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

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE 1947 - 1948

THE OPERATIONS OF C COMPANY, 509TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY BATTALION AT ST TROPEZ, SOUTHERN FRANCE 15 - 16 AUGUST 1944 (SOUTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN) (Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

Type of operation described: PARACHUTE INFANTRY COMPANY IN AN AIRBORNE ASSAULT LANDING

First Lieutenant Raymond F. Ruyffelsere, Infantry ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS GLASS NO I

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THE OPERATION OF C COMPANY, 509TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY BATTALION AT ST TROPEZ, SOUTHERN FRANCE 15 - 16 AUGUST 1944 (SOUTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN) (Personal Experience of a Platoon Leader)

INTRODUCTION

As early as December 1943 plans were considered for the Invasion of Southern France. "The primary responsibility for the southern France operation, for which the first plans were drafted in Algiers during December 1943, was assumed by the US Army officers in the Mediterranean Theater."

This blow was to be delivered simultaneously with the Invasion of Normandy - "Operation Overlord". But it was later decided to abandon this plan. The successful breakthrough to Rome and the invasion in Normandy itself, made men, material, and shipping too scarce. "The opportunity to launch 'Anvil' against southern France concurrently with or immediately after 'Overlord' was lost, due to the heavy demand upon all available assault shipping and craft for 'Overlord' and its buildup, and to the great demand for men and material for the campaign in Italy."

Late in June 1944, the Allied drive in Italy slowed down. Planes and shipping used initially in "Operation Overlord" were now available. Units could be taken out of the lines in the Fifth Army sector now that a stable situation had set in. Early in July it was decided to make assault landings in southern France as previously planned. "In general the plan called for the Seventh Army, supported by Naval Western Task Force XII TAC, to launch a seaborne and airborne assault on the southern coast of France, east of Toulon, secure a beachhead, assault and capture Toulon and exploit the west and northwest. Plans for the landing of assault troops were prepared in minute detail. Specifically, the assault was planned as follows:

To land the VI Corps, three (3) divisions abreast, between Cap Cavalaire and Agay, secure a beachhead and continue advance to

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the west and northwest.

- To land the First Airborne Task Force in the Le Muy area at 0422 on D-Day in order to prevent enemy movements into the target area.
- To land the lat Special Service Forces on the Islands of Port Cros end Levent on the night of D minus 1 and destroy enemy defenses there.
- To land French Commandos on Cap Negre under cover of darkness D minus 1, destroy enemy coastal defenses on Cap Negre and block the coastal road in that vicinity.
- To land the French Naval Assault Group at Pointe des Trayas night of D minus 1 and block the Cannes - St Raphael and Cannes - Frejus Roads.
- To land the II French Corps over secure beaches, assemble in the vicinity of Cogalin, pass through VI Corps and attack Toulon.
- To land I French Corps in the target area by D plus 40." (See Map B)

THE GENERAL AIRBORNE SITUATION

Initially it was decided there would be no airborne assault before dawn. mild be of no benefit if there was to be an air after the beach assault by the land forces. Two additional points were considered:

- The troop carrier units same as used in "Operation Overlord" had a great amount of experience in formation flying and navigating at night.
- 2. The pathfinder technique for airborne operations at night had greatly improved.

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Therefore the decision was made to have a pre-dawn airborne assault.

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It was now necessary to choose suitable take-off areas. The possibility of using Corsican airfields as take-off points for the airborne assault was discarded. The two main points influencing this decision were:

- The majority of Corsican airfields were not large enough. Furthermore their maintenance facilities could not handle large numbers of transport aircraft; i. e., C-47's.
- The 9000 feet mountains in Corsica had to be flown over in order to reach southern France. This was too near the maximum operational altitude of the C-47 transport plane, which would be loaded to capacity (5500 lbs.).

The general area for take-off points was to be in the vicinity of Rome. Here many excellent airfields could be found.

Finally, a rough plan for the airborne assault was drawn about 25 July 1944. Generally, this plan was as follows:

Pathfinder teams were to drop at 0330; the main lift, about one airborne division using 400 planes, was to drop at 0400; glider landings would be made at 0800; and a resupply drop made at 1800. All these drops would be by parachute on D-Day in the vicinity of Le Muy. Map B)

The route from take-off points to drop zones was to be as follows: After assembling in the air north of Rome, the planes were to proceed to the Island of Elba, to the northern tip of Corsica, over lighted naval craft check points to Agay, then on to the Le Muy area. (See Map A) This route was highly coordinated with the navy, and was chosen after due consideration of the following points:

- "1. Shortest feasible distance.
- Prominent terrain features.
- Traffic control for 10 % grows.

