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Green Light over the Drop Zone: American Army and Marine Paratroopers in World War II

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Green Light over the Drop Zone: American Army and Marine Paratroopers in World War II

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Honors Thesis, History Department

Colby College

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“New conditions and new weapons require new and imaginative methods for solution and application. Wars are never won in the past.”¹

- General of the Army Douglas MacArthur

¹ Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1965), p. 169.

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Glossary

PIR: The paratroop unit within the airborne division. The 511th PIR, for example, is the actual paratroop unit within the 11th Airborne Division.

Airborne Division: Airborne divisions consisted of parachute infantry regiments (PIRs), glider infantry units, and a number of specialized engineer, intelligence, medical and antiaircraft units. The Army created four airborne divisions during World War II: the 101st, 82nd, 11th, and 17th

PRCT: Unlike the airborne division, the PRCT did not include the glider unit and other specialized units. It was also smaller. The 503rd was not an airborne division, but was a Parachute Regimental Combat Team.

Douglas DC-3/C-47 Skytrain/RD-4: The troop carrier type airplane that paratroopers used in the war. The Douglas DC-3 was built as a passenger plane, the Army commissioned the C-47 Skytrain and the Navy commissioned the RD-4. They all have the same basic structure.

Gliders: aircraft without engines that transport planes towed almost all of the way to the landing zone. They held about 10 to 20 men in general as well as heavy equipment. Interestingly, the glider troops did not get the extra pay and other benefits that the paratroopers did, even though they had a job that proved just as hazardous.

Drop Zone (DZ): The intended spot for the paratroopers to jump on during a paradrop.

Landing Zone (LZ): The intended spot for gliders to land on.

Amphibious Landings: Infantry landing on beaches.

Landing Craft: Boats used during World War II during amphibious landings: they brought a group of men from the ship to the beach they were storming.

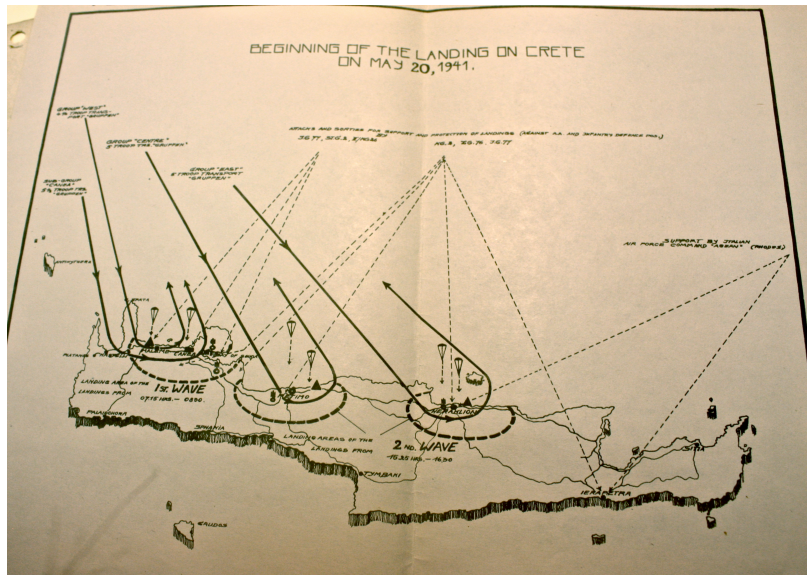
Maps and Charts

A paratrooper and his equipment: he needed enough to fight and survive for two days.²

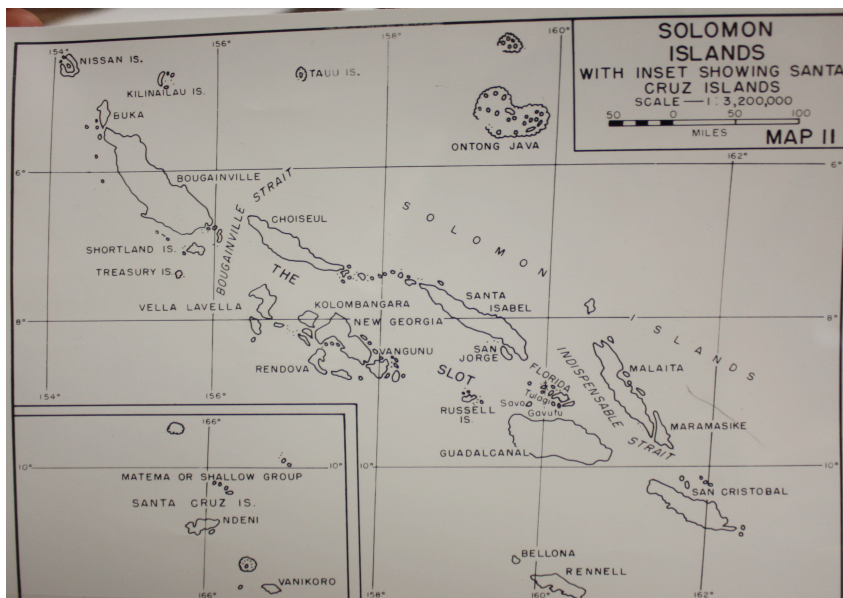


² Carl Smith, *U.S. Paratrooper: 1941-1941* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, Aug 25, 2000), p. 36.

German Invasion of Crete.³



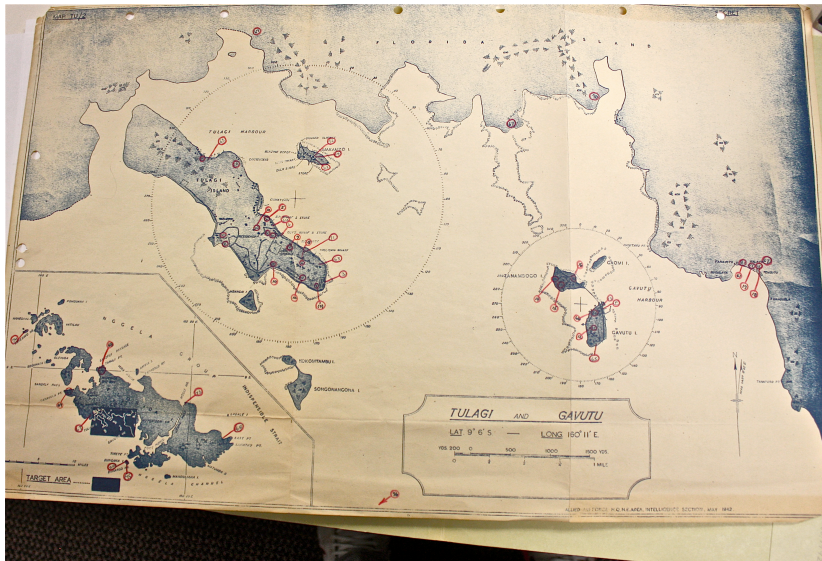
Solomon Island Group.⁴



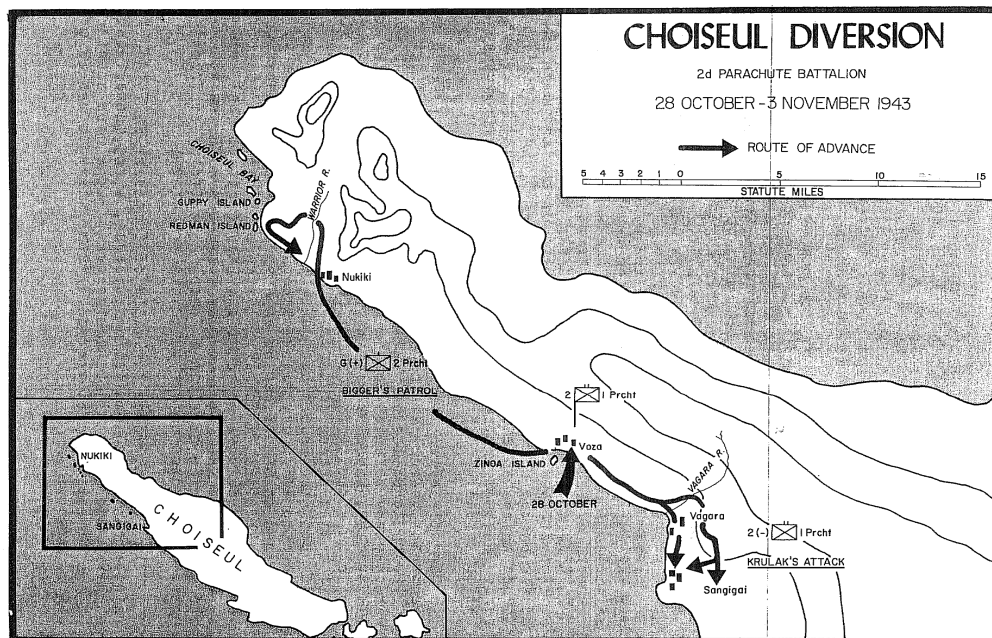
³ *Opening of the Landings on Crete*, Ells-Dran collection, from the holdings of the National Archives Research Association, College Park, MD.

⁴ *Solomon Islands*, Solomon Island Group collection, from the holdings of Archives and Special Collections, Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico VA.

Tulagi and Gavutu-Tanambogo⁵



2nd Parachute Battalion, Choiseul.⁶



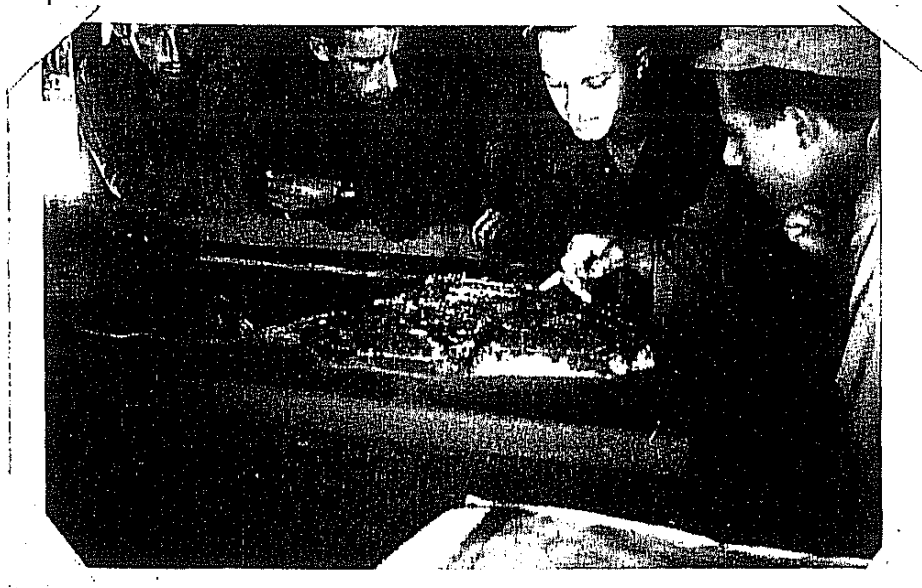
⁵ Tulagi and Gavutu, May, 1942, Guadalcanal collection, Quantico.

⁶ Choiseul Diversion, October – November, 1943, Choiseul collection, Quantico.

82nd Airborne Invasion of Sicily (note the parachutes at the bottom of the map that designate the intended drop zone).⁷



Men of the 503rd prepare for the jump onto Corregidor Island by looking at sand tables and maps.⁸



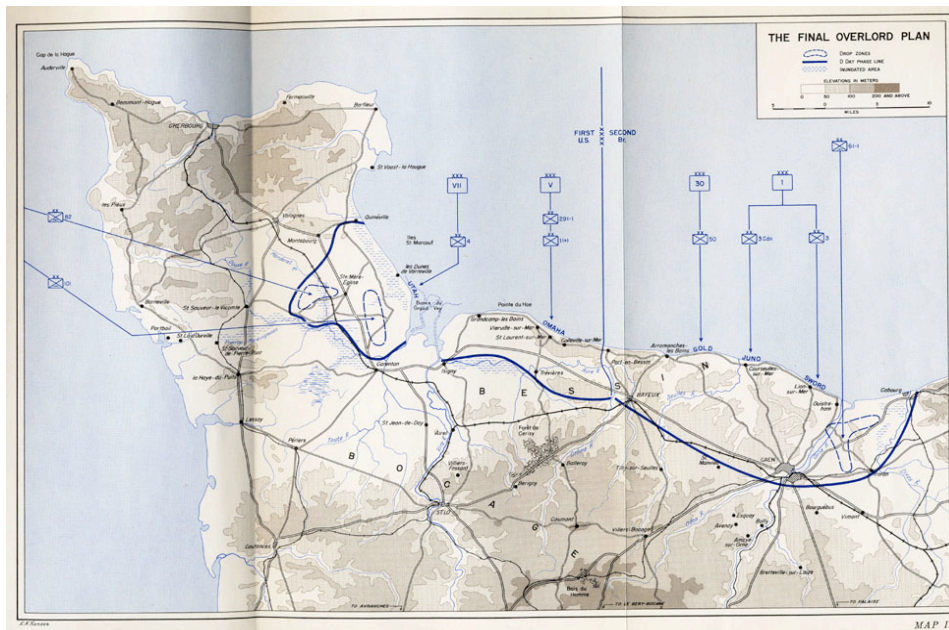
⁷ "The Conquest of Sicily July 10- August 17, 1943," *The 57th Bomb Wing Association*, 57thbombwing.com

⁸ *This is where we are going*, Corregidor, vol. 2, Infantry Regiment History 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team, from the holdings of the Donovan Research Library, Fort Benning GA.

Parachutes strewn all over "Topside," Corregidor Island.⁹



Normandy, June, 6, 1944¹⁰



⁹ *And men get out as best they can*, Corregidor vol. 2, History 503rd, Donovan Library.

¹⁰ "The Final Overlord Plan," *America on the World Stage*, <http://www.handsonhistorylibrary.org>.

Paratroopers jumping in Market Garden, Holland (They are all floating in perfect lines very close together, which demonstrates that it was a good drop).¹¹

]



¹¹ "Operation Market Garden September, 1944," *Battlefield Tours 4u*, <http://battlefieldtours-4u.com/MarketGarden.htm> .

Introduction

“This division has no history, but it has a rendezvous with destiny.”¹²

- Major General William C. Lee

One of the greatest military inventions to come from World War II, a war unprecedented in casualties, geographic scale, and technology, was the addition of Special Forces to the military. As a pioneer of Special Forces in the United States, the airborne proved to be one of the most unique, dangerous, and expensive Special Forces in the war. By the end of 1940, many belligerent countries had airborne units, including Russia, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, Japan, France, and the United States. American Chief of Air Service William Mitchell came up with the idea at the end of World War I, and countries employed it throughout World War II. Paratroopers jumped behind enemy lines via parachute and wreaked havoc on the enemy rear by cutting telephone lines, destroying supplies, blocking roadways, breaching headquarters to obtain sensitive information, and evading capture in order to take enemy troops away from the front.

The United States considered airborne troops to be infantrymen within the military that trained for a unique purpose. When the Army began building an airborne, it had to determine in which of its branches the airborne belonged. In August, 1940, Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall decided after hearing from all of the branches that paratroopers should

¹² Leonard Rapport and Arthur Northwood, Jr., *Rendezvous with Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Infantry Journal Press, 1948), p. 3.

belong to the infantry branch.¹³ At the same time that the Infantry Branch took over airborne operations, Major General Thomas Holcomb, Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, decided to start an airborne. Both branches intended to use their airborne units to jump behind enemy lines. While the Army units did make many paratroops during the war, the Marine paratroopers (Paramarines) never dropped into combat. This disparity begs the question: why did the Army achieve its goal while the Marine Corps did not? Analyzing the differences between the Army and the Marine Corps, their roles in the war, the difficulties they had to overcome, and whether or not they chose to do so provides the answers to this question.

Historically, the Marine Corps operated as a special unit within the Navy, serving as its infantry troops. Marines acted as the “police of the Navy,” protecting officers from mutiny and the ship from attack. As a subcategory of the Navy, the Commandant of the Marine Corps answered to the Secretary of the Navy, the Navy controlled its budget, and the Corps used naval material.¹⁴ In World War II, the Corps began building a reputation as an elite amphibious landing force; however, Marines still lived on and acted from the ships as they had always done.¹⁵ Because the Marine Corps was already an elite unit, it had a different construct from the Army even though both branches performed regular infantry missions. The Marine Corps had an advantage in being attached to the Navy, in that it could land amphibiously anywhere the Navy could go. Not being tied down by transport planes or land-based staging areas in order to make amphibious landings meant that the Corps could take the islands in the middle of the Pacific

¹³ Gerard M. Devlin, *Paratrooper!* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 81.

¹⁴ William M. Greene, Jr., “Memorandum for the Director of Plans and Policies Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps,” AO- 773 – hch (003B7845) Quantico, (Washington: HQUSMC Division of Plans and Policies, 19 March, 1945), p. 17.

¹⁵ Fletcher Pratt, *The Marines' War: An Account of the Struggle for the Pacific from Both American and Japanese Sources* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1948), p. 3.

Ocean.

The Army's main goal is summarized well in its mission statement: "The Army's mission is to fight and win our nation's wars by providing prompt, sustained land dominance across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders."¹⁶

In World War II, the Army and Marine Corps operated under different frameworks, one in the sea and one on land. The Army fought all over the world, operating in the Mediterranean, North Africa, Europe, and the Pacific while the Marines raided islands with the Navy in the Pacific Theater. It is easy to believe that differences in the two theaters of war, such as island terrain, solely influenced outcomes of the two airborne units. Upon taking a closer look, it becomes clear that the main factor that led to this disparity was whether commanders were willing to push through the obstacles they faced. The Army overcame lack of aircraft, terrain, uncertainty from above, and more issues that could have stopped it from continuing with the program. The Marines did not make any real attempt to overcome these very issues, but instead ended their program.

The Army paid attention to and learned from every airborne operation conducted in the war, showing its interest in making the program work. It proved its dedication to the program by creating numerous review boards, performing countless training maneuvers, and forging on when operations went badly. No one operation posed the same problems, but each paratroop provided a new opportunity for planners to discern the most appropriate use of paratroops. The Battle of Crete in 1941, in which German airborne troops attacked New Zealanders and Greeks defending the island, taught the Army its first lessons. The Army Airborne units' early drops

¹⁶ "Organization," *The United States Army*, <http://www.army.mil/info/organization/>.

illustrate how little the Army knew at the beginning of the war about paratroopers, as well as how hard commanders worked to make the technology feasible for the United States. The Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943 proved to be the Army's most important teaching moment and almost ended the program. American and British infantry and airborne units attacked German defenders, and although they won the overall battle, the actual paratroop did not go well. The Americans had problems with communication, navigation, and preparation that led to extremely high casualties. These issues forced the Army to reconsider its use of the airborne and its dedication to the program. Soon after this first operation, the 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team (PRCT) executed the first paratroop in the Pacific, and the success of this mission saved the Army Airborne.¹⁷

The lessons the Army learned from early battles in the war paid off later when it conducted multiple successful operations. The Army made seven jumps in the Pacific between 1943 and 1945, and each one demonstrated its dedication to the airborne and the feasibility of jumps in the Pacific. These drops diminish the legitimacy of the Corps commanders' claims that Pacific terrain, lack of aircraft, and the size of the Corps kept them from dropping the Paratroopers into combat. The Army conducted multiple airborne battles in Europe at the same time; in three of which they did especially well. The airborne battles in Normandy on D-Day, 1944, in Holland during Market Garden, 1944, and in Germany during Operation Varsity, 1945, outline how the Army's perseverance allowed it to successfully use its paratroopers in large-scale drops to help its infantrymen. These later paratroops illustrate how hard the Army worked to make airborne operations successful as well as how much they learned throughout the war.

