

= Operation Fustian =

Operation Fustian was an airborne forces operation undertaken during the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943 in the Second World War . The operation was carried out by Brigadier Gerald Lathbury 's 1st Parachute Brigade , part of the British 1st Airborne Division . Their objective was the Primosole Bridge across the Simeto River . The intention was for the brigade , with glider @-@ borne forces in support , to land on both sides of the river . They would then capture the bridge and secure the surrounding area until relieved by the advance of British XIII Corps , which had landed on the south eastern coast three days previously . Because the bridge was the only crossing on the river and would give the British Eighth Army access to the Catania plain , its capture was expected to speed the advance and lead to the defeat of the Axis forces in Sicily .

Many of the aircraft carrying the paratroopers from North Africa were shot down or were damaged and turned back by friendly fire and enemy action . Evasive action taken by the pilots scattered the brigade over a large area and only the equivalent of two companies of troops were landed in the correct locations . Despite this and the defence by German and Italian forces , the British paratroops captured the bridge , repulsed attacks and held out against increasing odds until nightfall . The relief force led by the 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division , under Major @-@ General Sidney C. Kirkman , which was short of transport , were still 1 mile (1 @.@ 6 km) away when they halted for the night . By this time , with casualties mounting and supplies running short , the parachute brigade commander , Gerald Lathbury , had relinquished control of the bridge to the Germans . The following day the British units joined forces and the 9th Battalion , Durham Light Infantry , with tank support , attempted to recapture the bridge . The bridge was not finally secured until three days after the start of the operation , when another battalion of the Durham Light Infantry , led by the paratroopers , established a bridgehead on the north bank of the river .

The capture of Primosole Bridge did not lead to the expected rapid advance , as by this time the Germans had gathered their forces and established a defensive line . It was not until early the following month that the Eighth Army captured Catania . By this time the 1st Parachute Brigade had been withdrawn to Malta and took no further part in the conquest of Sicily . Lessons were learned from the operation and were put into practice in Allied airborne operations .

= = Background = =

After the Axis powers were defeated in North Africa , the Allied armies ' next logical objective was to cross the Mediterranean , landing in either the south of France , the Balkans , Sicily or Italy . The objective chosen was Sicily , with the landing scheduled for 10 July 1943 . The Allied 15th Army Group was commanded by General Sir Harold Alexander . It consisted of the United States Seventh Army , commanded by Lieutenant General George S. Patton , which would land in the west between Licata and Scoglitti , and the veteran British Eighth Army , commanded by the experienced General Bernard Montgomery , which would land in the south east between Cape Passero and Syracuse .

In addition to the seaborne landings , there were also airborne landings during the invasion . The US 82nd Airborne Division would land in support of the Seventh Army , while the British 1st Airborne Division conducted brigade @-@ sized landings along the eastern coast to support the Eighth Army .

The first British airborne landing was Operation Ladbroke , which was carried out by the 1st Airlanding Brigade during the night of 9 ? 10 July . Their objective was to seize and hold the Ponte Grande bridge just outside Syracuse . The second British airborne mission , Operation Glutton , was to have been undertaken by the 2nd Parachute Brigade on the night of 10 ? 11 July , aiming to capture a bridge beside Augusta . However circumstances changed and the second operation was cancelled .

The third British airborne mission planned was Operation Fustian , to be carried out by the 1st Parachute Brigade , and scheduled for the night of 13 ? 14 July . The 1st Parachute Brigade 's objective was the Primosole bridge , crossing the Simeto River , south of Catania . The bridge was a vital objective , as it was the only crossing point over the Simeto . Its capture would give the Eighth

Army access to the Catania plain , to enable them to continue their advance northwards ; its destruction would seriously hamper the advance . Once the parachute brigade had captured the bridge , they would then have to defend it until relieved by units of the Eighth Army advancing from the landing beaches .

= = = British forces = = =

The 1st Parachute Brigade was commanded by Brigadier Gerald Lathbury and comprised the 1st Parachute Battalion , the 2nd Parachute Battalion , the 3rd Parachute Battalion , the 16th (Parachute) Field Ambulance , the 1st (Parachute) Squadron , Royal Engineers and the 1st (Airlanding) Anti @-@ Tank Battery , Royal Artillery . The airlanding anti @-@ tank battery were equipped with the 1st Para Brigade 's only anti @-@ tank guns , the British 6 pounder . Despite the formation being a parachute brigade , the only way to transport the anti @-@ tank guns and the jeeps required to pull them when they had landed , was by glider . Transporting artillery by air was something new to the British or any other army , and this would be the first time that any artillery guns had ever been flown into combat .

