

The 6th Airborne Division In Normandy.

Excellent work was done here by the mortar officer (Archdale) who led numerous small patrols to break up parties attempting to come in this way during the course of the days fighting.

I estimate that the organised attacks were delivered by about a company each time. The enemy showed little initiative and repeated the same attack time after time, fortunately the dispositions suited the approach he chose. He usually attacked from the north west or west. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy (many more would have been inflicted if I could have used mortars and M.M.G's) and all attacks were beaten off. No further closing in on the bridge-head was therefore necessary. The snipers in Le Port were a constant source of trouble and excellent work was done by 5 platoon (Poole) in dealing with them. At one time a P.I.A.T. (Projectile infantry anti-tank) (Cpl Thomas Killeen) was used most successfully against the snipers in the tower of the church in Le Port. The snipers too showed little initiative and twelve bodies were later found in the church tower.

At 1200 hours on "D" Day the piper of No.1 Special Service Brigade could be heard in St Aubin 0876. This was the pre-arranged recognition signal but I did not give the answering bugle call as this would have meant that the way was clear for the S.S. Brigade to come through. Until the whole of Le Port had been cleared this was not the case. However the leading elements of the Brigade (No.6 Commando) succeeded where the Germans had failed and found my weak spot. At 1330 hours the first commando troops entered my H.Q. area from the north having worked round the S.W. of Le Port.

The S.S. Brigade assisted in the clearing of Le Port and the piper led the first part of them over the bridge at about 1400 hours. Snipers returned to the northern half of Le Port after the S.S. Brigade had passed through and they were never completely cleared from there.

Relief by 8th Infantry Brigade was expected not before H plus 5 hours i/e 1215 hours and all ears were strained for the pre-arranged bugle recognition call (Defaulters) which was to be sounded from St Aubin by the leading unit (East Yorks) which was to relieve the battalion in it's bridgehead position.

Further attacks were launched on the battalion position during the afternoon. At one period, as a novelty, two gun boats came up the canal. Fire was held until they reached the bridge when one of them was put out of action by a P.I.A.T. fired by Howards force from the bridge area. The second one turned round and made off quickly whilst the first one opened fire with its gun (Which was remote controlled) and shot up my H.Q. area. There were several lucky escapes and only one slight casualty. The crew of the boat were taken prisoner.

The same boats, or similar ones, had been shooting up the battle outpost at the battery position 105765 (Lieut Parrish). This outpost found that the position was, as thought, abandoned and so they occupied it themselves and remained there all day without incident other than the trouble with the gun boat. This trouble cost the outpost one killed and one wounded.

About 1900 hours the 2nd in command "A" Coy (Webber) appeared at my H.Q. and gave me my first real report of his company. The company commander (Taylor) was a stretcher case, Webber (Himself wounded, but capable of movement) was commanding, the other officers were all casualties (One dead, one missing after the drop and one wounded but carrying on) and the company as suspected, surrounded and hard pressed but nevertheless intact and fighting back hard. A counter attack was clearly necessary to enable them to collect in their wounded and regroup. I detailed the platoon of "C" coy who formed my counter attack force (Lieut MacDonald) for the job and replaced them temporarily with a platoon drawn from Howard.