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OPERATIONS OF THE 82d AIRBORNE DIVISION
IN THE INVASION OF HOLLAND,
ARNHEM OPERATION,
17 - 26 SEPTEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)

Type of operation described: VERTICAL ENVELOPMENT BY AN AIRBORNE
INFANTRY DIVISION TO SEIZE AND HOLD A CORRIDOR THROUGH LOW, FLAT
TERRAIN

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OPERATIONS OF THE 82d AIRBORNE DIVISION
IN THE INVASION OF HOLLAND,
ARNHEM OPERATION,
17 - 26 SEPTEMBER 1944

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph is a discussion of the vertical envelopment by the 82d Airborne Division of the area NIJMEGEN, HOLLAND, and vicinity during the ARNHEM OPERATION, 17-26 September 1944, a phase in the invasion of HOLLAND.

Before considering this action in and around NIJMEGEN one should recall the situation confronting the Allies in the fall of 1944 which precipitated the ARNHEM OPERATION.

By early September 1944 the Allies were closing rapidly on the outer defenses of the German WEST WALL (SIEGFRIED LINE). (See Map A) (1) Defeat of the defenders of the WEST WALL by frontal assault alone was calculated to be an expensive, and indeed jeopardous, undertaking. Also of grave consideration was the fact that our pursuit of the enemy into the defenses of his homeland had overextended our supply lines while those of the enemy grew proportionately shorter as he withdrew toward his source of supply. The three months of fierce fighting since the initial invasion 6 June 1944, had not led to the procurement of more adequate port facilities for the Allies. The vast bulk of all supplies still had to flow through the port of ANTWERP, now nearly five hundred miles from the front lines. The momentum of our advance was slowing, not so much from the action of the enemy as from our own problem of resupply. Capture of the Belgian port of ANTWERP relatively intact would relieve this strain immeasurably. (2)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

Allied intelligence agencies revealed that the Germans were relying

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- (1) A-5, p. 793D
(2) A-5, p. 793D

heavily on the numerous water barriers of HOLLAND as an important north-western extension of their defenses. Although these barriers, consisting principally of the DANGHEL, MAAS, WAAL, and LEK rivers, and connecting canals, were recognized as formidable obstacles, they were estimated to be the weakest link in the chain of defenses between the Allies and the heartland of GERMANY. (3)

Analysis of the situation indicated that a swift envelopment of the enemy left flank might well be screened by a vigorous frontal attack against the industrial centers of the RHINE. It was decided that the British Second Army would renew its northward drive, launching the main offensive toward, then beyond, the LEK RIVER, skirting the northern extremity of the WEST WALL to knife east and southeast to strike the strong fortifications of the SIEGFRIED LINE from the rear. Running interference on the left flank of Second Army, the Canadian First Army would also be in position to clear the coastal area of hostile forces, including the badly needed port facilities of ROTTERDAM.

Simultaneously 12th Army Group would support the British attack and conduct an offensive toward the RHINE by driving a wedge through AACHEN. To facilitate and hasten the flanking maneuver of the British and Canadians, a decision was reached for the extensive employment of airborne troops to seize and hold a corridor of key terrain and important bridges along the route of advance. The strictly ground phase of the proposed strategy was designated OPERATION GARDEN, whereas the airborne phase received the code name of OPERATION MARKET. Following a trend established by airborne operations in SICILY, ITALY, NORMANDY, and SOUTHERN FRANCE, direct command authority over all airborne forces participating in the operation would be vested in one individual. It was therefore that First Allied Airborne Army came into existence under the command of Lieutenant General BRERETON. (4)

(3) A-4, p. 57
(4) A-5, p. 23

(1)

The First Allied Airborne Army was certainly a force of allies, consisting of American, British, and Polish units. Specifically the First Allied Airborne Army was composed of XVII Corps (Airborne) (US), including the 82d Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne Division; Airborne Corps (British), including the 1st Airborne Division (British), the 1st Polish Parachute Brigade Group, and the 52d (Lowland) Division (Airportable) (British). It was decided that initially the American Divisions would be attached to the British Corps which would execute detailed planning and coordination with the Troop Carrier Forces. For transport and under the operational command of First Allied Airborne Army were IX Troop Carrier Command (US), 38 Group RAF (British), and 46 Group RAF (British). Though the First Allied Airborne Army had not existed as such prior to August 1944, all components had long before undergone extensive training and had passed the exacting test of battle. (5)

The most recent operation involving the 82d Airborne Division was the invasion of NORMANDY, 6 June 1944, in which the troopers dropped in to support the surface landings. After remaining in FRANCE until late July 1944, the 82d returned to ENGLAND. There the division redistributed key personnel, absorbed replacements, and underwent intensive unit training. During this period careful consideration was given to errors noted by officers and non-commissioned officers in combat, as a result of which corrective training followed. During the month of August 1944 units of the division participated in range practice, parachute drops, air landings, and rehearsals for two operations that did not materialize. Nevertheless the operational training yielded dividends in facilitating the planning phase of OPERATION MARKET. (6)

DISPOSITIONS AND PLAN OF FIRST ALLIED AIRBORNE ARMY

At 1800 hours, 10 September 1944, the Commanding General, First Allied

(5) A-6, p. 3

(6) Statement by 1st Lt GERALD G KIMBRELL, then Platoon Leader, 325th Inf

Airborne Army, held a conference at his headquarters, at which time he outlined the overall plan of OPERATION MARKET. In contrast with our SICILY and NORMANDY airborne operations, OPERATION MARKET would be a daylight operation to begin 17 September 1944—weather permitting. It was considered that the important element of surprise, characteristic of night operations, was outweighed by the necessity of delivering troops in concentrated strength to pinpointed zones in the immediate vicinity of their objectives, a navigational impossibility for night flying. Furthermore it was no longer necessary to cloak airborne operations in darkness to escape the vigilant observation of enemy fighter planes; allied air superiority was preponderant. However, because of the time length of the carrier column, two approaches to the drop and landing zones would be utilized, a northern route and a southern route. (7) (See map A) The selection of these routes resulted from consideration of various factors: location of troop carrier take-off ports, location of enemy flak, enemy fighter capabilities, location of enemy ground forces, and weather forecast. (8)

