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The Sword of St. Michael:
the 82nd Airborne Division in World War II

A Dissertation Presented

by

Guy Anthony LoFaro

to

The Graduate School

in Partial fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

Stony Brook University

May 2007

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Dissertation

The Sword of St. Michael: the 82nd Airborne Division in World War II

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Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

Stony Brook University

2007

In a host of works published shortly after the end of World War II and continuing through the early 1980s scholars and military analysts almost without exception made sweeping generalizations about the relative ineffectiveness of Allied ground combat units, especially when compared to similar units in the German Army. But beginning in the late 1980s historians began challenging this prevailing orthodoxy and while some took to task the evidentiary underpinnings of the previous work others disputed the notion that the German Army of World War II was as good on the battlefield as had previously been thought.

This study enters the historical debate at the micro level by focusing on one American combat unit, the 82nd Airborne Division, which saw about as much combat as any American unit in the European Theater. It takes as its measure of success the sine qua non of effectiveness on the battlefield—mission accomplishment—and demonstrates that despite fighting surrounded, outnumbered, or both the 82nd never failed to accomplish any mission assigned it. Moreover, it did so while confronting some of the very best ground combat units Germany had to offer.

Why and how the 82nd was able to perform so well in combat is an essential theme of the work. Two factors stand out. One was an organizational culture that prized aggressiveness and initiative and instilled these attributes in the ranks through training and by example. A second was an ethos of up-front leadership that permeated the division's officer and noncommissioned officers corps.

The study draws on official records and histories, interviews, and the reminiscences, letters, diaries, and writings of veterans who fought with, alongside, and against the 82nd to both present a narrative history of the division during World War II and explicate the reasons for its success in combat. Moreover, it also provides a look at the early development of American airborne warfare, to include the struggle for its acceptance by the U.S. Army and the tactics and techniques that made it viable.

. . . but the sword
Of *Michael* from the Armorie of God
Was giv'n him temperd so, that neither keen
Nor solid might resist that edge: it met
The sword of *Satan* with steep force to smite
Descending, and in half cut sheere, nor staid,
But with swift wheele reverse, deep entring shar'd
All his right side; then *Satan* first knew pain . . .

John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (VI: 320-327)

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Introduction

> *However vague and indefinable the reasons may be—racial stock, training, leadership, motivation, or more likely a blend of these—the US paratroopers were in the forefront of the fight and their combat effectiveness was outstanding.*
>
> Leo Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg[1]

In 1994, during a conference held to commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Normandy Invasion, historian Stephen Ambrose made the following comparison:

> [m]an-for-man the American soldier in the campaign in Northwest Europe was way better than his German counterpart. And I'm not talking just about battalion troops here either, I'm talking about even Waffen SS. The American best, the rangers and the airborne, were way better than the German best.[2]

The airborne and America's best. To many these words are synonymous. But this reputation had to be earned, and the 82nd Airborne Division, America's first and most battle-scarred airborne division did just that on the World War II battlefields of Sicily, Italy, France, Holland, Belgium, and Germany. It fought outnumbered, often cut off from friendly units, and for far longer than expected. Its members, paratroopers and glidermen, saw some of the most ferocious fighting of the war at places like Biazzo Ridge, Anzio, Sainte-Mère-Église, Nijmegen, Cheneux, Trois Ponts, and Hitdorf. Throughout these fights, and countless others, the 82nd Airborne Division sustained incredible casualties, inflicted far more, and never failed to achieve its objective. For its exploits the governments of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands decorated the entire division, while fifteen of the 82nd's subordinate units earned U.S. Presidential Unit Citations, the nation's highest organizational award.

In many ways, the story of the 82nd in World War II is the story of the American Army in microcosm. Just as the Army had to organize, train, and equip ground, air, and support forces to fight a modern war, so too did a small group of enthusiasts organize, train, and equip America's fledging paratroop and glider units. In the summer of 1940, the U.S. Army comprised fewer than 270,000 members.[3] That same summer, the Army could boast but fifty paratroopers organized as a test platoon at Fort Benning, Georgia.[4] While the Army's regular infantry and armored divisions were learning the tactics, techniques, and procedures of mechanized warfare, 82nd Airborne Division troopers forged a new doctrine of vertical envelopment. And by the end of the war in Europe, having learned its lessons well, the U.S. Army stood in triumphant league with its Allies and selected the 82nd Airborne Division to be America's Guard of Honor in Berlin.

Notes for this chapter are found on pages 10 through 12.

An examination of America's premier airborne division in World War II offers several unique insights as well. One, of course, is the story behind the development and evolution of U.S. Army parachute and glider units, a tale that parallels closely that of the 82nd Airborne Division itself. A second is the "combat multiplier" effect an elite unit can have on operations when its unique capabilities are properly employed and exploited. Third is the power of initiative and innovation at all levels of the chain of command, both in combat and in training. And finally, there is the impact of leadership on morale, unit cohesiveness, esprit, and combat effectiveness, especially the special brand of leadership by example embodied by the division's two wartime commanders.

Ironically, despite the wartime exploits of the 82nd and other high-performing American and Allied ground combat units, analysts writing in the immediate post-war era denigrated their battlefield performance. In a series of books, monographs, and articles published through the early 1980s, a spate of military historians, political scientists, and sociologists made sweeping generalizations about the relative *ineffectiveness* of Allied ground units, especially when compared to similar units in the German Army (including the *Waffen SS*) of World War II. Rising Phoenix-like from the ashes of defeat in the works of these influential commentators the Nazi war machine became, for a time at least, the exemplar of combat effectiveness.

The opening salvo in this post-war debate came from a most unlikely source—U.S. Army historian S.L.A. Marshall who, not more than two years after the end of the war, questioned the battlefield performance of the American Army in his influential book *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War*. A pioneer in the use of after-action interviews as a means of gathering historical data, Marshall criticized the battlefield performance of American soldiers in both the Pacific and European theaters. Marshall felt strongly that the battlefield is "the epitome of war" and the place where "the issues of war are decided."[5] The key to success on the battlefield, he continued, is fire superiority but his interviews had revealed that not more than twenty-five percent of American soldiers in any firefight actually engaged the enemy with their weapon.[6] According to Marshall, the reason for this stemmed, in part, from U.S. Army doctrine, which stressed individual maneuver in relationship to terrain as opposed to individual maneuver in relationship to the other soldiers in a unit. But, wrote Marshall, the poor firing ratio was primarily the result of the American Army's personnel management policies. What he had learned through his interviews was that a soldier "is sustained by his fellows primarily" and hence, in order to build effective combat units, it is imperative to foment cohesiveness among the soldiers in a unit, something he claimed the American Army had failed to do in World War II.[7] Instead, U.S. Army personnel managers "moved men around as if they were pegs and nothing counted but a specialist classification number."[8] These managers had become, in Marshall's eyes, "fillers-of-holes rather than architects of the human spirit."[9]

Men Against Fire, though directed solely at the U.S. Army, set the stage for another influential work published the following year in *Public Opinion Quarterly* by two sociologists, Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, entitled "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II." Whereas Marshall excoriated the American Army for its failure to nurture cohesiveness within its ranks, Shils and Janowitz demonstrated that it was such cohesion that sustained the German Army despite fighting against overwhelming odds. Based on interrogations of German prisoners of war taken on the

Western Front as well as the examination of captured documents and combat observation reports, Shils and Janowitz concluded that "the unity of the German Army was in fact sustained only to a very slight extent by the National Socialist political convictions of its members."[10] Instead, what was "more important in the motivation of the determined resistance of the German soldier was the steady satisfaction of certain *primary* personality demands afforded by the social organization of the army."[11] Central to their thesis is the importance of what Shils and Janowitz call "primary groups" defined as small groups " 'characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation.' "[12] In the German Army of World War II, the primary groups were the small units that comprised the army's squads, platoons, and companies. The recruiting and replacement system of the German Army, according to Shils and Janowitz, actively sought to promote the creation of these primary groups and the subsequent cohesion that they exhibited. Furthermore, a cadre of paternalistic junior officers and noncommissioned officers, who provided the core around which the primary groups formed, led these men. The result was an organizational structure that satisfied the individual's basic needs—affection, esteem and power—and regulated his personal behavior. In the waning days of the war, despite the odds arrayed against them, it was this primary group loyalty and the cohesiveness born of that loyalty that kept German soldiers in the field.

These two works set the tone for much of the post-war analysis about combat effectiveness, especially when that analysis attempted a comparison of the fighting qualities of the German and American armies. Concurrently, there also developed what Dennis Showalter has called "a virtual cult of the Wehrmacht" by which historians accepted a sanitized version of German history that not only separated the German Army from its Nazi masters, but which heralded the fighting qualities of the German Army as the standard to be emulated.[13] The problematic fact of Germany having lost World War II (to say nothing of World War I) was explained away as a simple matter of numbers; the German Army was not out-fought on the battlefield, it was out-produced in American factories, and since such decisions are beyond the military realm the blame for Germany's defeat rests squarely with its politicians, industrialists, and economists, not with its soldiers. Additionally, by attributing the fighting effectiveness of the German Army to organizational factors such as the maintenance of small group cohesion, the German Army avoided the taint of Nazism. The German Army and the German officer corps emerged, therefore, unscathed by defeat, with a reputation as the world's most effective military machine run by professional, competent, and innovative officers.

The social chaos of the 1960s and 1970s combined with the increasingly frustrating war in Vietnam and the deleterious effect the war was having on the American Army reignited the debate about combat effectiveness and invited, once again, comparisons with the German Army of World War II. Not surprisingly, therefore, two political science professors, Paul L. Savage and Richard A. Gabriel, mirrored Shils and Janowitz by publishing an article entitled "Cohesion and Disintegration in the American Army." Beginning with the premise that "a condition of cohesion and disintegration in a military structure is by and large a function of circumstances generated within the military structure," they discarded the notion that the ills being experienced by the American Army in Vietnam were inevitable given the chaos permeating American society.[14] Instead they contended that the U.S. Army had been deteriorating since the end of the Second World War, that this disintegration had accelerated during the period 1961-1971,

and that "the disintegration of the Army, together with the dissolution of primary group cohesion, is directly related to the loss of officer professionalism expressed in the pervasive phenomenon of 'managerial careerism.' "[15]

To prove their point, Savage and Gabriel compared the American Army in Vietnam with the German Army of World War II, accepting the latter, without question, as the epitome of professionalism and effectiveness. They asserted that the German officer corps held fast to a "traditional 'gladiatorial' officer stereotype," proof of which was the much higher casualty rate among German officers in World War II as compared to the casualty rate of American Army officers in Vietnam.[16] Furthermore, given the ethos of the German officer corps they found that "in all German field operations, one found a readiness of officers to undertake an inordinate share of risk and to regard any insulation of officers from the risks of battle as dishonorable, regardless of prevailing civil societal disharmony."[17] This ethos they juxtaposed with one they felt characterized the U.S. Army officer corps in Vietnam: a "managerial combat nonparticipant" ethos "where efficiency instead of 'honor' [became] the performance standard."[18]

Savage and Gabriel also laid the problems of desertion, drug abuse, racial tension, and just about any other challenges experienced by the U.S. Army in Vietnam on the loss of primary group cohesion, which, they posited was the direct result of the American policy of maintaining "units in combat for protracted periods, keeping them filled by the replacement stream, and, in effect, considerably reducing the maintenance of primary group ties in American units and, hence, unit cohesion."[19] This they compared with the German Army policy of "rotating divisions out of the line for reconstitution of primary groups," thereby echoing the Shils and Janowitz thesis about the importance of small group cohesion in ensuring combat effectiveness.[20]

Two years after publishing "Cohesion and Disintegration in the American Army," Savage and Gabriel expanded their thesis into a book entitled *Crisis in Command: Mismanagement in the* Army. Once again they used the German Army of World War II as their point of comparison, writing that its performance "in both world wars is an obvious example of high cohesion under great stress largely irrespective of the nature of their [sic] government."21 They again praised the high quality and standards of the German officer corps, which resulted in behavior that "remained unambiguously in accord with what cohesive military units require as essential to performance: they were available to their men; they accepted an inordinate share of the burden of death; they were professionally competent and reliable; and, very importantly, they were present at the front."22 As before, they also stressed the positive effect of the strong primary group ties that German soldiers felt, referring to this bond as "the cement of the German Army."23 Hence, though Gabriel and Savage focused primarily on the ills of the American Army in Vietnam, their selection of the German Army of the Second World War as the standard against which the combat effectiveness of all other armies should be measured did much to further the notion of German fighting prowess.

Concurrent with the work of Gabriel and Savage a retired U.S. Army colonel, T.N. Dupuy, published *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945*. In his prologue, which he subtitled "The Riddle of 1944," Dupuy introduced his work with the proposition that though there is nothing surprising about the ultimate failure of the German Ardennes Offensive of that year, "what is amazing is the fact that the Germans had been able to undertake such an offensive at all, and to drive it eighty

kilometers deep into the lines of an enemy with overwhelming superior numerical and material strength in the air and on the ground."[24] Dupuy explained that he did not come to grips with this "riddle" until some years later when he was engaged in a project to develop a quantified model of historical combat. Using as his database sixty engagements fought in Italy during 1943 and 1944, Dupuy claimed that "on average, a force of 100 Germans was the combat equivalent of 120 American or 120 British troops" and that, in addition, German soldiers generally inflicted three Allied casualties for every two they sustained.[25] The key to the above, he wrote, was that the German Army had "uniquely, discovered the secret of *institutionalizing* military excellence" through the medium of the Prussian, later German General Staff.[26] For Dupuy, the organization and operation of the German General Staff is "the fundamental explanation of German combat ability, and of the quality of German military power as demonstrated in two world wars."[27] Furthermore, Dupuy relieved the German military establishment of all blame for the losses of World Wars I and II. Those losses, he wrote, were "in no way connected with the professional organization, indoctrination, or performance of the German General Staff" thereby salvaging, once again, the martial reputation of the German Army.[28]

Historian Martin van Creveld seized Dupuy's comparative quantitative analysis, expanded it to include other factors, and in 1982 published *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945*, bringing to a head the convoluted thesis that, though defeated, the German Army of World War II comprised the finest fighting units of any that took the field. At the outset, van Creveld suggested that

> [w]ithin the limits set by its size, an army's worth as a military instrument equals the quality and quantity of its equipment multiplied by what, in the present study, will be termed its 'Fighting Power.' The latter rests on mental, intellectual, and organizational foundations; its manifestations, in one combination or another, are discipline and cohesion, morale and initiative, courage and toughness, the willingness to fight and the readiness, if necessary, to die. 'Fighting Power,' in brief, is defined as the sum total of mental qualities that make armies fight.[29]

After defining "Fighting Power," van Creveld examined its components as they were reflected in the German and American armies of World War II and found, in every instance, the American Army wanting. For example, van Creveld praised the German military principle of *Auftragstaktik*, which he defined as a "mission-oriented command system" in which subordinates are told what to do, not how to do it, thereby placing a premium on the initiative of lower level commanders.[30] In comparison, van Creveld saw the American Army's command system as much more directive in nature, somewhat akin to the scientific management principles with which U.S. industries were run. He also took to task the overall administration and organization of the American Army in that it had too many soldiers committed to non-combat duties, too few committed to combat formations, and suffered from a replacement system that treated men like interchangeable parts. The German Army, on the other hand, continually formed new divisions, thereby allowing for the periodic rotation of units out of the front lines to refit and preserving the small group cohesion he saw as essential to effective fighting formations. Accordingly,

"German divisions sacrificed some strength but remained bunches of men who suffered, fought, and died together" while American divisions "preserved the teeth to tail ratio by acting like some huge meat-grinding machines that processed men on their way from the replacement system in the rear to becoming casualties at the front."[31] In summary, van Creveld posited that the German Army of World War II was "[a] fighting force first and foremost" in which "doctrine, training, and organization were all geared to fighting in the narrower sense."[32] On the other hand, the American Army "chose to regard war not so much as a struggle between opposing troops but rather as one whose outcome would be decided largely by machines."[33]

Hence the myth of the German Army which, though beaten decisively, emerged from the maelstrom of World War II unscathed and became, in defeat, the standard by which all armies were measured. This myth also formed the basis of what was, for years, the standard historical interpretation of victory and defeat in the European Theater in World War II. Simply put, this interpretation assumed the superior fighting mettle of the German Army and explained its defeat either through the incompetence of its Nazi masters or its inability to withstand the weight of men and materiel aligned against it or a combination of both. Some historians, such as John Keegan, took this notion of martial prowess to fanciful lengths, comparing German soldiers fighting the Russians with "the warriors of the Teutonic tribes of old" who were "resolved if necessary to die where they stood, should that be necessary to protect the uprooted population from the eastern invader."[34] Russell F. Weigley offered a more sober, yet still damning indictment of the American Army in his highly regarded work *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaigns of France and Germany, 1944-1945*. In this work, Weigley wrote that "the United States Army suffered long from a relative absence of the finely honed professional skill of the Germans, officers and men, in every aspect of tactics and operations."[35] Echoing Dupuy and van Creveld, he stated that "the German Army remained qualitatively superior to the American army, formation for formation, throughout far too many months of the American army's greatest campaign" and concluded unequivocally that "it was its preponderance of material resources" that brought the U.S. Army victory.[36]

The prevailing orthodoxy, however, has not remained unchallenged. One of the first to do so was Omer Bartov, an Israeli soldier-turned-scholar in *The Eastern Front, 1941-45, German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*. In this work, Bartov tested the Shils and Janowitz thesis at the micro level by examining three German divisions that fought extensively on the Eastern Front. As the result of a statistical analysis of the casualties these units sustained while fighting the Red Army, Bartov concluded that "it is difficult to speak of a more or less stable 'primary group' in divisions which suffered between 200 and 300 per cent casualties within the space of about three years of fighting."[37] Having thereby demonstrated that, on the Eastern Front at least, the primary group thesis as a basis for combat motivation could not be sustained, Bartov asked

> whether it was possible to fight for years in a foreign and hostile land, with the imminent danger of death lurking behind every tree and hill and to endure the most terrible physical and mental hardship, without believing that all this was necessary for the achievement of some 'higher cause,' however confused and nonsensical, let alone inhuman, it may seem to us today.[38]

To answer this question, Bartov focused on the influence of junior officers, whom he labeled "the backbone" of the German Army. He showed that these officers were generally young men who grew up under National Socialism and hailed from the same social classes that supported Hitler and his regime. These young men also translated orders to the rank and file, and in so doing infused those orders with appropriate National Socialist ardor. Their impact, combined with the political indoctrination to which German soldiers were increasingly subjected, ensured that "by and large, the German soldier on the Eastern Front felt he was fighting for the cause of National Socialism and was motivated by an unquestioning belief in Hitler."[39]

Bartov expanded his thesis in *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, writing that not only were primary groups destroyed and therefore inconsequential for the maintenance of German combat effectiveness on the Eastern Front, but as the fighting conditions worsened the whole nature of the struggle changed. He explained that German soldiers kept fighting because of an incredibly harsh disciplinary system by which some 15,000 men were executed for dereliction of duty.[40] Furthermore, "[a]s the fortunes of the *Ostheer* [German Army in the East] rapidly deteriorated, the troops' 'belief' in Hitler did not falter, but rather increased in direct proportion to the hopelessness of the situation."[41] And as the war on the Eastern Front spiraled out of control, becoming ever more brutal and inhuman, Bartov maintained that it was "the troops at the front [who] were the firmest of Hitler's followed, and the least cynical about his ideology."[42] In both his works, therefore, Bartov made a compelling argument that called into question the efficacy of the primary group cohesion thesis as it applied to the German Army on the Eastern Front, while bringing to light the dark ideological side of German combat motivation.

Other historians have questioned the effectiveness of the German military as a whole. In *The Great Crusade: A New Complete History of the Second World War*, H.P. Willmott wrote of his "contempt for that popularly accepted but pernicious myth of German military excellence."[43] In contrast, Willmott placed the blame for Germany's defeat in the Second World War squarely in the hands of the German military. According to Willmott, "the German military genius was in fighting, not in war, [and] that indeed Germany's failure stemmed from her inability to understand the nature of war."[44]

In *Why the Allies Won*, Richard Overy furthered Willmott's indictment of German military excellence, labeling the commonly held material explanation for Allied victory "at best an unsophisticated argument."[45] For Overy

> [t]he material balance also tells us little about *how* the weapons were used once the forces got them. This was not a question of economic power or technical ingenuity, but of fighting skills. During the war there were plenty of instances of poorly-armed troops fighting superbly; a super-abundance of weapons and equipment was no guarantee that forces could use them effectively. Fighting power was determined not just by weapons, but by training, organisation, morale and military elan.[46]

Overy explained that as the war progressed Axis forces stagnated, relying on the tactics, techniques, and procedures that had brought them success in the early days of the war. The Allies, on the other hand, learned their lessons and "were forced by the nature of their enemy to stretch their strategic imaginations to embrace ways of warfare that were more ingenious and effective."[47] The result was that, by the end of the war, Allied combat formations were qualitatively every bit as good as those of their enemies.

In separate works, Michael D. Doubler and Peter R. Mansoor further refined the historical debate about German military competence. Whereas Willmott and Overy took a comparative approach, Doubler and Mansoor focused their arguments mainly on the performance of the American Army, thereby bringing full circle the discussion begun by Marshall in 1947. Doubler's work, *Closing with the Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945*, is a detailed assessment of the combat performance of American army divisions at the tactical level. According to Doubler, it was "[t]he army's ability to learn on the battlefield and to implement improved methods of combined arms warfare [that] contributed significantly to the American success in World War II."[48] Unlike Marshall, Doubler labeled the American Army's pre-war doctrine sound and therefore "the army did not have to devise and learn a whole new approach to battle."[49] Instead, "[c]ombat formations concentrated on improving their battlefield performance rather than significantly revising their broad approach to operations."[50] What resulted was American army divisions that "were more effective instruments of national policy than is generally believed" and which were "powerful, cohesive combined arms formations capable of generating awesome firepower and effective ground maneuver."[51] In *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945*, Peter Mansoor echoes Doubler, writing that one of the main failings of the German Army was "its inability to adapt to the changing tactics and operations of its foes as World War II progressed."[52] Meanwhile, the strength of the American army "lay in its ability to adapt to changing conditions on battlefields across the globe, its use of intelligence, outstanding fire support, the ability to execute joint operations, and, most important, its endurance."[53]

Five days before the final German surrender, General Dwight D. Eisenhower gathered with his staff for dinner at his headquarters in Rheims, France. Musing aloud about the impending end of the war in Europe, Eisenhower commented that his primary intention was "to seal the Allied victory so completely that no one in Germany, civilian, soldier, airman, or sailor will fail to appreciate that fact that the 'superrace' has had the hell beaten out of it."[54] Coincidentally, on that same day, approximately four hundred miles northeast of where Eisenhower dined, troopers of the 82nd Airborne Division's 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion were witnessing the Supreme Commander's intention come to fruition.

> Along five miles of Highway 191, over which we traveled, was a sight which climaxed two years of warfare for the veterans of this battalion. A whole German Army had laid down its arms and was marching in to surrender. The endless column composed of soldiers on foot, bicycle, motorcycle, automobiles, trucks, tanks, horses and covered wagons crowded the highway as they shuffled along westward. Rifles, guns,

> ammunition and supplies were haphazardly scattered along the route. . . . Wrecked vehicles lying by the road, horses which faltered due to fatigue, and once arrogant field officer side by side with lowly privates sitting on the side of the road doctoring their corns and bunions accentuated the fact that the will to resist in this army had definitely been broken. . . . No one bothered to take prisoners. Like cattle they were herded on to the road and directed toward the stockade.[55]

Throughout the war in Europe and the Mediterranean, the 82nd Airborne Division served at the forefront of the Allied war effort, spearheading invasions, providing emergency reinforcements to threatened sectors, and slogging toward Germany side-by-side with their earthbound brethren. All told, the 82nd saw as much combat as almost any division in the American Army during the Second World War, most of the time fighting outnumbered, surrounded, or both. Only once did it give up ground it had already taken, and this at the behest of higher headquarters not enemy action, and later took back that ground. It accomplished every mission assigned, sometimes at the cost of tremendous casualties, but was always ready and willing to engage the enemy. It might be averred that this rings a bit hagiographic. It is, however, true.

The following narrative, told mostly through the letters, journals, correspondence, and reminiscences of the men who fought with, beside, and against the 82nd will hopefully shed some light on the stuff that made the division such a formidable fighting unit. By way of background and context, the first chapter is devoted to a synopsis of the 82nd Infantry Division's exploits in the First World War while chapters two and three briefly outline the historical development of the parachute and glider, their adoption as instruments of war, the evolution of the theory and practice of vertical envelopment in Russia and Germany, and the early years of the same in the United States. Chapters four through twenty-six follow the 82nd Airborne Division from its (re)birth at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, through the end of the war in Europe. An epilogue summarizes post-war events that almost led to the dissolution of the division, but which ultimately end with the 82nd Airborne Division leading America's victory parade down New York City's Fifth Avenue.

Introduction Notes

[1] Leo Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg, "Glimpses of the US Soldier," *Military Review* 42, no. 4 (April 1962): 25-26. During the Normandy invasion, *General der Panzertruppen* Leo Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg was chief of *Panzer Group West*, the headquarters that controlled many of the German armored units in western Europe.

[2] Transcript of comments by Stephen Ambrose in Steven Weingartner, ed., *The Greatest Thing We Have Ever Attempted: Historical Perspectives on the Normandy Campaign* (Wheaton, IL: Cantigny First Division Foundation, 1998), 16.

[3] Mark S. Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1950), 16.

[4] John T. Ellis Jr., *The Airborne Command and Center*, Army Ground Forces Historical Study, no. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Army Ground Forces, 1946), 3.

[5] S[amuel] L[yman] A[twood] Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1947; reprint, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978), 27.

[6] Ibid., 50. Marshall's claims about the number of men who fire their weapon have since been proven false. Marshall had no statistics to back up his assertion, and even his primary assistant claims that he cannot recall Marshall ever asking soldiers about firing their weapons. However, this was not discovered and made public until 1988. See Frederic Smoler, "The Secret of the Soldiers Who Didn't Shoot," *American Heritage* 40, no. 2 (March 1989): 37-45.

[7] Ibid., 43.

[8] Ibid., 156.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II, in *Military Conflict: Essays in the Institutional Analysis of War and Peace*, ed. Morris Janowitz (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1975), 178.

[11] Ibid. Emphasis in original.

[12] Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization* (New York: n.p., 1909), 23 as quoted in footnote in ibid., 218.

[13] Professor Dennis Showalter provided the author with a draft copy of a book foreword in which he made this comment. This foreword was subsequently published in Russell A. Hart's *Clash of Arms: How the Allies Won in Normandy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienne Publishers, 2001).

[14] Paul L. Savage and Richard A. Gabriel, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the American Army," in *The Military in America from the Colonial Era to the Present,* ed. Peter Karsten (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 400.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 402.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 403.

[20] Ibid., 402-403.

[21] Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, *Crisis in Command: Mismanagement in the Army* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 32.

[22] Ibid., 38.

[23] Ibid.

[24] T[revor] N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), 2.

[25] Ibid., 3.

[26] Ibid., 5. Emphasis in original.

[27] Ibid., 302.

[28] Ibid. Two years after *A Genius for War*, Dupuy published the findings of his quantified analysis of combat performance in *Numbers, Predictions and War: Using History to Evaluate Combat Factors and Predict the Outcome of Battle* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979).

[29] Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 3.

[30] Ibid., 36.

[31] Ibid., 46-47.

[32] Ibid., 164.

[33] Ibid., 167.

[34] John Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy From D-Day to the Liberation of Paris* (New York: The Viking Press, 1982; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 320.

[35] Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), 729-730.

[36] Ibid., 730.

[37] Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-4: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 36.

[38] Ibid., 38.

[39] Ibid., 69.

[40] Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press Paperback, 1992), 6.

[41] Ibid., 166.

[42] Ibid., 169.

[43] H. P. Willmott, *The Great Crusade: A New Complete History of the Second World War* (New York: Macmillan, 1989; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1991), xi.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995; reprint, Paperback Edition, 1997), 2.

[46] Ibid., 6. Emphasis in original.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Michael D. Doubler, *Closing With The Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 2.

[49] Ibid., 267.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 7.

[52] Peter R. Mansoor, *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941-1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 4.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower: The Personal Diary of Captain Harry C. Butcher, USNR, Naval Aide to General Eisenhower, 1942 to 1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 827.

[55] Headquarters, 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division, "The Unit History of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion (From May 1, 1945 to June 3, 1945 Incl)," n.d., pp. 2-3, 382-FA(319)-0.3, Box 12435, Record Group 407, National Archives and Records Administration II, Modern Military Reference Branch, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NARA II).

Chapter One
To Be Known as the All-American Division

'They were swinging rapidly towards Camiers,' she later recalled, 'and though the sight of soldiers marching was now too familiar to arouse curiosity, an unusual quality of bold vigour in their stride caused me to stare at them with puzzled interest. They looked larger than ordinary men; their tall, straight figures were in vivid contrast to the under-sized armies of pale recruits to which we were grown accustomed. At first I thought their spruce, clean uniforms were those of officers, yet obviously they could not be officers, for there were too many of them; they seemed, as it were, Tommies in heaven. Had yet another regiment been conjured out of our depleted Dominions? I wondered, watching them move with such rhythm, such dignity, such serene consciousness of self-respect. But I knew the colonial troops so well, and these were different; they were assured where the Australians were aggressive, self-possessed where the New Zealanders were turbulent.' Then she heard an excited cry from a group of nurses behind her, 'Look! Look! Here are the Americans!'

Vera Brittain, April 1918[1]

When Marshal Joseph Joffre, France's victor at the First Battle of the Marne, arrived in the United States about three weeks after America's entry into World War I he was hailed as a hero. Heading a delegation sent to the United States with the express purpose of imprinting on Americans the grave nature of the threat and the vital importance of speeding resources to the war before it was too late, Joffre carried but one simple message, which he repeated over and over: " 'We want men, men, men.' "[2] Certainly America's Navy, merchant fleet, industrial power, and financial resources were also assets on which the French and their British allies wished to draw, but it was the pressing need for fresh bodies on the Western Front that was their most immediate concern.

German leaders, meanwhile, were confident that their campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare, launched on 1 February 1917, would preclude the very thing for which Joffre was pleading. This attitude, based on German Naval Staff calculations pitting available merchant tonnage against average monthly tonnage sunk by German U-boats, led them to the conclusion that the war would end before any substantial number of American troops could set foot in France. When asked about these calculations during testimony before the budgetary committee of the Reichstag, German Secretary of State for the Navy, Admiral Eduard von Capelle, proclaimed, " 'They will not even come . . . because our submarines will sink them. Thus America from a military point of view means nothing, and again nothing and for a third time nothing.' "[3]

Notes for this chapter are found on pages 29 through 33.

On 6 April 1917, the day the United States declared war on Germany, the American Army appeared more the "nothing" of which von Capelle spoke than the succor for which Joffre pleaded. At the time, the American military establishment comprised just over 133,000 Regulars (including 5,500 ill-trained Philippine Scouts) plus an additional 80,000 National Guardsmen who had been called to federal service for duty in the Mexican Punitive Expedition and a further 100,000 Guardsmen still in state service.[4] This force of approximately 300,000 men, long neglected and ill-equipped, was wholly unprepared for the type of warfare being conducted on the Western Front. At a time when hundreds of divisions faced off against one another in trenches running from the English Channel to the Swiss border, the largest permanent tactical organization in the American Army was a regiment.[5] When, in the interests of bolstering Entente morale and demonstrating a sense of purpose, President Woodrow Wilson ordered the immediate dispatch to France of a sizeable American force, a congeries of units were hastily thrown together to form the U.S. 1st Division, an organizational improvisation that required the transfer of hundreds of soldiers from across the Army to get the four infantry regiments that formed the core of the 1st Division up to wartime strength.[6] So unprepared was the United States for World War I that, when it actually entered the war, "the General Staff believed correctly (and unpopularly) that the United States could not play a significant part in the fighting until 1918 and that its army would not be ready for decisive operations until 1919."[7] And it was not solely at the cutting edge where the American Army was lacking; on the day the United States declared war on Germany, there were only nineteen General Staff officers assigned to duties in Washington, D.C., to plan for the mobilization, organization, training, and overseas deployment of a force the size of which no one could begin to grasp.[8]

Despite this unpreparedness, however, the National Defense Act of 1916 and the Selective Service Act of 1917 provided a solid foundation upon which to mobilize and fashion an American Army capable of participating in a world war. The former authorized a five-year expansion of the Regular Army establishment to 175,000 as well as an expansion of the National Guard to a strength of 400,000.[9] More importantly, it also standardized unit tables of organization for both the Regulars and National Guard and recognized the latter as the nation's only organized militia contingent upon its acceptance of tougher federal supervision and the recognition that it must be responsive to both state governors and the President. Finally, it placed on a firmer basis the Reserve Officers' Training Corps as well as student and businessmen's training camps.[10] Called by some the "most comprehensive piece of military legislation which Congress ever passed," the National Defense Act of 1916 created a standardized organizational framework on which to build an expanded Army and created the necessary officer training base to provide for the many platoon- and company-level officers the force would require.[11]

On 18 May 1917, President Wilson signed the Selective Service Act of 1917, requiring all males ages twenty-one to thirty to register for the draft (later expanded to include all males eighteen to forty-five). As a result, 24,234,021 men registered for the draft and over 2,800,000 were called to serve.[12] This act, however, was much more than a vehicle by which to obtain manpower for an expanded Regular Army and National Guard, it also created a third force, the National Army, under whose authority the hundreds of thousands of draftees would be organized.[13] As a result, by war's end

America had about four million men under arms (not including the Navy) and of every hundred, ten were National Guardsmen, thirteen were Regulars, and seventy-seven were National Army men.[14] The force was further organized into sixty-two divisions, forty-three of which eventually made it to France where thirty saw combat in an American Expeditionary Force (AEF) that, at its height, totaled some two million men.[15]

At the outset of America's involvement in the war, despite French and British pleas to amalgamate U.S. troops into their already formed units, the War Department made the decision to organize entire divisions in the United States, train them, and only then ship them overseas. Initial mobilization plans also envisioned the preservation of the pedigree of the divisions by adopting a system that reserved the numerical designations one through twenty-five for Regular Army divisions, twenty-six through seventy-five for National Guard divisions, and seventy-six and higher for National Army divisions, with the members of each type division wearing distinctive "US," "NG," or "NA" collar insignia as appropriate. The intent was that Regular Army divisions would comprise mostly Regulars and volunteers; National Guard divisions would comprise mostly Guardsmen; and National Army divisions would be formed primarily from draftees, though the commissioned and noncommissioned officers would be Regular Army. However, within a year such distinctions became meaningless because personnel turbulence was so pronounced that eventually all divisions were composed of significant numbers of all three type soldiers. Therefore, in August 1918, Major General Peyton C. March, the Army Chief of Staff, ordered the elimination of all distinctions among the three components.[16]

The 82nd Division, a National Army organization, assembled at Camp Gordon, Georgia, on 25 August 1917 under the command of Major General Eben Swift, a man respected throughout the Army who had but one major mark against him: he was sixty-three years old.[17] Of the division's initial officer cadre, one-third of the majors and most of the higher ranking officers were Regulars while the remainder, sons of Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, were recent graduates of the First Officers' Training Camp at Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Georgia. The division's first contingent of draftees arrived ten days later, most of whom also hailed from Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, along with a small training cadre of Regular Army noncommissioned officers from the 6th and 17th Infantry Regiments.[18] The new soldiers, mostly from the rural South, shocked the officers who were ultimately responsible for training and organizing them into a cohesive fighting unit. According to the 319th Field Artillery regimental history (a subordinate unit of the 82nd Division), " '[a] more motley crew never whittled a pine stick or spit tobacco juice on the doorstep. To them, every person who wore leather legging[s] was a sergeant, the captain was invariably called boss, reverence for rank and authority was a thing unknown and illiteracy was appalling.' " Yet, continued the regimental history, the men " 'could sing, and they worked as hard as any officers, trying to learn what was expected of them.' "[19]

It was good they could sing, and march as well, for these two activities formed the bulk of their training during the first several months of their service. The men had no uniforms and few individual weapons (some trained with wooden weapons until February 1918) so a typical day began with thirty minutes of physical training followed by thirty minutes of group singing. Thereafter the division would split into platoon and squad groups where drill and ceremony, the manual of arms, and instruction in the rudiments of

soldiering occupied the men until late afternoon, when a road march would conclude the day's training.[20] The artillerymen and mortarmen, specialists who would provide the bulk of the division's firepower once it was committed to combat, were woefully under trained because there were few artillery pieces or mortars to be found. Similarly, there were only twelve French-made Chauchat machine guns on which to train the 82nd's machine gunners.[21] It was not until March 1918, a month after the division left the United States for France, that the 82nd had anywhere near its required complement of weapons, though it was still short .45-caliber handguns and did not receive all of its artillery pieces until much later.[22]

Lack of equipment, however, did not impede the growth of the 82nd which, by the end of September 1917, numbered 830 officers and 12,650 men, a figure which strained the existing facilities at Camp Gordon, but which was still significantly short of the division's authorized wartime strength of approximately 28,000.[23] Yet almost as soon as the division began to approach full strength, the War Department stripped it of all its enlisted men save a cadre of 783, sending the bulk of the men to the 30th and 31st Divisions, two National Guard units higher on the priority list.[24] Thus began a series of transfers into and out of the 82nd that plagued training, organizational integrity, and continuity, and presented the division's officers and noncommissioned officers with unique challenges at every turn. For example, the second cohort of draftees, replacements for those who had initially formed the division, were men from several camps in the northeast, many of whom were recent immigrants, and twenty percent of whom could not speak English.[25] To overcome this obstacle, the division organized language schools to teach the men elementary English, but then lost these men in whom it had invested so much valuable time and energy when they were identified as "enemy aliens" and mustered out of the service just prior to the 82nd's departure for France.[26] Furthermore, the division lost some its best men when some 3,000 "specialists," identified as such by the War Department's occupational classification system, were transferred elsewhere into jobs that more closely resembled their civilian pursuits.[27] As the division historian noted, though the identification of men with specialized civilian skills that were roughly translatable into military skills might make sense at the macro level

> [t]he Division believed that the War Department had overlooked one important consideration. Although the soldier might be a very good plumber, lumberman, blacksmith or structural iron worker, a great deal of Government time and money had been expended in making him an ever more valuable specialist in his present occupation: namely, that of a non-commissioned officer, bayonet instructor, hand-grenade expert or machine gunner.[28]

Stability within the 82nd was not much better at the top. In November 1917, Brigadier General James G. Erwin replaced the elderly Swift as division commander.[29] A "competent officer," Erwin "never inspired great enthusiasm among the troops" but "[u]nder his guidance training had begun, albeit slowly, and unit morale and esprit de corps was high."[30] Less than a month later, however, Erwin received orders moving him to command of the 6th (Regular Army) Division and Brigadier General William P.

Burnham took command of the 82nd.[31] Burnham was something of an anomaly. He had entered the Military Academy in 1877 but failed to graduate, at which time he enlisted in the Army and worked his way up through the ranks.[32] A "solid infantry officer who could be counted on to train the 82nd Division for combat on the Western front," Burnham remained in command until October 1918, when Major General George B. Duncan took over.[33] Duncan had previously commanded the 77th Division but had been relieved when his physical fitness had been questioned. Undeterred, Duncan told the board of medical officers examining him that they could send him home if they wished; he would simply enlist and serve as a private. Inspired by Duncan's combativeness, General John J. Pershing intervened, saved Duncan's career, and eventually gave him command of 82nd because he was a fighter. Duncan commanded the division until its deactivation in 1919.[34]

This confusing assignment and reassignment of commanders echoed throughout the division's chain of command. According to orders dated 2 September 1917, Brigadier General Charles T. Menoher was to take command of the 82nd Division's field artillery brigade, yet on the day he was to assume his position Menoher was in France, awaiting a division command slot. In the interim Colonel Earle D'A. Pearce, commander of one of the subordinate field artillery regiments, led the brigade until February 1918, when Brigadier General Charles D. Rhodes finally arrived to fill the slot to which Menoher had been assigned but never physically occupied.[35] Conversely, somewhat periodically the opposite phenomenon would occur. Commanders would remain at their posts, but their units would disappear. This happened in October 1917 when the War Department transferred all the men from both the 307th Engineer Regiment and the 307th Field Signal Battalion elsewhere.[36]

Despite the problems created by the incessant personnel turbulence, the lack of equipment, and the inexperience of even the Regular Army officers in handling large units, the 82nd Division slowly came together. As finally organized, the division consisted of two infantry brigades (the 163rd and 164th Infantry Brigades), one field artillery brigade (the 157th Field Artillery Brigade), and divisional troops comprising the 307th Engineer Regiment, the 319th Machine Gun Battalion, the 307th Field Signal Battalion, and an array of service and support units. The 163rd Infantry Brigade consisted of the 325th and 326th Infantry Regiments and the 320th Machine Gun Battalion while the 164th Infantry Brigade was made up of the 327th and 328th Infantry Regiments and the 321st Machine Gun Battalion. The 320th and 321st Field Artillery Regiments (armed with French 75mm howitzers), the 319th Field Artillery Regiment (155mm howitzers), and the 307th Trench Mortar Battery were all subordinate units of the 157th Field Artillery Brigade. The division was commanded by a major general (Burnham was eventually promoted), the brigades by brigadier generals, regiments by colonels, battalions (there were three infantry battalions in each regiment) by lieutenant colonels, and companies (there were four companies in each battalion) by majors. Infantry squads were eight-men strong and there were seven squads in each platoon (commanded by a captain) and four platoons in each company. All told, the division's authorized maximum strength was 991 officers and 27,114 men, about twice as large as the French, British, and German divisions of the time.[37]

In February and March 1918, representatives from the War Department inspected the 82nd and, despite the challenges of the previous six months, rated it sufficiently trained,

equipped, and organized to begin preparation for movement to France, making it the second National Army division and the eighth division overall to be earmarked for movement to the Western Front.[38] On 4 April 1918, just a few days before the lead elements left for the ports of embarkation, Burnham assembled the division for one final review and invited as the reviewing officer Mrs. John Brown Gordon, wife of the deceased Confederate general after whom the 82nd's birth home was named.[39] Thereafter, the division moved in separate serials by rail to Camp Mills, New Jersey, and Camp Upton, New York, and then, following a brief respite, to the ports of Boston, New York City, and Brooklyn, from whence it began sailing in late April. By the beginning of May 1918, the bulk of the division was assembled near Liverpool, England, and then began moving once again, this time by battalions, to Southampton, England, where it then boarded ships to France.[40]

During its movement to the English ports one of the division's regiments, the 325th Infantry, passed through London, where it paraded before and received a salute from an assemblage of English nobility, to include the Queen Mother and King George V. In describing the scene, the London *Times* echoed the sentiments of a war-weary people jubilant at the prospect of aid from " ' these sturdy sons of the New World' " passing before them.[41] Continuing, the *Times* insightfully described the makeup of the 82nd troopers on parade.

> Tall they were, clean-shaven almost to a man; and their speech betrayed them. Yet even among themselves it was not difficult to pick out the slow Southern drawl from the clipped speech of the Yankee, while the distinctive profile of the North American Indian was the hall-mark of many faces.
>
> Every State in the Union had its representative, for these were not men of the Regular Army, such as had 'come across' twelve months ago with General Pershing: they were the vanguard of the New Army, that almost numberless force which America is raising to crush for ever the evil spirit of Prussian militarism.[42]

General Burnham, too, could not fail to recognize the diversity in the ranks of the 82nd and, desiring "to give the division a symbol that would strengthen morale and esprit de corps," issued General Order No. 6 on 8 April 1918, which turned this potentially fractious characteristic into a symbol of unity.[43] The order, simple, short, and succinct, declared "[t]he Eighty-second Division represents the best men from every state in the union. In view of this fact, the commanding general designates this division and orders that it be known as the 'All-American Division.' "[44] That this unit designation and its symbolic import was not lost on those in the ranks is perhaps best underscored by the simple words of one of the 82nd's most renowned soldiers, Sergeant Alvin York, who wrote

> I was in the All-American Division, made up of boys from all over. In my platoon there were Greeks, Italians, Poles, Irish, Jews, and a German, as well as a few mountain boys and some Middle West farmers. It didn't occur to me nohow to look too carefully at their branding marks. They

> was jes American soldier boys to me and that was all; and I would be a heap bothered if I was to try to make up my mind which of them was the best. I didn't find out then, and I'm a-telling you I haven't found out since, that jes because a man comes from some particular place or country he's any better'n anybody else. It ain't where you come from, it's what you are that counts.[45]

On 10 May 1918, the lead elements of the 82nd finally arrived in France, and settled in and around St. Valery-sur-Somme near the Channel coast to train with the British 66th Division. Having been informed beforehand of the strengths and weaknesses of the 82nd, Major General H. K. Bethell, commander of the 66th Division, set up a training program for the Americans that was designed to familiarize them with the tactics, techniques, and procedures of trench warfare on the Western Front. The 157th Artillery Brigade, meanwhile, which did not arrive in France until early June, moved to the La Courtine training area where French instructors put it through a similar training program.[46] After inspections by Field Marshal Douglas Haig, the British Expeditionary Force commander, and General Pershing at the end of May, officers and noncommissioned officers of the 82nd began a series of familiarization tours to the British front-line trenches around Albert and Amiens. Captain Jewett Williams of the 326th Infantry Regiment became the 82nd's first ever battle casualty when, during the course of one of these familiarization tours, he was killed.[47]

While the 82nd was learning the practicalities of its deadly trade under British tutelage, Pershing was engaged with his Allied counterparts in a running debate about how best to use American manpower. Before Pershing left for France, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, with President Wilson's approval, told the American field commander

> '[i]n military operations against the Imperial German Government, you are directed to cooperate with the forces of the other countries employed against the enemy; but in so doing the underlying idea must be kept in view that the forces of the United States are a separate and distinct component of the combined forces, the identity of which must be preserved. This fundamental rule is subject to such minor exceptions in particular circumstances as your judgment may approve. The decision as to when your command, or any of its parts, is ready for action is confided to you, and you will exercise full powers in determining the manner of cooperation. But, until the forces of the United States are in your judgment sufficiently strong to warrant operations as an independent command, it is understood that you will cooperate as a component of whatever army you may be assigned to by the French government.'[48]

In order to fully realize Baker's instructions, Pershing's staff conducted a strategic analysis of the Western Front with an eye toward finding an area where the AEF could assemble and train before assuming its own sector just prior to the decisive offensive that Pershing assumed would not occur until 1919. Since British forces were committed north of Paris protecting the Channel ports and French forces protected the capital itself, Pershing's planners looked to Lorraine, southeast of Paris, as a likely area in which to

concentrate. At the time of the American buildup there were few Allied troops in the area and railroad lines linking Lorraine with the ports of St. Nazaire, La Pallice, and Bassens were sufficient to transport and keep the AEF supplied without adding further congestion to the French and British lines of communication. Furthermore, the area fronted the St. Mihiel salient, a bulge in the lines that Pershing had been eying as a potential target for the great war-winning American offensive. In June 1917, therefore, Pershing secured permission for the AEF to occupy Lorraine between the Argonne Forest and the Vosges Mountains.[49]

As a result of Pershing's strategic calculus, on 15 June 1918, the 82nd's training period with the British ended and the division (minus its artillery brigade, which remained at La Courtine to continue its training) boarded rail cars for movement to the area surrounding Toul, France, where it fell under the (temporary) operational control of the French XXXII Corps of the French Eighth Army in Lorraine. After arriving, the division troopers turned in their British automatic rifles and machine guns for those of French manufacture and, on the night of 25-26 June, relieved the U.S. 26th Division on a portion of the front known as the Lagney sector, situated at the southern tip of the St. Mihiel salient.[50] During this first tour at the front, which lasted until early August, the division finally had the opportunity to test itself and the quality of its training. Some of the actions it undertook were wildly successful, such as the trench raid of 4 August 1918 during which K and M Companies of the 326th Infantry Regiment penetrated 600 meters into enemy territory, killed a platoon of Germans, and captured three machine guns and numerous small arms at the cost of one killed and four wounded Americans.[51] Overall, however, General Burnham was not pleased with his division's performance. Despite actions like the aforementioned trench raid, he felt that his men lacked aggressiveness, pointing to the fact that though his units conducted nightly patrols they came back without having taken any prisoners. Even the offer of a thousand-franc reward to the first man or patrol that did come back with a prisoner had no effect. Some of this, of course, could be attributed to inexperience and the natural tentativeness the fearful forays into No Man's Land inspired. Yet even when the division was on the defensive it lacked aggressiveness. One example to which Burnham pointed occurred during the night of 5-6 July, when a German patrol was able to penetrate the division's lines and occupy a demolished village, causing all manner of trouble in the rear, before returning safely to its own lines. During the raid only two 82nd troopers returned fire; another seven who were on outpost duty—and therefore should have provided early warning that the patrol was coming—slept through the entire encounter.[52]

During its short stay at the front the division also experienced several incidents of fratricide, the direct result of the high number of non-English speaking troopers in its ranks who could not reply, in English, with the correct password when challenged by sentries at night. Burnham had been warning higher headquarters about this potential problem for some time to no avail and finally took the unusual step of sending a letter directly to the Adjutant General of the Army in Washington. " 'Their [the non-English speaking soldiers] presence in the division, as well as being a menace to the safety of themselves and their comrades, tends to reduce the morale of their organizations,' " wrote Burnham. When he received no response Burnham took up the matter with Pershing's headquarters and suggested that over a thousand 82nd troopers who could not speak English be transferred to the Service of Supply for duties out of harm's way. At a time

when the AEF was gearing up for its first major offensive at St. Mihiel, Burnham's request to weaken a combat division already earmarked for use in the attack met with "an icy response." Additionally, because of his outbursts, Pershing and others at AEF headquarters began to question the 82nd commander's fitness for command.[53]

On 10 August, the same day that the 82nd was relieved from front-line duty in the Lagney sector (as a result of its first combat the division sustained 44 killed, 327 wounded, and 3 men known to have been taken prisoner), the U.S. First Army became operational under Pershing and began preparations for an offensive into the St. Mihiel salient.[54] With its apex at the town after which it was named, the salient protruded some 16 miles deep into allied lines and was about 25 miles wide at its base. Although in a relatively quiet sector of the Western Front since the opening days of the war, the salient itself was of some strategic importance, for it lay astride one important rail line and allowed German artillery inside the salient to interdict with fire a second rail line feeding into Paris.[55] Furthermore, the salient covered the fortified city of Metz, protected the Briey iron basin, and presented a threat to the flank of any force attacking on either side of it. But reducing the salient would be no easy task. German defenses within the salient were arranged in three fortified bands. The first band comprised a series of outposts. The second, four to eight kilometers behind the outpost line, ran generally parallel to the face of the salient. The third, known to the Germans as the *Michel Stellung* (fortified position Michel), ran across the base of the salient and formed a portion of the much larger Hindenburg Line which ran from Metz to the North Sea.[56]

Pershing's original plan of attack called for the U.S. First Army to penetrate all three defensive belts in anticipation of effecting a strategic breakthrough. This plan changed, however, after French Marshal Ferdinand Foch convinced Pershing to limit his objectives so that American units would be available for a subsequent and much larger offensive into the Meuse-Argonne, the region just west of the St. Mihiel. Pershing therefore revised his plan. Only the first two defensive belts were to be reduced and the attack halted before it entered the *Michel Stellung*. Once this was accomplished the American Army was to disengage, sideslip left some sixty miles to the Meuse-Argonne, and take part in Foch's larger offensive. Although significantly reduced in scope, the St. Mihiel offensive was no small affair. In broad terms, the scheme of maneuver called for three coordinated and simultaneous attacks by four corps. The American I and IV Corps, arrayed against the southern face of the salient, would conduct the main attack. The American V Corps, facing the salient's western face, would conduct a supporting attack, and the French II Colonial Corps, arrayed opposite St. Mihiel at the tip of the salient, would conduct a holding attack.[57]

After leaving the front in the Lagney sector the 82nd spent a week refitting and training near Toul and then, as part of the buildup for the St. Mihiel offensive, returned to the line in an area astride the Moselle River under the operational control of the U.S. I Corps, commanded by Major General Hunter Liggett.[58] Liggett, like Pershing, was a strict disciplinarian and was concerned lest the first major U.S. offensive of the war be undermined because of incompetent leadership. Hence, before the offensive, Liggett had his chief of staff, Brigadier General Malin Craig, instruct all the I Corps division commanders that they were to take a hard look at their commands and relieve any officers they found wanting. Already none too pleased with how the 82nd had performed during its first taste of combat Burnham took this opportunity to get rid of several officers

he felt had performed poorly, including two of his regimental commanders.[59] Despite Burnham's actions, or perhaps because of them, at the end of August a team of officers from the AEF's Inspector General's office inspected the 82nd and found discipline and morale high, training in basic soldier skills adequate and rated the division an "efficient, if not spectacular, combat unit."[60]

The 82nd was the right-most division in the I Corps sector (and hence of the entire U.S. First Army), with the French 125th Division to its right and the U.S. 90th Division to its left. The division's mission for the offensive was to exert pressure on and maintain contact with the enemy to its front through aggressive raiding and patrolling, but it was to make no permanent advance.[61] Complicating the 82nd's mission, however, was the fact that the Moselle River split the division sector with the bulk of the division lying east of the river while just the 328th Infantry Regiment lay west of it. Moreover, it was not until just prior to the opening of the offensive that the 82nd was reunited with its field artillery brigade, leaving little time for the establishment of effective coordination measures. Much of the subsequent fighting, therefore, would be borne by the infantry alone.[62]

The 82nd moved to its attack positions during the night of 11-12 September in a steady rain, which turned the roads and trails into muddy quagmires. One soldier, commenting on the difficult conditions, speculated that American commanders ought to have substituted " 'submarines for tanks, ducks for carrier-pigeons, and alligators for soldiers.' "[63] Still the troopers trudged on and were in position ready to go at 0100 hours the next morning when the offensive began with the deafening roar of a preparatory artillery bombardment from more than three thousand guns.[64] Sergeant York, a member of G Company, 328th Infantry Regiment described the opening barrage as "the awfulest thing you ever heard. It made the air tremble and the ground shake. At times you couldn't hear your own voice nohow."[65]

At 0500 hours, American and French colonial infantrymen all around the salient's perimeter went over the top. Those on the southern face of the salient, comprising Pershing's main attack, advanced swiftly. This advance, however, was somewhat misleading. German commanders had anticipated the American attack and the day before the offensive began ordered the eight divisions and two brigades manning the St. Mihiel defenses to be prepared to withdraw. Hence what appeared to be a great American offensive victory was, in reality, an advance into ground the enemy had already decided to abandon.[66] Sensing this withdrawal, Pershing adjusted his plan by ordering IV Corps, attacking from the south and V Corps, attacking from the west, to adjust their respective directions of attack and rush with all possible speed to Vigneulles, a town at the approximate center of the salient, where they were to link up and then straighten the lines. Advancing hard on the heels of the withdrawing Germans, the two corps linked up as ordered at dawn on 13 September, well ahead of the original time table for the attack, thereby reducing the St. Mihiel salient to little more than a slight curve in the Western Front.[67]

Pershing's change caused a ripple effect throughout the U.S. First Army and forced corps and division commanders to adjust their plans so as to conform to the modified advance of the IV and V Corps. For the 82nd, it gave rise to a fairly unusual circumstance. As the First Army's right-most division it had to simultaneously maintain contact with the static French units to its right while keeping pace with and covering the flank of the advancing American units on its left. Such a maneuver is difficult even

under the best of circumstances, but the 82nd also had to contend with the fact that it was deployed on both sides of the Moselle River, making lateral movement within the division's area practically impossible. Moreover, only one of the division's four infantry regiments, the 328th, was on the American side of the Moselle. Doctrinally, a division would employ the bulk of its combat power in an attack, thereby ensuring that it would have sufficient weight of men and matériel to carry on to the objective. But given the speed with which the American units whose flanks it was to protect were advancing there was no time to make adjustments. Hence, while the bulk of the 82nd remained in static defensive positions on the French side of the Moselle, albeit conducting large-scale raids in order to keep the enemy to its front off balance and negating his ability to shift forces, the division attacked with but a quarter of its available strength on the American side of the river. It was a tall order for a relatively inexperienced unit, but the troopers of the 328th Infantry Regiment proved themselves equal to the task. Jumping off on 13 September, the 328th kept pace with the 90th Division to its left and took its objective, the town of Norroy, with relative ease and then continued its advance to some high ground beyond the town where it consolidated its positions and dug in, all before nightfall. Two days later, the 328th attacked again, still protecting the 90th Division's right flank, and passed through the village of Vandières to some high ground four hundred meters farther north, where it remained until being ordered the next day to withdraw back to Norroy.[68] Of particular note during the 328th's advance to Vandières were the actions of Lieutenant Colonel Emory J. Pike, the division machine gun officer, who earned the 82nd's first Medal of Honor. While observing the advance of the 3rd Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment, Pike became aware that the battalion commander had been unable to keep up because of a severely sprained ankle. Rushing forward into intense enemy artillery fire, Pike took charge, rallied the men, and helped bring order to the chaos. Wounded himself, Pike refused evacuation until, too weak to continue, he was carried back to a dressing station where he eventually died from loss of blood.[69]

The St. Mihiel offensive resulted in the capture of over 15,000 German prisoners, 450 guns, and the liberation of 200 square miles of occupied France. American casualties numbered fewer than 9,000.[70] The 82nd Division's toll was 78 killed, 15 missing or taken prisoner, and 857 wounded. When added to the casualties sustained by the division while it was on line in the Lagney sector, the 82nd had lost 1,029 troopers since engaging in active combat operations.[71]

For its actions at St. Mihiel, the division the division gained in stature in the eyes of the American high command. Even before the offensive had ended, the hard-to-please Liggett, sent a personal note to Burnham asking him to " '[p]lease convey to the officers and men of your Division my appreciation of the difficult part they had to perform in the highly successful operation of the First Corps to-day. This part they performed to my full satisfaction.' "[72]

On 20 September, the French 69th Division relieved the 82nd in its front line positions, whereupon the 82nd moved to the rear and became the U.S. First Army's reserve. It was a short-lived respite, for on 3 October the division moved back toward the front, this time near Varennes-en-Argonne in preparation for the next, and last, major American offensive of the war.[73]

The Meuse-Argonne offensive, one of a series of strategic converging attacks whose ultimate aim was to drive the Germans from French soil by cutting into their rear areas,

threatening vital lines of communication, and making continued resistance untenable, was an attack by the U.S. First and French Fourth Armies into the Argonne Forest and valley of the Meuse River. Their objective was a vital east-west rail line over fifty kilometers away that ran through Mézières and Sedan. Severing this rail line would force German forces in the area to either retreat or risk being cut off and destroyed.[74]

The overall scheme of maneuver envisioned a coordinated advance by the Fourth Army on the left and the First Army on the right, with the French making the final push to Mézières and Sedan. Before the final French push, however, the Americans would have to clear the way. To do this, Pershing and his staff planners drew up an attack in two phases. Phase one was to be an advance of approximately sixteen kilometers on either side of the fortified heights of Montfaucon, a key German defensive position. Taking the phase one objectives would threaten the flank of German forces in the Argonne Forest and force their withdrawal. Then, after tying in with the French Fourth Army north of the Argonne, phase two was to be a thrust through the *Kriemhild Stellung* (fortified position Kriemhild), a heavily fortified section of the Hindenburg Line, which would force a further evacuation of the German forces fronting the French Fourth Army and thereby open the road to Sedan and Mézières.[75]

For the offensive the First Army was given operational control of six corps. Three of those corps—from left to right the U.S. I, V, and III Corps—were concentrated in an area approximately twenty miles wide between the western edge of the Argonne and the Meuse River. The remaining corps in the First Army—the French XVII, French II Colonial, and U.S. IV Corps—were situated east of the Meuse where they would conduct supporting attacks.[76]

The ground over which the Americans comprising the main attack would be advancing, heavily forested and intersected by numerous streams and rivers that served to canalize and restrict lateral movement was, in the words of the First Army's Chief of Staff, Colonel Hugh S. Drum, " 'the most ideal defensive terrain I have ever seen or read about. Nature had provided for flank and crossfire to the utmost in addition to concealment.' "[77] Moreover, German defenses in the area were formidable, arrayed in depth, and carefully arranged to take full benefit of all the advantages the terrain provided. As they advanced, the Americans would first encounter an outpost line composed of machine gun positions carefully sited to fire along likely avenues of approach. Farther back, a series of mutually supporting strongpoints, generally located along high ground, would then have to be overcome (it was in this second defensive band that the Montfaucon Heights were located). And beyond the strongpoints lay the German main defensive line (the American phase two objective), the *Kriemhild Stellung.*[78] It was because of the strength of the German defenses that Pershing elected to concentrate the three corps of his main attack along such a narrow front. Mass and firepower would be required to both overcome the defenses in each band and sustain the momentum of the advance. But this, in turn, left little from for tactical subtlety. According to Colonel Drum, " '[t]here was no elbow room, we had to drive straight through.' "[79]

The offensive opened with a three-hour artillery barrage from 2,700 guns at 0230 hours, 26 September, after which the infantry advanced behind a rolling barrage. Although the first day's advance went well, the Montfaucon strongpoint remained in German hands and did not fall until noon the next day. On 28 September, the First Army attack had ran up against the *Kriemhild Stellung* and stalled. Accordingly American units

dug in and consolidated their gains in preparation for a resumption of the offensive on 4 October. During this time, the 82nd was in First Army and I Corps reserve, though elements of the division had been detached for short periods to help stiffen the lines.[80]

On 4 October, Major General Burnham was relieved of command of the 82nd to become military attaché to Greece. He was replaced by Pershing's protégé, George Duncan. Two days later, Duncan received an order from I Corps to attack into the Argonne Forest.[81] Duncan's mission was to seize the village of Cornay, situated at the eastern edge of the Argonne Forest. He was to do so with only one of his infantry brigades, the 164th, since the 163rd would be retained as an I Corps reserve. Jumping off at 0500 hours, 7 October, the 164th made little headway against stiff German resistance. With only one infantry brigade in the fight it appeared that the 82nd simply did not have enough mass to overcome the enemy defenses. But Duncan was unrelenting and ordered the 164th to press the attack. Eventually, his troopers took Cornay, but then yielded it in the face of a German counterattack. This set the rhythm for the next two days, each side gaining and then losing control of the village several times. Finally, on 9 October, I Corps released the 163rd back to Duncan's control. Duncan promptly sent it on a turning movement against Cornay. The next day the village was firmly in American hands.[82]

The fight at Cornay was the toughest the 82nd had yet encountered, but the division prevailed because of Duncan's tough and unyielding leadership and a host of subordinate commanders who knew their jobs, having whet their skills during the St. Mihiel offensive. Still, the dense and foreboding Argonne Forest, and the terrible destruction wrought during the fierce fighting there, left a lasting impression. Years later, Sergeant York was still able to describe in vivid language his feelings upon entering the Argonne:

> The woods were all mussed up and looked as if a terrible cyclone done swept through them. But God would never be cruel enough to create a cyclone as terrible as that Argonne battle. Only man would ever think to doing an awful thing like that.[83]

Yet despite his apprehension, York continued the fight and on the second day of the 82nd's commitment to battle earned the division's second Medal of Honor. York's company was engaged in a fight near Châtel-Chéhéry, a hamlet approximately 2,000 yards south of Cornay, and was taking fire from a German machine gun on a ridge. York and sixteen troopers maneuvered behind the machine gun position and took it along with a German headquarters element. Higher up on the ridge, however, a second group of enemy machine guns spotted them and opened fire, killing six of the troopers with York while wounding three more. York took charge of the seven remaining troopers, organized them in a hasty defensive position, and had them return fire but it was York's uncanny marksmanship saved the day.

> I had no time nohow to do nothing but watch them-there German machine gunners and give them the best I had. Every time I seed a German I jes teched him off. At first I was shooting from a prone position; that is lying down; jes like we often shoot at the targets in the shooting matches in the mountains of Tennessee; and it was jes about the same distance. But the targets here were bigger. I jes couldn't miss a German's head or body at

> that distance. And I didn't. Besides, it weren't no time to miss nohow. I knowed that in order to shoot me the Germans would have to get their heads up to see where I was lying. And I knowed that my only chance was to keep their heads down. And I done done it. I covered their positions and let fly every time I seed anything to shoot at. Every time a head come up I done knocked it down.[84]

With no means to overcome York's deadly fire the Germans changed tactics and charged, hoping to overwhelm the small group of Americans by sheer weight of numbers. York remained cool, directed the fire of his small element against the onrushing Germans, and stopped the charge dead in its tracks.

> In the middle of the fight a German officer and five men done jumped out of a trench and charged me with fixed bayonets. They had about twenty-five yards to come and they were coming right smart. I only had about half a clip left in my rifle; but I had my pistol ready. I done flipped it out fast and teched them off, too.
>
> I teched off the sixth man first; then the fifth, then the fourth, then the third; and so on. That's the way we shoot wild turkeys at home. You see we don't want the front ones to know that we're getting the backs ones, and then they keep on coming until we get them all. Of course, I hadn't time to think of that. I guess I jes naturally did it. I knowed, too, that if the front ones wavered, or if I stopped them the rear ones would drop down and pump a volley into me and get me.[85]

Eventually the Germans had enough and those still able, 132 in all, surrendered to York and his comrades.[86] Some time after York's stand Captain Bertrand Cox, a platoon leader in F Company, 328th Infantry Regiment, passed through the battlefield and wrote, " '[t]he ground was covered with German equipment and I should estimate that there were between 20 and 25 dead Germans on the scene of the fight.' "[87]

After taking Cornay, the 82nd received orders to reorient its advance northward astride the Aire River. Attacking at 0700 hours, 11 October, with its two infantry brigades abreast, the division made good progress despite the failure of promised tank support to arrive. On the following day, however, instead of continuing to attack northward, the 82nd received orders to once again change direction, this time pivoting on its left in coordination with the rest of I Corps in order to defeat German forces still in position in front of the French Fourth Army. Preparations for this coordinated attack continued throughout 12 and 13 October, despite a massive German counterattack against the 164th Infantry Brigade east of the Aire, which was repulsed without loss of any ground. At 0830 hours on 14 October, the 82nd resumed the attack and by late morning penetrated the *Kriemhild Stellung* between the towns of St. Juvin and St. Georges. Reacting violently to the penetration of their main line of defense, German forces counterattacked the points of penetration early in the morning of 15 October. This counterattack, too, was repulsed without loss of ground, though at one point, troopers from A and C Companies, 1st Battalion, 325th Infantry Regiment, having been forced

back in the face of overwhelming German numbers, fixed bayonets and charged, and regained the positions they had lost.[88]

By this time the 82nd had suffered substantial casualties, forcing Duncan to order the reorganization and amalgamation of units during the night of 15-16 October. Fortunately operations were grinding down all along the front and from 16 to 30 October, the 82nd remained relatively static although it still conducted aggressive patrolling and a number of limited raids. Finally, during the night of 30-31 October, the U.S. 77th and 80th Divisions relieved the 82nd at the front (except the 157th Artillery Brigade, which remained in place and continued to provide fire support). The division then moved back to the Argonne Forest, now an American rest area, for a short period and then proceeded to successive training areas in the rear.[89]

The Meuse-Argonne campaign ended, after forty-seven days of continuous combat, with American forces on the heights above Sedan. During this time twenty-two American combat divisions engaged one-fourth of the entire German divisional strength in the west, drawing off considerable reserves from in front of the French and British, thereby facilitating advances on each of their fronts. All told, the AEF advanced thirty-four miles in its sector and took approximately 16,000 German prisoners at a cost of 120,000 casualties, 25,000 of whom were killed in action.[90] During its time in the campaign, the 82nd suffered 6,377 casualties.[91]

Following the armistice the 82nd received over 8,000 replacements and continued to train; Pershing was uncertain about the viability of the cease-fire and did not want to be caught unprepared.[92] But after several months of peace the American public began clamoring for the return of American boys from "over there." Hence, on 9 February 1919, the 82nd sent its first unit home, the 307th Trench Mortar Battery. The rest of the division followed in waves and it was not until 6 June 1919 that the last 82nd trooper was back on American soil. Those few in the last wave found, however, that the units they had once called home had ceased to exist for by 1 June the last of the 82nd's colors had been furled and the division relegated to the inactive list.[93]

Raised during the heady days of American mobilization, the 82nd Division of World War I overcame the tremendous challenges of inexperience, rapid personnel turnover, lack of equipment for training, and language to become a first-rate combat unit. It had had two solid commanders in William Burnham and George Duncan and a host of subordinate commanders who, if not spectacular, got the job done. The 82nd was also blessed with two extremely competent staff officers, John C. H. Lee, who served for a time as the G-2 (intelligence) officer and Jonathan M. Wainwright, the division G-3 (operations) officer. Both these men would rise to high rank in the next war (during which Wainwright would win the Medal of Honor). The heart of the division, though, was its troopers who despite coming from every State in the Union as well as numerous foreign countries were, in the words of Alvin York, "all of them most awful hard fightin' men and most awful tough soldiers. Most of them were always causing a lot of trouble; but they bothered the Germans a heap more than they bothered anybody else."[94]

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the 82nd Division, the AEF, and all the other nations aligned against the Central Powers in World War I, the job had not been finished. Alone among the ranks of the Allied high command, General Pershing saw this and

> was angry that his advice had not been taken, and that the war had not continued until the Germans had thrown down their arms in the field. 'I suppose our campaigns are ended,' he remarked, 'but what an enormous difference a few more days would have made. . . . What I dread is that Germany doesn't know that she was licked. Had they given us another week, we'd have *taught* them.' The Germans, their troops still under arms, their trenches manned, their machine guns in place, their soldiers everywhere still on French and Belgian soil, felt betrayed by those who had signed the armistice, handing victory to the Allies at the negotiating table. That day General von Einem, commander of the German Third Army, told his troops: 'Firing has ceased. Undefeated . . . you are terminating the war in enemy country.'[95]

Pershing, of course, was correct and years later America would have to raise another army and hence the 82nd would be reborn, this time in a new form, though with the same overarching mission: to cause trouble and bother Germans.

Chapter One Notes

[1] Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1933; reprint, New York: Seaview Books, 1980), 420-421.

[2] Joffre quoted in Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968; reprint, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 8.

[3] Capelle quoted in John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 372.

[4] Marvin A. Kreidberg and Merton G. Henry, *History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army, 1775-1945* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1955), 221-224.

[5] American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe: A History, Guide, and Reference Book* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), 15 and Kreidberg and Henry, *History of Military Mobilization*, 222.

[6] Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1967), 356.

[7] Allen R. Millett, "Over Where? The AEF and the American Strategy for Victory, 1917-1918" in *Against All Enemies: Interpretations of American Military History from Colonial Times to the Present,* eds. Kenneth J. Hagan and William R. Roberts (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 236.

[8] Maurice Matloff, ed., *American Military History* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1988), 372.

[9] Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, 348.

[10] Kreidberg and Henry, *History of Military Mobilization*, 193-194.

[11] Ibid., 193.

[12] Leonard P. Ayres, *The War With Germany: A Statistical Summary*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 17 and Kreidberg and Henry, *History of Military Mobilization*, 263.

[13] Matloff, *American Military History*, 373-374.

[14] Ayres, *The War With Germany*, 22.

[15] Kreidberg and Henry, *History of Military Mobilization*, 375.

[16] Ayres, *The War With Germany*, 26 and Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 61-62.

[17] James J. Cooke, *The All-Americans at War: The 82nd Division in the Great War, 1917-1918* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1999), 3.

[18] G. Edward Buxton Jr., ed. *Official History of the 82nd Division: American Expeditionary Forces "All American" Division, 1917-1919* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1919), 1.

[19] Quoted in Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 4-5.

[20] *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army* (Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.), 9 and Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 9.

[21] Buxton, *Official History*, 4.

[22] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 21-22.

[23] Ibid., 4.

[24] Buxton, *Official History*, 1.

[25] Ibid., 2.

[26] *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry,* 9 and Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 23, 28.

[27] Buxton, *Official History*, 3.

[28] Ibid.

[29] U.S. Army Center of Military History, *American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions*, vol. 2 of *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), 346 and Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 5.

[30] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 10.

[31] Center of Military History, *Divisions*, 346 and Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 10.

[32] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 10 and Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 275-276.

[33] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 10; Center of Military History, *Divisions*, 346; Buxton, *Official History*, 37.

[34] Laurence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 296 and Center of Military History, *Divisions*, 346.

[35] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 6 and Center of Military History, *Divisions*, 346.

[36] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 8.

[37] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944), 1 and Stallings, *Doughboys*, 32-33.

[38] Buxton, *Official History*, 4-5.

[39] *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry,* 11.

[40] Center of Military History, *Divisions*, 349; American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 4; Buxton, *Official History*, 5; Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 24-30.

[41] Buxton, *Official History*, 5.

[42] Quoted in ibid., 6.

[43] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 27.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Alvin C. York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, ed. Tom Skeyhill (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1928), 42.

[46] Center of Military History, *Divisions*, 351; American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 4; Buxton, *Official History*, 11; Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 33.

[47] Buxton, *Official History*, 12.

[48] Baker quoted in Millett, "Over Where?" 237.

[49] Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 125; Millett, "Over Where?" 237-238; American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 17-18; Matloff, *American Military History*, 381. As American divisions arrived in France they did not necessarily go immediately to Lorraine. Like the 82nd, U.S. divisions first trained with British and French divisions behind the lines on weapons and tactical exercises up to division level, concentrating on the tactics and techniques of trench warfare. Once this training was complete, American divisions would be blooded by assuming a portion of the front under a French or British corps, after which they would come together to form the great independent American Army Pershing envisioned. See Edward M. Coffman, "American Command and Commanders in World War I," in *In Defense of the Republic: Readings in American Military History*, eds. David Curtis Skaggs and Robert S. Browning III (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), 219.

[50] Buxton, *Official History*, 13-14; Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 36-37; Center of Military History, *Divisions*, 351; American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 4. In mid-July, this sector was later reduced in extent, redesignated the Lucey sector, and put exclusively under the control of the 82nd Division. See American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 4.

[51] Buxton, *Official History*, 15.

[52] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 47.

[53] Ibid., 46.

[54] Buxton, *Official History*, 16.

[55] Donald Smythe, "St.-Mihiel: The Birth of an American Army," in *In Defense of the Republic: Readings in American Military History*, eds. David Curtis Skaggs and Robert S. Browning III (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), 226.

[56] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 6.

[57] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 7 and Smythe, "St-Mihiel," 226.

[58] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 8.

[59] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 57.

[60] Ibid., 58.

[61] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 7 and Buxton, *Official History*, 19.

[62] Buxton, *Official History*, 18.

[63] Smythe, "St-Mihiel," 229.

[64] Stallings, *Doughboys*, 212; Smythe, "St-Mihiel," 227.

[65] York, *Sergeant York*, 207.

[66] Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 279 and American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields*, 110-111.

[67] American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields,* 111.

[68] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 7-8 and Center of Military History, *Divisions*, 353.

[69] American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields*, 139-140 and Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 76. The 82nd Airborne Division's parade field at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, is named in Pike's honor. Every summer the division celebrates its achievements and honors its veterans during an event called All-American Week. The high point of the celebration is a review by the entire division held on Pike Field.

[70] American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields*, 112.

[71] Buxton, *Official History*, 29.

[72] Liggett quoted in ibid., 292.

[73] Center of Military History, *Divisions*, 353.

[74] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 15.

[75] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 16 and Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 300-301.

[76] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 16 and Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 300-301.

[77] Drum quoted in Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 300.

[78] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 15-16.

[79] Drum quoted in Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 300.

[80] *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, 173-177 and American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 16-17.

[81] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 87.

[82] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 17-27 passim and Cooke, 88-101 passim.

[83] York, *Sergeant York*, 215.

[84] Ibid., 227.

[85] Ibid., 228.

[86] Ibid., 234.

[87] Cox quoted in Ibid., 259.

[88] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 32-48.

[89] Ibid., 46-53.

[90] Millett, “Over Where?” 246.

[91] American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields*, 328.

[92] Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 114.

[93] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division*, 53 and Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 125.

[94] York, *Sergeant York*, 188.

[95] Gilbert, *First World War*, 503. Emphasis in original.

Chapter Two
Our Whole Future is in the Air

But what would be the security of the good, if the bad could at pleasure invade them from the sky? Against an army sailing through the clouds neither walls, nor mountains, nor seas, could afford any security.
Samuel Johnson[1]

It was the Latin poet Ovid who, in his epic story *Metamorphoses*, wrote of Daedalus and his son, Icarus, both of whom had been imprisoned in a labyrinth by King Minos of Crete. So elaborate was this labyrinth that despite having designed it himself, Daedalus knew that escape on foot was impossible. Not content with his fate, however, Daedalus turned his talents to devising alternate means of escape for him and his son and eventually constructed two sets of wings by which they could soar out of their roofless prison and escape Minos's clutches and the island of Crete altogether. Daedalus made the wings from bird feathers and wax and warned his son before they took off that though they were functional, the wings were also fragile, and that flying too high might cause the wax to melt in the heat of the sun. Once aloft, the headstrong Icarus ignored his father's advice, soaring ever higher in a fit of exaltation, and as predicted the wax melted, the feathers fell free from their frame, and Icarus plunged to his death in the sea below. Daedalus, meanwhile, continued on and eventually landed safely in Sicily.[2]

According to renowned classicist Edith Hamilton, "[m]yths are early science, the result of men's [*sic*] first trying to explain what they saw around them."[3] Taken in this light, Ovid's tale provides a glimpse of how man first thought about the mystery of flight—to fly, one must become bird-like—a paradigm that, for centuries, informed many who turned their gaze skyward. But in 1890, a German mechanical engineer and part-time flying enthusiast, Otto Lilienthal, published *Der Vogelflug als Grundlage für Fliegerkunst* (*Bird Flight as a Basis of Aviation*), which demonstrated conclusively that humans do not possess the correct muscular structure nor dexterity to imitate the rapid flapping of a bird's wings. Not one to be deterred by this shortcoming Lilienthal turned his talents to finding other means to take the air and in so doing ushered in a new phenomenon through his experiments with hang gliders. At first, Lilienthal's gliders were capable of distances of fifty feet at most. But when Lilienthal added a second wing to his gliders he found that he not only had better control over his craft, he could also stay aloft for distances of up to 100 yards and gain fifty feet in altitude. Constantly striving for more altitude and distance, Lilienthal continued his experiments until, during a flight on 9 August 1896, unexpected winds caused him to crash. He died the next day, but not before uttering a fitting epitaph: " '[s]acrifices must be made.' "[4]

Percy Pilcher, a Scotsman who had visited Lilienthal in Germany, was inspired by his friend's experiments and carried on his work. Returning to Britain, Pilcher built a series

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 49 through 52.

of four gliders, the most advanced of which he dubbed *Hawk*. *Hawk* had a wheeled undercarriage so that it could be propelled skyward by a tow rope hitched to a team of horses in much the same manner a child gives flight to a kite. Using this unique launch system, Pilcher's *Hawk* achieved controlled flight for distances greater than 300 yards. On 30 September 1899, however, Pilcher met the same fate as his mentor when a tail strut broke during flight causing Pilcher to crash. He died two days later.[5]

Meanwhile, a wealthy American engineer, Octave Chanute, had also been following Lilienthal's gliding experiments and conducting some of his own, but his most important contribution to the field of manned flight was financing and encouraging other enthusiasts, including two brothers who were conducting experiments in Dayton, Ohio. In 1902 these two brothers, Orville and Wilbur Wright, fashioned a glider that made 375 separate successful flights at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, some of which lasted over fifteen seconds. The next year the brothers attached a twelve horsepower, four-cylinder engine and two propellers to their glider and, on 17 December 1903, ushered in a new aviation epoch when they achieved the first ever sustained heavier-than-air power-driven flight.[6]

The Wright brothers' success at Kitty Hawk turned the attention of most aviation enthusiasts to powered flight. Gliding, however, was not totally abandoned for there remained a solid core of glider devotees whose continued experimentation kept the sport alive. One such devotee was Professor John J. Montgomery of Santa Clara Jesuit College in California, who built a tandem-wing glider in 1904. To test his invention, Montgomery convinced balloonist Ed Unger to attach one of his gliders to a balloon, carry it aloft, and then release it for its flight back to earth. On 29 April 1905, in front of a crowd of some 15,000 people at the Santa Clara fairgrounds, one of Unger's balloons carried a Montgomery-built glider to an altitude of approximately 4,000 feet before Daniel Maloney, a 130-pound circus acrobat whom Montgomery had convinced to pilot his craft, climbed in, cut loose from the balloon, took control, and landed safely. Three months later Montgomery, Unger, and Maloney teamed up again to replicate their now-famous feat. Unfortunately, the results were not as favorable. Sometime during the descent a tail brace broke and like Icarus, Lilienthal, and Pilcher before him, Maloney plunged to his death.[7]

Despite such accidents, glider interest in the United States and elsewhere continued to flourish. Even the Wright brothers continued their work with gliders and on 24 October 1911 launched a model with improved stabilizing devices that remained aloft for 9 minutes and 45 seconds, a soaring record that stood for a decade.[8] But the advent of World War I and the explosion in the field of powered aviation spawned by the necessities of war dampened glider production and experimentation in favor of powered airplanes that could bomb, strafe, and seize control of the airspace above a battlefield. Interest in gliders, meanwhile, went into dormancy until after the war.

Aerial combat in World War I presented the belligerents with new problems and challenges, one of which was a means by which pilots and balloonists could escape their stricken craft so they could live to fight another day. To solve this dilemma a relatively benign piece of circus stunt equipment was adopted for military use, a device first theorized by Leonardo da Vinci in the fifteenth century: the parachute.

Parachutes based on da Vinci's design had been around since the eighteenth century. The earliest recorded successful parachute demonstration occurred in 1785 when French

balloonist Jean Pierre Blanchard attached a parachute based on da Vinci's model to a small dog and dropped the dog from an undetermined height. The parachute worked and the dog survived, though immediately upon landing the dog took off running, with Blanchard's parachute still attached, and was never seen again.[9]

There is no record of the first human to attempt a parachute jump, but following Blanchard's experiment carnival operators throughout Europe began staging exhibitions wherein intrepid showmen would jump from balloons before astonished crowds. The first recorded *unsuccessful* parachute jump occurred on 24 July 1837, when Robert Cocking, a 60-year-old Englishman, jumped a rigid-frame parachute of his own design from a height of 4,000 feet in London's Vauxhall Gardens. When asked just before leaping if he really wanted to go through with his stunt, Cocking replied, " 'I've never felt more confident in my entire life.' " He then jumped to his death when the frame of his chute collapsed; England forthwith passed a law making parachute jumping illegal.[10]

In America it was again two brothers, Samuel and Thomas Baldwin, who gave impetus to this fledgling movement. The Baldwins were high-wire walkers who developed a folding parachute that Thomas Baldwin successfully tested on 30 January 1887 at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. Following this exhibition, enthusiasm for parachute jumping skyrocketed in both the United States and Europe, and on 28 February 1912 another American, Albert Berry, became the first man to jump from a moving plane during a highly publicized event at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. Berry's feat did not pass unnoticed, for having demonstrated the efficacy of exiting a plane in flight and landing safely by parachute, pilots the world over began clamoring for just such a life-saving device.[11]

Charles Broadwick, an American balloon designer, answered the pilots' calls and invented the first static-line parachute, which he called the parachute coat. Having convinced the U.S. Army Signal Corps (at that time the Signal Corps was charged with the development of Army aviation) that his parachute was something on which pilots could depend, in April 1914 Broadwick staged a demonstration for the Army's chief Signal Corps officer at the U.S. Army Flying School in San Diego, California. To underscore the reliability and safety of his design, Broadwick had his 22-year-old adopted daughter, Tiny Broadwick, jump his parachute coat. When she did so successfully, the officers in attendance recommended that the Army develop Broadwick's parachute for its use, but this never came to pass.[12]

The outbreak of World War I a few short months later rekindled interest in parachutes for military purposes. The first to use them were artillery observers stationed aloft in highly vulnerable observation balloons who began using parachutes to avoid plunging to their deaths when enemy aircraft attacked and set their balloons on fire. These men stored their parachutes in containers fastened to the outside of their observation baskets and wore a harness to which was attached a static line that would automatically deploy the chute in the event they had to make a quick exit from a burning balloon. A one Lieutenant Phelps, an American aerial observer, held the record for the most jumps from a burning balloon, having accomplished this feat five times. However, despite the obvious suitability of the parachute as a life-saving device British, French, and American pilots were not issued them or, as some have reported, eschewed their use because of their weight and bulk, which they felt detracted from their plane's performance during a dogfight. German pilots, on the other hand, started wearing them in increasing numbers

and by the last year of the war the parachute became for them a required piece of equipment. The experience of the German fighter ace Ernst Udet, whose sixty-two victories stood second only to Manfred von Richtofen's (the Red Baron), and who jumped from his wounded plane twice during the last six months of the war was testament enough to underscore the effectiveness of the parachute as a means to escape a stricken aircraft.[13]

Meanwhile, the imaginative and innovative Brigadier General William L. 'Billy' Mitchell, commander of the U.S. Air Corps in France during World War I saw even greater possibilities by combining the capabilities of the parachute with that of the airplane. During a conference with Pershing on 17 October 1918, Mitchell proposed the formation of a parachute unit that could strike deep behind enemy lines and perhaps break the deadlock of the trenches that had gripped the Western Front since 1914.

> I . . . proposed to him that in the spring of 1919, when I would have a great force of bombardment airplanes, he should assign one of the infantry divisions permanently to the Air Service, preferably the 1st Division; that we should arm the men with a great number of machine guns and train them to go over the front in our large airplanes, which would carry ten or fifteen of these soldiers. We could equip each man with a parachute, so that when we desired to make a rear attack on the enemy, we could carry these men over the lines and drop them off in parachutes behind the German position. They could assemble at a prearranged strong point, fortify it and we could supply them by aircraft with food and ammunition. Our low[-]flying attack aviation would then cover every road in their vicinity, both day and night, so as to prevent the Germans falling on them before they could thoroughly organize the position. Then we could attack the Germans from the rear, aided by an attack from our army on the front and support the whole maneuver with our great air force. This was a perfectly feasible proposition. The Germans were already using parachutes for their pilots. Many a good man of theirs had been saved from an untimely death by this device.[14]

But the war ended before Mitchell could carry out his plan, and the idea of forming an American parachute division died, overcome by victory celebrations and the concomitant rush to demobilize and return to civilian pursuits.

Despite Mitchell's prescience the American response to military parachuting during the interwar years was episodic and fleeting. It was not until 1927, when twelve Marines jumped over Anacostia in Washington, D.C., that the U.S. military conducted its first experiment with this emerging capability. The attitude of the Marine Corps brass about the experiment and military parachuting in general was that it was "a sideshow, [and] a carnival attraction" and hence ten years passed before another Leatherneck strapped on a parachute and jumped from an airplane in flight.[15] The Army's reaction to the idea was similarly ephemeral. It was not until 1928 that the Army staged its first experiment with parachute troops when it dropped three men and a machine gun from four two-man observation planes at Brooks Field, Texas, and then did not drop another parachutist until 1940.[16]

The American military's interest in gliders was equally meager, despite the presence of a vibrant civilian gliding program in the United States. In 1922, experiments with gliders for use as aerial targets by the U.S. Air Service came to naught. Seven years later, the U.S. Navy considered using gliders as escape modules for its airship crews but this too went nowhere. In 1933, the Navy again turned its attention to gliders, going so far as to establish a glider pilot training school at Pensacola, Florida, but abruptly ended the program in 1936 when it got too expensive for the sparse budgets with which the Navy had to operate. In the small interwar Army, meanwhile, soaring became a popular off-duty sport at the many isolated posts to which soldiers were stationed, and in 1931 the Army could even boast a distance soaring champion when Second Lieutenant John C. Crain soared for 16 hours and 38 minutes in Hawaii. The next year, however, all Army participation in gliding came to a halt when Secretary of War Patrick J. Hurley prohibited participation in this off-duty activity by all Army personnel because of the many injuries they were sustaining.[17]

In the main, the Army's interest in wedding aerial transport assets with ground combat formations during the interwar years was confined to the relatively simple and unimaginative concept of moving troops and equipment from point to point by airplane. The first large-scale test of this as an effective means of military transportation occurred on 20 March 1931 when "a heterogeneous group of transport planes" flew the troops and 75mm pack howitzers of B Battery, 2nd Field Artillery Battalion from France Field in the Panama Canal Zone to a ranch some seventy-six miles away. Upon landing, B Battery "proceeded to go into position and fire a few rounds of blanks to celebrate the advent of a new means of transportation for the field artillery," after which they exercise promptly ended.[18] Two years later, the entire 2nd Field Artillery Battalion replicated this feat when it moved by air from Bejucca to Chorrera in the Panama Canal Zone, a distance of thirty-five miles, an event that prompted the Infantry Board to conduct similar experiments with infantry battalions in 1934.[19] In 1933, however, Captain George C. Kenney provided a glimpse of the tactical possibilities inherent in the marriage of airplanes and ground combat formations when he air-landed a small infantry detachment behind 'enemy' lines during maneuvers at Fort DePont, Delaware, surprising not only his opponents but the umpires and observers as well (Kenney would go on to become a full general in the U.S. Air Corps in World War II during which he would serve in the Southwest Pacific Theater as General Douglas MacArthur's top air force officer).[20]

As so often happens following a major conflict, it was the defeated that were most avidly driven to innovation. Shackled by the provisions of the Versailles Treaty, which denied Germany any military air force whatsoever and severely limited the civilian aviation industry, German flying enthusiasts turned once again to gliding.[21] By 1920, gliding had become so popular in Germany that Oskar Ursinius, editor of *Flugsport* (*Sport Flying*) magazine organized a national competition which he held at Mount Wasserkuppe, a 3,177-foot peak in the Rohn Mountains. Twenty-four pilots entered this first ever gliding competition which was won by Wolfgang Klemperer, a veteran World War I pilot, who flew his monoplane glider a distance of 6,006 feet. The winner of the next year's competition, Frederick Harth, flew a glider built with the assistance of a then-unknown aircraft designer, Willi Messerschmitt, for an amazing twenty-one minutes. So passionate were the Germans about sport gliding between the wars that, when in 1923 the

Allied Control Commission permitted an expansion of the German civilian aviation industry, gliding clubs continued to proliferate throughout the country.[22]

The potential inherent in Germany's passion for gliding was not lost on those who still rankled over the restrictions placed on German military aviation by the Versailles Treaty. Though Germany could have no air force and therefore no means to train military pilots, glider clubs could serve as surrogate pilot training centers in anticipation of a day when the restrictions of Versailles were lifted. This train of thought struck a cord with the Nazis, who played on discontent with the Versailles *diktat* to gain increasing support from the German population. In 1922, while traveling through Germany on his honeymoon, American World War I ace Eddie Rickenbacker had the Nazi plan for skirting the provisions of Versailles and ultimately creating a new German air force laid out for him in startling clarity. Meeting with a group of former German World War I aviators at a hotel in Berlin, Rickenbacker was taken aback by the vehemence with which one of them spoke. That man was Hermann Göring, one of Nazism's earliest converts, who proclaimed

> '[o]ur whole future is in the air. And it is by air power that we are going to recapture the German empire. To accomplish this we will do three things. First, we will teach gliding *as a sport* to all our young men. Then we will build up commercial aviation. Finally, we will create the skeleton of a military air force. When the time comes, we will put all three together—and the German empire will be reborn.'[23]

Göring's proclamation was no false bluster. Not long after coming to power the Nazis initiated an aggressive program to grow a new generation of German aviators by subsidizing glider clubs, which, in turn provided young boys of the *Hitler Jugend* (Hitler Youth) free access to their facilities, training, and certification.[24] In 1934, one year after the Nazi accession to power, another step on the path Göring had described to Rickenbacker was taken when these clubs were subsumed by the Air Ministry.[25] But the Nazis' interest in gliders extended beyond the simple expedient of using them as a surreptitious means to train pilots for a resurgent *Luftwaffe*; they were also interested in turning this sport aircraft into a weapon of war and in this vein subsidized glider research and experimentation with an eye toward finding a military application for the glider. They were not long in waiting.

A research scientist in Munich, Dr. Alexander Lippisch, had already designed a stubby-winged glider that served as a flying laboratory from which to conduct meteorological experiments. Robust enough to carry scientists and their sensitive equipment aloft, Lippisch's glider caught the attention of the Nazis because of its payload and ability to withstand high winds. Seeing the military ramifications of Lippisch's craft, Göring turned to the *Deutsche Forschungsantalt Für Segelflug* (DFS) and requested that it design a glider based on Lippisch's prototype that could carry nine fully-armed men, glide for long distances, dive silently, and land on short, uncultivated fields.[26] In 1939, DFS delivered its model 230 (named the DFS-230). It weighed 1800 pounds, had a wingspan of 72 feet, and was 37.5 feet long. It carried a single pilot plus nine combat-equipped soldiers or 2,800 pounds of equipment and could be towed by a JU-52 aircraft, the *Luftwaffe's* primary transport plane.[27] Sturdy, reliable, easy to manufacture, and

cheap (the unit cost was 7,500 *Deutschmarks*, the equivalent cost of ten parachutes), the DFS-230 became Germany's primary military glider during the Second World War.[28]

Germany also turned to external sources for inspiration in rebuilding its war machine. A secret covenant in the 1922 Russo-German Treaty of Rapallo allowed Germany to conduct military training in Russia beyond the watchful eyes of the Allied Control Commission. This arrangement proved a boon for the German military, and it was in the Soviet Union that they were introduced to the theory and practice of parachute troops. Led by the brilliant Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, the Red Army began theoretical discussions about airborne warfare as early as 1929. Initially, the Soviet concentration was on parachute troops; in 1930 the Red Army conducted two small-scale tests of parachute troops, both of which proved highly successful. This, in turn, led to the formation in March 1931 of a 164-man experimental parachute unit. In the months following, Soviet experimentation with parachute troops picked up considerable momentum and by 1932 the Red Army had already conducted over 550 separate airborne exercises. By 1933, the Red Army had twenty-nine parachute battalions.[29] By 1936, the Soviets were so convinced of the value parachute troops that they incorporated their use in that year's version of the Red Army's field regulations, what one leading scholar called "the epitome of Soviet pre-World War II doctrinal development." This manual laid out in very specific manner the role parachute troops would play in any future Soviet war.

> 'Parachute landing units are the effective means . . . [of] disorganizing the command and rear services structure of the enemy. In coordination with forces attacking along the front, parachute landing units can go a long way toward producing a complete rout of the enemy on a given axis.'[30]

The Germans were not the only ones to witness Soviet developments in the field of military parachuting and glider operations (though started several years after the development of its parachute troops was well underway, the Red Army also had a robust glider force, which by 1934 could boast ten glider manufacturing plants, 230 gliding stations, and 57,000 trained glider pilots).[31] In 1935, the future British Field Marshal Archibald P. Wavell, then a military attaché, had the chance to observe a large-scale airborne operation held near Kiev. During this operation the Soviets flew two parachute regiments totaling more than 1,100 men from airfields 280 kilometers away and dropped them onto a landing zone which they then seized and held against a notional enemy attack until reinforcements, which were also flown in, could be landed in the airhead. Together, the parachute troops and the air-landed infantry then seized crossings over the Dnepr River to block the movement of the notional enemy's reserves.[32] Wavell, however, was unimpressed, writing in his report that though it " 'was a most spectacular performance' " it was also, in his mind, of " 'doubtful' " tactical value.[33]

One man who could not have thought Wavell more wrong was *Luftwaffe Oberst* (Colonel) Kurt Student who witnessed Soviet paratroopers and glider troops in action during the 1937 maneuvers. Enthralled by what he saw, Student began proselytizing for the organization of similar units in the *Wehrmacht*. In this he had a powerful ally and patron, chief of the *Luftwaffe*, Hermann Göring. Göring, too, was enamored of the possibilities parachute and glider formations offered. As early as 1933, while Prussian

Minister of the Interior, Göring had sponsored the development of a small paramilitary parachute formation that could be used against Communist agitators in and around Berlin. When he took command of the *Luftwaffe*, he brought this paramilitary formation with him and used its personnel as cadre around which he could form other paratroop, or *fallschirmjäger*, units.[34] When Student took up the call, Göring appears to have turned the development of Germany's still-emerging parachute and glider troops over to his protégé by promoting him and appointing him to command of Germany's first airborne division. It was an inspired choice as Student was uniquely qualified for this command. Originally commissioned in the infantry, he spent World War I as an aviator, rising to command of a squadron before being wounded in aerial combat in 1917. After the war he returned to the infantry and commanded a battalion and then, once Hitler renounced the Versailles Treaty restrictions, transferred back to the *Luftwaffe*. Generally regarded as the father of the German airborne, Student took full advantage of Göring's patronage and by war's end had raised eleven paratroop divisions, two paratroop corps, and one paratroop army, (which he commanded).[35]

Despite having forged a commanding lead in the organization, equipping, and theoretical employment of parachute troops by 1935, the Soviets were unable to exploit this advantage and never dropped more than a brigade-sized element at any one time during World War II. By 1943, the Soviets had abandoned large-scale parachute operations altogether and relegated their highly trained paratroopers to partisan and diversionary roles. After the war, the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division's commander, Major General James M. Gavin, who was quite familiar with Soviet interwar developments, asked a Russian paratroop colonel about the Soviet failure to stage any large-scale airborne operations. The colonel replied, " 'We just couldn't make sense out of all those men and airplanes.' "[36]

Yet Student and his airborne acolytes could make sense of it all and demonstrated that in stunning fashion during the opening years of the Second World War. Their use of airborne forces (both glider and parachute) in Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Greece, and Crete had a profound impact not only on the battlefield, but also in the highest reaches of the American military and directly influenced the organization, development, doctrine, and eventual employment of U.S. Army airborne units. It was the Germans who first made sense of all those planes and men; who first used daring glider and parachute assaults in combination with their tank and infantry offensives to break open enemy defenses long thought impregnable; who first demonstrated that, if properly employed, airborne forces could have an impact on operations well beyond what one might expect given their relatively small size and light armament. American airborne pioneers came to rely on the vicarious experience gleaned from German operations to develop their own program. One of the foremost of those pioneers was James Gavin who recalled that as early as 1940, while assigned as a tactics instructor at West Point, he felt that "the most promising area of all was airborne warfare, bringing parachute troops and glider troops to the battlefield in masses."[37] To study this new type of warfare, Gavin obtained from the War Department "[c]opies of the German orders for the invasion of Holland and later, copies of the detailed orders for the invasion of Crete [from which he gleaned]. . . [t]he German method of organizing after landing, the equipment they used in assault and follow-up, and their means of control and command."[38] Another early student of airborne warfare was William C. Lee, the man who would come to be known

as the father of American paratroopers. In January 1941, Lee published an article in *Infantry Journal* in which he cited the employment of paratroopers and air-landed infantry during the German invasion of Holland as an example from which the U.S. Army could learn to develop and deploy like organizations.[39] Lee published a follow-up article in April 1941 wherein he declared that, based on the German example, "[b]y now, even the most skeptical agree on the feasibility of using airborne troops."[40] And shortly after the end of the war the official historian of the American Airborne Command and Center further underscored the effect that Germany's use of airborne troops had on the development of like organizations in the U.S. Army.

> Not only was attention directed to the accomplishments of the comparatively small German airborne forces employed, but the relative bearing of their achievements in the attainment of the main objective provided a concrete example of the capabilities of airborne troops, when properly employed. The tactics of employment of these German airborne troops furnished an initial guide, which for a time at least, was to influence the development of the doctrine of employment of airborne troops in the United States Army.[41]

Hence, the German airborne operations of the early years of the Second World War form a backdrop without which a complete understanding of the American airborne experience is impossible.

Hitler first used his paratroopers during the April 1940 invasion of Denmark and Norway. Striking in the early morning hours of 9 April, the Germans employed a combination of conventional, amphibious, parachute, and air-transported troops to seize key targets throughout the length and breadth of both countries. In Denmark, a platoon of paratroopers, followed by a battalion of air-transported infantry, seized critical airfields in the northern tip of the Jutland Peninsula from which German aircraft subsequently mounted air operations in support of operations in Norway. Moreover, the swiftness and ferocity of the German invasion, exacerbated by the rampant fear created by the German paratroopers who could seemingly appear at any place and at any time, compelled the Danes to surrender before day's end. In Norway, a company of paratroopers dropped near Stavanger and, along with two air-landed conventional infantry battalions that followed, secured the best airfield in the country at Sola. At Oslo, fog and heavy antiaircraft fire negated the planned parachute assault, but after German bombers cleared the area several companies of conventional infantry, reinforced by two paratroop companies, air-landed and occupied the Norwegian capital the same day. Although fighting continued in the north around Narvik until 8 June, the fighting for Norway was essentially over by early May.[42] Pleased with this relatively easy victory, Hitler called the campaign " 'not only bold, but one of the sauciest undertakings in the history of modern warfare.' "[43]

A month and a day after premiering in Norway and Denmark, Student's paratroopers made an even larger contribution to the German conquest of Western Europe. The German plan for the invasion called for an attack by three army groups, from north to south *Army Groups B*, *A*, and *C*.[44] Army *Group A*, in the center, would contain the bulk of the German armor and would conduct the main attack through the Ardennes, relying

on surprise and the Allied assumption that this area was impassable to tanks to cut through to Liège and Sedan and in so doing get behind the Anglo-French forces advancing northward. In the south *Army Group C*, fronting the formidable Maginot Line, was to conduct limited operations to hold the French forces manning the defenses in place. *Army Group B* would play the role of the "matador's cloak," attacking into Holland and Belgium in order to draw the British and French forces onward, engaging them in such a manner that they were convinced they were facing the main German attack. If successful, *Army Group B's* attack would hold the attention of the Anglo-French forces long enough to allow the panzers of *Army Group C* to pass through the Ardennes and cut them off, thereby setting the stage for the quick and decisive victory Hitler had told his general he wanted.[45]

Generaloberst (colonel general, equivalent to full general in the American army) Fedor von Bock, the commander of *Army Group B*, had a difficult mission that was crucial to German success. In order to keep British and French attentions focused on his army group he had to present a credible threat. This, in turn, meant not getting bogged down by any of the innumerable waterways that crisscrossed the Low Countries. Bock himself was also concerned with a British landing in Flanders, an eventuality he thought certain to occur once his soldiers crossed the Dutch frontier. To clear the way Bock turned to Student's paratroopers.

In Holland, Bock assigned Student a twofold task. First, paratroopers were to seize a series of bridges at Moerdijk, Rotterdam, and Dordrecht, and then hold them until relieved by the onrushing ground elements of *Army Group B*. Secondly, they were to seize some airfields ringing The Hague, receive air-landed reinforcements, and then move against the Dutch government and military offices in the city.[46] In Belgium, Bock focused Student's efforts on Fort Eben Emael, the linchpin of the Albert Canal defenses behind which the Belgian Army planned to defend. The fort itself, measuring 1,100 by 800 yards, sat above the Albert Canal and mounted nearly a dozen artillery pieces ranging from 75mm to 120mm in size as well as numerous smaller cannon and machine guns. A completely self-contained fortress with underground facilities large enough to house over 1,000 soldiers, Eben Emael was thought by many to be impregnable. To take it out, Student hand-picked a detachment of paratroopers comprising 11 officers and 427 enlisted men and gave them the mission of not only reducing the fort but of capturing three nearby bridges at Vroenhoven, Veldwezelt, and Canne. If successful, this select group of paratroopers, named *Sturmabteilung Koch* (Storm Group Koch) after its commander *Hauptmann* (Captain) S. A. Koch, would ensure the smooth passage of the *Sixth Army* of Bock's *Army Group B* into the heart of Belgium and facilitate the subsequent fall of fortress city of Liège (which had held up the German advance through Belgium in the opening days of World War I). Once this was accomplished Bock would be able to maintain unrelenting pressure on the British and French forces to his front, thereby keeping them focused in the north while the panzers from *Army Group A* encircled them from the rear.[47]

When the invasion commenced on 10 May 1940, Student took command of the attack on the Dutch bridges himself and with a force of four parachute battalions and one air-transported infantry regiment succeeded in taking and holding all of them at the cost of only 180 casualties. The German forces sent against The Hague did not fare as well, sustaining several hundred casualties while an equal number were taken prisoner.

Despite the setback at The Hague, however, Germany's success in Holland was directly attributable to the work of its paratroopers and their air-landed brethren, for not only did they keep open the vital bridges for Bock's conventional forces, which linked up with them on 13 May, their appearance throughout the country once again caused widespread panic and fear, and on 15 May the Dutch government capitulated.[48] After the war, captured German officers summarized the psychological impact of the paratroop assault on Holland as follows:

> [t]his success [in Holland] was connected not so much with achievement of the tactical objectives, such as the capture of a number of bridges which were important to the attacking ground forces, as with the morale influence exerted upon the enemy by a wholly new method of fighting. The very fact that in this way large forces could penetrate deep behind Dutch defenses at the outset of the fighting undoubtedly broke the resistance of the Dutch and saved the German Army the cost of a serious fight in capturing Holland.[49]

Farther south in the *Army Group B* sector, *Hauptmann* Koch and his men followed suit. For the mission against Eben Emael, Koch had trained his men for a glider assault, an adjustment made necessary because of the pinpoint accuracy required by the small size of the objective sites. Taking off well before the first shot was fired, the gliders containing *Sturmabteilung Koch* cut loose from their tugs while still over German airspace, crossed the international border and then flew silently through the dawn to touch down directly adjacent to the target bridges or, in the case of Eben Emael, on top of the objective itself. Within minutes the bridges at Vroenhoven and Veldwezelt fell to the attackers (the bridge at Canne was destroyed before the charges could be removed).[50] Meanwhile, a force of seventy-eight men landed atop Eben Emael and employing shape-charges, blew up the steel cupolas housing the artillery pieces and forced the defenders underground where they were ineffective. By noon the next day, over 600 Belgian soldiers defending the fort surrendered, all at a cost of six Germans killed and eleven wounded.[51]

Hitler was overjoyed with his success in the West and particularly proud of Student's men, on whom he lavished many awards and accolades: each officer of *Sturmabteilung Koch* received the *Ritterkreuz* (Knight's Cross), Nazi Germany's highest combat decoration, and each enlisted man (with one exception) received the Iron Cross and was promoted one grade.[52] In light of this success Hitler also directed the expansion of the German airborne establishment to the size of a corps.

Germany next used its airborne forces when it invaded Greece in April 1941. Six months previously the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, had launched an ill-conceived invasion of Greece. Within a week, the Greeks recovered and launched a series of counterattacks that drove the Italians back into Albania where the front stabilized over the winter. Desirous of aiding his flagging ally as well as securing his southern flank before he invaded Russia, Hitler unleashed his forces against both Yugoslavia and Greece on 6 April 1941. Yugoslavia fell quickly, capitulating after eleven days, and in so doing made untenable the Greek defenses, which had been bolstered with British and Commonwealth troops rushed there from North Africa. Turned out of one defensive

position after another, by 24 April the Allies realized that all hope of salvaging a viable position in Greece had been lost and therefore began a massive evacuation operation while simultaneously conducting a fighting withdrawal. A key choke point, recognized by both sides, was the single bridge over the Corinth Canal. In the hands of the Allies, it would hasten the withdrawal of their troops to ports in southern Greece where they could be evacuated by the Royal Navy. If, however, the Germans could seize this bridge, they could cut off and destroy the Allied units still north of the bridge while ensuring their panzers could continue their pursuit of the Allies south of the bridge unabated.

On the morning of 26 April, two battalions of German paratroopers, reinforced with fifty-four glider-borne engineers, dropped from over 400 JU-52 transport planes in an attempt to seize the bridge over the Corinth Canal by *coup de main*. Though initially successful, the accidental (or lucky) discharge of a British antiaircraft shell set off demolition charges that had not yet been removed from the bridge and partially damaged the span. Despite this setback, the German glider-borne engineers quickly constructed a temporary span for use by German ground forces, ensuring that traffic was only momentarily interrupted. Though German casualties amounted to sixty-three killed, 158 wounded and 16 missing, twenty-one Allied officers, along with 900 British and 1,450 Greek enlisted men were taken prisoner. The total prisoner bag for operations in Greece was over 12,000 Commonwealth and Greek troops.[53]

Even before the drop at Corinth, Student and his staff had been hard at work preparing a plan for an event that would shock the world and have a significant impact on the American airborne program—an invasion that would be conducted entirely from the air. In mid-April 1941 both the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW, Hitler's supreme command headquarters) and the Oberkommando *des Heeres* (OKH, the Army high command) considered two objectives likely candidates for such an invasion: Malta and Crete. According to Walter Warlimont, who at the time was Chief of the National Defense Section of the *OKW* and one of those most intimately involved with preparing a staff appreciation for both possibilities, "[a]ll the officers of the section, whether from the Army, Navy or Air Force, together with myself, voted unanimously for the capture of Malta since this seemed to be the only way to secure permanently the sea-route to North Africa." However, it appears that Göring's intercession swayed Hitler to the idea that Crete was the more lucrative target for, again in Warlimont's words, "Hitler was determined that Crete should not remain in the hands of the British because of the danger of air attacks on the Rumanian oil-fields and he had further agreed with the Luftwaffe that from a base in Crete there were far-reaching possibilities for offensive action in the Mediterranean."[54]

The island of Crete lies 60 miles from the southernmost tip of Greece. It is 160 miles long and varies from eight to thirty-five miles in width. There were few roads of any sort on the island in 1941, with the sole major traffic artery being an east-west track that connected Suda Bay with the north coast towns of Maleme, Canea, Retimo, and Heraklion. There were hardly any north-south passages at all. There were three airstrips on the island, all near the northern coast at Maleme, Retimo, and Heraklion.[55]

Originally, the Cretan garrison comprised approximately 6,100 men but as a result of the loss of Greece to the Germans, the Royal Navy had evacuated additional British, New Zealand, and Greek troops to the island, bringing the total force available to defend the island to just short of 47,000 men.[56] This force, commanded by Major General Bernard

C. Freyberg of New Zealand, was deployed specifically to defend against a German airborne attack for, as Winston Churchill pointed out after the war, "[a]t no moment in the war was our Intelligence so truly and precisely informed [of what the Germans were planning]."[57] In fact, on 28 April 1941, the very same day that Freyberg arrived on Crete (having himself been evacuated from Greece with the last of his troops) Churchill sent a message to Lieutenant General Archibald P. Wavell, (the same man who years before had characterized the tactical value of paratroopers as "doubtful") the Commander-in-Chief of Commonwealth forces in the Mediterranean, stating quite trenchantly that

> [i]t seems clear from our information that a heavy airborne attack by German troops and bombers will soon be made on Crete. Let me know what forces you have in the island and what your plans are. It ought to be a fine opportunity for killing the parachute troops. The island must be stubbornly defended.[58]

Student's plan the invasion was quite simple. His troops would seize the airfields and the one port of any capacity on the island in a series of parachute and glider assaults on D-Day morning and afternoon: Maleme airfield and the town of Canea were the morning objectives, followed by Retimo and Heraklion airfields later on in the day. Once the assault objectives were seized, reinforcements would be brought in by both air and sea to complete the destruction of the enemy forces. For his invasion force, Student had his *XI Air Corps*, comprising the *7th Air Division*, the *5th Mountain Division*, and one regiment from the *6th Mountain Division*, totaling approximately 25,000 troops. He also had available ten air transport groups with 600 JU-52 transport planes and 100 gliders. Other *Luftwaffe* fighter and bomber groups would also support the invasion.[59]

The Germans attacked the morning of 20 May 1941. Having seriously underestimated the strength of the island garrison—the many vineyards and groves on Crete afforded the Allied troops excellent camouflage under which they hid from German reconnaissance aircraft—the initial assault wave sustained heavy casualties. At Maleme, for example, the plan was to land a battalion of glider-borne assault troops directly on the airfield so that they could neutralize the Allied defenses and clear the way for follow-on waves of paratroopers and glider-borne infantry. What German reconnaissance had failed to detect, however, was a battalion of New Zealanders dug in on the high ground overlooking the airfield. Taken under fire even before they touched down, the German glider troops were slaughtered; only 100 survived the battle. Moreover, when the follow-on paratroopers arrived at Malame airfield they were scattered, disorganized, and had a difficult time recovering their equipment; one parachute battalion, which landed in the midst of the entrenched New Zealanders, suffered 400 casualties out of a total strength of approximately 600 paratroopers. At Canea, where the gliders used a nearby beach as a landing zone, there was much the same result. The glider troops could not clear the way for the paratroopers, whose subsequent landing was made all the more difficult by the rocky ground, which caused numerous broken bones. Finally, to add to the German difficulties, the two leading commanders in the first wave were lost at the outset: *Generalleutnant* (Lieutenant General) Wilhelm Suessmann, commander of the *7th Air Division*, was killed when the glider in which he was riding cut loose from its tow prematurely and crashed on the island of Aegina and the next ranking officer with the

assault echelon, *Generalmajor* Eugen Meindl (a veteran of the Norwegian campaign), was critically wounded at Maleme airfield.[60]

Because the transport aircraft returning to Greece for the second echelon forces sustained relatively few casualties, Student and his staff, headquartered in the *Hotel Grande Bretagne* in Athens, remained blithely unaware of how serious the situation was on the ground in Crete. They therefore did not hesitate to send the second echelon to take the afternoon's objectives. With the element of surprise lost and Allied forces on Crete on full alert, two regiments of paratroopers that jumped onto Retimo and Heraklion met even more devastating fire than that experienced by their comrades in the first wave and failed to achieve any of its objectives.[61]

Hence, by the evening of the first day, none of the major assault objectives was in German hands and the fate of the entire venture was in jeopardy. Back in Athens, Student slowly began to grasp the gravity of the situation and adjusted his plan accordingly, making Maleme airfield his focus into which he diverted all follow on forces. To this end he formed a scratch battalion from some 550 paratroopers still in Greece and had them drop west of the airfield. Two of the four companies from this ad hoc force landed directly on the New Zealanders' positions and were decimated. The other two dropped safely, formed with those paratroopers and glidermen still on the ground, and pushed the defending New Zealanders back far enough to allow additional transport planes to begin landing on the airfield itself, disgorging at an ever increasing rate elements of the *5th Mountain Division* as well as much needed supplies and ammunition. With control of the airfield, the fate of the island was sealed. By 28 May, all Allied resistance had crumbled as the Germans consolidated their positions along the north coast while what remained of the defending forces escaped to the south where they were evacuated by the Royal Navy.

Despite having wrested control of Crete from the Allies, Student's airborne forces suffered tremendously: German after action reports listed the number of casualties between 3,986 and 6,453 men while over 350 *Luftwaffe* planes, over half of them transports, were also lost or damaged.[62] After the war, Student told B. H. Liddell Hart that " '[t]he Führer was very upset by the heavy losses suffered by the parachute units, and came to the conclusion that their surprise value had passed. After that, he often said to me: "The day of parachute troops is over." ' "[63]

Yet the Allies, and especially the Americans, had a different conception of the Crete operation, unaware as they were of the extent of the German casualties in the operation. Labeled by one historian "[p]robably the greatest single impetus to airborne development and expansion," the German invasion of Crete propelled the American airborne effort into high gear.[64] In an article published in *Military Review* shortly after the war, Lieutenant Colonel Jack G. Cornett, an instructor at the Army's prestigious Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, characterized the invasion of Crete as

> a definite shock to many of those who had scoffed at this new weapon. It was startling . . . It was thought-compelling . . . It was new . . . And most important of all, it was successful! Almost immediately the wheels began to turn in various circles, including our U.S. Army, and although nebulous

> at that time and opposed by many authorities on war in positions both high and low, its place in modern warfare was assured.[65]

General Maxwell D. Taylor, who served in both the U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions during World War Two, wrote in his autobiography "what was a red light to General Student and his German airborne colleagues was a green light to those American officers who had a vision of the possibilities of airborne warfare."[66]

James Gavin was one of those American officers of whom Taylor wrote. Gavin felt "[i]t would not be enough to copy the Germans, that would never provide a margin sufficient for victory."[67] Recognizing that the U.S. Army was well behind in the race to develop and organize airborne forces, Gavin, Lee, and many other American airborne pioneers forcefully promoted innovative thinking so that they could gain "a quantum jump on the Germans."[68] And by war's end, despite its late start, the U.S. Army organized, trained, and equipped an airborne force that far surpassed anything the Germans, or any nation, could match. Based, at first, on the example set by their enemy and then increasingly on experience gained in Sicily, Italy, France, and Holland, American Army airborne forces, and the 82nd Airborne Division in particular, ensured that "[t]he German was to reap a sorry harvest from the seeds he had so powerfully sown."[69]

Chapter Two Notes

[1] Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), 52.

[2] Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1940; reprint, New York: Mentor, 1969), 139-140. What is also interesting about Ovid's tale is its prescience for in World War II both Crete and Sicily were scenes of great airborne battles during which, once again, men descended from the sky, this time in gliders and parachutes, riding the wind in much the same manner as did the mythical father and son.

[3] Ibid., 19.

[4] Gerard M. Devlin, *Silent Wings: The Saga of the U.S. Army and Marine Combat Glider Pilots During World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 3-4.

[5] Ibid., 4-5.

[6] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 5-6 and William B. Breuer, *Geronimo! American Paratroopers in World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 2.

[7] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 7-8. Professor Montgomery's enthusiasm for gliding did not dampen with Maloney's death and he continued to experiment with gliders until, in 1911 he, too, was killed in a glider crash.

[8] Ibid., 7.

[9] Gerard M. Devlin, *Paratrooper! The Saga of U. S. Army and Marine Parachute and Glider Combat Troops During World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 2. Interestingly, da Vinci also designed a crude hang glider but there is no proof that he ever tested either the glider or his parachute design.

[10] Ibid., 6-7.

[11] Clay Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers: The American Airborne in World War II* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985) and 26; Devlin, 7-13.

[12] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 13-14.

[13] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 15-21. After the war, Udet became a famous stunt pilot. With the rise of Nazism and the birth of the *Luftwaffe*, Udet rejoined the military and rose to high rank, though a falling out with *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Göring somewhat stifled his career. He committed suicide in 1941. See Mark M. Boatner III, *The Biographical Dictionary of World War II* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1996), s.v. "Udet, Ernst."

[14] William Mitchell, *Memoirs of World War I: "From Start to Finish of Our Greatest War"* (New York: Random House, 1928), 268.

[15] Breuer, *Geronimo*, 7.

[16] James A. Huston, *Out of the Blue: U.S. Army Airborne Operations in World War II* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Studies, 1972), 47-48.

[17] James E. Mrazek, *The Glider War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 53 and Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 17-27.

[18] John W. Morgan, "Airborne Field Artillery," *Military Review* 23, no. 6, (September 1943): 55.

[19] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 1 and William C. Lee, "Air Infantry," *Infantry Journal* 48, no. 1 (January 1941): 16.

[20] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Cente*r, 1 and Maurice A. J. Tugwell, "Day of the Paratroops," *Military Review* 57, no. 3 (March 1977): 42.

[21] Articles 198-202 of the Versailles Treaty dictated that Germany surrender its aviation material, including 17,000 planes and engines. Besides being permanently prohibited from maintaining any military or naval air force, the German aviation industry was completely shut down for six months following the signing of the treaty. After that time, severe restrictions were imposed on the performance criteria for German aircraft, limiting their range, speed, and power. Finally, German air space was to be controlled by the Allied powers for several years. See James S. Corum, *The Luftwaffe: Creating the Operational Air War, 1918-1940* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 49.

[22] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 10-16. The Allied Control Commission was the organization responsible for monitoring compliance of the provisions of the Versailles Treaty by the former Central Powers.

[23] Göring quoted in Edward V. Rickenbacker, *Seven Came Through* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1943), 104. Emphasis in original.

[24] Mrazek, *Glider War*, 27-28.

[25] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 29.

[26] James E. Mrazek, *The Fall of Eben Emael: Prelude to Dunkerque* (Washington, D.C.: Robert B. Luce, Inc., 1970), 36-37.

[27] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 31.

[28] Mrazek, *Eben Emael*, 37-38.

[29] David M. Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience*, Combat Studies Institute Research Survey, no.4 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1984), 4-11 passim.

[30] Quoted in Ibid., 14.

[31] Mrazek, *Glider War*, 230-233 and Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 28-29.

[32] Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience*, 4-11 passim. An airhead, much like a beachhead, is an area seized and controlled by airborne forces (either parachutists or glidermen) during an airborne assault.

[33] Wavell quoted in ibid., 11-13.

[34] Breuer, *Geronimo,* 3 and James Lucas, *Storming Eagles: German Airborne Forces in World War Two* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1988), 8-9.

[35] See also John Hackett, "Student" in *Hitler's Generals: Authoritative Portraits of the Men Who Waged Hitler's War*, ed. Correlli Barnett (New York: George Weidenfield & Nicolson Ltd., Quill/William Morrow, 1989), 464-466 and Lucas, *Storming Eagles*, 172-176. The German parachute forces, unlike

those of any other major belligerent of World War II, were air force organizations a result, no doubt, of Hermann Göring's direct involvement in their creation. It should also be noted that the Germans did not have separate glider and parachute units. German paratroopers were also trained in glider operations. As will be seen, this was not the case with the American airborne divisions, which comprised separate parachute and glider units.

[36] James M. Gavin, *On To Berlin: Battles of an Airborne Commander, 1943-1946* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978), xiv. One reason the Soviets may not have been able to make sense of all those men and airplanes is, perhaps, the purges that emasculated the Red Army in the 1930s, to include the purging of the most innovative and brilliant of the interwar reformers, Tukhachevsky.

[37] James M. Gavin, "Beyond the Stars," 61, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 2, Folder "Chapter 2: Autobiography," United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania (hereafter USAMHI).

[38] Ibid., 67.

[39] Lee, "Air Infantry," 14.

[40] William C. Lee, "Air-Landing Divisions," *Infantry Journal* 48, no. 4 (April 1941): 20.

[41] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 3.

[42] Earl F. Ziemke, *The German Northern Theater of Operations, 1940-1945* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959), 35-52 passim.

[43] Hitler quoted in ibid., 109.

[44] For ease of identification, all Axis units and formations will be set in italics.

[45] Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, "Dunkirk 1940" in *Decisive Battles of World War II: The German View*, eds. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Jürgen Rohwer (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 37-38; Robert A. Doughty, *The Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France, 1940* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1990), 25-26; B. H. Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1948), 117.

[46] Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk*, 118-119 and Lucas, *Storming Eagles*, 27-30.

[47] Alistair Horne, *To Lose A Battle: France 1940,* rev. ed. (London: Macmillan London Ltd., 1990; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 267-270 and Mrazek, *Eben Emael*, 21-46.

[48] Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk*, 118-119 and Lucas, *Storming Eagles*, 27-30.

[49] Helmuth Reinhardt, et al, *Airborne Operations: A German Appraisal*, facsimile edition (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1989), 17. This is a study written for the Historical Division of European Command after the war by a committee of former German officers, to include Kurt Student as well as several other German airborne commanders.

[50] Mrazek, *Eben Emael*, 145-146.

[51] Mrazek, *Eben Emael*, 13 and Horne, *To Lose A Battle*, 269-270.

[52] Mrazek, *Eben Emael*, 189. The one exception was a paratrooper named Grechza who rode into battle at Eben Emael with a canteen filled with rum and became gloriously drunk during the combat at the fort.

[53] *The German Campaigns in the Balkans (Spring 1941),* facsimile edition (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1984, 1986), 107; Karl Gundelach, "The Battle for Crete 1941" in *Decisive Battles of World War II: The German View*, eds. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Jürgen Rohwer (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 102; Lucas, *Storming Eagles*, 41-45.

[54] Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters, 1939-45*, trans. R. H. Barry (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1964), 131.

[55] *German Campaigns in the Balkans*, 121 and Lucas, *Storming Eagles*, 46.

[56] Gundelach, "Crete," 116. Over 10,000 of the newly arrived defenders were Greek troops who, as a result of the loss of their country, were demoralized, disorganized, and poorly equipped.

[57] Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, vol. 3 of *The Second World War* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), 270. Churchill, of course, was referring to ULTRA intelligence which was gleaned from intercepted German Enigma codes. At the time of Churchill's writing the ULTRA secret had not been revealed, hence his elliptic comments.

[58] Ibid., 271.

[59] Gundelach, "Crete," 120 and *German Campaigns in the Balkans*, 124.

[60] *German Campaigns in the Balkans*, 126-130; John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 166; Thomas R. Buell, et al, *The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean*, *The West Point Military History Series,* ed. Thomas E. Griess (Wayne, NJ: Avery Publishing Group, 1984), 98; Gundelach, "Crete," 121.

[61] Keegan, *The Second World War*, 167 and *German Campaigns in the Balkans*, 132.

[62] *German Campaign in the Balkans*, 139-141.

[63] Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk*, 160.

[64] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 5.

[65] Jack G. Cornett, "Development of Airborne Forces," *Military Review* 25, no. 9 (December 1945): 26.

[66] Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972), 44-45.

[67] Gavin, "Beyond the Stars," 61.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Cornett, "Development of Airborne Forces," 26.

Chapter Three
A Breed Apart

> *They walk as if they know how good they are, and they walk like individual men. All combat troops have a special pride and style. All combat troops despise garrison life and garrison soldiers, and all combat troops look like something very rare and would shock anyone with stern ideas about uniforms and compartment [*sic*]. But these airbornes seem to me even more remarkable than most and, seeing them now, you notice every face, for every face is that of an entire man, and you notice that each man wears his soiled and baggy clothing as if it had been designed for him alone and was not Army issue at all.*
>
> Martha Gellhorn[1]

Spurred, no doubt, by intelligence information on the development of airborne forces in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, on 1 May 1939 the War Department sent a memorandum to the U.S. Army's Chief of Infantry, Major General George A. Lynch requesting that Lynch's office " 'make a study for the purpose of determining the desirability of organizing, training, and conducting tests of a small detachment of air infantry with a view to ascertaining whether or not our Army should contain a unit or units of this nature.' " Interestingly, this memorandum also delineated a drastically different line of experimentation than that previously conducted by the Army by suggesting that the " 'role of this type of unit will be, after being transported in airplanes, to parachute to the ground a small detachment to seize a small vitally important area, primarily an air field, upon which additional troops will later be landed by transport aircraft.' "[2] The American airborne program was about to take flight.

Five days after receiving the memorandum, Lynch submitted his staff's preliminary findings, which suggested that such a unit could be employed in four ways. First, very small detachments could be deposited "within enemy territory for special specific missions where the possible accomplishments of the detachment warrant the risk of possible loss of the entire detachment." Such "suicide missions" would, in theory, be aimed at the destruction of vital communications centers or special industrial plants. Second, these type units could also conduct reconnaissance "to gain information not otherwise obtainable." Third, units of battalion or regimental size could be inserted behind enemy lines "to hold a key point, area, or bridge-head" until relieved. And finally, such units could "work in conjunction with a mechanized force at a considerable distance from the main body."[3]

In spite of Lynch's prompt response, further development of the Army's airborne program was put on hold while other projects took priority as America mobilized for war. But when, in January 1940, General Lynch appointed then Major William C. Lee to

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 65 through 68.

oversee and breath new life into the project, there began a remarkable series of events that resulted in the expansion of the American airborne community from one parachute platoon to what would ultimately comprise an airborne corps, five airborne divisions, and myriad independent parachute battalions and regiments. But Lee's task was a daunting one; according to one of his assistants at the time, when Lee took over the project, "the entire file on what we [the U.S. Army] knew about parachute troops was contained in a small manila folder."[4]

William Lee was born in Dunn, North Carolina, on 12 March 1895. He attended Wake Forest and North Carolina State University where he lettered in both baseball and football. During World War I, he secured a reserve commission in the infantry, saw combat in France as a platoon leader and company commander, and elected to remain in the Army after the war. In 1932, while serving in France, Lee attended the French tank school and served for one year in a French tank regiment. In 1935, he returned to the United States for posting as an instructor at both the U.S. Army Tank School and the U.S. Army Infantry School. After graduating from the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1938, Lee served for a time as the executive officer of the 2nd Infantry Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division before assigned to the Office of the Chief of Infantry in Washington, D.C.[5] According to Gavin, who for a time served under Lee, "there couldn't have been a better man" for the job of shepherding the fledgling airborne concept through its first years because Lee "knew Washington quite well. . . . So when he wanted something, he could pick up the phone and get it." Besides connections, Gavin also saw in Lee other traits that subsequently proved immeasurably more important, characterizing him as "the most tolerant, kind, considerate, intelligent man I've ever dealt with in a situation like that. He let us try anything we wanted to do. And we did."[6]

It was well that Lee was a tolerant man for upon being named the project officer for this still inchoate concept, Lee had to proceed cautiously while awaiting the resolution of an internecine conflict over which branch of the Army would assume the lead role in the development of airborne forces. In consonance with prevalent thinking about the role of parachute troops the Chief of Engineers proposed that since these troops would be primarily employed in small detachments behind enemy lines to carry out demolition and sabotage missions, their training and employment should fall under the direction of the Engineer branch. Likewise, the Air Corps, already looking ahead to a time when it would be an independent service, saw in the development of airborne units a chance to procure its own Marine Corps-type organization. The Chief of Infantry, meanwhile, maintained that since airplanes were but a means of transport, and that once on the ground the soldiers would be expected to fight as infantry regardless of their mission, he should remain the lead proponent for the project. This discussion, which began in the fall of 1939, remained unresolved until August 1940 when the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army finally ruled that the development of airborne units would remain under the control of the infantry.[7]

Undeterred by these turf wars, Lee forged ahead and in April 1940, obtained War Department approval for a plan to organize a parachute test platoon that would function under the auspices of the Infantry Board.[8] Less than two months later the Adjutant General sent a memorandum to the Commandant of the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, ordering him to " 'designate personnel for the test platoon from the 29th

Infantry,' " a regiment whose primary mission was to support officer training at the Infantry School. This memo also stated that " '[t]he test platoon will be a composite of specially selected men rather than a regular platoon' " and that " 'service with the test platoon will be voluntary,' " thereby setting the parameters for parachute duty that remained throughout the war and which continue to the present day.[9]

While volunteers for the test platoon were being interviewed and vetted, the Infantry Board established an eight-week training regimen for the platoon that looked very much like what a British Commando or U.S. Army Ranger would undergo, a further reflection of the dominant strain of thinking about how parachutists would be employed in combat, that is, in relatively small formations against unusually high-risk targets. There was heavy emphasis, therefore, on physical training, night fighting, use of explosives, and hand-to-hand combat, as well as instruction in parachute packing and parachute manipulation. At the conclusion of the eight-week program, recommendations were to be made on the organization, training, uniform and equipment of parachute units as well as the best methods to land troops and equipment by parachute and the " 'practicability and feasibility of employment of the platoons under the assumed conditions.' "[10]

The commander of the test platoon, Lieutenant William T. Ryder, was just four years out of West Point. His platoon comprised an assistant platoon leader, Lieutenant James A. Bassett, and forty-eight enlisted men, all of whom were specially selected volunteers from the 29th Infantry Regiment.[11] Besides being seasoned soldiers, the test platoon volunteers were outstanding physical specimens; they had to be given the torturous physical training they endured on a daily basis. According to test platoon member Thad P. Selman, each day began with a six-mile run, followed by breakfast and then additional physical training during which the platoon

> did pull-ups, chin-ups, that sort of thing. And we worked out with medicine balls. We'd stand in a circle and you'd throw a ball and you [were] supposed to hit [your buddy] in the stomach. And you'd try to catch a fellow unprepared. And it got so, you know, it could knock you down. We were tough. We thought we could whip anything with hair or a bark . . . and almost could. But they encouraged that in us, they wanted to build it, they wanted us to feel like we were superior individuals.[12]

On 16 August 1940, the test platoon made its first ever jump onto Lawson Field at Fort Benning, Georgia, from an Army Air Corps C-33 transport. Lieutenant Ryder was the first man to jump, becoming the Army's first official paratrooper. Unfortunately, the second man scheduled to jump (who would have become the Army's first enlisted paratrooper) froze in the door and despite numerous passes over Lawson Field simply could not bring himself to make that leap into space. According to Selman, who was on the plane, the test platoon had a 180-pound dummy nicknamed Oscar that it used to check wind drift so the jumpers could gauge where they should exit the plane. Before Ryder's jump, Oscar was released and things worked perfectly. Ryder then had the plane circle back around, land, and pick him up along with a second Oscar. By that time

> a certain amount of tension was building up. And we got ready to circle around and drop the dummy to check the wind drift again and the sucker

> didn't open. It augured in. Well, we all saw that of course. So the first man [after Ryder] got to the door. And he just . . . he was willing, but he just wouldn't go. As I recall we circled the drop zone two or three times to give him an opportunity to change his mind but he went back and set down.[13]

Fortunately, the second Oscar's untimely accident did not affect the remainder of the test platoon members and by the end of the day the Army had its first forty-nine paratroopers.

The test platoon's final jump as a unit was their first mass jump. Staged before an assemblage of high-ranking officers and civilians, to include Major General Lynch (accompanied by Major Lee), Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, and Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, the members of the platoon jumped from three planes, hit the ground, recovered their weapons and equipment, and attacked a mock enemy position. Afterwards, a duly impressed Marshall talked to the members of the platoon, complimented them on their achievements, and announced that he was going to activate whole battalions of parachute troops.[14] True to his word, on 16 September 1940 Marshall had the War Department Adjutant General issue a memorandum announcing that " '[t]he 1st Parachute Battalion is constituted and will be activated at the earliest practicable date at Fort Benning, Georgia.' "[15]

Command of the Army's first parachute battalion (later renamed the 501st Parachute Battalion) went to Fort Benning's athletic officer, Major William M. 'Bud' Miley, a 1918 graduate of West Point and award-winning gymnast. An Army-wide call for volunteers to fill the 501st met with an immediate and overwhelming response and by November 1940, the battalion was assembled at Fort Benning, ready to begin parachute training under the direction of Lieutenant Ryder and several members of the test platoon, who formed the nucleus around which the 501st was organized.[16] According to one of its members, Lieutenant William P. Yarborough, the training the 501st underwent was "more in line of [a] combination of Ranger-Special Forces" than of mere "straight leg infantry arriving by air," reflecting the still predominant thought that parachute units would remain small, commando-type organizations.[17] Brigadier General Omar N. Bradley, who arrived at Benning shortly after the 501st assembled, inspected the unit and called Miley's men "a breed apart—the toughest best-trained infantry I had ever seen."[18]

In order to demonstrate both to others and to his men that they were, in fact, a breed apart, Miley instituted a number of uniform changes that clearly delineated paratroopers from the rest of the 'straight leg' Army.[19] The first significant change was replacing the standard issue low quarter shoes and leggings with specially designed paratrooper jump boots, which Miley authorized his men to wear with their dress uniforms and into which they bloused (tucked) their pants. He also authorized the wearing of a circular cloth insignia on the overseas cap on which was stitched a white parachute on a field of infantry blue. He then assigned Lieutenant Yarborough the task of designing a badge that could be awarded to all those who successfully completed the parachute course. Working closely with Lee, who was still overseeing the program from Washington, D.C., Yarborough designed what became—and has remained to the present day—the U.S. Army's parachute qualification badge, or 'wings,' the first group of which was struck by Bailey, Banks and Biddle of Philadelphia.[20] A few months later, the innovative Yarborough also designed a special combat uniform for paratroopers with oversized

pockets on the blouse and pants in which could be stored all the impedimenta which paratroopers would be required to carry with them into battle.[21]

These uniform items quickly became jealously guarded symbols of distinction among America's growing corps of paratroopers and served as visible manifestations of a pride in self as well as an *esprit de corps* that would sustain these troopers and their units through some of the most horrendous combat of World War Two. John D. McKenzie, an 82nd Airborne Division trooper who passed through parachute school relatively late in the war described the moment he entered this fraternity. "I hobbled up to receive my silver parachute wings . . . in a very impressive ceremony. I was far more proud of this accomplishment than either of my two college graduation ceremonies."[22] Another college man, Princeton graduate Richard Mott Janney, who enlisted in the Army as a private, volunteered for the paratroopers and eventually received a commission described the paratroopers as "the best soldiers in the company" because

> [t]here was a certain bravado about them which implied that they liked to scrap. They didn't give a hang about promotion and pay. A number of them refused opportunities to remain as non-commissioned officers at [Camp] Wheeler [Georgia]. In everything they did they displayed an excess of good spirit, good health and athletic ability. When they ran, they raced, and when they went to Macon on a week-end, they left a track of blitzed bar-rooms behind them.[23]

Janney also highlighted the importance paratroopers attached to their distinctive uniform items, especially their jump boots.

> The paratroopers take a great deal of pride in their boots. When they are new, the leather is orange tan, but they ripen with age and proper treatment, like a meerschaum pipe, until the leather is the color of a horse chestnut. It is not remarkable to see a lad, who never bothered to kick mud off his shoes, spend three hours bent over his boots with a cloth and a dozen different kinds of lotions and ointments.[24]

Another veteran paratrooper, Richard L. Blank, described what happened when non-paratroopers deigned to wear what they had not earned. Just before leaving for North Africa, the fiercely proud troopers were forced to remove anything that identified them as paratroopers, including their jump boots, and were restricted to the camp. But, explained Blank,

> [s]ome of the troopers . . . did get outside the restricted area and found that an engineering outfit at the camp had been issued jump boots. This was resented by the troopers since they thought this was our special equipment and our badge of distinction. That resulted in fights and in some of the offending boots were cut down to GI shoe size.[25]

Perhaps the truest measure of the importance that paratroopers attached to their totems is a letter addressed to General Marshall from Major General Matthew B. Ridgway. On 12

June 1944, just six days after the Normandy landings and while the division was still "[i]n the midst of the world's greatest battle" Ridgway made time to address a matter he felt had "deep significance" for his paratroopers. He had learned that manufacture of the paratrooper combat dress uniform was to be discontinued and wrote to request that this decision be reversed for, in his eyes, the "parachutist combat dress is distinctive and now represents, in the eyes of all our combat forces in all theaters, fighting spirit second to no troops in the world."[26]

While Miley's 501st was still undergoing parachute training, the War Department announced its intention to form three more parachute battalions in 1941, but personnel shortages and, more importantly, a lack of transport aircraft with which to train the paratroops delayed this expansion. By mid-1941, there were but ninety-four transports in the entire Army Air Force and only twelve of these were available for parachute training, with no additional transports projected to be available until February 1942. This shortage, portending a trend that would continue throughout the war, delayed the activation of the next parachute battalion, the 502nd, for some seven months.[27]

To oversee the planned expansion of the parachute corps, Miley also recommended that a special organization be established at Benning that would have the sole mission of administering parachute training and providing parachute qualified replacement personnel as required. This recommendation resulted in the activation in March 1941 of the Provisional Parachute Group at Fort Benning under the command of newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel Lee. Filled out with cadre from the 501st Parachute Battalion, Lee's Provisional Parachute Group assumed responsibility for developing the tactics, techniques, procedures, and doctrine for the employment of parachute troops. It also established one of the toughest, most grueling training programs of any in the Army at the time in the Parachute School.[28]

The newly minted paratroopers from the 501st who provided the cadre for the Parachute School carried forward the physically demanding standards bequeathed them from their predecessors in the test platoon, standards which quickly became a hallmark of Army paratrooper training. Irvin 'Turk' Seelye, who washed out of the Army Flying Cadet Program in 1940 and then volunteered for the paratroopers recalled that the training was " 'much more vigorous, hazardous, strenuous, and energetic and more frightening than what I'd had in my three months with the cadet program.' "[29] Joe Stolmeier, a member of the first parachute field artillery battery, remembered the Parachute School instructors as "the healthiest, strongest, biggest instructors in the world."[30] Training for the fledgling paratroopers usually began at four o'clock in the morning with an extended run. Bernard McKearney recalled " 'running around Lawson Field until someone dropped.' "[31] Stolmeier recalled that if you fell out of a run "the meat wagon [a truck that trailed the formation] would pick you up and . . . take you to the office and they'd transfer you back to where you came from."[32]

The morning runs were followed by two hours of calisthenics and then a day filled with instruction on the myriad techniques of parachute jumping, landing, and assembling, both during day and night, as well as classes on how to pack both personnel and equipment parachutes. According to John McKenzie, this demanding program "weeded out some of the volunteers who might have been weaker than those who succeeded and who might later have failed in their duties." But, added McKenzie, "I knew few men who completed the program who failed later."[33] The sheer physical brutality of the

course had two added benefits, the first being the strong sense of camaraderie that developed among the men who survived its rigors. According to McKenzie,

> [w]hether these men succeeded because of what they individually brought to the program or because the program brought out the best in them, I do not know. I tend to believe it was a combination of these two factors, and perhaps others. I do know that I would rather have died than fail the men for whom I was responsible or my commanders and peers. I believe the majority of the men . . . shared that feeling, and it was a powerful contributor to the [unit's] success in combat.[34]

The rigorous parachute training program also served as a data point against which troopers later compared their experiences in combat—and many preferred the unpredictable hazards of combat to the known hazards of parachute training. In thinking back on his training, Joe Stolmeier stated,

> later on I realized that no matter how much combat, no matter how much mud, no matter how many shells came in, no matter how much machine gun fire, or anything that the Germans could throw, it was never as bad as those instructors at Fort Benning. So we all said that. We said, 'Would you rather be here or would you rather have those guys at Fort Benning working you over?' And we always agreed we'd rather take . . . combat. And that's, I've always felt, how you make superior soldiers.[35]

By October 1941, the U.S. Army had activated three additional parachute battalions—the 502nd, 503rd, and 504th—and was still operating under "a general supposition . . . that such troops would be used principally, in small detachments, for demolition work in enemy rear areas."[36] Eventually though, there did emerge a second notion about the employment of parachute troops—an expansion on the idea of paratroopers as saboteurs and demolition teams based on doubt on what had been observed of German airborne operations in Europe—that being that "parachute troops should be used as a spearhead to seize airfields for air-landed troops."[37] Omar Bradley, who at the time was the Commandant of the Infantry School at Fort Benning and in whom local oversight of the parachute program rested, explained that even after adding the second airfield-seizure mission to the paratrooper capabilities list, no one in the higher echelons of the Army envisioned the need for larger formations, a mindset which resulted in the "limitation of airborne [i.e., parachute] units to battalion size."[38]

Concurrent with the development of parachute battalions, the U.S. Army was also experimenting with numerous other types of units to include tank destroyer, armored, and mobile infantry formations. The first major test of these new formations and the emerging doctrine associated with each was conducted during the Army General Headquarters maneuvers held in Louisiana and the Carolinas in September and November 1941. During the Louisiana maneuvers, which pitted Lieutenant General Ben Lear's 'Red' Second Army against Lieutenant General Walter Krueger's 'Blue' Third Army, A Company of the 502nd Parachute Battalion was employed to test the concept of paratroopers as saboteurs. During phase one of the maneuvers, General Krueger dropped

his paratroopers behind ‘enemy’ lines where, after a “well-executed jump . . . [it] embarked on a daylong career of mayhem,” as the paratroopers commandeered vehicles, blew a pontoon bridge, captured numerous startled ‘enemy’ troops, and conducted a raid on the opposing army’s headquarters before a force of sufficient size could be brought to bear to corral them. In spite of its accomplishments however, A Company’s contributions were viewed as “a suicide mission that had little bearing on the ground battle.”[39] During phase two of the Louisiana maneuvers, A Company switched sides and conducted an ill-fated raid against Krueger’s headquarters, though once again the paratroopers ranged the ‘enemy’ rear area causing as much destruction as possible before finally being overwhelmed by superior forces.[40] During the Carolina maneuvers, Major General Oscar W. Griswold’s reinforced ‘Red’ IV Corps, which included the entire 502nd Parachute Battalion, attacked Lieutenant General Hugh A. Drum’s ‘Blue’ First Army in a battle waged along the Pee Dee River. To test the concept of using parachute troops to seize an airfield onto which air-landed reinforcements could then be inserted, Griswold had the entire battalion jump on Pope Field at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, some fifty miles behind ‘enemy’ lines. Though supported by dive bombers, horizontal bombers, and strafing fighter planes, the battalion drop was a disaster as the waiting defenders annihilated the paratroopers before they could carry out their mission.[41] In summing up the results of this first use of Army paratroopers in mock combat, the historian of the wargames noted that “the maneuvers never provided a realistic tactical test of airborne warfare in that none of the . . . drops were of sufficient scale to have much impact on the greater scheme of the battle at hand.”[42]

An event that did have a significant impact on the mindset of those entrusted with the expansion of the U.S. Army in general and with its parachute formations in particular was the German airborne invasion of Crete in May 1941. In a 1977 interview General Melvin Zais, an original member of the 501st Parachute Battalion, recalled that “[t]he big thing that convinced us to go ahead and expand our parachute troops was the Germans. It was the German invasion of Crete.”[43] Omar Bradley concurred with this assessment, writing in his memoirs that “after the German operations on Crete . . . Lee, Miley, Gavin and others began to think in much larger terms: airborne regiments, airborne divisions.” And, added Bradley, “I shared their enthusiasm.”[44] Finally, probably the most influential member of the fledgling airborne community at the time, William Lee, wrote “ ‘[a]fter these successful operations [on Crete], I think it would indeed be dull of us to say that parachute troops will seldom be employed in units larger than a battalion.’ ”[45]

Heeding the call of the Army’s parachute pioneers, the G-3 of the War Department, Brigadier General Harry L. Twaddle submitted a memorandum on 11 December 1941 to the Chief of Staff of Army General Headquarters, Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair, the man General Marshall had charged with creating and training the American Army, in which Twaddle observed that “ ‘experience in Europe, and in the November maneuvers, showed that in the future parachute troops would be employed in larger numbers.’ ”[46] Twaddle went on to recommend that the four existing parachute battalions be grouped under a parachute group headquarters much more robust than the existing Provisional Parachute Group. McNair concurred with Twaddle’s recommendations but preferred instead to use the existing parachute battalions as core units around which to form parachute regiments. On 24 February 1942, therefore, a War Department directive constituted four parachute regiments with each to receive, as its first subordinate unit, one

of the existing parachute battalions. Hence, for example, the 501st Parachute Battalion became the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment.[47] In order to facilitate this increased training burden, in March 1942 the Provisional Parachute Group was disbanded in favor of a more robust Airborne Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the function of which was to "organize and control the training of all airborne personnel and units and to promulgate such policies, tactics, and standard operating procedures as are deemed necessary."[48]

Two other concepts animated the innovative thinkers surrounding Lee and Miley in the early days of the Army's experimentation with airborne forces: air-landing and glider-borne combat formations. In July 1941, the Army activated its first air-landing unit, the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion, at Fort Kobbe in the Panama Canal Zone. Shortly thereafter the 550th, reinforced by C Company, 501st Parachute Battalion, began work on the development of methods and tactics for the employment of the parachute-air-landing team in assaulting key installations. A fairly successful training exercise the following August by the 550th-C Company team compelled the activation of the Army's second air-landing unit, the 88th Infantry Airborne Battalion, at Fort Benning in October 1941.[49] This experiment with air-landing infantry was short lived, however, the result of the paucity of available transport aircraft for their training as well as General McNair's desire to "concentrate on production of standard units and give special training only to units which had completed their standard training, and only when operations requiring special training could definitely be foreseen."[50] By April 1942, therefore, the War Department issued a directive stating that all " 'infantry divisions . . . will so far as practicable be trained for airborne operations prior to departure of the unit to an overseas theater of operations' " and specified that this training would encompass both movement by airplane and glider.[51] This decision also highlighted a perspective on the part of the War Department regarding the 'uniqueness' of glider-borne combat formations that would have significant ramifications later on.

It was not until February 1941 that the Army showed any serious interest in gliders and glider-borne units and then only after Major General Henry H. 'Hap' Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Force, announced " '[i]n view of certain information received from abroad, a study should be initiated on developing a glider that could be towed by an aircraft.' "[52] Four months later, the first experimental training of Army Air Corps glider pilots began at Elmira, New York, and Lockport, Illinois. At first, the goal was to train 150 glider pilots, but in the wake of the post-Pearl Harbor defense build up the call went out for 1,000 pilots, a figure later upped to 4,200 and ultimately 6,000, all of whom were to be trained by December 1942.[53] But the call for pilots interfered with the concomitant expansion of the powered pilot program and sufficient volunteers could not be procured, even after standards for acceptance into the program were lowered. Another brake on the expansion of the program was the lack of combat gliders with which to train; it was sixteen months *after* the glider pilot training program began before the first successful test flight of the CG-4A Waco, which became the standard U.S. Army glider throughout the war. Constructed of wood, steel tubing, and canvas, and comprising over 70,000 parts, the CG-4A had a wingspan of 83.6 feet, was 48 feet long, and had a cargo capacity of 4,060 pounds. It could carry thirteen combat equipped soldiers plus a pilot and co-pilot, or a jeep, trailer, or small artillery or antitank piece with crew. By the end of the war, approximately 14,000 Wacos had been manufactured by firms as varied as the Heinz

Pickle Company, Steinway Pianos, and Anheuser-Busch, making it the fourth most produced combat aircraft of World War II.[54]

The expansion of the glider pilot training program, the parallel development of an acceptable combat glider, and the decision to do away with the fielding of 'unique' air-landing combat formations all came to a head in May 1942. In that month, the Army formed its first glider unit from the 88th Infantry Airborne Battalion, redesignating it the 88th Glider Infantry Regiment and in the process of this transformation set several precedents that would have a significant impact on the troopers in glider units.[55] The most significant precedent stemmed from the manner by which glider units were formed, a process that required nothing more than the mere redesignation of a unit as a glider outfit. There were, of course, some equipment and organizational changes that also occurred when a unit was redesignated as a glider unit in order to ensure the unit and its weaponry could be transported in gliders to the battlefield, but the troopers in the units were not given any choice.[56] Nor were glider troops regaled with special insignia beyond a cap badge, given flight pay like the glider pilots who transported them to the battlefield, or given extra 'hazardous duty' pay like their paratrooper brethren beside whom they fought once on the battlefield (enlisted paratroopers received an extra $50 per month while officers received an extra $100 per month) until July 1944, when they also earned the right to wear a glider badge.[57] The mindset behind this state of affairs was best outlined in a War Department communiqué in response to a request to obtain for glider troopers hazardous duty pay. In coldly bureaucratic fashion, the War Department Adjutant General ruled that parachutists received extra pay because they were individually trained and "VOLUNTEER FOR THIS DUTY WHICH IS CONSIDERED EXTRA HAZARDOUS. . . . WHILE GLIDER TROOPS ARE UNIT TRAINED [A]ND ARE NOT VOLUNTEERS. . . . IT IS THEREFORE FELT THAT NO REPEAT NO INCREASE IN PAY SHOULD BE PROVIDED FOR GLIDER PERSONNEL WHO MERELY RISE IN AIRPLANES OR GLIDERS."[58] This differentiation between glider and parachute troops, in terms of both pay and status, often resulted in considerable tension between the two groups when they began working more closely with one another, especially when the units were in garrison. But an unintended consequence of this rivalry was a heightened battlefield performance by both parachute and glider troops as one group sought to uphold its elite status while the other sought to earn a similar distinction for itself.

Hence by 1942, the U.S. Army was well on its way to developing a significant capability to conduct vertical envelopment operations using both parachute and glider-borne combat units, though the tactics, techniques, and procedures for their use were still being developed and debated. Moreover, the newness and danger of the parachute troops attracted mavericks who saw in these formations an opportunity to carve a niche for themselves and potentially transform the face of warfare. According to one veteran, what distinguished paratroopers from other soldiers was a "willingness to take chances and risks in a branch of the army that provided a great, new, almost unexplored frontier." In characterizing his comrades, this same veteran wrote "[i]n other days paratroopers would have been the type of men to sail with Columbus, or the first to seek out the West and fight the Indians."[59] Additionally, because of the premium placed on physical fitness, parachuting was a young man's game and thus young men with new ideas commanded a

measure of influence not found in other branches of the Army, a point William Ryder made in a letter to an aspiring parachute officer.

> I know that you will like the [parachute] service, because there is nothing to this jumping out of an airplane, and there is a great need for ideas. We are still suffering from growing pains, and if there was ever a place in the Army where people are willing to listen to your ideas—this is it! The older officers are always willing to listen to the jumping officers [*sic*] point of view.[60]

The man to whom Ryder addressed his letter was James M. Gavin, then a 34-year-old captain serving in the Department of Tactics at the United States Military Academy at West Point. In early 1941, Gavin volunteered for parachute duty only to have his request disapproved by both the Commandant and Superintendent of West Point, with the latter adding "in order to replace [Captain Gavin], it would be necessary to have an officer of equal ability ordered to this station" and "so far as I know, he is not particularly fitted for this type of duty."[61] Not to be deterred, Gavin traveled to Washington to see a friend in the Chief of Infantry's office, secured a list of officers who had been previously considered for duty at West Point, verified their availability, and with this information finally convinced both the Commandant and Superintendent to release him for parachute duty.[62] Upon graduating from jump school in August 1941, Gavin was initially assigned as the commander of C Company, 503rd Parachute Battalion. His drive and intellect did not go long unnoticed, however, and when Lee formed the Provisional Parachute Group, Gavin became the Group's training and doctrine officer. While in this position, Gavin made a name for himself by literally writing the book on airborne warfare, U.S. Army Field Manual 31-30, *Tactics and Techniques of Air-Borne Troops*.[63]

James Gavin epitomized the men who flocked to the airborne—young, tough, adventurous men, full of ideas about how to employ parachute and glider units—men who, because of their youth, were not beholden to traditional 'old-Army' norms of social decorum, discipline, or training methods.[64] And these men were led by officers, almost all as young as the troopers themselves, with novel ideas about how to mold their roughnecks into a finely honed fighting force. As Gavin himself disparagingly wrote, despite the advent of "machine weapons . . . between World War I and World War II countless hours were spent on wheeling about and moving squads to the right and to the left, as though they were preparing to fight the wars of a century ago."[65] But paratrooper, and later glider officers discarded such outmoded notions in favor of a revolutionary idea—that being that their troopers should think for themselves, for given the nature of parachute and glider operations, they would very likely be isolated in small pockets, without officer leadership, and still be expected to perform their assigned missions. According to Gavin,

> [w]e decided that they [the troopers] had to be superbly trained physically if they were to do the things that were expected of them, but their mental condition was also equally as important. In this respect, we decided that the old method of forcing individuals into a mold, while at the same time removing their personal identities as far as possible, had to be done away

> with. From the moment they joined the parachute units, we tried to impress upon them what outstanding individual soldiers they were. We wanted to do everything we could to enhance their pride, and we sought to do so. At the same time, we wanted to train them as thoroughly as we . . . could.[66]

It was not only training with which Gavin, Lee, and others in the fledgling airborne community concerned themselves, but also size. In order to make a significant impact, the disparate parachute and glider regiments had to be combined into a larger formation, one that would not be squandered in penny-packet raids of little consequence, as had been the case in the Army maneuvers of 1941. And after the German invasion of Crete, this idea gained increasing impetus. So in the spring of 1942, William C. Lee traveled to Washington in company with his expert on training and doctrine, James Gavin, and as the latter later related "[w]e were talking then about a division."[67]

Chapter Three Notes

[1] Martha Gellhorn, "Rough and Tumble" in *Saga of the All American*, ed. Buck Dawson (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Hoffman Publishing Company, n.d.), n.p.

[2] This memorandum to Lynch is reproduced in Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 35.

[3] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 36.

[4] Ridgely Gaither to Doctor Randolph Doffermyre, 17 May 1957, copy of letter in possession of the author. In 1940 Gaither was a captain assigned as Lee's assistant.

[5] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 15.

[6] James M. Gavin, transcript of interview, 1 April 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Gavin, James M.," USAMHI.

[7] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 2-4.

[8] Ibid., 2.

[9] This memorandum from the Adjutant General's Office, dated 25 June 1940, subject: Organization of Test Platoon, Parachute Troops and Air Infantry, is reproduced in appendix no. 2 of Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 84.

[10] This memorandum from the Office of the Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia, dated 1 July 1940, subject: Parachute Troops and Air Infantry, is reproduced in appendix no. 3 of Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 85-87.

[11] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 50-55.

[12] Thad P. Selman, interview by the author, Atlanta, Georgia, 13 April 2002.

[13] Ibid. During the interview, Selman was insistent that the plane from which they jumped was a C-33 transport and not a B-18 bomber, despite the existence of a plaque at Lawson Field, which states it, was the latter aircraft that carried the first Army paratroopers aloft.

[14] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 71-75; Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 5.

[15] This memorandum from the War Department Adjutant General's Office, Washington, D.C., dated 16 September 1940, subject: Constitution of the 1st Parachute Battalion, is reproduced in appendix no. 4 of Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 88.

[16] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 82-85.

[17] William P. Yarborough, interview by John R. Meese and H. P. Houser III, 28 March 1975, The William P. Yarborough Papers, Box "oral interview," Folder "Section One (Duplicate)," USAMHI.

[18] Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 101.

[19] The term ‘straight leg’ or ‘leg’ was a derisive name that paratroopers called non-jumping soldiers. It was a reference to the dress uniform trousers worn by non-paratroopers which had a straight, sharp crease extending from the soldier’s waist to the top of his low quarter shoes. It is a term still in common use today by paratroopers.

[20] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 91-93. Yarborough not only designed the Army’s airborne wings, he also played a significant part in designing the jump boots.

[21] Breuer, *Geronimo*, 26.

[22] John D. McKenzie, *On Time On Target: The World War II Memoir of a Paratrooper in the 82d Airborne* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 2000), 46.

[23] Richard Mott Janney, *Richard Mott Janney, 1st Lt. 505 Reg. 82 A.B. Div. Killed in Action Villa Literno, Italy, October 5, 1943* (Baltimore, MD: The Gilman School, n.d.), 37. Hardbound memorial booklet found in World War II Veterans Survey Project, Box “505th PIR (1),” Folder “Janney, Richard Mott, 505th Regt.,” USAMHI.

[24] Ibid., 60.

[25] William L. Blank, personal history narrative, World War II Veterans Survey Project, Box “82nd Airborne Division. 505th PIR 1,” Folder “Blank, William L. S/SGT, 505 Parachute Inf., 82nd Airborne Div.,” USAMHI.

[26] Matthew B. Ridgway to George C. Marshall, 12 June 1944, *The Papers of George C. Marshall: Selected Correspondence* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1993), microfilm.

[27] Kent Roberts Greenfield, Robert R. Palmer, and Bell I. Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1947; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 94.

[28] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 90-96 passim.

[29] Seelye quoted in Gerald Astor, ed., *June 6, 1944: The Voices of D-Day* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 54.

[30] Joe Stolmeier, interview by the author, Atlanta, Georgia, 13 April 2002.

[31] McKearney quoted in Astor, *June 6, 1944*, 52.

[32] Stolmeier, interview, 13 April 2002.

[33] McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 50.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Stolmeier, interview, 13 April 2002.

[36] James A. Huston, “Thoughts on the American Airborne Effort in World War II,” *Military Review* 31, no. 1 (April 1951): 5.

[37] Huston, “Thoughts on the American Airborne Effort,” 5.

[38] Bradley and Blair, *A General’s Life*, 101.

[39] Christopher R. Gabel, *The U. S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1991), 76-77.

[40] Ibid., 107. On the day prior to A Company's jump, Krueger moved his headquarters. Finding their primary objective gone, the paratroopers simply caused as much damage as they could given their limited resources.

[41] Ibid., 144.

[42] Ibid., 190-191.

[43] Melvin Zais, interview by William L. Golden and Richard C. Rice, 20 January 1977, The Melvin Zais Papers, Box "oral history," USAMHI.

[44] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 101-102.

[45] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 11.

[46] Twaddle quoted in Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, 97.

[47] Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, 97-98.

[48] E.G. Chapman, "American Divisions Take to the Air," *Military Review* 23, no. 1 (April 1943): 11; Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 15-16. E.G. Chapman was the first chief of staff of Airborne Command, later assumed command of the unit, and then moved from that assignment to command the 13th Airborne Division. Airborne Command was originally constituted under Colonel William Lee at Benning but shortly thereafter moved to Fort Bragg, and then, in April 1943, to Camp Mackall, North Carolina.

[49] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 5-7.

[50] Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, 340.

[51] Quoted in Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 48-49.

[52] Arnold quoted in Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 38.

[53] Mrazek, *Glider War*, 129-134.

[54] Ronald M. Buffkin, "Assault Gliders: A World War II Phenomenon," *Military Review* 72, no. 7 (July 1992): 80 and Mrazek, *Glider War*, 58.

[55] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 119-120. The 550th Airborne Infantry Battalion was also, eventually, transformed into a glider unit, the 550th Glider Infantry Battalion.

[56] For example, for most of the war glider infantry regiments comprised only two subordinate infantry battalions, not three as was the standard in the rest of the Army. This did not change until the June 1944 Normandy invasion when glider regiments in the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions had a third glider regiment attached for operations in France, an attachment which later became permanent.

[57] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 119.

[58] War Department Adjutant General, Message to Commanding General, Fifth Army and Commanding General, 1st Armored Corps, 23 June 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder

"Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI. All capitals in the original. On page 249 of his book, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, July-August 1943* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), Carlo D'Este wrote "One disgruntled gliderman was heard to rage, 'I would give a year's pay if the desk-bound son of a bitch in Washington who decided crash-landing in one of these canvas coffins isn't hazardous duty would go up with us just once.' "

[59] Ross S. Carter, *Those Devils in Baggy Pants* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), viii.

[60] William C. Ryder to James M. Gavin, 17 May 1941, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 7, Folder "West Point Records Parachute Training Transfer Records," USAMHI.

[61] Endorsement to Gavin's request for parachute duty, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 7, Folder "West Point Records Parachute Training Transfer Records," USAMHI.

[62] James M. Gavin, *War and Peace in the Space Age* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 45-46.

[63] Jonathan M. Soffer, *General Matthew B. Ridgway: From Progressivism to Reaganism, 1895-1993* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 42.

[64] An example of this departure from accepted modes of military conduct is related in Bradley Biggs, *Gavin: A Biography of General James M. Gavin* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1980), 34. During a 1972 interview with Biggs, Gavin told the following story, which occurred while he was commanding the 505th Parachute Regiment at Fort Benning, Georgia: " 'The Regimental Adjutant of the 505th came into my office and told me that one of our troopers had been arrested for having sexual intercourse with a young lady on the lawn of the Courthouse in Phenix City, [Alabama, a town right near Fort Benning]. The question he was asked from the Post Headquarters was 'What am I going to do about it?' referring to me. 'Well,' I replied, 'in view of the fact that the young man will be asked to give his life for his country in the next few months, I suggest we give him a medal.' I heard nothing further of it.' "

[65] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 2.

[66] Gavin, "Beyond the Stars," 75.

[67] James M. Gavin, interview by Clay Blair, 28 September 1982, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Gavin, James M.," USAMHI.

Chapter Four
Men of a Particularly High Order

The fine men I met and served with in the old 82d were not all paragons of virtue, but a goodly number of them demonstrated traits of character and a manliness which make one proud to have served with them.

Charles A. Harrington[1]

On 7 December 1941, after more than three years of fitful mobilization, the United States Army comprised thirty-six combat divisions, an impressive array when compared to the size of the Army during the interwar years, but a force that paled in comparison with the hundreds of battle-hardened divisions the Axis Powers could field at the time.[2] The War Department was fully aware of this disparity; it had completed a strategic assessment—the Victory Plan—two months earlier in which it was emphasized that Germany, Italy, and their smaller European allies could field "approximately 300 divisions fully equipped and splendidly trained" and estimated that by 1943, these same powers would have "a total of 400 divisions available in the European Theater."[3] Taking into consideration the forces of the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, the Victory Plan concluded that were the United States to become an active belligerent its contribution would have to be no less than 215 ground combat divisions.[4]

Expanding from thirty-six to over two hundred divisions would be no mean feat, but at least it appeared that the Army was moving in the right direction. However, looks were deceiving, for the Army had already activated all eighteen National Guard divisions, thereby effectively eliminating the nation's organized reserve force and expansion base, and of the thirty-six divisions on the rolls only one was at a full wartime footing, with the rest being woefully ill equipped and undermanned.[5] Yet victory's price had been established, and the Army was committed to making payment as quickly as possible.

The Japanese attack and subsequent German declaration of war eased things considerably for Army mobilization efforts. Gone were the political and social constraints that had curbed the pre-war expansion program. Momentum toward mobilization picked up considerably and within three months of America's entry into the war the Army instituted an accelerated program designed to activate three to four divisions per month.[6] As part of the first contingent so activated, on 25 March 1942, Major General Omar Bradley signed an order announcing the rebirth of the 82nd Infantry Division at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, a new Army post on the banks of the Red River near Alexandria. Bradley signed the order in his capacity as the 82nd's newest commanding general.[7]

Prior to assuming command of the 82nd Infantry Division, Omar Bradley had been Commandant of the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. Characterized by one historian who knew him well as "one of the homeliest and most humble men West Point

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 84 through 89.

had ever turned out," Bradley "had the low-key air of a country schoolteacher and spoke in rural, twangy, Midwest vernacular." But Bradley's performance and innovative training methods at the Infantry School caught Marshall's eye and the Army Chief of Staff subsequently nominated Bradley for a second star and gave him command of the 82nd, making Bradley the first member of his West Point class to rise to division command.[8]

In order to meet its mobilization quota of three to four divisions per month the War Department streamlined its processes. Formerly, recruits arrived at training centers, received thirteen weeks of individual basic training (specialists were then shipped off to other training schools), and were then shipped to their units where they were integrated into their squads, platoons, companies, battalions, regiments and, ultimately, divisions. In the charged atmosphere of early 1942, the challenge was to simultaneously train recruits and form the divisions into which they would be organized so that by the end of the year the total number of divisions in the Army would be at least doubled. To make that happen trained personnel from already extant divisions were reassigned to supply a "nucleus" around which a new division's recruits were then "poured, like concrete around a form."[9] There were obvious shortcomings to the new process, not least of which was the loss of trained soldiers by the parent division. In addition, the turnover wreaked havoc with unit readiness, especially in those divisions that were tapped for cadre more than once. Those selected as cadre also faced a daunting task, for they were not only charged with forming new units, they had to do so while instructing raw recruits in everything from left and right facing movements to the intricacies of large unit combined arms warfare. And they had but seventeen weeks in which to do this.[10]

The 82nd Infantry Division's cadre—approximately 700 officers and 1,200 enlisted men—came predominately from the 9th Infantry Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Arriving at Camp Claiborne in early 1942, these soldiers had little time to organize themselves before they were inundated by 16,000 men who knew not the first thing about soldiering. Bradley, too, was awed by the task before him; despite being well schooled in the training of men for combat (a direct result of his previous assignment), the additional burden of having to receive thousands of untrained men and then organize them into a unit as large as a division was a daunting one. As Bradley saw it "[t]he challenge was large; the danger of failure, or even disaster, lay everywhere."[11]

Realizing that the loneliest and most stressful hours of a draftee's life are those he experiences immediately after reporting for duty, Bradley showed his innovative side by attempting to minimize the impact of the "strange, impersonal and wholly unfamiliar world" into which these men would be thrust. The absence of some plan to mitigate this loneliness and stress, Bradley felt, raised the "real danger that we might experience devastating morale problems, delaying our training and readiness, and generating the usual flood of accusatory letters to Congress, Drew Pearson and other columnists, and even to Marshall himself." Bradley's plan, considered "radical at the time," was "to make the draftees feel they were coming to a 'home' where people really cared about their welfare." The first step in this plan involved sending a team from the division's G-1 (personnel) section to the recruit reception centers to "greet, interview, classify and assign each draftee to a specific paper unit and duty, according to his civilian background." Then, when the recruits arrived at Camp Claiborne, Bradley arranged to have them met by a brass band that played while the men were shepherded off the train

on which they had arrived, formed into the units to which they had been assigned, and marched to their tents where they found their equipment waiting for them on a cot. They were then fed a hot meal while their travel uniforms were rush-laundered in preparation for the next day's events.[12]

Bradley's reception scheme went hand-in-hand with his training philosophy, which demanded that his officers and noncommissioned officers be "tough as hell on [the recruits], but in an intelligent, humane, understanding way."[13] As a result, "[t]he officers conducting basic training . . . were patient and understanding" and "[t]here was no shouting and profanity as men learned to be citizen-soldiers."[14] Word of Bradley's methods soon got out and a mere two weeks after the division's activation McNair and his Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Mark W. Clark, paid the 82nd a visit to see firsthand how things were proceeding. Afterwards, Clark reported that his boss " 'was certainly well pleased' " and suggested that the example the 82nd was setting for the rest of the Army's new divisions " 'should certainly whip [them] into shape in rapid fashion.' "[15] According to Bradley, "General McNair gave us a hearty pat on the back" and soon thereafter "recommended that all new divisions adopt" similar methods.[16]

Bradley's "rudest shock" upon seeing his new soldiers was his "discovery that [the draftees], the prime youth of America, were generally in appallingly bad physical condition." The initial focus of his training, therefore, was to whip his men into trim and build the physical toughness he knew would be demanded of them in combat. To this end he instituted a physical training regimen that included daily calisthenics, foot marches, and organized sporting events. He also "erected an extremely difficult obstacle course, with high walls, deep ditches, log barriers, culverts, rope swings and the like" and then led his men, including all his staff and line officers, through this demanding physical program.[17]

Bradley's achievements as a division commander kept him in Marshall's sights. He had worked miracles with the 82nd, "adhering closely or exceeding McNair's seventeen-week training schedule" and he looked forward to "leading it into battle whenever and wherever it might be sent." But his success precluded him this opportunity. The 28th Infantry Division, a National Guard unit at nearby Camp Livingston, had not made comparable progress despite having been mobilized a full year before the 82nd so to save the 28th Marshall tagged Bradley to move in, take command, and rescue the foundering Guardsmen. Assuming command of the 82nd would be Bradley's assistant division commander, Brigadier General Matthew B. Ridgway. It was a propitious choice, for Ridgway, for the 82nd, and for nascent American airborne community.[18]

Like Bradley, Matthew Bunker Ridgway was a Marshall protégé. He had graduated West Point two years behind Bradley and at the time of Pearl Harbor was a lieutenant colonel assigned to the War Plans Division in the War Department, albeit on temporary duty at Fort Benning where he was attending a refresher course in anticipation of his taking command of an infantry regiment. News of the Japanese attack sent him rushing back to Washington, where he assumed his duties as a staff officer, his plans for regimental command on indefinite hold. It was a command Ridgway never got. Instead, in January 1942, Marshall called Ridgway into his office to tell him he would be promoted to brigadier general (after only six weeks in grade as a full colonel) and sent to Camp Claiborne as Bradley's second in command.[19]

Bradley felt "lucky to get" Ridgway and rated him "first and foremost one of the most charismatic and able young infantrymen in the Army."[20] Likewise Ridgway praised Bradley's "great warmth of nature" and admired his commander's "quiet, soft-spoken" demeanor and "great athletic ability." The two hit it off immediately (they had served together before but had never been close) and began a friendship and mutual admiration that lasted throughout the war. During their time together in the 82nd, Bradley entrusted his assistant with "complete" latitude in training the division's three infantry regiments, a task Ridgway called "a full time job every waking hour of the day." [21] Hence when Marshall announced Ridgway as Bradley's successor to command the 82nd, the latter felt this "the best possible choice" and though sad at leaving the division he had had so large a part in creating, he was content to see command of his "pride and joy" go to Matt Ridgway.[22]

Ridgway was an impressive man. Years after the war John S. D. Eisenhower recalled that as a young second lieutenant fresh out of West Point he had the unique opportunity to accompany his father, the Supreme Allied Commander, during some of the toughest fighting of the Normandy Campaign. Enjoying the view from such a lofty perch without having to suffer the attendant responsibilities, he spent his time observing the men who did the fighting. "Ridgway," he wrote, "was by any yardstick a strong commander" and a man who "prided himself on being a soldier's soldier."[23] According to another observer Ridgway's "powerful presence made him no stranger in a crowd" and added that his "image, profile and reputation projected more than his 5-foot-10-inch frame indicated."[24] A third commented on Ridgway's "mature leadership" which "made a lasting impression."[25] And a fourth, who came to know Ridgway quite well during the war while serving as his bodyguard, commented,

> [t]he General was a type of man who could make you feel at ease. He could talk to you on your own level. At the same time, you read about him and he was conversing with the biggest men in the country.
>
> I would not know how to compare the general with those other generals. . . . He was a great commander and after all, he looked the part of the warrior and I fully believe I would prefer being with him more than, well, a lot of others.[26]

Matt Ridgway was the son of a soldier, Thomas Ridgway, an 1883 West Point graduate who retired as a colonel in 1919.[27] Though "a soldier to the core" Thomas never attempted to persuade his son to follow in his footsteps, nor did the younger Ridgway "recall feeling any strong inner compulsion to take up the trade of arms as a career." He did sense, though, that his father would approve of such a decision and so it was "as much an effort to please him as it was any burning desire . . . to become a soldier" that led Matt Ridgway to apply for admission to West Point.[28] Failing to gain entrance on his first attempt (Ridgway failed the geometry portion of the entrance exams) he tried again and finally entered the Academy on 14 June 1913.[29] After enduring six weeks of "beast barracks," the cadet equivalent of basic training, Ridgway settled into the West Point routine and four years later graduated in the top third of his class of 1917, with a commission in the infantry.[30]

According to one biographer, Ridgway possessed "[d]ecisiveness, self-confidence, and single-mindedness of purpose . . . in abundance" and that "[e]ven as a young officer, Ridgway was an overly serious and perhaps somewhat humorless workaholic."[31] On one occasion, for example, following a relapse of streptococcal throat that sent Ridgway to the hospital, Marshall upbraided him for the relentless manner with which he drove himself and chastened him to take it a little easier. Hence, despite the insouciance with which he entered the profession of arms, no one ever doubted that Matt Ridgway took his calling seriously, and even during the professionally stifling atmosphere of the interwar Army, when there seemed little prospect of advancement, he zealously devoted himself to what many would have considered mundane tasks best left to others. A fellow officer who served under then Captain Ridgway at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in 1926 related the following illustrative anecdote:

> I easily remember one very hot August afternoon when I went by the company to find Capt. Ridgeway [*sic*] in the supply room. He was very carefully inspecting the bore of each rifle to make sure the lans [*sic*] and grooves were not eroded or gummed up so that the rifle would be able to fire accurately and not with a too great amount of dispersion.
>
> I don't really know how he felt in his heart about doing this—but to me he seemed to be seeking perfection in the company preparations for the coming rifle qualification program at Camp Bullis, Texas. I might add that such detailed extra work that could have been delegated was not common in the peacetime army of the 20's where there was little thought of impending conflict. Capt. Ridgeway [*sic*] himself qualified as an Expert Rifleman, the highest award, over a then quite difficult course.[32]

Intelligent without the airs of an intellectual, Ridgway was suspicious "of purely technological solutions to military problems" and as "a serious reader of Clausewitz he understood moral superiority as the underpinning of *morale* superiority, an absolutely necessary ingredient for overcoming the friction of war."[33] Throughout this military career, Ridgway emphasized that morale could only be obtained through "charismatic leadership" exercised "by men who were deserving because of their strength and spiritual power as well as their technical expertise."[34] In Ridgway's mind, the effectiveness of any military organization "is dependent on primarily its officers corps and secondarily on its noncommissioned officer corps." With effective leadership, he contended, soldiers "will rise to any height" and without it "they won't, and that's the key to the whole thing—leadership."[35]

Leadership and how to produce effective combat leaders was Ridgway's "eternally fascinating question," the answer to which he felt was more art than science.[36] He defined leadership as "the art of imposing one's will upon others in such a manner as to command their implicit obedience, their utmost confidence, their profound respect, and their wholehearted cooperation." Leadership, he felt, was indispensable to effective military organizations because it formed the bedrock for morale and discipline, with the latter being "not the discipline of the martinet or the guard house" but a relationship based on a feeling of "mutual confidence between the leader and his men." And, in typically Clausewitzian fashion, Ridgway underscored the importance of morale because

he viewed combat as a "moral struggle" with victory going "to the side which refuses to become discouraged."[37] Ultimately, the leader was responsible for all his unit did or failed to do or, as he put it, the "action of any military organization, from a squad to an army group, is merely the reflection of the qualities of leadership possessed by its commander."[38]

Because he believed so fervently in the power of dynamic leadership, Ridgway pushed himself hard to set the example and expected "all his officers to devote the same time, energy and attention to duty that he demonstrated."[39] He desired always to be where the action was and while the 82nd was at Camp Claiborne the action was in the field where his soldiers were training for combat. The field, therefore, became his place of duty, day in and day out. He was everywhere, enforcing standards, inspecting training, and inspiring through his presence. Maxwell D. Taylor, who served for a time with Ridgway in the 82nd, wrote afterwards of his commander's unique style of inspecting training:

> [w]e worked in the field from morning till night, seven days a week in sizzling Louisiana temperatures—which were an excellent preparation for our later service in the desert of North Africa. Matt was a stickler for physical condition and drove his men hard to reach that level of fitness necessary for combat. I often accompanied him to inspect troop training in the field, the two of us jogging briskly from site to site under the midday sun to the wonderment of the troops.[40]

As a trainer and motivator, Ridgway carried on the firm but caring style he inherited from Bradley. Eschewing the hours of mindless drills that had been the norm in the interwar Army, Ridgway demanded that the "[e]nthusiasm [and] imagination of [the] instructor must preclude all boredom," that "[a]ll instructors must stress 'the reasons why,' " and finally that "[s]upervision must be constant and effective."[41] Under his command, trainers were to enunciate "in clear positive language . . . [standards] which each individual or unit must reach in order to be considered satisfactorily proficient" and that progress charts be kept "which will indicate to the unit commander . . . the status of training of the unit or individual concerned."[42] One junior officer who served under Ridgway through the Normandy Campaign recalled that

> [t]he officers and soldiers of Company E welcomed his unannounced visits during which he would offer constructive criticism, but would always end up with some sort of compliment. He never talked down to us, but spoke as though we were on his level. He never used a profane or vulgar word and his tone was always conversational. He could be ruthless, but never cruel. His knowledge of Infantry weapons was phenomenal, he knew each part and its function. He gained the respect of my people by pointing out our mistakes in a gentlemanly, but firm, manner and he, therefore, secured instant compliance.[43]

A second junior officer wrote:

> I can truthfully say that his image and stature projected down to the troops where, basically, everything happens. We saw him on occasion and just assumed that he knew what he was doing and never questioned his directives and commands.[44]

In short, Ridgway possessed an almost single-minded focus on the power of leadership to transform a group of strangers into a cohesive, deadly fighting machine. Of course, technical and tactical competence were also important to him, but it was leadership that, in his eyes, made the difference between victory and defeat on the battlefield. And unbeknownst to Ridgway at the time, events were in train that would put him at the head of a fledgling organization that required just the sort of leadership he personified.

While Ridgway was consumed with getting the 82nd ready for war, War Department planners were engaged in a dialogue with their British counterparts, a dialogue that would have a significant impact on both Ridgway and his division. As early as March 1941, American and British planners had come together in Washington, D.C., to hold a series of "staff conversations" aimed at fashioning a grand strategy should the United States be drawn into the war. As a result of these conversations, both sides agreed that the "early defeat of Germany, the predominant member of the Axis" should be the focus of the Anglo-American war effort and therefore "the principal military effort of the United States . . . [would be] in the Atlantic and European area, the decisive theater."[45] How to achieve this end, however, was a much more contentious issue, for while the British preferred a peripheral approach aimed at weakening Germany through blockade, aerial bombardment, and ground operations in North Africa and the north shore of the Mediterranean, the Americans were determined to come to grips with the main body of the Nazi war machine on the European Continent as quickly as possible. In order to reify their thoughts on how the war should be conducted, on 27 March 1942, War Department planners drew up a document—subsequently known as the Marshall Memorandum—which called for a massive build up of American forces in the British Isles so that by April 1943, Anglo-American forces could launch a cross-Channel invasion. As part of the American contingent of this proposed invasion force, the memorandum envisioned one U.S. airborne division plus an unspecified number of U.S. parachute units that could be dropped inland astride key transportation arteries in order to impede the advance of German reinforcements toward the invasion beachhead.[46]

The publication of the Marshall Memorandum had far-ranging ramifications, not the least of which was to provide direction to those engaged in the organization and mobilization of Army ground combat forces. In this vein, it forced another major shift in the policy of Army Ground Forces with regard to airborne units.

Even before the contents of the Marshall Memorandum became known, Lee and Gavin had traveled to Washington in an attempt to convince General McNair and his staff of the efficacy of forming airborne divisions comprising both glider and parachute regiments, but despite their entreaties it remained Army Ground Forces policy that "[s]pecial-type units and excessively specialized personnel, useful on certain occasions only, should be discouraged."[47] This mindset, which had become so entrenched that Army Ground Forces staff officers continued to pronounce that " '[a]irborne divisions should not be designated as such' " a full two months *after* the dissemination of the

Marshall Memorandum, finally started to change in early summer 1942.[48] The operational requirement to have at least one American airborne division on hand for an invasion of Europe breathed new life into the concept and not long after William Lee, by then a brigadier general, was once again traveling, this time to London, in order to exchange ideas with his British airborne brethren on the organization, equipping, and employment of airborne divisions. When he returned he briefed McNair, who in the interim had done a complete turnabout on his thinking about airborne divisions. According to Lee, McNair " 'not only approved the organization of one division but of two, in order to provide an additional division for the Mediterranean area.' "[49] In order to effect this, explained McNair in a memorandum to Marshall, the Army " 'should inaugurate studies without delay looking to the organization of whatever airborne divisions can be formed from one triangular division, plus the available parachute regiments.' "[50]

The next step was to determine which of the Army's already extant divisions should be converted. McNair turned this task over the Lee and his Airborne Command staff, which began canvassing the Army to see which division best met a specific set of selection criteria. According to Gavin, who was involved in the selection process, "[t]he division had to be one that had already completed basic training, and it could not be a Regular Army or National Guard division; the States would not want the National Guard made airborne. It was also stipulated that the division should be one that was then stationed where flying weather was generally good and near one or more airfields."[51] The one division that met all these criteria was Ridgway's 82nd.

Having selected the division that was to be converted, it was then to determine what the two airborne divisions to which it would give birth would look like. The primary consideration affecting this thinking was the "concept of employment envisioned by General McNair, General Lee, and other airborne authorities . . . [which] envisioned the use of this specialized striking force for definite missions" such as "[t]he capture of beachheads, key terrain positions, air bases, road nets, and the immobilization of enemy reserves." Furthermore, it was assumed that these missions would be quick, hard-hitting affairs for which "sustained ground action beyond a period of six to ten days was not contemplated.[52] Hence, there was no need to build a divisional structure capable of sustaining continuous combat operations for a significant period of time. The means by which airborne divisions would enter combat also predicated that most if not all of the division's organizational equipment had to be air transportable, thereby eliminating large artillery pieces, armor, and heavy transportation assets for inclusion in the division's equipment tables. Finally, the strain on existing aerial transport assets necessitated that the airborne division's logistical and administrative organizations also be pared down significantly.

Given these design considerations, McNair predicated that an airborne division should comprise one parachute and two glider regiments and that it " 'should be evolved with a stinginess in overhead and in transportation which has absolutely no counterpart thus far in our military organization.' "[53] In effect, McNair saw airborne divisions as "miniature" infantry divisions.[54]

With Airborne Command's selection process complete and his own thinking about airborne divisions fully formed, on 6 July 1942, McNair formally recommended that the 82nd be split in half and reorganized into two airborne divisions. By proceeding in this

manner, he emphasized, the Army would not only have an airborne division trained and ready for the contemplated cross-Channel invasion of April 1943, it would also have a second airborne division ready for deployment to the Mediterranean as well. After referring his recommendation to the operational planners in the War Department, where it was accepted without delay, McNair dispatched Brigadier General Floyd Parks to Camp Claiborne to deliver the news.[55]

Wholly unaware of the decisions that were being made about his command, Ridgway was preparing to convert the 82nd into a motorized division when Parks visited him at Camp Claiborne, "wearing an air of mystery." As Ridgway later described the meeting, Parks "came into my office, shut the door, looked about him cautiously, and then in a voice that was almost a whisper asked me how I'd like to command an airborne division." Ridgway responded that he "didn't know what an airborne division was," to which Parks replied, "nobody else knew much about it either." However, continued Parks, it was obvious "a new form of warfare was coming into being and the 82nd, as the best of the divisions then in training, had been chosen to develop its tactics."[56] The down side of this opportunity, however, was the requirement to release half of his 82nd to form a second airborne division, the 101st, command of which was vested in William Lee. As Ridgway later described it,

> Bill came to me and said, 'Now, you and I are old Army people. You know if you get ordered to transfer some men, all the jailbirds and guard house [*sic*] lawyers are going to be the first on the list. How are we going to divide this thing, the 82nd?' I said, 'Bill, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make two lists of the 82nd as nearly equal as possible in rank, experience and everything else. We will put them in two different posts and we'll flip a coin. If you win the coin [flip], you take whichever half you want.' It couldn't have been better and that's the way we did it.[57]

For several weeks after Parks's visit the fate of the 82nd 'Motorized' Division was held in strictest secrecy. Then, on 15 August 1942, Ridgway held a division review during which he announced that effective that day the 82nd was an airborne division and that furthermore half the soldiers standing before him on the parade field would be transferred out in order to form the 101st Airborne Division.[58] " 'Tomorrow,' " Ridgway wrote in a memorandum to his troops, " 'our destinies divide. That which was one division becomes two. That which was one team must be rebuilt into two.' "[59] According to one eyewitness, " '[t]here were sixteen thousand men standing there . . . and you could have heard a pin drop. And when Ridgway explained that four *glider* regiments would be formed from the ranks of the regular infantry, I saw a lot of faces go white.' "[60] Another witness revealed, however, that despite the shock and predictions by some noncommissioned officers "that casualties would be high" in the glider ranks, only a "very few requested a transfer."[61]

To form the nucleus of the two divisions, the nine battalions of the 82nd's three infantry regiments, the 325th, 326th, and 327th, were reorganized into four two-battalion glider infantry regiments, the 325th, 326th, 327th, and 401st, with the latter two being transferred to the 101st. Each division was also assigned a parachute infantry regiment,

the 82nd getting the 504th and the 101st the 502nd. All the other units of the 82nd were likewise redesignated as either glider or parachute units.[62]

Concurrently, the authorized personnel strengths of the subordinate units were pared significantly in order to comply with McNair's dictum that airborne divisions be lean on overhead. The newly designated glider regiments went from having an aggregate strength of 3,000 men (their strength before conversion) to 1,605 men. Glider battalions lost their heavy weapons companies (standard formations in conventional infantry battalions) and the strength of each glider rifle company (there were three in each glider battalion) was reduced from over 200 men to 5 officers and 150 enlisted men. All told, each airborne division comprised 8,520 men, just more than half the number in a standard infantry division of 14,248 men.[63]

The equipment tables were also modified to fit an airborne division's unique role and means of employment, with the most significant modification being that made regarding the artillery battalions. Instead of the 105mm and 155mm howitzers found in standard infantry divisional artillery battalions, airborne divisions had three artillery battalions (two glider and one parachute) armed with thirty-six 75mm pack howitzers, artillery pieces originally designed for mountain fighting that could be disassembled and transported on mules.[64] These guns could also easily fit on a glider or disassembled and packed in parachute bundles attached to 'para-racks' on the underside of the transport aircraft. During a drop the bundles would be released just ahead of the paratroopers, gathered up on the ground, and assembled for immediate use. The 75mm howitzers did not deliver as heavy a wallop as their 105mm and 155mm cousins and had a shorter range (9,475 yards for a 75mm; 12,500 yards for a 105mm; and 16,300 yards for a 155mm) but they could be manhandled around the battlefield if necessary.[65] This manhandling characteristic was critical for another significant equipment modification was made with regard to the airborne division's vehicular transport: instead of the over 2,000 vehicles and trailers found in a standard infantry division, the airborne divisions had approximately 400 vehicles, mostly jeeps, and about 240 trailers.[66]

The parachute regiments assigned to each of the divisions also had unique organizational structures. Unlike the two-battalion glider regiments, parachute regiments had three parachute battalions with an aggregate strength of 1,958 men, 300 more than a glider regiment but still well below that found in standard infantry regiments.[67] However, instead of the standard three-squad platoons, parachute rifle platoons contained only two rifle squads, each with a light machine gun (Browning automatic rifle) and a 60mm mortar.[68] There was also a much higher density of automatic weapons in a parachute unit than in a conventional infantry unit, especially .45-caliber Thompson submachineguns, and almost every paratrooper had an additional weapon by his side.[69]

The organizational and matériel structure of airborne divisions became a point of contention between those who commanded and fought in them and those charged with organizing them, and would remain so throughout the war. At the lowest level, the two-squad structure of parachute infantry platoons contravened Army doctrine, which taught junior officers and noncommissioned officers to fight with three squads per platoon and which therefore required paratroop leaders to improvise their tactics. This same problem held true, on a larger scale, for the two-battalion glider regiments. These organizational adjustments to the combat echelon of the airborne division were mirrored in the logistical echelon, considered by those at Army Ground Forces unnecessary "overhead" that could

be significantly pared down, as well as the equipment tables that either substituted lighter items of equipment or did away with that equipment altogether. The result was a division that, because of its small size, could be quickly moved by air but which, once committed, was relatively immobile and often times outmanned and outgunned. After the war, a board of general officers was convened to consider the value of airborne divisions in light of the experience of combat in Europe in World War II. Without exception, these officers agreed that

> [t]he fighting qualities of the airborne soldier have proven to be of the highest order and the best, but as a unit the airborne division has worked under several handicaps which limited the missions to which it could be assigned with expectation of complete success. It has very little transportation and is in effect a foot division once on the ground, its artillery is light and engineer construction equipment is practically nil. . . . The airborne divisions, however, have never faltered or failed and have played an important part in the winning of the war.[70]

Since there was little they could do about the organizational and matériel shortcomings of their newly minted divisions, at least in the near term, Ridgway and Lee focused their attentions on the "fighting qualities of the airborne soldier." Shortly after taking command of their transformed divisions, the two addressed a joint letter to General McNair, writing, " '[i]n the type of combat in which airborne divisions are likely to engage, control will be decentralized to leaders of small units among whom casualties will be high.' " Because of this, they continued, " 'airborne divisions will require an unusually large number of junior officers and enlisted men of a particularly high order of intelligence, leadership, and physical condition.' " They requested, therefore, the authority to transfer out of their units unsuitable junior officers and enlisted men in the lowest Army General Classification Test (AGCT) categories (IV and V), as well as any trooper who was prone to airsickness, possessed a lack of physical stamina or strength, was too old, or who demonstrated a temperament unsuitable for the airborne. Finally, they also requested a twenty percent overage in first and second lieutenants to fill their expected combat losses.[71]

Although unintended and somewhat elliptic, the Ridgway-Lee letter proved amazingly prescient about the impact the Army's personnel policies would have on the Army's ground combat formations. It also flew in the face of the Army's accepted paradigm for allocating military manpower which reserved for the technical and support services, especially the Army's air arm, the largest percentage of high-quality draftees (Categories I and II) while burdening the infantry, armor, and other combat arms with a larger share of lesser quality men (Categories IV and V). Quality was measured by several criteria, the most important of which was an individual's AGCT score, and there was direct correlation between a high AGCT score and leadership potential.[72] By about mid-1943, when Army formations overseas were committed to combat in increasing numbers, it became glaringly apparent that the Army's manpower allocation paradigm had had a deleterious impact on the performance of ground combat units by denying them a pool of potential junior leaders. An observer with the U.S. Fifth Army fighting in Italy noted that " '[s]quad leaders and patrol leaders with initiative were scarce. . . . The assignment of

Grade [Category] V intelligence men to infantry is murder.' "[73] The U.S. XIV Corps surgeon rendered a similar report after the fighting in New Georgia in the Pacific, writing that a dearth of quality junior leaders resulted in a concomitantly high rate of combat neurosis.[74] Another Army medical officer noted: " 'I saw one whole platoon of an infantry company go out because the platoon sergeant went "wacky." It is very important to select strong leaders, men with strong minds, especially during training periods in the States.' "[75]

Taken in this light, the joint letter from Ridgway and Lee requesting special dispensation with regard to the assignment of personnel to airborne divisions was of singular importance. On 18 September 1942, McNair acceded to the request (with the exception of the twenty percent overage in junior officers), allowing the transfer of officers and enlisted men "who have demonstrated unsuitability for airborne duty" as well as the transfer of low scoring AGCT men until the percentage of class IV and V men in the divisions approximated the Army average (21.6 percent and 8.9 percent respectively).[76] However, since "the Army average was better than the average for the ground arms, this policy constituted preferential treatment for the airborne divisions."[77] Additionally, armed with the vague "unsuitable for airborne duty" as a measure by which they could transfer men out of their divisions, Lee and Ridgway had, in practice, much more latitude in decreasing the number of unsatisfactory soldiers in their ranks. According to Ridgway, "I had the authority to wash out anybody who had any qualms about the airborne business, and in the next few months we got rid of thousands on the grounds that they were not temperamentally suited for airborne training."[78] As a result the airborne divisions had no dearth of men capable of stepping into leadership positions and taking charge, which was elemental to the battlefield success they enjoyed. This proved especially so in the 82nd, which saw more combat than any other American airborne division, and thus had a higher requirement for leaders to step in take over for those who had fallen.

Nine days before Ridgway revealed that the 82nd would be split in half and reorganized as an airborne unit, the division completed its seventeen-week training program.[79] Obviously, as a result of the reorganization much of the work invested to achieve that goal went for naught. What is more, there immediately followed four-months of turbulence marked by wholesale personnel transfers and the loss of keys leaders, all of which occurred while the bulk of the division moved to a new stateside home. As a result, by the time the 82nd Airborne Division once again got down to tactical training, the men in its ranks were practically all brand new.

Close on the heels of the reorganization effort Ridgway received orders to move that part of the 82nd still at Camp Claiborne to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where it would link up with its parachute infantry regiment, the 504th under Colonel Theodore L. 'Ted' Dunn and begin airborne training in earnest with Brigadier General Harold L. 'Hal' Clark's 52nd Troop Carrier Wing stationed at nearby Pope Field. Completed by mid-October 1942, the move was immediately followed by a call for the 82nd to supply a large contingent of personnel to form a cadre around whom the 98th Infantry Division could be built. In their place, the 82nd received thousands of brand new recruits, all of whom required basic training. The division's readiness status suffered commensurably.[80]

When Ridgway and Lee tossed a coin to determine which half of the original 82nd each would get, they agreed that everyone was eligible for assignment to either of the

new divisions with the exception of the general officers (who were assigned to their positions by McNair) and their principal division staff officers. McNair assigned Bud Miley, the Army's first parachute battalion commander and now a brigadier general as Ridgway's assistant division commander and Brigadier General Joseph M. Swing as his artillery commander. The old 82nd Division staff, which remained in place, was headed by Colonel Maxwell Taylor and included Lieutenant Colonel Ralph P. 'Doc' Eaton as the G-1 (personnel), Lieutenant Colonel George P. Lynch as the G-2 (intelligence), Lieutenant Colonel R. Klemm Boyd as the G-3 (plans and training) and Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Wienecke as the G-4 (logistics).[81] Soon after the division moved to Fort Bragg, however, both Miley and Swing received word that they would be taking command of their own airborne divisions and transferred out. To replace Miley, Lee's chief of staff, Charles L. 'Bull' Keerans was promoted and transferred to the 82nd. To replace Swing, McNair promoted Max Taylor, an artilleryman by training and temperament; a move which pleased Ridgway greatly for, even as chief of staff, Taylor spent more time with the artillery than with the staff. Finally, in a move that surprised everyone, Ridgway appointed Doc Eaton as Taylor's replacement.[82]

Eaton had left the Army after serving as an enlisted stretcher-bearer in World War One to attend the University of Illinois, where he joined the Reserve Officers Training Corps and played semi-pro baseball. Taking advantage of a special program designed for veterans, he later transferred to West Point and graduated near the bottom of his class in 1924. In the ensuing years Eaton served with Ridgway several times and the two forged a friendship based on their mutual love of baseball. By 1940, however, Eaton had transferred out of the infantry and joined the adjutant general's corps; hence his selection as chief of staff, a position usually reserved for combat arms officers, was highly unusual.[83] Speaking about his decision years later, Ridgway said, "[w]ell, Doc Eaton is a conspicuously superior officer and, more than anything else, has the ability to handle men. He is superb! He would get as much out of coordination of a General Staff as anybody I have ever seen."[84] Moreover, Ridgway continued, because of Eaton's talents "Doc ran the staff and kept house at home, and I spent all the days out with the troops—where I wanted to be anyway."[85]

There also occurred several changes in regimental command. The 325th Glider Infantry Regiment's commander, Colonel Claudius Easley, was promoted to brigadier general and sent to become the assistant division commander of the 96th Infantry Division. To replace Easley, Ridgway made another surprising selection when he gave command of the 325th to Colonel Harry L. Lewis, a man quite old for the airborne (he had been in the service four years longer than Ridgway) and for whom there was a great deal of mixed feeling.[86] Some found Lewis to be "an energetic type of fellow" who, though "small in stature . . . was tall in ability."[87] Others felt that despite Lewis's age he was still "young of spirit . . . quick and a bundle of energy" even "hyper" and a man who was "fair and loyal to those who were performing, but perhaps impatient with others."[88] Conversely, there were those who thought Lewis "too old to lead an airborne regiment" and characterized him as a man who "looked old, acted old and his manner and uniform reflected the 'old army' type"[89] And then there were those who were much more damning, contending Lewis was a "weak officer" who "looked like a Mr. Milquetoast—short, slim, steel-rim glasses, sharp little face, humorless expression" and a man for whom "bank teller would be a better description."[90] Yet Lewis had Ridgway's

confidence and remained in command of the 325th until after the Normandy invasion when he was evacuated for health reasons. In Ridgway's eyes, Lewis was "a very gallant little fighting man."[91]

Ted Dunn did not fare as well. Ridgway first met Dunn shortly after being informed that the 82nd would convert to an airborne division when Ridgway and several members of the division staff traveled to Fort Benning to undergo parachute training. Naturally, since the 504th had been designated the 82nd's parachute regiment, Dunn was responsible for this training. During the visit, Dunn demonstrated a propensity to drink heavily, and it became known that though he commanded a parachute regiment he himself did not jump regularly and when he did he used a specially designed over-sized canopy to slow his descent, soften his landing, and save his knees, which were bad from his days as a West Point football player. Furthermore, Dunn's ideas about training were, in the eyes of Ridgway and his staff, woefully inadequate. At one point Dunn staged a fairly large-scale parachute exercise after which the 504th troopers simply recovered their parachutes and assembled for movement back to their barracks. According to one staff officer who was present, " '[t]here was this definite feeling that the job ended with the jump. They made the jump; they were all heroes and they went home.' " Later, this lack of emphasis on tactical training resulted in two of the regiment's three battalions failing their pre-combat evaluations.[92]

So when the 504th met the 82nd at Fort Bragg, Ridgway summarily relieved Dunn "for inability to secure results" and placed Dunn's executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Reuben H. 'Rube' Tucker III in command. Fearing that his selection of Tucker, a lieutenant colonel in a colonel's position, would be undercut by Army personnel managers, Ridgway fired off a preemptive letter emphasizing that "[u]nder Tucker's leadership there was an immediate improvement, which has continued steadily. He has force, determination, and common sense to a high degree, and is determined to get the results I want." Moreover, noted Ridgway, "General McNair observed and talked to him [Tucker]. . . . [and] was very favorably impressed." Still, there remained the possibility that Tucker would have to revert to his former position because, at the time, "there were several hundred surplus Colonels" one of whom might be sent to the 82nd before Tucker could be promoted to colonel himself (it was mandatory that a lieutenant colonel have at least six months in grade before being eligible for promotion to colonel). To allay such an eventuality Ridgway added, "I should regret very much having an outsider brought in, regardless of his ability, as I am convinced that Colonel Tucker will lead this regiment in action as well or better than he has during the training period."[93] Ultimately Ridgway was able to protect Tucker, who remained the 504th's commander throughout the war and earned a reputation as one of the 82nd's most capable and aggressive combat leaders.

By January 1943, it appeared that the turbulence that had gripped the 82nd since the previous August had subsided. Ridgway had the command team he wanted, a division staff in which he had confidence, and units that had been filled to their authorized strengths. It was time to begin forging the division into a cohesive whole. Unbeknownst to Ridgway, however, logistical difficulties would compel another major reorganization.

Unlike most combat aircraft, which could be either flown or ferried aboard aircraft carriers to forward areas, the more fragile gliders had to be disassembled and packed in five large shipping crates for movement overseas and then reassembled at the port of debarkation.[94] So packaged, one glider weighed 20,000 pounds and took up considerable

cargo space. This presented shipping managers with a significant challenge—how to get enough gliders overseas in time for the next planned operation given their disproportionate weight and bulk and relatively low shipping priority? The answer was that they could not. Hence the very thing that made airborne divisions unique—their ability to enter combat from the air—was seriously undermined because roughly two-thirds of an airborne division's combat power was glider-borne. Faced with the conundrum of wanting to employ one of the new airborne divisions in upcoming operations in the Mediterranean but lacking sufficient gliders to do so, War Department planners came up with an alternative: change the organization.[95] Since it had already been determined that the 82nd would be the first to be deployed overseas, Ridgway was told in February 1943 that he was going to have to release one of his glider regiments but that he would receive a second parachute regiment in return. Ridgway elected to retain Harry Lewis's 325th Glider Infantry Regiment (its sister regiment, the 326th, was transferred to the Alliance, Nebraska, where it became part of the 1st Independent Glider Brigade). In return, he received Jim Gavin's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment as well as a second parachute field artillery battalion, the 456th (Ridgway also retained the 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, giving him four field artillery battalions).[96] The 82nd thus went from being predominantly glider-borne to a division that was about two-thirds paratrooper.

Before Ridgway had the chance to greet his new units, Marshall summoned him to Washington and told him to report immediately to Eisenhower in North Africa so that he could familiarize himself with the planning for Operation HUSKY, the impending invasion of Sicily. Ridgway arrived in Algeria on 8 March, but Eisenhower was too focused on defeating the *Afrika Korps* in Tunisia to spend much time discussing future operations in Sicily. Nevertheless, to ensure the trip was not a complete waste Eisenhower suggested that Ridgway shadow his old boss Omar Bradley at the front so that Ridgway could get a feel for the foe he would eventually face. At the time, Bradley was the deputy commanding general of the U.S. II Corps, serving under one of the Army's most flamboyant combat commanders, Lieutenant General George S. Patton Jr. Ridgway leapt at the chance. Bradley and Ridgway spent the next week together, visiting the forward echelons of the U.S. 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions, both of which were in daily contact with retreating German forces. Ridgway went so far as to accompany relatively small American units on patrol.[97] Having never before been in combat, Ridgway saw for the first time what he called "the loneliest and most ominous of all landscapes, a battlefield" and contemplated "that strange exhilaration that grips a man when he knows that somewhere out there in the distance, hostile eyes are watching him and that at any moment a bullet he may never hear, fired by an enemy he cannot see, may strike him."[98]

Ridgway returned to Fort Bragg on 24 March, just in time to meet some visiting dignitaries interested in his division's progress, armed with the realization that he was going to take that division to war and that he had but little time to prepare.

Chapter Four Notes

[1] Charles A. Harrington to James M. Gavin, 14 October 1982, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder "Letters and cards, to + from Gavin and 82nd Airborne Div. Veterans," USAMHI.

[2] Kreidberg and Henry, *History of Military Mobilization*, 597.

[3] Charles E. Kirkpatrick, *An Unknown Future and a Doubtful Present: Writing the Victory Plan of 1941* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), 125.

[4] Ibid., 100. The Victory Plan did not ignore the Japanese threat. Rather it assumed, as had been previously agreed with British staff planners as early as March 1941, that Germany was more menacing and therefore the more immediate threat and that, if the U.S. were to enter the war, it would concentrate its resources to bring about the defeat of Germany and its allies first while maintaining a strategic defensive in the Pacific. At the conclusion of the European war, the resources of both the U.S. and U.K. would then concentrate in the Pacific and begin a concentric, strategic offensive.

[5] Kreidberg and Henry, *History of Military Mobilization*, 597 and Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, 435.

[6] Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, 436.

[7] Headquarters, 82d Infantry Division, General Order No. 1, 25 March 1942, 382-1.13, Box 12351, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[8] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 15.

[9] Walter V. Bingham and James Rorty, "How the Army Sorts its Man Power," *Infantry Journal* 51, no. 4 (October 1942): 28.

[10] Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, 199-200 and Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 21.

[11] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 105-106.

[12] Ibid., 106.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Wayne Pierce, *Let's Go!* (Chapel Hill, NC: Professional Press, 1997), 5.

[15] Clark quoted in Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 22.

[16] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 106.

[17] Ibid., 106-107.

[18] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 107-108 and Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 23.

[19] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 3-14.

[20] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 104.

[21] Matthew B. Ridgway interview by Colonel John M. Blair, 15 December 1971, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 51, Folder "Interview by John M. Blair, volume I," USAMHI.

[22] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 108.

[23] John S. D. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 299.

[24] Duane A. Lempke, "Ridgway's Leadership Legacy," *Military Review* 68, no. 11 (November 1988): 71.

[25] Wayne Pierce to Clay Blair, 24 August 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 51, Folder "Pierce, Wayne," USAMHI.

[26] James A. Casey, taped statement transcript, 1 November 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Casey, James A.," USAMHI.

[27] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 4.

[28] Matthew B. Ridgway and Harold H. Martin, *Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 22.

[29] Ibid., 23.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Soffer, *Ridgway*, 6.

[32] Rupert D. Graves to Clay and Joan Blair, 14 November 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Graves, Rupert D.," USAMHI.

[33] Soffer, *Ridgway*, 4-5, emphasis in original.

[34] Ibid., 8.

[35] Matthew B. Ridgway by Lieutenant Colonel Robert M. Elton and Major Matthew P. Caulfield, 29 August 1969, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 51, Folder "Ridgway interview Robert M. Elton and M.P. Caulfield covering his whole career but focusing on Korea," USAMHI.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Matthew B. Ridgway, "Morale-Discipline-Leadership (Outline of a 30 minute talk for Chaplains)," n. d., The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 4, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Speeches to his troops, 1942-1944," USAMHI.

[38] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 27.

[39] Memorandum by C. L. Patrick, "Re General Ridgeway [*sic*]," 19 September 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "Patrick C. L.," USAMHI.

[40] Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 44.

[41] Matthew B. Ridgway, "Notes on ARMY Comdr's Training Comments," 7 May 1942, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 4, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway. Excerpts from his notebook on training 1942," USAMHI.

[42] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82d Airborne Division, "Training," 31 August 1942, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 4, Folder entitled "Matthew B. Ridgway, Memoranda on Training, 1942" USAMHI.

[43] Robert L. Dickerson to Clay Blair, 20 September 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Dickerson, Robert L.," USAMHI.

[44] Louis A. Hauptfleisch to Clay Blair, 6 March 1984, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Hauptfleisch, Louis 504," USAMHI.

[45] Louis Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II," in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 44.

[46] Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1953; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), 183-186.

[47] Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, 273.

[48] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 72.

[49] Lee quoted in Jerry Autry, *General William C. Lee, Father of the Airborne: Just Plain Bill* (San Francisco, CA: Airborne Press, 1995), 126.

[50] This memorandum from McNair to George C. Marshall, dated 19 June 1942, is reproduced in appendix 1 of Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 257-258.

[51] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 3.

[52] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 53.

[53] Memorandum, McNair to Marshall, 19 June 1942, appendix 1, Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 257-258.

[54] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 53.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 54.

[57] Matthew B. Ridgway and Walter F. Winton Jr., seminar transcript, "Troop Leadership at the Operational Level: The Eighth Army in Korea," The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 51, Unmarked Folder, USAMHI.

[58] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 9 and Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 38.

[59] Memorandum from Ridgway to the Officers and Enlisted Men of the 82d Infantry Division, dated 14 August 1942, is reproduced in Autry, *Just Plain Bill,* 129.

[60] Anonymous witness quoted in Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 38. Emphasis in original. This same witness told Blair that the day after Ridgway's announcement 4,500 men went absent without leave (AWOL) from the 82nd. Ridgway called the witness in and asked what had gone wrong. The witness replied " '[y]ou scared the pants off 'em' "; that many did not want to be glider troopers and many others

did not want to transfer out of the 82nd. He also assured Ridgway, however, that in a few days most would be back, which also held true. 38.

[61] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 10.

[62] Headquarters, 82d Infantry Division, General Order No. 24, "Reorganization of the 82d Infantry Division into the 82d Airborne Division, and the 101st Airborne Division," 15 August 1942, 382-1.13, Box 12351, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[63] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 10 and Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 247.

[64] Joe Stolmeier, one the members of the original test battery (the artillery equivalent of the parachute test platoon) told the following story about his first contact with the idea of parachute artillery: "Well this little . . . second lieutenant came and give us a talk just after retreat one day and he made a plea to get some of us experienced artillerymen to come into the parachute troops he was going to form. He and some other officers were going to form a parachute troop artillery company that were going to drop from airplanes with artillery and support the infantry. And of course we made fun of him. All of us made fun of him. We asked him questions. Asked him questions about the jackasses, if they were going to drop those jackasses to pull the pack . . . it's a mountain gun and all. And he said no, he didn't think so, cause he thought it would break their legs." Stolmeier, interview, 13 April 2002.

[65] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 40 and John Whiteclay Chambers II et al, eds., *The Oxford Companion to American Military History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), s.v. "Artillery."

[66] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 53 and Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 247.

[67] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 53.

[68] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 246.

[69] Chapman, "American Divisions Take to the Air," 11.

[70] General Board Report, United States Forces, European Theater, Study No. 16, "Organization, Equipment and Tactical Employment of the Airborne Division," pp. 6-7, 17 June 1945, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box "World War II Lessons Learned," Folder "Report of the General Board United States Forces, European Theater. Organization, Equipment, and Tactical Employment of the Airborne Division," USAMHI.

[71] Letter to Commanding General, Army Ground Forces, subject: Improvement of Pers of 82d and 101st A/B Div., dated 28 August 1942, quoted in Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 39.

[72] Robert R. Palmer, Bell I. Wiley, and William R. Keast, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1948; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1991), 5-9. The AGCT was a cognitive instrument "designed to measure [a soldier's] ability to learn." Numerical scores on the AGCT were grouped into five categories, I through V. Enlisted men selected for Officer Candidate School had to fall into Category I or II, with the latter category being the main source of quality noncommissioned officers as well.

[73] Quoted in ibid., 50.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Quoted in ibid.

[76] This memorandum from Headquarters, Army Ground Forces, dated 18 September 1942, subject: Improvement of Personnel in Airborne Divisions, is reproduced in appendix 20 of Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 124-125.

[77] Palmer, Wiley, and Keast, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, 20.

[78] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 58.

[79] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 31.

[80] Charles W. Mason, "The 82d Under Ridgway," Chap. 2, p. 1, n.d., The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 5, Folder "Charles W. Mason. The 82d Under Ridgway," USAMHI.

[81] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 33. Swing took command of the 11th Airborne Division in February 1943 and Miley took the 17th Airborne Division in April 1943.

[82] Ibid., 39-40.

[83] Ibid., 18-19.

[84] Ridgway, interview, 15 December 1971.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 42-43.

[87] Gerald M. Cumming to Clay Blair, 20 October 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Cummings, Gerald M.," USAMHI.

[88] Osmond Leahy to Clay Blair, 16 May 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "Leahy, Osmond A.," USAMHI.

[89] Wayne Pierce to Clay Blair, 4 October 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 51, Folder "Pierce, Wayne," USAMHI.

[90] Arthur G. Kroos Jr., to Clay Blair, 17 June 1983, attached taped statement transcript, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "Kroos, Art" USAMHI.

[91] Ridgway, interview, 15 December 1971.

[92] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 36.

[93] Matthew B. Ridgway to Brigadier General A. R. Bolling, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, Army Ground Forces, 26 March 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[94] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 78.

[95] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 104.

[96] Headquarters, Airborne Command, General Order No. 5, 10 February 1943, 382-1.13, Box 12350, Record Group 407, NARA II. As a result of this reorganization, other elements of the division also reorganized. For example, the 82nd's engineer unit, the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion converted one of its glider companies to a parachute company, giving it two parachute and one glider company. See also:

Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 519; Stuart Cutler to Clay Blair, 20 February 1984, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Cutler, Stuart," USAMHI.

[97] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 61-63 and Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 58-59.

[98] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 58.

Chapter Five
A Whole New Dimension to Soldiering

> *It might be interesting . . . to describe how an airborne division is committed to battle, compared to a standard unit in the Army. The infantry unit goes into battle with its communications and its command structure at its best. The radios are all functioning, the command chain is intact. The commander knows where all his people are, and what's happening to them, and he can exercise an excellent degree of control. The exact opposite is true of an airborne division. When its people hit the ground they are individuals, and a two-star general and a Pfc. are on exactly the same basis.*
>
> Matthew B. Ridgway[1]

Once the division was assembled all in one place and after the last of the individual and unit transfers were complete, Ridgway and his commanders could finally begin a collective training program in earnest. Collective, or unit training is determined in large part by doctrine, which is a broad statement about how an army fights and, concurrently, how the various elements of that army work together on the battlefield to bring about victory. For the airborne divisions, no such doctrine existed. There were, to be certain, myriad theories, most of which were based on what could be gleaned from Russian interwar experiments and German operations in Scandinavia, Western Europe, Greece, and Crete, but there was no definitive statement or guiding principles about how the Army would employ its airborne divisions in a theater of war in concert with other ground, air, and naval forces. In fact, the only Army manual in existence that addressed airborne operations in any form was Field Manual (FM) 31-30 *Tactics and Techniques of Air-Borne Troops*, which focused almost exclusively on the particulars of parachute operations.

Airborne Command headquarters published FM 31-30 in May 1942. Its principal author, Jim Gavin, was still a relatively junior officer assigned as the chief of plans and training for Airborne Command when he wrote it. After the war, Gavin freely admitted that he "didn't know anymore [*sic*] about it [airborne operations] than anybody else" but simply "wanted to do it" and in "doing it" read everything he could on the subject, including captured German documents that detailed their airborne operations in the war thus far.[2] He was aided in his endeavor by another young airborne pioneer, William P. Yarborough, who served with Gavin on the Airborne Command staff as the intelligence officer and who contributed additional reference material in the form of translated Russian manuals which, he later recalled, proved to be "some of the best training material we had in the early days on the techniques of parachuting."[3]

Notes for this chapter are found on pages 100 through 102.

Armed with this material and the limited experience each of them had since joining the paratroopers, Gavin and Yarborough produced a manual that covered in detail everything they knew or had learned about parachuting and parachute operations. Everything from the proper way to pack a parachute to the foreign phrases paratroopers should have handy when they jumped into combat was addressed. But Gavin and Yarborough were not content with simply writing a "how to" manual and did, therefore, make a passing stab at formulating a doctrine for employment. Parachute troops, they wrote, "may be considered the spearhead of a vertical envelopment or the advance guard element of air landing troops or other forces. They must seek decisive action immediately upon landing." In this vein, they should be "assigned specific missions and limited objectives" and "should not be used for missions that can be performed by other troops."[4] They then went on to suggest some suitable missions for parachute troops, to include "[s]eizing and holding terrain suitable for the landing of troop[-]carrying airplanes or gliders"; [s]eizing and holding river and canal crossings, and defiles"; [e]stablishing bridgeheads"; [a]ssisting ground offensives by means of vertical envelopment"; and "[c]reating confusion and acting as a diversion to the operations of the main force."[5] All of these foretold missions for which the 82nd would eventually be employed during the war, but in FM 31-30 they were more suggestive than anything. Absent the test of combat, American airborne doctrine was vague, theoretical, and impressionistic. No one had a real clear idea about the best way to take advantage of the capabilities airborne units afforded beyond the simple notion "that some airborne troops would be 'handy to have around.' "[6]

Without the guidance of an overarching doctrinal template, Ridgway was unable to focus on a set of specific roles and missions for which he should prepare the 82nd. But what he did know, or at least believed, is that there are some enduring battlefield constants for which he could prepare his troopers, one of the chief being that in order "to survive the weariness, the long marches, the loss of sleep, the tremendous exertion that men in combat must undergo, each of them had to be as finely trained as a champion boxer."[7] Additionally, he surmised that given the nature of airborne operations, especially in the hours immediately following a parachute or glider assault, there was a good chance that his troopers would be scattered in isolated groups fighting on their own and that, because of this, he needed to nurture an independent spirit of initiative in his troopers at all levels. He therefore set about to improve upon the strenuous physical training program that Bradley had initiated in the pre-airborne days of the division, while emphasizing small unit tactics and initiative at battalion-level and below.

The 82nd's paratroopers were already conditioned to an extremely arduous physical training regimen. Colonel Gavin, whose paratroopers joined the division at Fort Bragg the day after Ridgway left for his reconnaissance trip to North Africa, was particularly attuned to the rigors he expected his paratroopers to face in combat. A "typical" training exercise for Gavin's troopers, for example, involved "a 25- or 30-mile forced march" followed by "two-sided maneuvers" during which Gavin sought to "grind . . . [his subordinate leaders] down to where the leaders would make mistakes because they were tired" so that he could "teach 'em how to overcome the fatigue factor."[8] According to 505th veteran Allen Langdon, "[e]very facet of this training was directed toward the accomplishment of the two-fold goal of the regimental commander: namely, to have a skilled, aggressive body of men that could fight as a combat team or lead and fight as

individuals in small unit actions." Furthermore, continued Langdon, an unstated goal of the strenuous training was "to eliminate misfits, and a daily run of at least four or five miles and a weekly march of twenty to thirty miles assured this." "The rule was," he recalled, was that " 'if you fall out, you ship out,' and there were seldom second chances."[9] One particularly grueling exercise, related by Gavin himself, underscores this "no second chance" dictum:

> I remember taking the 505 out on a night march one time. We walked from the training area down to Cottonton, 23 miles and we got there about seven-eight in the morning. We maneuvered all day and then I moved them at night on the way back by a different route and went into bivouac at around nine-ten o'clock and let them sleep for two hours and then got them up, and it was as black as could be, and moved them to Bragg. We were marching all night, and they had then walked about 50-55 miles. And one or two of them bitched and complained. They began to bitch and complain and we yanked them right out, right there in the field, 'OK, back! Get your stuff out! You're out of the regiment!'[10]

Though not considered elite soldiers like their parachuting brethren, the 82nd's glider troopers underwent just as rigorous training. Having already experienced Bradley's form of physical conditioning, their redesignation as glider troopers brought with it heightened physical standards, a requirement promulgated by William Lee (and adopted by Ridgway) who, upon returning from his consultations with British airborne personnel in England, emphasized that " '[i]t is the experience of the British that it is highly wasteful to attempt to carry ordinary troops in gliders, as thirty percent must be eliminated due to air sickness.' " Because of this, Lee recommended that " 'the selection, physical standards and special training for glider troops must approximate that prescribed for parachute troops.' "[11] To this end, several officers from the 325th attended an Army Ranger training camp to learn their techniques for conditioning and when they returned set up a training program for the division's glider troopers that was every bit as demanding as that of the paratroopers. In one typical four-day training period, for example, the 325th completed a five-mile march in fifty-eight minutes, a ten-mile march in four inches of snow, and a twenty-five mile march in just over seven hours.[12] As a result of this strenuous program, "[t]he older men began to fall out, not being able to keep up with the speed marches, incessant night-training exercises, and live-fire combat course." Invariably, "[t]his brought to the fore the younger, more physically fit men" who "lived in the field" and, like wolves, eventually "became inured to sleet, rain and snow."[13]

Because they trained side-by-side every day, there developed an intense rivalry between the 82nd's glider troopers and paratroopers. According to paratrooper veteran Melvin Zais, "[t]he paratroopers always looked down their noses on glider troops, and they would run around, with their arms spread out, tilting their bodies at an angle right and left, yelling, 'Look, Herman, no motor; look Herman, no motor.' " The paratroopers also had a tendency to "beat their breasts a little bit," recalled Zais, because they viewed themselves as specially selected soldiers who, having endured an extremely difficult rite of passage to earn their airborne wings and jump boots, were not enamored of the idea of

having to share the same divisional shoulder patch with pedestrian 'straight legs.'[14] It was Wayne Pierce's impression that Gavin's 505th in particular "did not care for their assignment to the 82nd Airborne, maybe because they felt that they would not receive full credit for their accomplishments, or perhaps because they would be associated with the Glider Troops whom they openly despised."[15] There were, to say the least, "frequent fights, some quite serious, almost amounting to riots."[16]

This paratrooper braggadocio was a holdover of the time these men had spent undergoing parachute training at Fort Benning where they would run into the tankers and mechanized infantrymen of the 2nd Armored Division, also stationed at Benning. When off duty, both 'legs' and paratroopers would frequent the bars of Columbus, Georgia, the town outside the post gates, and whenever a paratrooper's mouth or swagger landed him in trouble he had but to yell out "Geronimo!" and any paratrooper within earshot would rally to the call of his comrade, thereby turning fistfights into wild melees. This heightened sense of camaraderie sometimes resulted in outrageous acts that would not have been tolerated in conventional units. During one memorable episode, Gavin's 505th troopers learned that one of their number had been mistreated at a roadside inn called Cotton Fish Camp in Phenix City, just across the Alabama state line. According to Gavin,

> [t]he following night several squads of troopers from the 505th Parachute Infantry decided to take over the place. They deployed some distance away in a skirmish line in good combat style and began to close in on the roadhouse. Rumor of their intentions had preceded them, however, and as they got close to the inn they found themselves confronted by the State Police. They were all promptly arrested. The following morning twenty-seven of them were in the main Post guard house at Fort Benning.[17]

As punishment, Gavin took the entire regiment "on an all-night march through the canebrakes in the bottoms of the Chattahoochee River" and then maneuvered one battalion against the other two, training all day and not returning until the next evening. Much to his dismay, however, when he got back to garrison he noticed "quite a few of them in dress uniforms, wearing polished boots, on their way to the bus stop to go to Phenix City."[18]

Their boastful self-confidence, special items of uniform, and disdain for anyone not a part of their fraternity earned for paratroopers the enmity of much of the Army; but the lingering matter of a glaring pay disparity within the ranks of the division posed a potentially serious threat to the cohesiveness, and thereby combat effectiveness, of the 82nd. When the Army formed its Parachute Test Platoon, the volunteers received a pay incentive under the rubric of 'flying pay' which all subsequent parachute volunteers received until 1942, when Congress passed the Pay Readjustment Act, providing additional 'parachute pay' of $100 per month for parachute officers and $50 per month for enlisted paratroopers.[19] This disparity in pay rankled the glider troops who felt they, too, were performing hazardous duty and should be equally compensated. These feelings were exacerbated when it was learned that glider pilots, too, got extra pay, despite the fact that, once on the ground, glider pilots did not have to fight (their skills being seen as too valuable to risk in close-quarters combat) whereas their passengers did.[20] From the

outset, Ridgway realized that this pay disparity could be a source of interminable morale problems within the division and emphasized to his superiors that "parachute and glider units train and enter combat under similar and equal hazards for the attainment of common objectives" and that"[b]oth are subject to much greater risks than other troops." To counter the argument proffered by those opposing extra pay for glider troops that they "accept no greater risks than other troops transported by air," Ridgway wrote a memorandum to the War Department in which he asserted that

> [f]acts prove the contrary. Normal training of a glider soldier will require many hours of flight in aircraft yet in the experimental stages of development and subject to all the hazards peculiar to other aircraft with the sole exception of fire in crash landings. The glider soldier no longer has a parachute and he must remain with the glider regardless of mechanical failure in flight. He must, moreover, participate in flights at night, as well as by day, and land in unprepared fields where natural obstacles create numerous ever-present hazards to life and limb. To maintain that this soldier is subject in his training to no greater hazards than those incident to casual air transportation is a refusal to recognize facts.

To rectify this injustice, he suggested that "flying pay, either full or limited" be granted to glider soldiers and that this action should occur "through executive action," which would preclude having to gain Congressional approval, thereby expediting the process. Despite numerous entreaties, however, Ridgway was unable to secure the extra pay for his glider troopers until July 1944, and only after the personal intervention of General Marshall.[21]

Unable to make his superiors see the problems the pay differential created for him, Ridgway devised other means to close the status gap between his paratroopers and glider troopers. An early attempt by Ridgway to assuage the 'second-class citizen' feelings among the glider troops was his authorization of a glider cap patch, much like that worn by paratroopers, for every man who had completed a glider flight. The patch was "oval, about two and one half inches across with a white glider on a blue background" and was "the first distinctive item issued to the glider troops" during the war.[22] Award of this patch may have helped to bolster the morale of the glider troopers somewhat, but it did not impress the paratroopers. Ridgway therefore issued a second order; that anyone who made one parachute jump could wear jump boots and the parachute insignia. This, too, was met with derision by the paratroopers and soon thereafter there appeared on the 505th's bulletin board a memorandum aping Ridgway's order which stated: " 'Any man in the 505 who makes one glider ride shall be entitled to wear shoes and canvas leggings.' "[23]

Yet, remarkably, this competition within the division's ranks, potentially so destructive, did not tear it apart nor affect its performance. There are myriad explanations for this phenomenon—this wedding of such disparate elements into a highly effective combat team. One was most certainly the rivalry between the parachute and glider soldiers of the division which, for the paratroopers, took the form of having to live up to the high standards they had set for themselves and, for the glidermen, of always attempting to demonstrate that they, too, were as tough and daring as their jumping

comrades by aspiring to the same or higher standards. As far as the latter were concerned, Ridgway noted in one of his many letters protesting the pay difference within the division that "there has been loyal acceptance by all ranks in glider units of the pay discrimination against them" and they have "performed their duties without hesitation."[24] Closer examination reveals, however, that though the division's glider troopers did perform their duties "without hesitation," their acceptance of the pay disparity between themselves and the paratroopers was more "fatalistic" than "loyal," an attitude best represented by a poster, popular among the ranks of the glider troops, on which there were pictures of burned and crashed gliders and the words: "Join the Glider Troops! No Flight Pay. No Jump Pay. But—Never a Dull Moment."[25] Nevertheless, despite seeing at close-hand the disparity between themselves and the paratroopers, very few glidermen volunteered for parachute duty, adopting instead the brooding conviction that, though treated as second-class soldiers, they would have their chance to prove their mettle on the battlefield.[26]

A second reason the conflict within the ranks of the 82nd did not result in catastrophic morale problems can be attributed to the powerful presence of Ridgway himself, one of the few men in the division who had made both a parachute jump and glider flight and therefore knew the hazards associated with both.[27] The officers and men of the division almost without exception held him in awe, with many noting that he appeared to them as a steadying, competent, father figure. As such, Ridgway rose above the internecine conflict in the ranks and became the figure around whom all could rally and to whom all appealed for approval. Describing the effect Ridgway's mere presence had on others Arthur Kroos, his one-time aide, stated

> [h]e was brilliant. He was a military man in every way. I never, ever saw him cross his legs. Unbelievable! He always would sit up straight. There was never any slouching. No matter how soft the chair was, somehow the goddamn chair stiffened up when he sat in it.
>
> He would walk in a room and he would create a presence by being in that room. He didn't have to say anything. Just the way he walked, the way he looked. When his eyes would go over a room, everyone was instantly drawn to him, just like that. He didn't have to say a word. . . .
>
> He was intense. I think he slept that way. He was a very determined person. He knew what he wanted. He wouldn't tolerate anything that was not right up to perfection. When things went not to his liking, just his look told you everything. He didn't have to say anything. . . . His appearance in itself, his facial expressions, his use of eyes, perhaps his raising his eyebrows, said one hell of a lot more than any words that he could have come out with. He was just a remarkable person.[28]

Even the most battle-hardened troopers found themselves at a loss for words when attempting to describe Ridgway. When asked to describe the impact Ridgway had on the division one legendary paratroop commander, Benjamin H. Vandervoort, stated categorically "I love the man and an attempt by me to analize [*sic*] him feels presumptious [*sic*]."[29] Another paratroop veteran, Al Ireland, one of the original members of Gavin's tough 505th, wrote that his impression of Ridgway was "[o]ne of

awe and admiration for the appearance of this man—his countenance, posture (warlike); his manner; gentle and most gracious." "I knew," he concluded, "we were in good hands under the generalship of this person."[30]

Ridgway was a soldier—and leader—in the mold of his mentor George Marshall who, in turn, emulated his mentor, John J. Pershing. Both Pershing and Marshall were stoic, aloof, and unapproachable, yet set an example that influenced strongly the generation of officers who came to maturity during the interwar years. Officership for them was a vocation, defining not only what a man did but who a man was, and having come of age in the First World War (Marshall served under Pershing in France), they were grounded in the ideals of two epochs: the nineteenth-century ideal of officer as heroic symbol and the twentieth-century view of officer as technician. The Pershing-Marshall leadership paradigm, therefore, required officers to not only be technically and tactically competent, but to also be inspirational leaders *sans peur et sans reproche*, and Ridgway was its very embodiment. He had, without question, mastered the skills of his profession. An expert shot and proficient with every infantry weapon in the American arsenal, Ridgway stalked the ranges on which his soldiers were training and was not above demonstrating the proper techniques for sighting a machine gun or anchoring a mortar. When confronted with a new weapon or technological development, as he was with the introduction of gliders and parachutes, he made it a priority to immediately become familiar with the intricacies and nuances of the thing by experiencing it firsthand. But despite the physical proximity with his soldiers that ensued from this hands-on approach, Ridgway remained a distant figure, someone the troops admired from afar, again in much the same vein that both Pershing and Marshall were admired. Bob Piper, an original member of the 505th, recalled that within the division few people really knew Ridgway and that "a lot of people more or less ran . . . scared of him" because he was the division commander and the thought was to "leave him the hell alone."[31] Gavin, who felt he knew his commander as well as anyone, stated that Ridgway's extreme integrity made him appear to some as "flinty" and "hard to get along with."[32] Yet both Piper and Gavin, like so many others, admired the man immensely, with the latter commenting during his assumption of command of the division that under Ridgway's tutelage the 82nd developed "attributes that would serve it well for the remainder of the war."[33]

One of these attributes was what one author has called a "military corporatist ideology" which focused not the exploits of a few elites but on the exploits of the group as a whole.[34] To achieve this end, Ridgway envisioned molding a combat unit that prized both individual initiative and teamwork, with the former enhancing the effectiveness of the latter. According to Gavin, who shared Ridgway's ideas, the key to achieving this goal was for the officers of the division to come up with new ways to train and motivate their men. In this endeavor the very newness of the airborne concept in the U.S. Army worked to their advantage, for Ridgway and his subordinate commanders were granted "almost complete freedom" to train their men as they saw fit, eschewing "the concept of the need for close order drill and the need for imposing on the soldier a sort of templet [*sic*] to make him fit into the platoon, fit into the squad." They felt, moreover, that "close order drill was an absolute waste of time," a remnant of the days of Frederick the Great when the epitome of a "good" soldier was an automaton that marched and fought but did not think.[35] Their goal, conversely, was to form units comprising soldiers who, knowing the larger mission and its intent, could seize the initiative on a chaotic battlefield and,

even in the absence of higher direction, accomplish the mission. This required them to fashion "a whole new dimension to soldiering" that did not seek to destroy a soldier's individuality, but which sought to integrate myriad individuals into a cohesive fighting team. To this end nametags were introduced in the division, highlighting the fact that each 82nd trooper "wasn't just another soldier" but was, in fact, something different, "a special kind of animal."[36] Corollary to this unique and somewhat heretical (for the time at least) emphasis on individuality was the idea, fomented by both Ridgway and Gavin, that for the men of the 82nd there was "nothing too good for them; no bed too soft, no food too good; no conditions too good for them to live" with the payoff being that anything could and would be asked of them, and they would be expected to come through.[37]

The dignitaries awaiting Ridgway at Fort Bragg when he returned from North Africa were interested in one thing—to see if the 82nd was ready for combat. Included in the group were Generals Marshall and Arnold as well as Britain's Foreign Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, and the British liaison officer to the American Chiefs of Staff, Field Marshal Sir John Dill. This was an important test. One of the few things Ridgway had been able to glean from Eisenhower during his trip was that although the Allied plan for the invasion of Sicily was still in draft, the plan envisioned the use of airborne troops on a large scale. Hence, Ridgway was anxious to demonstrate to Marshall and Arnold especially what his troopers could do. Furthermore, although Marshall had already selected the 82nd as the American airborne division that would be the first overseas Ridgway knew there was a sizeable coterie of officers in the Army who felt that "if one of the divisions went into combat right away it should be [Lee's] division because he was senior."[38] Not one to let rank stand in his way, Ridgway had done "some jockeying in Washington for the honor of being the first airborne division into combat" and was anxious to prove to his mentor Marshall that he had made the correct decision.[39]

To highlight the 82nd's capabilities and level of training, Ridgway staged a capabilities demonstration for the visiting dignitaries at nearby Pope Field. The demonstration began with a simulated combat jump followed by the insertion of twenty-six Waco gliders carrying Lieutenant Colonel Paul Turner's 2nd Battalion, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment (2/325th). The parachute jump went off without hitch and, on cue, the gliders cut loose from their tow planes and made precision landings right in front of the reviewing stands, with Turner's glidermen piling out of their craft to perform a mock assault. Though well staged, the glider assault left both Marshall and Arnold disappointed. Arnold was particularly piqued that the gliders came in over open ground and did not, upon landing, taxi toward the cover of the tree line but instead disgorged their passengers in the middle of an unprotected airfield. When apprised of Arnold's disappointment, Ridgway became a little "irked," being fully aware himself that the demonstration "bore little resemblance" to what would be done in actual combat.[40] In a subsequent letter to Brigadier General Elbridge G. Chapman, who as Lee's replacement as the chief of Airborne Command was the man in whom Marshall had entrusted the authority to validate each airborne division's readiness for combat, Ridgway acknowledged the unreality of the demonstration, explaining "that only the compelling necessity of conserving material in order that training might continue, induced us to bring these gliders in over open ground and land them carefully on a good airport."[41]

Six days later Ridgway staged a second demonstration that put to rest any reservations about the 82nd's readiness for combat. On 30 March 1943, Gavin's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment successfully conducted the first regimental-sized parachute operation in U.S. Army history. Taking off from Pope Field in approximately 130 C-47s, Gavin's paratroopers jumped on three separate drop zones near Camden, South Carolina. Though marred by the death of three troopers who were killed when one of the planes in formation lost power and plowed through the descending parachutists the exercise proved that Ridgway's 82nd could plan, organize, and execute large airborne operations over long distances. In later years, aerial assaults this size and larger were standard fare for the division but at the time the 505th's Camden drop was seen as an "unbelievable, uncanny watershed," proving that the mass airborne assaults were not beyond the realm of possibility.[42] More importantly however, both General Marshall and Field Marshal Dill were once again on hand to witness the exercise, accompanied this time by Prime Minster Winston Churchill.[43]

Sometime in late March or early April, the 82nd Airborne Division was alerted for movement, though where it was going only a very few knew. That the division was deploying to a combat zone became all too apparent, however, when the troopers were called in from their field training to make out wills, allotments, and insurance papers, after which they were confined to the unit area. Married troopers with families nearby were granted short passes to look after any last-minute arrangements for their loved ones. Other troopers went absent without leave (AWOL) in search of one final hot time on the town, all but a handful reporting back to duty in time to board the troop trains, albeit a stripe lighter.[44] Then, just prior to leaving Fort Bragg, the division's troopers underwent one last "great ordeal." Operational security measures dictated that the "cocky troopers" were to "pretend they were just ordinary doughboys and be on good behavior and to profess ignorance of the identity of their units."[45] Paratroopers were told to hide their "polished jump boots under ordinary infantry leggings" and all troopers in the division were required to sew an olive drab patch over the 82nd insignia on their left shoulder.[46]

The lead elements of the division departed Fort Bragg on 18 April. Twenty-six hours later, the troopers found themselves at Camp Edwards, on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where the entire division finally closed by 23 April. While at Camp Edwards, the troopers kept fit with daily distance marches, zeroed their weapons, received the necessary inoculations, attended classes on security and hygiene, and were issued additional equipment. On 28 April, the entire division once again boarded trains, this time for ports in Staten Island, New York, and Hoboken, New Jersey, where they then boarded the transports that would carry them off to war. Early in the morning of 29 April 1943, the troopers of the 82nd Airborne Division, at least those awake and topside, saw the shore of their homeland recede from sight. For many, it would the last time they ever saw their homeland.[47]

Thirteen years later, Ridgway recounted the uncertainty he felt when he sailed with his division to North Africa. "Looking back on it now," he wrote, "I am convinced that no division that left the States for battle, either in Europe or the Pacific, had been torn up and put back together again so frequently or so drastically as had the 82nd" and as a result, when the division sailed, it had "about a third the amount of training that the [other] infantry divisions had had."[48] Others were much more assured and confident. Gavin, for one, was convinced that his people would fight and that "[t]here have never been soldiers

like them."[49] He knew he had a highly spirited regiment in a highly spirited division and remarked in his diary that "[i]f they fight as well in Africa as they fight in Fayetteville [North Carolina] we have nothing to worry about."[50]

Chapter Five Notes

[1] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 7.

[2] James M. Gavin interview by Lieutenant Colonel Donald G. Andrews and Lieutenant Colonel Charles H. Ferguson, 16 April 1975, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box "oral history," USAMHI.

[3] Yarborough, interview, 28 March 1975. Interestingly, Yarborough went on to reveal that the Russian documents used as references were translated by his father, a Russian linguist who had served in the 31st Infantry in Siberia during World War One.

[4] War Department, FM 31-30, *Tactics and Techniques of Air-Borne Troops* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942), 32-33.

[5] Ibid., 31-32.

[6] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 61-62. The comment 'handy to have around' was made by Mark Clark in a letter to William Lee when the Army was considering expanding the parachute units from battalion to regimental strength. See Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 138.

[7] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 53.

[8] John Norton, interview by the author, Washington, D.C., 22 February 2001. Norton remained with the 82nd throughout the war, rising to become a battalion executive officer, then the 505th regimental plans officer, and then, once Gavin took command of the division, the division plans officer. He retired as a lieutenant general.

[9] Allen Langdon, *"Ready": The History of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, World War II* (Indianapolis, IN: Western Newspaper Publishing Co., Inc., 1986), 1.

[10] Gavin, interview, 16 April 1975.

[11] Memorandum from Lee to the Army Chief of Staff, dated 2 July 1942, subject: Policy Regarding Tng of A/B Tr., quoted in Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 52.

[12] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 15-19.

[13] Ibid., 15.

[14] Melvin Zais interview by Colonel William L. Golden and Colonel Richard C. Rice, 20 January 1977, The Melvin Zais Papers, Box "oral history," USAMHI. Melvin Zais went on to earn four stars and commanded the 101st Airborne Division in Viet Nam.

[15] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 11.

[16] Ibid., 14-15.

[17] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 4.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 42-43. To this day, all persons assigned to a parachute position receive extra pay—$150 per month regardless of rank.

[20] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 118. The problem of what to do with glider pilots once they were on the ground in combat was a lingering problem for the Americans throughout the war. The British airborne community, on the other hand, formed its glider pilots into their own regiment and trained them to fight as infantry once they had delivered their cargo, thereby increasing the number of fighters that were available to their airborne commanders.

[21] Memorandum from Ridgway to the Assistant Chief of Staff, Operations Division, War Department General Staff, "Airborne Troops," 2 December 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[22] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 21.

[23] Quoted in Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 52.

[24] Memorandum from Matthew B Ridgway to Lieutenant General Mark Clark, Commander, U.S. Fifth Army, "Pay Status Airborne Troops," 19 May 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI. This memorandum, written while the 82nd was in North Africa preparing for the Sicily invasion, was passed through Clark's headquarters because the 82nd fell under that headquarters for administrative and logistical purposes prior to the invasion.

[25] Poster reproduced in appendix 22 of Ellis, *The Airborne Command and Center*, 130.

[26] It should be noted that by the end of the war most of the glider troopers in the 82nd were also parachute qualified, having been given the option to volunteer for this duty and undergo parachute training during the periods when the division was not in combat. But the troopers who did this remained with their parent glider units and they retained their distinction as glider troopers (until such time as the Army did away with gliders, shortly after World War II).

[27] Ridgway's first glider flight ended ingloriously. Soon after being informed that the 82nd would convert to an airborne division Ridgway traveled to Wright Field, Ohio, to get checked out on the glider. The craft he was in was an experimental model outfitted with both wheels and landing skids. The wheels were used for takeoff and were supposed to be dropped during flight so the glider could land on its skids. There occurred a malfunction in this craft, though, and the wheels would not drop, so when the glider landed it did so on the still attached wheels for which there were no brakes. The glider seemed headed right for an idling bomber so Ridgway and his artillery commander, Brigadier General Joe Swing, leapt from the aircraft. As Ridgway described the incident: "Our dry dive onto the concrete proved to have been premature. Some quick-thinking airmen, at considerable risk to themselves, grabbed the wing of the glider as it whizzed past them and diverted it from the runway well short of the bomber." See Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 56-57.

[28] Kroos to Blair, 17 June 1983. One of the reasons Ridgway held himself so erect was because of a severe back injury he sustained when he fell off a horse while a cadet at West Point, which bothered him throughout his life. Ridgway was ever fearful that this injury would end his career. See Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 24-26.

[29] Benjamin H. Vandervoort to Clay Blair, 12 June 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 55, Folder "Vandervoort, Benjamin," USAMHI. Vandervoort was an original member of Gavin's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment and became one of the division's best battalion commanders before being returned to the United States as a result of a severe wound he sustained in Belgium. It is Vandervoort who John Wayne plays in the movie *The Longest Day*.

[30] Alfred Ireland to Clay Blair, 20 February 1984, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Ireland, Alfred W.," USAMHI.

[31] Bob Piper, telephone interview by the author, 16 June 2001.

[32] James M. Gavin, interview by Clay Blair, 1 April 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Gavin, James M.," USAMHI.

[33] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 143.

[34] Soffer, *Ridgway*, 3 and 63.

[35] Gavin, interview, 16 April 1975.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid. In the same interview, Gavin highlighted an interesting by-product of developing this attitude in the division, that being the creation of unique discipline problems that required special handling. In Gavin's words: "First of all, when they went into combat, they were told if they wanted blankets or any other refinements, kill a German and take his; and if you need a truck, take a German truck. Well, of course, it wasn't long in combat and they began taking trucks from the 1st Infantry Division and anybody else's they could get their hands on. . . . Yet, it was better to learn to tolerate a certain amount of misbehavior but have guys who were really capable fighters and confident and proud."

[38] Gavin, interview, 28 September 1982.

[39] Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 47.

[40] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 59-60.

[41] Matthew B. Ridgway to Elbridge G. Chapman, 12 April 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI. See also Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 69; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 23; and Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 59-60.

[42] Norton, interview, 22 February 2001.

[43] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 8.

[44] James M. Gavin, Personal Diary, 8 April 1943, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 8, Folder entitled "Diary Passages: April-Dec, Fort Bragg, North Africa and Sicily," USAMHI.

[45] Mason, "The 82d Under Ridgway," Chap. 2, p. 2.

[46] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 8; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 28.

[47] Gavin Diary, 24 April 1943; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 8; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 25-29.

[48] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 62.

[49] Gavin Diary, 8 April 1943.

[50] Ibid., 17 April 1943.

Chapter Six
A Small Phalanx in a Vast, Strange Land

> *We sleep on the ground, give up most of our blood to the insects, march long hours in the dust, eat no better than you would expect, and occasionally gaze at the stars and dream of home. It is the life of the Foreign Legion, the land of no return, the school of forgetfulness, and gradually the men are acquiring the habits and thoughts of a professional soldier.*
>
> Richard Mott Janney[1]

Although originally conceived as part of an Anglo-American force that would launch a cross-Channel invasion in April 1943, that month saw the 82nd bound for an entirely different theater of war. Operation TORCH, the Allied invasion of North Africa of November 1942, had changed everything. From the American perspective, TORCH "meant such an investment of resources that a cross-Channel operation became improbable in 1943" and undermined the strategy that had guided the American Joint Chiefs since the publication of the Marshall Memorandum in March 1942.[2] Nonetheless, the Americans still held to the notion that an invasion of northwest Europe should be mounted as soon as possible. But from the British perspective, and especially that of Prime Minister Churchill, the success of TORCH opened new possibilities that should be exploited to weaken the Axis grip on the Continent in advance of any such invasion. Just as the Allied strike at North Africa had compelled the Germans to shift eleven combat divisions from northern to southern France, Churchill noted, eliminating Italy from the war would likely force Germany to shift even more divisions around, thereby weakening the German hold on northwest Europe, or Russia, or both.[3] Given these differing viewpoints, in January 1943, Churchill, Roosevelt, and their military staffs met in Casablanca, French Morocco, in order to work out a post-TORCH strategy.