The 1st Parachute Brigade was an experienced formation , initially under command of the 1st Airborne Division before being detached from the division to fight in North Africa . The brigade had taken part in the landings in Algeria in November 1942 and the subsequent Battle of Tunisia , during which each of the brigade 's three parachute battalions had taken part in their own battalion @-@ sized parachute landings . It was during this campaign that the 1st Parachute Brigade had been given their nickname the Red Devils by the Germans . A British parachute battalion had an establishment of 556 men in three rifle companies . Each of the companies were divided into a small headquarters and three platoons . The platoons had three sections ; each section had a Bren machine gun and a 2 @-@ inch mortar as well as the men 's own personal weapons . The only heavy weapons in the parachute battalion were in the 3 @-@ inch Mortar platoon and the Vickers machine gun platoon which were part of the battalion headquarters .

It was decided that the brigade 's paratroops would land on four separate drop zones and that the gliders would land at two landing zones . The paratroops of the 1st Parachute Battalion were divided into two groups , one of which would land at ' Drop zone One ' to the north of the river , and the second at ' Drop zone Two ' to the south of it . Once they had landed the two groups would head for their assembly points , before conducting an assault on the bridge from both sides simultaneously . The 2nd Parachute Battalion were to be landed south of the bridge on ' Drop zone Three ' , in the area between the Gornalunga Canal and the main highway . The 2nd Battalion then had to assault and occupy three small hills , which had been given the codenames ' Johnny I ' , ' Johnny II ' and ' Johnny III ' . The hills were believed to be occupied by an Italian force of around platoon strength . Once the battalion had secured the three hills , they were to dig in and prepare to defend the hills against an attack from the south . The 3rd Parachute Battalion would land at ' Drop zone Four ' , 1 @, @ 000 yards (910 m) north of the bridge . Their objective was to secure the ground in this area , defending against any counterattack from the direction of Catania . The brigade 's glider force had two landing areas , ' Landing zone Seven ' north of the river and ' Landing zone Eight ' south of the river . Owing to the complexity of the landing plan and the short time between inception and execution , the pathfinders belonging to the 21st Independent Parachute Company , Army Air Corps , would be deployed to mark the correct drop zones . This was the first occasion this had been done in British airborne operations . The pathfinder company had special marker lights and Rebecca and Eureka beacons that the transport aircraft and gliders would be able to identify and home in on .

The senior officers of the 1st Airborne Division had estimated that there would be around 450 casualties during the capture of the bridge , of which 25 per cent would be killed or missing , and the other 75 per cent wounded . It was appreciated that by themselves the three battalions ' medical officers and staff would be unable to cope with the expected numbers of casualties , so one section from the 16th (Parachute) Field Ambulance , consisting of one doctor and 16 other ranks , would be attached to each of the parachute battalions . The remainder of the field ambulance , comprising the headquarters with two surgical teams , would be co @-@ located with the brigade and establish

their main dressing station in farm buildings to the south of the bridge .

After problems with the first two airborne operations in Sicily , the Royal Air Force advisor assigned to the 1st Airborne Division suggested that the American C @-@ 47 pilots adopt the Royal Air Force bomber stream formation . This entailed the aircraft flying in pairs one behind the other with one minute between each aircraft , instead of flying in their normal ' V ' formation . The suggestion was dismissed by the American pilots , who were mostly pre @-@ war airline pilots , not least because their training had not included any instruction in night time navigation and the inexperienced crews relied heavily on following the aircraft in front .

Unconnected with Operation Fustian , but being conducted at the same time , No. 3 Commando would carry out a separate operation 8 miles (13 km) to the south of the Simeto River . The commando unit were to carry out an amphibious landing from the sea , then assault and capture the Malati Bridge over the Leonardo River .

