



## AIRBORNE INVASION - GLIDER STY.

By

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1st Lt. 194th Glider Inf.

The shelling stopped.

The whine and thud and roar were gone. The trembling earth was still again. The jarring blast that had rocked the green fields for days was replaced by quiet.

The silence was deafening.

The soldier, crouching haggard and grimy behind his gun slowly raised his head and peered out. The smoke was still there. It had come in just before the barrage was halted. He stretched a little higher and looked around. Suddenly his blood ran cold.

Out of the smoke loomed a dim shape that quickly took on the form of a glider. It crashed to a stop in front of him. Before he could leap to safety a dreaded figure with baggy pants and big pockets leaped out carrying an undersized rifle. Swiftly he raised it and fired.

The German soldier dropped, a hole through his helmet. His comrades crouched back in their emplacement as the little rifle barked again and again. Then they came out, hands in the air, two of them wounded.

By this time, the big American lieutenant with the carbine had been joined by other soldiers and they took over two more flak guns before moving on with their prisoners.

All over the field and on other fields gliders were spilling out more of the dreaded sky-troopers with the baggy pants and big pockets.

Planning to the last detail, complete briefing of every man, and the sheer fighting qualities of the glider troopers themselves made history for the 194th Glider Infantry Combat Team and set up its air



invasion of Germany as a model for future airborne operations.

It was the first big-scale glider operation

It was the longest combat glider flight

It was the first double-tow in combat.

It was the first glider landing on fields not previously secured by paratroops.

For weeks the big tent that served as a war room for the combat team back in France was a scene of activity. But not a secret passed beyond the double barbed wire fence that surrounded it. The operation was planned, down to the last detail, and that last detail then became a guarded fact. When the Allies were ready to strike the 194th was set for its part in opening the long road to Berlin.

Through the hands of Capt. Charles F. Collyer, regimental intelligence officer, passed picture after picture, aerial photos of the Wesel area of Germany, already selected by supreme headquarters as the Airborne's objective across the Rhine, and with those pictures Major Carl A. Peterson and the battalion S-3's mapped the operation. The whole thing was a jigsaw puzzle and Col. James R. Pierce, 194th Glider Infantry Commander and Lt. Col. ~~Edward J.~~ <sup>JOSEPH W.</sup> Keating, commander of the 681st Glider Field Artillery, hovered about as every piece was dropped into place to form the design for invasion.

Then came the order to put the plan into operation and the combat team went swiftly but surely into action. The supplies for the invasion were issued and the troops moved off to the marshalling areas, poised for the swoop on Germany.

That was where the men received their briefing. Using sand tables, photos, and mosaics, Lt. Hubert Cunningham, Lt. Frederick S. Morton III, and Lt. Edward A. Gillam made it plain to every man where his glider was to land and what his individual job was to be. Every man knew his own job was linked with the regimental objective of seizing and holding all bridges near the junction of the Issel River and the Issel Canal in the vicinity of Wesel.



D-Day was 24 March and the takeoff began at 0809 and required 11 minutes. The troops were off on the ride for which they had trained for two years. It was a smooth ride, as glider rides go, but the two and half hours stretched out for ages as the men wondered what they would meet at the other end.

They soon learned. First of all they saw the smoke - - 66 miles of it laid down along the Rhine by the British. It helped the ground troops pushing across the river but made observation difficult for the pilots. Then they got a nasty taste of flak. Tugplanes burst into flames - the planes the men had come to know and trust. Gliders were hit. Some crashed. Some wandered off course. But most of them landed on or very near the tiny fields that had been selected long before.

The glider pilots had done their job well and the troopers were glad to have them for a part of the team. Now it was up to the infantry and the artillery to carry the ball.

As they tumbled out of their ships they were greeted by a scene of confusion. Gliders were burning. Some had caught in trees. Flak guns that had fired at them in the air had leveled off now and were firing flat trajectory. Small arms and mortars were in operation. Men were running, fighting, crawling everywhere. There were at least 150 small battles going on at once.

One glider ripped over fences, trees and emplacements and skidded to a stop at a machine gun position. The occupants captured the terrified gunners. The co-pilot of another glider knocked out a machine gun nest by firing his tommy-gun through the glider nose before it reached the ground.

Company G was the first to land, at 1030 - just three minutes ahead of schedule. The flak was bad though and not a single glider of its lot landed on the assigned fields. But the men assembled quickly and as other companies came in they found the going somewhat easier.