The Casablanca Conference was a rancorous affair that pitted each nation's principal military spokesman against one another. For the U.S. this was Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, who wanted to mount a cross-Channel invasion as quickly as possible and avoid, at all costs, getting sidetracked by " 'interminable operations in the Mediterranean.' "[4] Field Marshal Alan Brooke, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and Britain's principal military spokesman, emphasized that the Western Allies should capitalize on their successes in the Mediterranean, knock Italy out of the war, force Germany to further disperse its forces, and thereby give some relief to the Russians who, at the time, were fighting for their lives in front of Moscow.[5] After four days of stalemate, during which Brooke became so despondent that he penned in his diary "[w]e are further from obtaining agreement than we ever were," the Americans finally acceded to the British plan.[6]

Notes for this chapter are found on pages 124 through 130.

As a sop to Admiral Ernest J. King, the American Chief of Naval Operations, the British dropped their demands that American and Commonwealth forces in the Pacific and Far East go over to the strategic defensive and agreed that Allied forces already in those theaters would maintain pressure on the Japanese, albeit without major reinforcement until after the war with Germany was complete.[7] In return, the Americans agreed to accept "an invasion of Sicily [with a target date of 25 July 1943] because of the large number of troops which would become available in North Africa, the great economy in shipping tonnage to be obtained (the major consideration), and the possibility of eliminating Italy from the war and thereby forcing Germany to assume responsibility for Italian commitments."[8] With apparent strategic comity secured, Roosevelt and Churchill congratulated their military chiefs on their work and told them that they had "produced the most complete strategic plan for a world-wide war that had ever been conceived, and far exceeding the accomplishments of the last war."[9] Brooke and Marshall, however, were not as comfortable with the Casablanca agreements. Although the outcome had clearly been a win for Brooke, he realized that left uncertain was the question of what to do after Sicily. For his part, Marshall was determined to exploit that uncertainty to his advantage the next time the two sides met to discuss strategy.

After agreeing to an invasion of Sicily, the Combined Chiefs of Staff (the name given to the Anglo-American committee comprising the American Joint Chiefs and the British Imperial General Staff) grappled with the question of an overarching command structure for the Mediterranean Theater. Brooke emphasized that it had become "clear that centralised command was essential to co-ordinate the actions of the [Anglo-American] First and [British] Eighth Armies and the American and French forces" which, by that time, had cornered the Axis forces in Tunisia. "From many points of view," continued Brooke, "it was desirable to hand this Command over to the Americans, but unfortunately up to now Eisenhower . . . had neither the tactical nor strategical experience required for such a task." But left without a credible alternative the Combined Chiefs eventually settled on Eisenhower as the overall theater commander (his official title was Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces in North Africa) and charged him with not only clearing Tunisia, but of planning and executing the invasion of Sicily. Having elevated Eisenhower "into the stratosphere and rarefied atmosphere of a Supreme Commander," the British insured that the actual conduct of operations remained in their hands by appointing under him a committee of British commanders.[10] General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander was appointed as Eisenhower's deputy and the overall ground force commander while the theater's naval and air forces were placed under the command of Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham and Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, respectively.[11]

The island of Sicily lies approximately ninety miles from the tip of Cape Bon, Tunisia. Triangular in shape with sides measuring 180 miles in the north, 125 miles in the east, and 170 miles in the southwest, it comprises an area of approximately 10,000 square miles, about the same size as Vermont. Sicily's most prominent feature, the 10,000-foot-high Mount Etna, lies on its eastern shore and dominates all travel in that part of the island. The Allies, however, were much more interested in Sicily's ports and airfields. The four major ports on the island—Messina, Catania, Syracuse, and Palermo—had an estimated daily capacity of over 1,000 tons and it was deemed essential to seize at least one of those ports intact early in the operation so that Allied naval forces could use it to

unload the supplies and matériel that would be required to sustain the ground campaign. Likewise the air commanders were interested in the early seizure of airfields all of which, because of Sicily's rugged interior, were within fifteen miles of the coast. With the airfields in hand, Allied pilots could provide the air cover essential for protecting the fleet and providing close air support for the Allied armies.[12]

Immediately after being named to his new post Eisenhower established a planning headquarters, Force 141, named for the room in the St. George's Hotel in Algiers where it first met.[13] Carved out of the Eisenhower's G-3 (Operations) section, this small group of officers, more a planning cell than an actual separate headquarters, had the difficult task of formulating a plan for the largest amphibious operation yet undertaken, codenamed Operation HUSKY, while their chief was preoccupied with ongoing operations in North Africa. As Eisenhower's newly appointed deputy and the overall ground force commander, Alexander should have stepped into the void to provide close oversight and direction but he, too, was focused on completing the destruction of the remaining Axis forces in Tunisia and took the view that Operation HUSKY was "a nuisance that—like it or not—would simply have to wait."[14] Hence, the Force 141 planners found themselves working with little or no guidance beyond a broad statement of purpose.

Undeterred, the Force 141 planners forged ahead and eventually drafted a plan that called for a series of assaults along Sicily's periphery that were aimed at the quick capture of the ports and airfields deemed necessary to support the ground operations. The landings were to occur sequentially over a period of three to five days, with the initial landings occurring in the east, followed by landings in the west and north. It was thought that by separating the invasion forces in both time and space, the Allies could not only take advantage of their command of the sea, they would also compel the enemy to dilute his forces by having to respond to multiple threats from a variety of quarters. Briefed to Alexander in late February 1943, the plan was accepted as tentative and preliminary because Alexander did not have the time to devote to its more thorough study. Given this response, Force 141 planners proceeded apace under the assumption that their plan would, in large part, form the basis of the final operational concept.[15] This assumption proved false. When General Bernard Law Montgomery, whose British Eighth Army had been selected as one of the two major ground forces for the Sicily invasion was briefed on the Force 141 plan in mid-March, he immediately cabled Alexander, saying " '[i]n my opinion the operation breaks every common-sense rule of practical battle fighting and is completely theoretical. It has no hope of success and should be completely recast.' "[16]

What followed the briefing to Montgomery were several weeks of wrangling. Both the naval and air force planners of Force 141 (as well as Cunningham and Tedder) remained steadfast in their support of the plan because it promised the early seizure of ports and airfields while Montgomery continued to rail against it, both because of the geographic separation of ground forces it entailed and their piecemeal commitment over the course of several days (by this time the forceful Montgomery completely overshadowed the reserved and gentlemanly Alexander and in so doing assumed the mantel of primary ground force commander for HUSKY).[17] Furthermore, contended Montgomery, the Force 141 plan had " 'been based on the assumption that the opposition will be slight and that Sicily will be captured rather easily.' " This assumption, he continued, was a grave error that undermined Force 141's entire plan, adding that " '[t]he

Germans and also the Italians are fighting desperately now in Tunisia and will do so in Italy.' "[18] He desired instead to mass the greatest concentration of forces at one time and place that could be achieved with the available sea and air assets and proposed the southeastern tip of Sicily as the most suitable location. Once established ashore, predicted Montgomery, this force could then drive north to Messina, cut off the remaining Axis forces on the island, and destroy them.

Both Tedder and Cunningham howled at Montgomery's suggestion, with the former declaring that without the early capture of sufficient airfields, " 'the operation is impossible' " and the latter maintaining that " '[f]rom a naval point of view, the massing of so many ships in [one] area is to invite disaster, and besides, the chief merit of amphibious attack is to do so on a broad front and disperse the enemy effort.' "[19] Of course, all problems could have been solved to everyone's satisfaction had more of everything been available—men, ships, and planes—but that was not to be so choices had to be made and the attendant risks weighed carefully. Eisenhower, who was still too involved with operations aimed at ending the fighting in North Africa to devote his full attention to HUSKY planning, relied on his Force 141 team but, devoid of any command authority, it could only serve as a sounding board and, for Montgomery, a whipping boy.

Montgomery's objections coupled with Eisenhower and Alexander's indifference to throw the whole HUSKY planning effort into disarray. Ridgway was apprised of this during his reconnaissance trip to North Africa, and also discovered that some factions were taking advantage of the resulting chaos to craft for themselves larger roles in the upcoming invasion. He thought this especially true of the British airborne contingent, which he felt was looking to expand its role in HUSKY at the expense of the American airborne forces. Leading the British effort was the "dapper, handsome, [and] charming" British Major General Frederick Arthur Montague 'Boy' Browning, who was the senior airborne officer in either army and Eisenhower's principal airborne staff officer.[20] Ridgway felt that Browning was "a bit patronizing in his manner toward those who had had considerably less airborne experience than he" and was fearful that "from his post at Supreme Headquarters, [Browning] was in a position to exert an undue influence."[21] Ridgway became even more alarmed when he compared the Force 141 plan to Montgomery's plan and saw how the differences between the two impacted the employment of Allied airborne forces. Force 141's plan called for the dropping of two British airborne brigades ahead of a British amphibious assault in the east to be followed by American regimental-sized drops ahead of each of the American-led amphibious assaults in the west and north.[22] However, because Montgomery's counterproposal did away with the landings in the west and north it also eliminated the requirement for drops in those areas. Montgomery's proposal, which staked everything on one massive assault, envisioned dropping as many paratroopers, at one time, as resources would allow and since, as with everything else in Operation HUSKY, there was a distinct limit on how many resources were available, there arose an inter-Allied struggle over which airborne contingent would receive the largest share of those assets on D-Day. The crux of this struggle was the apportionment of transport aircraft.

Fearing that when he returned to the States there would be no one in the theater to represent American airborne interests and that they would suffer commensurably, Ridgway sent a message back to his division artillery commander, Brigadier General Maxwell Taylor, telling Taylor to assemble a small planning staff and get to

Eisenhower's headquarters in North Africa without delay. Taylor's mission, simply put, was to represent Ridgway, champion the interests of the 82nd Airborne Division, and ensure that the first American airborne division to deploy to an active theater would not be relegated to a sideshow.[23]

The airborne portion of the Force 141 plan was based on an estimate that there would be 210 transport aircraft available for use during Operation HUSKY, a number sufficient for the series of drops called for in the plan, especially since the drops were to occur sequentially. As acceptance of Montgomery's plan became more and more likely, however, the limited number of transport aircraft, all of which would be used simultaneously, became an acute point of contention. A related issue, and one that particularly rankled Ridgway, was the fact that the vast majority of the transports were of American manufacture flown by American crews, and even after more were made available to bring the total number of transports available for HUSKY to approximately 360, all but thirty-five were American.[24] Even with the additional aircraft there was still an insufficient number "to fill the minimum combat needs of both the U.S. and British airborne forces who were to jump into Sicily" and "[e]very plane allotted the British, therefore, meant less combat strength [the 82nd] could take into battle."[25] To bolster his claim to the transports, Ridgway enlisted the aid of General Patton, to whose Seventh Army the 82nd would be attached for the invasion. Patton, in a heated contest himself with Montgomery over which Allied army should be the main effort in Sicily, saw Browning's actions as another example of the British tendency of taking advantage of Eisenhower's desire to maintain Allied harmony to maneuver themselves into starring roles, leaving second billing to their less experienced American cousins. Ridgway was apparently successful in persuading Patton that he had a case. Confiding in his diary, Patton mentioned that in his role as Eisenhower's airborne advisor, Browning was "trying to get command of the paratroops."[26]

Eventually, the argument over aircraft allocation became so serious that Eisenhower was forced to make a decision. He ruled that, on D-Day, one-third of the available transport aircraft would go to support the British while the remaining two-thirds were to be used to support the Americans. This amounted to 144 aircraft for the British (109 C-47s from the U.S. 51st Troop Carrier Wing plus thirty-five British Albemarles) and 222 aircraft (all C-47s) for the 82nd Airborne Division, enough to carry only one of the division's regiments with its supporting arms.[27]

The final HUSKY concept, approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff in mid-May, called for the reduction of Sicily in five phases.

> Phase 1. Preparatory measures by Naval and Air Forces to neutralize enemy naval efforts, and to gain air supremacy.
> Phase 2. Pre-dawn airborne assaults, assisted by airborne landings with the object of seizing airfields and the ports of SIRACUSA and LICATA.
> Phase 3. The establishment of a firm base from which to conduct operations for the capture of the ports of AUGUSTA and CATANIA, and the GERBINI group of airfields.
> Phase 4. The capture of the ports and airfields outlined in Phase 3.
> Phase 5. The reduction of the island.[28]

The Allies had already achieved naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. Sporadic forays by the Italian fleet met with repeated disaster and hence, although Axis naval efforts remained a concern, especially during the amphibious landings when the over laden troop ships be vulnerable, they were not likely. The Allied air forces had likewise set as their primary goal the gaining of air supremacy prior to the invasion and, for the most part, achieved this prior to D-Day, although until Allied fighters could begin operating from forward airbases on Sicily itself the possibility of Axis aircraft making periodic appearances over the battlefield remained high.[29] A week before the invasion Eisenhower's naval aide, Captain Harry C. Butcher, recorded in his dairy that during a conversation at Tedder's headquarters, he was told that

> we now have about 5000 combat airplanes in the theater, of which eighty per cent, or 4000, are operational. Going into the HUSKY battle we have a numerical superiority of at least two to one, although our bases will, of course, be considerably removed, especially at the outset, from the battle line. This condition will improve when, as, and if we capture some or all of the eleven airdromes in the southeast corner of Sicily.[30]

Phases two, three, and four were the main focus of the ground commanders and it was to achieving the goals outlined in these phases that the British Eighth and U.S. Seventh Army planners devoted the bulk of their effort. Focused almost exclusively on getting ashore, staying ashore, and capturing the needed ports and airfields as quickly as possible, they gave scant attention to the larger question of securing the rest of the island, an oversight that would give rise to even more contention in the coming weeks.

The British Eighth Army plan called for simultaneous amphibious landings by four divisions and one independent brigade. Most of the landings would occur on Sicily's eastern shore, along beaches in the Gulf of Noto stretching from Syracuse in the north to the southeastern tip of the island (the Pachino Peninsula) in the south, except for the Canadian 1st Division on the Eighth Army's extreme left flank, which would assault on both sides of the Pachino Peninsula in order to secure a nearby airfield. Several hours before any British or Canadian soldier hit the beach, the 1st Airlanding Brigade of the British 1st Airborne Division would make a glider assault on a bridge called Ponte Grande over the Anapo River, just south of Syracuse. Codenamed Operation LADBROKE, the objective of the glider assault was to seize the bridge and the western portion of Syracuse itself, hold both, and then assist with the rapid passage of British troops into the city, thereby facilitating the capture of the port at Syracuse. Originally conceived as a parachute assault, in late May Montgomery decided that the threat of Axis armor was so great and the possibility of the troop carrier aircraft finding their drop zones at night so minimal, that he desired instead that the mission be undertaken by glider troops. Influenced, no doubt, by the German glider assaults in Belgium in May 1940 (where Montgomery had fought as a division commander), Montgomery was convinced that the advantages of employing glider troops—the arrival of the troops in tight, organized groups carrying heavier antitank weapons—far outweighed the fact, as he was told repeatedly, that night glider assaults were not part of British doctrine, nor were the glider pilots themselves sufficiently trained to guarantee success. The British also planned two follow-on parachute assaults, Operations GLUTTON and FUSTIAN, aimed

at seizing bridges outside of Augusta and Catania respectively. Both assaults, assigned to the parachute brigades of the British 1st Airborne Division, were on-call missions that would be mounted only if necessary.[31]

Patton's plan was to land his Seventh Army along a seventy-mile front on Sicily's southern shore in the Gulf of Gela in order to secure the ports at Licata and Gela and the airfields at Licata, Ponte Olivo, Biscari, and Comiso. To do this, Patton had Omar Bradley's II Corps landing on his army's eastern flank at Gela (U.S. 1st Infantry Division) and Scoglitti (U.S. 45th Infantry Division) while the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division, under direct army control, landed on Patton's western flank at Licata in order to secure the port and protect the army's exposed left flank. Having also been assigned the 82nd, Patton planned to insert as much of the division as the available aircraft would allow several hours before the amphibious assault in order to secure key terrain on the high ground inland of the invasion beaches. Follow on insertion of the remainder of the division was, at best, tentative and contingent upon the availability of aircraft as well as the availability of an airfield or other suitable area into which it could be inserted.[32]

When the troopers of the 82nd set sail from the United States only a very few were informed about the division's destination; an even smaller number were aware of the great debate then being waged over its operational employment. Once out of sight of land, the first mystery was solved when sealed orders were opened and the announcement was made that the division was headed for Casablanca.[33]

The convoy in which the 82nd sailed comprised twenty-three transports, eight destroyers, one aircraft carrier, and the battleship *Texas.*[34] Three transports carried the division: Gavin's 505th was on the *Monterey*; Lewis's 325th was on the *Santa Rosa*; and Ridgway, his staff, and Tucker's 504th were on the *George Washington* (other divisional units were spread among the three transports). Zigzagging across the Atlantic, the voyage was generally uneventful. The troopers learned to speak a smattering of Arabic—"which way is north?" "I am wounded," and "where is the railway station?"—and kept themselves busy by organizing wrestling and boxing matches and watching each ship's limited repertoire of movies. For the troopers of the 325th, this meant seeing *The Bank Dick* starring W. C. Fields and, appropriately, *Casablanca* over and over again. The rest of the time was spent conforming to the rhythm of life aboard the crowded ships, a rhythm that was controlled by a colored card system. Since none of the transports were large enough to sleep or feed all the troopers aboard simultaneously, shifts were set up. Those with white cards were required to be below deck at night while those with yellow cards were to be below during the day. Every three days the cycle was reversed. Only two meals were served each day since it took so long to feed everyone on board and as soon as one meal finished the next one started.[35] The most significant event of the voyage involved Ridgway's transport, the *George Washington*, which kept breaking down. A few hundred miles off the coast of Africa, Ridgway awoke in the middle of the night to "discover that the old tub had stopped again, and that the convoy had already disappeared over the horizon." Distraught that his division would arrive in North Africa without him, Ridgway "sent a message to . . . the convoy commander, and told him if we weren't under way by morning, [he] was going to jump overboard" and in so doing, force the convoy commander to send a destroyer back to pick him up so that he could arrive with the main body of his division. Ridgway's threat "seemed to provide all hands with some amusement" but, said Ridgway, "I wasn't joking."[36] Eventually the *George*

Washington was repaired and on 10 May 1943 sailed with the rest of the convoy into Casablanca's port. There the troopers saw for the first time war's devastation in the form of the French battleship *Jean Bart*, beached, burned, gutted, and lying on its side.[37]

By late afternoon the troopers had disembarked and formed up, "brushed and polished . . . a small phalanx of men in a vast, strange land."[38] Still wearing their long johns, wool shirts, and trousers, they shouldered their heavy packs and weapons and moved out in a column of twos toward their temporary bivouac area, Camp Don B. Passage, which was nothing more than a large, unoccupied patch of desert five miles outside Casablanca. Having had their physical conditioning curtailed because of the crowded conditions aboard ship, "the march in to the bivouac area soon turned to pure misery as shipboard muscles complained about full packs, bed rolls, and weapons, and the sweat poured down."[39]

In light of the stringent security measures that had been invoked since their departure from Fort Bragg, the troopers were surprised to find that the division's arrival in North Africa was being openly trumpeted on the airwaves that very night. According to Lieutenant Joe Lyons of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, while settling into bivouac that night

> [o]n the radio were the German propaganda duo, Axis Sally and George. The propaganda was rather crude but the music was great and the gags corny. Their news of the moment was 'Welcome 82nd Airborne to Casablanca.' Ben Wright [another 456th trooper] made a classic remark, 'American Top Secret Equals the British Most Ridiculous.' The Great Secret was out of the bag.[40]

While in North Africa, the 82nd was assigned to Lieutenant General Mark Clark's U.S. Fifth Army, a purely administrative headquarters charged with preparing units and replacements for combat. Ridgway had been informed that this would be the case during his reconnaissance trip and hence had already made arrangements with Fifth Army for the care and training of his troopers. Since there were some refurbished French airfields near the small French Moroccan village of Oujda that could house the troop carrier aircraft the 82nd would require for training and employment, Clark and Ridgway agreed that the 82nd's headquarters, its two parachute regiments, and the bulk of the division's support units would set up there while Ridgway's assistant division commander, Brigadier General 'Bull' Keerans, along with Lewis's 325th, the 80th Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion, and the 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion set up at Marnia, twelve miles away and just across the border in Algeria.[41]

The division began its movement to Oujda and Marnia, which lay over 400 miles away, after spending two days at Camp Passage where the troopers attempted to get acclimatized to the North African heat. A "fortunate few" made the journey by truck but the bulk of the division traveled for several days aboard trains, riding in World War I-era 'forty and eight' rail cars.[42] Although miserably uneventful, at one point in the journey the division's troopers got their first glimpse of the German foe.

> At some point in the desert the train stopped on a siding directly opposite a train load of big, blonde, bronzed Afrika Korps prisoners of war. Riding

> on top of each of the box cars was an equally big, inky-black Senegalese soldier with a tommy gun. One German who spoke good English began talking to the troopers and the following conversation took place:
> Afrika Korps POW: 'Where do you Americans think you are going?'
> Paratrooper: 'We're going to Berlin.'
> Afrika Korps POW: 'Well, that's fair enough. We're headed for New York.'[43]

When the troopers finally clambered out of their boxcars and took a look at where they would set up their new homes there was unanimous agreement: both Marnia and Oujda were hellholes. The former was "no more than a railroad siding with one or two buildings."[44] The slightly larger Oujda was where troopers fortunate enough to have some free time went "if there was nothing else to do and if life had become so unbearable that one didn't care what happened to him."[45]

The troopers slept in two-man pup tents, arranged with parade-ground precision in rows that formed perfectly straight company streets. But the neatness of the tent cities belied the reality of life in the desert, which was made almost unbearable by a potent combination of extreme heat, wind, sand, and flies. Even the water, which was trucked in, "was so heavily chlorinated it burned the troopers' throats."[46] But it was meal times that were the worst. Lieutenant Mott Janney of the 505th wrote home that "[a]ll agree that the greatest blessing would be to be able to live without the necessity of eating."[47] According to Lieutenant Arthur Kroos, the simple act of eating became a study in balance, coordination, and futility. He recalled that while "going through every mess line with our mess kit, one ha[n]d was constantly fanning the flies off" and that he had to eat "in a sort of circular motion—if you let them land, then you had to pick them off and ten more would land while you were doing that."[48] Lieutenant Kenneth R. Shaker recalled that the swarms of flies were so thick, " '[w]hen we drank coffee, we learned to clench our teeth to strain out the dead flies, and then we would spit them out.' "[49] Besides the flies, the troopers had also to contend with the fine sand that got into everything and which was "richly mixed with sheep dung" causing mass dysentery within the division.[50] According to Kroos

> [e]very morning we got up, we took [a] pill to stop [the diarrhea]. It sealed us off for about 8 hours during the day. . . . Everyone in the division had dysentery. You'd be lying on your bunk with your butt on one end and your head at the other and you just [shot] both ways. Unbelievable.[51]

The troopers termed their illness the 'G.I. shits' or simply the 'G.I.s' and as a result

> [a]n entrenching tool became a standard part of everyone's daily uniform. This malady was so universal and struck so suddenly it became commonplace to see someone break ranks and tear off to some unoccupied part of the desert, with no explanation needed or demanded. Toilet paper [became] more valuable than French franc notes.[52]

Gavin noted in his diary that during this plague the height of military achievement for the division's troopers became the ability "[t]o travel 100 y[ar]ds removin[g] a pair of coveralls enroute."[53] The dysentery got so bad that the division surgeons had to adjust their normal procedures. According to the 505th regimental surgeon, "[i]f you had 10 stools a day, you pulled fully [*sic*] duty; 20 stools a day you were on quarters, and 30 a day you were sent to the hospital."[54] Despite the outbreak of dysentery, training continued unabated, although eventually Ridgway did make one change—in order to avoid the extreme daytime heat he was forced to begin training the division at night. This paid huge dividends in Sicily in that the troopers grew accustomed to operating in the dark, but while in North Africa it only added to the their discomfort; there was nowhere to sleep comfortably and the bit of shade provided by their pup tents was not enough to offset the stifling heat.

The training was hard and realistic and for the most part conducted with live ammunition. The troopers zeroed their personal weapons (for the paratroopers this included a primary and secondary weapon, usually a .45-caliber semiautomatic pistol) and got familiar with all the infantry weapons they might have to employ, to include those of the enemy but the bulk of the time was spent training with their squads, platoons, and companies. To ensure tactical proficiency Ridgway organized a series of "fire control problems" that were supervised by a board of officers headed by Brigadier General Keerans. Every one of the 82nd's subordinate units had to successfully pass these problems; failure to do so meant going through again and again until a satisfactory level of competence was attained.[55] As the invasion drew near the training got more mission-specific. Sand tables and aerial photos of the objective area were set up in guarded tents so that leaders could orient their men to the upcoming mission. For security reasons all mention of Sicily was excised from these training aids and "[t]he troops knew only that there was a small piece of ground somewhere in enemy territory where they were to land, knock out fortifications nearby and hold . . . until relieved by the 1st Infantry Division."[56] In addition, life-sized mock-ups of the assault objectives were constructed so the troopers in the initial assault could rehearse their actions using live ammunition, to include bangalore torpedoes, bazookas, and supporting mortar fire and "until every man knew his job letter perfect and believed that nothing could stop him from carrying out his mission."[57] According to a Fifth Army observer, "[a]t the conclusion of its two month training period . . . the 82d [Airborne] Division was in superb physical condition, well qualified in the use of its armament except in the case of the Field Artillery, well advanced in combined ground operations and had adopted a workable SOP for equipment and personnel drops."[58]

About the only training that suffered was parachute training. A combination of unpredictable winds and extremely rough terrain made this an even more dangerous event than training with live ammunition. According to Ridgway, "[e]ven on the rare calm days, jumping was a hazard, for the ground was hard, and covered with loose boulders, from the size of a man's fist to the size of his head."[59] During one jump exercise twenty-two troopers from the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment were hospitalized because of injuries sustained during landing.[60] A few days later the 3/505th sustained fifty-three jump casualties.[61] Eventually Ridgway was forced to curtail parachuting, especially for key leaders. At one juncture Gavin was "loaded and all set to take off . . . when the control tower called and said that Gen[eral] Ridgway ordered [him] not to

jump."[62] All told, during the three weeks they had to train with the troop carriers only two regimental-size night practice missions were held, and in each of these missions only the jumpmasters in the lead planes actually exited the aircraft. The first, carrying Gavin's 505th, "scattered stragglers at every turn." The second, carrying, Tucker's 504th, "proved deceptively successful."[63]

Ridgway's decision to limit jump training had little impact on the readiness of the 82nd to accomplish its HUSKY missions. Parachuting was but a means of delivery. What counted more was what the troopers did once they were on the ground and, as the Fifth Army Observer noted, the 82nd was ready for combat. The same could not be said about the aircrews.

While at Fort Bragg the 82nd had trained with Colonel Hal Clark's 52nd Trooper Carrier Wing, the same wing that would be carrying the division to Sicily (the 52nd arrived in North Africa about the same time as the 82nd). Much had been accomplished in that time, but there remained much yet to be done and neither Ridgway nor Clark was confident that the pilots and navigators had the necessary expertise to find drop zones in the dark. Ridgway wrote a letter to Taylor in North Africa to apprise him of this. "The 52d [Troop Carrier] Wing was not, at date of departure, capable of conducting night operations," wrote Ridgway. Colonel Clark, whom Ridgway thought was "a very fine officer," had been "one hundred percent cooperative and frank in discussing all such matters" and was "in full agreement . . . that with present training levels operations in darkness of the scope contemplated are not practicable."[64] Taylor, therefore, was to press the HUSKY planners to take the 52nd's state of training into consideration and have them set the drop times so that Clark's crews would have some daylight by which to navigate when over Sicily. A dawn drop was Ridgway's preferred solution. But Taylor could do little to influence the planning; by the time he received Ridgway's letter in late April planning was already well advanced. HUSKY had been sequenced to conform to a doctrinal template for amphibious operations that called for the amphibious troops to hit the beaches during darkness. This meant that the only way the initial drop could both precede the amphibious assault and be carried out during daylight hours was if it were conducted, at the latest, during dusk on the previous day. This Eisenhower would not allow. With D-Day set for 10 July and H-Hour for 0245 hours (H-Hour was the time the main attack, in this case the amphibious assault, would commence) the initial paratroop drop would have to take place around midnight. There would be a second-quarter moon, enough light, it was thought, for Clark's pilots to find their drop zones.[65]

Clark's 52nd arrived in North Africa officially rated as "qualified for daylight operations over familiar terrain, but unqualified for night operations."[66] Assuming that he had about two months to get his crews ready for HUSKY, Clark fashioned a training program that concentrated on the specific tasks that would be required of them during the initial drop. The first task to be mastered was formation flying at night. The C-47s of the era did not have station-keeping radars that help a pilot see where his aircraft is in relation to other planes in the air. Everything then was line-of-sight. If a pilot could not see the other planes around him he had no way of knowing where he was in relation to them and the concentration required to stay in formation at night while flying over water for extended periods was, to say the least, taxing, especially during course changes. This took some time to master, and the training time devoted to its mastery was training time

that could not be devoted to the next critical task, night navigation and the pinpointing of drop zones. According to a Fifth Army observer,

> [v]ery little real effort was put forth by the 52d [Troop Carrier] Wing to check the location of pin point [drop zones] at night. Equipment containers were made available in an effort to get the 52d Wing to drop simulated loads on a [drop zone] on practice flights. Very few times were containers used to check the [drop zone] location by the navigator and jump signal by the pilot. Air photos for training aids in the location of [drop zones] by night pilotage, were not used in the majority of training flights.[67]

Gavin also noted this discrepancy in the 52nd's training focus, writing in his diary that some of its subordinate groups were "not pointing their training at what we will require and there is reason to believe that some of the [parachute combat team] will miss their [drop zones] by a great deal."[68]

Clark and Ridgway also had to contend with an unforeseen distracter that ate up significant chunks of training time: an almost constant stream of visiting dignitaries. In the words of one trooper, "suddenly it seemed as if every General Officer in North Africa wanted to see what this new-fangled outfit was all about, so naturally the division had to parade before them all."[69] The first to arrive was Lieutenant General Mark Clark, who stopped by less than a week after the 82nd settled in at Oujda and Marnia. He was followed the next day by Lieutenant General Carl A. Spaatz (the commander of the Northwest African Air Force) and a coterie of British officers. Four days later General Browning arrived. Each visit necessitated a parade and inspection. On 3 June, Generals Eisenhower, Clark, and Patton showed up along with several French and Spanish generals. For this visit the troopers and aircrews had not only to hold a parade and inspection, they also had to put on a jump demonstration. According to Gavin, the demonstration was staged purely for political reasons; a show of force designed to impress the Spanish fascists whose hold on Spanish Morocco (and friendship with Germany) posed a potential threat to the Allied rear in North Africa.[70]

Because it arrived in North Africa virtually untrained in night flying and had then to contend with training distracters like the parades and demonstrations required for visiting dignitaries (and later with shuttle missions in support of the 82nd's movement to its forward staging area) by D-Day, the 52nd "was still insufficiently trained on formation flying, navigation, and drop-zone location at night" and "[a]t least one group commander later felt that the Troop Carrier Command was far too optimistic as to its crews' proficiency."[71]

Meanwhile, logistics intervened to ensure that the division's glider troopers had few opportunities to train with gliders while in North Africa, and never on a large scale. Although the first consignment of five hundred Waco gliders arrived in North Africa more than two weeks ahead of the 82nd, sufficient numbers were not available for training until mid-June. Packed aboard ships with no eye toward ensuring that the correct parts got to the correct locations, the crates in which the glider sections were packed were unloaded haphazardly at a variety of North African ports and put in the charge of 105 U.S. glider pilots who, it was assumed, knew not only how to fly them but how to put

them together as well. Thirty days later, plagued by their mission's low priority and the lack of correct parts and tools, only four completely assembled Wacos were available for trans-shipment to airbases in North Africa. Sixty days after the first shipment had arrived, there were 240 Wacos in North Africa, but only thirty had been assembled. Not until the British decided to use gliders during the initial airborne assault did glider construction become everyone's priority. At that time, assembly lines were set up under the watchful eyes of trained mechanics and, within days, 346 gliders were assembled, but these were all earmarked for the British.[72]

There is no evidence to indicate that Ridgway or any other American airborne planner was overly concerned about the lack of gliders in North Africa. American airborne tactics called for the use of parachute troopers in the initial assault to seize and hold airfields or other suitable landing areas into which glider troopers or air-landed units could then be introduced, and planning for the use of the 82nd in HUSKY followed this sequence.[73] According to Gavin, another reason the 82nd never seriously considered the use of gliders was "because of the transports being turned over to the British the first day after [the D-Day] drop."[74] It was therefore assumed that Lewis's 325th, as well as the other glider elements of the division, would be inserted once sufficient airlift did become available and would then be air-landed onto an already secured airfield.

Yet the division's glider troopers trained just as hard as their parachuting cousins, confident that once introduced into combat in Sicily, regardless of how they got there, they would prove, once and for all, that they were every bit as tough and tactically competent as the paratroopers. This appeared to weigh particularly heavy on Colonel Lewis's mind and resulted in some "quixotic and controversial" behavior.[75] While still at Fort Bragg, Lewis arbitrarily weeded out of the regiment any men he thought would not make it in combat. Initially, he confined his scope to men over thirty-five, as well as those with flat feet, those who were deemed excessively nervous, or those who were prone to airsickness. Later, Lewis turned his attention to the officers and transferred out those he felt were unfit for the unit, including his regimental executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Jean D. Scott.[76] As one 325 officer described it, Lewis assembled the officers of the regiment and told them "to submit a list of people with whom [they] did not want to go into battle and they would be transferred."[77] Scott, who was something of a petty tyrant, was tops on everyone's list and no one was sorry to see him leave, but Lewis's methods raised quite a few eyebrows. Then, during a second round of transfers Lewis got rid of sixteen more officers. Still, it seemed, Lewis was not happy with the makeup of his regiment and as combat approached the pressure seemed to be getting to him. He would inexplicably fly into rages, venting most of his anger at his officers. Wayne Pierce described one incident:

> In Africa, shortly before the invasion of Sicily, we conducted an extended training exercise. At the critique all officers of the regiment were present, seated on the ground, hot, dirty, tired and sleepy, having been up all night. Normally these critiques would be where the 'junior officers' caught hell . . . no names, just 'junior officers.' Col. Lewis wet into a tirade about the lack of leadership and mistakes that he believed he had seen. At the heighth [*sic*] of his condemnation he stopped, completely lost his composure and in a breaking voice said . . . 'and gentlemen, combat is

> only two weeks away!' Then he turned and walked away, visibly sobbing. We felt leaderless, and this was the man [who] was going to lead us into combat.'[78]

Ridgway, whose petition had secured for him and, it would appear, his subordinate commanders the authority to transfer out of the division all those deemed unfit for service in the airborne, seems to have not taken issue with Lewis's mass firings. Fortunately, there was an abundance of good, solid junior officers and noncommissioned officers in the 325th who sustained the regiment through Lewis's tirades and arbitrary behavior. Moreover, though unconventional, Lewis's methods ensured that only the youngest, toughest troopers remained.

Two days after arriving in North Africa, while the division was still encamped at Camp Passage, Ridgway called both Gavin and Tucker forward to Oujda to tell them about Operation HUSKY and the roles each of them would play. It was then that Gavin discovered that his regiment, reinforced with one battalion from Tucker's 504th, would spearhead the American landings in Sicily.[79] Although in Ridgway's eyes both Gavin and Tucker were "splendid officers and very gallant fellows" he selected Gavin because "[h]e was the older and more experienced commander of the two parachute regiments."[80] Gavin already had a reputation as one of the Army's leading theorists on airborne operations as a result of his work on FM 31-30. Since then he had forged the 505th into a tough, well-trained fighting force and did so in a manner that inspired tremendous loyalty in the ranks. Because there were sufficient aircraft to carry but one reinforced parachute regiment, Gavin got the nod.

Though four years older than Tucker, Gavin was "astoundingly youthful looking" who "looked like a leggy young lieutenant fresh out of college."[81] Arthur Kroos surmised that, because of his youthful appearance, Gavin "held himself rather remote." Still, Kroos thought Gavin

> a frontline soldier's soldier all the way through. He was never warm, he's not a warm person. But he's a person who's close to his troops. He was the sort who had no hesitation of helping a private, or kicking a private in the butt if he deserved kicking. When you'd see him stand, he'd look like a statue. . . . He was a tremendously hard worker. He was out in the field, he was all over. When he said something, you listened because it was very meaningful, there was nothing trite about anything he said.[82]

His leadership style was such that "[h]e assumed that you were better than you were, and you worked so hard to receive his approbation that all of a sudden you discovered you were better than you thought you were."[83] And this desire to please their revered commander was a feeling that permeated the ranks. According to several troopers who served with Gavin in North Africa and Sicily, a few days before taking off

> [w]e were having a beer party when Colonel Jim Gavin . . . climbed on a beer keg and talked—as only [he] can. He talked about the Cotton Fish Camp, and Town Pump 'Campaigns.' He talked about the frying pan area at Fort Benning, and our jumps in Carolina. As he talked we drank our

> beer and listened. And we wondered if this would be our last beer for a long time—or just our last beer. We looked at the Colonel, and liked what we say. We'd follow him straight to Hell, if he asked us, and plant our color[s] over Satan's C.P. ahead of schedule.[84]

Writing to Gavin after the war, 505th veteran Edwin Sayre summed up Gavin's achievements as regimental commander as succinctly as anyone:

> You built an esprit de corps that made all of us feel that we were unbeatable. You also lead us in a training program that toughened our minds and bodies to the extent that we all knew that we could fight forty[-]eight hours without rest and still be on our feet and combat ready.
>
> When we landed in Sicily and saw ourselves outnumbered, surrounded and faced with tanks . . . it never even occured [*sic*] to us that we should retreat. You had imbued us with only one concept—attack! In my opinion this was the secret to the 505's success. When the Germans and Italians found themselves being attacked on all sides it was impossible for them to believe that it was by a numerically inferior force.[85]

When Gavin first received word that his regiment would spearhead the invasion, the specifics about his mission were yet to be worked out; Patton and his staff were still analyzing the tasks before them and had not yet issued an order. What resulted from the staff analysis, however, was the realization that in order for the Seventh Army to accomplish its assigned tasks—make an amphibious assault over a seventy-mile frontage; quickly secure four airfields in the area; capture the ports of Licata and Gela and get them into operation as quickly as possible—it would also have to secure the high ground inland. Failure to do so would expose the amphibious forces to counterattack at their most vulnerable, while still on the beach. This realization gave rise to the concept for the employment of Gavin's combat team: jump inland of the invasion beaches, seize the high ground and key terrain, and disrupt enemy counterattacks. Hence even before Patton's forces hit the beaches, Gavin's troopers would jump ahead of them with in order to accomplish four tasks:

> (1) Land during night D-1/D in area N and E of GELA, capture and secure high ground in that area.
> (2) Disrupt communications and movement of reserves during night.
> (3) Be attached to 1st Infantry Division effective H/1 hours on D-Day.
> (4) Assist 1st Infantry Division in capturing and securing landing field at PONTE OLIVO.[86]

To accomplish these tasks, Gavin's plan was to drop his combat team at four separate locations. The regimental headquarters along with 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment and A and B Batteries of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion were to drop just north of an important road junction (named Objective 'Y') about seven miles east of Gela and about four miles inland, attack and overcome the enemy strongpoint in the vicinity, and then defend the junction until relieved by the 1st

Infantry Division. The 3rd Battalion of the 505th along with C Battery, 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion would drop just south of the same road junction and occupy the high ground overlooking it. The 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, on loan from Tucker's regiment, was to drop just south of Niscemi, a town about ten miles inland and establish and defend roadblocks on the road running south from Niscemi to Objective 'Y.' Finally, three planeloads of troopers, including the regimental demolitions section, were to drop near two bridges over the Acate River located about four miles inland and some five miles east of Objective 'Y' and prepare them for demolition.[87] Accomplishing these missions would seal off the 1st and 45th Infantry Division beaches from counterattacks from the east and northeast and deny the enemy use of Highway 115, the major road paralleling the coast, without which the enemy would have a difficult time shifting forces east and west to defeat the multiple threats in both the British and American zones of action.

The rest of the 82nd Airborne Division was to be on call after H-Hour, D-Day to "concentrate rapidly in the zone of action of the Seventh Army and assist in the assault of SICILY."[88] This included the independent 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, which had been attached to the 82nd since the division's arrival in North Africa but which, unlike the division, already had three combat jumps to its credit.[89] Despite its experience however, Ridgway was not enamored of the 509th or its leadership and was especially wary of the manner by which he felt General Browning seemed to be using the 509th to gain control over all Allied airborne forces (while in England before the invasion of North Africa, the 509th had been under the operational control of the British Airborne Forces).[90] This struggle came to a head in early June 1943 when Browning wrote a letter to the 509th's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Doyle R. Yardley, informing him that his battalion had been made honorary members of the British Airborne Forces and that, as a result, Browning was attempting to secure for them the same distinctive maroon berets worn by British paratroopers. Browning also informed Yardley that he would be honored to stop by and inspect the battalion.[91] Though none of this correspondence flowed through 82nd command channels, Ridgway soon discovered what was afoot and hit the roof. Just two weeks before, Ridgway had had a conversation with Browning in which the latter indicated that he was "in a command status since his recommendations on basic decisions effecting [*sic*] Airborne troops are very likely to be accepted without change by the 141 commander [Eisenhower]." Ridgway was not about to take orders from Browning and replied that since the 82nd was assigned to Patton, "missions to it should come from him alone."[92] Browning's interest in the 509th was but another indicator to Ridgway that Browning was attempting to insinuate himself into a command position, using his place on Eisenhower's staff to do so. In the end, Browning's inspection trip was cancelled and tempers smoothed over, but it would not be the last time that Ridgway and Browning collided on issues of command.

As heated as the many Anglo-American internecine quarrels were, they did not begin to compare with the virulent distrust that had been fermenting in the Axis camp. The once seemingly invincible Pact of Steel was crumbling in the face of repeated setbacks at Moscow, Stalingrad, El Alamein, and the Allied landings in North Africa. Feeling increasingly threatened by British and American successes in the Mediterranean, as early as December 1942 Italian head of state Benito Mussolini began urging Hitler to make a separate peace with the Soviet Union.[93] By doing so, he argued, Germany and Italy could

turn against the Western Allies in the Mediterranean and make it once again an Axis lake. Hitler dismissed Mussolini's entreaties and instead sought to bolster his flagging ally with promises of German aid. Hitler also assigned *Luftwaffe Feldmarschall* Albert Kesselring to the position of *Oberbefehlshaber Sued* (commander-in-chief South). He could not have made a better choice. Kesselring was "[a] gifted, thoroughly trained, and experienced officer [who] had a strong sense of duty as well as considerable personal charm and tact" and was one of the few German officers who held the Italian people in high regard.[94] But for all his charm and tact Kesselring knew what he was about. As long as Italy remained a partner in the war he would work in coordination with the *Comando Supremo* (the Italian High Command) and integrate German combat units alongside Italian formations to provide added backbone to the defensive scheme. If that failed, his units would be postured to take over the unilateral defense of Italy and its possessions themselves.

Even before the fall of North Africa, Axis intelligence officers were attempting to predict the Allies' next move. A major Allied deception operation designed to convince the Axis partners that Sicily was nothing more than a cover operation for simultaneous landings in Sardinia and the Peloponnesus was moderately successful and as a result several thousand German troops that could have been used to reinforce the Sicilian garrison were either routed elsewhere or maintained in place.[95] But throughout the months of waiting Kesselring, the *Comando Supremo*, and the man ultimately charged with the defense of Sicily, *Generale d'Armata* Alfredo Guzzoni, remained convinced that with the fall of North Africa, Sicily would be the Allies' next objective.

The sixty-six year old Guzzoni, who was called out of retirement to assume command of the *Italian Sixth Army*, had a tough task before him.[96] He could count on practically no naval support: most German submarines had been withdrawn from the Mediterranean and the Italian battle fleet—six battleships, four cruisers, and ten destroyers—was holed up at La Spezia on the mainland, far removed from Sicily and too weak in any case to engage the Allied fleet in a surface action. His air support, both Italian and German, had been badly handled in the months leading up to the invasion, reduced in strength to approximately 1,000 aircraft of all types, many of which were obsolete or inadequate to match the performance and firepower of the Allied planes and almost all of which was based on the mainland. Moreover, during a series of air battles in the latter half of May, *Luftwaffe* units sustained such heavy losses that *Reichsmarschall* Göring sent a stinging rebuke, promising that if " 'improvement is not forthcoming, flying personnel from the commander down must expect to be remanded to the ranks and transferred to the Eastern front to serve on the ground.' "[97] Hence, the main effort for the defense of Sicily would fall to the ground forces Guzzoni had at his disposal.

Approximately 200,000 Italian soldiers, organized into four mobile divisions and numerous coastal units of varying size, composed the bulk of Guzzoni's ground force. Overall they were of poor quality, especially the coastal units, which were armed with antiquated weapons and grossly overextended around Sicily's periphery.[98] In the assessment of *Generalleutnant* Frido von Senger und Etterlin, the German liaison officer to Guzzoni's headquarters, the coastal troops "were incapable of effective defense, and at best could provide only a security service."[99] The Italian mobile divisions were not much better. Both the *Aosta* and *Napoli Divisions*, composed largely of disaffected Sicilian conscripts, were under strength, ill-trained, and poorly led. Although of somewhat higher

caliber, the *Assietta Division* was also under strength and was equipped with outdated equipment, especially artillery. Only the *Livorno Division* was at anywhere near its full wartime complement and had all its organic transportation. Regardless of their relative readiness, however, all four of the Italian mobile divisions were lacking sufficient quantities of artillery ammunition and were severely handicapped by nonexistent or poor quality communications equipment.[100]

The backbone of Guzzoni's defense therefore would be supplied by the two major German combat units on the island: the *15th Panzer Grenadier Division* and the *Hermann Göring Division*. The *15th Panzer Grenadier Division*, commanded by *Generalmajor* Eberhard Rodt, had been on the island longer and was ready for immediate commitment. It had stockpiled twenty days of supplies and, though not completely mobile, was still capable of swift action. The *Hermann Göring Division*, commanded by *Generalmajor* Paul Conrath, began moving into Sicily in late June. It was well trained and equipped, though somewhat deficient in infantry and had not had the opportunity to undergo extensive combined arms training prior to getting to Sicily.[101]

Guzzoni used the two Italian corps headquarters at his disposal, the *XVI* and *XII Corps*, to effect tactical control of the units in the eastern and western halves of the island respectively. Believing that the southeastern tip of Sicily was the most likely area for an Allied invasion, Guzzoni weighted that part of the island with his best Italian division, *Livorno*, along with the much less effective *Napoli Division*. In consultation with Kesselring, he also placed the newly arrived *Hermann Göring Division* in the east, with its headquarters at Caltagirone, twenty miles northeast of Gela, and a combat command from the *15th Panzer Grenadier Division* near Catania. Securing the western part of Sicily were the *Aosta* and *Assietta Divisions* along with the rump of the *15th Panzer Grenadiers*.[102]

The placement of the German divisions caused quite a stir in German command channels. *Generalleutnant* Senger heartily disagreed with the arrangement. The *15th Panzer Grenadier Division*, he wrote

> had been on the island for a considerable time and was familiar with local conditions. It had well-organised coastal reconnaissance and possessed sufficient infantry and armour at least to fight a delaying battle with some prospect of success. . . . General Roth [*sic*], the commander of this division, was an experienced leader with a General Staff background. The division should therefore have been given the main task of defending the eastern part of the island.[103]

Conversely, as Senger pointed out, the *Hermann Göring Division* "had some notable weaknesses" not least of which was its "inconsiderable" infantry strength. Additionally,

> [t]wo of its principal commanding officers were unfit to lead in action. The first, commander of an infantry regiment, was removed by the divisional commander, while the second, commanding the armoured regiment, was replaced [on von Senger's] personal orders immediately after the fighting had started. Similar shortcomings appeared among other

> officers. The division enjoyed an unmerited prestige on all sides and especially among our Italian allies.[104]

The "unmerited prestige" of the *Hermann Göring Division* Senger attributed to "the predominance of personal over professional motives." Whether because of Göring's personal intervention or Kesselring's desire to "comply with the wishes of his superior officer in the Luftwaffe" he could not ascertain, but he was certain that these dispositions had been "arranged behind the scenes."[105] For his part, Kesselring may have been attracted by the *Hermann Göring Division* commander's aggressiveness. Writing after the war, Kesselring noted that when briefed on the tactical concept that would be employed in the face of an Allied invasion, *Generalmajor* Conrath replied, " '[i]f you mean to go for them, Field-Marshal, then I'm your man.' "[106]

The Axis ground tactical plan, about which both Guzzoni and Kesselring agreed, was that regardless of where the Allies landed the initial battle would be fought at the coastline by coastal units supported by local reserves. The Italian divisions would then move to the invasion beaches as quickly as possible and pounce once the Allies were ashore in strength. Finally, the German divisions would come in for the kill.[107] To ensure his commanders were not hampered by what he felt might be a less than efficient Italian command structure (under whose orders the German units on Sicily ostensibly were to react), Kesselring told both Rodt and Conrath "[i]t makes no difference . . . whether or not you get orders from the Italian [Sixth] Army at Enna. You must go into immediate action against the enemy the moment you ascertain the objective of the invasion fleet."[108]

The end of June saw the repositioning of Allied forces as well. On 16 June, advance elements of the 82nd and 52nd began moving to their staging areas and departure airfields and by 20 June all training had ceased in order to begin the massive ferrying of planes, equipment, aircraft support personnel, and airborne troopers to Kairouan, Tunisia, the last stop before Sicily. This huge logistical undertaking, which was not completed until 4 July, ate up valuable training time and had a deleterious effect on the 52nd's equipment readiness.[109] A Fifth Army after action report noted that "[g]roup by group, the [aircraft] of the 52d Wing were deadlined as the division employed the [aircraft] in continuous shuttle movements between the Oujda Airfield and the advanced take-off airfield and dispersal area of Khairouan [*sic*]" and "[b]y 22 June . . . operational air training [had] ceased altogether." In summary, the report concluded, at least "two weeks of the most valuable training time was lost" because of this movement, especially that time that had been tentatively set aside for pilot and navigator drop zone location training, radar employment training, and two regimental training drops.[110] This tug-of-war between those who wanted to use troop carrier units as logistical assets versus those who wanted them for training and operations was a problem, first experienced in the build up for HUSKY, that would plague the 82nd throughout the war. After the war, Ridgway made note of this constant diversion of troop carrier aircraft from their primary airborne mission.

> They [the pilots and navigators] had the skill and the guts all right. All they needed was training. Throughout the war, the 82nd and the 52nd were handicapped by the fact that they didn't get much chance to train

> together. As soon as a combat operation was over, everybody from Supreme Headquarters on down started grabbing these troop carrier wings for other purposes. They'd put them on a milk run somewhere, hauling cargo, and they never got sufficient practice in the precise formation flying that was so essential to the success of an airborne operation.[111]

In Sicily, this lack training time would have disastrous results.

Eventually, the troopers of the 82nd settled into their new temporary home in and around Kairouan. Training was limited to the studying of air photos, maps, and sand tables of the objective area as well as the last minute issuance of material and equipment for the operation. Though generally remembered by 82nd veterans more favorably than Oujda and Marnia because of the shade offered by the olive groves in which they set up their tent cities and the more temperate wind off the Mediterranean which made the nights tolerably cool, Kairouan offered its own brand of unpleasantness. For security reasons the troopers could not be housed inside Kairouan so they had to bivouac outside the town, amongst a multitude of Muslim graves.[112] According to one account

> [b]odies were interned [*sic*] only two feet below the surface of the ground and each tomb featured an air-conditioning vent that was to serve as an escape route for evil spirits that might have inhabited bodies of the faithful. Unfortunately, and much to the discomfort of those nearby, evil spirits weren't the only elements to escape through the vents and the air constantly reeked with the odor of departed Moslems.[113]

As D-Day approached, there was a palpable increase in the tension felt among the ranks of the division. According to Ridgway, "[b]y take-off time for Sicily, the men were so lean and tough, so mean and mad, that they would have jumped into the fires of torment just to get out of Africa."[114] Gavin, keyed with the congeries of emotion common among soldiers who are to see their first combat confided to his diary "[w]e are in for one hell of a fight. I love the prospects but feel as scared as I did on my first jump. It is going to be exciting."[115] Veteran John McNally, writing to his sister well after the invasion of Sicily was over and he could tell the tale without censor perhaps best summarized the surreal sensations that engulfed the troopers of the 82nd before their first test of arms. He described the scene of the division's last parade, and the beauty of his words is worth quoting at length.

> It was in Africa that our division held its last review before combat. For us, there never will be another review quite like it. We knew instinctively that it was to be our great day.
>
> Picture a great, empty, dusty stretch of land in the desert. At one side was the reviewing stand, brilliant with the blues and reds and greens of the massed colors—flags of America, France and England. Before it the long lines of paratroopers stood motionless in the shimmering heat, in that awe-inspiring silence of an entire division standing at attention. The great silence was broken only by the drone of the fighter planes overhead, circling back and forth, spreading their protecting wings over the field.

> Then came a burst of martial music and down the long field they marched, rank after rank, battalion after battalion strong in their pride and youth—boots gleaming in the sun, flat-waisted, sure of themselves. The dust boiled around their marching feet and the guidons swooped forward as they passed the stand. The line of generals receiving the review stood motionless—Eisenhower, Patton, Giraud, DeGaulle, Ridgway. The drums beat out the march and the cymbals crashed as the trumpets rose to a climax. There was no cheering crowd, no waving handkerchiefs—just the Division, almost lost in the empty expanse. It was our greatest moment. Sometimes I think the men who marched there for the last time that day are the real winners, with this, their brief, bittersweet moment of glory.
>
> Experiences like these are contained in the word 'Africa' for me.[116]

And so, having been hardened by Africa's heat, the division stood ready for its first test of fire.

Chapter Six Notes

[1] Janney, *Richard Mott Janney,* 67.

[2] Albert N. Garland and Howard McGaw Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1965; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1993), 4.

[3] Ibid., 6. Churchill estimated that the Germans would likely move four to six divisions into Italy at the mere threat of continued Allied operations in the Mediterranean.

[4] Marshall quoted in Ibid., 11.

[5] Ibid., 8.

[6] Arthur Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide: A History of the War Years Based on the Diaries of Field-Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), 449.

[7] Ibid., 449-450.

[8] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 10. The American focus on the primacy of shipping tonnage was further underscored by Lieutenant General Brehon B. Somervell, the Commanding General, Army Services of Supply, who "estimated that once the Mediterranean was cleared of enemy forces the Allies would save 1,825,000 tons of shipping in the first five months." This, to the Americans, was a much more important goal than eliminating Italy from the war. Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 8.

[9] Brooke diary entry for 22 January 1943 from Bryant, *Turn of the Tide*, 457.

[10] Brooke quoted in ibid., 454-455.

[11] Eisenhower was somewhat put out with having been saddled with the British committee system of command and drafted a memo to Marshall "demanding a continuation of the centralization of command in his own person" with which he was more familiar and which he thought had worked so well during Operation TORCH. He was subsequently persuaded by his Chief of Staff, Major General Walter Bedell 'Beetle' Smith not to send the memo and thenceforward begrudgingly accepted the command arrangement in the interests of Anglo-American unity. Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 10-11.

[12] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 52-53.

[13] Ibid., 56.

[14] D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 87.

[15] Headquarters, U. S. Seventh Army, "Report of Operations," 1 October 1943, p. a-3 to a-4, Copy in the Department of History Library, U. S. Military Academy, West Point, NY; D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 75-79; Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 58. Force 141's initial plan was based on a concept that had been forwarded by the British Joint Planning Staff of the Imperial General Staff and which had been approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff at Casablanca. The timing of the landings changed as the plan evolved, but the concept of sequential landings remained until Montgomery's intercession.

[16] Montgomery quoted in D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 79 and 82.

[17] According to D'Este, Montgomery "considered Alexander's role was to meet his logistical requirements, to act as a buffer with those who would otherwise distract his attention, and to command with the very loosest rein, all of which Alexander obligingly did." D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 100.

[18] Montgomery quoted in Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 61.

[19] Martin Blumenson, ed., *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, Company, 1974), 235. These quotes are from a transcript of a 29 April 1943 meeting attended by Alexander, Patton, Tedder, and Cunningham. Montgomery was too busy to attend so he sent Lieutenant General Sir Oliver Leese, his XXX Corps commander in his stead. Leese presented Montgomery's plan to the group.

[20] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 6. Browning had also commanded the British 1st Airborne Division, which was slated to support Montgomery's Eighth Army during Operation HUSKY, a point not lost on Ridgway.

[21] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 66-67.

[22] Headquarters, U. S. Seventh Army, "Report of Operations," p. a-3.

[23] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 65 and Breuer, *Geronimo,* 58.

[24] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 115.

[25] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 67.

[26] Patton diary entry for 22 May 1943 from Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 254.

[27] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 115. These figures would change slightly up until D-Day because of aircraft maintenance as well as the arrival of additional or replacement aircraft in theater.

[28] Headquarters, U. S. Seventh Army, "Report of Operations," p. d-1.

[29] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 105-108.

[30] Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 341.

[31] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 91-92 and John C. Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean, 1942-1945*, U. S. Air Force Historical Study, no. 74 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: U. S. Air Force Historical Division, Research Studies Institute, 1955), 41-48, passim.

[32] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 97-105.

[33] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 29.

[34] Gavin Diary, 29 April 1943.

[35] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 28-32 and Langdon, *"Ready,"* 8-9.

[36] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 63.

[37] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 33 and Langdon, *"Ready,"* 9. The *Jean Bart* was destroyed by the U.S. battleship *Massachusetts* during a naval engagement that occurred in the initial hours of the invasion of North Africa the previous November.

[38] Margaret Bierbaum, ed., *As Ever, John: The Letters of Col. John V. McNally to his sister, Margaret McNally Bierbaum, 1941-1946* (Fairfield, CT: Roberts Press, 1985), 13.

[39] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 9.

[40] Starlyn R. Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion* (n.p., 1998), 48. In *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, Blair reports a similar incident as related to him by the division's chief of staff, Doc Eaton. Eaton told Blair that while settling into his tent that night, he turned on the radio and heard Axis Sally proclaim " 'Welcome to Africa, Matt Ridgway and your bad boys.' " See Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 71.

[41] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 65 and Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 38-42. The 80th Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion comprised six firing batteries, three of which had 37mm anti-tank guns and three of which had .50-caliber machineguns.

[42] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 71; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 9; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 36. A 'forty and eight' was a French railcar designed to hold either forty men or eight horses.

[43] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 9; Wayne Pierce relates a very similar story about an encounter between German POWs and 325 troopers in *Let's Go!,* 38.

[44] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 38.

[45] Buck Dawson, ed., *Saga of the All American* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Hoffman Publishing Company, n.d.), n.p.

[46] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 12.

[47] Janney, *Richard Mott Janney,* 69.

[48] Kroos to Blair, 17 June 1983.

[49] Shaker quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo,* 61.

[50] James A. Gray to Clay Blair, 8 August 1984, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Gray, James A.," USAMHI. Gray was the commander of the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment when it arrived in North Africa, but was relieved of command by Gavin before the Sicily jump for going absent without leave.

[51] Kroos to Blair, 17 June 1983.

[52] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 12.

[53] Gavin Diary, 18 June 1943.

[54] Dan McIlvoy, "Medical Detachment, 505th Parachute Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division in World War II," World War II Veterans Survey Project, Box "82d Airborne Division, 505th PIR (2)," Folder "McIlvoy, Dan (M.D.) 505th Parachute Infantry Med. Det.," USAMHI.

[55] Information on the training conducted in North Africa from Memorandum, Headquarters, Fifth Army Airborne Training Center, "Report of Airborne Operations, 'Husky' and 'Bigot,' " 15 August 1943,

p. 3, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Invasion of Sicily, intelligence reports, organizational and operation plans, after action report + inquiry of friendly fire losses, maps," USAMHI. This report was written by Lieutenant Colonel Billingslea, who was at the time assigned to Mark Clark's Fifth Army Headquarters and acted as an airborne observer. Later, he was transferred to the 82nd and served as commander of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment.

[56] Edwin M. Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A" 505th Parachute Infantry (82nd Airborne Division), Airborne Landings in Sicily 9-24 July 1943 (Sicily Campaign) (Personal Experience of a Company Commander),* 10 November 1947, p. 6, Donovan Research Library, Fort Benning, Georgia.

[57] Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 6.

[58] Headquarters, Fifth Army Airborne Training Center, "Report of Airborne Operations," 4. Billingslea's comments about the field artillery stemmed from his observation that "[t]he artillery range was not altogether satisfactory it being too restricted" and was not attributed to the failure of the division's artillerymen themselves (page 3). See also James P. McGinty Diary, 382-INF(505)-0.3.0 "Exec's Diary—1st BN, 505th Para Inf, 17 May-9 July 43," Box 12459, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[59] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 65.

[60] McGinty Diary, 3 June 1943 and Langdon, *"Ready,"* 13.

[61] McGinty Diary, 5 June 1943 and Gavin Diary, 9 June 1943.

[62] Gavin Diary, 9 June 1943.

[63] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 28. The 82nd sustained two non-human jump injuries while in North Africa as well. Major Mark J. Alexander, the executive officer of the 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, was given the task of conducting tests to determine if mules could be safely dropped by parachute so that, once in Sicily, the artillerymen of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion would have a means by which to transport their howitzers and ammunition. After purchasing two mules from a local Arab, Alexander and his "test board" fitted them with forty-eight-foot parachutes, coaxed them aboard an aircraft, and took off. Once they were at the right drop altitude the mules were blindfolded and pushed out the door. Unfortunately, the experiment proved unsuccessful as both mules broke their legs upon landing and had to be destroyed. Six week later, the troopers "would learn firsthand that Sicily had more mules per square foot than nearly any other country in the world." William B. Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily: Allied Airborne Strike, July 1943* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983), 7. Information on the mule drop is also contained in Langdon, *"Ready,"* 13-14 and Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 66.

[64] Matthew B. Ridgway to Maxwell Taylor, 22 April 1943, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "CHRONO FILE: SICILY," USAMHI.

[65] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 88-89.

[66] Headquarters, U. S. Fifth Army Airborne Training Center, "Report of Airborne Operations," 3.

[67] Ibid., 4.

[68] Gavin Diary, 29 May 1943.

[69] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 12.

[70] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 8-9 and McGinty Diary. So real did the Allies perceive the threat from Spanish Morocco that Clark's Fifth Army had drawn up a contingency plan, Operation BACKBONE II, that called for the seizure of that portion of Spanish Morocco adjacent to the Straits of Gibraltar as well as

key terrain in eastern Spanish Morocco that would deny access of enemy troops to the Allied lines of communication. The concept of the operation called for the use of the 82nd Airborne Division to seize a variety of potential targets, to include the cities of Tanger and Melilla. See Memorandum, Headquarters U.S. Fifth Army, "Mission for 82nd Airborne Division," 11 May 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[71] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 28.

[72] Ibid., 26-27.

[73] Ernest F. Fisher, "Evolution of US Airborne Doctrine," *Military Review* 46, no. 5 (May 1966): 71.

[74] Gavin Diary, 16 May 1943.

[75] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 70.

[76] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 16-21. Scott, a West Point officer, became very unpopular because of his continual harassment of the other officers in the regiment for trivial matters. According to Pierce, Scott "told the doctors who daily inspected the mess halls that if one water bug was found (and they had better find one!), the company commander in charge of the mess hall would receive a letter on which he would be required to reply by endorsement, explaining what he was going to do to prevent a recurrence of the water bugs." The water bugs, continued Pierce, "were firmly entrenched in the large cracks in the mess hall floor. The time spent on these 'reply by endorsements' after a hard day in the field preparing to defeat the German Army, seemed to sidetrack the officers from their mission." After leaving the 325th, Scott went on to command a regiment in the 99th Division in Europe.

[77] Dickerson to Blair, 20 September 1983.

[78] Pierce to Blair, 4 October 1983.

[79] Gavin Diary, 16 May 1943.

[80] Ridgway, interview, 15 December 1971. Gavin was four years older than Tucker and had assumed command of the 505th about four months earlier than Tucker did. When Tucker took command of the 504th he was thirty-one years old, perhaps the youngest regimental commander in the Army at the time.

[81] Melvin Zais, "Glimpses of Gavin," The Melvin Zais Papers, Box "Family Papers, Correspondence, Including Barrie Zais, Mitchell Zais, LTG James Gavin," Folder "Glimpses of Gavin," USAMHI.

[82] Kroos to Blair, 17 June 1983.

[83] Zais, "Glimpses of Gavin."

[84] H. L. Covington, *A Fighting Heart: An Unofficial Story of the 82nd Airborne Division* (n.p.: Ted Davis, 1949), 31.

[85] Edwin Sayre to James M. Gavin, 15 September 1970, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Letters to & from Col. Edward [*sic*] Sayre, Remembering Sicily Operations, file page including # of planes (C-47) for Operation Husky," USAMHI.

[86] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, n.d., p. 5, Folder "82nd Airborne Division—WWII After Action Report: Sicily," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, North Carolina and Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 91-98 passim.

[87] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 5. In addition to the 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment and the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, Gavin's combat team also comprised B Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion; detachments from the 82nd Signal Company and the 307th Airborne Medical Company; and personnel assigned to the air support party and prisoner of war interrogation teams.

[88] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, Field Order No. 1, 23 June 1943, 382-0.3, "82nd A/B Div, Synopsis of Opns in Sicilian Campaign," Box 12345, Record Group 407, NARA II. Capitalization in original.

[89] The official designation of this unit changed several times. Originally the 504th Parachute Infantry Battalion, it later became the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment and finally the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, the name it retained throughout the war. See Devlin, *Paratrooper,* 678, note 2. The three jumps included a botched attempt to seize Tafaraoui airfield, just south of Oran, Algeria, on D-Day of Operation TORCH; a second, uncontested jump onto Youk les Bains airfield near the Tunisian border; and a small, three-plane jump during which thirty men attempted, unsuccessfully, to blow a railroad bridge near El Djem, Tunisia.

[90] Edson D. Raff, *We Jumped to Fight* (New York: Eagle Books, 1944), 18.

[91] Browning's letter to Yardley is reproduced in William P. Yarborough, *Bail Out Over North Africa: America's First Combat Parachute Missions, 1942*, 2nd ed. (Williamstown, NJ: Phillips Publications, 2000), 150.

[92] Matthew B. Ridgway to Major General Geoffrey Keyes, 25 May 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI. General Keyes led the planning effort for Operation Husky for Patton.

[93] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 34.

[94] Ibid., 33.

[95] The deception scheme included Operation MINCEMEAT, a ruse made famous in the book and subsequent movie by the same name, *The Man Who Never Was* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1953). While working for MI5's XX Committee, Ewen Montagu, the book's author, devised a scheme whereby a corpse dressed as a Royal Marine officer carrying top secret dispatches to Alexander washed ashore in Spain. The dispatches, opened and passed from Spanish to German authorities before being returned to the British, ostensibly, 'unopened,' pointed to Allied landings in Sardinia and the Peloponnesus.

[96] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 77. Interestingly, Guzzoni had never even visited Sicily before assuming command of its defense.

[97] Ibid., 46-47 and 82-83.

[98] Ibid., 79-80.

[99] Frido von Senger und Etterlin, *Neither Fear Nor Hope: The Wartime Career of General Frido von Senger und Etterlin, Defender of Cassino*, trans. George Malcolm (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989), 128.

[100] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 80-81.

[101] Ibid., 81.

[102] Ibid., 86-87.

[103] Senger, *Neither Fear Nor Hope*, 132.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., 132-133.

[106] Conrath quoted in Albert Kesselring, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring*, trans. William Kimber, Ltd. (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989), 161.

[107] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 87.

[108] Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 161.

[109] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 28.

[110] Headquarters, Fifth Army Airborne Training Center, "Report of Airborne Operations," 5.

[111] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 60-61.

[112] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 51.

[113] William D. Mandle and David H. Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment: April 1943-July 1945* (Paris: Draeger Frères, n.d.), n.p.

[114] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 66.

[115] Gavin Diary, 6 June 1943.

[116] Bierbaum, *As Ever, John*, 37.

Chapter Seven
A Self-Adjusting Foul Up

Regardless of anything that may go wrong on an operation, if the small unit commander knows his job, his mission, and the missions of other units in the operation, and has the physical and mental courage to try to accomplish the mission, regardless of the obstacles that may confront him, the over-all operation will be a success.

Edwin M. Sayre[1]

Friday, 9 July 1943, D-minus-one, began an hour earlier than usual for the troopers of Gavin's 505th Parachute Regimental Combat Team, yet just as they had done since arriving in North Africa, the men crawled from their pup tents, washed, shaved, and then filed into the mess tents for breakfast.[2] After breakfast they started drawing their equipment. When outfitted, each paratrooper carried his individual weapon with bayonet, a secondary weapon, an assault knife, an entrenching tool, 168 rounds of ammunition, one 3.5-pound 'Hawkins' antitank mine, four fragmentation grenades, one D-ration and one K-ration, a gas mask, a first-aid kit with morphine syrettes, a jump rope, escape kit, blanket, extra socks, underwear, and personal hygiene items. According to Captain Edwin Sayre, all officers also received Benzedrine tablets for their use as required.[3]

The troopers then took down their tents, packed everything they would be leaving behind in their 'A' and 'B' bags, and turned the bags in for storage. They then packed their mussette bags, checked their equipment one last time, and relaxed as best they could. Those responsible for loading the equipment bundles in the 'para-racks' trucked to the airfields, attached their loads to the planes, checked the release mechanisms, and then returned to the by then deconstructed camp where they, too, relaxed and prepared their individual equipment. The officers and noncommissioned officers went over their missions, checking sand tables, maps, and aerial photographs one last time. Dinner was served at 1600 hours after which all the troopers, laden with the impedimenta of war, boarded trucks for the departure airfields. There they drew their parachutes, adjusted leg, shoulder, and chest straps, and lounged beside the planes that would carry them to combat. Just prior to emplaning, they received the current password: a challenge of "George" was to be answered with "Marshall."[4] Each trooper also received a mimeographed message from Colonel Gavin.

Soldiers of the 505th Combat Team

Tonight you embark upon a combat mission for which our people and the free people of the world have been waiting for two years.

You will spearhead the landing of an American Force upon the island of SICILY. Every preparation has been made to eliminate the element of

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 157 through 164.

> chance. You have been given the means to do the job and you are backed by the largest assemblage of air power in the world's history.
>
> The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of every American go with you.
>
> Since it is our first fight at night you must use the countersign and avoid firing on each other. The bayonet is the night fighter's best weapon. Conserve your water and ammunition.
>
> The term American Parachutist has become synonymous with courage of a high order. Let us carry the fight to the enemy and make the American Parachutist feared and respected through all his ranks. Attack violently. Destroy him wherever found.
>
> I know you will do your job
>
> Good landing, good fight, and good luck.[5]

About thirty minutes before takeoff the aircrews arrived and began their pre-flight checks. This was the signal for the paratroopers to board, which they did by pushing and pulling one another through the narrow fuselage door on the plane's port side (so laden with equipment were they that there was no way a trooper could climb up the short ladder and through the aircraft door under his own power).[6] At the appointed time, the first planes revved their engines, taxied to their designated spots, and started taking off in three-ship elements at thirty-second intervals. Once in the air, the planes formed up in V-of-V formations with nine planes in each V. Although the prop wash from so many planes created a dust storm "so thick it could be seen five miles away and [caused] many pilots . . . to take off [*sic*] on instruments" the departure went without incident.[7] According to a Fifth Army observer, "[t]he planning for the final takeoff had been complete and thorough," and its execution "went off like clock-work."[8] It was the last event of that evening, and for several days thereafter, about which that claim could be made.

Although in his message Gavin assured his troopers that every preparation had been made to eliminate the element of chance he did not share this assurance. It would have seemed a long time ago had Gavin thought of it as he boarded his plane for Sicily, but a few days before departing Fort Bragg for North Africa, he had had a conversation with Ridgway, the details of which he confided to his diary. Ridgway had made some oblique remarks about the 82nd's role in upcoming operations, "something to do with crossing the Mediterranean," for which there would be about six weeks in theater to train before being committed. Reflecting on this at the time, Gavin thought that although the division "could use considerably more time before combat," he felt that eventually the best thing might be to experience "the real thing" followed by "a lull to absorb the lessons and lick our wounds."[9] By 9 July, the real thing was upon him and the training time in North Africa had gone by much too quickly, with great chunks of it having been eaten up entertaining curious dignitaries, battling the heat and winds, and bowing to the demands of logistics and dysentery.

For Gavin, the last two weeks before the invasion had been a blur. He complained in his diary (complaining openly would have done absolutely no good) that the movement from Oujda to Kairouan was much too "time consuming and [would] take just about all [the remaining] training time." He was right. There was no time for unit training in

those final two weeks so Gavin turned his attention to other things—details, seemingly minor, that in their totality might provide just the advantage his troopers would need once they were in combat. He wrote about these details in his diary, no doubt so he could remember them for the next mission, but also perhaps to exorcise his feeling that time had run short and there still seemed so much that had yet to be done. He wrote of the importance of obtaining sufficient quantities of cork so that his troopers could blacken their faces; of getting his hands on the metallic crickets he had been told would facilitate night assembly; of insuring that everyone had one of the new trench knives that could be used for close-quarters combat; and of somehow procuring enough olive-drab patches to cover the red, white, and blue divisional insignia each trooper wore proudly on his left shoulder. He had to send some of his troopers, in full combat regalia, to the 1st and 45th Infantry Division encampments to familiarize those soldiers with the distinctively different uniforms of American parachutists.[10] Luminous tape suddenly became important so that equipment bundles could be marked and quickly found on the drop zone. There was a concern that not every trooper had an entrenching tool so more had to be acquired and distributed, one per man. And commanders were to ensure that every soldier was wearing a set of two dog tags. No explanation for this requirement was necessary.[11] Lieutenant Colonel Arthur F. 'Hard Nose' Gorham, the 1/505th's commander, had a good idea. Each trooper should sew a strip of luminous tape on the cuff of his jump suit so that they could more easily find and identify one another in the dark. In the attack the tape could be easily covered up. Gavin ordered that it happen.[12]

In his last entry before D-Day, made two days before the jump, he wrote of the unit organization day that had been held the previous afternoon. Ten young steers and several sheep had been slaughtered and spitted. Four thousand liters of beer had been trucked in, "not quite enough" in Gavin's mind. He took the opportunity to speak with his troopers, both en masse and in smaller groups. In the privacy of his diary he wrote that he grew increasingly confident in the ability of his troopers to accomplish their missions. They were "enthusiastic and keen" he noted. He hoped that he had done everything he could, however, to prepare them for the upcoming fight.[13]

While Gavin was consumed with the final preparation of his combat team Ridgway and key members of his staff boarded the *USS Monrovia*, Vice Admiral Henry K. Hewitt's flagship from which command of the more than 1,700 craft, vessels, and ships of the Western Task Force transporting Patton's Seventh Army to Sicily would be exercised.[14] After getting underway shortly after 1700 hours, 6 July, Patton, whose headquarters was also on the *Monrovia* wrote in his diary of the helplessness he felt now that the grand machinery for the invasion of Sicily had been set in motion. "It is a moving sight," he wrote, "but over all is the feeling that only God and the Navy can do anything until we hit the shore. I hope God and Navy do their stuff."[15] Ridgway, an equally devout man just a few cabins away, would have added solicitations for the Army Air Force, for it was on its skill that he now had to depend.

The 226 C-47s of the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing carrying Gavin's 3,405 troopers began taking off at 2010 hours, 9 July and were in the air by 2116 hours. Each plane was capable of carrying fourteen to eighteen combat loaded paratroopers and had a maximum cargo load of 5,000-6,000 pounds. A modified version of the civilian Douglas DC-3 airliner, the C-47 was a sturdy aircraft. It could takeoff from a dirt airstrip less than 3,000 feet long, had a range of 1,500 miles (with extra fuel tanks), could cruise at 150 miles per

hour, and slow down to a drop speed of 110 miles per hour without sacrificing air stability. It could also fly shot full of holes and on one of its two engines for up to 100 miles. It was to be the principal Allied troop carrier aircraft throughout the war, during which over 10,000 were produced and put into service.[16]

Early weather reports had indicated winds of gale intensity off the southern coast of Sicily and although they somewhat subsided as the day wore on they remained high throughout the night.[17] Gavin received a last weather update while sitting aboard his plane that was revving for take off. A harried airman stuck his head in the door and yelled " 'the wind [was] going to be thirty-five miles an hour, east to west.' " Since there was not much he could do about it Gavin simply acknowledged the message and prepared himself for a hard landing.[18]

Just seconds before takeoff a second soldier appeared in the fuselage door, this one shouldering a huge barracks bag, which he promptly heaved through the door onto the aircraft floor. " 'I was told to give this to you or your S-1 (personnel officer),' " he shouted. As Gavin later related:

> I asked, 'What in the hell is it?'
>
> He replied, 'They are prisoner-of-war tags. You're supposed to put one on every prisoner you capture, and be sure to fill it out properly.'
>
> This was no time for argument, when we were within seconds of roaring down the runway, so I merely replied, 'O.K.'
>
> About an hour after departure the personnel officer, Captain Alfred W. Ireland, threw them into the Mediterranean.[19]

Once aloft and in formation, the pilots were to fly a strictly circumscribed air corridor over Tunisia to their first checkpoint (called the initial point), the Kuriate Islands, about forty miles to the southwest of the departure airfields. From the Kuriates, the route ran almost due east for approximately 200 miles, past the small island of Linosa and on to Malta, where beacons were to be lit to aid the pilots with their navigation. From Malta, the route dog-legged northeast for sixty-two miles to a point just southwest of Cape Passero, a prominent peninsula at the eastern end of Sicily's southern shore. At Cape Passero, the pilots were to turn left and parallel Sicily's southern shore for thirty-five miles to Punta Secca, a much less prominent peninsula, where they were to make a half-right and continue paralleling the coast for an additional fourteen miles. This would bring them to the mouth of the Acate River, five miles east of Gela, where they were to finally turn inland, locate Lake Biviere, their last checkpoint, and then head for one of four closely grouped drop zones. In order to avoid enemy detection the transports were to fly low, no higher than 500 feet, and were to maintain radio silence.[20] This exceedingly complicated route had been agreed to just three days before the invasion and only after several weeks of argument between the airborne and air corps commanders on one side and the naval planners on Eisenhower's Allied Force Headquarters staff on the other. The argument arose because of the reluctance of naval authorities to give positive assurance that the vessels under their command would hold their fire if they saw planes approaching them at night. The reason for this reluctance was that "while fire from men-of-war could be controlled, fire from the many miscellaneous merchant vessels and small craft included in the various convoys was impossible to control."[21] What resulted was an

over-water air route designed to avoid the possibility of fratricide that required flying and navigational skills that the pilots and navigators of the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing simply did not have. Writing after the war, Ridgway maintained that the route was so difficult that even "at war's end we still could not have executed [the] first SICILY mission, AS LAID ON, at night and under like conditions."[22]

At the very outset all 226 planes, forming an air column about 100 miles long, were on time and on target. But the sun set just after they left the North African coast and it was not long thereafter that the aerial formations completely disintegrated. Since a pilot could only see the dim wingtip lights on the surrounding planes if he maintained his ship's place in formation, even the tiniest deviation was cause for considerable concern lest there be a mid-air collision (remarkably, there were none). Were a pilot to suddenly discover that he could no longer see the lights on the planes around him he had two options: He could try making a blind correction to regain his place in formation or he could take the safer alternative and fly on by himself. Most chose the latter. Adding to the pilots' difficulties were the rougher air currents at the prescribed low altitudes as well as the salt spray, which clouded windshields and further obscured vision. Finally, the stiff wind blowing out of the northwest that Gavin had been informed of just before takeoff wreaked havoc with the navigators' time-distance calculations (the only way to stay on course when flying over water). Well before Sicily had been reached, therefore, "a large part of the expedition was off route and off schedule."[23]

The 52nd Troop Carrier Wing air column was composed of five subordinate troop carrier groups, which were, in order of flight, the 61st, the 314th, the 313th, the 316th, and the 64th.[24] The 61st Group, carrying Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Kouns's 3/504th, hit Malta twelve minutes ahead of schedule, although by that time several planes were already straggling (two of the stragglers eventually got so lost they missed Sicily altogether and made landfall on the toe of Italy). As the 61st neared Sicily, only the group commander was still on course and his formation of nine planes dropped their paratroopers about one mile east of the intended drop zone. Meanwhile the remainder of the 61st Group had become so disoriented that it scattered the main body of Kouns's battalion over a fifty-mile swath of southeastern Sicily. Six of those planes dropped their loads so far behind enemy lines that the troopers remained unaccounted for for over a month.[25]

The second group in the column, the 314th carrying Major Edward C. 'Cannonball' Krause's 3/505th, did the best job of navigation that night, hitting all of its checkpoints until reaching the Acate River. At the Acate, however, the group turned inland and promptly got lost. Only one flight of planes, carrying I Company, dropped on its designated drop zone. The rest of the 314th turned back out to sea in search of familiar landmarks so that it could line up for a second pass. But the second pass was no better than the first and as a result most of Krause's troopers landed ten to fifteen miles east of their intended drop zone.[26]

The third, fourth, and fifth groups in the air column fared the worst: their V-formations lost any semblance of integrity well out to sea. Small, scattered, ad hoc groups of planes somehow formed up in the air and flew blindly toward Sicily with most never even sighting the critical checkpoint of Malta. Captain Edwin Sayre, the A Company commander of 'Hard Nose' Gorham's 1/505th was flying with the 313th Troop Carrier Group, the third in the order of flight, when he suddenly realized they were lost.

> The first thought that all was not going just as planned came when the Island of MALTA was not sighted on schedule. At about the time the planes should have passed over MALTA, the formation ran into heavy headwinds and then began breaking up into small groups. The nine-plane formation carrying the Battalion Commander's group and the first and second platoons and Company Headquarters of Company 'A' managed to stay together. At the time when the planes were supposed to be nearing the Drop Zone, anti-aircraft fire could be seen coming up on the left side of the planes. This could mean only one thing: the planes were coming in on the wrong [eastern] side of the Island.[27]

Twenty-three of the 313th's planes, having obviously made landfall on Sicily's eastern shore as well dropped their paratroopers well into the British zone and over fifty miles from the designated drop zone.[28] But Sayre's group of nine-planes continued on.

> The Flight Commander realized this [that he was on Sicily's eastern shore] and the formation was turned back out to sea in order to make another attempt to find the correct Drop Zone. After about an hour, a lake [Lake Biviere] which was the final check point was sighted. The planes turned over the lake in the direction to bring them over the Drop Zone in about two minutes. After proceeding about one minute and a half, the formation met heavy anti-aircraft fire and began breaking up. One minute later the green 'go' light was given and the parachutists left the planes.[29]

As things would turn out, this was a most fortuitous drop.

The fourth group in the order of flight, the 316th Troop Carrier Group, carrying the regimental headquarters, the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, and the engineers, signal and medical personnel, fared the worst of all.[30] Things went awry early in the flight. According to Gavin, who was flying with the 316th's commander,

> I had memorized the route and times and knew we should pass the island of Linosa at 2230. But 2230 came with no sign of Linosa. I thought perhaps we were slightly off course and [a] correction would be made before reaching Malta. Malta was a big target and certainly would not be missed. The lights would be on, so I expected no difficulty in recognizing it.[31]

But at 2300 hours, "there was no sign of Malta." The lead navigator believed they had missed the island altogether, having been blown off course by the wind, so the group made a left-hand turn to compensate. This adjustment brought them over some naval convoys bound for Sicily and provided "an anxious moment, since we knew that we would probably draw fire if we flew over any ships [they did not draw fire]."[32] Finally, around midnight, they saw land.

> We turned and flew parallel to the coast for some time[, recalled Gavin]. All troops prepared to jump and we turned in toward the coast. I had memorized all the terrain surrounding the landfall we should have passed. We were supposed to fly over a large lake [Lake Biviere], the one I had already flown over a month before [Gavin and two of his battalion commanders had accompanied a bombing raid bound for Sicily in order to conduct an aerial reconnaissance of the objective area under moonlight conditions similar to that expected during the drop]. But we saw none of the recognizable landmarks. It was almost time to jump. Finally the green light in the plane came on and out we went.[33]

By this time Gavin's plane was all alone, the formation having broken up and scattered. Since they had not seen any of the landmarks they had no idea where they were. They were not even certain that the ground below them was Sicily.

Before takeoff, Gavin had issued standing orders that everyone was to jump, that no one, unless wounded or dead, was to return to North Africa. Reed Satterstrom of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion was aboard a plane in Gavin's group that night and took desperate measures to comply with those orders.

> 'When it came time to hook up, my snap wouldn't open on my static line. Gavin had said that everyone had to jump—no one could return. I handed my static line to the plane crew chief and told him to HANG ON TO IT—he braced himself against the bulkhead—and out I went. But my hand was on my reserve! Later, they came looking for me—to hear the story—they wanted to give that air force guy a medal!'[34]

Enemy antiaircraft fire, or 'flak,' also convinced many paratroopers that leaving their planes to fight on the ground was a much safer prospect than staying aboard. Though flak was generally not a problem for the first and second groups of the air column, as the enemy recovered from the surprise and realized that the planes flying overhead were transports disgorging paratroopers and not bombers on their way to more lucrative targets on the Italian mainland, succeeding groups were subjected to increasingly heavy enemy fire. Captain Ireland remembers

> 'standing at the door with Jim [Gavin], and the flak was starting to come up all around us. The pilot asked us if we needed to make another pass. I said, 'If we go around again we may not make it.' He said, 'I think you are right.' We got the green light and we got out.'[35]

John H. 'Beaver' Thompson, a war correspondent from the *Chicago Tribune*, was also aboard a plane in Gavin's group. According to Thompson, as soon as he exited

> 'the sky . . . broke out in a brilliant white, just like it was high noon under a blazing sun. A C-47 had apparently been struck by shellfire, bursting into a fiery ball. How many of our boys had gone to their deaths? I wondered. The sight sickened me.'[36]

All told, eight of the 226 planes carrying Gavin's troopers to Sicily were shot down that night, all after having dropped their paratroopers, while ten more sustained some sort of damage. Despite Gavin's orders three planes, which had become hopelessly lost, returned to North Africa without dropping.[37]

Though it, too, was hopelessly lost, the last group in the air column, the 64th Troop Carrier Group with Major Mark Alexander's 2/505th aboard remained together. Before departing, Alexander made the 64th's commander, Lieutenant Colonel John Cerny, promise that "if they didn't do anything else, they'd drop us all together."[38] Cerny kept his promise, and though hopelessly lost the 64th maintained the integrity of its formation and dropped Alexander's battalion, en masse, on a plateau approximately twenty-five miles from the designated drop zone.[39]

At 0125 hours, 10 July, the first planes returned to their North African bases (the last planes did not stagger in until 0620 hours). Initial reports were optimistic. Estimates were that approximately eighty percent of the paratroopers had been dropped on the correct drop zones. In the words of one official historian, it was "a prodigious overestimate."[40] Of the 3,405 men who emplaned the night before, fifty failed to make the jump and the rest were spread throughout the width and breadth of southeastern Sicily. Thirty-three planes had dropped well inside the British sector and another 127 dropped in front of the U.S. 45th Infantry Division, well to the east of the objective area. Only fifty-three planes dropped as intended, in front of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division, and of those only nine dropped on the correct drop zone. It was, to say the least, an inauspicious beginning.[41]

Besides the scattered drop, another potentially disastrous factor weighing against the success of the airborne assault was the heightened state of readiness of the Axis forces on the island. General Guzzoni had been receiving reports since early July that indicated there was a strong possibility that an Allied invasion of Sicily was not far off. Axis intelligence reports indicated that ninety percent of the available Allied troops in the theater, sixty percent of the Allied air forces, and ninety-six percent of Allied landing craft were concentrated in the central and western Mediterranean, directly threatening Sicily. Axis meteorologists predicted that the first ten days of July would bring prime conditions for an amphibious assault. On 4 July, Guzzoni received word that twenty-five merchant vessels were staging in North African waters. The next day, his intelligence noted an increase in the number of Allied hospital ships, from two to sixteen, a sure indication that a major operation was pending. On the night of 5 July, Axis reconnaissance planes spotted some Allied convoys on the move, prompting Guzzoni to warn his subordinates of this " 'very serious and decisive indication' " that an assault was imminent. Having already issued preliminary alert orders for his forces on Sicily, on 8 July Guzzoni upped the alert posture. Sicily's southern ports of Licata, Porto Empedocle, and Sciacca were to be prepared for demolition. Meanwhile *Comando Supremo* sent word that the harbors at Trapani and Marsala were to be rendered useless. The next day, as Allied forces were steaming toward Sicily, Axis reconnaissance planes once again spotted them and radioed back that the invaders were finally on the move—by 2200 hours that night, the defenders of Sicily were on full alert.[42]

Despite Axis preparations and a complete loss of unit integrity, however, once battle was joined it was the aggressiveness of Gavin's troopers and the initiative of the junior

leaders that carried the day. Attacking the enemy wherever they found him, their actions sewed fear and frustration in the Axis ranks and, more importantly, chaos and confusion in the Axis headquarters. An unforeseen benefit of the scattered drop was that it magnified the effect and made the size of the airborne assault appear much larger than it was. So many reports came into Axis headquarters from so many different quarters that it was assumed that there were many more paratroopers on the island than there truly were. At one point, Radio Rome announced that " '[f]ive and perhaps 10 American parachute divisions landed in Sicily ahead of troops landing by sea.' "[43] Italian and German soldiers on the ground came to believe that they were literally surrounded by American paratroopers, a belief that was a direct result of the paratroopers' penchant to emerge from the darkness on hit-and-run raids and then melt away. Axis plans were consequently thrown into disarray as their units either could not, or would not move to their designated defense positions for fear they would be ambushed. Frustration ran high, a feeling that is perhaps best illustrated by the comments of an officer from the *Hermann Göring Division* who proclaimed after being captured, " '[o]ur people will cut the throats of these parachutists if they capture them. . . . It has been unsafe to use the roads for the past forty-eight hours.' "[44] In Axis eyes, all of southeastern Sicily appeared was ablaze with countless running firefights.

Even those paratroopers who found themselves in the British zone of operations quickly adjusted. Working either independently or in conjunction with British and Canadian forces they attacked the nearest enemy locations, thereby accruing for the Eighth Army unexpected, yet welcome reinforcements. One group of about seventy-five paratroopers under the command of Lieutenant Charles E. 'Pinkie' Sammon, the intelligence officer of the 2/505th, assembled in a farmhouse about two miles outside of Avola, a city of some 22,000 on Sicily's eastern shore that was well within the British zone. Instead of skirting Avola and making for the coast where they could link up with the British forces they knew were landing there, Sammon led his small band on an attack directly into the city. The got as far as the town square before getting pinned down by heavy fire. Their attack, however, diverted the attention of the enemy defenders so once forces from the British 50th Division did land they were able to enter Avola from the opposite direction without having to fight their way in. When the British got to the town square and discovered there were already American paratroopers there they were astounded. " 'What the bloody 'ell are you Yanks doing 'ere,' " queried one British Tommy.[45] Buoyed by the unexpected reinforcements, the British took Sammon and his paratroopers under their wing and together they cleared the rest of Avola, thereby securing one of the 50th Division's primary assault objectives. A second group of American paratroopers had a similar experience. Dropped near Pachino on Sicily's southeastern tip, they assembled under the command of Major William R. Beall, the executive officer of the 3/504th, and fought for two days alongside the Canadian 1st Division until being returned to American control.[46]

Other groups of paratroopers, unable to immediately link up with any seaborne elements, moved to key terrain, seized it, and held until relieved. Approximately eighty paratroopers, mostly from the G Company, 3/505th, assembled on their commander, Captain James P. McGinty and set up a defensive position around a 200-yard-long, two-lane concrete slab over the Acate River. There, they held off several Axis counterattacks

for two days before being relieved by elements of the 45th Division, a battalion of which had this crude bridge as its D-Day objective.[47]

Another group of about fifty troopers under Lieutenant Peter J. Eaton, a mortar platoon leader in the 3/504th, was moving toward their battalion's assault objective when they spied two trucks towing two antitank guns moving toward the invasion beaches. Eaton quickly organized a hasty ambush, killed the Italians inside the trucks, and took the guns. So armed, Eaton decided to hold in place and establish a roadblock in order to delay, as best he could, any follow on Axis forces from reaching the beachhead. He did not have long to wait. Thirty minutes later a battalion-sized column of Italian infantry approached the roadblock. In the lead was an Italian tankette (a small Italian armored vehicle that generally mounted two machine guns). Unfamiliar with the sighting mechanism on their captured antitank guns, the troopers manning them simply bore sighted the guns and knocked out the tankette while the rest of Eaton's ad hoc force raked the infantry column with small arms fire. The Italians dispersed in total confusion.[48]

Forty troopers under Lieutenant H. H. Swingler, a former intercollegiate boxing champion assigned as the 505th Regimental Headquarters Company commander, assembled on some high ground overlooking the Santa Croce Camerina-Vittoria road, a key thoroughfare that led right to the 45th Division's landing area. At daybreak, Swingler discovered that near his position was an intersection defended by four pillboxes. Reasoning that if he could take the pillboxes he could turn them into a strongpoint from which to defend against Axis troop movements, Swingler devised a plan of attack. Using the bulk of his force as a decoy to draw fire and divert the attention of the enemy, Swingler and fifteen troopers followed a covered and concealed route to get as close to the pillboxes as they could. Once in position, they attacked each pillbox in turn, using captured weapons from one to suppress the fire from the others. Within two hours the intersection was in American hands. The entire enemy garrison had been either killed or captured. Swingler and his troopers remained at the strongpoint and defended it until the next day when elements of the 45th Infantry Division driving inland from the coast relieved them. By that time Swingler's troopers had collected a fairly large haul of prisoners, including four officers and about 100 enlisted men from an Italian field artillery battalion who, when they encountered the American paratroopers, surrendered en masse.[49]

Major Mark Alexander's 2/505th, the only battalion of Gavin's combat team that was dropped intact, jumped right into the middle of some Italian pillboxes. A stiff firefight ensued that lasted until mid-morning on 10 July. When the firing stopped the pillboxes had been knocked out and Alexander had assembled most of his battalion as well as a significant portion of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, some 475 troopers all told. Unlike many who dropped into Sicily that night Alexander also knew where he was, and that was too far away from his assault objective to get there on time. He decided, therefore, to march toward the coast, reasoning that he could attack the enemy's shore defenses from the rear. He would also be in position to link up with the American amphibious force once it got ashore. Alexander and his troopers got all the way to the seaside village of Marina di Ragusa before encountering any enemy forces. There they came upon another Italian pillbox complex. Not wanting to send his infantry against such a hardened target, Alexander turned to the artillerymen with him to put the one 75mm pack howitzer they had been able to salvage into operation. Directing the fire of

the gun, for which there were only thirty rounds, was Lieutenant Colonel Harrison B. Harden Jr., the commander of the 456th. Firing round after round into the pillboxes with uncanny accuracy, the 456th's gunners compelled the Italian naval contingent manning the complex to surrender en masse. Alexander then moved his force, along with more than 100 prisoners, to some high ground north of the village to await the amphibious forces (figuring, no doubt, that the pillboxes had not escaped the attention of Allied planners, he did not want to be anywhere near the pillboxes once the pre-invasion bombardment commenced). Once on the high ground Alexander's force began taking fire from some snipers firing from some nearby cliffs. Pinned down and unable to move in any direction, Alexander tried contacting a British cruiser he could see just off the coast for fire support. When he was unable to establish radio contact he had one of his lieutenants flash the cruiser a request for help using Morse Code. Alexander knew he had gotten through when several rounds fired from the cruiser passed overhead sounding like "a bunch of freight cars" and exploded against the hillside above. "We didn't have a peep out of that hillside the rest of the night," recalled Alexander.[50] The next day, 11 July, Alexander moved his force north and west toward Santa Croce Camerina, one of the 45th Infantry Division's objectives. His troopers, who had captured enough arms and ammunition at Marina di Ragusa to outfit another battalion, had also somehow procured a mélange of donkeys, donkey carts, and wheelbarrows in which to transport their haul. Moving along in what must have looked like a heavily armed gypsy caravan, Alexander's force reached Santa Croce Camerina later on that morning. Immediately Alexander ordered an attack and, in conjunction with the 1st Battalion, 157th Infantry Regiment of the 45th Infantry Division moving in from the coast, reduced the town by mid-morning (curiously, it was not until the two battalions met inside the town that they realized they were attacking the same objective). With so much combat power at his disposal and more than enough arms and ammunition, Alexander next marched on Vittoria, one of the larger towns in the 45th Infantry Division's sector. Vittoria fell to Alexander's gypsy band later on that day. All told, in its first two days of combat Alexander's force cleared a significant portion of the area fronting the 45th Infantry Division's invasion beaches. As a result the 45th got ashore with much fewer casualties than expected and was able to proceed inland much faster than anticipated.[51]

The aggressiveness of Sammon, Beall, McGinty, Eaton, Swingler, and Alexander and the troopers they led, as well as scores of other officers and noncommissioned officers heading small bands of paratroopers scattered throughout Sicily, threw the pre-planned Axis contingencies for the defense of the island into disarray. In their first day of combat these men proved the worth of the tough, realistic training they had received. A report by Kesselring's headquarters published ten days after the invasion noted, " '[p]aratroops have greatly delayed the advance of our own troops and have inflicted considerable casualties on our troops. Small groups of parachutists who had jumped into overgrown country made themselves noticed in a particularly unpleasant manner.' "[52] One of those paratroopers was T. Moffatt Burriss, a mortar platoon leader in the 3/504th, who perhaps best described the manner by which he and his brethren visited their brand of "unpleasantness" on their Axis foe.

> Despite the fact that many of us landed many miles from the drop zone, the invasion proved the wisdom of our paratrooper training. From the

> beginning, we were taught to fight in small groups and behind enemy lines. Our purpose was to disrupt communication lines, divert the enemy's attention, and create general havoc in areas where we were least expected to be. When we were isolated from the main force, we didn't panic. We regrouped in twos and threes, then proceeded to seek out and attack the enemy. Avoiding superior forces that might have overwhelmed us, we nonetheless fought aggressively and killed many times our own numbers. We didn't fight by the book or wait to receive orders from headquarters. In an atypical situation, we improvised, as we had been taught to do.[53]

Reflecting on the results of the scattered drop, Gavin wrote that he had heard someone call it "the best executed Snafu in the history of military operations." He commented that perhaps a better term would be "Safu" for "Self-Adjusting Foul Up."[54]

The first Allied troops to hit the island were actually British, members of the 1st Airlanding Brigade of the British 1st Airborne Division conducting their glider-borne mission to seize the Ponte Grande, a bridge one and a half miles southwest of Syracuse.[55] Landing about an hour before any of Gavin's paratroopers, this British assault alerted the island's defenders to the start of the invasion, yet because he was still unsure of the intent behind this glider assault (an intent made even more difficult to glean given the fact that this assault, too, was scattered over a large area), Guzzoni did nothing more than issue a proclamation exhorting his soldiers and the citizens of Sicily to resist the enemy wherever they found them. The American parachute assault confirmed in Guzzoni's mind that the landings would occur, as expected, in Sicily's southeastern region, yet he was still uncertain about the exact whereabouts of the Allied main effort. Hence, he called his corps commanders, warned them about what he felt were impending amphibious landings somewhere in southeastern Sicily, and ordered the destruction of the pier at Gela. He still refrained, however, from ordering any large-scale troop movements to counter the landings beyond local anti-parachute patrols. It was only with the dawn and the arrival of the Anglo-American invasion convoys that there emerged from Guzzoni's *Sixth Army Headquarters* any definite counterattack plans. In the interim precious hours had been wasted which allowed American paratroopers and their British glider-borne comrades to recover from the misdrops, form up, and terrorize the countryside. These groups also completed the destruction of the Axis communications network. Scant to begin with, Axis communications were first reduced by Allied air attacks and then almost completely severed by the thousands of paratroopers and glidermen ranging the countryside that cut every wire they came across.[56]

Guzzoni eventually realized that the Allies were attacking at several points simultaneously but since he was not strong enough to counterattack everywhere at once he focused on those locations he felt most critical: Syracuse, Gela, and Licata. Syracuse's defenses, he felt, were already strong enough. Moreover, nearby were both the *Napoli Division* and a German task force composed of elements from the *Hermann Göring Division* and the *15th Panzer Grenadier Division*. Combined they would suffice to hold off the British landings for a while. The American landings along the southern coast were another matter. Although he did not have many mobile forces in the immediate area of the landings, Guzzoni figured that if he could gather enough combat

power and mount a coordinated attack on the invasion beaches before the Americans were firmly ashore, he could push them back into the sea. To this end he ordered his *XVI Corps* to take operational control of the *Livorno Division*, the bulk of the *Hermann Göring Division*, and two Italian mobile airfield defense groups in the area and mount a coordinated attack on the American invasion beaches east of Gela.[57] But so complete was the devastation wrought on Axis communication links on the island that Conrath, commander of the *Hermann Göring Division*, never received word that he was under *XVI Corps* control and that he was to counterattack at Gela in coordination with his Italian allies. In fact, he never even received word of the invasion from Guzzoni's headquarters at all; it was Kesselring's headquarters on the Italian mainland that informed Conrath that the invasion was on, this through wireless.[58]

Bent on making good his boast about going after the Allies, Conrath spent the night of 9-10 July preparing his force and putting in train his own plan to attack toward the beaches just east of Gela. His concept was relatively straightforward. In order to facilitate a speedy movement toward the invasion beaches Conrath divided that portion of the *Hermann Göring Division* he still had under his command (which was the bulk of the division) into two reinforced regimental combat teams and sent them southward toward the beaches along two parallel routes. Conrath's eastern, infantry-heavy column, comprising two truck-mounted infantry battalions, an armored artillery battalion, and a company of seventeen Mark VI Tiger tanks was to advance to the beaches by way of Biscari. The western, tank-heavy column comprising two tank battalions (with a total of ninety Mark III and Mark IV tanks), two armored artillery battalions, and armored reconnaissance and engineer troops functioning as infantry, was to advance to the beaches by way of Niscemi. Conrath's intent was mount a coordinated attack that would have the columns converging on the invasion beaches from the northwest and northeast simultaneously. To do this, he designated two attack positions—one for each column—just north of the beaches where the columns would halt, prepare for combat, and coordinate their actions before jumping off for the final assault. Although he did not know it at the time, Conrath had aimed his columns right at the center of the American sector. If successful, he would cut the American sector in half and be in a position to roll up the other American divisions landing to the east and west. Both columns began moving shortly after 0400 hours, 10 July, with a planned attack time of 0900 hours. Almost as soon as they started moving, however, they became targets for Allied fighter-bombers and innumerable small groups of paratroopers laying in ambush. As a result, the scheduled 0900 attack time came and went and Conrath's columns were still some distance away from their respective assembly areas.[59]

Meanwhile, the Italian attacks on Gela moved forward as well, but because Guzzoni and his *XVI Corps* commander were unable to coordinate the overall effort, Allied forces in the path of the attackers met each advance individually and defeated them piecemeal. One of the first Allied units to come into contact with the attacking Italian forces was a small band of paratroopers from the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

Six plane loads of paratroopers which composed the headquarters element and 1st and 2nd Platoons of Captain Edwin Sayre's A Company, 1/505th landed in a vineyard about four miles south of Niscemi.[60] Upon landing there were taken under fire from some nearby machine guns located around the fairly large villa called Casa del Priolo. The vineyard, which offered ample cover and concealment for Sayre's paratroopers also

slowed their assembly so at 0230 hours, having rounded up but a handful of men, Sayre decided to take matters into his own hands. He selected twelve troopers and divided them into two-man teams. He told them they were to crawl as close to the enemy machine guns as possible and then wait for him to initiate the attack. When he threw his grenade, they were to throw theirs and then follow up with an assault. If things went awry, they were to immediately break contact and withdraw. "With the pop of the fuze [*sic*] on the first grenade," Sayre wrote after the war,

> the teams threw their grenades. By the light of the grenades thrown and by about twenty which the enemy threw back, it could be seen that the troops were attacking not dug-in machine guns as supposed, but heavy concrete and stone pill boxes. A very hasty withdrawal to the rendezvous point was made. One man was slightly wounded, but none were lost.[61]

Sayre waited until daybreak before mounting a second sortie so he could get a better look at what he was up against, and what he saw was a formidable strongpoint consisting of a ring of pillboxes surrounding a two-story stone farmhouse. He had no idea how many enemy soldiers there were inside. Since his last attack, however, he had gathered about him more of his troopers, some forty-five in all, who brought with them two 60mm mortars, fifty rounds of mortar ammunition, and two light machine guns. Setting up half his force, the mortars, and the two machine guns in positions from which they could suppress the enemy defenses with fire, Sayre led the other half in the assault. He jumped off at 0530 hours, leading the charge "carrying one hand grenade in his teeth and another in his left hand, and with his carbine in his right hand."[62] Thirty minutes later the position was his, as were forty Italian and ten German prisoners (all noncommissioned officers from the *Hermann Göring Division*) at a cost of four wounded Americans (one of whom later died of his wounds).

Casa del Priolo dominated the road running south from Niscemi toward the invasion beaches, the same road down which Conrath had dispatched his tank-heavy western column (although Sayre did not know that at the time). The very presence of such a strong fortified position along the road indicated that keeping the road open was important to the enemy. Sayre therefore decided to turn the tables, occupy Casa del Priolo, and use what his troopers had captured—twenty machine guns and approximately 50,000 rounds of ammunition—to defeat or delay any enemy forces that might happen by. Later that morning Sayre's battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel 'Hard Nose' Gorham, and an additional thirty paratroopers joined Sayre at the villa. Gorham approved of Sayre's decision and opted to stay. At about 0700 hours, 10 July, the advance guard of *Mobile Airfield Defense Group E*, one of the two mobile airfield groups Guzzoni had told his *XVI Corps* commander to use to mount an attack on the invasion beaches, approached Casa del Priolo from the north. Led by a point element consisting of two motorcycles and a Volkswagen, the paratroopers let the Italian scouts get well within their position before they opened fire and killed or captured them all. Alerted by the gunfire, the main body of the Italian column halted and then deployed two companies of infantry against the strongpoint. Again the paratroopers held their fire and allowed the Italians to get within 200 yards of their positions before opening up with every weapon at their disposal. The fire wreaked havoc in the Italian ranks. Those not killed or wounded

were either pinned down or fled. Only the appearance of a heavy assault gun that began systematically shelling the Sayre-Gorham strongpoint forced the paratroopers to cease their fire and take cover.[63]

Just minutes before spotting the enemy column, Sayre had sent out a reconnaissance patrol with orders to find the designated drop zone. In the midst of the Italian shelling, the patrol reported back that the drop zone was unoccupied and that the regimental objective, the key intersection that commanded the roads just north of the invasion beaches (Objective 'Y'), was about a mile and a half to the south and was being defended by about twenty Italians with heavy machine guns inside a fortified position. Since their present position had become untenable and the regimental objective was still in enemy hands, Gorham and Sayre decided to withdraw and move on Objective 'Y.' They would take their prisoners with them, if only to carry their wounded paratroopers. But when Sayre told them to pick up the stretchers, some of the prisoners balked. According to Sayre, the Germans in the group "just popped their heels together [and shouted] '*nein*, *nein*.' " Not in the mood to debate, Sayre turned to one of his noncommissioned officers and, pointing to what he thought was the ranking German said, "would you convince that son of a bitch that we really need for him to pick up those stretchers?" The American sergeant "just jabbed [the German] in the ass with his bayonet a pretty good jab, about two inches [in, and] everybody laid hand and picked up the stretchers real quick."[64]

Delayed by their intransigent prisoners-turned-stretcher-bearers, the paratroopers were just about to pull out when six Italian tanks appeared on their right flank and forced them to ground. With nothing heavy enough to knock out a tank, Gorham, Sayre, and the troopers with them prepared to be overrun. Suddenly the lead tank burst into flames. Then a second tank blew up and the remaining four reversed course and pulled back. Another wandering band of paratroopers who were marching to the sound of the guns had come upon the tanks just as they were about to make their run at the Sayre-Gorham group. They took out the lead tanks with a bazooka but were then pinned down by machine gun fire from the remaining four. They held out as long as they could, buying time for their fellow paratroopers to withdraw, but were eventually taken prisoner after having expended all their ammunition.[65]

Gorham and Sayre made for some high ground that overlooked Objective 'Y.' When they got there they could see that there was a small American spotter plane directing naval gunfire onto the objective, but a passing German fighter eventually shot it down. With no means of communicating with the ship that had been delivering the fire, Gorham and Sayre decided on a ruse. From their position on the high ground they could see that the naval rounds had landed about 200 yards in front of the enemy positions and that, given the lay of the land and the flat trajectory with which naval gunfire was delivered, there was no way that the ship delivering the fire would ever be able to hit the objective, even if the spotter plane had not been shot down. They were betting, however, that the enemy would not know this so they sent one of their Italian prisoners to the strongpoint with a message: surrender or they would direct the fire onto the Italian position. According to Sayre, "[t]he prisoner was evidently an eloquent speaker for in a very few minutes after he entered the first pill box, all occupants of the three pill boxes in the area came out with their hands up."[66] Gorham, Sayre, and the fewer than 100 paratroopers with them moved in and occupied the positions. So it was that at 1045 hours, 10 July, the primary assault objective of Gavin's regimental combat team was in American hands.

Shortly thereafter, scouts from the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division linked up with the Sayre-Gorham group at Objective 'Y.' With no orders forthcoming from his chain of command, Gorham attached his small force to the 1/16th, which fell in around the crossroads and started digging in.[67]

Oblivious to what was happening to his Italian allies, Conrath was meanwhile struggling to get his two-pronged advance back on track. Already well behind schedule, it was not until 1400 hours that the columns reached their assembly areas. After a short pause, they then moved out for the beaches in attack formation. Jumping off from its assembly area just south of Niscemi, the western tank-heavy column moved south along the same road that *Mobile Group E* had taken earlier. American forward observers from the 1st Infantry Division spotted the column as it passed Casa del Priolo and took it under fire with artillery and naval gunfire. Impervious to anything but a direct hit, the armored column slowed but did not stop and continued south toward Objective 'Y.' When the column neared the crossroads, however, the column commander deployed his infantry to secure the surrounding hills in an apparent attempt to take out the American forward observers that were directing the annoying artillery fire. The American infantrymen from the 1/16th, reinforced with Gorham and Sayre's paratroopers, were lying in wait. Employing as much automatic weapons fire as they could muster, the Americans decimated the German infantry, and without this vital support for his tanks the German column commander halted the advance. Furious at this timidity Conrath immediately countermanded the halt order and told the column commander to get moving. But the second advance was a half-hearted affair; without his infantry the column commander was chary of charging blindly into an area that might very well conceal antitank weapons. Furthermore, the American artillery and naval gunfire on the column had increased in intensity, and had gone from annoying to deadly. Eventually even Conrath saw the futility in continuing the attack and ordered a withdrawal back north where the column could regroup beyond the range of the American guns.[68]

A few miles to the east Conrath's infantry-heavy column had run into equally resolute resistance. Constant harassment by roving bands of paratroopers who took advantage of the terraced terrain that restricted the maneuver of the huge Tiger tanks slowed this column's pace to a crawl. When Conrath learned of this he relieved the column commander and ordered a renewed push with increased vigor. Although initially successful (it overran one American infantry battalion and captured the battalion commander) this column, too, was brought to a halt. Elements of the 45th Infantry Division, pushing inland, ran headlong into the lead elements of the eastern column near Highway 115 and in the ensuing firefight the Germans broke and ran.[69]

Hence, by mid-afternoon on D-Day the Axis attacks on the American beachhead east of Gela had been turned back and the key intersection at Piano Lupo, Objective 'Y,' was firmly in American hands. All over southeastern Sicily, Gavin's paratroopers were cutting wires and ambushing anything they came across causing confusion in the Axis rear and rendering any attempt at a coordinated attack impossible. This was fortuitous for although the 1st and 45th Divisions were able to establish firm footholds on their respective beaches, the scene on those beachheads was one of clutter and confusion. Heavy minefields in the 1st Division's sector forced the first waves to hold on the beach until combat engineers could clear paths inland and as follow on waves arrived the congestion mounted. Furthermore, the American tanks were having problems getting

through the sand, leaving those 1st Division elements that had pushed inland without armor support.[70] On the 45th Division beaches, the scene was much worse. Having landed in an area dominated by soft sand dunes through which there were few useable exits, "the five assault beaches were cluttered with masses of stranded landing craft and milling groups of men and vehicles soon after the initial landing."[71] Beach masters worked throughout the night to get the mess cleaned up but with daybreak the beaches were still cluttered and extremely vulnerable.

That night, after having regrouped his division, Conrath traveled to the *XVI Corps* headquarters. It was only then that he learned that Guzzoni had attached the *Hermann Göring Division* to the corps and that Conrath was to coordinate his movements with those of his Italian allies. In consonance with those orders Conrath and his Italian counterparts worked out a plan for a renewed attack to commence 0600 hours, 11 July. The intent of the plan was to mount another converging attack on the American beaches just east of Gela. To accomplish this the *Livorno Division* was to advance on Gela from the northwest while Conrath's *Hermann Göring Division* simultaneously attacked from the northeast. In preparation for the attack, Conrath split his division again, this time into three columns (it is likely he did this in order to avoid presenting American forward observes with such large targets). Two tank-heavy columns were to advance southward to the west of the Acate River while a third, infantry-heavy column advanced southward along the river's east bank. The point of aim for all three columns was Piano Lupo (Objective 'Y'), where they would reform before jumping off for the final assault on to the southern shore.[72]

Realizing that the fighting on D-Day had been a near run thing and that he had to secure more breathing space between the front lines and the vulnerable beaches, Major General Terry de la Mesa Allen, the 1st Division commander, ordered his units to push inland.[73] As a result of this order Gorham and Sayre's paratroopers, which were still fighting as part of the 1st Division, were swept into the path of Conrath's panzers.

The advance northward from Objective 'Y' commenced at dusk on 10 July under the command of the 2/16th commander, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Crawford. Crawford enlisted the paratroopers as his lead element, figuring that since they had come from the north they were already familiar with the terrain. Once underway (it took some time for Crawford to get his battalion ready to move and, according to Sayre, Crawford "was very apprehensive of the attack because he had only one 57 MM gun for defense against the German armor which seemed to be concentrating to the front") the column advanced about a mile before darkness set in and Crawford gave the order to halt and dig in for the night.[74]

The advance brought the paratroopers back near Casa del Priolo, where they had fought their first engagement earlier that day. During that fight, Captain Sayre had dispatched a reconnaissance patrol under the command of a brand new second lieutenant. He told the lieutenant to find the intended drop zone, see if he could locate any other paratroopers, and report back, but when the patrol returned the lieutenant was missing. Having now returned to the same area, Sayre wanted to see if he could find the lieutenant whom he feared was wounded and alone. After his men dug in for the night, Sayre and eight paratroopers probed to their front and miraculously found the lieutenant's body. According to Sayre

> his [the lieutenant's] gun was still in his holster so evidently he was caught totally by surprise. And I thought well I'll just take that gun with me, might need it a little later. I took the gun out and just as I got it out evidently the same machine gun that got him opened up on me. They missed me by about two feet and I started running for some cover.[75]

Sayre and his patrol withdrew to a dry streambed and were preparing to return to their own lines when an enemy patrol unwittingly entered the same trench. A wild mêlée broke out and after some intense hand-to-hand combat, during which Sayre was firing with the dead lieutenant's .45 in one hand and his own in the other, the Germans withdrew, leaving three dead behind. There were no American casualties.[76]

Shortly after daylight, 11 July, Crawford again enlisted 'his' paratroopers to lead an attack on a small hill about half a mile to their front. Within an hour, the paratroopers and accompanying infantrymen took the hill against light resistance. Meanwhile, somewhat farther north, Conrath's attack had jumped off at 0615 hours. The western-most tank-heavy column ran into another infantry battalion from the 1st Division, decimated one of its companies, and then turned east toward Piano Lupo. The middle tank-heavy column, attacking down the Niscemi-Piano Lupo road, ran headlong into Gorham, Sayre, and the paratroop-infantry force.[77]

According to Sayre, six tanks came straight down the road while about twenty more, most likely from Conrath's western-most column, which had been traveling cross-country to converge on Piano Lupo, hit them from the left rear. Some of the 2/16th's infantrymen, raw replacements who had yet to experience intense fighting, broke and ran while the remainder, "[a]bout one third of the [infantry] battalion and all of the parachutists stuck to their positions." Soon the tanks were directly on top of the Americans. "The troops there," wrote Sayre, "were fighting back desperately with rocket launchers, rifle grenades, machine guns, rifles, pistols and even throwing hand grenades." Two officers from the 2/16th managed to get the lone 57mm antitank gun into position and knocked out one German tank while Colonel Gorham took out a second tank with a bazooka. Although they could not stop the tanks, the paratroop-infantry force compelled the center column to slip to its right in an attempt to bypass them. There, on "a wide open flat piece of terrain about three miles from the beaches" known as the Gela Plain, the western and center columns merged and continued their attack to the coast. But the delay of their advance caused by the stubborn resistance of the paratroopers and accompanying infantry allowed sufficient time for a blocking force of artillery, infantry, and armor to meet the onrushing panzers, which got within 2000 yards of the beaches before sustaining such heavy losses that they were forced to withdraw back up the Niscemi-Piano Lupo road. In doing so, the panzers once again passed through Gorham's paratroopers, who had in the meantime withdrawn under orders back to Piano Lupo. Gorham and his troopers took out four more tanks before the fighting died down.[78]

Several miles to the east, on a slight rise known as Biazzo Ridge, Conrath's third, infantry-heavy column ran into another group of paratroopers who had been assembled there by their indomitable regimental commander, Jim Gavin, whose Sicilian odyssey began far to the east.

When he landed Gavin had absolutely no idea where he was. He had with him six other troopers, equally as lost, including Captain Al Ireland, his regimental personnel

officer and Captain Benjamin Vandervoort, his operations officer. Following Gavin's lead they began moving west toward the sound of the guns. After traveling for about an hour, avoiding scattered small arms fire and gathering lost paratroopers as they moved, Gavin's group came upon their first enemy soldier, a lone Italian who was whistling and singing as he drunkenly staggered down a darkened road. Gavin hid his group behind a stone wall and when the enemy soldier got close yelled "*Alto*" in his best Italian. Stunned by the unexpected challenge, the Italian froze while "Vandervoort rushed through an opening in the wall with a .45 in one hand and a knife in the other."[79] Surrounded by American paratroopers in full battle garb and blackened faces, the enemy soldier surrendered without a fight. After questioning their prisoner in an attempt to discern their location, they then forced him under a shelter-half where Vandervoort, flashlight in hand, attempted unsuccessfully to " 'work the guy over to get more information.' "[80] Seeing that any further persuasion would be for naught and anxious to push on, Gavin decided they would have to bring their prisoner along. Vandervoort, who had taken an intelligence course, once again took matters into his hands.

> The idea was to take the belt out of the prisoner's trousers and to cut the buttons off his fly so that he would have to hold up his trousers when he walked.
>
> Van[dervoort] put his .45 in its holster, pressed his knife against the Italian's chest, and said 'I'll take care of the bastard.'
>
> The Italian was muttering, '*Mamma mia, Mamma mia*,' over and over again. His concern was understandable. The moonlight was shining on the knife blade, and it looked as though it were a foot long. He took off his belt and dropped it. Then Van[dervoort] went into Phase Two of the operation and reached for his fly with one hand, bringing the knife down with the other.
>
> A scream went up that could be heard all the way to Rome.[81]

The Italian grabbed the knife and a furious struggle ensued during which the prisoner escaped, blood dripping from his hand. By that time Gavin was "madder than hell" and asked a sheepish Vandervoort " '[w]hat in the hell did you think you were doing?' " Before Vandervoort could answer, Gavin turned on his heel and continued on his way, fearful that the struggle, the screams, and the manic Italian would attract forces his small band could not handle.[82]

Gavin remained oriented on the bursting shells on the horizon, sure that that was where he needed to be. He set a blistering pace and some of the men who had joined the group during the night simply could not keep up because of injuries they had sustained during the jump. According to Ireland,

> 'Gavin was the kind of person . . . he had one thing on his mind and that was to get to his objective. Anything that was going on was done to try to get to that point. He wanted to speed it up, so we took off and we cut communications wherever we could find them; we were all working on it.'[83]

By daybreak, 10 July, only five men still remained with Gavin. During their journey they had stopped a couple of times at some farmhouses attempting to get information about their whereabouts, but to no avail because "the natives were terrified and would hardly talk."[84] So they continued on until they crested a small rise and bumped into an Italian platoon on patrol. A burst of small-arms fire brought down the paratrooper on point and wounded a second. When they attempted to return fire, both Gavin's and Vandervoort's carbines jammed so they were both reduced to firing single-shot. Ireland, meanwhile, picked up some of the slack with fire from his tommy gun, killing an Italian officer in the process. The action was short and intense, but despite their obvious numerical superiority the Italians had no stomach for the fight.[85] According to Vandervoort

> '[i]n the length of time it takes to fire two dozen aimed shots with a carbine, the Italians were driven to cover behind a stone wall. In the lull, we disengaged straight back, one at a time, the others covering. The colonel was the last man to withdraw from the position. . . . We were sweaty, tired and distressed at having to leave wounded behind. The colonel looked over his paltry . . . command and said, "This is a hell of a place for a regimental commander to be." '[86]

Following the firefight, Gavin pushed his diminished band on until mid-morning when he came across a maze of irrigation ditches on the side of a hill around which a thicket of underbrush had grown. Here, his group could find shade, cover, and concealment in an area inaccessible to armored vehicles and from which they had a good view of the surrounding countryside as they waited for nightfall, when they would continue their journey.[87]

When night fell Gavin mustered his men for another concerted push toward Gela. They soon came across a group of wounded paratroopers under the command of Lieutenant Al Kronheim and traded their morphine syrettes for functional M-1 rifles and ammunition before continuing on. At approximately 0230 hours, 11 July, Gavin and his small group made contact with an outpost from the 45th Infantry Division. It was not until then that they learned where they were—about five miles southwest of Vittoria, which, they also discovered, was in American hands. Gavin and his troopers made their way to the city, hoping they would find there a headquarters that could provide them a better picture of the overall battle. What they found instead were more paratroopers as well as three of the 456th's howitzers, all of which had participated in the taking of the town. Gavin told the troopers to start moving toward Gela. He then commandeered a jeep and with Vandervoort and Ireland in tow, sped westward on the coastal road connecting Vittoria with Gela.[88]

Not far out of Vittoria, Gavin came across more of his paratroopers, some 250 in all, mostly from the 3/505th, who were bivouacked "in foxholes in a tomato field and [were] just awakening."[89] Some troopers told him that Major 'Cannonball' Krause, the 3/505th commander, was also present so Gavin went to find him. Gavin found Krause "sitting on the side of a foxhole dangling his lower legs into the hole, no equipment, no security out." Krause told Gavin that "there were a lot of Germans 'up that way' toward where [the regimental] objectives were."[90] Gavin was dumbstruck. He could not believe what he was seeing from one of his battalion commanders, especially Krause, who was always

so 'gung ho' during training. The first thought that crossed Gavin's mind was to relieve Krause on the spot, but he reconsidered. Instead he told Krause to get his men up, get them organized, and start moving westward. Gavin then jumped back in his jeep and continued on his way toward Gela. Two miles down the road he came across forty soldiers from L Company, 180th Infantry Regiment of the 45th Infantry Division along with twenty airborne engineers from B Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Benjamin L. Wechsler.[91] The 45th Division soldiers told Gavin that there was a sizeable concentration of German troops on some high ground to the west. Undeterred, Gavin took his engineers in hand and, employing them as infantry, continued west on foot. Gavin, Vandervoort, Ireland, and the engineers had gone about a mile when they came upon a railroad station where a German motorcyclist and a German officer in a sidecar careered into their midst. As soon as they realized that they were surrounded by American paratroopers the Germans surrendered. According to an after action report, they "appeared to be quite disgusted with the lack of resistance being offered by the Italian troops, but refused to give any information regarding their own troops."[92] The German officer did, however, point to the insignia on his collar to indicate that "he was in the Medical Corps . . . and demanded that he be released at once."[93] Gavin, however, noticed that there were grenades in the sidecar and "[r]easoning that an armed medic should not be let loose, . . . took the motorcycle and sidecar from him and started him to the rear on foot, disarming the driver also."[94]

The appearance of the German officer reinforced the report Gavin had just received about a large enemy force to his front. Before continuing therefore he instructed Vandervoort to head back in the direction from which they just come, hurry Krause's men along, and then find the 45th Division command post and inform the division commander, Major General Troy H. Middleton, of their situation. Gavin then deployed Wechsler's engineers in a skirmish line and pressed on toward the high ground to their front—a piece of ground known as Biazzo Ridge. A few hundred yards short of its crest the paratroopers began taking small arms fire. Gavin, who was up front, told his troopers to continue moving forward and maintain a steady stream of fire " 'because it [gave] the impression of a unit in strength coming at [the Germans].' "[95] As they neared the crest of the ridge, the enemy fire increased in intensity causing "a rain of leaves and branches as bullets tore through the trees, and there was a buzzing like the sound of swarms of bees."[96] Several paratroopers were hit, including Lieutenant Wechsler, but those that remained fought on, following Gavin's lead, and eventually dislodged the German defenders and gained control of Biazzo Ridge. By that time Gavin's force was too small and the enemy fire too intense to continue, so Gavin told his troopers to dig in and hold. The unexpected appearance of the paratroopers on Biazzo Ridge, however, diverted the attention of Conrath's infantry-heavy column commander, who instead of continuing his advance westward toward Piano Lupo, turned to meet this new threat to his flank and rear.

At 1000 hours, approximately twenty minutes after Wechsler's airborne engineers had taken the ridge, the 3/505th troopers Gavin had earlier rousted from their tomato patch arrived, albeit under the command of Captain William J. Hagan, the battalion's executive officer. Gavin met Hagan at the foot of the ridge and inquired after Krause. Hagan told Gavin that "[h]e went to the Headquarters of the 45th Infantry Division to tell them what was going on." Gavin "just couldn't believe it" but with no time to waste ordered Hagan

to have his troopers drop their packs and prepare to attack up and over Biazzo Ridge and on to the Acate River.[97] Sometime between 1030 and 1100 hours, Gavin gave the order to advance.

Hagan and his troopers passed through the engineers on the ridge and continued forward for about a mile against scattered enemy small arms fire before running into a sizeable contingent of German infantry supported by six Mark VI tanks, against which the paratroopers were defenseless. Gavin watched the 3/505th's advance from the top of Biazzo Ridge, but because of the smoke, dust, and vegetation he had had no idea what Hagen and his troopers were up against. He found out when wounded paratroopers, including Hagan who had been shot in the thigh, began crawling back. "They all told the same story," wrote Gavin after the war. "They fired their bazookas at the front plate of [the] German tanks, and then the tanks swiveled their huge 88 mm. guns at them and fired at the individual infantrymen."[98] Although Gavin had not yet seen the German tanks, he heard them as they overran the 3/505th and started moving toward the ridge. With him on the ridge was but what remained of Wechsler's engineer platoon and a small force of infantry he had dragooned from the 45th Infantry Division. Gavin started moving among his men, checking their fields of fire, and preparing them to defend in place. Just then a heavy mortar and rocket barrage hit the ridge, signaling the start of the German counterattack. Gavin was caught in the open. "I found myself lying on the ground bouncing from the concussion," he wrote later. "The best way to protect yourself from the concussion was to place your palms flat on the ground as though you were about to start doing pushups, and thus absorb the shock of the ground jolts."[99] When the barrage lifted he ran to his foxhole, only to witness a frightening sight, a huge German tank inching forward from behind a small group of buildings to the front of the ridge, trying to obtain enough room for the turret to swivel the 88mm gun in the direction of the defending paratroopers.

By that time one of the 75mm howitzers Gavin had discovered earlier that day in Vittoria had arrived in the area, but was still on the reverse (friendly) side of the ridge. According to Ray Grossman, one of the airborne artillerymen manning the gun, " '[w]ord came that the Germans had a Tiger tank across the ridge, and they were kicking hell out of our boys.' "[100] Jumping into action, the artillerymen manhandled their gun to the top of the ridge, "until they were plainly visible and could get a direct line of sight on the tank. Field artillery in the front lines, shades of Gallant Pelham at Fredericksburg."[101] The howitzer got off the first shot, which was short. Watching the scene from his front-line foxhole, Gavin then saw

> a tremendous explosion in front of the gun. The tank had fired and hit the ground just in front of the gun, knocking the troopers like tenpins in all directions. . . . The troopers got up and ran off like startled quail. A second later they realized, to their embarrassment, what they were doing, and they ran back to the gun. They fired one round that hit the tank, or the corner of the building. In the smoke and dust the tank backed out of sight.
>
> That was the last we saw of it.[102]

According to Grossman after hitting the tank, " 'lots of adrenaline was flowing, and we were cheering like we had just scored a touchdown.' "[103]

Meanwhile other tanks had started working their way up the ridge on Gavin's left. Two other airborne artillerymen, who had captured an Italian armored personnel carrier, rode up and over the ridge to meet them, hoping that by so doing they could effect a ruse that would stay the German advance by fooling them into thinking that there was American armor present. As they crested the ridge, however, they received a direct hit and the personnel carrier burst into flames, killing both men instantly. Shortly thereafter one of the regimental surgeons who was attempting to evacuate wounded from the battlefield drove his ambulance too far forward and this, too, was destroyed, though the surgeon escaped unharmed.[104] It was obvious that the Germans were close and that venturing forward to the enemy side of Biazzo Ridge meant almost certain death.

With their forces finally gathered at the base of the ridge, the Germans let loose with a full-throated attack. According to Ireland

> '[t]hey drove up five or six tanks and infantry; they were coming at us. They looked like they were the biggest tanks ever invented. I thought we had it when the Germans got up within fifty or sixty yards of the C[ommand] P[ost], but we held them off with a lot of heavy firing, and we used pack 75-mm howitzers to kind of slow them down.'[105]

Gavin had meanwhile withdrawn the few men he had with him to the friendly side of Biazzo Ridge and arranged them in a reverse slope defensive position. By doing so, his troopers were shielded from the direct fire of the attacking Germans, but sacrificed long-range observation and fields of fire and were therefore relegated to waging a close-in fight. The plan was to "engage the less heavily armored underbellies of the tanks when they first appeared at the top of the rise" and, if the tanks overran their positions, to remain in place and fight the accompanying German infantry.[106]

According to Ireland, after beating off the first German counterattack Gavin told him, " ' "We are staying on this goddamned ridge—no matter what happens!" ' "[107] Vandervoort, who had arrived back at the ridge with Hagen's force, suggested that Gavin at least move the command group back to a large culvert which afforded more protection from the constant mortar and rocket fire. Gavin refused because he was " 'dedicated to the belief that the commander's presence was an inspiration to the troops.' "[108] But he also knew that he urgently needed help so he sent Ireland back to the rear with the mission of finding either Middleton's division or Bradley's II Corps command post to get some reinforcements.

While Ireland was off seeking help the battle for Biazzo Ridge raged on and American casualties mounted. During this time, the most critical of the day, Gavin was constantly on the move, shifting reserves, checking on the few relatively light crew-served weapons he had (by the end of the day all three 75mm howitzers from Vittoria were in the battle as well as two 57mm antitank guns the paratroopers had borrowed from the amphibious troops), and encouraging his men to hold on. At one point Major Krause drifted back and told Gavin "that all of his battalion was killed, wounded, or pinned down and ineffective." Gavin angrily told Krause that they "were going to stay at the top of the ridge with what [they] had and fight the German infantry that came with the tanks." Muttering that the Americans "didn't have a chance" and would be finished if they tried to stay there, Krause drifted to the rear.[109] But Krause proved an exception that day. As

had their regimental commander other groups of paratroopers marched to the sound of the guns and joined Gavin and his stalwart defenders on Biazzo Ridge. Taking them in hand, along with everyone else in the area—clerks, cooks, truck drivers, as well as troops from the 45th Infantry Division—Gavin formed ad hoc squads and plugged the holes in his lines. Lieutenant Richard Janney, a communications officer in the 505th wrote that since none of his radios worked, his "radio operators were in the front lines, firing bazookas."[110] In this manner, Gavin and his band held off three German counterattacks.

Meanwhile, Ireland made his way to the base of the ridge, liberated a bicycle from a native and rode furiously toward the beach in search of help. A patrol from the 45th Infantry Division directed him back to the division command post where he found both Middleton and Bradley. When Ireland told them of the fighting going on at Biazzo Ridge, Bradley instructed Middleton to give him whatever he wanted, which was heavy artillery support, armor support, and a jeep with which to return to the fighting. Since it would take some time to round up the tanks and knowing that the Americans on the ridge needed help quickly, Ireland loaded a three-man forward observer party in the jeep and returned to the fight. When he returned, at about 1500 hours, the fighting was even more intense than when he left. Immediately the artillery observers went into action, bringing 155mm and naval gunfire to bear to the attacking Germans.[111] Ireland later described one of the forward observers as

> 'a fat guy who had never been under fire. But the shelling never fazed him. He leaped up, grabbed the radio transmitter from his operator, and gave coordinates to his guns back near the beach. I heard the big guy shout into the mouthpiece, "To hell with zeroing in! There's so goddamned many targets out there you can't miss! Fire for effect!" '[112]

The fire from the big guns eventually broke the back of the German counterattack and what remained of their infantry and armor withdrew. Biazzo Ridge was never again threatened. Gavin and the congeries of paratroopers and conventional infantrymen he had gathered about him had held off what turned out to be the biggest threat either the Germans or Italians could mount against the American beaches.

But Gavin was not content with a defensive stand. He wanted to bring the fight to the enemy. When he learned, at about 1800 hours, that Captain Swingler's group of paratroopers was on the road and headed his way, he began making plans for his own counterattack. While his newfound observers kept the Germans at bay with artillery and naval gunfire, Gavin organized an infantry-armor task force around Swingler's men and a company of Sherman tanks that arrived at about the same time. The attack jumped off at 2045 hours. Preceded by a heavy concentration of artillery fire, Gavin led Swingler's troopers and the accompanying tanks up and over the ridge. Seeing the tanks and paratroopers bearing down on them, the Germans reacted with heavy defensive fire, but Gavin pressed the attack and overran the German positions. Those Germans who were not killed, wounded, or captured broke and fled northward. During the fight Swingler single-handedly captured the division's first tank by crawling up beside a Tiger and killing the crew, who were inexplicably standing outside the tank, with a hand grenade. Having secured the entire ridge and recovered his dead and wounded, Gavin stopped the attack and organized a defensive position.[113] American losses were forty-three killed and

100 wounded. Besides Swingler's Tiger tank, the paratroopers also captured twelve 120mm mortars, two half-tracks, and took fifty prisoners. The Germans also left fifty dead on the battlefield.[114]

By dusk, all three of Conrath's columns were retreating northward toward what they believed was safe haven. But as one element in one of Conrath's tank-heavy columns discovered, it was not sound practice to let down one's guard in the presence of ubiquitous, highly aggressive paratroopers. About three miles southwest of Niscemi a group of 100 paratroopers under the command of Lieutenants Willis J. Ferrill and George J. Watts, both of the 3/504th, had prepared a strong defensive position in a large chateau on some high ground known as Castel Nocera.[115] Lieutenant Ferrill, the senior officer present, surrounded the position with Hawkins mines and had with him three machine guns, two mortars, and two bazookas, besides each trooper's individual equipment. At about 1300 hours, 11 July, a group of approximately 200 Germans halted on the road just below the chateau for a break. They had come from the south and were obviously tired. Ferrill's men held their fire until the Germans were off their vehicles and were lounging on the road. They then opened up with everything they had and in the furious battle that ensued, during which the Germans were reinforced by two tanks that shelled the American positions from some nearby hills, Ferrill's men inflicted over 100 enemy casualties at a cost of five Americans killed. According to one report, at one point "[t]here was a break in the battle [and] a German lieutenant, bearing a white flag, came up the hill to arrange a surrender, but when he saw that he was fighting American parachutists he refused to surrender and returned to his position."[116] This battle, which lasted until well after dark when the Germans broke contact and fled northward, was the last significant action of the day.

The *Hermann Göring Division*, the force that Guzzoni had counted on to form the backbone of his mobile defensive force, had been mauled.[117] In one day of fighting, Conrath lost over one-third of his tank strength. However, it was not until Gavin and his disparate group of paratroopers and infantrymen made their stand on Biazzo Ridge that Conrath admitted defeat. Guzzoni had already instructed him, following the losses sustained by the two western tank-heavy columns, to break off the attack and withdraw to positions around Caltagirone. But Senger disagreed and ordered Conrath to redirect the remnants of all three columns eastward so they could cut off elements of the 45th Infantry Division that had advanced inland and be in position for an attack on the British beaches the next day. Faced with these conflicting orders, Conrath initially sided with Senger, but when news of the defeat at Biazzo Ridge reached him he reversed himself and ordered the complete withdrawal of his division.[118] The 1st and 45th Infantry Division beaches had been secured and would never again face another serious ground attack.

After his stand at Biazzo Ridge, Gavin was still uncertain of the fate of the rest of his regiment. He commanded no more than the forces he had with him on the ridge and it would be days before his regiment assembled in any appreciable strength. But had he extrapolated from his own experience, he would have sensed that his paratroopers were paying a heavy price, especially as they faced an enemy for which they were wholly unprepared. Gavin had not known of the presence of German armor on the island. After the war he wrote, "there were supposed to be no Germans (except a few technicians) on the island" and became alarmed when, during his movement to Biazzo Ridge, he spotted

some knocked out German scout cars, a sure precursor, he thought at the time, to German armor.[119] As a result, Gavin felt a great sadness when, burying his dead, he discovered that "many of them had had pieces of bazookas ground up in them by tanks as they were crushed."[120] The warhead on the bazooka was simply too small to penetrate the thick German frontal armor, especially on the Tiger tanks which were impervious to anything the paratroopers could bring to bear. The next day the regiment suffered a momentous loss because of this when Colonel Gorham, attempting to replicate his tank-hunting success of 11 July, faced down a Tiger tank with his bazooka and was killed by a round from the tank's 88mm main gun.[121]

In North Africa, the rest of the 82nd hung on the combat reports filtering back from the battlefield and prepared for employment as needed. The call came on the morning of 11 July when, during the fierce fighting around Gela, General Patton ordered Colonel Tucker's remaining two parachute infantry battalions (along with their supporting elements) inserted into the Gela-Farello landing ground as reinforcements.[122] By the time Tucker's force was in the air the fighting had died down all along the front and the urgency with which Tucker had been summoned had abated. But the addition of two battalions of aggressive paratroopers into the front lines, especially given the congestion on the beaches that had slowed the insertion of additional amphibious infantry, was something too good to pass up. Expecting, therefore, that the drop would be unopposed, plans were already in train to lead off the attack the next day with this fresh force. Unfortunately, a series of events would occur that would visit tragedy on Tucker and his men, and this from a wholly unexpected quarter.

Chapter Seven Notes

[1] Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 22.

[2] A regimental combat team is a combined arms unit formed around a combat regiment, usually an infantry regiment (or, for the purposes here, a parachute or glider regiment). It is generally composed of anywhere from two to four infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, combat engineers, and other supporting assets such as signal and medical as necessary.

[3] See Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 8; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 17; Robert M. Piper, *The Operation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team (82d Airborne Division) in the Airborne Landings on Sicily, 9-11 July 1943 (Sicilian Campaign) (Personal Experience of Assistant Regimental Adjutant),* n.d., pp. 12-13, Donovan Research Library, Fort Benning, Georgia.

[4] Headquarters, Fifth Army Airborne Training Center, "Report of Airborne Operations," 6 and Langdon, *"Ready,"* 17.

[5] Gavin, *War and Peace in the Space Age*, 53. Capitalization in original.

[6] Headquarters, Fifth Army Airborne Training Center, "Report of Airborne Operations," 6.

[7] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 29.

[8] Headquarters, Fifth Army Airborne Training Center, "Report of Airborne Operations," 6.

[9] Gavin Diary, 10 April 1943.

[10] Gavin Diary, 22 June 1943. The metallic crickets Gavin wrote of here were the same crickets used by the 101st Airborne Division during the invasion of Normandy and made famous in the movie *The Longest Day*. In a letter to author Clay Blair after the war, Gavin wrote that "[m]ost of us who tried [the crickets] in Sicily wanted no part of them [in Normandy]. They were just a nuisance. They started, for example, teaching people to use one click for a challenge, expecting two [clicks] in response. That didn't work, because once you made one click, if you thoughtlessly released it, it clicked itself again. In the second place some of the troopers lost them when they dropped out of their pockets when they jumped. They always had their voices. . . . I think that the 101st used them [in Normandy], but to the veterans of the 82nd, they seemed pretty silly. You couldn't find them in your pockets when you needed them and you couldn't walk around all night holding a cricket in your hand." See James M. Gavin to Clay Blair, 19 July 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Gavin, James M.," USAMHI.

[11] Gavin Diary, 26 June 1943.

[12] Gavin Diary, 30 June 1943. Alfred W. Ireland, Gavin's Regimental S-1 (Personnel Officer) at the time was the one responsible for coming up with the nicknames of the regimental leadership. In an oral interview after the war, Ireland stated " '[b]ack in '42 we received word that the Japanese would trick our guys by calling out names of the different individuals, major this, colonel that, and captain this. So headquarters wanted nicknames put on every officer in the whole regiment. At that time Gavin said, "Al, I want you to nickname every field officer and all the key people." So I had to sit down and come up with names for everyone. That's how Slim Jim [Colonel Gavin] got his nickname. I nicknamed him Slim Jim because at the time there was a pretzel called Slim Jim Pretzels and he was a tall slim guy and I said, "I hope you don't mind, but I'm nicknaming you 'Slim Jim.' " He laughed and said, "That's fine." I nicknamed Gorham "Hard Nose" because that's just exactly as I saw him. He was a tough, hard-nosed soldier. He was the kind of guy who would do it all himself.' " See Patrick K. O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor:*

World War II's Rangers and Airborne Veterans Reveal the Heart of Combat (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001; reprint, New York, Touchstone, 2002), 43.

[13] Gavin Diary, 7 July 1943.

[14] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Index Outline to G-3 Operational History of 82d A/B Division July 9-August 21, 1943 (Sicilian Campaign)," 31 August 1943, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Invasion of Sicily, Intelligence reports, organizational and operation plans, after action report + inquiry on friendly fire losses, maps," USAMHI and Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 89.

[15] Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 274. A significant portion of the American invasion force, including the whole of the U.S. 45th and 1st Infantry Divisions, had already set sail on 4 and 5 July respectively. See also Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 108.

[16] See Robert Goralski, ed., *World War II Almanac, 1931-1945: A Political and Military Record* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), 442; Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 84; Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 2; Piper, *The Operation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team*, 14. For all its ruggedness, the C-47 did have two significant weaknesses: it lacked self-sealing gas tanks and had an unarmored crew compartment. These would remain major points of contention between the airborne and troop carrier pilots on one side and the bomber and fighter pilots on the other.

[17] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 6.

[18] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 19-20.

[19] Ibid., 20-22.

[20] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 29-33.

[21] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82d Airborne Division, "Reported Loss of Transport Planes and Personnel due to Friendly Fire," 2 August 1943, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Invasion of Sicily, intelligence reports, organizational and operation plans, after action report + inquiry of friendly fire losses, maps," USAMHI.

[22] Matthew B. Ridgway to Chet Hanson, 5 April 1949, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "CHRONO. FILE: SICILY," USAMHI. Capitalization in original.

[23] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 33.

[24] The 64th Troop Carrier Group was on loan from the 51st Troop Carrier Wing, then carrying elements of the British 1st Airborne Division to its D-Day objectives. After D-Day, the 64th returned to its parent headquarters. See Headquarters, North African Air Force Troop Carrier Command (Provisional), "Report on Operations and Activities Troop Carrier Command (Prov) Including Operation HUSKY 18 May, 1943 to 31 July, 1943,", n.d., part 1, series A, Records of the War Department's Operations Division, 1942-1945 (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1993), microfilm, p.2, reel 5.

[25] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 34.

[26] Ibid., 34-35.

[27] Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 9. Capitalization in original.

[28] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 35.

[29] Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 9.

[30] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 35.

[31] James M. Gavin, *Airborne Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 8-9.

[32] Ibid., 9.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Quoted in Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 62. Capitalization in original.

[35] Ireland quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 44.

[36] Thompson quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo,* 71. Thompson had also jumped with the 509th, the battalion of U.S. paratroopers that parachuted into North Africa.

[37] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 33-34.

[38] Mark Alexander, telephonic interview by the author, 16 June 2001.

[39] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 36.

[40] Ibid., 34.

[41] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 6-7 and Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 117. All fifty men who did not drop were cleared of any responsibility for their actions and participated in the second drop.

[42] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 109-111.

[43] Quoted in Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily*, 113.

[44] Quoted in D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 244.

[45] Quoted in D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 245. Also see Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily*, 75-82. Upon being evacuated after the fight, one of the American paratroopers, Lieutenant Thomas W. Graham, came face to face with the British Eighth Army commander. " 'We American paratroopers moved toward the British landing beach for eventual evacuation back to North Africa. For transportation, we had mules and carts. I was riding a bicycle with no tires—not an easy task. On the way, we passed General [Bernard] Montgomery, beret and all, standing at an intersection and waving his troops inland. He seemed exasperated over our ragtag group cluttering up the narrow road.' " See Breuer, *Geronimo,* 82-83.

[46] Piper, *The Operation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team*, 19.

[47] Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily*, 65; Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 14; Piper, *The Operation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team*, 24-25.

[48] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 35-36; Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily*, 109-110; D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 246; Piper, *The Operation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team*, 18-19. There are conflicting reports about the makeup of the enemy column Eaton's group turned back at the roadblock. Breuer and D'Este contend it was composed of Germans, while all other reports contend it was an Italian column. Given the confusion in the Axis ranks it could have been either. After driving off the column, Eaton withdrew his force to the south, fearing a more coordinated counterattack by much larger

numbers. Eaton and his men eventually linked up with elements from the 180th Infantry Regiment of the 45th Infantry Division and continued to fight with them until 12 July, when they finally returned to 82nd control.

[49] Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Report After Action Against Enemy as Required by AR 345-105," 21 August 1943, Box "82nd Airborne Division—WWII, 307th Eng. Bn, Unit History, Incident Reports," Folder "307th Abn Eng Bn AAR—Sicily," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Elements of the B Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion fought with Swingler's force during this time. See also Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 119 and Piper, *The Operation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team*, 26-27.

[50] Alexander, interview, 16 June 2001.

[51] Except where noted see Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily*, 115-118; Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 230; Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 156; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 21-22; Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 14-15 and *On To Berlin*, 22-23; Piper, *The Operation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team*, 23-24; Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 19.

[52] Quoted in D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 253.

[53] T. Moffatt Burriss, *Strike and Hold: A Memoir of the 82d Airborne in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000), 50-51.

[54] Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 16.

[55] This was Operaton LADBROKE and it was a disaster. A British force of over 1,200 men was carried to Sicily in 136 U.S. Waco and 8 British Horsa gliders. The entire force was to be inserted into landing zones adjacent to the bridge to ensure there was sufficient combat power there to hold it against the inevitable counterattacks. Unfortunately, only eight officers and sixty-five enlisted men ever made it to the bridge, which they seized and held until eventually being overrun the next day. See F. A. M. Browning, "Report of Airborne Operations. 'HUSKY' Between nights 9/10th July, 43 and 16/17th July, 43," 24 July 1943, part 1, series A, Record of t War Department's Operations Division, 1942-1945 (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1993), microfilm, p.1, reel 4; Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 41-47. The Horsa was an all wooden glider of British design. Larger than the Waco, the Horsa had a wingspan of 88 feet, was 68 feet long, and could carry 28 troops plus a pilot and co-pilot. A total of 412 of these gliders were built during the war. See Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 72-73.

[56] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 119-120 and 147.

[57] Ibid., 147.

[58] Ibid., 148.

[59] Ibid., 148-149.

[60] Except where noted, the following account of the fight led by Captain Sayre and Lieutenant Colonel Gorham is from Sayre's personal reminiscence of the events in Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 10-18.

[61] Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 10.

[62] From a report of the incident written by Jack 'Beaver' Thompson contained in *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 11.

[63] In some accounts of this fight, the Axis column is identified as the western half of Conrath's division but this is not be possible for at this time it had still not reached its assembly area which was well north of Casa del Priolo. Italian *Mobile Group E*, which had started its movement from an area just west of Niscemi, had also been divided into two columns for movement and it was the eastern column of *Mobile Group E* that Sayre's paratroopers encountered during this fight. See Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 149-150.

[64] Edwin M. Sayre, interview by the author, Atlanta, GA, 13 April 2002.

[65] Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily*, 104-105; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 24; Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 13.

[66] Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 14.

[67] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 152.

[68] Ibid., 154.

[69] Ibid., 154-155.

[70] Ibid., 159-160.

[71] Ibid., 161. A report by a naval transport commander who had been dispatched to the beaches by Admiral Hewitt estimated that 150-200 landing craft were stranded on the 45th Division beaches alone.

[72] Ibid., 163-164.

[73] Ibid., 165.

[74] Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 14. Unless otherwise noted, the account of this action is taken from this source.

[75] Sayre, interview, 13 April 2002.

[76] Ibid. Sayre noted that the only reason he started shooting with both .45s was because he just happened to have them both in his hands when the Germans entered the trench. He explained that he was examining them to ensure there was no dirt in the barrels. Still the legend of his two-handed shooting persisted. According to Sayre "that's when I got my reputation for being the fast draw from Texas. You can draw pretty fast when you already have your guns in your hands."

[77] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 165-167 and Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A,"* 15.

[78] Quotes are from Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A."* 15-16. See also Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 168 and 170-171. It took the combined efforts of the 32nd Field Artillery Battalion (the guns of which were being employed as direct fire weapons), the 16th Infantry Cannon Company, and elements of the 18th Infantry and 41st Armored Infantry supported by four Sherman tanks to stop the German advance. Sixteen German tanks were destroyed on the plain before the Germans withdrew. During this battle naval gunfire could not be used because the units were too close to one another.

[79] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 24.

[80] Ireland quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 45.

[81] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 25. Gavin noted that "[w]e had heard that the Germans had scared the wits out of the natives with their stories about the atrocities committed by American parachutists. They spread the news that we were long-term convicts who had been granted our freedom in exchange for becoming paratroopers. This was given credence by the practice in many parachute units of having all the men shave their heads. After the battle of Sicily was over, the Sicilians told us the shaved heads were one of the things that had convinced them that the Germans were right." In his book, Breuer substantiates Gavin's claim by quoting a German officer who told a gathering of Sicilians in Vittoria that " 'American paratroopers are cutthroats. You had better beware of them if they should land. All of the paratroopers are former convicts of the worst type—murderers, rapists and thugs. They were released from prison to join the paratroops.' " See Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily*, 23.

[82] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 26.

[83] Ireland quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 45.

[84] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 26.

[85] D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 251-252. See also Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 26 and O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 45.

[86] Vandervoort quoted in D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 251-252.

[87] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 27.

[88] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 169; Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 27-28; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 26; O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 45; Piper, *The Operation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team*, 27.

[89] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 28.

[90] James M. Gavin to Mark Alexander, 23 August 1978, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder entitled "Letters to and from 82nd Vets on airborne operations in Holland, September 1944," USAMHI.

[91] Like Gavin, Wechsler's group had been dropped well away from their intended drop zone. Landing approximately three kilometers south of Comiso, Wechsler and his engineers had been marching to the sound of the guns and had traveled some twenty miles when Gavin found them. See Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Report After Action Against Enemy As Required by AR 345-105," 21 August 1943, Box "82nd Airborne Division—WWII, 307th Eng. Bn, Unit History, Incident Reports," Folder "307th Abn Eng Bn AAR—Sicily," the 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

[92] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "Airborne Assault Operations," 14 August 1943, 382-INF(505)-0.3, Box 12455, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[93] Gavin, "Beyond the Stars," 78.

[94] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 28.

[95] Ireland quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 46.

[96] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 29.

[97] James M. Gavin to Clay Blair, 5 April 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Gavin, James M.," USAMHI.

[98] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 30.

[99] Ibid., 31.

[100] Grossman quoted in Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 71.

[101] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 32.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Grossman quoted in Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 71.

[104] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 32. The driver of the Italian personnel carrier, Captain Lewis Baldwin of C Battery, 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for this action. See Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 72.

[105] Ireland quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 46.

[106] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 30.

[107] Ireland quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 46.

[108] Vandervoort quoted in D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 294.

[109] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 33. In a document in which he comments to Clay Blair about the draft of his book *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 82nd veteran and historian Allen Langdon disputes Gavin's version of this incident as quoted here. Langdon wrote "where Gavin states . . . 'he [Krause] went to the rear,' it should be said that he 'went to the rear to have a small wound he had sustained treated.' This latter is corroborated by Dr. Daniel McIlvoy, the Bn. Surgeon, who had no love for Krause. To not state this leaves Gavin vulnerable because if Krause 'went to the rear' without any excuse, Gavin was derelict in his duty by not relieving him on the spot. To not state why Krause went to the rear is assassination of character by omission." See Allen Langdon to Clay Blair, n.d., The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "Langdon, Allen," USAMHI. In describing the same incident in his book *"Ready,"* Langdon wrote "[a]t about this time, Major Krause, who had been lightly wounded and was on his way to the aid station to get bandaged, came over the ridge and told Gavin that the 3rd Battalion's losses were considerable and those who were still effective were pinned down." See *"Ready,"* 26. Blair gave both versions of the event in *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, but added comments from an anonymous "senior 505 officer, who shared Gavin's misgivings about Krause" who recalled that after the battle " 'Gavin came across Krause sitting on a roadside curb, head down and sobbing. Krause said, in essence, his troopers would never be as brave again as they had been that day. Krause himself had been brave. He went down into the vineyard in front of the ridge and bounced 2.36-inch bazooka shells off a German tank. There was no effect on the tank and every German gun in the area fired at the spot where they saw the bazooka blast. It was our first real hard-fought battle—with the issue in doubt all afternoon. We were all affected to some degree by first-battle trauma. Somehow, relieving Krause didn't seem the right thing . . . to do at that moment.' " See *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 99. Krause was an enigma and was both brave and vexing that day. If it is true that Krause went to the rear because he was "lightly wounded" the question remains: why didn't he return to the fight after he was treated? This would not be the last time Krause would reportedly leave a battle in search of medical aid for a "light wound."

[110] Janney, *Richard Mott Janney*, 80.

[111] Action described by Ireland in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 47-48.

[112] Ireland quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo,* 87.

[113] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 33-34.

[114] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 34; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 27 and Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "Airborne Assault Operations."

[115] Except where noted, the following account of the fight at Castel Nocera is derived from the following sources: Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily*, 108-109; Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 229-230; *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 11-12 and 34-35; Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 13-14; Piper, *The Operation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team*, 17-18; Sayre, *The Operations of Company "A."* 20. The previous day, Ferrill's group had ambushed a small Italian column on the same road. During that fight two privates, Shelby R. Hord and Thomas E. Lane, killed eleven Italians and captured an Italian machine gun. See *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 12.

[116] Piper, *The Operation of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team*, 18. This is substantiated in *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 12.

[117] The *Livorno Division*, the best-equipped Italian division on the island, attacked Gela at the same time but sustained such heavy casualties at the hands of U.S. Army Rangers that it ceased to be an effective fighting force. See Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy,* 169-170.

[118] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 171-173. Though Guzzoni nominally commanded Conrath and the *Hermann Göring Division*, the Germans were wary of Italian war weariness. Hence, they maintained a separate chain of command and were not above countermanding orders or acting independently if they felt that by doing so they would serve German interests.

[119] Foreword by Gavin in Langdon, *"Ready,"* XIII. See also D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 246-247. D'Este explains that the reason Gavin had not been told about the presence of German armor on Sicily was because this information had been gleaned from ULTRA intercepts, the highly secret Allied codebreaking effort. It was feared that if the Germans were to discover that the Allies knew of the presence of their armor on the island, they would also discover that the Allies were intercepting and reading their radio transmissions which they thought, throughout the war, to be unbreakable.

[120] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 43.

[121] See *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 11; Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 187-188; and Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 41. Carlo D'Este disputes the fact that Gorham was killed by a Tiger tank, but mistakenly confuses the date of Gorham's death (See D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 300). D'Este writes that Gorham was killed on 11 July and on that date the only Tiger tanks present were fighting at Biazzo Ridge. While this is correct, Gorham was killed on 12 July and during that action, fought on the Niscemi-Piano Lupo road, Tiger tanks were present. For his gallantry during the period 10-12 July, Gorham was posthumously awarded two Distinguished Service Crosses. In a letter to Clay Blair, Gavin wrote that "Art Gorham, as you must know, [was] a highly respected, gutsy, fighter. If he lived, he would have commanded the 505 right after Sicily." See Gavin to Blair, 5 April 1983.

[122] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 175.

Chapter Eight
A Very Rugged Delivery

Deplorable as is the loss of life which occurred, I believe that the lessons now learned could have been driven home in no other way, and that these lessons provide a sound basis for the belief that recurrences can be avoided.
The losses are part of the inevitable price of war in human life.
Matthew B. Ridgway[1]

At first light on D-Day, 10 July, General Ridgway and his aide-de-camp, Captain Don C. Faith Jr., boarded one of the many landing craft headed toward the Gela invasion beaches.[2] Their first stop was the 1st Infantry Division command post, where they found the "grinning and chipper" Major General Terry Allen. Ridgway was anxious to learn what news Allen had received from Gavin's combat team. Allen told him that he "[h]adn't seen hide nor hair of them, and hadn't heard a peep out of them on the radio." Furthermore, Allen continued, based on reports from his own forces inland there was "one thing he was sure of, . . . they weren't out in front of him."[3]

Intent on finding his paratroopers, Ridgway borrowed a sergeant from Allen's staff for added security and with Faith and the sergeant in tow set off inland. They walked for quite a while without seeing another soul—enemy, friendly, or civilian. The only indication that there were people present was a picked-over watermelon patch. The landscape, Ridgway recalled, was "ominously still and empty, as silent and forbidding as the surface of the moon." The group eventually reached what was most likely Sicily's main east-west road in the south (described by Ridgway as a "main road") where Ridgway flagged down the 1st Division's assistant division commander, Brigadier General Theodore R. Roosevelt Jr., who just happened to be speeding by. Ridgway and Roosevelt were good friends and the two stopped a while to discuss the situation. Ridgway asked Roosevelt if he had seen any paratroopers. Like his boss Allen, Roosevelt had not. The meeting did not last long. Roosevelt had things to do and sped off leaving Ridgway, Faith, and the sergeant to carry on alone. Finally Ridgway came upon Captain Willard R. Follmer, the I Company commander of the 505th's 3rd Battalion, sitting alone beneath a fig tree nursing an ankle he broke on the jump. Follmer told Ridgway that several small groups of paratroopers had crisscrossed the area during the night but to his knowledge there was no substantial airborne force in the area. After ensuring that Follmer was comfortable (Follmer refused Ridgway's offer of assistance, preferring to await medical attention where he was), Ridgway, his aide, and the sergeant moved on. They eventually came across small groups of two and three paratroopers but, as Follmer had reported, found none in any appreciable strength.[4]

Notes for this chapter are found on pages 188 through 195.

Later that morning Ridgway returned to the 1st Infantry Division command post, reported on what he had seen (or, more appropriately, not seen) and tried again, unsuccessfully, to raise Gavin on the radio. He then returned to the *Monrovia* and convinced Patton to postpone the insertion of his second parachute combat team, Tucker's 504th, scheduled for later that night. Patton wanted to use Tucker's troopers as reinforcements and hence the plan was to drop them behind *friendly* lines where they could quickly assemble and become a Seventh Army reserve force poised for immediate employment. The planned drop zone was the Gela-Farello landing area, an abandoned airfield approximately three miles east of Gela and one mile inland. As a result of his reconnaissance, Ridgway was convinced that the time was not right and having yet to account for Gavin's troopers Ridgway was chary of risking Tucker's, especially given that the Gela-Farello area was not yet totally secure. Patton agreed and the second American drop was postponed.[5]

The next morning, however, Patton changed his mind. He wanted Tucker's paratroopers dropped as soon as possible. The congestion on the beachheads was preventing him from building up his combat power as quickly as he had hoped and a parachute drop offered him a means by which to bypass the congestion and get a large number of troops into the fight quickly. If all went according to plan, the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing would deliver over 2,000 combat-ready paratroopers in approximately forty minutes (the time it would take the air column to pass over the drop zone).

Prior to the invasion, Ridgway had worked out an elaborate code system by which he could alert those elements of the division still in North Africa to any of a number of on-call missions. The obscure message Ridgway sent back to North Africa at 0839 hours 11 July—"Mackall tonight, wear white [pa]jamas"—signaled that approximately 150 aircraft carrying Colonel Tucker's parachute regimental combat team were to fly in to Sicily that night with the first plane making landfall at about 2230 hours ("Mackall") and that the drop was to occur on the Gela-Farello landing area after which the troopers were to "be prepared for ground action as ordered" ("White").[6] For some reason the 82nd's rear command post in North Africa did not receive the message until 1100 hours, but once it did it sprang into action and alerted Tucker and Clark who, in turn, alerted their commanders and staffs to start the last minute preparations. The troopers and aircrews had been standing by. They had but to chute up, take off, and go.[7]

The first planes took off eight hours after receiving the order. Within forty-five minutes all 144 of the aircraft carrying the 2,304 troopers of Rube Tucker's combat team consisting of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 504th, the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, and C Company of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion were in the air. The route was essentially the same as that flown during the first drop except that once they rounded Malta the pilots headed for Sampieri, a point about thirty miles east of Gela on the southern Sicilian coast and on the extreme right of the Seventh Army zone of operations. At Sampieri, the pilots were supposed to turn west and fly a corridor two miles wide and roughly two miles inland at an altitude of 1,000 feet, all of which would be over friendly lines, to the Gela-Farello landing field.[8]

The planes flew in their familiar nine-ship V-of-V formations with the 313th Troop Carrier Group leading, followed at ten-minute intervals by the 61st, 314th, and 316th groups respectively. By leaving an hour earlier than they had on the first drop, the pilots had the advantage of daylight as far as Linosa. To aid them in keeping station within the

formation at night they also adopted a "stepped-down" attitude wherein the trailing planes in each V flew at a slightly lower altitude, "making it easier to see the silhouette of the lead aircraft against the sky."[9] The night was clear and calm, without the strong winds that had so severely affected navigation two nights previously, and the moon was bright. As a result, the entire formation rounded Malta in good shape—on course and on time. The pilots, convinced that this would be a "milk run," concentrated on keeping their formations intact while the paratroopers dozed in the cargo holds.[10]

When he received word that the drop was back on Colonel Tucker made his way through the ranks of the units he would be taking into combat, challenging them to live up to the high standards of the paratroopers. According to the 504th regimental chaplain Delbert Kuehl, Tucker came up to his group and stated " ' "I want you now to be the kind of soldiers you were trained to be, and I know you will be." ' "[11] The epitome of the tough, relentless, paratroop officer, Tucker would prove to be "a combat leader of extraordinary ability."[12] Somewhat chagrined that Ridgway had selected Gavin and not him to lead the first drop Tucker wanted to get in the fight and prove that his regiment was every bit as good as the 505th. If Tucker had a downfall, it was that he paid scant attention to administration and logistics, two areas that Ridgway emphasized, which resulted in Tucker remaining a colonel throughout the war. But, according to Gavin, "Rube couldn't care less. He wanted to fight. And the troops all knew that."[13]

Whereas Tucker was keen to get to Sicily, Ridgway was wary of a second drop, especially given the Navy's intransigence about assuring the safety of transport aircraft flying in the vicinity of its convoys. Since the beginning of June, Ridgway had been fighting to obtain assurances that the aircraft carrying his troopers would not be fired upon by friendly vessels. He and his air corps counterparts had gone to great lengths to design an aerial route to Sicily that avoided the convoys, which was sufficient to ensure the safety of the aircraft during the first drop. But any follow on drops in or around the beachheads would inevitably require the transport aircraft to fly over or near the hundreds of vessels lying offshore as well as the ground units already established inland. There had to be positive assurances that the Navy, as well as those forces already ashore, would not fire on the vulnerable transport aircraft, especially at that time when they were most vulnerable, after they had descended to drop altitude and slowed to drop speed. Exasperated by the half-hearted assurances he had received from naval quarters, Ridgway took his concerns to the top. On 2 July, Eisenhower accompanied Spaatz on an inspection visit to Kairouan. During the visit Ridgway explained his problem to Eisenhower whereupon "[t]he Commander-in-Chief [Eisenhower] made instant reply that he thought the desired action could be taken."[14] Yet in spite of Ridgway's impromptu imposition on the Allied commander in chief the only "action" Eisenhower took was to send out warnings to all parties that the drops would occur. On 5 July, naval forces were warned that

> THERE WILL BE ADDITIONAL PASSAGES OF AIRBORNE TROOPS AFTER [THE] INITIAL ASSAULT AND INFORMATION CONCERNING THEM WILL BE FORWARDED WHEN AVAILABLE. ACTION ADDRESSEES [WILL] GIVE WIDE DISTRIBUTION TO VESSELS UNDER THEIR COMMAND SO AS TO PREVENT SHOOTING DOWN THESE PLANES.[15]

On 6 July Eisenhower's headquarters issued a similar message to all subordinate ground commanders warning them "to expect flights of friendly troops" at any time from D-Day to D+6. The friendly aircraft, continued the messages, "will pass between 2230 and 2400 hours," will be overhead for about forty minutes, and will either "drop parachutists or release gliders" as the situation dictates. Patton, whose headquarters echoed Eisenhower's warning, also ordered his subordinates to "[a]dvise respective naval commanders."[16] Besides this flurry of message traffic, however, no other measures to ensure the safety of any follow on airborne operations were taken by Eisenhower's headquarters—the only headquarters capable of enforcing agreed upon measures among the air, ground, and naval components.

Hence the danger of a catastrophic fratricidal accident remained wedged in the minds of both Patton and Ridgway and their actions on the day preceding the 504th's drop underscore this concern. Less than ten minutes after he made the decision to drop the 504th, Patton reiterated his warning to his subordinates, ordering them to " 'notify all units, especially antiaircraft, that parachutists [from the] 82d Airborne Division will drop.' "[17] Although it is unclear whose idea this message was, the fact that it went out so quickly and with Patton's imprimatur is further evidence that, at least in the minds of the Seventh Army planners, the coordination between ground, air, and naval components had not been sufficiently clarified to salve concerns.

While Patton did everything in his power to ensure the units in his command were informed of the drop, Ridgway could only wait. Having still made no contact with Gavin and the bulk of the 505th combat team, and perhaps fearing the worst, he was beside himself with worry. Finding release through action, Ridgway returned to the beachhead several hours before the scheduled drop time to pass the word that the 504th was inbound. He, too, was especially concerned that the antiaircraft batteries get the message. Of the six antiaircraft positions he visited near the Gela-Farello landing area, five had already received word of the impending drop. The sixth had an officers' meeting scheduled well before the arrival time of the air column and the officer to whom Ridgway spoke ensured him that he would disseminate the warning about the inbound troop transports at that meeting.[18]

As the pilots and paratroopers in North Africa were preparing themselves for their "milk run," that same day saw some of the heaviest aerial attacks yet experienced by Allied forces in the Mediterranean, most of which occurred in and around the 1st Infantry Division beaches. Shortly after first light, twelve Italian planes bombed and strafed the transports lying off Gela, forcing the ships to weigh anchor and scatter. Although there were no direct hits during this attack there were two near misses, one of which punched a hole in the side of the *Barnett*, a troop transport. The air attacks continued throughout the morning and early afternoon, each seemingly more violent than the one before. At 1540 hours, approximately thirty German Ju-88 medium bombers staged an attack during which the Liberty Ship *Robert Rowan*, filled with ammunition supplies, took a bomb in its hold, caught fire, exploded, and sank in shallow water. For the rest of the day the *Robert Rowan's* exposed bow spewed fire and smoke, further complicating beach-landing operations while also serving as a beacon for follow on enemy aircraft. The largest enemy aerial attack of the day began at 2150 hours when 381 enemy aircraft attacked the invasion area. During this hour-long surface-to-air and air-to-air mêlée,

several more ships were damaged by near misses. Once again the vulnerable transports weighed anchor and dispersed under the covering fire of the accompanying warships and Allied fighter planes that had joined the fray.[19] All told, there were twenty-four air raids on and around the Allied invasion beaches on 11 July.[20] As a result of these attacks the troops ashore, sailors at sea, and most especially the antiaircraft gunners assigned to both were operating with frayed nerves and hair triggers.

Patton experienced one of the attacks first-hand earlier that day while he was ashore. When he returned to his wardroom aboard the *Monrovia* that evening, he wrote of his concern about the inbound paratroopers.

> Went to the office at 2000 to see if we could stop the 82d Airborne lift, as enemy air attacks were heavy [during the day] and inaccurate Army and Navy anti-air[craft gunners] were jumpy. Found we could not get contact by radio. Am terribly worried.[21]

Meanwhile Ridgway made his way to the Gela-Farello field where he waited patiently, and nervously, for Tucker's combat team to arrive.

By early evening scattered cumulous clouds had gathered over Sicily making the last leg of the approach flight somewhat more difficult. The transport pilots, intent on maintaining the integrity of their formations gained altitude to fly over the clouds. This change in altitude, combined with the resultant smoke and haze from the Axis bombing raids had two effects: it obscured landmarks, making aerial navigation more difficult and, for the forces on the ground and at sea, made identification of the incoming aircraft increasingly problematic.[22]

The first flights of the lead 313th Group arrived over Gela-Farello at 2240 hours and dropped their paratroopers five minutes ahead of schedule. Then, according to testimony by Captain Willard E. Harrison the commander of A Company, 1/504th who was on the lead plane that evening, "one gun open[ed] fire on the formation, and that . . . seemed to be the signal for many others to open fire, both from the beach and from ships offshore."[23] Within minutes the entire beachhead was ablaze with tracers as nervous antiaircraft gunners, and seemingly anyone else who had a weapon at hand, opened fire at what they believed was another enemy aerial attack.

When the barrage began the second troop carrier group in the armada, the 61st, was just entering the air corridor and its rear two squadrons were still five to ten miles off shore. Because the firing was so contagious, however, they too were taken under fire from vessels nearby against which " 'no amount of recognition signals [from the aircraft] had the least effect.' "[24] Still the gallant pilots of the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing flew on, taking what evasive action they could to avoid the wall of steel being thrown at them. Many dove for the deck and used high-speed low-level maneuver, the only protective measure the unarmed C-47s could take, in an attempt to fly through the friendly flak and deliver their paratroopers to the drop zone. Yet the fire never abated, instead growing more intense as succeeding flights approached the drop zone (some pilots reported being under fire for as long as thirty minutes). The last group in the armada, the 316th carrying the bulk of the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion experienced the heaviest fire, losing twelve planes and sustaining thirty-seven casualties to air crewmen. Since the fire was so heavy by the time they got to the drop zone, six of this group's planes returned to

North Africa without dropping at all (all told eight planes carrying 104 paratroopers returned without dropping).[25]

One particularly harrowing account by an unnamed pilot who flew this mission begins when his plane was on its final approach toward the drop zone. Quoted at length, it provides a poignant picture of the intensity of the antiaircraft fire, the ruggedness of the C-47, and the bravery of the aircrew and paratroopers aboard.

> A few minutes before reaching the drop point with the paratroopers, a shell smashed into the starboard side of the fuselage and knocked out a hole four by six feet while a fragment from the shell slit the aluminum and every rib from hole to rudder. Passing through the plane the fragment ripped off a door as a second ack-ack blast carried away a portion of the left stabilizer. The explosion also blew away a large piece of equipment, and the impact was so great that it felt like a motor crash in the pilot's cabin.
>
> The airplane spun at a right angle and nearly pulled the controls from my grasp. For a second I didn't realize what had happened, then finding myself out of formation I began a violent evasive action. I saw three planes burning on the ground and red tracers everywhere as machine gunners sprayed us as if potting a flight of ducks.
>
> Meanwhile I had cut into a less dangerous spot to give the parachutists a fighting chance to reach ground. But I've got to hand it to those boys; one, who had been pretty badly hit by shrapnel, insisted on leaping with the others although he had been ordered to remain in the plane.[26]

Of the 144 aircraft from the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing that set off that evening, twenty-three did not return and an additional thirty-seven were badly damaged. Total 52nd Wing casualties were seven dead, thirty wounded, and fifty-three missing. As a result of this terrible mishap, "[t]he legend of a navy which shot from the hip without distinguishing friend from foe spread widely and lingered long among the troop carrier units."[27] Interviewed almost immediately after returning to North Africa, a pilot and co-pilot from a plane in the hard-hit 316th Group claimed somewhat bitterly " '[e]vidently, the safest place for us tonight while over SICILY would have been over enemy territory.' "[28]

Six planes were shot down with their paratroopers still aboard. Lieutenant John P. O'Malley, a platoon leader in the 2/504th saw one of these planes go down.

> 'Riding in the plane on our left wing was half of my platoon. In its frenzy to escape the lethal inferno, their C-47 veered sharply to its right and almost struck our plane. I watched in horror as their C-47 then tilted and plunged to earth, where it exploded in a huge ball of fire. Those were my boys. That was the most anguishing experience of my life; one that I would never forget.'[29]

Captain Adam A. Komosa, the 504th Headquarters Company commander also recalled planes dropping out of formation and crashing into the sea while " '[o]thers, like clumsy whales, wheeled and attempted to get beyond the flak which rose in fountains of fire,

lighting the stricken faces of men as they stared through the windows.' "[30] Paratrooper Chaplain Delbert Kuehl recalled that the air was so full of tracers " 'it looked like a mammoth Fourth of July celebration.' " He saw

> 'plane after plane go down in flames. Some exploded in the air; others crash-landed in the sea. Tragically, some that were on planes that crashed in the sea, a few of them were alive and they [the navy] shot them in the water. One of our medics, who later survived, was shot in the water.'[31]

As was revealed during the investigations that followed, it was not uncommon that night for naval gunners to continue to fire on downed planes in the water. Although it was impossible to reconstruct exactly what happened, in the mind of the Army's official historian there is strong evidence to indicate that "[i]t is probable that a majority of the troop carriers shot down . . . were given the *coup de grace* by naval guns."[32]

Even those troopers who made it out of the aircraft and landed among friendly troops were not safe. Lieutenant Charles A. Drew of F Company, 2/504th reported that of the four men killed and four men wounded from his platoon, three were hit while descending in their parachutes and "one was killed on the ground because he had the wrong pass word."[33] Tucker's paratroopers had been told that the sign and countersign for that night would be "Ulysses—Grant" but after landing and being shot at several times by troops of the 45th Infantry Division with whom they attempted to make contact, it quickly became apparent that the paratroopers had been misinformed. Standing at the edge of the drop zone when Tucker's troopers came in Ridgway saw several soldiers from the 45th Division firing on his paratroopers and when he hurried to inform them that they were firing on friendly paratroopers discovered that he, too, had the wrong sign and countersign.[34]

It took several days to determine the extent of the tragedy, but what was immediately apparent was that Tucker's 504th was almost as badly scattered as Gavin's 505th. Only the first few planes had managed to deliver their paratroopers to the Gela-Farello drop zone. Once the firing began, the evasive action taken by the pilots combined with the intense desire of the paratroopers to exit as quickly as possible resulted in the remainder being scattered from the Acate River in the west to Vittoria in the east. Patton's plan to have an intact combat team of paratroopers immediately at his disposal had been thwarted.[35]

Not as immediately apparent was the casualty toll among the paratroopers, but once compiled the number amounted to approximately ten percent of Tucker's combat team: eighty-one dead, 132 wounded, and sixteen missing.[36] Back in North Africa, Maxwell Taylor met the aircraft as they limped back and oversaw the evacuation of the dead and wounded paratroopers. He recalled talking with one of the wounded. The trooper had an American bullet in his shoulder. Remarking "awkwardly that it must have been pretty hot over the beachhead in all that fire," the trooper replied, " 'Yes, it was . . . but I was glad to see that our fellows could shoot so good.' "[37]

The reason Taylor was supervising the evacuation of the dead and wounded was because the man who should have been in charge, the assistant division commander Brigadier General Keerans, was among the missing. Ridgway had ordered Keerans to remain behind to command the rump of the division in North Africa, but Keerans

disobeyed and rode along with the 504th as an observer. Long thought to have been lost at sea, others report having seen Keerans alive on shore. His body has never been found or identified. His loss, however, cleared the way for the rise of other, more able combat commanders.[38]

Although two-thirds of his division had been committed to battle it was days before Ridgway could assemble a force of any sizeable strength. In the wake of the friendly fire disaster Eisenhower cancelled the on-call glider insertion of the 82nd's remaining regiment even as the gliders and tow planes were lined up on the runway ready to go.[39] The 325th, therefore, never got to Sicily. The next morning (12 July) Ridgway reported to Seventh Army that he had " '[n]o formed element of Combat Team 505 under [his] control' " although based on 1st Division reports he expected to make contact with them later in the day. Out of Tucker's combat team, he had but one battery of 75mm howitzers and the equivalent of one company of infantry. Although Ridgway had linked up with Tucker on the drop zone shortly after the jump, he had subsequently lost contact with the 504th commander in the ensuing chaos and he had yet to make contact with Gavin. By 1730 hours, 12 July, Ridgway had still not made contact with the bulk of the 505th and the 504th stragglers he had rounded up numbered but thirty-seven officers and 518 enlisted men. Gavin finally found Ridgway at 0900 hours on 13 July, and reported that he could account for approximately 1,200 of his troopers, while the 504th numbers by that time were 555 all ranks. By midnight 13 July, more and more troopers had streamed into the 82nd assembly area near Gela and Ridgway reported having 3,024 effectives under his control. By dawn, 14 July, that total had grown to 3,790. On 16 July, nerves had calmed sufficiently to allow for an additional 426 troopers to be flown into the Ponte Olivo airdrome and by midnight, 17 July, Ridgway's force finally reached a respectable 4,309 men with both Gavin and Tucker present.[40]

Meanwhile, the remainder of the Seventh Army had been consolidating its beachheads and continuing to fight its way inland (and in so doing uncovering pockets of paratroopers and shuttling them back to the division assembly area). On 12 July, Montgomery unilaterally altered the boundaries between the two armies when he seized a highway in the American sector for use by his British XXX Corps. At the time, advance elements of Bradley's II Corps were about a thousand yards short of the highway but were forced to pull back and reorient once they discovered British formations moving across their front. Montgomery's actions, which Bradley called "the most arrogant, egotistical, selfish and dangerous move in the whole of combined operations in World War II" meant that Patton's Seventh Army would be cut out of the advance on Messina and relegated to nothing more than a flank guard for the British Eighth Army.[41]

The next day (13 July) Alexander issued instructions approving Montgomery's actions and assigned to Eighth Army all roads leading to Messina. Before the invasion, Alexander had never been very clear about how he expected the subsequent campaign to unfold. Focused mainly on getting ashore and staying ashore, he was confident that once that had been accomplished subsequent events would determine the best way to advance to the one objective on which everyone could agree—Messina. By 12 July it had become clear, however, that Montgomery's scheme to mount a drive up the eastern coast road through Catania and on to Messina was going to turn into a hard, slow, slugging match. It was obvious to the Axis commanders as well that if Messina were to fall their forces would be cut off and destroyed, hence after failing to hurl the Allies back into the sea

they rushed to establish a strong defensive position anchored on the rugged slopes of Mount Etna, south of Messina. Montgomery's seizure of the American highway was a reaction to the defensive build up, for with that road he could mount a two-pronged advance on Messina: while British XIII Corps continued its advance up the eastern coast road, British XXX Corps could swing inland and seek to bypass Etna to the west.

When Alexander informed Patton of his decision the latter was uncharacteristically docile. Patton's only request was that he be allowed to continue his advance to the west to seize Agrigento and Porto Empedocle for " 'by so doing [Seventh Army] can obviate the necessity of using Siracusa as a [supply] base, thus saving a turn around of 140 miles [by trucks] over bad roads, and also obviating the necessity of using a port in conjunction with the Eighth Army.' " Alexander replied that " 'if this could be done through the use of limited forces, in the nature of a reconnaissance in force, he had no objection.' "[42] But the germ of a much more expansive plan had already been planted in Patton's mind.

Barred from taking Messina, Patton poised his forces to take Palermo which, according to the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division commander Major General Lucian K. Truscott Jr., "drew Patton like a lode star."[43] Securing Agrigento and Porto Empedocle was simply the first step in Patton's grand plan. He took the second step two days later when, on 15 July, he reorganized and reoriented Seventh Army. Patton assigned what was ostensibly his army's primary mission, the security of Montgomery's left flank, to Bradley's II Corps, still composed of the U.S. 1st and 45th Infantry Divisions. He then grouped the 3rd Infantry and 82nd Airborne Divisions under a 'provisional' corps headed by his deputy, Major General Geoffrey Keyes. Keyes's task was to advance to the west and northwest and march on Palermo with all due speed.[44]

Concurrent with being assigned to Keyes's corps, Ridgway received orders to move the 82nd to Palma di Montechiaro, a town on the southern coastal highway approximately thirteen miles east of Agrigento, where he was to prepare his division for a rapid advance to the west. Assigned a zone of action that abutted the southern coast and extended five to ten miles inland and which included the southern coastal highway, the 82nd was to advance roughly twenty-five miles to the Verdura River, keeping pace with the 3rd Infantry Division on its right. When both divisions reached the river, the 3rd Division would veer sharply northward and race to Palermo while the 82nd secured its left by clearing the westernmost part of the island.[45]

On the evening of 18 July, with the advance set to begin at 0500 hours the next morning, Keyes gathered his subordinate commanders for one last conference. Stressing the importance of remaining in their respective zones, Keyes enjoined Ridgway and Truscott to move fast and not to stop unless ordered to do so by he or Patton.[46]

Ridgway selected the 504th combat team to lead the division attack and the impetuous Tucker, having finally assembled the bulk of his regiment (to include the 3rd Battalion) jumped off two hours ahead of time while the remainder of the division followed. Intelligence had reported " 'no known organized fighting forces . . . located to the immediate west on the route of advance' " and those isolated enemy forces that were encountered were quickly overrun by the hard-marching paratroopers.[47] According to Gavin, "[t]he usual action of the Italians was to fire a few shots, rifle and [machine gun], cause the [advance guard] to deploy, and then surrender as soon as pressure was brought to bear on them."[48] By nightfall, Tucker's troopers had advanced twenty-five miles and

captured over 500 prisoners. The division's total bag for the day was 848 prisoners at a cost of only seven men wounded, the result of a strafing run on the division column.[49]

The next day's advance began at 0600 hours with the 504th still in the van and by 0925 hours Tucker's lead elements entered the coastal town of Sciacca, where they encountered a demolished bridge and extensive minefields. Finding a bypass slowed the movement of the division's main body through Sciacca, but by noon the paratroopers had picked up the pace and by nightfall Tucker's men had secured Menfi, another twenty miles beyond Sciacca, and had captured an additional 745 prisoners at the cost of only one killed and one wounded.[50] An entry in the 2/504th's unit journal for 20 July noted that "the enemy is retreating fast," so fast that it seemed the paratroopers "never have been able to catch up with them, [yet there] seems to be plenty of prisoners."[51]

The speed of the advance also forced a change of plan. The U.S. 2nd Armored Division had been following in the wake of the 82nd, ready for employment as the situation dictated. Because enemy resistance had been so sparse in the west, and the advance so swift, Patton and Keyes agreed that the time was right to unleash their armored division for the final, rapid thrust to Palermo. Keyes thus informed Ridgway that instead of continuing the westward advance, the 82nd would secure the line of the Belice River so that it could protect the right flank of the 2nd Armored as it passed through the division and advanced on Palermo.[52]

To accomplish Keyes's directive, Ridgway wanted to leapfrog Gavin's 505th past the 504th which, according to Gavin, "had lost 2/3rds of its effective strength from stragglers." "I have never seen anything like it," wrote an exasperated Gavin.

> All along the roads they were bumming under trees around houses and in fields. On the march officers and men alike would leave ranks to pick grapes, melons, and get water. Probably one of the greatest sources of losses was in 'capturing' vehicles. Every wreck and abandoned vehicle that had not the slightest chance of ever operating again was the center of a group of from three to six parachutists who upon being questioned said that they were getting it ready to run to use for the reg[iment]. This had the sanction of the reg[iment] in its desperation to get transportation. Our experience was that even the good service[e]able vehicles soon broke down and became much more of an automotive liability than asset. Orders were accordingly issued forbidding troops from leaving ranks to capture vehicles.[53]

Before Gavin could bring up his regiment, however, Ridgway ordered Tucker to continue the advance with his 2nd Battalion, which was well positioned to lead the way to the Belice River. So at first light on 21 July the 2/504th under Lieutenant Colonel William P. Yarborough started moving toward San Margherita, a small town just short of the river. A few miles southeast of the town, at a place called Tuminello Pass, Yarborough's troopers encountered the first significant resistance of the march. The Italians had emplaced a battery of 77mm and 90mm guns, protected by machine guns, on a chain of small hills that dominated the pass. Well camouflaged and obscured by an early morning ground fog, the Italians let the paratroopers get well within range before opening up. Immediately Yarborough's troopers deployed to either side of the road and

returned fire. Pinned down for about thirty minutes, the paratroopers finally brought up some mortars and artillery to cover their assault. One platoon, led by Lieutenant Charles A. Drew of F Company used this covering fire to maneuver up a hill and onto the Italian flank. Once in position, Drew had his men fix bayonets and charge, the shock of which ended Italian resistance and resulted in wholesale surrender. At a cost of six killed and eight wounded, Yarborough's troopers killed over 100 Italians, wounded thirty-five more and captured one Italian colonel, thirteen officers, and over 1,500 enlisted men. Shortly thereafter Gavin's 2/505th passed through the 2/504th and continued the advance. By nightfall the 82nd had secured the Belice River line, having moved an additional fifteen miles while sustaining only fourteen casualties.[54]

The next day, 22 July, the 82nd remained in corps reserve and continued to guard the river line. This respite ended the next morning when Ridgway received orders to " 'move without delay to seize TRAPANI,' " a fairly large city on Sicily's westernmost tip.[55] Since speed was imperative Gavin's troopers, leading the way, boarded trucks for the forty-five-mile ride to the city. Encountering nothing more than some mined roads at two points along the way, both of which were quickly cleared, the bulk of the journey seemed more parade than combat operation. Although no Allied troops had yet ventured this far west, "[a]ll along the route . . . the local population competed with each other in their expressions of good will." When the troopers passed through the numerous small towns along the way, "the roads were lined with people who not only shouted their approval and showed in one place a prepared sign: 'Welcome Liberators,' but who also showered the vehicles with fruit, bread and chocolate, much of which had been pilfered from abandoned Italian military stores."[56]

It was not until late afternoon, as they were approaching the outskirts of Trapani, that the 505th troopers even saw any enemy soldiers. About ten kilometers east of the city a group of Italian soldiers were spotted attempting to hide in a railroad tunnel. A lieutenant and fourteen troopers from H Company, 3/505th followed, fired a few shots, and then emerged from the tunnel with fifty prisoners in tow. Three kilometers farther on, the 3/505th's point element began receiving small arms and machine gun fire. Having taken the measure of their demoralized opponent and knowing therefore that the Italians would not resist in the face of a resolute attack, the troopers went into an immediate assault, quickly overran the Italian position and took another 110 prisoners.[57]

The most determined resistance of the day occurred when Gavin's troopers appeared on the hills overlooking Trapani itself. Roadblocks and minefields halted the American advance while Italian artillery positioned on hills north and southwest of the city opened up on the lead elements. The parachute artillerymen of the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion responded in kind, reinforced by fires from the 34th Field Artillery and 83rd Chemical (4.2-inch mortar) Battalions, which had been attached to the division for the advance. A two-to-three-hour artillery duel ensued during which Gavin's infantry troopers maneuvered on the Italian positions and took them out one by one. After silencing the guns and surrounding the city, Ridgway sent an envoy into Trapani with his terms of surrender. The Italian military commander, Admiral Giuseppe Manfredi, quickly accepted. As agreed, the Italians ceased all resistance, preserved their stores of supplies, and posted guards on all military and naval equipment until troopers from the 505th relieved them. The net result, besides an "uncounted amount of guns and other

military and naval material and stores" was the taking of an additional 2,639 prisoners of war.[58]

On the same day that the 505th entered Trapani, Tucker's 504th took Alcamo, a town some twenty-two miles to the east of Trapani, and completed the occupation of western Sicily the next day when it occupied Castellammare del Golfo, a small town on the coast between Trapani and Alcamo. With the mainland of western Sicily in hand, the only enemy forces remaining in the 82nd's area was a force comprising approximately 1,000 Italian soldiers and naval personnel who were garrisoning the Edagi Islands of Favignana, Levanzo, and Marettino, roughly ten to twelve miles off the coast of Sicily at Trapani. On 29 July, two officers from the division staff sailed to the main island of Favignana to parlay with the local commander. Following a short discussion during which terms were presented and almost as quickly accepted, the Italian commander of the island garrisons surrendered his force without a fight.[59]

In ten days, the 82nd had advanced 158 miles, secured approximately 1,550 square miles of hostile territory, and captured 18,836 enemy personnel.[60] For the remainder of its time in Sicily, the 82nd conducted police and occupation duties, ensured that the local population was fed, maintained police and order, and rounded up local fascists. The officers and troopers of the two combat teams that had participated in the campaign were justifiably proud of their achievements. These feelings, however, were not universal.

Well before the Sicilian Campaign had ended the Allies were already investigating why their airborne operations had gone so terribly wrong. The most obvious deficiency uncovered during this first large-scale use of airborne forces by the Allies was the inability of troop carrier pilots to deliver their paratroopers and gliders to the correct drop and landing zones. But poor navigation skills were not limited to transport pilots. Both British and American bomber pilots had, for some time, demonstrated that aerial navigation was not an easy task even when the target was significantly larger, such as a city. Hence, although airborne commanders, especially Ridgway, expressed their concern over this shortcoming, the difficulties of aerial navigation were not new to the Allied high command. It was something Allied air commanders had been constantly striving to improve, not as a direct result of the Sicilian airborne experience, but as a result of the experience of aviators of all ilk.

A more immediate concern, however, and one that ranked foremost in the minds of Allied commanders, was the need for more effective coordination among the services to prevent another fratricidal incident. Allied air-ground-naval coordination was a deficiency that demanded hasty redress if future invasions, already being planned, were not to be likewise marred by catastrophe. Hints that it was difficult to achieve effective coordination and cooperation among the services had been present during the pre-invasion planning; yet it took two separate but eerily similar friendly-fire incidents to drive this point home. The first incident involved the 504th combat team described above. The second occurred one day after the American disaster when Montgomery launched Operation FUSTIAN, a parachute and glider assault aimed at the seizure of the Primasole Bridge over the Simeto River, roughly five miles south of Catania. Troopers from the British 1st Parachute Brigade, 1,856 in all, were to jump and glide onto drop and landing zones surrounding the bridge, seize it, and hold until relieved by the Eighth Army. Of the 135 British and American aircraft that took off with the British paratroopers, fourteen were shot down, thirty-four severely damaged, and twenty-five

returned without delivering their loads, all the result of friendly fire from naval convoys off the eastern coast of Sicily. Only thirty-nine planeloads of paratroopers were dropped within one mile of the bridge while only four of nineteen gliders delivered their cargoes intact.[61]

As soon as if had become apparent that something horribly wrong had occurred during the 504th jump Hal Clark, the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing commander, submitted a preliminary report of his findings. Inconclusive at best, Clark's report offered nothing more than initial observations gleaned from the returning pilots, although it did claim (incorrectly) that "all group elements reached [the] designated [drop zone] on schedule."[62] The next day, U.S. Brigadier General Paul L. Williams, commander of the North Africa Air Force Troop Carrier Command, the 52nd Wing's higher headquarters, forwarded his report of the incident. Addressed to Eisenhower, Williams's report outlined in great detail the coordination that had gone into planning the American airborne operations for HUSKY, ensuring Eisenhower that the air planners had done everything in their power to coordinate with naval and ground force commanders beforehand to guard against just such an accident. In summary, Williams posited several possibilities for the fratricide, including the theory that enemy air and ground action coincident with the drop caused confusion in the ranks of friendly antiaircraft gunners.[63]

But these reports were not enough to mollify Eisenhower, especially after he learned about Operation FUSTIAN. Furious at what he considered failure on the part of his subordinate commanders he sent heated cables, such as the one he sent to Patton, demanding " 'an investigation [of the 504th incident] and statement of punishments for those guilty of firing on them.' "[64] He also tasked Major General Joseph Swing, his American airborne advisor, to conduct another investigation of the incident. Swing submitted his report on 16 July, citing five contributory causes for the mishap: insufficient prior planning " 'with respect to successive lifts of the 82nd Airborne Division [which] resulted in lack of coordination between Army, Air, and Navy' "; the inability of the pilots to adhere to the prescribed routes; the " 'unalterable' " decision by the Navy to fire on all targets within range at night; the " 'unfortunate circumstance of an enemy bombing raid coinciding with the arrival of the Troop Carrier element' "; and the negligence on the part of some ground commanders to warn their units that friendly aircraft carrying U.S. paratroopers were inbound.[65] Eisenhower seems not to have been entirely convinced by Swing's report, however, for in a cable he sent to General Marshall the next day he was still searching for an explanation. In this cable, Eisenhower acknowledged (incorrectly) that "[s]ome German night bombers came in at the same moment that our troop-carrying planes did and the dropping of bombs and flares made all the ground troops open up a maximum fire." Yet he still found it "odd" that "[e]ven in the daytime we have great trouble in preventing our own naval and land forces from firing on friendly planes" especially in an operation "where we have such great air superiority that the presumption is that any plane flying in a straight and level course is friendly."[66] Eisenhower either did not know about, or still had not assimilated the effect of the twenty-four separate air attacks his naval and ground forces had endured that day, so the search continued for a responsible party.

Eisenhower's insistence that those responsible be found and punished compelled the services to close ranks and act defensively, thereby becoming even more uncooperative with one another. What resulted was an atmosphere of recrimination in which each

service defended its actions while pointing to the deficiencies in others. The navy was especially defensive, insisting that ships had the right to defend themselves against unidentified aircraft approaching at night. Even Admiral Cunningham entered the fray. Having learned that Eisenhower was appointing a board of senior officers to look into the two instances of fratricide, Cunningham cabled Eisenhower because he was concerned that the emphasis being placed on the indiscipline of naval antiaircraft gunners would prejudice the board members. He stressed, therefore, that '[a]ll ships fire at once at any aeroplane particularly low flying ones which approach them" and that "[n]othing less is acceptable without incurring grave risk of the loss or damage to valuable merchant vessels or fleet units." He stated that during preliminary planning, this fact had been "constantly kept in the foreground and pointed out" by the naval staff. Hence, to Cunningham, it appeared that the fault for the friendly-fire incidents must lay with the air force, a result of either "bad routing or bad navigation on the part of the aircraft pilots."[67]

The board to which Cunningham referred convened on 24 July (the day after Cunningham sent his cable to Eisenhower). Composed of Brigadier General H. A. Craig of the U.S. Army Air Corps, Brigadier General W. C. Crane of the U.S. Army, Rear Admiral Philip Vian of the Royal Navy, and Colonel Fay Ross, an American infantryman, the board began its investigation by hosting a conference which was attended by high-ranking British and American army, air force, and airborne representatives.[68] Also in attendance was Air Chief Marshal Tedder, Eisenhower's commander in chief for air while Major General Browning facilitated the discussion. Colonel Lewis, the 325th commander, represented the 82nd Airborne Division. Browning opened the conference by stating that in his opinion the airborne objectives in both the American and British sectors were "proper objectives for airborne troops" and that the difficulties encountered were not the result of any one service in particular. He concluded by saying that despite the scattered drops, the operations were a success because they caused "abject confusion in the Axis General Headquarters and undoubtedly contributed materially to the decision of the Axis to withdraw the[ir] troops so rapidly, apparently not knowing just how many paratroopers had been dropped and where." Means to improve performance were then discussed and it appears that both the air force and airborne representatives at the meeting agreed that new techniques and additional training was required to ensure greater accuracy of delivery. Then, according to Lewis's summary of the conference, things turned rancorous. Since Admiral Vian was absent for this initial meeting, the only other naval representative at the conference was a Captain Barnard of the Royal Navy from Cunningham's staff. Barnard had been obviously prepared to repeat the navy line and no other—a line that complemented perfectly the position Cunningham had outlined in his cable to Eisenhower. Just as Cunningham had attempted to shift focus away from the naval antiaircraft gunners, so did Barnard whenever he was confronted with questions about ships firing on friendly aircraft. Hence, when asked why friendly planes were fired on by friendly naval craft at least twenty miles out to sea, Barnard "studiously, laboriously and perspiringly [*sic*] avoided any direct replies" but instead repeated the same prepared response over and over again: " 'Is it not possible for the Air Corps to fly a course well removed from the naval operations and then at a point change directions and hit the [drop zone] from some direction other than that covered by the Navy?' " According to Lewis this questioning went on for some time, much to the malevolent delight of Tedder and Browning who

mercilessly badgered Barnard and "made life utterly miserable for him." Eventually, his shirt wet with perspiration, Barnard broke with his prepared statement and in exasperation said in closing " '[w]ill you gentlemen please remember that up to the present any airship over our naval craft in the Mediterranean has been an enemy ship, and while the Navy is now in the transition period, it was extremely difficult to impress upon all "light-fingered gentry" that there were such things as friendly planes flying over our craft.' "[69]

The board met seven more times between 24 and 31 July before rendering its report. At none of the other meetings were as many persons gathered, and not once was either of the airborne division commanders called to testify. The board's findings included a list of conclusions about the cause of the incident, none of which differed significantly from those already forwarded by Swing and Williams. As far as the touchy subject of fault was concerned, the board was studiously circumspect and vague, concluding "[t]hat there was a lack of a well understood, uniform definition of the responsibilities of the several authorities concerned in all stages of airborne operations and of command in the various stages."[70] Finally, the board made some recommendations for improvement and suggested that these recommendations be codified in a training memorandum, a draft of which was included in the report. The resultant two-and-a-half page Training Memorandum Number 43, *Employment of Airborne Forces*, was a predictable product of a process undermined from the outset by Eisenhower's desire to find fault rather than solutions. Filled with vacuous statements of the obvious such as "[f]ull coordination of all elements involved is paramount to the success of airborne operations" it then failed to delineate which organization or service was ultimately responsible for ensuring that this occurred thereby prolonging the faulty system it was meant to improve.[71] Nothing more than a sop, within months it was shelved in favor of more relevant statements of doctrine.

Three days later Ridgway submitted his own summary of the events that had led to the friendly-fire incident involving Tucker's combat team. Listing in minute detail the coordination that had been conducted to ensure against just such an incident, as well as the resistance he encountered at every turn by naval authorities, he refused in the end to implicate any one service or organization for the tragedy. Furthermore, with eloquence unequalled in any of the hundreds of pages of documents that grew from the investigations associated with the Sicily fratricides, Ridgway put the matter to rest with one sentence: "The responsibility for loss of life and materiel resulting from this operation is so divided, so difficult to fix with impartial justice, and so questionable of ultimate value to the service because of the acrimonious debates which would follow efforts to hold responsible persons or services to account, that disciplinary action is of doubtful wisdom."[72] As far as the friendly-fire incidents were concerned Ridgway's was the last word and not one person, organization, or service was ever found to be ultimately responsible.

In his 1947 book *Airborne Warfare*, Gavin labeled American airborne forces "the toddling tot that . . . was born in Sicily and survived a very rugged delivery."[73] He was correct in more than one respect, for not only did American paratroopers have to survive two disastrous drops at the outset of the campaign, afterwards they also had to face a movement by high ranking officers to disband the very organization for which they fought. Ironically, this debate over the efficacy of airborne divisions ultimately did more to forward airborne doctrine than any single event to date.

The debate was sparked as a result of comments rendered by observers from both the War Department and Eisenhower's headquarters. According to Gavin these observers, safely ensconced "in the headquarters in North Africa during the Sicilian operation" returned to Washington "quite pessimistic" about the utility of airborne divisions based on the logic that "[i]f a regiment could not be delivered more effectively than had occurred in Sicily, what chance would a division have?"[74] One of the leading observers was Major General John P. Lucas who reported that " 'from the experience of this campaign and from numerous conversations with [unnamed] participants in airborne operations therein, that the organization of Airborne troops into divisions is unsound.' "[75] Several who were much closer to the fighting, however, maintained otherwise. Summing up the Sicilian Campaign Patton commented that " 'his swift and successful landings followed by a rapid advance inland would not have been achieved at such a light cost or at such speed without the action of his Airborne Division.' "[76] Bradley, too, was impressed with what the paratroopers had accomplished in Sicily, writing that "[i]n spite of the foul-ups, Gavin's scattered force had caused great confusion and distraction among the enemy on D-day."[77]

This matter came to a head in September 1943 when, in a letter to Marshall, Eisenhower stated categorically "I do not believe in the Airborne *Division*." Continuing, he explained

> I believe that airborne troops should be organized in self-contained units comprising infantry, artillery, and special services, all of about the strength of a regimental combat team. Even if one had all of the air transport he could possibly use, the fact is that at any given time and at any given spot, only a reasonable number of air transports can be operated because of technical difficulties. To employ at any time and place a whole division would require dropping over such an extended area that I seriously doubt that a division commander could regain control and operate the scattered forces as one unit. In any event, if these troops were organized in smaller, self-contained units, a senior commander with a small staff and radio communications could always be dropped in the area to insure necessary coordination.[78]

Spurred by Eisenhower's comments, Marshall appointed two boards to examine the airborne division concept. The first, headed by Brigadier General Albert Pierson, the assistant division commander of the 11th Airborne Division, came to naught, for although the board concluded that the " 'division organization for airborne troops could be supported in combat and recommended that the division be retained' " Pierson himself admitted that many of the supporting documents were "sketchy."[79] A second board was therefore convened. Chaired by Major General Swing, who was quite familiar with the performance of both the British and American divisions during the Sicily Campaign, Swing's board comprised paratroop, glider, and troop carrier officers as well as glider and transport pilots. The board met at Camp Mackall, North Carolina, where its members studied every Allied and Axis airborne operation that had taken place to date in all theaters of war. After several weeks of study the board published its findings, concluding unequivocally " 'Airborne divisions are tactically sound.' " As had Training

Memorandum Number 43, the Swing Board findings recognized that the " '[s]uccessful employment [of airborne divisions] requires careful and exact planning and coordination with the major ground effort.' "[80] But then the Swing Board findings departed dramatically from all preceding studies and investigative boards with its publication of Training Circular 113, (TC 113), *Employment of Airborne and Troop Carrier Forces*.

Published in October 1943, TC 113 not only codified procedures for the planning, coordination and execution of airborne operations in painstaking detail, it clearly placed the onus for ensuring that everything was accomplished properly on the theater commander, the only one who had the "authority to direct the necessary coordinated action of all land, sea, and air forces in the areas involved."[81] Undoubtedly drawing from lessons learned in Sicily, during which responsibility for airborne planning and coordination had been delegated to subordinate headquarters (the U.S. Seventh and British Eighth Armies) that did not have command authority over all the organizations involved in the operation, TC 113 elevated responsibility to the only level of command that could demand compliance. This had long been trumpeted by Major General Browning who consistently recommended that "centralised planning and control of all airborne matters, . . . are an essential."[82] In the days prior to Sicily, however, Browning's call to centralize airborne planning had been interpreted by many, to include Ridgway, as an attempt by the British to take control of all airborne forces and was therefore resisted.

Because of its clear delineation of responsibilities, TC 113 superseded Training Memorandum Number 43 as the source document for Allied airborne operations and though later modified slightly to accommodate changing circumstances, remained in effect throughout the war. It had, however, one other significant impact: it formally recognized airborne divisions as operational and strategic assets that should not be frittered away on tactical objectives. It did this by not only making the theater commander responsible for the planning, coordination, and execution of airborne operations, but by placing all airborne units under his "direct control" until such a time that they had been deployed in a subordinate ground commander's area of operations.[83] In other words, airborne units were not to be viewed as simply another asset that a theater commander could divide up among his subordinates for their use as they saw fit. They were, instead, assets that he should seek to employ *en masse* and in a manner that would further the achievement of his operational or strategic objectives, and through their use seek to facilitate the successful termination of the campaign or war. This shift of focus would have, in the future, a far-ranging impact on the missions for which airborne divisions were selected and the resources that would be available to support them.

Before validating the Swing Board's recommendations however, McNair and Marshall wanted proof. A large-scale exercise was therefore planned with an eye toward employing an airborne division in accordance with the principles, techniques, and procedures set forth in TC 113. This exercise, referred to as the Knollwood Maneuvers, involved the capture of Knollwood Airport in North Carolina by Swing's 11th Airborne Division. Designed "to test the feasibility of loading up an airborne division in its jump transports and gliders, flying a four-hour triangular course—for the most part over water—hitting the drop and landing zones at night under blacked-out conditions, assembling the units into combat formations speedily, and then attacking the defending forces aggressively" the exercise was also to answer the overarching question of the practicability of the airborne division concept.[84] This six-day exercise, conducted in

December 1943, was a resounding success for those advocating airborne divisions. Even the skeptical McNair, who had been opposed to the formation of "specialty units" from the outset of the war and who had therefore acted as chief umpire of the exercise so that he could observe the results for himself instead of reading about them in someone else's report praised the work of Swing's division. In a letter to Swing, McNair wrote:

> 'I congratulate you on the splendid performance of your division in the Knollwood Maneuver. After the airborne operations in Africa and Sicily, my staff and I had become convinced of the impracticality of handling large airborne units. I was prepared to recommend to the War Department that airborne divisions be abandoned in our scheme of organization and that the airborne effort be restricted to parachute units of battalion size or smaller. The successful performance of your division has convinced me that we were wrong, and I shall now recommend that we continue our present schedule of activating, training, and committing airborne divisions.'[85]

Thus ended all debate in the U.S. Army about the efficacy of airborne divisions.[86] Having been defined as operational and strategic assets, commanders began looking at employing them in entirely new ways and in significantly larger numbers. Even those commanders such as Eisenhower who had at one time advocated doing away with division-size airborne units began contemplating even larger formations of paratroopers and glider troops—a trend that after Normandy became irresistible.

With the exception of Ridgway and Taylor, and perhaps a few others on the division staff, most troopers in the 82nd were oblivious to the debates being waged for and against the retention of airborne divisions. And while those outside the division argued theory and doctrine, those who had fought in Sicily concerned themselves with the tactics, techniques, and procedures of the battlefield that they had learned as a result of their first campaign. According to Gavin, "Sicily had been a sobering experience" because "[f]or years [the troopers] had been told that [their] weapons were superior to any [they] would encounter."[87] Yet the clashes with German tanks on Sicily demonstrated that the American bazooka was not up to the task. So great an impact did this make on the 82nd's leadership that as soon as the division settled down to its police and occupation duties they organized a series of training events to test the vulnerability of German tanks against American antitank weapons.[88] The tests underscored what many of them already knew, that "[t]he most marked deficiency of airborne troops [was] their inability to cope with heavy armor" and hence "[a] larger bore bazooka that could penetrate the front armor of the German Mark VI tank" was the division's most needed weapon."[89]

Other weapons also came under scrutiny. The troopers thought that the M-1 carbine proved "almost without exception . . . unsatisfactory, both from mechanical malfunctioning and ineffectiveness at mid ranges." Conversely, they judged the M-1 Garand "the best weapon in the hands of any troops on either side" and the recommendation therefore was to replace all carbines with Garands (most were replaced, including Gavin's that had jammed during his first firefight in Sicily; for the remainder of the war, Gavin carried a Garand). Troopers also thought the crew-served .30-caliber machine gun was too unwieldy, especially in the assault and as a consequence they were

replaced with additional Browning Automatic Rifles. The 75mm pack howitzer, although not given a thorough combat test as an indirect fire weapon "proved very valuable as an antitank gun" and these, too, were retained, at least in the parachute field artillery battalions (sometime later, the division's glider field artillery battalions had their 75mm howitzers replaced by long- and short-barreled 105mm howitzers).[90]

Combat packing lists were also modified. Toiletry, extra clothing and blankets were, in the future, to be left off the paratrooper's combat load in favor of additional ammunition, mines, and grenades. Extra socks were important and kept on the packing list not only because of the importance infantrymen placed on foot care, but also because the troopers found that they made great improvised plastic explosive satchels for use against tanks and pillboxes.[91] Because of the heavy loss of equipment containers during both jumps, the decision was made "that more weapons would have to be jumped on the person so that they would be immediately available."[92] Finally, all mechanical assembly devices (the crickets) were abandoned in favor of simple passwords, which had to be the same for all friendly forces, airborne and otherwise.[93]

Operations in western Sicily convinced Ridgway that the 82nd in particular and airborne divisions in general required additional ground transportation assets. In a report to Patton shortly after the hard-marching 82nd had taken Trapani, Ridgway wrote "[t]he statement that airborne troops are highly specialized, should be reserved for airborne roles, and withdrawn from ground action as early as possible is fallacious."[94] Seeing how his troopers performed in its first test of combat, Ridgway was prescient enough to realize that once ground commanders got control of his highly aggressive, superbly trained soldiers, they would be reluctant to give them up. In order, therefore, that his troopers could keep up with the armor and mechanized infantry divisions with whom they would be fighting side-by-side, and to ensure against the straggling that had, at times, plagued the division, Ridgway recommended that the airborne division's equipment table be changed to include two truck companies along with additional jeeps, trailers and other vehicles for use as artillery prime movers, reconnaissance and liaison vehicles, and combat supply vehicles.[95] This request was denied but future operations would demonstrate time and again that his prediction about the willingness of commanders to relinquish control of the 82nd was valid.

Because it did not involve the dedication of additional assets, one organizational modification that Ridgway could implement on his own authority was the formation of pathfinder teams. British Bomber Command had successfully experimented with specially equipped pathfinder aircraft manned by highly trained crews who could find target cities at night and illuminate them by dropping a special mix of incendiaries and high-explosives, thereby creating an aiming beacon on which the heavier bomber streams could concentrate. Borrowing liberally from the success of Bomber Command, every officer and board that reviewed the performance of the airborne insertions in Sicily recommended the formation of similar groups to improve the navigational accuracy of transport pilots. Captain John Norton of the 82nd and Lieutenant Colonel Joel Crouch of the 52nd Troop Carrier Command were the two individuals entrusted with adapting this concept to airborne operations and conducting the experimentation and training required to bring it to fruition. The two men began their work while the division was still on occupation duty in Sicily. Crouch selected the most experienced and proficient transport pilots and navigators from those available in North Africa to form the 1st Pathfinder

Group, the air component of the joint team. Norton selected one officer and five enlisted men from each parachute battalion to form the parachute component. Training with special 'halophane' lamps, man-portable radio transmitters and radars, smoke grenades and brightly colored ground panels, the paratroopers, pilots and navigators worked together to develop the techniques and operating procedures that would be used for the remainder of the war. The concept, once developed, was to have the pilots of the 1st Pathfinder Group insert their parachuting counterparts on the planned drop zones about twenty minutes before the arrival of the main body. Once on the ground, the pathfinding paratroopers would set up their homing and recognition signals to guide the follow-on aircraft in. In the case of multiple drop and landing zones assigned to different battalions or regiments (the pathfinders were trained to guide both parachute and glider forces in), recognition systems were developed so that the pilots carrying the main body of paratroopers or glider troopers could differentiate between their drop or landing zone and others. In this manner, battalions and regiments could be inserted in the same area, thereby facilitating rapid assembly. Later on, techniques for the aerial resupply of airborne forces were also developed.[96]

Despite being outgunned, outnumbered and scattered throughout the island, the troopers of the 82nd had, almost without exception, proved themselves up to the task of combat and by their performance validated the training philosophy of the division's leadership. As Gavin put it, the "pay-off" for all the training and preparation is in the performance of the individual troopers and small-unit commanders, for "[i]f they have learned their missions and those of other units working with them and if they have the initiative and moral and physical courage to do something about it, everything will turn out all right."[97] Sometimes by design, sometimes due to exigencies that precluded anything else, the bulk of the division's training time leading up to Sicily had been devoted to company-level and below training. As a result the division's small-unit leaders and individual soldiers were consistently challenged to display their initiative as they negotiated the training scenarios. Even those at the lower levels of command agreed. Artilleryman John D. McKenzie attributed "[m]uch of the superior efficiency of the 82d . . . to [its] focus on platoon, squad, and individual training" for "[w]hen its men are well disciplined and the smaller units perform consistently with excellence, a division becomes a formidable force."[98] Sicily was not, then, the first time that the 82nd's troopers and junior leaders had been called upon to perform on their own; rather, it was the culminating event that validated the theory that one could create soldiers that were disciplined, yet not afraid to use their initiative; who would obey orders while knowing when to question those orders and seek a better solution; men who could go into combat lightly armed and stand up to enemy formations larger in size and with significantly more firepower.

This reliance on initiative and aggressiveness at the lower levels accrued other benefits as well. Not only did the troopers more readily adapt their actions to the fluid or unexpected situations in which they found themselves, their penchant for action gained them the upper hand on the battlefield, a critical characteristic given the light armament with which they entered battle. It also saved their lives. Gavin wrote of this phenomenon while on occupation duty in Sicily, as he mulled over his first taste of combat.

> Most people become somewhat mesmerized by the holocaust and the danger to be promptly and energetically ag[g]ressive in a fight. That moment, the initial moment of indecision, should be made the most of. Hit them quick and hit them hard, keep the initiative even on the defensive.[99]

Seizing the initiative in "the initial moment of indecision" was critical. It kept the enemy off balance. Gavin realized that the very manner by which airborne troopers entered battle sewed confusion and fear in the mind of the enemy. Summing up his experience against the Germans he had encountered on Sicily, Gavin wrote that they "are good fighters but they can be beaten badly especially if outsmarted and attacked when they least expect it. Surprise is costly to them always whereas a paratrooper will fight anytime."[100] Capitalizing on the confusion, fear, and indecision of the enemy was key for success and survival and hence the high premium that had been placed on individual initiative during training, which translated into aggressiveness on the battlefield, earned great dividends in combat.

Forging a unit in which aggressiveness, initiative, and toughness are so highly valued places a great deal of responsibility on the higher ranking officers of that unit to measure up to the same standards. The troopers of the 82nd would not have tolerated 'chateau generals' who demanded much sweat in training and blood in combat but who remained behind when battle was joined. Ridgway echoed these sentiments in a post-war seminar at the Army's Command and General Staff College when he told the assembled students that "a basic element in troop leadership is the responsibility of the commander to be where the crisis of action is going to happen." Accordingly, once combat is joined, the commander "doesn't belong back at his command post" but should be "where the going is the toughest." A leader should not "trespass on the sphere of his subordinates," he continued, but he should be up front to assess the situation, "to drink in, by his senses and all his experience, the actual situation and the human element above all else."[101] In that manner, he could get a feel for the capabilities of the unit and lend support and reinforcements if required. And by his mere presence at the front, the leader would inspire.

Ridgway, Gavin and Tucker demonstrated beyond doubt that they were tough, aggressive combat commanders during the Sicilian Campaign. They were constantly at the front, exposed to enemy fire as much as any individual paratrooper, pushing their men to perform. Through their actions, they not only earned the respect of their troopers because of their competence and toughness, they also inspired them with their courage. The effect was electric, especially within a division as small as the 82nd. This was no mass organization—it was an intimate brotherhood. Tales, good and bad, passed quickly through its ranks. It was during Sicily that there began to form reputations about the division's principal leaders. Ridgway was the intense commander for whom the war was a Manichean crusade. Although outwardly cool, Gavin could see that before a fight Ridgway would get very tense, "almost grinding his teeth" like a police dog straining at its tether.[102] He also personalized the war. In a post-war interview, Gavin stated,

> [i]t was always Ridgway versus the Wehrmacht in my mind. He'd come up to the front and go around the road bend and stand and urinate in the

> middle of the road. I'd say, 'Matt, get the hell out of there. You'll get shot.' No, he was defiant. Even with his penis he was defiant.[103]

Tucker was the fighter who cared little for anything else. His regiment, reflecting its commander's personality, was much the same—intense paratroopers who, during lulls from the fighting, tended to bend the rules. Illustrative of Tucker's personality and proclivities is an incident that occurred while Tucker was a president of a court martial. According to Gavin, "[a] soldier got caught driving a stolen jeep. Tucker sat on his court martial. Acquitted him. I said, 'How the hell can you acquit him? He was driving the stolen jeep?' Tucker said, 'He's a good combat soldier; we need him.' "[104]

Gavin was the cool, steely-eye, soft-spoken commander who was destined for higher station. Though young, he was simply too talented, too smart, too innovative to remain a regimental commander throughout he war. Many of the tactics, techniques and procedures that had been employed on Sicily were a direct result of his thoughts and experimentation. But for Gavin, Sicily was more than a simple test of his theories of airborne warfare and training, it was also a personal test. He wanted to know if he was smart enough, and brave enough, to lead his paratroopers in combat. After Sicily, no one doubted that he was. During the fight on Biazzo Ridge, Gavin earned his first Distinguished Service Cross for his "cool courageous leadership of the highest order throughout the day's fighting, encouraging and inspiring his men, and by his heroic example achieved decisive success in the face of greatly superior odds."[105] Gavin had already developed into that very rare breed of commander who is not only respected, but who is worshiped by his men, a sentiment best summed up by historian Stephen Ambrose (who was writing of Gavin after he took command of the 82nd).

> To indulge in a generalization, one based on four decades of interviewing former GIs but supported by no statistical data, Jim Gavin was the most beloved division commander in the [European Theater of Operations]. Some veterans can't remember their division commanders' names because there were so many of them, or because they never saw them; others don't want to remember. But veterans of the 82nd get tongue-tied when I ask them how they feel about General Gavin, then burst into a torrent of words—bold, courageous, fair, smart as hell, a man's man, trusted, a leader, beloved.[106]

Sicily had been a good proving ground for the American Army in general and 82nd in particular. After a rocky start, the division had prevailed against fearsome odds, made more so by the inadequacy of its weaponry. Those in the American Army who still questioned the concept of the airborne division because of the difficulties encountered during the drops would have done well to examine the situation from the enemy perspective. Field Marshal Kesslering recognized that although Gavin's combat team had been widely scattered during the initial drop, "[o]perating as nuisance teams, they considerably impeded the advance of the Hermann Goering Panzer Division and helped to prevent it from attacking the enemy promptly after the landings at Gela and elsewhere."[107] The German airborne pioneer Kurt Student stated unequivocally that the Allied airborne operations in Sicily were decisive " 'despite the widely scattered drops

which must be expected in a night landing' " and had it not been for the delay imposed on the advance of the *Hermann Göring Division* by the American paratroopers, " 'that Division would have driven the initial seaborne forces back into the sea.' "[108]

Much that had gone wrong during the Allies' first attempt at mass airborne warfare had been the result not of enemy action but of faulty coordination, plans, and training, all of which was within the power of the Allies to correct. Once battle was joined, however, the troopers of the 82nd proved fearsome fighters. This reputation for fearsomeness, worn as a badge of honor by the troopers of the 82nd, would also prove an albatross. Higher commanders, vaguely familiar with the capabilities of the division but knowing beyond a doubt that the troopers were superb fighters led by aggressive leaders, would in the future devise a never-ending string of contingency plans that called for the use of the 82nd, many of which would most assuredly have resulted in its destruction. And once they did get control of the 82nd, commanders were chary of relinquishing it. Hence while those at the highest echelons of command in North Africa and Washington discussed the division's future, those who had seen it in action were clamoring to use it. Ironically, its next call to arms would not come after weeks of careful coordination, planning, and training thought necessary to alleviate the problems encountered during Sicily. The next call was an emergency call, which the troopers of the 82nd were the *only* troops in the theater capable of answering.

Chapter Eight Notes

[1] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82d Airborne Division, "Reported Loss of Transport Planes and Personnel."

[2] Captain Faith served as Ridgway's aide throughout World War II and remained in the Army afterwards. When the Korean War broke out he was commanding the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry, which, in November-December 1950 was surrounded by the Chinese Communists at the Changjin (Chosin) Reservoir. Faith organized disparate elements of the U.S. 7th Infantry Division into a task force—Task Force Faith—and led them on a fighting withdrawal before they were finally overrun and during which Faith was killed. For his actions Lieutenant Colonel Faith was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. See Billy C. Mossman, *Ebb and Flow, November 1950-July 1951* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), 132-136.

[3] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 71. Allen's report, of course, was not correct. There were some paratroopers to his front, most notably the group under Lieutenant Colonel Gorham and Captain Sayre. But according to the plan Gavin's entire regimental combat team should have been to Allen's front, and this certainly was not the case.

[4] Ibid., 71-73. According to the original plan for the drop, Follmer's company was to knock out an Italian strongpoint near Lake Biviere and then light huge bonfires that would serve as guideposts for the seaborne elements of the 1st Infantry Division. Though not able to do this himself because of his broken ankle, Follmer's platoon leaders accomplished both missions. See Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily*, 84-87. After Sicily, Follmer remained with the 82nd but had the most unfortunate luck on airborne operations. During the jump into Normandy, Follmer broke his right hip and was invalided out of the Army. Normandy was Follmer's third combat jump and Ridgway's first. Strangely, after Ridgway climbed out of his parachute harness in Normandy the first person he met was Bill Follmer, lying on his back. When Ridgway approached him and asked what was wrong, Follmer commented that he thought he had broken his back. Not being able to linger, Ridgway commented, " 'Well . . . I guess you hope to god you never see *me* again.' " See Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 6 and letter from Willard B. Follmer to Clay Blair, 5 February 1984, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Follmer, Willard R." USAMHI.

[5] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 92; Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 73; Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 39.

[6] See Memorandum, "Follow-up Lift 82nd Airborne Division," n.d., signed by A. S. Nevins for Eisenhower; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division "Plan for CT 504 (less 3d Bn)" 29 June 1943; Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Red, White, Blue, Green, Purple and Brown Messages," 30 June 1943; and copy of actual message sent by Ridgway on 11 July. All the above are exhibits in H. A. Craig, W. C. Crane, Philip Vian, and Fay Ross *Proceeding of Board of Officers Considering Airborne Operations*, 23 July 1943, part 1, series A, Records of the War Department's Operations Division, 1942-1945 (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1993), microfilm, reel 4.

[7] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 175.

[8] Breuer, *Drop Zone Sicily*, 139; Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 159; Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 37.

[9] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 39.

[10] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 176 and Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 39.

[11] Kuehl quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 52.

[12] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 74.

[13] James M. Gavin, interview, 4 January 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder entitled "Gavin, James M.," USAMHI. Tucker finally got his star after the war and ended his military career as the Commandant of Cadets at The Citadel.

[14] Headquarters, 82d Airborne Division, "Reported Loss of Transport Planes and Personnel." Some of the others Ridgway had enlisted to his cause were Major General Browning; Major General Geoffrey Keyes, Patton's deputy commander; and Major General Joseph M. Swing, Eisenhower's American airborne advisor. These three had been instrumental in getting the naval planners to agree that if the aircraft followed certain prescribed routes they would be safe from friendly fire. But designing aerial routes that avoided the convoys was one thing; ensuring that the ships did not fire on the aircraft required positive fire control measures from both the naval and ground force commanders.

[15] Message, 5 July 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI. Capitalization in original.

[16] Message, 6 July 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI. See also Blumenson, ed. *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 281. A notation at the bottom of the message indicates that Patton's G-3 passed this message to Admiral Hewitt that same day.

[17] Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 282.

[18] Headquarters, 82d Airborne Division, "Reported Loss of Transport Planes and Personnel."

[19] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 177.

[20] Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Two-Ocean War: A Short History of the United States Navy in the Second World War* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), 259.

[21] Patton diary entry for 11 July 1943 in Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 280.

[22] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 39.

[23] Harrison's testimony is paraphrased in Headquarters, 82d Airborne Division, "Reported Loss of Transport Planes and Personnel."

[24] From after action report quoted in Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 39. Each plane had recognition flares which they were to fire to ensure recognition by friendly forces but in the heat of battle, and mixed with the hundreds of tracers and airburst antiaircraft shells, these were futile.

[25] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 177-181 and Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 40.

[26] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 7-8.

[27] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 40. Surprisingly, not all the men aboard the six planes that crashed were killed.

[28] Joint interview of Flight Officer Anderson and Lieutenant Harpster, pilot and co-pilot of aircraft No. 505, 45th Troop Carrier Squadron, 316th Troop Carrier Group included in report from Headquarters, 52nd Troop Carrier Wing, 12 July 1943, exhibit in Craig et al., *Proceeding of Board of Officers*. Capitalization in original.

[29] O'Malley quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo,* 92.

[30] Komosa quoted in Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 180.

[31] Kuehl quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 53.

[32] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 40.

[33] Statement by Charles A. Drew, n.d., The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Invasion of Sicily, intelligence reports, organizational and operation plans, after action report + inquiry on friendly fire losses, maps," USAMHI.

[34] Headquarters, 82d Airborne Division, "Reported Loss of Transport Planes and Personnel." There is much confusion about what the correct sign-countersign was that night. Lieutenant Charles Drew stated he was told it was "George-Marshall" and that he later found out it was, ironically, "Think-Quickly." See statement by Charles A. Drew.

[35] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 182.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Quoted in Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 50.

[38] See Breuer, *Geronimo,* 93-94 and Nelson Mayhew, "The Yacht Club: The Sixty-Second Troop Carrier Squadron and the Evolution of Combat Airdrop Operations During World War II" (masters thesis, University of Alabama, 1992), 12. In *Geronimo,* Breuer writes that Sergeant Fielding Armstrong, the crew chief aboard the plane on which Keerans was riding, saw Keerans on Sicily the next morning. Their plane had been shot down during the run in to Sicily and ditched about 400 yards from the coast. Most of the crew and some paratroopers struggled free of the wreckage and made it to shore. While Armstrong was searching for his pilot and co-pilot, he encountered Keerans standing near the beach. Keerans asked Armstrong if he would accompany him inland. Armstrong declined, saying he wanted to return to his unit in North Africa. Mayhew substantiates this story in *The Yacht Club*. Gavin saw Keerans as "a problem boy" who "liked to go on a [drinking] spree every now and then. 3 and 4 days." Keerans was on Gavin's boat during the voyage to North Africa and, though the senior Army officer aboard, Keerans "was drunk most of the time . . . and he'd have us do crazy things and it'd just drive you bananas." Ridgway thought about relieving him but Keerans "was one of those guys that everybody in the U.S. Army knew he drank and they all took care of him and protected him." That was why Keerans was told he could not go on the mission to Sicily. See Gavin, interview, 4 January 1983. In an 8 May 1943 diary entry, made while sailing for North Africa, Gavin noted "Gen[eral] K[eerans] back to normal after a three or four day drunk. I dislike that in anyone. . . . I thought that he had given up those habits. I never want to serve in his division if he gets one. . . . With no one to whom he would be accountable it is probable that he would be drunk most of the time. . . . Even when he is sober his judgement [*sic*] is not entirely sound. I am tired of tolerating his drunk[e]ness for days at a time and then defending my policies the remainder of the time." See Gavin Diary, 8 May 1943. Apparently, Keerans's reputation had spread to the lower ranks as well. When learning that Keerans had been shot down (and presumably killed) during the 504th drop, an unknown historian of C Company, 1st Battalion, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, which was still in North Africa wrote " 'I don't believe we can get anyone worse (than Keerans) as CO of our combat team. The Army and the "cause" didn't lose a helluva lot when they lost him.' " See Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 56.

[39] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 40.

[40] See *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 9 and 13 and Chester Garrison and Lewis P. Fern, "Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion 504th Parachute Infantry 82nd Airborne Division," unmarked box, Folder "*S-1 Journal—Sicily, Salerno, Anzio (2/504th)" in an unmarked box from the 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.

[41] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 188.

[42] Patton diary entry for 13 July 1943 in Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 285-286. In *A General's Life*, Bradley contended that Patton accepted Alexander's plan because he was fearful of being relieved. According to Bradley, "[i]n Tunisia [Eisenhower] had sharply warned him to curb his rampant Anglophobia and 'to respond to General Alexander's orders exactly as if they were issued by me.' Only the day before, Ike had landed on him hard in person. Ike's accusatory cable about the paratrooper disaster had arrived just that morning, and Patton already felt the blame must rest on him." (page 188). It is true that in his 13 July diary entry, Patton wrote of the disaster and Eisenhower's subsequent cable, saying " '[p]erhaps Ike is looking for an excuse to relieve me.' " See Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 283.

[43] Lucian K. Truscott Jr., *Command Missions: A Personal Story* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1954), 222.

[44] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 230-231.

[45] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 14.

[46] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 245 and 249.

[47] Quoted in *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 14.

[48] Gavin Diary, 31 July 1943.

[49] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 15 and 21.

[50] Ibid., 15-16 and 20-21.

[51] Garrison and Fern, "Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion 504th Parachute Infantry."

[52] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 245 and 252.

[53] Gavin Diary, 31 July 1943. William Mandle and David Whittier, in *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, cast a slightly different light on the regiment's advance to the west. They wrote: "With Italian light tanks, motorcycles, horses, bicycles, mules, trucks, and even wheelbarrows for transportation, the regiment pressed forward; a cocky, spirited bunch of 'mechanized' paratroopers heading into battle." (n. p.)

[54] See *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 16; Garrison and Fern, "Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion 504th Parachute Infantry"; Gavin Diary, 31 July 1943; Letter from John P. O'Malley to William P. Yarborough, 20 January 1980, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "CHRONO FILE: SICILY," USAMHI; Yarborough, interview, 28 March 1975.

[55] Quoted in *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 16-17. Capitalization in original.

[56] Ibid., 17.

[57] Edward C. Krause, "Extracts from Battalion Journal of 23 July 1943, Montevago, Sicily," n.d., 382-INF(505)-0.3,, Box 12455, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[58] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 17.

[59] Ibid., 17-18.

[60] Map overlay, "Sicilian Campaign, 82d A/B DIV OPERATIONS, 162400-292400 July", n.d., 382-0.3, Box 12345, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[61] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 47-52.

[62] Report from Headquarters, 52nd Troop Carrier Wing, 12 July 1943, exhibit in Craig et al., *Proceeding of Board of Officers*. Because he believed that his pilots had dropped Tucker's men on the Gela-Farello landing area, Clark concluded that the "mission was successful as far as dropping equipment and personnel was concerned" although "[i]t was disastrous so far as losses to this Wing are concerned."

[63] Memorandum, Headquarters, North Africa Air Force Troop Carrier Command (Prov.), "Operation—HUSKY (Subsequent Missions 52nd TC Wing and American 82nd Airborne Division)," 13 July 1943, exhibit in Craig et al., *Proceeding of Board of Officers*. Like Clark, Williams also insisted that though the mission was costly for the air force, the pilots successfully delivered their paratroopers where designated.

[64] Patton diary entry of 13 July 1943 from Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 283.

[65] Memorandum from Joseph M. Swing, "Comments on Night Operation, 82d Airborne Division Night D plus 1/D plus 2," 16 July 1943 reproduced as appendix XI in Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 273.

[66] Dwight D. Eisenhower to George C. Marshall, 17 July 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years II*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1,259.

[67] Cable from Cunningham to Eisenhower, 23 July 1943, exhibit in Craig et al., *Proceeding of Board of Officers*.

[68] Craig et al., *Proceeding of Board of Officers*.

[69] Harry Lewis, "Reactions to Airborne Operations Conference Held NATOUSA, 241430 July 43," The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "CHRONO FILE: SICILY," USAMHI. See also Craig et al., *Proceeding of Board of Officers*.

[70] Craig et al., *Proceeding of Board of Officers*.

[71] Allied Force Headquarters, Training Memorandum Number 43, *Employment of Airborne Forces*, 2 August 1943, part 1 series A, Records of the War Department's Operations Division, 1942-1945, (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1993), microfilm, reel 8.

[72] Headquarters, 82d Airborne Division, "Reported Loss of Transport Planes and Personnel."

[73] Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 1.

[74] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 52-53.

[75] Lucas quoted in Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 166.

[76] Patton quoted in ibid., 164.

[77] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 184. Bradley also wrote that the resistance that had grown up against the airborne forces ran much deeper than the desire to disband airborne divisions in that many wanted to do away with the concept of military parachutists all together. According to Bradley many of his "infantry cohorts declared the paratroopers a dead dodo. There was soon a strong move in Washington to abolish the force" (184). Interestingly, in light of the experience of the Sicily Campaign both Generals Ridgway and Taylor also questioned the usefulness of airborne divisions as then organized. On 29 July, Taylor submitted a memorandum to Ridgway in which he observed that "[a]s the 82nd Airborne Division has no immediate chance for use in combat as an Airborne Division, it is exposed to deterioration thru idleness unless given a new mission." He recommended, therefore, that the parachute troops be formed into separate regiments and divorced from the 82nd, which should then be organized as an "Air Ranger" division capable of movement by glider, plane, or assault boat to conduct air or amphibious landing operations and "Ranger type of missions." See Memorandum, Maxwell D. Taylor to Matthew B. Ridgway, "Airborne Operations," 29 July 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI. Two days after receiving Taylor's memorandum, Ridgway drafted one of his own in which he maintained, as he always had, that airborne divisions should be employed as divisions and not piecemeal. Like Taylor, he also stated that if they are not used they will deteriorate and that "[t]herefore if appropriate opportunities do not appear imminent, or if sufficient aircraft to permit employment of the division as a whole are not available, the division should be unhesitatingly employed, as a whole, as a light infantry combat division, with missions appropriate to its fire power and combat strength." He went on to say that the division's "parachute elements should be withdrawn and incorporated in separate parachute regiments" and that the division be reconstituted as an air-landing division for movement by glider or plane. See Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Airborne [Troops] Divisions," 31 July 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI. There is no evidence to indicate that either of these memoranda, the second of which exists in only draft with Ridgway's editing scrawled in the borders, ever got any farther than Ridgway's desk. What these documents do demonstrate, however, is the frustration both men felt with having to rely on the untrained and insufficiently equipped Troop Carrier Command to supply them with a means to get to the battlefield.

[78] Dwight D. Eisenhower to George C. Marshall, 20 September 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years III*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1970), 1,440. Italics in original.

[79] Pierson quoted in E. M. Flanagan Jr., *The Angels: A History of the 11th Airborne Division* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989), 49.

[80] Quoted in Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 167.

[81] Training Circular 113, excerpted in ibid., 264.

[82] F. A. M. Browning, "Report on Airborne Operations. 'HUSKY.' Between nights of 9/10th July, 43 and 16/17th July, 43," 24 July 1943, exhibit in Craig et al., *Proceeding of Board of Officers*.

[83] Training Circular 113, excerpted in Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 264.

[84] Flanagan, *The Angels*, 55.

[85] Letter from McNair to Swing, 16 December 1943, quoted in Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 132.

[86] Remarkably, despite all the boards, reports, and exercises that resulted from the Sicily fratricide, the Army censors kept the incident quiet until April 1944. In a diary entry for 4 April 1944, Eisenhower's naval aide, Captain Harry Butcher wrote, "[t]he unfortunate loss of twenty-three transport aircraft in the Sicilian operation by our own naval gunfire eventually reached the press." He continued, "there has been considerable hue and cry at home. As a matter of fact, the story could have been released months ago, but

with action developing so fast in the Mediterranean and other problems pressing for attention, this affair was more forgotten than purposely hidden." See Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 511-512.

[87] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 51.

[88] Ibid., 45-46. To recognize the courage bazooka gunners had to display in order to kill a tank, having to maneuver to the side or rear of the tank where the armor was thinner, and by so doing increasing the chances of being killed by accompanying German infantry, Gavin arranged that a special insignia be designed for his bazooka carriers. As he explained it: "Near Trapani are an old convent and monastery on the very high mountain of Erice. I arranged for the nuns there to embroider an insignia to be worn over the left breast of the jumpsuit for the bazooka carriers. It consisted of crossed bazookas and a bolt of lightning in the regimental colors, red and blue. We issued them to all the bazooka men as soon as we got back to Africa a few weeks later. There was no authority in regulations for it, but it seemed like a good idea, and the bazooka men were proud to wear them." Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 45.

[89] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 26 July 1943, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Personal Records to James Gavin, Memo to Ridgway, Orders 505th Parachute Regimental Combat Team," USAMHI. In this same memo, Gavin also noted that the bazooka had to be modified in length to permit it to be jumped on the individual.

[90] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 26 July 1943.

[91] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 52.

[92] James M. Gavin, "Airborne Plans and Operations in the Mediterranean Theater," *Infantry Journal* 59, No. 2 (August 1946): 22.

[93] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 26 July 1943.

[94] Memorandum, Headquarters 82nd Airborne Division, "Analysis of Methods of Employment of 82d Airborne Division, NORTHWEST AFRICAN THEATER, Summer of 1943," 26 July 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[95] Headquarters 82nd Airborne Division, "Analysis of Methods of Employment of 82d Airborne Division."

[96] See Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 50 and letter from Michael A. Chester to James M. Gavin, 30 March 1959, the James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Letters to Gavin, Comments and Inquiries about D-Day mentioned from 'Longest Day,' " USAMHI.

[97] Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 17.

[98] McKenzie, *On Time On Target*, 39.

[99] Gavin Diary, 10 August 1943.

[100] Gavin Diary, 31 July 1943.

[101] Transcript of seminar by Matthew B. Ridgway and Walter F. Winton, "Troop Leadership at the Operational Level: The Eighth Army in Korea," 9 May 1984, Fort Leavenworth, KS, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 51, unmarked folder, USAMHI.

[102] Gavin, interview, 28 September 1982.

[103] Gavin, interview, 4 January 1983.

[104] Gavin, interview, 28 September 1982.

[105] Memorandum, "Award of Distinguished Service Cross," 2 August 1943, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 7, Folder "Records for Receiving Citations and Awards of Valor: Distinguished Service Cross Silver Star," USAMHI.

[106] Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The US Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge and the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944 – May 7, 1945* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 121.

[107] Kesselring's comments in Reinhardt et al, *Airborne Operations: A German Appraisal*, 25.

[108] Student quoted in Dawson, *Saga of the All American*, n.p.

Chapter Nine
Taking Off For the Gates of Hell

And it seems to me, too, that the hard decisions are not the ones you make in the heat of battle. Far harder to make are those involved in speaking your mind about some hare-brained scheme which proposes to commit troops to action under conditions where failure is almost certain, and the only results will be the needless sacrifice of priceless lives. When all is said and done, the most precious asset any nation has is its youth, and for a battle commander ever to condone the needless sacrifice of his men is absolutely inexcusable. In any action, you must balance the inevitable cost in lives against the objectives you seek to attain. Unless, beyond any reasonable doubt, the results reasonably to be expected can justify the estimated loss of life the action involves, then for my part I want none of it.

On the other hand, there are occasions in which daring and risky operations, boldly executed, can pay great dividends. One such plan, hastily conceived and carried out with great daring, probably turned the tide in the early days of the Battle of Italy. With only the briefest preparation the 82nd was sent in as a fire brigade and stopped a German drive that was threatening to split the Allied beachhead and drive our attacking forces into the sea.

Matthew B. Ridgway[1]

The American Chiefs of Staff were soundly outmaneuvered by their British colleagues at the Casablanca Conference and as a result found themselves committed to an invasion of Sicily. Brigadier General Albert C. Wedemeyer, Marshall's principal advisor at Casablanca, marveled at how the British " 'swarmed . . . like locusts with a plentiful supply of planners and various other assistants with prepared plans to insure that they not only accomplished their purpose but did so in stride and with fair promise of continuing in their role of directing strategically the course of this war.' " The Americans were confronting " 'generations and generations of experience in committee work and in rationalizing points of view,' " added Wedemeyer, who led what was in comparison a small contingent of American planners that were " 'on the defensive practically all the time.' "[2] Consequently, summed up Wedemeyer, " 'we lost our shirts and . . . are now committed to a subterranean umbilicus operation in mid-summer. . . . We came, we listened and we were conquered.' "[3]

Marshall left Casablanca vowing that there would be no repeat performance. Convinced that the quickest way to bring about victory in Europe was to mount a cross-Channel invasion at the earliest possible date the Army Chief of Staff was adamant that

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 220 through 228.

in future conferences he would be better prepared to forward the American position. At Marshall's urging, therefore, the American Chiefs instituted a wholesale reorganization of their joint planning system in order to improve inter-service coordination and relieve those responsible for strategic planning of the myriad logistical and administrative duties that had hitherto detracted from their primary undertaking. The Chiefs then charged this streamlined staff with conducting a thorough strategic analysis in order to determine the best and most expeditious way to defeat Germany and Italy.[4] When Churchill and Roosevelt agreed to meet again to discuss post-HUSKY operations the American strategic planners saw it as an opportunity to professionally redeem themselves and, more importantly, re-focus Anglo-American initiatives where they felt they ought to be—on the preparation and execution of a cross-Channel invasion.

The TRIDENT Conference, as it came to be known, was held in Washington, D.C., from 12 to 25 May 1943. Four days before it began the Americans Chiefs of Staff met with the President. Armed with detailed studies, estimates, and position papers the Chiefs wanted to ensure that everyone, and most especially Roosevelt, was in full agreement on the American position regarding post-HUSKY operations. Roosevelt concurred with everything put before him and, as recorded by Admiral William D. Leahy, the chairman of the American Chiefs of Staff, " '[i]t was determined that the principal objective of the American Government [during the TRIDENT Conference] would be to pin down the British to a cross-Channel invasion of Europe at the earliest practicable date and to make full preparations for such an operation by the spring of 1944.' "[5]

Meanwhile, while sailing aboard the *Queen Mary* en route to the United States, Churchill and his military advisers were likewise refining their position for the upcoming conference. Unlike the Americans, the British Chiefs "were convinced that an attack upon the mainland of Italy should follow, or even overlap, the capture of Sicily."[6] They were quite aware of the American desire to curtail further operations in the Mediterranean in favor of building up forces in the United Kingdom and the mounting of a cross-Channel invasion "at the earliest practicable date." The British, however, thought it best to maintain pressure on the Axis in the Mediterranean and thereby "proposed the seizure of a bridgehead on the toe of Italy, to be followed by a further assault on the heel as a prelude to an advance on Bari and Naples."[7]

In reality the American and British positions were not that far apart: both desired the same end but disagreed on how best to achieve that end and where, therefore, to place priority. The American Chiefs's focus on a cross-Channel invasion did not blind them to the possibility of further operations in the Mediterranean and, in fact, conceded that "there were certain merits in operations in the western Mediterranean immediately after HUSKY—to maintain the momentum of HUSKY, utilize resources in the area, furnish support to the USSR, and threaten southern France and Italy."[8] And as Churchill made clear in his opening remarks at TRIDENT, "[h]is Majesty's Government earnestly desired to undertake a full-scale invasion of the Continent from the United Kingdom as soon as a plan offering reasonable prospects of success could be made."[9] But to Churchill and the British Chiefs the "reasonable prospects of success" could be best secured by continuing operations in the Mediterranean and forcing the surrender of Italy, which would bring in its wake the diversion of German divisions from the Eastern Front

and France when Hitler would be compelled to fill the void an Italian surrender would create.