The relieving force for both the commandos and paratroopers would be from British XIII Corps , commanded by Lieutenant @-@ General Miles C. Dempsey . The corps consisted of the 5th Infantry Division , 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division and the 4th Armoured Brigade . The armoured brigade , with three tank regiments , was equipped with the American built Sherman tank . Early on 13 July the commander of the 50th Division , Major @-@ General Sidney C. Kirkman , was called to General Montgomery 's Eighth Army headquarters . Here he was informed about the two missions by the British Commandos and the 1st Parachute Brigade , and the requirement for the bridges to be captured intact . Montgomery 's intention was for the 50th Division to lead the Eighth Army 's advance and relieve the commandos and the paratroopers . To assist Kirkman in the task , Montgomery placed the 4th Armoured Brigade under his command . Montgomery was insistent that he wanted the infantry division to relieve the parachute brigade early on 14 July , which would require the division to advance around 25 miles (40 km) in 24 hours . The 50th Division had landed on 10 July and by this time had been fighting for three days non @-@ stop . With the daily temperature most of the time reaching 100 ° F (38 ° C) , many of the men in the division were physically exhausted and suffering from heat exhaustion . The division 's situation was not improved by a grave error of judgement by Montgomery . During the planning for the invasion , he had overestimated the strength of the German and Italian resistance to the Allied landings . The British Eighth Army consisted mainly of infantry , tanks and heavy weapons but were light on any form of mechanical transport , so any advance by the 50th Division would have to be conducted on foot .

= = = Axis forces = = =

The Italian Army force in the area of Primosole Bridge came from the 213 Coastal Division commanded by General Carlo Gotti . Coastal divisions were second line divisions , usually formed from men in their forties and fifties , and were intended to perform labour or other second line duties . Recruited from the local population , their officers were mostly men who had retired but had then been called up again . Their morale was low , not least because of their second rate equipment and weapons . It had been intended to improve their armaments with equipment seized from the recently disbanded Vichy French army , but when the arms arrived in Sicily , many of them had been made unusable , and some had the wrong type of ammunition or no ammunition at all .

The Italians were supported by German paratroopers of the 1st Parachute Division , who were ordered to move to Sicily from France , and if necessary were to parachute in on 9 July . The 1st Fallschirmjäger Machine Gun Battalion commanded by Major Werner Schmidt had landed at Catania during an Allied air raid early on 13 July . Their aircraft and anti @-@ tank guns were destroyed during the raid , so the battalion left on foot for Primosole Bridge . When Schmidt informed the divisional commander of his intentions , he was warned to expect a sea or airborne landing that night . If the Allies landed to the rear of the division , Schmidt 's battalion had to hold Primosole Bridge so that the division could escape . Forewarned in this way , the machine gun battalion started to dig in and prepare a defence around 2 @, @ 000 yards (1 @, @ 800 m) to the south of the bridge once they arrived , well located to deal with any parachute or glider landing in that area .

== Primosole Bridge ==

The Primosole Bridge is built from steel girders . It has a span of 400 feet (120 m) , and is raised 8 feet (2 @. @ 4 m) above the Simeto River . The land to the north of the bridge is mainly olive and almond groves in tree @-@ lined fields . Immediately to the south of the bridge is the Gornalunga canal , and beyond that three prominent hills . The road crossing the bridge is Highway 114 , running from Lentini 10 miles (16 km) to the south to Cantini 7 miles (11 km) to the north . To assist the Italians defending the bridge , four pillbox bunkers had been constructed , two on the north bank and two on the south bank .

== Fustian ==

At 19 : 30 on 12 July 1943 , the first aircraft carrying the 1 @, @ 856 men of the 1st Parachute Brigade took off from North Africa . The aircraft used consisted of 105 Douglas C @-@ 47 Skytrains belonging to the 51st Troop Carrier Wing , 51 each from the 60th and the 62d Troop Carrier Groups , while the 64th Troop Carrier Group supplied the other three . No. 38 Wing Royal Air Force supplied eleven Armstrong Whitworth Albemarles . Following behind the parachute force were the glider towing aircraft . These aircraft , again supplied by No. 38 Wing , comprised 12 Albemarles and seven Handley Page Halifaxes , towing 11 Horsa gliders and eight Waco gliders . The gliders were used to carry 77 men , mostly from the anti @-@ tank battery , ten 6 pounder anti @-@ tank guns and 18 jeeps .

The aircraft 's flight path took them around the south eastern corner of Malta and up the eastern coast of Sicily . The route was measured to ensure that the first planes arrived over the drop zones at 22 : 20 . When the planes arrived off Sicily , they were supposed to stay 10 miles (16 km) offshore until reaching the Simeto River , when they would head inland for the drop zones . Somehow , 33 aircraft strayed off course and approached an Allied convoy . The naval gunners had been warned to expect an air raid , and opened fire on the American and British aircraft . Two of the planes , trying to avoid the unexpected anti @-@ aircraft fire , collided and crashed into the sea . Another two were shot down , and nine were so badly shot up , with wounded crew and passengers , that they were forced to turn back towards their airfields in North Africa .

