

My Normandie **By Bert Marsh**

I was born Herbert Marsh on the 24th October 1924 and at the time we lived at 12, Northcross Road, Cowcliffe, Huddersfield. The fifth in line of eight children I had what could only be described as a fairly normal upbringing. In the early years I attended at Oaks C of E School and went from Infants through junior to senior and left in 1938 at the ripe old age of 14 years. I had a lot of time off school due to regular problems with chest infections but managed to complete it. In them days most children left school at 14 years and had to find work to help with the family income.



When I left school I wanted to be a chef probably influenced by my mother who was a marvellous cook as far as I was concerned and I just loved to help her when she was baking etc. The smell of fresh bread straight from the oven is a joy to behold and we would often be chastised for our eagerness to tackle the hot oven in anticipation of the rewards of mothers labour. On one occasion when my mother was laid up in bed I baked 2 stone of bread myself running up and down stairs to obtain further instructions on the next step from the master baker. Little did I know then what training that would be for my future in the Airborne. I'm not sure how good the bread was compared with that baked by mum but nevertheless I can't recall any of it being left so it was obviously edible if nothing else. Having left school it was time to find work and the temptation of being a chef was not great enough as it did not pay enough money for a poor family. The likes of Gordon Ramsey were unknown and while my ability to cook was at a minimum I am sure my ability to swear was much easier.

Like most in those days I was forced to go in the Woollen Milland my first job was as an assistant for which I was paid the princely sum of 7s 6d per 48 hour week. (37½p in today's Money). When I was about 16 ½ years old I snapped up an opportunity to get into engineering at Brahmas, Division Street, Sheffield. Initially in electrical motors and the likes, followed by tool design, and at one time worked in the Press shop.

I became quite proficient in the Engineering world and at Aircraft and Sheet Metal Engineering. After the war it was to become the job I relied on and where I eventually became foreman. I worked long hours and often worked late into the night at home doing paperwork etc for the company. My wife did not appreciate it and I unfortunately perhaps didn't appreciate her as I should have.

In 1936 we moved to a new home at Celandine Avenue Salendine Nook Huddersfield, an address that caused me untold grief when I was later to serve Her Majesty. When war broke out in September 1939 I was still a young lad of 14 yrs but like most wanted to join up and be like the rest but of course we did not know then what lay ahead. At the age of 17 years in 1941 I suffered from Meningitis

which laid me low for a while. This illness gave me violent headaches and I could not stand any daylight or bright lights and I was isolated in a bedroom which was completely blacked out. There was a time during the early part of this illness when it was touch and go as to whether I would recover and my devoted parents sat up with me each night nursing me through the ailment.

Perhaps that too was to stand me in good stead for the coming onslaught and I began to get better after about a week and remained off work for about 8 weeks all together, after all the war effort was important work and my output would surely be missed if we were ever going to defeat Herr Hitler. The main treatment was medicine and rest in the dark. A bit like, the mushroom syndrome we were to come to know in the Airborne. The illness didn't leave me with any lasting effects and if anything things improved because while at school I had regular yearly chest problems and had all on getting my wind. This resulted in long periods of absence. After the illness and joining the Army I never had any further chest problems. Fortunately, I did not go to meet my maker and having got over the illness in early 1942 at the age of 18 years I volunteered for the Army.

Many a story has been told about the passing fit of any Tom Dick or Harry for the war effort and true or not following my attendance at the Huddersfield Recruiting Office I was sent for a Medical Examination in Huddersfield. When I went for the medical my GP Dr Owen who normally sat on the medical boards was not on the panel and so I was passed A1 and fit to serve. My GP Dr Owen was less than pleased to hear that I had passed the board and went mad when he found out remonstrating with my mother as if it was her fault, but it was too late to his annoyance, her fear and my delight, I was in!

After passing the Medical and signing up, about 1 month later I received the call up papers. I was to join the Army at Richmond Barracks, North Yorkshire, home of The Green Howard's. I remember we were all tested on a sort of aptitude test having to fit electrical items together and also small pumps after which they decided what part of the Army you would be best suited too. You were asked what part of the Army you would like to join and I said, 'Artillery' don't really know why the Artillery I certainly didn't know much about them but obviously I had heard bits about what happened at different points in the early years of the war. For some unknown reason I wanted to be a 'Gunner'. This choice of service was apparently given great store, put into your records and then dismissed, because I was duly despatched to the infantry barracks in Richmond North Yorks to take up my new occupation as one of the poor bloody infantry.

I remember the first day arriving at Richmond station and being met by a Sgt and 2 corporals although I hadn't a clue who they were then and even less now. We were quickly got into file and then carrying our suitcases we were marched up the long hill to Richmond Barracks. Anyone who has travelled that way will know what I mean when I say, 'Why didn't they have suitcases with wheels on in them days?' That road seemed to go on for miles and there was always just a bit more to go, something that became prevalent throughout my military experience. They tell me nothing changes.

My initial training at Richmond Barracks was Basic Infantry Training and was for 6 weeks and like most amounted to learning to march, or as the drill sergeants

amongst you will know, how to move about a body of men in a smart, soldier like and uniform manner' with and without weapons.

It is often said that Drill is the basis of good order and military discipline and that may be true but one thing for certain not many squaddies liked it. Never the less we all started off with two left feet but we soon got the hang of it and after managing to coordinate the left arm with the right leg and visa versa we were able to move about as a body of men in a smart soldier like and uniform manner. This was achieved under the direction of a smartly dressed chap in the trappings of a sergeant major raising his voice to unbelievably high decibels and directing us in the noble art of foot drill. Not recommended to those with flat feet, lack of coordination and general sloppiness. Those unable to carryout this form of synchronised foot stomping would find themselves running round the square with the rifle above the head until the nice man told you to stop, or until such time as they were placed in the guard room as a warning to all other would be slackers.

Getting fit and weapons training were also on the menu whether you wanted it or not. I can recall that during weapons training we would be taught how to strip down a weapon such as the Bren gun and then reassemble it. Each part had to be taken in the right order and it was required that you call out the name of the part as you stripped or assembled the weapon and to perfect it you had to be able to do it all blindfolded. It had to become second nature and with the help of the instructors and a few sturdy kicks up the backside we managed to pass the tests. It was a test that we would all later be eternally grateful to have passed when we eventually came up against 'The Hun'.

Our lack of strength showed when we were required during the early stages of fitness training to carry a colleague 100 yards and back again and if I'm honest too many of us were weak kneed and struggled. At that early stage I was never strong enough and extra push ups and squats and star jumps were awarded me as if it was winner takes all. I did however have a certain ability to run over a reasonable distance without getting too short of breath and this became my get out or at least that was what I thought. During the training we all took part in what was a 6 mile run competition in which at the time I was proud to say I came 1st but as they say in the army never volunteer for anything. I found out a short time later that I had been a little unwise, because I was then deemed to have volunteered to take part in a 10 mile run along against other runners from across the Army. Some of these athletes were a little more professional and were from all three armed services and across the Empire. Well we still had one in them days. I didn't win of course and apart from the gasping past the finishing post there was little I remember of the race except that I was not the triumphant 1st across the line.

There was no official passing out parade or anything like that after the initial training and civilians were not allowed anywhere near the camp as security was pretty tight. Would we have wanted our parents to have seen us pass of the square like they do today? I don't know. I laugh now but it really didn't matter all that much because everyone was passed out including them that couldn't keep step. I suppose it was a matter of needs must. There was a niche for all, even if it meant you were to be sent to the Pioneer Corps.

Once a recruit had passed the initial training he was then posted to a suitable Regiment for his standard and I fully expected to be sent to the Royal Artillery as selected by my good self when asked at the recruitment stage. Imagine my surprise then having passed out, to find I had been transferred to The Green Howard Regiment. Not that the Green Howard's were a new unit no siree, they had a long tradition going back to their formation. in 1688 from independent companies of infantry in Devon. Until 1751 it was known by the names of its various colonels, when it then became the 19th Regiment of Foot. In 1782 all regiments of foot without a special designation were given a county title "to cultivate a connection with the County which might at all times be useful towards recruiting". The regiment became the 19th (1st North Riding of Yorkshire) Regiment of Foot, and its main recruiting efforts continued in this area until 2006, particularly in Middlesbrough, Redcar, Northallerton and Scarborough.

