

The Eighty Second

AIRBORNE DIVISION



AIRBORNE



Operation "Neptune"



CLASSIFICATION
CANCELLED
BY AUTHORITY OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
DOWNGRADING COMMITTEE

NORMANDY

6 JUNE - 8 JULY 1944

R E S T R I C T E D

82D AIRBORNE DIVISION
ACTION IN NORMANDY, FRANCE

IN FOUR SECTIONS

- I -- PREFACE
- II -- NARRATIVE
- III -- DISTRIBUTION
- IV -- ANNEXES

* * * * *

... 35 Days of action without relief, without replacements.
Every mission accomplished. No ground gained ever relinquished.
(Report of Major General RIDGWAY.)

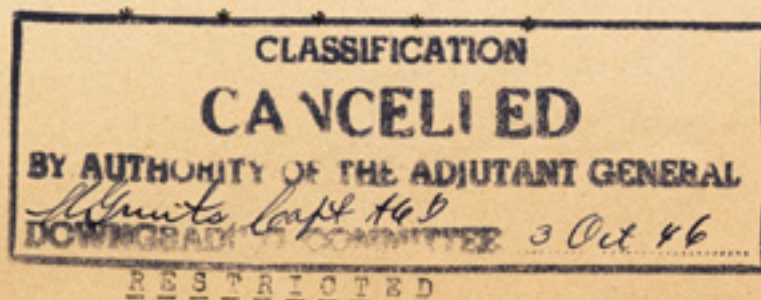
* * * * *

COMBAT EFFICIENCY: Excellent, short 60% Infantry, 90% Artillery.
(From G-3 report as of 062400 June 1944.)

* * * * *

MAPS: GSGS 4347, FRANCE, 1/25,000, Sheets 31/20 SE, 31/18 NE, SE,
SW, NW

GSGS 4249, FRANCE, 1/100,000, Sheets 5E, 6E, 5F, 6F.



R E S T R I C T E D

82D AIRBORNE DIVISION
ACTION IN NORMANDY, FRANCE
JUNE - JULY 1944
SECTION II -- NARRATIVE

R E S T R I C T E D



R E S T R I C T E D

SECTION II - NARRATIVE

By 26 May 1944 all plans and preparations were completed for the Division to carry out the mission assigned it by First United States Army. Field and administrative orders had been published and distributed. In a series of map maneuvers on a special 1/5,000 map regimental and battalion commanders had outlined their plans in order that all commanders might be briefed thoroughly on the prospective Division operations. Divisional airborne echelons already had departed for the marshalling yards and were assembled in camps scattered along the Welsh and southern English coasts. The Division mission was to be as follows:

"Land by parachute and glider before and after dawn of D-Day west of ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE: seize, clear and secure the general area ST. JACQUES DE NINOU (136985) - BESNEVILLE (157928) (both inclusive) - ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE (exclusive) - ELANDAMOUR (167982) (Inclusive), and reorganize; seize and destroy the crossings of the PRAIRIES MARCAGEUSES north of LA SANGSURIERE (188998), at ST. SAUVEUR DE PIERRE FORT (145890); destroy the crossings of the OLLOMONDE River in the vicinity of ST. LO D'OURVILLE (090994) and block crossroads vicinity LE CHEMIN (102902); prevent enemy forces moving north between ST. LO D'OURVILLE and junction of DOUVE River with PRAIRIE MARCAGEUSES (228921); and protect the south flank of VII Corps north of the same line."

The mission, however, was changed by the First Army Commander on 26 May due to confirmed intelligence reports the enemy had strengthened his forces on the COTENIN, (CHERBOURG) Peninsula with the addition of the 91st Infantry Division in the general area of ST. SAUVEUR LE VICOMTE. The revised mission of the 82d Airborne Division was to be:

"Land by parachute and glider before and after dawn of D-Day astride the MERDERET River, seize, clear and secure the general area: OR (261938) - OR (263958) - OR (269975) - RJ (274982) - RJ (283992) - Bridge (309987) - NEUVILLE AU PLAIN (340985) - BANDIENVILLE (360987) within its zone; capture ST. MERE EULISE (340965); seize and secure the crossings of the MERDERET River at (315957) and (321930), and a bridgehead covering them, with HLR along the general line: OR (261938) - OR (269953) - OR (269975) - RJ (274982) - RJ (283992); seize and destroy the crossings of the DOUVE River at BEUZEVILLE LA BASTILLE (309911) and ETISEVILLE (also known as PONT L'ABBE) (269927); protect the northwest flank of VII Corps within the Division zone; and be prepared to advance west on Corps order to the line of the DOUVE north of its junction with the PRAIRIES MARCAGEUSES."

New orders and other administrative details made necessary by the new mission were worked out quickly and disseminated within four days. The change did not effect the basic plan for movement in three echelons which had been worked out as follows:

Force "A" - commanded by Brigadier General JAMES M. GAVIN, assistant Division Commander, to be committed by parachute before dawn of D-Day and to include

Planes

Det Hq & Hq Co, 82d Abn Div

4

- 2 -

R E S T R I C T E D



R E S T R I C T E D

Pathfinders	9
Det Hq 82d Div Arty	2
Det 82d Abn Sig Co	3
Det 456 Prcht FA Bn (atchd 505 Prcht Inf)	
Air Support Party (atchd Hq 82d Abn Div)	
505 Prcht Inf	117
507 Prcht Inf	117
508 Prcht Inf	117
Co B, 307 Abn Engr Bn	9
Naval Shore Fire Control Party (atchd 505 Prcht Inf)	
TOTAL 378	

Force "B" - Commanded by Major General MATTHEW B. RIDGWAY, Division Commander, to be committed by glider before and after dawn of D-Day and to include.

	<u>Glider</u>
Hq & Hq Co 82 Abn Div (-)	22
Hq & Hq Btry, 82d Abn Div Arty (-)	11
82d Abn Sig Co (-)	13
325 Gli Inf	172
319 Gli FA Bn	40
320 Gli FA Bn	54
Btrys A, B & C, 80 Abn AA Bn (AT)	57
Co A, 307 Abn Engr Bn	10
307 Abn Med Co (-)	20
82d Abn Rcn Plat (-)	13
Air Support Party	4
Command vehicles - Prcht Regts	12
TOTAL 428	

Force "C" - Commanded by Brigadier General GEORGE P. HOWELL, Commanding General of 2d Airborne Infantry Brigade, to be committed by sea, to land between D plus 2 and D plus 7 and to include.

456 FA Bn (-)	87 Armd FA Bn, atchd
80 Abn AA Bn (-)	899 TD Bn, atchd
307 Abn Engr Bn (-)	Tr B, 4 Cav Sqdn, atchd
782 Abn Ord Maint Co	Co C, 746 Tk Bn (M), atchd
407 Abn QM Co	3809 QM Trk Co, atchd
82 Abn MP Plat	3810 QM Trk Co, atchd
Corps Med Dets	1st Plat, 603 QM (GR) Co, atchd

Seaborne elements of units in Forces

"A" and "B"

Under the plan Force "A" in its entirety was to approach the CHERBOURG (CO-TENTIN) Peninsula from the west and to drop between 0100 and 0315 hours on the night of D-1/D-Day on three drop zones. The 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment and its attachments were to land east of the MERDERET River about 1,000 yards northwest of STE. MERE EGLISE (3397). The 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment was to land west of the MERDERET River about 1,000 yards north of AMFREVILLE (3098). The 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment and Force "A" Headquarters were to land west of the MERDERET River about 1,000 yards north of PICAUVILLE (2995).

Fifty-two gliders of Force "B" were to approach the CHERBOURG Peninsula from the west prior to H-Hour and land on the 505th drop zone. The remainder of Force

"B" was to approach the peninsula from the east and was to land late on D-Day and early on D plus one on landing zones astride the STE. MERE EGLISE - BLOS-VILLE Road (3694). In a last-minute change of plan General RIDGEMAN parachuted with Force "A".

