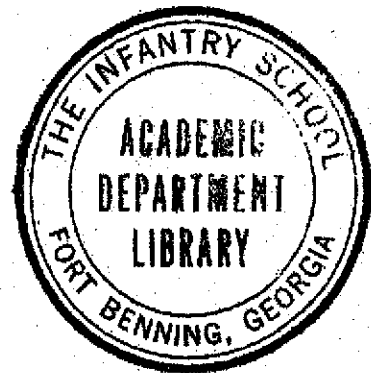


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REGIMENTAL UNIT STUDY
NUMBER 5

(PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS
AROUND THE LA FIERRE BRIDGEHEAD,
MERDERET RIVER, NORMANDY)

An Action by Various Elements
of the
82d Airborne Division

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CONCENTRATION ON THE MERDERET

In the beginning what confused many of the paratroopers and acted as a drag on operations along the MERDERET line was the presence of the marshes. The Battalions had not expected to find them there; they knew that there were wide marshes near the confluence of the MERDERET and DOUVE but they had believed that above CILF DU PONT and adjacent to LA FIERE they would find the MERDERET running cleanly through a well-defined and narrow trench and that the meadows on both sides of the stream would be flat and reasonably dry. Thus when they came down in the marshes during the darkness, many of them assumed that they had dropped off course and were somewhere along the line of the DOUVE.* The marsh not only fouled their equipment and increased their physical difficulties; it also confused them mentally, made individual orientation more difficult and slowed concentration.

Yet all of this came of curious circumstance, since the waters had been there for nearly a year. In July of 1943 the flood of inundation, backing up from the lock at LA BARQUETTE, had reached as far as the Causeway to west of MANOIR DE LA FIERE. Within a few weeks of then, the salt lake filling the little valley on both sides of the MERDERET was as deep as a man's

*All officers and men who came down on the MERDERET made this statement. Commanders such as GAVIN and LINDQUIST also spoke of how it influenced the calculations of many.

chest and it did not recede thereafter. Reeds and tall grasses grew out of the water during the Autumn and thickened when Spring came.* They partially obscured the spread of the sheet of water which at the LA FIERE crossing was approximately 650 yards from shore to shore. Intimations of this situation should not have been wholly unknown to the airborne forces. The sheet maps published by Company B, 660th Engineers (Second Edition of April, 1944) rather clearly defined the limits of the inundations though it was done in terms of classic under-statement—"ground probably soft." But what had further confused the issue was that detailed study of the most recent air photographs of this terrain—taken within a few days of the invasion—did not reveal the marsh, though what false trick of photography was responsible for that mischance must go unknown. All that is certain is that the men felt sure the marsh was not there.** The river itself was an insignificant barrier and had their initial expectations materialized concerning the marsh, the operations along the MERDERET would have taken a quite different turning and the bad drop suffered by two of the infantry regiments would have had far less hurtful consequences.

*This comes from M. LOUIS LEROUX of MANOIR DE LA FIERE who kept accurate check of the rise of the waters because it interfered with the grazing of his cattle.

**The Commanders all said that their miscalculations were based on the air photographs. Apparently there was no other competent source of local intelligence as to terrain conditions.

However, one other accident of ground partially compensated for the unexpected jeopardy caused by the marsh. Coming down into this black pit, finding themselves suddenly precipitated into water almost shoulder-high or clinging to soft banks adjacent to that water, wondering as they struggled to free themselves from their harness how to go about finding their bearings, the paratroopers man by man and group by group were drawn to one spot as if by a magnet. A short distance above LA FIERE the railroad rightofway cuts diagonally across the shallow valley of the MERDERET. But the stream also bends at that point so that for a distance of about 2½ miles between LA FIERE and GRAINVILLE the railway embankment stands up boldly like a dike commanding the marshland. In dark or in daylight it dominates the landscape; to anyone coming down in the marsh above LA FIERE, the embankment is the first thing to be seen on the skyline and the one solid object in an otherwise uncertain situation. Although no one had foreseen that the embankment would prove a life-saver, it was inevitable that in the circumstances of that night, the paratroopers would gravitate straight to it.

Many of those who descended into or near the water north of the LA FIERE Causeway were well off course. The heavy clouds had tended to separate the elements of the formation after it had crossed into NORMANDY and this scattering was further aggravated by the evasive action of individual planes when they

encountered anti-aircraft fire about two-thirds way across the peninsula. These experiences were distracting, and coupled with the darkness of the night, they permitted the paratroopers little chance to observe the line along which the flight was proceeding.

When the green light flashed on and they had to jump, they were an average of two miles from their proper Drop Zone. The strays included most of the command elements of 508th Regiment and some of its combat people, a considerable number of 507th men (though these were scattered for yet another reason) and GEN GAVIN'S group: in the majority, they belonged to Force "A" whose task is was to secure the MERDERET crossings. The Force was supposed to arrive at the Drop Zone, west of the MERDERET, 8 minutes after crossing the coastline.

But the 8 minutes passed and COL LINDQUIST of 508, looking out, saw chiefly a wide expanse of water just ahead of the plane. He concluded that this must be THE PRAIRIE--the large flood area near CHEF DU PONT around the confluence of the MERDERET and DOUVE. This would put him somewhat south of the Drop Zone. Then the green light flashed and he jumped. He landed easily in about two feet of water amid deep marsh grasses. Tracer fire had boiled up around him during the descent; it kept coming at him across the water; he lay prone and began working to free himself from his harness; in about 10 minutes he was out of it. But the experience had deepened his belief that he was on the

DOUVE.

In reality he had landed not far from the sunken causeway running east to the railroad just south of the place which the paratroopers were later to nickname "The Grey Castle." He saw no enemy troops around him and while he was waiting a large flight of planes crossed the sky to southward of him and the tracer fire which had been bothering him was drawn off. After a few minutes of walking through the marsh he saw a blue light and recognized it as the beacon for his Regimental HQ assembly. It looked as if it were a thousand yards away though he found it half that distance.* The walk took him eastward. Quite suddenly he was challenged; it was his own orderly; he had heard LINDQUIST churning along through the water. They went along together. The walk was broken twice when the water shelved off sharply and they went in over their heads. The ducking came from canals running roughly parallel to the River: both times they got out of the water without losing any equipment.

About 20 men had already assembled on the light when they reached it. LINDQUIST could hear other men milling around in the marsh and he sent runners out in all directions to collect them, regardless of unit. They came back with a few 508 men, some from 507 and a scattering of artillerymen belonging to

*According to LINDQUIST, this deception is characteristic of assembly lights.

Force "A". They were less lucky with their equipment. The assembly light had short-circuited because of the wet ground. Most of the supply bundles had vanished into the marsh, and of the two or three that were recovered from the high ground, only one contained an SCR-300.

One man who had found his way to the light told LINDQUIST that from the marsh he had seen what appeared to be a railway embankment only a few hundred yards to the west. Since he knew that the rail line ran roughly parallel to the MERDERET rather than the DOUVE, it was the first news to LINDQUIST of his general location. He told the other men to stay with him and they would move out shortly. In this way was begun one of the major assemblies along the MERDERET.

GEN GAVIN, landing relatively close to where LINDQUIST had come down, had escaped the marsh, though he had labored under the same misapprehensions as to his position. Just before jumping, he had observed what appeared to be a wide river well to the westward and he figured that it was likely to be the DOUVE and the abounding marsh. Small arms fire was coming up at him from the ground as his chute opened and well off to the right of the line of flight he saw gunfire and flak; he guessed wrongly that the fire was coming from ETIENVILLE which was thought to have the only heavy AA installations in the general area. There was also much tracer fire that way. GAVIN came down in an orchard and was joined almost immediately by

his aide, LT HUGO V. OLSEN; together, they proceeded to "roll up" their stick. By the time they had worked their way to the last few men they found themselves at the edge of a wide marsh; a few men were already in the water, dragging supply bundles out of the mud and muck. Other paratroopers were coming down in the water; the men of the stick could hear the splashes out somewhere in the darkness.

Twenty minutes after the party had reached the marsh, they saw a red assembly light show on the far bank—the signal of 507. Shortly thereafter a blue light blinked on several hundred yards from the red light—508's signal. GAVIN posted close-in security and then sent OLSEN on a scouting mission to round up all the men he could find on their side of the marsh. Within about two hours, approximately 150 men were at hand—all from 507 except GAVIN'S own stick and one plane-load from 508. There had been no counter action by the enemy though the solid ground confronting the marsh was well dug with slit trenches and prepared gun positions. On his return OLSEN told GAVIN that he had seen a railroad embankment on the far side of the marsh and that he believed that the marsh was passable for foot troops; this was GAVIN'S first knowledge that he had come down on the MERDERET rather than the DOUVE.*

*GAVIN said this: "I thought we were on the DOUVE because of the depth and width of the water. Our pre-operational photo interpretation had established that the MERDERET was a

GAVIN could hear heavy firing to the eastward; he guessed that it was occurring around STE MERE EGLISE. At about 0430, LT COL OSTBERG and LT COL MALONEY of 507 arrived with about 150 men. Thereon GAVIN tentatively decided to move as quickly as possible and seize the LA FIERE bridge and causeway: he knew that he would have to do it before daylight or his men would face the formidable task of advancing 600 yards across a shallow lake in the face of enemy weapons. Such was GAVIN'S situation at about the time LINDQUIST decided to move his 100 men over to the railway embankment. They took up a march formation and moved out. LINDQUIST had in mind the same goal as GAVIN. He knew that LA FIERE was the mission of First Battalion, 505, but he was guessing that that Regiment, too, might have been scattered: if he got to the bridge-head and found 505 already there, he could move through it and continue south to ETIENVILLE, his assigned objective.

The 507 Regiment was in a bad way. The drop had left its elements so badly scattered that for three days thereafter the Regiment remained uncollected. The regimental Drop Zone was about 1000 yards north of AMPREVILLE and a little to the southeast of GOURBESVILLE. Not one single stick from 507

narrow stream. Its value as an anti-tank obstacle had been carefully studied. It seemed to us that it would be difficult because the river bank was bounded by grass-covered marsh, the fringes of which were used for grazing. Actually, what we mistook for pasture grass was swamp grass several feet high which showed above the water and concealed the water expanse."

landed on the Drop Zone, though one Pathfinder team, which had arrived in advance of Regiment, made it; the Pathfinder from the other two battalions were driven back by fire and couldn't set up either their markers or radars. The one officer and 3 men of the successful team maintained the signal on the Drop Zone from 0220 to 0300, by which time all of the assault serials had passed over. The signal appears to have been of little benefit.* Many of the sticks came down between the Drop Zone and the MERDERET and most of the men landed in

*LT CHARLES AMES led the successful Pathfinder team. None of the light men were assembled after the drop and AMES got together only his Eureka man, the wire man and the section sergeant. All four men had encountered rifle and machine pistol fire during the drop but the Germans remained in position and did not come after them when they hit the ground several hundred yards from the Drop Zone. AMES landed in the middle of a group of buildings which he recognized at once from prior study of air photos. He backed away from the area at once but came under fire in so doing; moving into a wheat field near the Drop Zone, he ran into the other three men. After waiting vainly for the rest of the team, he sent the three men on to cover the field and then went on patrol by himself, seeking other members of the team. The search was unavailing and at 0220 he set up the Eureka. At 0230 the planes came over and AMES saw the men dropping well beyond him. As AMES explained it, what had happened was probably this: In the absence of lights the Eureka signals the location of the field. The blip is on the grid coming up to the field; it goes down the scale during the approach; then it wings out as the plane goes over the field and starts to rise again at a little distance. This couple of seconds between the pilot's puzzlement over not seeing the lights and his sudden awareness that the blip is rising would account for the planes, on a proper course, dropping their sticks well to eastward. AMES did not know at this time that he was the only Pathfinder on the Drop Zone. He waited for a few minutes and saw the second serial come over. It acted much as the first had done. The third serial was already scattered because of a heavy cloud bank as it approached him and a number of the planes could be seen far off course. AMES withdrew his men about 15 minutes after the last planes came over.

the marsh. That was in consequence of the TROOP CARRIER COMMAND overshooting the mark about 1000 yards. The planes had been fairly well on course but they had been undone finally by the bad fortune of the Pathfinders. The pilots came on looking for the three large "T's" which were supposed to mark the Drop Zone. When the "T's" failed to appear, the pilots had a few seconds of natural hesitation before giving the signal; it was just long enough to avail that the strength of the Regiment was dissipated in the marsh and that for many of its men the immediate problem became one of extrication and survival rather than of effecting an assembly. Other 507 planes which had been scattered by cloud and fire far north and south of the intended line of flight dropped their sticks in territory remote from the Division area. Some of the men from sticks fairly well on course came down among the fields and orchards on the west bank of the MERDERET; others landed along the western edge of the marsh and found their way to the nearest solid ground; these troops collected for the most part around OSTBERG and MALONEY and linked up with GAVIN'S force. LT JOHN H. WISNER, Regimental G-2, landed on the eastern bank of the MERDERET, saw the railway embankment and moved to it through the marsh. Enroute, he picked up about 30 men, mostly from 507's Second Battalion. On coming to the track, he found that the embankment was serving as a lodestone; paratroopers were coming to it from both sides from out of the marsh. He gathered these men in and he led them south along

the railroad until they came at last to where LINDQUIST had collected his 100 men. They joined this body as it moved on LA FIERE.