Having past out of basic training and arriving to join my new Regiment my next move was 3 mile down the road to Ask Hall. Prior to the start of the war Ask Hall had been a racing training stables and my first accommodation was a hayloft within the complex. Here I was to be instructed in driving and in the use of the 3" Mortar. The Driving coarse lasted for 3 weeks and consisted of learning to drive 15cwt trucks and the half tracked Bren Gun Carrier. We would drive the vehicles around all the villages and on one occasion while driving a Bren gun carrier I was asked to reverse round a corner. On doing so I accidentally drove the track onto the verge at which to my embarrassment and everyone else's enjoyment the Sgt shouted, "Marsh you have just knocked a row of Fucking houses down.". It was of course only a blip and I eventually passed the coarse a few days later and the details were duly recorded in my part one pay book.

A 3 week, coarse on the 3" Mortar was next on the list for this "Would be warrior" and after a few lectures in the art of throwing lumps of metal long distances in the class room we were taken out in carriers onto the North Yorkshire Moors to put into practice that which we had learned in doors. Firstly we practiced Range Finding. **The range finder was a wonderful invention. It was a long tube about 1 yard long, (feet an inches in them days)** mounted on a tripod and had prismatic lenses at each end. In the centre was two eye pieces through which one would look into the instrument and aim at the target. As a result it was possible to work out the range of the target from your location. Having eventually mastered that art to a degree satisfactory to a recruit hungry Army we then turned to the actual part were we got to fire the mortars. After a period of learning and practice we were again tested on our ability to select a target, find the range and direction after which we fired 1 round. We then had to adjust to the target and call for fire from both mortars when 3 shots would be fired.

Having completed and passed the two coarses I was sent on a weeks leave at the end of which I was told to report to the 10th Battalion the Green Howard's Regiment in Truro, Cornwall. Leave was soon over and like most young soldiers I could not wait to join my battalion. Shortly after reporting for duty in Truro the Battalion was asked if it would like to train as a Parachute Battalion. Like most young men at that time Parachuting was seen as something different and exciting to be part of and of course that was true in my case. When asked, approximately 50% of the Battalion volunteered, me along with them although we didn't know

what we were letting ourselves in for. The Commanding Officer at the time was Lt Colonel Parker who apparently was a good C.O. although I had only been in the battalion about a month. After the decision to make the 10th Battalion the 12th Yorkshire Battalion of the Parachute Regiment Col Parker went round the other Battalions asking, which of the men wanted to transfer to the Para's. Anyone that volunteered of course joined those from the 10th Battalion that had formed the 12th Bn of the Para's and those in the tenth that didn't like the idea of falling through the sky were sent to the other two battalions, that is the 9th and the 11th Battalions of the Green Howard's. Colonel Parker later went to the 6th Air Landing Brigade and later took part in the events of Normandy. When I finished my basic training and was sent to the 10th Bn Green Howard's' only one other lad was posted with me. He was from Todmorden although I can't remember his name it's such a long time ago. I don't think he came with me to the Para's because he was Mortar trained like me but was not with me in the 12th Bn.

We were sent to Hardwick Hall to do the Initial training for the Parachute Regiment so I guess it was the first Parachute Regiment training school. It had already been used by SOE to train their Operatives so it was I suppose a natural choice for Para training. It was situated near Chesterfield in Derbyshire and was in the grounds of a large Country Manor linked to the Duke of Devonshire and the Cavendish family. The house was perched up on the top of a hill and was surrounded by woods etc. In the bottom was a large lake around which was built the wooden huts used for our accommodation. While not the best in the world it was still better than the stables at Ask Hall. I would estimate that there was, about 200 of us in this intake and the accommodation was sparse with double bunk beds.

This for us was a place of vigorous physical training consisting of P.T (Physical training), runs and assault course with and without full kit and boxing, which I always hated. Full kit was khaki clothing and over smock, webbing, pouches, small pack containing mess tins etc. Our boots were the general black leather with leather soles and filled with segs. Sometimes referred to as Ammo boots they were difficult to walk in on hard concrete floors and you could be heard miles away. All our kit was typical military stuff and had to be clean, spit and polished and blanched whenever we were training and was an absolute pain to clean. Boxing took the basic of formats. We would parade in PT shorts and vest and be taken into a building used as a gym and a square would be made up of bench's. We all stood round the square and the staff would point to two individuals who were told to get in the ring (square) and fight. Woe be to those who did not box and the selection took no account of difference in height, weight, age, or build. I didn't particularly enjoy this activity although I assumed it was to determine if you had the necessary spirit and aggression in you to become one of them! I must have fitted the requirement. The course was not for the faint hearted as I soon found out and for me at least it was difficult at first, but as I got fitter it got easier. The hills didn't get any smaller or shorter and there was always one more ridge to climb. The Instructors I think were Sgts and mainly had been on PT courses etc. The final test as a form of passing out we had to do a 6 mile road run in full gear. On that occasion a couple of the guys were really flagging and so as you do we carried their rifles etc. The training was hard and like most things when you live and work with a group of blokes in arduous conditions you are bound together like no others and you become as one. At the end of training we marched into

Chesterfield, about 8 and ½ miles, in full kit, all blanco'ed up, where we were put on a train to Wilmslow, Cheshire. Having disembarked we were formed up in ranks and to save us walking we were marched to Ringway the then newly created No1 parachute training school. Before the war Ringway had been a civil airport and after the decision to form Airborne Forces it was chosen to be the school at which parachute training would take place. My time at Ringway was very pleasant in fact it was like a bloody tea party compared with the riggers of Hardwick. The instructors were brilliant they were all RAF personnel. Gone were the shouting and bawling that encouraged us up the hills, over the walls and through the ditches of Derbyshire. They like all RAF guys were calm, cool and casual to the point of being Ally. Back in 1942 paratroops were very new and there was a lot to be learned by all. The parachute we used was nothing like those used today and barely held us up. If the rigging was pulled down on to hard then the whole thing would collapse care was taken when operating this equipment. We were shown how to prepare the parachute, to fit what was then at least fairly fit taught bodies, after all with limited food and lots of training not many carried much weight. One renowned piece of equipment was the 'Winch'. It was situated on a platform some distance in the air and it was required that you climbed up to the platform fastened into the harness and jumped off. This was a very testing, 'Brown Trousers moment' for most. When first required to jump off the instructor was saying jump you'll be fine and the mind was saying can I trust this bit of webbing and a reversed fan? In the end I made it and once conquered the hesitation vanished. After a few days in the hangers carrying out aircraft drills and flight training where we discovered how to exit a plane and safely land by rolling along the ground and spreading the shock across the body. We moved on to Tatton Park which was similar to Hardwick Hall, to do balloon jumping. The grounds of the Tatton Hall estate were used as the DZ for the Balloon jumps. We had to do 3 balloons jumps from 700 feet, one of which was a night drop. The balloon was a barrage balloon with a cage underneath, which was fastened to a vehicle mounted winch and allowed to rise to the required height for the jump to take place. On each occasion there would be 5 or 6 recruits and an instructor strategically placed in the cage and a flimsy retaining bar placed across the entrance to prevent premature ejaculation. Once in the cage would rise to 700 feet and each and every man stood quietly observing the nearing clouds and distant horizon privately going through his thoughts of what was happening. The instructors would tell jokes to try and ease the tension in the cage. The higher you climbed the quieter it became and every sound was magnified. The wind never too strong blew across the cage and as the cable paid out and the creaking of the Hauser was a sound like the creaking door of the haunted house. For some it was a frightening experience and knees could be heard knocking whilst teeth chattered. Nerves were obvious, but in my case I was looking forward to it, the very idea of parachuting was an exciting adventure not to be missed. When my time came I was called forward by the instructor and was required to sit in a hole cut in the base of the cage. It was circular about 2 to 2 and half foot across and when instructed you were required to push off with your hands in order that the chute on your back didn't catch the rim of the hole. There was not a lot of spare and if it did you were pushed forward and inevitably your head or face would come into contact with the aperture and injuries were not uncommon. This particular practice was referred to as 'Ringin the Bell' and there were no steel helmets in those days, merely a sponge filled band around the head and tied under the chin. If the chute failed or collapsed there was