¹⁷ Gene Eric Salecker, *Blossoming Silk Against the Rising Sun: U.S. and Japanese Paratroopers at War in the Pacific in World War II* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2010). p. 134.

One must ask: could the Marines have used their paratroopers to jump into combat as the Army did? Ultimately, the Marine Corps commanders were not very interested in using paratroopers, and the troopers probably would have jumped had even one or two high-level commanders pushed for them to do so. There is no evidence that any officer fought to use them as anything but infantry troops. Many high-level leaders in the Army pushed for airborne use throughout the war, and continued to find ways to convince top commanders to continue the program. Whether the Army should have used them or not is perhaps a different story.

History of the Parachute

Enthusiasts have searched for daring new ways to use parachutes for hundreds of years, and as technology progressed they applied the chute in new, more daring ways. Army commanders took the lessons early parachutists learned and applied them to the Military in World War II, creating paratroopers. No country could have had an airborne without these audacious leaders in the field. Leonardo Da Vinci conceptualized the parachute in the 1470s when he drew a rigid framed chute that, if built, would have been approximately twelve arm lengths wide and deep.¹⁸ Nobody used Da Vinci's design until Sebastien Lenormand performed the first recorded successful jump in 1783 and leapt off the tower of the Montpellier observatory into a crowd of people. Jacques-André Garnerin made the next stride in parajumping in October 1797 when he jumped from a hydrogen balloon with a parachute that did not have a rigid frame. For the next century, enthusiasts and inventors throughout Europe worked on perfecting this new

¹⁸ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. vi.

sport. In the mid-1800s, daredevils and trapeze artists began using parachutes to amaze crowds at circuses. Trapeze artists shocked crowds by preforming from balloons, and when that became mundane, they began parachuting from the balloons after their acts.¹⁹ As more and more people added to the sport, they evolved the parachute, eventually creating an apparatus that the military could make use of.

The biggest leap in the use of parachutes occurred upon the invention of the airplane, at which point the parachute became a safety device. Early aviators packed their chutes in a cumbersome drum impractical for emergency use. In the early 1900s, American Charles Broadwick designed the “pack on the aviator,” a similar design to the parachute airborne troops used in World War II. It attached to the back of the pilot and ripped open via a static line when he fell away from the aircraft. Broadwick's foster daughter “Tiny” demonstrated his design for United States Military personnel on March 15, 1915. Although she awed them with her bravery, they were not interested in using the design for their pilots.²⁰ This disinterest remained throughout World War I, and the U.S. Military did not equip its pilots with safety chutes even though the technology existed to do so.

Unlike the United States, Germany saw the parachute as a safety device for its pilots and equipped its aviators with parachutes throughout World War I. This paid off, as the parachutes worked well, and Allied pilots often reported seeing Germans deploy their chutes to safety after shooting them down. American and British military leaders and aviators debated whether to issue parachutes to pilots. An article in “Flight: First Aero Weekly in the World” argued that airplane pilots needed parachutes. The author explained that R.E. Calthrop developed a

¹⁹ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, pp. 2-3.

²⁰ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, p. 14.

parachute that seemed practical for use in airplanes, and extensive testing proved its usefulness when ejecting oneself from an aircraft. He concludes the article: "...the Calthrop parachute is as near perfection as it is possible to get it, [and]... a very great percentage of these pilots might have been saved had they been equipped with a reliable parachute, is a very strong point in favor of a more general adoption of this useful 'accessory'." ²¹ Even though this life-saving technology existed, Allied countries continued to refuse to use it. Aviators had a prejudice against parachutes because early designs were unreliable, and pilots were concerned that the chute would not open, or would do so incorrectly. Many believed they were safer sticking with their aircraft than trusting the parachute. ²² Another thought is that pilots believed they were too bulky and restricting in the already tight cockpit of early planes. ²³

Although most pilots did not use them, parachutes did prove useful in World War I for balloon crews. Crews of two or more men floated above the battle area in hydrogen balloons, and reported about artillery placement, enemy movement, and enemy submarines to soldiers on the ground via telegraph. ²⁴ In World War I, as airplanes evolved and were equipped with firepower, balloons became "floating" ducks for enemy pilots to shoot down. Parachutes became instrumental for these men, as they were "the observer's sole means of escape if his balloon was brought down." ²⁵ W.S. Lewis, a British sergeant in the Royal Air Force, detailed his experience of using his parachute to bail from a balloon, and his excerpt shows that early parachuting was a harrowing experience, but the parachute did save him from an otherwise sure

²¹ "The Parachute Up to Date," *Flightglobal/Archive*, first published in *Flight: First Aero Weekly in the World*, August 16, 1917, London, ed. Stanley Spooner, <http://www.flightglobal.com/FlightPDFArchive/1917/1917%20-%200837>, p. 837.

²² Spooner, "The Parachute Up to Date," p. 837.

²³ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, p. 14.

²⁴ Holland Thompson and Leonard Wood, *The World's Greatest War: From the Outbreak of the War to the Treaty of Versailles* (New York: Grolier: 1920), p. 243.

²⁵ Thompson and Wood, *The World's Greatest War*, p. 246.

death:

I glimpsed the white face of Lieutenant H. 'We must jump,' he said. I agreed with him, and immediately dived over head first, and nearly dived through my harness. It had no shoulder straps, only a waistband and loops for one's legs. Never shall I forget that sickening horrible sensation when, in my first rush through air, I felt my leg loops at the knees, and my waistband round my buttocks.²⁶

Lewis survived the ordeal by bouncing off the top of his commanding officer's chute. All belligerent countries employed parachutes in this manner throughout the war. The balloonist's experience demonstrates the military's interest in exploring different uses for parachutes.

United States Colonel William Mitchell, commander of the U.S. Air Force during World War I, sought innovative ways to use aviation. He invented the concept of vertical attack as a way for soldiers to enter battle, which he proposed to U.S. General of the Armies John J. Pershing on October 17, 1918.²⁷ Mitchell knew how useful bombing behind enemy lines could be in both creating confusion and destroying enemy materials. Trained soldiers would be able to cut telephone lines, create blockades, find enemy headquarters and battle documents, do reconnaissance, and evade capture. All of these things would take energy away from the front and force enemy soldiers to search for the men creating all of the confusion. Mitchell proposed vertical attack by parachute:

²⁶ W. S. Lewis, "In a Kite Balloon," *First World War*, first published in *Everyman at War*, ed. C. B. Purdom, (London: J.M. Dent, 1930), <http://www.firstworldwar.com/diaries/inakiteballoon.htm>.

²⁷ William Mitchell, *Memoirs of World War I* (Michigan: Random House, 1960), p. 265.

We could equip each man with a parachute, so that when we desired to make a rear attack on the enemy, we could carry these men over the lines and drop them off in parachutes behind the German position. They could assemble at a prearranged strong point, fortify it and we could supply them by aircraft with food and ammunition. Our low flying attack aviation would then cover every road in their vicinity, both day and night, so as to prevent the Germans falling on them before they could thoroughly organize the position. Then we could attack the Germans from the rear, aided by an attack from our army on the front and support the whole maneuver with our great air force. This was a perfectly feasible proposition.²⁸

Mitchell understood the importance of air support and dominance in vertical attack, a lesson many countries still had to learn half-way through World War II. Unfortunately for Mitchell, the war ended not a month after he proposed the idea and went unused in World War I.²⁹ Mitchell's invention of the vertical attack became the airborne, or paratroopers, so named by the Army during World War II. The paratroopers of World War II jumped from airplanes behind enemy lines with parachutes and wreaked havoc until the infantry could break through the front and rescue them. They were "one-man armies" and jumped with everything they would need to survive for a day or two.

An instrumental invention for paratroopers occurred during the late '30s and early '40s: the troop carrier airplane. Donald Douglas created the DC-3 in 1934 for commercial use, and by

²⁸ Mitchell, *Memoirs of World War I*, p. 268.

²⁹ Gordon L. Rottman and Ron Volstad, *U.S. Army Airborne, 1940-90: The First Fifty Years* (London: Osprey, 1990), p. 5.

1936 he began building standard 21-passenger planes. The military quickly picked up on its possible uses and ordered a military version in 1940. The Army labeled its version the C-47 Skytrain and built over 10,000 during the war.³⁰ The Navy did the same thing in 1941, and called its version the R4D. The military DC-3 took its first flight on December 23, 1941; it could fit up to 28 paratroopers, and it had a normal range of 1,600 miles.³¹ The invention of this aircraft allowed for the existence of paratroopers.

In the interwar years, Mitchell followed his passion and fought for the development of parachutes. Many commanders in the United States Military continued to be disinterested in parachutes as they tried to recoup from the First World War. When the Soviet Union brought Mitchell's idea back to the drawing board twelve years after he proposed it, the United States paid little attention to the rumors. The Soviet Union became the first nation to experiment with mass jumps, and on August 18, 1933, 62 troops jumped out of 3 large bombers, landing successfully. The Soviets then experimented with tactical jumps two years later, in September of 1935. Captain John White of the Marine Corps wrote an article in June, 1940, revealing that the Soviet Union conducted a training maneuver in which over 6,000 Soviet paratroopers jumped 13 miles behind the "enemy's" rear and "vital points were destroyed and key installations overrun."³² In this training operation, the Soviets took the first step toward using paratroopers in war and proved the technology could very well work.

As the Soviet Union continued experimenting and Germany reoccupied the Rhineland in 1936, other countries became worried about their belligerent movements. In order to meet the threat of new technology, they began looking into building airborne units. By 1938, France,

³⁰ "History: DC-3 Commercial Transport," *Boeing*, <http://www.boeing.com/history/mdc/dc-3.htm>.

³¹ "History: C-47 Skytrain Military Transport," *Boeing*, <http://www.boeing.com/history/mdc/skytrain.htm>.

³² Captain John A. White, "Parachute Troops," *U.S. Marine Corps Gazette*, June 1940, Donovan Library. p. 11.

Italy, and Germany all had established parachute schools.³³ The United States, however, still did not build an airborne. Early in 1940, a select few in the Army worked on parachute development and inquired into creating airborne troops, but high command showed a general lack of interest and kept the program from moving forward. It seemed only one thing could prompt the United States to enter into the airborne game: the threat of Germany. After World War I, Western countries watched Germany's every movement very carefully, especially its military force. Nobody wanted another war, and because countries involved in the First World War blamed Germany for starting it, they were concerned that Germany would try to start another. When Germany attacked the Low Countries on May 10, 1940, the United States finally took notice of airborne operations.³⁴ The "Fallschirmjäger" (German paratroopers) played an instrumental role in motivating the United States to build not one, but two airborne divisions, as both the Army and Marines began creating their own in May, 1940.

The Beginning of Army and Marine Airborne Programs

"GERONIMO!"

- Private Aubrey Eberhardt

The zeal with which the Army jumped into the airborne program foreshadowed its dedication to the unit during the war. Major General William C. Lee, one of the leaders who drove the Army forward in creating and continuing its airborne program, became known as the

³³ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, p. 32.

³⁴ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, p. 9.

“father” of the American airborne.³⁵ Lee had been one of the few men working on airborne operations before the German jump into the Low Countries, and he began bringing the idea together by late May. Army planners knew little about what paratroopers needed in order to function as intended and stay safe. The Infantry Board reviewed the idea of starting an airborne, and it recommended that the Army develop a troop-type parachute. The board also stipulated that upon the development of the chute, Benning commanders should establish a test platoon of volunteers.³⁶ In late May, 1940, the Air Corps debuted the T-4 parachute, which reduced the amount of time the trooper floated helplessly in the air in decent, subject to enemy fire.³⁷ In June, the Adjutant General in Washington told Lee to start a test platoon of volunteers from Fort Benning's 29th Infantry Regiment.³⁸ The commanders thought they would have a hard time filling out a platoon, but volunteers flooded in, eager to take part in this revolutionary technology. The officers had to take a written exam to determine who would command the test platoon. Airborne zealot Lieutenant William T. Ryder aced the exam, finishing within half the allotted time, and commanders chose him to head up the platoon.³⁹ Ryder is a perfect example of a leader whose overwhelming belief in airborne operations kept Army leaders invested in the program throughout the war.

Once the board narrowed all of the enlisted volunteers down to 48 men and established the platoon, Ryder wasted no time in beginning testing. The platoon set up camp at Lawson

³⁵ “William C. Lee, 'Father of the Airborne,’” (North Carolina Museum of History, 2005), www.ncmuseumofhistory.org/collateral/articles/William.Lee.pdf, p. 1.

³⁶ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, pp. 43-44.

³⁷ The static line feature on the T-4 caused the chute to open faster, allowing troopers to jump from lower altitudes and therefore be in the air for less time. The Army later replaced the T-4 with the T-5, which was more reliable and specifically made for paratroopers. Found in Rottman, *US Army Paratrooper*, p. 34.

³⁸ “William C. Lee, 'Father of the Airborne,’” p. 1.

³⁹ Guy LoFaro, *The Sword of St. Michael: The 82nd Airborne Division in World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2011), p. 19.

Field, where they met three experienced Air Force parajumpers and riggers from Wright Field. These men taught the test platoon to become paratroopers, putting them through an intense eight-week course that ranged from grueling physical training to lessons about how the parachute worked to tactical combat training. After spending weeks learning everything about the process of parajumping, the platoon jumped from towers, an essential stepping stone to ensure the troopers' safety when jumping from a plane.⁴⁰ The towers released the paratrooper from a height of 150 ft. and gave them the experience of jumping. After completing this step, Ryder told his men they were ready for the real thing. The first jump they made, in August of 1940, was particularly special for these troopers, because they became the first paratroopers in history.⁴¹ In the next week, the platoon made five jumps from airplanes, and with each jump, a new problem arose. Commanders made new rules daily to ensure the paratroopers' safety.⁴² With this process, the Army began experimentation with airborne troops. The Army employed this type of trial and error for the airborne throughout the war.

The night before their first mass jump, some of the privates in the platoon went to see the movie *Geronimo*. They came out of the film discussing the next day's jump, and Aubrey Eberhardt said it would be no worse than the first two jumps. One of the men joked that Eberhardt would be too frightened to yell out his own name. Taking offense to this, Eberhardt told him that he would yell out "Geronimo" as he jumped to prove his lack of fear. The morning of the jump, everyone on the ground waited to see if he would come through. As they watched men rapidly jump from the plane, they heard "Geronimo" and an Indian war whoop loud and clear. The men loved it, and "without knowing it at the time, Private Aubrey Eberhardt had just

⁴⁰ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, p. 57.

⁴¹ LoFaro, *The Sword of Saint Michael*, p. 18.

⁴² Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, p. 67.

originated what was to become the jumping yell of the American paratroopers.”⁴³ Since that day, each paratrooper that has gone through Fort Benning has yelled this when jumping from the aircraft.

After the platoon's fifth jump and the end of testing, the men disbanded. Half of the men became riggers so they could teach incoming paratroopers how to pack their own chutes. The other half became cadres at Fort Benning for the incoming units. In September, 1940, the War Department created the 1st Parachute Battalion, later designated the 501st Parachute Infantry Battalion, and made Major William M. Miley commander.⁴⁴ The 501st assembled at Fort Benning and began training by November, 1940. The Army moved right into adding to the 501st, and in November, 1940, the War Department announced that it intended to create three more parachute units in 1941.⁴⁵ From the moment it decided to start the airborne, the Army put an extreme amount of energy and money into the program. It committed to the technology from the beginning, and it continued to do so throughout the war.

The Army made the qualifications for becoming a paratrooper tough due to the elite status of the airborne and hazardous nature of the program. A *LIFE Magazine* article published May 12, 1941, explained that: “A parachutist must be tough. Because the job is dangerous, all must volunteer, and entrance requirements are strict. A man must be between 21 and 32, unmarried, athletic, have a high I.Q. He must realize that he is likely to get hurt.”⁴⁶ Gerard Devlin adds to these requirements in *Paratrooper!*, saying that the “minimum height requirement was five feet six inches, maximum six feet two inches. Each volunteer could weigh no more

⁴³ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, p. 70.

⁴⁴ Edward M. Flanagan Jr., *Airborne: A Combat History of American Airborne Forces* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), p. 96.

⁴⁵ Rottman and Volstad, *U.S. Army Airborne*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ “U.S. Trains More Parachute Troops,” *Life* 10 (May 12, 1941): pp. 110-111.

than 185 pounds and had to be free of any heart or blood-pressure problems...”⁴⁷ The height and weight restrictions ensured that only physically fit men became paratroopers and that they could withstand the strain of parajumping. Volunteers poured into the program, partially because of the hazardous pay of 50 dollars for enlisted men and 100 for officers, but also because of the sense of adventure inherent in novel technology.⁴⁸ These men were trailblazers for the United States as the first Special Forces.

Once the men passed these requirements, they had to get through the toughest training the Army had to offer. The units began training at Camp Toccoa, Georgia, where they went through callisthenic training and learned basic rules of the military, such as rank and orders. The same article in *LIFE* said that: “before he is allowed to jump, a parachutist must go to ground school. He must run, tumble and to calisthenics until he is in better shape than a football player.”⁴⁹ They then went to Fort Benning for jump training where the cadres put them through a grueling process similar to what the test platoon experienced. The program established the training regimen during this early period in U.S. airborne history, and it consisted of four weeks of jump school: physical training, ground week, tower week, and jump week. At the end of the four weeks, and upon the completion of five qualification jumps from C-47s, the men became paratroopers.⁵⁰

Upon receiving their certificates, they also received coveted jump wings (a pin worn on their uniform) and they could blouse their trousers over their jump boots. Both of these were

⁴⁷ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, p. 85.

⁴⁸ Gordon L. Rottman, *US Army Paratrooper in the Pacific Theater 1943-45* (Osprey Publishing: Oxford, 2012), p. 8.

⁴⁹ “U.S. Trains More Parachute Troops,” pp. 110-111.

⁵⁰ Rottman, *US Army Paratrooper in the Pacific Theater*, pp. 14-15.

immediate telltale signs of a paratrooper.⁵¹ After becoming paratroopers, the units transferred to Camp Mackall, North Carolina, for tactical combat unit training in the field and continued practice jumps.⁵² Then, after over a year of training, the units shipped off to either Europe or the Pacific. Between 1940 and 1944, the Army created five combatant airborne units, two of which fought in the Pacific Theater and three in the European Theater.⁵³ The tough training these men endured paid off when they entered combat and had to be one man armies behind enemy lines, never knowing what they would face.

The Marine Corps became excited about paratroopers at the same time as the Army. On May 14, the director of the Division of Plans and Policies for the Marines wrote to his staff, saying: “The Major General Commandant [Thomas Holcomb] has ordered that we prepare plans for the employment of parachute troops.”⁵⁴ In May 1940, Holcomb gave the job of planning the use of Marine paratroopers to the Division of Plans and Policy.⁵⁵ During that summer, Marine personnel observed Army operations and training facilities, which fueled their interest. In October of 1940, Holcomb decided that the Marines would train one battalion of each infantry regiment as “air troops,” one company of which would be made up of paratroopers, totaling around 750 paratroopers in the Marine Corps.⁵⁶ Holcomb set the requirements for Marine paratroopers to be nearly the same as those for Army volunteers. They also got the same extra pay, and they had equally difficult training as the Army.⁵⁷ They devised a program based off of the findings of the Army test platoon, the Soviet Union, and Germany. This means that both

⁵¹ LoFaro, *The Sword of Saint Michael*, p. 19.

