

[<<< go back](#)

BURE 4th. JANUARY.

It was a long time coining light that morning and when day dawned, heavy swirling snow accompanied it and also the resident Tiger tank. Before daylight Lieutenant Fred TIRAMANI (M.T.O.) drove into Bure with the Battalion's breakfast and was stopped by tile M.M.G. Platoon, otherwise he might have delivered it to the Germans. Major "Dixie" DEAN was standing in a bedroom of the house forming his Platoon H.Q. and was having his first view of the battle scene. Outside the house across the road (now the H.Q. of Headquarters Company), stood an abandoned farm cart loaded with hay which to the Tiger's Commander must have appeared a British tank, only vaguely visible in the half light and falling snow. He must have thought it shell proof also, for lie fired at least five rounds, all of which went completely through his adversary, seemingly causing no damage. "Rommel" (Private RODDEN M.M.G.'s) was crossing the road at the time. He dived under the hay cart, crawled to the front and engaged the tank with a full magazine of 9mm. Honour satisfied, he rejoined his Vickers in the small chamber under the flight of steps running up to one of the houses.

Celestin LINIET:

A British machine gun had been sited between my house and the barn which separates it from Dufong's farm, from where they can sweep the street with fire as far as Defaux Goffinet's house, where I am watching. (The M.M.G. Platoons new task was to cover the main street). But the tank has seen them and opens fire with his cannon, killing two men (Privates Norman SCOTT and KING of the M.M.G.'s) After firing four or five rounds, the tank withdraws but is replaced by another. The members of 9 Platoon, isolated in their house near the church, had spent an anxious, sleepless night, expecting relief or reinforcement, but neither had arrived.

Len COX:

As soon as it was light the shelling started and the massive German Tiger tank took direct aim at the house and put several rounds into the upstairs rooms. Some of the lads were wounded, but could not be evacuated. When the Tiger got within range, Doug SHARPE and I got a couple of P.I.A.T. bombs off, hitting it on the side. Later I heard from "A" Company that it had to be towed away. All day long the area was bombed and shelled and there were more casualties, mostly as a result of blast, but Corporal RYAN was severely wounded and later died. All that day and the night that followed we remained cut off from the rest of the Battalion.

Dennis BOARDMAN:

By 1100 hours, infantry and tanks of the elite Panzer S.S. were moving in on us and the fields and gardens behind our positions seemed to have enemy in every ditch and hedge row. Major WATSON came down the cellar steps to where I was sitting next to the radio and in a grim voice ordered an artillery barrage on our positions and the surrounding area. Runners went out warning every one to get under cover.

We looked at our watches as the appointed time approached, the whine of the shells reached our ears and although we knew they were going to fall on us, as well as the enemy, we felt strangely elated. For fifteen minutes the shells tore into our positions and the barrage had hardly ceased before every one in the houses were firing from windows and holes in the walls. We watched the Germans pull back, dragging their wounded with them. "A" Company had suffered two more wounded from our own shells, yet it seemed worth it.

Bill HOLDING:

We had worked our way towards the cross roads and I was with Lieutenant LAGREGAN and several others in a barn. The Germans were advancing towards us supported by a tank, which put a round through the barn door, killing three men and I got splinters in my thigh. Now the Germans were only yards away, Lieutenant LAGREGAN threw the door back, stood in the open firing either a Bren or Sten, while the rest of us scrambled out the back through a low opening into a pig sty. We reached safety but we never saw Lieutenant LAGREGAN again.

Private Dave BEADHAM was one of the few men of "B" Company who survived the slaughter on the bare hillside above Bure and he along with other members of 5 Platoon took up positions covering the street.

We had to keep dashing front house to house, because there was this German Tiger tank which was roaming up and down the street. It would drive right up to a building we were using, poke its big 88mm gun through the window and then blast away, we had to nip smartly out of the back, all very disturbing. After we reached safety I looked out of a bedroom window and there was Billy ROPER, one of the Company Medics, walking calmly tip the street, looking into the now half demolished houses to see if there were any wounded. Sometimes he was no more than twenty yards away from the Tiger, but the crew respected his Red Cross armband and didn't try to stop him. He was the real hero he was completely unarmed and wouldn't even carry a pistol which he was entitled to do.

Lieutenant Colonel P.J. LUARD:

Perhaps the most romantic episode in a battle packed with incident was when the ambulance under Serjeant SCOTT D.C.M. of the R.A.M.C., went forward to our front line in order to pick up casualties. A German "Jag Tiger" tank which had been fighting us all day, rolled forward along side the ambulance and the German commander seeing the Serjeant unafraid, said "Take away the casualties this time, but don't come forward again, it is not safe". Even Serjeant SCOTT, who would bandage a wounded man with bullets cutting his own hands as he did so, knew when to take a hint.

Dennis BOARDMAN:

We couldn't believe our eyes when we saw the ambulance coming up the road completely ignoring the Tiger, which was less than 20 yards from our front door. The ambulance stopped and out got Serjeant Scott of the Medics.

