

# **Assignment #1**

## **The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (ABD) and the 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment**

**First Read Study Instructions and Core Reading: Battle of Carentan, Normandy (7 to 13 June 1944) Virtual Staff Ride (Provided as a separate document)**

During the field study, you are responsible for all the actions of the 101<sup>st</sup> Division Headquarters and the actions of the 501<sup>st</sup> PIR from D+2 (8 June 1944) to D+7 (13 June 1944). Discuss the actions and decisions from both your own and the unit's perspective. Remember that other staff ride participants are discussing the actions of the 502d PIR, 506 PIR, and the 327 GIR. You should discuss the actions of these other units from a division perspective and allow other participants to discuss the details of their unit actions. For the division and the 501<sup>st</sup> PIR you should be prepared to discuss:

- Unit organization and equipment, training, and morale.
- Key decisions, why those decisions were made, and the consequence of the decision.
- Unit's actions and accomplishments.

**This supplemental reading contains four parts:**

- **Part 1: Overview of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division**
- **Part 2: A short biography of Major General Maxwell D Taylor – commander 101<sup>st</sup>**
- **Part 3: Airborne Infantry Regiment Organization and Equipment**
- **Part 4: A short biography of Colonel Howard Johnson – commander 501<sup>st</sup> PIR**

**Part 1: Overview of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division** "Screaming Eagles." Additional information can be found at [https://www.wv2-airborne.us/18corps/101abn/101\\_overview.html](https://www.wv2-airborne.us/18corps/101abn/101_overview.html)

**"The 101<sup>st</sup> Division has no history, but has a Rendezvous with Destiny."<sup>1</sup>**

Gen. W.C. Lee (the first commanding general of the division),  
August 1942

In August 1942 the U.S. Army activated the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. In October 1942 the division moved to Fort Bragg, North Carolina and started its training to qualify for its new airborne mission. In the spring of 1943 the division conducted its first division maneuvers and then that summer participated in the Army Tennessee maneuvers (primarily jumping from trucks).

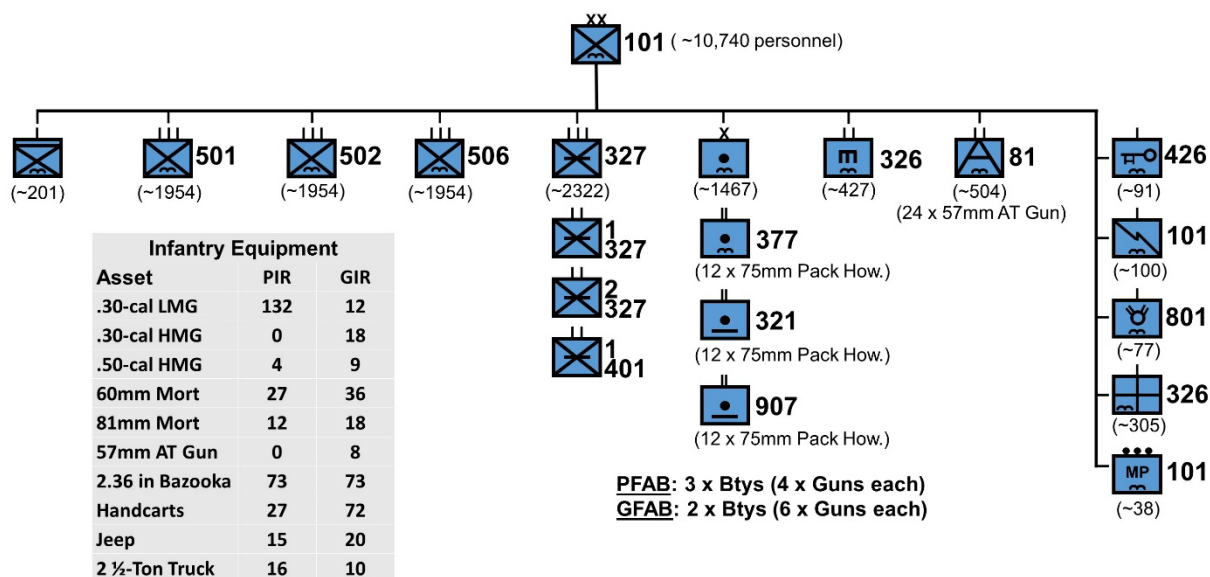
In early 1944, transferred to England and continued its training. On 5 February General Lee suffered a heart attack and returned to the United States. In March, BG Maxwell D. Taylor, former commander of the 82d Airborne Division Artillery, assumed command of the division.

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<sup>1</sup> Bando, Mark. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne at Normandy (1994), 9.

Soon after that the division underwent another organizational change when the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, was attached to the 327th Glider Infantry to operate as the regiment's third battalion. The division was now training with the task organization with which it would fight in Normandy.<sup>2</sup>

## 101st Airborne Division Organization



**PIR:** 3 x Bns with 3 x Rifle Cos

- Companies: 3 x Rifle Plts
- Rifle Plts: 2 x Sqds (12 pax; w/ 1 x M1919 LMG each); 1 x Mortar Sqd

**GIR:** 2 x Bns with 3 x Rifle Cos

- Companies: 2 x Rifle Plts; 1x Wpns Plt (2 x M1917 HMGs, 2x 60mm Mortars)
- Rifle Plts: 3 x Sqds (12 pax)

In England, the 101st participated in three major exercises. On the last exercise, the division's mission was to capture the causeways leading away from a simulated beach. Ironically, the regiments were scattered at the wrong drop sites. Nevertheless, the units regrouped and accomplished their assigned tasks successfully.

The "Screaming Eagles" lacked combat experience, but had been extensively trained and contained many combat veterans. Although lightly equipped, it was a strong formation with four infantry regiments (standard infantry division had 3 regiments). The men of the division were determined and highly motivated to accomplish the mission. Cornelious Ryan in his classic work *"The Longest Day"* stated **"The 101<sup>st</sup> on its first combat jump was fiercely determined not to be outdone by its more illustrious partner [the 82d ABD]"**.<sup>3</sup>

### Part 2: A short biography of Major General Maxwell D Taylor – commander 101st.

#### Major General Maxwell D. Taylor (1901 – 1987)

<sup>2</sup> CMH web site. <https://history.army.mil/documents/ETO-OB/101ABN-ETO.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Bando, Mark. *101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, The Screaming Eagles at Normandy* (2001), 8.

- **Early Life:**

- 1901: Born and raised in Missouri.
- 1918-1922: West Point. 4<sup>th</sup> in class and commissioned in the Corps of Engineers.
- 1927-1927: Transferred to the Field Artillery and promoted to First Lieutenant.
- 1927-1933: French and Spanish instructor at West Point.
- 1933: Field Artillery School.
- 1935: Command and General Staff College – promoted to Captain.
- 1935 -1939: Attaché duty American embassy in Tokyo and in China.
- 1940: United State Army War College and promoted to Major.
- 1940 – 1942: Various assignments: Commander 12<sup>th</sup> FA Battalion, Office of the Secretary of General Staff.
  - 1941 (December): Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel.
  - 1942 (February): Promoted to Colonel.
  - 1942 (December): Promoted to Brigadier General.

- **Italian Campaign:**

- 1942: Chief of Staff 82d Airborne Division and then commander of the 82d Airborne Division Artillery. Combat experience in Sicily and Italy.
- 1943: Secret Mission to Rome to coordinate 82<sup>d</sup> air drop with Italian Force. Reporting directly to Eisenhower's staff (friends in high places).

- **101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division:**

- 1944: Assigned to command the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.
- 1944 (May): Temporary promotion to Major General

<p><b>Part 3: Airborne Infantry Regiment Organization and Equipment.</b> Additional information can be found at <a href="#"><i>"1st Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry Unit History"</i></a>. U.S. Army Alaska Public Affairs Office. Other sources noted in the foot notes.</p>
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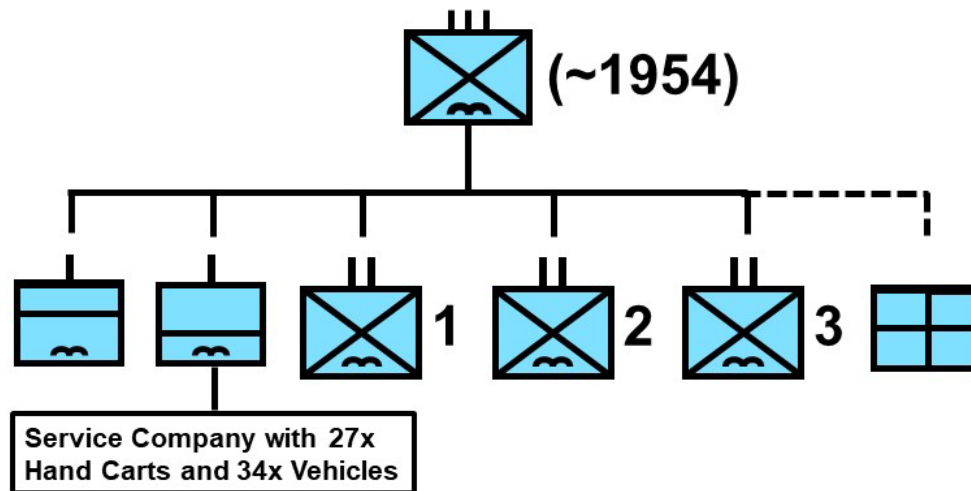
**The 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment** was activated at Camp Toccoa, Georgia on 15 November 1942. The famous airborne test platoon, the prime ancestor of all American parachute units, provided the nucleus of the 1st Parachute Battalion, which in turn provided part of the cadre, the unit number, the genealogical lineage and the heraldic background of the 501st Parachute Regiment. Its initial group of officers were hand-picked by its first commander, Colonel Howard R. Johnson.

All members of the regiment were parachute volunteers, but only a minor fraction were actually qualified jumpers during training at Camp Toccoa, GA. So, when that very arduous training was over in March 1943, the unit marched to Atlanta, GA, a distance of 105 miles (169 km). They then moved to Fort Benning, GA, to jump train all members not previously qualified.

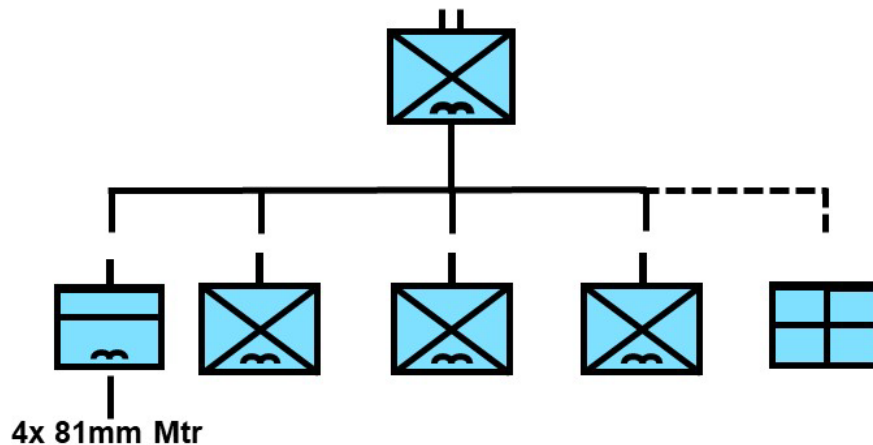
With jump training over, the regiment was assigned to the Airborne Command at Camp MacKall, NC. This was its home base during prolonged maneuvers in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Louisiana, and until January 1944, when the regiment deployed to England. Once in England the 501st became a permanent attachment of the 101st Airborne Division and was a vital part of that famous unit for the duration of World War II. In England, training was hard, realistic and became increasingly oriented toward an airborne assault into German-held Europe.

**Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) Organization:** A PIR consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Service Company, three Parachute Infantry Battalions, and the attachment from division of a small medical and chaplain detachment. The PIR, with only 1954

men, was about two-thirds the size of standard infantry regiment. The PIR had no regimental cannon or anti-tank company. Additionally it had only 34 vehicles whereas a standard regiment had 187 trucks and jeeps.<sup>4</sup>



**Parachute Infantry Battalion Organization:** The PIR's basic tactical unit was the parachute Infantry Battalion. The battalion consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Service Company, three Parachute Infantry Rifle Companies, and an attached medical detachment. The Parachute Infantry Battalion with only 37 officers and 512 enlisted, was about two-thirds the size of standard infantry company. The battalion had no heavy weapons company or vehicles. The HQ company did have four 81mm Mortars.<sup>5</sup>



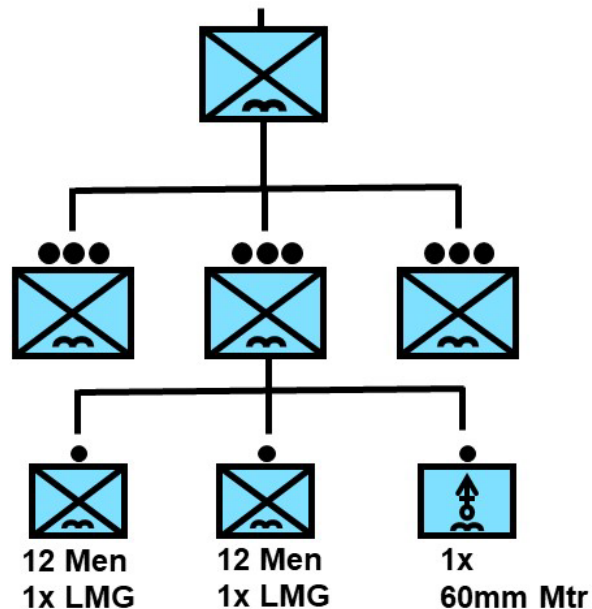
**Parachute Infantry Company Organization:** The Parachute Infantry Rifle Company consisted of company headquarters and three rifle platoons. As with the regiment and battalion, the company was about two-thirds the size of the standard infantry company (8 officers and 119 enlisted) [Note: standard infantry company has only 5 officers]. The company had no heavy

<sup>4</sup> Zagola, Steven. US Airborne Divisions in the ETO 1944-45, 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 26-28.



weapons platoon or vehicles. **The parachute rifle platoons** had two rifle squads and a mortar squad with one 60mm mortar [a standard infantry platoon had three rifle squads]. **The parachute infantry rifle squad** was the same size (12 men) as the standard rifle squad. Each squad had one .30-cal LMG verses one Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) in the standard squad.<sup>6</sup>



#### Part 4: A short biography of Colonel Howard Johnson – commander 501<sup>st</sup> PIR

##### Colonel Howard R. Johnson (1903 – 1944)

- **Early Life:**
  - 1903: Born and raised in Maryland.
  - 1923- 1924: Attended the U.S. Naval Academy (on the boxing team).
  - 1924: Resigned from the Naval Academy and joined the Army to become a pilot (2d Lieutenant).
  - 1920's and 30's serving in the Panama Canal Zone, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and in Tientsing, China.
    - Known to his peers as “Skeets.”
    - Said to have swashbuckling personality.
- **Preparation for World War II**
  - 1940s: Promotion dates not known, but most likely advanced from Major to LTC during the rapid buildup of U.S. Forces.
  - 1941: Turned down a battalion command in the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Service Force (Devil’s Brigade/The Black Devils)
- **101<sup>st</sup> Airborne**
  - 1941: Volunteered for parachute duty.

<sup>6</sup> Zagola, Steven. US Airborne Divisions in the ETO 1944-45, 28-30.

- Zealot for physical training and set the individual record for running up Currahee Mountain.
  - Known to his men as "Jumping Johnson."
  - It is believed that the popular airborne phrase "To command a parachute unit, you don't have to be nuts, but it helps!" is based upon Johnson.
- 1942: Selected to command the 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment and promoted to Colonel.

## **Assignment #2**

### **Supplemental Reading for**

### **The 6th Fallschirmjäger (Parachute) Regiment (6th FJR).**

**First Read Study Instructions and Core Reading: Battle of Carentan, Normandy (7 to 13 June 1944) Virtual Staff Ride (Provided as a separate document)**

**Discuss the actions and decisions from both your own and the unit's perspective. You should be prepared to discuss:**

- Unit organization and equipment, training, and morale.
- Key decisions, why those decision were made, and the consequence of the decision.
- Unit's actions and accomplishments.

**This supplemental reading contains three parts:**

- **Part 1:** A short biography of Major Von der Heydte – the commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> FJR.
- **Part 2:** An overview of the organization, training and morale of the 6<sup>th</sup> FJR
- **Part 3:** A German perspective narrative of the battle - The Lions of Carentan Part II: Defending Carentan.

**You may enhance these readings with your own research.**

**Part 1: Major Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte.** Below is an excerpt of his biography that can be found at [Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte | Military Wiki | Fandom \(wikia.org\)](https://www.friedrich-august-freiherr-von-der-heydte.com/)



**Major Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte (1907 – 1994)**

#### **Early life**

- Born to a noble family in Munich, Bavaria. His father, a Freiherr (roughly equivalent to a baron) had enjoyed a successful career with the Royal Bavarian Army, serving with distinction during World War I. His mother emigrated from France.
- The family was stout Roman Catholics. He attended the Munich Catholic school and achieved excellent grades.

- He was also a wartime associate of Claus von Stauffenberg (the bomb plot to kill Hitler).
- 1925: He joined the Reichswehr. He wanted the cavalry but was posted to *Infanterie-Regiment Nr.19*. He later secured a posting as an officer cadet in *Kavallerie-Regiment Nr.18*.
- 1927: Released from the military and attended Innsbruck University, studying Law and Economics. He took a job as a private tutor to pay his university fees (Despite their noble status, his family was in dire financial troubles)
- In 1927, Von der Heydte was awarded his degree in law, and traveled to Berlin to continue his studies. Late in the same year, he secured a posting to a diplomatic school in Vienna.
- Young Von der Heydte, during his college years, developed decidedly liberal views for 1930s Germany.
- 1933, He joined the NSDAP (The Nazi Party) and also entered the SA (the Brown Shirts) the same year.
- In 1934, Von der Heydte obtained Austrian citizenship while also maintaining German/Bavarian citizenship.
- In early 1935 he re-joined the Reichswehr, and was transferred to *Kavallerie-Regiment Nr.15* and promoted to Lieutenant within the Wehrmacht. He again secured his temporary release from the military for study, and traveled to the Netherlands where he furthered his education at The Hague.
- Late in 1935, His cavalry company was re-designated as anti-tank company.
- After two years in The Hague, he returned to the military, where he attended a General Staff Officer's course over the winter of 1938-39. In August 1939, he was recalled to his company in preparation for the planned invasion of Poland.

## War career

- **France 1940:** He served as an aide-de-champ in the divisional HQ of the 246th Infantry Division. In mid May 1940, he was promoted Captain and at the same time transferred to Luftwaffe and its parachute arm. Here he joined the 3d Fallschirmjäger Regiment as one of its company commanders.
- **Crete 1941:** Commanded the 1st battalion of the 3rd Fallschirmjäger Regiment during the Battle of Crete in May 1941 and he was awarded the Knight's Cross. Later transferred to Russia.

- **North Africa 1942:** Promoted Major, was sent from his posting in Russia to Libya as commander of a parachute battalion in the elite Fallschirmjäger-Brigade Ramcke. Participated in the brigade's daring escape from the German disaster at El Alamein in captured British trucks. Von der Heydte kept his position as an officer in the "Ramcke" Brigade in North Africa until February 1943 when he and several other Fallschirmjäger-officers were transferred to France to form the nucleus of the newly raised 2d Fallschirmjäger Division. Here, he was posted as the senior operations officer in the divisional HQ.
- **Italy 1943:** The 2d Fallschirmjäger Division transferred from France to Rome. Von der Heydte gained audience with Pope Pius XII. On 8 September 1943, Italy broke its alliance with Nazi-Germany and join the Allies. The 2d Fallschirmjäger Division was given orders to capture all key positions in Rome. By September 11th the whole of Rome was under German control. During this operation, he was serious injured in an aircraft accident.
- **France and Normandy 1944:**
  - On 15 January 1944 given command of the newly formed 6th Fallschirmjäger Regiment of the 2d Fallschirmjäger Division. The unit was formed from veteran paratroopers and Luftwaffe ground personnel. The Regiment had an average age of 17½, with a combined strength of 3457 men as of May 19, and around 4500 men by June 6, 1944.
  - In June, the 6<sup>th</sup> Fallschirmjäger Regiment had been detached as a third regiment to the newly reformed 91<sup>st</sup> Luftlande (air-landing) Infanterie Division and deployed in the Carentan area of the Cotentin Peninsula. The dispositions of its three battalions on June 6th, 1944 were as follows: 1st battalion advancing towards Sainte-Marie-du-Mont to relieve the strongpoint W5 and reinforce the defense of Utah Beach; 2nd battalion advancing towards Sainte-Mère-Église and attempt to make contact with 795 Ost battalion (Georgian); 3rd battalion remaining southwest of Carentan to provide flank security.
  - On D-Day, about 500 US paratroopers dropped southwest of Carentan. Skirmishing between airborne troops of both sides went on throughout the night.
    - The 1st battalion managed to reach Sainte-Marie-du-Mont, only 6 kilometers from strongpoint W5 on Utah Beach; but finding the town held by the elements of 101st Airborne, the battalion dug in among the hedgerows outside the town. On June 7, after fighting a combined assault of US paratroopers and tanks most of the day, the battalion was destroyed in a fighting withdrawal towards Carentan. About 300 men surrendered. Only 25 reached Carentan.
    - The 2nd battalion found Sainte-Mère-Église held by the 507th Infantry Regiment (United States), fought until its ammunition ran low and

withdrew towards St. Come-du-Mont. From Ste. Marie-du-Mont's church tower, Von der Heydte saw the vast Allied invasion armada 11 kilometers away. After heavy fighting on June 7, the 2nd and 3rd battalions were withdrawn into Carentan.

- Field Marshal Erwin Rommel ordered Von der Heydte to defend Carentan to the last man, since it was the critical junction between Utah Beach and Omaha Beach.
  - Starting around the night of June 10, US troops entered the outskirts of Carentan, and by morning of June 11 fierce fighting went from house to house. To illustrate the intensity: a US battalion (3rd of 502nd PIR) had 500 men entering Carentan and after two days' fighting only 132 men were left.
  - By dusk on June 11, Von der Heydte withdrew what remained of his men out of Carentan to avoid encirclement. The commander of the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division was furious and wanted to arrest Von der Heydte, only intervention from Von der Heydte's higher ranking brethren saved the situation.
- A counter-attack on June 12 failed to retake the town. At Carentan, the German paratroopers earned the nickname "Lions of Carentan" from the US paratroopers.

<p><b>Part 2: Organization, Training and Morale of the 6<sup>th</sup> FJR.</b> Excerpt from CMH Pub 7-4-1, <i>Cross Channel Attack</i>: 238.</p>
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The best infantry units in the 1944 German Army were the parachute divisions, administratively under the Luftwaffe but tactically always subordinated to Army command. Of the new parachute units created during the early months of 1944, OB WEST received the 3d and 5th Divisions and the 6th Fallschirmjäger (Parachute) Regiment (6th FJR). Only the separate regiment and the 3d Division were encountered during the early fighting in Normandy. Both were first-rate fighting units. When the 6<sup>th</sup> FJR's parent 2d Parachute Division was sent to Russia in November 1943, the 6th FJR was left in Germany to provide cadre for the 3d Parachute Division. The regiment, while still formally organic to the 2d Parachute Division, was reconstituted under the direct command of the First Parachute Army.

The Regiment was organized along the same lines as a standard German Army Infantry Regiment, having three battalions, each of which was made up of three rifle companies and a heavy (weapons) company. The regiment's 13th Company was a heavy mortar company with nine heavy (120-mm mortars). The 14th was an anti-tank company and the 15th an engineer company.



## **6th Fallschirmjäger (Parachute) Regiment (6th FJR) – Commander: Major von der Heydte**

- **I Battalion**
  - 1<sup>st</sup> “Rifle” Company
  - 2<sup>d</sup> “Rifle” Company
  - 3<sup>d</sup> “Rifle” Company
  - 4<sup>th</sup> “Heavy” Company – 12x HMG and 6x 81mm mortars
- **II Battalion**
  - 5<sup>th</sup> “Rifle” Company
  - 6<sup>th</sup> “Rifle” Company
  - 7<sup>th</sup> “Rifle” Company
  - 8<sup>th</sup> “Heavy” Company– 12x HMG and 6x 81mm mortars
- **III Battalion**
  - 9<sup>th</sup> “Rifle” Company
  - 10<sup>th</sup> “Rifle” Company
  - 11<sup>th</sup> “Rifle” Company
  - 12<sup>th</sup> “Heavy” Company– 12x HMG and 6x 81mm mortars. The 12<sup>th</sup> Company also had at least one 75mm Infantry Gun in addition to the HMGs and mortars.
- **13<sup>th</sup> Heavy Company- 9x 120mm mortars**
- **14<sup>th</sup> Anti-tank Company** – authorized 3 platoons each with having 18 Panzerschrecks (a larger bazooka type weapon). However, it appears that at least one of the 6<sup>th</sup> FJR’s anti-tank platoons was equipped with Pak 40 75mm anti-tank guns.
- **15th Engineer Company**

The strength of the 6th Parachute Regiment was 3,457. It was considerably larger than the normal infantry regiment. The regiment was superior not only in numbers but in quality. Entirely formed from volunteers, they were composed principally of young men whose fighting morale was excellent. The average age of the enlisted men of the 6th Parachute Regiment was 17½. The regiment was fully trained in jumping. Each man had made at least nine jumps, including three night descents. At least a third of the officers and a good portion of the non-commissioned officers were veterans, having fought in Crete, North Africa and Russia.

The parachute units were also much better armed than corresponding army units. The rifle companies of the 6th FJR had twice as many light machine guns as the infantry division rifle companies. The battalion weapons companies with twelve heavy machine guns and six medium mortars each were also superior in fire power to army units. Chief weakness of the parachute troops was one they shared with the rest of Rundstedt’s army-their lack of motor transport. Each

company in the Regiment had an average of two trucks, and the seventy trucks across the whole unit were of fifty different makes – German, French, Italian and even British.

In May 1944 the Regiment was deployed to Normandy and spread out amongst the towns at the base of the Cotentin peninsula conducting anti-parachute patrols. These were Lessay, Periers, Raids, St Georges-de-Bohon, Meautis, Baupe and Monte Castre. It was assigned to LXXXIV Corps and for supply purposes attached to 91<sup>st</sup> Luftlande Division (air-landing division). Together they formed the strategic reserve for the Corps.

**Part 3: The Lions of Carentan Part II: Defending Carentan.** Found at [The Lions of Carentan Part II: Defending Carentan - Warfare History Network](#)

*After American airborne troops took Ste.-Mere-Eglise and St.-Come-du-Mont, it was Fallschirmjäger Regiment 6's job to keep the vital city of Carentan from the Yanks.*



**By Volker Griesser**

*Background: Fallschirmjäger Regiment 6, under the command of Major Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte, had the fortune (or misfortune) to be stationed in Normandy at the time of the Allied invasion of France on June 6, 1944.*

**A Reconnaissance Mission:** Dietrich Scharrer, an Oberjäger [under-officer] in the 7th Company, recalled, “Around midday on 6 June, I received the assignment from our platoon leader, Leutnant von Socha, to lead a recon troop and gather information about the enemy [at Ste.-Mère-église]. We advanced from cover to cover, bush to bush, in the specified direction, intending to use our machine gun for fire support. At that point, we hadn’t seen anything of the soldiers on the other side. “In this way we entered into a disastrous situation. Even before we got our machine gun into position, Obergefreiter [Private First Class] Walter Klute was pushing through a hedge and was halfway through when we heard a short burst of gunfire. Because Klute took a round directly in the chest, he was dead right away, our first casualty. We had established contact with the enemy; our assignment was fulfilled with this, and we pulled back. When we reported the strength of the enemy and his position to the company, Leutnant von Socha gave me a proper dressing down for having lost someone in our first deployment.”

Some of the 2nd Battalion were successful in breaking into the Americans’ positions. The U.S. units, however, were connected to one another via small, portable radios, so they could easily request fire support from mortars. The Americans soon brought down mortar fire on the 2nd

Battalion positions, and the men of FJR 6 had to pull back to Turqueville [about four miles east of Ste.-Mère-église].

In the course of the night, Hauptmann [Captain] Rolf Mager [commanding 2nd Battalion] received tactical information from his recon units and formed a very clear picture of the numerical superiority of the enemy troops: The flanks and rear of the 2nd Battalion were threatened by American units, and in order to prevent his battalion becoming encircled and destroyed, Mager decided to withdraw to St.-Côme-du-Mont [11 miles south of Ste.-Mère-église].

That night, 30 American military gliders landed directly in front of 2nd Battalion's positions, bringing supplies and reinforcements for the troops in Ste.-Mère-église. In the open field of the landing site, the Americans were easy targets for the Fallschirmjäger, who quickly overpowered them. The Germans took rations from the American supply boxes: fruit juice, chocolate, cigarettes, cans of meat, and everything that a hungry soldier could want. Dietrich Scharrer remembers his experience of the engagement: "On 7 June, my group and I were supposed to join a scouting troop of the 5th Company. We found the 5th Company quickly; they lay well camouflaged in a bush behind an earthwork. I told my soldiers to be quiet and take position between the groups of the 5th Company. Then I understood what we had planned here. In front of us lay a wide field, on which American military gliders were landing. When the first [glider] touched down, fire from our gun barrels greeted him. It was a mean surprise for the Americans to have so much heavy fire rain down on them during the landing. Many of them paid with their lives; they must have suffered great losses. Afterwards we searched the field to haul scattered Americans from their hideouts. My group returned back to the 7th Company."

**Withdrawal From St.-Côme-du-Mont:** On the morning of 7 June, the Fallschirmjäger broke away from the enemy and occupied a defensive position in front of St.-Côme-du-Mont. This move soon proved to have been the right decision, because scouts reported strong enemy units approaching from the direction of the "Utah" [Beach] section, and from Ste.-Mère-église toward St.-Côme-du-Mont. If they had stayed any longer in Turqueville, it would have cost FJR 6 a second battalion.

Meanwhile, Major von der Heydte had secured the area from St.-Côme-du-Mont to Carentan with two companies from the 3rd Battalion and brought 3rd Battalion/1058th Grenadier Regiment into deployment near Basse Addeville to guarantee the safe return of the 2nd Battalion/FJR 6. An energetic advance by American tank units, however, broke through the grenadiers' defensive positions. The 9th Company of FJR 6 stabilized the grenadier unit's front, and once again the Fallschirmjäger destroyed some enemy tanks with close-combat tactics. The Americans now attacked the Fallschirmjäger positions around St.-Côme-du-Mont from the north and east. In a delaying battle, FJR 6 still managed to fight off the enemy assaults, but the danger of being encircled remained. A unit of American light tanks penetrated into the positions of the 3rd Battalion during the fighting. Obergefreiter Fischer managed to bring one of the vehicles to a halt with a Panzerfaust directly in front of the battalion's command post. Because the American ground troops had reported the position of the Fallschirmjäger to the naval artillery, FJR 6 troops by St.-Côme-du-Mont also received heavy fire from the sea. One element of uncertainty was the resilience of the subordinate army battalion, whose Georgian

companies [Note: some “German” units were comprised of foreign troops, including those from the Caucasus state of Georgia] were given a particularly tough hammering by the Allied air attacks.

At first in smaller groups, later in larger ones, the Georgians trickled away from their positions and turned themselves over to the enemy. “After three days, no more Georgians could be found,” Major von der Heydte remembers in his memoirs.

In the meantime, enemy tank forces marched on Pont l’Abbé, a village northwest of Carentan. Further elements of the 3rd Battalion/FJR 6 were deployed to clean up the breaks in the line, but it turned out that a row of smaller towns and homesteads had been occupied by the Allies, and winning them back would only lead to splintering the forces of the 3rd Battalion. Major von der Heydte therefore announced the return to Carentan.

But he soon learned that his own troops, probably the company of the 191st Pioneer Battalion who had been stationed in Carentan until then, had blown up the northern bridge over the Douve. Now FJR 6 found itself in a pinch, with Americans in front of them and on their flanks, and cut off by the flooded areas behind them. Major von der Heydte did the only correct thing: instead of waiting until the Americans rolled up and destroyed the 2nd Battalion with their numerical strength, he ordered a retreat into the area south of the Douve.

In the morning, a heavy barrage of American field and naval artillery beat down on the ranks of the 2nd Battalion. The enemy increasingly used phosphorous grenades, which caused intense burns for their victims. With smoke grenades the Americans then laid out a thick obscuring curtain, under the cover of which their combat troops could sneak in and settle themselves in hedges and trees.

Dietrich Scharrer remembers, “With three submachine-gunners and Gefreiter [Private] Herbert Peitsch, who had a rifle grenade launcher, I was supposed to cover the withdrawal of the 7th Company. We spread ourselves wide across the position and waited until the order came to retreat. Then we slid slowly under cover into the trenches along the street. “Suddenly we were under small-weapons fire from the left! I couldn’t make out the origin of the fire and therefore could not figure out the enemy’s positions. Gefreiter Peitsch ran across the street, sat down with his legs apart and began to bombard the tree line in front of him with rifle grenades. He was so calm while doing so, as if nothing could happen to him. But the way he sat there made him a perfect target for sharpshooters in the trees. “On this day, for the first time, Gefreiter Peitsch showed stubbornness and cold-bloodedness on the front. He hit a sniper in the tree with a rifle grenade. The sniper fell out of his hiding spot and ended up hanging from a tree branch. Peitsch turned to me and said ‘Oberjäger, look at that—I feel sorry for him!’ Peitsch mastered situations like this with his rifle-grenade weapon. On his own, he shot up two Sherman tanks and died in the process. Posthumously he received the Ritterkreuz [Knight’s Cross] for this action.”

**A March Through the Swamps:** At the same time, the Americans succeeded in breaking through the defenses of 3rd Battalion/1058th Grenadier Regiment, and forced the remains of the battalion to flee. In mindless flight, the battalion was pushed back towards the west. The 13th Company’s position also came under heavy fire, as well as the regimental combat platoon deployed to protect them, the bicycle platoon, and the messenger section.

The powerful shells of the naval artillery caused great losses among the Fallschirmjäger and destroyed some of the heavy weapons that were so necessary to providing fire support. At 5:45 am, the Americans stopped the barrage but did not immediately follow up with their ground troops, so that the available elements of FJR 6 had a chance to regroup along the St.-Côme-du-Mont–Carentan road and place their remaining mortars into a secure reverse-slope position. Soon, however, the American infantry showed up and stormed the new defensive line, and were only pushed back in bitter close combat.

Nevertheless, the enemy succeeded in entrenching themselves on the western edge of St.-Côme-du-Mont and bringing further tanks into position. Because the Americans were now unhindered by German defenses on the coasts, they could land reinforcements of men and armor; this build-up led Major von der Heydte to the conclusion that the position on the road towards Carentan could not be held for long. The swamp between St.-Come-du-Mont and Carentan represented a formidable hindrance for the Allies, as FJR 6 could quickly take a new defensive position on the northern edge of Carentan.

Second Battalion/FJR 6, meanwhile, pulled back past Housville through the flooded fields and over a railway bridge towards Carentan. During this process, the battalion lost its heavy weapons, because these could not be transported across the swamp. Through radio contact with the 3rd Battalion, Major von der Heydte announced the arrival of the 2nd Battalion in the Carentan area.



The support weapons of 3rd Battalion/FJR 6 were set up to cover the withdrawal route. FJR 6 lost most of their heavy equipment in the first days of the Allies' D-Day invasion. This Panzerabwehrkanone 40 is one of their last remaining anti-tank weapons. While the few mortars, submachine guns, antitank guns and 2cm anti-aircraft cannons could not match the firepower of the Allied artillery.

Oberleutnant [1st Lt.] Pöppel's company nevertheless managed to shut down an advanced command post with well-aimed mortar fire. The 3rd Battalion, however, also found itself under fire. The Fallschirmjäger regretted the beautiful sunny day, because the wonderful weather brought further air attacks, in addition to the harassing fire of the American big guns.

The 2nd Battalion needed longer than planned for the march through the flooded area. Wading and sometimes swimming, the Fallschirmjäger had to cross the swamp to then proceed along the railroad embankment. From their position on top of Elevation 30, they observed further landings of transport gliders near Ste.-Mère-église. Bomber fleets thundered above their heads, destined to unload their deadly cargo over the Vire River bridges.

The bicycle platoon, under the leadership of Leutnant von Cube, still managed to establish and maintain communications with the retreating 2nd Battalion.



Communications were an essential part of the German defense system in Normandy. These signalers are laying wire for field phones, but they also must repair those lines cut by French Resistance fighters.

Those from FJR 6 who were following Major von der Heydte through the swamp towards Carentan had as difficult a situation as the 2nd Battalion—further pieces of gear and equipment sank into the water. A handful of Fallschirmjäger who attempted to save the machine guns at least, drowned for their efforts. Sanitäts-Fahnenjunker-Unteroffizier [Medical NCO Officer Candidate] Hehle, an excellent swimmer, managed to save the lives of some of his comrades in the swamp. When von der Heydte's combat squad finally reached dry ground, the major found the 3rd Battalion already in position. His small troop was temporarily incorporated into an extension of the defensive line.

**Low on Supplies:** Shortly after 10:00 am, the pickets of the 3rd Battalion reported that the tip of 2nd Battalion/FJR 6 could be seen approaching through the path in the marsh area. The Americans also noticed the movement of the withdrawing Fallschirmjäger; they attacked the German troops, who were moving forward slowly and with difficulty because of the terrain. Now the heavy weapons of the 3rd Battalion opened a devastating fire on the Americans, thus giving their comrades the chance to climb up the railway embankment and cross over the Douve River on the railway tracks. The 8th Company of the 191st Artillery Regiment even managed, by firing six anti-tank shells, to destroy the church tower of St.-Côme-du-Mont, in which the Americans had set up an observation post. The U.S. troops were apparently too surprised by the fire assault to cover the railway bridge with their own mortars or machine guns; therefore the 2nd



Battalion succeeded in reaching the safe side of the Douve. Leutnant Degenkolbe, the leader of the Pioneer [Combat Engineer] Platoon, stood ready to transport the men across the water with inflatable boats, but luckily this dangerous undertaking was not necessary.