⁵² Rottman, *US Army Paratrooper in the Pacific Theater*, pp. 10-19.

⁵³ Rottman and Volstad, *U.S. Army Airborne*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Charles L. Updegraph Jr., “1st Parachute Regiment,” *Special Marine Corps Units of World War II* (Washington D.C.: Historical Division, HQUSMC, 1972), p. 36.

⁵⁶ Updegraph, “1st Parachute Regiment,” p. 37.

⁵⁷ Charles B. Fitzgerald, “Paratrooper Training,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 27 (July, 1943): pp. 13-18.

branches started off evenly, and one branch did not have advantages in terms of better training, a better understanding of what they faced, or better volunteers due to extra pay.

The Marines dispatched 40 eager volunteers to Lakehurst, New Jersey, home of the Naval Air Station in order to commence training on October 26, 1940. Their training moved along successfully enough that Holcomb stated that in order to train the estimated 750 men he envisioned for the program, training should proceed “as fast as facilities and personnel are available.”⁵⁸ Progress sped up as more and more groups went through the Lakehurst program, which had graduated 225 jumpers by July 1941. Lakehurst's facilities could not handle the influx of paratroopers, so Holcomb decided to create two airborne schools. On May 6, 1942, he moved the program to Camp Gillespie in San Diego, which became one of the two schools. The Marines erected the second school in New River, North Carolina on June 15.⁵⁹ They wasted no time in starting the program, and interest in the paratroops extended beyond Holcomb to other Corps leaders.

The first two classes to go through Lakehurst graduated on February 26, 1941. The members of both classes qualified as parachute jumpers, with the first class also qualifying as riggers. Due to the 1st class' special qualifications, the men dispersed among the other classes as the riggers. The second class along with 6 riggers transferred to San Diego to make up the 1st Platoon, Company A, 2nd Parachute Battalion. The Marines created and graduated multiple more paratroop units and consolidated them into just one battalion under Captain Robert H. Williams during the summer of 1941. During this time, Williams trained his soldiers with the belief that

⁵⁸ Updegraph, “1st Parachute Regiment,” p. 37.

⁵⁹ Greene, “Memorandum for the Director of Plans and Policies,” p. 25.

“paratroopers are simply a new form of infantry,”⁶⁰ Williams commanded the Paramarines throughout most of the war, but there is neither evidence that he asked to command them nor that he ever lobbied for their use as paratroopers. Although the Paramarines never jumped into combat, their special training made them excellent infantrymen, and consequently, the Marines sent them into many dangerous missions.

Both the Army and the Marines had formed at least one airborne unit by October of 1940, and each wanted to add to the original units. Each branch discovered while building the programs that new technologies came with many issues to solve; some they overcame, and some they did not. Both branches discovered the same thing at this time: keeping the airborne programs running proved to be no easy task. Both branches began to run into problems by the beginning of 1941. Nearing the end of 1940, Army commanders questioned how they wanted to employ the paratroopers. Some Generals in Washington believed that the Army should abandon the program in favor of creating more infantry units.⁶¹ Once the Marines gathered under Williams in the summer of 1941, they began tactical training and ran into problems of their own: lack of aircraft, time, and interest.⁶² In times like these, the dedication of leaders such as Lee became instrumental to the continuation of the Army airborne program. On the other hand, the Marine paratroopers lacked zealous leaders and had no real champion, which hurt them greatly throughout their time as a unit.

⁶⁰ Jon T. Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting: U.S. Marine Corps Parachute Units in World War II* (Washington DC.: HQ Marine Corps, 1999), p. 2.

⁶¹ Bernd Horn, “Surviving the Devil's Cauldron,” *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, (June, 1, 2006): p. 79.

⁶² Ken Haney, “A Chronology: U.S. Marine Corps Parachutists 1927-93,” *Leatherneck* (February, 1993): pp. 56-60.

The Battle of Crete

“The grave of the German Parachutists”⁶³

- General Kurt Student

While both the Army and Marines tested out the use of parachutes for combat and formed units throughout 1940, the Germans spent months preparing for a jump that changed the course of both German and American airborne operations. German paratroopers played an instrumental role in the Battle of Crete in May, 1941, an operation many military commanders deemed a success because the troopers captured their objective and led the Germans to victory. The United States Army paid close attention the Battle of Crete, and the Fallschirmjäger's success provided Army planners, who constantly questioned the feasibility of airborne operations, with incentive to continue and revamp their plans to build a significant airborne. It also provided them with crucial information on what airborne troops needed in order to operate successfully and what not to do in airborne attacks. It turns out that the operation was not a smashing success for the Germans, and the high casualties the Fallschirmjäger suffered during this operation convinced Hitler to drop the program. He told Student on July 17, “Crete proved that the days of the parachute troops are over.”⁶⁴ Crete proved to be the end of German Airborne and the beginning of the legacy of United States Army paratroopers. There is no indication that the Marines paid any attention to the Crete operation, but they do have a connection to the mission. Hitler's reaction after the operation and reasons for ending the program align closely with the reasons the Marine Corps gave for not using its paratroopers as intended.

⁶³ Ian M.T. Stewart, *The Struggle for Crete: 20 May- 1 June 1941; A Story of Lost Opportunity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 478.

⁶⁴ Robert M. Citino, “Dead on Arrival?” *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* 22 (January, 2010): p. 24.

By April of 1941, the Germans had pushed the Allies out of Greece as far as Crete, making the island the last real threat for the southeastern German flank.⁶⁵ Hitler knew he had to remove the threat from the south so that he could focus solely on the Russian front. On October 2, 1940, General Franz Halder, chief of the German Army General Staff, proposed an attack from the air, suggesting, “mastery of the Eastern Mediterranean was dependent on the capture of Crete, and that this could best be achieved by an air landing.”⁶⁶ General Kurt Student, Commander of the Fallschirmjäger, then proposed the use of the German Airborne to Hitler on April 21, 1941. Hitler worried such an operation would incur high casualties, but he eventually approved the idea because his “fear of invasion from the south-east made him see the island as a useful offshore rampart.”⁶⁷ For this purpose, he approved the plan and told Student to start setting it in motion.

General Bernard Freyberg, head of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, led the preparation of Crete for a German attack. Although both the Germans and Allies believed that the Germans had to perform an airborne attack to capture the island, Freyberg did not consider this option. Churchill tried to inform Freyberg multiple times that he should ready for an airborne attack; he even wrote to the Prime minister of New Zealand on May 3, saying: “Our information points to an airborne attack being delivered in the near future, with possibly an attempt at seaborne attack.”⁶⁸ Freyberg simply did not heed the warnings and continued to focus instead on his naval forces. The geography of Crete also made an airborne attack even more likely, as it had limited landing space on the beach. Due to Freyberg's misconceptions, the

⁶⁵ Stewart, *The Struggle for Crete*, pp. 17-19.

⁶⁶ Anthony Beevor, *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance* (Boulder: Westview, 1994), p. 72.

⁶⁷ Beevor, *Crete: the Battle and the Resistance*, p. 73.

⁶⁸ Beevor, *Crete: the Battle and the Resistance*, p. 87.

defenders were not prepared for an airborne attack when it came. This afforded the Germans the element of surprise, an advantage that determined the outcome of the battle.⁶⁹

“Operation Mercury” began at 8:00 am on May 20 when 50 German gliders landed just south of Maleme. Although surprised, the defenders shot many of the glider troops down before they could land.⁷⁰ Minutes later, the paratroopers jumped into the scene just to be shot down in a similar manner to the gliders. The German High Command chose the “oil spot tactic,” where many small groups of troopers jumped some distance apart, and spread out toward each other, with the objective being to merge and blanket the area as well as break up enemy counter measures.⁷¹ The same situation to this first landing occurred four more times on various parts of the island throughout the rest of the day. Pockets of approximately 2,000 gliders and paratroopers landed and defenders wiped them out almost immediately.⁷² At the end of the first day, the German Airborne had suffered an 80% casualty rate of their 750 glider troops and 7,200 paratroopers.⁷³ On the third day, the Fallschirmjäger drove a wedge between the enemy and captured the Maleme airfield. This gave the Germans a way to land their transport planes and bring support troops onto the island, their main objective from the beginning. With this new support from the ground troops, the Germans took the island less than ten days after they captured the airfield.⁷⁴

The Germans faced such high casualties on Crete because they made many miscalculations and mistakes in planning and executing “Operation Mercury.” German military

⁶⁹ “Nazi Invasion of Crete: Office of Strategic Services, 1944,” YouTube, video file, 31:22, posted by Jeff Quitney, May 7, 2012, accessed October 21, 2012 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFqabDQvC5w>.

⁷⁰ Stewart, *The Struggle for Crete*, p. 149-50.

⁷¹ Hellmuth Reinhardt et al., *Airborne Operations: A German Appraisal* (D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989). p. 5.

⁷² “Nazi Invasion of Crete,” video file, 31:22

⁷³ “Nazi Invasion of Crete,” video file, 31:22

⁷⁴ Citino, “Dead on Arrival?,” pp. 23-24.

analysts wrote a pamphlet about the necessities for successful airborne operations, in which they analyzed the problems they had during the Crete operation. They explain that the commanders severely underestimated the manpower needed for paratroop attacks. They also cited the need for and lack of a reliable communication system and immediate ground transport. The Germans did have the element of surprise, and, according to the analysts, “connected with the element of surprise is deception. A typical deceptive measure in airborne operations is the dropping of dummies by parachute.”⁷⁵ Countries went to great lengths to maintain surprise, even dropping dummy paratroopers hours before the paratroopers dropped in order to deceive the enemy and create more panic. The Germans made a few more detrimental mistakes: they did not perform proper reconnaissance, and they should have dropped their paratroopers fully equipped for battle, not with just a pistol and a hand grenade. Finally, the analysts point out that the commander of the paratroop units needed to jump before any of his troopers did, and once they landed, ground operations and airborne operations needed to be under the same command, as they suffered from a lack of communication between units.⁷⁶ Had the Germans done even half of these things, they would have had significantly fewer casualties, and a swifter defeat of the enemy.

The U.S. Army paid close attention to the paratroop and its after effects, and it learned essential lessons about airborne operations. Major James M. Gavin wrote the *Basic Field Manual* on the Army Airborne operations, and there are clear signs that he took the German mistakes at Crete to heart. In section 43 of the handbook, he stated:

- a. the element of surprise must be present
- d. a comprehensive knowledge of the territory involved in the operation is essential

⁷⁵ Reinhardt, *Airborne Operations: A German Appraisal*, pp. 3-5.

⁷⁶ Stewart, *The Struggle for Crete*, pp. 5-12.

g. Terrain objectives to be seized and held should lie in the path of the contemplated advance of friendly forces

h. local air superiority must exist⁷⁷

The Germans did not meet these conditions on Crete, and the fact that Gavin put special emphasis on them shows that he paid attention to what to do differently to ensure the safety of the United States paratroopers. He also addressed the issue of communication between units in article 119, in which he stated: “the commander of the parachute troops must have frequent contact with the commanders of all of these units during the planning and preparatory phases of an operation to insure complete mutual understanding, and to arrange the precise coordination which is necessary.”⁷⁸ Without communication the whole operation imploded, which happened to the Germans and then later to the Americans in their first large-scale airborne operation. Army planners took these lessons seriously and worked for the next two years to make paratroopers a feasible technology.

In response to the Battle of Crete, Hitler aborted German Airborne operations, and “after the Crete operation no German parachute division was committed in airborne operations as a whole unit.”⁷⁹ The German Airborne incurred such high casualties that Hitler decided that he could not use his paratroopers in large-scale offensives again. By the time commanders had a better understanding of airborne operations, the Germans were not in a position to revamp the program to necessary levels for use. Many airborne historians believe that Hitler should not have abandoned his airborne because there were numerous times that they could have effectively

⁷⁷ James M. Gavin, *FM 31-30 Basic Field Manual: Tactics and Technique of Air-Borne Troops* (Washington: Government Printing Office, May, 1942), p. 31.

⁷⁸ Gavin, *Basic Field Manual*, p. 85.

⁷⁹ Reinhardt, *Airborne Operations: A German Appraisal*, p.13.

jumped later in the war.⁸⁰

Hitler did have reasons for ending the program beyond the high casualty rate, which the German military analysts explained. After the loss of 1/3 of Germany's Airborne at Crete, a severe lack of trained jumpers and too few planes to train more made it difficult to preform large-scale jumps.⁸¹ As the war wore on, the Germans lost air superiority to the Allies, they had scarce manpower, and a lack of money made Special Forces too expensive for the Germans to justify. The German military personnel concluded their appraisal: "in airborne operations cheap successes cannot be achieved with weak forces by means of surprise and bluff."⁸² This statement stands out as something the Marines might have said upon ending their program. In fact, the issues that contributed to the end of German Airborne operations appear very similar to the reasons the Marines gave for ending their paratroop operations. The deeper meaning of Hitler's excuses were that he had stretched himself too thin and could not take on this expensive, time consuming, high-risk technology. The parallels in the Germans' and Marine Corps' excuses came from a very similar connection in their situations of not wanting to, or perhaps being able to, invest in their airborne programs. They had neither the time nor the money at their disposal to work out the kinks inherent in a new technology. For this reason, Crete can be seen as a foreshadowing of the issues the Marines later faced.

The Germans jumped onto Crete early in the war and did not yet understand the extent of paratroop capabilities. Germany took chances with its airborne and forged the path for other countries in this technology, but it did so before performing sufficient research and analysis. Paratroopers trained for specific duties and needed the freedom to carry out their tasks, but also

⁸⁰ Citino, "Dead on Arrival?," p. 24.

⁸¹ Reinhardt, *Airborne Operations: A German Appraisal*, p. 21.

⁸² Reinhardt, *Airborne Operations: A German Appraisal*. pp. 22-23.

had to fit in with the rest of the battle plan. Because Special Forces began at the start of World War II, military planners had yet to understand this balance. The lessons the Germans learned in their experimental operations greatly helped the Army in planning its airborne operations, and the Army did have the time, money, and spirit needed to push the airborne forward.

Ideal Conditions for Paratroopers

“Stand Up, Hook Up”

- The beginning of the routine paratroopers performed before jumping.

After analyzing the Fallschirmjäger on Crete and the conditions into which the German High Command sent them, the question of what paratroopers needed in order to be able to jump and be effective in battle arises. Airborne units could not safely make large-scale parajumps without certain material, terrestrial, or tactical advantages. By understanding the importance of these aspects, why they were important, and how they affected airborne operations, it becomes easier to understand why the Army and Marines made the decisions they did. The Army used its paratroopers in many different situations and for many reasons throughout World War II, and it can therefore be hard to pinpoint just what makes an “ideal” jump. Some of the conditions do outline the reasons why some jumps did or did not go well and why some were feasible and others not.

Paratroopers and planners quickly learned that airborne operations required surprise. Attackers easily surprised the defenders early in the war as no side had dealt with paratroopers

before and just the shock of a vertical envelopment stunned the defenders. In after-action reports of both the Battle of Crete and the invasion of Sicily, commanders cite the element of surprise and lack of action from the defensive side as the reason why the attackers accomplished their missions. Although they executed the drops poorly, the missions succeeded because the troopers used surprise to their advantage. Due to the importance of the element of surprise, the Army considered nighttime drops to be more desirable if the enemy would be near. The Army learned in Holland that "day light operations are preferable to night operations, but feasible only when definite air superiority and strong anti-flak measures are assured."⁸³ The Army in the Pacific preferred early morning jumps, probably due to the nature of the jumps, rough terrain, and small drop zones.

Airborne planners also paid special attention to terrain. Paratroopers did best when jumping onto grassy fields. Trees were a serious detriment to the paratrooper, as they could fall through the branches, be impaled on them, or to get stuck in them and be shot by an enemy soldier. Hedgerows, tall clumps of bushes and trees that lined the hedges and roads all over Normandy, proved perilous for paratroopers on D-day. Planners had trouble finding perfectly flat, large, grassy fields behind enemy lines, and the attackers had to make do with what they had. Europe had more fields than the Pacific, which had jungle terrain of thick tree growth, tall grass, swamps, and mountains. Due to this rough terrain, Army planners in the Pacific often chose ridges and plateaus on which to drop the paratroopers. Ridges worked well in general because engineers could clear a small drop zone for the troopers, and pilots were precise, often only dropping around five men on each pass over the drop zone. Plateaus were dangerous if

⁸³ "Allied Airborne Operations in Holland, September - October 1944," Market Garden collection, Donovan Library, p. 2.

surrounded by cliffs from which the paratroopers might fall if they missed the drop zone, but they were a better option than landing in the jungle.

Airfields were the best option for jumps in the Pacific, and the Army made several drops onto them during the war. They were cleared of trees and had to be big enough for a plane to take off and land, making them perfect for paratroopers in that sense. They often had debris all over them and the ground consisted of densely packed coral, which caused sprained and broken joints and the troopers likened to concrete. Similar to terrain, weather played an important role in the feasibility of jumping. No wind and clear skies proved to be the best conditions for jumps, as wind blew troopers away from their drop zones and chutes collapsed in the rain. Overcast skies greatly reduced air support and separated aircraft formations, making the operation more dangerous for the transports.⁸⁴

One of the most controversial questions the Army faced about airborne operations became whether to make large-scale jumps in numbers closer to regular infantry battalions, or if small-scale, company sized jumps were better. Ranking generals and planners asked this question many times throughout the war, and the answer often depended greatly on the operation and what it needed or could accommodate. Big campaigns needed large-scale drops, as the sheer numbers of attacking and defending troops would have overwhelmed smaller units. A big jumping force allowed paratroopers to find each other more easily as well as pose a more daunting force to the defenders. It would have been much more worrisome to see over 15,000 paratroopers descend from the sky than 500. Large airborne operations could accomplish more, meaning that it would have been harder to capture or stop 15,000 troopers wreaking havoc than

⁸⁴ C. F. Barrett, Jr, "82nd Airborne Division Action in Normandy, France June-July, 1944," Normandy collection, Donovan Library, Section II Narrative Annex 1 D., p. 4.

500. On the other hand, small-scale drops proved better for smaller operations or in order to accompany guns behind enemy lines. Pacific terrain caused the U.S. to send smaller invading forces into battle, meaning that it sent in smaller airborne forces as well. Jungle terrain also made it hard for movement of heavy machinery across islands; therefore parachuting pack howitzers into the center of the island often worked much better.⁸⁵

Airlift capabilities and local air superiority were vital for successful airborne operations. In order to make mass jumps, the airborne needed enough transport planes for the troopers. Both the Marine Corps and Army had to overcome this issue in order to use their paratroopers. Early in the war, when very few transport planes had been manufactured and the U.S. faced an overall shortage, planners could only dream of getting enough Douglas DC-3s to lift an entire company, much less a battalion. The Marines, who began large operations earlier in the war than the Army, saw this more acutely. The attacking side had to have local air superiority in airborne attacks, as it meant that the attackers had control of the airspace with little to no opposition from the enemy. If the attackers did not have air superiority in a paradrop, the results would be disastrous, as transport planes carrying the paratroopers became susceptible to enemy fighters. The United States did not have this issue because, soon after entering the war, it had local air superiority in both theaters.⁸⁶

Many other factors influenced the success of paradrops; however, they did not differ for each individual campaign in the way that the previous conditions did. Communication between branch commanders ensured that branches did not sabotage each other. The Army learned that it

⁸⁵ Joseph B. Seay, "The 11th Airborne Division in the Leyte Mountain Operation," *Military Review C & GSC*. Infantry Regiment History 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Donovan Library, ed. H.R. Emery, (Ft. Leavenworth, KA), October, 1949, p. 18.

