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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 550TH INFANTRY AIRBORNE BATTALION
(FIRST AIRBORNE TASK FORCE), IN THE AIRBORNE INVASION
OF SOUTHERN FRANCE, 13-16 AUGUST 1944
(SOUTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Battalion Executive Officer)

Type of operation described: AIRBORNE BATTALION IN THE ATTACK

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph explains the operations of the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion, First Airborne Task Force, in the airborne invasion of Southern France, 13-16 August 1944.

Since the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion (often erroneously referred to as 550th Glider Infantry Battalion) was organized on a special Table of Organization and was radically different in organization, training and equipment from other infantry battalions, it is considered advisable to cover briefly the organization, equipment and training of the Battalion. This Battalion was organized in the Panama Canal Zone on 1 July 1941. The enlisted personnel strength of 590 men was composed of Regular Army soldiers who had volunteered for airborne duty with the Battalion. All personnel had received a considerable amount of basic, unit and combined unit training as well as extensive jungle training prior to joining the Battalion. Officer personnel included seven officers who had served in the Panama Canal Zone and eighteen who had been assigned to the Battalion from the United States. The Battalion remained in the Panama Canal Zone for approximately two years during which time training was conducted for all types of combat with emphasis on jungle warfare training. In August 1943 the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion was ordered to proceed to Laurinsburg-Maxton Army Air Base, Maxton, North Carolina and was assigned to The

Airborne Command, Camp Mackall, North Carolina. During the period 1 September 1943 to 31 January 1944 the Battalion conducted the Airborne Instruction School at Laurinburg-Maxton Army Air Base and engaged in a limited amount of unit training. By 31 December 1944 the composition of the Battalion had changed materially and only 50% of the enlisted strength was Regular Army soldiers. The Battalion departed for the European Theater of Operations in April 1944; arrived in Italy in May 1944; and departed immediately for Trapini, Sicily where six weeks of training was conducted. In July 1944 the Battalion proceeded to Lido de Roma, Italy and was assigned to the First Airborne Task Force. (1)

The 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion was composed of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, three Rifle Companies and a small Medical Detachment. The Headquarters and Headquarters company consisted of administrative, supply, intelligence and Operations, and command sections plus an over-size Weapons Platoon of Cal. 30 Heavy Machine Guns, 81 M.M. Mortars and 37 M.M. Antitank Guns. Prior to the operation under consideration the 37 M.M. Antitank Guns were replaced by additional 81 M.M. Mortars and 2.36 Rocket Launchers. Each Rifle Company consisted of three Rifle Platoons and a Company Headquarters. The Rifle Platoon consisted of two Rifle Squads and one 60 M.M. Mortar Squad. Each Rifle Squad included one Cal. 30 Light Machine Gun Team. The Company Headquarters included an automatic Rifle Squad of two Automatic Rifle Teams. (2)

Battalion transportation which was transported by air included 9- $\frac{1}{4}$ ton trucks, 6- $\frac{1}{4}$ ton trailers and 17 hand carts. (3)

(1)(2)(3) Personal Knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948

The First Airborne Task Force (also referred to as the Seventh Army Provisional Airborne Division) was composed of:

2d. Independent Parachute Brigade (British)
517th. Parachute Infantry Regiment
509th. Parachute Infantry Battalion
550th. Infantry Airborne Battalion
551st. Parachute Infantry Battalion
602d. Pack Howitzer Field Artillery Battalion
Co. "A", 2d. Chemical Battalion
460th. Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
596th. Parachute Engineer Co.
Co. "D", 83d. Chemical Battalion
Antitank Company, 442d. Infantry Regiment
463d. Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
887th. Engineer Company.

This Task Force was organized 15 July 1944 under the command of Major General Robert T. Frederick. The Task Force Staff was composed of officers from the Airborne Command, Camp Mackall, North Carolina, who arrived in Italy on or about 15 July 1944. Since the major units of the Task Force were separate units and had been accustomed to operating independently, the problem of organizing the Task Force became one of orientation, coordination, and reequipping. Units of the Task Force were directed to accomplish designated training missions which would prepare each for its part in the forthcoming operation. One Task Force Command Post Exercise was held to coordinate and test the communications within the Task Force. Several of the smaller units had not been trained

as Airborne units and a school was established to give these units the required training. Ground rehearsals for the operations consisted of combat team exercises on ground similar to the terrain which each combat team would occupy in Southern France. The air rehearsal consisted of test loading of personnel and loading and lashing of all equipment and orientation flights by key personnel. (4)

