

Freddie's Normandy campaign in the 6th Airborne Division

At dawn on the 6th June 1944, two Allied armies, one British and one American, landed on the beaches of Normandy in France. It was the largest invasion ever attempted, and its ultimate goal was to secure a foothold in Europe, to defeat Germany and liberate the Continent from Nazi rule. Leading the invasion, landing by parachute and glider, several hours before the first troops assaulted the beaches, were three Airborne Divisions; two were American and landed in the west, the other, the 6th British Airborne Division, landed in the extreme east.

The tasks of the 6th Airborne Division were:

1. To seize intact the bridges over the Canal de Caen and the River Orne at Benouville and Ranville and to secure a bridgehead of sufficient depth to ensure these could be held.
2. To seize and silence an important coastal battery at Merville before seaborne assault took place.
3. To destroy the bridges over the River Dives at Varaville, Robehomme, Bures and Troarn.
4. To delay and interfere with as much as possible, the movement of any enemy reinforcements from the east towards Caen.
5. To seize the seaside towns of Sallenelles and Franceville Plage (this was the role of the 1st Special Service Commando Brigade under command).

The 6th Airlanding Brigade, together with the 5th Parachute Brigade, was concerned with the first and fourth of these tasks, while the 3rd Parachute Brigade's role covered the second, third and also the fourth. The Brigade was under the command of Brigadier The Honourable Hugh Kindersley from 6 - 12 June (when he was wounded) and then Brigadier Edwin Flavell from 12 June onwards.

The brigade comprised:

- **2nd Battalion The Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry** (Freddie's regiment)
- 1st Battalion The Royal Ulster Rifles
- 12th Battalion The Devonshire Regiment
- 249th (Airborne) Field Company, RE
- 195th Airlanding Field Ambulance, RAMC

And the 2nd Ox & Bucks comprised:

Battalion Headquarters

Commander : Lieutenant-Colonel Michael Roberts

Second-in-Command : Major Mark Darrell-Brown

Adjutant : Captain John Tillett

Intelligence Officer : Lieutenant R M Osborne

Loading Officer and Weapon Training Officer : Lieutenant L Nicholson

Medical Officer : Captain S Smith

Chaplain : Captain/Reverend A Nimmo

Support Company

Commander : Major E V M Favell

Quartermaster : Lieutenant J James

Signals Officer : Lieutenant S F Robin

Mortar Platoon : Lieutenant G C Chicken

Pioneer Platoon : Lieutenant G Van Klaveren

Reconnaissance Platoon : Captain A C Mason

Second-in-Command : Lieutenant C H David-Goff

No.1 Section : Lieutenant P S Jones

No.2 Section : Lieutenant P G Bulford

No.3 Section and Welfare Officer : Lieutenant T Deacon

Transport Officer : Captain J F S Busher

H Company

Commander : Major S J Heath-Smith

Second-in-Command : Captain P K Everett

No.7 Platoon : Lieutenant H J S Seville

No.8 Platoon : Lieutenant A Bousfield

No.9 Platoon : Lieutenant E H Budds

No.26 Platoon : Lieutenant C M Moncrieff

A Company

Commander : Major Gilbert Rahr

Second-in-Command : Captain J Marriott, GM

No.10 Platoon : Lieutenant P H Godsal

No.11 Platoon : Lieutenant H J C Bashford

No.12 Platoon : Lieutenant D M Neale

No.13 Platoon : Lieutenant K Gunter

B Company

Commander : Major J S R Edmunds

Second-in-Command : Captain J Brabner

No.14 (No.3) Platoon : Lieutenant Richard Smith (att. "D" Company for coup de main)

No.15 Platoon : Lieutenant Michael Aston

No.16 Platoon : Lieutenant Johnny Pankhurst

No.17 (No.6) Platoon : Lieutenant Dennis Fox (att. "D" Company for coup de main)

C Company

Commander : Major Johnny Granville

Second-in-Command : Captain J J W Molloy

No.18 Platoon : Lieutenant B M Rutherford

No.19 Platoon : Lieutenant E H Nankivell

No.20 Platoon : Lieutenant C T Cross

No.21 Platoon : LIEUTENANT FREDERICK BALFOUR SCOTT

D Company

Commander : Major John Howard

Second-in-Command : Captain B C E Priday

No.22 (No.4) Platoon : Lieutenant Tony Hooper

No.23 (No.5) Platoon : Lieutenant "Todd" Sweeney

No.24 (No.2) Platoon : Lieutenant David Wood

No.25 (No.1) Platoon : Lieutenant Denham Brotheridge

No.1 Section : Corporal Caine

No.2 Section : Corporal Webb

Scout Section : Corporal Bailey

R Company (based in the UK)

