



9 JUNE 1944

THE 325 GIVES AND TAKES A BLOODY NOSE!

THE MERDERET RIVER CROSSING! (1ST BATTALION)

THE ATTACK ON LE HAM! (2ND BATTALION)

THE CHARGE OF THE CAUSEWAY! (3RD BATTALION)

On the afternoon of 8 June, Sanford, on orders from Col. Lewis and Gen. Gavin, made plans for the 1st Battalion to ford the Merderet River and attack the Germans holding the west bank of the river at the La Fiere-Cauquigney causeway. The battalion was to be guided across a ford by a 507 lieutenant. This officer had waded across the ford earlier in the day seeking assistance for a group of 507 men under the command of Lt. Col. Timmes. This group of 100 men under Timmes had been holed up at a farm orchard (the Jules Jean farm) since landing in the early morning hours of 6 June.

Sanford's plan of attack was to have the battalion proceed in a column of companies, with C Company under the command of Capt. Dave Stokely in the lead, followed by Company A

commanded by Lt. Heckman and Company B with Capt. Dick Gibson in command. Company C was to ford the river then turn slightly to the right and attack the "gray castle," a known German position near Amfreville. Stokely's company would make a strong show of firepower against the gray castle, then fall back to the farm orchard.

Company A, next in line, was to proceed through the orchard and go about one half mile on a country road turning slightly to the right at a road junction near LeMotey. Here they were to set up a blocking action to keep German reinforcements away from the La Fiere causeway. Company B, following Company A, would swing to the left to make an attack on Cauquigney. After their feint on the gray castle, Company C was to fall back and align on the right of Company B for the attack. This plan used the troops available to good advantage.

The battalion started moving at 2300 along the railroad which paralleled the river. The flooded Merderet River was several hundred yards wide at this point but narrowed down to about 100 yards at the ford. Engineers preceding the battalion had marked the ford with engineer's tape. The night was dark as Carl Crabtree, the lead man for Company C, made his way through the ford and along the farm road toward the orchard.

Forming a skirmish line in their feint on the gray castle, Company C opened up with a show of fire-power creating an eerie light in the darkness. Company A moved through the orchard and out on the road toward LeMotey. Company B was making the swing to the left toward Cauquigney Church and the causeway as Company C came back in line.

Lt. Buester Johnston and the men of his platoon in Company C were elated. They had done a lot of shooting and felt they had put the fear into the Germans. "They can't shoot worth a

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damn!" he remarked to Pierce. Buester, or "Rooster" as he was called by some, was a "Georgia cracker" who got along well with his men. He was KIA within the next hour.

Major Sanford and Pierce with Pfc Riddle and others making up the 1st BN CP, followed on the left of Company C in a position they expected to be near the center of the attacking companies. Company C crossed the road leading from LeMotey to Cauquigney, then turned left through a wheat field and formed a skirmish line as they went over a slight knoll.

Moving through a small orchard, there was sporadic fire and one lone German soldier was captured and turned over to the CP group. The time was just a few minutes after 0400; visibility was still no more than a few feet. The orchard was a German artillery park with howitzers positioned to fire across the Merderet.

At the end of the orchard, a platoon of Company C crossed a sunken road and at the first light of dawn were caught in a fierce fire fight.

On the right, Lt. Paul Kinsey and his platoon intercepted a truck moving down the road headed for Cauquigney. Kinsey, a former state trooper from Ohio, limping badly from a leg wound, stepped out into the road and stopped the truck. The assistant driver opened fire with a machine pistol. Kinsey, in spite of this fire, leaped forward, seizing the protruding barrel of the machine pistol, and dropped a grenade into the cab of the truck, setting it on fire, eliminating the threat from the driver and his assistant. Knocked down by the explosion, Kinsey, hearing cries and movement in the rear of the truck, completed its destruction with a well-placed rifle grenade.

The platoon in the center of the Company C line that had crossed the sunken road, found itself exposed to devastating flanking fire. The men were being cut down as they tried to get back across the road where they had some cover and conceal-

ment. Pfc Charles DeGlopper from Grand Island, N.Y., a BAR man, jumped into the middle of the road, stood up to his full height of six feet, six and three-quarters inches and fired his BAR from the hip on full automatic. The Germans then had to concentrate on eliminating this threat and while doing so, a number of DeGlopper's comrades made it back across the road. DeGlopper's action won him a posthumous award of the Medal of Honor, the only 82nd Airborne man to win this medal in Normandy. Company C had lost a considerable number of men in this brief but fierce fire fight. Lt. Johnston was killed, Lt. Kinsey and Capt. Stokely were wounded. As daylight broke, a few of the men were able to extricate themselves and move back into the wheat field; the others, including Stokely and Kinsey, were forced to surrender. A number of the wounded, including Capt. Stokely, were liberated by the Americans within two weeks. Paul Kinsey, with bullet wounds in his elbow, calf and thigh, spent 13 days in a German hospital. He lifted a P-38 pistol from a sleeping attendant and made his way toward the sound of firing. A U.S. patrol found him. Due to his severe wounds, Kinsey was returned to the States for hospitalization. He was awarded the DSC for his actions in the battle. Capt. Stokely returned to the regiment at Scraptoft later in the summer and was assigned as Executive Officer of the 2nd Battalion.

Major Sanford and his CP group were close enough to hear and discern the action in and beyond the sunken road. When the firing quieted down, they concluded that Company C was no longer able to offer resistance. Sanford, after throwing a hand grenade in the fight, ordered his little CP group to return to the orchard. Pierce, however, thinking he might salvage some of the men from Company C, ran across the orchard, past a German artillery howitzer to a position where he could look to the right. No one was in sight, while the sound of German voices and other activity along the sunken road was becoming louder.