PREPARATION FOR THE OPERATION

As early as 29 December 1943, Seventh Army had been directed to plan an operation similar in size to the operation against Sicily. The initial plan was for an invasion of Southern France with a target date during May 1944. This operation was to be known by the code name of "Anvil". The planning and preparations for operation Anvil were accomplished under very serious handicaps of shortages of troops, supplies and transportation and the dependency of this operation upon the success of other operations already in progress. It was finally determined that operation Anvil could be launched on 15 August 1944. (5)

It was for operation Anvil that the First Airborne Task Force was organized. For convenience, the Task Force was assigned the code name "Rugby Force". "It was to land on the high ground north and east of Le Muy and on the high ground north of Grimaud. The Primary mission was to prevent the movement of enemy forces into the assault area from the west and northwest. Prior to dark on D-Day, Le Muy was to be cleared of enemy forces and the area secured for subsequent glider

(4) Personal knowledge; A-2, Sec 1, pp 2 & 3; A-1, pp 86, 101 & 110; (5) A-1, Chap 1

landings. Thus, Rugby Force would assault enemy positions from the rear and assist the advance of seaborne forces by neutralizing enemy installations to the east within the range of weapons. Bridges in the airborne Division area were to be prepared for demolition, but no bridges were to be blown except on order of the Task Force Commander." (6)

The 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion closed on Lido de Roma, Italy, on or about 10 July 1944. The Battalion Commander was informed that the Battalion would participate in an airborne operation and was given a training mission which included the formation of an instructional team to teach the principles of airborne operations to nine ground units of the Task Force. As the Battalion had trained for Airborne operations since its activation in July 1941, there was little need for general tactical training. The Battalion had practically all of its organic equipment and the acquisition of special items needed for the operation was a simple matter. Supplies were drawn directly from Army Supply points and requisitions for supplies and equipment were filled promptly. The Battalion was authorized and received enough replacements to bring the strength up to 10% above tables of organization strength. The mission of training the ground units in airborne principles became a major objective of the Battalion. Instructional teams were organized and during the period 20 July to 5 August 1944 this training, which included computation of safe loads, loading and lashing of equipment, two operational flights and basic training in the technique of assembly after landing, was given to the nine ground units of the Task Force. (7)

(6) Quoted from A-1, p. 58; (7) Personal knowledge; A-1, p. 86

On or about 1 August 1944, the Battalion received the Task Force Operation Order covering the impending invasion. The 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion would land north of Le Muy on D-Day after all parachute elements had landed and would be in Task Force reserve initially. The Battalion was to be prepared to move to the attack in any direction immediately upon assembly. Plans would be made to assist the 2d Independent Parachute Brigade in the capture of Le Muy. Plans would be made to effect the recovery of all supplies dropped by parachute in the automatic aerial re-supply drop on D plus 1. This latter plan was to be put into effect on Task Force order if the Battalion had not been committed to the attack. (8)

Intelligence reports indicated that the following enemy units were located within the area to be occupied by the Task Force:

- 1 Battalion, 745th Infantry
- 242d Antitank Battalion
- 1048 Assault Gun Unit
- One unidentified Armored Battalion
- An Officer Candidate School with 1,000 Candidates
- 500 Labor troops
- Some lines of communication troops

Due to heavy withdrawals of enemy aircraft from the Southern France Area, little or no enemy air activity was expected. The enemy had taken passive defense measures against airborne landings by the construction of Anti-landing obstacles in the fields and vineyards. (9)

Immediately upon receipt of the Task Force Operations Order the Battalion Staff began planning its operation and writing the

(8) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948; (9) Personal knowledge; A-2, Section II, p. 1

Battalion Operation Order. A war room was established with a sand table reproduction of the invasion area and terrain and road map coverage of Southern France. On or about 5 August 1944 the Company Commanders were briefed on the situation by use of the sand table and without reference to the location of the area or names of towns. During the period 7-10 August 1944, the enlisted personnel were briefed on company sand tables and again no reference was made to the location of the assault area. (10)

The Battalion was issued complete map and aerial photograph coverage of the assault area. In fact, the Battalion was issued more maps and aerial photographs than it could use and after returning approximately 100 pounds had enough maps of various scales to issue each enlisted man one map or photograph and each officer a complete set of maps and photographs. (11)

