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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 82D AIRBORNE DIVISION
ARTILLERY (82D AIRBORNE DIVISION) IN THE
AIRBORNE LANDINGS NEAR ST MERE EGLISE, FRANCE
6 - 8 JUNE 1944
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Division Artillery
Communications Officer)

Type of operation described: GLIDER ARTILLERY
IN LANDINGS, ASSEMBLY, AND INITIAL SUPPORT

Captain Tony J. Raibl, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO.II

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 82D AIRBORNE DIVISION
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 82d Airborne Division Artillery, 82d Airborne Division, in the airborne phase of the Battle of Normandy, France, 6-8 June 1944.

In order to orient the reader it is necessary to discuss briefly the military and political events which led up to the cross-Channel invasion of the mainland.

In June of 1940, the Nazis had soundly defeated the British and French at Dunkirk, and could look across from Calais at the white cliffs of Dover. This was to be their exultant privilege for four years. These four years, however, had wrought a considerable change in their situation. Whereas in 1940 they had measured the short distance across the channel as a goal for further conquest, they now measured the nearness of the Allied might, poised for an invasion, which, with the exception of when and where, was not concealed from them. (1)

The fortunes of war had forced the Germans to assume a defensive attitude on the Russian front. In Italy they were also on the defensive. But, in their eyes, the Russian Army was still the greatest threat, consequently, their strategy was based upon containing and defeating the cross-Channel invasion forces, and then concentrating on the defeat of Russia. (2)

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

For accomplishing the total defeat of Germany, U. S. strategy conceived, as early as 1942, a plan for the cross-Channel invasion of the European mainland, using the British Isles as a base. (3) British Prime Minister Winston Churchill opposed this plan from the time of its inception, but at the Teheran Conference in December 1943, it was decided that the Overlord Plan, which was the code name for the cross-Channel invasion, would be mounted and launched in May or June of 1944, with General Dwight D. Eisenhower as Supreme Commander of allied sea, air, and land. (4)

Strategically, the mounting of Overlord was made feasible by two occurrences of major importance. First, the Battle of the Atlantic had been won by the Allies. American ships now had uninterrupted passage anywhere in the Atlantic. Secondly, the strategic bombing of Germany's war industries had been very effective, and the once mighty Luftwaffe had been appreciably subdued. (5)

The first step in the Overlord Plan was to land on the Normandy coast and establish a base for further operations. (6)

NORMANDY

Normandy, a province of old France, had had a turbulent history for some 1400 years from the time it was conquered by Clovis through the Hundred Years' War and its conquest by the French in 1450. (7) The Normans of 1944 were known to be politically reactionary, agricultural, and antagonistic to strong authority. Collaborationists had made very little headway in this province. (8)

The general topography of the major portion of Normandy, the Cherbourg Peninsula (synonymously referred to as the Cotentin

(3) A-2, p. 138; (4) A-2, p. 194, 198, 206; (5) A-1, p. 3;
(6) A-2, p. 228; (7) A-3, p. 493; (8) A-5, p. 2.

Not shown on map

Peninsula), is made up of high ground backing the city of Cherbourg, and extending generally both east and west. The south half of Cotentin, which is of particular interest for the purpose of this narrative, is generally low and drained by the Douve River, and its principal tributary, the Merderet, into the sea at Carentan. The entire valley of the Douve is characterized by broad alluvial areas subject to inundation. The higher ground is generally in mixed agriculture, pasturage, and small orchards. The fields are small. Even the larger ones are hardly more than 150 by 350 yards. All fields are bordered by very thick hedges, trees, and earth embankments. The road network is generally excellent. As to precipitation, there is no wet or dry season, but due to the nature of the soil, there is little evaporation; consequently, the ground is usually soaked. Winds are not severe in the summer but vary in direction. Average temperature for the period May-July is approximately 60 degrees. Cloud and fog conditions, which are of particular interest to airborne forces, are generally unfavorable for night operations in that the cloud level at night is generally very low, and land fog conditions frequently limit visibility to almost zero. (9)

THE ENEMY SITUATION

German civilian and army morale by June of 1944 was grim, determined, and high. This was a morale born of desperation, and contributing thereto were several factors. Allied air attack had failed to break home morale, the defense in Italy was holding the Allied advance to a snail's pace, and the German Army had just escaped from complete defeat at Stalingrad. (10) Hitler also let it be known through all propaganda outlets that secret weapons

(9) A-5, p.3-5; (10) A-5, p.3.

which would wreck havoc on the enemy were forthcoming. (11)

The enemy had approximately 320 divisions of all kinds at this time, many of which were greatly understrength and ill equipped. The German Air Force was estimated at 5300 planes of all types. (12) Of the Army divisions, 53 were estimated to be in the West, and were known to be under the very capable command of Field Marshal Rommel. (13) The planes presumably available to repel invasion numbered 2900. (14)

There were three enemy divisions on the Cotentin Peninsula which were of immediate concern to the 82d Airborne Division, and VII Corps in general. (Map A) The German 243d and 709th Infantry Divisions, both static*, were stationed strategically over the length and breadth of the peninsula. The 91st Luftlande (Airborne) Division made its appearance in St Sauveur Le Vicomte and vicinity in the latter part of May, thereby causing a change in plans for the 82d Airborne Division. (15)

The status of supply, training, and combat efficiency of the German divisions was in varying degrees from poor in the static divisions to good in the 91st. The static divisions were understrength, short on equipment, inexperienced as units, and contained large numbers of Austrians, Bavarians, Poles, and Russians. Their morale was not high, nor was their physical condition good, but as long as they were occupying their prepared positions, they were expected to fight well, which they did. The 91st Division was mobile, had armor, and the 6th Parachute Regiment attached, and constituted a formidable foe. (16)

Anti-airborne defenses in the intended areas of airborne operations, as far as passive measures were concerned, were in

*Unable to move with their organic transportation.

(11) Personal knowledge; (12) A-1, p.5-6; (13) A-6, p. 1;
(14) A-5, p. 5-6; (15) A-4, p. 6-7; (16) A-6, p. 3-4.

various stages of completion, and were installed in varying degrees of thoroughness, apparently dictated by the efficiency and thoroughness of the local commander. The principal obstacle was "Rommel-spargel". Literally translated this is Rommel-asparagus, and consisted of poles in the possible drop and landing zones, wired together and connected to mines and various booby-traps. The latter refinement, in most instances, however, had not been added. (17) In addition there were prepared mine fields, but in most instances the mines were not armed. It was our custom to study the daily photographs for live stock in pasturage. By this we were able to ascertain which areas contained armed demolitions. The inundation of the river bottoms formed the most effective obstacle. (18)

As an active means of anti-airborne defense, the enemy had established static warning posts, organized anti-airborne patrols, and engaged in frequent anti-airborne training exercises. (19) Mobile striking forces were organized and artillery supporting fires were planned, but it was to be brought out by later events that the Infantry-Artillery action was not well coordinated. (20)