⁸⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years: II* ed. Alfred D. Chandler Jr. 5 vols. (Baltimore: The John's Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 1259.

had to give one commander charge of the whole airborne operation because nobody knew whom to turn to otherwise. This leader had to have the authority to command the Navy, Air Force, Infantry, and any other units involved in the operation. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, commander of U.S. Army Forces in the Far East, understood this well, and one commander gave orders in all of the Pacific paratroops. Planners also had to take thorough reconnaissance of the drop zone because without proper recon, the attacking side had no idea into what conditions it sent its troopers. Airborne campaigns needed this more than most because of the dangers terrain posed to the jumper. If the drop zone had perils that troopers did not know about due to a lack of reconnaissance, a high number of casualties ensued. Also, to have bearings immediately upon landing, paratroopers memorized sand tables and key landmarks near the drop zone in the days preceding the jump. In order for paratroopers to survive behind enemy lines, they had to be equipped with the materials to do so. Therefore, they jumped with enough rations, clothing, ammunition, communication implements, and more to last them at least 24 hours after the drop. All of these elements came together to either make a successful jump or a mess of casualties and lost men.

Marine Operations

“The Darkness of the Dawn in the Eastern Sky is Very Deep”⁸⁷

- Japanese 38th Division Commander Sano Tadayoshi

Most of the Paramarines' story is one of lost opportunity and difficulty overcoming basic problems that arose when using paratroopers. The Marines cited lack of aircraft, no close land-based loading zones, small objectives, and the size of the unit as reasons for not being able to drop the Paramarines into combat.⁸⁸ While all of these factors did pose problems for Corps commanders and planners, the Army overcame many of these very issues in order to use its paratroopers in the Pacific. The Marines should have cited “lack of interest from commanders” as a reason for not using their paratroopers as originally intended. Commanders made questionable decisions with how they chose to employ the Paramarines, often sending them into missions that caused casualties of up to 40% in the unit.⁸⁹ Just as the Paramarines might have been able to perform drops, commanders relocated the unit to I Marine Amphibious Corps (IMAC), a unit specifically designed for amphibious landings. In attaching the Paramarines to IMAC, commanders took them away from the 1st Marines, who soon after began raiding islands that would have been suitable for paratroops.

In August, 1941, the Paramarines participated in a tactical landing exercise in Fredericksburg, Virginia, under General Holland M. Smith with the Amphibious Force, Atlantic

⁸⁷ Sano Tadayoshi, “Address of Instruction,” HQ XIV Corps Cactus G-2 Section 25, January 43, Guadalcanal collection, Quantico.

⁸⁸ Updegraph, “1st Parachute Regiment,” p. 46.

⁸⁹ Alexander A. Vandegrift to Headquarters First Marine Division Fleet Force, “Commendation of Raider Battalion, Parachute Battalion, and Eleventh Marines for action against the enemy on 13-14 September, 1942,” September 19, 1942, 1990-5-10, 066/293, Quantico, p. 1.

Fleet. Smith planned to drop Williams' company behind enemy lines at H plus 1 hour and seize a vital cross-roads before attacking the enemy's flank.⁹⁰ Captain Howard's company planned to jump on D plus 2 with the second wave of the amphibious attack. A lack of aircraft plagued the troopers yet again, as they could only muster two transport planes for the operation. It took multiple flights and hours of delays to get just one understrength company on the ground. Due to the time this took, the troopers' "sudden" appearance did not surprise anybody, and they could not carry out their original assignment. Undeterred, Smith ordered Williams to re-embark one squad, drop behind enemy lines in another section of the training arena, and create as much havoc as possible. The plan worked, and "Williams' tiny force cut tactical telephone lines, hijacked trucks, blocked a road, and successfully evaded capture for several hours."⁹¹ This training maneuver proved the value of having surprise attack groups in the Marines. In a rare burst of enthusiasm for the airborne, Smith recommended that his Amphibious Force should include an "air attack brigade" that had at least one parachute regiment. He also asked the Marine Corps to work on getting more airplanes for the paratroopers to use.⁹² Even with interest coming from such a high level, planners still did not work to get aircraft or other supplies for the Paramarines.

During this time, Marines began to face the problem of not having enough aircraft to properly train its paratroopers. As seen in the tactical landing exercise they performed with Holland Smith, they could not get enough aircraft to properly perform the exercise. The Corps

⁹⁰ H+/- 1 hour means that the time would be from the hour chosen for the start of the battle +1 our or -1 hour. Therefore, in a battle that begins at 9:00 am, H+ 1 hour means 10:00 am and H- 1 hour means 8:00 am. Paratroopers often jumped at H- as they were supposed to go before the infantry. D +/- 1 day is the same concept, just with days. So D+ 1(2,3..) in a battle would be 1(2,3..) days after the day the battle began.

⁹¹ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 4.

⁹² Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 4.

had problems with this throughout the war, in fact, “at no time could existing Marine aviation organizations muster more than six transport squadrons for a single operation, which meant that only one reinforced battalion could be lifted to an objective.”⁹³ This problem did make using the Paramarines in large-scale operations harder, but the Marines could probably have gotten around it had they wanted to. The Army also had problems with not having enough airplanes. Marshall wrote to Eisenhower on April 27, 1942 about the need for more transport planes, saying that the Army needed at least 1150 planes by the fall, and: “we have on hand only 111, of which 57 are in the Far East and 54 are doing all the transport work in this hemisphere and providing only 10 for the training of 3,000 parachute troops.”⁹⁴ Even with these shortages, commanders worked with what they had, often dropping the paratroopers in sections rather than as a whole unit. The Army also made multiple company to battalion-sized jumps in the war.

After training at Quantico for almost a year, Headquarters told Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, commander of the 1st Marine Division, to which the paratroopers were attached, that they would leave for New Zealand in May, 1942. While the Marines sailed across the world, Navy and Marine commanders arrived in New Zealand and got ready to train their troops for a mission they incorrectly believed to be months away. MacArthur ordered Vandegrift's unit to take part in “an amphibious operation against two enemy-held islands, Guadalcanal and Tulagi, in the Solomon Island chain northwest of [them]...on August 1 – less than five weeks away.”⁹⁵ This would be the first ground battle for the United States in World War II. With this time restraint, Vandegrift believed MacArthur crazy to think this a possibility, as it left far too

⁹³ Benis M. Frank and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *Victory and Occupation: History of the U.S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II* volume V, Washington D.C.: Historical Branch G-3 Division, HQUSMC, 1968, p. 706.

⁹⁴ George C. Marshall, *Papers of George Catlett Marshall* vol. 3, ed. Larry Bland and Sharon Stevens (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1991), p. 173.

⁹⁵ Vandegrift, *Once a Marine*, p. 105.

little time to train the green troops, gather intelligence about the islands, and create a battle plan. Vandegrift and his planners had their work cut out for them, and spent the month of July in a frenzy. Luckily, Vandegrift got the date pushed back to August 7, giving him an extra week to prepare.⁹⁶ Vandegrift devised a plan that called for the 1st and 5th Marines to land on Guadalcanal, three miles east of a large airfield. They attacked the island to gain Henderson airfield, so that the United States would have a base for landing aircraft. At the same time, separate forces would attack Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanambogo, three small islands about 20 miles north of Guadalcanal.⁹⁷ The 1st Parachute Battalion took Gavutu and Tanambogo while Colonel Merritt Austin Edson's 1st Raider Battalion and regular infantry troops attacked Tulagi.

Marine intelligence believed that the enemy had Gavutu and Tanambogo under light defense; however, there ended up being around 536 men on Gavutu-Tanambogo, a significantly bigger number than the 361 paratroopers that made up the landing unit.⁹⁸ A great number of casualties result when the attackers send a smaller number of men than there are defenders if the defense is prepared. The defenders can shoot them down easily with heavy artillery, and the only way to beat the defenders quickly is by overwhelming them with troops. Vandegrift explained in a letter to Holcomb on August 11 that the Marines expected the paratroopers to have an easy time securing Gavutu: "the attack was H + 4 hrs. On Guadalcanal where we expected the main resistance we had the least."⁹⁹ A shortage of landing craft created the four-hour delay, as

⁹⁶ Henry I. Shaw, Jr., "First Offensive: The Marine Campaign for Guadalcanal" *Marines in World War II Commemorative Series*, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/npswapa/extcontent/usmc/pcn-190-003117-00/sec6.htm (accessed April 25, 2013).

⁹⁷ Vandegrift, *Once a Marine*, p. 118.

⁹⁸ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 6.

⁹⁹ Alexander A. Vandegrift to Thomas Holcomb, "Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Gavutu-Tanambogo," August 11, 1942, Correspondence section, Thomas Holcomb collection, Quantico, p. 2.

the paratroopers had to wait for the raiders to land on Tulagi first.¹⁰⁰ The paratroopers planned to take Gavutu and then move on to Tanambogo once they secured the first island.¹⁰¹

The paratroopers did an exemplary job as infantrymen on Gavutu and Tanambogo, even though they had one of the hardest fights of all the units in the battle. As a small group, they were under-equipped: they had minimal heavy artillery such as mortars and machine guns. To compound this, they lost the element of surprise due to their late entrance, they faced difficult terrain, and they had an extremely vulnerable landing site.¹⁰² All of these issues combined to make Gavutu a death trap for the paratroopers, and Vandegrift stated in the same letter to Holcomb: "Bob Williams' outfit was badly chewed up and Bob wounded. After an intensive bombardment by ships and literally tons of heavy bombs, Bob landed without casualties. It was then a dog fight in a very restricted area."¹⁰³ As Vandegrift pointed out, the naval bombardment just prior to the paratroopers' landing did little but stun the Japanese defenders. Once they came out of their stupor, the Japanese opened fire on the paratroopers and wounded many of them, including Major Williams, at which point Major Charles A. Miller stepped into command.¹⁰⁴

Despite losing four officers within the first half-hour of the battle, the paratroopers fought on, taking personal initiative and showing courage in the face of uncertainty. Only six hours after their landing, the paratroopers raised the American flag at the top of hill 148, signaling that they controlled the island at long last. On the morning of August 8, the 2nd Marines attacked Tanambogo amphibiously and finally secured it on the 9th. The paratroopers endured casualties of 20%, with 28 killed (4 officers and 11 NCOs), and around 50 men wounded. This was much

¹⁰⁰ Updegraph, "1st Parachute Regiment," p. 39.

¹⁰¹ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰² Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 7.

¹⁰³ Vandegrift to Holcomb "Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Gavutu-Tanambogo," p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 9.

higher than any other unit in the Guadalcanal campaign, the next closest being Edson's 1st Raider Battalion with a casualty rate of 10%.¹⁰⁵ On the 9th of August the Paramarines relocated to Tulagi, and became reserve troops. At this point, Miller, their acting commanding officer, became sick and had to be evacuated to the field hospital, leaving the paratroopers without a commander.

One must ask why the Marines used paratroopers as infantry rather than as airborne troops in this mission. Searching through planning documents, intelligence reports, after action reports, and communications among commanders yields no mention of paratroopers save their amphibious landing onto Gavutu. The Paramarines could not have jumped onto Gavutu and Tanambogo, which were much too small. Guadalcanal had Henderson Field that would have been suitable for paratroops, but the Marines chose not to employ them there. Upon securing Henderson field, the Marines acquired an air strip that they "estimated at 3,900 feet and serviceable," meaning they could take off within range of many islands the Marines attacked thereafter.¹⁰⁶ However, because this was the first American attack, the United States had no islands with airstrips close enough to Guadalcanal for the range of the DC-3s. A Marine Historian explains: "There is no indication that planners gave any thought to using their airborne capability, though in all likelihood that was due to the lack of transport aircraft or the inability of available planes to make a round-trip flight from New Zealand to the Solomons."¹⁰⁷ One would expect to find some mention that planners considered dropping the Paramarines and that they chose not to due to lack of aircraft or nearby landing zones. There is no evidence that they even thought of doing so, and Vandegrift only mentioned the use of parachutes in his memoir to say:

¹⁰⁵ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰⁶ "Guadalcanal," 1942, Guadalcanal collection, Quantico.

¹⁰⁷ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 7.

“... Williams' 1st Parachute Battalion, sans parachutes, struck Gavutu-Tanambogo.”¹⁰⁸ He did not give any indication as to why they attacked “sans parachutes” or that he considered using them as airborne troops.

The Marines should not have used the paratroopers in such a dangerous fight right from the beginning because the high casualties they suffered made the battalion too small early in the war. The airborne had already started out as a very small unit, and the loss of 20% of its strength made it impossible for it to act alone. In a sense, the Guadalcanal campaign for the Paramarines had the same effect as Crete for the Fallschirmjäger. The Marine Corps would not officially give up on its program for over a year, but within 9 months, planners ditched the possibility of using the airborne for anything but infantry. The lack of manpower troubled the Marines from the beginning. The Corps never came close to the numbers it originally wanted to have in the airborne, and the casualties the paratroopers faced throughout their time as a unit kept their numbers dysfunctionally low.¹⁰⁹

The Paramarines fought “The Battle of Bloody Ridge” in a two part mission on Guadalcanal. Because the airborne had been so decimated in the previous battle and had fewer than 300 men, Vandegrift attached them to the Marine Raiders under Edson.¹¹⁰ In Early September, 1942, the Marines heard of a large force of Japanese troops gathering east of the Marines' perimeter near the village of Tasimboko. Commanders asked Edson's group to gather information in a raid on the 7th of September. Although over 3,000 Japanese troops were in the area, only 300 defenders remained on the beach, giving the Marines the opportunity to carry out

¹⁰⁸ Vandegrift, *Once a Marine*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁹ Christ, *Battalion of the Damned*, p. 180.

¹¹⁰ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 12.

their mission.¹¹¹ They did this by going into the village nearby and destroying a large Japanese supply base. They found valuable information as well, and by nightfall they were back in the division perimeter.¹¹²

Some of the information the raiding party found showed that 3,000 Japanese were making their way slowly through the jungle southwest of Tasimboko. Edson believed that they would attack the weak southern part of the Marines' perimeter via a grassy ridge southeast of Henderson Field. The commanders assigned the paratroopers and raiders this ridge to protect the airfield on September 10 to protect the airfield, and the men dug in and made defensive barriers using the few materials they had.¹¹³ The Japanese attacked on the night of the 12th, first with bombs, and then with troops. After making it through the night, the American troops counterattacked on the 13th, which the Japanese returned by attacking that night. The paratroopers and raiders held them off all night, and with aid from the 4th marines early the next morning, they wore the Japanese down, forcing them to retreat the morning of the 14th.¹¹⁴ By the end of the battle, the raiders had casualties of 135 men and the paratroopers 128.¹¹⁵ Commanders in the Marines lauded the paratroopers as having done a magnificent job at the ridge. Vandegrift said when speaking about the Guadalcanal campaign: "I think the most crucial moment was the Battle of the Ridge."¹¹⁶ The Paramarines' determination and initiative helped them yet again in battle and although they did not fulfill their duty as airborne troops, they did an excellent job as infantrymen and were a credit to the Corps. When the Paramarines acted as

¹¹¹ Christ, *Battalion of the Damned*, pp. 187-189.

¹¹² Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 14.

¹¹³ "First Parachute Battalion Sept 13-14 1942," Operations Report, Quantico, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ Paul C. Curtis, "Giants of the Corps," *Leatherneck* 58 (July, 1975): pp. 48-49, 70.

¹¹⁵ Christ, *Battalion of the Damned*, pp. 285-86.

¹¹⁶ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 19.

infantry troops, they still incurred extreme casualty rates, and this raid reduced their size even further, meaning that they had an even smaller chance of acting as paratroopers.

Sick and exhausted after Bloody Ridge, the paratroopers sans a commanding officer went to a transient camp on New Caledonia where they did manual labor until Williams returned and put a stop to this. The troopers began training in November under Williams, which included jumping, hiking, and tactical training for jungle warfare.¹¹⁷ In January of 1943, the 2nd Battalion joined the 1st at Camp Kiser, the permanent residence of the paratroopers on New Caledonia. The 3rd Battalion arrived from San Diego in March of 1943, joining the 1st and 2nd battalions at Camp Kiser. At this time, the Marines transferred the paratroopers to IMAC as a special asset, and then they created the 1st Parachute Regiment out of all three Battalions on April 1, 1943.¹¹⁸ When the Paramarines transferred to IMAC, it became clear that the Marines had no plans to use them as paratroopers. IMAC's commander, Vandegrift, used the Paramarines as raiding parties on small islands for the remainder of the year.

At this time, commanders began to question whether or not the Marine Corps Airborne should continue. In October of 1942, director of plans and policies at HQMC, Brigadier General Keller E. Rockey, asked IMAC about “the use of parachutists” in the south Pacific.¹¹⁹ Soon after this, IMAC sent Williams on a reconnaissance mission of New Georgia to determine the feasibility of using paratroopers in this operation. This idea never came to fruition, and there is no evidence that he brought back any pertinent information concerning the possible use of paratroopers on New Georgia. The Marines found enough planes to put one practice jump together in May of 1943, but it went terribly wrong and ended in one death and eleven injuries.

¹¹⁷ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 19.

¹¹⁸ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 20.

¹¹⁹ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, p. 20.

This convinced the Corps that the paratroopers would only arrive through amphibious landings thereafter. In April, 1943, under the recommendation of Rockey, Holcomb signed off on closing the New River Parachute School so that its resources could be put to more pressing issues. This was just one more nail in the coffin for the Marine Airborne. When Vandegrift took over IMAC in July of 1943, he made it clear to Headquarters that he believed the Marines had no use for airborne troops.¹²⁰ By the time the Corps deployed the paratroopers to battle again, they had already given up on using them as an airborne unit.

The paratroopers took part in two more missions as a special unit before being disbanded. Both missions used the paratroopers as raiders on small islands and are examples the paratroopers performing jobs that regular infantrymen could have done. While the Paramarines raided small islands unsuitable for paratroops, the 1st Marines, from whom the paratroopers had just been detached, fought on islands suitable for paratroops. The 2nd Parachute Battalion conducted a diversionary operation on the island of Choiseul in order to take Japanese attention away from the Marines attacking Bougainville Island in the Solomon Islands.¹²¹ Lt. Colonel V. H. Krulak who commanded the raid instructed that the “basic principle is strike and move; avoid decisive engagement with superior forces.”¹²² The paratroopers landed at Voza unopposed at 11:00 pm on October 27 and set up a defensive base position. They then went out on patrols to determine “the location of the nearest enemy installations,” which were Sangigai, a barge area, and the Choiseul Bay outposts.¹²³ For the next few days, the paratroopers engaged the enemy in

¹²⁰ Hoffman, *Silk Chutes and Hard Fighting*, pp. 22-23.

¹²¹ V. H. Krulak, “Comments on Operations and Material; Choiseul Operation, October 27 – November 4, 1943,” HQUSMC Correspondence, 1939-50 Ells Dran No. 1975, Vol. 15. NARA , Annex A p. 2.

