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6th Airborne Armoured Recce August 1944

INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN



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WAR DEPARTMENT

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Amidst the action on June 6, 1944, twenty Hamilcar gliders successfully arrived at Landing Zone 'N' just outside of Ranville along with other elements of the 6th Airborne Division. Overall, Operation Mallard was a success. Lost in the excitement of Pegasus Bridge and the Merville batteries, the Tetrarch tanks of the 6th Airborne Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (6AARR) quietly joined the Normandy campaign, the result of the largest air landing of armored vehicles in WWII.

6AARR was a constant presence on the Allied left flank for 82 days. Remaining in the vicinity of Ranville, the regiment was constantly active identifying enemy positions and, on occasion, participating in minor engagements with German forces.

As July came to a close, the regiment was placed under the command of 5 Para Brigade. On August 17th, the 6 Airborne Division's breakout began. With the Seine River and Pont Audemer as objectives, the division moved out and, by day's end, St. Pair had been reached. 6AARR held this position while the 3rd and 5th Parachute Brigades launched major assaults against enemy forces blocking the advance past Dozule.

Orders were received on August 20th to proceed to the River Touque to search for bridges in the Pont L'Eveque area. Passing to the south of Dozule, the advance was threatened by German positions. With A Squadron unable to cross over the Dives River, B Squadron was left to lead the effort.

August 21st found the enemy retreating with frequent engagements occurring as 6AARR advanced into the hilly country beyond Dozule. Joined by the 1st Belgian Reconnaissance Squadron, the

1st July 1944
Placed under command 5 Para Brigade with responsibility for defence of Bridges in 1074.

1st August 1944
Party of 2 officers and 43 Other Ranks receiving instruction in the Cromwell tank at ARG.

6th August 1944
Party of trainees returned with 8 Cromwell tanks which were taken on strength of A Squadron and organised into two troops.

- 6AARR War Diary

recce elements spread out to the east with B Squadron working to the south. As they approached Pont L'Eveque, reports made it obvious that a company of Germans were scattered throughout the area, roads had been mined, and anti-tank guns had been positioned to receive the advance.

By 0900 on August 22nd, reports on the bridges in and around Pont L'Eveque were being received. The

6th June 1944

Regiment emplaned from airfields as above on Operation OVERLORD, B and Headquarters Squadrons at 1900 hrs, A Squadron and Regimental Headquarters at 1925 hrs. One Horsa with Second-in-Command forced to cast off and made successful landing area Winchester. No further episodes in flight. Hamilcars and Horsas arrived over D.Z. area Ranville 1173, 2100-2130 hrs. All Horsas landed without incident, one Hamilcar in landing crashed into Tank unloading from another causing both to become Z casualties. Some Mortar fire on D.Z. during landing, one Hamilcar hit. Rendezvous in harbour at 123734.

- 6AARR War Diary

River Touque took two channels through the town and the east bank was strongly held. 6AARR pulled back to allow the 5th Parachute Brigade to assault then enemy. No. 1 Troop, A Squadron was utilized to provide cover for bridging operations before supporting 13th Battalion's advance. Finding that the western bridge could not support the Cromwell IVs, 1 Troop could only wait while an armoured bulldozer created a ford. Once across, the Cromwell tanks advanced into the church square to find that the Germans had set several buildings on fire. While engaging several targets, including the destruction of a pillbox, it was discovered that they would be unable to cross to the east bank. Faced with anti-tank guns and the increasing threat posed by the burning buildings, they were forced to disengage.

22nd August 1944

1530 - Regiment was ordered to follow up 5 Para Brigade in an attack to the high ground East of Pont L'Eveque and there to protect the right flank of the position. Watching posts were to be established at 5402, 5804 and 6007. A Squadron was to move in support.

1600 - B Squadron reported that an Italian claiming to be a Prisoner of War of the Germans had been picked up in the area 5100. A Squadron were ordered to send up one troop to support infantry attempting to advance in Pont L'Eveque and to cover bridging operations in the town.

1900 - As the infantry were unable to make progress into the town the Regiment was ordered to stand down for the night.

23rd August 1944

0600-1200 - Infantry were unable to force crossing in the town.