Such were the actions and intentions of the principle mobile groups which had been quite inadvertently precipitated into the fight for the LA FIERE crossing. One other group which figured prominently in the subsequent developments couldn't get started. LT COL CHARLES J. TIMMES, commanding Second Battalion, 507, landed in the marsh west of the MERDERET in water up to his knees.* While dragging himself out of the muck, he saw the railway embankment on the far side of the marsh and heard firing to north and south. From these things he guessed his location--AMPREVILLE lay to the west of him, probably about a mile away. He moved north along the edge of the marsh searching the ridges and drainage ditches for men; he found about 10 of them, all of whom had had experiences not unlike his own. They went on through the dark. It was about 0400 when two gliders came in and landed near them while they were still moving indecisively along the west shore.

*There was quite a bit of wind and TIMMES couldn't collapse his chute. It pulled him along through the marsh, the water sometimes giving off to a depth of 4-5 feet. A large part of the time he was being pulled along flat with his head under water and his body fighting to recover balance. The waterlogging of the equipment and clothing weighted him down so that all the time recovery became more difficult and he found it impossible to get his knife out and cut loose. He felt himself near to drowning several times but the chute always pulled him onto slightly higher ground in time. After 20 minutes of struggle, he came up on an embankment of a drainage ditch and was able to free himself of his harness.

TIMMES picked up 10 more men from the gliders, though in so doing his group became engaged at close range by enemy machine gun fire and had to get for cover. Wandering into CAUQUIGNY (Note: This was the first potential capture of the western approach to the LA FLETT crossing.) they picked up another 30 men from Company D, 507. At that time, TIMMES heard firing from the direction of AMPREVILLE and decided that his own Battalion was probably attacking the village from the north (according to plan) and that he had best take his group and move against AMPREVILLE from the east to assist the mission.

By this time, it was daylight. TIMMES figured it would be inviting trouble to move his group via the main road, so he veered a little to the north of the CAUQUIGNY church and started them cross-country. They deployed along a hedgerow and then went ahead along the lateral hedgerows and ditches. There were about 40 men. They moved on through the group of farm buildings to northwest of the church; there they ran into a group of about 30 men under LT LEVY of 507. TIMMES organized the enlarged party for all-around protection and again started forward. He imagined that he would be moving in on the rear and flank of an enemy force already engaged along its own front, once he came to AMPREVILLE. On this assumption, he weighted both his flanks with the idea that it would give him some advantage in the attack. As the group started moving up the high ground just to the east of AMPREVILLE, they ran

into a platoon of Americans, mainly from 507; but the platoon was concerned with getting on to its own objective—a position along the northeast flank of the 82d's sector. It moved off at right angles to the line which TIMMES was taking; within a very few minutes thereafter he was beginning to find trouble. The Germans had taken up fire positions along the top of the high ground; apparently, there weren't very many of them, but some small arms fire from beyond the hedges on both flanks began to take slow toll of TIMMES' men. By the time TIMMES started to move into the village, he realized that his estimate of the situation had been entirely wrong. The enemy was not being engaged by any other Americans; the only firing from the village was being directed against him; and he felt that he was gradually losing control of his own force without doing any hurt to the Germans. The attack drew machine gun fire from out of the tops of some of the buildings; that simply spurred TIMMES' decision to withdraw and reorganize. He had lost 7 or 8 men, some of them killed. During the withdrawal, enemy fire again harassed his flanks; some of the Germans in AMERREVILLE had followed him out, and one machine gun made itself especially obnoxious, trailing the group by one hedgerow distance. By 0930 TIMMES had taken up a defensive position in an orchard next the marsh, somewhat less than a mile north of the CAUQUIGNY church. He put his men to work digging in and otherwise organizing the position. That morning they had abandoned a 57 AT gun in one of the gliders and

TIMMES intended to recover it if he could. But the position continued to draw some fire from outside its perimeter: in the morning, this was of desultory character and the group could have picked up and moved on had they chosen. In mid-afternoon of that day, TIMMES would have moved, but by that time it was too late.*

As for the advance of Company A, 505, against the LA FIERRE position, there was nothing either accidental or casual about it. That was the Company's target; they went straight to it and were well fitted for the undertaking. The Company came into the same Drop Zone as the two Battalions which were to fight in STE MERE ECLISE; it became the first company to assemble that morning. All in all, that was perhaps the most remarkable assembly accomplished during OPERATION NEPTUNE, since, despite the darkness, all but two men were accounted for within one hour of the drop. They began gathering while on the move and the first sticks were already proceeding toward the objective when the last sticks hit the field. Perfect briefing followed by a perfect drop accounted for this phenomenon.**

They had proceeded to within 300 yards of the LA FIERRE bridge

*This was TIMMES' statement. He spoke with regret of what he considered a lost opportunity.

**This is not the CO's opinion but the statement of the men. All Company A material was obtained at a Company critique with all surviving officers and NCOs present.

and were at the road junction just to east of it when they drew sniper fire from their left flank and within a few seconds bumped into a front of machine gun fire covering the houses at MANOIR DE LA PIERRE. They believed that they were the first Americans on the scene. LT GEORGE W. PRESNELL led one squad far over to the right almost to the bank of the river, then tried to move by the left flank against the buildings; the group got past the first band of fire and was moving in behind the first enemy gun position when it came under fire from a second machine gun positioned near the bridge; PRESNELL grenaded the first gun and thought he knocked it out; then the squad had to withdraw.

While these things were happening to Company A, 505, the LINDQUIST group, including WISNER'S party, were coming toward LA PIERRE down the east bank of the River. GEN GAVIN and his force were still on the west shore or finding their way across the marsh. It had been reported to GAVIN that LINDQUIST'S column was moving down the railroad and he (GAVIN) was about ready to take off along the same route when two gliders landed on the west shore about 400 yards from GAVIN'S position. Up till then, the GAVIN party had managed to retrieve only one bazooka and a few rounds of ammunition; all other heavy equipment, including radios, had been lost in the marsh. The glider landing therefore seemed like a gift from above; with luck, one of the gliders might even contain a 57 AT gun; so the move

south was postponed and a patrol was sent to reconnoiter the glider. The patrol's leader, LT GRAHAM, returned in about 30 minutes; he needed 25-30 additional men; one glider contained a 57 gun and the other a jeep; they had landed in a marsh, and added to the normal difficulties of the situation, the enemy was putting small arms fire on the marsh. (Note by HO: From examination of the ground, it seems probable that the orchard where GAVIN had landed is the same one where TIMMES force became held.) The patrol left on its mission but GRAHAM was back within the hour; he said that the men couldn't budge the equipment and the enemy fire was building up steadily. This time GAVIN accompanied him to the marsh. He found that the men had gone to ground in old German positions where they were under such grazing fire that the primary difficulty was to get them out of their holes and working. He went back to the position along the marsh shore after giving MALONEY instructions to either get the men on their task at once or give it up. MALONEY tried, but no good came of it. The men couldn't manhandle the heavy equipment out of the bog; even after they had braved the fire and got the first part of the detail accomplished, the jeep sank from its own weight into the mud; in the end they had to destroy both jeep and gun; they were lucky to get out, such was the build-up of the German fire.

By that time it was broad daylight--0600 or 0630. GAVIN now

felt that he had no choice in the matter. The evidence of enemy strength to west of the river was such that he believed it was impossible to move down the west shore and go at the Bridge from the western approach; the risk of crossing the marsh in daylight seemed the lesser; so the column moved across the marsh to the railroad embankment, where it turned south and followed the rails to LA FIERRE. It was GAVIN'S idea that his force would pick up all that could be found of 508, contact whatever elements of 505 were at LA FIERRE, and attack the causeway from the east.

The enemy did not crowd them as they waded out into the water: they crossed to the east shore without any additional trouble.*

*The varying operational parts of this chapter come from the GAVIN interview, the first and second LINDQUEST interviews, the TIMMES interview, the 507th narrative (prepared with the help of LT WISNER) and the AMES interview, in addition to the Company A critique, previously mentioned.

THE MORNING FIGHT

Although the LA FIERE bridgehead was the Number 2 objective, it was surprising in view of the bad circumstances of the drop how many parties went after the bridge at MANCIR DE LA FIERE that morning. Or again the very circumstances of the drop may have reacted in that direction. Far more sticks were dropped in the vicinity of LA FIERE than had been intended, and those which did so, knowing how badly they themselves had fared, were under the additional pressure of worry lest the forces committed to LA FIERE had been dropped no less far from the assigned objective.

Where so many were drawn to the objective from various directions, where so few were present to defend it, the effectiveness of the resistance which kept the east end of the Causeway in German hands for almost seven hours after the arrival of overwhelming American forces cannot be explained in terms alone of a determined effort by a few die-hard individuals. In the nature of the circumstances, the Americans came to the contest piecemeal, and each element, apart from Company A, 505, was more or less probing its way into an uncertain situation. There was never a time when the American side knew its own strength; this, and the piecemeal character of the approach, gave the enemy a chance to deal with the onset in detail.

First Battalion, 505, had been given the assignment, and

Company A, being ready, proceeded to the objective. It did so by the shortest route and without any extensive reconnaissance of the general position. Had such been undertaken that morning, Company A would have been surprised to learn that part of the American force had beaten it to the objective and already had LA FIERE under attack. A group of about 45 men, mainly from 507, had collected that morning on the east shore of the MERDERET just north of the LA FIERE Causeway. CAPT F. V. SCHWARTZWALDER had assembled them on the railway track. Possibly an hour before GAVIN came across the marsh with the body of the regiment (there were about 300 men of 507 with GAVIN finally, the greater number having been assembled by CAPT JAMES A. DICKERSON in the marsh to east of GOURBESVILLE) SCHWARTZWALDER'S party began to advance against MANOIR DE LA FIERE. They moved only a little distance along the southern side of the "Y" formed by the two highways and were then brought in check by the fire of a heavy machine gun. LT JOHN W. MARR, who was leading the point about 150 yards in advance of the Company, looked back and saw that the Company had stopped. He decided to try to take the gun out by moving far over to the left so that he came at the MANOIR from the south. His group got down to the first hedgerow next the river, then fire broke around them from a number of positions in or around the buildings at the MANOIR; MARR decided that the place was too hot and he led the point back to the Company; as he withdrew, the German gun which had opened the skirmish

displaced forward, hedgerow by hedgerow; its fire began to beat around SCHWARTZWALDER and the men and he ordered them to attack forward along the hedgerows. The gun withdrew over the same line along which it had advanced; the Company accomplished nothing except the killing of one sniper; but by this route the Company got up to the ground which the point had held for a few minutes before it, too, was forced to check.

