## AIRBORNE OPERATIONS

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PREFACE

This manual discusses the employment of airborne brigades, battalions, and regiments in airborne operations within the context of the AirLand Battle. It sets forth tactical and administrative support doctrine for the employment of Army forces in joint airborne operations. It discusses command and staff procedures, tactics, and techniques used in the planning and execution of parachute operations at brigade and lower echelons.

The discussions are written in general terms so they apply to brigade or smaller units taking part in joint airborne operations. For this reason, the term “airborne force” is used to refer to the Army component in the operation.

The principal tactics and techniques peculiar to airborne operations are of primary concern. Details of unit organization/capabilities, and guidance for employment of units in other than airborne operations are in other field manuals.

This publication implements the following international agreements: STANAG 3466/ASCC 44/18C, Responsibilities of Air Transport Units and User Units in the Loading and Unloading of Transport Aircraft in Tactical Air Transport Operations and STANAG 3570/ASCC 44/13G, Drop Zones and Extraction Zones—Criteria and Markings.

The proponent of this publication is US Army Infantry School. Send comments and recommendations on DA Form 2028 (Recommended Changes to Publications and Blank Forms) directly to the Commandant, United States Army Infantry School, ATTN: ATSH-ATD, Fort Benning, Georgia 31905-5410.

Unless this publication states otherwise, masculine nouns and pronouns do not refer exclusively to men.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Airborne forces of the US Army have often demonstrated their ability to conduct decisive, short notice, forced entry operations deep into enemy territory. They seize and maintain the initiative until follow-on forces are committed to the fight and then move to hit the enemy where he is the most vulnerable. The ability to rapidly deploy, land, and sustain a powerful ground combat force is vital to US interests and worldwide commitments.

From their origins early in World War II, the US Army’s airborne forces have dramatically demonstrated their responsiveness and flexibility many times on DZs and battlefields all over the world. As the threat of regional conflict has grown, the XVIII Airborne Corps, the 82d Airborne Division, and the 75th Ranger Regiment have demonstrated that well-trained, determined airborne soldiers armed with modern light weapons and led by skilled officers and NCOs can dominate the close fight and impose their will upon the enemy—wherever he is.

During Operation Just Cause in 1989, the actions of the 75th Ranger Regiment and the 82d Airborne Division clearly demonstrated the advantages of US airborne forces. The operation was well supported by other US Army units, the US Air Force, and US Navy.

On 17 December 1989, the National Command Authority decided to commit specially trained airborne units to military action in Panama. The President established H-hour for 0100 on 20 December, just three days after the decision to intervene. The complex operation was centrally planned due to the need for thoroughly synchronized operations. The mission assigned to the airborne force was to quickly isolate, neutralize, and, if needed, destroy units of the Panamanian Defense Force by overwhelming combat power. These forces were then to link up with elements of the 7th Infantry Division (Light), the 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized), and the 193d Infantry Brigade.

Deploying by strategic airlift from multiple bases in the continental United States, paratroopers jumped into action on two principal DZs. Ranger task forces seized airfields at Rio Hato and Torrijos-Tocumen Airport. Another task force built around the 1st Brigade of the 82d Airborne Division followed the rangers. Their mission was to jump, assemble, and conduct immediate air assaults to eliminate PDF garrisons at Fort Cimarron, Tinajitas, and Panama Viejo. These initial offensive operations were later followed by ground combat and stability operations. They were sustained by air lines of communication from the US and by CSS units already in Panama.
Largely through airborne operations, capable and aggressive combined arms task forces were brought to bear on short notice against a dispersed enemy. Thirty-two separate objectives were attacked at the same time, paralyzing the enemy. The resounding success of Operation Just Cause was due mostly to the parachute assault and rapid follow-on missions made possible by the airborne operation. Operation Just Cause demonstrated once again the capability, flexibility and value of airborne forces.

1-1. PREPARATION FOR WAR

Airborne and ranger units are organized and equipped to conduct parachute assaults to close with the enemy to kill him, to destroy his equipment, and to shatter his will to resist. This close personal fight requires combat-ready units composed of skilled soldiers and resourceful leaders. These units are the result of a tough, thorough, and demanding training program conducted by leaders who understand the effective employment of airborne forces, the combined arms team, and joint operations.