THE ALLIED PLAN

The ground forces to be employed formed the 21st Army Group under the operational command of British General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery. (21) The mission of the 21st Army Group was to execute the first phase of the Overlord Plan, or "Operation Neptune", as this phase was known. (22) The lodgement area selected on the Continent was in the Caen-Cotentin Peninsula area. (Map B) In accordance with the mission, the British Second Army, under the command of General Sir Miles C. Dempsey, would attack on the

(17) A-7, p. 48-49; (18) Personal knowledge; (19) A-7, p. 51;
(20) A-6, p. 3; A-7, p. 66; (21) A-2, p. 223; (22) A-4, p.2(foot-note)

left, establish a bridgehead, and conduct a holding action, while the First U. S. Army, commanded by Lieutenant General (now General) Omar N. Bradley, would attack on the right and capture Cherbourg. (23)

In the First U. S. Army zone of action, V Corps, under the command of Major General Leonard Gerow, would attack on the left; and VII Corps, commanded by Major General J. Lawton Collins, would attack on the right. The VII Corps order, in effect, was to land on its zone and capture Cherbourg with a minimum of delay. General Collins employed his seaborne troops in a formation of divisions in column, with the 4th Infantry Division (Reinforced) leading the assault. The 4th was to be followed in order by the 90th and 9th Infantry Divisions. (24) (Map B)

The 101st and 82d Airborne Divisions, directly under First Army control, were to be employed in the zone of VII Corps, and would pass to VII Corps control upon landing. Accordingly, the 101st Airborne Division, commanded by Major General Maxwell D. Taylor, was given the mission to land by parachute and glider between St Mere Eglise and Carentan, and assist the 4th Infantry Division in landing. The 82d Airborne Division, commanded by Major General (now Lieutenant General) Matthew B. Ridgeway, was assigned the mission to land by parachute and glider astride the Merderet River and block enemy reserves from the West. (25)
(Map B)

THE DIVISION SITUATION

In the spring of 1944, the 82d Airborne Division less the 504th Regimental Combat Team which was operating in Italy, was stationed in the English midlands north of London. The major units organic to the division were the 325th Glider and 505th

(23) A-8, p. 26; (24) A-4, p. 10; (25) A-4, p. 9.

Parachute Infantry Regiments, and Division Artillery consisting of one parachute and two glider field artillery battalions. Additional infantry for the Normandy operation was forthcoming in the attachment of the 2d Parachute Brigade, which consisted of the 507th and 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments, thereby giving General Ridgway a quadrilateral division. (26)

Our two previous airborne operations were of immeasurable help in perfecting our technique, but unfortunately, we had never combat landed gliders before. Also, since this was to be a joint operation in that British aircraft and facilities would be used, of immediate concern was the standardizing of loading manifests, methods of marshalling and loading, alert and jump signals, and the many other details peculiar to an airborne operation. The glider troops had the larger problem. All glider training had been based upon the use of the CG-4 glider. This craft, with a maximum pay load of 3,750 pounds, had generally been mastered as to computation of loads, loading, lashing, and unloading. Many of the officers and non-commissioned officers had even had the opportunity to co-pilot this craft, and had gained confidence thereby. But now the gliderists were introduced to the British Horsa glider, which, it was learned, would be the principal glider used in the forthcoming operation. (27)

The Horsa carried a payload of nearly twice that of the CG-4, or 6,900 pounds. It was of plywood construction, and stood on a tricycle landing gear some four feet off the ground. Computation of loads to properly place the center of gravity was difficult, elaborate equipment such as metal ramps and clamps were required to load heavy items of equipment into its side door and secure same. This lashing equipment in itself weighed 300 pounds.

(26) A-9, p. 1; (27) Personal experience.

The time required for unloading was unduly long. To facilitate unloading, numerous experiments were conducted, the most promising of which was the placing of powder charges in the tail section, with the view of blowing off the tail upon landing and seeking egress through the rear. Some troops might have actually used this method, but most abandoned it as being too dangerous to both men and equipment. Of gravest concern to the gliderists was the fact that our pilots had had very little experience in flying this craft, and also that the nose wheel frequently broke through the floor upon landing, and ripped its way through the entire craft. (28)

Training through April and May was at a terrific pace. Much attention was given to the balancing of loads to provide for proper distribution of weapons to provide security for each load. Recognition signals were worked out. Assembly aids and various plans for assembly were worked out and rehearsed, and toward the latter part of May the division was ready. (29)

The 52d and 53d Troop Carrier Wings of IX Troop Carrier Command were designated to furnish our transportation. The number of aircraft to be utilized by the 82d Airborne Division alone included 378 C-47's to take in the parachute lift on the night of 5-6 June, 240 Horsa and 188 CG-4 gliders to land on D day and D plus 1 (including the necessary C-47's to single tow these gliders) and the additional use of 191 C-47's for resupply on D plus 1. (30)

The air echelon of the Division was organized into two forces: Force "A" to consist of the parachutists; Force "B", the gliderists. The land-tail element was known as Force "C". (31)

(28) Personal experience; (29) A-7, p.45; (30) A-9, Annex 3;
(31) A-10, p. 1-3.

The Troop Carrier plan was to fly Force "A" and one serial* of Force "B" into Normandy by the western route; that is, to fly around the Cherbourg Peninsula and approach from the west, and the rest of Force "B", the eastern route, or overhead of the seaborne forces. (32) (Map C)

On 27 May, when Force "C" was already enroute to its marshalling areas, the 82d Airborne Division received its mission to land by parachute and glider, before and after dawn of D day, astride the Merderet River, capture St Mere Eglise, destroy the Douve River crossings at Beuzeville La Bastille and Etienville, protect the northwest flank of the Corps, and be prepared to advance to the west on Corps order. The mission of the Division Artillery was to support the Division, and be prepared to deliver fires beyond the northwest boundary of the Division zone. (33) Accordingly, final drop and landing zones were selected and assigned, areas of responsibility established, and tentative artillery position areas designated. (Map D)

THE DIVISION ARTILLERY SITUATION

Brigadier General (now Major General) Maxwell D. Taylor left the Division Artillery on 21 ^FFebruary to assume command of the 101st Airborne Division, thereby leaving the command to the Executive Officer, Colonel Francis A. March, who is frequently referred to as the dean of airborne artillerymen. (34)

The artillery, discounting the battalion with the 504th Parachute Infantry in Italy, now consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, two glider battalions, the 319th armed with twelve 75 mm pack howitzers, the 320th armed with twelve 105 mm M3 howitzers, and the 456th Parachute Field Artillery

*50 gliders

(32) A-11; (33) A-10, p. 1; (34) A-12.