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A-4, p. 27.

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employed the contract of the property of the property of the contract of the c Control of the Control of Manager State (1979) and the Late of the Control of the

- Naval convoy routes. .
- Position of assault beaches.
- Frimary aerial targets.
- Enemy radar installations.
- Avoidance of excessive doglegs.
- Prominent landfalls.
- Position of chartered enemy flak installations. (5)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

Prior to D minus 20, the 509th Battalion had had much combat experience as a separate unit in North Africa, Avellino, and Anzio. Therefore getting the men properly trained and the unit up to T/C and E strength presented no particular difficulties between D minus 20 to D minus 4. So on the morning of D minus 4, just prior to our move to the take-off point, from Lido di Roma to Grosseta airfield, all officers were briefed. This briefing was on the BN HQ CO. C.O. airborne operation itself. It was given by Major Tomasik, the Battalion 6-3.

The gist of the briefing was as follows: (The maps and photos used for the briefing were inadequate, An excellent plaster terrain model of the drop zone areas, helped us to memorize the terrain features we should see upon landing.

"The 1st Airborne Task Force under the command of Major General P. T. Frederick was composed as follows:

2d Indep Para Brigade (Bn)

517th Pcht Inf Regt

509th Pcht Inf Bn

551st Pcht Inf Bn

550 Gli Inf Bn

460th Pcht FA Bn(75mm Pack How)

463rd Fout FA Bn("

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602nd Pack FA Bn(75mm Pack How)

Co A 2nd Cml Bn

Co D 83rd Cml Bn

AT Co, 442d Inf

887th A/B Eng Co

_596th Pcht Eng Com (6)

The Nineteenth German Army had nine divisions in the area south of the Loire River and west of the Franco - Italian border. (7) The following enemy troops were believed to be in the vicinity of Le Muy: An Antiaircraft Artillery Officer Candidate School of approximately 1500 cadets; a Corps Headquarters; and the 11th Panzer Division about 20 miles north of Le Muy.

The Seventh US Army supported by the 12th US Naval Task Force was to invade the southern coast of France with the main effort between Toulon and St Raphael. There was to be an airborne diversion by use of dummies west of Toulon near Ciotot. (8) The 517th Farachute Regimental Combat Team was to drop on DZ "A", block the roads to the northwest, and attack Le Muy to the southeast. The 2nd British Parachute Brigade was to drop on DZ "O", block the roads to the north and attack Le Muy to the south. (See Map B)

The 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion was to drop on DZ "C", Company B leading, with the mission of protecting the DZ. Company C was to follow with the mission of immediately moving out and attacking Le Muy to the northwest, followed by Company A which was to move out to attack Le Muy to the northwest on the left of Company C. Company B would then revert to Battalion Reserve with the continued mission of blocking roads to the southeast of Le Muy. A bomb safety line or circle had been set up with Le Muy as its center. This circle had a 5000-yard radius. (See Map B)

The afternoon of D minus 4 the Battalien minus Company C moved to its take-off point at Piombino. Company C moved to Grosseta mirfield with A and

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B Batteries of the 463rd Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. (From this time on to D plus 4, Company C would be separated from the Battalion.) The remainder of the day was spent preparing a bivouac as there were no buildings available for billeting. No one was permitted to leave the bivouac area unless accompanied by an officer on official business. Strict security measures were now in force. (9)

D minus 3 and D minus 2 were spent making final preparations, and loading the individual aircraft. On D minus 2 all officers attended a briefing by the Chief Air Corps Navigator of this operation. This is generally what was covered: The route and check points would be as originally planned (see Map A). The drop would have to be made at altitudes of 1500-2000 feet (normal 600-800 feet) because of high rugged terrain in DZ "C" area. A B-17 had just flown the same route that the airborne lift was to follow and had encountered no enemy flak. The weather forecast for D-Day (0001) was clear to the Island of Elba, then visibility steadily decreased to the DZ area where it would be about one-half mile. All men were to jump on the pilot's green light signal. The air of self-assurance of the Chief Navigator, a Lieutenant Colonel, gave all officers confidence that we would have no trouble dropping on DZ "C". (10)

On the morning of D minus 1, final issue of individual ammunition was made and all plane loads checked. In the afternoon all men and officers went into the town of Grosseta to take a hot shower. The Air Corps had set up a hot water shower system there. That night everyone was fed a fine steak supper. At this time we were given the paroles and countersigns that would be used by friendly forces between 15-17 August. These were to change at 2400 each day. After this tents were struck, everyone donned his individual combat equipment and drew individual parachutes. We were then marched to the vicinity of the C-47 planes where a movie screen was set up. Movies were \$100, 10, 11) Terminal works.

