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 Auth: C.O. 550th Inf
 Date: 12 Oct. 1944
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HEADQUARTERS 550TH INFANTRY AIRBORNE BATTALION
 Office of the Commanding Officer

APO 512, U. S. Army,
 12 October 1944.

SUBJECT: Report of the Operations of the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion for the Period 1 August to 31 August 1944.

TO : Commanding General, 1st Airborne Task Force, APO 758, U. S. Army.

1. From the Period 1 August to 10 August 1944 inclusive the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion was located at Lido di Roma, Italy. During this time the Battalion was largely occupied in making preparations for the airborne invasion of Southern France. For the enlisted personnel these preparations largely consisted of equipment and clothing checks, specialized training in loading and unloading their respective equipment in gliders, and during the latter days of the period in orientation talks with the use of sand tables, plaster models and aerial photographs of the landing areas in France, though at the time names of terrain features were not given.

2. On the morning of 11 August 1944, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Company "B" and Company "C" loaded in trucks and proceeded North to Follonica Airfield, approximately 125 miles above Rome. Company "A" and the Battalion Executive Officer departed later in the day by truck for Grossete, which was designated as this Company's departure field. Tents were pitched near the airstrips and such last minute preparations as were necessary were made during the period 11 August to 15 August 1944. At approximately 1000 hours, 15 August 1944, a complete Field Order was given the Officers of the Battalion assigning the mission in detail. This mission, in brief, prescribed the initial assembly area and measures to be taken to provide perimeter defense of this area.

3. Forty-eight (48) gliders were required for the movement of the Follonica group and twelve (12) gliders for the Grossete group. The Follonica group took off at 1535B, 15 August 1944 while the Grossete group took off at 1548B, the same date. The flight to France was uneventful except for the crash-landing of the leading glider of the Follonica group in the Mediterranean Sea. All personnel were rescued by a U. S. Naval craft, taken to Corsica and at a later date (25 August 1944) the platoon leader and the majority of his men rejoined the Battalion in France. The landing and the subsequent actions of the Battalion during the period 15 August to 16 August 1944 were recorded in a summary report under the subject: "Report of the Operations of the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion on 15 - 16 August 1944" dated 11 September 1944 and addressed to the Commanding General, 1st Airborne Task Force. This report includes a detailed account of the two (2) attacks made by this Battalion 15 and 16 August 1944 which resulted in the capture of Le Muy, France.

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for the Period 1 August to 31 August 1944, dated 12 October 1944, (Cont'd)

4. Following the attack and capture of Le Muy, France on the 16 August 1944, the Battalion moved to a bivouac area approximately one and one half (1 1/2) kilometers North of Le Muy where reorganization took place. This reorganization and rest for the personnel of the Battalion continued for four (4) days and then on 20 August 1944, by order of Division, the Battalion marched South toward the coast to Frejus, France where it reverted to the Division Reserve. A bivouac area approximately two (2) kilometers southwest of Frejus was taken up. Complete reorganization was effected in this area during the period 20 to 25 August.

5. On 25 August 1944, the Battalion began to shuttle by truck to Grasse, France. At this time, the remainder of the Division had succeeded in a rapid advance eastward towards Cannes and Nice so that this Battalion's movement toward Grasse was simply a forward displacement in its role as Division Reserve. Leading elements of the Battalion arrived in Grasse (which had just been captured during the early morning by another Unit of the Division) toward noon and immediately began to set up a plan of defensive fires on roads and avenues of approach to the town. During the remainder of the day and on the following day (26 August 1944) the rest of the Battalion arrived and completed the defensive occupation of Grasse. The Battalion remained in these positions till 29 August 1944.

6. It was known at this time that the enemy had taken up defensive positions generally along the Franco-Italian frontier as far North as the Swiss border. By direction of Division, a motorized patrol of approximately fifteen (15) officers and men set out from Grasse 27 August to reconnoiter the road net and the area North of Grasse as far North as the town of Barcelonnette. The patrol returned with the report that the enemy was in the process of occupying strategic mountain passes along the frontier and in particular the important pass on the Franco-Italian border known as Col de Larche. Ostensibly the enemy was attempting to occupy advantageous defensive positions along the frontier in the Alpes Maritimes and the Basses Alpes.

7. On the morning 29 August this Battalion, less Company "A" which was left to secure the Division Command Post at Grasse, with a battalion of Field Artillery (163rd Parachute Field Artillery Battalion), a platoon of Tank Destroyers (Company "B", 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion), a platoon of 4.2 Mortars (83rd Chemical Battalion), and a platoon of Engineers (Company "A", 40th Engineers) began to move from Grasse to Barcelonnette, France with the mission of holding the enemy in Col de Larche and preventing his movement into France. Immediately upon entering the town of Barcelonnette forward security elements reconnoitered the surrounding country and prepared temporary out posts for the security of the remainder of the 550th Infantry Combat Team (this latter name having been assigned to the composite group). Much assistance was initially given the Combat Team Commander by members of the F. F. I. and members of the Inter Allied Mission (British and American parachutists who had been in this region for periods ranging from two (2) weeks to two (2) months prior to "D" Day).

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8. By the 30 August the remainder of the Combat Team arrived in Barcelonnette. Contact with the enemy was made almost at once largely due to the excellent intelligence reports of the enemy furnished by members of the Inter Allied Mission and our own reconnaissance patrols. Seven (7) enemy were taken prisoners this day by an F. F. I. and American patrol in a small valley directly East of Barcelonnette. On 30 August the Combat Team Commander (Commanding Officer of the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion) disposed his forces as follows; Company "B", 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion was moved to the town of Jausiers (about eight (8) kilometers northeast of Barcelonnette) with the mission of holding the valley leading West of the town of Condamine (about four (4) kilometers northeast of Jausiers) against an enemy push westwards from St. Ours or St. Paul; the 463rd Parachute Field Artillery Battalion took up positions about one (1) kilometer northeast of Jausiers with fire missions assigned in St. Ours and the Condamine Valley; the Chemical Platoon took up mortar positions on high ground one (1) kilometer southwest of the village of Chatelard, with fire missions assigned in the Condamine Valley; Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion and Company "C", same Battalion together with the Engineers and the Tank Destroyer Platoons remained as a reserve in the Military Barracks at Barcelonnette.

9. By 31 August, Infantry and Artillery positions were well along the way to being organized while the latter registered fire on assigned target areas. One platoon of Company "B", 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion organized a defensive position left of the main road between Condamine and Jausiers and about one half (1/2) kilometers southwest of Condamine. This platoon was reinforced by one (1) section of Heavy Machine Guns and one (1) section of 81mm Mortars.

10. In short the end of August 1944 found the 550th Infantry Airborne Battalion now a part of a Combat Team with the Combat Team Command Post in Barcelonnette organized to prevent the enemy from advancing north westward through Col de Larche into France.

For the Commanding Officer:



WALTER E. GRISSETI,
1st Lt., Infantry,
Adjutant.

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