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BURE 3rd. JANUARY

The members of the Battalion "O" Group were called from their beds around mid night and assembled in the kitchen of the large farm house of their Headquarters and were fully briefed on the attack to capture the bridge at Grupont, clearing the road through Bure on their advance. However orders for the battle were not to be given to the troops until after breakfast.

The information concerning the German troops occupying Bure was very scanty believed to be held in about Platoon strength, equipped with the normal weapons. No mention was made of tanks or other armoured vehicles. But the reports of the villagers provide a different picture. The first German tanks reached the village in the afternoon of 23rd. December, hot on the heels of the retreating Americans, several of whom did not get away in time. Some of the locals risked their lives leading these evaders to safety during the night. Reports speak of 2 Tigers and several smaller tanks and of between 100 and 200 men laying mines on all roads leading into Bure.

On 31st. December a Belgian S.A.S. patrol jeep was destroyed on Chapel Hill (code name "Orange") and all three occupants killed. Afterwards the village was subjected to spasmodic shelling, increasing in ferocity day to day.

Transport carried us as far as Resteigne, from where a further two hours approach march was made. The road was deserted until the village of Tellin was entered and here men of the 10th Battalion, King's Royal Rifles, were gathered around "biscuit tin" stoves as they endeavoured to keep themselves warm. (Simultaneous with the 13th's attack on Bure they, with armoured support, would assault twin features code named "Gin" and "Orange" which dominated the area). Instead of the usual good humoured banter and trading of light hearted insults which was the usual practice when passing through another unit of 6th. Airborne, we were met by a stony silence. Before the eastern end of the village was reached, the Battalion turned off along a side road and started to climb up into the low hills and shortly afterwards left the road, moving across the open fields towards the woods. These woods provided a covered route to the start line for the attack, some 400 yards from the village. This last part of the move, proved a problem for the Support Weapons Platoons.

"Dixie" DEAN:

Even after we left the road and moved across the fields, the Machine Gunners with their guns and ammunition on the trolleys could still keep their place in the column, immediately behind "B" Company. The first stretch of woods was no difficulty either, but after crossing a shallow gully, the planting of the trees was much closer and the trolleys would not pass between the trees. So a halt was called, while everything was unloaded and individual loads sorted out for a long carry. The "start line" was reached on time and without enemy interference.

Lieutenant Colonel P.L. LUARD:

"A" Company encountered heavy registered artillery and mortar fire on the start line and had many casualties, but Major Jack Watson, with magnificent leadership, led them in the assault into the village, against German infantry and armour. At the same time "B" Company were advancing along the high ground on the right flank, where it came under very heavy fire from artillery, self propelled guns, tanks and infantry, suffering heavy casualties. Major Bill GRANTHAM and Lieutenant Tim WINSER were killed immediately and C.S.M. MOSS severely wounded.

Jack WATSON who had dropped into Normandy as Platoon Officer of 3 Platoon "A" Company, was now O.C. of that Company and provides this account:

We reached the start line and looked down into the village, which was silent. As soon as the first Platoon broke cover, we came under heavy fire I looked up and saw the branches of the trees being shattered by machine gun bullets and mortar bomb fragments. Machine guns on fixed lines had us pinned down, even before we crossed the start line. This was the first time I had led a Company in battle. We were held up by the dead and wounded among us but we had to get away.

The village was some 400 yards away and as quickly as I could, I got a grip on the Company and ordered the advance to continue. Whatever happened, we had to get into the village as quickly as possible but we suffered more casualties on the way.

Private Dennis BOARDMAN, signaller attached to "A" Company:

I had taken part in the D Day landing and had seen some pretty bloody fighting. It was bitterly cold when we eventually debussed some six miles from our objective. The going was heavy as we moved across country towards Bure where the plan of attack was for "A" Company (to which I was attached) to go in on the left flank.

"Zero" hour was 1330 hours and we crouched in the thick pine wood of the start line, looking down on the picture post card scene below. All was peaceful and quiet, not a sign of an angry German. We moved out of the woods, into the fields, the 38 wireless set beginning to weigh heavily on my back and prepared to double across the fields to the road and the first group of houses.

A series of "plops" came from the far side of the village and seconds later down came the mortar bombs, followed by more "plops" and heavy machine gun fire. I threw myself down my head buried in the snow. The noise was deafening. Despite the cold, I was sweating profusely and my bare hands gripped the grass beneath the snow. At first I only heard one groan, but it was quickly followed by others and cries of "Medics" filled the below zero atmosphere.