Because their viewpoints differed so little, what resulted from TRIDENT was a decision with which both sides were reasonably comfortable. The British agreed on a 1 May 1944 target date for the cross-Channel invasion on the basis of twenty-nine divisions (seven of which, three British and four American, were to be transferred from the Mediterranean from 1 November 1943 onward). The Americans, meanwhile, accepted "such operations to follow the conquest of Sicily as were best calculated to eliminate Italy from the war and to contain the greatest number of German forces" although each specific operation would only be launched after being approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.[10]

The Combined Chiefs also agreed that where and when to mount any post-HUSKY operation could be best determined by the Allied commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean and thereby charged Eisenhower with formulating alternatives for their review and approval. Desirous of influencing the list of alternatives, Churchill, Brooke and Lieutenant General Hastings L. 'Pug' Ismay, Churchill's chief of staff, left Washington immediately following the conclusion of TRIDENT to fly to Allied Force Headquarters in Algiers. At Churchill's request, Marshall accompanied the group so that it would not appear that the British were attempting to undermine the TRIDENT agreements (Major General Thomas T. Handy, the Chief of the Army's Operations Division, later joined the group in Algiers).[11]

Arriving in late May, the British tried to persuade Eisenhower and his principal deputies that an invasion of Italy would be the best course of action following victory in Sicily. But the reticent Eisenhower refused to be pinned to any specific operation, preferring to wait to see how the Italians and Germans reacted to the invasion of Sicily, still five weeks away. Eisenhower felt that

> he would be able to determine early in the campaign for Sicily the attitude and defensive strength of the Italians on the mainland. If Sicily proved to be relatively easy, this would be an index which would dictate an immediate follow-up of a bridgehead on the toe of Italy across the Messina Strait. If the Italians fought stubbornly in Sicily, . . . then [the Allies] would be confronted with a long campaign, fighting for each hilltop. This would tie down [Allied] forces. It was simply too early, he emphasized, to make a firm commitment now, but, like the P[rime] M[inister], he didn't want to lose any opportunity for exploitation that presented itself.[12]

Marshall suggested, and all agreed, that Eisenhower set up two planning staffs, each of which would prepare a separate post-HUSKY operation: one against Sardinia and Corsica (the American preference) and one against southern Italy. Eisenhower assigned the planning mission for the invasion of Italy to the British X and V Corps while Mark Clark's Fifth Army undertook the planning for an invasion of Sardinia (Corsica evolved into a wholly French undertaking that was subsequently planned and executed by French forces in North Africa under General Henri Philippe Giraud).[13]

Five days into the invasion of Sicily, it was glaringly apparent that the Italians no longer had the will to resist. On that day Marshall's intelligence chief, Major General George V. Strong, told the Army Chief of Staff that "Italian combat power had deteriorated to the point where the Allies could assume calculated risks in dealing with Italy." To that end, Strong recommended "prompt action against the Italian mainland," citing Naples as the most lucrative post-Sicily target.[14] A landing at Naples, Strong felt, would avoid protracted land operations in Calabria (the Italian toe), rule out an Axis defensive stand anchored on Naples, give the Allies a major port and also give aid to the Soviets who, at the time, were battling the Germans in the largest tank battle of the war at Kursk. Impressed with Strong's presentation, Marshall brought it to the attention of the Combined Chiefs the next day. The Chiefs promptly adopted the recommendation and forwarded it to Eisenhower for study.[15] To Marshall, Strong's bold suggestion represented a "device to gain all the advantages of a position in Italy—as far north as Rome—as quickly and as cheaply as possible, thereby ensuring rather than impeding the success of OVERLORD."[16] The British, however, saw things differently, believing instead that their arguments against a precipitous rush to cross the Channel had finally borne fruit.[17]

Eisenhower met with his primary subordinate commanders on 17 July to discuss Strong's recommendation. Although unable to gain a consensus on the issue, Eisenhower and his commanders were convinced that when the time came the attack would have to be mounted quickly in order to retain the momentum and deny the enemy the opportunity to retrench.[18] Furthermore, in light of the swiftness with which Patton and Montgomery were overrunning Sicily, the decision would have to be made soon. As a result of his commander's conference, therefore, Eisenhower requested that he be granted advance approval to carry the war to the Italian mainland, at a place of his choosing, immediately after the fighting in Sicily had ended. He received this permission two days later, though once again the Combined Chiefs chided him to consider options as far north on the Italian boot as possible.[19]

The fall of Mussolini on 25 July provided further impetus for a stroke at Naples, compelling the Combined Chiefs to send Eisenhower yet another cable urging him to launch Operation AVALANCHE, a proposed landing in the vicinity of Naples, at the earliest possible date in order to expedite Italy's collapse and ouster from the war. To sweeten the deal, the Combined Chiefs also granted Eisenhower the use of one light and four escort carriers previously earmarked for use in the cross-Channel invasion.[20] Seizing on the growing support for a landing at Naples, Eisenhower instructed Clark to have Fifth Army headquarters cease work on the Sardinia option and start drawing up the detailed plans for AVALANCHE.[21]

Before they turned Operation AVALANCHE over to Eisenhower for consideration, Allied planners had considered three landing options: landing north of Naples in the Gulf of Gaeta; landing south of Naples in the Gulf of Salerno; and landing in Naples itself. They quickly rejected the third alternative because of the strong defenses that would have to be breached on the way in and the possibility that, in so doing, Allied forces would destroy the very thing for which they were fighting—the port. Landing north of Naples offered the advantage of easy access to the city and port since the terrain separating the proposed invasion beaches and Naples was relatively open. However, the landing sites were beyond the range of Allied fighter aircraft based on Sicily and thus a landing there

would negate the Allies's significant airpower advantage; it was this drawback that eventually lead to the rejection of this option as well.[22] Hence, once Clark received the task to finalize the plan for AVALANCHE, the sole focus of the planning effort was to effect a landing south of Naples in the Gulf of Salerno.

Landing south of Naples had many advantages the most significant of which was that it was within Allied fighter range, though just barely. However, it was thought that by taking Montecorvino airfield, a few miles inland from the invasion beaches, the Allies could establish a forward operating base from which fighters could support a subsequent push on Naples itself. The Gulf of Salerno also offered excellent sea approaches to the invasion beaches and good underwater gradients, both of which would allow warships to come in close to support the landings. There were also quite a few beach exits to the main north-south highway and the small nearby ports at Salerno and nearby Amalfi would facilitate the unloading of supplies once the Allies were firmly established ashore and were pushing inland.[23]

Of course, landing in the Gulf of Salerno was not without its disadvantages. The Sele River cut the proposed landing area into two sectors and its steep banks would make lateral movement within the Allied beachhead difficult, exposing the invasion forces to the possibility of defeat in detail. The mountains inland of the beaches would also limit the initial depth of penetration and give the defenders a positional advantage. Finally, the mountainous Sorrento Peninsula, just north of the invasion area, cut the beach off from Naples, the ultimate prize.[24] Clark's challenge, then, was to get ashore quickly, establish a solid base from which to thrust inland, take control of the mountains surrounding the invasion beaches, establish a forward airfield, and then attack northward through the Sorrento Peninsula into Naples itself.

Mark Clark had long been angling for a combat command. Eisenhower had previously offered him a corps command but Clark demurred, looking for something larger. When Fifth Army was formed Clark took it, despite its being nothing more than an administrative, logistical, and training headquarters. Once Operation HUSKY was underway however, Clark's Fifth Army was the only headquarters of its size not actively engaged in combat, and since Eisenhower was anxious to get an American army into Italy as quickly as possible, it became the logical candidate to undertake planning for the largest of the potential post-Sicily operations.[25] Marshall, who did not know Clark very well was at first reluctant to give him the mission but Eisenhower backed his subordinate (and friend), cabling the Army Chief that Clark was " 'the best organizer, planner and trainer of troops I have met' " and was superb at " 'preparing the minute details of requisitions, landing craft, training of troops and so on, [and] he has no equal in our Army.' "[26] Eisenhower also thought highly of Clark's staff, which another observer called " 'a collection of very brilliant men, exceptionally so.' "[27]

Having been allocated two corps for AVALANCHE—the British X and U.S. VI Corps—Clark's staff fashioned a plan that would get both ashore simultaneously. Landing on the left with two divisions abreast (the British 46th Infantry Division in the north and the British 56th Infantry Division in the south), the British X Corps under Lieutenant General Sir Richard L. McCreery was to be Clark's main effort. Its tasks were to land north of the Sele River, secure the bridges spanning the river, seize the port of Salerno, capture Montecorvino airfield, take the rail and road center of Battipaglia (located about six miles inland), and gain possession of the mountain passes leading to

Naples. The VI Corps, under Major General Ernest J. Dawley, was to land on the right with one division in the lead, the Texas National Guard's 36th Infantry, and be Fifth Army's supporting effort. Landing south of the Sele River, VI Corps was to protect the army's right flank by seizing the high ground to the east and south of the Salerno Plain. Clark's overarching intent was to get overwhelming combat power ashore as quickly as possible, establish a firm bridgehead, and then rush north to take Naples through which he would then debark the remainder of his army and continue the attack toward Rome.[28] Key to the success of Clark's concept was the quick seizure of the passes through the rugged Sorrento Peninsula, just north of the British 46th Division's landing area, through which Fifth Army would have to pass in order to get to Naples.

Besides the British X and American VI Corps, Clark was also granted use of the two Allied airborne divisions then in the Mediterranean, the 82nd and British 1st Airborne. When Clark's staff began its planning effort, both the 82nd and 1st Airborne were still in Sicily. But that did not stop the Fifth Army planners from entering into what one 82nd staff officer called "a fantasia of planning"—a period of approximately forty days during which Ridgway's "planning staff was rubbing Aladdin's magical lamp and turning out detailed plans for mission after mission as fast as Fifth Army revised its plans for the invasion."[29] Several factors contributed to this planning paroxysm: Eisenhower's reluctance to make a decision; the rapidly changing political situation; and the lack of understanding among the Fifth Army planners about the capabilities of airborne divisions and how best to employ them (Training Circular 113 had not yet been published and the vacuous Training Memorandum Number 43 provided no guidance on this most important initial step). As a result Fifth Army tabled several plans for integrating the 82nd into the operational concept for AVALANCHE, all of which Ridgway thought were "ill-considered tactical schemes" that he was convinced "would result in useless slaughter." According to Ridgway "airborne divisions were particularly vulnerable to these noble experiments" not only because commanders did not know how to employ them, but also because higher commanders "sought to prove to the world . . . that they were bold thinkers, quick to seize upon and utilize a new and dramatic weapon."[30] Whatever the reason, in the weeks leading up to AVALANCHE Clark's staff amended its plans several times in an attempt to 'fit' the 82nd into the larger scheme of maneuver while Ridgway, displaying great moral courage, fought to ensure his division would be employed in a manner that would provide it a fighting chance of not only success, but survival.

Ridgway seems not to have been apprised of the specifics of any of Fifth Army's plans for the 82nd until the end of July, and it was only as a result of his efforts to get his division out of Sicily and back to North Africa that he became aware of them. Since taking Trapani, the 82nd's two parachute regiments had been conducting occupation and police duties in western Sicily while the division's glider regiment and other division troops remained uncommitted in North Africa. Anxious to regroup his division so that it would be positioned for commitment *as a division* and not piecemeal and so that he could prepare it for use elsewhere, Ridgway pestered his superiors for relief from occupation duties. When he approached Patton with his request, Patton told him that it was the commander-in-chief that allocated forces in the theater and hence a letter to Eisenhower would have much greater effect. Ridgway wrote that letter and on 29 July flew to Allied Force Headquarters in Algiers to present it to Eisenhower in person. Ridgway emphasized that an early decision about how and when the 82nd would be used in the

future was vital so that he could begin preparing. As a result of casualties sustained during the Sicilian Campaign, his two parachute regiments had to reorganize and absorb approximately one thousand replacements, all of whom were still in North Africa.[31] Additionally, his paratroopers were in dire need of resupply. They had been provided nothing but water, food, and ammunition since jumping into Sicily; were wearing the same uniforms they jumped in with; and had many weapons that were in need of repair or replacement. Ridgway also emphasized that the sooner a decision was made about the future use of the 82nd, the sooner he and his staff could begin the detailed planning and coordination necessary to avoid a repeat of the Sicily fiasco. Finally, Ridgway also hoped to have at least three weeks of uninterrupted joint training time with the Troop Carrier Command so that both could hone their tactics, techniques, and procedures in light of lessons learned from the HUSKY drops. After listening to Ridgway's argument Eisenhower directed him to report to Clark's Fifth Army Headquarters. Ridgway did so later that same day. It was then that he discovered that plans were already well in train to employ the 82nd on the Fifth Army's northern flank at Salerno.[32]

When Ridgway arrived at Fifth Army headquarters he saw that Clark's planners had already roughed out an operational concept that called for both an airborne and amphibious assault by the 82nd on the Sorrento Peninsula in order to cover the debouchment of the British X Corps onto the Plain of Naples. Desirous of quickly seizing passes through the mountainous terrain on the peninsula, Clark's staff wanted to employ every available troop transport and all of the 318 gliders then in the theater to drop as large a force as possible onto the towns of Nocera and Sarno, the northern termini of the passes leading to Naples from the Salerno Plain. Simultaneously, those elements of the 82nd not employed in the airborne assault were to conduct amphibious landings at Amalfi and Maiori, on the southern coast of the peninsula, and then fight their way overland to link up with their comrades. Concerned about a repeat of the Sicily drops, especially in the face of what promised to be much stiffer and more sustained enemy resistance, Ridgway informed Taylor, whom he had dispatched to Fifth Army headquarters along with a small contingent of 82nd planners, that they were to be very careful about signing on for any night drops (the drop on Nocera and Sarno was to be conducted by moonlight on D-1). Ridgway also told Taylor that he had already informed Alexander that he "will not recommend a night parachute operation until I can be shown by actual demonstration in training that the Air Corps can put down in a selected area units of the size of battalions."[33] But, as it turned out, it was the "air experts" of Clark's staff who torpedoed the plan because "it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to land paratroopers effectively in that area because of treacherous air currents sweeping around Mount Vesuvius [a few miles northwest of the intended drop area], the limited space in which transport planes could be brought to a low altitude, and the intense enemy anti-aircraft concentrations nearby."[34] Hence on 12 August, the Sarno-Nocera operation was cancelled.[35] In its place a second operation was tabled, code named GIANT.

As originally conceived Operation GIANT (later known as GIANT I) called for an even bolder use of Ridgway's airborne division: instead of dropping adjacent to the AVALANCHE beachhead, the division would conduct an airborne and amphibious operation along the Volturno River, some forty miles north of the invasion site, in order to "prevent movement of hostile forces south across the VOLTURNO towards the NAPLES Area, [and] to assist the Fifth Army's attack of the NAPLES Area from the

Southeast."[36] To accomplish this mission, it was envisioned that an airborne task force comprising both parachute regiments (and their supporting troops), one glider field artillery battalion, and two glider antitank batteries would drop on the night of D-1/D-Day along the length of the Volturno from Triflisco to the sea. Simultaneously, a seaborne task force formed around the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment would land at the mouth of the Volturno and fight its way inland. Once united, the division was to destroy all crossings over the Volturno from Triflisco to the coast, a straight-line distance of approximately nineteen miles but more than double that when measured along the flow of the meandering Volturno. If successful, GIANT I would seal off southern Italy from the bulk of the German forces then on the peninsula, which were still situated in areas stretching from Rome to the north.[37] It was also envisioned that link up with the British X Corps would occur within five days but if not the division had one of three alternatives: continue to hold along the river, fall back on Naples, or disappear into the rugged interior and wait for the Fifth Army to arrive. It was a fantastic proposal and given what eventually transpired one that almost certainly would have resulted in the destruction of the 82nd Airborne Division. As it was, however, the concept began to disintegrate almost as soon as it was put on paper. First, the navy announced that sandbars at the mouth of the Volturno prohibited the landing of a large force so the seaborne effort was subsequently reduced, first to one battalion, then to one company until finally all amphibious landings were cancelled and a heavy naval bombardment was substituted. This presented a problem for the airborne task force because most of their supplies and ammunition were to have been brought in by sea. Without its seaborne line of communication the airborne task force would require the aerial delivery of some 175 tons of supplies per day for as long as it was out of contact with Fifth Army. When faced with this requirement the air planners blanched. An aerial resupply effort of this magnitude would require the commitment of between 90 and 145 planes each day, or 30 to 45 percent of all the C-47s in the Mediterranean. Additionally, the C-47s would have to fly unescorted since the Volturno was well beyond the range of the Sicily-based fighters. Hence the magnitude of the resupply mission engendered a reduction of the size of the airborne task force to two battalions (thereby making room for more supplies to be flown in on the first day), and a scaling back of the mission to one of simply destroying the Volturno bridges at Capua, located fifteen miles inland.[38]

Ridgway was appalled at the prospect of GIANT I in any size, yet he had to be prepared to execute whatever the planners finally agreed on and to do that he had to get his 82nd out of Sicily and back to its North African bases. By the end of the Sicilian campaign the division was split between western Sicily (where the parachute regiments were scattered among six towns) and North Africa (where the glider elements remained at Kairouan). For three weeks, in between shuttling among various planning headquarters, Ridgway pleaded with anyone who would listen to get his division reunited in North Africa. Despite his entreaties, however, it was not until after the end of the Sicilian Campaign that Ridgway was able to secure the aircraft necessary to move his paratroopers back to North Africa, a move completed by 21 August. With D-Day for AVALANCHE less than three weeks away and GIANT I still looming there was no time for relaxation. While refitting and reorganizing, the paratroopers also absorbed their replacements and instituted a crash training program designed "to imbue the replacements with the high degree of morale and esprit de corps" of the division.[39]

Ridgway also constituted a provisional airborne brigade under Gavin's command, composed of the 82nd's parachute elements, and on 24 August began a week of joint parachute-troop carrier training.[40] But competing demands on the transport aircraft and the fear that there would be insufficient time to recover and re-pack all the parachutes before GIANT I limited the size of the practice drops. Consequently, the only element of the division that was able to make effective use of the limited training time was the pathfinders who tested and jumped the various radars, radios, and beacons they would use in any upcoming operation.[41]

While the paratroopers were training at Kairouan, Colonel Lewis and his glider troopers (reinforced by one parachute battalion, the 3/504th) moved to Bizerte, Tunisia, on 25 August to begin training for their role in GIANT I, the amphibious assault at the mouth of the Volturno. They were still there when the navy cancelled the amphibious portion of the operation, so Clark made the decision to use this force-in-training as a Fifth Army floating reserve. Hence, instead of returning to Ridgway's control, Lewis's task force remained at Bizerte and continued training with orders to be prepared to sail no later than 1600 hours, 3 September.[42]

Clark's decision regarding Lewis's task force was the first of what was to be a series of decisions that would result in the parceling out of the 82nd to various other headquarters leaving Ridgway, at one point, a division commander without a division. Ever since Sicily, Ridgway had become increasingly adamant that the 82nd should be employed as a whole and not used as a force pool from which pieces and parts could be plucked and given to other headquarters. The logistics required to employ the division as a whole, however, undercut Ridgway's desire. Mustering enough troop carrier aircraft and gliders to transport the division in one lift was simply not feasible in the Mediterranean theater, especially given the desire by the U.S. Chiefs of Staff to stem the flow of additional resources into the theater in favor of sending everything to the United Kingdom in preparation for the cross-Channel invasion.[43]

Meanwhile, in early September the planning for GIANT I came to a sudden halt. The reasons for this were not immediately clear. Then, at 0800 hours, 2 September, General Taylor left Kairouan for General Alexander's 15th Army Group headquarters at Cassibile, Sicily, (just south of Syracuse) in compliance with somewhat mysterious instructions received from Eisenhower's Allied Force Headquarters. No explanation was given for Taylor's summons but at 1300 hours Ridgway received a similar order. He was to meet General Spaatz at La Marsa, Tunisia. During the meeting, Spaatz told Ridgway that secret surrender negotiations with the Italians had been taking place for some time. This portended something for the 82nd, although what it was had yet to be determined. Without delay, ordered Spaatz, Ridgway was to follow Taylor to Alexander's headquarters where he would be told more.[44]

Following the fall of Mussolini, a group of conspirators in the upper reaches of Italy's *Comando Supremo* began pushing the new head of the Italian government, *Maresciallo d'Italia* Pietro Badoglio, as well as the country's aging monarch, King Victor Emmanuel III, to conclude a separate peace with the Allies. After much equivocating the leader of the conspirators, *Generale di Brigata* Giuseppe Castellano, received approval to initiate preliminary discussions with representatives from Eisenhower's headquarters. Disguised as a representative of the Italian Ministry of Exchange, Castellano traveled to neutral Portugal so that he could make contact with the Allies through the British Embassy at

Lisbon. On 17 August, Castellano met with the British ambassador, Sir Ronald Hugh Campbell, and divulged the purpose of his trip. Two days later General 'Beetle' Smith and British Brigadier Kenneth Strong (Eisenhower's intelligence chief) arrived in Lisbon to see what Castellano had to offer. Following a lengthy discussion, Castellano returned to Rome, bringing with him the Allies's terms of surrender.

After more wrangling in the Italian high command, Castellano next traveled to Alexander's headquarters to continue his negotiations. Meeting again with Smith and Strong, as well as Alexander and a host of other military and diplomatic representatives, Castellano made it clear that "[o]ne of the conditions of the armistice . . . [was] that Allied military support be given the Italians at Rome to protect their capital city and the Vatican from the Germans when and if the armistice is announced."[45] Castellano added that a minimum of one armored and one airborne division would be required for this task.

After conferring with Eisenhower, Smith offered Castellano only the airborne division, which he stated could drop on Rome in coordination with the main Allied invasion of the peninsula. Once again Castellano returned to Rome and once again he encountered internal squabbling. Finally, Victor Emmanuel summoned enough courage to make a decision and ordered Castellano to return to Sicily to sign the terms of surrender, which Castellano did at 1715 hours, 3 September, although by mutual agreement the surrender was not made public until 8 September.[46]

The Italian King's decision was most likely compelled by news of Operation BAYTOWN, the British Eighth Army's assault crossing of the Straits of Messina onto the toe of Italy, which began at 0430 hours, 3 September. Of the several plans under consideration, Eisenhower selected BAYTOWN because he considered it the fastest way to follow up after Sicily, although due to Montgomery's fastidiousness it was mounted ten days later than Eisenhower would have preferred.[47] In the larger strategic scheme, BAYTOWN was to be a supporting operation to AVALANCHE. Montgomery's task, as given him by Alexander, was to secure the Straits of Messina for use by Allied naval forces and, once ashore, to follow the enemy " 'with such force as you can make available, bearing in mind that the greater the extent to which you can engage enemy forces in the southern tip of Italy, the more assistance will you be giving to AVALANCHE.' "[48] As events unfolded, however, Montgomery provided little appreciable support to Clark's Fifth Army.

On the evening of 2 September, while the Italian surrender negotiations were in their final stages, Ridgway and a select group of 82nd staff officers arrived at 15th Army Group headquarters, where they met Taylor, who had arrived a few hours earlier. Shortly thereafter, Alexander and Brigadier General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Alexander's Deputy Chief of Staff, outlined in broad strokes what would be required of the 82nd in the event an agreement was reached with the Italians. The next day, Lemnitzer codified Alexander's concept in writing. Under the direct command of Alexander and "in cooperation with Italian forces and not subordinate thereto" Lemnitzer wrote, the 82nd Airborne Division's mission was as follows:

> a. On the night of D-1 – D-day, and on subsequent nights as required, to land the maximum force in the ROME Area, either by dropping or in air transports, or both, as the situation dictates.

> b. To provide moral and physical reinforcement for the Italian forces located in the Rome Area.
> c. In cooperation with these Italian forces, secure the City of Rome and adjacent airfields and prevent their occupation by German forces.[49]

Beginning at 1430 hours, 3 September and continuing almost non-stop until 0630 hours the next day, Ridgway and his airborne planners, along with Lemnitzer and representatives from the air corps met with Castellano and his delegation to work out the details of the operation, code-named GIANT II. Castellano stated at the outset that the Italians had four divisions in and around Rome and did not lack men. What they did lack, however was firepower, especially antitank guns and artillery and therefore could not promise to delay an attack by German forces for more than twenty-four hours. The Germans, he went on, had two divisions in the immediate vicinity of Rome, the *3rd Panzer Grenadier Division* to the north and the *2nd Parachute Division* to the south with four more within a few day's march. Moreover, the Germans had concentrated numerous antiaircraft batteries on both sides of the Tiber River. He promised that the Italians would silence the antiaircraft batteries and pinpointed six airfields in the vicinity of Rome that had not been occupied by the Germans that he felt certain Italian forces could hold pending the arrival of Ridgway's troopers. Castellano also promised that a high-ranking Italian military officer would be present at each of the airfields and would be prepared to offer whatever assistance the Americans would require, to include 23,000 rations, 355 trucks, 12 ambulances, 120 tons of gasoline and oil, 12 switchboards, 150 field telephones, 100 picks, 200 shovels, 5,000 wire pickets and 150 miles of barbed wire along with a 500-man labor force to aid the Americans in setting up a defense of Rome.[50]

Ridgway was skeptical from the outset. Since Rome was well beyond the range of Allied fighters, once on the ground the 82nd would have to rely primarily on its own light artillery for close support. As a sop, Ridgway was told that medium and heavy bombers would be diverted from their regular missions to support GIANT II but he knew, as did the aviators, that their effectiveness would be marginal during the city fighting that would most assuredly ensue. What really disturbed Ridgway, however, was his feeling that the Italians were promising more than they could deliver. He became even more suspicious of the Italians when, after a short break, they changed their story, saying that they could not, in fact, guarantee that they could silence all the antiaircraft defenses along the Tiber and that therefore the initial drop would have to occur on airfields some twenty-five miles north of Rome, with follow-on drops and air-land operations at three airfields nearer to the center of the city once the initial force moved into the city to help secure them.[51] Becoming increasingly anxious and leery of Italian promises, Ridgway sought an audience with General Smith. According to Ridgway:

> I stated that I felt it my responsibility as Division Commander to express my views frankly on the contemplated mission; that within the past few days the Division had been assigned two different missions in a distant area; and that now with only four full days for preparation, two of which would have to be employed for air movement of the Division from TUNISIA to SICILY [in order to get the transport planes within range of Rome], I was about to receive a mission involving the employment of over

> three hundred aircraft in a new area. I stated that in my opinion this mission, under these conditions, violated every sound principle we had developed in our training, and that my conscience compelled me to state my strong objections. General SMITH supported this view and directed me to restate these opinions to General ALEXANDER.[52]

According to Ridgway, during their meeting Alexander "treated the whole matter in a cavalier fashion, making light of the enemy situation, apparently giving full faith to the Italian guarantees of full military support, and exhibiting startling ignorance of the logistics of airborne operations."[53] Alexander also stated that the Italians would not have signed the armistice had not the Allies promised that a strong airborne force would descend on Rome and for that reason he felt it imperative that the operation go forward as promised. However, because of Italian equivocation about their ability to silence the antiaircraft defenses along the Tiber, a situation that especially worried Ridgway in light of what had occurred during the second drop into Sicily, Alexander agreed to some adjustments of the plan and allowed Ridgway to scale back the initial force to one parachute regimental combat team (less one battalion) along with some follow on air-landed artillery and antitank reinforcements. The remainder of the 82nd would then drop or air-land on subsequent days as the situation permitted and an amphibious force would be prepared to land at the mouth of the Tiber.[54]

Following his audience with Alexander, Ridgway returned to his waiting staff officers, briefed them on the changes to the plan, and sent them back to Kairouan, where they could finalize the plan and prepare the division for combat (which included moving the division back to Sicily where it would stage for Rome). He then cloistered himself with Taylor. Castellano's equivocation and palpable fear of the Germans had both men worried. One moment the Italian general was confidently pointing out airfields that were completely under Italian control and the next he was changing those airfields. One moment he was promising that antiaircraft defenses would be silenced, the next he was not as forthcoming. Castellano seemed perhaps too willing to make promises, anything to get the Allies to commit combat units to the defense of Rome. They also had the feeling that Castellano's ardor was not shared by everyone in the Italian government and agreed that someone had to get to Badoglio in Rome and attempt to ascertain the truth. A similar scheme had already been forwarded once and Alexander vetoed it as too risky but, using 'Beetle' Smith as an intermediary, Ridgway floated the idea by Alexander a second time. Taylor, a linguist who spoke French and "could get along all right in Italian" had "very gallantly offered to go in personally" as did Air Corps Colonel William T. Gardiner of the Troop Carrier Command.[55] This time Alexander approved.[56]

Taylor and Gardiner left Sicily aboard a British PT boat early in the morning on 7 September, disguised as two airmen who had ditched their plane at sea. The British transported them to Ustica Island (approximately forty miles north of Palermo) where they transferred to an Italian corvette for the long ride to Gaeta, Italy. When they arrived at 1950 hours, the two 'downed pilots' were bundled into a military sedan and taken to the outskirts of town where they transferred to an ambulance for the final ride to Rome up the Appian Way. They arrived at the Pallazzo Caprara, opposite the Italian War Office, at nightfall where they were met by a delegation of military officers led by Colonel Giorgio Salvi, chief of staff to *General di Corpo d'Armata* Giacomo Carboni,

commander of the Italian motorized corps manning Rome's outer defenses. The Italians insisted that their guests eat, clean up, rest, and begin negotiations in the morning. " 'It appeared,' " according to Gardiner, " 'that they were attempting to stall, and later it was evident that they did not expect us to move so fast: it was stated that they had expected our operation September tenth to fifteenth, but nearer the fifteenth.' "[57] Taylor insisted that time was of the essence; that he and Gardiner could not wait until the next day. Hence Salvi contacted his boss, Carboni, who arrived at 2130 hours.[58]

When he arrived Carboni "immediately launched upon an expose [*sic*] of his views of the military situation in the Rome area." Since the fall of Mussolini, he began, the Germans had been rushing troops and equipment into Italy, despite Italian protests, and as a result the German strength around Rome had increased significantly. None of this was news to Taylor or Gardiner, both of whom were well aware of the German order of battle in Italy. What startled them, however, was the bleak picture Carboni painted, a picture radically different from that which had been presented by Castellano.[59] According to Carboni,

> [i]f the Italians declare an armistice, the Germans will occupy Rome, and the Italians can do little to prevent it. The simultaneous arrival of U.S. airborne troops would only provoke the Germans to more drastic action. Furthermore the Italians would be unable to secure the airfields, cover the assembly and provide the desired logistical aid to the airborne troops. If it must be assumed that an Allied seaborne landing is impossible North of Rome, then the only hope of saving the capital is to avoid overt acts against the Germans and await the effect of the Allied attacks in the South. He stated that he knew that the Allied landings would be at Salerno [Italian knowledge of this surprised Taylor and Gardiner], which was too far [a]way to aid directly in the defense of Rome. He stated that General [Mario] Roatta, [Chief of the Army Staff and ostensibly overall ground commander in Italy] shared his views.[60]

Because of Carboni's "alarming pessimism" which the Americans felt not only colored his views but might also affect his conduct if GIANT II were carried out, Taylor suggested that the matter be brought to the head of state. Carboni agreed and arranged to have the Americans meet Badoglio at his residence.[61]

Carboni, Taylor, and Gardiner arrived at Badoglio's villa around midnight. Badoglio first saw Carboni alone for fifteen minutes, after which Taylor and Gardiner were ushered in. Standing before the Americans in his pajamas, Badoglio echoed Carboni's views: the Italians were too weak to resist the Germans, the arrival of U.S. airborne troops in Rome would unnecessarily provoke the Germans and therefore GIANT II must be cancelled. General Taylor then asked Badoglio "if he realized how deeply his government was committed by the agreements entered into by the Castellano mission." Badoglio replied "that the situation had changed and that General Castellano had not known all the facts."[62] Stunned by Badoglio's backpedaling, Taylor asked Badoglio to draft a message that could be sent to Eisenhower outlining everything the Italian head of state had just said. Badoglio agreed, writing " '[d]ue to changes in the situation brought about by the disposition and strength of the German forces in the Rome area, it is no longer possible to

accept an immediate armistice as this could provide the occupation of the capital and the violent assumption of the government by the Germans.' " Taylor, too, wrote a message for transmission along with Badoglio's stating that, in view of the inability of the Italians to provide what had been promised by Castellano, GIANT II was impossible.[63]

Carboni, Taylor, and Gardiner then returned to the Pallazzo Caprara where Carboni took both messages and transmitted them to the waiting Allies in Sicily and North Africa. At 0800 hours, 8 September, Taylor received word back that Allied Force Headquarters in Algiers had received the message, although nothing was said about GIANT II having been cancelled. Concerned that the drop was still on, takeoff for which was slated for 1745 hours that day, Taylor sent a second message at 0820 hours, emphasizing that American airborne forces were not wanted "as their arrival would bring an immediate attack on Rome." By 1135 hours, having received no positive assurance that GIANT II had been cancelled, Taylor sent a third message: "[s]ituation innocuous" ("innocuous" was the code word Taylor was to use to cancel the operation). Having done all they could Taylor and Gardiner were once again trundled into an ambulance, only this time they were taken to Centocelle airfield where, at 1705 hours, 8 September, they boarded an Italian Savoia-Marchetti tri-motor bomber for their return trip to North Africa, where they arrived at 1905 hours.[64]

Despite Taylor's repeated messages to cancel GIANT II, Tucker's 504th troopers, who were to lead the drop on Rome, did not get the word until after several planes had already taken off (fortunately they were still loitering in the sky above Sicily, awaiting the remainder of their group and were easily recalled).[65] Once word was disseminated that the operation had been cancelled, a general sense of relief infused the ranks. Not overly enamored of Italian prowess, Edwin Sayre best summed up the position of most of the troopers: "Well, having captured three thousand of them in the last two weeks, I really wasn't very confident that the Italians were going to be all that much help."[66] Based on what he had learned during his cloak-and-dagger trip to Rome, Taylor, too, was relieved that the drop had been cancelled and after the war wrote:

> [i]n light of what we know today, had we decided to go ahead with Giant II in spite of the refusal of the Italians to cooperate with us, we could never have introduced more than the first night's increment of about 2,500 troops, fewer than a full regimental combat [team]. They would have landed twenty-five miles from Rome with no trucks, few supplies, and limited ammunition. With surprise lost after the first night's landing, and no Italian antiaircraft defense of the airfields, the German air force would never have allowed further reinforcements to arrive from Sicily by air, and our men on the ground would have been on their own with no assurance that the Italian forces would be even friendly to them. What they could have accomplished under these circumstances I certainly do not know, but I have never regretted the decision which spared these elite troops to serve their country with distinction at Salerno, Anzio, Normandy, and elsewhere rather than end their useful days in Italian graves or German prisons.[67]

Gavin concurred. After the war he visited the airfields on which the follow-on troopers, including his regiment, were to have jumped and air-landed on day two of the operation

and concluded "that the decision to cancel was the proper one."[68] Gavin was especially concerned about the German antiaircraft guns along the Tiber River following "the soul cleansing experience of seeing what flak can do to C-47's in Sicily."[69] But no one was more relieved when GIANT II was cancelled than Ridgway. For him, the operation was not just an exercise in tactics—it was a moral dilemma. How far should he go in speaking his mind about what he considered a "hare-brained scheme" that he felt certain would fail and result in the needless sacrifice of his troopers? After the war, Ridgway wrote

> [a]nd when the time comes that I must meet my Maker, the source of most humble pride to me will not be accomplishments in battle, but the fact that I was guided to make the decision to oppose this thing, at the risk of my career, right up to the top. There were other operations which I opposed, on similar grounds, but this was the one of greatest magnitude, and I deeply and sincerely believe that by taking the stand I took we saved the lives of thousands of brave men.[70]

Because of the last-minute cancellation of GIANT II, when Clark's Fifth Army hit the Salerno beaches on 9 September, Ridgway and his troopers were without a mission. Alexander had returned the 82nd to Fifth Army control, but there was simply not sufficient time to re-insert the 82nd into the scheme of maneuver or to turn GIANT I back on.[71] In preparation for GIANT II, however, the division had been repositioned to Sicily. Scattered among bivouac sites adjacent to ten airfields on the island (an arrangement necessary because of the relatively small size of the Sicilian fields), the troopers stood by, prepared for any opportunity that might occur, listening for news from the front.[72] Rumors were rampant about when and where the 82nd would go next. Gavin wrote that the feeling was that Clark would eventually have a mission for them, "but very likely not [for] the entire division."[73] Gavin's comments were prescient, although not entirely accurate. Eventually the entire division would be fighting at Salerno, although not under 82nd command.

When GIANT I was cancelled in favor of GIANT II, Clark lost control of the 82nd so he summarily ordered Lewis to unload his troopers, then standing by to sail for Salerno as Clark's floating reserve, so that the vessels could be used to move other assets that Fifth Army still controlled. During the planning for GIANT II, however, Ridgway was allocated additional landing craft with which he formed a second amphibious task force that he planned to have land at the mouth of the Tiber River in conjunction with the initial drops on Rome. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William H. Bertsch, the 319th Glider Field Artillery commander, the task force comprised the 319th; A, B, and C Batteries of the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion; H Company of the 3/504th Parachute Infantry; some division signal and engineer troopers; and several platoons of tank destroyers from the 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Loading out of Bizerte harbor, Task Force Bertsch had already set sail when GIANT II was cancelled. Ridgway had no way to recall it. With orders to sail for to Objective 'FF,' a beach just north of the mouth of the Tiber River and, if no one met him there, to proceed to Objective 'GG,' a point up the Tiber about halfway to Rome, Bertsch was well underway when he received countermanding orders to report with his tiny flotilla (three Landing Craft, Infantry and

one Landing Craft, Tank) to Clark's command ship, the *USS Ancon*, in the Gulf of Salerno. When Bertsch and his task force pulled up alongside the *Ancon*, Clark informed him that GIANT II was off and the since the 82nd had been returned to Fifth Army control, Task Force Bertsch belonged to Clark as well. Clark then issued a change of mission, diverting Task Force Bertsch to the Sorrento Peninsula with orders to land at Maiori, where Bertsch was to report to Lieutenant Colonel William O. Darby, Clark's Ranger Force commander, and support Darby as he fought to secure the passes leading to Naples. Task Force Bertsch remained on the peninsula, fighting in support of Darby's Rangers, until 30 September, when it again reverted to Ridgway's control.[74]

A few days later, Clark stripped Ridgway of more of his division. Alexander had informed Clark that there were nine vessels docked at Licata, Sicily, that were no longer needed to support Montgomery's Eighth Army and were therefore available for Clark's use if he could find something to put on them. On 11 September, when the situation at Salerno had already grown critical, Clark ordered Ridgway to send over as much infantry as could be packed aboard the vessels.[75] Ridgway complied by embarking Lewis's 325th reinforced with the 3/504th Parachute Infantry (less H Company, which had already sailed with Task Force Bertsch). Sailing on 13 September, Lewis's force waded ashore on the Salerno beachhead on 15 September, surprised to find both the 504th and 505th Parachute Infantry Regiments had beaten them there.[76]

The presence of the 82nd's parachute regiments at Salerno can be directly attributed to a monumental strategic miscalculation on the part of the Allied high command about the effect the Italian surrender would have on the AVALANCHE operation. As had been agreed with Castellano, nine hours before Clark's Fifth Army hit the beaches at Salerno, Eisenhower made a radio address from his headquarters in Algiers in which he made public that Italy had surrendered. Listening aboard their assault vessels lying just inside the Gulf of Salerno, the news brought the eruption of " 'scenes of sheer joy' " among the Tommies and GIs who, in light of the announcement, fully expected to " 'dock in Naples harbor unopposed, with an olive branch in one hand and an opera ticket in the other.' "[77] And at the outset, it appeared that their predictions were correct. Enemy resistance was slight in both the British X and U.S. VI Corps landing areas. The few German defenders near Salerno, numbering no more than two companies of infantry, were easily driven off and by nightfall both corps reported that they were firmly established ashore. Yet one critical task remained: notwithstanding their easily acquired beachhead the two corps had not linked up during the day and a seven-mile-wide gap still separated them. Furthermore, before retreating the Germans had blown the bridges over the Sele River, which ran through the gap, making lateral movement within the beachhead and thus mutual support between the two corps problematic. Consequently, the Allied beachhead was split into two distinct battle spaces.[78]

When the Germans heard that the Italians had surrendered—a circumstance they had long anticipated but only learned of with Eisenhower's announcement—they acted with alacrity. Almost immediately, Kesselring issued the code signal "[b]ring in the harvest," thereby activating *Operation Achse* ('Axis'), a contingency plan which called for German units to disarm their former allies and assume the unilateral defense of the Italian peninsula. German units throughout Italy "sprang into action to disarm the Italian troops, the only casualty being an Italian general, who indignantly refused and was shot out of

hand."[79] For their part, Italian commanders told their soldiers not to fight anyone, German, British, or American and "simply to pretend that the war had gone away."[80]

The Germans had long been infiltrating units into Italy in anticipation of an Italian surrender, and when combined with the forces they already had in place and the forces they were able to evacuate from Sicily, the Germans had more than enough strength spread throughout Italy to take over the defense of the peninsula themselves.[81] Kesselring was confident that he could exploit the difficult Italian terrain and delay the Allies well to the south of Rome despite the strongly held opinion by many in the German high command, including Erwin Rommel, that southern Italy could not be defended and the best course would be a withdrawal to the north. Disregarding his doubters, Kesselring had deployed his units in depth. Hence, when Montgomery's forces first set foot on the Italian mainland, although resistance was slight there were still enough German units to his front to wage a deliberate fighting withdrawal. Meanwhile, Kesselring's principal ground force commander, *General der Panzertruppen* Heinrich von Vietinghoff gennant Scheel, the commander of the *German Tenth Army*, had done his own analysis and was anticipating Allied landings in the Naples-Salerno area, which he believed " 'represent[ed] the main danger to the whole of the German forces in Southern Italy.' "[82] So when Clark's Fifth Army stepped ashore at Salerno, Vietinghoff had his *16th Panzer Division* already deployed along the heights surrounding the beachhead.[83] And although the *16th Panzer* was spread too thin to make a vigorous defense of the initial Allied landings, within four days Vietinghoff had reinforced the Salerno defenses with three more divisions: the *15th Panzer*, *29th Panzer Grenadier* and the *Hermann Göring*.[84]

By repeatedly attacking along the periphery of the Allied beachhead, and aided by temporary *Luftwaffe* air superiority, Vietinghoff was able to contain the Allies on the beaches. Clark reacted to the increased pressure by shifting his corps boundaries and shuttling forces from the southern American sector to the hard-hit British in the north. In doing so, the gap between the two Allied corps became even more pronounced; one lone engineer battalion was all that could be spared to cover the gap while the U.S. 36th Infantry Division, Clark's southernmost unit, was stretched to cover a front of some thirty-five miles over mountainous terrain.[85]

By 13 September Vietinghoff sensed that the Allies were contemplating a withdrawal from the beachhead. The arrival of additional ships off the coast, the heavy use of smoke in the British sector, and the gap he discovered in the Allied lines all pointed to this possibility. He decided therefore to launch a massive counterattack designed to destroy the Allies before they could get away. Massing elements of the *16th Panzer* and the *29th Panzer Grenadier Divisions*, he attacked into the Sele River corridor. The few American troops outposted in the gap were unable to stop the attack. Some units broke and ran. In the first few hours of the attack over 500 U.S. soldiers were lost, most having been captured. By 1830 hours, 13 September, a German tank-infantry force had fought its way well inside the Allied gap. The only thing remaining to stop the Germans from driving to the sea was two American artillery battalions and behind that, the Fifth Army Command Post itself, established in the ruins of a Sixth-Century B.C. Greek colony at Paestum.[86]

That night, a *German Tenth Army* war diarist wrote " '[t]he battle for Salerno . . . appears to be over.' "[87] Vietinghoff cabled Kesselring and reported:

> 'After a defensive battle lasting four days . . . enemy resistance is collapsing. Tenth Army pursuing on wide front. Heavy fighting still in progress near Salerno and Altavilla. Maneuver in process to cut off the retreating enemy from Paestum.'[88]

There were many in Clark's camp that felt likewise. When he assembled his primary commanders and staff officers that evening in his headquarters, the discussion turned to the preparation of plans to evacuate the beachhead.[89] Sometime during this crisis, "when the going was really tough, when the whole 5th Army headquarters was in the weeds no higher than your waist and crawling around on their hands and knees, the four stars and the three stars and everybody else all together" Clark turned to his young airborne advisor, Major Yarborough (formerly of the 2/504th), "to see what could be done about bringing some parachute reinforcements in."[90]

The Allies had before them three options to save Clark's army. The best course of action would have been to spur on the British Eighth Army, but Montgomery's deliberateness, combined with a masterful fighting withdrawal on the part of the few Germans forces to his front, left him too far away to have any impact at the moment of crisis at Salerno.[91]

A second option was to increase naval and air support to the beleaguered Fifth Army. Admiral Cunningham ordered the battleships *Valiant* and *Warspite* to steam to Salerno, but they could not arrive before 15 September. Eisenhower also diverted some heavy bombers from their long-range bombing missions to targets nearer the Salerno beachhead but this, too, was insufficient, especially given the close proximity of the opposing ground forces. Moreover, Allied carrier-based fighters had already expended almost all their fuel and ammunition reserves while Allied land-based fighters, flying from Sicily, were at the extreme limit of their range and therefore largely ineffective. The British had seized Montecorvino airfield, which figured prominently in Clark's plan as a forward air base, after a tough fight on the second day of the battle but because it remained under German artillery fire it was unusable. On the other hand, the *Luftwaffe* had been able to mass as many as 120 aircraft over the beachhead and wreaked havoc with the forces on the beach and the ships lying offshore.[92]

The last option was to call for reinforcements. At the time there were four uncommitted American divisions in the Mediterranean, the 82nd Airborne and U.S. 3rd Infantry Divisions in Sicily and the U.S. 1st Armored and 34th Infantry Divisions in North Africa, but the paucity of landing craft ruled out the quick movement of the armored and infantry divisions.[93] Hence, "[t]he only hope for quick help appeared to rest with the 82d Airborne Division."[94]

Following Clark's prompting, Major Yarborough put together a hasty plan to get the parachute elements of the 82nd into the bridgehead to shore up the crumbling Allied lines. Captain Jacob R. Hamilton, a fighter pilot who had made an emergency landing on the beachhead volunteered to deliver the plan, along with a personal letter from Clark to Ridgway. After a harrowing flight out of the threatened beachhead, Hamilton arrived at Licata field in Sicily at 1330 hours, 13 September, where he was greeted by Eaton and Gavin; Ridgway had just departed by plane on an inspection trip of the division's far-

flung bivouac sites. Recalled by the airfield tower, Ridgway returned to receive Yarborough's rough plan and Clark's letter.

> 'I want you to accept this letter as an order,' [Clark] wrote, knowing that Matt Ridgway was the kind of commander you could count on. 'I realize the time normally needed to prepare for a drop, but this is an exception. I want you to drop within our lines on the beachhead and I want you to make it tonight. This is a must.'[95]

Less than two hours later, Hamilton was on his way back to Salerno with Ridgway's response: " 'Can do.' "[96]

Yarborough's plan called for a regimental drop on successive nights into a 1200-by-800-foot area located on some flat ground just behind the precarious front lines. The flight route was kept simple. The transports of the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing would take off from various airfields beginning at 2040 hours that evening, rendezvous at Cape Rasocolmo, just north of Messina, then fly up the western coast of Italy to the Salerno beachhead. To help guide the aircraft in, Yarborough arranged a giant 'T' on the drop zone made up of five-gallon cans filled with sand and gasoline. On his order, men standing by each can were to light the gasoline. Additionally, Ridgway planned to precede the main body with his newly trained pathfinders. Flying in three aircraft just minutes ahead of the main body, the division pathfinders were to drop with all their homing and radar equipment on Yarborough's 'T' and provide additional navigational guidance to the incoming pilots. For the first night's drop, Ridgway selected Tucker's 504th Parachute Regiment (less the 3rd Battalion, which was sailing to Salerno with Lewis's 325th Glider Infantry Regiment), reinforced with C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion (less one platoon, which was with the 3/504th). Gavin's 505th and the independent 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, temporarily attached to the 82nd, would follow on the next day.[97]

On the ground in Sicily, all was frantic action. Pilots and paratroopers alike were recalled from whatever training they were doing and briefed planeside. Typical of the hurried preparations was the experience of F Company of the 2/504th, which had just completed a training march up a mountain road above Trapani. According to trooper Joe Watts

> 'We had just arrived at the top of the hill, it must have been about noon, and were looking forward to melons and rest, maybe beer and wine when a jeep screamed up the road with an officer from our battalion . . . standing and holding on to the windshield frame, shouting for us to return to the airfield immediately. We were to load for a drop that night.'

Jogging back down the mountain, F Company approached the airfield where they saw C-47s " 'circling to land like buzzards around roadkill.' "[98] Less than five hours after receiving the mission, Tucker's paratroopers were rigged and aboard their aircraft taxing for takeoff. According to one observer, "[s]ome [Troop Carrier Command] groups and Airborne units had less than two hours to load their men and equipment, give their planes

a final servicing and arrange their take-off plans."[99] Not one to waste words on flowery prose, Tucker summed up the situation bluntly for his troopers:

> '[t]he Krauts are kicking the shit out of our boys over at Salerno. We're going to jump into the beachhead tonight and rescue them. Put on your parachutes and get on the plane—we're taking off in a few minutes for the gates of hell.'[100]

Tucker's pathfinders hit the drop zone at 2314 hours, 13 September and within three minutes had their 'Eureka' transmitting device up and operational. This first-use of the pathfinders in combat proved spectacularly successful. Pilots in subsequent groups reported receiving the homing signals anywhere from seven to thirteen miles out, well before they spotted Yarborough's flaming 'T.' Twelve minutes behind the pathfinders and four minutes ahead of schedule, thirty-four C-47s of the 313th Troop Carrier Group carrying Tucker's 2nd Battalion arrived over the beachhead and dropped most of their troopers within 200 yards of the drop zone. Mechanical problems delayed the takeoff of the remainder of Tucker's troopers for several hours, but by 0430 hours, 14 September, Clark had at his disposal an additional thirteen hundred infantrymen. All but one group of planes, which dropped B Company, 1/504th eight to ten miles off target because of a failure by the 'Rebecca' receiver operator aboard the lead plane, delivered their loads within one mile of the designated drop zone. Jump injuries numbered but seventy-three.[101] Less than an hour after the last troopers dropped Clark found Tucker and directed " '[a]s soon as assembled you are to be placed in the front lines.' " Without hesitating Tucker replied, " '[s]ir, we are assembled and ready now.' "[102] By daylight, Tucker's two battalions and attached engineers were dug in and holding front-line positions beneath the critical heights at Albanella in the center of the VI Corps zone.[103]

The drop was repeated the next night, although on a slightly larger scale, with Gavin's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. As had Tucker, Gavin led with his pathfinders (although the 504th pathfinders were on the drop zone already manning the 'Eureka' device and Yarborough again lighted the drop zone with his gasoline cans) who dropped almost dead center on the drop zone at 2338 hours, 14 September. Because of mechanical difficulties encountered at the departure airfields, it was another ninety minutes before the first planes of the main body appeared. After that, however, the planes carrying the three battalions of the 505th along with B Company of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion arrived in a steady stream. By 0300 hours, 15 September, 123 planes of the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing had dropped an additional 1,900 paratroopers all within a mile and a half of the drop zone; by 0345 hours they were assembled and aboard trucks on their way to the front lines.[104]

The second night also saw another, separate drop, by the independent 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion (with a forty-man demolition section from the 82nd attached) behind enemy lines. Led by Lieutenant Colonel Doyle R. Yardley, the 509th's task was to drop near Avellino, a small crossroads nestled among mountain peaks over 4,000-feet high and some fifteen miles behind enemy lines in order to " 'block all roads leading to and from that area' " and stem the flow of German reinforcements to the beachhead.[105] Although a desperate gamble given the terrain and heavy concentration of German troops in the area many in Fifth Army, including Clark's airborne advisor Major Yarborough (who had

previously served in the 509th) thought it worth the risk. "[I]t seemed to me," Yarborough recounted, "that since we were fighting for our lives on the beachhead, that anything that would stop that jugular, even temporarily, would react to our advantage."[106] But the drop was a disaster from the outset. The pilots had little hard intelligence with which to plan their flight routes and aerial photographs were of practically no value. Preceding the main body by approximately thirty minutes, the 509th's pathfinders dropped over a mile south of the selected drop zone, which was itself three miles south of Avellino. Because none of the planes carrying the main body, all from the 51st Troop Carrier Wing, had had 'Rebecca' receivers installed, the highly effective 'Eureka' devices were not used. Flying practically blind, the pilots dropped their loads anywhere from four to twenty-five miles from the intended drop zone. Additionally, because they had to drop at such high altitudes, the paratroopers within each stick were even more dispersed once they hit the ground. One group of paratroopers landed squarely inside a German tank park and were either captured or scattered before they could organize. Those that did manage to assemble caused as much damage as they could, but generally the men spent their time hiding, and running, from German patrols. Staff Sergeant William Sullivan, a 509th veteran, described the nightmare that ensued.

> 'Not long after the jump, Christ, it seemed the whole German army moved into the area and they were hunting for us—they were hunting us like rabbits. That scared the hell out of me. They were going up and down the rows of corn and shooting anything that moved. It reminded me of when I was a kid, in the fall. We used to hunt rabbits that way. The idea of being captured or the idea of someone hunting you scares the shit out of you. The idea of fighting back is one thing—you take a rifle and here comes the enemy and bang, bang. But the idea you were being hunted, there's nothing you can do, you have to hide.'[107]

Of the 640 troopers who jumped, 510 eventually made it back to friendly lines, buy many went missing for more as long as three weeks. Colonel Yardley was wounded and taken prisoner.[108]

Opinion varies about the effectiveness of the Avellino drop. Gavin wrote that "[i]t is doubtful that it had any decisive bearing on the outcome of the Battle of Salerno" although he qualified his remarks by adding that it caused "the enemy to keep units on antiparachute missions that otherwise could have been used at the point of his main effort at Salerno."[109] Clark maintained that the scattered raids by the small groups of paratroopers "seriously disrupted the German communications" and "[c]onsidering the hazards of merely existing on the Salerno beachhead at the time, the mission of the 509th paid off in big dividends."[110] The most significant damage caused by the paratroopers, the blowing of a hole in a single-span concrete bridge, was not accomplished until the night of 18-19 September, well after the major fighting at the beachhead was over.[111] The bravery of the troopers notwithstanding, the force was too small and too dispersed to be more than "a minor nuisance" to the German defenders.[112]

There is no doubt about the value accrued from the reinforcing drops onto the Salerno beachhead. Brigadier General Lauris Norstad, the Mediterranean Allied Air Force's chief of operations and intelligence, called them the only " 'essential' " airborne

operations conducted in the theater.[113] Others labeled the drops “history’s greatest example of the mobility of airborne troops.”[114] Gavin wrote that dropping the 504th and 505th into the beachhead as reinforcements “had a decisive influence on the final outcome of the Salerno operation as a whole.”[115] But Gavin also looked beyond immediate results and saw in the operation something more, something he would preach in the future when the Allies were racing across northwest Europe.

> By airborne action reserves over two hundred miles from the scene of combat, separated by unfriendly seas and land, were committed to decisive action within twelve hours of receipt of orders. The implications of this were plain. The airborne troops had a mobility and striking power that no high commander could overlook in the future. Correct and timely commitment and exploitation of such forces could turn the tide of battle.[116]

The author of the Army’s official history of the campaign called the operation “a brilliant expedient” but then qualified his remarks by adding, “[t]he value of the reinforcement stemmed less from the actual number of troops than from its psychological lift to the commanders and men in the beachhead who were beginning to feel uneasy; they had no way of knowing that the worst had passed.”[117] But had it?

At 0800 hours, 14 September, just after the First and Second Battalions of the 504th had taken up positions in the front line, the Germans renewed their attacks in the Sele River Valley. A battalion of German infantry supported by eight tanks tried again to break through to the coast. Unlike the previous attacks, this one ran headlong into resolute resistance. Seven of the eight tanks were destroyed, the eighth was immobilized, and the accompanying infantry withdrew. Surprised by this sudden change of events, Vietinghoff ordered three more attacks that day at various points along the VI Corps perimeter all of which were easily blunted by the defending Americans. This was the high-water mark of the German assault on the beachhead, made possible because of the two additional infantry battalions Clark had at his disposal which allowed him to adjust his lines and solidify what just a few hours before had been a porous front. No mere bystanders, elements of the 2/504th played a direct role in the defensive stand along the Sele River and aggressive patrolling by the paratroopers discovered German attacks before they began, giving the Americans throughout the beachhead advance warning of what was coming and where. All told, the Germans lost almost thirty tanks during the day’s fighting without even blunting the American lines. Assessing that the tide of battle had turned, that evening Kesselring ordered Vietinghoff to disengage and make preparations for the conduct of a fighting withdrawal to Rome.[118]

By 15 September, after all eight of the 82nd’s infantry battalions, plus supporting troopers, had arrived in the beachhead Clark felt sufficiently strong to go on the offensive. The next day Major General Fred L. Walker, commander of the 36th Infantry Division, proposed an attack on the dominating heights of Altavilla, the highest point fronting the VI Corps sector. Command of Altavilla, he reasoned, would deny the Germans observation of the beachhead and would serve as a great jumping off point for a future drive to the north. Walker wanted to use Tucker’s First and Second Battalions for the attack (which were temporarily under this tactical control). Dawley agreed, so Walker summoned Tucker to his command post and gave the orders.[119]

Tucker's attack on Altavilla, "a collection of light-colored houses etched on the top of a mountain," began with a difficult movement under artillery fire to a forward assembly area.[120] Then came the advance—almost straight up against stiff German resistance. Finally, having seized two hilltops overlooking Altavilla, including Hill 424, the primary objective, Tucker's band withstood repeated counterattacks. Under intense artillery fire the entire time and at one point completely surrounded, the 504th troopers held out for three days. Even the normally staid unit journal entries reflected the ferocity of the battle.

> 17 September: [Captain] WIGHT has been killed. . . . A piece of shrapnel hit him in the back . . . severe 88 fire. . . . men jumpy. Water and food are scarce. Pvt Stokes . . . killed . . . 88 shell. He was buried in his fox-hole. Sgt Warner got it this afternoon. . . . As yet he hasn't been buried.
>
> 18 September: Continued 88 fire during the night and throughout the day. There are no rations . . . men are hungry and tired.[121]

At one point Walker conferred with Ridgway, the newly appointed deputy VI Corps commander (according to the official historian, Ridgway's posting to this temporary position was "in part a reflection of General Clark's growing dissatisfaction with General Dawley, in part a practical matter designed to give Ridgway a 'home' on the beachhead" since his units had been temporarily parceled out to other commands) about withdrawing Tucker and his men.[122] When informed of this possibility, Tucker exploded and testily responded" '[r]etreat, Hell!—Send me my other battalion!' "[123] Encouraged by Tucker's fighting spirit, Ridgway pushed the 3/504th up the mountain. Bolstered with the arrival of their Third Battalion, the troopers of the 504th hung on and fought their way into Altavilla on 18 September, forcing the Germans to quit their positions and withdraw to the north.[124] Two days later the 504th was relieved and returned to a reserve area on the beachhead, the troopers proud that they had "done something the army field manuals often talked about: infiltrated into enemy territory, chased out the enemy, and taken over his positions."[125] For this action Tucker and Majors Robert B. Acheson and Don B. Dunham were awarded Distinguished Service Crosses, Dunham's posthumously.[126]

Salerno had been, in Gavin's words, "a touch-and-go affair" and "came very close to being a disaster."[127] The overarching concept, to turn the German flank at Salerno, was sound but the resource constraints with which Fifth Army had to contend—the result of the buildup in the United Kingdom taking priority over ongoing actions in the Mediterranean—made its success contingent upon the smooth coordination and synchronization of air, land, and sea assets. There was little room for error; if for some reason the operation did not go as planned there was little 'fluff' with which to adjust and make corrections. Thus when the plan did break down, the result of any number of reasons not least of which was the alacrity of the German response, Clark faced a crisis. Ironically, his only recourse was to turn to the one unit thought to require the most careful planning and coordination before it was employed: the airborne division. In responding to the emergency, the commanders and staff of the 82nd demonstrated amazing operational flexibility and forged for the 82nd, and other airborne units, a new role: that of a highly mobile reserve force. Once thought too cumbersome by many, the

dramatic drop of the 82nd at the eleventh hour during the Battle of the Salerno beachhead highlighted a capability that few had thought possible. Henceforth, however, the 'airborne division as emergency response force' became a standard in the Allied playbook. Having an airborne unit in their back pocket became something all higher-level commanders clamored for, a sentiment that would result in the 82nd leaving behind a significant portion of itself when it finally quit the Mediterranean to prepare for the long-anticipated cross-Channel invasion.

Chapter Nine Notes

[1] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 82-83.

[2] Wedemeyer quoted in Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1959), 107.

[3] Wedemeyer quoted in ibid., 106. According to Arthur Bryant, Brooke's biographer, "the British took to the [Casablanca] conference an elaborate staff, cipher and planning organisation, with the technical mechanism for presenting every quantitative calculation that might be called for. They sent it out in advance to Casablanca in a six-thousand-ton liner equipped by Combined Operations Command as a headquarters and communications vessel, thus temporarily transferring Great George Street [the site of British Imperial Headquarters] to Morocco." Quoting Brigadier Sir Ian Jacob, a member of Churchill's War Cabinet Secretariat, who kept a diary during the conference, " '[w]hat was completely lacking in the American party was any kind of staff who could tackle the problems that were bound to arise in the course of the conversations, and to produce detailed solutions for the Chiefs of Staff. When the U.S. Chiefs saw how the land lay and the size of our party, they suddenly woke up to the fact that they had left most of their clubs behind.' " See Bryant, *Turn of the Tide*, 443.

[4] Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, 107-108.

[5] Leahy quoted in ibid., 124.

[6] Winston S. Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, vol. 4 of *The Second World War* (Boston. MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), 785.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, 123-124. Capitalization in original.

[9] Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, 793.

[10] Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 205.

[11] Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, 152-153. Also present at the Algiers conference were Alexander, Montgomery, and Tedder. Besides Marshall, Eisenhower, and Handy the Americans present were 'Beetle' Smith and Major General Lowell W. Rooks, Eisenhower's G-3.

[12] Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 318. Diary entry for 30 May 1943.

[13] Martin Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 10-12.

[14] Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, 157.

[15] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 16-17.

[16] Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, 158. Capitalization in original.

[17] Ibid., 157-158. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson was with Churchill in London when the latter received news of Marshall's suggestion to go for Naples. Based on Churchill's reaction, Stimson got the impression that the Prime Minister thought that Marshall had finally come around to the British way of thinking. To clarify the situation, Stimson called Marshall to confirm that the Army Chief of Staff only meant this as a means to exploit Italian weakness and gain position in Italy in the cheapest possible manner and did not represent a wholesale abandonment of the agreed upon 1 May 1944 date for OVERLORD. Marshall confirmed Stimson's thoughts, telling him " '[y]ou are absolutely correct. This is exactly what we are after' " (158).

[18] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 260.

[19] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 19-20; Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 261-262; Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, 158-159.

[20] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 21; Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 269; Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, 160.

[21] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 30 and Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 269.

[22] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 18.

[23] Ibid., 26.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 30.

[26] Eisenhower quoted in ibid., 30.

[27] Major General Lucas, AFHQ observer, quoted in ibid., 30.

[28] Ibid., 43.

[29] Mason, "The 82d Under Ridgway," Chap. 4, p. 1. In *On To Berlin*, Gavin quips about the impending invasion of the Italian mainland: "This was to be known as operation AVALANCHE: named, one can suppose, for the avalanche of combat troops soon to swarm onto the war-weary Italian Peninsula. But to some of the wags on the staff of the 82nd Airborne Division, the name was more indicative of the avalanche of airborne plans and papers that engulfed them in the days that followed" (55).

[30] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 29. About the various schemes for which the 82nd was considered and against which Ridgway fought he wrote "I knew the airborne's limitations, as well as I knew its magnificent capabilities. I fought against these foolhardy schemes as stubbornly as I could, and I am convinced that on several occasions I saved the 82nd, or large elements of it, from being dropped into situations where it would have been destroyed as a fighting force" (29).

[31] The division had sustained 964 casualties during the Sicilian Campaign. Unit breakouts were as follows: The 504th – 388 casualties; the 505th – 424 casualties; the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion – 39 casualties; the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion – 57 Casualties; the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion – 55 casualties; and the Division Headquarters – 1 casualty. From *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 39-40.

[32] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Airborne Operation in ITALY," 25 October 1943, p. 2, 382-0.4, Box 12348, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[33] Mathew B. Ridgway to Maxwell D. Taylor, 8 August 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[34] Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 179. According to the calculations of the air planners, the air currents and mountainous terrain would force the troop transport pilots to drop the paratroopers from altitudes of from 1,500 to 2,000 feet, and glider release would have to be made at altitudes between 4,500 and 6,000 feet. Both would have not only scattered the parachute and glider forces, it would also have exposed them for a prolonged period of time to enemy ground fire. See Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Airborne Operation in ITALY," 25 October 1943, pp. 3-4, 382-0.4, Box 12348, Record Group 407, NARA II. In an article published after the war Gavin wrote: "On thinking back now to the situation at the time, it seems to me that this first plan contemplated the use of our airborne units merely to gain a temporary tactical advantage. Their use in the manner planned would hardly have had a decisive bearing on the outcome of the operation as a whole. It was a good thing that the decision was made to drop the plan." See Gavin, "Airborne Plans and Operations in the Mediterranean Theater," *Infantry Journal* 59, no. 2 (August 1946): 24.

[35] See *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 41-42 and Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Airborne Operation in ITALY," 3-4.

[36] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 51-52, capitalization in original.

[37] At the time of the Salerno landings only six of the fifteen German divisions in Italy were south of Rome, with two more in the vicinity of Rome itself. See Vincent J. Esposito, ed. *The West Point Atlas of American Wars 1900-1953* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1959), section II, map 94 and Ralph S. Mavrogordato, "Hitler's Decision on the Defense of Italy" in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 311-312.

[38] See Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 44; Gavin, "Airborne Plans and Operations in the Mediterranean Theater," 24-26; Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 57; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Airborne Operation in ITALY," 4-7.

[39] Patrick D. Mulcahy, "Airborne Activities in the Avalanche Operation Preliminary Report by Major Patrick D. Mulcahy, AFHQ, Observer," 22 September 1943, p. 1, 382-1, Box 12348, Records Group 407, NARA II.

[40] Mulcahy, "Airborne Activities in the Avalanche Operation," 2. With the loss of Keerans during the Sicily drop and the fact that the only other general officer in the division, Maxwell Taylor, was often away at higher headquarters leading the planning effort, Gavin became the de facto assistant division commander and, as such, responsible for training.

[41] See Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 59-60; *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 43-46; Mulcahy, "Airborne Activities in the Avalanche Operation," 2; Ralph. P. Eaton, "Contact Imminent: A narrative of the pre-campaign activities of the 82nd Airborne Division, July-September 1943, prepared by the 82nd Airborne General Staff," 26 December 1943, p. 5, The Ralph P. Eaton Papers, Folder " 'Contact Imminent' July to September 1943," USAMHI.

[42] See Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p.; *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 44-46; Eaton, "Contact Imminent," 5-6.

[43] As noted in the last chapter, it was during this time that the various boards and study groups were assembled to determine the fate of the airborne division in the U.S. Army. It was also during this time that Eisenhower wrote Marshall that he did not believe in the airborne division, a statement that was perhaps a reflection of the reality of the situation facing Eisenhower more than anything else. What is remarkable is that, given the difficulties of employing the division as a whole, the decision was made to retain the airborne division.

[44] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Airborne Operation in ITALY," 7 and Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Development of Operation GIANT," 9 September 1943, pp. 1-2, The Clay and Joan Blair Collections, Box 48, Folder "Chrono File Anzio," USAMHI.

[45] Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 404. Diary entry for 2 September 1943.

[46] Except where noted see Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 441-485, passim.

[47] Nigel Hamilton, *Master of the Battlefield: Monty's War Years 1942-1944* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983), 392.

[48] Alexander's handwritten directions to Montgomery are reproduced in Bernard Law Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1958; New York: Signet Books, 1959), 175. Capitalization in original.

[49] Lyman L. Lemnitzer, "Directive to the Commanding General, 82nd Airborne Division," 3 September 1943, The Arthur S. Nevins Papers, Box 2, Folder "Personal File—Mediterranean, esp. Sicily + Southern Italy," USAMHI. Brigadier General Nevins was Alexander's Operations Officer. Mark Clark was also present at Alexander's headquarters on 3 September and he, too, learned for the first time that the 82nd was no longer available for his use. According to Carlo D'Este, when Clark learned of this he told Eisenhower " 'No! That's my division! . . . Taking away the Eighty-Second just as the fighting starts is like cutting off my left arm.' " See Carlo D'Este, *Fatal Decision: Anzio and the Battle for Rome* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, Inc., 1991; New York: HarperPerrennial, 1992), 35. See also Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 180.

[50] See Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 485-489; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Airborne Operation in ITALY," 7-10; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Development of Operation GIANT," 3-4.

[51] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 488; Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 80; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Airborne Operation in ITALY," 7-10; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Development of Operation GIANT," 4.

[52] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Development of Operation GIANT," 5. Capitalization in original.

[53] Ibid., 5-6.

[54] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Airborne Operation in ITALY," 7-10 and Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Development of Operation GIANT," 6.

[55] Ridgway and Winton, "Troop Leadership at the Operational Level." Gardiner was a 53-year-old pilot who was also the former governor of Maine.

[56] Except where noted see Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 81-82; and Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Development of Operation GIANT," 7.

[57] Gardiner quoted in Richard Tregaskis, *Invasion Diary* (New York: Random House, 1944), 105.

[58] Unless otherwise noted, the account of the Taylor-Gardiner mission to Rome is taken from Maxwell D. Taylor and William T. Gardiner, "Mission to ROME," 9 September 1943, reproduced in *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 56-59.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 56. According to Gardiner, Carboni stated " '[t]he Germans are suspicious. They had cut off the Italians' gasoline supply and some of their ammunition. There were only twenty rounds for some of the pieces. When I asked Carboni about getting more ammunition, his only reply was that we had destroyed the largest factory. He said that he had the facilities for only a few hours' fighting; that if he moved his armored units more than thirty miles, they would be immobilized.' " See Tregaskis, *Invasion Diary,* 105-106.

[61] Taylor and Gardiner, "Mission to ROME," reproduced in *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 56-57.

[62] Ibid., 57.

[63] Ibid., 58-59. According to Gardiner, both Carboni and Badoglio attempted to maneuver Taylor into canceling GIANT II on his authority. At one point, " 'Gen[eral] Carboni . . . asked Gen[eral] Taylor to concur in recommending that the airborne mission to Rome should be cancelled. But this, Taylor said, could not be done: the Italians must assume responsibility for adopting a position and he would report it. Gen[eral] Taylor handled that very well. The Italians were evidently trying to jockey us into a position where we should make that decision.' " See Tregaskis, *Invasion Diary*, 106.

[64] Taylor and Gardiner, "Mission to ROME," reproduced in *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 576-59. Taylor sent a fourth message to Allied Force Headquarters before leaving Rome, requesting permission to return with the Deputy Chief of *Comando Supremo*, *Generale di Corpo d'Armata* Carlo Rossi (and an interpreter) in order that Rossi might represent the changed Italian position. Although a response to this message was never received, Taylor and Gardiner returned with Rossi and his interpreter anyway.

[65] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Development of Operation GIANT," 9. There is some confusion about whether GIANT II was cancelled on 8 September, postponed indefinitely on 8 September, or postponed on 8 September and cancelled on 9 September. Regardless, once Taylor and Gardiner returned, with Rossi in tow, there was no further thought of conducting a drop on Rome.

[66] Sayre, interview, 13 April 2002.

[67] Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, 64.

[68] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 62-63.

[69] James M. Gavin to Joseph I. Greene, 29 March 1946, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder "General Ridgway, Matthew B., letters on insignia, 504th Regt. Combat Team, 505th at Nijmegen + 82nd Airborne Division," USAMHI.

[70] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 82. According to Eisenhower biographer Merle Miller, Eisenhower never lost "his enthusiasm for GIANT II. After the war, in an interview with an Army historian, he said, 'I wanted very much to make the air drop in Rome, and we were all ready to execute that plan. . . . I was anxious to get in there.' " Miller goes on to point out that Brigadier Kenneth Strong was also disappointed when GIANT II was cancelled. Miller wrote: "In a similar interview with an army historian in 1947, [Strong] said, 'My opinion is that the cancellation of GIANT II was a great mistake. If the airborne division had been sent . . . the Italians would have welcomed us, and they would have held the airfields for us.' " Strong was, according to Miller, "sparing in his approval of Taylor. He said that the paratroop officer had learned nothing in Rome that he had not been told before undertaking the risky mission; nevertheless, he advised against it." See Merle Miller, *Ike the Soldier: As They Knew Him* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1987), 550. This is not entirely true. Taylor did not know that the Italian forces had been starved of ammunition and gasoline, both critical commodities on which the operation depended. Castellano had promised the Allies an impressive list of aid. Taylor discovered that much of

what Castellano promised was simply not available. Regardless, it was the Italians who would have been most responsible for supplying that aid, Carboni and Badoglio, who directed that the drop be cancelled, not Taylor.

[71] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 122.

[72] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 46-47.

[73] Gavin Diary, 11 September 1943.

[74] See *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 47-48; Headquarters, 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, "Report of Action During Month of September, 1943," 10 October 1943, p. 6, 382-FA(319)-0.3, Box 12434, Record Group 407, NARA II; "Airborne Operations, July-September 1943," n.d., The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Invasion of Sicily, intelligence reports, organizational and operation plans, after action report + inquiry of friendly fire losses, maps," USAMHI; Eaton, "Contact Imminent," 8-9.

[75] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 122.

[76] Ridgway selected Lewis's glider troops and the 3/504th for this mission because both had already undergone extensive amphibious training in preparation for GIANT I. See "The 325th Glider Infantry in Action," 19 October 1943, 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448. Record Group 407, NARA II; *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 74; "Airborne Operations, July-September 1943," 8.

[77] Anonymous soldier quoted in Charles B. MacDonald, *The Mighty Endeavor: The American War in Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969; New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 207.

[78] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 79 and 90-91.

[79] Shelford Bidwell, "Kesselring" in *Hitler's Generals: Authoritattive Portraits of the Men Who Waged Hitler's War*, ed. Correlli Barnett (London: George Weidenfield & Nicolson Ltd., 1989; New York: Quill/William Morrow, 1989), 279-280. In a cable to his *Tenth Army* commander sent following Eisenhower's announcement, Kesselring said " '[i]f we retain our fighting spirit and remain dead calm, I am confident that we will continue to perform the tasks entrusted to us by the Fuehrer. Italian troops will be asked to continue the fight on our side by appeals to their honor. Those who refuse are to be ruthlessly disarmed. No mercy must be shown the traitors. Long live the Fuehrer.' " See Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 69.

[80] MacDonald, *The Mighty Endeavor*, 202.

[81] The German evacuation of Sicily was complete by 17 August. In all, they succeeded in evacuating over 39,000 men, over 9,000 vehicles, 94 guns, 47 tanks, 1,100 tons of ammunitions, 970 tons of fuel, and 15,700 tons of miscellaneous equipment and supplies. Both the *Hermann Göring* and the *15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions* were reconstituted in Italy. See Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 416.

[82] Vietinghoff quoted in Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 64.

[83] Information on German plans and dispositions is from the following sources: Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 78-79; Ralph S. Mavrogordato, "Hitler's Decision on the Defense of Italy," 314; Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, 318.

[84] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 97-98.

[85] Ibid., 107-110.

[86] Ibid., 76 and 112-115.

[87] Quoted in ibid., 117.

[88] Vietinghoff quoted ibid., 116-117.

[89] Ibid., 116.

[90] Yarborough, interview, 28 March 1975. Yarborough had been commander of the 2nd Battalion of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment during the Sicily Campaign, but was relieved by Ridgway a few days after his battalion had taken up occupation duties in western Sicily because he felt that his experience was not being sufficiently recognized. According to Yarborough, "I went up to Palermo and then I got orders to . . . come back and see Ruben [*sic*] Tucker and also go and see Ridgway, who said, 'Your services are no longer required. You're a pain in our ass, excuse me, but you go back to Mark Clark and tell him that he should find another job for you.' So, I went back to Mark Clark and Mark Clark said to me, he said, 'You know, knowing your personality and that of General Ridgway,' he said, 'I never should have assigned you or allowed you to be assigned to that outfit in the first place.' He said, 'Now you . . . you come back here with me and in due course, I'll see that you get a . . . you get another command.' But in the meantime, I wanted to die. I felt like a . . . I felt that if I could only get into combat someplace and get an honorable slug or whatever, that I would have paid the price for my high spirited stupidity, you see. Challenging . . . challenging authority in a way that . . . no outfit can work on that basis. You just can't have that kind of thing and I recognized where the deficiency lay. It was with me and not with Ridgway or with Tucker. So, this was how I then got back in the parachute planning business for the invasion of . . . of Italy."

[91] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 118-119.

[92] Ibid., 119-120.

[93] Ibid., 120-122.

[94] Ibid., 122.

[95] Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 199.

[96] Ibid., 203. Afraid of a repeat of the Sicily friendly fire incident, Ridgway insisted that " '[r]igid control of antiaircraft fire is absolutely essential.' " In response, Clark called his naval and ground force commanders and ordered them to hold all antiaircraft fire and to bring down all barrage balloons beginning at 2100 hours, 13 September, and that they were not to act otherwise until they received word to free their guns and balloons from him personally. See Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 61.

[97] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 61-62; Yarborough, interview, 28 March 1975; Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Report of Arrival of Units in ITALY," 22 October 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[98] Joe Watts quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 67.

[99] Mulcahy, "Airborne Activities in the Avalanche Operation," 6.

[100] Tucker quoted in Devlin, *Paratrooper,* 301.

[101] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 61-62 and 65 and Reuben H. Tucker, "504th Parachute Infantry Action in Italy," n.d., 382-INF(504)-0.3, Box 12451, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[102] "Airborne Operations, July-September 1943," 8.

[103] Tucker, "504th Parachute Infantry Action in Italy."

[104] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 65-66; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Report of Arrival of Units in ITALY." A total of 130 planes took off. Five turned back because of mechanical difficulties. Of the remaining 125, two planes were wildly off course. One dropped its stick of paratroopers well behind enemy lines at Eboli. The other strayed over the Allied fleet in the Gulf of Salerno where despite Clark's stern orders about holding all fire, some itchy-fingered gunners opened up and set the port engine on fire. The paratroopers aboard jumped as soon as they were over land, wandered for a few days in no-man's land and then fought for several more days alongside the British. Led by Lieutenant Jack Tallerday, the C Company 1/505th executive officer, this small band finally made its way to Salerno, where Tallerday went in search of a truck that could transport them back to his regiment. Before he left, Tallerday pointed out a house where he told his men to rest until he returned. "Unknown to the Lieutenant, of course, the house was one of ill repute, well stocked with occupants and refreshments, and so it was a happy, but reluctant to leave, group of warriors that Tallerday found when he returned later in the day with a British truck." Langdon, *"Ready,"* 31.

[105] Mission statement quoted in Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 31.

[106] Yarborough, interview, 28 March 1975.

[107] Quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 70.

[108] Except where noted, information on the Avellino drop taken from Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 31-32; Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 169; Warren, *Airborne Mission in the Mediterranean*, 68-69. Ironically, Yarborough took command of the 509th once it was reassembled at Naples.

[109] Gavin, "Airborne Plans and Operations in the Mediterranean Theater," 28.

[110] Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 206.

[111] Journal, 14-28 September 1943, 2nd and 3rd Sticks, 1st Platoon, C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, attachment to Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "History of 307th A/B Engr Bn 82nd A/B Div, from 22 Sept 1943 to 30 Sept 1943," 18 October 1943, Box "82d Airborne Division—WWII—307th Eng. Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort, Bragg, NC. First Lieutenant William C. Kellogg led the group of twenty-seven men from the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion who destroyed this bridge. They wandered the hills causing what destruction they could and hiding from the Germans for thirteen days. They inflicted twenty-four German casualties and destroyed one small German armored vehicle, two personnel carriers and sixty-seven telephone poles before linking up with British patrols. They also rescued one downed aviator. For his actions, Lieutenant Kellogg was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

[112] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 132.

[113] Quoted in Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 69.

[114] Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p.
[115] Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 31.

[116] Ibid. Today, the 82nd constantly maintains one of its brigade combat teams on alert, ready for worldwide commitment at any time. Starting from a 'cold start,' meaning the complete lack of intelligence of an impending threat, the division can have its first battalion task force loaded aboard aircraft and moving toward its objective within eighteen hours.

[117] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 145.

[118] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 129-131; Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p.; Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "S-2 Journal, September 1943," 20 October 1943, 382-INF(504)-0.3, Box 12451, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[119] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 134.

[120] Tregaskis, *Invasion Diary*, 114. Tregaskis accompanied Tucker's men on this attack.

[121] Journal, 13-29 September 1943, C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, attachment to Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "History of 307th A/B Engr Bn 82nd A/B Div, from 22 Sept 1943 to 30 Sept 1943." Captain Wight was the company commander.

[122] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 135. Since Ridway's division had been parceled out to other units, the position of deputy corps commander also gave him some modicum of control over his regiments.

[123] Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p.

[124] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 136. Ross Carter told an amusing story of the taking of Altavilla in his book. At one point, Tucker turned to one of this troopers, a Greek-American named Perici and told him to " 'take six men and go into [Altavilla] and find out how many Krautheads are in it.' " At first, Perici refused. When Tucker, on the edge of rage, asked why, Perici responded " 'Sir, . . . I've been in this army for four years. I done learned that I can't go to town without a pass. The MP's would get me as shore as hell is red-hot.' " Tucker thus wrote out a pass for Perici to enter Altavilla with his six-man patrol. Perici conducted his reconnaissance during which his patrol ran into stiff German resistance. Returning to Tucker, Perici reported " 'Sir, they's MP's in that damn town with tanks and half tracks. A rough bunch, sir!' " Carter, *Devils in Baggy Pants*, 54-55.

[125] Carter, *Devils in Baggy Pants*, 47.

[126] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 135.

[127] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 69.

Chapter Ten
A Force Upon Which the Fifth Army Could Depend

> *American parachutists—devils in baggy pants—are less than 100 meters from my outpost line. I can't sleep at night; they pop up from nowhere and we never know when or how they will strike next. Seems like the black-hearted devils are everywhere.*
>
> Excerpt from diary of anonymous German officer at Anzio[1]

Once the Fifth Army's Salerno beachhead was no longer in danger General Alexander turned his attention to future operations; in particular an advance on Naples. His planners warned that the Germans would fight tenaciously for Naples, but Alexander disagreed. He sensed a slackening of the German pressure around the beachhead and felt certain that this indicated that the Germans were about to withdraw to positions well north of Naples, thereby shortening their lines of communication and anchoring their defenses along more defensible terrain. And as certain as he was about German intentions, so was he certain about what he wanted to do about them—follow hard on their heels in hopes of turning their withdrawal into a rout. Accomplishing this would require the Fifth and Eighth Armies to link up and form a cordon of forces stretching across the Italian boot. He also needed Naples for its port capacity and, in the east, the airfields around Foggia, from whence Allied aircraft could stage to provide the ground forces responsive air support.[2]

Naples and its port was a must if Alexander was to keep his forces supplied. However, its value as a port was only part of its allure; as the first major European city within grasp of the Allies its fall would have great political and symbolic value and it therefore loomed as a significant milestone in the steady advance of Anglo-American forces toward the heart of the Third Reich. Clark needed no reminder of the importance of Naples. In concert with Alexander's intent he assigned an entire corps, McCreery's X Corps, the mission of breaking through the mountainous terrain on the Sorrento Peninsula and securing the passes that linked the Salerno Plain, south of the peninsula, with the Naples Plain to the north. Furthermore, to ensure he had enough combat power on hand to exploit a X Corps breakthrough once it was achieved, Clark formed an unusually large Fifth Army reserve force composed of two divisions: the 82nd Airborne and U.S. 36th Infantry.[3]

Happily for Ridgway, being put in reserve brought with it the chance to reassemble the 82nd, elements of which were scattered throughout the Salerno battle area while other parts, to include the division staff, were still in Sicily. Hence beginning at the end of September he began congregating the 82nd at the northern edge of the beachhead, just south of the Sorrento Peninsula. This not only positioned the division so that it could move rapidly through the passes and on to Naples, it also brought it closer to those

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 259 through 268.

elements of the 82nd that had been fighting alongside the Army Rangers in some of the most fearsome combat of the campaign thus far.

Since 11 September, three days before the 504th's dramatic jump onto the Salerno beachhead, Task Force Bertsch had been engaged alongside Lieutenant Colonel Darby's Rangers in the fighting on the Sorrento Peninsula.[4] It was a slow, rough slog for the Rangers and Bertsch's task force (comprising the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion; H Company of the 3/504th Parachute Infantry Regiment; and a detachment from the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion) so on 16 September Clark reinforced Darby with the 2/325th Glider Infantry Battalion (less G Company), which had just arrived on the beachhead as part of Lewis's amphibious force the day before. As soon as Darby had the 2/325th in hand, he assigned it to front-line positions atop Mount San Angelo di Cava and Mount di Chiunzi (over 3,000 and 2,600 feet high respectively), just west of the critical Chiunzi Pass.[5] Under fire for the first time, the division's glider troopers performed to the same high standards set by the paratroopers and successfully defended their positions against repeated German assaults. One of the more critical fights occurred atop Mount San Angelo where E Company, 2/325th, skirmished for five days with German forces bent on taking this critical point, which provided unobstructed observation of both side's rear area. This skirmishing culminated on 20 September in a particularly ferocious battle.

A light fog enshrouded the San Angelo heights that morning. Peering out of their damp foxholes, the glider troopers saw a herd of sheep approaching their positions—a sight to which they had grown accustomed in the few days since they had arrived. But Staff Sergeant Donald T. Harmon of E Company's Weapons Platoon noticed something unsettling—some of the bells on the sheep were not ringing in consonance with their movement. The wary Harmon spread the alarm; fearing that there might be German wolves among the sheep. His hunch proved correct. Fifty yards from the E Company positions German infantrymen emerged from the sheep herd and charged. In the initial onslaught an E Company fire team was overrun, but the rest of the company held and repulsed the German attack. The firing was so intense during the mêlée that E Company burned out two machine gun barrels. Driven off on their first attempt, the Germans reformed and attacked again a few minutes later at another part of the E Company line. Once again they were repulsed and withdrew, leaving behind a large number of dead and wounded. For the remainder of the morning and early afternoon the Germans contented themselves with mortaring Mount San Angelo, softening the American positions as prelude to another attack. At 1400 hours the mortaring grew more intense and shortly thereafter German infantry assaulted a third time. Once again E Company repelled the German assault, its machine gunners expending all their ammunition during the fight. At the height of the attack, however, Captain Robert Dickerson, the E Company commander, requested reinforcement. He had sustained some forty casualties and was in dire need of more bodies to fill the holes. A special 'Ranger' platoon that had been formed under First Lieutenant Wade M. Meintzer responded. Meintzer led his platoon in a counterattack across open terrain, pursued the Germans into the gullies and ditches to which they retreated and broke the back of the enemy assault. For their actions Meintzer, along with Private First Class Robert Cooper, one of the intrepid machine gunners, were awarded the Silver Star.[6] Additionally the entire company received a personal commendation from Ridgway in which he wrote

> [w]hen a bold and aggressive enemy repeatedly attacked the positions of Company 'E' with intense machine gun, mortar and artillery fire, it stood fast and repelled every hostile effort for more than eight hours. Outnumbered and out-gunned, every element of this command . . . displayed high courage, spirit and devotion to duty to make possible the successful accomplishment of their assigned mission.[7]

The fight on Mount San Angelo came as a result of a shift in German strategic thinking. As the *Wehrmacht* high command continued its internal bickering about the best course of action to follow in Italy—maintain the defense as far south as possible or immediately withdraw to the northern Apennine Mountains (as Alexander expected they would do)—Kesselring, who favored the former course, took action. Still convinced that he could use the rugged Italian terrain to his advantage, Kesselring envisioned a strategy that would have his forces defending from a succession of fortified lines that began well south of Rome. But he needed time to prepare those positions before falling back on them. He therefore ordered Vietinghoff to conduct a fighting withdrawal to gain time so that German engineers could prepare the positions that would later come to be known as the *Barbara*, *Reinhard*, and *Gustav Lines*. To perform this difficult task (withdrawals while in contact are the most difficult of all military maneuvers), Vietinghoff retained the bulk of his strength in the west, fronting the Fifth Army. The Sorrento Peninsula became Vietinghoff's most heavily defended area and he planned to hold it as long as possible by conducting local counterattacks (like those endured by E Company) to keep the Allies off balance. This would not only gain the time Kesselring demanded, it would also facilitate the evacuation of German supplies from Naples and gain time for German engineers to complete the destruction of the city's harbor.[8]

Notwithstanding the defensive stand of the Army Rangers and glider troopers on the Sorrento Peninsula, Clark's original intent was to use those forces offensively to seize the passes through the mountains by coup de main and thereby open the way to the Naples Plain and the city itself. When it became apparent that Ranger Force was too small for this mission it was reinforced, and then reinforced again and again. Ultimately, Darby's ad hoc command comprised over 8,500 soldiers and included not only elements of the 82nd but an additional infantry battalion from the U.S 36th Infantry Division as well as the entire British 23rd Armored Brigade. But given the difficult terrain in which it was operating and Vietinghoff's determination to hold in the west as long as possible, Ranger Force was still not strong enough to effect the breakthrough McCreery, Clark, Alexander, and Eisenhower so desperately desired.[9]

When the bid for a coup de main failed McCreery switched his main thrust inland and tried bulling his way through the German defenses by attacking with two divisions abreast. Jumping off on 23 September, this attack also went nowhere, stymied by resolute German defenders ensconced in mountaintop defenses. To bolster McCreery, Clark gave him the 82nd. McCreery, in turn, put Ridgway in command of all forces on the Sorrento Peninsula. Having finally succeeded in uniting the bulk of the 82nd (with two exceptions) on the Sorrento Peninsula, Ridgway also gained control of Darby's three Ranger battalions and the British 23rd Armored Brigade, a force of some 13,000 soldiers.[10] Ridgway's orders from McCreery, who was preparing his forces for yet another run at the Naples Plain, were to "seize and secure the dominating ground in the

EGIDIO-SALA area [at the northern terminus of the Chiunzi Pass] for debouchment of the 23d Arm[ore]d Brig[ade]" and to "get out on [the] plain before full light." When successful, McCreery urged that "[c]ontact must be maintained with [the] enemy and enemy retirement closely and vigorously followed up." Ridgway was to attack "at the earliest practicable date," if possible on the night of 27-28 September but no later than 28-29 September.[11]

Given the compartmentalized terrain on the Sorrento Peninsula, Ridgway divided his area into two sectors. He put Gavin in command of the western portion of the Sorrento Peninsula, where the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment had been concentrated and retained Darby in command of the east where the Rangers, 325th, and 504th were located. His plan was to have Darby's forces make the main attack on the right while Gavin's paratroopers made a supporting attack in the west. Jumping off the night of 27 September, the Rangers, paratroopers and glider troopers hit thin air—the German defenders had already withdrawn. Heeding McCreery's injunction to "vigorously" follow up, Ridgway pushed his forces northward and by dawn the next day (28 September) he was through the passes and descending on the Naples Plain. By 30 September the reinforced 82nd had converged on two points: at Castellammare on the coast and Torre Annunziata, on the southern slope of Mount Vesuvius.[12]

Once past the Sorrento Peninsula McCreery was anxious to make a rush on Naples. He assigned this mission to Ridgway, whose forces were along the most direct route to the city.[13] Jumping off the early morning of 1 October, Ridgway led with the 23rd Armored Brigade followed by Gavin's 505th in column, both advancing headlong up the coastal road toward the southern outskirts of Naples.[14] According to Gavin,

> [t]he day began, as often happened during the early period of the battle for Italy, with the Germans completely out of sight, and our first attacks were blows into the air. The situation stiffened a bit; then late in the afternoon all resistance seemed to disappear. Soon there were throngs of people in the streets of the small villages along the main road to Naples. I wondered what would happen if the Germans were to counterattack.[15]

Once it reached the southern outskirts of Naples, Ridgway ordered the 23rd Armored Brigade to bypass the city to the east and continue on to the Volturno River.[16] Strangely, he also ordered the 505th, following behind, to halt despite intelligence that Naples was undefended. Up front with his lead elements, Gavin soon learned the reason for this halt when his operations officer, Major John Norton, walked up and declared, " 'Colonel . . . we are to wait until a triumphant entry is organized.' "[17] Orders had come up, recalled Norton, "saying wait for General Clark who is going to have a triumphant cortege into Naples where [he would] address the assembled multitudes."[18] So while sitting outside an undefended Naples, dodging a few German aircraft that strafed their stationary column and avoiding the booby traps that seemed to be going off everywhere, Gavin and Norton huddled to draw up a hasty plan so that Clark the Conqueror could realize his grandiose vision. Their first concern was security. Their second was that, as everyone knew, an appropriately glorious entry would require the participation of the Neapolitans. They could do something about security. Waving throngs of Neapolitans would have to be left to chance.

Clark directed that his victory procession would end at Garibaldi Square. Norton and Gavin decided that they would personally lead the procession in a jeep, navigating as they went since there had been insufficient time to send any reconnaissance elements ahead. Generals Clark and Ridgway would follow in a British armored vehicle while Gavin's 3/505th, mounted in trucks, provided security.[19]

> The plan was to move directly into Garibaldi Square, and as General Clark's vehicle entered the square, the vehicles of the 3rd Battalion of the 505th would make a complete circle around the square and thus seal it off. The troopers would then jump from the trucks and clear all of the people out of the square. Then, if General Clark wanted to make the customary conqueror's speech, he could do it from one of the trucks, or he might find some arrangement in the square more suitable.[20]

When Clark's procession entered Naples the expected throngs of delirious, liberated Italians had disappeared and "the streets were ominously empty."[21] After "wandering around town looking for the multitudes," Norton, Gavin, Ridgway, Clark and the troopers of the 3/505th finally made it to Garibaldi Square, where they were greeted with silence.[22] "Every door and window was shuttered," Ridgway wrote, "and not a living soul moved in the streets except our own men."[23] According to both Gavin and Norton, Clark's triumph had been aimed at the wrong place—the expected crowds were about a mile away, massed at the Plaza Plebescito where "the conquerors traditionally had been received" and hence the location where the Neapolitans expected the Allied generals to appear.[24] The fall of Naples, at least from the standpoint of the liberators, was "a real flopo-flopo."[25]

The celebratory moment, such as it was, passed quickly and Ridgway immediately set about taking control of the city. There were still some pockets of German resistance, the largest of which resulted in a sharp clash between the 2/505th and a German rear guard detachment at Copodichino Airport, located in Naples's northern suburbs, but with this one exception enemy resistance was all but nonexistent.[26] What did trouble the 82nd's commanders, however, was the shooting among Italians who were settling old scores, "accusing friends and foes alike of being fascists or tedeshi."[27] Ridgway's approach to restoring order was simple: he told his regimental commanders "to get in touch with the city authorities [in each of their assigned areas] and tell them that if those people kept on firing, we would kill them."[28] In compliance with these orders, just before darkness set in that first night Gavin grabbed a local police chief and told him

> that any Italian, regardless of his sympathies, who possessed a weapon in the vicinity of where a weapon had been fired would be shot at once. [The police chief] seemed startled and gulped a bit as we explained exactly what we meant; then off he went. A few minutes later a weapon was fired in a side street. I took a platoon of troopers and went right out to get anyone with a weapon. The men had orders to shoot. No one with a weapon could be found. Almost at once quiet descended on the city.[29]

Once they had the time to look around, the troopers found that the city of Naples and its harbor were devastated. In addition to the submerged mines and sunken ships blocking the waterways and the almost complete destruction of the port facilities, the Germans had also wrecked the city's transportation infrastructure, water and sewage systems, and electrical generating capacity. They also left behind hundreds of hidden booby traps and improvised delayed-action high-explosive bombs. The first of these exploded on 7 October and destroyed the city post office, causing scores of military and civilian casualties.[30] Three days later a second bomb demolished the Italian Army barracks where B Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion was billeted. Twenty-three troopers were killed and another twenty-one wounded.[31] Yet in spite of the damage, explosions, intermittent artillery fire and, beginning on 21 October, German bombing raids, the 82nd kept order while engineers and technicians from the Fifth Army's Base Section restored the city and its harbor to working order. Both performed miracles and on 4 October the first Liberty Ship docked in Naples harbor. By the end of the month, an average of 7,000 tons was being unloaded through the port each day, only 1,000 tons short of the pre-war average.[32]

The troopers relished the thought of an extended stay in Naples. Being off the front lines was a luxury in itself but Naples offered the added comforts of hot food, warm beds, and Italian women. But to the other commanders in Italy, having the 82nd on police duty seemed a great waste of troops with proven combat ability. Hence, three days after taking control of the city, the division received word that it was to once again reinforce McCreery's X Corps as it continued to drive north beyond Naples.

Mark Clark wanted to get across the Volturno River before winter set in. To accomplish this he ordered McCreery to attempt the quick seizure of one of the two crossing sites in its area: a highway bridge approximately six miles inland of the coast linking the twin villages of Cancello (on the northern bank of the Volturno) and Arnone (on the southern bank); or an unimproved crossing at Castel Volturno located near the mouth of the river.[33] Because he lacked sufficient infantry to get the job done, McCreery asked for and received two battalions from the 82nd.

Ridgway passed the mission to Gavin who sent Lieutenant Colonel Mark Alexander's 2/505th and Major Walter F. Winton Jr.'s 1/505th (the 3/505th remained in Naples to police the regiment's assigned area). Working under the tactical command of the British 23rd Armored Brigade (the same brigade that had led the division to the outskirts of Naples), the 505th troopers were to seize five canal bridges south of the Volturno and then proceed on to take Arnone and its highway bridge, if possible. By nightfall on 4 October, the same day they left Naples, Alexander's troopers had taken the first of the five canal bridges before going into an assembly area for the night. On 5 October the 2/505th took the remaining four bridges (although one was partially destroyed) and advanced to the southern outskirts of Arnone. The next morning, 6 October, Alexander sent a platoon from F Company into Arnone and drove the Germans in the village across the river into Cancello. During their withdrawal the Germans dropped one of the highway bridge spans but, according to Alexander, enough of the bridge remained to support dismounted infantry. Later in the day, Alexander moved the remainder of F Company along with his battalion 81mm mortars into Arnone and requested permission to attempt a crossing to seize a bridgehead on the far bank. Brigadier R. H. E. Arkwright, the 23rd Armored Brigade commander, denied Alexander's request "as he had not been

able to keep pace with his armor and said that he could not support me."[34] (Interestingly, one of initial plans for an 82nd drop in support of the Salerno landings called for the 2/505th to drop on Arnone and Cancello to seize the bridge over the Volturno and then hold until relieved. Alexander later wrote that the planning for that mission resulted in his battalion being "well prepared for the later mission in support of the 23d Armored Brigade, inasmuch as . . . we had carefully studie[d] aerial photos of the Arnone area, we knew the exact location of pillboxes, buildings, etc., exactly as depicted in the previous photographic studies").[35] When he was denied permission to continue his advance, Alexander left his F Company inside Arnone to guard the bridge and pulled the remainder of his battalion into positions outside the village. Shortly thereafter the Germans counterattacked.[36]

Following what Alexander called " 'one of the heaviest artillery concentrations I've ever seen' " the F Company troopers in Arnone were attacked from two directions.[37] To their west was a company of German infantry that had somehow crossed to the southern side of the Volturno and to their north was a force of approximately battalion size attacking over the highway bridge and into the heart of Arnone. In order to allow the F Company troopers in Arnone to concentrate on the attack across the highway bridge, Alexander led his E Company in a charge against the German force descending on Arnone from the west. After a fierce fight during which the troopers had to dodge the fire of German 88mm antiaircraft guns being used as direct fire weapons, the troopers beat back both attacks (John Norton, who was following behind Alexander's battalion, recalled that the Germans used their 88mm's like large-caliber sniper rifles).[38] Late in the afternoon, having repulsed the German attacks but still under heavy artillery fire, Alexander withdrew his forces from the village to a more protected area. Winton's 1/505th, in supporting positions to the rear, covered the withdrawal.[39]

The next day was relatively quiet. There was one small skirmish during which a German patrol attempting to cross the river was repulsed, but for the most part the 505th troopers remained in place and prepared for relief. Chaplain (Captain) George B. 'Chappie' Wood led a detail back into Arnone to evacuate the dead and wounded. Respecting the Red Cross flag, the Germans permitted the padre and his group to bring out the battalion's casualties, approximately sixty in all, most of whom were dead. Also wounded in the fighting was Captain Edwin Sayre who had been awarded a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions in Sicily. The Germans had sewn the area south of the Volturno with hundreds of antipersonnel 'S' mines and antivehicular Teller mines. Sayre either stepped on an 'S' mine or drove over it in a jeep.[40] On 8 October, the two battalions from the 505th boarded British lorries and returned to Naples.[41] They had accomplished all that had been asked of them and set the stage for an early crossing of the rain-swollen Volturno River. But because Arkwright's other forces had been unable to keep pace with the paratroopers they would spend another week fighting south of the river before finally getting a toehold on the river's northern bank.

On 10 October, Gavin received a radio message telling him he had been promoted to brigadier general. He had been acting in the capacity as assistant division commander (a brigadier general's position) for some time during Taylor's many absences, but this made it official.[42] Reluctantly, he turned over the 505th Regiment to his executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Herbert F. Batchellor.[43] Mark Alexander, the 2/505th commander, was moved to regiment to become Batchellor's executive officer and Major Ben

Vandervoort took command of the 2/505th.[44] When his stars were pinned on him before a small formation outside the division headquarters, Gavin became the youngest general officer in the U.S. Army (he was thirty-six years old).[45] He was also somewhat taken aback by his meteoric rise—three years before he had been a captain teaching tactics to cadets at West Point. Nine days after his promotion, still unsure of himself as a general he reflected on the brand new stars on his collar: "I do not believe that I wear them particularly well, I may in time."[46]

Concentrated in Naples with a temporary respite from combat in the offing the 82nd had time to refit and receive replacements while it continued its none-too-demanding police duties (the only divisional unit not in Naples was the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, which was scattered among various bases in Sicily and North Africa).[47] Ridgway also assigned his new assistant division commander the mission of ensuring the division's troopers remained combat ready. The training regimen Gavin designed focused on reinforcing basic combat skills, inculcating and disseminating lessons learned from the battlefield, and integrating replacements into their squads and platoons. He did this by rotating battalions through short, intense training exercises, truncated versions of those he had used to train the 505th at Fort Benning. Each rotation began with a seventeen-mile foot march and ended four to five days later with battalion-sized maneuvers. With training time at a premium Gavin and Ridgway were determined that when the division was next called, the troopers would be ready.[48]

Looking also to improve the conduct of parachute and glider operations, Gavin put the trusted John Norton in charge of an airborne test group comprising handpicked officers and noncommissioned officers from every unit in the division. Norton's group was sent to Sicily where it could train with a select group of pilots from the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing. The troopers and aircrews were charged with working together to find answers "to the many questions regarding the correct use of Radar equipment and combined parachute-glider employment."[49] During three weeks of joint training, Hal Clark's pilots and Norton's troopers worked "out all the experiments that you can think of: how to get in, with and without pathfinders; jumping out of airplanes like we'd been doing; or jumping out of tugs towing gliders; or jumping out of gliders; or jumping at 200 feet; or at nighttime; and landing gliders on the roads at nighttime; and how should the equipment be distributed; what lights should we use; what should the patterns be; how soon should they go in."[50] What emerged from this frenzied experimentation (during which, Norton dryly commented, "we didn't kill anybody, but we came awfully close") was a thoroughgoing pathfinder doctrine with complete tables of organization and equipment that became standard for all U.S. airborne divisions and troop carrier units for the remainder of the war.[51] There were still many problems to be worked out, but this three weeks paid great dividends in France and Holland later on.

While Gavin concentrated on training, Ridgway waged his continuing battle against those in higher headquarters who persisted in their calls to employ pieces and parts of the 82nd in operations that had little strategic value. According to Ridgway, because of its unique capabilities and proven fighting ability, the 82nd was "a tremendous temptation to all higher tactical commanders" who, lacking the aircraft to employ it as a whole, looked constantly to employ it piecemeal. "It was not unnatural, therefore," continued Ridgway, "to find senior commanders reaching for this magic key which would open many tactical doors, whenever an assault operation was planned" and the first thing the planning staffs

invariably thought of "when pondering how to overcome some enemy strongpoint, was to drop some airborne troops on top of it."[52] One such plan called for the insertion of a battalion near the small town of Sessa almost thirteen miles behind enemy lines and seven miles inland from Italy's west coast. Conceived as part of a Fifth Army operation to deliver a 'left-hook' from the sea and air in order to isolate the right wing of the *German Tenth Army*, still firmly entrenched on the north bank of the Volturno River, the operation was cancelled when intelligence revealed the presence of strong German reserves around Sessa.[53]

But Ridgway was also concerned with another matter—the impending departure of the 82nd for the United Kingdom as part of the build up for the cross-Channel invasion. The American Chiefs of Staff had decided that the division would leave the Mediterranean in mid-November and as that time grew near Ridgway became more and more reticent about committing any of his troopers to combat lest they become so decisively engaged that they could not be pulled from the line when the time came to depart. He told Gavin, whose duties included analyzing the various airborne plans that the Fifth Army staff churned out, to ensure that the estimates did not call for anything too extravagant because he did not want to leave a large element behind when the 82nd left Italy.[54] His most significant fight in this regard was with Eisenhower who, in early October, began canvassing Marshall about "[t]he possibility of retaining one combat team out of the 82nd (U.S.) Airborne Division when we ship troops to the U.K.."[55]

Still convinced that an airborne division was "too large to use as an entity and that the proper organization is in strong regimental combat teams," Eisenhower hoped to retain at least one American and British parachute regiment to "carry out airborne operations during the winter in conjunction with amphibious landings behind the enemy's lines."[56] When he heard this Ridgway appealed to Eisenhower, through Clark, for reconsideration. In a passage he drafted for inclusion in a letter from Clark to Eisenhower, Ridgway stressed that breaking up the 82nd "runs counter to every sound principle of organization and training."

> One of the prime objectives in the building of an Army [continued Ridgway] is to weld the elements of a Division together into one fighting team embued [*sic*] with pride of membership based on the Division's accomplishments. This is a long and laborious process to which the devotion of officers and men must be given over a long period of time. It has been accomplished in high degree in the 82d Airborne Division. While it takes much time and effort to build this spirit, it takes a very brief time to destroy it. To remove a Combat Team is one of the most effective ways I can think of to destroy this spirit into which a year and a half of painstaking effort has gone.[57]

Eisenhower's feelings about airborne divisions and Ridgway's constant battle with higher headquarters against breaking up the 82nd were rooted in the same phenomenon: the sparse resources with which the commanders in the Mediterranean theater had had to constantly contend. During the fighting in North Africa, there simply was not enough of everything to go around and the harsh climate and tremendous distances consumed what there was at an unprecedented (and wholly unexpected) rate. Once the invasions of

Sicily and Italy were underway U.S. factories were producing at or near peak output, but by that time most of the major end items of war—tanks, planes, landing craft, trucks—were being stockpiled in the United Kingdom. Having suffered with these limitations ever since taking command in the Mediterranean, Eisenhower naturally came out against the airborne division because he could not conceive of ever having enough aircraft to employ one as a division. Hence, he only saw value in smaller airborne formations, which his limited resources allowed him to employ, and therefore asked for them before they were irrevocably lost to OVERLORD.

But there was a second aspect to Eisenhower's argument against airborne divisions; he was convinced that even if there were enough aircraft to drop an entire division at once, it would be so scattered that all command and control would be effectively lost. He had, after all, seen this in Sicily and again at Avellino, albeit on a smaller scale. It was this argument that Ridgway found most threatening. If the highest ranking Army officer then engaged in active operations against the Germans maintained that dropping an airborne division *as a division* would only result in mass chaos—that the very idea of an airborne division was flawed from a command and control perspective—that was another, more serious problem.

At the time the efficacy of the airborne division was still being hotly debated in the War Department. The Knollwood Maneuvers, which once and for all convinced Marshall and McNair that airborne divisions were viable entities, were still weeks away. To ensure that the Army Chief of Staff and the Army Ground Forces commander heard something other than what Eisenhower relayed about airborne units in combat, Ridgway took the unusual step of bypassing his chain of command and wrote a memorandum directly to the Chief of the Operations and Plans Division of the War Department General Staff (where he had been serving when the U.S. entered the war and thus knew full well that what he had to say would eventually get to Marshall and McNair). In this memo, Ridgway stated at the outset that "[g]rave deficiencies exist in the present training for <u>airborne</u> operations of this Division and its associated Troop Carrier Command units." Presuming to speak for the Army Air Corps caused something of a rift in the division's relations with its troop carrier colleagues, but Ridgway was intent on demonstrating that the deficiencies which he went on to outline in detail arose from causes that were "beyond the control of both [the airborne division and troop carrier] Commanders." He acknowledged that anything more complicated than an unopposed daylight drop of no more than battalion size was problematic. But, he continued in unusually strong language, the reason for this state of affairs—and he stressed there was "only one reason"—was "because the opportunity to conduct such training has been denied."[58] In essence, Ridgway laid the problems that had been encountered during airborne operations in the Mediterranean at the very feet of the man who highlighted those problems as a reason for doing away with the division. In a separate letter to Brigadier General Paul Williams, commander of the Troop Carrier Command, Ridgway acknowledged his use of "strong but temperate language" in his memo to the War Department, but insisted that he had done so to ensure that the problems of training he highlighted "might command the attention the subject deserves." He was determined "that the airborne training situation, so far as it pertains to the ability of the 82d Airborne Division to carry out airborne missions of the kind the Service expects it to conduct" were presented "as accurately as possible."[59]

The phrase "to carry out airborne missions of the kind the Service expects it to conduct" is telling. As Ridgway never tired of telling others, the 82nd Airborne Division was formed for use as a division and he insisted that this could be done if it was given the opportunity to train. Writing after the war about his struggles with higher commanders, Ridgway summed up his frustrations. "Unfortunately, though they [higher commanders] might have a fairly good grasp of what airborne troops could do when properly employed, they had little idea of the complexity of the operation, of the split-second timing, the high degree of co-ordination between ground, air, airborne and seaborne elements, which a properly executed drop required."[60]

Ridgway's spirited defense of the airborne division was propitious. At the time the 82nd was preparing to leave Italy, and when it did there would be no U.S. airborne divisions engaged in active operations against the Germans. Had Eisenhower's opinion prevailed, it would have been a relatively easy matter to disband the 82nd (and all other U.S. airborne divisions then in England and the United States) while it sailed to the United Kingdom, forming separate parachute and glider regiments in its stead. That this did not occur can only be attributed to the weight accorded Ridgway's opinion, especially by his mentor Marshall, himself an advocate of larger airborne formations. Marshall had once told a group of officers, including Eisenhower, " 'that in the proper development of airborne operations lies one field in which we have real opportunity and capability to get ahead of the enemy.' "[61] A month later, the Knollwood Maneuvers validated once and for all the airborne division concept. Ironically, by that time Eisenhower had been announced as the Supreme Commander of the much more lavishly resourced European theater, and even his opinion about airborne divisions underwent a sea change. Less than three weeks after being named to command OVERLORD, Eisenhower (at the time still in command of the Mediterranean Theater) denied a request by Alexander to retain a parachute regimental combat team from the 82nd in theater, writing "[t]he position is that our demands against OVERLORD resources have been so numerous and oft repeated that I am unwilling to put up another, particularly since it does not seem to be vital."[62]

Ultimately, however, Ridgway did not leave Italy with his entire division in tow, the result not of theoretical wrangling over the organization of airborne forces, but the hard reality of the fight in Italy brought about by a change in German strategy. Erwin Rommel, commander of *Army Group B* in the north of Italy had maintained that the best strategic course of action would be a withdrawal to strong defensive positions in the northern Apennines. This move, he insisted, would shorten German lines of communications and negate the threat of Allied seaborne end runs along the Italian coast. But Kesselring's competent fighting withdrawal following the Salerno landings undercut Rommel's proposition and earned him increased favor in Hitler's eyes, who was irrationally opposed to surrendering any territory without a fight. During a conference at his East Prussian headquarters at the end of September, at which Rommel and Kesselring presented their opposing views, Hitler concluded that the best course of action to follow in Italy would be one that would inflict the maximum casualties on the Allies while preserving German combat power. He therefore began leaning more toward Kesselring's point of view and, although he maintained Rommel in command in northern Italy for another month, began funneling resources farther south.[63]

Within ten days the Allies were fully aware of the decisions reached in East Prussia because of ULTRA. Always on the lookout for a means to keep the Allied focus on Italy,

Churchill cabled Roosevelt on 10 October: " '[t]he German intention to reinforce immediately the south of Italy and to fight a battle before Rome is what Eisenhower rightly calls a "drastic change within the last forty-eight hours." ' " Underscoring the worth of ULTRA intelligence, he warned " 'that we must now look forward to very heavy fighting before Rome is reached instead of merely pushing back rearguards.' "[64] His words were prescient.

Although he did not assume supreme command in Italy until 6 November, Kesselring's plans to defend in the south were already well in train. Hitler's decision gave them added impetus, however, as Italy was allotted extra construction personnel and materials.[65] Little time and effort was wasted on the southernmost German position, the *Barbara Line*, which was nothing more than a series of outposts a few miles north of the Volturno River. But the second, more formidable *Bernhard Line* received considerable attention and was composed of a wide belt of mutually supporting defensive positions arrayed in depth on easily defensible high ground that commanded access to the Liri River Valley, the most direct route to Rome. Some 75,000 mines protected that one route alone. The third and most formidable defensive position, the *Gustav Line*, was anchored on the meandering Garigliano and Rapido Rivers. It was Kesselring's last prepared defensive position south of Rome and as such was the primary focus of the construction effort. These three lines would stymie Clark for months, throwing his and Alexander's timeline for the capture of Rome well behind schedule and forcing them to come up with alternatives to the strategy of slow and steady progress up the Italian boot. It was in considering these alternatives that the decision was ultimately made to leave a portion of the 82nd in Italy when the rest of the division set sail for the United Kingdom.[66]

The Allies finally crossed the Volturno in mid-October. With full knowledge of Kesselring's intentions of fighting from successive prepared defensive positions, Alexander's solution was to spur Clark on so that he might breach the German defenses before Kesselring had a chance to organize and consolidate them.[67] As part of this advance, Clark once again called on Ridgway for use of one of his combat teams to operate in the mountainous Italian interior on the far right of the Fifth Army. Alerted on 27 October, Tucker's 504th, along with C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion attacked two days later. Advancing twenty-two miles over terrain "so difficult that it was necessary often to communicate by carrier pigeon and sometimes to send food and ammunition by overhead trolley strung across deep mountain gorges," the 504th Combat Team crossed the upper Volturno River, captured the important road and rail center at Isernia, pushed on to the equally important town of Colli, and succeeded in taking Hill 1017, the primary Fifth Army objective in the sector.[68] The speed of the advance took the Germans by surprise; they had expected to see a more deliberate logistical build up prior to any major Fifth Army offensive.[69] Lieutenant Wesley D. Harris experienced the effect of this surprise firsthand when he captured two Germans who "were reading a book when he walked in on their cozy little machine gun nest."[70]

Gavin, too, was impressed by the performance of Tucker's troopers. After one visit with the 504th commander, Gavin noted in his diary that Tucker was "[d]oing well on his front." He added that because of the 504th's exploits

> [p]arachute troops are making a name for themselves with the Germans. [The] 504 captured five [G]ermans from a seven[-]man patrol the other

> day, they killed the other two. One of the [G]ermans told the 504 that their company commander had gathered the company together and asked for volunteers, he told them that the troops to their front were special troops and barbarians.

So ferocious were the 504th troopers in combat, Gavin noted, that the regimental intelligence officer "says that if he does not go out and plead with the men he does not get any prisoners."[71]

Because the 504th had acquitted itself so well in combat while maintaining the vital link between Clark's army to its left and the British Eighth Army to its right, the situation that Ridgway feared had come to pass. The 504th was decisively engaged and could not be extracted in time to join the division when it set sail for the United Kingdom. Moreover, it had become increasingly evident that an overland advance to the Liri River Valley would be slow and bloody so in early November Alexander ordered Clark to prepare plans for an amphibious operation near Rome. For this operation Alexander also requested the retention of the 504th combat team in the Mediterranean (in addition to the 504th and C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, Tucker's combat team included the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion).[72]

Ridgway was not as vigrorously opposed to this as he was to Eisenhower's previous request. Given the evidence, the most likely explanation for this is simply that Ridgway trusted Clark. They were West Point classmates and Clark was having a rough go of it. He needed Tucker's troopers to help him break the deadlock on his front and promised to return them once that mission was complete (as opposed to Eisenhower's previous request, which was open-ended). Additionally, unlike Eisenhower, Clark had no problem with airborne divisions, hence Ridgway did not view Clark's request as a precursor to the breaking up of the division altogether. Ridgway knew that Clark had long championed the airborne concept. Clark had even adopting the style of tucking his trousers into paratrooper boots, although he had never made a parachute jump.[73]

On 10 November, when the final decision to leave the 504th Combat Team in Italy had been made, Ridgway wrote Clark a personal letter. "Within the next few days the situation which has happily placed me under your personal command will change," he began.

> There is nothing I can add to what I have so often told you. Your continued and expanding success will remain very close to my heart. Thirty years of admiration and affection have gone into the building of that feeling.

Though there is no reason to doubt Ridgway's real affection for Clark (the only other soldier to whom he expressed himself in a similar manner was George C. Marshall; he certainly never used this type of language in his correspondence with Eisenhower), he did not shrink from telling Clark that he expected his units back. First, he reminded Clark that "[w]hen you appealed to me personally [during Salerno]. . . for immediate help, the Division instantly and wholeheartedly responded, accepting without thought of self the unusual hazards involved." He then stated four times in succeeding paragraphs that the loan of the 504th Combat Team was temporary. He stressed that the division's "officers

and men view this separation, temporary as it is promised to be, with live concern." "I have complete confidence," he added a few lines later, "that this situation is recognized, no less by the War Department than by you, . . . that the separation of Regimental Combat Team 504 from the rest of its Division will in fact be temporary." "I know I can count, as you have assured me I may, upon your assistance," Ridgway continued, "in securing the prompt return of these troops to Division control as soon as the temporary need for their services in your ARMY shall have ceased." In closing, he beseeched the Fifth Army commander to give his personal attention to "safeguarding the interests of these units and in helping to bring about their early return to their own Division."[74]

Clark's response, written two days later, was equally warm.

> I have always appreciated, as you know, your wonderful support and feel the same admiration and affection for you. It is a source of great regret to me that we are not to be permitted to fight together, for I have found your Division, under your magnificent leadership, to be a force upon which the Fifth Army could always depend. The wonderful discipline, morale and fighting ability of your command speaks well of their [*sic*] leader
>
> I have worried about keeping your combat team, for I know what it means to you, and I would fight to keep my Division together the same way you have done. I, of course, must look at it from the Fifth Army point of view, and I needed to have done the splendid work that team has just completed. My troops are tired. I do not have the strength I need for this show; hence, your Regimental Combat Team is indispensable at the present moment. I will get it out in time for any airborne mission, and I will return it to you in the best shape I can, commensurate with any job they have to do. You know I have your interests at heart, and I will protect them as though they were mine, and I will see that my staff does likewise.[75]

One of Ridgway's last acts before leaving Italy was to ensure that Maxwell Taylor, who was still assigned to the division despite some prolonged detached work as a member of the Allied liaison team to the Italian government, watched over Tucker and his troopers. Ridgway had received assurances from 'Beetle' Smith, Eisenhower's chief of staff, that Taylor would be eventually relieved and returned to the 82nd. The fact that Taylor would also remain in the Mediterranean Theater once the division sailed for the United Kingdom, however, allowed Ridgway to maintain a friend at the Fifth Army court who would, he felt, ensure that the 504th Combat Team would be returned as soon as possible. To this end Ridgway requested that when Taylor's liaison duties were complete, he "report to and assume command of C[ombat] T[eam] 504, and when released from [the Mediterranean] Theater to bring it on to rejoin the Division."[76] Taylor reported to Clark's headquarters in December and true to his charter kept pressure on the Fifth Army commander to release Tucker's troopers as soon as possible, but to no avail.[77] Other events, including Taylor's own reassignment to take command of the 101st Airborne Division, intervened and the 504th found itself stranded in Italy, victims of its own success.

By mid-November that portion of the division earmarked to depart for the United Kingdom was set to sail. Several soldiers in hospital, not wanting to be left behind and trust their fate with the personnel replacement system, went AWOL from their hospital beds to rejoin their units before they departed.[78] To those too sick or injured to be moved, Ridgway composed a letter that was delivered to each by name assuring them that "within regulations and policies of the Commanding General of this Theater, the 82d Airborne Division, to which you have given your best efforts, will use its utmost endeavors to secure your return to your own Company or Battery, and as quickly as possible."[79]

The main body of the 82nd boarded transports on 18 and 19 November and sailed for the United Kingdom.[80] Though casualties had been relatively light the troopers, tired and worn, were looking forward to the rest.[81] Rumors ran rampant about the division's destination, but everyone was certain that the 82nd would have some part to play in the cross-Channel invasion. One rumor, perhaps the result of the zigzag route the convoy followed to avoid German submarines, held that the transports carrying the 82nd would run far out in the Atlantic, as if headed for New York, to make the Germans think that the division was rotating home.[82] As it turned out the German high command was confused, but not because of the convoy route. According to Gavin, the extended stay of the 504th Combat Team in Italy made the Germans believe that the entire division was there and therefore unavailable for use in any cross-Channel invasion. Subsequent interrogation of American prisoners in Normandy highlighted this confusion as German intelligence officers seemed fixated on the trying to pinpoint the 504th to clear up what was, by then, an obvious error in their calculation of the Allied order of battle.[83]

Tucker's combat team was still heavily engaged guarding the Fifth Army's right flank when the main body of the 82nd departed Italy. They were not relieved until 22 November when the troopers were withdrawn to rear area camps for a well-earned rest.[84] Clark's offensive to break through to the Liri Valley had, by that time, ground to a halt, his units exhausted from the heavy fighting. Gavin visited the front before he left for England and noted in his diary that Clark's troops were "very tired" and that "[t]he number of divisions present are barely enough to cover the front leaving wide gaps between units."[85] Even units that had been out of the line for some time, like the U.S. 36th Infantry Division, which had not seen combat since the end of the fighting at Salerno six weeks earlier, were no more than seventy-five percent combat effective.[86]

Faced with such tenacious resistance, Alexander forwarded a three-phase plan designed to unhinge the German defenses across the width of the peninsula. Phase one called for an offensive by the British Eighth Army intended to gain access to the main road to Rome from the east. It was hoped that the success of Eighth Army's attack would so threaten German forces in the west that Kesselring would have no choice but to begin withdrawing to positions north of Rome. To hasten that withdrawal, phase two called for a renewal of Clark's offensive into the Liri Valley where, once secured, Clark could unleash the newly arrived U.S. 1st Armored Division for a dash to Frosinone, a city well north in the valley. With Frosinone in hand, Clark could then initiate phase three of Alexander's plan, an amphibious assault south of Rome.[87]

Montgomery's Eighth Army attacked on 20 November, but heavy rains that washed out key bridges and tough resistance from German reinforcements brought this attack to a halt well short of the road to Rome.[88] Undeterred, Clark began phase two on 1 December

with an attack on the village of San Pietro Infine, "a cluster of gray stone houses huddled in medieval fashion part way up the dark and forbidding slope of Monte Sammucro."[89] Positioned at the southern opening of the Liri Valley, San Pietro was key to gaining access to the Liri Valley. Clark's plan was to have Major General Geoffrey Keyes's U.S. II Corps (which had taken over a portion on Clark's front on 18 November) attack to seize the heights of Monte Sammucro before taking the village of San Pietro itself.[90] After three days of heavy fighting, elements of the U.S. 36th Infantry Division, assisted by Army Rangers, seized the heights but in the wake of persistent and ferocious German counterattacks Keyes asked for reinforcements. Clark once again called on Tucker's troopers to bolster his line.[91]

On 10 December the 504th Combat Team moved out on a seven-hour trek, entirely uphill and under constant enemy artillery fire, to take up positions atop Sammucro (also known as Hill 1205). One brand new second lieutenant thought the terrain "more suited for goats and donkeys than for men."[92] A second trooper, who had seen combat in Sicily and Salerno, called the mountain and its surrounding heights "terrain that God must have made when He was mad at somebody and forgot to improve after He made it."[93] The Germans, this same veteran trooper wrote, "were hidden in the caves, grottoes, camouflaged pillboxes, foxholes and behind the rocks" with artillery "leashed like giant dogs awaiting the signal to tear us to death."[94] The experience of I Company, 3/504th on that very first day was a portent of things to come. With the mission to relieve some Rangers on an adjacent hilltop, I Company ran headlong into a group of bypassed Germans, fought its way through, linked up with the Rangers, manned defensive positions and then endured seven German counterattacks in the succeeding twelve hours. On that first day alone, I Company sustained forty-six casualties, almost fifty percent of its assigned strength.[95] A little over two weeks later, when Tucker's troopers were finally relieved, these casualty rates had become the norm. In the particularly hard-hit 2/504th, F Company was the largest rifle company with two officers and twenty-eight enlisted troopers still standing. E Company, on the other hand, had but four officers and ten enlisted troopers.[96]

The fighting atop Monte Sammucro and the five other hilltops the 504th Combat Team took and held during this stay at the front was some of the toughest the troopers had yet experienced. The weather was miserably cold and wet and the troopers were still wearing their summer jump fatigues. The difficult terrain and the constant threat from German artillery and sniper fire meant that those on the hilltops often went days without adequate food, water, and ammunition. Fifth Army employed Italian mules and skinners, but they could not be relied upon when it was too cold, too steep, or too dangerous. Hence, Tucker had always to employ a good portion of his already depleted combat team as porters in order to keep those on the front lines supplied.[97]

The tough, redoubtable leadership that infused the ranks of the 504th Regimental Combat Team held the men together during those nineteen days of fighting above the clouds (on 19 December, the 2/504th adjutant noted in his journal "[t]he B[attalio]n is situated so high up that one has to look down to watch the air raids taking place").[98] This brand of leadership flowed from the top. Following one of the innumerable unsuccessful attacks that defined the back-and-forth fighting around Monte Sammucro, the troopers, hugging the ground, were surprised to find "the little colonel [Tucker] with one man as a bodyguard" in their midst "wanting to know why in the hell the attack had failed." Told

that a German pillbox, skillfully situated and carefully camouflaged, was blocking the way and had already accounted for several dead and wounded "[t]he little colonel took two men, walked to the pillbox, caught the Nazis cleaning the machine gun and took eleven prisoners without firing a shot."[99] On another occasion, the troopers of C Company, 1/504th, who were dug in " 'literally under the gun muzzles of the Germans' " such that even the smallest movement " 'immediately drew heavy fire' " saw their battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Warren Williams walking alone toward their position " 'as though he were on a Sunday outing in the park.' " Upon reaching the cave in which several troopers were seeking cover, Williams stooped down " 'ostensibly to tie his boot lace, and rolled a bottle of Old Grandad into the cave entrance' " wished his troopers holiday cheer and then moved off to visit the remainder of his battalion.[100] Regimental chaplain Delbert Kuehl related an incident that epitomizes the leadership that was common among the Combat Team.

> 'We will never forget those long days and nights, week after week, in the rain and snow, not enough to eat and the constant shelling in the Italian mountains. One day during that terrible winter fighting in the mountains of Italy, I was standing by a rocky trail and a sergeant came by with no boots on, as his feet were too swollen. He had his feet bound up with cloth and rags. I said, "Sergeant, you can't go up this rugged trail like this, you need medical attention." He replied, "Chaplain, I can't go back [down], my men need me." '[101]

On 27 December, the 504th Combat Team was finally relieved and pulled back out of range to a valley amidst olive trees under which were pitched pyramidal tents. Fifty-four troopers had been killed in the nineteen days of fighting, another 226 had been wounded and two went missing.[102] According to the official combat team after action report, "[t]he combat efficiency and physical condition of the personnel available for duty upon relief was poor and impaired by mental and physical exhaustion and a deficiency of basic equipment and ordnance" and "the adviseability [*sic*] of sending the Combat Team into another mission so closely following one of the type just finished might have been questionable."[103] But this was exactly what Clark and his Fifth Army planners had in mind.

Phase three of Alexander's plan called for an amphibious assault at Anzio, just thirty-five miles due south of the Italian capital city.[104] Anzio itself offered a sheltertered anchorage while the surrounding beaches, suitable for amphibious landings, fronted a wide, level coastal plain onto which the Allies could quickly debouch and maneuver. Furthermore, twenty miles inland lay "the last barrier the Germans could use to bar an Allied entry to Rome," the Alban Hills.[105] Lying astride the two main north-south highways in the west, possession of the Alban Hills would give the Allies a dominating position in the rear of Kesselring's forces still defending to the south and provide an excellent jumping-off point for a push to Rome.[106]

As originally envisaged, the amphibious operation at Anzio, codenamed SHINGLE, was to be a supporting effort to Fifth Army's main attack up the Liri Valley and through the *Gustav Line*. But Clark's inability to break through to the Liri Valley forced a reevaluation of Alexander's concept. With Fifth Army still sixty miles south of Anzio,

both Clark and Alexander thought that an amphibious landing there was too risky and recommended that it be cancelled. But Churchill, who was bent on keeping up the fight in Italy and taking Rome, would entertain no such talk and he was well positioned, both physically and politically, to have his way.[107]

On their way back from the Teheran Conference (28 November – 1 December 1943), Roosevelt and Churchill stopped by Cairo, Egypt, before returning to their respective capitals. While at Teheran, Stalin had pressed for a cross-Channel invasion at the earliest possible date and at one point turned to Roosevelt and asked who would command the Anglo-American forces. When told that that had not yet been decided, Stalin replied dismissively, " '[t]hen nothing will come out of these operations.' "[108] Stung by Stalin's comment, Roosevelt promised that the decision would be made in a fortnight. While in Cairo, Roosevelt made his decision: Eisenhower.

To replace Eisenhower in the Mediterranean, Churchill named General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, and with the assumption of overall command in the theater by a British officer executive direction for the theater passed from American to British hands. The way was open for Churchill to make his play for SHINGLE. After seeing Roosevelt off in Cairo, Churchill flew to Tunis to meet with Montgomery and Alexander. After spending several nights in bed battling pneumonia, he finally felt well enough to convene a series of conferences and attempt to force his imprint of future operations in the Mediterranean.[109] As he wrote to his British Chiefs of Staff in England, " 'the stagnation of the whole campaign on the Italian Front is becoming scandalous' " and he was going to do something about it.[110] During the conferences Churchill devoted his considerable powers of persuasion to reanimate SHINGLE and eventually convinced those present (to include Alexander, who reversed his previous position; Clark did not attend any of the meetings) that SHINGLE should go ahead as planned, regardless of Fifth Army's relative position to Anzio, with the promise that sufficient landing craft would be made available (a promise to which Roosevelt agreed on 28 December).[111]

Faced with this turn of events, Clark issued his order for Operation SHINGLE on 12 January 1944. General Lucas's VI Corps, composed of the U.S. 36th Infantry Division, the British 1st Division, the 504th Combat Team, the independent 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, two battalions of British Commandos and three battalion of U.S. Army Rangers (this was later increased to include another infantry regiment and the bulk of the U.S. 1st Armored Division along with additional artillery), was to " 'seize and secure a beachhead in the vicinity of Anzio' " and " '[a]dvance on Colli Laziali [on the Alban Hills].' "[112] As part of his scheme of maneuver Lucas wanted to mount an airborne operation, codenamed Operation SUN ASSAULT, which called for the insertion of the 504th Regimental Combat Team by parachute and glider assault on two drop zones approximately eight miles north of Anzio in order to block the roads and rail lines from Rome and thereby impede the flow of German reinforcements to the beachhead.[113]

Operation SUN ASSAULT was cancelled just three days before D-Day. Fears that the troopers would be cut up by German armor, that the parachute and glider assault would prematurely tip the Allies's hand, and that the difficulties inherent in coordinating amphibious and airborne assaults would result in another friendly-fire fiasco all contributed to this decision.[114] With the cancellation of SUN ASSAULT the 504th should have been released so that it could join its parent division in the U.K. Alexander and Clark had specifically requested the retention an airborne formation *for use in*

airborne operations. With none in the offing, there was no reason to keep the paratroopers in the Mediterranean. But Lucas did not want to release a proven combat formation so he found a way to integrate it into his amphibious plan. What followed was approximately two months of some of the toughest fighting of the war during which the 504th would be constantly battling enemy forces that were larger, more mobile, and could bring to bear more firepower.

At 1357 hours, 21 January 1944, twelve landing craft carrying the 504th Combat Team left Pozzuoli, on the northern coast of the Gulf of Naples en route to Anzio. Hastily inserted into the D-Day landing scheme, Tucker's troopers had only the vaguest of missions: to land on a beach southeast of Nettuno "as soon after daylight as possible," ensure that the landing did not interfere with that of the 3rd Infantry Division coming in over the same beach, and move to an assembly area northwest of the seaside town of Nettuno where it would assume the role of VI Corps reserve and await further orders.[115]

Leading the assault into Anzio were elements of the British 1st Division on the left, Darby's Rangers and the independent 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion in the center, and all three regiments of the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division on the right. Since surprise was paramount, a massive pre-landing naval bombardment was cancelled. Instead, two newly developed and outfitted British landing craft, each carrying 798 five-inch rockets designed to shock enemy defenders, explode minefields and destroy defenses, unleashed a barrage at 0150 hours, 22 January, ten minutes before the first wave of amphibious troops.[116] It was a waste of rockets.

The Germans were taken completely by surprise. A major amphibious operation in his rear was the last thing Kesselring expected. In early January, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, chief of the Office of Intelligence in Berlin had visited Kesselring's headquarters and reported " '[t]here is not the slightest sign that a new landing will be undertaken in the near future.' "[117] On 15 January Kesselring's chief of staff, *Generalmajor* Siegfried Westphal announced " 'I consider a large-scale [Allied] landing operation as being out of the question for the next four to six weeks.' "[118] And on 18 January, armed with these predictions, Kesselring had committed his last remaining reserve force, the *I Parachute Corps* headquarters along with the *29th* and *90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions* to the defense of the *Gustav Line* in the south.[119] As a result, when the Allies hit the beaches around Anzio on 22 January, they met but small, unorganized, and scattered resistance. By midnight of D-Day the VI Corps had pushed ashore 36,000 men, 3,200 vehicles and large quantities of supplies amounting to over ninety percent of the equipment and personnel in the assault convoy. It had taken 227 dazed Germans prisoner and sustained only thirteen killed, ninety-seven wounded, and forty-four missing.[120]

Some of the Allied casualties were from the 504th Combat Team. Coming ashore between 1030 and 1130 hours on D-Day, Tucker's troopers were moving toward the beach in their landing craft during one of the few German air attacks of the day. One landing craft carrying a portion of G Company, 3/504th received a direct hit from a dive-bomber and sustained fourteen casualties.[121] Captain Hyman Shapiro, the battalion medical officer, who was in the landing craft that was hit and who was himself wounded, swam ashore and administered first aid to his comrades before accepting evacuation himself. For his actions he was awarded the Silver Star.[122] It was the first of what would be many awards for valor that Tucker's troopers, and entire units, would earn during the hell that was to become Anzio.

By mid-afternoon Tucker had gathered his combat team in its assigned assembly area and reported to the 3rd Infantry Division command post for orders. Told that scattered German forces to the west had driven off advance elements of the 3rd Infantry Division, Tucker was to attack, drive off the Germans, and secure the line of the Mussolini Canal, which defined the right-most limit of the invasion area.[123] Constructed as part of a massive land reclamation project, the Mussolini Canal was, in places, 120-feet across with steep sloping sides that made it a perfect antitank ditch as well as an obvious feature on which to anchor the VI Corps right flank.[124]

Tucker's troopers moved out the next day (23 January) at about 1300 hours with the 1/504th attacking on the left, the 3/504th on the right, and the 2/504th following in reserve. Lieutenant Colonel Warren Williams's 1/504th made contact with a force of about thirty German infantry supported by two halftracks at about 0400 hours, 24 January and after a four-hour fight, assisted by the 57mm antitank guns of D Battery, 376 Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, succeeded in pushing the Germans back across the canal. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Leslie G. Freeman's 3/504th found itself in a much sharper fight lasting all night and into the next day. During the initial clash Freeman's troopers pushed the Germans across the canal and then took up defensive positions along the near edge. At 0600 hours the next morning, the Germans counterattacked with a force of about 200 infantry supported by four tanks. Freeman's I Company, which received the bulk of the German attack, withdrew under pressure while Freeman organized the remainder of the battalion to counterattack, hit the Germans in the flank and stopped their advance. Subsequently the troopers of I Company "infuriated at the death of their commanding officer earlier in the day" reversed their withdrawal, counterattacked themselves and pursued the broken German force across the canal bridge over which they had attacked, exacting a fierce revenge along the way.[125] By 1130 hours, having given vent to their bloodlust, Freeman ordered his troopers back to their defensive positions. They left no fewer than 150 dead Germans in their wake.[126]

Tucker's troopers had run into some of the first German reinforcements to appear around Anzio, soldiers from their old nemesis the *Hermann Göring Division*. They were there because Kesselring had reacted swiftly once he received word of the Allied landings. Despite the misleading intelligence of the past few weeks, Kesselring quickly determined that he was, in fact, facing a major Allied amphibious assault. He also knew that if the Allies at Anzio pushed hard they would find little in the area to stop them and that not only were his lines of communications exposed, so was the backdoor to the Liri Valley and, likewise, the backdoor to the *Gustav Line*. According the Westphal, so too was "[t]he road to Rome . . . open, and an audacious flying column could have penetrated to the city.' "[127] But the Allies did not drive inland. Lucas was primarily concerned with building up his strength before mounting a major thrust inland and Clark, who visited the beachhead on D-Day, confirmed this course when, just before leaving, he told Lucas not to stick his neck out as he (Clark) had done at Salerno.[128] Hence Kesselring was given a respite, one of which he took full advantage. By nightfall of the first day elements of twelve different divisions were rushing toward the Anzio beachhead and he had in place the *I Parachute Corps* headquarters (which he had snatched from Vietinghoff's *Tenth Army* defending to the south) to organize the German defensive line once the units arrived.[129]

Its attack to the Mussolini Canal secured for the 504th Combat Team the positions it would occupy for most of its stay at Anzio. From those positions Tucker's troopers would beat back countless German counterattacks, would counterattack in turn, and endure incessant artillery bombardment directed by German observers atop the Alban Hills who had an unobstructed view of the entire beachhead. According to Corporal Fred J. Baldino of A Company, 1/504th, the general thought at first was that the Allies would take Rome " 'within a week, so we dug only shallow slit trenches. None of us could know that this mud would be our "home" for more than three grueling months, a time that none of us who were there will ever forget.' " But as time passed and enemy resistance stiffened, continued Baldino, " '[o]ur foxholes along the Mussolini Canal got deeper and deeper.' "

> 'We were like moles. Because we had to stay down in our holes constantly [to avoid German artillery fire], the wax boxes that the K rations came in were very useful. They served as urinals, and if you tore them up into small strips and put a match to it [*sic*], it made just enough heat to warm up a canteen cup of water to be used for coffee or bullion.'[130]

At times the 504th's defensive front exceeded 5,000 yards, well in excess of the frontage that even a much more robust conventional infantry regiment could adequately cover.[131] Unable to defend along a continuous line, the troopers adopted a defense built around outposts and strongpoints backed by reserve forces ready to respond to any enemy penetration. According to one veteran,

> [o]ur front line outposts being as much as two hundred yards apart, the Krautheads, armed with machine pistols, easily passed through our lines at night and prowled unmolested for hours. Our front line positions were so well camouflaged that they ran into them only by accident. If the two or three men on an outpost detected a twenty-man patrol, they let them pass but telephoned the information to a small reserve of tommy gunners located back a few hundred yards, who would sally forth to shoot it out.
>
> It must have been very disconcerting and was certainly misleading to the enemy to prowl behind our lines for an hour and find nobody. When enemy patrols returned to their company commander and reported that the line was weakly held, a counterattack took place at the presumed weak spot. They came storming over almost every day and were always surprised when the boys rose out of their gopher-hole hiding places and scattered the ground with them.[132]

Another manner by which Tucker's combat team disguised its thinly held line was through aggressive patrolling. Each night patrols of varying strength would probe enemy positions, conduct reconnaissance, or take prisoners. At first, Tucker's troopers were able to range far behind enemy lines and kept "the enemy in a constant state of bewilderment." With time, however, and the laying by both sides of thousands of antipersonnel mines, the patrols became "more than ordinarily hazardous" and their effectiveness dropped off dramatically.[133] There was one trooper, however, who became

an instant legend in Anzio: Private Ted Bachenheimer of the 1/504th. Born in Germany, he had immigrated with his family to the United States when he was twelve years old and spoke flawless English and German. According to Gavin

> [a]t Anzio [Bachenheimer] developed considerable facility in moving around among the German units. On one occasion he joined a chow line and, having finished a meal of wieners and potatoes, captured the German troops that had been eating with him and took them back to the 504th. When the 504th left Anzio . . . Bachenheimer knew most of the German command posts as well as their supply points and medical stations. According to veterans of the 504th, he even knew the officers and their reputations among the German troops.[134]

Colonel Williams, Bachenheimer's battalion commander, once approached him as he was applying soot to his face in preparation for another of his solo missions behind enemy lines and asked if he was scared when he went out. According to Williams, Bachenheimer " 'pondered that question, then replied softly, "Well, I'm a little nervous when I leave friendly lines, and have to piss a few times, out in no-man's land. But after that, I'm not bothered." ' "[135] Miraculously, Bachenheimer survived Anzio and next saw combat in Holland, where he continued his personal war against the German Army.

By far the most debilitating aspect of life on the beachhead was the constant rain of German artillery and mortar shells interspersed with sniper, small arms and machine gun fire, shelling from self-propelled guns and tanks, and periodic strafing and bombing runs by German aircraft. So densely packed were the Allied units in the beachhead (the result of Lucas's desire to build up combat power followed by his inability to break out once that combat power had been assembled) that the German chances of hitting something or someone in the beachhead, even with unobserved fire, was great. Even when temporarily pulled from the line to a 'rear area' for rest, units could not escape the eyes of German observers on the surrounding hilltops. On 29 February, the 1/504th was relieved after twenty-eight days on the Mussolini Canal. Moved back in the vicinity of the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion's gun positions, a move "necessitated by the lack of space on the Beachhead itself, and because the Battalion in reserve had to be ready upon call to reinforce the line battalions in the event of any enemy break-through" the 1/504th ended up receiving "a great deal of enemy counter-battery fire intended for the artillery." "The rest area," continued the combat team's after action report, "proved to be practically an 'impact area.' "[136]

Enduring the steady stream of enemy fire became an accepted part of life, and death, on the Anzio beachhead. Even the staid, choppy prose employed by those responsible for keeping unit journals reeks with numb futility as this excerpt from the 2nd Battalion combat journal reveals.

> 2 February: Lt. Richardson hit by shrapnel.
> 3 February: Rear CP abandoned. . . . Several casualties. . . . 2 [Headquarters Company] men cracked under strain—sent to rear.
> 4 February: Had first experience with German 'screaming mimis.'

5 February: Extremely noisy night. Large exchange of artillery fire—rounds landing in close vicinity to B[attalio]n CP.

6 February: Artillery fire has its constant effect (one to two men per day). . . . During afternoon enemy artillery zeroed in on B[attalio]n CP (felt like 105 or larger), made several shell holes in area—also E Co[mpany] CP (wounded one man and hit a jeep belonging to artillery officer).

7 February: Enemy fire coming into area of CP fairly constant all morning—mortar, artillery and at noon a tank or T[ank] D[estroyer] which concentrated on F Co[mpany] CP (killed two, wounded nine). Roof of E Co[mpany] CP also knocked off and one wounded. . . . Machine gun fire directed on B[attalio]n CP front door kept personnel traffic to a minimum. Also machine gun fire on crossroads kept road traffic down. Every time a jeep went by it, it would be fired on but so far nobody hit.

8 February: Enemy rounds came in more rapidly in afternoon. Zeroed in on house used for supply opposite E Co[mpany]—killed 2 litter bearers, wounded 3 more and 1 E Co[mpany] man. . . .Our whole position is under observation by Germans in mountains to our front—our terrain is flat.[137]

Up until the beginning of February, before the onset of the arduous static warfare that defined the bulk of the combat team's stay in the beachhead, the 504th conducted several large-scale offensive actions under the operational control of Major General Lucian K. Truscott Jr.'s 3rd Infantry Division. These too were costly. The first of these occurred on 25 January. The 3rd Infantry Division, in position to the 504th's left, was going to mount a deliberate attack on the town of Cisterna, a crucial road and rail junction through which ran a key main north-south highways. To support his attack, Truscott ordered Tucker to seize the town of Borgo Piave, another road junction approximately a mile and a half east of the Mussolini Canal and just under eight miles south of Cisterna. By so doing, Tucker's troopers would fix the German forces to their front in place and thwart the movement of any German reinforcements attempting to move north against the 3rd Division's right flank.[138]

Tucker assigned the Borgo Piave mission to the 2/504th, while he had his other two battalions attack villages to the north and south of Borgo Piave respectively. Moving out at 1330 hours, 25 January, all three battalions met stiff enemy resistance, yet each continued to advance and eventually reached their objectives and dug in to await further orders. D Company, 2/504th was leading the advance on Borgo Piave and continued its advance for about 200 yards past the village before the Germans recognized they had just lost a major road intersection and counterattacked. Pinning the head of the D Company column down with deadly 20mm cannon fire, five German tanks accompanied by eight flak wagons (mobile 20mm or 40 mm antiaircraft guns that could also be used as devastating ground support weapons) hit D Company in the flank just as the company column was crossing a road. The company was cut in half. Those troopers in the rear of the column who survived the initial onslaught took cover in nearby ditches, reorganized, and attempted to fight through to those troopers at the head of the column who were cut off. But they were no match for the German armor, which ranged the roads next to the ditches, their main guns pointed downward, firing point-blank at the lightly-armed

troopers. Tucker ordered his troopers to hang on. As long as the German tanks were occupied with D Company, they would be unavailable to move against the 3rd Infantry Division's attack to the north. Finally, at 2030 hours, Tucker gave the order to withdraw. The 3rd Infantry Division's attack on Cisterna had failed so there was no reason to keep the 504th troopers beyond the Mussolini Canal. Fortunately D Company's losses were not as heavy as feared: three troopers were killed and twenty-nine missing (several of whom the 82nd liberated from German prisoner-of-war camps sixteen months later).[139]

The 504th made a second major attack five days later, the result of mounting pressure from Clark and Alexander on Lucas to push his forces inland. Relenting, Lucas planned a two-pronged offensive for 30 January. The main effort, to be conducted by the British 1st Division, was to be an attack northward toward the Alban Hills with elements of the U.S. 1st Armored Division following, ready to exploit any breakthrough to move on Rome. The 3rd Infantry Divison, along with the Rangers and Tucker's 504th, was to mount another attack on Cisterna in support. Truscott's plan was to infiltrate two battalions of Rangers toward Cisterna during the night of 29-30 January while elements of the 3rd Division's 7th and 15th Infantry Regiments conducted their own infiltration attacks to the left and right of the Rangers respectively. Then at daybreak, with several battalions of infantry already behind enemy lines, Truscott would attack with the remaining Ranger battalion up the main road to Cisterna and follow up quickly with tanks and mounted infantry.[140] The 504th Combat Team (minus 3rd Battalion, which had been attached to the U.S. 1st Armored Division to provide flank protection if and when it made its drive on Rome) was to make a diversionary attack by blowing two bridges over the Mussolini Canal and then advancing to a creek bed beyond the canal from where it could protect the 3rd Division's right flank. For its attack the combat team received the attachment of an armored reconnaissance platoon consisting of three medium tanks and two tank destroyers.[141]

At 0100 hours, 30 January, A and C Companies, 1/504th crossed the Mussolini Canal followed by the remainder of the 1/504th, the regimental headquarters section, and the 2/504th in order. Under cover of darkness, the troopers made steady progress, although the innumerable irrigation ditches, intermittent enemy flares, and sporadic long-range artillery fire slowed the pace. With dawn, however, everything changed. Groups of German soldiers that had been bypassed during the night infiltrated into the rear and flanks of the combat team and began shooting up the two assault companies moving toward the bridges. Shortly thereafter, several German flakwagons and 20mm cannons joined the fight and the lead companies began to stall. Seeing this, Colonel Williams climbed aboard one of the reconnaissance platoon tanks that had been following a little to the rear and, despite 20mm rounds bouncing off its armor, directed the tank's fire against the heavier German weapons which were eventually either destroyed or driven away. Williams then dismounted and led the tanks on foot to the front of the battalion so they could blast through to the bridges while the paratroopers followed. Having regained the momentum of the advance, A and C Companies achieved their objectives but, in each case, before the accompanying airborne engineers could blow the bridges the Germans did it for them. Once the bridges had been blown, Tucker leapfrogged the 2/504th to the front and continued the attack to the north but this was short-lived because the accompanying tanks and tank destroyers, which were to follow, were hemmed in by the irrigation ditches and dry creek beds in the area. Hence, Tucker organized a defensive

front, drove off several German counterattacks and cleared his rear of the remaining pockets of resistance. By day's end, his troopers had inflicted heavy casualties on the Germans, taking over 150 prisoners alone. They had also established a small, but important salient in the Allied perimeter, the farthest eastward penetration by any Allied unit on the beachhead. This new position would be the 504th's home for the remainder of its time at Anzio.[142] Truscott's attack on Cisterna, meanwhile, had ended in disaster. The two infiltrating Ranger battalions were ambushed at daybreak by German armor and mechanized infantry and decimated—of the 767 Rangers who departed on the attack, only six returned.[143]

The attack of 30 January was the last major offensive in which the 504th participated while at Anzio. Yet much heavy fighting remained for Tucker's troopers, who continued to defend the ground they had gained at such high cost, ground that was vitally important to the Germans. Because of the swampy terrain and innumerable erosion and irrigation ditches in the area, roads were of vital importance for the movement of both wheeled and tracked vehicles, and the 504th's new defensive perimeter bisected an important north-south road the Germans had been using to shift forces around the periphery of the Allied perimeter. Loss of the road forced the Germans to employ a roundabout route, losing time in the process. This circumstance, combined with the inherently exposed position of troops in a salient—open to attack from three sides, in this case from the north, south and east—made the 504th the focus of some extremely heavy counterattacks.

The first significant German attempt to reduce the troublesome salient came on 7 February when a company of infantry attacked the 2/504th's sector with "seeming disregard of the casualties sustained" and was repulsed, losing twenty killed and three captured in the process. Three days later the 1/504th repulsed another company-sized attack supported by flakwagons, again with substantial casualties to the Germans. The Germans launched a third major attack on 14 February, switching their effort back to the 2/504th's sector, only to be once again repulsed. On 16 February, the entire combat team front was ablaze. A German infantry regiment supported by numerous flakwagons advanced behind a rolling barrage and fought its way up to the edge of the American positions, but murderous small arms and machine gun fire from the paratroopers, accompanied by deadly accurate artillery fire from the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion stopped the attackers before they could force a breach. So heavy were the German casualties that a two-hour truce was asked for and granted so that the Germans could remove their dead and wounded, which "were literally stacked up" in front of the American positions. At the expiration of the truce, the Germans melted away. The last major attack came on 4 March when the 3/504th, returned from detached duty elsewhere on the beachhead, held off a German force of two infantry companies, two flakwagons, and two self-propelled guns. Thenceforward, there were no other large-scale attacks on the 504th's defensive line, although fire from German artillery and mortars continued unabated. During one particularly heavy barrage, over 100 artillery rounds landed on the 1/504th's command post, the third time in less than a week that the command post had been targeted (despite being moved after each of the preceding barrages). According to the 504th's after action report, enemy shelling was so heavy and persistent that "[e]nemy counterattacks were almost welcomed as an opportunity for the men on the line to 'blow off steam' as contrasted to sitting under an artillery barrage with no means of self defense [*sic*]."[144]

Besides the various actions around the Mussolini Canal, there was one other significant action on Anzio in which an element of the 504th distinguished itself. When the 3/504th was detached and put under the operational control of the U.S. 1st Armored Division in preparation for Lucas's major offensive of 30 January, it moved back to an assembly area and waited for a call that never came. The British 1st Division, attacking to its front up the main road to the Alban Hills, made steady progress and took Campoleone Station on 31 January, and in the process cut a railway that ran from Rome to Cisterna and continued further south, a rail line on which the Germans relied to keep their forces in the *Gustav Line* supplied. But the terrain around Campoleone, from which the 1st Armored Division was to launch its run toward Rome was, like most of the terrain in the beachhead, rent with gullies, devoid of cover, and surrounded by muddy bogs through which no vehicle could pass. Faced with having to commit the 1st Armored Division in such restrictive terrain, and disheartened over the loss of the two Ranger battalions at Cisterna, the cautious Lucas cancelled all further offensive operations on 1 February.[145]

In the same manner that the advance of the 504th Combat Team during Lucas's offensive created a salient, so too had the attacking British 1st Division created one, only this one, extending northward on both sides of the main road leading north from Anzio to the Alban Hills, was much longer, much thinner, and much more threatening to the Germans than that created by Tucker's two battalions. It was also much more vulnerable. Seven miles wide at its base, the Campoleone salient narrowed to less than a mile at its tip, extended some five miles into the German lines and encompassed a frontage of over ten miles that the British 1st Division, stopped in its tracks and spent from the attack, was too weak to defend. To bolster the British line, the 3/504th was released from its attachment to the 1st Armored Division and attached to 24th Guards Brigade of the British 1st Division holding the left face of the Campoleone salient. By afternoon 1 February, the troopers were in their new positions.[146]

Generaloberst Eberhard von Mackensen and his *Fourteenth Army* staff had taken over command of the German defense at Anzio on 25 January (relieving the *I Parachute Corps*, which remained as a subordinate element). Having been summoned from his resort villa in the northern Italian town of Verona, Mackensen arrived and, after his initial interview with Kesselring, had but one object in mind—to drive the Allies back into the sea. He had, in fact, been preparing to mount his counterattack in the very area where the British 1st Division had mounted its drive but postponed his attack and assumed the defensive when the British beat him to the mark. This state of affairs accrued for him unexpected advantages: having massed over five divisions in the vicinity of the road to Anzio (as it was known from the German perspective) he easily stopped the Allied attack which, once spent, left the British 1st Division seriously weakened and occupying an extremely exposed position.[147]

Mackensen opened phase one of his counterattack on 3 February, which was aimed at cutting off and destroying the British forces in the tip of the salient and by so doing eliminating the threat to the vital north-south railroad. The attack began just before midnight with an artillery barrage that kept the Allied troops's heads down, disrupted communications, and allowed parties of German infantry to use the numerous gullies and ditches in the area to infiltrate between Allied positions. Behind the infantry German Mark V Panther tanks used the roadways to take up firing positions from where they could provide direct fire support from their deadly 88mm main guns. British Sherman

tanks, rushed up to counter the fire from the Panthers, were outgunned and promptly withdrew. Despite the heavy attacks, however, the Allies held and at day's end, 4 February, still owned the salient.[148]

But once again Lucas was shaken. The fighting at the tip of the salient had taken a toll on the British (they had lost over 1,400 men in less than two days).[149] The German attack had almost achieved its aim; small elements attacking simultaneously from the east and west had linked up on the main road to Anzio but were driven back by British counterattacks. Additionally, the appearance of German tanks in such quantity, lurking behind the German infantry, like attack dogs straining at the leash awaiting that time when they would be freed to pursue and finish a fleeing foe, was ominous. And then there was Clark and Alexander, both of whom had visited the beachhead in the previous few days, whispering a message much different from the one they had been trumpeting earlier. Now it was: prepare to meet a major offensive. Be ready. The Germans are coming.[150] (Both Clark and Alexander had access to ULTRA intelligence, Lucas did not, and they knew with great clarity how formidable a force Mackensen had at his disposal, as well as his plan to use it).[151] Hence, once the fighting had died down, Lucas ordered Major General W. R. C. Penney, the 1st Division commander, to withdraw his forces to a new line that was considerably shorter and less vulnerable to attack on the flanks. This the British did on the night of 4-5 February.[152]

Following the British withdrawal, the front remained relatively quiet (though the incessant artillery pounding continued) for three days, during which time Penney replaced some of his worn out troops with the 168th Brigade, attached to him from the newly arrived British 56th Division. Securing the middle of the British line, the 168th Brigade was given use of the 3/504th, which took up positions slightly behind the front line and astride the Anzio road, the focal point of phase two of Mackensen's offensive.[153]

At 2100 hours, 7 February, a heavy artillery bombardment announced the renewal of the German attacks. Employing the same infiltration tactics that had almost won them success previously, the Germans attacked everywhere across the British line. Mackensen's ultimate aim was to secure a cluster of three- and four-story brick buildings that the Allies had dubbed 'the Factory' as well as the small hamlet of Carroceto, 500 yards to its southwest. Built in 1936 as a model Fascist farming community (and properly called Aprilia) the Factory was situated on some of the only high ground in the entire area. Taking it and Carroceto would give the Germans a dominating position over the surrounding low, wet, boggy ground, as well as possession of several significant road intersections. With these in hand, Mackensen could build up forces and continue his attack in any of several directions, with the ultimate aim of breaking through to the coast with armor and annihilating VI Corps.[154]

Attacking from the west, the German *65th Division* succeeded in infiltrating large elements behind the Allied front lines. The fight there soon became a confused, hand-to-hand affair. Several British strongpoints were overrun while others ran completely out of ammunition.[155] At 2120 hours, Colonel Freeman, the 3/504th commander, received an urgent call for help—the 1st Battalion, Irish Guards were in danger of collapse and needed reinforcement. Freemen sent his H Company, which at the time had but twenty-seven troopers present for duty.[156] Passing through retreating British soldiers, H Company advanced to an embankment where it took up defensive positions to plug the gap. Lieutenant James Megellas, one of the company's two officers, conducted a quick

reconnaissance once the paratroopers were in position and discovered, to his amazement, that "[t]he Germans were everywhere, and the British were nowhere to be found."[157] Soon, H Company was itself embroiled in a fierce firefight. At times, the combatants were so close that they were hurling grenades over the embankment at one another. Fighting throughout the night of 7-8 February, German soldiers and American paratroopers engaged in a wild mêlée. On two separate occasions, large groups of Germans stumbled blindly into the H Company positions only to be ambushed and decimated.[158] Corporal John C. Granado who was manning an outpost on the H Company right flank, recalled that "[t]he Germans appeared to be everywhere, infiltrating all around us." Refusing to abandon his position, Granado's position was eventually overrun and he was taken prisoner. As he was being marched to the rear by his captors, he bore witness to the effect of the German attack.

> We were taken back through the attacking forces and the German lines. We passed through what had been the British lines where we saw a lot of dead British soldiers. A lot of them were killed in their foxholes.[159]

Early the next morning, Freeman ordered his remaining companies, I and G, to attack to relieve H Company, which by that time was completely surrounded. The attack stalled when it ran headlong into intense German small arms and machine gun fire. Freeman consolidated his position and waited for dark to attack again.[160] Leading I Company at the time was Lieutenant Roy Hanna. Hanna had been originally assigned to G Company but took command of I Company after all of its officers had been killed or wounded. Jumping off at 1900 hours, Hanna

> was leading his men in an assault against well-entrenched forces with greatly superior firepower when a bullet tore through his rib cage and lung and exited from his lower back.
>
> Nevertheless, he continued leading the attack until he lapsed into unconsciousness. When he came to his senses, he got up and continued the attack. He collapsed three more times and got up each time until his unit had driven the Germans from their seemingly impregnable position. Only then was he evacuated to a hospital and later sent back to the United States for thirty days. Afterward, he rejoined his unit for the remainder of the war. He received the Distinguished Service Cross for this action.[161]

While Hanna's company overran the German position separating it from H Company, G Company maneuvered around and eventually contacted the beleaguered paratroopers, who were still holding the embankment. The next day the Germans took the Factory, forcing Penney to again adjust his positions rearward. Freeman's 3/504th, now down to about twenty-five men per company and fewer than 100 men in the battalion, moved as well. Unfortunately, the 3/504th's new position was well within range of the Germans in the Factory who directed machine gun and tank fire at the troopers throughout the afternoon of 9 February.[162]

At 0430 hours, 10 February, the Germans attacked again. Freeman's paratroopers, fighting in three directions at once, refused to budge, fighting back furiously and firing as

fast as their weapons would allow; the battalion 81mm mortars wore out their gun barrels, averaging 1,200 rounds each day. Fighting for six days along this new line, the 3/504th was finally relieved on 16 February, down to less than one-third strength in each of its rifle companies. Two days later, Mackensen called off his offensive. His units had suffered incredible casualties at the hands of the Allied defenders and he had insufficient combat power remaining to continue the attack. He had failed to break through to the coast, and although this was not the last time he mounted an attack on the Allied beachhead, it marked the German high-water mark at Anzio.[163]

For its actions fighting alongside the British, the 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment received the division's first Presidential Unit Citation, the highest award a unit can earn. As is true of most citations of this type, the award narrative is filled with platitudes, all true, about holding ground "courageously and stubbornly" against "continuous and determined hostile attacks" and attacking "with fighting determination" until "all objectives were regained." But towards the end of the narrative there is one sentence that, more than any other, bespeaks not only what carried the 3/504th through the terrible fight at the Campoleone salient, but what marked it, as well as the rest of the 82nd Airborne Division, as a fighting force to be reckoned with: "[o]fficers and men . . . consistently distinguished themselves by aggressive patrolling, exceptional initiative, and great individual courage."[164]

The 504th Combat Team did not see the end of the fighting at Anzio. It was relieved of front-line duty on 23 March (VI Corps did not break out until 23 May) and the next day boarded ships that brought it to, Pozzouli, Italy, the same port from which it had left sixty-two days earlier. Anzio had cost the combat team 120 dead, 410 wounded, and 60 missing, thirty-five percent of the strength with which it had arrived.[165] Many of the wounded were wounded twice, having returned to the hell of the beachhead so as not to leave their comrades short-handed. Corporal Robert Kinney had been shot in the buttocks early in the campaign.

> 'We were taken off the beachhead and sent to a hospital in Naples and got sewed up. Several weeks later we were all down the hospital—lots of us down there in Naples. One of the officers of the 504th came down and said, "Anyone from the 504th who can stand up, can walk, meet me down here at the end of the hall." We all went down, about forty of us in casts, bandages, arms in slings and everything. He said, "Your buddies up there are catching hell and we've got to go back if we can. You don't have to, we're not going to order you, but we're looking for volunteers." We said, "Hell, we'll go."
>
> We just had the best-spirited bunch of scrappers you ever saw. I was wearing a kind of diaper, and the nurse gave me a bottle of boric acid to keep it [my wound] clean with. We went; only one guy didn't go.'[166]

Spirit of this kind is found only in well-led, well-trained units. The 504th was one such unit, as was the division as a whole. With each passing campaign, the troopers of the 82nd Airborne Division proved themselves resolute fighters who, though lightly armed, compensated for their lack of armament with initiative, aggressiveness, and inspirational leadership. They had been sorely tested at Anzio and not found wanting.

Tucker and his troopers remained at Pouzzouli for eighteen days. They rested, did some minimal training and, when possible, visited Naples. On 10 April they finally boarded the transport for their journey to the United Kingdom, where they would join their division comrades who were training for the great cross-Channel invasion.[167] But the 504th was too beat up to participate in OVERLORD and was scratched from the troop list. Anzio had taken a lot out of them.[168]

But it had not taken everything. The irresolute character of the regiment remained. (Not everyone was enamored of that character, especially Ridgway, and hence it was perhaps fortuitous that Tucker's regiment remained in Italy. Before leaving for the United Kingdom, Ridgway was becoming increasingly exasperated with Tucker's indifference to administrative matters and was close to firing him. Gavin noted in his diary that he had had to have a talk with "Tucker and Billingslea [Tucker's executive officer] about their administrative troubles" and went on to write "Tucker does not realize, or if he does he has at last gotten fed up with the pressure, but his situation is critical." When the 504th entered combat again with the 82nd the division was being commanded by Gavin, who was much more forgiving of Tucker's attitude).[169] While sailing to the United Kingdom aboard the *HMS Capetown Castle,* Tucker's troopers found themselves in the company of British Guardsmen who regarded them as nothing more than undisciplined pirates. One trooper penned a hypothetical reply that a Guards officer might receive if asked about the behavior of the troopers of the 504th Combat Team and their relationship with their commanding officer.

> Hell, yes, Colonel Tucker and I get along fine. He is just one of the boys. When Old Rube tells us to go out and kill off some Krautheads, we go out and kill 'em off for him. He tells us to kill some: He don't say how. He leaves the way of doing it up to us and we go out and do it. He is a hard old joker to get along with, but he stands up for our rights and we fight like hell for him. Yeah, we salute our officers cause we're in the dam' army, but most officers in the [504th] don't give a damn whether they're saluted or not. Discipline, hell yes, we got it, but not the lady-laced kind! We'd obey Old Reuben if he told us to jump into hell. What you mean . . . we ain't got discipline? We got more discipline than we need![170]

Tucker's troopers were certainly not British Guardsmen, but their performance throughout the war, coupled with the performance of the rest of the division, would earn for the 82nd a very similar title—they would become America's Guard of Honor.

Chapter Ten Notes

[1] Quoted in Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p. According to Lieutenant John P. O'Malley of the 2/504, "[t]he Baggy Pants were actually tank crew suits which we started wearing in the Venafro area to keep warm as we were sleeping on the ground most of the time." See John P. O'Malley to William P. Yarborough, n.d., The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "CHRONO. FILE: SICILY," USAMHI.

[2] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 154-155.

[3] Ibid., 157.

[4] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Report of Arrival of Units in ITALY."

[5] William O. Darby and William H. Baumer, *Darby's Rangers: We Led the Way* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1980), 116.

[6] See Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 69-74; Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Award of Silver Star Medal," 23 October 1943, Box "82nd Airborne Division WWII 325th GIR *Personal Papers," Folder "Personal Papers—Meintzer, Wade M. (E Co., 325th GIR)," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, "The 325th Glider Infantry in Action," 19 October 1943, 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448, Record Group 407, NARA II. Meintzer's Ranger platoon should not be confused with the Army Rangers with which the glider troopers were fighting at the time. Meintzer's men were selected from within the 2/325th and served as an unofficial reserve and reconnaissance force for the battalion commander. They had undergone 'Ranger-like' training, but were not Army Rangers.

[7] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Commendation of Company 'E,' 325th Glider Infantry," 23 October 1943, Box "82nd Airborne Division WWII 325th GIR *Personal Papers," Folder "Personal Papers—Meintzer, Wade M. (E Co., 325th GIR)," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC. Dickerson, the E Company commander, later wrote that he often observed Ridgway well forward, inspecting the front, ensuring weapons were sighted correctly and that defensive lines were tactically sound. During one such visit from his division commander, while E Company was defending Mount San Angelo, Ridgway questioned Dickerson about his appearance. "We were very short of ammunition, food, and water. The weather was very warm. I had not shaved in about ten days because of the water shortage and did not insist that my men do so. Early on a sunny morning, who appears from the valley below but General Ridgway. His first question was 'Why aren't you shaved?' He would not accept the excuse about water, but pointed out that I was the senior office on that mountain, and expected to set the example and that I should dry shave immediately then require my men to do so. Then he asked how many casualties we had suffered, complimented me on the performance of Company E, and approved all my weapons and troop dispositions. His last words were, 'You and your soldiers have done a fine job.' " See Dickerson to Blair, 20 September 1983.

[8] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 155-156.

[9] Ibid., 163. It is a remarkable testament to Darby's leadership that he was only a lieutenant colonel and yet put in command of such a large force. Ridgway likewise saw in Darby unusual talent as his subsequent actions would show.

[10] Ibid., 164. The only two 82nd units Ridgway did not have under his command at the time were G Company, 2/325th Infantry and the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. On 17 September, Clark sent the former to occupy the island of Ischia, just outside the Gulf of Naples, where it remained until 23

October. The latter remained in Sicily until much later. See Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Report of Arrival of Units in ITALY"; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, "Activities of the 325th Glider Infantry During October, 1943," n.d., 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448, Record Group 407, NARA II; and Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, "The 325th Glider Infantry in Action," 19 October 1943, 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[11] Memorandum by Matthew B. Ridgway, "Operations," 26 September 1943, 382-INF(505)-0.1, Box 12455, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[12] *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 72.

[13] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 165.

[14] Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "Historical record for the month of October 1943," 4 November 1943, 382-INF(505)-0.3, Box 12455, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[15] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 71.

[16] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 165.

[17] Gavin, *To Berlin*, 71.

[18] Norton, interview, 22 February 2001.

[19] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 72 and Norton, interview, 22 February 2001.

[20] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 72.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Norton, interview, 22 February 2001.

[23] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 88.

[24] Gavin, *On to Berlin*, 73. According to Ridgway, the reason that there were no crowds is because he had summoned the city's chief of police and ordered him to clear the streets. "I gave him explicit instructions," wrote Ridgway. "I told him I wanted the streets of Naples cleared completely, because when we came in we were coming fast, and anybody in our path, either German or Italian, was going to get hurt. We gave him time to get back to town and carry out his order, and then we went in." See Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 88. See also Matthew B. Ridgway to his wife, 7 October 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942, 1943," USAMHI.

[25] Norton, interview, 22 February 2001.

[26] Norton, interview, 22 February 2001 and Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Restoration and Maintenance of Order in the City of NAPLES," 18 November 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder, "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[27] Gavin Diary, 19 October 1943.

[28] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 88.

[29] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 73.

[30] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 168.

[31] "Company 'B,' 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, Station and Record of Events, from Jan 1/43 to Jan 1/44," n.d., Box "82nd Airborne Division WWII 307th Eng. Bn Unit History Incident Report," Folder "307th Abn Eng Bn History 1943," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC. There was some thought that the explosion was caused by B Company's own explosives, but this was never proved and the prevailing mindset, given the other explosions throughout the city, was that it was a German booby-trap. See Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 89-90.

[32] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 168-169.

[33] Ibid., 192-193 and 203-204.

[34] Mark Alexander to William E. Ekman, 5 October 1978, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder "82nd Airborne Division, Personal letters w/veterans on historical events (WWII), postcard of Ste. Mere-Eglise w/82nd Memorial window," USAMHI.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Except where noted see Langdon, *"Ready,"* 33-34 and Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "Historical Record for the month of October 1943."

[37] Alexander quoted in Tregaskis, *Invasion Diary*, 165.

[38] Norton, interview, 22 February 2001.

[39] Except where noted see Langdon, *"Ready,"* 33-34 and Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "Historical Record for the month of October 1943."

[40] Sayre, interview, 13 April 2002. According to Sayre, "something went off behind me and I thought a mule had kicked me in the ass. And . . . didn't knock me down, nope. Ran my hand back there to my ass and about three fingers fell in the hole. . . . Oh, I thought, man, you done bought the farm. But I had an aid man very near and he came up and he said I am going to give you a shot of morphine. We had little syrettes with needles on the end of them. . . . Well, they were a damn good thing, I'll tell you that. But anyway, I said, 'I'll tell you what you do. Why don't you give me two of them because I don't think I'm going to make it anyway and there's no use of me dying in pain.' And the aid man, he was used to taking orders from me, so he gave me two of them. And I think it might have been one of those things that was the reason I survived because it kind of knocked me out and I didn't go into shock or anything. And they carried me about a mile on a stretcher and found an ambulance and evacuated me all the way to Naples."

[41] Except where noted see Langdon, *"Ready,"* 33-34 and Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "Historical Record for the month of October 1943."

[42] Eisenhower pulled Taylor for duty as a member of the Allied liaison group to the Italian government in exile. According to Taylor, " '[a]pparently I qualified for membership [in the liaison group] on the basis of having become an Italian expert after some twenty-four hours in Rome.' " See Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 156.

[43] Batchellor was later relieved of command while the division was in England preparing for the Normandy invasion. A married man, Batchellor " 'fell in love with an Irish lass where we were training and he neglected the regiment to be with her almost every afternoon.' " Mark Alexander quoted in Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 193. According to Gavin, Batchellor "really wasn't a good regimental commander" but "[i]t was hard to find regimental commanders of parachute regiments at that time, with the limited experience we had. You had to have someone with combat experience." Batchellor had fought with the 505th in Sicily and Italy and as regimental executive officer was next in line to take the regiment when Gavin left. After being relieved, Batchellor was made commander of the 1st Battalion, 508th

Parachute Infantry Regiment and was subsequently killed in Normandy. The fact that he was reported killed as a member of the 508th and not the 505th was a difficult thing to explain to his widow and something Gavin tried to explain for the rest of his life. See Gavin, interview, 4 January 1983.

[44] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 34.

[45] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 73-74.

[46] Gavin Dairy, 19 October 1943.

[47] According to Blair, Ridgway, Taylor and Taylor's executive officer, Colonel Francis A. 'Andy' March, had soured on the 456th after having to relieve its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Harrison B. Harden Jr., for what they felt was poor performance in Sicily. The battalion would later be split to form a second parachute field artillery battalion, the 463rd, which later fought in Italy and southern France while the rump rejoined the 82nd in England, where it retained the 456th designation and regained the confidence of Ridgway. See Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 160 and Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 84-88.

[48] Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "Historical Record for the month of October 1943."

[49] Gavin Diary, 19 October 1943.

[50] Norton, interview, 22 February 2001.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 93.

[53] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 70.

[54] Gavin, Diary, 23 October 1943.

[55] Dwight D. Eisenhower to Walter Bedell Smith, "Notes for Chief of Staff," 2 October 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years III*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1481. In October 1943 Eisenhower assumed, as did everyone else, that Marshall would command Operation OVERLORD and that Eisenhower would either retain command in the Mediterranean or, more likely, replace Marshall as Chief of Staff. As the mid-November 1943 deadline for the retention of forces in the Mediterranean drew near, Eisenhower sent Smith to Washington to discuss strategy and the allocation of resources between the two theaters.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Matthew B. Ridgway to Alfred M. Gruenther, "Suggested for inclusion in personal letter to General EISENHOWER from General CLARK," 14 October 1943, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "Chrono File Anzio," USAMHI. Gruenther was Clark's chief of staff at Fifth Army.

[58] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Airborne Training," 6 November 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI. Underlining in original.

[59] Matthew B. Ridgway to Paul L. Williams, 6 November 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[60] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 93.

[61] Marshall quoted in Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 51.

[62] Dwight D. Eisenhower to Harold Rupert Leofric Alexander, 29 December 1943, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years III*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1,634. Even Butcher noted a change in Eisenhower after the announcement, writing in his diary that Eisenhower stated one morning at breakfast that he did not want to hang around in the Mediterranean and "wait until Rome is taken because once [the] decision had been taken to change your job, everyone has 'ants in his pants' to get on with the new one and inevitably loses interest in the old." See Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 456.

[63] Ralph Bennett, *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1989), 251.

[64] Quoted in John Ellis, *Cassino: The Hollow Victory* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984), 28.

[65] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 245 and Ellis, *Cassino*, 27.

[66] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 207-208 and 224.

[67] Ibid., 207-208.

[68] Quote from ibid., 220. See also Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n. p. and Mason, "The 82d Under Ridgway," chap. 4, page 4.

[69] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 223.

[70] Journal, 27 Oct 1943 – 23 April 1944, C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, attachment to Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Unit History," 1 August 1944, Box "82nd Airborne Division, WWII, 307th Eng. Bn, Unit History, Incident Reports," Folder "307th Abn Eng Bn C Co. Sicily/Italy Sep 43-Apr 44," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.

[71] Gavin Diary, 13 November 1943.

[72] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 337.

[73] Martin Blumenson, *Mark Clark* (New York: Congdon & Weed, Inc., 1984), 143.

[74] Matthew B. Ridgway to Mark Clark, 10 November 1943, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "Chrono File Anzio," USAMHI. Capitalization in original.

[75] Mark Clark to Matthew B. Ridgway, 12 November 1943, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "Chrono File Anzio," USAMHI. Reminiscing after the war, Clark wrote "[i]t was a sad day for me when Ridgway departed. He was an outstanding battle soldier, brilliant, fearless and loyal, and he had trained and produced one of the finest Fifth Army outfits." See Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 236.

[76] Matthew B. Ridgway to Maxwell D. Taylor, 7 November 1943, The Mathew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[77] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 171.

[78] See Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 89-90. It was not uncommon for 82nd troopers to go AWOL from the hospital in order to remain with the division. Bradley wrote that as early as the invasion of Sicily, 82nd troopers would leave the hospital in an attempt to keep up with their peripatetic division. In one instance,

Bradley was well to the east on Sicily when he came across an American paratrooper hitching a ride. When Bradley asked him where he came from the trooper replied, "[t]he hospital, sir. I'm AWOL from the hospital but I had to bust out before they ran me through that repple-depple [replacement detachment] routine. Otherwise I would never had gotten back to my old outfit." Bradley turned the matter over to his G-1 (personnel officer) and ensured the man returned to the 82nd. See Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally & Company, 1951), 141.

[79] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, 9 November 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "World War II, Personal Files, Matthew B. Ridgway, Correspondence, January 1942 – November 1943," USAMHI. In the upper left-hand corner of the letter contained in the file, Ridgway penned "[a] copy to go by name to every member of the Division left in hospital." Anecdotal evidence indicates that Ridgway remained true to his word. Edwin Sayre, for example, spent many months in hospital after being wounded in Italy but eventually returned to the 82nd. See Sayre, interview, 13 April 2002.

[80] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 89 and Mason, "The 82d Under Ridgway," chap. 4, page 4.

[81] Collectively, the units sailing for the United Kingdom had sustained 78 killed, 263 wounded, and listed 15 troopers as missing or prisoners of war. Some of the heaviest fighting in Italy was yet to come. See *82d Airborne Division in Sicily and Italy*, 96-98.

[82] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 92.

[83] Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 39.

[84] Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p and Journal, 27 Oct 1943 – 23 April 1944, C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, attachment to Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Unit History."

[85] Gavin Diary, 29 October 1943.

[86] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 235.

[87] Ibid., 257.

[88] Ibid., 258-259.

[89] Ibid., 270. Although its real name is Monte Sambucaro, Fifth Army maps referred to this high ground as Monte Sammucro, a name which will be retained here. See Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 208.

[90] Ibid., 251 and 275-277.

[91] Ibid., 275-277.

[92] James Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin: A Paratrooper at War in Europe* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 29-30. Megellas joined the 504th on Thanksgiving Day, 1943. He remained with the regiment throughout the war, becoming one of the division's most decorated officers.

[93] Carter, *Devils in Baggy Pants*, 136.

[94] Ibid., 108.

[95] Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p.

[96] Garrison and Fern, "Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry."

[97] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 30-41 passim; Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p.; Garrison and Fern, "Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry."

[98] Garrison and Fern, "Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry."

[99] Carter, *Devils in Baggy Pants*, 133-134.

[100] Incident related by the C Company commander, Captain A. E. 'Ernie' Milloy, in Breuer, *Geronimo,* 157.

[101] Kuehl quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 33.

[102] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 41 and Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p.

[103] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead," 21 June 1945, 382-INF(504)-1.6, Box 12454, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[104] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 257.

[105] Martin Blumenson, "General Lucas at Anzio," in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Robert Greenfield, (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 325.

[106] See Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 293 and Blumenson, "General Lucas at Anzio," 325.
[107] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 293-294.

[108] Stalin quoted in Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943-1944*, 363.

[109] Winston S. Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, vol. 5 of *The Second World War* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951), 420-421.

[110] Telegram from Churchill to British Chiefs of Staff, dated 19 December 1943, quoted in ibid., 429.

[111] Except where noted see Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, 428-441 passim; Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 296-298; Blumenson, "General Lucas at Anzio," 327-328.

[112] Blumenson, "General Lucas at Anzio," 330-331.

[113] Warren, *Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean*, 71.

[114] Ibid. Warren contended that all the fears that brought about the cancellation of SUN ASSAULT were unfounded and in retrospect wrote: "[s]uggestions that the 504th might have swept up the unguarded road to Rome can be discounted, not only because of the suicidal nature of such a dash, but also because a parachute regiment, almost devoid of vehicles, could not race 30 miles in a day. What the paratroops could have done within the limits of their mission and capabilities would have been to reconnoiter, to inform the commanders on the beaches that the way was clear, and to advance through Carroceto to the strategically valuable junction of Campoleone, about seven miles away. Campoleone was a natural bastion for the northern end of the Anzio beachhead. The Allies later paid heavily in vain attempts to take it after the Germans had established themselves there. In SUN ASSAULT had been carried out, Campoleone could have been occupied safely and cheaply." Warren, *Airborne Missions in the*

Mediterranean, 72. Writing after the war, Gavin concurred, although he maintained that "[i]f the capabilities of the 504th in this situation can be gauged by its performance in combat throughout Italy, it would almost certainly have entered Rome." Gavin, "Airborne Plans and Operations in the Mediterranean Theater," 29.

[115] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead." Like Anzio, Nettuno was a small seaside resort city about two miles to the northeast along the coast.

[116] War Department Historical Division, *Anzio Beachhead: 22 January – 25 May 1944* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Division, War Department, 1948; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), 6 and 14.

[117] Canaris quoted in Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 319.

[118] Westphal quoted in ibid.

[119] Ibid., 318-319.

[120] War Department Historical Division, *Anzio Beachhead*, 18.

[121] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."

[122] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 50.

[123] Headquarters, 504th Combat Team, "S-3 Operations Summary," 5 February 1944, p. 1, 382-INF(504)-0.3, Box 12451, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[124] D'Este, *Fatal Decision*, 137-138.

[125] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."

[126] See also Headquarters, 504th Combat Team, "S-3 Operations Summary," p. 1 and Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."

[127] Westphal quoted in Blumenson, "General Lucas at Anzio," 350.

[128] Ibid., 340.

[129] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 361-362.

[130] Baldino quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo,* 164-165.

[131] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."

[132] Carter, *Devils in Baggy Pants*, 166-167.

[133] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."

[134] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 75.

[135] Williams quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo,* 171.

[136] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."

[137] Garrison and Fern, "Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry." The 'screaming mimis' referred to were most likely German *Nebelwerfer*, multi-barrel mortars that threw salvos of 150mm, 210mm, or 300mm projectiles fitted with sirens which caused them to wail as they flew through the air. See Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1984; New York: Touchstone, 1985), 188.

[138] War Department Historical Division, *Anzio Beachhead*, 22 and Headquarters, 504th Combat Team, "S-3 Operations Summary," p. 2.

[139] Headquarters, 504th Combat Team, "S-3 Operations Summary," p. 2.; Garrison and Fern, "Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry"; Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."

[140] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 390.

[141] Headquarters, 504th Combat Team, "S-3 Operations Summary," p. 2 and Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."

[142] Headquarters, 504th Combat Team, "S-3 Operations Summary," pp. 2-3; Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."; and Garrison and Fern, "Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry."

[143] War Department Historical Division, *Anzio Beachhead*, 30-31.

[144] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."

[145] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 390-391.

[146] Headquarters, 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "The Anzio Beachhead, Italy," n.d., untitled box, Folder "*Histories—Anzio (3/504th)," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.

[147] Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino* 364-365.

[148] War Department Historical Division, *Anzio Beachhead*, 44-46.

[149] Ibid., 46.

[150] Blumenson, "General Lucas at Anzio," 345.

[151] Bennett, *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy*, 267.

[152] War Department Historical Division, *Anzio Beachhead*, 46.

[153] Ibid., 55.

[154] Ibid., 54-55.

[155] Ibid., 55.

[156] Headquarters, 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "The Anzio Beachhead, Italy."

[157] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 60.

[158] Ibid., 62-63.

[159] Granado quoted in Ibid., 67. Granado was liberated in May 1945 and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for this actions at the embankment.

[160] Headquarters, 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "The Anzio Beachhead, Italy."

[161] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 95.

[162] Headquarters, 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "The Anzio Beachhead, Italy" and War Department Historical Division, *Anzio Beachhead*, 61.

[163] Headquarters, 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "The Anzio Beachhead, Italy"; Department Historical Division, *Anzio Beachhead*, 62; Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, 423.

[164] Memorandum, Headquarters, Fifth Army, "Citation of Unit," n.d., untitled box, Folder "*Unit Awards—3/504th PUC," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.

[165] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 76 and Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "Narrative of Events of the 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team on the Anzio Beachhead."

[166] Robert Kinney quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 88.

[167] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 77.

[168] One Combat Team veteran, Louis Hauptfleisch, railed against the 504th being left out of the Normandy invasion. "True, the 504th [including the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and C Company of the 307th Airborne Engineers] was short of officers and enlisted men. But how often had we enjoyed the luxury of having our ranks filled during our overseas actions? That should not have been construed as an impediment . . . since, at that time, the majority of Os and EMs in the 504th Combat Team represented a valuable base of combat-experienced troops. Replacements were flowing in regularly, so the 504th seemed to be adequate and ready." Quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo*, 189. Another veteran, Al Langdon of the 505th disagreed. Writing "[f]or what it is worth, I agree with Ridgway that the 504 was in no condition to go into Normandy. I was on the detail that readied their camp near Leicester and I saw them when they arrived. I have never seen a more beat-up bunch of men." Allen Langdon to Clay Blair, n.d., The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "Langdon, Allen," USAMHI.

[169] Gavin Diary, 31 October 1943. Lieutenant Colonel Charles 'Chuck' Billingslea took over as executive officer during the Salerno fight when Leslie Freeman was wounded (Freeman, of course, recovered and led the 3/504 brilliantly during Anzio and the fight at the Campoleone salient). A colleague recalled that Billingslea was " 'cold, brilliant, and fearless. He also had a well organized mind. Tucker was very, very weak in administration—paperwork, detailed planning, and so on—so Billingslea became an extremely strong addition to the 504's leadership.' " Quoted in Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 160. Billingslea went on to take command of the 325th after Normandy.

[170] Carter, *Devils in Baggy Pants*, 197.

Chapter Eleven
A Terrible and Handsome Sight

Finally, bulky and shapeless with guns, knives, rations, ropes, maps and food, we climbed into the waiting plane. The sunset glowed red and a cold wind started to blow. We smelled again the old familiar scent of high octane gasoline, hot metal and airplane fabric. We sat down and tightened our straps as the motors roared and the plane vibrated. The crew chief came through and slammed the door shut. We knew that the next time we went through it would be over France. I wouldn't trade those moments for anything in the world. With pride and tenseness we sat side by side, the common loneliness of men dissolved in the white heat of the coming hours. We knew that we were going in ahead of everyone else and would be alone, behind the German lines for hours, and upon our efforts depended in a large measure the success of the storming of the beach.

John V. McNally[1]

None of the 82nd's general officers accompanied the division when it set sail from Naples in mid-November 1943. Taylor remained in Italy as liaison officer to the Italian government (and Ridgway's representative to Fifth Army to watch over the 504th Regimental Combat Team, the other 'member' of the division that had been left behind in Italy). Gavin had already departed, bound for London where he was to lend his expertise to the airborne planning effort for the cross-Channel invasion. And Ridgway was en route to the United States where the debate over the efficacy of airborne divisions was reaching its denouement. In their absence, Colonel 'Doc' Eaton became the division's acting commander and shepherded it to Northern Ireland, its designated port of debarkation.[2]

Ridgway arrived in the United States prepared to fight for the retention of airborne divisions in the Army's force structure. His guiding precept was contained in the opening sentence of a tightly written two-page memorandum with which he had come armed: "[a]irborne troops are weapons of opportunity." It followed, he contended, that commanders should therefore "refrain from assigning airborne missions merely because airborne troops are available" but that if an airborne operation was required, adequate time and resources to ensure "[r]ealistic and thorough" training with the troop carriers had to be allocated. He acknowledged that occasions may arise when the resources required to commit an entire airborne division might not be available. In those instances "the Division should be unhesitatingly employed as a whole as a light infantry combat division with missions appropriate to its fire power and combat strength." Taken individually, nothing Ridgway wrote was startlingly new and much of it had already been

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 292 through 299.

captured in Training Circular 113, *Employment of Airborne and Troop Carrier Forces*, published by the Swing Board the previous month. But Ridgway's memorandum did put the first gloss on an emerging paradigm—airborne divisions as "weapons of opportunity" that, if employed correctly *and as divisions* could have a decisive impact on the course of a campaign. Its influence would be felt for the remainder of the war in Europe, beginning with the assault into Normandy.[3]

Marshall had long been an advocate of airborne divisions but McNair, the Army Ground Forces commander and the man to whom Marshall had entrusted the mission of organizing and training all Army combat forces, was yet to be convinced. Hence the Knollwood Maneuvers—wargames specifically designed to determine if airborne divisions could, in fact, do all that Swing, Ridgway, and others said they could. Ridgway remained in the United States to observe the maneuvers and must have felt a keen sense of relief when, at their conclusion, McNair finally admitted that airborne divisions had a place in the Army force structure. Not until the end of the war would talk of disbanding airborne divisions again arise, and then for significantly different reasons.

While in the United States Ridgway took the opportunity to press the War Department on several other matters, foremost of which were the issues of pay and the organization of airborne divisions. Ridgway told the War Department that the pay discrepancy between paratroops and glider troopers was a "fundamental injustice" especially since, based on his "personal observation and experience . . . there is no essential difference between the hazards of parachute and glider duty."[4] As had happened before when he brought up this issue Ridgway's request was denied, but his entreaties were not in vain; the pay issue landed on the Chief of Staff's desk and Marshall promised that he would seek Congressional help to rectify the matter.[5] With regard to organization, Ridgway asserted that when the 82nd was created "no precedents existed on which to base Tables Of Organization" but the experience of two major campaigns had amply demonstrated the need for change. Furthermore, experience had also shown that once committed the airborne division "is almost certain to be used for sustained mobile ground operations" and thus to ensure that the division remained combat effective certain increases were needed. Among Ridgway's more substantial recommendations were increasing the number of squads in parachute rifle platoons from two to three, the number of battalions in the glider regiment from two to three, and the inclusion of a second glider field artillery battalion in the division artillery array. He also recommended strength increases for the military police, engineer, signal, medical, quartermaster, and ordnance units of the division as well as the addition of substantially more wheeled vehicles and heavier antitank weapons. McNair rejected the recommendations without exception; although he had been convinced that airborne divisions were worthwhile, he was not similarly compelled to admit that they also required substantial increases in personnel and equipment.[6] Yet Ridgway remained convinced of the correctness of his recommended changes and when the chance presented itself made many of them on his own authority.

While Ridgway was fighting the bureaucracy in Washington, Gavin was in London, a posting that resulted from an urgent call from Marshall to Ridgway for "AN ABLE OFFICER WITH VISION AND COMBAT EXPERIENCE FOR THE STAFF IN ENGLAND . . . WHO COULD GIVE US THE BEST OF THE EXPERIENCE IN AIRBORNE OPERATIONS AND COULD WORK WITH OTHER PEOPLE IN A BRITISH SETTING."[7] Ridgway sent Gavin. "He more than any other I know in my

Division or out, has vision, combat experience, professional knowledge and personality, for this assignment," wrote Ridgway in his reply to Marshall's request.[8] So with great haste Gavin packed his things, took his leave, and winged his way to England. When he finally arrived in London on 19 November, however, it appeared that the urgency had passed. "No one seems to know just what in the hell I am supposed to be doing here," penned Gavin that night in his diary, " except that I am on the COSSAC staff."[9]

COSSAC was a combined Anglo-American staff that had been established to plan for " '[a] full scale assault against the Continent in 1944, as early as possible.' "[10] Its name derived from the title of its chief, British Lieutenant General Frederick E. Morgan, the Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander whom Gavin thought "a quiet, scholarly type of officer and an excellent chief of staff."[11] When organizing COSSAC, however, Morgan instinctively adopted the British planning system with which he was familiar, but which was wholly foreign to American officers. In the British system committees, or syndicates, were formed to analyze and prepare plans for each major aspect of an operation and the specific topic on which each was focused determined its membership (Americans, on the other hand, organized planning staffs along service lines—air, ground, and sea). Writing after the war Morgan admitted that "[t]o the American mind the committee system appeared just exactly what was not needed if we were after positive results and rapid action" and that "[t]o the shrewd American observer it seemed that one of the safest ways of ensuring that positive action is postponed indefinitely . . . is to refer the question to a properly constituted committee."[12] Confronted with this situation it is no wonder that Gavin, like many of his U.S. compatriots, found it hard to determine "what in the hell" he was supposed to do.

What he did know, however, was that before doing anything he should call on the highest-ranking American officer in England at the time and the man for whose army the 82nd would be working during the invasion, Omar Bradley. Hence within hours of arriving in London, Gavin was at Bradley's U.S. First Army headquarters. The two talked for an hour about the coming operation and Gavin noted that Bradley had "some sound ideas."[13] Moreover, Gavin felt Bradley to be an "enthusiastic supporter of airborne operations." Bradley assured Gavin that he "insisted that parachute troops be used" but warned that "[s]ome senior officers, particularly those in the R. A. F. [Royal Air Force], believed that the airborne operation would be too costly."[14] Both buoyed and forewarned by his visit with Bradley, Gavin went to see Morgan the next day.

When Gavin arrived at Morgan's office the next morning he found there—whether coincidentally or not is unknown—'Boy' Browning. The three talked for some time, Gavin later noting that Browning was "as smooth as ever and quite generally distrusted by American high commanders."[15] Foremost on the list of distrustful Americans was Gavin's boss, Ridgway. Before Gavin left for England, Ridgway warned him about Browning's "machinations." He was "intelligent, charming, and very close to Mr. Churchill," said Ridgway, but he was also "unprincipled and ruthless in his efforts to align every operation and every piece of equipment to the complete benefit of the British Empire at our expense." Furthermore, Ridgway added, Browning had convinced Major General Bill Lee, whose 101st Airborne Division was already in England, that "his word was law." As the junior airborne general officer in England (although the one with the most airborne experience) Gavin would have to handle Browning "cautiously but firmly."[16] As it turned out, however, Browning was not the British bugaboo Ridgway

portrayed (at least not yet). That title fell to Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, OVERLORD'S Air Commander-in-Chief and the R. A. F. officer about whom Bradley had warned him. Formerly Chief of Britain's Fighter Command, Leigh-Mallory had but a tenuous grasp on the capabilities of and requirements for airborne forces and exacerbated his ignorance by disregarding those who did, a trait that would cause a significant stir amongst the Allied high command on several occasions, to include in the hours immediately preceding the invasion.

Gavin made two other office calls before beginning his COSSAC duties. The first was to Lieutenant General Lewis H. Brereton, commander of the U.S. 9th Air Force and, as such, commander of all the American troop carrier units in the United Kingdom. In his diary entry for that day Brereton noted that Gavin's "experience in airborne operations . . . makes him invaluable as an adviser." He wished to use Gavin, he continued, "to the utmost to direct our planning and training" and vested in him full authority "to deal directly with both the Troop Carrier Command and the airborne divisions in order to get the best results."[17] Gavin's initial impression of Brereton was not as favorable. He found him to be "a most difficult man to deal with" and felt that "[h]is attitude and plans make the picture look very very black." Brereton's news was indeed bad. He had insufficient airlift and green crews. He had only one under-strength troop carrier group on hand and could not predict how many more he would receive before the planned invasion date. When Gavin suggested the transfer of the experienced 52nd Troop Carrier Wing from the Mediterranean, Brereton seemed resentful and jealous of his prerogatives. All in all Gavin came away from the meeting in a foul mood, commenting that he had no desire "to be associated with an effort that has such little prospects of success as this."[18]

Gavin's last visit was to his old mentor, Bill Lee. He recorded little in his diary about the meeting beyond Lee's desire to have Gavin wring from COSSAC a clear statement on airborne policy. Lee had tried and failed several times. He therefore left this to Gavin to deal with while he concerned himself with preparing the 101st for its first taste of combat. Gavin promised to do all he could.[19]

When he finally settled down to do the staff work for which he had been summoned Gavin, too, became frustrated with the Byzantine world of the British committee system. "Before an order is published," he complained to his diary, "everyone must be queried on their attitude toward its publication. It makes for an intolerable situation since in some measure, large or small, depending upon the circumstances, squabbling, jealousies, politics and self-aggrandizement are rampant."[20] As Lee had told him, the number one issue being debated at the time was the formulation of an overarching policy for the employment of airborne forces in the European Theater of Operations. Gavin felt this was wasted effort. Training Circular 113, he wrote, "fully meets our needs" and all that was required was its interpretation in light of conditions in the theater. "But specifically interpreting anything around this headquarters," Gavin railed, "is asking for trouble."[21] Nevertheless Gavin and his British counterpart, R. A. F. Wing Commander Dugald MacPherson, spearheaded the effort and after six weeks of haggling produced a document with which all were satisfied.[22] The final product, a SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force) memorandum entitled "Employment of Airborne Forces" read very much like Training Circular 113 sprinkled with many of the recommendations (almost verbatim) Ridgway had made in his memorandum to Marshall

and McNair.[23] Its significance, however, lay not in establishing a *new* doctrine but in establishing a *common* doctrine that would govern the airborne forces from both nations. It was also a giant leap toward the realization of an Anglo-American airborne command.

That Gavin and his counterparts at COSSAC were concerned with issues of policy as opposed to the formulation of concrete tactical schemes was the result of a planning hiatus that would only be lifted with the appointment of a Supreme Commander. As early as July 1943, Morgan's staff had completed an outline plan for OVERLORD (generally referred to as the COSSAC plan) that only needed a commander's imprimatur to give it life. In very broad detail, it envisioned seizing a lodgment area on the Continent "in the Caen sector [of Normandy, France] with a view to the early capture and development of airfield sites . . . and of the port of Cherbourg."[24] Other potential landing sites, such as the Pas de Calais and the Brittany Peninsula, were rejected as either too heavily defended, too far away (from both England and the heart of Germany), or unsuitable to sustain a rapid build up of forces. To secure the lodgment, the COSSAC plan called for

> a very short air bombardment of the beach defences [after which] three assault divisions [two British and one American] will be landed simultaneously on the Caen beaches, followed up on D Day by the equivalent of two tank brigades (United States regiments) and a brigade group (United States regimental combat team). At the same time, airborne forces will be used to seize the town of Caen; and subsidiary operations by commandos and possibly by airborne forces will be undertaken to neutralize certain coast defences and seize certain important river crossings.[25]

Once the Allies were established ashore the "objective of supreme importance was the town of Caen, with its command of communications." It was, Morgan explained, the "key" to the entire operation for with Caen as a base the Allies could then break out onto the open terrain to the east, terrain that was eminently suitable for fast-paced maneuver warfare.[26] To this end the COSSAC plan allotted the bulk of the available airborne troops to the capture of Caen, while any remaining forces were to be dropped against coastal batteries and along river crossings.[27]

In August 1943, Morgan briefed the COSSAC plan to Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff at the QUADRANT Conference in Quebec, Canada. Morgan let it be known that although the COSSAC plan generally remained within the resource constraints that had been laid down by the Chiefs there remained a desperate need for more transport aircraft. Morgan's planners had estimated that taking Caen would require an entire airborne division but at the time OVERLORD had been allotted only 634 transports, enough to lift but two-thirds of a division. Neither Marshall nor Hap Arnold, the Army Air Corps commander, thought this insurmountable and immediately took steps to alleviate the shortfall. As a result, the Allies eventually amassed thirteen-and-a-half U.S. troop carrier groups (to include all of the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing which was ordered transferred from the Mediterranean) in the United Kingdom. With the two British troop carrier groups that were also available for the invasion this amounted to over 1,100 aircraft and crews, more than enough to accomplish the airborne missions

outlined in the COSSAC plan (when Gavin had his initial meeting with Brereton, these increases were yet to be realized, hence Brereton's gloomy outlook and Gavin's foul mood).[28]

Following his briefing at Quebec, Morgan traveled to Washington at Marshall's behest for more in-depth talks about the upcoming invasion. Both Marshall and Arnold, backed by their respective staffs, were put off by what they considered a timid use of airborne forces. Heavily influenced by the manner in which General Douglas MacArthur had used his airborne forces in New Guinea, they briefed Morgan on what had occurred there and then forwarded a like plan for consideration, albeit on a much larger scale.

In early September 1943, MacArthur dropped the U.S. 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment, in daylight, on an abandoned airfield at Nadzab, near the north coast of New Guinea, twenty-one miles behind the main Japanese defensive positions at Lae. Capitalizing on the element of surprise, the paratroopers swiftly secured the airfield. MacArthur then flew in the entire Australian 7th Infantry Division. Caught between the Australians and paratroopers in their rear and other Allied troops advancing on their front, the Japanese were decimated. The result was a wholesale Japanese withdrawal of over 150 miles.[29]

In this same vein, Marshall and Arnold presented a plan whereby two or three airborne divisions would drop into the Orléans Gap, near the towns of Evreux and Dreux, eighty-five miles inland. There they would seize four large airfields suitable for flying in reinforcements. Backed by Allied airpower this force could, they believed, form an impenetrable barrier that would threaten enemy lines of communication to Normandy, block reinforcement by enemy units in northern France and Germany, and thereby force a German withdrawal from Normandy. It would also win for the Allies a position much closer to the Seine and Paris, a line that the COSSAC plan did not envision the Allies reaching until D+90. Out of his element, Morgan asked Leigh-Mallory to fly to Washington to hear the American proposal. When he arrived at the end of October, Leigh-Mallory rejected the plan, asserting that airborne forces were too lightly armed to take on German armor, which he was certain would counterattack; that it was impractical to keep such a large force supplied by air; and that the *Luftwaffe* and German antiaircraft defenses were much too stout to ensure its success.[30] Undeterred, Marshall and Arnold shelved their concept. They realized, as did Morgan and Leigh-Mallory, that the ultimate decision-maker would be the Supreme Commander. Until one was named, everything was conjecture.

Eisenhower first saw the COSSAC plan in the fall of 1943. His initial impressions were that the assault frontage was too narrow and the assault force lacked punch but like everyone else at the time he assumed that these were issues with which Marshall would have to wrestle since it was he who was everyone's pick to be named Supreme Commander. Everyone, that is, except Roosevelt, who fearing he could not sleep at night with Marshall away from Washington, passed the mantle of command to Eisenhower who, in turn, immediately focused on the shortcomings he had previously identified.[31]

In late December 1943, just two weeks after being named to his new post, Eisenhower shared his thoughts about the COSSAC plan with Montgomery, the newly appointed 21st Army Group commander and the man who would lead the initial ground assault. Both were preparing to leave North Africa, but Eisenhower was first returning to the United States where he would take a short rest before assuming his new post (as ordered by the

magnanimous Marshall). Montgomery, meanwhile, would be traveling to London straightaway to assume his new command. According to Montgomery, the two met in Algiers where Eisenhower told him

> he had only a sketchy idea of the [COSSAC] plan and that it did not look too good. He directed me to act as his representative in London until he himself could get there; I was to analyse and revise the plan and have it ready for him on his arrival in England about the middle of January.[32]

This Montgomery did and when Eisenhower convened his first meeting as Supreme Commander on 21 January 1944, Montgomery had prepared a much-revised concept for the cross-Channel attack.[33]

Assembled at Norfolk House in London for the meeting, which one diarist predicted "may prove to be one of the most important of the war," were all of Eisenhower's key deputies: Montgomery; Leigh-Mallory; Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur W. Tedder, the Deputy Supreme Commander; and Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey, the Allied Naval Commander in Chief.[34] Also in attendance were Bradley; Major General Sir Francis 'Freddie' de Guingand, Montgomery's deputy; Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith, whom Eisenhower had brought with him to serve as his Chief of Staff; Morgan, who became Smith's deputy; and Rear Admiral Alan G. Kirk, commander of the naval task force that would carry Bradley's First Army to Normandy. Montgomery opened the meeting by stating that after studying the COSSAC plan he was in total agreement with Eisenhower: the envisioned three-division assault was insufficient and over too narrow a front. In its stead, he proposed a five-division assault (two American and three British or Canadian) over a much wider front (although in the same general area), to include the landing of one U.S. division on the Cotentin Peninsula. This would position the Americans much closer to Cherbourg, the port city at the tip of the Cotentin. It was Cherbourg, Montgomery stressed, that was the key, not Caen, for by taking Cherbourg the Allies would free themselves from their dependence on the two pre-fabricated harbors (codenamed MULBERRIES) that would be installed shortly after D-Day and which everyone agreed would be insufficient to sustain Allied forces once they had started to drive toward Germany. Because of this, he recommended that the focus of the airborne effort be switched from Caen to the Cotentin as well in order to protect the U.S. right flank and secure the ground from which Bradley's First Army could launch its break out toward Cherbourg. After some debate, most prominently a remark by Ramsey that a five-division assault necessitated the postponement D-Day from 1 May to 1 June in order to obtain sufficient landing craft for the two additional divisions, Montgomery's concept was accepted (as was the new target date for D-Day).[35]

A few days later Montgomery's concept was codified in the NEPTUNE Initial Joint Plan, which replaced the COSSAC plan as the fundamental document on which all supporting plans for the invasion were to be based (NEPTUNE referred to the assault phase of the operation while OVERLORD referred to the overarching plan for the invasion of Europe).[36] In it, the U.S. First Army was allocated one American airborne division, which Bradley intended to drop behind the second U.S. beach on the Cotentin (eventually codenamed UTAH). Intelligence had shown that the Germans had flooded the area inland of the beach, turning that area into a swampy marsh traversed by but four

easily defended causeways. The airborne division's task, therefore, was to seize the causeways and prevent the isolation of the amphibious forces landing at UTAH. If this were done, Bradley could amass his tanks and mechanized infantry on the beach, drive through the causeways, and attack toward Cherbourg.[37]

The Initial Joint Plan made vague reference to subsequent airborne missions as well, but where and when these might occur was left open pending more detailed planning. By mid-February, however, it had become clear that there would be sufficient troop carrier aircraft on hand to drop one-and-two-thirds divisions simultaneously so the Initial Joint Plan was amended. While Bradley retained enough aircraft to drop an entire division, what remained was allocated to the British who planned drops astride the Orne River, on their left flank, in order to secure the crossings over the river and defend against German counterattacks from that quarter. In addition, because it was envisioned that after the D-Day drops sufficient aircraft would remain to mount another division-sized airborne operation, Bradley was told that he could plan for a second drop in his sector for the early morning of D+1.[38]

In light of the revised Initial Joint Plan, plans were drawn up for D-Day drops by the U.S. 101st Airborne Division behind UTAH beach and two brigades of the British 6th Airborne Division on the Orne River. These would be followed approximately twenty-four hours later with a drop by the 82nd near la Haye du Puits, a small town on the west coast of the Cotentin Peninsula. As Bradley explained it the 82nd would "throw a barricade across the [Cotentin] peninsula at its neck" by seizing a narrow strip of dry land that contained the only passable thoroughfare to Cherbourg from the rest of France.[39] With this secured, German reinforcements to Cherbourg would be stopped. Bradley selected the 82nd for this mission because he viewed it as the more hazardous of the two drops. Since the objective area was more than twenty miles from UTAH beach, the troopers would have to fight isolated until link up could be made. It was, he thought, a job for a battle-tested unit.[40]

Watching from afar, Marshall and Arnold were once again disappointed with the airborne plans. Having made so much troop lift available for the invasion they felt that the airborne forces were being frittered away for limited tactical gains. In another bid for their Orléans Gap scheme, which by that time had come to be called Plan C, they sent Brigadier General Frederick W. Evans, commander of the I Troop Carrier Command in the U.S. and Colonel Bruce W. Bidwell of the War Department Operations Division to England to brief Eisenhower and his commanders.[41] Marshall also took the unusual step of sending along an introductory letter in which he asked Eisenhower " 'to give the young men an opportunity to present the matter to you personally before your Staff tears it to ribbons.' " He also explained, clearly and concisely, his reasoning behind Plan C.

> 'Up to the present time I have not felt that we have properly exploited air power as regards its combination with ground troops. We have lacked planes, of course, in which to transport men and supplies, but our most serious deficiency I think has been a lack of conception. Our procedure has been a piecemeal proposition with each commander grabbing at a piece to assist his particular phase of the operation, very much as they did with tanks and as they tried to do with the airplane itself. It is my opinion

> that we now possess the means to give a proper application to this phase of air power in a combined operation.
>
> I might say that it was my determination in the event I went to England [as the Supreme Commander] to do this, even to the extent that should the British be in opposition I would carry it out exclusively with American troops. I am not mentioning this as pressure on you but merely to give you some idea of my own conclusions in the matter. . . .
>
> This plan appeals to me because I feel that it is a true vertical envelopment and would create such a strategic threat to the Germans that it would call for a major revision of their defensive plans. It should be a complete surprise, an invaluable asset of any such plan. It would directly threaten the crossings of the Seine as well as the city of Paris. It should serve as a rallying point for considerable elements of the French underground.
>
> In effect, we would be opening another front in France and your build-up would be tremendously increased in rapidity.
>
> The trouble with this plan is that we have never done anything like this before, and frankly, that reaction makes me tired.'[42]

Eisenhower dutifully complied with Marshall's request. When Evans and Bidwell arrived in England in mid-February, he immediately granted them a private audience, but reserved judgment until he could hear from his subordinates. Next he had Evans and Bidwell brief his staff officers, whom he ordered to hold their comments as well. Finally he had them brief the three commanders whose opinions on the matter carried the most weight: Montgomery, Bradley, and Ridgway.[43] At the last meeting, held 18 February, Bradley strenuously objected. "Cherbourg had to be secured as soon as possible," he insisted, "and nothing should be allowed to deflect from that aim." Bradley "also felt that the Germans could destroy the [Orléans Gap] airhead before it became an effective threat." Ridgway seconded Bradley. Montgomery, with uncharacteristic tact, stated that although he agreed that "Allied airborne potential should be developed to the maximum" he felt that "[i]nitially it should be used only to win the main battle, i.e., the beach landing."[44] The next day, Eisenhower summarized the objections to Plan C in a letter to Marshall.

> My initial reaction to the specific proposal is that I agree thoroughly with the conception but disagree with the timing. Mass in vertical envelopments is sound—but since this kind of an enveloping force is immobile on the ground, the collaborating force must be strategically and tactically mobile. So the time for the mass vertical envelopment is after the beach-head has been gained and a striking force built up!

Eisenhower added that because his primary focus was to secure Cherbourg as quickly as possible in order to alleviate the "anxiety concerning Mulberries, Gooseberries, and other forms of artificial aids in landing supplies and troops" he intended to "devote [to that end] everything that can be profitably used, including airborne troops." He also reminded Marshall of "the enemy's highly efficient facilities for concentration of ground

forces at any particular point" despite Allied air supremacy, something the Germans had demonstrated during the Italian campaign. Finally, using Anzio as his example, he posited that an immobile force deep behind enemy lines was more of a liability for the attacker than the defender.[45]

Thus ended all talk of a deep airborne strike during OVERLORD. Yet the Marshall-Arnold idea had had an impact, although its effect would not be made manifest until September when the Allies were stalled and looking for a way to jump-start their advance. Ironically, despite their rejection of Plan C, the OVERLORD planners had no detailed airborne plan of their own. Aircraft had been allocated and broad missions defined but the specifics had yet to be worked out. As it turned out this, too, proved contentious, forcing yet another change to the OVERLORD airborne scheme of maneuver.

It was the timing of the glider insertions that caused the controversy. Both Ridgway and Taylor (who had taken command of the 101st in mid-March after Bill Lee suffered a heart attack during a training exercise) wanted large glider insertions immediately following their nighttime parachute assaults in order to bring in antitank weapons, artillery, and additional infantry in that order. The troop carrier commanders balked. Landing a glider in combat was tricky business, but landing a mass of them at night was suicide given the inexperience of most of the glider pilots. With no way out of the impasse at their level, the planners elevated the issue to Leigh-Mallory who sided with his pilots and cancelled all night glider operations in the U.S. sector, thereby forcing the airborne division planners to reconsider their ground tactical plans. A few days later they forwarded a proposal for dawn glider insertions, which Leigh-Mallory likewise vetoed. By dawn, he argued, the paratroopers would have been on the ground for several hours and the element of surprise having been lost, the ungainly gliders and their tow planes would be easy targets for alert German antiaircraft gunners. At this, the usually mild-mannered Bradley weighed in, losing his temper in the process. If the gliders could not carry out missions when and where they were needed, Bradley countered, then they had no value as weapons of war and he threatened to cancel all glider operations and bring his glider troopers in over the beach (and in the process demonstrate that a considerable part of the air force was irrelevant). Once again the planners left in search of a compromise. It took them until the end of April, just over a month before D-Day, to find one. To appease the air force, it was agreed that no glider missions would be flown with the initial U.S. parachute assault; instead all available aircraft would be used to carry paratroopers, thereby making possible the simultaneous drop of the 82nd and 101st on D-Day (this was possible because one C-47 could not both tow a glider and drop paratroopers, hence those originally scheduled to be tow planes were now available to conduct parachute drops). A small force of gliders carrying the heavy weaponry the paratroopers would need to defend against the inevitable German counterattacks would be inserted just before dawn on D-Day. A second, larger insertion would follow at dusk on D-Day and on D+1 two more insertions would deliver the remainder of each division as required.[46]

With the exception of a few 'bigoted' officers on the division staff, the troopers of the 82nd Airborne Division were wholly unaware of the great debates that would determine their fate.[47] They knew, of course, they were going to participate in the long-awaited invasion in some manner, but when and where were secrets not revealed to them until just days before their departure. Their concern was to be ready for anything.

The 82nd arrived in the European Theater of Operations on 9 December 1943 and disembarked at Belfast, Northern Ireland. From Belfast the division moved by train and truck to a string of Quonset hut camps northwest of the city. Ridgway was not pleased with the area; there were scant training facilities, limited training space, and nowhere to conduct airborne operations, all of which was exacerbated by the short days. Gavin had tried to procure a different location for the 82nd but Bradley squelched this, telling Gavin that the 82nd would have to make do until about sixty days before the invasion, at which time the division would be moved nearer its departure airfields (as it turned out, the division was moved more than ninety days before D-Day).[48] While in Northern Ireland, therefore, the division's focus was on integrating replacements, conducting physical training, and individual and small unit proficiency; no large unit maneuvers were conducted.[49] Perhaps the most significant event that occurred in Ireland, however, was the integration of the green 507th and 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments and the 2/401st Glider Infantry Battalion into the 82nd.[50]

As the senior American airborne officer in theater (Browning had been promoted to lieutenant general in December, making him the senior Allied airborne officer), Ridgway took advantage of the unique circumstances and authority accorded him to make many of the organizational changes that he had earlier requested of General McNair.[51] The 82nd arrived in the theater with one parachute regiment, the 505th, and one glider regiment, the 325th. Meanwhile the 101st Airborne Division, which had been in England since summer 1943, was still organized in accordance with the original airborne division design—one parachute regiment, the 502nd, and two glider regiments, the 327th and 401st—although it also had a second parachute regiment attached to it, the 506th. There was also in England an independent parachute regiment, the 501st and two more parachute regiments, the 507th and 508th, arrived in January under command of the 2nd Airborne Brigade. With support from Bradley and Eisenhower, Ridgway combined the disparate American airborne outfits to form two robust divisions. To do this he disbanded the 2nd Airborne Brigade and attached both its parachute regiments to the 82nd (and assigned the brigade commander, Brigadier General George P. Howell, as a second assistant division commander for the 82nd). He also attached the independent 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment to the 101st, giving each division three parachute regiments. Finally, he disbanded the 401st Glider Infantry Regiment of the 101st and used its two battalions to give both the 325th and 327th Glider Infantry Regiments a third battalion (the 1/401st remained in the 101st while the 2/401st, later renamed the 3/325th, went to the 82nd).[52]

Ridgway also took advantage of the resource-rich environment in the United Kingdom to make other equipment and organizational adjustments. Since the 82nd had arrived in the United Kingdom with only two batteries from the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion (approximately half its authorized establishment), Ridgway and the new division artillery officer, Colonel Francis 'Andy' March III (March assumed the position after Taylor took command of the 101st) regenerated the 456th which gave the division one parachute and two glider field artillery battalions for the invasion (the 82nd's fourth field artillery outfit, the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, was still in Italy with Tucker). He also organized a provisional division reconnaissance platoon, a provisional parachute maintenance company, and formed a fourth parachute engineer company for the engineer battalion. Because enemy tanks were one of his primary concerns—and

Sicily had clearly demonstrated that the American bazooka was not up to the task of taking them out—he increased the division's antitank capability by converting one additional battery of the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion into an antitank battery, giving the battalion four antitank and two antiaircraft batteries. He also had the 80th trade in their U.S. 57mm antitank guns for British 6-pounders (also 57mm) which had narrower wheelbases, thus making them easier to load on a glider.[53]

In mid-February, the reorganized division moved from Northern Ireland to the Nottingham-Leicester-Market Harborough area in the English Midlands. There the training program increased in intensity. A parachute school was opened to train replacements, especially those who volunteered to fill out the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and the various provisional parachute units in the division. Unit exercises of increasing size and complexity were held. Joint exercises with the troop carrier pilots were conducted to train both pilots and troopers. Battalion parachute drops and extended glider exercises, with both U.S. Waco and British Horsa gliders, were conducted, with some flights lasting as long as two hours.[54] Long forced marches were common as were live-fire exercises during which the troopers fired both friendly and enemy weapons and learned to operate armored vehicles. Just as had been the case in North Africa before the jump into Sicily, Ridgway, Gavin, and the other leaders of the division left little to chance. When not engaged in planning conferences they were out with the troopers, pushing them harder and harder, leaving no detail unaddressed.[55]

The hard training produced results. Gavin kept an especially sharp eye on the 82nd's two new parachute regiments and was generally pleased with what he saw. Early in the training program he observed that it was "refreshing to work with troops fresh from America." They were "enthusiastic" and "anxious" but "listen and hang on to every word and . . . try to do exactly as they are told." What they lack in experienced, he added, "they more than make up for in their zeal and interest in doing the correct thing."[56] After several additional weeks of tough training, he felt that all three parachute regiments were "confident and certain of their ability to do the job. . . . They are so sure of themselves. They will do a good job and it is just as well."[57] He was, of course, confident that his former regiment would perform well, but he was also particularly impressed with the 508th which, he wrote, "looks as good as any new outfit that I have ever seen, if they cannot do it it cannot be done by green troops."[58]

Although he was quite parochial in his attitude toward paratroopers, Gavin was also pleased with the division's glider troopers. "This afternoon visited the 325 training," he wrote. "Coming along OK. A steady appearing regiment, probably never will fight with the elan [*sic*] and dash of the parachute regiments but it can be counted upon for a steady fight."[59] The glider troopers also impressed Ridgway. A little over two weeks after Gavin made his observation Ridgway observed a training exercise by the 1/325th and came away so encouraged that he was moved to write Colonel Lewis a letter of commendation, something he did for no other regiment during this time.

> The tactical exercises conducted by the First Battalion of your Regiment on 13 March 1944, was without exception the best of such exercises I have observed during two years on duty with this Division. The conduct of the attack, the seizure of the objective , the reorganization of the battalion, and

> the organization of the ground for defense, were all executed in a Superior manner.[60]

Even the doubtful Leigh-Mallory warmed to the idea of glider and airborne forces (albeit temporarily, as will be shown). After accompanying the Air Chief Marshal to a glider demonstration, Brereton noted in his diary that it appeared that Leigh-Mallory had "relaxed his stand against the glider operation," adding that following the demonstration Leigh-Mallory told the assembled troopers that participated in the demonstration " 'that airborne forces are one of the most powerful weapons in modern warfare, and they will become increasingly important with each new operation.' "[61]

Since the 82nd was to be dropped so far behind German lines it would not have recourse to the heavy artillery and naval gunfire support on which it had called in Sicily and Italy. Hence, Colonel March's artillery training program received special attention. While in England, March focused his artillerymen on honing their techniques for preparing positions, camouflaging, and rapidly displacing from one firing position to another, both during the day and night, which was necessary to ensure survival against German counterbattery fire. To validate his training program, in mid-April March moved the entire artillery contingent of the 82nd to Sennybridge firing range in Wales for a six-day live fire exercise. There he set up a series of firing problems, beginning at the battery level and progressing through battalion and division massed fire exercises, all aimed at ensuring the delivery of timely and accurate indirect fire, the *sine qua non* of the artillery. At one point in the training, Ridgway, Gavin, and March arrived at the command post of the reborn 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, then under the command of Major Wagner J. D'Alessio. To test the battalion's mettle, Ridgway pointed to a flock of sheep and told D'Alessio to " '[s]catter those sheep—don't kill.' " D'Alessio turned to Lieutenant Clarence McKelvey standing nearby and directed him to adjust the fire of the guns. Although he was working with an untrained observer temporarily attached to the battalion from the Air Corps who, instead of repeating the artillery command "on the way!" shouted into the phone "bombs away!" McKelvey remained calm and scattered the sheep as ordered. According to McKelvey, " 'D'Alessio looked like he had just pee'd his pants' " but both Gavin and Ridgway grinned, tapped McKelvey on the shoulder and congratulated him, D'Alessio, and the battalion on its performance and departed. For many of the gun crews, it was the first time they had ever fired an artillery piece.[62]

On 12 May the last major parachute training event prior to D-Day was held, a full dress rehearsal of the initial drop, code-named Exercise EAGLE (there were no drops following this for fear of incurring jump casualties that could not be replaced in time for the invasion). It involved 432 aircraft from the 50th and 53rd Troop Carrier Wings carrying the 101st and 369 aircraft from the 52nd Wing carrying the 82nd. The air route, over 260 miles long, was half over water and required the pilots to navigate using the same light and radar aids that would be set up for the invasion. Generally the drops were accurate, although one of the 52nd's serials broke formation and only sixteen of its forty-two planes arrived at the correct drop zone while, in a separate incident, two C47s collided after the drop, killing all aboard. No paratroopers were injured. As a result of Exercise EAGLE a general mood of optimism prevailed.[63] In a letter reporting the results to Hap Arnold, Brereton wrote "[t]he dress rehearsal indicated to my satisfaction that the plan of employment is practicable from a flight and navigational point of view, and that

we have reached an effective state of readiness to carry out the plan."[64] Gavin, however, was not as sanguine. After an apparently heated critique of the troop carrier performance during Exercise EAGLE he wrote it "is the damndest touchy problem, how to get them to fly better and show more concern for our aspects of the operation without becoming too critical of their technique. They are quick to resent it if we do."[65] But there was little more that could be done. By late May, training had ceased and the 82nd's troopers started marshalling at their departure airfields where they were locked down.

The Germans awaiting them on the far side of the Channel were a mixed lot. The headquarters responsible for the defense of France and the Low Countries, *Oberbefehlshaber West* (Commander in Chief West, hereafter *OB West*), had at its disposal fifty-eight combat divisions. Thirty-three of the divisions were low-quality static or reserve divisions, suitable only for defensive duties. The other twenty-five divisions, however, were some of the best in the *Wehrmacht*, comprising thirteen German Army infantry divisions, two parachute divisions, six Army panzer divisions, and four SS panzer or panzergrenadier divisions.[66]

The static divisions were first formed in 1942 as a means to retain a nucleus of units not subject to transfer to the east. These formations were significantly weaker than standard German infantry divisions, having no reconnaissance battalions and only three artillery battalions (as opposed to four in standard German infantry divisions). By the end of 1943, continued manpower drains had further reduced the infantry complement of most static divisions to two, as opposed to the standard three infantry regiments (with three battalions in each regiment). Because their task was to defend in place, these units were almost bereft of all transportation, to include horses. According to *Generalleutnant* Hans Speidel, Rommel's Chief of Staff, the static divisions were so immobile that " 'they were hardly able to resupply themselves.' "[67] Furthermore, in many cases they were equipped with captured materiel. According to the Chief of Staff of the *German Seventh Army*, in whose area the Allies would make their landings, there were artillery pieces from nine different nations, all of varying calibers and type. Finally, most of the German soldiers in the static divisions were old, averaging thirty-five years, and many were sick, having been previously declared unfit for duty because of stomach or other problems; the younger, healthy men having long been culled for service on the Eastern Front.[68]

In an attempt to reduce the impact of troop transfers to the east, in 1943 the Germans began raising *Ost* (East) Battalions to help fill out the western defenses. These units were composed mainly of Eastern Europeans who volunteered to serve in combat units rather than work as forced laborers. At the program's outset the guidance was to replace every German battalion taken from *OB West* with two *Ost* battalions, but over time this ratio changed to the advantage of the Russian theater. Eventually, over forty-five *Ost* battalions were brought into the *OB West* sector to fill out the static divisions, although most of the German commanders to whom they were assigned considered these units highly undependable and sought to put them in areas that they considered the least threatened, thereby stretching the capabilities of the already under-strength German units. By D-Day, *Ost* battalions made up a considerable percentage of the defensive force in the west. The German *Seventh Army* alone contained twenty-one *Ost* battalions, over a quarter of the total number of battalions at its disposal.[69]

For all its weaknesses, however, the German force arrayed in France was still formidable and had in its favor several advantages not least being that which accrues to

every defender—knowledge of the ground. It had also had approximately four years to fortify that ground, although that effort did not begin in earnest until November 1943, spurred on by two significant events: the issuance of Führer Directive No. 51 and the posting of *Generalfeldmarschall* Rommel as inspector of coastal defenses (in December 1943, this posting evolved into Rommel's assuming command of *Army Group B*, a subordinate headquarters to *OB West*, then under the command of *Generalfeldmarschall* von Rundstedt).[70]

Directive No. 51, issued 3 November 1943, focused the attention of the *Wehrmacht* on the growing threat across the Channel. " 'For the last two and one-half years the bitter and costly struggle against Bolshevism has made the utmost demands upon the bulk of our military resources and energies' " it began, but " '[t]he situation has since changed.' " The threat from the East remained, it continued,

> 'but an even greater danger looms in the West: the Anglo-American landing! In the East, the vastness of the space will, as a last resort, permit a loss of territory even on a major scale, without suffering a mortal blow to Germany's chance for survival.
>
> Not so in the West! If the enemy here succeeds in penetrating our defenses on a wide front, consequences of staggering proportions will follow within a short time. All signs point to an offensive against the Western Front of Europe no later than spring, and perhaps earlier.'[71]

Hitler and his generals could read a map. Although they did not know where the Allies would land, what they did know was that if the Allies gained a foothold somewhere in the west, and from that foothold mounted an offensive, they could soon be in the Rhine-Ruhr basin, the industrial heart of Germany. These were the "consequences of staggering proportions" to which Hitler referred in Directive No. 51. In fact, the Anglo-American forces in southeastern England were closer to the industrial cities of Cologne, Düsseldrof, and Essen than was Hitler in Berlin. They were also closer to Berlin than were the leading Russian units by more than 1,000 kilometers.[72] " 'For that reason,' " Hitler ordered, " 'I can no longer justify the further weakening of the West in favor of other theaters or war. I have therefore decided to strengthen the defenses in the West.' "[73]

This was not the first time that Hitler had focused the *Wehrmacht's* attention on the west. In August 1942 he had ordered the construction of 15,000 interconnected concrete strongpoints (approximately twenty per kilometer of coastline) to be manned by 300,000 men, a project his propagandists dubbed the Atlantic Wall. In the intervening months, however, little had been done due to lack of concrete and insufficient numbers of construction personnel. In order, therefore, to re-energize the lethargic fortification program, two days after issuing Directive No. 51 Hitler called Rommel to his headquarters and appointed him to his new post. The Desert Fox, as wily in defense as he was on the attack, was to be Hitler's panacea.[74]

Rommel had not been to the west since 1940. Like everyone else he had heard of the Atlantic Wall, mostly from propaganda reports, but he had never seen it firsthand. His first order of business, therefore, was to conduct an inspection tour. Starting in Copenhagen, Denmark, and working his way south, traveling hundreds of miles a day, Rommel discovered that the Atlantic Wall did not really exist, labeling it a " 'figment of

Hitler's *Wolkenkuckkucksheim* [cloud cuckoo land].' "[75] There were some areas that were heavily fortified, especially port cities, river mouths, U-boat pens, and the areas defending the V-1 rocket launching sites, but for the most part the fortifications were, at best, partially complete.[76]

After rendering his report, and with Hitler's full backing, Rommel instituted a vigorous fortification program of his own design. Abandoning efforts to build massive concrete fortresses, Rommel instructed commanders along the coast to have their soldiers build with whatever materials were available and to focus their efforts on likely enemy avenues of approach leading inland from the coast. Mines, both standard and improvised, were to be laid by the thousand to protect the defensive positions and slow the enemy advance. Beach obstacles—metal tetrahedrons designed to rip the bottoms from landing craft that were topped with mines—were laid on every open beach. And to ensure his instructions were carried out Rommel was everywhere, bullying, cajoling, and encouraging soldiers to lay more mines, dig more positions, or emplace more obstacles. Because of his efforts, by D-Day the Germans had laid approximately 4,200,000 mines along the Channel coast and emplaced over 500,000 offshore obstacles.[77] Likely landing sites were defended by well-camouflaged primary, secondary, and tertiary defensive positions, all interconnected by trenches and carefully sighted to ensure interlocking fields of fire. Much was accomplished in the six months prior to the invasion, although nowhere was a continuous wall even approximated. But what the Allies did encounter was an enemy force with intimate knowledge of the area manning prepared strongpoints astride key terrain designed to slow, stall, or break up Allied attacks just enough so that reserve forces could be summoned to deliver a killing blow.[78]

Countering an amphibious assault was not the only German concern during this period of frenetic activity. Almost without exception German commanders expected the Allies to launch large-scale airborne operations in conjunction with the assault from the sea. Some estimated as many as eight to ten airborne divisions would be dropped. To meet this threat, Rommel ordered the emplacement of anti-airborne obstacles in every open field. Nicknamed *Rommelspargel* (Rommel's asparagus), the obstacles consisted of eight- to twelve-foot poles driven upright into the ground at irregular intervals that were then wired together and topped with mines.[79] Additionally, in the German *Seventh Army* sector in Normandy, several rivers were flooded to further diminish the amount of available landing space for airborne forces. Frequent map exercises and maneuvers were also held to train commanders at all levels of the actions they should take in the event of an airborne assault.[80]

The most pressing question on the mind of every defender, however, was when and where the Allied invasion would come, with the latter question being the most vexing. According to *Generalleutnant* Günther Blumentritt, Rundstedt's Chief of Staff, the German high command

> expected invasion on a different front each month. Invasion was expected first in Norway, then in Denmark and the North Sea, in the OB West area, in Spain and Portugal, in Genoa and upper Italy, in the Adriatic, and in Greece and Turkey. Expectations changed continually.[81]

Rundstedt and his staff held what was generally the majority view, that the invasion would occur somewhere between Calais and the mouth of the Somme at Le Havre.[82] Landings in this area would follow the shortest and most direct route across the Channel, were well within Allied fighter range, and provided a good area from which to break out into the French interior and drive toward Germany. In late April 1944, however, Admiral Theodor Krancke, Commander of *Naval Group West*, provided an alternative solution. Based on a detailed study of Allied bombing and minesweeping patterns combined with aerial reconnaissance photos of the Allied build up in England, Krancke forwarded the notion that Normandy and the Brittany Peninsula were more likely landing places.[83] Krancke's estimate seems to have validated a notion that Hitler had had for some time. According to *Oberst* (Colonel) Nicolaus von Below, Hitler's *Luftwaffe* adjutant, the Führer had also received intelligence from a German agent, code-named 'Cicero,' who was working in the British embassy in Ankara, Turkey, that indicated that Normandy was, in fact, the invasion area.[84] Based on this information and Krancke's estimate, in early May 1944 Hitler ordered the strengthening of the defenses in the Cotentin Peninsula. A parachute regiment and two separate parachute battalions were moved to the peninsula as was a crack machine gun battalion, a rocket-launcher regiment, and the German *Seventh Army Sturm Battalion*, an unusually large infantry-artillery outfit designed for shock action. Most significantly, the *91st Division*, a veteran unit then en route to Nantes from Germany, was also diverted to the peninsula and its sudden appearance on intelligence maps in England precipitated a crisis in the Allied high command.[85]

The *91st Division* took up positions centered on la Haye du Puits, the same area into which the 82nd was to be inserted. When informed of this change in enemy dispositions, Bradley immediately summoned Ridgway and Taylor to his headquarters to discuss options. All agreed that the original plan would have to be scrapped, but Bradley insisted that the 82nd be put down somewhere. Following a hurried planning session a concept was drawn up which moved the 82nd's drop zones to an area just north of the 101st's. The 82nd's new mission was to capture the important road center at Sainte-Mère-Église, located some six miles due west of UTAH beach, seize several crossings over the nearby Merderet River, destroy other crossings over the Douve River, and protect the northwest flank of the U.S. VII Corps landing at UTAH beach.[86]

It took the American airborne and troop carrier planners fewer than three days to finalize the new plan. To simplify matters, they merely adapted the original movement scheme to the new area of operations. The division had already been broken down into three movement echelons. Force A, the parachute echelon comprising all three parachute regiments along with some signal, engineer, and artillery assets was to jump onto three separate drop zones around Ste.-Mère-Église and the Merderet River crossings in the early morning hours of D-Day. Force B, the glider echelon, would follow on in four separate increments, landing both north and south of Ste.-Mère-Église on D-Day and D+1. Finally Force C, the division's seaborne echelon under the command of Brigadier General Howell (also known as 'Howell Force') would come in over UTAH Beach. It, too, was divided into increments. Leading Howell Force would be a small task force under Colonel Edson D. Raff that was composed of F Company, 2/325th and some medium tanks and armored cars. Its mission was to land on D-Day, fight its way inland, and link up with the parachute echelon at Ste.-Mère-Église. Two days later (D+2)

Howell would land with the remainder of Howell Force, a polyglot of units that included additional artillery, tank destroyer, and truck units along with the remainder of the 82nd's support units, and move to link up with the division wherever it may be.[87]

After all coordination for the 82nd's new mission had been completed Eisenhower's Deputy, Air Chief Marshal Tedder, chaired a meeting to go over the plan a final time. It was then that the Allied crisis hit. Leigh-Mallory, who had always been lukewarm about the proposed airborne operations, was certain that the new German dispositions spelt disaster. Estimating that fifty percent of the American paratroopers and seventy percent of the gliders would be dead or destroyed before landing, he insisted that the American airborne operations be cancelled altogether (the British airborne landings on the opposite flank would not, in Leigh-Mallory's estimation, encounter the same level of resistance and he therefore acquiesced in their execution). Refusing all opposing arguments, Leigh-Mallory remained firm in his conviction and, at the conclusion of Tedder's meeting, immediately called Eisenhower to express his firm refusal to sanction the new American plan.[88]

The Supreme Commander had been on edge about the American airborne operations for several days. Even before his intelligence officers told him that the Cotentin Peninsula was being reinforced, he had expressed his concerns about the 82nd's drop in a secret memorandum for his diary.

> In contemplating Airborne operations, which I had originally thought would present very little difficulty because of our tremendous preponderance in fighters, we have run into a great deal of difficulty because of the almost universal coverage of the European continent by strong flak. When going into areas where gliders cannot land at night we run into most appalling difficulties and obstacles due to this fire. This is one phase of the operation that still worries me and I am somewhat concerned that the 82nd Airborne Division will have a most sticky time of it. I am going to see whether or not special support by fighter bombers cannot be given them.[89]

Leigh-Mallory's urgent call of protest could not have but redoubled Eisenhower's concerns. After hearing him out Eisenhower called Bradley and asked his opinion. As usual, the First Army commander was clear and concise: if the airborne operations were cancelled Bradley would cancel the amphibious landings on UTAH Beach—the two were inextricably linked. Eisenhower then called Ridgway, who seconded Bradley's counsel. Finally, he called Leigh-Mallory back and informed him that he had decided that the American airborne operations would go ahead as planned. He also told Leigh-Mallory that if he desired he could put his objections in writing, which Leigh-Mallory did the next day. Apologizing for his stridence but insisting he would be " 'failing in my duty to you [Eisenhower] if I did not let you know that I am very unhappy about the U.S. airborne operations as now planned,' " Leigh-Mallory went on to list all the reasons he felt the American paratroopers, glider troopers, and transport aircraft were in grave danger.[90] He also expanded his argument, insisting that if success at UTAH was contingent upon the success of the airborne drops then the entire operation on the Allied western flank was a much too hazardous proposition.[91]

Eisenhower later stated, " '[i]t would be difficult to conceive of a more soul-racking problem.' "[92] But success at UTAH Beach was vital to the success of the overall operation, especially with regard to the capture of Cherbourg. Thus the airborne operations would have to go. After contemplating Leigh-Mallory's written protest, Eisenhower drafted his reply.

> Thank you very much for your letter of the 29th on the subject of airborne operations. You are quite right in communicating to me your convictions as to the hazards involved and I must say that I agree with you as to the character of these risks. However, a strong airborne attack in the region indicated is essential to the whole operation and it must go on. Consequently, there is nothing for it but for you, the Army Commander and the Troop Carrier Commander to work out to the last detail every single thing that may diminish these hazards.
>
> It is particularly important that air and ground troops involved in the operation be not needlessly depressed. Like all the rest of the soldiers, they must understand that they have a tough job to do but be fired with determination to get it done.
>
> I am, of course, hopeful that our percentage losses will not approximate your estimates because it is quite true that I expect to need these forces very badly later in the campaign.[93]

Fortunately, the thousands of airborne troopers, glider pilots, and troop transport crewmen who were to carry out the operation remained blithely unaware of Leigh-Mallory's concerns. Spread among fourteen airfields and ports throughout England and Wales, surrounded by double rows of barbed wire fences that were patrolled by military police, and strictly quarantined from any access to the outside world, their sole focus was on readying themselves for the upcoming fight.[94] Generally this consisted of studying elaborate sand tables that had been constructed of the jump area. For most, this was the first time they knew for certain where they were going. According to *Times* correspondent Bill Walton, who jumped in with the 82nd, these were "extraordinary tables with—everything you know in Europe was photographed from the air—repeatedly every day. If there was anything new that appeared it was then added to the sand tables." Even Rommel's asparagus, added Walton, which quickly became the primary concern of the troopers in the days before the invasion.[95]

For the most part, however, the time spent in the departure camps was relatively slow paced, coming as it did on the heels of a long and arduous training regimen. When not studying sand tables the troopers spent their days playing ball on the runways or laying on their cots reading and writing letters. Nights were spent listening to military bands or watching movies. The food was tremendous. The only discomfort, and one that every soldier who participated in the Normandy invasion experienced and could not escape, came from their combat uniforms, which had been impregnated with a chemical that was supposed to make them resistant to gas attack. But the "treatment eliminated any airflow through the fabric and made the jumpsuits very hot and almost impossible to clean. They were also stiff, uncomfortable, and smelled bad," recalled John McKenzie of the 456th. Of course, McKenzie added, the troopers could not wash their jumpsuits since "that

would neutralize the protection against poison gas."[96] Hence by the time the troopers boarded their planes, gliders, or landing craft, their uniforms were soaked with over two weeks of sweat and dirt in addition to the mysterious chemical compound. "We all smelled to high heaven," recalled another trooper.[97]

But this was a minor inconvenience to men who were awaiting the word to launch the Great Crusade. To them, the most pressing issue was the waiting and the constant tension in knowing that the 'go' order could come at any time. Even the combat veterans were affected. Before Sicily, life in North Africa had been so miserable that many were anxious to 'escape' to combat and the jump into Italy had been mounted in a matter of hours, thereby leaving little time for reflection. The troopers marshaled in camps throughout England and Wales had had six months in a friendly, livable environment—but once they were moved to the departure airfields the barbed wire and military police patrols were constant reminders of what was looming. According to Sergeant Bill Dunfee, a veteran of Sicily and Italy,

> '[e]veryone sweats it out in his own way. We all put on happy faces for appearance' sake. I saw one young replacement who was really down. I got the company barber kit and trimmed his hair. I told him I wanted him to look good when we entered Paris. I was able to talk him out of his funk. I assured him that every man in that hangar was as scared as he was, including myself. I feel I relieved him of some of his anxiety. I hope so; he was one of the first killed.'[98]

For some odd reason getting a haircut was something many troopers did to relieve the tension. Many in the 101st took this to extremes, cutting their hair Mohawk-style, but most of the troopers in the 82nd, influenced no doubt by the combat-tested among them simply wanted a close cut, compelled not by military regulations as much as by the feeling that it would have to last a while. Bill Walton recalled his experience at the hands of another trooper who "had the toughest looking mug you've ever seen in your life." This trooper, explained Walton, sat placidly on a chair in a hangar and "if he saw you going by with more hair than he thought you should have [would say,] 'Buddy come on in,' which he did to me. He said, 'don't you want to get rid of that? It will be growing bugs in a few days.' And he mowed it off."[99]

The leaders sensed the tension as well and spent a lot of time reassuring their men. Ridgway and Gavin traveled to each of the 82nd's camps and gave impromptu talks to the officers and troopers. Wayne Pierce of the 325th recalled that Ridgway inspired "enthusiasm by his presence and his impressive appearance."[100] Bill Walton also noticed the Ridgway look and likened it to the idealized visage of a "Roman Emperor and very sharp . . . very sharp."[101] Gavin was most ubiquitous and it was during this time that he really made his presence felt throughout the division. According to Captain Hubert Bass, "[y]ou could always expect him to pop up at the damdest [*sic*] places. He just didn't act like a general, more like one of us."[102] Major Daniel McIlvoy Jr., the 505th's regimental surgeon, remembered standing with Captain Matthew Connelly, the regiment's Catholic chaplain, while listening to one of Gavin's talks. "I turned to Fr. Connelly and said 'I hope he doesn't ask us to jump without parachutes, because I'm sure no man would refuse to go!' "[103] John McNally wrote his sister and, with his inimitable talent for

description, explained the effect Gavin, a man whom he labeled “the soldier’s general,” had on the troopers of the division.

> Picture, if you can, a general who, arriving a little ahead of time and seeing the waiting soldiers being entertained by a GI doing card tricks, would stand unnoticed and wait until the little act was over before coming out to speak. Then he started talking in his quiet way, punctuated once in a while by a slow, tentative smile. He has the intense eyes and lined mouth of a man who has fought the Nazis a long time and well. I watched the faces of the men as he talked. It was as though an electric shock had gone through the whole group. When he talked, every man felt drawn into the company of the elect who, for the space of a breath, risked their lives a thousand feet above the ground.
>
> When he had finished, he needed only to lift a finger and say ‘Follow me,’ and there wasn’t a single man who wouldn’t have followed him straight to hell.[104]

There was one false alarm. Several weeks earlier Eisenhower made the decision that D-Day would be 5 June.[105] This was, of course, known to but a very select group of high-ranking officers. For the paratroopers of the 82nd, 101st, and British 6th Airborne, a 5 June invasion date necessitated a take-off time of about 2300 hours the night before. Hence on 4 June, under even tighter security than they had become used to and with little warning, the paratroopers were assembled in their sticks, drew their ammunition, issued their parachutes, moved to the flight line, and waited. Then word reached them that the invasion had been postponed twenty-four hours so they moved back to their hangars and tried to relax. Few could sleep. Many tuned their radios to one of the more popular American dance music stations, broadcast by a Nazi station and hosted by one Mildred Elizabeth Gillars, affectionately known as ‘Axis Sally’ or, as the troopers of the 82nd dubbed her, the ‘Berlin Bitch.’ They were stunned by what they heard. As Sergeant Robert L. Bearden of the 507th remembered it, during a break in the music “[t]he ‘Berlin Bitch’ . . . welcomed our virgin parachute regiment to the Division—and pointed out that a very warm reception had been planned for us on the 5th. She then advised her sorrow that the project had been called off, and that our reception would still be one to remember.”[106] Major Ben F. Pearson, also of the 507th, remembered Axis Sally telling them “ ‘[h]ello, boys of the 82nd [Airborne] Division. We know you are coming. We’ll be waiting for you.’ ”[107] To the veterans of Sicily and Italy, like Private First Class Anthony ‘Tony’ Joseph DeMayo, one of the 2/505th’s pathfinders who would be one of the first American paratroopers to hit the ground, such talk was nonsense. German claims that 82nd troopers “would never see or walk on French soil,” DeMayo wrote, were empty talk; they had heard the same thing in Sicily and Italy.[108]

In the early evening of 4 June, Eisenhower assembled his principal subordinates at Southwick House, just north of Portsmouth, the headquarters of Admiral Ramsay. He had just received a forecast from his staff meteorologists that predicted marginally favorable weather for the morning of 6 June. Eisenhower canvassed those present for their opinion. All agreed to go but the decision was Eisenhower’s alone to make. At

2145 hours he made that decision—D-Day would be 6 June 1944—and the great engine of invasion, tens of thousands of ships, planes, and men, was restarted.[109]

The troopers reassembled by their waiting transport planes in the afternoon of 5 June. There they methodically checked and rechecked their equipment, blackened their faces, caught catnaps, and dealt with their mounting anxiety. Many sought out priests, ministers, and rabbis for a final blessing. Others were almost giddy. Bill Walton remembered a British NAAFI (Navy Army Air Force Institute, the British equivalent to the U.S. military post exchange service) band pulling up in a truck next to the airstrip where it proceeded to play some popular dance tunes for the troopers nearby. "These GIs . . . many of them with black faces, you know . . . hung with knives . . . and everything else, homely guys, began jitter-bugging together. . . . Oh, they were so mad—it was the goddamdest thing, most fantastic thing I ever saw."[110]

As take off time drew near the troopers donned their equipment and began boarding their planes. Outfitted for combat with extra ammunition, antitank grenades, fragmentation grenades, land mines, several knives, ropes, rations, food, a Mae West life preserver, musette bag, gas mask and their main and reserve parachutes, the troopers had to be individually hoisted and pushed into each of their aircraft.[111] Before boarding, each jumpmaster received a mimeographed copy of Eisenhower's message, which was to be read to the troopers in each stick. In it, they were reminded that their task would "not be an easy one," that the "enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle hardened" and would "fight savagely."[112] Several junior officers also took the time to impart their feelings to their troopers as well. Lieutenant Colonel Ed Krause, commander of the 3/505th (the same man Gavin had considered relieving in Sicily) flamboyantly hoisted an American flag over his head and declared " '[t]his was the first flag to fly over Naples when we captured that city last October. I want all of you, no matter where you land in France tonight, to march on the town of Sainte Mère-Église, where together, we're going to liberate the people and fly this flag from the tallest building in town!' "[113] Others were more reserved. Lieutenant Homer Jones, a platoon leader in the 508th recalled looking at the men in his platoon and realizing " 'there were a lot I wasn't ever going to see again' " but when he tried to say something to his men, " 'country boys, poor kids, ones with different backgrounds' " to whom he had become very close, he was overcome with emotion and sputtered " ' "[o]h shit!" ' " Seeing Jones's distress, Trooper Japhet Alphonso picked up from there: " ' "[t]hat's okay, lieutenant. We know what you mean." ' "[114] Sergeant Bill Lord, another 508th trooper, recalled the words of his platoon leader, Lieutenant Neal Beaver. " 'Neal told me this was going to be the greatest thing I ever did in my life. If we survived, we would have something to talk about to our grandchildren. I told him that was pretty much word for word what Yale coach Ducky Pond used to tell his football players on the day of the Harvard game' " (Lord had dropped out of Yale to join the paratroops).[115]

At 2300 hours, 378 C-47s of the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing began taking off from seven separate airfields, carrying the division's 6,420 paratroopers and attached personnel (included in this total are the three pathfinder aircraft that departed thirty-minutes before the main body). Each of the planes had been newly painted with three white and two black two-foot-wide stripes on each wing and around the fuselage back of the jump door to facilitate recognition by friendly ground and naval units. In a little over an hour every plane except one was in the air and moving toward aerial assembly point 'Atlanta,' some

twenty miles east of Birmingham. From there the nine-ship V-of-V serials flew a dog-leg route of approximately 150 miles to departure point 'Flatbush' at the tip of a sandy cape called Portland Bill, where they left England behind and headed out to the Channel en route for France.[116] All over southwestern England "people were awakened by the thunder of a great armada," wrote John McNally, describing the scene as no other has been able.