By throwing up a curtain of fire, the 3rd Battery of the 243rd Anti-aircraft Regiment prevented low-flying enemy air attacks for the duration of the crossing of the railway bridge. A skilful feint prevented the American infantry from going after the 2nd Battalion in earnest. By running along the hedges and firing from changing positions, the men of the bicycle platoon and the regimental combat platoon gave the enemy the impression that the defensive position was occupied by strong forces. By [a farm in the village of] Pommenauque, the recently arrived 2nd Battalion took up its position right away and defended the area against a strong American recon unit that wanted to work its way forward in the direction of the bridge to Carentan. The 6th Company under Leutnant Brunnklaus went after the enemy unit and destroyed it.

Immediately after his arrival, Major von der Heydte had Hauptmann Trebes inform him about the situation. The area west of Carentan was completely flooded around the Douve and therefore safe from enemy attacks; east of the city the ground was swampy and unfit for tanks.

The supply situation of the regiment was particularly worrisome, given the significant material losses it had suffered, especially in terms of vehicles and heavy weapons. FJR 6 also had to provide supplies for the units placed under them. Many of the ammunition and ration reserves were lost with the vehicles; furthermore, the fighting had led to a disproportionate use of ammunition. At the regiment's special request, one of the ammunition storehouses, "Melon," was assigned to them by the 91st Airborne Division.



Fallschirmjäger throw Model 24 stick grenades at U.S. forces near Carentan. German paratroopers wore little equipment during operations; only weapons and

ammunition were carried, with perhaps an additional field bag and canteen. The 6<sup>th</sup> FJR used small boats to maneuver in the marshes surrounding Carentan.

The Waffen und Geräte Trupp (WuG; Weapons and Equipment) that showed up there found a well-marked and well-prepared storehouse that was, however, completely empty. The replacement storehouse “Mulberry” [not to be confused with the Allies’ two artificial Normandy harbors known as “Mulberries”], which lay 50 kilometers [30 miles] from Carentan, was in the process of being relocated, so no ammunition could be received from there.

One thing was clear as day to FJR 6: Carentan was the linchpin of the right wing of the Allied invasion army, because as long as the city was in German hands, the Allies could not unite their “Utah” and “Omaha” landing zones, nor push forward into the flank of the German defense.

**Blowing the Taute River Bridge:** Major von der Heydte had some of his troops go into position along the flooded areas by the Douve, west of the homesteads, over the northern and eastern edge of the city. At the same time some of the Georgian army volunteers who had recently arrived from the 635th Eastern Battalion were deployed to strengthen a rear position in the south of the city. Parts of the 2nd Battalion relocated at night to the eastern edge of Carentan because the forward-deployed observers reported American troops approaching the city from “Omaha.” The Americans’ first goal, to take Carentan by midday on 6 June, had already failed, but it was expected that the Allies would commit everything to get the city under their control as soon as possible. Indeed, two hard-hitting and large task forces stood ready to storm Carentan, along with the 101st Airborne Division and the 1st Infantry Division.

Eugen Griesser [the author’s grandfather] remembers the early phases of the engagement: “Our group lay on the northern edge of Carentan in the first floor of a house. From there we looked onto the National Street, which gave us a clear view into the city, and all around there was a broad field of fire. To the left and right of the street, American soldiers were working their way forward; it was definitely a whole platoon sent to scout ahead. When our machine gun opened fire, they scattered and went under cover. A short time later, enemy fighter-bombers appeared and fired on the houses along the street. “The Americans tried one more time to bring their recon troop into the city, but quickly discovered that their fighter-plane attack had not cleared us out of our position. It didn’t take long until their artillery opened up to shoot the way clear for them. Everything that you can imagine came at us: mortars, small arms, aircraft, even naval artillery from the sea. It went on and off like that for days.”

Carentan became the Cassino of the Normandy invasion front [the Allies’ drive northward through Italy stalled at Cassino in the autumn of 1943]. Like the old “Sixers” had done in Kirovograd, the men of this FJR 6 transformed every building into a fortress. They lured the Americans into traps, maneuvered around them and cut them off from their own lines. As soon as a U.S. combat unit believed it had secured one section, the Fallschirmjäger appeared from an unexpected direction and engaged them in crossfire. In a countermove, the enemy artillery, in tandem with the fighter-bombers operating during the day, turned the city into a landscape of ruins.

A group of engineers was assigned the task of blowing up the Taute River bridge, which led to the Carentan train station. Gefreiter August Gönnermann and his comrades took their positions along the bridge and began to wire the explosives. The importance of their task soon became clear, as a strong American force tried to take the bridge, which they believed to be unwatched, in a quick attack.



The railyard in Carentan lies in ruins as a result of aerial bombing and naval shelling. Photograph taken several days after American airborne troops secured the city.

The Fallschirmjäger allowed them to advance to within close range, then opened fire on them and threw the Americans back. The commanding subordinate officer tried to set off the explosives with an electrical fuse, but because of a technical failure, this was unsuccessful. Despite the enemy fire, therefore, Gefreiter Gönnermann jumped out of his foxhole on the side of the street and set off all the explosions manually. Just in time, and with a huge leap, he managed to get himself to safety as the charges exploded behind him. So thick was the smoke that only after a full five minutes could the Fallschirmjäger recognize that the destruction of the bridge had been successful. The cloud of dust that formed from the explosion proved that the task had been completed; the bridge was completely destroyed.

**Would You Surrender in the Same Situation?** On the afternoon of 9 June, the battalion doctor of the 439th Eastern Battalion reported to the FJR 6 command post. He explained the situation of a battlegroup formed from the remains of his battalion, 2nd Battalion/914th Grenadier Regiment and a mixed anti-aircraft unit—they had set themselves up in defensive positions at the mouth of the Vire around a railway bridge.

On the same day, Major von der Heydte received the order to take the battlegroup located at the Vire under his command. Recon troops of 2nd Battalion/FJR 6 established contact between the battlegroup and the main Carentan defense. However, they also soon ran into the enemy, because the Americans had crossed the Vire with their tanks in the combat team's area and were pushing forward towards Carentan. Major von der Heydte reorganized the battlegroup (it had now been

driven back to Carentan) and deployed them as the Battlegroup “Becker” on the right flank of 3rd Battalion/FJR 6 near St.-Andre-de-Bohon.

With American forces closing in on Carentan from all sides, the Germans could not maintain control of the city. On the morning of 10 June, the enemy attacked from the east and the southeast, supported by a whole tank battalion [note: US tanks do not arrive at Carentan until 12 June]. FJR 6’s outer defenses slowly pulled back towards the main line of fighting, and prevented the Americans from pursuing them decisively. Once again artillery and fighter-bomber attacks rained down on the Fallschirmjäger’s defensive line before the ground troops stormed the area. In the north of Carentan, the enemy infantry had attempted an early-morning crossing of the canal in inflatable boats, but they were destroyed in the crossfire.

The Fallschirmjäger were harassed by constant artillery barrages and air attacks, and the Americans finally managed to break through the German lines in the area of 635th Eastern Battalion. In response, 8th Company, FJR 6, led a quick counterattack that managed to push back the enemy successfully, so the German troops could once again take their former positions. Around 3:00 pm, the enemy artillery barrage suddenly stopped. An American Jeep under the protection of a white flag arrived at the street bridge of St.-Côme-du-Mont facing towards Carentan. Two German prisoners of war, accompanied by some American soldiers, delivered a message from the commander of the 101st Airborne Division, Major General Maxwell Taylor: a message written in German in which General Taylor demanded the Fallschirmjäger’s capitulation with the advice, “Bravery has been well served.” If they resisted, they would face further bombardment.

The letter was given to the commander in the foremost position, Hauptmann Mager of 2nd Battalion/FJR 6. He established radio contact with Major von der Heydte right away in order to save time, because the answer was already clear. Mager wrote a reply on the missive in English: “Would you surrender in the same situation?” and sent the messengers back to General Taylor. At the same time, under orders from Major von der Heydte, 4th Battalion/191st Artillery Regiment fired off a demonstrative bombardment on the southern edge of St.-Côme-du-Mont with their last high-explosive shells.

During these negotiations, the weapons were silent only for a short period. In a hurry, both sides secured their wounded and fallen, moving them away from the front lines. One of the American captives from the first days was a doctor, a captain named Thomas Urban Johnson, who helped the German military doctors treat the wounded. The bandages and medicines taken from the prisoners turned out to be helpful supplements to their own materials, because the reserves of painkillers and bandages were quickly dwindling.

**A War of Materiél:** The pause in fighting was brought to an abrupt end when the American paratroopers carried out a heavy attack near the Pommenauque farm, north of Carentan. The Americans once again received additional support from their artillery and fighter-bombers. The 10th and 11th Companies of FJR 6 were in the hot seat of bitter defensive fighting and managed to hold the position, but with heavy losses. Recon troops brought new, worrisome news. During the night of 10/11 June, the enemy had gone around the right flank of the regiment near St. Fromont and had taken up positions there, about nine miles southeast of Carentan, with tank

units. Strong Allied forces which had managed to cross the Merderet were also positioned by Amfreville, ten miles northwest of the city. Furthermore, sabotage units were spotted attacking supply vehicles and messengers.

Around 5:45 pm, 10 June, two strong U.S. companies were able, with artillery support, to infiltrate the German defensive lines along the railroad bridge; elements were able to push forward to the Carentan train station. Hauptmann Mager dispatched the 6th Company under Leutnant Brunnklaus to restore the situation in cooperation with the 8th Company. In a pincer movement, they managed to annihilate the Americans.

Around the same time, a patrol of the 5th Company captured three American medical orderlies who apparently had lost contact with their unit. Major von der Heydte sent the men back to their own units with a message written in English. The message stated that, due to their high losses, the Americans could surely use their medical practitioners, and that Major von der Heydte hoped that the American commander would one day know how to return the favor.

Once again, the 635th Eastern Battalion proved the weak link, with serious breaches of its line in many sectors. (At one point, two Eastern battalions took up positions near Carentan, but then quickly defected to the enemy.) Major von der Heydte regrouped his troops and from then on only FJR 6 fought in the important areas—the army units took over securing the flanks. In this way, the front could be held on 10 June against increasingly strong enemy attacks.

But despite the German bravery, the lack of ammunition and other essential provisions was soon readily apparent. The bridges and streets to the German rear were destroyed or impassable, so that barely any provisions could make it through to the fighting troops. While the Americans could land all necessary materials through their “Utah” landing zone, Allied air supremacy prevented effective German resupply. Only one anti-aircraft unit, which appeared in Carentan by accident, not by plan, gave itself to the regiment’s command and proved to be a valuable help.

Eugen Griesser remembers the serious deficit in supplies: “On the evening of 10 June, I only had a little ammunition left for my submachine gun: two full magazines on my belt in a bag and one in the weapon. Because we barely received any ammunition resupplies, I had little more than my 08 [pistol], the bayonet, the spade and a few hand grenades. The war could not be won with this meager arsenal, however, and some of my comrades had it even worse off.”



Fallschirmjäger gather weapons for a coming fight. The man in foreground is grabbing the tripod to a machine gun while the soldier behind him reaches for cans of machine-gun ammunition.

The Luftwaffe put in a rare appearance over Carentan on the night of 11/12 June. Ju-52 transport planes threw down 13 tons of supplies over the edge of the city, including urgently needed ammunition for rifles and machine guns. Major von der Heydte implored the command of the 1st Fallschirm Army in Nancy for more air supply, but no promises could be made and the drops never materialized.

In a nighttime operation from 10 to 11 July, the Americans attacked the road bridge at St.-Côme-du-Mont but did not move forward from their positions in front of 3rd Battalion/FJR 6. In actions such as these, and in contrast to the German situation, the Americans displayed their material wealth. When the soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division could go no further, they simply pulled back and demanded plentiful air and heavy artillery support. For hours, the men of FJR 6 were subject to punishing bombardments that reduced their positions to rubble and ashes, burying whole troops and platoons.

The Fallschirmjäger did not yield, not even when the ammunition situation worsened. Rifle ammunition had to be collected in order to refill the belts of the machine guns. Every position was held literally down to the last cartridge; only once that was fired would the Fallschirmjäger pull back.



After a three-hour firefight, the enemy eventually succeeded in entrenching themselves in the Pommenauque farm and infiltrating Carentan from the northwest. Again the Americans pushed forward to the train station and occupied part of the building there. In order to close the hole in the defense between the remains of 3rd Battalion/FJR 6 and the 13th Company of the regiment, the 6th Company, moving on their own initiative, threw themselves against the enemy at Pommenauque. Leutnant Brunnklaus and his men managed to fight through to the road bridge and establish a connection with the remains of the 3rd Battalion located there. Once again, events came down to bitter close-quarters combat between German and American paratroopers. Leutnant Brunnklaus fell in the dense struggle, hit in the back by a pistol bullet.

Meanwhile, the combat reserves of the 2nd Battalion took on the task of recapturing the train station. Cut off from their own forces, the Americans couldn't hold the building and were slaughtered to a man. Dietrich Scharrer celebrated his 20th birthday on this day: "11 June was a particularly hot day. We lay in our positions, the sun burned down on us, and our canteens were empty. I collected all the flasks and, during a break in the firing, I ran to find water. After I had filled the canteens with water, I discovered two glass bottles behind an open door. I suspected that spirited cider was in them and took them back for my comrades and me. We figured out that the bottles were too old and that the good cider had turned into vinegar. So for my birthday we toasted with a mixture of water, vinegar, and sugar."

**Hang In There As Long As Possible:** Around 3:00 pm, Major von der Heydte arrived at positions along the Hiesville–Carentan rail line in order to get an overview of the enemy position. While the 6th Company deployed to the right of the Carentan–St-Côme-du-Mont road had won ground in their operations, the 3rd Battalion, fighting to the left of the road, remained under heavy fire from enemy mortars. Furthermore, parts of the 439th Eastern Battalion and the 3rd Battalion/1058th Grenadier Regiment, which had been sent as reinforcements had been apparently scared off and had advanced no further.

At first individual men, then soon whole groups, fell back because they had run out of ammunition. Across improvised bridges, the Americans could land on two positions along the southern bank; they could now speedily reinforce their ranks. Even tanks were brought into play in large numbers [Note: there were no tanks in this phase of the fighting] In the face of the overwhelming superiority of enemy numbers and weapons, and in response to the completely inadequate provisions situation, especially with regard to ammunition, Major von der Heydte decided to pull his troops back from the northern and western edges of Carentan and then reform on the southwestern perimeter of the city. Holding onto the present positions would have led to the annihilation of his men.

At 5:05 pm, Major von der Heydte reported to the 91st Airborne Division, "All leaders of Jäger companies have fallen or been wounded. Hardest fighting on the city limits of Carentan. The last of the ammunition has been fired; at 1800 hours we will vacate Carentan and fall back to Elevation 30–Pommenauque. This line can only be held if ammunition and provisions arrive." The tactical leader of the 91st Airborne Division confirmed receipt of the radio message but did not answer it.

The Fallschirmjäger had to disengage from the enemy in leaps and bounds, so as to disguise their maneuver. Eugen Griesser remembers the situation: “In Carentan train station, my unit held the baggage storage rooms. During a break in the firing, the commander [von der Heydte], Hauptmann Mager, Hauptmann Hermann, and another Oberjäger came over to us. ‘What’s the status with you?’ the Major asked. ‘We can still give the Amis hell,’ I said. ‘But when the ammunition’s gone, it will be difficult.’

“The commander knew how serious the situation was, because the other sections had the same to report. ‘Hang in there as long as possible,’ he said. Then he unfolded a map and showed us the prepared positions in the rear. ‘Before the [support] fire is completely stopped, pull your men back to here,’ he said to Hauptmann Mager and Hauptmann Hermann. As he left, he patted me encouragingly on the shoulder and moved on, ducking.”

**The Death of Hauptmann Hermann:** The battle for Carentan was largely determined by American material superiority. Fighter-bombers swooped on individual targets, and machine-gun nests were wiped out by concentrations of heavy artillery fire before the U.S. infantry advanced. In this manner, and supported by strong tank units, the Americans were able to entrench themselves on the eastern edge of Carentan and push farther forward. The city literally had to be taken by the Americans house by house.

Now the Fallschirmjäger had to pay the price for the way that German tank reserves had been stationed deep in the French hinterland. The 17th SS-Panzer Division “Götz von Berlichingen” was moving towards them from Bordeaux, but it could only move forward under the protection of darkness—during the day, the Allied planes turned the march into a suicide mission. The men of FJR 6 still had only themselves to rely on.

After the men of Fallschirmjäger Regiment 6 were forced to pull back from Ste.-Mère-Église to St.-Côme-du-Mont, they made a “last stand” at Carentan. Parts of the 5th Company under the leadership of the beloved Hauptmann Otto Hermann were still trying to push back the enemy through powerful counterattacks. In this way, the Fallschirmjäger came to an open piece of ground, and they suspected that the opposite side was occupied by the enemy. Some young daredevils wanted to cross the field first, but Hauptmann Hermann held them back. According to an eyewitness: “The Hauptmann called to them: ‘I am in command here, therefore I will go first!’ He rose from under cover and went forward in a crouch. He had barely covered 50 metres when the Americans open fired on him from all sides. Heavily wounded, he fell to the ground. Suddenly the young boys lost the desire to attack. An old Gefreiter pushed the medic forward. ‘You’re the Sani [medic], now it’s your turn!’ But the medic stubbornly refused to leave his position. “The Gefreiter pulled out his pistol, shot down the medic, and called: ‘Is there another coward who wants to leave the Hauptmann out there to rot?’ We then gave covering fire while he and a few other volunteers recovered the Hauptmann.” The Fallschirmjäger took the heavily wounded man to the next aid station. Shortly thereafter, the Hauptmann succumbed to his wounds.

**The Lions of Carentan” and the “Kiss-My-Arse Division:** The situation became ever more desperate for the individual battlegroups, because soon the ammunition for the automatic weapons became scarce, and the enemy kept adding reinforcements to the battle. Furthermore, one depot did not have the necessary ammunition on hand, while the personnel of another

explained to the men of the WuG Troop that they were not responsible for Carentan. So while the Fallschirmjäger were going against American tanks with empty weapons, a depot administrator refused them the ammunition that could have helped them keep control of Carentan!

On the way to the regimental command post, Major von der Heydte met the chief of staff of the 17th SS-Panzer Division “Götz von Berlichingen,” who had driven ahead of his troops in order to investigate the situation. When Major von der Heydte reported to him, in accordance with protocol, that he had just given the order to evacuate the city, the SS man flew into a rage, because his division had been redeployed specifically with the assignment of securing Carentan and leading a decisive counterattack in the region. He thrust aside Major von der Heydte’s objections and produced the orders for the subordination of FJR 6 to the 17th SS-Panzer Division, and thus removed the major from his [independent] command.

The eventual arrival of a fresh division gave the Fallschirmjäger hope that Carentan could still be held. Their disappointment was that much greater when not a single SS man took up a position within the city itself. On the evening of 11 June, while his Fallschirmjäger were clearing out of their last positions in Carentan, Major von der Heydte reported to the division’s command post and Brigadeführer Werner Ostendorf. He accused von der Heydte of cowardice, but he was eventually forced to take back his untenable accusations when the commanding general of LXXIV Corps, General Dietrich von Choltitz, joined the conversation (like a *Deus ex machina*, according to von der Heydte’s memoirs) to express his admiration of the major for the resistance he had maintained for six days in Carentan.

General von Choltitz coined the phrase, “the Lions of Carentan.” Nonetheless, the Fallschirmjäger felt that the Waffen-SS had left them in a lurch. Had the SS reinforced the city, Carentan would not have been vacated on 11 June. The main benefit of the 17th SS-Panzer Division for the paras was they could supply some ammunition and rations.



Major von der Heydte (center), commanding FJR 6, informs Brigadeführer Werner Ostendorf, head of the 17th SS-Panzer Division, of the situation at Carentan. Ostendorf was critical of Heydte’s defense of the city, despite the paratroopers’ being given little ammunition or support.

Gerd Schwetling, an Obergefreiter in the 6th Company at the time, had low opinions of these particular troops: “The 17th SS was one of the new divisions that had been put together in the spring and basically had no combat experience. Maybe that’s what caused their snobbery; they

hadn't had any interactions with Fallschirmjäger yet. Looking back on it, it doesn't surprise me that a high-ranking SS officer, who had run across my path in the half-darkness, had jumped to attention and saluted me quickly. He probably thought that he had run into a superior officer." The new line of defense southwest of Carentan was much shorter than the old line, and therefore it could be occupied by Fallschirmjäger in denser positions. But after six days of ceaseless deployment against a more powerful enemy, the men of FJR 6 were burnt out and completely exhausted. As a precautionary measure, Major von der Heydte pulled them away from the front line so they could catch their breath; he left the rest of the army infantry in their positions overnight.

The Wehrmacht report from 11 June 1944 stated: 'Under the leadership of Major von der Heydte, 6th Fallschirmjäger Regiment distinguished themselves in heavy battles in the enemy beachhead, and in the destruction of the enemy paratroopers and air landing troops landing in the area.' Yet, despite the clear appreciation of the performance of FJR 6 since the first day of the Allied landings, there were further attacks on Major von der Heydte. These attacks only stopped after General Kurt Student and General Eugen Meindl, independently of each other, declared that they would have acted in the exact same way in such a hopeless situation. Outvoted by three generals, the 17th SS-Panzer Division (now referred to as the "Kiss-My-Arse Division" by the Fallschirmjäger), supported by 2nd Battalion/FJR 6, fell in on 12 June to storm Carentan.

**Von der Heydte's "Volunteers"** FJR 6, now subordinate to the division, took over securing the right flank, with the assignment to occupy and hold the Carentan train station [note: this claim is somewhat confusing, because the 6<sup>th</sup> FJR pulled out of Carentan and regrouped SW of the city] while the SS division undertook a counterattack from Carentan towards the coast. At first, the Americans seemed impressed by the tank units of the Waffen-SS, and they pulled back, but it turned out they only partially retreated to escape the hail of bombs and rocket fire from the air support they had quickly called in.

Surprised by the intensity of the Allied air attacks and the firepower of the enemy artillery, the Waffen-SS forces quickly came to a standstill and were caught in the enemy's fire. The SS approached the battle with a "murderous idealism" (as Oberleutnant Martin Pöppel later described in his memoirs), but without prior battlefield reconnaissance and sufficient artillery support, spirit alone was not enough to win the city back from the Americans.

The men of FJR 6, meanwhile, managed to occupy the train station according to their orders, and prepare themselves to defend it; the fighting of the past few days had given them enough knowledge of the area, and the fighter-bomber attacks were nothing new to them [Note: Again this is somewhat confusing because according to most sources the 6<sup>th</sup> FJR had abandoned the city by the time of the counterattack]. Some Fallschirmjäger couldn't conceal a certain Schadenfreude [joy at another's suffering] at the fact that the Waffen-SS, with all their pomposity, had failed miserably in Carentan.

Hurrying in with the regimental combat platoon, Major von der Heydte ordered his officers to round up all scattered and fleeing SS grenadiers and incorporate them into the Fallschirmjäger—some of the grenadiers could only be convinced at gunpoint. Major von der Heydte inspired the bunch of men who had been thrown together; transfer papers to the Luftwaffe were filled out for the SS men, and he accepted volunteers into the Fallschirmjäger troop.



The Fallschirmjäger often used captured weapons in the defense of Normandy. This gun crew is using an American .30-caliber Browning air-cooled machine gun.

The nearest messenger carried the documents to the corps command post, from where they were sent on to the Reich Air Ministry. Thus FJR 6 had received reinforcements. While the losses suffered in the battle of Carentan were not made up in the least, Major von der Heydte preferred even this small number of new men as replacements, as opposed to the actual big fat zero that he had received as official replacements.

While the 17th SS-Panzer Division, heavily wounded, pulled back to its original jump-off position, FJR 6 pulled back and its men were reunited in their positions having suffered minimal losses. One forward regimental company continued to hold off the American advance. One of the most important roads into Carentan was kept free by firing machine guns along it from covered positions. The American paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division, trying to advance, were forced to stay in place by the concentrated fire.

When the U.S. soldiers, despite a German bombardment and their own heavy losses, finally managed to push forward, the Fallschirmjäger evaded them and fell back into other prepared positions, from which they continued resistance with their remaining mortars. The company finally withdrew on the evening of 12 June to the regiment's new positions, as now three American divisions with strong tank support attacked the city from three different directions and occupied it.

Brigadeführer Ostendorf now accused Major von der Heydte of not having held his position. But in the face of his own defeat, he was unable to counter the major's cool response that FJR 6 simply covered the retreat of 17th SS-Panzer Division and followed their general reduction of the front. The news now arrived that an attack by the 100th Panzer-Ersatz Division (Tank Replacement Division), about six miles west of Carentan, had not improved the German situation in the region. Accompanied by some officers, the commander was said to have left his troops during the battle, as though fleeing. The situation was tumultuous because some of the troops had surrendered to the enemy, while others dug in their heels and tried to hold out.

Major von der Heydte sent his 3rd Battalion out to stabilize the situation, because if the Americans were to advance successfully in that sector, it would be possible to cut off and surround FJR 6 and the 17th SS-Panzer Division. Because the major recognized the general helplessness of the Waffen-SS, he moved the regiment to prepared positions in the rear, southwest of Carentan. The terrain there was not well suited to tanks, and therefore the next four weeks were mostly determined by infantry actions.

Nevertheless, the enemy artillery was still a great danger and the nonstop Allied fighter-bomber attacks were giving the Fallschirmjäger a tough fight. In the land battles, however, the men of FJR 6 were particularly tough opponents for the Americans. It took the Allies 24 days to wrest 11 miles of land from them between Carentan and Périers, the outer points of the new defensive line, where FJR 6 took up its positions between Raffoville and the River Sèves.



Obergefreiter Werner Haase.

**A Letter Home:** At this time, the remains of the 1st Battalion, the so-called “Emil Unit,” relocated via Paris and Weissewarte to the air base at Güstrow in Mecklenburg to form a new 1st Battalion. On 17 June Werner Haase, an Obergefreiter in the 14th Company, found time to write a letter to his family: “You have probably waited for a few lines from me for a while. Today’s the first time it has been possible for me to write to you. I’m sure you know from the radio or newspaper how it’s going here with us. This is the first letter that I can say comes directly from the battlefield. Until now I have always gotten away unscarred, and I hope that I continue to do so. “Everything’s going okay. I was deployed to the point that was, at first, the weakest point. You’ll have heard on the radio how there was a battle for one city that had to be given up after a few days. Our regiment has shrunk down to only a few because of this city. If you find an old newspaper, you’ll be able to read more about it. I’ll only give away the name of our commander: Major von der Heydte....“To a soon and healthy reunion! Greetings, Werner”

The reunion never happened. On 20 June 1944, only three weeks after his 21st birthday, Werner Haase fell victim to an enemy sharpshooter. Because his foxhole could be seen by the opponents,



his comrades only managed to get to him after darkness fell; they brought him to the main first aid station where it was discovered that one small, clean shot had gone through his left armpit. The bullet had gone straight into his heart.

**Reinforcements:** At the beginning of July, the remains of 17th SS-Panzer Division were relieved by the 2nd SS-Panzer Division “Das Reich.” This division had a lot of experience in the field at this point, and worked well with the Fallschirmjäger. FJR 6 also received replacements at this time, although the 830 new men could not completely make up for the losses they had suffered. In addition, many of the new arrivals needed uniforms and weapons in order to be ready for battle. Major von der Heydte wrote in his memoirs: “About a third of them didn’t even have a steel helmet, over half had ripped footgear, their training and their morale were even worse than it had been with the original regiment.”

Obergefreiter Franz Hüttich had a similar impression: “Among the replacements were many young boys around 17 or 18 years old, who had absolutely no combat experience and had basically been brought into the military directly from the school benches. They were no well-trained Fallschirmjäger, whom one could send into battle without concern. There was no evidence in their behavior of training or jump school. We had to teach the boys everything, and because we were constantly deployed into combat, they had to learn very quickly if they weren’t going to fall in battle. “Others came from the practice of Heldenklau [“hero-stealing,” the process of recruiting soldiers from other divisions] in the offices and air bases, redeploying them to a new troop. These were men from ground personnel that hadn’t held a weapon in years; they had voluntarily signed up for the Fallschirmjäger troop after hearing the persuasive talks of the recruiters. Some had been threatened with deployment to the Waffen-SS, because the ranks of the fighting troops urgently needed to be filled up.”

The regiment only just managed to equip, clothe and arm the new arrivals. Major von der Heydte reorganized the companies of FJR 6, so that battle-experienced Fallschirmjäger would be standing shoulder to shoulder with the young boys. Nevertheless, the companies were not more than 30–40 men. The Americans were getting bogged down attacking the defensive positions between Périers and St.-Germain-sur-Sèves, which were echeloned in depth.

The newly formed 16th Company, which had been created out of the bicycle platoon and the regimental combat platoon, had counterattacked and cleared up a breakthrough in the main line of resistance by the American infantry on 4 July. Obergefreiter Rudolf Thiel and his group managed to take 15 prisoners during this action. He received an Iron Cross 1st Class for his efforts.

Having completely captured the Contentin peninsula, the Americans now channeled more and more reinforcements into the Carentan sector. The American paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, after suffering heavy losses in the battle against FJR 6, had been relieved from the frontline. Now the Fallschirmjäger faced a new and no less tough enemy, the U.S. 90th Infantry Division.

# **Assignment #3**

## **The 502<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment**

### **“The Five-O-Deuces”**

**Discuss the actions and decisions from both your own and the unit’s perspective. You should be prepared to discuss:**

- Unit organization and equipment, training, and morale.
- Key decisions, why those decision were made, and the consequence of the decision.
- Unit’s actions and accomplishments.

**This supplemental reading contains three parts:**

- **Part 1: Overview of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division**
- **Part 2: Airborne Infantry Regiment Organization and Equipment**
- **Part 3: A short biography of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cole – commander 3/502 PIR.**
- **Part 4: Regimental Studies #1: The Carentan Causeway Fight**

\*Note: The CarentanCauseway Fight is 90 pages (double spaced with numerous maps). If a small group is assigned to cover the 502d PIR then some could concentrate of the Causeway Fight (document pages 1 to 33) and others could focus on the Ingouf Farm Fight (document pages 33 to 93).

**You may enhance these readings with your own research.**

<b>Part 1: Overview of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division</b> “Screaming Eagles.” Additional information can be found at <a href="https://www.wv2-airborne.us/18corps/101abn/101_overview.html">https://www.wv2-airborne.us/18corps/101abn/101_overview.html</a>
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<p><b>“The 101<sup>st</sup> Division has no history, but has a Rendezvous with Destiny.”<sup>1</sup></b></p>
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<p>Gen. W.C. Lee (the first commanding general of the division), August 1942</p>
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In August 1942 the U.S. Army activated the 101st Airborne Division at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. In October 1942 the division moved to Fort Bragg, North Carolina and started its training to qualify for its new airborne mission. In the spring of 1943 the division conducted its first division maneuvers and then that summer participated in the Army Tennessee maneuvers (primarily jumping from trucks).

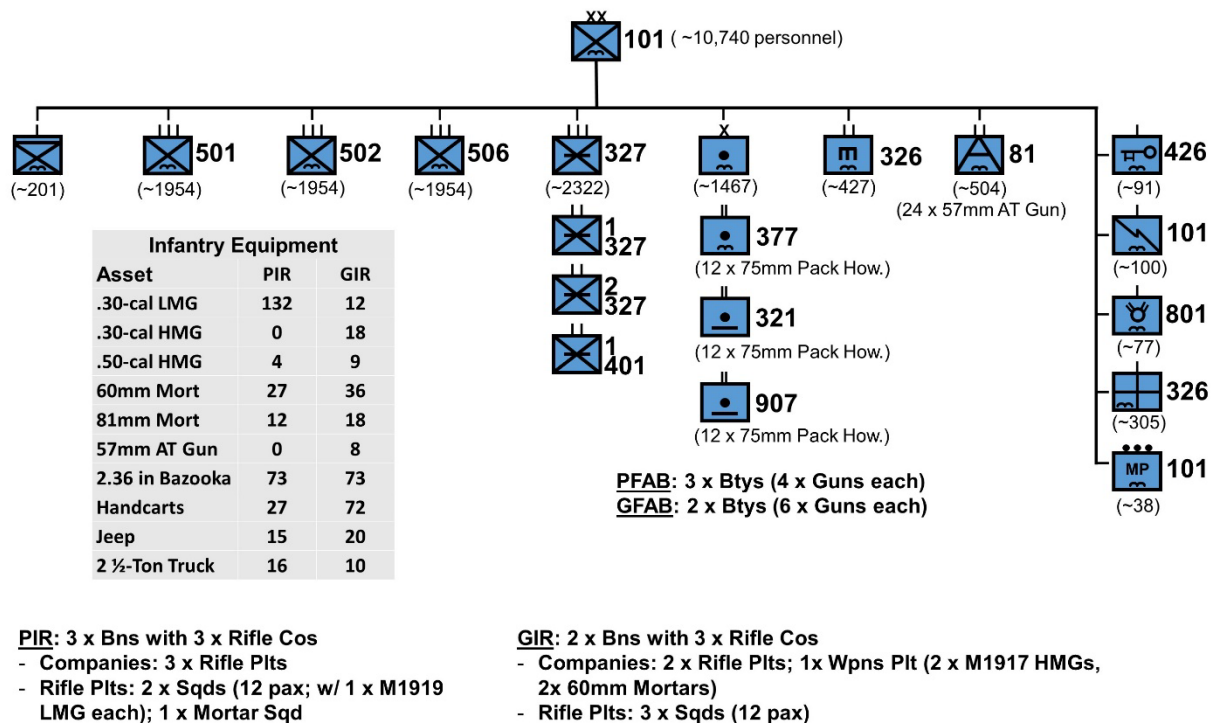
In early 1944, transferred to England and continued its training. On 5 February General Lee suffered a heart attack and returned to the United States. In March, BG Maxwell D. Taylor,

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<sup>1</sup> Bando, Mark. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne at Normandy (1994), 9.

former commander of the 82d Airborne Division Artillery, assumed command of the division. Soon after that the division underwent another organizational change when the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, was attached to the 327th Glider Infantry to operate as the regiment's third battalion. The division was now training with the task organization with which it would fight in Normandy.<sup>2</sup>

## 101st Airborne Division Organization



In England, the 101st participated in three major exercises. On the last exercise, the division's mission was to capture the causeways leading away from a simulated beach. Ironically, the regiments were scattered at the wrong drop sites. Nevertheless, the units regrouped and accomplished their assigned tasks successfully.

The "Screaming Eagles" lacked combat experience, but had been extensively trained and contained many combat veterans. Although lightly equipped, it was a strong formation with four infantry regiments (standard infantry division had 3 regiments). The men of the division were determined and highly motivated to accomplish the mission. Cornelious Ryan in his classic work *"The Longest Day"* stated **"The 101<sup>st</sup> on its first combat jump was fiercely determined not to be outdone by its more illustrious partner [the 82d ABD]"**.<sup>3</sup>

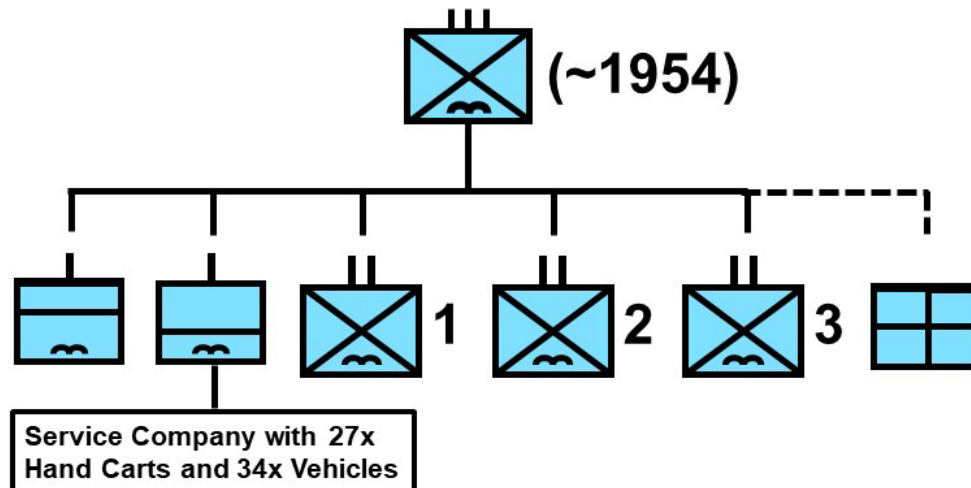
<sup>2</sup> CMH web site. <https://history.army.mil/documents/ETO-OB/101ABN-ETO.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Bando, Mark., 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, The Screaming Eagles at Normandy (2001), 8.

**Part 2: Airborne Infantry Regiment Organization and Equipment.** Additional information can be found at [The 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment\(PIR\) during WW II \(ww2-airborne.us\)](http://www.ww2-airborne.us) and other sources noted in the foot notes.

On 2 March 1942, the Army activated the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) at Fort Benning, GA. Soon after that, Col George Van Horn Moseley Jr. took command of the regiment. Moseley was a determined trainer and made enormous demands on his troops. In July of 1942, the regiment was assigned to the new 101st Airborne Division at Fort Bragg NC. Col Moseley executed a grueling training program, and the regiment took part in the several large division and corps maneuvers. In October 1943, the regiment deployed to the UK with the 101st and continued with a rigorous training program which included 15-25 mile hikes and daily close combat exercises. Instructions were given in a wide variety of items from 1st-aid, map reading, chemical warfare and the use and firing of German weapons. Company and battalion size parachute drops were also rehearsed during this period. \*Col Moseley broke his leg during the airborne drop into Normandy and the regimental XO LTC John Micaelis commanded the regiment at the Battle of Carentan.