no going back and no reserve to call on. Fortunately there were not too many of these events and I was only aware of one happening myself, when a young lad in battalion had what was called a roman candle. On completion of the balloons we moved on to the real thing Aircraft! In order to pass the coarse and gain those wings we had to complete descents from 5 aircraft at 500 ft in our case these were all from Whitley Bombers, a real bone shaker as those who have experienced it will testify. When jumping from this aircraft we all drew and fitted chutes as normal and then emplaned about 10 at a time. We sat on the floor without equipment side by side and hooked up to a cable that ran the length of the aircraft two sticks facing each other. When we approached the DZ again at Tatton Park we would shuffle along the floor towards the aperture which was similar to that of the balloon. As you got to it you had to swing your legs into the hole alternately with port and starboard stick, and wriggle your backside to sit on the edge and then push yourself off. All this had to be done quickly to ensure all the stick exited onto the DZ. Not always easy and many an event to laugh about afterwards especially those how 'Rang the Bell'. I completed my jumps successfully without incident and having qualified for my wings and the coveted Red Beret the end of the coarse was one of the proudest moments of my life. To have chosen to be a Paratrooper and endured the extremely hard training and passed was something that men only dream of. I had conquered many of my own fears, achieved standards of fitness that only those who have done it can know, and merged into a brotherhood so strong that it would later help me through three years of war and much later in my own battles in civilian life. During this final part of the training, those of us that remained had become very close, because we had faced the difficulties and learned to manage them together. We had conquered our fear of throwing our bodies out of a perfectly good aircraft in the uncertain hope that all would be fine and we would come through unscathed. We were finally Paratroopers! As Montgomery later said?

What manner of men are these who wear the maroon beret?

They are, firstly, all volunteers and are toughened by hard physical training. As a result they have that infectious optimism and that offensive eagerness which comes from physical well being. They have "jumped" from the air and by so doing have conquered fear. Their duty lies in the van of the battle; they are proud of this honour and have never failed in any task. They have the highest standards in all things whether it be skill in Battle or smartness in the execution of all peacetime duties. They have shown themselves to be as tenacious and determined in defence as they are courageous in the attack. They are, in fact, men apart -- every man an Emperor.

Of all the factors which make for success in battle, the spirit of the warrior is the most decisive. That spirit can be found in full measure in the men who wear the Maroon Beret.

Field Marshall the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein

'Over the years I have found that there will be times when for long periods you never see another Airborne Brother but, when you meet, that instant unity is still there. It is something that remains with you for the rest of your life.'

I was now given 10 days leave and returned home to Huddersfield to my parents and family. My father a Canadian had served in the First World War so knew of the dangers that I would later face. However he was one of the proudest men alive when I came home a member of the Parachute Regiment. The Red Beret of course was not the Icon that it was to become. My mother was like all mothers, she worried about me as she always had and told me so every time I went on leave. Her concern was natural and I loved her for it yet she knew I had to do my duty and each time I left my mother reluctantly kissed me, waved me good bye and let me go. This time was no different except that we all knew that I would probably see the horrors of war before and if, I saw them again. Roundabout July 1943 I travelled to Larkhill where I joined the rest of the battalion on Salisbury Plain which was to be the home station. We were now called the 12th Yorkshire Battalion Parachute Regiment.

The Parachute Regiment had still a lot to prove at this time although other battalions already existed. The next 9 months was hard training, with reveille at 6 a.m., on parade at 6.15a.m do a 6 mile run in less than 1 hour, or on other occasions it would be 2 mile in full battle dress in 15 minutes. These were stepped up to 10 mile and 4 mile. We did small exercises followed by a 50 mile march in 18 hours all the time training for that first big real event. It was during this time that I met my mates Eddie who had been in the 10th Green Hoard's before me and 'H' who joined the 12th Battalion, at Larkhill sometime after me and Eddie. We were to become close friends for the duration.

Parachute training continued and many were cancelled owing to bad weather and I guess times don't change much the weather will always have great influence on the war and on the frailty of the men that fought against it whilst battling against a greater evil. During this time we had 2 fatalities. One lad I think his name was Pte Wilson refused to do a balloon jump and as was the norm he was dragged before our C.O. He was given the opportunity to try again the following day, and as if he knew before hand, his chute failed to open and he was fatally injured. God only knows why. Another lad got caught up on the tail wing, and the crew flew round trying to shake him loose without success. After that failed the pilot took the plane over Poole Harbour, where they cut him loose, even though, he like any of us did not have a reserve chute to count on. He must have been killed from the impact of hitting the water. I never did know his name, but both events brought home the dangers faced when making a descent.

All the extensive training meant that when we were granted 36 hour passes and there were a few of them we made the most of it. Most, of our platoon were from the London or the Southampton area and it was probably natural that birds of a feather stuck together, whilst remaining a platoon. I became pals with two great lads, Eddie Ogden a strong character and Herbert Pain known as 'H' a very caring man. None of us took life too seriously and liked to laugh and joke about most things, probably no different to the young men of today's forces. Like me they were Northerners so we hit it off early on and stuck together on such excursions. We would go to places such as Bournemouth, Bath, Bristol and Southampton, and would get a bed at the YMCA for 1 shilling (5pence in old monies). We were not wealthy by any means but that didn't stop us, if one had money then we all had

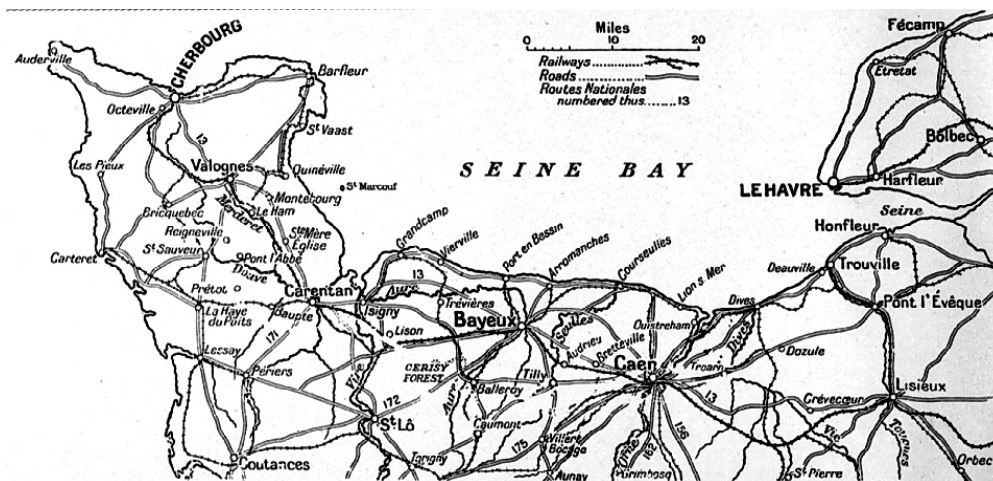
money we would share all we had. We would go to the cinema or visit places of interest such as museums, or go for walks on the seafront at Bournemouth and over the cliffs to Christchurch then catch a bus back to Bournemouth. On one occasion whilst visiting Bristol we encountered a couple of young ladies who invited us back to a party. Needless to say a great time was had by all and we stopped overnight. In the morning we were treated to a full breakfast cooked by the mother of one of the girls. When we got back to camp were managed to obtain some ration coupons which we sent on to show our appreciation. Times were hard and we knew what it meant to give away a full breakfast never mind three. We had some great times together. We knew that there would come a time when the chips would be down and knew without saying that either one would defend the other to the hilt. We also took place in training exercises in areas which were not part of War Dept land but would be requisitioned for the time of the exercise. This would sometimes involve the American Airborne such as the 101st Airborne, later known as the 'Screaming Eagles'. I found them to be a good bunch of blokes overall and at the end of one exercise we were in a bivouac area when they had vans arrive which were manned by women who produced Donuts en mass. Each and every man would have his fill of these American delights. Lots have been said about the American Soldiers over in England during the war and I can't speak for all but those we worked with were no different to us and had similar fears and outlooks. They were part of the wider Airborne Brotherhood.