The confusion created by more than one glider landing on a single field from different directions - an apparently haphazard landing pattern - worked to the advantage of the Americans. The Germans were suddenly confronted with a fighting front on every side. The Glider troops expected that.

One battalion S-4 landed near the CP and was inside within 10 minutes. By 1045 Easy Company had assembled a platoon, had taken 50 prisoners and was converging on the regimental CP, which was also the CP of the defending force.

Led by Capt. Robert Dukes, men from Fox company swarmed through an enemy CP before the occupants knew what was happening and captured the colonel. As the officer was led from the building his orderly, hearing the commotion and seeing the officer departing, rushed out with an armload of papers and maps,

"Sir!" he called, "You forgot your maps."

A gliderman, quick to size up the situation, grabbed the papers and maps from the astonished orderly. They showed the location of defense installations throughout the area.

While Fox Company was capturing the colonel and his CP, Co. I was busy on a similar mission. Lt. Thomas McKinley gathered up 15 men and they rushed an artillery battalion CP, capturing the commanding officer and his entire staff. They took 50 prisoners, 15 of them wounded, within a few minutes.

The Third Battalions anti-tank platoon went into action shortly after landing, knocking out one Mark IV tank and damaging another.

Hastily assembling, Able Company seized and manned its objective within 30 minutes after landing, holding bridges and preparing demolitions for possible later use. It had a stretch of 1000 yards to defend. A strong point along the river was pinning down Company A and part of Company C. A glider-load of men from Baker Company, coming to their aid, knocked out resistance in a house with grenades and then went on to capture two 88 guns and their crews before they could get into action. The men turned over the guns to the anti-tank company, along with the prime movers.

In the Second Battalion, the two assault companies were assembled



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within an hour and moving on their objective. Suddenly faced with tanks they went into action. Pfc. Robert C. Flynn, a member of the I and R section, had jumped on a bicycle he found and pedalled away to alert both Company F and Company G. Pfc. Robert Geist knocked out a Mark IV with a bazooka at 15 yards and William Palowida got one from a distance of 100 yards. Some time later, after the company was in position, another tank appeared and Pfc Robert Weber looped a high angle shot from his bazooka 600 yards to strike the open turrent. The tank burst into flames. Pfc. Andrew Adams of Company G likewise was able to chalk up one tank. He waited until it was 10 yards away and got it with his bazooka.

The artillery part of the combat team also was finding the going tough in spots as howitzer men turned infantry for a few minutes while beating off attacks and at the same time trying to get their guns into position. The spots picked for some of the gun positions turned out to be infested with Germans and bristling with flak batteries. As soon as some of the guns could be brought into position, they laid direct fire on 88's that were pinning down both infantry and artillery.

Before it could go into action with its own guns, however, the 631'st was bringing artillery fire from across the Rhine, where the British 31st Light Regiment was waiting for only a fire mission sent back by radio. That eased the pressure. Throughout the first day, cub planes of the 631st cruised about over the Rhine, relaying any messages that might not be clear, and the British help continued.

Within two hours, however, the battalion was firing co-ordinated fire missions and had wire laid to the Combat Team CP. It fired six missions on D-day and eight more that night.

The artillery was handicapped somewhat by the lak of medics. One medical officer's glider had to cut loose in France. The other surgeon, Capt. Katsumi Nakadate, was wounded but refused to be evacuated during the early stages of the combat and went on with his duties at a hastily set up aid station.



The first battle on D-day had gone off successfully. As the pressure eased, each commander began a checkup. Most of the men were there. Most were unscathed and ready for more fight. But some had not been so fortunate.

Some men went down with their gliders. Others were killed or wounded as they left the ships. Some gliders were forced down some distance away from their landing zones.

First Lieutenant Robert B. McGhee of the AT company, dropped away from the LZ, left his men to make a reconnaissance. Thinking he saw a GI enter a house, he followed. He called out but received no answer. Then he heard a door open and turned to see a German squad entering. He opened fire with his carbine, killed four before the other 12 surrendered. Marching his prisoners back to where he had left the men, he was engaged in a fire fight by another German squad but other Americans came to his aid to help wipe out the resistance and he proceeded with the prisoners.