For the purpose of securing a corridor for the northward passage of the British 30th Corps, the 101st Airborne Division would drop in the vicinity of Eindhoven, the 82d in the vicinity of Nijmegen, and the British 1st (accompanied by the 1st Polish Brigade) in the vicinity of Arnhem. (See Map A) (9) The force at Arnhem would be reinforced by the landing of the 52d Lowlands Division as soon as airstrips became available. Since the 101st would have the southern most objective, its troops would be assigned transportation based in the Newbury area of southern England from whence they would fly the southern air corridor. The 82d, further north, would leave England from the Nottingham area and proceed along the northern route, closely followed by the British and

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- (7) A-5, p. 27
(8) A-6, p. 11 and 12
(9) A-6, p. 12

Polish forces from the SWINDON area. In event weather closed in over one route, the other route could be utilized by all participants. (10)

The intelligence briefing which followed included a discussion of previously identified enemy forces. The 15th German Army, which had occupied most of HOLLAND, was in the process of withdrawing into the REICH. The 5th and 7th Panzer Armies were established before the banks of the ALBERT CANAL in a line that extended south into the ARDENNES FOREST. The 5th Infantry Division was thought to be in the general area of proposed OPERATION MARKET-GARDEN. These forces, though great in number, were believed to be still reeling from the constant pressure exerted by the British Second Army. In spite of equipment limitations in an airborne operation, the 1st Allied Airborne Army was expected to assault with more complete equipment than the deficient enemy. All weather forecasts indicated that the weather during that season would be ideal for an airborne operation, both over the carrier home-fields in ENGLAND and over the drop and landing zones in HOLLAND. This was an especially important consideration, as a principal characteristic of OPERATION MARKET would be the necessity for regular resupply by air until overland supply routes could be established by elements of OPERATION GARDEN breaking through. (11)

MISSION OF THE 82d AIRBORNE DIVISION

Elaborating on the missions of his forces, General BREWSTER directed General GAVIN, commanding general of the 82d Airborne Division to accomplish the following:

*Land by parachute and glider, commencing D Day, South of NIJMEGEN; seize and hold the highway bridges across the MAAS RIVER at GRAVE and the MAAS RIVER at NIJMEGEN; seize, organize, and hold the high ground between NIJMEGEN and GROENEBEEK; deny the roads in the Division area to the enemy;

(10) A-11, p. 10

(11) A-5, p. 795D

and dominate the area bounded North by line running from BEEK West through HAREFT thence Southwest to EINDSGHESSTRAAT, South by RIVER MAAS and the MOOER-RIETHORST HIGHWAY, East by OLIVE-NIJMEGEN HIGHWAY and FORST REINSWALD, and West by line running North and South through EINDSGHESSTRAAT¹.

This meant that the division would be required to seize crossings over three principal waterways and dominate key terrain of approximately 25,000 yards frontage. Following receipt of this order Commanding General, 82d Airborne Division, and his staff proceeded with an exhaustive map reconnaissance of the area south of NIJMEGEN for the purpose of selecting the best tactical drop and landing zones. Fortunately, by early morning of 11 September 1944 a Dutch Commande Captain, formerly from NIJMEGEN, was able to volunteer his knowledge of the terrain to the staff. Before noon the same day zone preferences were presented to the operational headquarters of the IX Troop Carrier Command. Only minor deviations from the recommended zones were desired by the Air Corps to avoid known enemy flak concentrations. (12)

At this time the troop carrier lift estimated to be available for the operation was announced. Completion of the draft of a division outline plan followed and was in the hands of unit commanders the next morning, 12 September 1944. Unit commanders then proceeded with organizational planning which matured into the issuance of orders, which in turn resulted in the preparation of unit loads. Unfortunately much of this work had to be repeated several times because of changes in strength of lift at various airdromes to be utilized. (13)

It is only logical that airborne units desire that tactical unity be maintained constantly; that platoons, companies, battalions, and

(12) A-9, p. 1

(13) A-9, p. 2

regiments be bivouaced, receive briefings, and have occasion to prepare final combat plans together. At least such organizations should be located at the same airfield. This was not permitted before OPERATION MARKET because troop carrier units insisted that their tactical unity be maintained; that they be allowed to service and fly their own aircraft. It was decided that the advantage of airborne units loading, flying, jumping, and landing with tactical unity, ready for immediate organized encounter with the enemy did not justify the breaking up of squadrons to accommodate odd sized airborne units, as this would tend to strain their command, control, and administration.

This situation emphasized the fact to airborne and troop carrier commanders alike that the C-47 was not the most suitable type aircraft for transporting airborne troops and equipment. When utilizing all passenger space the plane carried only eighteen to twenty-two troopers, less than a full platoon. For this reason members of one platoon transported in more than one ship might be dropped miles apart, thus arriving as individuals instead of well coordinated teams subject to accustomed command. (14)

82d AIRBORNE DIVISION UNITS AND UNIT MISSIONS

Finally lift assignments were agreed upon and the resulting assignment of departure airfields made assignment of regimental and subordinate missions possible. Participating in OPERATION MARKET as the principal combat components of the 82d Airborne Division would be the 504th, 505th, and 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments, the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, the 319th, 320th, 376th, and 456th Field Artillery Battalions, the 80th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, and the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion.

It was deemed tactically necessary that the first lift consist of the three parachute infantry regiments, Division Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Division Artillery Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Division Signal Company, Battery A of the antiaircraft artillery battalion, the

entire 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, and an advance party from the 325th Glider Infantry. These units would be transported by fifty gliders and 482 C-47 aircraft. In order to effect the greatest possible surprise upon the enemy, the transports would fly in a very tight column with only the minimum time interval between serials. The pathfinder team would land on Drop Zone "O" a bare ten minutes in advance of the first serial. (See Map B) (15)

