Operational Employment of the Airborne Brigade Combat Team: The 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment as a Case Study

A Monograph
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Abstract

Operational Employment of the Airborne Brigade Combat Team: The 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment as a Case Study by MAJ Matthew J. Konz, U.S. Army, 87 pages.

Given the focus on the Brigade Combat Team as the Army's primary combat unit, the limited availability of U.S. Air Force airlift assets, and the U.S. Army history of employing predominantly medium sized airborne units, future airborne operations in support of operational level objectives will likely center around the Airborne Brigade Combat Team (ABCT). The combat airborne operations of the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment will provide a case study to assess the elements of risk, surprise and the operational context of how the airborne unit contributed to the achievement the operational and strategic outcomes. The combat airborne operations discussed are the jump to re-take the island of Corregidor in the Philippines in February 1945, Operation Junction City in February 1967, and the airborne insertion of the 173d Airborne Brigade onto the Bashur airfield in Northern Iraq in March 2003. The intent of this monograph is to provide insights into the possible employment of the current ABCT and how to best use the resources and organization that we have, not necessarily to advocate a radically new airborne organization, propose new equipment, or recommend a new mission for airborne forces.

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Introduction

In 2003, the U.S. Army began transformation to a Modular Force structure which emphasizes the capability of Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) and their ability to deploy, fight and integrate with other U.S. Army and Joint forces. In conjunction with organizational transformation, the Army is transitioning from a forward deployed force to an expeditionary force. Since 2001, the U.S. Army has increased the number of conventional airborne infantry units from eleven infantry battalions (organized into three brigades and two separate battalions) to twelve infantry battalions and six reconnaissance squadrons (all organized into six brigade combat teams).[1] These six transformed Airborne Brigade Combat Teams (ABCTs) are assigned to widely dispersed bases in North Carolina, Alaska and Italy, thus providing all Geographic Combatant Commanders with readily available, rapidly deployable airborne forces.

Most historical works about airborne operations describe specific military operations or unit histories. Some of the most well known and studied U.S. airborne operations are the division size operations conducted by the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions. These operations include the missions in support of the allied amphibious landings on the French coast of Normandy during Operation Overload and the later operations to secure objectives in support of an armored advance into Holland during Operation Market-Garden. However, the Army has conducted only six large-scale operations of 2500 or more jumpers in its history. Approximately eleven combat airborne operations have been conducted by battalion to brigade-sized (500-2500 jumpers) units

[1] This count only includes conventional airborne infantry battalions and reconnaissance squadrons, and does not include other airborne capable units such as the 75th Ranger Regiment or special purpose units such as Special Forces, Pathfinder or Long Range Surveillance units.

and approximately eight small-scale operations of 100 to 500 jumpers.[2] Given this history of U.S. Army employment of predominantly medium sized airborne forces, the limited availability of U.S. Air Force airlift assets, and the focus on the BCT as the Army's primary combat unit, future airborne operations in support of operational level objectives will likely center around the Airborne Brigade Combat Team (ABCT).

This paper will analyze three airborne operations conducted by the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR): the retaking of Corregidor Island in 1945, Operation Junction City in Vietnam in early 1967, and the jump onto Bashur airfield, Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, March 2003.[3] The 503d PIR provides a good case study of ABCT airborne operations for several reasons. First, all of the unit's combat airborne operations were conducted at the regiment or smaller level. Second, the selected airborne operations provide a fair representation of the doctrinal employment of U.S. airborne forces at their respective times in history- World War II, the Vietnam and Cold War era, and during the Post-Cold War and Global War on Terror era. Rather than analyze a series of similar airborne operations and identify specific trends as 'the way' to employ airborne forces, each of these operations are significantly different from each other that they demonstrate the wide range of instances that an airborne force might be employed. Each operation displays the significant capabilities of U.S. airborne organizations as well as the

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[2] United States Combat Jumps. http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/airborne-jumps.htm (accessed on 28 March 2009). For the purposes of this monograph, a named airborne operation that included multiple units on separate drop zones or extended over multiple days is counted as one jump.

[3] The 503d Infantry was originally activated in March 1941 as a Parachute Infantry Battalion. In 1942, it was expanded and redesignated as the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment. Gordon Rottman, *U.S. Army Airborne 1940-90.* Page 11. Through its history, the 503d Infantry and its' subordinate battalions have held other designations, such as '503d Airborne Infantry' or' 2d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry.' In 1963, and again in 2001, the 503d Infantry was assigned to the 173d Airborne Brigade. Therefore, the 503d Infantry's history is linked to that of the Brigade. In this monograph, every attempt is made to refer to the 503d Infantry in the designation appropriate to the historical period.

equally critical weaknesses which must be considered. These strengths can be exploited and weaknesses mitigated by coordination, link-up and integration with other combined arms and joint force units. Lastly, the operations have a wide range of significance at each of the levels of war- tactical, operational, and strategic. These aspects will allow a fair comparison of each operation and possibly provide insights for planners of future airborne operations.

These case studies allow one to study brigade-sized airborne operations in terms of risk, surprise, and how the airborne mission contributed to achieving operational and strategic objectives. Significant to each case study is the historical context in which the missions were conducted by relatively small airborne forces. By understanding the particulars of each situation, one can better envision the considerations and possibilities of employing the ABCT in the future.

Airborne operations inherently involve high risk. There is risk in the conduct of the drop itself by the possible scattering and injury of troops, the loss or damage to equipment, and the reliance on suitable weather conditions. There is also the vulnerability to enemy action during the jump and assembly, the risk of being cut off from logistics and other friendly forces, and the limited mobility available to the current ABCT organization. Each case illustrates examples of these various risks and how they were mitigated by the commander, or weighed as worthwhile risks to accept in order to achieve an advantage over the enemy.

Surprise helps to mitigate some of the risks of an airborne operation. If the conditions are properly set, the enemy will not expect the sudden appearance of paratroopers in their area and the airborne force can achieve their objectives and result in effects disproportionate to the size of the unit. This aspect is vital in not only mitigating risk, but also in offsetting several limitations of the ABCT.

Finally, each operation can be analyzed in its operational context to determine if the accomplishment of the tactical objective helped achieve the desired operational and strategic outcomes, if the risk and resources warranted the gained operational advantage, and if parachute forces were the most advantageous means to accomplish the mission. The operational context

includes how the airborne force was integrated with other joint and combined arms forces to maximize the effect on the enemy and accomplish the mission.

The idea of using aircraft to deploy ground forces behind enemy lines may have its roots in World War I. In October 1918, Colonel William "Billy" C. Mitchell proposed a unique plan to General John J. Pershing, the commander of the American Expeditionary Force.[4] Mitchell, serving as Pershing's aviation advisor, described a concept of consolidating American bombers, loading them with soldiers wearing parachute, and dropping them on an objective behind German lines.[5] There, the soldiers would be supported by aerial fires while a main attack would penetrate the German defenses and link up with the airborne force. Pershing gave approval to begin planning of this concept. However, just as planning started, it was terminated as the armistice ending the war was signed just one month later.

While the U.S. military all but ceased innovations in airborne employment of troops after the war, that was not the case elsewhere. Russia experimented with various forms of airborne operations in the early and mid 1930s. They conducted several large-scale, combined arms exercises that included the mass exits of troops, dropping heavy equipment, and parachuting infantry battalions to seize an airfield until reinforcements could be flown in.[6] Observing the Russian developments, the German military developed and refined their own concepts in employment of airborne forces. By 1938, the German 1st Parachute Rifle Battalion was formed.[7]

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[4] William B. Breuer, *Geronimo! American Paratroopers in World War II* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), 1.

[5] Edward M. Flanagan Jr., *Airborne: A Combat History of American Airborne Forces* (New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 2002), 5.

[6] David M. Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, November 1987), 13.

[7] Breuer, 3.

On 11 May 1940, these forces were employed in combat for the first time with amazing success.[8] The co-called impossible seizure of Fort Emael in Belgium, coupled with the taking of airports and bridges in Holland in support of advancing Panzer forces, caught the full attention of military leaders in the U.S.

In early January 1940, the U.S. Army Chief of Infantry tapped Major William C. Lee to take the lead in experimenting with the air transport of infantrymen.[9] The German actions in May of that year resulted in increased support and the formation of a Parachute Test Platoon. This thirty-nine man platoon, lead by Lieutenant William T. Ryder, developed airborne equipment and created parachuting techniques.[10] Lieutenant Ryder led his men in making the first jump on 3 August 1940.[11] Only two months later, the 501st Parachute Infantry Battalion was formed as the first U.S. airborne tactical unit.[12] The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and following declaration of war on Japan and Germany, resulted in an immediate build-up of military forces, to include airborne units. By the Spring of 1942, a total of seven airborne regiments were formed from the early parachute infantry battalions and placed under the Airborne Command, led by Brigadier General William Lee, and based at Ft Bragg, North Carolina.[13] Interestingly, in November 1942, the men of 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment were redesignated as the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion, and conducted the first

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[8] Ibid., 3.
[9] Flanagan, *Airborne: A Combat History of American Airborne Forces*, xiii.
[10] Breuer, 5.
[11] Flanagan, *Airborne: A Combat History of American Airborne Forces*, 5.
[12] Breuer, 6.
[13] Ibid., 9. These units included the 501st, 502d, 503rd, 504th, 505th, 506th, and 507thParachute Infantry Regiments.

U.S. combat jump into North Africa.[14] The rest of the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment deployed to the Pacific Theater in October 1942 and reformed second battalion while in Australia.[15] Throughout the war, the 503d PIR remained a separate regiment and was never assigned to a division as Gen. MacArthur wanted to retain it as an independent unit to perform special missions.[16]

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[14] Flanagan, *Airborne: A Combat History of American Airborne Forces,* 37.

[15] Edward M. Flanagan Jr. *Corregidor- The Rock Force Assault, 1945.* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), 112; Gordon Rottman, *U.S. Army Airborne 1940-90,* 11.

[16] Rottman, *U.S. Army Airborne 1940-90,* 11.

The 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment Retakes Corregidor Island: 16 February 1944.

In October 1944, General Douglas MacArthur made good on his promise to return to Philippines. At the time, the Philippine archipelago was defended by about 300,000 Japanese forces from the Fourteenth Area Army and commanded by Imperial Army Lt.Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita.[17]

Leyte Island was the first objective for US Forces, where they established bases before beginning an offensive against the larger and better- prepared forces on Luzon.[18] Not only were the majority of Japanese forces present on Luzon Island, but they also held the nation's capital of Manila and its large population. Additionally, Luzon's several airfields and naval bases were considered vital for any later advance on to Okinawa and mainland Japan.[19] Following the landings on Leyte, the 503d Parachute Regimental Combat Team (PRCT) and the 19th Infantry Regiment , 24th Infantry Division conducted an amphibious landing and seizure of Mindoro Island on 15 December 1944, meeting only light resistance.[20] By the end of December 1944, organized resistance on Leyte and Mindoro ceased with the U.S. forces controlling excellent naval and air bases for the follow-on invasion of Luzon.[21]

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[17] Breuer, 484

[18] Gerard M. Devlin, *Back to Corregidor: America Retakes the Rock.* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1992), 26.

[19] Breuer, 473

[20] Dale Andrade, *CMH Pub 72-28 The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II: Luzon.* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), 6. By late 1944, the 503d PIR was assigned a parachute artillery battalion and parachute engineer company, thus forming a Parachute Regimental Combat Team.

[21] Edward T. Flash, 1st Lieutenant. "The Operations of the 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry Regimental Combat Team in the Recapture of Corregidor Island, 16 February – 23 February 1945, (Luzon Campaign) (Personal Observation of a Parachute Rifle Platoon Leader)." Monograph, Advanced Infantry Officers Course, Class No II, The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia, 1949-1950, 3

The initial plan to retake Luzon included three major parts: seize Manila, clear the Bataan peninsula and take Corregidor. On 9 January 1945, I and XIV Corps, under the U.S. Sixth Army commanded by General Walter Krueger, began the invasion of Luzon by amphibious landings at Lingayen Gulf, then advancing south toward Manila.[22] On 29 January, Maj. Gen. Charles P. Hall's XI Corps landed on the west coast of Luzon just north of Subic Bay, moved to capture Bataan, and then conduced a link up with the Sixth Army for the continued advance to Manila.[23] On 31 January, Maj. Gen. Joe Swing's troopers of the 11th Airborne Division began their attack onto Luzon.[24] Elements of the 187th and 188th glider regiments conducted an amphibious landing at Nasugbu, southwest of Manila, while on 3-4 February, the 511th PIR conducted an airborne operation 22 miles inland, jumping onto Tagatay ridge.[25] While the airborne forces were widely mis-dropped, they were able to re-group, link up with the glider units, and advance northward to Manila

By 7 February 1945, the 11th Airborne Division, 1st Cavalry Division and 37th Infantry Division surrounded Manila.[26] However, these forces were held up by a series of well-established defensive lines outside of the city known as the 'Genko Line.'[27] Some of the toughest fighting was yet to occur as the Japanese fiercely resisted the invaders. US forces finally took Manila on 3 March, with most of the city destroyed after days of brutal urban fighting.[28]

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[22] Flash, 3; Lingayen Gulf is about 120 miles North of Manila and is the same place the Japanese landed in 1941. Breuer, 484-485.
[23] Breuer, 484-485.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 485, 489.
[26] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 101.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

During the height of the fighting around Manila, MacArthur ordered Kruger to "attack and seize Corregidor."[29] A tadpole shaped island about 3 ½ miles long and 1 ½ miles wide at its widest point, Corregidor was strategically positioned at the entrance to Manila Bay.[30] Its location in the bay separated the entryways into a 3-mile channel to the north and a 9-mile channel in the south.[31] As long as Corregidor was in Japanese control, the Manila ports were inaccessible and useless.[32]

General Yamashita, the commander of the 14th Army and overall commander of Luzon, did not think Corregidor was valuable to the general defense of Manila city.[33] However, Rear Admiral Sanji Iwabuchi, Commander of the Manila Naval Defense Force, believed that control of Corregidor was essential to the defense of Manila and directed to hold the island at all costs.[34]

With its many well-fortified gun positions, control of Corregidor meant control of Manila Bay.[35] Resupply ships could not reach Manila ports without first reducing the threat of the large guns or remote controlled sea mines from Corregidor.[36] While the U.S had built many large gun emplacements prior to 1941, several were damaged or destroyed by the U.S. gun crews prior to surrendering to the Japanese in May 1942. The U.S. forces preparing to retake Corregidor in 1945 did not know if they had been repaired.[37]

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[29] Breuer, 499.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 26.
[32] Hudson C. Hill, Captain. "The Operations of Company 'E,' 503d Parachute Regiment at Wheeler Point, Island of Corregidor, Philippine Islands 23 February 1945 (Luzon Campaign) (Personal Experience of a Company Commander)." Monograph, Advanced Infantry Officers Course, Class No I, The Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia, 1947-1948, 5.
[33] Flanagan, *Corregidor* , 106.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 28.
[36] Ibid., 105.
[37] Ibid., 107.

Sixth Army intelligence estimated that there were about 850 Japanese defenders on Corregidor.[38] In actuality, there were well over 5000 men (mostly Imperial Marines), two batteries of ADA guns, four batteries with ten 150mm naval guns, 100 kamikaze boats (suicide boats filled with explosives), mined beaches, and tons of supplies.[39] Commanded by Japanese Imperial Navy Capt. Akira Itagaki, approximately one half of the forces were positioned to block amphibious landing at three ravines at the base of the island while the other half were held in reserve in tunnels and underground positions.[40] While Capt. Itagaki was warned by Gen. Yamashita to prepare against a possible airborne assault, he decided that the terrain of Corregidor made a parachute assault unlikely, and focused on defending the coast against an amphibious landing.[41]

Brig Gen. Clyde Eddleman, the Sixth Army G-3, thought an airborne assault was the only way to take the island without sustaining heavy losses on the beach.[42] Several factors made an airborne assault on Corregidor feasible. Remembering the Japanese experience in 1942, Corregidor was very difficult terrain to attempt an amphibious assault alone.[43] Additionally, Allied forces enjoyed air superiority over Luzon, allowing virtually unhindered aerial bombing and naval gunfire on the island and free movement of troop transport planes.[44] Because of the rugged terrain and small drop zones (DZ), planners did not think that the Japanese would be

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[38] Hill, 38.
[39] Devlin, 109.
[40] Flanagan, *Corregidor,* 109 - 110.
[41] Devlin, 36.
[42] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 165.
[43] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 163; As an example of how difficult an amphibious assault alone might have been, in 1942 the Japanese initiated their assault on Corregidor by landing two battalions on the north shore of the east end of the island, taking over 50% casualties. Louis Morton. *CMH Pub 5-2 The Fall of the Philippines.*. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952), 556.
[44] Flanagan, *Corregidor,* 164.

prepared for an airborne assault, thus achieving tactical surprise against what was thought to be a lightly defended island. Finally, an airborne assault would be 'inspirational' as revenge for the surrender by Lt. Gen. Jonathan M. Wainwright IV in 1942.[45] Still, planners at Sixth Army understood that there would be a great deal of risk involved in such an operation.

On 5 February 1945, Col. George M. Jones, commander of the 503d PRCT was given the order that his regiment would retake Corregidor.[46] For the operation, the 503d PRCT was reinforced by Lt .Col. Edward M. Postlethwait's 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment from the 24th Infantry Division.[47] Meanwhile, Col. John Lackey's 317th Troop Carrier Group would provide the aircraft for the jump and aerial resupply.[48]

With aerial photos and information from soldiers who had previously served on Corregidor, planners were able to conduct very detailed analysis of the terrain and the facilities.[49] However, they could not accurately determine the enemy strength or disposition. The U.S. forces were unable to infiltrate scout elements onto the island and aerial photos were completely inadequate for determining troop strength due to the dense jungle vegetation, Japanese camouflage skill, and underground positions.[50] Therefore, the invaders never knew the operational status of the long range cannons or air defense guns, if the remote controlled mines

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[45] Ibid., 163.
[46] Devlin, 35.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 39.
[49] Ibid., Page 38.
[50] Flanagan, *Corregidor* , 105.

and kamikaze boats were viable threats, or that there were nearly 6000 defenders rather than the Sixth Army intelligence estimate of only 600-800.[51]

On 6 February, the 503d PRCT was alerted with a mission to "seize and secure the [Japanese] held Island of Corregidor, and to destroy all enemy forces on the island as part of the greater mission of the Manila Bay area of Luzon, [Philippine Islands]"[52] With D-Day set for 16 February, his men had about one week to plan, train and prepare. As this was the regiment's third combat jump, they had several advantages for time constrained planning. First, the unit had a regimental Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) with detailed steps for preparation of an airborne operation. The SOP was refined through previous experience and was well known by all the troops.[53] Also, the men and leaders of the 317th Troop Carrier Group and 503d PRCT worked with each other frequently and knew each other very well, going back to late 1942 when the two units trained together in Australia.[54]

From 23 January to 15 February, the 13th and 5th Air Force relentlessly bombed Corregidor, destroying infrastructure, razing buildings, splintering trees, and cratering the landscape, to include the selected drop zone areas.[55] Despite the incessant shelling, many defenders remained unscathed thanks to the well-fortified gun positions, underground tunnels and supply bunkers. However, the shelling also forced the defenders underground and away from the drop zones and exposed gun positions. Additionally, the extended bombing missions gave 503d PRCT commanders and jumpmasters the opportunity to conduct an air reconnaissance of their

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[51] Breuer, 500; This is based off an estimate from Col. Jones. Reports varied, with one estimating 850 Japanese defenders. Flash, 10.

[52] Hill, 3.

[53] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 166.

[54] Ibid., 173.

[55] Ibid., 167.

drop zones and objectives by riding in the bombers. Between the small size of the drop zones, the rugged surrounding terrain, the enemy situation and the damage caused by shelling, the drop zones were the most hazardous of any used in the Pacific theater. When Lt Gen. Krueger, saw photos of the drop zones, he understood the significant hazards to the airborne troops. Even Col. Jones himself estimated up to 50% casualties from the jump alone.[56] Still, Krueger believed that the airborne assault "offered…the best chance of surprising the enemy."[57]

The only two cleared areas that were considered even marginally suitable as drop zones were located on the high ground of the west side of Corregidor in an area known as 'Topside.' At an elevation of about 500 feet, the terrain of Topside dominated the rest of the island, and included most of the infrastructure on the island such as large barracks and garrison buildings.[58] Designated drop zone "A," the parade ground provided the larger of two drop zones.[59] At 325 yards by 250 yards and located toward the west side of the hill, the drop zone was directly in front of 'mile long' barracks.[60] A nine-hole golf course, only 350 yards by 185 yards, provided the only other open area, and was designated as drop zone 'B."[61] Adding to the hazards, at the south edge of both drop zones was a 500-foot cliff.[62]

The two small drop zones necessitated a complicated drop plan. The plan was for the troop carrying aircraft to fly in two parallel columns, one over each drop zone, with 25 seconds

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[56] Devlin, 37.