They had made an approach which was to figure with ever-increasing emphasis in the story of the MENDERSBT bridgehead and at that moment, it was probably the key to the situation. For it seemed to MARR, as he watched, that some of the enemy fire was being directed toward the opposite flank, though he had no way of knowing that this was because Company A, 505, was attacking from the other side. SCHWARTZWALDER told MARR to take his men and attempt to move forward along the hedgerow and get to a stone wall flanking the farm road which led into the bridge. MARR started across the field with four men; two of them were shot through the legs by a machine gun firing at 10 yards range as they closed on the hedgerow. They went flat. TEC 5 ESCOBAR, one of the wounded men, opened fire on the German gun with his tommy gun; he was firing wild; a German rose out of the position with his arm cocked to heave a potato masher; CPL LAWTON drilled him with his carbine; the German didn't die and he stood there, struggling to get the grenade away; LAWTON and PVT FARLETTO throw grenades right together;

that blew up the gun position and two Germans with it; by this time machine pistol fire was raising hell against the hedgerow where the five men lay; LAWTON, who was still looking for trouble although he was bleeding badly from two wounds, shot a German officer who was casually regarding the scene through binoculars from behind the bridge; after that, MARR decided that LAWTON was losing too much blood, and he carried him back, with the rest of the point following. The Company was several hedgerows to the rear, and what had been going on along the right flank (where Company A, 505, had engaged) all of this time, they knew nothing at all about. If a psychological moment had passed, at least none present were in position to recognize it.

Such tactical mishaps as occurred might be incomprehensible unless the development of situation is examined in the light of the extreme difficulties of ground. The area around MANOIR DE LA FIERE was strongly compartmented with high, box-like hedgerows which for the most part were over-run with blackberry and other thorn so that both observation and the opportunity for penetration were critically limited. The ground itself, considering the position from flank to flank, was most irregular. From the railway line westward, it rolls gently for a few hundred yards, then falls off sharply to the MERDERET: that is true of the triangle of land bounded by the railway and the two highways leading into MANOIR DE LA FIERE; it is true of

the ground bordering both sides of the main road leading down to the River.

But the ground to the immediate south and east of the MANOIR buildings—a terrain that is partly pasture, partly orchard and partly truck garden—is extremely irregular. The side road cutting in through the MANOIR and used principally for the servicing of that establishment is bounded on the north by several large knolls, criss-crossed by hedgerows, and on the south by a series of rather large mounds, shaped not unlike the Indian "kitchen middens" of the United States. It was through these small hillocks and their surrounding hedges that SCHWARTZWALDER made the first bid of the morning to seize the eastern end of the Causeway.

The hills were thus a mass imposed between the two flanks of any force attempting to envelop the MANOIR position. The extreme height of the MANOIR buildings compounded this difficulty. They are not average French farm buildings, but are massive stone-walled affairs, averaging about four stories in height, both the houses and the barns. Moreover, where the buildings are not directly joined, they have connecting stone walls, higher than a man. The effect is like fighting on both sides of a block of apartments, where the latter are of such stout construction and fitted with such convenient outworks that mortar fire will hardly scar the walls. None but a very large force, perfectly joined in the first place,

could bring off an envelopment of MANOIR DE LA FIERE from the eastward, without risking the probability of a divorce of the two flanks. And of course those conditions were not present that morning.

For the time being, SCHWARTZWALDER practically gave over the attack on the left though DOLAN persisted on the right. GAVIN got there before LINDQUIST'S people had joined the battle. He knew nothing about SCHWARTZWALDER'S force or what the left had found. Briefly, he talked to MAJ KELLAM, commanding First Battalion, 505, who told him that Company A's point had gotten down almost to the bridge. He said that he was lightly opposed and that he expected to have the position within the hour. It was a correct premise but was reasoned to an incorrect conclusion.* GAVIN then decided that his own duty was to move south as quickly as possible; he had not seen LINDQUIST who was then deploying his own force to southeast of the MANOIR position without yet coming in contact with the enemy; but inasmuch as the LA FIERE bridgehead seemed to be coming under control, the situation at CHEF DU PONT became of foremost concern in the mind of the General; what was happening there and around Hill 30, where 508 was supposed to concentrate, was still unknown; but the fact that LINDQUIST'S party from 508 had been dropped so far north made it the less likely that there had been an effective concentration around Hill 30

*The data on German strength is to be found further along in the narrative.

scattered and had not yet come up) had estimated the situation and reported it to GAVIN; then GAVIN had gone to CHIEF DU FOINT; no instruction had come to LINDQUIST to take the operation over. It was considerably later in the morning when GEN RIDGWAY came to LA FIERRE from his CP near STE MERE EGLISE and gave LINDQUIST a positive instruction to clear up the situation-- which he proceeded to do.

In the intervening hours the advance of LINDQUIST'S men on the left had been slow, steady and uneventful; they had been harassed by a few snipers and an occasional burst of automatic fire, and by exercise of caution had kept down their losses. But over on the right, a great deal had happened to Company A. After PRESNELL'S patrol had withdrawn from the advanced ground on the right near the bridge, DOLAN tried for a time to soften up the enemy fire positions by liberal use of his 60 mm mortars; he thought that the effort had been somewhat successful. He then followed up with a plan of attack aimed at a general envelopment.

One patrol was sent far over to the right; it was told to get to the River and then move south along the embankment with the object of penetrating the enemy defenses from that flank, or at least of punching toward them and keeping them occupied: in the end this patrol could not make a near approach and it accomplished very little. A second patrol under 2ND LT WILLIAM A. OAKLEY was sent far over to the left to get to the embankment

south of the MANOIR with the same general purpose in mind; it is revealing of DOLAN'S state of information on the general situation that in so assigning his second patrol, he was in effect sending it around 508's flank and employing it as if no one else was present.

Company A's center was then sent forward across the ground flanking the main road--the ground which, after survey, LINDQUIST had considered was too well interdicted by automatic fire. LT DONALD G. COXON, leading the platoon in the center, was told by DOLAN to get his scouts out during the approach; the ground and hedges around them were already being beaten by intense fire from machine guns and machine pistols. COXON said: "Well sir, if I must send someone out, I'll go myself." So he crawled forward along the hedge, taking the first scout with him. They got about 100 yards. A bullet killed the scout; another bullet wounded COXON; he was pretty hard hit and he started coming back; while he was moving along another bullet hit him in the stomach; after that, he bled to death.

2ND LT ROBERT E. MC LAUGHLIN took over the platoon. His radio operator, CPL FRANK BUSA, moved on forward and was hit by a sniper's bullet. MC LAUGHLIN though he was alive and went out to get him; before MC LAUGHLIN could make it, he himself was hit in the upper leg; the bullet went through the lower part of his stomach and came out of his buttocks. DOLAN and MAJ JAMES E. MC GINITY, Battalion Executive, were observing from

the same hedgerow from which MC LAUGHLIN had crawled forward. A sniper's bullet hit MC GINITY and killed him; DOLAN located the sniper and killed him with a tommy gun. DOLAN then crawled on forward and dressed MC LAUGHLIN'S wounds; after that, he crawled back to the hedgerow; it began to rain softly; DOLAN crawled up to MC LAUGHLIN to cover him with a raincoat; MC LAUGHLIN was dead.

The enemy automatic fire had increased steadily during this time. However, Company A's position was such that it could not make suitable return. DOLAN was worrying about the two patrols moving in from the flanks and feared that he might shoot his own men. Already, about 10 men were dead and 20 wounded in the Company line. The hour was between 1000 and 1030. A few more men from 507 were coming into the area and were placed on the defensive line along the River to north of the area where DOLAN was attacking; a large number of 507 men under CAPT DICKERSON were already in line there. But of this increased strength, DOLAN could feel very little. He knew mainly that his own men were stopped for the time being.

It was about 1100 when word of Company A's trouble and of MAJ MC GINITY'S death reached LINDQUIST. This was after he had talked with GEN RIDGWAY. In his sweep around to the left, he had contacted and swallowed SCHWARTZWALDER'S force. He now sent for SCHWARTZWALDER and said: "I've got a mission for you." The plan he outlined was no novelty: SCHWARTZWALDER was to

attack the MANOIR from the south over exactly the same route he had gone early that morning. LINDQUIST then sent an officer to tell DOLAN that at 1200, the two forces would advance on both sides of the main road, with Company A, 505, sweeping along the right, and Company B, 508, keeping pace with it through the fields to the left. When the noon hour came, LINDQUIST saw no signs of movement on the right and heard nothing from DOLAN. He tried to contact the right, then failing, he told his own men to go ahead. Their progress was almost uninterrupted; the enemy had had enough. During the search of the buildings at the MANOIR, the 508 force killed 6 Germans, wounded about the same number and captured 9 or 10. The losses among 508 were two wounded and one killed; the Germans put up a white flag and as one of LINDQUIST'S men stepped into the open to receive the surrender, he was shot dead.

The final footnote to the engagement was that LT OAKLEY'S patrol from Company A, which had swung out and around LINDQUIST'S force, reached the appointed ground in time to clean up the left, or at least to soften it to a point where, when SCHWARTZWALDER came through, he had clear sailing.

The patrol slipped smoothly down to the River embankment, moving toward the MERDERET along the third hedgerow south of the MANOIR. The enemy did not see them until they had moved up to the first hedgerow, which was almost on top of the German

position. Machine gun and machine pistol fire then came against them but they were snug against the hedgerow embankment and no one was hit. OAKLEY and SGT OSCAR L. QUEEN, using rifles, eliminated one German with a machine pistol and two riflemen.

Then the patrol ran for the cover of the stone wall which runs from the southernmost barn of the MANOIR almost to the bridge, thus covering the side road along its south facing. (This wall greatly influences the tactical situation during succeeding operations at the bridgehead.) They made it without hurt and opened fire on an enemy machine gun to north of the main road. (This gun was in position to operate against the American right flank.) The others covered while QUEEN crossed the side road, running as low as he could. As QUEEN ducked through a gate in the stone wall opposite, a grenade exploded about five feet away and stunned him slightly. He heard someone behind him firing a .45. A figure moved in the branches of a tree near where he lay; with his carbine, QUEEN shot a man out of the tree. Then he ran back across the road. He found that CAPT DALE ROYDEN had done the pistol shooting: ROYDEN had seen someone in the house throwing grenades at QUEEN. The patrol sent back for a machine gun. When the gun got there, they put it in action at the lower end of the stone wall, firing at the German gun on the other side of the main road. The position was strengthened and the situation further

cleared a short time later by the arrival on the far left flank of the force from Company G, 507.

SCHWARTZWALDER advanced his men to this ground almost in a romp. There was still a little automatic fire over the front, but the final surrender to LINDQUIST'S force was fast approaching. About 4 or 5 men were lightly wounded in moving the Company up to the stone wall. They had to stop there. 2ND LTS JOHN G. DARLING and EDWARD KEEHAN, on taking the advance party as far as the bridge, had been turned back by mortar fire coming from the American right flank.

But enemy resistance had died around the MANOIR and SCHWARTZWALDER was straining to get to the other side of the Causeway.

LEVY'S PATROL

TIMMES hadn't forgotten the LA FIERRE bridge and bridgehead. It was about mid-morning when he called LT LEVY and told him to take 10 men, move southward, capture the ground around the church and establish a fire position which would dominate the Causeway from the western end. The order thus loosely given became one link in a chain of events which resulted in one of the bravest episodes of the MERDERET battle. It was the supreme irony of the day that this same heroism came of an episode which thwarted GEN GAVIN of his main chance for a quick victory. The LEVY group moved out equipped with rifles, grenades, one tommy gun, one BAR and a rifle equipped with anti-tank grenades.