Commander, Mess President and President of Regimental Institutes : Major C H Styles

Reserve Mortar Officer : Lieutenant C W Groos

Reserve Transport Officer : Lieutenant R E Gleed

Lieutenants A F White, F H Wood, D O Smith, R N Prince, P G Henstridge,

2nd Lieutenants M L Southern and S G Harvey

The original plan was for the 6th Airlanding Brigade to land with the first wave of Airborne troops to secure the Ranville and Bénouville Bridges across the River Orne and Caen Canal, but numerous and

robust anti-glider defences were spotted on their intended landing zone so their sortie was delayed until the evening of 6 June D-Day. The Bridges still had to be captured though, so Major John Howard led 180 men, including two platoons of "B" and all of "D" Company of the 2nd Ox & Bucks under the command of the 5th Parachute Brigade in a coup-de-main raid. Travelling in six gliders, they were the first British troops to arrive in France, landing within yards of both the Ranville and Bénouville (later christened Pegasus after the insignia worn by all members of the division)) bridges. They took the two German garrisons completely by surprise, and within ten minutes, both were safely in their hands. Major Howard's force remained in command of the bridges throughout D-Day.

After delivering the First Lift, the aircraft of 38 and 46 Groups began to land at their bases in England around dawn. Each of the 15 squadrons of these two groups provided between 15 and 22 aircraft for this second glider lift, which carried most of the 6th Airlanding Brigade as well as the rest of the Division's heavy equipment and supporting units. In all, 250 aircraft were to take off, each towing a Horsa or a Hamilcar glider under a massive escort of 17 fighter squadrons whose presence would make sure enemy fighters couldn't even see, never mind fire upon the formation.

Second Lift – ‘Operation Mallard’

We are incredibly fortunate to have the following firsthand account of the regiment's Normandy campaign which comes from the regimental war chronicles of the 2nd Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry Vol 4 1944-1945. It is actually recorded by a member of Freddie's "C" Company so we're able to follow his Normandy campaign, starting with the preparation for Operation Mallard and actual glider flight taking off from RAF Harwell followed by every action he saw in France.

‘Excellent briefing facilities were available, in the first instance, for company commanders in the secret briefing rooms, and secondly, for all members of the Regiment at a later stage when on the airfields. The country over which we were to operate could be studied in minute detail with the aid of beautifully constructed cloth models which showed detail down to hedgerows and individual buildings. Air photographs taken up to the last moment enabled us to plan down to the very location of section posts in Escoville should we arrive there as planned.

Situation maps gave the latest information of enemy localities, defences and troop movements. A guide book gave a wealth of local information. We were therefore able to study the ground and our opponent's moves, trace the defences of the 711th and 716th German Infantry Divisions in our battle area, watch the movements of the German counter-attack divisions, and, for instance, note and wonder at the sudden move of the 21st Panzer Division to the Caen area. Did the enemy know where we were to land? If not, why had the panzer division moved? And why were anti-glider landing poles being erected in the areas where our landing zones were planned?

Training continued up to the last available day. The intricate plans for each glider load were worked out, weapons, equipment, vehicles and kits checked and rechecked, and then, a few days before D-Day Bulford saw us no more and we moved to concentration areas on the airfields from which we were to fly into battle.

The last parade and the move to the airfields differed little from the parades we had held so many times before going on exercises. Perhaps a certain tension and finality in the tone of CSM Belcher's voice, as he reported Letter "C" Company present, echoed all our feelings that at long last we were really off to face our unknown destinies.

The 52nd moved to sealed camps at Tarrant Rushton, Harwell and Keevil airfields. Those of us at Harwell thought it a good omen that we were to depart from Oxfordshire. However, the particular stubble field, surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, across the road from the airfield was not one of the county's choicer spots. In this camp we were completely sealed from the outside world, no contact whatsoever being allowed with anyone not in the Regiment, and no one being allowed beyond the barbed-wire perimeter, except the

loading parties, which were closely shepherded to the glider parking area on the airfield.