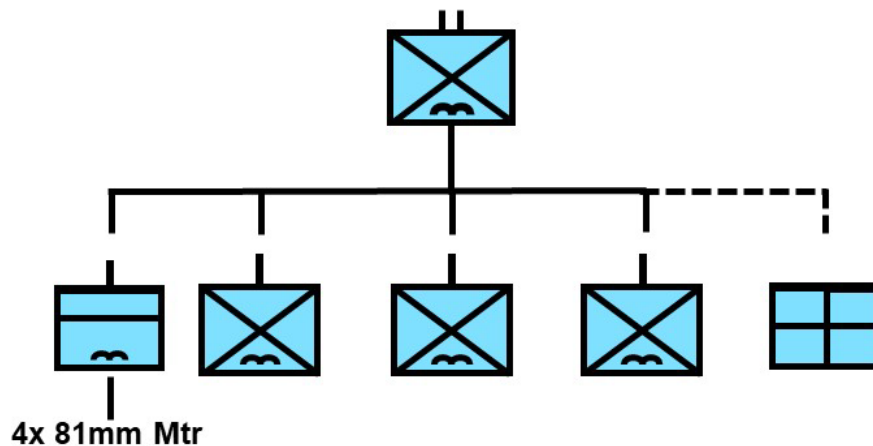
**Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) Organization:** A PIR consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Service Company, three Parachute Infantry Battalions, and the attachment from division of a small medical and chaplain detachment. The PIR, with only 1954 men, was about two-thirds the size of standard infantry regiment. The PIR had no regimental cannon or anti-tank company. Additionally, it had only 34 vehicles, whereas a standard regiment had 187 trucks and jeeps.<sup>4</sup>



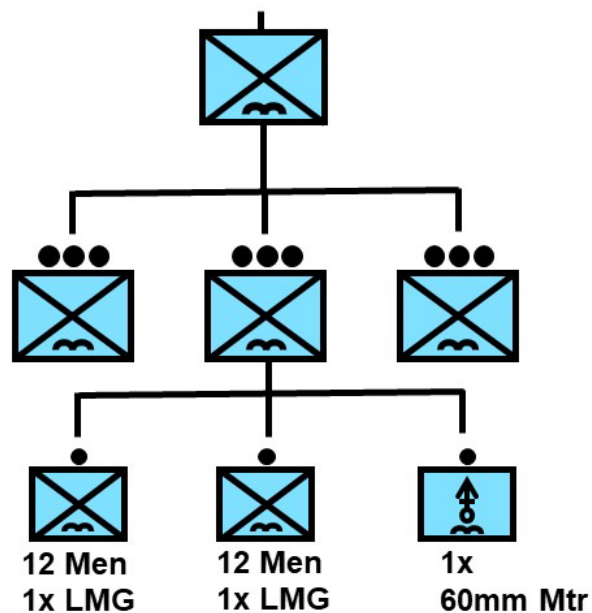
**Parachute Infantry Battalion Organization:** The PIR's basic tactical unit was the parachute Infantry Battalion. The battalion consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Service Company, three Parachute Infantry Rifle Companies, and an attached medical detachment. The Parachute Infantry Battalion with only 37 officers and 512 enlisted, was about two-thirds the size of standard infantry company. The battalion had no heavy weapons company or vehicles. The HQ company did have four 81mm Mortars.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Zagola, Steven. US Airborne Divisions in the ETO 1944-45, 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 26-28.



**Parachute Infantry Company Organization:** The Parachute Infantry Rifle Company consisted of company headquarters and three rifle platoons. As with the regiment and battalion, the company was about two-thirds the size of the standard infantry company (8 officers and 119 enlisted) [Note: standard infantry company has only 5 officers]. The company had no heavy weapons platoon or vehicles. **The parachute rifle platoons** had two rifle squads and a mortar squad with one 60mm mortar [a standard infantry platoon had three rifle squads]. **The parachute infantry rifle squad** was the same size (12 men) as the standard rifle squad. Each squad had one .30-cal LMG versus one Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) in the standard squad.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Zagola, Steven. US Airborne Divisions in the ETO 1944-45, 28-30.

### Part 3: A short biography of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cole – commander 3/502 PIR.

**Note:** During the field study, you are responsible for all the actions of the 502d PIR from D+1 (7 June 1944) to D+7 (13 June 1944). LTC Cole was the lead BN and main effort for the 502d PIR attack on Carentan (9 to 11 June 1944). This action is covered in detail during stands 2 and 3 of the staff ride's field study.

LTC Robert Cole:

- Robert Cole was 39 years at the Battle of Carentan. (Son of an Army Doctor)
- He joined the Army in July 1934. One year later he was discharged and secured an appointment to the US Military Academy at West Point.
- He graduated in 1939 (2d Lt) and joined the paratroopers in 1941. By 1944, he was a Lieutenant Colonel and commanding 3/502 PIR in the rapidly expanding airborne forces.
- He was tall, muscular, and said to have a booming voice which others noted he seldom lowered. One trooper remember that Cole was not a **“gentle talker”** and during the causeway attack, **“he was at his cussingest best.”**<sup>7</sup>
- Others noted that he commanded his battalion with an iron hand and that his men respected and feared him as much as they did the Germans. Trooper Ralph Kelly remembered, **“I was more afraid of Cole than I ever was of the Germans.”**<sup>8</sup>
- On D-Day, his BN was scattered during the drop. By midday, he had only 75 men collected but was still able to fulfill his mission and capture Exit 3 at Saint-Martin-de-Varreville and linkup with the 4<sup>th</sup> ID.
- By 10 June, he had collected about 600 men and was the 502d main effort in the attack on Carentan.
- LTC Patrick Cassidy (1/502) was a good friend of Cole. Prior to Cole's marriage they had been roommates. Their friendship allowed them to work together effectively during the Battle of Carentan – many times without direct coordination because of the knowledge of what they knew each would do.

LTC Robert Cole – Medal of Honor Citation: For gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his own life above and beyond the call of duty on 11 June 1944, in France. Lt. Col. Cole was personally leading his battalion in forcing the last four bridges on the road to Carentan when his entire unit was suddenly pinned down to the ground by intense and withering enemy rifle, machine-gun, mortar, and artillery fire placed upon them from well-prepared and heavily fortified positions

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<sup>7</sup> Marshall, *Night Drop*. 350

<sup>8</sup> <https://sofrep.com/specialoperations/remembering-robert-g-cole-moh-in-normandy-on-memorial-day/>

within 150 yards of the foremost elements. After the devastating and unceasing enemy fire had for over one hour prevented any move and inflicted numerous casualties, Lt. Col. Cole, observing this almost hopeless situation, courageously issued orders to assault the enemy positions with fixed bayonets. With utter disregard for his own safety and completely ignoring the enemy fire, he rose to his feet in front of his battalion and with drawn pistol shouted to his men to follow him in the assault. Catching up a fallen man's rifle and bayonet, he charged on and led the remnants of his battalion across the bullet-swept open ground and into the enemy position. His heroic and valiant action in so inspiring his men resulted in the complete establishment of our bridgehead across the Douve River. The cool fearlessness, personal bravery, and outstanding leadership displayed by Lt. Col. Cole reflect great credit upon himself and are worthy of the highest praise in the military service.<sup>9</sup>

<b>Part 4: Regimental Studies #1: The Carentan Causeway Fight</b>
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See separate document

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<sup>9</sup> [HTTPS://WWW.CMOHS.ORG/RECIPIENTS/ROBERT-G-COLE](https://www.cmoHS.org/RECIPIENTS/ROBERT-G-COLE)

<https://mcoepublic.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/library/Documents/Hardcopy/paper/Carentan%20Causeway%20Fight%20-%20D809.7%20.A3%20no.%201.pdf>

Author: United States. Army. European Theater of Operations.; United States. Army. European Theater of Operations. History Section. <sup>FEB</sup>

Regimental unit study, no. 1

Numbered Regimental Studies #1, The Carentan Causeway Fight

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THE CARENTAN CAUSEWAY FIGHT

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### THE CARENTAN CAUSEWAY FIGHT

The attack of the 502ND PARACHUTE INFANTRY across the CARENTAN CAUSEWAY on 9, 10 and 11 June, 1944, broke the back of the German defense of that city. Practically no records were kept by the Regiment or by either of the two Battalions which engaged. Had a reconstruction not been undertaken by means of the Group Interview method, there would have been little of record to memorialize the event. The reconstruction was begun with COLONEL COLE and all of his surviving officers and men present. It was the first time that the attempt was made by History Section to interview an entire Battalion at one time. The nature of the action made this necessary. Such diffusion had occurred during the attack that all of the companies were mixed and scarcely one squad was able to stay together. The interview was begun in a NORMANDY apple orchard near CHERBOURG on 8 July, 1944. It was the first group interview to be held on French soil. When rain broke up the assembly, the Battalion marched one-half mile and the interview was then continued in a horse barn. That night, after a march bivouac, the work was resumed, and it was extended into the next two days while the Battalion was still on march and after it had boarded an LST bound for England. There were two more full Battalion assemblies at CHILTON FOLIAT, ENGLAND. So that in all, it was necessary to form the Battalion six times to complete its portion of the narrative. In the case of FIRST BATTALION, 502ND INFANTRY, however, it was not necessary to hold

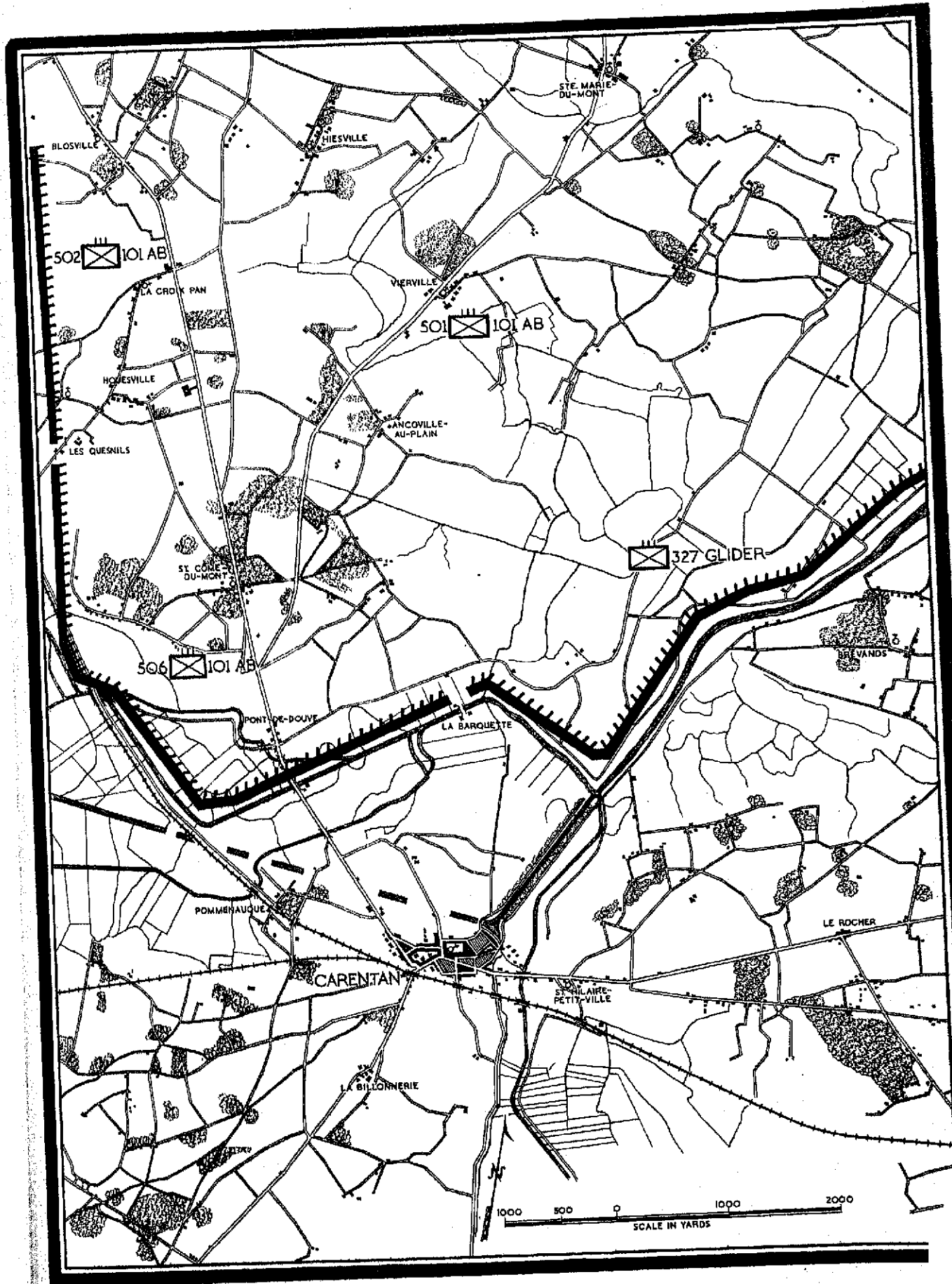
a Battalion formation. COLONEL CASSIDY'S men, coming forward into the action some hours after COLONEL COLE'S THIRD BATTALION, remained fairly well collected according to platoons and squads. The various groups knew very little about the action of any other group and each composed a separate story. They were therefore interviewed as groups and when the work was complete, it became possible to put together the many interlocking pieces in this strange story. Each group interview took place with the Battalion Commander and his Staff present. Throughout the period of these assemblies, it was necessary to check back to the Division Commander and his Staff and the Regimental Commander and his Staff to confirm or correct all such statements of situation or decision as would be more accurately known at the higher levels. It was also necessary to interview COLONEL SINK and his Staff of the 506TH REGIMENT as to the reconnaissance which preceded the advance of the 502ND REGIMENT. While still in France, the Historical Officer went over the ground with COLONEL COLE (Later KIA in HOLLAND.) An additional reconnaissance of the CAUSEWAY and the farm house and fields was made some months later.

S.L.A. MARSHALL  
Col, GSC

### THE SITUATION

By 2200 on 8 June, 1944, the 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION had completed all of the missions initially assigned it in OPERATION NEPTUNE and was holding a defensive position along the western and southern limits of the area where it had engaged the enemy during the first three days. The 501ST PARACHUTE REGIMENT was assembled in the vicinity of VIERVILLE as Division reserve. The 506TH PARACHUTE REGIMENT held a line from LES QUESNILS along the DOUVE RIVER to LA BARQUETTE. The sector of the 502ND PARACHUTE REGIMENT ran northward from LES QUESNILS and the sector of the 327TH GLIDER REGIMENT extended from LA BARQUETTE to the mouth of the DOUVE. The defensive position had been consolidated and orders had been issued by the Division Commander for the 327TH REGIMENT to cross the DOUVE at 0100 next morning and move to the high ground around BREVANDS. The Corps Engineers brought forward assault boats along concealed routes during the day. (These facts are from statements by GENERAL TAYLOR and his G3.)

This was the beginning of the operation against CARENTAN. On the afternoon of 8 June, however, an Engineer reconnaissance party looked the ground over and reported to the Division Commander that an advance from the north, along the main highway out of ST COME DU MONT, might be possible: it was a first view which gradually changed the whole form of the operation. (From COL MICHAELIS.)



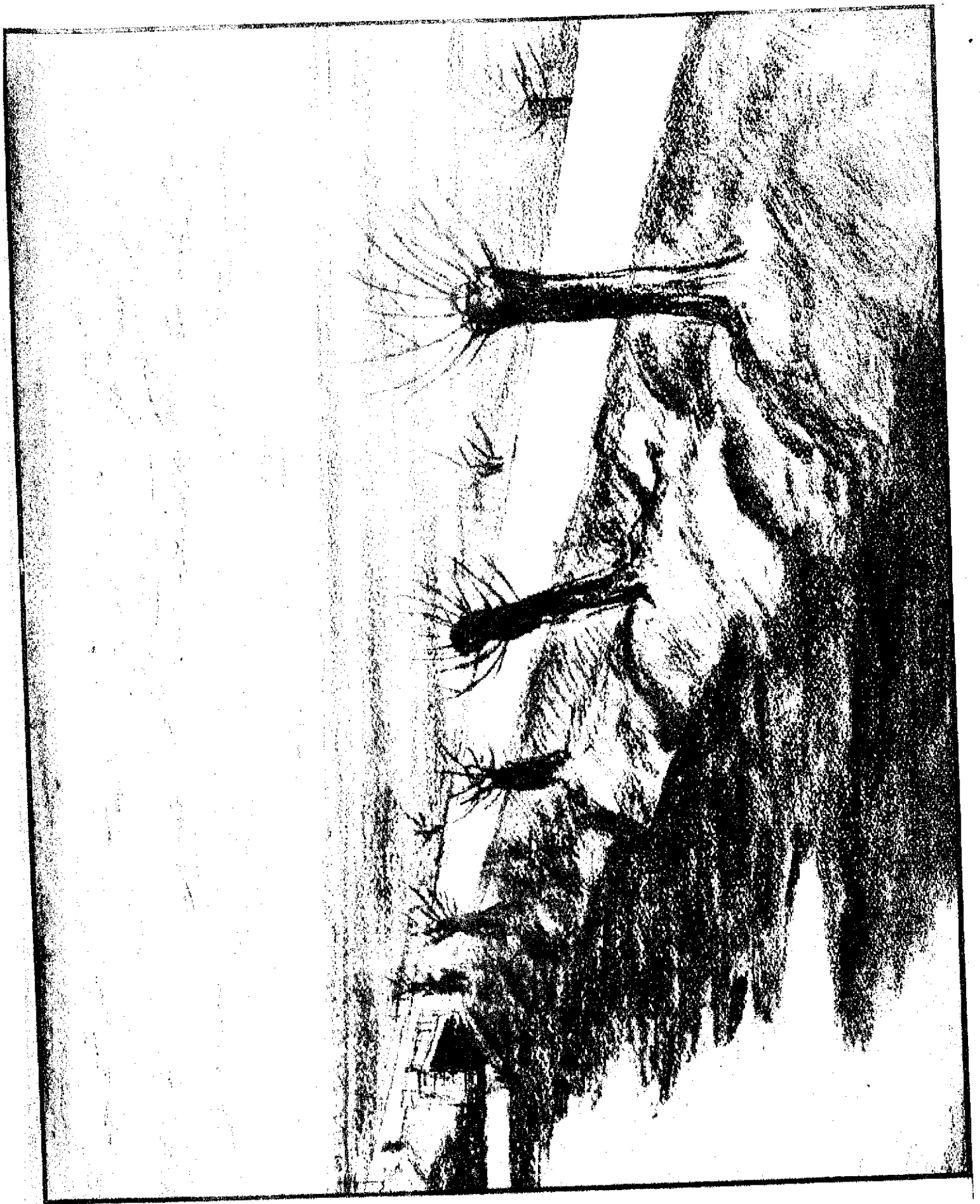
The chief obstacle to attack in that direction was that the highway crossed a wide stretch of marsh just before entering CARENTAN. For more than one-half mile the route was a coverless defile. After pushing the enemy out of ST COME DU MONT, the 506TH REGIMENT had out-posted the eastern abutment and the first two bridges of this CAUSEWAY. On the afternoon of 9 June, COL ROBERT SINK, the Regimental Commander, went up to look things over and found that the lieutenant in charge of the outpost had put his men in the houses at PONT DE DOUVE and left the bridges uncovered. SINK asked why and was told: "The outfit which we relieved kept their men here, so I did the same." SINK replied: "God damn it! You get your men up there now." He then went ahead with his party — 9 men. At first they drew no fire. At the second bridge, which had been demolished by the enemy, they found an old bateau a short way up the stream, took some two-by-fours for paddling and rowed across the stream. There was still no fire. Just beyond the third bridge on the right side of the road there is a 30-yard stretch which is peculiarly barren of trees or any foliage. As they moved from the bridge into this clearing, they drew strong machine gun fire from the swamp off to their right and from the solid ground ahead. SINK "recognized it unmistakably" as the fire of American machine guns. Still doubtful whether the troops were friendly, he put up orange smoke. Promptly, he got orange smoke back from the area ahead. The fire quieted momentarily, then blazed more strongly than ever. SINK then withdrew the patrol, leaving two men on the far side of the ruined bridge.

The bullet fire was so heavy at the gap that half of the party decided to swim for it. SINK and two others went in the bateau; to get out of the rain of bullets from upstream and speed the boat along, SINK used his arms as paddles while the other men plied their crude paddles. There was heavy fire as they ducked across the first bridge. At PONT DE DOUVE, SINK found his lieutenant gone. The men said he had moved out to ask for artillery fire to counter the German machine guns. SINK called Division and told them what had happened. He said: "We put up orange smoke and they raised hell with us. If they're Americans, they ought to be shot." (SINK'S account of what happened to him.) But as this intelligence was relayed to 502ND REGIMENT, its substance was that "SINK put out orange smoke and was lightly fired on. The town seems to be lightly held." (From MICHAELIS and CAPT HENRY G. PLITT, his S3.) That same afternoon, LIEUT RALPH B. GEHAUF, S2 of 502ND REGIMENT, THIRD BATTALION, made a route reconnaissance past CARENTAN in an L-4 plane, looking for the best road to LA BILLONNERIE, which was to be the Battalion objective. He obtained no positive information about enemy dispositions around CARENTAN and there was thus nothing to offset the G2 estimate that CARENTAN was held by less than one Battalion. (GEHAUF and DANAHY, G2.)

#### THE GROUND

The CP of 502ND REGIMENT was near LA CROIX PANS, about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles





northeast of CARENTAN. At about 2100 on 9 June, Division ordered Third Battalion to attack toward CARENTAN, moving on such a schedule that it would reach Bridge Number 2—the ruined bridge—at around 0300. The asphalt highway from LA CROIX PANS to CARENTAN is quite straight, about 40 feet wide and with a strong dirt shoulder. It has the same solid character where it becomes a CAUSEWAY crossing the marshes at the confluence of the DOUVE and JOURDAN RIVERS. The road runs along levelly for the entire distance with its crown about 6-to-9 feet above the surface of the water, depending on whether the salt marsh is full or draining. The marsh extends both ways from the road for more than rifle shot distance. Reeds and marsh grasses cover the water surface but the growth is not thick enough to provide more than the scantiest screening cover for men moving along the CAUSEWAY embankment. Out in the swamp to the westward, between the CAUSEWAY and the railroad, there are a few large hammocks of fairly solid ground which might accommodate a machine gun or a few riflemen, who would have fair concealment. On this side, the CAUSEWAY embankment falls away sharply to the edge of the water. A rifleman may walk along this bank, perhaps stumbling and slipping into the water occasionally. But he may not do more than that. There is not enough dirt on the right embankment to permit troops to dig in. The embankment of the left is wider and does not fall away as steeply. A man may burrow in there with a spade, or even cut a two-man foxhole running back into the bank. Even so, the foxholes would be open to flanking fire.

There is no concealment along the road itself: it is naked to fire from any direction. The drainage ditches which run along the embankment are only a few inches deep.

The four bridges along the CAUSEWAY are simple, single-span affairs. The DOUVE, the JOURDAN and the canals all run with fair swiftness and are deep-to-drowning. But all are narrow streams. The Germans had put up roadblocks at Bridges 2 and 4. (Testimony of French witnesses at PONT DE DOUVE.) They were of heavy concrete posts about 4 feet by 4 feet. Iron gates of heavy design and great weight had been fixed to the posts with steel cables. The demolition of Bridge Number 2 had eliminated one of these blocks but on Bridge Number 4, the barrier still blocked the rightofway.

What most threatened the approach by our troops, however, was the complete exposure of the CAUSEWAY. Running straight as a die and standing boldly above the marsh, it was a high-perfect target to the enemy from three directions. Snipers might hide in the reeds on either side. Artillery could put it under fire for its entire length. From the solid ground beyond the marshes, automatic guns could be disposed along the crests and hedgerows where they would be 20 feet above the level of the CAUSEWAY and in line to rake either embankment. (Data from the reconnaissance.)

These were the risks which had to be accepted. The stunted

poplars along the CAUSEWAY banks were hardly leafed at all and were too thin to provide any cover. Bridge Number 2 was still down, and before the infantry could move up, a way had to be found to cross the water. Why the enemy had not destroyed all bridges remained a mystery to our commanders. (MICHAELIS and COLE.)

The mission of Third Battalion was to seize and occupy HILL 30 near LA BILLONNERIE and so cut off the enemy line of withdrawal from CARENTAN. Enroute to this objective, it was to by-pass

THE OVER-ALL PLAN

the city. The over-all plan envisaged that CARENTAN would be taken by 327TH GLIDER INFANTRY which had started crossing the mouth of the DOUVE at 0145 on 9 June and had taken heavy losses from our own mortar fire. The crossing was completed by 0600 on 10 June. The 327TH then went on to within 500 yards of CARENTAN where it came under 88 mm fire, was checked and got no farther. (327TH Journal and interview with COL HARPER.) Too, it was expected that elements of 29TH DIVISION, coming up from the south, would be moving toward LA BILLONNERIE at about the same time and that Third Battalion might meet them there. Such were the prospects as 502ND REGIMENT moved toward its assignment.

About one-half hour before dark on 9 June, CAPT HENRY G. PLITT, the Regimental S3, was told that an alternate route might be required for the advance and that it would have to be specific

by 0300. He took a Piper Cub from HOUESVILLE and scouted the railway line south of the DOUVE. The hour was 2130 and there was just enough light left for his purpose. Flying at 1500 feet, he could see the bridge over the JOURDAN-DOUVE confluence and he noted that the bridge looked passable for foot troops. However, upon circling from southwest to east and coming back along the railway line, he saw that a 10-yard section of the CAUSEWAY and track had been blown out cleanly at 376-855. The plane flew back and forth above CARENTAN for about 30 minutes, but received no fire. On returning to the Regiment, PLITT reported that: (1) The railway line was not a feasible route of advance, and (2) CARENTAN had been evacuated. (From PLITT.) In consequence, it was decided that the whole Regiment would go forward, with the other two Battalions following the Third. They duly reached the assembly area at ST COME DU MONT at about 0530 on 10 June. The Third Battalion was already going forward when PLITT got back. It had no chance to learn that he believed the enemy would not fight for CARENTAN. (COLE)

Moreover, Third Battalion quickly established that PLITT was wrong about the German intentions. The infantry had been told that the 326TH ENGINEER BATTALION would repair the 12-foot gap

THE NIGHT PLAN FAILS

in Bridge Number 2 at around midnight and the structure would be solid when time came for the infantry to go forward. LIEUT COL ROBERT G. COLE moved his men out at 0145. One and one-half

hours previous, LIEUT GEHAUF, having completed his airplane reconnaissance, had taken off on a road reconnaissance. The night was fair and a thin mist partly obscured the full moon. (GEHAUF) With GEHAUF were 10 men under SGT ROBERT P. O'REILLY — six from the regular reconnaissance section and four others from Headquarters Company. They were armed with pistols and rifles.

The party reached the ruined bridge at 0130. There were no Engineers at work but there were bridge beams, ropes and other materiel piled along the bank. Several Engineers were under

FIRST CONTACT

cover near the bridge. They told GEHAUF'S men that an 88 mm gun had found their range and compelled them to quit work. (GEHAUF and his men.) The infantrymen saw no dead or wounded and heard no fire. Finding a small boat along the embankment, they crossed the stream, three men at a time. As they crossed the 88 opened fire again and dropped 8 rounds in their vicinity. From the far bank, they proceeded single file, five men on each side of the road, past the third bridge and to Bridge Number 4 where the iron gate stopped them. They could budge one end of it about 18 inches and they managed to wriggle through, one man at a time. PFC JAMES ROACH and PVT JAMES R. FACE led the others through, and went on about 50 yards beyond the gate. GEHAUF then got up to ROACH and told him to hold it, and give the Battalion a chance to catch up. Just then a mortar shell landed

came excited and forgot. In the sum total of things, the error did not count. The movement had been called off for the night, already. Battalion had called Regiment, and from there, MICHAELIS had called Division, telling that the infantry was blocked by the Engineer failure. At 0400 the attack order was canceled. Battalion marched back to QUESNILLS and slept for a couple of hours in a field. Trucks had been promised for the withdrawal, but never arrived. GEHAUF wasn't advised that Battalion was pulling out. At 0500 he sent PFC ALLEN W. BRYANT back to learn what Battalion intended. BRYANT took along a sketch showing the probable location of enemy fire positions. Not finding Battalion, he reported back to GEHAUF. In the meantime, ROACH had checked the fourth bridge, found it wired for demolition, and had cut the wires. There was sporadic fire until 0400. BRYANT came back standing up and walking down the middle of the road. That gave the patrol new confidence. They returned to QUESNILLS without drawing fire. But they found the little boat so full of holes that they could not use it and they crossed the water gap at Bridge Number 2 on a 3-by-12 timber. COLE was just preparing to send an officer after the patrol when the men came in.

### THE AFTERNOON ADVANCE

About 0930, Third Battalion was told that it would advance again some time in the afternoon. Division said that it would be supported by a substantial artillery. Detailed to that purpose were the 377TH FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION—an airborne unit which had lost all but one of its original 75 mms during the jump and had since captured two artillery pieces from the Germans—the 90TH BATTALION, a glider outfit which had come by sea with 12 pack howitzer 75s, and 65TH ARMORED FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION, which had 18 self-propelled 105 mms. The fire positions were in the general vicinity of ST COLE DU MONT, which town occupied high ground fairly dominating the CARENTAN marshes. The mass of the shells were delivered against the enemy left, in and around POILLERANQUE, which was south of the inundated area. By 1200 these dispositions were set and GEHAUF'S information about the enemy positions beyond Bridge Number 4 had been made known to the artillery. COLE and GEHAUF went on down to the CAUSEWAY to see if the road was again solid.

Nothing had been done. So COLE grabbed hold of a rope and told CAPT ROBERT L. CLEMENTS and two of the enlisted men to get plating from the stores which the Engineers had left. Working together, the four men jury-rigged a

### THE INFANTRY REPAIRS THE BRIDGE

foot bridge. COLE kept the detail small on purpose to avoid drawing fire. By 1400, the bridge



was complete, though a bit wobbly. (COLE and CLEMENTS.) The heavy fence of iron on the far side of the bridge, which had been part of the enemy road-block, had been torn loose and was used as a flooring. At about 1500, GEHAUF and PVT BRYANT crossed Bridge Number 2 ahead of Company G's First Platoon. The Battalion thus began its move into the CAUSEWAY defile, bound on both sides by the marshes and insecure as to their rear because of the unsatisfactory situation at Bridge Number 2. The men had to proceed single file when they came to the bridge. It could not accommodate more than a single line of men, and if they jammed up at all, an 88 mm gun whizz-banged away at them from up around CARENTAN.

This intermittent pot-shooting by the 88 gun, which had flushed the Engineers the night before, harassed the infantry without stampeding them. The first portion of the advance along the CAUSEWAY was relatively uneventful. Several hundred yards off to the right of Bridge Number 2 there was a patch of solid ground in the marsh, and across the front of it stretched one of the ubiquitous hedgerows of NORMANDY. From behind the hedge, a sniper cracked down on the mortar squad of Company G. He missed. CPL N. F. ELLIS sent PVT CLAUDE A. WILLIAMS out after him along a shoulder of high ground which jutted into the marsh. WILLIAMS crawled along a ditch until he was close enough to arch a grenade over the hedge. Then he waited a few minutes, but he drew no return fire. SSGT A. L. ZEROSKE had crawled along be-

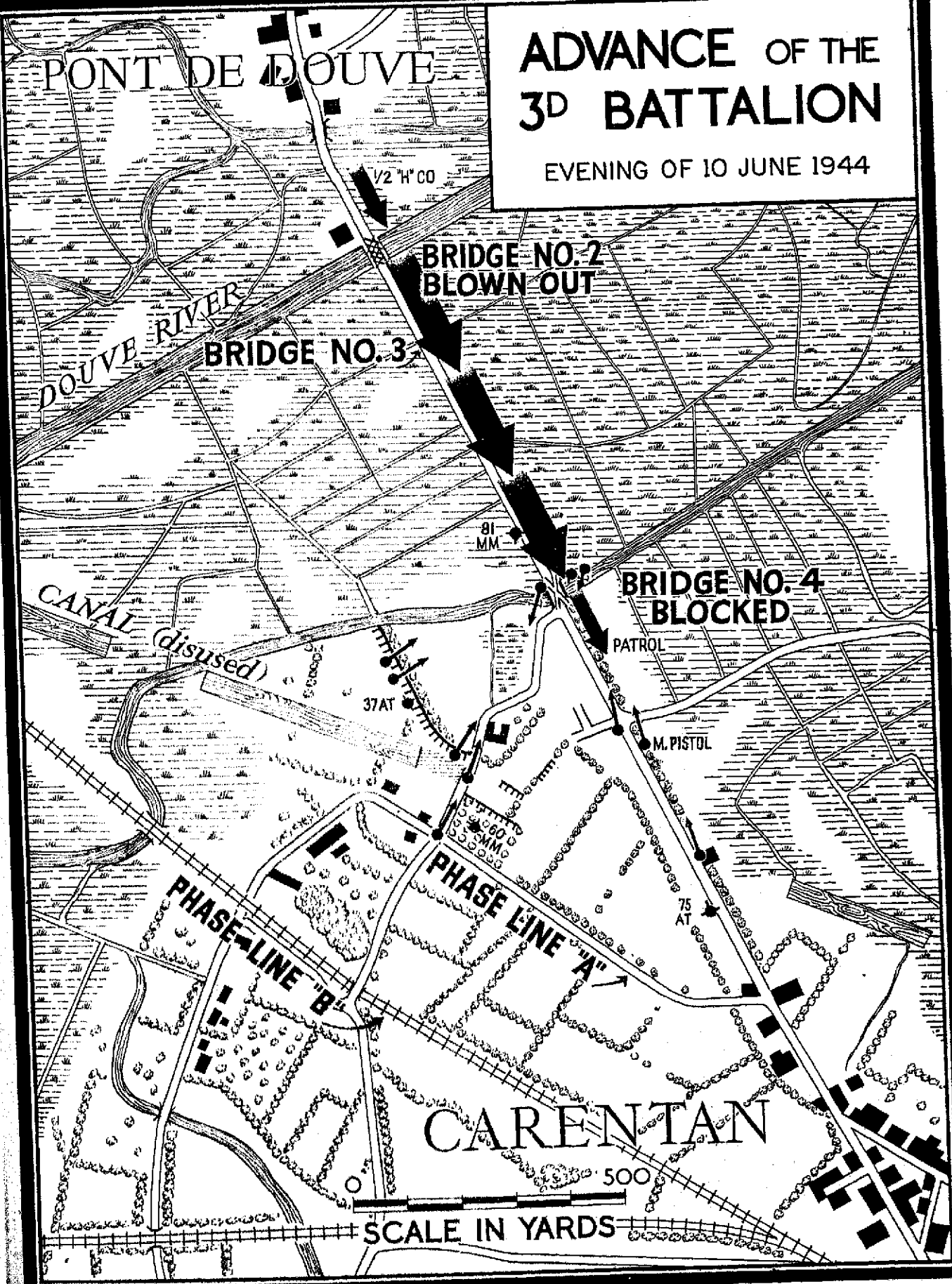
hind WILLIAMS. Both men saw the German move behind the hedge, both fired, and when he went down with a scream, both felt that they had hit him. That was the first casualty on either side. Only one man was knocked out by the 88 fire on the Number 2 Bridge; the blast toppled him over, but his head was clear again in a few minutes. Realizing what a concentrated artillery fire would do if it struck the Battalion while they were still on the CAUSEWAY, COLE moved up and down, swearing at his men and pleading with them not to bunch. But nearly all he said was futile. They kept herding together, and as rapidly as he broke them up, they came back together. However, no penalty was exacted for the time being. The enemy seemed to be paying no attention to the advance. The men of the Battalion began to believe that the operation could be carried off almost without cost. (This was their statement at the group interview.)

In the first three hours all of the Battalion except the last half of Company H crossed the narrow flanking to the far side of Bridge Number 4. LIEUT DAVID IRVIN got Company G across the first three bridges without losing one man. The files moved forward slowly but steadily. The men moved along both embankments right next the water's edge. The footing here was loose and the walking was difficult. This was especially true of the right embankment. When the men there came to any stretch where the reed grasses thinned out greatly toward the solid ground on their front and far right, they sometimes crawled along the

PONT DE DOUVE

# ADVANCE OF THE 3<sup>D</sup> BATTALION

EVENING OF 10 JUNE 1944



bank and sometimes got out and walked through the water. Running the entire length of the embankment on the right, there was a drainage ditch about 8 inches deep which was approximately a foot above the level of the marsh. Some of the men went forward along this ditch, crouching on their haunches or crawling. This gave them a more comfortable feeling but no real protection.