Halfway to the church, LEVY ran into LT JOSEPH KORMYLO of Company D and about 20 men, including a crew with a light machine gun. KORMYLO had already seen the bridge; in fact, he had seen quite a lot of the countryside that morning. He had dropped into a field covered by enemy fire near the GREY CASTLE, and after working his way cautiously out of that hot spot, he had traveled south, collecting men as he went along. The first were glider men and anti-tank men; finally he found a machine gun crew and some riflemen from his own unit. The group steered clear of farmhouses as it moved along; on coming to the group of farmhouses northwest of the church at CAU-QUIGNY, KORMYLO figured that he had better set up a defensive

position and wait the time that he could attach himself to some larger group. They set up among the buildings and established a perimeter defense; they were still there when LEVY came along. KORMYLO briefed him on the situation. He had already set up his machine gun near the marsh line so that it covered the bridge and Causeway, though in so doing he had worked blind. Initially the gun had been pointed in that direction because they could hear firing from there. KORMYLO then routed a Frenchman out of one of the houses, and after checking through his phrase sheet, he asked: "Le Pont?" and pointed to the south. The Frenchman led him to where he could see the bridge across the marsh; also, he could see the church and he knew from these things that his guess with the gun had been a good one. It was deeply in his mind that the Bridge was the secondary mission of the Division and he figured that he had better collect his gang and get on down there; but it was just at this moment that LEVY and his group came along.*

LEVY and KORMYLO discussed the situation briefly, and in the face of the facts that KORMYLO was impressed with the importance of the objective and neither officer knew the state of things at the Bridge, it was decided to send all of KORMYLO'S men except the machine gun crew to TIMMES' position in the orchard. In this decision, their awareness that TIMMES had

*From KORMYLO.

seen fit to send only 10 men to the bridge doubtless played a large part. Since LEVY was senior, KORMYLO incorporated his men into the group and they started south. LEVY told KORMYLO that they would get to the church as quickly as possible; their numbers considered, LEVY felt that occupation of the ground around the church was the strongest move the group could make. The hour was about 1130 when the movement got underway; KORMYLO did not expect any real trouble. He had moved up and down the west bank quite openly prior to LEVY'S coming and had drawn no fire. During this time, he had heard firing on the east bank, but it was a ragged and irregular fire and he did not get the impression that any important action was taking place.

The group moved down to the first hedgerow confronting the MERDERET along the western bank, then walked along it toward their objective. The first lap was easy. As they started through the second hedgerow short of the church, they drew sniper fire. It seemed to be coming from eastward of them, as if from enemy fire positions in the lowland along the swamp. (It is quite possible this was American fire from the west bank.) They went low along the hedgerows, trying both for protection and to keep their presence hid. But the fire built up in volume as they went along until it prohibited passage. At the last hedgerow north of the church LEVY called a halt. To go ahead on that line meant that the patrol would

have to move in the open. He led them back along the north-running hedgerow, then moved west and south, taking advantage of the embankment cover, and finally brought them into the church along a lane paralleling the main road. The passage was unopposed; it was exactly noon when the patrol took the church over. After setting up a fire position, the men broke out their rations. A Frenchman came over and served them milk and cider. The machine gun was set up so that it had a field of fire ranging along the western bank north of the bridge. This seemed the best use to make of it; the patrol did not sense at this time that there were other friendly forces close at hand along the western shore, though looking beyond the far end of the Causeway they could see a 57 gun on the high ground beyond the LA PIERRE buildings—the only indication of the position of the Americans attacking the bridge from the east.

As LEVY completed his defensive arrangements, two 508th officers and about 40 men came into the church from south of the main road. This group had assembled on the western side of the MERDERET. The newcomers agreed with LEVY that the position was of prime importance and after joining forces with him, they set up a defensive position covering the road fork near the church and the ground lying south of it. The 508th party had a bazooka; a road block, covering to the west, was set up near the church. LEVY sent a runner back to TIMMES

with the message that he had secured the bridgehead.

While these arrangements went forward, KORMYLO noticed a sudden pickup of activity along the east bank. Mortar fire was hitting heavily into the LA FIERRE buildings and the small arms fire was making a swift crescendo. Men could be seen moving rapidly along the hedgerows toward the Causeway. Knowing that friendly forces were engaging on the far side, KORMYLO and LEVY sent word up and down the line to hold fire; but despite their restraining efforts, a number of the riflemen kept banging away in the general direction of the MANOIR DE LA FIERRE buildings.

LEVY walked out onto the road and looked through his field glasses eastward along the Causeway.

"KORMYLO," he yelled, "Damn it! That's a paratrooper coming across the bridge."

KORMYLO threw an orange smoke grenade out into the middle of the road. Immediately there came back an answering wave of an orange flag from the other side of the River.

These were small acts, and in themselves, they were perfectly correct. They seemed to signal that the Causeway fight was over and the 82d Division had won the MERDERET bridgehead at slight cost. Yet of them came much trouble.*

*KORMYLO. His statements were all supported by other members of the patrol.

THE FIRST CROSSING

On the east bank the ball had been passed to CAPT SCHWARTZWALDER'S Company—the same commander who had happened to be present that morning when GEN RIDGWAY said to COL LINDQUIST: "I want that bridge taken!*"—the same company which had found the soft spot along the right flank of the German defenses east of the bridge. With SCHWARTZWALDER as the noon hour came and passed, there were about 50 men. LINDQUIST in going to the north flank of the position had taken most of SCHWARTZWALDER'S own men; there remained about 12 men from Company G and the others were mainly from other companies of the same battalion.

The time was about 1330. GEN CAVI: was away on his personal reconnaissance of the situation at CHEF DU PONT. SCHWARTZWALDER'S force was practically non-engaged and over on the right the situation had quieted. From across the river around the CAUQUIGNY church there had come no sign that Americans were present. These were the general circumstances when the order came that SCHWARTZWALDER was to take his men on across. SCHWARTZWALDER told LT MARR to lead out with the point. MARR already knew something of the situation into which he would be moving; a captured German NCO had told him that there were occupied fire pits strung out along the Causeway. MARR looked

*This was SCHWARTZWALDER'S recollection of the order. According to LINDQUIST, RIDGWAY said: "I want this area cleared of all Germans and the bridgehead secured."

at his watch as the lead scout, PVT JAMES L. MATTINGLY, stepped off; it was 1345.

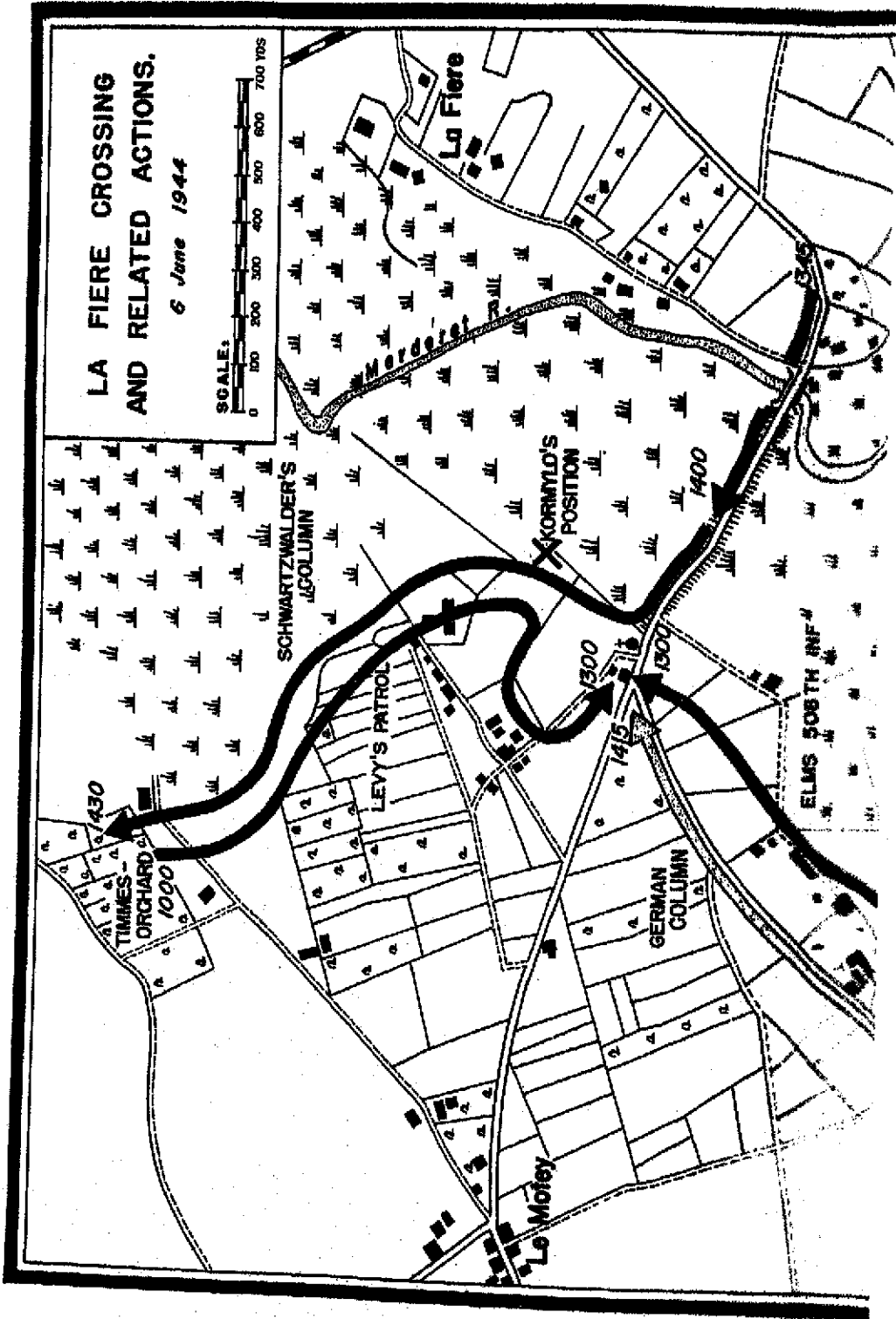
Walking erect, right along the top of the embankment, MATTINGLY got 100 yards west of the bridge without a shot being fired; then an enemy rifleman in a machine gun emplacement on the north side of the Causeway blazed away at him. MATTINGLY emptied his rifle into the position as fast as he could pull the trigger, then went flat and threw a grenade. It hit fair on the target, killing one man and wounding another. From the same emplacement, two other Germans jumped up with their hands in air. Then five Germans who had been in foxholes right next to MATTINGLY rose up in surrender. He had no choice but to take them in because his own rifle was empty. So he waved them on back toward the Company. The Americans behind MATTINGLY saw this action clearly, noticed its boldness and were greatly encouraged by it; they felt that the resistance was crumbling. They also saw that both of the German groups had quitted machine guns—MG-42s—with which they could have covered the embankments on both sides. Only one man was shot crossing the Causeway; he got a bullet in his buttocks from a sniper firing from the marsh somewhere south of the Causeway. MATTINGLY continued to lead the advance. Behind him came PVT JOHNNIE K. WARD, the second scout, and behind WARD came MARR.

As they moved along, they thought they saw a few Americans on

the west bank. SCHWARTZWALDER told one of his men to break out an orange flag; as he did so, he saw an orange flare light up in the roadway next the church. LT WISNER, who was observing from off on the flank of the MANOIR position along the east shore, saw the same flare—the orange smoke grenade thrown by KORMYLO. To WISNER, it indicated that SCHWARTZWALDER'S forces had reached the west bank and he realized that the move should be supported. He reported the matter to CAPT DICKERSON of 507 who replied: "Yes, we intend to cross at once." WISNER relaxed, figuring that the situation was at last coming well under control. But the circumstances had set up an entirely different train of thought in SCHWARTZWALDER'S mind; he had expected to meet stern resistance and instead he had beaten down the resistance swiftly and had then received the friendly signal from what he had supposed was a hostile quarter. It filled him with optimism and he went forward thinking that the Americans were solidly in possession of the west bank and that his tour de force had been scarcely needed. The impression was deepened when LEVY and KORMYLO came forward along the western end of the Causeway to meet MARR. There was a little sniper fire coming from the marshes to south of the Causeway. After the meeting, LEVY continued on to the east bank where he talked to a field officer and assured him, as he had assured SCHWARTZWALDER, that he had the west bank under control. LEVY was back in about 15 minutes; he told KORMYLO that he had a promise that a Battalion of 505th

LA FIERE CROSSING AND RELATED ACTIONS.

6 June 1944



was on its way to take the bridgehead over.*

In the few minutes before LEVY'S return, SCHWARTZWALDER and his men moved in beside the churchyard and deployed along the hedgerow which faced the MERDERET. The point, under MARR, steadied at the northern end of this hedgerow. It was thus that LEVY found them when he got back to his own men. They had not moved westward as if to protect the bridgehead from enemy pressure from that side, but were already pointed as if they intended moving north. LEVY and SCHWARTZWALDER talked over the situation. SCHWARTZWALDER figured that the bridge was already "captured" and he had it firmly in his mind that he ought to be on his way to AMFREVILLE--his original objective. LEVY made no objection. But he felt that since TIMMES had sent him to outpost the bridge, he had better stick there. However, he told SCHWARTZWALDER about the situation of TIMMES' group, and when a very few minutes later SCHWARTZWALDER started moving north along the hedgerow, he had already decided that he would go to AMFREVILLE via the orchard where TIMMES was in difficulty. Further weakening the bridgehead, most of the men of 508th who had been standing by LEVY picked up and

*SCHWARTZWALDER'S reactions are set down as he reported them to the HO. At the time of the interview, he had no idea of the full consequences of his action at the Bridge and his testimony was given fully and freely. WISNER was the witness as to how DICKERSON happened to make his move. KORMYLO told of LEVY'S course of action. MARR and MATTINGLY told about the crossing. GAVIN'S check on his own schedule placed him at CHEF DU PONT.

went with SCHWARTZWALDER; in fact, only two 508 officers and 8 enlisted men remained behind in the immediate vicinity of the church. The others figured that the show was over at this point; so they moved on, looking for another fight.