¹²² V. H. Krulak, “Operation Order Hq 2d PchteBn, Reinforced Vella Lavella BSI,” October 23, 1943, Choiseul collection, Quantico, p.1

¹²³ V.H. Krulak USMC to Headquarters, IMAC Guadalcanal, B.S.I., “The Commanding Officer, 2d Parachute Battalion, Preliminary Report, Operation Blissful,” November 5, 1943, Choiseul collection, Quantico, p.1.

small skirmishes in order to alert them to their presence on the island, and they destroyed “permanent buildings, stores of ammunition, food, medical supplies, barge repair parts and other miscellaneous material.”¹²⁴ They also took note of enemy movements on the island, created mayhem for the Japanese, ruined an enemy supply area and found important documents.¹²⁵ The troopers made their way off the island on November 3 to meet congratulations from Marine commanders for a job well done. The plan worked to confuse the enemy and create a diversion from Bougainville.

After this raid, Kulak assessed the role of the paratroopers in the Marines, and decided that they were an unnecessary burden on Marine funds and the Corps needed them elsewhere. In the after action report he sent to Holcomb on November 29, 1943, his “Final Comment” began with: “It is believed in point at this time to examine the general Marine Paratroop picture in the light of combat employment to date.”¹²⁶ He then went on to list why he believed the Paramarines should be disbanded:

- a. Kulak claimed first that the 2nd Parachute Battalion was held back from being committed to action for 14 months after being full strength, a year of which it spent in the South Pacific, and “when finally committed the battalion was assigned a task which comes definitely under the heading of “Raider Operations.”
- b. “In early May, 1943, all jumping was halted in the 2d Parachute Battalion due to lack of aircraft.” At which point it was trained as an infantry battalion and the soldiers did not gain skills beyond the other infantry groups in terms of jungle warfare, and “its

¹²⁴ Krulak to Headquarters, IMAC Guadalcanal, B.S.I., “Preliminary Report, Operation Blissful,” p. 2.

¹²⁵ Krulak to Headquarters, IMAC Guadalcanal, B.S.I., “Preliminary Report, Operation Blissful,” p. 4.

¹²⁶ Krulak, “Comments on Operations and Material,” Annex I p. 6.

capabilities in that respect varied little from any good Marine infantry battalion.”¹²⁷

c. Therefore:

1. “a unit composed of carefully picked Marines was idle for a year, a year during which marines were badly needed – because it was originally constituted for execution of a special type operation.”

2. “And when finally committed to action it was assigned a task for which another type of hand picked unit is organized and trained.”

d. He then explained that the Marine Corps was small, and therefore it should concentrate on a uniform purpose [amphibious landings] and get rid of any unit not used for this purpose, or used infrequently. In his opinion, “the Corps cannot afford the luxury of Paratroopers under existing conditions... Parachute operations are unquestionably a powerful tactical adjunct if those troops are available in adequate numbers. However, the number of paratroops in the Marine Corps is small and, unless greatly expanded and completely implemented with aircraft, they will never have material effect on the general strategic situation... And the war is too far advanced for the Marine Corps to embark on a vast airborne program.”

e. He believed that because 2,000 mainly battle hardened Marines were “unprofitably tied up in the Parachute Troops,” the unit should be disbanded and absorbed into other personnel.

f. Kulak concluded that Edson's Raiders should be considered similarly at that point.¹²⁸

As the commander of the 2nd Parachute Battalion, Kulak did not seem to be very invested in the

¹²⁷ Kulak, “Comments on Operations and Material,” Annex I p. 6

¹²⁸ Kulak, “Comments on Operations and Material,” Annex I p. 7.

continuation of his own unit. As a reason for ending the program, he pointed out that the Marines did not use the unit for a year. This argument was mired in the past as it only considered what the unit did before that time, not what it could do for the Marines in the future. He then used the argument that they had only been employed as raider troops until that time, again something that could have been fixed in the future. The only time he gave an even slightly forward-thinking argument is when he explained that the Marine Corps did not have enough personnel to justify the program and that the war had progressed too far to begin making the airborne bigger at this point. He, like the other commanders in the Marines, did not allow the war to progress to the point where the Paramarines would have been useful. Instead, he thought back to what it had not accomplished and decided to end it based on its past experiences.

The 1st Parachute Battalion and Edson's Raiders took part in the unit's final battle on November 28, 1943. They landed amphibiously 10 miles from the Marine base near Koiari on Bougainville with the intention of sneaking behind the Japanese lines to create mayhem. The planners miscalculated the enemy's position, and the troopers landed in the middle of a major enemy supply zone.¹²⁹ Japanese firepower stopped them short and forced them to dig in on the beach, surrounding them on three sides. Finally, after being pinned down for hours, three destroyers arrived at the beach and provided cover for the troopers' retreat. For such a short battle, the troopers met with extreme losses with 15 killed, 99 wounded and 7 missing. This was out of a total of 24 officers and 505 enlisted men that were in the original landing force.¹³⁰ The Marines had yet again sent the Paramarines into a death trap. On December 3, the 3rd Parachute Battalion joined the 1st on Bougainville and the paratroopers spent the next month on and off

¹²⁹ R. Fagan, "Unit Report Bougainville B.S.I.," November 29, 1943, Bougainville collection, Quantico, VA, p. 1.

¹³⁰ Updegraph, "1st Parachute Regiment," p. 45.

patrolling the island and defending the perimeter against Japanese patrols. They went off rotation on January 11, 1944. During this time, the 1st Marine Division, from which the Paramarines had just been detached, fought in “Operation Cartwheel” on New Britain. This was a big island very close to Papua New Guinea, which could have been a very good location for the Paramarines to jump into combat had they still been attached to the unit and had the Marines still been interested in them. They were attached to IMAC at this point though, and there is no evidence that even one commander fought to use the paratroopers or to keep the unit together.

Throughout the fall and winter of 1943, many commanders called for the disbandment of the Paramarines. The unit leached the Marines' badly needed resources and did not fulfill its purpose. The Marines calculated that if they ended the parachute unit, 3,000 troops would become available, and 150,000 dollars would be saved monthly.¹³¹ At such an important time, these resources could not be wasted by the Corps, especially for a group that had never jumped into combat.¹³² Holcomb, who retired in January of 1944, had not been excited about the paratroopers since mid-1940, and he ended the program as one of his last acts as Marine Commandant. On December 30, 1943, Holcomb officially declared the 1st Parachute Regiment disbanded.¹³³ When Vandegrift took the position of Commandant of the Marines on January 1, 1944, the Corps had few resources and replacements. He therefore immediately went to work on appointing officers to new positions, reorganizing troops, and resting tired men. He stated in his memoir that “one thing was certain: to fulfill such obligations luxuries had to go. General Holcomb already had scratched our incursions into the barrage balloon and glider fields. I now took what was left of the raiders and parachutists and made them into a new 4th Marine

¹³¹ R.W. Stubbe, “Revive the Parachute Forces,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 57 (October, 1973): pp. 58-59.

¹³² Updegraph, “1st Parachute Regiment,” p. 46.

¹³³ Stubbe, “Revive the Parachute Forces,” pp. 58-59.

Regiment in honor of the 4th Marines who went down on Bataan.”¹³⁴ With this, Vandegrift ended the Marine Parachute unit, but not the soldiers' role in the war. As Vandegrift stated, many of the Paramarines transferred to the 4th Marine Regiment or 5th Marine Division and fought on Vella La Vella, Saipan, Okinawa, and Iwo Jima.¹³⁵

The Army's Continued Dedication to the Program

The Army showed its interest in the airborne by giving Lee as much help as it could. Times were tight for everyone, but the Army constantly allocated resources, time, and money to the airborne. In 1941, Washington activated three more parachute battalions. With such a large increase in personnel came supply, space, and command issues that Lee worked to fix throughout that year. Lee had trouble obtaining necessary materials for training, even parachutes were hard to come by, but he and the paratroopers forged on and continued training with the materials they did have. The volunteers that flooded in to create the new platoons filled Benning to capacity, and Lee urged the Army to buy land just across the border in Alabama. In the summer of 1941, Washington allocated 235,000 dollars to create a tactical training zone in the new area.¹³⁶ With this new land, the troopers practiced tactical maneuvers they would have to perform after jumping into combat. Command issues also resulted from the expansion of the airborne program as parachute battalions had no formal command headquarters and Lee had to pass everything through commanders in Washington. In the summer of 1941, Washington took care of this problem and gave command of the airborne program at Fort Benning to Lee. At the same time,

¹³⁴ Vandegrift, *Once a Marine*, pp. 241-2.

¹³⁵ James F. Christ, *Battalion of the Damned*, p. 302.

¹³⁶ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, pp. 109-111.

the 550th Airborne Infantry Battalion participated in the Army's first cooperative amphibious and airborne maneuver in Panama.¹³⁷ The success of the operation fueled Marshall's interest in the program, and he called for the formation of another air-landing battalion.

Lee's continued dedication to the program, constant nagging to personnel in Washington, and implementation of training maneuvers kept the Army interested in the airborne. Because the airborne stayed on commanders' minds, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Washington called for four new parachute regiments to be activated. Later in the year, Lee gained command over all air-landing battalions, glider troops, and paratroopers, the combination of which he called the "airborne." In August, 1942, the Army designated the 82nd and 101st Infantry Divisions as the first two airborne divisions of the United States.¹³⁸ Elements of the 82nd saw action soon after in Africa, performing the first paradrop in combat for the United States.

The 82nd Goes to War

"The end of the beginning"¹³⁹

- Eisenhower after Operation Torch

In the fall of 1942, the Army teamed up with England to remove all Axis troops from North Africa, and it did so using a small number of paratroopers. The 509th PIR participated in "Operation Villain" as a part of the bigger "Operation Torch" on November 7, under the

¹³⁷ Rottman and Volstad, *U.S. Army Airborne*, p. 6.

¹³⁸ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, p. 126.

¹³⁹ Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: the War in North Africa, 1942-1943* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002), p. 159.

command of Colonel Edson D. Raff, whom they called “Little Caesar.”¹⁴⁰ The Allies wanted to capture two French airstrips south of Oran with amphibious and airborne forces. Eisenhower's plan depended upon the cooperation of the French troops in North Africa, which the Allies did not have. Believing it to be too risky, the British urged the Americans to call off the use of paratroopers in the mission, which would have been wise as the mission did not go well.

Multiple issues occurred on the way to the drop zone: the transport planes from England lost each other en route and landed all over western North Africa, they ran out of fuel on the 1,100 mile flight, and many of the planes were shot down by the French or captured by the Spanish.¹⁴¹ Most of the C-47s landed in a dry lake bed west of the airfields. Still flying toward the objective, Raff noted an armored enemy column approaching the stranded planes, and he ordered his group to jump behind the tanks to save the men on the ground.¹⁴² Upon landing, the paratroopers discovered that the “enemy” was an American force on its way to complete its objective. Most of the paratroopers eventually made it to the airfields by truck on the 9th of November and secured the objective.¹⁴³

Thus ended the Army's first attempt to use its airborne. Rick Atkinson states in *An Army at Dawn*, “British skepticism of Villain had been well founded. The operation contributed nothing to the invasion while expending half of all Allied parachute forces.”¹⁴⁴ Neither the British nor American commanders had a clear understanding of how to use their paratroopers at this point. They should not have used their paratroopers this early in the war and before totally

¹⁴⁰ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, p. 87.

¹⁴¹ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁴² Robert K. Wright and John T. Greenwood, *Airborne Forces at War: From Parachute Test Platoon to the 21st Century* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), p. 30.

¹⁴³ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁴ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, p. 91.

understanding the technology that they employed. Torch demonstrated the vitality of communication, proper reconnaissance of the battle area, and a clear command. Perhaps the Army did not take away as many lessons as it could have because, as commanders “wheeled around to the east and pulled out their Michelin maps of Tunisia, they believed they had actually been to war.”¹⁴⁵ This false sense of experience made them believe they knew all they needed to know in order to employ paratroopers in war. They had seen nothing, though, as they soon found out.

After this mission, the French in North Africa were still unwilling to cooperate, so the Allies spent next few days capturing towns in Algeria and Morocco. In this effort, the British generals in charge of the operation ordered the 509th to jump onto a French airfield and secure it before the Germans could. In doing so, the 350 men of the 509th made their first jump on November 15.¹⁴⁶ The success of this mission fueled the Army's confidence in its paratroopers, so it sent elements of the 509th to do one more paratroop in North Africa. Unfortunately, they did so before actually gaining any knowledge about how to use their paratroopers. Commanders thought after their successful drop onto the airfield that they knew the limitations of paratroopers, but this mission had taught them nothing about how to use the technology. Because of this false belief of understanding, British and American commanders ignorantly sent elements of the 509th into an impossible mission.

On the 26th of December, 32 paratroopers jumped behind enemy lines in order to destroy a railroad bridge at El Djem that air bombardment could not demolish. Their commanders instructed them to walk 5 miles south from the DZ to the bridge, blow it up, and walk 110 miles

¹⁴⁵ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, p. 160.

¹⁴⁶ Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces at War*, p. 30.

back to Tunisia.¹⁴⁷ Unbeknownst to the paratroopers, the two C-47s that took them there miscalculated and dropped them south instead of north of the bridge. Due to this error, the troopers walked 20 miles away from the bridge instead of the planned 5 miles toward it. When the sun rose, they discovered that they were nowhere near the bridge and were in danger of the Germans catching them. One soldier recalled his experience: “That left us in daylight, no objective in sight. There was little we could do. I can truthfully say we did not panic. There were no troops in the area.” He then goes on to explain that they decided to blow up the tracks they were on, scatter in pairs, and then head for the border.¹⁴⁸ Of the 32 men who jumped, 8 made it back to Tunisia, 16 were interned in prison camps, and 8 were considered killed in action.¹⁴⁹ This drop illustrated the importance of navigation and good pilots for airborne missions. The men would have completed their mission and been on their way to Tunisia by daylight had they been dropped in the right place.

The Army should have paid more attention to the lessons the African campaign could have taught it, but it took another disastrous drop of a much larger scale for commanders to really grasp the fact that they understood very little about airborne operations. Jim Travis Broumley writes in *The Boldest Plan is the Best* that “whoever wrote the original order must have thought that the paratroopers were supermen who could do anything.”¹⁵⁰ This is true, as the Army's use of its airborne in all three of these jumps in Africa demonstrated that it still had a lot to learn about the use of its airborne and what these missions needed in order to succeed. They

¹⁴⁷ Patrick K. O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor: World War II's Ranger and Airborne Veterans Reveal the Heart of Combat* (New York: Free, 2001), p. 29.

¹⁴⁸ O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁹ Jim Travis Broumley, *The Boldest Plan is the Best: Combat History of the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion During World War II* (Rocky Marsh Publishing, 2011), p. 115.

¹⁵⁰ Broumley, *The Boldest Plan is the Best*, p. 111.

could not send paratroopers into any situation they felt required special attention.

SICILY

“Tonight you embark upon a combat mission for which our people and the free people of the world have been waiting for two years.”¹⁵¹

-General Gavin to the 505th

The Army's first large-scale airborne operation could have ended the program had it not been for leaders unwilling to give up on the airborne. The 82nd Airborne under Major General Matthew B. Ridgway made its first jump into combat during the Allied invasion of Sicily on July 9, 1943.¹⁵² The *Fort Benning Bayonet* published an article about the jump just after it occurred, saying: “Operation Husky' was the first large-scale Allied airborne combat jump in history, and the largest operation of its kind since the German capture of Crete.”¹⁵³ The Allies attacked Sicily in order to gain a base from which they could invade Italy. In November, 1942, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt saying that they had to “strike at the under-belly of the Axis in effective strength and in the shortest time,” which meant to jump-start a campaign against Italy, Vienna, the Balkans, the Ljubljana Gap between Slovenia and Italy, and Austria.¹⁵⁴ With both commanders on board, the Americans and British began planning the operation. The paratroopers themselves did an exemplary job in the campaign, but rushed planning and a lack of necessary training, not understanding what paratroopers needed in order to operate successfully,

¹⁵¹ Barbara Gavin Fauntleroy, *The General and His Daughter: The War Time Letters of General James M. Gavin to his Daughter Barbara* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 38.

¹⁵² Clay Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers: The American Airborne in World War II* (Garden City, NY: Dial, 1985), p. 83.

¹⁵³ *Fort Benning Bayonet*, (Thursday, July 15, 1943): p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ William Manchester, and Paul Reid, *The Last Lion, Winston Spencer Churchill* (New York, NY: Little, Brown &, 2012), p. 603.

and branch leaders not cooperating caused the paratroopers to suffer extreme casualty rates. The Sicilian campaign showed Army commanders that they had yet to fix the fundamental issue of communication between branches, had to allot enough planning and training time, and had to test the use of paratroopers more in order to understand their needs and limitations.

The British 1st Airborne Division jumped onto the east side of Sicily while the Americans jumped onto the west. The British commanders did not consult any airborne experts in planning their airborne attack, and therefore organized an impossible mission. Hoppy Hopkinson laid out a plan to Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery that called for a night glider assault. “Monty” approved the plan without realizing that “neither the American nor the British glider [pilots] had had much night flying experience. None had ever flown a glider into combat.”¹⁵⁵ The Germans learned on Crete that using gliders before paratroopers would end in disaster because the defenders could easily shoot them down. Yet Hopkinson believed it was a solid plan, and continued with the decision to lead the British Airborne operation with gliders.

Ridgway planned the American Airborne attack in this mission, but fundamental issues stemming from America's lack of experience with airborne missions created many issues with his plan. The American paratroopers were not adequately trained in night jumping, and their pilots were not trained in night flying and navigation. Due to a lack of aircraft, the entire 82nd could not jump at the same time, so Ridgway chose to drop the 505th PIR, 82nd Airborne reinforced under the command of Lieutenant General James M. Gavin behind a beachhead first.¹⁵⁶ Commanders hoped that by doing this, they would block Axis counterattacks against the US 7th Army's amphibious landing on the beach that morning. Ridgway did not begin

¹⁵⁵ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, p. 76.

¹⁵⁶ John S. D. Eisenhower *Soldiers and Statesmen: Reflections on Leadership* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2012), p. 138.

training the paratroopers for this operation until the beginning of June, and high winds on the drop zone made jump training impossible. He planned a night jump, but quickly realized that pilots could not get their bearings or see the drop zone in the dark, making night drops exceptionally risky. In an attempt to fix this problem, he decided to drop “pathfinders” (men who jumped early to light the way for the pilots), but the men had not perfected this new system by the jump into Sicily.¹⁵⁷

The Americans encountered another problem: cooperation between the branches attacking Sicily. Collaboration between Air Force, Infantry, Navy, and Airborne forces proved essential because of the novelty of airborne operations. Although Gavin had outlined the importance of cooperation in article 119 of his manual for airborne operations in 1941, the commanders did not fully understand its true importance. Commanders had not made sure that all branches had worked together in any capacity, in fact: “none of the American ground forces embarked for Sicily had had any training with airborne forces whatsoever.”¹⁵⁸ Due to this lack of contact, Ridgway worried that the infantrymen would not know how to react to these men who were not within their ranks.

Ridgway's main concern ended up being British and American naval forces; the British Navy purportedly shot at any aircraft passing over, and some of the American naval forces had never seen combat. Hoping to avoid friendly fire on his paratroopers, Ridgway gave the troop carrier pilots an extremely complex flight plan that wound around naval convoys and other obstacles.¹⁵⁹ He also asked naval commanders to ensure safe passage for reinforcing airborne

¹⁵⁷ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, pp. 79-80.