Flak cut the tow rope of the glider in which Lt. Frederick S. Morton, I First Battalion S-2 was riding before it could circle for a landing. It was forced down three miles beyond its LZ. Two flack guns levelled off as it skidded to a stop on a tiny field. The six men crawled out, two of them wounded. With Morton in the lead they began crawling for the woods a hundred yards away. But only Morton made it. There he met a patrol of five Germans whom he shot, and eluded another patrol the same size. He hid in the woods that night and the next day, ventured out again and narrowly escaped detection when he stepped on a covered foxhole and had to wipe out a patrol of three more men. Then he was shelled by both British and American artillery and dug in. When the shelling stopped, he went to sleep but was awakened by kicks from three German soldiers who took him prisoner. After being questioned by various commanders, he was sent to Borken under guards who had orders either to take him there or shoot him and a British paratrooper who likewise had been captured. But at Borken nobody could be found to accept them and the guards went to a farmhouse that was also an inn. There Morton and the innkeeper talked the Germans out of holding him any longer and the guard left.



Morton and the Tommy stayed at the Inn escaping discovery by banqueting German paratroopers and an SS man who came looking for them, and were rescued when a British column pushed past Borken.

Cpl. Homer C. Moyer, a medic, likewise was captured but when the Airborne and ground units pushed forward rapidly three days later, he was freed. When he reported to a British armored force commander he brought with him 20 Germans whose surrender he had accepted. Unarmed, he lined them up in a column of twos and marched them to the nearest MP's.

As they checked up, the various organization commanders noted the absence of these men and others. They noted too that they had lost equipment in some of the gliders which had crashed. The 681st had lost 60% of its ammunition. But a re-supply was dropped from low-flying liberators. Using every vehicle available - from wheelbarrows to conveniently located horses and wagons, the artillerymen began to bring in food for their howitzers and were able to boost the ammunition supply from 300 to 1000 rounds.

Company G had the mission of securing the Issel canal as far as Wesel and of establishing contact with the British Commandos who had entered and sealed off the town. Lt. Fred B. Wittig took his platoon and tried to infiltrate through the German lines which were particularly strong on the exposed flank of the glidermen but was pinned down by enemy fire. A runner was able to return and report the situation and a platoon from the reserve company was sent to aid the patrol. But as darkness fell, Wittig's platoon advanced into the town, contacted the commandos and spent the night in Wesel.

Meanwhile, Company G reported all communication lines cut along its 2500 yard front and enemy patrols infiltrated and were picked up by the reserve company. Machine gun positions in the area were overrun but the lines held. Enemy reinforcements, not knowing the exact location of the front, came up and detrucked 600 yards from Fox company. As they came across an open field corps artillery inflicted heavy casualties.



Lt. Herman Lemberger, forward observer for the 681st with Company G, who had given first aid to five wounded men earlier in the day, disregarding his own safety as tanks approached opened up his radio to adjust fire. He was killed by fire from the tanks but his effort resulted in breaking up the attack.

Another artillery officer, Lt. Hilliard S. Dura, that night disregarded sniper fire to take personal command of a gun and knock out the snipers and one gun which had been hampering the glidermen's work.

The glider pilots, who had brought the war to Germany, now had turned infantrymen to help liquidate the enemy in the Airborne area. Armed with the weapons they had brought and whatever they could pick up, they were formed in two defense groups. Suddenly a German bomber, shot down by Allied action, crashed within a few yards of the house in which some of them, under command of Capt. H.A. Lyerly, of the 194th were located.

A body of 150 Germans with a tank, a self propelled gun and an armored car, tried to break out of the woods and attacked the 435th Group TCC, supported by B and E Batteries of the 155th Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion. The glider pilots allowed them to approach within a few yards and then opened up with every weapon they had, killing 50 and knocking out one vehicle. The Germans moved on and were further cut down by fire from the AA men, Battery A of the 681st and Company K. By the time they reached Company G only 30 men were left and some of them were killed there. The glider pilots had had their first taste of fighting east of the Rhine and they were ready for more action.

Throughout that night and the next day the Third Battalion had the task of clearing out the woods. During sporadic fighting Sgt. W. M. Wolford of Company C took a mortar out in front of his riflemen and, without the use of either bipod or sight, fired six rounds at the advancing enemy. His action helped to halt an attack without giving away the position of the company.



By the second day the various companies had reorganized preparatory to a new attack. They had taken 1153 prisoners on D-day. They added 229 more on the second day as they successfully advanced to the "London Line", the day's objective.