[57] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 170; Lt. Gen. Kruger was the operational commander and his Sixth Army was responsible for taking the Bataan Peninsula and Manila, to include Corregidor. Andrade, 18.

[58] Breuer, 499.

[59] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 182.

[60]Devlin, 37; Flanagan, *Corregidor* , 168.

[61]Devlin, 37; Flanagan, *Corregidor* ,169 and 182.

[62] Devlin, 37.

between aircraft.[63] To de-conflict the airspace over the island, both columns of aircraft would fly in trail formation from southwest to north east with the left column dropping over the parade ground in a counter clockwise pattern while the right column dropped over the golf course in a clockwise pattern.[64] While each aircraft would be loaded with 20-21 jumpers per plane, the drop zones were so short that only six to eight could exit per pass.[65] Finally, the planned drop altitude was 500-550 feet above both drop zones, so the jumpers would spend little time in the air and limit the amount of drift they would encounter.[66] To test the feasibility of the plan, and increase the chance of success during execution, the 503d PRCT set up small drop zones on Mindoro so pilots and jumpmasters could practice dropping small sticks of jumpers onto areas the same size as on Corregidor.[67] To observe and provide control of the drop, Col. Jones and Lt.Col. Lackey would observe the jump from a C-47. From the aircraft, Jones planned to observe from above to determine if the drop zones were visible after the shelling, then radio corrections to the drop aircraft to account for wind drift and enemy, and control supporting air and naval fires.[68]

In the basic plan, forces would land on Corregidor in four phases. The assault would begin at 0830 on 16 February 1945, D-Day, with the airborne assault of 3d Battalion, 503d PIR, augmented with 75mm artillery and engineer support.[69] Their initial task would be to secure the drop area for the follow-on battalions, then support the amphibious landing of 3d Battalion, 34th

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[63] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 182.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., 9 and 193 .
[66] Ibid., 195.
[67] Ibid., 173. This training was conducted on 10 February.
[68] Ibid., 183. This was the first use of an aircraft as a command and control platform for an airborne operation.
[69] Ibid., 178; Lift 1- Commander: Lt.Col. John Erickson. Devlin, *Back to Corregidor* Page 38; Task organization of first lift was 3/503 PIR reinforced by C/462d PFAB (75mm), one platoon from D/462d PFAB (.50 MG),C/161 Airborne Engineers, and elements of the Regimental Headquarters. Flash,. Page 8.

Infantry with direct and indirect fires. Upon relief by 2d Battalion, 503d PIR, 3d Battalion would seize high ground 600 yards north of the hospital and link-up with the amphibious forces.[70]

At 1030 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry would conduct an amphibious assault onto San Jose Beach at an area known as 'Bottomside.'[71] The terrain of Bottomside formed a saddle about 100 feet in elevation between Topside and Malinta Hill. At an elevation of 350 feet, Malinta Hill was the highest point east of the beachhead.[72] Once ashore, the assault units would secure the beachhead, then attack east to occupy Malinta Hill and block enemy reinforcement of Topside from the east.[73]

At 1215 on D-day, 2d Battalion, 503d PIR reinforced with artillery, would jump onto the secured drop zone, relieve 3d Battalion, 503d PIR, and exploit the terrain north and west of the drop zones.[74] Finally, 1st Battalion, 503d PIR plus artillery, would jump at 0830 on D+1 (17 February) as the regimental reserve, prepared to exploit the terrain south and west of the drop zones.[75] Continuous security of the drop zone after the initial jump was critical for the successful landing of following units and for ease of aerial resupply.

On 15 February, the 151st Regimental Combat Team (RCT) conducted a shore-to-shore amphibious assault to secure Mariveles Bay at the south tip of the Bataan Peninsula. The 151st RCT was accompanied by 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry in order for them to stage for the shore-to-

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[70] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 178.

[71] Ibid., 179; The landing area was also known as "Black Beach." Devlin, 38.

[72] Breuer, 499.

[73] Devlin, 38.

[74] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 178; Lift 2- Commander: Maj. Lawson B. Caskey. Devlin, *Back to Corregidor*. Page 38; Task organization of the second lift: 2/503 PIR reinforced by B/462d PFAB (75mm), one platoon from D/462d PFAB (.50 MG), elements of Regimental Headquarters and service company. Flash, 9.

[75] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 178. Lift 3- Commander: Maj. Robert Woods. Devlin, 39; Task organization of the third lift: 1/503 PIR reinforced by A/462d PFAB (75mm) and the remaining elements of the Regimental Headquarters. Flash, 9.

shore assault on Corregidor the next day.[76] At 0700, 16 February 1945, the first lift of airborne troops began to takeoff from Elmore and Hill airfields near San Jose on the southern part of Mindoro Island.[77] To augment the bombing effort, the U.S. Navy's Destroyer Division 46 (DESDIV 46) had been bombarding Corregidor for two days in advance of the assault.[78] As the aircraft approached the island, the fire support shifted off the drop zones at H-60 seconds.[79] Even during the jump, Air Force A-20s continued to strafe and bomb the east portion of the island.[80] At 0833, the first pass of jumpers exited the aircraft as Col. Lackey, flying the lead C-47 aircraft, circled over the island with Col. Jones in the cockpit in order to observe and control the drop.[81] The first pass of jumpers exited at over the designated release point, but higher than expected winds caused jumpers to drift over the cliffs on the south edge of the drop zones.[82] Col. Jones observed the missed drop and radioed the pilots to drop following sticks at 400 feet instead of the planned 500 feet, reduce sticks of jumpers to five or six per pass, and adjust the release point to account for the actual wind direction and speed.[83] While the lower altitude meant a higher risk for the jumpers because there was less time for the chute to deploy, it increased the chances of landing on the drop zone.[84] Still, several jumpers missed the drop zone, some even landing in the bay. Because each aircraft had to make a minimum of two to three passes to exit all jumpers, it

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[76] Flash, 8.

[77] Hill, 4. It was approximately a 180 mile flight to the drop zones. Blair, John. Page 12. The limited number of aircraft for the paradrop and resupply necessitated dropping the 503d PRCT in three lifts over two days.

[78] Devlin, 40. This task force consisted of five cruisers, six destroyers, torpedo boats and other craft, which shelled Corregidor and Mariveles Harbor. Page 12.

[79] Ibid, 52.

[80] Flash, 12.

[81] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 52 and 195.

[82] Breuer, 506.

[83] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 52 and 196.

[84] Breuer, 506

took over an hour to complete the drop of the first lift.[85] Once on the ground, the soldiers of Lt.Col. John L. Erickson's 3d battalion quickly went to work.[86] By 1000, all initial objectives were achieved, most Japanese were driven from Topside and the drop zones were secured for a second lift.[87]

The mis-drop had a fortunate and unanticipated result. Very early in the airborne operation, soldiers who landed off the south edge of the drop zones observed several Japanese soldiers running into a cave. The troops hurled several grenades into the opening, killing those inside. One of the Japanese killed was the island commander, Imperial Navy Capt. Akira Itagaki.[88]

The airborne operation achieved complete surprise, producing the desired effects on the enemy. It was perhaps this element of surprise, which compensated for the lack of mass on the drop zones during the critical first hour of the assault.[89] At the time of the assault, most defenders were likely in bunkers to avoid the preparatory barrage, or in positions which over watched the shoreline.[90] The preparatory shelling also cut the wire communication between defensive positions, making a coordinated defense even more difficult.[91] Furthermore, the Japanese defenders had no contingency for a parachute assault and without their commander, were slow to react or coordinate a counterattack on the paratroopers.[92]

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[85] Ibid., 507.
[86] Ibid., 501
[87] Devlin, 61.
[88] Breuer, 506.
[89] Hill, 35.
[90] Devlin, 58.
[91] Hill, 35.
[92] Devlin, 57.

The operation was hardly without flaw. First, several soldiers missed the drop zone and became isolated or landed in the bay. Because of this possibility, troops were issued inflatable life vests.[93] As an additional precaution, the 503d PRCT S-3, Maj. Ernie Clark, coordinated with the Navy to provide PT boat patrols around the island to rescue mis-dropped troops.[94] These patrol boats saved the lives of several troopers, often encountering enemy fire while doing so.

The debris from days of bombing and shelling shattered trees, destroyed buildings, craters, and debris combined to create severe obstacles and hazards for jumpers on and around the drop zones. About 25% of first lift were seriously injured by the jump or killed by Japanese.[95] Of the approximately 750 who were capable of fighting, almost all troops received some type of jump injury, from bruises and sprains, to concussions and broken bones.[96] Even Col. Jones, who jumped from the lower altitude, was injured when he landed in a splintered tree.[97] After extracting himself, he remained in command of his unit and was still capable of fighting.

During the jump, 3d battalion, 34th Infantry with five Sherman tanks from the 603d Tank Company began conducting their shore-to-shore amphibious assault.[98] With a plan to land in five assault waves with fifteen-minute intervals, the battalion boarded 25 Landing Craft, Mechanized (LCMs), each carrying up to 60 troops or one medium tank.[99] They embarked from Mariveles on Bataan and conducted an approximately 12-mile movement to San Jose Beach.[100] Supported by

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[93] Flanagan, *Corregidor,* 191.
[94] Ibid., 186.
[95] Devlin, 61.
[96] Breuer, 507 .
[97] Ibid., 506.
[98] Devlin, 62.
[99] Ibid. This area is also known as Black Beach
[100] Flanagan, *Corregidor,* 179.

fire from 3d battalion on Topside, the first wave landed at 1028 and was initially unopposed.[101] The second, third, and fourth assault waves also landed with little resistance except for except for encountering several mines on the beach, while the fifth wave came ashore under intense Japanese machine gun and mortar fire.[102] Despite the late resistance and losing a tank, a self-propelled gun and an anti-tank gun on the beach, the amphibious forces rapidly moved inland and by 1101, Malinta Hill was secure.[103] With the Japanese commander dead and the landline communication system knocked out by the intense shelling, the defenders appeared confused and had yet to conduct much of a coordinated defense.[104]

After dropping 3d battalion, the C-47s returned to Mindoro to load the men and equipment of Maj. Lawson B. Caskey's 2d battalion, 503d PIR.[105] Slightly behind schedule, the first pass of lift two jumped at 1240.[106] At about the same time, Japanese from coastal positions began to attack up the ravines from the positions they had been defending from the shore.[107] The element of surprise was now fleeting as the enemy began to counter attack and stiffly oppose to the second lift, shooting jumpers in the air, bayoneting troops that were caught in trees, and placing effective machine gun fire on the drop zone.[108] By 1345, the second drop was complete.[109] To expedite assembly and employment of the battalion after their jump, Maj Caskey had his S-3 and company executive officers jump with the first lift.[110] At the end of the first day,

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[101] Devlin, 67.
[102] Ibid., 68.
[103] Breuer, 507.
[104] Devlin, 74.
[105] Ibid., 38.
[106] Ibid., 75.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., 80.
[109] Ibid., 85.
[110] Flash, 10.

Topside and Malinta hill were secure. Of the about 2050 jumpers, approximately 60 were killed from small arms fire while in the air or from parachute malfunctions and landing injuries, while another nearly 200 sustained serious jump related injuries.[111]

At nightfall, Col. Jones ordered his men to form defensive perimeters, the two battalions from the 503d PIR on Topside while 3d Battalion 34th Infantry remained on Malinta Hill. That night, the soldiers of the 24th Infantry Division valiantly repelled a Japanese probing attack on Malinta Hill.[112] On D+1, the paratroopers on Topside began running low on supplies, especially water. Infantry forces from Bottomside, supported by tanks, attacked through Japanese positions to clear a lane and link up with the 503d PRCT on Topside. They reached the paratroopers at 1330 and were immediately followed by resupply assets.[113]

Up to this point, the first two phases were successful and met their objectives, the Japanese were disorganized and opposition was light.[114] With the high number of jump injuries from the first two lifts and loss of surprise, Col. Jones decided there was no need to risk even more jump casualties and cancelled the jump that was scheduled for 0830 on D+1.[115]

The new plan was to fly Maj. Robert Woods' 1st Battalion to San Marcelino Airfield on Luzon, then move by truck to Subic Bay where they would board LCMs for the movement to Corregidor, landing on the beach secured by 3d Battalion 34th Infantry.[116] Because the battalion's

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[111] Devlin. 85; Details of jump casualties: about 3 total malfunctions, 50 killed while in the air from small arms fire (determined because the bodies were recovered with bullet holes yet while still in the harness and a full chute), 19 killed from landing injuries (ex: dragged over the cliff or landing on jagged debris), 210 other jump injuries, 25 MIA. Of a total of 2019 jumpers, 279 killed or seriously injured. Breuer, 508.

[112] Devlin, 96-101.

[113] Ibid., 122.

[114] Ibid., 90.

[115] Ibid., 86.

[116] Ibid., 39 and 90.

equipment was rigged for airdrop, Maj. Woods arranged to have it dropped on Topside while enroute to San Marcelino so his troops would not need to load it onto LCMs or carry it up the hill.[117]

At 0830, 17 February, transport aircraft flew over Corregidor and began to drop the equipment.[118] However, no Navy or Air Force fire support was conducted to suppress the Japanese air defense systems because friendly troops were all over Corregidor with no means to control fires and prevent fratricide. The Japanese were not surprised by this airdrop, taking the transport aircraft under very heavy fire, damaging 16 of the 44 aircraft, killing one trooper and wounding five others.[119] Casualties would have certainly been much worse had 1st Battalion actually jumped, demonstrating the wisdom of Col. Jones' decision to cancel the jump.

At 1500, 1st Battalion, 503d PIR began landing on San Jose Beach, coming under machine gun and mortar fire.[120] Supported by Naval gunfire and 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry, the troopers were able to get ashore, reduce the local enemy resistance, and establish a perimeter defense for the evening. On 18 February, 1st Battalion, 503d PIR started their advance to Topside and completed link up with the rest of the Regiment by 1200.[121]

For the next several days, the U.S. battalions were embroiled in brutal fighting within their assigned sectors around the island. One by one, they seized the coastal gun batteries, destroyed the harbor mine remote control, and captured several 'suicide' boats. They cleared numerous caves and tunnels and closed off many others, burying countless Japanese. The most

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[117] Ibid., 118.
[118] Ibid., 117.
[119] Ibid., 118.
[120] Ibid., 123.
[121] Blair, 21.

significant Japanese counterattack occurred at 0200 on D+3 (19 February) with a coordinated attack and Banzai charge, which was repelled after hours of fierce night fighting.[122]

On 25 February, 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry was replaced by 2d Battalion, 151 Infantry of the 38th Infantry Division so they could return to the 24th Infantry Division and prepare for future operations.[123] By the end of 28 February 45 (D+15) all organized resistance on Corregidor ceased.[124] Up to that time, U.S. forces had captured 20 Japanese soldiers and reported 4506 Japanese dead, plus many others sealed in caves and tunnels.[125] For the next several days, the 503d PRCT continued mopping up operations, killing another 118 Japanese.[126]

On 2 March 1945, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur returned to Corregidor via PT boat, the same way that he was forced to leave the island three years earlier.[127] There, he briefly toured the island and gave an inspirational speech to the troopers nearby as a U.S. flag was hoisted up the original garrison flagpole.[128] The next day, Manila was freed after most of the city being destroyed by weeks of brutal urban fighting.[129] On 8 March, 21 days after landing on Corregidor, the 503d PRCT departed Corregidor via Landing Craft, Infantry (LCI), leaving 2d Battalion, 151st Infantry to complete the clearing and garrison the island.[130]

To assess the effectiveness of the airborne operation on Corregidor, one might start with a statement made by the commander of the invasion force:

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[122] Breuer, 516.
[123] Devlin, 197. Casualties at the end of the day were 42 KIA and 163 wounded.
[124] Ibid., 213.
[125] Ibid., 213.
[126] Ibid., 217.
[127] Breuer, 522.
[128] Ibid., 524.
[129] Flanagan, *Corregidor*, 101.
[130] Devlin, 217.

> My [Col. Jones'] philosophy as a parachute commander was simple: Parachuting into combat is basically a poor means of transportation. There is always the very real possibility of jump injuries, loss or damage to weapons and supplies, and scattering of tactical units throughout the objective area and beyond. Parachute entry into combat should only be made when that mode provides a tactical advantage![131]

In this instance, "parachute entry into combat" not only provided a tactical advantage, but also an operational and strategic advantage. First, the operation achieved complete surprise. The Japanese made no preparations or contingencies to repel the paratroopers when they were most vulnerable-on the drop zone. The immediate surprise confused the defenders, providing a temporary advantage for the smaller airborne forces. Landing on the highest ground of the island gave the U.S. forces the most advantageous position from the very beginning. The paratroopers were able to fight from high ground and clear downward to the coastal positions and the tunnels, while every Japanese attempted attack had to fight uphill. Also considering that it took over an hour to drop the first lift, there were fewer casualties due to enemy fire than one would expect if the enemy had guns oriented on the drop zones during the initial jump.

Operationally, the timing of the assault on Corregidor was critical. By attacking during the battle of Manila, any forces capable of assisting the island defenders were decisively engaged by the main force elements of the U.S. Sixth Army and were unable to provide reinforcement or relief. Capitalizing on surprise, a small force of four well-trained battalions of airborne and amphibious forces, supported by air and naval fires, were able to defeat a much larger defending force. The use of these forces and the way they were employed meant very few precious Pacific Theater resources were diverted from the main effort fight to secure Manila. Also, because the

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[131]Devlin, xii.

end of resistance on Corregidor nearly coincided with the end of fighting in Manila, it allowed immediate opening of the port to support both reconstruction of the city and follow-on operations against the remaining Japanese forces on Luzon. A final significant operational factor that must not be overlooked is the successful joint integration of forces for the Corregidor attack. Overall, the mission is an example of a very complicated operation with a high level of synchronization of joint forces, which included Army airborne and amphibious forces, supporting Navy gunboats and transports, plus Air Force airlift and close air support. The combined arms fight on the island included infantry, armor, artillery, engineer and various other supporting units. Without the detailed coordination during planning coupled with close synchronization during execution between the various units and commands, the mission would likely have cost the U.S much more in lives, resources, and valuable time. With this operation, the U.S. was able to regain control of Corregidor in a few weeks, compared to the more than 4 months of siege required by the Japanese to take the island in 1942.

Strategically, the liberation of Corregidor was significant boost to the morale of the US population. The memory of Gen. Wainwright's surrender in May 1942 was still fresh in many minds. The capture of fortress Corregidor was revenge for the black mark left on the American psyche. It also set a dramatic stage for the return of Gen. MacArthur and his inspirational speech. Finally, the control of Luzon and Manila Bay gave the U.S. a vital base from which to stage follow-on operations against Okinawa and later Japan itself. In this instance, a combined airborne and amphibious force almost perfectly fit the mission requirement.

The 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) in Operation Junction City: 22 February 1967.

Events in the early and mid 1960s resulted in an expanding U.S. effort to "defeat [North Vietnamese] effort(s) to impose a communist state on an unwilling [South Vietnam], thus allowing [South Vietnam] to choose its own government."[132] In 1964-65, both North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main force units significantly increased operations in South Vietnam to the point where it appeared that South Vietnam would lose the war unless the U.S. intervened.[133] As a result, the U.S. military presence transitioned from advising to warfighting.[134] By the end of 1965, additional U.S. units deployed to South Vietnam, to include 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, the 1st Cavalry Division, the 1st Infantry Division and the 173rd Airborne Brigade, raising the number of US Army personnel in country to 116,800.[135] In the midst of a South Vietnamese insurgency, Gen. William C. Westmorland recognized the importance of pacification and population security. However, the reality was that he also had to deal with the ineffective Vietnamese government and security forces, and an enemy which by the end of 1965 fielded over 225,000 regular and irregular forces.[136] Westmoreland decided the best way to use his resources was for U.S. forces to focus on fighting and destroying the enemy's large military formations while the South Vietnamese oriented on pacification and securing the population.[137] Then as progress was made, the U.S. effort would shift to supporting the pacification effort. In

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[132] Lorenz, G. C. et al. *Operation Junction City Battle Book: Vietnam, 1967*. U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS. 1983. Page 4.