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shown until about 2300. A mobile Red Cross unit served coffee and doughnuts until 2330. All planes were then loaded and took off at 2400. (11)

THE ACTION OF COMPANY C 15 - 16 AUGUST 1944

Just prior to take-off at 2400, D minus 1, the pilot and I agreed that he would awaken me 15 minutes out from the DZ. This would give me time to check that the men re-fastened their individual parachutes, and adjusted their equipment. The majority of the men, including myself, were soon asleep. The crew chief woke me up 15 minutes out from the DZ. The trip so far had been uneventful. I personally checked each man, and felt that they were all alert and ready. I then looked out the rear door and could see only what appeared to be a ground fog or mist. My watch showed 3 minutes to go. I made a last hasty check of the men, had them stand up, and hook up their static lines, ready to go.

Finally the green light came on and we all cleared the plane at 0423. On the way to the ground I passed through the mist I had previously seen, and expected to hit the ground soon after. Instead I just continued to float What I had thought to be ground fog or mist was an overcast at 1000 -1500 feet altitude. It was pitch black because this overcast had cut out all the moonlight. Finally I landed in a vineyard. I heard someone else land on the tile roof of a house near by. everyone was an enemy who did not have a countersign for the parole. Close by I heard a carbine shot. It turned out later that one of our men had been shot by another one of our men. I looked for a previously arranged assembly signal - a circling blue light. What I actually saw was about five different colored lights. These lights were tied on the parachute bundles and served the purposes of squad and platoon identification. These bundles carried our extra ammunition, water, machine guns, 60mm mortars and K-rations. The lights that were swinging were those that were on the bundles bung up in the trees. (11) Fersonal knowledge.

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Finally, on a high point, I saw a blue light being swung in a circle by what was obviously a human being. I approached this light cautiously, as one of the enemy could easily be swinging that light. However, on getting nearer, and not hearing gun-fire, I felt it was safe to assume that the light was a friendly one. After being challenged several times, I reached the blue light. The officer with this blue light was Captain Jess Walls, Company C Commander.

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In about one-half hour, 0500, the skies began to light with the dawn.

We decided we had assembled as many men as there were in the vicinity. About this time an FFI (French Forces of the Interior) leader, Marc Renault, contacted us. We were quite suspicious of him at first, but he proved of invaluable aid later. He supplied us with an old map of the vicinity, pointed out our approximate position, and local terrain features. We were near St Tropez! We were a small force of about 110 men. We had no definite information of the enemy. The FFI leader estimated 500 Germans in St Tropez. (Later this estimate turned out to be highly exaggerated.) Captain Walls made the decision to occupy a defensive position on a hill overlooking St Tropez. (12) The hill we occupied had entrenchments already dug. These positions had good fields of fire and excellent observation. They were the supplementary positions of the German garrison in St Tropez. (See Map C)

After the occupation of the hill a reconnaissance patrol, under Lieutenant McCarthy, was sent into St Tropez. Meanwhile a new threat was gathering. It was now very close to H-hour. The morning mist had risen, and out to sea could be seen an impressive array of warships and transports. Overhead we could see combat and reconnaissance planes circling. We were outside the 5000-yard bomb circle. Did they know we were friendly troops? If not, we would soon be bombed and shelled by our own forces! Our only means of identification were panels with a white star on a red background. This would identify us as friendly, but could these panels be seen? The communication (12) To social knowledge; Statement of Capt Walls, 1 Dec 1947.

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r (m. 1941). Portuguis de la martina de production de la martina de la martina de la martina de la martina de l La martina de la martina d sergeant was trying desperately to contact the planes overhead or the ships offshore by SCR 536 radio.

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Captain Walls sent me and five men on a patrol to find a bundle containing an SCR 300 radio. This radio would better the chances of identifying ourselves to our own forces. These bundles were scattered all over the peninsula, in trees, on houses, in the sea. (Later we were to find out that Captain Willer, GO of Company B and two plane loads of men had jumped into the sea. They were never heard of again.) My patrol was unsuccessful. We had found K-rations, 75mm pack howitzer parts, water, British mines, rockets and 60mm mortar ammunition, but no SCR 300. Meanwhile we heard a devastating naval artillery preparation on the peninsula coast. We now knew that we were in the area of the main effort of our own troops.

