

Bun, Cuppa and Chat

Veterans' Group

NEWSLETTER



May 2024



This month's D-Day piece relates to the very first landings on French soil on D-Day, 6 June 1944. Not the arrival of American, British and Canadian troops on the five Normandy beaches just after dawn, but the aerial assault, commencing just after midnight, comprising parachute and airdropping troops from the three nations. The objectives of the British 6th Airborne Division (which included the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion), whether landing by parachute or by glider, were to take two bridges intact, and destroy others, take out the Merville Battery, attack the Germans wherever they found them, and fend off counter attacks, so protecting the east flank of the seaborne invasion which would follow within hours. The task of the American airborne troops was to protect the west flank of the seaborne invasion. The bravery, dedication and skill of these airborne troops helped their comrades arriving by sea to secure the beachheads and ultimately move into Germany.

Thank you (I think) to Dick for passing on the Tommy Cooper joke book to Norman – he is Norman's joint favourite comedian (along with Norman Wisdom). I could not possibly comment on how this book will affect the Chuckle Corner!

Bun, Cuppa and Chat – D-Day 80th Anniversary

Our next Bun, Cuppa and Chat will take place at the Mariner's Galley, Rushall on **Thursday 23 May**, 2.30-4pm. I have acquired some RBL D-Day 80th anniversary poppy pins, so instead of putting out the usual Bun, Cuppa and Chat donations box on the day, there will be a Poppy Appeal tin so you can make a donation for your D-Day pin. If you would like a pin, but will not be at the event on 23 May, please let me know, and I'll make sure you get one. I do have enough for all the Group!

Please give generously!

D-Day 80th Anniversary Service

Starston Church

Sunday 9 June 2024, 3pm

Everyone is most welcome to join us for this commemoration service at Starston Church.

There are also events in Harleston all day on the 80th anniversary itself – Thursday 6 June.



Ranville War Cemetery

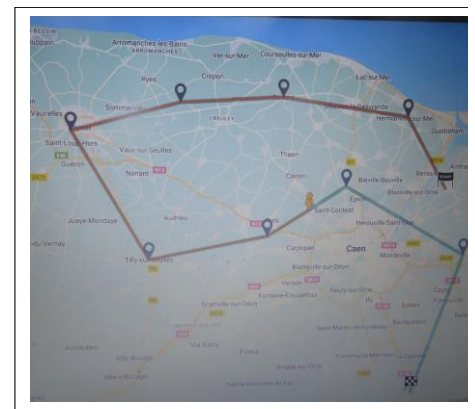
Many members of the 6th Airborne Division are buried here, with a few buried in the nearby churchyard.

Walking our War Graves - Normandy

Sahara and I are making good progress on our 95.2 kilometres sponsored walk this month in aid of the Commonwealth War Graves Foundation (the education arm of the CWGC) that promotes the stories of those who served, and died, in the two world wars and keeps their memories alive.

The route starts at the Ranville War Cemetery near Pegasus Bridge (the site of the first airborne landings just after midnight on 6 June 1944), tracks back to the coast, over to Bayeux, then follows the allied advance beyond Caen. We follow the route by our daily walks on the Norfolk lanes and footpaths, though, not in France! If you would like to sponsor Sahara and me, please follow the online link:

<https://cwgf.enthuse.com/pf/rosemary-steer-59271>, or I can input it for you if you prefer. Thank you to everyone who has already supported Sahara and me.



D-Day Remembered - The Airborne Assault

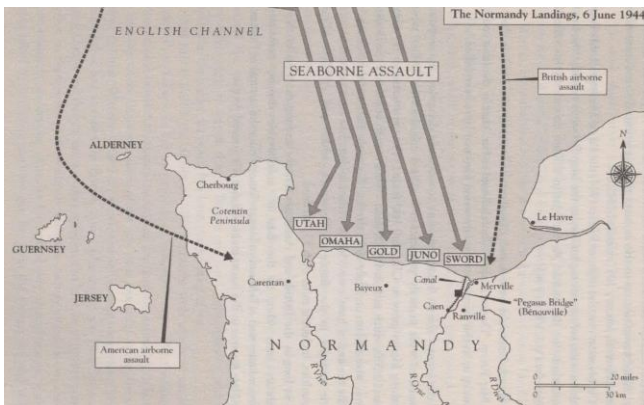
Shortly after midnight on 6 June 1944, several hours before the allies started their amphibious assault on the five Normandy beaches, codenamed Sword, Juno, Gold, Omaha and Utah, the British 6th Airborne Division and their American counterparts launched separate airborne attacks inland to secure the east and west flanks of the upcoming seaborne invasion. The airborne assault took two forms – parachute units and airdropping units (by glider). All troops within the airborne division, as well as the tow and glider pilots, were elite forces that had undergone extensive and specific training for D-Day operations.