¹⁵⁸ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, p. 82.

¹⁵⁹ Phil Nordyke, *All Americans in World War II: From Sicily to Normandy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zenith, 2009), p. 19.

troops, which they refused to do. It took an intervention from Eisenhower and American air-force commander Carl Spaatz to get any cooperation from the Navy. Even then, the naval commanders gave Ridgway a vague assurance for the safety of his troopers.¹⁶⁰ This lack of consideration for the combined effort of all of these branches to make the mission as safe as possible cost the airborne dearly. Ridgway's paratroopers went into their first combat drop with green pilots flying a crazy rout at night, they themselves had almost no night jump training, and the planning and preparations were little else but frantic. This was the setting for disaster for the troopers, and the outcome shows the lack of preparation on all fronts.

At 7:30 p.m. on July 9, 1943, the paratroopers took off in 226 C-47s to begin their part of "Operation Husky." A strong head wind near Malta, the first checkpoint, broke up the convoys and Gavin remembered looking for the island and realizing that "there was no sign of Malta," meaning they had missed it and were heading to Sicily with no landmark to make sure they were on course.¹⁶¹ Most of the pilots missed Malta and could not regain their bearings in the darkness, which resulted in the 505th jumping all over Southern Sicily. The 3rd Battalion, 504th PIR, and 3rd Battalion of the 505th had some good success, but mainly jumped miles away from the DZ, some going deep into enemy territory. 400 troopers from the 1st Battalion of the 505th jumped 50 miles east of the DZ into the British sector, while a few sticks in the 316th landed 65 miles from their drop zone.¹⁶² Gavin landed 30 miles from the drop zone, and therefore the predetermined command post, which did not bode well for organization on the ground. The pilots carrying the 2nd Battalion of the 505th managed to stay together and the troopers executed their jump just as practiced, but "even so, the troopers came down badly scattered. They were twenty-five miles

¹⁶⁰ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, p. 82.

¹⁶¹ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, p. 86.

¹⁶² Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, p. 87.

southeast of the assigned DZ.”¹⁶³ While the paratroopers struggled to find their bearings and their units, the pilots that dropped them told their superiors that “80% of the paratroopers had been dropped on the designated drop zones”; however, more than 80% were dropped between 1 and 65 miles from their DZs.¹⁶⁴ Commanders in the rear had no idea that their troopers were scattered all over the southern part of the island.

The British fared little better as they attempted their night-time glider invasion. They started with 137 gliders in Tunisia and 115 of the planes towing the gliders made land fall near the landing zone. The noise of the planes alerted the Germans in Syracuse to their presence who slammed them with heavy artillery and antiaircraft smoke. In the panic, pilots cut the gliders loose at random, and at least sixty-nine Wacos (gliders), carrying 1,100 men, landed in the sea, killing 200 of the troops. Only four gliders came down on the LZ, and of the 2,075 forces that left North Africa, only 104 men reached their objective and fought in the initial battle. These men did their job successfully and held their objective, Ponte Grande, long enough for the 5th Division to get to them.¹⁶⁵ In this campaign, the British learned not to land gliders before paratroopers, a lesson they should have taken note of when Germans learned it on Crete.

The Americans fought in small guerrilla bands until they met up with their airborne units. Throughout the day, scattered troopers scared and confused enemy troops by appearing all over southern Sicily, cutting phone lines, blocking convoys, capturing fortifications, taking out pillboxes, and generally buying time for the infantry regiments that landed on the beach that morning. A large enough group of the 3rd Battalion, 504th landed together for the troopers to “harass any enemy column moving south on the road from Niscemi to Gela, where the U.S. 1st

¹⁶³ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, p. 88.

¹⁶⁴ Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces at War*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁵ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, pp. 89-90.

Infantry Division would begin beach landings at 2:45 a.m.”¹⁶⁶ Even with their horrific landing inaccuracy, they adapted and stayed focused on their goals, making them very useful in the campaign. The scattered jump also tricked the Germans into thinking that more paratroopers jumped than actually did, which sent them into an even greater panic.¹⁶⁷

Although the Germans jumped into combat in 1940 and '41, they had never experienced anyone jumping on them, and this new experience stunned them. Due to their confusion, the Germans did not counterattack in time, and the dreaded Hermann Göring Panzer Division that waited just north of the American DZ did not mobilize in time to launch a formidable attack on the first day.¹⁶⁸ After recouping, the Germans fought back on the 11th, attempting to throw the Allies back into the sea. That day of fighting culminated in a battle for a ridge, which the Americans ultimately won with the help of naval fire, infantry tanks and artillery, and the arrival of pack howitzers with the 456th Parachute Artillery.¹⁶⁹ The Germans made a grave mistake by not aggressively attacking the invading troops on the 10th, and this slow Axis response saved the Allies. Had they aggressively counterattacked, the paratroopers would not have been organized enough to hold them off. Bernd Horn explains in “Surviving the Devil’s Cauldron” : “during the invasion of Sicily I n1943, the German 6th Army headquarters was paralyzed by widespread reports that paratroopers were dropping all over the southern part of the island.”¹⁷⁰ Airborne operations succeeded because they surprised and confused the defenders enough to allow paratroopers to gather and attack.

To reinforce Gavin's troops, the 504th PRCT led by Colonel R.H. Tucker, minus the

¹⁶⁶ Nordyke, *All Americans of World War II*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁷ Flanagan, *Airborne: A Combat History of American Airborne Forces*, p. 96.

¹⁶⁸ Flanagan, *Airborne: A Combat History of American Airborne Forces*, p. 96.

¹⁶⁹ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, p. 98.

¹⁷⁰ Horn, “Surviving the Devil's Cauldron,” p. 82.

previously dropped 3rd Battalion, left Tunisia for Sicily in 144 C-47s the night of the 11th. Upon reaching the coast of Sicily, a naval vessel took the formation for German bombers and shot at them, which signaled to the other vessels to shoot as well. Some “planes dived into the sea and those that escaped broke formation and raced like a convoy of quail for what they thought was the protection of the beach;” however, having seen the Navy firing on the C-47s, the ground troops took their cue and fired on them as well.¹⁷¹ In the end, friendly fire shot down 23 planes, damaged 37, and caused casualties of 81 killed, 16 missing, and 132 wounded.¹⁷² By the morning of July 12, only 400 of the 1600 men that left Tunisia had reached the regimental area.¹⁷³

Ridgeway feared this disaster from the beginning and tried to avoid it by nagging the Navy for safe passage for his men. Had naval commanders taken the precautions Ridgeway asked of them and promised to make sure their sailors would not shoot at the paratroopers, the operation would have gone much more smoothly. After Sicily, commanders understood the importance of cooperation for Special Forces and did much better in later campaigns.

Ridgeway reported on July 16, three days after the second airborne mission, that “he had 3,883 of the 5,307 [paratroopers who left Africa] in his control, leaving 1,424 unaccounted for. These were the dead, the wounded, the missing. The casualty rate was thus about 27 percent.”¹⁷⁴ Nobody wanted blame for the disaster, so branch leaders passed the blame around to Patton, the aviators carrying the troops, the Navy, and the Army ground commanders for their part of the

¹⁷¹ William D. Mandle and David H. Whittier, *The Devil's in Baggy Pants, Combat Record of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment* (Nashville, TN: Reprinted by the Battery Book Shop, 1976), p. 2.

¹⁷² Nordyke, *All Americans of World War II*, p. 22.

¹⁷³ Mandle and Whittier, *The Devil's in Baggy Pants*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Blair, *Ridgeway's Paratroopers*, p. 102.

casualties and issues with the 504th.¹⁷⁵ Each man involved in the planning and organization of the mission had to think about his stance on airborne operations thereafter. Patton and Bradley continued to support large-scale use of the airborne while Ridgway and Taylor wanted to separate the paratroopers from the division and only use them in small-scale operations. Major General Joe M. Swing, commander of the 11th Airborne, believed they needed to be “employed in a considerably different manner,” and Gavin and Tucker wanted to keep the paratroopers in their present large-scale formation but take better precautions with the Air Force.¹⁷⁶ All of these leaders had been watching airborne operations carefully and had observed training maneuvers and the 509th PIR in Africa, and many of them had questioned the use of the airborne before this. Sicily answered questions for some of the more influential commanders, but they came to polarizing conclusions. Because of the mistakes during Husky, the Army almost scrapped large-scale airborne operations all together. Lucky for the legacy of the United States Airborne, enough leaders wanted to continue the program and a successful paratroop in the Pacific not a month later changed skeptical minds just in time.

A 504th PIR historian stated that Sicily proved “costly, both in lives and equipment” but then explains that “valuable experience was gained by those who survived, untold damage was inflicted behind enemy lines, many prisoners were captured (the 82nd Division was credited with 22,000), and Nazi and Fascist forces were given their first dose of medicine that proved to be fatal.”¹⁷⁷ This shows an optimistic outlook on what the airborne had accomplished, but it explains little about what happened in the planning that could have allowed them to succeed in their landing as well as in combat. Ridgway believed that the operation could not have gone

¹⁷⁵ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, pp. 102-3.

¹⁷⁶ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, p. 106.

¹⁷⁷ Mandle and Whittier, *The Devil's in Baggy Pants*, p. 3.

much better no matter what they did beforehand, and he wrote that “at war's end, we still could not have executed that first Sicily mission, as laid on, at night and under like conditions.”¹⁷⁸

Although Sicily was a successful campaign, it almost completely changed the face of American airborne operations, and commanders gained many new lessons about how to employ paratroops. It could have been the Army's Crete, but instead, due to interest from leaders, it became a springboard for paratroop operations and forced the Army to create the best airborne it could.

The Focus of Marine Commanders

Under Holcomb's command, the Marine Corps in World War II went through a metamorphosis from an awkward attachment of the Navy to an elite amphibious landing force. This transformation so monopolized the corps' energy that it had none to give to Special Forces. Holcomb stated: “For more than twenty years, the main mission of the Marine Corps has been to provide an amphibious expeditionary force to operate with the United States Fleet.”¹⁷⁹ By starting an airborne during this time, Holcomb overloaded the Corps with tasks, similar to giving newly walking baby juggling balls and asking it to perform both things at once. The baby, excited about learning to walk, will ignore the balls. This is what Marine commanders did: they ignored the paratroopers and focused on amphibious landings. With nobody focusing on the paratroopers, they fell under the radar time and time again. It was easier and cheaper for the Marine Corps to focus on the straightforward beach landings and not complicate the already frenzied attacks with the addition of paratroopers.

The Japanese invaded many of the Pacific Islands Allied countries held between the

¹⁷⁸ Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers*, p. 82.

¹⁷⁹ Thomas Holcomb, “The U.S. Marines in World War II,” Thomas Holcomb collection, Quantico, p. 1.

Japanese mainland and Australia in late 1941 and early 1942. By doing this, the Japanese protected themselves from air bombardment as the Allies did not have control over any islands close enough for bombers to take off from. In order to get to the Japanese mainland, the Allies had to first take the islands leading to it. To do this, MacArthur created a new attack strategy, whereby the Allies invaded important strategic islands on their way to Japan and skipped the major strongholds. MacArthur stated in *Reminiscences*: “I intended to envelop them, incapacitate them, apply the 'hit 'em where they ain't – let 'em die on the vine' philosophy.”¹⁸⁰ This brilliant strategy meant that the Allies could skip the more heavily defended islands and nullify them by taking less defended islands containing airstrips and ports closer to Japan. The Allies began with the Solomon Island group, which MacArthur had the Marines do in the Guadalcanal campaign in August, 1942. In this early Marine campaign, the islands sat too far away from land based loading zones for transport planes to fly round trip.

One solution for the early issue of distance could have been to use aircraft carriers as a sea base for paratroopers, from which transport planes could take off. If it were possible, this answer would be the solution to many of the Marine's problems. The United Kingdom thought it feasible, and told the Marine Corps Bureau of Aeronautics: “The Admiralty appears to be quite interested in the development of means of using paratroopers from carriers...it is expected that trials will be held within several weeks and a report will be submitted at that time.”¹⁸¹ There is no evidence that the United States Marines considered this an option, or that the Royal Marines got very far in testing the idea. The British showed their continued interest in using paratroopers even in the face of hardship by trying to employ aircraft carriers for this purpose. Unfortunately,

¹⁸⁰ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, p. 169.

¹⁸¹ Chief of Naval Operations, “Navy Department Intelligence Report,” Ells-Dran collection, NARA, p. 1.

there are multiple reasons why this would not work, one of which is that DC-3 type transports needed at least 2,000 ft. of runway for take-off at sea level.¹⁸² At 888 ft., the longest Allied aircraft carrier throughout most of the war was the United States Essex-class.¹⁸³ This meant that the airplanes could not take off from the aircraft carriers. Even if the DC-3 could have taken off, it would have been impractical to have many of them on a carrier. The DC-3's wingspan and length were nearly twice the size of the biggest carrier-based aircraft used in the war.¹⁸⁴ They would have taken up precious realty for a project that the Marine Corps had little interest in to begin with. Finally, due to the scarcity of transport planes, the Marine Corps would have been hard pressed to leave a few dozen of them sitting on aircraft carriers awaiting a battle that called for paratroopers.

When Holcomb first dreamed up the Paramarines, he envisioned mass jumps similar to those the Army conducted in Europe, but did not take the size of the Corps into account. In June 1940, Holcomb wrote to Carl Vinson, Chairman of the House of Naval Affairs Committee, saying that: "The Marine Corps is now in the process of enlisting up to 34,000 men, which we ought to reach by 1 March 1941 or sooner."¹⁸⁵ In May of 1940, the Corps had fewer than 30,000 men, a very small number, especially when considering that the Army conducted airborne operations consisting of over 34,000 paratroopers and gliders.¹⁸⁶ In April of 1941, the airborne

¹⁸² Flagship Detroit Foundation DC-3 Training Manual, "Takeoff Performance," (ref: AA DC-3 Operations instructions 1943) p. 91.5.

¹⁸³ "Allied Warships: Aircraft Carriers," *Uboat.net*, <http://www.uboot.net/allies/warships/types.html?type=Aircraft+Carrier>.

¹⁸⁴ Jirka Wagner, "Grumman F8F Bearcat," *American World War II's Aircraft*, http://www.military.cz/usa/air/war/fighter/f8f/f8f_en.htm.

"DC-3 Commercial Transport" *Boeing*, <http://www.boeing.com/history/mdc/dc-3.htm>

¹⁸⁵ Thomas Holcomb to the Honorable Carl Vinson, Chairman, House Naval Affairs Committee, "Memorandum," 13 June 1940, Thomas Holcomb collection, Quantico, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Holcomb to Carl Vinson, "Memorandum," p. 2.

had 496 members.¹⁸⁷ The size kept the paratroopers from performing jumps that consisted of much more than accompanying equipment to land via parachute. It is necessary to note that the Army did not use large airborne forces in the Pacific as it did in Europe, and many of the jumps Army troopers made only came to company or battalion size.

Upon beginning the program, Corps commanders wanted to build a bigger airborne and planned for more paratroopers. One commander told the Navy in a Confidential Memorandum about the training situation of the Corps in July, 1941: "Immediate training objective for the Marine Corps is to develop two battalions of parachute troops (550 officers and men each)."¹⁸⁸ With over 1,000 Paramarines, the unit could have completed many combat jumps, especially if the Marines had continued to grow the airborne as it did its regular infantry troops throughout the war. In mid-1941, the Marine Corps still wanted to build a bigger airborne, and the Paramarines were on its radar.

By early 1942, there is little evidence of this forward thinking for paratroopers. At a time that all military branches expanded at a seemingly exponential rate, the Marine Corps budgeted for almost no enlargement of its airborne. In February, 1942, the Corps expected to have a total strength of 130,000 men by June, 1942, 160,000 by June, 1943, and 200,000 by June of 1944.¹⁸⁹ At the same time that Holcomb planned this massive increase, he completely neglected the airborne. In February, 1942, the airborne had 516 members and Holcomb only planned on a complement of two more members per company in that year.¹⁹⁰ While the Corps expected to

¹⁸⁷ The Commandant US Marine Corps to Chief of Naval Operations, "Fleet Marine Force Plan, Fiscal Year, 1942," 28 April, 1941, Thomas Holcomb collection, Quantico.

¹⁸⁸ Navy Department Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Washington, "State of Training for Amphibious Operations," July 28, 1941, Thomas Holcomb collection, Quantico, p. 2.

¹⁸⁹ Greene, "Memorandum for the Director, Division of Plans and Policies," enclosure C, p. 12.

¹⁹⁰ Commandant US Marine Corps to Chief of Naval Operations, "Revised Fleet Marine Force Plan, Fiscal Year, 1942," February, 1942, 1605-20-15, Thomas Holcomb collection, Quantico.

expand by almost six times its size in four years, it only foresaw a two person increase per company for the paratroop unit in the upcoming year. This astounding lack of foresight demonstrates nothing more than the Corps already giving up on the airborne. Because the Corps had already decided not to expand the Paramarines months before the unit even entered combat, how could one to expect commanders to put effort into using them? By the time the Marines began invading islands appropriate for paradrops, the unit did not exist.

The Army's Struggle to Continue

“I Wrote the Book”

- General James M. Gavin

Skeptical leaders after Sicily became convinced of the feasibility of large-scale paradrops again due to four key events that occurred throughout the rest of 1943. Just two months after Sicily, the Army completed its first jump in the Pacific. The successful jump the 503rd PRCT made onto Nadzab in Papua New Guinea on September 5, 1943 became a decisive factor in influencing the Army commanders to believe in the airborne. During this time, Marshall instructed Swing to create a review board to decide whether to continue the airborne division. Upon the board's recommendation, the Airborne Command created a book that outlined its expectations for training and conducting airborne operations. Because of the success of the 503rd in Nadzab and the training circular, Marshall asked Swing to lead a training program he called the “Knollwood Maneuver”. These four events convinced even the most unsure of leaders to try

using paratroopers in large missions. Had airborne leaders been unwilling or too busy to fight for airborne divisions, skeptical leaders could have ended the program.

On March 2, 1942, the War Department formed the 503rd PRCT from the 503rd and 504th Parachute Infantry Battalions in Fort Bragg, North Carolina under Colonel George M. Jones. After intense combat training, the troopers headed for Australia on October 20, 1942 where they continued training for jungle terrain and paradrops.¹⁹¹ On September 5, 1943, almost a year after arriving in Australia, the 503rd made its first parajump onto Papua New Guinea. This jump occurred only two months after the 82nd dropped onto Sicily, and it “saved the life of the American airborne division.”¹⁹² By this time, the Marines had worked their way up to Bougainville and New Britain, just next to New Guinea, the next step in MacArthur's island-hopping strategy. MacArthur wanted to capture the Japanese stronghold at the port of Rabaul on New Britain and then eventually take the northwest coast of Papua New Guinea.¹⁹³ He decided to take Lae, using airborne, seaborne, and infantry troops on August 1, 1943 with the help of the Australians. Due to lack of C-47s, the invasion had to wait until September, at which point they had 82 transport planes.¹⁹⁴

“Operation Cartwheel” began at dawn on September 5 when the 7th and 9th Australian Divisions landed amphibiously near Lea. The 1,800 men of the 503rd PRCT made their first paradrop a few hours after the operation began, and because of confusion with the green jump lights, at least half of the 3rd Battalion missed the DZ and jumped into jungle trees to the east. The rest of the men jumped without issue onto a flat, grassy landing that was “more than ample

¹⁹¹ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, pp. 87-90.