Aerial resupply missions were scheduled automatically for the morning of D plus one and on call thereafter if needed. The automatic mission was the only parachute mission ultimately flown but a small amount of equipment and supplies were received later by glider.

All airborne elements of the Division had closed and were sealed in special camps at the take-off fields by 24 hours before the scheduled take-off time. Parachute elements were located at seven airfields in the GRAVEHAM - COTTESMORE - LINGAR area of the British Midlands, and glider elements were at seven airfields in the LDERMASTON - RAMSBURY - MERRYFIELD area. (See Annex No. 3 A)

All men were briefed thoroughly on their missions, a recheck was made of all equipment and personnel, and planes and gliders were loaded with equipment. The Allied D-Day was postponed 24 hours because of weather conditions, and the first planes of Force "A" took off at 052315 June 1944.

The main flight was preceded by the three regimental pathfinder teams which dropped one-half hour prior to the first group. The pathfinders sustained many casualties and had difficulty in using lights, but they accomplished their mission and set up beacons to guide the incoming planes to the three designated drop zones.

The flight over the English Channel was in good formation and without incident, but between the west coast and the drop zones a heavy fog bank tended to break up the formation of the planes. Flak and some enemy night fighters activity caused some of the troop carrier planes to take up evasive action, and by the time the drop zones were reached many planes were scattered, and were flying at excessive speeds and at altitudes higher than those ideal for jumping.

The 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment landed generally in the vicinity of its drop zone. The 507th Parachute Infantry was scattered, one element dropping in the vicinity of MONTBOURG, another south of CARSTAN and the remainder astride the MERDERET River east of the drop zone. The 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment was likewise scattered widely, the bulk of its parachutists dropping east of the Drop Zone and some personnel landing as far away as nine kilometers south of CHERBOURG.

The 52 gliders containing batteries of the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion and detachments and forward parties of artillery, signal and Division Headquarters groups followed the main body of paratroopers and began landing at 0404 hours. The gliders also encountered fog and flak. They too were scattered, and many of them were damaged upon crashing into the small fields and high hedges.

Enemy reaction to the landing of the 82d Airborne Division in the NORMANDY area was prompt and severe, but from the time the first member landed until 77 days later, when the Division was finally relieved, every mission was accomplished and no ground gained was ever relinquished.

A day-by-day account of the Division's activities follows:

D-DAY, 6 JUNE 1944 (See Annexes 5 and 6)

The first element of the main body of the Division jumped at 0151 hours, having been preceded 30 minutes by the Pathfinder teams. By 0312 hours all paratroopers had landed, and at 0404 hours the first of 52 gliders in the initial glider serial crash landed. Both parachutists and gliders were scattered.

Small groups and some units attacked to secure the Division zone. Groups



R E S T R I C T E D

of men and individuals who had been scattered in the landings rejoined their units throughout the day, and by nightfall approximately 30 per cent of the Division's forces were under control.

At 2100 hours 100 gliders landed with artillery, engineers, and special troops. Seaborne elements set sail at 0645 from BRISTOL except for a task force consisting of Company C, 746th Tank Battalion; the 1st Platoon, Troop B, 4th Cavalry Squadron; and elements of Company F, 3d Battalion (originally 2d Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry), 325th Glider Infantry. This task force landed on Utah Red Beach at 1400 hours and proceeded inland with the mission of contacting the Division near STE. MERE EGLISE.

At the close of the day, the Division was in the midst of severe fighting. It had captured STE. MERE EGLISE and held a general line along the MERDERET River from LA FIERE (319963) south to include the eastern end of the causeway over the MERDERET River at 321930.

Headquarters & Headquarters Company, 82d Airborne Division

Parachute elements, part of Force "A", dropped at 0214 hours near the west bank of the MERDERET River, and glider elements, leading echelon of Force "B", landed at 0204 hours. The Force "A" Command Post was set up initially at 305965, west of the MERDERET River, but at 0730 the group waded across the River to the east bank and assembled at LA FIERE (319963). A new Force "A" Command Post was established at a railroad crossing at 326944.

The Division Commander, who jumped with the 505th Parachute Infantry, established his Command Post in a hedgerow west of STE. MERE EGLISE at 332965. Elements of Headquarters and of the Defense Platoon moved south to secure the bridge west of CHEF DU PONT (321930) where it encountered severe enemy fire. This group returned to the Command Post at 1700, but part of the Defense Platoon moved to a new Force "A" Command Post at a railroad pass at 323960.

The Division Headquarters initial glider ariel, which landed in the dark at approximately 0415 hours, was scattered, and the G-2 and G-3 did not reach the command post until late afternoon. The Chief of Staff was injured in a glider crash and later evacuated. The G-1 did not reach the command post for two days.

505th Parachute Infantry Regiment

The first element, the 2d Battalion, dropped at 0151 hours and the entire regiment landed by 0202 hours. Most of the troops landed on or near the drop zone, but a few were widely dispersed over the countryside. Assembly was rapid, and the battalions moved off toward their objectives. The 3d Battalion entered STE. MERE EGLISE at 0400 hours, and the town was securely held and outposted within an hour. The American Flag was raised over STE. MERE EGLISE, the first French town to be liberated by the Allies. After assembling the 2d Battalion started to move out to take NEUVILLE AU PLAIN, but orders were received from the regiment to stand by. At 0600 hours the 2d Battalion moved into position north of STE. MERE EGLISE and assisted the 3d Battalion in holding the town. The 1st Battalion moved toward its objective, the bridge over the MERDERET River (314956) at LA FIERE at 0630 hours and by 0830 held the eastern end of this bridge against heavy enemy fire from the western approaches.

507th Parachute Infantry Regiment

The first element, the 1st Battalion, jumped at 0232 hours, and by 0312 hours the entire regiment was on the ground generally east of the MERDERET River and was fairly dispersed. Small groups assembled to form small task forces until such time as the regiment could assemble completely. One such force on the west bank of the MERDERET River attacked AMPREVILLE but was forced back by overwhelming superiority in enemy strength to FLAUX (303955). A patrol was sent to the western

R E S T R I C T E D

end of LA FIERE Bridge and contact was made with elements of the 505th Parachute Infantry on the eastern end at 1430 hours. The enemy recaptured FLAUX and drove this patrol from the western end of the LA FIERE Bridge. Another force of the regiment joined with Force "A" Headquarters and at 1130 attacked to secure the CHEF DU PONT Bridge (321930), meeting extremely severe resistance. The eastern end of the bridge was finally secured by nightfall. Leaving one company to hold the bridge, the remainder of this second force moved to an assembly area at 1715 hours in the vicinity of the railroad overpass at 323960. Still another group, led by the regimental commander, landed on or near the scheduled drop zone but had no contact with other elements of the Division during the day.

508th Parachute Infantry Regiment

The 3d Battalion jumped at 0208 hours and the entire regiment was on the ground by 0220 hours. Four separate groups were assembled. One group was in the vicinity of LA FIERE, fought along the railway and attacked the LA FIERE Bridge. This group was later relieved by the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry and moved to an assembly area in the vicinity of the railroad overpass (323960) to organize a defensive position. Two other groups joined forces west of the MERDERET River in the vicinity of PICAUVILLE after taking part in heavy fighting around GUETTEVILLE (300948) and north of PICAUVILLE. An officer of this group shot and killed the commanding general of the German 91st Division. The combined group then seized the high ground west of the MERDERET River south of GUETTEVILLE at 310940 during the night of June 6-7. A fourth group dropped in the vicinity of STE. MERE EGLISE, fought with the 507th Parachute Infantry to take the CHEF DU PONT Bridge (321930) and later organized a defensive position covering this bridge.

325th Glider Infantry Regiment

Company F, 3d Battalion, supporting Company C, 746th Tank Battalion, landed on Utah Red Beach at 1400, de-waterproofed vehicles and moved inland at 1600 to make contact with the Division. Heavy artillery, mortar and small arms fire held up this task force at crossroads 363933. Two tanks were knocked out. The remainder of the regiment prepared to take off from airports in England.

82d Airborne Division Artillery

Parachute elements jumped at 0210 hours, joined a group from the 508th Parachute Infantry and assisted in the attack on the LA FIERE Bridge. At 1330 hours this element joined the glider element at the Division CP at 332965. Glider elements landed at 0500 hours and moved directly to the Division CP. At 2305 hours Headquarters and Headquarters Battery of Division Artillery, the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion and the 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion glided into NORMANDY and encountered severe enemy small arms and mortar fire. Reorganization commenced immediately but was handicapped by intense enemy fire. The section of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion attached to 505th Parachute Infantry jumped with the 3d Battalion, but was able to assemble only one of the two 75mm pack howitzers which had been dropped.

80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion (AT)

Batteries A and B landed by glider at 0405 hours. Six 57mm antitank guns had been recovered and were in position by 1730 hours. Battery C glided into the area at 2100 hours and began assembly and reorganization. The remainder of the Battalion sailed from BRISTOL, ENGLAND, at 0645 hours.

307th Airborne Engineer Battalion

Company B (less one platoon attached to the 505th Parachute Infantry)



R E S T R I C T E D

jumped with the 508th Parachute Infantry at 0210 hours. Some Engineer personnel took up defensive positions at LA FIERE in support of one group of the 508th, and other personnel joined the 508th group west of the MERDERET River. One "stick", which included the Battalion Commander, was dropped over ST. SAUVIEUR LE VICOMTE, and only a few escaped. Part of Headquarters and Company A landed by glider at 2300 hours and started to assemble under heavy enemy artillery and small arms fire. The remainder of the battalion prepared to take off from air-ports in ENGLAND.

307th Airborne Medical Company

Elements of the company landed by glider about 2100 and immediately began assembly, recovering by use of life rafts much equipment from gliders that had landed in shallow water near the banks of the MERDERET River. A clearing station was set up at a crossroad north of BLOSVILLE.

82d Airborne Signal Company

Parachute and glider elements of the company which landed prior to H-Hour were scattered and assembled with difficulty. Much equipment was lost. Only one of the three SCR 193 radios landed during D-Day was operative, and it was not until the night of June 6-7 that radio contact was established with the 4th Infantry Division and with the Division base in ENGLAND.

D PLUS 1, 7 JUNE 1944

The Division continued to assemble, reorganize, and secure its area against extremely severe enemy resistance which included armor. Enemy troops, identified as the 91st Infantry Division, were held along the MERDERET River to the west and were driven back to the north and northwest. Contact was established with the 4th Infantry Division during the day, and the VII Corps Commander visited the Division Command Post late in the day. The 325th Glider Infantry arrived by glider during the morning. Additional personnel which had been scattered in the original landings continued to report back to their units.

During the afternoon garbled radio messages signed "OO 507" were received at the Division Command Post, and it was finally determined that they originated with the Regimental Commander who was isolated with a group of about 300 men west of MEFREVILLE.

325th Glider Infantry Regiment

The first glider elements began landing at 0700 hours about 2,500 yards southeast of STE. MERE EGLISE. There were many crash landings, and casualties totalled approximately 7.5 per cent. Assembly was rapid, however, and by 1015 hours all battalions were reported. The 3d Battalion moved out toward CARQUEBUT at 1415 hours and reached LE PORT (328918) without encountering opposition. The remainder of the regiment proceeded to move into an assembly area northeast of CHEF DU PONT. At 1600 hours the 2d Battalion was ordered to move into an assembly area east of LA FIERE in the vicinity of 325962 and later was attached to the 505th Parachute Infantry at 2100 hours. The 1st and 3d Battalions were ordered to move into and to outpost the regimental assembly area. Company F, 3d Battalion in support of Company G, 746th Tank Battalion, and the 1st Platoon, Troop B, 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, assisted the 8th Infantry in its attack towards STE. MERE EGLISE from the west at 0630 hours and made contact with gliderborne elements of the 325th by 0900. The 325th's regimental strength at the close of the day was approximately 85 per cent.

505th Parachute Infantry Regiment

The 2d and 3d Battalions continued to hold STE. MERE EGLISE against severe