A key objective for the 6th Airborne Division (its name was another ruse to confuse the Germans – the British only had two airborne divisions!) was the capture intact and then the defence of the bridges at Bénouville (Pegasus Bridge) and Ranville which spanned the Caen Canal and the Orne River respectively. This first mission of D-Day, just after midnight, was codenamed Operation Deadstick, planned as a *coup de main* attack – swift, decisive and taking the enemy by surprise. It was carried out by men of the airborne 2nd Battalion Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry led by Major John Howard, and supported by 30 sappers from the 249th Field Company, Royal Engineers, whose task was to neutralise any demolition charges on the bridges.



Pegasus Bridge, 1944

Note the two gliders to the right of the bridge



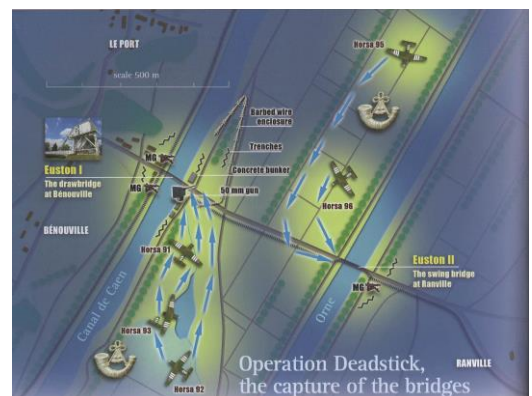
Map showing the allied aerial and seaborne assaults 6 June 1944
From *Forgotten Voices of D-Day* by Roderick Bailey

The men were transported by Horsa gliders – three to each bridge – towed by RAF Halifaxes. The glider pilots headed for landing zones beside the two bridges, although due to a navigational error by the RAF tow pilot, one of the Ranville Bridge gliders (No. 94) landed beside the wrong river, and it took the troops 48 hours to get back to their unit. Within 15 minutes of landing, though, both bridges were taken, and the signal “Ham and Jam” was sent to indicate the success of Operation Deadstick. Two men from the Ox and Bucks Light Infantry died in this initial assault – L Cpl Fred Greenhalgh and Lt Den Brotheridge, commander of 25 Platoon.

Major John Howard, the commander, described landing in the lead glider at the Bénouville Bridge:

Suddenly everything went dark and I felt my head had been knocked rather badly and my own feelings were, ‘God, I’m blind. We’ve been training and waiting for this all this time and now, when the moment comes, I’m going to be useless.’ But all that had happened was my head had bumped the top of the glider and my battle-bowler had come down over my eyes. ... I could hear the glider pilots moaning in their cockpit, it would seem to have been smashed, but I was conscious that everyone in the glider was moving ... and people were pushing in front of me to get through the broken door.

Led by Lt Brotheridge, 25 Platoon were the first on the bridge and after killing one German and throwing a grenade into a machine gun post, Brotheridge was shot in the neck and died shortly afterwards. The third glider at the bridge, piloted by Staff Sgts Geoffrey Barkway and Peter Boyle, of the Glider Pilot Regiment, who were also trained infantrymen, broke apart on landing and L.Cpl Greenhalgh was flung out and drowned in the swamp. Barkway was also catapulted out of the glider and landed in a small pond but was able to get out and release his co-pilot and the troops who were trapped in the glider. While unloading ammunition, Barkway was severely wounded in the arm and was evacuated back to Britain where his arm was amputated.



From *Pegasus 1944* by Olivier Richard

Boyle helped to clear the enemy from the far bank of the river and returned to Britain on a tank landing craft on D-Day + 1; the policy was to return glider pilots to Britain as soon as possible to prepare for their next mission. Barkway was invalided out of the army in 1945, but Boyle piloted a glider at Operation Market Garden (the ill-fated Arnhem mission) and was taken prisoner of war. Barkway was awarded the DFM for his role in Operation Deadstick and Boyle was awarded the Legion d'honneur by the French, but not until 2005. I assume the French award was given specifically for Boyle's actions on D-Day; those awarded from 2014 onwards were given to all surviving British veterans who took part in the liberation of Europe from 6 June onwards, by application only.



Geoff Barkway (L) and Peter Boyle on a pilgrimage to their landing site, 2004

As Operation Deadstick was under way, the advance parachute units were landing, followed by the remaining elements of the 6th Airborne Division, including thousands of troops and containers dropped by parachute, and 98 gliders that formed part of Operation Tonga, landing between midnight and 0400 hours, some carrying troops and others carrying essential equipment. Unfortunately, many parachute landings occurred outside the limits of one of the drop zones due to high winds and poor visibility, meaning some men and vital equipment were lost and other paratroopers spent valuable time re-grouping so the allies were under-strength and poorly equipped to deal with German counter-attacks in the area later in the morning.



On seeing the graves in Ranville War Cemetery and churchyard in 2019, I was struck by the range of different units that made up the 6th Airborne Division. The Parachute Regiment was created on 1st August 1942, and was made up of parachute battalions including the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion and volunteers from infantry regiments, such as the Green Howards and the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, as well as the airborne battalions that landed by glider, such as the 2nd Bn. Ox and Bucks Light Infantry and 1st Bn. Royal Ulster Rifles.