The Commanding General, 82d Airborne Division made the following assignment of missions to his regiments with the understanding that any regiment should be prepared to assume the mission of any other regiment at a moment's notice: the 504th Parachute Infantry would jump on Drop Zone "O" and proceed to capture all bridges crossing the MAAS-WAAL CANAL and the MAAS RIVER BRIDGE at GRAVE, after which all ground would be captured and denied the enemy between the WAAL RIVER on the north and the MAAS RIVER on the south, the MAAS-WAAL CANAL on the east and a line running north from EINDHOVENSTRAAT to the WAAL RIVER on the west; the 505th Parachute Infantry would jump on Drop Zone "N" in order to capture and organize the defense of the GROESBEKK HEIGHTS and to assist the 504th in the capture of the two southernmost bridges spanning the MAAS-WAAL CANAL; the 508th Parachute Infantry with the greatest regimental strength in the division would jump on Drop Zone "T" to execute possibly the most responsible mission of the division, that of holding Zone "T" open for glider landings and subsequent aerial resupply, the seizure and organization of the high ground between NIJMEGEN and WYLER, the establishment of road-blocks along the eastern slope of the high ground, to assist the 504th in taking the two northernmost bridges of the MAAS-WAAL CANAL, and ultimately to anticipate an order to capture the WAAL RIVER highway and railroad bridges at NIJMEGEN: the 325th Glider Infantry would land at Zone "O" on D / 2 and would constitute the division reserve. (See Map B) (16)

(15) A-9, p. 1

(16) Recent statement of Lt Col SHIELDS WARREN, CO, 1st Bn, 508th PIR

After receipt of the regimental missions on 12 September 1944 issue down the chain of command of battalion, company, and even platoon orders rapidly followed. All Officers and NCO's, and so far as possible individual troopers were instructed in considerable detail the missions of the various units that substitutions might be made, if necessary, with the maximum of efficiency.

Accurate large scale maps and the latest aerial photographs of the NIJMEGEN area were placed in the hands of every individual, that check-points might be carefully studied and other terrain features impressed with indelible clarity upon the mind prior to take-off. Hastily constructed sand-tables assisted unit commanders greatly in the rehearsal of the expected tactics of their organizations. (17)

Unit loads were meticulously computed, checked, and rechecked as no margin was allowed for error. Within three days (by 15 September 1944) all of the necessary preparations were satisfactorily completed in spite of a number of changes of the basic plan, each of which vitally affected the composition of the divisional lift and the location of units at take-off airdromes. By dawn of 16 September 1944 all units had moved to and were sealed at their appropriate airfields. (18)

Nearly every individual in the division spent 16 September inspecting and adjusting personal equipment, writing letters home, and discussing the most minute details of the morrow's expected tactics.

NARRATION

DAY

On 17 September 1944 the rising sun rapidly dried out the slight fog that enveloped the English countryside. Down from Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces came final instructions to commence OPERATION MARKET. Final briefings were conducted and aircraft loaded with personnel

(17) Statement of Colonel WARREN, 5 March 1950

(18) A-9, p. 1

and equipment. The first serial rolled down the runway at 0950. The last plane of the lift was in the air by 1040. Breaking through intermittent clouds the air train headed nearly due east, out and over the ENGLISH CHANNEL. Along the route Jumpmasters anxiously joined crew members in spotting check-points. According to plan, there below lay a line of various type vessels to mark the course across the channel, and to go to the rescue of those forced down into the choppy waters. Then suddenly there were no more friendly vessels below. All eyes strained in the direction of flight. A haze gradually closed around the aircraft.

Visibility between planes became poor. All Troopers who had participated in OPERATION NEPTUNE, the NORMANDY invasion, 6 June 1944, remembered the disconcerting, almost disastrous, fog bank that had caused the carriers to break formation and the resulting wide dispersion of jump personnel and equipment. This was the continental landfall. Below, there could again be seen ships, enemy flak barges with greedy tongues of flame frequently reaching skyward. 88 mm and heavier ack-ack fire was fortunately inaccurate, however a few casualties resulted from 20 mm and small-arms fire. The haze cleared. The carriers continued unflinchingly on course in tight formation. The ineffective flak of the coastlines diminished to zero as the air-column proceeded inland. Obvious check-points were again a welcomed sight.

Within fifteen minutes of the drop zone the enemy started blazing away again with growing intensity. Everyone wondered, "Was Jerry even better informed of the coming attack than the troopers?" Machine gun, 20 mm, and 88 mm fire was clearly visible. Still casualties from the fire were relatively light. Systematically our fighter-bombers went into action eliminating and discouraging fire from the ground batteries. Enemy fighters hesitated to attack the tempting carrier targets because of the obviously strong fighter escort overhead.

Exactly on schedule the pathfinder team descended on Drop Zone "Q" at 1250. (See Map B) Just ten minutes later the head of the air column homed on their signal to drop the 505th Parachute Infantry. The first paratroopers on the ground immediately proceeded to attack the small caliber flak units that dotted the area. Barrels were depressed and guns fired point blank to little avail against the troopers rushing gun positions from all directions. Discouraged, these gun crews not killed nor captured deserted their weapons and equipment and fled into the woods. These ack-ack pieces not damaged by small-arms fire were seized intact, and unfortunately were left intact.

Troop carrier pilots were remarkably accurate in the dropping of their human cargo. Quite obviously lessons had been learned from and since the NORMANDY drop. Nearly all units were dropped according to schedule on, or in the immediate vicinity of, their proper zones. As consequence of a mix-up in marshalling the 2d Battalion serial of the 505th dropped before the 3rd Battalion, causing the 2d Battalion to land two thousand yards northeast of its proper zone. For no known reason two platoons from the 508th were dropped into GERMANY approximately two miles northeast of their scheduled drop zone. Without the loss of a man these platoons later joined their parent unit, accompanied by approximately forty German prisoners of war and the report of at least an equal number of enemy killed. It was later confirmed that these were the first prisoners of war to be secured in GERMANY proper by allied airborne troops.

