

Chicago Chapter, 82nd Airborne Division Assn. Newsletter

July 2020



Chicago Chapter Officers:

- Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary: Mark Mueller
- Vice Chairman, Sergeant at Arms, Historian: Glenn T. Granat
- Service Officers: Mark Mueller and Glenn T. Granat

Upcoming Events:

- Chicago Veteran's 20 Mile Ruck March: This event has been postponed to September 2020. When a specific date has been announced, this will be sent out to all chapter members.
- Due to the ongoing pandemic, Chicago Chapter in person monthly membership meetings have been replaced with online meetings. This has allowed remote members to participate with the same Airborne spirit.
- Please check the Chapter website at www.chicagoairborne.com for a complete calendar of events and meetings.
- Please note that both All American Week (May, Fort Bragg) and the National Convention (August, Houston, TX) have been cancelled this year due to the pandemic.

Historic AIRBORNE days in July

- 1 July 1941: 502nd PIR formed.
- 1 July 1942: 506th PIR formed.
- 3-4 July 1944: Operation Table Tennis (New Guinea).
- 6 July 1942: 505th PIR formed.
- 9 July 1943: Operation Husky I (Sicily)
- 10 July 1943: Operation Husky II (Sicily).
- 20 July 1942: 507th PIR formed.



July 2020 History Report:



Operation Husky I and Husky II:

Operation HUSKY I involved four separate airborne operations, two by the American 82nd Airborne Division and two by the British. The first operation, HUSKY I spearheaded this Airborne invasion of Sicily. COL James M. “Slim Jim” Gavin led the Airborne assault. The 505th PIR and the 3rd Battalion, 504th PIR were organized into a Regimental Combat Team. Their first objective was to parachute into an area around Gela on the southern shore of Sicily, close off roads leading to the beaches, and secure the drop zone for the next Airborne operation. Under a nearly full moon, the paratroopers crossed over the Sicilian coast and jumped on their assigned drop zone on 9 July 1943.

The second operation, HUSKY II, involved the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 504th PIR, led by Colonel Reuben H. Tucker. As the 504th neared the Sicilian coast, a nervous Allied naval vessel fired upon the formation. Immediately, all other naval vessels and shore troops joined in, downing friendly aircraft and forcing planeloads of paratroopers to exit far from their intended drop zones in one of the greatest tragedies of World War II. Twenty-three of 144 USAAF transports were shot down by friendly fire and 318 American Paratrooper were killed or wounded in the operation.

Colonel Tucker’s plane, after twice flying the length of the Sicilian coast and with over 2,000 holes in its fuselage, finally reached the DZ near Gela. By morning, only 400 of the Regiment’s 1,600 soldiers had reached the objective area. The others had been dropped in isolated groups across the island, so carried out demolitions, cut lines of communication, created roadblocks, ambushed German and Italian motorized columns, and caused so much confusion over such an extensive area that initial German radio reports estimated the number of American parachutists dropped to be over ten times the actual number, (AKA: Black Hearted Devils in Baggy Pants).

Paratroopers of the 504th PIR 3rd and 505th PIR fought an enemy superior in numbers and equipment. Ambushes were conducted and even Objective Y, the deadly pillboxes, were secured. Fighting in small groups, (LGOPS) the 82nd led the Germans and Italians to overestimate the number of Airborne invaders thus impeding any meaningful counterattacks. The German Herman Goering Panzer Division was another matter. Even though outmanned and outgunned, the 82nd used raw courage and fighting spirit to block the Panzers from advancing toward the Allied landings on the beachhead.

By the third day of the invasion, paratroopers of the 82nd had accomplished their mission and were relieved by the 1st Infantry Division. On 13 July, the 504th moved out in the attack, spearheading the Division’s drive 150 miles along the southern coast of Sicily. With captured Italian light tanks, trucks, motorcycles, horses, mules, bicycles, and even wheelbarrows pressed into service, the 82nd encountered only light resistance and took 22,000 prisoners in their first contact with Axis forces. Overall, the Sicilian operation proved costly in both lives and equipment, but the unit gained valuable fighting experience and managed to hurt the enemy in the process. It was with this experience and pride that the 504th returned to its base in Tunisia, to prepare for the invasion of mainland Italy.