Those aircraft that did reach the Sicilian coast were engaged by Axis anti @-@ aircraft guns , which shot down 37 of them . Another ten were damaged and were forced to abort their mission . Some of the inexperienced pilots now refused to go any further , and on his aircraft Lieutenant Colonel Alastair Pearson , commanding officer of the 1st Parachute Battalion , realising his plane was flying round in circles , had to threaten to shoot the crew to make them continue . The anti @-@ aircraft fire and the evasive action taken by the pilots had dispersed the aircraft formations , and the parachute drop was scattered over a large area . The violent evasive manoeuvring left some of the paratroopers in heaps on the aircraft floor , and they were unable to jump when ordered . When safely back out to sea , some of the pilots refused to try again , considering the risk too great . Of the surviving aircraft which carried on with the mission , only 39 managed to drop their paratroops within .5 miles (0 @. @ 80 km) of the correct drop zone . The furthest off course were some groups from the 3rd Parachute Battalion and Royal Engineers who landed 12 miles (19 km) to the south of the bridge , while another four aircraft landed their paratroops on the slopes of Mount Etna 20 miles (32 km) to the north .

Those men of the 1st Parachute Brigade that landed on the southern drop zone were well within range of the 1st Fallschirmjäger Machine Gun Battalion . In the darkness , the Germans initially thought that the paratroopers were their own reinforcements landing , but they soon realised their mistake and opened fire . Some of those who escaped the machine gun fire were rounded up on the drop zone , and about 100 of them became prisoners of war as soon as they had touched ground . In the confusion of the landing , 50 men of the 1st Parachute Battalion had assembled , assaulted and managed to capture the bridge before the 50 Italian defenders could destroy it with the attached demolition charges . The Italians were taken prisoner , just as a second group of 40 paratroopers

led by Brigadier Lathbury arrived at the bridge . Lathbury organised the safe removal of the demolition charges and set up a defensive perimeter . More paratroopers continued to gather at the bridge , and soon they numbered around 120 men , who dug in to the north and south .

The Brigade Headquarters and the field ambulance main dressing station were established to the south of the bridge , where the brigade 's casualties started arriving for treatment . Away from the main dressing station , the medics on the 2nd Battalion drop zone had 29 wounded as a result of the parachute drop , and there were 15 wounded on drop zone one from the 1st Battalion .

The first glider casualties had occurred on take off , when two aircraft towing Waco gliders crashed . While on route , one of the gliders was released early by its towing aircraft , and crashed into the sea . When they did arrive over Sicily , the element of surprise was gone , and four gliders were shot down by the coastal anti @-@ aircraft batteries . By the time the gliders arrived at their landing zones , two hours had lapsed since the parachute landings had started . One glider pilot later commented that they did not need the pathfinders , as the tracer and lights from explosions were brighter than any of the landing markers . Of the surviving glider force , only four gliders managed to land relatively unscathed , all the others being caught by the Fallschirmjäger machine gun fire and destroyed on their approach . The four intact gliders had been carrying three of the anti @-@ tank guns , which were now included in the bridge 's defences . Including the men from the gliders , the 1st Parachute Brigade had 295 men at the bridge . Shortage of manpower was not their only problem ; their only support weapons were the anti @-@ tank guns , two 3 @-@ inch mortars and a Vickers machine gun .

= = = Daybreak = = =

By 04 : 30 on 14 July , the 1st Parachute Battalion was in control of Primosole Bridge , but the Fallschirmjäger Machine Gun Battalion were well dug in to the south . Beyond them , 140 men of the 2nd Parachute Battalion had occupied the three small hills , and taken 500 Italian prisoners . In numbers , both battalions had little more than company strength . The 3rd Parachute Battalion had suffered the worst in the scattered parachute drop , and only a few of their men had arrived at the bridge . With no command structure , they were attached to the 1st Parachute Battalion to help defend the bridge . To the north , the Italian 372nd Coastal Battalion and the Blackshirt Arditi Battalion had been informed of the parachute landings . Many of the 372nd Battalion had disappeared , while the Blackshirts mounted the first of a number of attacks on the British positions . Without the support of any heavy weapons , they were easily fought off .