As young soldiers many of us had not been in combat and were eager to prove our worth while being uncertain of what battle would bring. The 26th May 1944 was to be our next big date but before we went to transit camp our sergeants were having a bit of a do in their mess. The mortar platoon decided we would have a bit of fun with them, and discharged a smoke canister at the mess door and smoked them out. They took it in good spirits and later our platoon Sgt. Sergeant Walker and section Sgt. Lance Sergeant Kilkenny came and gave us all a tot of rum.

Our transit camp was near our allotted airfield at Keevil, between Devizes and Trowbridge. We were in tented accommodation for the next 2 weeks, and had briefings nearly every day, with models made by our intelligence section. Each time we got all keyed up ready for the off only for the event to be called off and the process to start all over again. More Briefings, more packing, unpacking hurry up and wait being the common phrase. To pass our time when not preparing we played cards and football and they showed a number of films and of course there were the inevitable guard duties. Security as always was tight and no one was allowed out and no one was allowed in without authority. At some stage we went to the airfield to pack our containers which were round cylinders made of metal about 6 foot long and 18" in diameter. We placed the mortars, packs, bombs, ammunition etc inside before sealing them and with the help of the RAF lads they were then stowed in the bomb bay ready for travel.

Going to the airfield for the last time, on the night of 5th June 1944 the lads were talking about their prospects and one lad a Private by the name of Catchpole must have been very low. He said he wouldn't be coming back, and he didn't as he killed himself later after we had taken Breville. Arriving at the airfield the pilots and aircrews were all taking photos not for us the wonders of that modern

technology. It was of course the biggest event of the decade and the greatest mobilisation ever to take place in history with thousand and thousands of troops, vehicles, aircraft and ships ever to be assembled. It was now time to blacken our faces, fit our chutes, put on our gloves which we were given to keep our hands warm so we were able to fasten our equipment. Stirling bombers were our choice of aircraft which weren't made for carrying troops, and they were extremely awkward to get into. While waiting to board the aircraft we had time to reflect on what lie ahead. All manner of things went through my head. Different scenarios of what might happen, would I make the jump? Would I be shot? Would I be blown up? Would I live, would I die? I was never frightened to go, but all the training in the world was never ever going to be like the real thing. I tried continually to rid it from my mind and thought of my family at home, my father proud though he was fearful of what may happen and putting on a brave face for the sake of my dear mother. My mother, crying inwardly for the safe keeping of her son and my sisters and brothers rallying round to make all things on the surface at least appear normal. Whatever normal was in those dark hours.



Take-off time was 00:50 am 6th June 1944, on the way we had a cup of tea, there was plenty of bravado and banter to start with, but as we reached the Normandy coast it became very, very quiet except for the constant drone of the engine. The cylinder of the aircraft acted like a cocoon and shielded us from the events outside. No windows to look out of, no room to move about and nothing to be heard, we just sat waiting for the instruction to get ready for the jump. Gone had the thoughts of family and friends, gone too was the fear of battle whatever that was it had been pushed to the back of the mind. Somehow we new we were nearing DZ 'N' and about to take the first step into the unknown territory of an occupied land. That deep dark drop would find us finally at war playing for keeps, and mistakes would cost us dear. From now on training would be 'On the Job'. Our DZ was near to Ranville on the side of the river Orne and fortunately the river was a good navigational aid for the RAF. We made ready and got to our feet the containers were man handled out of the bomb bay ready for despatching. Only the aircrew spoke while we set about of practiced routine in preparation for the task ahead. The load master signalled 2 minutes to exit and the red light came on. After what seemed like an age the green light came on and each in turn we took the step that

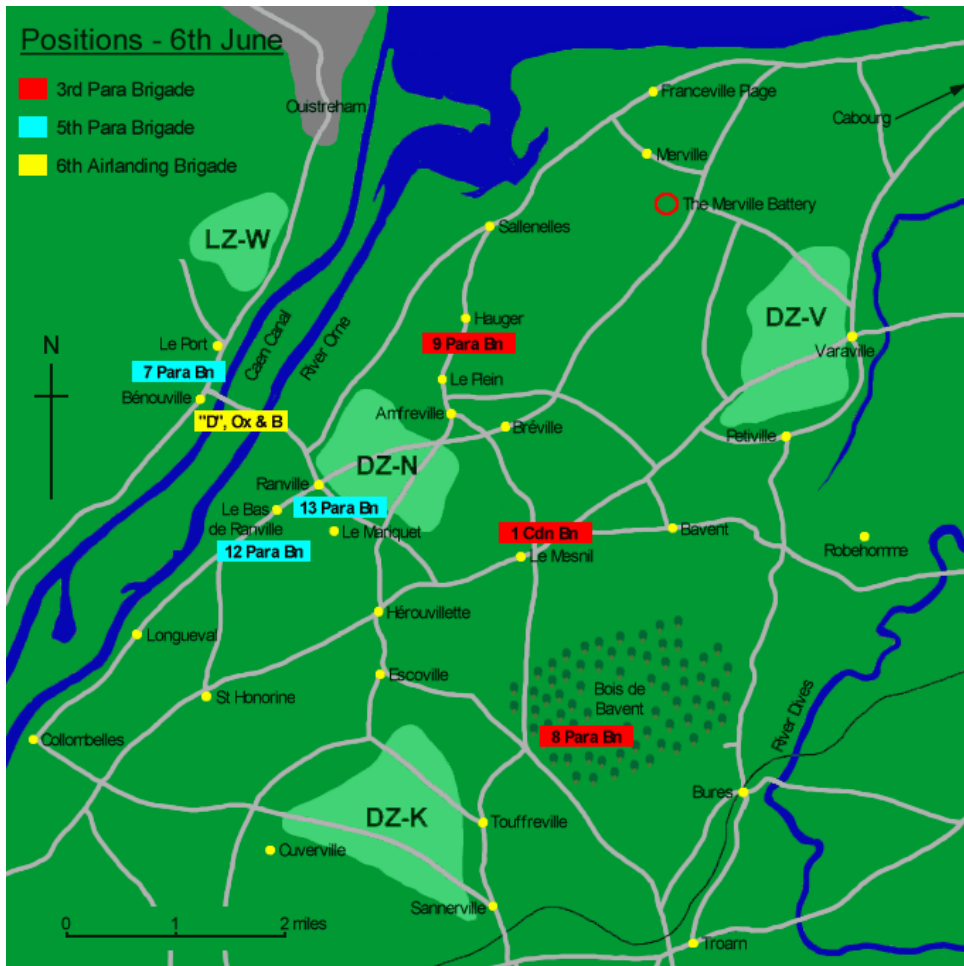
sent us hurtling down through the coffin shaped aperture in the floor at the back of the aircraft. It was my turn and I dropped through the hole into the cold dark night to travel the 500 feet to terra firma. Quickly at first as the static line paid out pulling the chute from my pack, releasing it in good order to develop and deploy above me like an overgrown mushroom. I looked up and was delighted to find it had blossomed into the perfect shape without any tears or holes. I turned my mind to making that landing as easy as possible only to find that the only thing I could see below me was a pitch black abyss. There was no moon as we had been promised but we were use to such falsehoods and anyway I don't suppose Churchill and co could arrange everything to order. They had also failed to provide the flak and bullets expected as we dropped much to our delight although my concentration was so tense it was days before I realised how lucky we had been. Our containers as usual had been dropped in the middle of the sticks and each had a red light attached to make it easy to find in the dark once on the DZ. The trouble was everything seemed to have red flashing lights attached and on landing, and numerous containers had to be visited to try and find our particular container. After all the mortars had to have their own equipment if battalion were to have the support it had planned for. The actual landing for me was very hard and not at all like the DZ at Tatton Park, but I was quickly out of my chute and searching for the container in which my kit was dropped. It seemed an age before I got my kit and weapon and met up with a few of the lads from my group but we managed to slowly come together and find the mortars we needed for the assault on Le Bas Ranville. This was a very scary time with troops dashing around everywhere trying to find their kit and make off to their own RV.