LIEUT GEHAUF and the Intelligence Section and five men of Company G's First Platoon were on the south side of Bridge Number 4, the other men of the Platoon were between Bridges Number 3 and 4 and the remainder of the Battalion was strung out all the distance back along the CAUSEWAY to the solid ground at PONT DE DOUVE. This was the situation when the enemy opened fire. It was small arms and automatic fire. Most of it seemed to be coming from the high ground forward and on the right, ahead of Bridge Number 4. On this bearing and only about 300 yards in front of the head of the column, a grassy bank rose sharply out of the marsh. In the center of this high ground was a capacious farm house whose landscape, screened all around by hedgerows, gave the enemy ideal cover. The first burst of fire broke all around the leading platoon and the bullets zinged off the pavement. But it was not well aimed. The men who were in the Point went flat in the embankment ditches and in a few minutes resumed the crawl forward on hands and knees. GEHAUF urged the men to keep moving. He told them that motion was their best protection. So they carried on. The enemy bullets continued to search along

behind DE LEON there was a bulge in the embankment which provided them with a defilade. So he told the others to turn about, and they crawled rearward for a few yards. The enemy must have seen this small retrograde movement, for a German came worming along the ditch behind them, occasionally firing with a machine pistol. So far as WASHKO and DEYAK knew, this lone-handed sniper turned back before hitting anyone, though two more men of the Point were hit by machine gun bullets during the withdrawal. The Point had seen enough to make its reconnaissance worthwhile. GEHAUF was now convinced that the real difficulties of the crossing would be met at Bridge Number 4 rather than at Bridge Number 2. The last bridge was right under the brow of the enemy position. Further, the gate across the bridge, which had caused GEHAUF'S detail to defile the night before, was still jammed and unmovable. Only one man could rush it at a time. SGT DELWIN J. MC KINNEY, the non-commissioned officer in charge of the Point, had been going through this gate when the enemy opened fire. He had saved himself by jumping into an old enemy foxhole which was on the embankment, right next the gate. He had an idea that the German guns were zeroed-in on the road block. Also, GEHAUF had taken another good look at the enemy fire as well as at our own. He came back to MC KINNEY with the message that the American shells were dropping far beyond the German fire positions along the hedgerows and that the artillery should lower its fire about 200 yards. MC KINNEY yelled the message back to IRVIN who was still

on the high side of the bridge. IRVIN put it on the radio. But it was 2200 before this message finally reached the artillery. (Statement of COLE and supported by the artillery journal.) By that hour Third Battalion had been held in check for somewhat more than four hours. The head of its greatly attenuated column had felt out the enemy fire positions forward. The right side of the column had become badly seared by fire from the flank. The few men who had made the passage of Bridge Number 4 could not go forward. Every man who had run this gauntlet had done so under a hail of bullets. The shattered Bridge Number 2 restricted any withdrawal. On both sides the Battalion was held by the marshes. In this manner the Battalion became largely immobilized through the remainder of the daylight hours, except as it trickled forward painfully a man or a squad at a time, extending the advance toward Bridge Number 4.

COLE remained at Bridge Number 2 throughout the afternoon and evening, jockeying the column forward. But he worked also to get the men to maintain an interval so that they would offer no large targets. (COLE'S statement.) He had realized that the CAUSEWAY would become a dead end for the Battalion if the enemy found it with artillery and that the main chance to keep down losses was to prevent bunching. But he found it almost impossible to get this idea over to his men. Whenever he turned his back they crawled closer to one another as if bound by herd instinct. He noted also that his men would lie in the grasses

along the embankment muttering: "That god-damned sniper!" but doing nothing about it. They did not answer fire with fire unless specifically ordered to do so, though by this time, as COLE saw it, his men should have been sufficiently experienced of the enemy to know that he usually put his fire pits back of the hedgerows and that volleys of fire poured against that line would check him. COLE figured that in his situation the salvation of the infantry would depend pretty much on the artillery. (His statement.) LIEUT SPRUEL of the 377TH BATTALION, a forward artillery observer, was up with Company G. His radio was out, but he was using Company G's radio to relay fire sensings to COLE and to CAPT JULIAN ROSEMOND, the artillery liaison officer. As the slow creep forward along the CAUSEWAY went on, the chief effort of the command and of GEHAUF, who remained in position at Bridge Number 4, was to supply the artillery with as complete fire data as possible. With small arms and machine guns, the enemy positions around the farm house wholly commanded the line over which the American column had to advance. The only available offset of this advantage was an artillery fire which would compel the enemy to keep his head down and reduce his fire in volume and aim. The guns worked over the enemy ground from about 1600 until 2330, when darkness closed the action, though, as GEHAUF noted, most of the shells were going beyond the vital area. The artillery told COLE they could not put over any night fires. They did not explain why and he never found out.

### THE NIGHT VIGIL AND STRAFING

The limited protective measures which were taken during the daylight hours proved largely unavailing and the infantry companies suffered quite heavily. The bullet fire from the farm house area continued to build up steadily and to strike deeper into the column. In Company G, the Second and Third Platoons had followed First Platoon across the first three bridges. Upon reaching Bridge Number 3, Second Platoon deployed leftward. A thick dyke about eight feet high confines the canal to the left of the third bridge. Riflemen and machine gunners dug in along this dyke so as to build up a fire position facing forward. A little behind this line, one machine gun was set up on the right side of the road to fire into the enemy positions around the farm house. The guns on the canal line opened fire. Company G then began its move through the narrow opening in the road block at Bridge Number 4. Six men got through. The seventh man, SGT JOE L. CLEMENTS, was hit by a bullet while trying to squeeze through the gate. CAPT ROBERT L. CLEMENTS ordered the rest of the Company to hold up. The men got ropes and levers and tried to force the gate. But it would not budge. So the body of Company G stayed behind Bridge Number 4 and more of the men deployed out to the left where a steady fire from the enemy automatic weapons peppered the muddy ridge along which Second Platoon had dug in. It did not seem to the men that this fire was well aimed but there was enough of it that they crawled around



on their bellies in extending the line along the dyke. They kept their guns working and within less than two hours they had run out of machine gun ammunition and had to send back for more. The riflemen also maintained a fire. They could see little or nothing of the enemy but the tracers from the guns around the farm house gave them a line to the fire positions. The two 60 mm mortars were put up along the dyke and trained on the hedges in front of the farm house. PVT ALLEN EMERY of Headquarters Company, lugging an 81 mm mortar, pushed up to within 30 yards of Bridge Number 4 and put 18 rounds on the enemy ground within the hedgerows around the farm house. He opened fire at 400 yards range, moved up to 350 yards and then back to 400 again. He was almost out of ammunition when a German mortar shell burst within seven yards of him. The blast was muffled in a small defilade just down the embankment. So he moved back 100 yards, set up again, and fired another half dozen rounds into the hedgerows.

At about 1800, COLE left the situation at Bridge Number 2 in charge of his executive, MAJ JOHN STOPKA (Later KIA in BASTOGNE) and worked his way forward through the column to the head of Company G. As he moved along he found the men of Company I hugging the low spots along the grassy embankment on the right side of the road and trying to keep their heads below the level of the reeds. They were doing nothing. (His statement.) He told them: "God damn it, start firing and keep firing." He felt that

any action would give them confidence and build their morale and that inaction might prove fatal. (COLE'S statement in front of the Battalion.) He told their officers to keep them firing and he cursed them also for not taking sterner measures in this direction. He found that the machine gunner up on the left of the road in Company G's position was spraying his ammunition along the hedgerows; COLE told him to keep firing but just tap the trigger and given them two or three shots at a time as he traversed. CLEMENT'S men were dug in around the angle of the canal dyke and the CAUSEWAY embankment at Bridge Number 4. From within this angle, LIEUT IRVIN was putting bazooka fire on the farm house (this fire was at rather extreme range and we could not find positive signs that it did any good). The riflemen in the foxholes along the embankment were firing mainly against the hedgerows in front of the farm house. Intermittently, they took pot shots at any likely places down the road where an enemy machine gun might be nested. All hands by this time were well burrowed in the embankment. Yet the enemy bullet fire took steady toll of them, mainly because of ricochetes. Some of these bullets bounced off the pavement and into the fire line along the dyke but more of them caromed off the metal gate and into the foxholes. COLE stayed up with the forward company for about four hours watching this phenomenon. He did not see how he would be able to get his men across Bridge Number 4 if the enemy continued his fire. So he proposed to CLEMENTS that he make ready to swim his Company across the last canal and that

he reconnoiter off to the leftward to find a suitable place for the crossing. COLE figured that if he could get one company across the canal he could throw some ropes to them and pass the rest of the Battalion over the water, hand over hand.

Company I held the most exposed ground in the column—on the right side embankment to the south of Bridge Number 3. There was not enough dirt in this embankment for troops to dig in; it was without any cover except the slight screening afforded by the reeds. From somewhere way out in the marsh, some of the men thought, a group of snipers were shooting into their open flank. At about 600 yards off to the right of the road, a solid neck of land stood up in the marsh like the prow of a battleship. They thought this might be the source of the sniper fire. Others thought that the bullets were coming from a concealed boat lying out in the reeds. Still others believed that an automatic gun along the high ground up ahead on the right was doing all of the damage and that there were no snipers in the marshes. (These varying views were expressed by both men and officers at the time of the group interview.) All that the Company knew for certain was that the barren spot just beyond Bridge Number 3 on the right embankment had become an alley of death and anyone who approached it became the choice target for the fire of the enemy. After 15 of their number got hit, the men of Company I grew weary of running this gauntlet and weary of the day. A first aid man, PVT TKOYZKA, was hit in the head

and died almost instantly. LIEUT GEORGE A. LARISH, leader of First Platoon, was shot through the heart. LIEUT JOHN P. PAIN-SCHAB was mortally wounded. The curious part was that the rest of the column had a kind of insulation from the shock of these losses. The Battalion was so spread out that it felt almost nothing as a whole. Juniors knew that their superiors had become casualties only when someone passed the word along the line for them to take over. The men on the right embankment had a general idea that the men on the left embankment were faring a little better than themselves and they would have crossed over to the other side had that passage not become impossible. (Their statements.) Bullets were scratching the asphalt of the road in two directions. The men moved forward crawling. Those who were hit got it while lying down. Those who remained unscathed could see very little of what was going on except the heels of the man in front of them.

CPL LLOYD KING, PVT WESLEY JACKSON and PVT THOMAS A. PINON from Headquarters Company worked their way up to Bridge Number 3, carrying a machine gun. They then crawled under the bridge and made their way to the far bank by passing along the struts. PINON'S ammunition carrier was hit during this passage and dropped into the water. PINON got the gun set up in a foxhole right beside the bridge and began firing rightward at an angle 90° from the road. The hour was about 1800. There was no more sniper fire from that direction during the evening. Bridge

Number 3 began to cool off, although PINON'S action was the only thing done to counter the bullet fire at this point. The men of Company I had been under steady fire for about two hours.

CAPT CECIL L. SIMMONS got Company H up to Bridge Number 2 about 1630. They went forward according to SIMMONS' instructions:

"Keep your heads down and try to follow the leader." One half of the lead platoon crossed Bridge Number 3 before the general movement of the column was halted by the coming of dark. Five rounds of enemy mortar fire struck around the bridge coincident with their arrival and two men of the Company were hit. Also wounded by the mortar fire was LIEUT ROBERT L. MC LAUCHLIN of Headquarters Company. A patrol was sent out through the reeds to right of the CAUSEWAY. It waded for about 60 yards but saw no enemy and drew no fire. Several of Company H's men were picked off by stray rifle bullets while trying to hug the ditch on the right embankment. But on the whole Company H stood the evening better than the others. COL COLE figured that if he had to swim any men across the MADELEINE that night, he would move Company H up through Company G and let SIMMONS' men take the beating for a while. (COLE'S statement.)

With the coming of dark the situation quieted a little because the enemy could not see the live targets wriggling along the CAUSEWAY banks. Company G was still drawing heavy bullet fire

#### THE STRAFING

up front and was taking losses as some of the men tried to crawl

across the road to get the better protection on the left side. The hour was about 2330. PVT HANS K. BRANDT had moved up to Bridge Number 4. He noted that the men were badly bunched at that point, seven or eight of them crowding into a ten-yard space. From somewhere off in the reeds to the right—he thought it about 75 yards—a German machine gun suddenly opened fire and the bullets began to bounce off the bridge. BRANDT figured that with the men bunched as they were, the fire would get some of them. He took a grenade and started out through the reeds. At about this moment the men farther back along the CAUSEWAY, being not so closely engaged, saw and heard a plane coming toward them from the direction of CARENTAN. The men saw that the plane's wheels were down and they recognized it as a dive bomber. It came steadily along, flying the line of the road and about 150 yards up. No one yelled. Those who had seen the plane still scarcely realized what it signified. Above Company I the plane unloaded—six or eight small personnel bombs which hit along the flank of the road, dead on the ground where Company I's men had been trying to hide from the snipers. PVT BRANDT had moved only a few yards when he heard a heavy explosion close to him. He looked up and saw the dive bomber. In the same instant that he went flat next a stunted tree, there was another explosion and he felt a jar against his left leg. The "whole place seemed to light up." BRANDT went cold for a few seconds. So did the man just to his rear. BRANDT got up and went on to his objective. He waded as far as he

could and then heaved his grenade in the general direction of where he thought the enemy gun lay. He didn't know whether he hit anything but the position got no more fire from there. Coming back, he found that the man who had got concussion was still out and had slipped down into the water. BRANDT carried him to the embankment. He noted that the men who had been only lightly wounded in the bombing had now properly spaced themselves. Those who couldn't move were still bunched together. He got some of them spaced out, then started back for first aid. There were so many wounded along the embankment that he was blocked that way. He then walked right down the middle of the road. There was no fire. After dropping its bombs—or so the men along the CAUSEWAY thought—the enemy plane went right on down the position, blistering the column with machine gun bullets. Between bombs and bullets, Company I lost another 30 men in those few seconds, the strafing taking the greater part of them. About eight of the 30 were either dead or badly hit. It was a curious thing that the men who were strung out along the CAUSEWAY thought without exception that only one plane attacked them (this was determined at the group critique). It is probable that they went flat so quickly that they had no real view of it. For others, who had watched the attack from behind Bridge Number 1 on the road to QUESNILLS, saw clearly that two German planes had crossed above the column at right angles to one another in a split second. The plane which had dropped the bombs had flown across the marshes while the plane

which attacked with its machine guns had come right along the road from CARENTAN. They had seen the tracers "bouncing like ping-pong balls off the pavement". PVT PAUL J. MC KENNA was on the left side of the road. He got bomb fragments in both shoulders, his right leg and right hand. He walked on back for first aid. PVT GLENN A. MOE had started digging a foxhole on the left embankment and was about 3 feet down when the bombs hit. Two shards struck him in the left hand and shoulder. Two men who were lying within 10 feet of him were also hit. He completed digging the foxhole. Then he walked on back to PONT DE DOUVE, carrying one of the wounded. After getting his wounds dressed, he returned and brought the other man back with the aid of a stretcher bearer, this work taking him until 0400.

The air attack practically eliminated Company I from the reckoning for the time being. Having gone flat when the bombs fell, the men of the Company did not arise again save for the few whose first thought was to evacuate the badly wounded. The others fell victim to the deadly drowsiness of which infantry are especially susceptible after they have experienced heavy shock losses. They had almost no interest in what had happened to them and no curiosity about who had been hit. (This was the statement of their officers.) LIEUT ROBERT G. BURNS found that he could not keep his men awake no matter how he tried. Some were asleep within two or three minutes of the bombing. This confused BURNS because he could not tell which were the



sleepers and which were the wounded men. He saw men who had tumbled down the embankment and lay still with their bodies half in the marsh. He went to them, figuring they had been hit, and then discovered that they were sleepers who had rolled down the bank and had not been awakened when they slipped into the icy water. Others lay there in their ODs and jump suits, wet through and through, yet sleeping the torpid sleep of utter spiritual exhaustion. The officers had to yield any attempt to rouse these men and for the next four hours Company I remained a cipher in the column.

But there were signs that the enemy also must have passed the limit of endurance. For the Battalion lay there open to him and his guns knew how and where to fire. The night was fair and the air chilled. Visibility was exceptionally good. Yet the hours of complete darkness passed and the moon rose, fully illuminating the scene, without changing the situation. Over the marsh lay a great quiet.

The way was open for another try at the Number 4 Bridge. About 0130, STOPKA reported to COLE that CLEMENTS had said all of Company G had crossed the bridge except a few men who were right around him. COLE told STOPKA: "OK, tell him to get them all across." At 0330 the commander went forward. He then found that SIMMONS was getting his men across the bridge but that CLEMENTS' men were all where he had left them 5 $\frac{1}{2}$  hours before. Only now LIEUT CORTEZ was up ahead with a 5-man out-

post on the right embankment, and three men under a corporal were ten yards beyond the bridge on the left-hand side. When SIMMONS had come up, CLEMENTS had said: "I am not sending any more men up. There's no cover." SIMMONS had replied: "Hell, there must be some if there's men up there." (COLE did not know of this conversation but SIMMONS reported it.) SIMMONS had then gone forward and made a reconnaissance past the bridge, finding the ground as barren as CLEMENTS said. He crawled on along the left side of the road until he heard Germans talking within a few yards of the spot where he lay in the roadside ditch. Then he crawled on back to his radio and asked for artillery fire along the hedge where he had listened to the Germans; he was told by fire control center that the guns couldn't fire at night. At 0200, COL COLE confirmed the arrangement

PASSAGE OF BRIDGE  
NUMBER 4

of the companies as they then stood with Company H taking over the lead from Company G and moving along the left embankment. He figured that Company G was the more "beat up" of the two, and as for Company I, he figured that he would have to wait another hour or two before knowing whether they were ready to fight again. SIMMONS, taking over the lead position, could hear wagons creaking along the enemy front and calculated that the Germans were getting either more machine guns or mines into position. CLEMENTS, dropping his Company back to support, did not get a chance to explain to COLE why he had incorrectly reported that his men had passed through Bridge Number 4; he

was wounded and taken from the battle early in the morning.\*

At 0400, COLE got back from Regiment with orders to continue the attack. SIMMONS was putting his men through the gap at Bridge Number 4 at a rate of one man per minute. Though the enemy was not firing, SIMMONS thought it best to space his men that way so that if fire were opened suddenly, not more than one or two men would be caught. But on coming back to the Battalion from Regiment, COLE had walked right down the middle of the CAUSEWAY without one shot being fired at him. This made him optimistic. (His statement.) He told SIMMONS to send his men on through the gate as rapidly as possible and not to hesitate about bunching two or three of them there. Company H completed the passage without loss. Company G followed. Company I for the time being pulled back of Bridge Number 2. COLE had looked the Company over and decided it would be folly to order it forward immediately. There were only 21 men and 2 officers

\*Note by Historical Officer: It seems possible that this is another case where the lower commander makes an overly optimistic report of his position to keep his superior mollified. STOPKA had this to say when asked whether he was certain about what CLEMENTS had reported to him: "I could not be mistaken about the message. I harassed him at least seven times about it." Probably any junior commander would have felt some hesitation about ordering men to run through the gate. CLEMENTS and the others all the way back along the Causoway had witnessed the spectacle of the afternoon. Telephone and electric wires were down in a tangle over the gate. When each man made his run, diagonally through the small breach, those who were watching from the rear could see scores of sparks fly up from the gate and bridge iron and from the electric lines as bullets bit into the metal. The men said it looked like a "fire works display".

left to it of the 80 which had started the action.

Company H moved on along both sides of the road, toward the hedgerows and the farm house, 84 men in the Company. Company G, with 60 men, and Headquarters Company, with 121 men, moved on to the solid ground on left of the road, thus entering a very small meadow bounded by hedgerows. SIMMONS' men were going forward in column. They had been told to advance along azimuth 195 which would take them on a cross-country route over high ground to HILL 30.

The lead scout, PVT ALBERT W. DIETER, went forward in the thin light until he was within about five yards of the hedgerow which ran at right angles to the main road and behind the farm buildings. The Platoons were

THE ATTACK BEGINS

strung out behind him in squad column for about 200 yards. As he took his last few steps to close on the hedgerow, German fire—rifle, machine gun and mortar—opened up on the Company all along the line. Whether the enemy had been surprised by the advance or had simply held fire until Company H had moved to within easy range wasn't clear; however, the first fire was wild and did little damage. DIETER, in the lead, got the full effect of it and his left arm was shredded from wrist to shoulder by the opening volley. Without ducking or quickening his pace he walked right back along the line of fire to where SIMMONS had taken cover in a

ditch. There he stopped. He said to SIMMONS: "Captain, I am hit bad, ain't I?" SIMMONS said: "Your sure are!" DIETER said: "Well, I didn't fuck-up on you, did I Captain?" SIMMONS replied: "No, you sure didn't." The boy then went on back. COLE, who only a couple of minutes before the wounding of DIETER had yelled to SIMMONS: "The Company's too bunched. Those God-damned Germans are here. They must know we're here," now looked around to survey the damage. Up forward, a couple of men had been knocked down by machine gun bullets. Five or six others from the leading platoons had been wounded in one way or another and had crawled off to the ditches at the side of the road. SIMMONS crawled over to dress their wounds. He needed some kind of a table on which to work while putting rough splints on one boy's arm. There was a dead Gorman in the ditch lying cold and stiff and ready for his purpose. He took the corpse's pack off, rested it on the stomach and went to work with the first aid pack.

A sniper from the other side of the road kept firing into the ditch. From rearward, a light machine gun was passed up to the position and SIMMONS and S SGT JOHN T. WHITE pressed it over against the bank and fired about 250 rounds into the hedge-row from which they thought the fire was coming. WHITE kept working the gun. PVT WILLIAM PEDEN came running out of the field and flopped down beside SIMMONS. SIMMONS asked: "Are you hurt, PENDEN?" PENDEN answered: "Hell no, they haven't got

me yet." SIMMONS said: "Well let's keep firing at the dirty devils." (However stilted this conversation may sound, SIMMONS said in front of his Company that these were his exact words.) PENDEN then inched his way up to the ditch and fired a few rounds. SIMMONS, putting a new clip in his carbine about two minutes later, noticed that PENDEN wasn't firing. He said: "What's the matter, PENDEN?". There was no answer. WHITE shook PENDEN, then turned to SIMMONS and said: "PENDEN'S dead. The sniper got him. The left side." Another boy crawled to SIMMONS with a bad arm wound, spurting blood from an artery. SIMMONS told him he had no tourniquet. The boy said: "Maybe there's something in this medical kit I've got in my pocket that might help." SIMMONS took a hemostat out of the kit and pinched off the flow of blood. The German sniper kept on banging away.

### THE CHARGE

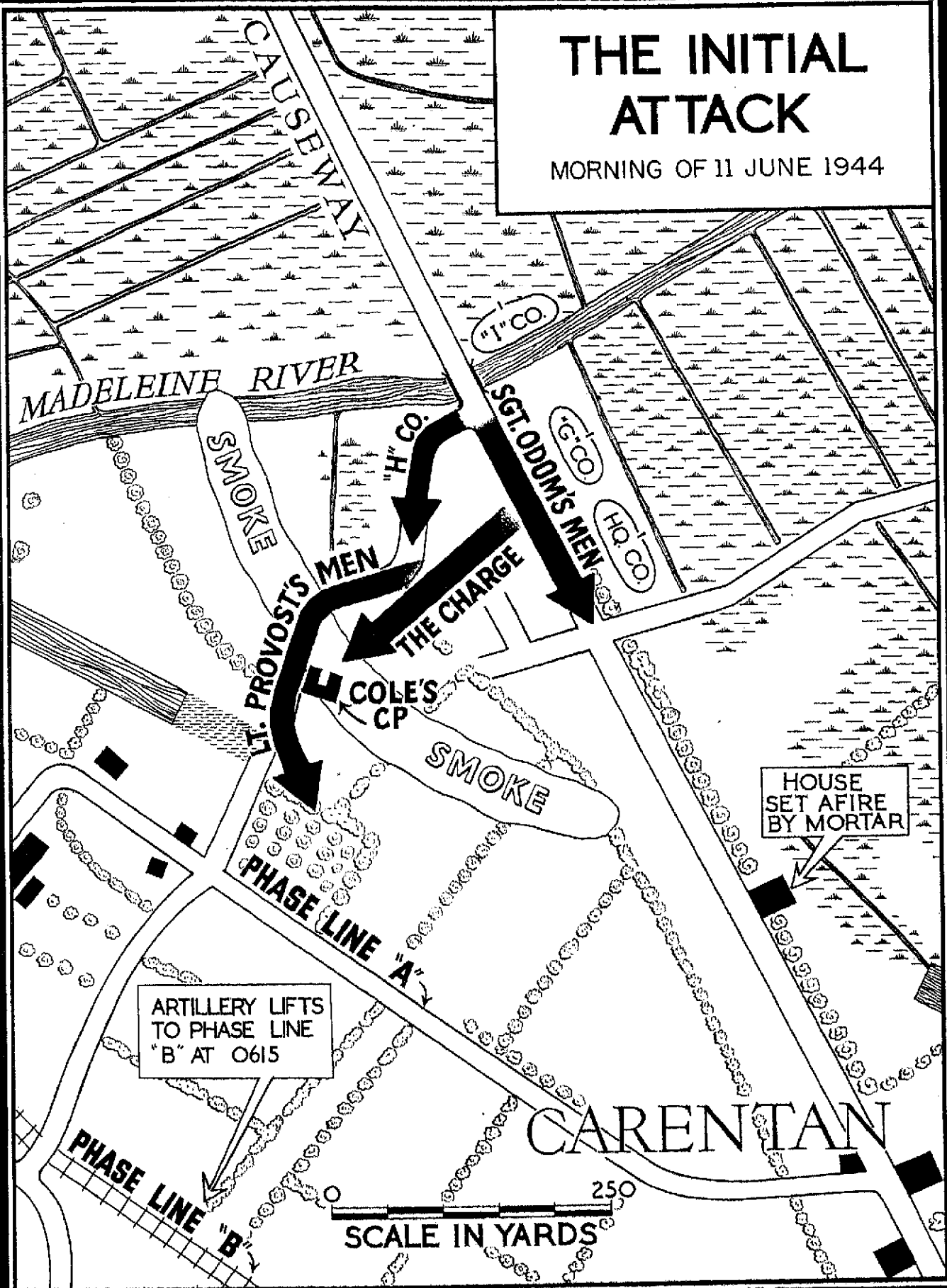
COLE crawled back along the ditch. Forty or fifty yards behind him was CAPT ROSEMOND, the artillery liaison officer. COLE asked him to shell the farm house and the hedges. ROSEMOND told him he couldn't get the fire because the artillery commander wasn't present with the guns to approve the request. COLE said: "God damn it! We need artillery fire and we can't wait for a general." He got the fire in 15 minutes.

The hour was then about 0530 and for the next 25 minutes the artillery pounded the hedgerows around the house. COLE and ROSEMOND watched the shellbursts; it looked as if the stuff was getting in where they wanted it. Still, there was no slackening of the enemy bullet fire. On COLE'S order, the artillery fire was changed from air bursts to delay, and then changed back again. It made no difference. Bullets still whipped through the thorn above the ditches and tore into the embankments in as great volume as before. (All hands at the interview agreed that was the case.)

COLE was puzzled. He felt no assurance about what to do next. For a fleeting moment, he considered moving his men back the way they had come. He wondered whether he should try to get them forward by infiltration along the main road, and against this, he weighed the possibility of making a heads-up assault against the house. But he did not weigh these alternatives

# THE INITIAL ATTACK

MORNING OF 11 JUNE 1944





very long. He made his decision on impulse, not as a well-reasoned thing, but with almost explosive force. (COLE was asked to recall as carefully as he could whether he had made an accurate estimate of situation prior to decision and what he said here is not an interpretation but a faithful account of his emotions and reactions as he stated them.)

STOPKA was right across the road. COLE yelled to him. He said: "We're going to order smoke from the artillery and then make a bayonet charge on the house." STOPKA replied: "OK." COLE told ROSEMOND what he wanted. Within a few minutes, the smoke was being laid in an arc which had the house in its center and extended past the MADELEINE RIVER on one end and over the main road to CARENTAN on the left. COLE waited while the smoke was being put down. About 15 to 20 minutes passed. COLE adjusted the smoke further leftward to meet the wind. He was especially concerned that the screen would be just right.

Company G, deployed and pinned in the small meadow to the left of the main road, was being sprayed by fire from a machine gun and a machine pistol in a covert along the hedgerow on the southern border of the field. The men in the meadow tried to crawl over to the hedgerow next the main road as this fire fell among them. Others of the company who had not got up to the meadow were sent scurrying from the road by fire which swept right down the CAUSEWAY. They dug in beside the road and remained in their foxholes while the action thickened around the

farm house.

1ST SGT HUBERT ODOM of Company G, taking three men and a machine gun, worked along the hedgerow which bounded the road to the hedgerow covering the enemy fire trench. The men moved crouched over, walking in the ditch and sticking close to the embankment. At the same time, PVT EMERY, the mortar man, went to work on a house about 800 yards down the road from where machine gun fire seemed to be spilling into Company G's position. He bracketed the house and hit it with his third round, setting it afire. Then he put two more shells on the target for good luck. He picked out a second enemy position, and working the mortar by himself, continued to fire. ODOM was still toiling forward with the machine gun. At 40 yards range, he saw a German stand up behind the hedge and fire a burst from a machine pistol. ODOM was 15 yards ahead of his own gun. The German's first burst hit all three men who were behind him, carrying the gun. One of them, PVT WILLIAM P. EVANS, got the gun in action and kept on firing. ODOM crawled forward through the water of the ditch which ran along the hedge. He was low enough that the enemy fire could not find him. He yelled to SGT ANTHONY L. ZEROSKI to toss him some grenades. ZEROSKI did so. ODOM threw three grenades over the hedge and heard a German scream. Then he saw a German rise out of a trench and disappear so quickly that ODOM had no chance to fire. ZEROSKI crawled up and covered ODOM while he crawled on through the

his men had let him down. (His words.)

What had happened? Some small part of this slack was due to men who had gone to ground at the first heavy volley from the enemy and had remained mentally pinned. But there were other contributing factors. COLE, concerned most of all with the QUESTION ABOUT AN ORDER direction of his artillery, had not checked to make certain that his whole command knew of the plan and were expecting the signal. STOPKA had not troubled to make a careful round of the companies and be sure that the officers understood the plan and the signal and were getting the word back to their subordinates. He, too, was watching the smoke screen and after shouting what was intended to the officers nearest him, he did not follow up to make certain that all hands understood. In the din of the battle and the natural excitement of the moment, it was not easy to get the word around to a command which was widely distributed, and for the most part, hugging earth. Nor was it certain that a clear signal could be given which would reach the entire field. Some men, some officers, never got the order. They heard something passed on to them about "whistle" and "bayonet" but in the confusion they could not tell what was said. Others heard nothing. Still others got the order, but didn't know the advance was on until they saw the trickle of men crossing the field. Then a few raced

on trying to catch up.\*

COLE trotted half way across the field. Then he stopped knelt on one knee and looked back. Fire was clipping the grass all around him and more of it was passing overhead. He saw that his men were trailing behind him single file. So he waved both arms at them trying to get them to fan out. Instead, they hit the dirt. He started working on them one man at a time, urging them to get up and go on. He kept firing his colt .45 wildly in the general direction of the farm house and as he fired he yelled: "God damn, I don't know what I'm shootin' at, but I gotta keep on." (His exact words as recalled by COLE and by several of the men who heard him and who remembered that they laughed at the spectacle.) About 5 or 6 men were killed by bullet fire as they lay there, while COLE was trying to get them up. TEC 5 ROBERT E. DORAN, COLE'S radio operator (Later KIA in HOLLAND), got up to his Commander, his SCR300

\*When the critique was held and this point in the narrative was reached, the Historical Officer asked COLE: "Why didn't the men follow you?" COLE replied: "God damn it, Colonel, they were afraid, that's why." The Historical Officer said to COLE: "I can't be satisfied with that answer and I would like to inquire into the facts with your permission," as the evidence had already shown that the men were well spread out and both COLE and STOPKA were preoccupied. About 30 witnesses were heard, including 4 officers. Their testimony was substantially as is reported above. COLE was then asked for his opinion. He replied: "The men we have heard from are among the best men in my Battalion. I would not question their courage for a moment. I am convinced now that the fault was largely my own." The testimony as to STOPKA'S actions was given by STOPKA himself. As both of these men are now dead it is in point to add that they were willing that the circumstances should be clearly stated in the record.

on his back. Then they ran on together. The smoke was gradually clearing from the barrage fire and through the rifts in it, they could see the farm house. STOPKA kept yelling: "Let's go! Let's go!" and ran on, hurdling the first ditch. COLE leaped a low hedge and came down in a ditch almost up to his neck in water. He yelled back to DORAN: "Don't follow me!" and DORAN took both hedge and ditch in one leap. Others caught up with the leaders and passed them. STOPKA saw two men go down in front of him. He yelled to PVT EDWIN S. PASTOURIS, one of them: "How are you?" Said PASTOURIS: "I'm OK. You keep going!" Fifteen men from Company H and Headquarters Company, who had come belatedly to the action, ran on up the road to the hedgerow which formed the rear boundary of the house, then turned and ran down the hedge on the outside till they came to the building. They kept right on, going into the orchard. That was the way COLE wanted it. He was standing by the house, waving the men on; all of them wanted to stop as they came to the building. He told Company G to assemble on the brush pile behind the house along with Company I, which was now coming up from behind Bridge Number 4. Company H and Headquarters Company were to collect themselves next the right of the house before continuing. The enemy machine gun groups which had been well fortified on the high ground to the right of the house had now pulled back for the most part. There were dead Germans lying thick over the ground and in the fox-holes, but most of the live ones had retired through the

orchard toward the railroad. The American artillery continued to fire into this area. The Battalion had lost radio contact with the artillery and the guns continued to fire at the last assigned target.

PVT BERNARD STERNO of Company H had started the charge with COLE although his M1 was jammed. Halfway across the field he saw a dead German sprawled in a slit trench behind a clump of

ONE MAN'S PORTION

bushes. Set up in the bushes in front of the German was a pistol with a cord leading back to the body. STERNO wanted the pistol, but figuring that the cord might be set to a mine, he took his knife out and slashed the cord. He felt something "bump into a finger" on his right hand. But his gloves were on and he didn't realize at once that he had been hit by a bullet and had lost a finger. He got the pistol and crawled on. A few feet farther along STERNO saw another man from Company H. He went to the man but saw that he had been shot through the chest and was near death. An aid man came along and told STERNO that his hand was all bloody. He bandaged the stump of the finger and STERNO kept going. Then he heard someone call: "Help me!" It was a sergeant from his own company. STERNO crawled up to him. The sergeant was hit in the stomach and leg. Next him was the medical man who had just bandaged STERNO. But he was dead now with a bullet through his head. STERNO got the medical man's kit and canteen and gave the sergeant rude first aid. By that

time, enemy fire was breaking around the CP in heavy volume and COLE was telling the men to move away from the vicinity. STERNO went on about 25 yards beyond the house, found a place in the fire line, flopped down in a water-filled ditch and began to fire, using an M1 he had taken from one of the wounded. His bandage worked loose. Another first aid man came along, looked at the wound and told STERNO to get to the rear. There were a number of wounded lying in the ditch along the road and STERNO figured he'd better help them. They begged him to stay there and try to flag the ambulance that came along. The ditch and the road were now being raked by 88 mm fire from the direction of CARENTAN. One man lying next STERNO had had an eye torn out by shrapnel. He didn't know whether the eye was gone and he asked STERNO about it. STERNO didn't want to tell him the truth so he replied: "Well, even if it is, you should be glad you have the other one." He prepared a sulfa pad and put it on the man's eye. Then he started to work on some of the other wounded. There was the sudden swish of another 88 shell. STERNO jumped for the slit trench but didn't quite make it. He felt "something terribly heavy" land against his back—jarring him as if he had been kicked hard. He wasn't sure whether he was wounded again or had only felt concussion. In fact, a shard had ripped into his back and stopped in the groin although this was not known until he was thoroughly examined on the LST the next day. The man who had lost an eye was now yelling: "My arm, O my arm, O my arm."

STERNO was groggy for a few seconds. When he looked at the man he saw that his arm had been smashed by the latest explosion. Another man next him, who had been alive a few minutes before, had lost half of his head. It felt to STERNO as if there was blood running from his own back but he wasn't certain; he thought still it might be shock and imagination. He looked at the others in the group of wounded. One man who was just five feet from him had blood streaming from his ears, nose and mouth; he was conscious but was so shocked that he couldn't utter words and was expressing himself in a little babble. STERNO figured that most of these men were beyond his power to help. He crawled on rearward to Bridge Number 4. There was a foxhole and he dropped into it. About one-half minute later a mortar shell hit just outside the hole and a piece of it got STERNO in the neck and another piece hit an officer lying beside him.\*

\*This man returned to the Battalion from hospital in late July. He seemed to remember accurately everything that had happened to him. His statements were made in the presence of all Battalion officers and such of the wounded as had returned to the Battalion. A number of the officers and men had seen him during the movements herein described and it is believed that his story is absolutely reliable.



### AROUND THE FARM HOUSE

1ST SGT KENNETH M. SPRECKER and PVT ROACH of Company H reached the farm house 20 yards in front of COLE. They shot the lock off the door and dashed inside. The place was empty. SPRECKER moved on to the brush pile and saw two Germans in the orchard, rifles in hand, getting ready to fire. SPRECKER fired first with the tommy gun. Both Germans fell.

2ND LIEUT EDWARD A. PROVOST of Company H had nine men with him as the charge started. Five got hit or lost crossing the field and he carried on with the four who remained. They worked up the road skirting the right of the house. A hedgerow parallels the road; just opposite the house was a solidly constructed machine gun position which had been dug deep into the embankment overlooking the MADELEINE. The men crept in behind the cover of the farm house wall. PROVOST was not giving them any orders; they moved in silence. TEC 5 JAMES O. BRUNE, the mail orderly, threw a grenade over the hedge. There were five Germans at the gun and in the V-shaped fire trench which adjoined it. The grenade hit and exploded fair among them. Some were stunned; others stood there screaming. BRUNE and PROVOST saw them so as they bounded up the eight crude steps from the road to the gun position without giving the gun crew a moment to recover. BRUNE started to fire as he ran. PROVOST yelled: "Don't waste bullets! Use the bayonet!" This was what they did but such was the excitement of the moment that later they

could not remember how many of the five they had run through. Then they retraced their steps and went on up the road, picking up men from Companies I, H and Headquarters as they went along — ten men altogether. As they drew abreast of the orchard, they looked leftward and saw about two squads of Germans "milling around" beyond the first few rows of trees, as if getting ready to pull out. The men with PROVOST propped up behind the hedge and fired. A few of the enemy fell at the first volley. The others went to ground immediately and formed a line, then began shooting. PROVOST thought the Germans were at extreme range for a grenade but he pulled the pin out and got ready to throw. Then a bullet slashed through his cheek. Blood spilled all over him and he returned to the farm house looking for first aid. There he met SPRECKER who had come back in search of other men from the Company. PROVOST told him what had happened and SPRECKER went forward and took charge of PROVOST'S men. They had ceased firing when PROVOST left but SPRECKER held up the fight and five Germans came out of their foxholes. That ended the skirmishing around the orchard for the time being.