The tag-end files of SCHWARTZWALDER'S column had scarcely disappeared beyond the first hedgerow when KORMYLO'S attention was drawn in the opposite direction. At first he could hear only rifle fire, as if at a considerable distance; it was joined very quickly by the steady rat-tat-tat of machine gun fire though he could not be sure that these were German guns. Then rather indistinctly he could hear tanks coming toward him and he knew that these rumblings were from west of the River.

Suddenly, opposite him, a German ambulance bobbed out of the trail which ran south along the River and turned west into the road leading to AMPREVILLE. The ambulance stopped for a second; a German waved a Red Cross flag from the door. Before anyone thought to do anything, the ambulance was on its way again and speeding down the road; but the German had had time to see that there were Americans on the west bank of the MERDERET and covering the bridge.

Within three minutes, a shell landed on the intersection west of the Causeway and was followed after an interval by four or five others. The shells then searched northward along the

River hedgerow, and SCHWARTZWALDER, feeling them singeing his tail but not knowing the full inferences of the build-up, urged his men to move along faster. They went on the double until they got to the sixth hedgerow north of the church. Still, some of the men must have guessed what was happening behind them. Days later, MARR remembered that during a momentary pause in the shooting, he had heard the men passing around the word: "Tanks!" He scarcely believed it at the time.

SCHWARTZWALDER pressed on; he wanted to talk to TIMMES and find out if he needed help; and he also wanted TIMMES' advice about whether he should strike for AMFREVILLE. So thinking, he unwittingly led his own men into ground where a force equal to their own had remained immobile for hours because of fire from north and west of them. Thereby they were wasted; joining TIMMES, SCHWARTZWALDER and his men contrived only to share their immobility during the next 48 hours.

Back at the church, LEVY, KORMYLO, the two 508 officers and 8 enlisted men* built up a line inside the hedgerow and paralleling the main road. The bazooka had departed with the group which moved north to the orchard. The machine gun was so placed that it covered a line running across the rear of the church. The riflemen were spread out at intervals of

*There were a few other men from 508 to south of the road though LEVY'S men did not know it at the time.

10 to 15 yards, the officers taking their place in line as riflemen.

These things done, they looked to the south and westward and awaited the enemy.

THE ONE-SQUAD STAND

But LEVY couldn't stay quiet. He told KORMYLO and an unidentified private (He was a stranger to LEVY and KORMYLO, and because he became KIA during the afternoon and was lost to the detail, KORMYLO never learned his name) to follow him and then he moved out along the hedgerow extending to their own right flank. A very narrow sunken lane cuts through into the side road at a right angle behind the church. LEVY made for the spot where the hedgerow bounding the main road and the hedgerow bounding the lane came together—about 200 yards beyond the church. This was within stone's-throw of the southward-leading road along which he thought the Germans were coming. He said to KORMYLO: "We may be able to swing around their left and get in a few licks before they know what has hit them." Until now he had seen no enemy and he had no idea whether they were coming forward deployed or in column.

Just short of the main road, there is a shallow but heavily-screened bay in the hedgerow bordering the lane. Here LEVY waited; KORMYLO and the private were told to go on; he said he would cover their line of retreat. The pair slipped quietly along the hedge until only a stride or two separated them from the open road. The enemy tanks were making a clatter; now, KORMYLO could see their turrets as they came on into the intersection; and at that point he could see also a group of enemy riflemen coming obliquely across his front from the left.

The tanks were moving in about the same direction but were inside the line of riflemen. KORMYLO and the private fired a few quick rounds with their rifles, and without stopping to see the effect, they ran back down the lane as fast as they could go. They passed LEVY and he yelled: "Go on!" But he did not follow. They jumped in the ditch and continued to run, thinking the Germans were right behind them. But the enemy had stopped to set up a machine gun right at the turn of the hedge where the lane met the road. The embankment covered the Germans so that the crew handling the machine gun inside the churchyard did not even see them. However, they were within 10 yards of where LEVY waited in the bay of the hedgerow. He could hear them talking excitedly as they set up the gun. So he took out a grenade, pulled the pin, counted three and gave it a little toss. It exploded between the two Germans and wounded both: LEVY took a few quick steps and dispatched them with his rifle. Then he came running back; KORMYLO and the private had halted some distance down the lane, realizing on second thought that they had better stand to cover LEVY. He was helmetless and was laughing like mad when he reached them. KORMYLO remembered then that he had heard a second grenade go off; he knew it was LEVY'S habit to laugh hard when the heat was on and he took it, though nothing was said, that the second grenade had almost got LEVY.*

*The description in detail is KORMYLO'S. The HO checked over the ground and found enough to wholly confirm most of

The tanks were already up and shelling the church and a few of the American riflemen had pulled back from the position. The German infantry had closed right up on the side road next the church and the half dozen men remaining on the American line were fighting it out with them through the hedgerow. The forces were not 10 yards apart; yet neither could see the other very well because of the hedge. They were throwing grenades at one another and although the Americans were holding their own for the moment, it was perfectly clear from the way the enemy numbers were building up that the position could not be held. KORMYLO saw a German come up over the hedgerow embankment; at a range of two feet, he emptied his carbine into him and shattered the top of his skull. By this time, LEVY had disappeared; KORMYLO thought he had pulled out but in fact he had only moved down the hedgerow to try and get within grenade distance of the tanks. KORMYLO looked around and saw only one other American still standing at the hedgerow line; he yelled to him: "Come on, let's go!" and they dashed for the rear of the church.

Earlier in the game, PVT ORLIN STEWART had been sent well over to the right of the position to cover the bazooka man. When the bazooka man pulled out to go with SCHWARTZWALDER, STEWART

these details; that is, there was physical evidence that an action of this kind had taken place. KORMYLO said of LEVY (who was KIA and therefore could not be interviewed): "He was the bravest man I have even seen in battle."

stayed. He was there when the tanks came along. At the fork of the road, the lead tank was hit straight on by a rocket and knocked out; the source of the rocket was a mystery; there was no one in the position armed with a bazooka; the men figured out later that a bazooka man, working alone, must have been in hiding somewhere to south of the main road. A sharp volley of rifle fire broke out all along the enemy line as the tank went dead. Then two Renault tanks came alongside the damaged tank and tried to pass it, headed for the bridge. Being all alone, STEWART didn't see how he could stop them. Unexpected help arrived—a first sergeant and a private whom he had never seen before (still unidentified) came crawling along the same ditch where he lay hidden. Both carried gammon grenades; STEWART had a BAR and several gammon grenades. STEWART passed them his grenades and stood ready to cover them as they threw. The hedge gave them partial cover; the tanks came on past them, moving slowly; the two grenadiers stood and threw all of their gammons at the metal. There were several explosions, very close together. The tanks rolled on a few yards and stopped—disabled. The crews tried to clear out; as the first two men jumped down, the first sergeant got them both with a fragmentation grenade; STEWART shot the third man as he ran; the second crew ducked back into the tank. At that moment a medium German tank moved up to the road fork, trailed by a large group of infantry. STEWART and his companions didn't waste a second glance on them; their grenades were gone; they got up from their ditch and started moving

back along the hedgerows leading north.*

Back of the church, LEVY and the others joined them. This was the last of the action for the squad. They got out in pretty good order, carrying their machine gun and staying collected as they moved along the hedgerows until they rejoined TIMMES' force.

In 10 minutes, or perhaps 15 minutes at most, the whole situation had become reversed and LEVY'S men hadn't been able to hold their ground long enough to see the first hard penalty exacted. Company B of 508th had been coming across the Causeway, getting up there, or so they thought, to support SCHWARTZ-WALDER'S bid for the bridgehead. The Germans swept past the church just after the middle of their column reached the western end of the Causeway. The blow caught them unaware; the Germans fire made it impossible for them to turn back the way they had come. The first of their number had only managed to cross the Causeway and start a deployment to south of the main road; they were just beginning to dig in when the blow fell. Those who followed had no choice but to flee for safety the best way they could, for there was no possibility of a deployment along the narrow Causeway or of maintaining the advance. The fire coming down the twisting road interdicted any movement to the right. They broke to the left and tried to

*Witnesses were KORMYLO, STEWART and PVT OWEN L. GARLINGHOUSE, who saw this action.

work or swim their way back through the swamp and the river. But that hard choice cost them dear. The Germans were deployed along the western shore before any of the Company B men had managed to wade very far through the waist-deep water and the uneven ground and rushes of the marsh. Some of them were shot down; and some of them died from drowning within sight of their comrades on the east bank. These were the troops which CAPT DOLAN'S men saw shot while they were floundering through the swamp, and mistakenly assumed were paratroopers who had dropped on the west bank and were merely moving to an assembly; DOLAN and his men did not know that there had been an advance across the Causeway.*

*Some of the testimony with respect to the Company B men comes from COL LINDQUIST. WISNER, KORMYLO and some of the others remembered the departure of SCHWARTZWALDER'S company and the repulse of Company B as closely joined; separated, in fact, by only a few minutes. LINDQUIST thought the Company B group was well across and had been on the west bank for an interval before the collision occurred. The force described as "Company B" included some Division artillerymen and men from Regimental Headquarters, according to LINDQUIST—in all, about 40 men. LINDQUIST, who was senior officer at the bridge position all morning though he had not been formally placed in charge of the operation or of the force (in fact, he had not seen or talked to GAVIN) issued the order for the Causeway crossing at the same time that he had issued orders for the establishing of his own CP to rear of the LEROUX farmhouses at MANOIR DE LA FIERE. He knew that SCHWARTZWALDER intended to go on from CAUQUIGNY to TILMES' position. "He was hell bent for it and could talk of nothing else but making that move," LINDQUIST said. Accordingly, he followed with the first of the troops in the wake of SCHWARTZWALDER'S column, purposing to make a quick reconnaissance of the situation west of the bridge. But he was on the west bank for only a brief interval and then shuttled back to see how the establishment of the CP was coming along. Right after he returned to the east bank, the German tanks reached the west bank.

When LEVY'S group closed on the orchard, there were altogether 121 men and 21 officers under COL TIMMES' command. But the enlargement of the force in no wise improved TIMMES' position. Although the force was never charged by the German infantry (in fact, it saw almost nothing of the enemy) the pressure of the enemy fire intensified rapidly after SCHWARTZWALDER'S arrival. The orchard received rifle fire from all around the perimeter except on the MERDERET side and there were bands of automatic fire from the westward which covered the marshes and focused toward the road running east through the orchard. During the next two days, while remaining on this ground, 25 percent of TIMMES' men became casualties with disabling wounds; the lightly wounded were not counted.

On D night, however, after the bridgehead had been won for a fateful few minutes and then lost, LEVY and KORMYLO compared experiences. They agreed that if they had had one company present around the church, they could have beaten back the German attack and held the bridgehead. But this was only conjecture.*

The gradual envelopment of TIMMES' position was of course the natural complement of the German counter-attack against the LA FIERE bridgehead. The enemy knew that the under-water road running just south of the GREY CASTLE and connecting the

*From KORMYLO.

railway with AMFREVILLE was a possible means of ingress to their general position west of the MERDERET. When they stormed back to seize the LA FIERE causeway, they had no intention of leaving the back door open. So a part of the force continued north to cover the ford; in so doing, they collided with TIMMES' people holding the orchard just to south of the ford. That produced a deadlock. The Germans couldn't get to the ford, nor could TIMMES; they couldn't afford to pull back and leave him and he couldn't afford to break out. That was the way the situation remained for the next several days, while TIMMES was out of radio communication with all other elements of the Division. The men in the orchard had retrieved the 57 AT gun during the afternoon. It was set up so as to cover in the direction of the ford. In addition, two machine guns were covering to the north and two to the south. Three 60 mm mortars were put in position at the south end of the orchard and two bazookas were put on the same side as the 57 AT gun. In men and weapons, the perimeter was weighted heavily on its western and northern sides and there was almost no strength along the marsh. The group continued to patrol to the northward; they could hear a great deal of firing out there and they thought they might be able to link up with other friendly forces.