The battalion RV was a quarry I can't recall where exactly but, we never reached it as it took such a long time to find our own containers. They wasn't a lot going on by this time, small arms fire could be heard in the distance and shells going over which were taking quite a time to land probably from the naval bombardment of Caen which went on for a considerable time. There was quite a lot of action going on around the bridge area but there on the DZ things were reasonably quiet. There was an added danger on the DZ, that of the Gliders. They came in low and hard and worst of all silently. Only at the last minute would you hear the ghostly swoosh of the wooden craft as it passed a few feet over your head to crash or glide along the ground some bursting open or tipping on end as they came to a grinding halt, the soldiers spilling out and adding to the mayhem.

We trooped off the DZ towards our position, on the way we had a taste of what was to come. A pick-up full of Jerries thundered round the corner behinds us throwing what we thought was a grenade it turned out to be a thunder-flash. A corporal threw a grenade at it, but they managed to escape. We went on to find our position in Le Bas Ranville, which was to be in an orchard. On arrival at approximately 3 o'clock in the morning of 6th June it was by now just starting to break light and we found that we were the first of the platoon to arrive. The rest of the platoon came in dribs and drabs all without mortars. Those containers were proving a problem to find.

We started right away digging mortar pits and slit trenches, and Sgt Nankivell took a team of lads back onto the DZ to see if they could find a crashed glider and trailer, on the way they captured a German VW and trailer, Sgt Nankivell shot the

Officer driving it. They eventually returned with 12 mortars and a load of bombs. The surplus mortars and bombs were sent round the Brigade. By mid-day we went into action firing our mortars, all from within the gun pits we had dug. The ground was soft so when we had fired a few rounds the base plate sank into the ground it was never going to be ideal for mortars. We didn't have any choice but to take the mortars out of the pits and put them on top of the ground and fire them from the open. This was obviously a risk but we just got on with it and did the job.

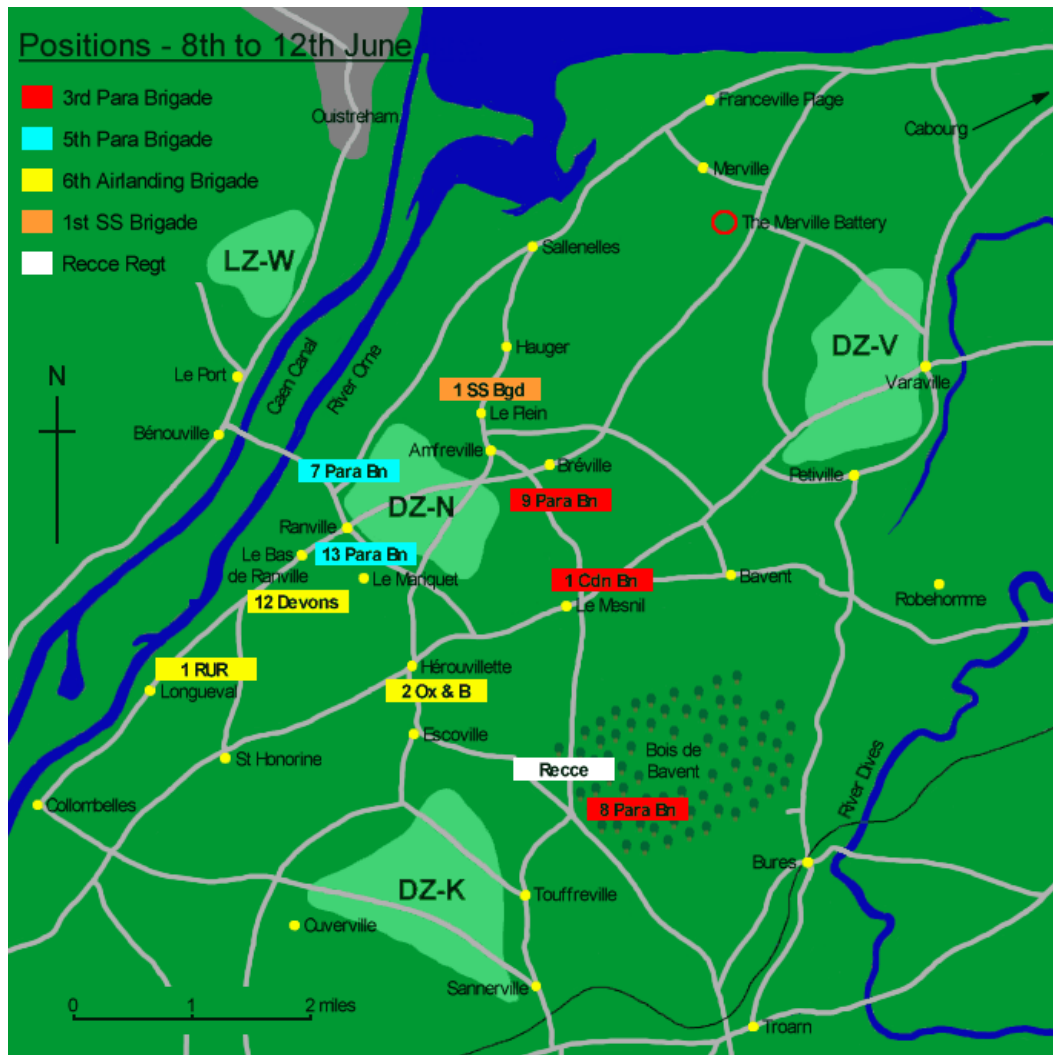


At one point a shell exploded at the back of us, I was talking to my mates, when there was a big thud at a spot I had just moved from. It was about 16" long and probably a half shell, it would have cut me in two. Mid afternoon we were joined by 4th Commando's.

The rations we had, consisted of a block of oatmeal, a cube of fat which was about 2" in diameter and 1¼" thick, pats of butter and hard tack biscuits. The cube of fat was burned and would take about 15 minutes to boil a mess tin of water for a cup of tea and the rest to have a shave with.

Later on in the evening of D Day the air-landing brigade came in, the sky a complete mass of gliders a real spectacular sight. The tugs would release the glider then go over the Jerry lines and drop the tow rope. Enemy aircraft were just about none existent until about D + 2, 8th June, when a Messerschmidt 109 flew

over with a Spitfire on his tail in a spectacular Dog Fight. He was shot down by the Spitfire, everybody just cheered and cheered.



The attacks on our positions eased off it just became guard duties and mortars to clean. The following day we had to fire the mortars as Jerry was using the crashed gliders for sniping. It was later they found 100 dead Jerries at the far end of the DZ.

It was now D + 3, 9th June our platoon casualties were increasing and included the Platoon Commander Lt Tottenham Smith, 2 Sgts, 2 Cpl's Sharp and Payne and a Pte all wounded and all happened at the forward observation post FOP. A fatigue party was sent to Oustreham for new ration packs, on return we found the packs had been rifled already. All the fruit taken out, peaches, apricots, etc we were left with soup, oxtail full of bones. Sweet was always marmalade pudding, it was as heavy as lead. Everybody got 50 cigs in a tin usually a gift from either, Eisenhower, Monty or Churchill, also 6 boiled sweets each. Eddie Hogden was the only one of us three to smoke so 'H' and myself would have his sweets to share where as he would have an extra 100 fags. Later on this day we went to a rest area, where we were able to have our first shower a have change of underwear. God knows we needed it. We had walked miles backwards and forwards, dug pits, shell scrapes, dived for cover, dodged Germans and slept whenever and wherever

we could. There was a ripeness about us that would do a round of Gorgonzola proud.

Lance-Sergeant John Fennell Nankivell

Unit : 12th Parachute Battalion.