¹⁹² Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 134.

¹⁹³ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 102.

¹⁹⁴ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, pp. 104-5.

for the requirement,” and the unit suffered only minor casualties, with 3 dead and 34 seriously injured.¹⁹⁵ Luckily for the paratroopers, there were no Japanese in the immediate area, so the troopers had no problems clearing the airstrip for infantry landings the next day.¹⁹⁶ They spent the following days helping the Australian 7th Division land and move cargo around. While most of the 503rd headed back to Port Moresby on the 14th, the 3rd Battalion stayed behind to help fight for a few days until receiving orders to meet up with the rest of the division. The jump was “a masterful example of skilled planning and coordination between paratroop leaders and air corps commanders – an almost textbook-perfect operation.”¹⁹⁷ The jump's success convinced Army commanders to perform the Knollwood maneuver in December, 1943. It also demonstrated the patience MacArthur had with the technology, as he put off a huge operation to wait for enough transport planes for the paratroopers. He did not use a lack of aircraft as an excuse not to use them, but instead made sure to procure enough transport planes.

Eisenhower gave up on large-scale airborne operations after Sicily. He wrote to Marshall, his superior, on September 20, 1943, saying:

I do not believe in the Airborne Division. I believe that airborne troops should be organized in self-contained units comprising infantry, artillery and special services, all of about the strength of a regimental combat team... To employ at any time and place a whole division would require a dropping over such an extended area that I seriously doubt that a division commander could regain control and

¹⁹⁵ “Field Order #1 Markham Valley Operation by the 503rd Parachute Infantry.” 25 September 1943, no. 258, Infantry Regiment History 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team, Donovan Library.

¹⁹⁶ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, pp. 112-117.

¹⁹⁷ William Breuer *Geronimo!* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 109.

operate the scattered forces as one unit.¹⁹⁸

Had Marshall agreed completely, this could have been the end of airborne divisions. Marshall also worried about the airborne, but he wanted to try one more time, and in September, 1943, he told Swing, commander of the 11th Airborne, to create an airborne review board at camp Mackall. The “Swing Board” reviewed all of the previous airborne operations the Axis and Allies had conducted as well as the Army's current training methods. The board recommended that the basic structure stay the same, but suggested that a training circular be published that outlined everything involved in planning and executing airborne operations.¹⁹⁹ On October, 9, 1943, per these recommendations, the Airborne Command created the Training Circular 113: Employment of Airborne and Troop Carrier Forces. The TC-113 contained similar guidelines to those Gavin suggested two years earlier, but they showed that the Airborne Command had a much better understanding of their importance. The training circular explained the need for one person to have command authority “to direct the necessary coordinated action of all land, sea, and air forces in the areas involved...since positive coordination can be insured only by the one agency in control of all elements.”²⁰⁰ It took a long time for the United States in the European Theater to learn the importance of cooperation, especially when dealing with special operations, but after Sicily, it did much better with this.

The training circular defined two other important directives: the importance of preparation and the need for adequate time to plan. One of these lines concerned friendly fire on

¹⁹⁸ Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, p. 1440.

¹⁹⁹ Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces at War*, p. 22

²⁰⁰ James A. Huston, *Out of the Blue: U.S. Army Airborne Operations in World War II* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Studies, 1972), Appendix VI, p. 264.

aircraft, stating: "Routes, altitudes, time schedules, and means of identification..must be known in advance..which will insure that troop aircraft..are not fired upon by friendly land, sea, or air forces." The other deals with the issue of troops being unprepared for the battle plan: "Plans should provide for the necessary preparation by troop carrier and airborne units to include training and practice operations and the concentration of these units in the departure areas."²⁰¹ Both of these doctrines clearly pointed to the issues that the United States ran into during the Sicily campaign, and they tried to fix these problems. By attempting do so, the Airborne Command proved its dedication to continuing the airborne.

The publication of the TC-113 did not quell everyone's fears, and Marshall needed further proof that paratroopers could be effective and safe. He directed Swing to plan and lead a five day airborne exercise with the objective of capturing the Knollwood airport in North Carolina.²⁰² Swing used the 11th Airborne to conduct the "Knollwood Maneuver" from 6-11 December, 1943, and future of the United States Airborne depended upon its outcome. The troopers did extremely well, conducting themselves for three days without ground support and meeting their objectives. The success of the maneuver convinced Army commanders to continue the airborne at division size. One important convert, Lieutenant General Leslie J. McNair, commander of Army Ground Forces, had been an airborne enthusiast early in the war. After Africa and Sicily, he began to oppose keeping the large-scale airborne divisions, but Knollwood changed his mind, and he wrote to Swing to congratulate him on a job well done:

After the airborne operations in Africa and Sicily, my staff and I had become

²⁰¹ Huston, *Out of the Blue*. Appendix VI, p. 264.

²⁰² Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces at War*, p. 23.

convinced of the impracticality of handling large airborne units. I was prepared to recommend to the War Department that airborne divisions be abandoned...The successful performance of your division has convinced me that we were wrong, and I shall now recommend that we continue our present schedule of activating, training, and committing airborne divisions.²⁰³

Both the Swing Board and the Knollwood Maneuver demonstrate the dedication Army leaders had to the airborne program. Had Marshall not tried one more time and commissioned the Swing Board, Eisenhower's declaration might have been the end of airborne divisions. Had Swing been less dedicated to his task, he might have organized an impossible maneuver that his men could not successfully complete. Had McNair been uninterested in special operations from the beginning, or unwilling to change his mind later, he might have pushed for the program to downsize. Without these commanders, "paratrooper" may have been a word that never left the 1940s.

Jungle Jumps: the Army Airborne in the Pacific

After this first smashing success, the 11th and 503rd made six more paratroops in the Pacific between 1944 and 1945. Each paratroop presented unique challenges in terms of objective, planning, resources, terrain, and enemy strength. The diversity between jumps illustrates the perils of paratroops in the Pacific and that paratroopers could perform a wide array of jumps. MacArthur always made sure to put one man in charge of the whole mission. This

²⁰³ Edward M. Flanagan, *The Angels, a History of the 11th Airborne Division* (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1948), p. 11.

ensured airborne and infantry units worked together to achieve their ultimate goal. The Army faced many obstacles that could have kept it from making any paratroops in the Pacific, such as rough terrain, an entrenched enemy, small drop zones, and lack of sufficient transport aircraft. Instead, commanders forged on, making many successful jumps.

The 503rd did not jump again for almost a year. Their second jump took place on July 3, 1944 onto Noemfoor island, “the typical Pacific island: primitive, hostile, thick with jungle growth and surrounded by jagged coral reefs.”²⁰⁴ The Japanese started building three airstrips on the island in November 1943, and in June of the next year, the Americans decided to invade. The Army conducted “Operation Table Tennis” in order to seize the Kamiri Airfield on the northwest coast of the island and prepare it for fighter planes and medium light bombers to use.²⁰⁵ The troopers had a rough drop due to an error in the first plane's altimeter that caused all of the troopers to jump at 125-200 feet (regulations require 400 plus feet). This meant that the jumpers had almost no time in the air before they landed on the compacted coral, parked vehicles, engineering equipment, and ruined enemy planes scattered all over the DZ. Troopers suffered broken bones, concussions, sprains, and heavy bruising. The two battalions that jumped had suffered a 9% casualty rate by the end of the second day.²⁰⁶

By D-day plus 2, the 503rd began clearing the southern part of the island and they chased small groups around for the next six weeks. When they encountered an enemy group, the Japanese often slipped away in the night rather than waiting to fight the next day. The most horrific sight that the 503rd came upon during that time was cannibalism. Starving Japanese soldiers, weakening by the day, resorted to eating dead American soldiers and civilians in an

²⁰⁴ Breuer, *Geronimo!*, p. 286.

²⁰⁵ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p.158.

²⁰⁶ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 112-117.

attempt to survive.²⁰⁷ The 503rd finally found the main resistance, and on August 17, killed the last of the Japanese, who were too weak to fight. The troopers then returned to the Kamiri airstrip and built a semi-permanent camp for rest and relaxation.²⁰⁸

The 503rd made its final jump onto Corregidor Island in the Philippines, a task that proved to be the most daunting and dangerous they performed during the war. Gordon L. Rottman, an Army historian, states that “The Corregidor jump on February 16, 1945, was arguably the most dangerous combat jump of World War II.”²⁰⁹ The United States lost the island to the Japanese in 1942, and two and a half years later, in February 1945, MacArthur could finally give the command to the 503rd to take back “Fortress Corregidor.” Colonel George Jones commanded the mission and “estimated that up to 50 percent of his paratroopers would suffer injuries in the jump” after going on a reconnaissance flight over the island.²¹⁰ This high casualty rate would be due to the fact that Topside, the DZ assigned to the jump, was not fit for paradrops. It spanned less than 1,000 by 430 feet, had a hard surface and high winds, and was riddled with bomb craters, steel roofing, and Japanese troops. Cliffs also surrounded the plateau, so if the troopers missed the DZ, or if they could not get their chutes off fast enough, they would be swept off the cliff into the water.²¹¹ Jones knew he would have to accept these casualties in order to secure Topside.

The 503rd jumped on the 16th of February, and at the same time an infantry battalion landed amphibiously.²¹² Again, the troopers had to jump in three shifts, and the first two

²⁰⁷ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 169.

²⁰⁸ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 170.

²⁰⁹ Rottman *US Army Paratrooper in the Pacific Theater*, p. 48.

²¹⁰ Breuer, *Geronimo!*, p. 501.

²¹¹ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 250.

²¹² Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 250-51.

battalions met with the disastrous jump conditions Jones expected. Troopers landed in craters, cut themselves on the steel roofing, and were impaled on steel poles and trees splintered by bombs. One stick of troopers landed in front of a heavily defended cave, and the Japanese mowed them down immediately. Another man's parachute got caught on a tree protruding from the cliff, and he hung helplessly by his harness.²¹³ By the end of the day on the 16th, of the 2,069 men who jumped, 231 had been killed or wounded, 203 of which were “severely injured in drop,” and almost everyone was badly beaten up.²¹⁴ Because of these high casualties, the 1st Battalion landed amphibiously on Bottomside the next day.

The next few days proved to be some of the hardest the 503rd experienced in the war. The Japanese had a whole underground tunnel system on topside that they blew up in a mass suicide of unknown numbers after days of fighting. A few hundred Japanese escaped and headed to the tail of the island, and on the 23rd, Jones told the troopers to head after the enemy. The 503rd pushed the resistant enemy to the very end of the island's tail, and in a last desperate attempt, the remaining Japanese tried to kill as many Americans as possible by blowing their considerable ammunition stores. The blast was so large it shook Bataan 3 miles away and killed hundreds of Americans and Japanese men. Finally, on the 27th of February, the Japanese resistance ended. The casualty count came to 6,000 dead Japanese, 223 Americans killed, and 1,107 wounded and injured, about 1/3 of the men who fought on Corregidor island, later nicknamed the “Rock Force” for their heroic actions on the island.²¹⁵

At the same time the 503rd made its three jumps, the 11th Airborne made four jumps in the

²¹³ Breuer, *Geronimo!*, p. 508.

²¹⁴ “Corregidor Island Operations V. 1,” Infantry Regiment History 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team, Donovan Library, Overlay 1 p. 16.

²¹⁵ Breuer, *Geronimo!*, p. 520.

Philippines. The War Department activated the 11th Airborne on February 25, 1943 at Camp Mackall, North Carolina under Lieutenant Colonel Joseph M. Swing. The 11th consisted of the 511th Parachute Infantry Unit and the 187th and 188th Glider Infantry Regiments totaling an “authorized strength of just over 2,000 men.”²¹⁶ The men trained for a year before embarking for Papua New Guinea on May 4, 1944. They arrived by June 15 and began training for amphibious landings and reviewing jump procedure.²¹⁷ Throughout the war, the 11th worked with General Walter Krueger and his 6th Army under the command of MacArthur.

Elements of the 11th Airborne conducted the unit's first paradrop onto Leyte Island in the Philippines on December 3, 1944 as a support mission for Krueger's 6th Army, which landed amphibiously on the island on October 20.²¹⁸ Krueger and his men ran into difficulty when hiking toward their objective, and Krueger became concerned about Japanese troops in the area. He called in Swing's men for help, who landed amphibiously on the Leyte gulf beach on November 18.²¹⁹ While the glider troops protected the rear and patrolled for enemy troops, the 511th PIR hacked through the jungle and cleared the Ormoc-Burauen supply trail, an essential rout for the Japanese. Swing set up camp next to the San Pablo airstrip; therefore, the Japanese 3rd Parachute Regiment jumped out of the sky in an attempt to take the three airstrips onto the 511th. Major Joseph B. Seay explained in a Military Review that “the surprise was complete, and the Japs captured and held most of the strip” until Swing could organize a counterattack.²²⁰ Within two days, the Americans cleared the strip of the Japanese paratroopers, but they felt

²¹⁶ Rottman, *US Army Paratrooper in the Pacific Theater*, p. 9.

²¹⁷ Flanagan, *Airborne : A Combat History of American Airborne Forces* p. 305-309.

²¹⁸ Marvin Miller, *The 11th Airborne Brick*, (Marvin Miller, 2011), p. 14-15.

²¹⁹ “11th Airborne During World War II: Overview,” *The 11th Airborne*, http://www.ww2-airborne.us/18corps/11abn/11_overview.html.

²²⁰ Seay, “The 11th Airborne Division in the Leyte Mountain Operation,” p. 22.

lasting effects for many days after the attack. Even paratroopers could be surprised by a vertical attack.

As the 6th Army continued pushing into the jungle, Krueger realized that he needed firepower inland. He gave the task to Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas G. Stadther, head of the 457th Paratroop Field Artillery Battalion, 511th PIR. Stadther created a plan for he and his men to jump with disassembled 75mm pack Howitzers onto the Manarawat plateau. Engineers cleared a 475 by 170 foot drop zone on the plateau in preparation while Stadther looked for airplanes to transport his troops. The pilot of the only carrier plane he could find agreed to take thirteen trips to drop the cannoneers and their equipment. All of the men landed on target along with the Howitzers, and completed the 11th Airborne's first and smoothest paratroop in the war.²²¹

This jump illustrates two important factors of paratroops: that they could be made in the jungle onto small drop zones, and that they were possible with just one transport plane. It also shows the Army's dedication to using its new technology in innovative ways and that a combined effort from infantry and airborne units could result in successful paratroops. One of the main arguments that the Corps made about not using its paratroopers in combat was the lack of transport planes, but the fact that Stadther's men used only one carrier plane in this mission proves that paratroopers did not need many planes in order to function at a small size. As long as commanders showed interest, the paratroopers could perform their duties under many conditions, and Army commanders did whatever it took to use the technology while the Marines did not.

The 11th made its next jump onto Tagaytay ridge on Luzon Island on February 3 and 4, 1945. In the mission, the Americans wanted to take Manila, Bataan, and Corregidor in southwest Luzon, and the 511th had to seize a vital ridge-line, which “if everything went as

²²¹ Devlin, *Paratrooper!*, p. 479.

planned, the surprise landing would cut off Japanese support from the south, cut the main road to Manila from southern Luzon, and give the Americans a second front moving toward the capital.”²²² The more skeptical paratroopers aptly named this mission “Operation Shoestring,” as many men ended up jumping into a banana plantation.²²³ By the end of the evening on the 3rd, Haugen had only one-third of the airborne with him, but “he was lucky: there was not a single Japanese soldier to be found on Tagaytay ridge.”²²⁴ By midday on the 4th, both the glider troops assigned to meet the 511th and the misplaced paratroopers made it to the ridge, bringing the 11th Airborne to full strength.²²⁵ Haugen was wounded during the fighting, and he died on his way to the hospital, leaving the 511th with no commanding officer.

Colonel Ed Lahti took over the 511th after Haugen's death and led the troopers into their most daring mission yet: rescuing 2,200 American civilian prisoners from the Las Baños Internment Camp on February 23. For this heroic jump, the 11th gained its nickname the “Angels,” and thereafter, they put wings on their insignia. Swing's staff, Lahti, and Major Henry Burgess, head of the 1st Battalion, 511th planned the operation, and they chose B Company and its commander 1st Lieutenant John Ringer to make the jump.²²⁶ On L-day minus 2, a reconnaissance platoon met up with Philippine guerrillas and scouted the area.²²⁷ On L-day, they approached the camp and waited for 7:00 am (when the Japanese soldiers did their calisthenics) to kill the guards on duty while 130 paratroopers jumped from 9 C-47s.²²⁸

²²² Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 237.

²²³ Miller, *The 11th Airborne Brick*, p. 54.

²²⁴ Breuer, *Geronimo!*, p. 488.

²²⁵ Miller, *The 11th Airborne Brick*, p. 55.

²²⁶ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 282-83.

²²⁷ Headquarters 11th Airborne Division, “Narrative of the Rescue of Internees at Los Baños Prison Camp by the 11th Airborne Division on 23 February, 1945,” Infantry Regiment History 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Donovan Library, p. 3.

²²⁸ Headquarters 11th Airborne Division, “Rescue at Los Baños,” p. 1.

The Japanese could have easily killed all of the paratroopers and civilians if anything had gone wrong. Commanders found secrecy “particularly difficult to maintain,” but they did a good job, and they took the Japanese by surprise.²²⁹ The operation went swimmingly, and “within twenty minutes of the first shots, the firing seemed to die down. Most of the Japanese guards were either killed or else had fled to the south and west, away from the incoming paratroopers.”²³⁰ The rescue team loaded the starving prisoners onto Amtracs (amphibious tractors) and brought them back to Mamatid Beach. The whole operation went extremely well, and had very few casualties, as an 11th Airborne historian explained: “we had suffered only one man wounded in action and two civilian internees were slightly wounded.”²³¹ Los Baños is an example of the diversity with which the Army used its paratroopers. The Marines felt that its paratroopers could not operate as an airborne unit due to its small size, but the Army demonstrated at Los Baños that airborne units could be effective at any size.

The 11th made one more jump in the war in June of 1945 onto Aparri, in northern Luzon.²³² The Army used its gliders for the first and only time in the Pacific campaign in this mission, which went very poorly.²³³ After jumping onto Aparri, the Paratroopers continued to train for the final push into Japan, scheduled for August, 1945. They never got to perform this jump, as the United States dropped the two atomic bombs at the beginning of August, ending the war Japan.

The seven paradrops the 11th Airborne and 503rd PRCT made during the war illustrate

²²⁹ Headquarters 11th Airborne Division, “Rescue at Los Baños,” p. 2.

²³⁰ Salecker, *Blossoming Silk*, p. 298.

²³¹ Headquarters 11th Airborne Division, “Rescue at Los Baños,” p. 3.

²³² Robert Ross Smith, *U.S. Army in World War II: Triumph in the Philippines* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), p. 570.

²³³ James Mrazek, *Airborne Combat: The Glider War/Fighting Gliders of WWII* (PA: Stackpole Books, 2011), pp. 263-64.

that while terrain, lack of equipment, and a suicidal enemy did make using paratroopers in the Pacific harder, they did not make it impossible. Innovation and flexibility were words to live by for those planning operations using airborne, seaborne, and ground attacks together. The Army took chances by using this new combat technology. Not all of the operations were successful on all fronts, but they demonstrate the usefulness of paratroopers, and that when employing them, commanders had to be willing to change the battle plan depending on conditions. The Army used its paratroopers in the Pacific to accompany and assemble weapons, clear airstrips for transport planes, rescue civilians, and envelop the enemy from behind. All of these uses demonstrated practical applications of their skills, and as long as they were employed properly, they showed that paratroopers were very useful in supplementing infantry and naval operations.

