossing of the Rhine after the bridgehead was secured. (17)

The division plan was based on dropping the 507th Combat team on drop zone "W", the 513th Combat team on drop zone "X", the 194th Combat team on landing zone "S", and Special Units and Division Headquarters on landing zone "N", in that order. (18)
The plan of employment on the ground was as follows:

The 194th Glider Infantry Combat Team would seize crossings of the Issel river in its assigned area, prevent enemy penetrations

into the area, defend the line of the Issel river and Issel canal, hold one battalion in reserve to be committed on division order, and prepare plans for movement to the southeast.

The 513th Parachute Infantry Combat Team would seize the assigned objective and assist by fire the assault crossings of the 15th British division, consolidate in the eastern part of the sector upon junction with assault units. The 3d battalion would prevent enemy crossings of the Issel in the regimental area and occupy the OPLR.

The 507th Parachute Infantry Combat Team would also assist by fire the assault crossings of the 15th British division after seizing its objective, prevent enemy penetrations in the regimental area, and assemble along the eastern edge of the woods upon junction with the assault units. (See Map "B")

It is noteworthy that the glider pilots who were to bring the glider echelon to the objective were also given a mission in the ground role. They were to be organized and equipped to assist in the defense of the division area. They were, however, to be evacuated on division order at the earliest practicable moment to a rendezvous point on the east bank of the Rhine.

Contact points were designated in order that the combat teams could make physical contact at preselected locations with one another and with the British troops making the assault crossings. The division artillery would receive reinforcing fires of three British twenty-five pounder field regiments and one British medium regiment (5.5 inch). These fires were to be delivered from position areas on the west side of the Rhine river. (19)

507TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY COMBAT TEAM PLAN

The 507th Parachute Infantry Combat Team, commanded by Col. Edson D. Raff, received the following mission published in Field Order No. 1, Headquarters 17th Airborne division, 18 March 1945: "Seize objective and assist by fire the assault crossings of 15th British division, clear the regimental portion of the division area, prevent enemy penetrations into the regimental area, assemble along the east edge of the woods upon junction with assault units. Junction points were designated for contact with the 194th Combat Team and the 513th Combat team." (See Map "C")

The 507th Combat Team was composed of the 507th Parachute Infantry, the 464th Parachute Field Artillery battalion attached, and Battery "A" 155th Antiaircraft Artillery battalion attached. The 464th was to land on drop zone "W" initially attached to the 507th, revert to division control on division order and then to direct support of the 507th. Battery "A", 155th was to land by glider on landing zone "N", proceed immediately to local defense positions prepared to repulse local armored attacks, and after reconnaissance, it would move to prearranged positions and become attached to the 507th. (20) (See Maps "B" and "C")

This combat team was divided into three echelons for the operation; the assault echelon, overland tail, and the base or rear echelon. In the assault echelon were the 1st, 2d, and 3d battalions of the 507th, the 464th Parachute FA battalion, and Battery "A", 155th AA battalion (gliderborne). The land tail was composed of regimental and battalion supply vehicles and personnel, company mess vehicles, and medical vehicles. Enough

placed in the land tail. Supplies carried on this transportation included enlisted men and officer rolls, with only the essential clothing and equipment necessary to keep them comfortable in combat, PX supplies, and messing equipment. The land tail would cross the Rhine as soon as practicable after the bridgehead was secured in order that these supplies and equipment might be made available to the combat troops. The base echelon would remain at the Chalons camp and was to be composed of regimental service, administrative, and guard personnel to include both officers and enlisted men. Returnees from the hospital and personnel injured on rehearsal jumps were utilized to the maximum extent in order that combat effectives could be made available for the assault echelon. The company mail orderlies were also left with the base echelon. (21)

Two marshalling areas were designated for the confining and briefing of the 507th prior to the operation. The regimental command group, consisting of approximately fifty officers and men, and the 1st battalion would be confined in a camp near Chartres, France, southwest of Paris and depart for the operation from A-40 airfield nearby. The 2d and 3d battalions would be confined in a camp near Rheims, France and depart from A-79 airfield in that area.

The assault plan of the 507th was based on dropping the regimental command group, 1st battalion, 2d battalion, and 3d battalion on drop zone "W" in that order. The 464th Parachute FA battalion would follow the 3d battalion and drop on the same drop zone. (Note: The Division Commander and division headquarters

(-) was to accompany the 464th. (22) The general missions of the battalions were:

The 1st battalion would, upon landing, assemble in the woods north of the drop zone, seize, secure, and defend the battalion area and be initially in regimental reserve.

The 2d battalion would, upon landing, assemble in the woods west of the drop zone, seize, secure, and defend, the battalion area, assist the crossing of assault elements of the 15th British division and make contact with them as soon as possible.

The 3d battalion would, upon landing, assemble in the woods north of the drop zone, attack northeast through the woods, seize, secure and defend Diersfordt and the high ground to the north and east of Diersfordt.

The 464th Parachute FA battalion, upon landing, would assemble on the eastern end of the drop zone, establish firing positions in that area, be prepared to deliver pre-planned fires, and establish liaison with supported battalions. (See Map "C")

Junction points were designated in order that all battalions could gain and maintain contact and facilitate perimeter protection. Artillery concentrations were planned to support all battalions and known enemy installations, detected from photograph studies, were included in the artillery fire plans.

The 57mm recoilless rifle teams, newly trained under regimental control, were attached to battalions. These weapons were to be dropped in special aerial delivery containers made of wood by Service company personnel. Due to limited ammunition supply

instructions were given for strict conservation in order that the weapons might be used against enemy tanks which were expected to be employed in the Rhine defenses. (23)

A full dress rehearsal was carried out on 16 March, 1945 in which all phases of the regiment's initial objectives in VARSITY were covered. This included movement to marshalling camps, detailed briefing of all personnel, employment of full combat loads to be dropped on person and by container, a flight of the same duration required to transport the combat team to the Rhine objective, dropping and assembly, attack through woods and seizure of limited objectives, and defense of the objectives during the night. This exercise culminated in a critique and as a result, the defects discovered were corrected prior to the actual operation. (24)

1st BATTALION PLAN

The 1st Battalion, commanded by Maj Paul F. Smith, received the following mission for the operation:

To drop on drop zone "W" at P-hour D-day, assemble in the woods north of the drop zone, seize, secure, and defend the assigned battalion area, gain and maintain contact with the 2d battalion on the south and 3d battalion on the north, be initially in regimental reserve, and be prepared to sweep the woods of the enemy to the northeast of the regimental objective area in the regimental zone, with not to exceed one company,

The battalion objective area was triangular in shape and relatively small. Since the mission of the battalion was a reserve mission the size of the area permitted maximum control

The battalion plan of operation was based on the division of the objective area into four parts: designating an area of responsibility for each of the rifle companies on the perimeter and an area inside the perimeter for the Headquarters Company and battalion C.P. (Note: The Parachute infantry battalion during World War II was composed of rifle companies "A", "B", and "C", each composed of three rifle platoons and a company headquarters, a Battalion Headquarters company composed of an 81mm mortar platoon, a light machine gun platoon, and a communications platoon, and a battalion headquarters and staff.) The companies would be dropped on drop zone "W" with Company "B" leading, followed by Company "C", Headquarters Company, and Company "A" in that order.

Company "B" would seize the right portion of the perimeter, and be prepared to sweep the woods to the northeast in that portion of the regimental zone. Company "C" would seize the left portion of the perimeter, and gain and maintain contact with the 3d battalion on the left. Company "A" would seize the rear, or south, portion of the area and be prepared to assist regimental supply teams in clearing supplies and equipment from drop zone "W" prior to the dropping of the automatic resupply of the 17th division. (See Map "C")

Battalion exercises were conducted before and after the rehearsal for VARSITY. Most of the exercises were simulated drops in which the troops were conducted to an open area suitable for a drop zone and upon a prearranged signal they would assemble to a large wooded area nearby. A limited

consolidated and the problem ended. Emphasis was placed on speed in assembly and rapid organization of objectives. (25)

PLANS AND PREPARATIONS OF COMPANY "B"

As was mentioned previously the 17th Airborne division was engaged in combat in Luxembourg when first information concerning VARSITY was given. Upon arrival in the camp area east of Chalons, France, Company "B", like the other units of the 507th Parachute Infantry, was situated in a tent camp composed of pyramidal type tents. The area where the camp was located was approximately six miles east of Chalons. The terrain was ideal for the type of training required for the troops and units prior to the assault east of the Rhine river. The terrain was flat and level and approximately fifty percent wooded. The wooded areas were thick in growth and consisted mostly of planted pine trees ranging from ten to fifty feet high. The open areas were largely cultivated fields or pasture land. The weather was still wet and cold when the company arrived in the area 12 February, 1945 and the open area which contained the camp site was deep with mud. Nevertheless the training of the company for its part in the Rhine crossing was carried out with a great deal of enthusiasm. (26)

The mission assigned to Company "B" was: To drop on Drop zone "W", P-hour, D-day, seize, secure, and defend the company area, gain and maintain contact with Company "A" on the right and "C" on the left, be prepared to sweep the woods to the northeast of the objective, in the regimental zone, on battalion order. (See Map "C")

The company plan of operation was based on seizing the assigned objective as rapidly as possible and digging in along the wooded road with three platoons on line in order to make physical contact with the companies on the right and left. The platoons would be facing generally northeast. The 1st platoon would occupy the left 1/3 of the area, the 3d platoon would occupy the right 1/3 while the 2d platoon would fill the gap thus remaining in the center portion of the objective. The flank platoons were given the responsibility for making contact with the units on their flanks. In the event the company received orders to sweep the woods to the northeast, the 2d platoon would move out in the lead followed on the right and left, slightly to the rear, by the 1st and 3d platoons, in an inverted "V" formation. On the initial objective the company headquarters would be to the rear of the platoons on line. The communications sergeant was instructed to establish sound power communication to the three platoons.

The reader should bear in mind that there was no information given out to the company troops of the impending operation until they were safely within the confines of the marshalling camp from which the operation was launched. Briefing prior to movement to the marshalling camp was performed down to and including company commanders, no lower. There was, however, no doubt in the minds of the men that the unit would be participating in an airborne operation sometime in the near future. (27)

Individual training in scouting, patrolling, map and terrain orientations, and familiarization firing with the

the training time. Squad and platoon training exercises were then performed. Night and day company exercises were carried out as realistically as possible. Assembly and limited attack culminating in defense of the objective were concentrated upon. Emphasis was placed on rapidity of assembly from simulated drop zones, gaining and maintaining contact between platoons and squads, and perimeter security. The training of all units in the regiment was pointed toward situations which it was expected they might encounter in the assault over the Rhine.

Meanwhile reinforcements were being received and assigned to the company. They were initially placed in a composite training battalion under regimental control for a period of ten days. They received training in weapons and small unit problems, climaxed by a three day battalion maneuver, then released to company control for the remainder of the training time. These reinforcements were utilized to form an extra squad in each of the rifle platoons, authorized by TO&E 71, 16 December 1944, and to replace personnel lost as casualties in the Ardennes campaign. The addition of the rifle squad to each platoon posed new problems of reequipping for combat in that the entire loading procedure for personnel and equipment had to be revamped. (28)

The company composition after receipt of the reinforcements was eight officers and one hundred seventy-six enlisted men. Each of the three rifle platoons was composed of three rifle squads and a 60mm mortar squad with a platoon headquarters in which there were two officer platoon leaders.

The rifle squads contained a light machine gun team, an

automatic rifle team, and a rifle grenadier. The company had two 2.36 rocket launcher teams in the company headquarters. These teams were composed of cooks in the company mess section. The fire power of the company was designed to give heavy shock effect on initial landing, however, it could not be expected to maintain this effect over long periods of time due to ammunition limitations. In an airborne drop the ammunition load of the company was limited to that which could be carried on the backs of the troops. No transportation could be taken in with the company on the airborne drop. (29)

On 16 March, 1945 Company "B" participated in the full dress and final rehearsal performed on regimental level. The area selected for the drop was on terrain very similar to that which was to be encountered east of the Rhine. The Marne river, flowing through Chalons, supplied the crossing site and approximately four miles to the east was a large cultivated field which was used for the drop zone. Bordering the field on the east was an expanse of woods suitable for the objective area. The drop took place in mid-afternoon with the units of the entire regiment dropping in the order of employment to be used in the actual operation. Company "B" assembled in rapid order and seized the assigned objective. Objectives were defended until the following morning when the exercise ended with a critique. (30)

Two note worthy developments took place in the rehearsal stage of this operation:

1. The introduction of packboards which would enable the ammunition bearers of crew served weapons to nearly

2. The procedure of dropping all crew served weapons of the company by the use of special made containers permitting the crew members to carry them to the ground on their person.

The packboards were loaded with light machine gun and 60mm mortar ammunition, lashed to aerial delivery containers, also containing ammunition, in such a manner as to ensure that they would be on the top of the container during descent in order not to be smashed upon impact with the ground.

The crew members of the 60mm mortar and 2.36 rocket launcher teams were to jump with the component parts of the weapons in leg packs, first used by the British and adopted by U.S. airborne troops during the war. Light machine gun and automatic rifle teams were to employ special made side packs for carrying these weapons to the ground. The practice of drop-individual weapons on the person had already been adopted as standard procedure. The employment of the special containers and pack boards eliminated the necessity for unrolling the aerial delivery containers which were dropped from para-racks on the belly of the planes. It also shortened the exceedingly vulnerable period of the operation; the period of time required for the troops to secure weapons and ammunition from the container and assemble in order for commanders to regain tactical control. With this procedure, only the ammunition bearers were required to visit the containers and then just long enough to untie or snip the pack boards from the container. The supplies and ammunition within the containers were to be recovered by regimental supply teams and placed in a supply

On 18 March, 1945 the company commanders were assembled in the battalion section of the regimental war tent. Here they received the first and only briefing for the assault over the Rhine, prior to enclosure in the marshalling camp. The remainder of the day and the following morning the men of Company "B" rolled the aerial delivery containers with ammunition loads, loaded them on trucks, and prepared personnel baggage for storage at the base camp and movement on the land tail.

On 19 March, 1945, D-5 aerial delivery containers (four per plane) were loaded and rolled with parachutes attached. Pack boards were securely lashed to the containers which were then loaded on trucks and transported to the marshalling camp to be attached to the planes on D-1. Company "B" received six enlisted reinforcements on this day. Not knowing the qualifications of these men, the company placed them throughout the company in order that they might benefit from the experience of the more seasoned men. Combat loads were distributed to them in the marshalling camp.

Mail deliveries were to cease upon departure from the base camp. The company mail orderly remained with the base echelon to assist in sorting and packaging the incoming mail of the entire regiment for delivery by plane to a forward area, thence by truck to the airhead after the operation was underway. Prior to movement to the marshalling camp all the insignia and patches which might identify the company as an airborne unit were removed from the uniforms of the officers and men. This

Just prior to nightfall on 20 March, D-4, Company "B" was loaded on trucks and transported to the rail head at Chalons, loaded on a train, and proceeded to A-40 air field at Chartres, France. (The remainder of the 1st battalion and the three plane loads of regimental command group personnel also moved at this time to the same destination.) The movement was completed in the late afternoon of 21 March, D-3.

