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DEBRIEFING CONFERENCE - OPERATION NEPTUNE

On the evening of Thursday, 13 August 1944, a debriefing conference was held at the Glebe Mount House, LEICESTER. During the course of the conference each commander present who had commanded a unit the size of a battalion or larger of the 82d Airborne Division in Operation NEPTUNE, was permitted to talk for not to exceed ten minutes. Instructions were that each officer was to speak freely, without restraint, regarding any aspect of the operation during its airborne phase and to offer any criticism he saw fit in the interests of improving our operational technique in future combat. Commanders spoke in the order in which it was planned that they would land. Their statements were taken down verbatim as far as possible. At the conclusion of the conference, considerable free-for-all discussion took place of which no record was kept. However, it did have a bearing on the conclusions attached to this report.

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Lt Col VANDERVOORT, 2d Bn., 505th Pchgt Inf:

I feel that I have very little for posterity at the moment. The flight until we hit the French coast was quite uneventful for my Battalion. We reached FRANCE intact and in formation. As we came in across the coast we saw a little ack-ack from the ground and I thought that there were some planes from the 101st Division shot down. As we approached our DZ the pilot informed me that he could see our T. The pathfinder group had been dropped essentially where they should have been, a little further inland, and they only displayed two T's. One was lighted when we dropped. The pilot I had was extremely reluctant to come down to the correct jumping altitude. We came in at 1400 feet, and our speed was excessive. I talked to the crew chief and asked him to slow down. We went through a bit of scud as we came in and it caused the formation to break slightly. At the time I thought the Germans had smoked the area. I lost two platoons from Company "E". The green light was turned on about 45 seconds before we reached the LOUVE River. I told them to turn it off. We dropped pretty well on our DZ. I, myself, was a quarter of a mile from the DZ, and I had a little hard luck on the landing and banged up my foot. I watched the battalion come in and they were well spread out, the ships being too high and too fast. Within fifteen minutes after I got on the ground I started putting up some green flares that worked out well. We encountered no resistance from the enemy at night, only some fire from ack-ack around our DZ. Some members of the battalion were dropped in STE MERE EGLISE and were engaged in a fire fight at once. There was movement of vehicles on the road, one of the first things I heard being vehicles moving on a road to the South. I went North to the nearest hedgerow. I think it was about 0410 in the morning when I felt I completed the assembly sufficiently so that I could move out on our mission and take the town of NEUVILLE au PLAIN. In the meantime, the regiment had told me to stand by. The news from STE MERE EGLISE was so vague to the Regimental commander that he had me stand by. General RIDGMAN happened to be in my CP during that period and he also directed me not to move without consulting him. It was not until daylight that I received orders to move. We actually started moving at 0600. Later my mission was changed to STE MERE EGLISE, and from there on it was essentially a ground operation. The 2d Battalion met no resistance as we went into the town. A small group of Germans attacked our left flank, but one platoon from "D" Company was enough to drive them off, and as I said, it was a ground operation thereafter. It was 0141 when I landed.

- Q. Apparently it was 0730 when you were ready to move out?
- A. We started moving at 0600. Reorganization was only partially completed, but when I reached the town I had a battalion less two platoons. In the meantime, I picked up quite a few people from the 101st Division, and some men from other regiments which I carried along for several days and then returned them to their organization.
- Q. Do you think that your lighted T was a great factor in your getting to your destination?
- A. It meant a great deal to us. I saw planes coming in from various directions, from 40 degrees to 90 degrees off course. They came in close to the T, and dropped their personnel. I think some planes from the 101st circled and dropped their people there.
- Q. Did you attempt to use your green assembly lights at all?
- A. None of my lights worked; anticipating that, I had a flashlight I had fixed up with green facing and I flashed that.
- Q. None of your lights worked. Why?
- A. I don't know, I had no opportunity to inspect them. I hid them, but later couldn't find them.

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Q. You say you had orders at 0410 to tell where you were. How did you get those orders?

A. We had radio contact with the regiment very early. Regimental S-3, after daylight, came by my CP, and as I remember, the Regimental Commander was also there at one time.

Q. What did you think of the challenging system?

A. Right at the moment, sir, I would make no essential changes. I would like to impress upon the Air Corps the necessity for coming down to the proper altitude, and flying at the proper speed. We have stories at the battalion from men who spoke to pilots later on, quoting pilots as follows: "—and the last time I looked at the air speed indicator we were going at 190 miles per hour." It was the hardest opening I ever had. I have jumped at 130 and 140 miles per hour, but this was the roughest I ever had. It tore off some of my equipment.

I made a positive identification of where I was by sending an S-2 patrol to the nearest house. The Frenchman there gave us much valuable information of the enemy.

I believe that the greatest single contribution to the assembly of the 505 was the superior job done by our pathfinder teams, Air Corps and parachute.