Medics of the combat team played an important part, both in giving aid during the early phase of the combat and often taking prisoners. On the second day of the operation Pfc. Robert Martin, of the First Battalion Medics, went to the second floor of the building used as an aid station. Seeing a German officer's cap, he shouted, "Achtung!" A German lieutenant came out of hiding, his hands in the air. Medics of the battalion took 78 prisoners.

The supply problem, bugaboo of every airborne operation, was handled in three ways.

The men carried what was essential in their big pockets, in a few jeeps, wherever they could tuck it and be sure it would go with them. Those supplies went aboard the gliders. But a quick re-supply was necessary. That meant it had to be dropped by plane. The glidermen had hardly landed before fat-bellied Liberators, ignoring the flak, just cleared the treetops to dump out ammunition, rations, whatever else was most needed. Some of the Liberators plowed into the flak and crashed in flames. Supplies were dumped from such low altitudes that supply parachutes hardly opened before they hit the ground. One man, kicking out supplies, became tangled with a bundle and crashed with it. But a big part of the supplies came through.

The rest of the supplies came overland.

Before the troops left for the marshalling areas long columns of trucks had wound their way through France, Belgium and Holland into Germany, into pine forest west of the Rhine. The ground echelon, under security orders, looked like green replacements. Nobody wore pants with big pockets, jump-boots or knives strapped to their legs. They had the unglamorous task of supplying their buddies in the glider echelon spearheading the Allied offensive. They watched the skies. As the skytrain came over they went into action.



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Out came their jump boots, the pants with the big pockets. Now they were airborne and proud of it. Jeeps were desperately needed. In column they left that night to cross the Rhine. As they moved into the 194th area at noon on D-plus-one they were a welcome sight. Their arrival meant a strong linkup across the river. The bigger trucks came over the next day. Arrival of the kitchens meant welcome relief to the men in the front lines from the K rations they carried in their big pockets. With them were other trucks carrying other needed supplies and able to haul more supplies from the bases across the river.

Solution of the supply problem was well on its way.

On 26 March the 194th launched its drive inland, across the Autobahn, with the First and Third Battalions abreast and the Second a motorized reserve. The advance was so rapid that frequently the Third Battalion did not wait for supporting fires but drove ahead and over-ran all enemy positions encountered.

First Lieutenant Ford H. Browne, commanding officer of Dog Company, during the early part of the operation was a one-man terror for all the Germans he met. On D-day plus one he charged a sniper in his jeep, firing a machine gun as he rode, and the terrified Nazi came out of the house where he had been hiding and surrendered. On D-plus-two a part of his company was pinned down by sniper fire from a house. As Brown advanced a machine gun opened up from behind a pile of bricks. He fired a rifle grenade into the brick pile and the gunner fled, only to be captured. The sniper likewise left the vicinity. On D-plus-three Brown was advancing through the woods with a platoon when he suddenly jumped from his jeep, fired once. A Nazi fell. Twenty-five men and a captain surrendered.

Somewhat heavier opposition than on the preceding day was encountered by the 194th on D-plus-three, but the units consolidated their positions in the late afternoon and on the next morning made rapid progress. By 29 March, the forward CP had been set up at Hausdulmen.



The enemy was cleared from occupied areas the following day and no enemy action was reported. On 31 March the CP was set up at Dulmen while the Second Battalion moved to Nottula to clear the woods northeast of the town. The CP, after a brief stay at Schapdetten, moved to Nienberge where the combat team prepared to launch an attack on Munster.

The attack started on the afternoon of 2 April with the 194th driving into the ruined city from the North to meet the 513th coming in from the South. Casualties were light as all objectives of the first day were gained and as the process of clearing out enemy resistance continued.

The Third Battalion, racing around the city to seize bridges over the Dortmund Canal arrived just as a bridge was blown.

The combat team had liberated hundreds of slave laborers throughout the drive from Wesel and had seen the look of gratitude on their faces as they were told they now were free to leave German taskmasters. But it remained for Munster to provide the first Allied prisoners of war to be liberated in the midst of a flak storm.

Arriving at a prison camp after dark, Company I learned that there was a large body of men inside. "Two thousand Jerries", the word went down the lines, and Capt. David R. Sellars prepared for whatever action there was to be, but voices could be heard inside and they were not talking Jerry talk.

Cautiously Company I and other elements of the battalion approached. Inside they found 2000 Russians and 1000 Greeks, Belgians, French, Italians and Poles, all prisoners of war.

They came out laughing, crying, overcome with emotion. Like the glidermen who had found them, they were free.

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