The airborne infantry were supported by a wide range of supporting arms and services that dropped or landed with them, including artillery, engineers, signals, armoured reconnaissance, vehicle and equipment maintenance, medical services, rations and munitions supply. Chaplains, military police and intelligence officers also formed part of the Airborne Division as did the Glider Pilot Regiment, part of the Army Air Corps. All wore the red beret and flashes of the Parachute Regiment with pride, though retaining their own regimental and corps identity.



Captain George Parry



Captain George Parry, Padre to the 7th Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, parachuted into France with the battalion on 6 June. He was killed that day after the Germans stormed a regimental aid post, killing wounded paratroopers, and the unarmed Padre who was trying to protect the soldiers. Richard Todd, the actor, who served in the battalion, said of Parry, 'he was a wiry little Welshman with a nature as fiery as his red hair, and a heart and courage to match.' Parry is buried in Bénouville Cemetery. He was 29 years old.

Norman's Chuckle Corner

✚ “Thank you, vicar,” said the parishioner, “for your sermon about the terrible destruction to one’s life through drinking too much alcohol. How the poor working man spends his wages in the pub, with his children going barefoot and hungry, while the publican drives an expensive car, and his family lives in luxury”. The Reverend bowed his head solemnly, “And did my sermon change your life for the better?” The parishioner said, “Oh yes, it did, it really did, it transformed it beyond recognition. I decided to become a publican myself.”

✚ One day a man put an advert in the paper ‘Wife wanted’, next day he received a hundred letters, all saying the same thing ‘You can have mine.’ [*Be careful what you wish for, chaps! Editor*]

✚ A dignified gentleman walks into the bank and asks for a £2000 loan. The bank manager asks, “What security can you offer?” The man says, “I have parked my Rolls Royce Phantom in your car park, and I’ll be away for a few weeks so here are the keys.” A month later, the man returns to the bank with £2024, which includes the interest due, and asks for his keys. The bank manager was a little surprised, “Why does a man of your obvious means want to bother with a loan?” “Very simple,” the gentleman replies, “Where else could I get secured parking for £24 for a month!”

✚ A man steps out in front of a car and is almost knocked down. The incensed driver winds down his window and shouts “What the hell are you doing? There’s a zebra crossing fifty feet up the road”. “Is there?” replies the pedestrian “I hope he is having better luck than I am.”

Thanks to Tommy Cooper (“Not like that, like this”) for the following jokes. And out with the fez!

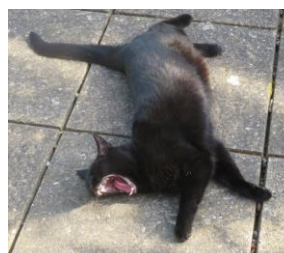
✚ “My wife is a magician; she turned my car into a tree”.

✚ I bought a greyhound about a month ago. A friend of mine said “What are you going to do with it?” “I’m going to race it”. He said, “By the look of it, I think you’ll beat it.”

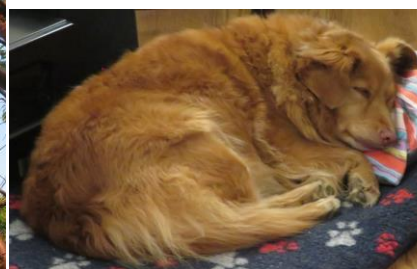
✚ I went to the doctor the other day and he said, “Open your mouth” I did and he pressed down my tongue, He then said, “A little raw,” so I did, I went “Grrr”, very quietly.

Musings from the Mutt and the Moggie

The Staff decided we should take more responsibility, so Sahara and I were tasked with dealing with all health and safety issues for the Missus’ annual pond cleaning exercise. We thought the main risk was that she fell in the pond. So here we are as feline and canine lifeguards, on high alert – see below.



All seemed well – the Missus donned her waders and gently slipped into the pond, trimming plants and getting the blanket weed out. Time for us to find other things to do – in my case a bit of tree climbing. Sahara found being alert very tiring, so went to sleep indoors.



Then disaster struck – the Missus slipped as she moved between the different levels of the pond and found herself swimming instead of wading. Her waders filled with water, and she emerged dripping, shivering and cross! Master, who was playing his keyboard, came to the rescue and she went to have a hot shower.

We think we have now redeemed ourselves – Sahara accompanied the Missus on her 95 km sponsored walk this month and I went hunting and brought in a very large rat (though I had eaten the head by the time the Missus found it – all this work made me rather peckish). No pictures of the sodden Missus were permitted, but the drying waders (stuffed with newspaper) tell the story.



Sahara and Sugie

The Bun, Cuppa and Chat Group is part of the Benefice of Dickleburgh and the Pulhams,
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