Lt. Col. Krause, 3rd Bn., 505th Inf:

I, too, experienced the same as Col. Vandervoort. The trip was very uneventful on the way over. As we crossed the coast of FRANCE, I talked to my pilot on the interphone, and said, "It looks like a good deal". I looked back and saw my ships behind me. Just about that time we hit the soup, (fog or cloud), and we started to see fires on the ground, a little ack-ack and we had some fighters come in on us and fire at us. An element of three ships was directly under us and not more than thirty feet below. One came up from under and passed miraculously between my ship and the left wing ship. I would say that in the next three minutes I came as close to being crashed in the air as I ever hope to. We tried to keep our formation, but ships constantly over ran each other. The pilot called for evasive action and we split up. Some went high, some went lower, others right and left. This split our formation and we were well spread. Just about two or three minutes before drop time we saw this green T. It was a Godsend and I felt that I had found the Holy Grail. I would say that I dropped from over 2,000 feet. It was the longest ride I have had in over fifty jumps, and while descending, four ships passed under me and I really sweated that out. Just after I landed, a mine bundle hit about 80 yards away from me without a parachute and exploded. We tried to orient ourselves very quickly, and ran upon a conical shaped field, which I remembered as the conical shaped field that we had studied during our preinvasion briefing. Northeast of this should be the Battalion DZ Command Post which was to be in a wooded area on the Southeast end of the DZ. Further investigation proved this to be true and then I knew exactly where we were, or thought I knew where we were, and I told the people all around me. Because we were so split up, we did not have too much organization of the units. We even had some men from the other Divisions contacting us. I composed two groups, one under Captain DeLong and the other under Lt. Isaacs and we began to form, but not too rapidly. I sent out patrols to guide in assembling groups and about that time we saw the green flares. I could not find my original signal which I was supposed to use and likewise alternate signals were gone. We had absolutely no visual signals to assemble on. Our method of assembly was to roll up on our sticks. Our sticks formed up in good shape. The next problem was that of people running through our area wanting to know where they were. Major McGinity asked where we were and I told him whereupon he put his map away and headed for the bridge with Captain Dolan and most of Company A. We were starting to get close to 200 men in about an hour and a half of assembling. One of my officers landed in the town of STE MERE Eglise. On his way out he saw a group of Germans and witnessed several chutists taken prisoner and others killed, so he headed Northeast to join us.

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On his way he picked up a slightly inebriated Frenchman, who stated that this was STE. MERE EGLISE, and we knew then exactly where we were. It was just before four when I made the decision to move out to STE. MERE EGLISE. We moved in from the Northwest on the road that the man had said the troops had departed from. It was mostly transportation and service units that had remained in the town when the bulk of the forces moved into field bivouac several days prior to D-Day because of the bombing. Captain DeLong and I went in toward the Northwest section of town. The civilian in a white coat was carrying an American mine while guiding the way. We made him go out first so that he would not lead us into any gun position. We met no opposition, but we did meet some members of the other units, and they were all heading for their missions. I would say that we arrived in town just before light and had no opposition at all, mainly due to the covered route the civilian took us by, but in the center of the town there were spasmodic shots that became ever increasing. My instructions to my men were not to fight with any other unit but to fight with me in the town. This proved worthy because all my men concentrated on getting to the town and the bulk of my Battalion was with me by mid-morning. The remaining enemy troops in the town were apparently scared out of the town. The force which we had was just a jumbled group and in order to secure the town as quickly as possible we endeavored to establish road blocks around the town as hastily as possible, which we did. One important thing we were going to do was to cut the communication lines. We thought we found it, and severed the main cable from the town. As more troops came in we put up road blocks around the whole town. We had about one fourth of the force we expected at about five O'clock. A message was sent to the Regimental CP. This message was dispatched at about five O'clock.

Q. About how many men did you have in the town?

A. We had 120 men and groups of 40 and 60 came in rapidly throughout the morning. At about 10 O'clock 350 men of the Second Battalion came in.

Q. What happened to your two artillery pieces?

A. One we never found, sir, and one was in action before noon.

Q. Did you have color assembly lights to use?

A. Yes sir. I think in the next operation for assembly we should try to get weather balloons, and stick the light up on that.

Colonel Ekman, Commanding Officer, 505th Parachute Infantry:

I have nothing much to add about the ride over, except the 1st Battalion Commander, Major Kellum, not being here, being KIA, I can give his story. Regimental Headquarters and the 1st Bn. got in the planes, and just about five or six minutes prior to taking off a huge explosion occurred. Someone had set off a Gammon Grenade which in turn set off all the ammunition. I was initiated into combat that way. I saw a lot of dead bodies lying around after the explosion. Our ride over was uneventful except for the ack-ack which came pretty close to our planes. Jumping out after going through the clouds, I baled out at about 0204 hrs. according to my watch. I had a very hard opening, because we were going at least 150 miles per hour. I do not remember the landing because I was pretty dazed. I was in the midst of a field of cattle when I landed. No other personnel was around me. It took me about ten minutes to get out of my chute. I found out later that I had landed just a few hundred yards South of FRESVILLE, which is well Northwest of STE. MERE EGLISE. I started out and the first man I met was Major Thomas of the 508th, and he was treating a few men who were injured. I wandered around still dazed for about two hours. Just before four o'clock I ran across Major Norton, and we debated about where we were. About that time we found a Frenchman and from him we got the direction to the town and found that there were a number of Germans there. We started out to our area and on the way we ran into the

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1st Bn. under Major Kellum, heading toward the bridge and his area. "A" Company had very speedily organized and was already engaging the enemy just East of the bridge near STE MERE EGLISE. Rest of the 1st Bn. continued on their mission to get on to the assembly area, they being the Regtl. Reserve. We went further towards the CP and ran into the 2nd Bn. At that time, the situation being a little obscure, we told Lt. Col Vandervoort to stand fast until further orders. At the location of the CP was Gen. Ridgway, and we speedily established the CP. It was a little after seven o'clock when I heard that the 3rd Bn. was in STE MERE EGLISE, that the 2nd Bn. was moving toward their objective, and that the 1st Bn. was well down toward the bridge. The situation was well in hand. Later on the 2nd Bn. fell back into STE MERE EGLISE and with the 3rd Bn. organized for the defense of the town against superior enemy forces which were attacking from the North, Northwest and South. When action in STE MERE EGLISE ended, these two units were all mixed up due to the speed with which they had to move to meet enemy threats.