> Not the familiar far-off roar of the bombers, but a sharper, lower throbbing—the C-47's. Hour after hour it went on and they lay wide-eyed in their beds. Aware that the men they had known for months were now helmeted and strained, sitting in those planes above their heads. They knew that in a few hours the assault would be made, that the greatest D-Day of a thousand years was at hand.[117]

Viewing the scene from another angle, Martha Gellhorn called the departure of the airborne divisions for France "a terrible and handsome sight."[118]

Chapter Eleven Notes

[1] Bierbaum, *As Ever, John*, 42.

[2] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 170-173.

[3] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Summary of Principles Covering Use of The Airborne Division," 27 November 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[4] Memorandum, Matthew B. Ridgway to the Assistant Chief of Staff, Operations Division, War Department General Staff, "Pay Status, Airborne Troops," 2 December 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[5] This was part of Marshall's overall effort to obtain for all infantrymen extra pay and recognition based on statistics that showed their casualty rates were "seventy to eighty percent of the total figure." See George C. Marshall to Matthew B. Ridgway, 16 March 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Personal File Jan-Jul 44," USAMHI and Palmer, Wiley, and Keast, *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, 58-59 and 62.

[6] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Changes in Tables of Organization Airborne Divisions," 15 November 1943, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 2a, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, 1942-1943," USAMHI.

[7] Message from Office of the Chief of Staff, War Department to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 25 October 1943, *The Papers of George C. Marshall: Selected Word War II Correspondence* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1993), microfilm, reel 31. Capitalization in original.

[8] Matthew B. Ridgway to George C. Marshall, 1 November 1943, *The Papers of George C. Marshall: Selected Word War II Correspondence*, reel 31.

[9] Gavin Diary, 19 November 1943.

[10] Directive from the Combined Chief of Staff to COSSAC dated 23 April 1943, quoted in Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington, D. C.: Center of Military History, 1989), 49. Initially, COSSAC was also to plan small-scale raids and prepare several contingencies to jump Allied forces across the Channel in the event of a German collapse. By April 1943, however, COSSAC was told to concentrate solely on the large-scale cross-Channel invasion.

[11] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 83.

[12] Frederick Morgan, *Overture to Overlord* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1950), 76. Morgan also wrote that the system did, indeed have its merits, not least of which was that matters of vital importance regarding crucial aspects of an operation were referred to all concerned. The system's success, however, was contingent upon "the adroit selection" of committee chairmen "who will reduce chatter to a minimum" and of efficient committee secretaries "who can write the minutes beforehand to ensure that the proceedings keep to the proper course." Morgan, *Overture to Overlord*, 76.

[13] Gavin Diary, 19 November 1943.

[14] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 84. In this work, Gavin wrote that he visited Morgan first, but his diary clearly shows that Bradley's headquarters was his first stop and that he did not meet with Morgan until the next day.

[15] Gavin Diary, 20 November 1943. When Gavin departed he ran into Major General Ray Barker, Morgan's American Deputy Chief of Staff. When Gavin told him that he had just talked with Browning, Barker replied " 'Oh yes, he is an empire builder.' "

[16] Ibid., 17 November 1943.

[17] Lewis H. Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries: The War in the Air in the Pacific, Middle East and Europe, 3 October 1941 – 8 May 1945* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1946), 223.

[18] Gavin Diary, 20 November 1943.

[19] Ibid., 23 November 1943.

[20] Ibid., 12 December 1943.

[21] Ibid., 17 December 1943.

[22] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 90.

[23] Memorandum, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, "Employment of Airborne Forces," 19 January 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "World War II—Personal Files, August 1942 – May 1943," USAMHI.

[24] "Digest of Operation 'Overlord,' " appendix A of Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 452.

[25] Ibid., 454.

[26] Morgan, *Overture to Overlord*, 152.

[27] John C. Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, U. S. Air Force Historical Study, no. 97 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: U. S. Air Force Historical Division, Research Studies Institute, 1956; reprint, Manhattan, KS: MA/AH Publishing—Sunflower University Press, n.d.), 2.

[28] Ibid., 2-4 and 8.

[29] Roger Hand, "Overlord and Operational Art," *Military Review* 75, no. 3 (May – June 1995): 88.

[30] Hand, "Overlord and Operational Art," 88-89; Morgan, *Overture to Overlord*, 203-205; Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 5-6.

[31] Ed Cray, *General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman* (New York: Simon & Schuster Touchstone Book, 1990), 13.

[32] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 191.

[33] Except where noted, see Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander: The War Years of General Dwight D. Eisenhower* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), 335; David Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War, 1943-1945* (New York: Random House, 1986), 120; Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 7.

[34] Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 475.

[35] Except where noted, see Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 120-123 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 7. Eisenhower had, of course, to refer these recommendations to the Combined Chiefs of Staff as well as to the President and Prime Minister. After weeks of discussion, however, all recommendations were accepted.

[36] Ray S. Cline, *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1951; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), 209.

[37] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 182-183 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 7.

[38] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 184 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 8-9.

[39] Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 232.

[40] Except where noted see Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 184-185 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 8-9.

[41] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 171.

[42] Reproduced in appendix XII of Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 274-275.

[43] Interestingly, Leigh-Mallory was not included, perhaps because he had heard this all before and either he or Eisenhower felt he did not require a second rendition or perhaps because Eisenhower desired a fresh, unbiased look at the proposal.

[44] Memorandum from Brigadier General Frederick W. Evans and Colonel Bruce W. Bidwell to George C. Marshall, 1 March 1944, *The Papers of George C. Marshall: Selected World War II Correspondence*, reel 22. Underling in original.

[45] Dwight D. Eisenhower to George C. Marshall, 19 February 1944, *The Papers of George C. Marshall: Selected World War II Correspondence*, reel 15. Underlining in original. Writing to Clay Blair after the war, Gavin commented: "[a]ctually, Marshall had good grounds for observing that we were beginning to use airborne troops in pennypackets, as we used armor in World War I. Only when we made a mass out of the armor did it become truly effective as we demonstrated in World War II. The problem was that we really had no effective antitank weapons for the paratroops. . . . So, we could see the Orleans Gap chewed to pieces by German panzers long before linkup could occur. Marshall and Arnold had an interesting idea, which, unfortunately, was not valid with the state of the antitank art then in being." Gavin to Blair, 19 July 1983.

[46] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 9-10.

[47] To be "bigoted' was to be privy to the specifics of the overarching plan. This group was kept as small as possible for reasons of security. Although all plans were classified, those that addressed when and where the invasion was to occur were marked "Top Secret—Bigot."

[48] Gavin Diary, 24 and 25 November 1943.

[49] Except where noted, see Langdon, *"Ready,"* 35-36; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 92-93; *Operation Neptune, Normandy, 6 June – 8 July 1944*, n.d., p. 1, unmarked box, Folder "82d Airborne Division, WWII After Action Reports: Normandy," 82nd Airborne Divisions Museum, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

[50] One means by which this integration was facilitated was by having the division's combat veterans live with the new troopers for a short time. Bill Lord was with the 508th when it joined the 82nd in England. According to Lord, "[i]f any man who was with the Regiment in Ireland were questioned on what was the most valuable training he got there, he would undoubtedly answer that it was knowledge and confidence acquired from the battle veterans of the 82nd Airborne Division. Men of the 505th Parachute Infantry, veterans of the Sicily and Italy jumps, lived with each company of the 508th for about a week. They explained what they knew of war and gave many helpful hints about fighting the Germans. Credit must be given to those who selected these visitors, for they were all very sincere in their efforts to help, and no line was handed out for the untested soldiers to swallow." See William G. Lord II, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry* (Nashville, TN: The Battery Press, 1977), 13.

[51] Gavin Diary, 17 December 1943.

[52] See Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 191; Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 332; Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 173-174; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 98; *Operation Neptune*, 1.

[53] See Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 192-193; Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 73; Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 97-100.

[54] The British Horsa was substantially larger than the American Waco. Made of plywood, it was sixty-eight feet long, almost twenty feet high and had a wingspan of eighty-eight feet. It had a payload of 7,000 pounds, which equated to twenty-eight fully equipped soldiers or a howitzer, a jeep and trailer, or an antitank gun. Britain produced over 5,000 Horsas during the war. See Charles J. Masters, *Glidermen of Neptune: The American D-Day Glider Attack* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 9.

[55] See also reminiscence of Adolph 'Bud' Warnecke in Astor, *June 6, 1944*, 58 and *Operation Neptune*, 1.

[56] Gavin Diary, 19 March 1944.

[57] Ibid., 25 May 1944.

[58] Ibid., 4 June 1944.

[59] Ibid., 23 February 1944.

[60] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Tactical Exercise," 14 March 1944, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 51, Folder "Pierce, Wayne," USAMHI.

[61] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 262-263.

[62] Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 101-102.

[63] See Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 263-264 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 25-26.

[64] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 267.

[65] Gavin Diary, 16 May 1944.

[66] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 242-243.

[67] Speidel, quoted in Robert J. Kershaw, *D-Day: Piercing the Atlantic Wall* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 24.

[68] Except where noted see Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 237-238 and Max Pemsel, *Report of the German Seventh Army Chief of Staff (June 1942 – 5 June 1944),* p. 23, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 27, Folder 3 “Pemsel, Lt Gen Max,” Ohio University, Athens, Ohio [hereafter OU].

[69] See Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attacks*, 146; Pemsel, *Report of the German Seventh Army Chief of Staff*, 24; “Anti-Invasion: The Normandy Battles from the Enemy Side,” *R. A. C. Journal* 4, no. 1 The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 3, Folder 1 “Anti-Invasion—the Normandy Battles from the Enemy Side—R. A. C. Journal.” OU.

[70] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 149 and 246. The term *OB West* refers both to the headquarters in overall command of German defenses in the West as well as to the person occupying the position of commander-in-chief in the west, in this case Rundstedt. Despite the grandiose title, Hitler sharply curtailed the authority of *OB West*. For example, Rundstedt had no command authority over *Luftwaffe* air or antiaircraft units, *Kriegsmarine* sea or coast artillery units, or any of the military governors of the occupied countries. He had but tactical control of the *Waffen SS*, which for all other matters reported to Heinrich Himmler. He also had very limited control over his panzer reserves, having to obtain approval from Hitler before employing them. Finally Rommel, because of his rank as a field marshal, had the right of direct access to Hitler despite commanding an army group subordinate to Rundstedt. See Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 243-248, passim.

[71] From Führer Directive No. 51 as translated and contained in Appendix D to Harrison *Cross-Channel Attack*, 464.

[72] Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day, June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 29.

[73] From Führer Directive No. 51 contained Harrison *Cross-Channel Attack*, 464.

[74] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 138-140; David Irving, *The Trail of the Fox: The Search for the True Field Marshal Rommel* (New York: Thomas Congdon Books, 1977), 313; Samuel W. Mitcham Jr., *The Desert Fox in Normandy: Rommel’s Defense of Fortress Europe* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 5. Hitler’s order to build an Atlantic Wall resulted from the abortive Allied raid on the French port of Dieppe, France, also in August. Staged by a mixed force of approximately 5,000 Canadians and 1,000 British Commandos (accompanied by a small party of American Rangers), its aim was to test landing techniques, especially the proposition that an amphibious assault could be conducted directly into a port city. It was a disaster for the Allies, who sustained 3,369 casualties against negligible German losses. See “Dieppe Raid” in Elizabeth-Anne Wheal, Stephen Pope, and James Taylor, eds., *The Meridian Encyclopedia of the Second World War* (New York: Penguin Books 1992), s.v. “Dieppe Raid.”

[75] Rommel quoted in Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day, June 6, 1944* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959; reprint, New York: Pocket Books, 1970), 24.

[76] Except where noted, see Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 137-138 and Mitcham, *The Desert Fox in Normandy*, 7.

[77] Mitcham, *The Desert Fox in Normandy*, 20-21.

[78] Almost without exception, post-war accounts of the Battle for Normandy, written either by German participants or members of the cult of German military superiority, begin with a statement juxtaposing the length of coast to be covered (approximately 2,500 miles) versus the paucity of forces on hand and cites statistics demonstrating that some divisions had to cover coastlines of over 270 kilometers. What none of them points out, however, is that the Germans knew that there were vast stretches of coastline where a large-scale amphibious landing was exceedingly unlikely and hence very little, if any coverage was afforded these areas, thereby allowing the Germans to concentrate their forces in and around

beaches where large-scale landings were possible. See, for example Hastings, *Overlord*; Kershaw, *D-Day, Piercing the Atlantic Wall*; Mitcham, *The Desert Fox in Normandy*; Hans Speidel, *Invasion 1944*, trans. Theo R. Crevenna (New York: Henry Regnery Company, Paperback Library, 1950); Hans von Luck, *Panzer Commander: The Memoirs of Colonel Hans von Luck* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1989).

[79] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 174.

[80] Pemsel, *Report of the German Seventh Army Chief of Staff*, p. 20.

[81] Blumentritt in Günther Blumentritt et al, *Fighting the Invasion: The German Army at D-Day*, ed. David C. Isby (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000), 26.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 259.

[84] Irving, *The Trail of the Fox*, 332-333.

[85] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 260.

[86] See Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, 235; Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 186; Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 10-11; and *Operation Neptune*, 2. The only change made to the 101st Airborne Division's scheme of maneuver was to relieve it of responsibility for capturing Ste.-Mère-Église. This was originally the mission of the 101st's 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, but when the 82nd assumed this mission the 501st was shifted south and given responsibility for protecting the southern flank of the 101st's airhead. Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 11.

[87] *Operation Neptune*, 2-4, 6, 10, and Annex 3.

[88] Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1948), 246 and David Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 241.

[89] Dwight D. Eisenhower, Memorandum for Diary, 22 May 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years III*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1,881.

[90] Leigh-Mallory quoted in Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 241.

[91] Ibid., 242.

[92] Eisenhower quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 407.

[93] Dwight D. Eisenhower to Trafford Leigh-Malory, 30 May 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years III*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1,894-1,895. Four years later, when he retired as Chief of Staff of the Army, a reporter asked Eisenhower what he considered the high point of this military career. Hesitating for a moment, Eisenhower replied that the obvious thing to say would be the surrender of Germany, but that had been anticipated for so long that it was somewhat anticlimactic when it finally did occur. He then said that his greatest moment was when he got word that the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions had landed and were in action on the Cotentin Peninsula the morning of D-Day. " 'Had it failed, he went on, he would have gone to his grave haunted by the thought that he had killed 20,000 young Americans stupidly.' " See Leonard Rapport and Arthur Northwood Jr., *Rendezvous With Destiny: A History of the 101st Airborne Division* (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), 56-57.

[94] McKenzie, *On Time On Target*, 11 and *Operation Neptune*, Annex 3.

[95] Bill Walton, interview by Cornelius Ryan, 18 March 1958, The Cornelius Ryan Papers, Box 9, Folder 4 "WALTON, BILL," OU.

[96] McKenzie, *On Time On Target*, 19.

[97] James J. Coyle questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 7, Folder 50 "Coyle, James J.," OU. When conducting research for his books *The Longest Day* and *A Bridge Too Far*, Cornelius Ryan and his research assistances sent out hundreds of questionnaires to surviving participants on both sides. The answers to these questionnaires, along with a vast store of letters, diaries, orders, and other material is at the Alden Library at the University of Ohio, Athens, Ohio.

[98] Dunfee quoted in Astor, *June 6, 1944*, 2.

[99] Walton, interview, 18 March 1958.

[100] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 104.

[101] Walton, interview, 18 March 1958.

[102] Hubert S. Bass to Cornelius Ryan, 20 March 1959, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 7, Folder 37, "BASS, Hubert," OU.

[103] Dan McIlvoy, "Medical Detachment, 505th Parachute Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division in World War II," World War II Veterans Survey Project, Box "82nd Airborne Division, 505th PIR (2)," Folder "McIlvoy, Dan (M.D.) 505th Parachute Infantry Med. Det.," USAMHI.

[104] Bierbaum, *As Ever, John*, 41-42.

[105] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 269.

[106] Robert L. Bearden questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 7, Folder 38 "BEARDEN, Robert L.," OU.

[107] Ben F. Pearson questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 28 "PEARSON, Ben F.," OU.

[108] Anthony 'Tony' Joseph DeMayo questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 7, Folder 51 "DeMayo, Anthony J.," OU. Mildred Gillars was an aspiring actress who dropped out of Ohio Wesleyan University and subsequently went to Germany in the 1920s to study music. When the war broke out she was teaching English in Berlin and had fallen in love with a Nazi Foreign Ministry official who convinced her to broadcast propaganda. Supplied with information from German intelligence sources, her broadcasts were often remarkably accurate, even about matters that were supposedly secret. After the war she was convicted of treason and spent twelve years in a U.S. federal prison for women. After her release she taught language and music at a Catholic convent in Columbus, Ohio, but subsequently returned to Ohio Wesleyan where, at the age of seventy-two, she finally earned her bachelor's degree in speech. She died in Columbus, Ohio, in 1988. See Boatner, *Biographical Dictionary*, s.v. "Gillars, Mildred Elizabeth."

[109] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 272-274.

[110] Walton, interview, 18 March 1958.

[111] See reminiscence of Edward C. Boccafogli in Ronald J. Drez ed., *The Voices of D-Day: The Story of the Allied Invasion Told By Those Who Were There* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 35.

[112] Eisenhower's message is reproduced in Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 256-257.

[113] Krause quoted in Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 376.

[114] Jones quoted in Astor, *June 6, 1944*, 3.

[115] Lord quoted in ibid., 1 and 58.

[116] See Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 13-14, 48, and 224 and *Operation Neptune*, 4 and Annex 1c. The one plane that failed to take off was destroyed on the airstrip when a trooper's grenade accidentally detonated. Three troopers were killed and nine wounded as a result of the explosion as well. Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 378-379.

[117] Bierbaum, *As Ever, John*, 42.

[118] Martha Gellhorn, "Stand Up and Hook Up!" in Dawson, *Saga of the All American*, n.p.

Chapter Twelve
Allus Kaput! The Americans Are Killing Everybody!

> *In the narrative to follow, the great names drop out. Even Eisenhower and Montgomery appear but seldom. In their place will be the corps and division commanders, the colonels, the lieutenants, and the privates. For the few will be substituted the many, as the battlefield, so long seen as a single conceptual problem, becomes a confused and disparate fact—a maze of unrelated orchards and strange roads, hedgerows, villages, streams and woods, each temporarily bounding for the soldier the whole horizon of the war.*
>
> Gordon A. Harrison[1]

Just as the first Allied planes were taking off for France, German signals intelligence officers solved one of the two great secrets of the invasion—when it would come. But no one believed them.

A few days before the invasion German agents who had infiltrated the French Resistance obtained twenty-eight radio codes, called 'B' messages. These were innocuous phrases that the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) would transmit no more than forty-eight hours before the invasion in order to alert Allied agents and Resistance fighters throughout France to be prepared to sabotage certain pre-determined targets. Sometime between 2200 and 2300 hours on 5 June, German listening posts monitoring BBC transmissions intercepted several of these messages and immediately sent word of their discovery up the chain of command. But no one paid heed. At Erwin Rommel's *Army Group B* headquarters the Chief of Staff, *Generalleutnant* Hans Speidel, dismissed the news out of hand and did not even bother to inform his commander who was then on leave in Germany. At *OB West* headquarters in the Château St. Germain a gruff and somewhat tipsy Rundstedt was pulled away from his dinner and told of the intercepts. " 'Does anyone think the enemy is stupid enough to announce his arrival over the radio?' " he barked before dismissing the courier bearing the news so that he could return to his meal.[2] And for the vast majority of German forces in France, it was business as usual. *Generaloberst* Friedrich Dollmann, the *Seventh Army* commander, even went so far as to cancel a planned alert, most likely so that his subordinates could travel to a long-postponed map exercise the next day in Rennes. There was a double irony in this: not only was Dollmann's *Seventh Army* responsible for the defense of Normandy, but the subject of the map exercise was defense against airborne attack.[3]

This incredible laxity in the face of hard intelligence indicating an invasion was in the immediate offing was due to a variety of miscalculations, the most significant of which concerned the weather. German naval analysts had calculated that an invasion fleet could only sail in seas of less than intensity four (wave heights of five to eight feet), with

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 321 through 328.

surface visibility of at least three miles, and with winds of less than twenty-four knots. None of these conditions held the night of 5-6 June.[4] In addition, *Luftwaffe* reconnaissance flights over the ports of southern England, the last of which occurred on 24 May, indicated that the Allies had not yet assembled adequate tonnage to carry out a large-scale amphibious assault. Based on the above as late as 4 June the *Kriegsmarine* position was that " 'at the present moment, no immediate major invasion is to be expected.' "[5] Added to these miscalculations was the somewhat myopic outlook of many in the German high command, not least of whom was Rundstedt, that the Anglo-Americans would only launch the invasion in conjunction with a major Russian offensive on the Eastern Front, which had yet to break.[6] Yet despite the weather, wind, waves , Russian stagnation, and the prediction of all the best minds of the German General Staff British and American glider troopers and paratroopers were touching down in Normandy.

The first American soldiers in France were the pathfinders who dropped between 0025 and 0138 hours, 6 June.[7] These were a select group of handpicked men who had completed a grueling training program in England during which they honed the pathfinder techniques and procedures that had been worked out by Major John Norton and his experimental group some months before. Each of the pathfinders was aware of two things that evening: that the accuracy of the division drop rested in large part on their shoulders and, as Gavin reminded them before takeoff " '[w]hen you land in Normandy . . . you will have only one friend: God.' "[8] Their mission was to set up Eureka radar beacons and lighted Ts on each of the drop zones, which for the 82nd were designated 'O,' 'N',' and 'T.' East of the Merderet and just north of Ste.-Mère-Église, was drop zone 'O' where the 505th was to make its drop. The other two parachute regiments, the 507th and 508th were to drop west of the Merderet on drop zones 'T' and 'N' respectively (to further bolster the green 507th and 508th pathfinder teams, their security detachments were composed of volunteers from the veteran 504th).[9]

The 505th pathfinders landed squarely on drop zone 'O,' met no resistance and within ten minutes of hitting the ground had assembled (less one man) and set up their Eureka radar transmitter and three giant Ts lit with green lights. The 507th pathfinders also had a perfect drop onto drop zone 'T,' about one-and-a-half miles northwest of the critical Merderet River crossing at la Fière. Unfortunately it was also right into the midst of a heavy concentration of German units, most likely elements of the newly arrived *91st Division*. The 507th's pathfinders encountered small arms fire as soon as they exited the plane. On the ground this fire hampered their assembly, although the Germans seemed content to remain in their positions instead of sallying forth to seek out and destroy the paratroopers. Eventually, however, the 507th pathfinder team leader, Lieutenant Charles Ames, assembled a portion of his team and moved to a position where he could set up his Eureka beacon. But Ames could risk no lights. The enemy was too close. The plane carrying the 508th pathfinder team went astray and dropped its pathfinder team about a mile southeast of drop zone 'N' which itself was about a mile and a half south of drop zone 'T.' Once on the ground, however, the 508th pathfinders quickly assembled and got their bearings, but when they tried to move to the correct drop zone found their way barred by substantial enemy forces. Hence they set up their radar and two amber lights where they were and hoped for the best. It was, to say the least, an inauspicious start.[10]

There was some good news. The pathfinder aircraft had flown the same route that would be taken by the main body; a route designed to avoid enemy antiaircraft and radar

concentrations, achieve complete surprise, and facilitate navigation. Despite the misdrop of the 508th pathfinder team (which was still only a mile off course, a dramatic improvement over the Sicily operation) the route delivered all that air force planners had hoped for. This was due in no small measure to the fact that the route brought the pathfinders in through the German back door. All the German defenses in the Normandy area were oriented north and east, their guns pointed toward the Channel. The route followed for the pathfinders and the initial D-Day drops brought the aircraft into the invasion area from the west, or landward side. After departing English airspace at Portland Bill (Departure Point 'Flatbush') the route continued southwest over water for fifty-seven miles to checkpoint 'Hoboken,' which was marked by a Royal Navy vessel outfitted with both radar and light beacons. At 'Hoboken' the route turned ninety degrees to the left and began a fifty-four mile leg between the occupied islands of Alderney and Guernsey (and just out of range of the antiaircraft guns on both) until it hit the west coast of the Cotentin Peninsula at initial point 'Peoria.' At 'Peoria' the route turned slightly left and continued overland for approximately twenty miles to the three drop zones. After dropping, the aircraft were to make a beeline for the coast and exit French airspace over the same beaches on which the amphibious soldiers would land some five hours later. From that point it was a dogleg route back to England.[11]

To further confuse the Germans, the Allies mounted several operations designed to either blind them to or deceive them about the true routes and objectives. While the planes carrying the 82nd, 101st, and British 6th Airborne Division were in the air, a combined force of British and American aircraft jammed every German radar and fighter control station in Normandy and the Channel Islands. A second force of British Stirling bombers dropped dummy parachutists and 'Window' (strips of aluminum that, when dropped, simulated a large number of aircraft) into the coastal areas of France north of the Seine (exactly where the Germans expected the invasion to occur). A third force of Stirlings accompanied the lead serials of the U.S. airborne divisions until 'Hoboken' and then veered south to drop 'Window' in the southwest portion of the Cotentin.[12]

For the most part the flight of the main body, codenamed 'Boston,' was flawless. Flying in temperate weather with no winds, scattered clouds, a bright moon, and excellent visibility, all serials approached Normandy on course, at or ahead of schedule, and in formation.[13] During this phase of the operation many troopers slept, especially those who had jumped into Sicily and Italy. Others prayed. Captain Lyle Britain Putnam, the 2/505th battalion surgeon recalled being "frightened and apprehensive—cold—homesick." Several troopers on Putnam's plane became air sick and vomited while others griped and made "allusions to [the] unfortunate females who were being deprived of our so outstanding and exceptional company."[14] Private Ken Russell, who had begged an early release from the hospital so he could be with his unit for the jump spent the time thinking of his high school class, which was graduating that night in Tennessee.[15] Those near the open doors watched the scene unfold around them. Private First Class Anthony 'Tony' De Mayo recalled "looking out of the plane and seeing the [C]hannel spotted with all sorts of seacraft. It looked as if one could walk across the Channel."[16] Captain Robert M. Piper, the 505th Regimental Adjutant, sat in the open door of his plane with his "feet in the breeze," checking off waypoints as he headed toward France.[17] As is characteristic of cohesive groups in tense situations, the troopers drew strength from those around them. Captain Putnam recalled that other than the "very real concern for personal

welfare" the average trooper in the 82nd did not worry "about general environments as long as he was in contact with other members of his unit."[18] Private Dwayne Burns recalled thinking "[t]hese men around me were the best friends I will ever know" and prayed that he would not do anything to get any of them killed.[19]

This solidarity, forged in battle and through tough, realistic training, was further cemented by the example of the division's leaders. In each plane making its way to France, privates sat beside the sergeants, lieutenants, captains, majors, and colonels who would lead them out the door. Living up to the creed he ruthlessly instilled in his officers—to " 'jump first and eat last' "—Gavin flew on the lead plane of the 508th serial.[20] As John McNally recalled, the mere knowledge that this would occur had a tremendous effect in the ranks.

> In all of our airborne drops, the first man out of the plane is always the General [Gavin] himself! All of the thousands of men who crouch in the door of a plane, ready to leap into the roaring, flak-filled night know that someone else was down there before them. Imagine the terrific morale factor of the simple, stark facts: the General jumps first! If there is a mistake in picking the drop zone, the General is the first to pay the penalty.[21]

Gavin was not the only general flying in with the 82nd that night; Ridgway, too, was preparing himself for the drop, his first into combat. Ridgway had initially planned on going in with the first glider serial but changed his mind sometime during the six weeks preceding the invasion. Gavin wrote in his diary that this did not occur until after the 82nd's mission was changed in late May.[22] Ridgway's aide, Arthur Kroos, indicated that his boss had been contemplating this decision as much as a month earlier when he asked Kroos how he would like to arrive in France and Kroos told him that he would prefer to jump.[23] Gavin was perplexed by Ridgway's decision, writing that it "hardly stands up on analysis."[24] But Kroos provides some insight. Going in by glider "would have been an ego destroyer" for Ridgway, recalled Kroos, and would not conform to the "symbol he was creating."[25] That symbol had already been assailed by General Browning, Ridgway's chief competitor for overall command of a combined Allied airborne force (serious talk of which had already surfaced in SHAEF) and the man with whom Ridgway had already butted heads in the Mediterranean. When Gavin arrived in London to assume his position on the COSSAC staff, Browning had even been so impolitic as to make "a rather unkind remark" to him about Ridgway not having parachuted into Sicily. Gavin defended Ridgway, replying that he thought that Ridgway "had handled the division as it should have been handled, that he had had much more responsibility than just the parachute assault" but Browning's comment made it clear there were some that felt that jumping into combat with the troopers was a *sine que non* of an airborne force commander.[26]

Ridgway did take precautions, however. To ensure he was not dropped miles away from the division ("No way did he want to land 200 miles out someplace when his troopers were winning the war over in this place"), Ridgway talked with Major General Paul Williams, commander of the IX Troop Carrier Command and demanded that he get the best plane, pilots, and crew. Kroos also brought a parachute back to Ridgway's

quarters and helped his boss fit it perfectly in order to lessen Ridgway's chances of injury, something about which Ridgway was particularly concerned because of his chronic back problems.[27] On the day of the jump Ridgway showed up at the 505th's departure airfield and asked the regimental executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Alexander, to "pick a plane and jump master where-by [*sic*] he had the best chance of landing in the chosen landing area." Alexander selected Lieutenant Dean Garber, an experienced jumpmaster whose plane would be on the right side of the formation and hence in the best spot to see the pathfinder lights.[28] It was a fortuitous choice.

As the planes carrying the main body of the 82nd and 101st crossed the coast of France they flew both figuratively and literally straight into the fog of war when they entered a cloud bank so thick that many troopers thought it was a German smokescreen. The first three of the division's ten serials, carrying the troopers of the 505th (and Ridgway), climbed above the clouds without breaking formation. Encountering but sporadic and generally ineffective fire en route to drop zone 'O' the pilots picked up the Eureka signal at ranges of fifteen to twenty-one miles and, on nearing the drop zone, homed in on the three lighted Ts, which could be seen three to five miles out (according to Lieutenant Colonel Krause, the 3/505th commander, seeing the T's "was a Godsend and I felt that I had found the Holy Grail").[29] Although they generally flew too high and too fast, the pilots were amazingly accurate and delivered eighty of 118 sticks within two miles of the drop zone, including Ridgway's, which "was put down exactly where we were supposed to go."[30]

Next in the air order of movement were four serials carrying the 508th and Gavin. They met with disaster. Scattering badly when they entered the clouds, they encountered much heavier antiaircraft fire from German gunners that had been alerted by the passing of the first three serials. Additionally, most of the pilots in these serials received no Eureka signal at all because it had been set up a mile off course. They also had no drop zone lights on which to guide (unlike modern radar, Eureka could only get pilots in the vicinity of the drop zone; they relied on visual aids to pinpoint the drops). Flying blind through flak that grew more intense the nearer they got to the drop zone the pilots resorted to the crudest form of navigation, time-distance calculations. By maintaining a straight and level flight they knew that seven and a half minutes after entering France they would be over drop zone 'N.' Few pilots, however, were able to keep their planes straight and level and even those who did searched for the drop zone lights through the clouds in vain (many reported that at seven minutes the clouds broke, but even these pilots could not find the drop zone lights). Because they also knew that twelve minutes into their flight over France they would have completely crossed the Cotentin Peninsula and be once again over water, most pilots simply estimated their position as best they could and turned on their green jump lights wherever they were. As a result, only sixty-three of the 508th's 132 sticks landed anywhere near the drop zone, and many of these landed in the flooded marshlands of the Douve and Merderet Rivers. Twenty sticks were still unaccounted for a month after the drop.[31]

The last three serials, carrying the 507th, fared no better. They, too, scattered in the cloudbank and received the most intense antiaircraft fire of all. Although these pilots received a strong Eureka signal from drop zone 'T,' like their compatriots carrying the 508th they did not have any lights on which to guide once they were close and used time-distance calculations to make a best-guess drop. Seventy-three of the 117 sticks in these

serials dropped near drop zone 'T' but many of these troopers also landed in the marshland.[32]

All told, in less than two hours slightly fewer than 6,400 paratroopers from the 82nd dropped into France that night (13,400 from both U.S. divisions). Only eight men refused to jump. Thirty-six troopers are known to have drowned in the marsh while another 223 were injured on the jump (173 of these were evacuated to friendly lines while the remainder were taken prisoner). Only one plane was known to have been shot down before dropping. The crew and troopers of a second were never found (both of these from the serials carrying the 507th). A third, carrying troopers from the 505th, did not drop due to a lucky flak burst that wounded seven troopers inside the plane before they could exit. Seven other planes were either shot down or ditched on the way home and 111 returned to base in England with some sort of flak damage.[33]

The Germans reacted with uncharacteristic lethargy to the sudden appearance of paratroopers in their midst, no doubt the result of the confusion that reigned in their headquarters as they attempted to discern both the true size of the airborne assault and the location of the *schwerpunkt*, or main effort. Because the drop had been so widely scattered reports flowed into German headquarters from all points of the compass. The information received was spotty, conflicting, and at times wildly inaccurate. Despite this chaos, however, the telephone logs from the two headquarters directly responsible for the defense of the area under attack, *LXXXIV Corps* and *Seventh Army*, reveal that both recognized early on where the main body of paratroopers lay. As early as 0300 hours on 6 June the *LXXXIV Corps* Chief of Staff reported to his counterpart at *Seventh Army* that the Allies were concentrated in two spots, one in the *716th Division* area (where the British 6th Airborne had landed) and the other in the *91st Division* area (where the 82nd and 101st had landed). Two hours later he called back and refined his estimate, correctly citing Ste.-Mère-Église as the focus of the U.S. airborne effort on the Cotentin.[34]

Yet nothing was done. Major Friedrich Hayn, the *LXXXIV Corps* intelligence officer and, as such, the man responsible for determining the Allied order of battle and intent, left a telling account of what it was like in his headquarters on D-Day.

> The minutes were dragging on and the nervous strain became almost unendurable. Single reports arrived in rapid succession, contradicting or confirming each other. The Command Post of the Seventh Army as well as the Army Group Command [*Army Group B*, Rommel's headquarters] kept calling us. But our Staff could do nothing but wait! Wait until the confusing situation had become somewhat clearer; until the centers of attack of the paratroops and beach parties could be discerned; until we knew which of our strongpoints had been encircled or outflanked by the enemy; until our reconnoit[e]ring parties had brought in some prisoners.[35]

Hayn's account is typical of headquarters that, having been formed to operate in a routine environment (and occupation duty was nothing if not routine) are suddenly faced with a crisis. Information gathering and tedious analysis replace rapid decision-making. So taken, in fact were the various German headquarter staffs in France with their analysis of what was going on that they began to argue amongst themselves about whether or not what had occurred was, in fact, the invasion or simply another large-scale raid the likes of

which the British and Canadians had previously staged at St. Nazaire and Dieppe. As a result it was more than *seven hours* after the last paratrooper landed before the Germans organized a counterattack anywhere in the Cotentin.

The one force that was both well-positioned and possessed enough firepower and mobility to wreak havoc on the U.S. paratroopers, especially those from the 82nd, was the *91st Division*, the same veteran outfit whose sudden appearance in the Cotentin had forced the last-minute change to U.S. airborne plans and had caused Air Marshal Leigh-Mallory so much angst. Allied intelligence had placed the main concentration of the *91st* in the vicinity of la Haye-du-Puits, nearer the west coast of the peninsula, but in fact the 82nd dropped right on top of it. Its command post was at Picauville, a small village in the southwest portion of the 82nd's sector. But confusion paralyzed the *91st* as well. Following the 82nd's standard operating procedure, troopers cut every wire they came across and soon the *91st's* internal communications network broke down, leaving companies and battalions isolated and without orders.[36] Furthermore within minutes of the airborne landings the *91st* was decapitated by five troopers from the 508th, all new to combat, but who had been trained to the high standards that Ridgway and Gavin had set for the division, standards that demanded quick thinking under pressure and placed a premium on aggressiveness.

Generalleutnant Wilhelm Falley, the commander of the *91st Division*, had set out early that morning to attend the wargame at Rennes. A few miles outside Picauville, Lieutenant Malcolm D. Brannen, commander of Headquarters Company, 3/508th and four other troopers ambushed his sedan; a burst of gunfire through the windshield caused it to swerve and crash into a ditch. Falley had either opened his door and freed himself or was thrown free but when Brannen approached he was crawling toward his pistol. Brannen shot him before he got there (according to witnesses Falley was muttering in English "don't shoot, don't shoot" but his actions belied his protests).[37] When word of Falley's death and other clashes with roving bands of paratroopers in the area reached the *91st Division* command post a few miles away, it was thought that at least an entire battalion was preparing to attack so the headquarters staff hastily fled to an alternate location a few miles away.[38]

While German staff officers debated and unit commanders hunkered down awaiting orders, the paratroopers of the 82nd sought one another out in the night. The technique used to do this was called 'rolling up the stick.' To effect this, once on the ground and free of his parachute harness the first jumper moved in the same direction as that flown by the plane that had dropped him while the last jumper moved in the opposite direction. The troopers in the middle of the stick stayed in place until they were gathered by the men from either end so that eventually all met somewhere in the middle. In Normandy this technique proved worthless. Most of the planes were flying too high and too fast during the drop, thereby increasing the dispersion between each jumper. Moreover, the thick Norman hedgerows so compartmentalized the terrain that moving in a straight line anywhere in the Cotentin was virtually impossible (in 1944 there were, on average, fourteen hedgerows per kilometer).[39] General Morgan, who had visited Normandy before the war and knew it well left perhaps the best description of this country, which the French called the *bocage* and which he labeled "a tactical feature of major importance."

> It consists of a series of minor undulations, well wooded and divided up into small enclosures, each one separated from the next by an earth bank some feet in height and some feet in thickness. In most cases these banks were topped by considerable quickset hedges and trees garnished on at least one side by a considerable ditch.[40]

So formidable were these hedgerows that frequently during the fighting in Normandy fairly large groups of soldiers would be on opposite sides of the same hedgerow, physically separated by only a few feet, yet would remain oblivious to the presence of one another.[41]

If they could not assemble in their sticks the troopers were trained to move to their assigned objectives individually or in whatever small groups they could gather, orienting on the large terrain features they had memorized from the maps, aerial photos, and terrain models in England. For the scattered troopers of the 507th and 508th this was problematic for when they exited the aircraft and took one last look around while descending in their chutes (something they had all been trained to do), the terrain looked nothing like what they expected. They had been told to focus on the two rivers in the area, the Merderet and the Douve, and to keep in mind that the former was really nothing more than a stream while the latter was approximately sixty feet wide.[42] But as part of their anti-airborne measures the Germans had manipulated the locks that controlled the water levels and thereby caused both rivers to overflow their banks. So what the troopers saw gleaming in the moonlight as they descended were two large rivers, not one, and they became immediately disoriented. Even veterans as savvy as General Gavin were momentarily stymied. In an interview with an Army historical officer conducted after the division's return to England, Gavin stated he "had estimated 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."[43] Colonel Roy E. Lindquist, the 508th regimental commander, found himself in so much water he thought he had landed at the confluence of the two rivers when in fact he was at the upper reaches of the Merderet, the "narrow" part of the river.[44] And some, like Private First Class Orville A. Amorose, were more concerned with survival than with pinpointing their location.

> 'Halfway down, I saw that I was over water. Before, I had been merely scared; now I was petrified—for I didn't know how to swim. I knew I was about to die, that I'd never get out of my harness and the 90 pounds of gear to even inflate the Mae West I was wearing. When I hit, I went clear under the water. That's the end, I thought. But my legs hit the muddy bottom and I stood up—in water up to my neck. Miraculously, I had beaten the odds, for many places in that swamp were ten feet or more deep. I thanked God.'[45]

Eventually the 82nd troopers coalesced into five major groups, two to the east and three to the west of the Merderet River. The largest gathering was east of the river at Ste.-Mère-Église, where the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 505th, along with many misdropped troopers from the 507th and 508th congregated. The other group east of the

river (and the second largest gathering overall) was at la Fière, one of the two crossings over the Merderet that the division was to secure. Of the three groups west of the Merderet, two were north of la Fière while the third assembled on a prominent terrain feature, Hill 30, opposite Chef du Pont, the second crossing site the division was to secure.

Taking Ste.-Mère-Église was Lieutenant Colonel Krause's 3/505th's mission, which for the most part landed accurately on drop zone 'O.' Once on the ground Krause set up his command post, gathered some troopers about him, and then sent out patrols to gather and guide to him as many men as possible. Within forty-five minutes he had about 180 troopers whom he organized into two companies. One of his officers, Lieutenant William F. Mastrangelo, had also brought in a drunk Frenchman who verified Krause's position and volunteered to guide him along a trail that entered the town from the northwest. He also told Krause that the German garrison was relatively small and that its main strength was along the roads that ran into the town. Reluctant to place too much faith in his inebriated scout, Krause guided on but did not proceed directly down the trail indicated by the Frenchman, whom he put on point along with several troopers to ensure his cooperation. But the Frenchman proved true and thirty minutes after starting out Krause's force was on the outskirts of Ste.-Mère-Église. Gambling that swift action would pay off Krause decided to clear the town from the inside out and led his force in a rush to the town square from which he then had his troopers fan out in all directions, following the major roads that intersected at the square, clearing as they went. Using only their bayonets and grenades, the troopers fought their way to the edge of town where they stopped to set up blocking positions. By 0430 hours, Krause owned Ste.-Mère-Église and the American flag Krause had carried with him was flying over the first town to be liberated in France.[46]

Taking the town was a relatively easy affair during which Krause's troopers killed ten German stragglers, took thirty more prisoner, and sustained no casualties of their own. As they moved through the streets, however, they met with scenes that made a lasting impression. Near the center of town, where a building had been set on fire as a result of incendiary debris from the German flak guns that fired on the troop transports as they passed overhead, they found the charred remains of several troopers who had drifted into the fire, their bodies torn apart by the sympathetic detonation of the grenades and ammunition they carried with them. Other troopers were hanging from trees and buildings, their bodies riddled with bullet holes. Some had been bayoneted.[47] This angered the men, recalled Chaplain George Wood, "but I explained that this was what we could expect in our kind of an outfit."[48] What was even more maddening were scenes like that described by trooper Clarence Ollom, who saw "American paratroopers who were tied to a fence . . . with their throats cut," the first indication that the war in northwest Europe would take on a much more ferocious tenor.[49] Although in a different form, this same ferocity was displayed in another scene recalled by Private John Fitzgerald of the 101st who fought alongside the 82nd at Ste.-Mère-Église.

> 'It was a picture story of the death of one 82nd Airborne trooper. He had occupied a German foxhole and made it his personal Alamo. In a half circle around the hole lay the bodies of nine German soldiers. The body closest to the hole was only three feet away, a potato masher [grenade] in

> its fist. The other distorted forms lay where they had fallen, testimony to the ferocity of the fight. His ammunition bandoliers were still on his shoulders, empty of M-1 clips. Cartridge cases littered the ground. His rifle stock was broken in two. He had fought alone and, like many others that night, had died alone.'[50]

By daylight Krause had collected approximately 350 troopers at Ste.-Mère-Église along with one of the two 75mm howitzers that had dropped in with the regiment.[51] Morning also saw the town's residents emerging from their hiding places. Most, like Andre Mace who had spent the night hiding in his garage, were overcome with joy at their long-awaited liberation. " 'The Americans are the only ones in the streets of the town. There are no more Germans,' " recorded Mace in his diary. " 'It is an indescrib[a]ble joy. I was never as happy in all my life.' "[52] Others had yet to come to grips with what was occurring. In a letter to General Charles De Gaulle, the mayor of Ste.-Mère-Église described a scene he witnessed. Several women were crying and beseeching the paratroopers not to leave, he wrote, and "one of them made this reply with a big smile, 'We'll never leave, we're staying right here!' "[53]

Taking the town was of particular importance for two reasons. First, it denied the Germans use of the only major highway in the eastern Cotentin, thereby diminishing their capacity to rapidly reinforce the invasion area with forces from the north and west. Second, it provided the 82nd a base from which to defend in the event the amphibious invasion went awry. Several hours passed before Ridgway had any communication with anyone outside the division. As late as noon on D-Day, six hours after the amphibious landings, Ridgway and Gavin still had no information from the beaches and rumors were rampant that the assault had been postponed due to weather. At one juncture the two met to discuss the situation between themselves. According to Gavin, " 'Matt and I decided right then that if the seaborne assault had been called off or beaten back, then we would continue to fight to the end.' "[54] Ste.-Mère-Église would be their battle position. They shared their thoughts with no one.

Just as Krause's men were securing Ste.-Mère-Église the first of the division's four planned glider insertions occurred. Codenamed 'Detroit' it involved fifty-two C-47s towing fifty-two Waco gliders bringing in sixteen 57mm antitank guns of the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion, twenty-two jeeps, five trailers, ten tons of supplies and ammunition, signal equipment and elements of the division staff (220 troopers total). Flying the same route as had been taken by the paratroopers, the formation (with the exception of one C-47 and glider, which had problems at the airfield and followed thirty minutes behind) reached the French coast intact when it, too, hit the low-lying cloudbank. The formation scattered. Some of the planes flew over the clouds while others flew through them. Seven gliders were either cut or broke loose and landed in the western Cotentin (five were still not located over a month later). Seven more released early, west of the Merderet, the pilots seeing the water and thinking they had flown completely over the peninsula. Of the remainder, seventeen to twenty-three gliders landed on their objective, drop zone 'O,' between 0401 and 0410 hours. Nine others landed within a two-mile radius of Ste.-Mère-Église (to include two that landed in the town itself) and three came down in the 101st area.[55] Most of the gliders were destroyed on impact. Tony DeMayo was one of the 505th pathfinders at drop zone 'O' when the gliders came

in and recalled seeing "one crash after another as they hit the so[-]called hedgerows. It was just like crumbling wooden match-boxes in your hand."[56] Lieutenant Jack Tallerday, who was also at the glider landing zone, recalled that when the gliders hit the hedgerows the "equipment in the rear of the glider was torn loose and pinned the crew members in the nose of the glider. . . . The moans of the dieing [*sic*] and injured men, lack of sufficient first aid men and the fact that the gliders were being attacked by the Germans as they landed makes this incident one that is hard to forget."[57] Master Sergeant Charles W. Mason of the division staff, who flew in with this increment, remembered the German antiaircraft fire tearing through his glider and ripping the groin out of an artillery captain sitting across from him.[58] Miraculously, only three troopers were killed and twenty-three injured in the landings, including the division Chief of Staff, Colonel Doc Eaton. Eleven of the jeeps were damaged beyond repair but, most welcome, six (or seven, accounts vary) of the antitank guns were salvaged and in action by noon.[59]

As soon as he had taken the town Krause sent a runner to inform his regimental commander, Colonel William E. Ekman. Ekman was new to the regiment, having taken over in late March from Batcheller who had been relieved and sent to command the 1/508th. According to one of Ekman's troopers

> I doubt that any regimental commander took over a regiment under a greater handicap than he did. The 505, with two combat jumps and two campaigns to their [*sic*] credit, felt that they were combat hero[e]s and entitled to go home since we had already won the war so to speak. And then to be handed a noncombatant commander was the absolute pits [Normandy was Ekman's first combat].[60]

But Ekman quickly earned the respect and admiration of his subordinates and superiors alike and remained in command of the 505th for the remainder of the war. His executive officer going in to Normandy, Mark Alexander, said Ekman became a "very good" regimental commander despite trying "so hard to prove himself the first days in Normandy that he was lucky he wasn't killed. He made mistakes in Normandy but it was because he was so aggressive and without the experience to back it up."[61] Ekman admitted to being a little shaky during his first few hours in combat. Because the plane in which he was riding was flying too fast, his parachute opened with an incredible shock. This was followed by a very hard landing.

> I was knocked out and came to with everyone gone. It was dark, of course, and I found myself in the middle of a herd of cattle. Due to my difficulty in walking for the next several days, I am sure I landed astride a cow.[62]

Ekman eventually linked up with his S-3, Major Norton, and then wandered around trying to find his battalions. Consequently he never received Krause's message that Ste.-Mère-Église had fallen and as it grew light he became increasingly concerned. Apparently still suffering the effects of his hard landing, Ekman issued a series of conflicting orders to Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin F. Vandervoort who was leading the 2/505th to its objective, Neuville-au-Plain, a small village about a mile northwest of Ste.-

Mère-Église. Ekman ordered Vandervoort to stop, then proceed, and then stop again. Finally, at 0817 hours, having still not heard from Krause, Ekman told Vandervoort to change course and proceed immediately to Ste.-Mère-Église.[63]

Vandervoort had had a rocky start as a battalion commander. He took command of the 2/505th just prior to the division's departure from Italy, succeeding the very popular and competent Mark Alexander and seemed, at first, to be trying too hard to impress others of his bona fides. According to Lyle Putnam, the battalion surgeon, Vandervoort was "[a] very proud individual, with the ambition to do a good job" but he had earned a reputation in Italy as "anxious, indecisive, and with too much desire to gain personally with no regard to cost of trouble to others."[64] Five weeks after arriving in Britain, things had apparently become so bad in the battalion that the AWOL rate skyrocketed. Ridgway told Gavin to find out what was going on. When he arrived, Gavin observed that Vandervoort had turned into something of a martinet, had lost control of the battalion, and was using mass punishment in hopes of regaining control.[65] Gavin set things straight and two months later recorded that Vandervoort was "a good soldier" whose "battalion will do well in its next fight."[66] Gavin could not have been more correct.

In Normandy, Vandervoort earned the respect and admiration of not just his troopers, but of the entire division. Ridgway called him "one of the bravest, toughest battle commanders I ever knew."[67] Although he injured himself on the jump Vandervoort refused to take himself out of the fight and continued to lead his battalion with gritty determination. Putnam recalls meeting his commander about an hour after the jump near a small farmhouse.

> He was seated with a rain cape over him reading a map by flashlight—he recognized me and calling me close, quietly asked that I take a look at his ankle with as little demonstration as possible. His ankle was obviously broken; luckily a simple rather than compound fracture. He insisted on replacing his jump-boot, laced it tightly, formed a very makeshift crutch from a stick, and moved with the outfit as an equal and a leader without complaint. We were able to reduce the fracture and apply a walking cast some four days after D-day in a field hospital advance unit. The man did not lose two hours in our forty some days in Normandy [*sic*, actually the division fought for thirty-three days], covered rough ground and was personally very active in combat. He thoroughly convinced every man of his battalion of his merits and qualities.[68]

Before diverting his battalion to Ste.-Mère-Église in accordance with Ekman's instructions the prudent Vandervoort, chary of abandoning his original mission, ordered Lieutenant Turner B. Turnbull, the platoon leader of Third Platoon, D Company, to take his forty-three troopers on to Neuville-au-Plain. Turnbull's men moved swiftly up the road linking Neuville-au-Plain with Ste. Mère-Eglise without making contact, passed through Neuville-au-Plain and set up a blocking position on a small rise about forty yards north of the hamlet. With fields of fire extending to his front for about 600 yards, Turnbull was optimistic that he could hold the position against a much larger force and ordered his men start digging in.[69]

Meanwhile, the remainder of the 2/505th proceeded to Ste.-Mère-Église. Once he got there Vandervoort requisitioned one of the jeeps and a 57mm antitank gun that had come in with the gliders that morning and rushed north to see how Turnbull was doing. On the way he passed a Frenchman on a bicycle headed south. When Vandervoort arrived at the platoon position, Turnbull told him that the Frenchman had stopped by and claimed that there were some paratroopers approaching from the north that had with them a large group of German prisoners along with some captured German vehicles. As they were talking, there appeared the column the Frenchman had warned them about. Soldiers who they could clearly make out as Germans were marching serenely on either side of the road while what appeared to be American paratroopers were in position on both flanks of the column. The paratroopers were also waving orange panels, the same panels the 82nd used to identify their positions to friendly aircraft. And just as the Frenchman had related, there were several armored vehicles interspersed in the column. Something did not look right to the suspicious Vandervoort, however, so he ordered the antitank gun crew to ready its weapon. When the column was about 100 yards away, Vandervoort told Turnbull to have his machine gun fire a burst into a field to the left of the column to see what would happen. As soon as the machine gun fired the alleged prisoners deployed to both sides of the road and the lead vehicle, a self-propelled gun, opened fire. The antitank gun crew responded and set the lead and second vehicles in the column on fire. A third vehicle, farther back, fired smoke canisters to cover both its movement and the movement of the German infantry. Vandervoort turned to Turnbull, told him to hold on as long as he could, then jumped in his jeep and sped back to Ste.-Mère-Église to spread the word and get reinforcements.[70]

Turnbull was facing a reinforced battalion from the *1058th Regiment* of the *91st Division* which had been bivouacked about five miles north of Neuville-au-Plain. It had been ordered to march on Ste.-Mère-Église at 0130 hours, but the confusion that had gripped the German command throughout the peninsula delayed its movement until mid-morning and it was approximately 1100 before it appeared on the road fronting Turnbull's blocking position. Turnbull and his men had been in position for just over thirty minutes when it arrived.[71]

Back at Ste.-Mère-Église, Vandervoort told his E Company commander, Captain Clyde Russell, to send a platoon up the west side of the road to hit the German right flank to take some of the pressure off Turnbull. Russell sent his First Platoon under Lieutenant Theodore Peterson, who led his platoon to Turner's position by orienting on the sound of what by that time had become quite a battle. When he arrived, Peterson went to see how Turnbull was doing. It was not good. Turnbull's platoon had already sustained sixteen casualties, including six killed, and was low on ammunition, but Peterson recalled that Turnbull himself was remarkably quite calm. When Peterson asked what he could do, Turnbull told him to reinforce his left and try to take out a particularly troublesome machine gun. Peterson returned to his platoon, moved his troopers into the positions Turnbull indicated, and had them open up with everything they had on the enemy machine gun. When he saw no indication of any enemy return fire, Peterson ordered a cease fire and crept forward to take a look around. Finding nothing, he returned to his platoon and waited. Ten minutes later a large group of Germans began moving across the front of Peterson's platoon position, obviously unaware that there were American paratroopers on their flank. Peterson had his troopers hold their fire until the Germans

were within a few feet of them and then had them open up with a second furious fusillade. This time his troopers' fire clearly had an effect, obliterating the German formation. Most of the enemy soldiers were killed outright. Those few who survived scattered. There were no wounded.[72]

By dusk Turnbull was down to twenty-three men. His platoon had been in contact nearly the entire day yet had stubbornly held its blocking position against several enemy assaults. German mortar fire and enemy snipers on both his flanks made it increasingly clear, however, that the position was fast becoming untenable. At one point Turnbull turned to his troopers and told them there was but one thing to do—charge. Private First Class Joseph Sebastian, who had just returned from reconnoitering the ground to the rear, disagreed. " 'I think there's a chance we can still get out,' " offered Sebastian, " 'that's what we ought to do.' "[73] In a rare display of battlefield democracy Turnbull polled the other troopers. All agreed with Sebastian. Turnbull relented but added that they would have to leave their twelve wounded behind. There was no way any of them would get back if they had to carry their wounded along. Sebastian spoke up again. Since the withdrawal was his idea, he would stay behind to cover his comrades with his BAR. Sergeant Robert Niland and Corporal Raymond Smitson also volunteered to stay and fight alongside Sebastian while the platoon medic, Corporal James Kelly, volunteered to remain behind to tend the wounded. The decisions having been made, Niland made for a machine gun but was shot dead before he could reach it.[74] The others, totaling but sixteen then, took off for the rear. Every one got back safely to Ste.-Mère-Église. Turnbull was killed the next day. Shortly thereafter Peterson's platoon also withdrew having lost no one.[75]

For all its fury, the action at Neuville-au-Plain involved an infinitesimally small portion of the thousands of paratroopers that had landed in Normandy that night. Yet what occurred there was of tremendous import to the success of the 82nd's mission. Although the troopers of Third Platoon, D Company, 2/505th were eventually forced to quit the ground for which they had paid such a high price—ground that their leader Turnbull thought he could hold indefinitely—it was not the ground gained or lost at Neuville-au-Plain that was critical, it was time. By holding off the German force advancing on Ste.-Mère-Église from the north Turnbull's troopers, with an assist from Peterson's platoon, gained the time needed by Krause's 3/505th to defeat an enemy threat south of town.

Krause's troopers defending to the south of Ste.-Mère-Église were being hard pressed by two companies of infantry from the *795th Georgian Battalion* (one of the *Ost* units in the German Army) supported by tanks and self-propelled guns when Vandervoort hobbled into town at the head of his battalion. Recognizing the need for unity of command, Vandervoort subordinated himself to Krause. Krause told Vandervoort to take over the northern part of Ste.-Mère-Église so that he could concentrate his 3/505th in the southern half of the town. In this manner Vandervoort's propitious arrival and Turnbull's resolute defense allowed Krause to concentrate the combat power he needed to defeat the German threat developing south of Ste.-Mère-Église.[76]

But the respite was temporary for it was not long before Krause's southern outposts reported significant truck movement to their front signaling the arrival of enemy reinforcements. Determined to break up a second enemy assault before it got started, Krause ordered Captain Harold D. Swingler to launch a spoiling attack. Swingler led the

eighty-four troopers of I Company that he had assembled so far—a force less than half the size of the *Ostruppen* unit he had been sent to attack—along a zigzag course through the hedgerow maze in an attempt to get astride the enemy flank. About a mile south of town Swingler pivoted his company against what he thought was the enemy's flank. But he had miscalculated and hit the enemy force head on. For the next two hours Swingler and his troopers waged a running gunfight with the *Ostruppen*, often at point-blank range. With little hope of breaking the numerically superior foe with a frontal assault, Swingler tried repeatedly to sideslip his force onto the enemy flank, but since he was both outgunned and outnumbered, he could never get enough room between his force and the enemy's to make that happen. However, the aggressiveness with which Swingler's troopers attacked had an effect; the German officers in command of the *Ostruppen* became convinced that it was they who were facing a superior force and ordered a withdrawal, which quickly turned into a precipitous retreat, leaving behind their precious trucks which Swingler's troopers destroyed. After driving away the last of the *Ostruppen* the I Company troopers returned to Ste.-Mère-Église bearing the bodies of several of their comrades, including that of their intrepid commander. Remembered by his troopers as " 'a superior officer in every way' " Swingler had not even been on the manifest to jump into Normandy.[77] He had been in the hospital recovering from knee surgery but signed himself out so that he could make the jump with his men.[78]

The routed *Ostruppen* joined the German antiaircraft unit that had previously fled Ste.-Mère-Église on a long, low ridge south of town known on 82nd maps as Hill 20. Although it was not a formidable terrain feature its vegetation provided cover, its height dominated the surrounding area, and it lay astride the roads leading to Ste.-Mère-Église from the south. The mixed bag of defenders atop the ridge were well camouflaged and in possession of significant firepower, to include at least one 88mm gun and could not, therefore, be ignored. More importantly, the position constituted a direct threat to the incoming glider serial, for it was to the flatlands just south of Hill 20 that the glider pilots were headed, known to them as landing zone 'W.'

On D-Day afternoon a combat task force from the 82nd's seaborne element tried to clear the hill. This was the task force led by Colonel Edson D. Raff composed of a platoon of armored cars from B Troop, 4th Armored Cavalry Squadron; a company of Sherman tanks from C Company, 746th Tank Battalion; and approximately ninety glider troopers from F Company, 2/401st. As planned, they had landed at UTAH at 1530 hours and as soon as they de-waterproofed their tanks made a dash for Ste.-Mère-Église. Following in the wake of the 8th Infantry Regiment (U.S. 4th Infantry Division), which had also debarked at UTAH, Task Force Raff got all the way to les Forges, a small hamlet just over a mile south of Hill 20 before halting. The commander of the 8th Infantry Regiment refused to continue. Raff pleaded with him to keep going, to clear landing zone 'W' before the gliders arrived. The mechanized infantrymen had much more firepower than Task Force Raff, more than enough to clear Hill 20. Still the 8th Infantry commander refused. So with time running out and no way to contact the inbound gliders Raff decided to mount an attack himself—a quick rush by his armored cars and tanks that would hopefully close on Hill 20 before its defenders had time to react. Three hundred yards was as far as they got. An armored car was the first to be hit. Then one of Raff's Shermans. Then a second Sherman. Then a third. Task Force Raff pulled back. But Raff was not done. Since the antitank fire was so intense he would

have to lead his attack with infantry. Raff's remaining tanks could provide covering fire from hull defilade positions (positions from which only the top of the turret could be seen) while his troopers moved forward in an infiltration attack—small groups of soldiers moving over several parallel routes toward Hill 20. But, this too drew intense enemy fire and the infantry attack got nowhere.[79]

Aboard the 82nd's second glider insertion, codenamed 'Elmira,' was the 319th and 320th Field Artillery Battalions, the remainder of the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion, various division troops, jeeps, trailers, antitank guns, and tons of supplies and ammunition. They were riding in 36 Waco and 140 of the much larger British Horsa gliders and were scheduled to touch down on landing zone 'W' at 2100 hours, 6 June. The flight route was almost a mirror image of that flown for the initial mission; for 'Elmira' the planes approached from the east (Channel) under heavy fighter escort. And in order to limit the size of the air column and make it easier for the accompanying fighters to defend the air column, 'Elmira' was split into two echelons, each of which was further split into two serials.[80]

At 2104 hours Raff's troopers were still 500 yards short of Hill 20 when the lead serial of the first echelon arrived. Just about everything possible had been done by those on the ground to divert them to an alternate, and safer, location. Ridgway still had no communication with anyone outside the division at the time and could not, therefore, inform the pilots to head elsewhere. The 505th pathfinders set up an alternate landing zone two miles northwest of landing zone 'W,' essentially the same area north of Ste.-Mère-Église onto which the 505th had dropped (drop zone 'O') and marked it with a lighted T, smoke, and radar, hoping to guide the tow planes and gliders to them. Meanwhile, at the southern edge of landing zone 'W' Raff's troopers used yellow flags and orange smoke in an attempt to get the glider pilots to guide on them and away from the enemy guns on Hill 20.[81] But, as Raff later observed, "[l]ike watching a movie in which the full plot was known I realized that the smoking knocked–out tanks were appearing as LZ [landing zone] markers in the evening light to the pilots of the Troop Carriers, so unerringly did they release the gliders over the valley."[82]

Despite the wall of flak put up by the defenders on Hill 20, who opened up with every weapon in their arsenal, all but a handful of the gliders in both serials of the first echelon landed within two miles of landing zone 'W.' Surprisingly, casualties were relatively light: five glider pilots were killed, four went missing and seventeen were either injured or wounded; their passengers sustained five killed and eighteen injured or wounded.[83] When they started to land Raff abandoned his attack and instead set his troopers to collecting the new arrivals and directing them to les Forges where by morning of 7 June about 200 of the 437 troopers who had flown in were assembled.[84] Other groups of troopers, like those of the Division Reconnaissance Platoon, organized under their leaders and fought their way off the landing zone independently (Private Gordon Adams was with this group. In an act of courage that was commonplace that day, the wounded Adams rushed a German machine gun position that was holding up his unit and, armed only with a knife, killed the enemy gunner and took the assistant gunner prisoner).[85]

The second 'Elmira' echelon, flying in two fifty-plane serials, arrived at 2255 hours. It, too, was supposed to land on landing zone 'W' but for some reason the tow planes diverted to the alternate landing zone that had been set up by the 505th pathfinders (drop zone 'O'). This incredibly fortunate navigational error, however, was marred when,

inexplicably, the majority of the gliders in the first serial missed the well-lit landing zone completely and drifted off to land behind enemy lines. The following second serial did not follow suit and landed right on target. All told ten glider pilots of the second 'Elmira' echelon were killed, twenty-nine were wounded or injured and seven went missing. Of the 737 passengers, twenty-eight were killed and 106 wounded or injured.[86]

There were twenty-four artillery pieces aboard the 'Elmira' gliders (twelve 75mm howitzers and twelve 105mm howitzers). Fifteen of them survived the landing intact, but seven of those fifteen, from the 319th, were in the serial that had landed behind enemy lines. The artillerymen that landed with the guns, as is the case with artillerymen the world over, were unwilling to abandon them. However, there was no way that the artillerymen would be able to fight their way through to Ste.-Mère-Église while burdened with the guns, jeeps, ammunition, and other equipment required to operate the pieces, so instead they moved east and linked up with the 4th Infantry Division advancing from the sea; it was another two days before they returned to 82nd control. Meanwhile, only two guns from the 320th were able to make it to Ste.-Mère-Église by daybreak on 7 June and although most welcome, they brought Ridgway's total artillery complement to but three tubes (including one of the two 75mm howitzer that had been dropped in with the paratroopers). It would be another forty-eight hours before the scattered groups of division troopers had anything heavier than their mortars with which to support their attacks, enduring all the while almost constant pounding by enemy guns of much larger caliber.[87]

At daybreak, 7 June, Raff and his 8th Infantry Regiment counterpart were still trying to organize a coordinated attack on Hill 20 when the last two of the 82nd's planned glider insertions occurred, 'Galveston' and 'Hackensack.' The 'Galveston' mission was composed of eighty-two Wacos and eighteen Horsas organized in two fifty-ship echelons and was carrying 968 troopers of the 325th Regimental Headquarters and the 1/325th along with additional division troops, supplies and equipment. Because of the heavy fire from Hill 20, the decision was made to fly 'Galveston' into landing zone 'E,' one of the landing zones in the 101st's area a little over three miles southeast of Ste.-Mère-Église that had already been cleared and was safely behind friendly lines. Flying in from the east, the first 'Galveston' echelon arrived at 0655 hours. Despite almost no enemy ground fire most of the first-echelon gliders released prematurely and missed landing zone 'E.' Seventeen glider troopers were killed and eighty-five injured in the landings. Ironically the second 'Galveston' echelon, which for some reason made for the still contested landing zone 'W,' had far fewer casualties and a far more accurate drop. Appearing at 0701 hours, all but two of the second-echelon gliders landed within two miles of landing zone 'W' and, although they were under fire as soon as they appeared overhead, sustained but thirteen injured in the landings.[88]

Approximately two hours later the first echelon of 'Hackensack' appeared overhead and it, too, inexplicably flew into landing zone 'W.' The lead echelon, carrying 968 troopers of the 2/325th and 2/401st in thirty Wacos and twenty Horsas, flew into terrific flak and scattered badly. According to Lieutenant Richard B. Johnson, a platoon leader in the 2/401st who flew in with this echelon the air over the deadly landing zone "was filled with gliders, flying no pattern whatsoever, but all making for the nearest feasible landing area." As a result some collided in mid-air while others tried to stop "by flying between two trees and shearing off the wings."[89] Many of those that made the landing

zone did so at its northern edge, right under the guns of the enemy still entrenched atop Hill 20. Two glider pilots were killed and ten or eleven injured while fifteen glider troopers were killed and fifty-nine injured. The second 'Hackensack' echelon, carrying 363 supply and service personnel from the 325th along with mortars, ammunition, equipment and supplies in fifty Wacos had a far more accurate drop and sustained but one pilot killed and five injured along with one trooper killed and fifteen injured. With 'Hackensack' complete the majority of the division had arrived in France.[90]

The glider insertions made a significant impression on the paratroops watching from the ground and forever elevated the standing of their glider brethren in their eyes. Almost every paratrooper who witnessed the gliders coming in, especially those flying through flak as they descended to their controlled crash landings, was awed by the courage of their gliderborne brethren. Sergeant Elmo Jones, one of the pathfinders who set up the landing zones, said " '[t]here's never been a greater slaughter than what took place that night. It was the most horrible thing a person could see.' "[91] Sergeant Ernest L. Gee of the 505th called the glider insertion "pitiful and ghostly" and added, "I always tip my hat to this day if a meet a glider man who hit Normandy because he is a fighting fool and alive by the Grace of God."[92] Trooper Howard Melvin of the 505th recounted how he and his fellow paratroopers felt somewhat guilty about their extra pay when witnessing what the "glider-riders" endured.

> 'These gliders guys had the worst of the worst. I'd rather jump any day in the week, make five jumps, than do a glider ride. . . . A paratrooper slogan was, a paratrooper should be on a DZ [drop zone] when gliders are coming in, with a stack of thousand-dollar bills, and anybody who walks out of a glider you would hand him a thousand-dollar bill. And that was because at that time we were getting jump pay and they were getting nothing—no hazardous-duty pay. And they weren't volunteers, either. A glider trooper didn't get anything extra.'[93]

Especially unlucky were those troopers who flew in on the flimsy British Horsas. Larger than the Waco, the Horsa's frame was made of wood as opposed to the tubular construction used in U.S. gliders and hence had a tendency to disintegrate on landing. Statistics compiled after Normandy revealed that a trooper was twice as likely to get injured in a Horsa than in a Waco.[94] When Ridgway learned of this he informed the commander of the IX Troop Carrier Command that "for the next operations of the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions glider personnel and equipment will be carried in CG-4's only. No Horsas will be used." Taylor concurred.[95] The paratroopers, meanwhile, finally accepted the glider troopers as equals and signified this in the best way they could, by agreeing to the issuance of jump boots to every glider trooper in the division at the conclusion of operations in Normandy. Henceforward glider troopers too would proudly wear their trousers bloused, especially when they returned to England and caroused the bars where they would make use of another dividend they had earned in France—hazardous duty pay.[96]

Hill 20 did not fall until late in the morning of 7 June. By that time the German cadre had melted away leaving the *Ostruppen* on their own. Rather than face a massed attack by all three battalions of the 8th Infantry Regiment plus Raff's task force, and urged on

by a Russian-speaking American officer they had earlier taken prisoner who convinced them that continued resistance was both futile and deadly, the *Ostruppen* surrendered. After reducing the hill Raff and his task force, along with elements of the 8th Infantry Regiment, sped northward to Ste.-Mère-Église where the paratroopers were fighting for their lives.[97]

Throughout the night of 6-7 June the Germans kept pressure on the U.S. defenders at Ste.-Mère-Église. A steady rain of artillery and mortar fire punctuated by frequent clashes with German combat patrols attempting to find weak spots in the American lines ensured that little, if any sleep was had by the few hundred paratroopers in the town. The bulk of the activity occurred in the north against Vandervoort's 2/505th and it was there, at first light, that two battalions of German infantry supported by three artillery battalions, an antitank gun company, and ten 75mm self-propelled guns attacked, moving south down either side of the asphalt road to Neuville-au-Plain (the same road on which they had been held up by Turnbull's platoon the day before). The fight raged all day and in the end the Germans were not only beaten back, they were decimated. It was once again the action of junior officers, sergeants, and individual troopers, displaying great courage and initiative, that won the day.[98]

The action began at 0700 hours when Lieutenant Waverly W. Wray, the D Company executive officer, appeared at Vandervoort's command post to report that his company positions east of the road were being pressed hard and he feared they could not hold much longer (Wray's commander, Captain T. G. Smith, had injured his leg on the jump and was manning the company command post). Vandervoort informed Wray that there was little he could do, that help had not yet arrived and that perhaps Wray should mount a limited counterattack in order to slow the German advance and gain time. A soft-spoken, devoutly religious Mississippian, Wray returned to his position, quietly collected all the grenades he could carry along with his M-1, a .45-caliber semiautomatic pistol, and a silver-plated .38 revolver that he stuck in his boot and informed his commander that he was going to conduct a one-man reconnaissance patrol preparatory to leading the counterattack Vandervoort had suggested. Picking his way cautiously through the hedgerows, Wray had traveled some 300 yards north of town when the sound of German voices froze him in his tracks. Snaking to the top of the hedgerow that separated him from the voices with his M-1 at the ready, Wray popped up and

> in his best invasion German said, 'Handy-ho!' Seven Germans, in a sunken road and grouped around a radio transmitter, froze and turned their eyes toward him. One of them pulled a pistol and fired, tearing Waverly's cartridge belt half off his belly. Waverly reflexed with seven shots from his M1 rifle as two German Schmeisser machine pistols fired from the hedgerow . . . to his right rear—glanced bullets off his helmet and nicked two half-moon notches from his ear.[99]

Wray killed the seven Germans who, it was later discovered, were the commander and staff of the *1st Battalion, 1058th Regiment*, and returned to his company for reinforcements. First he positioned a 60mm mortar crew so that they could shell the main body of the German battalion, which was lined up in a sunken road awaiting orders from the dead commander. Then he moved the remainder of D Company into positions from

which the troopers had good fields of fire around the sunken road. His plan was to flush the Germans from their hiding place with the mortars and then complete their destruction with the company's small arms and machine guns. His plan worked to perfection. When the mortar rounds started landing in the sunken road the Germans broke and ran right into the sights of the D Company guns. Under Wray's leadership, D Company moved forward in pursuit. A slaughter ensued that was only brought to a halt after a quick-thinking German medical officer waved a white flag and asked for a truce to care for his wounded, in the process covering the escape of those Wray and his troopers had not yet gunned down. But the D Company attack had erased the threat of a German attack down the east side of the asphalt road. Later that morning Vandervoort met Wray, minus part of his ear and with dried blood caked on his neck and right shoulder. " 'They've been getting kind of close to you haven't they Waverly?' " asked Vandervoort. In a heavy Mississippi drawl Wray replied, " 'Not as close as ah've been gettin' to them, Suh.' " When Sergeant John Rabig, Wray's first sergeant saw his lieutenant he turned to Vandervoort and said, " 'Colonel, aren't you glad Waverly's on our side?' "[100] Wray was later killed in Holland.[101]

It was about 1500 hours, 7 June before Raff's task force, along with the Second and Third Battalions of the 8th Infantry Regiment finally broke through to Ste.-Mère-Église.[102] By that time Wray's attack had already defeated the German forces northeast of town but in the northwest the *Seventh Army Sturm Battalion* continued to advance. Supported by several armored vehicles, the Germans pushed the lightly armed paratroopers of F Company, 2/505th to the edge of town. "By early afternoon we and the Germans were one hedgerow apart," recalled Vandervoort. "They kept driving their tanks and self-propelled guns south toward us. They would fire smoke shells to conceal the movement of their vehicles, then suddenly dart from the smoke . . . firing as they came."[103] Using these tactics a large group of German infantrymen pushed to within fifty yards of the 82nd's medical aid station where they temporarily halted to coordinate their movement with an armored assault gun nearby. According to Captain Putnam, who was inside the aid station, three paratroopers suddenly appeared out of nowhere, saw the threat to the aid station, and immediately took action to drive the Germans off. The first, an anonymous private from H Company, 3/505th, rushed up from the southern part of Ste.-Mère-Église, manned an abandoned antitank gun and drove the German assault gun off. Stunned by the unexpected loss of their armor support the German infantry froze. There then entered the fray two other troopers, a lieutenant and a sergeant, both armed with Thompson submachine guns. Standing "side by side, at the end of the road [they] emptied clip after clip into the milling and disorganized crowd."[104] Action like this was characteristic of the seasoned troopers of the 505th, wrote Colonel Ekman after the war. "Whenever a machine gun or other automatic weapon, including 88's, opened up, it seemed like everyone in the vicinity started to converge on it to knock it out."[105]

Although it continued to attack using the hit-and-run tactics described by Vandervoort, the penetration by the aid station was the closest the *Sturm Battalion* got to breaking through to the center of Ste.-Mère-Église. Before the Germans could organize a second assault, the paratroopers launched a hasty counterattack of their own in conjunction with the recently arrived reinforcements. Elements of the 2/505th, supported by several tanks, attacked up the west side of the asphalt road while the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment attacked up the east side. Vandervoort detailed his battalion S-2,

Lieutenant Eugene A. Doerfleur, who another trooper described as an unusually young looking man without "two whiskers on his face" to guide the attack.[106] Known as "the Creeper" by the other members of the battalion, Doerfleur was another trooper who spoke fluent German and spent many nights patrolling behind enemy lines. He told Vandervoort that during a reconnaissance of the area he had conducted the day before he discovered a sunken road, just wide enough for one tank, that he believed might lead to a position from which he could engage the German right flank. Trusting Doerfleur's judgment, Vandervoort committed his remaining reserve to the attack—approximately twenty E Company troopers under Lieutenant James Coyle—which he reinforced with three of Raff's Sherman tanks. Jumping off at 1715 hours with Doerfleur in the lead, the Sherman tanks in column behind him and Coyle's troopers behind the tanks, the small band advanced cautiously up the lane. Turning a corner, Doerfleur found himself suddenly astride the right flank of the *Sturm Battalion* which was massed in the lane preparing to renew its attack. The tanks opened up and for the next ten minutes fired their main guns down the sunken lane while the E Company troopers, deployed atop the hedgerows to either side, fired down into the lane, picking off the startled Germans as they attempted to flee. "It was their death trap," recalled Sergeant Otis Sampson. "It was so easy I quit firing. There were four that got away."[107] Over 160 Germans surrendered, many of whom were wounded, the rest were killed. Some, but not many, escaped.[108] One of the few American casualties was Lieutenant Coyle who was shot through both thighs. Coyle ignored his wounds and continued fighting until the firing stopped; only then did he allow Otis Sampson to patch him up. "When he tried to stand up his legs would not hold him," Sampson recalled. "He had been going on pure spunk."[109]

E Company broke the back of the German attack; Ste.-Mère-Église was never again threatened and what was left of the German attack force fell back on Neuville-au-Plain. In two days of fighting the 82nd troopers at Ste.-Mère-Église had taken over 700 prisoners and inflicted massive casualties on the attackers; north of the town alone there were over 400 German dead. An American lieutenant who was being held captive at the *1058th's* command post (and later liberated as the Americans advanced north) reported that as the German survivors streamed past one ran in and shouted " 'Allus kaput! The Americans are killing everybody.' "[110] Surveying the area a few days later, even General Gavin was moved to comment on the slaughter inflicted by the 2/505th—" 'Van, don't kill them all. Save a few for interrogation.' "[111]

The 82nd's stand at the crossroads town astride the only high-speed highway in the eastern Cotentin kept the Germans from massing against UTAH Beach and allowed the amphibious forces landing there to get established ashore with relative ease (there were fewer than 200 casualties on Utah during D-Day).[112] With Ste.-Mère-Église in hand, the division also had a secure base from which to conduct operations elsewhere in its zone, most notably along the banks of the Merderet where two of the division's D-Day objectives were still being hotly contested.

Chapter Twelve Notes

[1] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 274.

[2] Rundstedt quoted in Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 261.

[3] Except where noted see testimony by Blumentritt in Blumentritt et al, *Fighting the Invasion*, 171; Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack,* 275; Translated copy of German Fifteenth Army *Kriegstagebuch* (War Diary), entry for 5 June 1944, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 27, Folder 22, OU. All times given are in Double British Summer Time (DBST) which was one hour ahead of German clocks set at Central European time. There is some controversy about whether or not all of *Fifteenth Army* was, in fact, placed in a higher state of alert once its listening post intercepted the 'B' messages. Most contend that it was; however, the War Diary clearly states that this did not occur until 0230 hours on 6 June, and only *after* the headquarters had received reports of paratroopers having landed in its rear area. The confusion is perhaps the result of the wording used in the diary. The entry for 2233 (2333 DBST) hours, 5 June states that corps and army headquarters were alerted—in the sense that they were informed—that a message 'B' had been intercepted. Conversely, the entry for 0130 (0230 DBST) hours, 6 June clearly indicated that *Fifteenth Army* was placed on Alert II, the highest level of alert.

[4] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 276. The Germans also lacked weather stations any farther west than the Channel Islands and it was from the west that the weather came. Hence, the predictive ability of German meteorologists was severely hampered. In his work Robert Kershaw quoted a one Dr. Müller who, he wrote, was the chief meteorologist for *OB West*. Müller contended that he had, in fact, predicted the same break in the weather that compelled Eisenhower to risk a 6 June invasion. However, the Germans were making their calculations based on the weather in the Pas de Calais, not Normandy. See Kershaw, *Piercing the Atlantic Wall*, 53.

[5] Kurt Assman, "Normandy 1944," *The Forces Magazine*, March 1955, p. 5, copy contained in The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 3, Folder 2, OU.

[6] Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 261.

[7] Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 685-686 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 33.

[8] Anonymous pathfinder quoted in Ryan, *The Longest Day*, 95.

[9] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 48, 53 and 55 and Chester to Gavin, 30 March 1959.

[10] See Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 33, 48, 53 and 55; Chester to Gavin, 30 March 1959; Combat interview "507-2 on D-Day and Immediately After," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II. The 505th Pathfinders were accompanied by a stowaway who jumped in with them. According to Gavin this was "an Air Force colonel of World War I, Lafayette Escadrille, vintage" named Bagby. "For the deed he received the Silver Star and a verbal reprimand." See James M. Gavin to Cornelius Ryan, 3 April 1959, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 21, OU. Backing up Gavin's assertion is an interview conducted after the war with 505th pathfinder Clarence Ollom who said "[s]omething sticks in my mind that some high-ranking officer was on the plane with me." See interview of Clarence Ollom in Steve Anderson and Louis Eschle, "From Sicily to the Siegfried Line," *Military History*, 20, no. 2 (June 2003): 54. Chester also confirmed that this unknown colonel flew in with the 505th pathfinders.

[11] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 11-12 and 15. The route taken by the 101st was exactly the same until 'Hoboken.' At that point the 101st aircraft deviated to a point farther south on the west coast of the Cotentin ('Muleshoe'), followed a route south of and parallel to that taken by the 82nd, and dropped on three drop zones south and east of those used by the 82nd. In order to avoid congestion, the 101st also departed first and dropped a few minutes before the 82nd. The British 6th Airborne Division, dropping at the opposite end of the Allied invasion beachhead, flew its own separate route to Normandy.

[12] Ibid., 14-15.

[13] Ibid., 48.

[14] Lyle Britain Putnam questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 31, OU.

[15] Ambrose, *D-Day*, 198.

[16] DeMayo questionnaire.

[17] Robert Martin Piper questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 30, OU.

[18] Putnam questionnaire.

[19] Burns quoted in Ambrose, 198.

[20] Jack P. Nix, "505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (A Legacy of Lessons)," (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College Paper, 1989), 5. In preparing this paper, Nix interviewed several officers who had served in the 505th under Gavin. It was Brigadier General Walter F. Winton who recalled that when he reported into the 505th as a lieutenant he knocked on Gavin's door, received permission to enter, and saluted. Winton recalled that before returning the salute and without even looking up from his desk, Gavin told him " '[l]ieutenant, in this outfit you'll jump first and eat last.' "

[21] Bierbaum, *As Ever, John*, 41.

[22] Gavin Diary, 26 May 1944.

[23] Kroos to Blair, 17 June 1983.

[24] Gavin Diary, 3 June 1944.

[25] Kroos to Blair, 17 June 1983.

[26] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 83.

[27] Kroos to Blair, 17 June 1983.

[28] Mark Alexander "Thirty Four Days in Normandy in 1944," (n.p., 2001). This is a personal reminiscence of his experiences in Normandy written by Alexander for his son. In possession of the author.

[29] "Debriefing Conference—Operation Neptune," 13 August 1944, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Debriefing Conference—Airborne Operations on D-Day by 82nd Airborne Division, Interviews w/Battalion and Regimental Commanders on problems and other complications from invasion," USAMHI. On 13 August 1944, the 82nd held a debriefing conference at the Glebe Mount House in Leicester, England. Each commander of a unit of battalion size or larger spoke freely about his experience

and his impressions and recommendations. Their statements were transcribed as near to verbatim as possible.

[30] Ridgway, interview, 29 August 1969. See also Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 48-50.

[31] See Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 53-55 and "Debriefing Conference—Operation Neptune."

[32] See also Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 55-58 and "Debriefing Conference—Operation Neptune."

[33] See Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 48-58 passim and *Operation Neptune*, Annex D-1. According to one glider pilot, seeing what had become of the disciplined formations of C-47s that had left England just hours before was a chilling precursor of what they were about to endure. " 'As soon as we saw them come back straggling in one by one with no sort of a formation at all . . . we knew that something had gone terribly wrong. They circled the field once, and from several of the planes red flares were fired, indicating that there were wounded aboard. They were all strung out at different altitudes, and we could tell from the absence of the bluish exhaust flames that several of them were on single engine. I remember that no one said a word, we were so scared. We just stood there on the edge of the field counting them as they came in on their approach. It took over an hour before the last plane landed. Something had gone terribly wrong.' " Quoted in Milton Dank, *The Glider Gang: An Eyewitness History of World War II Glider Combat* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1977), 110.

[34] Seventh Army Telephone Log, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 26, Folder 6, OU.

[35] Excerpt from Friedrich Hayn, *Die Invasion*, p. 6, copy contained in The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 26, Folder 18, OU. Hayn also offers an interesting perspective on the makeup of the 82nd, a perspective that reveals much about the German mindset vis-à-vis the importance of race. "A significant episode was the arrival of the first prisoners at Corps Headquarters. All of them belonged to the 82nd U.S. Airborne Division and had 'dropped from the sky.' They were robust men and excellently equipped. . . . Already the first four of them were a good example of the racial composition of their unit. There was an officer of Anglo-Saxon descent with reddish hair. . . . The next was a Pole with closely cropped hair and fanatical features. . . . [The third was a] half-breed from California with a mongolian sprinkling. . . . Finally there was a certain Braun, born 1913 in Stuttgart. . . . So the 82nd U.S. Division really deserved its nickname of 'All American.' America, the great melting pot of races!" p. 11.

[36] See statements by Günther Keil, commander of the 91st Division's 1058th Infantry Regiment and Friedrich von Criegern, the LXXXIV Corps Assistant Chief of Staff in Blumentritt et al, *Fighting the Invasion*, 180-186.

[37] See Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 388-389 and James M. Gavin to Frank McKee, 25 October 1979, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "82nd Airborne Division, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, letters about D-Day invasion," USAMHI.

[38] Friedrich von Criegern in Blumentritt et al, *Fighting the Invasion*, 185.

[39] Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 34.

[40] Morgan, *Overture to Overlord*, 157. Much has been written concerning the apparent ignorance of the Allies about the *bocage* and the effect it ultimately had on tactical operations in Normandy. Stephen Ambrose wrote that "[t]he great failure on the part of the Allied intelligence community was that it did not anticipate the problems of fighting on the offensive in the hedgerow country." He attributed this ignorance to the fact that the Allies were so narrowly focused on getting ashore and staying ashore, "they hadn't studied the hedgerow country or worked out techniques for fighting in that difficult terrain." Ambrose in

Weingartner, ed., *The Greatest Thing We Have Ever Attempted*, 9. According to Morgan, however, COSSAC "had studied and restudied all sources of information on the point and had argued that over and above all its manifest disadvantages the existence of the bocage country in this particular relationship to the beaches could be entered on both sides of the balance sheet. In our favour was the possibility that the enemy would regard it as unlikely that we should deliberately commit ourselves to the passage of such an obstacle immediately on landing. Also we had in mind the defensive-offensive nature of the operation in prospect." Morgan, *Overture to Overlord*, 157. A review of annex 1c (tactical terrain study) to the 82nd's field order for the operation shows that, at least in one division, there was an awareness of the physical dimensions of the hedgerows. However, nowhere in this annex is there any mention of the difficulty it would cause to those in the attack. Field Order No. 6, 1 May 1944, Annex 1c, Tactical Terrain Study, 382-ART-0.3, Box 12429, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[41] Gavin has insisted that the 82nd did not use the famous metallic crickets used by the 101st on D-Day. In an article written just after the war, he stated categorically that "Sicily and Italy had taught us that it was undesirable to blacken our faces or use crickets as signals. We decided to rely solely on oral challenge and response, and a quick response it had better be" (Gavin, "Back Door to Normandy: Airborne Plans and Counter Plans for the Invasion of Europe," *Infantry Journal* 59, no. 5 [November 1946]: 12). However, it appears that some of the division's troopers did get their hands on the crickets. Trooper James Eads recalled getting out of his harness and, after hearing a sound behind him, " 'dropped flat and tried to see what or who was there. Taking a chance on a hunch, I snapped my cricket, and an answering two clicks came back' " (Drez, *Voices of D-Day*, 135). Chaplain George Wood of the 505th also remembered being "alone in a field surrounded by hedgerows, snapping my cricket, when [another paratroop officer] came up behind me & said, 'Stop that damn noise' " (See George B. Wood questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 9, Folder 5, OU). With or without crickets, the hedgerows made assembly exceedingly difficult.

[42] Extracts from the 505th Regimental S-2 briefing that was presented to every man in the regiment. Contained in Benjamin H. Vandervoort, "505th Normandy Campaign," n.d., p. 4, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 9, Folder 1, OU.

[43] Combat interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II. Capitalization in original.

[44] Combat interview "508 Regiment After the Drop," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[45] Amorose quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo*, 224-225.

[46] See Combat Interview by R. H. Wienecke, n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II and Langdon, *"Ready,"* 53-54.

[47] See Wienecke Combat Interview; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 53-54: "Request for a French decoration for the two battalions of parachutists which landed at Sainte Mere-Eglise," n.d., The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Personal File Jan-Jul 44," USAMHI. This letter, written by the mayor of Ste.-Mère-Église, was addressed to Charles De Gaulle.

[48] Wood questionnaire.

[49] Steve Anderson and Eschle, "From Sicily to the Siegfried Line," 55.

[50] Fitzgerald quoted in Ambrose, *D-Day*, 314.

[51] See Wienecke Combat Interview; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 53-54; Thomas A Donahue interview synopsis, n.d., The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 7, Folder 53, OU.

[52] Mace quoted in Ambrose, *D-Day*, 237.

[53] "Request for a French decoration for the two battalions of parachutists which landed at Sainte Mere-Eglise."

[54] Gavin quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo*, 249.

[55] One of the two gliders that landed in Ste.-Mère-Église crashed into the roof of a two-story building at the western edge of the town that had been set up as an aid station. The townspeople had already donated huge quantities of food and drink, much of which was stored in the aid station for use as needed. Captain Lyle Britain Putnam, the 2/505th Battalion surgeon, recalled that the glider fell through the roof and all its contents, a jeep, ammunition, and some troopers, landed right on top of the stockpiled food. "In the midst of all this, I saw my sergeant (a huge specimen of muscle and generally impassive efficiency) throw his helmet down, sit in the middle of ruined food and drink, and combine profuse tears with abundant profanity and a dissertation of Fate." Putnam questionnaire.

[56] DeMayo questionnaire.

[57] Jack Tallerday questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 46, OU.

[58] Charles W. Mason questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 19, OU.

[59] Except where noted see Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 61 and 64-65.

[60] Allen Langdon to Clay Blair, 17 October 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "Langdon, Allen," USAMHI.

[61] Mark Alexander to Clay Blair, 9 June 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Alexander, Mark J.," USAMHI.

[62] William E. Ekman questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 1, OU.

[63] Wienecke Combat Interview. Although he assumed command of the battalion while still in Italy, Vandervoort remained a major until the day of the jump into Normandy. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel on the flight line.

[64] Putnam questionnaire.

[65] Gavin Diary, 11 February 1944.

[66] Ibid., 13 April 1944.

[67] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 7.

[68] Putnam questionnaire.

[69] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 56-57 and Benjamin H. Vandervoort questionnaire and attached untitled manuscript, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 9, Folder 1, OU.

[70] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 56-57; Vandervoort questionnaire and untitled manuscript; Combat Interview "Neuville-au-Plain," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[71] See statement by Keil in Blumentritt et al, *Fighting the Invasion*, 181-182.

[72] Vandervoort untitled manuscript and Theodore L. Peterson to Cornelius Ryan, 22 March 1959, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 29, OU.

[73] Vandervoort untitled manuscript.

[74] According to Stephen Ambrose, Niland's brother, a lieutenant in the 4th Infantry Division, was killed that same morning on UTAH beach and a second brother was killed that same week in Burma. The fourth Niland brother, Fritz, was in the 101st and subsequently "snatched out of the front line by the Army." Hence, the basis for the movie *Saving Private Ryan*. Ambrose, *D-Day*, 316-317.

[75] Vandervoort untitled manuscript; Peterson to Ryan, 22 March 1959; Combat Interview "Neuville-au-Plain." Sebastian, Smitson and Kelly were eventually captured. In his letter to Ryan, Peterson also recalled seeing Vandervoort in the area. Having obviously returned to the scene of the fight after ordering Peterson's platoon forward, Vandervoort was sitting in a jeep "just as calm as you [can] be talking on his radio" and directing the fire of the 57mm antitank gun and a nearby machine gun in support of Peterson and Turnbull.

[76] Wienecke Combat Interview.

[77] Sergeant Bill Dunfee quoted in Astor, *June 6, 1944*, 118.

[78] Except where noted see Wienecke Combat Interview; Combat Interview "Attack on Hill 20 by 'I' Company," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[79] See Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 109-110; Edson D. Raff questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 32, OU; Combat Interview "South of Ste. Mere Eglise," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[80] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 66.

[81] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 67 and Combat Interview "South of Ste. Mere Eglise."

[82] Raff questionnaire.

[83] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 68.

[84] Combat Interview "South of Ste. Mere Eglise."

[85] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "History of Division Headquarters and Headquarters Company in Operation 'NEPTUNE,' " 31 July 1944, 382-HQ-0.3, Box 12447, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[86] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 68-69. In a combat interview conducted soon after the battle, Raff stated that after the insertion of the first echelon he called the commanding general of the 4th Infantry Division and asked him to send a message to the rear stating that no more glider missions should come in on landing zone 'W.' Combat Interview "South of Ste. Mere Eglise."

[87] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 68-69; "Narrative Report," n.d., 382-FA(320), Box 12436, Record Group 407, NARA II; Memorandum, Headquarters, 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, "Historical Record 319th Glider FA Bn for June, 1944," n.d., 382-FA(319)-0.3, Box 12434, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[88] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 69-70.

[89] Richard Brigham Johnson, "RBJ's Adventures in Normandy, June, 1944: Written by RBJ December 1976, at the request of his children," December 1976, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "D-Day Story by an R.B.J. (Richard) letter to Richard by Dick," USAMHI.

[90] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 70-71. After 'Hackensack' there were several other small-scale glider and parachute insertions, all into landing zone 'W' which by that time had been totally secured. On 9 June two gliders with badly needed signal equipment arrived successfully. On 10 June, six Wacos carrying jeeps and over six tons of equipment made another successful landing. On 12 June five Wacos landed and were immediately followed by one stick of fifteen paratroopers. Finally, on 13 June, eleven Wacos with ammunition and equipment were flown in. See Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 78.

[91] Jones quoted in Ambrose, *D-Day*, 220.

[92] Ernest Leffel Gee questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 5, OU.

[93] Melvin quoted in Drez, *Voices of D-Day*, 146.

[94] *Operation Neptune*, Annex D, Appendix 1.

[95] Memorandum, Headquarters 82nd Airborne Division, 28 July 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Personal File Jan-Jul 44," USAMHI. Ridgway spoke for both divisions in his capacity as the ranking American airborne officer in theater.

[96] See Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 189; Coyle questionnaire; Reminiscence of Clinton Riddle in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 154. By act of Congress, glider troopers were to be awarded glider-flight pay on par with paratrooper jump pay. According to Pierce, the troopers received word of this award in late June 1944. Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 186.

[97] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 342.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Vandervoort untitled manuscript.

[100] Benjamin H. Vandervoort, "Waverly W. Wray, Ste Mère Eglise, Normandy, June 7, 1944," n.d., The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 55, Folder "Vandervoort, Benjamin," USAMHI.

[101] Except where noted see Vandervoort untitled manuscript and "Waverly W. Wray." For his actions that day, Wray was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. There is a movement now underway by surviving 82nd veterans to have that upgraded to a Medal of Honor.

[102] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 342.

[103] Vandervoort untitled manuscript.

[104] Putnam questionnaire.

[105] Ekman questionnaire.

[106] Bass to Ryan, 20 March 1959.

[107] Otis L. Sampson, "Destination," n.d., p. 17, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Letters to Gavin, Comments and Inquiries about D-Day mentioned from 'Longest Day,' " USAMHI.

[108] Except where noted see Combat Interview "Concluding Actions at Ste. Mere Eglise," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Vandervoort untitled manuscript; Coyle questionnaire.

[109] Sampson, "Destination," 18.

[110] Vandervoort untitled manuscript.

[111] Gavin quoted in Langdon, *"Ready,"* 64.

[112] Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 93.

Chapter Thirteen
You Crossed That Causeway

Upon reading these accounts, one cannot fail to be impressed by the significant results achieved by the little groups of men . . . who advanced in the opening minutes of operation NEPTUNE against whatever enemy confronted them without asking whether they were outnumbered, and then held their ground waiting for the larger forces to come up. Without drawing any conclusions as to the merits of the tactical argument by either side, it is enough to point out that had these small fractions not acted so, much less would have been accomplished by the airborne forces.

Anonymous SHAEF Historical Officer[1]

An underlying assumption of the 82nd's plan, informed by intelligence that placed the main concentration of German mobile units much farther west on the peninsula, was that the Merderet River crossing sites at la Fière and Chef du Pont would fall quickly (in a narrative that appears to have been written coincident with the events as they occurred, Vandervoort noted " '[w]e don'[t] think that in our immediate area [there] are many enemy troops—we estimate about two companies' ").[2] Dropping two parachute regiments west of the river would, after all, place both sites behind friendly lines (defined as the area contained within the division's airhead). The Douve, which lay to the south and west of the intended division area, and not the Merderet was to be the main line of resistance. But when the drops went awry so did the plan and once the German forces recovered from their surprise they made a rush for the Merderet with la Fière and Chef du Pont their points of aim (la Fière was a little over two miles due west of Ste.-Mère-Église while Chef du Pont was two-and-a-half miles southwest of the town).

Meanwhile the hundreds of troopers in the marshes north of la Fière had also to recover from surprise, a surprise brought about by their being dropped so wide of the mark and in water that, in many places, was over their heads. Predominantly from the 507th and 508th, these troopers struggled from their parachute harnesses, formed up in groups large and small and waded and swam to the only recognizable, and dry, landmark in the area, a raised railroad embankment silhouetted against the sky. Running in a north-south direction, this embankment was not only a rallying point, it also became a major thoroughfare used by the troopers to get themselves back on track. Because of the detailed sand tables they had studied in England, they knew that by following the railroad south they would eventually come to the la Fière-Ste.-Mère-Église road at a point approximately 1,000 yards east of the la Fière bridge. From there they could move due west to la Fière or southwest to Chef du Pont and at both places cross the Merderet and link up with their parent units at or near their assigned objectives.

Notes for this chapter are found on pages 350 through 354.

The scene was set, therefore, for a head-on clash of opposing forces, each bent on securing two innocuous bridges that had suddenly become critical terrain. In German hands these bridges would be the major arteries through they could rush reinforcements against UTAH beach and Ste.-Mère-Église. In American hands, they would seal the outer perimeter of the VII Corps defensive front and eventually serve as sally ports through which American armor and mechanized infantry could launch an offensive across the base of the Cotentin Peninsula.

The bridge at la Fière was, in the words of one veteran, "a smallish stone affair and little more than a large culvert."[3] Taking it was the mission of Lieutenant John J. Dolan's A Company, 1/505th. Flying in a nine-plane serial that kept perfect formation, avoided enemy flak, slowed to the correct drop speed, and descended to the correct drop altitude, A Company jumped squarely onto drop zone 'O.' "We hit our drop zone right on the nose," wrote Dolan after the war, "because within twenty minutes to one-half hour I knew our exact location."[4] Despite the accuracy of the drop, however, assembly was slow because of the hedgerows. So Dolan waited for his troopers to filter in to the company assembly area until finally, with over ninety percent of A Company in hand, he gave the order to move out. It was an hour before dawn on D-Day.[5]

A Company headed south from the drop zone with First Platoon in the lead. It had not gone far before it hit the east-west la Fière-Ste.-Mère-Église road, where the troopers saw their first enemy soldier in France, a German motorcyclist who sped by hell bent for Ste.-Mère-Église. It appears that this unexpected encounter caused some confusion in the A Company ranks for soon thereafter Dolan discovered that he had lost contact with a portion of his lead platoon. Undeterred, Dolan put Third Platoon in the lead, crossed to the south side of the road, and turned west. A combat veteran with a good eye for terrain, Dolan halted his troopers several hundred yards short of the bridge at the edge of an open field some 100 yards deep and 75 yards wide. Figuring that if there was an enemy force defending the bridge (and the German motorcyclist certainly indicated there were, at least, some enemy still in the area) this would be a likely kill zone, Dolan ordered one of his platoon leaders, Lieutenant Donald G. Coxon, to send his scouts out to reconnoiter the far wood line. Unwilling to order his men to do something he would not do, Coxon led the reconnaissance party himself. At a point just short of the far wood line, Coxon's three-man patrol was taken under fire by a hidden machine gun. One scout was killed instantly while Coxon and the second scout were at first wounded and then finished by German snipers as they attempted to crawl to cover.[6]

Since he now knew the approximate location of the enemy, Dolan's next move was to use a portion of his company to pin the Germans in place by fire while the remainder skirted around the open area to get on the German flank. Dolan led the flanking movement himself, taking his Third Platoon with him. On point was Major James P. McGinity, the 1/505th's executive officer, who had joined A Company somewhere en route. Dolan led the Third Platoon around the perimeter of the open area, expecting to come up on the German machine gun from the flank when a burst of fire from another direction killed McGinity and sent the rest of Dolan's flanking element to ground. Taking fire from two directions, Dolan and the Third Platoon were pinned down for over an hour. During that time another A Company officer was killed, Lieutenant Robert F. McLaughlin, who at the time was attempting to go to the aid of his radioman, Corporal Frank Busa, who was also killed.[7]

Meanwhile, by moving along the north side of the la Fière-Ste.-Mère-Église road, Dolan's lost platoon made it all the way to the bridge, but adjacent to the bridge was a stone-walled manor that the Germans had turned into a strongpoint. When the troopers of the lost platoon tried to make a go for the bridge, fire from the manor drove them off and they withdrew behind some nearby hedgerows. The advance of Dolan's A Company, split as it was into three separate groups, had come to an abrupt halt.

Unbeknownst to Dolan help was nearby. Approximately sixty troopers from G Company, 3/507th under their commander, Captain F. B. 'Ben' Schwartzwalder, were also maneuvering toward the la Fière bridge on the south side of the road, having arrived in the area via the railroad embankment. Although the timing is uncertain, Schwartzwalder's group may have arrived slightly before Dolan's and it, too, had taken fire and gone to ground but in the maze-like terrain each group remained oblivious to the presence of the other although they could not have been separated by more than a few score yards. Because he had traveled the railroad embankment, however, Schwartzwalder knew something that Dolan did not—that reinforcements were readily at hand, just several hundred yards to the rear. Schwartzwalder therefore made his way back to the point where the railroad intersected the la Fière-Ste.-Mère-Église road in search of help. He found there Colonel Lindquist, the 508th regimental commander, who had formed the troopers collecting at that point into three companies (Lindquist had also traveled the railroad). When Schwartzwalder reported that his force was pinned down and unable to take the bridge on its own Lindquist organized a hasty attack. Schwartzwalder was to return to his company and renew his push on the bridge from the south of the road while Lindquist sent a second force, composed mostly of B Company, 1/508th troopers, to attack the bridge from the north. The attack was set for 1200 hours.[8]

Meanwhile, Dolan had been able to regroup the part of his company he had with him south of the road and was in the process of organizing his own attack on the bridge. What resulted was a confused affair that saw paratroopers from three separate companies and three different regiments maneuvering toward the same objective. By that time it appears that all the Germans in the area had fallen back to the manor next to the bridge. As directed by Lindquist, Schwartzwalder led his company south of the manor, passed completely by the strongpoint, took out several enemy outposts, and advanced all the way to the bridge and river beyond. Simultaneously several B Company, 1/508th troopers actually fought their way inside the manor itself, entering through a cellar where they exchanged fire with the Germans above by shooting through the floor. And while that fight was raging inside, a third group of paratroopers from Dolan's A Company (it is not certain whether these were troopers who had been with Dolan the entire time or members of Dolan's lost platoon), reinforced with some recent arrivals from the 1/505th battalion headquarters, assaulted enemy positions outside in the manor's courtyard. In the end, some seventeen Germans were taken prisoner, another eight were either killed or wounded, and the east end of the la Fière bridge was firmly in American hands.[9]

The troopers assisting Dolan's A Company during the final assault on the manor were part of a large group of 1/505th troopers that had arrived at the bridge under their battalion commander, Major Francis Caesar Augustus Kellam. As the ranking officer present, Kellam took charge of the confused situation, set his troopers to securing the area, and prepared to defend. When Gavin arrived a few minutes later, Kellam told him

that he felt he had more than enough combat power to hold the bridge and that he would have the entire area firmly in hand in less than two hours.[10]

As was true for most troopers that morning, Gavin's journey to la Fière had been most eventful. He had landed in the marsh north of la Fière, although on the west bank of the Merderet proper. Initially confused about his exact whereabouts (like so many others, he mistook the flooded Merderet for the much larger Douve) he eventually got oriented and proceeded to collect as many men and as much equipment as possible. Within two hours he had with him over 150 troopers, mostly from the 507th (finding Gavin in the dark marsh, recalled Bill Walton, who had jumped from Gavin's plane "was like finding 'Daddy'—it really was") as well as Lieutenant Colonels Arthur A. Maloney, the 507th's executive officer and Edwin J. Ostberg, the 1/507th commander.[11] The sound of gunfire emanating from the direction of Ste.-Mère-Église convinced him that his best course of action would be to cross the marsh, if possible, and march toward the fight. To this end he dispatched his aide, Captain Hugo Olson, on a reconnaissance mission to find a passable route while he remained behind to collect additional men and equipment. When Olson returned he reported that although it was deep in places, the marsh was passable and that the raised railroad embankment was not far off. After one last effort to retrieve an antitank gun from a glider that had crashed nearby, Gavin led his men east through the waist-deep water. By that time dawn was approaching and the Germans were firing at anything that moved. Still Gavin pushed his men onward, ignoring the fire, and succeeded in getting all of them safely to the railroad embankment.[12] One member of the group, Lieutenant Thomas Graham, recalled the difficult journey.

> 'I'm sure many of the others like me were both excited and scared. I had cramps in both my legs. I didn't know whether I could make the next step, and I believe others felt the same. The general was out in front, and when you have someone like that leading, you know you're going to make it. And we all did.'[13]

When Gavin arrived at the point where the railroad intersected the la Fière-Ste.-Mère-Église road he ran into troopers from the 1/505th rushing westward toward the bridge. When he asked them where they were going he was told that the battalion's lead elements were engaged at the bridge, that Major Kellam was on the scene, and that Kellam wanted his entire battalion to come to his location. Moving forward to get a feel for the situation himself, Gavin found Kellam at the bridge with most of his battalion present, confident he could hold. Satisfied that the situation at la Fière was under control, Gavin led his ad hoc force south toward Chef du Pont. At first he contemplated finding some boats with which to ferry his troopers back across the Merderet so that they could attack la Fière and Chef du Pont from the west bank. A Frenchman he met along the way told Gavin that he could perhaps get his hands on two small rowboats, but advised against a crossing; the thick marsh grass would slow the boats considerably and make the troopers in them sitting ducks for the German forces he knew were on the opposite bank in considerable strength. But, continued the Frenchman, the Germans had evacuated Chef du Pont and hence a force rushed there could possibly gain possession of the town and the adjacent bridge before the Germans could recover. Turning to Ostberg, Gavin told him to take

half the force he had with him, approximately seventy-five troopers, and make the attempt.[14]

Whether the Frenchman's information was inaccurate or Ostberg's force was simply too late is unknown, but when Ostberg's troopers arrived at Chef du Pont they ran into heavy sniper fire and got bogged down. (According to Gavin the green troopers had a tendency to duck into doorways instead of advancing aggressively, which slowed their advance considerably). Sensing that his opportunity to take the bridge, which was on the western outskirts of Chef du Pont, would pass if he allowed the Germans time to organize an even stronger defense, Ostberg led his men in a charge.[15] Captain Roy Creek, the E Company, 2/507th commander, was there.

> We were too late. Two officers reached the bridge and were both shot. One toppling off the bridge into the water. The other falling on the eastern approach. The officer toppling into the river was Col. Ostberg. He was rescued shortly afterward by two soldiers of the 507 and lived to fight again. (The other officer was dead).[16]

The Germans defending the bridge did so from a string of well-camouflaged foxholes at both ends of the bridge that were situated to take advantage of the undulating terrain. Hence when the paratroopers charged they suddenly found themselves in the midst of a nest of enemy positions. A wild mêlée ensued and shots were exchanged at pointblank range. Sometime early in the fight two German soldiers attempted to surrender and stood up in their foxholes only to be shot and killed by the onrushing paratroopers. Many felt that had this not occurred German resistance at the bridge would have quickly dissipated and the division would have been in full possession of the crossing at Chef du Pont and that the subsequent fight there and at la Fière could have been avoided. Although it can never be proved that the latter two points would have played out Captain Creek, who took temporary command of the troopers at Chef du Pont after Ostberg was wounded, challenged this criticism.

> Having witnessed this action at close range, I would defy anyone to make a split[-]second judgment on what to do when an enemy soldier jumps out of a foxhole 5 to 20 feet from you in the heat of heavy firing on both sides and in your own very first fight for your life. I support the action taken by our troops under these conditions and circumstances and to this day, years later, I don't know if the enemy was trying to surrender or not. I observed this whole action at very close range, and in my opinion, any enemy shot during this attack as close and intense as it was at times had waited too long to surrender. He was committed, as the attacker was, to a fight for survival.[17]

Shortly after Ostberg's failed charge, which had cost the Americans eleven dead and twenty-three wounded, Lieutenant Colonel Maloney arrived with another seventy-five troopers and attempted a second charge on the bridge. This charge got as far as the western terminus of the bridge before it, too, was stopped, this time by a hail of grenades. The fight at Chef du Pont then settled down into an exchange of small arms fire, the two

sides separated by no more than the length of the bridge itself. At 1700 hours a runner arrived with a message from Gavin: Maloney was to return with his troopers to la Fière immediately. Creek was to remain at Chef du Pont with his small force and some automatic weapons Maloney left behind and hold as long as possible, but if his position became untenable he, too, was to fall back on la Fière.[18]

With Maloney's departure Creek was left with thirty-four combat effective troopers. Perhaps sensing his vulnerability, the Germans on the opposite bank brought up an artillery piece and began peppering the American positions with fire, further reducing Creek's numbers to twenty. Adding to his difficulties, there also appeared on the east side of the river, a few hundred yards to Creek's rear, a substantial force of *Ostruppen* that had hitherto avoided contact but, seeing the American forces dwindling, most likely felt it time to attempt a link up with their comrades across the river. Cut off and pinned down, Creek prepared his troopers for a fight to the last when salvation dropped literally from the heavens. A few minutes after 2100 hours on D-Day, during the insertion of the first echelon of the 'Elmira' mission there landed near Creek's position a lone, lost glider. Scrambling from the wreckage were several troopers from C Battery, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion who had with them one of the 57mm antitank guns, which they quickly put into operation and turned on the German howitzer across the river. After a few well-placed shots the German gun fell silent. Creek sensed that with their big gun out of commission the German infantry on the west bank of the Merderet would sit tight which allowed him to readjust his defenses to meet the enemy threat massing to his rear. There then appeared a second salvation, albeit one less heavenly—a group of about 100 paratroopers, mostly from G Company, 3/508th, who joined with Creek's men to drive off the *Ostruppen*. With his rear secure and momentum and numbers (and luck) on his side, Creek felt it propitious to take one more shot at the bridge. Instead of a third headlong rush, however, he opted for a more deliberate approach. He first positioned a portion of his force on a small rise just north of the bridge. On order, this force opened fire with the object of keeping the heads of the enemy down while Creek led the remainder of his troopers in an assault across the bridge itself. So devastating was the fire from the covering force, however, that every German defender, with the exception of two or three who fled, was either killed or wounded. When Creek led his assault force onto the bridge and causeway he counted over forty enemy dead, shot in their foxholes. With both ends of the Chef du Pont bridge in hand, Creek settled his force down to defend. The cost for the bridge had been high. Creek lost thirteen troopers killed and had another twenty-three wounded. He was much too weak to do anything but hold what he and his troopers had fought so hard to get.[19]

When Gavin recalled Maloney and his troopers from Chef du Pont, it was in response to a major German counterattack at la Fière, the more critical of the two Merderet crossings from the division's perspective since, with it in hand, the enemy would have a straight shot into Ste.-Mère-Église. By the time Maloney arrived back at la Fière, sometime around dusk on D-Day, the fight was over, at least for that day. The bridge, however, had yet to be secured and would not be until 9 June. In the interval there would rage three days of bloody, close quarters combat back and forth across its span, combat comparable in every way to that experienced by those who stormed OMAHA Beach. There would also be displayed, according to Gavin, "more gallantry per square foot . . . than probably in any other single action of the war."[20] Ironically, it was a battle that

might never have had to occur, for American paratroopers had occupied the west end of the bridge earlier in the day without a fight.

Following the drop there collected on the west bank of the Merderet, in an orchard just north of the la Fière crossing, approximately fifty troopers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Charles J. Timmes, the 2/507th commander. Shortly before daybreak on D-Day, Timmes led this small group in an attack on Amfreville (about a mile and a half northwest of la Fière), his battalion's objective, but was driven back by automatic weapons fire. Requiring substantial reinforcement if he was to take Amfreville, Timmes dispatched patrols in all directions in search of additional men. He also sent a ten-man patrol under Lieutenant Louis Levy south from the orchard toward the western end of the la Fière bridge (one of the 507th's secondary missions was to assist in securing this crossing site). Lieutenant Joseph Kormylo, who had with him a machine gun crew and a few other troopers, joined Levy en route and the two led their combined force to Cauquigny, a small hamlet at the bridge's western terminus. As they approached they could hear small arms fire from the east bank and decided, therefore, to take up defensive positions in the church courtyard at Cauquigny and await events. Shortly thereafter some forty troopers led by two officers arrived and joined the Levy-Kormylo group (these were more than likely troopers from B Company, 1/508th, one of the three companies that had maneuvered on the manor on the other side of the bridge). At that juncture Levy decided to conduct a personal reconnaissance, most likely to see if, now with a larger force at his disposal, he could somehow influence events on the opposite shore where he still heard scattered gunfire. When he walked out on the road and peered through his binoculars, however, he was greeted with the sight of a second group of paratroopers, this one much larger than that which had just joined him. It was Schartzwalder's G Company with Lieutenant John W. Marr on point. Marr had just stepped out onto the bridge and was headed across. Levy moved to meet him and, following a short discussion, continued on to the east bank. There he conferred with a field grade officer (most likely Major Kellam) and then returned to Cauquigny. By that time all of Schwartzwalder's company had crossed bringing the number of troopers at the western end of the bridge to about 150. Backed by Kellam's troopers on the east bank, there were all told some 300-400 troopers securing both ends of the bridge. Unfortunately Schwartzwalder was bent on joining his regiment and therefore decided to continue north toward Timmes's position and took with him his company as well as some of the troopers from the 508th. In a matter of minutes, what was a more than ample force to defend Cauquigny and the west end of the bridge was reduced to little more than an under-strength platoon. And it was then that the lead elements of the *1057th Regiment* of the *91st Division*, a combined infantry-tank force, came marching up from the west. A short, sharp fight ensued during which the few remaining paratroopers destroyed one German tank (actually a captured French Renault tank) before being overwhelmed. Levy, Kormylo, and eight enlisted men withdrew north toward Timmes's position. Others withdrew eastward into the marsh and waded and swam their way back to the east bank.[21]

Not long after taking Cauquigny, the Germans mounted an assault on the eastern end of the la Fière bridge, intent on forcing their way across the span and breaking through to Ste.-Mère-Église (it was this attack that prompted Gavin's recall of Maloney from Chef du Pont). Fortunately for the Americans defending there the delay imposed by Levy and his small band on the onrushing Germans allowed Kellam time and ample warning to

organize a hasty defense in depth. Dolan's A Company, dug in at the edge of the marsh on either side of the bridge, comprised Kellam's forward line of resistance. Behind A Company, positioned on a slight rise from which it could support Dolan's troopers with fire, was the remainder of Kellam's battalion along with his battalion mortars. Kellam was further reinforced by an engineer platoon from B Company, 307th Airborne Engineers, who had with them a 57mm antitank gun and ammunition they had salvaged earlier that morning. Kellam sighted the gun on the road about 150 yards behind Dolan's troopers so that it could fire directly onto the bridge and over the heads of the entrenched A Company troopers.[22]

Dolan's troopers occupied a defensive frontage that was approximately seventy-five yards wide. Given so narrow a sector, Dolan organized his company defense with two platoons forward and one platoon in reserve, the latter ready to plug any gaps in the line. Anticipating that the Germans would lead with tanks Dolan also positioned two two-man bazooka teams directly in the marsh, one on either side of the bridge span itself. He also barricaded the bridge with an abandoned truck his troopers found in the area and surrounded the truck with antitank mines. In this manner Dolan and Kellam hoped to negate the enemy's numerical and matériel advantage. If the Germans led with tanks, they would be vulnerable to the mines, bazooka fire, and antitank gun fire. If the Germans led with infantry and engineers (who would presumably attempt to clear the mines) they would run into a murderous hail of small arms, machine gun, and mortar fire. And, because of the width and depth of the marsh, there was only one way to get either wheeled or tracked vehicles from Cauquigny to Ste.-Mère-Église—over the bridge and through the 1/505th's defenses.[23]

The Germans preceded their assault on the bridge with a rolling artillery barrage, which commenced at approximately 1700 hours. When it fell Kellam and his S-3, Captain Dale S. Roysden, were forward inspecting the A Company defenses. Both were killed in the initial volley leaving Lieutenant Dolan in temporary command of the battalion. Moving forward behind the barrage were three Renault tanks followed by some 200 infantrymen. After slowly making their way onto the span itself, moving right behind their falling artillery, the attackers halted just short of Dolan's improvised barricade. The lead tank commander, attempting to get a better view of what lay before him, emerged from the top hatch of his tank and was immediately killed by American machine gun fire. In the ensuing confusion the A Company bazooka teams—Privates First Class John D. Bolderson and Lenold Peterson and Privates Gordon C. Pryne and Marcus Heim—went to work. Emerging from their foxholes and standing in full view of the accompanying German infantry, the bazooka teams fired shot after shot into the halted tanks. "I cannot understand why all four of them were not killed," recalled one eyewitness.

> They fired and reloaded with the precision of well-oiled machinery. I don't think that either team wasted a shot. The first tank received several direct hits. A tread was knocked off and within a matter of minutes it was on fire. . . .
>
> The bazooka-teams [*sic*] soon went to work on the second tank. Within 30 seconds it too was on fire. Peterson put another round into the tank's turret as it swung around to take a pot shot at him. As Peterson was

> running out of rockets he sent Marcus Heim over the other side of the bridge to get extra ammunition. Heim ran through a hail of enemy bullets only to find the Bolderson bazooka with a hole blown through it. He picked up a bag of rockets he found and ran back to Peterson's side. They then hit the second tank seven more times. As the panzer crew tried to back away, their tank burst into flames, incinerating the crew.[24]

Meanwhile the third tank, which lagged about fifty yards behind the lead two, was knocked out by the 57mm antitank gun.[25]

With no armor to cover their advance the German infantry withdrew out of range, regrouped, and began plastering the American positions with concentrated mortar and artillery fire. They also brought up an 88mm gun, the most feared in the German arsenal, and employed it in a direct fire mode against the entrenched paratroopers. "The German technique," recalled Gavin, "was to fire [the 88s] directly at the infantry kicking up tons of dust and smoke" so thick that "weapons were frequently clogged and jammed." The Germans 88s also had a "tremendous psychological effect" because "[t]he interval between the scream of the incoming projectile and the tremendous impact and detonation was very small" and when they hit "[f]ragments ricocheted with unusual velocity" producing many casualties.[26] Lieutenant William R. Oakley was one such casualty. Oakley had been Gavin's aide prior to Normandy but had requested transfer to a line unit. He was hit by shrapnel that produced a fist-sized hole in his back. His platoon sergeant, William Dale Owens, found Oakley, bandaged him up, and administered morphine. Owens then called for a couple of men to carry his lieutenant to the rear, but Oakley refused and insisted on making it back on his own. Before leaving, he told Owens to hold the bridge at all costs and then, turning to his troopers, yelled in parting " 'Sergeant Owens is now in command, what ever you do, obey him and stick with him, good luck to all, I am very proud of every one, I'll see you in England.' " Oakley got as far as the aid station in Ste.-Mère-Église, where he went into shock and died.[27]

When word reached the 505th command post that Kellam had been killed Lieutenant Colonel Mark Alexander, the regimental executive officer, rushed to la Fière to survey the situation. On the way he met Gavin who told him to take command of the battalion and hold the east end of the bridge at all costs. Collecting lost troopers as he moved toward la Fière for use as emergency reinforcements, Alexander found when he arrived that the German attack had already been repulsed although enemy artillery and mortar fire was continuing to fall on the American positions. Dolan had repositioned his forward lines slightly back from the marsh to avoid the incoming shells, but otherwise the east end of the bridge was still securely in American hands. Alexander approved Dolan's move and then began organizing the disparate groups of troopers he had brought with him and others he found already there (including several from the 101st) into a coherent force that could bolster the hard-pressed 1/505th. He also found his heaviest weapon, the lone 57mm antitank gun, abandoned and lying in a ditch with two holes in its front armor plate, the obvious result of direct hits from the German tanks. Alexander grabbed the three nearest troopers, told them to get the gun back into operation, and since the gun's sight was also missing, to use bore sight aim in the event of another German tank attack.[28]

For the remainder of the day and throughout the ensuing night the Germans stayed on their side of the river and continued to pound the American positions with mortar and artillery fire. The only other action that night occurred at about 0200 hours, 7 June, when a lone tank inched its way onto the bridge, most likely in an attempt to drag away one or both of the burnt out hulls blocking the roadway. Alerted by the clank of treads Sergeant Owens, alone and armed with but his individual weapon and two Gammon grenades, crawled through the marsh to a position from which he hoped to disable the tank. From a distance of some thirty to forty yards, Owens rose and threw his grenades. Although he missed with both the resulting explosions convinced the German tank commander to abandon his efforts.[29]

At about 1000 hours, 7 June, the intensity of the German shelling suddenly increased, prelude to a second assault on the bridge. In the lead were two Renault tanks. A battalion of infantry followed. The German column got all the way onto the bridge before the lead tank exploded, most likely the result of fire from the 57mm gun Alexander had salvaged the day before. With the span now blocked by three dead tanks and the truck Dolan's men had placed there, the German advance bogged down. Braving the still falling artillery and mortar shells, which was "coming in like machine gun fire," the paratroopers rose from their holes and laid down a withering fusillade. From behind the tank hulls the enemy infantry returned fire and even attempted several rushes against the east bank. Sergeant Owens, who Gavin described as "one of the best fighting men in the division," ranged the front line, encouraging his troopers, redistributing ammunition, tending the wounded, and manning several different weapons.[30]

> The machine gun I had [wrote Owens] was so hot it quit firing. I took Pvt. McClatchy's BAR, he had been wounded earlier, and fired it until I ran out of ammo. I then had a machine gun that belonged to a couple of men that took a very near hit, they were killed and the gun had no tripod so I rested it across a pile of dirt and used it along with . . . one other machine gun and our 60 m.m. mortor [*sic*], we stopped them but they had got to within 25 yards of us.[31]

No one is certain how long the battle raged although it continued well into the afternoon. Finally, after suffering some 200 casualties, the Germans requested a truce to evacuate their dead and wounded. Alexander agreed and thirty minutes of peace enveloped la Fière. Taking advantage of the respite the Germans not only evacuated their casualties, they also withdrew all the way to Cauquigny, never again to try another assault.

It had been a costly fight for the Americans as well. Dolan's company alone had seventeen killed and three times that number wounded. Those who remained were tired and jumpy, having been denied sleep by the incessant artillery and mortar fire they had had to endure ever since the first German attack the day before. Moreover, the intensity of the German assaults was something none of the troopers had ever experienced, including those who had been with the division from the outset. Even Gavin, who made his place as far forward as possible and saw firsthand the beating Dolan's troopers were taking questioned their ability to withstand another assault. Bill Walton recalled being in the general's foxhole command post at the time. Gavin turned to him and said, " '[y]ou

know, you don't have to stay here.' " When Walton asked why, Gavin replied, " '[w]e can't hold . . . but we are not going to give up . . . we're going to keep at it.' "[32] Privately, Sergeant Owens had the same thoughts. After enduring the brunt of two German assaults, some of Owens's troopers suggested that it might perhaps be time to withdraw. " 'No, we will wait for orders,' " Owens barked. " 'We haven't been told to withdraw.' " But with ammunition running low and casualties mounting Owens was not certain he could hold so he sent a runner to Dolan requesting guidance. " 'Stay where you are,' " Dolan told the runner and, in a handwritten note for Owens's eyes only added, " 'I don't know a better place than this to die.' "[33] Fortunately for the A Company troopers the Germans did not make a third assault and later that evening Gavin withdrew the weary 1/505th troopers and replaced them with an ad hoc force of 507th troopers he had collected.[34]

The Germans were still in strength on the west bank but Gavin was too weak to attempt a counterattack, so he held what he had at la Fière and sent Lindquist south to Chef du Pont to take control of the situation there. Earlier in the day he had made radio contact with Lieutenant Colonel Thomas J. B. Shanley, the 2/508th commander, who told Gavin that he was occupying a strong defensive position with about 300 troopers on Hill 30, a small rise on the west bank of the Merderet almost directly opposite the Chef du Pont bridge. Since D-Day, the various groups of paratroopers that eventually coalesced under Shanley's command had been engaging a significant number of German forces, thereby drawing off strength that could otherwise have been used against either of the two critical bridges. Shanley also endured several attacks against his Hill 30 bastion and it is doubtless that his position served as something of a buffer between German units farther west and the small force at Chef du Pont. But Shanley was not content to sit pat and wait for the enemy to come to him so he sent out combat patrols that kept the Germans off balance by either destroying or driving off forces that were in the process of massing for attacks on Chef du Pont. One of these combat patrols drove off an entire German howitzer battery by ambushing it while it was preparing its firing positions. Another patrol took on an entire reinforced infantry battalion that was headed straight toward the western end of the Chef du Pont bridge and sent it back in disarray from whence it had come. By 8 June, however, Shanley and his troopers were running low on ammunition, food, water and, above all, plasma for the wounded. Gavin therefore told Lindquist that once he had gotten control of Chef du Pont he was to force his way across the river, link up with Shanley, and then continue north on the west bank of the Merderet to Cauquigny, taking the Germans defending there in flank.[35]

When Lindquist arrived at Chef du Pont on 8 June he found Creek's troopers clinging precariously to the east end of the bridge (although unclear, it is likely that Creek withdrew the small force he had pushed across the bridge on D-Day). He also found that there were fairly large enemy elements both on the east bank south of Chef du Pont and directly opposite the bridge on the far bank. Faced with this situation, Lindquist elected to belay the order to relieve Shanley and focused instead on defeating the enemy on his side of the river. In an interview conducted after the division had been withdrawn from Normandy, Lindquist stated he felt this was the correct course of action because by clearing enemy pockets of resistance south of Chef du Pont he would not only eliminate a threat to the division's southern flank, he could also tie in with the 101st, thereby consolidating the American airhead. Hence, while leaving Shanley's force on its own for

the time being, Lindquist sent two companies under the command of Captain Royal Taylor south with the mission of clearing the area there and linking up with the 101st. Taylor's force was wildly successful—it drove off the Germans massing to the south of Chef du Pont, made contact with the 101st, and took 135 prisoners without a single American loss. Meanwhile Shanley's situation had become increasingly critical and that evening he radioed Lindquist to tell him that he needed an immediate resupply. But with Taylor's force still away to the south, Lindquist replied that although he had the supplies Shanley required, he did not have enough combat power to clear the Chef du Pont causeway to get to Shanley's position. Thus, if Shanley needed the supplies, it fell to him to clear the Chef du Pont causeway and connecting bridge. Lindquist promised artillery support.[36]

Shanley sent Lieutenants Woodrow W. Millsaps and Lloyd L. Polette with thirty men to accomplish the job (Millsaps was in command). Millsaps moved out at around midnight, 8 June. Lindquist had coordinated for a twenty-four-round artillery barrage on the western end of the causeway to cover Millsaps's advance but at the appointed time, about 0230 hours, 9 June, only three rounds landed on the causeway while the rest fell on an undefended island in the middle of the marsh. With no means to call for or adjust additional fires and time running out, Millsaps moved his men forward in the hope that the night would provide the cover that was supposed to have been supplied by the artillery. It was not to be. The German defenders had been alerted by the artillery miscue and illuminated the area with parachute flares that silhouetted Millsaps's troopers in their glare. They then unleashed devastating machine gun fire. Temporarily blinded by the light and exposed to the enemy guns, some of the paratroopers began to bolt to the rear but Millsaps and Polette grabbed them, turned them around, and prepared them for a second advance. The quick-thinking Millsaps had also determined from the arc of the German tracers that although there was a substantial number of enemy in the area, they had been haphazardly positioned and their guns were not mutually supporting. A fast, determined rush could thus get his men into the midst of the enemy and onto the causeway. Working his way from trooper to trooper, Millsaps told each man that on his signal they were to advance at a run and fire on the move. When he was ready, Millsaps stood up, yelled, and charged. No one followed. Returning to his men, Millsaps spent another twenty minutes talking to each trooper. He then initiated a second charge. This time his troopers followed. Faced with this unexpected assault, many of the defenders broke and ran only to be gunned down by the rampaging paratroopers. Other enemy soldiers, who had taken shelter in the few buildings in the area, were shot dead as they ran out the doors. The charge carried Millsaps and his men all the way to the western end of the causeway where Millsaps halted his troopers, positioned them in a defensive perimeter around the entrance to the bridge, and with a Sergeant Kleinfelter in tow continued across to the east side. Side by side the two men shot, grenaded, and bayoneted their way through the enemy in their path. Millsaps was knocked down four times during the mad advance, but each time struggled to his feet and carried on. Kleinfelter was shot six times in the arm and shoulder and began to fall behind from loss of blood. When Millsaps retraced his steps to find out what had happened, the weakened Kleinfelter apologized for his laggardness. Unwilling to leave his comrade, Millsaps urged the stricken sergeant on. The two finally struggled to the east end of the bridge where Millsaps dropped Kleinfelter off for medical aid while he reported to Lindquist.

Unfortunately, replied Lindquist, the bridge and causeway were still under fire from the south and Lindquist felt he could not risk sending the precious supply convoy across. Hence, despite Millsaps's madly heroic charge it was not until the next afternoon, after both Lindquist and Shanley sent out combat patrols to mop up the remaining pockets of German resistance in the area, that the men on Hill 30 received their badly needed supplies. But with link up achieved, both ends of the Chef du Pont crossing were in American hands. The first of the two critical Merderet bridges had fallen.[37]

While Lindquist was clearing the southern half of the division sector, Gavin consolidated the positions around la Fière. He had with him the 507th troopers that were manning defenses on the east side of the river and the 1/325th under Major Teddy H. Sanford, which he placed in a reserve position to the rear. He also knew that on the opposite bank and slightly northwest of the bridge there were two large groups of paratroopers, one under Timmes which by that time numbered approximately 200 troopers and a second under Colonel George V. Millett, the 507th regimental commander, who had with him no fewer than 400 troopers. Gavin had never been enamored of Millett (despite the fact that they were West Point classmates) and while still in England tried to get him relieved because he thought Millett "[l]azy, soft, indolent, [and] lacking leadership necessary for combat." [38] Unfortunately, Gavin was overruled, although his premonition proved correct. Unlike Shanley or Timmes who were also cut off and surrounded but continued to send out patrols to seek out and destroy the enemy, Millett simply sat tight. Besides some minor clashes with passing German units that had stumbled on his hide position, Millett's force was relatively untouched. Ironically, Millett's force had also captured an undefended German supply column that provided him with enough ammunition, water, and food to last a week, to say nothing of an ample supply of cigars and Hennessey. Commanding the largest and best supplied of any of the three forces cut off west of the Merderet, Millett did the least, seemingly content to maintain a low profile and await rescue.[39]

Timmes, meanwhile, continued to act although he was in a much more precarious situation (Gavin originally thought Timmes too timid for command as well but after seeing him in action in Normandy changed his mind, labeling him "a terror in combat").[40] Timmes's force had already sustained twenty-two dead and thirty wounded and Timmes was desperate to save his troopers who were under constant automatic weapons, artillery, and mortar fire. Since he was pinned against the Merderet marsh, he had very little room for maneuver and hence spent the bulk of his effort attempting to find a passage to the east bank. On 7 June Timmes dispatched a patrol under Lieutenant Willard E. Chambers with just that mission but when the patrol returned, minus Chambers, he considered it a failure. But unbeknownst to Timmes, Chambers had continued on alone, found a way across the marsh and reported to Ridgway, who then knew he had three groups of paratroopers on the far bank (Ridgway had intermittent radio contact with Millett and Shanley; Chambers's report was the first he heard of the group under Timmes). With still no contact with anyone outside the orchard he had been occupying since D-Day, Timmes sent out a second patrol with the same mission—find a passage through the marsh. Led by Lieutenant John W. Marr (Schwartzwalder's erstwhile point man), this patrol, too, returned to Timmes's position and reported that Marr and one other man, Private First Class Norman V. Carter, had continued on alone. Like Chambers, Marr and Carter also got through to the opposite bank after some Frenchmen they encountered along the way

informed them of a nearby submerged roadway. When Marr and Carter arrived at the division command post and reported what they had discovered, Ridgway decided to attempt a bold maneuver. Marr would lead Major Teddy H. Sanford's 1/325th troopers, reinforced with nine antitank guns, back across the marsh to Timmes's orchard via the submerged roadway. Meanwhile Ridgway informed Millett by radio that he was to likewise move to Timmes's position and once there the three forces, presumably under Millett's overall command, would attack the la Fière crossing from the northwest, thereby securing the bridge site from the rear.[41]

Moving out at about 2300 hours 8 June, Marr's navigation was unerring and Sanford's troopers made it across the marsh without incident. Once on the west bank, however, they began taking fire from the same positions that had been harassing Timmes. Sanford was prepared for this eventuality. He had instructed Captain Dave Stokely, whose C Company was leading the battalion column, that he was to conduct a feint attack on the German positions to keep them occupied while the remainder of the battalion completed its crossing and moved on to Timmes's orchard. Then, once the last of the column was clear of the marsh, Stokely was to break contact and proceed to the orchard where his company would participate on the attack on Cauquigny with B Company while A Company occupied blocking positions further west in order to stymie German reinforcements. Although a complicated plan even under the best conditions, all was proceeding well until Stokely's troopers ran headlong into a German artillery position as they were swinging into position for the attack on Cauquigny. During the ensuing close-quarters firefight, a platoon from C Company got pinned down in a roadside ditch and was in danger of being overrun. One avenue of escape remained, a break in a hedgerow some forty yards to the rear, but this required the troopers to cross an exposed road that was being raked by German machine gun fire. At this juncture Private First Class Charles N. DeGlopper, armed with his BAR, jumped into action to cover his comrades.

> Scorning a concentration of enemy automatic weapons and rifle fire, [DeGlopper] walked from the ditch onto the road in full view of the Germans, and sprayed the hostile positions with assault fire. He was wounded, but he continued firing. Struck again, he started to fall. . . . Kneeling in the roadway, weakened by his grievous wounds, he leveled his heavy weapon against the enemy and fired burst after burst until killed outright.[42]

For his action, DeGlopper was posthumously awarded the division's first Medal of Honor of World War II and the C Company platoon that had been in danger of annihilation was able to withdraw across the road to safety. By that time, however, the entire 1/325th attack on Cauquigny had come unhinged and Sanford withdrew his men to Timmes's orchard.[43]

Millett and his men never got to the orchard. They had set out at 0300 hours, 9 June, in a long column, and soon thereafter began taking fire and went to ground. Millett, who was at the head of the column, quickly lost control and the column split into a number of smaller groups, all acting independently. In the ensuing confusion Millett was himself cut off and eventually taken prisoner. By 10 June, of the over 400 troopers who set out from Millett's hide position, only 155 made it back to friendly lines.[44]

When word reached Ridgway that Sanford's attack had failed he turned to Gavin and told him to use everything he could lay his hands on to "get the Merderet crossing . . . [and] get it without delay." Time was running out and it was imperative that the la Fière crossing be seized so that the 90th Infantry Division, which by that time had advanced into and around Ste.-Mère-Église, could continue the attack to the west in order to cut the base of the Cotentin Peninsula as envisaged in Bradley's original operational concept. Within four hours Gavin had organized an attack although it was, in his estimation, somewhat of "a rough thing."[45]

For his assault force Gavin grabbed Lieutenant Colonel Charles Carrell's 2/401st from its reserve position east of Chef du Pont. Carrell's troopers were relatively fresh since they had seen very little fighting since arriving in France. It was also the only uncommitted infantry unit in the 82nd. Gavin's plan was simple—Carrell's troopers would conduct a frontal assault across the la Fière bridge following a fifteen-minute tank and artillery bombardment. Gavin had positioned ten or twelve Shermans (accounts differ on the number) on the high ground overlooking the bridge. These were the Shermans from C Company, 746th Tank Battalion that had arrived at Ste.-Mère-Église as part of Raff's task force. Their orders were to start firing their main guns and machine guns at suspected enemy positions on the far bank at 1030 hours. Added to the direct fire of the tanks would be indirect fire from the 75mm and 105mm howitzers of the division's 456th and 320th Field Artillery Battalions, grouped nearby. And providing even more weight to the bombardment was a battalion of 155mm howitzers that Brigadier General John M. Devine, the 90th Infantry Division artillery commander, lent Gavin. All was ready when Carrell arrived at his attack position around 1000 hours. When Gavin briefed him on the plan Carrell turned white and when Carrell, in turn, briefed his officers on the attack he told them he regarded the mission as "impossible."[46] Still the order stood.[47]

The bombardment opened right on schedule. It was devastating. "For about 15 minutes," related Gavin, " we poured everything we had right on top of the German positions. Dust, horses screeching and getting shot up—the Germans had all this horse-drawn stuff. Finally the Germans were coming up out of their foxholes with dust streaming down their faces and blood streaming out of their mouths and coming in surrendering." At 1045 hours, Gavin turned to Carrell and told him to go. " 'I don't think I can do it,' " came the reply, " 'I'm sick.' "[48] Gavin was floored, but without a second thought he relieved Carrell on the spot and put Major Arthur Gardner, a 325th regimental staff officer, in command.

Before he was relieved Carrell had selected Captain John Sauls's G Company to lead the assault. He did not need Carrell's dire prediction to know that this was going to be a bloody affair, but he was determined to do everything he could to increase his chances for success and protect his troopers. To that end, under cover of the bombardment he moved his company forward along a barely discernable trail that skirted the south side of the road to a position directly behind one of the manor's stone walls. Sauls figured that his chances of success, and of his troopers' survival, increased the closer he got to the bridge. While his troopers were tensed and crouched behind the stone wall waiting for the signal to charge, Sauls took another look at his objective. This was no time or place for fire and maneuver. The ground was both too constricted and too open for any tactical finesse. So he passed word back—once the charge started, his troopers were to abandon any pretense of fire and maneuver and simply run as fast as they could to the other side in a "bull-like

rush."[49] Sauls also directed that in order to obtain as much dispersion as possible the company was to peel off by squads, alternating to the left and right side of the road.[50] According to one 325th trooper, despite Sauls's precautions, the charge required the troopers to cover

> 500 yards, directly into the teeth of well-aimed, grazing machine gun and rifle fire, interspersed with mortar and artillery fire. The causeway was little more than a one-lane road with water and marshland on both sides. There was no cover and the few bushes and small trees along the edge of the causeway offered very little concealment.[51]

On Gavin's order and without hesitation, Sauls jumped up and ran through a hole in the stone wall onto the causeway and over the bridge. Following close on his heels was his Second Platoon, most of which made it all the way to the other side, moving at a dead run. The remainder of G Company, however, had been held up. Once the preparatory fires had been lifted the Germans on the far bank recovered their weapons and began returning fire. Some had obviously zeroed in on the hole in the wall through which Sauls's troopers were passing. Private Melvin L. Johnson was hit and killed instantly just as he was climbing through the hole and his body became wedged in the opening. Several minutes passed before Johnson's body could be removed, during which time the intensity of the German fire around the wall opening steadily increased. For several long minutes it appeared as though Sauls and his small band on the far bank would be left on their own. It was another G Company officer, Lieutenant Frank E. Amino, who got the charge started again. Jumping to his feet, he shouted " '[l]et's get up and kill the sons of bitches' " and led the remainder of G Company across the bridge.[52]

Next in line was Captain Charles Murphy's E Company. Murphy had briefed his troopers earlier on what was expected of them but had become so choked up by the end that he could not continue. "All that [he] could say was 'God bless you,' while two big tears rolled down his cheeks," recalled one of his platoon leaders.[53] But when it came time to move Murphy was all business. Having followed the same small trail taken by Sauls, Murphy led his troopers through the wall and onto the causeway immediately behind the last of G Company. By that time the Germans had recovered sufficiently to place interlocking fires on the bridge from both flanks, mowing down the charging troopers "like wheat before a scythe."[54] Ridgway, who was also present, likened the bridge to "a funnel" through which "the Germans were just pouring in the fire . . . we were losing a lot of men . . . the fire was so intense that men were just physically recoiling."[55] Yet, miraculously, the troopers continued to advance.[56]

When it was time for Captain James M. Harney's F Company to cross, the roadway was so congested with the bodies of the dead and wounded that it was impossible to take the bridge and causeway at a dead run. To add to the congestion, moving in the opposite direction were several dozen Germans who had surrendered and been told to throw away their weapons and move toward the American lines unescorted. In addition, one of the tanks that had been providing fire support moved out onto the bridge just as Harney was leading his company over and ran over one of the antitank mines placed there three days before by Dolan. The tank was attempting to clear the way by pushing aside the wreckage already on the bridge (three Renault tanks and an old truck) but instead it

became another burning hulk that further constricted movement. And the explosion all but wiped out Harney's Weapons Platoon. Yet just as had Sauls and Murphy before him, Harney continued to lead his glidermen across. For those observing from the American side, however, it appeared that the assault was losing momentum and was in danger of stopping altogether.[57]

"Something about the laws of physics applies to combat," said Gavin later when speaking of the assault. "A certain amount of inertia will bring [attacking soldiers] to a stop and a certain amount of inertia will make them go."[58] Gavin had prepared for this. Before the first man had set foot on the bridge he alerted a company of 507th paratroopers under Captain R. D. Rae that were occupying foxholes at the edge of the marsh, to be prepared to reinforce the 2/401st's assault if it bogged down. As Gavin described it, "I told Rae now once this thing starts, you watch me and I'll give you an arm signal if the glidermen look to me as though they are not going to make it. I want you to get those troopers up and go across that bridge and take them with you."[59] When he sensed this happening, Gavin signaled Rae to go. With about 80 to 100 troopers following, Rae rushed full speed into the masses on the bridge, sweeping up any glidermen who were still capable of advancing and bringing them with him.[60] One of Rae's officers, Lieutenant James D. Orwin, was particularly memorable as he hustled men to the far side. Orwin had had his steel helmet blown apart by German artillery fire earlier in the day and hence when he ventured onto the causeway he was wearing but his knit cap into which he inexplicably stuck several red roses. In full view of the enemy, Orwin nonchalantly strolled the causeway gathering troopers who, for whatever reason, had temporarily halted and told them " 'Now, fellows, we're all going to the other side. Things are good over there. Walk with me—for I'm a lucky bastard!' "[61]

Incredible courage (though not all as peculiar as that displayed by Orwin) was not uncommon that day at la Fière. The mere effort to propel oneself into the maelstrom of fire that defined the bridge and causeway was, in itself, an act of supreme heroism. Nevertheless accounts of the battle are replete with acts of extraordinary valor which, when taken together with all that was occurring on the bridge, form the only coherent explanation for its success. Lieutenant Donald B. Wason, one of the first men over, was killed as he single-handedly took out a German machine gun position. Nearby Private First Class Frank Thurston silenced a second machine gun nest by shooting the crew with his M-1 one at a time. Lieutenant William H. Condon of F Company, already suffering from an injury he had sustained in the glider landing, was hit in the head and shoulder by shrapnel when crossing with his company but refused evacuation. Another lieutenant, Joseph H. Shealy, was also hit by mortar fragments but continued to lead his platoon to the far shore where he eventually dropped dead from loss of blood. Sergeant Albert Morrison, charged with keeping communications intact, was seen lying in the roadway repairing a break in the wire—he was lying because he could not stand, having been shot through both thighs. Lieutenant Bruce H. Booker, E Company's executive officer, made five trips back and forth across the bridge, urging men forward. Finally, hit in both legs, he propped himself on the roadway and continued his exhortations, stopping only long enough to crawl to other, more seriously wounded troopers to administer first aid. The medics, too, were everywhere, ignoring cover and "running up and down the causeway bandaging the wounded as rapidly as they could get to them." Captain Rae, who observed them at work during his trip across the bridge, stated "the success of the

Medical Corps in clearing the causeway of wounded . . . was nothing short of phenominal [*sic*]."[62] And in the midst of the bloody chaos, as much exposed to danger and imminent death as any man that day, were the two most recognizable figures in the division—Ridgway and Gavin.

Some years after the war, Gavin mused on the proper place of a general on the battlefield. "Historically," he wrote, "there has always been much discussion in the U.S. Army about the proper place of a general in battle. Although lip service is paid to the view that the general belongs as close to the scene of action as circumstances will allow, the fact is that very few generals behave this way."[63] For him, there was "no question that the place for the general in battle is where he can see the battle and get the odor of it in his nostrils."[64] Ridgway, likewise, held that a general should always be "where the crisis of action is, where the going is the toughest."[65] That day at la Fière, both were in the thick of the fight, right on the fire-swept bridge itself. Even after Rae's crossing, dazed troopers still wandered the causeway. "The physical force of that fire," recalled Ridgway, "was such that they just stopped and started back, not from cowardice at all. We just grabbed them by the shoulders and lead [*sic*] them . . . and pushed them."[66] Along with Colonel Lewis, the 325th Regimental commander who was also well forward, Ridgway and Gavin personally ensured that the momentum of the assault was maintained, feeding more and more troopers and ammunition into the precarious bridgehead. They were ubiquitous. When not urging their men forward they were tending wounded, helping engineers hook up tow cables to the burnt out hulks so they could be pulled off the roadway, or clearing a lane for jeeps carrying ammunition. They organized the roadway so that it resembled, to one observer, " 'an escalator, two streams of men on the inside trying to run forward and on the outer side streams of wounded trickling back.' "[67] "The presence of these senior officers," wrote another participant, "helped a lot to encourage the men and get them better organized."[68]

Once across the river, the plan of attack called for G Company to veer left, E Company to veer right, and F Company to fill in the gap between to form a rough semi-circular perimeter around the western end of the bridge. As soon as possible thereafter, link up was to be effected with Sanford's and Timmes's troopers still holed up a few hundred yards to the northwest. With two of his battalions in hand, Colonel Lewis planned to then adjust the perimeter and in the process expand the bridgehead to a depth of 1,000 yards. It was thought that this would be more than enough room for the tanks and infantry carriers of the 90th Infantry Division, slated to pass through the 325th's lines and continue the attack westward, to deploy for combat.[69]

Although conceptually straightforward the plan assumed a great deal of coordination among the 2/401st's companies. Flanks had to be tied in, fires interlocked, and whole units shifted, all while engaged in close-quarters combat with a determined and numerically superior enemy. In the end Lewis's object was achieved, but the actions by which this occurred in no way resembled what had been laid out beforehand. The intensity of the fight, unabated once the units reached the enemy shore, undermined all efforts at inter-unit coordination. Instead, success was once again underwritten by junior leaders displaying initiative in the absence of orders and their troopers, displaying the aggressiveness that had become the hallmark of the division.

When Captain Sauls's G Company breached the German defenses it veered left in accordance with the plan and found itself in the midst of an entrenched enemy. Even

after Lieutenant Wason took out one German machine gun at the cost of his life and Private Thurston's marksmanship disposed of a second there remained the bulk of the enemy force, pouring its deadly fire onto the bridge and causeway. Seeing this, the quick thinking Sergeant Wilfred L. Ericsson, who had assumed command of Wason's platoon once his lieutenant was killed, took action. In a classic display of small unit tactics, Ericsson led a portion of his platoon in an attack designed to force the enemy to deploy to its secondary positions. To do so, however, the Germans had to cross an open field where Ericsson had positioned the other half of his platoon. Hence as Ericsson and the troopers with him flushed the Germans into the open, the other half of his platoon shot them dead. Ericsson continued in this manner, clearing some hundred yards of enemy positions, before he was wounded and had to leave the action, but his initiative had secured for the battalion a solid left shoulder in the still forming bridgehead.[70]

Murphy's E Company, second across the bridge, veered slightly right and headed straight for Cauquigny. Already down by thirty troopers that had been killed or wounded on the bridge, Murphy's fight got even more intense as he neared the hamlet. Still Murphy pressed the attack and eventually overran Cauquigny where he discovered the reason for the particularly ferocious resistance—E Company had captured the *1057th Regimental Headquarters*, took some thirty prisoners and, a little farther on, disposed of an enemy mortar section of four tubes and took another twenty-two prisoners. With Cauquigny under control Murphy and his E Company troopers firmly established the right shoulder of the bridgehead, in the process smashing the primary German command and control node in the area and eliminating a significant indirect fire threat.[71]

When Captain Harney arrived at the enemy end of the bridge he did so with most of his F Company miraculously intact (with the exception of the weapons platoon) but he could find neither of the two companies that had preceded him across. Nevertheless, since it was his mission to establish the center of the defensive perimeter he made for some high ground directly to his front, figuring that it was always better to defend from high ground. With a platoon of Rae's paratroopers in tow, Harney and his F Company glidermen attacked toward the high ground, shooting up everything in their path. About a thousand yards west of Cauquigny they entered the village of le Motey where strong German resistance and friendly artillery fire (this fire had been shifted to le Motey once the attack on the bridge was underway) forced them to withdraw to some low ground about 200 yards east of le Motey, where Harney put his men in defensive positions and then returned to the rear seeking both reinforcement and a means to turn off the friendly artillery fire. With both his flanks exposed it was also imperative that he tie in with friendly troops or he would be forced to withdraw even farther. He eventually contacted Major Gardner, the 2/401st's brand new commander, back toward Cauquigny. Gardner had no means with which to turn off the friendly artillery either (all wire and radio communications were out of working order) so the best he could do was order Captain Murphy to move his company forward from Cauquigny to cover Harney's right flank. Murphy did so; however he passed right by Harney's position and ran into a German ambush and withdrew back to Cauquigny. So for more than three hours Harney and his F Company troopers remained in place, their flanks exposed, enduring German artillery and mortar fire as well as periodic probing attacks mounted from le Motey. Finally, weakened by casualties and with hope for support diminished, Harney ordered a withdrawal. Only then was he finally able to tie in with the rest of his battalion.

Although a seemingly pointless action on its face, Harney's attack, withdrawal, and prolonged defensive stand gained the time needed for the forces nearer the bridge, to include those of Timmes and Sanford which were finally rescued from their orchard position, to consolidate, expand, and solidify the defensive perimeter.[72]

The final action of the day occurred around 1900 hours when German artillery and mortar fires began falling on E and F Companies in preparation for another counterattack. By that time Colonel Lewis had been evacuated due to exhaustion and command of the 325th had passed to his executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Herbert G. Sitler.[73] Sitler sent word back to the 82nd command post that the tanks that had been supporting him on the west bank of the Merderet had withdrawn, and that some of his troopers had taken this as a sign to withdraw as well. Ridgway turned to Gavin and told him to take charge of the situation. With Lieutenant Colonel Maloney and Major Willard E. Harrison in tow, Gavin rushed forward to see for himself what was happening (Harrison was one of the few 504th troopers to participate in the Normandy Campaign). When he got to the bridge Gavin positioned Maloney at its western end and told him to stop any rearward movement (Maloney was a large redhead who had been wounded earlier in the day and still had streaks of blood in his beard stubble; armed with a huge tree branch, he "convinced" several troopers that their place was at the front). Gavin took Harrison with him to Sitler's command post where Sitler reported that he did not think he could hold without tank support. "After what we had been through for three days," wrote Gavin later, "we simply could not give up the causeway." Gavin ordered Sitler to gather every trooper he could lay hands on, "including himself, regimental clerks, headquarters people, anyone . . . with a weapon."[74] This ad hoc force, Gavin told Sitler, would be conducting a counterattack. To lend even more weight to the attack Gavin turned to the same men he had tasked with ensuring the success of the bridge crossing, Captain Rae and his 507th troopers. Rae and his troopers were in the process of digging in when Gavin appeared and told them to get moving. When Rae asked where, Gavin told him to " '[t]ake your men and go forward. . . . Go to town [le Motey].' "[75] With Rae's troopers moving on one axis and Sitler's 325th troopers, led by Harney's F Company, moving on a second, le Motey finally fell. The last significant threat to the la Fière bridgehead had been defeated.[76]

Taking la Fière was the last of the 82nd's original missions. With it secure Bradley's First Army was poised to strike west to sever the Cotentin Peninsula at its base and then turn north for the ultimate prize, Cherbourg. At 0300 hours, 10 June, the lead elements of the U.S. 90th Infantry Division began passing through the 325th's lines in the opening act of that drive and the 82nd went into reserve (less the 505th and the 2/325th, which were assisting the U. S. 4th Infantry Division clear the area north of Ste.-Mère-Église).[77]

No one has ever counted the human cost of the la Fière causeway. The only reliable figures are from the battalion that led the assault, the 2/401st, which lost forty troopers killed and another 180 wounded in the attack (the fact that the 2/401st was one of the only division units relatively intact before the battle would account for its figures being captured).[78] German figures have been forever lost, although it is certain that as a result of the fight the *1057th Regiment* ceased to exist as a cohesive fighting force. Even absent the numbers, however, the ferocity of the battle made a lasting impression. Ridgway called it "as hot a single battle as any U.S. troops had, at any time, during the war in Europe."[79] Writing after the war, Gavin opined that "the shock of battle never has been

greater than it was . . . in the causeway crossing," adding "[p]robably the only thing that compared with it in raw courage was the crossing of the Waal River at Nijmegen [Holland] to link up with and save the British at Arnhem." And despite his previous misgivings about the tenacity of the glider troopers "[f]rom then on," he wrote, "the 325th became one of the great regiments of the war."[80]

More than thirty years after the Normandy invasion a retired Lieutenant General Gavin, who had gone on to become a respected author (with five books to his credit) and U.S. Ambassador to France (1961-1962), accepted an invitation to speak to veterans at a relatively small venue. Richard Brigham Johnson, who had served with the 2/401st in Normandy and been wounded on 9 June at la Fière, had arranged the event. While the two were alone setting up Gavin's slides and projector in preparation for the talk, the general turned to his former subordinate and asked, " '[d]o you know why I'm doing this?' " When Johnson replied that he did not, Gavin said, " '[y]ou crossed that causeway, and I can't say no to any man who did.' "[81]

Although doctrine explicitly stated that airborne divisions should be withdrawn to rear bases for refitting once they had been relieved by more heavily armed ground forces, such was not to be the case in Normandy. Bradley found that his conventional infantrymen lacked aggressiveness, especially given the type of close fighting dictated by the *bocage* and he was chary of releasing two divisions that, though bloodied, had proved capable of offensive maneuver in such restricted terrain. Victims of their own success, Ridgway's troopers remained in France for four more weeks, thrust time and again to the forefront of an advance. Ste.-Mère-Église, Chef du Pont, and la Fière were but a beginning.

Chapter Thirteen Notes

[1] "Comment on 82nd Division Operation," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[2] Vandervoort, "505th Normandy Campaign."

[3] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 66.

[4] John J. Dolan to James M. Gavin, 23 March 1959, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 7, Folder 52, OU.

[5] Except where noted see Langdon, *"Ready,"* 66-68; Robert M. Murphy, *No Better Place to Die* (Croton Falls, NY: Critical Hit, Inc., 1999), 22-23; Combat Interview "Concluding Actions at Ste. Mere Eglise."

[6] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 66-68; Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 22-23; Dolan to Gavin, 23 March 1959; Combat Interview "Concluding Actions at Ste. Mere Eglise."

[7] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 66-68; Robert M. Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 22-23; Dolan to Gavin, 23 March 1959; Combat Interview "Concluding Actions at Ste. Mere Eglise."

[8] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 68-70; Combat Interview "Movements on East Bank at Merderet Crossing," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407,NARA II; Combat Interview "508 Regiment After the Drop."

[9] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 69-70; Reminiscences of Homer Jones and Jim Kurz in Gerald Astor, ed., *June 6, 1944*, 246-248; Combat Interview "Movements on East Bank at Merderet Crossing"; Combat Interview "508 Regiment After the Drop."

[10] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 69; Dolan to Gavin, 23 March 1959; Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin."

[11] Walton, interview, 18 March 1958.

[12] Except where noted, see Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin."

[13] Graham quoted in Astor, ed., *June 6, 1944*, 140.

[14] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 69; Dolan to Gavin, 23 March 1959; Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin"; and Combat Interview "Operation of 507th Regiment Following Drop," n.d., CI-170, "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, USAMHI.

[15] See Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin" and Combat Interview "Operation of 507th Regiment Following Drop."

[16] Roy E. Creek interview, n.d., n.p., World War II Oral History Project, Eisenhower Center, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Except where noted see Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin" and Combat Interview "Operation of 507th Regiment Following Drop."

[19] See Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 48-50; Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin"; Combat Interview "Operation of 507th Regiment Following Drop"; Lew Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508 P.I.R. in Normandy," n.d, World War II Veterans Survey Project, Box "82nd Airborne Division, 507th PIR, 508th PIR," Folder "Milkovics, Lew, Hq. Co. 508th PIR," USAMHI.

[20] James M. Gavin to Arthur A. Maloney, 4 March 1959, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Letters to Gavin, Comments and Inquiries about D-Day mentioned from 'Longest Day,' " USAMHI.

[21] See Combat Interview "Levy's Group," n.d, CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Charles J. Timmes to Richard Brigham Johnson, 12 April 1977, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "82nd Airborne Division, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, letters about D-Day invasion," USAMHI; Combat Interview "507-2 on D-Day and Immediately After"; reminiscences of Bill Dean, Homer Jones and Jim Kurz in Astor, *June 6, 1944*, 246-248. Much has been written about the decisions made that day at la Fière bridge, especially in light of the ferocious fight that subsequently erupted across its span. Schwartzwalder's actions appear questionable, but it must be remembered that Schwartzwalder had a *primary* mission, to assist in the taking of Amfreville, and when he arrived at Cauquigny nothing was happening. Hence his logical course of action was to get to his battalion commander, Timmes, and help out there. For Schwartzwalder, helping with the seizure of la Fière bridge was a *secondary* mission, and that had already been accomplished. Secondly, why did Kellam fail to reinforce the far bank? As stated, he had with him almost his entire battalion. Sending a company to the far shore would have been a sound tactical move. But from Kellam's perspective, the far bank was secured. He could not have missed seeing Schwartzwalder's large column moving over the bridge, and the conversation he had with Levy must have left him with the impression that he did not have to spare a company to take the far side since there already was a company over there. Finally, the time interval between Schwartzwalder's departure and the German attack was simply too short for Kellam to react, even if he had known that Schwartzwalder had continued on to Timmes's location. Both men made decisions based on what they saw and what they knew they had to do. Neither had the luxury of hindsight with which their critics have, since that day, questioned their actions.

[22] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 69-70.

[23] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 70; Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 41; Dolan to Gavin, 23 March 1959.

[24] Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 42-43. All four bazooka team members were subsequently awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

[25] Except where noted see Dolan to Gavin, 23 March 1959 and Combat Interview "Concluding Actions at Ste. Mere Eglise."

[26] James M. Gavin to Cornelius Ryan, 23 March 1959, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 27, OU.

[27] William Dale Owens, " 'D Day' June 6th 1944," n.d., The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 8, Folder 27, OU.

[28] Alexander, "Thirty Four Days in Normandy."

[29] Langdon, "*Ready*," 71 and Owens, "D Day."

[30] Gavin to Ryan, 23 March 1959.

[31] Owens, "D Day."

[32] Walton, interview, 18 March 1958.

[33] Owens and Dolan quoted in Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 61.

[34] Except where noted see Langdon, "*Ready*," 71-72; Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 56-61; Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin"; Combat Interview "Concluding Actions at Ste. Mere Eglise"; Dolan to Gavin, 23 March 1959; Combat Interview "508 Regiment After the Drop."

[35] See Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 110; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 20-21; Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin"; Combat Interview "508 Regiment After the Drop"; Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508 P.I.R. in Normandy."

[36] See Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 20-21; Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin"; Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508 P. I. R. in Normandy"; Combat Interview "508 Regiment After the Drop."

[37] See Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin"; Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508 P. I. R. in Normandy"; Combat Interview "508 Regiment After the Drop."

[38] Gavin Diary, 24 March 1944.

[39] Except where noted see Combat Interview "Colonel Millett's Group," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II and Combat Interview "Initial Operations of 325th Glider Infantry," CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[40] Gavin, interview, 4 January 1983.

[41] Except where noted see Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 68; Combat Interview "507-2 on D-Day and Immediately After"; Combat Interview "Initial Operations of 325th Glider Infantry."

[42] Medal of Honor Citation for Charles N. DeGlopper, Box "82nd Airborne Division, WWII, 325th GIR, *Personal Papers," Folder **"***Personal Papers—DeGlopper, Charles N. (C Co., 325th GIR)," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.

[43] Except where noted see Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 68 and 91-92; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 133-136; Combat Interview "507-2 on D-Day and Immediately After"; Combat Interview "Initial Operations of 325th Glider Infantry."

[44] Combat Interview "Colonel Millett's Group."

[45] Gavin, interview 4 January 1983.

[46] Lee C. Travelstead untitled manuscript, n.d., The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 55, Folder "Travelstead, Lee C.," USAMHI.

[47] Except where noted see Combat Interview "Initial Operations of 325th Glider Infantry" and Combat Interview "Statement of Brig Gen James M. Gavin."

[48] Gavin, interview, 4 January 1983.

[49] Johnson, "RBJ's Adventures in Normandy."

[50] Except where noted see Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 71 and Combat Interview "Crossing of Merderet by 325-3," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[51] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 143.

[52] Combat Interview "Crossing of Merderet by 325-3."

[53] Johnson, "RBJ's Adventures in Normandy."

[54] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 144.

[55] Matthew B. Ridgway interview by John M. Blair, 24 November 1971, The Mathew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 51, Folder "Interview by John M. Blair, Volume I," USAMHI.

[56] Except where noted see Combat Interview "Crossing of Merderet by 325-3."

[57] See Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 72 and Combat Interview "Crossing of Merderet by 325-3."

[58] James M. Gavin interview, 28 September 1982, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Gavin, James M.," USAMHI.

[59] Gavin, interview, 16 April 1975.

[60] Except where noted see Combat Interview "Composite Force under Captain Rae at Merderet Crossing," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II and Combat Interview "Statement of Brig. Gen James M. Gavin."

[61] Breuer, *Geronimo*, 257.

[62] Combat Interview "Composite Force under Captain Rae at Merderet Crossing."

[63] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 252.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ridgway and Winton, "Troop Leadership At The Operational Level."

[66] Ridgway, interview, 24 November 1971.

[67] Quoted in Murphy, *No Better Place to Die*, 77-78.

[68] Johnson, "RBJ's Adventures in Normandy."

[69] See Combat Interview "Initial Operations of 325th Glider Infantry" and "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign 6 Jun 44 – 14 Jul 44," n. d., 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[70] Combat Interview "Crossing of Merderet by 325-3."

[71] See Combat Interview "Crossing of Merderet by 325-3" and Combat Interview "Initial Operations of 325th Glider Infantry."

[72] "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign" and Combat Interview "Continuation of Merderet Crossing," n.d., CI-170, "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[73] According to Lieutenant Vernon L. Wyant Jr., a 325th officer on liaison duty with the division headquarters, Lewis was so distraught over what befell his troopers on the bridge that he had to be sedated. It took him three days to recover. Lewis displayed as much personal courage as anyone during the attack on the bridge and was, according to Wyant, too keyed up to rest following the attack and " 'constantly paced up and down the room [of his regimental command post]. His grief at having to order the causeway attack and the fact that so many men were killed, was overwhelming. He constantly mumbled seemingly without any coherent meaning.' " After observing Lewis in this state for about twenty minutes Wyant decided to contact the regimental surgeon. " 'Dr. Johnson came into the room, tried to talk with the Colonel, observed his pacing and tried to get him to relax and rest. He was not successful so the two of us retired from the room. Dr. Johnson advised me that Col. Lewis should be moved to the Division Aid Station for rest and observation. The problem was how to accomplish this as Col. Lewis would be very much against it. Dr. Johnson decided that the best plan would be for him to approach Lewis with the idea of giving him a sedative to relax him. . . . Dr. Johnson's plan was to give Lewis a strong sedative. This would put him in a position where he could be moved to the division aid station by way of a jeep and stretcher. Col. Lewis agreed to what he thought was a mild sedative and just as darkness closed in, he was taken by jeep to the Division Aid Station. The troops of the regiment, including most of the officers, had no knowledge of this incident at the time.' " Three days later Lewis returned to duty and led the regiment for the rest of its time in Normandy. One of his first acts after returning, however, was to give Johnson and Wyant " 'the worst dressing down either of us had experienced in our Army Service!' " He then shook both men's hands and nothing more was ever said of the matter. Lewis was an old man by airborne standards, but he was a tough old man. What occurred with Lewis has often been ascribed to battle fatigue. This is not entirely true. What no one knew at the time is that Lewis was suffering from cancer, which would hospitalize him upon the division's return to England and kill him in less than a year. See Wyant's reminiscence reproduced in Jerry L. Richlak Sr., ed., *Glide to Glory* (Chesterland, OH: Cedar House, 2002), 230-231.

[74] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 118.

[75] Combat Interview "Composite Force under Captain Rae at Merderet Crossing."

[76] Except where noted see Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 118-119; Combat Interview "Composite Force under Captain Rae at Merderet Crossing"; Statements on fighting at la Fière by Gavin and Willard E. Harrison, n. d., The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Letters to and from 82nd Vets on airborne operations in Holland, September 1944," USAMHI; Combat Interview "Continuation of Merderet Crossing."

[77] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 401 and "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign."

[78] "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign."

[79] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 14.

[80] James M. Gavin to Richard Brigham Johnson, 7 March 1977, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "82nd Airborne Division, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, letters about D-Day invasion," USAMHI.

[81] Johnson, "RBJ's Adventures in Normandy."

Chapter Fourteen
Can't Anything Stop Those Men?

> *'It is essential that infantry in training be imbued with a bold, aggressive attitude. Many units do not acquire this attitude until long after their entry into combat, and some never acquire it. On the other hand units containing specially selected personnel such as Airborne and Rangers exhibited an aggressive spirit from the start.'*
>
> U. S. First Army Report on Normandy[1]

The 82nd won three significant battles in the first four days of the invasion—all against an enemy that had both a numerical and matériel advantage—and by so doing achieved its initial assault objectives. Control of the bridges at la Fière and Chef du Pont also facilitated the consolidation of the division's scattered elements; throughout the night of 9-10 June, the ad hoc formations with which much of the fighting to date had been conducted were disbanded, troopers returned to their parent units, and the chain of command was re-established. By daybreak of the tenth the 82nd finally resembled the organization that had left England five days earlier.

Despite having established unit integrity, however, the division was woefully under strength. Again, because of the chaotic fighting of the first few days (D-Day to D+4) there exists no accurate accounting of the division's overall casualty figures for the period (although one estimate puts the 82nd's D-Day casualties alone at 1,259), but a sampling of units strongly suggests that losses were high across the board.[2] It has already been mentioned that the 2/401st lost 220 troopers killed or wounded during the assault crossing at la Fière. To this figure can be added the more than 130 casualties sustained within the Timmes perimeter northwest of the bridge; the more than 200 troopers killed, wounded, or taken prisoner during Millett's ill-fated breakout attempt; and the 130 wounded from the First and Second Battalions of the 505th during the fight for Ste.-Mère-Église.[3] And since much of the combat occurred at extremely close range, it was not the infantry alone that paid the Norman butcher; the division's combat support units also sustained heavy casualties. Two such units for which accurate records were kept, the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion and the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, sustained twenty and thirty percent casualties, respectively, in the first few days of combat.[4]

Many of the wounded were patched up and sent back to the lines. Those with more serious injuries were treated at the division's medical clearing station at Ste.-Mère-Église and subsequently evacuated through UTAH beach to England. It took several days for this system to mature, however, during which the medics and doctors who had either jumped or glided in did their best with what they had available. Chaplain George Wood recalled seeing the 505th regimental medical officer, Captain Putnam, performing major

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 374 through 378.

surgery, "even to amputations, all night long, with the few instruments he jumped in with on his person in a blacked-out room of the school-house which we were using as an aid station, to the music of a rain of shells which never ceased."[5] Correspondent Bill Walton was forever haunted by the carnage he saw at the division aid station.

> I went into the barn where all the wounded were and it looked like something out of the Crimean War. Because they were shot through the face, lying on their back . . . sitting here, his tongue half shot off . . . the lower part of his jaw missing . . . G. I. Sitting up in his own blood . . . and people were just hunks of flesh and everything that could be done was being done . . . but it just meant walking wounded and a slight clean-up. This is about all there was. And all the broken legs were put in separate sections. While I was still there I found Phil Buckley of *Stars & Stripes* who had broken both legs. He laid in the field all day under machine gun fire . . . caught . . . unable to get out . . . and finally, I went out . . . tired . . . I was nearly dead. I decided to join some sleeping guys outside. They were wrapped up in parachutes so I pulled half the parachute cloth of one guy and rolled up with him. And about a half hour later some guard shook me on the shoulder, and said, 'Come on, we've got to abandon this command post quick.' I shook the guy behind me and found he was dead. He had been dead when I went to sleep with him. How innocent I was . . . I didn't know that all troopers were always rolled in their chutes when they died.[6]

Only forty-three replacements reached the division while it was in France, all of which were junior officers whose ranks were especially hard hit during the course of the campaign: overall, seventy percent of the infantry first lieutenants (168 of 238 committed to combat) and sixty-four percent of infantry second lieutenants (115 of 178 committed) became casualties during the Normandy campaign.[7] Although they were available in training camps in England, enlisted replacements were not brought forward "possibly because it had not been expected that the Division would stay in action so long, possibly because it was felt that so many new men could not be advantageously absorbed."[8] As a result, by the conclusion of the 82nd's time in France many units were down to less than fifty-percent strength (all told, the division sustained a casualty rate of forty-six percent).[9] One outfit—G Company, 2/325th—returned to England with but thirteen of its original complement of officers and men (out of an authorized strength of 155).[10]

Many of those listed as casualties were actually misdropped troopers (who were listed as missing) whose return to the division fold in the days and weeks following the initial insertions, often after having traveled a large chunk of the French countryside was, to say the least, most welcome and helped to bolster the seriously depleted ranks. Technical Sergeant Edward W. Shimko along with twelve troopers from the 2/325th and the pilot and co-pilot of the glider that delivered them to Normandy did not return to division control until 14 June, and then only after traveling the entire length of the Allied beachhead in Normandy. Landing about three miles north of Caen (about forty-five miles on a straight line from their designated landing zone), Shimko and his troopers

dodged mortar, artillery, and naval gun fire (both enemy and friendly), hid from numerous German patrols, and gingerly picked their way through minefields until they finally reached Allied lines and hitched their way back to Ste.-Mère-Église.[11]

The same day Shimko's group returned so did a fairly large group of 3/507th troopers. They had been dropped south of the large city of Carentan, itself some ten miles southeast of their intended drop zone, and assembled at the village of Graignes. Under the command of Major Charles D. Johnson, the battalion executive officer, this isolated force defended Graignes for seven days until, low on ammunition and battling overwhelming enemy numbers, Johnson gave the order to split up into small groups and infiltrate toward friendly lines. A little more than half of 182 officers and men made it all the way (the remainder were either killed or captured and at least twenty-four of the latter, along with several French civilians who had nursed American wounded during the fighting at Graignes, were executed by the Germans).[12]

A third group of paratroopers from the 508th under the command of First Sergeant Leonard A. Funk had one of the longest journeys of all. They landed some forty miles away from their intended drop zone but Funk told his troopers that " 'come hell or high water, I would never be taken prisoner, that we were going to fight our way back to friendly forces—even if it took us the rest of the war. It damned near did.' " Hiding by day and traveling by night, Funk and his troopers literally fought their way across Normandy. " 'When possible,' " Funk later recalled, " 'we avoided enemy contact, but got mixed up in all sorts of shootouts and scrapes.' "

> 'Several times, we ambushed Kraut vehicles and small groups, and we blew up one panzer by putting a landmine in the road. Much of the time we were starving and thirsty—didn't dare to approach a house. Hardly ever took our boots off. The closer we got to American lines, the thicker were the Germans. Now it was touch-and-go every yard of the way, and we had several brushes with disaster. Finally, after 21 days, we reached an outpost of our 90th Infantry Division—and we were so filthy and disheveled that the straight-legs thought we were Krauts and damned near shot us.'[13]

Notwithstanding the division's staggering casualty figures, Ridgway's troopers were called on time and again to spearhead major drives, with the first call coming even before Ste.-Mère-Église had been fully secured. At 1700 hours 7 June, while Vandervoort's 2/505th was still beating back the attack by the *Seventh Army Sturm Battalion* on the northern outskirts of town Major General J. Lawton 'Lightning Joe' Collins, the VII Corps commander, arrived at the 82nd command post to outline his plan to commit Colonel Ekman's 505th alongside the 4th Infantry Division in a drive north to clear out some long-range artillery that still had UTAH beach under fire. The attack called for four regiments to advance abreast toward the towns of Montebourg and Quinéville, some six miles to the northwest. The 505th—reinforced with a fourth battalion, the relatively unscathed 2/325th—was to be the westernmost of the attacking regiments. Its mission was to seize the hamlet of le Ham along with the important road and rail intersection at Montebourg Station (just over two miles southwest of the larger town of Montebourg) while securing the left flank of the 4th Infantry Division.[14]

Collins wanted the attack to commence early the morning of the eighth but agreed to a postponement until later in the day after it became obvious that the 4th Infantry Division would not be ready on time. Although maddening for Collins, the delay came as a welcome respite for the division's troopers for fatigue and exhaustion were beginning to take its toll, especially among the leadership. Colonel Ekman recalled being so tired (he had not slept since the jump in) that he fell asleep while issuing his attack order. His operations officer, John Norton, took over the briefing after "unceremoniously" shoving the comatose regimental commander under a table so that he could get his much needed sleep undisturbed.[15] Vandervoort, too, felt the effects of sleep deprivation.

> The most amusing incident I remember was when I thought I'd been killed and woke up in heaven. At the end of the third day of almost continuous fighting we were approaching exhaustion. It was just before sunset and my C. P. was being shelled by a German 88. I issued orders for the C. P. to move and fell asleep in my fox-hole [*sic*]. The next thing I knew I was waked by beautiful music. I looked up and saw beautiful blossoms above me. I knew I had been killed and was in heaven and thought 'What a lovely place it is.' When they moved the C.P. my troopers had been unable to wake me and poured me into a jeep and then a fox-hole [sic] under one of the Normandy apple trees which was then in full blossom. The music was the BBC broadcasting over a small portable radio one of the troopers had carried in with him.[16]

The Germans also took advantage of the delay. *Generalleutnant* Karl-Wilhelm von Schlieben, commander of the *709th Division*, scooped up what remained of his division along with two others (the two others were the *243rd*, which had been defending the western side of the Cotentin and the ubiquitous *91st*; Schlieben's own *709th* was the static division defending the eastern coast of the peninsula) and the remnants of the *Seventh Army Sturm Battalion*, formed them into three *Kampfgruppen* (battle groups) of regimental size, and positioned them on high ground that dominated likely avenues of approach to the north. Set in hastily constructed field fortifications that made maximum use of the hedgerows and backed by more than three battalions of artillery, to include captured Russian 122mm and French 155mm howitzers, Schlieben's force was far from the broken host that was last seen retreating from the killing fields north of Ste.-Mère-Église.[17]

It was mid-day on 8 June before the 4th Infantry Division was ready to attack. By that time Ekman's 505th troopers had been in their pre-assault positions just shy of Neuville-au-Plain for over four hours. Ekman's plan was to attack with two battalions abreast (the 2/505th and 3/505th) while his two other battalions (the 1/505th and the 2/325th) followed. The only other element Ekman had attached for the attack, one platoon of tanks from C Company, 746th Tank Battalion, would provide direct fire support up front as needed. When word finally came to move out, the veteran 505th troopers attacked aggressively, virtually running through enemy artillery concentrations and overcoming dug-in defenders by suppressing them with automatic weapons and mortar fire and then closing with and destroying them on the march. By 2300 hours Ekman's lead battalions had moved over two miles and taken the town of Grainville. Ekman then moved up his

other two battalions and constructed an inverted L-shaped night defensive position that not only poised the force for a continuation of the attack on the morrow, but which also formed a secure barrier protecting the American left flank.[18]

The advance to Grainville cracked the outer crust of the German defenses. In order to complete his mission, however, Ekman would have to hurl his troopers against the enemy's main line of resistance. Looking at his map that evening Ekman could not have mistaken where that would be. A canal and two streams (tributaries to the Merderet) flowed perpendicularly across his front and it was on those natural obstacles that the Germans anchored a considerable defense in depth. To take le Ham and Montebourg Station, Ekman's troopers would have to first cross the canal, then the lower stream whereupon the troopers would find themselves on an inland peninsula formed by the lower and upper streams. At this juncture, Ekman would have to attack in two directions simultaneously: northward toward Montebourg Station, near the banks of the upper stream; and westward to le Ham, situated on the Merderet itself. Finally, all this would have to be done in a relatively narrow attack corridor—since the 505th's was but a supporting attack the majority of the maneuver room in the area had been reserved for the 4th Infantry Division.[19]

At 0930 hours, 9 June, Ekman continued the attack. Due to the narrowness of the attack corridor he elected to attack in a column of battalions with the 2/325th leading, followed by the 2/505th and 1/505th, while the 3/505th remained behind at Grainville to protect the regimental flank and rear. His plan was to breach the defenses on the canal and lower tributary and then have the 2/325th execute a ninety-degree turn to the west to attack le Ham while the following 2/505th continued north toward Montebourg Station and the 1/505th remained ready to support either. Soon after jumping off, however, Ekman's attached glider troopers began taking heavy fire from the German defenders dug in along the canal as well as from enemy mortars situated in a stone quarry to the west. With the 2/325th pinned down short of the canal, Ekman regrouped and attempted to coordinate an attack for later in the afternoon that would pass the 2/505th past the 2/325th's right flank and across the canal in concert with elements of the 4th Infantry Division, but when the planned artillery support was pulled at the last moment and the 4th's units elected to assume the defense instead of advancing, Ekman cancelled his order as well.[20]

The next day Ekman held the 2/325th in place to shield the regiment's left and renewed the advance, this time with the 1/505th in the lead attacking toward Montebourg Station while the 2/505th followed and assumed the mission to take le Ham. With nearly two battalions of artillery in support (the 320th Glider and most of the 456th Parachute) Ekman's troopers advanced behind a rolling barrage, crossed the canal and lower tributary, and took Montebourg Station by early evening. Although the Station itself fell with relatively little resistance, the fight en route had been hedgerow-to-hedgerow against an enemy backed by heavy artillery, to include the feared 88mm guns that the Germans used as direct fire weapons. Casualties were heavy; by day's end the 1/505th could muster but 250 combat effective troopers of all ranks. Additionally, since the Germans at Montebourg Station fled toward le Ham and bolstered the defenders already there, when the 2/505th turned to take le Ham it ran into extremely heavy resistance and had to halt for the night.[21]

The terrain leading to le Ham was ideally suited for defense. The two tributaries north and south of the town created a natural channel down which any attack from the east would have travel. The hedgerow-partitioned fields were much smaller and the hedgerows themselves much stouter than previously encountered and each had been turned into a killing zone by the German defenders. The only open area, on the eastern outskirts of the village, was inundated with small streams and swamps, slowing considerably the movement of large formations. To offset these enemy advantages, Ekman organized a two-battalion attack for the eleventh: 2/505th was to conduct a limited holding action northeast of le Ham while the 2/325th, which had moved up in the wake of the advance the previous day, assaulted the village from the east. Following a fifteen-minute artillery bombardment, Lieutenant Colonel John H. Swenson, the 2/325th commander, led his battalion in the attack. With all three rifle companies on line, the glider troopers advanced at a run with fixed bayonets, firing from the hip, supported by frantically firing artillery (in this one attack alone the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion fired 1,456 rounds). Not long into the attack Swenson was hit while attempting to grenade an enemy machine gun position. Lieutenant George Cockle, the G Company commander, stopped to render first aid but was waved off by Swenson. " 'Attack, Cockle, forget me!' " bellowed Swenson. Major Osmond Leahy, the 325th regimental operations officer, came up to take command of the assault when Swenson went down, although the tough Swenson, propped against a tree and subsequently bandaged by a passing medic, refused to leave the fight. When offered some morphine Swenson replied, " '[n]o, it would knock me out and I want to be alert and know what is going on.' "[22] After overrunning the enemy outposts, Leahy halted the glider troopers to reorganize for the final push into le Ham. By that time, however, the defending Germans had become fearful of being caught with their backs to a river and had started to withdraw across the Merderet to the west. Leahy quickly followed up and by 2000 hours the 2/325th had fought its way to the center of le Ham and shortly thereafter cleared the village and advanced completely through it to take up defensive positions along the banks of the Merderet. About one hundred German prisoners were taken, to include several that had been captured single-handedly by Ekman who, throughout, was up front in the attack.[23]

Taking le Ham ended the 82nd's role in the push north. For the next two days the 505th and 2/325th remained in defensive positions securing the 4th Infantry Division's left flank so that it could finish clearing out the last of the German long-range artillery and thereby end the bombardment of UTAH beach. Although not a quiet sector by any means, being able to remain in place for more than a few hours afforded the troopers the opportunity to re-equip, reorganize and, as much as possible, rest. It was much needed. The 505th had been reduced to but 1,400 effectives (out of an authorized strength of just over 2,000 for the regiment) and the 2/325th had lost upwards to forty percent of its strength. As had become the norm in the division, the battalion leadership suffered the most grievously; besides losing a battalion commander, two company commanders, and the battalion intelligence officer, numerous junior officers and noncommissioned officers were killed or wounded and had to be replaced.[24]

In addition to saving UTAH beach from enemy artillery fire, Collins's thrust to the north had also carved out sufficient space into which to introduce follow-on divisions and supplies. One of the first to arrive was the inexperienced U. S. 90th Infantry Division which Collins pegged to lead the thrust westward across the base of the Cotentin

Peninsula. Sallying forth with two regiments abreast in the early morning hours of 10 June through the newly won bridgeheads at la Fière and Chef du Pont (where the bulk of the 82nd remained in defensive positions while the 505th and 2/325th attacked northward), the 90th advanced little more than a mile before stalling. Two days later the 90th was still creeping along, a far cry from the bold drive Collins had envisioned, its leaders paralyzed by threats to its flanks. On 13 June the 90th took its first major (interim) objective, the city of Pont l'Abbé, but only after leveling it with heavy artillery and U. S. bombers. Yet Pont l'Abbé was less than three miles from the 90th's initial line of departure and more than five miles from the limit of advance Collins had set for it and every day that the Cotentin remained open was another day that the Germans could pour in reinforcements, thereby prolonging the seizure of Cherbourg and its port which everyone in the highest echelons of the Allied chain of command was persuaded was necessary to ensure the continued survival of the Anglo-American beachhead. Convinced that drastic measures were needed to get the 90th back on track Collins relieved the division commander, Brigadier General Jay W. MacKelvie, as well as the two lead regimental commanders. He also revamped his scheme of maneuver. Ordering the 90th to remain in place and with time of the essence, Collins reinvigorated his westward advance by placing two veteran outfits in the van, the American 9th Infantry and 82nd Airborne Divisions.[25]

Collins's new order, issued on 13 June, required Ridgway to fight the 82nd in two different directions simultaneously with the renewed advance westward becoming the division's main effort while a secondary effort to the south, ongoing since 12 June, was brought to a close. The latter, which was fought by Colonel Lindquist's 508th Parachute Regiment, came about as a result of high-level concern that the two American corps that had led the amphibious assault had still not linked up (while Collins's VII Corps came in over UTAH, Major General Leonard T. Gerow's V Corps came in over OMAHA). To rectify this situation, while Collins concentrated on the drive across the base of the Cotentin Bradley assigned his deputy commander, Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges, the mission of securing the juncture of V and VII Corps in the area around Carentan. As part of his scheme of maneuver, on 11 June Hodges ordered Ridgway to send a regiment south across the Douve River at Beuzeville-la-Bastille (about two miles southwest of Chef du Pont) where it would then move south for three and a half miles to Baupte and link up with the 101st in order to form an outer defensive perimeter west of Carentan.[26]

Ridgway assigned the mission to Lindquist's 508th, reinforced by A Battery, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion; a detachment from A Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion; and one platoon from B Troop, 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. The 319th and 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalions, reinforced by 155mm howitzer fires from the VII Corps's 188th Field Artillery Battalion, would provide artillery support. Lindquist had been told to begin his attack on the night of 12-13 June, but during the night of 11-12 June he attempted to slip a small patrol across the Douve by boat to gain an appreciation for enemy defenses on the far bank. Led by four French guides, the troopers of the regimental S-2 section comprising the patrol got halfway across the river before their leaky craft foundered, and although they all swam safely back to the near (north) shore, none were able to provide any information about what awaited Lindquist's troopers across the river. Despite this failure, Lindquist insisted on

stealth and eschewed a pre-assault preparatory bombardment. Hence at one minute after midnight, 13 June, the troopers of F Company, 2/508th, loaded several small boats piloted by engineers from the 307th and, led by the same French guides, set off to cross the Douve directly opposite Beuzeville-la-Bastille. Trooper Bill Giegold remembering experiencing " 'a most eerie feeling. We couldn't see a thing or hear anything on the other side. It was like paddling into the JAWS OF HELL.' "[27] Yet forty-five minutes later the entire company was across, the crossing having been "effected so quietly and skillfully that not a shot was fired and the infantry company was enabled to take the enemy by complete surprise."[28] Once on the Douve's south shore, the F Company troopers crept toward their assault positions. En route they were taken under fire by two German tanks obscured in the darkness. Lieutenant Pollette, one of the F Company platoon leaders, sprang into action and became a one-man tank hunter. " 'Pollette knocked out one tank by dropping a Gammon grenade down a vent,' " recalled radioman Edward Chatoian, " '[h]e destroyed the other with a bazooka rocket.' "[29] Then, with his company just short of Beuzeville-la-Bastille, Lieutenant Hoyt T. Goodale radioed for a fifteen minute artillery bombardment.

> 'We lined up in assault formation behind a fence, [recalled Chatoian]. We were supposed to attack after the artillery softened up the enemy for fifteen minutes. I kept looking at my watch—no artillery and 0115 was getting close. I radioed, "Where are the firecrackers?" No response. Goodale said, "We will go without the firecrackers." Exactly at 0115, Goodale ordered, "Run, yell and fire!" It was a long run across an open field—several hundred yards. I saw one trooper stop, take out his canteen, and take a long drink (probably Calvados), and start running again. . . . We took the town and didn't lose a man. It was the surprise that did it. We were better off without the artillery.'[30]

Meanwhile, as F Company was attacking Beuzeville-la-Bastille, a second group of engineers from the 307th constructed both a foot and vehicular bridge across the Douve. So smoothly had Lindquist coordinated the operation (with the exception of the artillery miscue) that by 0500 hours 13 June, his entire task force was safely across the river. Lindquist then released his three battalions so they could proceed to their respective objectives, unleashing in the process what would become a rampaging horde of paratroopers whose actions would throw the German forces in the area into complete disarray.[31]

The first battalion across was Major Shields Warren's 1/508th (Warren had taken command of the battalion after Lieutenant Colonel Batcheller was killed on D-Day). After passing through Beuzeville-la-Bastille without incident Warren's troopers moved swiftly to their objective, the town of Coigny some three miles distant, destroying seven German tanks along the way (the German armor in the area was from the *100th Panzer Replacement Battalion* which was composed of a large number of makeshift vehicles and foreign personnel).[32] By 1600 hours Warren had secured Coigny without a fight and was sending his A and B Companies, each of which was reinforced by one of the 80th's 57mm antitank guns, to find and destroy bypassed enemy units in the area. Captain Jonathan E. Adams's A Company enjoyed especially good hunting—before returning to

Coigny for the night Adams's troopers ambushed a German command post and destroyed five more tanks (bringing the 1/508th's one-day total to twelve). Lieutenant Colonel Louis G. Mendez's 3/508th was next across the Douve. Experiencing very little resistance beyond an occasional sniper, Mendez's troopers occupied their objective, over four miles from Beuzeville-la-Bastille, by early morning. Last across the river was Lieutenant Colonel Shanley's 2/508th. Its mission was to take Baupte and link up with the 101st. Picking up F Company as they passed through Beuzeville-la-Bastille, Shanley's troopers veered left as they left town and proceeded south without incident until they were about 2,500 yards northeast of Baupte, where they ambushed and destroyed two German tanks sent out to stop them. As they got closer to Baupte enemy fire increased considerably so Shanley halted his column and sent out reconnaissance patrols to try to get a feel for the size of the force opposing him. They returned to report that Baupte contained a battalion of German soldiers supported by tanks and artillery, a defensive force that, according to doctrine, would require at least a reinforced regiment to overcome. But Shanley had no time for doctrinal solutions so he counted instead on speed of execution and the aggressiveness of his troopers to carry the day. They did not disappoint. Following a two-hour, close-quarters fight Baupte was his. During the fight, Shanley's troopers overran two enemy infantry companies, destroyed ten more tanks, four 20mm automatic cannon, and captured a vehicle park consisting of some fifty vehicles. Link up with the 101st was achieved shortly thereafter and the juncture of the V and VII Corps cemented. To ensure he held this critical point, that evening Lindquist ordered Warren's 1/508th to move to Baupte to bolster Shanley's defenses.[33]

The 508th's advance had been so swift and devastating that German intelligence mistook the airborne force for an American armor column. The fall of Baupte and destruction of the *100th Panzer Replacement Battalion* also tore a gaping hole in the German defenses fronting the two U.S. corps and so threatened the overall enemy effort to contain the Allied beachheads that a *kampfgruppe* from the *265th Division*, recently arrived from Brittany and originally slated to reinforce the Cherbourg sector, was diverted to the Baupte area and sent to counterattack Baupte. Early the next morning, Lindquist got a radio call from Mendez. The 3/508th had just repulsed a company-sized element but there appeared to be an even larger force massing for an attack on Baupte. Eager to stop the German counterattack before it started, Lindquist ordered Warren to mount a pre-emptive strike. Advancing with two companies abreast and one in reserve and supported by fire from the 319th, Warren's 1/508th troopers overran several German outposts before they were halted by heavy return fire on the outskirts of a small village. Warren's troopers had caught a reinforced enemy battalion preparing to kick off its attack. A stiff three-hour firefight followed. Since he was too weak to assault the massing Germans, Warren maintained his position and kept the enemy under direct fire while his forward observers pounded the enemy with some six hundred rounds from the 319th's guns. Chary of pulling units from his thinly held sector to reinforce the 1/508th, Lindquist finally ordered Warren to break contact and withdraw back to Baupte before sundown. The German counterattack never materialized. With the exception of a probe by fifty German bicyclists that the troopers from D Company, 2/508th ambushed while they were trying to cross a bridge early the next morning, there developed no further threats to the continuity of the Allied beachhead and Bradley and Collins were left free to concentrate once again on cutting the Cotentin Peninsula.[34]

On 14 June, while the 508th was still holding the Baupte sector and the 505th was in a rest area after having just returned to division control since its thrust north to le Ham and Montebourg Station, the 82nd's other two regiments passed through the 90th Infantry Division's lines and, in tandem with the 9th Infantry Division to the north, renewed Collins's westward advance. The advance got off to a rocky start. Both of the attacking regiments, the 507th and 325th attacking north and south of the Pont l'Abbé-St. Sauveur-le Vicomte road respectively, unexpectedly found themselves having to fight for terrain they were told that the lackluster 90th Infantry Division had already cleared (the same held true on the 9th Division's front). This threw the timetable for the advance off and it was not until early afternoon that the paratroopers and glidermen crossed their respective starting points for the advance. Despite the delay, however, by nightfall both the 325th and 507th had advanced more than a mile. For the 325th, the advance had been particularly costly. In the fight to the starting point alone, the lead 2/401st lost fifty-eight wounded and an unknown number killed. The glider regiment also lost two battalion commanders: Major Gardner of the 2/401st and Major Roscoe Roy of the 2/325th.[35]

The advance was renewed at 0500 hours the next day, this time with increased vigor. In the south Lewis's glider troopers attacked in a column of battalions with the 1/325th in the lead (Lewis had returned to command of the regiment, having recovered from his fit of exhaustion). Assisted by a tank platoon from A Company, 746th Tank Battalion, the glider troopers smashed through hedgerow after hedgerow, braving enemy small arms, machine gun, and artillery fire. By nightfall they had advanced over three miles and were within 1,000 yards of St. Sauveur-le Vicomte. Meanwhile, when the 507th renewed its advance in the north it did so with its right flank completely exposed. The 9th Infantry Division (a motorized outfit) had not been able to keep pace with Ridgway's hard-marching troopers and before long the 507th found itself under attack by enemy armor from the north. Intent on maintaining the momentum of the advance, Ridgway had Lieutenant Colonel Maloney, who had taken command of the regiment after Millett's capture, turn the 507th ninety degrees to the right to set up a defensive barrier and then called on Ekman's 505th to rush forward, pass behind the 507th's defenses, and continue the fight westward. Both regiments executed flawlessly and by nightfall the 505th, reinforced by C Battery, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion and a platoon of tanks from A Company, 746th Tank Battalion, had come on line with the 325th. It was by then apparent that the 82nd had pierced the German defenses guarding the base of the Cotentin, a fact that was reconfirmed later than night when a five-man patrol from the 325th under the command of Lieutenant Scott Cole crossed the Douve and observed heavy German vehicular traffic fleeing west.[36]

The advance of the fifteenth had taken the 82nd farther west than any other American unit on the peninsula. Because of this its flanks were perilously exposed. But neither Ridgway nor Collins wanted to stall the momentum of the advance by having the 82nd wait for the rest of the corps so they both agreed that the division would continue to advance while the rest of the VII Corps followed behind in echelon. Jumping off early the next morning (16 June), the 325th and 505th moved swiftly, overran a German rearguard, and occupied the bluffs overlooking St. Sauveur-le Vicomte (the city was on the far, or west bank, of the Douve). Climbing to the top of a tall, château-like building on the bluffs Vandervoort could look directly down and into the city and excitedly radioed the regimental S-3, Major John Norton, to report what he saw.

> 'From where I am standing I can see everything—the town is full of Germans. Our artillery is in position to give them Hell. I tell you, Norton, this is it. This is the place to cut off the Nazis and cut off the peninsula. If we don't take advantage of this, we are crazy. I am counting on you to get this information to Col[onel] Ekman and General Ridgeway [*sic*]. Tell them to come up here and see for themselves.'[37]

In his excitement Vandervoort forgot to give his location, but the resourceful Norton deduced this and sent word through Ekman to Ridgway, who eventually arrived at Vandervoort's château with General Bradley in tow. There they saw "an artilleryman's dream" as the forward observers carefully coordinated the guns of every VII Corps artillery battalion in range for a devastating 'time-on-target' shoot (a 'time-on'target' is a barrage technique that is calculated to deliver the shells of all the guns firing on the target at the same time).

> The guns were far enough back so that those who were watching hardly heard a single gun fired, but suddenly there was a whispering sound that changed into a roar and two-thirds of [St. Sauveur-le Vicomte] blew up at once. The observer called a slight adjustment and a second barrage finished the rest. German soldiers, trucks, horses and wagons, all disappeared in a cloud of smoke, dust, and steel shrapnel.[38]

Although Collins's orders to Ridgway were to advance to the Douve and hold, as soon as the barrage lifted Ridgway asked Bradley if he could launch the 505th across the river and into the city. Bradley approved. Advancing through a hail of German artillery fire aimed at the bridge over which they passed en route to St. Sauveur-le Vicomte, the 1/505th and 2/505th were soon in complete control of the town and pushing outward from its northern and western fringes. Still observing from the high ground, Bradley turned to Ridgway and said, " 'My God, Matt, can't anything stop those men?' " Ridgway replied, " 'Sir, I would rather have a platoon of those men than a battalion of regular infantry.' "[39] By 2230 hours, Ridgway had five battalions across the river (three from the 505th and two from the 508th, which had moved up from the Baupte sector) and was securing a bridgehead some 2,000-3,000 yards in depth while three more battalions from the 325th remained in place on the opposite bank to protect the southern flank of the division zone.[40]

The 82nd (less the 507th, which had switched places with the 508th and was holding the Baupte sector) spent the next day, 17 June, clearing out small pockets of resistance in the bridgehead. Meanwhile Collins ordered the 9th Infantry Division to exploit the 82nd's success by passing a motorized regiment through the bridgehead for the final push to the west coast. During its lightning advance from Pont l'Abbé begun three days earlier, the 82nd had advanced over five miles, killed, wounded, or took prisoner over 1,000 of the enemy, and seized a bridgehead over the last remaining obstacle en route to the Cotentin's west coast. Hence, when the 9th Division passed through the 82nd's lines, it encountered "nothing more than straggler units of a completely disorganized enemy."[41] On 18 June the 9th Division reached the west-coast town of Barneville, some ten miles

distant and thereby severed all connection between the Cotentin and the rest of France, trapping an estimated twenty-five to forty thousand Germans in the peninsula's northern tip. Fortress Cherbourg fell nine days later.[42]

On 19 June Bradley passed operational control of the 82nd from Collins's VII Corps to Major General Troy H. Middleton's newly activated VIII Corps. Although primarily charged with defending the base of the Cotentin Peninsula while the VII Corps advanced on Cherbourg, Middleton was also to begin preparations for an attack to the south and out of the Cotentin for it was feared that any reduction in pressure on this front would allow the enemy time to organize a defensive belt that could potentially seal up the First Army in the peninsula. In compliance with this directive, Middleton ordered Ridgway to mount an offensive from Pont l'Abbé south across the Douve to carve out a lodgment from which a larger offensive could be launched once forces became available. Ridgway gave this task to the 325th, reinforced by the 3/508th while the 507th, still in the Baupte sector, conducted a supporting attack.[43]

Although a relatively small-scale and limited action given the much more sweeping maneuvers being conducted elsewhere in Normandy, the 82nd's attack south from Pont l'Abbé was an example of superb tactical deftness and agility. Coordinating the actions of infantry, artillery, engineer, and support units, in one twenty-four-hour period Ridgway and his staff oversaw the conduct of a feint, a nighttime river crossing, the link up of two disparate fronts, and a forward passage of lines (the passing of one unit through another). Whereas the division's successes to date in France, though not lacking in tactical skill, were much more the result of hard marching, aggressiveness, and resolute toughness, the attack of 19 June was an exercise in finesse. That it played out almost flawlessly was a sign that the division had attained a level of battlefield competence equaled by few and surpassed by none.

The attack began with a bold ruse. Ten troopers from the 325th under the command of Sergeant Clarence A. Rohrbacher crossed the Douve by boat at a point well west of the main crossing site and, armed with automatic weapons, began firing wildly. Under cover of darkness, and firing at nothing in particular, for over three hours Rohrbacher's patrol scurried from point to point on the southern shore, dodging German artillery fire while attempting to draw as much attention to itself as possible. So convincing were Rohrbacher and his small band that prisoners later related that they believed a force of not less than two companies, and possibly as large as a battalion, had landed. With enemy attention focused on Rohrbacher's phantom force, at 2350 hours 18 June the troopers of the 2/325th under the command of Major Charles Major (Major replaced Roy upon the latter's death—he was the battalion's fourth commander since landing in Normandy) boarded twenty-five assault boats piloted by A Company, 307th Engineers and began the main assault crossing of the Douve. Sixty-five minutes later the entire battalion was across without a shot being fired and, with the aid of a French guide, infiltrated behind the German defenders opposite the one remaining bridge in the area. Major Major then called Lewis who, in turn, unleashed a fifteen-minute artillery barrage on the unsuspecting Germans. As the first of over five hundred rounds impacted, a second contingent of 307th Engineers sprang out onto the partially destroyed bridge and began making repairs. When the barrage lifted, Major assaulted and drove the Germans away from the southern terminus of the bridge. Shortly thereafter the other two battalions of the 325th crossed on the semi-repaired bridge and joined the attack. As

Lewis's glider troopers drove the Germans south and west, troopers from the 1/507th launched a supporting attack that cleared the 325th's rear by mid-afternoon. By nightfall, the 82nd had secured the lodgment Middleton asked for, a lodgment that extended some 3,000 yards south of the Douve.[44]

The attack of 19 June was the division's last major action for almost two weeks. The same day saw the onset of a Channel storm that raged for three days, destroyed the American artificial harbor at OMAHA beach, and thoroughly disrupted Allied lines of communication. As a result Middleton postponed an attack out of the 82nd's lodgment as the bulk of available supplies were diverted to Collins's VII Corps for its drive on Cherbourg. Ridgway did mount several limited attacks to the west and south in order to expand his lodgment and deny the enemy favorable terrain, but for the most part combat actions during this period were confined to aggressive patrolling and artillery exchanges.[45]

When not on patrol the troopers manned the division's defensive lines and battled the weather. The last half of June in Normandy was rainy, cold, and clammy and in the opinion of many trying to stay dry was of equal, if not greater moment than trying to remain safe, especially since the latter meant standing in a foxhole or lying in a slit trench filled with several inches of frigid, muddy water. Lieutenant Colonel Alexander, whom Ridgway had transferred to the 508th to serve as Lindquist's executive officer, (Alexander replaced Harry J. Harrison, who was transferred out of the 82nd for countermanding an order; Harrison was later assigned to the U.S. 28th Infantry Division where he was awarded a Bronze Star for valor and with which he was killed in November 1944) recalled being so wet and tired that after returning from an inspection of the lines one evening he elected to savor a rare few moments of dry comfort beneath a pup tent rather than repair to his muddy slit trench during an enemy mortar barrage. It took a second barrage, which tore four holes in the canvas over Alexander's head, to convince him to move.[46]

During this period of static warfare aggressive patrolling and nightly inspections of the lines were crucial to ensuring the division retained its edge and that the troopers did not succumb to the allure of a few minutes of comfort at the expense of vigilance. It was the 82nd's leadership that ensured this. Alexander walked the lines every night, as did the squad leaders, platoon sergeants, platoon leaders, and company, battalion, and regimental commanders and their executive officers. As had been ingrained in them from the beginning, theirs was to look after the welfare of the troopers first and foremost and in defensive warfare this meant leaving the safety of one's own foxhole to prowl the lines and ensure those on outpost duty were awake and alert. And, as always, the ubiquitous Ridgway and Gavin led by example. Major Shields Warren, the 1/508th commander recalled being hunkered down behind a hedgerow observing through his binoculars the fall of artillery rounds he had called in to disperse some German tanks to his front when he suddenly heard someone address him from nearby.

> 'Well, Shields, how are things going?' The voice sounded familiar, so I dropped the [field] glasses from my eyes and turned to the speaker, who turned out to be General Ridgway. I told him that I'd been held up by the tanks, but now that they were gone, we'd be on our objective with the area secured in one hour. General Ridgway expressed satisfaction with that

> schedule, and then asked what I'd been shooting at the tanks. I recounted my experience with the 2.36" bazookas, and the 81mm mortars [both had failed to disperse the tanks], and then told him we had moved them out with 155mm howitzers. The General said: 'Well, that's fine, but be careful how you use that heavy stuff, there's a storm in the Channel and we're having problems getting supplies ashore.' And then as he turned to go, he said with a smile, 'Besides, isn't that sorta like swatting a fly with a sledgehammer?' I had no rejoinder to the comment, since I had been quite aghast at the appearance of the division commander at my elbow where he could have been hit by some of the hot lead and steel flying around. The point of the story is that no one had to tell General Ridgway what his assault troopers were doing—he knew from personal observation.[47]

On another occasion, Privates First Class John P. Lynn and Steve Minarcik of C Company, 1/505th were manning a foxhole on the battalion's outpost line in the Bois de Limors, a heavily forested area on the western edge of the division sector, trying to stay warm, dry, and alert when they heard movement to their rear. Expecting it to be their sergeant, but not wanting to take chances, they issued the challenge and received the correct reply, although the voice was not one they recognized. As the figure approached out of the darkness, they were aghast to see standing over them a smiling Gavin who asked if he could climb into the foxhole with them and get out of the rain. Standing with the two stunned troopers in their foxhole, Gavin asked how things were going. Minarcik's only complaint was that there was not enough coffee. At that Gavin reached into his pocket, pulled out a coffee packet, handed it over, and then stood guard with Lynn while Minarcik fired up his small stove and prepared the coffee, which the three of them passed around for the remainder of the watch. After the war Minarcik would tell this war story to anyone willing to listen and always prefaced it with " 'General Gavin saved my life once.' "[48]

Once Cherbourg had been secured Bradley became anxious to launch his long-postponed breakout into the heart of France and tapped Middleton's VIII Corps to make the main effort, which was aimed at Coutances, a major road and rail junction some fifteen to twenty miles south of the VIII Corps lines. At the time VIII Corps consisted of three divisions, the U.S. 79th Infantry, 82nd Airborne, and 90th Infantry, aligned west to east respectively. Since they had been guarding the base of the Cotentin during the drive on Cherbourg they already faced south and were thus ideally positioned to launch Bradley's offensive. Furthermore, reasoned Bradley, an VIII Corps advance on Coutances would facilitate a larger advance by U.S. First Army, which in turn would carve out enough room on the Continent so that Patton's Third Army could be activated and unleashed into the French interior. To make all this happen quickly Bradley called on the 82nd, then long overdue for refitting in England, for one last offensive effort.[49]

Immediately fronting Middleton's corps was a string of hills ringed around the town of la Haye-du-Puits, beyond which the terrain was relatively flat and open, thereby providing excellent maneuver space for armored and mechanized forces. In order to get south of la Haye-du-Puits and on to Coutances as quickly as possible, Middleton rejected a straightforward drive with three divisions abreast in favor of a bolder approach. To the 79th Division in the west and 90th Division in the east he assigned diagonal axes of

advance that converged south of la Haye-du-Puits, thereby bypassing the town and its protective line of hills altogether with his mechanized forces. Clearing the hills would fall to the 82nd, attacking in the center. Hence, the opening of the VIII Corps offensive would resemble a V-shaped thrust with the 79th and 90th Divisions advancing down each leg of the V while the 82nd cleared the V's interior from east to west (obviously the 82nd would be pinched out of the front by the converging attacks of the 79th and 90th; it was then that Bradley planned on relieving the division of further combat duty and returning it to England). The attack would begin at 0515 hours, 3 July, with a massive fifteen-minute artillery bombardment.[50]

At VIII Corps headquarters and higher the prevailing opinion was that the offensive would meet but half-hearted resistance from a hodge-podge of enemy units hastily thrown together and with nowhere near the combat power that Middleton commanded. Although partially true, this prediction proved monumentally misleading, especially as it concerned the enemy's ability to resist. From atop the hills around la Haye-du-Puits—one of which, Hill 131, was the highest point on the Cotentin Peninsula—the Germans had an unobstructed view all the way to the American invasion beaches. *Generalleutnant* Dietrich von Choltitz, whose *LXXXIV Corps* defended the area, was determined to defend those hills and use them as a means to keep the Americans bottled up in the Cotentin. Hence, Choltitz used the time afforded him by the VIII Corps's offensive lull to organize a strong defense in depth. *Kampfgruppe Koenig*, composed of the remnants of the *91st*, *243rd*, and *265th Divisions*, along with several detachments of *Ostruppen*, formed Choltitz's outpost line (the *kampfgruppe* was named after its commander, Colonel Eugen Koenig, who took command of the *91st Division* following *Generalleutnant* Falley's death at the hands of 82nd paratroopers). Farther back, Choltitz positioned the entire *353rd Division*, just arrived from Brittany, as well as another *kampfgruppe* from the *77th Division*. And to further bolster his combat power, Choltitz had on hand the entire artillery complement of the *243rd Division*; two cannon companies; five antitank companies; a tank destroyer battalion; miscellaneous howitzer, rocket launcher, and antiaircraft batteries; and a collection of French Renault tanks. Though in many respects a hodge-podge force, it was not one to be lightly discounted.[51]

Ridgway's plan of attack was simple and, based on intelligence reports that painted an enemy force in disarray, quite logical. Eschewing the subtlety and finesse that had characterized the division's last offensive, Ridgway elected instead to flood the 82nd's zone of attack with as many forces as he could assemble, thereby denying the enemy any opportunity to husband resources or switch units among threatened points. With three regiments on line, the 505th in the north, the 508th in the center, and the 325th in the south, the division would sweep through its assigned attack zone from east to west. At the outset the 2/507th would also attack to secure a shallow draw between the 508th and 325th but then fall in on the rest of its regiment in division reserve. Both the 505th and 508th would be focused on a large hill in the northern part of the division zone (Hill 131 on 82nd maps) while the 325th, constituting the main effort, would attack to seize the string of hills just north of la Haye-du-Puits known collectively as la Poterie Ridge. For the attack the division also had attached two tank platoons from A Company, 712th Tank Battalion; one platoon of tank destroyers from A Company, 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion; and D Company, 86th Chemical (4.2-inch) Mortar Battalion.[52]

Division reconnaissance patrols in the days preceding the attack had determined that the enemy was present in much greater strength than was anticipated by higher headquarters. One such patrol led by Lieutenant Stanley Weinberg of the 505th and guided by a young Frenchman penetrated several hundred yards into enemy territory, captured a machine gun crew consisting of a German sergeant and two *Ostruppen*, and brought them back for questioning. Only too happy to be done with the war, the prisoners provided a great deal of information about the defenses fronting the 82nd, information that would prove invaluable in the upcoming attack.[53]

As scheduled, at 0515 hours, 3 July every artillery piece and mortar in the VIII Corps arsenal commenced firing a fifteen-minute preparatory barrage under cover of which the infantry regiments and their supporting units crept forward to their lines of departure. For the 505th and 508th this meant passage through the Bois de Limors. The 505th had occupied this sector of the division's front since 20 June. It proved to be the deadliest assignment yet for the veteran paratroopers. Situated just east of Hill 131, from which German artillery spotters looked directly down into the forest, the 505th troopers had already endured almost two weeks of shelling and sustained 293 casualties, about half the total suffered by the regiment in all of Normandy. As they and their 508th brethren moved forward on the morning of 3 July, however, very few enemy shells fell; the friendly artillery barrage and a driving rainstorm that blew into Normandy that night compelled many of the defenders to seek safety and shelter at the expense of security.[54]

The troopers from the 505th and 508th moved silently and swiftly through the dense forest of the Bois de Limors "which recent rain had rendered impassable to anything but infantry and ducks."[55] Both regiments attacked with two battalions forward while the third followed in reserve and moved so quickly that the lead battalions were through and behind the outlying German defenses before their occupants even realized they had been surrounded, leaving the reserve battalions to mop up. By 0900 hours, both regiments had secured their initial objectives and were preparing for the final assault on Hill 131. By noon the 2/508th had secured the hill's southern slope and the 2/505th, which had enveloped the hill from the north, was moving undetected toward its summit. The latter feat was achieved thanks to the keen eyes and quick wit of an unnamed private who spotted a strand of communication wire running toward the top of Hill 131. Surmising that the wire led right where the 2/505th wanted to go the private suggested that the battalion deviate from its planned route and simply follow the wire instead—and, he added, it was a good bet that the area around the wire was free from mines and booby-traps. Both Lieutenant Colonel Vandervoort and General Ridgway (who, as always, was up front with his lead elements) agreed. By 1225 hours the 2/505th had secured the summit of Hill 131. The eighteen Germans manning the observation post surrendered after a short fight, completely surprised when Vandervoort and his troopers suddenly appeared in their midst.[56]

While the 2/505th was taking Hill 131, the 1/505th was moving on its right due west toward the western edge of the division's attack zone, its mission to secure the St. Sauveur-le Vicomte-la Haye-du-Puits highway (the boundary between the 79th Infantry and 82nd Airborne Divisions). Based on the information gleaned from the Weinberg reconnaissance patrol, the 1/505th had prepared a 'hammer and anvil' attack plan. Well before H-Hour, the battalion infiltrated a reinforced rifle company through a gap in the enemy defenses to a position where it could ambush retreating enemy forces (the 'anvil').

Hours later, when the main body of the 1/505th attacked (the 'hammer'), those defenders lucky enough to escape the paratroopers to their front suddenly found themselves under the guns of a second paratrooper force in their rear and surrendered. In this manner, despite heavy artillery fire, the 1/505th troopers broke through to their assigned objective, secured it by 1400 hours, and in the process bagged 105 prisoners (many of whom were *Ostruppen*).[57]

The attacks by the 505th and 508th succeeded with very few friendly casualties. Such was not the case for the 325th moving on la Poterie Ridge. Advancing in standard attack formation (two battalions forward and one following in reserve), the glider troopers started slowly, picking their way through extensive minefields, and then picked up speed. By about noon, however, the pace began to slow again. The 90th Division attacking on the 325th's left had once again failed to keep pace thereby exposing the glider troopers to devastating enfilading fire. Additionally, resistance in the 325th's sector was much stouter than that encountered by the paratroopers; whereas the latter had rolled up the enemy outpost line with ease, the 325th had run headlong into the German main line of resistance. Realizing that there was no way that the 325th would be able to attain its initial objective, Hill 95 at the western edge of la Poterie Ridge, at 1700 hours Ridgway (most likely through Gavin who, like his boss, was up front and moving with the 325th's leading battalions) informed Lewis that he was to limit his advance to the village of la Poterie at the eastern edge of the ridge. Moving much more deliberately against increasingly heavy enemy fire, and notwithstanding the support of five tanks and two tank destroyers, the 325th could get no closer than 600 yards of la Poterie by 2200 hours before stalling. So thinned had the ranks of the 325th become by that time that Lewis had to commit his reserve, bringing his third battalion on line to fill in the gaps.[58]

When Ridgway renewed the attack on the ridge the next day, 4 July, it was with the 325th attacking from the east while the 505th and 508th, repositioned late the previous day, attacked from the north. Start time was set at 0800 hours. By noon the 325th had taken the village of la Poterie while, on the opposite end of the ridge, the 505th secured the northern slope of Hill 95. The 508th, which was to have attacked the center of the ridge with all three battalions on line, was held up at first due to some confusion between Lindquist and Lewis about their respective axes of advance. Despite this confusion the 2/508th, then being commanded by Captain Chester E. Graham (Lieutenant Colonel Shanley had been wounded during the attack on 3 July and Lieutenant Colonel Alexander moved forward to take command of the battalion; Alexander was then wounded during the night of 3-4 July; both would be sorely missed by the division) shook itself free from the confusion, passed through the 505th's lines at the base of Hill 95, and attacked toward the summit, reaching it shortly after noon. Casualties had been severe however, and Graham had not been able to muster all his 2/508th troopers on the hilltop before the Germans counterattacked and regained the high ground. The other two battalions of the 508th, meanwhile, were pinned down by heavy machine gun, artillery, and mortar fire and had not been able to take the series of smaller hills in the center of the ridge.[59]

As darkness fell, with the exception of the 325th's positions around la Poterie village in the east the division's hold on the rest of the ridge bearing that name was, at best, tenuous. In the west, although the 505th and 2/508th had secured the base of Hill 95, the crest was still in enemy hands. In the center, where the Germans had amassed significant firepower behind well-prepared positions, the division had been stopped cold. But

Ridgway was not through. One final push could secure the last of the division's objectives and then it would be time to return to England. But the push had to be that night, before the enemy had time to regroup. The division could not withstand another bloodbath, it was simply too weak across the board to sustain many more casualties, hence the attack had to occur before the enemy had time to make his already formidable defenses nearly impregnable. Additionally, attacking during darkness would negate the enemy's positional advantage, especially his long-range fires, and give the troopers time to close with the enemy without suffering attrition on the approach march. Metaphorically, Ridgway wanted a knife fight, not a gun battle. Shock and surprise were the keys to success. To this end Ridgway threw just about everything he had into the fray: the 2/508th, with support from the 1/505th and 3/505th, was to regain the crest of Hill 95; the 1/507th and 2/507th were moved up from their reserve positions so they could attack to take the center of la Poterie Ridge; the rest of the 508th would support the 507th with fires and be prepared to reinforce if needed while the 325th made a limited supporting attack from its positions around la Poterie village.[60]

Ridgway's plan met with stunning success. In every case the attacking troopers were able to close with the enemy before being detected and, after some brief clashes at close range, secured their objectives. The enemy, unwilling to stand and fight without the advantage of long-range fires, melted away. By 0500 hours, 5 July, Hill 95 and all of la Poterie Ridge were in 82nd hands. The only fight of any consequence occurred at daybreak when a reinforced company from the 2/507th, which had been pushed forward of the rest of the battalion, found itself in the middle of a German bivouac area. A firefight erupted that lasted until early afternoon, fought at point-blank range. Both sides sent in reinforcements, the Germans rushing up armor, but in the end the paratroopers prevailed and won the ground. With the exception of mopping up bypassed enemy formations and repelling some limited counterattacks, this was the 82nd's last major action in Normandy.[61]

In three days the 82nd had advanced the Allied line approximately four miles. It had also killed or wounded some 500 enemy soldiers, taken another 772 prisoner, and captured or destroyed five enemy field pieces.[62] An impressive achievement on its face, the fact that the division accomplished this against an enemy force entrenched in strength on high ground (every attack was literally an up-hill fight for the 82nd's troopers) at a time when the strongest company in the 82nd was at only fifty percent strength and after almost thirty days of continuous combat makes this a truly remarkable feat. As if to punctuate the 82nd's Normandy saga, the last attack also saw an act of courage exclamatory of its overall performance. During the 2/507th's fight at the German bivouac site, some of the German armored reinforcements strayed into the area seized by the 325th. Several tanks with supporting infantry broke through the lines of one of the 325th's companies and began shooting up the lightly armed glider troopers with impunity. Private First Class James L. Geach grabbed a bazooka and, though he had never before handled one, loaded and fired several rounds at the tanks and forced them to retire. Exchanging the bazooka for his rifle, he then charged the accompanying enemy infantry and killed four before driving the remainder away. Not long thereafter friendly tanks arrived at the scene and Geach volunteered to lead them on foot to break up a second German counterattack. This, too, was successful. For his actions, Geach was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.[63]

At 1000 hours, 7 July, Ridgway issued Operations Order No. 4 which outlined the division's move to the rear in preparation for its return to England. Early the next morning the U. S. 8th Infantry Division passed through the 82nd's lines and the division reverted to VIII Corps reserve as it moved to assembly areas in the rear where the troopers could clean their equipment and get a hot meal. By 11 July each of the troopers had received a fresh uniform and a shower and began trucking to assembly areas near UTAH Beach, where the division was released from VIII Corps control and put in First Army reserve. On 12 and 13 July the troopers marched to UTAH Beach and boarded LSTs for transport back to England. Debarking at Southhampton, the troopers then entrained for movement back to the same base camps from which they had departed some six weeks before.[64]

During its thirty-three days of combat (6 June – 8 July) the 82nd battled five major enemy units (the *77th*, *91st*, *243rd*, *265th* and *353rd Divisions*), killed an estimated 1,500 enemy soldiers, and took another 2,200 prisoner. It also destroyed sixty-two enemy tanks, two light reconnaissance vehicles, three self-propelled guns, and forty-one artillery, antiaircraft, and antitank guns. It achieved all missions assigned both in the defense and on the attack and on several occasions advanced with such alacrity that it outpaced friendly mechanized units on its flanks. As has already been intimated, however, Normandy cost the 82nd dearly. All told the division sustained 5,436 casualties out of a committed strength of 11,770. Of the casualties, 1,142 were killed in action or died of their wounds while another 2,373 were wounded in action. The remainder were listed as missing or known captured (840), evacuated sick (377), or evacuated injured (704). The parachute and glider infantry regiments were hit the hardest with casualty rates ranging from a low of fifty-one percent in the 505th to sixty-one percent in the 507th.[65]

The entry for 7 June 1944 in the 505th's combat journal includes a telling quote from an anonymous paratrooper: " '[t]wo days ago I was 19 years old; now I feel like I am 40.' "[66] At the time the division had been engaged in combat, albeit heavy combat, for approximately twenty-four hours. A little over a month later the survivors were all much considerably older men. Two things struck those that saw them: their look and their numbers. Lieutenant Sidney Eichen of the U.S. 30th Infantry Division recalled standing with his soldiers in silent awe as a group of 82nd troopers filed past. " 'We asked them: "Where are your officers?" and they answered: "All dead." We asked, "Who's in charge then?" and some sergeant said, "I am." I looked at the unshaven, red-eyed GIs, the dirty clothes and the droop in their walk, and I wondered: is this how we are going to look after a few days in combat?' "[67]

Chapter Fourteen Notes

[1] Quoted in Hastings, *Overlord*, 168.

[2] See Devlin, *Paratrooper*, 412.

[3] Matthew B. Ridgway, "Resume of Service of Pvt. John J. Van Valkenburg," n.d., The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Personal File Jan-Jul 44," USAMHI; Combat Interview "Colonel Millett's Group"; Combat Interview "Within the Perimeter," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[4] See Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Engineer Operations Report," 9 July 1944, Box "82nd Airborne Division—WWII—307th Eng Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports," Folder "307th Abn Eng Bn—Reports June-Jul 44," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC and Headquarters, 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, "Historical Record 319th Glider FA Bn for June, 1944."

[5] Wood questionnaire.

[6] Walton, interview, 18 March 1958.

[7] See "Status of Personnel, Operation Neptune, 82d Airborne Division," 26 July 1944, 382-0.3, Box 12345, Record Group 407, NARA II and "Operation Neptune, 82d Airborne Division, Analysis of Officer Casualties" 26 July 1944, 382-0.3, Box 12345, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[8] "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign."

[9] "Status of Personnel, Operation Neptune, 82d Airborne Division."

[10] Wayne Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 191 and John B. Wilson, *Maneuver and Firepower: The Evolution of Divisions and Separate Brigades* (Washington, D. C.: Center of Military History, 1998), 168.

[11] "Sworn Statement of Technical Sergeant Edward William Shimko with Reference Glider Landing in Vicinity of Caen, France on 7 June 1944," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II. For Shimko and his men, even the trip to France was unusual. Ten to twelve minutes into the flight the latches that secured the glider's nose broke (the noses were designed to swing up and away to facilitate loading and unloading), exposing a gap over two feet wide. Shimko and his men grabbed the nose, pulled it closed, and attempted to secure it shut but when it came undone again the tug and glider returned to the departure airfield. There the latches on the swing-away nose were wired shut and the tug and glider took off a second time.

[12] See Breuer, *Geronimo*, 271-282 passim; reminiscence of Frank E. Naughton in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 157-162; "Statement of Captain Frank Brummett, S-3, 3rd Bn. 507th Prcht. Regt.," n. d., 382-0.3.0, Box 12346, Record Group 407, NARA II. The Germans also razed a large portion of Graignes, to include blowing the edifice off a Twelfth-Century Roman Catholic Church.

[13] Funk quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo,* 223.

[14] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 72-73; Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 386-387; Combat Interview "Continuation of Command Narrative," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "Advance on Le Ham," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[15] Ekman questionnaire.

[16] Vandervoort questionnaire.

[17] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 386-387.

[18] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 386-387; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 74; 505th Combat Journal, n.d., 382-INF(505)-0.3, Box 12456, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "Advance on Le Ham"; *Operation Neptune*, 9.

[19] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 387-388; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 74; Combat Interview "Advance on Le Ham."

[20] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 74-76; 505th Combat Journal; Combat Interview "Advance on Le Ham."

[21] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 74-76; 505th Combat Journal; Combat Interview "Advance on Le Ham"; "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign"; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Unit History," 9 September 1944, 382-ART-0.3, Box 12429, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[22] Swenson quoted in Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 172-173.

[23] Except where noted see Langdon, *"Ready,"* 76; Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 388; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 172-174; 505th Combat Journal; Combat Interview "Advance on Le Ham"; Memorandum, Headquarters, 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, "Narrative History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion During the Period 20 February – 15 July 1944, and C and D Battery from 14 November 1943 to 19 February 1944," 9 August 1944, 382-FA(456)-0.3, Box 12442, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[24] Wayne Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 174; Wilson, *Maneuver and Firepower*, 168; 505th Combat Journal.

[25] Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit* (Washington, D. C.: Center of Military History, 1961; reprint, Washington, D. C.: Center of Military History, 1993), 204; Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 401-403; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 98-99. MacKelvie was relieved without prejudice and replaced by Collins's deputy corps command, Major General Eugene M. Landrum. Eisenhower believed that the 90th's problems were due to reasons beyond MacKelvie's control, contending in a letter to Marshall that the 90th had been " 'less well prepared for battle than almost any other' " having not been " 'properly brought up' " after activation and that MacKelvie, who had had command of the division only since January 1944, could not be held wholly responsible (Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit* 204). According to Weigley, however, though the 90th's problems "seemed to be worse than those of other outfits in similar predicaments" the Allied planners had not adequately prepared any of its formations for hedgerow fighting (Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 99). One 82nd veteran, Richard Brigham Johnson, related after the war that Gavin had told him that the soldiers of the 90th, "mostly from Texas and Oklahoma, who called themselves Tough 'Ombres, and wore a 'TO' shoulder patch, were so demoralized by the sight of our dead and wounded [presumably as they passed through the 82nd's lines at la Fière and Chef du Pont] that they were unable to . . . continue the attack." Johnson, "RBJ's Adventures in Normandy."

[26] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 256 and Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 364 and 402-403.

[27] Giegold quoted in Zig Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale: Stories of the RED DEVILS of the 508 Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division in World War Two* (College Park, GA: Static Line Books, 1992), 90. Capitalization in original.

[28] Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Unit History," 10 August 1944, 382-ENG-0.3, Box 12433, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[29] Chatoian quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 91.

[30] Ibid., 92.

[31] Except where noted see Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 27; Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508th P.I.R. in Normandy"; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Unit History"; *Operation Neptune*, 14.

[32] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 402.

[33] Except where noted see Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 27-29 and Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508th P.I.R. in Normandy."

[34] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 402; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 30; Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508th P.I.R. in Normandy"; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Unit History."

[35] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 403; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 181-182; "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign"; 505th Combat Journal; *Operation Neptune*, 15; Combat Interview "Operation of the 325th Glider Infantry 2d Phase," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune,' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[36] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 512; Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 404; "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign"; 505th Combat Journal; *Operation Neptune*, 16-17; Combat Interview "Operation of the 325th Glider Infantry 2d Phase."

[37] Vandervoort quoted in 505th Combat Journal.

[38] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 79.

[39] As related in ibid., 80.

[40] Except where noted see Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 404-408; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 80; "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign"; 505th Combat Journal; *Operation Neptune*, 18-19; Combat Interview "Operation of the 325th Glider Infantry 2d Phase"; Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508th P.I.R. in Normandy."

[41] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 415.

[42] Except where noted see Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 417; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 80; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 101 and 106; *Operation Neptune*, 19-20.

[43] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 37; Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* 415-416; *Operation Neptune*, 21.

[44] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 509; *Operation Neptune*, 21; "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign"; Combat Interview "Operation of the 325th Glider Infantry 2d Phase"; "Notes on the 325th Narrative," n.d., "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune,' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Unit History."

[45] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 423-426; *Operation Neptune*, 22-24.

[46] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 287; Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 44; Alexander, "Thirty Four Days in Normandy."

[47] Shields Warren to Clay Blair, 24 October 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 55, Folder "Warren, Shields (508)," USAMHI.

[48] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 82.

[49] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 37-38 and 53.

[50] Ibid., 53-58.

[51] Ibid., 56-60.

[52] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 60-61 and *Operation Neptune*, 26-27.

[53] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 61 and Langdon, *"Ready,"* 82.

[54] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 82; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 34; *Operation Neptune*, 23.

[55] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 33.

[56] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 83; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 34; *Operation Neptune*, 26-27.

[57] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 61 and Langdon, *"Ready,"* 82-83.

[58] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 61-62; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 187; *Operation Neptune*, 26; "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign"; Combat Interview "Continuing the 325th Narrative," n.d., CI-170 "82nd Airborne Div Operation 'Neptune' June 1944," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[59] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 62; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 83-84; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 34-36; *Operation Neptune*, 27-28; Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508th P.I.R. in Normandy."

[60] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 62-63; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 84; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 37; *Operation Neptune*, 27-28; Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508th P.I.R. in Normandy"; "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign."

[61] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 62-63; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 84; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 37; *Operation Neptune*, 27-29; Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508th P.I.R. in Normandy."

[62] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 63.

[63] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 188 and Headquarters, First United States Army, General Orders No. 45, 9 August 1944, Box "82nd Airborne Division WWII 325th GIR *Personal Papers," Folder **"**Personal Papers—Geach, James L. (HHC, 1/325th GIR)," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Ft. Bragg, NC.

[64] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 84; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 37-38; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 189; Milkovics, "A Day by Day Account of the 508th P.I.R. in Normandy"; "Regimental History, 325th Glider Infantry, The Normandy Campaign"; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Unit History"; *Operation Neptune*, 29-30.

[65] *Operation Neptune*, Annex 1D(2) and "Status of Personnel, Operation Neptune, 82d Airborne Division." There exists no definitive accounting of the costs in Normandy. The figures given here are based primarily on the former source which, in turn, was based on the latter although updated to include discoveries occurring after 26 July 1944.

[66] 505th Combat Journal.

[67] Eichen quoted in Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers,* 60.

Chapter Fifteen
A Lasting and Firm Faith in the Airborne

From the realization of . . . necessity and because of the ever-increasing size of the Airborne-Troop Carrier contingent in the theater, it became self-evident that some organization must be activated to bring all the elements of such a force into one cohesive whole rather than permit them to remain echelons of various diversified major units of unrelated characteristics. Hence, upon direction of the Supreme Commander and with War Department concurrence from the U.S. and British approval for her units, there was formed the First (Allied) Airborne Army. . . . It was a major step in the right direction, and needless to say, placed airborne operations on the level at which they were suited to function best.

Jack G. Cornett[1]

The replacements awaiting the return of the 82nd from Normandy were stunned as they watched the thinned files march back into the gates of their English base camps. They had, of course, heard stories of the division's exploits in Sicily and Italy, but Normandy was the biggest show to date—"the stuff of instant legend"—and the reports that had filtered across the Channel told nothing of the terrible nature of the fighting.[2] Even the wounded who had been evacuated to England could only relate what they had seen from their very personal, and limited, perspective. The enormity of the losses was something few below the rank of colonel grasped. The return of the bedraggled survivors changed all that. Companies looked like platoons, battalions like companies. The horror hit like a load of bricks. "When they told us the boys should be there any hour we were very interested," related Trooper Louis Moon, one of the 325th's replacements. "When the men came, it was my first unpleasant feeling in a long time. Their clothes were dirty, long beards, their packs were shot up and worst of all, only 16 men out of 200 came in that day."[3] When eventually reorganized and replenished many units, especially the infantry battalions, contained more replacements than veterans by a wide margin.[4] For the first time since leaving the States the 82nd had the look of a green outfit. In a letter to General Bradley, Ridgway estimated that it would be at least seventy-five days before the division could regains its "full combat efficiency."[5]

The first two days in camp were devoted to cleaning personal equipment (the division had transferred most of its organizational equipment, jeeps, and howitzers to follow on units in France), repairing what could be repaired and requisitioning anew what could not. More importantly the men rested. They had lived outside for more than a month and endured the heat, wind, rain, and cold of Normandy. The veterans more than ever appreciated their English accommodations: neatly arrayed, graveled company streets; five-man pyramidal tents; and latrines instead of slit trenches. Even the chow was to

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 394 through 398.

their liking. "We quickly learned to appreciate army food cooked from fresh ingredients more than anyone thought possible after a month of eating mostly field rations," recalled John McKenzie of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. "The reputation of army cooks reached an all-time high, at least for a week or two."[6] It was not long, however, before the veterans grew restless. They had been promised weeklong furloughs that were to begin as soon as possible after their return and they were anxious to cut loose and spend their hard-earned pay outside the gates. To that end Ridgway and Gavin worked the division's personnel sections nonstop and as a result thirty-six hours after returning to their respective base camps the first contingent of Normandy veterans were passing back through the gates sporting spit-shined jump boots and neatly pressed dress uniforms adorned with newly awarded ribbons.[7]

And so began a second invasion, one for which the unwitting rear echelon soldiers and military policemen throughout England were wholly unprepared (it should be noted that the 101st observed the same liberal leave policy, hence what remained of two American airborne divisions was loosed on an unsuspecting English countryside simultaneously).

Upon returning from Normandy, the 82nd received everywhere a hero's welcome. Beginning at Southampton, where the ships carrying them back across the Channel docked, cheering crowds swarmed the troopers as they marched down ships' gangplanks to waiting trains set to take them to their base camps in the Midlands. Several military bands were on hand as well, serenading them with martial songs as Red Cross girls plied them with donuts and coffee. Hours later, at each of the small towns bordering the base camps, the homecoming celebration grew even more exuberant. One 508th trooper recalled that the return of his regiment to Nottingham

> was beyond comparison. Met at the [railroad] station by two bands . . . and most of the inhabitants of the city, the troopers were given a welcome second only to a return to the States. As the notes of 'Over There' filled the air, some of the girls looked for a familiar face in the crowd, and old women wept, mumbling little statements like, 'God bless you, son.'[8]

Hence when the troopers began their furloughs they were primed to "unwind and forget the war for the moment" in the company of grateful Englishmen and (especially) Englishwomen unrestrained by military discipline and decorum."[9] Many headed for London, where, perhaps because of the constant threat of death or grievous injury from Hitler's vengeance weapons they found a frenzied live-in-the-moment temperament that went far toward assuaging their pent up tension. They also found there rear echelon Services and Supply soldiers and Military Policemen, two groups the cocky, hardened combat veterans held in high disdain. Inevitably there was conflict, especially with the latter whose task it was to police unruly soldiers, imposing parade ground standards of uniform dress that those just recently returned from the mud and blood of France found hard to countenance. Within a week the situation had become so serious that Brigadier General Pleas B. Hodges, commander of Central Base Section (London) was moved to write the commanders of the airborne divisions requesting their help in getting matters under control. His letter is worth quoting at length.

> We have just had a deluge of paratroopers in London, and they are the finest type of American soldier. They apparently think they can whip their weight in wild cats, and if they think it, they can do it. When they arrived there immediately showed up a very large number of uniform violations. I do not mean one pocket unbuttoned, but all buttons on their blouses unbuttoned, no coats worn, no hats worn, and no ties with two or three shirt buttons unbuttoned and the collar pulled open overlapping the lapel of the blouse. . . .
>
> We expect the men to have a good time when they come to London, and we have a very liberal policy on drunks, namely, if a man apparently has had about all he can handle, my Military Police go up to him and tell him that he had better get off the streets. If his attitude is one of cooperation we will tell him where a Red Cross Club is, or even take him to the nearest Club where we have arranged for beds to take care of them until they sober up. Conversely if he tries to tell us that he isn't drunk, or starts back about three generations telling the MP what kind of a family he comes from, he is arrested and tried for being drunk in a public place. He is either so drunk that the American uniform needs protection, or he is utterly undisciplined, and both positions are untenable.
>
> I suppose it is natural, but I think it will have to be broken up, but these men feel that now they have been in combat they are beyond uniform regulations, and they should be given very special consideration. 24 hours after their arrival, the Commander of the Military Police Battalion wanted to change the patrols from 2 to 4 men as the paratroopers were inclined to gang up on our Military Police when they had to make arrests. Of course it is a serious matter when any soldier tries to restrain a Military Policeman in the execution of his duty, and the next step is a young riot.
>
> My Colonel Provost Marshal had to call the assistance of a Scotland Yard officer to arrest two of your paratroopers as they refused to get in his car and started to walk away. The troopers in question had their garrison caps stuck under their shoulder loop of the blouse, a la British, and had all the buttons on their coats unbuttoned. After they got in the car one of them who was a Corporal told my Provost Marshal that the last time he had seen his brother in Normandy he didn't have a blouse on [presumably because he was either dead or wounded].[10]

Ridgway neither denied nor condoned the mayhem caused by his high-spirited troopers. But he did understand it. "Combat mutually shared draws men together, but it sets them apart from other men who have not seen battle, or who have known war of a different kind," he wrote. He acknowledged that his troopers had "little enough respect for other soldiers . . . who have not experienced the peculiar joys and trials of jumping [or gliding] into battle" anyway and that the experience of surviving the invasion served only to heighten their belief in their "God-given right to go around punching other soldiers in the nose." Contending that he solved the problem in the same manner he had used before in the States—"stern lectures and sterner discipline"—it was more likely the result of the increased pace of training that followed the return of the troopers from leave and the

absence of airborne troopers in London that the problem shrank to manageable proportions.[11] War correspondent Martha Gellhorn, albeit a great admirer of the 82nd but one who was also unconstrained by issues of military decorum, provided an explanation that is perhaps closer to what Ridgway and his commanders really felt about the behavior of their troopers. "If you take very young men and teach them to hold their own lives lightly and to kill, and then expect them to go out and kill on your behalf, you cannot be indignant in case they raise some hell outside the combat zone."[12]

By the time the second group of veterans returned from pass it was well toward the end of July. With the weekend falling on the twenty-ninth and thirtieth, the troopers were granted two final days to recover and prepare themselves and their equipment for the intense training (or re-training) regimen that was to kick off on Monday, 31 July. Up to that time the only training of note was some drill and ceremony in preparation for a visit from the Supreme Commander and other dignitaries, all anxious to get a look at and thank the heralded airborne divisions. Still, the troopers grumbled. "[T]he top brass felt that in England we had to demonstrate that we knew our left foot from the right and could drill as well as we could fight," wrote Lieutenant Megellas. "I was never able to understand how hours and hours on end of close order drill contributed anything to combat readiness except perhaps to irritate the men."[13]

About the only group of Normandy veterans that experienced any physically demanding training before 31 July were the troopers who had been assigned to parachute positions but had yet to attend jump school (generally troopers in the division's non-infantry parachute units who entered France in gliders). Before returning to England they were told that despite their combat experience if they desired to remain with the 82nd they had to pass a parachute course that had been set up at Rutlandshire Royal Air Force Base which was every bit as grueling as the training conducted in the States. According to John McKenzie of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion (who was one such trooper), "[t]o my knowledge, no one who had been in Normandy failed to sign up."[14] Hence, notwithstanding the horrors of combat so recently experienced and the rigors of parachute school training that they had to endure upon their return, the pride and esprit that had developed within the 82nd ensured that an invaluable core of combat veterans remained to help train the green replacements. This is no small point. No one could be ordered to attend jump school. Nor could men be required to remain in parachute positions. Any man who opted out would be sent to a replacement detachment where he could easily get 'lost' for weeks before being assigned to another unit. That these troopers, who knew the type of missions and fighting the 82nd was expected to undertake volunteered to remain with their units, in spite of the hard training they would have to undergo to retain their places and notwithstanding the existence of an 'honorable' way out, speaks volumes about they type of unit Ridgway, Gavin, and the other leaders of the 82nd had forged. Further underscoring this point are the actions of the vast majority of the troopers who had been injured or wounded. It would have been relatively easy for many of them to have themselves declared unfit for further combat duty so that they could spend the remainder of the war in a rear echelon job. Instead they returned in droves, many going AWOL from the 'repple depots' and hospitals, and made their way back to the 82nd's base camps where they asked to be taken back into the division fold. Niches were found for all of them and none were transferred out except at their own request.[15] All told, some sixty-seven percent of the troopers injured or wounded in

Normandy returned to the division (3,077 troopers were wounded or injured; 2,056 returned to duty).[16] More than anything, it was these veterans who ensured that the division was able to so quickly assimilate its replacements and regain its fighting edge. And there was little time to lose.

On 25 July Bradley's First Army launched Operation COBRA and finally succeeded in breaking out of the hedgerows of the Cotentin and into the heart of France. A week later Patton's Third Army became operational and raced wildly in three directions: west toward Brest, south to the Loire, and east toward Le Mans. Talk began to turn to the quick defeat of the German Army in the west if only some way could be found to cut it off and kill it before it escaped.[17] Almost everyone looked to the airborne to fulfill this role. During the period 6 June to 17 September 1944, twenty-five separate airborne operations were planned and eventually cancelled, postponed, or shelved for later use.[18] It seemed that even the most parochial and pedestrian saw in the airborne a war-ending panacea making them, in the words of one historian, "the most prestigious and sought-after troops in the history of the Army."[19]

There had doubtless occurred a thoroughgoing sea change in the prevailing attitude about the airborne. Prior to Normandy many in the Allied high command viewed airborne forces, especially division-sized airborne forces, as an expensive luxury. Much smaller than standard infantry divisions and packing much less firepower, airborne divisions not only required an inordinate amount of air transport to get to the battlefield, their use also necessitated special plans, prohibitions, and control measures to ensure against a recurrence of fratricide. Their use, in the eyes of many, was simply more trouble than it was worth. As will be recalled even Leigh-Mallory thought so little of the potential contributions U.S. airborne divisions would make during OVERLORD that, when faced with a last-minute change in German dispositions, rather than make adjustments he counseled outright cancellation of the drops. The airborne fight in Normandy changed everything.

Virtually without exception everyone in First Army, SHAEF, and the War Department was convinced that the invasion would not have succeeded but for the airborne divisions. Bradley, long a friend of the 82nd and the concept of mass vertical envelopment, trumpeted the fact that the "airborne operations back of Utah Beach . . . were essential for the success of the attack" (and in the process vindicated his insistence that the D-Day drops proceed).[20] Eisenhower echoed Bradley. At one time an advocate of doing away with large airborne formations ("I do not believe in the airborne division") Eisenhower readily admitted that "[o]ur good luck was largely represented in the degree of surprise that we achieved by landing on Utah Beach, which the Germans considered unsuited to major amphibious operations, and by the effective action of the two airborne divisions."[21] Even General Marshall's War Department observer, Colonel Bruce Bidwell (one-half of the team Marshall sent to England prior to the invasion in an attempt to convince Eisenhower to adopt a bolder airborne plan for OVERLORD), reported that the use of the 82nd and 101st directly behind the beaches " 'was a success.' " It is important to note, however, what Bidwell wrote next. In a veiled swipe at the timidity of the OVERLORD airborne plan, he attributed success not to the operational foresight of Eisenhower, Montgomery, or Bradley, but to the airborne troopers themselves who " 'slugged it out with the defenders and had no thought other than to achieve eventual victory.' "[22] In so doing, Bidwell kept alive the notion of a bold airborne stroke aimed at ending the war

quickly, a notion that rang with increasing resonance as the German armies in the west retreated headlong toward Germany.

