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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 503D PARACHUTE INFANTRY
REGIMENT IN THE MARKHAM VALLEY, WEST OF
LAE, NEW GUINEA, 1-7 SEPTEMBER 1943
(NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Regimental Parachute Officer)

Type of operation described: AERIAL SUPPLY OF A
PARACHUTE REGIMENT

Captain Elden C. Campbell, Infantry
ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO II

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the aerial supply of the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment in the MARKHAM VALLEY operation, west of LAE, NEW GUINEA. Although the operation began on 5 September and terminated on 19 September 1943 the period covered herein is from 1 to 7 September 1943 inclusive, the dates in which the preparation for the aerial supply began and was effected.

To properly orient the reader, a brief review will be given on the events which paved the way in establishing the Allied foothold in southern NEW GUINEA leading up to the plan for the recapture of LAE.

The Japs had all but engulfed NEW GUINEA. All remaining was MILNE BAY and PORT MORESBY, both of which they wanted in order to extend their bases to facilitate launching their attack against the mainland of AUSTRALIA. The plan for the capture of these two important bases all but succeeded except for the timely arrival of troops dispatched by General MacArthur. The Japanese forces that landed at MILNE BAY on 25 August 1942 were repulsed by stubborn, hard-fighting Allies who, by their tenacity, were responsible for the first decisive land victory in the start of the Allied drive to the North. (See Map A) (1)

(1) A-6, p. 95

On 25 September 1942 the first elements of the 32d Division were flown into PORT MORESBY for the beginning of the fight for BUNA and GONA. Commanded by Lieutenant General Robert Eichelberger, they, along with the 7th Australian Division pushed the Japs back over the KOKODA TRAIL, on which they had advanced to within twenty (20) miles of PORT MORESBY through the jungles to the coast. The Allied objective was sealed on 22 January 1943--but not without heavy losses. (See Map A) (2)

This victory allowed General MacArthur to establish forward bases at PORT MORESBY and at MILNE and ORO BAYS to more effectively press the recapture of NEW GUINEA. Realizing the importance of the Allied foothold, the Japanese began moving troops and supplies to reinforce their garrisons at LAE and SALAMAUA in an effort to repel the advance. These convoys were heavily attacked by Allied bombers during the period 6-9 January 1943. Later, in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea 1-3 March 1943, Fortresses and Liberators trailed and bombed Japanese shipping for three days inflicting casualties estimated to be eighteen (18) enemy ships and fifteen thousand (15,000) troops also destined to reinforce LAE and SALAMAUA.

The Japanese Air Force, however, was relatively unhampered to the extent that it was estimated they outnumbered the 5th Air Force two to one. To neutralize this strength the 5th and 13th Air Forces, aided by carrier based planes, engaged in a constant offensive that lasted through the Spring of 1943 and succeeded in wearing down the Jap air strength based at RABAU on NEW BRITAIN ISLAND. (See Map A) (3)

(2) A-6, p. 103; A-9, p. 43
(3) A-5, p. 234

THE GENERAL SITUATION

WARNING ORDER

The Warning Order to alert one (1) Battalion of the 503d Parachute Infantry was received on 24 July 1943 from General Headquarters. Immediately after, the Regimental Commander, Assistant Executive Officer, Air Support Officer, and the 3d Battalion Communications Officer departed by air for PORT MORESBY to confer with the Commanding General, Fifth Air Force, and the General Officer commanding the 7th Australian Division (General Vasey). After conference with the 7th Division it was decided, that due to the type terrain the parachute troops were to operate in and the wide front to be covered, to request that the Regiment be employed in place of the one (1) Battalion. The request was immediately sent to General Headquarters and subsequently approved. (4)

PREPARATION

The preparation for the operation began by bringing all equipment shortages up to date. Items of equipment requiring special construction, i. e., individual containers not available through the normal supply facilities that were used by the jumper for carrying ammunition, weapons, and other individual combat equipment, were massed produced by the Parachute Maintenance Platoon and issued to the Companies. All personnel parachutes and aerial delivery parachutes necessary for the operation were inspected, packed, wrapped in water proofed paper, and placed in parachute kit bags or sealed boxes preparatory to shipment. Included in the preparation were the

