

The 6th Airborne Division In Normandy.

When I judged that the positions had been occupied at about 0210 hours, I ordered Howard (Who came under my command at this stage) to withdraw his men over the canal bridge and made him responsible for the River Bridge and the area between the two bridges.

Steele-Baume and rear Battalion H.Q. which still included no mortars, Medium Machine Guns (MMG'S) or Wireless. joined me on the West of the Canal at 0220 hours.

From then on it is not really possible to give a clear story of the fighting which was very confused and fierce and almost continuous. The loss of the wireless was particularly handicapping. "B" Company were much troubled by snipers in Le Port and were also heavily attacked in their positions on the wooded escarpment at 096750. Soon after daylight the lack of mortars and M.M.G'S became uncomfortably apparent and a modification of the original dispositions was called for. The situation generally, at first light was as follows:-

(1) "A" Coy were fighting in their area but runners failed to reach them, no runners came back from them, and there was no wireless. The company appeared to be surrounded because "B" Coy were on occasions attacked from the south i/e their ("B" coy's) left.

(2) The Regimental Aid Post in "A" coy area had been over-run and the Medical Officer Wagstaffe of 225 Para Field Ambulance was missing, the Padre Parry had been killed at the R.A.P. This was found out by the Intelligence Officer Mills who had gone to try and contact "A" company. The battalion Medical Officer Young was also missing after the drop. He arrived by glider the next day together with his stick (The number of men carried in one plane) which had not been dropped. This stick also included Officer Commanding H.Q.Coy (Tullis)

(3) "B" Coy were finding it difficult to retain their hold on the wooded escarpment and had only been able to dominate the southern half of Le Port.

(4) "C" Coy was almost completely split up into battle outposts. I had altered the original orders to these outposts about withdrawal as I could not communicate with them by wireless and did not consider runners reliable enough for such an important message. I ordered them to withdraw on their own initiative but only if under heavy pressure. None of them did so withdraw.

(5) The rifle companies were about 50% strength (less casualties which they were suffering at the time); a few personnel of the mortar and M.M.G. platoons were available but armed only with pistols. These I retained at my H.Q. to augment the counter attack force which consisted of "C" Coy (Less two platoons and commander (Missing).

I decided to hold the enemy on the line of the road running North-South from Le Port to Benouville. The plan was:- "B" Coy was to infest the southern half of Le Port and the wood on the north side of the road junction at 097748 and to prevent any breakthrough to the bridge from the north. I held my counter attack force in the area of my H.Q. from which it could cover the small wood at 097748 by fire and was well placed to launch a counter attack. The gallant fight being put up by "A" Coy, I hoped would prevent any large scale attack developing from the south. If it did so develop however the country was fairly open to the south of the bridge itself and I had placed one platoon of "B" Coy (Thomas) in this position and felt confident that he could at least delay any attack from that direction for sufficient time for me to be able to take any necessary action. In a real emergency I would have brought a proportion of Howard's force back to the West side of the bridge.

This plan worked well and during the course of the day's fighting the enemy launched eight separate attacks in addition to nagging constantly with small parties and occasionally armoured cars. My weak spot was the bank of the canal or round the south west of Le Port. This was covered only by battalion H.Q. personnel and was continually threatened by small infiltrating parties of enemy and snipers.