When the German fire had broken over the head of the column during the advance of Company H along the CARENTAN road, Company I had been in movement from behind Bridge Number 2 to behind

#### ADVANCE OF COMPANY I

Bridge Number 4. The survivors of Company I heard the sounds of battle

up ahead, in and around the farm house. The Germans fire, however, had again engulfed Bridge Number 4 and bullets were rattling off the iron gate as on the afternoon before. The men of Company I had to run for the narrow opening through this bullet fire; they did it one man at a time with heads down. Those who made it then jumped down to the protection of the embankment. The last two officers, LIEUTS BURNS and GLEASON, were hit in trying to get through the gate. About one-third of the other survivors were lost at this point. The rest went on leaderless. They attached themselves as individuals to any group they could find and joined the skirmishing around the orchard and through the hedgerows. For the time being Company I ceased to exist as a unit. The entire Third Battalion was by now completely scrambled and the junior leaders fought on with little scratch groups, however it was easiest to collect them.

The fire had not lifted from fields which were immediately south of Bridge Number 4. Most of the men who had been under cover there when COLE and his group charged the house were still pinned. Many of the enemy were positioned behind the hedgerows which ran at right angles to the CARENTIAN road. It was from this direction that much of the automatic fire had poured into the fields and had kept the men from Company H and Headquarters Company confined to the ditches. The charge had moved off oblique to the right from the direction of this fire, though the original movement, extended into the orchard, would have outflanked it. The enemy's point of greatest strength, inso-

far as command of the CAUSEWAY was concerned, had been on the ridge of high ground between the house and the MADELEINE. The charge had routed the force there and PROVOST'S dash-in with the bayonet had stifled the last flicker of resistance at this position. However, the Germans in the hedgerows along the opposite flank had not been dislodged by the charge. When the smoke began to clear away, they could again volley into the fields south of Bridge Number 4. This was their natural line of fire. In fact, the hedgerows which the enemy was holding were on axial lines toward the fields where the Battalion remnants were still looking vainly for cover.\*

\*In the NORMANDY fighting the Germans almost invariably had their Resistance Line behind, and running parallel to, the hedgerows. These are considerable obstacles, being so thick with thorn, vine and bramble that at most places, a man cannot force his way through them. More than that, they are, in point of screening, a fair fire breastwork, in that they are thick enough at the base that a man may lean up to them and fire through them without being seen. If the position cannot be destroyed by artillery or mortar fire, then infantry must find a way to move around the flanks and enfilade it. For supported by fire, the hedgerow is a stopper to any skirmish line which tries to assault it frontally. Behind the hedgerows, the Germans dug their foxholes in perfect geometric proportion, square-walled and deep. In fact they were so deep that a man of average height could stand erect in them and just see over. When two Germans stand to from within a foxhole, they maintain themselves in a sort of half-crouch, back on their haunches, with heads erect. They face one another. Each man has a rifle slung at his hip and pointed up over the edge so that one man sees whatever comes at the back of the other and both have a fair field of vision. In NORMANDY the machine gun strong points were usually at the corners of the field where the hedgerows came together. So positioned they could cover the roads or a sweep of country. The foxholes were along in a line directly back of the hedges and spaced more or less evenly between the machine guns. The battle was complex because of the cut up nature of the country. Yet its tactics were as simple as a run around end: flank the hedgerow line and the whole section of front then must form on the next convenient field to the rear.

CAPT SIMMONS and SGT WHITE hadn't heard COLE'S order. Trying to attend to his wounded, SIMMONS had heard someone yell something about a "whistle" and "bayonet" but the words didn't register as an order. He shouted to WHITE: "Well what about a f—— whistle?" but he got no reply and he continued with his work. The charge across the field got away without either man seeing it.

It must have been only a few minutes later that a shell exploded near SIMMONS and the concussion knocked him cold. He came to, with WHITE shaking him by the shoulders. "What happened?" SIMMONS asked. WHITE told him that the Battalion had been ordered to charge across the field and that some of the men were already at the farm house. SIMMONS said: "Then let's get the hell out of here." His head still was not clear. He motioned to the men around him to follow. A group got up. He didn't notice how many. They advanced straight up the ditch and toward the corner of the hedgerow which ran back of the house. A German machine gun was still firing from that point into the field where SIMMONS' men had been. This last anchor of the German forward line gave way as SIMMONS and his men ran on toward the hedgerow. A few of the men with SIMMONS fell under bullet fire in crossing the ditch. The Americans ran on firing their rifles toward the gun. A few Germans were killed. A grenade knocked the gun out. SIMMONS set up a machine gun on the same spot and pointed it in the opposite direction. The men then prowled around in the im-

mediate vicinity for a few minutes. About one hour after the charge (This was COLE'S estimate) SIMMONS reported to him at the house. COLE told him that he should move over to the right of the farm house where the rest of the Company was reorganizing. He had started the day with 84 men. When it was over, he had 30. Most of them had been lost in the field during the first couple of hours.

The fighting slackened for a few minutes. The right flank had been cleared. The left flank was clear to the first hedgerow, though it was a question whether the enemy had pulled any farther back on that side than the width of the first field. COLE, making a random estimate of his own strength without leaving the farm house, sent PVT DOYLE BOOTLE of Headquarters Company back to LIEUT COL PATRICK F. CASSIDY of First Battalion to tell him to bring his men on through. COLE figured that Third Battalion was washed up at least for the time being. (His own statement.) In point of fact his situation was even worse than he knew; the meager parties which had closed up to the hedgerows were not even sufficient to compose a thin fire line. Still, COLE believed that he had the enemy on the run. (His statement.) The mission of Third Battalion remained unchanged; it was to go on to HILL 30. But COLE figured that a fresh Battalion would come through in sufficient momentum to complete the assignment that day and he so advised the Regimental Commander. PVT BOOTLE went on back and was fired on by snipers all the way across the

field to the CARENTAN road. The field was now clear of troops except for the dead and wounded, BOOTLE saw. First Battalion was still north of Bridge Number 4. But BOOTLE didn't get that far. He gave the message to SGT JOSEPH H. GILLION of Company H who sent it on to the Regimental CP from where it was relayed to First Battalion. A few minutes after BOOTLE had left COLE, PROVOST showed up there, looking for a bandage for his face wound. There was no aid man at the farm house. COLE told PROVOST to keep moving to the rear. DURAND'S radio was again working by this time but COLE didn't know it. So COLE gave PROVOST the same message which he had given BOOTLE and told him to deliver it to CASSIDY. PROVOST got the message as far as a sergeant who was with the most forward platoon of First Battalion near Bridge Number 4. He told the sergeant to send the message back to CASSIDY. Right afterward, PROVOST saw one of his own men lying in a ditch, shot through the chest. He stopped to patch him up. Then he noticed that a group of men from Company H were hugging the dirt around him and he asked them why they weren't forward. "We're pinned down," several of them said. PROVOST couldn't understand it. Quite suddenly the fire opened on him and he crawled on hands and knees back along the ditch until he could yell to the first men of CASSIDY'S Battalion. They, too, were hugging the cover of the ditch. About 10 minutes later, he saw CASSIDY'S men get under way. As the leading files made their way into the field beyond Bridge Number 4, machine gun and rifle fire coming from far down on

the left hand side of the CARENTAN road cut into them.

They went on through a scene already well littered with the dead and dying. COLE at the farm house had his hands full. During the charge two of his first aid men stopped to patch up their comrades and the other wounded men in the field. That left no one to care for the wounded from the fight which was still going on up forward. PVT JOHN W. PIKE, a mortar man from Headquarters Company, came in with a wound through his shoulder. COLE and SPRECKER bandaged him. PVT JAMES W. EVANS of Company H came in with a leg broken by a shell burst. PVT JOE JIMINEZ of Company H came in with a bullet wound in the shoulder. COLE and SPRECKER put splints on one man and bandages on the others. COLE got on the radio and asked Regiment to "send up all kinds of ammunition, particularly machine gun" and also to send along an ambulance and any aid men who could be found.

By now, the Engineers had rigged a temporary span at Bridge Number 2 and had torn away the jammed gate at Bridge Number 4. It was possible for vehicles to come through to the farm house. COLE was in the court of the farm house where he had just finished splinting EVANS' leg with a pick handle. Next the door was a young private from CASSIDY'S Battalion. He had taken off his shoe and was putting sulfa powder on a minor wound in his heel. COLE said to him: "Get out of here right now. This is a dangerous spot." The kid said: "I want to be safe, Colonel.



I might get blood poisoning if I don't fix this." As he spoke the last word, he was hit straight on by a flat trajectory missile which smashed him up against the stone building and dropped him in a bloody heap on the flagstones.

The ambulance duly arrived, carrying ammunition. There were no Red Cross vehicles present and so an ordinary truck had been rushed to the scene. It brought ammunition up and took the wounded back, under fire in both directions. There were so many wounded that they were carried out double deck, some riding in the body of the truck and others in stretchers across the top. Two jeeps were also pressed into service.

The truck ambulance returned on its third trip, bringing a group of first aid men from FIRST ARMY with it. COLE'S Staff got back to him. They had been scattered about with the various elements. GEHAUF, dead beat from his exertions of the two preceding days and nights, had gone to sleep in a ditch in the early morning and COLE had decided to let him sleep. He came into the CP cursing COLE for leaving him behind. LIEUT RALPH A. WATSON, S1, had been back with the radio section. CAPT EDWARD J. BARRETT, S3, had been at the Fourth Bridge and had then gone on up the road which wound past the farm house to help organize the men.

The Staff collected in one room. COLE was in the room next them working on the wounded. A shell—whether it was mortar,

### ADVANCE OF THE FIRST BATTALION

COL CASSIDY and his men had seen the first wounded from Third Battalion's morning action streaming back along the CAUSEWAY embankments, but they did not have any clear idea of how the battle was going around the farm house. CASSIDY suspected that COLE had probably broken the back of the enemy resistance but had spent his own force in so doing.

This impression was gradually dissipated as First Battalion got in motion. Company B came under heavy fire immediately. It was automatic fire and the worst part of it seemed to be coming from well-concealed positions in the marsh off to the right of the road. When the lead elements reached Bridge Number 4, the bullet fire became so thick that "a man could scarcely raise his head." (Statement of LIEUT ROBERT ROGERS.) ROGERS had two of his machine guns set up on the embankment at Bridge Number 4 and put a traversing fire over the marsh. Still, the fire from the marsh did not diminish. Company B lost 8 men that morning — 3 of them killed — just in finishing the move across the CAUSEWAY.

ROGERS led his men forward: he was still thinking that he would crash them through a thin line of enemy and then march on to HILL 30. (His words.) They reached the open field across which COLE had charged and were able to deploy over toward the house without many additional losses. At that point COLE warned them

that the house was becoming a target for artillery and mortar fire and that they had best get on quickly. They did so. ROGERS found to his amazement that there were only small fractions of squads from Third Battalion holding any part of the ground. So he disposed his men generally up along the hedgerows to the right of the house and on the far side of the road which ran alongside the house. He saw that Third Battalion "had no defensive position" and that he would have to relinquish for the time being any idea of advancing beyond his initial line among the hedgerows. (His words.) The advance of the Company stampeded the small number of enemy who had continued to cling to the immediate foreground. They were pursued beyond the houses at the crossroads and small groups from the Company kept on going for several hundred yards farther. LIEUT HOMER J. COMBS led six men all the way to the railroad track. Meanwhile, another group of men got a machine gun forward to the crossroads and then searched all of the houses. In this party was PVT REDMOND WELLS who was to conduct himself conspicuously later in the day. The men found the houses empty, except for a few French civilians. The group which had gone on to the railroad track saw six Germans some distance away, off to their left. They fired at them. But as they themselves were already being fired upon by snipers, their aim was not good. The enemy vanished. The group held a council of war. The men wanted to go on, hunting for the six enemy. COMBS figured he was getting too far away from the main body and led them on back. They stopped

at the road and built up a fire line along it, distributing themselves just in front of the houses and employing the ditch and hedgerow cover abounding the road. This line—or rather a part of it—held until the Battalion was relieved late that night. It had no moments of quiet. It was counterattacked numerous times. On one occasion, it almost completely shattered and during much of the day was subjected to a continuing pressure from 20 yards range. The Germans came back to the road line almost immediately after COMBS' sortie, and took up position in the ditches on the other side of the road. There they were protected by a high brick wall. Thus locked with the enemy and virtually isolated from their own main body, the men at the forward line on the right maintained themselves by dueling with grenades, and in two instances turning the Germans back at the point of the bayonet. They had one machine gun which was set up initially to fire diagonally across the cross-roads and into the field beyond. For a time, this machine gun position was able to hold firm. The group, however, had no line of communication to the rear. One thing helped them. As they had come forward, they had found a grim tableau at the cross-roads. Set up there was a German machine gun with a dead gunner behind it. Sprawled across the gun and the gunner was a dead American paratrooper. He had been dead many hours but next his hand were two boxes of American machine gun ammunition. The group took this gift along and before the morning was out, they had need of it. At first, there were only a dozen men on the

forward line. More came as the morning wore on, until at its strongest the position had about two-thirds of First Platoon and 25 men from the Third.

The backstop of the right flank had been set up, however, at the Number 1 Hedgerow, on the side of the hedgerow which faced toward the orchard. There S SGT HARRISON SUMMERS, who on D Day had given as distinguished account of himself as any soldier in the American Army, had set up two machine guns, one at the corner and the other at the rear where it could sweep up the road.

While these arrangements were going on, disaster had already overtaken Company A. The two leading platoons came over the CAUSEWAY and through Bridge Number 4 under a heavy shelling by artillery and mortar. They lost a few men along the way. Then they started across the clear field as Company B had done. One of the heaviest concentrations of shell that day—mainly mortar but with some 88 mm mixed in it—fell right among the men as they reached the middle of the field. Fifteen men were hit. The shock scattered the others in all directions and they scrambled four ways in search for cover. The deep ditch was directly ahead of them. Some jumped head-first into the water. But others ran back to Bridge Number 4. It took 1½ hours to get the men together again and up to the firing line; the mortar fire continuing meanwhile, though in lesser amounts. Third

Platoon (These platoons had only 15-25 men apiece) then came up, started across the field and got caught in the same meat grinder. This platoon lost 9 men on the identical spot and the others scattered, looking for any kind of cover. But cover was not easy to find by that time; the more convenient ditches and foxholes were already filled by the wounded and the stragglers who had been caught in the backwash of the battle. Company A had lost 6 men in crossing the CAUSEWAY, most of them from bullet fire. That made it 30 all told before the Company approached the fire line.

It was at about 1100 that this first heavy blow fell on Company A. The same barrage had engulfed the farm house where COLE was sweating out the regulation of his artillery and the finding of his own flanks. The American artillery was firing toward the railroad and CARENTAN. This COLE knew. He knew also that some elements of First Battalion had gone on and were working at the hedgerows somewhere beyond. But he did not know how the battle was forming or whether the men forward in the orchard and along the hedgerows were closely engaged. (His statement.) By now most of the forward line—to call it that is an exaggeration—was manned by First Battalion, and between COLE and CASSIDY on that day there was curiously little

exchange of information.\*

In the long run, it probably made very little difference. For First Battalion's role in the CARENTAN fight was simply to build up on the ground where Third Battalion had exhausted itself. Without actually relieving Third Battalion, First Battalion took over, got its shoulder in the door, and there became wedged. Such of COLE'S men who were still in the fight filled in along CASSIDY'S defensive line. Nobody reconnoitered the front in detail—it wasn't that kind of a day—and COLE continued to imagine that his men were doing the lion's share of the work. After Company A had been ripped apart while trying to move up left of the farm house so as to push the enemy from the high ground lying west of CARENTAN, five men who had jumped forward to seek cover in the ditch picked themselves up and tried to keep their assignment. They got as far as the left end of Hedgerow Number 4 where they reinforced the leftmost element of Third Battalion—four riflemen and a light machine gun. At this position two successive gunners had been hit by

\*This was because both commanders, who were having their first experience with war, were preoccupied with what they saw directly before them. Later, in talking together with the Historical Officer, they agreed that this was the case. COLE and CASSIDY were roommates and had a Damon and Pythias kind of friendship. COLE rode CASSIDY hard; the latter, who is a quiet and non-assertive Irishman with a gentle sense of humor, was able to take it. They consulted almost none at all during the battle. Although CASSIDY'S men were spread pretty much over the general front, he stayed mainly on the left and tried to run that part of the action.

bullets bouncing off the gun and hitting them in the face. They tried to resume fire and did so twice. But both were bleeding badly and the gun finally went out of action because they grew too weak and there was no one to take over. When CASSIDY'S men reached the hedge, all four of COLE'S men were lying in the ditch, bleeding badly and unable to defend themselves. The newcomers took up fire positions behind the hedge. But the German automatic fire from the right swelled to such proportions that they could not raise their heads to take one shot. They pulled back before noon, taking the wounded. But they had reached the most advanced ground to be held during the day.

In that time, they had not seen a single enemy, and indeed, this was characteristic of the whole day's fighting. It was like fighting an army of phantoms, the men said. (All of these

#### NATURE OF THE BATTLE

details were supplied by numerous witnesses during the critique.)

Keeping well covered, the Germans advanced along the perpendicular hedgerows and ditches, then moved to the flank on the inside of the hedgerows which ran at right angles to the road. They understood this manner of advance very well and rarely exposed more than a shoulder or the tip of a helmet. The men of 502ND knew that a new line of fire had been built up opposite them only from the rising rattle of the guns. Many of them fought all day and saw no one. In fact, two-thirds of



COLE'S men who were under fire around the farm house saw Germans only after the Germans had become corpses. (This was by count at the critique.) They fought on, pouring their small arms and machine fire at the hedgerows, hoping that volume of fire alone would keep the enemy back. In this work the rifle was their most useful weapon. (Their statement.) Only 13 could remember having made some use of the grenade; only 6 were certain that they had killed any of the enemy with it. More by accident than by design, about 10 of them closed with one or two of the enemy in the scurrying around the hedgerows and used their bayonets.

Too, the scrambling which had resulted from the manner in which the two battalions were committed was made worse by the geometric pattern of the countryside. The fields in this part of

#### NATURE OF THE GROUND

NORMANDY are sometimes square, some oblong and some triangular in shape, and of varying size. Their outline, rather than the rise and fall of ground, determined the lines of advance and of resistance. The units had to accommodate themselves tactically to the situation as they found it. Large units could not remain together as a group, and for the same reason, could not be put forward as a group. To greatly increase the strength along any one stretch of hedge was to multiply the chance that a number of men would be killed. Small groups, moving out on separate missions, sometimes advanced on converging lines, or returned

from a completed mission to find their companions gone, then joined another group. Each company lost some of its number to the ditches and other cover as the advance continued under fire. When these stragglers were rounded up and put into action by a passing officer or non-com, they included men of every company.

The weakness of the general position, as COLE and CASSIDY both realized (They discussed this with the Historical Officer on three different occasions) was that it had no rear. As the dif-

#### COMMAND WORRIES

fusion of the assault forces increased, any chance for organization which would allow for a local reserve was swallowed up. There was nothing to fall back upon. If the front cracked, those who were still on two legs would have to retreat back over the CAUSEWAY. (Their statements.) CAPT ROSEMOND, who was trying to direct the support artillery from the second story of the farm house, was being plagued by the hedgerows. They blanked out the fields so that he couldn't see where the shells were falling. So he had to sense and regulate in the manner of "jungle warfare" — judging by the sound whether he was getting the shells in where he wanted them. COLE wanted more delay fire — something that would get into the ground at the base of the hedges and root the Germans out of their holes. He felt that too much of the stuff was wasting in air. However, the ammunition supply didn't allow for it. What bothered both men even more during the morning hours was the absence of communications. ROSEMOND'S

radio operator had gone down in the same ditch where COLE had taken his bath and the set had been drowned out. That deprived them of all contact with the batteries. Artillery fire was breaking around the house at the time and ROSEMOND wasn't sure whether it was his own or enemy fire. About 2½ hours after he had taken his post, the first truck ambulance arrived, bringing ammunition. Aboard it was an SCR609. ROSEMOND took the crystals out of his dead radio and put them in the 609. From noon-time on for several hours, he did his forward observer's work without a hitch. That should have been LIEUT SPRUEL'S work but SPRUEL had been killed in the charge across the field with COLE. SPRUEL had had a hunch about it. He said to ROSEMOND as he arose to jump off: "Well, I didn't want to go back to England, anyway. They'd just give us another training schedule." (All of this statement came from ROSEMOND.)

But until the sun stood high, neither Battalion had gotten enough feel of the enemy to be sure whether he intended to stand and fight or to cut and run. During the first heavy blaze of artillery and mortar fire which broke over the American front in mid-morning, the rattle of the burp guns had crept closer and the men had said to one another: "They're coming now." Machine guns from far over to the West of the CARENTAN road had put Bridge Number 4 under heavy fire and enveloped the area immediately south of it. First Squad, Third Platoon of Company H lost 6 men in less than 10 minutes while they were lying in the ditches; the men said later that more of their comrades died in ditches

that day than died going forward. (At the critique.) A man from Company G had a mortar shell land almost on his head as he lay flat in a ditch with arms out-stretched. It wrapped the helmet around his skull and he had to crawl to a medico to have it pried loose.

SIMMONS had sent 8 men up beyond the first farm house on the righthand side of the winding road. Three were hit by mortar fire. The others jumped into a water-filled ditch. The bullet fire above the ditch was such that they lay submerged for more than an hour.

But this, too, passed and a lull held the front.

### AMONG THE CABBAGES

What caused the break in the morning action is not known for certain though it may have had its source in certain moves which at this hour, unknown to the two Battalions, were taking place in the higher headquarters of both camps. But it was the greatest boon that came to the 502ND REGIMENT all day, for it enabled First Battalion, which up till this moment had not been able to take hold firmly, to complete its defensive arrangements.

Company C came forward and moved to ground just ahead of Hedgerow Number 2 and along the main highway. The deep ditch which forms the boundary of the field between the CARENTAN road and the farm house turns about even with the Number 2 Hedgerow and the stream flows under the road and through a culvert. Beyond the ditch at this point and extending almost to Number 3 Hedgerow was a large cabbage patch. This patch was to become the pivot of First Battalion defense along the left flank. Company C moved up among the forward cabbages. There its rifles and machine guns were positioned so as to put a flanking fire on the Germans as they crept down the far side of Hedgerow Number 3, or with equal facility, to pour a frontal fire on the enemy as they came down the inside ditch and the hedgerow paralleling the main road. Company A's line was built up along the rear of this one, taking in the base of the cabbage patch south of the ditch. From this ground the company could fire toward the top of the orchard and against Hedgerow Number 3. The line extended across

the road and past the culvert so that the machine guns stationed there could fire frontally against the Germans coming down the ditch on the outside of the road. These were to become the lines along which the enemy was to press his further attacks. The attacks varied hardly at all throughout the hours of the afternoon.

In all of this, however, was a large element of luck. For insofar as First Battalion was concerned, the decisive character of the cabbage patch had not been carefully estimated. (The statement of CASSIDY and his officers.) The men spread themselves among the cabbages because the plants themselves provided fair concealment. They did not realize at first that this plot of ground was a hub covering the enemy's axial lines of advance. CASSIDY had been over to COLE and they had discussed where First Battalion might find room to dispose its upcoming platoons so that they would have some usefulness in the event of a counterattack. They agreed that the area next the CAREN-TAN road was the least lightly manned and the most vulnerable sector of the front at the moment. So the platoons were told to go that way and the men took up their positions among the cabbages. (Statements of COLE and CASSIDY.)

While the two companies were fixing themselves on this ground, LIEUT W. A. SWANSON and SGT JAY SCHENK of Company C, SGT STANLEY CZARNICK of Headquarters Company and two machine gunners from Company G (unidentifiable) took advantage of the respite

# AFTERNOON ACTION

Lines of Enemy Advance  
on Defensive Positions

11 JUNE 1944

BRIDGE NO. 4

MADELEINE RIVER

CULVERT

CABBAGE  
PATCH

502

"B" CO

"A" CO

"C" CO

HEDGEROW NO. 1

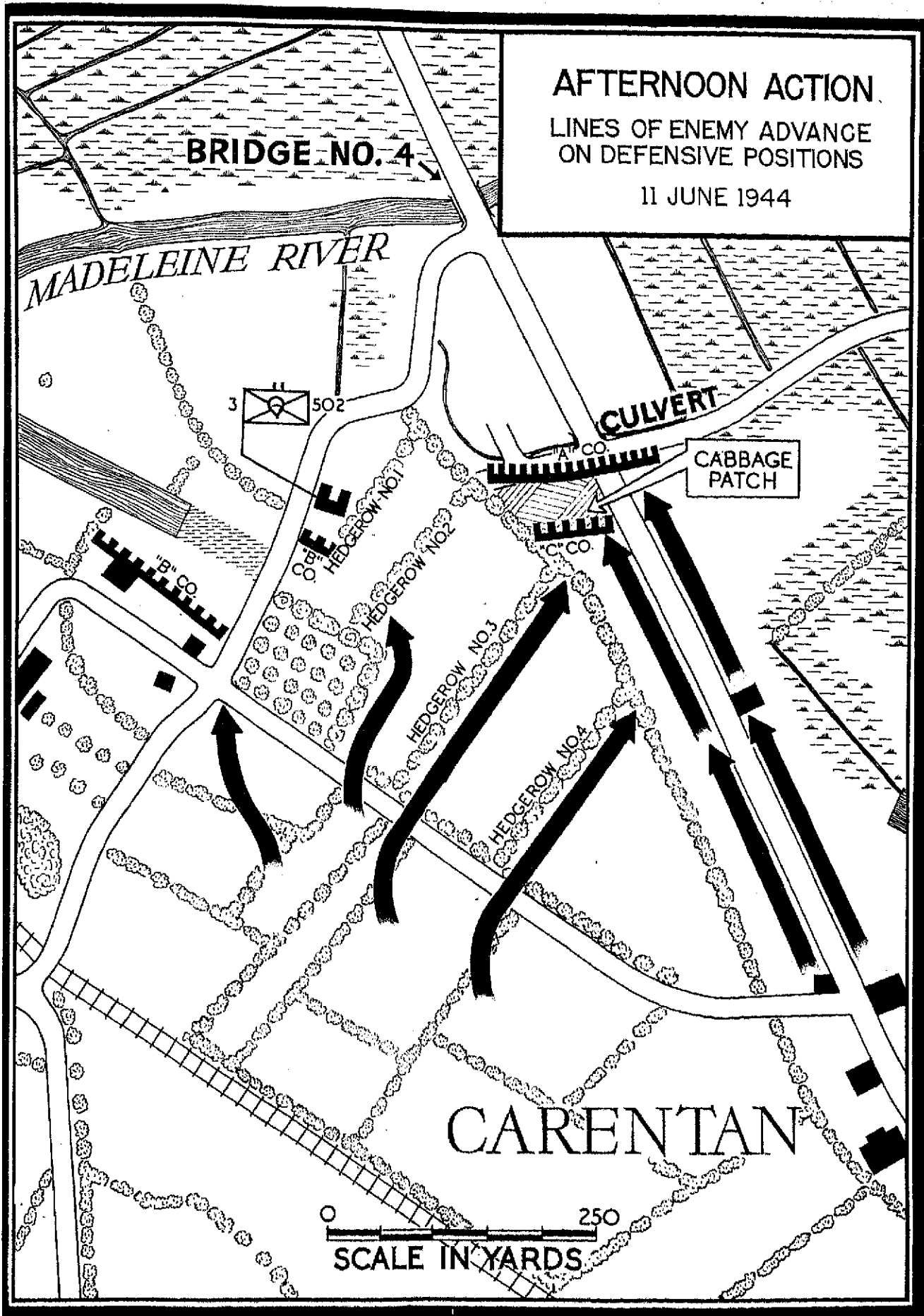
HEDGEROW NO. 2

HEDGEROW NO. 3

HEDGEROW NO. 4

CARENTAN

0 250  
SCALE IN YARDS



from mortar fire to go up to the main road to the house which was on the left side of the road. The house was just a little beyond Hedgerow Number 4. They saw Germans in the next house. The Germans saw them at the same time and engaged them with rifles and machine pistols. Two Germans were hit by machine gun fire. CZARNICK then got hit in the face by a bullet from a machine pistol and he started back for a dressing. The machine gun ran out of ammunition. (It was 1145.) SWANSON decided he'd better fall back. The situation, insofar as the enemy infantry were concerned, was quiet. SWANSON had seen no enemy activity off toward his right. But while he was retracing his steps he saw Germans moving along Hedgerows Number 3 and 4 toward the road. LIEUT GEORGE R. CODY, who was then in the cabbage patch, could look ahead and see these same activities. No one was firing at the enemy during this time and it mystified SWANSON.

SGT ODOM, who had got up to this same forward ground early in the morning, continued to hold it with his two men after knocking out the enemy machine gun. He had been there when SWANSON came up and he remained there after SWANSON withdrew. But he could not see what was happening to the SWANSON group because, though they were spaced only a few yards apart, a hedgerow intervened. However, PVT ALLEN C. MC LEAN of Company G had been keeping a solitary post in this same field between the road and the house. Not far from him, although MC LEAN did not know



it, were CPL LEROY DRUMMOND of Company H and a small group of men from First Battalion. DRUMMOND had stopped in the field to help a wounded comrade, PVT CLAUDE F. FLETCHER, who had been hit in the stomach by a shell fragment. After getting FLETCHER to the road he met the First Battalion men who were coming along. By now, SWANSON and the machine gunners had already begun their retrograde move. As PVT MC LEAN saw it, a few German grenades had fallen among SWANSON'S men and while no real hurt had been done to them it quickened their belief that a lack of machine gun ammunition argued for a slight withdrawal. DRUMMOND and the others saw the Germans coming down the hedgerow on the right of the road. It looked like there were 30 or 40 of them. The group figured it was time to move back. They withdrew carefully, not running or exposing themselves. At the position where ODOM had grenaded the German gunners early in the morning, they found an American machine gun set up. The sight of the gun encouraged them. DRUMMOND and three riflemen from First Battalion and one machine gunner thereupon decided to make a stand. They put down a line of fire on the men moving along the hedgerow, killed a few of them and forced the others to deploy and then withdrew.

During these actions SGT ODOM and his two men stayed right where they were in the forward ground.

Well over to the right of the Regimental front, PVT ROBERT I. BOYCE and about five other riflemen moved up the road past the

right-hand corner of the farm house. They saw a German machine gun squad coming down the road. Two women were marching in front of the squad. At first they thought the Germans intended a surrender. Then one man of the party saw that two of the enemy were lugging the gun and he yelled to the others that it was a trap. They shot into the group and killed two of the Germans. The Americans had gone to ground as they fired. The women ran, but where they disappeared, no one noticed.

SIMMONS' men who had been in the water-filled ditch finally worked off flankward toward the RIVER MADELEINE. They reached its bank just in time to see two squads of Germans pull out of a dugout and flop into position behind a hedgerow. The two squads poured so much fire toward the American party—rifle fire supported by one machine pistol—that the men had to get down into the water again. Having spent one hour in the water of the ditch, they spent another hour in the water of the river.

SWANSON in the meantime had gone on a sight-seeing tour. He had made one prior trip to reconnoiter the situation on the extreme right where THOMPSON and the others were fighting at the crossroads. He again moved forward to see how things were going there. But before he ever reached THOMPSON he bumped bodily into a group of Germans who came from behind a hedgerow. They grabbed him and blindfolded him and held him for an hour. Then they turned him loose and he returned to his own lines.

All of this mystified LIEUT SWANSON very much.

### ONE MOMENT OF ROUT

The enemy infantry had been pressing their only strong counter-attack of the morning. SWANSON had seen their right flank come on along Hedgerow Number 4 as he had walked back along the CAR-ENTAN road but he had moved on before the two forces opened fire. DRUMMOND and his men had turned back the attack on the right flank without knowing that this was part of a general engagement. But the fight had flamed along all the hedgerows and through the orchard. Firing machine pistols and rifles, the enemy moved straight along the hedge bordering the orchard toward the two machine guns commanded by SGT SUMMERS.

LIEUT CLARENCE A. THOMPSON, JR, was moving along Hedgerow Number 2 trying to round up some men. There were two or three 502ND riflemen near him. They began to feel the heat of the German fire as the enemy came on through the orchard. SGT WILLIAM A. GRANT was hit in the arm and ran toward the farm house to get first aid. The other men, seeing GRANT go, moved out fast along Hedgerow Number 2 toward the highway. They had not seen the bullet hit GRANT but they had seen him run, and they took alarm and followed him. (This was determined at the critique but it was agreed that in view of the circumstances the names of the men would not be entered in the record.) THOMPSON, seeing his men run, took out after them.

LIEUT ROGERS, who was at the hedgerow next the house, heard the

cry as it passed along: "The order is to withdraw." The word passed from man to man: "Withdraw! Withdraw!" Then an officer repeated it. "Don't say that unless you're sure!" ROGERS yelled at him. The officer stayed at his post and was shot dead by a German bullet a few seconds later.

The rift at Hedgerow Number 2 dropped the weight of the attack squarely on SUMMERS' two guns. Fire from the enemy's burp guns ripped the trees and cut the ground all around the gunners. They gave back everything they had, raking the Orchard Hedgerow and Hedgerow Number 2 with steady fire. After closing to within 30 yards of the gun, the Germans faded back. It is not too much to say that the salvation of the position turned on the effectiveness of SUMMERS' fire at that moment, coupled with the courage of the few riflemen from Company B who supported him.

For what THOMPSON and ROGERS had feared most had happened on the left. The sudden run by the three men along the Number 2 Hedgerow and the cries of "Withdraw!" brought panic to the stragglers and the wounded who were lying in the fields and ditches to the rear of the cabbage patch. They arose on all sides and ran toward Bridge Number 4. There they were stopped and turned back by a small group of supply and communications officers and non-coms. This retreat was not even felt in the cabbage patch; the men were too busily engaged in firing at the enemy to know that it had taken place.

COLE, who was still directing the battle from the farm house, did not know there had been a breach on his front. But of a sudden he felt a vague uneasiness. He thought from the way that the enemy fire was building up and from the prolonged rattle of his own machine guns that the Germans were counterattacking. He asked for more artillery.

It was different with PVT ALLEN T. EMERY of Third Battalion, Headquarters Company. He was in the hedgerow just beyond the house. The men who had been with THOMPSON were a little to the left in the hedgerow just forward of EMERY. He sensed nothing unusual until he heard a cry: "The Germans are counterattacking. Get behind the bridge!" He heard several men yell it. Then he saw men from First Battalion come running back. At first they were not running rapidly but at a kind of slow trot, as if doubtful whether they were doing the right thing.

EMERY, and PVT EUGENE W. SAVER of Company H who was with him, watched them go. Some of the First Battalion men were firing as they fell back. EMERY and SAVER jumped in a foxhole to keep out of the line of fire. In the hole they found a large bag of food—sausage, butter, bread, and fudge—and they proceeded to eat it while they peered out of the foxhole and watched the First Battalion men stream back to the bridge. Mortar fire had been falling spasmodically all along the line. Then it came quite suddenly in large and persistent doses. There was a pick-up in machine gun fire also from the hedgerows. Being in the foxh

EMERY and SAVER saw no Germans. They didn't believe that any were coming and they kept on eating and wondering why the others had fallen back to the bridge.

They thought that the fudge was very good.

### THE TRUCE

Noon was a few minutes gone when Regiment sent word by radio that all hands were to cease firing: The enemy wanted a truce. COLE dispatched runners to tell the men that they were to hold their positions but that all hostile activities along the front were to cease.

Some of the groups never received this order. The men had taken cover in such a scattered way that it was impossible to circulate any message completely. SWANSON wandered right through the early part of this truce without hearing about it. That was how he happened to be captured when he blundered into an enemy position and how he happened later to be released without any explanation.

The men on the right who had established the forward line near the crossroads heard nothing about the noon time truce. So far as they knew, the war was still going on. They had no radio nor were any runners getting up to them. Far off on their left, they could see the Germans moving around and concentrating toward them with more freedom than before but they had no awareness that the American left had suddenly quieted. The Germans who were behind the wall opposite them were still carrying on the fighting with percussion grenades, machine pistols and a few rifle grenades. They replied to this fire as best they could but they were having to hoard the last of their ammunition. The free movement of the Germans up ahead of them during this general

respite was something they could not curb in any case. The road curved sharply beyond the intersection. That, and the intervention of the hedgerows, made futile any fire toward the left flank. The men there simply sweated out the German re-grouping and wondered what was happening.

Elsewhere, among the men who knew what it was all about, the feeling was general that the Germans were using the truce to strengthen their small arms fire positions. They were sure the enemy would come on more strongly than ever if the truce failed. All of the men felt this (Determined at the critique) but there were only a few of them who saw any movement among the Germans and these few saw little which could really support their suspicions. Rather than the tangibles of sight and sound, it was the difference in the volume of power in the German build-up before and after the battle which convinced them that the Germans had abused the truce.

Among the men, rumor ran like wild-fire. Along the road someone yelled: "They've surrendered." Another story went the rounds. "We have captured a German field marshal." However, those who figured that they were through fighting for the day and that the battle was over, were in a small minority. The majority had only a limited idea of the truce. They thought it had been called to permit them to remove the dead and care for the wounded. These things, they proceeded to do. The impression was strengthened a few minutes after the "Cease firing!" order came through.