Army No. : 5123514

Awards : Military Medal

On the 9th June 1944 at Longueval two companies of 12th Parachute Battalion were occupying a forward position as fire companies for an assault by 1st Royal Ulster Rifles on St Honorine la Chardonnerette. Lance-Sergeant Nankivell's Company came under heavy mortar and sniper fire and were ordered to withdraw. Nankivell, with complete disregard for personal safety, stood at the cross roads till the last man was over, covering with fire the withdrawal of the wounded and of his comrades until the last man was over. His action set a magnificent example and undoubtedly saved many casualties.

D Day+4 June 9th we were told we were to be in a reserve operation, to back up the Royal Ulster Rifles at Longueval on the river Orne, and as with most things this didn't go as planned and we finished up in front of them. As a result we had a lot of casualties that day. Afterwards while we were going back to our rest area, when crossing the bridges we were strafed by a 109 Sgt a PT Instructor, who was the CO's Body Guard, brought it down with Bren Gun fire.

Our platoon lost our first man he was John William Bull, a great guy who hailed from Nottingham I believe. John William Bull died

10/07/44	BULL, John William	Pte	19	-
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By the time we had got to D Day+6 12th June, the battalion had left England with 600 men now it was down to 350. Moral was not at its highest but we had to get on and do the job. We were back in the quarry rest area recovering from the last few days and nights adventures to rid Normandy of the Hun, when we were informed that tonight we are to attack the village of Breville.

Unit : "B" Company, 12th Parachute Battalion.

Army No. : 4395919

Awards : Military Medal

At Pont L'Eveque on 22nd August 1944, when his platoon commander was killed, Sergeant Dobson immediately took command of the platoon. In the face of intensive enemy cross fire from both flanks he reorganised his platoon, and without hesitation led them forwards towards the objective, gaining several hundred yards of ground. Later when the whole company was pinned by fire, up to their waists in water for 7½ hours, his gallantry and cheerfulness were an inspiration to all ranks. When darkness fell and he was ordered to withdraw his platoon, he did so under the most trying conditions under fire from Machine Guns on fixed lines and snipers. It was thanks to his gallantry and leadership on this occasion that a large proportion of his company were withdrawn with so few casualties. This NCO throughout the whole period 1st to 23rd August 1944 showed unsurpassed qualities of gallantry and cheerfulness. He is a born leader whom men will follow anywhere. Under the worst conditions it is impossible to damp his infectious cheerfulness and enthusiasm, and his personal gallantry has been an example to all ranks.

Later that day D Day+ 7 Tuesday 13th June we were to be relieved by the 51st Highlanders. When the Highlanders arrived we packed up and marched back to our rest area, a really depleted lot. 350 men went into Breville that night and 55 of us marched out. Our platoon had just one Pte wounded. We were lucky buggers, no doubt about it and we were all pleased to have been mortar-men, and therefore 2nd in line. We had been fighting for 7 days or more with little or no real rest never mind sleep and many of our friends had disappeared as thieves in the night.

While in the rest area the battalion was strengthened with soldiers from many different Regiments. They were not Parachute trained but no doubt would do the Parachute Course if and when they got back to England. I guess it was a case of needs must. The Mortar Platoon was reinforced by just one sergeant who I'm afraid wasn't very popular. When giving rations out and he came to the tins of fruit, he would say, 1 between 7, he became known as, 'Sgt one between'.

The main position from which the 346th Division was fighting was the village of Bréville, which was sited upon the ridge and also served as a potentially destabilising wedge between the positions of the Paratroopers and the Commandos. The commander of the 6th Airborne Division, Major-General Richard Gale, decided that Bréville had to be captured immediately or else his defence might fold. During the night of the 12th June, the 12th Parachute Battalion attacked and successfully captured the village, though at a very high cost. The British lost one hundred and sixty two killed to the Germans seventy seven. Despite this, The Battle of Bréville was a crucial victory because it truly secured the 6th Airborne Division's position, and with it the entire Allied left flank. Furthermore, the offensive spin of the 346th Division had been shattered, and from the 12th June onwards, no further serious attacks were mounted against the 6th Airborne Division.

The German presence in Bréville was certainly the gravest threat facing the 6th Airborne Division at this time, because every attack that was launched from the

village risked the security of the bridgehead. On the afternoon of the 12th June, whilst the 3rd Parachute Brigade was still fighting along the ridge, Major-General Gale concluded that the Bréville situation had to come to an end. He knew that the attacks which the 3rd Parachute and 1st Special Service Brigades had fought off over the past few days had inflicted terrible casualties upon the Germans, and so he suspected that after the hard fighting that had taken place throughout the 12th June, the defences in Bréville would now be at their weakest. Gale was also of the belief that the Germans would surely think the British to be too weak to mount another attack on Bréville. It was certainly true that the 6th Airborne Division could ill-afford what would undoubtedly be a costly attack, but it was absolutely vital that Bréville be taken before reinforcements could reach the village.

The attack was a highly improvised affair, taking place at such short notice that the units involved had just a few hours to make their plan and they arrived at the start line for the advance with only moments to spare. With all his infantry strength otherwise committed, Gale turned to his reserve to carry out the attack, and so the task fell to the 12th Parachute Battalion. Despite being in reserve since the evening of the 7th June, the Battalion was still badly understrength with only three hundred men present for action. To further increase their numbers, the sixty pathfinders of the 22nd Independent Parachute Company were placed under their command, as were "D" Company of the 12th Devonshires. In addition to these, the attack was to be supported by a squadron of tanks from the 13th/18th Royal Hussars, and no fewer than five artillery regiments.

At 21:45 on the 12th June, the attack began with an artillery barrage that pounded Bréville extremely hard. At 22:00, "C" Company of the 12th Battalion left the start line at Amfreville and moved on to Bréville, however the Germans reacted quickly and poured very heavy small arms and artillery fire upon the troops moving forward. Almost at once, "C" Company lost all of its remaining officers, but nevertheless they continued to push on under the command of Sergeant Warcup.

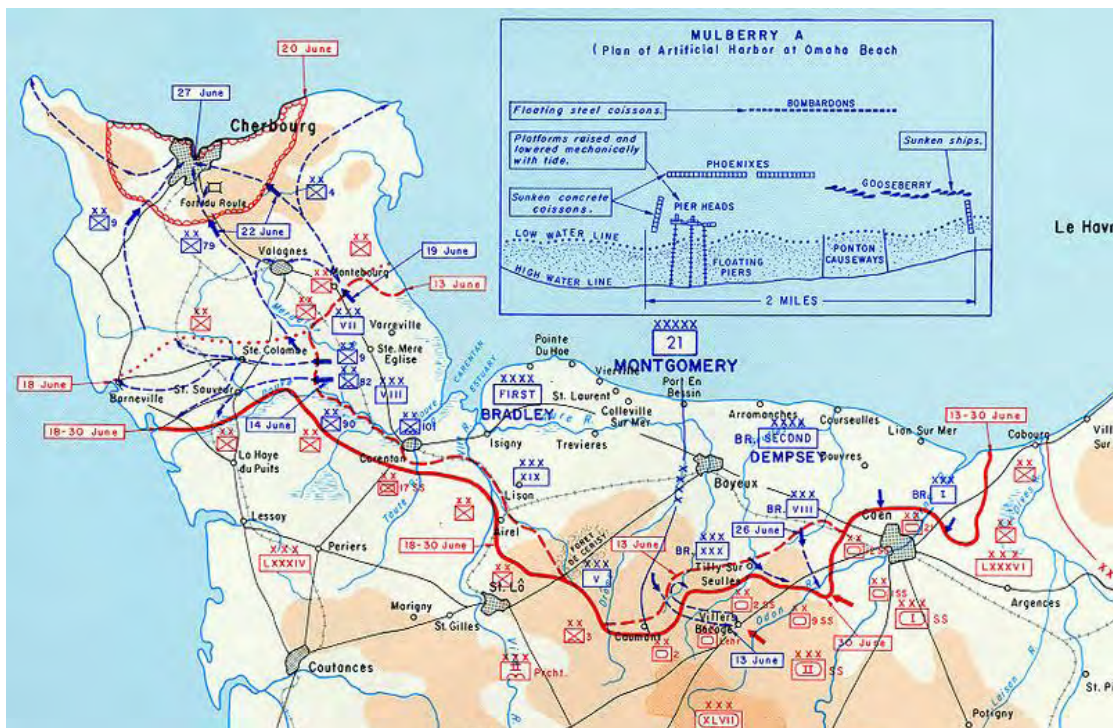
As the attack was going in a disaster struck the 6th Airborne Division's leadership. A group of senior officers from the units involved had gathered to watch developments unfolding when a single Allied artillery shell fell short of Bréville and exploded amongst them. The commander of the 12th Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson, was killed, and Brigadiers The Lord Lovat of the 1st Special Service Brigade and Hugh Kindersley of the 6th Airlanding Brigade were badly wounded, and neither played a further part in the Normandy Campaign. Kindersley's deputy, Colonel Parker, had also been hurt, however he was able to carry on and immediately resumed command of his old and now leaderless unit, the 12th Battalion.