- Q. Would you recommend any changes if you were to do it over again?
- A. I see no reason to change the assembly plan except to get the assembly lights where they can be seen. I also came in from a higher altitude and a greater speed than I should have, and believe the Air Corps should receive more training in dropping our units.
- Q. In your area you had two lighted T's, is that correct?
- A. Yes, sir. The only comment I have on the operation is about the speed, the altitude of the planes and the assembly lights. One plane load returned to the base because of some trouble. The men joined us about a week later in a C-47. When I was on the field I was sure our plane had not come in from the proper direction. I noticed planes coming in from all directions and all altitudes. The assembly lights did not work in this case. I saw some flares which I believed Col. Vandervoort put up.
- Q. How long were you in the fog?
- A. Right after crossing the coast and, I would say, maybe three miles from ST. SAUVIER we hit a heavy cloud bank and it was then that we lost control of the formation. Just a little ways this side of the MERDERET my plane came down under the clouds, but I could see few of the planes.
- Q. What do you think of the use of flares?
- A. I like the use of flares only in the event the assembly lights won't work. The flares, if not shot straight up, that is, if shot at an angle, will give the impression that they are two or three hundred yards from the actual assembly point. The "T" lights are not feasible to use for assembly except in case of extreme emergency as they cast off so much light. (Col. Vandervoort) - In regard to the flares try to pick a place where the enemy is not, then the flares will work. In regard to radios, you need 12 radios to do it right. Tie in everybody with 536 radios, we dropped our 300's in bundles, but through 536's we tied in very quickly and were able to locate men right away.

Colonel Ekman continues--I think it is better to use BAR's in leg packs in place of machine guns during the actual drop. You can move out with BAR's in place of machine guns and come back later for the guns which would be dropped in bundles. "A" Company was delayed in moving out as they couldn't find their bundles immediately. The weapons section we had contained machine guns in the squad, we jumped with some BAR'S, but would like to replace the machine guns with BAR'S, because looking for the machine guns holds us back at first.

- Q. Do you want two BAR's in every squad and one machine gun?
- A. In the machine gun section we would like to have for the drop two BAR's. A searching party to find the machine gun bundle and bring up guns later. Each rifle squad to have two BAR's. "A" Company could have been able to secure the bridge if they had had their bundles. We lost quite a bit of equipment. Someone can always use the BAR'S after the machine guns are found.

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C. How did you identify your bundles?

A. (Col. Vandervoort) - We didn't use any bundle lights. We daisy-chained all six bundles tied together. I lost one 60mm Mortar; I had the bulk of my machine guns. I had more radios than the rest of the Regiment put together. Tie your bundles together - it helps. We used a system of luminous paint to separate the bundles. I believe that bundles should be painted lighter colors to be seen easier. We used no vitrolite on our bundles, but we later used it for marking roads, etc. The system of challenges and responses was OK. One thing in combat people have no scruples about whose equipment they have as long as they get it. Another thing, my men were reluctant to get everything. It is important that the men are trained to get everything they have. Jumping with an M-1 mine on the individual proved beneficial.

Lt. Col. Mendz, 3rd Bn., 508th Pchnt. Inf:

I was in command of the 3rd Bn. at the outset. I didn't see my Bn. for five days. We ran into a lot of trouble as soon as we hit land. The flak was terrific. We jumped from about 2100 feet, the entire serial, and were going rather fast. 2100 feet is too much of a ride, I checked my field bag and found 3 bullet holes in it. Lt. Daly was subsequently killed. I landed about 0230 in the morning and didn't see anybody for five days, with the possible exception of my messenger. I batted 1000 with my pistol, I got three Heines with three shots; two Heines with a carbine and one Heine with a hand grenade. The Germans had a very good means of communication. We seemed to run into antiparatroop groups of about 60 men and we shot back and forth. We drew the conclusion that these groups called other groups who were waiting for us. Altogether I had three men, one officer and my messenger. The most outstanding thing I learned was the accurate intelligence of the Germans. They used full name, even nicknames to confuse my company commanders. My company commanders stated that they received messages in my full name and even my nickname. It is essential that the challenging system must be known to the Air Corps as well, in case they end up on the ground. The reply to the challenge must be given very quickly or it will be too bad. Selection of words is very important. We landed about 3/4 or a mile from the DZ, Southeast. I was on the North side of the DOUVE River. In the five days that I was separated from the Bn. I walked 90 miles. I was looking for the Second Battalion and all I found was ack-ack. We never saw a T, we jumped on the green light. The pilot did not see the T light either. It would be helpful to have earphones from the jump master and the crew chief and the pilot. As a matter of fact "G" Company was dropped in the ocean and several men were drowned. Recommend the short method of challenging, bundles be daisy-chained, one light per plane load of bundles.

