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REGIMENTAL UNIT STUDY

NUMBER 4

(THE FORCING OF THE MERDERET CAUSEWAY
AT LA FIERE, FRANCE)

An Action by the Third Battalion
325TH GLIDER INFANTRY
and Other Elements

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European Theater of Operations



This study is one
of a series purposed
to develop the Normandy
Operations of the 82d and
the 101st Airborne Divisions

THE FORCING OF THE MERDERET CAUSEWAY
AT LA FIERE, FRANCE

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CHARGE ACROSS THE CAUSEWAY

(These facts were developed at a battalion critique in LEICESTER ENGLAND, on 2-3 August, 1944, with all surviving officers and NCOs present. In the narrative, the witnesses are self-identifying.)

The Battalion was already in motion toward the MERDERET and approaching the railway crossing when the order for the attack came down the column of marching men. It passed from man to man so that no one would misunderstand the nature of the assignment: They were to attack across the Causeway, and once started, they were to keep moving. Company G, being first in the column, would lead the assault, followed by Companies E and F. After that, in the formation, came the heavy machine guns, the 81 mm mortars (6 of them) and the other elements of Headquarters Company. The column came to an exposed space at the railroad crossover but the men all double-timed through there and the Battalion made it without anyone being hurt.

While the order was still being relayed to the rearward files, the preparatory barrage fire opened, and the artillery and other supporting weapons continued their pounding of the western bank as the column moved downgrade along the winding road which led to the River. It was a preparation loosely coordinated in part, not fully satisfying in its over-all effect. Along the river bank, CAPT R. D. RAE and his badly-punished group of men from the 507th Regiment had been having some hours of extra anxiety. They had been told early that morning that there would be an

attempt to force the Causeway by storm and that either his Company (reinforced) or a battalion from 325th Regiment would draw the assignment; it was a question whether the 325th column would arrive in time from CHEF DU PONT. They sweated it out through the early hours, knowing that if the other force was not on hand by 1000, they would have to jump-off.* Periodically, RAE got reports of the upcoming column's progress; it began to look hopeful. At 1030, RAE heard the barrage open and he knew that the 325th's men were moving in to attack. He had already deployed his own men in firing position close to the water's edge, with the greater part of them disposed to the left of the bridge and along a small rise of ground to right of it. This was according to GEN GAVIN'S instructions; GAVIN had also sent word to RAE to keep heads-up when the attempt was made to force the Causeway, and if 325th's attack seemed to waver, he was to charge forward with his own group, and take over the assault.** Now as the Division's light guns and the 155s of the 345th Battalion, 90th Division, began to speak from the ground between LA FIERE and STE Eglise, the roar and rattle above the swamp of the MERDERET mounted rapidly. They were joined by the artillery pieces and machine guns of Company A, 746th Tank Battalion, which after coming cautiously forward under cover of the artillery attack had put its tanks into hull defilade among the farm buildings on the rising ground just above RAE'S fire line. The action was hardly

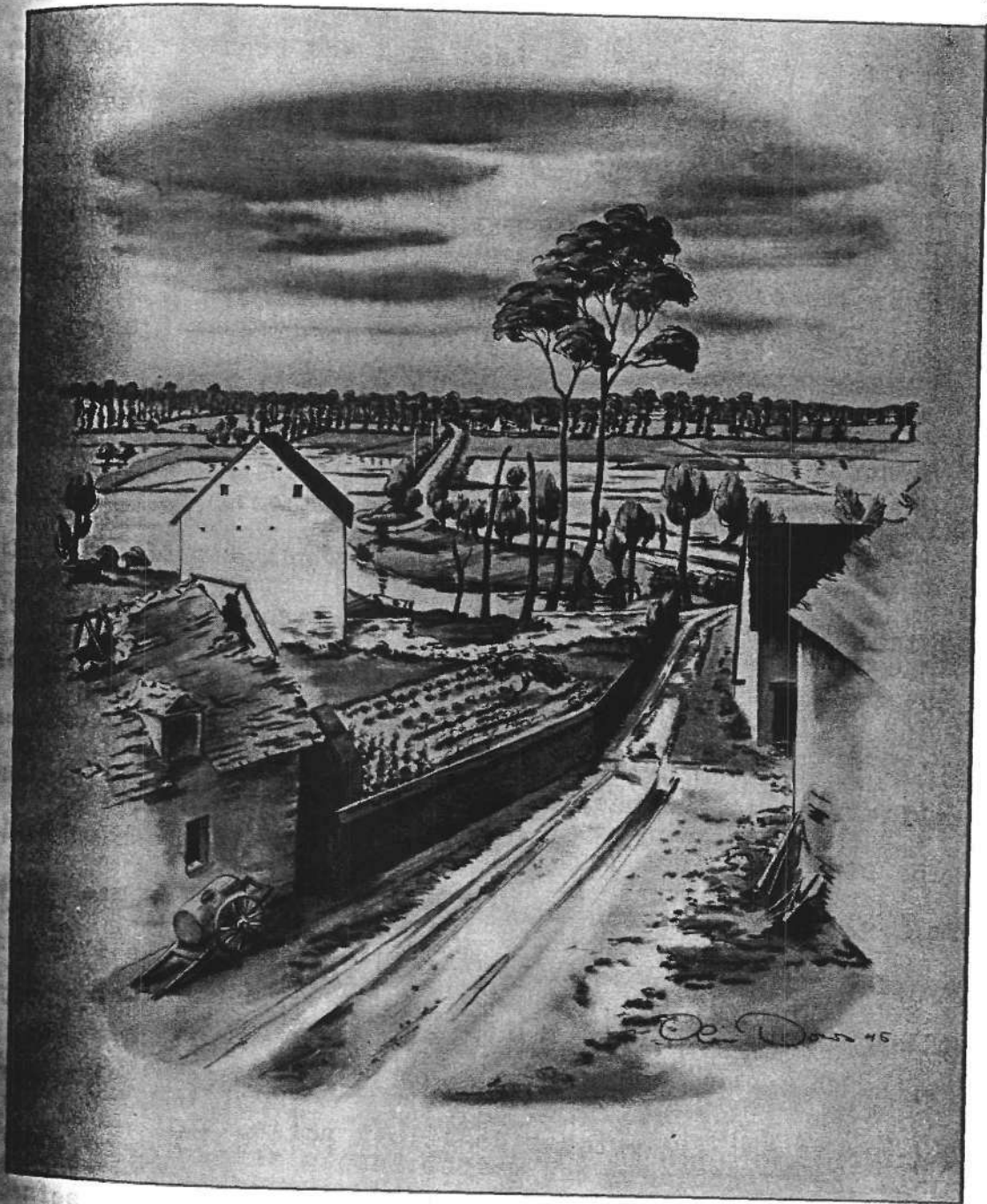
from the interview with RAE and his men.
from RAE and corroborated by GAVIN.

begun before the German artillery replied. Shellfire shook the ridge at LA FIERRE and crashed among the buildings next the river. It seemed to be coming from directly across the swamp and about 1000 yards away.* But the precise location of the guns was unknown to the American force and there was no effective counterbattery fire; the American artillery continued to concentrate attack against the built-up area along the opposite shore. From these same buildings came a small arms fire of such intensity that it "beat like hail" against the American side of the river threatening anyone who tried to approach the bridge. RAE'S men had already joined this action; every rifle and machine gun was bearing on the likely-looking targets on the far shore. Yet there was no apparent lessening of the volume and deadliness of the enemy fire.

Company G, 325th, had kept on moving toward the bridge, hearing yet not feeling, this blast. Until the last 200 yards or so, the road came at the bridge from an angle; the road embankments were high and sufficiently protecting. And the Company had something else to worry about. For the attack across the Causeway, the column had been promised an adequate covering fire of smoke. They figured that would be pretty important, since they would be charging right into the teeth of the enemy. So they had looked

*These latter details from COL LEWIS but confirmed by his company officers and RAE.

*The words are LEWIS' but RAE, HARNEY and others spoke of the intensity of this fire.



LA FIERE CAUSEWAY

anxiously for the smoke; they had seen a few smoke shells fall, then nothing more. The opposite bank was perfectly clear. The men felt pretty let down about it.*

The Company turned the last bend and the road straightened out to the bridge. Instantly machine gun fire swept over them from beyond the MERDERET and the men jumped for cover into the ditches on both sides of the road. CAPT SAULS saw his men go down, but he figured that for the moment it was useless to get them on their feet again; the stretch of road between him and the bridge was simply a slot of fire and he was sure that if he tried to take his men that way, the attack would crumple before reaching the Causeway.** Neither he nor his men had to strain their imaginations to glimpse the danger; in among them in the ditches and along the embankments were about 20 dead from 507th—most of them victims of the artillery. SAULS' men, looking forward, could see enemy mortar and artillery fire beating around the bridge. SAULS wondered if there wasn't a side road leading into the bridge; he talked to a couple of 507 officers; they could tell him only that they'd been taking a beating on this ground for two days and that there were a "hell of a lot of Germans" on the other side of the MERDERET. Leaving his company in the ditches, he made a wide

*From the critique.

**It is an interesting fact that despite all the fighting which had gone on over this ground during the preceding days, SAULS was given none of the benefits of what had been learned by the other companies already at LA FIERE.

reconnaissance around to the left. It took him over about the same ground where CAPT SCHWARTZWALDER'S men had gone on D Day and he found the side road which twisted through the cluster of high-walled farm buildings nearest the river. CAPT RAE'S men were deployed over this portion of the shore; so many of their dead were strewn over the road that SAULS had to ask the help of a 507 sergeant in moving some of the bodies so that he could get forward to where the side road turned into the Causeway and so complete his reconnaissance. The road seemed suited to his purpose; it approached the bridge at almost a right angle; the ground was flat and the road would have been under full observation from the far shore had it not been that a shoulder-high stone wall screened it during the last 40 yards. The cover was almost perfect; at one point an enemy shell had breached the wall for about seven yards and this meant that every man would have an instant of exposure in moving up to the last assembly point. One of the enemy machine guns seemed to be playing its fire around this breach but SAULS decided that the risk was worth taking. He ordered the Company to follow the way he had come. Most of the Company made it without too much difficulty, bounding one man at a time past the gap in the wall. Once past it, the men packed tight together, hugging the stone wall, so that the first two platoons were compressed into a single line of men not more than 50 yards long. There they waited, crouched over. The American artillery fire continued: the guns were supposed to hold on the beaching shore until the last minute and the fire was then to roll

on back as the infantry charged the Causeway. The enemy artillery was falling just short of the wall; it didn't bother SAULS' men but it landed with unusual consistency along the narrow strip of river bank where RAE'S men were deployed. Enemy small arms fire—quite a lot of it—was beating against the wall and bouncing off into the farm buildings beyond the Company. MAJ ARTHUR W. GARDNER, who had just taken over the Battalion a few minutes before, came forward to see whether SAULS' men were ready. They were—but they were still fretting about the smoke and wondering whether it would come.

Five minutes to go! By now the aim and concentration of the enemy fire against the wall were such that the men were certain they had been spotted. S SGT WILFRED L. ERICSSON was at the head of the column and just behind him was LT DONALD B. WASON; it would be their job to lead out. SAULS, who was up with them, looked forward and saw the ruined tank and the burned vehicles which had blocked the Causeway and made it necessary for the American infantry to advance without armor; he also noted a number of American mines scattered about near the tank. Then he looked back over his Company. To his eye, the men seemed calm. He winked at a few of the leaders and they winked back at him. One man said: "Let's get on over to the other side of the river. There are probably some good looking mademoiselles waiting for us." Some of the others laughed. SAULS raised his hand and gave them a signal as each minute ticked by. At last he held

up one finger. And then it came 1045. SAULS held one-half minute extra because the leaders of the column still had seen no smoke. Then he yelled: "Go!"

