

The 6th Airborne Division In Normandy.

7th (L.I.) Battalion Parachute Regiment.

WAR DIARY of Lieut Col. Pine-Coffin (Commanding Officer).

De
DE
De
Pl
6t
st
No
fo
tl
p.
(
T
1

The role of the battalion was to seize and hold the bridges over the River Orne and Canal de Caen at 103745 and 098748 and to establish a bridgehead on the west bank of the canal until relieved by seaborne troops. The bridges were to be captured intact if possible. In addition, a battery position at 105765 (Thought to be abandoned) was to be neutralised and occupied.

In order to try and secure the bridges intact a coup de main force landed as close to the bridges as possible at 0020 hours "D" Day (6th June) This force consisted of a company and two platoons of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (With certain attached troops) under Major Howard (Oxf & Bucks) and was carried in six gliders. Lieut MacDonald travelled with this force for liaison duties between Howard and myself.

The coup de main party was successful and as a result of this success it was not necessary for the battalion to cross the water obstacles by dinghies as had been expected.

These dinghies were carried in kit bags, together with the necessary ropes for making the ferries, either on the legs of men or attached to bicycle chutes and thrown out by number ones of certain sticks. 30 dinghies and 12 recce boats together with a large number of ropes (Falls) were carried in all.

The dropping was not too accurate and, although the bulk of the battalion were dropped on the D.Z. (Dropping Zone), there were many who were put down several miles wide. Speed in forming up was an essential part of the battalion plan; this was difficult for the following reasons:-

(1) The sticks were very scattered (The large number of kit bags undoubtedly slowed up the exits and resulted in some sticks being unduly long) and the aircraft seemed to come in from all angles, which confused those who were using the line of flight to get their bearings.

(2) The enemy had manned positions on the DZ itself and there was a good bit of machine gun fire across the DZ which resulted in some casualties.

(3) The heavy kit bags containing the boating material slowed the men a lot. The normal drill coming in to the RV at the double was quite impossible.

Despite these difficulties however the men came in pretty well and by 0130 hours I had about 50% of the riflemen and Bren gunners in. There were no mortars, Medium Machine Guns or wireless sets in though I could hear Howard's success signal and knew that he had captured the bridges and that they were crossable, so at 0130 hours I set off with my initial attack force (A.B.C. company's and advance Battalion H.Q. The plan was for rear Battalion H.Q. to follow in it's own best time, so I left the 2nd In-Command (Steele-Baume) to collect in all he could and to follow us up, choosing his own time in starting.

As the bridges were intact I took my force over them with all speed and ordered them into their pre-arranged bridgehead positions in Benouville. I had arranged in ENGLAND with Howard to do this if he should be fighting on the west of the canal when I arrived; my positions were outside the area he was likely to be in with his small force, and by working around into them I would not only assist him but would also save time. It was 0140 hours when I crossed the canal bridge with this force.

The occupation of the bridge head positions called for some hasty decisions and reorganisation as no complete platoon (Or even section) existed as such. It was only possible to gauge the position of the companies by the sound of small arms fire as there was no wireless.