More than anything, these jumps illustrate that it was in fact possible to use paratroopers on a small scale successfully, and that with proper planning and application, paratroopers could jump onto Pacific islands. The Marine Corps offered many reasons for not using its paratroopers in the war, and while all of these reasons appear valid, the accomplishments of the Army paratroopers in the war call into question whether or not the Marines could have jumped. The Army made jumps onto 475 by 170 foot drop zones, plateaus surrounded by cliffs, airstrips riddled with hazards, and into entrenched enemy fire. They jumped with just one carrier, in multiple groups due to lack of transport, from 125-140 feet, and into high wind. They jumped to accompany pack Howitzers, raid a Japanese internment camp, prepare air strips, and cut off enemy escape. They faced casualties of up to 1/3 killed or wounded in some missions, jungle terrain, and crippling jump injuries. In doing all of this, they proved their value to the world and that parajumps in the Pacific were not only feasible, but also aided the overall battle plan. They

also demonstrate that because the Army did overcome the issues that both units had, that the Paramarines could probably have overcome them as well.

Jumping onto Normandy, June, 1944

“And the opening shock, of course, was a beauty!”²³⁴

- Colonel Raymond Hoffman recalling
his experience

The Army used its airborne many more times in the European Theater after Sicily, three of which illustrate the size and scope that the jumps reached in Europe by the end of the war. The Army could not have performed these missions without learning from its previous operations. The 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions jumped into Normandy on June 6, 1944 and Holland on September 17, 1944. The 17th Airborne Division Jumped over the Rhine on March 24, 1945. All three of these jumps posed unique challenges and had varying degrees of success. They also show that the Army's perseverance paid off, as the paratroopers did exemplary jobs in all three of these missions.

The Allied invasion of Normandy in “Operation Overlord” is the most well-known campaign America took part in during World War II. Allies called the initial beach landings “Operation Neptune,” which took place on June 6, 1944. As thousands of paratroopers distracted the Germans and created mayhem behind enemy lines, the infantry landed on the beaches. The airborne units involved in this operation incurred high casualties (46.18% for the 82nd), but it was also one of the more successful jumps for the United States at that point in the

²³⁴ Interview with Colonel Raymond Hoffman, 101st Airborne about Normandy Jump, accessed Dwight David Eisenhower Presidential Library, September 15, 2012, p. 241.

war.²³⁵ The Allies had the plans for the airborne drop in place by May 26, 1944. By that time, “field and administrative orders had been published and distributed,” and Headquarters had briefed all commanders thoroughly.²³⁶ This shows a vast improvement over the Sicily campaign, in which very few people were involved in the planning. Commanders told the 82nd and 101st to land by parachute and glider after dawn of D-day, seize and clear towns and surrounding areas, stop enemy movement, destroy crossings over rivers, and protect infantry troops' flank.²³⁷

The paratroopers landed between 1:00 and 3:15am the morning of the 6th. Pathfinders jumped half an hour before the first paratroopers in order to lay down lights that signaled the drop zone to the pilots. Ridgway came up with this idea for Sicily; however, it did not work as well during that campaign as it did in Normandy. Again, bad flying conditions plagued the paratroopers – heavy fog broke up the plane formation, and then flak and enemy night fighters broke it up further. Because of these flight conditions, pilots forced them to jump at “excessive speeds and at an altitude higher than those ideal for jumping.”²³⁸ The troopers landed all over the peninsula and fought in small groups until they met up with their units. Colonel Raymond Hoffman remembered his experience after jumping: “You'd find somebody there that would be part of some unit and then, eventually, you'd make your way to your own unit.”²³⁹ Because of the uncertainty of jumping and landing, the paratroopers had to be prepared to band together with whomever they found. Members of the 82nd and the 101st fought together until they found their respective units, and by fighting in small bands, they accomplished their objectives.

²³⁵ C.F. Barrett Jr., “82nd Airborne Division Action in Normandy,” Airborne Division History 82nd Airborne, Donovan Library, Section II Narrative Annex 1 D.

²³⁶ Barrett, “82nd Airborne Division Action in Normandy,” Section II, Narrative p. 1

²³⁷ Barrett, “82nd Airborne Division Action in Normandy,” Section II Narrative Annex 1 D. p. 2.

²³⁸ Barrett, 82d Airborne Division Action in Normandy, Section II, p. 4.

²³⁹ Interview with Colonel Raymond Hoffman, 101st Airborne about Normandy Jump, p. 241.

Because the troopers banded together and completed their objectives without first checking in with their headquarters, it took a long time for all units to report to their commanders. Some units were missing for hours after the operation, as by 6:00 pm, the entire 501st PIR 101st Airborne still had not reported to the command post.²⁴⁰ The Chief of Staff for the 101st Airborne Division, Colonel G. H. Higgins, stated: “Most of our missing in this airborne division resulted from wide dispersion in dropping. Present casualties in the division as a whole are about 30 percent although in the combat elements they are about 60 percent.”²⁴¹ Had they been dropped on the correct drop zone, the 101st would have had fewer casualties and a much easier time connecting with their units. The paratroopers did not face strong enemy resistance, and in general, the Germans did not send out patrols to take out the paratroopers, but fired sporadically from held points.²⁴² Because the paratroopers took initiative upon landing and the Germans did not offensively counterattack, the Allies completed a successful airborne mission.

In Normandy, the Allies conducted one of the largest operations in the war on land, at sea, and in the air, and this was no different for the airborne operation. The Americans employed a total of 25,970 airborne troops, with 12,896 paratroopers and 13,074 gliders.^{243, 244} A jump this size was bound to have some complications, and Colonel Charles H. Coates said, “it is interesting to note the wide dispersion that can normally be expected even in an airborne operation as well executed as this one was.”²⁴⁵ His statement shows that the Army had a much

²⁴⁰ Headquarters 101st Airborne Division Office of the Division Commander, “Operations of the 101st Airborne Division in the Invasion of France,” C-116, Airborne Division History, 101st Airborne, Donovan Library, p. 2.

²⁴¹ Colonel Charles H. Coates, “Notes on interviews with various infantry commanders in Normandy, France, 6 June-8 July 1944,” 5 August 1944, Normandy collection, Donovan Library, Ft. Benning, GA, p. 3.

²⁴² Headquarters 101st Airborne, “Operations of the 101st Airborne Division”, p. 1.

²⁴³ Barrett, “82nd Airborne Division Action in Normandy,” Section II, Narrative Annex 1 D.

²⁴⁴ George Koskimaki, *D-Day with the Screaming Eagles* (Presidio Press: United States, 2006), p. 104.

²⁴⁵ Colonel Charles H. Coates, “After-action report, Normandy,” Headquarters European Theater of Operations United States Army, 15 July, 1944, Normandy collection, Donovan Library, p. 1.

better fundamental understanding of what to expect from airborne operations, and that even when a drop is planned to a T, men will still land all over the place. Normandy showed the Army that it could indeed perform very large airborne operations and that they would be successful. The success of this mission encouraged commanders such as Eisenhower and Ridgway to use the paratroopers in an airborne mission of an even greater scale.

Operation Market Garden, Holland

“I Think We May be Going a Bridge Too Far”

- British Lt. Gen. Frederick Browning to Montgomery

These two airborne divisions made their next jump on September 17 into Holland as a part of an attempt to cross the Rhine into Germany. While the infantry portion of “Operation Market Garden” was a disaster, the parajump went off without a hitch. British and American paratroopers cooperated in this mission as they had in Normandy. The commanders planning the operation did not have long to do so.²⁴⁶ Even with this obstacle, they had ideal jump conditions, so the operation went smoothly. All of the pilots carrying the paratroopers in this mission stayed together, met all of their checkpoints, and did not scatter in the face of antiaircraft fire. The paratroopers in the 508th PIR dropped at 1:28pm, were 90% assembled less than two hours later, and by 8:30pm, they had captured all of their objectives.²⁴⁷ The United States experienced only 2.5% airborne losses in this lift, an extremely low number.²⁴⁸ This operation employed the

²⁴⁶ “Allied Airborne Operations in Holland,” p. 3.

²⁴⁷ Headquarters 508th Parachute Infantry, “30 Days in Holland and Germany With the 508th Parachute Infantry,” 24 October, 1944. #169, Infantry Regiment History 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Donovan Library.

²⁴⁸ “Allied Airborne Operations in Holland,” p. 2.

most airborne members of any airborne operation in the war with 20,197 paratroopers and 14,589 glider troops taking part in the mission.²⁴⁹ The paratroopers did well and captured their objectives quickly. Unfortunately, the rest of the operation was a bust, and the main thing the airborne operation did in this mission was show the world what they were capable of.

Market Garden demonstrated that at this point, when given such good conditions, the Army could perform a paradrop with almost no casualties or loss of equipment. In an assessment of the mission, Lieutenant General L. H. Drereton explained that their method of command made the big difference, saying: “the Commanding General, XVIII Corps, states that since the airborne operations in Sicily there has been a steady trend towards placing a single individual with direct command authority over participating airborne forces, and with operational control over all associated air forces in an airborne operation.”²⁵⁰ He went on to explain that one person could not command such a big group once the troopers landed, especially if they were scattered and at that point, command went to smaller unit commanders still under the umbrella of the head commander. These were important lessons that the Army in the European Theater took its time learning, but once it did, commanders found that this made an enormous difference. In after-action reports commanders in the 82nd gave, they all stated that the drops went extremely well. Battalion Commanders of the 505th said: “formations were kept, drops were made accurately and that, in their opinion, they were the best drops made in the history of their units.”²⁵¹ Unfortunately, the infantry part of Market Garden did not complete its tasks and the

²⁴⁹ John C. Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, (United States Air Force Historical Division Maxwell Air Force Base: Alabama, 1956), p. 126-7.

²⁵⁰ L. H. Drereton, “Airborne operations in Holland, September -November, 1944,” Headquarters First Allied Airborne Army, 22 December 1944, Market Garden collection, Donovan Library.

²⁵¹ James M. Gavin, “Air Invasion of Holland, IX Troop Carrier Command Report on Operation Market,” 25 September, 1944, Market Garden collection, Donovan Library.

paratroopers had to be evacuated.

The United States conducted its final airborne operation in World War II on the 24th of March in an attempt to cross the Rhine into Germany. British and American airborne units cooperated again in “Operation Varsity,” with the U.S. 17th Airborne making its first and only jump into combat during the war. Varsity was unique in size, timing of the jump, and success of the jump. A combined total of around 17,000 paratroopers and glider troops landed in one day in a 25 mile radius, making Operation Varsity the biggest airborne operation in history.²⁵²

Although Market Garden employed more airborne troops, it did so over three drop zones and multiples days, making Varsity bigger. Operation Varsity was “unlike those previously conducted by the Allies, timed to follow the commencement of the ground assault, it being hoped thereby to achieve an additional element of surprise.”²⁵³ The Allies also did this because they did not want to drop the men too far behind the German lines, so that they would not get stuck if the infantry had a hard time getting to them.

Commanders were very pleased with the outcome of the operation that got them over the Rhine, something that they had been trying to do for months. Eisenhower commended the airborne's accomplishments, and stated: “Operation Varsity was the most successful operation carried out to date, and its brilliant results reflected the great strides made in this aspect of warfare since the landings of D-day, 9 months earlier.”²⁵⁴ Eisenhower had worried about the Army's use of its airborne after Sicily, but Marshall and airborne commanders convinced him to see their benefit, and he employed them effectively in Normandy, Holland and Germany.

²⁵² Warren, *Airborne Operations in World War II, European Theater*, p. 193.

²⁵³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “*Report by The Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Europe June 6 1944-8 May 1945*,” p. 78.

²⁵⁴ Eisenhower, “*Report by The Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff*,” p. 80.

Varsity is evidence that although the Army did not have a clear understanding of how to employ airborne troops early in the war, it learned from its past mistakes and excelled at using the technology.

These three operations were the result of all of the lessons the Army learned, and they show that its dedication to the program paid off. Multiple comments commanders made in after action reports and assessments of these operations point to their understanding of airborne operations. One report made a point to say that commanders briefed all units involved in the mission weeks ahead of time, another noted that since Sicily, the Army made sure they only have one commander in charge of each operation. Sicily and Africa taught the Army these two main lessons, and while the missions did not go perfectly, they went much better than the earlier jumps the Army performed. Had the Army been deterred by early problems the airborne posed, it would never have determined its airborne capabilities.

Conclusion

“One day my grandson said to me, grandpa were you a hero in the war? And I said to him no I'm not a hero, but I have served in a company full of them.”

- Major Dick Winters, 101st Airborne

The Marine Corps gave up on its paratroopers too early in the war. Had commanders stuck with it, the Corps would have procured more aircraft, been stormed islands close to loading zones, had a better grasp of amphibious landings, and had enough regular Marine forces to support amphibious attacks. Because of the low interest level from commanders such as

Holcomb, Vandegrift, and Williams, and the pessimistic attitude from other Corps leaders, the Marines gave up on the paratroops before even waiting to see if they could aid in the campaign. Many of the excuses Corps leaders gave for not using the Paramarines as paratroopers would not have been true by early 1944.

Captain John A. White of the Marine Corps discussed the use of paratroopers in a June 1940 issue of *The Marine Corps Gazette*. His sentiments about the airborne for the Marine Corps follow the same path that the Corps commanders felt during the war. In the beginning of the article, he claimed that “a very quick glance makes it a magic cure-all prescription to the headache of an attacking general.”²⁵⁵ In the same article he goes on to explain that the Marines did need to meet a few requirements in order for the technology to work. He stated:

However, one requirement must be met, at least locally, and that is the control of the air... In addition to the discussed shortcomings another factor must be considered as being singular to the Marine Corps. For the greatest effect, parachute troops must be used in mass. To land them in less force than a regiment would not serve the purpose of serving a line of communication for enough time to really weaken an enemy position. Our Corps is not large, and even in time of war would not be of such a size as to justify a regiment used for that sole purpose. Nor would it be likely that we would have sufficient planes for that use alone...Parachute troops would be out of proportion in a picture of the wartime Marine Corps.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ White, “Parachute Troops,” p. 11.

²⁵⁶ White, “Parachute Troops,” p. 13-14.

In 1940, White expressed the feelings that Holcomb and Vandegrift felt when they ended the Paramarine unit in December, 1943-January, 1944. Commanders could have saved a lot of time and energy by thinking through what they wanted out of the Marines during the war and realizing that paratroopers did not fall into their grand scheme.

Holcomb did not do this before starting the airborne, though, and the Corps did build an airborne, but it still did not use this resource that it had at its fingertips. The lack of interest for the airborne that the Corps displayed throughout its time as a unit shows through at the end as well. One of the only primary documents to be found about the ending of the parachute program was a discussion about what to do with the jump towers at camp Lejune, New River, NC which were “no longer to be used for training Paramarines and which were assumed to be, therefore, surplus property.”²⁵⁷ The fact that this letter was one of the only documents found about the end of the Paramarines demonstrates that the Corps did not really care about the unit.

Searching through Marine documents yields little evidence that any commanders really wanted to use the Paramarines as intended enough to make sure that it happened. It was impossible to find a document from the war that said why Holcomb decided to end the program, nor why Vandegrift finished them off. In Vandegrift's memoir *Once a Marine*, he does not mention trying to send the paratroopers into battle via parachute once. There is also no evidence that Holcomb, who started the unit, wrote about his decision to begin or end the program.

The Army experienced early setbacks with its airborne similar to those the Marines faced, but instead of throwing in the “chute,” the Army forged ahead and made airborne operations

²⁵⁷ E.E. Saunders, “Disposition of Surplus Parachute Jump Towers,” Navy Department Bureau of Yards and Docks Washington, DC., 9 Feb. 1944.

work. Airborne commanders had to overcome aircraft and equipment shortage, skepticism from high command, not understanding the technology, problems with communication, and jungle terrain. Many of these factors led to high casualties and further doubts from commanders about the technology. The Army put massive effort and a lot of money it did not have into the program. These resources went to: new equipment, test platoons, training maneuvers, hazardous pay, and more. Even when some commanders expressed feelings that it would save time and money to quit the program, the Army continued working to make it feasible and successful.

This attitude stemmed from enthusiastic commanders who never gave up and convinced skeptical leaders such as Eisenhower, Marshall, and Roosevelt to continue the program. Lee; the father of the American Airborne, and Ryder; the first American paratrooper, played pivotal roles in beginning the airborne, and they continued to champion its cause throughout the war. Gavin became an influential airborne leader as soon as he finished jump school in August, 1941.²⁵⁸ He convinced Lee to let him develop and write the American Airborne's Tactics and Basic Rules using Soviet and German airborne experiences. Later, when the Americans jumped into Sicily, which made many men question the use of the program, Gavin wanted to continue making large-scale drops.

Matthew B. Ridgway, commander of the 82nd, planned and led most of the operations the airborne conducted in Europe. He worried for the safety of his troopers and worked constantly to ensure they jumped into the safest situation possible. Swing, commander of the 11th Airborne, created the "Swing Board" to analyze the airborne after Sicily, led the Knollwood Maneuver to prove to Army commanders the feasibility of the airborne, and commanded his troopers through four jumps in the Pacific. All of these leaders, and the many others who commanded paratroop

²⁵⁸ Fauntleroy, *The General and His Daughter*, p. xix-xx.

units, played an instrumental role in keeping the Army Airborne going through hard times, of which there were many.

Gordon Rottman and Ron Volstad believe that the Army continued with the airborne partially because of the people the program attracted. They explain that there is a very special kind of person who volunteers for the airborne:

The very reason many countries retain certain airborne units is the simple fact that they know the kind of individuals they attract have the ability and willingness to take that extra step when the going becomes difficult, when an extra effort is needed to win the day... The fact that they have soldiers willing to throw their bodies, burdened with excessive equipment, out of a speeding aircraft on a moonless night is in itself worth the effort and expense of maintaining airborne units.²⁵⁹

When considering what lengths paratroopers were willing to go in order to get the job done right, it makes sense that the Army would want to keep its airborne program going.

While the Army and Marines began airborne programs at the same time, their paratroopers had very different experiences throughout World War II. The Army dropped its paratroopers into both theaters of war, in small and large campaigns, for various reasons, and with varying results. The Marine Corps never dropped its paratroopers into combat, but used them as raiders and regular infantrymen and ended the program before war's end. Many of the

²⁵⁹ Rottman and Volstad, *U.S. Army Airborne*, p. 3.

reasons the Marines cited for not using their paratroopers, the Army also had issues with. Lack of aircraft, jungle terrain, small Pacific Islands, and lack of resources plagued both branches.

Leadership made the difference, and the Army had leaders willing to do whatever it took to make the program succeed and the Marines did not.

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Abbreviations used in notes:

HQUSMC: Headquarters United States Marine Corps

Donovan Library: From the holdings of the Donovan Research Library, Fort Benning, GA.

Quantico: From the holdings of Archives and Special Collections Library of the Marine Corps, Quantico, VA.

NARA: From the holdings of the National Archives Research Association, College Park, MD.

