

N-10200 Report of Supply of American  
Troops in Bastogne Area

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HEADQUARTERS

IX TROOP CARRIER PATHFINDER GROUP (PROV)

by *Richard Keller*

APC 133, U S Army

29 December 1944

R. J. KELLER

SUBJECT: Report of Resupply of American Troops in Bastogne Area.

Custodian

TO : Commanding General, IX Troop Carrier Command, APC 133, U S Army.

Report on Operations to resupply American Troops in Bastogne Area by IX Troop Carrier Pathfinder Group (Prov), 22 - 26 December 1944.

1. This Group was alerted for a two ship Pathfinder mission at 1130 hours, 22 December 1944, via telephone from Colonel Oberdorff, IX Troop Carrier Command A-3. At 1230 hours the Group was notified by Major Lightfoot that the Group was committed for a 40 ship resupply mission. (At the time of the alert this Group was standing by loaded with troops of 17th Airborne Division, awaiting satisfactory weather for delivery to A-41 in France. Immediately all aircraft were unloaded and dispatched to Membury for resupply loading).

a. XVIII Corps (Airborne) Pathfinder Officer, Captain Frank Brown, and Group Executive Officer, Lt Colonel James T. Blair, Jr, left in charge of getting airborne teams and special equipment, air corps crews and equipment ready while Group Commanding Officer reported to IX Troop Carrier Command Headquarters (A-3) for detailed instructions.

b. Coordinates of DZ, together with pertinent intelligence, phoned to Chalgrove (scrambler) 1330 hours with instructions to have teams airborne by 1400 hours, in as much as airborne pathfinder teams had to be dropped, position checked and confirmed and operation of special equipment checked during hours of daylight. This was absolutely necessary in order to schedule critical resupply into area under instrument conditions and during hours of darkness.

c. It was impossible to get Airborne and Air Corps Crews properly briefed and equipped by the take-off deadline of 1400 hours. This was due to the following:

(1) Airborne teams did not have battle equipment on hand at this base (was supplied from Air Corps sources). Large scale maps of area (1-50,000 or 1-25,000) were not available until Colonel Crouch returned to Chalgrove from IX Troop Carrier Command Headquarters.

(2) Thirty (30) minutes time from receipt of briefing information from Lt Colonel Crouch at Command and take-off time was not sufficient to transpose this information to correct maps, plot course, run in and exact DZ.

d. Combined Airborne and Air Corps Pathfinder crews were airborne at 1452 hours. Airborne teams took off without necessary maps.

e. The course from Chalgrove to target area was 2 hours 25 minutes. This would have placed team over target area at 1507 hours and with weather existing at time would have required Airborne Pathfinder team to drop after dark with no way for Air Corps crews to confirm their exact condition.

f. Lt Col Crouch returned to Chalgrove at 1455 and, after reviewing briefing given to teams, reviewing weather and checking sunset, recalled the flight and so notified IX Troop Carrier Command Headquarters. Instructions were then given and confirmed to drop Pathfinder sticks first light 23 December 1944 and follow with forty (40) plane loads of emergency airborne resupply.

g. The subsequent delays in loading at Membury and complete deterioration of weather at take off airdromes proved the recall to have been correct.

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Ltr, Hq IX Tr Carr Path Gp (Prov), subj: "Resupply of American troops in Bastogne Area", dtd 29 Dec 44, cont'd.

2. Pathfinder drop was made 0931 hours, 23 December 1944, at a point 1 6/10 miles SW of Bastogne, adjacent to a small wooded area.

a. Briefing was continued during night of 22 December and 23 December-- both airborne and air corps crews received all information regarding situation from IX Troop Carrier Command A-2.

b. Information was conflicting as to exact position of Germans in this area and it was agreed to drop airborne sticks slightly to SW of town and not to W-NW due to cover troopers could find in woods if necessary.

c. A signal (smoke grenade) was agreed on to be shown by airborne troops on contacting ground if everything O.K. Aircraft were to remain in area and check condition of troopers before dropping spare sets of special equipment and spare batteries.

d. The first plane load of Airborne Pathfinders were dropped as planned, smoke signal and Eureka placed in operation (3 minutes) indicated team to be all right and resupply bundles were dropped from first plane as planned (estimated 200 to 300 yards from troopers). Troopers were seen running to recover bundles O.K. Then the second plane load of Airborne Pathfinders and equipment were dropped at the same place.

e. Immediately after dropping troopers an American ambulance was seen to be moving westward out of Bastogne (about 2 to 3 miles out). It is now felt that Airborne Pathfinder team should have been dropped right at the SW corner of town. However they must have established immediate contact with troops in Bastogne in as much as all DZ marker aids were positioned and in operation by 1035 hours at which time 29 Aircraft of the 50th Wing flew in the first resupply, and reported all aids working perfectly.

f. The course was flown from the French coast to A-62 (Rheims) at which point fighters and fighter bombers were to have been picked up by the Pathfinder ships. Two 360 degree turns were made over A-62, no support ships were contacted, no activity observed on ground so aircraft proceeded to IP. Five to six miles SW of Bastogne on highway leading to Arlon an enemy armored column was seen (10 to 14 vehicles - half trucks and tanks). This armor concentrated heavy fire on the two ships (one ship receiving several hits). Sitting on the road at this particular time this offered an excellent target for air support, and had air support been available, this column could have been destroyed. Information regarding this enemy column was relayed to IX Troop Carrier Command Headquarters, via radio and telephone, and later in the day strong air support was active in this area.