The time spent previously in the concentration camps was not wasted. Intensive briefing was done with the aid of the models and photographs that had been set up in the huts in the camp. Every soldier was put in the picture fully and shown the ground over which he would fight. Particular study was made of the village of Escoville and its approaches, for this was our ultimate objective. The ground in the area of our landing zone was also carefully scrutinised so that landmarks could be picked up if gliders went astray. The intense desire by all ranks for knowledge of the operation and of the area of operations was perhaps natural, but it was a comfort to see such enthusiasm.

Whilst in the concentration area we were issued with our escape kits which included silk maps, compasses, hard rations, hacksaw blades, money, magnetic buttons and even fishing hooks. Men of the Regiment vied with each other in ingenuity for concealment of the items in their clothing. One soldier remarked that he had never had magnetic fly buttons before and wondered what effect they might have. Company commanders had to sign for large amounts of liberation francs, to be used only in an emergency, and we wondered if an equivalent amount would be added to our overdrafts if they were lost or improperly used.

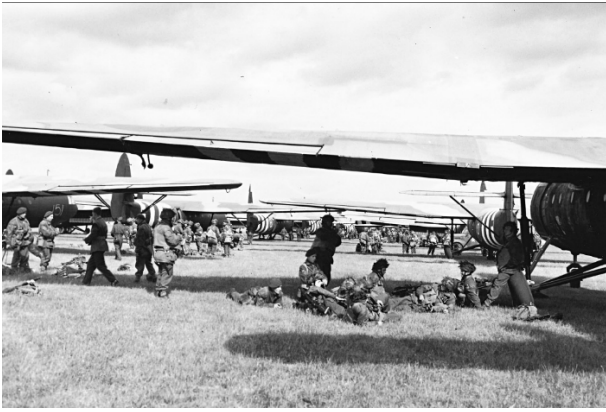
Two days before D-Day, equipment and vehicles were loaded into our gliders. The lashings were checked and checked again, for we were fully aware of the dangers of loose or runaway equipment in a glider. All was now ready for the big event, but the weather had intervened and it was not till the 5th June, 1944, that we heard that we would go on the morrow.

That evening a small party from Regimental headquarters visited Tarrant Rushton airfield to see the take-off of the coup de-main party commanded by Major R J Howard. They were in excellent heart and looked very impressive with their blackened faces, airborne helmets and clothing already camouflaged. They were airborne at about 2130 hrs on the 5th June, and so began the 52nd's part in the great assault of the 6th June, 1944 with the 52nd taking the honour by providing, in the coup-de-main force, the first fighting troops to land in Europe.

Meanwhile we at Harwell bade au revoir to the first glider lift. Included in this party was our small, advance party, led by Major M M Darell-Brown. However, he was unsuccessful in reaching Europe at his first attempt, as his glider made a forced landing in England and we were more than surprised to find him having an early breakfast the next morning. He was even less talkative than usual at such an hour.

The day of D-Day was spent in final checks and company commanders attended the RAF briefing of tug aircraft and glider pilots, and listened to technical details for the flight, cast-off and landing. The cheerful approach by the RAF to the operation was very encouraging and the meteorological officer got his usual laugh. We were then asked to give the pilots an outline of our company tasks, in which the pilots showed great interest. Every spare moment of the day was spent with ears glued to the wireless. The broadcasts in both French and English on that June morning will long be remembered by those who knew that before long they too would be joining in the "grand débarquement des Allies."

These photos (now held by the Imperial War Museum) show the gliders and men of Freddie's "C" Company 2nd Ox & Bucks along with those of the 195th Field Ambulance battalion preparing for Operation Mallard. The photos were taken by Captain Malindine (5 AFPU) on the evening of 6 June 1944 at RAF Harwell - 'Those of us at Harwell thought it a good omen that we were to depart from Oxfordshire.'



