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B-020

Fighting of the 3rd Parachute Division during the
invasion of France from June to August 1944.

Translated by Janet E. Dewey, November 1989
at the US Army Military History Institute
and for the Center of Military History

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Introduction.

The following work on the fighting of the 3rd Parachute Division during the invasion of France in 1944 has been completed without the aid of official documents. It is primarily based on memory. I have tried to reconstruct the events to the best of my knowledge; however, there may be some discrepancies on dates and times. If anything contradicts other reports, please feel free to investigate the matter.

Fighting of the 3rd Parachute Division during the invasion of France from June to August 1944.

1. Background. The activation of the 3rd Parachute Division was ordered on 15 December 1943. The organization area was Chalons sur Marne-Barle Duc-Joinville. The division staff was set up in Joinville. In early January 1944, I was named commander and took over the division. The division was subordinate to the II Parachute Corps which at that time had its HQs in Melun. Troops arrived by transport and gradually the strength was approximately 500 men. They were mostly young men between the ages of 21-22 who had voluntarily applied for the parachute troops. Very few had any type of training. Fighting spirit and morale of the men was excellent. The noncommissioned officers and separate troop commanders were battle-trying and came from other parachute units. We were well off as far as personnel and training. Now all we needed was enough time to train the young recruits. The issuance of materials took more time. In the last days of January 1944

the division was suddenly ordered to move to Brittany. The troops were transported by rail to the area Mons d'Arree and Heligat (see sketch 1).

At first the move was undesirable because of the delay caused in the organization of the division and the supply difficulties that resulted. The new area, however, provided ideal training conditions. It was scarcely populated and the farmers only used a small portion of the land. Maneuvers could be easily conducted as well as firing practice.

The division received a combat mission for the event that the enemy invaded Brittany. By deployment of parachute and air-land troops to the fields, the enemy would probably attempt to take the range of mountains of Mons d'Arree. This would be a very difficult area to recapture. For this event the division was subordinated to the Corps HQ of the XXV Army Corps. There was no change made in their normal subordination to the II Parachute Corps. The mission of the division in this area was to impede an enemy air landing and destroy the air-land troops before they could tactically effect the situation. The placement and distribution of the troops was based on this mission area. All point of departure areas and air landing areas had to be reached quickly. Effects of firing would have to overlap these areas. Based on this several troop sections, especially the artillery and anti-aircraft units, were quartered in barracks on the ruling hills of Mons d'Arree. A continual air reporting service was

established. In general, the troops were not affected by this eventual combat mission and their training continued.

The real problem was still getting material issue, in particular weapons and vehicles. They were much too slow in arriving. Through all types of improvisation we were able to get some materials so that we could at least meet training needs. As a result of the enthusiasm of the young, enlisted soldiers, experienced leaders, and good training conditions, the personal development of the soldiers progressed. It reached such a level that, at the beginning of the invasion, the troops were able to withstand the strenuous requirements of the month-upon-month battles that followed. A captured report of the 1st American Army during one of the battles in the Ardennes recognizes this. Training continued in the areas specific to paratroops. Soldiers were trained in individual combat in guerilla warfare with emphasis placed on terrain and weapons. Later they were trained in fighting in company and battalion strength forces. The non-commissioned officers were schooled in war plans and war games which strengthened their power of decision and command technique. Finally the troops began attending jump school in Lyon and Wittstock. This was all done in preparation for their employment. By the beginning of the invasion, most of the division had gone through the 3-4 week course. By 6 June 1944 division readiness was as follows:

Personnel: with some exceptions, 100%.

Training: ready for combat operations if they did not

require any special preparations.

Weapons: approximately 70%. We were still lacking machine-gun 42 and antitank guns.

Ammunition: sufficient. There were 3-4 stocks for all available weapons.

Mobilization: for a fully motorized division, there were not enough vehicles. Only 40%. Spare parts were very limited. There was also not enough fuel for the vehicles.

Force Distribution: see sketch 2 for deployment at the invasion front. Alert and march of the 3rd Parachute Division to the operational area of Normandy.