The men had been instructed that as they bounded forward in single file and crossed the 10-yard space between the end of the wall and the beginning of the bridge, they were to peel off right and left and continue running forward in parallel columns on both sides of the road. The order of advance was Second Platoon, First Platoon, Weapons Platoon and Headquarters Platoon. As he shouted the order, SAULS ran forward and became first man leading off on the left. WASON swung over to the right and ERICSSON made the mistake of trailing right behind him, followed by his entire squad. WASON yelled back over his shoulder for ERICSSON to swing over to the other side; after that, the line alternated evenly. Instantly, as the leaders bounded into the open, they felt fire all around them: it seemed as if it was coming at them from front and from both flanks. The distance to be traversed in the open was 500 yards and SAULS had told them all that their one best chance was to try to take it on the dead run without stopping. He, WASON and ERICSSON kept going. ERICSSON'S squad trailed along; so did one BAR man from the Second Squad. Enemy mortar shells were falling all along the Causeway as they made their run and it seemed to the running men as if the enemy bullet fire was beating the air all around them. But they ran straight up instead of stooping because they could go faster that

way and at the same time, save their wind.* For the time being, speed was what saved them. Of this first group, all reached the far bank winded, but otherwise unhurt. The American artillery was still shelling the river line and when SAULS reached the end of the Causeway, the shells were falling only 25-50 yards beyond him: it was a danger but it was also a relief and the men were glad to see it holding there. Not even stopping to collect his men, ERICSSON continued his run down the trail leading out leftward from the bridge. The men swung in behind him and ERICSSON yelled to the BAR man to come up even with him. SAULS stayed at the intersection of the road and the trail; he wanted to make sure that the men would deploy to the left, following ERICSSON. Until now he hadn't looked back to see how many men were following him but he felt that his first duty was to insure the best possible distribution of those who came along. When he first glanced back it seemed to SAULS that the advance of the Battalion was already withering and he sensed that something had gone wrong on the other side of the MERDERET. For some reason, his men weren't coming on. The Causeway curved sharply at about the halfway point and this curve and the tree foliage bordering both sides of the road made it impossible for him to look back and see how the advance was faring. In fact, the trouble was much farther back than that. At the moment of jump-off, there were still a

*All of this came out at the critique. Officers and men said unanimously that safety in this passage lay in speed alone and that most of the casualties occurred among men who stopped and tried to find cover as they were crossing the Causeway.

few men of Company G who hadn't closed up beyond the breach in the protecting wall; there hadn't been enough room for them. As the leading squads displaced forward and started for the Causeway, these men prepared to move past the breach. The first one, PVT MELVIN L. JOHNSON, was shot through the head by a machine gun bullet as he bounded past the gap; he dropped dead, and his body, falling across the roadway, shocked and stopped the remaining men of the company and the entire Battalion behind them. They stayed there inert for some time—possibly 10 minutes—solely as a result of this one bullet. In that interval no one seemed capable of action or decision. Impulse was again restored to the command when LT FRANK E. AMINO got up, yelled: "Let's go on and kill the sons of bitches!" and bounded past the breach. Most of the men then followed him. But the extra wait had taken the fight out of some of the others and they never got going.* In the meantime, SAULS' handful of men on the west bank had been making the best of their rather desperate situation. One hour earlier, when LT COL CHARLES A. CARRELL, the Battalion commander, had given SAULS the attack order, he had told him that he would be attacking the position of a reinforced regiment.** Now, as

*These facts were determined at the critique. All hands agreed on them. They completely contradict the statements of the Regimental Commander concerning this episode who even named the wrong officer. The HO is convinced that COL LEWIS was an unreliable witness on this as on other points.

This is the only point at which CARRELL figures in the story. SAULS relieved him before he could execute the charge. The reasons for that relief do not form a part of this study. At least one of the consequences, however, is reflected in the subsequent action. The Battalion went virtually uncommanded throughout the day. During crises, these companies were held together almost wholly through the action of the company officers.

SAULS looked about him, he was aware that scarcely 30 men had come on with him to close against the enemy and that most of these had already disappeared into the fields and among the hedgerows as they proceeded to their assignment.

IT WASON had gone straight on up the main road with about eight men following him, at a distance. During his dash across the Causeway he had seen an enemy machine gun firing straight down the road toward the bridge; he wanted that gun. The time soon came when getting it meant a straight dash across an open space toward the enemy emplacement; he told the other men he would try it alone. The action ended in a dead heat: WASON'S grenade knocked the gun out just as one of the German gunners shot WASON dead. SAULS' runner, PFC FRANK THURSTON, had gone on with WASON'S party and witnessing his death, had seen another machine gun firing from farther up the road. He returned to SAULS and said: "Sir, I know where there is a machine gun nest; can I go get it?" SAULS told him to go ahead. He went on up to a position near the first road intersection, lay down behind a hedge and shot the enemy crew one at a time with his M-1. He returned to SAULS laughing out loud. "I got the bastards," he said.

Back along the Causeway, things were going least happily for the middle third of the Company. It would have been tough enough in any case. Weighted as they were, the weapons men couldn't get away to the same running start as the riflemen. The interlocking bands of fire with which the enemy machine guns had the Causeway

covered from up and down the MERDERET seemed double the threat to this more ponderous element; the men proceeded slowly, a bound at a time, looking vainly for dirt cover on the almost barren shoulders of the Causeway embankments. And some, falling victim to the stopping habit, decided to go no farther. They lay there fully exposed and vulnerable until the enemy fire found them; their bodies, dead or wounded, made it difficult for all others to come along behind them. This was the beginning of the choke-up and of immobility; the longer the fight proceeded, the more deadly the passage became. Then in the middle of Company G's threading of the Causeway, the first American tank tried to come across. The American mines which SAULS had seen scattered near the ruined enemy tank had not been removed by Company G; the Company had been given no instruction on that point. In trying to get around the disabled tank, the Sherman tank exploded one of the mines. The explosion didn't hurt anyone in the Sherman but it wounded seven men from the weapons platoon. S SGT GEORGE F. LIERS, section leader of the mortars, was struck above the eye by a mine fragment and almost blinded. He jumped up and urged the other men on, though by the time he reached the end of the Causeway he was bleeding so badly that the others made him turn back. Already there were 20 to 30 casualties—the dead and the wounded—strung out along the Causeway. Some of the wounded had crawled down into the shallow drainage ditches which ran along the embankments. These gutters within a short time were completely choked with the wounded and malingerers; thereby was eliminated the only

partial cover along the Causeway.

In those minutes the operation hung by a few slender threads. The movement along the Causeway had lost its initial momentum; stagnation was rapidly changing to paralysis; any partial block resulted in yet greater numbers of men jamming the available road space; as there had been no diminishing of the enemy's mortar and bullet fire against the Causeway, these traffic blocks enlarged the target; in consequence, casualties mounted rapidly; this burden, in turn, compounded the difficulty of restoring motion to the column. That became the very heart of the problem; the rapidly-growing impasse at this narrow defile so gravely threatened the objectives of operation that before long every able-bodied and willing officer from the Division Commander on down was wrestling with it—trying to get the wounded back, trying to urge the faint-hearted to go forward, trying to clear the road again.*

But the efforts of the little band of men who had reached the west bank of the MERDERET to bring some relief to those who followed weren't wholly fruitless. They were too few in number to overwhelm immediately any important number of the enemy's fire positions, but step by step they were winning ground.

*This was the situation as men and officers described it and it developed very quickly, as the narratives of company experience reveal. The sight of a few wounded on the road made other men hesitate and stop. Once a few men had stopped, it was no longer possible for those who followed to make the Causeway on the run.

In turning down the first trail leading leftward along the river bank, SGT ERICSSON had motioned to his BAR man, PFC JAMES D. KITTLE, to take position at the high corner of the first field on the right and make ready to fire. ERICSSON and the others ran on down the trail: he figured that he and his men would grenade the enemy from out of the fire positions behind the hedgerow running parallel to the trail and that as the Germans fell back through the field, KITTLE could mow them down. It worked almost that way, though right at the beginning two Germans popped out from behind the hedgerow with their helmets rattling and their hands up. ERICSSON thumbed them back toward the Causeway and they went obediently, without guard. The Americans went on a few more yards and then threw grenades over the hedges. The enemy responded in kind; ERICSSON and his men went flat; it seemed to them as the German grenades exploded that the concussion was extremely slight and could not do them much harm.* Another dozen Germans came from behind the hedge, hands raised: they, too, were motioned back toward the Causeway—and went. These things built confidence in ERICSSON'S men. There were more grenadings and more surrenders. In short order, the exodus from the field became general and all resistance ceased in that small area. Others of BUNLS' men had proceeded in the same way against the hedgerow positions along the main road. Some additional power, which was resulting a large number of surrenders, had come with the belated

This was their exact testimony.

arrival of LT AMINO and his platoon, who had been held up by the incident at the wall. SAULS sent about two and one-half squads along in the direction WASON had gone, thus establishing the right flank of Company G. They set up a fire position along the main road so as to cover the fields toward the southwest and they also placed some of their automatic weapons so as to counter the fire coming from the buildings to right of the road, around the church.

One of AMINO'S men, T SGT JOHN P. KNEALE, worked his way up to the first fork in the main road. He stood there waving his arms and yelling back at the other men: "Come on! Come on! We've got the goddamn bastards on the run." Sniper fire kicked up the dirt all around him; he paid no heed and he kept on yelling; the men moved on up and past him. To SAULS, KNEALE'S stand was the "prettiest sight of the day" and one of the most effective individual actions. But he knew that in his exposed position, KNEALE was already pushing his luck and asking for a bullet. His own nerves became taut from this exhibition and he finally ran forward the necessary distance and gave KNEALE a personal order to take cover.*

ERICSSON and his men made a temporary withdrawal after proceeding about 100 yards down the trail; they had just about exhausted their ammunition supply, and ERICSSON figured he needed a few more men. He got just about back to the main road when a bullet hit him in

SAULS' description. He added these words: "To get American troops over a passage of this kind, the leader has to stay in front and say: "Let's go!" But if he's wise, he'll leave a few stout-hearted fellows behind to keep the stragglers moving."

the back and eliminated him from the action.

From the beginning, the assignment of Company G had been to clear that part of the enemy front which lay to the left of the main road. ERICSSON, WASON and KNEALE had all made passes at this assignment but had been limited by the strength at hand. The elimination of ERICSSON coincided with a realization by SAULS that enough men from the Company were now at hand to systematically mop-up the leftward sector. He sent LT AMINO and some of his men down the trail where ERICSSON had been with instructions to clear the fields between the trail and the MERDERET marsh and then swing gradually to the rightward. Another group which had followed SGT KNEALE to the fork in the road was to continue following him down the left turning. This would put AMINO'S group and KNEALE'S group on courses at first running roughly parallel but gradually converging. As they proceeded, they were to put under fire the hedgerow-bordered fields lying between them and destroy any enemy forces positioned there. Each force was to use its fire in such way as to provide a release for the other.

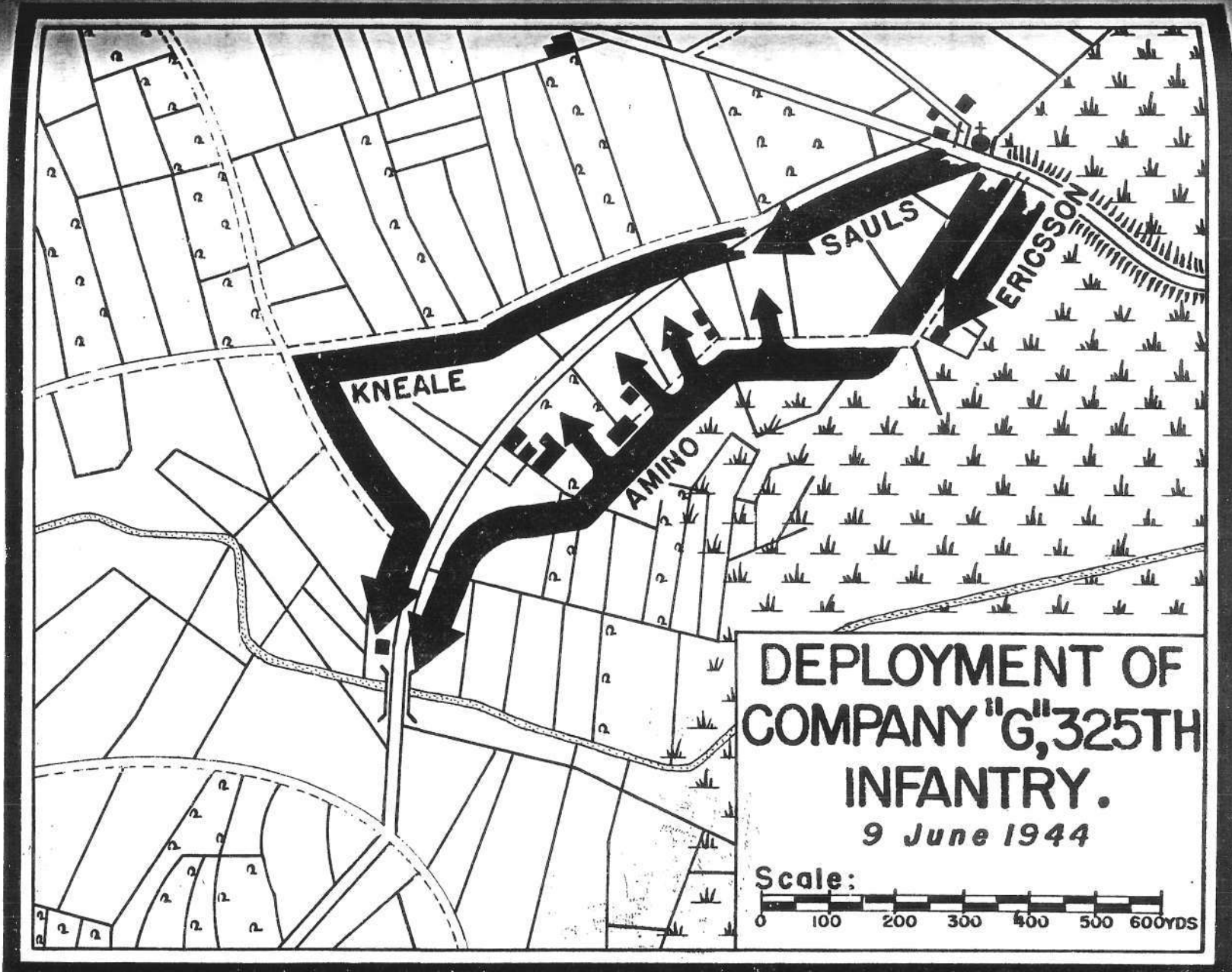
This simple maneuver was the beginning of order. Back along the causeway the situation was still fully desperate. Fire beat upon the roadway from both sides and front. The paving and the embankments were becoming littered with the dead and the wounded; such was the congestion that the forces still trying to come across had to move at slow pace. At times they were wholly stopped by the choke of bodies.