It was with few regrets that, after tea on the 6th June, we left our camp and moved to the airfield. An impressive array of Horsa gliders lined up on the edge of the runway awaited us. A brief command and we split up into our glider parties and waited for the order to emplane. The impression I got was that the men were quiet, but confident and keen to get on with the job. Such laughter as there was, seemed slightly forced and directed mainly at remarks, some rude, some humorous, chalked on the fuselages of the gliders. At about 1830 hrs with final wishes of bon voyage over, we were in our gliders. In the glider we all wore Mae Wests and had a rapid rehearsal of our ditching drill in case we pranged (this is believed to be current slang in the RAF for crashed or forced to land) in the English Channel. Then with safety belts adjusted we waited for the jerk as the tug took the strain on the tow rope. Soon it came and those in the front seats could see themselves hurtling down the smooth runway behind the tug. Then we were airborne and once again we heard the familiar whistle as the air rushed by and we glided higher and higher into the evening sky. The first hour of flying was spent in moving to a rendezvous over the south coast of England and then in taking up position in the air armada which was quickly forming for France.

Once inside a Horsa glider, except for a person standing in the hatchway leading into the pilot's cockpit, the view outside is restricted. Small portholes allow a limited vision to either side, but little can be seen except sky and an occasional glimpse of the nearer tugs and gliders. This soon becomes boring and it was interesting to note the reactions of one's fellow passengers. Most were soon asleep. This was the usual reaction on long practice flights and even the excitement of our present flight could not break the old hands of the remarkable aptitude of the British soldier for sleep. Others were reading newspapers and an occasional song was hummed. The only two persons looking in any way perturbed were two men of the Corps of Military Police who were flying with us. They were really parachutists, it was their first flight in a glider, and they obviously missed their parachutes. Glider troops carry no parachutes.

The air fleet eventually passed over the coast in the Portsmouth area and headed across the sea. For a short time we were out of sight of land and could only see silvery dots which were ships on the sea below. The sea

appeared calm. Our fighter escort was by now weaving and turning above and around us. One could not help wondering whether all the planes sweeping to and fro were friendly. A glider is very helpless if attacked in the air and, although we had been told to fire Brens through the glider's portholes in the event of air attack, we were not too confident of our prowess as air gunners. Events proved that all aircraft sighted were friendly.

Very soon the French coast came into sight. We had dropped altitude to about 3,000 feet and it was soon possible to see ahead of us the mass of shipping off the beaches. There seemed to be thousands of ships of every shape and size. Beyond the ships the yellow line of the beaches stretched out to our right and left, with the green and yellow fields of Normandy forming the background. Haze and smoke prevented, at this stage, the identification of any landmarks, but once over the coastline it was possible to pick out the line of the River Orne and out ahead the town of Caen. Our navigator had not failed us: we had arrived.'

The distant rumbling of the slow, low-flying transport aircraft could be heard approaching the landing zones in Normandy. It was still daylight and navigation was much simpler than on the previous night when the First Lift planes scattered over a wide area. Sporadic yet accurate flak and machine-gun fire was aimed at the aircraft as they neared their zones and although several aircraft were downed, most of the damage proved to be superficial; the total losses were negligible compared to what had been feared. Watching the Second Lift arriving was a huge boost to the men already on the ground and Major-General Gale later wrote, "It is impossible to say with what relief we watched this reinforcement arrive."

"C" Company firsthand account continued: *'The thoughts of all those in a position to get a view of the ground below must have been the same. Where was our landing zone? Would the pilots find it? Would it be free of enemy? Would it be clear of the anti-glider landing poles?*

Suddenly one of the glider pilots pointed below, and there was our landing zone LZ-W. A moment later he made another motion with his hand as puffs of black smoke began to appear in the sky, followed by the cracking thuds so well known to war-time airmen. It was flak (German for anti-aircraft fire) the enemy was somewhere below us. Then came the moment for cast-off. I noticed the sweat breaking out on the necks of the glider pilots and with a muttered "Here we go" we were clear of our tug and had begun our slow spiral descent to earth. The time was about 2130 hrs. Glancing back into the body of the glider, C Company headquarters staff were sitting stiffly in the seats. It must have been an ordeal for them, being unable to see what was happening. No one had been hit by flak and a quick "We're OK" brought relief to the faces of those I could see.'

15 of the 250 gliders didn't reach the landing zones due mainly to tow-rope malfunctions. On LZ-W, 1.5 miles to the north of Bénouville, on the western side of the Caen Canal, the 2nd Oxford & Bucks and "A" Company of the 12th Devonshires descended. The Horsa gliders carrying Brigade HQ and the 1st Royal Ulster Rifles landed on LZ-N at Ranville as did the large Hamilcar gliders, carrying the Tetrarch light tanks of the 6th Airborne Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment, making history as the first tanks ever to be flown into battle by air. Frustratingly, a high number of them became entangled in abandoned parachutes as they were being deployed and couldn't move until blowlamps were found to burn the parachutes away.