Lt. Col. Warren, Bn. Executive, 1st Bn., 508th Pchnt. Inf:

I came in as Executive Officer, 1st Bn., Col. Batcheller, commanding. Shortly after the drop he was KIA. The mission of the 508th was to go into Force "A" reserve in the vicinity of Hill 30, West of the MERDERET River. Our flight across the channel was very uneventful, it was routin. As we hit the coast we got some flak. I checked and noted that all the planes were back there. But then we hit the clouds and it spread us a little. I could still see the leading V even in the fog. We passed over ST. SAUVEUR le VICOMTE, and got a lot of flak which spread the formation. Then we went over ETIENVILLE and got a hell of a lot of flak there. Then I looked around and there were no ships around my plane. I jumped on the green light, and just after coming out of the plane I turned around and looked over my shoulder and saw the DOUVE River behind me very close. I landed about half way between PICAUVILLE and the DOUVE. I landed in an orchard. We got a great deal of flak practically all along the entire route between SAN SAUVEUR le VICOMTE and ETIENVILLE. After coming down I only saw one plane which was towing a glider and kept on going, and another C-47 which was shot down in flames. I did have a light

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but I didn't put it up, because it was obvious it would not be seen. I toured the area in ever widening circles trying to collect as many men as I could. Daylight came approximately 0430 or 0445 in the morning and I collected some 20 odd men and ran into Captain McRoberts who had the entire 508 radar outfit. They put up no lights because their lights were lost. The hedges were high, and the orchards were practically all over the place near PICAUVILLE. I collected between 40 and 50 men and headed for GOUTEVILLE just north of Hill 30. I got up to GOUTEVILLE and found part of D and E Company and a platoon of the 505 under Lt. Medaugh. We were on the verge of attacking GOUTEVILLE with 100 men, but we had no supporting weapons - just rifles and carbines. Since there was an estimated German Battalion in GOUTEVILLE we just stayed on the hill and shot at them. About 15 truck loads of Germans went by, going in the direction of LA FIERRE. After shooting at them all afternoon I got in contact with Col. Shanley and joined forces and moved west about 500 yards of my position near Hill 30 and stayed there for five days. No lights were used in the area south of PICAUVILLE because the area was too dense. Hedges were high and orchards were all over the place.

Colonel LINDQUIST, 508th Parachute Infantry

I went out about 1200 feet near AMFREVILLE. It was a good opening and a soft landing in about 2½ feet of water. The light went up within ten minutes after hitting the ground. The area was open and marshy, and the assembly light could be seen for about 600 yards. The assembly light worked well for about twenty minutes and then went out because of water soaking into the batteries. When the light went I stayed there 30 minutes before we moved out. There was no light on the embankment, the light was in the center of the drop of Regimental Headquarters. The challenging worked fine. There was very little challenging around the lighted area at first as the men came in. The challenging system was o.k., the verbal system should be used so long as it is consistent. I would make no changes in regards to what was planned before the operation. All of our equipment went into the water and went out of sight. We stumbled upon two bundles, but it was nothing that we could use. I think we should continue using radio communication and one light per battalion for assembling. I think flares would work well. Anything in regard to light should be used to get the unit together. As time goes on I would take a greater chance in regard to lights to get my units together.

Lt. Col. OSTBERG, 1st Bn., 507th Prcht Inf

We were scheduled to drop north of AMFREVILLE. We ran into a fog. I saw my flight and it was all there for about the first three minutes. We ran into a lot of flak. Pebbles kept hitting, which I didn't have enough sense to realize what was going on. We had no T to guide on, and only one radar set of the six we dropped was set up. Don't sell the home-made lights short. They are not so bright for a great distance but do allow for good identification. We had no automatic weapons until two o'clock the next morning. Phone communication should be in the plane. Second-hand information is no good, but you can't tell the pilot what his job is. We dropped from a low altitude. I landed in a very flat field, but it was inundated. I would endorse the home-made light on the bundle. The method of assembly lights should be kept as simple as possible. A lot depends on the terrain. We had no flares. If we were to do it again I would have flares, because I consider them well worth while. It would be a good idea to have a flare to spare.

Lt. Col. KUHN, 3rd Bn., 507th Prcht Inf

Our mission was to establish a defensive position just west of AMFREVILLE. The Air Corps sold us a snow job for they changed the SOP. I was in the lead ship of my Bn. Telephonic communication should be established between crew chief and jumpmaster. We had a very uneventful trip

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until we hit the mainland, and then things popped. There was no communication with the pilot whatsoever. I never had such a hard opening in my life. I think that the flash and thunder system is best for challenging. We dropped about 0240 in the morning. We landed about one mile southeast of FRESVILLE. "H" Company recovered a good deal of their equipment, but they used their home-made lights which was one flashlight bulb and two batteries. We used no luminous tape. "G" and "I" Companies landed up about the railroad tracks, closer to the DZ than where we landed. The issue Air Corps light was not worth a damn. Short challenging is the better way of identification.

Q. What's wrong with the Air Corps issue lighting?

A. The Air Corps light breaks. A good solid jar will knock it out. The Air Corps light did not burn long enough, and you can't tell one light from another.

Lt. Col. TEMES, 2nd Bn., 507th Precht Inf

I was in the group flown by Col. Mitchell. We got below a lot of haze and we flew at about 550 feet above the ground. We did not go too fast, and our landing was very good. We jumped at 0230, and we did not see any lights on the ground. I had a lot of difficulty in assembling. We had the mission of taking AMFREVILLE. I never did get with the Battalion until about the fifth day. As to lights, it would be a mistake to sell them short. The Executive Officer had a light, and the Regimental Commander had a light, and the Radar Section also had a light. Our flares were wet and did not work. I assembled small groups not far from the LA FIERRE bridge. Most of the bundles went into the swamp. We used the knot system and lights on our bundles, but we only retrieved a few. The mistake we made was that we used wooden container lights and most of them wouldn't work. The radios were jumped right on the radio men. The radio would come in handy but we had no radio. It was tragic not to have a radio for the first five days. The challenging system of using two words is excellent. The men were getting out of the planes too slowly and this caused dispersion. Also teach the men to get out of their equipment and chutes. Men should be taught more about that. After Captain Swartzwalder came in we were going to make a night attack on the bridge at AMFREVILLE, but we didn't because the artillery fire was falling on us.

We tied our bundles together and I think it is a good practice in using the knot system. We used no luminous lights, but if we were to do it again we would use bundle lights. We would use anything to help identify the bundles. We had to send out real strong patrols to recover the bundles. I would have liked to have talked to the pilot if there was an inter-phone. (Col. Mendez: One light per daizy chain for the bundles is recommended.)

Lt. Col. Shanley, 2d Bn., 508th Precht Inf

My original mission was to capture the town of ETIENVILLE and blow the bridge there and also the bridge at BOUZVILLE LA BASTILLE. On the flight to the drop my Bn. did not experience a great deal of flak. However, we experienced heavier flak than has just been described. A lot of jumpmasters said the planes took evasive action, and that may be the reason for the dispersion on the jump. The planes started taking evasive action due to the flak. I threw an A-4 radio bundle out, the chute on it failed, its contents were smashed; my battalion assembly light in it was also smashed. S-3 was supposed to have a light, but I did not see it. I used flashlights up in the trees when I landed. On the ground there was considerable fire which was all around us. A lot of the men who came into the assembly area had already killed a German or two. We landed just north of PICAUVILLE, and there were quite a few Germans around there. I sent several patrols out in different directions to get more men. I had only about 35 men with me at dawn. At that time I sent more patrols out and started encountering fairly heavy resistance. At approximately noon we were very heavily engaged on three sides, and I pulled out after I found that another group, larger than mine, was

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east of us. I left behind in that place about ten men, most of whom were jump casualties. Shortly after leaving the location north of PICAUVILLE I collected approximately 200 men and officers, lost members of the 508th and from all Battalions who had gotten together there, and I set up in that location, which was 1000 yards east of PICAUVILLE. With 200 men, I had two machine guns, no mortars and no other automatic weapons. We didn't have much success in getting the bundles on the ground. I did have SCR 300 radios however. By radio I got in touch with another group which was commanded by Lt. Col Warren. Several different groups of Frenchmen informed me that there were about 500 Germans in PICAUVILLE and more than that in ETIENVILLE. Having almost no heavy weapons and with so many Germans between my group and the objective I selected the one mission that the Regiment had that I felt I could accomplish--seizing a crossing of the MERDERET River. Lt. Col. Warren's group joined mine and we set up a defensive position on Hill 30, West of the MERDERET. Eventually the remainder of the regiment joined us on the West of the MERDERET River. I wish I had had flares to use for assembly after the jump; lights were useless in that terrain. A Frenchman told us that PICAUVILLE was a German bivouac area.

Q. Would you want to use flares there?

A. If I didn't use them there, I could have moved elsewhere and used them.

Q. Didn't you have flares?

A. No sir. I thought the Germans would have them and our men would be walking into the Germans. Flares, however, are the only feasible system of assembly in that hedgerow country. We used vitrolite tubing on our bundles. All the bundles I found contained ammunition. I did not find any heavy weapons.

Q. Did you succeed in rounding up your own stick?

A. No sir. I found many bundles, but found no one around the bundle. Eventually I ran into some men, but found none from my own stick for quite awhile. The men worked the challenging system very well. I recommend that we have one system of challenging to use throughout training and combat, and not change it later on, because that causes difficulty. Changing over confuses the men. In regard to assembly lights, we couldn't get them up high enough to be seen any distance.

Q. Would you have used a light that would flash up for one-thirtieth of a second every five or six seconds, and that would light up approximately a distance of six (6) miles (Krypton light).

A. Yes, I would use a light like that if I had to, to assemble my battalion.

Lt. Col. Boyd, 1st Bn., 325th Glider Inf:

We came in at D plus 1 at about 0730 in the morning. The men who flew the planes on D minus 1 scared the hell out of us by painting a bad picture. The 437 at Ramsbury was in quite a state of excitement. The landing zone was changed on us. The trip was uneventful. We were supposed to land in the Southwest part of STE MERE EGLISE, but the order was changed. We landed in the Southeast corner of STE MARIE du MONT. We came in too close together. The speed was 170 miles per hour and we were eight feet above the ground when we hit the trees. The first aid man saw us hit and they got to us immediately. The gliders should be strung out a little more to avoid collision. We had our 300 radios and all the companies checked in except "A" Company and we proceeded to the assembly area. We landed at seven o'clock in the morning. Our medical detachment came in about two PM and they took care of some casualties. Out of seven hundred men we had 600 ready to operate at 2 PM. We should have the glider pilots earlier for instruction. The Air Corps started dropping tow ropes all over us, which was wrong. Some even went over our troops. These ropes are an item of

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critical issue and should be taken home instead of being dropped in the area in FRANCE. We had no flak and plenty of air protection. We flew in column of fours, but would like to fly in a column of twos. A single column double tow, should be satisfactory, but would like to have some practice before taking it up. We were cut out at about 200 feet which was entirely too low.

