

Inclosure

HEADQUARTERS 507TH PARACHUTE INFANTRY
APO 452, U. S. Army.

2 April 1945

HISTORICAL REPORT ON 507TH COMBAT TEAM DURING OPERATION "VARSITY"

On 24 March, dawn breaking clearly found the 507th Combat team gathered about their C-47's in crisp-cool air that foretold the advent of a beautiful day - beautiful from an esthetic standpoint and beautiful from a flying and tactical standpoint. In short, it was a good day for a jump. Groups were milling around their respective planes, checking last minute items of equipment, making last minute adjustments of chutes, giving bits of final advice and instructions. The air was pregnant with tense expectancy, strained jokes cracked, greeted with brittle laughter, wisecracks bantered. This was it - D-day - the biggest D-day, the day for which countless hours of sweaty toil had been shaping us, the 507th was this day to take part in a jump into the Fatherland itself. The acme of every paratrooper's dream was becoming an actuality. At 0700 hours everyone was aboard and at 0730 hours the first plance was airborne. Off to the vicinity of Bruxelles for a rendezvous with the glider trains and the 6th Airborne (Br) column, a change of direction, off toward the Rhine and a destiny beyond prediction. Looking out as far as one could see stretched the biggest sky armada ever assembled, literally thousands of gliders, C-47's, C-46's and fighter cover of all sorts. A sight only for those who dared the blue unknown, before long some successful others dwell in posterity as men who met the challenge, accepted it, and took it dealt without a murmur.

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The panorama from the plane showed a European landscape colorfully roofed hamlets, large industrial centers and farms. War seemed far away. The 20 minute warning, the men stood up and hooked up. It won't be long now. Suddenly as if a curtain had been lifted the view changed. The countryside was beaten and gray, barren, a grave yard look, the smoke of battle wafted drearily upward, shots could be heard; we were approaching the Rhine. For an instance the big river flashed beneath us, ack-ack and anti-aircraft fire rattled and cracked about us; the green light, GO! a rush of air, a jerk, a look around, a jolt, we were on the ground and the 507th Parachute Infantry had been committed. Colonel Edson D. Raff, CO, was the first paratrooper to land on Heinie soil. The first Serial (1st Bn and 3 planes from Hqs & Hqs Co) dropped at 0953 hours in an area near Diersfordt, north and west of the intended DZ "W". The 2d and 3d Bn's followed closely and landed on correct DZ. By 1100 hours, 2d Bn was on its objective and the 1st Bn had taken the 3d Bn's objective, as well as that of the 513th Parachute Infantry. 3d Bn took over its area from the 1st Bn at 1200 hours. 1st Bn captured a battery of 150mm arty pieces intact with crews. Regt'1 CP was established by 1450 hours at 182434, north of Dieren and south of Diersfordt.

At 1458 hours, Chariot 5 reported that 5 jeeps had been assembled from glider lifts and would be delivered to the CP as soon as possible. A report came in that Co "F" had made contact with the British and that 2d and 3d Bn's had contacted each other. At 1526 hours, General Ridgway and party arrived at CP after having crossed the Rhine by boat and procee overland by jeep. At 1535 hours Chariot 6 ordered road running along NW side of DZ "W" cleared as ordered by General Ridgway. A report from AA officer indicated that 2 Mark V tanks had been knocked out by new 57mm recoilless gun. General Miley (at approx 1600 hours) ordered 464th Arty positions protected and woods in vicinity cleaned out. By 1803 hours, Co "I" had made contact with 6th Br Airborne. Some strafing was being done about 2115 hours, but not within our troop area. At 2135 hours General Ridgway ordered strong combat patrols sent to contact British at Wesel, 513th PIR, 194th Gli Inf and to clear east - west road. Co "I" sent a combat patrol to Wesel. Most activity seemed to be along river, with strafing and anti-aircraft fire occurring along east bank.

During this period the enemy seemed to be completely demoralized and disorganized. Some gave up without a fight, although they had advantage

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of ground, prepared positions, combined with the fact that a paratrooper is comparatively helpless for some seconds after he hits the ground. Others fought hard and ferociously, inflicting casualties on DZ and in engagements immediately beyond DZ. Our positions were beginning to take form, but as yet the Germans did not seem to be maintaining any line. The rest took an approx 1000 prisoners, destroyed at least 5 tanks and captured 1 armored car, 2 personnel carriers and 1 jeep. Immediately after the jump, a group from 1st Bn, under control of Col Raff, CO, cleared the nearby woods of four or five MG's, and proceeded against a well-dug in but thoroughly confused enemy. PW's began to be taken and several field pieces were found and neutralized. Next a btry of 150mm How's attracted Col Raff's attention and were taken without opposition. This group had thus far accounted for approx 55 enemy killed, 50 wounded and 300 PW's, including one full colonel.