So the 82nd's leaders pushed their troopers hard once they recommenced training on 31 July and focused on three broad areas: physical conditioning, weapons proficiency, and small unit tactics. Ten-mile runs were not an uncommon way to begin the training day and road marches, beginning with five miles and culminating in forty-mile hikes were the standard. Troopers were expected to hone their proficiency with all the weapons in the division's inventory, with special emphasis on those essential for close fighting—bayonets, hand grenades, and pistols. During maneuvers, small unit leaders had to demonstrate their ability to navigate, scout, and patrol.[23] "Little by little" recalled one trooper, "as the summer wore on our bodies got tough in spite of drunks, women and ornery carousing."[24]

And as the troopers conducted maneuvers in the fields around Leicester, their commander was conducting maneuvers in the corridors of power in and around London, clearly intent on taking advantage of his post-Normandy cachet. Foremost on his agenda was a topic he had addressed several times before—the role and proper employment of airborne forces. Ridgway opened his memorandum to Bradley and Eisenhower on the subject with a flourish:

> Landing during darkness, beginning at H-4 Hours on D-Day, this Division participated in the initial operation of the Invasion of WESTERN EUROPE for thirty-three continuous days without relief and without replacement. It accomplished every assigned mission on or ahead of the time ordered [a statement not entirely accurate]. No ground gained was ever relinquished, and no advance ever halted except on the order of Corps or ARMY. It sustained an aggregate loss of 46% in killed, missing and evacuated wounded. Prior to launching its final offensive, its infantry had sustained a loss of 45%. At the conclusion of its operation it went into ARMY Reserve, with fighting spirit as high as the day it entered action.

Given these accomplishments, Ridgway went on to explain that Normandy proved that the principles for employing airborne divisions articulated in Training Circular No. 113 were still "sound, comprehensive, and if properly applied to any given future operation, may be expected to yield optimum results." But, he warned, there was "a growing optimism among some commanders which, if unchecked, can lead to dangerous conclusions and, if applied in subsequent operations, to heavy and unnecessary losses." This optimism, a result of the unexpectedly low loss rate for transport aircraft during OVERLORD and the relatively low casualty rate for personnel and equipment brought into Normandy by glider could, he noted, lead to "fallacious" conclusions. Transport aircraft were still extremely vulnerable to even small arms fire and the dispersion of the parachute and glider insertions "while representing a tremendous improvement over similar phases of the SICILIAN Operation, was still greater than what we may reasonably expect with continued intensive training." His conclusion therefore was that any

> [d]ecision to employ airborne forces on subsequent missions should accord full consideration to anticipated losses, and if these are expected to

> be heavy, then the loss of so many superior troops must be carefully weighed against the anticipated probable gain. Commitment of airborne forces by air, merely because they are available, is basically unsound. Their subsequent large-scale commitment, in the face of an estimated heavy loss, should only be as part of a decisive effort, comparable in anticipated results, to the initial Invasion.[25]

Two days later, to help steer SHAEF toward adherence to the precepts he set forth, Ridgway instructed Gavin and Eaton to lead the division staff in the preparation of terrain studies that "may reveal proper airborne missions, which we may then present to the Supreme Command as guides for the employment of airborne forces in future operations in this war in this Theater." They were to base their studies on several assumptions: that "[t]here are sufficient airborne forces in this Theater for one large-scale operation, and these forces should be employed only in an operation designed to be, and which if successful will be, decisive in the defeat of GERMANY"; that "[d]ecisive results might be achieved by the independent employment of airborne forces" but would far more likely "accrue from the employment of airborne forces in close coordination with ground and naval forces"; and that they should not lose focus on the ultimate goal—the destruction of Germany's will to fight, which could be attained by "the destruction of her armed forces, the imminent threat of such destruction, or the destruction or neutralization of her means for continuing the war."[26] In Ridgway's eyes, Normandy had proved once and for all what he had always believed: that airborne forces, if employed en masse, could make a decisive contribution to the attainment of strategic objectives. He was determined that all thought of 'penny packet' attacks such as had been discussed prior to OVERLORD be forever squelched; subsequent airborne operations would be massive affairs that would form the centerpiece of a war-winning effort. Wittingly or not, in making these pronouncements Ridgway underscored perfectly concepts for the employment of airborne divisions that had been forwarded by Generals Marshall and Arnold and, more recently, kept alive by Colonel Bidwell in his after action report.

Finally, to ensure that American airborne divisions packed the requisite punch such an effort would require Ridgway also renewed his pleas for the restructuring of the airborne divisional tables of organization and equipment (when addressing issues that affected airborne divisions in general Ridgway, as the senior American airborne commander in theater, spoke for the 82nd, 101st, and the still forming 17th Airborne Division, although he always took great care to coordinate with General Taylor and Major General William M. Miley, the 17th's commander). As has been previously addressed, he had been able to effect a provisional restructuring of the 82nd and 101st prior to the invasion because of the enormous priority afforded OVERLORD but it was assumed at the time that these were temporary arrangements and that both divisions would resume their authorized structure as soon as possible after returning from France. Ridgway, however, asserted that Normandy validated the efficacy of the organizational modifications and argued, therefore, that they should be made permanent. In a somewhat strident memorandum to Bradley, written even before the 82nd had quit France, Ridgway made his case. "Thirty-three days' front line participation by this Division in operations on the continent of EUROPE demonstrate once more, and with increasing emphasis, the need for . . . basic changes in the organization of the airborne division." He had made similar requests

before, he continued, but each time his recommendations had been disapproved "largely if not entirely on the basis of inadequate manpower." Now, he believed, "there are means available to the War Department for surmounting this obstacle," concluding that "it is far better to have a smaller number of airborne divisions soundly organized than to have a larger number basically defective in organization." Unlike his earlier requests, in which he had listed a panoply of recommended changes large and small, this time Ridgway focused on but three, all of which had already been provisionally enacted for OVERLORD: the addition of a third battalion in the glider infantry regiments, the addition of a third rifle squad in the parachute infantry platoons, and the reorganization of the divisional signal company.[27] Unlike his previous endeavors, this one elicited no immediate response from the War Department, whose attentions were (most likely) focused elsewhere, in particular on manning and supplying the conventional armored and infantry divisions as they raced toward Germany. But Ridgway's efforts were not wasted. In the absence of a response the 82nd and 101st continued to operate under the provisional OVERLORD structure and when the War Department finally tabled the recommendations for consideration in December 1944 (by which time the Allied drive had stalled) it largely acquiesced to all of Ridgway's demands.[28]

There was one other major organizational decision that was wholly Ridgway's to make. With *de facto* authority to continue operating in accordance with the organizational structure adopted for OVERLORD the 82nd and 101st would also retain a third parachute regiment. When it returned to England, the division resumed control of Tucker's 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (as well as C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion and the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion), which gave the 82nd temporary control of four parachute regiments. Since the 504th and 505th were organic to the division (although the 504th had been on extended detached duty in Italy, it had never been dropped from the unit rolls), Ridgway had then to decide which of the two parachute regiments that had been attached to the 82nd for OVERLORD he would retain: the 507th or the 508th. Ridgway selected Lindquist's 508th and sent the 507th, under Edson Raff, to the 17th Airborne Division. To many familiar with the personalities of the American airborne community Ridgway's choice was much as expected. According to Chester McCoid, a company commander in the 507th, "[s]uch logical considerations as unit strength and availability of key leaders aside, had I been in the boots of General Ridgeway [*sic*]—or of Gavin . . .—choosing Roy Lindquist and the 508, over Edson Raff and the 507 would have taken an instant. There are enough hair shirts [i.e., Raff] to be worn in life without donning one willing[ly]."[29] A closer examination reveals, however, that the decision was not that cut and dried.

Raff was something of a maverick. He was also flashy, abrasive, and an insufferable egomaniac. During the invasion of North Africa (Operation TORCH) he led the first parachute assault in U.S. military history as commander of the independent 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion. Praised for his innovativeness and daring (an image Raff himself did much to promote in *We Jumped to Fight*, an account of the parachute assault he wrote while still in North Africa) he was immediately promoted to full colonel and elevated to the position of principal American airborne advisor in the North African theater. Mark Clark, Eisenhower's deputy in North Africa, was especially enamored of Raff and brought the brash colonel with him back to the States so that he could impart his wisdom to the officers of the 82nd, who at the time were in the final stages of preparing

the division for its deployment overseas. Gavin, for one, was unimpressed and likened Raff to Orde Wingate, the eccentric British general whose unconventional exploits in Burma won Churchill's admiration (Churchill had likewise paraded Wingate before senior military and political leaders during the Quebec Conference).[30] Raff, meanwhile, seems to have been oblivious to the rancor he caused and fully expected that when the 82nd arrived in North Africa, he would be given a position commensurate with his rank, in particular command of one of the division's parachute regiments. When he was not, he became livid. "I was an experienced officer in combat," Raff wrote, "had made quite a reputation [and] he [Ridgway] had no interest in anyone like myself who was already famous and already had combat experience."[31] The fact that the 82nd already had two top-notch parachute regimental commanders in Tucker and Gavin seems to have escaped the enigmatic Raff. With no place to go, Raff ended up floating around for some time, attaching himself to various headquarters, touting his expertise in all matters airborne. Eventually he made his way to England and in the lead up to OVERLORD attempted to get a regimental command position in the 1st Infantry Division. But since he was a qualified paratrooper Bradley stepped in and assigned him to the 82nd instead. It was, according to Raff, a transfer vehemently opposed by Ridgway whom Raff felt still resented him.[32] Ridgway's actions, however, belie this for while with the 82nd Raff was assigned to positions of increasing responsibility, despite the availability of other, less caustic, officers who, by that time, had accrued much more combat experience than Raff. As will be recalled, Raff's first assignment with the 82nd was as commander of the improvised tank-infantry task force that landed at UTAH Beach on D-Day and fought its way into Ste.-Mère-Église on D+1. Brigadier General George P. Howell Jr., who was also temporarily attached to the 82nd for OVERLORD, was in overall command of the task force and could easily have led it without Raff, but Ridgway gave Raff what he wanted, a combat command, by assigning him to lead the fighting echelon of Howell's task force. Then, shortly after Raff linked up with the division in Ste.-Mère-Église, Ridgway elevated him to the position of 82nd Chief of Staff when Doc Eaton was severely injured on the initial glider insertion. Again, other officers were available to fill this position, but Ridgway gave Raff the nod. A few days later, in another surprising move, Ridgway assigned Raff to command of the 507th as a replacement for Millett, a position that Raff retained for the remainder of the campaign, and the very position he had been trumpeting as his right given his experience and rank. As with the previous assignments, Ridgway had available other officers he could have selected for command of the 507th as well. Despite these plumb assignments, however, Raff remained Ridgway's harshest critic, harboring an unusually vitriolic opinion of the 82nd commander. In Raff's eyes, Ridgway was a poseur and a "man-killing bastard."[33] At one juncture, he even accused Ridgway of being dismissive of him because of his (Raff's) talent and aggressiveness at deck tennis![34] Given the implacable and ill-disguised loathing Raff bore for Ridgway, there was little doubt in the minds of many that when the time came to cut a parachute regiment loose it would by the 507th. In fact, however, it was Raff who requested the transfer of his regiment to the 17th Airborne Division, convinced that the division commander, his old friend 'Bud' Miley, "would certainly listen to me once in a while."[35] What is remarkable is that Ridgway did not relieve Raff. Nor did he harbor any enmity for his difficult subordinate. In fact, in a personal letter he wrote after the war and with full knowledge of the attacks Raff

continued to make on him, Ridgway characterized Raff as "a gallant [and] aggressive troop commander" for whom he had "the greatest respect."[36]

The Raff episode is interesting for several reasons. Many 507th veterans remained bitter about Ridgway's decision, feeling discarded because of the irascibility of one man. Writing after the war, Ridgway may have done much to further this feeling when he asserted that early on in his career he had learned "that one of the attributes of military leadership is knowing when to get rid of a sorehead, or a subordinate who is dragging his feet—the early recognition of those who can't, or won't respond, and their prompt elimination."[37] And although Ridgway did not mention him by name, many have made the assumption that it was Raff about whom Ridgway was referring. But, as noted, Ridgway did not eliminate Raff entirely for Raff retained command of the 507th for the remainder of the war (and as will be seen, as a result of Ridgway's next assignment he remained Raff's superior and could, therefore, have relieved Raff at any time). Perhaps one reason Ridgway did not fire Raff was because, for all his foibles, he was an aggressive combat commander and after the casualties sustained in Normandy there were few men remaining who possessed the requisite rank and experience to command a parachute regiment. Even Raff's harshest critics agreed that he was "a terrific combat leader" who "[b]y any standard . . . was the class of the 17th [Airborne] Division."[38] Hence, sending Raff and the 507th to Miley's green 17th Airborne Division would get a difficult subordinate out of Ridgway's beloved 82nd and would also provide Miley with some experienced combat troopers. Furthermore, firing Raff would not have relieved Ridgway of having to make a decision about which parachute regiment to release. Either the 507th or the 508th had to go. Lindquist had performed competently in Normandy and possessed none of Raff's ire. The 507th, too, had performed well, but it had already lost one regimental commander (as well as the regimental executive officer and two of the three battalion commanders); firing Raff would have meant the regiment would have its third commander in a little over a month, and with myriad plans afoot for the immediate re-insertion of the 82nd into combat, Ridgway could not afford such a turnover rate in such key positions.[39] Additionally, sending the 507th to the 17th *sans* commander would have imposed an unnecessary burden on Miley who was doing yeoman's work trying to get his division combat ready (and, as noted, Miley and Raff were old friends). Finally, as a result of the casualties accrued in Normandy there simply were not enough experienced senior officers left to put in command of a parachute regiment.[40] Hence, Ridgway's decision to send the 507th and Raff to the 17th Airborne Division was, when seen in its totality, perhaps the best available option.

Sending Raff to the 17th also accrued one other benefit for the 82nd—the elevation of Colonel Charles Billingslea, Tucker's regimental executive officer, to command of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment. Normandy had taken its toll on Harry Lewis. Sometime in August he was relieved without prejudice and sent back to the United States where it was discovered he had incurable cancer. He died within a year. Billingslea was first in the queue for regimental command (had Raff been relieved, Ridgway would almost have been compelled to put Billingslea in command of the 507th; keeping Raff in command allowed Ridgway to not only give the deserving Billingslea a regimental command, he could also retain him in the 82nd). He had extensive combat experience in Sicily and Italy, was one of the few 504th troopers to jump into Normandy as a 'spare' colonel, and was a favorite of both Ridgway and Gavin. As it turned out, Billingslea was an inspired

choice, exactly what the glider troopers needed. Whereas Lewis had been melodramatic and, some would say, unbalanced, Billingslea was soft spoken, "quiet and efficient" in the words of his regimental sergeant major.[41] Billingslea's physical presence alone was enough to make an impression, for at 6' 6" he was unusually tall for a paratrooper and easily one of the tallest men in the division. And although he did not cultivate close relations with his subordinates, he undoubtedly earned their respect. "We knew that he had the stamina and the courage to stay with us," recalled another 325th veteran. "He could and would show up everywhere, night problems in training, asking straight questions and giving orders that had better be followed. In combat he was fearless."[42] As a paratrooper assigned to a glider regiment he also represented a trend that, in time, blurred the distinction between the division's glider and parachute units and by war's end a significant number of troopers assigned to the glider outfits were also qualified paratroopers.

Ridgway could make decisions regarding the transfer of key personnel and the assignment of parachute regiments and make recommendations about airborne doctrine and future missions because, as the senior and most experienced American airborne division commander in theater, he was universally recognized as *primus inter pares*. That he did so much more forcefully upon returning to England was due to his knowledge about what the future held. In one of his first diary entries after returning to England, Gavin wrote that Ridgway revealed to him that he (Ridgway) would soon be leaving the division to form an airborne corps, that this corps would become part of an even larger entity, an allied airborne army, and that Ridgway's recommendation was that Gavin accede to command of the 82nd.[43]

Notions about forming an organization that could exercise command and control over all Allied airborne units in Europe along with the troop carrier formations to carry them had been bandied about for some time. As early as December 1943, Chief of the U.S. Army Air Forces, General 'Hap' Arnold, wrote General Carl A. 'Tooey' Spaatz, commander of U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe urging a similar idea. Arnold suggested that the U.S. Ninth Air Force (which encompassed all U.S. troop carrier units in England), then under Major General Lewis Brereton, would be an appropriate headquarters upon which to build such an organization.[44] When tabled for discussion with the British, Arnold's idea met with stark rejection. British airborne commanders were especially vehement in their criticism of the concept, fearful of placing their parachute and glider troopers under the command of an air force officer lest one day it be assumed that R.A.F. officers command such divisions.[45] But inter-service rivalry was not the only stumbling block, for national pride played its part in stymieing the idea as well. That same month, during one of the early planning conferences for OVERLORD, the British suggested a halfway measure: the realignment of all Allied troop carrier units under a single command. General Brereton, who was present at the conference "agreed in principle provided the command is American." Unacceptable to the British, the idea was shelved with Leigh-Mallory ruling "that the policy would be for American control of American airborne operations and British control of British airborne operations."[46]

So it stood for several months until the idea was revived from a most unlikely source, Eisenhower himself, who first proposed an all-encompassing airborne command to Marshall in late June 1944. According to Eisenhower, "[e]xperience has proved that in preparing to utilize large airborne forces there is at present no suitable agency available to

the High Command to assume responsibility for joint planning between Troop Carrier Command and the airborne forces." He proposed, therefore to set up

> an airborne commander directly under this [SHAEF] headquarters [and] give him these responsibilities. . . . He would not command troops actually fighting on the ground but would be responsible for providing them all logistical support until normal lines of communication could be established. Assuming that an airborne attack by two or three divisions took place within a single area, a temporary corps commander would be designated to conduct the fighting on the ground. He would operate under directives issued by this headquarters until his forces could join up with the nearest army, whereupon he would be taken over by the army commander both operationally and logistically.[47]

In closing, Eisenhower remarked that he wanted an American commander so that he could ensure that the troop carriers (the vast bulk of which were American) would receive adequate operational and training oversight. "This whole activity," he closed, "has been too loosely organized and I want to tighten it up under an energetic man who will do the job properly."[48]

Choosing the right man for the job was critical. In a subsequent cable to Arnold, to whom Marshall had delegated the authority to select a commander for the new organization, Eisenhower explained "there are questions of personality involved in this command which are difficult and delicate." Ridgway, he continued, was "quite senior and . . . has commanded in combat with great distinction" while his British counterpart, Lieutenant General 'Boy' Browning, "has long and varied experience both in the air and on the ground."[49] Hence, the man selected had to possess both enough rank and operational experience to justify placing him above two battle-hardened leaders. Major General John K. Cannon, commander of the U.S. Twelfth Air Force in the Mediterranean, was such a man and quickly emerged as the front-runner for the position. But with the invasion of southern France looming (Operation ANVIL, launched 15 August 1944), for which the Twelfth Air Force was to provide significant support, it was thought unwise to move Cannon (Eisenhower had fought long and hard for ANVIL against repeated and determined resistance from the British; he was, therefore, understandably chary of making last-minute command changes lest it affect the outcome). Next considered was Cannon's deputy, Brigadier General Hoyt S. Vandenberg. Eisenhower was satisfied that Vandenberg could do the job but pointed out that his selection for the position would require that he be promoted two grades, to lieutenant general, immediately.[50] Although not uncommon in wartime, such an accelerated promotion would have proved problematic and Vandenberg was consequently dropped from consideration. In casting about for a third candidate Marshall, Arnold, and Eisenhower eventually set their sights on a surprising choice, the staunch air power advocate, Lewis H. Brereton.

Brereton had had a long and somewhat checkered career. He was a 1911 Annapolis graduate who subsequently transferred to the army, won his wings in the nascent Air Corps, and served with great distinction in World War I, during which he earned a Distinguished Service Cross as a result of a dogfight in which he sustained grievous

wounds. Assigned to Billy Mitchell's staff after his release from the hospital, Brereton remained with the Air Corps after the war and adopted his mentor's zealous belief in the revolutionary potential of air power. So convinced was Brereton, in fact, of the rightness of these views that he risked his career by serving as a member of Mitchell's defense team during the latter's highly publicized 1926 court martial. Yet Brereton continued to advance and in November 1941, he was assigned to command MacArthur's newly created U.S. Far East Air Force in the Philippines. It was a command he was never to lead in combat. A month later, several hours after word had been received of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, eighteen of Brereton's thirty-five B-17 bombers, fifty-six of his pursuit (fighter) planes, and twenty-five other planes in his command were destroyed on the ground, a seemingly unpardonable sin for one so enamored of the offensive power of airplanes. Still Brereton escaped censure and with what was left formed and commanded the tactical air force for the short-lived ABDACOM (American-British-Dutch-Australian Command) in Java. When ABDACOM was disbanded in February 1942, Brereton and the few bombers he had remaining were transferred to North Africa where they played a minor role in support of Montgomery's El Alamein offensive. Eventually, Brereton's command grew in size and was redesignated the U.S. Ninth Air Force and, as such, supported the invasions of Sicily and Italy. During this time Brereton also got the chance to finally put his views on strategic bombing to the test. On 1 August 1943, Ninth Air Force mounted Operation TIDAL WAVE, an attack by strategic bombers on the Axis oilfields at Ploesti, Rumania. Fifty-four of the 178 B-24s sent on the raid failed to return and the damage on the oil refineries, although severe, was easily repaired. Despite these losses, two months later Brereton and his Ninth Air Force headquarters were earmarked for even greater responsibilities and transferred to England as part of the build up for the cross-Channel invasion. By April 1944, Brereton had been awarded his third star and the ranks of Ninth Air Force had swelled to some 170,000 airmen.[51] Steadfast in his views on the ability of strategic bombing to bring about the eventual defeat of an industrialized enemy through the destruction of his industry, Brereton was somewhat taken aback when, on 16 July 1944, General Spaatz invited him to lunch and told him he had been selected to command an organization that contained not one bomber. "I 'took a dim view' of this new assignment," recorded Brereton in his dairy, but it was an assignment in which he was to serve until the end of the war.[52]

On 2 August, Eisenhower's chief of staff, Major General 'Beetle' Smith, visited Brereton and handed him a directive ordering him to form what was then known as Combined Airborne Forces (on 16 August, at Brereton's prodding, the name was changed to First Allied Airborne Army). In the margin of the directive Eisenhower had penciled a reminder to Smith about what Brereton's initial focus should be.

> In accordance with our conversation this morning, Brereton should be working on his new job instantly. Please inform him that I am particularly anxious about the navigational qualifications of the Transport Command Crews. He is to get on this in an intensive way. He is to keep me in touch with his progress. There is nothing we are undertaking about which I am more concerned than this job of his. I want him on the ball with all his might.[53]

Before he could concentrate on training, however, Brereton had to form his staff and 'Hap' Arnold was only too pleased to help. Finally seeing his idea of a joint airborne-troop carrier command come to fruition, Arnold immediately assigned to it two top-notch Army Air Force officers to form the core of Brereton's air planning team: Brigadier General Floyd L. Parks as Chief of Staff and Brigadier General Ralph S. Stearley as G-3. To leaven the headquarters, Brereton next required an officer with extensive experience in ground combat and since this was to be an *Allied* airborne army, it would be best if that person were British. Browning was the logical choice but there was a problem—Browning, also a lieutenant general, had four-month's seniority on Brereton and had been heavily campaigned for the top slot. With no other airborne assignment in the offing however, Browning eventually accepted the deputy post on 4 August.[54]

On 8 August 1944, SHAEF officially announced the creation of the First Allied Airborne Army, although it was not until the end of August that Brereton gained full control of his subordinate units. When finally organized, however, First Allied Airborne Army had direct command over all Allied airborne troops in the European Theater of Operations, which were further organized into two corps-sized elements: British Airborne Troops (which became British I Airborne Corps upon commitment to combat) and the U.S. XVIII Airborne Corps. The former, commanded by Browning (it was not unusual for a deputy commander to simultaneously command a subordinate unit in the organization for which he was deputy) comprised the British 1st and 6th Airborne Divisions, the British 52nd (Lowland) Division, and the 1st Polish Parachute Brigade. The latter corps, which Ridgway ultimately took command of, comprised the U.S. 17th, 82nd, and 101st Airborne Divisions. Transferred to First Allied Airborne Army was also one of Brereton's former Ninth Air Force outfits, the U.S. IX Troop Carrier Command under Major General Paul L. Williams, as well as "such Royal Air Force troop carrier formations as might be allocated from time to time [generally R.A.F. 38 and 46 Groups]."[55]

Once the decision had been made to form an American airborne corps there was never any doubt that Ridgway would command it (as Gavin's diary entry attests). Yet although he had been instructed to form the corps immediately following his return from France, it took a while to assemble the staff officers, sergeants, clerks, and equipment to bring it to full operational capability and it was not until 27 August that Ridgway formally took command of XVIII Airborne Corps.[56] As was his prerogative, Ridgway also brought with him several key staff officers, all of whom assumed the same staff positions they had held in the 82nd: Colonel 'Doc' Eaton became the corps Chief of Staff; Lieutenant Colonel Fred Schellhammer, corps G-1; Lieutenant Colonel Whitfield Jack, corps G-2; and Lieutenant Colonel Bill Moorman, corps G-4 (Ridgway also brought along the division surgeon, Lieutenant Colonel Wolcott Etienne; his aide, Captain Don Faith; his driver, Sergeant Frank Farmer; and his orderly, Sergeant Jim Casey).[57]

Normally, the loss of a commander and so many primary staff officers at the same time would devastate a combat division, but such was not the case when, on 16 August 1944, Ridgway handed Gavin the 82nd's colors. "I had a lot of combat experience," recounted Gavin, "and I knew everybody in the division, all the commanders as well."[58] He also knew, without hesitation, which men he would call on to become the new division staff and on the same day that he became the 82nd's commander Majors Al Ireland, John Norton, and Albert G. Marin assumed their duties as the new G-1, G-3, and

G-4 respectively; Lieutenant Colonel Walter Winton became the new G-2; and the one man Ridgway left behind to provide some continuity, Lieutenant Colonel Bob Wienecke, moved from G-3 to become the new Chief of Staff. All of these men had proven their mettle in combat and, equally as important, had earned Gavin's trust and respect. Like their commander (who became, at thirty-seven, the youngest man to command a U.S. Army division since the Civil War) they were all extremely young, but they were also smart, reliable, and loyal. Along with Gavin they formed a close-knit family that remained untouched by death, wounds, or transfer through the end of the war.[59]

On the day he took command of the 82nd, Gavin mused about what lie ahead for himself, the division, and the future of the airborne.

> I have a thousand ideas and I am going to carry them through, in combat and out, with zeal and determination come what may. Either this division will rise to heights of combat attainment in our service unprecedented or rush to oblivion. In either case I will be with it all of the way. To those of us who have had a lasting and firm faith in the efficacy of airborne troops as a means of waging war there is of course no doubt about the future of this or any other parachute division nor is there any doubt or concern really with what value posterity will place on what we do now. We are supremely confident of ourselves. I suppose that we would not be in the hazardous business we are in if we in the slightest degree lacked this confidence. . . . With this abiding confidence in our professional creed, and a determination to excel in combat unmatched in any army anywhere, all airborne soldiers look to the future certain that they have a rendezvous with greatness.[60]

Little did he know, when penning these lines, that in a month and a day he and his troopers would be jumping into combat for the fourth time. Operation MARKET-GARDEN, the largest airborne operation in history would, unlike all previous airborne operations, put the airborne forces center stage. It was, must assuredly, a measure of how solidly "the firm faith in the efficacy of airborne troops as a means of waging war" had taken hold.

Chapter Fifteen Notes

[1] Cornett, "Development of Airborne Forces," 31.

[2] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*. "The Stuff of Instant Legend" was the title Blair gave to his section on Normandy.

[3] Moon quoted in Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 269-270.

[4] Pierce, *Let's Go!*, 199.

[5] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Training for Future Airborne Operations," 30 June 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Personal File, Jan – Jul 44," USAMHI.

[6] McKenzie, *On Time On Target*, 38.

[7] Except where noted see Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 133; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 86; Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 82. The 82nd granted furloughs to the Normandy survivors in two waves with half going the first week while the second half went once the first wave had returned.

[8] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 38.

[9] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 86.

[10] Brigadier General Pleas B. Rogers to Major General Maxwell D. Taylor, 24 July 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Personal File, Jan – Jul 44," USAMHI.

[11] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 105.

[12] Martha Gellhorn, "Stand Up and Hook Up!" in *Saga of the All American*, ed. Buck Dawson (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Hoffman Publishing Company, n.d.), n.p. According to Ross Carter, when the 504th troopers returned from Italy they, too, went wild on furloughs. His explanation for this behavior closely parallels that given by Gellhorn. "The truth of the matter is that we conducted ourselves like uncouth barbarians. Africa, plus the campaigns in Sicily and Italy, had dissolved most of the thin veneer that civilization spreads over the instincts. The boys simply went wild in England and didn't give two hoots in hell what they said or did." Carter, *Devils in Baggy Pants*, 202.

[13] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 85.

[14] McKenzie, *On Time On Target*, 38.

[15] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 86.

[16] *Operation Neptune*, Annex 1 D (2). Figures are as of December 1944.

[17] See Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 344 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 85.

[18] Karel Margry, ed., *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume 1 (London: Battle of Britain International Limited, 2002), 18.

[19] Soffer, *Ridgway*, 64.

[20] Omar N. Bradley to Commanding General, U.S. Forces, European Theater, 25 July 1945, General Board Report, "Organization, Equipment and Tactical Employment of the Airborne Division," appendix 6. In fairness, it should be noted that Leigh-Mallory was the first to admit that he was wrong. In his diary entry for 6 June 1944, Eisenhower's naval aide Harry Butcher wrote: "In typical British sporting fashion, Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory has written General Ike to admit that he was wrong about the airborne operation. The Marshal frankly said that it is sometimes difficult in this life to admit that one was wrong, but he has never had a greater pleasure than in doing so on this occasion." Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 570.

[21] Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 260.

[22] Bidwell's report quoted in Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 186.

[23] See Carter, *Devils in Baggy Pants*, 206-207 and Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 84.

[24] Carter, *Devils in Baggy Pants*, 207.

[25] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "82d Airborne Division—Operation NEPTUNE," 25 July 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Personal File, Jan – Jul 44," USAMHI. Capitalization in original.

[26] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Airborne Operations," 27 July 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Personal File, Jan – Jul 44," USAMHI. Capitalization in original.

[27] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Organization of Airborne Division," 10 July 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Personal File, Jan – Jul 44," USAMHI. Capitalization in original.

[28] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 516-518 and Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 75.

[29] Chester B. McCoid to Clay Blair, 16 January 1984, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "McCoid, C. (Chester) B, 507 Co. Cmdr.," USAMHI.

[30] James M. Gavin to Clay Blair, 21 November 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Gavin, James M.," USAMHI.

[31] Edson Raff, untitled narrative, n.d., p. 3, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "Raff, Edson D.," USAMHI.

[32] Ibid., 11-12.

[33] Ibid., 37.

[34] Ibid., 12 and 14.

[35] Ibid., 24. That Raff in fact did request that the 507th be transferred to the 17th Airborne Division is borne out by one of the 507th's best battalion commanders, Charles Timmes, who wrote "Raff volunteered the Regt to go to the 17th AB Div," adding it was "[a] decision we in the 507th deplored." See Charles J. Timmes to Clay Blair, 16 June 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 55, Folder "Timmes, Charles J.," USAMHI. Raff retained command of the 507th until the end of the war.

[36] Matthew B. Ridgway to Clay Blair, 6 August 1984, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "Ridgway Correspondence," USAMHI. That Ridgway knew of the personal attacks Raff had made and continued to make on him is confirmed by a letter from Blair to Ridgway in which the former cites a manuscript being prepared by Raff. "Based on the Raff ms I would say (privately to you only) that Raff is your bitterest critic. I am certain his ms will never be published. It is a scurrilous, nearly-hysterical attack on you for every conceivable . . . reason." See Clay Blair to Matthew B. Ridgway, 14 August 1984, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "Ridgway Correspondence," USAMHI.

[37] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 31.

[38] McCoid to Blair, 16 January 1984. Underlining in original. Charles Timmes seconded McCoid's characterization of Raff, labeling him "an outstanding combat cmdr." See Timmes to Blair, 16 June 1983.

[39] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 512-513.

[40] Of the likely candidates two had been severely wounded in Normandy, Mark Alexander and Arthur Maloney, both of whom were highly respected, courageous combat commanders. A third, Harry J. Harrison, was relieved for disobeying an order. He had been with Colonel Millett's group that was cut off west of the Merderet during the first few days of the fight in Normandy. Millett, it will be recalled, was ordered to break out with his force and move toward Cauquigny in order to participate in the attack there. When Millett was captured, Harrison escaped, took command of what remained of Millett's force, and withdrew to the east side of the Merderet instead of marching to the sound of the guns. The final candidate, Charles Billingslea, is discussed below.

[41] Cummings to Blair, 20 October 1983.

[42] Pierce to Blair, 4 October 1983.

[43] Gavin Diary, 19 July 1944.

[44] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 81.

[45] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 78.

[46] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 228.

[47] Dwight D. Eisenhower to George C. Marshall, 8 July 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years III*, 1988. Eisenhower sent the 8 July cable to "clearly" explain his ideas about the new airborne command, something he mentioned to Marshall in a previous cable sent 20 June.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Dwight D. Eisenhower to Henry H. Arnold, 13 July 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years III,* 2001-2002.

[50] Dwight D. Eisenhower to George C. Marshall, 15 July 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years III*, 2008.

[51] See Boatner, *Biographical Dictionary*, s.v. "Brereton, Lewis Hyde"; Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 167-213 passim; Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 231; Goralski, *World War II Almanac,* 274.

[52] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 308. In their book *Paratrooper, The Life of Gen. James M. Gavin* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), T. Michael Booth and Duncan Spencer maintained that Brereton got the job because Bradley, who was incensed over the disastrous D-Day drops, was convinced

that this had occurred because Brereton was too fixated on strategic bombing and not enough on improving the performance of his transport pilots. Reasoning that if the bombers were taken away from Brereton (Ninth Air Force comprised the IX Troop Carrier Command, the IX Bomber Command, and the IX Tactical Command) he would pay more attention to his troop transports, and that subsequently drop accuracy would improve, Bradley presented his case to Eisenhower, who accepted it without question (205). Clay Blair makes a similar case in *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 299.

[53] Dwight D. Eisenhower to Walter Bedell Smith, 1 August 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Year III*, 2053.

[54] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 81. Eisenhower tried to acquire for Brereton's staff either of two very highly thought of officers then serving in the Mediterranean: Field Marshal Alexander's American deputy, Major General Lyman L. Lemnitzer or Clark's Fifth Army chief of staff, Major General Alfred M. Gruenther. Both requests were denied. See Dwight D. Eisenhower to George C. Marshall, 17 July 1944, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years III*, 2013-2014. That Arnold was able to provide three general officers so quickly was the result of his personal interest in the project as well as the fact that he was not hamstrung by a hidebound personnel management system, as were his Army ground force compatriots. Though officially still a part of the Army, the U.S. Army Air Force was, for all practical purposes, a separate service and it was clear that after the war this would become a reality. Because of this, promotions within the Army Air Force were achieved at a much faster pace than they were in the ground Army and there was much more flexibility in the management of officers. Finally, there may have been one other reason behind Arnold's alacrity in providing Brereton three Air Force officers—he had, since the formation of parachute forces, been quietly angling for the Air Force to have its own Marine Corps and doubtless thought that the First Allied Airborne Army would provide an example of how this could be accomplished.

[55] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 81. See also Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 82.

[56] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 18.

[57] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 303.

[58] James M. Gavin, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Donald G. Andrews and Lieutenant Colonel Charles H. Ferguson, 29 May 1975, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box "oral history," USAMHI.

[59] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 303; "World War II Casualties, Decorations, Citations (also miscellaneous information)," unmarked box, Folder "82nd Airborne Division—WWII Casualties and Awards," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort. Bragg, NC. The one position that remained unfilled was that of assistant division commander. Ridgway and Gavin discussed several candidates. One logical choice was Brigadier General Howell, but not only was Howell irascible—" 'he didn't get along with anybody' " recalled Maxwell Taylor—he was also six years Gavin's senior in rank (Taylor quoted in Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 544. See also page 191). Ridgway was likewise down on Howell and rejected him for his XVIII Airborne Corps staff as well. Another candidate was Brigadier General Stuart Cutler, whom Ridgway favored. Cutler had commanded the 82nd's 326th Glider Infantry Regiment before it had been cut loose and replaced by the 505th just before the division sailed for North Africa. Cutler had already served as an assistant division commander in the 13th Airborne Division and at the time was on Brereton's staff. But Gavin was not high on Cutler either and, like Howell, he was also senior to Gavin. Gavin's preference was Reuben Tucker, but this choice Ridgway vetoed. As good a combat commander as Tucker was he was not, in Ridgway's eyes, general officer material. Gavin recalled talking with Ridgway about Tucker. "[H]e [Tucker] was famous for screwing up everything having to do with administration," recalled Gavin, and was notoriously lax when it came to matters of discipline, dress, and decorum; when finally released from detached duty with Clark's Fifth Army in Italy, Tucker was reputed to have thrown an orange crate full of charge sheets preferred against his 504th troopers into Naples harbor, an act the by-the-book Ridgway simply would not countenance. "Everybody in the paratroops wondered by we didn't name

Rube," Gavin continued. "We just couldn't do it" (Gavin, interview, 28 September 1982). In the end, Gavin fell victim to his own startling success. Besides Tucker there was no one in the airborne community of requisite rank who had as much combat experience as he did and those outside the airborne who did have the rank both lacked the experience and were all much older. Hence, until December 1944, when Colonel Ira P. Swift was assigned to the position, Gavin operated without an assistant division commander. "I sure could have used one," he later lamented (See Gavin, interview, 29 May 1975). See also Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 301; Floyd Lavinius Parks, Diary of the Chief of Staff, First Allied Airborne Army, (entry for 4 September 1944), The Floyd Lavinius Parks Papers, Box 2, USAMHI; Gavin Diary, 24 July 1944.

[60] Gavin Diary, 16 August 1944.

Chapter Sixteen
We'll Need Two Divisions to do That

General Eisenhower wants a plan prepared which would have as its purpose a maximum contribution to the destruction of the German armies in western Europe. He wants imagination and daring. . . . In parting, I told General Eisenhower that if he wanted plans with daring and imagination he would get them, but that I did not think his staff or the ground commanders would like it. My mind went back to October 1918, when Gen. Billy Mitchell dumped plans in my lap to work out details for what then was something unheard of—a parachute drop behind the enemy's lines. General Mitchell sold General Pershing on the feasibility of the operation and was proceeding with plans to take Metz from the rear by dropping an entire division by parachute from big bombers. The Armistice cut short General Mitchell's plans. Now, 26 years later, we had the same thing in mind. That's how far ahead Billy Mitchell was.

Lewis H. Brereton[1]

Once the Allies were firmly established in western Europe, Eisenhower, his principal commanders, and the SHAEF planners turned their attention to fulfilling the second part of the mission given them by the Combined Chiefs of Staff: to " 'undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.' "[2] Where, exactly, the "heart of Germany" lay was a matter they were left to determine. Berlin, the most obvious political, psychological, and moral point of aim was too far east to be of any immediate operational significance. Much closer, however, were Germany's industrial centers, in particular the Ruhr and Saar, the destruction or capture of which would significantly impact Nazi warmaking capabilities. Threatening these areas, it was thought, would also force the German Army in the west to stand and fight, hastening its destruction as well.

The decision to make the Ruhr and Saar twin points of aim was also informed by the terrain of western Europe. Generally speaking, there are four major routes of advance from the Normandy beaches to Germany. The first, via the flatlands of Flanders, is for much of its length below sea level and could be easily flooded; this route was therefore rejected. The second, described by the path Amiens-Maubeuge-Liège, skirts just north of the imposing Ardennes Forest, offers the most direct route to the Ruhr, and traverses terrain well suited for mechanized warfare. The third, through the Ardennes itself, was also rejected because of the limitations it would impose on Allied mobility. The fourth, a path that skirts the southern edge of the Ardennes through Metz, leads to the Saar and on to Frankfurt. It, too, is over terrain that would allow the Allies to take advantage of their superior mechanization. Ultimately SHAEF planners recommended that the Allies

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 420 through 424.

undertake a broad-front advance over routes two and four, although keeping in mind that the northern route through Liège would constitute the main effort since it offered the most direct line of advance to the Ruhr, Germany's largest and most important center of war industry.[3]

A critical assumption that underlay Allied conceptions about the course of events after D-Day was that the Germans would conduct a fighting withdrawal along the rivers of France and Belgium. It was envisioned, therefore, that the opposing Allied advance would be steady and methodical, punctuated by a series of operational pauses during which Allied logisticians would have sufficient time to stockpile needed supplies in preparation for a renewal of the offensive. Based on this assumption, a logistical timetable was established. According to the timetable Allied armies would not reach Paris and the Seine until D+90 (4 September 1944) and, because of the formidable barrier a fortified Seine posed, it was assumed that there would be at least a month's pause before the advance was resumed beyond the Seine. All this, however, did not take into consideration Hitler's maniacal determination to fight for every inch of ground, a determination that changed the course of the war in western Europe dramatically.[4]

On 10 June, Hitler set the tone for German Army operations in France. " 'There can be no question of fighting a rearguard action nor of retiring to a new line of resistance,' " he wrote to his *Seventh Army* commander. "Every man shall fight or fall where he stands.' "[5] In accordance with this directive, time and again German commanders threw their forces into fruitless counterattacks or maintained defensive positions long after they had become untenable. Following the fall of Cherbourg, Hitler upped the ante, ordering the commanders of all remaining port garrisons to hole themselves up in their respective port cities and fight " 'to the last man, to the last cartridge.' "[6] On 2 July, having grown tired of Rundstedt's constant refrain about retiring to more defensible terrain, Hitler sacked the aging field marshal and replaced him with *Generalfeldmarschall* Guenther von Kluge, one of his favorites and a man who had already demonstrated a capacity for fast-paced maneuver warfare in Poland, France (1940), and Russia. Kluge, however, could not stem the Allied tide and it was on his watch that Bradley's First Army launched Operation COBRA, the subsequent breakout from Normandy, and the unleashing of Patton's Third Army. When Hitler appointed Kluge to replace Rundstedt, he also ordered Kluge to counterattack toward Avranches in an effort to "re-establish a continuous defensive line in Normandy and restore the conditions that had made possible the static warfare of June and July."[7] Kluge launched his counterattack on 7 August and failed miserably. Forewarned by ULTRA intercepts, the Americans were prepared for the onslaught and not only beat back Kluge's attack, they then held his forces in place while Patton's army encircled his southern flank. Internecine Allied wrangling and Bradley's unfounded fear of fratricide ensured that the resulting Falaise Pocket in which Kluge's forces were trapped was not closed until 21 August, allowing some 20,000 to 40,000 German soldiers to escape.[8] But in the interim the German Army in the west lost horribly and looked, to all concerned, a thoroughly beaten and routed force. By 29 August, the day on which the last remaining German troops retreated to the north bank of the Seine, the Germans had lost some 240,000 men killed or wounded and another 210,000 captured. Some fifty German divisions had been engaged in the fight south of the Seine; fewer than ten could be classified as "reasonable fighting divisions" at the end

of August.[9] Allied thoughts of a methodical advance to Germany were forgotten. It appeared a pursuit was in order.

One of the first to contemplate a radical change of pace was the Supreme Commander himself. On the same day that Kluge launched his counterattack a confident Eisenhower cabled Marshall to inform him that he was considering operations " 'to cross the Seine before the enemy has time to hold it in strength, destroy his forces between the Seine and Somme and secure the Seine ports.' "[10] Ten days later, the collapse of the German counterattack and subsequent encirclement of Kluge's forces further emboldened Eisenhower. In another cable to Marshall, Eisenhower posited that the destruction of German forces around Falaise might set the stage for a " 'dash across the Seine' " thereby turning the Allied advance into an all-out pursuit.[11] By 19 August Eisenhower had made a decision. Calling his two subordinate commanders to conference, he ordered them to discard all previous plans; instead Montgomery and Bradley were to leap the river on the run and pursue the beaten Germans into the Fatherland.[12]

Eisenhower's decision to take the Seine in stride was one of "the most fateful tactical decisions of the war."[13] He had before him what looked like, from every indication, a thoroughly beaten foe ripe for a killing blow. A pursuit was what doctrine called for to deliver that blow. However, by unleashing both Montgomery and Bradley in the pursuit Eisenhower made an operational decision that "carried with [it] a supply task out of all proportion to planned capabilities."[14]

For the first seven weeks of the fight in France, the Allies had moved much more slowly than expected by the logisticians. The lag allowed time for the development of Cherbourg and other minor ports in Normandy and the stockpiling of supplies. This temporary logistical advantage quickly dissipated, however, once the Allies broke out of Normandy at the end of July. At D+49 (25 July, the date on which Bradley launched Operation COBRA) the Allies were still at the line logisticians had predicted they would reach and pass by D+20. In the thirty days following the breakout (D+49 to D+79 [24 August], COBRA to the Seine) the Allies advanced a distance that logisticians predicted would take them seventy days to traverse. Lines of communication from the Channel coast to forward supply depots could not be developed at that rate (the most efficient source of overland transportation, French railroads, had been ravaged by Allied airpower in the weeks leading up to the invasion) and hence when the Allied armies leapt the Seine, they did so having already used up their operational reserves. Nevertheless, the pace of the pursuit not only continued, it accelerated. By D+100 (14 September) leading Allied combat formations were at a point that logistical planners had not planned on reaching until D+330 (2 May 1945). Inevitably the pursuit slowed and Eisenhower was forced to re-look his broad-front strategy. Keeping all his commanders supplied with enough ammunition, water, food, repair parts and, above all fuel, was simply not possible.[15]

From the outset Montgomery had been dead set against a broad-front advance. In his mind, a strategy that envisioned two drives north and south of the Ardennes would result in the unnecessary dissipation of combat power. It would be far better, felt Montgomery, to have both his 21st Army Group (composed of the Canadian First and British Second Armies) and Bradley's 12th Army Group (composed of the U.S. First and Third Armies) pass northeast of the Ardennes in an advance toward the Ruhr. In this manner, the two army groups could form " 'a solid mass of some forty divisions which would be so strong

that it need fear nothing.' " This force would liberate Belgium, establish forward airfields and under an impenetrable Allied air umbrella mount a final offensive across the Rhine and into the Ruhr before the onset of winter.[16] Montgomery, acting in his capacity as the overall ground force commander, made this suggestion to Bradley at the latter's headquarters on 17 August. It is unclear whether Bradley agreed with the plan at the time (Montgomery insisted that he did; Bradley contended that he did not).[17] But the point is moot for on 1 September, in accordance with a previously agreed to protocol and in the face of vehement opposition by Montgomery, direct command of the army groups passed from Montgomery to Eisenhower and the Supreme Commander was intent on maintaining his broad front approach, although in a modified form.

Although he had failed to convince Eisenhower that "[t]he Supreme Commander must sit on a very lofty perch in order to be able to take a detached view of the whole intricate problem" and that someone else (read Montgomery) should run the ground battle for him, Montgomery continued to aggressively campaign to have his ideas about the future course of the advance accepted.[18] The increasingly straitened supply situation made this imperative. In a 4 September message to Eisenhower, Montgomery succinctly summarized what he had been maintaining, and continued to maintain, ever since the breakout from Normandy. " 'I consider we have now reached a stage where one really powerful and full-blooded thrust towards Berlin is likely to get there and thus end the German war,' " he wrote. " 'We have not enough maintenance resources for two full-blooded thrusts' " and since " 'the thrust likely to give the best and quickest results is the northern one via the Ruhr' " his 21st Army Group should get absolute priority on all supplies.[19] Eisenhower, too, had come to realize that maintaining two thrusts was problematic. " 'For a very considerable time,' " he informed Marshall, " 'I was of the belief that we could carry out the operation to the northeast simultaneously with a thrust east, but later have concluded that due to the tremendous importance of the objectives in the northeast we must first concentrate on that movement.' "[20] Nevertheless, for political reasons Eisenhower could not and would not stop Bradley completely. What he did agree to, during a series of tense and, at times, barely civil meetings with his abrasive British subordinate was to give Montgomery's drive *priority*, going so far as to strip three American divisions of their trucks so that they could be used to ferry supplies forward to the 21st Army Group.[21] Furthermore, he had already granted Montgomery permission to employ SHAEF's only reserve, the First Allied Airborne Army, to use as he saw fit.

Since mid-July Eisenhower had been pestering his staff to come up with plans that would use airborne troops to either cut off the German retreat or facilitate the advance of the Allied armies. One of the first to be considered, Operation TRANSFIGURE, envisioned a drop in the Paris-Orléans gap to cut off German forces retreating from the Falaise pocket. But TRANSFIGURE was cancelled when Patton's Third Army overran the drop zones on 17 August.[22] In the ensuing weeks plans to use airborne troops to seize crossings over the Seine (Outline Plans 1, 2, and 3); seize the port of Boulogne and V-weapon launching sites in Calais (BOXER); block the retreat of the Germans over the Meuse River and Escaut Canal (LINNET I and II); clear the Scheldt Estuary leading to Antwerp (INFATUATE); and aid in the crossing of the Rhine or the piercing of the Siegfried Line (COMET, NAPLES I and II, MILAN I and II, and CHOKER I and II) were prepared as well and each was subsequently cancelled.[23] The reason given for the constant cancellations was that, as had happened with TRANSFIGURE, the ground

forces were moving so fast that the proposed drop zones were overrun before the airborne operation could be mounted. Although true enough for some of the above, the main reason that the drops were cancelled is that, despite rhetoric to the contrary, the Allies were much more focused on gaining ground than they were on destroying the German Army. Patton's spectacular drives, the liberation of Europe's leading cities (Paris fell on 25 August, Brussels on 3 September, Antwerp on 4 September), and the allure of being the first into Germany were what captured the imagination and made headlines.[24] And although the German Army in the west suffered grievously as a result, it was never decisively beaten. Even during the fight of the Falaise Pocket, the vast majority of the German forces that *could have been* surrounded and destroyed were allowed to escape to fight another day. In the words of one student of airborne operations during World War II, "if a battle of annihilation were being sought, then an airborne operation might have been the very instrument to bring it about."[25] But mounting such an operation would have meant temporarily diverting Brereton's transport planes from the task that had accounted for the bulk of their flying time in the days after the breakout: the ferrying of supplies to the front.

Almost all of Eisenhower's ground force commanders were chary of releasing the C-47s so that they could prepare for an airborne operation, especially (and somewhat surprisingly) Bradley. According to Brereton, "George Patton has been exceedingly audible in his appreciation of the air supply assistance given him, and there is a definite and determined reluctance on the part of Bradley not to favor airborne operations in front of his armies at the expense of air supply."[26] After the war Eisenhower attempted to justify the decisions made during the heady days of August and early September.

> Unfortunately this withdrawal of planes from other work [i.e., supply runs] had to precede an airborne operation by several days, to provide time for refitting equipment and for briefing and retraining of crews. In late August, with our supply situation growing constantly more desperate, and with all of us eagerly following combat progress in search for another prospect of cutting off great numbers of the enemy, the question of the Transport Command employment came up for daily discussion. On the average, allowing for all kinds of weather, our planes could deliver about 2000 tons a day to the front. While this was only a small percentage of our total deliveries, every ton was so valuable that the decision was a serious one.[27]

Indeed it was a small percentage. A standard infantry or armored division in combat required 600-700 tons of supplies per day and by the end of August the Allies had some thirty-six divisions in combat (to say nothing of numerous independent regiments and battalions), with more arriving weekly. Various schemes were tried to keep the armies supplied the most famous of which was the Red Ball Express, a hastily improvised convoy system comprising just shy of 6,000 U.S.-built trucks that ran non-stop from August to November 1944. Still, demand outpaced supply (at its most efficient the Red Ball Express could only supply some 7,000 tons per day to U.S. divisions and 4,000 tons per day to British and Canadian divisions). By adding the C-47s of the IX Troop Carrier Command to the transportation chain it was thought that just enough supplies could be

delivered to push the Allies over the edge against a German Army that, by early September, Allied intelligence characterized as " 'no longer a cohesive force but a number of fugitive battle groups, disorganized and even demoralized, short of equipment and arms.' "[28] But it quickly became evident that, despite the hundreds of sorties Brereton's C-47s flew, the Allied armies were simply too far from the depots to be kept adequately supplied. Something had to be done to drastically shorten the Allies' over-extended lines of communication. The liberation of Antwerp on 4 September carried with it just this hope.[29]

Boasting a completely sheltered deep water port, over 600 cranes, forty-two kilometers of quays, and "clearance facilities [that] included more than 800 kilometers of rails, extensive marshaling yards, and excellent linkage with the Belgian network of over 5,000 kilometers of railroads and 2,200 kilometers of navigable rivers," Antwerp ranked with New York as one of the world's foremost seaports.[30] Much to the Allies' advantage, when Major General G. P. B. 'Pip' Roberts's British 11th Armored Division entered the city it made straight for the docks and captured them "in full working order." As Lieutenant General Brian Gwynne Horrocks, the British XXX Corps commander and Roberts's immediate superior related, "[t]his was an almost unbelievable stroke of luck, for the sluice gates and the dockside equipment, all electrically operated, could easily have been put out of action." But capturing the docks was not enough to bring Antwerp into operation for to reach the docks ships had to traverse the sixty-mile-long Scheldt Estuary, both sides of which remnants of the *German Fifteenth Army* still held. "If I had ordered Roberts to bypass Antwerp," wrote the self-effacing Horrocks after the war, "and advance for only fifteen miles north-west, . . . the whole of this [German] force, which played such a prominent part in the subsequent fighting, might have been destroyed or forced to surrender. Napoleon, no doubt, would have realized this, but I am afraid Horrocks didn't."[31] Nevertheless Montgomery saw that he could use Antwerp as leverage in his running argument with Eisenhower. His message of 4 September was the opening salvo. What he needed to seal the deal was a concrete plan that would force Eisenhower's hand.

Montgomery's staff, in conjunction with the staff of the First Allied Airborne Army, had already prepared Operation COMET, planning for which began the day prior to the liberation of Antwerp. COMET called for a drop by the British 1st Airborne Division, the Polish Parachute Brigade, an aviation engineer outfit (equipped to quickly put airfields into operation), and the subsequent air-landing insertion of the British 52nd (Lowland) Division into the area stretching from Arnhem, Holland, on the Neder Rijn (the lower Rhine) through Nijmegen, Holland. This force would seize and hold a series of bridges until XXX Corps, advancing overland, could link up and relieve it. In proposing COMET, Montgomery held out the hope of a quick end to the war. In one fell swoop, COMET would: cut off all the German forces occupying the area surrounding the Scheldt Estuary, leaving them vulnerable for quick annihilation or surrender, following which Antwerp could begin operating as a major port of entry; obtain a bridgehead over the lower Rhine in Holland; bypass the Siegfried Line to the north; and poise 21st Army Group for a strike into the Ruhr industrial area. Eisenhower bought it. Originally planned for 8 and 9 September, COMET was delayed twice, once because of bad weather and a second time because of intelligence reports that indicated a significant build up of German forces fronting XXX Corps. Finally, on 10 September, COMET was

cancelled altogether.[32] Montgomery also proposed a second plan, Operation INFATUATE. Much less aggressive than COMET, INFATUATE envisioned a drop on Walcheren Island, the key to the German defenses around the Scheldt Estuary. But INFATUATE was too risky for Brereton's taste, who vetoed the plan because of the heavy concentration of antiaircraft batteries in the area, terrain that was unsuitable for glider landings, the expectation of excessive losses due to drowning and, at the time, the non-availability of U.S. airborne troops as his reasons.[33]

Montgomery then proposed Operation MARKET-GARDEN, a plan so bold that according to Bradley " '[h]ad the pious, teetotalling Montgomery wobbled into SHAEF with a hangover, I could not have been more astonished.' "[34] Yet, for all its audacity, MARKET-GARDEN was much more than just another operational proposal. It was, in fact, a gambit by Montgomery, still in a fit of pique about having been relieved as the overall ground force commander, to obtain for his army group untrammeled access to Allied resources. To this end Allied politics had as much to do with its acceptance as did its promise to end the European war more quickly than envisaged. As Bradley saw it, Montgomery "was desperately, obsessively determined to lead a single thrust to Berlin and this was about the only way left to do it. It was strategy by subterfuge, legerdemain."[35] Added to this was Montgomery's wounded ego. Horrocks wrote that although Montgomery "was wont to assert that he did not mind what anybody said about him," he "deeply resented American suspicion that his handling of the Normandy battle showed evidence of caution and timidity, and that he would never be equal to the demands of exploitation and pursuit." "In his heart of hearts," continued Horrocks, "he knew that the moment had come, to use his own words, 'to throw his bonnet over the windmill and soar from the known to the unknown.' "[36]

Montgomery's intent for MARKET-GARDEN was the same as what he had proposed for Operation COMET: to seize a bridgehead over the Neder Rijn at Arnhem. But MARKET-GARDEN was much more expansive in scope. Instead of dropping one airborne division and the Polish Parachute Brigade, as had been the concept for COMET, MARKET-GARDEN called for a massive drop of three Allied airborne divisions and the Polish Brigade followed by the air-landed British 52nd Division all under the command and control of an airborne corps headquarters. As Montgomery had promised with COMET, if successful MARKET-GARDEN would solve the Allied supply difficulties by clearing the approaches to Antwerp, create a bridgehead over the Rhine, avoid the Siegfried Line, and poise 21st Army Group for an advance into the Ruhr. Added to this was the elimination of the V-2 launching sites in the vicinity of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. The first of this new generation of vengeance weapons fell on London on 8 September and their appearance caused quite a bit of consternation in England.[37] Finally, its much grander airborne scheme satisfied a desire by Eisenhower to employ the airborne divisions resting and training in England, which had, by that time, become "coins burning holes in SHAEF's pocket."[38] According to Bradley, both Marshall and Arnold had been hounding Eisenhower to use the "valuable" and "expensive" airborne forces for some time and "Monty's Arnhem plan offered Ike a golden opportunity to stage a splashy airborne spectacle."[39]

Still, Montgomery almost blew his chances of getting MARKET-GARDEN approved. Eisenhower had replied to Montgomery's 4 September message with one of his own that, due to communication difficulties resulting from SHAEF forward headquarters being so

far from the front (it was, at the time, in Granville, France, over 300 miles from Montgomery's command post), Montgomery received in two parts, on 7 and 9 September, and in reverse order (he received paragraphs three and four on 7 September and then paragraphs one and two on 9 September). This put Montgomery over the edge. Not only had he been supplanted as overall ground force commander, he was being given garbled directions from a headquarters far removed from the action. Furthermore, though the second part of Eisenhower's reply (which Montgomery received first) clearly stated that the Supreme Commander had " 'always given and still gives priority to the Ruhr RPT Ruhr, and the northern route of advance,' " the first part, received two days later, reiterated that while Eisenhower agreed with Montgomery's " 'conception of a powerful and full-blooded thrust towards Berlin [he did] not agree that it should be initiated at this moment to the exclusion of all other maneuvers.' "[40] At this Montgomery requested a face-to-face meeting with the Supreme Commander, to be held at Montgomery's command post near Brussels. Eisenhower agreed, although the meeting would have to take place aboard Eisenhower's plane since he was, at the time, hobbled by a wrenched knee.[41]

When Eisenhower's plane landed at Brussels airport, Montgomery was there to meet it in fighting trim. The Supreme Commander had brought with him his deputy, Air Chief Marshal Arthur William Tedder, and his chief administrative officer, Lieutenant General Sir Humphrey Gale, neither of whom were great admirers of their difficult countryman. Immediately upon boarding the plane Montgomery soured the atmosphere by insisting that Gale leave, although he had his 21st Army Group administrative officer with him and desired that he remain. When Eisenhower reluctantly agreed, Montgomery launched into an insubordinate lecture on strategy, ranting about the Supreme Commander's broad front approach and, as he saw it, its many flaws. Listening quietly, but with growing indignation, Eisenhower finally leaned forward, put both hands on Montgomery's knees and, staring him full in the eyes, said, " 'Steady, Monty! You can't speak to me like that. I'm your boss.' "[42] At this, Montgomery mumbled an apology but continued to insist on his plan.

> I told him [wrote Montgomery] that enemy resistance was stiffening on the line of the Albert Canal; that there was a steady consumption of petrol and ammunition; and that we were outstripping our maintenance [i.e., supplies]. It was becoming clear that I would not be able to launch the large-scale operation towards Arnhem as soon as I had hoped and that this would give the enemy more time to recover. Since crossing the Seine my headquarters had moved northwards, and Bradley's eastwards. The land battle was becoming jerky and disjointed. I said that so long as he continued with two thrusts, with the maintenance split between the two, neither could succeed. . . . The quickest way to open up Antwerp was to back my plan of concentration on the left—which plan would not only help our logistic and maintenance situation but would also keep up the pressure on the stricken Germans in the area of greatest importance, thus helping to end the war quickly.[43]

Eisenhower was nonplussed. " 'Monty, you're nuts," he replied. "You can't do it. What the hell!' "[44] Montgomery then played his ace card and outlined for the Supreme Commander Operation MARKET-GARDEN, the concept for which no one outside of a select group of trusted officers knew anything about. Eisenhower immediately warmed to the plan, seeing it as a compromise solution that promised great results without his having to give absolute priority to Montgomery's army group. " 'I not only approved Market-Garden,' " recalled Eisenhower after the war, " 'I insisted upon it. What we needed was a *bridgehead* over the Rhine. If that could be accomplished I was quite willing to wait on all other operations.' "[45] Montgomery, too, felt it a half measure. As his 4 September message demonstrated, he had abandoned any thought of the somewhat limited objective of the Ruhr and was instead contemplating an advance all the way to the German capital. MARKET-GARDEN was a step in that direction, an operation Montgomery hoped would, when successful, build such irreversible momentum that Eisenhower would feel compelled to acquiesce to all his demands. Patton called this the "rock soup" method of influencing strategy: start small, achieve success, and get so enmeshed in combat that those holding sway over supplies are forced to maintain your forces. It was, he wrote, "hell to wage war by inadvertence [and] to conquer by deceit," but it was the manner by which both Montgomery and, in his own way, Bradley, secured resources.[46] In September 1944, it was Montgomery's recipe that became the Allied *soup du jour*.

One of the few who had prior knowledge of MARKET-GARDEN was First Allied Airborne Army's deputy commander, Lieutenant General 'Boy' Browning. Since 4 September, Browning had been cloistered with the 21st Army Group staff exploring ways by which airborne forces could facilitate Montgomery's ambitious plans.[47] As soon as he received word that Eisenhower had approved MARKET-GARDEN Browning hopped a plane back to England and telephoned the First Allied Airborne Army Chief of Staff Brigadier General Floyd Parks in order to set up a briefing for the principle commanders and their assistants. There was little time to lose. The earliest proposed drop date was but five days away (15 September). Furthermore, by hand-delivering the plan (a plan he, no doubt, played a major part in formulating) Browning could ensure that he would be named the overall airborne force commander and, in so being, salvage a career that, just a few days previously, he had almost discarded in a fit of pique.[48]

The day before leaving for Montgomery's headquarters, Browning had submitted his resignation as First Allied Airborne Army deputy commander following a violent disagreement with his superior, Lieutenant General Brereton, over the conduct of a proposed drop in the Liège-Maastricht Gap. This plan, codenamed Operation LINNET II, was Brereton's idea although Browning was to be the overall airborne commander. A previous operation, codenamed LINNET (a drop in the Lille-Tournai area), had been cancelled on 2 September but, in a zealous attempt to realize Eisenhower's desire to use massed airborne forces somewhere soon, Brereton proposed that the same force package envisaged for LINNET (the British 1st and U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, the Polish Parachute Brigade, a U.S. engineer group, and the British 52nd Lowland Division) be switched to the Liège-Maastricht Gap in order to seize crossings over the Meuse River in front of U.S. First Army. When informed of this decision by Brigadier General Parks, Browning protested, saying that he could not possibly prepare for an operation in the new area on such short notice. He would not command LINNET II, continued Browning,

unless given a direct order. During a meeting with Brereton on the evening of 3 September that had been called to finalize LINNET II, Browning repeated his reservations about the plan and eventually became so upset that he stormed out, telling Brereton that he would tender a written protest and that that protest would be backed by the division commanders, who Browning intimated also had serious reservations about undertaking the operation on such short notice. Shaken by his deputy's vehement intransigence, Brereton turned to Ridgway, who was also present at the meeting, and asked if he thought Gavin and Taylor would, in fact, back Browning. Ridgway replied that "he felt sure that the commanders of the 82nd and 101st Divisions would not protest the execution of any decisions handed down to them—that they would express an opinion in the formative stages before the decision was made, but that once the decision was made their determination to carry it out could not be questioned." Gavin and Taylor, continued Ridgway, "would do as ordered and make a 100 percent job of it."[49] With this assurance, Brereton relieved Browning as the overall airborne commander for LINNET II and replaced him with Ridgway. Later that evening Brereton received his deputy's written protest and was further stunned to read that Browning felt "that in view of our sharp difference of opinion he [Browning] felt that he could not continue as Deputy Commander of the First Allied Airborne Army and therefore tendered his resignation."[50] Ironically, just fifteen minutes before Browning's protest and letter of resignation arrived at Brereton's headquarters LINNET II had been cancelled. But the incident had done Browning's professional standing within First Allied Airborne Army grave harm. Subsequent plans prepared at First Allied Airborne Army headquarters while Browning was away at 21st Army Group headquarters all called for the use of XVIII Airborne Corps in lieu of the British I Airborne Corps (Browning's field command) as the airborne command and control element. Browning was not only being frozen out of command by Brereton, a man on whom he had seniority, he was being replaced by his primary rival in the Allied airborne community, Ridgway. MARKET-GARDEN, therefore, had huge personal import for Browning. By keeping the plan close to his chest until *after* it had been approved by the Supreme Commander (the first anyone at First Allied Airborne Army heard of the plan was the 1430 hours, 10 September telephone call from Browning, a call he placed after he had returned to England), and then flying back to England so that he could personally lay it out for the assembled airborne and troop carrier commanders, he all but forced Brereton to accept him back into the fold and name him the overall airborne force commander. Ridgway was stunned.

> I well remember my bitter disappointment when General Brereton announced that he was giving command of this operation [MARKET-GARDEN] to General Browning. I had not anticipated this. We had two divisions committed to the operation. The British had one. We had won our spurs in three battles already—Sicily, Italy, and France. I felt in my heart that we could do a better job of commanding that operation than could anyone else, and I imagine I expressed these views, in private, with some fervor. I made no official protest, however, for I could not justify such an action. General Browning was a brave and widely experienced soldier, and it was entirely Brereton's prerogative to appoint any commander he pleased.[51]

Gavin concurred. “With two American divisions, Ridgway should have been given command of the [operation].”[52] But it was not to be. Just as Allied politics at the highest levels had had a significant impact on Eisenhower’s decision for MARKET-GARDEN, so did a similar struggle within First Allied Airborne Army determine whose stamp the airborne portion of the operation would bear.[53] As Gavin saw it, although “ ‘there was no better soldier than . . . General Browning,’ ” he was too much of a “ ‘theorist’ ” who lacked the hard-driving persona that might have compelled a different result.[54]

The conference Browning requested was called to order by Brereton at 1800 hours, 10 September at First Allied Airborne Army headquarters in Sunninghill Park, just west of London. Twenty-seven officers, including Brereton, Browning, all the airborne and troop carrier commanders (except Ridgway, who was in France and Maxwell Taylor, who was also absent; the 101st was represented by Brigadier General Anthony C. McAuliffe, the division artillery commander) and their principal planners were present (for the 82nd, this included the newly minted division G-3, Major John Norton, just three years out of West Point and Captain Clark Thornton, the 82nd’s G-3 Air Officer; Gavin, of course, was also present, although he arrived a few minutes late after rushing to Sunninghill Park from London where he had been visiting friends). After a few opening remarks, Brereton turned the conference over to Browning who, he announced, would be the overall airborne commander for the operation. Browning then proceeded to read, in broad outline, the scheme of maneuver he and Montgomery’s staff officers had come up with. MARKET-GARDEN, he explained, was actually two interdependent operations. MARKET, the airborne portion of the plan, called for the dropping of the British 1st Airborne Division (reinforced by the Polish Parachute Brigade) and the U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions—all under command of British I Airborne Corps—along a corridor extending some sixty-four miles northeastward from the British Second Army’s front lines astride the Meuse-Escaut Canal to Arnhem, Holland. GARDEN, the complementary ground plan, referred to the advance that the British Second Army, spearheaded by Lieutenant General Horrocks’ XXX Corps, would make through this corridor. The overarching concept was that the MARKET force would seize and hold a series of bridges behind enemy lines, thereby facilitating the rapid transit of the GARDEN force up the corridor to Arnhem, where it would cross the Neder Rijn and position itself for a subsequent advance into the Ruhr. Both the drop and the start of the ground advance would occur simultaneously with a tentative D-Day set for no earlier than 15 September.[55]

Following Browning’s briefing there occurred a discussion of several salient points, decisions on which were needed so that the more detailed planning required to flesh out the concept could take place immediately. The foremost of these points concerned the assignment of objectives to each of the airborne divisions. From south to north, MARKET envisioned the taking of bridges clustered in and around three Dutch cities: Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem. As briefed, Browning’s concept had the British and Poles jumping at Arnhem, the 101st at Nijmegen, and the 82nd at Eindhoven. At the suggestion of the troop carrier commanders, the objective areas for the 82nd and 101st were switched, a decision based on the relative position of the 82nd and 101st bivouacs in England. Otherwise, the planes carrying the 101st from southern England would have to cross paths with those carrying the 82nd from the English Midlands. This also ensured

that the 101st, the division with the least amount of combat experience of the three, would be the first with which XXX Corps would link up.[56] A closely related issue was the allocation of aircraft and gliders against the three objectives. General Williams, whom Brereton had assigned as overall commander of the troop carrier units for the operation, suggested that the lift assets be allocated essentially as they were for LINNET with one major exception: whereas the air movement plan for LINNET called for the use of double tugs (one plane towing two Waco gliders), MARKET air movement plans would be restricted to employing single tugs due to the greater distances the planes would have to fly (the LINNET target areas were Lille, France and Tournai, Belgium, cities much closer to the English departure airfields). This restriction, in turn, meant that each of the divisions would have to plan on parachute drops and glider insertions on subsequent days, much as had occurred in Normandy, and that aerial resupply missions would have to be programmed beginning D+2.[57]

Before breaking up, Brereton made one final decision: the MARKET drops, he ruled, would go in at daylight. This was not a wholly unprecedented decision. The parachute and glider insertions of Operation ANVIL, the invasion of southern France, had occurred at dawn and daylight respectively with negligible losses. Furthermore, the calculus of the situation dictated that a daylight drop be given serious consideration. According to Allied intelligence, although antiaircraft concentrations in the objective area were estimated to have recently increased by thirty-five percent Brereton believed that "a proper employment of the supporting air forces available could knock out flak positions in advance and beat them down during the airborne operations themselves."[58] That the Allies could do this was underscored by accurate intelligence that had determined that the ranks of the *Luftwaffe's* daylight fighters had been savaged and posed no serious threat, while the night-fighter squadrons were believed to be relatively intact.[59] Additionally, 15 and 16 September were the last two days before a new moon. Flying at night with no lunar illumination meant that pilots would have no recourse but to rely on radar and direction finding to help them navigate. Unfortunately, the nearest Allied radar chain was over 200 miles away and all but useless. A night drop, therefore, would be well nigh blind. The large number of relatively inexperienced glider and transport pilots participating in the operation was the final element that persuaded Brereton to decide on a daytime drop.[60] "Carrying out the operation in daylight would be much easier for them [the green pilots]," wrote Gavin, "and we all agreed that this was the way we wanted to go about it."[61]

The conference broke up at about 2100 hours so that the participants could return to their respective headquarters, issue warning orders to their subordinate commands, and begin more detailed planning in preparation for a second conference that would be held at 0900 hours the next morning at IX Troop Carrier Command headquarters in Eastcote, at which time air routes, drop and landing zones, and load plans would be finalized. But before returning to their headquarters in Leicester, Gavin and Norton visited British I Airborne Corps headquarters at nearby Moor Park where they picked up maps, aerial photographs, and terrain studies of the area around Nijmegen, all of which had been collected during the planning for COMET. While there they were made aware of two terrain features that had concerned the COMET planners, and which would have a significant impact on the 82nd's ground tactical plan. The first was the Reichswald, a heavily wooded area of approximately twenty-four square miles just inside the German

border and about eight miles southeast of Nijmegen, which the British were convinced housed a great deal of German armor. The second was a hill mass, just east of the Reichswald, atop which sat the small town of Groesbeek. These heights dominated the surrounding area. The British were convinced, and Gavin agreed, that "[t]he retention and control of the high ground [around Groesbeek] would mean control of the flatlands and glider landing areas, and would prove to be the key to the success of the over-all Grave-Nijmegen operation."[62] With this information in hand, Gavin and Norton returned to 82nd headquarters and turned everything they had over to the division G-2 so that he could begin work on a staff study and intelligence annex.[63]

The Eastcote conference the next day supplied the final decisions required before detailed ground tactical planning could begin. By the time the conference adjourned departure airfields and the number of aircraft available at each had been determined; flight routes to and from each of the objective areas had been laid out; drop and landing zone locations were pinpointed (with the exception of those in the 101st's area, an issue that was not resolved until the next day); and a time schedule for the insertion of parachute and glider elements synchronized.[64] Armed with this information the subordinate commands of the First Allied Airborne Army fleshed out their ground tactical plans. That they were able to so quickly plan and execute the largest airborne operation in history was due in no small measure to the very existence of the First Allied Airborne Army which brought together, under one roof, the troop carrier and airborne forces and thereby compelled cooperation and coordination and, in instances of disagreement, provided a clear chain of command for swift resolution. Furthermore, the fact that the various staffs of the First Allied Airborne Army had already prepared plans in response to numerous other contingencies served not only to keep them informed of the overall situation in Europe, it also honed their planning skills and provided them material from which they could draw and then adjust as needed.[65] That MARKET-GARDEN was, in a major sense, simply a modification of Operations LINNET (from which the air movement plan was adopted) and COMET (for the selection of the objective area and drop zones) underscores this point. Finally, the frequent alerts compelled the airborne divisions to remain at a high state of readiness. As Gavin pointed out, the experience of readying for missions that were ultimately cancelled "was useful in training our new troopers and junior officers to cope with the problems of pre-drop preparation; ammunition, food, maps, and air photos all had to be distributed, all commands had to be prepared, and every conceivable operational detail anticipated and covered."[66] In the words of the 82nd's G-4, "[a] great deal of planning for Operation 'MARKET' had been done prior to September 10, 1944. . . . All supplies required for the 'MARKET' Operation had actually been received and distributed prior to the actual receipt of the mission."[67] Hence, despite the enormity and complexity of the MARKET airborne assault, it also served to highlight a defining characteristic of airborne forces: operational agility. In a memorandum to Ridgway some weeks before, Gavin had highlighted this very point. "To impose upon an airborne unit an inflexible requirement that it prepare for four weeks prior to commitment in any operation," he wrote, "denies that unit of its most characteristic attributes, speed and surprise. The requirements of higher headquarters may require the commitment of airborne troops on very short notice."[68]

From 12 to 15 September, the airborne divisions refined their plans, issued orders to their subordinate units, and prepared individual and unit loads for air drop and glider insertion. On 15 September, 82nd and 101st troopers bussed to their respective departure airfields (the British 1st Airborne Division and the Polish Parachute Brigade were already at their departure airfields, having previously marshaled for Operation COMET), where they were subsequently sealed in. On the morning of 16 September, Browning gathered all his subordinate airborne commanders at his headquarters for one final coordination conference to ensure that, taken together, each of the divisional plans that comprised Operation MARKET did, in fact, form a coherent whole and that, furthermore, Operation MARKET was synchronized with Operation GARDEN.[69]

Major General Maxwell Taylor's 101st Airborne Division would be Browning's southernmost unit, dropping just north of Eindhoven in order to "seize bridges over the Aa River and Willems Vaart Canal near Veghel, over the Dommel River at St. Oedenrode, over the Wilhelmina Canal near Zon, . . . and the city of Eindhoven."[70] Although a tall order, this mission profile was a much-reduced modification to the original concept for the southernmost division that had been sent down by 21st Army Group. In that scheme, a " 'kite-string' " of drop zones stretching for thirty miles north to south was envisaged, with the southernmost of these being well within range of XXX Corps's artillery. Taylor objected to this scheme, contending that a concentrated drop would be much more effective. With Brereton's backing, Taylor flew to British Second Army headquarters (XXX Corps's parent headquarters) for a meeting with its commander, Lieutenant General Miles C. Dempsey, and Montgomery. After a heated exchange, Montgomery agreed to allow Dempsey and Taylor settle the matter between them. As a result, the 101st's original thirty-mile airborne corridor was reduced to sixteen miles, and it was agreed that Taylor's troopers would first concentrate on seizing several canal and river crossings north of Eindhoven before turning to take the bridges in Eindhoven itself.[71]

Browning's northernmost unit would be the British 1st Airborne Division, commanded by Major General Robert E. Urquhart, reinforced by the Polish Parachute Brigade under Major General Stanislaw Sosabowski. Dropping both west and south of Arnhem, this combined force was to seize the road and railway bridges at Arnhem and hold until relieved by XXX Corps.[72]

The 82nd, accompanied by Browning's corps headquarters, would be inserted between the 101st and 1st Airborne Divisions, forming the vital middle linkage. It would drop in an area north of the Maas and south of the Waal to "capture the bridges over the Maas at Grave, over the Waal at Nijmegen and over the Maas-Waal Canal between."[73] Browning emphasized, however, that Gavin was "not to attempt seizure of NIJMEGEN Bridge until all other missions had been successfully accomplished and the BERG-EN-DAL high ground [the Groesbeek Heights] was firmly in [82nd] hands."[74] This prioritization, contended Gavin, was "imperative" to the success of the overall mission.

> The Nijmegen-Groesbeek high ground was the only high ground in all of the Netherlands. With it in German hands, physical possession of the bridges would be absolutely worthless, since it completely dominated the bridges and all the terrain around it. . . . It is a basic concept of airborne tactics that an airhead must first be established from which further tactical

> operations can be conducted. This high ground provided ideally such an area. I personally considered it the key to the accomplishment of the entire mission and thought that even if we were driven off the low ground around the bridges, if the high ground could be held, ultimately the [British] Second Army could accomplish its mission.[75]

If the Groesbeek high ground was the 82nd's number one priority, the bridge over the Maas at Grave was just behind it as priority one-alpha. Its capture would open the way for link up with XXX Corps approaching from the south, thereby providing welcome reinforcements, especially armor, to the 82nd's extended defensive perimeter. The bridges over the Maas-Waal Canal, although also vital, were of secondary importance in comparison since it was thought the canal could easily be bridged with locally procured barges. With the Groesbeek Heights in hand (which lay east of the canal bridges and the crucial Grave Bridge) and a firm lifeline with XXX Corps established, Gavin could then turn his full attention to the railroad and highway bridges in Nijmegen itself (Nijmegen's two bridges were separated by about 1,000 yards with the railroad bridge in the western portion of town and the highway bridge in the eastern portion. Although both were objectives, it was the highway bridge that was the more important of the two).[76]

One of the most vexing problems facing the airborne commanders was the order in which they would introduce their forces into their respective battle areas. Although IX Troop Carrier Command, reinforced by R.A.F. 38 and 46 Groups, had 1,544 planes and 491 gliders available for the D-Day insertions, when divided three ways this was barely enough to carry half of each division's personnel complement (to say nothing of equipment and supplies).[77] Furthermore, because of the length of the air corridors to and from England, there would only be one lift per day in order to provide sufficient time for maintenance and repairs at the English airfields between missions. Given these conditions, it would take three days to insert all the parachute and glider elements into each of the objective areas. Both Gavin and Taylor opted to lead with their paratroopers, using the aircraft allotted them on D-Day to insert all three parachute regiments followed by small glider-borne contingents, mostly antitank and artillery. Urquhart, who had been allocated roughly three-quarters of the D-Day glider force (because of organizational differences and mission requirements), elected to drop but one parachute regiment on the first day in favor of inserting a glider-borne infantry brigade and a glider-borne artillery regiment. On D+1, Urquhart would receive the remainder of his 1st Airborne Division, which would arrive by both glider and parachute. The 101st, which was expected to have linked up with the lead elements of XXX Corps by that time and thus have recourse to XXX Corps artillery fires, would receive its glider infantry regiment on D+1 while the 82nd, expecting much stiffer resistance, allotted its D+1 glider space to its artillery. The last increments were set to arrive on D+2 when the Polish Parachute Brigade was to drop south of Arnhem, while the 101st received its glider artillery and the 82nd its glider infantry.[78] Finally, if all went according to plan, the British 52nd Lowland Division would be air-landed on airstrips north of Arnhem, to constitute an immediate reserve force.[79]

To make this happen IX Troop Carrier Command would employ two aerial highways, dubbed the Northern and Southern Routes. The former, to be used to insert Arnhem- and Nijmegen-bound elements, was a fairly straight shot to the objective areas although it ran

for almost eighty miles over enemy-held territory thought to be relatively free of flak. Beginning at the northern coast of England, it ran for ninety-four miles across the North Sea, making landfall at the western end of the German-held Schouwen Island. It then continued straight for another eighteen miles to the eastern tip of the island and then ran for another fifty-two miles to the initial point, a major highway intersection codenamed 'Ellis,' where those planes bound for Arnhem would turn northeast for a thirty-mile run to their drop zones while those bound for Nijmegen would turn east-northeast for a twenty-five mile run to the 82nd drop zones. The Southern Route, to the area around Eindhoven, had the advantage of spending the least amount of time over enemy territory; the pilots did, however, have to cross the British Second Army's front lines, a thought that terrified many who fretted about the massed artillery that would be firing in support of XXX Corps's advance. Beginning at Bradwell Bay, almost due east of London, the Southern Route cut across the Thames Estuary and ran for thirty-four miles to the tip of North Foreland, the easternmost point of the British Isles. It then ran for 159 miles to the initial point, codenamed 'Delos,' making landfall shortly before that just northeast of Ostend. From 'Delos' the planes would then fly northeast for approximately thirty miles to the 101st drop zones. Employing both routes, it was thought, would disperse *Luftwaffe* interdiction efforts and provide some degree of operational flexibility—if unforeseen events were to make one route untenable the other could still be used, with slight modification, for insertions at any of the objective areas. Additionally, because the flying was to be done at daylight the spacing between serials was reduced—four minutes between parachute aircraft serials and seven minutes between glider serials—a move that served to concentrate the parachute and glider drops immensely. Furthermore each route was designed to act like a stacked three-lane highway, with serials (consisting of anywhere from twenty-seven to fifty aircraft) flying above and below one another separated by one-and-a-half miles of altitude (the Northern Route, on which flew R.A.F. 38 and 46 Groups towing gliders, was actually a four-lane highway since the tugs flew 1,000 feet above the U.S. troop carrier planes). These innovations permitted the Allies to deliver over 1,000 plane-loads of paratroopers and some 470 gliders in the initial lift to three separate objective areas within sixty-five minutes, "the same time it took to bring in 369 sticks of paratroops for the 82d Division in NEPTUNE."[80] Finally, once the aircraft had completed their drops, they were to turn 180 degrees left or right, depending on their position on the aerial highway, and return the same way they had come.[81]

As had been done for the Normandy drop, navigational aids were placed along the route to keep the pilots oriented. Eureka beacons and radio compass beacons were positioned at all assembly points and points of departure along the English coast. The latter were also marked with aerial lighthouses, called occults. Additionally, marker boats were pre-positioned halfway between England and the Continent along both routes armed with both Eureka beacons and green lights. Pathfinders would also be inserted fifteen minutes before the main bodies of the 82nd and 101st to set up Eureka and radio compass beacons, panels, and smoke.[82]

During the final airborne coordination conference at British I Airborne Corps headquarters Browning told his commanders, who had expressed concern about flying during daylight in unarmored, slow-moving aircraft, "that he was fully aware of the danger and was prepared to loose [*sic*] 33% of his forces getting in."[83] Such a loss rate, however, would have rendered each of the airborne divisions combat ineffective even

before they arrived at their objective areas so Brereton, in conjunction with Leigh-Mallory, did everything in his power to ensure it would not occur. Calling on elements of R.A.F. Bomber Command and a second R.A.F. command called Air Defense of Great Britain along with the U.S. Eighth Air Force, Leigh-Mallory supplied Brereton with a powerful supporting air armada. On the night of 16-17 September, 282 R.A.F. bombers softened up German flak concentrations along both air corridors by dropping 1,180 tons of bombs with what was thought to be fairly good results. The next morning, before the troop transports were underway, U.S. Eighth Air Force B-17s attacked 177 separate enemy locations, most of which were antiaircraft batteries, dropping almost 3,000 tons of fragmentation and high-explosive bombs with similarly good results. Meanwhile, a mélange of British Lancaster bombers, Mosquito fighter-bombers, and Spitfire fighter planes staged an aerial raid on Walcheren Island in order to deceive the Germans about the true location of the drops. Dummy paratroopers were also dropped throughout Holland, as had been done during NEPTUNE, to further confuse the Germans. Further inland, Mosquitoes, B-25 bombers, and other attack planes bombed and strafed German barracks at Arnhem, Nijmegen, and Ede, a small village west of Arnhem. Finally, British and American fighter planes from the Air Defense of Great Britain, the U.S. Eighth Air Force, and the U.S. Ninth Air Force were on tap to escort the streams of transport aircraft to and from the objective areas, primarily to guard against *Luftwaffe* attacks but, in the absence of such attacks, to pounce on any German flak batteries still remaining that had the temerity to fire on the massive Allied air columns overhead. All told, some 550 American P-47s, P-38s, and P-51s along with 371 British Tempests, Spitfires, and Mosquitoes filled the sky that day.[84]

Once the conference at Browning's headquarters was complete, each of the commanders returned to their respective divisions to make any final preparations and adjustments. Upon his return to Cottesmore Airfield, from which his plane would depart as part of the serial carrying the 1/505th, Gavin gathered his commanders together for one last rehearsal to go over again, in detail, the plan for each battalion.[85] "All commanders, regimental and battalion, are assembled in a conference room before a large-scale map of the operational area," wrote Gavin in describing the manner by which these conferences, commonly referred to as 'rock drills,' were conducted.

> Each regimental and battalion commander, in turn, outlines to the assembled group his own mission and plan of operation upon landing. He is then questioned carefully on his plans for making contacts with other units, and on what he will do if his unit lands in a locality other than the one planned for, and what he considers the most important elements of his tactical objective and his plan. We found from experience that this was the only method to insure that every commander knows what every other commander is going to do. And—most important—what he should do in order to contribute to the common tactical effort if he should land with his own or any other unit in the wrong area.
>
> The importance of such a conference can be best judged when we realize that there never yet has been an airborne operation in which every unit has landed in its proper area. In an airborne operation every battalion commander must know the plan of *every other* battalion commander

> within the division. He must be prepared to undertake the execution of any of those plans immediately upon landing as well as his own plans.[86]

On D-Day, the 82nd's three parachute regiments were to drop on three drop zones—drop zones 'N,' 'O,' and 'T'—located southwest and southeast of Nijmegen. Two of the drop zones, 'T' and 'N,' were situated respectively north and south of the town of Groesbeek itself, thereby facilitating the quick seizure of the high ground and the formation of a defensive line that would face eastward and front the Reichswald, the foreboding forest from which everyone expected the fiercest enemy resistance to emanate. Drop zone 'O' meanwhile, was approximately four miles west of the Groesbeek Heights and lay between the main Eindhoven-Nijmegen highway to its east and the Maas-Waal Canal to its west. From drop zone 'O' troopers would be charged with seizing the Grave Bridge (on the main Eindhoven-Nijmegen highway over the Maas) as well as any of several bridges over the Maas-Waal Canal, thereby opening the vital passageways to the south and XXX Corps. A fourth drop zone, called 'Special DZ,' was situated about one-half mile west of the Grave Bridge in some low-lying, marshy, heavily ditched ground. It was written into the 82nd's D-Day insertion plan about thirty-six hours before drop time at the insistence of Colonel Tucker, whose 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment was charged with taking the Grave Bridge. By dropping one parachute rifle company on 'Special DZ' (which in relation to drop zone 'O' was on the other side of the Maas River), Tucker's plan was to assault the bridge from both ends simultaneously and overcome any resistance so quickly that there would be no time to destroy it. Finally, between and overlapping drop zones 'T' and 'N' was a rough oblong area averaging three and a half miles north to south and one and half miles east to west that was to serve as the 82nd's glider landing zone. Split into two, with the northern half labeled landing zone 'T' and the southern half landing zone 'N,' it was calculated that this area could hold up to 900 gliders, more than enough to bring in the division's glider echelon.[87]

Leading the division's D-Day insertion would be a ten-man pathfinder team that would drop on drop zone 'O' fifteen minutes before the arrival of the main body (H-Hour was set for 1300 hours, 17 September) to set up navigational aids. Since the following aircraft would be approaching the target area from the west and over-flying drop zone 'O' en route to drop zones 'N' and 'T,' both of which were easily identifiable from drop zone 'O,' it was thought that there was no requirement to have a pathfinder team on each drop zone as had been done in Normandy. Instead, the first paratroopers to hit the ground at drop zones 'N' and 'T' were to pop colored smoke and, if possible, set up marker panels. This scheme also avoided the grouping of Eureka radar beacons too closely together, which had a tendency to confuse the pilots.[88]

The first three serials of the 82nd's main body would carry Ekman's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment along with Gavin and his assault command group. Scheduled to drop on drop zone 'N,' (three separate serials were to drop on 'N' on D-Day) the 505th was tasked to clear, secure, and mark landing zone 'N,' seize and hold the key high ground south and southwest of Groesbeek, and capture the town of Groesbeek itself. The next three serials, carrying Tucker's 504th, would drop on drop zone 'O,' with E Company, 2/504th dropping on 'Special DZ.' The 504th's primary mission was to seize the 640-foot bridge over the Maas at Grave and then any one of four bridges over the Maas-Waal

Canal. The seventh serial, carrying B, C, and D Companies of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion as well as a core group from the division artillery cell, would be the second serial to drop at drop zone 'N.' The engineers, of course, would provide support as required but in the meantime would be the security force for Gavin's command post and act as a division reserve. Serials eight, nine, and ten would carry Lindquist's 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Dropping on drop zone 'T' it was to clear, secure, and mark landing zone 'T' (a task assigned to a parachute qualified pathfinder team from the 325th that would drop in with the 508th) and set up defensive positions and roadblocks on the high ground north of Groesbeek. It was also to be prepared to conduct the assault on the five-span, 1,960-foot-long highway bridge in Nijmegen on order. After the rock drill adjourned, Gavin pulled Lindquist aside for a more detailed discussion about the Nijmegen highway bridge. "I told him," recalled Gavin, "that if, in his opinion, the situation along the Groesbeek high ground was quiet in the late afternoon of the day of our landing, he was to send a battalion against the Nijmegen bridge that night."[89] Furthermore, Gavin

> pointed out that the way to get to the bridge was to go down into the flatland east of the city [Nijmegen] and approach it over the farms without going through the built-up area. We had had considerable fighting in towns in Sicily and Italy, and some in Normandy, and I cautioned him about the dangers of getting caught in streets. One Kraut with a machine gun can hold up a battalion under such circumstances, as we had learned earlier.[90]

The last of the 82nd's D-Day parachute serials would carry the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion and would be the last to drop on drop zone 'N' (thereby giving the troopers of the preceding serials enough time to clear the drop zone before the 376th released its heavy equipment bundles). Although it was a fully qualified parachute battalion, the 376th had never before jumped into combat. Upon landing it was to recover its twelve 75mm howitzers, assemble them, and be prepared to provide artillery support to the 505th as it assaulted Groesbeek and the surrounding heights. The decision to drop the 376th instead of inserting it by glider was done to conserve aircraft: a glider-borne field artillery battalion required ninety-five gliders and tugs and occupied fifteen minutes of airspace; a parachute field artillery battalion could be dropped by forty-eight C-47s and occupied only four minutes of airspace. But conserving airframes was not the only reason Gavin opted to drop the 376th on D-Day.

> It is an interesting aspect of an airborne operation that artillery is comparatively more effective than it is in any other type operation. The reason being that the type of units that are first committed against airborne landings are local police, militia, home guards, etc. A battalion concentration [i.e., all guns in a battalion firing simultaneously at the same target] will make them so ineffectual that they are not worth much for some time.[91]

Thirty minutes behind the last parachute serial fifty Waco gliders carrying elements of the division headquarters and various support elements; the division Reconnaissance Platoon; A Battery, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion (with eight 57mm antitank guns); and twenty-four jeeps with seven trailers would land at landing zone 'N.' Soon thereafter, R.A.F. 38 Group towing thirty-two of the large British Horsa gliders and six Wacos would deliver Browning and the fighting echelon of his corps headquarters, which would set up its command and control cell within the 82nd's perimeter. So would end D-Day around Nijmegen.[92]

On D+1, 454 C-47s towing an equal number of Waco gliders would insert the 319th and 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalions; the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion; B Battery, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion; and sundry engineer, signal, and medical personnel. Set to arrive in eleven serials of anywhere from forty to fifty aircraft beginning at 1000 hours, 18 September, this lift counted 1,899 troopers, sixty howitzers (both 75mm and 105mm), 206 jeeps, 412 cans of gasoline, and 133 trailers loaded with ammunition. Immediately upon landing they were to form with their respective battalions and be prepared to support operations as required.[93]

At 1000 hours on D+3, the third and final lift, comprising 406 C-47s and Wacos was to arrive at landing zone 'T' carrying the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment along with Batteries C, D, E, and F of the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion; Headquarters and A Company of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion; and the division Military Police Platoon. All told, 3,385 troopers, 104 jeeps, 59 loaded trailers and an additional twenty-five artillery pieces were to arrive to complete the insertion of the 82nd around Nijmegen. After assembling, Billingslea's 325th was to become the division reserve and be prepared to assault into the city of Nijmegen.[94]

Although satisfied with the plan for his division, Gavin secretly remained "concerned about the very widespread dispersal that would take place in the initial landing." He recognized that, until being reinforced, there "would be huge gaps in the perimeter that I was to seize and defend" but "some very difficult decisions had to be made concerning where the landings were to take place." Experience had taught "that it is better to land near an objective and take heavy landing losses rather than to have to fight on the ground to get it" but, "[o]n the other hand, we had so many objectives over such an extensive area—approximately twenty-five miles—that a complete loss of control of the division might take place the very moment the landings occurred if careful judgment was not exercised in allocating troops to particular battles." His plan, in full light of the risks, was predicated on taking the objectives first and then dealing with the gaps later.[95] Still, when Gavin explained what the 82nd was to accomplish around Nijmegen, his staff was stunned. Colonel Wienecke, the 82nd's Chief of Staff protested: " '[w]e'll need two divisions to do all that.' " " 'There it is,' " replied Gavin, " 'and we're going to do it with one.' "[96]

Another concern that nagged at Gavin throughout that frantic week of preparation was for his veterans.

> From time to time during the past week the thought had crossed my mind that we were asking a great deal of the survivors of the preceding three combat jumps. They had been through many difficult battles, and many of them had been wounded, some several times. I knew practically

> all the survivors personally, and I knew what went on in their minds. They were well aware of our heavy losses in the past, and to ask them once again to jump into combat more than fifty miles behind the German lines in broad daylight was asking a great deal. I remembered Lord Moran's *The Anatomy of Courage*. His book was based on World War I experience, and from it he concluded that courage, for every man, is like a bank account—it can be overdrawn. The parachute veterans, although quite fatalistic, believed that the odds went up significantly with further exposure to combat, no matter how experienced or how careful you were. So whenever I met a veteran during those last few days, I talked to him about our plans, assured him that we had an abundance of air power and that we could make the jump in daylight without heavy losses. Finally, I assured him that we had adequate troops and weapons to deal with the Germans on the ground.[97]

Still, as Gavin related, his troopers were very fatalistic, a fatalism often displayed by dark, gallows humor. Private Philip H. Nadler of F Company, 2/504th recalled a mission briefing conducted by his platoon leader while they were locked down at the departure airfield. The platoon leader, recalled Nadler, "grabbed the opportunity to be dramatic. With a pointer in his hand he threw back the cover of the sand table and said, 'Men, this is our destination,' and pointed to a sign on the table—'GRAVE.' " " 'Yeah, we know that," cracked Nadler, "but what country are we dropping into?' "[98]

At 1630 hours, 16 September, Brereton met with his weather experts. A high-pressure area approaching from the southwest would bring early morning fog, but the outlook was generally favorable through 20 September.[99] At 1900 hours, Brereton gave the go order: "[c]onfirmed MARKET Sunday 17 Sept. . . . All informed. . . . Acknowledge."[100] The largest airborne operation in history was set to commence.

Chapter Sixteen Notes

[1] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 308-309.

[2] Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, 457. The entire "Directive to Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force" is reproduced in Appendix B of Harrison's work, pages 457-458.

[3] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 657.

[4] Roland G. Ruppenthal, "Logistics and the Broad-Front Strategy" in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 420-421.

[5] Hitler quoted in Matthew Cooper, *The German Army 1933-1945: Its Political and Military Failure* (New York: Stein and Day, 1978; reprint, Lanham, MD: Scarborough House, 1990), 505.

[6] Hitler quoted in Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 340. As a result of this last order, some 180,000 to 280,000 German troops and their equipment were lost, although several of these fortress towns along the Channel coast held out until the end of the war.

[7] Ibid., 457.

[8] Ibid., 555.

[9] Cooper, *The German Army*, 512.

[10] Eisenhower quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 492.

[11] Eisenhower quoted in ibid.

[12] Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 492 and Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 253.

[13] Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 492.

[14] Ruppenthal, "Logistics and the Broad-Front Strategy," 422.

[15] Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 494-495 and Ruppenthal, "Logistics and the Broad-Front Strategy," 421-422.

[16] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 243.

[17] For contending points of view see Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 313 and Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 243.

[18] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 246.

[19] Ibid., 249.

[20] Eisenhower cable to Marshall, 24 August 1944, quoted in Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 659.

[21] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 331.

[22] Brereton, *Brereton Diaries*, 334.

[23] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 18. These were not the only plans SHAEF planned. Others included support for operations in Normandy and one, Operation TALISMAN (later renamed Operation ECLIPSE and ERUPTION) which envisioned drops on Berlin and Kiel in the event of an unforeseen German collapse, remained in SHAEF's docket until April 1945.

[24] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 615-618 and 686.

[25] Huston, "Thoughts on the American Airborne Effort in World War II," 8. In the same article, Huston wrote "[t]hough the opportunity certainly presented itself several times in Europe, airborne troops never were used to block retreating enemy forces until the main ground forces could destroy them. It is possible that the drop of two or three airborne divisions between Falaise and Argentan, about 12 August 1944, could have closed the escape route of the Germans in the pocket there and so brought about their annihilation" (6).

[26] Memorandum from General Henry H. Arnold to the Commanding General of the U.S. Command and General Staff School, "Narrative of MARKET Operation," 4 November 1944, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Military documents outlining Market (Airborne) operation, Copies to Command General + Staff, Gen. H. Arnold, 18th Airborne Corps," USAMHI.

[27] Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 303.

[28] SHAEF intelligence summary dated 2 September 1944 quoted in Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 685.

[29] Except where noted see Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 493; Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 689-690; Charles B. MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1963; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), 12-13, and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater,* 85-86.

[30] Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 260.

[31] Brian Horrocks, Eversley Belfield, and H. Essame, *Corps Commander* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), 80.

[32] See Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 18 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater,* 87-88.

[33] Brereton, *Brereton Diaries*, 340.

[34] Bradley quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 112.

[35] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 327.

[36] Horrocks, Belfield, and Essame, *Corps Commander*, 56.

[37] See Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 326 and Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 251.

[38] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 119.

[39] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 328.

[40] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 250.

[41] On 2 September, while flying back from a meeting with Bradley and Patton, Eisenhower's command C-47 was grounded at Chartres with a broken muffler. Captain Dick Underwood, Eisenhower's personal pilot, commandeered a small two-seat L-5 liaison plane and the two took off for SHAEF forward headquarters at Granville. Meeting increasingly high headwinds, the L-5 soon ran low on fuel. Looking for a place to land, Underwood made for a strip of beach close to Granville. Though the landing was successful, Underwood and Eisenhower were wary of German mines; neither could recall if the area had yet been cleared. Inching their way carefully over the sand, Eisenhower slipped and hurt his knee. Underwood then helped the Supreme Commander to the coastal road where they flagged down a jeep for the final leg of their journey to Granville. Eisenhower's doctor ordered a knee brace and bed rest. Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 439-440.

[42] Eisenhower quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 515.

[43] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 252.

[44] Eisenhower quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 85 and 88.

[45] Eisenhower quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 518. Emphasis in original.

[46] Letter from Patton to his wife dated 3 September 1944 in Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 538. See also diary entry for the same day on "rock soup" strategy, page 538.

[47] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 251 and Parks Diary, 4 September 1944.

[48] Parks Diary, 10 September 1944.

[49] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 337-338.

[50] Ibid., 338.

[51] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 108.

[52] Gavin to Blair, 21 November 1983.

[53] Except where noted see Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 336-341; Soffer, *Ridgway*, 65; and Parks Diary, entries for 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10 September 1944.

[54] Gavin quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 478.

[55] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 143; Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 12-13; Minutes for the 10 September Sunninghill Park Conference in Parks Diary, 10 September 1944.

[56] Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 74; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 24; Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 88; Minutes for the 10 September Sunninghill Park Conference in Parks Diary, 10 September 1944.

[57] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 18 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 89.

[58] First Allied Airborne Army, *Operations in Holland, September – November 1944*, n.d., p. 11, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 95, Folder 6, OU.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 89-90.

[61] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 145.

[62] Ibid., 148.

[63] Except where noted see Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 145-147; Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, 23 October 1945, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 100, Folder 3, OU; James M. Gavin to Cornelius Ryan, 18 November 1966, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 9, OU.

[64] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, 23 October 1945.

[65] James A. Huston, "The Air Invasion of Holland," *Military Review* 32, no. 5 (August 1952): 38.

[66] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 143.

[67] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, 5 October 1945, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 100, Folder 3, OU. Capitalization in original.

[68] Memorandum, James M. Gavin to Matthew B. Ridgway, 3 August 1944, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder "Military Documents, Combat Readiness Reports/G1 Inaugural Parade, Individual + Unit Citations," USAMHI.

[69] Memorandum, Headquarters 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Operation Market," 3 December 1944, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 100, Folder 3, OU and Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, 23 October 1945.

[70] First Allied Airborne Army, *Operations in Holland,* 12.

[71] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 89.

[72] First Allied Airborne Army, *Operations in Holland,* 13.

[73] Ibid., 12.

[74] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, 23 October 1945.

[75] James M. Gavin to John G. Westover, 25 July 1945, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Recollections of Market-Garden Operations w/friends in the '50s," USAMHI.

[76] Gavin to Westover, 25 July 1945.

[77] Office of Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, *Airborne Assault on Holland: An Interim Report* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Army Air Forces, 1945), 12.

[78] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 132-133 and Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 296.

[79] See also Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 20.

[80] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 90. Capitalization in original.

[81] Ibid., 90-91.

[82] Ibid., 95-96.

[83] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, 23 October 1945.

[84] Except where noted see Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 96 and 100 and Office of Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, *Airborne Assault on Holland: An Interim Report*, 12-14.

[85] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 151; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 132; Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, 23 October 1945.

[86] Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 90. Emphasis in original.

[87] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 21-22 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 94.

[88] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 96.

[89] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 151. See also Gavin to Blair, 21 November 1983.

[90] Gavin to Ryan, 18 November 1966.

[91] Gavin, *Airborne Warfare*, 103-104.

[92] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 242; Huston, "The Air Invasion of Holland," 46 and 52-56; Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 7-8; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 132; Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 109-112.

[93] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 256 and Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 276.

[94] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 242; Huston, "The Air Invasion of Holland," 46-47; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2 (London: Battle of Britain International Limited, 2002), 603.

[95] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 146-147.

[96] Quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too* Far, 135.

[97] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 151-152.

[98] Philip H. Nadler questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 12, OU.

[99] Huston, "The Air Invasion of Holland," 51.

[100] Message, First Allied Airborne Army, 16 September 1944, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 95, Folder 9, OU. Capitalization in original.

Chapter Seventeen
A Sunday Drive In an Airplane

At 1400 hours local time on 17 September 1944, Lieutenant Joseph Enthammer, a Wehrmacht artillery officer, was gazing in the direction of Oosterbeek [Holland, a suburb of Arnhem] when he detected what appeared to be white snowflakes hanging in the air. 'That cannot be,' he wondered; 'it never snows in September! They must be parachutists!'

They were. It certainly does not snow in September. The war had reached the Reich. The blow, moreover, had come as a total surprise.

Robert J. Kershaw[1]

On 4 September 1944, the day of Antwerp's liberation, *Generaloberst* Kurt Student was in his Berlin-Wannsee headquarters overseeing the organization of new parachute units when he received a phone call from the Führer bunker *'Wolfsschanze'* (Wolf's Lair) near Rastenberg. A frantic *Generaloberst* Alfred Jodl, chief of Hitler's operations staff, was on the line when Student picked up. " 'Collect all available units together and build a new front at the Albert Canal,' " ordered Jodl. " 'This new front is to be held at all costs!' "[2] Student's skeleton staff, continued Jodl, had been redesignated *First Parachute Army*, a "rather high[-]toned title" thought Student, and would proceed at once to Holland where it would be placed under the command of *Generalfeldmarschall* Walter Model's *Army Group B*.[3] The next day Student flew to Model's headquarters, then near Liège, to report and receive a situational update. It was grim. In essence, Student's yet-to-be-formed army was to fill the gap between Antwerp and Maastricht, a distance of some sixty miles as the crow flies, with units that had yet to arrive. To his right would be *General der Infanterie* Gustav von Zangen's *Fifteenth Army* trapped along the Scheldt Estuary and in danger of being cut off. To his left, *General der Panzertruppen* Erich Brandenberger's *Seventh Army* was barely holding against the U.S. First Army's advance on Aachen. All in all, the *Army Group B* order of battle counted sixteen infantry division flags, although Model estimated that, in reality, they amounted to no more than four full-strength divisions, while the once vaunted panzer and panzer grenadier divisions—eleven of which were, on paper anyway, available—had all been reorganized into regimental-size *kampfgruppen* fielding an average of five to ten tanks apiece. Finally, added Model, his troops were in headlong retreat.[4]

The Dutch called 5 September, *Dolle Dinsdag*—'Mad Tuesday'—the day the flight of Dutch Nazis and German civilians in Holland reached its peak. They had been spurred by orders issued a few days before by Dr. Arthur Seyss-Inquart, the *Reichskommissar* for Holland, and Anton Mussert, the Dutch Nazi Party leader, to evacuate to the east. Railway stations throughout the country were jammed; some 65,000 Dutch fascists alone clambered aboard anything heading toward Germany while their German counterparts

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 448 through 454.

confiscated anything with wheels or hooves to carry themselves and their belongings back to the Fatherland. The panic spread like a contagion, infecting the military as well. Many German soldiers threw away their weapons while others begged or coerced civilians to give them clothes so they could avoid military police checkpoints set up to catch deserters.[5] Wolfgang Dombrowski, an *SS-Rottenführer* (corporal) in the *9th SS 'Hohenstauffen' Panzer Division* recalled the scene.

> 'We felt that once we got over the German border it would all be over. Many soldiers were lost in the withdrawal. The situation moreover in Holland when we arrived was desperate. It seemed impossible that a front could be built out of these disparate fleeing elements.'[6]

Another veteran, *Feldwebel* (sergeant) Erich Hensel, who had also seen action on the Russian front, was overwhelmed by what appeared to a complete breakdown, even in the officer corps. At one juncture, Hensel saw a frantic *oberstleutnant* (lieutenant colonel) at a river-crossing site with a truck filled with booty, champagne, and two women demand that a ferry skipper take him across. The skipper refused and sailed on but Hensel's company commander was so embarrassed about what his men had just witnessed that he turned to his men to apologize. " 'The retreat from France was the first time I had ever seen demoralised German units,' " he recalled.[7]

It was this demoralization, panic, and headlong retreat that underwrote the Allied decision for MARKET-GARDEN. On 23 August, a SHAEF G-2 summary stated categorically that " '[t]he August battles have done it and the enemy in the West has had it. Two and a half months of bitter fighting have brought the end of the war in Europe within sight, almost within reach.' "[8] Sixteen days later, SHAEF estimated German strength in the west to be forty-eight divisions, with a true equivalent of twenty infantry and four panzer divisions. Just four days before the start of MARKET-GARDEN, the British 1st Airborne Division calculated that German forces in the Netherlands were nothing more than infantry reserves backed by not more than one hundred tanks.[9] " 'It was thought,' " went the same division's after action report, that " 'the enemy must still be disorganized after his long and hasty retreat from south of the River Seine and that though there might be numerous small bodies of enemy in the area, he would not be capable of organized resistance to any great extent.' "[10] The prevailing view, went the British I Airborne Corps after action report, was that "once the crust of resistance in the front line had been broken, the German Army would be unable to concentrate any other troops in sufficient strength to stop the break-through" and British XXX Corps, racing up the airborne corridor, would be able to "reach the ZUIDER ZEE [ninety-nine miles away] between 2-5 days after crossing the BELGIAN-DUTCH frontier."[11]

As so often happens with intelligence matters, there were some opposing views, except in this case not only were the views discounted, so was the evidence on which these views were based, especially as they related to enemy dispositions around Arnhem. On 5 September ULTRA intercepts reported that on the previous day Model had ordered four panzer divisions (the *2nd*, *116th*, *9th SS*, and *10th SS*) to move to the area Venloo-Arnhem-'s Hertogenbosch for rest and refitting, thereby placing four worn but still battle-worthy panzer divisions squarely in the MARKET-GARDEN target area. The next day, another ULTRA intercept reported that *II SS Panzer Corps* had also been ordered to the

same general vicinity to direct the refitting. Furthermore, Dutch resistance groups reported on 8 and 13 September that Germany Army and SS troops had moved into the Arnhem area and were occupying barracks and school buildings, and that they had tanks with them.[12] Based on these and other indicators, Patton's U.S. Third Army G-2, the prescient Colonel Oscar W. Koch weighed in (Koch was one of the only intelligence officers to later predict the massive German counteroffensive through the Ardennes in December 1944). The German retreat " 'has not been a rout or mass collapse,' " he contended. Conversely, the enemy

> 'has been able to maintain a sufficiently cohesive front to exercise an overall control of his tactical situation. . . . Barring internal upheaval in the homeland and the remoter possibility of insurrection within the Wehrmacht, it can be expected that the German armies will continue to fight until destroyed or captured.'[13]

Koch, however, was not directly involved with the planning for MARKET-GARDEN. But there were two men who were involved and who had also read the reports of panzers near Arnhem that made special appeals for reconsideration of plans for the operation.

The first was Eisenhower's chief of staff, Lieutenant General 'Beetle' Smith. Privy to ULTRA intelligence as well as the reports from Dutch resistance cells, Smith became increasingly concerned about the prospects for MARKET-GARDEN's success, especially with regard to the fight he feared the British 1st Airborne Division would have on its hands if, in fact, the *9th* and *10th SS Panzer Divisions* were where they were reported to be. After getting permission from Eisenhower to voice his concerns to Montgomery, Smith flew to 21st Army Group headquarters and suggested that either a second airborne division be dropped near Arnhem or that one of the U.S. divisions scheduled to drop farther south be redirected to Arnhem instead. According to Smith, Montgomery " 'ridiculed the idea' and 'waved my objections airily aside.' "[14]

Major Brian Urquhart (no relation to the British 1st Airborne Division commander), Browning's I Airborne Corps GSO-2 (intelligence) was also concerned about reports of German armor in the target area, and became increasingly strident in his appeals for reconsideration. After viewing many of the same intelligence reports that had alerted General Smith (although not the ULTRA intercepts, which for security reasons were not disseminated below army level), Urquhart approached Browning and his Chief of Staff, Colonel Gordon Walch. According to Urquhart,

> 'they seemed little concerned and became quite annoyed when I insisted on the danger. They said, as I remember, that I should not worry unduly, that the reports were probably wrong, and that in any case the German troops were refitting and not up to much fighting.'

But Urquhart persisted and requested low-level photograph intelligence over-flights of the Arnhem area in order that he might bolster his case. The pictures confirmed Urquhart's worst fears.

> 'There were German tanks and armoured vehicles parked under the trees within easy range of the 1st Airborne Division's main dropping zone. I rushed to General Browning with this new evidence, only to be treated once again as a nervous child suffering from a nightmare. Even in my overwrought state I got the message very clearly. I was a pain in the neck, and only our long association and his natural kindness prevented the general from saying so.'

Later that day, 13 or 14 September, Colonel Arthur Eagger, the chief medical officer of British I Airborne Corps, approached Urquhart and told him to go on sick leave.

> 'When I asked what would happen if I refused, [wrote Urquhart,] he said, in his kindly way, that I would be arrested and court-martialed for disobeying orders. I begged him to let me go on the operation in any capacity. He refused. I tried to explain the cause of my anxiety and asked if there was no way of stopping, or at least reshaping, the operation. He again said no, but I had the feeling he understood me better than discipline allowed him to say.'

Although he did not use this term, Urquhart accused Browning and his fellow British I Airborne Corps staff officers of suffering from what is often referred to as 'victory disease'—that feeling that the end is near, that one last push is all that is needed to secure victory, and the overwhelming desire to be in on the kill. According to Urquhart,

> '[t]here seemed to be a general assumption that the war was virtually over and that one last dashing stroke would finish it. The possibility of German opposition was scarcely considered worthy of discussion. The "Market-Garden" operation was constantly referred to as "the party." '

Furthermore, contended Urquhart, " 'Browning's ambition to command in battle was a major factor both in the conception of "Market-Garden" and in his refusal to take the latest news on German opposition seriously.' "[15] Even Montgomery admitted to downplaying the threat. "We knew it [the *II SS Panzer Corps*] was there," he wrote, "[b]ut we were wrong in supposing that it could not fight effectively; its battle state was far beyond our expectation."[16]

Doubtless both Smith and Urquhart would have given anything to have been wrong. Unfortunately, they were not. Moreover, not only were there panzers near Arnhem, the disposition of the German army in the rest of Holland had also changed drastically.

Following 'Mad Tuesday' there occurred a near miraculous regeneration of German strength in Holland. General Horrocks, whose XXX Corps would be stymied at every step of the way by this resurgent foe, perhaps best described how this occurred despite intelligence "of a very high order indeed." Generally, he continued, "it was unheard of for a fresh German formation to appear on my front without 24-28 hours' warning."[17] Yet Holland proved that the Germans were masters at generating combat power from "valuable assets" that are "not easily identifiable."

> In every country that has been engaged in a long war there are half-forgotten formations which have come to exist almost in their own right, and these were to be found even in Nazi Germany, as late as the autumn of 1944. The most important of them were the Parachutists, out of favour after Crete, but who could still muster about 3000 first-class troops, mainly engaged in training recruits and scattered through the Netherlands and Western Germany. There were also considerable numbers of well-trained men in Luftwaffe and naval units, as well as the battle-hardened Panzer troops who had escaped from Normandy. Finally, there were the men on leave from the Russian front, the convalescents and the recruits. Not ideal material with which to hold up an invading force, but useful as a stopgap, while reinforcements, and in particular the Fifteenth Army, were being collected together into conventional formations.[18]

Student was initially assigned two units to fill out his new command—the *LXXXVIII Corps* headquarters under *General der Infanterie* Hans Reinhard, temporarily 'borrowed' from the *Fifteenth Army*, and the *719th Infantry Division* under *Generalleutnant* Karl Sievers, a fortress division with very limited mobility that had been guarding the coast of the Netherlands since 1940—as well as a congeries of occupation and training units in northern Belgium and Holland and approximately twenty *Luftwaffe* antiaircraft batteries. Wholly insufficient to cover the breadth of *First Parachute Army's* assigned sector, Reinhard and Student received help from an unexpected source, a "crazy-quilt mob" of units pieced together by *Generalleutnant* Kurt Chill, commander of the *85th Infantry Division*.[19] On 4 September Chill was retreating northward with what remained of his unit as well as pieces and parts of the *84th* and *89th Infantry Divisions*. Although ordered to proceed to the Rhineland for refitting, Chill perceived the threat the unguarded line of the Albert Canal presented so, on his own initiative, he set up 'reception stations' at the crossing points and proceeded to form the army, navy, *Luftwaffe*, and military government troops caught in his net into something resembling a coherent force. By the following day Chill had gathered sufficient troops to cover the eastern portion of the *First Parachute Army's* defensive sector and, after so doing, reported to Reinhard and placed what then became *Kampfgruppe Chill* under *LXXXVIII Corps* control. This proved fortuitous, for on 6 September the British penetrated the front lines of the overdrawn *719th Division* and secured a bridgehead over the Albert Canal. *Kampfgruppe Chill* rushed to the area and helped contain the breakthrough, buying Student time to bring in additional reinforcements, the first of which was the *176th Division* under *Oberst* (colonel) Christian Landau, a unit made up primarily of convalescing soldiers. Hence by 7 September Student had provided Reinhard the equivalent of three divisions, all of which were generally positioned along the line of the Albert Canal. Though of dubious quality, these divisions proved just enough to hold the British in place, especially since the latter had suspended major combat operations while Montgomery politicked for additional resources. They also provided a thin shield behind which Student and Model could assemble an even more formidable force.[20]

Providing the *First Parachute Army* a tough and aggressive core around which to fashion a defense in depth were the *1st Battalion* of the *2nd Parachute Regiment*, the entire *6th Parachute Regiment*, five additional newly activated parachute regiments, and

a newly activated parachute antitank battalion, backed by some 5,000 service troops, all of which Student had ordered to Holland in his capacity as chief of German parachute troops. Both the *2nd* and *6th Parachute Regiments* had already acquired distinguished records, especially the latter under its redoubtable leader, *Oberstleutnant* Friedrich-August Freiherr von der Heydte, and had been reconstituted to strengths much in excess of standard parachute units of their size. Out of this mass, Student formed two ad hoc combat groups: *Kampfgruppe Walther*, under an *Oberst* Walther, which consisted of the *1st Battalion* of the *2nd Parachute Regiment*, von der Heydte's *6th Parachute Regiment*, and one of the new parachute regiments; and the *7th Parachute Division*, command of which he entrusted to his Chief of Staff, *Generalleutnant* Wolfgang Erdmann, which was formed from three of the new parachute regiments. By 17 September therefore, less than two weeks after the chaos of 'Mad Tuesday,' Student had assembled under his direct command a corps headquarters, five divisions, and several thousand service troops, all in an area that was almost devoid of any German combat formations when he first received his marching orders. Meanwhile Student's superior, Model, had also had his staff working overtime in an effort to hobble together something substantial that could back up the *First Parachute Army*. They were wildly successful.[21]

Model's first act was to extricate *General der Infanterie* Gustav von Zangen's *Fifteenth Army* from the area around the Scheldt Estuary. Working day and night under a constant rain of Allied aerial and artillery bombardment, Zangen was able to salvage elements of nine infantry divisions comprising some 86,000 men, over 600 artillery pieces, 6,000 vehicles, and 6,000 horses.[22] Model placed these forces, which ranged from "a collection of chaff that even a mild wind might blow away" to units with better-than-average combat power behind the west wing of Student's army.[23] Model also ordered *General der Flieger* Friedrich Christiansen to assemble the service, logistics, regional defense, and training formations of his command, *Armed Forces Command Netherlands*, and use them to provide rear security for the *Fifteenth* and *First Parachute Armies*, generally in the area north of the line of the Maas and Waal Rivers. Finally, Model also had at his disposal another rear echelon formation, *Wehrkreis VI*, a military district command and control headquarters responsible for that portion of Germany abutting Holland. Although an administrative command responsible for training replacements, organizing new units, and channeling matériel to the front, *Wehrkreis VI* was hastily reorganized into an ad hoc division, the *406th Landesschuetzen Division*, around which Model then organized another corps-size formation under *General der Kavalerie* Kurt Feldt (which became known then as *Corps Feldt*).[24]

By 17 September, therefore, the conditions under which MARKET-GARDEN had been conceived had changed drastically. No longer was Holland simply the transit point for broken German units fleeing one step ahead of the 21st Army Group, hell bent on making it back to the Fatherland before the end of the war. In the thirteen days since Student received his marching orders he and Model had stopped the retreat, formed one entirely new army, extricated the bulk of a second army from almost certain encirclement, and fashioned a rear area security force where none had existed before. And as luck would have it—and it was pure luck, not foreknowledge as some have contended—Model also had on hand two *SS Panzer Divisions* and an *SS Panzer Corps* headquarters, situated in the very area where the British 1st Airborne Division was to drop. As *SS-Obergruppenführer* (lieutenant general) Wilhelm Bittrich, commander of

the *II SS Panzer Corps*, recounted, " 'there was no particular significance in Model choosing the Arnhem vicinity—except that it was a peaceful sector where nothing was happening.' "[25]

Allied intelligence was not blind to what was occurring in Holland, but as had happened with reports of panzers near Arnhem, the prevailing attitude was that although the retreat had stopped, stiff resistance was unlikely. The SHAEF intelligence summary of 16 September 1944—D-1—recognized that "[t]he sector between MAASTRICHT and ARNHEM, which looked at first as though it was going to be able to offer little resistance, did eventually, with the help of elements of Fifteenth Army from across the SCHELDT Estuary and of First Parachute Army from NANCY with a collection of tough oddities, manage to stiffen considerably, and is now more or less holding." However, the same summary then downplayed this stiffening resistance, and reported that although "First Parachute Army has energetically taken over the ANTWERP-HASSELT Sector from C-in-C NETHERLANDS, [it] has contributed little more than the glamour of its name, that little being the remnants of the two or three parachute divisions."[26] Horrocks has contended that what compelled so many, and especially Browning and Montgomery, to downplay and even disregard so many warning signals was that they "were determined not to scrap once again the operation of the Airborne Army." There was a lot of pressure from Washington, he continued, "to use this powerful force in one magnificent gesture to finish the war in 1944, and Montgomery eagerly grasped the chance of an advance at last on a narrow front, which had originally been turned down by Eisenhower."[27]

Sunday, 17 September 1944 dawned overcast and drizzly in England, threatening another postponement or cancellation, but by 0900 hours the sun had come out and burned off the haze to reveal a bright, almost cloudless blue sky. Visibility was anywhere from four to six miles with a cloud base at 2,500 feet and above. MARKET-GARDEN was a definite go.[28]

Arising at dawn, the troopers of the 82nd Airborne Division were fed a unique breakfast-dinner mix of hot cakes and syrup, fried chicken with all the trimmings, coffee, and apple pie. "It was as if the condemned were being served a hearty meal," recalled Lieutenant James Megellas of the 504th.[29] After breakfast the troopers attended religious services, wrote letters, rested, or contemplating what lay ahead. Some, like Lieutenant Megellas, were "happy and anxious to return to action." "We recognized that a job had to be done," he continued, and "[w]e accepted that fact that this was a fight to the finish and we were eager to get on with the job."[30] Although less eager than Megellas to again enter the fray, it appears that most troopers still remained determined to do what was needed to end the war. Private Donald D. Lassen of E Company, 2/505th remembered being scared. "Nobody looks forward to dying," he recalled, adding that although "[n]o one was anxious to get into combat . . .we all knew we had a job to do" and furthermore, "[w]e got ourselves into this outfit, we knew what was required and we did it because it had to be done."[31] Captain Jack R. Isaacs, the G Company, 3/505th commander, echoed Lassen's sentiments, adding "[w]hile we had approached previous assignments with a great deal of spirit and élan I think for this operation we had begun to develop a methodical, calculating cunning which came to full fruition a few weeks later in the Battle of the Bulge."[32] Lieutenant James E. Baugh of D Battery, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion, felt that MARKET-GARDEN "was a show the Generals wanted." Having been in all the "hot spots" before, recalled Baugh, he felt "cynically fatalistic"

and at the time could see no end "to the missions for us until Tokyo had capitulated." Still, Baugh recognized in his troopers a "determination to excell [*sic*]" because "[w]e truly felt we were the best soldiers in the world."[33] Lieutenant Jack Tallerday of C Company, 1/505th, who had already made three combat jumps and been wounded twice was "not exactly over-eager" but he was certain that his unit was "combat ready" and was relieved that "[t]he suspense of waiting was now over."[34] Finally, there were the new troopers like Lieutenant Hanz Karl Druener of D Company, 2/504th, who remembered being "somewhat anxious not having been in combat before." "However," continued Druener, "training with my platoon which included many troopers and non-commissioned officers who had participated in prior combat jumps had the effect of [my] 'looking forward' to the operation."[35]

At about 0930 hours, the troopers boarded trucks and busses for the tarmac where they assembled on their assigned aircraft. The planes had been rigged with the parachute bundles the day before which contained the extra ammo, explosives, mortar tubes, and the pieces and parts of the 376th Parachute Field Artillery's 75mm howitzers. Jumpmasters made last checks to ensure the loads were secure and that the release mechanisms functioned properly. Meanwhile, the paratroopers began their now familiar routine of turning themselves into human pack mules. Besides parachutes, helmets, and musette bags, each trooper carried his individual weapon and at least one other sidearm, ammunition, grenades, antitank mines, at least one knife, first-aid packets, and two days' worth of rations. Each man was also issued two maps—one 1:50,000-scale map of the assigned target area and one 1:200,000-scale escape map of the Netherlands printed on silk—as well as partial pay in Dutch, Belgian, and German currency. Each man also had an orange armband that would be used to identify him as a friend of the Dutch Underground.[36]

Shortly after 1000 hours, the great armada began taking to the air. Within approximately ninety minutes, 1,534 troop carrier aircraft and 491 gliders took off, assembled over their respective airfields, formed in their now familiar nine-ship V-of-Vs and then turned eastward toward the Continent.[37] Correspondent Martha Gellhorn, observing from below, remembered "the endless flying wedge of transport planes and the gliders with men crowded in those canvas cockleshells without parachutes moved through the sky like an enormous procession of clay pigeons."[38] And though clay pigeons they were, especially the C-47s which still did not have any added armor protection or self-sealing fuel tanks, they were very well protected pigeons. Over 900 U.S. Eighth and Ninth Air Force and Air Defense of Great Britain fighters and fighter-bombers escorted the lumbering troop carriers from the coast of England all the way to the target areas and back. More heavily concentrated along the northern route (where the heaviest concentration of flak lay), the P-38s, P-47s, P-51s, Tempests, Spitfires, and Mosquitoes darted in and around the troop carrier columns, keeping a sharp lookout for the *Luftwaffe* both in the air and on the ground (where *Luftwaffe* personnel manned the antiaircraft batteries).[39] When they recalled this sight, many troopers and crewmembers expressed feelings similar to those of Lieutenant Hugo Olson, Gavin's aide who was flying aboard one of the 82nd's lead serials. "What really set my mind at ease . . . were the fighter planes," said Olson. "They seemed to be all over. We had a lot flying top cover and there were others . . . sweeping in and out of our formations."[40] Almost everyone who witnessed the escorts in action had nothing but praise for their actions that

day. The " 'fighters gave us excellent support,' " stated Lieutenant Colonel Charles H. Young, commander of the 439th Troop Carrier Group, the seventh of the 82nd's D-Day parachute serials. " '[F]our of them shot up a gun position on a docked ship at the east end of Schouwen [Island] right under our noses before they could fire a shot at us. Every direction we looked, up, down, sideways, we saw airplanes. It's a thrill to be part of an operation so gigantic.' "[41] Sergeant Albert A. Tarbell of H Company, 3/504th recalled that when a battery opened up, "[i]mmediately a fighter plane swooped down on it like a hawk after a chicken and knocked it out."[42] Hugo Olson said that the first indication that they were taking any fire at all was when "puffs of smoke" appeared below them and then just as suddenly "one of the fighters would peel off and dive on it."[43] As had been planned, many of the flak batteries along the routes had already been bombed and strafed both the night before and in the morning while the massive air armada was still over England forming up. What remained for the escorts was to mop up. Resistance was so slight, in fact, that most troopers, who were expecting a much tougher time during the flight in, felt as did Lieutenant John A. Holabird of the 307th Airborne Engineers. It "was a picnic, a Sunday drive in an airplane."[44]

Luftwaffe aircraft made but two attempts to intercept the aerial convoys, both along the southern route on which the 101st flew. The first, made by a group of fifteen FW-190s, resulted in the loss of five or six German aircraft for one U.S. P-51 while the second, made by fifteen ME-109s, ended with one German plane shot down with no U.S. losses. None of the German interceptors got close to the troop transports.[45]

All told, not one British troop carrier or glider was lost to enemy action that day and only thirty-five American transports and thirteen gliders were destroyed. Twenty-three supporting fighters and fighter-bombers were also lost, all but one to flak.[46]

The 82nd's D-Day parachute echelon lost a total of ten aircraft.[47] In every case the paratroopers had already jumped or were able to jump before the plane crashed. Only one aircraft, carrying sixteen H Company, 3/504th troopers, was shot down before reaching Grave. Lieutenant Virgil Carmichael, S-2 of the 3/504th, recalled watching as the plane carrying his mates caught fire, most likely the result of flak detonating some ammunition or plastic explosive contained in the para-racks beneath the aircraft.

> 'I was able to count them [the parachutes of his comrades] as they left and saw that all escaped safely. The pilot, although the aircraft was involved [*sic*] in flames, somehow kept the plane steady until the paratroopers jumped. . . . The Air Corps used white chutes, so I figured it had to be the crew chief. He was the last man out. Almost immediately the blazing plane nose-dived and, at full throttle, plowed into a flooded area . . . below. On impact, a white chute billowed from the plane, probably ejected by the force of the crash.'[48]

Lieutenant Allen F. McClain III of Headquarters Company, 3/504th, also saw this plane go down. Like Carmichael, he counted parachutes and recalled that "[a]t the precise time the C-47 was hit, a P-47 Fighter plane came out of nowhere and knocked out the anti-aircraft gun emplacement."[49] Some of these troopers eventually made it back to Allied lines with the help of the Dutch Resistance; others were taken prisoner, but all survived. Of the remaining planes lost, six were shot down in the target area, where the flak grew

significantly more intense and the planes, flying at but 500 feet and slowed to drop speed, were sitting ducks. Two went down over Holland on the way back to England as a result of a collision; and the last ditched in the sea as it, too, was flying back to base. Besides these losses, 118 other planes carrying 82nd paratroopers were damaged, twenty so badly that they required salvage or lengthy repairs. Most of the damage was sustained by those planes dropping onto drop zone 'T' because of the necessity of making the turn for home over the Reichswald where hidden guns put up some of the most intense antiaircraft fire encountered that day.[50] One pilot who made the drop on drop zone 'T,' Captain Donald M. Orcutt, remembered the flak being so heavy

> 'it formed a veritable cloud layer of black smoke at our flight level. The lead airplanes in our serial disappeared from view as they flew into this black cloud. I thought they couldn't possibly survive this hail of enemy fire, and I tried to make myself as small as possible in the hope that I could pass through without being shot down.
>
> Amazingly, the lead airplanes emerged on the other side just as my squadron was entering the black cloud. My navigator, Lt. Michael Whitfill, shouted that he could hear hits being scored on us. Indeed he had. When we got back to England, we counted more than 100 bullet and shell-splinter holes in our C-47.'[51]

Before leaving England, Air Corps commanders briefed their crews that they were to take no evasive action between the initial point and their drop zones, that they were to fly unerringly on course, descend to jump altitude, slow to jump speed, and drop their paratroopers or release their gliders as planned. No one was to return with a full load.[52] That day Captain Orcutt and thousands of his fellow pilots completed their charge magnificently.

The first 82nd troopers to arrive in the Nijmegen area were the pathfinders, two teams of veteran paratroopers from the 504th flying in two C-47s from the IX Troop Carrier Command's Pathfinder Group and escorted by a flight of P-47s. Having followed the southern route, they encountered no enemy resistance until the troop carriers descended to drop altitude and slowed to drop speed near their target, drop zone 'O.' Then, antiaircraft guns around Grave opened up, but the P-47s pounced and silenced them. The two teams landed side by side squarely on drop zone 'O' at 1247 hours with no injuries and within three minutes after landing had set up all their navigational aids, encountering only sporadic sniper fire while doing so.[53]

Approximately fifteen minutes after the pathfinders dropped the first three serials of the main body appeared overhead carrying the division command element and the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. The lead formation, carrying Ben Vandervoort's 2/505th and the regimental headquarters section veered slightly north after passing drop zone 'O,' perhaps surprised by the flak thrown up at them from around Grave, and made its drop one to three miles northeast of drop zone 'N,' the intended drop zone. "Hitler, count your men," shouted Private Earl W. Boling of E Company just before he exited, "we are coming down."[54] And come down they did, right in the midst of six 20mm antiaircraft guns that were firing at them as the jumped. Another E Company trooper, Private Fred Hebein, actually landed in one of the gun positions, his chute draped over the gun tube.[55]

With bullets tearing holes in his canopy, Private Edwin C. Raub actually steered his chute as close as he could to one of the gun positions and, without removing his harness, killed one German, captured the remainder of the crew, and disabled the gun.[56] Gavin later wrote that as a result of their Normandy experience of being shot at while descending, many troopers jumped with their pistols in their hands or readily accessible and fired at the gun emplacements while drifting toward the ground. "Troopers talking about it later recalled it as being pretty silly because they were just as likely to shoot themselves as the Germans." It also seemed foolish, he continued, to fire at such big guns with only a .45-caliber pistol, but "[f]ortunately for the troopers, their mere arrival caused most of the Germans manning the antiaircraft batteries to scatter and disperse in the interest of survival." One lieutenant recalled seeing a young German throw down his rifle and run toward the border; the lieutenant let him go, not having it in him to shoot an unarmed boy running for home.[57] Captain Robert M. Piper recalled seeing " 'three Germans manning a machine gun and they were firing at us as we came down, but seeing so many parachutists that were armed and would be landing on top of them they stopped firing and were standing outside their gun position with their hands in the air waiting to surrender as soon as we could get out of our chutes.' "[58] Though wholly unplanned, the misdrop vindicated the ability of airborne forces to conduct a forced entry assault on prepared enemy positions. "After Sicily we were told time and again that parachute operations might succeed at night and under conditions where antiaircraft could not engage the air transports, but if they dared to fly over German antiaircraft guns in any numbers, they would be totally blown from the skies."[59] Yet the 2/505th sustained relatively few casualties and within thirty-five minutes, though dropped well off course, the battalion was assembled and moving toward its assigned position, a wooded hill about one mile west of Groesbeek, where it would become the division reserve. Vandervoort, somewhat heady with the impressive performance of his troopers took the time to compliment them on their quick assembly, but was abruptly brought back to reality when a voice from the rear ranks reminded him " '[h]ell, Colonel, everybody knows you can move a lot faster when you're being shot at.' "[60]

The bulk of the rest of the 505th came down right on drop zone 'N.' The 3/505th was first there and thirty minutes after landing was moving toward its primary objective, the town of Groesbeek. Major James L. Kaiser, the battalion commander, sent his G and H Companies into the town, which fell after scattered resistance, bagging some 100 prisoners in the process (elements of 2/505th also helped take the town, attacking from the northeast). Major Daniel B. McIlvoy, the regimental surgeon who accompanied the 3/505th to Groesbeek, recalled two amusing incidents on the way, both of which underscore the lack of resistance encountered on drop zone 'N.' McIlvoy had cracked his left ankle on landing, an injury he initially thought was just a bad sprain. While hobbling around collecting other aid men, McIlvoy spotted a wood-burning German ambulance and its driver "whom we had little or no difficulty in persuading to join us."[61] They then loaded themselves and their equipment in the ambulance and, with their prisoner at the wheel ("a very jovial German driver who stuck with us a considerable part of this campaign until the higher echelon caused us to release him"), joined Kaiser's men as they moved on Groesbeek. As they approached a crossroad near the town, "we noticed a Volkswagen coming down the column and it passed about three-fourths of the column before it finally dawned on someone that the American Army had no Volkswagens and

those troops in the back stopped the vehicle and a German officer got out and surrendered." Finally, after taking the town, McIlvoy set up his aid station in a German commissary. "Naturally, we were well supplied with German delicacies, along with a considerable quantity of Benedictine, for which we had very little use at the time, but we did at least store it in the medical detachment supplies and celebrated the end of the war later on."[62] With Groesbeek secure, Kaiser turned his attention to manning his battalion's sector of the division defensive perimeter, a two-mile arc that stretched generally northeast to southeast of Groesbeek, facing the German border. By dark, the 3/505th had established a series of strongpoints and roadblocks set up on commanding terrain and astride major avenues of approach. Since he was so close to the German border, Kaiser also sent a strong patrol under Lieutenant Cletus C. Asbra to reconnoiter the Reichswald; Asbra reported back that although he ran into stiff opposition, the woods were simply too thick to house armor.[63]

The 1/505th, the last of the lead serial to jump, had initially veered so far south that it encountered one of the 101st serials dropping near Eindhoven but its pilots got back on track and conducted a perfect drop on drop zone 'N.' The 1/505th's primary assault objectives were to man that portion of the division defensive perimeter almost due south of Groesbeek and seize a railroad bridge over the Maas just north of Mook, a village about three miles southwest of Groesbeek. It was in carrying out these missions that the 1/505th experienced the regiment's heaviest fighting on D-Day, in particular B Company, for it was to that company that Major Talton W. Long, the battalion commander, assigned the Mook bridge mission (Mook itself was also to be taken, but was of secondary importance to the bridge). To accomplish this the company commander, Lieutenant Harold E. Miller, sent his First and Third Platoons against the bridge. The Second Platoon, meanwhile was to establish a roadblock in the vicinity of Riethorst, an even smaller village about one and a half miles southeast of Mook; the southernmost point of the division's defensive perimeter.[64]

Led by Lieutenant Stanley Weinberg, Second Platoon moved out at about 1400 hours. Just outside Riethorst Dutch civilians informed Weinberg that there were some Germans in a nearby ammunition dump that were preparing to blow their charges, but before Weinberg could react the ammunition dump exploded. Without orders, Weinberg's troopers sprang into action, firing and maneuvering their way through what remained of the ammunition dump and into Riethorst, which they cleared by 1530 hours, killing a German colonel along the way and taking eight prisoners. An hour later, one of Weinberg's outposts spotted a large enemy contingent approaching from the southeast. Under the command of Sergeant Frederick Gaugler, the troopers at the outpost stopped the German advance, despite an enemy mortar barrage that landed with remarkable accuracy on top of their positions. No one knows how long the fight at the outpost lasted or how many Germans were involved, but at one point Gaugler's troopers were firing so furiously that their machine guns overheated and jammed, forcing the gunners to continue the fight with their .45-caliber sidearms. Because retention of Riethorst was so critical (it sat on some high ground that commanded Mook and the surrounding area), Major Long later reinforced Weinberg with First Platoon of C Company under Lieutenant Harold L. Gensemer. During the next several days, the two platoons fought side-by-side in a series of sharp clashes with German forces emanating from the Reichswald.[65]

While Weinberg's Second Platoon was fighting at Riethorst, a few miles to the north First and Third Platoons of B Company were moving on the Mook railroad bridge. The two platoons had just left the drop zone when they ran into a small enemy force dug in along their route. The Germans did not seem overly concerned with mounting a prolonged defense, however, and after a short, sharp firefight all thirty-three of the Germans surrendered. After securing the prisoners and sending them off to the rear, the B Company platoons continued their advance. The lead First Platoon was about 400 yards from the bridge when enemy small arms fire forced them to deploy. Using fire and maneuver to both overcome the enemy fire and continue their advance, the B Company troopers got all the way up next to the bridge before the defending Germans blew it in their faces. Two troopers were killed, three were wounded and seventeen more prisoners were taken. With the Mook railroad bridge blown there was no reason for the platoons to linger in the area so they returned to the drop zone, linked up with their battalion, and took up positions around the division perimeter.[66]

At 2000 hours, 17 September, Colonel Ekman reported that he had assembled over ninety-five percent of his regiment and that his defensive sector was manned. It was understood, however, that given the length of the area the 505th was assigned to cover, what Ekman had done was establish a series of strongpoints and roadblocks situated along key terrain features that described a rough semi-circle that began southwest of Groesbeek and covered the area south, east, and northeast of the town. There was no way he could form a continuous defensive line and there were large gaps between positions. Ekman's troopers patrolled those gaps, but the line was porous nonetheless. Fortunately for Ekman and his troopers, the night was relatively quiet.[67]

Following the 505th, the next three serials over the target area contained Colonel Tucker's 504th troopers. Its missions were to jump onto drop zone 'O' and 'Special DZ,' seize the 640-foot bridge over the Maas at Grave, seize and clear the town of Grave, seize the crossings over the Maas-Waal Canal at Heumen and Blankenberg, clear the area between the Maas-Waal Canal and the Maas River, and tie in with the 505th on its left and the 508th on its right.[68] The drop, according to Colonel Tucker, was "right in on the button."[69] "If ever we made a perfect jump," seconded T. Moffatt Burriss, the commander of I Company, 3/504th, "this was it. . . . None of our practice jumps had ever gone so well"[70] Indeed, ninety percent of the regiment landed exactly where it was supposed to and those that did not landed less than a mile away.[71] Resistance on the drop zone was slight and only one man, Corporal Curtis Morris of E Company, was killed on the jump when his chute malfunctioned when he collided with an equipment bundle in mid-air. "Dutch farmers came out to assist him as we had to move forward," recalled Morris's company commander, Captain Walter S. VanPoyck. "The next day, in the town of Grave, the farmers delivered his body to us, in a casket, draped in his chute and covered with flowers."[72] Only forty-four men were injured.[73] One of these was Captain Louis A. Hauptfleisch, the regimental adjutant, who had the misfortune of being the only man to land right on top of a building. "I crashed through the tiled roof top and suffered leg injuries as a result, but managed to carry out my assigned duties in the days following."[74]

Major Willard E. Harrison's 1/504th was first over the drop zone with the mission of seizing the canal bridges at Heumen and Blankenberg, designated Bridges 7 and 8 on division overlays.[75] To facilitate the rapid transit of his companies to their assigned

objectives, Harrison designated a windmill as the battalion assembly area. Once on the ground, troopers moved to the windmill, checked in, dropped their gas masks, bedrolls, and musette bags, and were then directed to their objectives. Using this technique Harrison acted as the battalion traffic cop at the windmill and was able to effect the assembly of his battalion on the move. Harrison's plan was for B Company to take the Heumen Bridge (the southernmost of the Maas-Waal Canal bridges); C Company to take the Blankenberg Bridge (a little over a mile north of the Heumen Bridge); and A Company to take up a supporting position between the two so that it could easily reinforce either or both bridge seizures in the event of heavy resistance.[76]

The attack on the Blankenberg Bridge was unsuccessful. Just as a group of A and C Company troopers were about to charge over the bridge's roadway the defending Germans detonated their explosives and destroyed the bridge beyond repair. Captain Thomas B. Helgeson's B Company attack on the Heumen Bridge fared much better. To expedite movement, Helgeson sacrificed stealth for speed—instead of taking a covered and concealed cross-country route to the bridge, Helgeson formed his company in platoon columns on a road and ran straight at it. Traveling this way, B Company got to within 200 yards of the Heumen Bridge before taking fire from a force of about fifty Germans who were defending the bridge from a blockhouse located on an island just north of the bridge. Helgeson's lead platoon went to ground and returned fire while the next platoon in the company column, Second Platoon under Lieutenants Maurice Marcus and James R. Cummings (the platoon leader and assistant platoon leader respectively) maneuvered around to a dike from which they could bring machine gun and bazooka fire on the blockhouse. With the blockhouse momentarily suppressed Marcus, Cummings, and eight troopers from Second Platoon rushed Heumen Bridge. Marcus and one other trooper were wounded along the way, but the eight remaining under Cummings's command got all the way to the far side, where they were promptly pinned down. Meanwhile Helgeson brought up the rest of B Company so that he could suppress the blockhouse with even more fire, to include several rounds from the company 60mm mortars. But suppressing the island was not enough. Helgeson feared that the detonating mechanism was located in the blockhouse so he needed to take the island. He tried an assault with one of this platoons, but that was beaten back. He also ferried some additional troopers across the canal, using a small boat they had discovered but they, too, were pinned down once they got across. Waiting until dusk, Helgeson infiltrated troopers to both banks of the canal on either side of the island and then assaulted the island from all sides. After a hard fight that cost him six dead and one wounded both the island and Heumen Bridge were in Helgeson's hands (the bridge had been rigged with explosives, but for some reason the Germans never detonated them). Helgeson and his troopers got the division its first bridge over the canal; it would have been for naught, however, had the Grave Bridge been blown. But it was not, and had actually been in American hands for several hours already.[77]

The mission of securing the Grave Bridge and, on order, the city of Grave, fell to Major Edward N. Wellems's 2/504th. It was the most important of the 504th's D-Day missions. Since it is best to seize a bridge by attacking both ends simultaneously, thereby denying the enemy the opportunity to withdraw to one or the other bank and destroy the bridge behind him, the bulk of the battalion jumped on drop zone 'O' east of the bridge while E Company under Captain Walter S. VanPoyck jumped on 'Special DZ' west of

it.[78] Like Harrison, Wellems also ordered his men to assemble on the move, although his instructions were "that if the landing was hampered, all [2/504th troopers] would fight their way to the Grave bridge without organizing tactically."[79] This proved prescient for as it turned out, although the bulk of the 2/504th dropped on target it was, in fact, two units that were slightly misdropped that were the first to assault the bridge on both sides. Leading the way was one stick of fifteen troopers led by Lieutenant John S. Thompson.

Thompson was jumpmaster of the plane flying on the extreme right of the V-of-V formation carrying E Company to 'Special DZ.' When the green jump light flashed on, Thompson made a split second decision: instead of jumping on the light Thompson delayed a few seconds in order that his troopers would clear a group of buildings directly below them. By doing so he and the troopers in his stick landed in a field about 700 yards southwest of the bridge, much closer than the rest of the company, which landed squarely on 'Special DZ' and about two miles southwest of the bridge. As soon as they hit ground Thompson's group began taking fire from some buildings on the outskirts of Grave as well as from some antiaircraft positions near the bridge itself, but this proved wildly inaccurate and thus, within ten minutes of landing, Thompson had assembled his small force with all its equipment. Having tried and failed to contact his company commander, Thompson sent a runner back to 'Special DZ' to tell Captain VanPoyck that Thompson and the rest of his stick, in accordance with Wellems's pre-jump instructions, were moving on Grave Bridge without waiting for the rest of the company. Almost immediately after starting out they met their first significant opposition when two trucks and two halftracks filled with German soldiers and preceded by two motorcycles appeared on the road to their front. Sergeant Roy E. Tidd, Thompson's lead scout, fired at the lead truck and killed the driver. At this the lead motorcycles sped by and continued on into Grave while the rest of the German force dismounted and deployed along the road. Thompson and his men took cover in some water-filled ditches. A ten-minute firefight ensued during which the paratroopers fired at the Germans while standing in water up to their necks while the Germans withdrew, seemingly more interested in escaping than in coming to grips with the Americans. Once the threat to his front was gone, Thompson and his small band continued toward the bridge. About 200 yards short of the bridge they noticed what appeared to be a power plant to and from which Germans were running with bundles in their hands. Fearing that the Germans were preparing to blow the bridge, Thompson deployed his troopers so that they could take the power plant under fire from all sides and then assaulted it, whereupon they found no enemy and discovered that the bundles contained nothing more than bedrolls, weapons, food, stoves, and boots. In the process, Thompson's troopers cut all wires that they could find. Thompson then worked his way to the top of the power plant so that he could better observe the bridge, the area between the bridge and Grave, and the far (east) bank, and noted that "[e]vidently there was nobody in command [of the German forces] and there was therefore much confusion."[80] His force was still receiving fire from one of the flak towers on the bridge, however, so Thompson told Private Robert McGraw to take out the enemy gun with his bazooka. McGraw put two rounds through a vent at the top of the flak tower and silenced the gun. Meanwhile, another trooper armed with a BAR took out two sedans that were racing toward the bridge from Grave, killing all the occupants in the process. Soon thereafter a squad of twelve men led by Staff Sergeant Alek Misseres joined Thompson's group at the west end of the bridge. Misseres and his squad had

worked their way up to the bridge from 'Special DZ' by crawling through a series of interconnected canals and ditches. By that time it was about 1500 hours. Thompson had the west end of the bridge firmly in hand so he fired a green flare to denote mission accomplished. He then set up a roadblock with the two squads under his control and waited. Meanwhile, in order to protect the Grave Bridge from enemy reinforcements rushing up from the south, the remainder of E Company established a roadblock south of Grave. Throughout the remainder of the day there was sporadic contact both near the bridge, where Thompson's men ambushed another small sedan that unwittingly attempted to cross the bridge, and at the roadblock, where the most significant action occurred about 1705 hours when a German Mark IV tank, initially thought to be a British tank by the troopers, got within twenty-five yards of the roadblock before it opened fire with its main gun and machine guns. It was eventually driven away by bazooka fire, but not before one trooper was killed and thirteen wounded.[81]

It was not long after Lieutenant Thompson sent his green flare skyward declaring the west end of the Grave Bridge in U.S. hands that the east end was likewise secured, in large part by another stick that had also missed its designated drop zone. Lieutenant Martin E. Middleton, F Company's First Platoon leader, dropped with his stick and a portion of a second some 2,500 yards north of Grave, two of the few sticks to miss drop zone 'O' that day. Within twenty minutes of landing Middleton had assembled twenty men and in accordance with his battalion commander's orders set out for Grave Bridge. Marching along the paved road that led to the bridge, Middleton's group was making good time when it encountered a member of the Dutch Underground who had been sent out to help guide paratroopers to the battalion assembly area. Belaying his march on the bridge, Middleton led his charge to the assembly area where, upon meeting Wellems, he was immediately sent back in the direction of the bridge, only this time reinforced to a strength of thirty-five men, including three light machine guns, two BARs, a bazooka, a grenade launching rifle, four Thompson submachine guns, and twenty-four M1s. Following a dike that ran in the direction of the bridge, Middleton encountered his company commander, Captain Beverly T. Richardson, who had gathered all of his Second and a portion of this Third Platoon and was likewise moving on the bridge. Since Middleton had the most combat power, Richardson sent him ahead. Working their way forward by using the ditches and the few houses in the area as cover, Middleton's troopers secured the eastern end of the bridge without a loss and took thirteen prisoners and killed five of the enemy in the process. Middleton then sent a runner back to inform his company commander of his position. Shortly thereafter, Richardson arrived with the rest of F Company in tow but by that time the bridge had come under increasingly heavy fire from several surrounding antiaircraft gun emplacements and some well-hidden snipers. Richardson sent out patrols to take them out (by that time both Wellems and Tucker were also at Richardson's position). One such three-man patrol moved on a particularly well-entrenched 20mm gun position by crawling several hundred yards through ditches and over clear ground and then, following an exchange of grenades, assaulted and silenced it. One of the three troopers, Private First Class Willard G. Tess, stayed with the patrol and finished the mission despite being wounded in thirty-two places by grenade fragments. A second patrol led by Lieutenant John E. Schaeffer encountered enemy machine gun, 20mm, and mortar fire as it moved on a second emplacement. In a brilliant display of the aggressiveness and up-front leadership that

characterized the 82nd, Schaffer took out each of the positions in turn. First, he "dashed over open terrain in the face of heavy small arms fire and charged a machine gun position and two protecting riflemen, wounding several enemy soldiers and capturing six." He then led his troopers against the 20mm gun, where he killed another German and took two more prisoners, and then turned the gun on the enemy mortar position and took it out as well.[82] Captain Fordyce Gorham, the regimental S-2, also joined in the hunt and silenced the last of the German positions by rushing one of the antiaircraft gun emplacements, killing the crew, and then manning the gun to take out the other emplacements. While his troopers were clearing the west end of the Grave Bridge, Richardson sent Lieutenant Stuart McCash and one other trooper across the bridge to see what, in any, friendly forces were there (Wellems had radio contact with Captain VanPoyck but since VanPoyck was not physically at the bridge he could not give Wellems a clear idea of the situation at the other end). McCash and the trooper dashed across the bridge, which was still under considerable fire, found Thompson, and then dashed back to inform Richardson, Wellems, and Tucker that Thompson was in place with about two squads. By that time all German resistance around the bridge had been overcome. It was about 1700 hours. The most critical of the division's D-Day bridges was secure.[83]

By taking the Grave and Heumen Bridges and clearing the ground in between (a task accomplished by the 3/504th against very little resistance), Tucker's regiment had secured the vitally important road link necessary to pass XXX Corps through the 82nd zone and on to Nijmegen. And, like Ekman, he too could account for about ninety-five percent of his troopers by the close of day.[84]

Gavin was pleased with the performance of Tucker and his rowdy paratroopers that day, especially the 2/504th's fight to take the Grave Bridge, calling the action there "a masterpiece" that "very few commanders could have done as well."[85] But beyond the "first[-]class fighting job" the 2/504th's troopers had conducted that day, the taking of the Grave Bridge was, in Gavin's mind, "one of the best planned and executed operations of its type in the war" because it conformed exactly with the principles of bridge-taking that he had laid out for his troopers prior to the operation.[86] Attacking a bridge from both ends simultaneously was, of course, always to be preferred but even if this could not be accomplished (such as with the attack on the canal bridge at Heumen) there were other procedures that Gavin insisted his troopers follow when assaulting a bridge. The first was that "[e]ven though the enemy fire keeps you from getting near the bridge, under no circumstances allow an enemy soldier to move around near it" by concentrating sniper and rifle fire on its approaches and across its span. Secondly, all wires were to be cut, both during the approach to the bridge as well as on the bridge itself, a standing operational procedure that had been instilled in the division's troopers from the outset. Searching for demolitions on or near the bridge before the bridge had been secured was wasted effort, felt Gavin, but searching for and cutting the wires that would detonate those explosives was what would ensure success. According to Gavin, "they all [the troopers] carried switch blade knives, so called jump knives, that they used for this purpose."[87] Next, once the span was in friendly hands, troopers were to "[d]estroy all enemy around the bridge and allow no prisoners to loiter near." And finally, once in control of the bridge and its environs, then and only then remove the demolition charges.[88] Hence, the successful seizure of the Grave and Heumen bridges was testament

to the prior training the troopers had received; it would not be the last time they were called upon to put this training to the test.

The 82nd's seventh parachute serial dropped companies B, C, and D of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion along with thirty-four members of the division artillery headquarters element and a small advance party from the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion onto drop zone 'N' slightly ahead of schedule (only five to ten minutes after the 505th had dropped). The assembled quickly and the engineers for the most part provided security for Gavin and the division command post while the artillerymen reconnoitered positions for the guns soon to follow.[89]

Following the engineers and advance element of the division artillery headquarters element were three serials carrying Colonel Lindquist's 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment along with forty pathfinders from the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment who were to prepare the landing zones for the gliders soon to follow. Flying into the target area, Corporal Edward N. 'Toby' Bailey of the 3/508th recalled "seeing the civilians scampering through the villages" and, upon standing up in preparation for exiting the aircraft, hearing one of the other troopers in his stick shout " '[s]tand on your tip-toes boys[,] this is as near to heaven as you will ever get.' "[90] Bailey's battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Louis G. Mendez Jr. was much less sanguine about the drop. Before leaving England, he had gathered together the pilots who would be flying his troopers to battle and challenged them to hit the target.

> 'Gentlemen . . . my officers know this map of Holland and the drop zones by heart and we're ready to go. When I brought my battalion to the briefing prior to Normandy, I had the finest combat-ready force of its size that will ever be known. By the time I gathered them together in Normandy, half were gone. I charge you: put us down in Holland or put us down in hell, but put us all down together in one place.'[91]

Despite receiving heavier fire than the serials preceding them (twenty-five 508th troopers were injured before leaving the aircraft and returned to England, the most of any of the regiments), the pilots flying the 508th were for the most part right on target. Mendez's battalion, flying at the tail end of the regimental serial, landed together, although several hundred yards southeast of drop zone 'T.' The regimental headquarters and most of the 1/508th and 2/508th , meanwhile, landed on the drop zone which, like the area on which Vandervoort's 2/505th had landed, was heavily defended by antiaircraft guns. Fortunately, just as had occurred when the 2/505th dropped, as soon as the 508th troopers began to descend most of the enemy abandoned their positions and fled. Of the 132 aircraft carrying the 508th only six or seven missed the drop zone badly. Four or five pilots dropped their troopers short of the drop zone, although in two cases it was because the planes had been hit and were about to crash; the other premature exits were chalked up to overeagerness on the part of the paratroopers. The most egregious misdrop was made by two aircraft in the lead serial carrying a platoon from A Company, 1/508th. These two sticks, some twenty-five troopers in all, landed together about 2, 500 yards east of drop zone 'T' near the town of Wyler, just across the Dutch-German border. Lieutenant Rex Combs, who was wounded by shrapnel even before he exited his plane, assembled the troopers and led them in a fight back to the drop zone, assaulting and

destroying four German antiaircraft guns along the way and taking twenty-three prisoners.[92]

The 508th's D-Day missions were to seize and hold a series of objectives south of Nijmegen in order to secure the northern portion of the division's defensive area and establish roadblocks on the major avenues of approach, especially on the northern portion of the Groesbeek Heights. It was also to clear and secure the landing zone for the gliders soon to follow. Finally, in accordance with the verbal instructions Lindquist received from Gavin just before takeoff, if all went well the 508th was to attempt to seize the main highway bridge in Nijmegen by *coup de main*.

Lieutenant Colonel Shields Warren Jr.'s 1/508th had the mission of securing the center of the regimental defensive line, focusing mainly on the main road leading south from Nijmegen to Groesbeek (as such, Warren's battalion was just outside the southern outskirts of Nijmegen proper). Thirty minutes after landing, while the rest of the battalion was still assembling, Warren sent one platoon from A Company ahead to establish a roadblock on the Nijmegen-Groesbeek highway and report back about any resistance it encountered en route to, or on, the objective. Forty-five minutes later, Warren led the rest of his battalion north from drop zone 'T' having been informed by the A Company platoon that there were no Germans in the vicinity and that the roadblock was in place. The movement was, according to Warren, "a routine cross-country movement . . . enlivened only by the capture of four German labor troopers who surrendered without ado."[93] The battalion also had with it one unexpected addition picked up by Lieutenant Woodrow W. Millsaps, the B Company commander. Millsaps recalled being very much occupied on the drop zone, "running all over the place, directing men to the assembl[y] area, sending radio calls, etc." but noticed that everywhere he went he was followed by a soldier he did not recognize. After telling this stranger to go join his platoon several times to no avail, Millsaps finally got mad, turned on the soldier, and told him

> for the last time to go to his platoon. He told me he didn't have a platoon. It was then I discovered he was wearing a strange uniform so I asked him what kind of damn dress was that. He told me it was the Air Corps uniform, that he was a member of the crew on one of the planes, and since the plane was on fire and the troopers were jumping he thought it best to go along and jump, too. We all wondered how he made the jump, in a free fall parachute, at such low altitude, but he did, and was in good shape physically. He remained in my Company about a week and finally returned to the rear when ground troops arrived in the area.[94]

By 1830 hours, Warren's battalion, plus one man, was in place and digging in.[95]

The 2/508th, commanded by Major Otho E. Holmes, was to occupy the sector between the left flank of the 1/508th and the Maas-Waal Canal, a distance of some 3,000 yards and it was to do this with but two companies; Holmes's D Company was initially detached and retained under regimental control in order to clear and secure the glider landing zone. Meeting somewhat stiffer opposition than did the Warren's battalion (although E Company did surprise an oblivious group of Germans who, with rifles slung over their backs, were playing games on bicycles), the rump of Holmes's battalion was in

place and digging in by 2000 hours. An attempt that afternoon by Second Platoon of E Company to take the Maas-Waal Canal bridge at Hatert (a little over two miles north of the blown Blankenberg Bridge) was to no avail. When the troopers got to the Hatert Bridge they found that it had already been blown.[96]

Mendez's 3/508th was to secure the regiment's right flank by occupying the northern portion of the Groesbeek Heights around the town of Berg en Dal. The battalion assembled quickly, moved out against almost no opposition, and by 1830 hours had secured its objective. Once Berg en Dal was in hand, Mendez sent out combat patrols to the east and northeast to set up a series of roadblocks on the international highway that linked Nijmegen to Kleve, Germany, and which led directly to the main highway bridge at Nijmegen. Its interdiction was critical in order to seal off Nijmegen from reinforcement. Apparently, however, some 508th troopers became caught up in Dutch celebrations in Berg en Dal and failed to make it to their assigned objectives, leaving portions of the international highway uncovered. Trooper Henry McLean of H Company was told to take twelve to fifteen troopers to set up one of the roadblocks. When he got to Berg en Dal, however, McLean walked into a Dutch café and was enticed to linger by the offer of cold beer. When Lieutenant William J. Garry eventually found him there he " 'raised hell with me for not carrying out my orders' " and instructed McLean to return to his unit. McLean and his men never made it to their roadblock positions that day.[97] Apparently, a second patrol from I Company was to undertake a similar mission in the vicinity of Beek, a small town about a mile northeast of Berg en Dal right on the Dutch-German border but, according to Mendez "[h]ere the selection of officers seems to have been unfortunate for they lacked the aggressiveness to make the strongpoint stick."[98] Instead, this patrol set up its roadblock elsewhere, leaving Beek uncovered, an oversight for which the 508th would pay dearly in the days to follow.

The final parachute drop of the day was a forty-eight-plane serial carrying the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion to drop zone 'N.' The 376th landed squarely on the drop zone and had one of its 75mm howitzers assembled and ready to fire with twenty-four rounds of ammunition within twenty minutes of landing. By 1700 hours, eight guns were assembled and ready to fire in direct support of the 505th to its south. The battalion sustained twenty-four injuries on the jump, one of whom was the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Wilbur Griffith, who refused evacuation and instead commanded his battalion from a wheelbarrow.[99] In his after action report on the operation, Gavin insisted that

> [t]he employment of the Parachute Field Artillery of this division as a parachute force more than justified the Troop Carrier lift expended in its committment [*sic*]. The 376th Parachute Field Artillery engaged its targets shortly after landing and on D-plus-1, prior to the arrival of the gliderborne artillery, contributed, I believe decisively, to the success of the ground fighting.[100]

As Gavin had predicted, the use of artillery, even relatively small-caliber 75mm guns, was quite effective in breaking up enemy attacks or dislodging enemy defenders, especially when these forces were composed of rear echelon units not used to dealing with artillery concentrations. Furthermore, they provided the 82nd some insurance

against a prolonged fight on its own. Gavin later revealed that although the overall scheme for MARKET-GARDEN called for XXX Corps to link up with the 82nd no later than D+1, he was "quite prepared not to see British forces before D plus 2 or 3." Given this assumption, bringing in as much artillery as early as possible, as opposed to more infantry, especially on D+1 was a tradeoff he felt he had to make.[101]

Less than ten minutes after the last parachute serial dropped, the 82nd's only D-Day glider lift appeared overhead. It had started off in England in fifty Waco gliders carrying 216 troopers from A Battery, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion as well as elements of the division headquarters, the division artillery element, and sundry signal, reconnaissance, and air control units. Included also were twenty-seven jeeps, eight 57mm antitank guns, and several trailers loaded with supplies and ammunition. Shortly after take off two gliders broke their tow ropes while a third had its load shift in flight. All three returned to England, landed safely, started over again, and flew to the target area on their own. A fourth glider began disintegrating over the sea and was released and ditched safely. A fifth was hit by antiaircraft fire and along with its tug, went down just off the coast of Schouwen Island with all hands lost. The remainder had a fairly uneventful flight to the target area, although only six gliders actually made it to the landing zone. The rest (with the exception of one glider that inexplicably landed eighty-five miles to the southwest) were released about a mile short of the planned release point (this allowed the tugs to make their turn for home before flying over the Reichswald) but managed to land within a mile of the intended landing zone (including the three gliders that flew over separately). All told, 209 troopers, twenty-four jeeps, seven trailers and, most importantly, all of the antitank guns made it to the target area safely. Only seven troopers were injured in the landings. Interestingly, due to a shortage of glider pilots, an airborne trooper occupied the co-pilot seat in most of the gliders, a circumstance that caused a great deal of concern before the operation, especially among the pilots, but which turned out to have minimal impact.[102]

After all the 82nd's D-Day insertions were complete, Lieutenant General Browning's British I Airborne Corps command post element was to be inserted onto landing zone 'N' by thirty-two Horsa and six Waco gliders carrying 105 men and "great quantities of equipment." [103] Brigadier General Parks visited Browning at the departure airfield to see him off and wish him luck and came away especially struck by the latter.

> 'I took a look in General Browning's glider . . . and I have never seen so much junk. It looked like a gypsy caravan. There were bicycles, bazookas, bedding rolls, radios, and all sorts of stuff he planned to use for his Command Post.'[104]

On the other hand Colonel George Chatterton, commander of the British Glider Pilot Regiment and the man who piloted Browning's glider on D-Day, was struck by the appearance of the corps commander himself.

> 'Browning came to the glider immaculately dressed in a barathea battle-dress with a highly polished Sam Browne belt, knife-edge trousers, leather revolver holster, all gleaming like glass, a swagger cane in one hand and

> wearing kid gloves. He was in tremendous form because he realised that he had reached one of the climaxes of his career.'[105]

Of the thirty-eight gliders that took off, one Horsa aborted over England, a second over the sea, and a third broke loose over Holland well before the target area. The remaining thirty-five landed safely in the Groesbeek area, twenty-eight right on landing zone 'N,' shortly after 1400 hours. Within ninety minutes, British I Airborne Corps headquarters had gathered its men, sorted its equipment, and was up and running on the wooded slopes of the Groesbeek Heights.[106]

By day's end the IX Troop Carrier Command had delivered by parachute and glider 7,444 82nd troopers to the Nijmegen area along with twelve artillery pieces, eight antitank guns, twenty-four jeeps and over 250 tons of supplies. Only forty-six division troopers failed to make it to the target area and of those that did arrive, only 130 sustained injuries as a result of landing.[107]

Similar results were replicated throughout the airborne corridor on D-Day. All told 335 British and 1,044 U.S. transports delivered 431 gliders and over 19,000 troopers to the three objective areas.[108] South of Nijmegen, the 101st had occupied several key towns and had seized all the bridges in its area intact with the exception of one bridge over the Wilhelmina Canal, which had been destroyed, but by last light an improvised plank bridge had been constructed on the pillars of the destroyed bridge and 101st troopers were advancing southward toward XXX Corps. North of Nijmegen, the British 1st Airborne Division had secured its drop and landing zones and was pushing toward the main highway bridge in Arnhem, where a spearhead force consisting mainly of Lieutenant Colonel John D. Frost's 2nd Parachute Battalion was already ensconced at the bridge's northern terminus. And finally, XXX Corps had jumped off at 1435 hours after a thirty-five minute preparatory barrage fired by some 350 guns arrayed behind the front and supported by 100 tank-busting R.A.F. Typhoons. Lieutenant Colonel J. O. E. Vandeleur's 3rd Battalion, Irish Guards was in the van and ran into trouble almost immediately.

> 'The leading squadron crossed the Dutch border when, suddenly, nine tanks were knocked out, one after another. We got savage at this and put down yellow smoke wherever we thought the Germans could possibly be. The "Tiffies" [Typhoons] came cutting in from every angle at zero feet, shooting everything to hell. It was all very thrilling, particularly as the German bazooka boys and parachutists were hopping round the hedge all around us. There was a deafening bang behind us and a half-track sailed into the trees having touched off something unpleasant.'[109]

By nightfall, Vandeleur's Irishmen had advanced approximately eight miles to the town of Valkenswaard, still about six miles south of Eindhoven, and laagered for the night. Montgomery had instructed Horrocks that his advance to Arnhem must be " 'rapid and violent, and without regard to what is happening on the flanks.' "[110] Yet for all the combat power Montgomery had provided Horrocks, achieving such an end was easier said than done, especially when constrained to a road that, in many places, was one-tank

wide and elevated so that the vehicles appeared as perfectly silhouetted targets. Hence, by nightfall, 17 September, XXX Corps was already behind schedule.[111]

Chapter Seventeen Notes

[1] Robert J. Kershaw, *'It Never Snows in September': The German View of MARKET-GARDEN and The Battle of Arnhem, September 1944* (Hersham, England: Ian Allan Publishing Ltd., 1994), frontispiece.

[2] Jodl quoted in Kershaw, *'It Never Snows in September,'* 21.

[3] Kurt Student, "Arnheim—Last German Victory," *Der Frontsoldat erzählt*, no. 5, (1953): 3, copy in The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 131, Folder 7, OU. Depending on the source, Student's command has been called the *First Airborne Army*, *First Paratroop Army*, or *First Parachute Army*, depending on the whims of the translator. The latter will be used here.

[4] Except where noted see Kershaw, *'It Never Snows in September,'* 14; MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 125-126; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 255.

[5] See A. Korthals Altes, K. Margry, G. Thuring, and R. Voskuil, *September 1944: Operation Market Garden* (Derde Druk, the Netherlands: De Haan, 1987), 10 and Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 18-23.

[6] Dombrowski quoted in Kershaw, *'It Never Snows in September,'* 20.

[7] Hensel quoted in ibid., 24.

[8] Quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 496.

[9] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 121.

[10] Quoted in ibid.

[11] British I Airborne Corps, "Allied Airborne Operation in Holland," n.d., p. 1, 101-(A/B)-0.3.0, Box 2008, Record Group 407, NARA II. Capitalization in original.

[12] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 79 and 82.

[13] Koch quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 496.

[14] Smith quoted in MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 122.

[15] Urquhart quoted in Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 80.

[16] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 273.

[17] Horrocks, Belfield, and Essame, *Corps Commander*, 82.

[18] Ibid., 84.

[19] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 124.

[20] Except where noted see Kershaw, *'It Never Snows in September,'* 22; MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 123-124; and Office of the Chief Historian, Operational (German Branch), Manuscript B-717, General Student's Post-War Interrogation Report, 22 December 1947, pp. 3-9, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 131, Folder 7, OU.

[21] Kershaw, *'It Never Snows in September,'* 23; MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 124-125; and Student's Post-War Interrogation Report, 3-9.

[22] Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 293.

[23] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 125.

[24] Ibid., 126-127.

[25] Bittrich quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 116. Since the war various authors have posited that the plans for MARKET-GARDEN had been compromised and this is what led Model to position the *II SS Panzer Corps* near Arnhem. The most persistent myth is that Christiaan Lindemans, a one-time Dutch resistance fighter who had been turned by German intelligence and who was generally know by his nickname 'King Kong' because of his huge size, revealed to the Germans the entire outline of the MARKET-GARDEN plan. Although it may be true that Lindemans knew something of MARKET-GARDEN, he was not in a position to relay this information to his German handlers until sometime on 15 September, eleven days *after* Model had already ordered the *9th* and *10th SS Panzer Divisions* to Arnhem. Additionally, according to reports rendered by the German intelligence officers who debriefed Lindemans, the only thing he knew was that the British were preparing a huge attack with the object of occupying Eindhoven, news of no great account since Eindhoven was a logical objective for a continued British advance. Nothing was said about Arnhem. Still, in 1952, Oreste Pinto, a former Dutch colonel who worked on the SHAEF staff as an interrogator, published his memoirs, entitled *Spycatcher*, in which he insisted that Lindemans had given the MARKET-GARDEN plans to the Germans. Though Pinto's assertions were adequately refuted by another retired Dutch officer, Theodoor Boeree, the rumor persisted and in 1980 a Dutch historian, Louis de Jong, again asserted that Lindemans had betrayed the plan, although with the caveat that the Germans failed to act on the information. The fact the Lindemans committed suicide while awaiting trial after the war and that he had had some dealings with the Dutch Royal Family kept the story alive. In 1986, charges that Lindemans had been liquidated in order to keep quiet information that would embarrass the Dutch Royals led to his body being exhumed to see if, in fact, the body in the grave was that of Lindemans. Examination of the body revealed it to be his. Still, an official inquiry that same year resulted in the opening of the Dutch secret service files on Lindemans, which proved little. Finally, in 1997, Lindemans's suicide note surfaced and has, to date, provided satisfactory evidence that Lindemans took his own life. See Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol.1, 86 and Theodoor Booree to James M. Gavin, 8 September 1953, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 9, OU.

[26] Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, *Weekly Intelligence Summary*, 16 September 1944, p. 7, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Military documents and maps for Operation 'Market,' readiness reports of Airborne Divisions," USAMHI. Capitalization in original.

[27] Horrocks, Belfield, and Essame, *Corps Commander*, 93. Horrocks also wrote: "[i]n the course of the war, I had received many orders and instructions from Montgomery, but this was the first time that he, the master of the tactical battle, completely underestimated the enemy strength. I had no idea whatever that the 9th [SS] and 10th [SS] Panzer Divisions were refitting just north-east of Arnhem, nor had Dempsey [the British Second Army commander] so far as I know." p. 93.

[28] Adam Anthony Komosa, "Invasion of Holland, 'Market,' " 12 January 1968, p. 6, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 5, OU; Office of Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, *Airborne Assault on Holland: An Interim Report*, 12; Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 102.

[29] Megellas, *All The Way to Berlin*, 92. See also Komosa, "Invasion of Holland," 6.

[30] Megellas, *All The Way to Berlin*, 93.

[31] Donald Douglas Lassen questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 57, OU.

[32] Jack Roger Isaacs questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 47, OU.

[33] James Emory Baugh questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 106, Folder 2. OU.

[34] Jack Tallerday questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 105, Folder 9, OU.

[35] Hanz Karl Druener questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 21, OU.

[36] Komosa, "Invasion of Holland," 6; Megellas, *All The Way to Berlin*, 104-105; Carl W. Kappel, "The Operations of Company 'H,' 504th Parachute Infantry, (82nd Airborne Division) in the Invasion of Holland 17-21 September 1944," n.d., p. 12, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 1, OU.

[37] British I Airborne Corps, "Allied Airborne Operation in Holland," 3; Office of Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, *Airborne Assault on Holland: An Interim Report*, 12; Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 101-114 passim.

[38] Martha Gellhorn, "Rough and Tumble," n.p.

[39] Office of Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, *Airborne Assault on Holland: An Interim Report*, 14.

[40] Hugo V. Olson, interview by Frederic Kelly, 24 January 1967, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 2, OU.

[41] Young quoted in Dank, *The Glider Gang*, 173.

[42] Albert A. Tarbell questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 21, OU.
[43] Hugo V. Olson, interview, 24 January 1967.

[44] John Augur Holabird Jr., interview, 27 February 1969, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 106, Folder 10, OU.

[45] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 102.

[46] British I Airborne Corps, "Allied Airborne Operation in Holland," 6-8.

[47] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 107.

[48] Carmichael quoted in Megellas, *All The Way to Berlin*, 96.

[49] Allen French McClain III questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 9, OU.

[50] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 107-109.

[51] Orcutt quoted in Breuer, *Geronimo*, 330.

[52] Office of Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, *Airborne Assault on Holland: An Interim Report*, 8.

[53] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 101.

[54] Earl W. Boling questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 9, OU.

[55] Lassen questionnaire.

[56] Robert L. Machol, "The Story of the 82nd Airborne Division," n.d., p.1, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 60, OU.

[57] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 159-160.

[58] Piper quoted in Michel De Trez, ed., *The Way We Were: Col. Robert N. Piper, 'Bob,'* (Wezembeek-Oppem, Belgium: D-Day Publishing, 2002), 33.

[59] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 160.

[60] Quoted in Langdon, *"Ready,"* 95. See also page 93; Huston, "Air Invasion of Holland," 56; and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 109.

[61] Daniel B. McIlvoy to Clarence F. Montgomery, 31 October 1960, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 66, OU.

[62] Daniel B. McIlvoy to Cornelius Ryan, 6 October 1967, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 66, OU.

[63] See Langdon, *"Ready,"* 93-95; Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 109; Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "Invasion of Holland," 27 October 1944, no folder, Box 12456, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[64] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 95; Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 109; Combat Interview "1st Bn, 505th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div. Mook and Riethorst (Major Talton W. Long)," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "Company B, 505th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div (Lt Harold E. Miller, CO)," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[65] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 95; Combat Interview "Company B, 505th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div (Lt Harold E. Miller, CO),"; Combat Interview "Co. B, 1st Bn, 505th Prcht Inf, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "1st Bn, 505th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div. Mook and Riethorst (Major Talton W. Long)."

[66] Combat Interview "1st Bn, 505th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div. Mook and Riethorst (Major Talton W. Long)," and Combat Interview "Company B, 505th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div (Lt Harold E. Miller, CO)."

[67] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 110.

[68] Combat Interview "82d Airborne Division," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[69] Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[70] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 106.

[71] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 110.

[72] Walter S. VanPoyck questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 24, OU. In his questionnaire VanPoyck incorrectly identified this trooper as Corporal Jon Morris. After the war, however, some of the Dutchmen who were involved with the burial turned over personal effects that clearly identified the trooper as Curtis Morris. Corporal Jon Morris was, in turn, subsequently killed a few days later. Starlyn Jorgensen, telephonic interview by the author, 4 June 2001.

[73] Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[74] Louis A. Hauptfleisch questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 29, OU.

[75] The Maas-Waal Canal was about eight miles long and was spanned by five bridges, only four of which were of immediate concern to the 82nd. These four bridges, from south to north, were located near the towns of Heumen, Blankenberg, Hatert, and Honinghutie and were designated, in order, bridges 7, 8, 9, and 10. From a tactical standpoint the most important bridges were, in relative order, 10 (Honinghutie), 7 (Heumen), 8 (Blankenberg), and then 9 (Hatert). Bridge 10 held primacy of place because it lay directly on the six-mile stretch of paved road that connected Grave with Nijmegen. Bridge 7 was next in order of importance because it connected another high-speed highway from Grave, through Malden and then on to Nijmegen. The fifth bridge across the canal was located near Weurt, just below where the canal intersects with the Waal River west of Nijmegen and was too far north to be of any tactical significance. See "Operation Market," p. bridges 21, 382-0, Box 12344, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[76] Combat Interview "1st Battalion, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[77] Combat Interview "1st Battalion, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; Combat Interview "Company A, 1st Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "Company C, 1st Bn, 504th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 24-29.

[78] According to VanPoyck, his company was selected for this mission as a result of him losing a drawing of lots. See VanPoyck questionnaire.

[79] Combat Interview "Major Edward N. Wellems, CO 2d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[80] Combat Interview "Company E, 504th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[81] Except where noted see Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 240; Combat Interview "Company E, 504th Prchut Regt, 82d Abn Div."; Statement by John S. Thompson, "The Holland Jump," n.d., The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Recollections of 504th and 508th P.I.R. personnel on combat operations in Holland," USAMHI; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 3-13 passim.

[82] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Award of the Silver Star Medal," 14 September 1945, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 16, OU.

[83] Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div."; Combat Interview "Company F, 2d Battalion, 504th Para. Inf. Regt.—82d A/B Division," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "Major Edward N. Wellems, CO 2d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 13-17.

[84] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 110.

[85] Gavin to Blair, 21 November 1983.

[86] James M. Gavin to Major General A. C. Smith, 17 January 1954, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder “Recollection of Holland Operation by Gen. Gavin to Gen. Smith, Commanding General,” USAMHI.

[87] James M. Gavin to Cornelius Ryan, 2 October 1973, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 9, OU. See also Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954. So zealous were 82nd troopers about cutting wires that, at times, it worked against them. Soon after assembling his company on 17 September, Captain T. Moffatt Burriss, the I Company 3/504th commander was approached by one of his troopers and asked about a large lead cable “that resembled the expanded torso of a giant black snake” the trooper had come across while digging a foxhole. “Cut it,” came Burriss’s reply. The next day Burriss got an angry phone call from Colonel Tucker, who told Burriss that the trooper had cut the international telephone cable which the division and British I Airborne Corps had planned to use for its communications back to England. “Two days later, when I Company left that position,” wrote Burriss, “the linemen were still splicing wires and talking in what sounded like several languages. Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 107-108.

[88] Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[89] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 110; 82nd Airborne Division, Division Artillery After Action Review, “Unit History, Operation Market,” 382-ART-0.3, Box 12429, Record Group 407, NARA II; Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, “Historical Narrative,” 16 October 1944, 382-ENG-0.3, Box 12433, Record Group 407, NARA II; Memorandum, Headquarters, 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, “Unit History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion from 17 September 1944 to 16 October 1944,” 26 October 1944, 382-FA(456)-0.3, Box 12444, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[90] Edward N. Bailey questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 10, OU.

[91] Mendez quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 175.

[92] Except where noted see Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 111; Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, “57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry,” 7 December 1944, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 100, Folder 3, OU; Louis G. Mendez Jr. to James M. Gavin, 8 November 1945, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 9, OU; Statement by Shields Warren Jr., n.d., The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder “Recollections of 504th and 508th P.I.R. personnel on combat operations in Holland,” USAMHI.

[93] Warren statement.

[94] Woodrow Wilson Millsaps to Heather Chapman, 27 July 1967, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 105, Folder 34, OU.

[95] Except where noted see Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 41-42 and Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, “57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry,” 7 December 1944.

[96] Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, “57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry,” 7 December 1944 and “Operation Market,” pp. bridges 32-33.

[97] McLean’s story from Burroughs, *The Devil’s Tale*, 153-155.

[98] Mendez to Gavin, 8 November 1945. It should be noted that one of the few casualties suffered by the 3/508th that day was the mortal wounding of the I Company commander, Lieutenant Robert Mitchell, on the drop zone, a factor that may have contributed to the unit's lack of aggressiveness.

[99] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 166 and 82nd Airborne Division, Division Artillery After Action Review, "Unit History, Operation Market."

[100] Memorandum, Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Divisions, "Lessons of Operation Market," 3 December 1944.

[101] Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[102] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 246 and 250-251; Huston, "The Air Invasion of Holland," 56; Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 111-112.

[103] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 112.

[104] Parks quoted in Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 170.

[105] Chatterton quoted in ibid.

[106] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 112.

[107] Ibid., 226-227.

[108] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 226-227 and Office of Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, *Airborne Assault on Holland: An Interim Report*, 14.

[109] Vandeleur quoted in Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 218.

[110] Montgomery quoted in Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 292-293.

[111] Except where noted see British I Airborne Corps, "Allied Airborne Operation in Holland," 6-8.

Chapter Eighteen
The Germans Were Everywhere

A well planned and executed airborne operation, like a surprise river crossing or beach landing, is likely to meet light resistance at first, but to have its most difficult fighting later, after the enemy has had a chance to recover from the initial shock and to organize his forces for counterattacks. The critical time for Operation Market would come after D Day.

James A. Huston[1]

"The Allied airborne landing was a terrible shock—even to my paratroopers. For at least one or two hours we were not far from a panic"—*Oberstleutnant* (lieutenant colonel) Friedrich-August Freiherr von der Heydte, commander, *6th Parachute Regiment*.[2]

" 'As the troops were moving off to their quarters and the officers and myself were making for the officers' mess for lunch, we saw the first British parachutes in the sky over Arnhem. . . . It could not be deduced at this stage that a large-scale operation was under-way and we sat down quietly to lunch' "—*SS-Obersturmbannführer* (lieutenant colonel) Walther Harzer, commander, *9th SS Panzer Division.*[3]

"The airborne operation came as a complete surprise, hitting [*First Parachute Army*] in the center and splitting it in halves. Actually, it was really obvious to use airborne troops in this situation in order to gain possession of bridges before their demolition. However, both the command and the troops, particularly I and my staff, were all so overtaxed and under such severe strain in the face of our difficult and many-sided mission that we thought only in terms of ground operations"—*Generaloberst* Kurt Student, commanding general, *First Parachute Army*.[4]

So ran German reactions to the sudden appearance in their midst of some 20,000 parachute and glider troopers on 17 September 1944. Although it was, as Student pointed out, an "obvious" use of airborne troops, no one in the German command hierarchy had predicted it. Despite being aware of the existence of the First Allied Airborne Army—its birth had been highly touted in the Allied press—German formulations about its potential use were well off the mark. For example, on 6 September the *Army Group B* intelligence summary posited: " 'a large-scale airborne landing by the First Allied Airborne Army north of the Lippe River in the area south of Muenster [approximately fifty miles east of the Rhine] is planned.' "[5] Meanwhile the *Army Group B* commander, *Generalfeldmarschall* Model, was of different mind. On 11 September, alerted by reports that the Allies were assembling another fleet of landing craft in England, Model ordered *General der Flieger* Christiansen to employ the disparate units in his *Armed Forces Command Netherlands* to protect the Dutch coast against another NEPTUNE-like

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 481 through 488.

airborne and seaborne assault.[6] And finally, even after the Allies had shown their hand, when word of the airborne assault reached the Führer bunker *'Wolfsschanze'* Hitler still dismissed the drops as unimportant and speculated that the real threat Allied airborne units posed was as a raiding force that could be dropped directly onto his headquarters in East Prussia.

> We have to keep in mind—we don't want to be careless anymore—the possibility that they might make a similar mess here. . . . This thing is so dangerous that we have to be clear: if a disaster happens here—here I am, here is my entire Supreme Command, here is the Reichsmarshal, the Army High Command is here, the Reichsführer SS is here, and here is the Reich Foreign Minister! So that's the most valuable catch—that's clear. I would risk two parachute divisions without hesitation if I could get the entire Russian command in one stroke.[7]

(Interestingly, Model, whose headquarters was in the Hotel Tafelberg near Arnhem, directly adjacent to the British drop and landing zones, had a very similar reaction to the Allied landings, thinking that the whole purpose of the operation was to capture him).[8]

Given such faulty analysis it is no wonder that when the Allies struck they captured so many bridges intact; although the Germans fully expected a major offensive, they knew neither where nor how the strike would come and absolutely no one expected such a bold stroke by the conservative Montgomery. That the Germans were ill-prepared to counter a major assault in the area of Nijmegen and Eindhoven is underscored by the diary comments of *Oberstleutnant* Fritz Fullriede, a regimental commander in the *Hermann Göring Division,* who conducted an inspection of the Nijmegen-area defenses just four days before the Allied offensive (the *Hermann Göring Division* had training establishments spread throughout Holland, which explains Fullriede's presence in the area).

> 'Drive between Ede-Arnhem and Nijmegen etc. 21st NCO Anw. Company [probably an NCO training school] are securing the bridges at Nijmegen and Grave with totally inadequate forces. The bridges have not even been correctly prepared for demolition. It's criminal.'[9]

Hence faulty intelligence and inadequate preparations at all levels of the German chain of command set the stage for the successful seizure of the bridges around Eindhoven and Nijmegen. Furthermore, the shock and attendant confusion that gripped local German commanders ensured that, in many cases, even those bridges that were rigged for demolition were not blown. Blowing a bridge is always a last resort, especially when doing so strands thousands of one's comrades on the enemy bank, and local commanders were chary of giving this order in the absence of direction from higher headquarters, even when they were surrounded and cut off from all friendly communication.

In the final analysis American paratroopers knew what they had to do and went about doing it aggressively while their enemy—confused and surrounded—hesitated. On 17 September, the Allies achieved complete tactical and operational surprise.

Gavin was pleased with the results of the first day's fighting, although he himself narrowly missed being killed. Following a very hard landing (after the war Gavin explained simply that his parachute was still oscillating when he landed; in fact, he had cracked several vertebrae but continued to command the division, ignoring the pain—he did not discover the seriousness of his injury until sometime later) he ran off the drop zone into a nearby wood where he was ambushed by a well-camouflaged German machine gun nest. Fortunately, the 82nd's Dutch liaison officer, Captain Arie Dirk Bestebreurtje, was standing beside Gavin at the time and got off a snap shot that killed the enemy gunner, hitting him square in the forehead. " 'Whatever your role in this division,' " commented Gavin as the two were standing over the body of the dead German, " 'you're a mighty handy man to have around.' "[10] Handy he was. A few minutes later Bestebreurtje spied another German, this time attempting to flee on a bicycle. Again he shot and again he brought down his target, only to discover that his second victim had in his possession a briefcase containing the phone numbers and addresses of Germans living in the area. Once at the division command post Bestebreurtje turned this information over to the G-2 who, with the help of the Dutch Underground, rounded up many of the persons named on the list (at least those who had not already fled). Finally, to complete his invasion-day trifecta, upon reaching the outskirts of Groesbeek Bestebreurtje picked up a phone and called trusted agents in both Nijmegen and Arnhem to get a feel for how things were proceeding. The reports were encouraging. This news, on top of the favorable reports received from the regimental commanders throughout the day, boded well for the operation as a whole.[11]

But surprise is fleeting and the very success of the first day's landing made it even more so. Unlike in Sicily and Normandy, where the scattered drops disguised the true intent behind the landings, the almost pinpoint precision with which the British and Americans were delivered in Holland provided a pattern from which the overall objective of MARKET-GARDEN could be easily discerned. And once cognizant of this German commanders, at least those at the highest levels, did not long hesitate. One of the first to react was *SS-Obergruppenführer* Bittrich who, within minutes of the Allied landings, issued a warning order to his two divisions. " 'Enemy landings,' " it began. " 'Main point of effort identified around Arnhem and Nijmegen.' " Accordingly he ordered the *9th SS Panzer Division* to reconnoiter Arnhem and Nijmegen, take the former, and outpost the bridges with " 'strong security forces.' " The *10th SS Panzer Division*, at the time in the process of entraining for a refitting area in Germany, was to turn around, assemble, and " 'move to Nijmegen and firmly occupy the main bridges, and defend the Nijmegen bridgehead.' "[12] Model, who arrived at Bittrich's headquarters at about 1500 hours, 17 September after barely escaping the British forces around Arnhem, confirmed these orders. Additionally, in order to impose some structure on the chaos, he divided the battle area into thirds and appointed for each an overall command and control headquarters. Student and his *First Parachute Army* were to oppose the XXX Corps advance and destroy the 101st around Eindhoven. The center sector around Nijmegen Model made the responsibility of *Wehrkreis VI*, which had under its command the *406th Division* and an ad hoc organization known as *Corps Feldt*. Model also promised *Wehrkreis VI* elements of *II Parachute Corps*, at the time refitting near Cologne. The British at Arnhem were to be handled by Christiansen's *Armed Forces Command*

Netherland. That left the two panzer divisions of Bittrich's *II SS Panzer Corps*. Model would use them to attack and destroy the Allied forces at Arnhem and Nijmegen.[13]

Notwithstanding the speed with which Model and Bittrich responded to the Allied assault, it took some time for their orders to be translated into action and for the newly appointed headquarters to grip their areas of responsibility. Some German contingents, cut off from all communications with higher headquarters and therefore wholly unaware of these machinations, were more intent on escape than with counterattack or defense. Such was the case at Grave.

No doubt aware that American paratroopers had seized the major bridge over the Maas just north of Grave, the Germans and their Dutch allies inside the town had four choices: they could counterattack; they could take advantage of the strong position that defending from inside Grave afforded them and await succor from friendly counterattacking forces (and, by so doing, remain a constant threat to the Eindhoven-Nijmegen highway, a threat the Allies could not ignore); they could surrender; or they could attempt escape. The vast majority opted for escape. Throughout the evening of 17-18 September German and Dutch contingents of varying size and makeup clashed with Major Wellems's 2/504th, which by that time had occupied a string of defensive positions north and west of town. Many of those attempting escape were either killed or wounded. Almost certainly many more successfully evaded detection. Others were driven back into Grave. Fully aware that a concerted breakout attempt would most likely succeed given the large gaps in his perimeter and the concomitant dispersal of his forces in small elements in order to cover as much ground as possible, Wellems became alarmed when, at about 2200 hours, Captain VanPoyck, whose E Company was in position just west of Grave, radioed word that noise emanating from town was growing in intensity, perhaps precursor to a major enemy attack. Ordered to investigate, VanPoyck sent out a reconnaissance patrol under Lieutenant William Sharp. Surprisingly, Sharp got all the way into the town where, instead of an impending counterattack, he observed groups of Germans hurriedly burning papers and preparing for a hasty departure. So intent was the enemy on escaping, reported Sharp, that though he was certain he had been spotted he encountered no resistance. Dutch civilians, meanwhile, had gathered at various parts of the town to celebrate their impending liberation, drinking and singing 'Tipperary' (apparently they thought they were going to be liberated by British soldiers) and the Dutch national anthem. Armed with this information, Wellems ordered F Company and elements of D and E Companies to move into Grave from the west and north. At 0315 hours, 18 September, Wellems reported to Tucker, "Grave buttoned up."[14] Resistance had been slight. Although Sharp had reported the presence of approximately 600 German paratroopers in Grave (almost certainly a mistake, for there were nowhere near this many German *paratroopers* in the area at the time) the only element of significance the troopers found was a small Gestapo headquarters unit.[15] Only a handful of prisoners were taken. Few U.S. casualties were sustained. The first Dutch city of any appreciable size was in Allied hands.[16]

When Wellems's troopers entered Grave, they witnessed what would fast become commonplace: Dutch civilians, giddy about their liberation, demonstrating on the one hand a great capacity for thankfulness toward the Allies while, at the same time, giving vent to their long pent up hatred of the Germans and their Dutch cronies. For some troopers Holland was the third country they had liberated and they were unprepared for

this range of emotion in the civilian populace. Captain VanPoyck experienced this immediately upon entering Grave on the morning of 18 September. The first civilians he met were the Dutch farmers reverently bearing the body of Curtis Morris, E Company's only jump fatality. Shortly thereafter VanPoyck saw another Dutch delegation, this one composed of "local Boy Scouts [who] conducted a short parade to the town hall, escorting several female collaborators, whose heads had been shaven and marked in pitch with a swastika."[17] Likewise Captain Robert 'Doc' Franco, the 2/505th battalion surgeon, recalled being taken aback about the manner by which the Dutch could be both "warm & generous, [and yet] sound almost vicious when talking about the Germans."[18]

Although stunned by the vehemence with which the Dutch dealt with Germans and, most especially, the collaborators in their midst, virtually every trooper who served in Holland remembered the country and its people fondly. According to Sergeant Earl Boling of the 2/505th, the Netherlands "was a beautiful country and the people seemed really happy to see us make the invasion. They were all friendly, wheras [*sic*] in France the people seemed withdrawn awaiting the outcome of the invasion before showing any friendship."[19] "I remember initially how neat, tidy and clean looking the villages, town and countryside were—a distinct contrast to France," recalled Lieutenant Jack Tallerday of the 1/505th. "Many Dutch youths as well as their elders," he continued, "seemed willing to take unnecessary chances or risks to help us."[20] Staff Sergeant Richard Paul Wagner of E Company, 2/325th arrived in Holland several days into the operation via glider and became an immediate witness to Dutch intrepidity. "As soon as we landed and I started to get out of the glider," recalled Wagner, "I was met at the door by members of the underground. One of them asked me in perfect english [*sic*] if there was anything they could do for us or show us."[21] Corporal Charles Fergie, also of the 505th, recalled an incident where both Dutch gratefulness and courage were displayed under the most trying of circumstances.

> We were fighting for the railroad and I was pinned down in the street in Nijmegen. For a while I thought I couldn't get out without being hit. Finally I got to one of the buildings. There was a Hollander standing there, and he pushed me against the building using himself to protect me. . . . There was a lot of fighting going on, and we were looking for cover. We broke into a house and there was a family there; mother, father and a son and daughter. They were so scared because they thought we were Germans. When they saw that we were American, they were so happy and kissed and hugged us. We stayed there about 24 hours. There was nothing there for them to eat except potatoes, but they cooked up a pot of them and shared them with us. It was the only solid food we had had in a long time. Nothing was too good for us. They were so relieved that we weren't Germans, and that we were going to help liberate their country, they marked the day [on] the calendar in their kitchen.[22]

Indeed, the Dutch aided the Allies in any way they could: caring for the wounded, sharing what little food they had, helping to recover supplies after glider landings or parachute drops, providing intelligence, and taking up arms and fighting alongside the Americans. Gavin's Dutch liaison officer, Arie Bestebreurtje, was instrumental in

organizing these efforts. At the height of the fighting Bestebreurtje had some 600 Dutch civilians working for him, most of them armed with the weapons of troopers who had been killed or wounded.[23]

> [The Dutch, recalled Gavin,] organized and fought as units with us with no protection under the Geneva Convention. They fought in civilian clothes knowing they would be killed if they were captured by the Germans. But they were very courageous people and went right to work with us. They apparently had a very deep hatred for the Germans that came from the occupation as well as their association with the Germans in the past. They fought, and fought well.[24]

The aid and assistance the Dutch provided, especially in terms of up-to-date intelligence on German strengths and dispositions, proved a crucial combat multiplier and thereby enabled the paratroopers to more effectively capitalize on the element of surprise and the attendant confusion it fomented in the German ranks. In one instance, however, it was the Americans who were taken by surprise, not because of any Dutch perfidy but because, like the airborne assault, it was an event wholly unanticipated.

Running south from Nijmegen to Groesbeek and, from there, eastward toward Kleve, Germany, was a railroad line that, although clearly marked on the 82nd's maps, seems to have escaped the same degree of scrutiny and attention afforded the bridges and highways in the area. As a result of this oversight, at approximately 2200 hours, 17 September, a trained filled with German soldiers was able to leave Nijmegen and pass completely through the 82nd's line totally unhindered. Major McIlvoy, who was setting up his medical aid station in the girl's school in Groesbeek, remembered the incident vividly.

> About one-half mile from this girl's school there was a railroad crossing with the customary continental pole that comes down when a train passes, etc. Within a matter of short time, less than an hour after moving into this girl's school the gate came down and a train passed. In the car's [*sic*] open doors there were German troops. We waved, they waved back. As it later turned out, this was a train full of German soldiers that had escaped from Nijmegen by simply starting up and driving through our whole troop concentrations, no one stopping to think that this might very well be an enemy train getting out of the area.[25]

When the train left the division's lines, it did so through the sector held by G Company, 3/505th. According to Captain Jack Roger Isaacs, the G Company commander, when his troopers heard the distant rumbling of the train they thought it was German tanks and prepared for an armor assault. They had, after all, been warned that the Reichswald contained a sizeable German armor force. No one, however, expected they would have to stop a train and so stunned were the troopers when one appeared in their midst that no one got a shot off (Isaacs recalled having ordered his troopers to place antitank mines on the tracks but for some reason he had also been directed to keep the safety pins in).[26] Gavin was livid. To ensure against a repeat performance he ordered that several ambush

sites be set up along the tracks. Hence, when a second train appeared a short time later it was intercepted and derailed by elements of Vandervoort's 2/505th lying in wait that had rigged the tracks with explosives. Just to make sure the train stopped, however, one intrepid trooper took out the lead locomotive with a bazooka round right through the engine's boiler. Meanwhile, the other cars were raked with machine gun and small arms fire as the Germans inside spilled out and took cover in the surrounding woods. In the ensuing firefight most of the Germans were either killed or captured, although small pockets were still being rounded up the next day. Sergeant Paul D. Nunan of D Company, 2/505th inspected the wrecked train sometime thereafter and remembered it being loaded with "[c]ivilian furniture, chinaware, glassware, and other loot," although what really interested the troopers "was a supply of bread, cheese and wine to supplement our 'K' rations." The troopers also captured a German officer "resplendent in a dress uniform with much gold trim and impressive insignia." Given such finery Vandervoort's train robbers were certain that they had captured at least a full colonel; they were disappointed to discover that their nattily attired prisoner was but a quartermaster lieutenant.[27]

Despite the portent afforded by the escape of the first train, the alacrity with which the Germans had reacted to the Allied landings did not become completely apparent to the 82nd until it made a play for the Nijmegen highway bridge. In accordance with Gavin's instructions to secure the bridge "immediately if this was practicable," as soon as the 508th had seized its assault objectives Lindquist sent Third Platoon of C Company, 1/508th into the city on a reconnaissance mission.[28] Lieutenant Robert Weaver, the platoon leader and Lieutenant Lionel O. Frigo, the battalion S-2 who accompanied the platoon, were to "investigate resistance in and around the bridge, and radio back on the strength of the bridge defenses" and "if the bridge was undefended, or lightly defended, to secure it, and immediately radio battalion."[29] They never accomplished this mission. Even though it had started out in the full light of day, it was not long after entering Nijmegen's southern edge that the platoon "lost its bearings" and "[a]fter cutting through backyards for a half hour, . . . stopped for orientation." Several hours then passed, during which the platoon holed up in a Dutch home while Weaver and Frigo scoured the neighborhood for anyone willing to lead them to their objective. Starting out again at about 2130 hours, this time with a guide, the platoon had not gone far before it ran into enemy sentries, machine gun emplacements, and truck-borne reinforcements. Fired on from the front and flanks, the platoon got pinned down on an open street. The troopers sought what cover they could find in the gutters and along the sidewalks. Ricochets wounded fifteen of their number before, following their guide's lead, they eventually escaped into a warren of side streets. Their respite, however, was short-lived; shortly thereafter they stumbled upon another group of American paratroopers engaged in a much larger firefight. Seeing that there was no way he could possibly make it to the bridge, Weaver had his men fall in with their comrades where they fought until first light, at which time they withdrew back to their company area.[30]

The friendly troopers Weaver and his platoon stumbled upon were from A and B Companies of the 1/508th, sent into the city by Lindquist as a result of information he received shortly after he dispatched the C Company platoon on its reconnaissance mission. Geert van Hees, a member of the Dutch Underground, appeared at the 508th regimental command post early on the evening of 17 September (most likely while

Weaver's men were still "stopped for orientation"), informed Lindquist that "the highway bridge over the Waal River was defended by a non-commissioned officer and seventeen men," and volunteered to lead the way to the site.[31] Lindquist had heard nothing from Weaver and Frigo so he summoned Lieutenant Colonel Warren, whose 1/508th was closest to Nijmegen, and told him to send his A and B Companies (reinforced with a section of 81mm mortars and some machine guns from the battalion headquarters company) into the city under Hees's direction. Since Warren's companies were dispersed among a series of widely separated defensive positions, Warren established a centrally located, easily recognizable landmark—the Krayenhoff Barracks, just south of Nijmegen—as the point where the disparate elements of each company were to rendezvous (Warren's C Company, minus Weaver's platoon, was held back to serve as the regimental reserve).[32]

It was Warren's intention to follow the most direct route to the bridge but while waiting for his troopers to assemble Hees convinced him that a more circuitous route would be better. Warren's route, explained Hees, would necessitate that the troopers move through narrow streets ripe for ambush and that there was at least one German 88mm gun along the way that would have to be overcome before the troopers got anywhere near the bridge. Instead, Hees recommended that they approach the bridge from the southwest. By following this course the troopers would be traveling over much wider boulevards, thereby retaining more freedom of maneuver. In addition, Hees's route would take them right by the local Dutch Underground headquarters where they could receive a last-minute report on the situation at the bridge before moving on. As Warren later recalled, Hees

> stated that the Headquarters of the Dutch resistance movement was in the vicinity of the traffic circle [the Keizer Karel Plein, Nijmegen's main traffic circle, some 700 yards southwest of the bridge]. . . . He reasoned that information re[ference] current German strengths at the bridge would be available there, and of value to my operation. Since this traffic circle was not that great a distance from the bridge, and he knew the city and its people better than I did, I agreed to his plan.[33]

Another factor that swayed Warren to Hees's recommendation was that Weaver's platoon had already taken the most direct route (or so Warren thought at the time, not knowing that Weaver had gotten lost and subsequently strayed off course). Sending a second, much larger element along the same route might be tempting fate. No thought at all was given to the route Gavin had recommended to Lindquist earlier, that being through the flatlands east of Nijmegen, which would avoid moving through the city streets altogether.[34]

Captain Jonathan E. Adams Jr.'s A Company arrived at the rendezvous point first. Warren was anxious to get going so at 2030 hours he told Adams to move out even though B Company had not yet arrived (Warren and the battalion headquarters element also accompanied Adams). Leading the way was Hees, who scouted ahead on a bicycle. Hees would ride forward of the Americans, check each intersection for signs of the enemy, and then cycle back to give the all clear to the lead scout, Private Walter Dikoon. At first, the only resistance A Company encountered was from some joyous Dutch

civilians who plied their liberators with sandwiches and cookies.[35] Pressing forward through "pitch black" streets, A Company got all the way to a major intersection just shy of the Keizer Karel Plein without problem. At that juncture, Hees told Adams that he was going to ride forward and check in at his headquarters. That was the last the Americans saw of him; Hees was subsequently taken prisoner by *Waffen SS* soldiers who, just at that moment, were jumping off trucks and taking up defensive positions around the northern edge of the Keizer Karel Plein. These were most likely members of the *9th SS Panzer Division's* reconnaissance battalion that, earlier in the day, Bittrich had ordered post haste to Nijmegen (Bittrich's intent was that once the *10th SS* was ready it would proceed to Nijmegen so that the *9th SS* could concentrate all its combat power on the British at Arnhem; as a stopgap, however, he charged *9th SS* with sending elements to both cities). When they arrived the *9th SS* soldiers fell in on a defensive scheme that had already been organized by an *Oberst* (Colonel) Henke. Henke had some five to six kilometers of urban area to cover and before the arrival of the SS soldiers he had but an ad hoc force composed of approximately 750 German army and air force personnel that were in and around Nijmegen at the time of the invasion with which to do it. Given such a sparse force, Henke made the city's two main traffic circles, the Keizer Karel Plein and the Keizer Lodewijk Plein (a smaller traffic circle directly adjacent to the southern end of the highway bridge) twin focal points of his defense. As fate would have it, Adams's company and the SS troopers arrived at the Keizer Karel Plein almost simultaneously.[36]

According to Warren, as Adams's troopers started moving toward the Keizer Karel Plein, "[a] sharp 'Halt,' unmistakeably [*sic*] in German, came through the dark, followed by a prolonged burst of fire from a Schmeiser [*sic*] machine pistol." Warren immediately ordered Adams to "attack, secure the traffic circle, and block all entrances to it from the West" (six roads intersected at the circle).[37] Since the initial fusillade had killed A Company point man Walter Dikoon and wounded the lead (First) platoon leader, Lieutenant Fred H. Layman, Adams passed his Second Platoon, under Lieutenant George D. Lamm, through the First to continue the attack. " 'This move was ticklish business,' " remembered Lamm.

> 'Friendly and enemy soldiers were mixed and there was no definite line. However, the darkness, which contributed to the confusion, also assisted us in reorganizing. Instructions were passed along to units: "Fire only on orders or eyeball to eyeball defense! Use trench knife or bayonet when possible!'[38]

Creeping toward the southern edge of the traffic circle, Lamm and his sergeants conducted a quick scan of the area before leading their troopers forward. By that time the firing had subsided, the only sound being the cries of the wounded and the calls of the lost. Spotting the silhouette of a German antiaircraft gun near the center of the circle, Lamm knew it had to be taken out lest it open up on his troopers with devastating effect. Advancing shoulder-to-shoulder and as quietly and quickly as possible (" 'It was so dark, contact was maintained by touch' ") Lamm's troopers captured the gun and took its crew prisoner.[39] Other Germans encountered along the way were either bayoneted or knifed, some while still in their foxholes. Eventually, the Germans on the far (northern) side of the traffic circle realized what was happening and began firing wildly into the night. In

one final rush through "fierce fire" and "a hail of grenades," Lamm, Adams, and the troopers of Second Platoon, A Company, gained the far side and chased the defenders back into the black streets.[40] The rest of the company followed behind and extended the defensive line left and right. Fifteen minutes later Lieutenant Woodrow W. Millsaps's B Company also arrived at the traffic circle and occupied its southern edge, having hurried forward ever since missing the planned rendezvous.[41]

Once in control of the traffic circle, and with enemy resistance having faded into the night, Warren instructed Adams to send out a patrol to the Dutch Underground headquarters Hees had told them was nearby. Adams again called on Lieutenant Lamm. Accompanied by a handful of troopers for security Lamm found the Dutch headquarters right where Hees said it would be, but no one was there. Lamm and his men returned to the traffic circle and reported this to Warren. Concerned that time was running out and fearful that now that his position and intent was surely known the Germans would destroy the highway bridge before he got there, Warren ordered Adams to send another, larger patrol out to find and destroy the controls to the highway bridge demolitions. For a third time that night Adams called on Lamm and the troopers of Second Platoon, A Company. Taking command of Second Platoon himself, Adams led Lamm and his troopers to a nearby post office that intelligence reports indicated might house the controls. With Private First Class William E. Hanft on point (Hanft spoke fluent German and passable Dutch), the troopers moved stealthily through yards and alleys, silently dispatching German sentries they encountered along the way with their trench knives. When they arrived at the target building, Adams organized a hasty assault. Adams, Lamm, and a small group of troopers would lead the attack on the post office while the bulk of Second Platoon covered them with fire. On signal the assault group blew open the doors to the post office with Gammon grenades, rushed inside, drove the building's defenders out through every possible exit, and sprayed every room with small arms fire. Outside the post office, the rest of Second Platoon engaged German forces on the adjacent street. Sergeant Charles Gushue earned a Distinguished Service Cross in the action by charging a nearby machine gun position. Gushue used his fragmentation grenades to stun the crew and then rushing in behind the blast to bayonet the survivors. A second DSC, this one posthumously, was awarded to Sergeant Alvin Henderson. In a unit rife with legendary characters, Henderson stood out as a man of extraordinary courage and toughness. During Normandy, Henderson found himself with a group of troopers that had been dropped far off course. Prowling behind enemy lines, creating as much havoc as possible, Henderson displayed an unusual talent for silencing German sentries with his knife, although eventually his luck ran out and he was taken prisoner. Not one to be deterred by such a setback, Henderson waited and, when the time was right, overpowered his guards and escaped. He then made his way to the Channel where he stole a boat, sailed back to England, and then bummed rides to the 508th base camp; he reported present for duty about a week before the Holland drop. On the night of 17-18 September in Nijmegen, Henderson proved that his extended stay in France had not dulled his fighting prowess. During the assault on the post office, Henderson killed two Germans in hand-to-hand combat, bayoneted four others, and personally silenced four enemy machine gun positions, the last of which he turned on the enemy before he was killed. Meanwhile, inside the post office Adams found what he believed was the control mechanism for the bridge demolitions and smashed it (as it turned out, this was not the

control mechanism). With their mission (seemingly) accomplished Adams and Lamm led Second Platoon in a fighting withdrawal back to the traffic circle. However, as they approached the traffic circle they found their way blocked by an enemy force that had grown much larger during their absence. They attempted an alternate route to no avail, so with daylight fast approaching Adams felt it prudent to go into hiding in a nearby barn. With the help of Dutch civilians who kept them supplied with food and frustrated German attempts to smoke them out by setting fire to most of the surrounding structures, the troopers remained hidden until 20 September when they made contact with an Anglo-American force that was making another assault on the Nijmegen highway bridge.[42]

The Germans that Adams, Lamm, and Second Platoon had run into while trying to get back to the traffic circle represented Model's and Bittrich's earlier orders made manifest. Throughout the night of 17-18 September and on into the next day, the size of the German force in Nijmegen increased dramatically. On 17 September, *Oberst* Henke could count only two battalion equivalents as part of his improvised command, but within twenty-four hours there were thirteen to fourteen German battalions in the city and by 19 September, this number counted more than fifteen, many of which were hard-core *Waffen SS* and German paratroopers. By 20 September—the day on which the battle for Nijmegen was ultimately decided—the combat ratio in and around the city was 2:1 in favor of the Germans.[43]

While some of the German forces arriving in Nijmegen that first night were held in reserve and set to preparing defensive positions adjacent to the two bridges, it appears the bulk were rushed to the Keizer Karel Plein intent on either annihilating or expelling the Americans from the city. To oppose them Warren was left with the equivalent of but four infantry platoons. The Germans attacked shortly after Second Platoon departed on its mission to the post office and hit what remained of A Company which, with Adams gone was under the command of its executive officer, Lieutenant John P. Foley. In the initial assault the Germans overran several isolated positions and regained a foothold on the northern side of the traffic circle. In response Warren committed his only reserve, a platoon from B Company, which stopped the German attack long enough for Warren to effect a fighting withdrawal to the southern edge of the traffic circle, where he consolidated his force and waited. Certain that it was but a matter of time before the Germans continued their assault, yet unwilling to quit his ground before Second Platoon had returned, Warren opted for the unexpected—he attacked. While Millsaps's B Company assaulted directly to its front, Warren slipped the rump of A Company around the right flank, hoping that by so doing he could either break through to the bridge or, perhaps more realistically, regain contact with the lost Second Platoon. The attack caught the Germans flatfooted. As B Company held the enemy in place Foley and his troopers found a gap in the enemy line and fought their way to within 400 yards of the highway bridge. But it was too little, too late. Eventually Foley and his men ran into the enemy's second echelon set up around the immediate approaches to the bridge and were halted. With nothing left with which he could sustain Foley's drive and fearful of losing the rest of A Company in its exposed position, Warren broke off the attack and once again withdrew his forces back to the southern half of the traffic circle. Undeterred, Warren was in the process of organizing yet another spoiling attack when General Gavin drove up in one of the division's reconnaissance jeeps and told him to hold in place. Thus ended the first attempt to take the Nijmegen highway bridge.[44]

Writing after the war, Gavin mused "that it should have been obvious that Tucker's 504th was much better prepared to spare a battalion to go to the Nijmegen bridge that night."[45] But whenLindquist made the decision to go, Tucker's 504th was still heavily engaged much farther south: moving on Grave, clearing up the approaches to the Grave Bridge, and reducing the staunch enemy resistance around the Maas-Waal Canal bridge at Heumen. Furthermore, in the division scheme of maneuver Tucker's tasks had been afforded a higher priority for D-Day. Hence, since taking the Nijmegen bridges *on D-Day* was of secondary importance Gavin had entrusted the mission, along with the latitude to decide whether or not it should be undertaken that first night, to Lindquist, whose 508th was not only much closer to Nijmegen than was the 504th but also much less engaged (at least during that time before Warren entered the city). Gavin's statement about the 504th then was perhaps less his second-guessing of the overall scheme of maneuver and more a muted observation on the relative prowess of two of his regimental commanders. Gavin had unbounded confidence in Tucker, who had trained his regiment to be as aggressive and ferocious on the battlefield as he was. Gavin thought Lindquist, on the other hand, to be competent but lacking the killer instinct.[46] Yet in the final analysis, the possibility of taking any of the Nijmegen bridges on the first night, regardless of who commanded the operation, was something that "could only be determined after attempting it."[47]

Gavin did not know what was occurring in Nijmegen until he visited Lindquist's command post early on the morning of the 18th; Warren's battalion (less C Company), he was told, was heavily engaged somewhere in the city (Lindquist was not quite sure where Warren was). "My heart sank," he recalled. "If he [Lindquist] thought he could go through the city to get the bridge, despite the warnings that I gave him, he was in very deep trouble; so was the division."[48] Gavin's presentiment arose from his knowledge that, on D+1, Lindquist had not only to maintain his defensive front he had also to ensure that landing zone 'N' was secure and clear of enemy in advance of the day's massive glider insertion scheduled to bring in the rest of the division's artillery component. But with about one-third of the 508th's available combat power tied down in a street fight, this could be difficult if the enemy appeared on or near the landing zone in force. Furthermore, Gavin was piqued that Lindquist had failed to adhere to his admonition to stay off the city streets. With no time to waste bemoaning what could not be changed, Gavin audibled. While Warren held the enemy's attention at the Keizer Karel Plein, perhaps he could slip a force through to the bridge from another direction. And due to the initiative of Lieutenant Colonel Louis G. Mendez Jr., the 3/508th commander, a force was poised to do just that.[49]

As part of his responsibilities for D-Day, Lieutenant Colonel Mendez had been given an "on order" mission to make a move on the Nijmegen highway bridge in the event that Warren's battalion was unable to do so. To ensure he would be ready if called upon Mendez ordered his I Company to send a reconnaissance patrol into the city as soon as possible after landing so that, were the order to take the bridge to come, he would not have to make the move blindly. As it turned out, resistance on the drop zone was so light the I Company patrol was able to take off as soon as it assembled. Moreover, heartened by the unexpectedly light resistance on 17 September, Mendez, again on his own initiative, upped the ante by ordering Lieutenant Russell C. Wilde's G Company to move out and "advance as far as possible towards the bridge."[50] Starting out after dark, Wilde

led G Company to a patch of high ground on the southeastern outskirts of Nijmegen, where he linked up with the I Company reconnaissance patrol. There were no enemy anywhere, Wilde was told, but since he had yet to receive the final word to advance on the bridge he set his company down for the night.[51]

Gavin was obviously apprised of Mendez's move as well as the report from the I Company patrol when he visited Lindquist's command post on the 18th. With Wilde as yet undetected it might still be possible to slip G Company through to the bridge, especially since Warren seemed to be drawing the enemy to him and away from Wilde's front. "From intelligence reports we had just received," recalled Gavin, "this appeared practicable, and although it would normally be well beyond the capabilities of a company, the Battalion Commander of the [T]hird [B]attalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, Colonel Mendez, was an especially fine combat leader and 'G' Company was an unusually good parachute company" (it should be stated that Gavin's reservations about Lindquist did not, as is obvious, apply to the 508th as a whole or to many of its subordinate commanders).[52] On Gavin's orders, at about 0745 hours, 18 September, Lindquist radioed Mendez and told him to launch G Company toward the highway bridge. At first it appeared that the stratagem would succeed. Marching swiftly in column the only thing Wilde's troopers encountered was celebrating Dutch, some still in their nightclothes, and were pelted with nothing heavier than flowers and apples. At approximately 1000 hours, however, when the head of the column reached a point just short of the Keizer Lodewijk Plein, Nijmegen's other traffic circle that abutted the southern end of the highway bridge, everything changed. Gone were the throngs of celebrating civilians, disbursed by bursts of small arms and machine gun fire emanating from the northern side of the circle. Wilde immediately deployed his company in attack formation—two platoons abreast in the lead with the third following behind—and assaulted. But the nearer G Company got to the Keizer Lodewijk Plein, the greater the intensity of the fire it encountered and once the troopers broke into the open space of the traffic circle itself 20mm, 47mm, and 88mm cannon fire joined the steady rain of small arms and machine gun rounds aimed at them. In such a maelstrom it was impossible to maintain platoon cohesion and the troopers scattered. " 'The fighting within two blocks of the bridge was fierce" remembered Trooper Angel Romero, "I don't think there was a house in the area that wasn't hit by artillery, rifle and machine gun fire. . . . The Germans were everywhere, and we still held our own.' "[53] Seeking cover in the buildings and alleyways adjacent to the traffic circle, Wilde's troopers fought back as best they could. Lieutenants Ralph E. De Weese and Kenneth A. Covey, the First and Second Platoon leaders respectively, gathered their scattered troopers and organized a second rush on the traffic circle, but this too was driven back in the face of overwhelming enemy fire. Meanwhile one group of troopers, guided by Argadus 'Gas' Leegsma, a member of the Dutch resistance who joined the fight at the traffic circle, made it all the way to the river bank right next to the bridge before being driven back by German guns firing on them from the opposite bank. At 1400 hours, with G Company still holding, Mendez arrived to survey the scene. He could see that G Company was simply not strong enough to overcome the German forces guarding the bridge so he ordered Wilde to withdraw. Thus ended the second attempt to take the Nijmegen highway bridge. And with the Germans now fully alerted and firmly entrenched at the approaches to the bridge, it was obvious

that any subsequent attempt would require much greater firepower—firepower only XXX Corps could provide.[54]

The 82nd did succeed in taking one bridge on 18 September: Bridge 10 over the Maas-Waal Canal at Honinghutie (in actuality there were two bridges at Honinghutie, a railroad bridge and highway bridge, standing side-by-side, but the latter was the primary target). Although it was considered the most important of the canal bridges because it was on the most direct route from Grave to Nijmegen, it had not been assaulted the day before. To this day there exists some confusion over whether responsibility for taking the bridge rested with the 504th or 508th, whose defensive areas were southwest and southeast of Honinghutie respectively (the Honinghutie bridges were the northernmost of the Maas-Waal Canal bridges). Given the initial array of forces it seems most likely that Honinghutie was a 508th responsibility, and it appears that Lindquist opted to delay an attack on Honinghutie in favor of sending Warren into Nijmegen.[55]

Whatever the reason it was not until the early morning hours of 18 September that Lindquist radioed Major Holmes, his 2/508th commander, and told him to take Bridge 10. Holmes assigned the mission to First Platoon of F Company under Lieutenant Lloyd L. Polette. Approaching the bridge from the southeast, Polette and his troopers were approximately 300 yards from Honinghutie when the Germans defending the bridge opened up on them. The First Platoon went to ground. Polette felt that if could make one last rush he could get the bridges. "It was just breaking day and the light was in our favor," he wrote afterwards.[56] So he got his troopers up and led them forward, but the enemy fire was too intense. Within minutes twelve of Polette's troopers lay dead or wounded and the platoon was still 150 yards short of the objective. Polette positioned those who could still fire so they could keep the Germans at the bridge in their sights and sent a runner back to radio for help. In particular, Polette wanted support from the battalion's 81mm mortars. "From time to time we could observe Germans walking, or attempting to get on the bridge," he recalled. "We kept them at a disadvantage with rifle fire. It was apparent that the enemy was attempting to destroy the bridge."[57] At about 0930 hours, Second Platoon of E Company under Lieutenant Thomas Tomlinson arrived in the area and added its fire to that of Polette's platoon. For about an hour the German defenders (a hodgepodge of *Luftwaffe* ground soldiers and students from an army noncommissioned officer school) and the paratroopers traded small arms and machine gun fire, the latter unable to get any closer to the bridge and the former hampered as they attempted to set up the demolition charges.[58] Ultimately, however, the Germans did emplace some charges and at 1030 hours two explosions rent the air. When the smoke cleared Polette and Tomlinson could clearly see that although the railroad bridge had been completely destroyed all was not lost because the highway bridge remained, damaged, but still standing. Under cover from a section of 81mm mortars that had finally arrived, some of which were transported to the area on the backs of several cows that had been pressed into service as beasts of burden, Polette and Tomlinson led their troopers in a wild charge. By 1200 hours the bridge was in American hands. For his actions that day, Polette was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.[59]

With a second bridge over the Maas-Waal Canal in American hands, the 82nd had solidified its control of its portion of the corridor, and although the Nijmegen bridges were yet to fall Gavin was confident that when XXX Corps arrived with its formidable combat power he could mount another foray into the city and take the bridges intact. In

the meantime he ordered Arie Bestebreurtje, who had become the de facto commander of the local Dutch Resistance movement, to use all the resources at his disposal to ensure that the Nijmegen bridges remained standing. To this end Bestebreurtje infiltrated his fighters to positions throughout the city from which they could keep the bridges under surveillance and hamper with sniper fire any German efforts to prepare demolition charges. He sent others out with orders to scour the city and destroy anything that even remotely resembled demolition wires or control mechanisms.[60] But with XXX Corps already twenty-four hours behind schedule and German activity in the 82nd's area steadily increasing, Gavin's primary task was to ensure he retained control of the roads and bridges linking Grave with Nijmegen. In this manner, when the British tanks did arrive they could be swiftly incorporated into a third attack on the Nijmegen bridges. And with those bridges in hand, the road to Arnhem and the beleaguered 1st Airborne Division would be wide open.

Despite assurances to the contrary, Gavin had been skeptical about the ability of XXX Corps to fight its way up the narrow corridor with anything like the speed that had been promised (Eindhoven in two to three hours and Arnhem in two to three days).[61] Accordingly, he had fashioned his ground tactical plan to ensure he could "conduct a good fight, well in hand, for at least three days, and almost certainly well beyond this time, if need be."[62] By D+1 he had already accomplished the first part of his plan: the carving out of a sausage-shaped defensive perimeter south-southeast of Nijmegen and the taking of sufficient bridges to link Nijmegen with Grave. Next, to bolster the defense against inevitable counterattacks, Gavin's plan called for the insertion by glider at landing zones 'N' and 'T' of the bulk of the 82nd's artillery complement—1,899 troopers, 206 jeeps, 123 trailers, and sixty guns—thereby significantly increasing Gavin's available firepower.[63] Originally scheduled to arrive at 1000 hours on the 18th, Brereton had postponed H-Hour until 1400 hours because of fog that had closed down many of the departure airfields.[64] This turned out to be a blessing in disguise for at 1000 hours, 18 September, a large portion of both landing zones was in enemy hands.

At 0630 hours, 18 September, 3,400 German soldiers organized into four improvised *kampgruppen* supported by mortars, armored cars, and half-tracks stormed across the German-Netherlands border bent on dislodging the Americans from the Groesbeek Heights.[65] It was the first large-scale German counterattack in the Nijmegen sector and it hit the division where it was weakest, along a fifteen-mile-long arc that described the eastern and southeastern edges of the 82nd's defensive perimeter. If successful, the attack would not only give the Germans possession of the highest ground in all of Holland—ground from which they could dominate the approaches to Nijmegen—it would also put both glider landing zones squarely behind enemy lines. Defending the eastern portion of the arc and landing zone 'T' was D Company of the 2/508th. The southeastern portion of the perimeter and landing zone 'N' was the responsibility of I Company, 3/505th. Both companies occupied a string of squad and platoon strongpoints, generally focused on towns and key crossroads. Neither was strong enough to keep back the German onslaught.

The German attack was well-coordinated and hit D and I Companies simultaneously. Faced with overwhelming odds, the paratroopers tried fighting a delaying action, judiciously trading space to gain the time needed for reinforcements to be rushed forward. But with squads and platoons so widely scattered control was virtually

impossible and the battle quickly devolved into a mélange of discrete small-unit actions that hinged on the skill and courage of junior leaders. Staff Sergeant Clarence Praeger of I Company was one such leader. In order to slow the German advance in his sector long enough for his buddies to fall back to secondary positions, Preager mounted a one-man counterattack and carried the fight to the enemy before he was cut down. Afterwards, his body was found well forward of his original fighting position. For his actions, Clarence Praeger was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.[66] Despite these and other similar acts of heroism, by 1100 hours the German attackers had either pushed back, bypassed, or overrun the American defensive positions, were in possession of large portions of both landings zones, and were poised to assault the Groesbeek Heights. They had also seized the 508th's regimental ammunition dump. "The seriousness of the situation," ran the 508th regimental after action report with incredible understatement, "necessitated prompt and forceful action."[67]

As soon as the threat to the landing zones materialized Gavin ordered Lindquist and Ekman to counterattack and restore the original line. Attacking for the north and south respectively they were to hit the German flanks and in the concomitant shock and surprise roll up the enemy lines (hitting the flanks would also negate the Germans' numerical advantage). It would take some time, however, for Lindquist and Ekman to reposition their forces for the attack, so in the interim Gavin called on his most readily available reserve force to help stem the enemy tide: D Company, 307th Airborne Engineers. Placing himself in the van, Gavin led the D Company engineers into a gap that had developed between the 508th and 505th as a result of the mêlée on the landing zones. Once in position, he left the engineers of Second Platoon in place to cover the gap; sent First Platoon north toward landing zone 'T' to aid D Company, 2/508th; and sent Third Platoon south toward landing zone 'N' where it was to reinforce I Company, 3/505th. As it turned out, neither Second nor Third Platoon made enemy contact but First Platoon arrived just in time to assist elements of D Company, 2/508th in repelling two companies of German infantry, killing forty of the enemy in the process at a cost of one engineer killed and three wounded (one of the wounded was the platoon leader, a Lieutenant Hendrix, who was shot in the head but continued to lead his troopers in the fight).[68]

The time gained by the delaying infantrymen and attacking engineers proved crucial and gave both Lindquist and Ekman sufficient time to organize their counterattacks. Opposite the Germans' northern flank, the 508th effected a maneuver that Gavin posited "could have been executed only by extremely capable troops and unusual combat leadership" for which there existed "few parallels" (it most likely served to get Lindquist out of the general's doghouse as well).[69] First, Lindquist had his regimental reserve, C Company, 1/508th, prepare a line of departure (a linear position from which an attack proceeds) in a wooded area just north of landing zone 'T.' He then recalled Warren from Nimegen and ordered him to take what troopers he had (at the time only B Company and the rump of A Company), move at the double to C Company's position and be prepared to attack on order. To do this Warren had to break contact in the city—a move he accomplished by withdrawing his units in leap frog fashion—and then march his troopers some seven miles to the line of departure. When he arrived around noon, Warren positioned B Company to the left of the waiting C Company and retained what remained of A Company as his reserve. Thirty minutes later, Warren gave the order to go.

> The attack was carried out at the double time, by troops that had fought all night long in NIJMEGEN, and was a howling success. The line of departure was on the right [northern] flank of the German attack on the LZ, and rolled them up like a piece of tape, capturing 149 prisoners and killing approximately 50, and knocking out 16 dual 20mm AA guns.[70]

During the attack First Sergeant Leonard Funk of C Company, who had already won a Silver Star and Purple Heart in Normandy, earned a Distinguished Service Cross by leading an assault that knocked out four 20mm guns, three other antiaircraft guns, and killed fifteen Germans.[71] Nearby, Sergeant Jim Kurz earned a Silver Star by leading his B Company scouts as they cleared a string of enemy foxholes from which machine guns were holding up the company advance.[72] By 1400 hours the 1/508th had retaken landing zone 'T.'[73] According to Kurz,

> '[j]ust as we reached the far side of the field, the first gliders came in. The glider troops had seen the last of the attack and cheered us as they arrived. We sat down and thanked God we had cleared the field in time.'[74]

The task of clearing landing zone 'N' fell to C Company, 1/505th under Captain Anthony M. Stefanich, which at the time had only two platoons available (First Platoon of C Company was engaged in the defense of Riethorst, farther south). With but such a small force to spare, Ekman was concerned about the timing of his attack. "I carefully guarded against pre-commitment . . . with the pre-planned intention of launching a rapid initial attack which would disconcert the enemy and force him to fall back, with the attack so timed that the landing zones [*sic*] would be cleared . . . before [a] possible enemy counter-attack in force."[75] As a result, it was not until 1330 hours (one hour after 1/508th's attack to the north) that Ekman unleashed C Company. Once he did Stefanich's troopers rose from their concealed positions and swept across the landing zone, firing as they advanced almost shoulder-to-shoulder. "The C Company troopers were firing and the Germans were running away from us," recalled Lieutenant Jack Tallerday, the C Company executive officer. "It looked like a line of hunters in a rabbit drive and the Germans looked like rabbits running in no particular pattern."[76] Stefanich halted his platoons at the far edge of the landing zone and had them set up defensive positions to guard against a counterattack. Ekman's timing was perfect; within minutes the first gliders appeared overhead and began circling to land. For C Company, however, success came at a high cost. Although few, if any, of the troopers in the ranks were killed or wounded in the attack, they lost their commander to a German sniper. Private Arthur B. 'Dutch' Schultz, who was standing nearby whispering Hail Mary's to beseech the Blessed Mother to spare Stefanich's life, remembered that

> [m]ost of us cried when we heard the news. It is difficult to put into words the love we felt for this man. In one sense 'he was the old man,' and in another sense we all felt obliged to sort of 'look out for him.' He was not only a symbol of leadership, he was also a model of innocence [Stefanich

> did not smoke, drink, or carouse for women and when in garrison attended Mass daily].[77]

Jack Tallerday and a company medic tried to save their captain, who was still alive when they reached him. But it was too late. Mortally wounded and lying in Tallerday's arms, Stefanich told his executive officer and friend to " 'take care of my troopers and the Company; we've come a long way together' " and then passed away.[78]

Shortly after 1100 hours, the 82nd's D+1 glider contingent finally took off from its departure airfields in England: 454 C-47 transports (arranged in eleven serials) from the 50th and 52nd Troop Carrier Wings each towing one Waco glider throughout which were distributed the troopers, equipment, and ammunition of the division Artillery Headquarters, the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, the 319th and 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalions, B Battery of the 80th Airborne Antitank Battalion, and various other division troops (this was just a portion of the giant air armada bound for Holland that day, which, all told, consisted of 1,336 U.S. C-47s, 340 RAF transports, and 1,205 Waco and Horsa gliders). As they had on D-Day, Spitfires, Tempests, Thunderbolts, and Mustangs from the Air Defense of Great Britain and the U.S. Eighth and Ninth Air Forces flew escort. Unlike the previous day, however, the *Luftwaffe* came out to fight. At both Arnhem and Eindhoven, German fighters tried to break through to the slow-moving transports, but were in each case repelled. Not one transport or glider was touched by the German fighters, who lost twenty-nine of their number while claiming only five Allied fighters in return. The Allies were not as successful at suppressing German antiaircraft batteries, however. Pilots were told to hold their fire unless fired upon since it was difficult to tell friend from foe on the ground. A light haze also hampered visibility. Moreover, having learned a lesson from the day before, German gunners did not open up until the rocket-firing Thunderbolts were past and then targeted the rear of the columns. Two British tugs and their gliders and nineteen U.S. tugs and gliders were lost as a result.[79]

The 82nd's lift lost four gliders before reaching the Continent: two ditched in the Channel when their tow cables snapped, one returned to base when it began disintegrating in the air, and the fourth aborted when a crazed trooper aboard pulled the tow-rope release handle. In each case the troopers aboard either landed safely or were rescued. Over the Continent, at least eleven gliders released well short of the objective area when their tugs were hit by antiaircraft fire; seven of the crews later made their way back to friendly lines with the help of the Dutch Resistance, six of them with all their equipment. Notwithstanding the heavier-than-expected flak the vast majority of the pilots remained on course and in formation and at 1431 hours the lead glider cut loose over landing zone 'N.'[80]

The commander of the British Glider Pilot Regiment, Colonel George J. S. Chatterton, had piloted Browning's glider into Nijmegen the day before and remembered the sight of the American gliders appearing overhead. Unlike the British system of preselecting landing sites for each glider, Americans landed wherever there was clear space. " 'It was a fantastic sight,' " wrote Chatterton, " '[t]he Germans were even more staggered than we were and all firing ceased.' "[81] But not for long. Although physically cleared of the enemy both landing zones were still within range of German guns farther to the east and southeast (those in the Reichswald abutting landing zone 'T' were particularly

troublesome) and soon the large, slow tugs and the ungainly gliders began taking fire. The Germans also set about shelling the landing zones. Flying through this maelstrom, eight more C-47s were shot down and over 100 were damaged. Remarkably, not one glider was destroyed in the air and 385 managed to land within the 82nd's lines. The insertions on landing zone 'N' were especially accurate; all but a handful of gliders landed within a mile and a half of the landing zone. Those headed for landing zone 'T,' where German fire was much heavier, were not as fortunate; only ninety gliders landed on target. Another seventy-one were released early and came to ground about a mile short of the landing zone, although still within the area controlled by division troopers. Several badly misoriented serials, however, released wherever they could with devastating results.[82]

Eight planes in the third serial, bound for landing zone 'T,' overshot the target and released their gliders over Germany, all of which came to ground near Wyler, Germany. On board were seven officers and forty-two troopers of Headquarters Battery, 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, only four of whom eventually made their way back to friendly lines (two officers and two enlisted men).[83] The pilots of the eighth serial also scattered their loads badly. Eight gliders carrying B Battery of the 320th were released some twelve miles southeast of landing zone 'T,' well behind German lines; none of these troopers were ever heard from again. Another nine gliders, carrying troopers from the same battery also came down near Wyler, but in this case the battery commander assembled his men, evaded capture, and returned to friendly lines the next morning with another officer, thirty five troopers, and a prisoner captured along the way (all the equipment and two other officers were lost).[84] Finally, the ninth serial deposited some twenty-four to thirty gliders, carrying various elements of the 320th, some three to five miles southeast of landing zone 'T.' Caught in a no man's land between friendly and enemy lines, the officers and sergeants assembled their men into fifty-four separate groups and defended their positions until dark after which they worked their way back to friendly lines, saving in the process 160 troopers, twenty-two glider pilots, ten jeeps and two howitzers. Only four troopers and nine pilots remained unaccounted for.[85]

In spite of the mishaps, by nightfall of the 18th the division had assembled thirty-one additional howitzers, thirteen 57mm antitank guns, 177 jeeps, 106 trailers, and approximately 211 tons of supplies. Over 1,600 troopers had also arrived to man the guns and help fill out the division's over-stretched lines. Moreover, in spite of the fire on the landing zones, only three troopers were killed and forty-two wounded as a result of crashes.[86] This last is noteworthy given that, due to a shortage of glider pilots, most of the gliders had only one trained pilot on board; the co-pilot seats were occupied by the ranking trooper on board who received a quick block of instruction on how to fly and land a glider in a pinch. Trooper Tom Sharkey of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion recalled what he was told: " 'the pilot said that if anything happened to him, all I had to do was to cut loose and keep the air speed at 45 mph and we wouldn't get hurt too badly!' "[87] Trooper Vernon 'Mike' Aubin, also of the 456th, remembered doing " 'a lot of praying on the way over' " after he was drafted to serve as co-pilot.[88] Captain John W. Connelly, co-piloting one of the 319th gliders that came down near Wyler, successfully landed his aircraft when the pilot was killed by flak and small arms fire.[89]

Following twenty minutes behind the gliders were approximately 130 B-24 bombers from the U.S. Eighth Air Force that had been pressed into service to deliver supplies by

parachute (almost every available transport plane was used to fly in the D+1 glider echelon). Each plane carried about two tons of supplies loaded into twenty separate containers that were to be delivered through the bomb bays, waist, and belly of the aircraft (to facilitate this each bomber had its ball turret removed). Wholly new to this type of mission, the pilots were unsure of the tactics but finally decided to fly at 1,500 feet to the objective, descend to 300 feet for the drop, and then make a climbing turn back to 1,500 feet for the return home. Flying in nine-ship V-of-Vs, the bombers arrived on time and in formation, with but a few ships lost to navigation errors on the way. But once at the target area the bombers delivered their loads with uncharacteristic imprecision, some as much as five miles off target. What seemed to unnerve the pilots, who were accustomed to flying a straight and level course thousands of feet above the earth (and, except when they were delivering their bombs, above enemy flak), was the density of the small arms fire through which they had to pass, despite the fact that they were flying a much more heavily armored aircraft than did their C-47 comrades, for whom such low level drops were routine. In all, four B-24s were shot down in the 82nd sector and another thirty-eight were damaged. Yet the bombers delivered eighty percent of the expected 258 tons of supplies in the division area, although the bundles were widely scattered and took some time to recover. It was a much-needed shot in the arm for the hard-pressed troopers on the ground, many of whom were running short of food, water, medical supplies and, most importantly, ammunition.[90]

The night of 18-19 September passed in relative quiet around Nijmegen. It was as if both sides were resting, like prizefighters between rounds, staring across the space separating them in anticipation of the struggle's inevitable renewal. For their part the division troopers endured periodic artillery and mortar barrages—what would come to be known as harassing and interdicting fire in a later American conflict—and German reconnaissance patrols probed the division perimeter, at the time over twenty-five miles in circumference, and clashed with American counter-reconnaissance patrols seeking to keep them at bay. But with much more artillery at hand (the additional thirty-one guns were up and firing by late afternoon, bringing the division total to forty-one howitzers) the physical and psychological strain on the troopers conducting the patrols and manning the widely spaced outposts that loosely defined the 82nd's perimeter lessened. Furthermore, to facilitate responsiveness Colonel March, the division's artillery commander, placed one artillery battalion in direct support of each of the parachute regiments (the 319th to the 508th, the 456th to the 505th, and the 376th to the 504th) and kept one, the 320th, in general support.[91] The troopers used their dedicated fires, albeit sparingly, to cover the yawning gaps in their lines and to break up German probes. In the southwest, where the 505th was still short one parachute battalion (Vandervoort's 2/505th, still being held in division reserve), Colonel Ekman had his attached artillery battalion do double duty. Not only did it provide supporting fires to the regiment, Ekman positioned it so far forward that he was able to integrate the artillery security outposts into his defensive line.[92]

Meanwhile, thirty miles south of the 82nd's positions Royal Engineers spent the night constructing a 110-foot-long Bailey bridge over the Wilhelmina Canal; the original bridge had been blown in the faces of 101st troopers on D-Day. Queued up for miles behind them was XXX Corps. At 0615 hours, 19 September, after ten-and-a-half hours of grueling, non-stop work, Lieutenant Colonel C. P. Jones, XXX Corps's chief engineer,

pronounced the bridge safe for heavy traffic. Shortly thereafter armored reconnaissance cars of the 2nd Household Cavalry crossed the canal and resumed the dash northward, followed by the tanks, halftracks, and Bren gun carriers (small, armored personnel carriers) of the Guards Armored Division. The race was back on; it was time to make up for lost time.[93]

The drive from the Wilhelmina Canal to Grave went without incident. Driving at almost top speed, the British were finally advancing with the alacrity Montgomery had expected of them, the only impediment being the throngs of Dutch civilians lining the roads to cheer them on their way. At approximately 0830 hours, 19 September, the lead elements of the 2nd Household Cavalry made contact with some of Tucker's troopers dug in south of Grave.[94] " 'I knew we had reached them,' " stated Corporal William Chennell, a member of the Household Cavalry reconnaissance group, " 'because the Americans, taking no chances, halted us with warning fire.' "[95] The British made haste to identify themselves as friendly and once they did Tucker's troopers welcomed them like long lost relatives. Wasting little time with pleasantries, the cavalrymen passed through the 504th's lines, crossed the Grave Bridge, and rushed northward toward Honinghutie and Bridge 10, the most direct route to Nijmegen. Once there, however, they determined that the damage done to the bridge by the abortive attempt to blow it had rendered it unsafe for anything larger than a jeep. Fortunately, the cavalrymen were far enough ahead of the main body to radio back and redirect the advance; after crossing the Grave Bridge the main body of the column was to take a right and move over the more circuitous route to Nijmegen via the Heumen Bridge.[96]

Leading the main body of the Guards Armored Division was the 5th Guards Armored Brigade with the 1st Battalion (Motor), Grenadier Guards and the 2nd Battalion (Armored), Grenadier Guards in the van. As soon as they reached the Grave Bridge, sometime around 1000 hours, both battalion commanders were whisked away to meet with Browning and Gavin, who were anxiously awaiting them at Overasselt, a small village on the road from Grave to Heumen. Browning, himself a Grenadier Guardsman, was proud to see his regimental kinsmen leading the way, but was more interested in getting the combat power they represented into the fight. Gavin, too, was thrilled.

> It is difficult to describe my feeling of elation at that moment. So far, we had been spared a major German armored attack, but now, with the availability of British armor, we felt equal to anything that could happen, so we wanted to get armor into our area as fast as it could be poured over the [Heumen] bridge and moved northward.[97]

Soon thereafter Major General Allan H. S. Adair, the Guards Armored Division commander (and another Grenadier) and Brigadier Norman W. Gwatkin, commander of the 5th Guards Armored Brigade, joined the group. Following a quick overview of the situation around Nijmegen, Browning left Adair and Gwatkin to supervise the passing of their troops into the 82nd's airhead while he, Gavin, and the two battalion commanders (Lieutenant Colonels Edward Goulburn of the 1st Grenadier Guards and N. R. 'Rodney' Moore of the 2nd Grenadier Guards) repaired to the 82nd's command post to finalize plans for another thrust at the Nijmegen bridges scheduled for later on that day.[98]

The plan was simple, there being little time for rehearsals or detailed coordination. Two columns would enter the city simultaneously; one aimed at the railroad bridge, the other at the highway bridge, with the latter designated the main effort. Each column would comprise a mix of British tanks, British motorized infantry, and American paratroopers. The forces would assemble at the Sionshof, a roadside restaurant-hotel just south of Nijmegen, break into their respective columns and jump off for the attack at 1530 hours. The Dutch Resistance would provide guides. Colonel Goulburn recalled that according to the Dutch, "the town was not strongly held and . . . a display of force in the shape of Tanks would probably cause the enemy to withdraw."[99] Goulburn's counterpart, Colonel Moore, was much less optimistic. " 'It was fully realized,' " he later wrote, " 'that it might be a difficult operation, but it was thought worth the gamble.' "[100]

Browning thought so too. That morning, while awaiting XXX Corps' arrival, he told Gavin: " '[t]he Nijmegen bridge must be taken today. At the latest tomorrow.' "[101] General Urquhart's British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem was being savaged and it was not certain how much longer it could hold out. "The capture of the Nijmegen bridge was squarely on my shoulders," recalled Gavin. "This I knew."[102] By that time he also knew that because of fog in England the 325th's glider insertion, scheduled for 1000 hours that day, had been postponed until 1500.[103] Gavin was therefore in a difficult position. The British tanks would need infantry protection in order to fight through the city streets to the bridges. Gavin had planned to use his glider troopers for this mission but there was no way they would be ready to attack by 1530 even if they did arrive on time (as it turned out the fog in England did not lift and the glider insertion for D+2 was postponed until the next day).[104] Waiting for XXX Corps to bring up more infantry was also unsatisfactory as it would take hours to arrive since it would have to wend its way to the front via the single road over which the entire corps was passing. Hence, whatever infantry support there was to be would have to come from the already thinly stretched 82nd. Chary of further denuding his front, especially in light of the massive German attack Ekman and Lindquist had repelled the day before, Gavin had but one recourse: he must release his reserve. Though only a single battalion, it was all he could spare. It was, however, Ben Vandervoort's battalion. "Ever since I spent a night and a day behind German-Italian lines in Sicily July 9-10, '43 with Vandervoort I had the utmost confidence in him," wrote Gavin. "He was a rare fighting man, brave, dependable, hard as nails with the troops & they loved him. As soon as the link-up occurred with the British I sent him after the bridge."[105]

Notwithstanding the speed with which the plan was put together the columns jumped off only thirty minutes behind schedule. As had been the case when the 508th entered Nijmegen two days before, the scenes of joy the Anglo-Americans encountered in the city's suburbs belied what lay ahead. " 'The townspeople were out in force to welcome us,' " recalled Lieutenant William J. Meddaugh of E Company, 2/505th.[106] Meddaugh's company mate, Lieutenant James J. Coyle, likened the initial stages of the attack to a victory parade. " 'The Dutch people lined the roads in crowds and cheered us on our way.' "[107] One of those Dutchmen, Cor Kleijwegt, was stunned when he encountered the advancing paratroopers, treading silently along in their rubber-soled boots, a marked contrast to the hated sound of German hobnails to which he had become accustomed after almost four years of occupation.