1-2. THE SOLDIER

Paratroopers must be experts in marksmanship, close combat, individual parachute techniques, and fieldcraft. They should be proficient with their assigned weapons and other weapons in the unit. They should also be familiar with foreign-made weapons that the enemy will use. In the close fight, paratroopers must be skilled in employing all weapons to include the rifle, the bayonet the AT4, grenades, mines, and bare hands. They must be confident in their ability to fight with these weapons. They must be highly skilled in land navigation, camouflage, and tracking and stalking techniques. Paratroopers must be able to move undetected close to enemy soldiers. Stealth is required for reconnaissance, infiltration, and achieving surprise. Paratroopers must have the skill and the will to dominate the close fight.

1-3. THE LEADER

Infantry leaders must be the most capable soldiers in their unit and be tactically and technically proficient. The quality of the leadership determines the unit's success or failure in battle. Leaders must be proficient in land navigation and have an appreciation for terrain and parachute assault techniques. For a foot soldier, the terrain is both protector and ally. When properly exploited, it can increase the combat potential of the unit and support the achievement of surprise. All leaders must also be resourceful, tenacious, and decisive warriors. They are the combined arms integrators closest to the fight. They must be highly skilled in the employment of all the weapons and assets in the combined arms team. Leaders must be innovative and flexible when employing their units. They must have the mental agility to quickly grasp the situation and the initiative to take independent action, based on the situation and the commander's intent. Above all, they must personally lead their unit to success in close combat.

1-4. THE UNIT

The strength of airborne forces comes from the skill, courage, and discipline of the individual paratrooper. The paratrooper's abilities are enhanced by the teamwork and cohesion that develop in squads and Platoons. This teamwork
cohesion is essential to the survival and success of airborne forces in close combat. Cohesion enhances the paratrooper’s will and determination to persevere, to accept the hardships, and to refuse to accept defeat. In the close fight, when the decision hangs in the balance, these are the factors that decide the victor. It is at the small-unit level (squad and platoon) that cohesion and teamwork provide the greatest benefits to the combat effectiveness of the unit. Paratroopers must have complete trust and confidence in their leaders. Leaders earn this trust and confidence by sharing the hardships and by displaying the leadership attributes described in FM 22-100. They must entrust the same confidence in their soldiers for this bonding to develop.

1-5. UNIT TRAINING PROGRAM

The unit training program must instill individual and collective skills and confidence, and must develop combat-ready units. It must consist of difficult, challenging training events that prepare soldiers, leaders, and units for the close fight. It must be conducted IAW FM 25-100, FM 25-101, and the MTP. The program must emphasize physical fitness, marksmanship skills, and parachute techniques. Paratroopers must be challenged to achieve expert proficiency in all of the combat critical skills. Night training, especially night live-fire exercises and parachute assaults, should be routine. The environment of the close fight should be simulated when possible. Training events that require subordinate leaders to use their initiative and take independent action are essential to prepare for decentralized operations that the unit normally conducts. Training to standard also develops cohesive, tenacious squads and platoons that can overcome all obstacles to ensure the safety of their unit and the accomplishment of the mission. The training program must continue after the unit begins conducting combat operations. The skills, teamwork, and cohesion must be sustained as replacements arrive in the unit. This is essential to maintain the combat effectiveness of the unit.

1-6. CAPABILITIES OF AIRBORNE FORCES

Airborne forces may be strategically, operationally, or tactically deployed on short notice to DZs anywhere in the world. They can be employed as a deterrent or combat force.

a. The USAF provides support to airborne operations that include:
   • Airlift.
   • Counterair.
   • Close air support.
   • Tactical air reconnaissance.
   • Air interdiction.
   • Special air warfare operations.
   • Electronic warfare.
   • Suppression of enemy air defense.

b. The strategic mobility of airborne forces permits rapid employment to meet contingency across the operational continuum anywhere in the world. Airborne forces provide a means by which a commander can decisively influence operations. The primary advantages of airborne operations are as follows: