



HEADQUARTERS 82D AIRBORNE DIVISION
Office of the Division Commander

AFC 1169, US Army
25 September 1944

The following letter has been received from General GAVIN, Commander 82nd Airborne Division while in the field on Operation "MARKET" and is reproduced for your information.

Dear P. L.:

Captain THORNTON arrived last evening and asked me to send you a few notes on my reactions to the Troop Carrier-Airborne aspects of the present Operation.

First I would like to point out that the mission assigned the Division required it to land and seize bridges over the WAAL River, the MAAS River, the WAAL-MAAS Canal and to seize, organize and hold the GROSBEEK-RIJSEBEEK hill mass dominating these bridges. The area was occupied and well held by the Germans. The accomplishment of our mission required, above all else, precise and accurate troop carrier delivery, as well as aggressive, determined action on the ground.

The D Day parachute landings, without exception, were the best in the history of this Division. The accuracy, altitude and speed during drop were considered ideal by all participants.

The Pathfinder team landed on time on DZ "O" exactly as planned. Except for the fire of a few snipers, who were hardly more than a nuisance, there was no enemy reaction. They set up their equipment and proceeded to carry out their mission as planned.

The 504th Parachute Infantry, in order to accomplish its mission, arranged several DZs within its DZ "O" area. One was for the drop of a company west of GRAVE. The others were separate battalion drops east of GRAVEs. These drops were made very accurately. No men were drowned by being dropped in the river. Despite the flak, the pilots kept their formations and flew the troops into their specified areas. The regiment seized the GRAVE bridge in a matter of hours.

The 505th Parachute Infantry dropped southeast of GROSBEEK. There was considerable flak on their DZ. A number of ships were hit in the approach. Battalion Commanders stated that formations were kept, drops were made accurately and that, in their opinion, they were the best drops made in the history of their units. Initial parachute landings wiped out the flak crews on the DZs promptly and there were surprisingly few personnel casualties from flak.

The 506th Parachute Infantry landed northeast of GROSBEEK and went thru probably more flak than any other unit. Two ships were shot down in the DZ. Formations were maintained and accurate delivery accomplished, by the Troop Carrier pilots. In the opinion of the Regimental Commander it was the best drop the regiment has ever had.

Glider landings followed the parachute landings on D Day exactly on schedule and as a result of the elimination of the ground flak crews by the landing parachutists gliders were landed under excellent conditions and there was little loss except that caused by terrain hazards.

The D plus 1 glider landings were made on LZs "N" and "T". Early on the morning of D plus 1 the Germans launched a strong attack against the 82nd Divisions area from the REICHSWALD forest. A Mid-morning counter-attack by the Division drove the Germans to the approximate line of the forest, thus driving them from the LZ but not denying them the opportunity to place considerable flak over it and small arms fire upon it. A message was sent back to the rear base in an effort to direct the pilots to land on the high ground along the western portions of the LZ which was free of enemy fire. It was considered too late at this time to attempt to brief the pilots on a new LZ, and if the message, as sent, had reached all the pilots, I believe it would have accomplished its purpose. The tugs and gliders arrived during considerable flak and ground fire. Those landing on the west side of the LZs generally landed unscathed. Those that landed on the portion near the REICHSWALD Forest were generally pretty well shot up. For some unexplainable reason, 25 gliders and of the 319th Field Artillery continued over the LZ beyond the REICHSWALD Forest and landed about five miles into Germany. I was in GROSBEEK myself at the time and observed their flight. Several hundred gliders were landing on the proper LZ and the enemy fire from the REICHSWALD was very heavy. Despite this, they continued beyond the LZ through the heaviest enemy fire and landed beyond, suffering, no doubt, considerable unnecessary loss. Of these, about one-half have returned to the division. The Glider pilots stated that they were not given the green light by the tugs and, despite the fact that many landings were taking place on what they estimated to be the proper LZ, they thought it more proper to wait until the tug gave them an indication to release.

Twelve gliders of the 320th Field Artillery landed together three miles south of the LZ. To date seventeen glider loads from the D plus 1 Field Artillery landings are missing. All things considered, I would say that the D plus 1 glider landings were very successfully accomplished. There is obviously, however, considerable room for improvement; but the fact that so much was accomplished in the midst of a very intense ground fight on the edges of the landing zones speaks well for the training of the Troop Carrier pilots and the airborne personnel they lift.

The D plus 6 glider landings were made on LZ "O". This area was free of all enemy small arms fire and comparatively free of flak. Several rounds of enemy artillery landed on the LZ during the landing. Troop Carrier serials arrived in compact formations with time intervals that permitted landings on the same general area without too great a possibility of collision. I believe, however, that more gliders could be put over the LZ without causing any difficulties if the flight plan could provide for it. The personnel participating in the flight reported spotty and at times intense flak enroute, particularly in the vicinity of the ground engagement that was then taking place on the XXX Corps line of communications at VEGHEL. Initial landings took place at 1600 hours. At 1800 hours 75 percent of the 325th Infantry was present and effective. Today, D plus 8, 90 percent of the regiment is present. Missing gliders landed all the way from the UK to BRUSSELS, to LZ "Q". As well as can be determined,



landings were caused by tugs being shot down, gliders being shot loose, technical difficulties with tow ropes and flight equipment. All things considered, unit commanders participating in the D plus 3 flight feel that the flight was successfully accomplished. Again, however, there is great room for improvement.

Resupply missions, as viewed from this end, worked out as follows:

Resupply on D plus 1 was by B-24 bombers at a low altitude into DZs "N" and "T". This was the only resupply mission flown at the proper altitude. Considerable dispersion resulted from the variance in release points of the drop. The resupply was well scattered, part of it falling into enemy hands; however, it served its purpose and we recovered about 80 percent, all of which was very vital to our continued combat existence at this time.

The resupply mission flown on D plus 2 consisted of 30-35 ships. I was present on DZ "O" at the time of their arrival. They flew quite high, estimated to be 3000 feet, and dropped their supplies over a great range of territory. Recovery was practically nil.

Resupply on D plus 4 was evidently well over 300 ships flying at variable altitudes, from the proper low height to a very high altitude, and dropping the supplies in a pattern about six miles long and two miles wide, with the center of it about six miles northwest of the DZ, making recovery extremely difficult.

Air resupply was very essential to guarantee the continued existence of this division since, despite the fact that contact had been established with British troops, they were unable to furnish supplies of any class. Parachute resupply is, at its very best, an emergency means of resupply, and I believe to properly function would require about one-third of the combat force being used as a recovery detail to get the supplies to the remainder of the combat unit engaged. This is obviously an impossibility in a hard fought combat situation such as we had here. I believe that the your pilots made every reasonable effort to meet our resupply requirements despite the enemy interference present in the area, and I believe that the supplies delivered were an essential contribution to the Division's combat success. Error, if any, lies in planning a mission that requires supply of an airborne unit over such a long period of time by this means. I hope that in the future training we will have an opportunity to work out a few resupply problems and establish closer resupply liaison between the ground and air units.

I personally did not feel that close enough liaison existed between my own headquarters on the ground, where we were entirely familiar with the local enemy situation, and your own headquarters, where the pilots were being briefed. The areas of intense enemy activity, for example at VECHSEL, should have been avoided. The 325th Infantry, which is at present 90 percent effective, has been in the front lines for 24 hours actively and closely engaging the enemy. I feel that we should be able to accomplish a better delivery from the take-off airdrome to the firing line under conditions that now exist in this sector.



In looking back over the past weeks operations 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 our glider pilots.

Despite their individual willingness to help, I feel that they were definitely a liability to me. Many of them arrived without blankets, some without rations and water, and a few improperly armed and equipped. They lacked organization of their own because of, they stated, frequent transfer from one Troop Carrier Command unit to another. Despite the instructions that were issued to them to move via command channels to Division headquarters, they frequently became involved in small unit actions to the extent that satisfied their passing curiosity, or simply left to visit nearby towns. In an airborne operation where, if properly planned, the first few hours are the quietest, this can be very harmful, since all units tend to lose control because of the many people wandering about aimlessly, improperly equipped, out of uniform, and without individual or unit responsibilities. When the enemy reaction builds up and his attack increases in violence and intensity, the necessity for every man to be on the job at the right place, doing his assigned task, is imperative. At this time glider pilots without unit assignment and improperly trained, aimlessly wandering about cause confusion and generally get in the way and have to be taken care of.

In this division, glider pilots were used to control traffic, to recover supplies from the IZs, guard prisoners, and finally were assigned a defensive role with one of the regiments at a time when they were badly needed.

Major HEVINS was especially helpful, a conscientious and thorough in his effort to gain and maintain control over the pilots present. He did a fine job for me and I am recommending him for a Bronze Star for meritorious service.

I feel very keenly that the glider pilot problem at the moment is one of our greatest unsolved problems. I believe now that they should be assigned to airborne units, take training with the units and have a certain number of hours allocated periodically for flight training. I am also convinced that our airborne unit co-pilots should have flight training so as to be capable of flying the glider if the pilot is hit.

In summary, the Division captured the GRAVE bridge several hours after landing, seized the key terrain between GROSBECK and NIJSSGEN during the night of D - D plus 1, captured two bridges over the MAAS - WAA. Canal by daylight D plus 1, and captured the big NIJSSGEN bridge on D plus 3. The Division could not have accomplished any one of these missions, nor its complete mission, but for the splendid, whole-hearted cooperation of the Ninth Troop Carrier Command. The drops and landings were the best in the history of this Division. The courageous performance of the pilots was magnificent and has been the subject of boundless favorable comment by all ground personnel. With all the sincerity at my command I would like to express to you my appreciation and that of every soldier of this division.



for the splendid performance of your command.



Major General P. L. Williams
IX Troop Carrier Command

(By Personal Messenger)

Sincerely,

JMG
/s/ James M. Gavin
JAMES M. GAVIN
Brigadier General, US Army
Commanding