1245 - At the request of 5 Para Brigade a troop of tanks was again sent into the town to help infantry.

1330 - Information was received that the infantry were withdrawing to the high ground west of the town and the troop of A Squadron was employed to cover this withdrawal.

1630 - Information was received that the withdrawal was complete.

- 6AARR War Diary

The 7th and 13th Parachute Battalions attempted another assault on the 23rd, requesting the support of the Cromwell tanks around 1245 hours. Once again forced to retreat, the tanks of 6AARR provided covering fire.

A third attempt was not needed as the Germans retreated during the night, leaving Pont L'Eveque

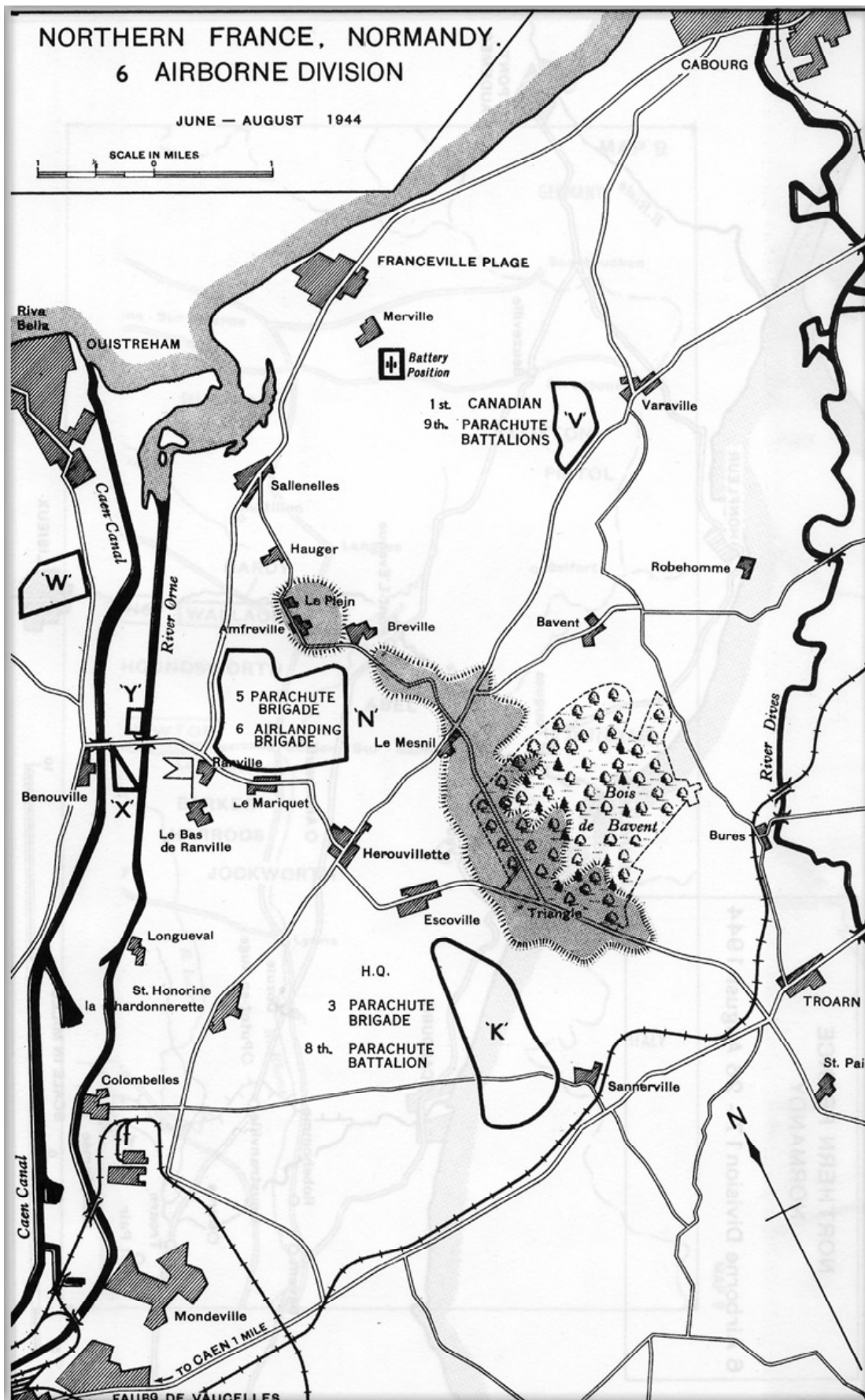
open on the 24th. 6AARR was given priority to cross the river, but the eastern channel of the river was bridged only by an 18-inch wide girder. As the regiment sought out an alternative crossing, the Royal Engineers set to work. By 1420, a crossing was found well to the north of town which was taken by most of the regiment. B Squadron, however, did not follow until it was obvious that it would take longer for the Engineers to complete their work than the time needed to take advantage of the new-found crossing and rejoin the regiment.