"C" Company firsthand account continued: *'Looking again over the glider pilot's shoulder I could see the first gliders about to land. They seemed to be coming in from all angles and as we approached to land, the*

language of the pilots became unprintable. The landing plan was obviously not working with the precision expected. In order to avoid a mid-air collision, our senior glider pilot made a split-second decision to land just off the actual landing zone. Leaning forward to place my arms in a protective position around my head, I felt the glider touch down and saw that we were making straight towards a large hedge. An almighty crash and splintering of wood followed, then silence and the glider had stopped.

Our landing drill worked and all-round defence around the glider was at once adopted. Our glider no longer had any wheels, wings or tail, otherwise it seemed undamaged, although we had ploughed a lane through a large hedge. No one was the worse for the experience except for a few bruises. The jeeps and other equipment were being unloaded and the signaller was struggling to re-net the somewhat shaken wireless sets. This landing was typical of many landings: some were better, some much worse. In fact, all the gliders of the Regiment, except four, landed in or near the landing zone, and in spite of the many crash landings and collisions that took place our casualties were small.

The position on the landing zone was rather obscure. Firing was going on in the area of Benouville, chosen as the Regimental rendezvous, and there was also a certain amount of firing on the landing zone itself. One glider ended up in an enemy slit trench, the occupants of which quickly surrendered, being quite unnerved by the sudden descent of a large number of gliders on their position.

The adjutant, doctor and serjeant-major were rather astonished to find a real live German about ten yards from them when they leapt from their glider. After a certain amount of fumbling for weapons they succeeded in taking their first prisoner.

After a certain amount of delay, during which time enemy were cleared out of Benouville by a battalion of the 3rd Infantry Division and ourselves, the Regiment assembled as arranged just west of the River Orne and at 2215 hrs began to move to the prearranged concentration area east of the River Orne. Four of our gliders were still missing. These contained a platoon of "B" Company, a detachment of the mortar platoon and the intelligence officer's party. It was learned later that they had landed in England and Lieutenant R M Osborne joined us the next day, having travelled by sea. Of the officers injured on the landing zone the assistant adjutant, Lieutenant L Nicholson had to be evacuated, but the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel M W Roberts was able to carry on for a time, although injured when his glider came into collision with another glider whilst still some ten feet from the ground.'

Up until now, the 6th Airborne Division had been operating without the assistance of supporting field artillery, but amongst the hundreds of Horsas were eight 75mm Pack Howitzers of the 53rd Light Regiment's 211th Battery. These much-needed guns were dug in and firing on German positions within 30 minutes of arrival.

As no one knew what kind of situation the Second Lift would be flying into, the Battalion didn't receive definite orders until an hour after landing.

"C" Company firsthand account continued: *'The situation in the divisional bridgehead area when the 52nd landed was as follows: 7th Parachute Battalion was in position holding an area west of the River Orne bridges. The remainder of the 5th Parachute Brigade (12th and 13th Battalions) were holding the bridgehead to the south-east of the bridges in the Bas de Ranville—Ranville—Ranville le Mariquet area. The 3rd Parachute Brigade, having destroyed the German coastal battery south of Merville and the bridges over the River Dives, was operating on an approximate line Hauger—Le Mesnil—Bois de Bavent.*

The 1st Special Service Brigade was fighting its way towards Sallenelles. All battalions had had very heavy fighting during the day against heavy German pressure on the bridgehead. By 2300 hrs on 6 June the 52nd was concentrated east of the River Orne. The move to the area was uneventful except that the night was dark and our move coincided with a supply drop in the area by the RAF.

Large hampers full of stores were falling to the ground close to our route and occasionally the parachutes failed to open and the threat from a "free drop" hamper seemed worse than the odd enemy shell. Major John Howard met the commanding officer on the bridges as we passed over and we learnt firsthand of the brilliant success of our coup-de-main party. It was, however, sad to hear of the first 52nd casualties, particularly the death of Lieutenant Denham Brotheridge, who was killed at the head of his platoon in its gallant assault on the western end of the bridge.'