A few of the German prisoners were trying to get to the east bank but most of them were being killed by their own or by American fire while trying to move against the current.* SGT ERICSSON, looking the scene over, had decided that it was better to lie in a ditch with a hole in his back than attempt that passage. He flopped down near the head of the Causeway and waited for things to change. A friend who had just come over the Causeway found him there. That was several hours later. ERICSSON had grown stiff and weakened from his wound and could barely move. But he motioned to his own tommy gun as the newcomer went past.**

"Take that with you," he said, "you won't need a carbine over here."

*The men of the Battalion said unanimously that they killed the prisoners as they tried to work back across the Causeway.

**The friend was 1ST SGT HARRY B. READY.



**DEPLOYMENT OF
COMPANY "G", 325TH
INFANTRY.**

9 June 1944

Scale:



THE STRUGGLE FOR MOBILITY

Once it had crossed the Causeway, Company E's immediate mission was to deploy to the right of the main road and clear up the area along the river bank to the north and around the church. Thus between the deployments of Companies G and E, it was expected to clear up the enemy fire positions in the immediate foreground and free the Causeway from harassment by everything save the enemy artillery. Company E was to go forward right on the heels of Company G, First Platoon taking the lead.

The platoon commander, LT RICHARD B. JOHNSON, took off in advance of his men and arrived on the west bank about the same time as LT AMINO'S group. He had intended to take a quick reconnaissance of the ground and make ready to send the men along as they got across the Causeway. So as AMINO'S men carried on toward their deployment, he closed in on the hedgerow bounding the churchyard and worked his way along it slowly, trying to see some sign of the enemy through the gaps in the row: it was an unprofitable business; the area was being pretty well churned up by mortar fire and small arms fire; he could see where bullets were clipping twigs and branches from the apple trees, but for the moment, he saw no sign of a live enemy.

The first of his men were about 10 minutes in reaching him and during this time he had left very much alone since Company G's had disappeared into the hedges on the other side of the road as

rapidly as they reached the west bank. There had been a slight delay when T SGT HENRY W. HOWELL led the platoon almost as far forward as the bridge and then found that his road was blocked by Company G stragglers. As HOWELL had been given no instruction about passing through any part of Company G, he puzzled over it for a few moments, somewhat in doubt as to whether the general advance had been halted. Then the Battalion S-3 CAPT JAMES G. FOGLE, told him to take First Platoon through the block and continue on across the Causeway. During the delay, a mortar shell landed along the embankment, just a few yards from the head of the Company. The shell exploded upward and several shards struck CAPT CHARLES F. MURPHY'S face; several other men had been wounded. MURPHY bled pretty badly but he didn't stop to get first aid; partly because of the bleeding, he decided to make the Causeway passage as rapidly as he could instead of using his personal force from the rear to jockey along the less willing elements; the latter task fell to his Executive Officer, LT BRUCE H. BOOKER. HOWELL and his group picked their way along like men doing a bending race in slow motion. It was no longer possible for the rifleman to run the distance or even to walk fast; stragglers and some prisoners were moving back toward them, mingled with a few American wounded; other wounded were crawling along the embankments; a few dead were scattered along the pavement. Some of the able-bodied, drained of their courage upon finding themselves wholly exposed and under intense fire during the Causeway passage, tried

to find cover behind the dead bodies, there being none better available. So doing, they enlarged the cluster and worsened the congestion. Too, the machine gun and mortar people were fighting their way across and taking it slowly; willy-nilly, and despite the clear intentions of the commanders, the Causeway was becoming a general fire line. HOWELL noticed that the leader of his own machine gun squad, SGT LARRY S. WILSON, proceeded by advancing his gun not more than 40 yards at a time, so that in all he must have set up and fired 10 or more times during the passage. It was the same with the other weapons men, though among the riflemen, the movement was slow or rapid, smooth or jerky, almost wholly according to the example set by each squad or small group leader. If the leader moved ahead at a collected pace, it was still possible to get a platoon ahead almost as a body; but if a squad leader lost heart and fell away from the platoon, his men usually fell by the wayside with him.*

LT BOOKER, whose task it was to prod Company E forward, had a chance to ponder these things. He at first worked his way up to the head of the Company column and reached the end of the Causeway about even with SGT HOWELL'S men. Aware that a large portion of the Company was lagging, he went on back as far as the Bridge and then began a personal sweep forward, looking for Company E men but working on SAULS' men, also. Halfway across on

*All Companies were interviewed at length on these points and as to the material details of the crossing experience. What is said here is the concensus of all who were interviewed.

his second trip, he was hit through the calves of both legs by shell fragments; it string-haltered him temporarily and he sat down on the edge of the embankment to wait for a medico to come along and bandage him up. Sitting there bleeding and unable to walk, he continued to wave back to the men strung out along the Causeway to the rear of him, shouting at them: "Get on up there, Godamn it! That's where the fight is!" Men heard him, got up and moved along. Still, he continued to exhort them. Before he could get his wounds dressed, he saw a group of Company E men beating it back along the Causeway, trying to escape the battle. Shouting and laughing, he pulled his pistol and fired a quick half dozen rounds just over their heads. They turned back toward the fight. The incident, however, by no means closed BOOKER'S record for the day. He was simply waiting for his legs to cool off. Once bandaged, he was ready to go again and the drive which he had undertaken on behalf of the Company was extended to include the entire force. No other officer played a stronger part in persuading numbers of men to pick up and join the battle.*

SGT HOWELL kept his appointment with LT JOHNSON. He had lost some stragglers back along the embankments and a few of his men had been hit and removed from the action. But most members of the platoon were either with or close behind him when he reported at the hedgerow covering the churchyard. A few men ran on toward the orchard. HOWELL stopped to talk with JOHNSON on further

The witnesses as to various aspects of BOOKER'S activity were SGT HARNEY, LT WHITE, LT TRAVELSTEAD, SGT ADRIAN L. RUSSELL and SGT LEE BAKER.

details of the deployment. Then machine gun fire coming from up the road toward LE MOTTEY cut them both down, HOWELL getting it in the arm and chest and JOHNSON being wounded in the shoulder. Both men were evacuated back over the Causeway. S SGT FRANK C. STUDANT took over the platoon; a few minutes later he was KIA. The fire continued to bear from the west on the ground where the platoon was advancing and there was a considerable, though scattering, rifle fire mixed with the steady whine of the enemy's automatic weapons. Adding to the discomfort of CAPT MURPHY'S men, the 507th's covering fire from across the MERDERET seemed to be searching sharply close to the American flank. As Company F's leading files started fanning out along the paths and ditches running past the church and orchard, they felt the fire close in on them as if both forces were centering their shot on the small patch of countryside in their immediate foreground. They had hardly any time in which to react strongly to this unpleasant sensation, however, before it produced its most startling effect on the Germans who had been holding fire positions within the churchyard and through the orchard to rear of it. The crossfire had unnerved them and they were begging for a chance to quit when MURPHY'S men arrived; the skirmishers going forward saw them bobbing up and down in their foxholes and yelling: "Kamerad!" About 30 Germans were captured right around the church.

By this time Second Platoon had put in a nominal appearance alongside of First Platoon on the western shore, though when LT WILLIAM

WEIKART counted heads, he found that only one and one-half squads had made it, the rest having fallen by the wayside during the Causeway crossing. Forward and rear, Company E's losses were in fact mounting despite the appearance of collapse in the enemy position. One artillery shell, landing among MURPHY'S men while they were taking the German surrender in the churchyard, carried off seven of them. Perhaps somewhat more than half of the Company strength was still distributed along the Causeway though only about 35 of the 148 men who started had been hit and put out of action during the crossing. More than that number had failed to come along because they lacked the nerve to face the fire. Some men said later that they were willing enough but that the Causeway seemed to drain them of all bodily vitality. Though it was not a day of high temperatures, the heat seemed terrible. Once the movement had become a slow march, the passage was more exhausting than when the leaders had been able to run for it. The first files had had only to face the fire: for those who followed, there was the extra ordeal of having to run the gantlet of their own dead and wounded. The able-bodied stopped to give first aid to the wounded; the wounded stopped to tilt a canteen to the lips of the dying. And wherever they stopped, the fire continued to beat about them.

LT BOOKER, his leg wounds dressed, tried to get back in stride but found that the muscles wouldn't respond—he couldn't walk. He went forward crawling and as he proceeded, he urged the

men who were sprawled out along the embankment to get up and follow him. Come to the end of the Causeway, he found one of SAULS' men, PFC ALEXANDER HAHN, bleeding badly from an arm wound and he stopped there and patched him up with a tourniquet.* But he realized that his own strength was slipping and that even crawling would soon be out of the question. He crawled back toward the east bank: there was still enough spark left in him that he continued his self-appointed task, urging the other men to get forward. As he was passing over the bridge, he stopped a soldier who was going forward and asked him to take a message to Company E. Quite a while later the message got up to LT WHITE while he was aiding the fight to clear the fields westward of the church. It read: "Tell Company E to give them hell and I'll be back in a couple of days."

After deploying to the right of the road, Company E had gone on to its objective line and had held there for about 15 minutes. During this holding period the small arms fire on the immediate area seemed to slacken a little bit. LT WEIKART sent a patrol of six men on down the trail running north past the church and orchard. They returned in about 10 minutes with 22 prisoners, having searched out a large group of farm buildings. WEIKART believed (mistakenly) that this eliminated most of the enemy forces from the vicinity of the church.

At first the patrol action had gone quite smoothly and without

HAHN believed that BOOKER'S act had saved his life.

incident. The group moved along from building to building. One or two men were used to cover the outside of the building, according to its size and the number of exits, and one man entered it via the most convenient doorway and completed the search. In this manner they picked up a few prisoners at each building. Come of the last house in the settlement, S SGT JOHN S. SELMER was preparing to enter when an English-speaking prisoner told him: "The building is empty except for two wounded."

SELMER walked in with his weapon lowered. As he got within the building, a German officer came at him from the rear and shot him dead with a Schmeisser. Another member of the patrol killed the German.

LT WHITE, passing up the side road which was the Company objective, went right on down the main road with about 18 men. It was, according to WHITE, plain error on his part. The party had progressed about 150 yards from the Causeway when off on their right flank, not more than 15 feet away, they saw a German mortar crew firing their weapon as rapidly as they could pass the ammunition. This crew had been so engrossed in its work that the Americans approached unobserved, and even when the Americans stood there, gazing over the hedgerow, they did not look up. It was manifest that the shells were landing on the near side of the bridge against the troops which had completed the passage.

SPT SAMUEL L. WEBSTER threw a grenade which landed and exploded

fair among the crew, killing all three men.

On the whole, Company E's initial sweep was carried off with a surprising smoothness despite the lost strength which had been dissipated along the Causeway.

