

Sept 1944

Fairford 17 10.00 The Battle of Arnheim Coy Strength 180 and 6 Officers See Appendix "A"

The Company took off in 12 Stirlings as the pathfinder force for the 1st Airborne Division. No 1 Platoon were directed to D.Z. "X", No. 2 Platoon to DZ "Z"; No 3 Platoon and H.Q. to D.Z. "S". The journey was almost uneventful, with the exception of a little light Flak fired at one aircraft of No 1 Platoon.

- 17 13.00 Platoons were most accurately dropped in the correct places and what little opposition there was was quickly overcome. Navigational Aids were immediately set out and 20 minutes later the first gliders appeared. The landings were affected without opposition and all the gliders reported that they had no difficulty in seeing the markings of their correct areas.

Holland 17 13.45 The 1st Parachute Brigade were dropped on D.Z. "X". The drop was accurate and Battalions were well together. So far the enemy had made no serious attempt to interfere with the Landings. During the course of the afternoon some enemy opposition was encountered but the D.Z. and L.Z.'s were kept clear. The night was quiet, all the Company being concentrated round HQ at a farm called PEETERS CAMP.

- 18 Platoons moved out during the morning to mark D.Z. and L.Z.'s for the second lift. No. 1 Platoon to L.Z. "L", No. 2 Platoon to L.Z. "X" and No 3 Platoon to D.Z. "Y". H.Q. remained on "S" to supply aids. Enemy opposition was encountered in all landing areas and Platoons had stiff fighting to drive the enemy back and to hold them whilst the second lift landed, also having to put out ground aids under fire. The difficulties were aggravated by the lift being delayed some three hours. The enemy were however kept in check and the lift landed with comparatively few casualties. Company H.Q. was heavily attacked by M.E. 107's. The Company rendezvoused at 1800 hrs at the Farm and moved at 1900 to take up new positions in the area of HALT OOSTERBEEK HOIG, up to this time we had had only one casualty, Cpl Jones who had been killed. The move was carried out without opposition in the dark and the new position was established by 2300 hrs. The night was uneventful. A horse and dray was comm an deered to move heavy equipment.

- 19 No 1 Platoon moved out again to L.Z. "L" to supply navigational aids for the third lift i.e. the Polish Glider element. They had to beat off a heavy enemy attack when the gliders were landing. No 2 Platoon supplied aids for the supply drop. During the afternoon the enemy started a movement on the Company position and I decided to take up a new position on some high ground overlooking the previous one, which gave us a field of fire approximately 150 yards and forced the enemy to attack up hill across a road with wire fencing. The Company dug in to the grounds of a house called "OMMERSHOL". We were reinforced by 2 Officers and 30 men of the 4th Para Field Squadron R.E. and some 60 Glider Pilots under Major Jackson. The enemy did not make any serious attempt to attack during the night but patrols were active. No 1 Platoon who had been cut off rejoined soon after darkness and occupied the line as shown on the sketch map.

- 20 1000 The enemy tried to cross the road to the right of our position and also moved up ~~to the right~~ on the left flank through the wood evacuated by the Borders on the previous night. Our positions were heavily mortared and ^{some} casualties were sustained. The enemy were repulsed with heavy loss. Later in the day he attacked approx. one company strong supported by mortars and an S.P. gun, which was knocked out by us with a P.I.A.T.. The night was comparatively quiet. During the evening the enemy called on us to surrender.

0700 The enemy attacked early and a fairly large force was seen to be moving up the wood on our left flank. Mortaring was heavy. An S.P. gun brought up on our left flank caused some casualties until knocked out by No 1 Platoon and the Sappers. The enemy continued to try and break in during most of the day, suffering very heavy casualties. During the afternoon the K.O.S.B.'s on our right flank were heavily attacked and forced from their position. This was later reestablished. As a result of the aforementioned attack we were joined by the two 6 pounder A/Tk guns and a section of mortars from the K.O.S.B.'s which were of great assistance. We could have held on indefinitely. Orders were received to withdraw to a position in the 4th Para Bde area under whose command we were to be. Area is called "HARTSTEIN".

- 21 0230 The Company were successfully withdrawn without opposition and rested by 4th Para Bde HQ for the night.

0500 The Company took up their new positions in houses in the Eastern perimeter between the two C.C.S.'s (see map). Apart from mortar fire the enemy appeared to be unaware of our position and no attack developed.

1600 Two patrols were sent out, one from No 3 Platoon and one from No 2 Platoon. The object being (a) to try and contact 10th Para Btn East of our position on the main road and (b) to try and push our line further out. Both patrols came under heavy M.G. fire and contact could not be made with 10th Btn. Casualties were 1 killed and 2 wounded. It appears that the enemy are well dug into strong points of about 400 yards to our front.

- 23 0300 No 3 Platoon moved up and took over the positions occupied by 10th Btn, who were withdrawn into reserve. This position is very isolated and I objected to occupying it. The Brigadier however insisted as it protected the C.C.S.

0715 No 3 Platoon's position was heavily attacked with 1 Mark IV Tank and 2 S.P. guns supporting Infantry. Fired at, at close range, the houses they occupied were quickly destroyed and their automatic weapons made useless. It was therefore decided to withdraw them back to the main position. This was accomplished, but the Platoon had 15 casualties. One S.P. gun was destroyed. The enemy continued to feel forward towards our front during the day and No 1 Platoon were subjected to heavy fire. They on the other hand took heavy toll of the enemy trying to occupy the C.C.S. and destroyed a truck full of ammo. Also a motor cycle and side car.