[133] Dale Andrade, "Westmoreland was Right: Learning the Wrong Lessons from the Vietnam War," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Volume 19, Issue 2 (June 2008), 154.

[134] Lorenz, G. C. et al., 5.

[135] Andrade, "Westmoreland was Right," 154

[136] Andrew J. Birtle, "PROVN, Westmoreland, and the Historians: A Reappraisal." *The Journal of Military History*, Volume 72, Issue 4 (October 2008), 1222.

[137] Birtle. 1222-1223.

general, this plan made sense because the Americans had the firepower and mobility to fight the communists, while the South Vietnamese forces had the cultural and language skills to interact with the population. Also, this concept was consistent with the U.S. policy in Vietnam that delegated internal security and politics responsibilities to the Vietnamese government, not the U.S.[138] With military operations restricted to within the borders of South Vietnam, the U.S. Army employed search and destroy tactics. In the search and destroy concept, large infantry formations supported by armor, artillery, air mobility and airpower, would attack into unsettled areas, away from indigenous populations, and seek an enemy to fight or a base to destroy.[139]

Operation Junction City was planned as a massive, two phase, multi-division search and destroy operation aimed at the "… destruction of the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) and the 9th North Vietnamese Division."[140] It was believed that COSVN was Hanoi's communist headquarters element which attempted to coordinate insurgent, military, and civilian communist organizations in the southern half of South Vietnam.[141] Destruction of COSVN could severely hinder the ability of the Viet Cong to continue to fight the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), or to overthrow the South Vietnamese government.[142] War Zone C, an 80km by 50km

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[138] Birtle. 1223. Many of these general concepts were consistent with the recommendations of a March 1966 report produced by the Army Staff entitled "A Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam" (PROVN) which recognized that reconstruction and security could only occur in conjunction with the neutralization of major enemy forces. 1214 and 1223.

[139] Lorenz, G. C., et al., 7. During a general search and destroy mission, infantry forces would assault into an area via helicopter, usually after artillery preparatory fires, then establish a base to conduct patrols. Because of the distances, often they would establish a firebase with artillery to support infantry patrols. Frequently, multiple bases would be established and positioned within range of supporting fires from another firebase. Once in an area, infantry forces would attack in an area to find and fix the enemy for artillery and air power destroy them. 14.

[140] 173d Airborne Brigade Combat AAR. Tab A, Page 1.

[141] Lorenz, G. C. et al., 13; Andrade, 153.

[142] Edward F. Murphy, *Dak to: America's Sky Soldiers in South Vietnam's Central Highlands.* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1993), 37

area along the Cambodian border, was believed to be a Viet Cong stronghold and the location of the COSVN headquarters.[143] This area, just 45 miles northwest of Saigon, became the target area for what was to be the largest search and destroy mission in Vietnam up to that time.[144] Enemy forces thought to be operating in War Zone C and surrounding region included the small, mobile COSVN Headquarters, support personnel, plus five regiments of the 9th Viet Cong (VC) Division composed of 7000 to 9000 fighters.[145]

Operation Junction City was planned and coordinated by II Field Force, a corps sized element commanded by Lt.Gen. Jonathan O. Seaman.[146] The mission would be conducted by two reinforced U.S. divisions with as many as 22 U.S. infantry battalions and four South Vietnamese battalions.[147] With a planned start date of 22 February 1967, Phase I would focus on the west portion of War Zone C.[148] In concept, a 60-kilometer horseshoe shaped cordon, with the open end facing south, would be established by ground and air inserted forces. Then, additional forces would attack from south to north, pushing enemy forces into the cordon where they would be destroyed.[149] The 1st Infantry Division, with the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) attached, was responsible for the north and east portions of the cordon, while the reinforced 25th Infantry Division would establish the west part of the cordon and provide the maneuver forces to sweep

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[143] Maj. Gen. Bernard W. Rogers, *CMH Pub 90-7-1 Vietnam Studies Cedar Falls-Junction City: A Turning Point. (*Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1974), 86.

[144] Lorenz, G. C. et al., 7 and 10.

[145] Lorenz, G. C. et al., 18. COSVN was thought to be composed of about 3000 men, including command and control, logistics, and PSYOPS. The COSVN HQ element was believed to consist of about 50-70 persons and very mobile, able to quickly move into Cambodia if required. Elements of the following five regiments were encountered during Operation Junction City: 101st NVA regiment, 271st VC regiment, 272d VC regiment, 273d VC regiment, 70th Guards regiment. 85 and 91.

[146] Ibid., 10.

[147] Rogers, 83.

[148] Ibid., 97.

[149] Ibid.; Lorenz, G. C. et al, 20.

inside the cordon from south to north.[150] Phase II would capitalize on the success of Phase I and continue search and destroy operations, only now oriented on the eastern portion of War Zone C.[151]

Phase I of the plan required a large number of forces to move by air to establish the cordon. However, no single brigade controlled enough aircraft to move more than one battalion at a time.[152] The 173d Brigade staff conducted an air movement comparison study to determine if an airborne insertion would result in a considerable savings of helicopter effort. The study found that a paradrop of one battalion task force would save 60 UH-1 aircraft for 2 ½ hours for troop movement and six CH-47 aircraft for 3 ½ hours for movement of artillery and supplies.[153] Furthermore, air reconnaissance of the operational area revealed an area suitable for use as a drop zone.[154] The 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) combat after action review for Operation Junction City describes the rationale for the jump.

> The primary factor behind the jump was to place the maximum number of troops on the ground in the shortest period of time to reduce the requirement for helicopter support. In addition, this maneuver would give allied Forces the complete element of surprise, leaving the enemy confused and scattered, more so than a heliborne assault since a larger force could be introduced.[155]

Secrecy was a critical requirement for the airborne operation. Not only would it facilitate achieving surprise, it would reduce the risk of the enemy repositioning forces, especially air defense weapons, around possible drop zones. Additionally, because there were very few suitable

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[150] Lorenz, G. C. et al., 20.
[151] Ibid., 25.
[152] Ibid., 21.
[153] 173d Airborne Brigade Combat AAR. Tab D, Enclosure 1, Page 1.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.

drop zones in the region, any hint of a paradrop could indicate to the enemy where the next major U.S. operation would be. The 173d Airborne Brigade staff recommended writing a cover plan to allow staffs to conduct detailed airborne planning and coordination, without knowing the actual plan in the event that it was leaked. The II Field Force Headquarters approved the idea of a cover plan and it was written into the full operation order.[156] In the cover plan, one battalion-sized task force would drop onto a similar sized drop zone, well away from the actual objective, with a fictional mission to secure a Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) airfield construction site during a later phase of Operation Junction City.[157] The real plan was known only by the Brigade Commander, Deputy Brigade Commander, the Brigade S-3, and the Brigade Plans officer, while other personnel were read into the real plan as required and only at the last moment needed for planning.[158]

The 173d Brigade mission for Operation Junction City was to block enemy escape routes into Cambodia in the northeast sector of the cordon along Highway 4 and conduct search and destroy operations within assigned area of operations.[159] In the brigade plan, Task Force (TF) 2-503 composed primarily of 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne) lead by Lt.Col. Robert H. Sigholtz, plus A Battery, 3d Battalion, 319 Field Artillery (Airborne) and elements of the Brigade headquarters would conduct a parachute assault into a clearing located three kilometers north of the village of Katum and only four kilometers south of the Cambodian border.[160] There, they

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[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid., 2. For example, the battalion S-4 was read into the plan on D-10, while the Signal officer was brought in on D-2. On 20 February, the Brigade S-3 briefed the Air Force on the actual drop zone so they could plan their flight routes.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Rogers, 101; Murphy, 37

would establish the Brigade command post (CP) and secure a firebase for artillery to support the helicopter insertions of the other two battalions. The support area would also provide a base for logistic support and follow on missions by the infantry battalions. After the jump, 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne) would conduct a helicopter insertion into two landing zones south of the drop zone while 4th Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne) would do the same, landing in two areas northwest of the drop zone, completing the establishment of the Brigade's sector of the cordon.[161] In the lead up to the mission between 19-21 February, most of the personnel of the 173d Airborne Brigade moved to a staging area at Quan Loi airstrip to prepare for the assault. Meanwhile, TF 2-503 remained at the Bien Hoa air base to prepare for the jump.[162] With secrecy still an imperative, the plan to conduct a parachute assault was not distributed until 21 February at 1900. At that time, the TF 2-503 was locked down in an area of the base, issued parachutes and equipment and conducted final mission preparation.[163]

Beginning at 0811 on D-Day, 22 February 1967, the lead elements of the 1st Infantry Division made the first airmobile assault of Operation Junction City landing in the northern portion of the cordon by a single lift of 70 UH-1 aircraft.[164] At 0825, thirteen Air Force C-130 aircraft, each loaded with about 60 soldiers from TF 2-503, took off from Bien Hoa enroute to an area known as Sroc Con Trang, designated as DZ Charlie.[165] Fixed wing aircraft conducted strikes around the objectives in advance of the assault, while helicopter gunships escorted the C-130s during the last five minutes of the flight and remained on station to support the troopers

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[161] 173d Airborne Brigade Combat AAR. Tab C. The information is extrapolated from the maps attached to the AAR.
[162] 173d Airborne Brigade Combat AAR. Tab A, Page 14.
[163] Ibid., 16.
[164] Lorenz, G. C. et al., 21.
[165] 173d Airborne Brigade Combat AAR. Tab A, Page 16; Tab D, Enclosure 4, Page 2.

during the jump and assembly.[166] At 0900, 22 February 1967, Brig .Gen. John R. Deane Jr., Commander of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) exited from the right door of the lead aircraft as the number one jumper, while commander of 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry, Lt.Col. Sigholtz jumped from the left door.[167] Because the drop zone was only about 2000 yards long, each aircraft had to make two passes over the drop zone with 30 jumpers exiting on each pass.[168] To minimize the chance of compromise, no pathfinder or combat control team (CCT) elements were on the ground prior to the jump.[169] In minutes, 743 troopers of the 173d Airborne Brigade were on the ground.[170] The jump was unopposed, with eleven soldiers sustaining minor jump injuries.[171] By 0920, all companies reported they had established command posts.[172] Companies immediately moved into assigned sectors to clear enemy presence and establish a defensive perimeter around the drop zone.[173] At 0925, eight C-130s delivered heavy drop platforms while five minutes later, two additional aircraft with container delivery system (CDS) dropped equipment and supplies. These equipment and supply drops were controlled by a CCT which had jumped in with TF 2-503.[174] At 0930, 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne) departed Quan Loi airfield on 70 UH-1D aircraft, landing at their designated landing zones 1.5 and two kilometers

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[166] Ibid., Tab D, Enclosure 3, Page 2.

[167] Ibid., Tab A, Page 1 (11).

[168] Ibid., Tab D, Enclosure 4, Page 1; Tab D, Enclosure 1, Page 2. With six minutes between each pass, the drop was conducted from 1000 feet and with a 050 degree air drop heading (extrapolated from map data).

[169] Ibid., Tab D, Enclosure 1, Page 2.

[170] Ibid., Tab D, Enclosure 5, Page 1-28 (122-149); Roster of personnel participating in combat assault. This is different than the 746 jumpers listed in GO 444, 12 March 1967 and Amended Orders G.O. 681, 24 April 1967: http://www.173rdairborne.com/manifest.htm (accessed on 10 March 2009).

[171] Lorenz, G. C. et al., 21.

[172] 173d Airborne Brigade Combat AAR. Tab A, Page 16.

[173] Ibid. After the drop, the three companies moved to the edge of the drop zone and secured the area to prevent enemy observed fire on the area. Each company was assigned 1/3d of the perimeter while the recon platoon served as the reserve. Tab D, Enclosure 4, Page1.

[174] Ibid., Tab D, Enclosure 1, Page 2.

south of drop zone Charlie at 1035, meeting no opposition.[175] After delivering 1st Battalion, the aircraft returned to Quan Loi to pick up 4th Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne) which began landing at 1415 at its objectives 500 to 1000 meters northwest of TF 2-503, also without enemy contact.[176] At 0700 on D-Day, the 173d Brigade's assigned Company D, 16th Armor, equipped with M113 Armored Personnel Carriers (APC), began its' route clearing mission of Highway 4, finally linking up with 1st Battalion at 1500 that day.[177] With unit movements complete, the 173d Airborne Brigade was dispersed over a five-kilometer area, establishing the northeast portion of the cordon and blocking Highway 4. Because no single brigade controlled enough aircraft to move more than one battalion at a time, the entire day was consumed by all brigades moving battalions into positions while ground units cleared and secured routes into the zone.[178] At the end of 22 February 1967, twenty U.S. battalions were committed to the horseshoe cordon, eight delivered by helicopter, one by parachute and the rest by ground, all with little enemy resistance.[179]

On D+1, 2d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) began their attack in zone from south to north within the horseshoe cordon to destroy COSVN, VC and NVA units, meeting light enemy opposition.[180] During operations throughout the day, all units uncovered fortifications, camps, as well as caches of supplies and equipment. Units establishing the cordon continued to improve their security and conducted company level

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[175] Lorenz, G. C. et al., 21; The distance from the airfield to the landing zones was over 30 miles (extrapolated from map data).

[176] Lorenz, G. C. et al., 21.

[177] 173d Airborne Brigade Combat AAR. Tab A, Page 17.

[178] Ibid., Tab A, Page 17.

[179] Lorenz, G. C. et al, 21. This was the largest single day Army aviation operation to that time, employing 249 helicopters.

[180] Ibid., 22.

search and destroy operations.[181] However most enemy contact was light, generally of squad size or smaller. The 173d Airborne Brigade improved and maintained its cordon with 1st and 4th Battalions, while 2d Battalion continued to secure the drop zone and brigade support area as supplies continued to be delivered by airdrop. From 23-28 February, operations continued while the two maneuver brigades continued their advance, uncovering more ammunition and food cashes while meeting light enemy resistance.[182] As search and destroy operations progressed daily, U.S. forces increasingly made contact, usually initiated by the enemy, resulting in an increase in U.S. casualties. U.S. forces captured literally tons of equipment, weapons and supplies, to include COSVN propaganda material, films, cameras, and two, one-ton printing presses.[183] On 17 March 1967, Operation Junction City I ended with the final search of the cordon area, resulting in a total of 835 enemy personnel killed and another 15 captured.[184] The lack of reports of enemy wounded indicate that most enemy forces likely withdrew and were never found.

Operation Junction City II was the continuation of search and destroy operations into the east portion of War Zone C, lasting from 18 March to 15 April.[185] US Forces changed tactics during Phase II by assaulting with helicopter lifts directly onto suspected enemy areas. The result was violent enemy contact, to include up to regimental sized forces, thus gaining one of the purposes of the operation-- the destruction of VC tactical formations.[186] Because of the success of Phase I and II, Operation Junction City was extended. Phase III was conducted by a single

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[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., 23.
[183] Ibid., 24.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid., 25.
[186] Ibid., 27.

brigade of the 25th Infantry Division in the southwest portion of War Zone C.[187] By the time Operation Junction City officially ended on 14 May 1967, the U.S. forces had killed over 2700 enemy while having suffered 218 soldiers KIA and over 1500 wounded.[188]

Despite the massive loss of equipment and supplies, the impact of Operation Junction City was only a temporary degradation of the VC and NVA units. During Phase I, the cordon was ineffective largely because establishing and maintaining a viable 60-mile cordon was unachievable, particularly against a dismounted force in heavily forested, restrictive terrain unobservable from the air.[189] The enemy generally only made contact to delay and harass U.S. forces in order to buy time for COSVN key personnel and critical goods to escape. While the loss of supplies, equipment, weapons, and personnel certainly hindered the VC and NVA operations in War Zone C, the overall effect was a temporary disruption, not destruction of the enemy.[190] As a result of Operation Junction City, the enemy likely modified its tactics and took time to recover from its' losses. However, the NVA and VC continued to use Cambodia as a haven while COSVN was able to maintain command and control functions.[191]

Tactically, the airborne operation was significant in that it was part of the largest operation of the war to that time and facilitated the rapid introduction of a reinforced battalion into a semi-remote, enemy held area. The parachute insertion of a battalion significantly reduced the burden on the very limited helicopter lift assets and allowed a more rapid deployment of forces into the cordon than if inserted by helicopter and ground means alone. The multiple, near

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[187] Rogers, 149.
[188] Lorenz, G. C. et al., 26 and 28.
[189] Ibid., 38.
[190] Ibid., 27.
[191] Ibid., 35.

simultaneous ground, heliborne and airborne assaults to establish the cordon, coupled with the deception operations and strict secrecy about the airborne objective, achieved initial tactical surprise. This resulted in very limited enemy contact at the most vulnerable time for an airborne force- during the insertion and the assembly of units. However, the element of surprise was very short lived. Establishing the cordon took over one day and the two assault elements did not begin their attack until D+1. This gave COSVN leaders and key personnel one to two days to slip through the cordon and disperse out of the area or escape into Cambodia.[192]

Operationally, it is significant to note that Operation Junction City was the largest such operation conducted in Vietnam to that time, the only major airborne operation of the war, and the only combat airborne operation conducted by conventional forces between March 1951 and December 1989 . With great aspirations, U.S. forces attempted to surround an enemy stronghold by approaching from multiple directions and multiple means-- ground, helicopter and parachute. While Operation Junction City I resulted in the capture of literally tons of enemy equipment, neither the parachute nor helicopter-inserted forces were able to prevent the escape of major elements of COSVN—the destruction of which was the operational objective. The enemy avoided major contact and were able to slip through the cordon, thus avoiding destruction or defeat. If the COSVN Headquarters was in the area at the time of the operation, their activity was only temporarily disrupted and certainly not destroyed. The airborne insertion option was largely feasible in this case because of the terrain in the operating area. Few areas in South Vietnam afforded suitable large drop zones. Also, there were many more, smaller cleared areas suitable for helicopter insertion than by parachute. One might deduce that if there was any other operational

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[192] Ibid., 27

impact of the airborne operation, it may have caused the NVA and VC forces to modify their operations nationwide to avoid becoming vulnerable to airborne forces. For example, avoiding potential drop zones or covering them with air defenses, or by moving into Cambodia and Laos where large encampments would be relatively safe from airborne forces.

The strategic impact of the airborne mission and Operation Junction City was minimal at best. The entire operation was not well linked with any major strategic military or political objective. The operation did not help to make a political impact in Saigon at a time when it might have made a difference.[193] Without a viable threat of U.S. forces ever entering North Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos, airborne inserted forces were unlikely to help achieve strategic objectives. The writers of the 173d Airborne Brigade Combat After Action Review (AAR) of Operation Junction City observed that airborne forces normally try to achieve strategic surprise by dropping forces in strategically significant area that cannot be reached by other means. However, the AAR recommends additional consideration of intra-theater airborne operations to achieve tactical surprise by the unexpected mass arrival of troops, employed in conjunction with other forces, even though it is relatively inefficient method when comparison to other means of insertion.[194]

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[193] Ibid., 38.
[194] 173d Airborne Brigade Combat AAR. Tab D, Enclosure 3, Page 2.

The 173d Airborne Brigade Jumps onto Bashur Airfield, Iraq: 26 March 2003.

On 20 March 2003, U.S. ground forces crossed the border from Kuwait into Iraq, initiating major combat operations in an effort to oust Saddam Hussein and his totalitarian regime.[195] This operation was years in the making. Despite the sound thrashing the U.S. military gave Iraqi forces in 1991, Saddam remained in power and a continued to be a disrupting influence in the Middle East. His resistance to United Nations (UN) resolutions to eliminate weapon of mass destruction (WMD) programs, his unwillingness to cooperate with UN inspectors, the violent measures he took to stay in power, and his support to terrorist organizations and actions, finally came to a tipping point in early 2003.[196] After a 48-hour ultimatum by President George W. Bush, the U.S. with coalition partners acted to enforce the UN resolutions against Iraq and forcibly institute regime change.[197]

In early August 2002, the Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander, Gen. Tommy Franks, held a meeting to discuss preparations for the invasion of Iraq.[198] There, Gen. Franks informed his subordinate commanders that the end state for the operation would be "regime change."[199] He continued with further guidance, telling his commanders that "Success is defined as regime leadership and power base destroyed; WMD capability destroyed or controlled; territorial integrity intact; ability to threaten neighbors eliminated; an acceptable

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[195] Gregory Fontenot, E.J. Degen and David Tohn. *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom.* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 86.