COMMAND VIEW AND ACTION

Perhaps 35 to 40 minutes had passed while the first two companies were reaching the state of deployment described in the preceding pages. It had come time for CAPT JAMES M. HARNEY to lead Company F forward toward the bridge. The Company's mission as given to HARNEY was this: It would move up behind the other two assault companies and mop-up on both sides of the main road so as to establish the center of the bridgehead. It was an assignment based on the assumption that the first two companies would have done their work with fair completeness, that their fronts would be unified and that their prime need would be reenforcement as the bridgehead sector expanded.*

Yet without HARNEY'S knowing it, a slight change in plan was already taking effect on his side of the MERDERET which was to alter the nature of Company F's employment and modify its role in the battle. When the Company reached the bridge, HARNEY noted that except for the one Sherman which had had the encounter with the mine field, the American tanks were still in a hull down position among the east shore farm buildings which were closest to the Causeway. They were firing on LE MOTTEY, the range being about 1700 yards. HARNEY clearly saw this fire. Company F's leading files picked their way through the 507th's positions. CAPT RAE'S paratroopers were no longer giving fire support to the force on

*From HARNEY and his officers.

the west shore but were standing around watching the action—a sufficient indication that the fire against the American base had already fallen off. HARNEY heard several paratroopers say: "I'm glad you're doing it instead of us." It was an eloquent thought though, as events proved, it was a trifle premature.

The difficulty of the command position had been from the beginning that it was almost impossible to arrive at a clean estimate of situation or to improve the estimate as things moved along. No information was coming back. The sounds of battle on the far side of the river were sufficiently irregular that it was all but impossible to tell whether the 325th was making headway or had suffered another repulse. Almost nothing could be seen of the fighting; the Americans had in fact lost themselves to view among the ditches and hedgerows. Except for an occasional puff of smoke or cloud of dust, the opposite shore seemed normal and motionless. The one positive sign of American success—the German prisoners—had not yet appeared east of the MERDERET. The majority had been killed trying to get across the Causeway. How the fight fared along that thoroughfare, those who watched from the east bank could get no clear idea. The choke there tended to make them believe that the issue up front was turning against the 325th; they were not at all sure that there had been any penetrations of the enemy front. The foliage of the poplar trees along the embankments, the curve in the Causeway and the dust and smoke all made it difficult to follow any part of the detail of

the action. What few manifestations they saw of the battle made it look as if there had been a recoil and having no exact information as to the kind of misfortune which was besetting the column, they mistook the immobilization of the rearward force for signs of a tactical reversal up front.

What the higher commanders could not well realize was that the Causeway block was now thickening at an especially rapid rate because the forward position was not developing swiftly enough to permit the absorption even of the relatively few men who were making it to the other side.* A situation which seemed to be falling for lack of men was in danger of becoming more greatly confused because momentarily the narrow fighting front had become congested with men. There was a quickly-reached limit to the numbers who could move forward along the ditches and hedgerows without presenting too solid a target to the enemy. Yet of these pressures and responses, an observer on the east bank could scarcely judge. It was a situation in which the local commander had to proceed by guess and by God. At daylight, GEN RIDGWAY had committed the task to GEN GAVIN (who had been Task Force commander along the MERDERET from the beginning) and had told him that he was to use all means available in the vicinity of LA FIERE to cross the bridge and establish the bridgehead. Having completed his artillery arrangements by 0930, GAVIN gave further instructions. SAULS, WHITE, HARNEY and other officers were quite emphatic on this point.

consideration to the nature of his infantry operation.* Two points appeared to him to be critical and he discussed both of them at some length with LT COL MALONEY of 507th. He knew that he couldn't risk the chance that 325th's attack would fail because it went unsupported; so he directed that a reinforced company from 507th should stand by in instant readiness to pick up the charge if the glider battalion wavered. The assignment fell, as already recounted, to CAPT RAE'S company. However, GAVIN had the offsetting fear that the 507th group, being within sight of the action, might be so carried away by the spectacle of the attack that it would cross the river without proper orders; since he considered that the retention of the position on the east bank would remain of utmost importance until a bridge head had been made solid on the west bank, he directed that RAE should not lead his men forward until he (GAVIN) had given the signal. MALONEY was to remain near GAVIN at a point about 100 yards east of the bridge where he would await the signal and he would then relay it to RAE.

*GEN DEVINE of the 90th Division Arty was at Division CP when RIDGWAY conferred with GAVIN. He told the latter he would give him the support of his Battalion of 155's but that it would be a "tight fit." GAVIN asked DEVINE to meet him at an OP overlooking the bridge without delay. Accompanied by MAJ HARRISON and LT OLSEN, GAVIN then went forward to LT COL MALONEY'S CP, about 700 yards east of the bridge. Enroute, he talked to the commander of the tank company and asked him to bring the tanks up in close assault range during the artillery preparation. Up to this time it had been impossible for the tanks to expose themselves in daylight on the forward slopes of the LA FIERE hill but it was believed that with the artillery now available, the German AT guns could be neutralized sufficiently to permit the movement of the tanks up close. GAVIN then went on to the OP and arranged for the light artillery to commence firing at 1030. DEVINE joined him there a few minutes later.

Having given these instructions, GAVIN watched the unfolding of his operation for the better part of an hour, trying to determine where the balance lay. He noticed that the first few men moved swiftly and seemed to get through unscathed; the conviction was strong in him that the more the movement slowed down the greater became the chance that he would suffer a complete reverse. The engineer detail went forward to remove the knocked out German tank which was partially blocking the Causeway. The obstacle did not appear so serious at first inasmuch as there seemed to be enough room for the American tanks to squeeze through. Then the movement of the American armor made its faltering start and the first tank hit the mine as it started across the bridge.

By this time, GAVIN had become acutely concerned about the appearance of buckling in his rearward elements. They were crowding up toward the east end of the bridge and the movement forward seemed to lack regularity and order. GAVIN didn't know how things were faring across the river or whether a lodgment had been made. But as he saw it, the feeling of uncertainty had become predominant among the elements of the 325th which had yet to make the crossing.*

He gave the order that CAPT RAE'S company was to cross the river and try to sweep all stragglers along with them.

*from the interview with GAVIN.

SHOT IN THE ARM

But the order from GAVIN to RAE did not pass through MALONEY. GAVIN was standing in the Company position when he made up his mind. He said to RAE: "All right, go ahead! You've got to go. RAE took this order as meaning that the 325th charge had failed and he concluded erroneously that no penetrations had been made on the west bank and that from the end of the Causeway forward his men would have to proceed unsupported.*

Between 80 and 100 men received the order, followed RAE out of the position and started across the Causeway. They emerged into a "hail of bullets" as they moved up to and over the bridge; artillery shells were exploding liberally along the embankments. The worst block to their immediate progress was next the damaged American tank where the 325th stragglers had knotted up, instinctively trying to take advantage of the protection of the metal. There was so little free space that RAE'S men would have

*This is according to RAE. GAVIN himself says that he wasn't sure whether there had been penetrations but he suspected some of the 325th men had been able to stick it. Three weeks later RAE was still under the impression that his troops were the first to make a lodgment west of the river though the evidence to the contrary was overwhelming. There was some feeling between the glider troops and the paratroopers on this point; the former felt that the latter were taking the credit. (A review of all the circumstances would seem to indicate that they were then receiving more credit than was due them.) HARNEY, SAULS, WHITE and all other Third Battalion officers felt (or said) that the situation west on the river was not hanging in balance when RAE was thrown out and that they were making steady, though slow, progress. But that was a local view. The record shows the slimness of the margin of success.

to elbow their way through. As they came down from the bridge, a shell exploded near them and PVT RICHARD KEELER, RAE'S runner, hit the dirt along with some of the others. RAE said to him: "If you're going to get it, you're going to get it, and you might as well start walking down the road with me." It was all that KEELER needed; from that moment on, he started working on the other men who had stalled along the embankment, and by "talking it up" and setting the good example, he helped to open a path through the huddle around the damaged tank. It was the first break of the day for RAE'S men.

This same path had opened just a few moments previously to the handful of men who had gone forward with CAPT HARNEY, for it had chanced that right from the outset HARNEY had become separated from the main body of his Company. HARNEY had become alarmed by the appearances of stalemate and of defeat among the forces on the Causeway; it seemed to him that a stage had been reached when the press of men who would not move was a greater deterrent to getting other men forward than was the menace of the enemy fire. The majority acted as if they had "set their brakes" against any attempt to get forward. So HARNEY decided to pull away from the main body of his company and try to blaze a trail with a small group of his headquarters men; the Company was to attempt to follow in this order--First Platoon, Second Platoon, Headquarters (the remaining men) and Weapons. The jam was so tight that running even at a slow trot was out of the

question. The men had to pick their way along the Causeway, zigzagging through the dead and wounded, the able-bodied who had lost interest and the machine gun crews who were fighting back. When HARNEY looked back after he had passed over the bridge and beyond the press of men around the damaged tank, he saw CAPT RAE following him: it looked to HARNEY as if there were not more than 35 paratroopers who had come along with RAE up to that point. It was the first he knew that 507th had been asked to take a hand.*

Yet even this small company was reacting on the scene like a freshening breeze. The change was due largely—so the other men said and felt—to a young lieutenant, JAMES D. ORWIN. Some of the others were just as keen to get the stragglers moving forward but their methods were less effective. RAE was pressing a little bit; an extremely intense commander, he was trying to get action by direct order. HARNEY, shy almost to the point of taciturnity, couldn't say the words that would loosen other men up. ORWIN had the relaxed manner. A mortar shell had exploded near him a few minutes before and had blown his helmet apart without doing him physical injury. As he came down the Causeway there was a knit cap on his head. A bright red rose was stuck in his hair just under the bill of his cap. Men all along the Causeway saw and remembered that rose. ORWIN walked along, head up, a broad grin on his face. He didn't raise his voice or give an order.

*From HARNEY and his men.

Came to a group of men who had foundered and were regarding the action listlessly, he said to them: "We're all going to the other side. I think you had better come along. It will be better for all of us over there." They listened to him. Some arose and followed. Little by little, an almost magic change came over the situation.* But it was by no means all the work of one man with a light touch. LT WILLIAM H. CONDON, who had gone along with HARNEY though he was suffering from a hip injury received in the glider landing, got a piece of shrapnel in his skull and another in his shoulder after the group had gone a short distance past the bridge. His comrades saw him take it standing up and CONDON looked to them "as if the whole side of his face had been caved in." Blood masked his features and covered his shirt front. But he refused evacuation, and too weak to walk forward, he stood there for several hours, feebly motioning the other men on.**

RAE and the leaders of the paratroopers stepped out as rapidly as they could, feeling that the speed of the advance was the principal safety factor, and convinced that if their own group once completely lost initial momentum, there would be no chance to restore motion to the men bunched up along the Causeway. But the situation did not clear up instantly; though some glider men joined the column and thereby gradually increased its numbers,

HARNEY and all of his officers were all eager to speak of CONDON'S influence on the situation. RAE and WISNER were other witnesses.

**From TRAVELSTEAD and his men.

quite a few of RAE'S men fell by the wayside. So while the main body kept moving forward as rapidly as the situation permitted, ORWIN and a few of the other leaders broke back from the column and worked as "beaters", encouraging the standstills to get on up and join RAE'S band. To LT WISNER, the S-2 who had gone along with RAE the scene came gradually to resemble "an escalator... two streams of men on the inside trying to run forward and on the outer side, streams of wounded trickling back." WISNER was impressed with "the great number of wounded who were still mobile enough to walk back or crawl back" from a fight "which was still so fresh that it was impossible to distinguish between the corpses and the litter cases as one passed them by." The aid men were already running up and down the Causeway bandaging the wounded as rapidly as they could get to them; their success at this stage in evacuating a large number of litter cases from the embankments was a principal factor in restoring movement to the operation.*

When they had gone more than half the distance to the west shore, RAE'S men saw prisoners coming back, hands lifted. But it made no impression on RAE: he failed to read it as a sign that elements of the 325th had succeeded in closing with the enemy.**

*This was RAE'S opinion.

**In talking with the HO, RAE said that he was certain his men made the first penetration, then told of meeting prisoners who obviously had already surrendered to someone else. The HO asked him: "Didn't it occur to you then that there were Americans already developing a front?" He said that it didn't.

On reaching the west end of the Causeway, the paratroopers drew rifle fire from Germans along the edge of the swamp to the south of the road; they had apparently been missed by Company G. These enemy were visible. Some of RAE'S men paused in the road and returned the fire from a standing position, without cover. The exchange continued until the Germans were beaten off.*

HARNEY and his headquarters group got across in about 15 minutes. By the time they had completed their run, the elements of Company F's main body, following behind RAE, had become so diffused during the passage that there was no longer any squad or platoon organization. The leaders got hold of whatever men were right around them and tried to get them forward.