At the same time, another group of the 1st Bn under Maj Paul F. Smith, CO of 1st Bn, numbering about 200 men, having landed in south end of DZ, assembled and assaulted enemy in woods to NE, overrunning positions which included well-dug in riflemen, light MG and several flak guns. After having taken this position, they came under direct fire from enemy tanks, which proved to be situated in Diersfordt castle. This group swung to attack his position. Two Mark IV tanks attempted to break out and were knocked out by one 57mm recoilless gun. A large number of small arty, mortar and small arms fire was now coming from the castle. The time was now about noon and a meeting had been effected with the other 1st Bn group. Plans were under way for an attack on the castle when 3d Bn, Co "I" leading, arrived, and as the castle was their original obj, it was decided that the 1st Bn would proceed to its original def area. They arrived at their designated position at 1400 hours (90% assembled).

Simultaneously with the 1st Bn's opn, as described above, the 3d Bn had dropped and were pursuing one of their assigned missions. The 1st Bn had arrived on the ground of the 3d Bn's assigned mission. First because having been dropped on the wrong field they found themselves, "looking down its throat". Lady Luck had smiled on us again, for this did not interfere with the CT's plans, as the 1st Bn had been designated as the reserve Bn in the initial mission. The 3d Bn followed the 2d Bn into DZ "W", assembled under fire and proceeded toward the Diersfordt area, which we know now as in 1st Bn's hands. When they arrived, they found the 1st Bn containing the force holding the castle and its installations. At this point, as we have seen, the mission of reducing the castle was turned over to them. Co "A" was left as a base upon which to maneuver, and Co "I" started to make a flanking attack to the NE. The 3d Bn, after taking over the job, systematically took the castle as ours and the last bit of resistance, consisting of a large group of officers holding out in an isolated turret, was overcome that evening. This strongpoint yielded approx 300 PW's, amongst whom were several high ranking officers, including two colonels, and 2 Mark V tanks destroyed and 2 captured.

The 2d Bn dropped on their correct DZ, and although subjected to heavy machine gun and small arms fire from well-dug in positions, supported by light arty, assembled in an orderly fashion, and proceeded to their obj, securing it at 1100 hours. Co "D" contacted the 15th Br Div at 1300 hours and the bird's head became an actuality.

The estimated take of PW's for the day totalled 800, of which 50% of that number were casualties.

Naturally all cannot be told, much will never be told. Individual acts of heroism, which are a natural part of the initial phase of an airborne landing, will go unsung. Many stories of heroic deeds will be repeated wherever two or more airborne soldiers meet for years to come. Much we will never know, as "dead men tell no tales". Several planes were destroyed in the air. At least one plane crashed on the DZ with all aboard. Other planes burned after dropping their personnel. In some, the AC personnel escaped; in others, charred bodies gave stark testimony to the devotion to duty performed by good soldiers. Some parachutists were hit during their descent; some were killed in their harness on the ground, and others while scrambling off the field.

But as a whole, the casualties for such an operation were light (approx 7.3%) - light in a general sense, but not light to those who lost friends and comrades.

At 0515 hours on the 25th, twelve 75mm towed AT guns of Co "B", 605 TD Bn were added to the CT. Lt Kormylo's (2d Bn) combat patrol reported that contact had been made with Br Commando's at 0200 hours near Wesel. Commodore 3 issued a counteract plan at 0631 hours, to assemble 3d Bn in place and be prepared to defend in place or attack to east or northeast. At 1015 hours Chariot 6 ordered 1st and 2d Bn's to clear areas to our south and southeast toward Wesel. At this time seven AT guns of Btry "A", 155 AT Bn were added to the CT; three went to 1st Bn, four remained in regt reserve. Through Corps arty radio we learned that the Br had made a crossing west of Co "E" and could be identified by the green hats they were wearing and we were to notify arty as soon as any green hats were seen. At 1145 hours, 2d Bn CO reported visual contact with Br, and was moving out to meet them. Later at 1215, 2d Bn reported the Br had six assault boats and one tank across at 175410, south and west of our area. Soon after (1250 hours), physical contact was effected with the Br. A pocket of resistance seemed to be developing in "Y" in river SW of us. 2d Bn was preparing to clean out this area when word was given that the regt must proceed in a SE direction.