Upon reporting back to Captain Walls, we learned that the hill had been bombed but that there were no casualties. He told us that radio contact was finally made with the planes, and their attention drawn to our panels. It was further learned, from our patrol and civilian sources, that the enemy had concentrated in two places in St Tropez: The "Citadel" and Latitude "43" Hotel. The decision was made to attack St Tropez. There were two reasons for this decision:

- 1. The enemy was there.
- 2. We now knew that St Tropez was an objective of our friendly forces.

 Our attack would occupy the enemy while friendly troops assaulted

 the beach. (13)

The plan of attack was as follows: The Company minus one squad would move out in V-formation towards St Tropez immediately. 1st and 2nd Platoons would lead abreast with 1st Platoon on the left; 3rd Platoon and Company Headquarters in reserve. Lieutenant Knight with the squad left on the hill would secure the hill until further orders. Upon reaching the town square, (13) rersonal knowledge, Jielement by Capit Wells, 1 200 2047.

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Lieutenant Rose and the 1st Platoon were to move out and engage the enemy in Hotel Latitude "43". Lieutenant Sammons and the 2nd Platoon minus one squad would envelop the "Citadel" from the right while I, with two squads, would envelop it from the left. The 60mm mortars were to be placed in the square. The rocket launchers and one squad from 2nd Platoon would be used for direct fire on the "Citadel" from a four-story building near the square. The Company CP would be in this building. The envelopment was not to move cat until the mortars, rocket launchers and support squad opened fire. The intention was to restrict the enemy's observation of the beach by small arms fire at close range. (14)

About 0900 the scouts of 1st and 2nd Platoons came under intense automatic small arms fire from the "Citadel", as they entered the square. No one was hit as the main body was already in the shelter of houses and garden walls on the outskirts of town. Captain Walls decided the attack would proceed as planned. The reason for this was that the planned double envelopment could be carried out with few casualties in spite of enemy fire, For at the base of the very prominent hill of the "Citadel" ran a low stone wall. (See Map C) Lieutenant Rose took two men on a reconnaissance patrol to be more certain of the disposition of the enemy in his zone. At this time a civilian told us there were some German troops in the telephone building. I was to clear the building, then proceed towards the outskirts of town in my sector. On reaching the outskirts of town, I was to report to the CP. At that time our covering fires would begin and the enveloping movement would take off. (The FFI leader, Marc Renault, and his men saved us much time by reconnoitering the streets that we did not have time to cover. We had lent him and his men 45 caliber pistols.) After cautiously approaching and entering the telephone building, we found it to be unoccupied. We then proceeded to our takeoff point on the cutskirts of town. Upon reaching there, I found that the (14) Personal knowledger Statement of Cept Walls, 1 Dec 1947.

terrain was gently sloping and gave no cover from the "Citadel" except the previously mentioned wall. So I decided to get one squad in position to cover the other squad while it proceeded to move to a road cutout three-fourths of the way up the hill towards the "Citadel". (See Map C) The latter squad would be in a better and closer position to deliver small arms fire on the loop-holes in the "Citadel's" outside wall. After informing my squad leaders of my plan, I notified the CP that we were ready. Soon the mortars and rocket launchers began firing as planned.

My base squad opened covering fire while my maneuvering squad rushed as skirmishers up to the predesignated road cut. It was at this time that I first knew that the enemy occupied foxholes outside the "Citadel" on the terrain at the same level as the base of the wall. (See Sketch D) Two German soldiers jumped out of their foxholes with machine pistols trying to get a better shot at the squad in the road cut. It was easy shooting for my base squad to kill these Germans. The base squad now had fire superiority over our sector of the "Citadel". The squad in the cutout was well spread out, and they were individually sniping and hitting Germans running along the top of the "Citadel" wall.

I was later told that Lieutenant Sammons, with a squad, had come under fire of some Germans in a house at the bottom of the "Citadel" hill. He proceeded to clear the enemy from this house and took positions with his squad at windows on the top floor. From here he could look down at about a 10-degree angle on the foxholes occupied by the enemy. (See Sketch D) It was now impossible for the enemy to come out of their holes without being killed. Those few who tried were killed. The bulk of the enemy at the "Citadel" was now neutralized as every loop-hole was covered by one of our riflamen. (15)

At this time Captain Walls ordered me to use a captured German truck to (15) Personal knowledge: Statement by Gert Wells, 1 Dec 1947.