An American officer with a Red Cross flag came across Bridge Number 4 behind two Germans who were bearing white flags and took the road into CARENTAN. However, MAJ DOUGLAS T. DAVIDSON, MC, the Regimental Surgeon, was acting as a direct agent of the Division Commander to ask whether the Germans were ready to yield CARENTAN.

His mission failed. The military commander in CARENTAN wouldn't see him. Nothing came of the truce except that the men got one hour's rest. There was occasional firing by riflemen and mortar men from both sides during the lull, coming apparently from outposts which hadn't received the order. One German machine pistol man in the forward hedgerows broke the silence with a few rounds. A few riflemen joined him and others answered him. Regiment heard these sounds and called COLE to ask who was firing. Upon being told that the enemy was guilty, Regiment replied: "Don't let our men fire except in self defense."

During the truce all of the wounded were taken to the rear except six who were behind Bridge Number 4. A chaplain came up into the forward ground, collected about 30 of the casualties and started them out.

MAJ DAVIDSON got back to his own lines about 1300. The men didn't see him return. But they didn't need to be told that he was back. As he crossed Bridge Number 4 on his way to the Regimental CP, the Germans cut loose with everything—rifle fire,

machine guns, mortars, and artillery—in what was by far the most intense concentration of the day.

It fell with power and precision over the entire area held by both battalions, and casualties mounted all up and down the line. COLE called Regiment and asked for permission to return the fire. He was told to wait: as far as Regiment knew, DAVIDSON had not returned. COLE waited. Then he called again. Regiment was still hesitating. It had not received official notice that the truce was ended. Just then a shell hit the farm house directly above COLE'S head. "Listen to that!" COLE said: "How about me telling my men to fire?" They again told him to wait.

All of this, however, was slightly beside the point. The men of the two battalions were already bearing down with every weapon they had. When the Germans had opened fire, the men had taken the situation into their own hands and the belated order from Regiment to resume fire wasn't even passed on to the men by COLE.

There was a little moral sag when the fighting started. The men had relaxed during the truce. But they hadn't expected too much of it. SIMMONS heard one of his men say: "Well if the bastards won't surrender we'll fight it out with them."\*

\*ROSEMOND'S statement was: "I am certain that the enemy carefully prepared an artillery attack during the truce. It was the heaviest shelling they gave us at any time and quite well regulated." The men along the hedges agreed unanimously that this was the most destructive fire they felt during the day.

### THE AFTERNOON

The afternoon battle wore on much as the morning fight had done though to the men on the fighting line it seemed to have a more deadly monotone. (This simply sums up many things which they had to say during the critique about their nervous reaction to the combat.) In the morning the enemy had acted indecisively, as if not certain whether to fight or retire. In the hours which followed the truce, there could be no doubt that the Germans intended to either drive 502ND REGIMENT back across the CAUSEWAY or annihilate the two battalions on the ground around the farm.

All offensive vigor by this time had been spent in the American force. That was almost as true of the individuals, taken one by one, as of the units. In COLE'S battalion, the last residue of offensive dash had been exhausted during the charge across the field and the brief advance into the orchard and the first few hedgerows beyond. CASSIDY'S men had become so spread over the wide front that the separate groups could no longer feel the strength of the larger unity. For both battalions, therefore, the afternoon was a period of grim holding on. The volume of German fire rose steadily, and the paratroopers felt again the pressure of an invisible enemy who revealed himself only through the swelling of sound as his mechanisms pushed nearer.

PVT PETER P. DUNSKY of Company H spoke for the men all along the line when he said: "We had to play it by ear. When we heard rifles and machine pistols fire at us from 200 yards away for

half an hour, then from 100 yards, then from 50 yards, we knew they were coming that much closer to us. The B-r-r-r-r sound of the machine guns would double, then treble in volume—not more shots, but more sound. We could hear them working the bolts of their rifles. We could hear their cartridge shells rattle. And the nearer they came to us, the more accurate they became."

Up at the crossroads on the right flank, the on-fall was swift and furious when the truce ended. The Germans swept in force around and within the curved line of the American position, throwing rifle, machine pistol, grenade and mortar fire ahead of them as they crept along the hedgerows. They got to the crossroads and from the ditches and trees just beyond the intersection they poured automatic fire into the ground beyond the road in great volume. The 35 men from First Battalion who were situated there had to break back precipitately. There is a place near the farm house where a long man-made inlet from the marsh and river gets almost to the roadway. They fell back to that neck of land and set up a new defensive line. So far as they knew, the whole detachment on the right had been forced to make this withdrawal.

But they were wrong about it. Seven men on the extreme right had stuck it. They continued to stick—a little island of resistance which lasted throughout the day.

Hour after hour, the Germans pressed on through the orchard and along the abounding hedgerows. About 10 men from Company B had taken position along Hedgerow Number 2 next a small detachment from Company H. The fire from the flank found them. Seven men from Company B were hit by bullets and the others quit the hedgerow in order to help their wounded back.

All that saved the Americans was that the enemy did not have a sufficient artillery. There were not more than two guns. (Both of them were 88s according to CAPT ROSEMOND.) After firing 6 or 7 rounds, each gun would break off for a while. The mortars never let up. They had the range and they stayed on it. This was just as true of the automatic weapons. After the men from Company B had fallen back from the Number 2 Hedgerow, the 10 men from Company H stayed on, holding it by themselves. They were on the north side of the hedge in one spot and the Germans held the rest of the hedge on the other side. Neither group could get immediately at the other because of the thickness of the hedge. But they grenaded each other.

The enemy kept coming. SGT SUMMERS' number 2 gun at the front of the last hedgerow was knocked out and the three crew members were killed. The right hand gun kept on firing down the road.

Probably the interdictory effect of this fire helped save the 7 men who were isolated in the forward position on the right. PVT WILLIAM J. BURT, who was on the gun, had no idea that there were any Company B men up ahead. But to him, firing along the

road seemed like a good idea at the time. (BURT'S own explanation.)

The 7 men—PVTS LUTHER DAVIS, JAMES PARHAM, BURTON PETTIT, JOHN KOKRUGGA, ANTHONY FOGLIA, WELLS and SGT TED KAUS—had watched their original numbers dwindle steadily. COMBS had been hit. Fifteen others had been wounded and three killed in the forward line.

Late in the afternoon, PVT WELLS, who was the acting squad leader, got a bullet in the shoulder. "I think that's about enough," WELLS said to the others. "Leave me here. The rest of you had better drop back to the next hedgerow." His comrades said nothing. They just looked at him and shook their heads. The grenade battle went on. The 7 men were still holding out when the American barrage came over and the Germans faded back. The closest shells were within 25 yards of them and some fell behind their flank. They were glad to see it.

Twenty-eight men had been helping SUMMERS and ROGERS hold the ground around the machine gun position at the farm house. Twelve remained in the fight. The others were dead or wounded, mostly from bullet fire.

Company C and what remained of Company A had had almost no hedgerow maneuvering to do. In the cabbage patch, where they had been disposed during the late morning, they held their ground for more than 6 hours against all enemy counterattacks. They

were in pretty solid. Alone among the units which had distributed over the front, they had maintained a semblance of their tactical organization. This was a marked advantage. The men knew one another and knew their leaders. Company A had about 30 men with three machine guns among the cabbages. Company C's strength was a little less. They took losses from German fire throughout the afternoon but as evening came on they were the weaker by only about 20 men. There was enough fire power distributed through the cabbage patch that the flank never faltered.

Nor was the position ever dented. In the first German on-fall which followed the truce, the enemy came right on down the hedgerows, moving in parallel lines toward these two companies on the American left. At the same time, other enemy riflemen came crawling along the ditch on the outside of the road. These lines of advance were continued throughout the afternoon. Each attack had the same pattern. Though toward the close of the action the Germans had trouble coming forward because they were obstructed by the bodies of their own dead, the machine guns covering the ditches were still cutting down enemy riflemen within 25 feet of their own muzzles. (This statement is attested by gunners and those who were around them.) From both sides of the culvert the machine guns covered the two parallel ditches. PFCS CHARLES L. RODERICK and FRANKLIN E. CAWTHON on the right hand ditch kept their gun going 6 hours. RODERICK got a hit on the operating handle while his gun was firing. It drove a piece of

the handle through his shoulder but he refused to be evacuated. PVT LERO C. NICOLAI and PFC ALFRED A. FITZSIMMONS stayed on the left hand gun. They fired usually in bursts of 6 or 7. It took a lot of ammunition. They counted 10 German dead within 25 yards of their gun when the action closed. The banks of the ditch were irregular and these enemy were able to crawl almost to the gun position before NICOLAI could get a clear shot at them.

Through most of the afternoon the CARENTAN road could not be travelled as far as the culvert by either jeeps or men carrying ammunition, such was the intensity of the fire. To the rear of the guns, the ditches were so fully clogged with wounded that ammunition carriers could not come forward over their bodies. Yet one of these hardships compensated for the others. Men — the wounded, the faltering and all of those who for one reason or another could no longer face the fire — were strung out along the ditches and along the CAUSEWAY for more than a mile on both sides of the road. These two chains of battered human beings served as a moving belt. Ammunition boxes were given into one pair of hands back beyond the CAUSEWAY. They passed through hundreds of hands on the way up. But always, they came along. The wounded would crawl the three or four yards which might be necessary to get the up-coming ammunition and then crawl back to pass it to the next man up the line.

The congestion at the road got worse as the afternoon yielded



more wounded who took cover in the ditches. As their numbers increased, the need grew for new hands at the front. Some of these men, rounded up by officers and non-coms working the rear, were stalled in the ditches as they tried to come up. SGT CHARLES R. DEROSE, who had stepped in a hole and broken his leg just as he got up to Company A's position, stood up in the same hole on the broken leg for 4 hours and served as a traffic director. He shuttled the wounded back and he urged the able men on toward the cabbage patch.

To all who witnessed, he was one of the most splendid figures of the day. But the Germans had his number on one particular shell.

### CRISIS

The hour was about 1800. In the farm house ROSEMOND stood at the second story window for a few moments looking out over the hedgerows. COLE joined him there. He noted the pitifully scant numbers of his men around the house and along the first two hedgerows. They were firing as rapidly as they could. Compared with the volume of sound from the close-up enemy bullet fire, however, the sound of his own pieces seemed to COLE like a dying rattle. (COLE said that it was the relative noise from the two fire lines which convinced him that he was beaten.) He knew then that his line was cracked.

Crawling along the inside of the hedge, CAPT SIMMONS made a last trip up to carry ammunition to the 10 men who were holding out along Hedgerow Number 2. Their machine gun was jammed and they were engaging only with rifles and grenades. SIMMONS then came back and with a handful of men around him built up a line of resistance in the last hedgerow next the house. They figured this was the final reserve. If the Germans got through the second hedge and the men there had to fall back from the last field, they could at least be covered during the withdrawal.

There was no longer any attempt to evacuate the wounded. They moved back along the ditches if they could crawl. If they couldn't, they stayed where they had been hit. The few remaining aid men tried to care for these cases on the spot after get-

ng up to them through the ditches. So close joined had become  
e bullet battle that the litters could not be brought up past  
idge Number 4.

COLE and ROSEMOND, straining their eyes toward the eastward,  
seemed now that the play was ended. They could see nothing  
the enemy but they could feel his presence all around them.  
fle fire was buffeting the house from two sides and knocking  
ates from the roof above their heads. They said nothing.  
ey simply nodded their agreement to one another that the fight  
l been lost. (Their own description.) In ROSEMOND'S mind  
ere was a question whether it would be best to stay and go  
wn fighting or try to retreat over the CAUSEWAY with all the  
ard that such a retreat entailed. He said a prayer. (His  
words.) In COLE'S mind there was no question at all. He  
gured that his men had already "fought to the last" and that  
had no right to ask any more of them. He believed it was his  
y to pull out. He decided that in pulling out, he would  
ve his wounded. There were 5 or 6 of them in the house. He  
d the first aid men that if a withdrawal was ordered, they  
e not to encumber themselves.

1630, he talked by radio to LIEUT COL ALLEN W. GINDER, the  
imental Executive. COLE told him he'd had enough for the  
. He said that he thought the Regiment had better get set  
rearward so that the forward battalions could be covered when  
y withdrew. He asked that the Second Battalion build up a

fire position on the dyke behind the MADELEINE and along the righthand side of the highway so that a fire screen could be put around the farm house when the appropriate moment came. He asked also for the artillery to get ready with smoke so that they could put down a curtain around the farm and the highway area when the battalions began to funnel back into the CAUSEWAY.

But after he had given GINDER these forewarnings, he marked time for a while and waited for a further sign that the battle was turning more radically against him. STOPKA, moving around the farm house to watch the fighting, could hear the Germans working their rifle bolts in the hedgerows. He said to COLE: "It is getting God-damn hot."

There were few local arrangements for the withdrawal. COLE thought the best thing was to get out as fast as possible. He told STOPKA to regulate the movement on the right while he, COLE, took it in the center. CAPT JAMES H. HATCH of First Battalion would do the same on the left.

One last chance remained. That was the American artillery. But ROSEMOND'S radio was jammed. The men had been working over it frantically but were getting only German jamming. (ROSEMOND'S words.) What was coming over from the guns was insufficient in quantity and too far from our lines to turn the enemy back.

ROSEMOND knew that the situation required everything the artillery could give it, planted just as close to the farm house as

possible. He got through at last to CAPT CHARLES ALDRICH at the artillery CP. As he made contact, COLE said to him: "If this don't work we'll get the hell out of here right now." ROSEMOND told ALDRICH what he wanted. ALDRICH replied: "We're almost out of ammunition." ROSEMOND said: "For God's sake get some!"

(These quotations are made exactly from the recollections of the officers concerned.) ROSEMOND was pleading with him as a man pleads for his life "Get it!" "We must have it!" ALDRICH drew back for just a moment to make further inquiries. Then he returned to the instrument and said to ROSEMOND: "Fresh supplies of ammunition are just now coming into the battery positions."

The shells came over at last and they sounded like sweet music. During most of the day only two battalions had been firing in direct support of the farm position. This time every gun within the command was brought to bear. Without asking COLE what he wanted, ROSEMOND pulled the fire back so close that it was just arching over the farm house roof and falling in the field beyond.

For some few who had survived the battle thus far, it was too close. SGT DEROSE was still standing in the hole next the roadway, leg broken, doing his duty. He saw a shell land 25 feet in front of him. He said to those around him: "The next one will fall here." (Three survivors heard him say this.) But he continued to stand there, waving the men on. The next shell landed

within 5 yards of him and blew him apart. LIEUT FRANK MAGRIE, already in a dying condition from a bullet wound, was also killed by the burst. SWANSON and CODY escaped death by a few feet. They heard a whistle and they dove head first into the water-filled ditch.

The men of Company A talked about these things afterward but they did not have the usual reaction of infantrymen who have lost men through their own artillery fire. "We lost good men but we had to have that fire." one of them said, and the others agreed. They had seen the last onslaught as the Germans came down Hedgerow Number 2 and the hedgerow bordering the orchard and started to close on the house from both sides. They knew as clearly as COLE how close a thing it was.

The barrage lasted not more than 5 minutes. The infantrymen who heard the shells go over and saw them explode along the line later described the fire gratefully as "very intense". In fact, however, the fields and the hedgerows were not much knocked about, and a day or so afterward one could walk about through this ground and scarcely notice a sign of a shelling. But the explosions took enough of the advancing German infantry to turn the tide of battle. When the American guns ceased fire, COLE listened carefully. What he heard told him that the crisis had passed. There was enemy fire—bullet fire—still beating around the farm house. But the volume no longer sounded ominous. ROSEMOND also listened and got the same idea. They wait-

ed 5, 10 minutes. The recession continued. They could still hear the crackle of small arms fire. Only it sounded now as if the pieces had been muted. The enemy machine guns were moving southward.

"Listen to it!" COLE said to ROSEMOND. "Just listen to it!"

COLE went outside and sent about 10 men up to the field which lay well beyond the farm house between the road and the MADELEINE. They moved on as far as the crossroads. Four Germans came out of the woods shouting "Kamerad". But they still held their arms. Two men of Company H had been killed by this same trick within a few hundred feet of the same spot earlier in the day. So the patrol shot into them. Two went down and the other two jumped back into the woods. Otherwise the patrol found nothing but dead Germans. They came back and reported it.

COLE sent a second force of 25 men under LIEUT GEORGE H. CRAFT and 2ND LIEUT GEORGE E. BEAN, both of Company G, to prowl the orchard. They crossed the first field in a skirmish line—a scratch force drawn from all four companies. There was no German fire. However, the advancing line continued to fire into the base of the hedgerow as it went forward. The second hedgerow and orchard were about 75 yards away and it was another 100 yards across the orchard. From the area embracing field and orchard had come most of the enemy fire throughout the day.

The artillery had cut a few convenient holes in the hedgerow.

Some of the men jumped through them. Others went by the gate. They stayed in the field and orchard for more than an hour. A German machine gun fired loosely at them from far over on the left. Next the hedgerow, they found an American 60 mm mortar which the Germans had been using against them. COLE came up to them where they had formed a fire line along the hedgerow. He told them to hold it until Second Battalion came to relieve them. The German fire could still be heard faintly in the distance. But the whole front had cooled along the bank of the MADELEINE.

About 2000, Second Battalion arrived and took over the position. COLE ordered a roll call of his men. There were 132 left to make answer. While they were forming in the orchard about 2100, there was one last burst of shelling from the German artillery. Three more men were killed and 8 were wounded.

The others marched off to ST COME DU MONT. They arrived, walking, at 2330. One of the men said to COLE: "Did you know today is Sunday?" Said COLE: "Jesus Christ, why didn't somebody tell me?" (This conversation was witnessed by about 6 men who reported it at the critique.) When morning came, the enemy had disappeared from this sector of the CARENTAN front.



CAWTHON and the others at the machine gun used direct fire. They were able to see the enemy coming on. They killed about 50. The men in the cabbages got only occasional glimpses of the enemy. Those fighting from behind hedgerows almost never saw the Germans

There was a large group of trees at the corner of Hedgerow Number 3 which enabled the enemy to concentrate at that point behind pretty good cover.

COLE got the Congressional Medal for his charge across the field. He did not live to know that he had received it. He was killed when a sniper's bullet hit him between the eyes at BEST, HOLLAND, in September. His family received the award about one month later. (The manner of COLE'S death is fully covered in the historical account of OPERATION MARKET.) STOPKA was given the Distinguished Service Cross for his part in the charge. He got it a few days before he was killed by one of our own air bombs at BASTOGNE, BELGIUM, in January.

## **Assignment #4**

### **The 506<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment**

#### **“The Five-O-Sink”**

**First Read Study Instructions and Core Reading: Battle of Carentan, Normandy (7 to 13 June 1944) Virtual Staff Ride (Provided as a separate document)**

During the field study, you are responsible for all the actions of the 506<sup>th</sup> PIR from D+1 (7 June 1944) to D+7 (13 June 1944). Discuss the actions and decisions from both your own and the unit's perspective. You should be prepared to discuss:

- Unit organization and equipment, training, and morale.
- Key decisions, why those decision were made, and the consequence of the decision.
- Unit's actions and accomplishments.

**This supplemental reading contains four parts:**

- **Part 1: Overview of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division**
- **Part 2: Airborne Infantry Regiment Organization and Equipment**
- **Part 3: A short biography of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Cole – commander 3/502 PIR.**
- **Part 4: The Operations of the 2d Platoon D Company, 506<sup>th</sup> PIR by Captain Ronald C Speirs.**

**Part 1: Overview of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division “Screaming Eagles.” Additional information can be found at [https://www.ww2-airborne.us/18corps/101abn/101\\_overview.html](https://www.ww2-airborne.us/18corps/101abn/101_overview.html)**

**“The 101<sup>st</sup> Division has no history, but has a Rendezvous with Destiny.”<sup>1</sup>**

Gen. W.C. Lee (the first commanding general of the division),  
August 1942

In August 1942 the U.S. Army activated the 101st Airborne Division at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. In October 1942 the division moved to Fort Bragg, North Carolina and started its training to qualify for its new airborne mission. In the spring of 1943 the division conducted its first division maneuvers and then that summer participated in the Army Tennessee maneuvers (primarily jumping from trucks).

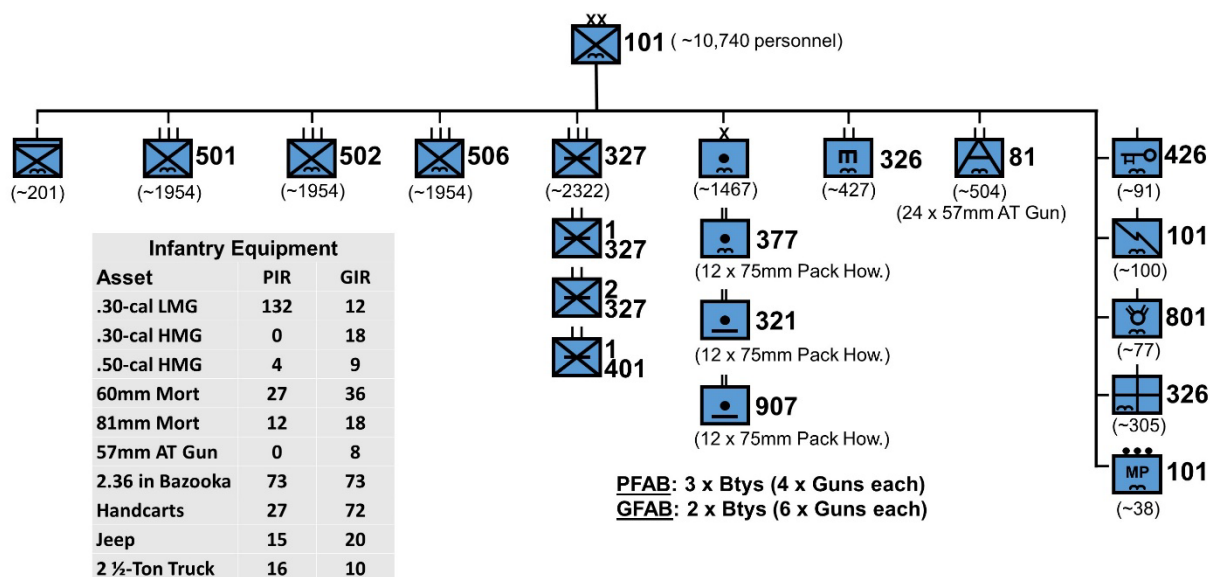
In early 1944, transferred to England and continued its training. On 5 February General Lee suffered a heart attack and returned to the United States. In March, BG Maxwell D. Taylor, former commander of the 82d Airborne Division Artillery, assumed command of the division. Soon after that the division underwent another organizational change when the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, was attached to the 327th Glider Infantry to operate to operate as the

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<sup>1</sup> Bando, Mark. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne at Normandy (1994), 9.

regiment's third battalion. The division was now training with the task organization with which it would fight in Normandy.<sup>2</sup>

## 101st Airborne Division Organization



**PIR:** 3 x Bns with 3 x Rifle Cos

- Companies: 3 x Rifle Plts
- Rifle Plts: 2 x Sqds (12 pax; w/ 1 x M1919 LMG each); 1 x Mortar Sqd

**GIR:** 2 x Bns with 3 x Rifle Cos

- Companies: 2 x Rifle Plts; 1x Wpns Plt (2 x M1917 HMGs, 2x 60mm Mortars)
- Rifle Plts: 3 x Sqds (12 pax)

In England, the 101st participated in three major exercises. On the last exercise, the division's mission was to capture the causeways leading away from a simulated beach. Ironically, the regiments were scattered at the wrong drop sites. Nevertheless, the units regrouped and accomplished their assigned tasks successfully.

The "Screaming Eagles" lacked combat experience, but had been extensively trained and contained many combat veterans. Although lightly equipped, it was a strong formation with four infantry regiments (standard infantry division had 3 regiments). The men of the division were determined and highly motivated to accomplish the mission. Cornelious Ryan in his classic work *"The Longest Day"* stated **"The 101st on its first combat jump was fiercely determined not to be outdone by its more illustrious partner [the 82d ABD]"**.<sup>3</sup>

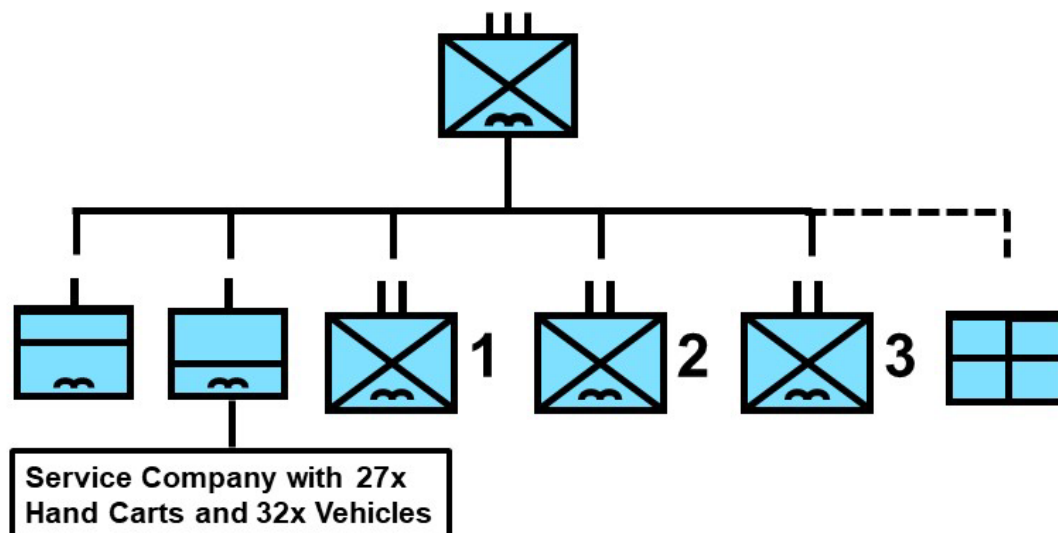
<sup>2</sup> CMH web site. <https://history.army.mil/documents/ETO-OB/101ABN-ETO.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Bando, Mark. *101st Airborne, The Screaming Eagles at Normandy* (2001), 8.

**Part 2: Airborne Infantry Regiment Organization and Equipment. Sources as noted in the foot notes.**

In March 1942, the Army activated the 506<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) at Camp Toccoa, GA. Col. Robert F. Sink commanded the regiment and he was a determined trainer and made enormous demands on his troops. He frequently required his troopers to run up Currahee Mountain and back. Veterans remember that it was “three miles up, three miles down.” Currahee was Cherokee for “Stands Alone” and it was soon adopted as the unit’s motto. At Camp Toccoa, Col Sink read in Life magazine about an Imperial Japanese Army Battalion that had set a world record for marching 100 miles in 72 hours. He declared that his men could do better and the 2/506<sup>th</sup> PIR marched 118 miles in 75 hours to set a new world record. In November 1942, the regiment moved to Fort Benning, GA to conduct parachute training. The regiment then moved to Camp Mackall, NC to conduct extensive tactical training and numerous night jumps. On 1 June 1943, the 506<sup>th</sup> was attached to the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division and participated in the Tennessee Maneuvers. The regiment arrived in the UK in mid-September 1943 and participated in numerous regimental and division exercises.

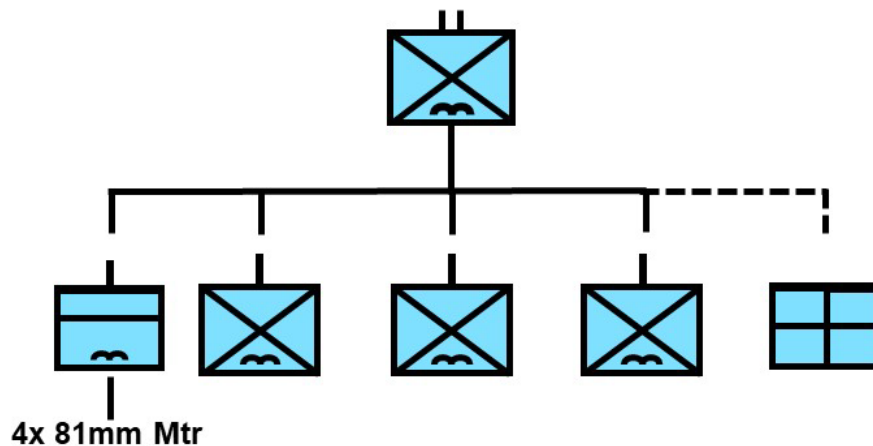
**Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) Organization:** A PIR consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Service Company, three Parachute Infantry Battalions, and the attachment from division of a small medical and chaplain detachment. The PIR, with only 1954 men, was about two-thirds the size of standard infantry regiment. The PIR had no regimental cannon or anti-tank company. Additionally it had only 34 vehicles whereas a standard regiment had 187 trucks and jeeps.<sup>4</sup>



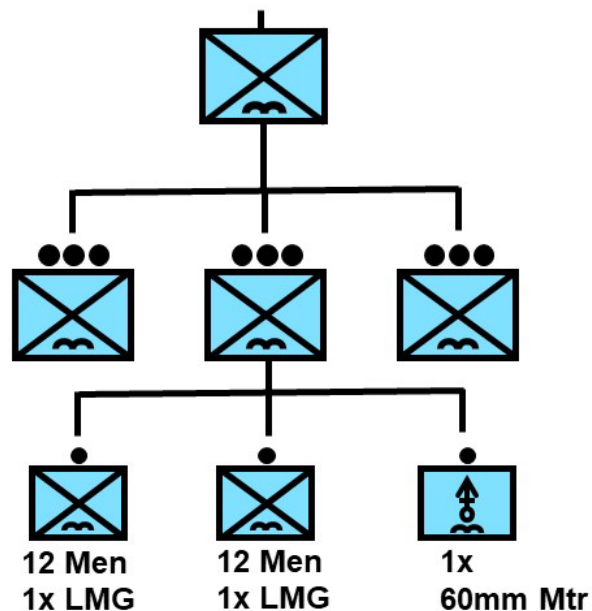
**Parachute Infantry Battalion Organization:** The PIR’s basic tactical unit was the parachute Infantry Battalion. The battalion consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Service Company, three Parachute Infantry Rifle Companies, and an attached medical detachment. The Parachute Infantry Battalion with only 37 officers and 512 enlisted, was about two-thirds the size of standard infantry company. The battalion had no heavy weapons company or vehicles. The HQ company did have four 81mm Mortars.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Zagola, Steven. US Airborne Divisions in the ETO 1944-45, 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 26-28.



**Parachute Infantry Company Organization:** The Parachute Infantry Rifle Company consisted of company headquarters and three rifle platoons. As with the regiment and battalion, the company was about two-thirds the size of the standard infantry company (8 officers and 119 enlisted) [Note: standard infantry company has only 5 officers]. The company had no heavy weapons platoon or vehicles. **The parachute rifle platoons** had two rifle squads and a mortar squad with one 60mm mortar [a standard infantry platoon had three rifle squads]. **The parachute infantry rifle squad** was the same size (12 men) as the standard rifle squad. Each squad had one .30-cal LMG versus one Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) in the standard squad.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Zagola, Steven. US Airborne Divisions in the ETO 1944-45, 28-30.

### **Part 3: A short biography of Colonel Robert F Sink – Commander 506th PIR.**

#### **Colonel “Bounding Bob” Robert Fredrick Sink (1905 -1965)**

- Colonel Sink was 39 at the Battle of Carentan.
- 1934: He joined the Army and obtained an appointment to West Point. He graduated in 1927.
- 1927 – 1933: Various assignments including: Infantry platoon leader, attendance to the Chemical Warfare School, and Civilian Conservation Corps.
- 1933-1937: Promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant (1933) and attendance to the Infantry School at Ft. Benning, GA. Various infantry assignments in the Philippines and Fort Huachuca.
- 1937: Promotion to captain and served as a company commander and regimental operations officer (25<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Ft Hauchuca).
- 1940: Assigned to the 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry (PIR).
- 1941: Promoted to major and commanded the 503<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Infantry Battalion.
- 1942 (1 Feb): Promoted to LTC and assigned to command the 506 PIR.
- 1942 (3 Nov): Promoted to Colonel.
- Sink commanded the 506th throughout World War II. He supposedly turned down two promotions during the war to remain with the unit and the regiment was sometimes referred to as the "Five-Oh-Sink". Post-war he would obtain the rank of LTG.

### **Part 4: The Operations of the 2d Platoon D Company, 506<sup>th</sup> PIR by Captain Ronald C Speirs.**

Ronald Speirs was a lieutenant in D Company, 506<sup>th</sup> PIR at the Battle of Carentan. His narrative not only provides details of his platoon in the fight, but also provides valuable details of the regiment's operations. **Remember** that the task is to discuss the operations of the 506<sup>th</sup> Infantry and not just Speirs' platoon.



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

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1948 - 1949

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D PLATOON  
D COMPANY, 506 PARACHUTE INFANTRY  
(101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION)  
IN THE VICINITY OF CARENTAN, FRANCE  
11-13 JUNE 1944  
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Platoon Leader)

Type of Operation described: AIRBORNE INFANTRY  
PLATOON ATTACKING IN HEDGEROW COUNTRY

Captain Ronald C Speirs, Infantry  
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO.II

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- A-9 The Carentan Causeway Fight  
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- A-10 506 Parachute Infantry Regiment in Normandy Drop  
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(20 July 1942-4 July 1945)  
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- A-13 Statement of Major Richard D. Winters, 8 December 1948,  
then Commander of E Company, 506 Parachute Infantry,  
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(Personal possession of the author)



- A-14 Statement of Captain F. T. Heyliger, 19 December 1948, former 81 mm Mortar Platoon Leader, 2d Battalion, 506 Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division in letter to the author. (Personal possession of the author)
- A-15 Statement of Captain Lewis Nixon Jr, 8 December 1948, former S2, 2d Battalion, 506 Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, in letter to the author.
- A-16 Statement of Captain Joe F. McMillan, 17 December 1948, former D Company Commander, 506 Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. (Personal possession of author)
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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2D PLATOON, D COMPANY  
506 PARACHUTE INFANTRY, (101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION)  
IN THE VICINITY OF CARENTAN, FRANCE  
11-13 JUNE 1944  
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Platoon Leader)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2d Platoon, D Company, 506 Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, in the battle for Carentan, 11-13 June 1944, during the invasion of Normandy.

The Allied invasion of Northern Europe took place on 6 June 1944. The initial landings were made by 21st Army Group, commanded by General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery. VII Corps, commanded by Major General J. Lawton Collins, landed at Utah Beach and V Corps landed at Omaha Beach, both under the First US Army commanded by Lt General Omar N. Bradley. To the east of the Americans, the Second British Army landed, commanded by Lt General Miles C. Dempsey.

Three hours before dawn on 6 June 1944, the 101st Airborne Division landed by parachute on the Cotentin peninsula. <sup>where</sup> 432 C-47 type airplanes were used for the division, carrying 6600 paratroopers. Three hours later, 51 troop-carrier gliders came in and at dusk on D-day an additional 32 gliders landed. The Glider Regiment of the division came in with the seaborne forces and joined after the airborne-beachhead linkup. As was to be expected in an airborne assault of a heavily defended area, losses in men and equipment were heavy. (1) When the German resistance on the exits to the beaches was broken, the division turned and drove toward the city of Carentan. All along the beachheads the Americans, British and Canadians attacked on a 60-mile front. (2)

(1) A-2, p.14; (2) A-1, p.243.



### THE GENERAL SITUATION

On 11 June the 101st Airborne Division, after six days of bitter fighting against a determined enemy, had accomplished all its assigned objectives and was in a defensive position on the high ground north of the city of Carentan. The defensive line followed the Douve river and extended from Chef-du-Pont on the west to the east where the Douve river joins the Atlantic. (3) (Map A)

The 4th Division, 12 miles to the north on the right flank of the beachhead, was engaged in heavy fighting in their attempts to reach the high ground northeast of Montebourg. (4)

*positions of Divs not shown on map*  
The 82d Airborne Division to the northwest was in defensive positions along the line of the Merderet river, with a bridgehead established in the area of La Fiere. The 90th Infantry Division, coming up from the beach, attacked through the 82d Airborne on the 10th and 11th, and on the evening of the 11th had cleared Amfreville, but was meeting violent resistance in its efforts to capture Pont L'Abbe. (5)

To the east, Omaha Beach extended for a depth of <sup>not shown</sup> 12 miles. The 1st Infantry Division was preparing to attack toward Caumont, and the 2d Infantry and 29th Infantry Divisions were moving to the south of Cerisy Forest and the Elle river. (6) The 2d Armored Division was in the process of landing on the beachhead, and those units of the division which had landed were in Corps reserve. The 29th captured Isigny on the 9th, and on the 10th the 327 Glider Infantry made contact with Company K, 175th Infantry, 29th Division near Catz. (7) The main attacks of the 29th were to the south, keeping east of the Vire river, and the link-up between VII Corps and V Corps was not strong and solid as should be the case. (8)

(3) A-2, p.78; (4) A-2, p.108; (5) A-2, p.128; (6) A-12, p.150;  
(7) A-8, p. 5; (8) A-12, p. 157.



