

The Battle of St. PIERRE TARENTAINE



On the evening of 1st Aug the Prince of Wales Coy was ordered to clear the southern half of the village of St. Denis-Maisoncelles and the surrounding area. This operation was completed without opposition and the Coy finished digging in at cross roads 666480 by 0130 hours on 2 Aug.

At 0500 hrs orders were received for the Coy to occupy the high ground Pt 238, 6848 before 0630 hrs. At 0500 hrs the Coy Comd went forward to recce the new area, and the Coy moved at 0530 hrs.

Pt 238 was occupied by 0630 hrs and digging in began. At about 0630 hrs orders were received to be ready to move forward by march route at 0630 hrs. At 0930 hrs the Coy Comd went to a Bn 'O' Gp. The Bn was to move forward embussed on the Left Centre Line of the Division as far as the high ground North of Vassy. The start was to be as soon as possible. The Coy was therefore immediately moved to its embussing point at rd junc 675478. Here a considerable delay ensued owing to a complete traffic block caused by the Grenadiers being held up in front.

At 1230 hrs the Coy Comd was sent for and given orders to take the Coy with two tps of No. 3 Sqn 1st Armd Bn Coldstream Gds under comd with the role of:-

1. Clearing the wooded area North East of the main road from 688458 to the river.
2. To locate and destroy dug in Panther tanks thought to be West of St. Pierre Tarentaine.
3. To search the village of St Pierre,
4. To locate and destroy more dug in Panthers between the village and Pt 205, 7245.

After completing these orders the Coy was to dig in and hold the village of St. Pierre and the area of Pt 205, whilst the remainder of the Bn. went on embussed, and to stay there until released by the Bde. Comd.

The Coy moved by march route to the SL, which was to be just off the main road at 683458. There was a considerable delay here as the tanks could not get through. At this juncture higher formation seemed to think that the operation should be well under way. It seemed impossible to impress upon them the difficulties which were being caused by the traffic blocks. However, the Coy Comd was made to rush his final arrangements and went forward without a proper tie up with the tanks on the SL.

The plan was for the tanks to remain in the area of the SL, and if the Coy was held up before the river they were to be called up to assist. It was hoped that on reaching the river, it would be possible to locate the first lot of Panthers. The tanks were then to support by fire an attack onto the enemy tanks. Phase one was completed without any opposition and the tanks were called forward. Again owing to traffic on the roads they had great difficulty in moving. Added to this was the inaccuracy of the map which caused them to go down a road out of which they could not get.

After a wait of half an hour and urgings from higher authority the Coy Comd decided to move forward towards St. Pierre in Adv. Gd formation, leaving behind the second-in-command, Capt Sir Richard Powell, to bring the tanks up. It was found that the first lot of enemy tanks was non-existent, and the King's Coy, 1st Bn. Grenadier Guards was holding the village of St. Pierre. The Coy halted in the village, while the Coy Comd went to contact King's Coy. At this juncture extremely heavy shelling took place. Unfortunately Coy HQ was hit, and L/Sjt. Helling's section was wiped out except for one man.

It was learnt that King's Coy had occupied the main rd junc at 714448, but had been driven off by MG fire thought to come from tanks. By this time communication with our tanks had broken down. There seemed to the Coy Comd to be three alternatives, one to withdraw, two to remain and be shelled in St Pierre, three to push on. He chose the third alternative.

No. 1 Pl. comd. by Sjt Kempson, was ordered to make good the main road junc 714448. This they did, opposed only by shelling and intermittent MG fire. They consolidated in the area of the wood at 715447.

No. 3 Pl., comd by Sjt Semark, was then ordered to push on along the left hand side of the main road to Point 205, 7245. They cleared the houses as far as 718452 without opposition except for some MG fire coming from the right flank. The houses were occupied by friendly civilians who said that Pt 205 and the area immediately South West of it was held by enemy infantry, and that Montamy was strongly held. No. 3 Pl. then went on and bumped the enemy just short of Pt 205. They got down and returned fire, whilst No 2 Pl. comd. by Lt. D.A. Rogers, put in an attack on the left flank. The enemy, strength probably a platoon, in an outpost position in front of Montamy, were taken completely by surprise. Several of them were hit and the remainder ran away. Shortly after this heavy MG fire pinned the Coy down and tanks were heard moving about. Owing to the fact that the Coy was quite unsupported and out of touch by wireless, and had suffered a fair number of casualties the Coy Comd decided to withdraw via Les Annaies to St. Pierre. No. 1 Pl. was called up and the withdrawal took place according to plan. Very great difficulty was experienced in removing some of the wounded.

On arrival at St. Pierre a message was received that there was to be a Bn. O Gp near Pevillon at about 701434. The Coy Comd went there, and found nobody, but soon discovered that this spot was under shell fire and appeared to be surrounded by snipers. It was a most unsuitable place for an O Gp. The Coy Comd therefore went back and met the Commanding Officer, who decided to hold his O Gp at rd junc 705445.

The Coy was ordered to move forward by march route and take up a defensive position between the road and the river at Le Pont d'Eloy

703422. The Coy, under Sir R. Powell, arrived at this place at about 2130 hrs. Everybody was busy getting into position when suddenly a MG 34 opened fire at 50 yards range. Nobody was hit and Sir R. Powell, Sjt. Kempson and L/Cpl. Llewellyn stalked it with grenades. They badly wounded one man and the other one ran away, but was killed by Sir R. Powell with a Bren gun. The Coy proceeded to dig in and finished this at about 0330 hrs on 3rd Aug.

During the night small numbers of enemy were heard wandering about in the woods. One walked up to a sentry post and was shot by L/Sjt. Smith.

By this time the Coy was very tired. They had fought thier first real battle with the enemy. They had dug in three times in the past 24 hours and had walked some 16 miles, mostly across country. They had completed every task which had been given them and had gained most valuable information. The total casualties suffered were eight killed and nine wounded.

Coy. Comd. MAJOR J.M. MILLER.
2 in C. SIR RICHARD POWELL.
NO.1. PL. SGT. KEMPSON
NO2 PL. LT. DA. ROGERS.
NO3 PL. SGT. SEAMARK.
A/CSM. CQMS. A.R. LEXIS.