



## HISTORY

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#### SOUTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGN

For three weeks in the summer of 1944 the Antitank Company of the [442nd Regimental Combat Team](#) was stationed in the hills and towns outside Livorno, Italy. There weren't many German tanks to destroy, so instead the men served as ration and litter bearers.

Then suddenly, on July 15, the Antitank Company was ordered to withdraw from the front line. The men didn't find out why until several days later when they reached an airfield near Rome. They were attached to the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment, part of the First Airborne Task Force.

For two weeks they trained to be glider infantry. The Antitank Company spent many hours learning to load the gliders and to securely lash down the equipment. The body of the glider was 48 feet long and 12 feet high - just large enough to fit a jeep, or a trailer filled with ammunition, or a British six-pound antitank gun. The Waco CG-4A gliders were made of metal tubing, canvas and wood. They had no motor, no armor and no armaments. Two pilots from the First Airborne manned each cockpit, and three to six men from the Antitank Company rode inside. The men completed two training glider flights over Rome.

On August 15, "Operation Dragoon," the invasion of Southern France began. At 6 a.m., the paratroopers left. Their job was to secure the landing fields for the glider-borne troops. At 4 p.m., the glider troops took off from the airfields in Italy. Their job was to land, quickly set up their guns and hold the area until the seaborne troops could relieve them.

The C-47 tug planes took off, towing the gliders 350 feet behind. The gliders bounced and jerked on an 11/16-inch thick nylon rope. The 44 gliders flew from Northern Italy over the Ligurian Sea. The men looked down on the seaborne troops plowing through the water toward the French coast.

As the men approached the green fields around Le Muy, they could see many colorful parachutes lying on the ground, like giant yellow, red and blue morning glories. They also were greeted by bursts of anti-aircraft flak. The tail of one glider was hit.

As they got closer to the ground, they found that the terrain was not as they had been briefed. They hadn't counted on the high hedges or "Rommel's Asparagus." German Field Marshal Rommel had ordered that thousands of wooden poles be erected in open fields to impede glider landings. The spiked poles were about four inches in diameter, 10-foot-tall, and were criss-crossed with barbed wire. Many poles were mounted with Teller Mines, which exploded on impact.

At 3,000 feet, instead of the prescribed 100 feet, the gliders were cut off from the tug planes. As the unarmed, motor-less, fabric-covered gliders hurtled toward the ground, the pilots tried to adjust the angle of entry. But the landing area was limited, and the pilots would only have one chance to decide where to land.

One glider crashed into a tree. Both glider pilots broke their legs from the impact. Their cargo, a jeep, was totaled. Fortunately the 28 ropes lashed to the jeep, though shredded, had held.

Two other glider pilots weren't as lucky. The steepness and force of the landing cut all the ropes and the gliders' contents shifted forward. The jeep broke free, smashed into the cockpit and instantly killed the pilots.

Nine men from the Antitank Company were injured during the landing. There were many glider pilot casualties. The men tried to help the pilots, but they were ordered to immediately unload their equipment and go to their gathering point.

As one team of Antitank men marched toward their objective, they were saddened to see 15 dead paratroopers. The *Nisei* had good relationships with the "jumpers," who invited them to a party the previous night. But thanks to the jumpers, the Antitank Company didn't encounter any enemy attacks. The men set up their guns in less than an hour, and some units did reconnaissance. For two days they held their positions until they were relieved by the seaborne troops, which had pushed inland.

For the next two months the Antitank Company guarded the exposed right flank of the 7th Army and gave antitank protection to the 517th Parachute Infantry. It also cleared mines, captured Germans, and guarded roads and tunnels.

On October 20 the Antitank Company was relieved and rejoined the 442nd in time to help in the rescue of the [Lost Battalion](#). For their actions in Southern France, the men received a Combat Infantryman's Badge and were the only unit in the 442nd to receive the Glider Badge.

For many years afterward the men shuddered when they boarded airplanes. To them, the phrase, "items may shift during flight" held a tragic memory.