At this time the Corps boundary ran just to the east of Carentan along the line of the Douve river, but on the next day it was moved east to the Vire river. (9) This change was to affect the 101st Airborne, as it was directed by General Bradley to seize <sup>INDEFINITE</sup> this area. The original missions of the division had been accomplished with the capture of the three bridges north of Carentan. (10)

In the British sector to the east of Omaha Beach, the 6th Airborne Division was defending its bridgehead across the Orne river, secured in their initial airborne drop by glider and parachute. The Commandos were attacking toward Cabourg, but with no success. There was savage fighting in the Caen area, where the British infantry divisions were attempting to capture the city against strong enemy resistance. The Canadians and British armor and infantry were attacking in the Tilly-sur-Seulles area, with the British 7th Armored Division preparing to attack the next day in conjunction with the US 1st Division on its right. (11)

#### THE PLAN OF ATTACK

The plan of Corps and Army on the 11th of June was to effect a solid junction of the Omaha and Utah beachheads by capturing the city of Carentan. These orders had come directly from General Eisenhower. The mission was given to the 101st Airborne Division. At the same time, V Corps was to attack from Isigny toward Carentan. (12) *(See map A.)*

101st Airborne Division activated these plans on the 10th of June by sending the 3d Battalion, 502 Parachute Infantry across the bridges on the road from St Come-du-Mont, <sup>*(See map B.)*</sup> passing

(9) A-12, p.156; (10) A-2, Map No.II; (11) A-12, p.143;  
(12) A-2, p. 77; A-19, p. 26.



through the outposts of the 506 Parachute Infantry on the bridges. The battalion had a murderous fight to move 500 yards past the last bridge, and the 1st Battalion of the 502 Regiment was brought to assist. Neither battalion was able to advance, taking very heavy casualties because of the strong enemy resistance and good defensive positions. The flooded fields to either flank made it impossible to flank the defenders. Simultaneously the 327 Glider Infantry crossed the Douve river three miles to the east and, after heavy fighting on the 10th and 11th, was in possession of the bridges to the <sup>INDEFINITE</sup> south. The glider troops were unable to advance into the city because of the canals which barred their way and the heavy fire being encountered. (13)

The division plan on the evening of the 11th was a move to encircle the city with the 506 Parachute Infantry closing around from the west through the battered 502 Regiment while the 501 Parachute Infantry Regiment was to swing south, then west of the 327th. Both regiments were to join on the high ground south of the city. <sup>Hill 30?</sup> Concurrently, the 327 Glider Infantry was to attack from their present positions directly into the city. (Map B) The importance of the attack can be measured by the presence of Lt General Courtney H. Hodges while the division order was issued. Brigadier General McAuliffe was in command of the attacking force. (14)

Colonel R. F. Sink, commander of the 506 Infantry issued his order to the assembled <sup>?</sup> company commanders and staff at 2200 hours. The 1st and 2d Battalions were to move out immediately in that order, while the 3d Battalion remained in position <sup>where?</sup> in division reserve. (15)

(13) A-2, p.78-89; (14) A-2, p. 89; (15) A-13, p.2.



### THE ENEMY SITUATION

The German High Command was well aware of the importance of Carentan to them, preventing as it did a junction between the American Omaha and Utah beachheads. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, Army Group Commander, personally stated that Carentan must be held. (16) The troops charged with this mission were the 6th Parachute Regiment, which had arrived in Normandy in June from the fighting in Russia. (17)

The platoon leader and his men were well aware of the German paratroopers fighting capabilities because the Germans had defended St Come-du-Mont and Vierville in the earlier fighting to the north. They attacked strongly when ordered, and were armed with a high percentage of automatic weapons. They wore special camouflage suits and paratroop helmets. Their morale seemed good. (18) This was possibly because fighting the Americans was preferable to fighting both Russians and cold weather. The German High Command did not share the American opinion of the 6th Parachute. Their War Diary for this period states, "The 6th Parachute Regiment has been fighting far better than expected."

The 17 SS Panzer Grenadier Division was being rushed up from the south of France. Elements of this division, along with the 6th Parachute Regiment, were the forces that struck Carentan on 12-13 June. The platoon leader and his men were also aware that there was armor in the vicinity of Carentan. While outposting a bridge on the St Come-du-Mont--Carentan road a few days previously, the platoon was fired upon by a German armored car

(16) A-12, p. 147 & 149; A-4, p.166; (17) A-12, p.112;  
(18) Personal knowledge.



coming from the direction of Carentan. One man of the platoon was killed. The car then withdrew to the city. (19)

The 17 SS Panzer Grenadier Division had been delayed and its tanks unloaded far behind the front lines because of the overwhelming Allied air attacks on the railroads and communications system. These delays had caused German Seventh Army to push an engineer battalion to Carentan, presumably to bolster the defenses by fighting as infantry. (20) The 17 SS Panzer Grenadiers <sup>DIV WAS</sup> were said to consist of good, tough troops, and had in addition to its organic artillery regiment, another battalion of artillery, a heavy howitzer battery, and another artillery group. (21)

#### THE TERRAIN

Carentan, a city with a population of 4000 people, is located 10 miles along the Douve river from where it enters the Atlantic. The city is connected with the Douve by a short stretch of canal. The buildings in the town are all very old and strongly built of stone. There is an excellent road and railroad net in the area, running directly through the city. Several paved highways intersect the city, including the main road to Cherbourg in the north. (22) The entire area, with the exception of the city, and to the southwest, was swampy and intersected with drainage ditches, streams, and canals. Nowhere does the terrain rise above 30 meters.

The drainage areas around the city, feeding into the rivers and canals, had been flooded, restricting movement to the roads, except to the southwest, where the terrain was dry and intersected with high Normandy hedgerows and deeply cut farm roads and paths.

(19) Personal knowledge; (20) A-12; p 148 & 149; (21) A-4, p.234 & 235; (22) A-4, p. 166; personal knowledge.



The highest point in this area is Hill 30, just outside the town to the south. (23)

#### THE PLATOON PRIOR TO THE ATTACK

The 2d Platoon of D Company, on the evening of 11 June, had been through six days of violent fighting, after a parachute drop which scattered the platoon over a large area. The platoon was very low in strength because of the many casualties suffered and the men missing from the parachute drop. (See Chart A) *Page 12*

The strength of the platoon at this time was one officer and 14 men. Each parachute infantry platoon was authorized two officers due to the expected casualty rate. My assistant platoon leader, Lt Watkins, was wounded by mortar fire a few days previously, and evacuated. He returned to the division later, and was killed in the fighting in Holland. (24)

The remainder of D Company was in bad shape also. The executive officer was killed on the parachute jump, and the company commander was killed by artillery fire a few days later. One entire planeload of men of the 1st Platoon was ditched in the English Channel, with the assistant platoon leader aboard. Lt McMillan, 1st Platoon Leader, took over the company, leaving no officers in his platoon. Both 3d Platoon officers were evacuated. The strength of the company was approximately 75 men. (25)

During the long night airplane flight into Normandy and the six days fighting which followed, the platoon had only one full night of sleep, and the men were physically and mentally affected. Our food consisted of K rations with which we had jumped, and a resupply of the same after contact with the beachhead was made.

(23) A-4, p.169; (24) Platoon rosters, casualty reports (Personal possession of the author); (25) Personal knowledge.



The Tables of Organization for an airborne unit at that time were different from the infantry. Some basic differences are the following:

- (a) Three identical rifle companies and a Battalion Headquarters Company in the battalion. In place of a Heavy Weapons Company were the 81 mm Mortar Platoon and Light Machine Gun Platoon in Battalion Headquarters Company.
- (b) D Company was a rifle company in the 2d Battalion, the others being E and F, and Battalion Headquarters Company. This point is emphasized because of the fact that D Company in the regular Infantry T/O is a heavy weapons company, while in the parachute troops it was a rifle company.
- (c) The rifle companies had three identical rifle platoons and a Company Headquarters, but no weapons platoon. Instead, each rifle platoon had only two rifle squads and a 60 mm mortar squad. Each 12-man rifle squad had a light machine gun team organic to it.

The 2d Platoon 60 mm mortar had been lost on the parachute jump, but no loss resulted because our depleted strength would not have allowed the platoon to operate it. Riflemen were needed much more than mortarmen. Only one light machine gun was carried because the platoon leader felt that riflemen were more valuable during the constant attacking in which we had been engaged. Our light machine guns during the Normandy Campaign were not provided with the bipod, but only a tripod, which was not satisfactory while attacking in hedgerow country. (26)

(26) Personal knowledge.



CHART A

PARACHUTE INFANTRY RIFLE PLATOON

Platoon Headquarters

Platoon Commander  
~~Asst Platoon Commander~~  
~~Platoon Sergeant~~  
Messenger  
~~Messenger~~  
~~Radio Operator~~

Rifle Squad

~~Squad Leader~~  
Assistant Squad Leader  
Machine Gunner, Justice  
~~Asst Machine Gunner~~  
~~Ammunition Bearer~~  
Scout  
Scout  
~~Rifleman~~  
Rifleman  
Rifleman  
Rifleman  
Rifleman

Rifle Squad

~~Squad Leader~~  
~~Asst Squad Leader~~  
Machine Gunner  
~~Asst Machine Gunner~~  
~~Ammunition Bearer~~  
~~Scout~~  
~~Scout~~  
~~Rifleman~~  
~~Rifleman~~  
Rifleman  
~~Rifleman~~  
~~Rifleman~~

60 mm Mortar Squad

~~Squad Leader~~  
~~Mortar Gunner~~  
Asst Mortar Gunner  
Ammunition Bearer  
~~Ammunition Bearer~~  
Ammunition Bearer

LEGEND

~~—~~ KIA  
~~—~~ Missing on Parachute Jump  
~~—~~ WIA During Previous Fighting

CHART A



### NIGHT MARCH TO HILL 30

<sup>2nd</sup>  
*when?* The battalion moved out in a column of companies with F Company leading, then E, Headquarters Company, and D. Previously, each company had been given a horse and cart to carry equipment and ammunition. Being airborne, we had no organic transportation. These carts were kept to the rear of the column to eliminate noise. (27) Headquarters Company was having trouble keeping up with the rest of the battalion because of their heavy loads of mortars, machine guns, and rocket launchers. A provisional anti-tank platoon in the company was armed with 2.36" rocket launchers.

The men moved slowly down the causeway in single file across the four bridges which span the river and canals. Up ahead, fires could be seen in Carentan, and the booming of the naval gunfire could be heard. The city was given a heavy shelling by the US Navy and other friendly weapons as we moved in. (28)

At the farmhouse where the 502 Parachute Infantry had the fierce battle with the German defenders during the day, the battalion left the road. The column moved across country keeping to the west of the town. The terrain began to rise gently and there were a great many fences to climb. At one gate there was a dead paratrooper, and every man in the long column stepped on him in the dark. The necessity for maintaining silence and keeping contact with the man ahead in the murk left no time for flank security. Headquarters Company ahead was having trouble with their loads, and D Company helped out. At this time the column was stopping and starting as the 1st Battalion up ahead probed their way through the dark, silent hedgerows. No enemy contact had been made as yet. (29)

(27) A-13, p. 1 & 2; (28) A-2, p. 89; (29) Personal knowledge.



Lt Winters, commanding E Company, upon reaching the front of his column found that contact had been lost with F Company ahead. He led his men on until reaching the railroad, and by sending scouts out was able to regain contact at 2400 hours. The two companies in the rear were the next to lose contact. Contact was regained and our slow uncertain progress resumed. Some firing was heard up ahead when the 1st Battalion struck a German outpost, but was able to push on. (30) The slow movement caused the tired men to doze off to sleep when the column stopped, and the officers in the companies had to wake men up and urge them forward. At 0100 hours the 1st Battalion reached Hill 30, the assigned objective, and the 2d Battalion stopped astride the Baupre road. (See Map B) D Company sent out security to the right and left along the road.

At 0230 hours the company commanders were called to the command post to receive the order for the attack for the next day. There was no sign of enemy activity, and the men slept where they dropped. There was much discussion at the battalion command post and the order was finally issued. The battalion S3, Capt Hester, gave out the order under a raincoat to the company commanders and staff. The 2d Battalion was to attack Carentan, while the 1st Battalion stayed at Hill 30. E Company was <sup>to be</sup> on the right and F Company on the left. The plan was to drive into town and join the glider troops attacking from the other side of town. D Company was to follow on the road to the right. (The nights were very short in Normandy at this time of year, but just before dawn F Company shot a 1st Battalion man who had strayed into their area. Dawn broke at 0400 hours.) At 0530 hours the

(30) A-13, p. 4.



company commanders were called back to the command post and given the time of attack, which was 0600 hours. As Lt Winters moved to the command post he was shot at twice by a sniper, without success. (31)

#### THE MOVE INTO CARENTAN (See map 15)

The regimental command post group, during the night movement, had strayed too close to town, and at the time of the dawn attack was actually closer to town than either of the battalions. Their situation was not realized until daylight, when they were fired upon from the town. The 1st Battalion was ordered by radio to send one company toward the firing and extricate the command post from its predicament. This was very quickly done. (32) The desirability of getting into town quickly caused the <sup>2nd</sup> battalion to move straight down the main road in a column of companies. F Company was leading, E, Headquarters, and D following in that order. The battalion light machine gun platoon was given the mission of covering the open fields to the north of the roads to protect the flank of the battalion. F Company crossed the LD about 20 minutes late, but was able to move into town without too much trouble. E Company following, however, was caught at the main intersection just outside of town, and had 10 serious casualties from mortar and rifle grenade fire. There was quite a bit of long-range machine gun fire coming down the road also, and the E Company commander, Lt Winters, was struck in the leg. He was not evacuated, however, and in spite of a stiff and painful leg, stayed until the end of the campaign.

The battalion was now being fired on from the houses east of the road to Carentan. Major Horton, battalion executive officer, ordered E Company to clear this area. This was done by

(31) A-13, p.5; A-16, p.1; (32) A-4, p. 229.



moving into a house on the west side of the road and firing rifle grenades and a light machine gun from the upper floor. The rifle grenadier put a direct hit on the German machine gun and soon the enemy withdrew. The machine gun was fired at the retreating enemy from the same position. (33)

By 0830 hours the battalion sector was quiet, although firing could still be heard towards the center of Carentan. Shortly before, F Company had met the glidermen attacking through town from the opposite direction. D Company was ordered to move into the city and did so, stopping just across the railroad at the intersection of the two main roads from the northwest and southwest. Carentan had suffered heavily from the pre-attack shelling; whole blocks were ablaze, while many buildings were in ruins. (34)

The 501 Parachute Infantry had difficulty with the flooded area to the east, but was able to swing around the town. Their final assault up the <sup>what hill against what opposition?</sup> hill was aided by 4.2" mortars and artillery, enabling the two regiments to join forces at Hill 30. (35) (Map B)

#### ATTACK WEST FROM CARENTAN (See map C)

Orders were issued from 101st Airborne Division Headquarters that afternoon for the 501 and 506 Parachute Infantry to attack south and west from the town. The objective of the 506th was Baupre, and of the 501st was Sainteny. When Lt McMillan, D Company commander returned from a battalion meeting with this order, he was heard with amazement by the platoon leaders. He agreed that the plan, to say the least, was an ambitious one. Four phase lines had been designated, but the platoon leaders, Lt Speirs, S/Sgt Long, and Sgt Rice, felt the company would be fortunate to reach the first. But the attack was necessary.

*Phase lines not shown map C*

(33) A-13, p. 9; (34) Personal knowledge; (35) A-4, p 232.



Otherwise, a German counterattack <sup>could</sup> would pin the Division in the city with the enemy in control of the high ground to the southwest. (36)

The 506 Parachute Infantry moved out with the 2d Battalion on the right of the Baupre road and the 1st Battalion on the left. The 2d Battalion was responsible for the road. The strength of the 1st Battalion at this time was 150 enlisted men. In the 2d Battalion the formation was D on the right from the flooded area to include the Le Hay du Puits railroad which ran due west along our advance. F Company was on the left and E Company in reserve. (37)

Within D Company the 2d Platoon was on the right, 3d on the left, and the 1st Platoon followed the 3d in support. The initial mission assigned the 2d Platoon was to clear the village of Pommenauque of enemy, while the 3d Platoon was to move astride the railroad embankment, keeping contact with F Company. (38)

As the company commander moved out with the left platoon, he met a lone French civilian coming from the direction of the enemy. Sgt Westphal, who had a smattering of French, interrogated the man, who said there were 1000 Germans back up the railroad. This was unhappy news to battered D Company but the company pressed on. (39)

The 2d Platoon found no enemy in the village; only a few frightened civilians. One Frenchman had been badly wounded by shellfire and the platoon leader advised him to go to the aid stations in Carentan. As the platoon moved out of the village to rejoin the company, it was brought under fire by long-range machine guns from the west. By infiltrating the men in rushes

(36) Personal knowledge; A-4, p.236; (37) A-16, p.1; Statement of Major K. H. Raudstein, 15 Dec 1948; (38) Personal knowledge; A-16, p. 1; (39) A-16, p.1



across the open fields, the platoon reached the shelter of the railroad embankment with no casualties. In the meantime, the 3d Platoon, about 500 yards down the railroad, had struck the enemy. A German machine gun, cleverly dug in between the railroad ties, opened up, killing the lead scout of the platoon. The 3d Platoon moved ahead by rushes until the volume of machine gun and rifle fire pinned them down. The terrain in the immediate area was extremely flat, with only small ditches and low hedgerows. To the left of the railroad were open fields to the woods, where the bursts of fire indicated F Company had met the enemy. The machine gun on the railroad continued to fire and was joined by other weapons. The 2d Platoon came up behind the 3d Platoon and extended the flank along the hedgerow to the flooded ground, but no progress was made. Lt McMillan was in touch with battalion by SCR 300 radio, and informed them of the situation. Battalion requested that he adjust fire for the airborne artillery pack howitzers with which they had contact. Lt McMillan could see this fire and he adjusted it on the woods and railroad to our front. Battalion called on the SCR 300 and ordered that the company was to hold in position and not attempt to advance. (40)

POSITION  
of 3d Platoon  
not shown

F Company, now at the village of Douville, was heavily engaged with the enemy. E Company stopped and dug in to strengthen the line to the rear. German rifle and machine gun fire was intense all along the line and the battalion was unable to advance in any part of the zone. The 1st Battalion, 506 Parachute Infantry, and the 501 Parachute Infantry, had struck the same enemy positions to the south and were unable to advance. 88 mm

(40)A-16, p.2; personal knowledge.



cannon fire was heard, and mortar fire began to strike our positions all along the line. Lt Winters saw that the gun crews of two attached 57 mm antitank guns were down in the ditches and making no attempt to set up. He ordered them to take the machine guns off their gun-towing  $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton trucks and start firing. This was done, but the firing was not accurate. (41)

The 81 mm mortar platoon of the Battalion moved into position at this time and began firing. The platoon was equipped with four mortars and was at about 75% strength. The platoon leader's order from the Headquarters Company commander was: "Set up anywhere and start firing!" Lt Heyliger set up on the forward slope of the hill behind the battalion command post. His guns were protected by the high hedgerow to the front, and were dug in. He commenced firing in 10 minutes and improved his positions later. The mortar platoon leader had his ammunition supply in horse-drawn carts, and these he sent to the rear along the road. The carts were 100 yards to the rear of the guns and also were protected by the hedgerows along the road. (42)

The machine gun platoon of the battalion was attached to the three rifle companies, one section per company. The platoon had suffered numerous casualties during the previous fighting and was able to man only six light machine guns. (43)

Just as it was growing dark, D Company had a call on the SCR 300 radio from battalion. The order was to pull back along the railroad and rejoin the battalion which had decided to consolidate for the night. This move brought D Company through E Company, and up on the right of F Company. The boundary between

(41) A-13, p.12; (42)(43) A-14, p.1.



companies was a deeply dug dirt road running back to the battalion command post. This area had very thick hedgerows with ditches on both sides and visibility was limited to the small fields between hedgerows. (44) E Company was in reserve at this time, 250 yards to the rear of D Company. (Map C) The firing had died down, F Company having withdrawn from Douville about 200 yards. Their positions were in an orchard to our left across the road. <sup>Position?</sup> Captain McMillan and the platoon leader made a reconnaissance of the D Company area. It was decided to put outposts at the junction of the hedgerows in the area as security for the night and allow the rest of the men to sleep. As the company commander and platoon leader checked the right flank of the night position, a squad of soldiers were seen running along the road at the <sup>northern south?</sup> other side of the orchard, toward the battalion. Night was creeping in and at first the platoon leader thought it was a friendly patrol, and waved at them from 100 yards distance. The last two soldiers stopped and looked toward the platoon leader, and he realized they were Germans passing our flank and headed for the battalion reserve line. The company commander ran to warn battalion, but before he could reach them the patrol struck near the battalion command post, which was in a stone house about 600 yards to the rear. The patrol was driven off by men of E Company and Headquarters. (45)

Lt McMillan arrived at the battalion command post and found that six light tanks were there to aid the battalion. The tank platoon leader had argued with Lt Col Strayer, the battalion commander, saying that it was getting too dark to move forward

(44) Personal knowledge; (45) Personal knowledge.



to D Company's positions, which the Colonel desired them to do. Lt McMillan was able to persuade the tank platoon leader that they could do some good out in the direction where the German patrol was seen. Lt McMillan took the seat of the bow gunner and the tank buttoned up and moved out. The other tanks stayed back and later did some firing which endangered E Company, forcing Lt Winters to run back and make them cease firing. The platoon leader's tank, guided by Lt McMillan, moved along the route of the German patrol, firing its 37 mm gun and spraying the hedge-rows with machine gun fire. The tank returned without seeing any enemy. (46)

The company commanders received their orders for the attack at 2300 hours. The attack towards Baupre was to be resumed at dawn on the next day, 13 June. D Company was to be on the right, F on the left, E in reserve. During the night contact patrols were to be sent out between companies. Lt McMillan decided that the first thing to be accomplished by the company at dawn was to capture the house on our right flank where the German patrol had been seen. This mission was given to the 2d Platoon. When it was accomplished, the 2d Platoon was to face to the <sup>indefinite</sup> left and place its right flank on the railroad. The 1st Platoon would then move out on the left of the 2d Platoon, keeping contact, followed by the 3d Platoon. Food and water <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ being issued at this time as Lt McMillan issued his order. The men filled the pockets of their combat suits with ammunition and grenades, and those who were not on outpost duty or contact patrol tried to get some sleep. All through the night machine-pistol firing could be heard, but very little artillery. The platoon leader briefed his men and tried to get some sleep without too much success, even though he was extremely tired. (47)

(46) A-13, p. 13; A-16, p. 2; (47) Personal knowledge.



### GERMAN COUNTERATTACK ON CARENTAN

Just before dawn the 81 mm mortar platoon commenced firing at the house which the platoon was to attack. They fired a heavy concentration, causing the roof of the house to be set ablaze. The platoon leader lined his men along the hedgerow facing down a gentle slope. At the bottom of the slope, seen through the orchard, was the house. The platoon was the size of a large squad but had for automatic weapons both an automatic rifle and a light machine gun. The platoon looked anxiously toward the house as dawn began to break, but no enemy could be seen. (48)

The platoon crossed the hedgerow "as skirmishers" and moved down through the regularly spaced trees. At that moment a heavy mortar and artillery concentration landed in the area. One of the platoon riflemen was struck by this fire and lay moaning on the ground. Back at the road where the company commander was calling battalion and notifying them that the platoon had moved out, the same barrage killed the radio operator and wounded another man. (49)

The platoon reached the stone wall surrounding the house at the bottom of the hill, vaulted the wall, and found the courtyard empty. As the platoon leader crossed the waist-high wall, he looked back up the hill and saw German soldiers running along the hedgerow he had just left. (Map D)

The machine gun was quickly mounted, firing through a gate in the stone wall. The automatic rifle was placed on the wall and heavy fire was rained on this threat. Screams of pain were heard, and many casualties inflicted on this unit of the enemy. The enemy returned fire but the stone wall protected the platoon.

(48)(49) Personal knowledge.



The platoon leader sent four riflemen to the other portion of the wall which faced directly toward the enemy-held west. They faced an open field except at the left where the orchard joined a hedgerow. At this moment a shower of grenades was received from the west where the hedgerow blocked our observation. The automatic rifleman was killed and the platoon leader struck by small fragments. A <sup>German</sup> machine gun began firing from the hill at the machine gunner as he lay exposed behind the gate. The platoon machine gunner was killed and the machine gun rendered useless. (50)

Back up the road, Lt McMillan had called battalion and notified them that the 2d Platoon was cut off, and his other platoon was being fiercely pressed from the front. Major Horton, battalion executive officer, told the company commander to fall back. Lt McMillan could see a field piece being dragged up behind the next hedgerow by the enemy. (51) D Company slowly fell back, leaving the 2d Platoon isolated.

On the left of the battalion, F Company was thrown back by a savage tank-infantry attack, which drove them back to the battalion reserve line. Here E Company had deployed along the road which crossed the battalion area. The F Company line joined E Company at the battalion command post house, which was now on the front lines. It was converted to an aid station by the battalion surgeon, Captain Neville, who was doing a marvelous job with the casualties that were pouring in. The battalion command post moved back down the road about 40 yards into the ditch and stayed there throughout the action. (52)

The attack of the 506 Parachute Infantry at dawn exactly coincided with the attack of the 17 SS Panzer Grenadiers and the (50) Personal knowledge; (51) A-16, p.3; (52) Personal knowledge.



6th Parachute Regiment. The attack stopped the American regiment in its tracks. The German intention was to recapture Carentan. The Berlin radio boasted that evening to all of Europe that the attack was successful and Carentan was again in German hands. (53)

The 1st Battalion was being attacked heavily to our left, and the 3d Battalion of the Regiment which had been in Division reserve was moved up to strengthen the 1st Battalion line. The 501 Parachute Infantry to the south was heavily engaged, but losing no ground. (54)

To the front of the 2d Battalion, the 2d Platoon of D Company was running low on ammunition. It was not possible to replenish the supply because E Company was firing on the courtyard from the rear. There was good cover behind the stone walls from flat trajectory fire, but a few hand grenades began to strike inside the courtyard, coming from the Germans to our front. Most of these were the small egg grenade type which can be thrown for long distances. The burst of a grenade caught another rifleman squarely, stretching him kicking and screaming on the stones of the courtyard. The platoon leader was able to do nothing for him because at that moment a squad of enemy soldiers burst out of the trees to our direct front. They were paratroopers, recognized by their distinctive helmets and uniforms. They were about 25 yards away and firing as they came. The platoon from behind the wall cut them down with aimed rifle fire and killed them all before any reached the wall. Despite this successful defense, the platoon leader now decided to withdraw. There was no protection against grenades in the courtyard and the burning house was throwing out a suffocating heat and smoke. By moving down a ditch single file

(53) Personal knowledge. (54) A-4, p.237.



the platoon regained the battalion line, 400 yards to the rear. The wounded man was left for dead, but managed to crawl back later. (55)

In the battalion area, the situation had not improved. F Company had fallen back again to the high ground 100 yards in their rear. This was done without authority from the battalion commander. It was a serious move, exposing, as it did, the <sup>of CO D?</sup>entire left flank of the battalion. D Company was now filling in the gap between E and F.

Our main difficulty at this point was getting the men out of the ditches and up into position on the hedgerow where they could fire at the enemy. Most of the men were frightened, but not panic-stricken. They just did not realize that in order to stop the enemy a continual wall of rifle and machine gun fire must be built up and maintained. There was plenty of ammunition in the line and no danger of running out. The Battalion S4, Lt Peacock, was running jeeploads of ammunition right up to the hedgerows by using the sunken roads. (56) The 81 mm mortar platoon continued to pour heavy concentrations on the hedgerows to the front of the battalion. German 88 mm guns were firing directly on the position at long ranges, but very accurately. (57) Several enemy tanks had been knocked out by the 57 mm antitank gunners and the rocket launchers of the battalion.

*Not shown on map.*  
The regimental commander, Colonel R. F. Sink, was aware of the precarious situation of the battalion, and had asked Division for aid. The 2d Battalion of the 502 Parachute Infantry was rushed up to the area and was in position to the right of the 2d Battalion, 506 Parachute Infantry, by 1000 hours. (58)

(55) Personal knowledge; (56) A-13, and personal knowledge.  
(57) A-13, p 17; (58) A-4, p 237.



### RELIEF BY 2D ARMORED DIVISION

Unknown to the battalion, help was on the way. Combat Command A, of the 2d Armored Division, had been rushed to the area east of Carentan to meet an expected enemy thrust which did not materialize. They had driven from the Omaha Beach area where they were under the control of V Corps. General Taylor, Commanding General of 101st Airborne Division, hearing that they were close by, requested their help from Corps. This was granted and the armored units began to arrive at 1030 hours. (59)

The situation had eased in the battalion area and no more infantry small arms fire was heard. German tanks, however, continued to fire and small amounts of artillery still fell in the fields to the front and rear.

At 1400 hours the Sherman tanks of the 2d Armored Division rumbled through the battalion lines, accompanied by armored infantrymen. This was a beautiful sight to the battered 2d Battalion. The tanks were firing as they advanced and doing a wonderful job. The tank-infantry team was able to move forward all the way to Baupre, the original objective of the 506 Parachute Infantry. (60) The 2d Battalion, along with the rest of the regiment, was relieved and moved into division reserve in Carentan.

During the day's action, the 81 mm mortar platoon had fired 1000 rounds of ammunition. Lt Heyliger reported that all the paint was burned off the barrels of his mortars. His platoon was down to 50% strength, about ten of his mortarmen being rushed into the line as riflemen to fill the gaps. The average range at which he had fired was from 300 to 500 yards. Most of his casualties were caused by rifle fire, but some from the direct fire of 88's.

(59) A-4, p 237. (60) A-2, p. 93.



He commented that if four of these 88 rounds had not been duds, he would have lost at least a section of men. (61)

D Company was down to a strength of 50 men, while E Company was reduced to 69 soldiers. (62) The men and officers who remained were physically and mentally exhausted. The amazing thing was that there were not more cases of combat exhaustion. Only a few of these were reported. The majority of the men fought bravely, even though the companies were forced to yield ground. The battalion had done its part in defending Carentan, and the men and officers were proud of their job.

The strategic importance of the action of the 101st Airborne Division in holding Carentan can best be summed up by quoting from the report of the Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

"On the 12th Carentan fell. The Germans made desperate but fruitless efforts to recover the town and reestablish the wedge between our forces. Our initial lodgement area was now consolidated, and we held an unbroken stretch of the French coast from Quineville to the east bank of the Orne." (63)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

*high level  
A/B doctrine*

Airborne troops are a strategic weapon. The present doctrine of their use visualizes employment in mass, and for short violent combat operations, using surprise as a vital factor. The 101st Airborne Division was in Normandy for one month, during which time many trained and expert parachutists were killed or evacuated because of sustained ground combat. The point in issue is not that the lives of parachutists are more valuable than

(61) A-14, p.1; (62) A-16, p.3; A-13, p.19; (63) A-19, p.26.



*for high level.*

the lives of infantry soldiers. That is not true. The point is that the mere presence of airborne troops in a theater of operations forces the enemy to constantly fear a sudden onslaught from the sky where and when he least desires it. The enemy commander must deploy more troops to guard his lines of communication and vital areas in the rear. The "vertical envelopment" which airborne forces have brought to the art of war has compelled caution by even the most aggressive enemy. But when the airborne forces are employed for long periods as infantry, the enemy can make his plans without fear of the airborne threat.

Sufficient artillery and armor support was lacking throughout the operation. This lack of sufficient organic supporting arms was a factor in the initial success of the German counter-attack on 13 June.

On 11 June, when the Carentan battle began, the 2d Platoon had eleven men less than each of the other two platoons of D Company. The company commander should have reassigned men from the other platoons to bring up the strength of the 2d Platoon. This problem does not arise in the infantry because of the arrival of replacements, but airborne units do not receive replacements in combat. When platoons are assigned identical missions in combat, the members of an understrength platoon are forced to fight more fiercely and are in greater danger of sudden death.

*new information*

There were no decorations awarded to any member of the platoon for bravery in this action. The platoon leader is to be criticized for not submitting recommendations for awards for his men. However, seven of the men of the platoon were promoted to the rank of noncommissioned officer upon the arrival of replacements in base camp.



The T/O&E of airborne units during World War II was totally lacking in motor transport from the company level on down. The rifle platoon was weak in having only two rifle squads. The light machine gun was equipped with a tripod but no bipod. The separate tripod was almost useless when units were attacking in hedgerow country. The above inadequacies in the airborne T/O&E have since been corrected. They are mentioned to illustrate the difficulties under which the platoon fought.

*Letter  
was sent  
on this matter*  
During the night march to Hill 30 the platoon moved in single file and had no flank security out. The reasons for such a formation were the tired condition of the men and the blackness of the night. *risks taken by* The (fatal results of) such carelessness are obvious. One enemy rifleman could have cut the entire battalion column.

All companies of the battalion at one time or another on the night march lost contact with the unit ahead or to the rear. A double file formation within the companies would have cut the length of the column in half and tightened control of it. Dispersion should have been maintained by connecting files between units down to platoons. These connecting files would be briefed in detail as to their duties, thus minimizing the possibility of loss of contact.

The security elements of D Company on the night of 12 June were far too weak. The night defensive positions of the 2d Platoon consisted of the men digging in along one hedgerow. A normal perimeter defense should have been set up around the four sides of the field. If a German night attack had been launched in strength, the battalion would undoubtedly have been overrun. The failure to set up a night defense was due to the fact that the platoon leader and his men were exhausted and did not realize the gravity of their situation.



*not previously translated*

The dawn attack of the platoon, coinciding as it did with the German tank-infantry assault, was doomed to failure. It seems certain that if the regiment had not moved from its positions, but had been in defense at dawn, that our casualties would have been much lighter and greater damage inflicted on the attackers. The battalion 81 mm mortar platoon had left their positions and were standing in the road ready to follow closely behind the assault companies when the Germans struck. Thus they could not immediately support with mortar fire. (64) Division G2 either was not aware of the coming German attack, or his knowledge was not acted upon.

The platoon leader is to be severely criticized for failing to carry the wounded man back as the platoon withdrew from the house on the 13th. His assumption that the man was dead does not excuse him. His expectation of another enemy assault and his fear that this would find the platoon with no ammunition were the factors causing this grave mistake.

The platoon did not make use of their hand grenades to full advantage. During the fight at the house, grenades should have been thrown into the wooded area to the left front. The casualties that would have resulted in the enemy grenade throwers would have aided the defense. The American hand grenade is a powerful weapon, but the writer feels that a light round grenade would be more valuable. It could be thrown for great distances. More grenades could be carried by the individual. This was the principle of the German egg grenade, which was a successful type.

The crucial point of the German attack on 13 June was just after the entire 2d Battalion had been thrown back to the battalion

(64) Personal knowledge; A-14, p.2.



reserve line. The men of the battalion did not realize that to prevent the Germans from assaulting a second time, a large volume of fire had to be built up on the enemy positions, even though no point targets appeared. The average soldier dislikes exposing himself to fire his weapon without a definite target in sight; however, area fire, and the self confidence gained by firing his own rifle are vital to the defense and the attack. This is the principle behind "marching fire".

The F Company commander was relieved of his command because of his unauthorized withdrawal to positions behind the battalion reserve line. The writer is not personally aware of the enemy situation in the F Company area, but the dangerous situation which this withdrawal created could easily have smashed the entire battalion position. The failure of F Company commander to inform battalion of the situation in his area and request permission to withdraw was a serious violation of tactical doctrine.

#### LESSONS

The following lessons were brought out by the operation:

1. Strategic use of airborne troops is essential. The attrition of trained parachutists in extended ground combat operations as infantry is wasteful and should be avoided.
- ✓ 2. When assigning missions to lower units, the commander must consider the comparative strength of his units as reduced by previous casualties.
3. Bravery in combat must be recognized by decorations and awards. Morale is raised and incentive provided to perform well in future combat.
4. Tables of Organization and Equipment must be constantly revised to increase the fighting strength and capabilities of the unit.



✓ 5. Flank security during night movement is essential,  
regardless of the effect on speed and the physical condition  
of the men.

✓ 6. In night movement all men must be alert to keep con-  
tact both to the front and to the rear.

✓ 7. When in contact with the enemy at night, one-half of  
the unit must be alert and in position to repel attacks.

8. Intelligence agencies must keep commanders informed of  
the enemy <sup>capabilities</sup> indications. Commanders can then adjust their plans  
in accordance, avoiding the possibility of surprise by the enemy.

9. Wounded men <sup>should</sup> must be carried along when a unit is forced  
to withdraw, if the situation permits.

✓ 10. The hand grenade should be used to full advantage in  
close combat. The present hand grenade is too heavy for long  
throws, and, too, it cannot easily be carried in sufficient  
number for a sustained fight.

✓ 11. Soldiers must learn that an enemy assault is repelled  
by fire power alone. When individual targets cannot be located,  
continuous area fire must be used.

12. Units are forbidden to withdraw without orders however  
desperate the situation. Unit commanders must keep higher head-  
quarters informed of the amount of enemy pressure, and request  
authority to withdraw prior to movement.

## **Assignment #5**

### **The 327<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiment (GIR)**

**First Read Study Instructions and Core Reading: Battle of Carentan, Normandy (7 to 13 June 1944) Virtual Staff Ride (Provided as a separate document)**

During the field study, you are responsible for all the actions of the 327<sup>th</sup> GIR from D+1 (7 June 1944) to D+7 (13 June 1944). Discuss the actions and decisions from both your own and the unit's perspective. You should be prepared to discuss:

- Unit organization and equipment, training, and morale.
- Key decisions, why those decision were made, and the consequence of the decision.
- Unit's actions and accomplishments.

**This supplemental reading contains four parts:**

- **Part 1: Overview of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division**
- **Part 2: 327<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiment Organization and Equipment**
- **Part 3: Commanders of the 327<sup>th</sup> GIR in Normandy**

**Part 1: Overview of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division** "Screaming Eagles." Additional information can be found at [https://www.vw2-airborne.us/18corps/101abn/101\\_overview.html](https://www.vw2-airborne.us/18corps/101abn/101_overview.html)

**"The 101<sup>st</sup> Division has no history, but has a Rendezvous with Destiny."<sup>1</sup>**

Gen. W.C. Lee (the first commanding general of the division),  
August 1942

In August 1942 the U.S. Army activated the 101st Airborne Division at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. In October 1942 the division moved to Fort Bragg, North Carolina and started its training to qualify for its new airborne mission. In the spring of 1943 the division conducted its first division maneuvers and then that summer participated in the Army Tennessee maneuvers (primarily jumping from trucks).