go back to our DZ with a patrol to pick up all the ammunition that I could find, especially the 60mm mortar and rocket launcher rounds. I started out with my patrol up the road about 1230. Suddenly, as we turned a corner, we ran into a friendly advance combat patrol from the 15th Regiment of the 3rd Division. I exchanged information with the patrol leader, then proceeded to gather up the ammunition. I returned to St Tropez about 1400 with a truck load of ammunition and reported to the CP. Here I learned what had transpired while I was gone: Lieutenant Sammons' maneuvering squad under Lieutenant O'Brien had reached their position as planned. Under cover of the fire from the house, they captured about six Germans and marched them along the base of the wall to the large wall gate. (See Sketch D) Here Ligutenant O'Brien had them call upon their comrades to surrender. By this time Captain Walls had led a tank destroyer, attached to the 15th Infantry, to a position from which it fired a few well-placed rounds into the "Citadel" tower. After fifteen minutes of repeated admonishing by their comrades on the outside of the wall, the Germans inside the "Citadel" capitulated. By this time the maneuvering squeds on both sides of the wells cleaned up or gathered as prisoners the remainder of the Germans in foxholes outside the "Citadel". The total number of prisoners amounted to about seventy-five, plus five seriously wounded and nineteen killed.

Lieutenant Rose, meanwhile, had encountered heavy fire from the hotel.

He maneuvered his platoon around the rear of the hotel, then on into it.

After clearing the first few floors of enemy, he accepted the surrender of the remaining Germans. Score: About sixty prisoners. All prisoners we had taken were young German marines. Our total losses were five killed and seven wounded. The remainder of the afternoon was taken up in reorganisation and the sending out of patrols after small groups of Germans in the hills near St Tropes. That evening we all had C-rations which we drew from a 3rd (16) Personel knowledge; Statement by Capt Walls, 1 Dec 1947.

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Division beach supply point.

As the enemy situation was still uncertain, Captain Walls decided that Company C would spend the night in position on the entrenched hill outside of town. Next morning we made contact, by liaison officer, with the remainder of the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, which had been dropped on the proper DZ near Le Muy.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

After the personnel parachute drop, it was found that many men had discarded their gas masks and "Mae Wests" (Air Corps life preservers) before they jumped from the planes. This was to relieve themselves from a normal overburdened state. But the bulk of the group dropped less than a mile from the sea!

There was too little detailed information about missions of friendly troops. If there had not been a naval preparation in the vicinity, we would not have known that St Tropez was in the area of the main assault.

Much valuable time would have been lost by Company C had it not been for the aid of the EFI leader Marc Renault. First he aided in orienting us on the ground and later aided in ascertaining that no enemy troops were in the town proper. Thus we had fewer worries about our flanks and rear.

Early in the morning we see an airborne unit occupy the prepared enemy defenses on a hill. These defenses were made to be used in case of an airborne attack. Consequently these defenses, although excellent, were worthless because they had been left unguarded. A small enemy security force could easily have held this hill until reinforcements came from the town, thus denying this hill to us.

The best ally for Company C was the confusion of the enemy. They were ready for our forces coming in by sea, and ended up by being attacked from land.

Another great contribution to the lowering of the markle of the enemy

was our firing down into their foxholes from the higher buildings. Also demoralizing was the sharpshooting of our troops in hitting enemy who were scurrying around the top of the "Citadel" wall. If the enemy had intended to make a firm stand, why did they not gather all their men inside the "Citadel"? They had not taken into consideration the few houses whose top floors were lower than the top of the "Citadel" wall; but higher than their foxholes.

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If Company C had sat on the entrenched hill to swait reinforcements, no one could have criticized. The enemy had greater numbers, a superior defensive position, and a greater amount of automatic weapons, grenades and ammunition. Company C had less than its T/O and E strength in men and equipment, and much of its extra ammunition lay in bundles scattered all over the land. Yet the aggressiveness and resourcefulness of individuals in this little group made it possible to cause the enemy to capitulate.

Here are quotes attesting to the facts and accomplishments of this small airborne group:

area at 0442 on D-Day. The German Commander of Southern France and his CP were captured and all his communications to subordinate commands were cut. Companies B and C of the 509th Parachute Battalion were dropped through error at St Tropez. However, they reduced the enemy garrison there and aided materially in the landing of the 3d Division." (17)

"Two 'sticks' of paratroopers landed in the sea off St Tropez, near Cannes. The remainder made ground landings in the vicinity of these two towns. Although far from the designated DZ, these units organized themselves, made contact with the FFI forces, and proceeded to seize and hold St Tropez."

(18)

"The individual initiative of airborne personnel must be maintained at (17) A-3, Sec III, p. 3; (18) A-4, p. 34.