Also at dawn the first attack by the Fallschirmjäger Machine Gun Battalion to the south began , when they opened fire with their machine guns and mortars . Their first assault was against the 2nd Parachute Battalion 's positions , and was unsuccessful . However , their next assault , later in the morning , succeeded in capturing Johnny II , the second of the small hills . Lieutenant Colonel John Frost , in command of the 2nd Parachute Battalion , immediately counterattacked , but his men were repulsed after sustaining a number of casualties . At 09 : 00 a forward observation officer attached to the 2nd Parachute Battalion managed to make radio contact with the British cruiser HMS Newfoundland , which then used its 6 @-@ inch guns to target the Fallschirmjäger positions . The naval gunfire had the desired effect , causing the Germans some casualties and keeping them under cover . From then on , German resistance from the south was restricted to harassing machine gun fire . A grass fire they started did force the 2nd Parachute Battalion to abandon Johnny I , and the remnants of the battalion now concentrated on Johnny III .

To the north of the bridge , a German battle group of 350 men , including the 1st Company , 1st Fallschirmjäger Signal Battalion , an anti @-@ aircraft battery and some anti @-@ tank guns , was gathered under the command of Captain Franz Strangenberg . Strangenberg was in position to launch his first assault on the bridge at 14 : 00 . This first attack was driven off by the British paratroopers . For his second attempt Strangenberg brought up three 88 mm anti @-@ aircraft guns in support . This assault was more successful , taking some prisoners , and almost succeeded in reaching the bridge . It also secured a position for the 88s to engage the two pillboxes on the north bank . By 17 : 00 the men of the 1st Parachute Battalion were almost out of ammunition , and were

forced to withdraw to the southern side of the bridge . The German 88s were moved forward again , and this time demolished the pillboxes on the south side . Running short of supplies and with his casualties mounting , Brigadier Lathbury made the decision to relinquish control of the bridge to the Germans , and the parachute brigade moved back 1 @, @ 200 yards (1 @, @ 100 m) . Of the 295 men who had been at the bridge , 115 had become casualties . The 16th (Parachute) Field Ambulance main dressing station could not be moved or evacuated , and remained behind in no man 's land .

An Italian officer entered the station , and informed the medical staff they were now prisoners of war . But since they were treating casualties from both sides , they were allowed to remain and continue operating . Treatment of the wounded continued all day , and by 22 : 00 the surgeons had carried out 21 surgical operations and were looking after 62 British and 29 German or Italian patients . At 18 : 30 , in the darkness , Lathbury led the remainder of his men to join the 2nd Parachute Battalion .

By dawn , the 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division had only managed to advance 10 miles (16 km) , and were still 8 miles (13 km) from No. 3 Commando at the Melati bridge and 15 miles (24 km) from Primosole Bridge . It was not until 17 : 00 that the 5th Battalion , East Yorkshire Regiment , part of the 69th Infantry Brigade , eventually reached Malati Bridge , although by now the commandos had been forced to withdraw . The bridge was quickly captured ; the commandos had dismantled the demolition charges so that it could not be demolished . With their first objective secured , the British infantry continued their advance on foot towards the parachute brigade . The tanks and small amount of motor transport belonging to the 4th Armoured Brigade had been held up even further back . They had been stopped in Carlentini by a destroyed bridge , and the 4th Armoured Brigade did not start moving again until after 19 : 00 .

The 50th (Northumbrian) Division eventually reached Lentini , about half way from their start point to Primosole Bridge , in the afternoon . Here the streets were blocked by debris , covered by snipers and machine gunners left as a rearguard by the retreating Germans . By nightfall only one of the 50th (Northumbrian) Division 's infantry battalions , the 6th Battalion , Durham Light Infantry , of 151st Infantry Brigade , with some tanks in support , had reached a position 1 mile (1 @. @ 6 km) from Johnny II . Despite their orders to advance at all speed , they halted for the night .

= = = Recapture of the bridge = = =

After the parachute brigade withdrew , the Axis forces gathered at the bridge . They now comprised the Italian 372nd Coastal Battalion and the Blackshirt Arditi Battalion , with the German 1st Fallschirmjäger Machine Gun Battalion and Captain Stangenberg 's Battle group . The German High Command was aware of the importance of holding the bridge , and overnight they dispatched reinforcements who arrived by parachute . These came from the 1st Fallschirmjäger Division , and consisted of the 1st Fallschirmjäger Engineer Battalion , the 1st Battalion , 4th Fallschirmjäger Regiment and a battalion of the 1st Fallschirmjäger Artillery Regiment . The Fallschirmjäger engineers started to form a defensive line to the north of the bridge , and a smaller one on the southern bank .