[196] Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor. *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2007) 76. Saddam Hussein provided direct support to a plan to assassinate U.S. President George H.W. Bush.

[197] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 86.

[198] Gordon and Trainor, 76.

[199] Ibid.

provisional/permanent government in place."[200] The CENTCOM general concept described the main effort as a ground attack, which, while supported by air and Special Operations Forces (SOF), would advance northward from Kuwait, defeat Iraqi forces, isolate the regime in Baghdad, remove the regime from control, and transition to security operations.[201] SOF would conduct two major supporting operations: one in the West to prevent Iraqi employment ballistic missiles against Jordan, Turkey or Israel; while in the North, Special Operations Forces with Kurdish and conventional forces, would fix Iraqi divisions to the North of Baghdad and maintain stability in the Kurdish region.[202]

Responsibility for the preponderance of planning and execution of the conventional force ground war fell on Lt.Gen. David McKiernan, Commander of Third Army and Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC).[203] Lt.Gen. McKiernan identified the ability of the regime to control the country as the main target, and since most of that mechanism was located in Baghdad, the city was believed to be the center of gravity.[204] Much like the CENTCOM plan, McKiernan "envisioned simultaneous and synchronized ground attack from multiple directions aimed at isolating the regime within Baghdad and ultimately at striking sites in the city."[205] He designated V Corps as the main effort, which would attack along the west bank of the Euphrates River while I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) conducted a supporting attack up the Tigris-Euphrates River valley with both forces aimed at Baghdad.[206] Because CFLCC needed to keep

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[200] Ibid., 76-77.
[201] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 47.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid., 31.
[204] Ibid., 54.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.

northern Iraqi divisions fixed in place to prevent them from reinforcing Baghdad, a significant northern Iraq operation was considered key to the success of his ground campaign.[207] Thus, the requirement of what would be called the 'Northern Front' would become a vital and controversial part of both the CENTCOM and CFLCC plans.

The original plans called for forces in Northern Iraq to comprise of Special Operating Forces (SOF) and conventional forces. The SOF component would consist of the Joint Special Operations Task Force North (JSOTF-N) working with the Kurdish Peshmurga (militia fighters) who already controlled part of north eastern Iraq, while the conventional force would consist of 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) and the 173d Airborne Brigade, both deploying through Turkey.[208] At the time of the invasion, more than 40 ships with the 4th Infantry Division's equipment were moving into the Mediterranean Sea.[209] However, negotiations with Turkey broke down and the Turkish government refused to allow offensive operations to originate from within its borders. While Turkey eventually conceded the use of its airspace, any U.S. forces deploying into Northern Iraq would have to arrive by air. This effectively eliminated any plan for the 4th Infantry Division, with its hundreds of armored vehicles, to attack from the North.

On 20 March 2003, Coalition forces breached the border from Kuwait into Iraq and launched their offensive to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime.[210] At that time, only the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force and 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized) were 100% ready for operations. The 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) was still closing on Kuwait and expected to

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[207] Ibid., 77.

[208] Harry D. Tunnell, IV. *Red Devils: Tactical Perspectives from Iraq*. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), ix.

[209] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 78

[210] Ibid., 86.

be ready by 22 March, the 4th ID was still in the Mediterranean, the 2d and 3d Armored Cavalry Regiments were still weeks away, and only three of the four United Kingdom Battle Groups from the 7th Armored Brigade were ready.[211] While Turkish ports were denied to U.S. forces, the 4th Infantry Division's equipment remained afloat in the Mediterranean in the event Turkey conceded. Gen. Franks argued that a northern front would keep Iraqi divisions in the north and out of Baghdad and wanted to keep the 4th Infantry Division in the Mediterranean Sea as a viable threat.[212] However, as would be seen later, keeping the 4th Infantry Division uncommitted so long would deny Lt.Gen. McKiernan forces he needed for the invasion and for the initial occupation.[213]

On 22 March 2003, Col. Charlie Cleveland and elements of his 10th Special Forces Group began their deployment via MC-130 into the Kurdish occupied areas of Northern Iraq near the areas of Bashur and Sulaymaniyah.[214] His unit formed the core of JSOTF-N.[215] Without the 4th Infantry Division able to move through Turkey, he was given responsibility for all operations in the north.[216] Two battalions of Special Forces immediately began working with two Kurdish organizations and their militia groups. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), located generally to the north along the border with Turkey, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which was in the Southeast portion of the Kurdish region, had a combined force of about 60,000 Peshmerga fighters.[217] Complicating matters, the Special Forces battalions also needed to keep

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[211] Ibid., 94.
[212] Gordon and Trainor, 132.
[213] Ibid., 133.
[214] Ibid., 385.
[215] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 78.
[216] Tunnell, ix.
[217] Gordon and Trainor, 386.

the KDP and PUK from fighting amongst each other.[218] The JSOTF-N was handed the unenviable mission to take on the approximately 12 Iraqi Divisions of 150,000 troops along the 100-mile "Green Line."[219] While JSOTF-N needed the invaluable assistance and support of the Peshmerga, they had another strategically significant mission. They also needed to prevent the Kurds from acting in any way that would provoke a Turkish military response to prevent Kurdish expansion such as declaring autonomy or seizing terrain, cities or oilfields.[220]

CFLCC was determined to keep Iraqi Divisions fixed in the north and prevent them from reinforcing Baghdad, and believed conventional forces were needed to maintain a viable Northern Front.[221] Without the 4th Infantry Division, SOF and Kurdish troops would fight alone until conventional forces could fight their way north.[222] The Third Army back up plan was to employ the 173d Airborne Brigade, commanded by Col. Bill Mayville.[223] In the original plan, the Italy-based 173d Airborne Brigade was to deploy through Turkey and operate under the 4th Infantry Division. Instead, the airborne troops would deploy and operate in support of JSOTF-N, providing a conventional ground force capability in Northern Iraq.

Located within Kurdish held territory, 30 miles south of the Turkish border and only 40 miles from Iran, CENTCOM selected Bashur Airfield in Northern Iraq as the place to establish a conventional presence.[224] Normally, the airfield had little significance. Built by an oil company to receive supplies, Bashur airfield was a simple, solid, 6700 foot runway with no tower, hangers, or

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[218] Interview with Maj. Derek Jones, Former Assistant S-3 of 3d Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group. 12 March 2009.

[219] Gordon and Trainor. Page 386. The Green Line was the unofficial demarcation line between Saddam controlled and Kurdish controlled territory.

[220] Ibid., 386- 387.

[221] Tunnell, ix.

[222] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 223.

[223] Gordon and Trainor, 514.

[224] The distance information was extracted from available maps.

other basic infrastructure.[225] While the runway itself could support C-17 landings for the build-up of forces and logistics, it only had enough space for one to two aircraft to be on the ground at a time.[226] Because of the airfield was located well within Kurdish controlled territory, 40 km north of the Iraqi Army positions, the air defense threat was relatively low, a critical concern for airborne or sustained air movement operations.[227] While the general area was protected by U.S. Special Forces and Kurdish militia operating in the area, the decision was made to introduce the 173d Airborne Brigade with a parachute insertion.[228] With extremely limited ramp space on the airfield, the jump allowed a large number of soldiers to get on the ground quickly, saving hours that would have been required for the same number of aircraft to land, unload and takeoff.[229] Additionally, the strategic information campaign provided by the jump would significantly contribute to the operational goal to paralyze the Iraqi command decision process. The rapid introduction of new forces from the north augmented operations that made it appear that the coalition forces could strike anywhere, anytime from any direction.

The previous year, the 173d Airborne Brigade was created by expanding from a single airborne battalion plus headquarters to a full brigade, reaching initial operating capability within a month prior to deploying to Iraq.[230] The 173d Airborne Brigade was composed of two infantry battalions: 1st Battalion 508th Infantry (Airborne) and 2d Battalion 503d Infantry (Airborne), plus

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[225] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 227.

[226] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 223; Interview with Col. Dominic J., former commander of 2-503 IN (ABN), 7 March 2009.

[227] Interview with Lt.Col. Mark Grdovic, Former S-3, 3d Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, 14 March 2009.

[228] Gordon and Trainor, 388.

[229] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 227.

[230] Caraccilo. 2d Battalion 503d Infantry was uniquely prepared for the jump into Iraq, having conducted twelve airborne operations into eleven different countries during from March 2002 to March 2003. This prepared the paratroopers for the inherent uncertainty of dropping into unfamiliar territory and still accomplish the mission with limited guidance.

a field artillery battery and other support elements.[231] Because the Brigade first thought they would deploy by ship and move with the 4th Infantry Division through Turkey, all of their equipment was staged at Campy Darby, just outside of Livorno, Italy, and prepared for ship movement.[232] However, when the mission changed to an airborne insertion, the Brigade had only days to move everything over 200 miles to Aviano Air Base and reconfigure for air movement.

While the 4th Infantry Division was held up from entering Turkey, the 173d Airborne Brigade was placed under Operational Control (OPCON) to Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC), then placed under Tactical Control (TACON) to JSOTF-N.[233] This unusual command arraignment placed one Colonel and conventional forces under the direction of another Colonel and SOF. Due to the unusual command relationship, personality conflicts amongst various leaders regarding their missions and roles, and a rapidly changing situation on the ground in Iraq, the 173d and JSOTF-N were never fully integrated during planning or execution. This was despite continuous liaison between the 173d Airborne Brigade and JSOTF-N. The initial guidance given by CFSOCC was for the 173d Airborne Brigade to conduct a demonstration of U.S. resolve in northern Iraq providing a credible presence to prevent

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[231] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 79.

[232] On Point interview with Lt.Col. Dominic Caraccilo.

[233] Grdovic; Operational control is the authority to perform those functions of command over subordinate forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction necessary to accomplish the mission. Operational control normally provides full authority to organize commands and forces and to employ those forces as the commander in operational control considers necessary to accomplish assigned missions; it does not, in and of itself, include authoritative direction for logistics or matters of administration, discipline, internal organization, or unit training. JP 1-02, 397. Tactical control is the command authority over assigned or attached forces that is limited to the detailed direction and control of movements or maneuvers within the operational area necessary to accomplish missions or tasks assigned. Tactical control is inherent in operational control. JP 1-02, 539.

movement of Iraqi Divisions, influence Turkey, and deter Kurdish autonomous factions, while being prepared to secure key oil facilities near Kirkuk, and to rapidly employ in support of JSOTF-N.[234] The 173d Airborne Brigade focused initial mission planning on simply seizing Bashur Airfield to facilitate buildup of combat power of the Brigade, in essence a mission to support itself.[235] While in Italy, there was limited planning for possible follow-on missions after the jump and reinforcement of the airfield. Pre-invasion meetings between 173d Airborne Brigade and JSOTF-N planners did not result in well-developed plans or contingencies for how the 173d Airborne Brigade would integrate with JSOTF-N operations, even though the 173d Airborne Brigade was directed to prepare to support them.[236] Still, the Brigade staff prepared estimates for operations in and around Irbil and Kirkuk.[237] Because the 173d Airborne Brigade anticipated they would need to secure the airfield for several days, they believed they could use that time to integrate with the JSOTF-N forces and plan for following missions based on the situation on the ground.

With U.S. forces and Peshmerga on the ground around the airfield, the jump was considered "permissive," that is they did not expect to receive enemy fire during insertion.[238] Still, commanders and staffs prepared for any contingency. Responsibility for securing the airfield was divided between the two infantry battalions. 1st Battalion 508th Infantry (Airborne), commanded by Lt.Col. Harry D. Tunnell IV, was the Brigade main effort with a mission to secure

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[234] Grdovic.
[235] On Point Interview with Maj. Steve Michael.
[236] Grdovic.
[237] Michael.
[238] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 227.

the southeast side of the runway and prepare to receive C-17s within six hours of landing.[239] Simultaneously, the paratroopers 2d Battalion 503d Infantry (Airborne), commanded by Lt.Col. Dominic J. Caraccilo, would secure the northeast side of the objective.[240]

On the night of 25 March, fourteen 173d Airborne Brigade personnel, to include the Brigade S-1, Maj. Phillip Chambers, men of the Brigade's Long Range Surveillance Detachment (LRSD) and an Air Force tactical air controller, flew to Bashur Airfield in advance of the Brigade.[241] Flying from Constanta, Romania, they landed in the middle of the night, arriving via MC-130 Combat Talon.[242] Immediately after landing, they linked up with a Special Forces team already on the ground at Bashur. The Brigade soldiers were to establish satellite communication with the airborne force and serve as the Drop Zone Support Team to control the drop.[243] The weather and visibility was very poor the next day, but fortunately cleared in time to conduct the jump.[244]

The 62d Airlift Wing based out of McChord Air Force Base, WA was tapped to conduct the airlift of the 173d Airborne Brigade personnel and equipment, to include the airdrop and five nights of air landings.[245] Once Turkey opened its airspace to the U.S., the aircraft only had to make a 4 ½-hour flight from Aviano Airbase into Iraq.[246] The relatively short flight did not require an in-flight refueling and minimized jumper fatigue.

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[239] Ibid., 228.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid., 225.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Tunnell, 7.
[246] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 223

The evening of 26 March 2003, five C-17s loaded with heavy drop platforms, followed by ten C-17s with jumpers, entered Iraqi airspace at 30,000 feet before rapidly descending to 1000ft for the jump.[247] Flying from northwest to southeast over the airstrip, the heavy drop aircraft delivered several loads of brigade equipment; to include HMMWVs for infantry companies, heavy weapons, 105mm towed artillery pieces, and medical equipment. Following the heavy drop were ten troop carrying aircraft were loaded with 100 jumpers each. With each jumper overloaded with equipment and only 58 seconds of green light, 963 soldiers jumped while 32 did not make it out of the aircraft.[248] Jumping on the 'red light' was not an option. Because of a mountain range to the east rising approximately 3000 ft above the drop zone, the aircraft would have to immediately accelerate and gain altitude once the red light came on.[249] Any trooper exiting at that time could become caught in the jet wash and result in death.[250]

At approximately 1900 (Zulu) on 26 March, the 173d Brigade Commander Col. William Mayville, was the first paratrooper to step out into the pitch-black darkness.[251] In addition to the two infantry battalions, other jumping units included D/319 Field Artillery battery, the 74th Long Range Surveillance (LRS) Detachment, plus combat engineers and Stinger air defense teams.[252] Because of the extreme wake turbulence caused by the C-17, the paradrop was not conducted in a close aircraft formation, as was common with C-47 aircraft during World War II, but instead with a significant interval between each aircraft. Therefore, each aircraft determined individual release

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[247] Ibid., 227.
[248] Ibid.
[249] This elevation information was extrapolated from available map data.
[250] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 227.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid., 228. Included in the airdrop was a nine man forward surgical team who, within a day, set up a working operating room with equipment delivered in the heavy drop. Page 229.

points. This, coupled with the near zero illumination preventing pilots and jumpmasters from identifying landmarks, meant some aircraft released their troops too early while others dropped too late. The result was the paratroopers were widely scattered over about 10,000 yards.[253] Problems were not limited to the scattered drop, as the previous days' rain turned the entire drop zone area into mud that was ankle deep and often deeper.[254] While the mud made for a relatively soft landing, it also made it difficult for the jumpers to assemble quickly while carrying extremely heavy rucksacks. Many of the vehicles became mired and took days to recover.[255] Despite the mud, extreme darkness, unrecoverable vehicles and scattered drop, troopers remained focused on the mission and commander's intent remembered from the detailed briefings and rehearsals in Italy. Individual parachutes were stored in kit bags after the jump to prevent them from becoming a hazard to air landing aircraft and before being picked up one to two days later, once the area was secured. Two hours after the jump, the brigade occupied all initial blocking positions.[256] Within six hours, the airfield was again open for air landing operations.[257] At fifteen hours, the brigade was completely assembled, sustaining 19 jump injuries, only four of which required evacuation.[258] The Northern Front was open, at least from a conventional force perspective.

Over the course of four days, seventeen C-17 Globemaster IIIs moved 2160 soldiers and 381 pieces of equipment from Aviano to Bashur in 62 sorties.[259] After the initial airdrop, approximately twelve C-17 sorties landed per day to deliver follow on soldiers, equipment and

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[253] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 228. Even with the C-17, the most modern and technologically advanced transport aircraft, paratroopers were scattered well off of the drop zone.
[254] Tunnell, 15.
[255] On Point Interview with Capt. William Jacobs.
[256] Fontenot, et al., 228.
[257] Tunnell, x.
[258] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 228 - 229.
[259] Ibid., 229.

supplies, to include humanitarian supplies. While the Bashur airfield was dedicated to receiving units and equipment for the 173d Airborne Brigade, all aircraft supporting JSOTF-N forces were diverted to Sulaymaniyah.[260] By 29 March, the entire 173d Airborne Brigade was on the ground and prepared to conduct follow-on operations.[261] The movement of the Brigade was just a part of the overall airlift effort. As more troops entered the region, sustainment requirements rose almost exponentially. Relying solely on an air bridge indefinitely would have been nearly unsustainable, as fuel requirements alone reached 10,000 gallons per day.[262] Eventually, an agreement was reached with Turkey that would allow the U.S. to contract for fuel with Turkish companies.

The paratroopers were not the only conventional force moving into northern Iraq. While the armored vehicles of 4th Infantry Division were denied the land routes through Turkey and were finally diverted to Kuwaiti ports, mechanized forces from U.S. Army Europe were airlifted to Bashur airfield to support to the 173d Airborne Brigade. In February 2003, 1st Battalion 63d Armor, commanded by Lt.Col. Kenneth Riddle, assumed the United States Army Europe (USAREUR) Immediate Ready Task Force (IRTF) mission.[263] The USAREUR IRTF was a C-17 deployable force of about 300 personnel with five M1 tanks, five M2 Infantry Fighting Vehicles, fifteen M113 Armored Personnel Carriers, plus support elements.[264] On 24 March, 1-63Armor reported to Rhine Ordnance Barracks where they received, prepared and loaded their equipment,

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[260] Jones.
[261] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 229.
[262] Ibid., 230.
[263] On Point interview with Lt.Col. Kenneth Riddle, Commander of 1-63 AR. Interview on 28 May 2003 in Kirkuk, Iraq by Lt.Col. Manning.
[264] Interview with Maj. Robert Murphy, Commander of B/2-2 IN. Maj. (then Capt.) Murphy's infantry company was attached to Lt.Col. Riddle's battalion as part of the IRTF. TF 1-63AR was essentially two companies of two platoons each, plus the battalion staff and support assets.

finally beginning deployment on 8 April.[265] Because of competing airlift demands of JSOTF-N, the 173d Airborne Brigade, and TF 1-63, Lt.Col. Riddle's two company task force with battalion headquarters element arrived in a piecemeal manner, taking over two weeks to fully assemble.[266] This significantly hindered his unit's ability to support the Brigade's initial operations. Even though the IRTF equipment was supposedly well maintained, tracked vehicles inherently have high maintenance and logistic requirements. Without basic parts, recovery assets, or adequate fuel supply, TF 1-63 was unable to support the Brigade's later attack into Kirkuk, not arriving in the city until two days later. Due to planning and prioritization of airlift assets outside of the control of Lt.Col. Riddle, the IRTF was immediately ready for deployment, but not necessarily rapidly deployed, and due to maintenance and logistic requirements, not immediately ready for sustained employment once in theater.

On 28 March, two nights after the jump by the 173d Airborne Brigade jump, Special Forces and Peshmerga attacked an Ansar al-Islam (AI) enclave along Iranian border region.[267] This AI force was considered a significant threat by the Kurds, as they oriented significant forces towards containing them. By smashing the AI camp, killing and dislocating the fighters, the Peshmerga were much more willing and able to commit more forces against the Iraqi Army along the green line.

From about 26 March to 10 April the Brigade established a lodgment and defended the airhead around Bashur. They conducted area reconnaissance and security patrols, established

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[265]On Point interview with Lt.Col. Kenneth Riddle, Commander of 1-63 AR. Rhine Ordnance Barracks is located near Kaiserslautern, Germany and is adjacent to Ramstein Air Base.- http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/rhein-barracks.htm.