HARNEY'S mission had been to peel his platoons off right and left and mop up behind the other two companies. But what he saw convinced him that he had neither room nor organization for a maneuver of this kind and he decided to push right on along the main road and establish his force along the high ground at the front of the bridgehead.

RAE, coming along behind him, determined to take the same line, though he had not known of HARNEY'S decision.

In this manner, as these groups began their separate deployments, the bridgehead came to have a center and to take form all around, although the various participating elements were operating quite

from WISNER

independently of each other and the commanders on the east bank as yet had no idea of how these components were dealing with their separate local situations.

THE CROSSING COMPLETED

COL LEWIS, the Regimental Commander, stood at the head of the Causeway urging the men forward. The crippled American tank was going again and an attempt was being made to hitch it to the wrecked German vehicles so that it could clear the Causeway. It was meeting with some success but the other American tanks had not put in an appearance, and LEWIS was annoyed: he believed if he could get the tanks going, they would sweep the infantry along. He ran on up the hill to see what was causing the delay. Before ever reaching the tanks, he ran into GEN RIDGWAY and asked him to use his influence to get the armor forward.

RIDGWAY first made a reconnaissance and what he saw at the Causeway convinced him that the block was still sufficient to endanger the advance of the armor. He didn't stop to give an order; he stepped out onto the fire-swept Causeway to see what he could do to clear the wreckage out of the way. For the moment he was a man intent on one thing—using his own hands to repair the situation as quickly as possible. Without realizing it, GAVIN was complementing RIDGWAY'S effort: he had gone on back to the tanks, checked up on their ammunition supply and discovered they were just about out. He did what was needed to get them ready for operations across the MERDERET. COL LEWIS in the meantime had returned to the bridge to resume his task of getting the infantry moving.

The Heavy Weapons had been instructed to follow Company F across the Causeway. The Company's position in the Battalion column was so far back, however, that the commander, LT LEE C. TRAVELSTEAD, had not been able to see exactly what the rifle companies were doing, and did not know of the detour which took them into the bridge by way of the covering stone wall. Consequently, on getting word to move out, he led his men straight down the main road; it was indicative of how the situation had improved during the first hour that the men moved unharassed past the bridge.*

TRAVELSTEAD'S men were all heavily burdened. Encumbered as they were with the heavy machine guns and mortars and the ammunition loads, they had no chance to make either a fight or a run of the passage. It was just a slow, arduous march in which they were fully vulnerable to the enemy fire; by this time mortar shelling was the worst danger; the machine gun fire from the flanks had tapered off considerably, due to the efforts of Companies E and G. "Keep your heads, keep your equipment and keep moving," TRAVELSTEAD told them. That was what they did; they never stopped to fire, although enroute they passed a number of light machine gun and mortar crews which were still banging away at the enemy positions up and down the marsh line. At first, they tried walking along the embankments to take advantage of the slight tree cover but the wounded were moving back along the outer edges of the Causeway and the few litter bearers were trying to carry

*All of this material came from the group interview of Heavy Weapons Company.

out the evacuations along this same line. So the Company was forced back to the center of the road. There, the condition was gradually improving though the congestion was still sufficient that the Company had to bodily shove men aside to keep moving.

When the Company passed the point where the burned German vehicle cluttered the roadway, they saw GEN RIDGWAY working alone, trying to loosen a cable from the Sherman tank so that the other obstacles could be dragged away. The General said nothing as the men passed, nor did he look up; he was too intent on what he was doing. TRAVELSTEAD'S mortar platoon moved perhaps a dozen paces beyond where RIDGWAY was working and was then hit straight on by a mortar shell which killed one man and wounded three. LT JOSEPH I. SHEALY got shell fragments in the head, arm and leg but continued in the lead of his platoon; the others were too hard hit to keep going; SHEALY got as far as the end of the Causeway and dropped exhausted into a ditch. By that time, two more men had succumbed to mortar fire and two had been hit by bullets.

The other Shermans came down from the hill and started across the Causeway in the wake of Heavy Weapons Company, firing along both flanks against the marsh line as they proceeded. The hour was about 1200. Most of the wounded had been cleared over to the embankments and the infantry stragglers who remained automatically gave way, or joined the movement forward, as the armor came

slowly on. The tanks made the run unscathed though in the meantime they had been overtaken by the CP group, bringing up the rear of Third Battalion. In the beginning, CAPT LEWIS S. MENTLI (later KIA) saw his opportunity and as the CP group came onto the Causeway, he and his officers worked through the last patches of stragglers, urging them to get underway and finish the march while they had a chance to use the protection of the armor. When this last clean-up gained such momentum that it bid fair to carry itself, MENTLI and his own group stepped out and got ahead of the armor. They came to a field beyond the first road intersection on the west shore; the CP was supposed to be already set up and working in one corner of the field. But CAPT JAMES R. FOGLE, who had been detailed to this task, had been hit during the crossing and the other men who were to assist him, on coming to the field, had been discouraged by enemy fire. MENTLI and his men hacked their way through a hedgerow bounding the field; they were just ready to start the task at which FOGLE had failed when the American tanks came along the main road and fired into the group with machine guns. MENTLI got out, taking a few wounded.*

In the communications section, 1ST SGT HARRY B. READY, SGT MORRISON and PVT RUMSY had waited on the east shore with a wire from Regiment which was supposed to go to the Battalion CP. Time dragged on, no word came as to whether the CP was set up and

*From the group interview.

operating, and so they started on across with the wire. They had scarcely passed the bridge when MORRISON was hit in the thigh by a bullet; he crawled over to the embankment and flattened out in a ditch. The other two went on, taking the wire. But the mission was voided for more than one hour because mortar fire continued to fall on the Causeway at such a rate that the wire wouldn't hold. READY and RUMSY returned to the Causeway. Until 1330 or later, they were kept busy repairing breaks in the wire.

At the tag end of the column, LT CLARENCE H. KNUTSON and his supply section loaded four jeeps and trailers with ammunition and headed for the west shore. At the bridge the convoy stopped for just a moment and KNUTSON asked GEN GAVIN if any vehicles had crossed yet.

GAVIN asked: "What have you got?"

KNUTSON replied: "Ammunition."

Said GAVIN: "Then get the hell over there!"*

The jeeps made the run in high gear as enemy mortar fire was still punishing the Causeway. They reached the fork of the road and next it the ammunition was unloaded--the beginning of supply on the west shore. Thereafter the jeeps were used alternately to bring in resupply from the east shore and to get ammunition

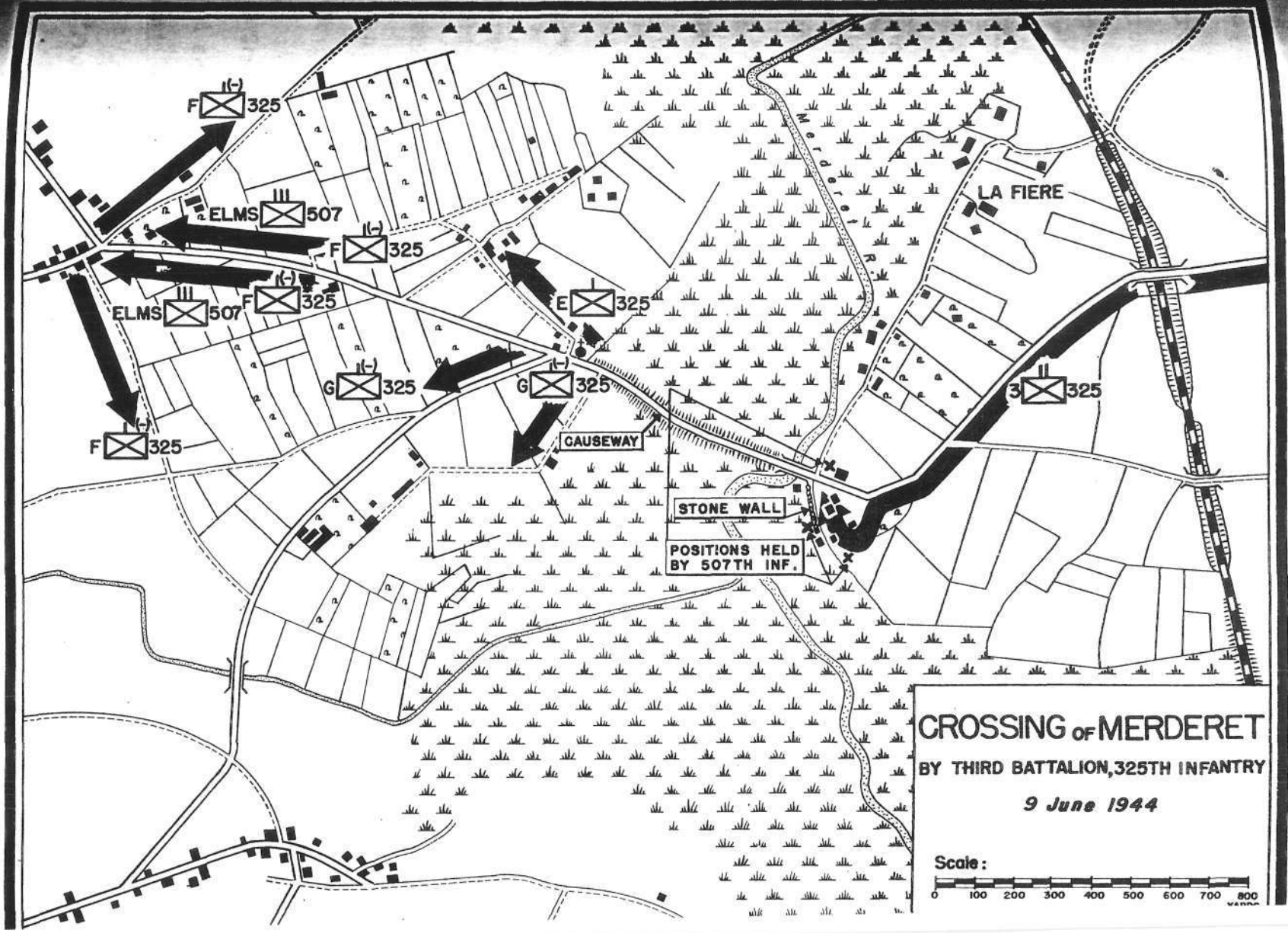
*From KNUTSON and his men.

forward to the fire line. On each trip to LA FIERE, they carried a load of wounded, limiting this service to the cases which were most likely to die if they did not receive prompt medical care; this was the beginning of systematic evacuation.

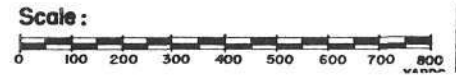
THE HEDGEROW FIGHTING

So far the Third Battalion of 325th Regiment had been largely leaderless and its several components had moved tactically on their own initiative, once they reached the western shore. Too RAE'S company, suddenly precipitated into the action, was acting in an independent role. Each small band took up a sector and then proceeded to deal with its local situation in detail. It was surprising, in view of the general circumstances, how quickly an orderly pattern began to develop from these diverse operations.

It happened that way largely because junior officers, in the emergency, were capable of fast thinking on their feet. Having made his decision to continue down the main road with Company F, CAPT HARNEY saw a knot of men from Company G—three cooks and a radio operator—standing at the road fork, doing nothing; he added them to his force and was glad later that he did it, for the cooks fought with "unusual courage" throughout the afternoon. The Company then continued on along the road, spraying the hedgerows with automatic fire as they moved along and grenading the edges of the fields where there were likely to be fire positions. RAE had been coming along behind and as the two groups got on up to the crossroads, thus coming into ground which had not been swept by any of the earlier-arriving companies, RAE asked HARNEY how he had better employ his men. HARNEY told him: "Take all of the men now moving along on the left side of the road, pass down



CROSSING OF MERDERET
 BY THIRD BATTALION, 325TH INFANTRY
 9 June 1944



the trail leading to your left and make contact with Company G's right flank. After making contact, move forward to the high ground and take up a defensive position." LT WHITE and his group of 18 men from Company E, taking the same road, had arrived at the same intersection. HARNEY told him to take his part out along the road leading to the right and try to make contact with the First Battalion which was presumed to be still pinned by German fire in the area where COL TIMMES' party had been held inactive. That done, WHITE was to clear the high ground to his front and take up a defensive position. As HARNEY figured it, the movement thus outlined was certain to leave some enemy ground on his rear but he felt that he could save time and round out the general position with least loss by "squeezing" these Germans between his own skirmishers and the advancing lines of Companies E and G. By this time, LT TRAVELSTEAD had come up with the heavy machine guns and one section was sent out with each of the flankward-moving Companies. HARNEY went along with WHITE'S party.* RAE split his force and sent part of them via the left flank, as HARNEY had suggested; he led the rest of them straight down the road and into LE MOTTEY. It looked at that point as if the bridgehead had been fairly well rounded out.