Early on 15 July , the 1st Parachute Brigade heard tank fire to the south of their position . Brigadier Lathbury sent out a patrol to investigate , which located the tanks and infantry of XIII Corps that had halted just south of them the previous night . The 1st Parachute Brigade and 50th (Northumbrian) Division now moved forward together . The main dressing station , which had continued to operate after being captured , was liberated by the 2nd Parachute Battalion . In an attempt to recapture Primosole Bridge the 9th Battalion , Durham Light Infantry , supported by the 44th Royal Tank Regiment , carried out a number of assaults . At one stage they managed to cross the bridge , but three Sherman tanks accompanying them were knocked out by the German 88s , and with no armoured support the infantry were forced to withdraw . However , an error in communication caused the Fallschirmjäger Engineer Battalion to withdraw to the north bank of the river , and this allowed the Durhams to establish a position at the southern end of the bridge . At the main dressing station the surgeons had operated on another 14 wounded by the time ambulances arrived from XIII Corps at 17 : 00 to evacuate the wounded . At 18 : 00 the Main Dressing Station was closed and the

men moved to Johnny I. During the time the main dressing station had been active , the surgeons had completed 31 operations , and the medics had treated 109 wounded .

The Germans were aware that the British paratroopers had dismantled the explosive charges attached to Primosole Bridge , and now attempted to destroy it by driving trucks laden with explosives onto it . This was unsuccessful .

During the night the 9th Battalion , Durham Light Infantry continued trying to capture the bridge . Their attacks also provided a distraction for the Germans while Lieutenant Colonel Pearson of the 1st Parachute Battalion led two companies of the 8th Battalion , Durham Light Infantry across the Simeto River using a small ford to establish another bridgehead on the northern bank . During the day 's battle both the British and Germans suffered heavy casualties , but the bridge was eventually retaken by the British infantry .

Leaving the British Eighth Army to continue their advance , at 07 : 00 16 July the 1st Parachute Brigade were transported in trucks to Syracuse , where they embarked on a LST . Here they remained overnight , sitting through a two @-@ hour air raid , and sailed for Valletta at 12 : 00 on 17 July . In Operation Fustian they had suffered around 141 dead , and 168 missing or wounded .

= = Aftermath = =

The recapture of Primosole Bridge did not result in the rapid advance over the Catania plain envisioned by Montgomery . The by now exhausted 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division was holding a position based on the bridge . The 5th Infantry Division took over the lead , but after a number of attacks could not make any further progress . Its 13th Infantry Brigade had to establish another bridgehead across the Simeto , but the Germans had brought in more troops and prepared defensive positions , and after hard fighting it was not until 5 August 1943 that the Eighth Army entered the city of Catania itself . Further hard fighting followed , and they entered Messina just after the United States Seventh Army on 17 August 1943 .

After an enquiry into the problems with the airborne missions in Sicily , the British Army and Royal Air Force submitted some recommendations . Aircrew had to be trained in parachute and glider operations , and pathfinders landing before the main force had to have enough time to set out their beacons . The landing plan was simplified , with complete brigades landing on one drop zone , instead of the smaller battalion landing areas used in Sicily . Gliders were no longer released at night while still over water , and their landing zones would be large enough to accommodate the aircraft with room to spare . Following the friendly fire incident over the convoy , more training was given to ships ' crews in aircraft recognition , and Allied aircraft were painted with three large white stripes on their wings . Training for pilots belonging to the Glider Pilot Regiment was increased , and improvements to the gliders were implemented , including better inter @-@ aircraft communication .

For transporting paratroops , to avoid relying solely on American aircraft and pilots , No. 38 Wing Royal Air Force was expanded , becoming No. 38 Group with its Halifax squadrons , now supported by four squadrons of Albemarle and four squadrons of Stirlings . To provide another method of delivering jeeps and artillery guns by air , the air force started experiments on parachuting them into combat , carrying the jeeps and guns in the aircraft 's large bomb bays . A second Royal Air Force transport group , No. 46 Group , was formed , and was equipped solely with Dakotas , instead of the mixture of aircraft in No. 38 Group . After these changes , the Royal Air Force groups could supply 88 Albemarle , 88 Stirlings , 36 Halifaxes and 150 Dakotas , a total of 362 planes , in addition to aircraft held as reserves .