Lt. Col. T. H. Sanford, Exec. 1st Bn., 325th Glider Inf:

The gliders, as a whole, came in too low. Cutting the gliders loose at 200 feet, traveling 120 miles per hour, in an area with such small fields and tall trees doesn't give the glider pilot any opportunity at all to select the field or to make the proper approach for a landing. Tug pilots had been instructed to go up to 700 feet after crossing the beach and very few, if any, of them increased their altitude. Many of the crashes of the gliders were a direct result of the failure of the tug pilots to give the glider pilot altitude enough to make a proper landing. In training it had been demonstrated that gliders can be landed safely in very small fields if the glider pilot has altitude enough to make a proper approach and come in slow. Under the conditions under which our pilots landed in NORMANDY they had no opportunity for selection of the field, or to turn to make any approach to it. It was just cut loose and land, which put a great many of our gliders into the trees and resulted in rather high casualties. Most all of this was due to the failure of the tug pilots to follow instructions and to give the glider pilots an altitude of 700 feet.

Colonel March, Division Artillery:

We use the system of tying our equipment together and we had no trouble. We got one gun going at STE MERE EGLISE. It would be a good idea to have a Battalion of parachute field artillery go with every regiment. We can get the individual guns in but to get them to work and assembled has not been very successful. This was sometimes due to landing. The landing zones of the gliders was SNAFU. LZ's were changed and the Air Corps was not informed of it. Some fire was delivered on D-Day, and much more on D plus 1, and it was built up as it went along. (At this point Col. March was interrupted and the following incident of artillery support related):

"Col. Shanley who was on the West bank of the MERDERET, Hill 30, had an SCR 300 which was in contact with the Regimental CP on the East bank of the river at CHEF du PONT. At the Regimental CP an artillery liaison party had set up the radio and wire net and was in a position to fire in direct support but did not have contact with Col. Shanley direct. Col. Shanley was being pressed by German infantry and requested through the SCR 300 artillery support, and an infantry officer adjusted fire through this medium with superior results".

Colonel March continued: If you are in a jam talk to somebody and try to get some artillery.

The gliders were coming in two and four at a time. I don't know whether I agree with that or not. Personally, I don't know how much they are briefed, but they usually go for the first field they see, particularly if someone is shooting at them. The best thing is to have a zone marked for a group.

In regard to parachute artillery, it is practical from the point of view of artillery. It will land and will be able to shoot. To get four guns together is quite difficult. In SICILY they got three together and did a nice job. (Statement made by an Infantry battalion commander present-- "Artillery coming in by parachute is good even if you can get one gun out of four".)

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Lt. Col. Singleton, 80th AT Bn:

We landed at 0420 in the morning at STE MARIE DuPONT. Everything went well until we got just between the islands of JERSEY and GUERNSEY, and then there was heavy flak. We came in a column of fours, and it was a nice formation, and we ran into a cloud bank, milky in texture, we could see very little. There was a lot of flak, small arms fire, machine gun fire and snipers. The glider pilots did a fine job. We came in 1½ hours after the last paratrooper landed. Anti-tank guns were scattered all over the area. It seems that we landed when all the Germans were awake. We landed at about four o'clock and we cut loose and glided about ten miles before landing. We landed very smoothly. We took in 16 guns in the dark and the next day we had about five out of those 16 within the Division area. Ten men are needed by a squad. The CG4s had one gun, a little ammunition and two men, or, two men and a jeep which should have a machine gun on it to protect the men. With CG-13 we could probably get guns and more personnel. The guns were OK but we did not have enough personnel.

Brig. Gen. James M. Gavin (CG task force "A"):

(This statement was dictated on August 16th at Hos., 82d A/B Division)

To begin with, the serial after leaving ENGLAND was in good shape--tight formation--all ships apparently present. The flight, as well as it could be observed from the lead plane, was excellent. Some flak came up from the channel islands--tracers were seen falling short. Shortly after crossing the West coast, the first check point was seen which I had figured would be BRICOUABEC. We then entered dense clouds. Ships which had been flying within a matter of feet of each other could not be seen anywhere. The red light went on, indicating four minutes before the drop. When it was almost time for the green light we emerged from the clouds. There were no ships in sight. A river appeared in the distance turning to the West, which I estimated to be either the DOUVE or the upper reaches of the MERDERET. The green light went on at about the instance several of the ships appeared out of the fog, closing in on us. After about a 3 second delay we went out. Small arms fire was coming up from the ground when the chute opened--just general shooting all over the area. Off to the right of the line of flight there was considerable apparent gunfire and flak. I figured that it probably was in the vicinity of ETIENVILLE, where there was supposed to be located the only known heavy AA installations in the area. A lot of firing was seen straight in the line of flight--tracers going into the air--several miles away. I landed in an orchard, joined my aide who landed nearby (LT OLSON) and proceeded to "roll up the stick" as per plan, arriving on the edge of a wide swamp where I found the remaining men of my stick who were endeavoring to retrieve equipment bundles from the deep mud and marsh. At this time parachutists were seen descending, landing in the swamp and on the banks. After collecting my stick, I found that several men had been injured during the landing, and two hit during descent. About 20 minutes after reaching the marsh, a red assembly light showed on the far bank. A few minutes thereafter a blue assembly light showed to the South of the red light several hundred yards. I sent Lt. OLSON at once to direct all the men that he could contact to report to me in my location. As it happened, the blue light was the 508 light--the red one of the 507 lights. Close-in security was posted. The Germans took no aggressive action, despite the fact that they were obviously in the area since there had been considerable firing during the descent. The river bank was well dug with slit trenches and prepared gun positions. Men from the 507 began arriving. Within two hours, about 150 men were assembled--all 507 except my own stick, and about one plane load of 508. Lt. OLSON reported that there was a railroad embankment on the far side of the swamp, and that it was passable for foot troops. We decided that we were on the MERDERET River since it was the only river with marshes and with a railroad running North and South alongside of it. Prior to this point, I had estimat-