Battalion armed as the 319th. All battalions were organized into one Headquarters Battery and three firing batteries of four howitzers each. (35)

A most welcome addition to the artillery family at this time was a replacement packet of officers ^{which} which were sorely needed. In addition to filling vacancies the artillery was now able to provide forward observer parties down to lettered infantry company level, which was not authorized by T/O but had been dictated by experience, inasmuch as ninety-five percent of our firing had been done by forward observer methods. (36)

The artillery shared the same training problems as the Division. The 456th was busy reorganizing because only the equivalent of one battery of Sicilian veterans was now with us, The 319th and 320th concentrated on the Horsa glider. This meant a complete recomputation and readjustment of unit loads. The plans which had gradually been perfected over the past two years were no longer applicable because of the increased capacity and other peculiarities of the Horsa. Also, until the glider assignments were actually made, no unit knew what proportion of Horsas to CG-4's it would have for the operation; consequently all plans had to be extremely flexible. By May, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery alone had twenty-four complete loading plans on paper to fit itself into almost any combination of planes and gliders. (37)

Artillery ranges were nonexistent in England. There were some ranges in Wales, but the demand was so great that Division Artillery was allotted only a very few days in which to engage

(35) (36) (37) Personal knowledge.

in service practice. This was totally inadequate and must certainly have left a question in the Artillery Commander's mind as to the ability of his officers to conduct fire, and the ability of the men to service the pieces. By improvising and using all available training aids, this was overcome to the best of everyone's ability. Considerable time was spent on training for night assembly by using the compass, flashlights, pyrotechnics, and radios. Unfortunately, glider landings after darkness were considered too dangerous for actual rehearsal, consequently, that phase of the training was simulated by using trucks. (38)

THE ARTILLERY PLAN OF ACTION

The artillery plan was influenced by our experience in Sicily. There, the parachute artillery had been committed with the infantry as integral parts of Regimental Combat Teams. (39) Due to the scattered drop patterns, however, and the limited mobility of the artillery once it reached the ground, it possibly did more to hamper the infantry than to help it. In addition, because of its heavy equipment, artillery requires considerably more aircraft than infantry. (40) This is always a limiting factor in its employment. It was believed that since there was insufficient aircraft to accommodate both the parachute and glider artillery, a commitment of the glider artillery would provide for better initial ground organization, mobility, and employment in mass; consequently, the glider battalions were designated. In the parachute echelon, or Force "A", the artillery was limited largely to reconnaissance, liaison, and forward observer parties. The plan was to commit Headquarters and Headquarters Battery and the two glider battalions in Force "B"

(38) Personal knowledge; (39) A-14, p. 5-6; (40) A-15.

*more details
needed on
services etc*

under Division Artillery control, and bring the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion in with the land-tail element, or Force "C". Therefore, this battalion is eliminated from the airborne phase of the operation. (41)

The artillery was initially limited to two planes in Force "A", but Colonel William Ekman, commanding the 505th Parachute Infantry, made available two planes from his lift to accommodate two howitzer sections for initial employment in an anti-tank role at the important communication center of St Mere Eglise. This mission was assigned to two sections from the 456th, who were to drop on DZ "O"* with the 3d Battalion of the 505th, and support that battalion in the vicinity of St Mere Eglise. (42)

The two planes assigned to the artillery were to drop the reconnaissance parties on DZ "N" with the 508th Parachute Infantry. Their mission was to become acquainted with the situation, reconnoiter crossings over the Merderet River, establish a CP, select reference points, and establish communications with the pre-selected battalion position areas. (43)

This completed the artillery loads in Force "A", with the exception of liaison and forward observer personnel mixed in with the infantry of all three parachute regiments.

In the first glider serial of Force "B", which was to fly the western route and make a pre-dawn D day landing on DZ "O" the artillery was allotted one CG-4. This was to be occupied by Colonel March and reconnaissance and survey personnel from the two glider battalions. (44)

*more
details
needed,*

Other elements of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery plus the 319th and 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalions were

*Drop zone for landing parachutists.

(41) A-10, p. 1-2; (42) (43) A-13; (44) A-16.

to commence their landings at 2300 hours D day on LZ "W"* , and proceed to their predesignated position areas. (Map D) The 319th upon landing was to be in direct support of the 508th Parachute Infantry, and the 320th in direct support of the 507th Parachute Infantry. Contingent zones were assigned to cover all Regimental zones of action. (45)

more detail needed.

The airborne echelon of the Division Artillery closed in its departure fields on 31 May, and proceeded to accomplish its final briefing. The enlisted men and junior officers had received no previous briefing on the target. Maps and escape kits were issued, and all final preparations made. D day, after one day's postponement, was announced as 6 June 1944. The troops were trained to a fine peak and morale was excellent.

THE PARACHUTE ELEMENT IN ACTION

The reconnaissance party of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, consisting of four officers and 32 enlisted men, loaded into its two C-47's and became airborne at approximately 2330 hours 5 June. The night was generally clear and moonlit. After marshalling, the jumpmasters of the two planes, Captain Edward E. Whitley and Lieutenant Thomas E. Shockley, were able to stand in the door and observe the visual navigational aids below. The planes were flying in a column of V of V's. In this formation three planes form a V, and three of these V's form a flight of nine planes. The flights in turn are in column to complete a serial which usually averages from four to six flights. (46)

Their flight over the water was at 500 feet, for tactical reasons, and uneventful until the twenty-minute warning was given by the pilots. At this time considerable flak was en-

*Landing zone for landing gliders.

(45) A-13, p.1-2; (46) A-17, p. 3;

countered from the Channel Islands of Guernsey, Alderney, and Stark, west of the Cherbourg Peninsula (Map C), but fortunately it was short, which was according to plan, and assured the jumpers that the planes were on course. The only cause for apprehension was that surely the enemy on the Peninsula was alert and waiting. As the planes went into their climb up to 1500 feet, upon approaching land another enemy of airborne operations appeared in the form of dense clouds. The jumpmasters could hardly see the wing tips from their positions in the doors. Though this gave a certain feeling of security to the airborne personnel as far as the ground fire is concerned, experience had taught them that it opens up flight formations and makes for a more dispersed landing pattern. Occasional breaks in the clouds indicated that the formation was opening up, and over each jumpmaster there came a feeling of loneliness. Although this ground fog had accurately been predicted by our intelligence reports, it had been overlooked in the briefing, and came as a surprise to the personnel occupying the planes. During the breaks in the fogbanks, the ships were subjected to scattered smallarms fire, which became more severe as they approached DZ "N". (47)

The planes were now flying at approximately 700 feet, and according to the time element they should have been over the DZ. The jumpmasters expected to see lights marking the DZ, but could see none even though it was now fairly clear. The planes were engaging in evasive action*, and there was nothing to do except wait for the green light, which was the signal to jump. The signal was given at 060214 hours and the troopers bailed out.

*Flying from side to side to escape cones of fire.

(47) Written reports for unit history, Captain Whitley and Lieutenant Shockley, 15 July 1944.

The two ships which had been flying wing to wing were no longer together in the formation, but later events proved that they were only 400 yards apart. Nevertheless, both loads landed in the inundated Merderet River bottom, approximately one-half mile north of La Fiere, thereby missing their DZ by approximately one and one-half miles. (Map E) The marsh was deceptive. What appeared to be only marsh grass from just a few feet away actually was marsh grass, but it was growing in from two to six feet of water. Comparatively ineffective enemy fire was sweeping the area, but the principal threat to immediate survival was the water. The ground wind was sufficient to pull the parachutists into a prone position, quick release harness had not been adopted, and the most expeditious means of getting out of the parachute was to cut the harness. By the stronger helping the weaker, and a wonderful spirit of cooperation, the artillerymen were able to extract themselves without casualties due to drowning. The Division suffered thirty-six known casualties due to drowning that night. (48)

They were not so fortunate with their equipment, however. Of the major items dropped, consisting of one radio SCR-284, two SCR-609's, two switchboards, and a supply of wire, four rocket launchers with ammunition, and one 50 caliber machine gun with ammunition, not a single item was recovered from the water. The jumpmasters each had one SCR-536 to aid them in assembly. These were wet and useless, and were thrown away.