(4) A-2

aerial delivery containers to be used for the dropping of heavy equipment and supplies. (5)

With such obvious activity existing throughout the Regiment the problem of secrecy arose. It was maintained, however, by information being released from Regimental Headquarters that the Regiment was preparing for large scale maneuvers with the 32d Division. This was so effective that when the troops landed at PORT MORESBY many had no realization of their location. (6)

MOVEMENT TO CAMP BASE SUPPLY, PORT MORESBY, NEW GUINEA

The movement to the Camp Base Supply at PORT MORESBY, NEW GUINEA was accomplished by plane and ship. The 2d Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel George M. Jones, began moving by air on 18 August 1943. The remainder of the Regiment, less the Rear Base Detachment, embarked by ship on 20 August 1943. By 23 August 1943 the Regiment had arrived at PORT MORESBY.

(See Map A) (7)

Personnel of the Parachute Maintenance Platoon accompanied the 2d Battalion by air in order to begin preparation of parachute storage to be ready to receive the parachutes and parachute equipment that would arrive on 23 August 1943. The only protection available were squad tents into which a make-shift floor was placed, constructed of logs, for the purpose of keeping the parachutes protected from ground moisture. This proved satisfactory as an expedient; and in spite of the high humidity and heavy, unpredictable rains typical of the tropics, ample protection was afforded with no loss of parachutes. After the arrival, and when the storage was completed, the Parachute Maintenance Platoon began the inspection of all personnel and aerial

- (5) Personal knowledge
- (6) A-2; Personal knowledge
- (7) A-2

delivery parachutes and aerial delivery containers in preparation for the issue to the Regiment. Although it would have been desirable to have inspected all parachutes internally, the facilities and time available allowed only an external inspection. This, however, was adequate and, except for a few parachutes that had suffered broken lacing on the pack covers during shipment, all parachutes were in prime condition for the jump. (8)

Upon receipt of the Regimental order to issue the parachutes and parachute equipment, parachute riggers were assigned by teams to each Battalion for the purpose of fitting and adjusting the parachutes to the combat equipped jumpers. Aerial delivery containers, with the accompanying aerial delivery parachutes, were issued to each unit of the Regiment into which would be packed the specified weapons, ammunition, and supplies to accompany them into combat. (9)

Being concurrently conducted at this time by First Lieutenant Robert Armstrong was the training of thirty-one (31) officers and men from the 2/4th Australian Field Regiment who would jump with the Regiment on D-Day to provide artillery support. The interesting part of this was that these men were selected two weeks prior to the operation and bluntly told of their mission. Of further interest was the fact that the 2/4th, when asked for volunteers to accompany the 503d on the jump, stepped forward almost to a man. They would take in with them two "cut down" twenty-five pounders--the first parachute Field Artillery to be used in the Pacific War. (10) The guns were prepared for the

(8) Personal knowledge

(9) Personal knowledge

(10)A-4, p. 32

drop by the Parachute Maintenance Platoon employing essentially the same procedure as used for dropping the 75-mm pack howitzer, i.e., separate containers for the principal parts, each attached one to the other with webbing (known as the ground control pattern) in order to facilitate recovery and expedite assembly on the ground. (11)

CO-ORDINATED PLAN OF ATTACK

The first step in the plan for the capture of NADZAB was the building of an air strip at TSILI-TSILI (South of NADZAB) which was to be used as a forward supply base by the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment, and at which the 7th Australian Division Engineers and the 2/2d Australian Pioneer Battalion would stage for the attack.

The 2/2d Pioneers would leave TSILI-TSILI and march overland to the MARKHAM RIVER to arrive just prior to the 503d attack. Their mission was to prepare the emergency landing strip at NADZAB to allow the air landing of the 7th Australian Division. The Engineers would leave from TSILI-TSILI via the WATUT RIVER using engineers' boats and would arrive at the MARKHAM RIVER prior to the parachute drop. The Pioneers would bridge the MARKHAM with the engineers' boats, cross over and contact the 503d.