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its present high state. This initiative has proven invaluable during the assembly stages when dispersion is greatest. This initiative leads to considerable destruction and confusion of hostile troops and installations, even though the airborne troops are dropped outside the target area." (19)

General Patch highly commended C Company for the initiative and fighting ability shown in the capture of St Trope's. (20)

LESSONS

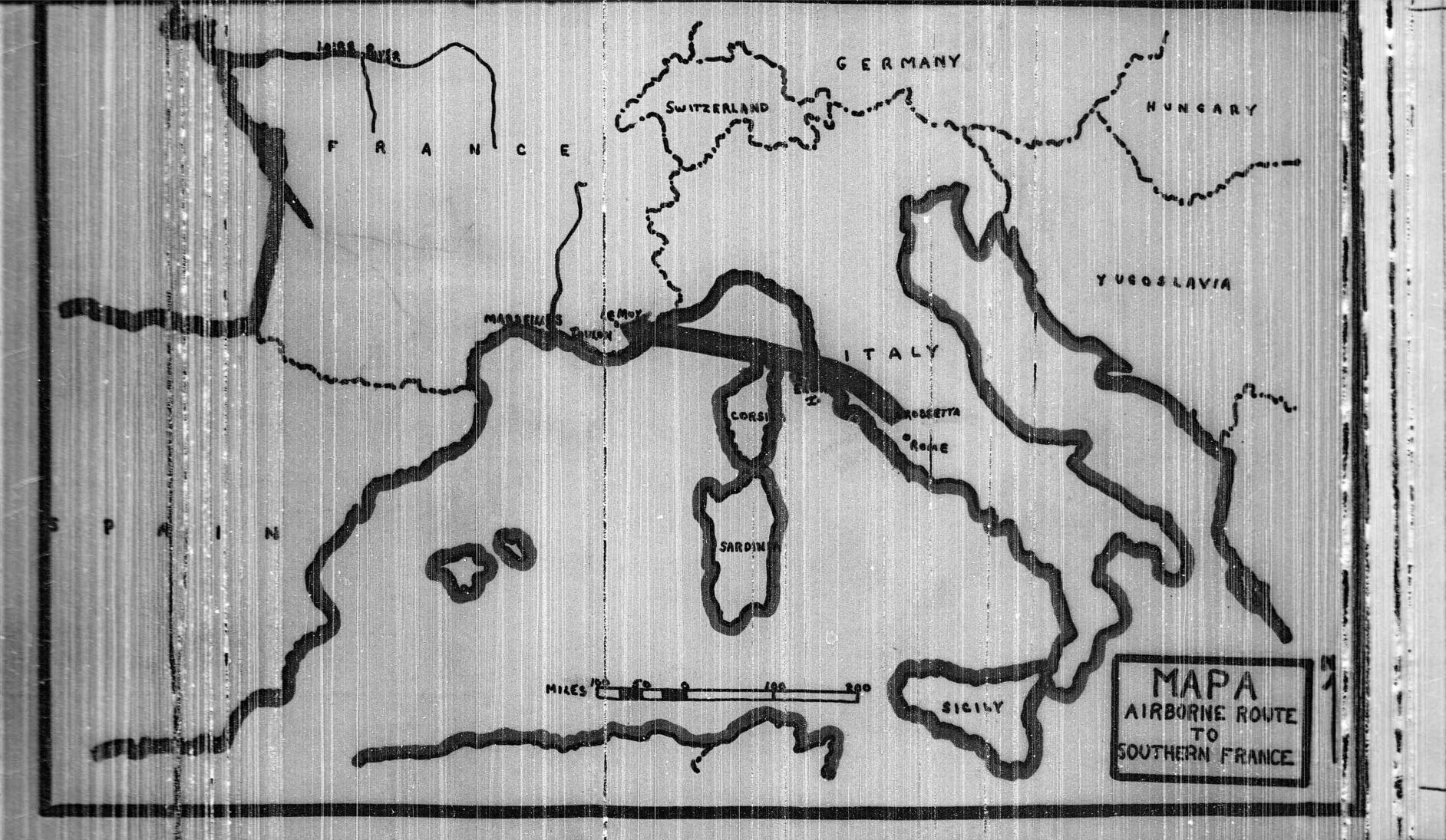
Some of the lessons brought out by this action are:

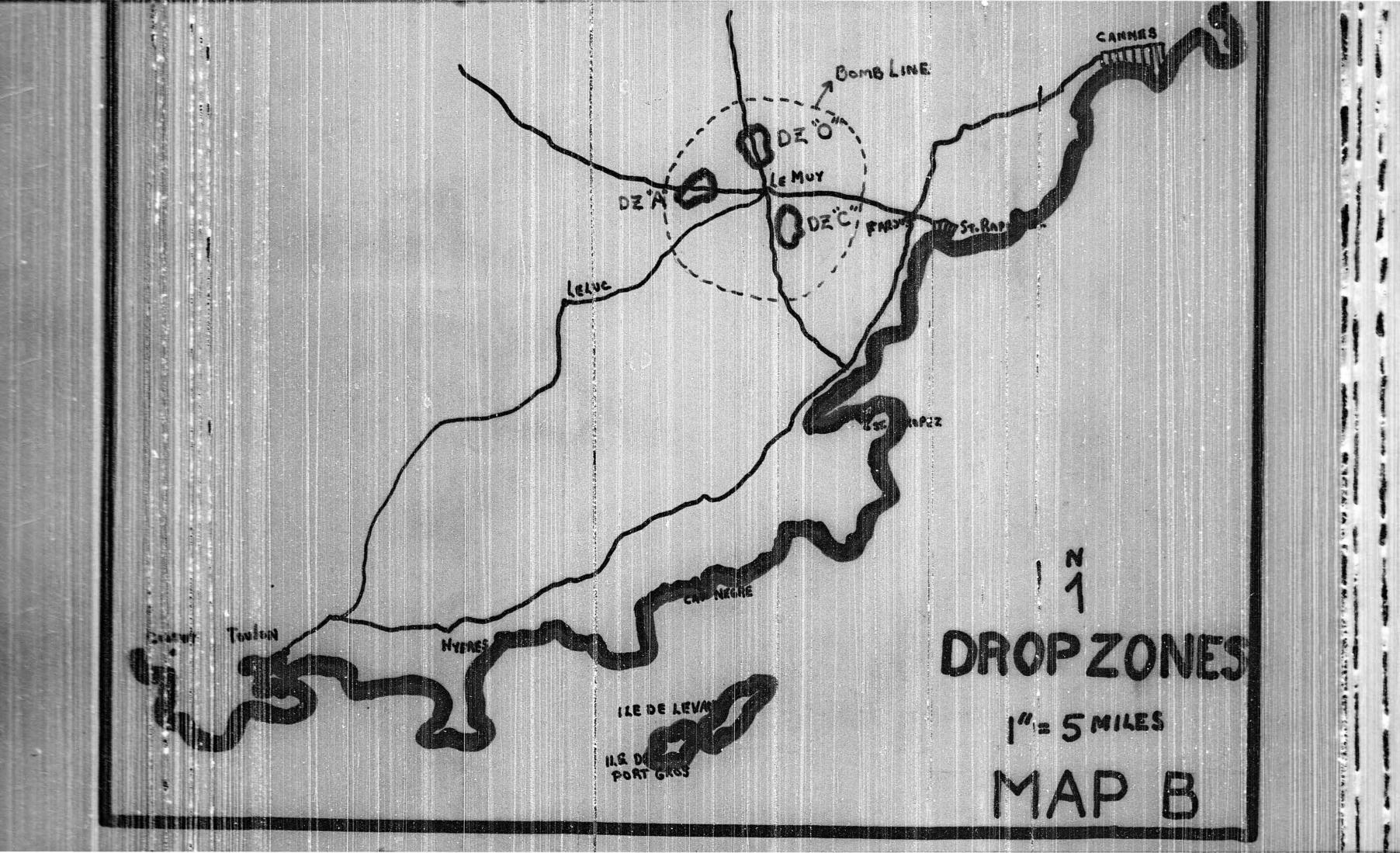
- 1. After dropping in a parachute operation at night, there is much confusion. Each man must be exceptionally careful not to shoot other friendly troops.
- 2. In an airborne operation it is necessary that each company have two SCR 300 radios. One as per T/O and E and one as a spare. In addition, these radios should be jumped individually with the operator rather than in equipment bundles.
- 3. A fool-proof system of identification to friendly troops should be worked out for personnel before an airborne operation. In large scale airborne operations, there always seems to be some small groups who are not dropped on the proper DZ.
- 4. In an airborne operation, troops should not leave "Mae Wests" (Air Corps life preservers) in the plane before a jump until it has been unmistakably ascertained that they are to jump on land away from bodies of water.
- 5. When an airborne assault is in conjunction with some other greater effort, give the airborne personnel more detailed information of the missions of greater effort. Then in case airborne troops are dropped outside their intended area, they may be in position to materially aid the main effort by knowing just how they can best help.