In Company G's sector—the area immediately west of the MERDERET and south of the main road—the action had moved along moderately well, though CAPT SAULS was worried by the knowledge that his

*From HARNEY, WHITE and their men.

ammunition was running low and that his communications were bad; in fact the skirmishers were keeping abreast of their situation by grapevine alone, word of what was happening being passed back from man to man. The Company had progressed about 200 yards along the road which forked to the left by the time the tanks had crossed the Causeway. The main body was still without word, however, as to how LT AMINO'S party was faring when CAPT SAULS got an order by runner from COL LEWIS to return back to him; LEWIS had heard nothing from the Battalion Commander (it is to be remembered that he had made a change in Battalion command just as the MERDERET crossing started) and he was worried that the situation might be slipping out of hand. SAULS met LEWIS at the head of the Causeway. LEWIS was sitting on a low stone wall talking to GEN RIDGWAY about the advisability of setting up a CP in the orchard next the church. While they were discussing whether the situation was safe enough for it, PFC KENNETH LYNN came out of the orchard herding 25 prisoners which he had captured within 100 feet of the spot where the two commanders were talking and which Company E had overlooked in its sweep to the right. LEWIS told SAULS how and where he wanted the Battalion position established (toward which consummation HARNEY and RAE had already taken steps without waiting for LEWIS) and he added that if the Battalion Commander couldn't be found, SAULS was to take over. SAULS noticed that SGT IRWIN had set up his 81 mm mortars close to the main road at the base of the area over which LT AMINO was pro-

ceeding. He then started back to rejoin SGT KNEALE and the advanced element of the Company.

That group had come in check during SAULS' absence because of strong machine gun fire coming from positions farther along the road. KNEALE, finding that the other men were reluctant to go forward, left them and worked out alone to a point 50-70 yards in advance of the group. There he was joined by two of RAE'S officers coming in from his right front. (It is a curious fact that these officers, though apparently of the party sent to make contact with Company G, after making the physical contact seem to have become so engrossed in Company G's fight that they did not send RAE word of the contact.) KNEALE was lying down next hedgerow embankment and was trying to get a line on the enemy position when the paratroop officers got to him; they told him he was helpless unless he got more fire power forward. As if to emphasize their comment, two German AT guns began to fire toward them from somewhere near the machine gun position. KNEALE moved on back to his group and asked for a machine gun; the AT fire was now blasting the hedgerows close around the group and it seemed to KNEALE that the guns were not more than 125 yards away and a little to right of the road. PFC WILL E. DICKENS, a machine gunner, and two members of his crew, followed KNEALE as he moved forward again. They crawled along the hedgerow, dragging the gun; after 75 yards of this, they set up in a corner of the field, covered front and side by hedgerows. When their

gun had spoken for only a few minutes, firing across the road toward the area where KNEALE thought he had spotted the battery, it seemed to them that the enemy fire slacked off. And at the same time "potato mashers" began to fall among them; the Germans, driven away from their pieces by the accuracy of DICKENS' fire, had apparently worked their way toward DICKENS' gun along a covering hedgerow and from a range of about 25 feet were trying to grenade him into silence. One grenade exploded right next DICKENS and he bled from a dozen wounds; but he stayed at his gun firing for a few minutes, when he dropped from weakness. He died within the hour. SAULS had come up to the group position just in time to see DICKENS engage; he figured that between the AT guns and the enemy machine guns, there was far too much power there for DICKENS to cope with it successfully. So he sent a runner sprinting back to SGT IRWIN to tell him to open fire on the German battery with the 81 mm mortars. Back at the mortar position, MAJ GARDNER appeared on the scene just long enough to countermand this order; it was his judgment that the action was too closely joined for use of the heavy mortars. In any case it didn't matter. DICKENS had completed his work before the grenade had killed him. The AT guns remained silent and after a few lobs, the grenadiers faded back. But a bullet had hit SAULS in the hand and he was bleeding quite badly. He remained on for a time, watching the action. Though the fire had died on the right and the men were again advancing, more machine guns had opened fire from farther down the road and the bullets

were searching the lateral hedgerows. A medium tank joined the group and moved along the road parallel with the infantry, shooting up the hedgerows as it advanced. The ammunition supply reached bottom among SAULS' men; a few went back to gather ammunition among the stragglers or to look for it among the wounded at the Causeway. Some of the enemy clung to their ground until the last moment, trying to fight it out with grenades; they were shot down as they tried to fade back along the hedgerows or were grenaded where they stood in their foxholes. SGT ROGER F. BERTOLINI, moving along the hedge to left of the road, saw a large slit trench in a field to right of it, but was not sure whether it was occupied. He prowled it and came back with a German officer and five other prisoners. At that point the first machine gun burned out and BERTOLINI went back to look for another. He brought it forward just in time: the group had rounded another bend in the road and had been stopped by an enemy gun which had the lateral hedgerows well covered. Whenever DEALE and his men tried to move, the gun fired a burst right around them; when they stopped, it stopped, so as not to disclose the position. BERTOLINI got his gun operating but wasn't sure of the line; the men lay there in the ditch; they felt that BERTOLINI'S gun wasn't helping much. SAULS stuck his head up several times and invariably drew fire. He made a guess at where the gun was located and gave the position to SGT LEO KOHLREISER and SGT JAMES MALAK who had set up the 60 mm mortars at another hedgerow just 25 yards in rear of the pinned riflemen. They

opened fire at 100 yards range, and between the mortars and BERTOLINI'S gun the German gun was silenced. The men moved on again—this time without SAULS who was losing so much blood that he could no longer take it. He turned the Company over to LT THOMAS E. GOODSON (later KIA) and went to the rear. The armor, too, had dropped back. The first tank had withdrawn when its machine gun jammed. A second tank came forward and drew mortar fire almost immediately. One shell exploded directly in front of the tank, whereupon it whipped around and was not seen again. SAULS got back to MAJ MOORE and told him that unless Company G got ammunition, it would have to pull back. While he was reporting, KNUTSON came by on one more trip, his jeep and trailer loaded with ammunition. SAULS sent him on up to the group. When KNUTSON got there, the Company was again engaged. KNUTSON asked: "What are you firing at?" GOODSON said: "Anti-tank gun." KNUTSON asked: "How far away?" and GOODSON replied: "One hundred yards." The trailer was dropped and the men turned it upside down to do a quick unloading. The jeep, backing away meanwhile, made its turn-around almost in the same motion, hooked on to the empty trailer and was on its way before the enemy had fired a round. It seemed a miracle to the men that the jeep got out. The mortars began to fire again and in a few minutes the AT gun went silent. The men went forward. Coming to a trail leading rightward, they advanced along it for about 300 yards; they found no enemy and so they came back to the main road.

A few yards short of the bridge, the group was again stopped by machine gun fire. On order from GOODSON, PFC LEONARD REE circled the hedgerows on a wide sweep to the flank, then moved back toward the road so that he came out finally in rear of enemy position: in 10 minutes he was back with 30 prisoners formed in column of threes.

The group then turned left into a field and waited for LT AMINO to come up from the left flank. It was about 1500 hours. Within a few minutes AMINO saw their smoke signal and joined them. His own excursion had been relatively uneventful. The Company then moved back out the trail running to rightward of the road searching for the flank of the force in the center.

The juncture was made and Company G distributed itself along the hedges abounding the trail.

TROUBLE IN THE CENTER

While Company G had been rounding out its mission, the forces under HARNEY and RAE which had been maneuvering in the vicinity of LE MOTTEY had met a temporary setback because of circumstances which were quite beyond anyone's calculation. GEN GAVIN had figured that the village itself was the most likely rallying ground for the Germans; under the cover of the buildings reinforcements from AMFREYVILLE or farther west might effect their assembly and launch the expected counter-attack against the not-yet-fused groups which were gradually consolidating the bridge-head. The artillery had been ordered to move its fire back to LE MOTTEY and then to hold there for a period, thus interdicting the principal roads leading into the Causeway. But as has already been explained, HARNEY, not finding ground in which to deploy his troops in the foreground of operation, went straight down the main road instead of mopping-up behind the other companies. RAE'S group followed in behind him, and additional troops, including TRAVELSTEAD'S party and then more men from RAE'S company, were strung out for another 300 yards to the rear. This meant that although they had no apprehension of it, they were moving into their own artillery fire. Of this, the artillery of course knew nothing, and the lack of radio communication between the infantry and the guns broadened the danger.

The rear element of paratroopers was cut off by enemy fire coming in from the right flank during the last stage of the advance

toward LE MOTHEY and one of TRAVELSTEAD'S men, SGT JOSEPH SINDAD, who was a little distance on ahead of them, saw their plight and turned back to help them out. But he was in a peculiar fix; he had a machine gun without tripod or ammunition; his carriers had been hit during the Causeway crossing. When the call came from the rear for fire support, SINDAD, leaving his gun, ran back 150 yards right through the area where the men were pinned, found a box of ammunition, ran forward again, set his gun up on an embankment and provided a covering fire until the last of the paratroopers could close up on RAE. Accompanied by part of the machine gun crew which had been operating under SGT ERNEST NEINFELDT, SINDAD then fell in behind this last element and followed as far as the crossroads just short of LE MOTHEY. That looked like a good place for the gun; a tripod had come forward; SINDAD set the gun up right in the middle of the intersection.

As he did so, an American artillery shell landed some yards forward of the gun and fragments hit TRAVELSTEAD in three or four places. The second shell landed almost on the gun and all that saved SINDAD was that two paratroopers who had stepped in front of the gun received the full force of the blast. They were killed; so were two members of SINDAD'S crew, and the gun was knocked out. At the same time the fire was hitting all along the line BARNEY and the others who had moved off to the right with the intention of then advancing to the high ground got not more than

100 yards into the orchard before the first American shells fell among them. One paratrooper was killed: the other men around HARNEY dropped back and took up a position along the road. RAE, who had planned that most of his force would be disposed to right of the road, didn't get started on his deployment. The front of his column was moving into LE MOTTEY when the fire came down. Being among the buildings, the group suffered only a few wounded from the first salvo. But RAE immediately pulled his men back from the village and then went looking for a tank to see if he could get a radio message flashed to the artillery. He ran into COL LEWIS and GEN RIDGWAY engaged in conversation near the church and was told to set up his group in the vicinity of the church as a general reserve.* TRAVELSTEAD, before submitting to his wounds and quitting the battle, sent three different runners to the artillery. HARNEY tried runners, a tank radio and orange smoke also, but all were equally unavailing. A curtain of their own artillery fire continued to bar the way to the high ground which the infantry coveted.

HARNEY redressed his line along the first convenient hedgerow short of the area beaten by the American gunfire and for the next 30 or 40 minutes he tried to make things as snug as possible. One of TRAVELSTEAD'S gunners—SGT HAROLD J. LOWE—was still with him,

This was the same conversation reported by SAULS and connected with the taking of prisoners near the church and established the relationship in time of one event to another. It probably happened some time during the noon hour.

anchoring the right flank. RAE had pulled back, taking not only the 21 paratroopers who had been in LE MOTTEY but most of the paratroopers who had worked leftward from the main road (and had still not reported contact with Company G.) This widened the already considerable gap on the left and lessened the chance that he would join flanks with Company G. Too, some 15 or 20 minutes after the artillery fire had interrupted the advance, LT WHITE had decided that he didn't belong forward and had withdrawn his 18 men to the area where Company E was employed, just westward of the marsh. That stripped HARNEY of support on both sides. There were other disturbing changes in the situation. Company F was now drawing considerable small arms fire from the LE MOTTEY buildings and HARNEY'S mortars were doing their best to cope with it. So far, there had been no demonstration by the enemy infantry but it seemed to HARNEY that his position and numbers were such that he was simply inviting an attack. He counted noses: There were 50 men from Company F, 16 from Headquarters (mainly heavy weapons men), 12 from Company G and perhaps a half dozen paratroopers; the latter were off on the left. Most of the force was sound though a few of the wounded had remained in line. HARNEY went on back to the churchyard and told MAJ GARDNER that he had better get Company E forward to support Company F's left if he expected the ground to be held. When he returned to the fire-line, it seemed to him from the way enemy fire was building up that their infantry must be

flooding back into the buildings at LE MOTEY; American artillery fire was still falling on the ground just short of the village. HARNEY continued to wait for Company E, and in the meantime, with the hope that he could find Company G's flank and lean on their strength, he sent out a six-man patrol under LT ARCHIE B. NOEL to reconnoiter the fields and hedgerows to the left. The patrol moved only a short distance--perhaps 100 to 150 yards then it was ambushed from among houses which had previously been cleared by RAE'S men; it was nearly a complete job; two men were killed and two wounded. But a disaster was averted by PFC HENRY L. HENDERSON who sprinted across the road in the face of enemy rifle and machine gun fire, picked up a BAR which had dropped from the dead hand of PFC JOSEPH W. WOODBURY and poured a covering fire to the front so that NOEL could get back and warn the Company that the Germans were coming around their flank. About one platoon of the enemy were already well launched on this maneuver which would have put them on Company F's rear. All of this time, the fire against the Company from front and right flank had increased in volume.