The 7th, after air landing, would drive to the East down the MARKHAM VALLEY to LAE. The 9th Australian Division was assigned the mission of attacking LAE from the East and establishing a beach head fifteen (15) miles East of LAE on D minus 1. The Jap garrison at SALAMAUA would be by-passed according to plan--which was to deceive the enemy into thinking that the attack

(11) Personal knowledge

would be against that area. (See Map B) (12)

MISSION OF THE 503D PARACHUTE INFANTRY REGIMENT

The mission of the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment was: to capture the area NADZAB-GABMATZUNG-GABSONKEK with the object of covering the NADZAB Emergency Landing Field; to establish a road block across the MARKHAM VALLEY road in order to deny to the enemy the use of the road as a means of movement into the NADZAB area; and, to begin the preparation of the landing field prior to the arrival of the 2/2d Pioneer Battalion. (See Map C) (13)

To accomplish this the 1st Battalion (less one Rifle Platoon), commanded by Major (now Lieutenant Colonel) John W. Brittan, would jump on Field "A" with the mission of capturing the area of the NADZAB Emergency Landing Strip and to establish a close perimeter defense around the area to prevent the enemy from infiltrating. In addition the Battalion was responsible for beginning preparation of the strip until relieved upon arrival of the 2/2d Pioneers. One Rifle Platoon of the Battalion was designated to jump on Field "D" with the mission of covering the assembly of the Battalion. (See Map C) (14)

The 2d Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel George M. Jones, would jump on Field "A" with the mission of capturing the area of GABSONKEK and preventing enemy infiltration from the North and Northwest. (See Map C) (15)

The 3d Battalion (less one Rifle Company and one Rifle Platoon) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John J. Tolson, III would jump on Field "C" with the mission of capturing GABMATZUNG

(12) A-2; A-4, p. 25, 27

(13) A-1

(14) A-1

(15) A-1

and preventing enemy infiltration from the East. (See Map C)

(16)

NARRATION

D MINUS 4

On D minus 4 the Regimental Operations Order was released, the "green light" for all personnel and units of the Regiment to establish a state of final preparedness for D day. (17)

The Regimental Parachute Officer was instructed to prepare twenty-two (22) parachutes with dummies attached to represent personnel, and twenty-two (22) colored aerial delivery parachutes with dummy supply bundles attached to represent equipment. These were to be used for a deceptive drop and were to be loaded, one of each, in the first twenty-two (22) planes that would transport the 3rd Battalion. Air Force crew personnel were assigned the responsibility of dropping the dummies at H plus six (6) minutes in the woods South of YALU. (See Map C) (18)

The Regimental S-4 was responsible for the procurement and movement by air of a forty-eight (48) hour supply of ammunition and rations to the forward base at TSILI-TSILI. Additional supplies, if required during the operation, would be delivered from the Camp Base Supply at PORT MORESBY. (19) Aerial delivery containers and parachutes were supplied by the Parachute Maintenance Platoon and transported during the same period. Approximately thirty (30) officers and men assigned from the S-4 Section and the Parachute Maintenance Platoon took part in the movement. At the forward base they were to be responsible

(16) A-1

(17) A-2

(18) A-1

(19) A-1

for the packaging of equipment and rigging of aerial delivery containers to load the supply planes and to ride the planes over to drop zones to discharge supplies to the combat echelon. (20)

The plan for the aerial supply of the combat echelon involved the use of three (3) modified B-17 bombers from the 43d Squadron of the 5th Bomber Command. In each B-17 a platform was built in one half of the bomb bay with the other half exposed to allow an exit for the supplies to be dropped. An anchor line was extended from the bomb rack to the radio compartment for the purpose of attaching the static line snap fastener of the aerial delivery parachute. In addition supplies were stored in the cabin of the plane and exited through the rear door by the handlers. The jumpmaster rode the bombardiers' compartment and gave the order over the liaison radio set to discharge supplies when the plane was over the drop zone. This method was satisfactory and was the best that could be effected inasmuch as the B-17 obviously did not possess the desirable characteristics of the cargo aircraft for supply by air--which at that time was the C-47. (21)