- 24 By first light it was seen that the enemy had occupied the C.C.S. at the crossroads between No 3 Platoon and No 1 Platoon and a considerable amount of sniping came from this area. The enemy further infiltrated behind No 1 Platoon position from their left flank and snipers were active. A number of snipers were killed during the day. The enemy continued to blast the area with 15 cm mortars, 88 mm's and S.P. guns. They also started to set fire to the houses with Phosphorous mortar-bombs. A heavy attack was launched to the right of our front which was partly successful and some enemy endeavoured to infiltrate into our positions but were destroyed. By this time no rations were available and water was very scarce. However most of the houses occupied by the Company or nearby had some tinned food stored in the cellars. Also most houses had tame rabbits. H.Q. were fortunate to find a bath half full of water. Raids for food and water were made by night, on one occasion the enemy were encountered and driven out of a house. It was therefore possible to have two meals of a sort each day and sufficient water was found for one brew of tea. Wine was the only other liquid and a fair supply was discovered. In

spite of the continuous shelling and mortar fire to which the Company had been subjected for 5 days and nights making rest almost impossible, their spirits were at a very high level and there was no thought of submission.

At about 1100 hours No 1 Platoon reported some Polish Paratroops in their area and at 1200 hrs they relieved No 1 Platoon who stood down for a rest.

1500 No 2 Platoon reported considerable enemy movement on their right flank and it was clear that the enemy were bent on seizing the other C.C.S. situated on the right of No 2 Platoon. This area had previously been held by some Glider Pilots who had been removed at the request of the Germans so as not to endanger the wounded in the C.C.S. It appeared at one time as if the enemy attack would swing round the back of our position. I therefore moved No 1 Platoon who were resting to the H Q area in close support. However having gained possession of the C.C.S. the enemy made no further move. No 1 Platoon took over part of No 3 Platoon's line, both platoons being down to a rather low level in numbers. This considerably helped to consolidate our position which was further strengthened by 8 Glider Pilots with a Bren Gun. During the afternoon two Mark IV Tanks were reported in front of No 3 Platoon. Later a message was received from the German Commander via one of our Medical Officers in the C.C.S. situated at the cross roads. The message was to the effect that unless I agreed to vacate a house some 30 yards from the CCS at once he would send two tanks against my position and blast me out. In view of the fact that this house was of great importance to my position and if in enemy hands would have made my position extremely insecure, I sent back a message to the effect that I would only agree if the German Commander would withdraw his men from the vicinity of the CCS and his tanks for a distance of 1 mile. Further that he would make no further advance in the area of the CCS until all casualties were cleared. If however he would not agree to this I should remain in the house in question and if his tanks attempted to advance I would blow them up. To add colour to my threat Pte Dixon No 3 Platoon ACC Cook sneaked out with his PIAT and destroyed one of the tanks. The PIAT bomb striking the back of the tank where presumably ammunition was stored and after several sharp reports the tank blew up burning for some hours. The remaining tank was moved back and enemy troops in the vicinity of the CCS withdrew.

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The left flank remained ~~quiet~~ quiet during the morning but the whole Company front was submitted to very heavy bombardment and an increasing number of light phosphorous mortar bombs were fired. More houses caught fire as the result. The enemy made an unsuccessful attempt to infiltrate into the right of our position which cost him casualties and an attack on our left was driven off in the afternoon.

1600 A conference was held at Div. H.Q. at which orders to withdraw over the river that night were given. The Independent Company were to form the rear-guard arriving at the river at 2230 hrs.

1800 An O Group was called and orders issued to form up the Company along the wood, later vacated by 4th Bde., with No 1 Platoon as head of the column. The Company to be in position ready to move at 2145 hrs. At approximately 2100 hrs 30 Corps Artillery opened up a terrific bombardment on a wood which was occupied by the enemy just South of our position and through which we were to pass. This bombardment was at 2115 answered by the enemy who put down everything he had into our area, making the forming up of the Company very difficult and hazardous. To add to the difficulties the enemy set fire to almost all the houses we were occupying.

1925 The Company started to move out.

2200 The Company moved up from F.U.P. It was now raining hard and the enemy guns and mortars were a little quieter. Two halts had been made so as to keep the Company closed up, when at approximately 2220 hrs whilst

proceeding through the wood recently shelled by our artillery the head of our column was halted by a German M.G. post which immediately opened fire with at least two L.M.G.'s. The Commanding Officer and one Officer at the head of the column became casualties and part of the leading section. Little confusion was caused however and the enemy shooting became wild when '36' Grenades were thrown back at them. The 2nd i/c reformed the Company and taking a right hand sweep reached the river with the majority of the Company and crossed to the South bank where the C.O. later rejoined being only slightly injured by a bullet grazing his nose and right eye. After passing through the 43rd Div the Company were embussed and taken to barracks at NYMEGEN.

26 On calling the roll it ascertained that 5 Officers and 115 O.P.'s had been brought back safely across the river. Of these 6 were removed to hospital as their wounds were too severe to stand further travel. Thus out of 6 Officers and 180 O.P.'s 5 Officers and 115 O.P.'s were known to be safe. A very high percentage considering the sustained fighting in which the Company had been constantly involved. A further party of six men (unwounded) were known to have reached the river but unfortunately lost touch and failed to cross.

Nymegen 27 1200 After one night and one and a half days in NIJMEGEN the Company were embussed and taken to LOUVAIN, where they spent the night.

Louvain 28 1500 The Company were taken to BRUSSELS airstrip and flown to SALTRY Airodrome near GRANTHAM in American C.47's. Thence back to barracks at NEWARK.
During the operation the Company destroyed 1 Tank Mk IV, 3 S.P.Guns, 1 Truck of ammunition with driver, 1 Motor Cycle Combination, 28 Prisoners were captured and the number killed must have been well over 300.