The 1st Royal Ulster Rifles were sent to expand the bridgehead southwards by capturing the villages of Longueval and Sainte Honorine, while the 2nd Oxford & Bucks proceeded towards Herouvillette and Escoville. Both moves would relieve pressure on the beleaguered 12th Parachute Battalion at Le Bas de Ranville.

"C" Company firsthand account continued: 'From the concentration area the Regiment was ordered forward at 0130 hrs to the area of the chateau at Ranville with orders to go forward to Herouvillette at first light. At Ranville companies took up all-round defence positions in the chateau grounds. The 13th Parachute Battalion was holding this area and had had a tough time since landing the previous evening. Lieutenant-Colonel P J Luard, their commanding officer, was in good heart and told us that they had been in contact with the enemy till darkness had fallen. He thought that HerouVillette, two miles to the south-east, was held by the enemy.

At 0430 hrs on 7 June the Regiment moved off towards Herouvillette. "C" Company, in the lead, soon reported it clear, the handful of enemy troops there having run off in the direction of Escoville. We rescued an injured glider pilot who had been locked up by the Germans in an attic without food or water for 24 hours. There was a certain amount of enemy shell fire on the village, particularly on road junctions leading to Escoville and Ste Honorine, but the occupation was soon completed and at 0830 hrs the advance to our final objective, Escoville, was started. Patrols from "A" and "B" Companies moved forward to Escoville, which lay some 1,000 yards to the south of Herouvillette across all fields, mainly pasture with very thick hedges and numerous trees. Patrols reported Escoville clear of enemy except for the presence of numerous snipers.

At 1000 hrs the Regiment, minus "C" Company, which was to form a firm base in Herouvillette, moved forward into Escoville. It was soon clear that the enemy was going to oppose our occupation of the village, and, although by 1100 hrs companies had reached their defensive positions and had begun to dig in, enemy resistance gradually increased. Regimental headquarters were unable to reach the Chateau d'Escoville owing to a self-propelled gun south of the village firing at the chateau. Piat mortar parties were unable to silence the gun.

Escoville was not the ideal defensive position that we had believed from the briefing models and air photographs. The high ground to the south and east of the village completely dominated our positions and gave the enemy excellent observation. We, on the other hand, had no observation and any movement forward of anti-tank guns brought down heavy and accurate fire. Between 1200 and 1500 hrs forward companies tried to dig in under fairly heavy mortar and artillery fire.

Casualties began to increase in spite of the efforts of our mortar platoon to counter the enemy's fire. They could claim little success as the enemy positions were well concealed and observation was difficult. Several enemy self-propelled guns were, however, engaged with some effect.

At 1500 hrs enemy infantry, closely supported by armoured fighting vehicles, began to infiltrate forward into the village. Artillery and sniper activity increased and it became obvious that Escoville would be impossible to hold without severe casualties.

The commanding officer therefore asked for permission to withdraw the 52nd to the village of Herouvillette, which was on higher ground and which offered a superior defensive position. At about 1600 hrs when the move to Herouvillette was confirmed, "A", "B" and "D" Companies were fairly heavily engaged at close quarters and in house-to-house fighting. "C" Company was therefore moved to a covering position forward of Herouvillette and forward companies withdrew through "C" Company's positions. Part of "A" and "D" Companies became cut off at Escoville, but a spirited counter-attack led by Major Edmunds (Flaps) relieved the situation sufficiently to allow them to extricate themselves, not without further casualties though. The Regiment then took up defensive positions in Herouvillette and fortunately the enemy did not follow up their advantage. In the fighting up to and including the action in Escoville the 52nd's casualties were 7 officers and approximately 80 soldiers.

Major Mark Darell-Brown had taken over command of the Regiment from Lieutenant-Colonel M W Roberts who had continued to command until, as the result of injuries received in his glider crash, he could no longer walk. He was evacuated on the evening of 7 June.