The B-17's would be available on D minus 1 for loading and would be assigned for supply by air for the period D plus 1 and D plus 2. (22)

D MINUS 3

On D minus 3 the 54th Transport Wing of the 5th Air Force began practicing the formations to be used for the jump. The formation was to be of six (6) planes echeloned to the right

(20) A-1; Personal knowledge

(21) A-2

(22) A-1

with thirty (30) seconds between elements. Of particular advantage to the Regiment was the fact that all pilots were seasoned in combat and well acquainted with the jump areas. This allowed the maximum time to be spent in practicing formation flying which was to continue until D minus 1 and in which eighty-two (82) aircraft participated--the number required to transport the Regiment to the drop zone. (23)

Concurrently, the communications to be used between the forward base and the combat echelon was being established at TSILI-TSILI. The radio set to be used was the SCR-188. (24)

The Communications Officer, Captain (now Major) Lawson B. Caskey, coordinated with the Air Force for the air-ground net, i.e., between the combat echelon and the B-17 supply planes. The ground set to be used was the SCR-284. The frequency assigned this net was the fighter liaison frequency, this coupled with the inexperience of the radio operator in the aircraft resulted in extremely difficult transmissions during the operation. (25)

The alternate means of communication which the Communications Officer provided for was a system of panels. These were issued to the Battalion S-4's with instructions for their use and the meaning of the pre-arranged panel displays outlined in the Signal Annex. (26)

D MINUS 2

By D minus 2 all personnel parachutes and aerial delivery parachutes and containers had been issued and the teams of parachute riggers had finished the fitting and adjusting of

(23) A-1; A-2

(24) A-1; A-2

(25) A-1; A-2

(26) A-1

the parachutes to the combat equipped personnel.

Included in the plan for the utilization of the Parachute Maintenance Platoon personnel was a detail to accompany the combat echelon. These men were attached to the S-4 Section and would be responsible for retrieving parachutes and aerial delivery containers and preparing them for evacuation by plane to PORT MORESBY. In addition they would assist the combat S-4 in the securing of equipment and in the establishment of the supply dump. Their main effort, however, was to be with the recovery of parachutes.

A detail of parachute riggers was designated to report to the departure airfields on D day to assist the personnel with their parachutes, to make minor adjustments, and replace parachutes if necessary. Each rigger was equipped with the required tools and equipment and to each air field was sent additional replacement parachutes. Upon completion of the air lift these riggers would report back to the base camp and prepare to receive the parachutes that would be returned to PORT MORESBY after collection by the riggers who accompanied the combat echelon.

Thus, the personnel of the Parachute Maintenance Platoon were assigned to three echelons; combat, forward base, and the base camp supply, and as they were trained and equipped were assigned those responsibilities commensurate with their training and equipment. (27)

D MINUS 1

Early on D minus 1 the three B-17 supply planes reported for loading. Two (2) planes reported to the forward base at

(27) A-1; Personal knowledge

TSILI-TSILI and one (1) to PORT MORESBY. The B-17 at MORESBY was designated as plane No. 1 and would accompany the combat echelon to drop supplies upon radio order or signal from the ground after all troops had jumped. The supply planes to be loaded at the forward base were designated as planes No. 2 and No. 3.

Loaded on plane No. 1 were the first priority ammunition and supplies to be delivered--those to be used for the road block across the MARKHAM VALLEY ROAD--land and anti-personnel mines, concertinas, plus 60 and 81-mm mortar, machine gun ammunition, and hand grenades to augment that which the troops carried in on their person and dropped in aerial delivery containers.

At the forward base planes No. 2 and 3 were being loaded to be ready and waiting for the call from Regiment. The order for the planes to take off for the drop zone would be given over the SCR-188 net by the communications section with the combat echelon as soon as possible after landing and securing the radio equipment.

Plane No. 2 was loaded with the Battalion and Regimental Headquarters medical supplies and equipment needed to supplement that which was carried on the person of, and dropped in containers by, the medical personnel. Included also was additional ammunition for the Australian Field Artillery 25-pounders, more 60 and 81-mm mortar, 30 and 50 caliber ammunition, anti-personnel mines, hand grenades, and concertinas.

