

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.