Lieutenant Shockley succeeded in "rolling up his stick"* and assembling his men on the edge of the railroad embankment running north-south through the marsh. Captain Whitley lost seven enlisted men who drifted to the west bank of the river,

*Assembling the jumpers of one C-47.
(48) A-9, Annex No.1 D(1).

joined a small force of infantrymen from the 507th Parachute Infantry, and engaged as infantry for the next thirty hours. (49) Through the use of runners, Lieutenant Shockley established contact with Captain Whitley, and by 0430 hours the four officers and twenty-five enlisted men were assembled on the railroad embankment, contemplating their situation. (Map E)

About this time Colonel Roy Lindquist, Commanding Officer of the 508th Parachute Infantry, came down the railroad track proceeding south with a force of approximately sixty officers and men. Since Colonel Lindquist's interests lay on the west side of the river, he intended to cross the causeway at La Fiere. Captain Whitley, the senior officer of the artillery detachment, recalling that part of his mission was to reconnoiter the bridge at La Fiere, formed a third platoon and joined the Colonel and his force. (50)

The fighting which developed around the La Fiere bridge when they arrived a short time later proved so interesting to the artillerymen that their mission was completely forgotten until General Ridgway, the Division Commander, arrived upon the scene at approximately 0930, and recognizing Lieutenant Shockley, ordered him to disengage his artillerymen and proceed to the artillery CP which had been established by Colonel March in the vicinity of St Mere Eglise. (51) (Map E)

The order was complied with, without incident, and the detachment closed in the CP at noon. Nothing material as far as the artillery effort was concerned had been accomplished by this detachment.

The two howitzer sections with the 3d Battalion of the 505th had encountered pretty much the same conditions enroute, but did

(49) Written report for unit history, Master Sergeant Frank Vlasak, 15 July 1944.

(50) A-18, p. 5-6; (51) A-18, p. 26, and statement of Lt Shockley.

drop on their designated DZ. Their bundles, however, became scattered on the drop, and they were able to assemble only one howitzer when it became time to move on to St Mere Eglise. Manhandling a 1270-pound howitzer, and the ammunition therefor, through the hedgerow country of Normandy, enemy or no enemy, is a mean job in itself; consequently, most of the efforts of this force was expended in getting from one place to another.

In support of the 3d Battalion, their efforts were negligible, but this howitzer was to play an important role later in the day. By noon the exhausted gun crews and their howitzer were at the artillery CP. (52)

THE ADVANCE GLIDER ELEMENT

As we recall from the breakdown of aircraft the artillery was allotted only one CG-4 glider in the command and anti-tank serial of Force "B". This load was formed at the Ramsbury departure field, and consisted of Colonel March, the Artillery Commander, Major Frederick J. Silvey, S-3 of the 319th, and Captain Robert J. Manning, Communications Officer of the 320th. The remainder of the load, to total thirteen officers and men, consisted of survey personnel and their equipment. (53)

The glider became airborne at 0130 hours D day, marshalled and flew the same route that the parachutists had flown shortly before. (Map C) The formation, as were all the other glider formations, was pair of pairs echeloned to the right, forming four plane flights. (54) It may be well to explain this formation, just to illustrate the increased length of the sky trains when gliders are involved. The tow ropes are 300 feet in length.

(52) Letter, Colonel Francis A. March, then Division Artillery Commander, dated 4 December 1948.

(53) A-16; (54) A-17, p. 3.

In the formation just mentioned, the two planes on the left dress on each other and establish the guide; the two planes on the right dress on each other and the gliders on their left, thereby occupying approximately the same distance space as a flight of nine planes alone.

Upon approaching land, the gliderists noted that the fog was still there, and that heavy anti-aircraft weapons were searching the sky. Here, however, the air train was in a favorable position. It was too low to be affected by the heavy weapons, and the poor visibility rendered the small arms fire comparatively ineffective. Since it was now almost four hours that the planes had been flying this lane, the enemy had analyzed the situation, and reacted accordingly.

The directional navigation of the tug ships was perfect. The Eureka station* on DZ "O" was functioning perfectly. As the ships approached the DZ, the fogbanks began to open. The occupants of the glider could now clearly see the tug ship ahead. The crew chief of the tug ship was signalling them to cut loose. This signal was transmitted by means of an Aldis lamp** operated by the crew chief from a position in the observation "bubble" of the C-47.

The glider cut loose, and immediately it seemed as if the entire sky was full of gliders going in all directions. To avoid a mishap in the air, the pilot brought it down hard and crash-landed on the outskirts of St Mere Eglise at 0407 hours just slightly beyond the DZ. (Map E) Due to the danger in the air, he had not been able to make his 180 degree turn. In smashing through a stone embankment, the glider was demolished, and five

*Homing device, ground station.

**Visual blinker light for visual transmission.

members of the party were injured to the extent that they could not be moved. Leaving two members of the detachment to take care of the injured, Colonel March, with his considerably reduced party, proceeded toward the center of the town, where Lieutenant Colonel Edward Krouse and his 3d Battalion of the 505th ^{were} ~~was~~ engaged in mopping up the town. Noting that St Mere Eglise, for the time being at least, was secure, the party proceeded west toward the preplanned CP location. (55)

While reconnoitering the preplanned area, the party was met by General Ridgway, who advised Colonel March that the Division CP was approximately 1000 yards west of the preplanned area. The Division SOP dictated that the artillery CP be near, so, at 0500 hours the artillery CP opened approximately 1400 yards west of St Mere Eglise. (Map E)

The reconnaissance detachment which Colonel March expected to find here was nowhere around, and if we will recall, it was engaged at this time in fighting as infantry at La Fiere. The situation was so obscure, and the survey parties so depleted that nothing could be done in that direction. No transportation was available, Isolated firing was heard from all directions. (56) About all the command group could do was wait for developments.

At noon, when the reconnaissance element joined the CP group, a portion of the enemy's plan of action was becoming apparent. Pressure just north of the CP was building up. It was mandatory that the enemy threat be repulsed in that it would cut the life line between the elements of the Division in the vicinity of St Mere Eglise, and those to the west at La Fiere. (55) Letter, Col March, 4 December 1948; (56) A-19, p.42.

More information needed.

General Ridgway realized that if the situation went from bad to worse he would have to go on the defensive, and St Mere Eglise and vicinity would be the ground he must occupy. Consequently, all efforts were directed toward the repulsion of this attack. (57)

Who? what strategy?
The enemy probed throughout the afternoon, but sought to dislodge the defenders by fire rather than by aggressive action. The lone 75 mm pack howitzer from the 456th had a field day in neutralizing enemy automatic weapons by direct fire. (58) The cannoneers would cautiously probe a small opening through the hedgerow, fire several fast rounds, and displace. In the meantime, observers would pick up another machine gun opening up on the now vacant position, thus providing the howitzer with its next target. Airborne artillerymen call this sniping, and enjoy the sport tremendously so long as the enemy is not sufficiently aggressive to overrun the position. (59)

The coverage of this action is too indefinite

During the afternoon's action, however, Colonel March was able to organize an improvised staff. Of immediate concern was the lack of equipment. He appointed Lieutenant Shockley S-4, and provided him with a one-quarter-ton truck and trailer, borrowed from Division Headquarters. The S-4, with a few enlisted men, was able to salvage considerable wire communication equipment from the crashed gliders and the parabundles which had not been picked up by the jumpers. The idea was infectious, and by evening the Division supply situation had been eased to some extent. (60)

Colonel March could see by this time that the artillery battalions would not be able to occupy their pre-selected posi-

(57) A-4, p.39; (58) Letter, Colonel March, 4 December 1948; (59) Personal knowledge; (60) Report of Lt Shockley, and A-19, p. 39.

tion areas, not even the alternate areas; consequently, he and his recently appointed S-3, Captain Whitley, reconnoitered new position areas. Their circulation was limited to the 2000 yards between St Mere Eglise and La Fiere, and they were on foot, so they decided to place the 320th just east of the CP and approximately halfway to St Mere Eglise, and the 319th a few hundred yards south of the CP. Sergeant Smith, the newly appointed Communications Chief, was able to establish wire communications to both areas without difficulty.

The newly appointed S-2, Lieutenant Sullivan, could get nowhere with his survey due to the lack of personnel, but managed to get the howitzer after the fight around the CP, register from one position area prior to darkness, and stake out a limited position area survey. The fruits of his labors, however, were never utilized, nor was survey ever to be employed during the remainder of the campaign. (61)

During the course of the afternoon the battalion parties, augmented by personnel from Headquarters Battery, were readied to receive the incoming gliderists, brief the commanders on the situation, and guide them to their position areas.

THE MAIN BODY

While the forward elements of Division Artillery were thus engaged in Normandy, the main body was engaged in last minute preparations for takeoff. The artillery ^{indefinite} was concerned with three serials: 30, 32, and 33. (62)

Serial 30 was composed chiefly of Division Headquarters and special troops, but one Horsa and one CG-4 was available to the artillery. Since this serial would land almost two hours prior (61) Personal knowledge; (62) A-9, Annex 5.

to serials 32 and 33, advantage was taken of the Horsa to transport a quarter-ton vehicle containing an SCR-193 radio, one officer, and two enlisted men from Headquarters Battery. This radio, incidentally, with the aid of modified antenna, was easily capable of communicating over the entire length and breadth of the Peninsula, and even back to England. It was thought that this set might be able to play a large part in the operation. The CG-4 contained a personnel load of twelve from the 320th. (63)

Serial 32, composed of two CG-4's and forty-eight Horsas, was principally an artillery serial. It was formed at the Membury departure field. (Map C) One CG-4 contained Lieutenant Colonel William H. Bertsch, Division Artillery Executive Officer, his vehicle, driver, and Sergeant Trijello from the PI section. This, together with two Horsas, rounded out the Headquarters and Headquarters Battery detachment. The latter contained a trailer each, with miscellaneous equipment and the entire staff of Division Artillery to include the S-1&4, S-2, S-3, Communications Officer, Surgeon, and the enlisted assistants, totalling twenty-nine in all. (64)

Forty Horsas of the serial were allotted to the 319th, and contained 362 officers and men, 12 75mm pack howitzers, 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton trucks and 16 trailers, plus their ammunition loads and other assorted equipment. Four Horsas contained 20 officers and men, 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton trucks and 3 trailers from the 320th. To complete the serial, one CG-4 and one Horsa contained medical support from the 307th Airborne Medical Company, and one Horsa, engineer support, from the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion. (65)

(63) Personal knowledge; (64) A-16; (65) A-9, Annex 5.

Serial 33, formed at the Welford departure field (Map C), consisted of twelve CG-4's and thirty-eight Horsas, all from the 320th. It will be noted here that the heavier 105 mm howitzer and the basic load of its heavier ammunition requires a considerably greater lift than does the 75 mm battalion. There were 323 officers and men, and major items of equipment included 12 105 mm M3 howitzers, 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton trucks and 17 trailers. The howitzers were loaded into the 12 CG-4's. (66)

Serial 30 spearheaded the evening glider lift for D-day. Its landing time was 2110 hours, followed closely at 2120 by serial 31, consisting chiefly of medical, reconnaissance and signal personnel and equipment. Then there was a gap in the schedule. Serial 32 was to land at 2300 hours, followed closely by serial 33 at 2310. The entire lift was to fly the eastern route, and as far as was known to the individuals concerned, the target was LZ "W" south of St Mere Eglise. (Maps C & D)

Despite the fact that no news had been received from Normandy the morale of the artillerymen in serial 30 was high. The weather was excellent. They were to fly over that portion of the Cherbourg Peninsula presumably secured by the 4th Infantry and 101st Airborne Divisions, and land well before darkness on LZ "W", which presumably had been secured by the 1st Battalion of the 505th and the 101st Airborne Division. All went well until the serial turned into its final leg of the flight at St. Marcouf Islands, which is a very small island group just off the east coast of the Peninsula, and was recognized by the gliderists as the navigational aid establishing the last leg of their journey. Let us leave the gliderists here for a moment and recapitulate what had

(66) A-9, Annex 5.

taken place at LZ "W".

General Ridgway had realized as early as 1400 hours this date (D-day) that LZ "W" might well be untenable for glider landings beginning at 2110 hours. On the other hand, DZ "O" was being held by a small group from the 505th, and it was felt that the entire area could be cleared by the 2d Battalion by landing time. Herein lay a wonderful opportunity to make full use of the flexibility and mobility of airborne troops. Accordingly, a radio message was dispatched forthwith, requesting that the gliders be landed at DZ "O". Unfortunately the radio receiver was out of order and there was no way of telling whether the message was received. The Division was plagued with a lack of communications with the outside throughout D-day. (67) As a secondary means of communication, since it was known that Troop Carrier Command would have a reconnaissance flight over the area at 1500 hours, panels were displayed to indicate the same message. Accordingly, the Eureka and landing panels were set up at DZ "O". (68)

The situation as concerned LZ "W" was definitely not good at 2110 hours. The 3d Battalion of the 505th had attempted to drive south from St Mere Eglise but had met with no success. (69) The 8th Infantry of the 4th Infantry Division had reached its D-day objectives generally south of LZ "W", and was ready to stop for the night. (70) The advance elements of Force "C", the land-tail element of the 82d Airborne Division had landed during the afternoon, and by 1700 hours found itself in the 8th Infantry sector just south of Les Forges and LZ "W", just $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from St Mere Eglise. Colonel E. D. Raff, commanding this element, had a force composed of one platoon of Company B of the 4th Cavalry Recon-

(67) A-19, p.30; (68) A-9, Annex 4b; (69) A-4, p.34; (70) A-4, p. 53.

naissance Squadron, Company C of the 746th Tank Battalion, and 90 infantrymen of the 325th Glider Infantry. (71) The Germans were well dug in on a slight ridge extending northeast. They had infantry, artillery and armor, and complete domination over LZ "W". (72)(Map E)

Colonel Raff immediately realized the seriousness of the situation. He thought the gliders were due in at 2200 hours, and having heard of no change in plans, he proceeded to attack the ridge. In the first probe he lost an armored car and one tank. Realizing that he had underestimated the strength of the enemy, he committed the entire force on the second attempt; covered by the Cannon Company of the 8th Infantry. The two lead tanks were immediately set afire by 88's, the attack again bogged down, and it became obvious that there were too many antitank weapons on the position to advance with tanks. It was now 2100 hours, and serial 30 appeared over the horizon. (73)

It is almost needless to inform the reader that apparently none of the messages requesting the change in landing zones had reached the tug pilots. (74) The Rebecca* in the squadron commander's plane was trying to pull them considerably to the north, while the terrain features clearly indicated that they were on the proper route. The tendency was to disregard the Rebecca. The Germans opened up with deadly accuracy, and the serial became scattered. The CG-4 landed in the LZ with only minor damage to the glider, but four men were killed, and the remaining eight were wounded and subsequently evacuated, thereby rendering this load entirely ineffective. The Horsa was more fortunate. It cut loose and headed due north. The pilot, intent upon securing

(71) A-19, p.32; (72) A-19, p.33; (73) A-19, p.35; (74) A-9, Annex 4b. *Homing device - the station in the plane netted with the Eureka on the ground. In squadron commanders' planes only.

his maximum gliding distance, had no speed and altitude left to reconnoiter a landing field, so he "pancaked" into an orchard. The glider was damaged, but none of the personnel was seriously injured. The load, however, could not be extracted with the personnel available, so it was abandoned and the officer and two men made their way to the CP. (75)

When serial 30 was having its troubles, serials 32 and 33 were becoming airborne. No word regarding any change in plans had reached them, consequently, in their ignorance, the only thing of particular concern was that some of these landings would be made after darkness, and this was something which had been considered too dangerous even to rehearse. ^{TP} The takeoff of the two serials was made with only one minor incident. One Horsa in serial 32 broke its tow rope assembly in takeoff, and had to pull off the line. This load contained Lieutenant Colonel John W. Smiley, the division artillery S3, and a large part of his operations platoon. Realizing that if any staff officer was essential to the overall effort of the artillery, he was that staff officer, he appealed to the local Troop Carrier Commander of the 436th Group. Here, the troop carrier element clearly demonstrated its flexibility, and preparation for the accomplishment of its mission. By the assistance of ground crews the load was transferred to another glider within a matter of twenty minutes, and airborne. This could well be a record of some sort. The glider pulled into its original place in the serial just as it turned into the final leg of the flight at St Marcouf. (76)

(75) Written report for unit history, Lt Henry W Millington, 15 July 1944.

(76) Statement of Lt Colonel John W Smiley, Division Artillery S3; and Personal knowledge.

In crossing the Channel in the waning light of D-day, the sight below was truly something to behold! There were sky trains and ships of all types below, as far as the eye could see, not to mention the fighter planes darting everywhere in their mission to protect the slow transports. The landing craft disgorging their men and equipment on Utah beach indicated clearly that the beach assault had been successful. Large fires inland gave us a feeling that all was well and according to plan. (77)

The first indication that maybe all was not well came when we were within sight of LZ "W". It is truly ironic and most amazing that by now, at 2300 hours, word had not circulated around sufficiently to avoid a duplication of the same experiences encountered by the serials two hours previously. There is evidence to indicate that the tug pilots were aware of some change in plans, and a study of the landing pattern shows clearly that the pilots were splitting the difference between LZ "W" and DZ "O". (78) There was no communication between the tug ship and the glider except the Aldis lamp in the tug ship, which was strictly one way, and it chose to tell the gliders nothing except when to cast off. (79)

The lead planes of serial 32 were now well within the range of the enemy weapons in the northern part of LZ "W", and the sky train was generally headed for St Mere Eglise. The Germans seemed to be concentrating their fire on the tug ships rather than the gliders. One must admire these C-47 pilots. Flying at less than 150 miles per hour, at an altitude of 1500 feet or less, with no armor protection and no self-sealing gas tanks,

(77) Personal observation. (78) A-9, Annex 4b; (79) A-17.

must, to say the least, be a trying experience which takes great courage. Serial 32 found itself in a situation where many things can happen and many personalities may become involved. It is the tug pilot's duty to tow the glider to the designated LZ, then signal to the glider pilot to cut loose. Now the glider pilot takes over and lands the glider in the LZ according to his training. When the glider comes to a halt, the glider commander* actively assumes command. There are many variables along this chain of command when the sky train comes under fire. The tug pilot may release the tow rope from his end and thereby cut the glider loose without any signal or warning. The glider pilot may become excited and cut loose before he receives the signal from the tug pilot. And no small factor to consider is the glider commander, who, in almost all instances, outranks the glider pilot, and becomes his commander when the glider reaches the ground. The glider commander may order the pilot to cut loose.

In serial 32 on this evening there were combinations of all the possible variables, and of the 47 artillery gliders in the serial, it is significant to note that not a single one landed on the intended DZ. The nearest was some 1000 yards away; the remainder was generally dispersed from two to six miles short of and between LZ "W" and DZ "O", thereby indicating that flying gliders over an alert and well organized enemy is not practical. (Map E)

There was no tactical unity in the landing, and since the forces on the ground had ceased their advance for the night, the enemy was able to concentrate on the gliderists. He was not aggressive, but he controlled the roads by fire. The artillery-

*Senior airborne passenger in the glider.

men could not move their equipment through the hedgerows, consequently there was a maximum of confusion and disorganization. Some loads were abandoned entirely as their crews engaged the enemy. In many instances this allowed the Germans to destroy the equipment by fire. In other instances, of course, the equipment was rendered unserviceable by the crash landings. Many of the CG-4's stopped against formidable objects and the noses could not be opened for unloading. The problem of assembly was made even more difficult by the fact that the troops were now trigger happy and were shooting each other in the darkness, and many glider commanders were unable to orient themselves. (80)

Rationalization set in. Heretofore unmentioned in this narrative is the fact that the 325th Glider Infantry, forming the Division reserve, was to commence its landings at 0700 hours on D plus 1, utilizing the same LZ. All artillery glider commanders knew this, and in many instances there was a tendency to establish a perimeter defense around the load and hopefully wait for daylight and the 325th. Other factors influencing the decisions of the commanders were the wounded, of which there were many. They did not desire to be abandoned, and there was no transportation for them even if they were transportable. Despite the planning of the loads, it was now discovered in the dispersed gliders that there were trailer loads of ammunition but no vehicles in sight with which to tow them, and the same was true of the howitzers. The loads were immobile.

Of the 47 gliders, only 8 landed intact; 11 were damaged, and 28 were destroyed. Of the 12 75mm howitzers, 5 were serviceable; 2 sustained minor damage and were repaired by cannibalizing parts from the 5 that were completely unserviceable. That gave

(80) Personal knowledge.

the 319th 7 serviceable howitzers. Of the 32 $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton trucks, only 18 were serviceable after landing, and of the 21 trailers, 14 were serviceable. Landing casualties in serial 32 amounted to almost twenty-five percent. Of the 409 officers and men, 18 were killed and 78 required evacuation. (81)

Serial 33, containing the 320th and just 10 minutes behind serial 32, fared somewhat better. Of the 50 gliders, 3 actually landed on DZ "O"; a large number landed within several thousand yards thereof, and only a few were as much as four to five miles off, and generally short. (82) The damage to the gliders themselves was greater than in the case of serial 32 in that only 5 landed intact, 10 were damaged, and 35 were considered destroyed. Conferences after the action attributed this to the fact that most of these landings were made after total darkness. (83)

Eight of the 105 mm howitzers were serviceable in the final analysis; 23 of the 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton trucks and 13 of the 17 trailers were serviceable. Of the 323 officers and men, only 7 were killed and 33 evacuated as a result of the initial landings. (84) It seems now that we have considerable argument in favor of landing gliders after darkness. Contributing factors which must not be overlooked, however, include the fact that serial 32 was engaging the enemy on the ground, thereby giving him less opportunity to concentrate on the sky train. As a direct result the flight did not open up, the landing pattern was less dispersed, and greater mutual support was possible when the troops reached the ground.

The assembly problems of the 320th, even though it had a better landing pattern, were generally identical to those of the

(81)(82) A-9, Annex 5; (83) Personal knowledge; (84) A-9, Annex 5

319th. The guides from the advance elements of the artillery did contact the 320th upon landing, and the trend toward their initial position just west of St Mere Eglise was started.

The many elements of the artillery gliderists who were depending upon succor from the 325th Glider Infantry at 0700 hours on the 7th were doomed to disappointment. The infantry did land promptly, but forced LZ "W", and hardly any of its gliders came this far to the north. Seeing this, the artillerymen, employing infantry tactics as best they knew how, concentrated upon assembly, and by 0900 hours it began to take on an organized form. The 319th was assembling in an area northwest of St Mere Eglise, and the 320th was assembling in its position area just west of the same town. (Map E)

At 0911 hours 7 June, the 320th, with only two of its howitzers in position, commenced firing in direct support of the 2d Battalion of the 505th. (85) The howitzers and crews were coming into the position area at the rate of approximately one per hour, and by evening they had eight 105's in position plus one 75 from the 456th which had been attached for the time being. It will be noted here that things had not gone according to the artillery plan. The position area occupied by the 320th was fully 6000 yards east of the planned position area, and even 2000 yards east of the alternate position. Needless to say, the preplanned fires were well beyond the maximum effective range, and would have been of dubious value at this time. Instead of supporting the 507th where liaison had been set up, the battalion was now supporting a unit with which no previous arrangements had been made. (86)

In order to more clearly understand the artillery situation, let us take a brief look at the infantry situation as of 0900

(85) A-9, p.8; (86) A-13.

hours on D plus 1. The 2d Battalion of the 505th was directing its attention toward the north and northeast of St Mere Eglise. It made patrol contact with the 8th Infantry of the 4th Infantry Division at 1000 hours at St Martin, northeast of St Mere Eglise. (87) The 3d Battalion was facing south and east of St Mere Eglise. The 1st Battalion was resisting heavy enemy counterattacks from across the Merderet in the vicinity of La Fiere. (Map F)

Elements of the 507th were engaged in the same defensive mission just south of the causeway at La Fiere. Other elements of the same regiment were engaged at the other Merderet River crossing site in the division area south of La Fiere at Chef Du Pont. The major portion of the 507th was believed to be west of the Merderet, but their situation was obscure. It was later determined that there were generally two groups: One west of La Fiere between the river and Amfreville, and the other west of Amfreville. (Map F) Only twenty-five percent of the regimental strength was accounted for at this time. (88)

The 508th had a small force east of the causeway at Chef Du Pont, and other elements were known to be farther west, between the river and Picauville. (Map F) Only twenty-five percent of this regiment's strength was accounted for. (89)

The 325th Glider Infantry was in the process of landing and assembling. (90) The last airborne element of the Division Artillery, in the form of five CG-4 loads, landed in LZ "W" with the second serial of the 325th at 0710 hours. Their actions are not important to this narrative, but they had one experience which was unusual and interesting.

Sergeant Charles Cummings and Corporal Edward Kroer, of one

(87) A-9, Annex 6; (88) A-9, p.8; (89) A-9, p.8; (90) A-9, p.7.

of the gliders, were captured shortly after landing. They were conducted to a stone building nearby which already contained some twenty airborne prisoners, and which also contained an enemy battalion headquarters. The prisoners were in good spirits because they could understand sufficient German to realize that the Germans were arguing among themselves about surrendering. The battalion commander appeared to be the only one who objected to the surrender. Their spirits however became dampened when the enemy brought in Lieutenant Colonel Gorlan A. Bryant (G-1 of the 4th Infantry Division) as a prisoner. This didn't look good to the prisoners who were not familiar with the situation. Colonel Bryant was instrumental in further inciting surrender of the garrison. (91) At 1030 hours when the 8th Infantry Regiment commenced its preparation for the assault of the position, many of the Germans were ready to surrender, but there remained the problem of how to stop the fire from the 8th Infantry. Items of American clothing were held up on rifles only to be cut to shreds by machine gun fire. A German grabbed a bugle and blew a surrender call, only to be hit in the process. Now occurred an incident which is typically American and probably would not occur in any other army in the world! One of the prisoners retrieved the fallen bugle and blew "chow call". The firing ceased. (92) The 8th Infantry came in and collected 174 enemy prisoners. (93)

D plus 1 went by without a round being fired by the 319th. Due to excessive casualties and temporarily missing personnel, the battalion was unable to effect sufficient organization to go into action. Including the walking wounded, they had over 100 wounded in their assembly area by evening. (94) There had been no thought given to air evacuation. Each unit was taking care of

(91) A-4, p.62; (92) Written report of Sgt Charles Cummings, 15 July 1944; (93) A-4, p. 62; (94) Statement of Capt Walter Bedingfield, Bn Surgeon, 319th; and personal knowledge.

its own. The able-bodied had to watch their wounded suffer until well into the following day when evacuation became possible.

On the morning of 8 June, the 320th was still firing from its present position, in support of the 505th and 2d Battalion of the 325th, which had been attached to the 505th for action to the north. No preparation was attempted for the attack due to the shortage of ammunition, but sufficient observers were provided to reach the infantry company level. The effectiveness of the observation was limited by the hedgerows, but approximately twenty-five missions were fired upon targets of opportunity, and this battalion did contribute materially to the success of the attack which cleared the division zone to the north.

The 319th got under way to a position area in the vicinity of Chef Du Pont, which, if we will recall, was their alternate position area in the initial plans. Since the battalion was in no condition to operate with any degree of efficiency, due to a shortage of personnel, and no replacements were in sight, plans were made to augment its strength from the 456th when the land-tail element arrived. This unit was further looked forward to because the battalion ammunition trains therewith were known to be carrying 1000 rounds per battalion. (95)

By evening seven howitzers were in position and the mission was direct support of both the 507th and 508th. Since the 320th had taken over its mission with the 505th, the liaison and observer parties were transferred to the 507th. The observers already with the 508th reported in to the fire control net during the day. At 1700 hours the battalion commenced firing. (96)

Many other events were occurring at this time. Our infantry was moving into positions to capture our initial objectives on

(95) A-13; (96) Personal knowledge.

the following day. The 90th Infantry Division Artillery was moving into positions to reinforce our fires. The 456th plus other attached artillery with the land-tail element was moving in. The airborne phase had ended.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing and criticizing this artillery operation, we must bear in mind that it was the first time that glider artillery was employed in mass, and there was no established doctrine. I do not believe that the artillery mission in the airborne phase of this operation was a success as such, but I am convinced that this experience contributed materially to the highly successful subsequent employment of airborne artillery, which was firing with eighty percent of its efficiency within one and one-half hours after landing. (97) From that standpoint only, could we consider the mission justified. The material results, however, were far from worth the cost in lives and equipment. The tactical error was in the commitment of gliders in unsuitable landing terrain. The fact that only thirteen of the ninety-seven artillery gliders landed intact is ample evidence that the small fields, trees, and hedgerows formed a very effective antiglider defense.

In the planning phase we had thought that we could get greater flexibility by commitment under division artillery control, but the plan depended upon the ability of the parachute infantry to clear the landing zone. When in the operation the infantry failed to clear the landing zone, it was clearly demonstrated that gliders are very vulnerable during landing; that our artillerymen were not trained to form complete, independent, and integral fighting units in themselves, and they could not effectively fight

(97) A-7, p.103.

from dis-ability effect the operation
for their own landing zones as the 325th Glider Infantry did successfully. This would lead to the conclusion that, in this instance, a combat team arrangement might have been more satisfactory.

The immobility of the artillery once it reached the ground was probably due to the inadequacy of the gliders themselves, rather than faulty planning and execution. I am satisfied that every attempt was made to form self-sufficient loads which would have been mobile had the landing fields not been so small and inaccessible to each other, and had the pattern not been so dispersed. I believe there was demonstrated that the artillery glider of the future must be safe, contain a tail loading and unloading feature, and have sufficient capacity to provide for a completely mobile load.

The one factor which contributed more materially to the difficulties experienced by the artillery than any other, in my opinion, was the lack of effective communication between the airborne division in the field and the troop carriers. Largely, the flexibility and mobility of airborne forces exists only prior to landing. If the commander on the ground cannot utilize these elements according to the tactical situation, he loses them. Had the request for the change of landing zones reached all concerned, the effectiveness of the artillery would have been considerably increased.

The lack of two-way communication between tug plane and glider is subject to criticism. This would allow discussion of a change in plans, and provide a means for a meeting of minds. A study of the landing pattern convinces me that most of the gliders cast off prematurely, probably due to the influence of the glider commanders, who had less current information than the tug pilots.

Summary

To properly evaluate daylight versus darkness glider landings, let us consider a few statistics. In a formal investigation after the action, the 82d Airborne Division Inspector General determined that the percentage chance of becoming a casualty in the Horsa was 10.5% in daylight as to 16.2% after darkness; in the CG-4 it was 5.8% in daylight as to 10.7% after darkness. The equipment rendered unserviceable due to crash landings ranged from approximately 20% in daylight to generally twice that during darkness. (98) There remains little question as to the desirability of daylight landings.

How?

Our plans for the evacuation of the wounded, in my opinion, should have included evacuation of the more seriously wounded by glider. Some flyable CG-4's were available, and we had seen sufficient "snatch takeoffs" to feel that it was not particularly difficult. We were forced to watch our wounded suffer for three days, and it is believed that at least some artillery commanders concentrated more on the operation of aid stations than the accomplishment of their missions.

actual effect?

We had given no thought to replacements. Artillery, as a general rule, does not contemplate large losses. The statistics we were able to gather from this operation, however, indicate that large initial losses are possible, and efficiency is affected from the beginning. The condition of the 319th required a redistribution of personnel from other battalions, which naturally decreased the efficiency of others. The answer would appear to lie in filler personnel in the land-tail element.

Though the artillery parachutists landing in inundated areas were a small minority, they recognized the need for a quick

(98) A-9, Annex 1D(1).

release harness for the standard parachute, which was also recognized by the official observers, and was provided subsequently. It might also be stated here that in this operation the dignity and morale of the gliderist was improved considerably in that the War Department recognized the hazard in gliding and awarded extra pay, which had been coveted by the parachutists only prior to this time.

The experiment conducted by the 320th in assembly led to a new thought in artillery assembly. The ideal situation still contemplates assembly by battery and then by battalion prior to going into position. But in a well-dispersed landing, the idea of each separate load or any combination of loads working through a prominent control point by using guides to position areas, has considerable merit in that it will expedite at least part of the organization going into action. This, in my opinion, cannot be overlooked as an alternate plan of assembly.

None of the sky trains were subjected to enemy air activity. Considering the complications caused by enemy ground activity, it would be shuddering to even think of what might have happened without complete mastery of the air. It appears, however, to have been an oversight that our air support did nothing to clear the enemy from LZ "W".

The Supreme Commander has stated that the assault on the Cherbourg Peninsula could not have been achieved so conspicuously without the work of the airborne forces. (99) The 82d Airborne Division Artillery would like to feel that it, too, contributed to the success of the operation.

(99) A-33, p.23.

LESSONS

Some of the more important lessons emphasized by this operation are:

- ✓ 1. Gliders require suitable terrain for landing.
- ✓ 2. Artillery glider units are not integral fighting units and require infantry to clear their landing zones.
- ✓ 3. Airborne artillery can be more effectively employed as a member of a regimental combat team than under division artillery control.
- ✓ 4. ^{CG-42 HORSA} The gliders used in the operation were inadequate for the transportation of artillery.
5. The commander of the airborne forces on the ground in the build-up type of operation must be in communication with his troop carrier unit in order to fully exploit flexibility and mobility in accordance with the tactical situation.
6. Two-way communications between glider and tug plane ^{is important} would facilitate operations in some instances.
7. Daylight landings are preferable to landings after darkness. ^{is this true as it stands?}
8. Airborne evacuation of the wounded should be included in a good airborne plan.
9. Early replacement personnel is essential to compensate for initial losses, if the artillery is to function for any period of time.
10. Quick release harness for parachutes will decrease initial casualties among parachutists.
11. The assembly area should be on the position area.
12. Air superiority is vital to the success of an airborne mission.

more specific wording needed

airborne lesson which could be improved by better wording

could have been stated more completely
General