In direct contrast to the confused intermingling of fragments of units participating in OPERATION NEPTUNE, units landed almost 100% intact, ready for immediate contact with the enemy. There was no milling of troops seeking landmarks that could be identified on their maps, because except for the cases listed above, all units landed where they were expected to, and were able, after a brief assembly and

and organization period, to proceed directly with their respective missions. (19)

The 504th Parachute Infantry, with the largest regimental area of responsibility descended on three drop zones simultaneously beginning at 1513. One company dropped south of the MAAS on the western outskirts of GRAVE, while the remainder of the 2d Battalion was released north of the river and west of the town of OVERASSELT on Drop Zone "G". The two forces converged on the GRAVE BRIDGE, completely surprising a platoon of the enemy to take the span intact with little resistance. * The 3rd Battalion also landed on Drop Zone "O", proceeded to clear the enemy from the division zone west of the MAAS-WAAL CANAL, and to deny the enemy the use of the GRAVE-NIJMEGEN HIGHWAY. The 1st Battalion dropped on the open ground northeast of OVERASSELT and immediately set out to seize the bridge objectives over the MAAS-WAAL CANAL. Strong enemy resistance was encountered but swiftly overcome to seize the arch at HENUMEN. Evidently an enemy message preceded the 1st Battalion's next move, to BLANKENBERG and HATERT. There the bridges had been destroyed and the enemy withdrawn before the approach of the battalion. All initial missions of the regiment were fulfilled by 1930, and by 2300 the 2d Battalion, attacking GRAVE, occupied same after forcing an estimated 400 enemy to abandon the town. (2) (See Map B) (21)

As has been previously stated, the 505th parachuted at 1500. The 2d Battalion dropped on Zone "T", northeast of GROESBEKE, while at the same time the other two battalions arrived at Drop Zone "H", south of GROESBEKE. In short order the city was occupied, the southeastern sector of the division airhead cleared of the enemy, outposts established along a line from KAMP to MOOK, and contact made with elements of the

(19) Statement of Colonel WARREN, 5 March 1950

(20) A-9, Map Annex

(21) A-9, p. 2

504th at the destroyed bridge sites over the ~~Waal~~-WAAL CANAL at BLANKENBERG and BLANKENBERG. Thus all initial missions were completed in the 505th regimental zone of responsibility by 2000. (22) (See Map B)

Parachute elements of the division headquarters dropped on Zone "N" south of GROESBEKE immediately after the 505th at 1306. As soon as the remainder of the headquarters had landed by glider at 1350 the headquarters proceeded to set up a command post 1,000 yards west of GROESBEKE by 1700. (23) (See Map B)

The 506th began jumping on Zone "T", 2,000 yards north of GROESBEKE at 1328. 1st and 2d Battalions landed well within their zone while the 3rd Battalion landed 700 yards short and to the southwest, but with no casualties. Lieutenant Colonel SHIELDS WARREN, JR., led the 1st Battalion through three miles of enemy territory to occupy the high ground in and around DE PLOEG, the battalion objective by 1830. After consolidating the position, Companies A and B were dispatched to attempt the capture of the large highway bridge across the WAAL at NIJMEGEN upon the advice of friendly Dutch civilians who maintained that the bridge was lightly held. By 2030 both companies were within the city engaged in heavy fighting. In storming a building, reported by the Dutch underground to contain the control room for the demolition of the bridge, a platoon from A Company led by Captain JACQUES ARAMS was surrounded by an estimated enemy battalion. In spite of such terrific odds the platoon succeeded in destroying the building, but due to its encirclement was not able to return to its parent unit for nearly five days. (24) (See Map B)

It is interesting to note that while the A Company platoon was destroying the control building a Dutch underground officer swam the WAAL, a very cold, wide river and snipped all demolition firing cables under the very noses of the German troops on the bridge. (25)

(22) A-9, p. 2

(23) A-9, p. 2

(24) A-12, p. 1, 2, and 3

(25) Statement of Colonel WARREN, 5 March 1950

The 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion; the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion; and Battery A, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion also landed on Drop Zone "N" in rapid succession after the 505th. The 376th was initially in direct support of the 505th and fired its first mission on call from the regiment at 1800. The 307th furnished cover for Division Headquarters in its move from Zone "N" and then protected Division Command Post when it was established. The ack-ack battalion allotted two 57 mm antitank guns to each of the infantry regiments and held two in division reserve for protection of the Division Command Post. (26) (See Map B)

D-1

The 504th retained the responsibility of holding all of the airhead west of the MAAS-WAAL CANAL with primary emphasis on aggressive patrolling of the GRAVIS-ELDMEGEN HIGHWAY. The city of GRAVE was held and bridges across the MAAS at GRAVE and across the MAAS-WAAL CANAL at HEUMEN were denied the enemy. At noon one platoon moving north along the MAAS-WAAL CANAL coordinated with a 508th patrol to attack and capture the ELDMEGEN-GRAVE highway bridge at HONINGHUTTE. (27) (See Map C)

The 505th continued to maintain its initial defensive area of responsibility in the southeast sector of the division zone. The enemy sent patrols to feel out our positions at HORST, GRAFWEGEN, and RIETHORST and after minor firefights withdrew in the direction of the REKHEWALD. One such patrol was detected and captured as it attempted to by-pass first battalion positions. Upon interrogation it was learned that the mission of the enemy patrol was to demolish the bridge at HEUMEN. At approximately 1845 a thirty-five car freight train attempting to reach GERMANY was captured on the outskirts of HEILANT. In preparation for the landing of additional glider elements of the division and aerial resupply, at 1240 the regiment, minus perimeter patrols from each battalion, attacked and cleared the glider landing zone south and southeast of

(26) A-9, p. 3

(27) A-9, p. 3

GROESBECK of approximately a battalion of enemy believed to be homeguardmen planting antipersonnel mines. The enemy troops were apparently poorly trained and offered little resistance before withdrawing. (28) (See Map Q)

Throughout the night of 17-18 September Companies A and B of the 508th aggressively advanced toward the bridge against determined enemy resistance. Shortly after dawn Baker Company was reorganizing for the final 400 yard drive through NIJMEGEN against the highway bridge when word was received that the Germans had launched a coordinated attack in the WYLER area and were already overrunning the glider landing zone located there. On regimental order B Company went into a defensive position in NIJMEGEN. Able Company was withdrawn to defend the DE PLOEG high ground while the other two companies of the battalion relieved a group of supply personnel which had been organized by the regimental S-4 to defend the supply dump at the edge of the landing zone. (29) (See Map Q)

It was then realized that the 20 mm guns taken intact the previous afternoon had been recovered by the enemy and were now being utilized against the troopers. Lacking sufficient strength to dislodge the enemy from this vital area, B Company was called out of NIJMEGEN. The enemy seemed only too glad for B Company to break contact, as no enemy patrols followed the company withdrawal. After a morning of fiercely determined fighting, 1st Battalion cleared the enemy from the landing zone at 1400 even as glider reinforcements prepared to land. (30)