On 6 June 1944 at 0200 hours, I was notified telephonically by the Operations Officer at Corps HQs (II Parachute Corps) that, according to reports by the 7th Army, enemy paratroops had landed at Coutances and the long awaited invasion was beginning. Paratroop and sea landings at other locations were to be expected. The division was ordered to 'Alert II. There was no order received or briefing given as to possible deployment of the division to another area. I gave the order for alert to the units subordinate to the division and then increased observation of the air space around Mons d'Arree. I did not raise a full alert because it would have been premature, disturbed the soldiers in their sleep, and unnecessarily used up strength.

On 7 June 1944 around 10000 hours, the Commanding General of the II Parachute Corps, LTG Meindl, telephonically ordered the

following (this is not verbatim): "It is certain that the invasion has started. In addition to the paratroops on the Cotentin peninsula and at the mouth of the Orne, there are major landings from the sea. The Corps HQs II Parachute Corps has the mission to use the 3rd Parachute Division, 352nd Infantry Division, and the expected 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division in the sector St. Lo and to the east and push the enemy to the north back into the sea in order to regain the coast. The 3rd Parachute Division was to move immediately by way of all available vehicles to the area of Avranches. The rest of the division was to begin marching up. The next order would be given from Avranches where a signal center would be set up."

As a result of this order, full alert was given and preliminary orders were given to prepare the troops for marching. For the first time, the mobility problems of the division (fully motorized division) became evident. These problems had been repeatedly presented to higher HQs. It was a sobering fact that, out of the light infantry division regiments, only one battalion from each could be mobilized. The rest of the division troops, engineers, artillery, antitank units, had only 1/3 to 1/2 of their motorized strength. The anti-aircraft battalion, which had been organized in Germany, as well as the parachute signal battalion were well-equipped with vehicles and could mobilize most of their forces. It had to be assumed that the motorized groups would already be engaged in fighting before the mass of the division arrived. For this reason it was necessary, in order

to later integrate forces or avoid a difficult relief, to take one battalion out of each regiment for as long as possible until the division could be established into regimental sectors. I decided to send ahead motorized advance troops made up of one battalion from each light infantry regiment, two engineer companies, two batteries from Parachute Battalion 3, a company from the antitank battalion, the entire anti-aircraft battalion, and the signal battalion. They would set out to use the night of 7-8 June and cover as much distance as possible. See marching route sketch 3. The first general officer, along with the ordnance officer and the division signal officer, would be sent out in advance on 7 June at 1700 hours to receive orders and establish an advance message center in Avranches. I supervised the movement of the motorized group as well as the preparations for the formation of two marching groups. Early on 8 June at 0600 hours I followed the motorized groups and caught up with them in the area east of St. Meen.

Surprisingly there was no enemy air reconnaissance during the day and no fighter bomber activity over the route of march. The troop movement went off without any interruptions or losses.

Around 1500 hours I arrived at the southern road out of Avranches and met with my advance general staff officers. They briefed me on the situation. The enemy had taken Bayeux and was feeling its way forward in the woods of Cerisy. At 1800 hours there was to be a receipt of orders by the Commanding General in Les Cheris (ten kilometers southeast of Avranches). After I gave

the tasks of reconnaissance and establishment of a temporary division HQs in St. George (12 kilometers northeast of Avranches), I drove to the II Parachute Corps. There I received the following order: after the motorized group arrived, thrust ahead to the northern edge of the woods of Cerisy and hold the enemy coming out of the north and out of Bayeux until the remainder of the division arrived. After I returned to my division staff HQs in St. George, I conveyed the order with the corresponding execution measures to the leader of the motorized advance troop, MAJ Becker. On the morning of 9 June, I drove to St. Lo where I reported to the Commanding General of the LXXXIV Corps, LTG Marks, and asked to be briefed on the situation. After I returned, I was informed of the arrival of the motorized group directly to the north of St. George. They were given the order to push ahead on the morning of 10 June over Dorigny-Rouxviele-Berigny on the northern edge of the woods of Cerisy. I personally reconnoitered a division command post north of Torigny and used a farm in the small woods west of Chapelle du Pest (three kilometers north of Torigny). That evening I transferred my staff to that location. After the motorized marching group arrived in the area north of Torigny, a large number of the transport vehicles were sent back to the two marching columns in order to speed up their arrival.

