
The Round Tablette

Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)

December 2009

Volume 18 Number 4

Published by WW II History Roundtable

Edited by Connie Harris

www.mn-ww2roundtable.org

Thursday, December 10, 2009

Welcome to the December meeting of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II Roundtable. Tonight the presenter is Guy LoFaro who is going to discuss the “Forgotten” paratroopers, the 82nd Airborne, in the Battle of the Bulge.

The 82nd Airborne began as the 82nd Infantry division and saw action in World War I. Its nickname was the “All American Division,” which explains the double “A” on its arm patch. Reactivated for World War II the 82nd became the Army’s first airborne division and the first to be sent overseas.

The 82nd’s first combat parachute drop was in *Operation Husky*, the invasion of Sicily, and involved four different airborne operations, two by the British and two by the 82nd. The first operation involved the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) and the 3rd Battalion of the 504th PIR led by Colonel James Gavin. They were able to achieve their objectives and take out German “pillboxes” along the Sicilian coast which helped the Allied landings. The second operation involved the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 504th PIR led by Colonel Reuben Tucker. While on their way to the Sicilian coast their planes came under friendly fire forcing paratroopers to jump far from their intended drop zones. Only 400 of the 1600 soldiers reached their objectives. The others proceeded to impede German progress and made them believe there were more troops than there actually were.

The division continued on to Italy with the supporting operations of

General Mark Clark’s 5th Army at Salerno. This second combat operation was known as the Oil Drum Drop. Cans of gasoline soaked sand were set afire in the shape of a “T” to guide the pilots to the drop zones, while the two parachute drops by the 504th and the 505th PIR aided the beleaguered soldiers of the 5th Army. The 504th PIR was temporarily detached from the 82nd and landed at Anzio as part of *Operation Shingle*, where they received their nickname “*Devil’s in Baggy Pants*” from an entry made in a German Officer’s diary.

While the 504th remained in Italy the rest of the division moved onto England to prepare for D-Day or *Operation Overlord*, the airborne invasion of Normandy was named *Operation Neptune*. Colonel James Gavin was promoted to Brigadier General and became Assistant Division Commander. Execution of the 82nd’s assignment of landing behind the Normandy beaches was hampered by the poor weather conditions only 10 percent of the troopers landed in the proper areas. However, this gave the Germans the perception that the Americans were everywhere and held back their reserves from the landings at the Normandy beaches. Fighting as infantrymen for 33 days after the Normandy landings the airborne troops finally returned to England with nearly half of the original contingent killed or wounded.

After the Normandy invasion a re-organization took place. The 82nd became part of the XVIII Airborne Corps which consisted of the US 17th, 82nd, and 101st Airborne Divisions and General Matthew Ridgway assumed command of the Corps, while James Gavin assumed command of the 82nd Airborne. As this was going on, planning was taking place for

WWII History Round Table on DVD!!!

Order online at: www.barros.us/online-store.cfm or contact Rob at (763) 639-3399

Programs \$10 + tax & shipping

Operation Market Garden, the brainchild of British Field Marshal Montgomery, the Allied troops were to seize roads, bridges and key communications cities to clear a path for the British troops to the German border. Operation Market Garden would be the final combat for the All-Americans and the largest airborne operation in history. While the units fought valiantly the much wished for corridor to the German border was not opened because of defeats by other Allied units at Arnhem.

After 56 days of combat the 82nd was ordered back to camp near Rheims, France and placed in reserve with other airborne units. When the Germans launched their surprise offensive through the Ardennes Forest on December 16, 1944, the airborne divisions were the closest reinforcements available and were quickly pressed into service and fought throughout the failed German offensive.

When the war ended the 82nd Airborne was chosen to serve as occupation forces in Berlin and earned the distinction as “America’s Guard of Honor.” After the war the 82nd was not demobilized but made its permanent home at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and was designated a regular Army division in 1948.

Further Readings:

Phil Nordyke, *All American, All the Way: The Combat History of the 82nd Airborne Division in World War II* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2005).

T. Moffatt Burriss, *Strike and Hold: A Memoir of the 82nd Airborne in World War II* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books 2001).

Michael Reynolds, *Devil’s Adjutant: Jochen Peiper, Panzer Leader* (London: Pen & Sword, 2009).

James Gavin, *On to Berlin* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979).

Leonard Levensen, *Surrounded by Heroes* (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2007).

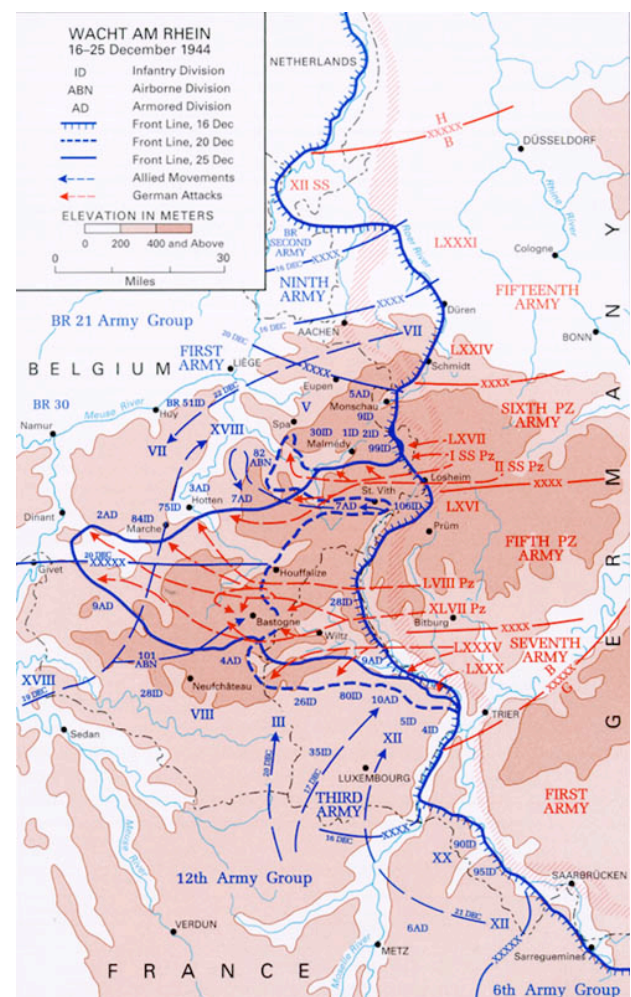
Spencer Wurst & Gayle Wurst, *Descending from the Clouds: A Memoir of Combat in the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment; 82nd Airborne Division*, (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2004).

Phil Nordyke, *Four Stars of Valor* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2006).

Phil Noryke, *More than Courage* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2008).

Round Table Schedule 2010

14 January 10	Russian Military Leadership
11 February 10	Role of Bombers in WW2
11 March 10	New Guinea Campaign
8 April 10	Invasion of Anzio
13 May 10	Flying the Hump



The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II: Alsace-Ardennes, p. 23.

WWII History Round Table on DVD!!!

Programs \$10 + tax & shipping

Order online at: www.barros.us/online-store.cfm or contact Rob at (763) 639-3399