In the vicinity of the landing zone 149 prisoners of war were taken and sixteen 20 mm flak guns captured that had been brought in to welcome our evidently anticipated glider landings. On this occasion guns taken intact were made inoperable without delay. As has been previously stated in a discussion of operations of the 505th, a platoon from the

(28) A-12, p. 5

(29) A-12, p. 2

(30) Statement of Colonel WARREN, 5 March 1950

24 Battalion of the 508th coordinated with elements of that regiment in the assault and capture of the MAAS-NAAL BRIDGE at HONINGHUTTE at high noon. (31)

Only a few gliders had arrived with the paratroopers of the 82d on D-Day, part of the division headquarters and representatives of the 325th Infantry. As stated above, only one battalion of artillery, the 376th, arrived with the main body of troops on 17 September. By mid-morning of the 18th the enemy had partially recovered from our surprise attack and it was realized that to stop his expected coordinated counterattacks entire Division Artillery would be needed. With this realization to motivate units, Landing Zones "H" and "I" were cleared for the landing of glider serials between 1000 and 1100. (32)

The glider lift consisted of 450 gliders bearing two field artillery battalions, an antitank company, and a badly needed medical company. Amid constant but scattered small-arms fire from the enemy delaying in the sparse wooded areas surrounding the landing zones the glider units unloaded with relatively few casualties. Although the landing was considered highly successful, several gliders overshot their zones and landed beyond the border in GERMANY, however, a high percentage of the personnel of these gliders eventually rejoined the main body, hand-carrying their vital equipment. (33)

Immediately after landing, assembling, and reorganizing the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion was ordered into the direct support of the 508th, the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion to reinforce the fires of the 376th (already furnishing direct support to the 505th) and the 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion to be in general support of the division. The 57 mm antitank guns of Battery B of the 80th Anti-aircraft Battalion were divided between the zones of the 505th and the 508th. Although it was an established fact that the 57s would do little damage to the German Tiger Tank, they offered considerable

(31) A-12, p. 3

(32) Statement of Colonel Warren, 5 March 1950

(33) Statement of Colonel Warren, 5 March 1950

protection against lightly armored personnel carriers and light tanks. (34)

Since there was little space in the glider lift to accommodate additional supplies for the troops who had landed on D-Day, an aerial resupply train consisting of 135 B-24 bombers closely followed the gliders. Approaching in tight formation at low altitude the planes released the resupply bundles which landed in a compact pattern. Since approximately 80% of the supplies were recovered the mission was considered successful.

D / 2

The spearhead of OPERATION GARDEN, the British Guards Armored Division, approached the GRAVE bridge to make welcomed contact with elements of the 504th there at 0820 on 19 September. Arrival of these reinforcements meant that Commanding General of the 82d would be able to redeploy his units to better advantage. 2d Battalion, 504th, proceeded across the MAAS-MAL CANAL to relieve the 2d Battalion of the 506th from the defense of the high ground and forest of the JOEKER BOSCH area. 3rd Battalion, 504th, moved by way of JOEKER BOSCH to a position east of MALDEN to compose the first formidable division reserve of the operation. 1st Battalion, 504th, assumed responsibility for the security of the whole area formerly assigned the entire regiment, by employing A Company to guard the bridge at GRAVE, B Company the bridge at ~~MAALDEN~~, C Company the HONINGHUTIE bridge, and D Company to patrol the highway between GRAVE and HONINGHUTIE. During the night of 19-20 September A Company was relieved of its duties at GRAVE by elements of the British 52d Brigade and B Company by elements of the Geldstream Guards. Upon relief in its old area, 1st Battalion, 504th, promptly marched to an assembly in the forest of JOEKER BOSCH. (See Map D) (35)

Throughout the day the 505th (Minus 2d Battalion) continued to improve its defensive positions throughout the southeastern sector of

(34) A-9, p. 4

(35) A-9, p. 4

the division zone. Enemy action consisted primarily of patrols feeling for gaps in the thinly held line. Fully realizing that large gaps did exist, Commanding Officer, 505th frequently moved his units to different positions up and down the front in order to confuse and counter any action resulting from information reported by these patrols. In the late afternoon an enemy attack started building up out of the REKESWALD that was finally repulsed after lasting well into the next day.

2d Battalion, 505th, which had been holding HILL 81.8, west of GROESBEKE, was relieved from that mission and attached to the Guards Armored Division at 1100 and marched northward to attack the bridges at NIJMEGEN. Except for a few casualties resulting from artillery fire the battalion moved into NIJMEGEN through minor opposition. In the middle of the city a prearranged reorganization for combat was carried out. Baker Company with seven tanks from the 2d Battalion, Grenadier Guards, diverged from the column to the left and moved against the railroad bridge. The remainder of the 2d Battalion and the tanks of the Grenadier Guards (-) reinforced by a company of British Armored Infantry resumed the advance against the highway bridge. Approximately 400 yards south of the bridge this force entered a park where the enemy had established his main battle position. The Allied units assaulted immediately and were promptly thrown back. Heavy mortars were set up and rained explosives on the enemy and his defenses. Repeated assaults during the afternoon and evening failed to make a breach of the line. Throughout the night patrols continued to feel for enemy weakness. (See Map D) (36)

When the 2d Battalion of the 505th was relieved by 2d Battalion of the 504th of the mission of occupying the JOHANN BOSCH that unit was readily utilized to strengthen the eastern sector of the airhead by

(36) A-7, p. 9

moving into the line between KAMP and VOEHILL. This enabled the overextended 1st Battalion to contract its lines in defense against ever increasing attacks into the coveted high ground between WYLER and HILL 64.6. Both the 1st and 2d Battalions cooperated in keeping the landing zone east of GROESBECK open for resupply missions until 1800. (37) However the only supplies to arrive were dropped at 1500 by thirty C-47's and unfortunately because of high winds and the excessively high altitude of the planes only an insignificant number of bundles were recovered by our forces. (See Map D) (38)

As a counter to the frequent enemy attacks out of GERMANY, in the early afternoon 1st Battalion pushed into the village of BEEK and established a roadblock to be held by elements of B Company. Very shortly it became apparent that the position was insufficiently manned and was subsequently reinforced by a platoon from D Company of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion. Perhaps the most determined fighting of the day occurred on the slopes of HILL 75.9. At 1530 depleted A Company (two officers and forty-two men) reinforced by a platoon from G Company, attacked HILL 75.9 and completely routed an enemy force of two companies that had occupied well prepared positions. In this inspired local action considerable enemy equipment, including two 20 mm cannon and 300 rounds of ammunition, was captured and promptly put to good use against the fleeing Germans. The hill was no sooner secured than the enemy became aware of the small number of troops holding the hill and proceeded with successive counterattacks which lasted well into the night without success. (39) Simultaneously with A Company's attack on HILL 75.9, elements of B and G Company attacked and seized WYLER and IM THAL respectively with little opposition and immediately established effective roadblocks in each town.

(37) Statement of Colonel WARREN, 5 March 1950

(38) A-11, p. 74

(39) A-12, p. 4

The 1st Goldstream Guards, Armored, and the 1st Goldstream Guards, Infantry, elements of the British Guards Armored Division, moving through the corridor secured by the paratroop and airlanding units of OPERATION MARKET, were attached to the 82d Airborne Division before noon of 19 September and moved to DEKKERSWALD in division reserve. (40)

D 43

With the 2d Irish Guards attached, the 504th (-) proceeded to clear the area between ~~BOHMER~~ BOSCH and the WAAL RIVER during the morning of 20 September. Shortly after noon the 2d Battalion, 504th, was relieved from division reserve and marched to join its now reinforced parent regiment in the assault crossing of the WAAL RIVER. This crossing was effected at 1500 with the use of British assault boats just around the river's bend west of the NIJMEGEN BRIDGES. The enemy evidenced surprise at the crossing site and time selected for the move by offering only uncoordinated resistance to the crossing. By 1800 the regiment had captured the remains of the railroad bridge and firmly established a bridgehead north of NIJMEGEN, including the ancient moated forts of VAN HOLLAND and HET LAUWIK. Closely coordinating with 2d Battalion, 505th, attacking through NIJMEGEN, the reinforced 504th rapidly closed around the main highway bridge to capture the north end of the span and the surprised German defenders. (See Map E) (41)

As previously stated, throughout the night of 19 September, 2d Battalion, 505th, attached to 2d Battalion, Grenadier Guards, continued to probe the southern defenses of the NIJMEGEN BRIDGE. At dawn a coordinated attack was launched by the Allied units but was efficiently repulsed by the enemy. Throughout the morning attempts were made to force a crossing of the bridge but without success. From 1300 until 1500 a pronounced effort was made to divert the attention of the enemy from

(40) A-9, p. 5

(41) A-9, p. 5

the proposed river crossing site of the 504th. The effort did enable initial surprise and prevented the enemy from withdrawing sufficient strength to halt the crossing, however the assault boats were detected on the river and subjected to considerable fire. On signal from the 504th the attackers of the south end of the bridge threw everything available against the defenders. After a final bloody advance the assaulting troops overran the bridge defenses, taking relatively few prisoners. At 1830 the lead tank of the Grenadier Guards rumbled across the highway bridge.

While the 2d Battalion participated in the assault on the NIJMEGEN BRIDGE the remainder of the 505th was involved in the heaviest fighting encountered since D-Day. During the morning the enemy jabbed viciously in sudden attacks on HORST and HEIKANT, then without warning an additional enemy regiment, reinforced by devastating artillery fire, assaulted 1st Battalion defenses at MOCK. The enemy relentlessly drove a wedge 1,000 yards deep into a ~~4,000~~ frontage between MOCK and RIETHORST. During the defense of the southeastern perimeter every available man was thrown into the line, including 185 glider pilots who had until this time appeared as interested but uninvolved observers. Fortunately Division was able to make a platoon of tanks available in time to throw the decision in favor of the 505th. By 2000 original lines were reestablished, though disjointed skirmishes continued well into the night. The above comment pertaining to the employment of glider pilots should not by any means be construed to imply that this group contributed materially to the repulsing of the enemy; rather that their temporary organization got them out of the way of the fighting men. The degree of efficiency of the glider pilots on the ground is well described in a letter dated 25 September 1944 from Brigadier General JAMES M. GAVIN to Major General PAUL L. WILLIAMS, Commanding General, IX Troop Carrier Command, "In looking back over the past week's operations

one of the outstanding things in my opinion, and one thing in most urgent need of correction, is the method of handling our glider pilots. I do not believe there is anyone in the combat area more eager and anxious to do the correct thing and yet so completely, individually and collectively, incapable of doing it than our glider pilots. Despite their individual willingness to help, I feel that they were definitely a liability to me." (41)

Beginning at approximately 1000, 20 September, the enemy initiated what proved to be a coordinated attack along the entire eastern and southeastern border of the division area. Two companies of enemy infantry converged on WILKE while two battalions of hostile parachutists, all strongly supported by armor and artillery drove elements of the 3rd Battalion, 508th, out of BEEK and back nearly 1,000 yards to higher ground. Once again the friendly fire of the direct support field artillery battalion coupled with a limited number of tanks from division greatly assisted in regaining the defenses of BEEK. Hardly had reorganization been accomplished in BEEK then the enemy counterattacked and recaptured the town. (See Map E) (42)

As 20 September expired the corridor between GRAVE and NIJMEGEN remained open, the highway bridge at NIJMEGEN had been crossed by elements of OPERATION GARDEN, and though fluctuating the division perimeter remained unruptured. Due to the weather badly needed supplies could not be flown in, and resupply overland was only theoretical. The purely airborne phase of the operation ended with a division count of nearly 200 dead and well over 600 wounded. (43)

(41) A-11, p. 75

(42) Statement of Colonel WARREN, 5 March 1950

(43) A-6, p. 36

D / 4

On 21 September the 504th continued to defend its bridgehead while subordinate units backtracked to mop up the area between the MAAS-WAAL CANAL and NIJMEGEN. The hardhitting 2d Battalion of the 505th assumed defense of the highway between NIJMEGEN and UBBERGEN while the remainder of the regiment strengthened defenses in the southern sector of the division zone. At dawn a determined 508th attacked to regain ground lost the day before. An equally determined enemy with superior numbers stopped the attack cold and threw the regiment for an additional 100 yard loss. During the subsequent reorganization all forces available were rallied and the attack reattempted at 1300. Slowly but surely the enemy was forced to withdraw until BERK was cleared and defenses reestablished by 1800. Shortly before 1500 the skies cleared and an estimated 400 G-47's arrived to drop supplies on Drop Zone "O". In spite of the fact that bundles were scattered over a two by six mile area, approximately 60% recovery was made through the help of Dutch civilian volunteers. (See Map F) (44)

D / 5

On 22 September the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 504th were relieved of the defense of the NIJMEGEN bridgehead and reverted to division reserve at DEKKERSWALD, while the 2d Battalion relieved 2d Battalion, 505th, from its defensive line astride the highway between NIJMEGEN and UBBERGEN and further cleared the area south of the WAAL and east of NIJMEGEN. Upon relief from the NIJMEGEN-UBBERGEN sector, 2d Battalion, 505th, rejoined the regiment and relieved the Coldstream Guards of the security of the bridge at HEIJEN. The remainder of the regiment mended its battered defenses and patrolled the highway between MOOE and RIETHORST. (See Map F) (45)

(44) A-9, p. 6

(45) A-9, p. 6

D / 6

On 23 September the weather was relatively clear and the long-awaited glider lift bearing the 325th Infantry, the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion (minus Batteries A and B already present in the airhead), Company A of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, and the remaining elements of Division Special Troops descended on Landing Zone "O", except for two gliders that never got away from ENGLAND, forty-three that dropped tow-line between the coast and the division area, and ten gliders unaccounted for. Immediately after landing, units of the 325th assembled in the wooded area west of GROENEHEEK as division reserve. All elements of the division, cheered by the arrival of reinforcing personnel and materiel, vigorously strengthened the reestablished perimeter with little enemy interference.

(See Map F) (46)

D / 7

Throughout 24 September the enemy troubled the division only by one inquisitive reconnaissance patrol that came out of and returned to the REIJENWALD without attempting to breach the perimeter. The 325th left division reserve to relieve the 505th from the line KAMP (exclusive), HORST, GRAFWEGEN, RIETHORST, WOOK, and assumed responsibility for the security of the bridge at HEEMEN. Upon relief from the southern sector by the 325th, the 505th moved north to assume responsibility for the close in protection of the NIJMEGEN bridges and the security of the bridge at NORTENHUTTE. The 504th was sent from Division Reserve to occupy a line from ERIJKOM to SMORENHOOKE to KAMP inclusive. (47) (See Map G)

D / 8

Evidently cautious because of the glider landings on 23 September,

(46) A-9, p. 7

(47) Recent statement of Lieutenant KIMRELL

the enemy made no notable attempts against the airhead throughout the 25th. After relief from the line by the 504th, the 506th took a rest in Division Reserve, otherwise the status quo remained undisturbed as all units improved positions.

D / 9

On 26 September, 3rd Battalion, 505th, was detached from the regiment guarding the bridges at NIJMEGEN and placed in Division Reserve. 1st Battalion, 504th, attacked and seized without great effort the factory area north of ERIEKOM. All units of the division enjoyed a well deserved breather from combat, but continued to improve positions and to maintain vigilant patrol activity throughout the corridor. (See Map G) (48)

In summary: within less than twelve short hours after the first paratroopers jumped on D-Day, all assigned objectives were captured. During the ten days discussed in this monograph, the 82d Airborne Division captured and held seven crossing sites over three major waterways, established and manned a perimeter of 25,000 yards frontage, cleared the area within the perimeter of the enemy, and held open the highway between GRAVE and NIJMEGEN for the passage of elements of OPERATION GARDEN, and thus successfully accomplished in detail the assigned mission of the division. All of this was done at a cost of less than 300 killed and 1,000 wounded, and 500 missing in action. During the same period the enemy suffered nearly 2,000 killed and lost over 2,000 as prisoners of war.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. TROOP TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT

Although dispersion of unit components was not as dangerously great in OPERATION MARKET as in OPERATION NEPTUNE, there was still a great deal of valuable time lost in assembling troops after the jump

(48) A-9, map section

because of the necessity of breaking up organizational unity for the flight to the drop zone. Especially in an airborne operation every individual and every bundle of equipment is an important element of the combat strength of an organization. Though losses of personnel and equipment must be anticipated in battle, it is most desirable that initially units be committed with full strength. In OPERATION MARKET paratroop units had no sooner landed than they were engaged with the enemy. Individuals who were not transported in the same plane with the main body of their platoon frequently had to fight through considerable opposition in order to join their tactical unit. Too frequently these individuals, as such, were destroyed before assembly could be effected. This expensive loss of manpower and equipment would have been considerably reduced if tactical unity of troops could have been maintained from the time of departure from the home airfield through the jump and landing on the drop zone. The structural design of the C-47, principal troop transport of OPERATION MARKET, prevented this in many cases as the ship lacked the capacity for a platoon and full equipment.

2. DROP AND LANDING ZONES

The principal resupply zone was located very near the perimeter of the division area, near a large forest from which the enemy could cover the zone with small-arms fire as well as artillery while afforded the cover and concealment of the forest. This enemy capability made recovery of supply bundles indeed hazardous, enabled enemy combat patrols to ruin bundles falling on the zone, and prevented recovery of bundles falling even a short distance outside the zone. Because of the close proximity of the forest the enemy was able to stage surprise attacks that nearly spelled disaster for the landing of gliderborne reinforcements.

3. OBJECTIVES AND MISSIONS

In addition to the staggering mission of seizing seven important crossing sites over three major waterways, the division was required to hold these crossings by manning a 25,000 yard frontage and all key terrain within the perimeter of the airhead. Considering that approximately one-third of the infantry strength of the division was required daily to recover resupply bundles, that enemy strong point pockets of resistance had to be destroyed in initially seizing all key terrain, that enemy combat patrols were capable of penetrating deep into the area through unavoidable gaps in the thinly held perimeter, it is felt that General GAVIN accurately described the successful accomplishment of the division mission as "marginal". It is believed that complete knowledge of mission, high morale, esprit de corps, aggressive small unit leadership, and individual initiative of troopers were factors that enabled the division to accomplish missions that might more appropriately have been assigned two divisions.