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ed that we must be on the DOUVE because of the depth and width of the water. Our pre-operational photo interpretation had rather clearly established the fact that the MERDERET was a narrow stream, about 20 yards wide and several feet deep. The value of the MERDERET River as an anti-tank obstacle had been carefully studied. The river bank was surrounded by marsh land, covered with grass which on the fringes was used for grazing. Actually, it developed that the grass was swamp grass several feet long, which showed above the water and concealed the wide expanse of flooded area from the photo interpreter. Heavy firing was seen in the direction of what was thought to be STE MERE EGLISE. At about 0430, Colonel MALONEY and Colonel OSTBERG, of the 507th, with about 150 men, had reported to me, and I decided to move as soon as possible to seize the West end of the LA FIERRE bridge. I considered it necessary to accomplish this before daylight because of the impracticability of fighting through the swamps, of which there were several, in the face of any German automatic weapons. Steps were taken to get the force organized for movement, but in a few minutes two gliders landed about 400 yards West of our position. By this time I had definitely decided that we were on the West bank of the MERDERET River several miles North of LA FIERRE. It had been reported to me that Colonel LINDQUIST had moved down the railroad with about 100 men towards LA FIERRE. Some individuals were still coming in. Everyone who was not on security was working at retrieving bundles from the swamp. I managed to get one bazooka and a few rounds of ammunition. All other heavy equipment and radios were then in the swamp water or impossible to get to. The glider landings appeared most fortuitous, and steps were taken to get the equipment out of them. With luck it would be a 57mm AT gun, which would come in very handy. At this time gliders were going overhead moving in the direction of STE MERE EGLISE. All indications tended to more clearly establish our estimated location as being correct. In order to retrieve the contents of the gliders, the move South was temporarily delayed while patrols were sent to the gliders. Lt. GRAHAM was placed in charge of these patrols. Lt. GRAHAM returned in about a half hour stating that he needed at least 30 men. One glider contained a "57", and one a jeep. They had landed in a marsh and it was very difficult to extricate the gun and vehicle. Some German small arms fire was being received in the vicinity of the gliders at this time. Lt. Col. MALONEY was instructed to make the men available to Lt. GRAHAM. About a half hour later Lt. GRAHAM returned and stated that he couldn't get the men, couldn't get out the equipment with the men he had, and that the German fire was increasing. I accompanied him to the hedge along the field containing the gliders where the fire was building up with considerable intensity. With some difficulty additional men were obtained and finally either the gun or jeep, I forget which now, was removed only to become impossibly bogged in the swampy bottom. At my direction Lt. GRAHAM destroyed the jeep and removed part of the breach mechanism of the "57"mm. It was just barely possible to do this, since the German Force was becoming increasingly aggressive. It was now broad daylight. It was about 6 or 6:30 AM. The degree of enemy build-up and his attitude made the possibility of moving down the West bank at this time appear impracticable, and I decided to move to the railroad embankment and move in the direction of LA FIERRE, and there pick up all who could be found from the 508, contact the 505, and attack the bridge from the East side. Orders were issued, and the movement started across the marsh. The movement started and contact was established with the 1st Battalion, 505th, under the command of Major KELLAM, at LA FIERRE. His battalion had landed as per plan, and was carrying out its prescribed mission. His point was then engaged at the LA FIERRE bridge.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Challenging.--Without exception, all agreed that the system of challenging employed was the best; that is, one word for a challenge, and one word for a response -- no further conversation being necessary. This

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further substantiates the findings as a result of the SICILIAN operation. It is important that the same challenging system be employed in training as in combat.

2. Assembly.--The assembly plan employed appeared sound and took the following steps. Each stick rolls up on the bundles. After securing the equipment, sticks join each other by sight or patrol contact, or rendezvous at a previously agreed upon terrain feature, or by radio contact. The assembly lights, one per battalion, were used and proved to be very valuable when placed in operation. Except for not being high enough, were most satisfactory for their purpose. Prior to this operation orders were issued as follows: "Each battalion commander, or one of his designated battalion staff officers, would take with him a flare which he should employ if all other assembly aids failed". It is unfortunate that this order was not carried out by all participants. It is noteworthy, however, that the flare when used, served its purpose well. It is believed that the present practice of limiting the use of flares to a battalion commander or one of his designated staff officers is sound. Too many flares create an impossible situation. One light per battalion is all that is permissible. However, the lights must be raised 40 to 50 feet above the ground. (Experiments are now being conducted in this Division with a view to the employment of large balloons capable of raising an assembly light to the proper altitude.) It is believed that the assembly could be facilitated by having more radios jumped on the individuals, and it is believed that for this purpose more radios, in addition to the present authorized number, must be obtained.

3. Equipment.--All unit commanders are in agreement that bundles must be tied together. There appears to be some disagreement as to the extent of bundle identification. As has happened in the past, if a unit uses a bundle light and they manage to recover their equipment without being shot up, it is felt that this is unquestionably the proper method, whereas a unit using lights and getting badly shot up finds it impossible to recover its equipment and feels that the use of a light is a serious mistake. All things considered, the soundest plan appears to be: First, to tie all bundles together, so arranging the jumpmaster's trip switch so they will be released simultaneously; next, identify separate bundles with vitrolite or similar luminous markings and, in addition, use the rope knot system; further, it must be emphasized in training that every weapon and round of ammunition and piece of equipment must be recovered from the DZ without delay, and that units must recover their own equipment. If a unit is unable to carry off all of its loads, then a recover detail must be put to work and a dump established. Bundles must be jettisoned in the stick and not before.