Plane No. 3 carried 60 and 81-mm mortar, artillery, 30, 45, and 50 caliber ammunition to again add to the initial load carried by the Regiment. (28)

It would be well to mention at this time that each man of the combat echelon carried his initial rations and ammunition requirements on his person. Machine guns, 81-mm mortars and ammunition were rolled in the A-5 aerial delivery containers, ^{with} parachutes attached and loaded on the aircraft to be pushed out over the drop zone followed by the jumpers. (29)

By 1700 hours all units had submitted their plane loading lists to the Regimental S-3. One (1) additional copy was carried by the Officer or Non-commissioned Officer in charge of each plane to be turned over to the pilot upon loading. (30)

ENEMY SITUATION

The strength of the enemy at this time (D minus 1) was estimated to be 6260 at the LAE Garrison. Of this figure there were approximately 4620 combat troops and the remainder were base troops. Enemy activity in the area of NADZAB was limited and there were no known garrisons at GABMATZUNG or GABSONKEK. A heavily armed patrol of one hundred (100) to two hundred (200) Japs from LAE had been patrolling the area daily, arriving at GABMATZUNG from the East just before noon and departing to the East again on the MARKHAM ROAD in the afternoon. Other patrols ranging from sixty (60) to one hundred (100) men were known to be operating up to the twenty-ninth of August. Permanent garrisons were known to be located: one, sixteen (16) miles Southeast of NADZAB at HEATH'S with a strength of two hundred (200); one, sixteen (16) miles North at BOANA also with a strength of two hundred (200); one, sixteen (16) miles North at BOANA also with a strength of two hundred (200), and one fifty (50) miles Northwest at KAIAPIT with an unknown strength.

(29) A-1; Personal knowledge

(30) A-1

Of other forces stationed at LAE, MADANG, WEWAK, and RABAU only a small number could be expected to reach the NADZAB area in time to effect the operation. (31)

The success of the attack by the 7th Australian Division on LAE, tying in with the 9th Australian Division, depended on possession of the strip at NADZAB. He who held NADZAB challenged the Valley. The Japs could not foresee the penetration of a seemingly impenetrable wall of miles of mountains and jungle--certainly not while they (the Japs) held LAE. (32)

D DAY

By H minus 5 hours on D day all aircraft were lined on JACKSON and WARD--the two (2) strips used as departure airfields. The planes were numbered one (1) through eighty-two (82) and each was assigned a definite location in the parking plan. Correspondingly, the trucks to transport the Regiment from the base camp were numbered in the same number with a block of numbers assigned to each Battalion, each Battalion constituting a serial. The trucks reported to the Regiment at 1500 hours on D minus 1, were numbered and loaded, and at H minus 7 hours the first serial departed for the airfield, followed by the two (2) remaining serials at thirty (30) minute intervals.

By H minus three hours all aircraft were loaded and take-off began. At H minus two hours, after the planes had assumed their position in the flight, the formation nosed toward the jump fields.

(31) A-1
(32) A-4, p. 26

A total of three hundred and three (303) aircraft took part in the flight. Air cover included P-38's, P-39's, P-40's, P-47's, B-17's, B-24's, and B-25's. At H minus 1 minute the B-25's began bombing and strafing the woods adjacent to the drop zones followed by the A-20's laying a smoke screen in front of the wooded areas.

The C-47's carrying the paratroopers followed and in four and one-half ($4\frac{1}{2}$) minutes eighty-one (81) transports had discharged their live cargo. Each Battalion and separate unit landed on its exact drop zone.