4. DAYLIGHT OPERATIONS

The weapon of surprise, desirable in all types of military operations, is absolutely essential in an airborne maneuver against an enemy still possessing any degree of mobility and striking power. In the invasion of SICILY and NORMANDY night operations were necessary in order to effect sufficient surprise. Fortunately by September 1944 the enemy was capable of attaining only the most temporary of local air superiority and the important element of surprise was outweighed by the desirability of delivering troops in concentrated strength to pinpointed zones in the immediate vicinity of their objectives, a navigational impossibility for night flying. In the invasion of SICILY and NORMANDY faulty navigation resulted in troop carriers breaking formation. In the darkness over SICILY improper identification

resulted in the shooting down of many planes by friendly land and naval forces. Check-points could not be spotted and troopers were dropped into the sea. In the grey dawn over NORMANDY there resulted a wide dispersion of troops which caused a confusing intermingling of elements of various organizations. In the broad open day light the air column of OPERATION MARKET encountered none of these difficulties. Following routes plainly marked with check-points the troop carriers proceeded directly to their destinations and with a minimum of exceptions discharged paratroopers and equipment over proper zones exactly as planned. In spite of the advantages accrued by this, the first large-scale daylight, airborne operation, the results would have been disastrous if a highly organized ground defense, supported by armor, had existed in the immediate vicinity of the drop zones.

5. WEATHER

Although an exhaustive study of the weather had preceded the conclusion that the weather would be ideal for an airborne operation during the latter half of September 1944, the experts were wrong. Overcast skies prevented badly needed airstrikes against enemy armor and artillery, and delayed resupply and reinforcement. Because of the weather resupply could not be effected with any degree of regularity, and a large number of bundles that were dropped were released at such high altitudes that they drifted into the hands of the enemy. Because of the weather the 325th Glider Infantry arrived four days later than scheduled, causing the division to be without a reserve during the most critical phase of the operation, a factor that might very well have caused defeat.

6. CAPTURED ENEMY EQUIPMENT

Due to the rapidity of the vertical envelopment, enemy gun crews were forced to abandon their weapons before they could make the guns

inoperable or dispose of large stocks of ammunition. Thus a great deal of ordnance was seized intact by the first wave of paratroopers. A few of these weapons were immediately employed against the enemy, but the majority were left alone as they had been captured. In spite of previous experience, the units apparently considered that an area once taken would never be lost. Unfortunately German counter-attacks proved this consideration faulty, and once again the weapons changed hands. Subsequent attacks by our forces were made against the coordinated fire of these guns, and although the guns were retaken, and this time properly and promptly demolished, the lesson cost a number of lives.

7. GROUND-AIR COMMUNICATION

On D / 1 the enemy anticipated the landing of gliderborne supplies and reinforcements and as a result only after a decided effort by our troops were landing zones freed for the landing of the gliders. Even so, gliders landed and were unloaded amid intense mortar and artillery fire. Many gliders with personnel and equipment were lost as a result of this enemy action; a loss that might well have been avoided if there had been adequate communication facilities available between our forces on the ground and those in the air. Forces on the ground should have been able to warn glider pilots not to land on the zones covered by fire, but to land on other designated areas.

8. ARTILLERY SUPPORT

On D / 3 the enemy launched a coordinated attack strongly supported by armor and artillery all along the eastern and southeastern border of the division zone. Slowly but surely our forces had to withdraw to the high ground. An enemy wedge 1,000 yards deep penetrated 1,000 yards of frontage. Close-in protection of rocket launchers and anti-tank grenades failed to halt the enemy armor. Only after every artillery battalion of the division directed fire on the penetration

was the enemy beaten out of the area. In all probability this threat would have severed the vital GRAVE-NIJMEGEN highway corridor, causing considerable delay to OPERATION GARDEN and possible defeat of the 82d Airborne Division, had sufficient supporting artillery not been immediately available.

9. DEFENSIVE FIGHTING IN TOWNS

On the night of 17 September a platoon from Able Company of the 508th attacked and destroyed a building housing the controls for the demolition of the NIJMEGEN BRIDGES. In so doing the platoon was surrounded by an entire battalion of hostile infantry. Taking full advantage of protection offered by semi-destroyed masonry, the platoon hastily formed a tight perimeter defense and successfully held the attacking enemy at bay for nearly five days. During this period the enemy employed mortar, machine-gun, and small-arms fire against the position to little avail. Finally, with only a few remaining rounds of ammunition, the platoon charged the besieging enemy, broke through, and returned to the parent unit.

10. AGGRESSIVE SMALL UNIT LEADERSHIP

On D + 2 forty-two men efficiently led by two junior officers successfully assaulted and captured an important hill held by an enemy force of two reinforced companies. Two 20 mm cannon and 300 rounds of ammunition, captured in the attack, were turned against the enemy and greatly assisted in repulsing his inevitable counter-attack.

LESSONS

1. In order to achieve the greatest efficiency of organizational unity so vital to paratroopers entering into combat immediately after landing, troop transports should be so designed to accommodate a full platoon with full battle equipment.

2. Resupply drop and landing zones should be located toward the interior of an airhead, away from heavily forested areas which might

harbor the enemy.

3. Airborne divisions should not be called on to secure frontage greatly in excess of that usually assigned a regular infantry division, because unless the strength of an extended front is dangerously reduced, delay will result in the seizure of vital objectives within the airhead.

4. When friendly air has superiority and there is no formidable hostile armor in the immediate vicinity of the drop zone, the surprise achievable by a night operation may be outweighed by the advantages of vertically enveloping the immediate vicinity of the objective in daylight.

5. Because of sudden, unpredictable, changes in the weather, resupply by air must not be dependent on good weather.

6. Enemy equipment, captured intact, should be destroyed to prevent recapture if it is not to be used to supplement our own equipment nor to be evacuated immediately for intelligence study.

7. Adequate ground-air communication facilities should be provided to direct glider landings from the ground in event of emergency.

8. Until adequate airborne armored vehicles can be designed and produced, present airborne artillery is indispensable to defense of airborne troops against hostile armor, artillery, and large concentrations of enemy troops.

9. Semi-destroyed masonry of towns can afford a strong defensive position against mortar, artillery, machine-gun, and small-arms fire.

10. A small unit aggressively led can attack and defeat larger units occupying prepared positions on commanding ground.