

P A R T III.

OPERATION 'MARKET'.

LESSONS.

INTRODUCTION.

221. The following remarks are of a general nature in most cases. The detailed reports of the various Arms can be read in the Annexures.

PLANNING.

222. Seven days were found to be adequate for planning, issue of orders, move to airfields, general briefing and loading of gliders. This assumes that transport is available for such moves and transit camps are ready for the reception of troops.

It is doubtful, however, if this time would be sufficient for a Div which either had not carried out an airborne operation before, or had not had experience of rapid planning and issue of orders. In an emergency, where the plan is simple, troops are at Transit Camps and gliders loaded, an operation has been laid on in 72 hrs. The operation did not take place, but the drill was worked out so that planning was completed in that time.

223. An Airborne Division is designed to fight as a whole. If the Division is split and committed to a 2nd lift some 24 hrs later then, owing to the necessity of allotting part of the first lift to protect the D.Zs. and L.Zs. of the following troops, the effective strength for immediate offensive action of the Div is reduced to that of a Bde.

224. It is considered that we must be prepared to take more risks during the initial stages of an Airborne operation. When the balance sheet of casualties at ARNHEM is made, it would appear a reasonable risk to have landed the Div much closer to the objective chosen, even in the face of some enemy flak. It has always been the rule when planning that the maximum distance from the D.Z. or L.Z. to the objective should not exceed 5 miles. In the ARNHEM Operation this distance was 7 miles and in some cases 8 miles. An extra two minutes flying time in the face of flak, if not too severe, would have put the Div - always supposing the ground was suitable - much nearer its objective. Initial surprise in this operation was obtained, but the effect of the surprise was lost owing to the time lag of some 4 hrs before the troops could arrive at the objective chosen.

A whole Bde dropped near the bridge site at ARNHEM might have been a major factor in the outcome of the battle; longer delay on the enemy would have been imposed and, if the SECOND Army had managed to get through ELST within the first few days, the larger bridgehead formed by the Bde might have made just the difference to the further progress of that Army north of ARNHEM.

225. The forecast of the photographic interpretation and of the 'I' appreciation, both RAF and Army, of the flak defences to be met in the area proved very pessimistic.

The forecast as to the suitability of the D.Z. and L.Z. in the POLDER country was also pessimistic. From subsequent examination it would appear that parachute troops could have been dropped practically anywhere outside the built up and wooded areas. Gliders could also have been landed in places previously considered as quite unsuitable. It is of course realized that a good deal

of dispersion would have been necessary in this case.

AIR SUPPORT.

226. Close air support during the first afternoon of the operation would have been invaluable. If there had been a "cab rank" available then and on subsequent days, the effect on the enemy would have been considerable. Close air support during the period when troops were in movement might easily have turned the scale and allowed the whole of 1 Para Bde to have concentrated near the main ARNHEM Bridge. Air formations must not expect to be given pin point targets always when air support is demanded. It was found that when area targets were indicated, both for medium gun shoots and air support, the results were considerable and the effect on the enemy's morale immense. A near miss within two hundred yds or so has a very shaking effect.

227. The support by Typhoon rocket aircraft was a great success and one could have wished that many more sorties of a similar nature had been forthcoming. There is no doubt that in an operation of this kind, immediate air support must be available at very frequent intervals if weather permits. Tac R aircraft were asked for on many occasions but none were allotted. Both these and Arty R aircraft are forms of support which should be automatic in an Airborne operation, or any operation for that matter, in the future.

228. It is considered that there should be one to one Signal working between the ground formation and the air formation which is actually detailed to provide close air support on call. A permanent allotment of a VCP to each Div HQ for use on training as well as on operations is a modern necessity.

PERSONNEL and WEAPONS.

229. It was found that the glider pilots, numbering some 1100, who landed with the Division took their part with success in the defensive battle which followed. The benefit of their initial training and their ability to shoot was invaluable. If such personnel had been untrained they would have become a complete liability very early on in the battle. In such numbers, if untrained, it is difficult to see how they could have been tucked away without becoming a complete menace to our own side and a liability as regards the consumption of the small amount of rations and water which was available.

230. It was found that the RASC and, of course, the RE could take their place in the line of battle with very efficient results. All personnel in the Airborne Division, who are likely to become involved in a battle, must be given the maximum infantry and weapon training that can be imparted in the time available.

231. It is thought that we do not realise our own strength as regards the effect of the weapons which we possess. It was not until the Div was put to it during the defensive battle and in the decreasing perimeter at ARNHEM that many of the soldiers appreciated how easily they could stop the German and destroy him with the weapons they possessed. The converse of course is very soon realised and over exaggerated during the early stages of a battle. A very few Germans with light automatics sometimes managed to hold up troops for much longer than was anticipated.

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We can do this equally as well, if not better, but we must appreciate what our weapons are for and we must learn to do early what we had to do in the end.

232. The value of the P.I.A.T. in thick country and in built up areas as a tank destroying weapon is immense. All ranks have now complete confidence in its use and throughout the battle there was a constant cry for more Ps. I.A.T. and more bombs. An increased establishment of these weapons for Para Bns and an initial allotment for the Lt Regt and A tk Btys is being demanded.

MORALE and DISCIPLINE.