[266] On Point interview with Lt.Col. Kenneth Riddle.

[267] Jones. Gordon and Trainor in *Cobra II* incorrectly state the attack was on 26 March, the same night as the airborne assault.

checkpoints and took additional measures to prevent disruption of airfield operations. Simultaneously, the Brigade began planning for follow-on operations in support of JSOTF-N.[268] Between 6 and 9 April, 1st Battalion 508th Infantry (Airborne) conducted artillery and mortar raids in support of Special Forces and Peshmerga operations against Iraqi Army infantry defensive positions.[269] The Brigade also moved one battalion to conduct operations around Irbil, seizing a small airfield.[270] For the most part, these were limited operations in support of JSOTF-N which did not capitalize on all available capabilities of the Brigade.

While the 173d Airborne Brigade and JSOTF-N were conducting an economy of force operation to keep Iraqi forces from reinforcing Baghdad, coalition forces were rapidly advancing northward to the capital. On 3 and 4 April, the 3d Infantry Division attacked and rapidly seized Baghdad International Airport.[271] Over the following several days, the mechanized forces continued their attack into the city. On 10 April, the 3d Infantry Division completed the last major fighting in Baghdad.[272]

On 9 and 10 April, nearly simultaneous with the fall of Baghdad, the JSOTF-N and the 173d Airborne Brigade made perhaps one of its most significant contributions to the Northern Front effort. With the crumbling of Baghdad and the regime, most of conventional Iraqi Army resistance shattered throughout the country. Many Iraqi Army soldiers discarded their uniforms and melted into the population. Police and other government institutions disappeared, creating a vacuum filled by rioting, violence and looting in many areas, to include the city of Kirkuk.

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[268] On Point interview with Lt.Col. Dominic Caraccilo.
[269] Tunnell, 15.
[270] Jacobs.
[271] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 302-304.
[272] Ibid., 377.

Kirkuk with its nearby oil fields and oil production facilities was one of the most strategically significant areas in northern Iraq.[273] Additionally, the city was home to both Kurds and Arabs.[274] It was feared that significant Kurdish expansion into regions of Iraq south of the Green Line, might spark a Kurdish declaration of autonomy and associated repercussions in the large Kurdish regions of Turkey and Iran. The appearance of Kurds taking control of key areas, such as the oil fields of Kirkuk, was certainly not tolerable to the Turkish government. Any impression that the Kurds were taking control, or that the U.S. was unable to maintain control of the Kurds, could result in a Turkish military response. By 9 April, 3d Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group with PUK Peshmerga fought and expelled most of the Iraqi forces in and around Kirkuk and began working to maintain control of the city.[275] Lt.Col. Ken Tovo, commander of 3d Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, told Col. Mayville that the 173d Airborne Brigade needed to get into the city right away to "stabilize the situation."[276] On 10 April, with most of the Brigade still around Irbil, 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne), moved south toward Kirkuk without external support or other enablers, and positioned to attack into city.[277] The battalion's original orders were to not become decisively engaged and to only conduct limited night attacks.[278] Once near Kirkuk, the local Special Forces team commander advised Lt.Col. Caraccilo that the city was "imploding" and that it was imperative that he needed to get his forces into the town right away. With limited communication with higher, the battalion finally received clearance to move south into the city. 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne) advanced and seized the high ground that

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[273] Ibid., 230.
[274] Gordon and Trainor, 513.
[275] Grdovic.
[276] Gordon and Trainor, 514.
[277] On Point interview with Lt.Col. Dominic Caraccilo.
[278] Ibid.

overlooked the city. The single battalion then secured two additional critical nodes which had been identified in the Brigade plan, to include the oil stabilization plant, before the rest of the Brigade arrived that night. The next day, both Brigade and JSOTF-N soldiers conducted operations to control the critical city infrastructure and provide security to the population. Shortly thereafter, the Brigade transitioned into conducting stability operations such as maintaining security, recruiting police, establishing governments, and targeting Fedayeen and Ansar al Islam fighters.[279] Later, Secretary of State Colin Powell called Turkish foreign minister Abdullah Gull, telling him that the situation in Kirkuk was under control and the Peshmerga would leave the city. On 11 April, Gull stated "There is no need at this time for intervention on our part" confirming the success of the 173d Airborne Brigade and Special Forces soldiers and their strategic impact in the Northern Front.[280]

In late April and early May 2003, elements from the 4th Infantry Division finally made their way northward from Kuwait to the vicinity of Kirkuk. At that time, the 173d Airborne Brigade was detached from JSOTF-N control, attached to the 4th Infantry Division and continued to operate in and around Kirkuk, for the duration of their deployment.[281]

Tactically, the introduction of the 173d Airborne Brigade into Northern Iraq provided the Special Operations Forces a capability that they did not normally have alone- the ability to seize and hold terrain. The airborne operation itself delivered nearly 1000 troops plus vehicles and heavy weapons within minutes. The Brigade was in its' blocking positions and capable of receiving aircraft six hours, and fully assembled and ready for operations within 15 hours. The

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[279] Ibid.
[280] Gordon and Trainor, 515.
[281] Interview with Col. Dominic Caraccilo and Lt.Col. Mark Grdovic.

infantry battalions were prepared for immediate follow-on operations while additional forces and supplies later flowed in. Because of the extremely limited ramp space, Bashur airfield only facilitated a single aircraft to land, unload, and takeoff before the next aircraft could arrive. Weather permitting, air landing the same size force with the same fifteen C-17 aircraft would have taken well over twice as much time, and resulted in additional wear and tear on the runway surface. Even with the jump, the airfield required a continuous maintenance effort by airmen from the 86th Combat Readiness Group.[282] The paratroopers also brought with them all weather indirect fire capability with 105mm artillery and 120mm mortars, augmenting the close air support the SOF Soldiers normally had to rely on. Additionally, the 173d Airborne Brigade provided a force in the north to control and begin stability operations in the strategically important city of Kirkuk a month earlier than would have been possible from units arriving from the southern axis. Two factors could have improved the ability employ the 173d Airborne Brigade more rapidly, one uncontrollable while the other was by choice. The first factor was the conditions of the landing. The muddy drop zone mired vehicles which took days in some cases to recover. The extreme dispersion of the jumpers, laden with extreme loads and forced to tread through the wet and muddy terrain in extreme darkness, made complete assembly take several hours longer than might otherwise be necessary. While not every Brigade vehicle, piece of equipment, or unit was at 100% immediately after the jump, by the next day the unit was certainly capable of employment beyond security of the airfield. After the jump itself, additional brigade soldiers, vehicles and equipment arrived by airlanding C-17s. The paratroopers had to wait for vehicles, or develop another transportation plan, because the selected drop zone was so

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[282] Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, 228.

far away from the operational objective areas of Irbil and Kirkuk. The second factor was how well the 173d Airborne Brigade was integrated into the plans and operations of JSOTF-N. The 173d Airborne Brigade was directed to be able to rapidly employ in support JSOTF-N, yet few from either unit had a clear idea what that might look like.[283] A liaison from the 173d had been embedded with 10th Group during planning in Romania, yet there was a lack of appreciation of the capabilities of each other, the roles they could serve, or how the two units could complement each other in employment prior to the invasion.[284] This, coupled with personality conflicts between the leadership of the two units, resulted in much slower employment of the 173d Airborne Brigade than their capability actually allowed. For example, 2d Battalion 503d Infantry was not well incorporated into the overall plan to take Kirkuk, receiving often conflicting guidance from the 173d Brigade and JSOTF-N. Instead, 3d Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group with Peshmerga forces fought Iraqi defenders around the city on 9 April, while on the 10th Lt.Col. Caraccilo had to wait to get approval to move into Kirkuk in time to avert potential widespread violence and demonstrate that the U.S. was in control of the city. The brigade employed a large force to secure Bashur airfield, which was essentially behind friendly lines. Although the Brigade had battalions that were fully capable of being employed, they remain tied to the airfield for several days and conducted only limited support of JSOTF-N. A change in the priority of airflow away from the armor and mechanized forces, plus maintenance requirements, slowed the employment mechanized task force, making it unavailable during the advance to Kirkuk. Once

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[283] This observation is based on multiple interviews conducted by the author and interview transcripts by participants from both units.

[284] In several interviews, this same sentiment was expressed regarding the initial integration between the airborne and mechanized units.

TF 1-63 finally linked up with the 173d Airborne Brigade in Kirkuk, they provided invaluable support to the light infantry soldiers.

Operationally, the 173d Airborne Brigade and reinforcements created a conventional force northern front, albeit significantly smaller than the mechanized division envisioned in the original plan. It was very much an economy of force role. Because the Iraqis knew there were paratroopers from the 82d Airborne Division in Kuwait, they were likely anticipating an airborne operation to occur somewhere in Iraq. Without a U.S. ground route through Turkey, it appeared that any U.S. airborne assault would likely support the southern advance, not the north. The airborne operation helped to achieve the desired effect of making the U.S forces appear to be advancing from every direction at the same time in an attempt to paralyze the regime and its' decision-making. The rapid sequence of the 173d Airborne Brigade paradrop, the attack of Ansar al Islam by JSOTF-N and Peshmerga, and the increased bombing and artillery raids on Iraqi Army positions contributed to fixing Iraqi units in the north, keeping them from Baghdad and Tikrit.

The jump probably had the most significance at the strategic level. Information about the conduct of the jump was broadcast on international media shortly after it was complete. The strategic informational effect of the operation sent the message that the U.S. could project military force anywhere and at any time. The presence of the 173d Airborne Brigade in Northern Ira, contributed to keeping the ambitious Kurds in check, and served to prevent the Turks from possibly taking advantage of an opportunity to attack Kurdish positions inside the Iraq border-two significant political objectives. The occurrence of either of those actions would have vastly complicated efforts to bring stability to Iraq once major combat operations ceased. Finally, the introduction of the 173d Airborne Brigade in Northern Iraq provided a conventional force with the ability to conduct stability operations once Baghdad fell, which was particularly invaluable immediately after the fall of the strategic city of Kirkuk.

Conclusion

Airborne operations inherently involve high risk. First, there is the risk which is related to the airborne insertion itself, such as jump injuries, loss and damage of equipment, widely dispersed and vulnerable forces during assembly, suitable weather conditions, and the general risks inherent in complicated joint plans which require detailed synchronization. There are also the several operational risks of employing a lightly equipped, lightly armed and relatively immobile ABCT which has the potential to be immediately engaged with the enemy or become an isolated force if logistics or link up with another force fails. It is incumbent for the tactical and operational leadership to identify and mitigate those risks, and to integrate all available means to set conditions for success of the unit, and accomplishment of the mission.

First, the leadership and staff should assess the desired condition, objective or endstate in relationship to the overall operation and strategic setting. They should weigh the advantages and disadvantages of using an airborne insertion; usually it is the only insertion means available to accomplish the task. Generally, because an airborne operation is inherently inefficient and requires a large commitment of joint forces to set conditions, leaders should strive to gain the greatest effect possible for the effort. The operation on Corregidor provides an excellent example of an airborne force achieving significant effects across all three levels of war. Not coincidentally, of the three studied, it was also the operation with the most extreme risk and sustained the most casualties. Dropping directly onto the objective meant that the light infantry forces did not need significant mobility assets and were immediately engaged with the enemy. This is in contrast the 173d Airborne Brigade in North Iraq, who jumped onto an airfield a significant distance from Iraqi front line forces and had to wait to build combat power though several days of air landings of additional supplies and vehicles before conducting sustained follow-on operations. However, the Corregidor force did not have an option to do anything but jump on the objective. This is not to say one was more effective than the other. It is simply to compare two extreme cases. For the

Corregidor "Rock Force," the surprise and tactical advantage provided by the jump certainly resulted in fewer casualties than an amphibious assault alone. While the 503d PIR suffered significant casualties during the jump, it was far fewer than the Japanese suffered when they assaulted Corregidor after four months of siege in 1942.[285] Furthermore, the operational significance of the island required it to be seized at that time. For the Bashur force, their initial assigned mission was more strategic than tactical in nature. It is the responsibility of the unit leadership to determine what risks are acceptable in the context of the assigned mission. When asked if the 173d Airborne Brigade's mission to secure a lodgement at Bashur airfield was a 'combat jump,' Lt.Col. Caraccilo replied: "Absolutely. The idea is to be behind enemy lines in a somewhat permissive environment. You're not supposed to lose 30 percent of your unit to enemy fire."[286] Lt.Col. Caraccilo makes an excellent point from the perspective that in most situations, the ABCT is already undersized in manning and immediate capability following a jump. Taking losses just from the insertion compounds those limitations and is one of the foremost risk considerations of the ABCT commander.

Surprise is perhaps the most important risk mitigation measure available for the ABCT. If the conditions are properly set, the enemy will not expect the sudden appearance of paratroopers in their area and the airborne force can achieve their objectives and result in effects disproportionate to the size of the unit. This aspect is vital in not only mitigating risk, but also in offsetting the limitations of the ABCT. Surprise may be achieved by striking in a time, place or manner unexpected by the enemy. In each of the three airborne operations, the units tried to

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[285] Morton, 556. One Japanese officer stated only 800 of 2,000 men on the initial amphibious landing reached the shore.

[286] On Point interview with Lt.Col Caraccilo.

create and capitalize on the opportunity to catch the enemy unaware and unable to immediately counter the airborne force. In Corregidor, the terrain itself helped to convince the enemy that an airborne assault was unfeasible. The Corregidor defenders were isolated and unable to receive information that might hint about the 503d PRCT intentions. Also, and the amphibious assault on Mariveles, nearly within view of Corregidor, coupled with the continuous air and naval bombardment, contributed to the impression that an amphibious, rather than an airborne operation, was imminent. Once surprise was lost, the risk of a jump by the third lift was unacceptable and it was abandoned. In Operation Junction City, extreme secrecy and deception measures were implemented to prevent the enemy from knowing the time and place of the airborne mission. Certainly, this was important to prevent the enemy from making preparations to counter the parachute force. However, the same level of security was not maintained for the overall search and destroy mission. Therefore, if the enemy was aware of impending U.S. actions in the vicinity of War Zone C, the manner of insertion- parachute or helicopter- may not have mattered and still allowed the escape of the COSVN forces. For the 173d Airborne Brigade in North Iraq to achieve surprise, it was supported by the posturing of a brigade from the 82d Airborne Division in Kuwait. Also, CENTCOM's deception plan was developed to convince the Iraqis that the 82d Airborne Division would be employed around Tikrit, not in the North. [287] Furthermore, the perceived threat of the 4th Infantry Division focused Iraqi attention on a ground advance through Turkey rather than by air.

Due to the limited mobility, reliance on relatively light weapon systems, and austere logistic structure, the ABCT should be employed as a fully integrated part of the greater overall

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[287] Gordon and Trainor, 391.

operation. Link up with another force is nearly imperative. Again, the 503d PRCT in Corregidor well illustrates these ideas. The entire mission to retake Corregidor was well planned, to include rehearsals with the supporting air unit. The 503d PRCT and the 317th Troop Carrier Group trained together on several occasions, so they knew what to expect from each other. The 503d PRCT had also participated in multiple amphibious landings, so they fully understood the capabilities and challenges that 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry would face when they landed. All units meshed together toward a common objective with unity of effort and single mission commander. Finally, the 503d PRCT plan was very flexible, providing both air and sea lines of communication for reinforcement and resupply. This was critical in allowing the third battalion to be brought shore by landing craft rather than jump into intense enemy fire.

The 173d Airborne Brigade in Vietnam also developed a flexible and redundant plan to integrate all available units and assets. The parachute delivered battalion accomplished multiple tasks by securing the Brigade Headquarters and logistic area, maintaining security of the drop zone which was used to receive airdrop and helicopter delivered supplies, and maintained a active presence in the outer cordon. The Brigade also integrated helicopter and vehicle movement into its plan, to include M113 APCs. The incorporation of multiple maneuver and fire support assets into the 173d Airborne Brigade's plan had a synergy and increased effect on the enemy beyond what an airborne delivered force could accomplish alone.

The 173d Airborne Brigade in North Iraq may serve as an example of a missed opportunity, where the Brigade was not well integrated into the concurrent operations of JSOTF-N. Without a clear, common idea between the leaders and staffs of the 173d Airborne Brigade and JSOTF-N, the Brigade was slow to become engaged in the overall effort of the Northern Front. While the two infantry battalions were on the ground and ready to quickly conduct follow-on missions after the jump, they remained in the vicinity of the airfield for several days as C-17s delivered additional units and equipment, despite the permissive threat environment. Multiple interviews of soldiers from both conventional and SOF units indicate a lack of common

understanding of each other's capabilities. The same interviews also reveal completely different perspectives on how units were supposed to be integrated into the overall effort of the Northern Front. This view was shared by soldiers and leaders from JSOTF-N, the 173d Airborne Brigade, and the mechanized task force. Ultimately the units were able to work through their employment and command relationship problems, keep the airfield operational, and secure the city of Kirkuk. Still, one could speculate how the initial friction between units might have impacted operations if actions by the Iraqi Army or another event forced the 173d Airborne Brigade, to deploy and fight directly off of the airfield. A final consideration in the employment of the 173d Airborne Brigade was the initial 100% reliance on aircraft for reinforcement and resupply from Europe. As more forces were delivered, the logistic requirement rapidly increased, especially once the armor-mechanized forces landed. Fortunately, there were two operational airfields for redundancy; Bashur Airfield primarily supported the 173d Airborne Brigade while the Sulaymaniyah Airfield supported JSOTF-N. Airlift remained the primary logistic link until V Corps forces finally reached the Kirkuk region around early and mid-May 2003.

There are several areas outside the scope of this monograph that are worthy of additional study. Vital considerations for the successful airborne operations include the methods to sustain and support airborne forces after they are employed, as well as the means to extract those forces if required. Also, airborne operations are inherently joint operations, reliant on extremely limited and high demand Air Force airlift assets. A 2003 Air Force magazine article discusses some of the airlift problems encountered during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the services' challenge in

the future in providing adequate lift for multiple theaters of conflict.[288] An inherent drawback to the ABCT is the limited mobility immediately after insertion. The development and procurement of purpose-built light tanks and APCs or airborne specific equipment and weapons might increase the mobility, firepower and protection of an airborne force. The authors of *Air-Mech-Strike* have well illustrated the value and feasibility of a more mobile, better armed, air delivered force.[289] However, the process for procurement and training on new equipment and procedures often requires years before they are fully employed. This does not benefit the leader or soldier in an ABCT today. The audience for this monograph is intended to be those ABCT leaders and soldiers, who need to do the best with what they do have, versus what they should or might have.

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[288] John A. Tirpak, "The Squeeze on Air Mobility." *Air Force Magazine*, Volume 86, No. 7 (July 2003): 22-29. http://www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Documents/2003/July %202003/0703mobility.pdf (accessed 16 February 2009).

[289] David L. Grange, Huba Wass de Czege, Rich Liebert, Chuck Jarnot, Al Huber, Mike Sparks. *Air-Mech-Strike: Asymmetric Maneuver Warfare for the 21st Century.* Turner Publishing Company: Paducah, KY, 2002.

APPENDIX 1

Review of Current Airborne Doctrine

Current U.S. Army doctrine as discussed in FM 90-26, lists several fundamentals and characteristics of airborne operations. Airborne operations are characterized by complexity, joint operations, a planned link-up with follow-on forces, a robust, flexible command and control with emphasis on mission-type orders, detailed and well understood Standing Operating Procedures (SOP), and aggressive, rapid seizure of the assault objective(s).[290] Airborne operations require centralized, detailed planning with aggressive decentralized execution, adhere to the principle of simplicity and typically use a four phase "reverse planning sequence."[291] The four phases are the ground tactical plan, the landing plan, the air movement plan, and the marshalling plan. While the plan will be executed chronologically from the marshalling area to the objective, the planning process is conducted in reverse, from the objective areas back to the departure airfields. Each phase is planned in extreme detail to ensure the entire operation has the best possible chance of success, and that each phase fully supports the phase that follows.

Remembering that a parachute is just a way to get to the objective, actions on the objective must be first considered. The ground tactical plan serves as the foundation of a successful airborne operation and must drive all other planning. All subsequent planning is based on the planned actions on the ground by the assault forces and the subsequent operations. The ground

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[290] U.S. Department of the Army. *FM 90-26: Airborne Operations*.)Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, December 1990), 1-5.