But it was a vain hope; they were to remain there until the arrival of a relieving column.*

* From the second TIMMES' interview.

AT CHEF DU PONT

The morning movement against CHEF DU PONT had taken place in about this manner:

LT COL ARTHUR MALONEY and a party of about 75 men had been detached from the LA FIERE action and sent on a wide flanking movement around to the east and south to see if a crossing through the marsh could be found somewhere to the eastward of CHEF DU PONT. Within a few minutes after this group moved out, word came to GEN GAVIN that the main crossing southwest of CHEF DU PONT was undefended. GAVIN himself then went on with LT COL EDWIN J. OSTBERG and another 75 men to seize this opening. OSTBERG took off directly down the railroad and beat MALONEY'S party to the objective. The village of CHEF DU PONT was lightly held by enemy forces but they were quickly driven out; they retired via the Causeway. There were dug-in positions along its embankments and in self-protection (since the Causeway was wholly exposed) the enemy soldiers dropped into these fire pits as they fell back. The Americans were pressing close behind them and had the Germans not got to ground they would have had to make a run along the Causeway for at least 300 yards in the open.

The Causeway, like most others in this section of France, is a dike-like earth embankment raised about six feet above the level of the marsh. Approximately 100 yards beyond the east

end of the Causeway, the arched bridge across the MERDERET obtrudes above the level of the road. Those of the enemy who had taken cover in the foxholes to east of the bridge could be shot from the positions where OSTBERG'S men deployed along the solid ground. The bridge, however, obstructed the view of the road beyond and the Germans who had gone to ground there were immune to small arms fire.

The Germans appeared hesitant and reluctant to fire. One soldier arose from his foxhole with hands raised, in the act of surrender. A paratrooper who was within a few feet of him, not seeing clearly what the man intended, shot him down in clear view of the others. Right after that another German got up from a foxhole with his hands raised. He, too, was killed. In this case there seemed to be no reasonable excuse for the action; it was the wanton act of a trigger-happy soldier. In that moment, the action thus took a desperate pitch and the circumstances permitted no change until the last man was done for on one side or the other. The Germans saw that they could neither get away nor surrender and they apparently decided to stay their ground and sell their lives as dearly as possible. Whether it would have been possible to have parleyed with the enemy and either obtain a surrender or permit them to retire across the Causeway to the southwestward in return for permitting the Americans to possess the bridge, at least this chance faded with the killing

of the two men who tried to surrender.*

OSTEERG at some time in the morning tried to rush the bridge with a group of his men. The rush was met by machine gun fire and OSTEERG pitched over into the marsh with several bullets in him; a number of other men were hit. MALONEY and his group joined the force. They organized another charge which was stopped with grenade fire and the incurring of further losses. When the charge was turned back, the two forces continued to engage with fire. The Americans closed up pit by pit to the east side of the bridge, taking over the holes where the enemy had been killed. The time came when only the wedge of the bridge separated the closest elements on the two sides; they carried on a grenade duel, interspersed with rifle fire supported by machine guns and tommy guns on the one side and by Schmeissers in the hands of the enemy. The targets in this kind of warfare were fleeting and unsatisfactory. A paratrooper would lift his head with the idea of taking aim, and if a German happened to have a bead on that particular foxhole at that moment, he was dead before he could fire. The skirmish wore on in these terms until about 1700.

At that time MALONEY and all but 34 of the men were called north by GEN GAVIN. (The reasons for this call are explained

*This was the view taken by five officers and 11 men who had been with the American party.

in a subsequent chapter.) Within a few minutes thereafter, the enemy brought up an artillery piece on the west bank and shelled the American position; 14 of the 34 men were either killed or wounded by the shellfire. At the same time, CAPT ROY E. CREEK, who had taken over command when MALONEY left, saw that a German foot force of approximately 75 men was moving up on his left rear and deploying in and around a group of farm buildings; this group had apparently held ground on the American rear throughout the day, biding an opportunity which arrived with the withdrawal of MALONEY'S men. It looked to CREEK as if he was about to be crushed between the artillery pounding his front and the infantry moving across his rear. Before the enemy could bring off the coup, however, these things happened—a staff officer (unidentified) from Division arrived on the ground, sized up the situation and got out again, and an American glider carrying a 57 mm AT gun with ammunition came down right in the center of CREEK'S position. CREEK'S men turned the gun on the German artillery piece and quickly silenced it; they then fired in the other direction against the infantry, which promptly recoiled. Before they could organize again, the staff officer returned with a large contingent of men. Thereon the German infantry withdrew from CREEK'S rear.

It was drawing on towards dark. CREEK had no intention of shoving on across the bridge. But in the process of reconnoitering to make his position more snug for the night, he

11)

11)



O. J. Jones

CAUSEWAY AT CHEF DU PONT

found a new fire position off on the right flank along the river embankment from where he could get direct fire into the German positions beyond the bridge.* This advantage quickly swung the balance in his favor. Such Germans as still survived on the far side of the bridge were picked off one by one until the last three men arose and fled. CREEK then pushed a platoon across the bridge and secured the ground on the far side without further opposition. This meant, however, that he was just holding one end of the Causeway with about 600 yards of marsh intervening between him and the solid ground.

CREEK'S men counted 40 corpses scattered around the German foxholes and gun pits. The American force had paid for this small victory with 11 dead and 23 wounded.

*In CREEK'S comment on his own situation he drew the moral that all day long he had been engaged in a close-up and bitter fight against the enemy when if he had taken an all-around view of the situation, he might have made these same dispositions earlier. It was the arrival of reinforcements which first made him see that the thing to do was to thoroughly organize the position.

ATTACK ON THE EAST BANK

All that had happened since noontime around the LA FIERRE Causeway—the advance of SCHWARTZWALDER'S column, the German onslaught, the stand by LEVY'S patrol—was unknown, curiously enough, to the troops closest to the scene. Over on the right flank of the American position on the east bank, CAPT DOLAN and the men of Company A, 505th Regiment, carried on almost unaware that there were any friendly troops in their vicinity or that there had been any radical changes in the situation. The foreground of their personal combat so monopolized their thoughts and observation that they scarcely looked beyond the buildings to the River. Men knew only so much of the battle as came before their gaze and thinking themselves unhelped and unsupported, they were oppressed by a terrible sense of loneliness.*

The enemy fire began to fall away and at last they felt themselves free on their local ground of the presence of the enemy. Yet when this happened, they did not attribute it to the possibility that the Germans had succumbed to blows from other 82d elements close at hand. They thought—quite mistakenly—that the enemy had withdrawn across the River. They had not been able to bring any sustained fire to bear on that exit,

*This was their testimony. Most of them had no idea that there were other American troops anywhere in the vicinity. They did not know until they were interviewed that others were also putting pressure on the Causeway.

thereby blocking it; in fact, they could only catch an occasional glimpse of it from among the buildings. It never occurred to them that where they had failed, some other unit may have succeeded. They did not know about LINDQUIST'S advance. They did not know that SCHWARTZWALDER had been there and so they were not prepared to miss him when he pulled out. When the enemy fire ceased, they moved into the ground which SCHWARTZWALDER and his men had recently held, still without suspecting that they were, in this sense, composing a relief. The move put them directly facing the river and covering the bridge and Causeway on its eastern end with their force fairly well distributed to either flank. During mid-afternoon the Company dug in, with First Platoon on right of the road along the river, Third Platoon on the left along the river and Second Platoon on the high ground to the rear at the turn of the main road. There was periodic mortar and artillery fire upon the position throughout the afternoon, and also some machine gun fire. However, this signaled nothing special to DOLAN and his men, nor did the fact that they heard tanks moving around on the west bank of the river. They could not take these things as a measure that the enemy was building up on the opposite bank because they hadn't realized that he wasn't there in strength in the first place.

The east end of the Causeway was catching mortar fire when the riflemen moved into line. A party of four men moved out

through this fire to set up a road block beside the bridge. In the party were two bazooka men, PFC JOHN D. BOLDESON and PVT GORDON C. PRYNE, a gunner, PFC LENOLD PETERSON, and his assistant, PVT MARCUS HEIM, JR. They were placed in depth with the left bazooka being forward about 25 yards; the men took over foxholes which had been deserted by the Germans a short time before under pressure from SCHWARTZWALDER'S company. The party carried four anti-tank mines out to the block and these were put in position across the roadway of the bridge; an old truck was also dragged out from the east bank and put on the bridge broadside as a partial barricade; the truck helped shield the bazooka men; it was curious that ultimately both obstacles did their work though they reacted adversely on the wrong force.*

During the afternoon there was no respite from fire and Company A kept digging deeper, figuring that sooner or later the counter-attack would come. The hour was perhaps 1730 when the enemy armor came across the Causeway—two tanks moving in front of a body of infantry. The first tank got right up to the mines. The tank commander stood in his turret. A machine gunner, PVT CLARENCE BECKER (later MIA) fired from the left flank of the Company position and killed him. Simultaneously the bazookas cracked down on the tank and their fire mingled with that of the 57 mm gun, firing from the hill.

*This happened on the fourth day.

The bazooka men held their fire until the last minute, not through hardihood alone but because the tree foliage at the bend of the Causeway kept them from getting any clear view of the oncoming column. Now they fired quickly and both of them got off four rounds as the enemy armor bore down on them; when the first rocket exploded, the lead tank stopped and began firing its cannon. Its first shell snapped a concrete telephone pole next to PETERSON; before the tank could fire again, it was set ablaze and disabled by the rockets. A second tank swung out and around the burning vehicle and then turned sharply leftward as if trying to ride out into the marsh. PETERSON, the gunner, grabbed a bazooka and ran forward about 20 feet so as to get beyond the trees which were screening the tank. He fired four rockets at the turret. They had no apparent effect. The tank's artillery began to swing around toward him and he thought they would try to pot-shot him with the cannon. Then he fired again and made a fair hit where the turret joins the body. His next rocket hit the tank's track; he ran forward a few feet and fired again, aiming at and hitting the tank's rear. The tank tried to back out into the road again but its motor was missing badly and the track was fouled. Before it could move more than a few feet, PETERSON got another rocket into it and the tank went up in flames, incinerating the crew. That ended the armored advance.*

*All four men were present for the interrogation. All had

During the close-up fight at the bridge, Company A's men in the main line of fire along the embankment had been concentrating on the German infantry which had come along behind the tanks. From their dug-in positions the guns were able to put a grazing fire on the bridge and Causeway. The result was "like mowing hay." The leading files fell in their tracks along the Causeway embankment; those still beyond the bend in the Causeway managed to withdraw to the vicinity of the church. The infantry did not try again to force the LA FIERRE crossing during D Day.

The impact of the attack, however, coupled with the stepping-up of the gunfire from the west bank, effected the whole situation along the river. GEN CAVIN, during his brief reconnaissance at LA FIERRE in the morning, had been impressed with the desultory character of the resistance. The sounds of the fight did not spell real strength to him. In that assumption, he was perfectly correct; despite the considerable American losses, especially in Company A, there were not many more than 30 Germans defending LA FIERRE.* As it seemed likely that the

been given the DSC. The detailed story, however, made it clear that PETERSON had been the mainspring of the whole action and that his initiative had stopped the armor.