It was wearing into mid-afternoon. For somewhat more than an hour, the Company had been standing alone in the forward ground. HARNEY fully aware that his jeopardy was increasing. He heard nothing from Company E. The strain of the long wait, compounded by the disaster to the patrol and NOEL'S warning that the counter-attack was coming forced him to a decision. He had

previously reconnoitered a position about 200 yards to the rear where there was a strong hedgerow embankment running along slightly higher ground with not much exposure toward the flanks. He told his men to break back to this new line. The mortars went first. Then the riflemen moved back, one-half squad at a time, creeping along the hedgerows. The BARS got out next and the machine guns brought up the rear. Fire was already sweeping across the forward line from the enemy on the left as the first elements pulled out; also, the enemy was firing from a house on the right rear.

At this stage, there were signs both that the men were feeling the pressure and that they remained in a state of fair control. The first few men got out so fast that they deserted their ammunition; the last few officers and NCOs to leave the position noticed this dereliction, picked up the ammunition (in all, three cases) and carried it back to the new line. There they turned about and waited for the next move, which was not slow in coming.

It had chanced that Company E, which had lost more than an hour in rounding up its men, had started its move up to where it could join HARNEY on the left at just about the time that HARNEY reached his decision to withdraw, via his own right flank. This came much trouble. For it meant that CAPT MURPHY and his men were looking for a friendly flank that wasn't there

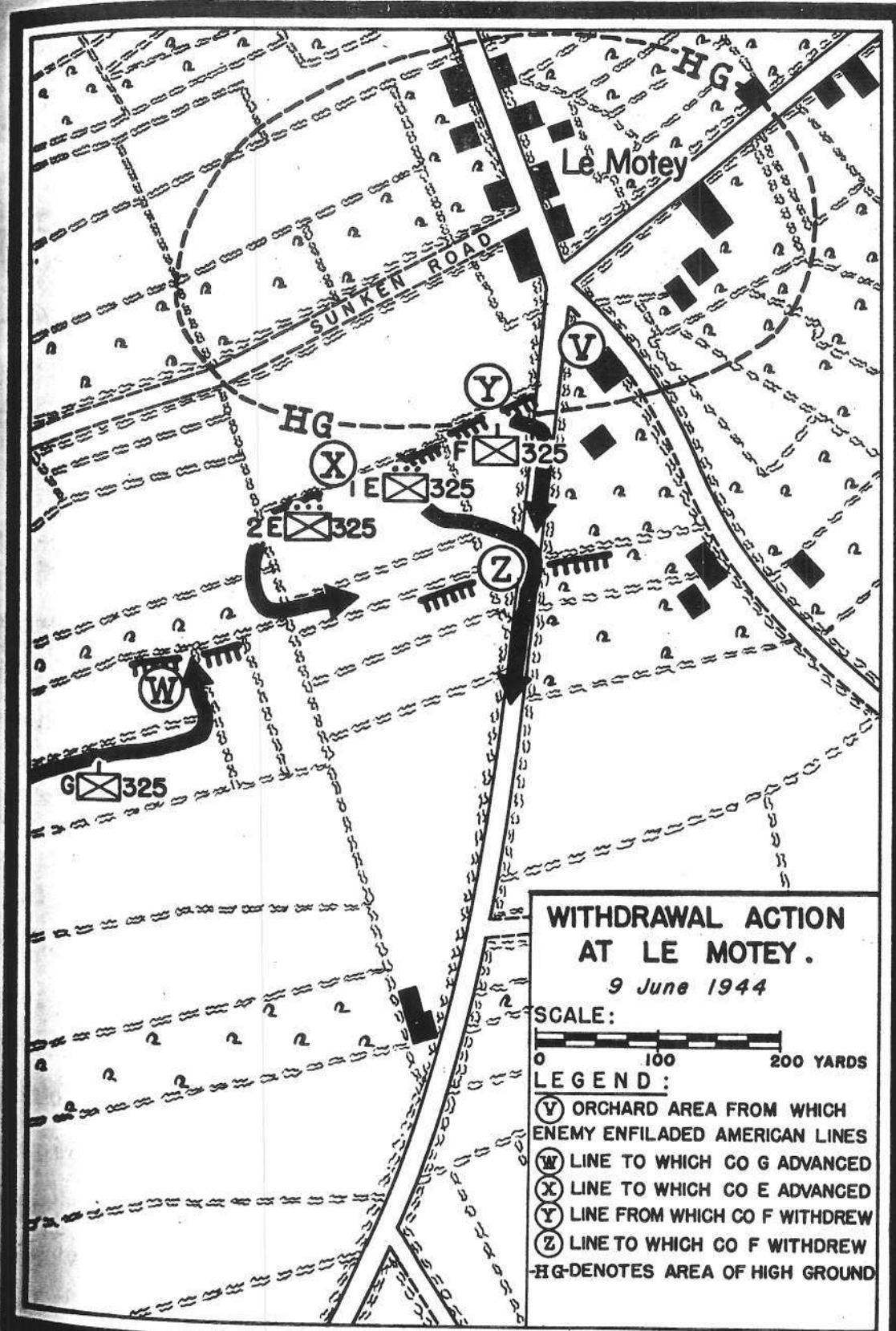
while moving into an area where the enemy had already made his presence known.

Having virtually traded missions with Company E for the time being, CAPT RAE sent part of his force to work northward from the church with the design of lifting the pressure from COL TIMMES' force and from First Battalion, 325th, and bringing the into the bridgehead. But the patrol's initial mission was limited. They were to get to TIMMES and tell him that the Americans were in fairly solid on the west bank of the MERDERET. Thereafter it would be largely up to the forces on the spot to work out their own salvation and get to the bridgehead.

THE MOMENT OF FAILURE

With neither sensing the other's presence, Companies E and F swung around each other like the outer edges of the same half of a revolving door. HARNEY did not know that MURPHY was coming forward well over on his left; MURPHY did not know that HARNEY was falling back well over on his right. Because of the intervening hedgerows, neither saw anything of the other's men. Because it seemed a more favorable line of approach, MURPHY'S men went forward along a hedgerow which ran perpendicular to what would have been the extreme left flank of the company position. Without incident, they got up to the hedgerow line immediately east of the sunken road which led into LE MOTEY, and along that line, they began to feed off to the right. Seeing nothing of Company F in that direction, MURPHY sent a patrol rightward to look for the friendly flank. HARNEY was at that moment taking up his new position, two hedgerows to MURPHY'S right rear.

Perhaps two minutes went by. The line had just finished extending to the right. Then from that same flank a heavy and direct enfilade fire—automatic fire, coming out of the orchard—hit into the top and sides of the embankment which was supposed to be covering MURPHY'S men. Two or three guns were raking the position from slightly higher ground not more than one hedgerow distant. MURPHY'S men were in a ditch and the superior position of the enemy made it impossible for them to raise their heads to



**WITHDRAWAL ACTION
AT LE MOTEY.**

9 June 1944

SCALE:



LEGEND:

- (Y) ORCHARD AREA FROM WHICH ENEMY ENFILADED AMERICAN LINES
- (W) LINE TO WHICH CO G ADVANCED
- (X) LINE TO WHICH CO E ADVANCED
- (Y) LINE FROM WHICH CO F WITHDREW
- (Z) LINE TO WHICH CO F WITHDREW
- HG- DENOTES AREA OF HIGH GROUND

fire. Then several rounds of smoke fell between Company E and the German position; the Americans took it as a sign that a counter-attack was coming.

MURPHY shouted an order. What he said, no member of the Company heard clearly.* But the leaders of the Second Platoon who were nearest him took it that he intended for them to move back one hedgerow to a position which was on slightly higher ground and not directly in line with the enemy fire. They were just guessing at it but it seemed like the best thing to do. So they made their exit via the left flank and went to the new position promptly and in an orderly manner. But what was said and what came of it were completely misread by the First Platoon over on the right. They thought the left flank had cracked and the thought panicked them. They got up and ran for the main road, heading toward the Causeway; their leaders went with, or after, them.

Company G, which had completed its work under GOODSON and AMINO and had then moved rightward looking for the nearest friendly flank, had come just far enough along the trail to see these things as they happened. Concluding that the contact had been made, the Company halted and SGT MALAK set up his three 60 mm mortars. As Company E broke back from the forward hedgerow, enemy artillery and small arms fire found the Company G area. MALAK began working his mortars, at first centering on the orchard,

*This was the testimony of all who were present at the critique.

then traversing the fire along one line at 200 yards range so as to cover the front of both companies. It was his feeling that his mortars, fired in battery, kept the enemy from coming on.

But the counter fire from MALAK'S battery couldn't check the running men. T SGT LEONARD SLATER of HARNEY'S outfit was moving along the road, going back to get some heavy machine guns, when he saw the Company E men—about 25 or 30 of them—coming toward him at a run. He realized instantly that unless something was done to stop the rout, it might sweep the whole front. Coming up the road was a paratroop lieutenant. SLATER yelled at him: "For God's sake stop them if you can!" They had already run past three fields and were passing the hedgerow beyond HARNEY'S line when this happened: HARNEY'S men had seen, but had held their ground. SGT JOHN M. HARRISON of Headquarters Company, who was with the 81 mm mortars near the road, saw them go by. One man yelled: "They're counter-attacking and we're getting out." But as HARRISON started to follow them out, intending to look for a hand or two who could help him move the mortars back, he saw the paratroop lieutenant standing squarely in their road and brandishing his pistol. "You'll keep your goddamn asses right where they are." He shouted so loudly that HARRISON could hear him above the sounds of battle. "Some of my men are up there and some of you men are going to pull out." The group came to a halt and looked around uncertainly. None of them tried to argue. HARRISON tried to go by and the lieutenant at first checked him,

then let him proceed, so that he could arrange to get the mortars out in case the panic showed signs of spreading. "But these riflemen will stay right here!" the lieutenant said. LT WHITE quite gradually got his men in hand and the paratrooper relinquished control. Moving on the inside of the hedgerows, however, a few of them got all the way back to the Causeway.* Somewhat more than an hour later WHITE got his group back on line and tied in with the force under MURPHY. The front was now fairly well knit between Companies G and E, though HARNEY, on the right, remained displaced several fields to the rear.

*The paratroop officer was never identified. He was apparently not one of RAE'S men.

THE EVENING ATTACK

Throughout the next hour the enemy continued to pound the Battalion's forward lines. But the German infantry did not advance and there was no material change in the American situation except that HARNEY, worried because he was not covered on the right flank, moved 16 men across the main road and put them behind a hedgerow on the other side so that he would have additional fire power and observation.* RAE'S patrol got to TIMMES' group without difficulty and confirmed what it had already suspected—that TIMMES was no longer in need of help. The forcing of the Causeway appeared to have removed the pressure from this area quite automatically and it is conceivable that the troops which had been keeping TIMMES' men and the First Battalion of glider infantry immobilized had been drawn off to strengthen resistance in the center of the bridgehead around LE MOTTEY. Quite suddenly the situation cleared for the men in the orchard; by the time the patrol got there, they could have walked out of the position. Now, however, there was no longer any need for TIMMES' people to move. The bridgehead had to be extended in that direction and TIMMES was on the right ground to take over the right flank. He and his men stayed in place.

Just after 1800, the Germans made their die-away effort. Steady mortar fire began to hit into the hedgerows where Companies E

*From HARNEY'S men.

and F were positioned, with most of the heat falling on HARNEY'S men. At the same time there was a pickup in automatic fire all along the front. HARNEY and his men saw groups of enemy infantry crossing the open fields coming toward them. He felt shaky. He had just made another trip back to GARDNER and had told him that he would have to get additional forces up to support his right or the line would not hold; GARDNER told him to go on back and he would receive plenty of support in a few minutes. Now, faced with the attack before the arrival of the expected help, he found that LT HOWARD HILL, the forward artillery observer, had lost radio contact with fire control. HILL sprinted on back to a position 200 yards in rear where he knew there was a SCR 610, but in the interval, HARNEY'S men sweated.