For reasons known only to them, the enemy left us alone until 9 June, thus affording us ample opportunity to make our position in Herouvillette impregnable. On the morning of 9 June our patrols reported Escoville clear of enemy and "C" Company was ordered forward as a battle patrol into the village. The result was identical to that of 7 June except this time there was only one company of the Regiment involved. "C" company reached the Chateau d'Escoville, but when spotted on the southern edge of the village, came under mortar and artillery fire. Infantry supported by armoured fighting vehicles again infiltrated into the village and round "C" company's flanks. A self-propelled gun continued the demolition of the chateau and at about 1600 hrs further enemy reinforcements, including a troop of armoured cars, appeared. At about 1630 hrs "C" Company was ordered to return to its position in Herouvillette and this was successfully carried out. Patrols left in the area reported at 1730 hrs further enemy infantry and tanks entering Escoville and it became obvious that the enemy was going to put in an attack on Herouvillette.

At approximately 1830 hrs the enemy attacked with heavy concentrations of mortar and artillery fire and Messerschmitt 109 aircraft carried out a series of strafing attacks on the village. This softening-up process was followed by an attack carried out by tanks, self-propelled guns and infantry. The respite given us for the preparation of our defensive position had not been used in vain. The defensive fire plan worked well and artillery, medium machine guns and 6-pounder anti-tank guns all had good shoots. Particularly impressive and effective was the artillery shoot. The large number of medium and 25-pounder guns on call to the division put down a terrific concentration on Escoville and its northern exits. The enemy got to within a hundred yards of the forward Regimental positions held by "C" and "D" Companies, but in the face of intense fire could advance no farther.

At about 2130 hrs the enemy withdrew, leaving two Mark IV tanks on fire within a hundred yards of our

positions. Four more tanks were destroyed at longer range and also two armoured cars, one of which was recovered from a ditch and used by "D" Company for some time. We were particularly pleased with our success in this action, as it levelled the score with our opponents from the 21st Panzer and 1st SS Divisions. They had scored in Escoville; we had scored in Herouvillette.

During the night of 9/10 June patrolling continued. Captain J J Molloy led a patrol into Escoville and came back with two prisoners. One, however, only counted as a "winged bird" as the unfortunate fellow had been run over by one of his own tanks.

The country between Herouvillette and Escoville was ideal for snipers and until we got the upper hand we suffered several casualties. A great loss to the 52nd in this manner was that of Captain J Marriott, GM, who was killed whilst giving first aid to a wounded member of the patrol he was leading.

On the morning of 10 June the enemy attacked through Breville towards Ranville. Their path was blocked by the 13th Parachute Battalion under Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Luard. From our rear positions in Herouvillette we had an excellent view of the attack, carried out by infantry with scarcely any artillery or mortar support. From our position on the flank of the attack our medium machine guns and mortars were able to inflict considerable casualties until they reached the cover provided by the gliders on landing zone N. For some time half our 3-inch mortars were firing south into Escoville and half north on the attacking enemy. The attack was broken up by the 13th Parachute Battalion who waited till the enemy were at short range and then opened up with everything they had. The enemy losses were devastating.

On 11 June a report of large, armoured forces moving from Caen in our direction caused considerable activity, especially in the fortification of chosen buildings. All civilians were evacuated from Herouvillette and the unlucky owners must have been disgusted when they returned to find their homes fortified, for this involved the removal of all glass and outside drainpipes, the wiring up of the lower floors and, in general, the destruction of all their amenities. The attack never materialised, although our patrols reported the presence of enemy armour in Escoville and a heavy artillery concentration was put down on our positions during the afternoon.

12 June was a quiet day for the Regiment and except for normal patrol activity it gave us a chance to check up on administration. Some men were able to get improvised shower-baths, the first since leaving England. During the day our fire plan was checked over by our forward observation officer, who fired a few harassing tasks. A forward officer, bombardment (FOB), arrived and directed a number of salvos into Escoville from a warship lying off the coast. The shells sounded like express trains as they passed over our heads and we were glad not to be at the receiving end.

During the evening we had a grandstand view of the battle for Breville.

The attack was made by the 12th Parachute Regiment, a company of the 12th Devons and a squadron of the 13th/18th Hussars with full corps artillery support. This attack was successful but very costly. It closed the gap at Breville which had been the only part of the commanding ground (running from Le Plein in the north to the Bois de Bavent in the south) held by the enemy. This gap had been a thorn in the side of the divisional area and its capture denied the enemy observation into the area and on to the bridge over the River Orne (by now christened Pegasus Bridge after the insignia worn by all members of the Division).