*The witness is M. LOUIS LEROUX, the resident at the MANOIR DE LA FIERRE, the farm along the River; MME LEROUX, who witnessed these events, corroborated his statements. He said that prior to 2300 on 5 June, 1944, the farm had never been garrisoned and no Germans were used to picket the Causeway. (15 Germans had guarded the railway crossing near the farm for 15 days prior to 6 June.) At that hour, 25-30 German infantry came to his home, got him out of bed and told him that they were setting up

position would soon be brought under control, GAVIN had gone on down to CHEF DU PONT. He remained at that danger point until well into the afternoon, and as the situation seemed to be turning in favor of the attackers, he then returned to LA FIERE. There, it was of course impossible to give him an accurate briefing on the events of the day. The commanders on the east bank did not know for certain what had happened to SCHWARTZWALDER'S column nor were they aware of how the Germans had gotten back into CAUQUIGNY. But what took GAVIN'S immediate attention was the intensity of the German mortar and high velocity artillery fire now falling into the LA FIERE position. He had expected to find the bridge cooled off; instead, his appraisal told him that the real fight was in the making. Too, he could not help but be impressed by the way casualties were piling up; he had lost a number of officers. LT DOLAN had been commanding the First Battalion (such of it as was present) for five hours. KELLAM was dead. The Executive, MAJ MC GINITY, who had been present when GAVIN left for CHEF DU PONT, had been killed during this absence. So had the S-3, and 4 or 5 other officers. Finally, LT COL MARK ALEXANDER of 505th had come into the position and had taken command of the Battalion.

a defensive position around the farm. They were there next morning when the American attack began; they were not reinforced; LEROUEX was certain that no Germans came from west of the River that morning. However, after the two forces became fully engaged, LEROUEX, his wife and their three daughters retired to the basement.

GAVIN sent an officer courier to LT COL MALONEY at CHEF DU PONT. He was told to leave about one platoon of men there with two machine guns. The rest of the force was to move to LA FIERRE at once. If the force staying at CHEF DU PONT should be forced out of the position, it was to fall back on LA FIERRE. GAVIN moved his own CP to the railroad over-pass behind LA FIERRE. On a call from GAVIN, GEN RIDGWAY came on down to the over-pass and the two Commanders discussed the general situation. The failure to get any contact with other elements of the invasion and the continuing blackout of information as to how the seaborne landings were proceeding were becoming of gravest concern to the Division Commander and were pressing on every decision relative to the local situation.

The German reaction continued to build in strength, culminating (as already related) in the attempt to force the Causeway with armor. What had happened to the force holding the bridge (Company A) could not be seen clearly to rearward. By error, word reached the Battalion Commander that enemy infantry had made a lodgement in the American position on the east bank while the armor was being turned back: from Battalion, this word was passed back to GEN GAVIN, and the Battalion Commander added his estimate that the position of Company A on the nose of land overlooking the bridge was becoming untenable because of the intensity of the German artillery and small arms fire. These things, coupled with the lack of medical care and a rapidly dwindling ammunition supply, seemed to put the position

in full jeopardy.

COL LINDQUIST'S force—or that part of it which remained on the east bank after the failure to consolidate the bridge-head—had made several moves during this time. Through the events of early afternoon, its fractions had remained dug-in on the ground over to left of the bridge, although the men of Company A, 505, remained unaware that there was any real support on that flank. Some time after mid-afternoon MAJ KELLAM had arrived with the remainder of First Battalion, 505, providing additional support for the close-up position. After GAVIN had talked with RIDGWAY, he told LINDQUIST of the Command's worry over the failure to hear from the seaborne force; it might mean that the whole Division would have to fall back on STE MERE EGLISE, and in that event it would be LINDQUIST'S task to cover the withdrawal of the force along the MERDERET. Accordingly, LINDQUIST moved his men into a reserve position along the first hedgerow west of the railroad line and inside the "Y" formed by the two highways; they were there when the German armor tried to come across the bridge. KELLAM, who had taken over LINDQUIST'S ground to left of the bridge, was already out of it; a mortar burst hit him almost as soon as he had made the relief and he died within a few minutes.

In the interim between COL MALONEY'S getting the order to move up from CHEF DU FONT and the arrival of his column from LA FIERE, GAVIN went forward along the road leading to the Cause-

way. He encountered little knots of men moving back from the bridge as if under the impression that a withdrawal was about to take place. The men told him that the AT guns had acted badly and that for some reason a number of them had withdrawn just before the time when they were most needed by the infantry.*

GAVIN was still awaiting MALONEY. But he told LINDQUIST to make a quick reconnaissance and if he found that the situation at the bridge presented an immediate danger, he was to move his force back into line and stabilize it without further orders. Going forward, LINDQUIST ran into a group of 505 men who were not engaged; they were bound for the rear; they were not panicky but they were getting out. He collected these men and got them started moving toward the river line, telling the officer in charge to move them in on the left side of the bridge. Going on a little way farther, he found part of a group of 507 men in position about 7 hedgerows east of the bridge. As he saw it, they were of no value to the general cause so long as they remained there, so he led them directly into the bridge and had them start digging in along the embankment.

These moves were completed just before the coming of the force.

*LINDQUIST said that he did not believe more than two of the guns did any firing from LA FIERRE. He, too, felt that the AT failure was demoralizing to the infantry and that the probable reason for it was that there was too little cover at hand.

from CHEF DU PONT under COL MALONEY. These reinforcements, coupled with GAVIN'S concern for the position along the MERDERET, prompted one more change. LINDQUIST'S force took up a defensive position just east of the railway cut and on top of the embankment; so situated, it was in better case if the time came when a withdrawal from the MERDERET line to STE MERE EGLISE was deemed necessary.*

LT COL MALONEY had arrived with about 200 men. He was directed to deploy his force on both sides of the main road and attack through First Battalion, 505th, to re-establish the position overlooking the bridge, this order being based on the assumption that the front had partly folded. When this was accomplished, both battalions were then to hold until further orders were received. MALONEY was told that as soon as darkness permitted, anti-tank weapons would be rolled into place and dug-in where direct fire could be obtained; it was also planned to get more machine guns and bazookas into the forward ground.

As the advance proceeded, it quickly became apparent that the local situation was not quite as desperate as had been imagined and that it called for an all-around strengthening of the position rather than a re-establishing of the center, which was quite intact. One force of 507 men under CAPT R. D. RAE was disposed to north of the bridge along the river bank, taking

*These last two paragraphs from GEN GAVIN.

up positions along the hedgerows closest to the marsh. Another part of MALONEY'S column was disposed to south of the Causeway along the river bank. But again, these reenforcements did not move through Company A, 505th, nor make their physical pressure directly felt, and the men in the center continued to believe that they were carrying the weight of the position almost exclusively on their own shoulders.*

Throughout the hours of darkness tanks could be heard milling about on the opposite bank and enemy soldiers could be heard yelling back and forth. Company A was kept fully alerted and the men were told to dig their foxholes deeper. Six more men were wounded during the night by fire from west of the river; there was only one first-aid man, PVT KELLY BEYERS, to take care of them; a first-aid station had been established farther north along the river by 508 but the German fire kept that flank so harassed that BEYERS carried his wounded out beyond the railway embankment where GAVIN had set up his CP. His tirelessness and calm courage helped cheer the entire Company.

For the 507 elements, the night was quite uneventful. RAE checked and found that his men were almost out of ammunition. He led a patrol to Division CP to pick up a supply but found that the people there were likewise embarrassed. It was about

*RAE and his men told of the actual movements of 507. GAVIN was the witness as to the orders. Company A men made the statements that they did not know of the arrival of this support.

**This was what they said at the critique.

daybreak next morning when a supply arrived by plane.

But the morning brought also another ill change in Company A's fortunes. The signs increased that the enemy was planning to hit GEN RIDGWAY'S force from the north. The 507 forces supporting Company A on either flank were withdrawn and ordered to a position a little to the south of the Division CP. They joined LINDQUIST'S force. He had been called at dawn by GAVIN and told that 505 was being hit on the left flank and he should move east to their support. That put the brunt of the LA FIERE defense quite squarely up to Company A just as on the day before it had carried the burden of the attack. A few drifters came into the lines from across the marsh during the early hours—mainly 507 and 508 men who had failed to make any assembly on the opening day and were drawn singly to the sounds of the American fire. They came in dripping wet, and blue with cold, and took positions among the 505 men. Others failed to make it; the Germans on the west bank had them directly under machine gun fire and they kept a spatter of bullets across the surface of the marsh. The Americans dropped their equipment and tried to hunch low in the muck and reeds as they waded toward LA FIERE. But the fire picked a number of them off while Company A watched.

THE BRIDGE HOLDS

2ND LT WILLIAM A. OAKLEY had the platoon of Company A which covered the embankment directly to right of the bridge. To the right of his own men were 8 men from the 307th Engineers. On coming into the position that morning, they had been grouped with two machine guns from Headquarters Company of First Battalion and deployed out along the main flank from which position the guns could put an accurate fire cross-wise over most of the Causeway's length. The platoon had very little natural cover. There were a few trees and shrubs in the foreground but the top of the embankment was quite bare and the principle protection of machine gunners and riflemen were the foxholes. The Company was not starved for ammunition. A party had gone out the night before and had collected a number of bundles; all hands felt there would be enough if the enemy came on.

Shortly after 0800 mortar fire from the west bank began to range along the Company line with the worst of it seeming to concentrate against OAKLEY'S men. Quickly the enemy machine guns joined the action, but the bullet fire did no great hurt as the foxholes were dug into the lower part of the face of the embankment and the guns were bearing on the top of it. OAKLEY began to lose a few men from the mortar fire.

At 1000 the German attack came on, four Renault tanks leading

the way. They got no farther than had the column of the prior evening. PETERSON and the other three bazooka men met the attack head on; they were supported by a 57 gun firing from directly above the embankment. It was an almost untenable place for an anti-tank gun, but no worse than the position taken over by CPL FELIX FERRAZZI, one of the machine gunners supporting OAKLEY'S position. (He was in fact a radio operator, but finding himself without a radio, he had volunteered to operate the gun.) With his gun, he had to take position directly under the 57 gun so that both weapons could hold a line of fire directly on the bridge. The other gunners begged FERRAZZI to move; they told him he couldn't possibly take it there. He insisted on staying, and though the blast from the 57 shook him terribly, he remained at his post until his gun was knocked out by mortar fire. An earlier burst had showered him with fragments and cut him badly around the head and neck. But he kept firing as long as the gun was operable.

The enemy armor was stopped at the middle of the bridge. By that time the lead tank was already past the bazooka crew's original position but PETERSON and the others had dropped back inside the rifle line. Whether from a rocket or one of the 57 shells or both, the first tank got a disabling hit; that piled up the column. The infantry which had been coming on behind the tanks was again brought in check. Now, however, there was this difference in the situation: the pile-up of German armor

and of the burned vehicles which the bazooka men had dragged onto the Causeway to form a partial barricade gave the enemy foot troops something to fight behind. They made swift use of it. The two forces became locked in a sudden death fire fight from less than 40 yards range, the Germans crouching behind the armor, the Americans making the most of their ground cover. Thereon the mortar fire from the west bank doubled in intensity with most of it falling among OAKLEY'S men, until they could scarce raise their heads. OAKLEY was hard hit by one burst and spouted so much blood that they had to get him out in the middle of the fight. SGT WILLIAM D. OWENS took over the platoon. Others went out the way OAKLEY had gone, the platoon strength dwindling at so fast a rate from the bullet and mortar fire that OWENS found it difficult to know whether any line remained. 1ST SGT ROBERT M. MATTESON, who was slightly to rear of the rifle line and was trying to steer the wounded back, found them coming on in such number that he "felt like a policeman directing traffic."

OWENS stood there, conspicuously in the open and not more than 30 yards from the bridge, a quietly impressive figure, rallying the men just by the example of his own steadiness. The point had come when some such example of personal heroism had to be set if the LA FIERRE bridge was to be held. The close-up fire from behind the barricade of wrecked armor was taking a terrible toll and the mortars pounded the embankment unceas-

ingly. Half of the platoon had become casualties. In OWENS' own squad only three men remained. The remainder of the Company line was not in position where it could give any strong support to the platoon's position; the men continued to fire, but they did so knowing that the issue was being decided on the ground held by OWENS' platoon; if the platoon broke, the whole position would go.