The marshalling camp, located near A-40 airfield, was operated by communication zone personnel. Theirs was the responsibility to provide for transportation, billeting, messing and medical facilities and service. No mail was delivered to the troops in the marshalling camp and outgoing mail was properly censored by unit officers, collected and turned over to Services of Supply personnel. The mail was held until the operation, then released. Ample recreation facilities existed at the camp, particularly in the form of athletic equipment, the latest magazines available, and daily issues of the "Stars and Stripes". PX rations were issued gratis to the officers and men prior to leaving the camp. Recreational facilities are of immeasurable assistance in marshalling camps, particularly if, after briefing, the operation was to be postponed because of adverse weather conditions. (33)

Briefing of officers and key enlisted personnel took place on the evening of arrival at the camp and continued into the late hours of the night. For the main part, briefing was conducted with the aid of sandtables prepared by battalion

In additional to the sandtables, a situation map, operation order, maps, and the latest aerial photographs were used. These briefing aids were enclosed in a war tent inside the camp. Both the camp and the war tent were surrounded by barbed wire. The situation map was kept current as information was disseminated, sometimes hourly. Large scale maps, (1:12,500) were available for detailed study of the terrain.

Schedules were arranged for briefing of the companies, and operated under battalion control. The time allotted to Company "B" was divided so that each platoon would have an equal share of briefing time. The company commander and headquarters personnel were available at all briefings in order to clear up any details of the operation not clear in the mind of every individual. Every man in the company received at least four complete and detailed briefings prior to take-off for the operation. At each briefing there was usually some news of a new enemy installation discovered in the regimental zone of action. In addition to the briefing the company commander conducted spot questioning of individuals throughout the company to measure the briefing coverage. Each man in the company was provided with a 1:25,000 map of the drop zone and objective area. These maps were distributed on D-1. (34)

Between briefings on D-1 the aerial delivery containers, loaded back at Chalons, were reissued to the company. They were taken to the airfield and attached to the para-racks of the planes in which the company was to be carried the following day. Personnel parachutes were also issued, fitted to the individuals, and placed in the proper planes, to remain

overnight. One guard was placed at each C-47 airplane to safeguard the parachutes and equipment during the night.

A jumpmasters-pilots conference was held at the Pathfinder Group, IXth Troop Carrier Command briefing room at A-40. This conference was held on the night of D-1. The conference was held for the purpose of conducting a common orientation and briefing for the pilots and jumpmasters of each and every plane. Company "B" was allotted ten aircraft for the operation. Six of the jumpmasters were officers and the remaining four were NCO's. During the conference last minute information of the enemy was covered. Other matters discussed by the senior ground and troop carrier commanders present were: Stations time, take-off time, approximate time of flight, direction of flight, speed and altitude over the drop zone, and the overall plan of operation on the ground. A considerable number of enemy earthworks and light flak installations were reported by the Pathfinder Group A-2 as having been discovered on D-1 by aerial reconnaissance elements. Most of them were located on drop zone "W" and had not been brought out by previous reconnaissance, indicating that they had been developed during the previous night. (35)

Note: Company "B" was to be honored with the presence of an additional jumper in its ranks for the operation. The gentleman was a British war correspondent for a large metropolitan daily newspaper in London. Conversation with this gentleman revealed that he had participated in an airborne combat drop in another part of the theater. He attended all

day to day. He attended the Jumpmaster-pilot conference on the night of D-1 and appeared to be quite impressed by the reports of new enemy activity and installations in the drop zone area. On the morning of D-day this gentleman, having had his name cancelled from the flight manifest, was bidding good-bye and Godspeed to the troops and finally remarking, "You don't have a ghost of a chance." He was thereafter referred to, by members of Company "B", as "The Poor Man's Ernie Pyle." (36)

The jumpmaster-pilot conference completed the preparations of the company for its part of the operation and the next formation was for morning chow prior to stations time, which was the time that all troops must be at the aircraft; in this case 0600 hours D-day.

Morale was at an exceedingly high level in the company. Every individual knew what part he was to play in the operation. Each individual was confident of his weapon, himself, and his leader. With long hours of training behind them, developing the know-how of being a successful airborne assault unit, esprit was at its height. The combat efficiency of the company was second to none.

THE ENEMY SITUATION

Identification of the enemy units located in the area of the drop zone and the objective was not definitely revealed during the briefings. It was known, however, that elements of the German 84th Infantry division were reported to be in the area. This division was in the LXXXVI Corps of First Parachute

Army. The main concern of the units of the 507th was the emplacements of light flak installations on drop zone "W". The enemy personnel manning the positions were not identified prior to the assault, mainly because of the fact that they were prepared during the night hours. The troops in the objective areas were, for the most part, artillery troops rendering support to the infantry troops defending the river-line. An artillery fire direction center was located after landing by elements of the 3d battalion off the eastern end of the drop zone and east of the Rees-Wesel highway. Several machine gun emplacements were overrun north of the drop zone in the area where the 1st battalion landed. A German Lieutenant was captured on D+7 by company "B". He was captured from elements of the enemy 84th infantry division which were fleeing in rout order back into Germany. Upon interrogation this officer stated, "They kept promising us tank units to support the river defenses, for two weeks they kept telling us that the tank units would join us, when the parachutists came we still did not have them." (37)

ANALYSIS OF THE TERRAIN AND WEATHER
(See Maps "B" thru "D")