One (1) plane load did not jump. As the aircraft approached the jump field the door, which the crew chief was removing to allow the exit for the jumpers, blew off and hung on the side of the plane. The life of every man would have been endangered had the jump been made. (33)

The Detachment of the 2/4th Australian Field Regiment, which had been loaded on D minus 1 at PORT MORESBY and flown to TSILI-TSILI, would jump on Field F at H plus 1 hour. They would take off for the drop zone after the C-47's had unloaded the jumpers and made their rendezbous over TSILI-TSILI. In each of the four (4) planes rode one (1) officer from the 503d with the responsibility of jump mastering the Aussie artillerymen and Engineer stores that would be used in the preparation of the landing strip. Lieutenant Armstrong, who had conducted the jump training of the 2/4th Detachment, jumped with them. The other 503d officers had been ordered to return with the aircraft to PORT MORESBY. (34) The Australians jumped at the designated hour, retrieved their guns from the kunai grass,

(33) A-2
(34) A-1

assembled them and were ready for firing in less than two and one-half (2- $\frac{1}{2}$) hours. This was extremely fast time considering the lack of experience of the men. (35)

All units that jumped were confronted by the very high and entangled kunai grass which was from six (6) to ten (10) feet high and extremely difficult to break through, resulting in impeding the assembly of the jumpers and equipment. (36)

At H plus 2 hours the 1st Battalion began preparation of the air strip. As planned in the operation the 2/2d Australian Pioneer Battalion was to join up with the 503d. The Pioneers crossed the MARKHAM RIVER upon landing of the Regiment, made contact, and immediately commenced work to complete the strip for operational use. (37)

According to their assigned missions the 2d and 3d Battalions moved out to capture their objectives and set up defense to deny the enemy access to the NADZAB area.

Immediately upon assembly of troops and equipment, radio contact was attempted with the supply plane hovering overhead. Contact was made, however the interference was too great to allow transmissions to be accurately identified. The alternate plan was immediately put into effect. All supply on the ground was conducted under the supervision of the Combat S-4. Supplies needed by the Battalions would be obtained by displaying the large circular panel which would indicate to the supply plane that supply was wanted. Next to the circular panel would be displayed the panel arrangement indicating the type supply desired. Each display indicated one unit needed. If more of the same unit was wanted the circular panel would be lifted and

(35) A-4, p. 32

(36) A-2

(37) A-1; A-2

waved when the supply plane came overhead. If only one unit was needed the next panel symbol was already displayed when the plane came over to drop the first supplies requested. (38)

As soon as radio contact was made with the forward base, the order was sent for planes No. 2 and 3, which were on ground alert, to take off for the drop zone and there receive instructions for the delivery of supplies.

The three (3) B-17's, when each had delivered its supplies, returned to the forward base. Plane No. 1 was again loaded with pre-planned supplies and equipment to await the call from Regiment to take off. It was planned at this time, i.e., when plane No. 1 returned from the second drop, that the ground action would be stabilized and that normal plane loading would be accomplished. (39)

D PLUS 1

At 1000 hours on D plus 1, after working all the night of D day, the NADZAB strip was operational and the first transports began landing carrying the Australian 7th and their equipment. Lending material assistance in the preparation of the strip and in the unloading of aircraft were approximately two hundred (200) Boongs (New Guinea "Fuzzy-Wuzzy's"). As Engineers and equipment landed--planes were landing one (1) every fifteen (15) minutes--two (2) more strips were prepared. As soon as the 7th landed they passed through the 503d positions and pushed down the MARKHAM VALLEY to converge on LAE in conjunction with the Australian 9th which had established a beach head fifteen (15) miles East of LAE. (40)

(38) A-1; Personal knowledge

(39) A-1

(40) A-2

Supply by air continued through D plus 1 delivering supplies as called for by Regiment, and at the end of D plus 1, as planned, the B-17's terminated their assignment as supply aircraft and returned to their home base. (41) Air supply, however, was on call to the end of the operation through the SCR-188 net. The aircraft that would be used were the C-47's based at TSILI-TSILI. Request to the Air Force for the planes would be made by the Forward Base Commanding Officer. (42)

D PLUS 2 TO THE END OF THE OPERATION

The parachute riggers who accompanied the combat echelon had, by D plus 2, collected and assembled the majority of parachutes and aerial delivery containers. All used in the operation, however, were not collected because of a fire, the source of which cannot be authenticated, that destroyed a large percentage still not collected from the drop zones. Parachutes returned to PORT MORESBY were retained at the air fields for evacuation to the camp site in AUSTRALIA where facilities were available for proper inspection, disposition, and replacement. Upon inspection all personnel parachutes used in the operation were condemned for further use. (43)