Light tank Mk VII Tetrarch Mk I with
Little John adaptor

Imperial War Museum KID 4781

With the end of the 45 mile advance in sight, efforts were concentrated to reach Pont Audemer. Spread out over an eight mile front, contact with the enemy



6th Airborne
Gener



6th Airborne Division Landing Zones

June-August 1944. 6AARR was assigned to Landing Zone 'N'

<http://warchronicle.com/dday/pegasus/pegasus.htm>



The Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment in Normandy

General movements of 6AARR from near Ranville to Pont Audemer, 17-28 August, 1944.

HQ Twelfth Army Group situation map (August 13, 1944) retrieved from The Library of Congress

<http://memory.loc.gov:8081/ammem/index.html> on February 25th, 2008.



Left: Daimler Dingo with markings of the Belgian Piron Brigade. The 1st Belgian Reconnaissance Squadron was assigned to the 6AARR for a brief time in late August, 1944.



Image: <http://mailer.fsu.edu/~akirk/tanks/bel/Belgium.htm>

Below: Members of 5th Parachute Brigade enjoy a cup of tea after fighting their way back from to their own lines after three days behind enemy lines. June 10, 1944.

Imperial War Museum B 5349



24th August 1944

1045 - A troop of 95-mm Centaurs came under command of the Regiment for support of operations.

1330 - Regiment was informed that it was allotted first priority in passage over the river and was also ordered to search for an alternative crossing to Pont L'Eveque. No suitable alternative crossing had so far been reported.

1420 - Information was received that at 533999 there was a Class 40 bridge intact and a patrol was sent to recce this bridge. It was found to be blown but the same patrol reported that at 533972 there was an intact bridge which could be used.

1630 - Regiment moved off in the following order:- Belgian Recce Squadron, Forward Regimental Headquarters, A Squadron and Rear Regimental Headquarters over bridge 533972; B Squadron with under command 2 armoured cars over the bridge in Pont L'Eveque. As soon as crossing complete Regiment was to recce on original axes to Honfleur and Pont Audemer.

- 6AARR War Diary

was reported from Fiqufleur to south of Beuzeville, the latter town being held by the enemy in a delaying action. No. 1 Troop, A Squadron was once again called upon to support the infantry and was sent south of the town under 8th Parachute Battalion in an attempt to outflank the Germans.

The troop provided support during an attack on a farm held by the Germans. The obstacle had to be removed and, while the attack was successful, Captain Rennith was wounded by machine gun fire, leaving Sgt. Cressy in command. As they moved on a second farm, the 75mm gun known to be hiding there fired upon the lead tank. Returning fire, the gun was knocked out. After shelling a neighboring wood held by the Germans, troop command was assumed by Lt. K.T. Robertson. Elsewhere, the Canadian Centaur's fired 60 rounds per gun in indirect support of 3rd Parachute Battalion.

On the morning of August 26th, every vehicle that could be mustered provided transport to Pont Audemer for "all possible infantry" in hopes of cutting off any German troops falling back towards the town. 6AARR carried the Royal Netherlands Brigade, setting off at 0730. Traveling from Beuzeville to Pont Audemer, they found that the Germans had blown all the bridges. A Squadron was sent to block the southern entrance to the town until the regiment received orders to concentrate in preparation to withdraw. By August 28th, 6AARR was making preparations to embark and return home for a well-deserved rest



FORCE LIST NOTES

On August 6th, 6AARR received eight Cromwell IV tanks. These tanks were formed into two troops, replacing some of A Squadron's Tetrarchs. By August 24th, both 1 Belgian Recce and No. 1 Canadian Centaur Battery were under the command of 6AARR. While the modeled troop configuration was short lived, it represents the regiment during some of the heaviest actions involving the 6AARR in Normandy.