> ‘I will never forget the emotion that ran like a flame through me when a helmeted paratrooper—gun at the ready—walked past us and apparently unmoved said: “You are free.” As I walked back almost drunk-like, I kept repeating “you are free” as if I wanted to keep his softly spoken words like a relic.’[108]

Guards Captain John Neville had overall tactical commander of the column making the supporting attack on Nijmegen’s railroad bridge. His force consisted of five tanks from the 2nd Grenadier Guards, a platoon of mounted infantry in three Bren gun carriers from the 1st Grenadier Guards, and Captain Taylor Smith’s D Company, 2/505th. Following their guide, Neville’s column moved toward its objective along a route that was about a mile west of that taken by the force advancing on the highway bridge. Moving without incident through the southern part of Nijmegen, the column got all the way to some marshalling yards just south of the railroad bridge before making enemy contact. There Neville’s force ran into a strongpoint manned by 750 to 1,000 Germans armed with machine guns, *panzerfausts* (shoulder-fired antitank weapons similar to but more powerful than American bazookas), two 20mm antiaircraft guns, a Russian-made 45mm antitank gun, and at least one tank. Furthermore, the Germans were arrayed behind a railroad embankment too steep for the British tanks to negotiate. Undeterred, Neville reasoned that a coordinated assault in the fading light of day might succeed. A tunnel running underneath the embankment opened onto a ramp that, in turn, led up to the bridge. By sending his tanks charging through the tunnel while simultaneously assaulting over the embankment with his infantrymen (who, in the dusk, would no longer be silhouetted against the sky), Neville hoped his troopers could break through the German defenses and at least gain a foothold on the bridge. Neville’s hope was short-lived. German guns firing from across the river knocked out the two leading British tanks as they emerged from the tunnel and the infantrymen assaulting over the embankment ran into a hornet’s nest of small arms and automatic weapons fire. “The entire park seemed filled with tracer slugs,” recalled Sergeant Paul Nunan of D Company, 2/505th. “My first reaction was that a German tank had moved in on us. I remember thinking that if they had infantry with them it was going to be a very tough day.”[109] Tough it was, too tough for Neville’s small force. Seeing that he was badly outgunned and outnumbered, Neville ordered a withdrawal to a small church the column had passed along the way. Sometime during the withdrawal Lieutenant Waverly W. Wray, the hero of Ste.-Mère-Église, was shot and killed by a sniper while covering his company’s movement to the rear. “ ‘The last I saw of him,’ ” related one trooper, “ ‘he was headed for the Germans with a grenade in one hand and a tommy gun in the other.’ ”[110]

As the main effort, the attack on the highway bridge involved a much larger force: twenty to thirty tanks (some accounts put the figure as high as forty tanks) from the 2nd Grenadier Guards, an entire mounted infantry company from the 1st Grenadier Guards, and the remainder of Vandervoort’s 2/505th. Lieutenant Colonel Goulburn commanded the British contingent, working in tandem with Vandervoort who exercised command over his paratroopers (actually, it seems most likely that Goulburn had been vested with overall tactical command of the entire task force, including Neville’s column, although once Neville split off he was on his own; likewise Goulburn was technically Vandervoort’s superior for the attack on the highway bridge, although it appears he and

Vandervoort worked together more through mutual agreement). Both men, however, relied heavily on their subordinates.[111] Vandervoort later wrote that his battalion

> had fought with tanks before, but never in such lavish quantities. . . . It required an intuitive sense of balance not to exploit the tanks as protection for the infantry nor to preoccupy the infantry with screening the tanks. That depended on a lot of individual initiative, not play-by-play command control. Colonel Goulburn, a perceptive commander, more or less turned individual tanks loose and let them go—up the alleys and through the yards with the infantry. The spearhead of the British column, which included the paratroopers, blasted its way up the avenue and into the side streets as required by the enemy dispositions. Oversimplified, all the following column had to do was duck random shells, wait until the ruckus died down up ahead, then move up another block.[112]

En route to the highway bridge, a troop of four tanks, two platoons of motorized infantry, and a platoon of paratroopers veered off toward the post office, the same building assaulted two days before by Captain Adams and Second Platoon of A Company, 1/508th. Since no one from the Adams group had made it back to friendly lines—they were still holed up in a building near the highway bridge—the thought persisted that the post office housed the demolition controls for the bridge. Under the command of Guards Major George Thorne, the post office force blasted its way through the narrow streets and seized the post office with nary a fight. Inside were a handful of Dutch civilians. No Germans and, more importantly, no demolition controls were found anywhere. Taking no chances, Thorne had his men destroy a switchboard and anything else that looked suspicious. Since he had gained what he considered a valuable foothold in the city, Thorne held in place, although later that evening he personally led a combat patrol consisting of two tanks and a platoon of infantry toward the highway bridge. Upon reaching the Keizer Lodewijk Plein, however, a German self-propelled gun began blasting the patrol at close range. After sustaining several casualties, the patrol withdrew back to the post office.[113]

The Germans that had repelled Thorne's foray against the highway bridge as well as Nivelle's assault on the railroad bridge were, as was the case throughout the area, a conglomeration of troops from various commands scratched together to fight in improvised *kampfgruppen*. Significantly, however, in the two days since the 508th's attempt on the Nijmegen bridges German paratroopers and SS soldiers from the *10th SS Panzer Division* had filtered into the area in significant numbers. Moreover, tactical control of the units defending both bridges rested in the hands of SS and German paratroop commanders whose combat experience, along with the battlefield prowess and élan of their handpicked soldiers, contributed immeasurably to the stiffening of the German defenses. Nivelle's force had run headlong into the Germans' right-most defensive position which was deployed to protect the railroad bridge. Thorne's combat patrol was repulsed when it ran into the center of gravity of the German defense, a wooded area directly adjacent to the Keizer Lodewijk Plein called Hunner Park. Concealed in the park was a force several hundred strong, the core of which was an SS infantry battalion supported by four self-propelled guns. Also incorporated into the

defense were numerous antitank and antiaircraft guns (including several of the feared 88s) cleverly concealed in houses and basements, with lines of fire that crisscrossed the approaches to the bridge. An attack on the highway bridge, therefore, would involve first fighting through a series of combat outposts, then fighting across the open space of the Keizer Lodewijk Plein traffic circle, which the Germans had turned into a kill zone, and then clearing Hunner Park. Only then could an attacker gain a clear shot to the highway bridge itself, which had its own defensive system that would have to be neutralized.[114] The column under Vandervoort and Goulburn hit this defensive system head on.

As with the railroad bridge force, the highway bridge column advanced quickly at first. "Speed seemed essential," remembered Goulburn, "and a rush with tanks through the town however unorthodox it might be, had an obvious chance of success."[115] Nearer the objective the fighting became more intense and the pace slowed. Still the British tankers and American paratroopers pressed on. "For soldiers of different allied armies, it was amazing how beautifully the tankers and troopers teamed together," observed Vandervoort. "It was testimony to their combat acumen as seasoned veterans—both Yanks and Tommies."[116] To avoid getting bogged down in the streets, Vandervoort's troopers took to the rooftops and covered the tanks from above while the tanks provided their heavy firepower to blast strongpoints or their mass to drive through obstacles. Watching from below, Colonel Goulburn thought "[t]he AMERICANS seemed to thoroughly enjoy the game."[117] But a game it was not. After some three hours of intense street fighting—"confusing face-to-face, kill or be killed show downs between small momentarily isolated groups and individuals"—the paratroopers gained a foothold in a row of houses bordering the Keizer Lodewijk Plein.[118] But the advance came to a sudden halt when the two lead tanks attempted to rush across the open traffic circle. German antitank and self-propelled guns firing from concealed positions in Hunner Park destroyed them. Lieutenant Coyle, whose platoon was occupying one of the buildings fronting the traffic circle, saw the remaining tanks go into reverse and back up out of the line of fire.

> 'I [Coyle] went storming back to the third tank shouting at the commander to get back with us. He said he was hit—I told him he was not hit as I could not see a mark on the tank. A British sergeant jumped out of the tank and said, "What's that then, Mate?" pointing to a large hole on the other side of the turret which I had not seen. I felt about two feet tall. I don't know how the tank took that hit without suffering any wounded or catching fire.'[119]

Vandervoort, too, wanted to maintain the momentum of the advance and set about organizing a renewed assault. After coordinating with his mortars and the supporting British artillery to blanket both sides of the bridge with salvoes of indirect fire, he wanted the tanks to rush the traffic circle again while his paratroopers provided covering fire from the upper floors of the buildings they had seized. But as soon as the paratroopers opened fire they were blasted with heavy caliber return fire. Lieutenant Coyle remembered seeing and hearing German high velocity antipersonnel shells passing through the rooms his platoon was occupying, killing or seriously wounding several of this men. Private Carl Beck was one of the latter. Beck was hit by shrapnel that " 'went

into my mouth and came out the left side of my head, taking everything with it. I woke up in the 119th General Hospital in England, nineteen days later [having lost his left eye].' "[120] According to Corporal Earl Boling, with no tanks on which to concentrate their fire the Germans used their 88s to systematically demolish the buildings in which the paratroopers were seeking cover. Whole walls came tumbling down so the Americans had to constantly reposition to avoid being buried under the debris. To add to the chaos, German artillery observers had zeroed in on the Allied positions and anything that moved attracted an immediate barrage. Faced with such withering enemy fire, and with night fast approaching (it was about 1900 hours when the column reached the traffic circle), Goulburn "decided that it was useless to continue . . . and that a much more carefully laid on plan should be made."[121] The ever-aggressive Vandervoort was dismayed.

> Our ammunition was plentiful with the exception of 60mm mortar rounds. All battalion communications—radio and telephone—were tied in 'Five by Five'—better than 'Ma Bell.' A dozen or more Sherman tanks, motors idling, were ready to roll when ordered. . . . In short, the battalion and the tanks were on the Line of Departure ready for a joint infantry/tank assault to put the armor over the river. There was time to establish a bridgehead north of the Waal before dark if the bridge wasn't demolished.[122]

Vandervoort insisted that his troopers were ready to take Hunner Park and pave the way for the tanks to get to the bridge. But "the generals, " remarked Vandervoort, decided to halt the column in place—more than likely on the advice of Goulburn—consolidate what gains had been made, and wait until more of XXX Corps could be brought forward.[123]

The generals to whom Vandervoort referred were most likely Browning and Horrocks, the latter having come forward "to smell the battlefield."[124] Horrocks also established his forward command post right next to Browning's, which was in a small schoolhouse in the southern outskirts of Nijmegen, in order to facilitate coordination between the two. As equals in rank and long-time friends, Horrocks and Browning exercised joint command of the units in the area and "took all the major decisions together without any semblance of friction," with Browning issuing orders to the airborne troopers while Horrocks issued complementary instructions to his XXX Corps forces.[125] But when they received conflicting advice about whether to continue the attack on the highway bridge or halt, it would have been natural for them to defer to their countryman, whose desire for "a much more carefully laid on plan" fit well with their British predilection for set-piece battles, the finest practitioner of which was a man to whom they both deferred, Field Marshal Montgomery.

Later that evening Horrocks, Browning, and Adair were sequestered in one of the classrooms discussing what actions to take next when "[s]uddenly the door opened and in came a tall, good-looking American General" who, in Horrocks's mind "was as unlike the popular cartoon conception of the loud-voiced, boastful, cigar-chewing American as it would be possible to imagine."[126] Jim Gavin had come to lay his proposal on the table.

Chapter Eighteen Notes

[1] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 29.

[2] Friedrich-August Freiherr von der Heydte to James M. Gavin, 30 January 1954, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 2, Folder 2, OU.

[3] Harzer quoted in Kershaw, *'It Never Snows in September,'* 65-66.

[4] Student's Post-War Interrogation Report, 9. Besides surprise, Student also recalled experiencing a sense of awe. "At noontime I suddenly was startled at my desk [by] a rushing sound which became louder and louder [Student was at his headquarters in a small cottage south of Vught, about twenty miles northwest of Eindhoven]. I stepped out onto the balcony. Everywhere I looked I saw airplanes—troop transporters and freight gliders—which flew in loose formation or one by one and very low. New units kept appearing and disappearing in the distance. I was deeply impressed by this mighty spectacle so suddenly offered to me. In this moment I didn't think of the danger of our position but I thought instead full of reflection and longing of our own earlier airborne operations. Sunk in thought, I commented to my chief of staff . . . who had hurried out onto the balcony, 'If ever I had had such mighty means at my disposal!' " See Student, "Arnheim," 5.

[5] Army Group B intelligence report quoted in McDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 135.

[6] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 135.

[7] Helmut Heiber and David M. Glantz, eds., *Hitler and His Generals, Military Conferences 1942-1945: The First Complete Stenographic Record of the Military Situation Conferences, from Stalingrad to Berlin*, trans. Roland Winter, Krista Smith, and Mary Beth Friedrich (New York: Enigma Books, 2003), 498-499. Transcript of conference conducted 17 September 1944.

[8] Kershaw, *'It Never Snows in September,'* 68.

[9] Fullriede diary excerpted in ibid., 37.

[10] Arie D. Bestebreurtje, interview by Frederick Kelly, 28-30 November 1966, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 7, OU.

[11] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 153-155; Bestebreurtje, interview, 28-30 November 1966; James M. Gavin to Arie D. Bestebreurtje, 9 July 1973, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 9, OU. For some reason it was several days before the Germans cut the Dutch phone system, an asset that the Americans, at least, used to their benefit with the aid of the Dutch resistance. After the war, Gavin wrote: "It was an odd situation and a very amusing one and it went on for several days before the Germans took over control of the commercial telephone system. Calls were placed to Arnhem and inquiries made of the success of the landings of the British Division and calls were made to Nijmegen and other near-by towns. In fact, someone on the staff wanted to know why we didn't call Berlin and talk to Adolf Hitler. I suppose that we could have in the first twenty-four hours but there were other far more important things to do." James M. Gavin, "Airborne Army's First Test," part two, *Infantry Journal* 62, no. 2 (February 1948): 41-42.

[12] Bittrich's order is reproduced in full in Kershaw, *'It Never Snows in September,'* 321.

[13] See Kershaw, *'It Never Snows in September,'* 76-78 and MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 142. Much has been made in various histories about some lost orders that fell into Student's

hands soon after the drop that supposedly aided the Germans in coming to grips with Allied intentions and then organizing their countermeasures accordingly. In his post-war interrogation, Student claimed that two hours after the initial landings, "the enemy attack order for the airborne operation was in my possession at my command post. It had been captured on one of the gliders near Vught. . . . The capture of this extremely valuable document . . . greatly facilitated and speeded up the initiation and execution of all counter measures. The German command now clearly visualized the intentions as well as the forces employed in this giant airborne operation." See Student's Post-War Interrogation Report, 10-11. The impact of this captured order, however, was minimal and, despite Student's recollection, what was revealed was not the entire plan for Operation MARKET, but only the operations order for the 101st. The glider in question was a Horsa from Browning's Corps Headquarters element and it did not go down near Vught, but rather much farther away, near Dongen, some sixteen miles to the southwest. The glider contained a Phantom signals detachment (a special signal unit devoted to the passing of intelligence between headquarters) of eight men who, along with their two pilots, fought off the Germans for as long as they could before surrendering. In the process they also attempted to destroy their documents but apparently overlooked the 101st order. For the most detailed explanation of this incident see Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 173. Regardless, Bittrich's warning order demonstrates that once the landings had occurred there was really no secret to what was being attempted. Furthermore, Bittrich claimed that " 'I never realized until after the war . . . that the Market-Garden plans had fallen into our hands. I have no idea why Model did not tell me. In any case, the plans would simply have confirmed my own opinion that the important thing to do was prevent the link-up between the airborne troops and the British Second Army—and for that, they certainly needed the bridges.' " See Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 284.

[14] Entry for 0315 hours, 18 September 1944 in Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team, Unit Journal, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 23, OU.

[15] Walter S. VanPoyck, interview, 27 January 1988, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 24, OU.

[16] Except where noted see Combat Interview "Major Edward N. Wellems, CO 2d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; Combat Interview "Company E, 504th Prchut Regt, 82d Abn Div."; Combat Interview "Company D, 2d Bn., 504th Regiment – 82d A/B Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "Companies D and F, 2d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[17] VanPoyck questionnaire.

[18] Robert Franco questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 33, OU.

[19] Earl W. Boling questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 9, OU.

[20] Tallerday questionnaire.

[21] Richard Paul Wagner questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 106, Folder 34, OU.

[22] Questionnaire answer by Charles Fergie, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 30, OU.

[23] James M. Gavin to Cornelius Ryan, 19 May 1975, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 2, Folder 2, OU and Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[24] James M. Gavin, interview by James Blue, n.d., tape provided to author by Starlyn Jorgensen.

[25] McIlvoy to Ryan, 6 October 1967.

[26] Isaacs questionnaire.

[27] Paul D. Nunan questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 72, OU. See also Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 161; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 95; Donald William McKeage questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 67, OU; Tallerday questionnaire; Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry, "Invasion of Holland," 27 October 1944; Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[28] Gavin to Westover, 25 July 1945.

[29] Warren statement.

[30] "Operation Market," pp. bridges 41-42. Interestingly, one group of soldiers from Weaver's platoon did make it to the bridge and, in fact, found it almost wholly undefended. According to trooper Joe Atkins, who was the point man for the platoon, as soon as they entered the city " 'a crowd of people gathered around us, and we had to push our way through.' " Atkins and two other troopers at the head of the formation became separated from the main body but pushed on to the bridge. There they found " 'a few German soldiers . . . standing around a small artillery weapon.' " While his mates covered him, Atkins jumped into the open with his Thompson submachine gun in hand and yelled for the Germans to surrender. " 'The Germans were so surprised,' " recalled Atkins, " 'the six or seven defenders of the bridge gave up without resisting.' " The three paratroopers remained at the bridge for about an hour, guarding their prisoners and awaiting the rest of their platoon. Once darkness set in, however, and with no other friendly troops in sight, they decided to pull back, " 'knowing we could not hold off a German attack.' " They left their prisoners behind, despite entreaties by the Germans to be taken along. " 'As we were leaving,' " added Atkins, " 'we could hear heavy equipment approaching the bridge.' " Atkins quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 157-158.

[31] Warren statement.

[32] Except where noted see Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 164; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 39; Memorandum, Headquarters, First Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, "Holland Operation," 2 November 1945, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Recollections of 504th and 508th P.I.R. personnel on combat operations in Holland," USAMHI.

[33] Shields Warren Jr. to Clay Blair, 3 December 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 55, Folder "Warren, Shields (508)," USAMHI.

[34] Except where noted see Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 164 and Warren statement.

[35] Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 158 and Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 43.

[36] See also Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 99-101; Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 159; and Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 164. It is unclear exactly what German units were at the traffic circle when A Company arrived, but the evidence suggests that there was a mixture of Waffen SS and soldiers from Henke's improvised task force. Several A Company troopers clearly remember hearing truck engines, tailgates slamming open, and hobnailed boots jumping on the road's hard surface. Others also clearly identified being engaged with members of the Waffen SS, easily identified by the twin silver SS runes on their collar tabs. These could only have been from the *9th SS Panzer Division's* reconnaissance battalion since, at the time, the *10th SS Panzer Division* was still north and east or Arnhem. Additionally, that Henke's soldiers were already at the Keizer Karel Plein when the SS arrived is underscored by the fact that, during the fight for the traffic circle, American troopers engaged enemy soldiers who were fighting from foxholes that could only have been prepared by soldiers at the site long before the Waffen SS arrived. The only soldiers in Nijmegen who could have done this were those Henke had gathered under his command.

[37] Warren statement.

[38] Lamm quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 160.

[39] Lamm quoted in ibid.

[40] Warren statement.

[41] Except where noted see Memorandum, Headquarters, First Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, "Holland Operation," 2 November 1945 and "Operation Market," pp. bridges 38-39.

[42] Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 161-166; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 44-45; Warren statement; Memorandum, Headquarters, First Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry, "Holland Operation," 2 November 1945; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 40-41; Shields Warren Jr. to James M. Gavin, 13 January 1954, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "82nd Division's Narrative Report, Operation 'Market' for Adjutant General's Records Branch," USAMHI.

[43] Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 305.

[44] See Warren statement; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 39-41; Gavin to Westover, 25 July 1945; Gavin, "Airborne Army's First Test," part two, 43.

[45] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 162.

[46] James M. Gavin, interview by Frederic Kelly, 20 January 1967, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 10, OU.

[47] Gavin to Westover, 25 July 1945.

[48] Gavin to Blair, 21 November 1983.

[49] Except where noted see. Gavin to Westover, 25 July 1945 and Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[50] Louis G. Mendez Jr. to James M. Gavin, 8 November 1945, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 9, OU.

[51] See Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 46; Statement by Howard A. Greenawalt, n. d., The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Recollections of Market-Garden Operations w/friends in the 50s," USAMHI; Mendez to Gavin, 8 November 1945; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 42-44.

[52] Gavin to Westover, 25 July 1945.

[53] Romero quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 179.

[54] Except where noted see Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 46; Statement by Howard A. Greenawalt; Mendez to Gavin, 8 November 1945; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 42-44. 'Gas' Leegsma, the Dutch resistance fighter who joined G Company in the fight, has an interesting history. He remained with the company after the fight, withdrawing with it later on in the day. His detailed knowledge of the area and of German dispositions proved invaluable and eventually the G Company troopers became so enamored of him they outfitted Leegsma with an American uniform and smuggled him back to their base camp once they were withdrawn from Holland. Gas subsequently fought alongside G Company during most of the Battle of the Bulge before he was found out and shipped home. For his efforts, however, he was recognized by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and rewarded with the opportunity to attend the British Royal Military College at Sandhurst. He then served in the Dutch Army

until 1962, attaining the rank of captain before finally returning to civilian life. See Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 178-179.

[55] Although silent on the matter in his published works *On To Berlin* and *Airborne Warfare*, in a letter to the authors of the Army's official history of the campaign Gavin maintained that Tucker, whose regiment was southwest of Honinghutie, was to have sent a patrol up the road linking the Grave and Honinghutie bridges on D-Day while Lindquist was to have taken the bridge by attacking from the east. Yet the division order and after action report say nothing about taking the bridge on D-Day, though the latter does state categorically that "[a]ll initial missions of 508 were accomplished by 2030 [hours, 17 September]." See Division After Action Review, Market-Garden, n.d., 382-0.3.0, Box 12346, Record Group 407, NARA II. Moreover, in his after action review Lindquist maintained that "the capture of Bridge #10 was not specifically prescribed as a mission for this Regiment." See Memorandum, Headquarters, 508 Parachute Infantry, "Capture of Bridge #10," 19 October 1944, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 9, OU. Still, given the respective areas of responsibility, logic would dictate that Lindquist would have been given the Honinghutie mission since his regiment was much closer.

[56] Sworn Statement by Lloyd L. Polette, 16 October 1944, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 9, OU.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 289.

[59] See also Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 170-173; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 46-47; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 33-35; Memorandum, Headquarters, 508 Parachute Infantry, "Capture of Bridge #10," 19 October 1944; Memorandum, Headquarters 508th Parachute Infantry, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944. Not only was there controversy about whose responsibility it was to take Bridge 10, there was also controversy about which regiment ultimately took it. Some have claimed a platoon from C Company, 1/504th actually took the bridge, but evidence proves that this platoon arrived after Polette and Tomlinson were already in possession of the bridge. See Combat Interview "Company C, 1st Bn., 504th Regt.—82d A/B Division," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-16 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[60] Gavin to Ryan, 2 October 1973 and Gavin, interview by James Blue.

[61] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 133-134.

[62] Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[63] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 121.

[64] Brereton made this decision at 1800 hours on 17 September based on weather predictions from his staff meteorologists. Gavin received word that the glider flight had been postponed at 0840 hours, 18 September. The morning of D+1, Brereton made additional changes, ordering all transports to fly the northern route due to low-lying clouds over the Continent that would have made navigating the southern route difficult. See Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 117-118 and 120.

[65] Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 121-122.

[66] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 96.

[67] Memorandum, Headquarters 508th Parachute Infantry, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944. See also Landgon, *"Ready,"* 96; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 47; and Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 1, 276.

[68] Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954 and Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Engineer Report," 19 September 1944, 382-ENG-0.3, Box 12433, Record Group 407, NARA II. Most accounts of this action relate that Gavin employed two engineer companies as his stopgap, but contemporaneous records clearly show that it was D Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion alone that served in this role.

[69] Gavin to Westover, 25 July 1945.

[70] Warren to Blair, 3 December 1983. Capitalization in original.

[71] Devlin, *Paratrooper,* 501 and Warren to Blair, 3 December 1983.

[72] Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 183-185.

[73] See also Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 47-48; Memorandum, Headquarters 508th Parachute Infantry, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944; Warren statement.

[74] Kurz quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 184. Warren validates Kurz's recollection. "As the last dual 20mm gun was knocked out, the first glider was released over the LZ." Warren to Blair, 3 December 1983.

[75] William E. Ekman to James M. Gavin, 22 January 1954, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "82nd Division's Narrative Report, Operation 'Market' for Adjutant General's Records Branch," USAMHI.

[76] Tallerday questionnaire (105/9).

[77] Arthur B. Schultz to Cornelius Ryan, 28 October 1966, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 105, Folder 2, OU.

[78] Tallerday questionnaire (105/9). See also Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 123; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 96; Richard H. Brownlee questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 12, OU.

[79] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 118 and 120-121 and Office of Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, *Airborne Assault on Holland: An Interim Report*, 16.

[80] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 256-257 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 121-122.

[81] Chatterton quoted in Dank, *The Glider Gang*, 176.

[82] Except where noted see Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 122.

[83] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 122-123 and After Action Report, "The History of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion," n.d., The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 4, OU.

[84] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 123 and Memorandum, Headquarters, 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, "Narrative Report," 26 October 1944, 382-FA(320)-0.3, Box 12436, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[85] Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 259 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 123.

[86] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 122 and 226 and Division Artillery After Action Review, Market-Garden.

[87] Sharkey quoted in Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 160. Underlining in original.

[88] Aubin quoted in ibid.

[89] After Action Report, "The History of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion."

[90] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 123-124 and James Edward Duke Jr. questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 107, Folder 9, OU. Duke was the Chief of Staff of the IX Troop Carrier Command and flew on this mission with the bomber pilots.

[91] 82nd Airborne Division, Division Artillery After Action Review.

[92] Memorandum, Headquarters, 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, "Unit History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion from 17 September 1944 to 16 October 1944," 26 October 1944, 382-FA(456)-0, Box 12444, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[93] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 330-331.

[94] Brian Horrocks, *Escape to Action* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960), 217; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 340; Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 411; Division After Action Review, Market-Garden.

[95] Chennell quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 411.

[96] Altes, Margry, Thuring, and Voskuil, *September 1944*, 64; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 343; and Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[97] Gavin, *On To Berlin* 169.

[98] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 345 and 348.

[99] Edward Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," n.d., p. 1, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 17, OU.

[100] Moore quoted in Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 349. See also Langdon, *"Ready,"* 97 and Division After Action Review, Market-Garden.

[101] Browning quoted in Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 170.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 127-128.

[104] Ibid., 131.

[105] James M. Gavin to Cornelius Ryan, 13 July 1973, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 9, OU.

[106] Meddaugh quoted in George R. Jacobus, ed., *Echoes of the Warrior: Personal Experiences of the Enlisted Men and Officers of E Company of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne in World War II* (Privately published, 1992), 369.

[107] Coyle quoted in Deryk Wills, ed., *Put on Your Boots and Parachutes* (Leicester, England: AB Publishers Limited, 1992), 141.

[108] Kleijwegt quoted in Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 352.

[109] Nunan questionnaire.

[110] Unnamed trooper in Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 125. See also Langdon, *"Ready,"* 97-98 and Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 362.

[111] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 97 and Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 350.

[112] Benjamin H. Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge, Holland—September 1944," n.d., pp. 4-5, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "82nd Division's Narrative Report, Operation 'Market' for Adjutant General's Records Branch," USAMHI.

[113] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 361 and Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 4-5.

[114] Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 139-141 and Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 358-359.

[115] Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 2.

[116] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 4.

[117] Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 4. Capitalization in original.

[118] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 5-6.

[119] Coyle quoted in Wills, *Put on Your Boots and Parachutes*, 141.

[120] Beck quoted in ibid., 126-127.

[121] Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 5.

[122] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 8.

[123] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 8. See also William J. Meddaugh and Sam Appleby, "Attack on the Nijmegen Bridge," n.d., The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 4, OU; James J. Coyle questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 21, OU; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 360; Recollection of Earl Boling in Jacobus, *Echoes of the Warrior*, 134-139. Gavin was also disappointed with the decision and recalled later that it was his "personal belief [that the 2/505th] would have captured the south end of the Nijmegen [highway] bridge without additional support from 30 Corps." See Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[124] Horrocks, Belfield, and Essame, *Corps Commander*, 110.

[125] Ibid., 109-110.

[126] Ibid., 110.

Chapter Nineteen
The Finest Division in the World Today

September 20th was certainly a wild day. . . .
James M. Gavin[1]

Gavin's scheme for taking the Nijmegen bridges was unbelievably bold. Since the best way to take a bridge intact was to attack both ends at once, Gavin proposed mounting a river crossing to seize the *north* end of both bridges concurrent with a renewed advance by the forces already inside the city to take the southern ends. He told his British counterparts that he had been contemplating this for some time and had already sent his engineers out in search of some boats, but to no avail.[2] In the American army, he continued, a corps would have at least one engineer company equipped with boats.

> I [Gavin] asked General Horrocks about it, and he said he thought they had some boats well down the road in the train [i.e., the rear of the column] somewhere. The discussion on this point quickly spread among the staff. They finally agreed that they should have about twenty-eight folding canvas boats in trucks somewhere farther to the rear. American boats, with which I was familiar, were plywood, but at that moment boats were boats and I had to have them.[3]

Gavin promised that if Horrocks could get the boats forward his paratroopers would make the assault. In fact, Gavin had already told Tucker to move the bulk of his regiment to a wooded area nearer Nijmegen just in case.[4] With no other options available to them, at least none that could be undertaken as quickly, Horrocks and Browning accepted the proposal. At that Gavin left for his own command post to make the preparations necessary to turn the proposal into a plan.[5]

The first order of business was to select a crossing site. This is best done through reconnaissance, but since the south bank of the Waal was still occupied by the Germans, Gavin had to be content with selecting the location from which to launch the crossing based on a map study. The most obvious location, and the one Gavin chose, was the point where the Maas-Waal Canal intersected the Waal River, some 1,500 yards downstream of the railroad bridge and 2,500 yards downstream of the highway bridge. Though a considerable distance from the objectives the location had two significant advantages: it would allow the troopers to load the boats in the cover of the canal and it would also provide them the opportunity to become familiar with handling the boats before proceeding out into the swiftly flowing river, which was some 300 yards wide at that point.[6]

Notes for this chapter are found on pages 515 through 523.

Before anything else, however, the crossing site had to be cleared and secured. This could prove difficult but Gavin knew his troopers and had great faith in Tucker and his 504th. As Gavin later wrote, "I was sure that, once released, Tucker's 504th could clear all the Germans up to the riverbank with little difficulty."[7]

Moreover, in order to increase the chances of success for an undertaking as risky as an opposed river crossing arrangements had to be made to gather as much support as possible. Since the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion was already in direct support of the 504th it, too, displaced forward so that its guns could range the far bank. Complementing the 376th's fires would be the 504th's internal 81mm mortars as well as twenty-four self-propelled 'Sexton' 25-pounder howitzers from the 153rd Field Regiment (Leicestershire Yeomanry), lent to Gavin by General Adair. To provide direct fire support for the crossing, Gavin attached two of the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion's 57mm antitank guns to Tucker. Additionally, Adair anted up again and attached the 2nd Battalion (Armored), Irish Guards to the 504th as well. On order its Sherman tanks were to line the near bank track-to-track and blanket the far shore with smoke and high explosive shells to cover the paratroopers as they rowed across the river. All told, approximately 100 tubes—howitzer, mortar, antitank, and tank—would be firing in support of the river crossing.[8]

But before anything could proceed Gavin had to get the boats. This worried him more than anything else. It would have been best to conduct the river crossing under cover of darkness, but there was almost no chance that the boats would arrive in time for a crossing during the night of 19-20 September, and Gavin felt he could not wait until the next night to conduct the assault. General Urquhart and his paras at Arnhem might not hold out another day. They were surrounded, critically short of supplies, and hanging on by a thread, battling German tanks with submachine guns. The next best time to make the crossing would have been at dawn, when the light was still too poor for accurate long-range fire but good enough to maneuver the boats across the river. When Gavin pressed Horrocks about this possibility, Horrocks simply echoed what he had been told by his staff: "that they had the boats and that they would get them up as quickly as they could."[9] What Gavin wanted to avoid if at all possible was a crossing in the full light of day, but with time of the essence he was prepared to order the river crossing whenever the boats arrived, without delay, and whatever the time of day or the state of preparation. "It was a risky tactic," wrote Gavin, "but something had to be done. I could not conceive of sitting on the southern bank with a regiment of infantry and the Guards Armored Division while Urquhart was destroyed eleven miles away."[10]

At about 2300 hours, 19 September, Gavin sent for Tucker (characteristically, Tucker was away from the regimental headquarters when the call came in so Lieutenant Colonel Warren R. Williams, Tucker's executive officer, reported instead). By then the 504th, less three companies that were providing local security at the Grave Bridge and Bridges 7 and 10 over the Maas-Waal Canal, had closed on the wood Gavin had designated as the regiment's assembly area. Gavin outlined the situation for Williams and then told him of his plan to have the 504th conduct an assault river crossing. It was "a very iffy situation," admitted Gavin. "If the boats arrived, and if the Germans were cleared as far as the riverbank, and if everything could be organized—all this during darkness—we could get off shortly after daybreak."[11] Sometime later that night, however, word reached

the 82nd command post that the boats would not arrive before noon on the 20th.[12] It would be a daytime crossing. The stakes suddenly got immeasurably higher.[13]

If there was anything positive about the delay, it was that Tucker had more time to organize for the attack. The 504th was still some distance from the designated crossing spot and the area between it and the river was still heavily infested with Germans. Hence, Tucker had first to move his regiment to the site, clear it of any enemy, and then prepare his troopers for the crossing. If possible, he would also want to conduct a visual reconnaissance of the far bank. At 0600 hours, 20 September, Tucker issued his orders. The 2/504th, which at the time consisted of but D Company and Headquarters Company (E and F Companies were guarding bridges) would lead the way to the proposed crossing site, clear it, and then support the crossing by fire. The 3/504th would spearhead the crossing. The 1/504th would follow the 3/504th across. Engineers from C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion would man the boats and shuttle them back and forth across the river until both the 3/504th and 1/504th were across.[14]

The troopers that were to effect the crossing were flabbergasted when told what was expected of them. Lieutenant John A. Holabird Jr. of the 307th Engineers recalled that "[a]t first, when we were briefed for the assault crossing, we took it as a joke. We couldn't believe anyone could be serious about it." Then, for a brief moment, Holabird's sentiments changed.

> I can remember being flattered they were considering using the engineers. We were always somewhat of a joke; effete and a little precious. We usually followed people around, not led them. It was flattering—and at the same time a little fantastic—that we were to lead this flotilla across.

But flattery was soon tempered by reality.

> Suddenly, it came across that this was not a joke; . . . at that moment, I would have liked to have been anyplace [*sic*] in the world except there. We lived on hope, though, and I am sure I still hoped—or believed—the mission would be called off before we left; that we would wait around there until dark and then be sent back.[15]

Lieutenant McClain of the 3/504th felt likewise: "[i]f ever I had wanted to be somewhere else at a given time it would have been then!"[16] Major Julian Cook, the 3/504th commander, "was dumbfounded" when he was told what was expected of his battalion.[17] His operations officer, Captain Henry B. Keep, thought "the odds were very much against us."[18]

Tucker's regiment departed its assembly area at 0730 hours, 20 September, with D Company, 2/504th in the lead. Moving slowly—the company mission was not so much to overcome enemy resistance as it was to probe ahead and find ways around so as not to draw attention to the build up near the river—D Company gained the line of the Waal by noon, cleaned out some snipers and a small group of Germans in the area, set up security, and emplaced its machine guns and mortars in positions from which they could support the river crossing.[19] With their way cleared, the movement of the other two battalions to the crossing site was uneventful, save for the stray artillery or mortar round. Since the

boats had not yet arrived when they reached the site, the 1st and 3rd Battalion troopers waited in some low ground behind a dike that shielded them from observation from the far bank while a large factory obstructed the view of anyone on or near the railroad bridge. Tucker had accomplished the first part of his mission and Gavin had delivered on his promise to Horrocks. Everything now depended on the boats.[20]

Meanwhile, Captain Wesley D. Harris, the C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer commander, went forward with a small reconnaissance party to check the landing site and confirm the tentative plan for the launch. Harris and his party determined that although launching the boats in the Maas-Waal Canal would provide cover for the troopers the swiftness of the current, especially at the point where the waters of the canal met those of the river, would propel the boats so far downstream that once they were on the far bank the assaulting battalions would be spent well before making it to either bridge. He suggested instead that the troopers assemble the boats in their hide position, carry them up and over the dike to their front, and then launch the boats directly onto the Waal. In this manner, though still affected by the current, which Harris estimated to be about eight miles per hour, the boats would not drift as much and the troopers would be closer to their objectives once they reached the far shore. But this meant that the troopers would be launching the boats in full view of the enemy. Both Tucker and Cook accepted Harris's recommendation, trusting that the promised artillery and tank support would provide enough cover to mitigate the risk.[21]

After settling the troopers in the hide position Cook, Keep, and the 3/504th's company commanders climbed a nearby power station in order to get a better view of what lay before them. "Everyone gasped when they saw the width of the river and the lack of protection," remembered Captain Keep, adding that he thought, "[t]his is absolutely impossible—the last evening of our lives."[22] What Keep and the others saw was, in fact, quite frightening. After making landfall on the far shore, the troopers would find themselves on a flat, coverless river plain some 800 yards deep, bounded on the inland side by a dike approximately thirty feet tall behind which they could clearly see German soldiers preparing defenses. Furthermore, northeast of the landfall site, situated between it and the railroad bridge, was the Hof van Holland, a huge 19th-century moated fortress that dominated the entire north shore and at which was located a battery of 20mm antiaircraft guns.[23] Contemplating the terrain over which they would have to fight, Captain T. Moffatt Burriss, the I Company commander, thought "[i]t looked like a suicide mission."[24] To add to their concern, while Cook and his officers were scanning the river they got a glimpse of the resistance they could expect when a flight of transport aircraft bound for Arnhem flew over. "A veritable wall of small arms and flak greeted them from the area north of the Waal," recalled Captain Carl W. Kappel, the H Company commander.[25] In a letter to his mother he wrote sometime after the assault, Captain Keep described the impact that the scene had upon him and his comrades.

> As we wound our way down the twisting stairs of the tower, no one said a word but from ensuing conversations I have learned that all our thoughts were identical. How could this operation succeed. At least ¾'s of the Battalion would be killed and the rest would drift downstream. It was a humanly impossible undertaking. However, it had to be done and quickly:

> the bridge must be taken: the road to Arnheim [the German spelling for Arnhem] must be opened up.[26]

Sometime thereafter Tucker, Lieutenant Colonel Giles A. M. Vandeleur, the commander of the 2nd Irish Guards, Browning, Horrocks, and Gavin arrived at the crossing site as well. Using the power station as a temporary command post they finalized the plan for the assault and supporting fire scheme and set 1500 hours as H-Hour, although this was contingent upon the arrival of the boats, the time for which no one could give for certain. Nevertheless, at 1445 hours a flight of Typhoons, a late but very welcome addition to the list of supporting assets, would bomb and strafe the far bank. Simultaneously artillery and mortars would pepper the immediate area of the landing site with high explosives until H-5 minutes and then switch to smoke between H-5 and H+5. Thereafter, indirect fires would be on call and fired only at the express request of forward observers to ensure against fratricide. Adding to the indirect fire support would be direct fire from Vandeleur's tanks, some twenty-four in all, which were to line the near shore and fire at any targets they could clearly identify. They were also to use their smoke shells as they saw fit to cover any gaps in the artillery smoke screen. Vandeleur told his tankers "that we knew it [the far shore] was heavily defended, but that we had nothing in detail about the defenses. I remember telling them also what one American company commander, I believe, told me: 'Just keep firing. If you're too close we'll let you know by firing one of our Verey lights.' "[27] The observant Colonel Chatterton was also present at the final planning conference. As he listened to Gavin outline the plan of attack, he was struck by the differences among the men assembled there. " 'one [British] brigadier wore suede shoes and sat on a shooting stick,' " he recalled, while three other Guards' officers present, " 'had on rather worn corduroy trousers, chukka boots and old school scarves.' " Chatterton contrasted them to Tucker, who " 'was wearing a helmet that almost covered his face. His pistol was in a holster under his left arm, and he had a knife strapped to his thigh.' " Furthermore, continued Chatteron, " 'Tucker occasionally removed his cigar long enough to spit and every time he did faint looks of surprise flickered over the faces of the Guards' officers.' "[28]

Cook's plan for the attack on the far bank was simple, predicated on speed and aggressiveness, and focused on one overriding concern—to take the bridges. Given the number of boats that had been promised there was room for only two companies to cross in the first wave. For this dubious honor, Cook selected Kappel's H Company and Burriss's I Company. Attacking on the right, H Company was to hit the far shore and strike out immediately for Hof van Holland. After neutralizing the enemy guns at Hof van Holland, H Company was to move on the highway bridge. Attacking on the left, I Company was to charge the dike, wipe out the resistance there, take up defensive positions to protect against counterattacks from the north, and capture of the north end of the railroad bridge. The remainder of the battalion, G Company and Headquarters troops, would cross in the second wave and follow H Company's route, reinforcing as necessary. Once all of 3/504th was across, 1/504th would follow and take up positions to defend against counterattacks from the north.[29]

"There was practically no talking while we waited to cross the river," recalled Captain Keep.[30] According to Lieutenant Megellas of H Company, "[a]s we waited for the boats to arrive, some of the men gathered in small groups; others did what a combat soldier

does when waiting: take off his pack, assume the prone position, and catch a few winks."[31] Horrocks noticed this as well. " 'My God look at 'em,' " he exclaimed to Tucker. " 'They make an assault river crossing in a very short time. They'll get killed or wounded and face intense fire but here they lay some of 'em fast asleep! . . . What wonderful troops.' "[32] Many of the troopers were, in fact, resigned to their fate. The 504th's chaplain, Delbert Kuehl, recognized this and decided to go over with the first wave, " 'thinking to myself that if there ever was a time that the men may need a chaplain it was now.' "[33] Megellas asked his good friend and fellow H Company platoon leader, Richard 'Rivers' LaRiviere, "to contact my mother if he survived and I did not. His request to me was similar."[34] Megellas also recalled hearing the moans of another friend, Lieutenant Edward T. 'Polack' Wisniewski, a D Company platoon leader, who had been wounded while leading a patrol to clear the area in advance of the rest of the regiment. "We tried to get some medics out there," remembered Lieutenant Hanz Karl Druener, another D Company platoon leader, "but every time they moved, the Germans would either hit one of them or they couldn't make it out there."[35] "Hearing of his fate and his patrol had a chilling effect on us," wrote Megellas, "but it prepared us for the worst."[36] Wisniewski eventually died of his wounds, bleeding out before anyone could get to him.

The boats finally arrived at about 1440 hours, twenty minutes before H-Hour. Each was nineteen feet long, blunt on both ends (much like a jon boat) and constructed of green canvas sides and reinforced plywood bottoms. The sides folded like an accordion and, once extended, were held in place by wooden struts. When erect there was thirty inches from floor to gunwale. Each boat weighted 300-400 pounds and was allotted eight paddles, although not all the boats had this many. Thirty-three boats had been promised but one of the trucks bringing them forward had been hit by artillery and destroyed. The engineers had already broken the battalions down into boat loads, assuming approximately ten men per boat (the rated carrying capacity), including two to three engineers per boat. When only twenty-six boats arrived the loads were hastily rearranged, resulting in loads of as many as sixteen to eighteen troopers.[37]

As they hurriedly unloaded and assembled the boats and saw the state of the flotilla that was to take them across a river under enemy fire, the troopers reacted with grim humor and resignation. " 'Where are the Boy Scouts to go with these toys?' " quipped one trooper. " 'You mean I'm trusting my life to that thing?' " asked another.[38] As he watched his platoon assemble its boats, Lieutenant Megellas thought back on his days of fishing the lakes of Wisconsin.

> The boat I was accustomed to was only a few feet shorter than these boats but was sturdy, wooden, and seaworthy and had a gas-powered outboard motor. Only three people could fish out of it; four was somewhat crowded and five or more made it overcrowded. Yet here we were, thirteen paratroopers with our individual weapons, crew-served weapons, ammunition, and packs, along with two engineers . . . preparing to squeeze into a nineteen-foot canvas boat propelled by an armful of paddles. . . . I wondered if we could stay afloat even without enemy resistance.[39]

To further add to the troopers' consternation there were no life vests or flotation devices. But every man would go, regardless of his ability to swim; it was thought that, weighted

down with so much equipment, there was little chance of survival anyway if someone were to fall overboard.

The arrival of the boats and the attendant activity involved in unloading and assembling them eventually attracted the attention of the enemy, who started targeting the area with sporadic artillery fire. The fire did little damage beyond adding to the fear and confusion felt throughout the ranks as the troopers queued up, waiting for the signal to go. First, however, they had to await the pre-assault softening up of the far shore. At 1445 hours, right on schedule, the Typhoons appeared overhead, dropped their loads, and strafed the far bank. Simultaneously the howitzers, mortars, and tanks opened up. The troopers of D Company, 2/504th added their machine gun, mortar, and automatic rifle fire to the mix as well, firing so furiously in support of their comrades that they burned out several barrels.[40] Finally, at 1500 hours, Major Cook raised a whistle to his lips and blew.

On Cook's signal the troopers grabbed their boats by the gunwales, hoisted them on their shoulders, and set out for the riverbank some 150 yards away. It was hardly an exercise in precision. "The boats were heavy and clumsy and it was a hot day," recalled Lieutenant Holabird. "There was the usual groaning and grumbling and slipping and everybody snapping at everybody else."[41] Moreover, with all the ammunition, equipment, and weaponry piled inside the weight of the boats had about doubled and getting to the riverbank meant first carrying the boats through loose sand up the near side of the dike and then down the far side through ankle-deep mud. A wire fence about halfway down the far side of the dike further slowed progress as the troopers, boats still shouldered, waited patiently near the few gaps in the wire for their turn to pass through. Despite the difficulties, however, everything seemed to be going well at first. "We must have caught the Krauts by surprise," wrote Captain Keep, "because for the first 100 yds there wasn't a round fired from the enemy side of the river."[42]

Then, as Colonel Tucker, Captain Keep, and Lieutenant Megellas described it, "all hell broke loose." "They opened up with everything they had," continued Megellas.

> [S]mall arms, machine guns, 20mm flak wagons, mortars, and artillery. As we frantically scurried for the river's edge, chaos and confusion reign. With shells exploding all around us, we kept charging forward. At that point we were all driven by instinct and running on adrenaline with but a single purpose: to get our boats in the water and across the river.[43]

For Megellas's commander, Captain Kappel, it was "a scene of mass confusion."[44] In the rush to get underway several boats got stuck in the shallow water and mud at the river's edge when the troopers boarded too quickly and bottomed them out. They then had to scramble out, push the boats farther out into the river where it was deeper, and then attempt to clamber back aboard. In the process several troopers lost their footing and had to swim back to shore. Captain Kappel dove in after one H Company trooper, a non-swimmer, who he spotted foundering in the swift current. After helping the trooper back to shallow water, Kappel rushed to get into another boat (his assigned boat having continued across without him) and made it over with the first wave, without a weapon or combat harness, both of which he had discarded before jumping in. "I think he [Kappel] was just about the bravest man that ever was," said Sergeant Albert A. Tarbell, who

witnessed his commander's life-saving feat.[45] Captain Keep recalled that by the time his boatload got to the river,

> the situation was horrible. The automatic and flat trajectory fire had increased and the artillery was deadly. Men were falling right and left. In everyone's ears was the constant roar of bursting artillery shells, the dull wham of a 20mm, or the disconcerting ping of rifle fire.[46]

Watching from the power station, Browning turned to Tucker and said, " 'what magnificent troopers to move forward like that. Any nation should be proud of 'em.' "[47] "Finally, God only knows how," wrote Captain Burriss, "we got everybody on boats and started paddling across the river."[48]

The sand, mud, and wire on the near bank as well as the confusion at the water's edge upset the timing of the attack, especially as it related to the smoke screen being laid on the far shore. "By the time they got the boats in the water and were starting across," remembered Colonel Vandeleur, "holes began to appear in the smoke."[49] In fact, so thin had the smoke screen become by the time the boats were underway that many troopers reported afterwards that there was virtually nothing shielding them from enemy observation. Chaplain Kuehl wrote " '[b]y the time we reached the riverbank with the boats, the smoke was gone.' "[50] Captain Keep thought the smoke screen "completely ineffective."[51] Captain Burriss recalled that when he got to the riverbank, "[t]he wind had already blown away the smoke, and our position was completely exposed."[52] Vandeleur tried to rectify the situation by having his tanks fire all the smoke they had.

> Normally, we would have about 15 rounds per tank. I don't know what we had that day, but I do know that not only was it not as effective as that laid down by the big guns, there was not enough of it. By the time the airborne troops were about halfway across, huge gaps had begun to appear and the Germans were beginning to shoot them up. We had kept our smoke going for about 10 minutes before it ran out.[53]

Out on the water the boats were sitting ducks. Small arms and machine gun fire and 20mm and 88mm shells churned the water around them. By far the most deadly and concentrated volume of fire came from the railroad bridge, an excellent vantage point from which to take the makeshift flotilla in enfilade (the next day Private Joseph A. Dickson of the engineers counted thirty-four machine guns, two 20mm guns, and one 88mm gun on that one bridge alone).[54] Lieutenant Patrick Mulloy, a veteran of the Italian Campaign, likened the fire to " 'the worst we ever took at Anzio.' "[55] Sergeant Tarbell wrote that "[i]t looked like it was raining from the way the bullets were hitting the water."[56] The same metaphor came to Captain Burriss's mind as well: "the surface of the water looked like it was in the middle of a sudden rainstorm, the sky actually hailing bullets."[57] Private First Class Everett S. Trefetheren likened the effect to " 'a school of mackerel on the feed' "[58]

"Lead was flying at us from all directions," recalled Lieutenant Megellas, opening "gaping holes in the canvas sides." Those not paddling "were frantically trying to keep their boats afloat, bailing with their helmets."[59] Chaplain Kuehl, in Cook's boat,

remembered the man sitting next to him getting hit in the head by a 20mm shell. " 'The top of his head was sheared off and you could see inside his skull.' " Kuehl also recalled hearing the devout Cook chanting in a loud voice, "Hail, Mary, full of grace. Hail, Mary, full of grace" over and over. Paddling nearby, Kuehl timed his strokes with "Lord, thy will be done. Lord, thy will be done."[60] Watching from the power station, Vandeleur remembered "almost trying to will them on faster. It was obvious they were inexperienced in handling assault boats, which are not the easiest of things to maneuver even in the best of conditions."[61] Doubtless one of the boats Vandeleur spied was Staff Sergeant Clark H. Fuller's. According to Fuller, "[t]here were only two oars, and in the excitement the men on the oars worked against each other, resulting in our boat going around in circles." Finally Sergeant Tarbell, also in Fuller's boat, yelled at the oarsmen to get them to pull together. "I was so scared I almost felt paralyzed," thought Fuller, thankful that someone had taken charge to get the boat headed in the right direction.[62] Captain Burriss was in another boat that, for a time, also circled aimlessly in the middle of the river. The engineer in the stern had been hit by a 20mm shell and when the upper half of his torso fell into the water it acted as a rudder, forcing the boat into a constant turn. Burriss disentangled the engineer's lifeless legs from the impedimenta piled in the boat, pushed the corpse overboard, and then watched dumbstruck as "the red blood [streamed] from what was left of his head."[63] Captain Keep, who had rowed competitively in college,

> had a rather incongruous vision—of our coxswain at Princeton on Lake Carnegie pounding rhythmically on the sides of the flimsy shell and of our rowing in unison pulling to the time of his beats. And so I started to count 1, 2, 3, 4 and then repeat. All at once for no apparent reason I found myself yelling 9 in a stentorian voice. Feeling rather silly I stopped; anyway I was out of breath.[64]

It took anywhere from fifteen to twenty-five minutes for the boats to cross the river, although to Chaplain Kuehl " 'it seemed like ages.' "[65] Along the way over half the boats were either sunk or so riddled with holes that they were abandoned on the north shore. Likewise personnel casualties were heavy and although no one is quite certain how many of the approximately 300 troopers in the initial assault were lost, the 3/504th's casualties for the day were twenty-eight killed, one missing, and seventy-eight wounded, while C Company, 307th Engineers (the company assigned to man the boats for the crossing) lost eight killed and twenty-six wounded.[66] Lieutenant Megellas lost half his platoon in mid-stream when the boat carrying it capsized and sank after an enemy shell exploded nearby. He recalled looking on helplessly as thirteen paratroopers and two engineers "splashed frantically to keep from submerging or being swept downstream. There was nothing we could do to help them; the strong current made it impossible to maneuver our boat toward them, and there were no other boats near enough to provide aid."[67]

Due mostly to the strong current, but abetted by the confusion and chaos that gripped the frantically rowing troopers, the boats made landfall on the north bank some 300 to 500 yards farther downstream than anticipated. "We climbed over the wounded and dead in the bottom of the boat and up to our knees in water waded to shore where behind a small embankment we flopped down gasping for breath, safe for the moment from the

incessant firing," wrote Captain Keep.[68] Captain Kappel did not wait for his boat to beach before exiting. With only three men in the boat still capable of paddling, about thirty yards from shore Kappel once again jumped overboard and pushed his boat in the rest of the way. "The boat was half-filled with water," he recalled. "Most of it was blood."[69] The troopers in Lieutenant Ernest Patrick Murphy's boat exited their boat early as well, although not of their own accord; they were thrown overboard about twenty yards from the shore when a shell exploded nearby and capsized their craft. After scrambling ashore Murphy counted his men and found that he could account for all save one: Private Joseph Jedlicka. When, in searching for Jedlicka, Murphy looked back toward the water his eyes fastened on a strange disturbance in the water. Nearby, Major Cook saw the same thing.

> I was just getting ready to get out of my boat when I saw a bubble of air come up out of the water. I hesitated a moment and looked further. I saw [a] 'bulge' in the water & kept on looking as I saw it move to the shore. My sensation was one of confusion by this thing in the water. Rapidly, the 'bulge' emerged from the water—all ashen gray just the color of the disturbed water.[70]

Carrying a BAR and two cans of ammunition Jedlicka, who could not swim anyway, used the weight as ballast to keep him on the bottom as he calmly walked and crawled to shore.[71]

Once ashore the troopers sought whatever cover they could find to catch their breath, gather their nerves, and prepare themselves for the assault inland. Many were so overcome with fear and exhaustion that they vomited. Two intrepid souls, however, remained near the water's edge, fully exposed to enemy fire: Lieutenant Hyman D. Shapiro, the 3/504th's assistant medical officer and Chaplain Kuehl, who assisted Shapiro in his ministrations. Moving from boat to boat the duo performed what first aid they could, administered morphine where needed, and trundled the seriously wounded into the remaining boats for transport back to the south shore. And though their actions on the deadly beachhead were subsequently engraved forever in the memories of all those who survived that day, both men downplayed their contributions.[72] According to Shapiro

> [t]he role of a parachute doctor was basically a first aid man. What impressed me was that we might not really do much good as doctors. Our worth, it sometimes seemed, came from just being there, giving moral support. This contribution was our most important role.[73]

Kuehl, who was himself wounded in the process, was likewise dismissive of his actions, remembering instead the heroism of the men with whom he served.

> 'While I was leaning over a trooper who had three bullet holes in his stomach, a mortar shell exploded behind me. I was hit by shrapnel, which hit my back, knocking me down. Despite being seriously wounded, the man cried out: "Chaplain, they got you, too?" That was the kind of men we had.'[74]

All semblance of unit organization had been lost in the maelstrom of the crossing. Nevertheless, the surviving troopers assembled in small groups around their officers and sergeants, cleared their weapons, gathered their ammunition, and steeled themselves for the assault against the dike embankment some 800 yards away. Moreover, their blood was up. Gripped by a vestigial passion to wreak havoc and exact revenge, they were transformed from helpless, hapless sailors into rampaging soldiers of destruction.

> When we finally got to the opposite shore, [wrote Sergeant Fuller,] I experienced a feeling I never felt before. All fear of the past 15 or 20 minutes that it took for the crossing seemed to leave me, to be replaced by a surge of reckless abandon that threw caution to the winds. I felt as though I could lick the whole German Army if they [*sic*] were in front of me at that moment.[75]

When Captain Burriss gave the order to charge, "[w]ithout hesitation, every single man, including several who were wounded, jumped from the embankment and started running forward and firing furiously at the machine guns on the back side of the dike."[76] "It was kill or be killed," remembered Lieutenant Megellas. "Men driven by rage were cursing the Germans as they charged forward, running low and firing their weapons as they advanced."[77] Hyperbole aside, Captain Keep described eloquently what he saw that day on the north bank of the Waal River.

> Many times I have seen troops who are driven to a fever pitch—troops who for a brief interval of combat are lifted out of themselves—fanatics rendered crazy by rage and the lust for killing—men who forget temporarily the meaning of fear. It is then that the great military feats of history occur which are commemorated so gloriously in our text books. It is an awe-inspiring sight but not a pretty one. However, I had never witnessed this human metamorphosis so acutely displayed as on this day. The men were beside themselves. They continued to plow across that field in spite of all the Kraut could do, cursing savagely, their guns spitting fire.[78]

Pretty it was not. Abandoning even the hint of tactical finesse the troopers charged en masse across the open ground toward the dike, anxious to come to grips with the German defenders on the other side. They were in no mind to offer quarter. Along the way they overran German outposts on the river plain and bayoneted their occupants mercilessly.[79] Once at the dike they counted their numbers, caught their breath, and resumed their charge up and over the embankment into the midst of the entrenched enemy on the other side. The troopers with Captain Burriss tossed grenades in advance of their assault. "The earth underneath us trembled with the almost simultaneous explosions," he recalled. "Then, there was a moment of silence in front, followed by the screams of wounded Krauts." Some of the Germans defending behind the dike stood in their holes and offered their surrender. It was too late. "Our men, in a frenzy over the wholesale slaughter of their buddies, continued to fire until every German on the dike lay dead or dying."[80]

Captain Kappel's troopers were likewise gripped by bloodlust. In response to some chiding by a fellow officer whose company had crossed in a subsequent wave (and therefore after the fight at the dike) about the relatively few prisoners H Company had taken during the day, Kappel replied " '[y]ou captured yours. We shot ours.' "[81]

All along the dike the 3/504th troopers charged up and over "[w]ithout hesitation, . . . yelling and cursing, not giving the Germans a chance to regroup."[82] The attack then devolved into a series of small-unit clashes as groups of anywhere from five to twenty paratroopers, led by junior officers and sergeants, set out to "hunt Germans." "The Germans had blown their opportunity to stop us when they had us in their crosshairs on the Waal," wrote Megellas. Once over the dike, he continued, "[w]e were no longer sitting ducks but moving targets coming at them."[83] Many troopers took to the enemy trenches, clearing their way with grenades and automatic rifle and machine gun fire. Enemy machine gun and heavy weapons positions attracted other troopers looking to exact some measure of revenge. By about 1545 hours, having carved out a secure area north of the dike, the troopers started moving eastward toward the bridges.[84] But before they could do so they first had to reduce Hof van Holland which, despite the Typhoon attack and the steady rain of Allied artillery, was still spewing fire from the four 20mm guns and countless machine guns protected within.

An ancient, moat encircled fort, Hof van Holland "resembled an inverted bowl, with sides sloping at about a forty-five-degree incline from the edge of the moat to the top of the fort, a distance of about fifty feet. The sloping sides were earthen and sodded. There was a parapet ringing the top from where the Germans had been firing at us."[85] The first to reach the fort were eleven H Company troopers led by Lieutenant Megellas, who came at it from the north. They knew nothing about the layout of the fort or about the size the German garrison inside. What they did know was that it was their task to take the fort and silence its guns; guns that had subjected them to such devastating fire during the crossing and which, if not reduced, would severely impede if not halt altogether the drive on the bridges. With apparently no thought about the relative imbalance of combat power—it was eleven paratroopers against some greater number of Germans armed with machine guns and 20mm cannon—Megellas and his troopers assaulted. First, they drove the German crews from their guns on the parapet with small arms fire. Once this had been accomplished one of Megellas's squad leaders. Sergeant Leroy Richmond, pulled off his harness and gear, ran forward, and jumped into the moat. Swimming underwater the entire way, Richmond gained the fort's wall and crawled up its inclined face to take a look inside. Since the German defenders had retreated to the bunkers inside the fort, Richmond was able to take a good look around, after which he rushed back down the incline, swam back across the moat, and reported that the only way to get into Hof van Holland (without getting wet) was by a drawbridge on the opposite side. Circling to the south side of the fort, Megellas sent two troopers across the drawbridge while the rest provided cover. When the two scouts entered the arched gateway to the fort German snipers drove them back out. The two then lobbed hand grenades and Gammon grenades through the archway while Megellas led the rest of his group across the drawbridge and up the sloped sides of Hof van Holland. Having secured the fort's parapet and silenced the 20mm guns Megellas could see that the only threat the Germans inside posed was to anyone in the fort's inner courtyard. As long as they stayed there, he reasoned, he could take his group on toward the bridges and leave the mopping up of Hof van Holland to the

1/504th following behind. So Megellas set up a machine gun crew at the head of the drawbridge to dissuade those inside from coming out (by that time friendly artillery had started to fall inside the fort as well, apparently at no bidding from Megellas, and this contributed to convincing the Germans to remain in their bunkers) and left with the rest of his troopers to join those making their way to the bridges.[86]

Several hundred yards east of Hof van Holland was a raised embankment, running due north and south, atop which were the railroad tracks that emanated from the north end of the railroad bridge. Many of the German defenders who had been thrown out of their primary fighting positions around the beachhead had retreated back to this string of high ground where they joined with other of their comrades in setting up hasty positions along its length. By holding the line of the embankment, the Germans could not only foil the drive on the bridges, they would also isolate the American beachhead, buy time for reinforcements to arrive, and then use the embankment as a line of departure for an eventual counterattack. From the American perspective then, it was imperative that the embankment line be breached.

Several of the first groups of paratroopers to reach the embankment tried to fight their way through several narrow underpasses but were repulsed by German machine guns sited to fire down their length. Others tried to charge up and over the embankment but they, too, met with withering return fire. Eventually, holding positions on either side of the embankment, separated by but a few yards, the two sides exchanged grenades and periodic rifle shots. Sergeant Theodore Finkbeiner described the fight at the embankment as an exercise in “jack-in-the-box shooting” as paratroopers on one side and Germans on the other intermittently popped up, fired a few rounds, and then quickly ducked for cover.[87]

Inexplicably, the weakest point of the German defensive line along the embankment was at its juncture with the railroad bridge. The first to reach that juncture were five troopers under the command of Lieutenant LaRiviere of H Company. By using the cover provided by a series of ditches running parallel to the river, LaRiviere and his troopers were able to get all the way to the railroad bridge without being detected. LaRiviere and his men then stormed its northern end, killing fourteen Germans and taking another twenty prisoner. After searching the area for wires, LaRiviere set his men in a defensive position astride the railroad tracks where they emerged from the bridge in full expectation that it would not be long before they were counterattacked. By that time it was about 1700 hours; the first of the 3/504th’s primary missions had been accomplished.[88]

Fortunately for LaRiviere and his troopers their ranks soon swelled as fellow paratroopers, in groups large and small, began filtering into the area. Most arrived from the north. After hitting the railroad embankment and seeing that it was too heavily defended to overcome, they simply turned south and followed it to the bridge (in this manner the Germans’ use of the embankment as an obstacle behind which to mount a defensive stand backfired; instead the embankment provided flank cover for scores of paratroopers who used it as a handrail for their trek to the bridge). Lieutenant Edward J. Sims, another H Company platoon leader, was one of the first to arrive, followed shortly by Captain Burriss with another twenty troopers in tow. Burriss did not tarry long, however. Once he saw that the railroad bridge had been taken he set off for the highway bridge (LaRiviere joined Burriss, turning over command of the railroad bridge to Sims). And soon after Burriss departed, Major Cook and Captain Kappel arrived with

approximately three platoons of troopers they had collected along the way. Sometime during all this coming and going two squads of troopers mounted an assault on a concrete and steel fort that had been constructed within a bridge abutment, and at the cost of one paratrooper wounded they killed several of the enemy, took twelve to fourteen more Germans prisoner, and secured a critical strongpoint.[89]

At 1740 hours, Major Cook sent a message back to the regimental command post, his first since the start of the river crossing (Cook lost all his communications during the crossing and did not have access to a radio until he linked up with Captain Kappel's group near the railroad embankment). As recorded in the regimental combat journal, Cook's message was "[h]ave guns and Dyke, Request Tanks to move across the bridge to help them out." Five minutes later Lieutenant Colonel Warren Williams, the regimental executive officer, radioed back "your request is being carried out" (by that time Tucker was also on the north bank of the river, having crossed over with the lead elements of the 1/504th).[90] But despite Williams' assurance, no tanks came. Instead, there emerged from the smoke and haze that blanketed the area—the result of the Germans having once again set fire to whole city blocks to aid them in their defense—some 200-300 stormtroopers hell bent on escaping Nijmegen, apparently unaware that their route was barred by American paratroopers. According to Lieutenant Sims, " '[w]e let them come within range and then opened fire.' "[91] With two captured German machine guns the paratroopers had sighted to fire down the long axis of the bridge Sims's troopers rent the enemy formation. Kappel had taken up position inside the recently captured strongpoint and threw Gammon grenades into the mass of enemy soldiers as fast as they could be passed to him. " 'At the time, my men and I were tense and angry because of the strenuous fighting and loss of many of our own men during the crossing,' " recalled Sims. " 'We had little concern about destroying the large enemy force opposing us.' "[92] After beating back the attack, Captain Kappel offered the survivors some mercy. Enlisting a German prisoner who understood English, Kappel ordered him to move to the middle of the bridge to try to convince those of his countrymen who were still alive to surrender. When he did so his comrades shot him down. At that paratroopers opened up again to finish the job. Quite a few Germans attempted to escape the carnage by leaping over the side (Kappel had to order his troopers to stop trying to shoot them in midair in order to conserve ammunition). When the firing stopped, some 267 Germans lay dead on the bridge. Scores more were wounded.[93]

While Cook, Kappel, and Sims were directing the defense of the railroad bridge Burriss and LaRiviere led their scratch group of approximately twenty troopers toward the highway bridge. They had not gone far before they began taking heavy machine gun fire from German forces on the south bank that had been alerted to the presence of paratroopers in their rear as a result of the fight on the railroad bridge. The fire split the paratroop column but Burriss and LaRiviere, both with the lead echelon, continued to press on to their objective despite their depleted ranks and the fact that they were then completely cut off from friendly troops.

Clustered around the northern terminus of the Nijmegen highway bridge was a sizeable suburb; once inside the small band with Burriss and LaRiviere slowed almost to a crawl. Attacking through a city is time-consuming business, even when one has the luxury of numbers. Without such luxury, the two paratroop officers led their men through the streets cautiously in a deadly game of hide-and-seek, hoping to preserve as

much combat power as they could for what they were sure would be a major fight once they reached their objective. But with scores of enemy soldiers traversing the area contact was inevitable. While clearing one house, Burriss stumbled upon a squad of Germans who were inexplicably sleeping.

> I stepped on the porch of the first house and opened the door. More than a dozen German soldiers were sleeping on the floor. One of them, a grizzled veteran, rolled over, opened one eye, saw me, and grabbed for his rifle. When he did, I tossed a Gammon grenade in the middle of the sleeping pile and dived off the porch. . . . The ensuing blast blew out the windows and the door. . . . There were no survivors.[94]

At another juncture the troopers ambushed a German automobile filled with negotiable Dutch guilders. "All of us grabbed handfuls of bills, stuffed them in our pockets and shirts, and continued toward the bridge," recalled Burriss.[95] Twice they found their way barred by deadly 88mm antiaircraft gun emplacements. In both instances they knocked out the guns without losing a man. Finally, two hours after starting out, the small band reached the highway bridge (by that time those troopers with whom they had lost contact had found an alternate route to the bridge and joined them). It was 1900 hours.[96]

Although the troopers with Burris and LaRiviere could clearly hear the sounds of battle raging near the highway bridge's southern exit and see in the faltering light that large segments of Nijmegen had been set ablaze, the area around the northern exit was strangely quiet and seemingly deserted. When Burriss and LaRiviere ascended a concrete stairway leading up to the bridge's elevated roadway they encountered but a lone German sentry who "was so surprised to see us that he dropped his rifle, held up his arms, and immediately surrendered."[97] With that the northern end of the highway bridge was in American hands. The next task was to keep it.[98]

Burriss's immediate concern was that the Germans would blow the bridge. Although his troopers had already cut every wire they could find there was no way to tell if any of the wires were, in fact, the ones that led to the demolition charges. With such a small force at his disposal and no information about where the detonating mechanism was located, he could ill afford to disperse his men in what would most likely be a fruitless search. Furthermore, he would need every man he had to defend against a counterattack should one come. The only way, then, to be certain that the bridge was not destroyed was to find the explosives themselves, which it was assumed were located near the center of the span where they could do the most damage, and cut the wires there. This task he assigned to Lieutenant LaRiviere, who in turn selected two or three other troopers to accompany him. Private James Musa was one of the men selected.

> 'The Germans were firing at as from the girders and there were more on the bridge. Some Germans tried to escape the advance of the Allied Forces on the south and ran toward us. We held our fire until they were within close range and then opened fire. Some turned around and started back towards the south end trying to surrender. Other Germans were still holding out in the girders on the bridge. We called for them to come down and surrender. I remember one of our men climbing a girder when an SS

> officer shot him in the chest. We retaliated with a hail of bullets, knocking him out of the girder and into the river below.'[99]

LaRiviere and his men never got to the center of the bridge. It was not, however, the snipers in the girders that stopped them but the looming silhouettes of tanks approaching from the south end. Certain that this was the vanguard of the expected German counterattack, the troopers retreated back to the northern end of the bridge and took cover at the side of the roadway with the rest of their comrades. In the failing light and swirling smoke it was difficult to tell what sort of tanks were approaching but taking no chances as soon as they were within range the troopers let fly with two Gammon grenades. Luckily their aim was off and they missed, for the tanks were British Shermans. When the paratroopers realized this they swarmed the tanks and their crews. According to Burriss, LaRiviere was so overjoyed he climbed aboard the lead tank and gave its commander a kiss. Others kissed and hugged the tanks themselves. The time was 1915 hours.[100]

The tanks, two in number, were from No. 1 Troop, No. 1 Squadron, 2nd Grenadier Guards under the command of Sergeant Peter Robinson. It was Robinson's second attempt of the day to cross the bridge. The first, undertaken at around 1800 hours (the result of an erroneous interpretation of Cook's radio message that he had taken "the bridge," meaning the railroad and not the highway bridge) ran headlong into a fusillade of antitank gun fire from the far bank and had to be abandoned. Twenty minutes later Robinson's squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel Moore, ordered him to make another charge and take the bridge at all cost. Roaring forward with hatches closed and machine guns blazing, Robinson's tankers had not only to brave the same antitank gun fire that had halted their first attempt, they had also to run a gauntlet of *panzerfausts* that were being fired at them from all directions and grenades that were being dropped directly on top of them from German's secreted high above in the bridge's girders. The two trailing tanks were knocked out, all but one of their crew taken prisoner, but Robinson's Sherman and one other got all the way across, literally skidding to a halt past some concrete barricades just shy of the bridge's northern ramp. Immediately Robinson's gunner, Guardsman Leslie Johnson, sighted the troublesome antitank gun and fired, dazing the German crew. And before they could recover Robinson's tank charged the emplacement crushing both men and metal beneath the treads. The two Shermans then continued off the ramp, destroying another antitank gun along the way as well as annihilating a large party of German infantry gathering to counterattack. It was then that they encountered Burriss's group.[101]

Robinson's mad dash was the end result of a renewed attack by Colonel Goulburn's Grenadier Guards and Vandervoort's paratroopers that had earlier cleared the southern approaches to the highway bridge. Launched so as to coincide with the 504th's river crossing, its object was to reduce the stout German defenses arrayed around the Keizer Lodewijk Plein, especially those that had been constructed throughout Hunner Park.

Having fought their way to the edge of the Keizer Lodewijk Plein on 19 September, the troopers of the Goulburn-Vandervoort task force spent the evening of 19-20 September shoring up their hard won positions, sending out reconnaissance patrols to probe for gaps in the German defenses and defending against enemy attempts to do the same. Periodically the boom of a tank or self-propelled main gun would rend the night

but since any muzzle flash attracted an almost immediate response this was kept to a minimum. Mortar and artillery fire exchanges were more frequent, with observers on both sides calling in fire on any suspected or presumed enemy sightings. But since the combatants were dug in in such close proximity this, too, was minimal. Hence most of the night's fighting was between small bands of soldiers that bumped into one another in streets, yards, hallways, and, at times, in the same room. "German patrols . . . tried to enter the houses we occupied," wrote Vandervoot. "They were gunned down through the lace curtained front doors and windows."[102] And despite the glow of burning structures and the almost constant canopy of flares illuminating the area the shadows played tricks on the eyes. One platoon from E Company, 2/505th moved into what was thought to be an abandoned row of foxholes only to discover that the Germans that had dug them were still there. In the ensuing mêlée, during which the weapons of choice were bayonets and trench knives, the paratroopers expelled the occupants only to be exposed, minutes later, to a withering artillery barrage that pinned them in place.[103] In another instance Corporal Earl Boling was in the ground floor of a house bordering the traffic circle when he heard the distinctive sound of hobnailed boots on the pavement outside. Since both the Germans and British wore hobnails, Boling had his men hold their fire until he could clearly ascertain the identity of the approaching forms. The distinctive cut of the helmets told the tale; it was a five-man German patrol headed right at them. In order not to give away his position, Boling had one of his troopers lob a grenade at the approaching enemy. The Germans scattered but three of them ran straight for the window where Boling and Private George Wood were keeping station. Boling dropped two of the three with fire from his automatic rifle but the third kept coming. While attempting to reload, Boling got so nervous that he dropped his spare magazine. Seeing that there was no way he was going to get off another shot, Boling reached for the trench knife in his boot. By that time the German was at the window with his Luger drawn. Before Boling could make his lunge, Private Wood called out " 'I'll get him.' " Using a Berretta semiautomatic pistol he had procured as a souvenir during the Sicily invasion, Wood fired five times point blank in the German's face. "We could see the German's head bounce with each impact," recalled Boling, "but he did not release the window sill and drop until the fifth shot." One of the few remaining original division troopers who had fought in every one of the 82nd's campaigns, Boling felt that that night in Nijmegen was "probably the longest night of the war."[104]

It was a long night for Colonel Goulburn as well. Once his task force had ceased attacking through Nijmegen early in the evening of 19 September, Goulburn returned to his command post. There he learned that, despite the seemingly impregnable German defenses they had run into around the Keizer Lodewijk Plein, the tankers, infantrymen, and paratroopers under his command were to continue the attack the next day. It was his job to figure out how. Accordingly, Goulburn's first order of business was to get a feel for what he had left with which he could mount an attack as well as pinpointing where those remnants were. Having spent the day with the main column attacking toward the highway bridge, Goulburn had a good handle on its dispositions. He did not, however, have any detailed knowledge of the other two subsidiary columns—the railroad bridge force under Captain Neville and Captain Smith; and the small detachment at the post office under Major Thorne—beyond that they were somewhere in the city. Eventually, through the "superhuman efforts" of his communications section, Goulburn was able to

piece together a somewhat coherent picture of the friendly situation. Neville and Smith, he learned, had failed to take the railroad bridge "but had done a lot of destruction amongst the BOSCH and had got safely tucked away for the night in a block of buildings South of the bridge." Given their location and strength, Goulburn felt that they "would be well able to look after themselves" and hence did not require a lot of his attention at the moment.[105] On the other hand Thorne's much smaller force was exposed, although it was still holding at the post office, so Goulburn decided to reinforce it by moving his reserve, No. 4 Company, 1st Grenadier Guards and a troop of self-propelled guns to the post office as well. With that, satisfied that he could at least hold in place for the short term, Goulburn set off for brigade headquarters in search of more specific information about what the morrow was to bring.[106]

When Goulburn arrived at the 5th Guards Armoured Brigade command post, Brigadier Gwatkin filled him in on the plans for the assault river crossing. Lieutenant Colonel Giles Vandeleur's 2nd Irish Guards, said Gwatkin, was to move through the western portion of Nijmegen to the crossing site. To protect Vandeleur's flank, Neville's railroad bridge column was to remain "where it was and so prevent anyone coming out of the town and interfering with this [Vandeleur's] operation." Finally, continued Gwatkin, Goulburn was to renew his attack on the highway bridge with the remainder of his force, cross the bridge, and link up with Tucker's paratroopers on the far side. Although a fairly straightforward plan, just before he left Goulburn overheard a brigade staff officer say that Vandeleur's Irish Guards would not be required at 0800, a remark almost certainly the result of the delays that resulted from the difficulty of getting the boats forward. Goulburn, however, "left with the impression that that operation in the West of the town was postponed and would probably not take place at all." Hence, when Goulburn formulated his plan of attack it was with the thought that the river crossing had been called off and that it would be up to him and Vandervoort alone to take the highway bridge.[107]

Goulburn's first stop was to see Vandervoort. "I wondered if [Vandervoort] would agree to the plan I had in the back of my mind," recalled Goulburn, adding, "[but] I had no cause to worry as he was most anxious to do whatever we thought best." Goulburn explained to his counterpart that based on his personal reconnaissance and reports from the Dutch Underground the Germans were in Nijmegen in some strength. However, it was doubtful that they were strong everywhere. It was obvious, he thought, that the Germans would concentrate their defenses at the approaches to the bridges and given the layout of those defenses, it was evident that the Germans expected the Anglo-Americans to attempt another direct assault. To counter this, Goulburn's intent was to mount his attack on the highway bridge from the west, "but to do this meant moving through a good portion of the town which we did not hold, and about which we knew nothing." Furthermore, since Goulburn was operating under the impression that there would be no Allied attack in the western portion of Nijmegen that day, not only would he have to maneuver his forces into positions from which they could mount such an attack he would also have to secure his western flank. This necessitated a very deliberate and, by definition, a very slow operation.[108]

Goulburn's plan was tricky. Under cover from Vandervoort's troopers, who were still hanging on by their fingernails near the Keizer Lodewijk Plein, Goulburn intended to send three of his mechanized infantry companies, each of which was reinforced by a

troop of tanks, on a wheeling movement through the city streets. No. 4 Company, starting from the post office, would jump off first with the objective of taking up a position to the left of and at an approximate right angle to Vandervoort's positions. Thereafter No. 2 Company would follow and fall in on No. 4's left to be followed by the King's Company, which would fall in on No. 2's left. If all went according to plan Goulburn would have forces to the front of and on the right (western) flank of the Germans defending the highway bridge. Once this was achieved Goulburn would then issue the final order to assault from all points simultaneously, thereby compelling the Germans to defend in two directions at once. "[T]he operation looked none too easy," he recalled, "and I think most of us felt it was scarcely the orthodox role for our very mobile [battalion] and that we might lose a good proportion of it."[109] But it was better than trying another deadly dash across the traffic circle and, if luck held, the enemy would break somewhere. Jump off time was set for 0815 hours, 20 September.[110]

Following some initial confusion about unit boundaries (some of Vandervoort's men were occupying positions in the path of Major Harry F. Stanley's No. 4 Company the result, no doubt, of the paratroopers moving from cover to cover as they attempted to avoid German heavy caliber fire), by mid-afternoon all seemed to be going well. "It really looked as if our plan was going to succeed," wrote Goulburn. "We had cleared a considerable portion of the town with very few casualties and everyone began to get very excited."[111] Before he could give the final assault order, however, Goulburn first had to make some last minute adjustments to his forces. Because rubble from bombed out buildings had closed off several of the narrow streets leading to the traffic circle, Goulburn could not bring all three of his mechanized companies on line as originally planned. He decided, therefore, to divide up No. 2 Company's assets between the King's Company and No. 4 Company. He then directed the King's Company to assault the Valkhof, a large wooded mound that was the highest point in Nijmegen, where there stood the ruins of an ancient citadel and throughout which ran a maze of subterranean tunnels. No. 4 Company he directed toward a group of buildings that separated the Valkhof from Hunner Park.[112]

While the British were moving into position Vandervoort's troopers watched Hunner Park, dodged German artillery and mortar fire, and used bazookas and rifle grenades to hunt and kill some enemy snipers who had used the cover of night to infiltrate behind American lines.[113] The 2/505th's 81mm mortar platoon, dug in in a nearby cemetery—the only place within range of the fight that provided enough clearance to deliver high-angle fire—was the most active of the battalion's elements, trading fire with their German opposites (in two days the platoon fired 1,650 rounds) as well as insults from passing Tommies who "thought the layout was hilarious" and accused their American brethren of being "fornicating Yank grave-robbers."[114] Otherwise, "[t]he atmosphere of the day was like being in the eye of a hurricane. . . . We knew the storm would be back soon but not when."[115] Those who could took advantage of the lull to prepare meals made from locally procured rabbits and vegetables (according to Vandervoort, "[e]very back porch seemed to have a cage of Belgian hares and every house a garden").[116]

Once his armored forces were in place Goulburn visited Vandervoort's command post one last time to get a final look at the objective. All agreed that Hunner Park "was the place [where] the great bridge would be won or lost" and it was straight into the teeth of the German defenses there that the 2/505th was to mount its charge.[117] The area the

paratroopers were to assault was about a quarter-mile deep and not much wider. Once they left the cover of the buildings, there would be little cover or concealment. It was, in the words of one anonymous trooper, " 'a bare-assed prospect' " but there was both little room and no time for elaborate maneuver.[118] Seeing that the Americans too were ready to go Goulburn set 1530 hours as the time for the final assault.[119]

The 2/505th assaulted at the appointed hour with four platoons abreast, two each from E Company and F Company on the right and left respectively, while the remaining platoons from each company and the battalion headquarters element provided covering fire from the rooftops.[120] Defending the park was a hodgepodge of German Army, police, and *Luftwaffe* units stiffened by several hundred storm troopers from the *10th SS Panzer Division* under *SS-Hauptsturmführer* (Captain) Karl Heinz Euling, and supported by four self-propelled guns and several 20mm cannon. Several 88mm antiaircraft guns situated on the opposite bank also added their fire to the German defensive scheme.[121]

As soon as the paratroopers emerged from their hiding positions, the Germans laid down a withering fusillade. Sergeant Spencer F. Wurst, a veteran squad leader in F Company, recalled it being "the hottest, heaviest fire" he had ever encountered. "It appeared to me," Wurst continued, "that I could reach out and grab the bullets as they flew."[122] But the Americans gave as good as they got, advancing with bayonets fixed and firing from the hip.[123] Sergeant Wurst remembered firing, reloading, and firing again so quickly that his rifle barrel overheated and literally boiled the oil residue out of his wooden gun stock.[124] According to Vandervoort "[t]he air in Hun[n]er Park [turned] blue with hand grenade, cannon, rifle and gun-smoke [*sic*] generated by the hundreds of combatants."[125] As was expected of them, the paratroop officers lead from the front. Wurst's platoon leader, Lieutenant Jack Carroll, was wounded by shell fragments while leading his platoon into the assault position. Captain Robert H. Rosen, the F Company Commander, was shot in the face and killed while manning a machine gun atop one of the supporting British tanks. Rosen's replacement, Lieutenant Joseph W. Holcomb, was seriously wounded himself just a few minutes later. Lieutenant John Dodd, at the head of his platoon, was hit in the torso by an exploding 20mm shell, a mortal wound that should have killed him instantly. But Dodd was, in Vandervoort's words, "a hard[-]dying young man," so the platoon medic, "with tears in his eyes, gave his dying lieutenant an overdose of morphine to ease his pain."[126] And in the midst of it all was the ubiquitous Vandervoort, at one point directing covering fire from the rooftops, at another advancing with the assault element to maintain the momentum of the advance. Sergeant Wurst recalled yelling at Vandervoort to get down, but the 2/505th commander ignored him and, in a calm voice, suggested that Wurst see if he could get a nearby tank to move forward and add its fire to the fray.[127] He was the "best battalion commander I ever had," recalled Wurst.[128] Captain Robert 'Doc' Franco, one of the 505th's regimental surgeons, "idolized" Vandervoort. According to Franco, John Wayne, who played Vandervoort in the movie *The Longest Day*, "was a pipsqueak compared to Vandervoort."[129]

The tide began to turn in the Allies' favor once No. 4 Company broke through to the traffic circle and added its considerable firepower to that of the lightly armed paratroopers. Major Stanley had intended for his company to assault a group of buildings that overlooked the park and from there take up firing positions from which to support Vandervoort's attack. But as he described what happened, "[f]rom the first five minutes the fighting did not conform in the slightest to my original plan."[130] Almost as soon as it

jumped off for the assault *panzerfausts* knocked out No. 4 Company's two lead tanks and the supporting infantry was stopped cold by deadly small arms and machine gun fire. Withdrawing his forces back to their start point, Stanley held a quick conference with Goulburn, who was observing nearby. Both men decided that it would be best if the main weight of No. 4 Company's assault were shifted slightly to the right, thereby tying in more closely with the 2/505th. When that was done "[t]he British Shermans," recalled Vandervoort, "gave the troopers the cumulative edge" and "[p]osition by position, the tank/trooper collaboration closed down on Hun[n]er Park."[131]

While No. 4 Company and the 2/505th were sweeping through Hunner Park, the King's Company's attack on the Valkhof was wildly successful. Cutting through a barbed wire fence at an unprotected spot, two King's Company's infantry platoons exploited a hidden alleyway and got into the midst of the German defenders before they knew what hit them. Bitter hand-to-hand fighting ensued during which the British overwhelmed the two SS engineer companies defending "the labyrinth of buildings, trenches, deep shelters and pillboxes which the Fort consisted of."[132] Both sides sustained significant casualties, but eventually the weight of the British attack forced the Germans from their positions, and once atop the Valkhof heights the King's Company brought its firepower to bear on anyone or anything trying to escape across the highway bridge.[133]

Meanwhile, a platoon from No. 4 Company under Lieutenant Adrian Slob fought its way through Hunner Park to a large building at the foot of the Valkhof heights. This was the Haus Robert Janssen, the headquarters strongpoint of *Kampfgruppe Euling*. Since he did not have enough men to systematically clear the building, Slob elected to burn the defenders out. Covering the exits with machine guns, Slob had his men lob phosphorous grenades into the structure. According to German prisoners, approximately 150 Germans were inside when Slob and his men set fire to the structure. Miraculously, some 60 Germans, including *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Euling, were able to escape immolation and eventually make their way to the north bank. With the fall of the Haus Robert Janssen, all German resistance south of the highway bridge collapsed.[134]

It was at this point that Sergeant Peter Robinson's tank platoon made its mad dash across Nijmegen's highway bridge (Euling recalled that he made his decision to quit the Haus Robert Janssen when he saw Robinson's tanks crossing the bridge).[135] Horrocks remembered he "could hardly bear to watch Sergeant Robinson's apparently suicidal advance" expecting "the bridge to be blown sky-high at any moment."[136] Watching from the small town on Lent on the opposite bank was *SS-Standartenführer* (Colonel) Heinz Harmel, the *10th SS* commander who, despite not having the authority to do so ordered the bridge blown before the tanks could get across.[137] Standing in a bunker containing the detonating mechanism, Harmel waited until Robinson's tanks were in the middle of the span before ordering a nearby engineer to detonate the charges. Again and again the engineer depressed the plunger, all to no avail. " 'I was waiting to see the bridge collapse and the tanks plunge into the river,' " recalled Harmel. " 'Instead, they moved forward relentlessly, getting bigger and bigger, closer and closer.' "[138] With little time to spare before the tanks were on him, Harmel left the bunker for his forward command post in Bemmel, just north of Lent, where he rapped out orders to have every available antitank gun and artillery piece assembled on the roads leading north from Nijmegen to Arnhem before the Allies could capitalize on their coup. It was most likely at Bemmel that he was

also informed that the railroad bridge too was in Allied hands.[139] " '[T]ell Bittrich,' " reported Harmel during a terse call to *II SS Panzer Corps* headquarters, " '[t]hey're over the Waal.' "[140]

No one has satisfactorily resolved the mystery surrounding the failure of the Nijmegen highway bridge to blow. Harmel offhandedly posited that the cables were " 'probably' " cut by artillery fire.[141] T. Moffatt Burriss was convinced that the bridge was saved by the quick work of his small band of paratroopers at the northern end of the bridge.

> As soon as Rivers [Lieutenant LaRiviere] and I reached the bridge, we instructed every man to search and cut every wire he could find. I am firmly convinced that the wires we cut were the demolition wires. Until reading [Cornelius] Ryan's book [*A Bridge Too Far*], it never occurred to me there was any mystery about the wires. To me, it was part of the mission and I thought nothing about it.[142]

But perhaps the most persistent explanation is that the Nijmegen highway bridge was saved through the heroic efforts of the 22-year-old student-turned-spy Jan van Hoof. According to this version of events, the original source of which was most likely a local newspaper story published in July 1945, sometime on 18 September van Hoof, an active member of the Dutch Underground who was fully cognizant of the strategic importance of the Nijmegen highway bridge, sneaked on to the span itself and cut the cables connecting the explosive charges to the detonation device, which was located in a nearby bunker. As proof of this claim, two pieces of evidence were cited. The first was the comment—" '[t]he bridge is safe' "—van Hoof was said to have made to his sister later on that evening. The second was the discovery by his parents of a set of insulated pliers in the overalls van Hoof had been wearing that day. Unfortunately, van Hoof himself could not corroborate the story since he was killed the next day while acting as guide for some British engineers who were making their way to the post office.[143]

The van Hoof story gained official sanction in September 1945 when a stone relief depicting him cutting wires was unveiled at one of the northern bridge piers. Furthermore, in July 1946 he was posthumously awarded the Dutch military's highest award, the Militaire Willemsorde. Without gainsaying van Hoof's heroism many remained skeptical of the tale and as a result the Dutch government commissioned a board of inquiry to look into the affair. Following a two-year investigation (1949-1951) the board concluded that though there is a chance that van Hoof did cut some wires on 18 September, it is also probable that the Germans discovered the break and repaired the sabotage. No alternative explanation as to why the bridge did not blow was offered.[144]

Anton Timmers, a Jesuit priest and Nijmegen historian has disputed the board's tepid findings and has offered perhaps the best explanation of why the bridge remained intact. Through a detailed analysis of van Hoof's whereabouts on 18 September, Timmers demonstrated that there were only two hours during that day (1300-1500 hours) that cannot be accounted for and during this time, because of the heavy fighting that was occurring south of the bridge, the fact that the bridge itself was heavily guarded, and the fact that time-distance calculations make it virtually impossible for van Hoof to have gotten to and from the bridge in the allotted two hours, there was no way that van Hoof could have sneaked on to the bridge and cut any wires. Furthermore, had he cut the

wires, Timmers contends that he would surely have reported this to Arie Bestebreurtje, Gavin's Dutch aide and the de facto head of the Dutch Underground, when van Hoof reported to him at the Sionshof on 19 September (just prior to the Vandervoort-Goulburn task force making its first push into Nijmegen). According to Timmers, who interviewed others who were present at the Sionshof, van Hoof "was urged to tell all he knew about the bridge" and "did so without reserve," pointing out on a map all the details of the bridge and the position of the demolition charges. But he said nothing about having cut any wires and, in fact, confirmed the erroneous information about the detonator being housed in the post office.[145] "That he could have remained silent on the subject [of having cut the wires] was out of the question and he knew moreover that it was an offense by the Underground code to withold [*sic*] information on such a critical issue."[146] In an interview after the war, Arie Bestebreurtje confirmed having met van Hoof at the Sionshof. According to Bestebreurtje, van Hoof was " 'very young,' " " 'very nervous' " and " 'highly excited,' " so excited that Bestebreurtje " 'did not think he was the right kind of person to guide troops into the city.' " Still, Bestebreurtje acquiesced and reluctantly agreed to allow van Hoof to accompany a British scout car. But Bestebreurtje would not say that van Hoof saved the bridge, although he felt that no one knew the real truth. That the van Hoof story had gained so much traction he attributed to officials at the Catholic university the youth attended before his death, and named them as the agents principally responsible for generating and perpetuating the story.[147]

So what did happen? According to Timmers, who came about his evidence through interviews with several persons, both German and Dutch, who had knowledge of the means by which the highway bridge was to be destroyed, the Germans had contrived a very cumbersome method of rendering the bridge unusable. Instead of wiring the center span with permanently emplaced explosives, they assembled some 1,000 kilograms of explosives in blocks of various shapes and sizes and stored them in a bunker near the northern part of the bridge (most likely this was not the same bunker in which Harmel was standing when he issued his order to blow the bridge; had it been so Harmel most assuredly would have seen the explosives and known, no matter how many times the detonating plunger was depressed, nothing would happen). In order to prepare the bridge for demolition, the charges first had to be carried from the bunker to a designated location on the span where they would then be laid both on the road surface and on some scaffolding beneath the bridge and the individual detonating fuses connected to a master detonating wire. German Army engineers, stationed nearby, were primarily responsible for this mission (as well as the mission to destroy many of the bridges in the area) but as a fallback an ad hoc force of conscripted German nationals living in Nijmegen was trained to back them up and rehearsed the procedures several times "in order to learn how to set [the charges] in the shortest possible time."[148]

The scaffolding charges were emplaced below the bridge eight days prior to the Allied landings (8 September 1944). This was a precautionary move, enacted at a time when the German forces in Holland were still in the midst of a full-scale retreat. However, since plans were already well in train to stem the rearward tide and stabilize the front well south of Nijmegen, the highway bridge had to remain clear of obstacles so that reinforcements could be rushed forward. Hence, the roadbed charges, along with the fuses required to link all the explosives together, remained in the ammunition bunker (it should be noted that in order to achieve the desired effect, the scaffolding and roadbed

charges had to be detonated simultaneously, otherwise the bridge would be damaged, but not rendered impassable).[149]

In the confusion following the Allied landings the German Army engineers primarily responsible for destroying the highway bridge were cut off from Nijmegen, leaving the task of completing the preparations necessary to destroy the bridge to the force of conscripts. But local German officers, concerned with other missions, seconded most of the conscripts to other duties. However, two of the conscripts familiar with the procedures for destroying the bridge did make it to the storage bunker but by evening of 17 September they had abandoned their post and "withdrew from the service."[150] Hence, no one with any knowledge of how to prepare the bridge for destruction was present during the critical days of 19 and 20 September and, it appears, no one else took the initiative to ensure that the charges were properly emplaced and prepared for detonation. That the bridge was not so prepared was substantiated by numerous refugees who fled the fighting in Nijmegen by crossing over the bridge, none of whom could recall seeing any demolition charges. Furthermore, Timmers cites evidence from a Dutch policeman who was familiar with the manner by which the Germans planned to render the bridge impassable who stated categorically that the bridge was not prepared for demolition on 20 September.[151] And finally, according to Lieutenant Tony Jones, a British engineer officer who followed Robinson's tanks across the bridge in his light reconnaissance car and immediately set about looking for demolition charges, only the scaffolding charges were in place.[152]

So who saved the bridge? Timmers has concluded that "the fact that the bridge fell undamaged into Allied hands is attributable primarily to the courage and intrepidity of the paratroopers of the 504th U.S. Parachute Regiment."[153] But it was not because the paratroopers cut the wires. Rather, it was the daring of their river crossing and the ferocity of their subsequent attack that spelled success. So surprised were the Germans that they were unable to recover; consequently their defenses fell apart and by the time they realized what had happened it was too late to do anything other than retreat and the final preparations to blow the highway bridge remained undone.

Writing after the war Vandervoort characterized the fight for the south end of the Nijmegen highway bridge as a "gladiatorial test of wills," a characterization apropos for the battle on both sides of the Waal River on 20 September 1944. "No quarter combat became the order of the day," he continued.

> The fighting was so close individual Germans were either too brave or too scared to surrender. Probably both. The Germans seemed indifferent to death. The paratroopers retaliated with ice[-]cold ruthlessness.[154]

In the aftermath of the battle each side accused the other of vicious brutality. *Oberstleutnant* Fullriede interviewed German survivors of the fighting on both sides of the river and later recorded his impressions in his journal: " '[t]he Americans behaved as they always do, throwing our wounded from the bridge into the Waal, and shooting the few prisoners among the army reservists.' "[155] An *SS-Hauptsturmführer* (Captain) Schwappacher, who commanded the German contingent defending the high dike that Cook's 3/504th troopers assaulted recalled seeing " '[s]hameful mutilations [that] had been committed against the wounded.' "[156] On the other side of the ledger, Vandervoort

recalled seeing a "crazed Kraut [charge] from a deep air-raid shelter to knife a paratroop aide man tending a wounded German."[157] Lieutenant Peter G. A. Prescott, a tank platoon commander in Major Stanley's No. 4 Company, wrote of another instance during which the Germans ignored the protection afforded by the red cross. According to Prescott, an American medic who was attempting to render aid to one of his wounded Guardsmen was under heavy, though fortunately inaccurate, rifle fire the entire time and escaped only after a smoke screen was laid down for him.[158] And Sergeant Finkbeiner, a member of Cook's battalion, remembered an incident during which the Germans violated another supposedly sacrosanct symbol—a white flag of surrender—to lure Americans from behind cover only to open fire once the would-be captors showed themselves.[159] But such accounting is far from being an attempt to ascertain the relative chivalry of either side. Rather, it is a testament to the ferocity of the fight that day, a fight during which both sides bled profusely. Although no accurate casualty figures exist, the official U.S. Army history puts total losses for the two battalions from the 504th that crossed the Waal and Vandervoort's battalion in Nijmegen at around 200.[160] Goulburn put British casualties at just under 100.[161] German casualties must have been significantly higher. In addition to the 267 Germans killed at the railroad bridge, several hundred more bodies were found in the small area south of the highway bridge alone (according to 82nd intelligence reports, there were some 500 German defenders in the vicinity of Hunner Park; only sixty were left alive at the conclusion of the fighting).[162] And no one knows how many Germans Cook's rampaging troopers or the troopers from the 1/504th who followed them across the river killed.[163]

Bill Downs, a CBS war correspondent who witnessed the river crossing described what he saw in terms reminiscent of romantic histories of bygone eras. It was, he wrote,

> '[a] single isolated battle that ranks in magnificence and courage with Guam, Tarawa, Omaha Beach. A story that should be told to the blowing of bugles and the beating of drums for the men whose bravery made the capture of this crossing over the Waal . . . [p]ossible.'[164]

Lieutenant General Horrocks, too, was awed by the sight, and in his memoirs labeled the river assault "one of the finest attacks ever carried out during [World War II]."[165] As for the Nijmegen fight as a whole Horrocks wrote "I don't believe that any other troops in the world could possibly have fought better than the Guards and the 82nd U.S. Airborne Division when they captured the bridges at Nijmegen."[166] And although justifiably proud of the performance put in by his Guardsmen, in private Horrocks was clear about who he felt truly carried the day. In a letter to Gavin not meant for public consumption ("[p]lease treat this in confidence," he wrote) Horrocks was much more open in his assessment of the battle.

> As I think you know, I always regarded your Division (the 82nd) as the best I ever came across in the last war. All your men were tough individuals and very quick into battle—far quicker than was the case with our troops.[167]

Horrocks was not alone in his opinion of the fighting qualities of the 82nd Airborne Division. Shortly after the highway bridge had been secured 'Doc' Franco was in the 2/505th command post when in walked General Browning. Franco witnessed Browning seize Vandervoort by the hand and declare, " '[c]ongratulations, Colonel, you've shown me the best infantry I've ever seen.' "[168] And when Lieutenant General Sir Miles C. Dempsey, the British Second Army commander, visited the 82nd command post a few days later he greeted Gavin with the statement: " 'I'm proud to meet the Commanding General of the finest division in the world today.' "[169]

Hyperbole aside, it is hard to argue with the observations of Downs, Horrocks, and Dempsey. In one of the hardest fought battles of the war the troopers of the 82nd Airborne Division proved their mettle. And were it the only battle in which the division ever fought, it would suffice to secure for it a significant place in the annals of the U.S. Army. But, as has already been shown, it was not the division's only battle. Even more astonishingly it was not even the only battle in which the 82nd was engaged that day.

Chapter Nineteen Notes

[1] Gavin to Ryan, 13 July 1973.

[2] Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Engineer Situation Report From 181800 Sept to 191800 Sept 1944," 19 September 1944, Box "82nd Airborne Divisions—WWII—307th Eng. Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports," Folder "307th Abn Eng Bn Reports Sept – Nov 44," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC. Interestingly, the next day B Company engineers did find fifteen boats at various places along the Maas-Waal Canal, but by then it was too late to use them. See Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Engineer Situation Report From 191800 Sept to 201800 Sept 1944," 20 September 1944, Box "82nd Airborne Divisions—WWII—307th Eng. Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports," Folder "307th Abn Eng Bn Reports Sept – Nov 44," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.

[3] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 171. See also Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[4] See various entries on 19 September 1944 in Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team, Unit Journal and Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[5] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 171. In his memoirs, Horrocks maintained that it was he and Browning who first thought of the idea of a river crossing. "We suggested to Gavin that there was only one solution—to cross the River Waal by assault boats just west of the town, while maintaining the pressure on the road bridge, and thus to capture first the railway bridge and secondly the road bridge from the rear. It is to Jim Gavin's eternal credit that he agreed at once to this apparently suicidal river crossing in the flimsy British assault boats which the U.S. troops had never even seen, let alone handled, in the swiftly running river." Horrocks, Belfield, and Essame, *Corps Commander,* 111. The evidence suggests, however, that it was Gavin who had the idea. The fact that he sent his engineers out looking for boats along the Maas-Waal Canal well before the meeting at the schoolhouse underscores this.

[6] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 171-172 and Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 490.

[7] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 170.

[8] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 178 and Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 489-490.

[9] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 171.

[10] Ibid., 172.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[13] See also James M. Gavin to Hugo V. Olson, 18 April 1968, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 17, OU and various entries for 19 September 1944 in Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team, Unit Journal.

[14] Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[15] Holabird, interview, 27 February 1969.

[16] McClain questionnaire.

[17] Julian Cook, interview by Cornelius Ryan, 25 February 1968, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 17, OU.

[18] Henry B. Keep interview by Frederick Kelly, 5 December 1967, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 2, OU.

[19] Entry for 20 September 1944 from Chester Garrison, "Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion 504th Parachute Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division [Holland]," Unmarked box, Folder ""'*S-1 Journal—Holland (2/504th)," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC; Combat Interview "Major Edward N. Wellems, CO 2d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[20] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 490; Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-26 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "1st Battalion, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[21] Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Report of Action, 307 A/B Engr Bn (less 'A' and H&S Cos),' 25 September 1944, Box "82nd Airborne Division—WWII—307th Eng. Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports," Folder "307 Eng History Sep to Nov 44," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC; Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[22] Keep, interview, 5 December 1967.

[23] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 490; Cook, interview, 25 February 1968; Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[24] T. Moffatt Burriss, interview, 11 December 1967, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 14, OU.

[25] Kappel, "The Operations of H," 25.

[26] Henry B. Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 2, OU.

[27] Giles A. M. Vandeleur, interview, 10 August 1967, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 2, OU.

[28] Chatterton quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 432-433. In his book Ryan places this meeting as having occurred earlier but that could not have been correct. The only time Gavin, Tucker, Browning, and Horrocks were present at the same place and time was at the power station right before the assault was launched.

[29] See Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 116; Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; Combat Interview "1st Battalion, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[30] Keep, interview, 5 December 1967.

[31] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 114.

[32] Horrocks quoted in Reuben H. Tucker, untitled manuscript on Waal River crossing, n.d., The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 23, OU. See also Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[33] Kuehl quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 114.

[34] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 114.

[35] Hanz Karl Druener, interview, 5 March 1968, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 21, OU.

[36] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 115.

[37] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 491 and "Operation Market," p. bridges 62.

[38] Quoted in Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 112.

[39] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 116.

[40] Combat Interview "Major Edward N. Wellems, CO 2d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; "Operation Market," p. bridges 63; Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[41] Holabird, interview, 27 February 1968.

[42] Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944.

[43] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 117. See also Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944 and Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[44] Carl W. Kappel, interview by Frederick Kelly, 27 February 1968, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 1, OU.

[45] Albert A. Tarbell, interview, 27 February 1968, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 21, OU.

[46] Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944.

[47] Browning quoted in Tucker, untitled manuscript on Waal River crossing.

[48] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 113. See also Kappel, "The Operations of H," 28 and "Operation Market," pp. bridges 65-66.

[49] Giles Vandeleur, interview, 10 August 1967.

[50] Kuehl quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 216.

[51] Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944.

[52] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 112-113.

[53] Giles Vandeleur, interview, 10 August 1967.

[54] "Operation Market," p. bridges 66.

[55] Mulloy quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 462.

[56] Tarbell questionnaire.

[57] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 113.

[58] Trefetheren quoted in Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[59] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 123.

[60] Kuehl in O'Donnelll, *Beyond Valor*, 217. As Cook remembered he, too, was using the prayer to time his strokes. "Being a Catholic I began to pray 'Hail Mary' (one stroke) 'Full of Grace' (2nd stroke) but since 'the Lord is with thee' is too long I kept repeating 'Hail Mary' one stroke 'full of grace' on the next stroke." See Julian Aaron Cook questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 17, OU.

[61] Giles Vandeleur, interview, 10 August 1967.

[62] Clark H. Fuller questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 25, OU.

[63] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 114.

[64] Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944.

[65] Kuehl quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 217. See also "Operation Market," pp. bridges 66.

[66] See Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 491; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 71; Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Report of Action, 307 A/B Engr Bn (less 'A' and 'H&S' Cos),' 25 September 1944, Box "82nd Airborne Division—WWII—307th Eng. Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports," Folder "307 Eng History Sep to Nov 44," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC. According to some accounts thirteen boats were lost during the initial crossing attempt and another two were sunk as the engineers ferried them back across the river to pick up the second wave. The engineer report, however, probably the most reliable of the sources, stated that only ten boats returned to the south shore after taking the first wave over.

[67] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 123.

[68] Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944.

[69] Kappel, interview, 27 February 1968.

[70] Cook questionnaire.

[71] For the Jedlicka story see also Ernest Patrick Murphy questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 11, OU and "Operation Market," pp. bridges 66.

[72] See for example Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 115 and Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 124.

[73] Hyman D. Shapiro, interview by Frederick Kelly, 10 March 1968, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 106, Folder 52, OU.

[74] Kuehl quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 217.

[75] Fuller questionnaire.

[76] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 114.

[77] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 125.

[78] Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944.

[79] Kuehl in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 217.

[80] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 115.

[81] Kappel, interview, 27 February 1968. The carnage did not stop with the troopers in the first wave. Corporal Jack Louis Bommer of the 504th's Headquarters Company crossed with the second wave and recalled "[s]urrenders—I saw few of, there was not time. I did see old German men grab our M-1s and beg for mercy—they were shot point blank. Such is war." See Jack Louis Bommer questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 12, OU.

[82] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 127.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Entry for 1545 hours, 20 September 1944 in Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team, Unit Journal and entry for 1545 hours, 20 September 1944 in Headquarters, Third Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry, Unit Journal, "Holland Campaign, 17 Sept. 1944 – 15 Nov. 1944," The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 1, OU.

[85] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 128.

[86] See Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 129-130; Combat Interview "Company H, 504th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div." n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-16 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 69-70; Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[87] Theodore Finkbeiner to Heather Chapman, 12 March 1968, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 24, OU. Finkbeiner was almost killed when he tried to peek over the embankment. When he did so, he found himself peering into the working end of an enemy machine gun. Fortunately, Finkbeiner's reflexes were fast, but only barely for when he ducked the muzzle blast from the machine gun knocked the wool cap he was wearing off his head.

[88] See Combat Interview "Company H, 504th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div."; "Operation Market," p. bridges 70; Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[89] See Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 120-121; Combat Interview "Company H, 504th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div."; "Operation Market," p. bridges 70; Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; Kappel, "The Operations of H," 32-33.

[90] Entries for 1740 and 1745 hours, 20 September 1944 in Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry Combat Team, Unit Journal.

[91] Sims quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 132.

[92] Sims quoted in ibid.

[93] See also Kappel, "The Operations of H," 32-34; Tarbell, interview, 27 February 1968; McClain questionnaire.

[94] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 121.

[95] Ibid., 122.

[96] See also "Operation Market," pp. bridges 72-73; Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; Richard G. La Riviere, Michael Kogut, and Irwin Soper, group interview, 23 March 1968, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 7, OU.

[97] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 122.

[98] See also "Operation Market," pp. bridges 72-73; Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[99] Musa quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 134.

[100] Breuer, *Geronimo*, 358; Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 122-123; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 500; La Riviere, Kogut, and Soper, interview, 23 March 1968; "Operation Market," p. bridges 73; T. Moffatt Burriss to James M. Gavin, 8 February 1979, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Letters to and from 82nd Vets on airborne operations in Holland, September, 1944," USAMHI.

[101] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 500-503 and Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 10. Later on in the evening Lance-Sergeant 'Rocky' Knight, commander of one of the two tanks that had been knocked out during the bridge crossing and the only crewmember of those two tanks not to have been taken prisoner—having been wounded and left for dead by the Germans—recovered. Finding one of the two tanks in working order (it had been hit by a *panzerfaust* but had not caught fire), Knight climbed aboard and drove it to join Robinson at the far end. Once there, he obtained a crew of paratroopers and spent the remainder of the night defending the shallow bridgehead. See Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 503.

[102] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 9.

[103] Memorandum, Company "E" 505th Infantry, 12 October 1944, "Attack of the Nijmegen Bridge," reproduced in Jacobus, *Echoes of the Warrior*, 349-351.

[104] Boling questionnaire.

[105] Captain Neville was not as sanguine about his position. After evacuating his wounded, Neville placed his three remaining tanks in locations from which they could defend against the likely avenues of approach and then placed his infantry in buildings from which they could defend the tanks. He then approached Captain Smith with a request to do the same. " 'The American commander, who was otherwise a most-cooperative man,' " wrote Neville, " 'refused at this stage to have anything to do with sentries on the grounds that his men need "a good night's sleep." Despite some forceful words from me, he remained adamant. To protect themselves against surprise attack, their so-called "sentries" slept behind the doors, so that any intruder would have to wake them up before getting in. My own expectation was that we would be rushed during the night; and at frequent intervals we could hear the Germans moving around us.' " Neville quoted in Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 362.

[106] Except where noted see Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 5. Capitalization in original.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid., 6.

[109] Ibid.

[110] See also Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 496 and H. F. Stanley, "One Aspect of the Battle of Nijmegen Bridge, Tues – Wed 19/20 Sep 1944," n.d., p. 2, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 17, OU.

[111] Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 7.

[112] See Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 7; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 496; Stanley, "One Aspect of the Battle of Nijmegen Bridge," 3; and Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 141.

[113] Meddaugh and Appleby, "Attack on the Nijmegen Bridge" and Recollection of Earl Boling in Jacobus, *Echoes of the Warrior*, 134-139.

[114] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 11. See also Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 495.

[115] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 10.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid., 11.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 8.

[120] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 11 and Langdon, *"Ready,"* 99.

[121] Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 99 and 139-141.

[122] Spencer F. Wurst, "Against All Possible Fire," *World War II* 19, no. 5 (September 2004): 30.

[123] Meddaugh and Appleby, "Attack on the Nijmegen Bridge."

[124] Wurst, "Against All Possible Fire," 30.

[125] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 12.

[126] Ibid. See also Langdon, *"Ready,"* 99 and Wurst, "Against All Possible Fire," 28.

[127] Wurst, "Against All Possible Fire," 31 and Coyle in Wills, *Put on Your Boots and Parachutes*, 145.

[128] Spencer F. Wurst, interview by the author, 12 September 2004.

[129] Robert Franco, interview by the author, 13 September 2004.

[130] Stanley, "One Aspect of the Battle of Nijmegen Bridge," 3.

[131] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 13. See also Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 498 and Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 8-9.

[132] Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 9.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Stanley, "One Aspect of the Battle of Nijmegen Bridge," 4; Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 140-141 and 201; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 499.

[135] Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 201.

[136] Horrocks, Belfield, and Essame, *Corps Commander*, 117.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Harmel quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 473.

[139] Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 473-474 and Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 215.

[140] Harmel quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, 474.

[141] Harmel quoted in Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 201.

[142] Burris to Gavin, 8 February 1979.

[143] According to reports, van Hoof was sitting atop a halftrack when it was ambushed and set afire. Wounded, though not seriously, van Hoof tried to limp away from the wreckage but was overtaken by a group of Germans who came running up with guns drawn. When asked who he was, van Hoof declared himself a " 'Dutchman, Free Netherlands.' " He was then searched but, finding nothing of any importance besides his wallet, the Germans beat him prostrate. They then shot him. Van Hoof's body was found just 300 yards from the bridge he was reputed to have saved. See Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 363 and Anton Timmers, "The Battle for the Waalbridge at Nijmegen," 13 March 1949, pp. 10 and 12-13, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 17, OU.

[144] See Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 363 and Timmers, "The Battle for the Waalbridge," 10.

[145] Timmers, "The Battle for the Waalbridge," 12.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Bestebreurtje interview, 28-30 November 1966.

[148] Timmers, "The Battle for the Waalbridge," 5 and 15-16.

[149] Ibid., 18.

[150] Ibid., 20.

[151] Ibid., 20-21.

[152] See Jones's statement in Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 505-506.

[153] Timmers, "The Battle for the Waalbridge," 22.

[154] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 12.

[155] Fullriede quoted in Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 212.

[156] Schwappacher quoted in ibid.

[157] Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 14. In his memoir, John McKenzie related a very similar incident that occurred sometime later in the campaign. According to McKenzie, a German paratroop major who had been taken prisoner was being treated for some slight wounds when he pulled a knife and killed the attending doctor. He was then shot and killed by four nearby troopers. "This and similar incidents made the fighting between the 82d and the SS paratroopers [*sic*] a no-holds-barred, to-the-death struggle. Shooting helpless prisoners was against the rules of war and most soldiers considered it reprehensible. Nevertheless, after the doctor died, both sides began to kill prisoners without mercy. After two weeks of this pointless killing, both sides informally stopped it." See McKenzie, *On Time On Target*, 75.

[158] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 497.

[159] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 131.

[160] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 182.

[161] Goulburn, "Battle of Nijmegen," 14.

[162] See Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 194 and Vandervoort, "Nijmegen Bridge," 14.

[163] Once the bridges were secured and the fighting had momentarily died down, the Allies set about mopping up and consolidating their gains. This lasted well into the night. During this time, in spite of the ferocity of the battle just concluded (and counter to German assertions to the contrary), several hundred German prisoners were taken. For example, while they were checking the bridge for explosives, Lieutenant Tony Jones's sappers took eighty-one Germans prisoner, all of whom were hiding in various compartments on the bridge itself. Later on that night, Private Fred Toenjost, a 3/504th trooper who spoke excellent German, convinced another 115 Germans hiding in the bottom lands to give up. And while mopping up the area south of the railroad bridge, a thirteen-man patrol from F Company, 2/504th picked up another 217 prisoners. See Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, vol. 2, 506; Virgil F. Carmichael questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 16, OU; and Combat Interview "Major Edward N. Wellems, CO 2d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[164] Downs quoted in Dawson, *Saga of the All American*, n.p.

[165] Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 219.

[166] Ibid., 231.

[167] Brian Horrocks to James M. Gavin, 3 August 1975, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 2, Folder 2, OU. Interestingly, engaging in a bit of counter-factual history, Horrocks also stated "Finally, I do hope that whoever makes this film [*A Bridge Too Far*, based on Cornelius Ryan's book of the same name] about Arnhem will be careful, because there is still a lot of bitterness about this particular operation, and one doesn't want to hurt the relatives of people who were killed if this can be avoided. I will not be critical, but I know very well that if the 82nd had been given the role of the 1st British Airborne Division, the Battle would have been won, and we should have got our bridgehead over the Rhine at Arnhem."

[168] Franco questionnaire.

[169] Dempsey quoted in Gavin, *On to Berlin*, 185.

Chapter Twenty
Even the Gods Were Weeping

. . . I don't think there was another day like it in the war.
James M. Gavin[1]

At 1330 hours, 20 September, Gavin was sitting with his back to a tree behind the power station where Tucker's 504th was mustered. Around him were the sights, sounds, and smells of battle. Periodically the air was rent with an explosion, the product of German harassing artillery fire. Still, he remained outwardly calm. As he revealed years later, however, this calm belied a deep concern. Tucker was preparing to make an assault "that should have required at least a division in any Command and General Staff School exercise" but was doing it with only two battalions.[2] One of Gavin's maxims was to never give his troopers "missions that are beyond the possibility of their achievement," and although he had demanded much of them in the past, an assault river crossing, during daylight, into the teeth of well prepared enemy defenses was something he could not possibly have imagined.[3] Yet it had to be done. Two battalions were all he could spare. There was no time to wait for reinforcements. He had already done everything in his power to prepare for the assault; it was now but a matter of waiting for the boats to arrive. He wanted to be there when the troopers shoved off. He needed to be there when they shoved off, both for himself and his men.[4]

But it was not to be.

There was an urgent call from Lieutenant Colonel Bob Wienecke, the division Chief of Staff. Wienecke was frantic. He had been trying to get through to Gavin for twenty or thirty minutes (the call had come in over the radio on Gavin's jeep, which was apparently parked some distance away; when Sergeant Walker E. Wood, Gavin's orderly, finally answered, Wienecke was so upset that he upbraided Walker and told him to never leave the radio again). Wienecke's news was bad. A massive German attack had hit the eastern and southern sides of the division perimeter. The key towns of Beek and Mook had been overrun and Lindquist (at Beek) and Ekman (at Mook) were barely holding on. The Groesbeek Heights, the key terrain in the area (and the location of the 82nd's command post) was in danger of falling to the Germans. With Groesbeek in hand, the Germans would command the surrounding lowlands. According to Gavin, "[w]hat Wienecke, in effect, said was that if I were going to have any Division Command Post left, I better get back and straighten the thing out."[5] Furthermore, the attack from the south, through the 505th's sector, threatened the Heumen Bridge, the only trafficable bridge over the Maas-Waal Canal. Were it to be captured or destroyed the lifeline of the British and American troops in Nijmegen would be severed.[6]

"I had to make a difficult decision right then," Gavin later wrote.

Notes for this chapter are found on pages 557 through 565.

> Since the river crossing was going to be extremely difficult, I should have stayed; on the other hand, Tucker was a very competent battle commander and I knew there was a real likelihood of losing Mook and the only bridge over the Maas-Waal Canal at [Heumen] and also losing Beek and the high ground at Berg-en-Dal. There seemed to be no question that my proper place was back where the decisive fighting was then taking place.[7]

With that Gavin, along with Wood and his aide, Captain Hugo Olson, jumped in the jeep and sped back to the division command post. He did not tarry long. According to Wienecke, Gavin "came into the C.P.—was briefed on the situation; called Lindquist—gave him his 'company' [most likely H Company, 3/508th] held by Div[ision] and said, in effect—'O.K. now kick 'em out'—called Ekman, said—I'll meet you at—(I don't remember where) I am <u>not</u> repeat <u>not</u> giving you the Div[ision] Reserve—And off he went."[8] Gavin then sped off to Mook, "which seemed to be the more dangerous situation," again with Wood and Olson in tow (along with a trooper named Landrum, who was driving).[9]

This second German attack from the Reichswald was much larger than that launched on 18 September. It was also much more stalwart for in the interim hundreds of paratroopers from *General der Fallschirmtruppen* Eugen Meindl's *II Parachute Corps* had arrived, as Model had promised, to reinforce the hodge-podge of units that comprised *Corps Feldt*, the unit that the 82nd so savagely repulsed two days before. Although the German goal was the same—drive the Americans from the high ground at Groesbeek—with Meindl's reinforcements the scope of the attack was enlarged into a concentric attack from four directions—north, northeast, southeast, and south.[10]

Attacking from the north and northeast respectively were *Kampfgruppen Becker* and *von Fürstenberg*. The former, under Major Karl-Heinz Becker, comprised some 700 paratroopers, remnants of the *3rd Parachute Division*, reinforced with five assault guns. The latter, under *Hauptmann* (Captain) Frieherr von Fürstenberg, numbered 500 men from a tank replacement and training unit and had with it armored reconnaissance vehicles, half-tracks, and light antitank guns. These two formations hit the towns of Wyler and Beek in the 508th sector. Attacking from the southeast directly against the Groesbeek Heights was *Kampfgruppe Greschick*, commanded by a major of the same name who had with him 400-500 regular infantry along with fourteen 20mm cannon. Finally, attacking from the south was *Kampfgruppe Herrmann* under *Obertsleutnant* (Lieutenant Colonel) Harry Herrmann. *Kampfgruppe Herrmann* had been formed from the remnants of the *5th Parachute Division*. Numbering some 500-600 paratroopers, it was reinforced with 88mm and 20mm cannon as well as a battery of parachute artillery. Backing up the entire front were the remnants of *Corps Feldt*, which had at its disposal tanks and assault guns that it fed into the battle at various stages. Unlike the dispersed, sweeping attack on the 18th against the glider landing zones this attack was concentrated in narrow corridors and focused on very specific objectives. In so doing, the Germans achieved overwhelming local superiority—nowhere did the attackers encounter anything larger than two under-strength platoons—which was the inevitable the result of the 505th (which had only two of its battalions, Vandervoort's being engaged in the fight in Nijmegen) and 508th covering a front roughly fourteen-miles in length.[11]

After he left the division command post Gavin's first stop was at a railroad overpass approximately 700 yards northwest of Mook. A paved two-lane road passed under the railroad and ran right toward the Heumen Bridge, which was only 2,000 yards farther north. The only defenders at the pass were either one or two 505th troopers (accounts vary) dug in by the side of the road about twenty-five yards north (on the Heumen side) of the overpass, a lone British tank on the south (Mook) side of the overpass, and a string of antitank mines that had been laid across the road right beneath the railroad. When Gavin's party arrived it was evident that Mook had already been overrun. "The small arms fire was intense," he recalled. "Leaves, branches of trees and bits of masonry were flying about from the impacts. A cow walked up on the bank of the river 50 yards to the right of the overpass and shuddered and slowly went down under the impact of many hits."[12] Perhaps sensing that he was about to be engaged himself the British tank commander started to withdraw, but while backing through the underpass hit a mine that blew off one of the tracks. The crew was unharmed but was in no mood for a fight so they dismounted and fled to the rear. Since he could find no one else in the area, Gavin posted Sergeant Wood and Captain Olson at separate positions on the railroad embankment with orders "to fire at the oncoming Germans as fast as [they] could."[13] Given the seriousness of the situation, Gavin also countermanded his own order ("I am <u>not</u> repeat <u>not</u> giving you the Div[ision] Reserve") and sent his driver back to the division reserve area to retrieve a battalion from the Coldstream Guards (the 1st and 5th Battalions, Coldstream Guards had been attached to the 82nd the day before; the former was an armor battalion, the latter an infantry battalion). Finally, he somehow also managed to get word to Ekman, although the 505th commander was well apprised of the situation and had already set plans in motion to take Mook back.[14]

Ekman must have had an inkling that something was afoot in his sector (the south and southeastern portions of the division's perimeter) even before the attack on the morning of 20 September. Ever since his troopers had taken Riethorst and Mook on the 17th and 18th respectively there had been no let up of German activity in the area and it seemed to be increasing every day. For example, on 19 September his two B Company platoons at Mook woke up to discover that the town they had secured the day before was again infested with Germans, a group of about 50-60 having infiltrated into their midst during the night. A fierce firefight ensued during which thirty-five of the enemy were captured and the remainder killed or driven out. Meanwhile, southeast of Mook, the troopers of Second Platoon, B Company and First Platoon, C Company near Riethorst had been exchanging artillery and mortar fire with various German contingents traversing their front ever since they had taken the position. On 19 September they reported "troops in groups of 30 or 40 . . . observed 600 yards south of Riethorst moving toward Mook. . . . Some of the troops were towing guns."[15] When Ekman went forward to get a look for himself, he observed "500 German foot troops . . . moving toward RIETHORST," a sure sign that a counterattack was in the offing. That night German reconnaissance patrols probed both Riethorst and Mook.[16] But with miles of front to cover and only two battalions with which to do it, Ekman could do little more than wait for the Germans to reveal their hand.[17]

The German counterattack in the 505th sector began in earnest at about 0900 hours, 20 September, when artillery fire started dropping on a hill just north of Riethorst where the two American platoons defending the position had set a defensive perimeter because the

village itself having become untenable. The shelling continued intermittently for about three hours during which the troopers observed several German tanks and a fairly large contingent of infantry moving all around them. At one juncture they spotted two enemy tanks followed by about a company of German infantry (actually German paratroopers from *Kampfgruppe Herrmann*) moving through a wood south of their position. A forward observer from the 456th waited for the formation to clear the wood and then called in artillery fire that knocked out one of the tanks and killed or scattered the accompanying infantry. This action must have convinced the Germans that they could not simply bombard and bypass the troopers' hilltop bastion; that if they were to have unhindered passage to the north they would have to dislodge the American paratroopers and deny them use of the hill as an observation platform. At approximately 1430 hours, therefore, they launched a direct assault on the hill itself. A company of German paratroopers, preceded by a tank (reports state this was a Mark V tank, although there is some confusion about this since the caliber of the main gun was reported to be 75mm; Mark V tanks had 88mm main guns) hit the east side of the American hill. In the initial push they overran two American outposts and under covering fire from the tank assaulted up the slope of the hill. Sometime later at least two other tanks appeared on the scene and added their fire to attack. Since they had nothing with which they could respond to the tank fire the 505th troopers concentrated on the approaching infantry. They rolled grenades down the hill to break up attack after attack and when that was not enough they called in artillery and mortar fire on their own positions. Eventually a stalemate developed wherein the Germans controlled the slopes of the hill while the troopers, now completely surrounded, refused to quit its summit.[18]

Meanwhile, while containing the threat from the 505th troopers on the hill north of Riethorst, *Kampfgruppe Herrmann* moved on Mook, then being defended by First and Third Platoons of B Company, 1/505th. Mortar, artillery, and *nebelwerfer* shells started falling on Mook at about 1100 hours and shortly thereafter several tanks appeared and added their fire to the mix. At around 1400 hours, German paratroopers in battalion strength advanced on the town from the southeast. Lieutenant William J. 'Buck' Riordan and eleven troopers were manning a combat outpost with two 57mm antitank guns and two light machine guns, but were unable to stem the German advance; six of Riordan's troopers were taken prisoner while he and five others took refuge in the cellars of some nearby buildings and spent the remainder of the fight sniping as best they could at the Germans above. By 1500 hours, *Kampfgruppe Herrmann* had retaken Mook. Its stay was to be short.[19]

Ekman knew that if the Germans were allowed to consolidate their position at Mook they could easily move from there to Heumen Bridge. He had already alerted his regimental reserve, A Company, 1/505th, with orders to move toward the area. He had also contacted the Coldstream Guards and requested tank support (apparently independent of Gavin's request and in direct contravention of Gavin's earlier statement about not releasing the division reserve).[20] Meanwhile, Major Talton Long, the 1/505th commander, rallied the remnants of B Company outside the town and readied them for a counterattack. The regimental S-3 journal reflected the precariousness of the situation: "6 Sherman tanks to contact 1st Bn. Plenty trouble at MOOK. Regt'l res[erve] has been committed."[21] But because of Ekman's initiative, within forty-five minutes of losing the town a tank-infantry task force was preparing to take it back; Long's B Company

troopers had linked up with the Shermans under Lieutenant J. H. T. Sutton from No. 3 Squadron, 1st (Armored) Battalion, Coldstream Guards and A Company was nearby (A Company was delayed in its arrival because its commander, Lieutenant Dolan, and two platoon leaders, Lieutenants Mike Chester and George Presnell, were wounded when their jeep ran over a mine as they were rushing forward to check out the situation; Dolan was out for the rest of the war while Chester and Presnell returned to duty within a month's time). Working in tandem, the British tanks and American paratroopers moved into the city. The fighting was house-to-house. By 1900 hours the Allies were once again in possession of Mook. But Ekman kept pressing southward toward the two platoons of beleaguered American paratroopers on their hilltop bastion outside Riethorst. He did not get there that night—he had to stop the advance because his counterattack force had run out of ammunition—but he renewed the advance the next day and got there. The fighting had been fierce. Ekman lost twenty dead, fifty-four wounded, and seven missing in the fight for Mook alone. The two platoons at Riethorst lost a further thirteen dead and twenty-two wounded. German casualties are unknown. What is known, however, is that the stand at Riethorst and counterattack at Mook broke the back of the German attack from the south and neither Mook, Riethorst nor, more importantly, the Heumen Bridge was ever in danger again.[22]

The situation at Mook was "nip and tuck" according to Ekman.[23] In fact, so bad were things in the 505th sector that 200-300 glider pilots who were bivouacked near Groesbeek awaiting transport to the rear were used to form a secondary defensive line near Mook. Though woefully under-equipped—most had no compasses, maps, or firearms larger than a pistol—they took up their positions and remained in place until 23 September. Ekman did not consider them "an effective reserve for use in counter attacking [*sic*] due to lack of organization," but were the situation at Mook to deteriorate drastically he admitted that he would have used them "as a last resort."[24]

Elsewhere in the 505th sector the 3/505th confronted what was most likely *Kampfgruppe Greschick* advancing on the Groesbeek Heights. Since he had such a long front to defend on terrain not well suited for it Major Kaiser, the 3/505th commander, established a string of strongpoints and outposts at key locations. Shortly after the attack commenced two of these outposts were overrun but drawing on internal reserves and supporting fire from the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, the 3/505th regained its positions by noon (on 20 September alone the 456th fired 789 rounds in support of the 505th and proudly reported in its after action report "505th officers at the front expressed their satisfaction with the results of our firing on the enemy counter-attacks, flak wagons, mortars, tanks and OPs").[25]

Gavin's appraisal of the situation at Riethorst and Mook mirrored Ekman's—"[t]he issue was seriously in doubt" he would later write—so he remained in the area long enough to ensure that the counterattack got underway.[26] Lieutenant James Morris Irvin, the B Company commander, recalled passing Gavin as he was leading the remnants of his company back into Mook. "Good fight Jim?" asked Gavin as Irvin passed him by. "Good fight Jim," answered Irvin in return.[27] But once the fight was joined, Gavin was confident that Ekman and his troopers would see it through, so he and his party got back in their jeep and sped northeastward toward the 508th sector where *Kampgruppen Becker* and *von Fürstenberg* were threatening to break through to Nijmegen itself.[28]

Like his 505th counterpart, Colonel Lindquist had had to deploy his three 508th battalions across a front well in excess of that normally required of an infantry regiment, an area some six miles in length. And like Ekman, Lindquist did so by having his troopers occupy key terrain features. Of particular importance to Lindquist was the international highway that ran from the town of Wyler, just inside the German border, northwestward through Beek and then on to Nijmegen, where it crossed the Waal by means of the Nijmegen highway bridge. On the day before the German attack Lindquist had taken action to cut the highway in three places. The 19 September attacks at each location were daring affairs.

The first of the 508th's attacks to cut the international highway occurred at Wyler. Sometime during the evening of 18 September, Lieutenant Woodrow Millsaps received orders to take the town with his B Company, 1/508th. Eerily cognizant that he had been ordered to take and hold a town *inside* Germany proper, Millsaps proceeded cautiously. First he sent his Third Platoon under Lieutenant Edward Gleim to take a look around. Moving out during the night of 18-19 September, Gleim and his troopers got all the way to Wyler's outskirts without being detected and reported back that there appeared to be a garrison of about company strength inside the town. Since this was too large a force for one platoon to handle, Millsaps told Gleim to withdraw to a small farming village several hundred yards south of Wyler and set up a roadblock. This proved a fortuitous decision, for not long thereafter Gleim discovered that German infantry was not the only thing inside the town. Just before noon on 19 September several armored vehicles left Wyler and drove straight at Gleim's roadblock, seemingly oblivious to any American presence (perhaps the result of a false sense of security since they were still inside Germany). Gleim's troopers responded with a hail of small arms and machine gun fire. Although not of sufficient caliber to damage any of the armored vehicles, so surprised were the Germans that after three hours of hide-and-seek gunplay they withdrew. Meanwhile, Millsaps had moved forward with his First Platoon to reinforce Gleim. Sensing the confusion in the enemy ranks that the sudden appearance of American soldiers on German soil invoked Millsaps seized the initiative and led his two platoons in a wild charge into Wyler's town center. Running, shooting, and throwing grenades as fast as they could, the B Company troopers scattered the defenders before them. By nightfall, Wyler was in American hands, strongly outposted and bolstered by the presence of two 57mm antitank guns from the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion.[29]

That same day, farther north on the international highway, I Company, 3/508th, and engineers from D Company, 307th Airborne Engineers, took Beek and established another roadblock. Remarkably, this action was carried out under the command of a corporal, Robert Chisholm, who had taken over I Company after all its officers and most of its noncommissioned officers had become casualties. In a supporting action, F Company 2/508th, temporarily attached to the 3/508th, moved on to Berg-en-Dal, a piece of high ground west of Beek that dominated Beek and its approaches. As at Wyler, the defenses at each position were bolstered by two 57mm antitank guns from the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion.[30]

Perhaps the most daring of the 508th's exploits on 19 September occurred at Hill 75.9, a piece of high ground about 200 yards long, fifty to seventy-five feet wide, and some 300 yards above sea level situated astride the international highway about midway between Wyler and Beek. From its heights artillery observers and heavier weapons could

dominate not only the highway, but also most of the surrounding terrain, to include the flatlands that extended across the Dutch-German border. With but two officers (including himself) and forty-two troopers, Lieutenant John Foley, who was still in temporary command of A Company, 1/508th during Captain Jonathan Adams's enforced absence (Adams, it will be recalled, was with Second Platoon of A Company, which had been cut off and surrounded in Nijmegen), was given the mission of taking the hill. Foley received the mission at about 1530 hours. He knew that earlier in the day a platoon-sized combat patrol from G Company, 3/508th had unsuccessfully assaulted the western face of the hill several times. Therefore, with the help of a local Dutch farmer who knew the area intimately, Foley led both his A Company troopers and the remnants of the G Company platoon to the southern face of the hill where they arrived undetected. At 1600 hours, Foley gave the order to attack. The troopers rose from their cover and charged, firing as fast as they could while screaming at the top of their lungs. As Sergeant Bob White remembered it, " '[w]e attacked on the run over the hill and down the northeast side of the hill. The Germans on that side of the hill had their backs to us. The ones we did not kill ran down the hill to the woods.' "[31] "The Germans on the summit were literally yelled out of their holes," declared the regimental after action report.[32] The defending Germans—a company of paratroopers—were forced off the hilltop but quickly recovered and repeatedly counterattacked, only to be beaten back each time by their American opposites who fought them foxhole to foxhole. By 1800 hours, Hill 75.9, henceforward known as Devil's Hill (after its local name) was in American hands. German dead "littered the hillside" as did several motorcycles, trucks, staff cars and two intact 20mm cannon that the Germans had left in their wake.[33] A Company lost 17 troopers, ten of which were killed.[34]

By taking Wyler, Beek, Berg-en-Dal, and Devil's Hill, Lindquist not only had control of the international highway, he had also established a string of fortified outposts with which to defend his extended front. And because of Holland's waterlogged geography these outposts could not be ignored for they controlled the roads and without access to trafficable roads trucks and tanks could not move. Sustained cross-country movement by wheeled and tracked vehicles was simply not possible in a country that lay largely below sea level. Hence it was that on 20 September the points seized the day before became the focus of the German counterattacks in the northeast.

Predictably, the first attacks of 20 September in the 508th sector fell on Wyler, although it seems word that there were Americans in the Fatherland did not get to everyone in a German uniform. At 0800 hours a lone truck filled with German soldiers approached the town from the south, apparently oblivious to the fact that Wyler was no longer a safe haven. When it was in range, one of the 57mm guns supporting Millsaps's B Company troopers opened up and destroyed the truck while machine gun fire finished off the stunned occupants as they spilled out the back. Forty-five minutes later the Germans appeared in force, hell bent on expelling the Americans from the Wyler. Three infantry companies, elements of *Kampfgruppen Becker* and *von Fürstenberg*, converged on the town from three directions, guided to their target by the still smoldering truck. With them were several tanks and antiaircraft guns. Millsaps's outgunned and outnumbered troopers held off the attackers for six hours, aided greatly by indirect fire from the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion. Yet the attackers persisted, using their heavy weapons to keep the Americans' heads down while their infantry closed in on

Wyler from every quarter. At one point, Millsaps recalled being under fire from so many German machine guns that he could not count them all. By about 1500 hours the B Company troopers were low on ammunition and cut off from the rest of the battalion. Millsaps had no recourse but to abandon Wyler and withdrew his troopers to the same roadblock position from which they had assaulted the town the day before. Once there, they hunkered down to await help. Incongruously, a short time later approximately seventy-five Germans marched out of Wyler toward the roadblock, ostensibly intent on either surrendering or evacuating their wounded, for in the lead was a flagman bearing a red cross flag. The Americans held their fire, but when the German column got within 100 yards of the roadblock all but the flag bearer bolted for cover and another firefight broke out (the flag bearer inexplicably continued marching toward the roadblock and was taken prisoner). Millsaps and his troopers defended their roadblock, intent on remaining in place for as long as possible. At one juncture it even looked as if they might be able to turn the tide and retake Wyler when some British tanks arrived on the scene. But the tankers mistook Millsaps's troopers for the enemy and opened up on them. With no way to contact the tankers by radio, Millsaps grabbed a bed sheet and started waving it frantically. This gave pause to the tankers, who momentarily held their fire, but then they opened up again, still targeting the American positions. Eventually, word was somehow gotten to the tankers that they were firing on friendly troops so, to avoid further problems with identification they were ordered to withdraw. With no help in sight, short of ammunition, and long on casualties, Millsaps received permission to withdraw and leave Wyler to the Germans. Exiting Germany, however, was much harder than entering. The Germans seemed intent on exacting retribution for the indignity of having lost a German town to the Allies and roving bands of the enemy hounded the B Company troopers almost every step of the way, going so far as to set haystacks on fire in order to guide others to the kill. Millsaps, who refused to leave his wounded behind (which by that time accounted for most of his number) led his troopers in a running gun battle that lasted all night long and eventually arrived back at the 1/508th's lines at dawn on 21 September.[35]

Concurrent with their counterattack at Wyler, the Germans also assaulted the small town of Beek, several miles to the northwest (both attacks were made by elements of *Kampgruppen Becker* and *von Fürstenberg*). Preceded by a short but intense artillery and mortar barrage, at about 1500 hours approximately 400 German paratroopers suddenly appeared at Beek's eastern outskirts. So surprised were the American defenders that many believed the Germans must have infiltrated into position by dressing in civilian clothes since not one of the outposts had reported sighting so many enemy soldiers so close to town. To make matters worse, several German armored vehicles also rushed the town to add their firepower to the attack. Corporal Chisholm, who was still in command of the small infantry-engineer team at Beek, quickly assessed the situation and, after determining that his force was simply too weak to defend in place, organized a fighting withdrawal to the southwest. Chisholm led the rear guard action himself.[36]

After taking Beek, the German paratroopers continued their attack to the southwest and on up the Berg-en-Dal high ground. It must have been about this time that Gavin and his party arrived on the scene, approaching Berg-en-Dal from the opposite direction.

> As we went up the road enroute to Beek, we came to the road crossing near the de Groot Hotel in Berg-en-dahl [*sic*]. . . . [I]t was on a high ridge,

> heavily wooded. From there the road down to Beek was steep and curved in several places. As we reached the top of the ridge the entire place was under very heavy fire. . . . I remember very well crawling across the road on my stomach to the woods on the far side. About fifty yards inside the woods I [Gavin] ran into members of the 508th digging in.[37]

The troopers Gavin encountered were badly shaken. Many had just barely escaped Beek. The swiftness with which such a large force had appeared in their midst, seemingly out of nowhere, had been stunning to say nothing of the halftracks mounting 20mm cannon they had had to battle at point-blank range in the city streets. Their fear was that they could not hold, but they still had some fight in them. They told Gavin that they had evened the odds somewhat by knocking out one of the halftracks in an 'S' turn farther down the hill, thereby precluding other vehicles from negotiating the steep, winding road that led to their present position. After assuring the troopers (and being assured himself) that they can and would hold the hill Gavin sought out Lieutenant Colonel Mendez, the 3/508th commander. Since he had somewhat nullified the German vehicular threat, Mendez told Gavin that he planned to hold off the German paratroopers by establishing a series of early warning outposts around his position and using a full rifle platoon as a fire brigade, shifting it from one threatened point to another as the situation warranted. He was not sure, however, how long he could keep it up. Gavin promised Mendez all the artillery support he needed and, if he could hold the night, perhaps some more infantry (Gavin was banking on the arrival of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment; he was to be sorely disappointed).[38]

At that point Gavin had nothing left—every single infantry battalion in the division was committed to either crossing the Waal, fighting through Nijmegen, or defending the perimeter. Two of his four artillery battalions, the 376th Parachute and the 320th Glider, were supporting Tucker and Vandervoort while the other two, the 456th Parachute and 319th Glider, were firing in direct support of Ekman and Lindquist and ammunition was running low. The remainder of the division's assets—engineers, antiaircraft, military police, reconnaissance, and signals—was also fighting in support of the parachute regiments. And although he had left Mook confident that Ekman had the fight in the south under control, with Wyler and Beek in German hands and the situation at Devil's Hill unknown, he feared that were Berg-en-Dal to fall the Germans "could have walked into the outskirts of Nijmegen almost unmolested, our forces on that front were so thin."[39] "As I understood the situation then, it was seriously in doubt," Gavin later admitted.[40]

There was but one thing to do. Counterattack.

Gavin knew his enemy. He knew that the Germans did not like to fight at night and therefore, by holding out at Berg-en-Dal a bit longer he was "hopeful that the Germans, as they often did, would stop their attack at darkness."[41] His plan, therefore, was to maneuver around the German forces fronting Berg-en-Dal and mount an attack to retake Beek. Even if it was unsuccessful, Gavin was certain that by merely threatening Beek he would draw forces from Berg-en-Dal and forestall a continuation of the German advance on Nijmegen. He would be proved right on all points.

At 1900 hours, 20 September Lieutenant Louis G. Toth, whose H Company, 3/508th was located in the Berg-en-Dal area, received a warning order: be prepared for an attack against Beek. Toth's mission was to take back Beek, drive through the town, and set up a

defensive line some 1,000 yards northeast of the town. Thirty minutes later Toth got the word to go. Inexplicably, he had been told that Beek would be lightly defended, but two troopers from the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion who had been supporting I Company when it was driven out of Beek informed him that this was not so; they reported that there were at least 400 Germans in the town supported by halftracks and other armored vehicles (they also volunteered to accompany H Company back to town, serving as infantrymen). So informed, Toth proceeded cautiously. By 2030 hours he had reached Beek's outskirts without being detected. All seemed fairly quiet. That changed when Toth launched his attack. As soon as his lead platoon, First Platoon, entered Beek it was hit by several hidden machine guns firing from multiple directions. The platoon leader, Lieutenant Frederick G. Humphreys, was killed, the platoon was pinned down, and the rest of the company was stacked up behind it. The assistant platoon leader, Lieutenant Vernon Thomas (who had received a battlefield commission in Normandy) took charge and, fighting house-to-house, managed to lead First Platoon to a secure position inside a churchyard, but it was cut off from the rest of the company. Toth sent Lieutenant Bruce B. Van's Second Platoon on a flanking attack in an attempt to relieve some of the pressure from First Platoon but it too ran into several German machine gun nests and got pinned down. Faced with overwhelming numbers, Toth decided to withdraw and regroup on some high ground south of town. But Van's platoon had suffered heavy casualties and he informed Toth that he was incapable of moving lest he leave them behind. Lieutenant Thomas, on the other hand, was able to extricate First Platoon by stealthily moving through Beek's backstreets and alleyways and arrived at the company command post around midnight.[42]

Although Toth had but two of his three rifle platoons with him (First and Third Platoons) and was fully aware that the German force inside Beek was at least three times larger than his own, he also knew that taking Beek was critical to the defense of the division perimeter and that by simply remaining in defilade outside of town he would accomplish nothing. Therefore, following a ten-minute bombardment of Beek by artillery and mortars, a move that Gavin agonized over since he knew there were still some troopers in town but which he felt necessary in order to help even the odds, Toth renewed his attack at 0630 hours, 21 September, throwing in everything he had. It was not enough, however, and at noon Toth ordered another withdrawal. Two hours later, reinforced with one platoon from F Company and a second from G Company, Toth attacked a third time and was repulsed a third time. At 1700 hours, while in the midst of preparing for a fourth attack, Toth learned that the Germans in Beek were withdrawing. Not one to question fortune, Toth immediately moved his conglomerate force into town behind the fleeing Germans and by 1800 hours Beek was once again in American hands.[43]

It is difficult to determine the cause of the German's abrupt withdrawal from Beek. Assuredly they had suffered casualties as a result of the American attacks, although to what extent is uncertain, but they were well ensconced inside the town and it would have taken a much larger force than Toth had at his disposal to dislodge them. Most likely they abandoned Beek because they received word that the Nijmegen bridges were in Allied hands and that the attacks on the southern end of the perimeter had been repulsed. Therefore keeping Beek served no larger tactical purpose. Conversely, although Toth and his troopers did not accomplish their immediate mission, their actions did serve a

larger tactical purpose—their repeated attacks kept the Germans focused on Beek instead of Nijmegen, and without ensuring a hold on the former any movement on the latter would be doomed to failure. It came at high cost, however. H Company lost seventy troopers during the three attacks and entered Beek on the evening of 21 September counting fewer than fifty troopers still standing.[44]

The German decision to abandon Beek may also have been influenced, in part, by events several hundred yards to the southeast. Of all the fights in the 508th sector, this may have been the most ferocious. It was certainly the most prolonged. The place was Devil's Hill.

Coincident with the 20 September attacks on Wyler and Beek, a third prong of *Kampgruppen Becker* and *von Fürstenberg* hit Lieutenant Foley and his troopers atop Devil's Hill. Preceded by an artillery and mortar barrage, approximately two companies of German paratroopers stormed up the slopes of the hill and a fierce firefight at close range developed that lasted all day long. At one juncture, since they had been unable to dislodge Foley's men with their firepower, the Germans tried another tack. Without warning the Germans ceased their fire. Into the calm stepped a "well-dressed German officer" who called on A Company to surrender. Foley responded " '[i]f you want me, come and get me!' " and ordered his men to resume fire.[45] At another juncture, the Germans attempted to gain an advantage through duplicity in much the same way they had tried outside of Wyler. Corporal James Blue and Private First Class Don Johnson were manning an outpost when they were approached by two German soldiers with their hands in the air as if to surrender.

> 'At a distance of about fifty yards we could see that one of them had something on his back. Shortly he fell forward, and the second soldier attempted to fire the machine gun that was attached to his comrade's back. We had our sights on them; they were riddled with gunfire.'[46]

The mixed force of A and G Company troopers held their position atop Devil's Hill despite repeated attacks that continued through 23 September. During that time they were reinforced once, on 21 September, when Captain Adams (who was suffering from two wounds but refused to abandon his men), Lieutenant Lamm, and Second Platoon of A Company joined them after being liberated from their hiding place inside Nijmegen. But because they were almost completely surrounded, ammunition became a problem and the men were ordered to fire only when absolutely necessary. At one point the troopers were down to five rounds per man before an ammunition detail was able to get through with a resupply. Sleep was another problem. The almost constant rain of artillery and mortar shells punctuated by ferocious assaults that seemingly materialized just a few yards from their positions forced the troopers to take unusual steps to remain alert—at night, the men strung bandoleers from foxhole to foxhole and tied them to their bodies so that they could shake one another awake in the event of an attack. Yet the 508th troopers refused to yield, turning Devil's Hill into a breakwater that withstood the German tide until it was eventually spent and receded eastward. Eleven troopers lost their lives, buried on the hill they helped to defend.[47]

The division's fight to maintain its perimeter had been a near-run thing. That the 505th and 508th were able to hold their positions despite being everywhere outnumbered

and outgunned is testament to the toughness, tenacity, initiative, and leadership of the troopers, noncommissioned officers, and officers at all levels, traits that Gavin had, in no small measure, done much to imbue through the sheer force of his personal example. He was justifiably proud of what his troopers had accomplished, particularly on 20 September, "a day unprecedented in the division's combat history."[48] It is surprising, then, that a little over two weeks later Gavin penned the following to Matthew Ridgway: "I believe it to be in the best interest of all concerned that I be relieved of command of this Division" and "that when I am relieved steps be taken to relieve me from assignment to the XVIII Airborne Corps. It is understood that this will undoubtedly involve a reduction in grade."[49]

When Gavin returned to the division command post following Wienecke's frantic call to get a quick update before he took off for Mook and Beek, he found there, much to his surprise, his predecessor, Matt Ridgway, who was also receiving a situation report from several members of the division staff. Not wanting to interrupt, and obviously in a hurry, Gavin huddled with his Chief of Staff, got what information he needed, and then took off for the front. As he was leaving Gavin told Wienecke to extend his apologies to Ridgway for not staying to brief him personally, adding that he should not be gone more than a few minutes and that once his mission at Mook was complete he would return and give Ridgway a much fuller appreciation of the situation.[50] Of course, Gavin found at Mook a situation that required more than just a few minutes of his time. When he eventually did return to the division command post at least an hour had passed and Ridgway had departed. "I asked him [Lieutenant Colonel Wienecke] if he had explained to you the situation and the reason why I had gone to MOOK," wrote Gavin later. "He said that he had and that you [Ridgway] fully understood and, in fact, were in sympathy with the difficulties under which we were fighting."[51] On 5 October, however, Gavin received a personal note entitled "Military Courtesy" in which Ridgway reprimanded Gavin for making "no apparent effort . . . to contact your Corps Commander, nor in any way to acknowledge his presence [in the command post on 20 September], which was completely ignored." He was therefore to "submit a written explanation of this apparently flagrant breach of military courtesy."[52]

In his memorandum to Ridgway, Gavin explained that he "weighed carefully in [his] own mind whether to interrupt your discussion or go to MOOK as quickly as possible and then return." Since the situation at Mook "appeared none too good" and Gavin was certain that Ridgway would "want the correct picture when I talked to you" he decided to take off and return as soon as he could in order to render as accurate a report as possible. Furthermore, continued Gavin, "[k]nowing your usual understanding and appreciation of such combat conditions and, in addition, taking the liberty of assuming that a more friendly understanding existed between us than apparently actually did exist, I asked my Chief of Staff to extend to you my apologies for having to rush off and explain that I would return in a matter of minutes." Gavin also emphasized that he was not at the command post for "more than several minutes" and that "[t]he distance separating us was beyond ordinary speaking distance." When he returned to the command post to find Ridgway gone, with no knowledge about his whereabouts, Gavin carried on with his duties. He then tried on succeeding days to contact Ridgway, but to no avail, concluding that Ridgway's duties elsewhere prevented him from getting up to see the 82nd again. Gavin ended his letter by stating that since "the welfare of the Division should come

above all else" and it was obvious that "my relations with your headquarters are not entirely compatible, and that my behavior has been such as to warrant the basic communication" he asked to be relieved.[53]

It was not, of course, mere military courtesy that had engendered Ridgway's letter to Gavin and there was no way that Ridgway was going to relieve his most experienced combat commander and the man he had personally recommended to take command of his beloved 82nd.[54] A few days later, in fact, Ridgway explained to Wienecke, who was in England to consult with the XVIII Airborne Corps staff, that he had sent the letter "in a moment of hasty judgement [*sic*] . . . and that the whole affairs [*sic*] was to be regretted."[55] And years later Ridgway would admit that "Gavin, as fine a combat commander as any in our service in WW II—as he amply demonstrated—was facing a critical operation . . . [and] had plenty of justification for his brusqueness toward me" on 20 September.[56] What had really spurred Ridgway's letter was two things: the fact that he still "harbored a sense of deep disappointment, if not of resentment, that command of the operation . . . had been given to General Browning" and his dissatisfaction "with the apathy and . . . lack of aggressiveness of the British forces" through which he had just passed en route to the 82nd command post.[57] At one point in his journey to the front, Ridgway's party was halted by a junior British officer who informed them that they could not proceed any further because the road ahead was under small arms fire. With no way of knowing what the immediate situation was, Ridgway did as the officer requested, but after forty minutes of waiting, during which he witnessed no action on the part of the British to rectify the situation, he grew impatient. Leaving his jeep and driver in place, Ridgway set out on foot with his aide and bodyguard in tow and walked all the way to the 101st Division command post, one-and-a-half miles away across a supposedly fire-swept road, without a shot being fired.[58]

Hence it was Ridgway's pique at being passed up for an operational command he felt he deserved combined with the disgust he felt when he witnessed the lack of aggressiveness of the British ground forces that landed him in a foul mood when he arrived at the 82nd command post. He knew he could have, and would have, done it better. "I always felt, and I still feel," he wrote years later, "that the sluggish actions of the ground armies in that campaign were inexcusable. A more vigorous command supervision from the top could have driven the armored force on through."[59] Furthermore, Ridgway had also been told "to be ready to mount an airborne operation with the units retrieved from the battlefield at the earliest possible moment after 1 October."[60] But with XXX Corps listlessly making its way toward Arnhem, there was no way that Horrocks, Dempsey, or Montgomery would countenance the reassignment of the American airborne divisions for tasks elsewhere, and the longer the two divisions stayed in Holland, the more casualties they would sustain and the longer it would take for them to become once again ready for combat operations.

Ridgway was not the only one who thought that things could have been done better. At dawn on 21 September, Gavin crossed the highway bridge to see how Tucker and his 504th troopers were faring. He found his regimental commander " 'so irate that he was almost unable to speak.' "[61] After securing the bridges Tucker's troopers spent the intervening night expanding their foothold on the northern bank of the Waal to a depth of about 1,000 yards. They expected, not without reason, that the British tankers would eventually seize the reins and dash north to rescue their countrymen who were being

mauled at Arnhem. Instead, the British sat and waited, fearful that without infantry support they would be easy prey to German antitank guns. " 'We've got the road ahead cleared for about quarter of a mile,' " said Lieutenant Ernest Murphy to one of the British tankers for whom the paratroopers were providing protection, " '[n]ow it is up to you to rescue your comrades.' "[62] But the tankers refused to budge. Both Captain Burriss and Lieutenant LaRiviere were apoplectic. Sergeant Jimmy Shields heard Lieutenant LaRiviere tell " 'the lead British tanker to get going or "I'll blow your head off and take the tanks myself." ' "[63] Burriss went even farther. Approaching Captain Lord Peter Carrington, second in command of No. 1 Squadron, 2nd Grenadier Guards (the unit from which Robinson's tanks had come) who had crossed the highway bridge in his tank to take charge of the British contingent on the northern bank, Burriss cocked his Thompson submachine gun, put it to Carrington's head, and shouted " '[y]ou get this tank moving, or I'll blow your damn head off.' "[64] Carrington quickly ducked into his tank and locked the hatch before Burriss could react. But he still refused to move.

It cannot be argued that the terrain between Nijmegen and Arnhem would have been easy going for mechanized forces. This area, often referred to as 'the island' because it comprises a spit of land bounded on three sides by the Waal, Ijssel, and Neder Rijn (lower Rhine) Rivers, was rife with dikes and marshlands that hampered off-road movement, large open fields that offered excellent observation and fields of fire, and orchards and villages that provided ample cover and concealment. Moreover, the main road connecting Nijmegen with Arnhem was, as was usual in Holland, atop a raised embankment some three to six feet high and bordered on either side by deep drainage ditches that tanks could not cross.[65] "It was perfect defensive country in which the anti-tank gun hidden in the orchards was always master of the tank silhouetted against the sky-line," remembered Horrocks.[66] Lieutenant Colonel Giles Vandeleur, whose 2nd (Armored) Battalion, Irish Guards had provided covering fire for Tucker's river crossing, called it "a ridiculous place to operate tanks."[67] Giles's cousin, Lieutenant Colonel J. O. E. 'Joe' Vandeleur, commander of 3rd Battalion (Infantry), Irish Guards (and overall commander of the Irish Guards group by seniority), recalled that when he went forward to take a look at the terrain with his second in command, Major Denis FitzGerald, the latter remarked, " 'we're never going to get a yard up this bloody road.' "[68]

During the evening of 20-21 September, while the 504th attacked to deepen and consolidate the bridgehead, only four British tanks from the 2nd Grenadier Guards made it over the highway bridge: three from Sergeant Robinson's troop (initially only two got across the bridge; a third joined sometime later) and one commanded by Captain Carrington. They advanced as far the intersection of the main road and railroad and then laagered for the night, staying well within the 504th's perimeter to ensure against attack by German tank-killer teams armed with *panzerfausts*. The only other British forces north of the Waal were two infantry companies from the Irish Guards that remained in defensive positions at the northern terminus of the highway bridge despite Carrington's calls to have them come forward to help solidify the 504th's lines.[69] Meanwhile, since the Grenadier Guards had had such a tough fight in Nijmegen itself, Horrocks and Adair decided to pass the whole of 'Joe' Vandeleur's Irish Guards through the Grenadiers and attack in the morning, with Giles's 2nd Battalion in the van. "I remember quite well my orders were simply to get through to Arnhem," recalled Giles Vandeleur. "Our advance,

funnily enough, was based on a time program, as though we were on a peacetime march. We were to advance at a normal speed of an approach march, 15 miles in two hours."[70]

The only other element north of the Waal that night was a troop of scout cars from the 2nd Household Cavalry on a reconnaissance mission. Moving cautiously along the proposed route of march, the cavalrymen reported that there were German forces in evidence at a crossroads near the village of Ressen, some two miles north of the highway bridge, and therefore justified British caution against rushing up the Nijmegen-Arnhem road without proper preparation.[71] Heinz Harmel, however, knew differently. " 'At this instant, there were no German armoured forces available to block Elst [a village at the approximate midway point of the Nijmegen-Arnhem road].' "[72] " 'The four panzers who crossed the bridge made a mistake when they stayed in Lent,' " Harmel continued. " 'If they had carried on their advance, it would have been all over for us.' "[73] The delay, therefore, gave Harmel time to rush a formidable *kampfgruppe* south from Arnhem, where it reinforced the thin infantry screen between Nijmegen and Elst that Harmel had hastily cobbled together following the loss of the bridges. " 'The English drank too much tea,' " scoffed Harmel.[74] By the time Giles Vandeleur's tankers pushed off, a blocking force consisting of approximately two battalions of infantry; sixteen tanks, including several Panthers and at least one Tiger tank; two batteries of 88mm guns; at least one battery of captured French 75mm antiaircraft guns; and some twenty 20mm cannon was waiting.[75]

At 1230 hours, 21 September, Giles Vandeleur's tanks were finally lined up bumper-to-bumper on the Nijmegen-Arnhem road ready to go. In the lead were the tanks from No. 1 Squadron, 2nd Battalion, Irish Guards. Following were Nos. 2 and 3 Squadrons, each of which carried a company of infantry from the 3rd Battalion, Irish Guards. An hour later, the lead tanks moved out. For ten minutes all went well. Suddenly, the first three Shermans in line blew up and caught fire, victims of German antitank fire. The fourth Sherman, unable to maneuver left or right off the raised road, stopped while the infantry riding atop the tanks of the following squadrons leapt off and took cover in the roadside ditches. German machine gun fire sprayed the area, making any advance across the surrounding fields impossible. The entire column was held up behind them, immobile. When Giles Vandeleur sped forward in his scout car to see what was happening, he came upon Captain Roland S. Langton, commander of No. 1 Squadron. Langton had managed to back his tank off into a driveway and was idling near a farmhouse. Vandeleur jumped off his scout car to confer with Langton, but just then a German machine gun opened up and forced Langton and Vandeleur to take cover behind the farmhouse.

> Amusingly [recalled Giles Vandeleur], although I wasn't amused at the time, I couldn't get to my scout car. It was a Humber armor[ed] car with two entrances: A lid on the top or a trap door on the side. I couldn't get to it with the German machine gun firing across the field, so I shouted to Goldman [the driver] to try and tell him to back the car up to the corner, so we could get in. Everytime [*sic*] I shouted, Goldman lifted the lid and the Germans poured a burst of fire over his head. Immediately, he would duck and slam the lid down, only to peer out cautiously when I called him again. This was followed by another burst of fire and down went the lid.

> We must have done this three or four times and finally I became exasperated and crawled back to Joe along a ditch.[76]

"It was a bloody mess," recalled 'Joe' Vandeleur. "I ordered we try to slip the tanks off the road, but we couldn't get them off."[77] He then tried to slip No. 3 Squadron, 2nd Irish Guards and No. 4 Company, 3rd Irish Guards around his right flank, using a nearby railroad line as a route of advance. They, too, were taken under fire from the German defenders, lost another tank and got pinned down in the process. The obvious recourse was to blast the German positions with either close air support or artillery fire or both, the same procedures that had been used previously whenever stiff resistance was encountered. But the radio link with the circling Typhoon fighter-bombers was down and the pilots were under strict orders not to attack without an express request from the ground commander; they eventually returned to base, fully loaded with bombs, rockets, and machine gun ammunition. Artillery support was to be provided by the 153rd Field Regiment (Leicestershire Yeomanry), but because of an inexcusable failure in coordination two of the regiment's three batteries were on the move when the attack began, leaving only one battery of eight 25-pounder guns available to respond, and it "was bloody slow registering on its targets," remembered 'Joe' Vandeleur.[78] A severe shortage of ammunition also hampered the artillery response, and as a result it was not until 1700 hours that the first rounds were delivered. With no hope of breaking through the stout German defenses, at 1900 hours the attack up the main Nijmegen-Arnhem road was called off.[79]

Moving out behind the Irish Guards were the Welsh Guards whose task it was to cross the highway bridge, turn left at Lent, and then attempt a breakout to the north via secondary roads to the west. When the Irish Guards were held up, however, the Welsh Guards were uncomfortably stalled on the highway bridge for some four hours. Finally, at about 1700 hours the lead elements of the Welsh Guards got off the bridge and turned left for Oosterhout, a small town just beyond the western-most point of the 504th's perimeter. Fronting the town was C Company, 1/504th. Earlier that day a three-man patrol composed of Corporal Martin L. Murray, Private First Class Almer G. Brouen, and Private Billy J. Puckett conducted a reconnaissance of Oosterhout. Moving along the road that the Welsh Guards would follow once they arrived, the three encountered approximately twenty Germans. Murray, Brouen, and Puckett scattered them with their fire. Short on ammunition after their firefight, the three troopers returned to their platoon, drew more ammunition, and went back up the road, this time getting all the way into Oosterhout where civilians informed them that the Germans had left. Several hours later, however, while the Welsh Guards were still stalled on the highway bridge, two German tanks, a halftrack and about 100 infantrymen rolled out of Oosterhout headed straight for C Company's perimeter. "We were conjecturing whether the Krautheads would wipe us all out or give us a chance to surrender," wrote Sergeant Ross S. Carter, when suddenly Private John R. Towle, the only remaining bazooka gunner in the company showed up. Towle "climbed up the bank, took a quick peep at the tanks, then slid down and got his bazooka." " 'I see that I'm going to get the Congressional today,' " Carter recalled him saying.[80] Towle rushed forward some 200 yards to get a clear shot at the tanks, engaged both and forced them to retire. He then turned his bazooka on a nearby house, killing nine Germans who had taken up position there. Finally, he moved

another 125 yards through enemy fire to a third position from which he could engage the halftrack. Then, "[w]hile in a kneeling position preparatory to firing on the enemy vehicle, Private Towle was mortally wounded by a mortar shell."[81] For single-handedly repelling the German attack, Towle was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.[82] When the Welsh Guards finally arrived several hours later and drove into Oosterhout, Lieutenant M. C. Davis, the lead troop commander encountered the tanks Towle had chased off and destroyed them. However, by that time the Germans had significantly reinforced the western road network. Unable to break out of Oosterhout, at nightfall the Welsh Guards were ordered to withdraw back toward the highway bridge, thus ending all attempts to break through to Arnhem on 21 September.[83]

At 1025 hours, 21 September, the 504th command post had been informed that it would be relieved by elements of the 43rd (Wessex) Division.[84] Normally, the relieving unit moves forward into the positions already occupied by the force being relieved. However, the British had no intention of moving into the 504th's positions. When the 43rd arrived in Nijmegen at noon on 21 September, its commander, Major General Sir Ivor Thomas, dispatched elements of his 214th Brigade to both bridges where they took up defensive positions just beyond the northern end of each bridge. Admittedly Thomas may simply not have been able to move any further north into the already congested perimeter, but when later on in the day the Irish and Welsh Guards retired to the rear Thomas kept the 214th Brigade in place. This meant that Tucker's troopers would have to execute two very difficult and dangerous tactical maneuvers: a withdrawal under pressure and a rearward passage of lines. And with the relief scheduled for the early morning hours of 22 September, both would have to be done at night, when it was difficult to discern friend from foe, over approximately 1,000 yards of terrain that was still heavily infested with German stragglers. "It was a ticklish situation," wrote Henry Keep to his mother.

> We were to withdraw from our present position with the Nazis hot on our tail as soon as they realized what was going on. Could our companies get back to the security of the bridge without being cut off by the Krauts? We were to receive no assistance or cover from anyone.[85]

The withdrawal began at 0500 hours, 22 September. Under tight control by Tucker, Cook, and Major Willard Harrison, the 1/504th commander, the companies leapfrogged back to the highway bridge (for some reason the railroad bridge, though closer to the 1/504th's positions, was not used). On the left, opposite Harrison's battalion, the Germans stayed in place, but on the right, opposite Cook's 3/504th, the Germans followed. By carefully orchestrating his companies' movements, Cook managed to extricate his troopers relatively unscathed, although at one point he felt he was being so heavily pressured that he called regimental headquarters to inform them that "he would not be responsible for what happened on the withdrawal of his battalion."[86] "It was a very skillfully directed maneuver," continued Keep to his mother. "To make a long story short our troops eventually reached the security of the close-in defense of the bridge by the British, and we moved across this huge structure still littered with the dead we had killed what seemed eons ago but what in reality was barely 2 days."[87] " 'When we got to the bridge entrance, we saw some British troops there,' " recalled Sergeant Tarbell,

another of Cook's troopers. " 'They did not seem too concerned about the situation and we remarked to them why it was they were still milling around. . . . We let them know our feelings, that we would not leave our men stranded like that. It was not a very cordial meeting.' "[88] By mid-morning the bridgehead, albeit significantly smaller, was in British hands and the last 504th trooper was back on the south side of the Waal.[89]

By 22 September the situation at Arnhem had become desperate. The only element to reach the Arnhem highway bridge, a disparate force of paratroopers composed mostly of troopers from the 2nd Battalion, 1st Parachute Regiment under Lieutenant Colonel John Frost had been overrun. Most of Frost's paras were either killed or taken prisoner. The last holdouts surrendered at 0500 hours, 21 September. The remainder of the British 1st Airborne Division had been driven into Oosterbeek, Arnhem's western suburb. Clinging tenuously to a thumb-shaped perimeter the base of which was anchored on the north bank of the Nedr Rijn, the troopers were besieged by an overwhelming force of German armor, most of which came from the *10th SS Panzer Division*. Incapable of any offensive action and running seriously low on ammunition, medical supplies, food, and water the 1st Airborne Division was simply hanging on. A glimmer of hope arrived in the form of the Major General Stanislaw Sosabowski's Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade, which dropped on the south side of the Nedr Rijn on 21 September. But with no means to cross the river, and insufficient firepower to fight its way through the strong German defenses posted at the Arnhem highway bridge the Poles, too, had to await XXX Corps.[90]

In the early morning hours of 22 September, while the 43rd Division was still readying itself for a renewal of the push north, two reconnaissance troops from the Household Cavalry slipped through the German lines and, by following two separate and circuitous routes over secondary roads managed to link up with Major General Sosabowski's Poles at Driel, a village on the south bank of the Nedr Rijn that was roughly opposite the 1st Airborne Division's perimeter on the north bank. That same morning General Urquhart, the 1st Airborne Division commander, sent two of his division staff officers, Lieutenant Colonels Charles Mackenzie and Eddie Myers across the river in a rubber dinghy to make contact with Sosabowski. While there, Mackenzie used the radio from one of the scout cars to send a message back to Horrocks and Browning. " 'We are short of food, ammunition, and medical supplies. We cannot hold out for more than 24 hours. All we can do is wait and pray.' "[91]

Despite Mackenzie's pleading, and an order from XXX Corps to take "all risks," the 43rd Division continued its plodding pace.[92] An attack up the main Nijmegen-Arnhem road by the division's 129th Brigade ran into the same fierce defensive fire that had stymied the Irish Guards' advance and quickly ground to a halt. Meanwhile the 214th Brigade attacked through Oosterhout, the same route tried the day before by the Welsh Guards. Despite minimal German resistance it took the 214th all day to clear the town. Finally, with daylight lapsing, Brigadier Hubert Essame, the 214th's commander, ordered Lieutenant Colonel George Taylor to take his battalion, the 5th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI) and slam through to the Poles at all costs. Jumping off at 1850 hours, the 5th DCLI broke through and by 1935 hours reported contact with Sosabowski's paratroopers at Driel.[93]

That night the Poles attempted a river crossing. Using a string of six rubber dinghies and some improvised rafts, Sosabowski's plan was to infiltrate his force across the Nedr Rijn and into the 1st Airborne Division's perimeter, leaving the 5th DCLI in control of

Driel. With German forces present on both sides of the river, this was a risky undertaking, but one Sosabowski felt had to be attempted. It came to naught, however, when German sentries alerted to the attempt and used their machine guns and mortars to sink all the dinghies and rafts after only fifty-two Poles had crossed. In a related effort, two DUKWs (amphibious trucks) that the 5th DCLI had brought forward, loaded with medical supplies and ammunition, ran off into a ditch while attempting to negotiate the slippery riverbank and could not be recovered.[94]

The breakthrough by the 5th DCLI and contact with Sosabowski had brought Horrocks a glimmer of hope that "there was every chance that the airborne division, replenished with stores and reinforced by the Poles and British infantry, might well be able to hold out."[95] With the failure of the river crossing during the night of 22-23 September, however, that glimmer began to fade. Adding to the increasing doom were reports that the Germans had once again cut the main highway in the 101st's sector, a situation that was not rectified until 1520 hours, 24 September through the combined efforts of the 101st attacking from the south and the Grenadier and Coldstream Guards attacking from the north. But this victory was short-lived; just over an hour later the Germans again interdicted the main north-south highway and were so well dug-in by the time the Allies counterattacked that it took over forty hours to dislodge them. Obviously, with the main road cut no supplies could be brought forward to the forces fighting north of Nijmegen, and although ammunition and other critical supplies were running short, perhaps the most grievous harm done as a result of the German attacks was the delay it imposed on getting the necessary assault boats forward.[96]

Yet Horrocks and Browning were determined to do all they could to save the beleaguered 1st Airborne. On 23 September, the 43rd Division's third brigade, the 130th, was relieved of guard missions around Nijmegen to which it had been posted and fought its way forward to the Poles and 5th DCLI at Driel. That night, using sixteen assault boats that the 130th had brought up (some of which had been salvaged and repaired following the 504th's crossing), Sosabowski's Poles attempted a second river crossing. This time, about 250 Polish paratroopers succeeded in getting across the river before German fire made additional crossings impossible, but only 150 of that group eventually succeeded in making it to the 1st Airborne Division's perimeter. The others were either killed or captured.[97] Urquhart's situation report that evening read

> 'many attacks during the day by small parties, SP guns and tanks including flame-thrower tks. Each attack accompanied by very heavy mortaring and shelling within Div perimeter. . . . Physical contact not yet made with those on SOUTH bank of river. Resup[ply] a flop, small quantities of amn only gathered in. Still no food and all ranks extremely dirty owing to shortage of water. Morale still adequate, but continued heavy mortaring and shelling is having obvious effects. We shall hold but at the same time hope for a brighter 24 hours ahead.'[98]

On 24 September, Horrocks and Browning went forward to Driel to get a feel for the situation themselves. Climbing to the top of Driel church, Horrocks, Browning, Sosabowski, Thomas, and Lieutenant Colonel Taylor of the 5th DCLI surveyed the 1st Airborne perimeter on the far bank. Fearful that Urquhart's troopers might be cut off

from the river altogether, Horrocks ordered Thomas to undertake another river crossing. The plan was that one battalion from the 43rd, the 4th Dorsets, would cross at a point a bit west of the 1st Airborne perimeter in conjunction with the Poles, who would be under Thomas's command for the operation. At a commanders' conference later on in the day during which the plan was mapped out, Sosabowski protested, saying that the attempt should be made even further downstream in order to avoid the German defenses on the north bank. At one point, the discussion became heated and Sosabowski interjected, " 'I am General Sosabowski. I command the Polish Para Brigade. I do as I like.' " Horrocks, taken aback by this affront, countered, " '[y]ou are under my command. You will do as I bloody well tell you.' " " 'All right,' " responded Sosabowski, " 'I command the Polish Para Brigade and I do as you bloody well say.' "[99] But the failure to get up sufficient assault boats—only nine were available—meant that only the 4th Dorsets could make the attempt. In the event, Sosabowski was proved correct. About 315 soldiers from the 4th Dorset embarked on the south shore, right into the teeth of German defenders firing from high ground to their front. Less than half of the troopers succeeded in getting across, most of whom were either immediately killed or captured.[100]

The next morning, 25 September, Urquhart sent the following to Browning:

> 'Must warn you that unless physical contact in some strength is made with us early 25 Sep consider it unlikely that we can hold out any longer. All ranks are now completely exhausted as the result of 8 days continuous effort. Lack of food and water and deficiency in arms combined with high officer casualties rate has had its effect. Even comparatively minor enemy offensive action may cause complete disintegration. Should this become apparent all will be told to break towards the bridgehead if any rather than surrender. Controlled movement from present position in face of enemy is out of the question now. We have done our best and will continue to do so as long as possible.'[101]

"General Browning and I," wrote Horrocks, "came to the conclusion that there was nothing for it but to withdraw the 1st British Airborne Division over the river."[102] That night, 25-26 September, 2,163 troopers from the 1st Airborne Division and the Glider Pilot Regiment, 160 Poles, and seventy-five 4th Dorset soldiers were either ferried or swam across the Nedr Rijn. A driving rain helped cover their withdrawal from watchful German eyes. At least 300 others hid or escaped; of these, approximately 140 crossed the river later, thanks in large part to the Dutch. A further 1,485 British and Polish troopers perished in the fighting around Arnhem and another 6,525 were taken prisoner.[103] "It was a tragic scene," summed up Horrocks. "As the exhausted paratroopers swam or were ferried across the river in torrential rain, it seemed that even the gods were weeping at this grievous end to a gallant enterprise."[104]

When the 504th withdrew from north of the Waal on 22 September, the only 82nd unit still in contact with any significant enemy elements was the mixed force of A and G Company troopers from the 508th atop Devil's Hill, though the fight there was in its last stages and would, by the next morning, be over. The firestorm of 20 September that had broken out at all parts of the division perimeter was over, a welcome respite. It could not have come at a better time. The 325th was supposed to arrive on 19 September, but haze

and clouds blanketing the airfields in England forced a postponement. By that time, the 82nd had already suffered 649 casualties, including over 150 killed while a further 299 were hurt so badly they had to be evacuated to the rear once linkup with XXX Corps had been achieved. The intense combat on 20 September added significantly to this number.[105]

Supplies were also short, especially ammunition. A resupply drop by 167 C-47 aircraft carrying 265 tons of supplies had been scheduled for 19 September, but only two serials totaling sixty aircraft were able to take off. Of the sixty aircraft, only thirty-two managed to get through while most of the remainder turned back after encountering heavy fog over the Belgian coast. Those that persevered arrived at drop zone 'O' at 1530 hours. Flying too high and too fast, most likely because of memories of the hot reception the pilots had been given the day before, the results of the drop were "decidedly unsatisfactory." According to 82nd records, the amount recovered was "negligible" and official estimates were that only twenty percent of the supplies were eventually recovered.[106]

Seen in this light—fighting at approximately seventy percent of its full complement and low on ammunition and other matériel—what the 82nd achieved on 20 September is truly remarkable. And by close of that fateful day, at least a portion of the strained situation had been rectified. Starting at 1430 hours, the 53rd Troop Carrier Wing, whose bases in southern England were once again clear of haze and clouds, put 311 C-47s in the air. Flying the southern route to drop zone 'O'—Brereton had decided the night before that all subsequent missions would fly the southern route, thereby allowing them to fly up the XXX Corps corridor and avoid German antiaircraft fire—all but one of the aircraft, which had turned back because of para-rack problems, delivered approximately 441 tons of supplies. Like the drop the day before, this too was disorganized—some aircraft dropped as low as 400 feet while others remained as high as 1,800 feet—and the loads were scattered over an area two miles wide and six miles long. But with a massive assist from the Dutch, which was especially needed this day while the division fought its battles, somewhere between sixty and eighty percent of the tonnage was recovered. The 325th lift, on the other hand, was once again grounded because of weather in England.[107]

The resupply drop on 20 September, which essentially solved the division's ammunition and matériel shortages until a more reliable ground-based supply system was put in place, was the 82nd's last large parachute resupply mission in Holland. A far more pressing problem was the continual postponement of the 325th lift. Although Operation MARKET-GARDEN had been predicated on the " 'intention that as soon as the ground forces have joined up with the airborne troops the two United States divisions [would] be withdrawn,' " the tactical situation dictated that the troopers be kept in place to guard XXX Corps' supply lines and flanks.[108] Yet even by retaining the 82nd and 101st there remained large gaps that, given the geography of the area, could only be plugged with more infantry, a commodity in short supply in Montgomery's 21st Army Group.[109] Fortunately, except for the isolated clashes already mentioned, enemy pressure was relatively light in the 82nd's sector on 21 and 22 September, a welcome respite that allowed commanders to adjust and reorganize as needed. Still, the division was overextended, the distances between foxholes much too great, so it was with some relief that word was received on 23 September that the glider troopers were finally inbound.

Many of the stranded glider troopers were relieved that the wait was over as well. Every day since 19 September, the planned insertion date, they had marched out to their assigned gliders waiting for the weather to break. Four times they keyed themselves up and readied to go and four times experienced that strange blend of relief and dread that accompanied each postponement. Even the normally staid unit journal entries reflected the effect this was having on the troopers:

> September 19, 1944—Today was supposed to have been the big day for us in this operation. . . . Troops all took stations . . . weather was quite hazy and foggy . . . flight was postponed for 24 hours.
>
> September 20, 1944—Everyone out bright and early this morning. . . . Weather quite foggy this AM but the sun is trying to come out and maybe it will be alright for a take off today. Weather did not clear . . . [troops] move back to their tents to sweat tomorrow.
>
> September 21 1944—Still at the airfields. [T]he takeoff was postponed for another 24 hours. . . . This is getting a little monotonous now. The boys are all set to go but they dont [*sic*] like the idea of sweating the ride out from day to day. Most of the men were in on the ride to France and know what a glider ride can be.
>
> September 22, 1944—Bad weather seems to be all we are running into now. If it isn't on this side of the [C]hannel its [*sic*] on the other. The past few days have been a little trying on the nerves.[110]

Private First Class Frank A. Plebanek of E Company, 2/325th recalled " 'staying on the airport grounds, sleeping on folding cots, with no weather protection. When the weather turned bad, we had no way to get out of it and no place to go, to keep dry. It was miserable.' "[111] Finally, on 23 September, D+6, "the weather broke nice and clear" and within hours the troopers of the 325th and sundry other parts of the 82nd (C, D, E, and F Batteries, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion; A Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion; the division Military Police Platoon; and elements of the division Reconnaissance Platoon) were airborne totaling some 3,385 troopers, 104 jeeps, 59 loaded trailers and 25 artillery pieces.[112]

Early morning aerial reconnaissance advised that drop times be pushed back two hours to ensure good visibility over the Continent, so at 1210 hours the first aircraft began taking off from their airfields in the English Midlands. In all, including the aircraft bound for the 101st and British 1st Airborne—84 gliders for the former and 123 supply aircraft for the latter—as well as forty-two C-47s carrying Polish paratroopers who were not able to drop on 21 September, the sky train comprised 490 gliders and 655 tug or drop planes. Miraculously, only three gliders aborted; one cut loose over England and the other two turned back because of mechanical problems. The remainder flew to their objectives via the southern route in order to minimize the amount of time spent over enemy-held territory. As had been the case on D-Day the troopers also witnessed a huge display of airpower as some thirteen groups and twenty-two separate squadrons of

Spitfires and Mustangs from the Air Defense of Great Britain and Eighth Air Force flew protection missions while another eighty-eight rocket-firing planes attacked any German gun positions still possessing the temerity to open fire—eighteen of those that did were completely destroyed and another seventeen damaged. The day also witnessed several dogfights, the Germans losing twenty-seven aircraft to six losses for the Americans.[113]

Yet despite the precautions and heavy escort there were some losses, most of which occurred around Veghel, a town about halfway between Eindhoven and Nijumegen along the main north-south highway where the Germans were still massed on the flanks. Once over that area, in the words of Lieutenant Colonel Teddy Sanford, the 1/325th commander, " 'Hell turned out to celebrate.' "

> 'I saw one of my gliders containing a trailer loaded with anti-tank mines and three men, explode [continued Sanford]. It almost knocked down two more gliders. A spray of machine gun bullets came up through the floor of my glider and a 20mm shell hit out left wing, but no one was hurt.'[114]

About to enter combat for the first time was replacement trooper Private First Class James H. Newcomer of G Company, 2/325th who recalled looking out the port window of his glider and seeing the air " 'heavily laden with bursts of flak.' " Suddenly, he saw the glider next to his get hit—" '[i]n an instant it blew apart.' "[115] Corporal Raymond T. Burchell, a veteran of C Company, 1/325th, was sitting next to another replacement trooper on the ride in. When he heard something hit the outside of the glider, the new trooper turned to Burchell and commented on the hail he was certain was the cause of the noise. " 'I said, "Hail, your ass! Those are bullets." He turned whiter than a ghost.' "[116] Sergeant Aaron Gelber recalled that his glider flew so low that he had a good look at the cause of the trouble.

> 'I looked down and saw a large group of German troops below running around, shooting at us. We were able to see the bastards laughing and pointing while they were shooting. Looking ahead, I was able to see two tow planes going down flying at four hundred to five hundred feet.'[117]

In all, nine planes were shot down and another ninety-six were damaged. Most hard hit were the first and fourth serials. The former, comprising forty-nine tugs and tows lost three C-47s while twenty-one Wacos were released early either because they were shot loose or because they were damaged. Fortunately, most of the gliders came down astride the main highway and the troopers inside were able to assemble and proceed the rest of the way on foot. Colonel Charles Billinsglea, the 325th regimental commander, was one of this group. Lieutenant Colonel Warren Williams, Billingslea's successor as executive officer of the 504th, remembered that when Billingslea finally arrived in the 82nd sector, he "took quite a kidding from his old parachute friends about not understanding the idea of riding the glider all the way to the objective instead of getting out part way."[118] The fourth serial was not as fortunate. When the squadron leader released his glider because his plane was about to crash, seventeen others did so as well. Six of the gliders landed in enemy territory; its occupants were never heard from again.[119]

Some 348 gliders eventually made it to landing zone 'O,' the first arriving at 1602 hours. Already scattered by enemy fire, the serials arrived out of sequence and for the next hour released at altitudes ranging from 800 to 2,500 feet. Still, as a result of some skillful flying 210 gliders landed within an oval a mile across and a mile and a half long centered on the pathfinders on the ground. Another 100 gliders landed along the Maas riverbank opposite Grave. Most of the rest were on or close to the intended landing zone and all but six were within a half mile of the two main concentrations. The landing zone—landing zone 'O'—was originally thought to have been unacceptable for glider landings because of the many small, narrow fields and herds of livestock that grazed there, but the glider pilots found they could smash through the flimsy fences and hedges relatively unscathed, using arrestor chutes with particular acumen to brake once on the ground. Lieutenant Edgar L. Cook of E Company, 2/325th saw a glider to his left smash "through a brick wall and except for its wings being sheared off, it stood up well." A glider to Cook's right encountered a somewhat more unusual obstacle. "I looked out as we were gliding in and saw a bull standing right in the path of a glider on our right," said Cook. "He just stood there, pawing at the ground, refusing to budge. The nose of that glider caught him right in the center of the forehead and it looked like an acre of hamburg[er]."[120] Private First Class Joseph J. Oberkrieser's glider smashed through " 'a heavy wire fence with thick posts like short telephone poles,' " which knocked the wheels off forcing the glider to slide on its skids through a heavily furrowed field before coming to a stop. " 'I was holding my rifle across my legs and the bouncing of the glider across the rough terrain caused me to continually rap my knees with it. To my surprise, the machine remained essentially intact and nothing inside, including us had been damaged.' "[121] Another 80th trooper, Private First Class Raymond E. Fary, was in a glider loaded with the 57mm antitank gun, a trailer, and six other troopers. " 'We had a hard landing due to the weight. . . . The landing gear collapsed and the wing snapped, but we had no casualties.' "[122] All told, of the twenty-four guns, eighty-two jeeps and forty-seven trailers put down on landing zone 'O' only one jeep was unusable. Furthermore, of the more than 2,900 troopers who arrived, all but ten were ready for duty. Though three days late, the 325th and other division elements that arrived on 23 September were welcome reinforcements. When Lieutenant Edgar Cook's company went into line later that night in relief of the 505th, a paratrooper officer approached him saying, " 'I'm sure glad you bastards are here.' "[123]

By 1800 hours, less than an hour after the last glider released, the 325th had assembled seventy-five percent of its strength and was prepared to move out. Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Sitler, the regimental executive officer, took charge in the absence of the 325th's commander and was in the midst of issuing orders to the battalion commanders when Billingsela arrived. The regiment was to move immediately to the 505th sector around Mook and Riethorst, relieve Ekman's troopers, and assume responsibility for that portion of the division perimeter. By 0500 hours, 24 September, the 325th was in the line. By that time if had ninety percent of its troopers present and accounted for.[124]

The defensive trace the 325th occupied, carved out as a result of the 505th's counterattacks against *Kampfgruppe Herrmann* on 20 and 21 September, included a significant salient just north of Riethorst that extended several hundred yards into American lines. Inside the salient was the Kiekberg Woods, "a veritable jungle about 1200 yards wide and more than 1700 yards long."[125] Fronting the south and west faces of

the salient was the 1/325th, while the northern edge was the responsibility of the 2/325th. That the Kiekberg Woods hid at least some German forces was made evident shortly after the two battalions occupied their positions when at 0900 hours, 24 September, E Company, 2/325th traded fire with an enemy combat patrol firing from inside the tree line. A reconnaissance patrol sent out later that night to investigate was unable to provide any further information about what was inside the Kiekberg. Returning to friendly lines after five-and-a-half hours the patrol leader, Lieutenant John Yarborough of Second Platoon, F Company, 2/325th reported that he had only been able to penetrate some 200-300 yards inside the because "the terrain was rough and that control was difficult due to thick undergrowth."[126]

The next day, 25 September, the Germans staged a much larger attack from inside the Kiekberg. " 'I was awakened by the sound of very heavy rifle and machine pistol firing right outside my foxhole,' " recalled Private First Class Plebanek. " 'The Germans had broken through our lines and were spraying our holes with machine pistol fire.' "[127] The Germans also employed several flamethrowers in the assault, which so unnerved some E Company, 2/325th troopers that they shed their equipment and quit their positions in disarray and fell back through B Company, 1/505th which was posted about a hundred yards to their rear. The paratroopers were by then inured to the Germans' use of flamethrowers and stood fast. Sergeant George Bean, a squad leader of Second Platoon, B Company, epitomized this steadfastness. When a flamethrower-bearing German appeared in his sights, Bean calmly picked him off and then held his ground as three more German riflemen came up the same path only to meet the same fate. Eventually the paratroopers drove back the German attackers, who fell back on the positions E Company had earlier abandoned. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Robert Worley rallied the glider troopers and mounted a counterattack to regain the lost positions, personally leading the way while carrying a bazooka with which he both killed another flamethrower-wielding German and drove off a flak wagon. As a result of Worley's leadership, as well as considerable fire support from the 319th and 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalions, by nightfall E Company was back in its positions.[128]

That night, 25-26 September, Lieutenant Yarborough led a second, much larger patrol into the Kiekberg Woods. This time he was only able to advance 100 yards into the wood line before running into intense small arms and machine gun fire that forced him to withdraw. Based on the action of the last several days along this section of the front as well as intelligence reports that heavy German reinforcements were mustering inside the Kiekberg, Gavin ordered Billingslea to attack to clear the wood commencing on the morning of 27 September. The plan called for F Company (less one platoon) and G Company of the 2/325th to attack abreast into the northern face of the wood following a seven-minute artillery barrage by the 319th and 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalions reinforced by fires from XXX Corps artillery. Additionally, fifteen Sherman tanks from the Nottinghamshire Yeomanry (Sherwood Rangers) were to provide direct fire support for the attacking glidermen while E Company, 2/325th made a diversionary attack on the western tip of the Kiekberg.[129]

At 0537 hours, 27 September, as artillery rounds plastered the Kiekberg, F and G Companies began their attack, the troopers advancing " 'hand tip to hand tip at a fast walk and occasionally hitting the ground.' "[130] At first, the only enemy fire they encountered was from two machine guns, one on either flank, both of which were

promptly knocked out. Once they entered the thick wood, however, all control was lost; squads lost contact with their platoons, platoons with their companies, and the companies with each other. Adding to the troopers' difficulties was the fact that many of their weapons malfunctioned, having been fouled by the damp, sandy soil. The Germans, meanwhile, had turned the Kiekberg into a veritable killing field by lacing the wood with some thirty machine gun positions, most of which had survived the artillery barrage (the artillery rounds exploded upon making contact with the tree tops; German machine gun positions, dug in with overhead cover, were protected from all but a direct hit). In the confusion small groups of troopers stumbled through the wood without any regard for the overall tactical mission (many complained afterward that they had been poorly briefed on the mission) and the attack ground to a halt. Into the confused mêlée rushed Major Charles W. 'Tad' Major, the 2/325th commander, who with the help of Lieutenant George M. Cockle, the G Company commander and Captain Junior Woodruff, the F Company commander, eventually got the situation under control. Major also committed B Company, 1/325th, which had been attached to his battalion as a reserve force, to help stabilize the situation. By about 1000 hours, Major had regained control of his units, although all thought of continuing the attack had long been abandoned. Instead, he had his companies dig in to secure a wedge of the Kiekberg about 500 yards deep and 800 yards wide, where they repelled several counterattacks and from which they launched several more fruitless reconnaissance patrols. Prisoner interrogations later ascertained that two German infantry battalions had been using the Kiekberg as a staging area where they were preparing to spearhead another large-scale attempt to break through the 82nd lines. The 2/325th's attack had spoiled these plans, but at the high cost of some sixty casualties.[131]

The 2/325th spent the next two days defending its foothold in the Kiekberg, fending off several fairly large German attacks in the process. All attempts to expand the foothold were for naught, however. Even small patrols dispatched to surreptitiously find gaps in the enemy defenses were unable to advance very far before overwhelming fire from well-camouflaged German positions drove them back to friendly lines.[132]

But Billingslea was not content with simply holding a portion of the Kiekberg, he wanted it all for by forcing the Germans from the wood he would deny them a covered and concealed location in which they could mass forces relatively secure from Allied artillery and air power and from which they could launch large-scale incursions against the division's lines. He made himself, therefore, a ubiquitous presence in the Kiekberg, moving from position to position rallying his troopers while constantly seeking an opening or weakness he could exploit to effect a breakout. At one juncture, while inspecting G Company's positions, Billingslea single-handedly captured an enemy soldier trying to sneak through the lines. At another juncture, he appeared at an F Company bunker in which the troopers had lain all night listening to German armor rumble around them. " 'It's all right, you guys,' " he assured the troopers, " 'we're going to push them back' ." And leading the way himself, they did.[133] But the German defenses were too much for one battalion, much less one man, to handle. So at 1600 hours, 29 September, Billingslea withdrew Major's 2/325th from the wood and set in motion a plan to attack with two battalions.[134]

Billingslea's plan of attack was straightforward: four companies aligned along the north face of the wood would attack in company columns. On the right E and G

Companies, 2/325th, would attack in a southwesterly direction while on the left F and G Companies, 2/401st, attacked in a southeasterly direction. A seven-minute artillery barrage was to precede the attack.[135]

Jumping off at 0800 hours, 30 September, the 2/325th immediately ran into problems. A heavy artillery concentration, no one is sure whether it was from friendly or enemy guns, caught G company, 2/325th in the open as it was leading the battalion to the line of departure. A German counterattacking force also hit the company in its flank. Meanwhile artillery had also fallen on the 2/325th's command post, wounding both Major Major and his executive officer, Captain Dave Stokely. With G Company pinned down and fighting for survival and the battalion command group decimated, the 2/325th's attack broke down. In an attempt to get things moving Billingslea grabbed the 2/401st's executive officer, Captain Samuel Ogden, and put him in command of the 2/325th, but when Ogden contacted Lieutenant Cockle of G Company and told him to move out, Cockle demurred. " 'This is murder,' " responded Cockle, adding that he had four dead and twelve wounded men on his hands, an enemy machine gun on his left flank that was raking his formation, and artillery falling on his exposed troopers. One of those wounded was Private First Class James Newcomer, who recalled the enemy being " 'dug in and camouflaged so perfectly as to be nearly invisible,' " while the " 'mortar [and presumably artillery] fire was devastating, since many of the rounds exploded in the trees, showering shrapnel over a wide area.' "[136] With the way forward blocked, Ogden had Cockle withdraw G Company some 100 yards to the rear to regroup. When Ogden again issued orders to renew the attack, however, the 2/325th's company commanders "advised against it." Not only were they chary of again entering what was obviously a well-sited enemy kill zone, they were also reluctant to use the one tool at their disposal that would have negated the German advantage—artillery. During the withdrawal they had been forced to leave several wounded comrades behind, all of whom were being cared for by German aid men, and it was not in them to sacrifice their troopers' lives. Meanwhile, the British had obtained information that a two-division German attack could be expected shortly, so the decision was made to withdraw E and G Companies of the 2/325th in the event the information was accurate and attach F Company to the 2/401st, which was still in the process of making its attack.[137]

The 2/401st's attack also jumped off as planned, advancing two companies abreast, F and G, on the left and right respectively. Major Osmond Leahy, the battalion commander, had deliberately positioned them this way in order to augment command and control. The G Company commander, Captain John B. Sauls, " 'a stable, deliberate commander,' " was to set the pace while F Company, led by the " 'dashing' " Captain James M. Harney guided off it.[138] As was the case with the 2/325th, the 2/401st received incoming artillery fire as soon as it started to move but, despite some casualties, both company commanders maintained control of their units and kept them moving forward. As they penetrated deeper into the wood, however, enemy resistance stiffened and the inevitable occurred—troopers went to ground. When they did contact between squads, platoons, and the two companies vanished. Although Sauls and Leahy were still talking via radio, neither had heard from Harney who, it was later discovered, had sustained a serious gunshot wound to his thigh and was out of action. The situation became critical when Sauls reported what appeared to be fresh German troops in some quantity massing for a counterattack. Leahy was moving just behind the lead elements and rushed forward

to assess the situation for himself. It was then that he came upon a scene that " 'shocked us into disbelief!' " American and German soldiers were " 'standing a few feet apart with their weapons still in their hand[s]' " and seemed to be taking a time out from the war, a time out that neither side appeared particularly anxious to have end.[139]

It was approximately 1100 hours when Leahy stumbled upon this surreal interlude. The informal truce had already been going on for about thirty minutes. It had been initiated by Lieutenant Clarence H. Knutson, G Company's First Platoon Leader, and two German sergeants. Knutson and the twenty troopers with him had been cut off from the rest of G Company for about three hours yet still managed to maneuver to within 200 yards of the battalion objective before they were stopped cold by heavy small arms fire. Plagued by malfunctioning weapons and running low on ammunition, Knutson attempted to slip left where he hoped to find Second Platoon. Instead he and his point man, Sergeant Marvin Watts, flushed about fifteen Germans from their hiding place, all of whom threw their hands up to surrender. When Knutson ordered his troopers to hold their fire and gather in their prisoners, there suddenly appeared a second, larger group of Germans who were not interested in surrendering. The two sergeants heading the second group demanded, in fact, that Knutson surrender his force to them. There then ensued an impromptu parley, with the leaders on each side trying to convince the other to lay down their arms. Meanwhile the soldiers intermingled, exchanged cigarettes, showed one another pictures of their loved ones, and passed around a bottle of cognac one of the Germans had proffered. Knutson could clearly see that he was outnumbered by about three to one and that the Germans were heavily armed and, unlike his force, had ample ammunition, so it was in his best interest to keep things calm and keep the Germans talking for as long as possible. Lieutenant Lee Travelstead, another 2/401st officer, arrived on the scene with news that Major Leahy and reinforcements were on the way, but until then Knutson was at a distinct disadvantage. Surprisingly, when Knutson informed the German sergeants that more Americans were inbound, to include the battalion commander, they wavered and began considering surrender, but they were adamant that only a German officer could approve such a measure. In order to gain that approval and, perchance, gain more time as well, Knutson struck a bargain—what amounted to a temporary exchange of hostages. Knutson would have his men escort the two sergeants behind American lines to meet Major Leahy in order to arrange terms of surrender while Knutson and one other man would likewise proceed under escort behind German lines to meet the German battalion commander to convince him that surrender was in the best interest of his soldiers.

As events transpired, Knutson's incredible gamble paid off; during their passage to the German rear, where they were escorted without blindfolds, Knutson and his fellow hostage, Sergeant Richard Richardson, counted over 300 heavily armed and amply supplied German soldiers. They were obviously massing for an attack and would have easily decimated the smaller American force, but it appears that Knutson's bravado had served to temporarily halt the German advance pending the outcome of 'negotiations.' Fantastically, Knutson's audacity increased the further he got behind enemy lines. Almost 400 yards into the German rear Knutson and Richardson were presented to a German officer, a lieutenant, who promptly dispatched a runner to find the battalion commander. While they waited a second German lieutenant arrived who engaged his counterpart in a heated argument. Neither Knutson nor Richardson understood what was

said, but it was apparent that the second lieutenant was in a fit of pique because the attack had been stalled and in what appeared to be an attempt to prove a point about the relative weakness Knutson's force, he abruptly turned on Knutson and, in English, demanded to know " '[h]ow many men have you?' " Nonplussed, Knutson replied, " '[i]s that a fair question?' " Taken aback by Knutson's arrogance, the German lieutenant blustered about his strength, adding, " '[w]e have many tanks in the Reichswald,' " to which Knutson commented that tanks were not of much use in the woods. Having reached an impasse, or perhaps because the Germans were fed up with Knutson's impudence, the two Americans were led back to their lines, this time blindfolded. When they arrived back at the site where their strange odyssey had started, and where against all reason the truce was still holding firm, Knutson and Richardson met Major Leahy and told him all they had witnessed. In a whispered aside, Leahy informed Knutson that, in fact, there were no American reinforcements inbound because of an expected tank attack in another part of the wood. Knutson's gamble had temporarily stayed the German hand. It now fell to Leahy to continue Knutson's bluff.[140]

On his way to the front Leahy passed through scattered elements of both companies. It was clear that the thick wood had defeated all his attempts at maintaining control. Furthermore, he discovered that G Company had suffered considerable casualties and was completely disorganized. F Company, on the other hand, still had considerable combat power, but had lagged far behind. This knowledge, combined with what he learned from Lieutenant Knutson of the enemy strength, made it imperative that he gain even more time so that he could regain control of his battalion and transition it from attack to defense. Obviously, the best way to do this was to continue with Knutson's bluff.[141]

When Leahy arrived at the truce site he had with him his operations sergeant who was fluent in German. Through his sergeant Leahy learned that the German battalion commander was on the way. He also learned that the German unit with which he was engaged had recently arrived from the Eastern Front and was attacking to seize the Groesbeek Heights. Gaining more time so that he could reorganize his force and transition to the defense became therefore Leahy's paramount concern, especially in light of the knowledge that the enemy they were facing was a force of hardened combat veterans.[142]

Eventually a tall German major (it is interesting that whenever 82nd veterans described German officers, they almost always described them as tall) dressed in a long leather coat arrived and, in perfect English, haughtily informed Leahy that he was hopelessly outnumbered and that he should surrender. Although Leahy obviously knew this to be true, he persisted with Knutson's bluff. When firing broke out at some distant positions off to the left, the German major became visibly perturbed and demanded that Leahy order his men to cease fighting while they continued their negotiations. Leahy informed the major that the units that were firing were not under his command—although they most assuredly were—thereby painting a tactical picture for his counterpart that assumed a much larger American force in the Kiekberg than there in fact was. Playing on the German major's distress Leahy then offered the Germans safe passage through the American lines if they agreed to lay down their arms and come peaceably. " 'We are fighting on the border of the [Reich] to the last man,' " came the major's reply.[143] Having reached another impasse, Leahy and the major then agreed to an hour's truce,

from 1130-1230 hours, after which each side would be free to do what it would. The German major saluted smartly and left. Leahy went about consolidating his lines.[144]

Leahy used the remainder of the afternoon to establish a defensive line along a trail he had earlier designated as a rallying point. Word was passed that all Americans in the Kiekberg were to fall back to the trail where Leahy, the few remaining officers he had with him, and the sergeants who were occupying the bulk of the leadership positions sorted them out and got them positioned. By that time, Leahy had also assumed tactical control of the 2/325th as well so, once established, his defensive trace was occupied by the remnants of four companies. Having put everyone in the line he could lay his hands on, to include some mortar crewmen pressed into service as riflemen, Leahy had his troopers dig in and wait. Shortly after midnight, 1 October, the Germans attacked. Three of the four companies on line—F Company, 2/325th and F and G Companies, 2/40st—were hit. The troopers fired as fast as they could at the shadows to their front and repulsed the attack, aided in no small measure by the few mortarmen still with their tubes who fired over 250 rounds in just under an hour. The defensive line Leahy had hurriedly established held. It proved, in fact, such a strong defensive position that it remained the line held by a succession of Allied units until April 1945, when British and Canadian forces used it as their start point for the final drive into Germany.[145]

When asked about the Kiekberg truce after the war, Leahy surmised that it came about because " '[t]he sudden close contact brought a very human factor to realization. The situation became too personal and the fighting spirit was lost.' "[146] What he left unstated, but which becomes clear after a close reading of after action reports and personal reminiscences, is that had it not been for Knutson and Leahy's wily bluff, the whole of the Kiekberg could very well have been lost to the Allies, giving the Germans a easily defensible salient in which they could mass substantial forces and from which they could launch dangerous attacks against the Groesbeek Heights and the invaluable bridges.

The 325th had sustained substantial casualties in Kiekberg, in particular the 2/401st. On 1 October, F Company, 2/401st could muster but seventy-odd soldiers whereas G Company had been whittled down to but forty-three combat effectives.[147] But the regiment was not yet done. Sometime around 0900 hours, 1 October, General Gavin appeared at Billingslea's command post with another mission. A second British corps, VIII Corps, was being brought forward into the battle area, a move that necessitated an expansion of the number of bridges over the rivers and canals in the region. British engineers were going to build two of the bridges over the Maas River opposite Mook. The British were also "anxious that no identification of that group [VIII Corps] be obtained on that front [i.e., near Mook] until the bridging operations were well under way."[148] Hence, the 325th's task was to attack and clear the area southeast of Mook for a distance of approximately 3,500 yards to establish a buffer that would both allow the engineers to complete their task free of observed artillery fire and defeat German attempts to determine the Allies' order of battle. The attack was to being the morning of 2 October. Billingslea had just enough time to conduct a relief in place with the 505th and move all three of his battalions to Mook and organize them for the attack.[149]

Things got off to an inauspicious start. At 1700 hours, 1 October, while elements of the 505th and 2/401st were exchanging places in the Kiekberg, the Germans launched a sizeable artillery and infantry attack. Caught in mid relief, Captain James A. White's E Company, 2/401st sustained twelve to fifteen casualties. Furthermore, White was forced

to leave one of his reinforced squads behind to help cover a portion of the sector until the 505th could get organized. When added to the forty-five casualties E Company had already lost in Holland, White was able to muster but seventy-nine troopers for the attack the next morning. Yet despite being so severely undermanned White had little ground for complaint; though operating at approximately half its authorized strength, E Company was one of the largest units taking part in the attack on the Mook Plain.[150]

The attack was scheduled to jump off at 0530 hours, 2 October with the 2/401st on the right, the 1/325th on the left and the 2/325th in regimental reserve. Billingslea's scheme of maneuver called for the 2/401st and the 1/325th to advance abreast with the former keeping the Maas River to its right and setting the pace of the advance. Although advancing in this manner through the Kiekberg had proved impossible Billingslea thought that the open terrain southeast of Mook would make maintaining contact among the units much easier. This was not the case. Even before the attack began both battalions had problems finding the line of departure. Moving at night with no easily discernable terrain features off of which to navigate, several units got lost. Despite the initial confusion, however, eventually everything was sorted out and the attack proceeded only five minutes behind schedule.[151]

Billingslea had elected to forego the usual artillery preparation in the hope of achieving surprise. At first it looked as though his gamble had paid off. Abetted by a thick ground fog that blanketed the plain, the troopers moved unmolested at a steady pace for some time. Then, somewhere between 500 and 800 yards beyond the line of departure F Company, 2/401st began taking machine gun and small arms fire. This forced the rest of the line to halt in order to maintain contact across the front. When the line got moving again, it advanced another 300 yards before next contact was made, this time in front of E Company, 2/401st, the right-most unit in line. Once again the rest of the line halted while E Company maneuvered to take out two enemy machine gun positions. By that time it was 0830 hours and the sun began to burn off the ground fog, which was completely gone by about 0930 hours. No longer concealed the troopers were subjected to increasingly accurate small arms, machine gun, artillery, and mortar fire. They also discovered that the British cartridges they had been issued for their M-1s were causing an unusual number of jams. Although the same caliber, the British casings were slightly larger. Hence, when after several shots the barrels heated up the casings would get stuck in the chambers, the only remedy for which was to manually pry the casing from the breach, thereby reducing the semiautomatic M-1s to nothing more than single-shot rifles. This put a premium on marksmanship, and served to further slow the advance. As a result by about noon the line began to waver and break apart. The two companies in the center had been halted all together while those on the flanks were still slowly moving forward. Large gaps began to appear in the line and the attack frontage, initially 400 yards, had more than doubled as small elements attempted to flank or sideslip enemy positions to their front. To cover the gaps Billingslea committed his reserve, the 2/325th, in the center. And to get the attack moving again he called on British armor and artillery. Fifteen tanks and seventy-six artillery tubes responded. With these reinforcements by mid-afternoon virtually all ground resistance had been overcome (during the course of which scores of Germans surrendered, but with so few men to man the line the prisoners were simply disarmed and sent back to the rear unescorted) but the final objective was still over 1,000 yards away. Continuing forward under a steady hail

of enemy artillery and mortar fire, the troopers eventually gained their objective, a dike road, by 0100, 3 October, and dug in. There they remained until the next night, covering the last of the bridge building effort, after which they were ordered to fall back to Mook through a British defensive line that had been established approximately 1,000 yards to their rear.[152]

The attack on the Mook Plain cost the 325th nine officers and 280 enlisted men. B Company, 1/325th was hardest hit and returned to Mook with just twenty combat effective troopers. Included in these figures were several cases of combat fatigue brought about, no doubt, by the lack of sleep, food, water and the non-stop fighting that the regiment had endured since 27 September. Yet the 325th retained its fighting trim, a fact amply demonstrated during a German counterattack that hit the regiment as it was pulling back to Mook. The withdrawal commenced at about 2000 hours, 3 October, and was already underway when there suddenly emerged from the darkness on the enemy side of the dike an entire infantry company supported by two self-propelled guns (some advance elements of the attacking force had even used a herd of cows as cover to infiltrate as close to the American lines as possible). Hitting at the juncture of 1/325th and 2/325th, the attack caused a great deal of confusion at first. But this was short-lived as the battalions' officers and sergeants quickly got the troopers in hand and organized a hasty defense. Meanwhile, E Company, 2/401st, counterattacked into the German flank. Led by troopers like Private First Class Edward C. Kuzio, a BAR gunner who established himself amidst the enemy and, in less than an hour, fired twenty-four magazines into the German main body, E Company routed the attackers, restored the original defensive line, and stayed in place until the withdrawal was complete.[153]

The attack on the Mook Plain was the last significant action the division fought in the campaign. Yet it would be more than a month before the 82nd's troopers saw the last of Holland. Most of that time would be spent defending the 21st Army Group's lines of communication from positions along the Dutch border with Germany. Sergeant Arthur B. 'Dutch' Schultz labeled it the " 'eight to five' war" in blithe reference to its routine.[154] But it was much more insidious than that. Captain Henry Keep of the 3/504th perhaps described it best.

> The most wearing, nerve-racking part of a campaign is the period of holding static front-line positions when both sides sit across from 'No Man's Land' and stare at each other awaiting the build-up which will mark the eventual big push. For this military treading water is noted for terrifying and deadly artillery duels almost constantly in progress when after a certain period of time men involuntarily duck and cringe at the slightest sound of shellfire. Local skirmishes and the dreaded constant night-patrols are also prevalent at such a time. It is a period of forever being cold and dirty and damp, of living in fox-holes half filled with water, of eating unheated 'C' rations because you don't dare light a fire, of constantly being shelled, and of dreading the dangerous patrol you must of necessity go out on that night. All that is part of 'holding the line.' And forever is the whole atmosphere redolent with the wildest of rumors. 'We are being relieved tomorrow.' etc.[155]

It was classic static warfare, a mission for which the lightly armed and equipped airborne divisions were ill suited. As of 28 September the 82nd had already lost 102 officers and 1,567 enlisted men killed, wounded, or missing in action, approximately fourteen percent of its ground strength in Holland.[156] Hundreds more would be added to the rolls before the division was finally relieved and sent back to the rear to rest, recuperate, and reorganize. But eventually respite did come; it would, however, be short-lived.

Chapter Twenty Notes

[1] Gavin to Ryan, 13 July 1973.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 252.

[4] See also Gavin to Olson, 18 April 1968.

[5] Gavin to Ryan, 2 October 1973.

[6] See also Robert H. Wienecke to Cornelius Ryan, 14 May 1968, The Cornelius Ryan Papers, Box 102, Folder 6, OU.

[7] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 175. The bridge at Heumen was also called the Molenhoek Bridge in some accounts. Reflecting on this incident during an interview years later, Gavin said. "I would have been better off in Holland if I'd had an assistant division commander, particularly when I got involved on two different fronts; first crossing the Rhine River [*sic*, Gavin obviously meant the Waal River] which was a major battle in itself, and then fighting for the defense of [Molenhoek] and [Beek], which was a tremendous battle all in itself." Furthermore, Gavin was of the opinion that "you can't make a decision off of a map ten miles from the battle. You really have to get out there where you smell it, taste it, and talk to people. Lots of times they are yelling for help they don't need, and sometimes they need help and don't even know it." See Gavin, interview, 29 May 1975.

[8] Wienecke to Ryan, 14 May 1968. Underlining in original.

[9] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 175.

[10] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 177 and Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 508.

[11] Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 189-190; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume I, 285; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 508.

[12] Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[13] Gavin to Olson, 18 April 1968.

[14] See also Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 175-176; Gavin, interview, 16 April 1975; Division After Action Review, Market-Garden.

[15] Combat Interview "Co. B, 1st Bn, 505th Prcht Inf, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82d Airborne Division Holland, 17-16 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[16] 505th Regimental S-3 Journal, entry for 1005, 19 September, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 4, OU. Capitalization in original.

[17] See also Combat Interview "1st Bn, 505th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div. Mook and Riethorst (Major Talton W. Long)"; Combat Interview "Company B, 505th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div (Lt Harold E. Miller, CO)."

[18] Combat Interview "Co. B, 1st Bn, 505th Prcht Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[19] See Langdon, *"Ready,"* 98-99; Combat Interview "1st Bn, 505th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div. Mook and Riethorst (Major Talton W. Long)"; Combat Interview "Company B, 505th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div (Lt Harold E. Miller, CO)"; "Operation Market," pp. flanks 23-24.

[20] According to the 505th Regimental S-3 Journal, the British tanks reached the railroad underpass at 1440 hours. The troop commander obviously left one tank behind to provide rear security and then proceeded on toward Mook. When Gavin arrived at the underpass he saw the lone tank and reported a great deal of firing coming from Mook. Hence, it is obvious that Gavin arrived at the underpass sometime after 1440 hours, by which time Ekman already set in train plans for a counterattack. The fact that Gavin felt assured that Ekman did, in fact, have things in hand bears this out. See 505th Regimental S-3 Journal, entry for 1440, 20 September.

[21] 505th Regimental S-3 Journal, entry for 1330, 20 September. Capitalization in original.

[22] See also See Langdon, *"Ready,"* 98-99; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 510; Ekman to Gavin, 22 January 1954; Combat Interview "1st Bn, 505th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div. Mook and Riethorst (Major Talton W. Long)"; Combat Interview "Company B, 505th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div (Lt Harold E. Miller, CO)"; Combat Interview "Co. B, 1st Bn, 505th Prcht Inf, 82d Abn Div."; "Operation Market," pp. flanks 23-24.

[23] Ekman to Gavin, 22 January 1954.

[24] Ekman to Gavin, 22 January 1954. See also Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 269 and 280; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 99; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 510. A few days after the fight at Mook, Gavin felt compelled to write General Paul Williams, commander of the IX Troop Carrier Command, about glider pilots on the battlefield. " 'In looking back over the past weeks' operation,' " he wrote, " 'one of the outstanding things, in my opinion, and one thing in most urgent need of correction, is the method of handling our glider pilots. I do not believe there is anyone in the combat area more eager and anxious to do the correct thing and yet so completely, individually and collectively, incapable of doing it, than the glider pilots.' " Though individually willing to help, Gavin felt them a definite liability since they arrived without the proper equipment, arms, training, and organization. Furthermore, they had a tendency to wander about the battlefield and thereby " 'became involved in small unit actions to the extent that satisfied their passing curiosity.' " Gavin's recommendation was that the pilots " 'should be assigned to airborne units, take training with the units and have a certain number of hours allocated periodically for flight training.' " Gavin was obviously influenced by the British system wherein the glider pilots formed a separate regiment and were fully trained and equipped to assume duties as another maneuver element once on the ground. Gavin's recommendation came to naught, vetoed by Ridgway who maintained that since the primary duty of glider pilots was to fly they would stay assigned to IX Troop Carrier Command. See Gavin's letter to General Williams reproduced in Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 279.

[25] Memorandum, Headquarters, 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, "Unit History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion from 17 September 1944 to 16 October 1944," 26 October 1944. See also Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry, "Invasion of Holland," 27 October 1944, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 101, Folder 4, OU.

[26] Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954. Underlining in original.

[27] James Morris Irvin questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, Folder 46, OU.

[28] See also Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 176 and Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 189-191.

[29] See "Operation Market," pp. flanks 16-18, and Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944.

[30] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 48-50; Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944; Memorandum, Headquarters 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, subject: Report of Action, 307 A/B Engr Bn (less "A" and "H&S" Cos)," 25 September 1944.

[31] Bob White quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tal*e, 194.

[32] Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944.

[33] Ibid.

[34] See also Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 191-195 passim; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 48-49; "Operation Market," pp. flanks 14-15.

[35] Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 191; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 511; Millsaps to Chapman, 27 July 1967; "Operation Market," pp. flanks 16-18; Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944; After Action Report, "The History of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion."

[36] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 51; Gavin, interview, 16 April 1975; Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944; Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Historical Narrative," 16 October 1944.

[37] Gavin to Olson, 18 April 1968.

[38] See also Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 176-177; Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 192; Gavin, interview, 16 April 1973; Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[39] Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954.

[40] Gavin to Smith, 17 January 1954. See also 82nd Airborne Division, Division Artillery After Action Review, "Unit History, Operation Market."

[41] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 177.

[42] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 51 and "Operation Market," pp. flanks 2-5.

[43] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 177; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 51 and "Operation Market," pp. flanks 5-7.

[44] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 51 and "Operation Market," pp. flanks 7.

[45] Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944.

[46] Blue quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 196.

[47] See also Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 191-201 passim and Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944.

[48] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 177.

[49] Endorsement letter from Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division to C[ommanding] G[eneral], XVIII Corps (Airborne), 6 October 1944, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder "General Ridgway, Matthew B., letters on insignia, 504th Regt. Combat Team, 505th At Nijmegen + 82nd Airborne Division," USAMHI.

[50] In *On To Berlin*, Gavin wrote that he did, in fact, speak briefly with Ridgway before departing. "I told him that I had a very difficult situation on my hands and that I would have to move on." But as the following account drawn from contemporaneous sources indicates, the two did not communicate with one another at all. See Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 175.

[51] Endorsement letter from Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division to C[ommanding] G[eneral], XVIII Corps (Airborne), 6 October 1944. Capitalization in original.

[52] Memorandum, Headquarters, XVIII Corps Airborne to Brigadier General James M. Gavin, "Military Courtesy," 5 October 1944, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder "General Ridgway, Matthew B., letters on insignia, 504th Regt. Combat Team, 505th At Nijmegen + 82nd Airborne Division," USAMHI.

[53] Endorsement letter from Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division to C[ommanding] G[eneral], XVIII Corps (Airborne), 6 October 1944. Capitalization in original.

[54] Jonathan Soffer wrote that Ridgway hated giving up the 82nd and according to Maxwell Taylor, Ridgway "never really cut his emotional cord to the division" and "was bound to over-supervise its commander." According to Taylor, he " 'used to thank god that I didn't get the 82d . . . I'd have been fired.' " See Soffer, *General Matthew B. Ridgway*, 64.

[55] Gavin Diary 16 October 1944.

[56] Matthew B. Ridgway to Cornelius Ryan, 24 June 1973, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 6, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Cornelius Ryan, James Gavin, Correspondence, June – July 1973, Concerning Operation Market Garden, September, 1944," USAMHI.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier* 110-111. Ridgway and his party had traveled to the battle area with General Brereton and select members of the First Allied Airborne Army staff. After bad weather scotched their plans on 18 September, they flew back to the Continent on 19 September and landed at Antwerp despite the airfield being under German artillery fire. They then procured a truck and drove to Montgomery's headquarters in Brussels, where General de Guingand, the 21st Army Group Chief of Staff, lent them some jeeps. Once in the XXX Corps area traffic snarls slowed their progress significantly. They finally arrived at Eindhoven's center square at dusk but found it "jammed with vehicles of all kinds—gasoline trucks, ammunition trucks, and troop transports." Suddenly, a single plane buzzed overhead and dropped two flares. " 'Lewis, I don't like the looks of this,' " said Ridgway, " '[l]et's get the hell out of here' " The two parties jumped in their jeeps and sped to a nearby park. "We'd gone about two blocks when the whole world exploded." Approximately 120 German Stukas and JU-88 bombers proceeded to tear Eindhoven apart, their task facilitated by the combustible mass of flammable and explosive-bearing vehicles in the town center. "We leaped from the jeeps and hit the ground . . . Lewis in his nice uniform scrambling for the pistol he had dropped." There they remained, "flat on our stomachs for about an hour" while Eindhoven exploded around them. When the aerial attack subsided, Ridgway could not find Brereton

so he decided to try to continue on to the 101st headquarters, a few miles north of the city. But the devastation was so widespread, with fires raging throughout the city, that there was no way that Ridgway was going to make it out that night so he finally ordered his driver to pull off to the side of the road where he and his companions spent the night sleeping in a ditch. Brereton, meanwhile, opted to turn around and spent the night in a British military police headquarters three miles south of Eindhoven. The next morning, 20 September, Ridgway set out again, arriving at the 82nd headquarters coincident with the German attacks along the perimeter. See Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 349-350 and Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 109-110.

[59] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 111.

[60] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 349.

[61] Gavin quoted in Ryan, *A Bridge Too Fa*r, 478.

[62] Murphy quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 135.

[63] Shields quoted in ibid., 137.

[64] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 124.

[65] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 577.

[66] Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 221.

[67] Giles A. M. Vandeleur interview, 10 August 1967, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 17, OU.

[68] J. O. E. Vandeleur interview, 18 April 1967, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 17, OU.

[69] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 504.

[70] Giles Vandeleur, interview, 10 August 1967.

[71] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 577.

[72] Harmel quoted in Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 224.

[73] Harmel quoted in ibid., 215.

[74] Harmel quoted in ibid.

[75] Kershaw, *"It Never Snows in September,"* 125-126 and 221 and MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 185.

[76] Giles Vandeleur, interview, 10 August 1967.

[77] J. O. E. Vandeleur, interview, 18 April 1967.

[78] Ibid.

[79] See also Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 578-580.

[80] Carter, *Devils in Baggy Pants*, 35.

[81] War Department, General Order No. 18, 15 March 1945, citation for Private John R. Towle, Company C, 504th Parachute Infantry, the 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Box "504th PIR—WWII Personal Papers," Folder "*Personal Papers—Towle, John R. (C Co., 1/504th)," Fort Bragg, NC.

[82] See also Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 581-582; Combat Interview "Company C, 1st Bn, 504th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-16 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "Company C, 1st Bn., 504th Regt.—82d A/B Division."

[83] See also Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 581-583; Combat Interview "Company C, 1st Bn, 504th Prcht Regt, 82d Abn Div."; Combat Interview "Company C, 1st Bn., 504th Regt.—82d A/B Division."

[84] 505th Regimental S-3 Journal, entry for 1025, 21 September. On 19 September, the 43rd Division was still in its assembly area in Belgium when it received word to start moving forward. Though quick to respond, the 43rd spent the most of the next morning strung out on the road south of Eindhoven, held up while the 101st fended off several attacks north of the city. It took the 101st and elements of XXX Corps seven hours to push the Germans out of range of the main road, at which time the 43rd sped northward, reaching Grave by nightfall, 20 September. Curiously, instead of maintaining the momentum of the advance by moving straight into Nijmegen and across the Waal as rapidly as possible the 43rd's commander, Major General Sir Ivor Thomas, opted to employ his lead brigade, the 130th, against three subsidiary missions: taking over guard missions at the Grave Bridge and Bridge 10 (Honinghutie) and clearing Nijmegen of German stragglers. Using the lead brigade in this manner (as opposed to one of the following brigades) imposed a further delay on the brigades following, the 214th and 129th, which subsequently were not in position to renew the attack on Arnhem until the morning of 22 September. See Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 520-531 passim.

[85] Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944.

[86] Combat Interview "3d Bn, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."

[87] Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944.

[88] Tarbell quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 137.

[89] See also Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 521-525; "Operation Market," pp. bridges 76 and 81; Combat Interview "1st Battalion, 504th Para Inf, 82d Abn Div."; Combat Interview "Colonel Reuben H. Tucker, CO 504th Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[90] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 460-483 passim, 584, and 610.

[91] Mackenzie quoted in Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 593 and First Allied Airborne Army, "Report on Operations 'Market' and 'Garden,' " n.d., pp. 14-15, 101—(A/B)—0.3.0, Box 2008, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[92] First Allied Airborne Army, "Report on Operations 'Market' and 'Garden,' " n.d., 14.

[93] See also Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 224-225; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 592-594; First Allied Airborne Army, "Report on Operations 'Market' and 'Garden,' " n.d., 14-15.

[94] Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 228; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 596; First Allied Airborne Army, "Report on Operations 'Market' and 'Garden,' " n.d., 15.

[95] Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 228.

[96] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 542-552 passim.

[97] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 597 and First Allied Airborne Army, "Report on Operations 'Market' and 'Garden,' " n.d., 15-16.

[98] 1st Airborne Division War Diary reproduced in *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 677. Capitalization in original.

[99] Sosabowski and Horrocks quoted in Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 599.

[100] See also Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 229-230; Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 601; First Allied Airborne Army, "Report on Operations 'Market' and 'Garden,' " n.d., 17.

[101] Urquhart's message is reproduced in Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 682.

[102] Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 230.

[103] Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 683 and First Allied Airborne Army, "Report on Operations 'Market' and 'Garden,' " n.d., 18.

[104] Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 230.

[105] See Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 131 and Memorandum, Headquarters 307th A/B Medical Company, "Report of Unit Operations in Holland (September 17, 1944 to October 16, 1944)," 6 November 1944, 382-MED-0.3, Box 14713, Record Group 407, NARAII.

[106] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 131.

[107] Ibid., 134-135. In addition to the parachute drops, the 53rd also delivered one Waco glider loaded with 1.5 tons of supplies.

[108] Administrative Instruction No. 1, Headquarters, British Airborne Troops, 12 September 1944 reproduced in James A. Huston, "The Air Invasion of Holland," *Military Review* 32, no. 5 (August 1952): 42.

[109] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 204-205.

[110] S-1 Journal, 325th Glider Infantry, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 106, Folder 62, OU.

[111] Plebanek quoted in Phil Nordyke, *All American All The Way* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2005), 564.

[112] S-1 Journal, 325th Glider Infantry. See also Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 603 and Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 142.

[113] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 141-142.

[114] Sanford quoted in Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 280-281.

[115] Newcomer quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 566.

[116] Burchell quoted in ibid., 566.

[117] Gelber quoted in ibid., 566-567.

[118] Warren R. Williams Jr. questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 26, OU.

[119] See also Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 143 and Margry, *Operation Market-Garden: Then and Now*, Volume II, 603.

[120] Edgar L. Cook, interview, 27 January 1967, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 106, Folder 23, OU.

[121] Oberkrieser quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 567.

[122] Fary quoted in ibid.

[123] Cook, interview, 27 January 1967. See also Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 143-144.

[124] Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 144; "325th Glider Plays Important Role in Historic Operation," n.d., 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448, Record Group 407, NARAII; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-16 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[125] "325th Glider Plays Important Role in Historic Operation."

[126] Combat Interview "The Attack on the Kiekberg Woods," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-16 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[127] Plebanek quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 568.

[128] See also Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 278-279; Combat Interview "Co. B, 1st Bn, 505th Prcht Inf, 82d Abn Div."; 82nd Airborne Division, Division Artillery After Action Review, "Unit History, Operation Market"; Memorandum, Headquarters, 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, Narrative Report, 26 October 1944.

[129] Combat Interview "The Attack on the Kiekberg Woods"; 82nd Airborne Division, Division Artillery After Action Review, "Unit History, Operation Market"; "325th Glider Plays Important Role in Historic Operation."

[130] Combat Interview "The Attack on the Kiekberg Woods."

[131] See Combat Interview "The Attack on the Kiekberg Woods" and "325th Glider Plays Important Role in Historic Operation."

[132] Combat Interview "The Attack on the Kiekberg Woods."

[133] Cook, interview, 27 January 1967.

[134] See also Combat Interview "The Attack on the Kiekberg Woods."

[135] Ibid.

[136] Newcomer quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 574.

[137] Except where noted see Combat Interview “The Second Attack on the Kiekberg Woods,” n.d., CI-171 “82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-16 Sep 44,” Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[138] See Leahy’s account of the battle in Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 286.

[139] Leahy’s account of the battle in Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 286. See also Combat Interview “The Second Attack on the Kiekberg Woods.”

[140] Combat Interview “The Second Attack on the Kiekberg Woods.”

[141] Ibid.

[142] See Leahy’s account of the battle in Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 287 and Combat Interview “The Second Attack on the Kiekberg Woods.”

[143] Quoted in Leahy’s account of the battle in Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 287.

[144] See also Combat Interview “The Second Attack on the Kiekberg Woods.”

[145] See Leahy’s account of the battle in Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 287; Pierce, *Let’s Go!,* 212-213; Combat Interview “The Second Attack on the Kiekberg Woods.”

[146] See Leahy’s account of the battle in Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 287.

[147] Combat Interview “The Second Attack on the Kiekberg Woods.”

[148] James M. Gavin to Matthew B. Ridgway, 3 October 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, box 3, Folder “Matthew B. Ridgway: World War II—Personal, August to December 1944,” USAMHI.

[149] Except where noted see Pierce, *Let’s Go!*, 213; “325th Glider Plays Important Role in Historic Operation”; Combat Interview “The Attack on the Mook Plains,” n.d., CI-171 “82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-16 Sep 44,” Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview “325 Glider Infantry Regiment.”

[150] Combat Interview “The Attack on the Mook Plains.”

[151] Combat Interview “The Attack on the Mook Plains” and Combat Interview “325 Glider Infantry Regiment.”

[152] Pierce, *Let’s Go!*, 213-215; Combat Interview “The Attack on the Mook Plains”; Combat Interview “325 Glider Infantry Regiment.”

[153] See Combat Interview “The Attack on the Mook Plains”; Combat Interview “325 Glider Infantry Regiment”; “325th Glider Plays Important Role in Historic Operation.”

[154] Schultz to Ryan, 28 October 1966.

[155] Keep to his mother, 20 November 1944.

[156] Brereton, *Brereton Diaries*, 358. Although exact figures are impossible to come by, a good estimate is that by 28 September approximately 12,100 Division troopers had been delivered to the 82nd either by parachute, glider, or ground transportation. See Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, 226.

Chapter Twenty-One
You Are Looking at the Survivors

It was quite a normal occurrence for all hell to break out suddenly on the 82nd U.S. Airborne front—shelling, mortaring, machine-gun fire, the lot. Whenever I rang up Jim Gavin to find out what was going on he gave me the same answer: 'We're just having a bit of a patrol.' I usually discovered that his 'bit of a patrol' had consisted of at least a hundred U.S. paratroopers carrying out a large-scale raid on the German positions. Like all first-class troops these two divisions [the 82nd and 101st] were never content to sit quiet; they were always hitting back at the Germans. And under their deceptively gentle exterior both Maxwell Taylor and Gavin were very tough characters indeed. They had to be, because the men they commanded were some of the toughest troops I have ever come across in my life.

Brian Horrocks[1]

The 82nd's extended Dutch sojourn was the predictable result of MARKET-GARDEN's failure. As will be recalled, General Horrocks's XXX Corps had taken Antwerp, with its port facilities intact, in an almost bloodless coup on 4 September. However, the seaward approach to the city, the sixty-mile-long Scheldt Estuary, was still in the hands of the *German Fifteenth Army*. When he proposed his plan to Eisenhower, Montgomery claimed that MARKET-GARDEN would not only achieve a bridgehead over the Rhine, it would also result in the opening of the port of Antwerp, thereby solving the Allies' increasingly parlous supply situation. Eisenhower was intrigued, and although the prudent course of action would have been to clear the Scheldt *before* undertaking further major combat operations, he approved MARKET-GARDEN.[2] As he later explained to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, " '[t]he attractive possibility of quickly turning the German north flank led me to approve [MARKET-GARDEN and] the temporary delay in freeing the vital port of Antwerp' "[3] When the gamble failed, however, Antwerp assumed even greater importance. MARKET-GARDEN had sapped almost all the available Allied supplies. Winter was fast approaching. And with no bridgehead over the Rhine, the Allies were going to have to undertake another major offensive, or several, to bring about Germany's defeat. It was imperative that Antwerp be opened to Allied shipping. But Montgomery's other army, the Canadian First, to which he had assigned the mission of clearing the Scheldt, had made little headway against determined German resistance. "I underestimated the difficulties of opening up the approaches to Antwerp," wrote Montgomery after the war. "I reckoned that the Canadian Army could do it *while* we were going for the Ruhr. I was wrong."[4] The

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 591 through 598.

British Second Army, meanwhile, was decisively engaged holding its portion of the 21st Army Group front, a front that, as a result of MARKET-GARDEN, had almost doubled in length (from 150 miles before 17 September to 280 miles once major offensive operations were concluded). The cascading effect was that Montgomery simply could not release the American airborne divisions because he had nothing left with which to replace them. On 18 October, over increasingly strident complaints from First Allied Airborne Army about delays in withdrawing the 82nd and 101st, Eisenhower gave his tacit approval for 21st Army Group to continue to employ the American airborne divisions until such time that the Scheldt had been cleared.[5]

For the remainder of their stay in Holland the 82nd's troopers rotated between front line positions and the 'rear,' which either meant Nijmegen or Grave, where there were showers, hot food, beds, and even the occasional movie. When on the line the regiments rotated among the positions the division had seized by 2 October. South of the Waal this was a defensive trace east and southeast of Nijmegen that was anchored on the Maas in the south and the Waal in the north and in the center generally ran along the eastern face of the Groesbeek Heights (and thereby fronted the German border). The 82nd also assumed responsibility for a portion of the eastern section of the bridgehead north of the Waal. "I do not recall anything drastic happening during that period," wrote Lieutenant Chester A. Garrison, the 2/504th's Adjutant,

> [b]ut that does not mean that we had a happy time. Quite the opposite. Being subject to enemy fire for two months without a break had its toll. There were patrols, rumors, wounds, deaths, and occasional encounters with the enemy. We were constantly alerted to the possibility of enemy build-up and an all-out attack. All of this was psychologically wearing, and the oncoming winter was physically testing.[6]

When on the line the troopers' existence was subterranean and, given Holland's geography, wet; in many places one did not have to dig too far down before hitting water. As time passed and the positions became more or less permanent, troopers did all they could to protect themselves from what emerged as the greatest threat, enemy artillery. Overhead cover made from stout logs was the norm and provided protection from all but a direct hit. The foxholes themselves were approximately seven feet long, two feet wide, and four to six feet deep. Sergeant John McKenzie of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion perhaps best summed up the troopers' feelings about their front-line living conditions when he wrote, "[t]he closest thing to a foxhole is a grave. . . . Living in a hole like a rabbit, no matter how well it was improved, was damp, confining, and extremely claustrophobic."[7] Nonetheless, some troopers went to great lengths to make their holes luxurious. Trooper Norb Studelska's foxhole, located about a half mile from the German border

> 'was a model of comfort. I took great pride in making my home the best on the block. It was chest deep, long enough to lie flat when I slept and narrow at the top. To keep things neat and clean, as my mother had taught me, I completely lined the hole with the canopy of a main chute. . . . I had

> a built-in shelf for my personal gear and a picture of my childhood sweetheart, Elaine Olsen, whom I married after the war.'[8]

Steve Schmelick, one of the 508th's communication linemen, wired several foxholes in the regimental headquarters area with headsets so the occupants could listen to Axis Sally on the radio. Two other 508th troopers, Matthew Bellucci and Dick Nelson, rigged up a light bulb for their foxhole, which they powered off a nearby generator.[9]

On 9 October, Browning's British I Airborne Corps headquarters was relieved and sent back to the United Kingdom, there being no need for what by the time were four corps-level command and control elements in the Eindhoven-Nijmegen area (the others being the British Second Army's VIII, XII, and XXX Corps) and the 82nd thereupon fell under Horrocks's XXX Corps for both operational and logistical matters.[10] Horrocks was elated to have both American airborne divisions under his direct command. " 'I never heard an Englishman as enthusiastic as General Horrocks was when he began extolling the 82nd and 101st,' " reported General Parks to General Brereton.[11] Writing after the war, Horrocks maintained his fulsome praise of the American airborne divisions and their commanders.

> As this difficult battle progressed I became more and more impressed with the fighting qualities of the 82nd and 101st U.S. Airborne Divisions. . . . What impressed me so much about them was their quickness into action; they were great individualists. They were also commanded by two outstanding men . . . [who] were quiet, sensitive men of great charm, with an almost British passion for understatement.[12]

Horrocks had witnessed firsthand the 82nd's conduct on 20 September when it simultaneously crossed the Waal, fought through the streets of Nijmegen, and countered two large-scale attacks along the eastern and southeastern edges of its perimeter, to say nothing of the equally ferocious battles the 101st waged in its portion of the narrow corridor. It is understandable that he would be so enamored of the fighting prowess of the two American airborne divisions. Interestingly, General Browning was not as captivated by Gavin's "individualists." A protégé of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff Field Marshal Alan Brooke who, like Montgomery, epitomized the British penchant for deliberately planned and executed set-piece battles, Browning was uncomfortable with the manner by which Gavin delegated authority to his subordinates. During a cocktail party at his quarters in Nijmegen prior to his departure, Browning took the opportunity to gently chastise Gavin on the subject. As the party was coming to an end, remembered Gavin, Browning

> 'walked me through the garden and allowed as how I gave too much freedom of action to my subordinates. I couldn't believe it. Freedom of action! The Germans had us outnumbered in each of the tactical fights we got into, when we were scrambling for our lives, and we won all of our engagements. That has always stuck in the back of my mind, for I couldn't understand it by American standards at all. We give our subordinates, and that includes division and corps commanders, as well as

> small unit leaders, a great deal of freedom of action so that they can take advantage of unexpected surprises that arise from time to time.'[13]

Browning's admonition reveals much about the difference between being an airborne theorist, which is how Gavin thought of Browning, and an airborne commander. Holland was Gavin's third airborne battle and Browning's first. Gavin knew that there was only so much he could control. Success, therefore, depended on subordinate leaders who knew the overall intent of an operation and took matters into their own hands to realize that intent. Detailed planning was conducted beforehand to the greatest extent possible, but once battle was joined an airborne division commander had to loose the reins and trust his subordinates to do the rest.

But this required that one's subordinates were capable; that once left to their own devices they would display the aggressiveness, toughness, initiative, and leadership upon which success depended. Having a cadre of handpicked soldiers was not enough, and the success of the division's non-paratroopers, most of whom were not handpicked for their positions, demonstrated that perhaps it was not even necessary. What was necessary was that the chain of command established and enforced standards, both in training and in combat, which served to inculcate the desired values throughout the ranks. Ridgway established these values; Gavin honed them to a fine edge. What resulted was an airborne ethos, an ethos reinforced by the battlefield success the division attained despite being assigned difficult missions against incredible odds. It was that ethos that so impressed Horrocks.

What made this ethos so powerful was the example set by those in positions of command. Tucker, Billingslea, Ekman, Warren, Vandervoort, Cook and so many others were its exemplars. Ridgway had been too but Gavin was, perhaps, the first exemplar. Stories of his ubiquitous battlefield exploits, always at the cutting edge of battle, are legendary. Sergeant Robert M. Murphy of A Company, 1/505th related a story reminiscent of so many others. " 'I was in an outpost in Holland when this lone guy in a jeep came out of the German lines,' " recalled Murphy. " 'I figured it was an enemy soldier in a captured vehicle, and I got him in my rifle sights. Then I saw the two stars on his helmet. Gavin, by God! Here we were supposedly the advanced guard, and he's ahead of us.' "[14] Corporal John Leh II of the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion had a similar recollection. Leh's antitank gun had been put out of action during a German counterattack in the vicinity of Wyler.

> The attack soon died and the artillery started coming in again. Just after daylight, I saw a tall erect soldier with an M1 slung over his shoulder walking along the edge of the woods. He peered down at our damaged AT gun . . . a shell had landed between the trails in our ammo dump, and our 'Betsy' was no longer useable. 'Doesn't that nut know he's right on the front lines?' I thought to myself. 'He should be more careful.' I looked . . . I looked again . . . It was Slim Jim Gavin himself. Well, if he could walk around like that, I guessed that I could get out of my foxhole. What a guy . . . to be up here with us!!!![15]

Captain Hugo Olson, Gavin's aide, perhaps knew the general better than anyone else. He characterized his boss as a man of great calm whom the troopers revered because he was always there with them, up front, instead of in some warm, dry, relatively safe rear headquarters. Gavin believed in personal reconnaissance and always wanted to get a look at things himself, to get the smell of battle in his nose, so that he could make a determination of what or what not to do. According to Olson, Gavin "had a kind of sixth sense," what the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz recognized in *On War* as *coup d'oeil*, the "inward eye" that allows a great captain of genius to make a "sound decision in the midst of action."[16] Olson wrote that Gavin "seemed to know instinctively where he should be and where he should make a reconnaissance. He knew instinctively where the logical place for a counterattack would come from and where to put his defenses."[17] Gavin epitomized what he expected every 82nd trooper to be, although he demanded much more of himself than he did of anyone else. General Gary E. Luck, a long-time paratrooper and one-time commander of XVIII Airborne Corps recounted a story about his father-in-law, Private First Class H. R. Patrick, a World War II veteran who served with the 82nd, that captures the feeling many in the ranks had for Gavin. Luck was going through his father-in-law's personal possessions when he came across an Army-issue Bible that had been given to troopers during the war. In the middle of the Bible was a section for unit information.

> One spot asked for the company clerk's name. My father-in-law listed (I believe) a Technical Sergeant Hill. It then asked for his commander's name, which clearly meant his *company* commander. However, PFC Patrick had penned in 'Gen. Gavin.' Think about that. This means a soldier at the bottom of the 82nd's organization felt a direct connection to his division commander. I am told that the entire division felt General Gavin was their 'personal' commander, such was his leadership style, and such was their trust and confidence in him.[18]

One of the things that Gavin had little control over, especially once the 82nd came under XXX Corps control, was chow. The words 'fine cuisine' and 'British' are generally not used together in the same sentence, and it appeared to many Americans who ate them that those responsible for developing British military rations wanted to highlight this ignobility. "Coming under XXX Corps hardly caused a ripple in our ranks," recalled Lieutenant Megellas, "except when we received British rations."[19] According to Lieutenant John McKenzie, eating British rations for some six weeks in Holland, "brought many Americans very close to mutiny."[20] According to McKenzie, all the British ration items

> were canned and among them were steak and kidney pie, mutton stew, scrambled eggs, kippered herring, plum pudding, and something called treacle pudding. Besides our unfamiliarity with these dishes, the main differences between British and American rations were the quality of the ingredients and the seasoning. Many British meat-based items had a rank taste and smell and seemed spoiled, whereas American rations seemed fresher and were of much higher quality.[21]

Private Allen Langdon of the 505th remembered that during the time the division was being supplied with British rations "Dutch cows, pigs, chickens, and rabbits suffered accordingly as a means of filling GI stomachs at least once a day."[22] But it was not all bad. The rations were slightly modified to account for American tastes—the troopers got U.S. coffee instead of tea and U.S. cigarettes instead of the "mouth-burning" English variety.[23] And there was also a rum ration, two ounces per day per man. This made the division G-4, Major Albert G. Marin, an instant hero with the troopers. Soon after XXX Corps assumed control of the 82nd Marin went to see his British counterpart to make the necessary logistical arrangements. When asked if he had received his rum ration yet, the perplexed Marin replied that he had not.

> So they got a couple of trucks and they got this ration of rum (Hudson's Bay) which was passed out to the troops on a per capita basis and everybody had a nice binge. It came in at least an inch high on a canteen cup—180 proof, that's a lot of good liquor. And Al was back a week later at 30 Corps and they said did he need any more rum. And he said 'well, what we have is pretty well gone.' So they got some more. And the third time he was back and they asked this question they said 'really, old boy, has the fighting been that heavy?' and he said 'No, its [*sic*] been pretty quiet as a matter of fact.' Then it came out that the rules of the British Army under which the rum was being rationed was that all hands got a drink only when a brigadier or better said 'well done.' And of course the Americans were just dishing it out with the food.[24]

For the most part Marin's characterization of division operations during this period of static warfare as "pretty quiet" was correct, but only when compared with the ferocious fighting that had been the norm from 17 September through 2 October, the date of the 82nd's last major offensive action, the 325th's attack on the Mook Plain. To be certain, there were some sections of the front that were somewhat dormant. According to Staff Sergeant James E. Jones of B Company, 1/505th, the river plain just south of the Waal was almost blissfully serene.