The regt was ordered to take up position E of Wesel. We proceeded in attack formation to London Line. What little resistance was encountered was found in 1st Bn sector. Regt was on final obj (London Line) at 0100 hours, 2d Bn on left, 1st Bn on right and 3d Bn in regt reserve. Regt CP was set up at Feldpark (225428), a small hamlet 1000 yds N of Wesel. To date 839 PW's have been taken officially, though half again as many would be the actual figure. The PW's came so easily and so fast the first day that to keep track of them was well nigh impossible.

At 0330 Co "A" 771 Tk Bn joined the CT with 13 med tks present and 4 more to arrive shortly. They were placed in regt reserve but instructed to follow the attacking echelons closely. (Actually, in many instances, the tks were but 50 yds behind the front wave.) The atk jumped off at 0900 2d Bn on left, 1st Bn on right and 3d Bn in reserve, and rolled on smartly, accounting only sporadic resistance. Three SP guns of 1st Tp, 144th SP AT Btry attacked with the troopers in the front line wave. Before noon the regt CP was established in a concrete dug-out, well camouflaged in the woods south of Schermbeck Hwy (269419). This was an elaborate installation controlling air raid communications from Holland through the Siegfried Line to the heart of Germany. 2d Bn reached the final obj (Autobahn running N and S across Schermbeck Hwy at 298415). At 1000 hours, 1st Bn reached obj at 1220 hours. Stiffening resistance was met at this point and one of the Br SP guns was slightly damaged by a German SP gun. Positions were consolidated at Autobahn.

At 1430 the 1st Bn was ordered to seize, hold and secure bridge across Lippe R near Krudenburg (323397), and to make contact with 30th Div on our right at bridge across canal S of river (325393). By 1645 contact had been made as required. Total PW's to date was 957. It appears that the enemy are fighting a not too well organized rear guard action.

On the morning of the 27th, a msg fr the CG informed the CO that he was not to cross the Paris line (a line running N fr Lippe R, 3500 yds E of the Autobahn), except on div order. Previous to jump-off time, the regt CP moved to a house on Schermbeck Hwy, 300 yds west of Autobahn (245425) at 0830 hours. The regt crossed at 0900 hours Co "C", 605 TD Bn reported to regt with 12, 3" guns (towed). At 0925 Co "F" mounted on tanks, crossed Pink Phase Line at 0945. 1st Bn reached Pink Phase Line at 0955. 2d Bn reached Pink Phase Line, at 1000. Co "F" dismounted fr tks, was momentarily pinned down; gained fire superiority and moved into the woods. Regt's CP was now at Pedderburg on Schermbeck Hwy (313418).

Just after noon our 2d Bn ran into some minor difficulties; one light tank was knocked out by a mine, Co's E and F were both engaged in a lively fire fight. In order to give the 2d Bn a chance to reorganize, the 1st Bn passed through them. The formation was now 3d Bn on right, 1st Bn on left and 2d Bn in reserve. By 1445 our front lines ran N and S astride the Schermbeck Hwy, 3500 yds E of Pedderburg. However, we were again on the move and by 1700 hours the Regt CP was located in a farm on Schermbeck Hwy. At this time, the CG ordered the regt on to Detroit Phase Line (road running fr Schermbeck S to Lippe R), and the Regt'l CP again moved forward to a farm house, 3500 yds west of Schermbeck Hwy (356429).

At 2020 the CP was visited by Brigadier Greenacre, CO of the 6th Gds Armd. In the morning this unit, reinforced by 513 PIR mounted on tks was to pass through us and attack S and E of Schermbeck toward Holsterhausen fr whence they would swing NE to Haltern, thus bringing them on our right flank from Schermbeck to Haltern. At this time we held a line about 1500 yds W of Schermbeck, with Co "I" astride road running fr Schermbeck to Lippe R. A msg from Commodore 3 informed us that we must hold the bridge where the Schermbeck Hwy crosses the Lippe R and contact patrol from 30th Div at bridge across canal on same hwy N of G hlen and report condition to division as soon as possible. Password for patrol to be "High Silk". To date we had taken 1033 PW's.