4. Individual Equipment.--The parachute must be equipped with a quick release device. Individuals whose load permits must jump with an M-1 Mine. A caliber .45 pistol should be worn by each jumper during descent so as to be available immediately upon landing. The use of the M-1 Rifle Container is not imperative. Individuals must be trained to carry their full and complete combat load, wearing all of their equipment in some training exercises and, in addition, each individual load must be checked with a view to his prompt and expeditious clearance through the door. Several serious delays occurred because individuals could not get out promptly. This was caused by faulty wearing of equipment, improper carrying of arms, etc., and must be eliminated by proper inspection and training.

5. Arms.--Because of the nature of the fighting in NORMANDY, the BAR was most desirable, being of a high rate of fire, long range, high penetrative power, light, and highly mobile. As a result of this operation, all unit commanders feel that they would like to have two BAR's jumped in every squad. This will permit a unit to engage promptly in a heavy fire fight immediately upon landing. However, LMG's must also be dropped by bundle. There is no substitute for them on many missions. Obviously, more weapons will be on the ground than parachute units can properly employ. This will necessitate the use of a salvage crew.

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Steps are being taken to jump the bazooka with a round of ammunition on an individual in future operations. The Gammon Grenade with two fragmentation grenades per man was very satisfactory.

6. Artillery.--All commanders were highly enthusiastic in their praise of the artillery support received. They also, without exception, would like to see more work done with a view to developing and perfecting the use of parachute field artillery. Even with the present small percentage of recovery of weapons, they feel that the support available to them from the weapons recovered more than justifies the loss incurred in the drop.

7. Enemy Reaction.--The enemy appeared to engage with all means at his disposal all airborne troops during their descent. It was most significant, however, that the Germans remained holed up after the parachutists landed, and attempted little aggressive action for some long time. The gliders seemed to attract particular attention, and were very vulnerable immediately upon landing.

8. Our Own Troops.--The conclusions drawn from the past operations appear after study of NEPTUNE to be sound. Every stick must assemble on its own equipment promptly upon landing, regardless of the situation at hand and the amount of fire. From there the assembly must proceed as fast as circumstances permit. All enemy communications must be destroyed immediately. All roads must be mined. Troops must stay off the roads. Use the roads to ambush the enemy. Move across country. Move promptly with all equipment, arms, and ammunition that it is possible to get without too great a delay. A unit will never assemble all of its men, so that every commander will be faced with a decision as to when to move with the strength at hand. Only he can make this decision on the spot. It is most important, however, that the hours of darkness be used for the seizure of key points and objectives. The enemy reaction becomes increasingly violent with daylight.

It is most important that every officer participating in the exercise, regardless of grade, be briefed on the mission of the Division as a whole, and understand in a general way the priority of importance of the Division's objectives, and how the subordinate units of the Division are going to seize these objectives. It is clear from both the Sicilian Campaign and the NORMANDY Campaign that this common understanding on the part of all participating officers is of the utmost importance.

9. Pathfinder Aids.--In country as heavily held as NORMANDY, setting up and operating three lighted T's per regimental DZ is impossible. One coded light, or a different type light, appears to be more satisfactory. The size of the pathfinder defensive group does not have to be as large as that of NEPTUNE. A few automatic weapons and a bazooka can hold off most any German force that will operate at night.

10. Airborne SOP.--The SHAEF Airborne SOP in general appears to be satisfactory. It must be closely adhered to, particularly in regard to the 20-minute warning, the 4-minute warning, and the green light. It is of the utmost importance in a combat operation that the speed of the troop-carrying aircraft not be excessive. With the extremely heavy load carried by most jumpers, serious physical injury results, equipment is lost, and frequently the parachute malfunctions in jumping from a high-speed plane.

11. Weather Conditions.--It is interesting to note in Operation NEPTUNE that weather conditions were almost ideal until shortly after crossing the West coast of the peninsula. There a dense fog was encountered that lasted almost up to the MERDERET River. This caused considerable dispersion and error in the drop of the 507th and 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments, with the error generally being that of dropping well beyond the DZ where the fog first cleared. Unfortunately, this put most of the equipment in the MERDERET River or the swamps or tributaries of that river. The 505th Parachute Infantry, jumping East of the MERDERET River, landed with most of its men in the DZ area,

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and promptly undertook to accomplish its mission. The 507th and 508th Parachute Infantry, with equal promptness, moved to accomplish what was considered the next most important mission, and that was the seizure of crossings over the MERDERET River. Due to the wide dispersion of these units, this took a bit more time than was anticipated.

12. Training.--Our present training policies are sound. Night reorganization and assembly exercises must be held at least twice weekly. Full combat loads carried whenever possible. Prompt aggressive action by each individual is imperative immediately upon landing, regardless of enemy interference and must be insisted upon in training. An individual or small unit that "holes up" and does nothing is ultimately isolated and destroyed. An airborne unit has the initiative upon landing, it must retain it. This is the essence of successful reorganization and accomplishment of a mission.

A number of airborne commanders present recommended that it be suggested to Troop Carrier unit commanders that they conduct unit proficiency tests similar to those conducted in this Division. Each unit to be given a mission and be required to execute it under simulated combat conditions. Exact numerical ratings to be given based upon marshalling, briefing, order, flight, timing and accuracy of drop and these ratings then be made known to the entire command. The troops and unit commanders of this Division are willing and anxious to assist in any way possible in the conduct of this type training.