In early 1944, transferred to England and continued its training. On 5 February General Lee suffered a heart attack and returned to the United States. In March, BG Maxwell D. Taylor, former commander of the 82d Airborne Division Artillery, assumed command of the division. Soon after that the division underwent another organizational change when the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, was attached to the 327th Glider Infantry to operate to operate as the regiment's third battalion. The division was now training with the task organization with which it would fight in Normandy.<sup>2</sup>

- Headquarters Company
- Reconnaissance Platoon

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<sup>1</sup> Bando, Mark. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne at Normandy (1994), 9.

<sup>2</sup> CMH web site. <https://history.army.mil/documents/ETO-OB/101ABN-ETO.htm>

- 101st Signal Company
- Military Police Platoon
- 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment
  - HQ and HQ Company
  - Service Company
  - 1/501<sup>st</sup> PIR (35x Off, 495x Men, 44x LMG, 21x Bazooka, 9x 60mm Mtr, 4x 81mm Mtr)
  - 2/501<sup>st</sup> PIR – same as 1/501<sup>st</sup>
  - 3/501<sup>st</sup> PIR– same as 1/501<sup>st</sup>
  - Attached Medical and Chaplin Detachment
- 502d Parachute Infantry Regiment – same organization as the 501<sup>st</sup>
- 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment – same organization as the 501<sup>st</sup>
- 327th Glider Infantry Regiment (8x 57mm AT Gun)
  - 1/327<sup>th</sup> GIR (23x Off, 621x Men, 18x BAR, 8x LMG, 12x MMG, 3x HMG, 28x Bazooka, 12x 60mm Mtr, 6x 81mm Mtr)
  - 2/327<sup>th</sup> GIR – same organization as the 1/327<sup>th</sup>
  - 1-401<sup>st</sup> GIR – same organization as the 1/327<sup>th</sup>
- 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion
- 101st Parachute Maintenance Battalion
- 81st Airborne Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
  - 3 Anti-tank batteries (24x 57mm (6pdr) AT Guns)
  - 3 Anti-Aircraft batteries (36x 50-cal. HMG)
- 101st Airborne Division Artillery\*
  - 321st Glider Field Artillery Battalion (12x 75mm Pack Howitzer)
  - 907th Glider Field Artillery Battalion (12x 75mm Pack Howitzer)
  - 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion (12x 75mm Pack Howitzer)

\*The Glider FA BN's may have contained some M3 105mm Pack Howitzers in lieu of the 75mm Pack Howitzers)
- 326th Airborne Medical Company
- 801st Ordnance Company
- 426th Quartermaster Company

In England, the 101st participated in three major exercises. On the last exercise, the division's mission was to capture the causeways leading away from a simulated beach. Ironically, the regiments were scattered at the wrong drop sites. Nevertheless, the units regrouped and accomplished their assigned tasks successfully.

The "Screaming Eagles" lacked combat experience, but had been extensively trained and contained many combat veterans. Although lightly equipped, it was a strong formation with four infantry regiments (standard infantry division had 3 regiments). The men of the division were determined and highly motivated to accomplish the mission. Cornelious Ryan in his classic work *"The Longest Day"* stated **"The 101<sup>st</sup> on its first combat jump was fiercely determined not to be outdone by its more illustrious partner [the 82d ABD]"**.<sup>3</sup>

**Part 2: The 327<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiment (GIR) Organization and Equipment.** CMH PUB 100-12, 88, 90-92] and other sources noted in the foot notes.

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<sup>3</sup> Bando, Mark. *101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, The Screaming Eagles at Normandy* (2001), 8.

In the summer of 1942, the Army organized the 327<sup>th</sup> as a standard infantry regiment in the 82nd Infantry Division (Camp Claiborne Louisiana). Then in August 1942, the 327<sup>th</sup> was designated as a Glider Infantry Regiment and reassigned to the newly formed 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Soon after that, the regiment moved to Ft. Bragg NC and started training with the gliders. At Fort Bragg there were numerous fights between the glider-troopers and paratroopers of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR). The paratroopers believed the glider-troopers didn't have the "Right Stuff" to be Airborne Soldiers. The points of contention included:

- The glider men, unlike the parachutists, were draftees.
- They did not receive extra pay or jump boots, and were required to wear canvas leggings like the infantry.
- The glider men tended to be older than the parachutists, usually in their late twenties or early thirties. Colonel Harper (2d commander of the 327<sup>th</sup>) believed the age was an advantage and that they were more effective fighters than the younger, wilder, and more impulsive paratroops.
- A paratrooper received \$55 per month extra as hazardous duty pay. The glider men received no extra pay and one of their chants was **"No flight pay, no jump pay, but never a dull moment!"** After the Normandy invasion, when glider troops suffered heavier casualties per unit in the direct assault than parachutists, hazardous duty pay was authorized.

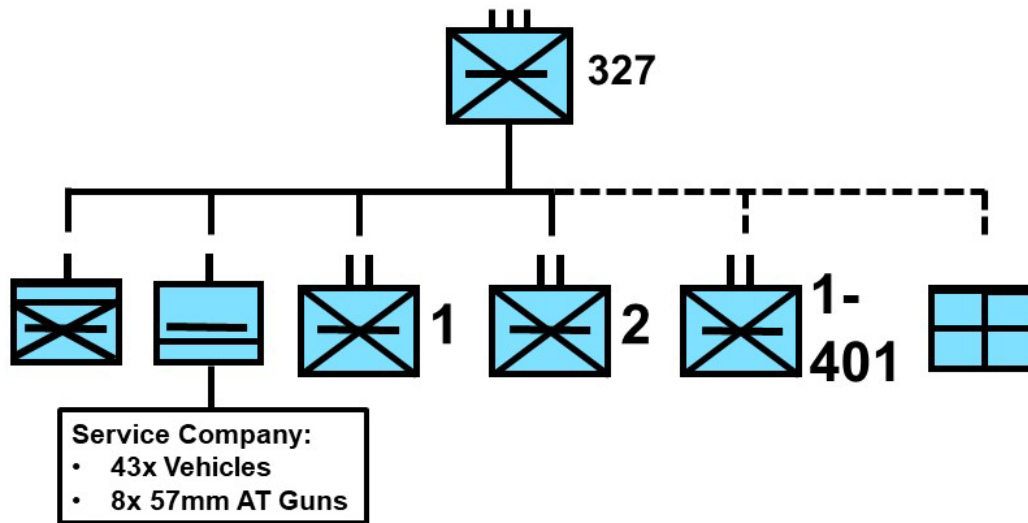
As with the parachute regiments, the glider regiment executed a grueling training program. The leaders and troopers of the 327<sup>th</sup> were determined to prove that they did have the "Right Stuff."

**Glider Infantry Regiment (GIR) Organization:** Initially the GIR consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Service Company, two Glider Infantry Battalions, and the attachment from division of a small medical and chaplain detachment. The 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, operated as a third battalion of the 327th Glider Infantry in Normandy. Even with the attachment of a 3d Glider Infantry Battalion, the GIR, with only 99 officers and 2223 enlisted, was about two-thirds the size of standard infantry regiment. The GIR, like the PIR, had no regimental cannon or anti-tank company. The Service Company did have an anti-tank platoon with 8x 57mm AT guns.<sup>4</sup> The Glider Infantry Battalions also had only two rifle companies each instead of the normal three. Additionally the 327<sup>th</sup> had only 43 vehicles whereas a standard infantry regiment had 187 trucks and jeeps.<sup>5</sup>

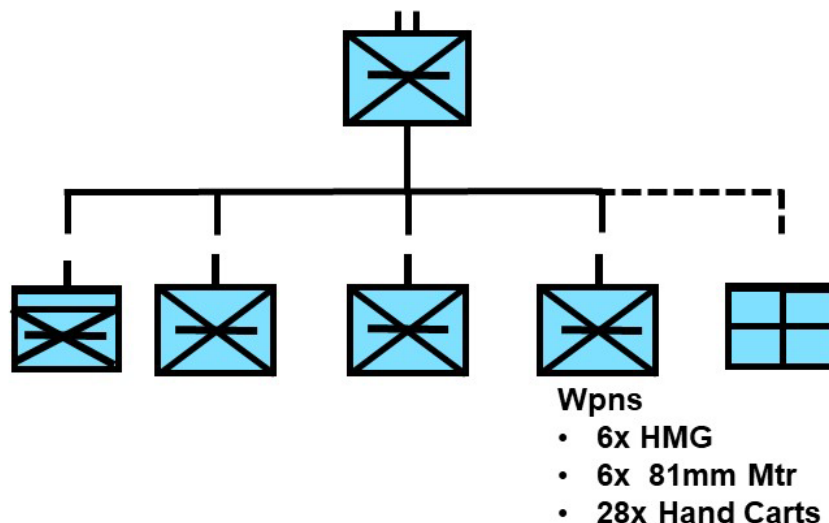
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<sup>4</sup> Zagola, Steven. US Airborne Divisions in the ETO 1944-45, 33. The authorization was for 37mm AT guns. But the GIR obtained the British airborne version of the 57mm AT gun for operations in Normandy.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 31-33.



**Glider Infantry Battalion Organization:** The GIR's basic tactical unit was the Glider Infantry Battalion. The battalion consisted of a Headquarters and Headquarters Company, two Glider Infantry Rifle Companies, a Heavy Weapons Company and an attached medical detachment. The Glider Infantry Battalion with only 23 officers and 621 enlisted, was about 17% larger than a Parachute Battalion (549 men), but significantly smaller than a standard infantry company. The battalion did have a heavy weapons company with six water-cooled .30-cal heavy machineguns and six 81mm mortars.<sup>6</sup>



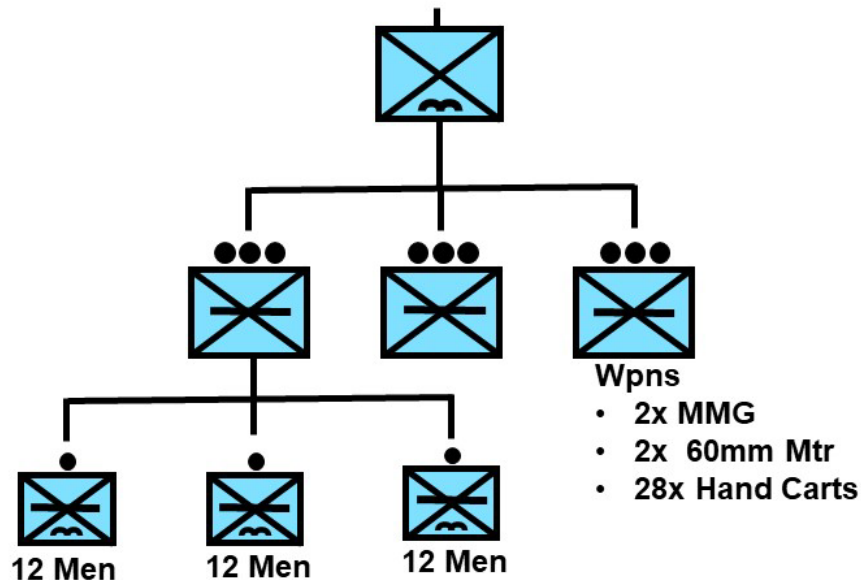
**Parachute Infantry Company Organization:** The Glider Infantry Rifle Company was organized differently than both the PIR Company and the standard infantry company. It consisted of company headquarters and only two rifle platoons (PIR and standard infantry had three rifle platoons). The company did have a weapons platoon with two air-cooled .30-cal medium machineguns and two 60mm mortars.<sup>7</sup> **The glider rifle platoons** had three standard rifle

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 33.



squads. The authorization allowed for only Garand Rifles. However, it was standard within the regiment to include a .45 cal SMG and Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) in each squad.<sup>8</sup>



### Part 3: Commanders of the 327<sup>th</sup> GIR in Normandy

1. Colonel George S Wear was the initial commander of the 327<sup>th</sup> GIR. He remained with the regiment through 11 June, when command was turned over to Col. Joseph H. Harper. Although not official, the men of the 327th understood that Wear was replaced because of friendly-fire artillery casualties while crossing the Douve River on 10 June 1944.
2. Col. Joseph H. "Bud" Harper commanded the 401<sup>st</sup> GIR. The Army split his regiment prior to the invasion of Normandy. His 2d Battalion was sent to the 82d Airborne and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion to the 10th Airborne.
  - a. He assumed command of the 327th Glider Infantry the afternoon of the 11<sup>th</sup>. He remained with the regiment throughout WWII.
  - b. At Bastogne in the Battle of the Bulge, he is remembered for translating BG McAuliffe's one word response of "Nuts" to the German emissaries demanding the surrender of the besieged 101<sup>st</sup> ABD.

<sup>8</sup> Zagola, Steven. US Airborne Divisions in the ETO 1944-45, 32.

## **Assignment #6**

### **The 17<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Grenadier Division (17<sup>th</sup> SS PzGD)**

### **Goetz von Berlichingen – The Iron Fist Division**

The Division was named after Götz von Berlichingen (1480–1562). He was a knight that lost a hand in battle during the Bavarian War of Succession (1504). His hand was replaced with an iron fist and this was adopted as the symbol of the 17<sup>th</sup> SS PzGD.

**First Read Study Instructions and Core Reading: Battle of Carentan, Normandy (7 to 13 June 1944) Virtual Staff Ride (Provided as a separate document)**

**Discuss the actions and decisions from both your own and the unit's perspective. You should be prepared to discuss:**

- Unit organization and equipment, training, and morale.
- Key decisions, why those decision were made, and the consequence of the decision.
- Unit's actions and accomplishments.

**This supplemental reading contains three parts:**

- **Part 1:** A short biography of *SS-Gruppenfuhrer* (MG) *Werner Ostendorf* – the commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> PzGD.
- **Part 2:** An overview of the organization, training and morale of the 17<sup>th</sup> PzGD.
- **Part 3:** 17<sup>th</sup> PzGD Timeline
- **Part 4:** 17<sup>th</sup> PzGD Narrative

**You may enhance these readings with your own research.**

**Part 1: SS-Gruppenfuhrer (MG) Werner Ostendorf –the commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> PzGD.**  
Additional information can be found at [https://military.wikia.org/wiki/Werner\\_Ostendorff](https://military.wikia.org/wiki/Werner_Ostendorff)



**Werner Ostendorff** (15 August 1903 – 1 May 1945)

- In 1934, he joined the *Luftwaffe* and trained as a pilot
- In 1935, he transferred to the combat arm of the SS. He initially served as a tactics instructor. Later served as a machinegun company commander and an anti-aircraft battery commander.
- 1939 to 1942, he served as the chief of staff for the first SS division “*The Das Reich.*”
- June 1942, he won the “Knight’s Cross” for leading a counter-attack on the Russian Front. The Knight's Cross was Nazi Germany’s highest award. Awarded for extreme battlefield bravery or outstanding military leadership.
- 1942 to 1943, he commanded a regimental size Kampfgruppe in Russia. Awarded the “German Cross in Gold.” Awarded for acts of bravery or achievement in combat. The award ranked higher than the Iron Cross First Class but below the Knight’s Cross.
- 1943, He was promoted to a division commander and assigned to command of the 17<sup>th</sup> PzGD.

**Part 2: An overview of the organization, training and morale of the 17th PzGD. Primarily from CMH Pub 7-4-1, *Cross Channel Attack.***

***SS-Gruppenfuhrer (MG) Werner Ostendorf’s, 17th PzGD*** like all *SS divisions* it was substantially stronger than the corresponding army division. However, its combat strength in fact was much less than it appeared on paper.

- The division had 17,321 of its authorized 18,354 personnel (94%).
- Its six rifle battalions were organized into two regiments. Four battalions had improvised motor transport, the other two BNs had bicycles. There were very few armored halftracks.
- The 17th SS Tank Battalion had 37 assault guns in lieu of tanks.

- The *17<sup>th</sup> SS Reconnaissance Battalion* should have had an armored car company, but it appears that it instead deployed with only its infantry companies mounted in light *VW Schwimmwagens*.<sup>1</sup>
- The division also had an anti-tank BN with 12x Marder III tank destroyers, an anti-aircraft BN with 12x 88mm guns, and an artillery regiment with towed 105mm howitzers.

The *17<sup>th</sup> PzGD* primary weakness was its lack of training and experience.

- Its officer and NCO strength was less than 60%. Additionally, its officers and soldiers lacked training and combat experience, Normandy was their “baptism of fire.”<sup>2</sup>
- The training deficiencies encompassed the entire division, but were very noteworthy in the artillery regiment. Its officers lacked the skills needed to concentrate fires or fire hedge to hedge to support attacking infantry. It was noted that the artillery regiment fought a “private war without paying any attention to the infantry.”<sup>3</sup>

<b>Part 3: 17<sup>th</sup> PzGD Timeline.</b> Primarily from CMH Pub 7-4-1, <i>Cross Channel Attack</i> .
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- **3 October 1943**, Hitler authorized the formation of the division. It did not start coming together until **15 November** in France and was not fully organized until early June. Created from replacement units and conscripts. There was a significant reliance upon Romanian conscripts and French equipment. By May, the division still lacked any assault guns or anti-tank guns. A battalion of assault guns and anti-tank guns joined the unit during its deployment to Normandy.
- **On 1 June**, the *17<sup>th</sup> PzGD* was in Thouars (268K S of Carentan). The division started its move toward Carentan on 7 June. A combination of allied air attacks, lack of fuel, and indifferent transportation greatly delayed the move.
- **On 10 June**, the lead elements of the division bumped into 182 82d ABN troopers at the village of Grainges (about 8K SE of Carentan). These troops had been dropped almost 30K SE of their assigned drop zone and decided to hold the village. The rightwing of the *17<sup>th</sup> PzGD* was not able to push past the village till the **12<sup>th</sup>**.
- **10 and 11 June**, other elements of the *17<sup>th</sup> PzG* approached Pierriers (about 16K SW of Carentan). During the *6<sup>th</sup> FJR* evacuation of Carentan, a *17<sup>th</sup> PzGD* liaison officer met with *Maj. Heydte* to inform him the division was in route to defend the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Isby-Normandy, 86.

<sup>2</sup> (Lefevre, 160)

<sup>3</sup> Isby-Normandy, 127.

However, combat troops and resupply would not be available until **13 June**. *Maj. Heydte* decided it was too late to cancel the evacuation.<sup>4</sup>

- **12 June**, the Germans planned a counterattack with the *17<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Grenadier Division* to retake Carentan.<sup>5</sup> The attack was delayed till the **13<sup>th</sup>** because the assault gun battalion, which had moved north by train, was held up in the assembly areas by air attacks.<sup>6</sup>
- **13 June**, the *17<sup>th</sup> SS PzGD* and the *6<sup>th</sup> FJR* established their forward CP at Douville Mano and planned the main effort to attack eastward on the Baupre-Carentan into the city.<sup>7</sup>
  - The *17<sup>th</sup>*'s commander was confident of success and in a discussion with *Von der Heydte* (6<sup>th</sup> FJR) stated, **"After Carentan has been captured, would you prefer to continue advancing towards Isigny or wheel to the left toward Ste-Mere-Eglise?"**<sup>8</sup>
  - The *17<sup>th</sup> SS*, in typical SS style, attacked without reconnaissance or artillery prep in order to gain tactical surprise. The division commander believed the surprise appearance of armor would overwhelm the US Airborne.<sup>9</sup>
  - The 101<sup>st</sup> operations report stated:
    - **"The (US) 501<sup>st</sup> was immediately pinned down by heavy small arms fire, but managed to hold its position."** At least one assault gun did break through the 501<sup>st</sup>'s line but was knocked out near La Billionnaire.<sup>10</sup>
    - **"The (US) 506<sup>th</sup> was again struck by heavy enemy counter-attack, and forced back to within 500M of the west edge of the city."**<sup>11</sup>
    - Lt. Speirs recalled (D/2/506<sup>th</sup> Airborne), **"F Company was thrown back by a savage tank-infantry attack, which drove them back to the battalion reserve line. Here E Company had deployed along**

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<sup>4</sup> (Isby-Normandy, 126).

<sup>5</sup> Goetz von Berlichingen was a famous folk hero of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>6</sup> (Harrison, 365)

<sup>7</sup> (Isby-Normandy, 146)

<sup>8</sup> (Isby-Normandy, 147)

<sup>9</sup> (Zaloga, 74)

<sup>10</sup> (101<sup>st</sup> op report, 110)

<sup>11</sup> (101<sup>st</sup> op report, 110)



the road...It was a serious move, exposing...the entire left flank of the battalion.”<sup>12</sup>

- In the fighting, E/2/506<sup>th</sup> Airborne destroyed an enemy assault gun with a bazooka.<sup>13</sup>
- The US 2d Armored Division stopped and pushed the 17<sup>th</sup> PzGD back to their start line.
- The 17<sup>th</sup> PzGD reported the loss of 446 men: 79 killed, 316 wounded, 61 captured or missing. Plus they lost 7 StugIVs and another 13 damaged.<sup>14</sup> The inexperienced SS troopers referred to the 2d AD as “**Roosevelt’s Butchers.**”
- General Max Pemsel, Chief of the General Staff, 7th German Army, noted: “The failure of the attack launched by the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division in the direction of Carentan was due not so much to the lack of air support as to the inadequate training of the young division, which ran into the simultaneously launched counterattack.”

**Part 4: 17<sup>th</sup> SS PzGD Narrative.** Below is a condensed version of the article found at <https://weaponsandwarfare.com/2020/05/26/the-iron-fist-17th-ss-panzergrenadier-division-gotz-von-berlichingen/>

### The Iron Fist 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division Götz von Berlichingen



*17. SS commander Werner von Ostendorf (left) plans the attack on Carentan with the 6<sup>th</sup> Fallschirmjäger Regiment commander Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heyde (centre).*

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<sup>12</sup> (Speirs, 23-25)

<sup>13</sup> (Amborse, 100)

<sup>14</sup> (Zaloga, 75)

**Combat experience:** By the time of D-Day, the *17th SS* was not fully combat ready and although some 17,321 men strong it lacked forty per cent of its Officers and noncommissioned Officers (NCOs). The division also lacked transport and by mid-May had just 257 trucks and towing vehicles. *SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 17* (anti-tank battalion) had received none of its Jagdpanzer IVs and the *SS-Panzer Abteilung 17* (tank battalion) had just nine self-propelled guns.

By early June the situation was little better, with its armored forces consisting of forty-two StuG IV assault guns equipping *SS-Panzer Abteilung 17* and twelve Marder self-propelled guns with *SS-Panzerjäger Abteilung 17*.

**Movement to Carentan:** On 6 June, the *17th SS* divisional HQ was still at Thouars and it would take a week for Ostendorf to get the division to the front. On 7 June, the division received orders to depart its marshalling area and head for Normandy. Under the designation of Operation Mimose (or Mimosa) the *17th SS Panzergrenadier Division* redeployed from the area of General Chevallier's 1st Army, south of the Loire, to the sector of General Dollmann's 7th Army, facing Lieutenant General Omar N Bradley's US 1st Army at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula.

The complete lack of transport meant that the division could only be moved piecemeal, and the most readily-available unit was *SS-Panzeraufklärungs Abteilung 17* (reconnaissance battalion). A Kampfgruppe had to be scraped together from three battalions. Nonetheless the division moved off in good spirits, happy at last that the uncertainty was over and that it would be seeing action. The Allies though were determined to make the deployment difficult.

Only four of the division's six infantry battalions moved on 7 June, the other two battalions had to rely on bicycles. Similarly, a flak battery and the artillery units began to move on the evening of the 7th, while the assault guns and self-propelled guns were loaded onto trains. Allied fighter-bombers quickly pounced on the freight cars, claiming one StuG IV for the loss of two aircraft. Three days later they had been unloaded between Montreuil and la Feche and were rumbling toward Mayenne.

Some units, including *SS-Flak Abteilung 17* and *SS-Pioneer Bataillon 17*, had to be left behind to protect the crossings over the Loire at Saumur, located between Angers and Tours. The flak battalion did not deploy to Normandy until the end of June and then I Battery and its 8.8 cm guns were left to guard the bridges for the want of prime movers or tow trucks. Similarly the pioneer battalion, some 726 men, did not reach Normandy until mid-July.

A divisional Staff Officer recalled how moving in daylight would soon draw the unwanted attentions of the Allied fighter-bombers: "Our motorized columns were coiling along the road towards the invasion beaches. Then something happened that left us in a daze. Spurts of fire licked along the column and splashes of dust staccatoed the road. Everyone was piling out of the vehicles and scuttling for the neighboring fields. Several vehicles were already in flames. This attack ceased as suddenly as it had crashed upon us fifteen minutes before. An hour later the fighter-bombers were back inflicting even more damage, wrecking the division's anti-tank guns and even more vehicles." *Werner Ostendorff's* men gave up the daylight advance and abandoned

the road trying to camouflage their vehicles and equipment in the nearby farms and farmland. The 17th SS would travel toward the battle at night.

**Into action:** By 8 June *SS-Panzeraufklärungs Abteilung 17*, although under fighter-bomber attack, reached Balleroy, halfway between St Lô and Bayeux. Two days later it went into action for the first time when it was committed to *the 352nd Infantry Division's* sector north of St Lô. At the same time *SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 37* arrived at La Chapelle southeast of the city. While the reconnaissance battalion was sent to help the *352nd Infantry* near Caen, Ostendorff went forward to make contact with the *6th Fallschirmjäger Regiment* defending Carentan.

Late in the afternoon of the 11<sup>th</sup>, the 6<sup>th</sup> FJR abandoned Carentan, just as the *17th SS* were preparing to relieve them. The US 101st Airborne Division captured Carentan on 12 June and the *17th SS* adopted defensive positions to the south. The first real test of strength came on the 13th when the *panzergrenadiers*, supported by the StuG IIIs, counterattacked the 101st Airborne southwest of the town.

*Ostendorf* and his operations Officer, *Obersturmbannführer Konrad*, set up their command post at St-Sébastien-de-Raids southwest of Carentan to direct the attack. At 0700 on the 13th *Sturmgeschütz* of *SS-Panzer Abteilung 17* got to within 500 yards of Carentan before being stopped by elements of the US 2nd Armored and 101st Airborne Divisions. Similarly *SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment 37* made no progress and by midday it was clear the attack on Carentan had failed. By the 15th the division had suffered 456 casualties in its struggle with the Americans.

# **Assignment #7**

## **Combat Command A, 2d Armored Division (CCA, 2d AD)**

### **“Hell on Wheels”**

In late 1940, George Patton organized a 600-mile road march from Ft. Benning to Panama City, FL and back (6,500 men and 1,200 vehicles). Soon after this a Columbus, GA newspaper coined the nicknamed “Hell on Wheels.” The name was then repeatedly used by the Ft. Benning newsletter and then adopted by the division.

**First Read Study Instructions and Core Reading: Battle of Carentan, Normandy (7 to 13 June 1944) Virtual Staff Ride (Provided as a separate document)**

**Discuss the actions and decisions from both your own and the unit’s perspective. You should be prepared to discuss:**

- Unit organization and equipment, training, and morale.
- Key decisions, why those decision were made, and the consequence of the decision.
- Unit’s actions and accomplishments.

**This supplemental reading contains three parts:**

- **Part 1:** A short biography of Brigadier General Maurice Rose– the commander of the CCA, 2d Armored Division.
- **Part 2:** An overview of the organization, training and morale.
- **Part 3: CCA 2d Armored Division Operations Report Part 4: PzGD Narrative**

**You may enhance these readings with your own research.**



**Brigadier General Maurice Rose (26 Nov 1899 – 30 Mar 1945)**

- The son and grandson of rabbis from Poland. Later as a MG he was, at the time, the highest ranking Jew in the U.S. Army. He was not openly religious and claimed in his Army records to be Protestant.

- In 1916, he lied about his age to enlist in the Colorado National Guard after graduating from high school hoping to serve in the Pancho Villa Expedition. His commander discharged him six weeks upon discovering he was underage.

- He enlisted again in 1917 and was selected for officer training (again lying about his age to meet the minimum age requirement for officer candidate school).
- World War One:
  - Participated in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.
  - Wounded at the Battle of St. Mihiel. Left the hospital without permission to rejoin his unit. The hospital reported to his parents that he had died of his wounds.
  - Discharged June 1919.
- Between Wars:
  - In 1920 he rejoined the Army. Commissioned as 2d Lt. Soon after that adjusted to 1<sup>st</sup> Lt in recognition of his wartime rank. The following day, he was promoted to captain.
  - Served in various assignments: instructor, ROTC, and cavalry company commander.
  - 1936, promoted to major and served as instructor.
  - 1937 graduate of the Command and General Staff College.
  - 1940 graduate of the Army Industrial College.
  - 1940 to 1941, LTC commanding and armor battalion and then executive officer of the new organized 1st Armored Brigade of the 1st Armored Division.
  - Early 1942, chief of staff for the 2nd Armored Division.
- North Africa and Sicily:
  - 1942-1943: chief of staff for the 2nd Armored Division. In North Africa he observed that the German tanks had superior armor and firepower. He therefore developed the tactic of task organizing the Combat Commands into smaller task forces.

Rose suggested to General Harmon (the division commander), "We'll have to outmaneuver them, sir." "But how? Our Lees are slow as hell, and our Shermans are all going to the Limeys," Harmon replied, "Task forces, sir. Small



task forces are the answer. Combat commands are too unwieldy. But a small task force can move quickly ... in direct combat, we hit them from the sides or rear where their armor is weakest." He drew formations on a sheet of paper. "Speed and more speed is the solution."

- 1943 promoted to Brigadier General and assigned to command Combat Command A, 2nd Armored Division. Commanded in combat throughout the Sicily Campaign.
- Nov 1943: 2d Armored Division moved to the UK to prepare for operations in Normandy.

**Part 2: An overview of the organization, training and morale of CCA, 2d Armored Division.** Primarily from CMH Pub 7-4-1, *Cross Channel Attack*.

1. MG Edward Brooks' **2d Armored Division "Hell on Wheels"** was a veteran unit that had fought in both the North Africa and Sicily Campaigns.<sup>1</sup>
  - a. 1940 and 1941, extensive training: Panama City road-march, Tennessee Maneuvers, Louisiana Maneuvers, and the Carolina Maneuvers.
  - b. 1942, select cadre train with the British Army in North Africa.
  - c. 1942, Operation Torch into North Africa.
  - d. 1943, Operation Husky into Sicily.
  - e. 1944, Reorganization and training in the UK
2. The division was well trained, fully equipped, and superbly led as it prepared for the Normandy Operation. It was organized as a "heavy" armored division with over 300 tanks organized into two armored regiments. Other core elements of the division included: an armored infantry regiment, three armored field artillery BNs, an armored engineer BN, and an armored reconnaissance BN.
3. The division tasked organized to fight into 3 brigade size battlegroups called: Combat Command A (CCA), CCB, and Combat Command Reserve (CCR). CCA was the first echelon to land on Omaha Beach and was the command engaged at Carentan.

**Part 3: CCA 2d Armored Division Operations Report.** <https://www.17th-engineers.nl/nl/headquarters-combat-command-a-cca-2nd-armored-division-june-1-to-june-30-1944/>  
Additional information is added in the boxes. Source is CMH Pub 7-4-1 unless noted different.

- **9 June:** CP at T6769000 awaiting arrival of elements of CC "A". Guides and CC "A" markers posted on routes to assembly area. Units landed started at 1200B and dewaterproofed wherever possible, then proceeded to assembly area. All elements of Second Armored Division under Command of CG, CC "A" pending arrival of CG, 2 AD. By

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division, 3.

092400B the lead elements of the command unloaded and were in assembly vicinity Mosles, France (T7083, where CP opened 2000B, leaving rear CP on the beach.

- **10 June:** Operations consisted of unloading and assembling the elements of the command. At 1130B, on order CG V Corps, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn 41<sup>st</sup> AIR (-) [Armored Infantry Regiment] was attached to 29<sup>th</sup> Inf Div with the mission of securing the bridgehead on the west bank of the VIRE river, vicinity Auville-Sur-Vey (T4684). Troops in position by 1700B. Rcn/66 sent patrols to south of CC “A” assembly area to contact friendly troops. Troops unloaded and under command of CG, CC “A” by 2200B.
  - a. Hq CC “A” (-)
  - b. 66<sup>th</sup> AR (-)
  - c. 41<sup>st</sup> AIR (-)
  - d. 17<sup>th</sup> Armd Eng Bn (-)
  - e. Hq Div Arty (-)
  - f. 82d Armd Rcn Bn (-)
  - g. 14<sup>th</sup> Armd FA Bn
  - h. Co A, 48<sup>th</sup> Armd Med Bn
  - i. Co A, 2 Ad Maint BN
- **11 June:** 3/41 (-) attached to 29<sup>th</sup> Inf at T4684, patrolling to south and west. 82d Rcn patrolling to south of CC “A” assembly area in contact with friendly troops. CG 2 AD and advance CP landed and took command. CC “A” reverting to normal composition. CG 2 AD assumed control or route marker from beach to assembly area. Units move to new assembly area and CP, CC “A” opened at 1700B vicinity Le Marias (T6775) (less 3/41(-) to rejoin CC “A” when released by V Corps. Operations of 3/41: Bn I&R plat moved out at 1030B to reconnoiter south of RR in directions of Montmartin-En-Graignes (T4681) in conjunction with a patrol from 101s A/B Div. Engaged by enemy MG fire and plat H Co, 915 Pz Gr Regt. Our losses 1 Off & 1 EM killed.
- **12 June:** CC “A” troops continued to unload and move to assembly. 3/41 detached from 29<sup>th</sup> Inf Div and returned under command CG, CC “A”, closing in assembly area at 1400B.
- **13 June:**
  - a. In assembly vicinity Le Marais (T6775). At 0005B, CG, CC “A” ordered by CG 2 AD to report to CG V Corps for orders. 3/41 and 2/66 alerted for movement, and moved out at 0315B toward Isigny, having been given the mission of securing the bridgehead west of town and cleaning out the Germans to the south thereof. Closed in assembly vicinity Les Veys (T4685) at 0630B and patrols sent to the south toward the RR and Montmartin (T4685) supported by fire from battleships TEXAS, NEVADA, AND ARKANSAS.
  - b. On order CG 1<sup>st</sup> US Army mission was changed and this force attached to 101<sup>st</sup> A/B Div vicinity Carentan (T3984): remainder of CC “A” ordered by CG 2 AD to move and join forward elements in Carentan areas, leaving assembly area at 1030B.

Coordinated attack with 101<sup>st</sup> A/B Div at 1400B by 3/41 and 2/66 and by 1/66 and 101 A/B at 1730B, supported by 14<sup>th</sup> FA Bn.

- The US First Army directed the 2d AD to send a Task Force with 1x tank BN and 1x Infantry BN to support the 101 ABN.<sup>2</sup> However, MG Brooks (2d AD) was hesitant to piecemeal his command and received permission to send BG Maurice Rose's Combat Command A (CCA) to support the 101<sup>st</sup> ABD. CCA consisted of:
  - 3/41st Armored Infantry Regiment (+)
  - 66th Armored Regiment (-)
    - 1st Battalion
    - 2nd Battalion
  - 17th Armored Engineer Battalion (less B, D and E companies)
  - 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
  - 92nd Armored Field Artillery Battalion
- At Carentan, CCA tasked organized into two Task Forces to conduct combat operations. The 2-66 Armor and 3/41AIR (-) attacked in the north through the 506<sup>th</sup>. 1/66 (-) Armor attacked in the south in support of A & B/1 /501<sup>st</sup>/101<sup>st</sup> ABD. (CCA Overlay with Operations report)

Sgt Don Marsh (CCA, 2d AR) remember, "At the hour for attack," **Sergeant Don Marsh remembers, "the 101<sup>st</sup> troopers held fast in their foxholes ... General Rose, alone, in his 'pink' riding breeches, polished boots and tank jacket, walked up, ignoring danger ... He came upon an airborne captain and demanded, 'Get your men out of their holes and moving forward. We're attacking, and I mean right now!' The troops successfully counterattacked, buoyed by CCA."**<sup>3</sup>

LT Dick Winters, E Co, 2/506 remembered, "...what a wonderful sight it was to see those tanks pouring it to the Germans with those 50-caliber machine-guns and just plowing straight from our lines into the German hedgerows with all those fresh infantry soldiers marching along beside the tanks." Lt Welsh also E Company remembered, "Oh, what a mess they made."<sup>4</sup>

A tanker from the 66<sup>th</sup> AR Regt wrote home, "Hardly off the beach, we pushed inland to support the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne... Fortunately we made it just in time."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, 21-22.

<sup>3</sup> Greene, Dr. Ralph C. The Triumph and Tragedy of Major General Maurice Rose, Armor Magazine March-April 1991, 22. [https://static.dvidshub.net/media/pubs/pdf\\_33962.pdf](https://static.dvidshub.net/media/pubs/pdf_33962.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> (Ambrose, 101).

<sup>5</sup> (Ptak, 50).

- c. Enemy was driven back with heavy losses. CC “A” elements assembled for the night. Estimated enemy losses – 500 killed, 2 PWs taken. Our losses – Personnel – 2 Off & 6 EM killed, 6 Offs & 39 EM wounded, Tanks – 3 M4, 1 M5 (US). CP set up for the night SW of Town at T388635 in an abandoned house. A/66 securing Isigny bridgehead.

The 502d followed the northern TF and helped to secure the Manor of Donville. Dead soldiers, from both side, laying in a farm path near the manor were crushed by the tracks of retreating German tanks and attacking US tanks. This resulted the survivors nicknaming the place “**Bloody Gulch**”.

The 501<sup>st</sup> with the southern TF attacked along the Carentan-Periers highway and pushed to the outskirts of Auverville. (Smith, 24)

The *17<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Grenadier Division* reported the loss of 446 men: 79 killed, 316 wounded, 61 captured or missing. Plus they lost 7 Stug IVs and another 13 damaged.<sup>6</sup> The inexperienced SS troopers referred to the 2d AD as “**Roosevelt’s Butchers.**”

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<sup>6</sup> (Zaloga, 75)

## CCA Operations Report Overlay