Major WATSON conferred with his 2nd in command Captain "Joe" HODGSON and next minute I was following them across the field, over the fence and onto the road, closely followed by all the remaining unwounded members of the Company. We leapt over the ditch in the road and ditches, trying to warn the rest of the danger. Breathless we rushed the first houses, passing several dead Germans who had been manning a heavy machine gun.

Sherman tanks of the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry arrived to support us but the Germans had observed their advance and two Tiger tanks drove up to the cross roads. Four of the Shermans were quickly knocked out, two of them going up in flames with their ammunition exploding all around. The other two made a hurried departure.

The close planting of the pines on the final leg of the move to the start line so delayed the Machine Gun Platoon that they were unable to accompany "B" Company, who by now were on their way (according to the orders of the attack) to take up positions overlooking Grupont from where they would support "C" Company's planned assault on the bridge.

Although they were only a few minutes behind schedule the C.O. was already aware that all was not well with "B" Company on the right flank, telling the "gunners" not to move forward until he had more information about the situation there. As if to answer his ignorance, a group of walking wounded led by 2nd Lieutenant Arthur PRESTT of the "Scouts" came down the slope and into the shelter of the wood. The C.O. was given a full account of the disaster which had befallen the unlucky Company.

The Scout Platoon were part of the "B" Company Group tasked with the establishment of a "fire base" to support the attack of "C" Company onto the bridge at Grupont.

Lieutenant Arthur PRESTT:

We moved out of the wood onto the snow covered hillside adopting an open formation as we did so. I was moving slightly to the rear of Major GRANTHAM and his Command Group. After we had advanced about 100 yards, he must have seen something suspicious and moved down the hill to the shelter of a hedge. He appeared to speak to his signaller who already was in contact with one of the other stations. There was a single shot and the O.C. fell dead at our feet. Then the shelling and the mortaring started. The hedge gave us no protection at all and very quickly the casualties mounted. I was one of the lucky ones, I was only wounded, but there were quite a number killed outright in the first salvos. Too many for the three Company Medics to deal with but they went about their task fearlessly and devotedly; laying us down in hollows in the ground. Alf (Lieutenant LAGREGAN) came forward and took charge, ordering all those capable of movement to run for shelter in the village and he led the rush to the nearest houses. From time to time a German tank appeared to our front, but never fired. We lay there for the best part of an hour and then Corporal Chailie BRYANT (R.A.M.C.) had run out of dressings, so he collected the walking wounded and moved us back to the start line, where I was able to give the C.O. an account of what had happened.

Private Bill HOLDING:

I was a sniper with the Scout Platoon and moved out with "B" Company onto that snow covered hillside. When the bombs and shells started to land among us we got a bit mixed up. Serjeant Tommy Hindle of "B" Company took a 2 inch mortar off one of the casualties, shoved it in my hand with some bombs and told me to put smoke down across the front. Once it was thick enough, we all ran as fast as we could for the houses on the right of the village.

Knowing the scale of the casualties in "B" Company, Harry POLLAK, the Intelligence Officer, went off to discover how "A" Company were faring. The party of walking wounded were

accompanied to the rear by Charlie BRYANT, who was seeking extra assistance and supplies, since the number of wounded was so numerous.

The Colonel on learning of the fierce house to house fighting taking place in Bure and realising the daylight hours were diminishing, decided to send in "C" Company in a desperate effort to clear the village before dark. An artillery concentration was fired on the high ground beyond Bure and under the cover of this bombardment, "C" Company charged over the start line, dashed into the village and linked up with their gallant comrades already there. They managed to fight their way forward as far as the cross roads in the centre of Bure, but a counter attack, supported by one of the Tigers, forced them to give some ground.

Serjeant Len COX:

Along with the rest of "C" Company I waited in the woods while the other two Companies cleared the village and high ground so that we could pass through and attack the bridge at Grupont. We could see the flashes of the German guns away to our left as they were firing and the shells were landing in the trees. After a time orders came that we were to make a run for the houses and assist "A" Company in evicting the Germans.