In the meantime, the battalions of the marching groups which had partly been deployed in fortified positions around Mons d'Arree by the regimental commanders for security reasons were put on alert and formed into two marching groups. The commander

of the marching troops in sections of the 3rd Parachute Division, LTC Liebach, was given the following order: sections of the division that were not motorized were to move as fast as possible to the combat area. The movement was to remain hidden from enemy air reconnaissance so that meant mostly night marches. See sketch 3 for the route of march.

The advance began on 7 June at 1900 hours in two marching groups (A and B) under the leadership of the commanders of Parachute Regiments 8 and 9. The bulk of the 3-6 issues per gun ammunition stocks had to be left behind because there was no means of transport. One box had to be carried with the troops in addition to baggage and small arms ammunition in pouches. As the troops reached the first marching objective at Carhaix, they were generally exhausted. These troops had never marched before. The stiff parachute jump boots were not broken in and this resulted in a large number of foot injuries. Some rural, two-wheeled horse carts were rented to provide some assistance. (No vehicles or fuel could be found.) Each battalion needed about 45 horse carts to transport the soldiers with foot injuries. The limited performance of the heavy, northern French horses made the going slow. Every two days, new carts were rented. The expansion of the road depth and the corresponding difficulties in camouflaging the operation caused problems for the commanders. Major roads as well as large towns had ^{to be} skirted and secondary roads were used. Difficulties in orientation, which were in part caused by lack of

maps, were overcome by using guides. Mobility was improved by the confiscation of bicycles. A large section of the marching group, primarily the liaison HQs, advance HQs and guides, was made "wheeled" in this manner.

The short nights required the march to be conducted at a sharp tempo of 40 kilometers per night. In the darkness, the draft-horses had to be led by the bridle and the troops had to frequently grope in the dark. These night marches required a great deal of discipline and perseverance by the troops. On the other hand, it bonded the units together. The feared obstruction of the route of march by the French resistance movement did not occur. In the first three days there were no losses to speak of. The conduct of the French citizens was restrained, but civil.

At the quartering area around Hede, the troops, which were resting during the day, could watch enemy bomber squadrons fly over as well as witness a bomb attack on Rennes. The impression of unquestionable enemy aerial superiority left its mark on the troops and increased the meaning of camouflage for them.

On early 15 June, the forward marching Group A reached the area south of Louvigne du Desert without having any contact with the enemy. Thanks to our excellent camouflage, the mass of enemy fighter bombers converging on us did not find any targets. Bombs were dropped in great numbers haphazardly on unoccupied towns and estates. That evening vehicles from the motorized sections of the division returned and loaded two battalions (I and II of

Parachute Regiment 8). They were given the order to move to the area around Lamberville northeast of Torigny sur Vire by morning. Because of the darkness, there was the usual difficulty in loading. Some columns went in the wrong direction causing traffic breakdowns. The bridges at St. Hilaire were barred as a result of enemy bomb attacks and the narrow detour west of St. Hilaire was congested because of a bus accident. As a result of these conditions, the march took 24 hours. Only one battalion staff and two platoons reached the hills of the division combat outpost by the morning of 16 June.

The last sections of marching groups A and B arrived in the ordered assembly area in the line Caumont-St. Lo during the night 17-18 June. In spite of the effects of aircraft on the road Bregey, Torigny, and, for the first time, night bomber activity with illumination bombs (Christmas trees), there were hardly any losses in men or materiel. The young paratroops had covered the long route of march of 350 kilometers in 8-10 nights under adverse conditions and had stood the test. Unfortunately, developments in the situation did not allow the troops to have even one day of rest.

Fighting east of St. Lo.

