

PRINCE OF WALES COMPANY.

THE BATTLE OF HECHTEL, SEP 7th to 12th.

It is intended that this shall only be the story of the part played by Prince of Wales Coy in the Battle of Hechtel, but all Coys were so closely involved that in order to give a clear picture it will be necessary to tell much of what happened to them.

On 7 Sep 2 Sqn, 2 W.G. and No 3 Coy advanced from Helchteren towards Hechtel, but were unable to get into the village owing to strong enemy opposition.

On 8 Sep it was planned that an attack should be put in by POW Coy and X Coy. Much information was available owing to the gallantry of the patriots who went into the village, noted all enemy positions and then returned to us. It was evident that the village was strongly held. The scheme was that a feint attack should be put in on the right flank by a section of carriers and mortars. A troop of Irish Guards was to cut the road running East from the village. No 2 Sqn was to shell the village from the South and move up on consolidation. An artillery concentration of 15 minutes was laid on and typhoons to bomb the village (only four turned up much to our disgust). The main attack was to come in from the West, POW Coy on the right and X Coy on the left. The objectives were the West side of the village, the main road running West to East being inclusive to X Coy.

We moved forward embussed, with a little delay caused by the enemy. We disbussed and marched to our start line. The artillery concentration did not last long enough, and so we had to ask for it to continue longer.

All went well until we reached some very flat open ground six hundred yards wide just before the village. This was swept by M G fire. No. 3 Pl tried to attack straight across this. They overran and knocked out one M.G. position and suffered some casualties. After this they were pinned down. A plan was made to attack under a smoke screen, but this was called off when it was discovered that X Coy had got on on the left. I decided to follow through them. We therefore crossed the main road. After a pause I decided to send No. 1 Pl down the left side of the main road, straight into the village. They got in without much opposition and were followed by No. 3 Pl. While this was going on we were being shelled by an enemy tank from behind. I then followed up with No. 2 Pl and Coy H.Q. The leading Pls were held up in the village as was X Coy, No. 2 Pl. reached its objective and started to dig in. Nos 1 and 3 Pls eventually pushed on as far as the main road running North and South, but could not cross it. During this episode Lt Hugh Mitchell was wounded (He took shelter with some civilians and was later brought back to us by two German stretcher bearers) and the three men with him were killed. I tried to get No 2 Sqn up to assist us to push forward to the Eastern edge of the village. When eventually I did get hold of them I found that they only had three tanks left. Major John Spencer, Lt David Rogers and myself went forward to a house in the main street which was a good O.P. It was beginning to get dark and we suddenly saw a number of Germans in the street just outside. They spotted us at the window and started firing their M.G. through the window at us. I threw a grenade and gave the three magazines from the Bren which enabled us to get out of the house. I then decided to draw the Forward Pls back to No. 2 Pl area and form a firm base on the South Western sector of the village. This was satisfactorily done.

During the night the enemy came out in full force and infiltrated right into the Coy area. Major John Spencer was unfortunately killed and one Gdsm, and four were captured. However, we took a good toll of the enemy. My 2-in-C, Capt Sir E. Bedingfield, myself and some others were in a house in the Coy area when the enemy arrived at the door and threw a grenade at the window. We managed to dodge out as it was so dark they could not see if we were some of their own men or not. My operator got into a soap box in the cellar.

Next morning we found that much the same had happened to X Coy