The terrain in the objective area rises from flat bottom land of the Old Rhine river to the east through a series of drainage ditches and dykes, rising more sharply into the wooded areas farther east, where, except for mound-like hills some seventy to seventy-five feet in height, it maintains fairly level footing eastward until it drops slowly to the

the area, running northeast and southwest. Drainage in the area consists of numerous small ditches running generally from the ridge line to the Rhine river on the west and south, the Issel river on the east, and the Issel canal on the south near Wesel. There were no towns in the zone of the 507th. There are a number of farm houses generally situated in small clusters with some rather isolated from the rest. Diersfordt castle, with its numerous buildings and spacious grounds, form what appeared to be a nobleman's estate. To the north of the castle lies the Diersfordt forest generally astride the ridge line. This forest is almost entirely coniferous growth, ranging in height from newly planted growths of five feet to older growth of sixty feet.

The road network in the area ranges from small unimproved roads nine feet wide to metaled or paved roads twenty-six feet wide. The main road in the area is the Rees-Wesel highway. Numerous roads and connecting trails run throughout the wooded areas and down to the old river bed of the Rhine. Due to low area, the roads are mostly built on embankments. Many of the roads in the open areas are lined with trees.

The open fields in the area are mostly grazing or pasture-land but there is considerable cultivation of the smaller plots. None of the fields are very large but rather cut up by hedges, walls, ditches, fences and roads.

In general the wooded areas and the mound-like hills therein offered good cover and concealment for both the attacker and the defender. Maneuverability was greatly facilitated by the wide spacing between trees and the almost total lack of underbrush. The road network favored the attacker in that it offered

mechanized units, and forced the enemy to guard many approaches instead of just a few key ones.

The weather in the Rhine valley at this time of the year is rather balmy and quite warm. Light rain comes very frequently, followed by warm sunshine. The nights are cool and the dampness in the ground makes it rather uncomfortable for resting troops.

The terrain and weather had no extremely adverse affect on the mission of the airborne troops. (38)

ACTION ON D-DAY

At 0717 on D-day the first plane load of the 507th took off from A-40 airfield. This plane carried Colonel Raff and members of the regimental command group. The next two planes carried the remainder of the command group which was to be the first troops to drop in this operation. Planes four through thirteen carried company "B", followed by the remaining three companies of the battalion in the next twenty-nine planes. The command ship of company "B" was also used as the command plane of the Battalion Commander. It contained the command group of both the company and the battalion, as well as the regimental military government officer and a corps artillery forward observer. In this situation the battalion commander became the jumpmaster of the plane and the company "B" commander became the 1st person to leave the plane, or the "pushmaster". (39)

The planes leaving A-40 composed the first serial of the 17th Airborne division and after assuming tactical flight formation the serial proceeded to a rendezvous point northwest of

proceeded to the final rendezvous point southeast of Brussels, Belgium. At this point, the air column of the British 6th Airborne division joined the 17th division column, making a sky train that was two hours and eighteen minutes in length. Ninth Airforce fighter planes providing air cover for the troop carriers could be seen, flitting about and over the columns; in anticipation of meeting an enemy plane perhaps.

The leading serial altered direction at a point approximately twenty minutes from the drop zone. This point was a check point, given the code name of "Yalta", at which a precalculated azimuth of flight was assumed to bring the planes over the objective area. (40)

As the planes neared the Rhine river a smoke haze was visible in the direction of the objective area. This haze increased in density toward the east and became cloud like in appearance, in some instances obscuring the ground below. The red signal light was flashed by the pilot just short of the river, alerting the troops to prepare for the exit. The troops performed last minute checks of parachute and equipment. Between the billowing clouds of smoke, caused by burning buildings, fired by artillery preparations, enemy emplacements could be seen on the east bank of the Rhine. Enemy troops could be seen firing up at the planes with rifles and machine guns. Some were firing 20mm and 40mm antiaircraft guns from the emplacements. Others could be seen running in all directions as if to get away from the shower of parachutists that would soon be descending. The flak was light as the planes crossed the

Approximately four minutes after the red signal was given in the planes, the green signal was turned on, whereupon the troops began their exit at 0950 hours. A small amount of small arms fire came up at the troops as they descended. This fire did not cause any casualties in Company "B".

The Company "B" Commander, having been the last jumper from the plane, dropped approximately two hundred yards from a wooded area on the east of the landing area. There were only a few parachutists in the immediate area since the mass of them had touched ground approximately four hundred yards to the west, back along the direction of flight. He proceeded westward in an effort to locate members of the company. Three men who had dropped from his plane were located immediately. Some of the aerial delivery containers discovered along the line of flight were minus the packboards, indicating that the ammunition bearers of the company had secured their loads. The fields in the drop area were exceedingly small and were lined with high hedges or rows of thick trees, reducing observation to the confines of fields that were only fifty to seventy-five yards square. Upon observing a few men heading for the wooded area to the east the company commander and the three men proceeded to the woods in anticipation that the rest of the company would be assembling there. After reaching the woods it was discovered that most of the 1st platoon and a few men of the company headquarters had assembled in the woods. The 2d and 3d platoons were no where in sight. Approximately two platoons of company "C", elements of the mortar, light machine gun, and communications platoon of battalion headquarters company were also (42)

assembled in the woods. The battalion executive officer, adjutant, regimental commander, and regimental command group were assembled nearby. There was no familiar landmark in the area of the drop or assembly, although the woods did bear some likeness to those bordering drop zone "W".