HARNEY made one move; he withdrew his platoon on the right an additional 25 yards to straighten his line. It was the only piece of ground given up during the fight. As the mortars opened fire, his men lay flat in the ditches, close to the hedgerows, waiting for the storm to pass. Not a man was hit. Then as the mortars ceased fire so as not to compromise the advancing German infantry, HARNEY'S men propped up against the hedgerows and met the onfall with rifles and machine guns. The attack was beaten back and the enemy had begun withdrawal before the American artillery got into action.

The repulse was attended by some acts of individual bravery.

THOMAS A. STRUM, returning through a field on the right flank

which was covered by German fire at the time, collided with two German infantrymen on the rear of Company F's right flank. STRUM'S tommy gun was empty at the moment and he had no ammunition. Using the gun as a club, he crashed in one man's skull; the other man fled. STRUM then continued to the rear, seeking ammunition; the whole force was running short at the time. In a few minutes he came back, inside a tank which was carrying a load of infantry ammunition. The tank unloaded and went back for more; the road was so hot with fire at the time that open vehicles could not move along it. So the tank continued doing this yeoman service, and when the supply was amply replenished, the tank moved in next the infantry line and gave it close-up fire support, knocking out several buildings with its cannon and spraying the forward hedgerows with its automatic guns. The infantry felt that the tank had been their salvation.*

Yet these things, unattended by any real misadventure for the American force even though HARNEY'S men remained fearful that the Germans would try to swing around their right flank, were almost totally misinterpreted by the commanders in the backwash of the battle. From the CP near the church, the sounds of the German attack seemed near and impressive. COL LEWIS had collapsed from sheer exhaustion and his Executive, COL SITLER, had taken over the command. SITLER looked out toward the road and saw a few infantrymen moving toward the Causeway; they said there was a German tank on HARNEY and his men and supported by the statements of HARNEY E.

was another counter-attack and the enemy was driving a wedge into the American lines. As SITLER set about collecting scratch local reserves from among his Headquarters personnel and the engineer detachment, he heard a tank rumbling back toward the MERDERET. SITLER kept at his task. A few minutes later he heard what he thought was another tank go by. But he had no chance to inquire into the circumstances. Had he done so, he would have learned that it was the same tank and that it was running an ammunition shuttle to the Battalion. Instead, he gathered the impression that the armor was pulling out under pressure from the enemy and he felt that the effect would be fully demoralizing to the men on the fire line. He called Division and told them that his situation was rapidly worsening and that he wanted them to send whatever help was available. Thus while the battle line situation began to brighten after a few minutes the Headquarters impression of it darkened steadily through the next hour.*

Oddly enough, in the brief interval ensuing between the onset of this last attack and his own physical collapse, COL LEWIS had taken the final steps essential to the filling-in and reorganization of his own line. He went to CAPT RAE and told him that he was being counter-attacked on both flanks and that he needed more man-power on the fire line. RAE asked that LEWIS be specific as to where he should put his men. LEWIS replied: "I can't tell you in detail. I haven't time. Go up and find a hole in the

*This comes from SITLER.

line and plug it." So RAE moved westward from the church until he came to the third unimproved road; there he built up a line running northward from the main road. HARNEY'S men on the right flank were just about 50 yards to the front of this position into which RAE deployed about 80 men. The ground did not seem to be under any special pressure at the time, though the enemy was giving it steady mortar fire and there were quite a few machine pistols popping away beyond the hedgerows. RAE'S men in the reserve line saw nothing of the opposing infantry. Soon after reaching the position their situation was further eased when they saw friendly troops move up and form a line on their right, filling in the gap which until that time had existed between them and TIMMES' force. This was First Battalion, 325th Infantry, which had again become mobile when the enemy withdrew from the area around TIMMES' orchard.*

Company G's role in the repulse had been limited to aiding with mortar fire. Along Company E's front the pressure was also relatively light, the effort of the enemy being directed evidently against that portion of the front where the line was thinnest and most retarded. But the Germans never really found HARNEY'S open flank. Only a few got that far and they didn't return to their comrades.

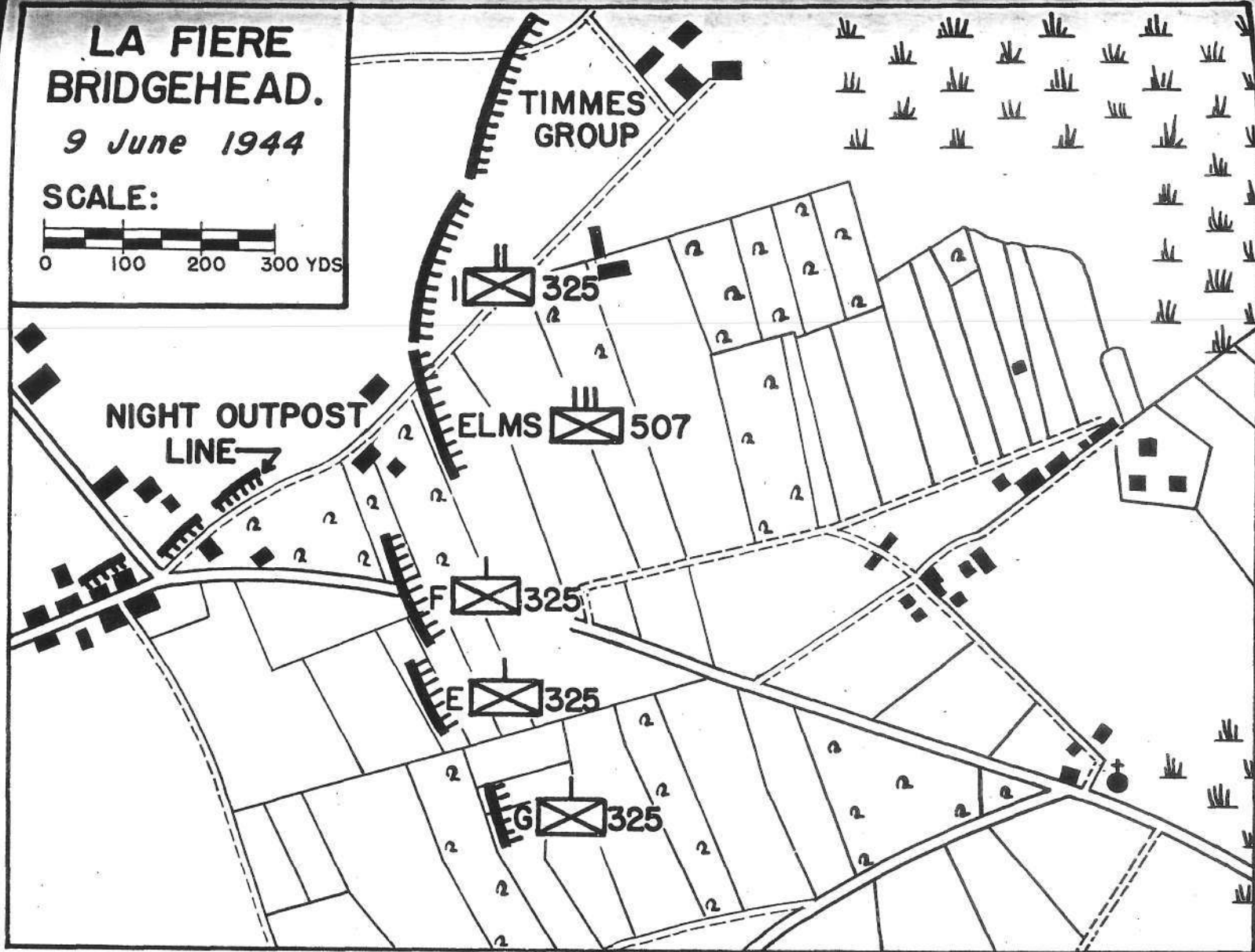
Scattered groups of CP men began to filter into Company E's

*All of this comes from RAE'S group.

LA FIERE BRIDGEHEAD.

9 June 1944

SCALE:



ground shortly before 1900; these were the reinforcements whom **SITLER** had started on their way. Perhaps another hour passed before **HARNEY** was reenforced by **LT KNUTSON** coming into the position with about 20 Supply and Communications men that he had rounded up; they took up rifles and distributed themselves along the hedgerow.

It had a marvelous effect on **HARNEY'S** men. He could judge of the lift in their spirits by the way they laughed and talked again; the arrival of even this small group made all the difference. Confidence flooded back and the men talked cheerfully about the prospect of going forward again.*

*From **HARNEY** and his men.

FINISH

After the arrival of SITLER'S disquieting message, GEN GAVIN got up to the bridgehead as fast as he could. He wanted to know what had gone wrong and he moved right up to the frontline foxholes to find out. A brief reconnaissance reassured him; he could feel that the whole situation was clearing and that the hour was ripe for offensive action.

RAE'S men were digging in solid for the night, and RAE himself was working on his foxhole when, at around 2100, RAE heard GEN GAVIN calling him from the road. Even as they talked, the enemy mortar fire continued to give the foreground a steady pounding.

GAVIN said: "Let's get moving. I want you to take your men and go forward."

RAE asked: "How far do you want me to go?"

GAVIN answered: "Go to town!"

RAE'S men moved straight ahead and into LE MOTTEY, drawing a little sniper fire as they advanced but meeting no opposition that was strong enough to bring them in check at any time. The movement was rapid, the men walking forward in file along the hedgerows; they closed on the village just a little before dark. There had been no skirmishing along the way and the paratroopers were not engaged from close range at any time during the night.

It was the luck of battle that RAE'S force, which was intended for a kind of tactical battering ram, had come practically unscathed through the day and had done relatively little fighting, whereas HARNEY'S force, which had moved along with RAE much of the day, continued to find trouble. In the final advance against the positions east of LE MOTTEY, these were the main participating elements and their sectors of advance were adjoining. HARNEY'S platoon to right of the main road went forward under a covering fire from three medium tanks which moved slowly along the highway, maintaining their fire ahead of the platoon until it had advanced two fields and taken a temporary position behind a hedgerow somewhat short of the intersection. The tanks then went on alone to the sunken road which was just short of LE MOTTEY; they turned into it somewhat gingerly; the road itself gave them good cover, but over on their right they were now within two-hedgerow distance of the fire positions which had burned Company E earlier in the day. The platoon, under command of 2D LT LEO J. FITZMARTIN, moved on up to the sunken road. One tank was ordered to advance up to the next field and gun the German positions and the houses right around from close range; another tank was ordered to cover the targets with fire from a more rearward position during the movement. The tanks did their work and then withdrew; it was believed that the position was sufficiently softened up to permit the platoon to advance. But the machine guns in the field positions (the fire had neutralized the houses) were still in operation.

FITZMARTIN led off, expecting his men to follow. Four of them did so, slightly to the rear of him; the others either failed to see FITZMARTIN go or didn't know what he was intending. As he reached the center of the field, two machine guns pinned a cross-fire on that point. The four riflemen were cut down. FITZMARTIN also was hit; the men could see his body lying out there and they thought that he, too, was dead. Instead, he was playing at it; he felt sure that if he moved, he would draw fire. The volley had given him a compound fracture of the leg and he was in too great pain to drag himself away after dark came. He remained in the field all night, not making a sound, and was found soon after 0700 when the platoon moved across. The last enemy troops had withdrawn from the nearby hedgerows just a few minutes before that time. FITZMARTIN had heard them talking as they pulled out.

The occupation of LE MOTEY was otherwise almost without incident. RAE had been placed in command of the force at that point; using his own and HARNEY'S men, he built his defense around Third Battalion's heavy machine guns. The defensive position was established along the road running from northeast to southwest through the village. A few minutes before dark, the tanks started to withdraw to a rearward bivouac area. RAE tried to hold them, figuring that he needed their fire power to be sure of retaining LE MOTEY. The tank commander said he didn't dare leave his tanks in such an advanced position. RAE went on back to the 325th CP

and protested the withdrawal. A staff officer intervened and persuaded the armor to turn back toward the village. But as they started forward again, 88 fire began ranging along the road and the tankers changed their minds and drove on back across the MERDERET. In the end it cost nothing. The night in LE MOTÉY was relatively quiet. The position—which was in effect an outpost beyond the bridgehead—was not attacked. However, the Causeway and the rear area of the bridgehead were shelled throughout the night.

At 0200 on 10 June, COL SITLER got word that he was to provide guides to escort the 357th Infantry, 90th Division, which would come through 325th's position shortly before dawn. At 0400 the Second Battalion of 357th started across the Causeway and within the hour the relief was well underway. In this manner was completed the initial mission of 82d Airborne Division. The MERDERET barrier had been finally surmounted and the bridgehead to west of it was the springboard to the further pursuit and destruction of the German Armies in the West.