By 10 August 1944 final preparations had been completed and on 11 August 1944 the Battalion left Lido de Roma for departure air bases approximately 125 miles north of Rome. The Battalion less Company "A" went into a staging area at Fallonica Air Base, Follonica, Italy, and Company "A" went to its staging area at Grossetto Air Base, Grossetto, Italy. These staging areas were established within close proximity of the landing strips and in comparison with staging areas for other airborne operations were very poor sites. Immediately upon arrival at the departure bases all personnel were restricted to the area and contact with persons not a part of the invasion force was prohibited. (12)

(10,11,12) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948

PREPARATIONS FOR THE TAKE OFF

On the evening of 13 August 1944 all airplane pilots, glider pilots and selected airborne officers attended briefing meetings. Plaster models and recent aerial photographs of the invasion area were studied. Final decisions were made and all matters were coordinated for the take off. (13)

Final Briefings of Battalion personnel were conducted 14-15 August 1944. During these briefings the plaster models, recent aerial photographs and maps were studied in every detail by each individual of the command. The plans for the operation were explained to each squad of the Battalion by the platoon leaders. At the conclusion of these briefing sessions each man of the Battalion was completely familiar with the entire operation and the terrain over which the Battalion would operate. Each glider load practiced loading and unloading its glider, checked the loads for safety and made final preparation for the operational loading of gliders on the morning of 15 August 1944. (14)

Items of individual equipment and individual supplies including air sickness tablets, salt tablets, atabrine, halazone tablets, rations, ammunition, grenades, escape kits, toilet paper and airborne first aid packets were issued. (15)

Gliders were placed on the take off runways on the morning of 15 August 1944. Gliders were loaded with equipment and supplies and the loads were checked for proper loading and lashing and maximum allowable weight. (16)

(13,14,15,16) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948

THE INVASION

During the night 14-15 August 1944 a constant stream of aircraft passed over the departure air bases. First, the heavy bombers passed en route to the assault area on their heavy bombardment missions. At approximately 2200 hours the transport planes carrying parachute troops took off from the departure bases. (See Map "A") These were followed by fighter and light bombardment planes and finally the returning heavy bombers and transport planes. As a result of the air activity the glider personnel in the staging areas were not able to get a good nights sleep prior to their entry into combat. (17)

Parachute troops began landing in the assault areas at approximately 0430 hours on 15 August 1944, and with a few exceptions, the Parachute force landed on the assigned drop zones. Returning pilots reported that the drop was successful and that enemy resistance was light. This information was reassuring to the Glider Troops. (18)

At approximately 1430 hours the gliders transporting the 550th. Infantry Airborne Battalion started taking off. Once in the air the planes circled to gain altitude and to assume the desired information. The planes from the various departure bases assembled over the Mediterranean Sea a few miles off the Italian coast and assumed the formation for the long flight. (19)

The U.S. Navy had cooperated in this operation by placing numerous ships and boats along the flight route to serve as check points and for rescue work. The flight was uneventful

(17) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948; (18) Personal knowledge; A-2, Section I, p. 3; (19) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948

except for one incident which later caused a great amount of confusion. A serious tail flutter developed in the glider which was being towed by the pathfinder airplane. The glider pilot determined that the glider could not complete the flight and so informed the airplane pilot. The airplane pilot maneuvered his plane, and consequently the entire serial of planes and gliders, in a wide circle in order to drop the glider near a rescue ship. While making this circle the second serial of the formation moved up on the first serial at a greater altitude. Both of these serials arrived over the landing zone at the same time with the second serial above the first serial. When the gliders of both serials were released the safe landing of such a large number of gliders became a serious problem. The landing areas were mainly vineyards with anti-glider stakes erected in an irregular pattern. The combination of the confusion, heavy grape vines and anti-glider stakes resulted in a costly landing in both personnel and equipment. The 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion suffered eight persons killed and twenty wounded in this landing. In addition, there were casualties among glider pilots. (20)

The Battalion landed at approximately 1810 hours and within two hours all personnel had arrived in the Battalion assembly area except the personnel of approximately twelve gliders of Headquarters and Headquarters Company. These gliders had not landed on the assigned area because of the crowded landing situation. They had landed approximately five miles from the Battalion Area. As these gliders were transporting practically all of the

(20) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948

Battalion's $\frac{1}{4}$ ton trucks, the Battalion was seriously handicapped in the early stages of the operation by a shortage of organic transportation. (21)

The glider pilots accompanied the infantry personnel to the Battalion Assembly area. When all glider pilots had reached the assembly area they were marched to the Task Force Command Post as had been directed. Upon arrival they were informed that they could not be taken care of there and that they should report back to the Battalion. During the next twenty-four hours they were obliged to follow the Battalion and assist in any way they could. These pilots rendered valuable assistance in the evacuation of Prisoners of War. (22)

THE ATTACKS ON LE MUY

At approximately 1930 hours the Battalion Commander received a message to report to the Task Force Command Post. Upon arrival at the Command Post he was oriented on the situation and ordered to capture the town of Le Muy by a night attack. Elements of the 2d Independent Parachute Brigade (British) had not been successful in their attempts to capture the town during the daylight hours of 15 August 1944. The British unit held a line extending along the north bank of the Nartuby River and a bridge across this river at Les Serres. (See Map "B"). The Battalion Commander ordered the Battalion Executive Officer to move the Battalion from the assembly area to a forward assembly area about 1000 yards north of the Nartuby River. The Battalion Commander and S-3 made a reconnaissance of the area by going to an observation post the British unit had established in a

(21,22) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948

large building in Les Serres. This reconnaissance was very brief because darkness had fallen within ten minutes after their arrival at the observation post. After discussing the situation with the commander and staff of the British unit the Battalion Commander and S-3 returned to the forward Battalion Assembly Area where the attack order was issued. (23)

The enemy had offered light resistance to the British Troops during their advance to the Nartuby River and by dark had withdrawn to hastily prepared defenses about two hundred yards north of the town. It was estimated that the enemy had about one rifle company plus some service troops in and around the town. When the Battalion Commander returned to the Battalion Assembly Area at about 2200 hours, enemy resistance had dwindled to scattered and ineffective rifle and machine gun fire. (24)

The Battalion plan of attack was to send Companies "A" and "C" across the Nartuby River Bridge by infiltration and have Company "C" deploy on the left (east) of the road leading south into the town and Company "A" deploy on the right (west) of this road. The Companies would attack south with the road as the boundary between companies. The British unit would support the attack with machine gun fire from positions along the Nartuby River and by firing a thirty-six round barrage from their Six Pounder guns. (25)

The Battalion heavy machine guns and 81-mm mortars, which had not been registered in, would support the attack from positions near Les Serres. Company "B" would remain in an assembly area in the woods at Les Serres. The Battalion command post

(23,24,25) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948

and Battalion aid station would be located in Les Serres. The Battalion attack order was given verbally to the assembled subordinate unit commanders in complete darkness, after which the S-3 went over the plan of attack with each subordinate unit commander using a map and flashlight under the cover of a shelter half. (26)

The Company Commanders made very limited reconnaissances and issued orders to the companies. Individual rolls and non-essential equipment were left in the assembly area in company piles, and at approximately 2400 hours the Battalion moved out to the line of departure. (27)

When the first element of company "A" started across the Nartuby River Bridge a burst of submachine gun fire from a British position wounded the company commander. This situation was quickly corrected and the remainder of the troops crossed the bridge without incident. At 0230 hours 16 August 1944 the forward companies were in position and the attack jumped off. The companies advanced slowly under increasingly heavy fire. When the troops reached a point approximately 200 yards from the north edge of the town the attack was stopped cold by very heavy machine gun and rifle fire. Attempts to flank these enemy guns were ineffective. Dawn found our troops in a flat open meadow facing an enemy who had excellent observation of the ground from buildings and high ground. The Battalion Commander ordered the two companies to withdraw to the north side of the Nartuby River under the last shades of darkness.

(26) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948; (27) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948; A-1, p. 113

This withdrawal was executed without confusion and without casualties. (28)

The British unit had remained in position along the Nartuby River. The Battalion moved back to the assembly area north of the Nartuby River where the troops were given about four hours rest. During this four hour period a more extensive reconnaissance of the area was made and a new plan of attack was decided upon. (29)

The personnel from the twelve gliders that had been unable to land in the assigned area joined the Battalion on the morning of 16 August 1944. The $\frac{1}{4}$ ton trucks and weapons brought in by this group strengthened the Battalion considerably. (30) The plan for the daylight attack on Le Muy was to ford the Nartuby River at a point approximately 1000 yards northwest of Les Serres in a column and attack Southeast. (See Map "C"). Company "B" would lead the attack and, upon reaching the road running north out of the town, company "C" would cross the road and both companies would attack straight through the town with the north-south road as the boundaries between companies. Each company would have one section of heavy machine guns attached. Company "A" would remain in an assembly area in the vicinity of the river crossing point. The 81 M.M. mortars would support the attack from positions near the river crossing point. The Battalion moved out of the assembly area at 1130 hours and crossed the river without opposition. As company "A" moved out into the open the enemy opened up with scattered rifle and automatic weapons fire. The Companies moved rapidly forward, reached the north-south road and approached the edge of the town. The enemy was driven from his

(28)(29)(30) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3 on 26 Jan 1948

fox holes and withdrew to the buildings of the town. This rapid advance was made possible by the aggressiveness of individuals and small groups and by the proper utilization of all weapons. The 2.36 Rocket Launcher was especially effective in its employment against machine guns and groups of enemy personnel in the scattered buildings. By 1300 hours companies "B" and "C" were entering the town from the north. The Battalion Commander was observing the action from an observation post on the high ground northwest of the town. He ordered company "A" to move up to the right of company "B" and assist in the attack through the town. As the three companies moved through the town physical contact was maintained and each house was cleared completely. Each time an enemy would fire a round it would be answered by a hundred or more from the guns of our troops. This was an excessive use and waste of ammunition but it was effective in taking the town. At approximately 1500 hours the town was secured. The Battalion had captured between 500 and 700 prisoners and killed a small undetermined number of the enemy. Battalion casualties were one killed and 15 wounded. (31)

It is noteworthy to mention the actions of the glider pilots in this attack. They had followed along behind the attack and had rendered some assistance in clearing the town of snipers and considerable assistance in the evacuation of prisoners. A few of them added confusion to the situation by indiscriminate firing of weapons and generally undisciplined actions. (32)

(31)(32) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948

With the town cleared of the enemy, the Battalion organized the town for defense. This defense consisted mainly of road-blocks and reinforced machine gun outposts on the main roads. Each Rifle company was assigned a sector of the town to defend. Security posts were established and the bulk of each company was held in an assembly area. The Battalion Commander contacted the Mayor of the town and established a civil affairs office to control the civilian population and to maintain law and order.

(33)

At approximately 1800 hours a reconnaissance patrol from the 45th Infantry Division approached Le Muy. Members of this patrol did not recognize the personnel of our outpost as American troops and opened fire on them. The outpost personnel set off a smoke grenade, the recognition signal, and the firing stopped. The reconnaissance patrol entered Le Muy and contact with the beach landing forces was established. (34) During the planning of this operation it was decided that all personnel and transportation would proceed to the Battalion Assembly Area immediately upon landing and the collection of supplies would be started after the Battalion Commander had established control of the Battalion. When the twelve gliders of Headquarters and Headquarters Company failed to land in the assigned landing area, and with the resulting delay of organic transportation reaching the Battalion Assembly Area, the supply collection function was thrown completely off schedule. The Battalion Supply Officer began searching the gliders for supplies and equipment on the morning of 16 August 1944 immediately upon arrival of the $\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks. All supplies that were left in the gliders had been

(33) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948; (34) Personal knowledge; A-1, pp 113 & 114

stolen by persons unknown. The loss of these supplies did not directly affect this operation but the Battalion would have had a serious supply problem had early contact with the beach landing forces not been made. It is also important to note that the individual rolls left unguarded in the assembly area were rifled. To off-set these losses a small amount of enemy equipment and supplies were captured in Le Muy. A small rations warehouse was captured but very little of these rations were used. Of greater importance to the Battalion was the capture of five enemy trucks. These trucks enabled the Battalion to support itself until additional transportation was shipped in from Italy. (35)

The Headquarters of the First Airborne Task Force moved into Le Muy on 17 August 1944 and the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion was relieved of all duties, except furnishing one platoon for Military Police duties in the town. The Battalion moved into a bivouac area on the Argens River southwest of Le Muy and prepared for its next combat mission. (36)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

An analysis of this operation should go back to the establishment of ^{the} staging area immediately adjacent to the landing strips because of its affect upon the personnel of the Battalion and its affect upon the operation. It is possible and highly desirable for staging areas to be located far enough from landing strips to be outside the high noise level and still near enough for efficient operation. In the operation under consideration this was not done and the noise from arriving and departing

(35)(36) Personal knowledge; Statement of Major George C. Dawson, Battalion S-3, on 26 Jan 1948

airplanes disturbed the sleep of the troops. They were not ^{well} completely rested for the operation as they might well have been.

When the pilot of the pathfinder plane circled his entire formation of planes to drop one glider near a rescue vessel he did a very considerate thing as far as that glider load was concerned; however, the confusion over the landing area and the inability of some gliders to land in the assigned area were direct results of that maneuver. The Navy had made plans for rescuing personnel of planes and gliders forced down at sea and it is highly probable that the life preserver worn by each individual would have supported him until assistance arrived. If the Battalion had met a determined and aggressive enemy the personnel of the twelve gliders that landed outside of the Battalion area would have had an extremely difficult task in re-joining the Battalion.

The failure of the Task Force to make better use of the glider pilots after the landing was a waste of personnel. Most of these pilots had received some training in infantry tactics and could have been used to a very good advantage. Plans for full utilization of these pilots should have been made during the planning phase of the operation and the plan put into effect immediately upon landing. Later Airborne operations proved that this personnel could be used effectively in assembling supplies and even occupying a sector in the defense of a position.

The need for adequate personal reconnaissance was forcefully illustrated in this operation. There was not time for a daylight reconnaissance in this instance and nothing could have been done about it but the principle of personal reconnaissance

by all commanders was proven correct by the results of the first attack on Le Muy.

When company "A" started its movement across the Nartuby River Bridge on the night of 15-16 August 1944 and drew fire from a friendly unit the difficulties of passing through friendly lines during hours of darkness was illustrated. Every man in both of the units involved must be thoroughly briefed on the operation when such movements are planned. It must be realized that personnel on the front line facing an enemy are prone to "shoot first and ask questions later" and that is as it should be. When any movement to the front of these front line troops is planned it is imperative that the details of time, place and direction of movement be given to all troops within the area and for leaders to check to be sure that the details are understood.

The Battalion failed to take its objective on the night of 15-16 August 1944. Before too much adverse criticism is made of the attack it should be recalled that this Battalion had seen no combat action prior to this operation. A night attack is very difficult of execution even under the most favorable conditions. In this operation the conditions were not favorable particularly in respect to combat experience of the troops and in knowledge of the terrain and disposition of the enemy. The Battalion conducted routine training during the month of June 1944 in Sicily. It would have been advantageous to the Battalion, and to the war effort as a whole, to have been committed to a "warming up" combat action in Italy before this operation was undertaken.

The attack on the afternoon of 16 August 1944 was characterized by aggressive action on the part of individuals

and small groups and by the proper use of all available weapons. When the forward companies once made contact with the enemy and set the pace for the attack, the Battalion advanced steadily through the town, clearing the buildings of all enemy personnel.

Entirely too much small arms ammunition was expended during the final phase of the daylight attack on Le Muy. It is of particular importance to an Airborne operation that all personnel conserve ammunition. It was a natural reaction for everyone to desire to have a hand in dealing the "final blow" in a successful operation; however, the excessive and indiscriminate firing of weapons should not be permitted.

The loss of large amounts of supplies and equipment in this operation was a result of the Battalion's failure to take the necessary security action. Small security groups should have been left in the landing area to guard these supplies. The Battalion had taken in relatively large amounts of ammunition, rations and gasoline which would have provided for several days of combat action had that been necessary. The objective was taken without too much delay and the loss of these supplies was not felt but that fact does not excuse the error.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons learned and principles illustrated by this operation are:

1. Staging areas for glider operations should not be located immediately adjacent to landing strips. The high noise level of such locations prevents the troops from getting the desired rest immediately prior to the take-off.

2. In an Airborne operation each individual must be briefed completely on the operation and oriented to the terrain by use of maps, aerial photographs and reproductions of the terrain.

3. When gliders of different serials of a flight formation are to land on the same landing zone, the interval between serials must be maintained. This was forcefully illustrated by the confusion over the landing zone when two serials attempted to land simultaneously.

4. Plans should be made for the use of glider pilots in ground operations and these plans should be put into effect immediately upon landing. Had such plans been effective in this operation, the glider pilots would not have become the responsibility of a commander who had no time to organize them and utilize their services.

5. Adequate personal reconnaissance must be made by all commanders to insure successful operations.

6. Aggressive action by individuals and small groups and the proper use of all available weapons is of primary importance to an Airborne operation. The attack on the afternoon of 16 August 1944 was an excellent example of such actions.

7. Airborne troops must be thoroughly trained in the conservation and economical use of supplies and equipment.

8. Adequate measures must be taken to guard supplies and equipment against loss, theft and destruction.