The strays who had come into the line from across the river that morning were the first to get out—not all of them, but a few. Most of them had been shocked and exhausted by their experience, and lacking that sense of personal identity with the unit which is the final stabilizing force in moments of supreme emergency, they responded to the instinct for self-preservation. OWENS was too preoccupied with other matters to make any attempt to dissuade them but he could measure the effect on his own men; these small withdrawals weakened and worried them. SGT MATTESON saw a lieutenant—stranger to the Company—start for the rear. "I saw a whole battalion of infantry over there this morning," said the lieutenant. "We can't stop them and it's time to get out." MATTESON couldn't tell him to stay. The machine gun ammunition supply in the front line was now down to one box per gun. The guns were kept going only by the persistence of S SGT EDWIN F. WANCIO (supply sergeant) who kept boring up to the fire line from rearward carrying enough ammunition to keep the guns fed. There were no spare barrels for these guns. They were kept in such constant use (they

fired approximately 40 boxes the piece) that when the gunners tried to stop fire momentarily, the guns kept spitting for ten or twelve rounds. Two of the guns in the Company line broke down from over-heating; LT JOHN OTTO'S men cannibalized them on the spot and got one gun back into operation.

But the attrition on men and weapons finally reached the cracking point. The wounded crawled on back. More of the strays quit the ground. Half the strength of the line had gone and OWENS, standing in the key position, had lost all but 15 men. At last these few began to waver. They said to OWENS; "Let's get out. We'd better withdraw." And he replied to them: "No, we will wait for orders. We haven't been told to go." Yet he was uncertain of his own decision and he sent a man over to ask DOLAN what he had better do. Back to the remnant of the platoon came the message. DOLAN had written it out. "I don't know a better place than this to die."*

*The most remarkable tribute the HO heard to any soldier in the ETO was paid by Company A to OWENS. When the Company was interviewed as a body, all hands said: "The defense was saved by OWENS. It was his courage and his calmness which made us stick it out. Finally, he carried the load." OWENS is not a conspicuous looking soldier. He is a man of medium size, rather reserved and considerably older than the average paratrooper. In the presence of the whole Company, he said this: "We stuck because our leaders stuck and we knew they were sticking. CAPT DOLAN was with us all the time. Such of the younger officers as did not get killed also went around encouraging the men. COL ALEXANDER kept coming up into the fight. We saw GEN RIDGWAY up there and GEN GAVIN. We knew they knew what we were doing and that they would give us all the help they could. That did more to give us confidence than the power of our weapons."

It was in these moments and in this spirit that platoon and Company met and passed their crisis. The Germans raised a Red Cross flag and asked for a half-hour respite to take out their wounded. Company A was glad to grant the request. It gave them a chance to succor their own men and to regroup with what strength they had.

During that half hour the German effort to re-establish the position along the line of the MERDERET River passed into decline. The enemy infantry did not come on again against the position defending the bridge and after the first-aid parties had carried out the wounded, there was no renewal of the close-up fight from behind the wrecked armor.

Sporadic mortar fire continued to fall into Company A's ground throughout the remainder of the day: there were some further losses of American personnel. That evening the Company was relieved by elements of the 507 returning with LINDQUIST'S force from the ground to north of STE MERE EGLISE; the fight which they had expected there had never materialized; LINDQUIST had continued his probing attack forward, keeping his right flank within 500 yards and within sight of the MONIEBOURG road, until he reached the crossroads beyond ST MERE EGLISE. But during the entire day his force had seen and killed only one German and it was only toward the end of the advance that the force began to draw a scattering mortar fire; he had reported these facts to Division by runner and had

included his estimate that there was no enemy strength on his immediate front; the order to withdraw came in consequence and he led his men back toward the railway line about the time that the river fight cooled off. At no time while his men were along the railway bank or operating to the east of it had they drawn any artillery fire.

Company A formed to move back from the LA FIERRE position. SGT MATTESON looked up and down the line of the Company and then said to his men: "If people don't think that men get killed in war, they ought to take a look at this Company." They had started with 147 able-bodied men on the day before, their strength was now 66 less, from death or from serious wounds.

Of the men standing in front of MATTESON, 20 were wearing bandages or were awaiting medical attention. They were the lightly wounded who had seen the show through.

COL LINDQUIST, his D PLUS ONE day mission having proved a blank, was ordered to go to CHEF DU PONT where elements of 507 and 508 were already located, having successfully engaged the enemy and defended the bridge position. LINDQUIST was to take over from CAPT CREEK, assemble his Regiment around the CHEF DU PONT bridgehead and proceed to bring the local situation under control.

THE ATTACK THROUGH THE FORD

The existence of the under-water road through the marsh to south of the GREY CASTLE (forming a possible line of approach from the railroad to ANFREVILLE) appears not to have been any closely-guarded secret.

A French girl who lived in a house along the railroad near the ford told LT WISNER about it one night and offered to lead him to it; he didn't take the offer, tried to find it himself and finally gave it up. His informant, however, was a member of a rather remarkable family who are worthy of some regard by the United States. The man, his wife and their daughter—whom even in the darkness the paratroopers noted for her lack of charm and commented on it long after—spent the night collecting paratroopers, going into the marshes for them in a small boat and searching them out among the hedge-rows along the embankments. They led them to the railway track and then gave them their bearings. They were altogether tireless in this work and together they appear to have been responsible for the orientation of the greater part of two battalions. WISNER was only one among many who were befriended.

Still, WISNER did not seem to attach any tactical significance to the presence of the ford; though an S-2, he did not make the information available to all who might make possible use

of it. The word that the ford was there and that it might be used for a flank approach against the LA FIERE bridgehead became known to the Division under the following circumstances.

On the morning of D PLUS 2, TIMMES continued to be under such pressure in the orchard that he sent LT MARR out to scout the road running east along the north flank of the position seeking a route of withdrawal in case relief did not come to them. MARR knew nothing of the existence of the ford. His runner, PFC NORMAN V. CARTER, discovered it quite by accident as they started walking into the marsh. They continued on along it, feeling for the edges; the water was clear enough that they could see the edge of the road part of the time.*

Just east of the GREY CASTLE, they came under machine gun fire, but they were moving away from it and the enemy made no attempt to follow. At the house by the railroad, MARR met the friendly French family and they told him that there were Americans directly to the westward. There was an American radio aerial near the house; MARR put an orange flag on it and waved it; another orange flag waved back at him from the ground indicated by the Frenchman. The latter got out his boat and rowed MARR across the marsh to the position of Third Battalion,

*MARR had made one prior attempt to go north around the marsh; he thought there was a possibility that its northern terminus might be somewhere near at hand. Ten men had gone with him on this occasion and he had been turned back by machine gun fire from the area where the most of the American gliders had landed, northeast of AMPREVILLE. This time he cut the patrol to one.

325th Glider Infantry Regiment. The Commander got MARR started toward Division in a jeep, but along the road they met GEN RIDGWAY. MARR explained about the ford and the General hurried him on to headquarters to tell the story to the Staff.

It was on the basis of this information that the 325th Glider Infantry came to figure in the one futile effort to bring the LA FIERRE bridgehead under control via the indirect approach, and having failed in that effort, to take it by the shortest but most desperate course.

The Regiment had flown into NORMANDY on the morning of D PLUS ONE, and although the assembly was supposed to be neatly packaged in a Landing Zone a little to the north of BLOS-VILLE in actual performance the gliders were scattered all the way from the STE MERE EGLISE-CARENTAN highway eastward to the Beach. The ground where most of the gliders landed was a no-man's land; it was supposed to have been brought under control by that hour through the juncture of 82d Division elements moving south from STE MERE EGLISE and the 4th Infantry Division moving north. But enemy forces still held the ridges around ECOQUENEAUVILLE and COQUERIE directly north of the Landing Zone and separating 325th from contact with the 505th Regiment at STE MERE EGLISE. The situation was slightly embarrassing but not painful as the enemy forces thus positioned made no effort to press offensive action.

against the glider forces while they were still uncollected and individually unapprised of the existing situation. One glider had come down far into enemy territory; two others had failed to get away from England; 160 men had been injured or killed by glider crackups in landing. Apart from these things, the situation of the Regiment when it became fully assembled five hours after the landing were completed was excellent, both as to the condition of its personnel and of its fighting equipment.*

The further movements of the Regiment immediately following the landing enter only incidentally into the MERDERET operation. During its first 24 hours, 325th did a great deal of marching and maneuvering, none of which had any large influence on the Division's tactical situation, though since the Regiment had flown in as Division Reserve, it brightened the strategic outlook.**

On 7 June, late in the day, First Battalion went to LA FIERRE and was placed in reserve just behind the village, staying there throughout the next day. When LT MARR reached the Division CP and told about the ford, COL HARRY L. LEWIS of 325th was there and heard the story. Thereon, LEWIS was directed

*In the landings 35 men had been killed in the Horsa Gliders and none in the CG4A's. Thirty-one were slightly injured in the Horsas and 26 in the CG4A's. The evacuation of these men was underway within one hour.

**The details of this early period are to be found in the file under: "Initial Operations of 325th Glider Infantry."

by GEN RIDGWAY to take a force not exceeding a battalion across the MERDERET, hold the village of AMFREVILLE and bring the western side of the bridgehead under control.

At about 1300 MARR joined First Battalion, 325th, which LEWIS had designated for the mission, and at about 2300 he started leading the column across the marsh to TIMMES' relief. Meantime he had sent PFC CARTER back to TIMMES with the message that a friendly force was coming in and he was to lift the minefields covering the road north of the orchard.* Engineers had gone ahead also and had marked the shoulders of the underwater road with white tape so that the passage was not too difficult in the darkness. While the column was in mid-passage, word came to COL LEWIS from Division that he was to disregard that part of the order which applied to AMFREVILLE and proceed immediately to the bridgehead with the object of capturing it before dawn. The Battalion reached the western shore of the marsh without being fired on and MARR got them into the cover of the first hedgerow along the embankment; he went on to make sure that the minefields had been lifted.

Fire came against the Battalion's position from the GREY CASTLE and Company C was sent to the right to put it down so that the Battalion could make the left turning into TIMMES' orchard.

*This came from the MARR interview. CARTER made the trip under machine gun fire with two men from 325th covering him. He received the Silver Star for this mission.

From that point, Company C was to turn south to the road from AMFREVILLE into CAUQUIGNY and attack across the road. Company B was ordered to turn around the western side of the orchard, move south as far as the AMFREVILLE-CAUQUIGNY road and then attack along the northern side of the road toward the west end of the Causeway. The mission given Company A was to secure the road junctions around LE MOTTEY and protect the rear of Companies B and C against any advance from AMFREVILLE. MAJ SANFORD, commanding the Battalion, had conferred with TIMMES in the orchard and this was the plan that he had decided upon; but because of Company C's over-long commitment at the GREY CASTLE, it had the effect of feeding the companies into the action piecemeal and without juncture anywhere along their front. From TIMMES' party, LT LEVY was assigned to guide Company B and LT FORMAN to guide Company A. Company A, which was still at the GREY CASTLE but had completed driving the Germans from the buildings, was put in LT MARR'S hands. He led them south; the Germans swarmed right back into the buildings and fired at them as they withdrew through the hedgerows. The Company got down to the AMFREVILLE-CAUQUIGNY road without difficulty, knocking out one machine gun post enroute; while they were in movement, a runner came in with the message that Company B had advanced rapidly to the road and was now moving eastward along the northern side; they wanted Company C to come on as rapidly as possible. This, they did, crossing the main road and deploying with platoons in line along a hedgerow

bounding an oat field, ready for the sweep east. As they moved out, they tripped several alarm devices set by the enemy. MARR talked to the Company Commander and suggested that he had better try to make contact on the left; he was told that Company B was probably on ahead in any case and that contact would be made automatically when Company C pulled abreast. But right after that they came to a road fork in the darkness, mistook their direction and turned southward along the hedge-row, thinking this was the boundary of the main road. (Note: This is the same road along which SGT KNEALE moved his men on the following day.) It was then about 0330. They got about midway of the field along which they were advancing and began to draw sporadic fire from their front. Still, the Company moved on rapidly to the end of the field; there they came abreast of a sunken road, and as they looked through the hedge at what lay ahead, they saw they were almost within touching position of a German artillery position. Thirty yards away, MARR counted three 88s and a snub-nosed howitzer. It was still dark, but by the starlight he could see the guns and men grouped around them.

The Germans had seen the Company at the same time. Some of them began yelling: "Kamerad!" and other things in German. They seemed wholly shocked by the surprise and for the moment they made no move to fire. All along the American line men were yelling: "Don't fire! The Germans are going to surrender."