We moved to the front edge of the wood and on a signal we raced across the open fields as fast as we could, crossed the road and started to work our way along the backs of the houses. There was a German tank firing down the main street. The first few houses had been cleared but after that it was grenade and Sten all the way, with no one daring to use the road because of the tank. Progress was slow and we had many casualties. The final orders were to clear the area around the church and then hold as it was getting dark. We finished up in the house next but one to the church, clearing "Jerry" out with grenades and then found four civilians in the cellar. Wireless contact with Company H.Q. had been lost earlier and we didn't know where any one else was. All that was left of 9 Platoon was Lieutenant Dick BURTON, Serjeant Bill RAILTON myself and 12 others were marooned in that house for 36 hours.

Celestin Limet of Bure:

When the shelling of the village started on the 1st. January we all took shelter in the cellars at the "Chateau" (the locals name for the large building housing a religious organisation) but used to return each day to look after our cattle. (His house on the right hand side of the main street was used by Major Andy McLOUGHLIN as his Company H.Q.) On the 3rd. I was on the street when the shooting started and took refuge in a cellar near the cross roads and witnessed the fighting through the cellar's ventilator.

Within days of his landing in Normandy, Serjeant "Taffy" LAWLEY M.M. was promoted to Company Serjeant Major to fill the vacancy in "C" Company, as a result of C.S.M. Micky MAGUIRE being wounded.

We got through to the centre of the village. It was getting dusk by now and then things started to happen. Everything became mixed up something like that can easily happen in street fighting. Two Platoons had been sent forward and we lost touch with them through their 38 Sets. It was very difficult in the dark to discern friend from foe. Sometimes we were in one house and the Germans in the one next door. We were helped by a Squadron of Sherman tanks, but they were

of little use against the two Tigers that "Jerry" had.

We were suffering many casualties from the heavy shelling and machine gun fire, but the order was to hold our footing at all costs. All that evening we tried to contact our two lost Platoons, but to no avail. There were many dead and wounded lying around and among them moved Padre Foy administering morphine and first aid, at great danger to himself

Celestin LIMET:

British soldiers moved into the village along the hedges at the back of the houses. A German tank behind the house where I was sheltering, at the bend in the road, controls the road from Tellin, with the British advancing on the cross roads through the gardens.

The only sub units of the Battalion riot yet committed to the battle in the built up area were the C.O. with his command group, plus the Mortar and Machine Gun Platoons, both of which are not much use in close quarter fighting. Before nightfall, they all moved well back into the trees and formed up into a long "snake" and undid the tail of their smock. Once total darkness set in and total darkness it really was in the close planted confine of the trees, each man grasped the tail of the man in front and foot by foot, the treacherous downward journey to the road began.

Speed was of no consequence, keeping together was the most important factor. Once clear of the pines, the snow covered slippery slope was still a hazard, but finally the road was reached without mishap and the move into Bure began. The first two houses became the R.A.P. and Battalion Headquarters respectively, while the Support Weapons pushed on until they bumped the rear of the two Companies already occupying houses along the main street.

BATTALION WAR DIARY:

BURE 3 Jan. 2015 hours. Tiger tank advanced beyond cross roads to support infantry counter attack, which was broken up by "A" and "C" Companies. Four counter attacks were broken up during the night. Fife and Forfar Yeomanry report 6 enemy S.P. guns disabled during the day.

"Taffy" LAWLEY:

When night finally came, Major CLARKE decided we would move forward and if possible find out what had happened to our two lost Platoons. After we had gone some distance (down the back of the houses) Major CLARKE decided we would enter the house we were immediately behind and try to make contact on the wireless, but we soon found that all the doors and windows were bolted. I saw a passage along the side, so we went along it, with the intention of getting in at the front. I tried to open the door, but found it locked, then I heard voices in a strange language which I knew to be German. I tip toed back and reported to Major CLARKE. We both went back up the passage and listened they were Germans all right and a large number too. They had a tracked vehicle with them and were busily loading it with documents from the building opposite. We went back to the others to formulate a plan of attack when suddenly we heard footsteps coming down the side of the house. We were only six in number, so we had to think quickly. We all stood still and waited until the footsteps came very close. Major CLARKE shone his torch in their direction and we all opened fire. When the torch went out I dashed back across the opening to the next house and gave covering fire while the others got across. We then returned to our original position. All that night we were heavily shelled, but

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Écrit par Administrator

Vendredi, 24 Février 2012 23:26 - Mis à jour Vendredi, 24 Février 2012 23:52

our two lost Platoons eventually got back to us.

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