On 10 June the advance group led by MAJ Becker reached the area Berigny by way of the road St. Lo-Bayeux. They felt their way forward in the woods of Cerisny and encountered only weak security by the enemy. Possession of these woods appeared to me to be very important for further conduct of battle, particularly

for the planned attack. I decided to take the newly arrived reconnaissance battalion from the 17th SS-Panzer Grenadier Division on my right and press ahead the next morning into the woods. To the left I had contact with the patrols of the 352nd Infantry Division. I explained my intention to the Commanding General of the II Parachute Corps and I was denied my request. The 352nd Infantry Division had suffered heavy casualties in the first days of the invasion and a considerable section of their sector was now given to me. My front now took on the character of combat outposts. Most of the division was still marching up to Brittany. I put the point of main effort north of Berigny, where the danger from the enemy was the greatest. If at that time the Americans had made an energetic attack out of the woods at Cerisny, St. Lo would have fallen. It could never have been held for an entire month. The sections of the division which were available, one reinforced regiment, occupied the sector St. Germain d'Elle-Berigny-Couvains. As a result of insufficient artillery, most of the anti-aircraft battalion for antitank protection (anti-aircraft combat troops) were deployed immediately behind the front. The situation was critical as support from the neighboring divisions was very loose and consisted of only contact patrols. An attempt to establish better connections to the right so that the right flank of the division would be further to the northeast was unsuccessful as a result of heavy enemy counterthrusts on and out of Cacquerie.

On 14 June the expected enemy attacks began on both sides of the road Bayeux-St. Lo. They lasted until 17 June. Even though

they were conducted with rested troops and had heavy tank support, they were able to be defeated or, after a short initial victory, could be stopped. By counterthrust the old main line of resistance was reached. These days brought the first major defensive victories and destruction of tanks. The soldier's level of self-confidence was raised considerably. On 16 June the Division Staff HQs in the small woods one kilometer west of La Chapelle du Fest was hit by a heavy bomber attack which lasted one half hour. It was so heavily damaged that it had to be moved to a group of houses two kilometers east of Conde sur Vire. There were nine dead and numerous wounded. In the meantime the enemy had reinforced the front to such an extent that a German counterattack, if even considered, could only be conducted if the necessary number of new troops were placed in readiness. In the place of the former order to attack, the division received a defensive mission. They were to hold the old main line of resistance at all cost. The foot troops had now arrived in the division combat area and they were distributed among the defensive sectors. Even then the front of the division, which had increased to 24 kilometers, was still very sparsely occupied. The battalions, which had been used as advance troops and were now exhausted, could be moved back and placed in reserve. As of 18-19 June, distribution was as follows: RIGHT. Parachute Regiment 8, CENTER. Parachute Regiment 5, LEFT. Parachute Regiment 9. Division Reserve: Parachute Engineer Battalion 3 immediately behind their sectors. (See sketch 4 for more details.)

During the next weeks, combat operations gave the impression of powerful reconnaissance and containment. The enemy attacked on almost every position on the front but never with more than battalion strength. If the enemy encountered considerable resistance, he fell back to his departure position. The strength and type of enemy artillery fire and the constrained combat air reconnaissance supported this view. For our troops, this type of defense against continual assaults was an excellent training and acclimation to the fighting ways of the enemy. Through close combat, a considerable number of tanks were disabled and this eased the troops' fear over the superior number of enemy tanks. On the other hand, the constant alert status and the difficulties experienced in battlefield movement as a result of accompanying enemy artillery and mortar fire were a great drain physically on the troops.

On 17 July the enemy began the long - expected attack with the objective of taking St. Lo. During the night of 10-11 July, heavy artillery fire began on the entire frontal sector of the division. The point of main effort was at first in the area Berigny-St. Quentin and later in the area of Hill-192-St. Andre. The attacks were reinforced by heavy tank support. Break-throughs occurred at St. George d'Elle and St. Quentin but we were able to seal them off. A battalion from Parachute Regiment 5 was cut off but was able to fight their way, with all their wounded, back to the line. Further attacks to the west with heavy artillery and tank support enabled the enemy to occupy Hill 192 by evening. A break-through on St. Lo could only be

hindered by heavy combat. The last, small reserves of the division were deployed on Hill 197. Because of its commanding position, it had a decisive meaning for the fighting around St. Lo.