By this time Bréville was ablaze from the artillery bombardment. "C" Company continued to lose men as they crossed the open ground between the start line and the village, and by the time they got into Bréville and under cover only fifteen men were still on their feet. The other companies following on behind suffered similarly heavily, "A" Company lost its commander, CSM and the whole of No.2 Platoon as it entered Bréville, whilst the 12th Devonshires fared little better. By

the time the 12th Parachute Battalion's "B" Company got moving, however, the Shermans of the 13th/18th Royal Hussars had successfully got around the flanks of the village and poured fire upon any enemy positions still offering a fight, and so "B" Company made it to Bréville without serious difficulty.

Once inside the village the paratroopers and Devons overcame any Germans that had survived the intense bombardment, and by 10:45 matters were drawing to a close, with all of the assault units reaching their planned objectives and digging in. Unfortunately the heavy losses that they had suffered in the attempt were to rise still further. A communications failure led the 51st Highland Division to believe that Bréville was still in enemy hands and so their guns opened up on it once more, causing many casualties amongst the Airborne men.

The Battle of Bréville had been won, but at a terrible cost. German fatalities have been put at seventy-seven, however the British tally stood at one hundred and sixty-two. Despite this severe loss, the capture of Bréville was nothing short of a great victory because it was a turning point in the battle for the Allied left flank. The 6th Airborne Division had been vulnerable to attack ever since they had arrived in Normandy, however the capture of Bréville had at last secured the ridge and with it the entire divisional perimeter. In addition, the offensive spine of the German 346th Division had finally been snapped, and from that night forth there were no further set piece engagements thrown against the 6th Airborne Division from any direction.



With the bridgehead now secure and after two days rest, on D Day+9 15th June we were told we were moving up to Le Mensnil?, this was the time when Catchpole died. On being told we were moving to Le Mensnil he threw a grenade in a slit

trench and then fell on top of it. It blew his stomach out, killing himself instantly. Our position at Le Mensnil was known as the Brickyard, where we set up our mortars all 4 on different targets, Jerry was dropping a shell on us every two minutes, our orders were to send 4 bombs back for every one shell. Later that day the shelling eased off, then we were showered with Moaning Minnies, a multi barrelled rocket system, a weapon used often by the German's and to good effect. Sgt Nankerville started a combat mortar team using only the base plate and barrel to create harassing fire. They would go up the front line and with the snipers pick out a target fire 3 or 4 bombs then move to another position and do the same again. The rifle men would curse them, when they returned to the platoon as they would be left to get all the shit dispatched by the much aggrieved Hun.

This was more or less the way things went until the breakout, moving from place to place digging in, setting up the mortars and staggging on. The battalion was engaged in 2 battles after that, first place I cant remember the name, the other was Point L Eveque. I can't forget that name it was the start of the end of my days in France. This was the place where I was wounded. Some time in the afternoon Me, H and Eddie were called on by Sgt Nankerville to go forward and do some Combat firing. We took the mortar barrel and base plate and went up front with C Coy. Once there Sgt N selected a couple of jerry targets and then guessing the direction and angle of the targets we fired the mortar, adjusted and then fired six rounds before selecting a second target. After using the ammunition we had we bugged out leaving C Coy to accept the reply and returned to our platoon position. We must have had some effect because shortly after we came under heavy shelling shortly after getting back. During the shelling I was hit by a piece of shrapnel in the upper right arm. Later on that day I finished up in Bayeux field hospital and bought a ticket out of there.

Approx 11 pm I arrived cleaned up and operated on straight away, Next morning after breakfast I was on my way by ship to Southampton. It was common practice on arrival back in England to try and get you as near to home as possible, so I eventually went to Halifax General Hospital via Chertsey and Pinderfields. While in Halifax my mate 'H' who cycled all the way from Bolton to see me (What a Comrade) never did get to know how found which hospital I was in.

We were required to wear hospital blues consisting of white shirt, red tie, and blue suit. From 5 o clock to 9 pm we were allowed out. I used to catch a bus from outside to Huddersfield and home. Halifax was the place my mates and I went to before I joined the army, so when on discharge from the hospital I was sent to a camp in Halifax to recuperate; this suited me down to the ground.

On being passed fit again, I was transferred to Hardwick Hall to be assessed to see if I was fit to still be a Para. I was given the all clear to return to unit. Once back there I was given 14 days leave.

The Battalion had returned along with the brigade in late August or early September and now back at Larkhill Camp it was down to a lot of hard training along with all the new faces. By Dec 23rd with all Christmas leave cancelled, order was to pack all your kit, and we left by train for Southampton not knowing where we were going exactly except back to the continent. Once again we were put into

a transit camp, under canvas, it was freezing and not having our sleeping bags made it even more difficult to bear. Next day December 24th, Christmas Eve we embarked onto a troop ship (?) and sailed for France. Half way across we were turned back and took shelter in the Dover harbour, but come Christmas day we again sailed for Calais. On the way dinner was served, which consisted of cold world war one styled corned beef soup.

That evening we left Calais by lorry, to take a terrible journey in extremely cold weather during which we couldn't keep warm. This was exacerbated by the rough roads, all iced up and full of pot holes. We stayed that night Christmas Eve in an old mill somewhere and we were presented with a gift of 5 German cigars, no good to 'H' and me but Eddie was elated, he said after that they were very rough, but it didn't stop him smoking them. We didn't eat all that day until about midnight we were treated to Christmas dinner dished out into our mess tins. We actually got meat, (?) carrots, and potatoes, then Christmas pudding to follow, a real treat except that everything was cold well it would be wouldn't it? It had been cooked elsewhere and then brought to us but as usual food was always late and sometime never came. We were thankful!

I remember one place where we dug mortar pits out of snow, pitched the mortars, then we had to put up sleeping quarters, tents again, it was hard work in the freezing cold. Tents went up and stoves went in, only trouble was, no chimneys, my pal 'H' and myself went down into the town managed to find something suitable. The lads had a great roaring fire, and for a while at least it did the job until later that evening the pipe which was made of aluminium started to melt. The main thing was we managed to thaw out and it boosted our moral considerably.

At some stage we crossed into Belgium but we seemed to do was move from place to place one of which was Roquefort, all the doors on the houses had been booby trapped by the retreating Germans so care was mandatory. Once again there was no grub, but we didn't starve our billet had a garden of vegetable, so up it came and we made soup. We got a great big fire going in the stove, cut the vegetables up with our fighting knives and concocted some of the finest soup you could imagine. Baxters' would have been proud of us. It went down really well when it was ready.

Our next move was to a place over the 3rd 4th and 5th January 1945 near Bure, before the battle our billet was a cottage, we had a good rest there but as usual it didn't last long. Our orders was to support the 13th battalion who were to attack the village, our position was on a ridge, it was night time, lots of action going on in the distance we dug pits and slit trenches, no sooner had we finished , order was withdraw to the cottage. We did not take part in the battle, but we felt for the men of the 13th Battalion. We knew they were going through what we had when taking Breville. It must have been hell for them. Next morning we were all stood outside, Jerry started to shell the position we had left, they just rained down. (Lucky buggers again).