On D plus 4 the surplus rations and ammunition at the forward base were moved back to PORT MORESBY. (44)

Patrolling adjacent to and the security of the NADZAB area was continued by the Regiment. On 14 September 1943, the 1st Battalion was withdrawn to be returned to PORT MORESBY to prepare for another mission. On 17 September 1943, the 2d Battalion was evacuated to PORT MORESBY there to be joined by

- (41) A-1
- (42) A-2; Personal knowledge
- (43) Personal knowledge
- (44) A-2

the 3d Battalion which had left the Valley on the 19th (45)-- thus completing the first large scale employment of United States parachute troops in the Pacific and establishing the practicability in the use of airborne troops.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. EMPLOYMENT OF THE REGIMENT VERSUS THE USE OF ONE (1) BATTALION

Considering the extensive front and the dense terrain to be covered, the decision to employ the entire Regiment rather than one (1) Battalion was wise. From the point of view of planning future operations the experience gained throughout was invaluable. The use of parachute troops against an objective such as the MARKHAM VALLEY with the mission of capturing and holding the NADZAB strip certainly followed the airborne concept of hitting quickly and surprising the enemy directly on the objective.

2. SUPPORT OF THE REGIMENT BY THE PARACHUTE MAINTENANCE PLATOON

The Parachute Maintenance Platoon, assigned to Service Company, is composed of technicians who are highly trained in the packing, maintenance, and use of parachutes and parachute equipment. The MARKHAM VALLEY operation set the pattern for the support this platoon would provide the Regiment in future operations, and throughout the war this pattern was not materially changed. In each operation parachute riggers were assigned three roles: those assigned to the combat echelon to retrieve parachutes and parachute equipment, those who would prepare equipment for aerial supply and assist in the delivery of the supplies, and those who would remain at the rear base to begin preparing parachutes and related equipment in anticipation of the operation to follow. In the latter respect, it was always

assumed that the Regiment would be called upon to execute a parachute mission immediately after relief from the current mission.

3. COMMUNICATIONS

The establishment of communications between the aircraft and the ground and between the forward base and the combat echelon had been well prepared. The fact that the air-ground net was not used because of interference was no indication that it was not a good means of contact and would not have been satisfactory except for the duplication of the frequency. The alternate means, i.e., the use of ground panels, indicated foresightedness on the part of the Communications Officer to be prepared for any eventuality. The operation brought to light that communications had to be definite and that sole dependence could not be placed on a single means of communication. In jungle terrain it is very difficult to spot panel arrangements on the ground; therefore, a means of guiding the aircraft must be used--specifically, smoke. This expedites locating the panels and assures a prompt delivery of supplies. It is most desirable, however, that a combination of radio and smoke be used. Smoke to guide the aircraft to the drop zone, and radio as the direct means of communication. This was used in later operations and was extremely successful.

4. CONTAINERS USED IN THE AERIAL DELIVERY OF SUPPLIES

The aerial delivery containers used to supply the Regiment were well suited. They had been perfected just prior to, and in the early stages of, the war. Used most extensively in the MARKHAM VALLEY operation were the A-4 for radio equipment and medical supplies, the A-5 for machine guns and 81-mm mortars,

the A-6 for rations, the A-7 for 30, 45, and 50 caliber ammunition, the A-9 for mortar ammunition, and the A-10 Cargo Net for irregular shaped equipment and supplies. A type container that had been thought of prior to the operation but had not been made by the Parachute Maintenance Platoon in any quantity, and one that could be used for almost any type supply, was the Double A-6. This container was conceived and perfected by the Parachute Maintenance Chief, Master Sergeant (now Warrant Officer, Junior Grade) Loyd McCullough and was capable of accomplishing twice as much as most containers were, i.e., as far as the delivery of bulk supplies were concerned. Following the operation this container was massed produced in preparation for the mission to follow.