[291] FM 90-26 *Airborne Operations*, 2-1.

tactical plan contains the same elements of any other infantry operation, but capitalizes on the elements of surprise and speed to rapidly build up combat power.[292]

A drop zone is simply an area designated by the ground unit commander where personnel and equipment are delivered by means of a parachute.[293] In an optimal situation, the ground tactical plan will normally dictate the number and location of drop zones as well as the sequencing of troops into the objective area. However, reality often interrupts the ideal. The number of available options for the ground scheme of maneuver are usually limited by the number, size or location of open areas suitable for use as drop zones.

Paratroopers are most vulnerable during the actual paradrop and assembly on the ground, therefore the Landing Plan is very detailed and must be well understood by all paratroopers and aircrews. Aspects of the plan must include aircraft airspeed, altitude and direction for flight over the drop zone. Very slow drop speeds increase the risk of an aircraft stalling and increases vulnerability of aircraft to ground fire. A high airdrop speed will result in fewer jumpers being able to exit on a given drop zone, jumpers becoming more dispersed, and increases the opening shock felt by the jumper when the parachute deploys. Also, high airdrop speeds often result in damaged parachute canopies as panels are 'blown out' due to the violent opening caused by the high speed.

Drop altitude is also carefully considered. Higher altitudes may make the drop aircraft more vulnerable to ground fire and air defense systems. High drop altitudes increase the

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[292] U.S. Department of the Army, U.S. Army Pathfinder School Student Handout, Ft Campbell, KY, June and July 2006. The Ft Campbell, KY Pathfinder School student handouts include previous writings of the author.

[293] U.S. Department of the Army. *FM 3-21.220: Static Line Parachuting Techniques and Training.* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, September 2003), 20-1.

vulnerability of jumpers to ground fire as they take more time to descend, while low altitudes may not provide enough time for the parachute to fully deploy and slow a jumper's rate of decent.

Suitable weather conditions are a critical condition for an airborne operation. High winds will cause jumpers to drift off the drop zone and land in trees or other hazards. Also, high winds increase the speed of lateral drift of a jumper on landing, causing a very hard landing and increased chance of injury. Hazards on and around a drop zone may significantly increase the risk of an airborne drop, or make it entirely unfeasible. For example, jumpers injured when landing into tall trees, power lines or large craters or jumpers drowning in water could cause so many casualties that the airborne force becomes ineffective before it gets off the drop zone. Commanders of airborne forces must carefully weigh the risks and make crucial decisions on how to mitigate these risks or to change or cancel a mission entirely.

Drop zones directly on top of the objective allow for the most surprise and rapid accomplishment of immediate mission, but will often expose troopers to intense hostile fire and increases risk of the airborne force of being isolated. Landing away from the objective and conducting a foot movement may be required when drop zone availability or the enemy situation requires it, yet may achieve the least amount of surprise. Also, landing away from an objective may make it difficult for troops to orient themselves to the terrain. Regardless of drop zone location, it is always difficult for units to re-assemble after soldiers and equipment are scattered across a vast area, especially at night. Well prepared plans and well rehearsed standing operating procedures conducted by trained, disciplined and fit soldiers are critical to minimize the inevitable confusion immediately following a drop.

The Air Movement Plan ensures the airborne unit get to the assigned drop zones and objectives at the assigned times with all available support, particularly supporting fires. The Marshalling Plan ensures that the correct personnel and equipment is secure, assembled, prepared and loaded onto the correct aircraft as per the ground tactical plan. Both of these phases sound simple in concept. In reality, the success or failure of a mission may occur based on the plans

during these phases. For example, units are frequently split up and dispersed on different aircraft. This is done for several reasons. First is a concept called tactical “cross-leveling.” For example, a unit will not place all key leaders or all items of critical equipment on a single aircraft. This is done in the event an aircraft becomes lost, shot down, or drops the troops in the wrong location, at least some leaders and critical equipment will still likely make it to the objective. A second reason a unit is split up on different aircraft is to be able to facilitate assembly and actions on assigned objectives. For example, a single C-130 aircraft dropping 60 soldiers from both troop doors will scatter the jumpers in a single line 2250 yards long. If a single unit placed all its troops on that aircraft, and that unit’s objective is near the trail edge of the drop zone, then there would be soldiers who would need to walk the entire length of the drop zone. If multiple units are conducting an airborne assault, they then can load each aircraft in a manner that will allow the soldiers to jump in a position that will allow them to land as close as possible to each objective, such as an objective on each end of the drop zone. What is most critical to understand about this cross leveling is the fact that after a unit arrives at the marshalling area and the jumpers are assigned to aircraft, there is virtually no way to re-assemble the unit to issue new guidance or make several, rapid changes to the plan. Contrast this to a mechanized unit where every vehicle has a radio and orders can be rapidly disseminated, even after the unit leaves its planning base or assembly area. Throughout the discussion of the airborne operations, it is important to understand these inherent risks of the landing phase of an operation. As a point of comparison when studying an airborne plan, a typical plan for a peacetime training airborne operation based on current doctrinal procedures follows: The maximum surface wind speed to conduct a training jump is 13

knots (15 MPH).[294] The planning airdrop airspeed for a single C-130 is 130 knots (150 MPH)[295] with a drop altitude of 800 feet.[296] This aircraft with 62 combat equipped jumpers will require a minimum un-waivered drop zone of 600 yards wide and 2125 yards long, requiring 43 seconds for all jumpers to exit in a single pass.[297] Time of decent for the jumpers is approximately 40 seconds.[298]

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[294] FM 3-21.220, 22-9.

[295] U.S. Department of the Air Force. *AFI 11-231: Computed Air Release Point Procedures.* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 31 August 2005), 128.

[296] FM 3-21.220, 15-1.

[297] U.S. Department of the Air Force. *AFI 13-217: Drop Zone and Landing Zone Operations. (*Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 10 May 2007), 10.

[298] FM 3-21.220, 2-8. Based on a rate of descent of 20 feet per second.

APPENDIX 2

Maps

The 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment Retakes Corregidor Island: 16 February 1944.

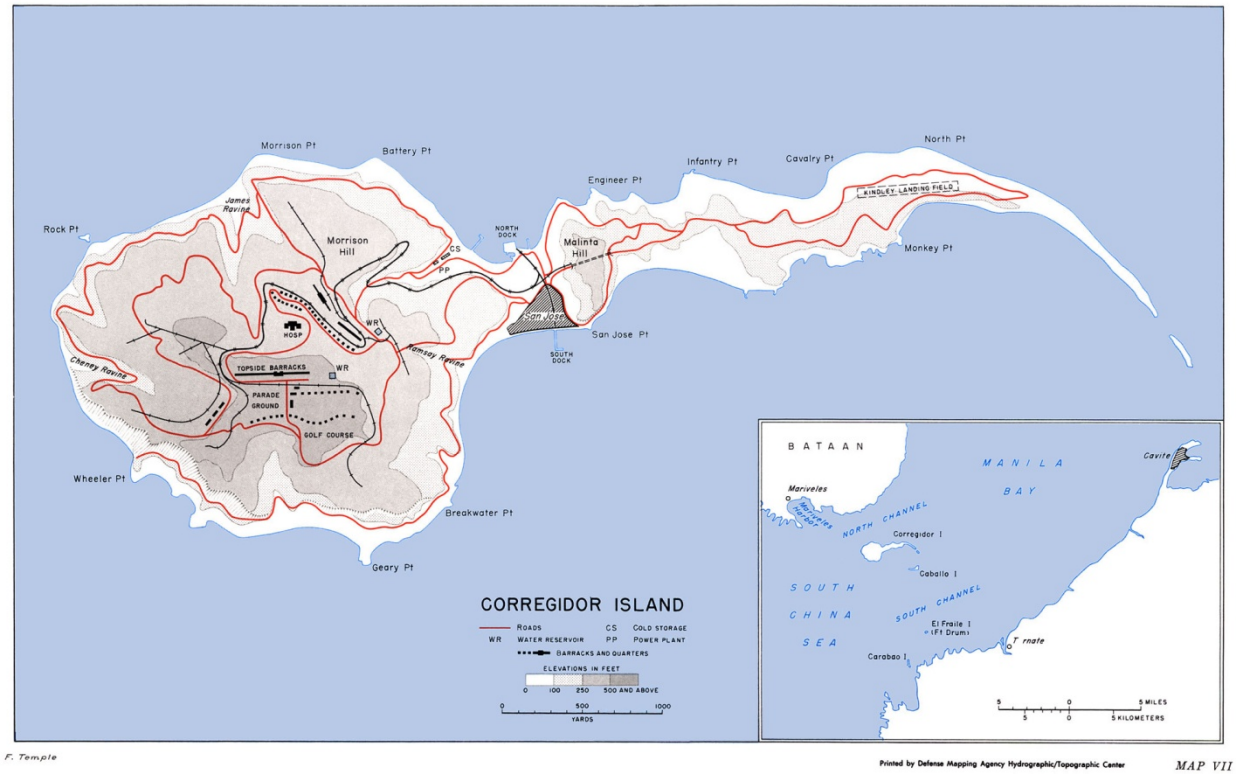

Figure 1. Corregidor Island.
Source: Smith, Robert R. *U.S. Army in World War II- The War in the Pacific: Triumph in the Philippines.* Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1993.

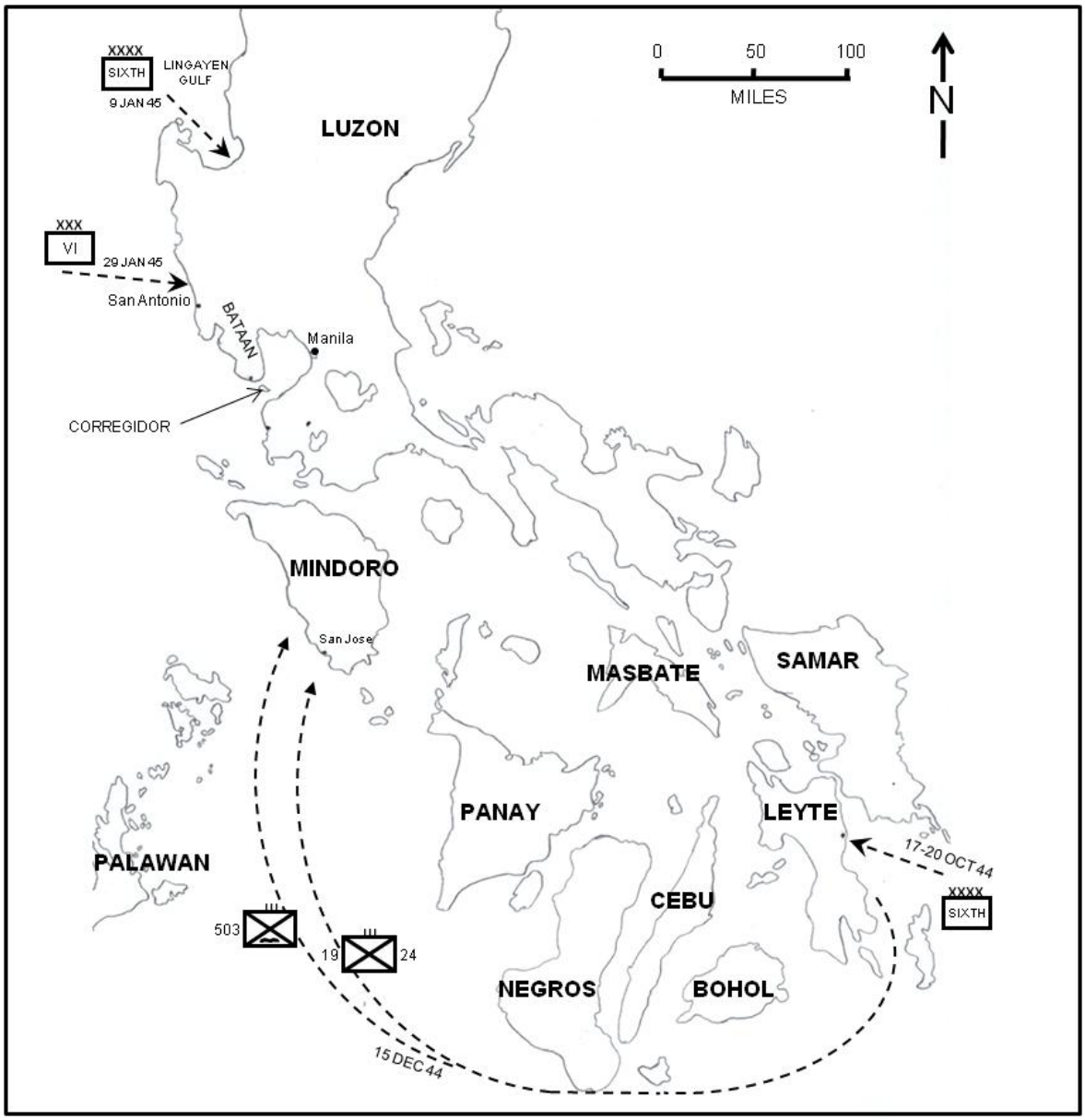

Figure 2. Philippines, 17 October 1944- 29 January 1945.

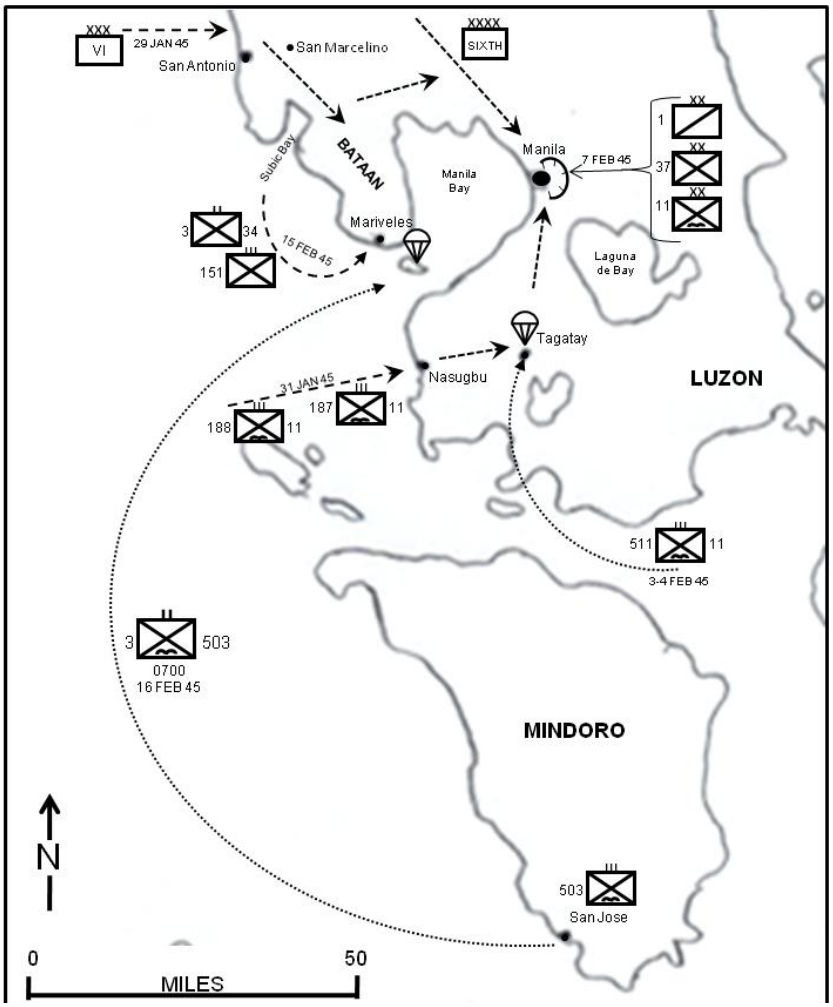

Figure 3. Philippines, 29 January - 16 February 1945.

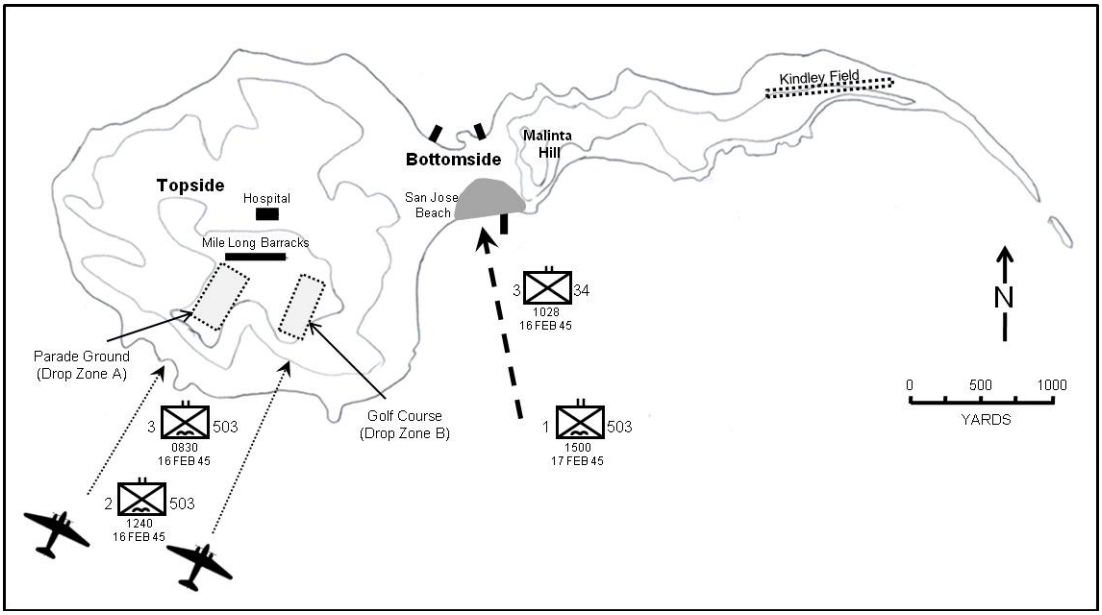

Figure 4. Corregidor, 16-17 February 1945.

The 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) in Operation Junction City: 22 February 1967.

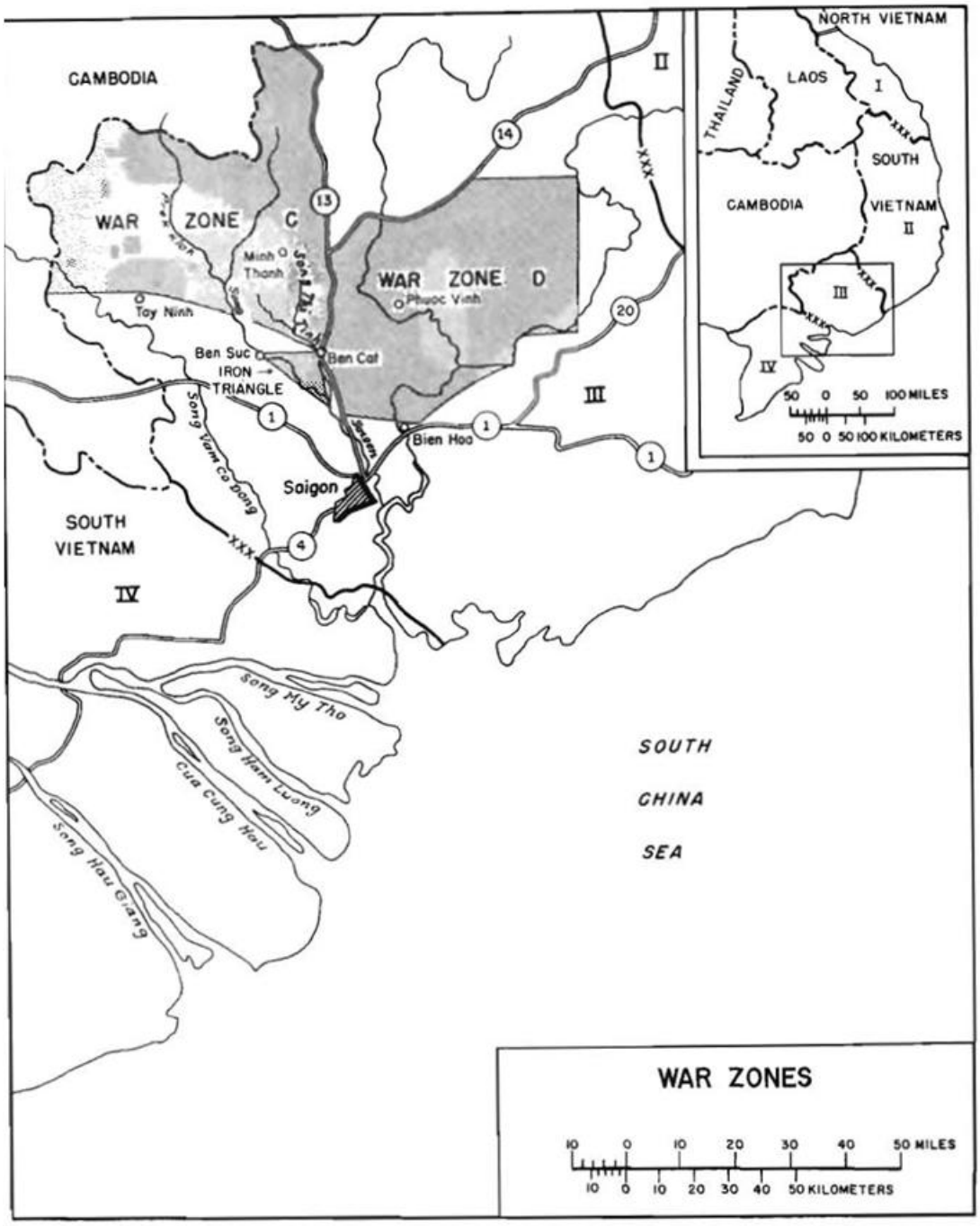

Figure 5. War Zone C.
Source: Rogers, Major Gen. Bernard W. *CMH Pub 90-7-1 Vietnam Studies Cedar Falls-Junction City: A Turning Point.* Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1974, 8.