Our divisional commander, Major-General Gale, describes the battle for Breville as the turning point in the

fight for the Orne bridgehead, for the 340th German Infantry Division was beaten in this battle and never put in another attack, but was content just to hold its positions in front of us and mortar the area we so thinly held. When the 52nd moved to Bréville later on it was a mere shell of a village and the final battle there must indeed have been, as the divisional commander described it, "a night hell."

During this attack our brigade commander, Brigadier Hugh Kindersley, DSO was wounded and evacuated.'

Disaster had struck as a group of senior officers from the units involved had gathered to watch developments unfolding. A single Allied artillery shell fell short of Bréville and exploded amongst them killing Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson, commander of the 12th Battalion, and badly wounding Brigadiers The Lord Lovat of the 1st Special Service Brigade and Brigadier Kindersley. Kindersley's deputy, Colonel Parker had also been hurt but was able to carry on and he immediately resumed command of his old unit, the 12th Battalion.

German fatalities numbered 77 and the British tally was a devastating 162. Despite this severe loss, the capture of Bréville was a turning point in the battle for the Allied left flank and the offensive spine of the German 346th Division had finally been snapped. Following the capture, the 6th Airborne Division braced itself for an immediate counterattack, but none came. On 13 June, the 1st Royal Ulster Rifles entered Bréville and took over responsibility for its defence, allowing the exhausted 12th Battalion to withdraw into reserve. The 51st (Highland) Division arrived to assume responsibility for the southern flank, and the 2nd Ox & Bucks were ordered to take over the Chateau St Côme.

The 6th Airborne Division had taken part in the Allied advance throughout July, maintaining the necessary pace despite having far fewer vehicles and support equipment than a standard British infantry formation might normally have. They confounded the sceptics through quick marches and intelligent use of whatever was to hand. Until mid-August, it fought a static defence, holding their positions and making no attempts to advance. They destabilised the Germans and stopped them even thinking about another offensive through various means, such as working snipers and machine-gun outposts into awkward positions, and sending fighting patrols behind enemy lines to carry out fast and hard-hitting raids by day and night. The Commandos were particularly good at this task! The Germans sniped and sent out patrols of their own, while their gunners shelled and mortared the British positions in the hope of inflicting some casualties. Almost every night, German bombers flew over the 6th Airborne Division but their fire was inaccurate and they did little damage. This continued until 17 August, when the Division began following up the German withdrawal in their area.

With the 2nd Ox & Bucks in reserve, the 6th Airlanding Brigade attempted to force a crossing over the River Dives near Cabourg but resistance was too strong, and after several days they were ordered to cross the River Touques further south. They met some serious resistance but at dawn on 23 August, "D" Company crossed and established a bridgehead at the cost of a few casualties. Transferring the remainder of the Battalion and all its heavy equipment presented a challenge as there were no boats or bridging material. The Pioneer Platoon eventually found a single craft and helped by French civilians, converted it into a raft that could support vehicles and the Brigade was able to cross the river.

On 25 August, the 2nd Ox & Bucks was ordered to attack the strong garrison in Manneville La Raoult. It was a huge challenge dealing with the enemy and the lie of the land, but "C" Company managed to

secure a foothold inside the village with Freddie in particular really showing his mettle. He was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery, his citation reading:

Lieutenant Scott commanded a platoon throughout the campaign in Normandy. He has taken out many patrols into enemy lines and his skill, personal courage and powers of leadership have been a source of constant inspiration to his men. In particular on 25 August 1944 Lieutenant Scott's platoon was to infiltrate towards a known enemy position. When his leading section came under machine-gun fire and grenades from an enemy post Lieutenant Scott immediately went forward firing his Sten inflicting casualties on the enemy and drove them out. During the action this officer's example, leadership and determination were largely responsible for the success of the action and were an inspiration to the men under him.



The main man Monty himself pinned the bling on Freddie's chest in the field of battle.

Then came a communications failure which led Battalion Headquarters to believe "C" Company were in trouble, so "A" and "D" Companies were ordered to attack. "D" Company fought its way into the village and after heavy fighting succeeded in driving the enemy out. As this was taking place, German artillery shelled the village and caused numerous casualties amongst both the British and Germans.

This episode marked the end of the Normandy campaign for Freddie and his Battalion as on 27 August, the 6th Airborne Division received orders to halt its advance on the west bank of the River Risle. Most of France and Belgium had been liberated by the Allies advance and the 2nd Ox & Bucks returned to England in early September.