3. During the remaining hours of daylight other elements of this group (in 3 ship flights) and of the 53rd Troop Carrier Wing, continued into target area with resupply. Navigators reports show that as time went on the effective range of R/E equipment grew less and less and that last flights into area had no Rebecca aid at all. It is felt that this is due to one of two causes - either the set was knocked out of operation or the airborne team in charge did not keep fresh batteries in the Eureka. This information has been given to the Corps Pathfinder Officer at this station and all airborne pathfinder personnel briefed again as to the importance of keeping live batteries in ground component.

4. Last Troop Carrier flight into target area on afternoon 23 December 1944, reported large bulk of resupply chutes 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 miles SW of town.

5. All pathfinder aids were working again perfectly on morning of 24 December 1944, when 5 aircraft of this group flew in at daylight with priority communication resupply and reported picking up R/E aids 34 miles out. This flight flew from French coast to IP on DR on top of overcast due to ground Gee chain being turned off for checking at that time. Six ships were scheduled on this mission, one of which dropped load at IP due to confused light signal. This ship was ordered to return immediately to base after dropping load by flight leader.

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Par 5, Ltr, Hq IX Tr Carr Path Gp (Proc, subj: "Report of Air-  
craft Participating in Resupply Mission and Paratroop Drop, 22-24 December 1944")  
Troops in Bastogne Area", dtd 29 Dec 44, on d

One ship delayed by take-off accident flew in and dropped with 53rd Troop Carrier Wing column.

6. Of the 42 aircraft from this group scheduled into target area, 39 received battle damage. (See Letter, this Headquarters, subject: "Report of Aircraft Participating in Resupply Mission and Paratroop Drop, 22-24 December 1944" dated 28 December 1944). Of 252 personnel (including 41 QM pushers) flying into target area, one pusher was killed, one was slightly wounded and three are missing in action with four pathfinder combat crew members seriously wounded, two slightly wounded and sixteen missing in action.

7. Requirements and suggestions for future Troop Carrier/Airborne Pathfinder emergency resupply and general resupply:

a. Each battle unit should be supplied with pathfinder equipment (i.e. R/E, MF Beacon, lights, panels and RT or WT equipment) and trained personnel so that in the event of emergency aerial resupply being called for the Troop Carrier can move out without the delay of dropping Airborne Pathfinders and the chance of dropping Airborne Pathfinders in the wrong place.

b. That IX Troop Carrier Pathfinder Group have at all times at least three sticks (3 officers and 27 TM) from each A/B Division on hand for any emergency that might arise.

c. That combined A/B and Air Corps training be continuous and progressive. That as soon as an airborne team is trained perfectly, it be returned to the parent organization and a new team sent up for training.

d. That complete and immediate study be made into aircraft-ground communication on specially assigned frequency or frequencies.

(1) In this connection this group is now contacting British 38 group in regard to VHF contact using R/E channels.

e. Higher headquarters must be able to resupply other infantry and armored units by air if necessary. This can be done perfectly if proper coordination is made ahead of time and all ground units briefed as to what to expect. IX Troop Carrier Command and XVIII Airborne Corps Pathfinder troops and equipment are ideally suited for this task if promptly cleared or committed by higher headquarters. Time used in obtaining clearances sometimes prohibits supplies reaching isolated combat units.

f. Troop Carrier Pathfinders and regular resupply column should be accompanied by fighters and fighter bombers if weather permits. Inter-ship frequencies should be set up so that troop carrier serial leaders can talk to fighters and fighter bombers over target area and during run in.

g. It is recommended that at least two flights of the best air support aircraft and crews be assigned directly to IX Troop Carrier Pathfinder Group for Pathfinder operations; that these crews arrive at Pathfinder Group Headquarters in sufficient time to receive joint briefing with Airborne Pathfinder and Troop Carrier Pathfinder personnel assigned to a particular mission. Mobile enemy armor is the most serious weapon standing in the way of efficient troop carrier delivery, it is also a target of opportunity in so far as air support is concerned and air support with at least 20mm fire power should be available at the exact moment and, if possible, under the direct control of the troop carrier flight commander in the target area.

h. Troop carrier aircraft with 717-C installed and pararacks mounted cannot sustain flight on single engine with the poor engine wind-milling. Only by using 2550 rpm and in excess of 40 inches manifold pressure can flight be main-

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tained on single engine if poor engine is feathered. This will give an estimated time of single engine flight (with radome and pararacks) of 15 to 30 minutes. It is recommended that troop carrier aircraft be modified to jettison pararacks in the event that single engine operation becomes necessary. In this connection this group is modifying one aircraft as a prototype and IX Troop Carrier Command engineering will be contacted as soon as it is ready for test.

i. It is recommended that a minimum number (100 ship loads) of emergency resupply be kept on hand at this base to save time in loading at other airdromes. These loads and parachutes could be turned over to the VIII Corps Pathfinder Officer assigned to this group for maintenance and loading when required. It is felt as much as six hours might be saved in getting this resupply to the target area if it were made available for "on call" loading on this base.

/s/ Joel L. Crouch  
/t/ JOEL L. CROUCH  
Lt Col, Air Corps  
Commanding

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