In the fighting over the next three days, Parachute Regiment 5 received monumental losses in men and materiel. The fighting effected the soldiers to such an extent that the regiment had to be relieved. Due to the lack of available troops, Parachute Regiment 8 took over and this claimed the right flank of the division. Since the division had no more reserves, the relief was only possible by putting together a company from the signal battalion to fill in while the units changed. The relief took a great deal of time and also led to combining of units which was not desired. Because of the continued attacks, it also led to considerable losses. The relief was conducted from 15-17 July. During the night of 17 July, the enemy penetrated the left, neighboring division from the north to St. Lo. The city fell. The 3rd Parachute Division along with sections in position withdrew north of the road St. Lo-Berigny to directly south.

As a result of the continual fighting and the heavy losses, there were now large holes in the front. This enabled the enemy to push forward on 18 July east of St. Lo to the south and southwest. To our surprise the enemy did not take the initiative and confined itself to the city of St. Lo. We were able to close the holes in the night 18-19 July. The withdrawal from Normandy was also beginning. On 20 August this fighting would end in the

battle of encirclement at Falaise. This will be dealt with in the next section.

Before I deal with that topic, I first want to answer all the questions on how the peculiarities of the terrain in Normandy made it different from the later combat areas.

Reserves. Because the division had been thrown into the battle of Normandy, it was never in place. The expansion of the division's sector in the course of combat operations in St. Lo made it impossible to build reserves. The sole reserves were formed by the division holding ready troops for deployment behind the regimental sectors. These regimental reserves were generally one company up to one battalion. The lack of reserves was very noticeable. Many opportunities to conduct counterattacks or to capitalize on a successful counterthrust had to be left unexploited.

Use of Artillery. In the first weeks of fighting, the division had one artillery battalion. It was deployed in the center of the division sector so that the point of main effort could effect Parachute Regiment 5 (in the area around Berigny) and fire from the front of Parachute Regiment 9 (left) and, in part, fire for Parachute Regiment 9 (right). Until the arrival of more Army artillery reinforcements, a heavy anti-aircraft battery was deployed at Parachute Regiment 8 for firing against ground targets. They were also to support the regiment. The disadvantage of flatness of trajectory did not appear often in the Normandy because the high terrain afforded enough firing positions. The troops enjoyed working with anti-aircraft

battery. Their effect of fire was very good. In addition the anti-aircraft battery had ample ammunition.

After the arrival of a second Army artillery battalion in early July 1944 and an Army chemical brigade in mid-July, the anti-aircraft battery was deployed for firing against air targets. There was no special tactic used in the deployment of the Army artillery. Artillery observation was very difficult because of the hedges and the limited visibility caused by the terrain. The lack of aircraft for firing observation was felt. Observation from high-lying support points was sparsely occupied. Harassing fire at night, on towns, roads, etc. was limited because of the shortage in ammunition. Each battalion had one VB* (*not translated) and later two. Contact to the artillery battalions was by wire and radio. The wires were destroyed by the enemy more often than the radios. Radio contact was often hindered by the peculiarity of the terrain and the wetness of the soil. The troops thought that the short wave equipment of the VB's were targets of the enemy and for this reason they did not like radio positions in their vicinity. The radio operators argued about taking of bearings of the short-wave equipment. The question remains open.

Peculiarities in the "Bocage" terrain. The peculiarities in the terrain of Normandy were a considerable advantage to the defenders. Good camouflage and cover, as well as limited movement for all enemy vehicles including track-laying vehicles on both sides of the roads, were all advantages. The only disadvantage was the limited observation for artillery and heavy