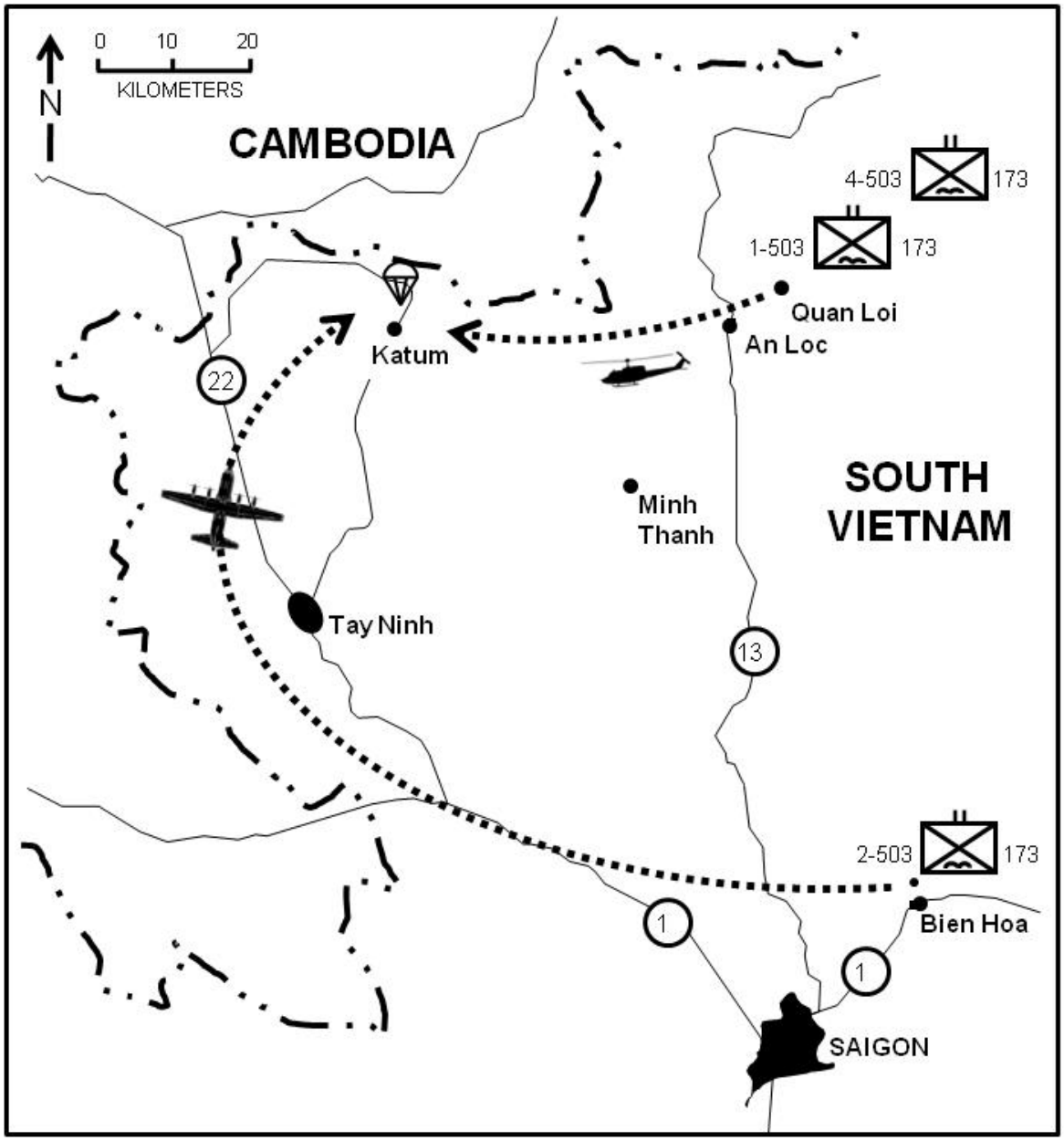

Figure 6. Air Movement of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate): 22 February 1967.

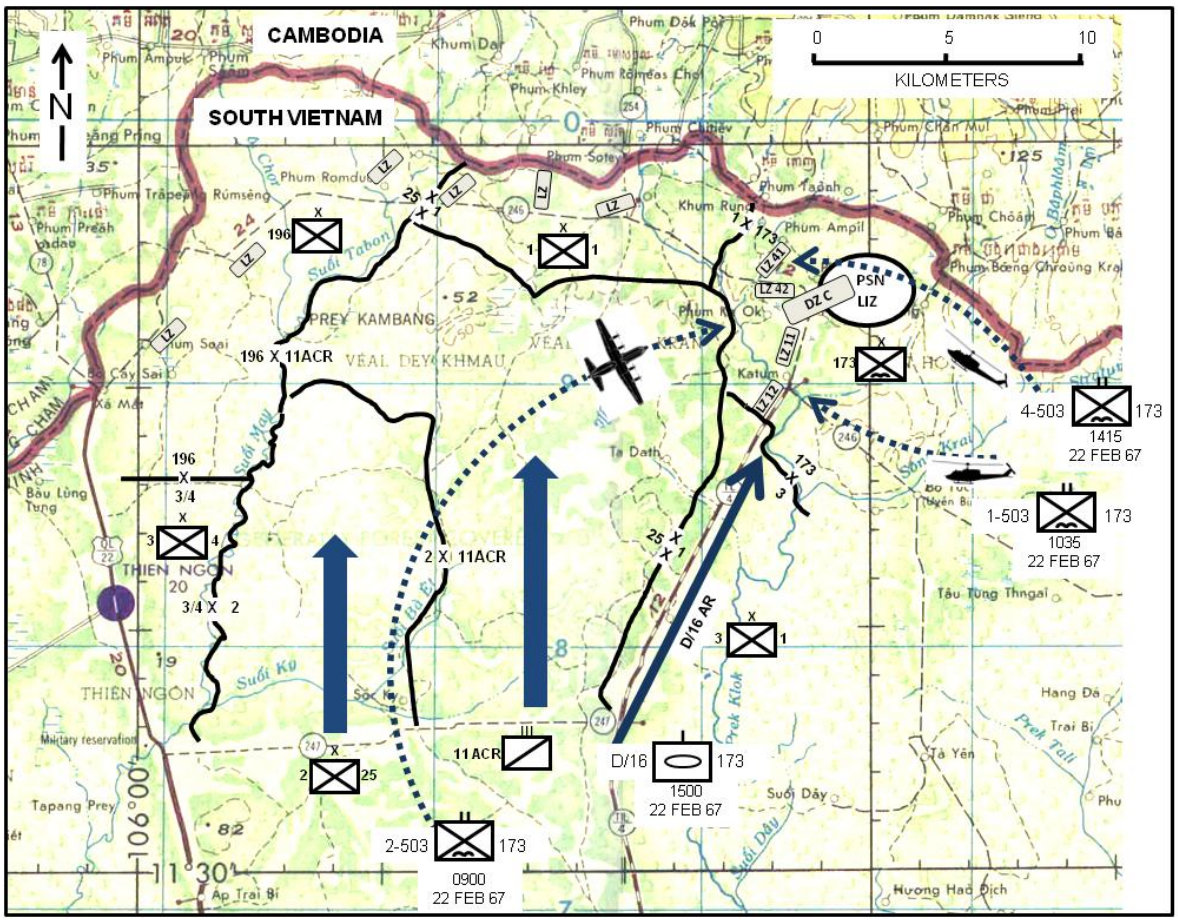

Figure 7. II Field Force Plan of Operations for Operation Junction City II.[299]

[299] 173d Airborne Brigade Combat AAR, Tab C, Pages 1-7; Rogers, 98—99.

The 173d Airborne Brigade Jumps onto Bashur Airfield, Iraq: 26 March 2003.

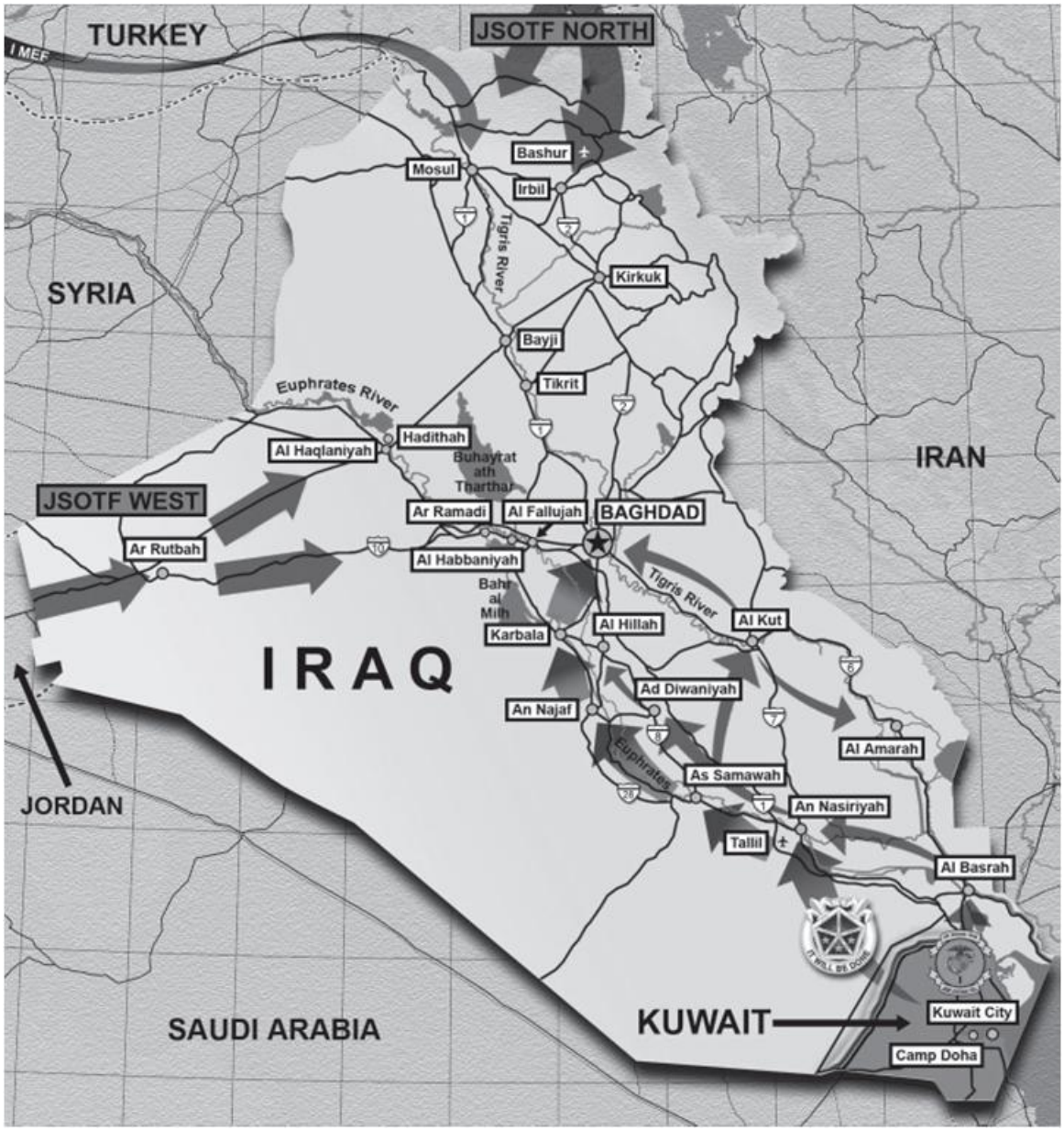

Figure 8. Ground Scheme of Maneuver in Iraq: March – April 2003.
Source: Gregory Fontenot, E.J. Degen and David Tohn. *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom.* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), Figure 9, 30.

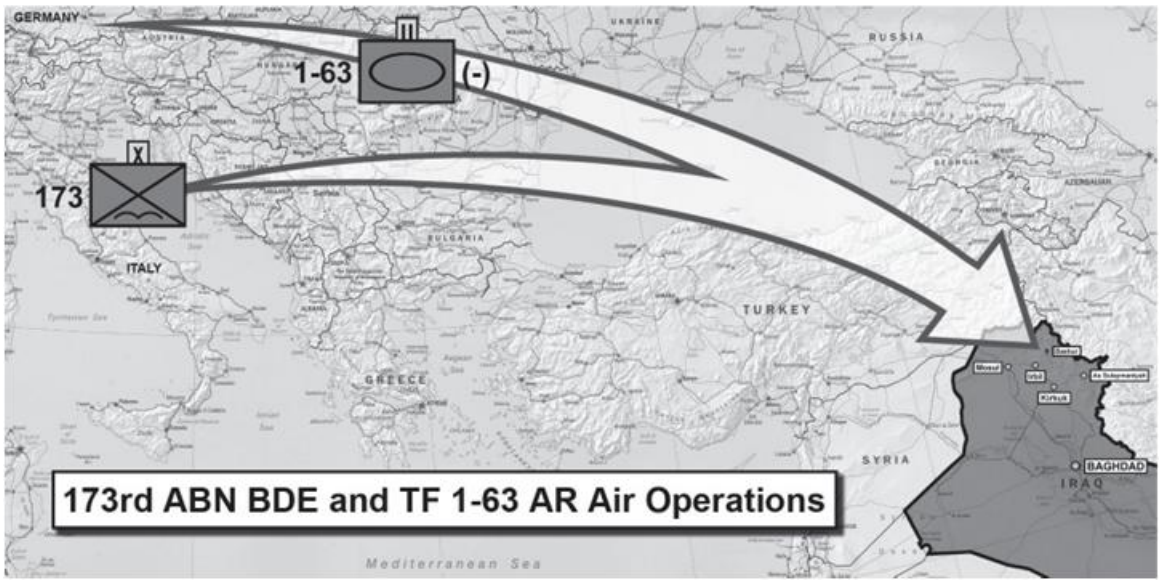

Figure 9. 173d Airborne Brigade and TF 1-63 Deployment from Europe to Iraq.
Source: Gregory Fontenot, E.J. Degen and David Tohn. *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom.* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), Figure 125, 224.

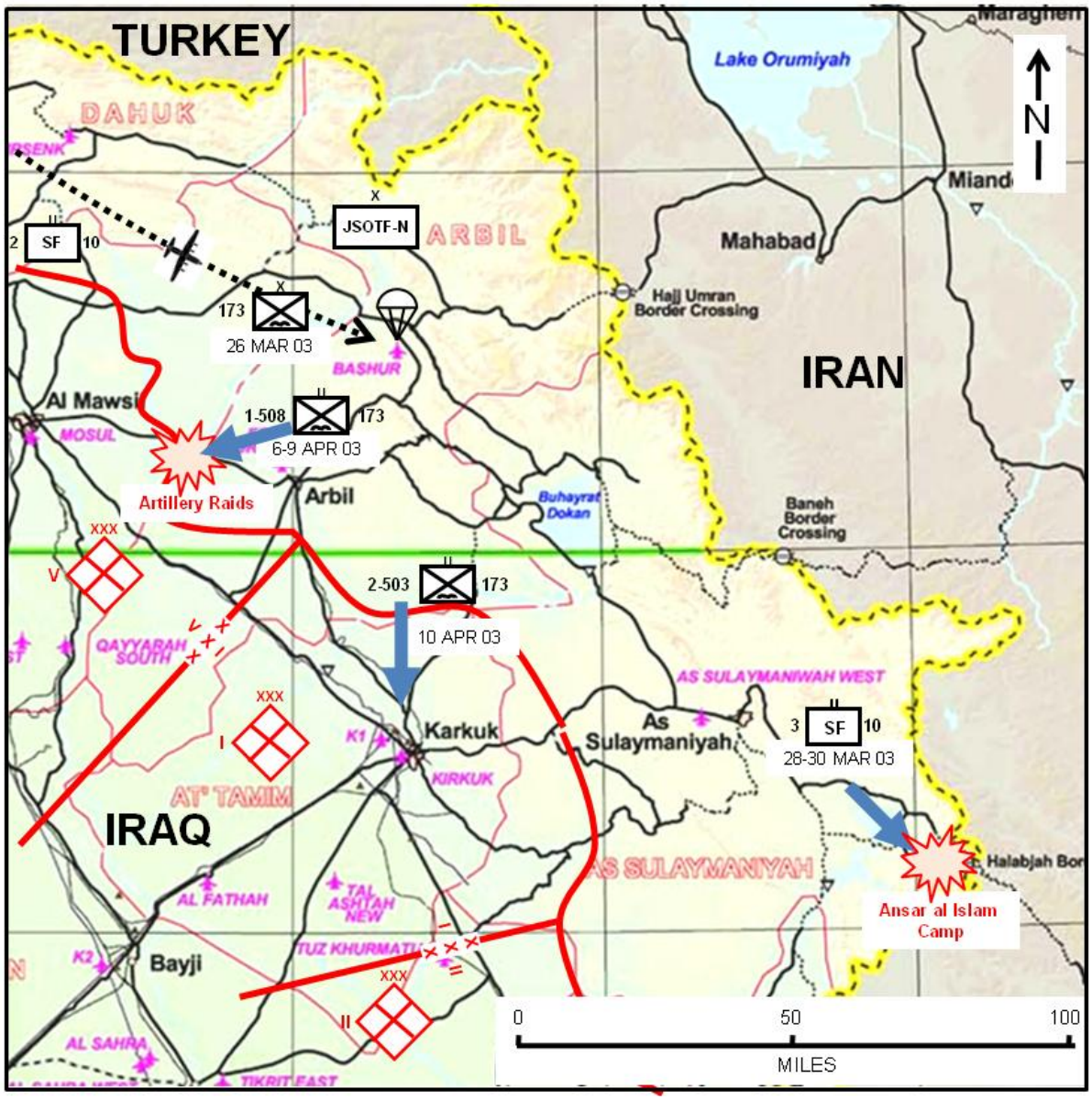

Figure 10. Operations in Northern Iraq: March – April 2003.[300]

[300] Tunnell,11; Grdovic.

APPENDIX 3

Organization of the Airborne Brigade Combat Team

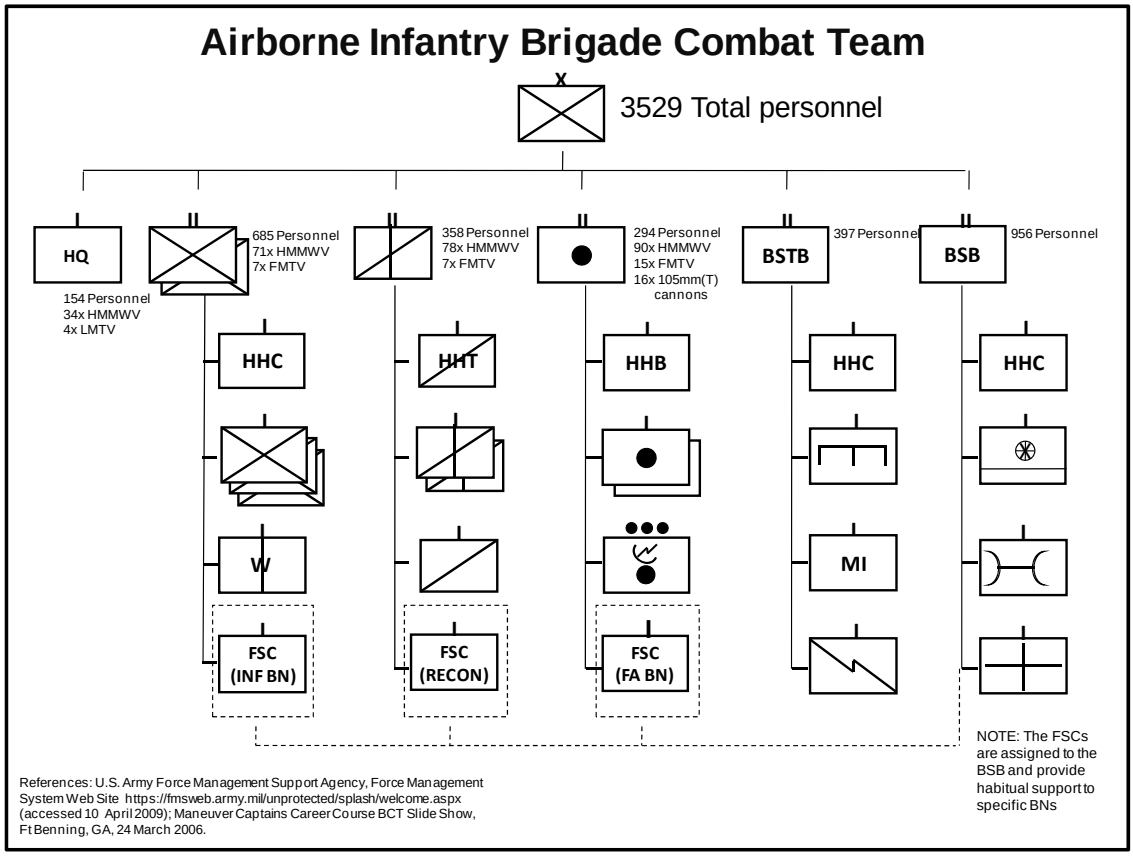

Figure 11. Post-Transformation Organization of the Airborne Infantry Brigade Combat Team: 2009.

APPENDIX 4

Historical Organizations of the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment and 173d Airborne Brigade

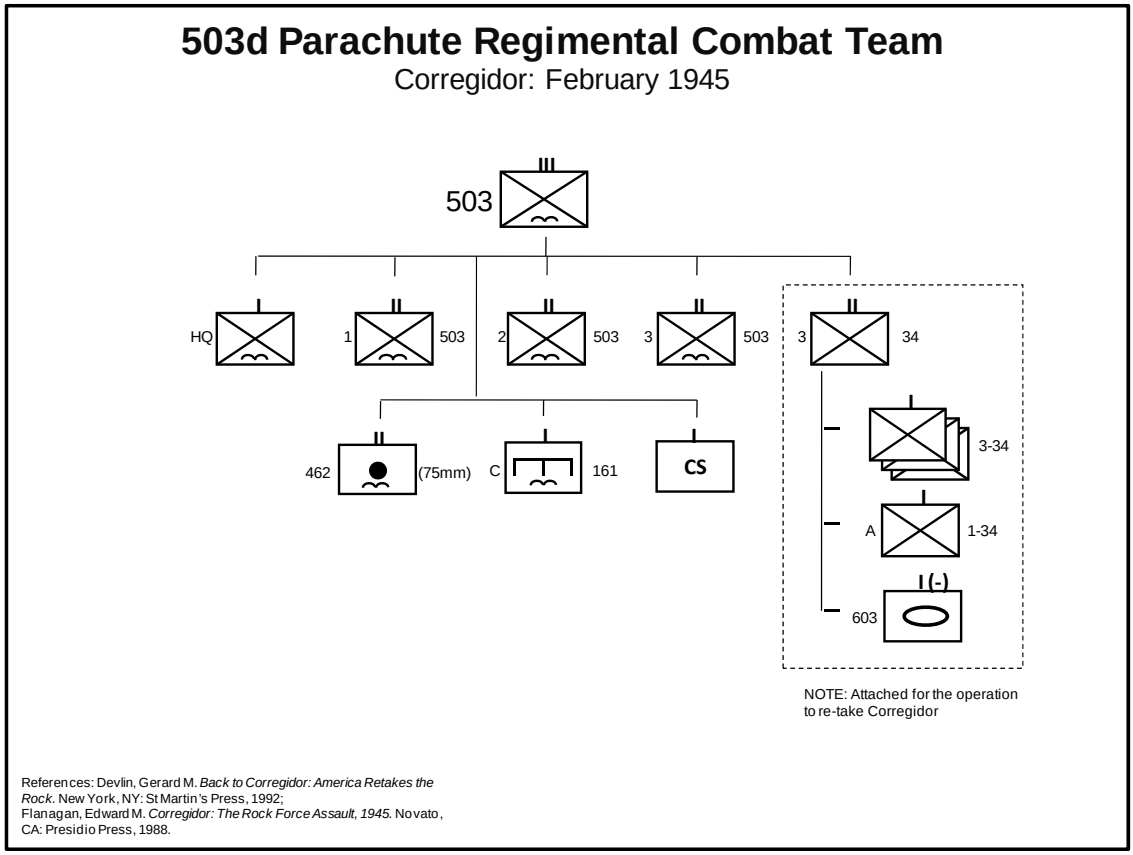

Figure 12. Organization of the 503d Parachute Regimental Combat Team to retake Corregidor Island.

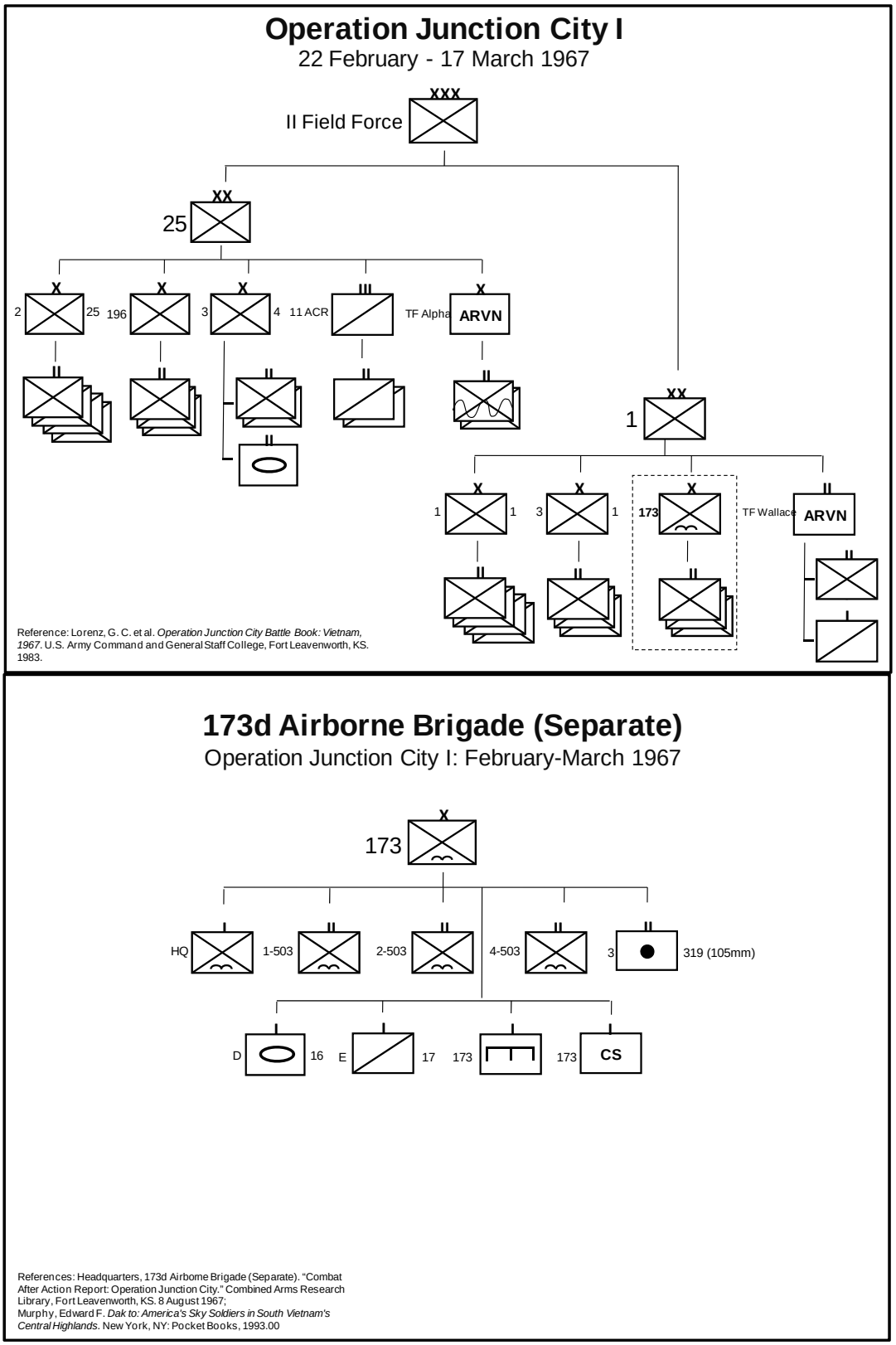

Figure 13. Organization of the II Field Force and the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) during Operation Junction City I.

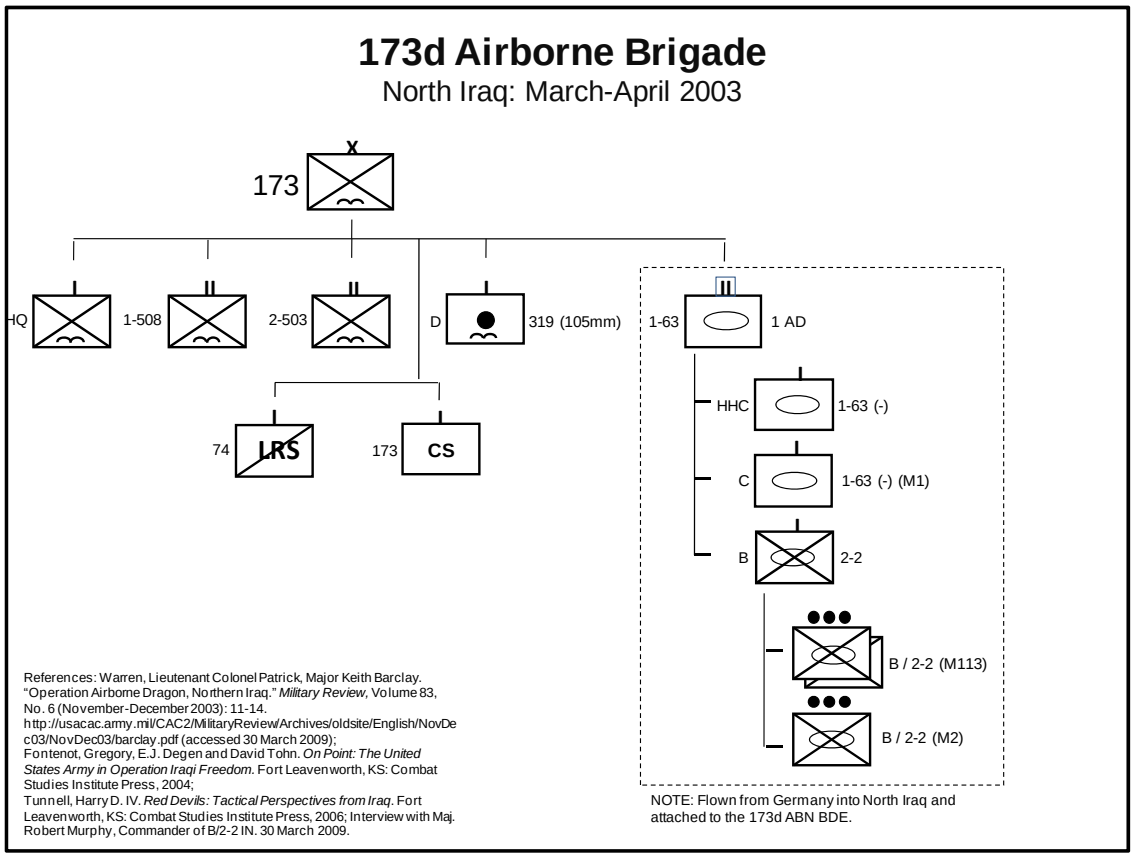

Figure 14. Organization of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) during Operation Northern Delay.

APPENDIX 5

503d Infantry Lineage and Honors

Lineage and Honors Information as of 7 March 2001

Constituted 24 February 1942 in the Army of the United States as the 503d Parachute Infantry (1st Battalion concurrently consolidated with the 503d Parachute Battalion [constituted 14 March 1941 in the Army of the United States and activated 22 August 1941 at Fort Benning, Georgia] and 2d Battalion consolidated with the 504th Parachute Battalion [constituted 14 March 1941 in the Army of the United States and activated 5 October at Fort Benning, Georgia] and consolidated units designated as the 1st and 2d Battalion, 503d Parachute Infantry) Regiment (less 1st, 2d, and 3d Battalions) activated 2 March 1942 at Fort Benning, Georgia (3d Battalion activated 8 June 1942 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina)
(2d Battalion reorganized and redesignated 2 November 1942 as the 2d Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry - hereafter separate lineage; new 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry, concurrently activated in Australia)

Regiment inactivated 24 December 1945 at Camp Anza, California

Redesignated 1 February 1951 as the 503d Airborne Infantry, allotted to the Regular Army, and assigned to the 11th Airborne Division

Activated 2 March 1951 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky

Relieved 1 March 1957 from assignment to the 11th Airborne Division; concurrently reorganized and redesignated as the 503d Infantry, a parent regiment under the Combat Arms Regimental System

Withdrawn 16 December 1986 from the Combat Arms Regimental System and reorganized under the United States Army Regimental System

Campaign Participation Credit
World War II: New Guinea; Leyte; Luzon (with arrowhead); Southern Philippines
Vietnam: Defense; Counteroffensive; Counteroffensive, Phase II (with arrowhead); Counteroffensive, Phase III; Tet Counteroffensive; Counteroffensive, Phase IV; Counteroffensive, Phase V; Counteroffensive, Phase VI; Tet 69/Counteroffensive; Summer-Fall 1969; Winter-Spring 1970; Sanctuary Counteroffensive; Counteroffensive, Phase VII; Consolidation I

Decorations
Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for CORREGIDOR
Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for BIEN HOA
Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for PHUOC VINH
Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for DAK TO
Presidential Unit Citation (Navy) for VIETNAM 1966
Valorous Unit Award for TUY HOA
Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army) for VIETNAM 1965-1967
Philippine Presidential Unit Citation for 17 OCTOBER 1944 TO 4 JULY 1945

1st Battalion 503d Infantry Lineage

Lineage and Honors Information as of 17 August 2006

Constituted 14 March 1941 in the Army of the United States as Company A, 503d Parachute Battalion.

Activated 22 August 1941 at Fort Benning, Georgia

Consolidated 24 February 1942 with Company A, 503d Parachute Infantry (concurrently constituted in the Army of the United States), and consolidated unit designated as Company A, 503d Parachute Infantry

Inactivated 24 December 1945 at Camp Anza, California

Redesignated 1 February 1951 as Company A, 503d Airborne Infantry, an element of the 11th Airborne Division, and allotted to the Regular Army

Activated 2 March 1951 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky

Reorganized and redesignated 1 March 1957 as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Airborne Battle Group, 503d Infantry, and remained assigned to the 11th Airborne Division (organic elements concurrently constituted and activated)

Relieved 1 July 1958 from assignment to the 11th Airborne Division and assigned to the 24th Infantry Division

Relieved 7 January 1959 from assignment to the 24th Infantry Division and assigned to the 82d Airborne Division

Relieved 26 March 1963 from assignment to the 82d Airborne Division and assigned to the 173d Airborne Brigade

Reorganized and redesignated 25 June 1963 as the 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry

Relieved 14 January 1972 from assignment to the 173d Airborne Brigade and assigned to the 101st Airborne Division

Inactivated 16 November 1984 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and relieved from assignment to the 101st Airborne Division

Assigned 16 December 1986 to the 2d Infantry Division and activated in Korea

Redesignated 1 October 2005 as the 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry Regiment

Inactivated 15 November 2005 at Fort Carson, Colorado, and relieved from assignment to the 2d Infantry Division

Assigned 15 June 2006 to the 173d Airborne Brigade and activated in Italy

Campaign Participation Credit
World War II: New Guinea; Leyte; Luzon (with arrowhead); Southern Philippines
Vietnam: Defense; Counteroffensive; Counteroffensive, Phase II; Counteroffensive, Phase III; Tet Counteroffensive; Counteroffensive, Phase IV; Counteroffensive, Phase V; Counteroffensive, Phase VI; Tet 69/Counteroffensive; Summer-Fall 1969; Winter-Spring 1970; Sanctuary Counteroffensive;Counteroffensive, Phase VII

Decorations
Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for CORREGIDOR
Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for BIEN HOA
Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for DAK TO
Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army) for VIETNAM 1965-1967
Philippine Presidential Unit Citation for 17 OCTOBER 1944 TO 4 JULY 1945
Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm for VIETNAM 1965-1970
Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Honor Medal, First Class for VIETNAM 1969-1971

2d Battalion 503d Infantry Lineage

Lineage and Honors Information as of 7 March 2001

Constituted 14 March 1941 in the Army of the United States as Company B, 503d Parachute Battalion

Activated 22 August 1941 at Fort Benning, Georgia

Consolidated 24 February 1942 with Company B, 503d Parachute Infantry (concurrently constituted in the Army of the United States), and consolidated unit designated as Company B, 503d Parachute Infantry

Inactivated 24 December 1945 at Camp Anza, California

Redesignated 1 February 1951 as Company B, 503d Airborne Infantry, an element of the 11th Airborne Division, and allotted to the Regular Army

Activated 2 March 1951 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky

Inactivated 1 March 1957 in Germany and relieved from assignment to the 11th Airborne Division

Redesignated 1 September 1957 as Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Airborne Battle Group, 503d Infantry, assigned to the 82d Airborne Division, and activated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (organic elements concurrently constituted and activated)

Relieved 24 June 1960 from assignment to the 82d Airborne Division and assigned to the 25th Infantry Division

Relieved 1 July 1961 from assignment to the 25th Infantry Division

Assigned 26 March 1963 to the 173d Airborne Brigade

Reorganized and redesignated 25 June 1963 as the 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry

Relieved 14 January 1972 from assignment to the 173d Airborne Brigade and assigned to the 101st Airborne Division

Inactivated 1 October 1983 at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and relieved from assignment to the 101st Airborne Division

Assigned 16 December 1986 to the 2d Infantry Division and activated in Korea

Inactivated 29 September 1990 in Korea and relieved from assignment to the 2d Infantry Division

Assigned 16 December 2001 to the 173d Airborne Brigade and activated in Italy

Campaign Participation Credit
World War II: New Guinea; Leyte; Luzon (with arrowhead); Southern Philippines
Vietnam: Defense; Counteroffensive; Counteroffensive, Phase II (with arrowhead); Counteroffensive, Phase III; Tet Counteroffensive; Counteroffensive, Phase IV; Counteroffensive, Phase V; Counteroffensive, Phase VI; Tet 69/Counteroffensive; Summer-Fall 1969; Winter-Spring 1970; Sanctuary Counteroffensive; Counteroffensive, Phase VII; Consolidation I.

Decorations
Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for CORREGIDOR
Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for PHUOC VINH
Presidential Unit Citation (Army) for DAK TO
Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army) for VIETNAM 1965-1967
Philippine Presidential Unit Citation for 17 OCTOBER 1944 TO 4 JULY 1945
Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm for VIETNAM 1965-1970
Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Honor Medal, First Class for VIETNAM 1969-1971

Reference: U.S. Army Center for Military History. Unit Lineage and Honors Information. http://www.history.army.mil/html/forcestruc/lineages/branches/inf/0503in.htm (accessed 30 March 2009).

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