Local security was posted about the assembly area and an attempt was made by the officers in the group to locate the position by map orientation. The discussion was interrupted by two men who had been placed as security on the north of the assembly area. The men reported that they had observed some artillery pieces to the north of the heavy woods in a field of short growth pines approximately three hundred yards distant. (See Map "D") The regimental commander issued orders to group for an attack on the gun positions. The commander of company "C" was directed to fan his troops out to the east with direction of attack to the north. The commander of battalion headquarters company was directed to fan his troops out to the western edge of the woods with direction of attack to the north. The commander of company "B" was directed to attack with his troops between and abreast of the other two companies.

(43)

The attack was launched on the enemy artillery positions in short order. There were five 150mm howitzers in the position area and they were unmanned. The wire communications were still intact and stacks of ammunition still remained at the gun sites. It was apparent that they had been vacated only a short time previously. The howitzers were pointed in the direction of the river crossings, giving evidence that they had

been fired in support of troops defending the river line. These guns were destroyed by thermite grenades carried by personnel of battalion headquarters company. Not all of the enemy artillerymen had left the area for some of them were hiding in the short, thick pine growth in which the guns were situated. These scattered enemy were rounded up as the composite force of the 1st battalion moved northward. Other enemy, fleeing from the river crossing elements were added to the prisoners taken in the artillery position areas.

The force moved approximately eight hundred yards when it was discovered that contact with the regimental command group had been broken. (Note: Having oriented themselves as to the true location of the assembly area, the command group, battalion executive officer and adjutant had proceeded southward to the objective area.) The force was meeting no real resistance in its attack, therefore it was halted and reorganized. The three company commanders posted security and went into a discussion as to the location of the force. It was decided that it was of the utmost importance that they attempt to reach the original objective without delay and locate the battalion commander in order that he might know what troops he had available for further action. The commanders made a hasty map orientation and discovered that they were located adjacent to the Rees-Wesel highway approximately thirty-three hundred yards northwest of drop zone "W" and that they had been dropped twenty-five hundred yards north and two-thousand yards west of it.

(44) (See Map "D")

The force had stopped on a low ridge line over looking

the force did an about face to proceed to the objective, two enemy soldiers came riding westward out of a trail in the dense woods east of the highway on bicycles. (See Map "D") The Germans turned north on the highway and were pedaling along unaware of the presence of the parachutists who were momentarily stupefied by their sudden appearance. As if on signal, all flat trajectory weapons in the force opened fire on the approaching Germans. Light machine guns, automatic rifles, and individual arms of every man sent forward a hail of fire. The two enemy quickly collapsed their bicycles and rolled to the safety of a ditch on the east side of the highway. Not one round from the volley had found its target. A scout from company "C" who had been sent forward to the woods on the left of the highway dashed forward to within seventy-five yards of the enemy and fired one round which struck one of them in the shoulder. The other one held a white handkerchief aloft and all fire was ceased. There were many red faces among the members of the force when it was learned that the two Germans were members of the Volksturm or people's army and that they were fifty-seven and sixty years of age. (45)

To give a complete picture of the actions of company "B" the performance of the remainder of the company must^{be} revealed. It is to be kept in mind that only the company commander, part of the company headquarters, and the 1st platoon assembled for the action previously described. The executive officer who jumped from the last plane of the company, assembled the other part of the headquarters and the 2d and 3d platoons. The first platoon leader also assembled with this group. This

portion of the company had assembled farther to the south under direction of the battalion commander, who had been able to assemble company "A" and the remainder of headquarters and company "C" also. This force quickly oriented itself and proceeded southward toward the battalion objective. (See Map "D")

Strong enemy resistance was encountered as the force reached Diersfordt. The forces of company "B" were deployed along the high wooded ground along the north side of the road running from Diersfordt to the Rees-Wesel highway, in command of the executive officer, 1st Lt Willis McCarty. They were ordered to hold the position and protect the left flank of company "A" which was committed to the attack of the Diersfordt castle immediately. The company was to be prepared to attack the castle and its outbuildings from the east if the attack by Company "A" bogged down. (See Map "D")

The attack of this portion of the battalion, in conjunction with the attack of the 3d battalion from the south which started a short time later, netted five enemy tanks. Two of these tanks were knocked out by 57mm recoilless rifles attached to 1st battalion from regiment. (Note: This section consisted of three guns. The crews of these guns were composed of men from the rifle companies of the 1st battalion. If attachment of the guns were made down to companies, each company would get the gun which was manned by its own personnel. Successful employment of the guns in the fight for Diersfordt bore out earlier belief that it would greatly increase the antitank protection of the regiment. (46)

As the portion of Company "B" commanded by Lt. McCarty was holding its position, the composite force to the north, having met with no further resistance, proceeded southward with the some forty prisoners it had taken. The force arrived in the Diersfordt area at 1200 hours to find the remainder of the battalion engaged in a raging fire fight attempting to reduce the enemy stronghold in the castle area. The prisoners were turned over to battalion control and the companies consolidated their forces. (47)