Markings have been modeled to assist in identifying troops during game play as it is not entirely clear what markings were actually carried by the 6AARR during this time period.



6th Airborne Division and Attached Units

Major General Richard Gale

June 6, 1944



3rd Parachute Brigade

Brigadier General James Hill

8th (Midland Counties) Parachute Battalion

9th (Home Counties) Parachute Battalion

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion

3rd Airlanding Anti-Tank Battery, RA

3rd Parachute Squadron, RE

5th Parachute Brigade

Brigadier General Nigel Poett

7th (Light Infantry) Parachute Battalion

12th (10th Bn Green Howards) Para Battalion

13th (2nd/4th Bn South Lancashire) Para Battalion

4th Airlanding Anti-Tank Battery, RA

591st Parachute Squadron, RE

6th Airlanding Brigade

Brigadier General Edwin Flavell (June 12th)

1st Battalion The Royal Ulster Rifles

2nd Bn The 'Ox & Buck' Light Infantry

12th Battalion The Devonshire Regiment

249th (Airborne) Field Company, RE

Divisional Troops

53rd (Worcestershire Yeomanry) Airlanding Lt Regt, RA

2 Forward (Airborne) Observation Unit, RA

2nd Airlanding Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RA

22nd Independent Parachute Company

6th Airborne Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment

286th (Airborne) Field Park Company, RE

6th Airborne Divisional Signals

63rd Composite Company, RASC

398th Composite Company, RASC

716th Light Composite Company, RASC

6th (Airborne) Divisional Ordnance Field Park, RAOC

6th (Airborne) Divisional Workshops, REME

10th Airlanding Light Aid Detachment, REME

12th Airlanding Light Aid Detachment, REME

6th (Airborne) Divisional Provost Company, CMP

317th (Airborne) Field Security Section, Intelligence Corps

6th Airborne Divisional Postal Unit

Units Attached to the Division

The Glider Pilot Regiment

HQ, 245th Provost Company, CMP

On the morning of 26 August "A" Squadron was ordered to block the southern entrances to Pont Audemer. 1 Troop was on the left. Sergeant Thomson's tank was ordered by the Commanding Officer to cover a patrol from "B" Squadron into a house. The tank advanced some 500 yards up a street when it was fired on by an Anti-Tank Gun and was hit and penetrated. The front gunner Trooper Greenwood was seriously wounded and the turret gunner Trooper Wattam slightly wounded. Fire was directed on to the target but the tank was hit again. The fire was again returned and the Anti-Tank Gun did not reply. The turret gunner fired 3 rounds of High Explosive from the 75-mm gun and it is believed the Anti-Tank Gun did not fire again although the tank was in view for some seconds before it was able to withdraw to evacuate the wounded.

- Report of Sergeant Thomson regarding incident for which Trooper George Wattam received the Military Medal

SOURCES

Flint, Keith. "Airborne Armour: Tetrarch, Locust, Hamilcar and the 6th Airborne Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment, 1938-1950." 2004

Unit Diary transcript retrieved from http://www.pegasusarchive.org/normandy/war_Recce.htm

Divisional Order of Battle retrieved from http://www.pegasusarchive.org/normandy/order_6th.htm

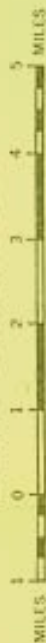
Force list background retrieved from <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/UN/Canada/CA/OpSumm/maps/OpSumm-7.jpg>

CONCEPT

Cover design based on Intelligence Bulletins produced by the Military Intelligence Service during World War II. Examples of these bulletins were retrieved at <http://www.lonesentry.com/intelbulletin/index.html>.

EASTERN FLANK OF THE NORMANDY BRIDGEHEAD

JUNE-JULY, 1944



Ground over 70 metres above sea level....	
Ground over 100 metres above sea level....	

ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS ARE SHOWN
EXCEPT WHERE OTHERWISE SHOWN



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