infantry weapons. The terrain hindered an attacking enemy in his full development and deployment of air and tank superiority. This condition served the young division well. The value was immediately evident: the soldier could evade effect from bombs and mortars by cleverly using available camouflage and cover. He soon discovered that one could destroy tanks (the American infantry refused to give up their accompanying tank support even in this terrain) by ambushing them. The "scare" caused by tanks, which had a great psychological effect on the assault strength of an infantry, was quickly overcome. An indication of this was the 360+ track-laying vehicles which were destroyed by the division in close combat. Next to courage and ability, it was the terrain of Normandy that enabled the division to hold off the superior enemy with his modern weapons for so long. It must be mentioned that the enemy scarcely used a covered approach to achieve surprise attacks. Most of the time he ruined his advantage by the betraying noises made by the infantry-accompanying tanks. An exception to this was the later assault operations in platoon and company strength. The selection of our main line of resistance was difficult to defend. The surrounding fields with walls and hedges were very small. Our effects of fire even from our light machine-guns could not be fully used. The placing forward of combat outposts was only possible because they were unnoticed by our own troops and could be easily pulled out by neighboring posts. Because of the insufficient amount of portable radio equipment, combat outposts were placed forward only at short distances.

In general, the combat forward area was secured by reconnaissance troops, tree observation points, and tree obstacles. This security could not impede the enemy from moving forward in platoon or company strength up to 70 meters from the main line of resistance--something that required a constant, heavy occupation of the main line of resistance, high alert readiness, and a tight lead-in of local reserves. The demands placed on the troops under such conditions is obvious. The most effective heavy weapons in this bush war were the mortars. Unfortunately the German side at this time did not have enough barrels and ammunition as well as radio equipment available. This does not even mention artillery aircraft. (The attachment of a mortar battalion to the parachute division occurred as the year 1944 closed.)

Information on firing data in the first six weeks was difficult because of the lack of special maps. Troops were told to draw firing maps by hand. This could delay the full effects of a firing plan up to 48 hours. The same was true for maps needed by the guides, and assault and reconnaissance troops. Captured maps 1:25,000 showing the embankments and hedges were searched for by the infantry. The best protection against enemy mortar fire were foxholes with covers. When time allowed, the infantry dug in to two meters deep directly behind the embankments and covered the holes with three beams. It was very important to have a stabile cover made out of boards and timber

to crawl into the hole. An infantry dug in this way suffered hardly any losses when hit by mortar fire. Only in isolated instances where the mortars were shot with timed fuzes or phosphorus grenades did the casualties increase.

Counterattacks. Due to the lack of reserves, no counterattacks were able to be conducted in the sector of the 3rd Parachute Division. Normally there were frequent counterthrusts to seal off and clean out enemy penetration. (See report.)

Road networks and signal communication lines. In rear-lying combat areas, all roads and ways were fully used in spite of enemy heavy bomber activity and artillery fire. There were some points which were under heavy effects of artillery. They were marked and detours were set up around them. In the forward combat area, traffic used the numerous covered roads and sunken roads or gorges.

It was discovered that gorges were not fired upon. On a captured map, it was determined that these gorges were not listed as "roads" but as "hedges". This was probably a misinterpretation of aerial photographs. The troops used this mistake to their advantage. Paths and roads were only used during the day, and only by single vehicles. Enemy aircraft constantly watched the traffic. The limited use of roads impeded supply traffic. Because of a well-equipped signal battalion, the division was independent from using the local land network (cables). Naturally the available lines were used from time to time. Generally, the cable network lost its meaning as the

intensity of combat increased. At the end, we could only use radio and the radio operators had to be motorized.

Assessment of strength and critique of American tactics as well as troops and equipment.

Based on prisoner statements, enemy strength against the sector of the division was said to be three divisions (this did not include their rear-lying operational reserves). It must be taken into consideration that these divisions were constantly given replacements for casualties and were rotated out after a relatively short deployment period while our division, during the entire period of fighting in Normandy, only once received some replacements of insufficient strength and was never relieved. The ratio of forces was estimated to be 1:4 to 1:5.