The company "B" commander located his radio operator upon joining up with the remainder of the company and reported in to the battalion commander. He was instructed to maintain the position he had outlined to Lt. McCarty previously. The battalion commander also reiterated that the company would be prepared to attack the castle from the east. (Note: The 3d battalion which had landed on the proper drop zone, was fighting in the outskirts of the Diersfordt area at this time but the enemy was resisting bitterly against this two-pronged attack.) (48)

As reorganization of the company position was being effected an enemy Mark IV tank broke away from the attack being waged on the castle and came roaring down the Diersfordt road in the direction of the Rees-Wesel highway. (See Map "D") The men of the 2d and 3d platoons immediately engaged the tank with small arms fire as it approached the positions. The company had no 57mm recoilless rifle since they were being employed under battalion control in the fight for the castle.

The 2.36 rocket launcher team was located approximately seventy-five yards north of the road in the midst of tall pine trees. The tank was traveling at top speed and as it neared the company position it opened fire into the woods with its primary gun. The rocket launcher team darted forward and fired one round at the tank. This round struck an intervening tree; the results were two trees damaged, one by the tank and one by the rocket launcher. The tank continued toward the highway, unhindered by the small arms fire bouncing off its armor plate. It fired three more rounds into the trees over the position, turned north on the highway and sped out of sight. The men brushed off the pine branches and a hasty survey revealed that no casualties had resulted from the foray. The rocket launcher team was placed in position along the Diersfordt road to prevent a recurrence of this incident. (49) The reorganization of the position was completed by placing the three platoons on line facing Diersfordt. The 1st platoon was astride the Diersfordt road and the 2d and 3d platoons extended northward into the woods on the higher ground.

Casualties, weapons, and ammunition were checked in order that the strength and efficiency of the company could be determined and reported. One man was killed by enemy fire on the drop zone, fourteen men had been either wounded by enemy fire on the drop zone or injured on the drop, and eleven men were missing. (The missing men had assembled with other units of the regiment and they found their way back to the company throughout the remainder of the day. All crew served weapons

except for one rocket launcher and one light machine gun were in position. The light machine gun was jumped by one of the missing men and the rocket launcher had been jumped by one of the men who were wounded. No officer casualties occurred and the strength of the company was: six officers and one hundred-fifty men. (50)

At 1330 hours the battalion commander ordered company "B" to proceed to the original objective. (Note: The regimental commander having noted the progress of the 3d battalion in the fight for the castle ordered the 1st battalion minus company "A" to proceed to the original objective.) The company moved out in column of platoons, 1st platoon leading, followed by the company headquarters, 3d platoon, and 2d platoon in that order. The company moved through the woods to its assigned area without intervention from the enemy. The position was organized in the manner planned prior to the operation. The position was occupied at 1400 hours. Slit trenches were dug by all men and contact was established with company "C" on the left. After about an hour had elapsed company "A" had occupied its position and contact was established with that company on the right making the battalion perimeter complete. (51) (See Map "D")

Shortly after the perimeter was established two hundred-seventy tons of supplies, representing one day of supply for the entire 17th division, were dropped over drop zone "W". This pre-planned, automatic resupply was dropped from B-24 bombers. They flew at near tree top level and many of the

company "B" area. Details were formed from each of the platoons to gather in the salvageable supplies. The supplies were stacked in a central location and regimental supply details were notified of the location. (52)

The initial mission of company "B" was completed by 1430 hours, D-day. The objective was organized despite the adversities of being dropped far off the designated drop zone and being divided on the assembly. These adversities did not seriously affect the functioning of the company since it was able to carry out intermediate tasks with a nominal degree of success. Four and one-half hours after landing the company was on the assigned objective and still strong enough in numbers and in firepower to be an effective fighting unit. Had the company landed on the proper drop zone, there is little doubt that the objective could have been taken in a much shorter time.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing this operation it should be mentioned that the mission given the company was a suitable mission. It was clearly defined and was simple in detail. The company possessed sufficient firepower to overcome the initial resistance that was expected on the drop zone. The objective was situated virtually in the drop area so that there was no extended march to reach it. This is an important consideration since the company could not bring any transportation vehicles in by air to carry the heavy ammunition loads. Some of the criticisms that may be made of the operation are:

1. The training phase of the operation was carried out on a sound foundation. The reinforcements received training as a group and saved much training time for the units since it was conducted directly under regimental control. Other men in the companies did not have to undergo training which they had already received. The training after receipt of the reinforcements was streamlined to cover those points which were necessary to stress the importance of the initial organization of objectives upon landing. The success that company "B" enjoyed, even though dropped in the wrong area, can be attributed to the stressing of such points as, rapid assembly, speed in reaching the objective, and, above all, every man should, if not familiar with the area of drop, assemble with the first group he contacts in order that effective fighting groups may be organized.

2. The full dress rehearsal for the operation was of immeasurable value to the platoon leaders and squad leaders of the company. This rehearsal was carried out with full combat loads and with the same type missions as given to the company in the actual operation. The rehearsal permitted unit leaders to observe their men in action under better than normal circumstances. It was during this stage that the men put everything they had into the exercise, knowing that the next jump would be for record. Under this condition the real deficiencies of both leaders and the individual could be brought to light and corrected. Much coordination was developed on higher echelons also.