Looking to the rear, Pierce saw the CP group top the small rise in the wheat field, the German prisoner bobbing along, trying to keep up with the Americans. Later, Pierce said, "I knew that if I wanted to be around for lunch, I had better start moving."

As he re-traced his steps through the wheat field he came upon seven men from Company C. Two of these men, Sgt. Koze and Cpl. Mason, were unarmed. They had lost their weapons in their haste to avoid capture. Mason had gone forward in the early morning darkness to talk to a German officer, thinking he wanted to surrender. When he approached close enough, he saw that the officer held a pistol on him. Mason was still white as a sheet but he had escaped, minus his rifle. In later combat action, Mason was a soldier without fear.

With this small band, Pierce again started toward the orchard. Small-arms fire could be heard in the B Company area and a German machine gun was now firing sporadically up the sunken road from Cauquigney toward LeMotey. After crossing the road, Pierce and his little group picked up three or four men from Company A and several stragglers from Company B. Firing was increasing in the Company B area, so Pierce started to organize his group into two squads with the intent of going forward to help Company B. Before this was accomplished, the group was peppered with small-arms fire from their rear, in the direction of Amfreville. That changed the picture; they headed for the orchard!

Major Sanford had set up his CP in the orchard and gained radio contact with Company B and Col. Lewis across the river. By 0730, all men of the 1st Battalion had closed into the orchard and taken up positions in the perimeter defense. Capt. Samuel Bassett, the battalion surgeon, had set up his aid station in an open farm building. This rapidly filled to capacity with the wounded men lying wall to wall on the dirt floor. Each time a

nearby 57mm anti-tank gun fired or a mortar round landed, chaff from the hay in the rafters of the farm building sifted down on the men lying on the floor, putting a light covering of dust over their bandages, faces and eyes. Lt. Kenneth Burgess of Company B was one of the wounded carried in from the early morning battle. He had a bullet in his heart, which was later removed at a hospital in England. He was "ZI'd" to the States for recuperation, carrying the now souvenir bullet in his billfold.

Although the intelligence estimate was that the causeway at Cauquigny was lightly defended, Companies B and C had been overwhelmed in the early morning darkness. Due to the blackness of the night, contact was temporarily lost between the two attacking companies, but this in itself did not change the outcome of the battle. The Germans were there in force and they knew the lay of the land over which they fought.

At the orchard with the men of the 507, the battalion was completely surrounded, with no way to evacuate the wounded. As the casualties were brought in, more space was needed. Dr. Bassett went to Major Sanford and asked permission to use the house which was attached to the farm shed, now completely full of wounded men.

When Bassett went into the house to set up his emergency operating and treatment room, he found two paratroopers at the kitchen table, eating a meal taken from the farm larder. They were safe within the thick stone walls and oblivious to the battle going on outside. Chaplain Henry Wall was busy assisting at the aid station. He made a red cross on a white sheet and hung it from an upstairs window, hoping this would stop some of the mortar fire aimed at the house. Wall also made several trips to an exposed well on the front lawn of the house where he hand-pumped water needed for the aid station. For this action, he was recommended for a medal for bravery under fire. When the road

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across the causeway was opened to evacuate the wounded on the morning of 10 June, more than 100 casualties were evacuated. Among them were Lt. Jim Helmer and Earl Clodfelter.

Considering that a number of Company C casualties were being treated by the Germans, this was probably the heaviest loss of men by the 1st Battalion in any short period of action during the war. Back in England during July, Major Sanford wrote his wife about this action:

We started the fight shorthanded due to heavy casualties on landing. I was given the mission of taking my battalion across a river [the Merderet] and attacking an enemy position from the rear. The enemy was defending a bridge [causeway] that was important to our movement West. It was estimated that the enemy was defending the bridge [at Cauquigney] with one company reinforced with automatic weapons and two medium tanks. If that had been true, our attack would have been a push-over.

We got well around to their rear, hit them at dawn and found ourselves in their artillery park long before we reached the bridge area. We were taking on a reinforced Regiment, their artillery first, which was a man-sized job for our small Airborne battalion. We did have complete surprise and tore them up as we knocked out their field pieces then closed with their infantry. The weight of their infantry soon forced us on the defensive.

Our attack, however, brought them out of their prepared positions to face our threat. While they were in the open to engage us, we called for the full force of our artillery, which cut the odds down fast and permitted our 3rd Battalion to make a direct charge across the

causeway. Our two small Airborne battalions of about 900 men completely routed the German 1057th Infantry Regiment of about 1600 men. This regiment, plus artillery, was a part of the ill-fated 91st Infantry Division.

When Generals Gavin and Ridgway were advised by Col. Lewis that the mission of seizing a bridgehead at Cauquigney had failed, there was an immediate reaction. The 90th Infantry Division was landing over Utah Beach that day and one of the missions of the 82nd Airborne was to secure a bridgehead over the Merderet so that the 90th could go on the offensive immediately. Since landing in the early morning hours of 6 June, the elements of the 82nd under Ridgway and Gavin had first controlled the causeway, then relinquished it. Rather than risk losing the causeway by trying to defend on the far side, a defensive position was maintained on the side nearest Ste. Mère Église. During the period from 6 June to the morning of 9 June, when the 1st Battalion crossed the Merderet and made their assault, the Germans had moved in the 1057th Regiment to stop a penetration across the causeway.