In my capacity as the Division Commander, it is not possible for me to critique the American strategy since I have no documents or records. In respect to American tactics, I think that they are considerably different than German views. Basically, I feel that the Americans are more systematic and more rigid than the Germans. Because of this, we frequently had the opportunity to take countermeasures. Enemy surprise assaults were rare. Defense against enemy attacks in spite of weak occupation of defense lines was successful because counterassault reserves were employed in time at the expected point of attack. Another difference from the Germans was in the establishment of only limited attack objectives and in not exploiting initial success by penetrating in depth. Our weak defense offered them

the possibility and, had it been taken, would have had dire effects as construction of new defensive fronts was almost impossible. The reason given to me by American prisoners, that as much blood was to be spared as possible, is hard to believe. The losses on the days of the attack were small but, if you consider the constant partial attacks over a long period, the sum of casualties must have been considerably higher than by a strong attack into the depth of our defensive front. This would have led to a battle of encirclement at the city of Vire instead of the later battle at Falaise. The Americans were exceptionally equipped. The effects of fire from the heavy artillery and especially the mortars was good and, as a result of their mobility, inflicted heavy losses. Only by clever conduct in the terrain and through immediate entrenchment in the defensive front were we able to ease the situation. The enemy air force did not appear much on our front; however, it interrupted supply behind the front to such an extent that, during the day, large supply movements were not possible. The situation was somewhat eased by the almost complete absence of fighter squadrons and the small numbers of anti-aircraft units. During the six weeks of defensive fighting, losses in men and materials were high. An estimate of the number is not possible, however, without reviewing my war diary.

by Schimpf

Commentary to the work by MG Richard Schimpf,
Diploma Engineer, "Fighting of the 3rd Parachute
Division at the invasion of France, June to August
1944.

A very good, encompassing work.

The author is a highly qualified officer with a technical background and practical parachute experience. As far as an assessment of this work, refer to my comments on the first work by the author (MS# B-020a).

The fighting strength of the 3rd Parachute Division was that of two regular German divisions. The weakness of the division was in the artillery. There was only one artillery battalion and the division had to be reinforced by Army artillery. In December 1943, the 7th Army suggested the division be organized in the area of Rennes in order to have this valuable division close to the expected invasion front of Normandy. The Army High Command, however, wanted to protect Brest with one in-place division and two attack divisions (among them the 3rd Parachute Division).

It is amazing that the division, in its ten day march from the very west of Brittany to the front in Normandy, hardly suffered any loss of men and materiel from the enemy air force. The reasons for this were good organization, intelligence agents, and the enemy's inattention from the air.

The Division Commander's suggested attack to capture the woods of Cerisy would probably have been a success. However it would have been conducted with insufficient force and the danger to the inexperienced division was too great. That is why the 7th Army forbade the attack. The strength of the parachute division was in defense and they were well trained for this. The division felt comfortable in the area of Bocage and the enlisted soldier felt superior. In defense, the division was in the position to cut out reserves of up to battalion strength. In spite of the width of the sector held by the 3rd Parachute Division, the Army was not concerned over their area because the division had earned their trust.

The commentary on the individual questions is correct.

by Pemsel

Sketch 1

Morlaix

Huelgoat

Faou

Carhaix

Supply troops

Chateau neuf du Faou

Assembly areas and quartering areas
of the 3rd Parachute Division
28 January to 8 June 1944

Scale 1:250,000

Sketch 2

Order of Battle of the 3rd Parachute Division in June 1944

Division Commander: MG Schimpf

Supply troops

Supply troops

Military Police

Field Medical
Battalion 3

Field equipment platoon

Field Hospital
Companies 1 and 2

Sketch 3

St. Lo

Avranches

Marching Group
Group B A

Rennes

Nantes

Sketch of the route of
march for the 3rd Parachute
Division from 8-10 June
(motorized group), from
8-18 June 1944 (foot group)

Scale: 1:100,000

Sketch 4

Force distribution of the 3rd Parachute Division from
19 June to 11 July 1944

Foret de Cerisy

Berigny

St. Lo

HKL

St. Juan

Caumont

Torigny sur Vire

Scale: 1:100,000

Remarks:

At the end of June - led-in
forces.

After early July - pulled out
from firing against ground
targets (at Regiment 8) and
redeployed for firing against
air targets.