233. Too much emphasis cannot be laid on the necessity for the strict insistence on discipline during training and preparation for battle. It was borne out in every case that the better trained and better disciplined the unit so the better it fought. Where, in some cases, these factors were not as good as they might have been, the results were very quickly shown.

The discipline of units shown during the withdrawal was quite first class and their behaviour on the river bank until light broke excellent.

234. Leadership and determination again showed themselves to the maximum during this battle. Numbers of men are not of the slightest use when the battle becomes really sticky, unless there is an officer or NCO who can, and does, lead them. The success or otherwise of the action always reflects sooner or later the determination and guts of the particular leader who happens to be responsible in that neighbourhood.

235. There is generally a certain amount of stickiness amongst units who are in the battle for the first time. This disappears in most cases when the noises of battle have been experienced. In ordinary formations units are broken in gently wherever possible but this is never the case with an Airborne Division, who generally drop straight into middle of the battle with little or no time to get its values correct.

236. One way in which this initial nervousness in battle showed itself was in the amount of indiscriminate shooting which went on during the first 48 hrs. Shooting at nothing in particular by individuals is a contagious disease and is extremely annoying to everybody. This must be checked in the very early stages. It must be impressed on individuals that they should shoot only at definite targets or if there is a definite suspicion of a target in their area. This restriction would not, of course, apply when a wood clearing operation or one of a similar nature is taking place, when hosepipe methods or "marching fire" may be just what is required.

The need for pre-battle training under conditions which are as realistic as possible cannot be over emphasised.

TRAINING.

237. More stress must be laid on the training of men to be more individualistic, especially in thick and difficult country. There is always a tendency to bunch together and to look to the local commander before taking any action. We are well behind the German when it comes to infiltration as shown by their snipers. The value of night training was borne out and there we have a tremendous

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advantage over the German who very seldom displays any initiative during the hours of darkness. This inactivity on his part during the withdrawal enabled us to reach the river bank. It is probable that otherwise very heavy casualties would have been suffered.

238. There is still far too much respect for enemy property or property of the country in which operations are taking place. This results in a tendency in the early stages for the troops to become road-bound and a failure to infiltrate or manoeuvre in the way that the situation requires.

GENERAL POINTS.

239. R.A.

The value of the FOU was proved. The immediate support given by medium artillery was quite remarkable. To shoot at the range of 19,000 yards on a map reference target which is surrounded by our own troops only a few hundred yards away, and do this without undue danger to them is a remarkable feat. The tremendous confidence of the infantry was such that repeat shoots were continually demanded and the medium artillery never failed in their consistent and accurate support.

The 75 mm gun is not a good anti-tank weapon at short range, owing to the lack of a shield to protect the personnel. It did extremely well in all other instances in the normal role.

The need for a third Anti-Tank Bty was shown. A third bty had been organised out of Div resources before the commencement of the battle and its value was found immense. It was found that anti-tank guns, either 6-pr or 17-pr, cannot be used as sniping weapons. Once in position they must stay in position. If tanks have to be stalked this must be carried out by anti-tank crews armed with Ps.I.A.T. and trained in tank hunting methods. This form of training must be practised.

240. R.E.

It is considered that all R.E. units within the Division should be homogeneous. There is a distinct lack of equipment with the Para Sqn as at present organised.

The value of the sapper as an infantry soldier was proved up to the hilt. They cannot, however, be asked both to fight as infantry and work as sappers. They can only do one thing at a time.

Flame throwing equipment manned by sappers proved useful.

241. Infantry.

The value of carriers to battalions of both Para Bdes and Airlanding Bde were proved. At least two per Bn are essential in future.

242. Royal Signals.

Communications within the Airborne Division and to the Base and the next higher formation need drastic revision and improvement. The sets at present in use are not satisfactory in all cases. The range attributed to sets was nearly always found to be grossly exaggerated.

243. R.A.S.C.

The whole question of air resupply needs reorganising. Some reliable method of communicating a change of SDP must be evolved. The VCP control for close support aircraft can be used for controlling air resupply.

Large numbers of jeeps were put out of action by air burst mortar fire and vehicles must be dug in as early as possible in a defensive battle.

There is no doubt that all ranks can fight with much less in the way of supplies than is normally prepared for. We should concentrate on ammunition and be prepared mentally to exist on very little food for considerably longer than is normally the case.

244. Fd Ambs should be homogeneous in future and contain a parachute element, a gliderborne element and a seaborne element. Some medical personnel should be allotted to each unit, however small.

Medical supplies during the battle rapidly became short and in the majority of cases those wounded only received a service field dressing. In spite of little attention for four or five days the condition of casualties remained extremely good.

FINAL.

245. In general the organisation of an Airborne Division showed up extremely well. Except for minor internal adjustments there is little need for alteration.

246. The lessons learnt in many cases are not new and they serve as a reminder for constant attention during the preparation period.

247. The Operation 'MARKET' was not 100% a success and did not end quite as was intended. The losses were heavy but all ranks appreciate that the risks involved were reasonable. There is no doubt that all would willingly undertake another operation under similar conditions in the future.

We have no regrets.

A.P.O. England.
10 Jan 45.

REU/BB

Major-General,
Commander,
1 Airborne Division.