5. PERSONNEL PARACHUTES USED IN COMBAT

Before parachute troops were employed in World War II it was generally thought by many that the parachutes could not expect to be recovered after an operation--in effect, a loss of one hundred (100) percent. Various reasons were given to support this thought, however, for the most part, it was purely conjecture. A valid reason on why they should not be used again came out of the MARKHAM VALLEY operation, and this established a precedent for all combat jumps--at least as far as the 503d was concerned.

All parachutes that were returned from the drop zones were thoroughly inspected to determine the possibility of further use. Because of the length of time they were exposed to the elements, deterioration had set in throughout the parachutes, mostly in the harnesses which were constructed of cotton and nylon. After due deliberation it was decided that those personnel parachutes returned would be converted to equipment canopies for

use in aerial supply. This was accomplished by cutting the harness from the canopy and attaching snap fasteners by means of webbing to the connector links of the canopy. A great many parachutes, however, were disposed of because of complete deterioration.

Most important, though, was the morale effect on the men of the Regiment. It is hardly necessary to mention that every man had to have absolute confidence in the parachute that was to transport him from the aircraft to the ground. This, naturally, was the greatest factor that influenced the decision not to use parachutes that had been jumped in combat a second time.

NOTE: It is not intended to imply that this practice existed in other airborne organizations in the Pacific or European Theatres. In some cases airborne organizations in the European Theatre did re-use combat jumped parachutes.

6. ESTABLISHMENT OF PERMANENT STORAGE AND MAINTENANCE BASE

The operation brought forth strongly the need for permanent facilities for the storage and maintenance of parachutes. This was based on the adverse effect the tropical elements had on the parachutes and parachute equipment. In addition, the bulk of the equipment and the time involved in becoming operational made it impracticable for it to be moved with the Regiment to each new location. Furthermore, the only storage available would be tents which, as proved during the MARKHAM VALLEY operation, would not be adequate to afford absolute protection to the equipment, upon which the men of the Regiment had to have complete faith. It was decided by the Commanding Officer (then Lieutenant Colonel George M. Jones) that the base south

of CAIRNS in NORTHERN AUSTRALIA would be kept in operation until such time as proper support to the Regiment could not be maintained. This arrangement worked extremely well. Parachutes and other parachute equipment were sent by air when called for by Regiment, accompanied by parachute riggers to assume their assigned missions and upon completion of the operation the parachutes were returned to the rear base for inspection and disposition.

7. STANDARDIZATION OF INDIVIDUAL EQUIPMENT

Equipment that presented a considerable problem were the items required to be constructed especially for the individual jumper. For example, the squad rifleman was issued special pouches in which to carry the M-1 ammunition. These pouches were constructed with a loop on the back side that was used to slide on to the pistol belt. The man equipped with the Thompson Sub-Machine Gun was issued with pouches to carry the gun clips. A pouch was constructed for the hand grenades which was attached for carrying on the suspenders. These and others were made by the Parachute Maintenance Platoon and consumed a great deal of time.

Originally it was felt that these items of special construction were needed in order to bring ease to the jumper. Realizing the problem of construction and, more important, the fact that such equipment provided nothing that could not be derived from standard items of issue equipment, the Commanding Officer ordered that such construction cease and that the troops be issued the normal individual equipment as supplied by the Quartermaster.

LESSONS

1. Airborne troops play an extremely important role in employment against objectives difficult to reach by land, utilizing the principles of Mass and Surprise.

2. The Parachute Maintenance personnel should be used to the fullest in rendering every possible assistance toward the success of the operation by assigning them effectively.

3. Alternate means of communication must always be available between air and ground to resort to in the event of an emergency.

4. The ingenuity of the soldier can never--and should never--be underestimated.

5. The airborne soldier must have implicit faith in the parachutes he will use and that faith must be fostered by the personnel of the Parachute Maintenance who pack and maintain the parachutes.

6. The best protection possible must be afforded the parachutes and parachute equipment, preferably by facilities at a permanent base, as long as that base can properly support the organization.

7. It is not necessary that the airborne soldier, except in isolated cases, be basically equipped any differently than the non-airborne soldier.