Ardennes

The German offensive through the Ardennes forest in mid-December 1944, resulted in the urgent dispatch of the 6th Airborne Division to Belgium, so that they might assist with containing this threat. On the 29th December, the Division received orders to advance against the very tip of the German thrust, and of all the units involved, none became embroiled in near such hard fighting as the 13th Parachute Battalion around the village of Bure from the 3rd to 5th January 1945. They succeeded in taking the village on the first day and held it thereafter against fierce counterattacks, but in so doing suffered sixty-eight dead and one hundred and twenty-one wounded and missing.

Battalion HQ

[Lieutenant-Colonel Johnny Johnson](#)

B Company

[Major Edward James O'Brien Crocker](#) (CITATION)

[Sergeant John William Dobson](#) (CITATION)

[Corporal Malcolm Kennedy Walsh](#) (CITATION)

C Company

[Major Clarence Weatherill Stephens](#) (CITATION)

[Captain John Sim](#)

[Sergeant James Albert Warcup](#)

Unknown Unit

[Lieutenant James Hunter Duthie](#) (CITATION)

[Sergeant Frank Milburn](#) (CITATION)

[Sergeant Patrick Robert O'Connell](#) (CITATION)

[Lance-Sergeant William Jones](#) (CITATION)

[Lance-Sergeant John Fennell Nankivell](#) (CITATION)

[Private Robert Kennedy](#) (CITATION)

Near the end of January the 'Battle of the Bulge' was over and we moved up to Holland, in the Venlo area, we finished up in a village called Barrle, and covered a line on the River Mass opposite was the 7th regiment German Para's. Our duties were mostly guards as at that time we were attached to HQ's, which was in a big house somewhere. The people who lived there had moved out while we were there, requisitioned I suppose. We had the job of guarding the Commanders and had all the guard duties we could handle. The one good thing was that it had a roaring great fire so at least we could get warm when not actually on guard. White suits had to be worn and a Sten gun, we only had American Colt 45, it was half hour on one hour off because of the cold.

By the end of February we were on our way back to Larkhill. Back to training we did a parachute drop over the Thames and used kit bags for our equipment. I

jumped with the base plate, sights and two bombs, it all weighed about 70 pounds. We did an exercise after the drop all leading up to March 24th.

Transit camp was Wimbush in Essex about 10 miles from our airport at Boreham. Night before we were ordered to bed about 7 pm, revellie was 00:30 am and move off at 2:30am. This time we had a Dakota, take off was 8.45 am with drop time approx 10. Most of the flight was quiet, better with being daylight.

I was number 2 in the stick, I jumped with the base plate again. You had to throw your leg out of the aircraft then release the bag, lowering it down on a rope, didn't have time to think what was going on. The DZ wasn't quite like Normandy it was a bloody hell hole Lots of 88mm guns on the DZ shell seemed to drop every few seconds. Going across to our RV there was no time to get down with the loads we had to carry. Arriving at the RV a small wooded area we got shelled again from a gun only 100 yards away. One lad got killed in our platoon, never found any part of him not even his ID disc. Our CO K T Darling ordered the rifle C in C's to silence all guns. The DZ was a shambles with crashed liberator bombers, all types of gliders it was a big casualty list that day. My mate Eddie got wounded crossing the DZ.

Later that day we moved off towards Wessel. Order came that we had to fend for ourselves and live off the land. We split into groups, 6 of us joined together, we got called the terrible 6. 2 got the grub, 2 prepare meal and 2 to cook. We lived like Lords for 6 weeks, the best thing KT decided.

Going across Germany we didn't have a lot of opposition, always on the move, riding tanks, lorries or anything you could find to travel on. Lots of little battles, one was at Bordenau, it was here the fleeing Gerry blocked the Bridge over the river with lorries. They got a couple of Shermans to clear it.

Had bee on the go for about 2 weeks, when, at one place they captured a German farmer who was giving the Jerry information about our positions. The CO got a firing squad together, and had him shot.

The advance was now towards Osnabruck, had a bad battle on the way. Our mortars were brought into action, firing heavily for 2 days, this was only our 2nd time firing since leaving Hamminkeln. Reaching the outskirts we got off the tanks and ordered to march in, we were that knackered we could only walk in. It was said Goring's car had been captured and it had a bath in the back, never knew how true it was. Celle. was next, (after that it was light battles and skirmishes for the next couple of weeks when we reached the river Elbe.

Crossing the Elbe we bashed on to Wismar on the Baltic. 'BASH ON' became the battalion motto. Our Final place was Mecklenburg finishing there on the 2nd May, six weeks after we entered Germany, and a lot of miles. While we were here an inter platoon football tournament was organised which was won by the mortar

platoon. We had some good players including Ron Wheatley (Nott's Forest) and goal Keeper Sam Reynolds (Bristol Rover).



Mortar Platoon on Luncburg Aerodrome returning to England, en route to Far East, May 1945.

Back to Larkhill where we was sent on 4 weeks disembarkation leave, and 2 weeks embarkation leave, on return we got kitted out in jungle green kit and long brown boots. Train to Scotland then the troop ship Corfu to Bombay which took 17 days.

The Japanese war was still on, so it was jungle training, it was the end of the war after the yanks dropped the two atom bombs. We now sailed for Malaya doing the actual landing we were expected to fight for, then back on board ship and on to Singapore. We got billeted in some houses, that were Officers married quarters before the war, it was called Alexandre barracks very near to the hospital of the same name, where the Japs shot all those nurses, the bullet marks were still on the walls. We got sent all over the Island to protect property, guard duty at Government House was another, a week's duty, the grub was brilliant we had the same as Mountbatten

By Christmas 45 we sailed to Java, landing in Batavia now Jakarta, kept busy patrolling to keep the Dutch safe. In February we sailed to Semarang, a small part off the mid Java Coast where we had to guard the airfield. One day I was called into the HQ office. I was told my class 'B' release had come through that meant I would soon be on my way home. I was not overjoyed but rather reticent at the thought of leaving those who had been at my side during the difficult times. I caught a plane back to Batavia and then a boat to Singapore where I waited for about 4 weeks for a ship home. I guess Singapore was the best place I ever went to, always spotless, and the tiger beer was the best I ever tasted. The ship was the SS Orient, taking about 4 week to get home, landing at Southampton. During the voyage I had a nice regulation hair cut ready for civvy street. All the Para's on board thought we would be going to Hardwick for discharge, wrong, Isle of Wight was the destination. Arriving at camp we were welcomed by the RSM, who immediately sent us all for a hair cut, 'You are still in the bloody army' he said, what is more he didn't like was us wearing brown boots. My kit bag which had

been put in the ships hold, it contained tinned fruit, it had all been pinched. A few days later it was back to Portsmouth for discharge and kitting out in civvies, and then the final journey, 'Home James'. No more did I want to be a chef but the smell of fresh bread straight from the oven is still a joy to behold. No more would my mother reluctantly kiss me, waved me good bye and let me go. The job was done we hadn't help beat 'The Hun' and once more the life in England Britain as many other places across the world could get back to some form of routine and in many cases rebuilding. For me life was now for living.

My Army career was over and I had not made General so I returned to settle back home in Yorkshire. It was not until late in my life that I found a small group of Airborne Brothers in Chesterfield and Sheffield that I returned back into the fold. I can never forget those days, when as young men we strode out to meet whatever came our way without hesitation albeit with a healthy fear for what was to come. Those whom I had fought alongside were my friends, my colleagues and in those darkest of days, my family. They stood by my side and helped me when the chips were down and I, when I could return the favour. They were not hotheads, bullies, war-mongers or trouble makers. They were not career soldiers out to make a mark in life, but young men who knew that for the sake of humanity the job had to be done and, without question, they gave their all. Many of them did not return with those of us that were lucky enough to escape the visit of the Grim Reaper. Most remain buried in a foreign field.

**'At The Going Down of The Sun
And In The Morning
We Will Remember Them'**