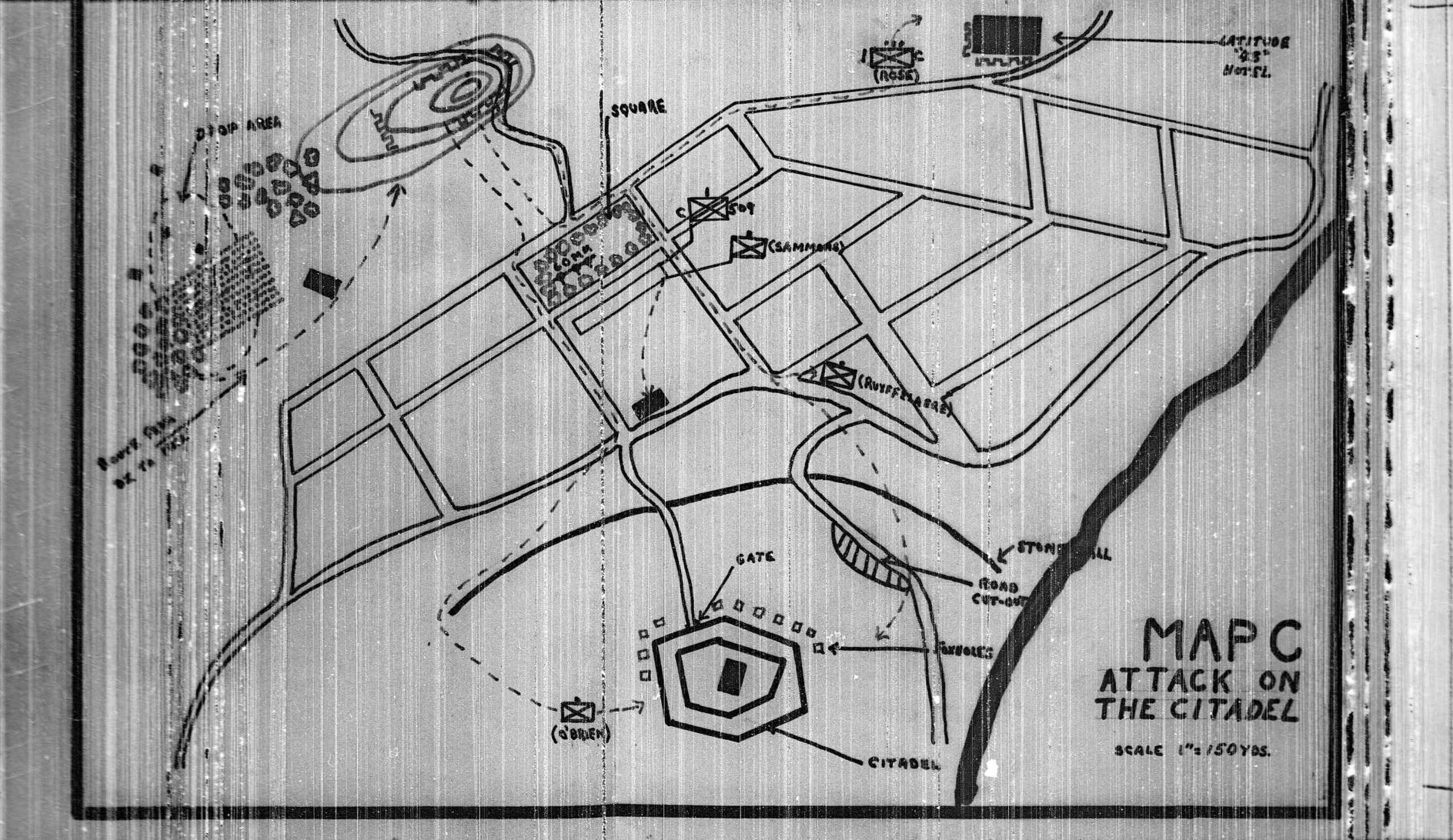
(19) A-5. Sec I. p. 2; (20) Percentl-knowledge; Statement by Capt Mallage.
1 Dec 1947.

- The preparation of supplementary defensive positions against an airborne operation is sound, but only when these positions are held by small security elements, otherwise airborne troops can make advantageous use of the positions themselves.
- 7. Rocket launchers can be used effectively for other missions besides antitank defense.
- "The attacking echelon of the platoon works its way as close as it can get to the hostile position without masking friendly supporting fires." (21)
- "Fire superiority is gained by subjecting the enemy to fire of such accuracy and intensity that his fire becomes so inaccurate or so reduced in volume as to be ineffective; once gained, it must be maintained."

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CITADEL LT SAMMONS FORMOLES LINE OF FIRE STONE WALL SKETCH D TERRAIN PROFILE SCALE I" = 20YDS.