At 0230 the morning of the 28th a patrol fr 119th Inf of the 30th Div showed up at the CP and was sent to contact Co "I" patrol at Gahlen bridge. By 0445 we had the rpt that though the bridge had been blown by the Germans the abutments were in good condition and suitable to hold a Bailey bridge. At 0750 the 6 GA with the 513th PIR mounted on their tanks, began passing through our lines. A Ln O was sent to maintain contact with them. The regt jumped off on schedule at 0900, and the CP was moved to a house on the E edge of Schermbeck. This was but a pause, and as the troops moved out, the CP went forward to a farm on the Schermbeck-Wulfen Hwy, about 1000 yds E of Schermbeck. By 1100 the 1st and 2d Bn's had crossed Green phase line, a north and south line 1800 yds E of Schermbeck. The regt'l CP was shelled by several SP guns at 1000. This lasted for about 20 minutes, killing one and wounding 3 others. At this point, 1st Bn is just short of Black Phase Line, 3500 yds E of Schermbeck, and 2d Bn is 700 yds short of it. However, tanks began moving faster and by 1200 the 2d Bn is on line Boston, north-south road running into Holsterhausen. Both 1st and 2d Bn's have reached Tampa line by 1615. (Tampa line; RR running N out of Dorsten). Both Bn's cross Tampa line for their final obj, the 2d Bn reaching theirs at 1725 and the 1st Bn theirs at 2030. In the meantime, just before reaching Tampa line, a large ammo dump had been taken (456451). This was mined and time fuzes were set to blow at 2400, 29 March. A new regt'l CP was set up in a lodge on N hwy to Wulfen. The Boche had left in a hurry, for we found electric lights working and running water in the taps. 1125 PW's had been officially credited so far.

At 0315, word was received that the 6th GA had taken Haltern, and were on their way to Dulmen (on the road to Munster). The plan being that we were to send a Bn to hold Haltern while the armor drove on. The 3d Bn was sent by convoy over the S route at this time. At 0600 we were still out of communications with Haltern, so the Ln O was sent to contact the Brigadier at Holsterhausen, and to proceed along N route if possible to get through. The 3d Bn returning by N route if possible to get through. The 3d Bn was found to have arrived at 0600 and the N route was found open. At 0630 the regt was ordered to move to Haltern. Regt'l CO issued order to 1st and 2d Bn's to proceed to Haltern in tactical formation, ready to clear any resistance in the way, the 1st Bn to take N route, the 2d Bn the S route. The Regt'l CP was moved to Haltern and at 1200 the 1st Bn entered Haltern, having met no resistance on the way. The 3d Bn had taken over the defense of Haltern, sending Co "I" to Davesum (to relieve a unit of the 6th GA).

At 2115 the 3d Bn reported having captured a huge water plant, supplying water for a large area in the vic including 4 or 5 large industrial cities. The plant is a beautiful feat of engineering. We received a report that the time fuzes had been successfully removed from ammo dump we captured the day before. 76 P's were taken today, bringing the total to 1201.

The 30th of March found the regt in a static position, holding Haltern and vic. Co "E" found an ammo dump in an area N and E of the town (635550). It was used as a munitions factory. All told there are 8 bldgs, four were used as receiving centers for shell casings and powder, four were used for processing explosives and filling shell casings. The installation is extremely well-camouflaged, with actual trees and hedges growing over it.

By noon a force of enemy had attempted a counter-attack near bridge over Lippe R south of Haltern. Elm's of 3d Bn, reinforced by med tks (771 Tk Bn) were sent to neutralize all enemy. A German PW, taken in skirmish, states that there are two 7.2cm Russian guns and about half a company of Germans in vic, but reconnaissance led to higher estimates of personnel involved. Through the evening and night, Haltern was shelled fr S where the trouble started.

On 31st March at noon, we learned that the CT had temporarily reverted fr 17th Abn Div to XIX Corps, the 17th Abn moving to Dulmen. We were to remain in position, to hold Haltern area, the 15th Cav maintaining a screen between Haltern and Olfen. At 1920 the 3d Bn received a counter-attack fr the S of Haltern fr a force estimated at 120 men supported by arty. The counter-attack was repulsed with heavy enemy losses. A force of light tanks was sent to screen the area with idea of preventing infiltration. Additional tks and TD's were sent to area to help in this mission. The enemy force can do little but harass the 3d Bn with nuisance attacks and shell with arty. Shells fr enemy guns had fallen on Haltern constantly during the night. During the night, 1st Bn patrols contacted 329th Inf and 331st Inf at Olfen.