Padre FOY was with him:

Hardly had the ambulance stopped however, when the tank rumbled forward, halting with its 88mm gun almost poking through the driver's window. By now several men were standing outside the door, greeting the two from the ambulance and ignoring the tank. To our surprise

the turret was thrown open and a German officer appeared. The conversation was brief. in perfect English, he agreed that the wounded could be collected, but the ambulance must not return.

There was good natured banter between ourselves as we helped the wounded aboard, under the watchful eye of the German Tank Commander. Padre FOY took the wheel a final wave and the ambulance turned and disappeared down the street. A signal to the tank and the Commander disappeared inside his steel shell. We grabbed our weapons and melted away into the battle scarred houses. Seconds later, the battle was resumed with renewed ferocity.

"Taffy" LAWLEY:

In the afternoon the Battalion Medical Serjeant drove up in the ambulance and stopped outside Company H.Q. The first couple of cases had been put on board when there was a sudden burst of machine gun fire. Then I heard the rumble of a tank and the next thing I saw was a "Jag Tiger" (88mm Assault Gun) outside Company H.Q. with the 88 trained on us. The commander was standing up in the turret, telling our Serjeant he was breaking the rules of war by his action and should wait until the battle was over before trying to evacuate the wounded, and that if he did it again, they would shoot the ambulance up. The "Tiger" then withdrew; which I thought was very sporting of him, especially as I was then practically looking down the barrel of the 88.

Dave ROBINSON was another witness of this incident:

After Normandy the P.I.A.T.'s were attached three per Company and I was a Lance Corporal in charge of one of "C" Company's team of three. During the second day in Bure, we went out whenever the shelling stopped to try and get a shot at the German tanks, but were always spotted and fired on before we could get within range. In the afternoon I had just taken a chap called Lord over to the Company Medics at H.Q. and was on my way back to the barn we were occupying. I was in the passage way between the two buildings and the tank blocked my exit, I cowered there until it withdrew.

Elsewhere in the village emergency surgery was carried out, as "Dixie" DEAN reports:

In mid afternoon I was with a Vicker's team in the back bedroom as we watched a group of Germans crawl along a hedge not 200 yards away. They halted and started to set pair of machine guns. Our gun was laid on the target and quickly opened fire but then a Number 1 Position stoppage caused the gun to stop. This was immediately remedied and we had only just recommenced firing when several ear splitting explosions occurred in the roof above us. The force of the blast threw us all to the floor and reduced the room to a shambles. The ceiling was down, roofing timbers and broken slates everywhere and we were all covered in dust from the plaster, but only one man was wounded. The gun had not been damaged and I instructed the Number 1 to set it up in another room and to carry on firing. I then turned to have a look at Private O'BRIEN'S hand which was bleeding quite badly. One of his fingers was almost severed his hand, with only a thin strip of flesh holding it. I tried several times to get a field dressing over the wound but the finger would not stay in place and kept flopping down. I led him to a chest of drawers, cleared the top with my elbow and told him to look away. I then pulled out my filleting knife, removed the offending digit and was then able to tie the dressing and send him on to the R.A.P.

Celestin LIMET had kept watch all day and in late afternoon came a lull in the firing: A German tank drew up outside and an Officer appeared in the turret. One of the other refugees who is finding these parts too dangerous goes out to speak to him and asks permission to move to the "Chateau". The German was already aware of our presence and allows us to leave, telling us to move quickly as the fighting is about to start again.

What a sight around the church where several tanks are halted and everything has been destroyed. We remained in the "Chateau" until after the fighting was over.

BATTALION WAR DIARY

BURE 4th. January 1400 hours. Situation a little more quiet. Enemy still infiltrating, positions however held without giving any ground. Any enemy movement of infantry or armour, subjected to heavy artillery fire.

1700 hours. Own losses 16 Shermans, enemy tanks still operating in village. Fighting throughout the day extremely hard and costly. Throughout hours of daylight "A" and "C" Companies sent fighting patrols into unoccupied part of the village, without, however managing to hold on to ground gained outside Battalion perimeter. Company of 2nd. Battalion Ox and Bucks joined unit as reinforcements.

A plan had also been drawn up to continue the advance towards Grupont, at first light on 5th. January. This time the 12th Battalion would be the attacking formation. The start line for this new attack was the road running in an easterly direction from the crossroads in the centre of the village and only yards forward of where "B" Company had almost been annihilated on the afternoon of the 3rd. The Machine Gun Platoon were ordered to this location, there to dig in and assist one Company of the 12th. to hold the position, while the remainder passed through them. The presence of enemy armour seemed to have been completely ignored in the formulation of the new plan. It was hard work breaking through the frozen crust below the snow covered grass and by midnight the digging of the weapon pits was half completed, when to the great relief of the "Gunnery", the attack is called off and they were able to return to the comparative safety of the houses.

[<<< go back](#)