> The Germans had accordions and no fighting was taking place at that time at all and we would call over and ask them to sing a particular song and if they knew it, in just a little while we would hear the accordion start and we would get our song played for us. In some cases, we would holler across 'Hello Jerry' and we would get an answer. To my knowledge no one at that time fired any shots at either side to disrupt the nice relationship we had.[25]

Juxtaposed with the vicious battles the two sides fought in the beginning of the campaign, Sergeant Jones's reminiscence seems somewhat surreal; yet stories like this are not unusual, especially during periods of static warfare when the opposing sides become more 'familiar' with one another. The American Civil War and World War I are replete with examples of similar episodes of fraternization. But an ostensibly peaceful attitude

can often be adopted for more mundane reasons as well as Stanley Kass recalled. According to Kass, a lone German gun that had proved impervious to counter-battery fire had been periodically bombarding the 508th's lines and inflicting casualties. Kass, who headed the 508th's demolition section, was assigned the mission of finding the gun and putting it out of action, so one night Kass and his troopers crept forward, found the gun, destroyed it, and returned to friendly lines without incident. At the time Kass thought nothing of the fact that the gun had been unguarded but later, when talking with a member of the regimental S-2 section he discovered that there were, in fact, two Germans who had had Kass and his men in their sights the entire time. These two Germans, who had subsequently been taken prisoner, revealed during interrogation that they were in a spider hole (a well camouflaged foxhole with a very small opening at the top) right in front of the gun and that Kass's patrol had almost walked right over their position. The insisted they could have killed everyone in the patrol had they wanted. When asked why they did not, they replied, " '[w]e wanted a good night's sleep!' "[26]

Artillery and mortar fire produced the greatest number of casualties during the latter part of the 82nd's stay in Holland. Estimates were that by early November the Germans had assembled 150-200 tubes in the area opposite the 82nd's sector. Particularly troublesome were the *nebelwerfers*, the multi-barreled mortars that could be manhandled into position and set up quickly to launch a barrage of shells in just seconds, and then broken down and moved before an effective response could be mounted. The Germans were also experts at artillery raids—short, intense, concentrated bombardments on a specific point fired without prior registration or adjustment—a technique they had perfected in the waning months of World War I.[27] And since patrols like the one Stanley Kass described were not always practicable the Allies generally fought fire with fire, using their own quite plentiful artillery to respond in kind. Fire missions against German artillery and mortar positions therefore replaced missions in direct support of the infantry regiments as the most frequent use of Allied artillery during this period, although harassing fire on suspected troop concentrations, command posts, and other targets of interest were not uncommon. By the end of the campaign, the division's four artillery battalions had fired a total of 125,874 rounds, an average of over 2,200 rounds per day. Even when relatively quiescent, the front was hardly quiet.[28]

And there were some fights during this period of relatively static warfare. One of the bloodiest engagements of the campaign occurred in the Den Heuvel Wood, "a finger of trees projecting into an open field" located at the approximate center of the division line during the period when the two sides were transitioning from offensive to defensive operations.[29] It was to this sector of the front that the 3/504th deployed after being relieved from the positions it had seized north of the Waal following its dramatic river crossing. "If the Krauts held these woods," explained Captain Burriss, the I Company, 3/504th commander, "they would be able to observe our every move, so Major Cook decided we should seize and hold it" thus precipitating a back-and-forth battle that eventually involved elements of both the 504th and 508th before it was over.[30]

The action in Den Heuvel opened on the night of 24-25 September when Colonel Tucker, "an ardent advocate of many and vigorous patrols," dispatched several into the wood to take a look around. They found nothing. The next night he sent out two more patrols with the same result, but at 0130 hours, 26 September, after both patrols had returned, a small enemy force hit the H Company line, threw some hand grenades, and

withdrew, killing one trooper and wounding a second. Lieutenant Don Graebner of G Company gathered twenty-one troopers and headed out to Den Heuvel in search of the raiders. But when they got to the wood they found nothing, so Graebner moved his men inside the wood and set up a defensive position, hoping his fairly large outpost would forestall similar hit-and-run raids. It appears that Graebner's position inside the wood did not, at first, even register with the Germans. Just before dawn, when shadows in the wood made it difficult to determine friend from foe, an unsuspecting German walked into the area near Graebner's command post and began speaking with Sergeant Henry Hoffman, who was still in the process of digging his foxhole. Calmly, Hoffman "continued to dig with his left hand, pulled out his .45 with his right and killed the German." The shot obviously alerted other Germans hidden in the wood and before long a close-range firefight broke out all around the American position. Graebner's troopers held their ground and eventually killed all their attackers, but in the process Graebner and two other troopers were wounded and it was feared that an even larger German force was gathering for a second attack. Before that could happen Cook dispatched Lieutenant Bernard Karnap with his I Company platoon reinforced with three British tanks to extract Graebner's troopers. By noon, 26 September, the extraction was complete.[31]

But Karnap was not done. Not more than thirty minutes after he returned to friendly lines Karnap grabbed five troopers and proceeded back into the wood to conduct a raid of his own. The result was the destruction of two strongpoints and ten dead Germans. Having stirred up the Germans again, Karnap moved his platoon and Graebner's platoon into positions at the edge of Den Heuvel and waited.[32]

Karnap's nickname was 'Babyface,' a moniker he earned, "not only because of his cherubic look but because, like the gangster Babyface Nelson, he loved to kill, even if it meant exposing himself to danger."[33] Described as both "brave" and "vicious" Karnap—who earned his commission on the battlefield—proved both true at Den Heuvel.[34] When setting up his defenses, he reportedly ordered ten of the nineteen prisoners he had with him killed "because there were not enough men to handle them and hold the wood at the same time."[35] Later, during repeated clashes with German units of varying size he became a one-man direct support mortar section. Moving from point to point with an 81mm mortar tube—he left the base plate behind because he said it was too heavy—he would put his 'gun' into operation by wedging the tube against a tree.[36]

According to Captain Burriss, the "shellacking" that Karnap and his troopers gave the Germans had obviously "alerted and angered them."[37] It was also obvious that they were infiltrating forces into the wood in preparation for a major counterattack. Burriss responded in kind, sending more and more of his I Company into the wood to shore up Karnap's defenses. By 1900 hours the next day, 27 September, Burriss had the whole of his company inside the Den Heuvel.

At about midnight, 27 September, German artillery and *nebelwerfer* fire began falling intermittently, but without much effect. Suddenly, at 0500 hours, 28 September, "the Germans poured in the damnedest artillery barrage" Burriss had ever witnessed.[38] Within thirty minutes, an estimated 2,000 rounds fell in an area approximately 100 yards square. According to Burriss, "the treetops burst into flames all around us and the ground shook like an earthquake."[39] Under cover of the barrage, about a battalion's worth of Germans infiltrated all around the I Company positions, and once the barrage lifted they came "swarming shoulder to shoulder in mass formation." Three Mark IV tanks entered the

fray as well, firing point-blank into individual foxholes. One of the I Company bazooka gunners tried to take out one of the tanks, but his rounds bounced off the armor "like a tennis ball" after which "[t]he tank continued forward and ran over him."[40] By 0600 hours, Burriss could see that the situation was hopeless. He radioed Cook, who told him to withdraw lest I Company be totally wiped out. "No man moved from his position until I gave the order," recalled Burriss. "By this time, the Krauts had overrun our position; as we withdrew, they were running side by side with my men, both sides shooting at each other."[41] Less than half of the I Company troopers who made it back were still combat effective. American losses were seven killed, twenty-two missing, and twenty wounded. Burriss called the fight in the Den Heuvel the worst he ever experienced, this coming from a man who spearheaded the assault crossing of the Waal.[42]

On 29 September the 2/508th relieved the dangerously under strength 3/504th in the vicinity of Den Heuvel and later that night sent out two combat patrols of its own to investigate the wood. One of the patrols stumbled upon a string of enemy foxholes about 200 yards inside the wood; after fighting for some time "hole to hole" the patrol leader withdrew his troopers in the face of heavy enemy fire coming from at least eight machine guns and a 20mm cannon. But the Germans did not follow up; instead they shelled the 2/508th's lines for two days. The fire cut all wire communications to the rear and effectively isolated the 2/508th from the rest of the division. Finally, at about midnight 1 October, the Germans attacked. A battalion of German panzergrenadiers supported by tanks, engineers, and assault guns advanced behind a rolling barrage and hit the 2/508th's line in the E Company sector. The weight of the attack drove one of E Company's platoons back 600-700 yards. Major Holmes threw his F Company at the panzergrenadiers, hit them in the flank, and restored the original line. Twenty-eight prisoners were taken during F Company's counterattack and several halftracks and self-propelled guns were also destroyed. The 2/508th sustained nine killed and wounded.[43]

Two D Company troopers, Frank Haddy and Luis Arellano, also accounted for a Mark V Panther tank during the attack. Set up beside a tree-lined road, the two troopers weathered the pre-assault barrage by hunkering deep in their foxhole only to find the tank bearing down on them once the barrage had lifted. " 'The barrel on that tank seemed a mile long,' " recalled Haddy. Knowing that they would have but one bazooka shot to kill the tank or be killed themselves, the troopers waited until the tank was almost on top of them. " 'At about ten yards we let her fly. The tank exploded and lit up the area like daylight.' " Trooper Bill McClure, who was in a nearby foxhole, recalled watching his intrepid comrades but was even more stunned by Haddy's impromptu celebration—Haddy " 'stood on the road bank next to the burning tank, and while tracer bullets were flying in all directions, Frank put one foot on the tank's track, beat on his chest and yelled like Tarzan.' " Yanked back to reality when another tank arrived, Haddy and Arellano reloaded, fired, and forced the second tank to withdraw. For his actions that evening Haddy was awarded the Silver Star.[44]

But the Den Heuvel fight was an anomaly. When not dodging artillery and mortar rounds or complaining about the chow, the most significant activity in which the troopers engaged during the defensive phase of their stay in Holland was patrolling, the vast majority of which were launched to gain intelligence about enemy dispositions. And the best way to gain that intelligence was through prisoner interrogations. But prisoners were hard to come by. During fluid tactical operations, it is not uncommon for soldiers to

suddenly and unexpectedly find themselves cut off from their comrades in the midst of an overwhelming enemy force and their instinct many times is to surrender rather than fight to the death. In static situations, however, this does not occur. Moreover, the Germans were literally defending at the border of the Reich and, as with soldiers defending their homelands the world over, were less willing to give up without a fight. Hence, in order to take a prisoner, patrols had to move cautiously into enemy territory, avoid alert sentries and outposts, somehow quietly subdue a potential prisoner, and then escort that prisoner back to friendly lines.

Usually prisoner snatch missions occurred at night, but not always. Captain Arthur W. Ferguson, executive officer of the 3/504th, recalled one instance when a trooper, fortified by his British rum ration, captured some prisoners in broad daylight. According to Ferguson, it had been some days since any prisoners had been taken so the division began offering enticements—trips to Antwerp or Paris and even back to England—to anyone who could take one. While standing in an observation post with General Gavin, Ferguson saw a trooper stand up, grab his rifle, cock his helmet back on his head and, before anyone could stop him, start walking across a flat flood plain toward the German positions some 200-300 yards away.

> Every one [*sic*] watched in amazement, including General Gavin, as this trooper walked across this open space in full view of the enemy (if they had been watching) up to a culvert and called for the 'Krauts' to come out with their hands up. The surprised Germans, three or four, meekly came out, and with a little urging from the trooper, turned and made their way to our lines, followed by the trooper. General Gavin met the trooper, still rather tipsy, and pinned the Silver Star on him.[45]

A second trooper, Private Bennie J. Siemanowicz of the 505th, was motivated by something other than rum when he accomplished a like feat. For ten days Siemanowicz watched from his observation post as two Germans directly opposite him, who were obviously intent on being as warm and dry as possible during the oncoming winter months, dug what appeared to be a luxurious fighting position, complete with sheet-metal roofing. On the day they completed their task Siemanowicz took off from his position, crossed a mined bridge, and ran along a dike to reach the prize foxhole. Lieutenant Colonel Williams watched the action unfold from a nearby observation post. He saw Siemanowicz approach the foxhole, shout, and then fire his carbine into the hole after which two Germans crawled out with their hands up, one of them obviously wounded. Siemanowicz made the still healthy German pick up his comrade and then herded them back to friendly lines, alternating between firing at nearby positions to keep the Germans there from getting a good shot at him and kicking the still healthy German in the buttocks whenever he slowed. Siemanowicz finally reached U.S. lines unharmed. Williams and an officer from London who was visiting the front rushed down to talk with Siemanowicz when he returned.

> We . . . asked him why he had walked out in the exposed area and taken such a risk. His reply was, 'Aw, I heard the division had been yelling for some prisoners, so I thought I would get a couple.' The next question was

> what had he been drinking. To this, he replied, 'Oh, a couple bottles of vino.' He was actually quite inebriated.[46]

Of course, not all prisoner snatches were motivated by liquid courage. Nor where the snatches as easily accomplished. Lieutenant Megellas led one such patrol. It was Colonel Tucker himself who ordered Megellas to get some prisoners. Megellas had a well-deserved reputation as a hard-nosed, tactically proficient leader who could do just about anything so when Tucker needed some prisoners he turned to Megellas. The area fronting the 504th's positions would make things difficult, so before setting out Megellas conducted a thorough reconnaissance. What he saw was an embankment about 1,000 yards away on which he could detect fresh dirt, an obvious sign that the Germans had been digging in there. Furthermore, atop the embankment were several blockhouses. Assuming this to be the German main defensive line Megellas elected to bring his entire twenty-four-man platoon with him in case he had to fight his way in and out. To get to the embankment, Megellas had two choices: he could cross the Wyler Meer, a large, boggy lagoon or he could use a small footbridge on its south side. Megellas decided to try the footbridge so, moving out at night and taking the point himself, Megellas got to the bridge, put his platoon in the prone, and then crawled forward to check the bridge for mines. What he found was accordion barbed wire, in which he became quite noisily tangled. His curses alerted some nearby Germans dug in on the far side. Keeping his head, Megellas crawled to a nearby foxhole and ordered its occupants to surrender. When they did not answer, he threw a grenade inside and then crawled to a second foxhole. Megellas again demanded a surrender. Again no answer. Again a grenade. Then a third foxhole. This one Megellas cleared with his carbine. Megellas continued this one-man raid for some time, during which he killed four Germans and knocked out a machine gun nest before he finally came upon an enemy soldier who was willing to surrender. When Megellas asked him how many more of his comrades were nearby the German replied in broken English that he did not understand. Not one to engage in battlefield diplomacy, Megellas hit his captive in the mouth, knocked him to the ground, and began choking him. Eventually the startled German sputtered that there were ten of his comrades in the area. Megellas had his captive call out and demand their surrender. One came forward. Megellas then called out to his platoon sergeant to bring the platoon forward. With his platoon in hand Megellas cleared the area, killed six more Germans and took four more prisoners. His task complete, Megellas could have returned to friendly lines. But he was not satisfied. He wanted to probe deeper into enemy territory so he sent the prisoners back with two of his troopers and continued on toward the embankment with the rest of his platoon, some 500 yards away. At the embankment he deployed his platoon on line and, on signal, led his troopers in an assault. A short, intense firefight broke out during which eleven more Germans were killed. Only one trooper, Sergeant John Fowler, was wounded. Megellas picked Fowler up, slung him over his shoulder, and ran back to friendly lines while his platoon brought up the rear, bringing along two more prisoners captured during the mêlée. For his actions on the patrol, Megellas was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.[47]

Because these patrols could be so hazardous, any prisoners taken were carefully guarded in hopes that they would curtail, temporarily at least, the need to mount any additional patrols. Captain Komosa, the assistant S-3 of the 2/504th, recalled a period

during which no prisoners had been taken for some time. Colonel Tucker grew increasingly impatient and put out the word that if sections could not take a prisoner, then a squad would be sent out the next night. If the squad failed to return with a prisoner, a platoon would go the following night, and so on. It finally got to the point that an entire company was sent out on a mission. The task fell to F Company, 2/504th. Komosa moved forward to an observation post to watch.

> Soon the troopers entered into the wooded area, and there was hell to pay. Angry exchanges of machine gun and small arms fire now took place. Much shouting, some screaming, and a hell of a lot of swearing was heard. In a little while it was all over. The shooting stopped, and the troopers started coming back out of the woods. I heard some swearing about that time. It sounded as though there was an argument between several troopers themselves. I heard one say, 'Let me throw my bayonet through that son of a bitch.' About that time one of the non-coms—I believe it was First Sergeant Bishop—stepped in and barked in his usually commanding manner, 'Look you stupid ass! If we don't bring this dried up little bastard back to the C.P. alive, we'll have to come out here tomorrow night and do this all over again.' From that moment on, and until they returned to the C.P., they guarded their prisoner with unusual caution.[48]

One of the most intrepid of the division's patrol leaders was the 504th's Ted Bachenheimer, who continued the same behind-the-lines heroics he had conducted at Anzio. Trooper Matthew W. Kantala Jr. recalled that Bachenheimer "was a boy that the officers didn't push around. He could get away with most anything."[49] Captain Louis Hauptfleisch, the 504th's adjutant, underscored Kantala's observation. Gavin, he wrote, was not certain if he should court-martial or promote Bachenheimer.[50] He ultimately decided on the latter and awarded him a battlefield commission. According to Private First Class Willard 'Bill' Strunk,

> Ted was one of the finest soldiers any country would ever want. Ted Bachenheimer was a very calm man in any circumstances. At night Bachenheimer would organize patrols and go behind German lines to gain information on German positions. He would speak German fluently. Many times on patrols he would talk to the Germans. The combat patrol would then take them prisoners. He was very serious about his work. He would sit and discuss ideas on how to get information from the Germans.[51]

Shortly before the 82nd left Holland, Bachenheimer left on a patrol, some say dressed in a German uniform, and was never heard from again. There were rumors that he was captured and subsequently shot while attempting to escape although it is very probable that, if he was caught in a German uniform, he was shot immediately upon being discovered. It was a tremendous loss for the division.[52]

The 82nd finally took leave of its front-line positions fifty-seven days after entering Holland. Relieved by the 3rd Canadian Division on 11 November—which itself had just

completed the fight to clear the Scheldt Estuary—the division pulled back to Nijmegen to prepare for redeployment to the rear. Many of the troopers were looking forward to returning to the English bases from which they had deployed. But it was not to be. On 12 November, the troopers marched approximately twenty miles in the rain to a staging area in Oss, Holland. From there they were trucked in stages to Bourg Leopold, Belgium, and then on to two old French Army cantonments near Rheims, France—Camps Suippes and Sissonne—where they could rest, refit, receive replacements, and prepare for the next mission. By the time it arrived in France the division was lean. All told, 4,297 troopers were missing, wounded, injured or dead, about thirty-percent of the total number that had deployed to Holland. Most of the division's losses had been sustained during the 'quiet' phase of the operation, that following 28 September.[53] Projections were that it would not be until mid-January 1945 before the 82nd was once again combat ready.[54]

Notwithstanding the high human cost, few questioned the success of MARKET, the airborne portion of the operation.[55] In a six-page after action report penned shortly after the division was relieved in Holland, Gavin opined that MARKET "served to emphasize the value of lessons learned in past airborne operations" and validated the principles that underlay the conduct of such operations enumerated in the Army's basic airborne handbook, Training Circular No. 113 ("[t]he content matter of this circular is believed to be basically sound and it is not recommended that any changes be made in it").[56] Ridgway echoed Gavin's assessment, writing in his own after action review that "[t]he experience of Operation MARKET has produced no basic alteration of accepted principles respecting the employment of airborne forces" and that it had, "in fact, further strengthened my conviction that our principles are sound and, if accorded due consideration in the planning and execution of airborne operations, will offer the maximum prospect of success."[57] General Brereton felt that "[d]espite the failure of the [British] 2nd Army to get through to Arnhem and establish a permanent bridgehead over the Lower Rhine, Operation MARKET was a brilliant success." The airborne troops, he continued, "accomplished what was expected of them. It was the breakdown of 2nd Army's timetable on the first day—their failure to reach Eindhoven in 6 to 8 hours as planned—that caused the delay in the taking of the Nijmegen bridge and the failure at Arnhem."[58] General Arnold, who was keenly interested in the potential of massed airborne formations ("[t]here has at all times been in the Air Staff a very strong interest and belief in airborne operations"), also pronounced MARKET a success. "I am pleased with the success of your initial operation," he wrote in a personal letter to Brereton.

> There had been discussion among American commentators about the failure to obtain the full possible measure of success at Arnhem. To meet this point there was presented at an off-the-record background Press Conference, now being held in the Air Staff weekly, a detailed map showing our front-line position after your retirement south of the [unintelligible—presumably Nedr Rijn]. The hypothetical question was asked as to whether that indicated military failure or military success. In sending my commendatory message to you I stated my pleasure at your success and I meant success.[59]

Eisenhower and Marshall were also pleased with the performance of the First Allied Airborne Army. Two days after the initial drops, Eisenhower sent a message to Brereton in which he wrote " '[t]he initial major operation of the Allied Airborne Army has already proceeded sufficiently far to confirm the wisdom of the decision to organize all our airborne divisions under [a] single command.' "[60] Marshall likewise sent Brereton a message in which he praised Brereton, the First Allied Airborne Army staff, and the pilots, crews, and airborne forces "for the courageous and determined manner in which they have carried out their duties."[61] Even after the war, when emotions had cooled somewhat the U.S. Army took the time to study all its operations in the context of the war as a whole. A board of general officers convened to look at airborne forces was effusive in its praise of Operation MARKET. Eschewing the staid bureaucratic language with which such reports were normally written, the board reported: "[t]his was the largest airborne operation in history, was a daylight operation, surprise was complete, the operation was successful and if success seemed easy it was only because of the skill with which it was executed."[62]

But despite MARKET's success, there were still problems that required attention. Gavin pointed out that air-ground communications "for the purpose of calling in fighters on hostile targets was not available" during the operation and, to rectify this, recommended that "[a]ir support parties should be permanently assigned to a division so that they will become fully acquainted with the division personnel and airborne problems." Similar communications should be available to glider pilots, he wrote, so that when the ground situation changes, as it did on D+1 when the pre-planned landing zones were overrun during an enemy attack, incoming gliders could be diverted to an alternate landing site. Furthermore, repeating what for him was a familiar refrain, he maintained that American "[g]lider pilots must be well trained [*sic*] ground soldiers or they will not live long," and recommended that they be made a part of the airborne division for that training. He also felt that the authorization tables for individual weapons needed modification. Automatic rifles "were at a premium" in the flat Dutch terrain so the 82nd had equipped each of its rifle squads with additional BARs, a basis of issue Gavin thought should be officially adopted. He also wanted each paratrooper to be armed with a .45-caliber semiautomatic pistol for personal protection immediately upon landing. Rifle containers had been introduced after Normandy so that paratroopers could drop with their assigned weapons on their person (as opposed to dropping the weapons separately in parachute-delivered containers), but in that period of time right after landing and before a trooper could get his primary weapon into operation, the .45 could very well save lives. Finally, Gavin addressed the issue of resupply, "one of our major unsolved problems." Even if accurately delivered on drop zones clear of the enemy, it still required "approximately one-third of the infantry forces of the division to recover and deliver to the firing line a daily resupply" (a problem that was mitigated somewhat in Holland because of the great aid provided by the Dutch Underground).[63]

With the exception of his recommendation about glider pilots, Ridgway concurred completely with Gavin's observations.[64] He too highlighted the resupply issue as one of the most intractable problems facing the fledgling airborne community and sounded the warning that "[i]t is entirely conceivable that an estimate, duly arrived at, of the impracticability of air resupply might alone dictate the abandonment of an otherwise feasible airborne operation." In other words, the resupply challenge was so severe that,

absent a solution, one of the Allies' most potent weapons might have to remain on the shelf.[65]

Finally, both Gavin and Ridgway had one additional concern. As Gavin put it, as a ground operation MARKET "was a marginal performance." By "marginal" Gavin meant not that his troopers had performed poorly but that the 82nd had been called upon to fight a battle and occupy terrain far in excess of that normally required of a unit its size.

> The practice of assigning an airborne Division frontage far in excess of that normally given a ground Division must be weighed very carefully and full consideration given to the probable enemy reaction. In this operation the staggerin[g] task of seizing crossings over three major waterways and dominating terrain, as well as occupying and holding approximately 25,000 yards of frontage, required the complete and rapid commitment of all the troops at the disposal of the Division Commander.

What resulted was wide gaps in the division's lines that "[a] vigorous, alert enemy, with the proper means at his disposal, could have capitalized on . . . to seriously jeopardize the integrity of our defense set-up."[66] Ridgway seized on Gavin's assessment and developed it further, writing "there is a point here of such vital importance to future airborne operations in this theater in this war, that I wish to emphasize it in the strongest possible manner." When MARKET-GARDEN was conceived the Germans were conducting "a hasty and somewhat disorganized withdrawal under powerful Allied pressure." The enemy's "command had been badly shattered, and his control severely crippled." But since that time, the situation on the Western Front had changed.

> Now we face a different foe. His precipitated [*sic*] retreat has ended, his command has been restored and invigorated, his control reestablished, and he fights with the aid of strong ground defenses, closer to his sources of supply.

What two airborne divisions had been able to accomplish in MARKET-GARDEN, he warned, "is no indication of what we may expect to accomplish in certain situations now." And if thrown against a well prepared, well entrenched, well supplied enemy determined to fight vigorously in defense of his homeland "these magnificent divisions [might] be assigned a task wholly beyond their strength."[67]

Ridgway's warning about hurling airborne divisions against an enemy that was no longer in disarray was, in microcosm, a warning that applied universally to the Allied forces on the Western Front in the autumn of 1944. The Germans had miraculously recovered everywhere, were waging a spirited defense, and although they were still falling back it was upon the prepared, albeit somewhat decrepit defenses of the Siegfried Line. Meanwhile, the Ruhr industrial area, MARKET-GARDEN's ultimate goal, was still pumping out war matériel—ball bearing production was up, fighter production was up, and the numbers for tank and truck production were still high.[68] And while the Allies' lines of communication were getting ever longer (especially without Antwerp in hand) the Germans were falling back on theirs. As a result every one of the Allied armies had slowed to a crawl. Even Patton, a man defined by his lightning thrusts, was stuck in

the Saar Valley while his Third Army engaged in a slogging match for the ancient citadel at Metz. Eisenhower had risked everything on Montgomery and Montgomery had failed to deliver on every one of his promises—there was no bridgehead over the Rhine, no destruction of the Ruhr, no clearing of the Scheldt (until much later). It was not just the airborne divisions that would have a tough go of it under these conditions. The same applied to all the Allied divisions, regardless of their makeup.

For his part, Montgomery remained MARKET-GARDEN's "unrepentant advocate," contending that "if the operation had been properly backed from its inception, and given the aircraft, ground forces, and administrative resources necessary for the job—it would have succeeded *in spite of* my mistakes, or the adverse weather, or the presence of the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps in the Arnhem area."[69] On the other hand General Bradley, who was perhaps MARKET-GARDEN's fiercest critic, thought the operation "a massive assault *in the wrong direction* at what was probably the most crucial moment on the German front," adding that "[i]n permitting Monty to launch Market-Garden, Ike committed his greatest tactical error of the war."[70] At one point Bradley became so vehement in his opposition to the plan that he considered forcing Eisenhower's hand. "Monty does what he pleases and Ike says 'yes, sir,' " wrote Patton in his diary two days before MARKET-GARDEN was launched.

> Monty wants all supplies sent to him and the First U.S. Army and for me to hold. . . . Brad told Ike that if Monty takes control of XIX and VII Corps of the First Army, as he wants to [in order to protect his right flank], he, Bradley, will ask to be relieved. . . . Bradley said it was time for a showdown. I offered to resign with him, but he backed out.[71]

Faced as he was with a struggle amongst his top subordinates as well as a rejuvenated enemy, Eisenhower decided to resume his broad-front approach, a decision he announced during a 5 October conference at his headquarters in Versailles. According to Field Marshal Brooke, who was in attendance, Ike's future strategy

> consisted of the capture of Antwerp, an advance to the Rhine in the north and south, forcing the Rhine north and south of the Ruhr, capture of [the] Ruhr followed by an advance on Berlin either from [the] Ruhr or from Frankfurt depending on which was most promising. Meanwhile [U.S Lieutenant General Jacob L.] Devers [the 6th Army Group commander] in the south to threaten Munich as a cover plan.[72]

According to Eisenhower biographer Stephen Ambrose, Ike's decision was "the safe, cautious route."

> Under his directives no army would take heavy casualties, no general would lose his reputation, credit for the victory could be shared by all, and there was no chance of the Germans reversing the situation by surrounding and destroying an advanced force. Eisenhower's policy would surely lead to victory. The only trouble was that if the Germans decided to fight on it would take time.[73]

Of course, no one expected the enemy to simply roll over. It was fully expected that the Germans would take full advantage of the benefits of fighting a defensive battle from prepared positions with shortened lines of communication, to say nothing of the psychological boost accrued from fighting on the borders of the Fatherland. Furthermore, with Rundstedt back in command of the Western Front (he had been temporarily retired at the end of June for 'health' reasons, and then returned to command in September), it was predicted that the Germans would generally conduct "a textbook defense" of the west, falling back from position to position, trading space for time, and conducting nothing larger than limited counterattacks to seal off local penetrations.[74] What they did not know, and never considered, was that neither Rundstedt nor any other German Army officer had any influence in the conduct of strategy. Despite their training, experience, and pedigree they were mere ciphers; the last vestige of their influence having disappeared with the smoke that, for a brief moment on 20 July 1944, engulfed Hitler's conference room.[75]

When he emerged, shaken but alive from the debris of the wooden barrack-hut that exploded around him during the failed attempt on his life on 20 July, Hitler was certain of two things: that he had been saved for some higher purpose and that vengeance would be swift, hard, and his alone. His survival, he said later on that night in a radio broadcast, was " 'confirmation of the task imposed upon me by Providence' " and he pledged that he would get even with the conspirators " 'in the way that we National Socialists are accustomed.' "[76] Several of the conspirators, including *Oberst* Count Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, the plot's leader and the man who had set the bomb, had already been summarily executed. Others, however, were rounded up, tortured, ridiculed, and paraded in front of a sham People's Court before being ignominiously hanged by wire nooses from meat hooks in a dungeon, where they were left to slowly strangle to death. All told, nearly 250 persons were executed and thousands more thrown into concentration camps during the blood orgy that followed the failed plot.[77]

But blood alone would not suffice. Hitler's messianic self-image required something more. It required the total sublimation of the one institution capable of resistance, the Army. In this the Army acquiesced.

Because most of the plot's leadership consisted of high-ranking Army officers, counting in its ranks at least two field marshals (including Rommel) and sixteen generals, it was left to those who remained to demonstrate beyond doubt their loyalty and the loyalty of the Army. Three days after the attempt *Generaloberst* Heinz Guderian, acting Chief of Staff of the Army, issued a general order in which he pledged the devotion of the Army to the Führer and German people, stating that " 'the only road open to an honest soldier' " was " 'the road of duty and honour.' "[78] The next day, as a result of Göring's toadyism, the Nazi salute was made the only mode of salutation for all branches of the service in place of the military hand salute, a further " 'indication of the unshakeable loyalty to the Führer and of the close bonds of comradeship between Wehrmacht and Party.' "[79] Furthermore, so anxious was the Army leadership to demonstrate its loyalty to Hitler that on 29 July Guderian issued a second general order demanding that " '[e]very General Staff officer must be a National Socialist officer-leader, that is, not only by his knowledge of tactics and strategy, but also by his model attitude to political questions, and by actively cooperating in the political indoctrination of younger commanders in

accordance with the tenets of the Führer.' "[80] With this diktat all those who wore the wine red stripe that marked them as the elite of the German officer corps "[s]ubmissively . . . accepted the status of a puppet and the mission to preach National Socialism. None resigned, none resisted."[81] And yet the debasement of the Army by those in its highest echelons seemingly knew no bounds. On 14 August, the Army's thoroughly cowed leaders requested that the Führer cleanse its ranks of the plotters so that they could be turned over to the German people for justice. To this end Hitler appointed a Court of Honor, composed of several high profile Army leaders, including Keitel, Guderian, and Rundstedt (who served as the court president). It was this court that conducted the initial investigations against the alleged conspirators and turned over those they found complicit in the plot to the bestial Gestapo for subsequent torture, degradation, public humiliation, and ultimately, gruesome execution. "There was no courage of Opposition left," wrote one historian of the affair, "let along the courage of Resistance."

> All that remained was a numbed sense of continuing duty, a duty which all now saw with nightmare clarity was leading swiftly and inevitably to disaster. Yet of all those who realized this truth, so great was the impact of the aftermath of July 20, with its trials and its hangings and its general horror, that none could be found even to raise a voice in respectful criticism of the *Führer's* genius. Indeed the reverse was true. All who could do so vied with one another in reaffirming their loyalty and allegiance, blind and abject, before their *Führer*.[82]

While bringing the Army to heel, Hitler also turned to the total mobilization of the German nation. He was abetted in this by the reaction of the vast majority of Germans who were appalled by the assassination attempt, relieved that their Führer was still alive, and approved of the methods used to purge those complicit in the plot. Some measures had already been in train before 20 July, most significantly those enacted by Armaments Minister Albert Speer to make more efficient use of German resources, which included hundreds of thousands of impressed foreign laborers. After 20 July, Hitler ratcheted up the mobilization of the home front by appointing Joseph Göbbels Reich Plenipotentiary for the Total War Effort, which, between August and December 1944, resulted in freeing up a million men for service at the front. Göbbels's efforts, along with those of *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler, who was appointed head of the *Replacement Army* (another slap in the face of the regular Army; Stauffenberg had been Chief of Staff of the *Replacement Army* and his boss *Generaloberst* Friedrich Fromm, though never proved guilty, was imprisoned and eventually executed by firing squad in March 1945) also brought about the creation of twenty-five *Volksgrenadier* (People's Grenadier) divisions, numerous artillery and rocket units, and a home guard, the *Volkssturm*.[83]

So the stage was set. Hitler, the unassailable warlord—surrounded by sycophants, unopposed by a thoroughly cowed officer corps, and bemused by figures that, on paper at least, indicated that there yet existed enough men and matériel for one last major effort—was set to fulfill his destiny. The task before him—to win the war and thereby save Germany and the West from Bolshevism—was one that Hitler believed only he had the will to carry out. " 'This war must be won by us,' " he told his secretaries, " '[o]therwise

Europe will be lost to Bolshevism. . . . I am the only one who knows the danger, and the only one who can prevent it.' "[84]

On 16 September, Hitler had his revelation: the road to ultimate victory began in the west.

During that day's situation briefing the normally listless Führer (Hitler was a hypochondriac who, by this time, was being heavily drugged on a daily basis in an effort to deal with a variety of health issues, some of which had been exacerbated by the bomb blast) suddenly became animated; pounding the map in front of him, he startled everyone with his announcement. *General der Flieger* Werner Kriepe, who was representing Göring at the meeting, recorded what was said in his secret diary: " 'Führer decision . . . Counterattack out of the Ardennes . . . Target Antwerp . . . Cut the joint between the English and Americans . . . a new Dunkirk!' "[85]

The idea of a major counteroffensive in the west had been fomenting in Hitler's mind for some time. As early as 31 July 1944, Hitler told Jodl and a few other *OKW* staff officers that he thought he could stabilize the Eastern Front with the forces already in place and given that eventuality, if he could muster enough aircraft to give him temporary air superiority in the west he could launch an offensive there that would divert the impending crisis. "Because for me there is no doubt," Hitler stated, "if we could immediately draw in an additional 800 fighters, to reach 2,000 fighters at once . . . this entire crisis would be overcome immediately; there wouldn't be a crisis anymore."[86] A few weeks later Hitler again turned his attention westward. At a 19 August conference he directed *General der Infanterie* Walter Buhle, Chief of the Army Headquarters at *OKW*, and Armaments Minister Speer to prepare large quantities of men and matériel for movement to the west. Why? Because, he told the assembled conferees, once the weather turned bad and grounded the Allied air forces, he intended to launch a counteroffensive (Hitler had obviously abandoned all hope of the *Luftwaffe* ever again regaining even temporary air superiority).[87]

Immediately following his 16 September announcement Hitler had Jodl assemble a small planning staff at *OKW* to come up with alternatives. Secrecy was to be maintained at all costs; the major commanders were not to be informed of anything until the last minute (another effect of the 20 July plot was that Hitler was convinced that there remained a hidden fifth column in the officer corps that was passing secrets to the Russians).[88] By October Jodl's planners had come up with five possible courses of action. Hitler selected two for further development. By 21 October, the plan had been finalized. The next day Hitler summoned *General der Kavallerie* Siegfried Westphal, Chief of Staff of *OB West*, and *General der Infanterie* Hans Krebs, Chief of Staff of *Army Group B*, to the *'Wolfsschanze'* to receive their orders.[89]

Hitler briefed the plan himself. The aim of the offensive, codenamed *Wacht am Rhein* (Watch on the Rhine), " 'was, by cutting off the British Army from its bases of supply, to force it to evacuate the Continent.' "[90] With that accomplished Hitler surmised that the Americans, who he believed had no stomach for the war, would quit the European struggle as well, thereby freeing the *Wehrmacht* to turn and finish off the Russians (who, at the time, had been stalled at the Vistula for four months).

> 'A single breakthrough on the western front! You will see! That will lead to a collapse and panic among the Americans. We'll drive through in the

> middle and take Antwerp. With that, they'll have lost their supply harbour. And there'll be a huge encirclement of the entire English army with hundreds of thousands of prisoners. Like it was in Russia!'[91]

Furthermore, as Jodl later explained, the situation in the west lent itself more readily to decisive results: " 'the Russians had so many troops even if we had succeeded in destroying thirty divisions it would have made no difference. On the other hand, if we destroyed thirty divisions in the West, it would amount to more than one third of the whole invasion army.' "[92] Moreover the final objective—Antwerp—was little more than 100 miles from the German border, a not unreasonable distance for armored and mechanized forces.[93]

Wacht am Rhein was to proceed in two phases. Phase one would have three armies of *Army Group B*—the *5th Panzer Army*, the *6th Panzer Army*, and the *7th Army*—attack through the Ardennes region to seize bridgeheads over the Meuse River. Phase two would be a continuation of the advance culminating with the capture of Antwerp, which, in turn, would be supported by a smaller offensive to the north by the *15th Army* driving towards the Meuse at Maastricht. Hitler told his generals that they could count on thirty divisions for the primary offensive, including three paratroop and twelve armored or mechanized divisions. Additional combat power in the form of twelve *Volks* artillery corps, ten *werfer* (rocket launcher) brigades, and a host of other support troops would also be available. The *Luftwaffe*, too, would weigh in with some 1,500 fighters, 100 of which would be jets. Finally, over four million gallons of fuel and some fifty trainloads of ammunition would be stockpiled as well. Two target dates were set: 20 November, the date by which all preparations were to be completed; and 25 November, the date the offensive would kick off. Meteorologists had predicted that the Germans could expect at least ten days of overcast skies during this time, thereby negating Allied air superiority (apparently Hitler did not have much faith in the *Luftwaffe*). It was also a new moon phase, further limiting visibility and in so doing abetting the element of surprise.[94]

When Westphal and Krebs returned to their respective commands and briefed their commanders there was shock all around. " 'This plan hasn't got a damned leg to stand on,' " commented *Generalfeldmarschall* Model, the *Army Group B* commander.[95] Rundstedt felt likewise.

> 'When I received this plan early in November [*sic*] I was staggered. Hitler had not troubled to consult me about its possibilities. It was obvious to me that the available forces were far too small for such an extremely ambitious plan. . . . In fact, no soldier believed that the aim of reaching Antwerp was really practicable. But I knew by now it was useless to protest to Hitler about the *possibility* of anything.'[96]

Rundstedt was correct. There was no talking Hitler out of his grandiose plan. When on 3 November Rundstedt forwarded his grave doubts about the plan Hitler simply ignored him. Trying another tack, Rundstedt and Model together tried selling Hitler on a less ambitious scheme to which Hitler tersely replied: " 'preparations for an improvisation will not be made.' " Finally, in a last-ditch effort to forestall what they were certain was a fatally flawed operation the field marshals enlisted the support of two of Hitler's

favorites—*General der Panzertruppen* Hasso-Eccard von Manteuffel of the *5th Panzer Army* and *SS-Oberstgruppenführer* Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich of the *6th Panzer Army*—both of whom also opposed *Wacht am Rhein*. This, too, proved fruitless.[97] "I have had to make hard—infinitely hard—decisions in my life," explained Hitler in a rambling speech to an assemblage of senior Army officers a few days before the invasion, adding that, for Germany, "in the coming ten, twenty, thirty, maybe fifty years, no man would come with more authority, more possibilities to influence the nation, and more decisiveness, than myself." Wars are won, he continued, by making an opponent recognize that he cannot win anymore, "[t]hus, the most important task is to bring the enemy to this realization." Waging a defensive war would not do this and nor, presumably, would a limited offensive.[98]

Hitler, in fact, had been rejuvenated by the idea of resuming the offensive to strike a shattering blow to the Anglo-America coalition and recovered something of his old self as he immersed himself in the minutiae of the preparations.[99] On 3 November he issued instructions on the tactical employment of Tiger tanks (" 'allot them in small units to the infantry' "). On 10 November he gave orders for the collection of captured enemy equipment (" '[t]he Home Guard to collect captured equipment in forward areas' "). A conference on 17 November was dedicated to the targeting of artillery including a warning not to use flat-trajectory fire against railway stations " 'where it does no good.' " The next day he discussed the timing of the attack across the front (" '[a]ll attacks to begin simultaneously or the enemy will get warning' ") and directed that all Alsatians be removed from front-line formations. Sometime after 23 November the attack was postponed, first to 10 December and ultimately to 16 December, yet Hitler's enthusiasm remained undiminished.[100] On 28 November he talked of blankets (" '[t]hree blankets per man for the attacking troops in the West' ") and boots and on 6 December directed that frogmen be attached to *6th Panzer Army* in order to assist in the seizure of bridgeheads over the Meuse Canal.[101] On 11 December he moved into his *'Adlerhorst'* ('Eagle's Eyrie') headquarters at Ziegenberg, near Bad Nauheim, so as to be closer to what he had come to regard as the decisive theater of operations, seeking a repeat of the stunning victory German forces had gained over the same ground in May 1940.[102]

During their pre-war preparations the French viewed the Ardennes—a triangle-shaped area whose 80-mile-wide base generally defined the German frontier from Eupen, Belgium, in the north to Luxembourg City in the south and then extended westward to the Meuse River—as an obstacle to armored or mechanized forces. It was, they believed, too heavily forested to accommodate large numbers of tanks and trucks that would, in any event, have a difficult time negotiating the region's twisting, narrow roads and steep river valleys. They were of course wrong, and it was through this seemingly impenetrable maze that the panzers of what was then *Army Group A* moved with amazing rapidity, stopping only when they reached the French coast at Abbeville. Commanding *Army Group A* at the time was *Generaloberst* Rundstedt who, for his leadership during the campaign, earned his field marshal's baton.[103]

In December 1944, the Allies were equally blind to the possibility of a strike through the Ardennes. Located in the southern part of the U.S. First Army zone, the Ardennes was considered a quiet economy-of-force sector where units could be rested, reequipped, reorganized, and, for those new to the front, slowly acclimated to combat. Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges, the First Army commander, had assigned responsibility for

the 85-mile-wide sector to Major General Troy H. Middleton's U.S. VIII Corps. With three infantry divisions under his command—the U.S. 106th, 28th, and 4th—along with a cavalry group (the 4th) and a combat command of the U.S. 9th Armored Division, Middleton was charged with defending a front that was three times larger than that normally assigned to a corps. Moreover the 106th Infantry Division, the northernmost unit in the corps zone, was brand new to combat while the 28th and 4th Infantry Divisions, which held the central and southern sections of the corps front respectively, had recently returned from bloody combat in the Hürtgen Forest where they had lost a combined total of more than 9,000 casualties.[104] Writing after the war, Eisenhower claimed that he was fully aware that he was "running a definite risk" in the Ardennes, but felt justified in doing so in order to maintain the momentum of attacks elsewhere on the front.[105] Bradley, too, felt justified in manning the Ardennes with such a weak force and told Middleton that were the Germans to attempt an attack over the few roads through the VIII Corps sector, they would be easily interdicted by Allied air power. Still, he warned, Middleton was to be prepared to conduct a fighting withdrawal and was to ensure that nothing of logistical importance, especially fuel and ammunition, was located in the withdrawal area.[106]

Allied perceptions about the improbability of a major German attack in the Ardennes were underscored by the intelligence summaries being issued at every level of the chain of command. On 9 December, the VIII Corps G-2 surmised that " '[t]he enemy's present practice of bringing new divisions to this sector to receive front line experience and then relieving them out for commitment elsewhere indicates his desire to have this sector of the front remain quiet and inactive.' "[107] This sentiment was echoed by Colonel Benjamin A. 'Monk' Dickson, the First Army intelligence chief, who wrote " '[d]uring the last month there has been a definite pattern for the seasoning of newly-formed divisions in the comparatively quiet sector opposite VIII Corps prior to their dispatch to [a] more active front.' "[108] Bradley's G-2, Brigadier General Edwin L. Sibert, took an even more expansive view of the enemy situation and reported that " '[i]t is near certain that attrition is steadily sapping the strength of the German forces on the Western Front and that the crust of defenses is thinner, more brittle and more vulnerable than it appears in our G-2 maps or to the troops in the line.' " He then went on to predict that " '[w]ith continued Allied pressure in the south and in the north, the breaking point may develop suddenly and without warning.' "[109] The attrition of which Sibert wrote was based on casualty figures disseminated by SHAEF, which estimated that the Germans were losing approximately 9,000 casualties a day or about five divisions per week.[110]

The likelihood of a German attack was discounted at the unit level as well. Private First Class John Marshall of B Company, 707th Tank Battalion, a unit that was attached to the 28th Infantry Division, recalled that being in the Ardennes " 'was like a holiday, as though we'd never fight again.' " " 'The tanks stayed idle although we could see the Germans across the [Our] river,' " he recalled, " 'I never had such a workfree [*sic*] time in camp.' "[111] Captain Charles B. MacDonald who commanded I Company, 3rd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment of the 2nd Infantry Division recalled that although the weather was cold and wet in November and early December in the Ardennes, his men stayed relatively dry and comfortable in their elaborate fighting positions. "Men ate from mess kits in a chow line," he later wrote, a procedure "usually reserved for rear areas." "Life became routine in the relative comfort and quiet of our new location," he continued,

so much so that, despite some occasional enemy shelling, MacDonald's men were chagrined to discover they were being relieved of their front-line positions and rotated to regimental reserve.[112] Lieutenant George Wilson commanding F Company, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division also remembered the "unaccustomed luxury" of life on the front line in the VIII Corps area, although he worried about the large sector his company had to defend. "All I could do was shake my head at the futility of ever having to defend our positions against serious attack, should it come to that."[113] But the prevailing attitude was that the odds of a German attack in the Ardennes were practically nil. " 'Take it easy, General,' " was Major General Walter M. Robertson's advice to his counterpart, Major General Alan W. Jones, whose green 106th Infantry Division relieved Robertson's veteran 2nd Infantry Division in the northern part of the VIII Corps sector, " '[t]he Krauts won't attack even if they were ordered to.' "[114]

Historical hindsight has uncovered a host of indicators pointing to a major German attack that went seemingly unheeded. Some, like Bradley, have argued that Allied intelligence failed because of its over-reliance on ULTRA intercepts that had all but dried up in the weeks preceding the German offensive as a result of Hitler's ban on the use of radios.[115] Others have argued that ULTRA did, in fact, reveal certain key pieces of information related to German troop movements which, had they been properly interpreted, would have painted a vastly different picture.[116] A third group posits that it was not Allied intelligence that failed; rather it was the effectiveness of the German deception plan that secured for the Germans the element of surprise, a plan that was constructed to make the Allies think that units were being emplaced not in readiness for a major counteroffensive but rather as fire brigades for use against Allied breakthroughs.[117] This debate, much like the debate over the supposed failure of intelligence that preceded the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, is one that will never be resolved. However, as Stephen Ambrose wrote, "[i]intelligence makes no decisions."[118] It is, instead, the mindset of the people who make predictions based on the intelligence they receive, much of which is oftentimes contradictory, that is the decisive element and in December 1944, virtually no one expected that the Germans would, or could, make a large-scale attack through the Ardennes.

Allied commanders made one other significant miscalculation in the fall of 1944. They put two U.S. airborne divisions fresh from combat in the middle of the French champagne region.

The 82nd arrived at Camps Suippes and Sissonne in stages over a three-day period in mid-November. After settling into their new homes, the troopers set about completing the standard post-combat tasks of accounting for and cleaning equipment and turning in weapons for maintenance. Mundane work to be sure, but the troopers were thankful for the roofs over their heads, warm beds, and three hot meals a day, to say nothing of having survived another campaign. What they really looked forward to, however, was their first weekend pass. And when that weekend arrived, the majority of the division went to nearby Rheims. The ensuing mayhem was colossal. Fights with rear-echelon soldiers were rampant, an impetus fueled, in part, by the presence of American soldiers from some of all-black service and supply units that were also in the area. Despite the arrests and disciplinary measures taken against the malefactors, the same thing occurred the next weekend. At the request of the local rear area commander, Gavin placed strict controls on the number of passes that could be granted for subsequent weekends which meant that

the vast majority of the 82nd spent the remainder of their time in France restricted to post. He also instructed his commanders to form courtesy patrols consisting of one officer and ten sergeants from each regiment that would patrol Rheims while those few souls fortunate enough to get a pass were in town.[119] "There were two problems," wrote Sergeant William H. Tucker of I Company, 3/505th.

> One was that we had been in the field too long and were ready to let loose. Another was that none of us had any experience drinking champagne. We did not understand that such a light, apparently frivolous drink made a person drunk inside an hour and a half.[120]

Gavin saw it a little differently.

> The trouble seems to center in three things. There is no way to get a girl of easy virtue, all houses are off limits and guarded, food cannot be bought in town anywhere, champagne can be bought by the bottle anywhere anytime.[121]

There were some attempts to bring entertainment to the troopers not lucky enough to get a pass. Sergeant McKenzie of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion procured the services of a French entertainment troupe for a hundred dollars, eight cartons of American cigarettes, and ten pounds of coffee. The troupe consisted of a magician, jugglers, and some mimes, but the real stars were the "statuesque dancers," two very well built young women who struck a series of poses in the nude. The troupe stayed in camp for a few nights and put on several shows. "The [armed] guard detail on their rooms had to be doubled," recalled McKenzie.[122] The Thanksgiving meal was also a big hit with the troopers and the cooks went all out to make a traditional feast with all the trimmings. In early December some major league ballplayers, including Frankie Frisch, Mel Ott, Dutch Leonard, and Bucky Walters stopped by the camps to spend time with the troopers. The division also formed a football team and began practicing for a much-ballyhooed New Years' Day game against the 101st. Eventually several weeks' of mail also caught up with the troopers, but this proved a double-edged sword for it seemed that every delivery contained one or two 'Dear John' letters; the hardest hit were those long-time troopers who had been away from home since April 1943.[123]

At the end of November, some troopers were awarded three-day passes to Brussels, Paris, or the French Riviera. A favorable exchange rate, about fifty French francs to the dollar, ensured that the lucky troopers had plenty of money, with a room in Paris going for twenty francs and a meal for ten. And unlike their behavior in Rheims, these troopers apparently comported themselves well, no doubt motivated by fear of what would happen if reports were otherwise. No less an authority than Lieutenant General John Clifford Hodges Lee, the commanding general of the European communications zone, who stopped by the 82nd's base camps to see his son (who was a captain in the division) regaled Gavin with "the excellent appearance and behavior of our lads in Paris." Lee also told Gavin about a conversation he had had with another general officer during which he commented on how sharp and alert the 82nd troopers looked, to which the other general replied, " 'alert, youre [sic] damn right they look alert. Hell, you are looking at the

survivors.' "[124] But even more valued than a trip to Paris were the thirty-day furloughs to the States, which began the first week of December. The majority, if not all of these were granted to enlisted troopers of proven dependability who also had a significant amount of combat time.[125]

For the first several weeks in camp the bulk of the time was devoted to rest, repairing weapons and equipment, and receiving and integrating replacements. No serious combat training was conducted, the only collective endeavors being physical fitness and some close order drill. Gavin looked forward to instituting a rigorous training program, however, and the area around Sissonne was an especially attractive location for doing so. The German Army had used it during the occupation and "the remains of their training arrangements show[ed] evidences of lots of work." He also counted on having that most important of resources—time. "I am counting on three months," he wrote in his diary not long after arriving at Sissonne, adding that although the weather would preclude any jumping or glider training, "[t]he only thing that will curtail our [ground] training will be the premature breakup of the present [G]erman government" which would mean occupation duty.[126] A few days later Gavin predicted an even longer stay.

> It promises to be a long stretch here, I wouldn't be surprised if we were here in May. It is difficult to see how the United Nations can mount a large[-]scale effective attack before spring. Any immediate show will no doubt be done by the 17th [Airborne Division], later the 13th [Airborne Division] will be available.[127]

Hence the most rigorous physical activity the troopers engaged in during the first several weeks of their stay at Suippes and Sissonne was the fighting in the streets and bars of Rheims. And that was a good thing. "We can use a few months of rest and recreation as well as reorganization and training," wrote Gavin.[128] It would go far toward dispelling a dread in the ranks that had been brought to his attention by the division's chaplains. "The four jump people are sweating out any more jumps feeling that they have used up about all their luck," confided Gavin to his diary, adding

> I understand exactly how they feel, I feel the same way myself. They have always done a fine job but now their ranks are thinning, many of them are banged up from combat and hardly fit mentally or physically for further parachute operations yet they have no other prospects. It hardly seems right, there should be some way out other than being killed or wounded. There is no other now. Some day there is going to be a hell of a mess when complete units refuse to jump in combat again. There should be some relief for them or some promise of relief.[129]

But all such hopes and promises vanished in the early morning hours of 16 December, swept away by a furious artillery, rocket, and mortar barrage announcing Hitler's last gasp for victory.

Chapter Twenty-One Notes

[1] Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 231.

[2] Even Field Marshal Brooke, Montgomery's avid champion, criticized his protégé's decision to move on Arnhem before clearing the approaches to Antwerp. Writing in his diary following a high-level conference chaired by Eisenhower at his Versailles headquarters, Brooke stated: "During the whole discussion one fact stood out clearly, that Antwerp must be captured with the least possible delay. I feel that Monty's strategy for once is at fault, instead of carrying out the advance on Arnhem he ought to have made certain of Antwerp in the first place. [Admiral Sir Bertram H.] Ramsay [Eisenhower's naval commander] brought this out well in discussion and criticized Monty freely. Ike nobly took all blame on himself as he had approved Monty's suggestion to operate on Arnhem." Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, eds., *War Diaries, 1939-1945, Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 600.

[3] Eisenhower's *Report by the Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff* quoted in MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 209.

[4] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 273. Emphasis in original.

[5] See MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 198-229 passim. General Brereton expressed his concerns about Montgomery's refusal to release the 82nd and 101st as early as 5 October 1944. "The delay in the withdrawal of the 82nd and 101st Divisions from Holland is giving me grave concern. . . . 21st Army Group is resisting efforts to have them withdrawn, claiming that insufficient troops are available because of the [Scheldt] estuary operation." Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 361.

[6] Chester A. Garrison, Unit Journal of the 2nd Battalion 504th Parachute Infantry, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Letters to and from 82nd Vets on airborne operations in Holland, September 1944," USAMHI.

[7] McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 81.

[8] Studelska quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 205.

[9] Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 211-212.

[10] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 199 and Headquarters, First Allied Airborne Army, "First Allied Airborne Army Operations in Holland, September – November 1944," 101-A/B-0.3.0, Box 2008, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[11] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 363.

[12] Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 228-229. Horrocks maintained his support of American airborne division troopers even in the face of Supreme Commander. Sometime after the 82nd and 101st had been pulled out of the lines, Horrocks happened to meet Eisenhower at Lieutenant General William H. Simpson's U.S. Ninth Army headquarters. "Eisenhower was, I remember, very angry just then with the 82nd and 101st U.S. Airborne Divisions which had been under my command during the Arnhem battle. After being pulled back into reserve they had apparently behaved badly and caused quite a lot of trouble in the rear area." According to Horrocks, Eisenhower muttered " '[t]hey are a disgrace to the American Army.' " "This was more than I could stand, because they were both magnificent divisions in battle. I leapt to their defence and suggested that it was a pity the whole American Army did not consist of similar 'disgraces.' " On hearing this Eisenhower's Chief of Staff let out a roar of laughter. " 'Well, well,' " he

said, " 'I never thought to hear a Britisher standing up for U.S. troops against an American general!' " Horrocks, *Escape to Action*, 234-235.

[13] James M. Gavin to Carlo D'Este, 2 September 1980, quoted in Carlo D'Este, *Decision in Normandy* (New York: Dutton, 1983), 288. Shortly after returning to England, Browning left First Allied Airborne Army to become Chief of Staff for Lord Louis Mountbatten's Southeast Asia Command, a post in which he served for the remainder of the war. Boatner, ed., *The Biographical Dictionary of World War II*, s. v. "Browning."

[14] Murphy quoted in "Gen. Gavin: guts, glory and rare modesty," *Boston Globe*, 26 February 1990, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 7, from pamphlet entitled "Lt. Gen. James. M. Gavin 82d Airborne Division," USAMHI. Gavin was promoted to major general on 20 October 1944. See "Military History of JAMES MAURICE GAVIN, 017676," The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 7, Folder "Collection of short Bibliographies of General Gavin on Military Service," USAMHI.

[15] John Leh II personal history narrative, World War II Veterans Survey Project, Box "WWII Veterans Survey 82nd Airborne Division Other Than Parachute Infantry Regiment," Folder "Leh, John II 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Batt.," USAMHI.

[16] See Olson, interview, 24 January 1967 and Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 102.

[17] Olson, interview, 24 January 1967.

[18] Foreword by General Gary E. Luck in Tom Clancy, *Airborne: A Guided Tour of an Airborne Task Force* (New York: Berkley Books, 1997), xiv. Emphasis in original.

[19] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 165.

[20] McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 73.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 102.

[23] Ibid.

[24] John C. H. Lee Jr., interview, n.d., The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 106, Folder 12, OU. Interestingly, Captain Lee's father was Lieutenant General John C. H. Lee, the Allied communications zone commander and, as such, the man responsible for overseeing logistics for the entire theater. General Lee was almost universally reviled by front-line commanders like Gavin, Ridgway, and Patton, who detested his imperiousness, religious zealotry (in reference to his initials, he was often mockingly called General 'Jesus Christ Himself' Lee), and luxurious Parisian lifestyle.

[25] James Elmo Jones questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 104, folder 50, OU.

[26] Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 212.

[27] See Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918* (New York: Praeger, 1989) and Timothy T. Lupfer, Leavenworth Paper No. 4, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1981) for two excellent discussions of the development of this technique.

[28] See also Memorandum, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Narrative History," n.d., 382-ART-0.3, Box 12429, Record group 407, NARA II.

[29] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 147.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Combat Interview "Company I, 3d Bn, 504th Para Regt, 82d Abn Div.," n.d., CI-171 "82nd Airborne Division Holland, 17-16 Sep 44," Box 24057, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 147-148.

[34] Burriss, interview, 11 December 1967. See also Nordyke, *All American*, 571.

[35] Combat Interview "Company I, 3d Bn, 504th Para Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[36] Burriss, interview, 11 December 1967.

[37] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 148.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 149.

[42] Burriss, interview, 11 December 1967 and Combat Interview "Company I, 3d Bn, 504th Para Regt, 82d Abn Div."

[43] Memorandum, Headquarters, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, "57 Days in Holland and Germany with the 508th Parachute Infantry," 7 December 1944. See also Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 55.

[44] Account from Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 208.

[45] Arthur William Ferguson questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 23, OU. Ferguson could not recall if the trooper got his trip to the rear.

[46] Williams questionnaire. See also Leonard Machol's monograph "The Story of the 82nd Airborne Division," 9.

[47] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 153-161 passim.

[48] Komosa, "Invasion of Holland, 'Market,' " 22-25. It was fortunate that the first sergeant stepped in when he did. According to Komosa, [t]he prisoner was just a little squirt who probably didn't weight over 90 pounds soaken [*sic*] wet. He looked and shaked [*sic*] like a starved chicken that had been abandoned in the slush for some time. But it turned out that he carried very impressive credentials. He was a pilot, a paratrooper, and a graduate of a number of schools of higher learning, including a school of the Nazi party. Why he was an ordinary soldier, I'll never know."

[49] Matthew Kantala, interview, 28 February 1968, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 30, OU.

[50] Hauptfleisch questionnaire.

[51] Willard M. Strunk questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 103, Folder 18, OU.

[52] See also John Richard Duncan questionnaire, The Cornelius Ryan Collection, Box 102, Folder 22, OU.

[53] See Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 190; Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Historical Narrative," 7 December 1944, Box "82nd Airborne Division—WWII—307th Eng. Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports." Folder "307th Eng History Sep to Nov 44," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Ft. Bragg, NC; Document entitled "82nd Airborne Division—WWII Casualties and Awards," unmarked box, 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Ft. Bragg, NC. The casualty figures given are as of 12 December 1944 and break out as follows: Missing in Action—622; Wounded in Action, Not Returned to Duty—1,796; Wounded in Action, Returned to Duty—821; Injured in Action, Not Returned to Duty—327; Injured in Action, Returned to Duty—196; Killed in Action or Died of Wounds—535.

[54] Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1994), 305.

[55] The 101st, which was not pulled out of Holland until 27 November 1944, sustained 3,792 casualties during MARKET-GARDEN. Hardest hit of all, of course, was the British 1st Airborne Division, which sustained 6,462 casualties and was all but decimated as a fighting force. See MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 199 and 205-206.

[56] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Operation Market," 3 December 1944.

[57] Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, "Operation MARKET, Airborne Phase, D to D Plus Ten, Inclusive," 4 December 1944, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Military Documents Outlining Market (Airborne) Operation, Copies to Commanding General + Staff, Gen. H. Arnold, 18th Airborne Corps," USAMHI. Capitalization in original.

[58] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 360-361. Capitalization in original.

[59] H. H. Arnold to Lewis Brereton, 13 October 1944, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Military Documents Outlining Market (Airborne) Operation, Copies to Commanding General + Staff, Gen. H. Arnold, 18th Airborne Corps," USAMHI.

[60] Eisenhower quoted in Office of the Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Intelligence, *Airborne Assault on Holland: An Interim Report*, 44.

[61] Marshall quoted in Ibid.

[62] General Board Report, *Organization, Equipment and Tactical Employment of the Airborne Division*, 5.

[63] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Operation Market," 3 December 1944.

[64] With reference to the glider pilot issue Ridgway wrote: "I dissent from the view of the Commanding General, 82d Airborne Division, that this [*sic*] personnel be placed under the immediate command of the airborne divisional commanders for full-time ground training. These men are airmen, an integral and essential part of an Air Force unit, and an indispensable element of the glider-tug team. British practice to the contrary notwithstanding, I believe they are now where they belong—in the Troop Carrier

squadrons. Such ground training as is desirable can be readily given by and within their associated airborne divisions." The result was that glider pilots were given more training, but remained in their respective Troop Carrier squadrons. See Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, "Operation MARKET, Airborne Phase, D to D Plus Ten, Inclusive," 4 December 1944.

[65] Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, "Operation MARKET, Airborne Phase, D to D Plus Ten, Inclusive," 4 December 1944.

[66] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Lessons of Operation Market," 3 December 1944.

[67] Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, "Operation MARKET, Airborne Phase, D to D Plus Ten, Inclusive," 4 December 1944.

[68] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 4-5. So optimistic were reports of German production that a few weeks before MARKET-GARDEN was launched, Reich Minister Albert Speer told Hitler that German war stocks could be expected to last through 1945.

[69] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 273. Emphasis in original.

[70] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 333. Emphasis in original.

[71] Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, 548.

[72] Danchev and Todman, *War Diaries, 1939-1945, Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke*, 600.

[73] Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 530.

[74] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 350.

[75] See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 9 and D. Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 534.

[76] Hitler quoted in Cooper, *The German Army*, 534.

[77] See also Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 687-728 passim and J. W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), 635-689 passim.

[78] Guderian's order of the day quoted in Cooper, *The German Army*, 535.

[79] Göring quoted in Ibid.

[80] Guderian's general orders quoted in Ibid.

[81] Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power*, 679.

[82] Ibid., 695-696.

[83] See Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis*, 689, 708, 713; Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 754-755; Charles V. P. von Luttichaur, "The German Counteroffensive in the Ardennes," in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Robert Greenfield, (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 448.

[84] Hitler quoted in Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis*, 695.

[85] Excerpt from Kriepe's diary quoted in Charles Whiting, *Ghost Front: The Ardennes Before the Battle of the Bulge* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 54. See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 1-2 and Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis,* 726-728.

[86] Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals: Military Conferences 1942-1945*, 446. Transcript of 31 July 1944 meeting at the *Wolfsschanze* in East Prussia.

[87] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 13.

[88] During a meeting with Jodl and other *OKW* staff officers eleven days after the assassination attempt Hitler mused aloud about traitors in the ranks: " 'So we only have to ask ourselves today—or rather, we don't have to ask ourselves anymore: how does the enemy learn about our thinking? Why are so many things neutralized? Why does he react to everything so quickly? [—] It's probably not the perception of the Russians at all, but permanent treason, constantly being carried out by some damned little clique.' " Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals: Military Conferences 1942-1945*, 447. Transcript of 31 July 1944 meeting at the *Wolfsschanze* in East Prussia. All officers who were privy to the plan were vetted by Hitler himself. All were made to sign an oath of secrecy. Anyone who violated this oath faced immediate death. Once the plan was finalized and disseminated to the field for execution the use of teletype, telephone, or radio to discuss the plan was prohibited and all lines and radio nets were monitored to ensure compliance. The only approved method for exchanging information was by courier, all of whom were closely watched by the Gestapo and other security agents. This heightened level of operational security contributed significantly to the ability of the Germans to achieve the surprise they did. See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 49.

[89] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 19-21 and Charles B. MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), 32.

[90] Quote by *General der Panzertruppen* Hasso-Eccard von Manteuffel, the *5th Panzer Army* commander, in Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk*, 275. The original codename for the operation was also chosen with an eye toward deception, selected so as to lead anyone hearing of the codename that it referred to the German plan to defend along the Rhine River. The codename was later changed to Operation *Herbstnebel* ('Autumn Mist'). See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 21 and Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, 490.

[91] Speer quoted in Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis*, 731.

[92] Jodl quoted in Charles V. P. von Luttichaur, "The German Counteroffensive in the Ardennes," 452. According to von Lutichaur, Jodl underestimated his effect—the destruction of thirty Allied divisions would amount to almost half of those on the Continent at the time.

[93] See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 21; D. Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 513; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 23. According the Gerhard Weinberg, "Hitler's view of the Americans as incapable of fighting effectively and of the American home front as likely to crack under a heavy blow at the front reflected his long-held perception of the United States. There is no evidence that Hitler realized or that a single one of his military advisors pointed out to him that, of all the major belligerents, the United States was the one which up to this point had been *least* damaged by the war and had by far the greatest recuperative powers, so that even a really major defeat was less likely to have a serious impact on its war effort." See Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 765-766. Emphasis in original.

[94] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 22 and Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk*, 275.

[95] Model quoted in Cole, *The Ardennes*, 26.

[96] Rundstedt quoted in Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk*, 275. Emphasis in original. Liddell Hart gleaned these comments from various German generals after the war and though there is an

element of truth in what they had to say, there is also some self-serving. Other sources have quoted Rundstedt as saying " '[t]he operational idea as such can almost be called a stroke of genius.' " See, for example, Cole, *The Ardennes*, 20.

[97] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 28-32.

[98] Helmut Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and His Generals: Military Conferences 1942-1945*, 536 and 539, transcript of speech to senior army laders given that the *Adlerhorst*, 12 December 1944.

[99] Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis,* 741.

[100] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 39 and Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis,* 742.

[101] Except where noted see Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, 483-484.

[102] Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis,* 742,

[103] See Doughty, *The Breaking Point*, 11; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 25; and Earl F. Ziemke, "Rundstedt," in *Hitler's Generals: Authoritative Portraits of the Men Who Waged Hitler's War*, ed. Correlli Barnett (New York: George Weidenfield & Nicolson Ltd., Quill/William Morrow, 1989), 191.

[104] The 28th Infantry Division arrived in the Ardennes on 19 November. It had sustained nearly 5,000 casualties during the Hürtgen fight, some of which were made up with 3,400 replacements that arrived on 1 December. The 4th Infantry Division arrived in the Ardennes on 7 December, having lost twenty-five percent of its strength in the Hürtgen. Replacements for the 4th had not yet arrived when the Germans launched their counteroffensive. See Whiting, *Ghost Front*, 172.

[105] Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 338.

[106] Bradley and Blair, *A Generals' Life*, 354. See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 55-56.

[107] Quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Command*, 554.

[108] Dickson quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 554.

[109] Sibert quoted in Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 347.

[110] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 349. Noel Annan, a member of the SHAEF intelligence staff, made an interesting observation about the role of intelligence in Eisenhower's headquarters that sheds some light on the manner in which enemy casualty figures were ballyhooed: " 'Intelligence at SHAEF was governed by what one might call the "Happy Hypothesis." This was that the German Army had been so shattered in Normandy and battered in Russia that it was only a matter of two or three months before the war would end. When I arrived at SHAEF, I formed the impression that the intelligence appreciations were tuned to justify Eisenhower's policy to attack all along the line. This policy required intelligence to report the German Army as being incapable of mounting an offensive.' " Annan Quoted in Whiting, *Ghost Front*, 163.

[111] Marshall quoted in Whiting, *Ghost Front*, 173.

[112] Charles B. MacDonald, *Company Commander* (New York, Bantam Books, 1978), 97-102.

[113] George Wilson, *If You Survive* (New York: Ivy Books, 1987), 188-190. Wilson wrote that his under-strength company had to cover a sector over a mile long, and one observation post was over five miles from the company command post.

[114] Quoted in Whiting, *Ghost Front*, 189-190.

[115] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 351.

[116] With regard to this contention two pieces of information are generally cited. The first concerns ULTRA intercepts of German state railway communications that revealed a massive movement of troops and supplies westward, along with *Luftwaffe* intercepts that called for the provision of local air cover over vital river crossings. The second concerns a series of coded messages sent by Baron Hiroshi Oshima, the Japanese ambassador to Germany, who summarized his meetings with German officials for his superiors in Tokyo. Those messages, which also spoke of a coming German offensive, were likewise intercepted and decoded. See MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 48-49 and Whiting, *Ghost Front*, 124-126 and 131-135.

[117] See especially Cole, *The Ardennes*, 50.

[118] Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 181.

[119] Gavin Diary, 28 November 1944.

[120] William H. Tucker, *Parachute Soldier* (Athol, MA: Haley's), 107. See also Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 227; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 105; McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 86.

[121] Gavin Diary, 28 November 1944.

[122] McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 87.

[123] See also Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 227-228 and Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 60.

[124] Gavin Diary, 14 December 1944.

[125] See also Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 227-229; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 105; Spencer F. Wurst and Gayle Wurst, *Descending From the Clouds: A Memoir of Combat in the 505 Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne Division* (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2004), 213; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 60.

[126] Gavin Diary, 15 November 1944.

[127] Ibid., 21 November 1944.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ibid., 18 November 1944.

Chapter Twenty-Two
To Turn the Tide

> *In brief, the 82d Airborne Division, still awaiting reinforcements and much re-supply at its base camps in the general area of RHEIMS, FRANCE, moved 150 miles with its first combat elements going into position in less than 24 hours and the entire Division closing in a new combat area in less than 40 hours from the time of the initial alert. It fought, stopped, and held against the best Divisions the German leader, Field Marshal VON RUNSTEDT [*sic*], could pit against it, protecting the North shoulder of the Allied line, preventing the GERMAN break-through from turning North to LIEGE, BELGIUM, and providing a safe area through which trapped Allied units could withdraw from the break-through area.*
>
> James M. Gavin[1]

The voice on the other end of the telephone was "almost so panicky that I didn't understand initially what he was talking about, but he said something about the Krauts breaking through all over the place," recalled Lieutenant Rufus K. Broadaway, Gavin's junior aide-de-camp.[2] It was Sunday evening, 17 December 1944. Gavin and his staff, along with two guests, Colonel Rupert Graves and Lieutenant Colonel Melvin Zais, the commander and executive officer of the independent 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment, were in the middle of dinner. As the junior man present it fell to Broadaway to answer the phone when it rang. The panicked voice on the other end was that of Colonel Eaton, the XVIII Airborne Corps Chief of Staff who, after his initial outburst, recovered sufficiently to ask Broadaway to put Gavin on the line.

It was about 1930 hours when Gavin picked up the phone. Eaton told him that "he had just received a call from SHAEF to the effect that the situation at the front to the east appeared to be critical; that the airborne divisions were to be prepared to move 24 hours after daylight the following day; [and] that the Corps Commander, General Ridgway, was in England and could not be contacted immediately."[3] Gavin took the message and returned to dinner. "There was no change in his expression," remembered Zais. "He smiled and said, 'Let's get on with dinner.' I recall relaxing with relief, because I was enjoying this visit and I did not want it interrupted." It was only after dessert that Gavin's "expression and attitude suddenly reflected a complete reversal." Looking around the table, he announced:

> 'Gentlemen, we've got work to do. That call was from Doc Eaton. The Germans have counter attacked [*sic*] and broken through in the Ardennes. The situation is critical. General Ridgway . . . is in England. General

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 621 through 629.

> Taylor . . . is in the States. I am the acting Corps Commander. We must move out with both divisions within twenty four [*sic*] hours. The 82d Airborne Division will move first.'[4]

With Gavin's revelation "[e]veryone sprang to action." There was no panic, no yelling. Though spurred with urgency, everything and everyone was "controlled and soft as velvet." Both Gavin and his staff had been through this before; they knew what to do and could do it well. According to Zais, "[i]t was . . . a vivid example of a leader who could keep his cool, hide his emotions, organize his thoughts, and, at the appropriate time, turn on the heat."[5]

Gavin assembled his staff in the 82nd's war room. During his conversation with Eaton he had directed that word be sent to Brigadier General Anthony C. McAuliffe, the 101st's artillery commander who, in Taylor's absence, was the acting division commander. Eaton was to tell McAuliffe to be prepared to move immediately. Sometime shortly thereafter Gavin also sent word to his own artillery commander, Brigadier General March, who was in Suippes with the other half of the 82nd and issued the same prepare-to-move order. Around 2130 hours, while still sequestered with his staff, Eaton called back. The airborne divisions were to "move without delay in the direction of Bastogne, [Belgium,] where further orders would be received." The only additional information Eaton had to offer was that XVIII Airborne Corps would be under the operational control of the U.S. First Army. At that the 82nd staff (which, at the time, was doing double duty as both a division and corps staff) sketched out a hasty movement plan that Gavin approved: the 82nd would move first, approximately an hour after daylight on 18 December, and the 101st would follow with a tentative departure time of 1400 hours, 18 December.[6]

The relative calmness displayed by the Gavin and his staff that had so impressed Lieutenant Colonel Zais was not replicated elsewhere in the division that night. There was much to do and very little time in which to get it done and Eaton's second phone call had cut preparation time in half. Equipment and weapons that had been turned in for maintenance had to be redrawn, regardless of their state of repair. Scarce supplies had to be scrounged. Somehow enough transportation to get the division to Belgium had to be procured. Plans had to be issued. Inspections conducted. Information disseminated. Ammunition distributed. The first priority, however, was assembling the troopers, a good portion of whom were scattered all over France.

Fortunately, most of the 82nd was already in camp on 17 December, a direct result of past indiscretions. Many of the 505th's troopers were in a theater hall at Camp Suippes watching a performance of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo when a call went out for all staff officers to report to the regimental command post.[7] Sergeant William L. Blank, of G Company, 3/505th was in the audience that night. "They started calling for the highest ranking officers," he recalled, and then "[t]he calls kept coming on down the ranks." He and his buddies joked that they would be calling out the sergeants next. They were right.[8] The 325th's officers had been invited to a dance at a nearby field hospital. No sooner had they arrived when word came to " '[r]eturn immediately to camp, regiment is on alert!' "[9] The 325th's troopers, meanwhile, were watching a movie in Camp Sissonne's theater when suddenly the film stopped, the lights came on, and an announcement was made that everyone was to return to their barracks immediately.[10] The troopers of the 456th were

already in their barracks; they were in the midst of a champagne party made possible by the ever resourceful Sergeant McKenzie who had procured fifty cases of champagne for a dollar a bottle plus fifty pounds of coffee. McKenzie recalled little of that night. After he drank his portion of champagne he passed out. When he awoke he was in the back of a weapons carrier headed for the front, fully outfitted in his combat gear.[11] Some 250 replacements bound for the 504th had an equally abrupt evening. They had just disembarked at a railroad station outside of Camp Sissonne when an officer from the regimental headquarters walked up and told them they were moving out in the morning.[12]

Those fortunate enough to have received a pass had them immediately rescinded. Getting those troopers back was the work of the military police who, knowing their prey, scoured the local watering holes and brothels as far away as Paris. For some troopers, already in military police custody, the German counteroffensive offered a reprieve. When Colonel Wienecke called the commander of the 82nd's Military Police Platoon to alert him to what was occurring he was told " 'Colonel, I'm up to my ears in wild troopers, and the jails are filled.' " " 'Sheriff,' " replied Wienecke, " 'Cut everyone loose. Mark them for duty, and get the hell over here.' "[13] Even troopers as far away as the United Kingdom got the call to muster. Staff Sergeant Wheatley 'Chris' Christiansen of G Company, 3/505th was in England, recovering from wounds he received in Holland. He had just been released from the hospital and was awaiting transport back to France.

> 'Sunday afternoon on the 17th, I had gone into town and was in my favorite pub when a 505 officer came in and said all passes had been cancelled. We were to report back to camp, as we were pulling out that night. That evening about fifty of us, plus about the same amount of rear-echelon service troops, were taken down to Southampton and loaded on a LCT and from there over to France.'[14]

No one had to tell Private First Class Jack Hillman of I Company, 3/505th to get back to his unit. Recovering from his second combat-related injury, Hillman was tired of being shuttled from hospital to hospital so he went AWOL and made his way back to Camp Suippes " '[j]ust in the nick of time to enjoy a winter vacation in the Bulge.' "[15]

In his after action review Gavin stated, "[t]he division was ready for a move, since, because of our past and usual[ly] quick commitments, we [had] maintained a high degree of readiness as a standard operating procedure."[16] There is much to indicate, however, that this was not universally the case. Both Colonel Ekman and his S-3, Major William J. Harris, maintained that, for the 505th at least, "the equipment situation was bad. Many of the weapons were in ordnance, there were shortages in food and ammunition, all requests for such items had not been completely filled, clothing was in the laundry, equipment was stored, [and] winter clothing had not been issued to the regiment."[17] Major J. W. Medusky, the S-3 of the 508th, confirmed that his regiment, too, had to move out "on such short notice that it was impossible to recover many of the mortars, BARs, and light machine guns which were still in ordnance; nor were there basic loads of ammunition immediately available."[18] Major John C. H. Lee Jr., the division's assistant G-3, noted that not only did the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion deploy without all of its weapons, it also lacked its basic load of explosives and mines, critical items when defending against an armored and mechanized enemy. Moreover, he highlighted one

other critical shortage: maps. Ekman, Harris, and Medusky underscored this shortage, noting that the only thing the convoy commanders had to guide them to their march objectives in Belgium were mimeographed strip maps.[19]

Weapons shortages were critical, of course, but even more critical was the lack of warm clothing. Fortunately, after Normandy, the division had been issued a heavier new style jump suit, the M-43, which replaced the lightweight M-42 version.[20] This provided the troopers some protection from the cold, but alone it was not enough. Lieutenant Rusty Hays of F Company, 2/505th, was one of the few whose kit was anywhere near adequate for the weather conditions he would encounter. He deployed with cotton underwear, long underwear, wool pants, a wool shirt, a medium-weight field jacket, his M-43 combat pants and blouse, a wool overcoat, combat boots (jump boots fit too snug and did not provide sufficient protection against the cold), wool gloves, a wool knit cap, a cocoon sleeping bag, two wool blankets, and a shelter half. " 'I was lucky,' " he recalled, " '[t]here were some men who, for one reason or another, did not have many of these items and had to leave for combat without them.' "[21] Sergeant Spencer Wurst was one of those men; his only over garment was a field jacket.[22]

The night of 17-18 December in Camps Suippes and Sissonne was, as one trooper characterized it, a "well-organized scramble."[23] Eventually, however, order emerged from the chaos. Trucks of all types arrived at the camps, having been diverted from their normal supply runs from all over northwestern Europe. Much to the chagrin of the troopers, most of the trucks were 10-ton tractor-trailer rigs, the trailers being nothing more than uncovered flatbeds with high panel sides. There were also too few of them so to make room for as many men as possible the troopers had to stand. It was going to be a long, cold ride. And then a light rain began to fall.[24] Private First Class Malcolm Neal from A Battery, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion, was one of the fortunate few who got to ride in a covered 2 ½-ton truck. He recalled sitting near the tailgate when he overheard " 'one of our guys, looking out at a group of cold, wet paratroopers standing packed in an open semi-trailer, say, "Boy, I feel sorry for the first Germans those guys get hold of." ' "[25]

The 82nd's hurried departure was the direct result of the Allied high command's blindness to the possibility of a major German counteroffensive, a blindness underscored by the actions that day of the two highest ranking commanders responsible for the Belgian front. On 16 December, several hours *after* German shells had already pummeled the VIII Corps's forward positions and *after* German ground elements had already overrun American positions, a wholly unaware General Bradley awoke in his headquarters in the Hôtel Alfa in Luxembourg City, dressed, breakfasted, and then took off in a car for Eisenhower's headquarters at Versailles, where the two planned to discuss manpower issues (specifically, the lack of infantry replacements). Stopping en route for a leisurely lunch at the Ritz in Paris, Bradley did not arrive at Versailles until early afternoon but found that his meeting had been postponed; Eisenhower's orderly, Sergeant Mickey McKeough, was marrying Pearlie Hargreaves, a SHAEF staff secretary, and the Supreme Commander was hosting the event in the chapel of Louis XIV. Hence, it was not until 1600 hours that the two generals eventually came together to discuss the war. When they did, both were still oblivious to the events in the Ardennes. Their first inkling that something was amiss at the front did not occur until an hour later when Major General Strong, the SHAEF G-2, interrupted them to report that the Germans seemed to

have broken through at five separate locations in the VIII Corps sector. Strong intimated that something big was afoot but Bradley disagreed. "My initial reaction to these fragmentary and unclear reports was that von Rundstedt had launched a limited spoiling attack . . . in an effort to force Hodges and Patton to slow down or pull back [at the time, Hodges was attacking toward the Roer River and Patton toward the Saar]. I was not overly concerned."[26] Since the reports, as Bradley wrote, were "fragmentary and unclear," and since it is a widely held axiom of military command that in a crisis first reports are generally much more dire than the situation truly warrants, the two decided that there was very little they could do at the moment. Moreover, there was yet one more pressing social engagement—the wedding reception—at which Eisenhower's presence had been requested, so the meeting broke up with no action taken. Later than evening Eisenhower and Bradley met a second time for dinner during which they broke open some champagne to celebrate the news that President Roosevelt had nominated Eisenhower for a fifth star. After dinner they played several rubbers of bridge.[27]

As the evening wore on and more and more reports began filtering in a clearer picture of what was happening emerged. First reports, it turned out in very un-axiomatic fashion, were in fact correct. Eisenhower and Bradley suspended their game playing and took up position in the SHAEF war room. "Ike sensed it before I did," wrote Bradley, "this was no spoiling attack."[28] This was corroborated the next morning with the arrival of the most recent batch of ULTRA intercepts, one of which was Rundstedt's exhortation addressed to the " 'Soldiers of the Western Front.' "

> 'Your great hour has come. Large attacking armies have started against the Anglo-Americans. I do not have to tell you more than that. You feel it yourself. *We gamble everything!*
>
> You carry with you the holy obligation to give all to achieve superhuman objectives for our Fatherland and Führer!'[29]

In response, Bradley and Eisenhower fashioned a plan that was right out of doctrine. To defeat an enemy penetration, one had first to build up the shoulders of the salient thereby ensuring a limited penetration did not widen into a wholesale collapse. Furthermore, in order to hinder the enemy advance important road junctions had to be held and a solid defensive wall formed along some easily defensible terrain feature (in this case, the Meuse River). And finally, a counterattack force had to be readied to hit the enemy in the flank and, hopefully, cut him off and destroy him in the same pocket he had formed during his offensive. Warning orders to this effect went out the night of the 16th and were later confirmed and amplified on the morning of the 17th. Securing the shoulders fell to the U.S. 7th and 10th Armored Divisions, advancing from the north and south respectively. Readying the counterattack force was a task Bradley assigned to Patton. Middleton, it was thought, could secure vital road hubs with the forces he had at hand while Hodges was to set about assembling a blocking position along the Meuse, drawing the forces to do so from other First Army formations.[30]

But events at the front developed much more quickly than anticipated and threatened to spiral out of control. Two green divisions, the U.S. 99th Infantry (the southernmost division in the U.S. V Corps sector) and 106th Infantry had been hit hard, the latter having all but disintegrated. The undermanned U.S. 28th and 4th Infantry Divisions were

also falling back. By evening of 17 December the lead element of the German main effort, *Kampfgruppe Peiper* of the *1st SS Panzer Division*, was outside Stavelot, Belgium, just forty-two miles from the Meuse. Middleton, meanwhile, had already committed most of his forces (he had but one engineer combat battalion left as a reserve) with little discernable effect on the German advance. Furthermore, his VIII Corps headquarters, located at the important road junction at Bastogne, was in danger of being overrun. Hodges, likewise, had little left with which he could respond, having lent his reserves to the build up along the Meuse. Bradley had nothing.[31]

Even before the Normandy landings there had been a lot of talk in SHAEF about forming a theater reserve force for use by the Supreme Commander. It was envisioned that this force's primary mission would be to exploit success, much akin to the manner in which Napoleon had once employed his cavalry but, if need be, it could also be used to counter an enemy breakthrough. Eisenhower had long wanted such a force, but once the Anglo-American armies broke out of the Normandy beachheads and rushed headlong toward Germany, divisions were fed into the line as quickly as they arrived on the Continent. In early December, with the Allies halted along the entire front, Eisenhower revived the idea and on 14 December the SHAEF operations section submitted a staff estimate for a strategic reserve of at least three divisions that would be placed under 12th Army Group for administrative and logistical support, but which could only be used at the direction of Eisenhower himself. When the Germans attacked two days later, this idea had yet to come to fruition. So when Hodges called Bradley in the afternoon of 17 December and told him that he needed the SHAEF strategic reserve, he was, in one sense, talking about nothing more than an idea.[32]

Eisenhower did, however, have something of a reserve, although not one in the same sense as had been outlined in the SHAEF staff estimate. Instead, the only reserve Eisenhower had at hand could be called one only inasmuch as it comprised combat units that were not engaged. This was, of course, the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, the only two such Allied divisions on the Continent. When Bradley communicated Hodges's request to SHAEF Eisenhower was chary of releasing them. Not only were they all he had left they were far from being combat ready. But he eventually acceded, "albeit reluctantly," and hence set in motion the chain of events that resulted in the troopers of both divisions riding in open trailers in the dead of winter for hundreds of miles to defeat an enemy that was long thought dead.[33]

Leading the way was the acting corps commander, Jim Gavin. After issuing orders to both divisions—orders that, because of the paucity of intelligence, were simply to mount up and move east toward Bastogne—Gavin left Camp Sissonne at 2300 hours, 17 December to find out for himself what was going on.[34] Traveling with him were his G-1, Lieutenant Colonel Al Ireland; his senior aide, Captain Hugo Olson; and a driver. Their first stop was the U.S. First Army's command post at Spa, Belgium, over 100 miles away as the crow flies. "It was a wickedly miserable night," Gavin wrote. "There was a steady light rain, considerable fog, and quite a few bridges were out."[35] Driving under blackout conditions made the trip even more difficult so Gavin and his party did not arrive at Spa until 0900 hours, 18 December. When he arrived, Gavin went immediately to the First Army war room and reported to General Hodges, who "seemed a bit weary," and Hodges's Chief of Staff and G-3, Major General William B. Kean and Brigadier General Truman C. 'Tubby' Thorson.[36] Although reports about the situation at many parts of the

front were still very vague and confusing, one clear and immediate threat had emerged from the chaos: *Kampfgruppe Peiper*. After conferring for a few minutes, Hodges ordered Gavin to divert one of the airborne divisions to a small hill mass around the crossroads at Werbomont, Belgium, right in the path of *Kampfgruppe Peiper*. Since the 82nd was in the lead and Werbomont was a farther drive from the 101st's base camps around Rheims, Gavin decided that it would be his division that would take on the German main effort. Word was sent out to this effect and the lead elements of the 82nd, by that time already on the road, were diverted accordingly. The 101st, meanwhile, remained on course for Bastogne. Furthermore, to facilitate command and control, Gavin temporarily attached himself and the 82nd to the U.S. V Corps, then holding the northern portion of the developing salient, while the 101st was to be under the operational control of VIII Corps. The activation of XVIII Airborne Corps would wait until General Ridgway arrived, who at the time was en route to the Continent. Gavin then requested the usual support that armies provide subordinate formations—tanks, tank destroyers, and artillery, none of which he received—and then left for Werbomont to conduct a quick reconnaissance.[37]

Gavin, Ireland, and Olson arrived at Werbomont around mid-afternoon and found that the area "offered excellent defensive possibilities, being the dominant terrain for many miles."[38] Gavin then ventured a little over a mile eastward to the village of Habiemont, which was situated on a slight rise overlooking the north-south Lienne Creek. Like almost all the waterways in the Ardennes, Lienne Creek, though narrow, was bounded by steep banks and was, therefore, a very effective vehicular obstacle. To his surprise, Gavin found there a detachment of engineers from A Company, 291st Engineer Combat Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Alvin Edelstein.[39] They had been there for about an hour and had already rigged the heavy masonry bridge over the Lienne at Habiemont for demolition. Gavin no doubt informed Edelstein that the 82nd would be arriving shortly. Whether or not it would be on time was another matter for while they were conversing they were accosted by a number of civilians who reported that they had come from Trois Ponts, a village some six to seven miles to the east. There were many Germans in Trois Ponts, they added, and it appeared the Germans were hell bent on making it to Habiemont and taking the bridge before it could be destroyed. Since Edelstein had the bridge rigged to blow and there was little else he could do since his units had yet to arrive, Gavin continued his reconnaissance, driving north along the Lienne until it intersected the east-west Amblève River. At Forges, a minuscule hamlet less than a mile north of Habiemont, he discovered a second bridge spanning the Lienne, though "it did not appear to be strong enough to take heavy tanks."[40] Content that he had a good lay of the land, Gavin returned to Habiemont, informed Lieutenant Edelstein of the Forges bridge (Edelstein told Gavin there was nothing he could do about the Forges bridge; he needed all the explosives he had to properly prepare the heavier Habiemont bridge for demolition), and then left with his party for Bastogne in order to coordinate with both VIII Corps and General McAuliffe.[41]

Gavin arrived in Bastogne at about 1730 hours and found there "considerable confusion. Vehicles were being loaded, and members of the [VIII Corps] staff seemed to be hurrying away."[42] Reporting to the VIII Corps command post, he talked with Middleton as well as the VIII Corps G-2 and G-3, who "had no solid information except that the situation was quite fluid and that they were leaving."[43] Present also were several

officers from the U.S. 28th Infantry Division, who "seemed to feel that their division had been overrun, although they were uncertain of its whereabouts."[44] Gavin also met with McAuliffe and gave him his orders: he was to place himself and the 101st under VIII Corps control, organize an all-around defense, and hold until relieved. He then left for Werbomont to await the arrival of his troopers.[45]

It was 2000 hours when Gavin arrived back at Werbomont, just ahead of the lead element of the 82nd. With little time to spare the troopers were hustled off their trucks and placed in defensive positions around the village, a scene replicated throughout the long night as truck serial after truck serial found its way into Werbomont. By daylight, 19 December, when the last of the trucks finally arrived, the crossroads was secure, completely enclosed within the division's perimeter.[46]

For the troopers in the exposed trailers the ride had been tortuous. "Progress was painfully slow," recorded the 504th after action report, "with the convoy seldom attaining a speed in excess of fifteen miles per hour."[47] Driving at night under blackout conditions over slick, unfamiliar roads certainly contributed to this snail-like pace, but nearer the battle area the main cause for the holdup was traffic snarls. Hundreds of refugees and soldiers from broken units cluttered the roads trying to escape the onrushing German spearheads. "As the trucks neared their destination, roads became congested and traffic so snarled that the column did not move for hours," recorded a 325th narrative.[48] According to a 505th report, "all the way up [the 505th serials] encountered convoys of retreating troops and guns."[49] Private First Class Virgil Goodwin, one of the 505th's new replacements, was in one of those trucks.

> 'When we got closer to the front we made several stops because the roads were jammed with civilians and soldiers coming from the way we were going. Some of the retreating soldiers wanted to know if we thought we could turn the tide. We told them that was what we intended to do.'[50]

Sergeant Wurst recalled a similar scene.

> The closer we got to the front, the worse the panic became. Riding in the open cattle trucks, we saw it all. The sides were three or four feet high, and there was no top or covering. We leaned out and hollered at the retreating men, 'Hey, you guys are going in the wrong direction.' They would look back at us and earnestly say, 'Oh no, *you* guys are going in the wrong direction.'[51]

But not every American unit had cut and run. Unbeknownst to the cold, weary troopers arriving at Werbomont, their reception would have been much less welcome had it not been for the intrepid stand of Lieutenant Edelstein's engineers and a battalion of straight-leg infantry from the U.S. 30th Infantry Division.[52]

A full hour before anyone was in Werbomont, several tanks leading a subsidiary column from *Kampfgruppe Peiper* came crashing out of the darkness headed straight toward Habiemont and its critical bridge. Corporal Fred Chapin was huddled in his foxhole on the other side of the Lienne Creek. He had with him the detonator but had been told that he was not to blow the bridge until given the signal by Lieutenant

Edelstein, similarly huddled in a nearby foxhole. At a range of about 200 yards, the lead tank opened fire with its main gun. The explosion threw Chapin to the bottom of his hole. Scrambling to his feet after the debris had cleared, Chapin looked toward Edelstein's hole in hopes of receiving the signal to blow the bridge. At first there was no sign of the lieutenant. Seconds later, however, Chapin spied Edelstein waving frantically. At that, Chapin turned the key on the detonating device and in a flash of light, dust, and debris, denied the Germans the only bridge over the Lienne Creek capable of handling heavy armor. Frustrated by those "damned engineers," Peiper ordered his men to fan out in search of other crossings. Eventually they found the smaller, less robust bridge at Forges, the same bridge that Gavin had scouted earlier, and later that night Peiper sent a reconnaissance detachment in half-tracks along with some self-propelled guns across in an attempt to get behind the American defenses along the Lienne. They did not get far. Elements of the 2nd Battalion, 119th Infantry from the 30th Infantry Division, laying in wait, cut them to pieces.[53]

The next morning, still with no news about German whereabouts, Gavin went forward to check things out. Only then did he learn that the Habiemont Bridge had been blown. He also came across the remnants of the German reconnaissance element that the 2/119th Infantry had decimated. "I visited the locality at daylight . . . and found about five armored vehicles, armored cars and [self-propelled guns], knocked out, with several German dead lying about the road."[54] Lieutenant Edward Arn, whose company had engaged the reconnaissance party, remembered meeting Gavin.

> Just as I was preparing to move into Chevron [a small village near where the German column had been ambushed] with the rest of the company, I heard a jeep coming down the highway behind me. I nearly fell down into the [Amblève] River [*sic*, Chevron was quite a ways south of the Amblève, Arn must have meant the Lienne Creek] when it pulled up and a tall, lean paratroop officer leaped out with two stars on his battered helmet.
>
> 'Who's in command here?'
>
> 'I am, sir, Lt. Arn, F Company of the 119th Regiment, 30th Division . . . at your service.'
>
> 'I'm Jim Gavin of the 82nd Airborne Division,' he waved away my salute with a grin. 'Looks to me, Lt., that you've had quite a night of it up here.'

According to Arn, he was "dumbfounded" at the sight of a major general so far out in front of his division with only a driver as an escort. He was even more dumbfounded when Gavin asked if it would be all right if he moved even farther forward to take a look around. Arn, of course, consented, but obviously failed to notify the rest of his company for minutes later, one of his platoon leaders called back in alarm. " 'Sir, I wish to suggest that you have me relieved. I'm going nuts. There's a two-star general in a jeep coming into town. I can't believe it.' "[55]

While Gavin was out conducting his reconnaissance, Ridgway and several members of the XVIII Airborne Corps staff arrived in Werbomont and set up operations in a building near the 82nd's command post. Ridgway and his staff had hurriedly flown back

to the Continent from England on 18 December, landing at an airfield near Rheims at 1030 hours, 18 December. From there he and his aide, Captain Don Faith, and his corps G-2 and G-3, Lieutenant Colonels Whitfield Jack and Alexander Day Surles, and a driver piled into an "ancient" military sedan and sped eastward toward the battle area, stopping first at the 101st base camp before continuing on toward Bastogne. "The fog was thick as heavy smoke, [and] a cold drizzling rain was falling," recalled Ridgway. Not usually "a nervous man in an automobile," Ridgway got "pretty jumpy" when, for the sixth time, his driver narrowly missed crashing into the tailgate of one of the many trucks traveling the same road. When asked what was wrong the driver admitted that he could not see very well. Without ado, Ridgway took the wheel himself and drove the rest of the way to Bastogne.[56] There he met Generals Middleton and McAuliffe.

> The gloom inside [VIII Corps] headquarters was thicker than the fog outside. This atmosphere of uncertainty was in no way the fault of General Middleton, a magnificent soldier with a wonderful combat record in two wars. But the most disquieting thing in any war is to be in a completely unknown situation. General Middleton knew that some of his units had been overrun. He knew the German attack had opened a great gap in his lines. But nearly all his communications with his forward elements were out, and he had no knowledge of where his forces were, nor where the Germans were, nor where they might strike next.[57]

While at Bastogne, Ridgway was informed that the 101st had been attached to VIII Corps. His XVIII Airborne Corps, comprising the 82nd, a portion of the U.S. 3rd Armored Division, and the U.S. 30th Infantry Division, would take command of the sector farther north around Werbomont. He was to report to First Army headquarters as soon as possible to receive more detailed orders. But since he had arrived in Bastogne at about 2030 hours, Ridgway elected to stay the night in town rather than risk getting lost on the unfamiliar roads and wandering blind into enemy lines. Middleton's VIII Corps, meanwhile, packed up as fast as it could and made for its new location at Neufchâteau, some eighteen miles southwest of Bastogne. As soon as it was light enough to travel the next morning, Ridgway too departed, leaving McAuliffe in command at Bastogne. "I felt a keen regret, and I think Tony did, too," recalled Ridgway of his leaving, "[f]or the 82nd and the 101st were brothers in the blood. They had fought side by side in Normandy, and they knew and trusted each other. Now they were to be separated." Though there was little he could do to aid McAuliffe and his troopers, he took solace in the knowledge that, were the enemy to make it that far, "[p]aratroopers were accustomed to fight[ing] surrounded."[58]

It was about 1030 hours, 19 December, when Ridgway and his staff finally drove into Werbomont, their first stop after leaving Bastogne. There he received a quick update from Gavin, who had hurried back from his reconnaissance when he got word that Ridgway had arrived and who was "delighted to see General Matthew Ridgway and his Corps back in action."[59] Ridgway then continued on to First Army headquarters which, by that time, had displaced to Chaudfontaine, a small town on the outskirts of Liège.[60] His mission, he was told, was to block *Kampfgruppe Peiper's* westward advance and seal

the gap between V Corps in the north and VIII Corps in the south. Following a situation update, Ridgway returned to his command post in Werbomont.[61]

During his brief stopover in Werbomont, Ridgway approved Gavin's plans to expand his perimeter eastward across the Lienne and relieve the 2/119th Infantry. In fact, Tucker's 504th and Ekman's 505th were already moving in that direction when the two generals talked and by early afternoon on the 19th both regiments had completed a movement of approximately six miles and were occupying defensive positions well east of the Lienne Creek with the 504th in the north and the 505th in the south. Gavin also had Lindquist move his 508th to the high ground around Chevron, the same area in which Lieutenant Arn's company had earlier defeated the German attempt to cross the Lienne, thereby establishing a blocking position behind the 504th and 505th.[62]

Meanwhile, First Army had received information, much of which was based on rumor, that the Germans had cut the main north-south thoroughfare, Highway N15, that connected Bastogne with Liège near Houffalize (about eighteen miles southeast of Werbomont) and that enemy spearheads were as far west as Hotton (about thirteen miles southwest of Werbomont). As it turned out only the information about Houffalize was true (although First Army did not discover this until much later). Reconnaissance elements of two German armored divisions, the *2nd Panzer* and *116th Panzer*, leading the *XLVII Panzer* and *LVIII SS Panzer Corps* of the *Fifth Panzer Army* respectively, had discovered an undefended gap in the U.S. lines just south of Houffalize and poured through. Were the main body of *Fifth Panzer Army* to follow, the already considerable breach between the U.S. V and VIII Corps that Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps was to fill would be torn wide open. Still trying to get his newly activated command in hand Ridgway had but one element to turn to for a quick reaction force, the 82nd. In response, Gavin told Billingslea to send one battalion, the 2/401st, to Barvaux, an important road junction and river-crossing site approximately eight miles southwest of Werbomont, and one company, F Company, 2/325th, to the Manhay-Grandménil area, approximately six miles due south of Werbomont. The rest of the 325th was to remain in the Werbomont area, constituting both the corps and division reserve. Finally, in order to establish a linkage between his elements on either side of the Lienne, Gavin had the 508th send one company, H Company, 3/508th, to Villetes and Bra, two villages east and west of the creek respectively, about five miles southeast of Werbomont. All these movements were completed by nightfall on the 19th.[63]

When day broke on the 20th of December, the 82nd's small defensive perimeter that was wound tightly around Werbomont crossroads twenty-four hours ago had become a semi-circular defensive trace approximately fourteen miles wide and eight miles deep. Despite this expansion, however, nowhere did any element of the division make enemy contact. *Fifth Panzer Army's* reconnaissance spearheads around Houffalize had stalled well south of the division's area and *Kampfgruppe Peiper* seemed to have mysteriously disappeared. Yet in spite of its strange absence or, more likely, because of it, *Kampfgruppe Peiper* still constituted the greatest threat both to XVIII Airborne Corps and First Army and it was, therefore, on finding, fixing, and finishing this enemy element that Ridgway concentrated on 20 December.[64]

Recoiling from the bloody nose delivered by Edelstein's engineers and Arn's infantrymen *Kampfgruppe Peiper* had doubled back and concentrated along the line of the Amblève, several miles north of the 82nd's positions. Comprising the bulk of the

combat power of the *1st SS Panzer Division*, *Kampfgruppe Peiper* was cut off from the rest of its division and strung out in a sausage-shaped perimeter some 3-4 miles long on a winding road that paralleled the north bank of the Amblève between the villages of La Gleize and Stoumont Station. To its west, north, and east were disparate elements of the 30th Infantry Division reinforced by Combat Command B of the U.S. 3rd Armored Division.[65] Its only remaining outlet was via a bridgehead it had established south of the Amblève near the small village of Cheneux. Ridgway's scheme was to squeeze *Kampfgruppe Peiper* by attacking from the north and west with Combat Command B and the 30th Infantry Division while the 82nd attacked from the south to secure Cheneux, thereby sealing off the last escape route for Peiper's beleaguered SS soldiers.[66]

Gavin learned of the enemy presence in Cheneux during the early morning hours of 20 December, independent of any information from XVIII Airborne Corps. He was visiting Tucker's command post in the hamlet of Rahier, a little over a mile southwest of Cheneux. Tucker informed him that "he had just received intelligence from civilians to the effect that approximately 125 vehicles, including approximately 30 tanks, had moved through [Rahier] the afternoon before, moving in the direction of Cheneux [obviously remnants of the German column Peiper had sent south toward Habiemont the night of 18 December]." The information, wrote Gavin, "appeared to be reliable" and posed "some interesting problems." Gavin surmised that the Germans had "given up hope of crossing the [Lienne] creek obstacle at Habiemont . . . and had turned to the main road [north of the Amblève]" and, if that were the case, "the seizure of the bridge over the Amblève River at Cheneux was imperative if their further movement was to be blocked [i.e., if they were to be bottled up north of the river]."[67] But what of the German armor? Gavin discussed this with Tucker. Tucker was "anxious to go after them without delay," wrote Gavin. "Any ordinary infantry regiment would want at least a battalion of tanks in support before it attacked, but Tucker's idea was to attack the Germans and take their armor away from them. He figured he would then have his own." Tucker's plan was based on much more than mere bravado. The 504th had also acquired a truckload of German *panzerfausts* in Holland, a much more effective antitank weapon than the American bazooka, and so armed felt equal to the task.[68]

Tucker assigned the mission of taking Cheneux to Lieutenant Colonel Willard E. Harrison's 1/504th, then in regimental reserve in Rahier. With only two of his companies available (A Company had earlier been sent on a mission elsewhere), Harrison's plan was to move up the Rahier-Cheneux road with B Company in the lead astride the road and C Company and the rest of the battalion following. Jumping off at 1300 hours, Harrison's troopers had not gone far before they ran into a small German reconnaissance element moving down the road from the opposite direction. A running firefight ensued that lasted several hours. With the help of a captured German halftrack mounting a 77mm gun manned by troopers from the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion, Captain Thomas C. Helgeson, the B Company commander, attempted to slip one of his platoons around the German right flank in order to maintain the momentum of the advance. It looked for a while that this would work, but once Helgeson's troopers got within 100 yards of Cheneux German fire from inside the town—small arms and machine gun fire augmented by numerous 20mm cannons and a battery of 105mm howitzers—was so intense that the attack stalled. By that time it was late afternoon and it was obvious, from the volume and caliber of the fire emanating from Cheneux that, as it was put with incredible

understatement in one after action interview, the Germans "apparently had more armor than originally estimated."[69] At 1700 hours, unable to move forward, Helgeson withdrew B Company to the cover of a nearby wood to regroup.[70]

At 1845 hours, Helgeson, Harrison, and Tucker conferred about what to do next. Tucker ordered a night attack. The plan was to attack up the road with B Company on the right of the road and C Company on the left. A ten-minute artillery barrage would precede the attack, which would jump off at 1930 hours. Because the ground outside Cheneux was flat and strewn with barbed wire, thereby providing the Germans entrenched inside "perfect grazing fields of fire," Harrison had his commanders organize their companies into four assault waves that were to advance at fifty-yard intervals. Attacking in this manner, Harrison could ensure that an entire company would not get pinned down at once. Two tank destroyers that had come up during the day were to accompany the attack, moving up the road itself to provide heavy fire support as needed.[71]

The attack jumped off right on schedule but no sooner had the troopers emerged from their attack positions than they came under intense fire. The wire slowed the advance and made the troopers easy targets. The two tank destroyers, careful to avoid the heavier German weapons, remained far to the rear and failed to provide the fire support hoped for, yet the troopers pressed on, sustaining the attack through short rushes. On the right, B Company's first two waves were almost completely wiped out. " 'The men were falling like flies,' " recalled Staff Sergeant James M. Boyd, the Third Platoon sergeant. On the left, C Company's first wave got hung up in the wire so the second wave moved up in an attempt to build up a base of fire. But it was not enough. The enemy fire was simply too devastating. Inevitably the attack stalled all along the line, and were it not for Staff Sergeant George Walsh of B Company who stood up and yelled, " '[l]et's get the sons of bitches!' " the troopers would have never got into town. Walsh's battle cry, however, energized the advance. Those with him stood up and charged a nearby German roadblock. "The men fired until their ammunition was exhausted; then they used their rifles as clubs and drew trench knives as they converged on the roadblock and engaged the enemy in close-in fighting." Still leading the way Walsh crawled to within twenty yards of a German 20mm gun that he intended to dispatch with a grenade, but discovered that he could not pull the pin because he had been shot through the wrist. Undeterred, Walsh crawled back to another trooper, had him pull the pin, and then crawled back to the German gun and silenced it. A Private Barkley in C Company displayed similar courage. Barkley stealthily crawled alongside a second 20mm flak wagon and then jumped aboard and slit the gunner's throat. By 2200 hours, the troopers of B and C Companies had gained a foothold on the edge of town, where they barricaded themselves in some homes and waited for reinforcement.[72]

Seeing that his 1st Battalion simply did not have enough remaining combat power to take Cheneux, at 2330 hours Tucker notified Lieutenant Colonel Julian Cook, the 3/504th commander, who sent his G Company forward to help the beleaguered 1st Battalion survivors inside the town hold on to their tenuous foothold throughout the night. The next day, 21 December, Tucker and Cook led the rest of the 3/504th on a wide flanking march to the east. Their intent was to get behind Cheneux, thereby cutting off the retreat of the Germans still inside the town and, once in position, attack the town from the north while G Company and the remnants of the 1/504th broke out of their foothold and

attacked from the south. En route, Tucker and Cook were also to seize the area between Cheneux and the Amblève (which was actually a few hundred yards north of the town) and, in so doing, completely clear the enemy from the south bank of the river. It took them all day to get into position, handicapped by the rough terrain and some 20mm flak wagons and a Tiger tank in a small, satellite village a bit north of Cheneux. By 1900 hours, however, all missions were complete: Cheneux was in American hands and the last of *Kampfgruppe Peiper* had been thrown back across the Amblève.[73]

Cheneux cost the 504th dearly. Before the battle C Company counted eight officers and 119 men. By the evening of 21 December, only three officers and thirty-eight troopers were still standing. It was B Company, however, that was hardest hit, for only eighteen troopers remained in its ranks when the smoke cleared. In all, 1st and 3rd Battalions combined suffered 225 casualties, twenty-three of which were killed in action. Testament to the ferocity of the battle was the fact that only thirty-one Waffen SS soldiers were captured, half of whom were wounded. The rest were either killed or managed to escape before the 3/504th was able to close the trap. They left behind fourteen 20mm flak wagons, six halftracks, four trucks, four 105mm howitzers, and one Tiger tank. As always, Tucker incorporated the still functional German weapons into his regiment. "When I went over the battlefield with them the next day," wrote Gavin, "they pointed out that they were now the 504th Parachute Armored Regiment."[74]

By securing Cheneux and clearing the south bank of the Amblève, the 504th denied *Kampfgruppe Peiper* its last viable escape route from the perimeter in which it found itself, a perimeter that, by nightfall on 21 December, had become much more constricted due to concentric attacks by elements of the 30th Infantry Division and Combat Command B of the 3rd Armored Division. Yet Peiper's battle-hardened storm troopers remained a dangerous threat. " 'They are trying to get out forward or backward or something,' " reported Major General Leland S. Hobbs, the 30th Infantry Division commander.[75] But unbeknownst to Hobbs, or anyone in the U.S. chain of command for that matter, Peiper was low on ammunition and, above all, fuel. Several attempts to break through to him, mounted by elements from the main body of the *1st SS Panzer Division,* had been ambushed and decimated. Peiper had little choice, therefore, but to remain in his defensive perimeter and await succor.[76]

Though *Kampfgruppe Peiper* was its most immediate threat, German advances elsewhere in the Ardennes threatened to totally unhinge XVIII Airborne Corps's defensive front. On 20 December, two divisions, the *116th Panzer* and *560th Volks Grenadier*, crashed into an area that contained nothing more than a scattering of rear echelon units and a weak force made up from the residue of the 3rd Armored Division, then in the process of moving forward to take up position on the corps right. To make matters worse, during the attack the *116th Panzer* seized an American depot containing some 25,000 gallons of fuel and 15,000 rations. Beyond supplying the German panzers a windfall of fuel with which they could continue their drive toward the Meuse, the loss of the depot had a significant secondary effect as well for the captured supplies belonged to the U.S. 7th Armored Division which, at the time, was in danger of being completely cut-off and destroyed at St. Vith.[77]

St. Vith, which was located approximately twenty-seven miles northeast of Bastogne, was one of the critical Ardennes crossroads that Middleton felt needed to be held if there was any chance of stemming the German offensive so when an advance party from the

7th Armored Division arrived at the VIII Corps command post in Bastogne on 16 December, he ordered the division to continue on to the St. Vith-Vielsalm area to link up with the green 106th Infantry Division already there. The 7th Armored's lead echelons arrived in the area at about 1100 hours the following day and found that the 106th, which by that time had lost the greater part of two of its three infantry regiments, was hard-pressed to hang on to the crossroads. In the following days, the rest of the 7th Armored Division closed on St. Vith, as did a congeries of units in various states of combat readiness that had barely escaped the onrushing German panzers. By 20 December the American units defending St. Vith were almost wholly cut off from friendly lines. To the north was the remainder of the *1st SS Panzer Division*, then trying to fight its way through to *Kampfgruppe Peiper*, and to the south and east were several panzer and volks grenadier divisions. That day Brigadier General Robert W. Hasbrouck, the 7th Armored Division commander, sent a message to U.S. First Army Headquarters in which he outlined the situation in the St. Vith pocket. " 'I am out of touch with VIII Corps,' " he began, and although Middleton had ordered him to hold, he needed some help to do so.[78] General Hodges radioed back that help was on the way: " 'Ridgway with armor and infantry is moving from west to gain contact with you. When communication is established you come under command of Ridgway.' "[79]

Ridgway issued his plan for the advance at 1600 hours, 20 December.[80] Advancing "vigorously" with three divisions abreast—from left to right, the 30th Infantry Division, the 82nd, and the 3rd Armored Division—he intended to "destroy or drive back all enemy forces in zone," reestablish contact with the 7th Armored and 106th Infantry Divisions, and "be prepared for further offensive action."[81] The last phrase is telling, for it indicates that Ridgway did not feel he was coming to the rescue of the forces around St. Vith, rather he was initiating a general advance that would sweep through St. Vith and, with the added combat power of the 7th and 106th, continue attacking into the flank of the German forces around Bastogne. But it was not to be. All attempts by the 30th Infantry Division and Combat Command B of the 3rd Armored Division to reduce Peiper's forces trapped north of the Amblève met with naught and the remaining elements of the 3rd Armored Division, which were to form up on the 82nd's right, were unable to do so, occupied as they were with the previously mentioned attacks by the *116th Panzer* and *560th Volks Grenadier Divisions*.

As a result, the only one of Ridgway's divisions that was able to effect any advance at all was the 82nd. Employing the few trucks he had available, but mostly by forced marches, Gavin moved his three unengaged regiments forward during the night of 20-21 December, and by daybreak the 82nd's new perimeter resembled a giant horseshoe with the open end in the west that bulged in a southeasterly direction toward the beleaguered American forces at St. Vith. Arrayed along the top portion of the horseshoe was the 504th, left in place to guard the southern bank of the Amblève and keep *Kampfgruppe Peiper* bottled up. The middle portion of the horseshoe paralleled the Salm River, which was guarded in the north by the 505th, and in the south by one battalion of the 508th. Located at the horseshoe's lower bend was Salmchâteau, also defended by the 508th, as was a portion of the horseshoe's bottom rung, which paralleled one of the few relatively high-speed east-west thoroughfares in the Ardennes, Highway N28. Finally, arrayed along the outer portion of the bottom rung of the horseshoe was the 325th, with two of its battalions in line while the third was held back as the division reserve. Besides the 504th

none of the other regiments had yet to make enemy contact and, with the exception of sporadic harassing artillery fire, this remained the case throughout the 20th and the morning of the 21st.[82]

The inability of the 30th Infantry and 3rd Armored to keep pace with the 82nd's advance did much to undermine Ridgway's desire to go over to the offensive. More compelling, however, was a note he received from Hasbrouck in the early afternoon of 21 December. Reporting the results of enemy attacks against the St. Vith pocket, Hasbrouck noted "[w]e held but he will be back stronger today." "My reserve is small," he continued, "and comprises a tank battalion, less one medium company, two platoons of infantry, one [tank destroyer] Company and a hodgepodge of remnants of the 14th Cav. Group which are perhaps more of a liability than an asset." In the days since he arrived he had collected all manner of units, "some legal [i.e., attached by order] and some we just found and appropriated." The second largest force in the pocket, Major General Alan W. Jones's 106th Infantry Division, was defending the southern portion of the perimeter but the 106th's strength, "as nearly as I can find out, comprises one [regimental combat team] and some service troops." Hasbrouck also hinted that there was a command problem to deal with and that there was something seriously wrong with his higher-ranking counterpart. "He is a Major General, and I am a Brigadier so it is probably not legal to attach him to me," wrote Hasbrouck, but "I most definitely do not want to be attached to him and suggest he be directed to cooperate with me in holding our present positions which I know he will do."[83] Gavin had a similar opinion of Jones.

> On 21 December I visited the Command Post of the U.S. 106th Infantry Division at Renceveaux, a small town just west of Vielsalm. General Alan W. Jones was the division commander, and as I entered his Command Post, he was the picture of dejection. I felt sorry for him. Outside his Command Post, which was in a schoolhouse with a large parking area nearby, were dozens of trucks, trailers, and other divisional vehicles. I was impressed and a bit envious at how new the equipment looked. There were two huge trailers containing doughnut-making machines and all kinds of vans and administrative vehicles. I could not recall when I had seen such fine-looking new equipment before. It was understandable, since the division had recently come from the United States. General Jones was depressed by the loss of two of his infantry regiments. They had been overrun several days before.[84]

At 2237 hours, Hasbrouck rendered another report to XVIII Airborne Corps (to which, in accordance with Hodges's earlier order, he was now attached). St. Vith was in German hands.[85] This seems to have finally put paid to Ridgway's offensive scheme. "I seriously doubt his ability and that of his teammates [the 106th Infantry] to hold," reported Ridgway during a phone conversation with Major General Kean of First Army later that night. "I would like to authorize their withdrawal back to the 82d area tonight," he continued, adding, "I think it can be made in orderly fashion." Kean approved Ridgway's plan, stating "the last instructions [First] ARMY had sent to 7th Armd made it clear that he was not expected to sacrifice his Command out there."[86] Ridgway ordered the withdrawal that night. But it was not to be a complete withdrawal. Under the overall

command of Major General Jones—Ridgway was anxious to clear up the command difficulties and, absent any personal observation of General Jones's performance and demeanor, placed the senior officer in charge of the operation—the 7th Armored, 106th Infantry, and its various hangers-on were to fall back to the Salm and form a fortified 'goose egg' on the east side of the river, anchored on the critical crossing sites of Salmchâteau and Vielsalm, a small village on the Salm about two miles north of Salmchâteau.[87]

The drastically changed situation east of the Salm forced a concomitant change in the 82nd's mission. As Gavin pointed out, "only the narrow neck of land from Vielsalm to Salmchâteau, held by the 82d Airborne Division, connected the St. Vith forces with remaining forces of the First Army. Its retention would be decisive."[88] The 82nd, therefore, would have to defend the Salm and keep open the links with the American forces east of the river at all costs. Failure to do so would spell the final destruction of the 7th Armored, 106th Infantry, and their myriad hangers-on. Fortunately, the terrain in the immediate area of Vielsalm-Salmchâteau, according to Major Medusky, was so favorable to the defense that he believed that his " 'regiment [the 508th] could have held out there for a month if necessary.' "[89] But retaining Vielsalm and Salmchâteau required that the whole of the division horseshoe be defended, for a breakthrough anywhere along the line by the much more mobile panzer forces would turn the Salm River from a protective barrier into an anvil on which the 82nd could be hammered into oblivion.

The first real test against this barrier came in the 505th's sector near the confluence of the Amblève and Salm Rivers at the pinprick hamlet of Trois Ponts.

On 20 December, while the 1/504th was attacking Cheneux, the rest of the division dispatched reconnaissance patrols east, south, and west in an attempt to get a feel for the situation in the surrounding terrain. One patrol from the 3/505th, advancing toward the Salm, came upon Trois Ponts and, much to its surprise, discovered there an American unit already in place, C Company of the 51st Engineer Combat Battalion. According to Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kaiser, the 3/505th commander, contacting this friendly element at Trois Ponts "was revealing to say the least. There had been no intelligence reports on this particular area and least of all, the 3rd [Battalion] had not expected to contact American troops in this spot."[90] Equally surprised were the engineers at Trois Ponts, who fired on the 3/505th patrol, inflicted one casualty, and took the others prisoner "because they would not believe at first their story that the 82d Airborne Division was in the area."[91]

The engineers at Trois Ponts, under the command of Major Robert W. Yates, executive officer of the 51st, had been in place since 17 December. Yates had with him 120 men from C Company as well as twelve to fifteen stragglers who had wandered in from other units and stayed, including one woefully lost British soldier. Their available firepower included eight bazookas, four heavy and four light machine guns, and one 57mm antitank gun Yates had commandeered as it passed through Trois Ponts looking for its parent unit. Yates's mission was to prepare the bridges in the area—one at Trois Ponts over the Salm and two just north of Trois Ponts over the Amblève—for demolition. On 18 December, an armored column comprising some nineteen or twenty tanks from *Kampfgruppe Peiper*, moving westward along the north bank of the Amblève, ran into Yates's engineers. " 'We proceeded at top speed towards Trois Ponts in an effort to seize the bridge there,' " recalled Peiper. " 'If we had captured the bridge at Trois Ponts intact

and had had enough fuel, it would have been a simple matter to drive through to the Meuse River early that day.' "[92] As the lead tank approached the bridge over the Amblève, the recently procured 57mm gun and its crew took it under fire and knocked off one of its treads. The other tanks returned fire and eventually destroyed the gun and killed the crew, but not before the engineers were able to blow the Amblève River bridges, thereby thwarting Peiper's plan to pass through Trois Ponts en route to the Meuse and forcing him to instead proceed along the north bank of the river. Faced with such overwhelming force, Yates withdrew his men all the way to Trois Ponts, on the west bank of the Salm, blowing the bridge there behind them as well. Throughout the following night and the next day Yates and his men, barricaded inside Trois Ponts, kept watch. German patrols made several attempts to wade the Salm and infiltrate the American positions, but all were discovered and cut down before they could reach the west bank. Yates also employed a ruse to trick the Germans into thinking his force had much more combat power than it really did.

> 'They probably thought we were getting armored reinforcements every night' [Yates explained,] 'because I put chains on a four-ton truck I had, and ran it up and down through town and west on the Basse-Badeux [*sic*] road all night. The noise it made really sounded like armor. Then, too, we took our bazookas out into the woods and fired them at night in an effort to simulate artillery. I guess the Germans never realized how little we actually had there.'[93]

When the 3/505th patrol discovered them on 20 December, Yates and his men were still holding up inside Trois Ponts. When informed of this find Colonel Ekman immediately rushed several bazooka teams forward to reinforce this " 'gallant group who had held of[f] enemy armored columns for three days with their bazookas and mine detectors.' "[94] Later on that evening, he also dispatched Lieutenant Colonel Vandervoort's 2/505th to Trois Ponts to continue the work Yates and his intrepid band started. Vandervoort's troopers were in position ready to defend before daylight on the 21st.[95]

As Vandervoort's troopers were taking up position around Trois Ponts, *SS-Oberführer* [a rank peculiar to the SS that is senior to a colonel but subordinate to a brigadier general] Wilhelm Mohnke was assembling the remnants of his *1st SS Panzer Division* approximately three miles to the southeast at Wanne, in preparation of launching a breakthrough toward *Kampfgruppe Peiper*. By 21 December, Peiper's vanguard had been cut off for two days in its pocket north of the Amblève, low on gasoline and ammunition. The plan as originally conceived had been for *Kampfgruppe Peiper* to rush forward without regard for its flanks or rear while the remainder of the *1st SS Panzer Division*, organized in three march serials, following in its wake. By the second day of the offensive, however, Peiper was already out of touch with Mohnke. On 19 December the second march serial, a mobile reconnaissance battalion, was able to break through to Peiper but failed to keep the corridor open. Meanwhile, the third and fourth march serials lagged far behind, delayed by minefields and roadblocks thrown up by the American defenders around St. Vith, and it was not until 21 December that Mohnke was finally able to corral them. This force, the equivalent of a reinforced armored infantry regiment, had two options: it could cross to the north bank of the Amblève and then strike northwest or

it could strike west, cross the Salm, and then head north. Mohnke sent a part of his infantry to try the first route but it ran into a task force from Combat Command B of the 3rd Armored Division and when the Germans tried to cross heavy assault guns over an unguarded bridge they had found, it collapsed. Mohnke then decided to make his main attack against the Salm, with the object of crossing at Trois Ponts.[96]

Ekman had been assigned a regimental frontage along the Salm some 8,000 yards long. "This was no wider than the usual regimental front which had been assigned in past operations," went the 505th's after action review, "so according to Col. Ekman it came as no surprise to him."[97] Covering such a wide front, however, required Ekman to employ all three of his battalions forward. Accordingly, Ekman arrayed, from north to south, the 2/505th around Trois Ponts, the 3/505th around the Salm River crossing sites at La Neuville and Grand Halleux, and the 1/505th in the southern portion of the regimental sector where it was to tie in with the 508th. Because he expected another German attempt to break through at Trois Ponts, Ekman assigned Vandervoort's battalion the narrowest sector. Before moving forward, Gavin had instructed Ekman to establish small bridgeheads on the east bank of the Salm but to avoid being committed in strength. At all costs, continued Gavin, Ekman was to keep the enemy from crossing the river and getting into the division's rear. Accordingly, Ekman told Vandervoort to put no more than one company across the river at Trois Ponts. Vandervoort assigned this mission to E Company under Lieutenant William J. Meddaugh.[98]

Crossing over the Salm River bridge at Trois Ponts, which had been temporarily repaired by Yates's engineers, Meddaugh arranged the E Company defense inside a wood on the high bluff overlooking the river and astride a winding road leading to the bridge.[99] "From their positions inside the tree line," wrote Vandervoort later, "the paratroopers had ideal fields of fire on the road and across the open area," to their front. Antitank mines were "sprinkled across their front," while a lone 57mm antitank gun was dug in twenty to thirty yards behind the rifle line. In order to add some depth to his defense, Meddaugh also deployed six bazooka teams in forward ambush positions.[100]

> It was an excellent position for an ambush, [wrote Vandervoort of Meddaugh's position,] but inherently a weak one to defend against armor accompanied by infantry. But up on the bluff, it was the best position available. The heavy woods left of the road provided the natural infantry approach, and the open area to the right of the road was good tank terrain. The Salm River separated the company from the rest of the battalion and prevented mutual support.[101]

Behind E Company, Vandervoort arranged F Company, Headquarters Company and Yates's engineers in houses fronting the west bank of the river. Machine guns were positioned to provide flanking fire to both sides of the bridge. Farther south, D Company guarded another, smaller bridge across the Salm. A platoon of engineers from B Company, 307th Airborne Engineers prepared the partially repaired Trois Ponts Bridge for demolition. Once in position, the troopers "settled down to wait in the bitter cold. No fires. No lights. No smoking."[102]

First contact with the enemy came at about 0300 hours, 21 December, when Meddaugh's troopers "bushwhacked" a lone German half-track that ran right up to E

Company's positions, apparently ignorant to the presence of American forces in the area.[103] Less than an hour later a second German vehicle appeared. It too was destroyed, this time by antitank mines the battle-wizened troopers had repositioned to the rear of the first hulk. With that, however, the Germans ceased their probing. At about 0945 hours, they launched an all-out assault. Approximately 800 infantrymen accompanied by Tigers, Panthers, and self-propelled artillery hit E Company all along its front. Hampered by the winding roads and damp ground, the armored vehicles could do little but provide fire support for their infantrymen. Fighting from well-prepared foxholes, the paratroopers held off the German infantry with small arms and machine gun fire, supplemented by sustained indirect fire from the battalion's 81mm mortars and the 75mm howitzers of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion.[104] Meanwhile, the 57mm gun crew knocked out two more enemy tanks, which served to keep the others temporarily at bay. Yet the German infantry kept coming, attacking in wave after wave. Later, some German prisoners taken during the fight were asked why they persisted with such unimaginative tactics. They replied " 'that that was what they had been doing ever since the start of their offensive, and up to now everybody had run away or surrendered.' "[105] But Meddaugh and his troopers would not run. According to Vandervoort, they "were proud, tough, battle-seasoned soldiers" with orders "to stay and to try to hold the Germans east of Trois Ponts. Unless ordered off of the position, confronted with being surrounded and captured, they probably would have gone down fighting under the treads of the Tiger tanks."[106] Vandervoort, however, was not prepared to sacrifice E Company. Although Ekman had told him that he was to send no more than one company across the Salm, Vandervoort knew that Meddaugh's troopers could not hold out alone indefinitely, and a withdrawal was simply out of the question given the size and strength of the German force opposing them. Ekman, who was in the southern part of the regimental zone coordinating the tie in with the 508th, could not be reached. As the senior officer present, Vandervoort had to make the call. His decision was typical of the aggressiveness he and his troopers had displayed since Sicily. He attacked by sending one platoon of F Company across the river with orders to hit the Germans in the flank. Other troopers were also sent across to carry ammunition forward and casualties back. But the Germans were throwing more forces into the fight as well. By about noon there were approximately fifteen German tanks in the area providing devastating close-in heavy fire support to their infantry. The 57mm antitank gun crew had long been put out of action and the gun was, by that time, being manned by Lieutenant Jake L. Wirtich, who waged an uneven duel with the panzers before he, too, was killed. "The Germans were all over the landscape," went one after action review. "Everywhere one looked, small groups of them were engaging [Meddaugh's] troops in firefights."[107] Vandervoort's response was to up the ante further, sending the rest of F Company across to go into position on E Company's right. Still the Germans came. Shortly thereafter, a message arrived from Ekman: relinquish the bridgehead "as it was costing more than it was worth."[108] But the Germans were too near the American lines to effect an orderly withdrawal. So Vandervoort made the decision to throw in his last chips, sending D Company across to hit the Germans in their southern flank. By that time Colonel Ira P. Swift, Gavin's newly assigned assistant division commander, arrived at Trois Ponts and reiterated Ekman's order; maintaining the bridgehead east of the river was not worth losing a battalion. Vandervoort rushed forward and, according to Gavin, "issued the classic tactical order,

'Let's get the hell out of here.' "[109] With the Germans close on their heels, the veteran paratroopers "intuitively improvised 'walking fire' in reverse. Moving backward and using the trees for cover, they simply outshot any pursuer who crowded them too closely."[110] When they finally got to the river, some managed to escape over the bridge. Others jumped from the cliffs into the river and swam across. Almost all of D and F Companies got back relatively unscathed, but E Company left almost half its strength on the west bank and could count only 40-50 troopers still standing at the end of the day.[111]

The headquarters troopers and engineers on the west bank of the river covered their comrades as best they could, pouring machine gun fire into the German ranks that appeared on the opposite bank. And as soon as the last trooper crossed over, what remained of the Trois Ponts Bridge was blown. Undeterred, the Germans brought up their own machine guns and began firing into the streets of Trois Ponts. "But the exposed rim of the cliff was no place to duel with dug-in defenders. The paratroopers settled down to some old fashioned sharp shooting and spilled a lot of blood on the bluff."[112] Then a Tiger tank made its way to the bluff's edge and added its 88mm gunfire to the mix. Forward observers responded with white phosphorous rounds and drove it away. After that, the firing settled down to an exchange of small arms fire, but heavy mortar and artillery concentrations eventually drove even the most intrepid Germans away, out of sight of the prying eyes of Vandervoort's forward observers. Things picked up again at nightfall. Approximately two squads of Germans crossed the river and managed to infiltrate Trois Ponts before being discovered. Vandervoort's troopers counterattacked viciously and killed most of the infiltrators. A few others were taken prisoner. A handful made it back to German lines.[113]

Later that night the Germans made a second attempt to cross the Salm, this time farther south at Le Neuville in the 3/505th's area. Self-propelled guns loaded with infantry seemingly appeared out of nowhere and raced toward the bridge. A platoon of paratroopers on the west bank withdrew just as the Germans called in artillery fire to cover their advance. Then, "[a]s a German soldier was waving the first vehicle onto the bridge, it was blown out from under his feet."[114]

On 22 December, Mohnke renewed his assault on the Salm by throwing his storm troopers against several points along the river. A group of 30 to 40 SS soldiers who waded the river in hopes of taking the 2/505th unawares made a third attempt at Trois Ponts. They were unsuccessful. The troopers of D and F Companies, waiting patiently in their foxholes, allowed the Germans to "almost reach the west bank and then [fired] on them with everything available." Most of the attackers were killed in mid-stream.[115] Toward evening an SS battalion hit the 3/505th sector again, this time hoping to take the bridge at Grand Halleux. As they approached a platoon outpost on the west bank, the Germans "began screaming at the top of their voices." As had happened at La Neuville, the American platoon withdrew and the bridge was blown before the enemy could cross.[116] Elements of this same German unit also hit A Company, 1/505th, a bit farther south. As had happened at Grand Halleux, the Germans advanced while yelling and screaming. The A Company troopers met them calmly and wiped out about a company. According to Ekman, the Germans " 'dashed down the bank into the river and in the river they still are.' "[117] Thus ended the last serious attempt by the *1st SS Panzer Division* to cross the Salm; two days of bludgeoning his command against the 505th's riverside

defense left Mohnke with little remaining combat power.[118] *Kampfgruppe Peiper* would either have to attempt a breakout itself or await succor from another direction.

For Ekman and his troopers, the stand along the Salm had been a near-run thing. Although aided greatly by the terrain, covering such a long front stretched the regiment to the limit. At one point, so desperate was Ekman for riflemen to fill gaps in the line that he improvised a company formed from 100 truck drivers and cooks and pushed them forward into the 3/505th's sector, the largest of the three battalion areas.[119] By that time, however, the threat against the Salm River had all but subsided, although another had emerged in the south, where there was no river behind which to defend.

Chapter Twenty-Two Notes

[1] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d., The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 5, Folder "Belgium and the Story of the Bulge," USAMHI. Capitalization in original.

[2] Rufus K. Broadaway, interview by the author, 3 December 2005.

[3] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[4] Zais, "Glimpses of Gavin." See also Zais, interview, 20 January 1977. General Ridgway was in England at XVIII Airborne Corps's rear headquarters overseeing readiness tests for the U.S. 17th Airborne Division. General Taylor was in Washington, having been sent there by Ridgway in another attempt to convince War Department planners that the table of organization and equipment for airborne divisions had to be increased. Other senior leaders were in England conducting a critique of MARKET-GARDEN. See Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 361.

[5] Zais, "Glimpses of Gavin." See also Zais, interview, 20 January 1977.

[6] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[7] Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry, "History of Operations of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment in the Belgian Campaign, Part I," n.d., 382-INF(505)-0.3, Box 12460, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[8] Blank narrative.

[9] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 229-230.

[10] Schwarm in Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 305.

[11] McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 89-92.

[12] Megellas, *All The Way to Berlin*, 177-178. The 505th also had to hurriedly integrate replacements, approximately 200, that arrived just hours before the regiment left Camp Suippes. See Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945, p. 1, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[13] Quoted in Tucker, *Parachute Soldier*, 112.

[14] Christiansen quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 587-588.

[15] Hillman quoted in ibid., 588.

[16] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[17] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945. To illustrate the shortages in key weapons, Ekman and Harris

noted that, "the 505th went into battle with only 3 81mm mortars and 7 or 8 60mm mortars for the entire regiment." The authorized complement for a parachute regiment was twelve 81mm mortars and twenty-seven 60mm mortars. See General Board Report, *Organization, Equipment and Tactical Employment of the Airborne Division*, 9.

[18] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky, 15 February 1945, p. 1, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II. Interestingly, Medusky also pointed out that when the 508th deployed it was about 430 troopers short of its authorized strength, the largest deficit of any of the infantry regiments. Why this was so can only be conjectured at, but it may have been the result of the fact that, officially, the 508th was not part of the 82nd. Although both Ridgway and Gavin treated the 508th as an inherent part of the division, its official status was *an independent parachute regiment attached* to the 82nd. It is likely that the 508th's independent status affected its priority for replacements, personnel officers being more likely to fill larger units first. This lower priority may have also extended to replacing matériel. Years later Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Zais recalled that when he and Graves got back to their base camp they received a call from the 508th's S-4. "He wanted to borrow or draw from us a certain number of mortars, a certain number of rifles, light machine guns, and a variety of other things, because they had not yet reconstituted their basic load or replenished all of the weapons that they had lost in their engagement in Holland, even though they had had more time to do it than we had." Zais talked this over with Graves, who "said that since they were in fact, going, and we didn't know whether we were going or not, that he felt we had to support them." This caused problems later on when the 517th was alerted for the Bulge as well. "[W]e immediately began scrambling very, very hard, and sent trucks to Paris to pick up weapons to replace what we had given to the 508th. This may sound overly dramatic, but it's absolutely true; I can still see vividly, big barrels of gasoline setting out near where we were loading the trucks, and we were dipping rifles covered with cosmoline into those barrels of gasoline and handing the dripping weapons to soldiers in the trucks who were busy wiping them down with oily rags as the trucks were pulling out." Despite this last-minute scramble, Zais said that the 517th was in good shape when it got to Belgium. See Zais, interview, 20 January 1977.

[19] See Combat Interview with Major John C. H. Lee Jr., 28 March 1945, p. 1, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945; Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky, 15 February 1945.

[20] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 108.

[21] Hays quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 588.

[22] Wurst and Wurst, *Descending From the Clouds*, 215.

[23] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 108.

[24] Almost every 82nd trooper who participated in the Battle of the Bulge recalled the cattle trucks and the miserably long drive to the front. See, for example, Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 165; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 108; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 60; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 230; Wurst and Wurst, *Descending From the Clouds*, 216.

[25] Neel quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 589.

[26] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 355-356.

[27] See also Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 722; D. Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 555-557 and McDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 184-185.

[28] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 356.

[29] Reproduced in Whiting, *Ghost Front*, 196. Emphasis in original. Bradley confirmed that although he and Eisenhower looked to ULTRA intercepts in an attempt to gain a clearer picture of what was occurring, it was not until receiving this message on the morning of 17 December that their fears of a major German counteroffensive were corroborated. Once the import of Rundstedt's message set in Eienhower's Chief of Staff, General Smith, turned to Bradley and said " '[w]ell, Brad, you've been wishing for a counterattack. Now it looks as though you've got it.' " Bradley responded, " '[a] counterattack, yes. But I'll be damned if I wanted one this big.' " Smith was referring to some statements Bradley made weeks earlier about wanting the Germans to come out to fight so he could get at them. See Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 356.

[30] Except where noted see Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 356-257 and Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 558. That this was, in fact, the U.S. Army doctrinal solution to a breakthrough see Cole, *The Ardennes*, 334.

[31] See Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 357; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 266, 305, and 312-313.

[32] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 332-333.

[33] Ibid., 305.

[34] It seems that it was Lieutenant General Smith, Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, who chose Bastogne as the initial rendezvous point for the airborne divisions based simply on a map study of the area. Cole, *The Ardennes*, 306-307.

[35] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 205.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Except where noted see Cole, *The Ardennes*, 336; Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 205-206 and 216-217; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 432; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.; Ridgway's Official Diary, 18 December 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 5a, Folder "Historical Record: Ardennes, December 17, 1944 to February 14, 1945," USAMHI.

[38] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[39] The 291st Engineer Combat Battalion was part of the 1111th Engineer Combat Group, the various subordinate units of which were operating sawmills and conducting road repairs throughout the Ardennes. A Company of the 291st had been posted in Werbomont. When the call came to take care of the bridge at Habiemont, A Company had but fifteen engineers available, the rest of the company having already been deployed elsewhere. Lieutenant Edelstein, an A Company officer, was actually with the 1111th headquarters at the time but when it fell back through Habiemont, he posted himself with the engineers at the bridge and took command there. MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 243.

[40] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 216.

[41] See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 343; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 242-244; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[42] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 216. Hodges had ordered Middleton to evacuate his command post to Neufchâteau, Belgium, about eighteen miles southwest of Bastogne. By the time Gavin and McAuliffe

arrived, most of the VIII Corps staff was already gone. Middleton and a few others had remained behind to brief the airborne commanders personally before pulling out himself. Cole, *The Ardennes*, 315.

[43] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 216.

[44] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[45] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 216-217 and After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d. The flow of events and orders that resulted in the 82nd being deployed to Werbomont and the 101st to Bastogne was not as smooth and clear cut as described here. As can be imagined the shock and speed of the German onslaught created a great deal of confusion and chaos. For example, when he left Spa it was clear to Gavin that his division was to be diverted to Werbomont and the 101st was to continue on to Bastogne as he had originally ordered. For some reason, however, McAuliffe believed that it was the 101st that was to head for Werbomont, and that this had been that division's march objective ever since leaving its base camps. How or why he got that impression no one is certain. McAuliffe, it seems, only learned that the 101st was to assemble at Bastogne when he made a detour to that city to speak with Middleton (McAuliffe, like Gavin, had departed ahead of the main body of the 101st). Furthermore, it was Colonel Thomas L. Sherburne, the 101st's acting artillery commander at the head of the column who diverted the 101st to Bastogne after he learned from some military policemen that McAuliffe's jeep had gone there. Finally, though he was certain that the 101st was to assemble at Bastogne, Middleton also believed that the 82nd was to assemble at Houffalize, a major road junction about ten miles northeast of Bastogne. See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 307 and MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 291.

[46] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 268; Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 217-218; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 242-244; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[47] "History 504th Parachute Infantry 18 December, 1944 – 11 January, 1945," n.d., p.1, 382-INF(504)-0.3, Box 12453, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[48] Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945, 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[49] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945.

[50] Goodwin quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 590.

[51] Wurst and Wurst, *Descending from the Clouds*, 218. Emphasis in original.

[52] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 268; Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 217-218; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 242-244; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[53] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 268; Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 217-218, MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 243-244; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[54] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[55] Edward Arn, untitled manuscript, n.d., 88, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Letters to and from 82nd Vets on airborne operations in Holland, September 1944," USAMHI [appears to have been misfiled].

[56] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 113.

[57] Ibid.,114.

[58] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 144. See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 344-345 and Ridgway's Official Diary, 18 and 19 December 1944.

[59] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 221.

[60] Ibid.

[61] See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 344-345 and Ridgway's Official Diary, 18 and 19 December 1944.

[62] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 343 and 345 and After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[63] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 317 and 345; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.; Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky, 15 February 1945.

[64] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 268-269 and 347-348.

[65] *Kampfgruppe Peiper* was named after its commander, the twenty-nine-year-old *SS-Obersturmbannführer* (Lieutenant Colonel) Joachim Peiper. Built around Peiper's *1st SS Panzer Regiment*, the kampfgruppe comprised approximately 4,000 Waffen SS soldiers, 72 medium tanks about evenly split between Mk IVs and Mk Vs (Panthers), a light antiaircraft battalion outfitted with 20mm self-propelled guns, 25 assault guns/tank destroyers, an artillery battalion of towed 105mm howitzers, a battalion of SS panzergrenadiers in eighty half-tracks, and two SS engineer companies. In addition, it had as an attachment the *501st SS Heavy Panzer Battalion* and its thirty Mk VI (Tiger) tanks. Peiper was a tall, well-educated man, fluent in both English and French, who had already acquired considerable combat experience on the Eastern Front, where his bravery earned for him Nazi Germany's highest award for valor, the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. He was also incredibly ruthless with a reputation for burning down entire Russian villages and taking very few prisoners. He continued his ways during the Battle of the Bulge and by 20 December 1944, his kampfgruppe had already murdered approximately 350 American prisoners and at least 100 unarmed Belgian civilians. Included in these figures are approximately 80 Americans his Waffen SS soldiers gunned down near Malmédy. After the war an Allied tribunal found him guilty of war crimes and sentenced him to death but due in large part to the political machinations of Senator Joseph McCarthy, his sentence was eventually commuted and subsequently reduced. In all, he spent thirteen years in jail. See Boatner, *Biographical Dictionary*, s.v. "Peiper, Joachim"; Cole, *The Ardennes*, 261-262; MacDonald, A *Time for Trumpets*, 197-198.

[66] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 268-269 and 348-351 and Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Operation Report, Ardennes, 19 December 1944 to 13 February 1945," 1 March 1945, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "Chrono File: Bulge," USAMHI.

[67] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[68] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 222-223.

[69] Combat Interview "504th Parachute Infantry Regt 82nd A/B Division," CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45," Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[70] See also Combat Interview "1st Bn, 504th Para Inf Regt, 82nd Inf Div," CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45," Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II and Reuben Tucker, interview by J. F. O'Sullivan, 28 March 1945, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45," Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[71] Combat Interview "1st Bn, 504th Para Inf Regt, 82nd Inf Div."

[72] Ibid.

[73] See Combat Interview "3rd Bn, 504th Para Inf Regt, 82nd AB Inf Div" and Tucker, interview, 28 March 1945.

[74] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 225. See also "History 504th Parachute Infantry 18 December, 1944 – 11 January, 1945," n.d.; Combat Interview "504th Parachute Infantry Regt 82nd A/B Division"; Combat Interview "1st Bn, 504th Para Inf Regt, 82nd Inf Div"; Combat Interview "3rd Bn, 504th Para Inf Regt, 82nd AB Inf Div"; Tucker, interview, 28 March 1945. In *A Time for Trumpets*, MacDonald took issue with the attack on Cheneux. "The story of the attack of those two companies was another of those incredibly heroic actions. But however courageous, the unsupported infantry attack across open fields laced with barbed-wire fences was as ill-conceived and senseless as many of the herdlike German assaults. . . . Afforded time to mount an attack with accurate artillery support—or even with the support of just the two tank destroyers—those companies could have taken Cheneux at far less cost and with no great forfeiture of time" (449). In one sense MacDonald is correct. With more artillery support and more time to prepare, it is possible that Tucker could have taken Cheneux at far less cost. The fact is, however, that the 504th *was* provided artillery support during the attack. On 20 December, the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion fired some 120 rounds in support of the night assault by B and C Companies, and the next day fired an additional 72 rounds at specific targets in and around Cheneux. The rest of the divisional artillery, meanwhile, was supporting the other regiments in the 82nd's area of responsibility. It should also be noted that the plan of attack did call for the use of the tank destroyers, but fear of heavier German armor in the town made them ineffective. And, finally, time was something that neither Gavin nor Tucker felt they had a lot of. As Gavin pointed out in his after action review comments, "[i]t was imperative that the bridge [just north of Cheneux] be seized." Had it not been seized and this outlet to the south bank of the Amblève remained in German hands, the chance to bottle up *Kampfgruppe Peiper* might not have been realized. Furthermore, if afforded the opportunity to mass south of the river, *Kampfgruppe Peiper* could have completely overrun the 82nd, thereby tearing a huge hole in the still-forming XVIII Airborne Corps defensive line. See After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d., pp.2-3; Gorman S. Oswell, 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion S-2, "Notes on German Breakthrough History," CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45," Box 24058, Record Group 407 NARA II; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Narrative History," n.d., 382-ART-0.3, Box 12429, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[75] Hobbs quoted in Cole, *The Ardennes*, 363-364.

[76] See ibid., 348-366 passim.

[77] Ibid., 257-259.

[78] Hasbrouck quoted in ibid., 393-395.

[79] Hodges quoted in ibid., 395. See also pages 274-276.

[80] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[81] XVIII Airborne Corps Diary, 20 December 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 5a, Folder "Historical Record: Ardennes, December 17, 1944 to February 14, 1945." USAMHI.

[82] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[83] Robert W. Hasbrouck to Matthew B. Ridgway, 21 December 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 5a, Folder "Historical Record: Ardennes, December 17, 1944 to February 14, 1945." USAMHI. Underlining in original.

[84] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 229.

[85] XVIII Airborne Corps Diary, 2237 hours, 21 December 1944.

[86] XVIII Airborne Corps Diary, Record of General Ridgway's Side of Conversation with General Kean, 2350 hours, 21 December 1944. Capitalization in original.

[87] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 406-407. The whole issue of command of the forces in the St. Vith pocket stirred up quite a bit of controversy after the war. Several historians mistakenly wrote that Ridgway relieved Hasbrouck. Gavin, too, was under that impression. In *On To Berlin* he wrote: "General Bob Hasbrouck's handling of the 7th Armored Division was one of the great actions in the Battle of the Bulge. Yet, strangely, because of his evaluation of the division's predicament and its need to be reinforced or withdrawn, he was relieved of command by his Corps Commander [i.e., Ridgway] early in the morning of December 22. More interesting, however, is the fact that when the situation became clearer to Corps he was restored late in the afternoon of the same day" (232). In fact, it was not Hasbrouck that Ridgway relieved, it was General Jones. In a letter to Clay Blair, Ridgway wrote "in part this [misunderstanding] arose from the fact initially—and before I had had time to reach the CP of General Jones—I had directed that the 7th Armd Div be placed under General Jones' command, as I wanted a single commander in control on the spot in the critical situation existing in the ST VITH pocket, and Jones was senior [to the other generals in the pocket]." Continuing, Ridgway asserted that "[n]ot once did I even entertain any thought of relieving General Hasbrouck of his command." However, "as soon as I reached the CP of General Jones and observed his condition, I at once recognized that he was physically incapable of exercising command, even of his own Division, much less of the combined forces in the ST VITH pocket." Ridgway cleared the room of everyone except himself, Jones, and Colonel James B. Quill, his liaison officer to the 106th Division, and dictated an order relieving Jones of his command. See Mathew Ridgway to Clay Blair, 11 January 1984, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "World War II: Personal Files—Matthew B. Ridgway, Correspondence with James M. Gavin, September-October, 1978, concerning General Gavin's book On To Berlin covering operations in the Mediterranean and European Theaters, 1943-1944," USAMHI. Colonel Quill's handwritten order, as dictated by Ridgway, is still extant. After being relieved, Jones was temporarily made assistant commanding general of the XVIII Airborne Corps, a sinecure in which he exercised no command responsibilities. Meanwhile, all of Jones's forces were assigned to the 7th Armored Division. See handwritten note, Headquarters, XVIII Corps, 22 December 1944, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway: World War II—Personal, August to December 1944," USAMHI.

[88] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[89] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky.

[90] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kaiser, 26 March 1945, p. 2, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45," Box 24058, Record Group 407 NARA II.

[91] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945.

[92] Peiper quoted in Cole, *The Ardennes*, 267.

[93] Combat Interview "Defense at Trois Ponts," interview with Major Robert Yates, 17 February 1945, p. 2, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[94] Ekman quoted in Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris.

[95] For C Company, 51st Engineer Combat Battalion's actions at Trois Pont see Cole, *The Ardennes*, 267-268 and Combat Interview "Defense at Trois Ponts," interview with Major Robert Yates, 17 February 1945. For movement of 2/505th into Trois Ponts see Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945.

[96] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 368-371.

[97] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945.

[98] See also Combat Interview with Colonel William Ekman, 22 March 1945, p. 3, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945; Benjamin H. Vandervoort, "The Battle of the Bulge: Trois Ponts," n.d., manuscript in possession of the author.

[99] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945.

[100] Vandervoort, "The Battle of the Bulge: Trois Ponts," n.d.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 219-220.

[105] Lieutenant Eugene Doerfler quoted in Gavin, *On to Berlin*, 227.

[106] Vandervoort, "The Battle of the Bulge: Trois Ponts," n.d.

[107] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945, p. 3, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 228.

[110] Vandervoort, "The Battle of the Bulge: Trois Ponts," n.d.

[111] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945.

[112] Vandervoort, "The Battle of the Bulge: Trois Ponts," n.d.

[113] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945.

[114] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kaiser, 26 March 1945.

[115] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945.

[116] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kaiser, 26 March 1945.

[117] Ekman quoted in Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945. See also Combat Interview "1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Talton W. Long, Captain Charles Paterson, and Staff Sergeant D. Curtis Raleigh, 26 March 1945, p. 4, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[118] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 374.

[119] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945.

Chapter Twenty-Three
Singing the Blues about the Right Flank

In the aftermath of the Battle of the Bulge, the tenacious and heroic stand of Tony McAuliffe and the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne would capture the public imagination. Less well known, but no less important, was a similar tenacious and heroic stand of the American forces at St. Vith. . . . Some historians—and senior German commanders—believe the American stand at St. Vith was more *important than the stand in Bastogne.*
Clay Blair[1]

For the forces manning the southern portion of the division perimeter, the first day and a half passed in relative calm. The three battalions there—from west to east the 2/401st, 1/325th, and 3/508th—received some desultory artillery fire but nothing to indicate the presence of large enemy formations. Yet both Billingslea and Gavin were uneasy about the situation in the south. The 3rd Armored Division was to have tied in with the 82nd on its right (southern) flank but had been unable to do so, faced as it was with attacks in its sector by the *116th Panzer* and *560th Volks Grenadier Divisions*. "The non-appearance of the 3rd Armored was a source of worry to everyone concerned," related Billingslea, but especially to him since it was his regiment, occupying the right-most portion of the perimeter, with which the 3rd Armored should have made contact.[2] Billingslea was already stretched thin (he had only two of his three battalions forward because the 2/325th was being held in the rear as the division reserve) but extended his right flank as far as he could toward the 3rd Armored (or where he thought the 3rd Armored was) by outposting key road intersections between the two divisions and monitoring the large gaps in between with jeep and foot patrols, but he could only go so far. Adding to Billingslea's unease were reports he received from fleeing civilians passing through the 325th's lines that German forces were massing about 2,500 yards farther south. Billingslea sent out patrols on 21 December to check out the reports but they found no sign of the enemy. What they did discover, much to their surprise, was a mishmash of American rear echelon units huddled together protectively around some road intersections. There had been nothing to indicate that there were any friendly units in the area and the thought was that perhaps the earlier reports of enemy units in the area had mistaken these Americans for Germans. The only certainty, it seemed, was uncertainty. As Lieutenant Colonel Leahy, the 2/401st commander put it, "[e]verything was very confused and everybody was asking, 'Is it safe to go this way?' "[3] For the moment, at least, it looked as though it was.[4]

But by the afternoon of the 22nd, the situation along the southern edge of the 82nd's perimeter had changed drastically. The notorious *2nd SS Panzer Division* had finally

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 642 through 645.

made its way forward into the battle area and, along with the *116th Panzer* and *560th Volks Grenadier Divisions*, was massing "for an attack to push through the XVIII Airborne Corps in a climactic, dramatic bid for Spa and Liège."[5]

The first indication of enemy activity to the south from other than a civilian source came from a 2/401st outpost that reported sighting a column of unidentified vehicles, approximately 100 in all, including tanks, moving north toward the division's lines. Shortly thereafter a second outpost reported an unidentified infantry column moving north along a parallel route.[6] Further confirmation that enemy forces were headed northward came from a two-jeep patrol from the 1/325th that ran head on into the vehicular column when it entered a small village from the north as the Germans were entering from the south. German fire blew the rear wheel off the lead jeep but the occupants, unharmed, piled in the remaining jeep and sped back to battalion lines.[7] But the most comprehensive information on enemy activity brewing in the south came from one man, Corporal Robert G. Mangers of the 3/508th, whom fate had deposited at a perfect, though precarious, vantage point.

Mangers and four men from the 3/508th's S-2 section had been sent out on 21 December in a jeep to check things out. They had not gone far before their jeep broke down. Leaving the driver with the vehicle, Mangers and the other three troopers continued their patrol on foot, found nothing, and returned to the vehicle at dark. The night passed uneventfully and the next morning they continued working on their jeep but to no avail. Then, sometime around noon, Mangers spotted an enemy patrol. He told the three troopers with him to return to friendly lines on foot. Meanwhile, he would stay with the vehicle and use the jeep's radio (which was still functioning) to render situation reports on what he observed. Mangers remained in position and provided the division an incredibly accurate picture of enemy movements for over twenty hours. His information included not the only number of vehicles that passed by his location, but also vehicle types and unit insignia. For example, at one instance he reported " '[t]anks are rolling by, fifty yards apart. Two columns of Panzergrenadiers are marching down the road at close interval. The column seems to be of battalion strength.' "[8] At another juncture, Mangers adjusted artillery fire onto some German engineers working on a nearby bridge. The fire forced the engineers to curtail their work for several hours, thereby buying time for the 82nd to adjust forces to meet the impending attack. When told to return to friendly lines, that he had done enough, Mangers replied that he could not; the enemy was too close. He would instead remain in position and continue to send reports but requested that no one call him for fear that the noise would give him away. Mangers sent his last report at around 0900 hours, 23 December. He was destroying his radio and was going to make his way back to friendly lines. According to an after action report compiled once the 82nd left the Bulge, neither he nor his patrol were ever heard from or seen again. But the after action report was hasty; Corporal Mangers was alive and, at the conclusion of the war, rejoined the division, having spent the intervening time in a German prisoner-of-war camp.[9]

Despite the many reports of German units moving north, for a while the troopers had a hard time getting permission to fire artillery on them. Staff officers who held rein on the howitzers were worried that the vehicles might be friendly; they had received word that afternoon that the forces from the St. Vith pocket had been ordered to withdraw through the 82nd's lines.[10] The outposts and patrols might be mistaking American vehicles

making for safety for German vehicles on the attack. Impatient with the refusals to lift the 'check fire,' the F Company, 2/401st commander, Captain Lee Travelstead, made his way forward to one of the outposts and convinced the artillery fire direction officers in the rear that what he was looking at were, in fact, German tanks by describing the unique muzzle brakes that adorned each of the main gun barrels. It was the lead echelon of the *2nd SS Panzer Division*, a reinforced reconnaissance battalion that had been thrown forward to scout the way ahead for the main body. Inexplicably, the German scouts had become snarled in traffic jams of their own making inside the two small villages of Ottre and Joubiéval, just a few hundred yards in front of the 2/401st's main line of resistance. With Travelstead's positive confirmation, the guns of two artillery battalions, the 320th Glider Field Artillery and the 254th Field Artillery (155mm howitzers attached to the 82nd on 19 December) swung into action. In one hour's time the 254th fired 568 rounds on Ottre while the 320th fired a like barrage on Joubiéval, decimating the German forces at each location. The vehicle column at Ottre, reported Lieutenant Colonel Leahy, "was in wild disorder and burning practically from beginning to end."[11] The enemy fell back in disarray but reorganized and advanced a second time. Again the artillery fired. Again the Germans fell back. One last advance, late in the day, was also repulsed with artillery fire, but by that time it was clear that a major attack from the south was brewing and that it would take more than just artillery to hold it off.[12]

The appearance of the powerful *2nd SS Panzer Division* made the 82nd's exposed right flank an even more acute problem. Were the *2nd SS* able to either break through the weakly held flank or side slip it altogether not only would it have a clear and wholly undefended line of march northward to *Kampfgruppe Peiper*, it would also be loose in the division rear area. With no help forthcoming from XVIII Airborne Corps, which had nothing left to give, Gavin, Ridgway, and Billingslea traveled to the 3rd Armored Division command post for a face-to-face talk with the division commander, Major General Maurice Rose, in hopes of hastening the promised link up.[13] They were sorely disappointed. Rose stated flatly that "he was covering a concentration of other forces and that his front was so extended that he could not occupy and hold in strength the terrain [between him and the 82nd's flank]," meaning that, despite Billingslea's having stretched his regiment as far as possible there still existed a gap some 3-4 miles wide between the two divisions that was almost completely uncovered.[14] Moreover, through this gap ran Highway N15, the north-south Bastogne-Liège road, a high-speed avenue of approach that ran straight toward the Meuse.[15]

Gavin was in a fix. The division's right flank was both weakly held and dangerously exposed. An enemy breakthrough or turning movement would spell disaster. The doctrinal answer would have been to conduct a tactical withdrawal to shorten the length of the defensive front and cover the exposed flank. But the concomitant withdrawal of the 7th Armored and 106th Infantry Divisions (and their multitudinous hangers on) from their fortified goose egg opposite Salmchâteau was predicated on the 82nd holding its positions; the division was to form the protective barrier through which their comrades could pass and behind which they could then reorganize and refit. Furthermore, Ridgway's orders were that the division was to stay in place until *after* the St. Vith forces had been evacuated.[16] Hence, for the 82nd, withdrawal was not an option. The division would stay and fight it out.

About the only thing Gavin and his lightly armed troopers had going for them was the terrain, which, if used correctly could turn the enemy's greatest strength—his armor—into a weakness. Encumbered with heavy tanks, self-propelled artillery pieces, half-tracks, and all manner of vehicular impedimenta the *2nd SS Panzer Division* was confined to the few roads in the area that could support such a force. Certainly the smaller German vehicles and dismounted infantry could take to the back roads and trails and find ways through or around the American lines, but eventually they would have to return to the main roads and clear them so that the heavier vehicles could pass, for it was with their Panthers and Tigers that the Germans expected to effect their breakthrough. Therefore, by focusing his defenses on the main roads and the adjacent key terrain and trusting in the tenacity of his troopers, Gavin hoped to be able to hold his present line as long as possible, thereby winning the time required to evacuate the survivors of the St. Vith pocket through the 82nd's lines to safety.

Even before they left Rose's command post Billingslea requested and Gavin assented to the return of the 2/325th to regimental control. Although one battalion would hardly suffice to fill the gap between the two divisions, with the 2/325th in hand Billingslea could reinforce the key crossroads of Baraque de Fraiture (while at the 3rd Armored command post word had come in that the situation at the crossroads "demanded more infantry") while positioning the remainder of the 2/325th on some high ground overlooking Highway N15.[17] Assuredly these dispositions could not completely halt a concerted effort by the *2nd SS Panzer Division* to drive up Highway N15 but they just might slow its advance long enough to get the St. Vith forces withdrawn or for Ridgway to conjure up some reinforcements.

When he returned to his own command post Gavin looked for other ways to influence events on his southern flank. To this end he directed his division engineers to make a thorough study of the terrain to the south to see what, if anything, could be done to interdict the passage of German armor. After a few hours the engineers reported their findings. "An examination of the map and terrain made it quite clear that the Germans would have to use a small road over a bridge near the town of Petite-Langlir [about six miles south of the 325th's main line of resistance] in the middle of the sector of the 325th if they were going to use armor against the 325th."[18] Were that bridge to be blown or otherwise impaired the *2nd SS* would be unable to bring its considerable combat power to bear against the center of the 325th's thinly held line, thereby reducing the risk Gavin and Billingslea were taking by stretching this one regiment over such a long front (when the 2/325th got on line Billingslea's frontage measured some 10,000 yards with gaps of up to 2,100 yards between units).[19]

Major John C. H. Lee Jr. of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion volunteered to lead the demolition mission against the Petite-Langlir Bridge. Lee's patrol, which consisted of him and eight troopers from A Company, 307th Engineers, left around midnight on 22 December in a weapons carrier that was to carry them to a point about a mile south of Salmchâteau; they would walk the rest of the way from their. The troopers traveled light, carrying only their individual weapons and some bags containing the explosives and primer cord. The group got to the dismount point about 0100, 23 December and set off on a circuitous route to their objective. Lee was on point scouting the way. About 600 yards short of the bridge Lee set his troopers in a hide position while he and a sergeant continued forward to get a look at their objective. When Lee and the sergeant were about

100 yards from the bridge they could clearly make out sounds of German tanks crossing its span, but dared not move any closer for fear they would be discovered so Lee sent the sergeant back to the hide site to guide the rest of the patrol forward while he stayed in position. When the remainder of the patrol arrived Lee, the sergeant, and one other trooper crept forward to the bridge to make a detailed reconnaissance. They found it to be a wooden pile bridge about 65-feet long traversing a stream about 40-feet wide. The depth of the water was only about three feet, but the current was swift and the streambed strewn with large rocks that made footing tricky. They also determined that given the steepness and sogginess of the stream's banks, were the bridge to be blown it would not be possible for vehicles to cross it anywhere along its length. Once his reconnaissance was complete and Lee was assured they could pull this off without being detected, he had the rest of the patrol come forward with the demolitions. Lee and three troopers placed the charges while the rest of the patrol provided security. All the while German sentries and vehicles traversed the span, oblivious to the presence of the American engineers. At about 0600 hours, 23 December, Lee ordered the fuses lit and the demolition party pulled away. Six minutes later the charges detonated and completely destroyed the bridge. Lee and his troopers returned to their waiting weapons carrier and proceeded home. They were so cold and wet, however, that, "[f]rom time to time on the return . . . the demolition party would dismount and run behind the weapons carrier to get warm and keep [their] feet from freezing."[20] It was, observed Gavin, a "display of unusual gallantry and perseverance."[21] And from a tactical perspective, with the Petite-Langlir Bridge out of commission the threat of a large armor thrust against the center of Billingslea's line had been eliminated.

At first glance the Baraque de Fraiture crossroads was, like so many others in the Ardennes, nothing special: a clearing carved out of the heavy wood in which there had been erected a handful of nondescript buildings. But this clearing was unique for not only did it stand atop one of the highest elevations in the Ardennes (2,139 feet) it also straddled the intersection of two of the region's most important roads: the north-south Highway N15 and the east-west Highway N28. But it was more than geography that gave Baraque de Fraiture its importance; as the battle had played out so far possession of this tiny crossroads could very well spell victory or defeat for either side. For the Germans, it was a required objective on the way to Liège and the Meuse. For the Americans, its loss would threaten not only the existence of the 3rd Armored, the 82nd, and the St. Vith forces, it would also unhinge all of XVIII Airborne Corps and expose the flank of the entire U.S. First Army.[22]

Highway N15 was clearly in the 3rd Armored Division's boundary, but Rose had been unable to muster a force of any strength to defend it. As a result, defense of this critical thoroughfare had been "on a strictly catch-as-catch-can basis."[23] Since 19 December, the only element anywhere near N15 was a hodge-podge collection of disparate units under command of Major Arthur C. Parker III, the executive officer of the 589th Field Artillery Battalion of the 106th Infantry Division who had been the first to pull into the crossroads with three 105mm howitzers, several other vehicles, and approximately 110 men (the rest of the 589th had been ambushed and destroyed during the retreat to St. Vith). On subsequent days, Parker requisitioned the services of a variety of other units that stumbled into the crossroads, including four half-tracks mounting multiple .50-caliber machine guns and a 37mm antitank gun from the 203rd Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion of

the 7th Armored Division; several tanks from D Troop of the 87th Cavalry Squadron, also of the 7th Armored; some additional tanks and self-propelled guns from the 3rd Armored Division; and an under-strength company from the independent 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion (the 509th had also been in bivouac near Rheims and was subsequently rushed forward to reinforce the 3rd Armored Division at Ridgway's request).[24] With each addition Parker adjusted his perimeter to take full advantage of whatever means of delivering fire the addition offered. He also ringed his position with mines and had his men dig in. By 22 December, Parker's force had already blunted several probing attacks by elements of the *560th Volks Grenadier Division*, but it was obvious to everyone, most especially Rose, Gavin, and Billingslea during their conclave at the 3rd Armored command post, that the attacks were but prelude to an all-out assault (curiously, at one juncture, a messenger from the 106th Infantry Division arrived and told Parker to withdraw north but recognizing the importance of Baraque de Fraiture; Parker refused).[25]

Immediately upon returning from his meeting with Rose and Gavin, Billingslea contacted Major Richard M. Gibson, the 2/325th commander. Gibson was to proceed forthwith to Friature, a hamlet of some thirty closely spaced buildings on a ridge about three-quarters of a mile northeast of the crossroads and prepare to defend. He was also to send F Company, under Captain Junior R. Woodruff, to Baraque de Fraiture to reinforce the force already there (by this time Major Parker had been wounded and command of the crossroads had passed to Major Elliott Goldstein; because of his efforts, however, Baraque de Fraiture was also referred to as 'Parker's Crossroads'). Gibson's battalion moved out on foot at about 0100 hours, 22 December. Traveling cross-country over a trail that was "almost impassable" and with no information about what lie before them, the 2/325th did not arrive at Fraiture until dawn.[26] Fortunately the found Fraiture unoccupied, at least by the enemy; there were two American armored cars and their crews in the village that Gibson commandeered to lend weight to his defense. Gibson set his battalion command post and the battalion's 81mm mortars inside the town and positioned G and E Companies south of the town and had them dig in. Woodruff's F Company was sent ahead to the crossroads, where they arrived at approximately 1100 hours.[27]

Working under a constant rain of harassing artillery fire, the troopers at both locations spent the remainder of 22 December improving their positions; at Baraque de Fraiture, some F Company troopers also received quick lessons on the operation of the various antiaircraft guns and tanks with which they were quartered. Unbeknownst to them, hidden in the wood farther south the *2nd SS Panzer Division* was experiencing fuel shortages and had thus temporarily suspended all armored assaults, but later on in the day and throughout the night large groups of dismounted panzergrenadiers infiltrated around and behind the crossroads in preparation of an attack. One group of panzergrenadiers ambushed a platoon from the 643rd Tank Destroyer Battalion that had been sent to reinforce the crossroads and then later turned the 643rd's tank destroyers on the very men they had been sent to reinforce.[28]

The German attack to open Highway N15 began at dawn 23 December, with an assault on Friature hamlet. A battalion of panzergrenadiers from the *2nd SS Panzer Division's 4th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* that had infiltrated around and behind the Baraque de Fraiture crossroads suddenly emerged from the morning mist and, just as suddenly, overran the E and G Company defensive positions south of town. The few

sentries on the line at the time (because of the intense cold Gibson elected to man the front with a skeleton force that was constantly rotated while the majority of his troopers huddled in the warmth of Friature's buildings) attempted to open up with the battalion's automatic weapons, only to discover that the bolts had frozen shut. With nothing to stop them the German grenadiers swept through the lightly manned defenses with nary a halt and burst in Friature's southern outskirts. Roused troopers scrambled for guns and ammunition belts, tumbled out into the streets, and literally met the enemy face-to-face. Since his mortars had been rendered useless because the opposing forces were so intermingled, Gibson used his mortar platoon as a counterattack force and drove it straight through the center of Fraiture with orders to fire at anyone who did not immediately identify himself as an American. In this manner, Gibson drove the panzergrenadiers out the way they came. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Cockle, the G Company commander, led one of his rifle platoons in a flanking attack against the German left rear. An hour after it had started with such promise the German attack disintegrated. Those grenadiers that survived fled back to the safety of the heavy wood from which they had emerged. Gibson's troopers restored their lines and kept careful watch for another attack. None came. Instead, the Germans pasted Fraiture with artillery and mortar fire. All told, Gibson's rump battalion sustained thirty-three casualties that day, twenty during the initial assault alone.[29]

After failing to clear Fraiture, the Germans focused their attention on the crossroads below town. Almost wholly surrounded, the Americans at Parker's Crossroads spent the morning and early afternoon enduring an intense softening up. Using captured radios, the Germans also jammed the American artillery fire control net, thereby denying Baraque de Fraiture's defenders the one weapon with which they might have evened the odds. Nevertheless, Woodruff somehow got word back to Gibson that he was in desperate need of ammunition, food, and batteries. After several futile attempts to break through the German ring surrounding the crossroads a Lieutenant Kotary, the 2/325th's S-4, finally managed to find an unguarded back road that passed near the crossroads where he set up an ammunition point and, as best he could, infiltrated supplies into Baraque de Friature on foot. But Woodruff, his troopers, and the other Americans defending at Baraque de Friature needed much more than a small clandestine ammunition dump to sustain them. This became apparent at 1600 hours when the artillery and mortar bombardment increased markedly in intensity, a crescendo announcing the coming onslaught. Sometime shortly thereafter Woodruff radioed the 2/325th command post to report that the "forces at the cross-roads were disintegrating" and requested permission to withdraw his F Company.[30] The reply, relayed through the 2/325th command post from Billingslea, was that Woodruff was to hold Baraque de Fraiture at all costs.[31]

At 1630 hours the bombardment of Baraque de Fraiture lifted. Peering over the lip of their foxholes, wiping the dust and sweat from their eyes, the troopers were greeted with a harrowing sight—two companies of Panthers and Tigers were bearing down on the crossroads from three sides. Following behind was the entire *4th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*. Using their 88mm guns like sniper rifles, the Tigers commenced a systematic destruction of everything at the crossroads: buildings, tanks, antiaircraft guns, trucks, jeeps, and individual fighting positions were reduced in a matter of minutes. Several of the American tank crews, all too familiar with the power of the Tiger tank, had abandoned their vehicles. Employing the scant knowledge they had about the operation

of a Sherman obtained the day before some of Woodruff's troopers scrambled aboard the abandoned tanks and attempted to return fire. But a Sherman's gun was no match for a Tiger's. By 1700 hours every American tank and tank destroyer at Baraque de Fraiture had been reduced to a burning hulk. With nothing to deter them, the German tanks drove onto the crossroads to claim their prize . Woodruff radioed again: "position was hopeless . . . overrun by enemy 'Tiger' tanks . . . [request] permission to withdraw."[32] This time Billingslea consented; there was nothing more F Company could do. The hulks of ten Sherman tanks, three 105mm howitzers, four half-tracks, four tank destroyers, and eight trucks cluttered the small Belgian Alamo. Every other American soldier at Baraque de Fraiture that had not been killed or wounded had already fled.[33]

The stand at Baraque de Fraiture cost F Company dearly. Nineteen troopers, including Woodruff, hid out all night in the frozen wood before they could make it the three-quarters of a mile back to their parent battalion at Fraiture. Another twenty-five straggled into friendly lines over the ensuing days. On its march into Baraque de Fraiture, F Company counted 116 troopers. Now it was but forty-four strong. But the sacrifice had not been in vain. While Woodruff, his troopers, and the other unlucky souls at Baraque de Fraiture were battling Tigers and Panthers some 15,000 survivors of the equally horrendous fight at St. Vith, as well as 100 tanks and eight 8-inch howitzers, were evacuated to safety.[34]

With the fall of Baraque de Fraiture, Billingslea " 'started singing the Blues about my right flank where the 3rd Armored was supposed to be in strength.' "[35] Gavin, too, was concerned. During the fight for the crossroads Gavin had traveled to Gibson's command post and, from there, tried to make his way on foot to Baraque de Fraiture, only to be turned back by overwhelming numbers of the enemy (Gibson, too, tried to get through to Woodruff and, like Gavin, was unsuccessful).[36] Hence, he knew firsthand the numbers the Germans had in the area. Moreover, he knew how paltry were his own defenses.

> On the afternoon of December 23, at about 1700 hours, I [Gavin] checked the dispositions along the Fraiture ridge. At this time riflemen were scattered 100 to 200 yards apart. There was a little antitank defense, and the possibility of defending the ridge against a major German attack appeared nothing less than fantastic.[37]

Gavin had already reported this parlous state of affairs to XVIII Airborne Corps to no avail.[38] Left to his own devices, Gavin told Tucker to free up one battalion for use as a reserve on the southern front. Tucker sent Lieutenant Colonel Wellems's 2/504th.[39] Initially positioned behind the center of the 325th's broad front to serve as a blocking force should there occur a breakthrough, after the fall of Baraque de Fraiture, Gavin ordered Wellems to counterattack to restore the position. Wellems moved forward to Gibson's command post to get a look at his objective and the surrounding terrain and to coordinate the passage of his battalion through the 2/325th's lines. When Wellems told Gibson about his mission the latter replied, " 'I would not attack the damned place with a Regiment not to mind a Battalion.' "[40] It appears that Gavin, too, thought better of committing Wellems's battalion in such a futile attack and eventually called the counterattack off and positioned the 2/504th just north of the 2/325th's position as a backstop.[41]

According to Gavin's after action review, with Baraque de Fraiture in enemy hands "there was nothing to prevent the German forces from entering the rear of the Division area."[42] Frantically trying to lay his hands on something with which he could at least delay the enemy's exploitation of Highway N15, Gavin again made his way to Manhay, only to find that the 3rd Armored command post had pulled out. "I found one MP on duty," he wrote in his after action report, "and the town completely abandoned."[43] He then went to the corps command post, where he met the Chief of Staff, 'Doc' Eaton.

> I said, you've got to give me orders, I've got to have something to do. I can't sit there and let the Germans come around behind me and cut me off. And no one's telling me what to do. I don't think anyone knows the situation. We've got a bad layout down there. . . . Eaton looked at me, listened to it all, wouldn't say a goddamned word. He didn't say Jim, withdraw your right flank, he didn't do a thing, he didn't say a thing. He didn't know what to say, he couldn't say anything.[44]

Gavin left the corps command post with "a profound sense of foreboding." He was certain that the Germans would exploit the fall of Baraque de Fraiture by attacking with everything they had up Highway N15. Rose's 3rd Armored Division, which had responsibility for the highway, "had disappeared into thin air." Not counting the gaping hole in the south the division frontage was some twenty-five miles long. Everywhere there were hug gaps in the line over which the 82nd had but the most tenuous control. Gavin had already accepted considerable risk by denuding Tucker's front and sending the 2/504th south to aid Billingslea. When he returned empty-handed from corps, Gavin called Tucker again: be prepared to send a second battalion to the threatened flank; contain the still dangerous *Kampfgruppe Peiper* with what was left.[45] Finally, not long after he returned to his command post he received word that Manhay had fallen although "[t]here seemed to be some doubt about this, however, and due to the darkness and confusion it was impossible to determine exactly where anyone was" (the reports were, in fact, wrong; Manhay did not fall until evening on the 24th).[46] Things could not have been any more dismal.

Were the worst to happen—were the Germans to exploit their temporary advantage by mounting an all out drive on Liège—Gavin decided that he would hurl whatever he could into their faces and conduct a fighting withdrawal. Although using a lightly armed and equipped airborne division to fight a retrograde action against a heavy SS panzer division was a seemingly suicidal task, Gavin's only concern was that he would be unable to slow the Germans sufficiently to gain the time needed to keep the Germans from crossing the Meuse. "If somehow I could get my hands on some armor," he mused, "we would be in pretty good shape for some time, since we never had trouble with the German infantry."[47] That evening, most likely as a result of his earlier remonstrance at XVIII Airborne Corps headquarters, Ridgway gave Gavin Brigadier General William M. Hoge's Combat Command B of the U.S. 9th Armored Division. Hoge's command had just escaped from St. Vith and was "practically exhausted from the past week's fighting. They were very short of infantry, and in the opinion of General Hoge Combat Command B was incapable of a sustained defense or offense."[48] But they were all that Gavin had, and Hoge's armor,

combined with Gavin's infantry might be enough to hold at least a little while longer. Gavin posted Hoge's force astride Highway N15.[49]

The German plan for 24 December was exactly as Gavin envisioned: a headlong rush up Highway N15 toward Liège. What he did not know, though, was the strength with which this attack would be carried out. The fall of Baraque de Fraiture and the withdrawal of the St. Vith forces had opened the way for the concentration of the entire *II SS Panzer Corps*, the same corps, under the same commander, Wilhelm Bittrich, that the 82nd had fought in the streets of Nijmegen, only this time consisting of the *2nd SS* and *9th SS Panzer Divisions*. Furthermore, Bittrich had operational control of the *Führer Begleit Brigade*, an independent formation composed of three panzer grenadier battalions, a panzer regiment, an artillery battalion, and an antiaircraft battalion and had been promised the use of two additional divisions, the *12th SS Panzer* and *3rd Panzer Grenadier*, as soon as they could be pushed forward.[50] With that much combat power there was a real chance that Bittrich could effect the breakthrough upon which the entire German campaign plan was predicated. There were but two challenges he had to overcome before he could unleash his panzers: his increasingly straitened fuel supply and some recalcitrant Americans whose presence on either side of Highway N15 denied him the maneuver room such a large mechanized force required. The first could be solved through improvisation, prioritization, and forcible appropriation. The second required further attacks on either side of N15. The task of clearing the area east of the highway—ground still held by the 325th—Bittrich assigned to the *Führer Begleit Brigade* and the *4th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* of the *2nd SS Panzer Division*.

The 24th opened with the 2/325th still holding its positions around Fraiture. Gibson and his troopers had endured a terrible night of shelling and reported what they believed were large groups of dismounted enemy soldiers infiltrating around their position. Still they maintained their position and protected as best they could the division flank. The closest American unit was over 2,000 yards away, to the east—a single platoon from F Company, 2/401st supported by two antitank gun and their crews at the village of Regné. It was there that the *Führer Begleit Brigade* struck. Under cover of the morning mist eight tanks and at least two platoons of panzergrenadiers shot their way into Regné, destroyed one antitank gun, machine-gunned its crew, and wiped out an entire squad of glider troopers. Caught by surprise, some of the troopers took to the cellars and hid out. A Lieutenant Redpath, who had command of the antitank section, took a radio with him to his cellar hideout and tried, unsuccessfully, to adjust artillery fire on the town. The rest of the troopers broke contact and made it back to friendly lines with the Germans hot on their heels. Fortunately, Lieutenant Colonel Leahy had procured the service of several tank destroyers, most likely from the remnants of the forces evacuated from St. Vith, which he pushed forward astride the road running north from Regné. As soon as the first German tank appeared they let loose a volley and destroyed it. The rest retreated whence they had come. It seemed a short respite had been won.[51]

Such was not the case for the 2/325th at Fraiture. It was there that the next German blow fell. The fall of Regné had cleared the way for the *4th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* to sweep in on Gibson and his isolated troopers. Although certainly aware that there were enemy forces all around, Gibson's first indication of an impending attack was when one of his supply trucks that was making a run back to regiment was ambushed by a *Führer Begleit Brigade* panzer, some of which had turned west from Regné to join in the

attack on Fraiture. When he apprised Billingslea of his situation, Gibson was told to withdraw and take up position closer to the 2/401st. The order came just in time. As soon as the last 2/325th trooper cleared Fraiture, the Germans struck in force, their blow landing on thin air. Shortly thereafter eight American dive-bombers appeared over the town and strafed and bombed the German columns, discomfiting any notions of pursuit. But one rather large enemy column escaped the dive-bombers' sights. Composed of three companies of panzergrenadiers, this column ambushed the 2/325th as it was passing through a narrow ravine. Caught in a maelstrom of fire coming at them from both flanks, Gibson's troopers took cover, fought back ferociously, and exacted a terrible revenge for the beating they had taken during the last couple of days. When the smoke cleared the Germans had withdrawn, leaving behind fifty dead and twenty-six prisoners, all from the *2nd SS Panzer Division*. American casualties numbered six. Gibson and his troopers made it the rest of the way to their new defensive positions around Lierneux, a position slightly behind the rest of the regiment, without incident.[52]

While the 2/325th was exacting its revenge on the *2nd SS*, others wreaked vengeance on the *Führer Begleit Brigade* at Regné. When Regné fell Billingslea ordered Leahy to counterattack to retake it. Leahy demurred. His companies were well entrenched on commanding terrain and the withdrawal of the 2/325th made them the outermost unit on the division flank. Abandoning his positions to mount an attack against any enemy force known to have armor did not seem prudent. Billingslea agreed, yet it remained important that Regné be retaken. Its possession gave the enemy command over several miles of Highway N28, the east-west lateral that intersected Highway N15 at Baraque de Fraiture, and thus sufficient maneuver room to bring up additional armor and mechanized units in preparation for the attack northward. Conversely, without Regné, Bittrich would have to launch his attack on a more constricted front.[53]

The importance of Regné was not lost on Gavin either and because of this he gave Billingslea use of a valuable commodity in order to get it back: a company of Shermans from the 14th Tank Battalion of Combat Command B, 9th Armored Division, part of the same element plugging the gap through which ran Highway N15. Using the Shermans in combination with his last remaining reserve, B Company, 1/325th, Billingslea improvised a counterattack. The plan was for the glider troopers to ride on the backs of the tanks until they reached some high ground north of Regné. At that point the troopers would dismount and, in coordination with one of the tank platoons, advance on the town under cover of a rolling artillery barrage that would be fired by the 254th Field Artillery Battalion. Simultaneously the other two tank platoons would take up blocking positions south and west of Regné to mop up any enemy attempting to escape.[54]

The attack went off without a hitch. At 1400 hours the 254th began plastering Regné; in twenty minutes it dumped 113 rounds of 155mm high explosive on the town. When the barrage lifted the B Company troopers and their supporting tanks shot their way the last few yards into town and, working in tandem and displaying "unusual gallantry and élan," set about chasing the Germans out.[55] By 1500 hours, Regné was back in American hands.[56]

The loss of Regné brought with it serious consequences for the impending German attack up Highway N15. Without access to the terrain around the town Bittrich was forced to assemble his attack echelons in a much more constricted area. With barely enough maneuver room for the *2nd SS Panzer Division* there was no way he could

squeeze the *9th SS Panzer Division* into the front lines as well. He therefore had to scrap his plan to attack with two divisions abreast. Instead, the *2nd SS* would lead the attack with the *9th SS* following. But this, too, was put paid to by the ripple effect the loss of Regné had on the Bittrich's lines of communication. Keeping an armor division supplied with ammunition and fuel required unfettered access to an adequate road net, but with the *9th SS* jammed in behind the *2nd SS*, supply trucks from the latter going back and forth to the depots had to share the road with the tanks, halftracks, and self-propelled guns of the former attempting to move forward. Immense traffic jams resulted and to make matters worse Allied fighter bombers ranging the skies above forced the Germans to move only at night or risk decimation. As a result the *9th SS* fell behind schedule and when it finally did attack it did so on its own, its actions separate from and uncoordinated with those of the *2nd SS*.[57]

Taking back Regné not only denied Bittrich the opportunity to mount a massive armor attack, it also provided the Allies valuable intelligence. Sometime during the confused back-and-forth fight for the town a regimental adjutant from the *2nd SS Panzer Division* fell into American hands. He had been sent forward to conduct a reconnaissance in advance of the next day's attack and, obviously ignorant to the fact that the Americans were once again in possession of the town blundered into American lines. He had with him a complete set of orders outlining Bittrich's scheme of maneuver. "They proved of great value," wrote Gavin later, "since they gave us definite information of the enemy's intentions for the following several days."[58] Those intentions were to take Manhay and from there continue the advance up Highway N15 through Werbomont on to Liège.[59]

The significance of the 325th's defense of the division's southwest flank cannot be understated. Though stretched over a frontage doctrine dictated should be assigned to nothing smaller than a division, Billingslea's regiment held on long enough to allow the evacuation of the St. Vith forces, in the process both frustrating Bittrich's attempts to fashion a breakthrough to Liège and seriously diminishing the combat power he had available to mount it. But time was running out. Having saved the St. Vith forces, it was now time for the 82nd to be saved lest it be encircled as well.

Chapter Twenty-Three Notes

[1] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 375.

[2] Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[3] Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[4] See also Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II and Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945.

[5] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 385. See also Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945 and Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945.

[6] Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945.

[7] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[8] Mangers quoted in Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 62.

[9] Apparently Mangers thought that instead of trying to hide from and dodge the innumerable German infantry, armor, and mechanized columns moving northward, his best bet for getting back to friendly lines was to simply join them. Wrapping himself in a German Army snow cape, Mangers waited until dark and then slipped from his roadside hiding place and took position at the rear of passing German infantry column. Knowing but one word of German—'Ja'—Mangers affected the guise of a disgruntled, slightly off-kilter private by muttering incessantly (and incoherently) under his breath and answering all queries put to him with the one word of German he knew. This worked well for a time, until an inquisitive German sergeant asked him something for which 'Ja' was an inappropriate reply and he was captured. For the Mangers story see Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 62 and Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky, 15 February 1945.

[10] XVIII Airborne Corps Diary, 1400 hours, 22 December 1944.

[11] Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945.

[12] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 420-421; Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Paul E. Wright, 17 February 1945, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 February 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview, interview with Major V. R. Butz, 20 February 1945, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[13] Both Gavin and Billingslea wrote afterwards that this meeting occurred sometime on 22 December, although they are silent about the exact time. Given the timing of subsequent events, it is probably that their meeting with Rose occurred in the early morning hours.

[14] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[15] See also Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[16] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[17] Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[18] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 231.

[19] See also After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.I; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[20] Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Report of Demolition Party," 23 December 1944, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Letters to and from 82nd Vets on airborne operations in Holland, September, 1944," USAMHI.

[21] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[22] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 388-389 and R. Ernest Dupuy, "Parker's Crossroads," *Infantry Journal* 62, no. 4 (April 1948): 14.

[23] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 389.

[24] Combat Interview "509 Para Inf," n.d., CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[25] See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 389-390 and Dupuy, "Parker's Crossroads," 14-15.

[26] Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945.

[27] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 390; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945.

[28] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 390; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945; Combat Interview "325 Glider Inf—2nd Bn.," n.d., CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[29] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 390-391; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945I; Combat Interview “325th Glider Infantry Regiment,” interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[30] Combat Interview “325th Glider Infantry Regiment,” interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[31] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 390-391; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945; Combat Interview “325th Glider Infantry Regiment,” interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[32] Combat Interview “325th Glider Infantry Regiment,” interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[33] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 391; Combat Interview “325th Glider Infantry Regiment,” interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, “The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge,” 14 January 1945.

[34] See Combat Interview “325th Glider Infantry Regiment,” interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945 and Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, “Summary of Operations: 18 December 1944 to 13 February 1945,” 1 March 1945, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder “Chrono File: Bulge,” USAMHI.

[35] Combat Interview “325th Glider Infantry Regiment,” interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[36] Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945.

[37] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[38] See XVIII Airborne Corps Diary, 1812 hours, 22 December 1944, which reads: “General GAVIN called at 1812 and stated that he was a little perturbed over the situation on the south in front of Billingsly [*sic*]. He felt that there might be considerable force behind the enemy that appeared this afternoon.”

[39] Tucker, interview, 28 March 1945 and Combat Interview “2nd Bn, 504th Para Inf Regt, 82nd Inf Division,” n.d., CI-173 “82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[40] Gibson quoted in Combat Interview “325th Glider Infantry Regiment,” interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[41] See also Edward N. Wellems to James M. Gavin, 13 March 1959, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder “Letters to Gavin, Comments and Inquiries about D-Day mentioned from ‘Longest Day,’ ” USAMHI.

[42] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[43] Ibid.

[44] James M. Gavin. interview, 4 January 1983, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder “Gavin, James M.,” USAMHI.

[45] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 235-236.

[46] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d. See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 589.

[47] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 236.

[48] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[49] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 392.

[50] Ibid., 174 and 580.

[51] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, 584-585; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945; Combat Interview "325 Glider Infantry—3rd Bn.," n.d., CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945.

[52] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 585; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945.

[53] Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945and Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945.

[54] Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945.

[55] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*.

[56] See also Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945; Combat Interview, interview with Major V. R. Butz, 20 February 1945.

[57] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 595.

[58] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[59] See also Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 231.

Chapter Twenty-Four
Making Monkeys Out Of the Germans

Unfortunately, I couldn't tell you the name of the town, but it was out in the Battle of the Bulge. Somewhere near St. Vith. And I had my squad; actually, my section was out there with their 81mm mortars set up. About two foot of snow all around us out in a field and of course you couldn't see anything. Suddenly, this jeep drove up and put on his brakes and stopped and he said to the driver . . . I didn't hear him, but he must have said to the driver, "take this box and come on with me." I immediately . . . one of my men, I guess, alerted me that this was the general. And I thought, "oh, my God. What's General Gavin . . . what's he coming here for? Is he going to ask me some technical questions or some . . . quill me on my fight orders or, you know, the routine we had and what have you?" And I had not even thought about it being Christmas because on the field of battle we don't have holidays. Anyway, the driver came up with this box. . . . And General Gavin came and said, "hey, fellas, Merry Christmas." And got down in the hole with us . . . said, "I just come to spend a little time with you." So the driver opened up the box and passed them out. It was fried chicken. Well, I'll tell you the honest truth, I don't know I got a piece of chicken or not out of the box because I was so nervous with him being present. But, anyway, the rest of them gnawed on their chicken and remarked what a hell of a time . . . and then he said, "well fellas, I got a long way to go and a lot of ground to cover." And he said to the driver, "come on, let's go." And he left the box of chicken there. And he said once again, "Merry Christmas." I was a nervous wreck.

Paul Stephenson Jr.[1]

On the morning of 24 December, there arrived at the XVIII Airborne Corps command post, which was still set up at Werbomont, an incongruous figure: Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery. It was time, he announced, to " 'tidy up the battlefield.' "[2]

Montgomery's visit to Ridgway's headquarters would doubtless have surprised most of the thousands of front-line soldiers then fighting under XVIII Airborne Corps command. What would have surprised them even more would have been the knowledge that for the last four days they, their divisions, the corps, and the U.S. First Army had been under the operational control of Montgomery's 21st Army Group, the result of a decision promulgated by the Supreme Commander as he, in his own way, sought to tidy up the battlefield as well.

Eisenhower's decision resulted from several considerations. By 19 December, intelligence reports indicated that the German main effort had developed a distinctly westward orientation. In the eyes of Major General Strong, the SHAEF intelligence chief

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 670 through 677.

and Major General J. F. M. Whiteley, SHAEF's Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, the orientation of the German thrust brought with it the very real danger that the 12th Army group would be split. Were things to continue to develop along this line Bradley, who had posted himself well to the south of the Bulge at his forward command post in Luxembourg City, would be unable to exercise effective command and control of his forces fighting along the northern face of the Bulge, in particular Lieutenant General Hodges's First Army. Furthermore, Bradley refused to reposition his headquarters. When Eisenhower suggested he do so, Bradley stated flatly that he would " 'never move backwards with a headquarters' " because " 'too much prestige was at stake.' "[3] Strong and Whiteley, both British officers, had a solution, albeit one they well knew would stir up a political hornet's nest. Army group boundaries should be redrawn, they suggested, with Montgomery taking charge of the defense along the northern face of the Bulge while Bradley retained responsibility for the defense of the southern face. Doing so, however, would mean that two of the three American armies presently in Bradley's 12th Army Group—Hodges's First Army and Lieutenant General William H. Simpson's U.S. Ninth Army (which was on line north of First Army)—would be placed under Montgomery's command, leaving Bradley with but one army, Patton's Third. Before going to Eisenhower, Strong and Whitely first floated their idea by the SHAEF Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General 'Beetle' Smith, who "reacted negatively and with considerable heat, [but] then cooled off and admitted the logic of the proposal."[4] When Smith, in turn, presented the idea to Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander considered the proposal soberly and then called Bradley to ask what he thought. Bradley insisted that there was no need to make such a change, that he still had good communications with Hodges and Simpson and that he was having auxiliary lines laid west of the Meuse to ensure this would continue. But then Smith interjected with a pointed question—whether or not the move would make sense were Montgomery an American commander—and Bradley was forced to admit that it would. That sealed the deal and on the morning of 20 December, Eisenhower redrew the boundaries and gave Montgomery temporary command of the First and Ninth Armies.[5]

Even before Eisenhower's call, Montgomery had taken measures to secure his rear area and right flank which, in essence, meant securing the line of the Meuse River. Working in concert with Lieutenant General J. C. H. Lee, the communications zone commander, Montgomery cobbled together a temporary Meuse River guard force from rear echelon personnel, tank replacement center troops, and British Special Air Service commandos and placed them in defensive positions around every crossing site in the path of the German advance. Additionally, in order to add some staying power to this hodge-podge arrangement, Montgomery directed Lieutenant General Horrocks to countermarch his powerful XXX Corps and move south immediately to take over the defense of the Meuse (at the time XXX Corps, which consisted of the Guards Armoured Division, the 43rd, 51st, and 53rd Infantry Divisions and three additional independent armored brigades, was in the process of moving north to undertake a counteroffensive aimed at the Ruhr).[6]

Having secured his right flank and rear—no doubt in anticipation of his being given command of the forces in the northern half of the Bulge—Montgomery was primed to sweep into First Army and take control of what he felt was a very untidy battle.[7] Arriving at Hodges's headquarters just ninety minutes after he had received Eisenhower's

phone call informing him of the new command arrangements—like " 'Christ come to cleanse the Temple' " according to one staff officer—Montgomery at once set about exerting some order on what he considered a chaotic situation.[8] "The first thing to do was to see the battle on the northern flank *as one whole*," he later wrote.[9] What this meant was arraying the forces along the northern face of the Bulge on a more continuous line. This he did in two phases. The first was the complete withdrawal of the St. Vith forces, thereby erasing Ridgway's small 'goose egg' on the east bank of the Salm.[10] When that was complete he turned to the contraction of the salient being held by the 82nd. It was with that in mind that Montgomery visited Ridgway's command post on Christmas Eve morning.

Montgomery's first act upon arriving at XVIII Airborne Corps was to commend Ridgway "on the conduct of his command during the initial operation," but then wasted little time in getting down to what he had really come for by adding since "the Corps had fought with distinction, [it] could withdraw with honor to itself and its units."[11] This was in direct contravention to an order Ridgway had issued earlier that same day in which he exhorted everyone in his command to hold the present line.

> In my opinion this is the last dying gasp of the German Army, [went Ridgway's message to his division commanders, which he insisted they relay to their soldiers]. He is putting everything he has into this fight. We are going to smash that final drive here today in this Corps Zone. This command is the command that will smash the German offensive spirit for this war. Impress every man in your division with that spirit. We are going to lick the German here today.[12]

By 1300 hours, after several hours with Montgomery, Ridgway had changed his mind. Admitting that he had had "an entirely contrary view" earlier that morning, he telephoned First Army headquarters to report that Montgomery was headed that way "with a very important suggestion, which originated with him, and which, in view of the picture he gave me, I entirely agree with."[13] That suggestion was that the 82nd should withdraw northward to a line running from Trois Ponts southwestward to a point just short of Manhay.

"I was greatly concerned with the attitude of the troops toward the withdrawal," wrote Gavin in his after action review, "the Division having never made a withdrawal in its combat history."[14] Some of the troopers felt the same way. "The withdrawal order did not set well with my platoon or me," remembered Lieutenant Megellas of the 504th.[15] According to Bill Lord of the 508th, the withdrawal order "was a shock to everyone. The 82nd Airborne Division, which had prided itself on its record 'no ground gained ever relinquished,' was moving back!"[16] Sergeant Ray Burchell of C Company, 1/325th agreed. " 'It was not like us to retreat. We had been fighting SS troops and had badly beaten them.' "[17] Allen Langdon of the 505th concurred, convinced that he and his fellow 505th troopers could have "held the Salm River line until hell froze over because, for defense, it may well have been the best position the regiment held during the whole war."[18] But Billingslea, whose glider troopers had been fighting for their lives out on the division's exposed flank, was not as quick to question the decision. In his typically understated way he later told an interviewer that "[t]he losses of the Regiment up to this

point had been very heavy and [he was] of the opinion that if it had stayed there [in the south], its losses would have been heavier."[19] Writing years after the war, Gavin concurred with Billingslea, backing off somewhat from the feelings he had penned in his after action report. Though he maintained that the "troopers did not like to withdraw in front of the Germans" and would have "much preferred to attack" since "they knew they had beaten the Germans in every tactical engagement so far," hindsight along with a greater appreciation of the larger "tactical situation confronting XVIII Corps" compelled him to conclude that "a withdrawal was very much in order."[20]

Gavin issued the order for the withdrawal on the afternoon of the 24th. The bulk of the division was to begin pulling back after dark, at about 2100 hours. A covering force of approximately one platoon per rifle company was to stay behind and hold the Germans in place until 0400 hours, 25 December, when it too was to pull back. The 307th Engineers were to support the withdrawal by blowing bridges and culverts, laying minefields, and blockading roads with abattis.[21]

With so little time to prepare, Gavin was fortunate in that he had already selected the position to which the division would be falling back. Four days earlier a prescient Ridgway had ordered Gavin to "make a reconnaissance of the divisional area with a view to withdrawing after the extrication of the St. Vith forces to a suitable defensive position that would tie in with the divisions on my right and left."[22] The position Gavin selected was exactly the one to which he now ordered his units to move. This new position "shortened the sector allocated to the 82nd by about 50 per cent," was "far superior in terms of fields of fire and cover for the defenders," and placed the division "in a much better position to launch a counterattack when the moment for that came."[23]

For the most part, the withdrawal went off just as planned. According to Gavin,

> [i]n all of the operations in which we have participated in our two years of combat and they have been many of multitudinous types, I have never seen a better executed operation than the withdrawal on Christmas Eve. The troops willingly and promptly carried into execution all of the withdrawal plans, although they openly and frankly criticized it and failed to understand the necessity for it. But everybody pitched in and the withdrawal went smoothly.[24]

The night of 24-25 December was clear and cold. The clouds had cleared two days before, ushering in much colder temperatures and snow. According to Langdon, "[t]hereafter the snow and cold became as great a factor in the battle as the enemy, and on the occasions when the temperature fell to below zero, it was a constant struggle to keep hands, feet, and ears from freezing." As cold as it was, however, the weather "was like Indian Summer" compared to what the troopers would endure in the future.[25] Illumination was about seventy percent, "with brilliant moonlight shimmering on the sparkling blanket of snow that covered the countryside." Overhead, Nazi "buzz-bombs" could be seen making their way to points west, "easily identifiable by the ball of flame which marked their path."[26] With one exception, the withdrawal of the main body of the division went without incident, the troopers no doubt aided greatly by the moonlight reflecting off the newly fallen snow. The exception occurred along the 505th's line of march where, in an event that perhaps could only have taken place on a battlefield as

confused and chaotic as that of the Bulge, two enemy forces withdrawing in opposite directions crossed paths.

By 23 December, the ring around *Kampfgruppe Peiper*, which was still in position along the north bank of the Amblève, had grown dangerously tight. American forward observers had inched forward with their armor and infantry counterparts and brought deadly artillery fire to bear on the encircled stormtroopers, driving them into any available cellar by employing the highly secret proximity fuses.[27] With their supplies running low (two attempts by the *Luftwaffe* to drop supplies to Peiper's force on the nights of 21 and 22 December were ineffectual as most of the supplies landed in American lines) and all attempts to break through to *Kampfgruppe Peiper* having been stymied by the 505th's defense along the Salm, *Oberführer* Mohnke called his subordinate on the afternoon of 23 December and granted him permission to attempt a break out to the east. Leaving behind some 300 of his number, almost all of whom were wounded, as well as approximately 170 American prisoners, twenty-eight tanks, seventy half-tracks, and twenty-five artillery pieces, Peiper led about 800 of his men in a breakout attempt starting at 0100 hours, 24 December. They moved as quickly and quietly as possible until daybreak on the 24th when they took cover in the dense wood north of Trois Ponts. As soon as it was dark again they continued their eastward trek with an eye to crossing the Salm and rejoining the rest of the *1st SS Panzer Division*. It was then that they crossed paths with Ekman's troopers moving west to their new battle positions.[28]

Gavin and Ekman were well aware that there was a substantial German force in the division's rear area, that it was attempting to break through to the Salm, and that it was made up of the remnants of *Kampfgruppe Peiper*. The signs were simply too obvious to miss. Shortly after receiving the order to withdraw, Ekman got a call from the 82nd's G-2 telling him that a small group of Germans were trying to swim the Amblève. Ekman sent a platoon to check it out. The platoon found nothing, but reports of large enemy formations in the 505th's area continued to flood in.[29] Later in the day Vandervort and his S-3, Captain Charles E. Sammon, were spooked while they were out conducting a reconnaissance of the route that would take them to their new position. Sensing movement in some bushes nearby they issued the challenge, got no reply, and then sprayed the area with their Tommy Guns before hightailing it out of there.[30] Just before nightfall, a supply detail from the nearby 1/504th reported seeing a platoon of soldiers wearing hobnailed boots and full field gear headed eastward along a road. When challenged, the unidentified platoon took cover.[31] While headed back to the 505th's new defensive position Major McIlvoy, the regimental surgeon, had his driver stop their jeep to let a column of what they assumed were German prisoners cross the road in front of them. "They were crossing in columns of two's. After they crossed, we drove on, but suddenly realized that they had their guns and no troopers were with them."[32]

Ekman was in a quandary. He had orders to withdraw to a new position, but there was also a large enemy force somewhere in the vicinity. Should he stop and fight or should he continue with his assigned mission? According to Gavin:

> [Ekman] knew that at daylight [on the 25th] he had to be fitted into the divisional defensive front, wired in and mined, prepared for a strong German attack if it came. His inclinations were to stop all movement and fight the Germans wherever he found them that night. He asked me to

> consider further my decision to carry out the withdrawal. It was an interesting problem, but from the viewpoint of Corps and Army, and even Division, for that matter, it would have been inexcusable to be caught at daylight with one regiment Kraut-hunting through the woods all over a gap of several miles wide. There was only one thing to do and that was to carry out the assigned mission to withdraw and organize along the new front west from [Trois Ponts]. This, I told him to do. His fighting, therefore, was to be limited to that which was necessary to get on his objective and get it organized.[33]

In light of Gavin's guidance Ekman told his subordinates "to skirt enemy resistance and continue on mission which was to withdraw and be in new position by dawn."[34]

The main bodies of the 1/505th and 2/505th made it back to the new position without enemy contact. The 3/505th was not as lucky. As events were to prove, *Kampfgruppe Peiper* had made the sector occupied by the 3/505th its point of aim. This became clear just before the 3/505th's main body began pulling back when a force of about 120 SS soldiers that was trying to break through to the Salm stumbled into I Company's assembly area. According to Sergeant Bill Dunfee, the I Company troopers " 'were all packed up awaiting orders to move out. . . . We were lying back on our packs dozing, when all hell broke loose. The Germans came from our rear, shooting and yelling like a bunch of Indians. I didn't have to see them to know who it was; the rapid rate of the German machine guns, the pink tracers told me. They wanted to go home for Christmas, too.' "[35] Dunfee and his mates made for their foxholes and returned fire. In the ensuing fight approximately eighty Germans were killed or wounded before they reached the river and many of the remainder who did make it across the Salm were cut down by I Company's machine gunners when they emerged on the opposite bank. A second clash with Peiper's men occurred at approximately 2330 hours that night. Major Kaiser, the 3/505th commander, was riding in an armored car he had somehow procured, driving toward the spot he had selected for his battalion command post. He had with him two other officers and six troopers from the headquarters section. Along the way they came upon a group of U.S. engineers who were putting in a roadblock. They told Kaiser that they had received small arms fire from a nearby wood. With no idea how large an enemy force the wood contained Kaiser deployed the engineers and the few paratroopers he had with him in a skirmish line and then conducted a reconnaissance by fire by having the armored car fire its .50-caliber machine gun into the wood line. After a few bursts, "moaning and confused shouting could be heard from the woods." Kaiser called on the Germans to surrender; when a few started to do so "a sharp German command halted the movement and the Germans replied with [small arms] fire."[36] Following a short firefight, Kaiser ordered a withdrawal, still uncertain about the size of the enemy force facing him. The third and most significant clash with *Kampfgruppe Peiper* occurred at approximately 0320 hours, 25 December. Again it was I Company that was involved in the fight. As a result of its earlier clash with the enemy I Company's main body did not pull out of its positions along the Salm until about 0245 hours, 25 December. Once it got moving it traveled a series of back roads leading north and west. It had not gone far when the company column ran head on into a sizeable German column approaching from the opposite direction. The two point elements exchanged fire at close range, about fifteen to

twenty yards. Both were pinned down but the Americans acted first and blanketed the road ahead with 60mm mortar fire. The also pushed up two more squads on either side of the road to take the German column in the flank. Eventually, each side broke contact and regrouped. In the confusion, Lieutenant William Cameron and Staff Sergeant Russell H. Burton, two forward observers from the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion who had earlier been captured and were marching with the German column made their escape and linked up with the I Company troopers.[37] Later on that night, I Company's covering force platoon picked up another American straggler, Major Hal D. McCown, commander of the 2/119th Infantry Battalion. "He stated that he had just escaped from the Germans and that he had valuable information to get through to higher headquarters."[38] McCown accompanied the I Company platoon to the 82nd's new position and from there was shuttled off to higher headquarters. His reports substantiated that it was, in fact, the remnants of *Kampfgruppe Peiper* that had crossed paths with the 3/505th that Christmas Eve night.[39]

Incredibly, the 505th suffered only four casualties during the withdrawal, all wounded. In return Ekman's troopers inflicted at least 100 casualties on the enemy.[40] After the war Gavin noted that "Peiper always considered it quite a feat of daring to have withdrawn through the 504th and 505th." But what Peiper did not realize, he continued, was that "the 504th had mostly pulled out and that the 505th was [also] withdrawing the night he went through."[41] According to Gavin, "[b]y an act of God, it was one night in the entire war when such a thing could have been accomplished because we had to let them do it. With the facts as [Ekman] saw them and as I saw them, if he had attempted to escape the night before, he would have been surrounded and destroyed as much of his forces were earlier when he tried to cross the river near Stoumont [i.e., when Peiper's men ran into Tucker's 504th at Cheneux]."[42] As it was the devastation wrought on Peiper's column, which constituted the bulk of the combat power of the *1st SS Panzer Division*, both during the withdrawal and in the days during which it had been bottled up north of the Amblève, ensured that once Peiper and the few stragglers with him made it back to their parent headquarters, "that elite unit could no longer be considered an armored division."[43]

While the main body of the division pulled back it was the mission of the small covering force, what Gavin called a "covering shell," to maintain the illusion that the full force of the 82nd was still up front.[44] "To fully appreciate the position of the men assigned to cover the withdrawal," wrote William Lord of the 508th, "it must be realized that they were holding in heavily wooded, mountainous country, and even with a full-strength regiment on line it had been very difficult to maintain contact with units on the left and right. Now that less than one-third of the Regiment was holding the same ground, contact was nearly impossible."[45] With this in mind, each commander positioned his covering force along the most likely enemy avenues of approach. Their orders were to remain in place for seven hours—until 0400 hours, 25 December—at which time they were to quickly and quietly slip away. If at any time their ruse was discovered, they were to hold as long as possible in order to gain time for the main body to get in position. It was a dangerous mission and unit commanders selected only their best, toughest, most tactically savvy leaders to carry it out. In the A Company, 1/508th sector, the task fell to Lieutenant George Lamm.

Lamm was no stranger to hair-raising missions. While in Holland, it will be recalled, it was his platoon that had been cut off for several days behind German lines after

assaulting Nijmegen's post office in the mistaken belief that the detonating mechanism for the bridges were contained therein. And already in the Bulge, while covering the withdrawal of the last of the American forces out of the St. Vith pocket, he and his platoon "became engaged in one of the most colorful fights of the 'Bulge' campaign," a fight that would earn Lamm the Distinguished Service Cross (though he had been put in for the Medal of Honor).[46]

It was the evening before the division's withdrawal. Lamm and eight of his troopers were outposted on the east side of the Salm River in Vielsalm. The remainder of A Company occupied covering positions on the west bank. Things had been relatively quiet in the 508th's sector ever since the move to the Salm, due in no small measure to the fact that the St. Vith pocket was directly to the regiment's front and it was on that pocket that the Germans had concentrated their effort. But once the last of the St. Vith forces withdrew there would be nothing between the 508th and the enemy. This became the situation at around 1900 hours, 23 December, when General Hasbrouck's 7th Armored Division passed word that "all known vehicles and remaining troops" had crossing into friendly lines.[47] " 'Seeing the troops of the 28th and 106th Division coming out of there was a very moving scene,' " recalled Private Ralph Gilson, of D Company, 307th Engineers. " 'This was one of the eeriest and scariest nights I can remember.' "[48] According to Captain Adams, the A Company commander (who was with Lamm's platoon in Holland when it was cut off), General Hasbrouck was on hand to see the last of this units cross over into friendly lines. He was not certain, however, that everyone had gotten out and therefore asked that Adams keep the two remaining bridges over the Salm at Vielsalm intact until midnight, if possible. Since this was against Adams's orders, he called higher headquarters for approval. Approval was granted. It was a gamble worth taking if it saved a few more Americans from death or capture. Besides, both Ridgway and Gavin, on whose shoulders ultimately rested the decision to keep the bridges intact, had the utmost faith in the ability of the men guarding them. A few hours later that faith was tested and not found wanting.[49]

Sometime around 2230 hours, Lamm spied some figures approaching from the east. In the dark he could not tell if they were friendly or enemy, but since the only reason he and his troopers were still on the east bank of the river was to guard the bridges in the event some American stragglers appeared he held his fire. The figures were about ten yards from his position when he finally got a good look. They were Germans, about a platoon's worth, and they were headed right toward him. He opened fire at point-blank range, killing some and scattering the rest. He then gave the prearranged signal to withdraw, a sharp blast on his whistle, and fell back to the railroad bridge (there were two bridges remaining at Vielsalm, a railroad bridge and a road bridge) to both count his men over and cover them as they crossed. When the last man passed him he followed and gave another blast on his whistle, indicating that the demolition men should ignite the thirty-second fuses attached to the explosives on each of the bridges. He then took cover. But nothing happened. For some reason the demolition men were out of position when Lamm gave the signal to blow the bridges. That meant that someone was going to have to go back onto each of the bridges, find the fuses, and pull the ignition rings. By that time, however, the Germans had recovered from their initial surprise and were making a move on both bridges. Furthermore, their strength had grown to about company size and, to make matters worse, a German tank had moved into the area and was systematically

blasting the houses on the A Company side of the Salm. But the bridges had to be blown. So Lamm organized his outpost detail into something of a flying wedge. The idea was that as the wedge (with Lamm on point) advanced back onto the bridges with the troopers firing from the hip, the demolition team was to follow behind, find the fuses, pull the rings, and then give the signal to withdraw, at which time Lamm's wedge would reverse course and make for cover on the friendly side of the river. Meanwhile, the rest of A Company was to provide covering fire into the mass of Germans who were now lining the opposite riverbank. Lamm's aggressiveness seems to have taken the Germans by surprise for despite the disparity in numbers the tactic worked, aided in great measure by the volume of fire put down by the rest of the company which was so heavy, reported Lamm, that the Germans caught in the open on the far bank bounced " 'like so many rubber balls' " off the doors and walls of the streets.[50] Once the fuses were lit, Lamm and his men again fell back to cover and waited. Thirty seconds later there came an explosion. But only one. Looking up, Lamm saw the railroad bridge completely destroyed and the road bridge still standing, its fuse having fizzled out before detonating the explosives. So, for a second time, Lamm employed his wedge tactics. For a second time it worked. And, for a second time, the fuse failed. There would have to be a third attempt to destroy the road bridge. This time, either out of frustration or because the demolition team was out of fuses, Lamm improvised. Single-handedly, he lugged a box of Composition C-2 out onto the bridge, placed it in the approximate middle of the span, ran back to cover, and then had one of his bazooka men fire a rocket into the box. The subsequent explosion destroyed the flooring of the bridge, but the hoped for sympathetic detonation of the explosives packed around the bridge's middle abutment did not occur. Were it not destroyed the Germans could simply lay new planking over the structure to make the bridge as good as new. Hence, Lamm counterattacked for a fourth time, driving the Germans from the bridge long enough for the demolition team to rig some sort of detonating device. This time the task was completed and the road bridge was completely destroyed. By that time it was 0100 hours, 24 December.[51]

The next day, when word came down that the division was withdrawing and that each company was to provide a platoon for the covering force, Lamm and his Second Platoon got the call once again. At first, it looked as though the battle for the bridges on the previous day had taken all the fight out of the Germans for things were relatively quiet along the 508th's front for the first two hours following the departure of the main body. Then, at about 2300 hours, high explosive artillery shells began falling in the A and B Company sectors. The barrage was short, yet intense. The troopers hunkered in their foxholes and waited for the inevitable ground assault. When the Germans switched to smoke rounds, blanketing both banks of the Salm in a thick cloud, they knew it would soon come. It is likely that the troopers heard the onrushing enemy before they actually saw him, for as they had elsewhere the attacking Germans moved forward yelling and screaming. It was the entire *19th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* of the *9th SS Panzer Division*. The B Company covering force platoon, positioned a bit farther away from the Salm River than was Lamm's A Company platoon, "split the enemy formation with deadly bands of steel, and the troopers held."[52] Lamm's troopers, positioned much closer to the river, did not have such clear fields of fire and before they knew it the Germans were amongst them, on both flanks, and in their rear. Lamm gathered together what troopers he could, formed a fighting phalanx, and shot his way out. Eventually Lamm

and his men linked up with the B Company platoon, which had also withdrawn, and then together the two platoons contacted the covering force from the rest of the regiment. With the German grenadiers hot on their heels the 508th covering force, under the overall command of Lieutenant Colonel Shanley, the regimental executive officer, fought a delaying action for most of the seven miles back to the new positions, an action later deemed "one of the best pieces of fighting in the 508th's history."[53] Eventually the *19th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* broke off its pursuit and Shanley, Lamm, and the rest of the troopers comprising the 508th's covering force rejoined their brothers at the new defensive position. By that time it was about 0800 hours, Christmas Day. The withdrawal was complete, to include the last of the covering force, and "all regiments were on their positions, mining and wiring were under way and all troops were dug in."[54]

The withdrawal of the 82nd brought it on line with the other divisions in XVIII Airborne Corps, erased a dangerously exposed salient, created a continuous front on which all divisional flanks were tied in and secured, and placated Montgomery's desire for tidiness. It also shortened considerably the frontage for which XVIII Airborne Corps and, in turn, its constituent divisions were responsible. With the 30th Infantry Division on its left and the remnants of the 7th Armored Division on its right, the 82nd's new defensive array faced south and ran along a generally straight line from Trois Ponts southwest to a point just short of Manhay.[55]

Having, for once, been assigned a greatly reduced defensive sector, it was Gavin's intent to man the front with his three parachute regiments—from left to right the 505th, 508th, and 504th—and place the 325th in division reserve. Intelligence indicated that the Germans were preparing another major attack aimed at breaking through to Liège and the Meuse, so it would be handy to have an entire regiment available to commit as either a stopgap or counterattacking force. It was, to be certain, a luxury to which Gavin was unaccustomed. It was a luxury that never came to fruition.[56]

Not long after the 325th arrived at its reserve location Captain Olson, Gavin's senior aide, "burst into the [325th's] C.P. with the news that the Germans had driven the 3rd Armored out of [Tri-le-Cheslaing]," a small hamlet about 2,000 yards east of Manhay.[57] Clearly there was some confusion about boundaries that precipitated this crisis for Tri-le-Cheslaing was well inside in the 7th Armored's defensive sector and the 3rd Armored Division was not even a part of the XVIII Airborne Corps anymore, having been transferred to the newly arrived VII Corps (Olson also may have mistaken the 3rd Armored for the 7th Armored). But it was not Billingslea's place to question battlefield geography so he dispatched his 1/325th to Tri-le-Cheslaing with orders to retake the town and hold it until further notice. This placed Billingslea's glider troopers once again on the division's right flank (between the 504th and the 7th Armored Division) with the task of holding a precarious position.[58]

When the 1/325th got to Tri-le-Cheslaing sometime late in the morning of 25 December, there was no sign of the enemy. Patrols sent farther south later on in the day confirmed this. But the orders were to hold the position until relieved so Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, the battalion commander, organized a defensive ring around the small hamlet. The enemy finally made his presence felt at 2200 hours when a lone tank pulled out of the wood south of Tri-le-Cheslaing and began systematically bombarding the village, destroying some buildings while setting others on fire. Gerard had with him two tank destroyers and a Sherman tank (the tank destroyers were

legitimate attachments; the Sherman had been somehow commandeered from the withdrawing St. Vith forces) but he ordered them to hold their fire and lay low; sensing that the bombardment was but a precursor to something larger Gerard did not want reveal that he, too, had some heavy firepower until he absolutely had to. The German tanks fired twelve shots and retired. Gerard was correct though—the bombardment was precursor to something larger. At 0600 hours the next morning a battalion from the 325th's familiar nemesis, the *4th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* of the *2nd SS Panzer Division*, attacked Tri-le-Cheslaing in a bid to widen their planned attack corridor to the north. The grenadiers hit Gerard's C Company troopers dug in on the south side of town and succeeded in overrunning a portion of their line by concentrating their entire force on a narrow front. Some of the grenadiers even succeeded in infiltrating beyond the C Company positions into Tri-le-Cheslaing itself. One squad of ten grenadiers, in fact, attacked Gerard's command post, but while the headquarters personnel organized their position into a strongpoint, the A and B Companies counterattacked, swept the hamlet clean of the enemy, restored the C Company lines, and inflicted heavy casualties on the attackers. Gerard's hidden armor added to the carnage, a most unwelcome surprise for the enemy. The fight lasted for approximately forty-five minutes. By the time the firing died down Gerard's troopers had restored their lines and chased the attackers back into the wood south of town. About an hour later, reports came in that the enemy was massing for a much larger attack in the wood south of Tri-le-Cheslaing. This time Gerard called in artillery support, most likely from a battery of 155mm howitzers from the 254th Field Artillery Battalion, which was still attached to the division, and plastered the wood. The attack never came. A patrol sent later in the day to take a look around the wood reported "that there were [G]erman dead all over the woods. They saw no live [G]ermans."[59] Thus ended the last attempt by the *II SS Panzer Corps* to break through toward Liège. At 2000 hours, an armored infantry battalion from the 7th Armored relieved the 1/325th and the latter shifted slightly eastward and took up positions between Tri-le-Cheslaing and the 504th on its left.[60]

For the most part, the 82nd's withdrawal took the Germans by surprise, but once they realized that there were no Americans to their front elements of two German divisions, the *9th SS Panzer* and the *62nd Volks Grenadier*, rushed forward into the voided salient. The division's covering force, however, had done its job well, as had the engineers who felled countless trees and laid hundreds of mines that slowed the onrushing Germans, thus gaining for the 82nd the time necessary to get to the new line, turn, and prepare to meet an attack. And though many had serious misgivings about the decision to withdraw, not least of which was because of the effect it might have on morale, Gavin's troopers remained undaunted. Typical of their attitude was that displayed by Staff Sergeant Frank L. Sirovica of G Company, 3/508th, who, upon reaching the new defensive line implored his platoon to " '[d]ig in, and dig in good! We have to stop the Germans here! We are not going to give up any more ground!' "[61] Trooper Angel Romero, one of those in Sirovica's charge, recalled that though " '[t]he ground was frozen hard as stone . . . digging helped keep us from freezing to death.' "[62] The digging also kept many alive. On 26 December, while the 1/325th was defending the division's right flank at Tri-le-Cheslaing against the *2nd SS*, the 504th and 508th repelled several limited probing attacks by the *9th SS* and *62nd* against the division center.[63] The *62nd*, wrote Gavin, "proved to be of very poor quality and not well trained. They consistently lost patrols by

having them destroyed by our outposts and they appeared to be very vulnerable to our own patrols."[64] The Waffen SS were another matter, however, and on 27 December they mounted a large-scale assault on the approximate center of the 82nd's line. Two villages, Erria and Villettes, were their point of aim. Defending was Lieutenant Colonel Mendez's 3/508th.

Erria, in the east, and Villettes, in the west, anchored the left and right flanks of the 3/508th. The battalion's mission—to defend the high ground north of the east-west road connecting the two villages—was fairly standard and hence Mendez employed a fairly standard defensive scheme, posting G Company to his left at Erria and H Company to his right at Villettes, while keeping I Company in reserve (which at the time had only thirty-eight effectives and hence could not have covered very much of a frontage anyway). Approximately 700 yards to the front (south) was the outpost line. Just after midnight on 27 December, H Company was hit with a concentration of high explosive and smoke shells, usually the sign of an impending attack. The H Company troopers huddled in their foxholes and peered into the darkness, searching for the silhouette of advancing enemy infantry or, worse, armor. They saw nothing. Suddenly, Mendez received a call from his G Company commander, Captain Russell C. Wilde. His outposts had been driven back. A few minutes later Wilde called again. He was in a fight. It was the *19th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* of the *9th SS*. Wilde's left flank platoon had been overrun; the Germans had penetrated Erria. There they ran into Wilde's reserve platoon, which temporarily blunted the German advance. Meanwhile, Wilde's right flank platoon had swung back and refused its flank to keep from being enveloped. Moreover, many of the troopers from the platoon that had been overrun had remained in their holes and were firing into the rear of the Germans that had bypassed them. Eventually, the weight of the German attack forced the G Company defenders out of Erria, but by that time the attack ran out of momentum. Artillery and mortar fire directed by the 3/508th's forward observers isolated the German spearhead from the follow-on echelons (some 1,200 artillery rounds and 660 81mm mortar rounds were fired that night) and the Germans in Erria were hemmed in with troopers to their front, left, and rear. Some of the panzergrenadiers tried slipping to their right (east) in an attempt to find another way through the American defenses. There they ran into F Company, 2/508th. Trooper Warren Zuelke, who was manning one of F Company's machine guns, remembered this group of Germans suddenly appearing out of nowhere. Repositioning his gun so that he could fire on the German flank, Zuekle delivered devastating fire. " 'It was a sin, and I'm not proud of it,' " recalled Zuelke, " '[t]o have murdered as we did that night, both Germans and cows.' "[65]

" 'The battle for Erria was the most aggressive German attack I experienced during the whole war,' " recalled Private Marvin Risnes, of G Company. " 'We lost a few men but those SS troopers, Hitler's best, lost many more.' "[66] (G Company losses were ten dead and thirteen wounded).[67] As had their comrades in other attacks, the *19th Panzer Grenadiers* advanced "yelling and screaming."[68] Angel Romero recalled " '[t]he Germans were yelling, calling the roll, and cursing Roosevelt' " but " 'their yells turned into screams as our machine guns opened up on them.' "[69] Once the advance had been contained, Mendez called on Billingslea for help in pushing the Germans out of Erria; his thirty-eight I Company troopers were simply not enough to do the work. Billingslea loaned him the regimental reserve, which, together with Mendez's troopers, attacked

from north to south through the town. By 0355 hours, 28 December, the village had been cleared and the lines restored. So swift was the American counterattack that several Germans inside Erria were found asleep with their clothes and boots off.[70]

Surveying the scene at daybreak, Mendez's troopers counted some 127 dead Germans in the G Company positions. Another 50 were found in the front of H Company. It had been a murderous slaughter. Belgian civilians living south of Erria "reported that for three days after the attempt German ambulances were streaming through the village with wounded from the battle."[71]

The battles of Tri-le-Cheslaing and Erria were the two most significant attacks the 82nd faced during its stay in its withdrawal positions. The casualties the 325th, 508th, and the division's complement of artillery inflicted during these battles seriously eroded the combat power of the *2nd SS*, *9th SS*, and *62nd Volks Grenadier Divisions*, all of which suspended offensive operations. Furthermore, when not being attacked each of the 82nd's infantry regiments conducted aggressive combat patrols aimed at keeping the enemy off balance and killing as many Germans as possible. So ruthless were some of the troopers in carrying out these patrols that, at one point, Lindquist was forced to enjoin his 508th troopers to "save a few [Germans] for identification purposes."[72] Gavin, too, was impressed with his troopers' performance, especially in the light of his misgivings about the effect the withdrawal would have on their morale and combat effectiveness. "This has been an experience the like of which I hope I never have again," he wrote in his diary on the last day of 1944. "Our army has a hell of a lot to learn but at present these airborne troopers of this division are making monkeys out of the [G]ermans opposing them. They are better trained and far superior combat soldiers."[73]

The 82nd's stand at Tri-le-Cheslaing and Erria, when combined with the fights at Cheneux, Trois Ponts, the Salm River, and along the southern ridge played no small part in making even Hitler realize that any further attempts to break through to the Meuse would come to naught. But instead of withdrawing behind the Siegfried Line (the defensive system that stretched the length of Germany's western border) as his generals advised, Hitler ordered that German forces inside the Ardennes salient conduct a battle of attrition. Caught in a sack of their making and refused exit by the leader to whom they all swore fealty, the Germans dug in and prepared for the inevitable counteroffensive.[74]

On the Allied side it was a matter of counteroffensive versus counterattack. Eisenhower and Bradley wanted the former—a massive, coordinated undertaking that would cut off and destroy the German forces in the Ardennes salient. They were especially anxious that the German mobile formations be destroyed before they escaped. To this end Bradley forwarded a plan by which Patton's Third Army, staging out of Bastogne (which it had relieved on 26 December) would drive north while Hodges's First Army drove south with the aim of cutting the salient at its waist. Since most of the enemy's mobile formations were in the western portion of the salient, this would serve to secure Eisenhower's intent. The German head was in the noose; it was now but a matter of cinching it tight.[75]

The only problem with Bradley's plan was that he did not own First Army; it was still under the operational control of Montgomery, who was more interested in simply stabilizing the Ardennes front so that the focus of the Allied effort in the West could return to his drive northward into the Ruhr; while Eisenhower and Bradley were talking counteroffensive Montgomery was talking counterattack, a much more limited

undertaking. On 28 December, the Supreme Commander traveled to Montgomery's headquarters in an attempt to forge a consensus. The First Army had suffered " 'severe losses,' " posited Montgomery, and hence it was " 'useless to pretend that we were going to turn this failure into a great victory.' "[76] Moreover, Montgomery's reading of ULTRA intercepts led him to believe that the Germans were planning another major push against First Army and he insisted that it would be better to absorb the blow, regroup, and then go over to the attack. Eisenhower and Bradley, of course, read these same intercepts, and although there was some indication that the Germans were *considering* a resumption of the offensive in the north, all indications were that the German formations simply lacked the combat power necessary to deliver such a blow. After several hours of back-and-forth Eisenhower finally wrested from his difficult and overcautious subordinate the promise that if the expected enemy attack did not materialize by 1 January, Montgomery would attack.[77]

Ridgway was of like mind with Eisenhower and Bradley. Ever ready to attack, he chafed at Montgomery's lack of aggressiveness. Therefore, in an effort to instill some sense of his readiness to resume the offensive and perhaps instill the same offensive-mindedness in his superiors, on 28 December (the same day Montgomery was insisting to Eisenhower that his forces could not attack) Ridgway sent a message to First Army and 21st Army Group in which he stated that XVIII Airborne Corps "would be prepared to launch a general attack by daylight 31 December 1944, and recommended this action."[78] His scheme of maneuver was to attack with his entire corps, which at the time consisted of the 7th Armored, 82nd Airborne, 30th Infantry, and 75th Infantry Divisions, toward St. Vith. Doing so would regain the ground lost in the withdrawal, secure a major road junction, and place the corps in a position from which it could continue to develop the situation southward. Ridgway pressed his ideas in meetings he had with Hodges and Montgomery on each of the last four days of 1944. He was continually rebuffed.[79]

When the attack order finally came down it was very much in line with Montgomery's desire to stage a limited counterattack instead of an all-out counteroffensive, for although Eisenhower had secured Montgomery's promise to resume offensive operations by 1 January in the absence of a renewed German push (later, Montgomery successfully argued to postpone his start date until 3 January), the Supreme Commander did not dictate the scheme of maneuver. As finally crafted, the push in the north would not be a major thrust aimed at linking up with Patton's Third Army advancing from the south (which had jumped off on 30 December) and cutting off and destroying as much of the enemy in the salient as possible. Instead, it would be a limited attack aimed at restoring the lines as they were on 15 December, the day before the Germans launched their offensive. As he later characterized his conduct during the Battle of the Bulge, "one of the most interesting and tricky battles I have ever handled," Montgomery stated

> [t]he first thing to be done was to 'head off' the enemy from the tender spots and vital places. Having done that successfully, the next thing was to 'see him off,' i.e. rope him in and make quite certain that he could not get to the places he wanted, *and also* that he was slowly but surely removed away from those places.[80]

In essence, Montgomery sought to usher the German forces out of the salient; annihilating them was not on his agenda. His tactical plan captured this intent completely. Major General Collins's VII Corps, with two armored and two infantry divisions, was to attack the tip of the salient and continue to advance west to east pushing the Germans before it while Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps attacked in a southeasterly direction to protect the VII Corps's left flank. Furthermore, Ridgway's attack was to remain limited; only the 82nd was to advance. Ridgway's other units, the 30th Infantry (on the 82nd's left) and 7th Armored (on the 82nd's right) were to remain in place, providing artillery support to the 82nd as needed as well as a small diversionary feint by the 30th on the first day (the 75th Infantry Division was given to VII Corps for the offensive). Furthermore, to ensure he could exercise the tightest control over his headstrong, offensively minded corps commanders, Montgomery enacted a series of phase lines that would determine the rate of advance of each of the attacking units, a control measure that Gavin later found "frustrating, indeed infuriating" when he was constantly told to hold up his advance at a certain phase line to wait for VII Corps units to keep pace while his troopers watched as the Germans fleeing before them were granted respite to stop, turn, and prepare defensive positions that on the morrow would be even more difficult to take.[81] As Collins likened it, Montgomery's operational concept was like " 'emptying the sack by pushing from the bottom.' "[82]

Gavin compared the attack plan to "a huge stable door . . . being closed."[83] Hinged at Trois Ponts in the east, Gavin's "door" would swing south and east over the same ground from which the 82nd withdrew with an intended end state of the division occupying roughly the same positions it left on Christmas Eve. For the attack Gavin had been given the 740th Tank and 628th Tank Destroyer Battalions but the terrain ahead, in his words, was "[d]efinitely . . . infantry country and poor infantry country at that."[84] Hence he led with three infantry regiments on line—from east to west the 517th, which had been attached to the 82nd for this operation (and to which the independent 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion was further attached), the 505th, and the 325th—and two infantry regiments, the 504th and 508th, following in support while the tanks and tank destroyers were integrated to provide close-in heavy fire support as needed.[85]

The attack jumped off at 0830 hours, 3 January, a cold, foggy day that portended even worse weather ahead. As originally envisioned the division was to advance to and occupy its former positions in twenty-four hours. It took more than four days. There were three reasons for this: weather; the frequent halts along the various phase lines imposed by higher headquarters in accordance with Montgomery's scheme of maneuver; and an enemy that, because of the halts, was time and again afforded the opportunity to retreat, regroup, and prepare defenses. It turned out to be one of the most difficult attacks the 82nd conducted in the war. During the period 1 to 10 January (when the division was finally relieved and sent to a rear area to recuperate), the 307th Airborne Medical Company treated 2,338 troopers, over half of which were suffering from weather-related diseases not including 107 cases of frost bite and 487 cases of trench foot.[86]

"It took us 5 days [*sic*] through the worst winter I ever was [in] to gain back that 7 miles," wrote the 325th's Lieutenant Colonel Sanford to his wife.[87] Advancing in sub-zero temperatures up and down densely forested hills while wading through snow that in some places drifted twelve to fifteen feet deep was exhausting, especially for men who had already endured over two weeks of such weather without benefit of warm clothes,

shelter, sleep, and food and who had to remain constantly on guard against enemy attack. In order to ease movement and facilitate tactical control in these conditions units advanced in columns, the troopers on point breaking trail for those following (point men were generally rotated to the rear every thirty minutes, about the longest anyone could bear). " 'I felt more like a snowplow than a scout,' " recalled Trooper Fred Gladstone of I Company, 3/508th.[88] Furthermore, during movement the troopers carried only what they needed—weapons, ammunition, some rations stuffed in their pockets, and water (which often froze solid in the metal canteens). Packs, blankets, and other impedimenta were left behind. The plan was to bring up the gear over one main supply artery, located in the approximate center of the 82nd's zone of advance, off of which would branch smaller supply lines to the units on the flanks. It fell to Lieutenant Colonel Edwin A. Bedell as commander of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion to keep that artery open. It was a Herculean undertaking, for it was no mere matter of keeping this one road plowed; mines had to be removed, bridges and culverts repaired, and felled obstacles and debris cleared away and rendered safe from booby traps. The 307th's after action review supplied some flavor of the immensity of this job.

> The attack was continued on Jan 4th. Engineer groups opened supply roads through the forests. The existing trails consisted of two ruts down a fire break. These trails were first checked for mines. Next, the trail was cleared of debris and snow by bulldozer. The ruts were filled using picks and shovels. For most of each trail this was sufficient, the ground was frozen. However, springs dotted the hillsides pouring water out at about 50° F. This comparatively warm water kept the ground in the vicinity from freezing causing 'soft spots'. A log 'corduroy' matting was built over these soft spots and on the matting was placed Somerfeld [fabricated metal] matting. These frozen trails, matted when necessary, took all loads including tank destroyers and tanks. The snow on the roads [however,] was creating a problem in the rear areas. The narrow winding road to the division clearing station was becoming impassable. The high crown and the iced top combined threw vehicles off the road into the ditches.[89]

Hence, even when cleared of mines and obstacles the icy roads were still treacherous. The result was that "[a]ll traffic for the three units [in the van] came down this one passable road, creating a traffic congestion known only to Times Square on Saturday night."[90] Even the rugged four-wheel-drive jeeps could not always get through. About the only thing that could negotiate the roads and trails with any regularity were the new 'weasels' that had been loaned the division—small, tracked vehicles with limited cargo space—but there were few of these and, as always, priority going forward was given to ammunition, medical supplies, and water. For the most part, anything else did not get forward until 7 or 8 January, after the division occupied its final objective line. It all added up to but one thing for the troopers in the attack: almost unbearable misery.[91]

"More than one 'old man' would have given his right arm to have been back in the blistering heat of Oujda," wrote Allen Langdon of the first night of the advance, "a night which few of the men would ever forget."[92]

> ‘I was miserable, cold, and hungry, with feet that had no feeling in them,’ [recalled Private First Class Virgil M. Goodwin of B Company, 1/505th.] ‘It was one of the most miserable nights I have ever spent. I dug out the snow and put some pine boughs down. I tried to sleep on that, but it was so cold, you were afraid to go to sleep because you would never wake up. I spent most of the night leaning up against a tree, standing on pine boughs. When you started to go to sleep you would start to fall and wake up; then jog in place to try to get the circulation going in your feet.’[93]

Sergeant Tarbell of the 3/504th employed a similar technique to keep warm. “ ‘I found a small tree that I could put my hands on and started to walk around it to keep from freezing during the night. A person can sleep and walk like that.’ ”[94]

Under such conditions the quick evacuation of the wounded took on added urgency for the extreme cold exacerbated the effects of shock and blood loss. Once again the division’s medics proved their mettle, taking whatever measures necessary to get wounded troopers to ambulances and the ambulances back to aid stations. At one juncture, in the midst of an attack on a ridgeline up which no vehicles could travel, Zeke Zuccala and his fellow medics “ ‘formed a daisy chain . . . and passed the wounded from man to man down the hill to the ambulances.’ ”[95] Angel Romero was wounded during the same attack and later found himself wandering in the rear with one other wounded trooper looking for help. They came upon some medics using a ‘weasel’ as an evacuation vehicle. “ ‘These medics were exhausted to the point that I thought they needed to be tended to more than we did. The bottom part of their legs were covered with ice and they were half frozen themselves, but they let us ride while they pushed and pulled.’ ”[96] “ ‘The medics could never be given enough credit for the job they did,’ ” wrote Lieutenant Dick Durkee of the 551st, “ ‘they were always on the spot as soon as a man was wounded, regardless of all danger to themselves.’ ”[97]

Some of the stoutest resistance encountered during the advance occurred on the first day. Since 28 December—the date of the attack at Erria—the Germans had been on the defensive, building extensive fortifications that integrated obstacles, wire, mines, and interlocking fields of fire. They had redeployed their best troops, those of the *9th SS Panzer Division*, to the south for the fight against Patton’s Third Army advancing from Bastogne. What remained was “a heterogeneous mass of second rate troops . . . raw, ill-trained recruits, satellites troops and impressed Russians” of the *62nd Volks Grenadier Division.*[98] Yet, ensconced as they were in well-prepared positions that afforded cover, concealment and, in many cases, at least a modicum of warmth and comfort, the enemy fought back fiercely.

The 505th, attacking in the center to take the towns of Fosse (3/505th) and Reharmont (1/505th) and the large farm complex at Noirfontaine (2/505th) met the stiffest resistance on the first day. Patrols from the 508th sent out in advance of the attack reported that none of the 505th’s objectives was occupied by anything larger than a platoon. That proved true at Noirfontaine, but reinforced companies backed by plenty of indirect fire support defended both Fosse and Reharmont and as a result the 505th suffered “more casualties . . . than in any other single day in its combat history.”[99]

Lieutenant Colonel Kaiser’s plan for taking Fosse was straightforward: G and H Companies would bypass the town and take up positions on some high ground to the

southwest from which they would provide suppressive fire while I Company attacked directly into the town from the north. All was going well until I Company, led by Captain Archibald A. McPheeters, emerged from a wood some 200 yards from the outskirts of Fosse and got pinned down by withering small arms, machine gun, and artillery fire. McPheeters was killed instantly, as was the only other officer in the company, Lieutenant Richard A. Degenhardt. In response, Kaiser diverted G Company to go to I Company's aid, but before it could get there it too was chewed up by "the most fierce [*sic*] artillery barrage encountered by the 3rd Bn. in this campaign."[100] Meanwhile the supporting fire being provided by H Company from the heights above the town proved ineffective; Fosse had a great many stone buildings that the Germans had turned into strongpoints. Reducing them would require tank support, but the only available tanks were supporting the 1/505th's attack of Reharmont, a little over a mile to the west, and until Reharmont was taken no tanks could get through to Fosse. So in the meantime Kaiser pulled his companies back and waited. When at 1100 hours Reharmont fell, Ekman sent a few tanks to the high ground above the town. Following a ten-minute direct fire barrage during which the tanks reduced the enemy strongpoints to rubble Kaiser ordered an all out attack. Converging on Fosse from the north and the southwest, the 3/505th troopers shot their way into town, firing from the hip, machine gunners cradling their guns in their arms, ammunition belts draped over their shoulders. Taking Fosse not only accomplished the battalion's mission for the first day, it also held with it the promise of shelter from the cold. The intensity of the 3/505th's final attack put the German defenders to rout and precipitated a wholesale collapse. According to Kaiser, everywhere he went in the town "ten or twenty Germans would come out of hiding and surrender."[101] By 1735 hours, Fosse was in American hands. The 3/505th took 150 prisoners, including a battalion commander. But the price had been high. According to Langdon:

> [w]hen the day was finished, so was 'I' Company. Every officer was either dead or wounded and two-thirds of the men were casualties. Sergeant William H. Tucker, waiting at the Regimental Aid Station for his turn to get patched up, saw Colonel Krause [the regimental executive officer] pacing up and down and said to him, 'Well, Colonel, a lot of old boys got it today.' The Colonel never said a word. As he looked at Tucker his eyes filled with tears and he turned away.[102]

The fight for Reharmont was equally devastating. En route to their objective, the 1/505th troopers had first to cross a stream and then climb a forested hill, all while enduring a constant rain of German artillery and mortar shells. Furthermore, in the middle of the wood was a crossroad on which were zeroed four 88mm guns. In order to get to the wood on the other side the troopers had to chance their luck and quickness by timing the firing of the guns and then rushing across before the gunners could reload. Private First Class Joseph Tallett of C Company recalled that the volume of fire from all these large-caliber guns was so heavy that " '[t]hree or four hours later, when we finally got out of there, it looked like someone had taken a lawn mower and just mowed the trees down. All that was left were tree stumps.' "[103] On the other side of the crossroads the wood continued for about another 300 yards and then ended abruptly, leaving about 100

yards of open space between the edge of the wood and Reharmont. Major Long, the battalion commander, ordered his C Company to try a quick assault, but to no avail. Every trooper who emerged from the wood was either killed or wounded. Two lieutenants, Walter Haupt and Wilbert H. Robbins, were among the former. A third lieutenant, Edwin H. Barker, who stepped forward to lead C Company once the other officers went down was shot through with "so many bullet holes in him no one thought he could possibly live [he did]."[104] As at Fosse, what was needed was tank support, but the creek's banks were too steep for any vehicle to attempt a crossing and the only bridge in the area had been partially destroyed. So while Long's troopers held up inside the wood line, engineers worked frantically to shore up the damaged bridge so that it could support the weight of the tanks waiting nearby. Working in freezing cold water while being pounded by enemy artillery and mortar fire, the engineers finally got the bridge back in commission. Joseph Tallett, who could see the bridge from his position, remembered that the engineers received some high-level help.