3. The briefing of the company in the marshalling camp was conducted on platoon, squad, and even individual level. The various assignments were covered again and again in detail in order that each unit and individual soldier would know the exact part he was to play in the company mission. Latest coverage of enemy installations and activities was provided through large scale aerial photograph interpretations which were obtained from time to time for study. Identifying landmarks were studied for orientation on the objective after dropping. The issue of 1:25,000 maps to each man in the company was a wise decision for they were used to great advantage by some isolated members of the company to find their way to the company objective. This map sheet covered the drop zone and the objective area.

4. The decision to employ the packboard for carrying ammunition and the special made containers for dropping the crew served weapons proved to be a wise one. This was evidenced by the fact that all of the company weapons were recovered after landing except those of the wounded and missing men. This procedure also permitted rapid employment of the weapons in the area of drop. Under the old procedure, that of dropping the weapons in aerial delivery containers, the troops might become isolated from the weapons containers due to intense enemy fire on the drop zone which they could not return due to the loss of the weapons. The packboard gave the ammunition bearers a far greater carrying capacity without the resulting additional fatigue, especially for short carries. This added greatly to the staying power of the company in the initial

5. The procedure of placing the company "B" commander in the "pushmaster" or rearmost position in the plane was detrimental to the assembly and subsequent action to gain the objective. This was especially apparent when the company landed on unbriefed terrain. It placed the company commander far to the east of the mass of dropping troops. The area afforded little observation from the ground in any direction therefore control by the commander was at an absolute minimum. Had he been permitted to take position near the head of the stick for the exit he would have landed in the center of mass of dropping troops. By the employment of platoon officers, who did jump at the head of their sticks, to cover segments of the drop zone for the purpose of gathering in all "B" company men and reporting with them to a given point, the company commander would have stood a far better chance of assembling the entire company.

6. The hasty decision of the regimental commander to send the three company commanders of the 1st battalion into the attack to the north to capture unmanned enemy artillery guns was not sound. These commanders were delayed in reporting in to the battalion commander thus causing the battalion to fight dividedly for an unnecessary amount of time. Had the enemy artillery position been properly appraised it would have been found that one platoon could have accomplished the mission of capturing it. The battalion commander was not notified of this proceeding and did not know where the three company commanders were until they reported in to him in the Diersfordt area.

7. The fire delivered on the two enemy soldiers who were

to the entire force. These two enemy could well have been the point for an enemy company. The wooded area from which they rode was very dense and the enemy would then have had the advantage of cover and concealment in an attack on the force. Nothing was gained by firing spontaneously and forcing the two Germans to cover for they could have been taken at any time nearer to the position without exposing the force to a possible follow-up lurking in the woods.

8. There is little excuse for the actions of the rocket launcher team when the tank broke away from Diersfordt and came virtually through the company position. The second platoon leader, to which the team had been attached, may be criticized for his neglect in placing the team in the most dangerous approach to the company position. There was no conceivable reason for the team to be located deep in the woods where little threat from armor existed. The two men who were manning the launcher deserve much credit however for exposing themselves to the fire of the tank in order to fire in an attempt to knock it out.

9. The enemy can be criticized to some extent for leaving his artillery positions still in operating condition with a supply of ammunition stacked at the guns. With proper observation the artillerymen could have placed fire on the dropping areas of the troops with the 150mm howitzers. Such fire might have delayed organization of the parachutists into effective fighting for some time. Also there was the possibility of the airborne troops turning the guns to the east

10. Probably the greatest criticism of the entire operation concerns the troop carrier group which flew the 1st battalion to the wrong drop area. This group was the Pathfinder Group of the IXth Troop Carrier Command and was considered by the airborne troops to be composed of the best pilots in the troop carrier command. This group was the leading serial in the drop therefore every parachutist was confident that he would land in the area about which he had been briefed. This feeling coupled with the fact that there were certain familiarities about the terrain in the area of actual drop caused the airborne troops considerable hesitation in initiating action to orient themselves as to the true location of their positions. Pathfinder teams which were organic to the regiment at this time could have preceded the assault elements by a few minutes and probably have brought the planes over the proper drop zone.

LESSONS

1. Small unit training should be prescribed for airborne units in preparation for an airborne assault mission. The small units should be trained to operate alone if the necessity should arise for them to do so.

2. Full scale rehearsals should be carried out by airborne units prior to assault operations, time and weather permitting.

3. Airborne unit commanders, particularly of battalions and companies should be so situated in the plane that they

4. Automatic weapons of airborne units should be dropped attached to members of the crews, whenever possible, in order that immediate employment on the drop zone can be ensured.

5. No commander should order units of a subordinate command to carry out secondary missions without notifying the subordinate commander as rapidly as possible and without weighing the results to be gained from the secondary missions.

6. Small forces operating alone on unknown terrain should be alert for a follow-up force when engaging a small number of enemy appearing suddenly to their view.

7. The 57mm recoilless rifle is an effective antitank weapon in the hands of a well trained crew.

8. Pathfinder teams should precede airborne units to the assault areas to better ensure landing of the units on the proper drop zone.

9. Detailed briefing of airborne units must be performed in such a manner that each individual knows as much about the operation as possible prior to the assault.