> 'General James M. Gavin . . . was in the water up to his chest assisting the combat engineers to get that bridge back together so the tanks could cross. That was a sight as far as leadership goes. You had to say this was a good place to be with men like Gavin.'[105]

Once the tanks were in position to provide direct fire support, the troopers rushed the town from three sides. Not long thereafter Reharmont belonged to the 1/505th as did another 120 prisoners. But like its sister battalion at Fosse, the 1/505th suffered grievously with the heaviest toll being that sustained by C Company, which was down to half strength.[106]

The 325th, attacking on the 505th's right and the 517th, attacking on the left, were not without enemy contact on the first day either. According to Gavin, the latter had trouble getting past the line of departure, although it picked up momentum later on.[107] The 2/517th, operating on the extreme left of the division's attack zone had a hard fight to take Trois Ponts and the surrounding terrain, the result of deadly accurate German artillery fire that killed fourteen and wounded another ninety-three of its number, but by nightfall had secured its objectives and 137 prisoners. The 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion, attached to the 517th, took especially heavy casualties when sometime during the day it approached Fosse under the assumption that it was in friendly hands and got caught in a massive artillery barrage.[108] The 325th, meanwhile, advanced on the villages of Ancomont and Odrimont, took the high ground above each in turn and bagged another 233 prisoners while killing an estimated 250 of the enemy.[109]

On day two of the attack, the 82nd consolidated its gains but had to limit its offensive thrusts "pending further advance by VII Corps" on its left.[110] In the 325th's sector this meant taking Ancomont and Odrimont and a third village, Heirlot, all of which fell with relative ease.[111] The 551st, hit hard the previous day, had another tough fight at the small village of Dairomont. According to Sergeant Doug Dillard, in order to get into the village the 551st had to advance through a wood and across an open field before reaching the German positions. Lieutenant Dick Durkee, leading the charge, gave the order to fix bayonets and charge. " 'As we approached the German positions, Durkee damn near knocked the head off the first German with the butt of his carbine,' " recalled Dillard. He

then went on to kill another six to eight of the enemy single-handedly. The rest of the battalion's troopers were likewise seized with a blood lust. " 'Everybody sort of came unglued and were bayoneting the dead German bodies. They just wanted to kill Germans. The men just unleashed all this fury that was pent-up inside.' "[112] The most significant action of the second day, however, occurred once again the in the 505th's sector. Sometime during the afternoon a German officer inadvertently drove into the 1/505th's lines and was either killed or captured. On him were found a complete set of attack orders, including maps and overlays that indicated that an entire battalion was moving to reinforce Fosse, apparently unaware that it was in the U.S. hands. Seeing from the plans that the German battalion was already in his rear, Major Long quickly organized a small counterattack force consisting of his headquarters personnel and one of the accompanying tanks, but the attack stalled when the tank was hit by a *panzerfaust* and the Germans withdrew to some high ground and started to dig in. Returning to his battalion, Long organized a second counterattack force, this time consisting of three squads and two tanks. Moving up a firebreak that led right into the German positions, the tanks on the trail and the troopers in skirmish lines to the left and right, this second force fought its way into the midst of the German battalion and precipitated a rout. Private Tallett and his squad mates were at the edge of the wood, picking off fleeing Germans as they emerged. " 'It was a turkey shoot,' " recalled Tallett, " 'like crushing roaches.' "[113] All told, Long and his troopers killed or captured 315 Germans without losing a man.[114]

On 5 January the 82nd continued its creeping advance to the southeast, took more prisoners, and closed up to the high ground overlooking the Salm. The next day, however, it was once again forced to halt in place to allow the VII Corps to catch up. Finally, at 0630 hours, 7 January, the division mounted its last attack, one that would bring it onto and through the last of the positions from which it had withdrawn on Christmas Eve, the long ridge just north of the east-west running Highway N28.[115]

The 508th, having moved up from its support position and come on line between the 325th (on its right) and the 505th (on its left) attacked to seize that portion of the ridge just west of Salmchâteau, an area known as Thier du Mont. Since it was Lieutenant Colonel Mendez's 3/508th that had previously occupied this area, it was to him and his troopers that Lindquist assigned the task of taking it back. Advancing in a column of companies, with G Company in the lead and a platoon each of tanks and tank destroyers attached, Mendez's plan was to hit the ridgeline at its westernmost point and then swing east, taking the German defenders in the flank. Getting to the base of the ridge, however, required Mendez's troopers to traverse several hundred yards of open ground and as soon as they emerged from their attack positions they were plastered with artillery and mortar fire. According to Major Medusky, German "observers on the hill were so alert that 3-4 shells were pumped in every time a man in G Co. would move."[116] But the company commander, Captain Wilde, urged his men forward, yelling at them that staying in the open meant certain death. Mendez, meanwhile, pushed the tanks and tank destroyers forward to lend their weight to the attack, but several cleverly camouflaged 88s opened fire, quickly dispatched four of them, and forced the remainder to withdraw. The 88s then turned their fire on Wilde's advancing infantry. " 'Those 88s were firing point blank on our men as we advanced,' " recalled Sergeant Risnes. " 'I saw a machine gunner whose head was blown off by a direct hit. With his head gone, he took three or four more steps with the gun still on his shoulder, before dropping in the snow.' "[117] Still Wilde's

men pressed on despite steadily dwindling numbers. As the troopers neared the base of the hill the Germans unleashed a smoke screen to shield their positions, but this backfired when the wind shifted and blew the smoke into the last bit of open area separating G Company from the German lines. Without hesitation, Wilde ordered a charge. Staff Sergeant Frank Sirovica, commanding Wilde's lead platoon, led the way. He and his platoon took out three 88s and three machine gun nests while Sirovica took out a fourth gun by himself (for his actions that day Sirovica was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross). With G Company established amidst the German positions, Mendez ordered forward his other two companies and, with relative ease, swept over the remaining German positions. The haul was eight artillery pieces and seventy-five prisoners. But, again, the cost was high, especially in G Company, which started the day with 100 men but could count only thirty-three effectives at the conclusion of the day's fight. Talking with the 3/508th's executive officer later in the day, Gavin said, " '[t]ell Lou Mendez and those men that this is the best job I've ever had done for me.' "[118] When informed of this later on, Mendez radioed his division commander and countered that he didn't do it for Gavin, or for the division; he did it for his troopers.[119]

Attacking to the left of the 3/508th was the 2/325th and 2/401st with the mission of taking a ridge known as Thier del Preux, a bit west of Thier du Mont. Both battalions got onto the ridge with relative ease, but when two companies of the 2/401st attempted to continue the attack down the opposite slope into the town of Grand Sart, German Panthers and self-propelled guns supported by approximately a battalion of infantry ambushed them in a draw. Tanks from the 740th Tank Battalion came to the rescue and drove off the enemy armor while the troopers of E and G Companies, 2/401st counterattacked, taking some 300 prisoners in the process. Later that night, Grand Sart was taken by elements of the 3rd Armored Division coming in from the west.[120]

Elsewhere on 7 January, the 504th and 505th conducted limited attacks designed to bring them all the way up to the west bank of the Salm, where the enemy was not nearly as numerous as he was along the Thier du Mont and Thier del Preux ridges. Yet, at places, the resistance was just as tough.

The 2/504th's mission that day was to take the village of Mont. Lieutenant Hanz K. Druener's Second Platoon of D Company was in the lead. His mission was simple: "[t]o go as far as possible, occupy the enemy and 'raise as much hell' as possible."[121] On point for Druener's platoon was Private First Class William Landsedeal. A better man could not have been selected to carry out the Second Platoon mission. Just outside Mont, the platoon ran into a German machine gun nest. Landsedeal crawled forward under enemy fire and coolly sighted in and killed the gunner. Continuing on, the platoon got to Mont's outskirts when it was again pinned down, this time by snipers. Again Landsedeal crawled forward under fire, got in behind the snipers, and killed them. Further into Mont, the platoon ran into a second machine gun nest. This time Landsedeal used his grenades to silence the enemy guns. Refusing to be relieved of his dangerous post, Landsedeal led the platoon all the way through Mont, fighting house-to-house all the way. When clearing the last few remaining buildings, Landsedeal was hit, but got up and continued his one-man war, but then was hit again in the head and killed, the only man Second Platoon lost that day.[122]

The 3/504th, attacking Petit Halleux, also ran into some stout resistance. Here, the role of Landsedeal was played by Lieutenant Ernest P. Murphy of H Company. About

800 yards outside the town one of the two supporting tank destroyers hit a mine and exploded. Six troopers were killed or wounded in the blast. Technical Sergeant Eddie C. Heibert saw what happened next.

> ‘At this point, enemy machine guns opened up on us and we were pinned to the ground. I saw Lieutenant Murphy crawl forward for about 50 yards under a curtain of murderous machine gun fire and call for the remaining TD to come up to him. The TD silenced two of the enemy machine guns.’[123]

Having silenced the enemy guns, but knowing that the advantage gained was but temporary, Murphy rushed back to the company, organized two squads, and led the attack into town. “ ‘When we reached the town,’ ” recalled Private First Class David E. Ward Jr., “ ‘Lieutenant Murphy ran from house to house under heavy enemy fire, firing his Thompson submachine gun and throwing hand grenades, forcing many of the enemy to surrender.’ ”[124] Spurred on by Murphy’s leadership, the rest of H Company rushed into town and cleared it, taking some 200 prisoners in the process.

The 505th moved up to the Salm between the 504th (to the north) and the 508th (to the south). The regiment’s 1st and 3rd Battalions took their objectives, some high ground adjacent to the river, against slight resistance. The troopers of the 2/505th were not as lucky. They had been assigned the mission of taking Goronne, where they ran into a reinforced infantry company supported by two Tiger tanks. Lieutenant Joe Meyers’s D Company was leading the battalion that day. Moving out while it was still quite dark, Meyers led his troopers across an open valley and then uphill through a cultivated forest without incident. About halfway through the forest his scouts found some communication wire. Meyers ordered them to follow it. Using the wire as a guide, D Company moved another several hundred yards when the scouts ordered a halt and called Meyers forward. Only then did it become obvious why D Company was able to move so far without taking fire. The Germans were sound asleep! Following the communication wire had led Meyers and his men right into the middle of the German defensive positions and were it not for the sounds of heavy snoring from all around them the scouts might never have discovered this. Quickly, Meyers organized two teams and had them move from foxhole to foxhole, quietly awakening the Germans, disarming them, and then passing them to the rear. This took some time, but it was better than a fight. Suddenly firing broke out in the rear of the column. “ ‘One of our men was about half asleep on his feet. He looked up, saw a German POW and in his confusion shot him. All hell broke loose.’ ” Cut off with no communication with the rest of the battalion, Meyers formed D Company into an oval-shaped perimeter in the midst of the German positions and slugged it out at close range with a now fully alert enemy for several hours before they received any word of what was happening with the rest of the battalion. This news arrived with Lieutenant Henry G. Coustillac of the 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion, who had crawled forward to tell Meyers that a couple of Tigers had the rest of the battalion pinned down in the valley, that they had already destroyed several of the American tanks that were supporting the battalion, but that he had managed to bring up a 57mm antitank gun and crew and needed Meyers’s help to get into a position from which he could get a flank or rear shot on the German tanks. Minutes later, Meyers saw another “ ‘slim figure . . .

crawling up the firebreak' " to his position. It was Vandervoort. Meyers briefed him on his situation. In order to get to a position from which the antitank gun would have a shot at the Tigers, D Company would have to gain a point higher up on the hill. Vandervoort agreed, adding that while D Company attacked from the front he would crawl back, grab his battalion staff, and attack the same position from the flank. The attack went off exactly as planned, although Lieutenant Coustillac was killed and several others wounded by a heavy mortar concentration that hit the position just as D Company took it. Meyers, however, had regained radio communication with the rest of the battalion. He was instructed not to fire on the Tigers as a tank destroyer was en route to his location. Again Meyers and his men waited several hours in a defensive position until, finally, the promised tank destroyer arrived. The captain in command of the tank destroyer was understandably uneasy about his task. The only way to take on a Tiger was from the flank or rear, and then only if you had numbers on your side and you could hit the imposing German behemoth with several volleys simultaneously. But there was only one tank destroyer and one 57mm antitank gun at hand yet the Tigers had to be destroyed, disabled or chased away lest the rest of the battalion be annihilated. So the tank destroyer captain organized an unusual attack. First he positioned both the tank destroyer and the antitank gun in positions from which they both had clear shots at the nearest Tiger. Then he bore sighted each of the guns to ensure their aim was true. He put one man in charge of the antitank gun and took position inside the tank destroyer himself while the crews for both took cover. On his order, the tank destroyer and the antitank gun were to fire simultaneously. " 'The Tiger tank with its 88mm gun was a formidable opponent. If you missed a shot at a Tiger, you were in for big trouble.' " The plan worked to perfection. The nearest Tiger was disabled, the other Tiger withdrew, and Meyers and his men moved down the hill and took Goronne with nary a fight.[125]

There had been one huge loss, however. The mortar barrage that greeted D Company when it took its last position on the hill had seriously wounded Vandervoort in the face and upper torso.

Gavin, as always, was out with the attacking infantry when he received word that Vandervoort had been wounded. He rushed to the aid station.

> When I got there, he was on a stretcher in an ambulance. He had been hit in the eye by a shell fragment and apparently had lost one eye. I felt very bad about it, because just a day or two earlier we had been talking about bringing Vandervoort to division headquarters. He had been commanding a company and then a battalion since Sicily, and the veterans among us believed that the chances of his luck running out were quite high and that we should make a change.[126]

" 'During my thirty years of service,' " recalled Meyers of his wounded battalion commander, " 'I hope I was able to instill in the young officers who served under me some of the outstanding traits of character and leadership I observed in Colonel Vandervoort. He was a true warrior.' "[127]

Having regained the positions from which it had withdrawn on Christmas Eve, the division settled into the defense. On 10 January, the green 75th Infantry Division began moving up to replace the 82nd all along the line (during which time the 517th was

detached from the 82nd and attached to the 75th), a relief that was completed the next day. Gavin recalled the scene years later.

> And then this poor 75th came up. And that poor division w[a]s green as grass. They were pulling little orange crates and boxes on icy roads in which they had the heavy equipment, cause they got tired of carrying it. And they were all wearing long overcoats, black overshoes. The perfect picture of a you[n]g trainee coming out of Fort Benning and doing things exactly like they're supposed to do. In the meantime, the 82nd was wearing their jump suits, no black over[sh]oes that they should have worn—they wouldn't put them on unless they had to put them on. All carrying their weapons. Tucker, by that time, killed people in long overcoats because the Germans always wore long overcoats. The reason they were pulling their equipment was that the manual says you shouldn't bring troops up under artillery fire in trucks. So that meant within ten miles of the front, there was artillery fire and everybody walk[s]. Christ, by the time they got to their posts, they were dead. They didn't know when to take a chance and when not to. What you do in a situation like that is scoot the trucks up one at a time. In a random pattern. If you lose one, th[a]t's better then having all your men walking ten miles.[128]

During the attack to regain the territory lost as a result of its withdrawal the 82nd captured 2,571 Germans (including five battalion commanders) and killed an estimated 2,250 more.[129] In the process it had totally destroyed the *62nd Volks Grenadier Division*. But the cost had been high. All told, the Battle of the Bulge cost the division 255 troopers killed, 1,735 wounded, and 274 missing, while an additional 1,697 troopers had incurred some sort of non-battle casualty (mostly trench foot, frostbite and other weather-related injuries).[130] Moreover, few replacements had been received since leaving Camps Suippes and Sissonne and many of the rifle companies were down to half strength or less. Many older veterans, including several of the 82nd's stalwarts, were also felled. In addition to Vandervoort, Landsedeal, McPheeters and the others mentioned above the division's casualty list included the 3/504th's Captain Kappel who had led his company on the Waal River crossing in Holland—wounded; Captains White and Ogden of the 2/401st—killed (Ogden was awarded a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross for his actions during the advance); Lieutenant Colonel Major and Major Gibson, the commander and executive officer of the 2/325th—wounded; and Captain Olson and Sergeant Wood, Gavin's longtime aide and orderly—wounded.[131] "I lost some very fine officers," mused Gavin in his diary. "There is little doubt in view of our losses of the past few weeks that continued attacks will do the division irreparable harm as an airborne division."[132] Relief, therefore, had come at a propitious time. But it was a relief that, though "almost idyllic" in the minds of most of the 82nd's troopers, was way too short.[133]

Chapter Twenty-Four Notes

[1] Paul Stephenson Jr., interview by the author, 11 April 2002. Stephenson never forgot this moment. When the war was over, he named his first-born son James Gavin Stephenson.

[2] Ridgway, interview, 15 December 1971.

[3] Bradley quoted in Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 562.

[4] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 423.

[5] See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 423-425; Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 561-576 passim; Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 361-364; MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets*, 549-550; Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 355. Strong and Whiteley were correct—the decision did cause considerable controversy, much of which continued to rankle after the war. For his part, Eisenhower tried to paper over the animosity, writing in *Crusade in Europe* that "[t]he depth of the German advances on the eighteenth and nineteenth had broken all normal communications between Bradley's headquarters at Luxembourg and the headquarters of the Ninth and First Armies. For this reason it was completely impossible for Bradley to give to the attack on the southern shoulder the attention that I desired and at the same time keep properly in touch with the troops in the north who were called upon to meet the heaviest German blows." Given the situation, he continued, "only one solution seemed applicable," and then tactfully, if somewhat disingenuously papered over the animus that his decision created by writing "[b]ecause of my faith in the soundness of the teamwork that we had built up, I had no hesitancy in adopting this solution. See *Crusade in Europe*, 355. Bradley remained bitter about the decision until his death. In *A General's Life* he wrote that the Battle of the Bulge gave the British "a potent new excuse to fault U.S. leadership and strategy and advance their own ideas. They did not hesitate to use it. Montgomery, Alan Brooke and Churchill all came at us like sharks at a shipwreck. Montgomery was the first to scent blood and attack. He led the pack. He would continue to be the most vicious and ravenous" (361). He went on to say that by knuckling under to Eisenhower's decisions, he made "one of my biggest mistakes of the war" (363). Montgomery was uncharacteristically mute on the subject, writing "I think the less one says about this battle the better, for I fancy that whatever I do say will almost certainly be resented." Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 281.

[6] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 557. In his memoirs, Montgomery recounts a joke he played at the time that, in his words, "was not considered funny in Whitehall," the home of the British high command. "The War Office were very naturally worried and I sent a telegram to the C.I.G.S. [Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Alan Brooke] giving the whole story of what happened and telling him what I was doing about it. The last sentence read: 'We cannot come out through Dunkirk this time as the Germans still hold that place.' " Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 283.

[7] Montgomery was actually actively campaigning for a redrawing of the army group boundaries, as Alan Brooke made clear in his diary entry for 20 December 1944: "Received telegram from Monty which showed clearly that the situation in France was serious. American front penetrated, Germans advancing on Namur with little in front of them, north flank of First American Army in state of flux and disorganization, etc etc. Also suggested that he should be given command of all forces north of the penetration." Alan Brooke goes on to write that he gave Montgomery's cable to Churchill, who then called Eisenhower to suggest Montgomery's proposed course of action. Eisenhower told the Prime Minister that he had already issued orders to that effect. Danchev and Todman, *War Diaries, 1939-1945, Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke*, 637.

[8] Anonymous staff officer quoted in Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 576.

[9] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 283. Emphasis in original.

[10] For his part, Hasbrouck welcomed Montgomery's decision to evacuate the last of the St. Vith forces still inside Ridgway's 'goose egg.' Writing after the war, Hasbrouck praised Ridgway as "[a] very courageous man with great determination and drive." But, he continued, "his command sense and good judgement [*sic*] were not always the best. Notably poor was his decision to leave the 7th Armored and its many attached troops to be surrounded in a heavily wooded area just east of Vielsalm. He wanted this as an island for him to fight back to. Fortunately, Field Marshal Montgomery cancelled Ridgway's orders soon after being apprised of them." Robert Hasbrouck to Clay Blair, n.d., The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Hasbrouck, Robert W.," USAMHI.

[11] Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Operation Report, Ardennes, 19 December 1944 to 13 February 1945," 1 March 1945.

[12] Ridgway's Official Diary, 0645 hours 24 December 1944.

[13] Ibid., 1300 hours 24 December 1944.

[14] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d. Another of Gavin's concerns were the rumors of German soldiers running around the First Army's rear area dressed as Americans. In his after action report he wrote that "[t]he German was using every artifice conceivable to create doubt and confusion in the minds of American fighting units. He was using our arms, equipment and vehicles, frequently leaving their own abandoned and disabled at bottlenecks on the roads. False messages were being used and Germans in American officers' uniforms were known to be in the rear areas" (7). Though wildly overblown, there was some truth to the rumors. One of Hitler's favorites, *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Otto Skorzeny, the same man who had engineered Mussolini's dramatic escape from captivity following his overthrow, had organized a special unit, *Panzer Brigade 150* (also called the *Brandenburger Brigade*), that consisted of approximately 2,000 men, 150 of whom spoke English, who would be outfitted with American uniforms, equipment, and identification papers. Their mission was to infiltrate behind U.S. lines, seize key bridges, and sew confusion in the rear areas through sabotage. In addition, approximately 1,000 German paratroopers under the command of *Oberst* Friedrich A. Freiherr von der Heydte, parachuted behind American lines early in the morning on 17 December in order to seize some key roads (these men were in German uniforms). The operation, codenamed *Greif* (or Condor), met with varying degrees of success. Von der Heydte's paratroopers were widely scattered, many were taken prisoner, and failed completely in their mission. Skorzeny's saboteurs, on the other hand, did cause some degree of chaos in the American rear. The net result was that American soldiers were suspect of anyone they did not immediately recognize as friendly, especially when word got out that one of the chief missions of the paratroopers/saboteurs was to assassinate Eisenhower, the result of wild stories told by those who were taken prisoner. According to Hugh Cole, "[t]he American officer who had the misfortune to appear on the heels of the most recent rumor in some headquarters where he was unknown stood a good chance of being welcomed with a cocked pistol leveled at his belt buckle" (Cole, *The Ardennes*, 559). To prove their bona fides, soldiers were asked to name state capitals, recount baseball trivia, and sing nonsensical nursery rhymes. Again in his after action report Gavin wrote that one 82nd trooper liberated during the battle from German captivity, said that he was taken prisoner by Germans wearing American uniforms (7). He must also have been aware of an incident that occurred in the 3/508th's sector on the day of the withdrawal. According to Lieutenant Colonel Otho Holmes, the 3/508th's commander, one of his patrols killed a German officer and sergeant who they ambushed riding in an American jeep. When they were searched, it was found that both were wearing American uniforms under their German kit, and the officer was wearing a brand new pair of U.S. jump boots. Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Otho Holmes, 28 March 1945, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II. See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 269-271 and 558-559.

[15] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 196.

[16] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 63.

[17] Burchell quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 639.

[18] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 111.

[19] Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[20] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 238-239.

[21] See Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 238-239; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 63; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[22] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[23] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 238.

[24] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[25] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 110-111.

[26] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 63.

[27] The proximity fuse, also known as the POZIT or VT fuse, got its first test in ground combat in the Ardennes. The fuse, "a tightly guarded American secret design for detonating projectiles by external influence in the close vicinity of a target, without explosion by contact," had been around for a while but fears that a dud might land in enemy hands had limited its use to fire over water or in an antiaircraft mode. However, a few artillery battalions had been issued the fuse prior to the German offensive. Use of the fuse against *Kampfgruppe Peiper* was one of the few times before the Allied counteroffensive in January 1945 that it was used. Though a lethal weapon that, in the postwar, would become the weapon of choice against infantry in the open, according to Hugh Cole claims "as to the value of the much touted VT fuse in halting the German advance are grossly exaggerated." Cole, *The Ardennes*, 655.

[28] See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 369 and 374-377.

[29] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 18 January 1945, "Report on Enemy Contact by 505 during withdrawal Dec 24-25, 1944," 382-0.3, Box 12345, Record Group 407 NARA II.

[30] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945.

[31] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 18 January 1945, "Report on Enemy Contact by 505 during withdrawal Dec 24-25, 1944."

[32] McIlvoy, "Medical Detachment, 505th Parachute Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division in World War II."

[33] James M. Gavin to John Toland, 4 March 1959, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Letters to Gavin, Comments and Inquiries about D-Day mentioned from 'Longest Day,' " USAMHI.

[34] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 18 January 1945, "Report on Enemy Contact by 505 during withdrawal Dec 24-25, 1944."

[35] Dunfee quoted in Nordkye, *All American*, 640.

[36] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 18 January 1945, "Report on Enemy Contact by 505 during withdrawal Dec 24-25, 1944."

[37] Starlyn Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery*, 232-233.

[38] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 18 January 1945, "Report on Enemy Contact by 505 during withdrawal Dec 24-25, 1944."

[39] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 18 January 1945, "Report on Enemy Contact by 505 during withdrawal Dec 24-25, 1944." Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kaiser, 26 March 1945.

[40] Memorandum, Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 18 January 1945, "Report on Enemy Contact by 505 during withdrawal Dec 24-25, 1944."

[41] James M. Gavin to Edward N. Wellems, 4 March 1959, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 11, Folder "Letters to Gavin, Comments and Inquiries about D-Day mentioned from 'Longest Day,' " USAMHI.

[42] Gavin to Toland, 4 March 1959.

[43] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 377.

[44] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[45] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 63.

[46] Combat Interview with Major Benjamin F. Delamater III and First Lieutenant Ernest J. Hager, 28 March 1945, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Gilson quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 634.

[49] Combat Interview with Major Benjamin F. Delamater III and First Lieutenant Ernest J. Hager, 28 March 1945 and Adams combat interview reproduced in Nordyke, *All American*, 634-636.

[50] Lamm quoted in Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky, 15 February 1945.

[51] Except where noted see Adams interview in Nordyke, *All American*, 634-636 and Combat Interview with Major Benjamin F. Delamater III and First Lieutenant Ernest J. Hager, 28 March 1945.

[52] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 63.

[53] Ibid., 65.

[54] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[55] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 587 and map VIII.

[56] See Cole, *The Ardennes*, map VIII; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[57] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 590 and Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[58] See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 590 and Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[59] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[60] See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 595-596; Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945; Combat Interview, interview with Major V. R. Butz, 20 February 1945.

[61] Sirovica quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 242.

[62] Romero quoted in ibid.

[63] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Zuelke quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 245. See also Cole, *The Ardennes*, 600-601; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 66-67; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Louis G. Mendez Jr. and First Lieutenant John T. Little, 28 March 1945, CI-172 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[66] Risnes quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 249-250.

[67] Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Louis G. Mendez Jr. and First Lieutenant John T. Little, 28 March 1945.

[68] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky, 15 February 1945.

[69] Romero quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 245-246.

[70] See also Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Louis G. Mendez Jr. and First Lieutenant John T. Little, 28 March 1945 and Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Otho Holmes, 28 March 1945.

[71] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky, 15 February 1945. See also Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Louis G. Mendez Jr. and First Lieutenant John T. Little, 28 March 1945.

[72] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky, 15 February 1945.

[73] Gavin Diary, 31 December 1944.

[74] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 410.

[75] Cole, *The Ardennes*, 555; Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 409; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 545.

[76] Montgomery quoted in D. Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 594.

[77] See also Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 409; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 544-545; Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 374.

[78] Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Operation Report, Ardennes, 19 December 1944 to 13 February 1945," 1 March 1945.

[79] See also Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 416.

[80] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 286. Emphasis in original.

[81] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 249.

[82] Quoted in Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 416. See also Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 546 and Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Operation Report, Ardennes, 19 December 1944 to 13 February 1945," 1 March 1945.

[83] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 249.

[84] Ridgway's Official Diary, Notes from Corps Commander's conference, 31 December 1944.

[85] See also After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[86] Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Medical Company, "Unit Operations, January 1, 1945 to January 31, 1945," 13 February 1945,382-MED-0.3, Box 14713, Record Group 407, NARA II. See also After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.; Combat Interview with Colonel William Ekman, 22 March 1945.

[87] Sanford quoted in Richlak, *Glide to Glory*, 313.

[88] Gladstone quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 256.

[89] Memorandum, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Historical Narrative 1 January 1945 – 22 February 1945," n.d., 382-ENG-0.3, Box 12433, Record group 407, NARA II.

[90] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945.

[91] See also Langdon, *"Ready,"* 114; Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 208; Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945; Combat Interview with Colonel William Ekman, 22 March 1945.

[92] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 114.

[93] Goodwin quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 671.

[94] Tarbell quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 209.

[95] Zuccala quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 252.

[96] Romero quoted in ibid., 253.

[97] Durkee quoted in Nordye, *All American*, 675.

[98] "History 504th Parachute Infantry 18 December, 1944 – 11 January, 1945," n.d.

[99] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 112. See also After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[100] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kaiser, 26 March 1945.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 113.

[103] Tallett quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 261.

[104] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 113.

[105] Tallett quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 261.

[106] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 114.

[107] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 250-252.

[108] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kaiser, 26 March 1945.

[109] Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945.

[110] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River.*

[111] 325 in the Bulge, 7.

[112] Dillard quoted in O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 267.

[113] Tallett quoted in ibid., 261.

[114] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 114-115 and Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Talton W. Long, Captain Charles Paterson, and Staff Sergeant D. Curtis Raleigh, 26 March 1945, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[115] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[116] Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky, 15 February 1945.

[117] Risnes quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 251.

[118] Gavin quoted in Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, 71.

[119] Mendez's comments related to the author by Starlyn Jorgensen, who spoke with Mendez about the attack years afterward. See also Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, 68-71; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Louis G. Mendez Jr. and First Lieutenant John T. Little, 28 March 1945; Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Major J. W. Medusky, 15 February 1945.

[120] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 255-257; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "The 325th Glider Infantry in the Bulge," 14 January 1945; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[121] Combat Interview "2nd Bn, 504th Para Inf Regt, 82nd Inf Division," n.d.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Heibert quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 211-212.

[124] Ward quoted in ibid., 212.

[125] See Meyers's narrative in Nordyke, *All American*, 680-682.

[126] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 253. Vandervoort did lose an eye and as a result was medically retired from active duty. But being on the division staff was no sure means to avoid injury. The very next day, while out with Gavin at the front Captain Olson, his longtime aide, was wounded in the legs by shrapnel. Olson was out of commission for about a month before returning to the 82nd. Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 254.

[127] Meyers quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 681.

[128] Gavin, interview, 4 January 1983

[129] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[130] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 392.

[131] See Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 254; Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 210; Pierce, *Let's Go!*, 253; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945; Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945; Gavin Diary, 14 January 1945.

[132] Gavin Diary, 14 January 1945.

[133] McKenzie, *On Time On Target*, 126.

Chapter Twenty-Five
Another Nasty Job

The spread of this 'easy-end-to-the-war' disease meant that elite units like the airborne divisions—which were willing, able, and trained to fight—would be called on for greater effort and even more suffering. Because of their willingness to fight, these high-quality fighting divisions could be expected to carry the fight to the end. Perhaps the most dangerous period of the war lay ahead for the 82d Airborne Division.

John D. McKenzie[1]

"[O]ne of the best places the regiment was ever situated in a combat area," was how almost every trooper who was with the division during the Belgian rest interlude described the experience.[2] Although not really a rest break—the 82nd remained in XVIII Airborne Corps reserve and had to remain ready to deploy in two-hour's notice—the troopers took this opportunity to relax, thaw out, and get clean and healthy.[3]

The first few days off the line were spent cleaning and repairing weapons and equipment, exchanging worn combat uniforms for new ones, and taking long, heated showers in mobile showering tents. Replacements were also brought forward and integrated into the ranks; the first time the 82nd ever received such a mass influx of green troopers while still in a combat zone. Even with the replacements (labeled euphemistically 'reinforcements' by higher headquarters), however, many of the units remained seriously under strength, especially the infantry regiments. Losses had simply been too high. There were too many vacancies to fill. Private First Class 'Dutch' Schultz of C Company, 1/505th had been evacuated earlier in the campaign because of an upper respiratory infection. When he reported back to duty just before the 82nd pulled back, it was " 'to a company that was virtually wiped out. The officers were all gone and we had about thirty men left.' "[4] Staff Sergeant Christiansen of G Company, 3/505th recalled that when his unit pulled back " 'we were down to less than fifty percent strength. In the past, we had lost more men killed, but no other place took quite a toll as the Ardennes.' "[5] Most telling was the loss of so many combat veterans, men whose battlefield experience proved invaluable in the past. To make up for this some regimental commanders opted to commute the sentences of some battle-tested troopers then in the guardhouse "because it was well known that some of the regiment's worst garrison soldiers were also some of its best combat men."[6] Yet even with replacements, jailhouse returnees, and troopers returned from the hospital, some units remained at less than fifty percent strength.[7]

Once the units were reorganized and men and equipment cleaned, a training program was instituted with special emphasis on calisthenics, zeroing weapons, tank-infantry coordination (to include lessons on how to operate American tanks), and the use of *panzerfausts*, demolitions, and flamethrowers to take out pillboxes.[8] But for the most part the regimen was none too difficult. Physical and mental recuperation was the

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 707 through 716.

primary goal. According to the 2/505th's after action report, "the entire battalion did nothing but enjoy themselves for the first time since leaving Camp Sissone and Camp Suippes on the 18th of December."[9] Captain Wayne Pierce of the 2/325th recalled that "[t]raining was at a near standstill."[10] And although some recreation was made available to the troopers, including movies, band concerts, and Red Cross club mobiles that served coffee and doughnuts, what really reinvigorated the troopers was the welcoming attitude of the Belgian people among whom they lived.[11]

For the first time while in a rear area the 82nd troopers lived in private homes, a situation that came about through the prompting of the villagers themselves. Corporal George D. Graves Jr., of the 504th's regimental S-1 section wrote in his journal that "[t]he townspeople were exceptionally cooperative and eager to help; as one housewife put it, 'All Our Doors Are Open to you.' "[12] Captain Pierce recalled that in Pepinster, Belgium, where the 325th was billeted (each of division's subordinate elements was assigned a different village), two of the regiment's battalions were initially quartered in a textile factory while the third occupied a school building. This state of affairs did not last long.

> The buildings were unheated. At the textile factory some of the men immediately gathered up anything made of wood and started a fire on the concrete floor. This filled the building with heavy smoke, making life more miserable. The people of Pepinster began to gather at the entrance to the building and by primitive communications, invited twos, threes and fours of the 325 men to stay in their homes. Gathering up their packs, the men left the building in droves.[13]

In return for their hospitality the troopers shared what they could with their hosts. Gifts of canned fruit and coffee obtained from mess halls were the most common offerings. "[T]hey hadn't seen real coffee in years," recalled Al Langdon and such gifts "led to many a pleasant evening spent in cozy kitchens, drinking coffee and eating fruit tarts, rice pies, or other delicacies which the womenfolk made."[14] Inevitably there developed many close relationships between the welcoming Belgians and their otherwise hard-bitten guests. "Most of the GIs became so attached to the family they stayed with that they started calling them 'Mama' and 'Papa,' " remembered Captain Pierce.[15] Sergeant Tarbell recalled that when the 504th pulled out of its assigned village, " 'the whole family lined up to bid us goodbye. It was a tearful farewell, because I guessed they figured we would never meet again.' "[16] Just before the 505th left Theux, where it had been quartered, the mayor presented Colonel Ekman with a proclamation which read:

> 'During their stay in Theux, . . . the soldiers of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, under the command of Colonel William E. Ekman, made the best impression on the inhabitants with whom they were billeted, their behavior being perfect in every way. While they were with us, we got to know them as fine fighting men, whose one wish was to beat and annihilate the Germans, who held us under bondage for four years.'[17]

Corporal Graves underscored the civility and warmth with which the troopers treated their hosts and with which they were treated in return.

> Before long the Belgian housewives were caring for the men as they would have their own boys. There were few families who didn't have a son who was a prisoner in Germany or who had been killed or wounded in the early part of the war. The mothers took to sewing and mending clothes, making linings for jackets and sleeping bags and all sorts of little helpful things for the men. Some insisted on sharing their food with the men. They went to our movies and entertainments with us and shared our Christmas packages from home. Everyone was so appreciative of the fact that they were out of the snow and cold with a roof over their heads that there was no disciplinary problem whatsoever.[18]

"The rest and recreation afforded the troops at this time did much to boaster their physical and mental well being" recorded the division's 307th Airborne Medical Company in its after action review.[19] But there remained a war to be won and a dangerous enemy that, though rebuffed in the Ardennes, had yet to collapse. It was in how that collapse would be brought about—a debate that once again consumed the highest reaches of the Allied command—that were sewn the seeds that eventually resulted in the abrupt termination of the 82nd's Belgian idyll.

" 'The clash,' " as Eisenhower's deputy Air Chief Marshal Tedder characterized the debate, " 'was between those who favored a continuance of the Ardennes offensive, which Bradley described as a going concern, with great possibilities, and the preparations of a heavy all-out assault in the north.' "[20] From Bradley's perspective, once the First and Third Armies linked up, which they did near Houffalize on 16 January, and he regained control of the First Army, which he did twenty-four hours later, he could turn his entire army group eastward and pursue the broken German Army to and through the vaunted Siegfried Line all the way to the Rhine, the last great obstacle behind which the Germans could hope to mount any sort of a determined defense. This plan, which Bradley called his "hurry up" offensive, would ensure "constant and mounting pressure" on the Germans, avoid an operational pause, take advantage of German expectations that the Allies would reinvigorate Montgomery's northern Ruhr offensive as their main effort, and put 12th Army Group in a position to unhinge the German forces facing Montgomery's army group and thus clear the way for the overly-deliberate field marshal once he did mount his drive. It would also go far to restoring American prestige in the wake of the Bulge debacle.[21] Montgomery, on the other hand, was convinced that the First and Third Armies were nowhere near strong enough to breach the Siegfried Line and felt that, once the Bulge had been reduced, all Allied resources should be directed to his army group which would close on and then cross the Rhine farther north. To this end he submitted to Eisenhower a two-phase plan, codenamed VERITABLE-GRENADE, to be carried out by the Canadian First Army, the British Second Army, and the U.S. Ninth Army (which, though formerly under Bradley's command, would be retained in 21st Army Group).[22] Eisenhower's decision split the difference. Since it would take some time for Montgomery to get his forces organized for VERITABLE-GRENADE Eisenhower gave Bradley the go ahead to launch his "hurry up" offensive, but with the

caveat that if it did not achieve " 'decisive success,' " defined as "a quick, broad penetration of the West Wall [Siegfried Line]" he would stop it.[23]

Bradley's scheme of maneuver was simple. Since First and Third Armies were already massed along a twenty-five-mile section of the front that ran through the Ardennes and Eifel (another heavily forested region south of the Ardennes), he would launch both in a northeasterly direction toward the strategic road center of Euskirchen, Germany, about thirty miles away. This would put them behind the Roer River defenses and across the Erft River, the last major water obstacle before the Rhine. To get there, however, Bradley's forces would have to breach the Siegfried Line.[24]

The Siegfried Line (also known as the West Wall) was a fortified belt of some 3,000 mutually supporting pillboxes that extended almost the entire length of Germany's western frontier from Kleve on the border with Holland to a point just short of Switzerland. Although touted in Nazi propaganda films as an impregnable defensive line, by 1945 the fortifications were in a general state of disrepair, although there were stretches that had been better prepared and maintained than others. The portion through which Bradley proposed to attack was just such a stretch, consisting of two bands of pillboxes, in heavy concentrations, about five miles apart situated behind either natural or manmade antitank obstacles, the latter generally being rows upon rows of "dragon's teeth," which were "pyramid-shaped reinforced concrete projections," that ranged in height from two and a half feet to almost five feet high.[25] Though in no sense impregnable, the Siegfried Line added much to the "defensive potentiality of the terrain along the German border" in that "steel and concrete can lend backbone to a defense, even if the fortifications are outmoded and even if the defenders are old men and cripples."[26]

Because First Army was closest to Euskirchen, Bradley selected it to make the main effort while Patton's Third Army, positioned farther south, mounted a supporting drive. For his part Hodges elected to advance with V Corps on the left (north) and XVIII Airborne Corps on the right while VII Corps followed, ready to exploit a breakthrough. Of the two corps in the lead, Hodges designated Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps as his main effort.[27]

Because of the heavily forested hills in the corps zone of advance Ridgway requested that Hodges assign him four infantry divisions for the attack: the U.S. 1st, 30th, 84th, and 82nd Airborne. "I didn't see much use for an armored division," Ridgway told his division commanders, "so I begged them [First Army] to give me a fourth infantry division [the 84th] in exchange for the armored division [the 7th, which became the First Army reserve], because I had the four [independent] tank battalions, which is all I need in this kind of thing."[28] His plan was to attack with two divisions up front, the 1st in the north and 82nd in the south, while the other two divisions followed and "prepared to sustain the attack by passing through the assault divisions on Corps order."[29] It was on the two veteran divisions in the lead, however, that Ridgway banked his success.

> I led off with the 1st Division and the 82nd, and I don't think any commander ever had such a magnificent experience as to see those two splendid divisions, both veteran outfits at their highest state of combat effectiveness, attacking side by side. It was a joy to see. It was like watching two great racehorses, driving head and head to the finish line.

> All I had to do was give them their head and then help them with all means at the Corps's disposal, and with everything that I could get from [First] Army.[30]

Although colorful, Ridgway's simile belied the true nature of the advance. Unusually low temperatures and heavy snowfall slowed progress considerably all across the front. It took the divisions four days just to move the eight to twelve miles that separated their lines of departure from the Siegfried Line, at which point they were still another twenty miles away from their ultimate objective, Euskirchen. In his after action review, a much less sanguine Gavin remembered the attack as being "the most arduous in the Division's history and, at its end, probably the most bitterly fought."[31]

When informed that the 82nd would spearhead another drive, Gavin had mixed feelings. He wrote in his diary that on the one hand he was "pleased" with how he felt about the "promise of moving into the attack." "The fact that we were again going to attack I found rather pleasant," he continued. "The troops are ready also. Sitting around gets rather tiresome. . . . If the war must be finished why then lets [*sic*] at it."[32] But he was also somewhat wary of Ridgway's motives. Commanding his first corps in combat, Gavin felt that his boss was "most anxious to committ [*sic*] us" for it would "undoubtedly make his attack a success."

> Ridgway is very ambitious . . . and it is unlikely that he will ever command a ground corps again, at least it doesn't happen every day. I do not believe that he would hesitate to exploit the 82nd to the utmost regardless of the long[-]range harm it may do.[33]

By "long-range harm" Gavin was referring to the possibility of the 82nd being employed in another airborne operation. Brereton, in fact, met with Ridgway and Hodges on 20 January to discuss that very thing. During a conversation that was ostensibly about replacements for the airborne divisions, Brereton mentioned that he had told SHAEF that if the divisions were brought up to acceptable strength, First Allied Airborne Army could mount four airborne operations in the next eight months. Ridgway thought this unreasonable and countered that Brereton's planning timelines were much too short and that airborne operations in winter were simply out of the question anyway.[34] Undoubtedly aware of this conversation and others like it—during a dinner at First Army headquarters, Major General Kean informed Gavin of the high-level discussions about the future use of the airborne divisions—Gavin elected to stay out of the mix in order to steer clear of the "complexities of ambition and subterfuge involved." But as he reasoned privately in his diary, unless any of the contemplated airborne operations were to be of such size as to require a corps headquarters (a contingency for which he thought there was "little chance"), and XVIII Airborne Corps was selected as that headquarters, Ridgway would never agree to release the 82nd.

> Ridgway . . . is hell bent on keeping us in his corps and he will never let us go without a direct order from SHAEF. It is all most unfortunate from an A/B [airborne] viewpoint. I believe that SHAEF would promptly act on his recommendation to send us back for A/B preparation if he would so

> recommend. This he will never do until he is ordered to command an A/B operation.[35]

Complicating matters was the somewhat ill starred performance of other American infantry divisions, a notion highlighted in Ridgway's mind by the recent travails of the 75th Infantry Division, the unit that had replaced the 82nd at the front on 11 January. Two days after the relief-in-place, Ridgway initiated a continuation of the offensive begun by the 82nd with an eye to encircling several German divisions still defending in the vicinity of St. Vith. The 75th advanced so slowly, however, that it was estimated that two German divisions were able to escape. Ridgway subsequently relieved both the division commander and the division artillery commander.[36] Monitoring the action from his position in the rear Gavin, too, was disgusted with the performance.

> If our infantry would fight this war would be over by now. . . . We all know it and admit it and yet nothing is being done about it. American infantry just simply will not fight. No one wants to get killed, not that anyone else does but at least others will take a chance now and then. Our artillery is wonderful and our air corps not bad. But the regular infantry, terrible. Everyone wants to live to a ripe old age. The sight of a few [G]ermans drives them to their holes. Instead of being imbued with an overwhelming desire to get close to the [G]erman and get him by the throat they want to avoid him if the artillery has not already knocked him flat. This is the fault of our training.[37]

Though informed and shaped by questions surrounding the quality of American infantry and the possibility of launching an airborne assault in the winter Ridgway's actions at this juncture, and Gavin's musings on those actions, brings to fine relief deeper issues as well. Most pointedly, this episode highlights their different outlooks and illuminates the way each of them approached the war and the changes wrought by the war.

Ridgway had always aspired to be, above all else, a combat leader. "The whole training of an officer seeks to accomplish one purpose," he wrote in his autobiography, "to instill in him the ability to take over in battle in a time of crisis."[38] Between the wars he had been embarrassed by what he considered a great "blot" on his record "or rather . . . that blank on my record where it said, "Combat service—None.' "[39] Hence, following America's entry into the war he set out with single-minded determination to erase that blot. Escaping his War Department posting for assignment to the 82nd Infantry Division as Bradley's assistant division commander "meant combat" and "everything I had ever dreamed of since I first stepped out before my company as a scared shavetail down on the Mexican border."[40] After replacing Bradley as commander of the 82nd, he worked his War Department contacts as well as his close personal relationship with General Marshall (who was himself enamored of the possibilities of airborne warfare) to get into the fight as soon as possible, using as ammunition the unique capabilities the 82nd offered theater commanders. This remained his modus operandi throughout his tenure as the division's commander. The fact that the 82nd represented a revolutionary new means of waging war was of secondary importance to Ridgway; rather, it was exploiting the division's uniqueness to get it and him into the forefront of major combat operations that remained

his primary focus. Once he was elevated to corps command his focus remained the same but in the wake of MARKET-GARDEN his emphasis shifted. Since it did not appear likely that a second large-scale airborne operation would be mounted anytime soon, at least not one that would require a corps command and control element, he set out to establish XVIII Airborne Corps as one of the preeminent ground combat corps in the theater. In order to make that happen he needed subordinate units that could attack with élan and aggressiveness. Hence, keeping the 82nd under his command was important not because there might be another airborne operation, but because the 82nd's proven battlefield prowess was something that would make his corps a perennial first choice of army commanders. Ridgway laid the groundwork for this shift as early as November 1944 when, in a letter to the War Department he proposed "that an Airborne Division should fight in the line as an Infantry Combat Division when not being employed as an Airborne Unit" and then went on to propose organizational changes that would give the airborne divisions the robustness to act in that capacity.[41]

Though every bit the combat soldier as was Ridgway, the much more cerebral Gavin was more attuned to the potentialities of airborne warfare.[42] He, too, railed against his posting at West Point when America entered the war and lobbied aggressively to get into a combat unit. But unlike Ridgway, just any combat unit would not do for Gavin. He set his sights on the Army's nascent parachute force, the development of which he had been following closely. "The whole concept of vertical envelopment was an exciting one," he declared, offering a "new dimension of tactics" that could revolutionize warfare.[43] And once he was accepted into the airborne fraternity Gavin took up the cause of "vertical envelopment" with a vengeance. It was Gavin who was the brains behind the doctrinal publications that guided the use of American airborne units throughout the war and it was because of his insistence and fertile imagination that the 82nd constantly sought ways to better its performance, experimenting with pathfinders, navigational aids, new parachutes, new ways to insert gliders, and even with the dropping of mules for use as 'prime movers' by the artillery and mortar sections. His diaries are replete with passages about new tactics, techniques and procedures that had caught his eye, adopting those that worked and discarding those that proved ineffectual, but never shying from the effort.

> Working with a new weapon as we are we are certain to make mistakes and many of them. When the time comes in this airborne effort that we are not making mistakes then the time has come when we are ceasing to improve and grow. We should always be overreaching and extending, probing into the future, groping into the black uncertain beyond. Only so do we grow.[44]

Gavin never lost the "lasting and firm faith in the efficacy of airborne troops as a means of waging war" he wrote about in his diary on the day he took command of the 82nd.[45] Just as Heinz Guderian, Erwin Rommel, and George Patton demonstrated the deadly potentialities of armored warfare, so did Gavin see in airborne units a means to bring decisiveness to the battlefield. Hence his concern that Ridgway would continue to employ the 82nd in a ground combat role well after the emergency in the Ardennes had abated.

Both men, of course, shared a determination to close with and destroy the enemy. But while Gavin felt that employing the 82nd in an airborne role remained the most efficacious way to bring this about (a few weeks later Gavin would write in his diary "[t]he [G]erman army is ripe for airborne attack. They could be taken apart now") Ridgway maintained that the division was simply too good a fighting unit to be taken out of the line to prepare for an eventuality that might or might not occur.[46] And since Ridgway was the senior officer (although both men were major generals at the time Ridgway was, by position, the senior officer; Gavin always addressed him with 'sir'), it was his call as to how that would be brought about. Hence on 26 and 27 January, the division troopers left the comfort of the Belgian homes in which they had been welcomed as sons and trucked to attack positions in an area just northeast of St. Vith.[47]

The XVIII Airborne Corps attack jumped off in the early morning hours of 28 January. Mirroring Ridgway's scheme of maneuver, Gavin attacked with two regiments abreast—the 325th on the left (north) and the 504th on the right—with the 505th and 508th following each respectively, ready to pass through the lead regiments and continue the momentum of the advance when ordered. "In order to gain maximum surprise," Ridgway had ordered that the attack commence without benefit of a preparatory artillery barrage. His ploy was wildly successful. "[T]he 1st Infantry Division ran over German positions where individuals were found asleep," recorded the Corps's after action report, "and the 82d Airborne Division caught the enemy at breakfast." The result was that "[d]espite the cold and waist[-]deep snow, which necessitated changing the lead man every forty (40) to fifty (50) yards, the initial assault proceeded rapidly."[48]

"Rapidly" would not have been the adverb that came most readily to mind for the troopers conducting the attack. True, the temperature was cold and the snow deep, and point men had to be rotated lest they keel over from exhaustion from breaking trail, but the sterile language of the Corps report simply does not do justice to the difficulties they encountered during Bradley's misnamed "hurry up" offensive. "[T]he weather was a more severe handicap than the enemy during the initial stages of the attack," remembered Colonel Ekman.[49] Colonel Tucker called it " 'the most back[-]breaking trek' " ever for the 504th, a serious statement from a man who had experienced combat in the mountains of Italy.[50] Lieutenant Carmichael, the 3/504th S-2, remembered it being so cold that water froze solid in the canteens.[51] Echoing what he wrote about the attack as a whole, Gavin told the troopers of the 325th that its advance " 'was the most difficult task ever accomplished by the regiment.' "[52] The terrain, wrote William Lord, was "about the toughest to be found anywhere."[53]

Given the difficult terrain and brutal weather it was fortunate that the German defenses the 82nd initially encountered were sparse, more a muddled hodge-podge of scattered strongpoints than an organized defensive line. In fact, so muddled and scattered were the enemy defenses that Billingslea's troopers surprised several isolated pockets of German soldiers even before the regiment got to its start point. The prisoners, who were both relieved at being out of the war and disgruntled over their superiors' lack of concern for their welfare, repaid their former masters by suggesting several routes the Americans could take in order to avoid the worst of the German defenses. Taking a chance, Billingslea adjusted his line of march to conform with the suggested routes. It proved a good chance to take for by nightfall the 325th had advanced eastward approximately five

miles to some high ground just above the town of Wereth, Belgium, without any significant enemy contact.[54]

The 504th's attack on the first day was equally uneventful in terms of enemy contact, at least until the very end. Moving in a column of battalions with the 3/504th in the lead, it took Tucker's troopers about twelve hours to advance approximately six miles to a wooded ridge just north of Herresbach, Belgium. Along the way contact had been light. Once on the ridge the plan was to consolidated for the night, bring up the 2/504th to a position west of Herresbach, and then attack the town from two directions the next morning. But then things changed. As Lieutenant Carmichael remembered it "[Major] Cook ordered the companies to set up a defensive position. Some of the officers came to the CP and a general discussion followed to the effect that there was a town down there—*with houses*—and here we were freezing our asses off in the woods."[55] Taking this under advisement, Cook radioed Tucker and asked permission to have a try at Herresbach. Tucker, always aggressive, agreed. Cook then turned to Lieutenant Megellas of H Company and ordered him to " '[t]ake those two cans [either tanks or tank destroyers that were in support of the 3/504th; accounts differ] and get into that town.' "[56]

Megellas's plan was stragihtforward: with his platoon in the lead and Lieutenant LaRiviere's platoon following, H Company would advance down either side of a road that led from their position on the ridge straight into town. The two armored vehicles would lead the way, moving down the road itself which, for some reason, had been plowed. Once they left the wood, which only covered the top of the ridge, and reached the valley floor there would be about 700 yards of treeless plain to traverse before they reached Herresbach. Speed, therefore, was essential. Starting out after dark H Company was barely 400 yards from the wood line when it ran head-on into a column of German infantry marching four abreast in the middle of the road in the opposite direction—a classic meeting engagement. Following Megellas's lead the H Company troopers accelerated and waded into the Germans, firing from the hip at point-blank range, a technique that, according to Colonel Tucker, had "become almost SOP" in the 504th.[57] "It was a killing frenzy unlike any other I experienced in the war," recalled Megellas, "we were shooting everything in sight."[58] The two armored vehicles added their gunfire to the mêlée as well, firing their on-board machine guns so furiously they turned "red hot—glowing in the semi-darkness."[59] The fight on the road was over in ten minutes and the German column, about a battalion in strength, was decimated. Later, more than 100 enemy dead were found in the field outside Herresbach and over 180 were taken prisoner. Not a single American was hit. It was, recalled Lieutenant Colonel Wellems, "the perfect battle."[60]

But the battle was not over. Herresbach had yet to be taken. Leaving the slaughtered remnants of the German column on the road for the rest of the 3/504th to mop up, Megellas led H Company to the edge of town where the troopers regrouped and waited for ammunition resupply. They had not been there long when they first heard and then saw the silhouette of a German tank, a Panther, coming at them from the center of town. Since none of the American armored vehicles supporting H Company were yet in position to fire on the Panther, Megellas took matters into his own hands, charged the tank, disabled it with a Gammon grenade, and then climbed on top and finished the crew with a fragmentation grenade down the top hatch. Once the Panther was out of commission Megellas orchestrated the clearing of the rest of Herresbach, using his armor

(which had belatedly arrived on the scene) as heavy direct fire support whenever needed (for his actions that evening Megellas was awarded the Silver Star).[61] For the most part, however, the German defenders were so stunned by the swiftness of the American assault that they surrendered in droves after minimal resistance. Sergeant H. Donald Zimmerman recalled that it was as if " '[e]very man was fighting his own war [by] rounding up prisoners going house to house.' "[62] Privates Harold Sullivan and Rufus Sampson, acting together, rounded up twenty-five Germans in one building alone. And although he took no prisoners Private John Schultz got an unexpected surprise when he rushed into a house only to find a steaming, uneaten dinner still on the table, so swift was the former diners' exit.[63]

Herresbach and its warm houses was firmly in American hands by 1900 hours as were an additional 100 or so prisoners most of whom were from a variety of volks grenadier divisions although there were also quite a few paratroopers from the *3rd* and *8th Parachute Divisions* in their ranks as well. Once the town was cleared, Tucker consolidated his hold on it by bringing up his other two battalions and soon Herresbach was completely enclosed within a regimental-sized defensive perimeter. Shortly thereafter, the Germans counterattacked. Three times they came on and three times they were repulsed, although during one attempt a small group of the enemy managed to get past the U.S. defenses and into the town, bluffing their way past American outposts behind one of their member who could speak English. It took all night to root out these infiltrators and kill or expel them, but when dawn came Herresbach was still in the hands of the 504th and the town was clear of Germans. The next morning, with help from some tanks of the 32nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, which was attached to the division for the attack, Tucker moved to further strengthen his position by attacking to clear some high ground to the south. Again it fell to H Company to lead the way only this time it was Lieutenant LaRiviere's platoon in the lead while Megellas's platoon followed. Better prepared than were their comrades the night before, the German defenders put up more of a fight during which they inflicted twelve casualties on the attacking paratroopers. But LaRiviere and Megellas pressed the attack and eventually forced those Germans they had not killed to surrender, adding another seventy-six prisoners to the 504th's haul.[64]

On 29 January, with both Herresbach and Wereth in hand (the 325th took Wereth against little resistance before daylight), Gavin moved to maintain the momentum of the advance by passing the 505th and 508th through the 325th and 504th respectively. The 505th's objective was a north-south road some three miles northeast of Wereth. Despite scanty resistance, it took Ekman and his troopers all day to get there. According to Major William Carpenter, whose 2/505th led the regiment's advance, the troopers "were now beginning to feel the lack of rations and the crudeness of the roads" and were exhausted.[65] "By this time the entire Bn. was out on their feet [because of] the continuous marching and state of mental alertness that had to be maintained," recalled Lieutenant Colonel Kaiser.[66] With no clear idea about where they or the enemy were in the trackless snow-covered forests, Ekman's troopers simply followed a route of march selected for them by spotter aircraft flying overhead. These small, highly maneuverable two-seaters would periodically buzz the regimental column and drop yellow streamers to which notes were attached with instructions such as " 'I will fly in the direction you will

find Germans.' "[67] In this manner the 505th reached its objective just before dark and contributed another fifty prisoners to the divisional total at zero cost to itself.[68]

Meanwhile, after passing through the 504th, the 508th attacked in two separate battalion columns to take the towns of Medendorf (2/508th) and Holzheim (1/508th), some two to two-and-a-half miles northeast of Herresbach. The former fell against light resistance and was in American hands by 1200 hours.[69] Holzheim, which housed a much larger enemy garrison, was not as easily taken. Advancing on the town from two directions simultaneously, B Company from the north and C Company from the south, the 1/508th troopers faced concentrated small arms and machine gun fire from the Germans defending from inside. In response Lieutenant Colonel Warren called for an artillery and mortar barrage to be laid directly on the town in order to drive the defenders to shelter and thereby allow sufficient maneuver room for his companies to get to the town's outskirts (according to Gavin, this was somewhat unusual. "An interesting characteristic of the winter war [was that] neither side wanted to destroy the villages with artillery fire, since invariably they used them for shelter. They would encircle them, dig out the occupants with rifles and bayonets, and do everything they could to rout out the enemy so as to have the houses for their own use later").[70] The tactic worked brilliantly and within minutes Holzheim, a considerable bag of prisoners (some ninety in all), and five artillery pieces were in American hands.[71]

Having cleared Holzheim of the enemy, the 1/508th set about consolidating its positions. As part of this consolidation the large haul of prisoners was evacuated. Private Merrel Arthur, a C Company mortar man, recalled being at the edge of town when Sergeant Bill Traband and two other C Company troopers approached him with the prisoners (it was Traband and his troopers who took most of the prisoners, all of whom were huddled in one house). Traband turned the prisoners over to Arthur and his mortar squad for escort to the rear. " 'We proceeded to march the prisoners out of town for about 300 yards or so when we came upon [First Sergeant Leonard] Funk and [Headquarters] platoon of about 3 or 4 men,' " recounted Arthur. " 'Here we stopped and made the prisoners sit on the ground out of observation of the Germans, who were shelling us at the time.' "[72] Lining the prisoners in some low ground with guards all around, Arthur and his fellow mortar men waited for a lull in the artillery fire before continuing with their escort mission.

> 'After sitting on the ground for awhile, all of a sudden the prisoners jumped up, threw their arms in the air and said, "Heil Hitler." I poked one with my bayonet and said "Sit down." He replied "Nein." I stepped around the column and looked down the row to see what the commotion was all about. I saw men dressed in snowcapes [*sic*] talking and yelling to our guards there [both sides were wearing snow capes, some of which had been improvised from white sheets and bedding, making identification of friend and foe difficult]. The impression I had was that it was some Belgium [*sic*] resistance fighters giving us a hard time on what to do with the prisoners, but instead they were trying to make our guards surrender.'[73]

What had happened was that a patrol sent out earlier by the 2/508th had been surprised and captured. A German officer in charge of the ambushers, thinking that Holzheim was still in German hands, proceeded to take his charge back to Holzheim when he suddenly came upon Arthur, his guards, and the column of German prisoners. Speaking perfect English and outfitted in a snow cape that masked his identity the German officer bluffed his way past the American guards, disarmed them, and was in the process of rearming his comrades when First Sergeant Funk arrived on the scene. " 'My first thought,' " recalled Arthur, " 'was, mess with Funk fellow and you're dead, and how true it was.' "[74] Funk had heard the commotion and approached the column with his Thompson submachine gun slung over his shoulder. When he rounded a building and came upon the scene, he found himself face-to-face with the German officer, who stuck his Luger in Funk's belly and demanded that he surrender. " 'I've got to admit that German had "balls" and big ones,' " wrote Arthur, " 'but they weren't big enough when he met Funk.' "[75]

> 'When the German officer stuck that Luger in my belly, the thought flashed through my mind that I had always told the troops that I would never surrender as long as I had a functioning weapon and trigger finger. As I started to take the sub-Thompson [*sic*] off my shoulder, the German relaxed the pistol against my belly and reached out his other hand to take my weapon. At that moment, I went into fast action, whipped that gun around and cut him down before he could react.'[76]

Funk quickly reloaded, yelled at Arthur to go get help, and then proceeded to take out the rest of the armed Germans standing around. Other members of the headquarters section joined Funk and in a few seconds, before Arthur could arrive with reinforcements, Funk and his small band had the situation under control. About twenty-one Germans were killed, many more were wounded and the rest rounded up. None escaped. During the mêlée however, Funk's closest friend, Staff Sergeant Edward W. Wild, the C Company clerk, was killed, possibly by fire from Funk's own gun. The death hit Funk hard.[77]

For his actions, Leonard Funk was awarded the Medal of Honor, making him the most highly decorated 82nd Airborne Division trooper of the war (Funk had already received the Silver Star for actions in Normandy and the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism in Holland). "At a time when courage was commonplace and prevalent, [Funk] had a brand of unique courage beyond that of the rest of the men," recalled John Hardie, one of Funk's company mates. "In trying to understand Funk's enormous capability in combat," he continued, "I have come to convince myself that it was his upbeat attitude to go ahead, his instantaneous capacity to decide to act upon those decisions which readily turned potential defeat into triumph. That German officer who had accosted him in Holzheim felt confident there was no way he could lose when he had his machine pistol in Funk's chest. But he did, and those who were with Funk cannot really explain how it was possible. But that was Leonard's capacity." But it was also within Funk to show compassion. He was not, explained Hardie, "a gigantic ogre of a man with a character of aggressive, insensitive arrogance." Funk was "of short stature and slight build," and a man of "tolerance, patience and consideration for others" who, despite having witnessed the devastation and destructiveness of combat, never gave in to vindictiveness; whose "dramatic intensity did not alter his innate goodness and tolerance once the action

ceased." Exemplary of this was Funk's actions during an unguarded moment following his quick thinking at Holzheim. Another C Company trooper, Sergeant John Entler, went looking for Funk once the firing had died down and "hearing murmurs of German off to one side, approached cautiously to find Leonard comforting a severely wounded German who shortly thereafter died in Funk's arms. As Funk got up and started to move back towards [the] 'C' Company position, he spotted Entler for the first time. As they moved back, Funk let John know that under no circumstances was Entler to let the rest of the company know what he had seen."[78]

The 82nd continued its advance over the next two days, gaining ground slowly against spotty resistance. In the southern part of the division attack zone the 508th remained in the van and advanced another two miles and on 30 January took Lanzerath and the high ground northeast of the town with nary a fight, the only enemy contact of note being with a column of enemy armor and infantry that it dispersed by artillery fire. The next day, the regiment pushed eastward once more to occupy some high ground overlooking the town of Losheim, about a mile due east of Lanzerath, where it attacked and overran an enemy infantry company that had taken up defensive positions in a railroad defile. Few casualties were sustained, more prisoners were taken, and by the end of the day the 508th settled down into defensive positions overlooking the westernmost outposts of the Siegfried Line, where it remained until relieved in early February.[79] In the north, the 325th leapfrogged through the 505th to attack toward a second railroad defile some three to four miles to the northeast. Against practically no resistance, the 325th attacked with two battalions abreast, the 2/325th and 2/401st, and reached its objective by mid-afternoon. It had advanced so quickly that E Company, 2/325th almost captured the command group of the *5th Parachute Regiment*, overrunning the site just fifteen minutes after the commander and his staff had departed.[80] On 31 January, it was the 505th's turn to spearhead the advance so it passed through the 325th en route to its objective, the town of Losheimergraben, a major road and railroad junction about a mile beyond the 325th's positions. Forced to leave its supporting tanks and tank destroyers behind because they could not cross over the railroad defile that the 325th had taken the day before the 505th advanced in a column of battalions with the 1/505th in the lead. All went well until the lead elements reached the outskirts of Losheimergraben, where a force of about 100 Germans supported by several self-propelled guns took the paratroopers under fire. Without hesitation, Lieutenant Colonel Long, the 1/505th commander, deployed his three companies from the march into attack formation and rushed the defenders with three companies abreast. Following a short yet sharp firefight, the town fell. Fifty enemy dead were counted and fifty more were taken prisoner. Friendly casualties were relatively light, except in A Company, which had attacked the town head on. The 2/505th, following behind the 1/505th, passed to the north of Losheimergraben to a road intersection some 4,000 yards to the northeast. It, too, met stiff resistance from infantry and self-propelled guns, but was able to sweep through the German positions with the help of tanks from the 740th Tank Battalion (which had finally found a way over the railroad defile) and dug in. By morning, 1 February, the 505th had consolidated its positions, tied in with the 1st Infantry Division to the north and the 508th to its south, and was occupying the most advanced positions in the 82nd's zone. It was also firmly entrenched inside Germany and squarely abutting the Siegfried Line, a circumstance that inexplicably seemed to have escaped the Germans manning the Siegfried defenses. "The

fact that the presence of the battalion was unknown was confirmed . . . when the sentries on the Siegfried Line never looked in their direction."[81]

The First of February was a day of decision. Due more to the weather and snow than enemy resistance, it had taken the 1st Infantry and 82nd Airborne Divisions four days to advance approximately ten miles. Both were occupying positions overlooking the Siegfried Line but, with the exception of small patrols, neither had breached the vaunted German border defenses. Bradley's "hurry up" offensive had failed to achieve decisive results so on 1 February Eisenhower cancelled Bradley's drive and ordered him to begin shifting troops northward to Simpson's Ninth Army, which was still under the operational control of the 21st Army Group, in preparation for Montgomery's forthcoming VERITABLE-GRENADE offensive. For its part, Bradley's 12th Army Group was to assume an " 'aggressive defense' " everywhere except in the extreme north where it abutted Ninth Army.[82]

Although Eisenhower's order clearly indicated Montgomery's impending drive was to be the Allied main effort, Bradley was not content to just sit back and watch. In his mind, "[s]hort of another major offensive," the Supreme Commander's somewhat vague guidance to Bradley to wage an " 'aggressive defense' " could be interpreted almost any way the 12th Army Group commander desired, and he "chose to view it as an order to 'keep moving' toward the Rhine with a low profile."[83] For XVIII Airborne Corps and the 1st Infantry and 82nd Airborne Divisions, this portended an attack into "the densest concentration of pillboxes in this part of the West Wall."[84] Hence, though limited in intent, the attacks against the Siegfried Line were anything but limited in effect and for the 82nd turned out to be the most costly attacks of the advance.[85]

To carry out the attack, Gavin sought to compensate for the tactical advantages that accrued to the Germans defending from within the fortifications by concentrating his attack on a narrow front, using mass to overcome the power of the defensive. The concept was simple. First, Gavin would mass three of his infantry regiments—the 325th, 504th, and 505th—within a narrow attack corridor. Once this was done, he would unleash all three regiments simultaneously for an attack against a five-mile section of the Siegfried Line. By attacking in the early morning hours when it was hoped the enemy would be least alert, Gavin also sought to gain the element of surprise. If all went well, a weak point would be found and exploited before the Germans could rush up reinforcements.

Although simple in concept, the execution required a great deal of coordination. Attacking with three regiments simultaneously through such a narrow corridor was a tricky proposition, made even trickier given the time constraints under which the division was operating as well as the proximity of the enemy. The first step, of course, was to assemble the attacking units near their jump off points without giving away the plan. This was accomplished on 1 February. While the 505th and 508th manned the division's forward-most positions and conducted both reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance patrols in order to gain as much information about the enemy defenses as possible while also keeping the enemy from learning what was afoot, Gavin had the 325th and 504th move to their respective attack positions, both of which were directly behind the 505th's lines. Once the attacking regiments were assembled, step two was implementing a scheme of maneuver that would keep the regiments from tripping over one another during the attack. To do this Gavin had the three regiments attack in slightly different

directions (the 508th and 32nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, both in the southern part of the 82nd's zone, were to remain on the defensive). The 505th, already up front, would leave its defensive positions and attack in a southeasterly direction. The 504th, coming up behind the 505th, would move through the 505th's defensive positions and attack due east into the Gerolstein Forest. Finally, the 325th would pass slightly north of the 505th's defensive trace and attack in a northeasterly direction to seize the towns of Neuhof and Udenbreth. Jump off time was 0400 hours, 2 February.[86] "I prayed that it would not be as rough as we all knew it would be," wrote Corporal Graves in his journal when he learned of the attack.[87] His prayers were not answered.

Of the three regiments in the attack, the 505th had the easiest time taking its objectives, though not without a fight. Colonel Ekman's plan had been to advance with two battalions abreast—the 1/505th on the right and 3/505th on the left—while the 2/505th followed behind in regimental reserve. Congestion at the line of departure, however, delayed the 3/505th's start time until 1000 hours and brought about an unintended modification to Ekman's march formation: instead of advancing abreast, the two lead battalions advanced in echelon with the 1/505th to the right front and the 3/505th to the left rear. Because the southeasterly orientation of the line of march, although the 3/505th started several hours after the 1/505th it was actually closer to the Siegfried Line defenses and thus made first contact when Captain Isaacs's G Company stumbled upon a nest of pillboxes. When he heard the gunfire Kaiser grabbed his I Company and rushed forward to see what was happening. Isaacs and his troopers were pinned down so Kaiser led I Company on a flanking attack that unhinged the German defenses, thereby freeing up G Company. Together, the two companies then cleared the German defenses and by mid-afternoon could account for six pillboxes destroyed and sixty German prisoners. Meanwhile, the 1/505th's advance was relatively uneventful and by the end of the day the two battalions had advanced some 4,000 yards into the Siegfried Line defensive belt and were dug in.[88]

Attacking in the center of the division zone of advance on a due east heading that took it directly into the "somber, forbidding shadows of Forst Gerolstein," Tucker's 504th encountered much stiffer resistance than did Ekman's 505th.[89] At first, however, all went well. Jumping off at dawn with the 2/504th in the lead and the 1/504th and 3/504th following the regiment made good progress until about 0930 hours when suddenly Captain Herbert H. Norman's E Company, 2/504th, the lead element in the column, began taking heavy small arms and machine gun fire. When he heard the gunfire Lieutenant Colonel Warren rushed forward to assess the situation. It was not good. The bulk of E Company was pinned down in an open field, taking fire from some cleverly camouflaged pillboxes, its left flank fully exposed. Fearing an enveloping attack that could result in E Company being cut off and annihilated, the battle-savvy Warren moved a squad into a blocking position to shore up the exposed flank. His next order of business, to somehow extract E Company from the killing zone in which it was trapped, was more problematic. The standard response was to call in artillery on the enemy positions and withdraw once the rounds impacted but that was not an option. The E Company troopers were too exposed in the open field and the enemy pillboxes were in a wood line only a few score yards to their front. Under these circumstances an errant artillery round would do more harm than good. Instead, Warren called forward all of his bazooka gunners (many of which were actually armed with captured German

panzerfausts), machine gunners, and 60mm mortar crews with the idea that with these assets he could provide enough well-aimed suppressive fire to keep the enemy's head down long enough to get E Company off the deadly field. Time, however, was of the essence as E Company was steadily taking casualties, including Captain Norman, who was fatally wounded. With Norman down, Lieutenant John E. Thompson took command of E Company. Thompson's first act was to request mine detectors, for in addition to being pinned down in the open E Company was also stuck in a minefield. Colonel Tucker, who had by this time also arrived on the scene, denied Thompson's request. There was no time to wait for the mine detectors to come forward and anyway, Tucker continued, the deep snow should cushion most of the mines. (According to the regimental after action review "[m]ines and booby traps were encountered by the thousands, yet [fortunately] only a small percentage of those actually disturbed were detonated" because of corrosion caused by prolonged exposure to the elements.)[90] Meanwhile, Warren had also called forward Lieutenant William J. Sweet, whose F Company had been following behind E Company. Sweet was to bring his troopers forward and find some way to maneuver his company into the German defenses and clear them out. By this time the situation was critical. The Germans had zeroed in artillery on the stalled battalion column strung out behind E Company and it was imperative to find some way out of the impact area. Sweet, in turn, called upon one of his most experienced lieutenants, Stuart McCash. Surveying the situation, McCash came up with a bold plan: he would lead his Second Platoon forward in a rush through the heavily mined open area and into a draw that, he believed, would put him and his troopers under the guns in the pillboxes with "the idea being that a quick rush and surprise would lessen the chances of casualties."[91] Covering Second Platoon's rush would be the bazookas, machine guns, and mortars Warren had called forward. On order, they were to lay down a concentration of suppressive fire, targeting in particular the pillboxes fronting the area over which McCash and his troopers would charge. Timing was critical. Since maneuver room was limited, Warren would first have to cease his suppressive fire before McCash could begin his charge. If timed right, McCash and Second Platoon would be in the draw before the Germans could recover. If the timing was off, McCash and his troopers might very well suffer the same fate as E Company. But there were no other options so when all was ready, Warren gave the order. For twenty minutes machine gun bullets, bazooka rockets, and mortar shells peppered the German positions. It was difficult to measure the effect of the fire, but time and ammunition were running out. So, with the same suddenness with which he initiated the fire Warren ordered it to halt. Immediately McCash and the troopers of Second Platoon, F Company leapt forward and charged across the open field, oblivious to the many mines and through a hail of enemy small arms fire that Wellems thought was "the best he had seen since entering France and the Continent" (obviously, at least some of the German gunners had recovered).[92] But the tactic worked. McCash and most of his men got to the draw and under the enemy guns. Moving carefully for the draw, too, was heavily strewn with mines within a few minutes McCash's troopers had worked their way behind two pillboxes and took them out in an assault that "was S.O.P. out of the Infantry Journal."[93] With that enemy fire slackened considerably and Thompson led what remained of E Company forward into the breach created by McCash's platoon. Anxious to exploit his temporary advantage before the Germans could react, Warren shoved the rest of the battalion forward as well. Fanning out in all

directions, the paratroopers reduced four more pillboxes and the German defenses crumbled; with American paratroopers in their midst the vast majority of the enemy defenders lost their stomach for the fight and surrendered. It was all over by early afternoon; a huge dent had been created in the Siegfried Line. But the 2/504th had suffered grievously. Seven officers and thirty-eight enlisted men were lost, either dead or wounded.[94]

Yet the advance was not over. The battalion objective was still 1,500 yards away so the 2/504th plunged ever deeper into the Gerolstein Forest and by mid-afternoon was atop some high ground just south of its assigned objective when it ran into two German infantry battalions. Based on their direction of march it appeared they were either attempting to get behind the 2/504th or were rushing forward to repair the tear in the Siegfried Line but Lieutenant Martin E. Middleton, the lead platoon leader, reacted first. Middleton halted his troopers, pulled in his flanks, and formed a defensive glacis in the Germans' path. The rest of the battalion fell in on Middleton's left and right to form a defensive line against which the Germans battered themselves for three hours until, finally spent, they withdrew back whence they had come (sometime during this action Lieutenant Middleton, "already wounded so many times he looked like a sieve, was wounded for the 5th time").[95] Warren then picked up and moved his battalion the last couple hundred yards to its objective, a piece of high ground overlooking one of the several small rivers that traversed the Gerolstein Forest. Meanwhile, Tucker hurried forward his other two battalions, swinging the 1/504th slightly south to tie in with the 2/504th's right flank while the 3/504th tied in in the north. By nightfall he had the entire regiment dug in and prepared to defend. It was a good thing he did. Having torn a hole 6,000 yards deep and 2,000 to 3,000 yards wide in Hitler's West Wall, the 504th's positions were farther east than any other in all of First Army. As such, they became the focal point for a series of fierce enemy counterattacks. All throughout the night of 2-3 February the Germans hurled themselves again and again at the defending paratroopers. Each time they were repulsed, even when they were supported by armor, due in no small part by the supporting fire delivered by the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, which fired a total of 2,022 rounds in support.[96] As the night wore on, the German counterattacks became more and more disorganized and uncoordinated, though no less ferocious. At one point an enemy formation of about battalion strength stumbled blindly into the 2/504th's positions totally unaware. Warren's troopers let them get "dangerously close and then opened up with artillery, 81mm and 60mm mortars, small arms and bazookas" and wiped them out.[97] Corporal Graves described the prisoners that were taken as "a shivering, miserable looking lot; there were some Russians among them who had only been in the army four weeks. The men were not even divided into companies, they had no intercommunications; they had just been dumped into the line and told to fight as best they could."[98] Fighting all along the line continued throughout the next day and into the next night. At every turn, except one, the 504th held. The only exception occurred early in the morning of 4 February when the Germans launched an unusually heavy attack against the 1/504th and succeeded in temporarily driving it back, but Lieutenant Colonel Willard E. Harrison rallied his troopers, counterattacked, and restored the original line, thus ending the 504th's last significant action of the Siegfried Line Campaign.[99]

Attacking in the northern portion of the division zone Billingslea's 325th was to take the small towns of Neuhof and Udenbreth and then advance through them to some high ground several hundred yards farther east. It was a particularly difficult assignment for not only would the 325th have to smash through the Siegfried Line defenses, it would also have to clear Neuhof and Udenbreth, both of which lay squarely *within* the Siegfried Line. The key to accomplishing the mission was to mass the regiment against one of the towns, seize and clear it, and then use it as a base of operations from which to attack the other. By this time in the campaign it was also the only viable option. As was the case with all infantry regiments in the division, the 325th was so severely under strength that attacking both towns simultaneously would serve only to dissipate its combat power. Hence, Billingslea chose to attack in a column of battalions: Lieutenant Colonel Gerard's 1/325th would lead and take the smaller town of Neuhof; Lieutenant Colonel Leahy's 2/401st would follow, pass through Neuhof, and then turn north to take Udenbreth; and Lieutenant Colonel Ostberg's 2/325th would remain in regimental reserve for commitment as needed. Accompanying the infantry would be engineers from B Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion who, acting as sappers, would carry out all demolition work needed to reduce the enemy pillboxes. Finally, because it had the most difficult mission the entire 740th Tank Battalion and a company of tank destroyers from the 629th Tank Destroyer Battalion were also attached to the regiment, and to soften the enemy defenses a ten-minute pre-attack artillery barrage was laid on. As with the other two regiments, H-Hour was 0400 hours, 2 February.[100]

Although there was no doubt that the 325th had drawn the toughest assignment, no one was quite sure just how strong the defenses in the Neuhof-Udenbreth sector were. Reports from reconnaissance patrols sent out the night before were conflicting. According to Lieutenant Colonel Gerard, "the patrols returned on the morning of 1 Feb. and reported no enemy in pillboxes in the vicinity of Neuhof."[101] Lieutenant Colonel Leahy felt likewise, although he was less specific about enemy locations: "[o]n the 1st [of] February, the Battalion sent patrols into the Siegfried Line which was reported to be lightly held."[102] According to the regimental after action report, however, Neuhof and Udenbreth were not even in the reconnaissance scheme and therefore the closest any patrols got was "the southern edge of Neuhof."[103] And finally there was Billingslea, who most likely had the best picture of the enemy defenses, although his was still incomplete and wrought with inconsistency

> The result of the information brought back by the patrols indicated that the line was held lightly on the southern edge of the Division sector. Some pill-boxes showed no signs of life whatsoever. Indications were that the line was held strongly to the north where a series of sentries were posted at vantage points between pill-boxes. It was also found that there were not strong field fortifications in front of the line and the pill-boxes did not seem to be connected by a trench system.[104]

In order to redress this lack of definite information about the positions he would be attacking, especially those fronting Neuhof, which was his battalion objective, Gerard opted to send one of his platoons on a probing mission on the afternoon of 1 February. Lieutenant Harry Teras's Third Platoon, C Company, 1/325th got the mission. From the

protective cover of the wood in which the regiment had assembled Neuhof was approximately 1,000 yards away across a treeless meadow that first sloped down for 300 yards and then rose up to the outskirts of the village. At the bottom of the down slope was an intermittent stream and just beyond that were rows of dragon's teeth. Behind the dragon's teeth numerous pillboxes could be discerned all of which appeared to be connected by trenches. Determining whether or not those trenches and pillboxes were manned was the purpose of Teras's probe. Following a short artillery bombardment, Teras and his troopers moved out of the wood and into the meadow. " 'The Germans were there,' " recalled Private First Class Raymon Hook, another C Company trooper who watched the probing attack from inside the wood.

> 'They waited until the patrol was well out in the open. They let loose with such a withering fire that many men were wounded and one killed. . . . There was no cover out there, only a few sparse and dry bushes without leaves. Some men got back to the woods, but others lay in the snow, not moving until darkness fell, and then they crawled back to the woods, if their wounds permitted. The able bodied of the 3rd Platoon went back out after dark to bring in the seriously wounded.'[105]

"Obviously the pillboxes on the [G]erman positions were occupied and Neuhof was strongly defended," remarked Gerard dryly.[106] Raymon Hook was not as blithe. " 'The regimental staff had gotten their answer! The Siegfried Line was indeed manned and fully alert to our presence.' "[107] The probe cost the battalion one killed and four wounded, including Harry Teras, and made it "obvious to all concerned that the next day's operation would be a difficult and hazardous one."[108]

Gerard's plan was to advance in standard attack formation—two companies forward and one in reserve—on either side of a dirt road that ran due east from the wood across the meadow into the southern edge of Neuhof. In the dark, the road would serve as an easily discernable handrail guiding the way to the battalion objective. But to reduce the effect of German fire that Teras's probe proved they could expect the troopers of the two lead companies, A to the left of the road and B to the right, were to advance in dispersed skirmish formation. Backing them up was a company of tanks and the .50-caliber machine guns of F Battery, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion, arrayed at the edge of the wood so that they could provide direct suppressive fire on enemy positions. The battalion mortars were also positioned nearby to lend immediate indirect fire support when needed. Finally, the tank destroyers were placed in an assembly area near the road, ready to rush forward in the event any German tanks made an appearance.[109]

At 0350 hours, right on schedule, the 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion opened fire and for ten minutes dumped hundreds of pounds of high explosives on the German defenses outside Neuhof. Not everyone was heartened by the spectacle. " 'Of course, we alerted every German within twenty miles with a terrific barrage, which was only a waste of ammunition, because none of those shells [the 320th had twelve 105mm howitzers] could penetrate one of those pillboxes,' " recalled Captain James Helmer, commander of A Company, 1/325th.[110] At 0400 hours, the infantry moved out and for about thirty minutes advanced without opposition. Once across the stream and into the dragon's teeth on the upward slope of the meadow they started receiving sporadic small arms and

machine gun fire from positions at the edge of town. Return fire from the supporting tanks and heavy machine guns silenced them. That done, the infantrymen continued on, picking their way through the dragon's teeth, carefully avoiding the mines (according to Gerard "the [G]ermans had neglected to activate much of the AP [anti-personnel] minefield," but it is more likely the mines failed primarily because of corrosion), waiting for any one of the pillboxes in the area, both seen and unseen, to suddenly start spitting bullets.[111] Captain Helmer's A Company, which appears to have been advancing faster than B Company, captured the first pillbox at 0455 hours. Inside were four Germans all of whom were taken prisoner. Fifteen minutes later, all hell broke loose.[112]

"At 0510 the attacking companies were hit by a tremendous volume of small arms, mortar, SP and artillery fire," remembered Colonel Gerard. "White phosphorus shells from enemy weapons illuminated the battle scene. The volume of fire pinned most of the elements of the attacking companies in the dragons [*sic*] teeth and on the open slopes of the hill."[113] Immediately the troopers went to ground. Those lucky enough to survive the opening fusillade continued forward on their bellies toward their assigned objectives (each platoon had been assigned specific pillboxes or trench sections to assault). " 'We crawled and crawled most of the morning,' " recalled Private First Class Clinton Riddle of B Company, 1/325th. " 'Many of our men had been killed or wounded. They were being hit all around me.' "[114] Having had more than enough time to verify their kill zones, clear their fields of fire, and zero their weapons, the Germans delivered devastatingly accurate defensive fire that hit the assault companies from the front and both flanks.[115] " 'The sound of German machine guns seemed to be everywhere,' " thought Private First Class Leonard T. O'Brien. As a member of C Company, 1/325th, he had yet to be committed to the attack and was still inside the wood, out of sight of what was going on in the meadow. " 'Men and tanks kept pouring down the road . . . and still the fighting did not seem to diminish or move farther away. What was happening up ahead?' "[116]

With dawn fast approaching it was imperative that something be done lest the troopers be caught in the open in the full light of day and annihilated. Taking a chance, for surely there were enemy antitank weapons in the area, Gerard ordered a platoon of tanks to advance down the road to provide close-in heavy fire support. Moving forward rapidly while machine gunning the trenches and pillboxes to their front the tanks succeeded in forcing the Germans' heads down long enough for A Company to make a push into the German trench line, taking out two more pillboxes along the way. The A Company troopers also used a bazooka to destroy a large iron gate that was barring the road, and the one large gap through the dragon's teeth, clearing the way for the tanks to continue their advance. However, no sooner had the lead tank moved past the gate when it was hit by three enemy antitank rounds. Seeing this, the rest of the tanks withdrew. "The sight of the tanks pulling back had a definite lowering effect on the infantry morale," recalled Gerard, so he ordered the tank company commander to move forward with the rest of his company and "move up with the infantry regardless of loss."[117] Along with the tanks, Gerard also committed one platoon of infantry from C Company, still in reserve in the wood. With all this added firepower, A and B Companies were finally able to get through the dragon's teeth, the trench line, and the pillboxes and establish a toehold in the southern outskirts of Neuhof.[118]

Although the 1/325th had entered Neuhof, the ground between the town and the wood was still under heavy machine gun, antitank, artillery, and mortar fire. Moreover, 1/325th's flank was exposed and its ranks dangerously depleted. " 'When we moved out of our forest that morning to begin the attack,' " recalled Captain Helmer, " 'Company A had a total of one hundred one officers and men. When we finally regrouped [in Neuhof] we had thirty-three men left.' "[119] Harder hit was B Company, which arrived in Neuhof with but seventeen effectives.[120] To shore up the flank Gerard had the remainder of C Company move forward into Neuhof. Private O'Brien was with this group and recalled entering the meadow and being met with " 'an awesome sight. . . . The road was being covered by at least two Jerry machine guns. The road was strewn with bodies of both Americans and Germans in all manner of dismemberment. Some had been run over by tanks.' "[121] Private First Class Raymon Hook was also among this group.

> 'When we, as the reserve, moved up into the town at least, there was still much fighting. On our way down the same road [General Gavin] and Colonel Billingslea had traversed, I saw many casualties [both Gavin and Billingslea were conspicuously forward in the battle area the entire time]. One was a lieutenant who had been hit directly on the lieutenant's bar on the front of his helmet. A shocking sight, as was the high number of dead along this road.'[122]

Billingslea met C Company and positioned them in some pillboxes so that they could guard the battalion flank with orders to " 'not let the Krauts get back in.' "[123]

With all of the 1/325th in Neuhof, Billingslea's next move was to have Lieutenant Colonel Leahy's 2/401st follow hard on its heels into town and then turn north to attack Udenbreth. He had hoped to be able to accomplish this while it was still dark but it had taken the 1/325th more than two hours to fight its way across the meadow and into town and a breakdown in communications delayed further the commitment of the 2/401st. Leahy's troopers would thus have to traverse the deadly meadow in daylight. Rushing across the meadow with another company of tanks following in its wake "blasting everything and anything they saw," the 2/401st got into Neuhof only to discover that the northern half of town, through which it would have to pass en route to Udenbreth, was still in enemy hands.[124] Leahy committed a portion of his battalion to clearing it, but had to hold back the bulk of his battalion so that he would have something left with which to stage the attack on Udenbreth. According to the 325th's after action review, a "critical moment" had emerged "and it was apparent that the side that could bring up supporting fire would gain the advantage."[125] Were the Germans to react first they could seal off Neuhof and contain the breach in the Siegfried Line. To prevent this, Billingslea called forward his last battalion and all his tanks and tank destroyers. Marching across the exposed meadow, the 2/325th troopers moved through the same heavy flanking fire that those before them had experienced. During this movement the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ostberg, climbed aboard one of the accompanying tanks to better direct its fire. A German round decapitated him. Major Richard M. Gibson, the executive officer, took over and continued pushing the battalion forward to the southwestern edge of Neuhof where it was ordered to wait until the 1/325th and 2/401st cleared the town. The day before the attack Lieutenant Walter G. Frauenheim had taken

command of F Company, 2/325th from the much respected and combat-tested Captain Junior Woodruff, who was rotated back to the States for another assignment. He had just ordered his troopers to take cover alongside a road just outside Neuhof when he saw General Gavin walking down the road toward him.

> 'The general spotted me in the ditch and I rather reluctantly, to say the least, got my posterior out of that ditch and met him. He said, "Son, it's too hot up there for you right now. What's your name?" I told him and as he departed he said, "Good luck, son," in a rather serious tone. Things got better, but at that time things didn't look very promising.'[126]

By about 1030 hours, Neuhof had been cleared and Billingslea was ready to commit Leahy's 2/401st to take Udenbreth. But before he did so he wanted to bring up more tanks and tank destroyers to support the attack. Neuhof had been an exceptionally hard fight. Udenbreth was somewhat larger and he had already taken significant infantry losses. Adding armor to the mix would hopefully make up for the lack of infantry. Additionally, many of the tanks that had been supporting the 1/325th and 2/401st were low on ammunition and fuel and had to go back to the wood for replenishment. All this reshuffling, rearming, and refueling took time; hence it was not until noon that the attack on Udenbreth jumped off. Proceeding parallel to and contiguous with the Siegfried Line defenses, the 2/401st picked its way through the pillboxes and trenches under a steady rain of German artillery and small arms fire. During the attack Private First Class Robert Eschbaugh of E Company, 2/401st, encountered something new: smokestacks coming right out of the ground. " 'We didn't understand this,' " recalled Eschbaugh, so " 'I decided to see what a hand grenade would do. I pulled the pin and dropped it down the pipe. In a little while, a bunch of Germans came out [of their underground bunker] off to the right.' "[127]

Meanwhile, back at Neuhof, things had suddenly turned dire. At 1400 hours, three German tanks, including one Tiger, several self-propelled guns, half-tracks, and about seventy infantrymen supported by mortars hit the southeastern edge of town. Within minutes they had reduced eight American tanks and two tank destroyers to burning hulks and German infantry had penetrated the town and was threatening to overrun the 1/325th's command post. Colonel Billingslea hurriedly organized a counterattack by the 2/325th, which was still in position at the southwestern edge of town and personally led the fight to root out the enemy infantry. He also called forward those tanks that had earlier gone to the rear for replenishment. Corporal Lloyd Crick, a forward observer for the 1/325th, was nearby when Billingslea met with the tank commander. " 'After looking at the Tiger tanks [*sic*], I heard the tank commander say to Colonel Billingslea, "I can shoot at them, but I can't knock them out." All that Colonel Billingslea said was, "Shoot at them." ' "[128] Fire from the tanks, combined with danger-close artillery fire, drove off the German tanks while the 2/325th mopped up the German infantry. By 1530 hours, Neuhof was once again cleared of all Germans.[129]

Thirty minutes later, Leahy reported that Udenbreth was his, except for three pillboxes at the northern edge of town that were firing "on anything and everything that moved." Having already taken some seventy casualties during the course of the day, Leahy opted to seal off the area around the pillboxes and reorganize his battalion to hold the rest of the

town rather than attempt another assault (sometime during the night the German defenders withdrew and left the 2/401st in total control of Udenbreth).[130]

With both Neuhof and Udenbreth in hand, Billingslea pulled the hard-hit 1/325th back into reserve, kept the 2/325th in Neuhof, the 2/401st in Udenbreth, tied in the flanks, registered heavy concentrations of artillery in front of his positions, and cleared his fields of fire. Gavin left Billingslea with but one order: " 'Hold the two towns.' "[131] This Billingslea and his 325th troopers did, using their artillery to break up several other counterattacks later in the afternoon and early evening.[132]

The Battle of Neuhof-Udenbreth had been costly for both sides. German losses, at least those that could be accounted for, were 275 prisoners, forty-four killed, and eight armored vehicles destroyed. The 325th lost fifty dead and 175 wounded while the 740th Tank Battalion and the one company of the 629th Tank Destroyer Battalion that had participated in the fight had both been reduced to about fifty percent strength.[133] According to medic Edwin Lainhart, in some places friendly casualties were " 'so thick you had to go around or walk on them.' "[134]

Sometime on 3 February, Gavin returned to his headquarters in Holzheim and penned some telling thoughts in his diary. It had been nine days since his last entry, the one in which he wrote of feeling pleased about the promise of moving into the attack. Now, with the division's advance to and into the Siegfried Line complete and the battles of Neuhof, Udenbreth, Herresbach, and other numerous skirmishes fought in the trackless Ardennes behind him, he was much less positive about the continued use of the 82nd as a ground combat division.

> About six days ago we jumped off . . . with the mission of punching the Seigfried [*sic*] line near Udenbreath [*sic*] and Neuhof. Yesterday we seized that portion of the line within our sector and it was a very rough deal. Five days of attacking thru country entirely devoid of raods [*sic*] and even in many cases trails. Deep snow hampered all movement throughout and the krauts resisted quite bitterly.

Fortunately, he continued, "after the first day we had him [the enemy] on his ass and it was simply a case of going fast enough to keep him there." This, to Gavin, was the key to battlefield success, moving fast (or at least faster than the enemy) despite the difficulties imposed by terrain and weather, and without regard for tidy lines of attack. "Nowadays one must move fast both to stay alive and to kill. If considerable confusion and chaos results [*sic*] that is to be accepted as a normal component of such an operation." But the mass of Allied combat formations simply did not have what it takes to fight this way, especially conventional American infantry units which were, in his eyes, "untrained and comparatively inefficient" and lacked "courage and élan." Yet even more grating to Gavin was the sluggishness of higher headquarters, a tendency he railed about several times in this entry. "It seems very clear to me that our higher headquarters take entirely too much time to put plans and orders into effect." "If all is orderly and well conducted speed is sacrificed." "To take 24 to 48 hrs to get a division rolling in the attack is r[i]diculous." "We must learn to move more quickly or we will be beaten." This stodginess he laid at the feet of "older officers" who "get ideas that stay with them that they can neither rid themselves of nor do they desire to rid themselves of." The

solution, he felt, "would appear [to be] to get younger officers in some of the higher commands or on the higher staffs." Absent this, however, what it all portended for the 82nd was continued employment wherever speed, shock, and aggressiveness were required, although the costs of employing lightly armed airborne troopers in sustained ground combat haunted him as evidenced by a non sequitur he inserted in the midst of his discourse on the requirements of modern warfare: "Ed Ostberg was hit and killed yesterday. Like most paratroop officers he was hit exposing himself when he should have been using cover."[135]

Gavin made his next diary entry seven days later. By that time things had changed drastically, although not at all to Gavin's liking. "To our dismay and disbelief the penetration into the Seigfried [*sic*] line at Udenbreth was not exploited." Instead, the ground gained by the 1st Infantry and 82nd Airborne Divisions was to be taken over by the U.S. 99th Infantry Division, which was to conduct a holding action. "Thus the build-up is to be abandoned and much of our sweating and losses was in vain. Difficult to explain this sort of thing to the troops." Yet there remained, as Gavin put it, another "[n]asty job and one that could have been done by anyone."[136] However, the importance of the mission and the time constraints under which it had to be accomplished spelled not relief for the division but commitment to another sector of the front, just as Gavin foretold.

The drastic changes were a result of the priority Eisenhower assigned to Operation VERITABLE-GRENADE, Montgomery's grandiose plan to cross the Rhine and fight his way into Germany's industrial heartland ("[i]t is surprising how influential Montgomery is," observed Gavin at the time).[137] As envisioned by Montgomery, VERITABLE and GRENADE were to be complementary drives by the Canadian First and American Ninth Armies respectively. The first drive, VERITABLE, was to propel the Canadian First Army from its positions around Nijmegen (essentially the positions gained as a result of MARKET-GARDEN) in a southeasterly direction along the west bank of the Rhine River. Its scheduled jump-off date was 8 February. Two days later GRENADE was to kick off with an assault by the U.S. Ninth Army across the Roer River and a subsequent drive to the northeast to link up with the Canadians. Then, having cleared the west bank of the Rhine, Montgomery would send his remaining army, the British Second, across the Rhine and on into the Ruhr.[138]

Ironically, although Montgomery had long touted his plan, which could only be carried out by his army group, as the most efficacious way to bring about the collapse of Nazi Germany, its success depended upon the actions of two of his foremost critics: Omar Bradley and Courtney Hodges. To set the stage for VERITABLE-GRENADE, Bradley and Hodges had to accomplish three critical tasks. First, Bradley had to transfer a total of eight divisions from Hodges's First and Patton's Third Armies to Simpson's Ninth Army, thereby ensuring that Simpson's force was robust enough to undertake the missions assigned it in GRENADE. Second, Bradley had to shift the First Army's northern boundary, which abutted the Ninth Army's southern boundary, even farther north so that Simpson could attack on a concentrated front. Finally, and most importantly Hodges was to resume his advance on the Roer River dams—in particular the Urft and Schwammenauel dams—in order to forestall their destruction and the consequent flooding of the Roer River Valley (First Army's previous attack toward the dams had been cut short by the Ardennes Offensive). "Until we seized those dams," wrote Bradley,

"the Germans could flood Simpson's [Ninth Army] sector and stop his advance."[139] This last task Hodges assigned to Major General C. Ralph Huebner's V Corps.[140]

The first two tasks, the reassignment of divisions and the shifting of army boundaries, were in large part accomplished by 5 February.[141] The third task, the taking of the Roer River dams, was halfway complete: on 4 February, the veteran U.S. Ninth Infantry Division took the Urft dam largely intact against little opposition. Hence, what remained was the taking of the Schwammenauel dam, a task Huebner assigned to the relatively green U.S. 78th Infantry Division.[142]

To take the Schwammenauel dam one had first to take the town of Schmidt, Germany, an important crossroads that lay about two miles northeast of the dam atop one of the highest ridgelines west of the Roer.[143] And getting to Schmidt meant traversing the Hürtgen Forest, the scene of four previous unsuccessful and exceedingly bloody Allied ground assaults.[144] Sitting at the northernmost tip of the Ardennes the Hürtgen was, like the larger forest of which it was a part, a high bog (and therefore exceedingly muddy) deeply carved by numerous rivers and streams and heavily forested with thick pines, so much so that "a man might experience for the first time the stifling embrace of the kind of forests he had heard or read about in old German folk tales [and l]ike Hansel and Gretel, he might be inclined to drop things behind him to mark his path."[145]

Jumping off in the early morning hours of 5 February, the 78th made good progress initially but then got bogged down by minefields that prohibited the movement forward of the supporting forces needed to continue the attack. An impatient Huebner, under a great deal of pressure to get the Schwammenauel dam before it could be blown, took control of the battle from the 78th's commander and proceeded to issue a stream of conflicting orders that served only to slow progress further. The next day, with the Germans fronting Schmidt now fully alert, resistance stiffened and little forward progress was made. Hence, on 7 February, Huebner threw in everything he had: all three of the 78th's infantry regiments, reinforced with a battalion of tanks, were to move on Schmidt, take it that day at all costs, and then proceed on to the dam without stopping. But this was more than the 78th could deliver and by nightfall it had but one regiment holding onto tenuous toeholds in the northern and southern outskirts of Schmidt. The bulk of the town and the Schwammenauel dam were still in German hands. The opening of GRENADE was less than sixty hours away.[146]

When the 78th failed to make any progress on the second day the call went out for help. Something somewhere had to be found that could get the attack moving again. It was, as Gavin labeled it, a "nasty job" and on the evening of 6 February it became his nasty job. What followed constituted the last act of the 82nd's stay in the Ardennes. During this time Gavin and his troopers saw very little fighting but what they did see made a lasting impression on them and brought to stark and bloody clarity the very things Gavin wrote about so presciently in his 3 February diary entry.[147]

The events of this last act can be summarized briefly. When Gavin received the call for help the only thing he had readily available was Ekman's 505th, which had been pulled off the front line on 3 February and sent to a rest area near Vielsalm, but it was only at about thirty-three percent strength. The remainder of the division was in the process of being relieved at the front; some units, like those of the 508th Regimental Combat Team, had just arrived in their rest area while others, like the 325th and 504th, were still in transit to the rear. But there was no time to wait for the entire division to

assemble again before moving north. So the 82nd's divisional staff 'audibled,' and issued a series of orders that introduced the division into the new battle area in stages. To get something to the hard-pressed 78th immediately the staff improvised a task force—Task Force A—commanded by the assistant division commander, Colonel Swift, and composed of the 505th Regimental Combat Team and the peripatetic 517th Regimental Combat Team. Forming up on the move, by dusk on 7 February Task Force A had passed to V Corps control and was in position some three to four miles north of Schmidt, where it dug in and, once darkness fell, sent out reconnaissance patrols to probe enemy positions. Then, in accordance with orders from V Corps, the next morning Swift sent the 2/505th forward to relieve a regiment of the 78th so that it, in turn, could participate in the final clearing of Schmidt. That day, 8 February, also saw the opening of the 82nd's command post in the area (absorbing Task Force A) as well as the introduction of another regimental combat team, the 508th, which promptly relieved the 517th so that it could return to France and join its new permanent parent organization, the U.S. 13th Airborne Division, newly arrived on the Continent. By 9 February, the entire 82nd Airborne Division was closed along the new front and on 10 February attacked eastward with two regiments—the 505th and 508th—both of which gained their objectives by morning, a stretch of high ground on the west bank of the Roer River. There the 82nd remained, its positions relatively unchanged, until it was relieved on 18 February by the U.S. 9th Infantry Division and sent back to France. There had been talk of another assault river crossing and Gavin went so far as to have Billingslea's 325th (reinforced with the 2/504th) practice its boat-handling skills in one of the smaller rivers in the area, but this was called off at the last minute.[148]

As it turned out, the alacrity with which the 82nd responded to V Corps's call for help was all for naught. Due in large part to Huebner's constant meddling the 78th did not take the Schwammenauel dam until 10 February, and when it did it was discovered that Allied assumptions about German intentions regarding the dam were incorrect. The Germans had never intended to completely destroy the dam. Instead, by sabotaging the dam's power plant and discharge valves, they unleashed a steady flow of water calculated to create a long-lasting flood in the Roer River valley. In this they succeeded and Operation GRENADE was postponed to 23 February.[149]

No one was more pleased to return to France than Gavin. Not only was he extremely reticent about conducting another assault river crossing, he had also found operating under V Corps frustrating. As he recorded in his diary, "[t]hey take forever to plan and stage a show and then they get nowhere after they start. The analogy of hitching a racehorse [i.e., the 82nd] to a plow [i.e., V Corps] is no fallacy"[150] But it was even worse. Not only was V Corps slow, Gavin had serious reservations about the tactical acumen and leadership abilities of Huebner and his staff. At one juncture, he visited the 78th Infantry Division's headquarters where he found both Huebner and the 78th's commander bent over a map.

> The Corps Commander occasionally drew a short line, a quarter to a half an inch, with a blue grease pencil. It represented an infantry battalion, and he was suggesting to the Division Commander a tactical scheme by moving battalions about. I had the strangest feeling when I realized how

> remote they were from the realities, from what it was like up where the battalions were.[151]

Conversely, as soon as he arrived in the new battle area Gavin conducted a personal reconnaissance of the area through which his troopers were to attack. The axis of advance V Corps had assigned the 82nd was nothing more than a cart path that intersected the steep Kaal River Valley in the heart of the Hürtgen and led on to Schmidt. "I proceeded down the trail on foot," wrote Gavin.

> It was obviously impassable for a jeep; it was a shambles of wrecked vehicles and abandoned tanks. The first tanks that attempted to go down the trail had evidently slid off and thrown their tracks. In some cases the tanks had been pushed off the trail and toppled down the gorge among the trees. Between where the trial begins . . . and the bottom of the canyon, there were four abandoned tank destroyers and five disabled and abandoned tanks. In addition, all along the sides of the trails there were many, many dead bodies, cadavers that had just emerged from the winter snow.[152]

The bodies were all wearing the insignia of the U.S. 28th Infantry Division, a red keystone that signified the unit's Pennsylvanian roots, but as a result of the beating it took in the Hürtgen, soldiers coined another name for the red shoulder patch—the bloody bucket. Gavin continued down the valley, crossed the Kall River by negotiating planks that had been thrown across the arches of a long-since demolished stone bridge, and then started up the other side. The carnage continued.

> Nearby were dozens of litter cases, the bodies long dead. Apparently an aid station had been established near the creek, and in the midst of the fighting it had been abandoned, many of the men dying on their stretchers.[153]

Ascending the opposite wall of the valley, Gavin saw more and more of the same—the debris of war and bodies, both American and German, that marked the ebb and flow of the previous battles in the Hürtgen. At the lip of the opposite valley wall he emerged into a clearing, across which he could see Kommerscheidt, a small village just north of Schmidt. He had seen no signs of the enemy, at least none that were still alive, but he was uneasy. Darkness was approaching and he wanted to get back to friendly lines, which meant having to retrace his path through the Kall River valley, and he did not want to get stuck there in the dark. It was, he remembered, "like something from the lower levels of Dante's *Inferno*."[154]

When Gavin returned from his reconnaissance he called V Corps headquarters and reported what he had seen to the corps Chief of Staff. There was no way, Gavin explained, that an attack over the trail he had just traversed could be sustained. What was needed was an alternate line of advance, one that included either trails or roads over which supplies could be brought forward and casualties evacuated. And there was one available, one that Gavin had discovered during the course of his reconnaissance. The

only thing required was to make some adjustments to the plan. "He [the V Corps Chief of Staff] listened to my story," wrote Gavin after the war, "then laughed and asked, 'Have you tried pack mules?' "[155] Such blithe indifference infuriated Gavin. "There is nothing that angers a combat soldier more than a higher headquarters staff officer belittling the problems of the combat infantryman."[156] Undeterred, Gavin visited V Corps to confront the staff face-to-face and forced them to reconsider their plan. As a result only one of the division's regiments, the 505th, had to advance along the hellish Kall River Valley route. The bulk of the division advanced along alternate routes that Gavin suggested, taking advantage of the trafficable roads he had discovered during his reconnaissance. Maneuvering in this manner, it took the 82nd one day to accomplish a task that had eluded the Allies for six months, the seizure of the west bank of the Roer River.[157]

Writing after the war, Gavin compared the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest to Passchendaele (otherwise known as the Third Battle of Ypres), the World War One battle in which the British Army lost some 240,000 soldiers (approximately 70,000 dead and 170,000 wounded). The similarities between the two are striking. Both were fought in seas of mud, both raged on inconclusively over a period of several months, and both resulted in little tactical or strategic effect (as one historian wrote, the point of Passchendaele "defies explanation," an observation that applies equally to the Hürtgen Forest fight).[158] But to Gavin, the strongest similarity between the two battles was the manner by which they were conceived, that being by château-generals with little conception of what it was they were demanding of their soldiers. In his history *The Great War*, originally published in 1930, the British military historian and commentator B. H. Liddell Hart related the tale of a British staff officer who came to the front after the fighting at Passchendaele had died down to view the reality of what to him had theretofore been known only through reports and lines drawn on maps. Stepping from his car, he took one look at the mud and muttered to himself, " 'My God, did we send men to advance in that?' " He then broke down and had to be led from the scene by his escort. Although perhaps apocryphal, the tale is illustrative of how Gavin felt about the Hürtgen fight. American senior officers, he wrote, "frequently lacked the firsthand knowledge of the conditions under which the troops were being compelled to fight. They had fought the battle on maps. And battles are not won on maps."[159]

Although not privy to the high-level failures that stirred Gavin's ire, the division's troopers did share one impression with their commander. As soon as they arrived in the area they knew they were in the midst of something the likes of which they had never before witnessed. "The towns that the convoy passed through, going north, did not appear badly damaged as a result of the war. Some gave no evidence of even a shot being fired into them—that is, until we reached Hurtgen [*sic*]," wrote the 505th's scribe in the regimental after action review. The town of Hürtgen, and the other towns and villages in the area, he continued, "were absolutely leveled. Through Sicily, Italy, Normandy, and Holland this unit has seen the devastation of war, but never anything to compare with this. Had the houses not had cellars the troops would have found absolutely no cover at all."[160] "When daylight came, it was a discouraging sight," recalled Sergeant Spencer Wurst of F Company, 2/505th.

> Only one house [in a village Wurst passed through] had been left standing, and it was a skeleton. Every other wall in town had been blown down.

> The tallest structures were a foot or a foot and a half high, and even they were few and far between.[161]

Trooper Allen Langdon compared the area to "a scene out of World War I trench warfare."

> This area had been the arena of a gigantic struggle since the fall before and it looked the part. There was hardly a spot that hadn't been churned up by artillery or bombs. The few towns had been absolutely leveled, and stubs of trees here and there were the only evidence that anything had ever lived in this hell-hole. To compound the dismal scene, the snow had mostly melted in this area and it was a vast sea of mud as far as the eye could see.[162]

Sergeant McKenzie of the 456th remembered the Hürtgen as "a huge graveyard of unburied corpses" and the Kall River valley as "something out of mankind's worst nightmare."[163] When the 2/505th passed through the valley en route to Schmidt, "one was able to count more dead lying there than one could count in the battalion."[164] Ridgway, who made his own reconnaissance of the Hürtgen, described it as "a graveyard of war, a no man's land populated by ghosts." So appalling was the scene that one of his subordinate commanders suggested that under no circumstances should a green unit, unfamiliar with the sights and smells of a battlefield be made to operate there.[165] But the Hürtgen was no ordinary battlefield. It was a massacre.

So it was with great relief that Gavin and his troopers boarded trucks and trains for the trip back to their old base camps around Rheims, France, where, in the words of an unknown 504th scribe "[l]ife, molded and compressed to the limitations of a garrison existence, [had] once again, and happily, become GI as well."[166]

Chapter Twenty-Five Notes

[1] McKenzie, *On Time On Target*, 121.

[2] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 117.

[3] See also Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Operation Report, Ardennes, 19 December 1944 to 13 February 1945," 1 March 1945.

[4] Schultz quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 695.

[5] Christansen quoted in ibid.

[6] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 117.

[7] Ibid.

[8] See Langdon, *"Ready,"* 117; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 267; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.; Memorandum, Headquarters, 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, "Narrative Report of Action Against the Enemy, January 1 – 31 1945," n.d., 382-FA(320)-0.3, Box 12437, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[9] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945.

[10] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 267.

[11] Memorandum, Headquarters, 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, "Narrative Report of Action Against the Enemy, January 1 – 31 1945," n.d.

[12] George D. Graves Jr. personal journal, entry for 9 January 1945, The William B. Breuer Collection, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence with veterans of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment," USAMHI.

[13] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 265.

[14] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 117.

[15] Pierce, *Let's Go!*, 267.

[16] Tarbell quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 216.

[17] Proclamation reproduced in Langdon, *"Ready,"* 117.

[18] Graves Journal, entry entitled "Respite at Remouchamps."

[19] Memorandum, Headquarters, 307th Airborne Medical Company, 13 February 1945, "Unit Operations, January 1, 1945 to January 31, 1945," 13 February 1945.

[20] Tedder quoted in Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 622.

[21] Charles B. MacDonald, *The Last Offensive* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973; reprint Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2005), 57 and Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 386.

[22] Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War*, 622-623 and Bryant, *Triumph in the West*, 291.

[23] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 57.

[24] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 57 and Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 390.

[25] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 34.

[26] MacDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, 35. See also pp. 30-34 for a fuller discussion of the Siegfried Line.

[27] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 426 and MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 60.

[28] Ridgway's Official Diary, Report of Division Commander's Conference 26 January 1945.

[29] Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Operation Report, Ardennes, 19 December 1944 to 13 February 1945," 1 March 1945.

[30] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 127-128.

[31] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d. See also MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 63 and Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 429.

[32] Gavin Diary, 24 January 1945.

[33] Ibid., 14 January 1945.

[34] Ridgway's Official Diary, 20 January 1945.

[35] Gavin Diary, 24 January 1945.

[36] See Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 421-422 and MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 43.

[37] Gavin Diary, 18 January 1945.

[38] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 199.

[39] Ibid., 49.

[40] Ibid., 50.

[41] Memorandum, Organization and Training Division, G-3, War Department, "Reorganization of the Airborne Division," 8 November 1944, *The Papers of George C. Marshall: Selected World War II Correspondence*, Reel 31 of 40.

[42] Gavin's battlefield exploits have, to a great extent, overshadowed his powerful intellect. But those who knew him well have often remarked on his intelligence. John Norton, Gavin's wartime G-3, called him "America's outstanding thinker, believer and architect of mobile warfare in our time." Melvin Zais, who eventually rose to four-star rank himself, thought Gavin "brilliant." Always the student of war and warriors, Gavin's papers are filled with references to great thinkers. For example, Gavin's wartime

diary at the U.S. Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, contains a green notebook in which are included quotes from Voltaire, Nietzsche, Suvorov, Ardant du Picq, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Socrates to name a few. After the war, as director of Army research and development he championed the military use of helicopters and satellite communications and predicted well before it happened that rocket technology would allow man to walk on the moon. See Gavin Diary; John Norton, Memorial Service Speech, "A Tribute to General James M. Gavin," 6 March 1990, given to the author by General Norton; Zais, "Glimpses of Gavin"; Boatner, s.v. "Gavin."

[43] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 2.

[44] Gavin Diary, 5 November 1943.

[45] Ibid., 16 August 1944.

[46] Ibid., 15 February 1944.

[47] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d. The 508th Regimental Combat Team (the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment plus the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion; D Company, 307th Airborne Engineers; and B Company, 80th Airborne Antiaircraft Battalion) had been temporarily detached from the division for four days (21 to 24 January) and placed in a relatively quiet part of the 7th Armored Division's defensive lines where it saw very little action. It was then returned to division control and moved with the division to the new assembly areas on 26-27 January. See After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d. and Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 73-75.

[48] Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Operation Report, Ardennes, 19 December 1944 to 13 February 1945," 1 March 1945 and After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[49] Combat Interview with Colonel William Ekman, 22 March 1945.

[50] Tucker, interview, 28 March 1945.

[51] Virgil Carmichael's account of the Battle for Herresbach, The William B. Breuer Collection, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence with veterans of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment," USAMHI.

[52] Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945, 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[53] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 75.

[54] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945.

[55] Virgil Carmichael's account of the Battle for Herresbach. Emphasis in original.

[56] Cook quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 224. See also Tucker, interview, 28 March 1945; Combat Interview "504th Parachute Infantry Regt 82nd A/B Division."

[57] Tucker, interview, 28 March 1945.

[58] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 225.

[59] Virgil Carmichael's account of the Battle for Herresbach.

[60] Ralph R. Larkin to James M. Gavin, 21 January 1980, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "Letters to and from 82nd Vets on airborne operations in Holland, September, 1944," USAMHI. See also Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regimen*t, n.p.; Combat Interview with Captain Henry B. Keep and First Lieutenant James Megellas, 29 March 1945, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45," Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[61] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 227; "History, 504th Parachute Infantry, 30 December, 1944 – 31 January, 1945," n.d., 382-INF(504)-0.3, Box 12453, Record Group 407, NARA II; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division, "Award of Silver Star Medal," 10 March 1945, Box "504th PIR—WWII Personal Papers," Folder "*Personal Papers—Megellas, James (H Co., 3/504th)," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Ft. Bragg, NC.

[62] Zimmerman quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin,* 228.

[63] Schultz quoted in Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 228. See also Sullivan's account in Ibid., 228.

[64] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 229-234; Combat Interview with Captain Henry B. Keep and First Lieutenant James Megellas, 29 March 1945; "History, 504th Parachute Infantry, 30 December, 1944 – 31 January, 1945," n.d.

[65] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945.

[66] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kaiser, 26 March 1945.

[67] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945.

[68] See also Langdon, *"Ready,"* 119 and Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945.

[69] One measure of the terribly cold weather in which the troopers were operating was related by Lieutenant George E. Miles, the E Company commander, who found that both his Tommy Gun and pistol were frozen when he tried to use them against a sniper in Medendorf. He then asked his executive officer, Lieutenant Dave Liebman, for his pistol. " 'He handed it to me then swore as his helmet was knocked off his head. He finally killed the young sniper and proceeded to a barn to rest. I thanked him for the .45 and he replied, "Good you didn't have to use it—there were no bullets in it." ' " See Nordyke, *All American*, 707-708.

[70] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 255. The official historian of this campaign wrote similarly about the value of the villages to the soldiers on both sides. "The state of the weather gave the little Ardennes towns an added dimension as prizes of war. Not only did the towns control the roads needed for tanks and trucks but they also afforded shelter, a chance for the men to thaw out and dry out, to get a night's sleep under cover." See MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 46.

[71] See also Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 77-78; Combat Interview with Major Benjamin F. Delamater III and First Lieutenant Ernest J. Hager, 28 March 1945; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Otho Holmes, 28 March 1945.

[72] Arthur quoted in Lewis Milkovics, ed., *"The Devils Have Landed,"* (Longwood, FL: Creative Printing and Publishing, Inc., 1993), 168.

[73] Arthur quoted in ibid.

[74] Arthur quoted in ibid.

[75] Arthur quoted in ibid., 169.

[76] Funk quoted in Boroughs, *The Devil's Tale*, 276.

[77] See also Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 77-78; Nordyke, *All American*, 706-707; Combat Interview with Major Benjamin F. Delamater III and First Lieutenant Ernest J. Hager, 28 March 1945.

[78] John Hardie, Speech at Leonard Funk Memorial Dedication Ceremony, 19 June 1999, Camp Blanding, Florida, copy in possession of the author. See also citation for Funk's Medal of Honor reproduced in Milkovics, *"The Devils Have Landed,"* 169-170.

[79] See Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 79-81; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Otho Holmes, 28 March 1945; Combat Interview with Major Benjamin F. Delamater III and First Lieutenant Ernest J. Hager, 28 March 1945; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Louis G. Mendez Jr. and First Lieutenant John T. Little, 28 March 1945; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[80] Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945; Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[81] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945. See also Langdon, *"Ready,"* 119; Combat Interview with Colonel William Ekman, 22 March 1945; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[82] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 392; MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 67 and 69-70; Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 428-430; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 581-583.

[83] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 392.

[84] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 68.

[85] See Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 392; MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 67 and 69-70; Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 428-430; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 581-583.

[86] After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.; History, 504th Parachute Infantry, 1 February, 1945 – 11 March 1945, n.d., 382-INF(504)-0.3, Box 12453, Record Group 407, NARA II; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 119; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945.

[87] Graves Journal, 1 February 1945.

[88] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945; Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Lieutenant Colonel James P. Kaiser, 26 March 1945; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 119; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Talton W. Long, Captain Charles Paterson, and Staff Sergeant D. Curtis Raleigh, 26 March 1945;

After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[89] History, 504th Parachute Infantry, 1 February, 1945 – 11 March 1945, n.d.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Combat Interview "Cracking the Siegfried Line," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Edward N. Wellems and Captain Victor W. Campana, 29 March 1945, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[92] Wellems quoted in ibid.

[93] Ibid.

[94] See also Combat Interview "German Breakthrough," interview with Colonel William L. [*sic*] Ekman and Major William J. Harris, 17 February 1945; History, 504th Parachute Infantry, 1 February, 1945 – 11 March 1945, n.d.; Tucker, interview, 28 March 1945; Megellas. *All the Way to Berlin,* 235; Combat Interview with First Lieutenant James E. Dunn, Staff Sergeant Edgar L. Lauritsen, and Staff Sergeant Sam D'Crenzo, 29 March 1945, CI-173 "82nd Airborne Div. Ardennes, 18 Dec 44 – 9 Feb 45, Box 24058, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[95] Graves Journal, 2 February 1945.

[96] Headquarters, 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, "Narrative History—Period 1 February to 28 February 1945," n.d., 382-FA(376)-0.3, Box 12440, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[97] Combat Interview "Cracking the Siegfried Line," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Edward N. Wellems and Captain Victor W. Campana, 29 March 1945.

[98] Graves Journal, 3 February 1945.

[99] See also History, 504th Parachute Infantry, 1 February, 1945 – 11 March 1945, n.d. and After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[100] Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945.

[101] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[102] Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945.

[103] Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945.

[104] Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[105] Hook quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 715.

[106] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[107] Hook quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 715.

[108] Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945. See also Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[109] Nordyke, *All American*, 718; Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945.

[110] Helmer quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 718. See also 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Narrative History 1 February 1945 to 19 February 1945," n.d., 382-ART-0.3, Box 12430, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[111] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[112] See also Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945 and Nordyke, *All American*, 718.

[113] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[114] Riddle quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 718.

[115] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[116] O'Brien quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 718-719.

[117] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[118] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945 and Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945.

[119] Helmer quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 725.

[120] Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945.

[121] O'Brien quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 721.

[122] Hook quoted in ibid., 722.

[123] O'Brien quoted in ibid., 721.

[124] Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945.

[125] Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945.

[126] Frauenheim quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 724. See also Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945; Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 278.

[127] Eschbaugh quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 720. See also Pierce, *Let's Go!*, 276.

[128] Crick quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 722.

[129] See also Combat Interview "325th Glider Infantry Regiment," interview with Colonel George [*sic*] Billingslea, 24 March 1945; Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945; Combat Interview, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Gerard, 26 March 1945; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945.

[130] Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945.

[131] Gavin quoted in Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945.

[132] Combat Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Major and Captain Herbert L. Little, 25 March 1945.

[133] Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "12 Miles Into the Siegfried Line," 8 February 1945; Combat Interview, "3rd Battalion—325th Glider Infantry," interview with Lieutenant Colonel Osmond A. Leahy, 25 March 1945.

[134] Lainhart quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 724.

[135] Gavin Diary, 3 February 1945.

[136] Ibid., 10 February 1945.

[137] Ibid.

[138] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 135 and Montgomery, *Memoirs*, 295.

[139] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 392.

[140] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 69; Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Operation Report, Ardennes, 19 December 1944 to 13 February 1945," 1 March 1945.

[141] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 135-136.

[142] Ibid., 73-75.

[143] Charles B. MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest* (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1963), 39.

[144] From September through mid-November 1944 Hodges's First Army launched three separate one-division attacks through the Hürtgen Forest. Though all were aimed in the general direction of the dams taking them was not, at the time, their primary purpose and all were stopped well short of the dams in any event. A fourth assault, this time by two infantry divisions reinforced with an armored combat command was tried in December 1944. The express aim of this fourth assault was to get to the dams but it was cut short by the German Ardennes offensive. MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 70. For a detailed account of the fighting in the Hürtgen prior to February 1945, see MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest*.

[145] MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest*, 5.

[146] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 75-80 passim.

[147] See After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.; Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry, "History of Operations of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment in the Belgium Campaign, Part III," n.d., 382-INF(505)-0.3, Box 12458, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[148] See Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 431-432; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 119-121; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 81-82; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.; Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry, "History of Operations of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment in the Belgium Campaign, Part III," n.d.; Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "325th Narrative—February 1 – 20, 1945," 6 March 1945, 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[149] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 81-82.

[150] Gavin Diary, 17 February 1945.

[151] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 265-266.

[152] Ibid., 261

[153] Ibid., 261-263.

[154] Ibid., 263.

[155] Ibid., 264.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 265-266 and Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 432.

[158] Keegan, *The First World War*, 368.

[159] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 268. See also Keegan, *The First World War*, 358-369 passim and James L. Stokesbury, *A Short History of World War I* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981), 239-242. In *On To Berlin* Gavin wrote, "[l]ooking back on the winter war, I realize that one battle made an indelible impression on my mind. It was the battle for Schmidt beyond the Huertgen Forest." And, in fact, although the 82nd played a relatively minor role in this fight, Gavin devoted eight pages to discussing and analyzing it. In one of the book's few footnotes, he also made the point that when he visited the Army's Command and General Staff College in the mid-1970s, he saw that the faculty there used the battle for Schmidt as a case study "to drive home [to the students] the need for senior commanders to learn firsthand the battlefield conditions under which their troops might fight." See Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 267-268.

[160] Headquarters, 505th Parachute Infantry, "History of Operations of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment in the Belgium Campaign, Part III," n.d.

[161] Wurst and Wurst, *Descending from the Clouds*, 238-239.

[162] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 120.

[163] McKenzie quoted in Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion*, 243.

[164] Combat Interview "Battle of the Bulge," interview with Major William Carpenter and Captain Charles E. Sammon, 27 March 1945.

[165] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 132.

[166] History, 504th Parachute Infantry, 1 February, 1945 – 11 March 1945, n.d. See also After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

Chapter Twenty-Six
Present At The End

> *During this attack, a tank commander who had joined the Battalion at Duren [*sic*] in March, and who had not worked with the 82nd Airborne Division, called back to Captain Wright on his radio and asked whether the troops he could see out in front of him were enemy or friendly forces. Captain Wright assured him that they were our own paratroopers. The Sergeant was amazed that they were up abreast and even in front of our tanks, spread out in a wide attack. During his experience he had always had to look back to the rear to find the infantrymen. He radioed back to Captain Wright that he sure wished he could have had soldiers like these with him all the time. A few minutes later I heard him call Captain Wright again on the radio and say, 'Believe it or not, Captain, four paratroopers on bicycles just passed my tank and are now spearheading. More power to them.' A few minutes later he radioed, 'Good Lord, here comes a horse and buggy loaded with about eight paratroopers—they are now passing me.' Just a little later he again called and said, 'Captain, this is the damndest thing I ever saw; look over there to the left; there's about twenty men riding horses, they are paratroopers and they are rounding up Jerries.' "*
>
> George K. Rubel[1]

Most of the division's troopers arrived back at Camps Suippes and Sissone by 20-21 February. Much had changed while they were gone. Most notably two general hospitals had taken over the barracks buildings at the two camps, relegating the troopers to pyramidal tents (with the exception of the 504th, which moved to a new camp in the vicinity of nearby Laon). Fortunately, the weather had turned pleasant, making the conditions somewhat tolerable. Moreover, noted Gavin in his diary, since the hospitals came "with their quota of about 190 nurses they [were] rather welcome."[2]

As was the case following all its other combat deployments, once settled the division instituted a liberal leave policy. Most troopers got three-day passes to Paris, Brussels, London, and the Riviera. A lucky few received thirty-day furloughs to the United States. Meanwhile, replacements arrived to fill out the depleted ranks, including former members of the independent 509th and 551st Parachute Infantry Battalions, both of which the War Department had decided to disband because of the heavy losses they had sustained in the Ardennes. Within a few weeks the division was back to full strength.[3]

The first couple of weeks in the rear were relatively uneventful. With many of the veterans on pass or furlough training was light. The bulk of the activity in the camps was devoted to physical training and organized athletics. After about the third week,

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Notes for this chapter are found on pages 744 through 754.

however, the pace of training began to pick up. A parachute school was opened for those who still needed to qualify and glider orientation rides were laid on for the newest members of the gliderborne units. Weapons and tactical airborne training began in earnest, with an emphasis on actions on the drop zones and glider landing zones and the swift assembly of units after the insertion.[4] To this end Gavin instituted a series of battalion-sized parachute drops. During one of these drops, several troopers from the 1/508th were killed when a plane flying toward the rear of the formation lost its propeller and plunged headlong through the jump formation. Still, Gavin persisted in pressing forward with the training and allayed the fears of his troopers by always being the first man out the door.[5]

There was a reason for this emphasis on airborne operations. Upon being withdrawn from the Hürtgen the 82nd (along with the 101st) was provisionally earmarked for several airborne operations still under consideration. One was Operation CHOKER II, a drop to support the U.S. Seventh Army's bid to cross the Rhine at Worms. A second, codenamed Operation ARENA, was a plan for a massive drop 100 miles beyond the Rhine in the vicinity of Paderborn, Germany, with the purpose of establishing "a 'fortress' area from which a decisive offensive could be launched at the east end of the Ruhr, to seize the high ground east of Paderborn in order to deny to the enemy this defensive position, and to provide an airhead toward which the Southern Group of armies [i.e., Bradley's army group] could advance."[6] The third major plan being bandied about the highest levels of the Allied command, and the one that trumped all others, was Operation ECLIPSE, an airborne assault into the very heart of Nazi Germany—Berlin.[7]

ECLIPSE had been on the First Allied Airborne Army's drawing board since well before Operation MARKET-GARDEN (although under the codename TALISMAN), but was reinvigorated on 20 November 1944 when SHAEF assigned it its new codename and a higher planning priority. The plan envisioned dropping two U.S. airborne divisions and a British airborne brigade onto several airfields in and around Berlin "in the event of a sudden collapse of German resistance."[8] Once on the ground the troopers were to race into Berlin, take control of the central government, capture high government officials, seize documents, and take over communications. It was expected that the airborne forces would be on their own for about a week before ground forces made linkup.[9]

Gavin received official word to begin preparing the 82nd for ECLIPSE around 5 March, although he was also receiving conflicting signals about whether or not there was really any chance that the operation would come off at all.[10] On 7 March, during a dinner he hosted for his American airborne generals at his headquarters in Rheims, Eisenhower downplayed the importance of Berlin as a strategic objective. According to Captain Harry Butcher, who was also at the dinner, Eisenhower stated "that the capture of Berlin in itself would not lead to a general collapse of the Nazi regime." Instead, the Supreme Commander continued, he was focused on the Ruhr, the seizure of which he felt "would have more serious repercussions on the Germans' will to resist, because of its far-greater effect on Germany's capacity to continue the war."[11] Reflecting on the dinner conversation in his diary Gavin wrote that he, too, felt that the chances of jumping on Berlin were slim if for no other reasons than time and distance. "Eclipse probably would never come off because the Russians would be there first. . . . How in the world can it be arranged for the Russia[n]s to wait at one street while we load up and jump a week later. Even now they are close to Berlin."[12]

However, five days after the gathering at Rheims, Colonel Eaton assured Gavin that "the whole thing is firm politically and that it would go."[13] In fact, XVIII Airborne Corps's planning for ECLIPSE was so advanced that Ridgway and his staff were already considering such weighty matters as the troopers' decorum once they had successfully taken control of the German capital. " 'It is believed that the reaction of the German mind will be tremendously influenced by the personal appearance of individual soldiers who participate in Operation ECLIPSE,' " wrote Ridgway in a memorandum to First Allied Airborne Army, and therefore, " 'it is the intention of this headquarters to take into ECLIPSE a dress as well as a field uniform.' "[14] Farther up the chain of command Brereton and his First Allied Airborne Army staff also remained enamored of the idea. Operation ECLIPSE "is definitely not abandoned," wrote Brereton in his diary. "Even if the Russians capture Berlin, the plan would be shifted to Munich or whatever city the German government moved to."[15]

In the face of such ambiguity Gavin prepared the division as best he could for ECLIPSE. To this end he held all of the division's training jumps on a nearby abandoned airfield so that the troopers could rehearse the actions that would be required of them were the operation to come off (according to the draft concept for ECLIPSE, the 82nd was to drop two regiments south of Berlin's Tempelhof Airport to defend against German counterattacks while a third regiment dropped directly on the airport itself to secure and prepare it for the insertion of follow on air-landed forces). Although billed as routine training, the specificity with which the training was staged fueled rampant rumors in the ranks; the veterans had seen this type of preparation before and knew something big was at least being considered. And Gavin himself added to the rumor mongering during a speech he made in front of the eintre division by mentioning the possibility of a Berlin drop, albeit while also suggesting several other potential missions for which the 82nd might be employed, including eventual deployment to the Pacific, a comment for which he had no basis of support beyond personal conjecture.[16]

Feelings were mixed about a drop on Berlin. The troopers were following closely the progress (or lack thereof) of the Anglo-American and Russian forces as they closed on the German capital from east and west, hoping on the one hand that the war would end before the 82nd could again be called to action while at the same time harboring a desire to be in at the kill.[17] Gavin reflected this duality. "I'd sure like to live through combat jump number five," he confided to his diary. "I believe that five are as many as one man should be given. Beyond that is too much. We all realize it now. There is a drain on the courage of a man that cannot be replaced."[18] (The idea that men have a limited supply of courage is one that Gavin returned to often in his writings. In this he was influenced by Lord Moran's book *The Anatomy of Courage*, published in early 1945. "Courage is will-power, whereof no man has an unlimited stock; and when in war it is used up, he is finished," wrote Moran. "A man's courage is his capital and he is always spending.")[19] A drop on Berlin would sorely test the courage of many. "It was a sobering prospect, especially for the veterans with four parachute combat jumps," recalled Gavin after the war. "But at the same time it *was* exciting. This was to be the final battle, and to be in at the finish, after the long road from North Africa, was very much to our liking."[20]

But on the very evening that Gavin, Ridgway, Taylor, Butcher, and others were dining with the Supreme Commander there occurred a single event that altered drastically the

final form of the Anglo-American drive in Europe and, in so doing, affected the future employment of the 82nd.

While the U.S. Ninth Army, still attached to Montgomery's 21st Army Group, was waiting for the flooded Roer River to abate so that it could launch Operation GRENADE, Bradley, Hodges, and Patton came up with a plan of their own that, if successful, would destroy all German forces west of the Rhine in the 12th Army Group's sector, advance the U.S. First and Third Armies to the west bank of the river, and position the army group to launch an enveloping attack on the Ruhr from the south. The plan, codenamed Operation LUMBERJACK, was approved by Eisenhower on 20 February and launched on 3 March. Executed "with drill-hall precision," LUMBERJACK so discomfited the German defenders that a small party of American infantrymen and tankers from Combat Command B of the U.S. 9th Armored Division was able to capture virtually intact the 1,069-foot-long Ludendorff railroad bridge over the Rhine at Remagen, Germany.[21] News of this coup passed quickly up the Allied chain of command. Eventually it got to Rheims. Eisenhower, in the midst of dinner with his airborne commanders, was called away from the table to take an urgent call from Bradley. "When he reported that we had a permanent bridge across the Rhine I could scarcely believe my ears," Eisenhower later wrote. "He and I [Bradley] had frequently discussed such a development as a remote possibility but never as a well-founded hope."[22] Immediately, Eisenhower approved Bradley's decision to push four to five divisions across as fast as possible to establish a robust bridgehead.[23]

"Fortuitous events have a way sometimes of altering the most meticulous of plans," wrote Charles MacDonald in the U.S. Army's official history of the campaign.[24] Since before the Normandy landings Montgomery had been steadfastly focused on driving his 21st Army Group to the Ruhr and from there on to Berlin, arguing with a vehemence that at times approached insubordination that all other Allied operations in Europe should be secondary to his drive, that only his British and Canadian forces (with some occasional help from an American army or so) were correctly positioned to achieve these twin objectives, and that were this to be done the war would be brought to a quick end. Although reluctant to give Montgomery the carte blanche he wanted, for the most part Eisenhower had supported the irascible field marshal, going so far as to allow him to retain operational control of Simpson's U.S. Ninth Army for his drive on the Ruhr. But the capture of the Ludendorff Bridge gave cause for Eisenhower to reconsider and adjust his priorities. Although it did not conform to SHAEF's blueprint for the advance into Germany—the Ludendorff Bridge was in the wrong place; it was simply too far south (when faced with this logic by SHAEF's chief planner, an apoplectic Bradley countered, " '[w]hat in the hell do you want us to do, pull back and blow it up?' ")— Eisenhower was not as myopic as his planners.[25] With the taking of the bridge at Remagen, he realized that suddenly Bradley's 12th Army Group was better positioned than was Montgomery's 21st Army Group to finish off the Germans. He also realized that, given the nature of the terrain in front of Bradley's armies, effecting this would necessitate a significant reorientation of the Anglo-American drives with a concomitant reprioritization of the effort among those drives. Based on this calculus, within three weeks of the taking of the Ludendorff Bridge Eisenhower made some unalterable strategic decisions. It would be Bradley, he decided, not Montgomery, who would thenceforward orchestrate the main effort. It would be Bradley, not Montgomery, who

would encircle and reduce the Ruhr (and have Simpson's U.S. Ninth Army returned to him to do so). And it would be the Elbe River, not Berlin, that would define the limit of the Anglo-American advance from the west.[26]

Of course, Eisenhower's strategic decisions made moot many of the airborne plans then being considered. Obviously, the first to go was Operation ECLIPSE. With Berlin no longer the Anglo-American point of aim there was no reason to continue planning for this contingency and Brereton's notion that the operation could be switched to wherever the Nazi leadership fled was likewise nullified when it became clear that Hitler had no intentions of leaving the German capital. Second to go was CHOKER II, the airborne drop in support of Patton's crossing of the Rhine. Not one to be outdone, or outshone, Patton urged his subordinates to get across the Rhine as well, a feat they accomplished on the night of 22-23 March in the vicinity of Oppenheim, Germany.[27] That left ARENA, the massive drop east of the Ruhr in the vicinity of Paderborn. When asked for his thoughts on ARENA, Ridgway proved remarkably prescient. " 'I believe this plan, sound as I think it is in strategic and tactical concepts, will stand or fall upon the hard facts of the ability and willingness of SHAEF to provide the aircraft and air fields in the quantities and for the periods of time which represent minimum essential needs.' "[28] On 15 March, eight days after the seizure of the Ludendorff Bridge and still in the full flush of possibilities that coup presented the Allies, SHAEF set a target date for ARENA of 1 May 1945. However, eleven days later, SHAEF reversed itself and cancelled the operation concluding, as Ridgway predicted it would, that sufficient air power to accomplish ARENA existed " 'but only at extreme expense of other air efforts, particularly as regards strategic air forces in their overall role. . . . The cost of launching the operation is a large one—chiefly in weakening the air support of the main operation, and diversion of strategic bombing.' " Hence, the staff study continued, " '[i]n view of the probably rapid progress of operations, it is considered that there will now be no need for an airborne operation in the [Paderborn] area.' "[29]

The Anglo-Americans did stage one final large-scale airborne operation however. It was Operation VARSITY, a drop by the U.S. 17th Airborne and British 6th Airborne Divisions in support of 21st Army Group's belated crossing of the Rhine in the north. Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps was the controlling airborne headquarters. The mission was to jump east, west, and south of the Diersfordter Wald, an elevated wood some three to five miles beyond the Rhine, deny its use to enemy observers, and capture or destroy the large concentration of German artillery and support elements that intelligence indicated were hidden there. In this VARSITY proved hugely successful, although many questioned if such a large commitment of paratroopers, gliders and gliderborne troopers, and transport planes was worth the tactical benefit gained. But planning for VARSITY had been in train for some time and Eisenhower was chary of denying his volatile subordinate use of the promised airborne forces, especially in light of the fact that he was just about to announce his decision to switch the Allied main effort to Bradley's army group, thereby relegating Montgomery's army group to a supporting role.[30]

The VARSITY drop occurred on 24 March 1945. Watching some of the troop transports flying over their base camps around Rheims, many an 82nd trooper felt a sense of relief after having developed an acute case of " 'Airborne Nerves.' "[31] Captain Pierce of the 325th recalled thinking "[m]aybe the war would end without the need for the

325/82 Airborne again."[32] Private First Class Lane Lewis of G Company, 3/508th felt likewise. " 'We were only too happy not to be going along. The war against Germany was coming to a close.' "[33] Others, however, were anxious to get back into the fight. In a letter to his sister, Lieutenant Megellas wrote, " '[t]hings are awful quiet and unexciting here. When coming back from the front, a warm, dry place to sleep and eating warm food again seems heavenly but after a month or so I find myself becoming restless.' "[34] Sergeant McKenzie of the 456th recalled having similar feelings. "All the rumors and doing nothing had sapped our energy, and we looked forward to doing something useful again."[35]

But all was not static during this time of waiting and wondering, for while in its base camps the division underwent significant organizational changes that, in accordance with orders from the War Department, were to take effect on 1 March 1945. Thenceforward, each U.S. airborne division would be composed of two parachute regiments and one glider regiment, each of which, in turn, would have three battalions. This change, of course, had no impact on the parachute regiments, which already had three battalions. But for the 325th this meant that the 2/401st Glider Infantry Battalion would cease being an attachment and became instead an integral part of the regiment; it was therefore re-designated the 3/325th, while its three line companies became I, K, and L Companies and its heavy weapons company, M Company. This change also necessitated, however, that the 82nd pare down to two parachute regiments and brought about the eventual release of the 508th from its semi-permanent attachment to the division. Gavin was not pleased with this decision and was apparently able to forestall releasing the 508th for about a month before he was finally forced to comply with the War Department directive. Protesting the move in a letter to Ridgway, he wrote "[b]ased on our experiences in Normandy and, especially, in Holland, I strongly feel that there is a real necessity to have available three regiments as the initial balanced striking force for an airborne division. In both those battles, especially in Holland, the late arrival of the glider forces was rather costly." Furthermore, noted Gavin, a "strong personal friendship [had] grown between us and the troops of that fine regiment, [and] we are anxious for it to return to the fold."[36] Yet, as Ridgway pointed out, it was difficult to take issue with the 508th's detachment given the new mission for which the regiment had been earmarked, Operation JUBILANT, an on-call contingency operation to liberate Allied prisoner-of-war camps in the event the Nazis decided to start murdering everyone in their clutches in one last act of malevolent defiance. "With respect to the 508th," counseled Ridgway, "its contemplated employment leaves little basis on which to lodge an objection. The rescuing and safeguarding of our prisoners in German hands well merits our utmost efforts."[37]

Thus it was that the 82nd and 508th parted ways. On 4 April, after being left behind when the 82nd moved out of its camps for another combat mission, the 508th moved to airfields in the vicinity of Chartres, France, where it was put on forty-eight-hour alert for Operation JUBILANT. Fortunately, JUBILANT had never to be carried out and thus the 508th saw no further action in the war. Instead, the regiment remained at Chartres until late May 1945, when it returned to Camp Sissonne for a brief time before moving on to Frankfurt, Germany, for occupation duty, with its primary mission being the provision of security and an honor guard for Eisenhower's post-war headquarters, also located in Frankfurt. Finally, after approximately eighteen months of occupation duty the 508th returned to the United States where, on 24 November 1946, it was inactivated.[38]

When the 82nd left the 508th behind at the beginning of April it was to undertake a mission that came about as a direct result of Eisenhower's change in strategy. In accordance with the Supreme Commander's new directive, the U.S. Ninth and First Armies were on the cusp of surrounding *Generalfeldmarschall* Walter Model's *Army Group B*, its three subordinate armies (*Fifth Panzer*, *First Parachute*, and *Fifteenth Army*), and over 300,000 German soldiers in the Ruhr. Once the First and Ninth Armies linked up (which they did at Lippstadt, Germany, east of the Ruhr, on 1 April), Bradley was to assume control of both, turn them inward, and complete the destruction of Model's force in the Ruhr Pocket by attacking from the north, south, and east. Squeezing the Germans like this, however, would force them back up against the Rhine, which bounded the Ruhr in the west. What was needed, therefore, was a force to hold the surrounded Germans in place and keep them from escaping back across the Rhine. This task fell to Major General Leonard T. Gerow's relatively new U.S. Fifteenth Army, which moved up to the river in March. So when Gavin received word to report to XVIII Airborne Headquarters on 30 March it was to be told that effective 1400 hours the next day the 82nd would be attached to the Fifteenth Army and one of its subordinate corps, the U.S. XXII Corps under Major General Ernest N. Harmon, and that its mission would be to defend a portion of a thirty-five-mile stretch of the Fifteenth Army's sector along the Rhine centered on the city of Cologne, Germany.[39]

Ever since the division moved to the rear rumors about what the future held had run rampant in the base camps but they came to a crescendo following the VARSITY drop. Many of these "[l]atrine communiqués," as a 504th report labeled them, held that the 82nd was going home.[40] Others posited with great certitude that the division would again be committed to combat, although "no one knew where."[41] One especially persistent rumor combined elements of both: the division was to be redeployed to the States and the troopers sent home on lengthy furloughs after which they would regroup for intensive training prior to their being dropped on Japan.[42] "They are straining at the leash," observed Captain Butcher when he had dinner with the airborne commanders at Eisenhower's headquarters, "never knowing from day to day what their next show will be."[43] It was thus with both relief and resignation that the troopers received word that they were to pack up and move out—relief that they would not have to mount another airborne operation, resignation that they were once again being committed to action. Even Tucker's hyper-aggressive troopers were somewhat muted when word reached them that they would again be moving forward. According to the official regimental history, "[t]he end of the war seemed near and according to General Gavin in his talk to the 504th, 'We want to be in on the finish.' How enthusiastically the fighting men endorsed this sentiment could not readily be determined."[44]

But Gavin was more than ready to leave Camp Sissonne and get back into the fray. "Six weeks out of the line is plenty although I appreciated the opportunity to absorb and train the reinforcements."[45] Hence, as soon as he had issued movement orders to his subordinate commanders he left for the front. His first stop was Fifteenth Army headquarters where he met for the first time with Gerow. "He told me that he wanted us to be aggressive," recalled Gavin, "to seek contacts with the Germans across the river, and to identify the formations opposing us. I assured him that we would."[46] Gavin and the small group of divisional staff officers that accompanied him then moved forward to meet with the commander and staff of the U.S. 86th Infantry Division, whose sector the

82nd was to take over (once relieved, the 86th reverted to First Army control for the attack on the Ruhr Pocket), to coordinate the relief in place and conduct a reconnaissance of the new battle area.[47]

Moving out by train and truck convoy beginning 2 April, the 82nd relieved the 86th Infantry Division in stages, finally taking sole possession of its assigned area along the Rhine by the morning of 4 April. Given the width of the frontage for which the division was responsible, Gavin arrayed all three of his infantry regiments along the river: the 504th in the north, the 325th (less the 3/325th, which was held in reserve) in the center, and the 505th in the south. And immediately after taking control of the sector Gavin began making good on his promise to General Gerow by inaugurating a steady rain of artillery fire on anything even remotely suspected of being a military target. On the day the 82nd took full control of the sector the division's artillerymen pumped 478 rounds of high explosive across the Rhine. The next day they more than quadrupled this total, firing a total of 2,215 rounds in 104 separate fire missions.[48] They kept up this pace for ten days at the end of which the division's four organic artillery battalions, reinforced by several attached artillery formations, fired 729 missions and delivered over 13,000 rounds of ordnance onto known and suspected enemy positions.[49]

The artillery attacks, while aggressive, did not fulfill Gerow's requirement that the 82nd make contact with and identify the enemy formations on the other side of the Rhine. That could only be done by sending reconnaissance patrols across the river and to that end General Harmon ordered that units in his XXII Corps were to conduct " 'not less than one patrol per front line battalion per night.' " Gavin, however, upped the ante and directed that " '[w]ithin the discretion of the Regimental Commander, up to one rifle company may be left on the far bank of the RHINE RIVER to screen, observe, and report on enemy activity.' "[50]

The 82nd sent its first patrols out on the night of 4-5 April—two from the 325th and four from the 504th—all of which were ferried across the river in a variety of different boats scrounged and crewed by engineers from the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion. ("[n]o boats were available in the division or corps area, and it was necessary to go far afield to get any, regardless of type," recorded the 307th's after action report).[51] Several of the patrols made contact and at least one trooper was killed and three wounded. Enemy killed and wounded were unknown and only one prisoner was brought back. It was an inauspicious start and one that the ever aggressive Tucker sought to rectify.[52]

Tucker reasoned that small reconnaissance patrols, usually no more than ten to twelve men strong, were simply too lightly armed to deal with what they could encounter, especially given that once they were on the far bank they had a major river to their back and might possibly face annihilation if pressed too strongly. Tucker, therefore, sought to take full advantage of the freedom granted him by Gavin's patrolling order. He would send an entire company across the Rhine to seize and hold a defensible foothold that he would then use as a base of operations from which to conduct far ranging patrols in the enemy's rear. Furthermore, it was reasoned that the size of the force would fool the German's into thinking that the Americans were attempting another Rhine crossing and thereby cause them to commit "disproportionate forces" in order to repel it.[53] Of course, any forces the enemy committed against Tucker's troopers would, in turn, be unavailable for commitment elsewhere in the ever-shrinking Ruhr Pocket, thus easing Bradley's task of reducing the pocket. And finally, given the massive artillery contingent to which the

division had recourse it was a shared belief that Tucker's troopers could hold off just about anything the enemy could throw at them.[54]

The mission fell to Captain John N. Pease's A Company, 1/504th. The objective was Hitdorf, a small village nestled along the eastern bank of the Rhine just north of Cologne. Pushing off from the west bank at approximately 0230 hours, 6 April, Pease led the first wave A Company troopers (Second Platoon) across the river in an uneventful crossing. But all that changed as soon as they made landfall on the east bank. Small arms and automatic weapons fire raked their ranks and, to make matters worse, the troopers found themselves in the midst of a minefield. Control was impossible under such intense fire but somehow the troopers coalesced into two groups, each of which made its way independently to the platoon objective, knocking out several enemy machine gun nests along the way. Meanwhile, successive waves of A Company troopers made the trip over the river, encountered the same withering enemy fire but fought through it and, like the Second Platoon, infiltrated into Hitdorf. By 0830 hours Hitdorf was in American hands, as were sixty-eight prisoners. Although he had suffered several killed and six to eight wounded Pease still had the bulk of his company intact, which he deployed in three platoon strongpoints around the outskirts of the village. Despite the initial heavy resistance, the situation appeared to be well in hand.[55]

But the peace was short lived. At 0845 hours, the Germans counterattacked from the north in company strength, drove in the A Company outposts and got to within 150 yards of the American main line of defense before Pease's paratroopers opened up with a fusillade of small arms and machine gun fire. The attack was stopped cold. An additional thirty-three prisoners were taken "while the remainder of the attacking force was believed to be either killed or wounded, as none were observed to leave the area."[56] Laden with so many prisoners, Pease instructed his executive officer, Lieutenant Reneau Breard, to get them to the crossing site so that they could be ferried back across the river and interrogated. As Breard recalled, " '[a]bout noon we put the prisoners in the boats and sent them back across. And then, we didn't have any boats to get back. If we had any wounded, we couldn't send them back.' "[57] It was also about this time that the Germans started pounding Hitdorf with artillery, which cut all wire communications both from the company command post to each of the defending platoons and from the company to the battalion command post across the river. The 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, firing in direct support of A Company, responded in kind, but its effectiveness was significantly curtailed when the Germans took out the A Company artillery observation post located in a church steeple with some nearby 88s.[58]

The enemy barrage continued for some two hours. Despite its intensity A Company took few casualties and hung on. Then, at about 1530 hours, the Germans laid a smoke screen at the southeastern edge of Hitdorf, behind which they mounted a second company-sized counterattack, only this time supported by two tanks. Lieutenant Rex E. Hazen, a forward observer from the 376th attached to A Company, called in artillery on the approaching enemy force and momentarily stopped it in its tracks. But the Germans regrouped and hit the town again, this time from the south and east, the sector being held by Pease's Third Platoon. The Third Platoon leader, a Lieutenant Hallock, sent a runner back to the company command post requesting more *panzerfausts*. Thereafter neither Hallock nor his platoon were heard form again; the Germans overran their positions and broke into the village. Meanwhile, another enemy force numbering approximately 200

infantry hit the northern edge of town in Second Platoon's sector. Outgunned and outnumbered, Pease ordered a fighting withdrawal to the beach where what remained of A Company formed a horseshoe perimeter with the open end facing the water. During the withdrawal Lieutenant James A. Kiernan, the Second Platoon leader, took it upon himself to fight a one-man covering force battle with the onrushing Germans before he was badly wounded by a grenade. He was " 'just perforated all over his body,' " recalled Lieutenant Breard, who helped the wounded Kiernan eventually get back to the west bank.[59] For his actions, Kiernan was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.[60]

Back at the river Pease received a radio message from Colonel Tucker. Hold on, said Tucker, I Company, 3/504th is coming across to aid you. But before I Company could get there Pease and his troopers had to stave off several attempts to annihilate them. At one juncture, a German tank got so close to the A Company perimeter that the troopers used Gammon grenades to knock it out. Finally, at about 0130 hours, 7 April, Captain Burriss shoved off from the west bank with two of his platoons in nine metal boats. About halfway across four German spotlights flashed on and illuminated the small flotilla, making them perfect targets for the small arms and machine guns firing at them from the east bank. Eight of the nine boats made it through the fire to the far bank; the ninth, the one containing Burriss, capsized and the occupants swam back to the near shore. Landing at a point just south of Hitdorf, the I Company troopers reorganized under the command of Lieutenant Bernard Karnap and turned north to counterattack the Germans surrounding A Company. Within an hour they had linked up with Pease and his besieged troopers and set up a hasty defense so that A Company's wounded and the remaining prisoners could be brought back to safety. By 0230 hours, A Company and the prisoners had been safely evacuated to the west bank and I Company followed shortly thereafter.[61]

Hitdorf had been a costly affair for both sides. Losses in A Company totaled nine killed, twenty-four wounded, and seventy-four missing while I Company suffered another four wounded. On the opposite side of the ledger, anywhere from eighty to eighty-five German prisoners were taken, while it was estimated that upwards to 350 Germans were killed or wounded.[62] Although it appears as a tally favoring the Americans the 504th's official after action review was blunt in its assessment of the mission.

> In reality, the number of KIAs is greatly in excess of the figure 9. However, darkness and the inherent confussion [*sic*] of 24 hours of continuous fighting, precluded the possibility of ascertaining the death of every man who fell. In view of the excessively high casualties, it is difficult to say that the mission was a success. From the view point of those GIs involved, the operation was a miniature 'Dunkirk' with at most, a hollow satisfaction achieved. Fighting men don't believe in moral victorys [*sic*]. Whether or not 'A' Company served its purpose in diverting enemy troops from a more important sector is impossibel [*sic*] to say. In any case, 'A' was hit and hit hard by at least a battalion of troops, plus a platoon of tanks supported by a battalion or more of artillery.[63]

General Harmon was also displeased with what took place at Hitdorf. According to Gavin, sometime while A Company was still on the east bank of the river the two

generals "had quite a fight" on the phone about what Tucker was trying to accomplish with the Hitdorf mission. Gavin explained the intent in tactical terms, telling his corps commander that sending small patrols across the river every night was just as dangerous. "The krauts wait until the boat is just about ready to touch down on the far shore and then they blast it out of the water," he told Harmon. "No future in that."[64] Harmon was having none of it. He demanded that Gavin withdraw Tucker's forces immediately (it is unclear whether it was at Harmon's prompting or because of the situation on the ground that the decision was made to withdraw from Hitdorf, but in either case Harmon's demand was met).

Gavin brooded about Harmon's upbraiding for several days. He had been anxious to get back into the fray and was galled by the strictures Harmon placed on his freedom of maneuver, strictures that did conform to what the Fifteenth Army commander had directed. Moreover, it was obvious that the war against Nazi Germany was fast coming to an end and if the 82nd remained in place along the Rhine it would eventually be pinched out of the action all together. Gavin did everything he could to avoid this. He pleaded with his old boss Ridgway, whose XVIII Airborne Corps was in the thick of the fight along the southern edge of the Ruhr Pocket, to get the division transferred back into the corps but to no avail. "I have asked and shall continue to ask on every appropriate occasion for your reassignment," replied Ridgway to one of Gavin's requests. "I was informed that the decision, however, was made by the Supreme Commander himself, so that until I can see General Bradley in person there is little I can do."[65] When he did get to Bradley, however, Ridgway received the same reply. "I made every possible effort to get you, being supported by General Hodges in full," wrote Ridgway a few days later. "I think General Bradley, too, was entirely sympathetic, but the decision came from still higher up."[66] Seemingly relegated to a static role for the remainder of the war in Europe, Gavin turned his attention to the war against Japan. "I want to get to the Pacific," wrote Gavin in his diary. "As this thing approaches a wind-up I realize that I will have a frightful time adapting myself to the years of peace and ways of peace. Fighting and excitement have become my daily sustenance, I miss tham [*sic*] after awhile."[67]

Ironically, and unbeknownst to Gavin when he had his row with Harmon, it was the very possibility of the 82nd being deployed to the Pacific that caused Harmon to react as he did when he was informed of the mission against Hitdorf. According to Harmon he had been told by Bradley that the "airborne divisions were destined for transfer fairly soon to the Pacific theater. Consequently he ordered us to limit our forays across the Rhine to forces of platoon size and smaller; this would ensure that our casualty figures were kept low."[68] However, it was not until ten days after the fight at Hitdorf that Harmon revealed this to Gavin. "Gen[eral] Harmon told me yesterday [16 April] that he had it from a very high level that we are on a high priority for shipment to the Pacific," recorded Gavin in his diary.

> I have also had it from another source that we are on a very high priority for shipment to the states. So far everything fits into the picture. We are being held back for ready preparation and shipment to the states and then to be refitted and shipped to the Pacific.[69]

But this, too, was not to be. A week later, while visiting XVIII Airborne Corps headquarters to receive the orders for what would turn out to be the 82nd's last wartime assignment, Ridgway told Gavin "there is little chance of us going to the Pacific after this winds up. This was a shock. We have our hearts set on it."[70]

Following Hitdorf and Harmon's insistence that Gavin desist from undertaking anything like it again the frequency with which the 82nd sent patrols across the Rhine was markedly curtailed. During the period 8 to 15 April—the latter date being when the 82nd linked up with the U.S. 97th Infantry Division on the east bank of the Rhine as it moved across the 82nd's front from the south—the division launched no more than four patrols per night, all of which were of platoon-size or less, and all of which went over and back in the same night. As Gavin warned, several of the patrols were shot up in mid-river, sustained casualties, and as a consequence accomplished very little (in his correspondence with Ridgway, Gavin stated that he was purposefully limiting the number of patrols because of this reason). It appears, however, that the greatest danger came from a series of relatively dense, unmarked minefields that had been emplaced on the far bank by the 86th Infantry Division (the unit the 82nd had relieved). Gavin did keep up the artillery offensive with the targeting done by aerial observers, but this, too, faded in intensity as friendly units got closer to the division's front.[71]

Beyond the occasional patrol life was quite tolerable for the troopers, the stay along the Rhine was seen by many, especially the veterans, as "more of a rest cure than a battle."[72] Most of the troopers lived in buildings, many of them private homes from which they evicted their former occupants. As the 325th's after action report recorded, "[f]or the first time, . . . veteran glidermen tasted some of the sweetness of war. The so-called living in the field was more comfortable than the tent camp left behind in France."[73] When not on duty, troopers attended band concerts and movies set up in the rear. Others spent their time scrounging and as a result there was no shortage of food and liquor. The division was also well supplied with sweets when one 325th company took over a candy factory and set itself up as the no-cost distributor of the factory's inventory. About the only thing missing was female companionship. Eisenhower had promulgated a very strict non-fraternization order that caused a good deal of grumbling in the ranks. "Higher headquarters was adamant on the point of no association between the troops and the Germans," recalled Gavin, but "[a]fter the long trek all the way from North Africa, some of the frauleins looked quite attractive."[74] And although Gavin dutifully passed on Eisenhower's order, he did not expend a lot of energy enforcing it. The great fear was that the troopers would be "politically contaminated," but as Gavin later explained to General Patton, "[t]he GIs reasoned that as long as they kept on their airborne caps and their jump boots, as tokens of their patriotism, they should be allowed to do anything, or almost anything." (To this Patton replied, " 'Gavin, you're as nutty as a fruitcake.' ")[75]

With his aggressive patrolling effort stymied, Gavin turned the division's attention to its secondary missions. One of these was to keep the German forces bottled up in the Ruhr Pocket from attempting a break out to the west but, as Captain Pierce of the 325th observed, that was "a quite unlikely possibility."[76] Another mission was to assist the various military government detachments in the area with searches and seizures; the apprehension of *Wehrmacht* deserters, Nazi officials, and other designated war criminals; the collection of weapons, ammunition, and other implements of war; and the enforcement of laws and ordinances and the general supervision of the German civil

administrators. Beginning 15 April, after contact had been made with friendly forces to the east of the Rhine this became the 82nd's full-time task. Regiments were pulled off the river and assigned areas that they were to administer. Ultimately, the 82nd became responsible for 650 square miles of occupied Germany and apprehended 653 deserters, Nazis, and war criminals. By far, however, the most difficult non-combat task the 82nd undertook during its stay along the Rhine was supervising displaced persons camps that, at any one time, contained over 25,000 souls. There were three such camps in the 82nd's area, one for westerners, one for Russians, and one for Poles. "The displaced persons, slaves really, are quite a problem," wrote Gavin at the time. "Especially the russians [*sic*] who love nothing more than to beat up or rape a german [*sic*]. Next to burning his home to the ground or robbing and looting they like this best."[77] For the most part the task of supervising the camps fell to the 3/325th, the division reserve, although it was augmented by individuals from other units. One such augmentee was Sergeant McKenzie of the 456th, who seconded Gavin's observations about the Russians. "They believed . . . that they had earned a right to raid German cities, steal whatever they could, and rape the women," he recalled. "They hated the Germans with a passion."[78] And it was the Russian camp, the largest of the three with over 10,000 persons, which caused the most problems. Although highly organized under the overall command of a Red Army major, the internees had a difficult time coming to grips with the hard reality that they were not going to be released to rape, plunder, and wreak revenge on the German civilian population. At one juncture, things got so heated that Gavin had to personally intercede. Called to the scene in the dead of night, he drove his jeep into the middle of the Russian compound, climbed atop the hood, and harangued the angry crowd for about an hour, "trying to explain . . . why we were doing what we were doing, and why it was in the common good to bring the war to an end quickly with no rioting and confusion in the rear areas."[79] Eventually tempers cooled and the riot averted. According to Sergeant McKenzie, guarding the Russian camp placed the troopers in a near intolerable quandary. "We did not want to waste time guarding our allies," he recalled, but on the other hand there was no way he and his fellow guards were going to allow the Russians loose in their rear areas and none of them "liked the idea of shooting allies."[80] "It was a job," recalled Lieutenant Megellas, "to which [even] combat-hardened paratroopers were unaccustomed."[81]

Meanwhile, the troopers watched anxiously as the pace of events on the Continent quickened. By 18 April, organized resistance inside the Ruhr Pocket had come to an end. Model's *Army Group B* had been completely destroyed. It was a resounding victory for the Allies, especially for the Americans of Bradley's 12th Army Group. Between them, the First and Ninth Armies killed countless thousands of the enemy and took some 317,000 prisoners. This was more than the Russians had taken at Stalingrad and more than the combined total of German and Italian prisoners the Allies had taken in the final phase of the battle of North Africa. And on the Eastern Front elements of three Red Army fronts were converging on Berlin; by the next day they would have the German capital within artillery range and begin the final bombardment.[82]

Watching from the sidelines made Gavin uneasy. "We continue in our present occupational role and in SHAEF reserve," he confided to his dairy. "We all feel a terrible let down."[83] What truly concerned him, however, was what he saw happening as the Army began preparing for the occupation of Germany. Units that had been trained for

combat were being broken up and transitioned wholesale into contingents of prison guards and policemen, in the process losing all sense of their former selves. He saw it happening all around him. The 417th Field Artillery Group, which had supported the 82nd during its watch on the Rhine, provided one particularly poignant example.

> My 417th FA group just off the boats has been given a definite occupational assignment. Their guns are to be put in cosmoline for long storage and they are to start guard duties of the occupied areas. It kills them.[84]

For a man who had literally conceived of the very idea of an American airborne division—who had gone to Washington in the early days of the war to argue with the personnel managers at the War Department and Army Ground Forces that such a thing was not only possible but necessary; and who had then risen to command the one airborne division that had more combat time than all the others combined; a division that had been in the thick of the fighting in Sicily, Italy, and across the Continent; a division that had four combat jump stars to its credit—the very thought of breaking up the 82nd to perform police and guard duties was anathema. Yet events portended a quick end to the war in Europe and, as General J.C.H. Lee told Gavin during a visit to the division (Lee, SHAEF's Communications Zone commander, most likely stopped by to see his son who was a highly regarded engineer officer in the 82nd), in any case "he did not think that the fighting up there was now worthy of the 82nd."[85] But unbeknownst to Gavin there were already in train measures that would require the 82nd to make one last dramatic advance, an advance that would bring about a fitting denouement to the division's wartime adventure.

The genesis of this last wartime assignment flowed from Eisenhower's new strategic directive, taken in the wake of the capture of the Ludendorff Bridge, which placed Bradley in the van of the Anglo-American advance. Bradley had taken the bit and run with it and displayed audacity that had been absent from his plans since Patton's daring advance following the breakout from the Normandy beachhead. Even before he had completed the destruction of Model's army group in the Ruhr Pocket, Bradley launched elements of the Ninth, First, and Third Armies headlong toward the Elbe and Mulde Rivers, the tentative demarcation line between the converging Anglo-American and Soviet armies. On 11 April, the Ninth Army reached the Elbe at Magdeburg. Nine days later both the First and Third Armies followed suit in their respective sectors. Lagging far behind, however, was 21st Army Group. Having been relegated to a supporting role, Montgomery was advancing slowly even by his standards. Eisenhower had assigned Montgomery the mission of taking Lübeck on the Baltic and in so doing accomplish three tasks: secure Bradley's northern flank, cut off any *Wehrmacht* remnants still in Denmark, and interpose his army group between Denmark and the onrushing Red Army. " 'Manifestly, . . . we must do everything possible to push across the Elbe without delay, drive to the coast at Lubeck [*sic*] and seal off the Danish peninsula,' " wrote Eisenhower to his recalcitrant subordinate on 31 March.[86] Yet Montgomery refused to quicken his pace so Eisenhower wrote him again, this time on 8 April, reminding him of the urgency of his three missions, especially the last. Eisenhower offered Montgomery whatever he needed, within reason, to get him going but a morose Montgomery replied that the only

thing he needed was for Bradley to extend his left flank. This Eisenhower made happen and still Montgomery dallied. Exasperated by Montgomery's continued reluctance to speed ahead, Eisenhower flew to the 21st Army Group headquarters on 20 April for a face-to-face meeting. This time Montgomery requested two things: the use of a railroad bridge, which Eisenhower promptly granted, and an American corps. Eisenhower sent him Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps, which would be composed of the U.S. 7th Armored, 8th Infantry, and 82nd Airborne Divisions, a force that he had secretly earmarked for just this purpose two weeks earlier. Bradley was none too happy to lend Montgomery his best corps but acquiesced if it would serve the purpose of getting the British moving on his northern flank. Besides, recalled Bradley, "[n]o one could build a fire under Monty better than Ridgway."[87]

Bradley informed Ridgway of his assignment on 21 April. The next day Ridgway reported to Montgomery's headquarters to receive his instructions: XVIII Airborne Corps would be inserted between the British Second Army (in the north) and the U.S. Ninth Army (in the south). It would be under the operational control of the Second Army and was to protect the right flank of that army as it crossed the Elbe and advanced on the Baltic. With that Montgomery left it to Ridgway and Dempsey, the British Second Army commander, to work out the more specific details. " 'You'll find Dempsey down the road,' " Montgomery told Ridgway. " 'You two have worked together before [during operation VARSITY]. Go down there and fix it up between you.' "[88] What Ridgway discovered upon reaching Dempsey's headquarters was that Montgomery had dictated a typically ponderous scheme of maneuver. According to the plan, the British VIII Corps (of Dempsey's Second Army) was to conduct an assault river crossing of the Elbe near Lauenburg on 1 May. Once the bridgehead was secure engineers would construct a bridge over the river over which would then pass the remainder of VIII Corps, British XII Corps, and two divisions of Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps (the U.S. 8th Infantry Division, which was already assembling near Lauenburg, and the British 6th Airborne Division, control of which would pass to Ridgway once it crossed the Elbe). Once on the east bank of the river, XII Corps was to turn left to take Hamburg while the two divisions of Ridgway's corps turned right, advanced up the Elbe some ten to fifteen miles and uncovered two more bridging sites where Ridgway was to build his own bridges in order to cross the remainder of his corps. Then, once he had gotten all of XVIII Airborne Corps across the Elbe, Ridgway was to move north and east simultaneously to both protect VIII Corps's right flank as it drove on the Baltic and to seek contact with the Russians. Orchestrating the flow of forces across the single bridge at Laueneburg would take some time, added Dempsey, who estimated that, at the earliest, Ridgway could begin crossing there on 6 May, although he warned that it would most likely not be until 7 May that the bridge would be finally cleared of all VIII Corps traffic.[89]

Ridgway was fully aware that he had been given this mission in order to "build a fire" under Montgomery, but the scheme of maneuver that Dempsey had outlined made this impossible. Something had to be done to force the pace of events. What this something was came to Ridgway whilst he was conducting a reconnaissance of the Elbe near Bleckede, one of the sites at which he was to build a bridge for XVIII Airborne Corps. "I went down to the river bank to take a look," he recalled after the war. "I exposed myself as much as I thought necessary, but drew no fire. Across the wide river all was silent." The silence, he continued, caused him to do "some hard, fast thinking. It seemed to me

we had an opportunity here to get a jump on the German, to seize a bridgehead across the twelve-hundred-foot river before he had a chance to reorganize."[90] Returning immediately to British Second Army headquarters Ridgway presented an alternative plan to Dempsey. He would accelerate the concentration of XVIII Airborne Corps; conduct his own assault river crossing at Bleckede either in consonance with or shortly after the VIII Corps crossing; seize a limited bridgehead and build a bridge there; insert forces into the bridgehead as they came available; expand the bridgehead outward; build a second bridge at Darchau (about twelve miles upriver from Bleckede); rush all his forces across the Elbe; and then attack northeastward to the Baltic. Dempsey accepted Ridgway's plan with only one caveat: were Ridgway to do this he would have to do it even sooner than originally envisaged for as a result of Eisenhower's prodding Montgomery had agreed to advance his time table by two days. British VIII Corps was going to cross the Elbe on 29 April; Ridgway would have to conduct his operation as soon as possible thereafter. Ridgway agreed and the race was on.[91]

At the time, Ridgway had but two regiments anywhere near his crossing site at Bleckede. These were two regiments of the 8th Infantry Division that were positioned behind the British VIII Corps so that they could cross at Lauenburg in accordance with the original plan. The 7th Armored Division was still assembling and was not, in any case, the type of unit one would call upon to conduct a hasty river crossing and the main body of the 82nd was still en route from its previous location around Cologne. Much "to the dismay of my Staff," recalled Ridgway, "I ordered [Gavin] to cross the Elbe . . . and attack, without awaiting the arrival of reinforcing units."[92] Ridgway knew it was just the sort of quick reaction mission to which the 82nd had become accustomed, a mission that perhaps no other unit in the Army could put together so quickly. The 82nd had done it at Salerno when it was still under his command and he had witnessed it again when the division rushed forward to stop *Kampfgruppe Peiper* in Belgium. Besides, his own reconnaissance indicated that the far bank was seemingly devoid of enemy defenders, but even if there were some present, if somehow the Germans had thrown together something with which to oppose a river crossing, Ridgway was counting on the combat prowess of the 82nd (and in particular Ekman's 505th, which he knew would be the first of the division's regiments to arrive in the area) to push across and hold the line until reinforcements could come to its aid. It was a risky decision but it was one, recalled Ridgway for "which he had no cause to regret."[93]

Gavin was unaware of Ridgway's charter to speed along the slow moving British and had no idea that plans for the 82nd had changed until sometime on the evening of 28 April. In fact, when he received his movement order five days earlier the only information he had was that the 82nd would be participating in nothing more than "the severance and clearing up of Denmark," which was not expected to commence until sometime after 30 April.[94] Hence it was with no great haste that the division began its trek north, taking two full days to turn over its occupational duties in the Cologne area to other units and an additional two days to make the journey to Bleckede, although the latter was more the result of transportation difficulties and traffic jams than a lack of urgency.[95] However, one consequence of the relatively leisurely pace with which the move was conducted was that it reinforced hopes among the troopers that for them the fighting was over. "[M]ost people just assumed that the regiment would occupy a little more German territory while the British Army went on about its business and the war

came to an end," recalled Private Langdon of the 505th.[96] Captain Sammon of the 2/505th remembered being under the "impression that we were coming north to be placed in Corps reserve, some 50 miles behind the lines."[97] Even Gavin was a bit melancholy about the 82nd's new assignment. "It cannot amount to much," he predicted, "except considerable discomfort and very little fighting."[98]

But then the plan changed. Gavin had just arrived in the vicinity of Bleckede when Dempsey and Ridgway visited him with the news.

> General Dempsey asked when I could cross the river. I told him that I should have most of the Division closed up in 24 hours and could cross it tomorrow night [the night of 30 April-1 May]. He said it wouldn't do; he was anxious that we cross the Elbe, confront the Russians, and block them from moving into Denmark. General Ridgway told me that he could let me have two battalions of the 8th Infantry Division, which was going to come in on the left. It seemed a bit risky, but since the war was coming to an end, it was a risk worth taking.[99]

Quite a risk it was. At the time the only divisional units Gavin had anywhere near Bleckede were the 82nd's Reconnaissance Platoon and the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion. The remainder of the 82nd was strung out over 200 miles between Cologne and Bleckede on trucks and trains, slowly making its way northward, with the first elements not scheduled to arrive until 0455 hours, 29 April. Furthermore, since Ridgway had set H-Hour for the crossing at 0100 hours, 30 April, Gavin and his staff would have to hobble together a plan on the fly, feeding units into the fight as they arrived. There would be no time to complete the myriad preparations that normally precede an assault river crossing. Even the 3/504th's Waal River assault had been undertaken with more time to prepare. Instead, Gavin and his staff concentrated on only the most essential tasks: procuring boats, finding suitable launching sites, and conducting a limited reconnaissance of the far shore.[100]

Finding the boats and determining the best locations from which to launch the assault was the job of the division's engineers, who appear to have set about their tasks with a fury. In less than twenty-four hours they not only identified four suitable crossing points, they also procured 116 canvas assaults boats, 34 motorized metal storm boats, 7 large motorized support rafts, over 2,000 life vests, and 300 paddles. They also coordinated with a nearby British armored division for the use of approximately thirty 'Buffalos,' tracked amphibious vehicles that could be used to ferry follow-on echelons across the Elbe once a bridgehead on the far shore had been established.[101]

Ridgway's assessment of the enemy situation notwithstanding it was imperative to get a feel for the condition of the German defenses on the far bank. To that end four squad-sized reconnaissance patrols made their way across the Elbe on the night of 28-29 April, one from the 13th Infantry Regiment of the 8th Infantry Division and three from the 82nd's Reconnaissance Platoon. Three of the four got over and back without incident and brought back nine prisoners. The fourth, a patrol from the Reconnaissance Platoon, got to within fifteen yards of the far shore when it was taken under fire by heavy automatic weapons that sunk its boat. Two of the eight troopers in the patrol swam back to the near shore. The others were reported missing. What the patrols uncovered,

however, was that the 82nd was facing a hodgepodge of German units, including policemen, sailors, and school troops that had been pressed into frontline service. Obviously, a few were capable of some level of resistance, but it was believed that in the face of a determined attack they would be incapable of sustained and resolute defense.[102]

The first elements of the division's main body to arrive at Bleckede were the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, which marched into town around 0400 hours, 29 April, "happily unaware that they had an assault crossing to make."[103] Still under the impression that they were going to do nothing more strenuous than hold another river line and act as a reserve force, as soon as they arrived the troopers began making themselves comfortable in abandoned German homes with an eye toward replicating the luxurious living conditions they had enjoyed while defending the Rhine. This was relatively short-lived, however, for it was not long after they arrived that they learned they were going to spearhead a hasty river crossing operation. "Of all the operations undertaken by the 505 in World War II," recalled Private Allen Langdon of C Company, 1/505th, "probably no operation was 'sweat out' by the 'old men' more than this one."[104] With the war obviously coming to an end no one wanted his name to be the last one added to the casualty list, especially those few remaining veterans who had been with the 82nd since North Africa. Moreover, the fact that they were being called upon to conduct an operation for which they had never trained this late in the war added to their unease. "Engineers [assured] us with sober faces that a minimum of six days intensive training is generally given" to prepare for a river crossing, recalled Captain Thomas Furey, the S-3 of the 1/505th; in this instance the troopers had but thirteen hours to prepare.[105] Hence, no sooner had the troopers billeted themselves in Bleckede's deserted homes than they were rousted outside, put in formation, and marched to their respective crossing sites. According to Langdon, the Germans had left behind a "bountiful supply of vintage booze" that the troopers liberated and "to be candid, it was not exactly a sober group of 505ers who formed up that evening to move out to the crossing site."[106]

As it flows northward to the North Sea, the Elbe takes a pronounced L-shaped turn at Bleckede, with the town situated on the western side of the river just opposite the junction of the lower and upper legs of the L. Two of the crossing sites the engineers had selected were along the upper leg of the L, one was at the angle of the L itself, and the fourth and farthest upstream was along the lower leg of the L. This presented Gavin and his staff with a conundrum. Were the division to attack from all four sites simultaneously there existed the possibility of enveloping any Germans defending along the river from three sides which, in turn, might very well tear a huge hole in whatever defensive trace the enemy might have erected on the far shore and precipitate a general collapse. But in order to do this in accordance with Ridgway's timeline Gavin would have to conduct the assault with but two infantry battalions for the remainder were not expected to arrive until well after H-Hour. Of course, there was always the possibility of offsetting the paucity of infantry with a massive artillery barrage—and General March and his Division Artillery staff had done yeoman work assembling what was one of the most impressive arrays of artillery support the 82nd had ever enjoyed, numbering some six battalions of howitzers, including one battalion each of 8-inch and 155mm guns—but using this artillery except in the case of emergency brought with it an increased risk of fratricide since the infantry lines of attack on the far shore converged on one another. It boiled down to two options: the riskier option of crossing at four sites with little or no artillery support or the more

conservative approach of crossing at only two sites (either the upper two or the lower two) behind a heavy artillery barrage. Gavin chose the former. Like Ridgway he had great faith in Colonel Ekman's 505th despite the fact that, of the three infantry regiments in the 82nd, Ekman's was the only one never to have even trained for an assault river crossing. Besides, it would be Ekman's veterans against a pick-up team of Germans and Gavin knew that even the most cohesive, battle-hardened outfits have a difficult time standing when faced with an attack along multiple fronts.[107]

The final plan was relatively straightforward. Ekman assigned two crossing sites to each of his lead battalions: the 2/505th got the two downstream (on the long leg of the L) and the 1/505th got the two upstream. At H-Hour, each battalion was to assault with one rifle company from each of its sites. For the 2/505th, Companies D and E were in the van while Companies A and C were to lead the 1/505th's assault. After seizing limited footholds on the far shore into which the remainder of each battalion could be inserted, the troopers were first to clear the far shore and then link up and continue their attack inland, their movements coordinated by a series of five phase lines. The rest of the division's infantry elements would be ferried across the Elbe as they arrived and fed into the line to either reinforce Ekman or expand the bridgehead as the situation warranted. Finally, it was Ridgway's intent to begin constructing his bridge as soon as practicable. Under normal circumstances, engineers would not have begun their efforts until after the assaulting infantry had pushed enemy artillery out of range of the bridging site, but given the importance of getting the remainder of the corps across the Elbe as quickly as possible Ridgway had two engineer combat groups standing by ready to rush forward as soon as the far shore was cleared. It was, Gavin recalled thinking, "a feasible undertaking, although a bit marginal."[108]

Ultimately, success hinged on the ability of Ekman's troopers to attack with their usual aggressiveness and élan and according to the division's after action review that was exactly what occurred.

> By nightfall, April 30, 1945, the 82d Airborne Division had established a small bridgehead East of the ELBE River in the vicinity of BLECKEDE, GERMANY. This bridgehead had been established by the 505th Parachute Infantry in a splendid example of coordination and river crossing technique by a veteran regiment.[109]

But as Private Langdon more accurately recollected, the "operation was the most screwed up, fouled up affair that I ever saw in my time in the war. That we came through it practically unscathed had to have been Divine Intervention."[110] Near chaos reigned at each of the four launch sites, due in no small measure to the alcohol some of the troopers had liberated during their short stay in Bleckede. According to Captain Furey, when the 1/505th troopers arrived at the battalion's crossing sites they "were filled with a new spirit, having obtained a store of cognac in Bleckede."[111] Backing this claim was an offhanded observation in the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion's official report on the operation, which stated that "[a]t one crossing site the passengers were unusually noisy" and that the troopers, no doubt fueled by the cognac to which Furey referred, "sang and made ribald comments between boats" while getting underway.[112] So loud, in fact, was the commotion that it forced a last-minute change in plans. "Everything had been

arranged with the basic idea that there would be no preparatory artillery fires; that the element of surprise would be employed for what it was worth," remembered Captain Furey. "But with the confusion of getting the boats off the trucks and into the water and with the loud whisperings of last minute orders, it was felt that the element of surprise was lost."[113] Hence "it was thought better to take advantage of the shock action of the artillery" so a ten-minute preparatory barrage was hastily arranged to begin at 0050 hours, 30 April.[114] This, too, proved disruptive. Several rounds fell near the crossing site from which C Company, 1/505th was embarking and although it resulted in no casualties, it did create "a state of disorganization which required a few minutes to settle."[115] A second change of plan was necessitated when the 2/505th arrived at its two crossing sites only to find that there were no boats anywhere to be found. Rather than wait, it was thought best to send the 1/505th's companies across on schedule so at 0100 hours, 30 April, the troopers of A and C Companies pushed off. An hour and forty-five minutes later, D and E Companies, 2/505th followed.[116]

The trip across the Elbe, which was more than 1,000-feet wide at each crossing site, took approximately thirty minutes. But for three of the four companies in the first wave it took a bit longer because of some unexpected stops along the way. Both C Company, 1/505th and E Company, 2/505th hit sand bars. Mistaking the sand bars for the far shore the troopers disembarked, fanned out, and assaulted, only to find they were still only about halfway to the far shore, whereupon they returned to their boats and pushed off again for the last leg of their crossing. The troopers of A Company, 1/505th launched their boats in a small stream that emptied into the Elbe, the intent being to launch out of sight of the far shore and allow the troopers to become familiar with their craft before they headed across the river itself. Apparently, however "[s]ome of the men were imbued with the idea that the stream in which the boats were being launched was the Elbe River," and at least two boats paddled across the stream and launched an assault on the spit of land that separated the stream from the Elbe River proper. These troopers, too, eventually discovered their mistake, re-embarked, and paddled to the far shore. Of the four companies in the first wave, only D Company, 2/505th got across without detouring.[117]

Fortunately for the troopers in the first wave it began snowing just as they were pushing off for the assault, cutting down considerably on visibility and muffling the sounds of their noisy approach. As a result, not a shot was fired during the crossing itself and by 0300 hours, 30 April, all four companies of the first wave were across and firmly planted on the far bank. On the far shoreline enemy resistance was negligible. Though they were dug in along a dike that bounded the east bank of the Elbe, the German defenders opted to remain in hiding rather than fight. According to Captain Furey, "[i]t required a hand grenade to properly induce them out, and they emerged, one by one, each a screaming mass of blood."[118] After clearing the dike the troopers pushed inland against spotty resistance, mostly from isolated strongpoints built around machine guns or 20mm antiaircraft guns, the latter of which the Germans had in abundance. In almost every case, however, the German defenders elected to surrender once the paratroopers returned fire. Typical was the experience of D Company, 1/505th, which ran headlong into a German antiaircraft unit. "They showed signs of resistance," recalled Captain Sammon, but then "Company D fired four rounds of [high explosive] with a recoilless 57mm gun and the entire unit surrendered" (the 82nd had received this relatively new weapon just

before departing for the Rhine). Once in captivity, the German commander said that it was his intention to hold out until he began receiving artillery fire so that he could surrender honorably. "He was mighty surprised when he saw the gun that fired the artillery," added Sammon wryly.[119] The most determined resistance of the day was faced by the 3/505th, which had crossed over in mid-morning on British Buffalos and been immediately thrown into the attack. Advancing in a southeasterly direction toward Darchau, the second bridging site Ridgway had pre-selected, it found itself in a stiff fight in the small town of Stiepelse and took it only after a twenty-minute artillery barrage had induced the defenders to surrender. During the assault the 3/505th lost eight killed and forty-three wounded, which accounted for all but two casualties the 505th suffered on 30 April (the 1/505th and 2/505th each lost one wounded during the day). But the action at Stiepelse was an anomaly and by nightfall the 505th was firmly entrenched along phase line five where it held up for the night. More telling of what the next few days would see was the prisoner haul: 588 Germans, young and old, hardy and infirm, hardcore and impressed, passed into the division's temporary prisoner-of-war enclosures that day, foretelling what would become, in the next several days, a deluge.[120]

Less than two hours after Ekman's first wave hit the far shore Ridgway put his bridge-building engineers to work. Standing in freezing water and enduring what both Gavin and Ridgway agreed was one of the heaviest concentrations of artillery either had ever witnessed—according to Gavin, the result of the Germans expending the last of their artillery ammunition—it took them less than fifteen hours to build the 1,200-foot span.[121] Meanwhile, elements of all three battalions of Tucker's 504th were ferried across the Elbe and positioned behind the 3/505th at Stiepelse in preparation of passing through that battalion and continuing the advance southeast so as to uncover the second bridging site at Darchau. As the division's after action report noted, Tucker's troopers were literally hustled off the trains at the completion of their two-to-three-day ride and "immediately entrucked and taken into the bridgehead. Then, after being briefed and issued ammunition, they were committed to the attack."[122] The 505th's attack had "broken the crust, the outer defenses," recalled Captain David L. Hollingsworth of the XVIII Airborne Corps intelligence section, and with that "the entire enemy resistance collapsed."[123] "It was obvious that the German was disintegrating rapidly," echoed the 82nd's after action report in summing up the situation on the night of 30 April – 1 May, "and it was of the utmost importance that regardless of the physical condition of our troops, the momentum of our drive be maintained until the enemy was completely destroyed or overrun."[124] And since the 325th was still en route, in order to maintain the momentum of the advance Ridgway attached the 121st Infantry Regiment of the 8th Infantry Division to the 82nd and it, too, was ferried across the river to take up position on the 505th's northern flank, poised to attack in that direction at dawn.[125]

At 0500 hours, 1 May, the advance started anew with the 504th passing through the 3/505th en route to Darchau. Twenty minutes later the rest of the 505th recommenced its attack to the east and at 0600 hours the 121st attacked northward. Tanks and tank destroyers that had rushed forward over the Bleckede Bridge reinforced the infantrymen, although there was little German armor with which to contend. Everywhere the attackers moved with surprising speed, oftentimes outrunning their artillery support. According to the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion's report the infantry was "advancing so rapidly that the battalion had done no firing since their [*sic*] registration" on 29 April and

therefore displaced forward in order to keep pace with the infantry it was supporting.[126] The 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion had much the same experience, having to displace three times on 1 May so that it could keep Tucker's 504th troopers within range.[127] In order to maintain its support of the 505th, the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion had to move even before the bulk of its artillerymen had arrived, making do by manning the guns with supply sergeants and drivers.[128] By day's end the 504th had advanced the front line some twelve miles to the southeast, the 505th had pushed a further nine miles due east, and in the north the 121st had carved out sufficient room for Ridgway to insert a second division headquarters east of the Elbe, turning over that sector to the 8th Infantry Division (and returning the 121st to the 8th's control). Ridgway also got control of a third division east of the Elbe, the British 6th Airborne, when it linked up with the 121st Infantry Regiment in the north.[129] To top off the day's achievements, after the 504th uncovered Darchau, Ridgway's engineers repeated their bridge-building feat by constructing a second bridge over the Elbe there, this one 852-feet long, in six hours and fifteen minutes.[130]

As had been the case on 30 April, German resistance on 1 May was scant. "Resistance to our advance was negligible," recorded the 504th's after action report, "as those German troops which the Regiment was able to make contact with surrendered en masse almost without resistance."[131] Private Langdon recalled starting the day's advance early "against no opposition, and the only Krauts we saw had their hands in the air."[132] Lieutenant Francis J. Myers of the 3/505th noted that enemy opposition was so light that at one juncture the battalion entered a town only to find elements of the division headquarters already there.[133] About the only opposition encountered on 1 May resulted from a new type of mine that the Germans had strewn liberally beneath the roads in the area. Fabricated from a 500-pound bomb, the mine employed a magnetic detector that allowed a preset number of vehicles to pass before detonating. The resulting explosion "left a huge crater in the road large enough to accommodate a small house," recalled Lieutenant Megellas.[134] Megellas's company mate, Lieutenant Sims, saw one of these mines go off. " 'The explosion lifted one of our tanks about 30 feet in the air, killing the entire crew.' "[135] After losing several of their own to the mines the 307th Engineers enlisted the help of technical experts from XVIII Airborne Corps as well as captured German engineers in an effort to find a solution. Working together, by day's end a means to both locate and defuse the mines had been found and thereafter mine-clearing parties, composed of both Germans and Americans, swept the roads and trails in the area, doubtless saving scores of unnecessary deaths, military and civilian, Axis and Allied.[136] And there was a growing pool of captured German manpower from which to choose for on 1 May, an additional 696 Germans surrendered to the 82nd.[137] According to Private Langdon, "we were absolutely inundated with prisoners and [displaced persons]. We stopped in a small town and set up a road block and thereafter processed prisoners that were just streaming in."[138] So anxious were the Germans to surrender to the Americans (and thereby escape the wrath of the Red Army, closing from the east) that whole units would give up to just about anyone wearing a U.S. uniform. The division Reconnaissance Platoon, which spent 1 May ranging far ahead of the main body, took approximately 470 prisoners alone, a figure that exceeded the platoon's strength fifteen times.[139]

The night of 1-2 May was spent pushing as much of XVIII Airborne Corps over the Elbe as possible for at daybreak Ridgway intended to unleash an attack that would gain for the corps, and in turn the 21st Army Group, its final objectives of the war and achieve contact with the Red Army. The plan was for the 8th Infantry Division to attack in the center of the corps zone along a northeasterly axis toward Schwerin and then (if practicable) on to Wismar on the Baltic, thereby sealing off the Jutland Peninsula and Denmark from the onrushing Soviets. Simultaneously, the 82nd was to continue its attack to the east and southeast while the British 6th Airborne conducted a limited attack in the northern portion of the corps zone in order to secure that flank. The bulk of the 7th Armored would be kept in reserve, ready to rush through the 8th Infantry and on to Wismar if the situation so warranted. The attack was to begin at daybreak, 2 May. Ridgway was going to push his troops hard; the enemy was already showing signs of collapse and he was to be given no time to reorganize to form a last-ditch line of defense.[140]

The 82nd's plan was to attack with the 325th (which had come up during the night), which would pass through Ekman's weary 505th and continue the advance eastward to the fairly large town of Ludwigslust, the former ducal seat of Mecklenburg; and Tucker's 504th, which would continue its attack in a southeasterly direction. Reinforcing each regiment were tanks and tank destroyers from Combat Command B of the 7th Armored Division. With their final objectives some twenty-five miles away, both Billingslea and Tucker elected to mount one of their battalions aboard the armored vehicles and use that infantry-armored task force to spearhead their respective advances. Speed was the watchword of the day. Enemy resistance, weak from the outset, had dwindled to insignificance. All indications were that the end was near.[141]

May 2nd dawned "a lovely spring morning. The fields were freshly green, and flowers and chestnut trees along the road were in full bloom."[142] It was also strangely quiet; "[n]ot even an occasional round of friendly or enemy fire could be heard."[143] Jumping off at precisely 0500 hours, the troopers found themselves moving through a landscape seemingly devoid of humanity, at least German humanity. As the 325th's Captain Pierce remembered it, the attack seemed more like a training exercise. "The only shot fired that morning was at a deer," he recalled. "The deer was not hit."[144] Gavin, who was up before dawn "[i]n anticipation of something unusual happening," rode forward in a jeep with Colonel Billingslea over streets and roads that were completely deserted. It was some time before they saw their first German, a lone soldier on a motorcycle, whom they chased down and took prisoner. "He was the last German in the war we were to see running away," noted Gavin.[145]

The situation started changing rapidly about mid-morning. By that time the lead elements were making contact and were "overrunning groups of bewildered enemy with hardly any will to resist, who thought [the 82nd was] still at the Elbe while they were fighting what appeared to be a retrograde action with the Russians."[146] Still other Germans, bypassed by the advance, made their way to the nearest Americans and surrendered (waiting, no doubt, until daylight when they would not be mistaken for raiding parties). One such group approached the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion's command post and "requested to be directed to the Prisoner of War Inclosure [*sic*]."[147] Another German commander chose a more expeditious manner of ending his wartime

service: he surrendered himself and his entire unit to an American sergeant he had captured the day before.[148]

Pushing eastward, the troopers began seeing larger and larger groups of Germans. "They seemed to be milling about indecisively and to be not particularly desirous to fight," remembered Gavin.

> It was an eerie sight for those of us who had fought for more than three years all the way from Africa, for the mere sight of that bucket helmet meant certain death unless one reacted instantly and instinctively, taking cover and firing. So, taking our lives in our hands, we drove right up to them. They wanted to surrender.[149]

Everywhere resistance was practically nonexistent. The 82nd lost but one tank to a *panzerfaust* and there were a few scattered firefights, but overwhelmingly the Germans were bent on surrendering.[150] And whereas the day began with no sign of anyone not wearing an American uniform, by mid-morning the troopers "were engulfed by an endless stream of German soldiers, German civilians and displaced personnel, fleeing in panic before the Russian drive, hoping to get across the Elbe into American areas."[151] Fighting through the mass of humanity clogging the roads, both infantry-armored task forces secured their respective regimental objectives by noon. The troopers of the 2/325th, riding aboard Combat Command B's tanks and tank destroyers, entered Ludwigslust and found the town "packed with German soldiers desirous of getting away from the Russian army."[152] Corporal Leonard Linton of the Division's G-5 (civil-military affairs) section was up front with them.

> We kept on rushing on that road [to Ludwisglust] until we no longer saw any of our men but increasing numbers of all types of German Army vehicles ranging from horsecarts [*sic*] to rows of Tiger tanks and their prime movers, as well as large numbers of Hussars of Hungarian horse-mounted cavalry in parade-like close-order which seemed unreal at the time. Most units' disorder or disarray was indescribable; none of them was firing or threatening. Every now and then a neat disciplined unit would appear to the credit of some unknown commander. Periodically I would stop the jeep at the level of some German command car and yell in German that they are all prisoners of the 82nd ABN of the US Army and to order their men to disarm themselves and throw the bolts and breach locks of their weapons into the ditch.[153]

In the 504th's zone it was much the same story. "Germans in all town[s] offer no resistance and seem to be waiting for us so they can surrender," ran the noon entry in the 3/504th's combat journal.[154] By 1540 hours, the same journal noted "[r]oads congested with Germans or D.P.'s. All weapons from PW's collected and put in piles along road."[155] The commander of the *5th Jäger Division*, in order to ensure the smooth movement of his unit into American prisoner-of-war camps, had even posted guides along the way. Like many German formations moving westward that day

> [t]hey had their tanks, artillery pieces, supply trains with them. All were armed, but had no intention of shooting. They were permitted to keep their tanks and vehicles for pulling supply trailers. If they had run out of gas, as many of them had, captured gasoline was obtained for them.[156]

As the 82nd's after action review noted, "after more than two years of intense and, at times, very costly fighting with the German Army, the spectacle that began to unfold itself was an unbelievable one."[157] But the day was not over.

At about 1415 hours, a delegation of officers entered the 325th's lines and presented themselves as representatives of the commanding general of the *Twenty-First Army*. The German general in charge of the group announced that they had come to arrange for the surrender of the *Twenty-First Army*. Private Shirley R. Gossett of A Company, 1/325th was one of the first to meet the group. "Since our only officer was a [second lieutenant] he wanted to see a much more higher officer to surrender to. We took his caravan to Division Headquarters as he requested."[158] By that time, the division headquarters had been established in the palace of the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg in Ludwigslust. When the group arrived, however, Gavin was standing outside near the intersection of two of the town's main thoroughfares, watching the fantastic scene unfold before him and "looking like any other GI in the 82nd" except for the two stars on his collar and helmet.[159]

> An American GI came up to me and said that there was a German general looking for the American general who was in charge[, recalled Gavin]. I told him to send him over. He arrived, rather haughtily, I thought, and a bit threadbare, but otherwise impeccably attired in the field gray uniform of the Wehrmacht. It was set off by the red collar tabs and insignia of a general, and an Iron Cross dangled at his throat. When told that I was the American general, he looked at me with some disdain, saying that I couldn't be; I was too young and did not look like a general to him. It took only a moment of change his mind.[160]

The general asked Gavin if he could arrange for the surrender of his wounded and Allied prisoners. Gavin replied that he "would accept the surrender of his complete army only and on unconditional terms."[161] The general stated that he would carry this message to his commander, and the two arranged a second meeting for 2000 hours that night at the palace.[162]

At the prescribed time *General der Infanterie* Kurt von Tippelskirch, commander of the *Twenty-First Army*, arrived at the luxurious palace with several members of his staff. Tippelskirch tried to convince Gavin that he would surrender only to Gavin and because of that the 82nd should "move out and accept the surrender of his army where it stood," an obvious ploy to use the 82nd as cover and ensure that as many *Twenty-First Army* soldiers as possible would spend their days in American and not Russian prisoner-of-war camps. Gavin demurred, reminding Tippelskirch that he (Tippelskirch) had little choice. "I told him that the Russians were our allies and that I proposed to move against him and destroy his army in conjunction with them if he did not surrender."[163] Seeing that this was the only avenue open to him, Tippelskirch accepted and at 2120 hours, the two

commanders signed a surrender document. Tippelskirch agreed to "unconditionally surrender the 21st German Army, all of its attachments, and equipment and appurtenances thereto, to the Commanding General of the 82d Airborne Division, United States Army." Furthermore, a stipulation was added that the unconditional surrender was "valid only for those troops of the 21st Army which pass through American lines," thereby avoiding any hint of German-American collusion against the Russians.[164]

Over the next several days over 144,000 German soldiers walked or rode into captivity through the 82nd's lines (conversely, the Elbe River Campaign cost the 82nd twenty-one troopers killed, 122 wounded, and eleven missing).[165] Since there was no way that the division could hold that many in its own prisoner compounds the vast majority were simply disarmed and herded to the rear in captured German vehicles. For two days following the surrender there was "an apparently endless stream" of these vehicles moving "bumper to bumper" over the bridge at Bleckede, all "loaded to overflowing with the bedraggled remnants of the German Army."[166] Meanwhile, the division troopers acted as road guides and column guards, provided medical care for those who needed it, issued rations, set up a military government structure in their zone, screened the prisoners, displaced persons, and civilian population for Nazis and SS officials, and collected all the captured war matériel in several salvage yards, a haul that included almost 2,000 trucks and cars, 81 half-tracks, 11 tanks, 21 flak wagons, 35 artillery pieces, approximately1,000 anti-aircraft guns, 655 antitank guns, and tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition of all calibers, grenades, detonators, and *panzerfausts*.[167]

"There will never be a day like this again nor a week for that matter," recorded Gavin in his diary the day after accepting Tippelskirch's surrender.[168] Spearheading what Bradley characterized as a "little-known but astonishingly effective drive," the 82nd not only compelled the surrender of one of the last German armies capable of any sort of organized resistance, it also opened the way for the rest of the corps to rush across the Elbe and seize its final objectives at least three full days ahead of Montgomery's original time table.[169] Despite violating one of the most sacrosanct of military dictums—to never commit units piecemeal, especially in the presence of a much larger enemy host—Ridgway's decision to hurl the 505th across the Elbe in a hasty river crossing and continue the attack by feeding in the rest of the division's units as they arrived was, in Gavin's estimation, "one of the best decisions of the war."[170] It also had tremendous post-war consequences, particularly when viewed in light of the Cold War, for it allowed Ridgway to speed the advance on Wismar, which the British 6th Airborne Division took on 2 May, just two hours before the arrival of the Russian Army.[171] "If you had not ordered us across," wrote Gavin to Ridgway in 1979, "the Russians would be in Denmark today, and the whole situation in Scandinavia and the Baltic would be different than it is today."[172] Of course, Ridgway's gamble would not have paid such dividends had he not had a unit he could rely on to react with speed and aggressiveness, but as he wrote in his memoirs, the 82nd "was accustomed to move fast."[173]

In his last after action report of the war Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Neptune, commander of the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion wrote, "[t]he once great German Army had collapsed before our eyes and after two long years which saw us in Africa, Sicily, Italy, England, Holland, France, Belgium, Luxemburg, and finally only 132 kilometers from Berlin, Germany, we had been present at the end. It was hard for

many of us to realize just what was happening."[174] Ironically, it was uncertainty that pervaded the ranks of the 82nd when it was committed to combat for the first time some twenty-one months before. Strewn all over the Sicilian countryside with no idea of "just what was happening" the troopers fought through the fog of war, came together in groups large and small, and attacked the enemy where they found him. Speed, aggressiveness, daring, and initiative, they learned, were uncertainty's antidotes. Now, having displayed one last time those same characteristics that had served them so well for so long—that got them through some of the toughest fights of the European War—they stood on the outskirts of Berlin as uncertain as when they had first begun. There was one thing, however, about which none of those who wore the 'AA' of the 82nd Airborne Division were uncertain, that being that they were members of a "proven outfit where reputations are made and fame is everywhere."[175]

Chapter Twenty-Six Notes

[1] Rubel quoted Dawson, *Saga of the All American*, n.p. Rubel was commander of the 740th Tank Battalion, which was attached to the 82nd during the drive across the Elbe in May 1945.

[2] Gavin Diary, 26 February 1945. See also Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 280-281; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 82 and 84; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 122; Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 237; After Action Report, *The Story of the 82d Airborne Division in the Battle of the Belgian Bulge in the Siegfried Line and on the Roer River*, n.d.

[3] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 268; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 122; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 84 and 86; Pierce, *Let's Go!*, 280-282.

[4] The division was also introduced to the C-46, the C-47's larger twin that could carry twice as many paratroopers, thirty-six as opposed to eighteen, and which could disgorge jumpers from its two aft paratroop doors simultaneously. Gavin was one of the first in the division to jump from a C-46 and they were used during several of the training jumps. See Gavin Dairy, entries for 12 and 18 March 1945 and Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 440.

[5] See also Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 269-279; Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 84 and 86; Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 239; Pierce, *Let's Go!*, 281.

[6] Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 217. ARENA called for the insertion of four to six airborne divisions in order to seize several airfields in the area into which a further four conventional infantry divisions could then be flown. Then, while the airborne divisions defended the airhead, the heavier infantry divisions would conduct offensive operations deep in the enemy's rear, thereby cutting German lines of communication to the front and easing the way for the eventual crossing of the Rhine. Overall command of ARENA would fall to Brereton's First Allied Airborne Army and would involve XVIII Airborne Corps and the British I Airborne Corps. Maneuver units earmarked for ARENA included the U.S. 13th, 17th, 82nd, and 101st Airborne Divisions, the British 1st and 6th Airborne Divisions, and the U.S. 2nd, 84th, and 103rd Infantry Divisions. A fourth U.S. infantry division and a third U.S. corps headquarters element would round out the troop list. See Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 217 and Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 445-447. ARENA was the direct result of General Marshall's insistence that airborne units in Europe were not being used to their full potential. In December 1944, just prior to the German offensive in Belgium, Ridgway dispatched Maxwell Taylor to Washington to discuss plans for the reorganization of airborne divisions with the War Department staff. While there, Taylor had an office call with Marshall. "Everyone in Washington appeared pleased over the conduct of Airborne troops in battle," Taylor later reported to Ridgway. "However, General Marshall is emphatic in speaking about the 'timidity' of our planning. His idea of the proper Airborne operation is to seize an air head and then pour in large quantities of troops. . . . I pointed out some of the difficulties in such an operation in Europe, but I am not sure he was listening. He damned without stint Montgomery['s] 'Carpet' in Holland." Maxwell Taylor to Matthew B. Ridgway, 17 January 1945, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway: World War II—Personal, January to February 1945," USAMHI.

[7] See also Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 436 and 445-447.

[8] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 370.

[9] See also Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 370-371 and Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 269-270.

[10] Gavin Diary, 12 March 1945.

[11] Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 768.

[12] Gavin Diary, 12 March 1945. At the time Gavin wrote this entry Soviet armies were arrayed along the Oder and Neisse Rivers, less than 50 miles east of Berlin. See Peter Young, ed., *Atlas of the Second World War* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974, Paragon Books), 219.

[13] Gavin Diary, 12 March 1945.

[14] Ridgway's memorandum of 8 March 1945 to First Allied Airborne Army quoted in Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 270. Capitalization in original.

[15] Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 398.

[16] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 269-271; McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 156; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 282; Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 241.

[17] See McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 157; Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 282: Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 239-241

[18] Gavin Diary, 12 March 1945.

[19] Charles McMoran Wilson [Lord Moran], *The Anatomy of Courage* (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1945; reprint, Garden City Park, NY: Avery Publishing Group, In., 1987), xvi. Perhaps no better illustration of Moran's concept occurred in the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. During one of the training jumps held at the time Corporal Jim Hancock, a long-time veteran of the 456th with service stretching back to Sicily, and who had already been awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart, refused to jump. Hancock's uncharacteristic action sent a shock wave through the battalion. Certain that Hancock had simply suffered from a temporary case of nerves, the 456th's officers arranged that he be given a second chance. Again Hancock refused to exit the plane. Unwilling to give up on a man who had already survived so much, a third jump was arranged. This time Hancock did not even get on the plane. While waiting in line to board, he hit the quick release on this parachute, dropped it on the tarmac, and walked away. According to his commander, Captain Herman Alley, Hancock " 'was found in the billets that evening and told us that he had lost his nerve and didn't care what happened' " (Alley quoted in Jorgensen, *History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion,* 250). Hancock was eventually court-martialed, sentenced to two years' hard labor (of which he served only six months) and dishonorably discharged. Undoubtedly, Gavin was apprised of the situation. See also McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 157-161.

[20] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 269. Emphasis in original.

[21] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 401.

[22] Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 379.

[23] See also Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 400-407; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 617-628 passim; MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 208-235 passim.

[24] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 208.

[25] Quoted in Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 407.

[26] See also Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*; MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 339-343; and Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower and Berlin, 1945: The Decision to Halt at the Elbe* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1967), 17-98 passim.

[27] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 278.

[28] Ridgway quoted in Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 218.

[29] Quoted in Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 218. See also Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers,* 448.

[30] See Warren, *Airborne Operations in the European Theater*, 156-193 passim and MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 296-314 passim. Unlike all other airborne operations to date, the VARSITY drop came twelve hours *after* the commencement of the ground assault. This sequencing, suggested by General Dempsey, the commander of the British Second Army, was necessitated because of the need to de-conflict the airspace over the drop zones and to ensure that Allied artillery rounds and Allied transport planes and gliders were not flying through the same piece of sky at the same time, a recipe for disaster. Gavin, who had never before witnessed an airborne operation in which he was not participating, flew up from Sissonne and observed the drop from a transport plane flying well above troop carrier formation. It was "[q]uite a sight" and "appeared a bit dangerous" he later wrote, unusual comments from a man who had already survived four combat jumps. Gavin Diary, 25 March 1945.

[31] "The Unit History of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion (from April 1, 1945 to April 30, 1945, Incl)," n.d., 382-FA(319)-0.3, Box 12435, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[32] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 282.

[33] Lewis quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 734.

[34] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 239.

[35] McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 161.

[36] James M. Gavin to Matthew B. Ridgway, 9 April 1945, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, February to April 1945," USAMHI.

[37] Matthew B. Ridgway to James M. Gavin, 8 April 1945, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, February to April 1945," USAMHI. See also Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 86-100 passim; Brereton, *The Brereton Diaries*, 415; Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 439; Pierce, *Let's Go!*, 282.

[38] Lord, *History of the 508th Parachute Infantry*, 100.

[39] See Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 677; MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 323; Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 278; 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d., unmarked box, Folder "82nd Airborne Division—WWII After Action Report: Cent. Europe," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC; Gavin Diary, 2 April 1945.

[40] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 31 March – 31 April [*sic*] 1945," n.d., 382-INF(504)-0.3, Box 12453. Record Group 407, NARA II.

[41] "Historical Narrative, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, April 1945," 10 May 1945, Box "82nd Airborne Division—WWII—307th Eng. Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports," Folder "307th Hist Apr – Oct 45," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.

[42] McKenzie, *On Time, On Target*, 155.

[43] Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 767.

[44] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 31 March – 31 April [*sic*] 1945," n.d.

[45] Gavin Diary, 2 April 1945.

[46] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 278.

[47] See also 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d. and MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 367.

[48] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[49] Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Narrative History, 2 April – 15 April 1945, Rhine Operation," n.d., 382-ART-0.3, Box 12430, Record Group 407, NARA II. Gavin's artillery assault prompted an unusual visit from the enemy. On the second day of the bombardment Captain Burriss and his troopers from H Company, 3/504th were keeping watch along the river when they spied a group of German soldiers on the far bank maneuvering a boat into the water. Because one of the group was carrying a pole on which was tied a large white flag, Burriss had his men hold their fire. They then watched as the group rowed toward them, bemused at the sight of one of the Germans, obviously an officer and significantly older the rest, standing in the bow like George Washington. Upon landing the older man, who turned out to be a German medical officer in the rank of colonel, demanded to see the American commander. Though infuriated by the colonel's haughtiness—according to Lieutenant Megellas, " '[t]he Colonel was an arrogant Nazi, slickly dressed, medals all over his chest and wearing a monocle, Hollywood style' "—the troopers complied with the colonel's request and sent word back that a German officer was requesting an audience with the division commander (Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 250). Shortly thereafter, Gavin arrived at the company command post where the colonel and his small band were being held. Speaking through a German lieutenant he had brought along as an interpreter, the colonel demanded that the Americans stop firing their artillery on a German hospital. Gavin, his ire up, snapped back that were the hospital properly marked it would not have been fired upon. Chastened, the colonel produced a letter signed by his superior, *General der Infanterie* Friedrich Koechling, the *LXXXI Corps* commander (part of the *Fifteenth Army*), that identified the colonel as the corps surgeon. Attached to the letter was a map on which was outlined the location of the German hospital and other areas where the Germans were collecting their wounded, both military and civilian. Gavin immediately designated the areas no-fire zones. With that matter settled Gavin had then to address the question of what to do with the colonel and his party. His first impulse was to take them prisoner, but he feared that that decision might be reversed by either XXII Corps or the U.S. Fifteenth Army because of the colonel's status as a medical officer so, after discussing the matter with General Harmon, he sent the colonel and his party back from whence they had come. In the almost twenty months since the division had first seen action, this was one of the few times that the 82nd set prisoners free, and it was most certainly the first time that one of such high rank had been let go. See also Gavin Diary, 9 April 1945 and Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 177-178.

[50] Both orders quoted in 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d. Capitalization in original.

[51] "Historical Narrative, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, April 1945," 10 May 1945.

[52] See also Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 177; Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 246-247; 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[53] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[54] See also Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 247 and Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 31 March – 31 April [*sic*] 1945," n.d.

[55] See Nordyke, *All American*, 736-737; Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p.; Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 248, Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 31 March – 31 April [*sic*] 1945," n.d.

[56] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 31 March – 31 April [*sic*] 1945," n.d.

[57] Breard quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 738.

[58] See also Nordyke, *All American*, 738 and Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 248.

[59] Breard quoted in Nordyke, *All American*, 739.

[60] See also Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 248-249; Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p.; Headquarters, 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, "Narrative History," 10 May 1945, 382-FA(376)-0.3, Box 12440, Record Group 407, NARA II; Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 31 March – 31 April [*sic*] 1945," n.d.

[61] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 249; Mandle and Whittier, *Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment*, n.p.; Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 178-182; Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 31 March – 31 April [*sic*] 1945," n.d.

[62] Burriss, *Strike and Hold*, 182; "Historical Narrative, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, April 1945," 10 May 1945; Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 31 March – 31 April [*sic*] 1945," n.d.

[63] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 31 March – 31 April [*sic*] 1945," n.d. After the war, A Company was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for Hitdorf. See "Award of the Presidential Unit Citation," unmarked box, Folder ""'*Unit Awards—A Co. PUC," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.

[64] Gavin Diary, 9 April 1945.

[65] Matthew B. Ridgway to James M. Gavin, 5 April 1945, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, February to April 1945," USAMHI.

[66] Ridgway to Gavin, 8 April 1945.

[67] Gavin Diary, 13 April 1945.

[68] E. N. Harmon, Milton MacKaye and William Ross MacKaye, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), 250.

[69] Gavin Diary, 17 April 1945. In his autobiography, Harmon wrote that Gavin knew this *before* the foray against Hitdorf (a battle about which Harmon gets several other facts wrong), but this is disproved by Gavin's diaries as the first mention he makes of this being a possibility is in his 17 April 1945 entry. See Harmon, MacKaye, and MacKaye, *Combat Commande*r, 250-251.

[70] Gavin Diary, 25 April 1945.

[71] See 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Narrative History, 2 April – 15 April 1945, Rhine Operation," n.d; "Historical Narrative, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, April 1945," 10 May 1945; Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Patrol Reports," n.d., Box "82nd Airborne Division—WWII—307th Eng. Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports," Folder "307th Abn Eng Bn Reports Apr – May 34," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC; James M. Gavin to Matthew B. Ridgway, 8 April 1945, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Personal File, February to April 1945," USAMHI.

[72] "Narrative to Accompany the Unit History of the 325th Glider Infantry for the Month of April 1945," n.d., 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448 Record Group 407, NARA II.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 279.

[75] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 279. See also "Narrative to Accompany the Unit History of the 325th Glider Infantry for the Month of April 1945," n.d.; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Narrative History, 2 April – 15 April 1945, Rhine Operation," n.d.; Langdon, *Ready*, 125.

[76] Pierce, *Let's Go!*, 283.

[77] Gavin Diary, 9 April 1945.

[78] McKenzie, *On Time On Target*, 165.

[79] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 278-279. See also "Narrative to Accompany the Unit History of the 325th Glider Infantry for the Month of April 1945," n.d.; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Narrative History, 2 April – 15 April 1945, Rhine Operation," n.d.; Gavin to Ridgway, 9 April 1945.

[80] McKenzie, *On Time On Target*, 165-166.

[81] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 255. See also "Narrative to Accompany the Unit History of the 325th Glider Infantry for the Month of April 1945," n.d.; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Narrative History, 2 April – 15 April 1945, Rhine Operation," n.d.; Gavin to Ridgway, 9 April 1945.

[82] Included in the German prisoner haul were twenty-five generals and one admiral. *Generalfeldmarschall* Model was not among them. He and a small group of his staff officers evaded capture and fled to a small forest just north of Duesseldorf where, on 21 April, Model committed suicide. The Allies also liberated some 200,000 displaced persons and 5,639 Anglo-American prisoners of war. See MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 372; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 677 and 680; Max Hastings, *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany, 1944-1945* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 468.

[83] Gavin Diary, 18 April 1945.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 13 April 1945.

[86] Eisenhower quoted in Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 719.

[87] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 427. See also Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 721-722, Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 488; Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, "Summary of Operations, The Elbe to the Baltic, 27 April to 3 May 1945," 20 May 1945, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "CHRONO FILE: Ruhr/Elbe," USAMHI.

[88] Montgomery quoted in Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 142.

[89] See also Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 490-491; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 719-722; Matthew B. Ridgway, "Summary of Operations XVIII Corps (Airborne), 20 April 1949, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 48, Folder "CHRONO FILE: Ruhr/Elbe," USAMHI; Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, "Summary of Operations, The Elbe to the Baltic, 27 April to 3 May 1945," 20 May 1945.

[90] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 142-143.

[91] Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 722 and Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, "Summary of Operations, The Elbe to the Baltic, 27 April to 3 May 1945," 20 May 1945.

[92] Matthew B. Ridgway to Cornelius Ryan, 24 June 1979, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 6, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Cornelius Ryan, James Gavin, Correspondence, June-July 1973, concerning operation Market Garden, September 1944," USAMHI.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Gavin Diary, 25 April 1945.

[95] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[96] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 126.

[97] Combat Interview, interview with Captain Charles E. Sammon, 14 May 1945, CI-361 "XVIII A/B Corps, Rhine-Ruhr-Elbe Operation" 24 Mar – 1 May 45, Box 24117, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[98] Gavin Diary, 25 April 1945.

[99] Gavin, "Beyond the Stars," 93. In this draft autobiography as well as in *On To Berlin*, Gavin incorrectly gave the date of 29 April for this meeting. According to contemporary accounts, however, which generally agree on the timing of subsequent events this meeting could only have taken place on 28 April. See for example 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.; Combat Interview, interview with Captain Charles E. Sammon, 14 May 1945; and Combat Interview, interview with Captain Thomas M. Furey, 13 May 1945, CI-361 "XVIII A/B Corps, Rhine-Ruhr-Elbe Operation" 24 Mar – 1 May 45, Box 24117, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[100] See also Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 284; Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Historical Narrative, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, May 1945," 10 June 1945, Box "82nd Airborne Division—WWII—307th Eng. Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports," Folder "307th Hist Apr – Oct 45," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC; Reconnaissance Platoon, 82nd Airborne Division, "Record of Events for Month of April 1945. After Action Report 1-5 May 45," 10 May 1945, 382-CAV-0.3, Box 12432, Record Group 407, NARA II; Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, "Summary of Operations, The Elbe to the Baltic, 27 April to 3 May 1945," 20 May 1945.

[101] Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Historical Narrative, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, May 1945," 10 June 1945.

[102] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d. and Reconnaissance Platoon, 82nd Airborne Division, "Record of Events for Month of April 1945. After Action Report 1-5 May 45," 10 May 1945.

[103] "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945," n.d., CI-361 "XVIII A/B Corps, Rhine-Ruhr-Elbe Operation" 24 Mar – 1 May 45, Box 24117, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[104] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 126.

[105] Combat Interview, interview with Captain Thomas M. Furey, 13 May 1945.

[106] Langdon, *"Ready,"* 126. See also Allen Langdon to Clay Blair, 3 March 1984, the Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 54, Folder "Langdon, Allen," USAMHI.

[107] See Langdon, *"Ready,"* 127; Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Historical Narrative, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, May 1945," 10 June 1945; Headquarters, 82nd Airborne Division Artillery, "Narrative History, 28 April – 30 April 1945, Elbe River Crossing," n.d., 382-ART-0.3, Box 12430, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[108] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 285. See also Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 492-493; Langdon, *"Ready,"* 126; 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.; Combat Interview, interview with Captain Hunter S. Marston, 11 May 1945, CI-361 "XVIII A/B Corps, Rhine-Ruhr-Elbe Operation" 24 Mar – 1 May 45, Box 24117, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[109] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d. Capitalization in original.

[110] Langdon to Blair, 3 March 1984.

[111] Combat Interview, interview with Captain Thomas M. Furey, 13 May 1945.

[112] Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Historical Narrative, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, May 1945," 10 June 1945.

[113] Combat Interview, interview with Captain Thomas M. Furey, 13 May 1945.

[114] "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945."

[115] Combat Interview, interview with Captain Thomas M. Furey, 13 May 1945.

[116] See "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945" n.d. and Combat Interview, interview with Captain Charles E. Sammon, 14 May 1945.

[117] See Langdon, *"Ready,"* 126-127; Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Historical Narrative, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, May 1945," 10 June 1945; Combat Interview, interview with Captain Thomas M. Furey, 13 May 1945; Combat Interview, interview with Captain Charles E. Sammon, 14 May 1945; "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945."

[118] Combat Interview, interview with Captain Thomas M. Furey, 13 May 1945.

[119] Combat Interview, interview with Captain Charles E. Sammon, 14 May 1945. See also "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945."

[120] See also Langdon, *"Ready,"* 127-128; 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.; "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945"; Combat Interview, interview with Captain Charles E. Sammon , 14 May 1945; Combat Interview, interview with Captain Thomas M. Furey, 13 May 1945; Combat Interview, interview with Second Lieutenant William P. Ramsey, 11 May 1945, CI-361 "XVIII A/B Corps, Rhine-Ruhr-Elbe Operation" 24 Mar – 1 May 45, Box 24117, Record Group 407, NARA II; Combat Interview, interview with First Lieutenant Francis J. Myers, 14 May 1945, CI-361 "XVIII A/B Corps, Rhine-Ruhr-Elbe Operation" 24 Mar – 1 May 45, Box 24117, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[121] Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 493, Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 285; "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945."

[122] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[123] Combat Interview, interview with Captain David L. Hollingsworth, 9 May 1945, CI-361 "XVIII A/B Corps, Rhine-Ruhr-Elbe Operation" 24 Mar – 1 May 45, Box 24117, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[124] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[125] Ibid.

[126] "The Unit History of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion (From May 1, 1945 to June 3, 1945 Incl), n.d., 382-FA(319)-0.3, Box 12435, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[127] Headquarters, 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, "Narrative History," 31 May 1945, 382-FA()376)-0.3, Box 12440, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[128] Headquarters, 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, "Narrative History of the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion for the Period of 1 April to 30 April 1945," 8 May 1945, 382-FA(456)-0.3, Box 12445, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[129] The British 6th Airborne Division crossed over the Lauenburg Bridge during the night of 30 April – 1 May by ruse. According to Ridgway, the British VIII Corps commander (to whom the 6th Airborne Division was attached while it was west of the Elbe) "impounded the airborne people and would not let them approach the bridgehead until the armor had crossed. This left the airborne troopers champing at the bit. Then some bright trooper figured out a ruse. The airborne wore a red beret, with a black lining, and the armored people wore a black beret. So the airborne troopers turned their berets inside out and went across under the noses of the MP's, disguised as armored elements." Once across, the British paratroopers turned right and marched hard to link up with XVIII Airborne Corps before they were discovered. "It was a damned smart stunt," commented Ridgway, and one for which he was very grateful. Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 144.

[130] See also 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d. and "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945."

[131] Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 1 May 1945 – 5 May 1945," n.d., 382-INF(504)-0.3, Box 12453, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[132] Langdon to Blair, 3 March 1984.

[133] Combat Interview, interview with First Lieutenant Francis J. Myers, 14 May 1945.

[134] Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 258.

[135] Sims quoted in ibid.

[136] Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Historical Narrative, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, May 1945," 10 June 1945. See also Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, 258.

[137] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[138] Langdon to Blair, 3 March 1984.

[139] Reconnaissance Platoon, 82nd Airborne Division, "Record of Events for Month of April 1945. After Action Report 1-5 May 45," 10 May 1945.

[140] "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945."

[141] Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "Narrative of Operations and Activities Month of May, 1945," n.d., 382-INF(325)-0.3, Box 12448, Record Group 407, NARA II; Headquarters, 504th Parachute Infantry, "History, 1 May 1945 – 5 May 1945," n.d.; Combat Interview, interview with Major Fordyce Gorham, 11 May 1945, CI-361 "XVIII A/B Corps, Rhine-Ruhr-Elbe Operation" 24 Mar – 1 May 45, Box 24117, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[142] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 285.

[143] "The Unit History of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion (From May 1, 1945 to June 3, 1945 Incl), n.d.

[144] Pierce, *Let's Go!,* 288.

[145] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 285.

[146] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[147] "The Unit History of the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion (From May 1, 1945 to June 3, 1945 Incl), n.d.

[148] Headquarters, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, "Engineer Periodic Report From 040001 to 042400 May 45," 4 May 1945, Box "82nd Airborne Division—WWII—307th Eng Bn—Unit History—Incident Reports," Folder "307th Abn Eng Bn Reports Apr – May 45," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.

[149] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 285-285.

[150] Reconnaissance Platoon, 82nd Airborne Division, "Record of Events for Month of April 1945. After Action Report 1-5 May 45," 10 May 1945.

[151] "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945."

[152] Combat Interview, interview with Captain Robert Hanson and Captain Irven Bushman, 11 May 1945, CI-361 "XVIII A/B Corps, Rhine-Ruhr-Elbe Operation" 24 Mar – 1 May 45, Box 24117, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[153] Leonard Linton to James M. Gavin, 4 October 1978, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder "Letters and cards, to + from Gavin and 82nd Airborne Div. Veterans," USAMHI. Capitalization in original.

[154] 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Battalion Combat Journal, 1200 hours, 2 May 1945, untitled box, Folder entitled "*Histories—Ardennes (3/504th)," 82nd Airborne Division Museum, Fort Bragg, NC.

[155] 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Battalion Combat Journal, 1540 hours, 2 May 1945.

[156] "XVIII Corps (Airborne), Elbe River to Baltic Sea, 30 April to 3 May 1945." See also Combat Interview, interview with Major Fordyce Gorham, 11 May 1945.

[157] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[158] Shirley R. Gossett to James M. Gavin, n.d., The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder "Letters w/members of 505th Parachute Inf. Regiment, 82nd Division—Active and Association," USAMHI.

[159] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 286.

[160] Ibid. When asked what he said to the German general that caused him to change his mind, Gavin replied, "I simply swore at the German, loudly and somewhat gutturally. It was the sort of thing they respect more than anything else. He blanched a bit, but from there on he was very respectful." James M. Gavin to Ian S. Wilde, 25 October 1979, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 12, Folder "letters to and from 82nd Vets on airborne operations in Holland, September, 1944," USAMHI.

[161] Gavin Diary, 3 May 1945.

[162] Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 286. See also Headquarters, 325th Glider Infantry, "Narrative of Operations and Activities Month of May, 1945," n.d.

[163] Gavin Diary, 3 May 1945.

[164] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid. The war matériel figures given do not include the vehicles that passed directly through the 82nd's lines into XVIII Airborne Corps holding areas west of the Elbe.

[168] Gavin Diary, 3 May 1945.

[169] Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 434. Bradley added "[w]hen I learned that an entire army group [*sic*] . . . had surrendered to Jim Gavin's 82nd Airborne Division, my old outfit, I was pleased" (434).

[170] James M. Gavin to Matthew B. Ridgway, 27 June 1979, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 6, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway, Cornelius Ryan, James Gavin, Correspondence, June-July 1973, concerning Operation Market Garden, September 1944," USAMHI.

[171] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 464. Ridgway had not intended to take Wismar with the British 6th Airborne Division, but Dempsey had approached him requesting that British elements of XVIII Airborne Corps have the honor of being the first 21st Army Group units to make contact with the Russians. At first, Ridgway demurred. Dempsey's request would throw his attack "off stride" as he had already made plans to take Wismar with the U.S. 7th Armored Division. Getting the 6th Airborne to Wismar would mean Ridgway would have to move them diagonally across the 7th's line of attack, "which could cause all sorts of trouble on the roads." But then Ridgway reconsidered and in deference to Dempsey, for whom he had great admiration, and the courage and sacrifice of the British people, Ridgway changed his plan and turned the 6th Airborne loose. The British paratroopers did not disappoint, making it to Wismar "with amazing rapidity." See Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 145.

[172] Gavin to Ridgway, 27 June 1979.

[173] Ridgway and Martin, *Soldier*, 145.

[174] Headquarters, 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, "Narrative History," 31 May 1945.

[175] Gavin Diary, 8 May 1945.

Epilogue
Soldiers Recently Engaged in War

In these days, when men and officers seem to have turned their thoughts exclusively to getting home, I want you to know that there are a great number of us who realize that the past few years have been climactic in our lives. Nothing we, personally, can ever do can recreate the atmosphere of the great airborne D-days. . . . Now the exaltation which was once part of our daily lives as skyborne soldiers has subsided and we walk silently into the future remembering that once our comrades lent fire and a touch of greatness to the American cause. . . .

And so, for myself as well as all those others in the Division who remember the roar of planes at night; the white-hot instant when the warning light flashes on; and the magnificence of night skies full of swaying chutes, I want to say this:

'We hope, with all our hearts, that your wish will be fulfilled, and that somewhere, somehow, there will always be an 82nd. If we can know that somewhere your men will dare the challenge to "stand up and hook up," and know the moment of pride and strength which is its reward, then a little part of us will always be alive, free and invincible.'

A Lieutenant of the 82nd Airborne Division[1]

Following the capitulation of the German *Twenty-First Army*, the 82nd turned its full attention to processing the tens of thousands of persons passing through its lines—Wehrmacht and SS soldiers, German civilians fleeing the Russians, displaced persons from almost every country in Europe, and Allied prisoners of war who had simply picked up and started walking west when their German guards abandoned their posts. All further combat operations were suspended. For the troopers of the 82nd Airborne Division, the war had come to an end.[2]

But there was yet one last fight to wage, this one for the division's very existence.

Within days of Germany's surrender to Eisenhower at Rheims, France, on 7 May 1945, the War Department ordered that all those eligible for release from the service be returned to the United States and discharged.[3] Planning for this eventuality had been ongoing for over two years. The initial plan was to demobilize by unit in much the same manner the Army had always drawn down following a major conflict but at the behest of the National Resources Planning Board the plan was changed; instead, the Army would demobilize by individual. A scoring system was established that awarded a certain number of points for time in service, time overseas, time in combat, number of wounds

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Notes for the epilogue are found on pages 761 through 762.

received, and the number of children a serviceman had. Those with the most points, 'high-point' men as they were called, were the first to be offered the chance to return to the United States and their civilian lives. Using this system the Army planned an orderly draw down that also took into account factors such as the availability of shipping and the capacity of processing centers, among other things. However, once Japan surrendered in September 1945, calls for more rapid demobilization from Congress and the American public compelled the Army to accelerate demobilization, thereby upsetting all plans for an orderly transition to a peacetime establishment. As a result, in about thirteen months time the Army went from a force of 8,200,000 to one that contained fewer than 2,000,000 servicemen and women.[4]

The 82nd lost 647 of its high-point troopers even before leaving the Ludwigslust area, where it stayed for about three weeks before moving back to France. What this portended for the division's future was unsettling. The War Department had decided to retain just three of the five airborne divisions it had raised for the war in the peacetime establishment. Given the demobilization calculus of the Army's individual replacement program, the most expeditious manner of paring down would be to disband those divisions with the most high-point men. As the Army's longest serving airborne division the 82nd naturally had more high-point men than any other airborne unit, some 6,000 in all, which equated to approximately half its authorized strength.[5]

Both Gavin and Ridgway became aware of ideas for the post-war airborne establishment in late April 1945 (the first draft of the post-war organization plan for the Army was not issued until 15 March 1945), which called for two airborne divisions and a few separate airborne regiments. Which two divisions would be preserved was yet a question that remained unanswered. Ridgway dispatched his corps artillery commander, Brigadier General Lemuel Mathewson, to General Bradley's headquarters on a fact-finding mission. Mathewson reported back that although General Bradley "would dislike as much as anyone to see a fine fighting organization such as the 82nd broken up," from the standpoint of the War Department it was all about individuals and numbers and not about "salvaging any particular unit, regardless of its traditional background or military achievements."[6] Having received an unsatisfactory answer from Bradley—which must have come as something of a surprise given that Bradley had at one time commanded the 82nd—and unwilling to let 12th Army Group, SHAEF, or the War Department decide for him, Ridgway instructed his staff to come up with a plan for the redeployment of the four airborne divisions then in Europe—the 13th, 17th, 82nd, and 101st, all of which were under the administrative control of XVIII Airborne Corps. Brigadier General Eaton, the XVIII Airborne Corps Chief of Staff, summarized the resulting concept in a memorandum. Assuming that the first two divisions that returned to the United States would be disbanded while the two remaining would be retained on the active roles, and taking into consideration the combat experience of the leadership of each division, Eaton outlined a plan whereby the 13th and 17th would be the first two divisions returned home, followed by the 82nd and 101st in that order. Prior to their departure, all high-point troopers from the 82nd and 101st would be transferred to the 13th and 17th (in turn, low-point men from the 13th and 17th would be transferred to the 82nd and 101st to fill their slots). Eaton's recommendation, based on "a weighing of administrative and morale factors as well as probable employment in combat," presented a cogent and justifiable rationale for retaining the two airborne divisions with the most seasoned leadership and

proven combat records (the 13th Airborne Division never saw a day of combat while the 17th Airborne Division did not enter the fight until the Bulge), albeit doing so would be administratively more difficult because of all the individual transfers that would be required to make it happen.[7]

Four days after submitting his memorandum, Eaton learned that morale, proven leadership, and combat performance counted for little to those in the higher echelons. Late on the evening of 30 May he received a call from Eisenhower's operations officer, Major General Harold R. 'Pinky' Bull, asking for a recommendation on the order in which the airborne divisions in Europe should be returned to the United States. In a memorandum to Ridgway in which he recounted his conversation with Bull, Eaton reported that Bull told him that he had a list from the War Department showing that the 82nd would be the first of the four European airborne divisions returned to the United States, whereupon it would be inactivated. Second to go would be the 17th, which would also be inactivated, while the 13th and 101st were to remain on the active roles. Bull asked Eaton what he thought. Eaton told him that Ridgway wanted to retain the 82nd on the active roles, but this made little headway with Bull. "He told me that it didn't seem to make any difference on the future war standing whether the 82d was disbanded or not, because it could be reactivated from the 13th at a later date," reported Eaton. Bull did, however, offer a possible way to forestall the decision. At the time the U.S. 2nd Armored Division was on occupation duty in Berlin and SHAEF was shopping around for a replacement. Eaton jumped at the idea. "I told him that we would do everything to save the 82d, and therefore the 82d would certainly be acceptable as a substitute for the 2d Armored." Bull told Eaton that he would have to get permission from the War Department before anything could be done.[8] By mid-June, that permission was granted and the 82nd, then in base camps in France, began preparing for its new mission.[9]

The division assumed its new role as the American contingent to the Berlin occupation force in August. Two months later it received word, once again, that it was to be inactivated. The final decision for the post-war Army envisaged two airborne divisions: the 11th, which was on occupation duty in Japan, and the 101st. Adding insult to injury, the 101st had been selected to march in the long-awaited Victory Parade down New York City's Fifth Avenue, which was tentatively scheduled for January 1946. Gavin laid this legerdemain squarely at the feet of Major General Maxwell Taylor, who had just given up command of the 101st.

> We knew that the commanding general of the 101st had been ordered to the Military Academy at West Point to be superintendent when the war came to an end. He took that position in early September, 1945. We all assumed therefore that on his return he called on the Department of the Army [General Marshall and the staff officers at the War Department and Army Ground Forces] to plead the case of the 101st, and thus have it kept on active duty while the 82nd was inactivated.[10]

When he received the news Gavin thought long and hard about making an emergency trip to Washington to plead the 82nd's case, but his duties in Berlin precluded that possibility. Furthermore, unlike Taylor he did not have a personal relationship with General Marshall, nor was he savvy in the ways of War Department politics (Taylor, on the other

hand, had served in Marshall's secretariat for a year prior to his transfer to the 82nd in July 1942). But Gavin refused to go down without a fight. Engaging in what he called his "hardest battle of the war," Gavin worked both official and unofficial channels to mount a massive public relations and information campaign aimed at saving the 82nd Airborne Division.[11] His first action, of course, was an appeal to Ridgway, who at the time was temporarily (and fortuitously) assigned to the War Department General Staff (Ridgway had returned to the United States in late-May 1945 for a two-week leave, but while there received word that General MacArthur desired to use XVIII Airborne Corps for the invasion of Japan; Ridgway therefore extended his stay to supervise the redeployment of the corps from Germany to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where it was to refit before moving on to Manila, from whence it would stage for the invasion. But the war against Japan ended just as the corps was arriving back in the United States. Ridgway spent September 1945 in Luzon supervising an area command before returning to the United States en route to his next assignment as Commanding General, Mediterranean Theater of Operations). Ridgway did not disappoint.[12]

After hearing from Gavin, Ridgway sent a memorandum to the Army Chief of Staff in which he compared the records of the 82nd and 101st. The 82nd fought in two wars, he noted, the 101st in only one. In fact, he reminded Marshall, it was the 82nd that had spawned the 101st by halving its strength to create America's first two airborne divisions. Enumerating the combat action of the two divisions, Ridgway noted for the record that the 82nd had two more campaign credits than the 101st, that it had suffered more casualties in the war, and that during the much publicized Battle of the Bulge, which earned the 101st national recognition as a result of its stand at Bastogne, the 82nd "engaged in at least equally severe combat, [and] suffered greater battle losses." "Both divisions have splendid records," he admitted, "but the facts show a much longer and at least equally brilliant battle record in the case of the 82nd." And in a veiled reference to the relationship he knew Marshall had with Taylor he wrote that "[p]ersonalities of former and present commanders should not be factors in arriving at a decision, which should be based solely on record, in and out of combat." Then, in a flourish that was typical Ridgway, he framed the issue as one with weighty moral and transcendent implications, writing

> [r]etention of the 82nd will be accepted by the Army as a just and proper recognition of its service. Inactivation of this Division and retention of any other Airborne Division will be viewed as a grave injustice to the many thousands of living and dead who contributed to its achievements. The United States Army will not wish to perpetuate such feelings.[13]

Ridgway also saw to it that his memorandum made it to Eisenhower, who was still on duty in Europe, and whose opinion he knew would carry great weight (especially since it was common knowledge that Eisenhower would be replacing the soon-to-retire Marshall as Army Chief of Staff). Eisenhower agreed with Ridgway's recommendation. In a supporting memorandum that he had cabled to the War Department Eisenhower wrote, "I concur fully in the presentation made by General Ridgway. . . . In spite of my admiration for the 101st, if a choice must be made I am quite certain that the 82nd should be the one to be retained."[14]

Not one to trust wholly in Army officialdom—it was, after all, composed of the same people that had made the decision to inactivate the 82nd in the first place—Gavin turned to a coterie of unofficial, albeit well-placed allies: the press. This was not a difficult task. According to Colonel Barney Oldfield, the First Allied Airborne Army's public relations officer (and a former member of the 505th), "[t]he decision [to inactivate the 82nd] fell almost as hard on a militant section of the press corps which was high on the Eighty Second."[15] These militants included Bill Walton from *Time*, who had jumped with the 82nd into Normandy; John 'Beaver' Thompson of the *Chicago Tribune*, who accompanied Gavin during the drop into Sicily; Martha Gellhorn of *Collier's*, who took up the division's cause "like a suffragette"; Charles Collingswood of CBS; and Judy Barden of the *New York Post*. Led by Oldfield, these and other members of the press used their newspapers, magazines, and radio microphones to let out "a steady stream of comment questioning the wisdom of letting the celebrated Eighty-second go down the military drain when its great record would be such an inspiration to the peacetime Army."[16] "The men of the Eighty-second Airborne Division . . . are going home soon with mixed emotions," ran one representative communiqué Oldfield's cabal had posted in the 15 October 1945 issue of the *New York Times*. "Theirs is one of the proudest divisions in the United States Army and to the men who helped to build its traditions and fame it seems that the logic behind the decision to send its battle colors into the limbo of a museum while the names of other less famous fighting units are perpetuated is debatable."[17]

Gavin's two-pronged campaign worked with surprising speed. Whether it was the hue and cry raised by the press or the official memoranda from Ridgway and Eisenhower or both, in early November the War Department reversed its decision. The 101st would be inactivated and the 82nd retained.[18] Later that same month Gavin received another heartening message—the 82nd Airborne Division had been selected to lead the victory parade that would be held in New York City in January 1946.[19]

So it was that at precisely 1300 hours, 12 January 1946, Gavin stepped off at the head of 8,800 of his 82nd Airborne Division troopers from beneath New York City's Washington Arch and headed up Fifth Avenue. Overhead forty C-47s, each towing a glider, provided a fitting aerial complement. It was a day threatening rain, overcast, with temperatures in the forties. When told about the chance of inclement weather, Gavin promised to go, regardless of the conditions. " 'It's one of those things you dream about,' " Gavin told a reporter. " 'We'd all say: "When we get back we'll all parade up Fifth Avenue." It was just like our saying we'd parachute down on Berlin. We never thought it would happen.' "[20] Some two to four million people lined the parade route, cheering, crying, waving, and throwing confetti, but Gavin and his troopers kept eyes front and marched in silent, disciplined tribute to all those who never made it back for the parade. Columnist Ed Bliss was one of those millions who watched the 82nd stride by that day, and in piece he wrote to commemorate Gavin's death in February 1990, he recalled vividly what he saw and felt.

> There was no sun. It was dark, befitting men who had come back from death. It was all dark: the sky, the street, the helmets, the rifles, the battle dress. Although CBS and NBC had brought out their large parabolic microphones to pick up the martial music, I remember only two bands.

> For long stretches the only sound you heard was the tread of thousands of pairs of boots, an unforgettable haunting sound. You felt pride—and pain. As they passed, and kept passing, and kept passing, the tears came. Out of this many, so many must be missing. It almost seemed these were the missing. There was no glamor [*sic*] in this parade. These were soldiers recently engaged in war.[21]

So ended the World War Two odyssey of the 82nd Airborne Division. During that time the division spent 422 days in combat in five separate campaigns, earned fifteen Presidential Unit Citations, and three foreign awards (the Belgian and French Fourragere and the Netherlands Military Order of Willems). It took more than 181,000 of the enemy prisoner and killed and wounded thousands more. Three 82nd troopers won the Medal of Honor (DeGlopper, Funk, and Towle), seventy-nine earned a Distinguished Service Cross and almost 900 were awarded Silver Stars. But it had come at a bloody cost. All told the 82nd suffered 19,586 casualties during the war (more than two times the division's authorized personnel strength), 2,665 of which were killed in action (with another 1,600 missing as of October 1945).[22] Time and again it was savaged only to come back for more and it never failed to accomplish any mission it was assigned despite almost always fighting outnumbered and outgunned. There are myriad reasons for this record. One is definitely leadership. Ridgway and Gavin epitomized the up-front leadership-by-example that was demanded of every commissioned and noncommissioned officer who wore the 82nd patch. There were a few who did not live up to this high standard, but the vast majority did. Hence, instead of being *sent* into battle, the troopers of the 82nd Airborne Division were *led* into battle. And there was also the ethos of toughness, aggressiveness, and initiative that permeated the division, traits that were pounded into the troopers during training and expected of them in combat. According to Lieutenant Colonel George K. Rubel, whose 740th Tank Battalion was often attached to the 82nd,

> '[t]hese were truly fighting men. A squad of the 82d Airborne Division will take on a company of the German Army, an 82d Airborne Division Company will take on a German Battalion, and to assign any unit of the 82d Airborne Division an objective is to know that the objective will be taken and held.'[23]

In the midst of the Battle of the Bulge, there occurred one exchange that, perhaps more than any other, exemplifies the attitude of the troopers of the 82nd Airborne Division. It was 22 December 1944. The American Army was still in headlong retreat from the onrushing panzers that were seemingly everywhere. One column of American tanks came upon a lone bazooka gunner in a snow-covered bunker. The lead tank commander leaned down from his hatch to ask the lone trooper where the American lines were. The bazooka gunner, Private First Class Thomas Martin of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, replied, " '[y]ou've just arrived at the American front lines, pal. Now you just pull your tank up behind me. I'm the 82nd Airborne Division, and this is as far as the bastards are going.' "[24]

Epilogue Notes

[1] A Lieutenant of the 82nd Airborne Division (John V. McNally) to James M. Gavin, 19 October 1945, copy of letter given to the author by Starlyn Jorgensen and Barbara Gavin Fauntleroy.

[2] 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.

[3] MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 475. *Generaloberst* Alfred Jodl, representing *Grossadmiral* Karl Dönitz, who became the German head of state after Hitler committed suicide 30 April 1945 in Berlin, signed a formal surrender at Eisenhower's headquarters in Rheims at 0241 hours, 7 May, to become effective 2301 hours, 8 May. The surrender ceremony was repeated the next day in Berlin for the benefit of the Russians, with *Generalfeldmarschall* Wilhelm Keitel standing in for Jodl.

[4] See Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, 439-443; Matloff, *American Military History*, 530-531; Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, 486-487 and 569.

[5] See Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, 450; 82nd Airborne Division, *Action in Central Europe, April – May 1945*, n.d.; Memorandum, Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Order of Airborne Divisions Returning to the United States," 26 May 1945, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway: World War II—Personal—April to May 1945," USAMHI.

[6] Memorandum, Headquarters, XVIII Corps Artillery (Airborne), 14 May 1945, The Matthew B. Ridgway Papers, Box 3, Folder "Matthew B. Ridgway: World War II—Personal—April to May 1945," USAMHI.

[7] See also Gavin Diary, 25 April 1945; Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, 450; Memorandum, Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Order of Airborne Divisions Returning to the United States," 26 May 1945.

[8] Memorandum, Headquarters, XVIII Corps (Airborne), "Order of Airborne Divisions Returning to the United States," 26 May 1945.

[9] "82d Abn Div Operations Report," 382-0.3, Box 12345, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[10] Gavin, "Beyond the Stars," 102.

[11] Ibid., 105.

[12] See also Taylor, *General Maxwell Taylor*, 36-48; Gavin, "Beyond the Stars," 104-105; Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, 498-499.

[13] Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, "Inactivation of Airborne Divisions," 18 October 1945, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder 82nd Airborne Division Inactivation Papers," USAMHI.

[14] Memorandum, CG US Forces European Theater Main Frankfurt, Germany to War Department, 5 November 1945, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder 82nd Airborne Division Inactivation Papers," USAMHI.

[15] Barney Oldfield, *Never a Shot in Anger*, Battle of Normandy Museum Edition, (Santa Barbara, CA: Capra Press, 1956), 298.

[16] Oldfield, *Never a Shot in Anger*, 298 and Gavin, "Beyond the Stars," 104-105.

[17] "Airborne Division Coming Home Soon," *New York Times*, 15 October 1945.

[18] War Department Outgoing Classified Message to COMGENUSFET [Commanding General, U.S. Forces European Theater], 5 November 1945, The James M. Gavin Papers, Box 10, Folder 82nd Airborne Division Inactivation Papers," USAMHI.

[19] James M. Gavin to Clay Blair, 6 March 1984, The Clay and Joan Blair Collection, Box 53, Folder "Gavin, James M.," USAMHI.

[20] "82d Set to March Full Parade Route," *New York Times*, 3 January 1945.

[21] Copy of Ed Bliss's column "Men of Consequence," in the James M. Gavin Papers, Box 7, bound pamphlet "Lt Gen. James M. Gavin 82nd Airborne Division," USAMHI. See also Meyer Berger, "City Millions Hail the 82d in GI Tribute, *New York Times*, 13 January 1945; Frederick Graham, "Mighty Air Show Leaves City Awed," *New York Times*, 13 January 1946.

[22] Statistical Summary of 82nd Airborne Division in World War Two, 382-0.3.0, Box 12347, Record Group 407, NARA II.

[23] Rubel quoted in Ibid.

[24] Martin quoted in Devlin, *Silent Wings*, 288.

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