



A Company, 1st Battalion, 505th PIR, 82nd Airborne Division

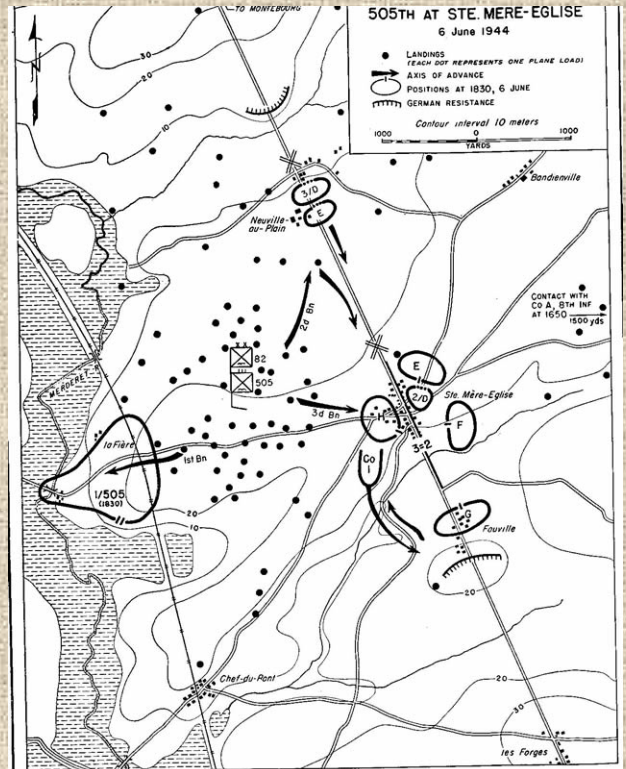
Tony Davis



As June 5th gave way to June 6th, the greatest Invasion force ever assembled was lumbering toward history. The lead elements of this force were flying over the English Channel and on their way to their designated drop zones. The veteran men of the 505 were aware of what to expect once they crossed the Norman coast.

The men of A company were assigned the task of capturing the eastern end of the bridge near Le Manior La Fiere. These men were to be a back stop for the inexperienced 507. Unfortunately the 507 were too scattered on their drops

to be able to capture any of their objectives. The 82nd Airborne division was to rely on the veteran 505 to ensure the Germans would not break through to attack the beach invasion forces.



The capture of La Fiere bridge (pictured to the left) would provide a staging point for the entire invasion force to cut-off the Contentin Peninsula and speed the capture of the port city Cherbourg. The men of A company found the estate at the eastern end of the bridge to be an ideal defensive position. Unfortunately, the Germans were defending the bridge early on June 6th at

the same location. After a bloody battle, the US airborne forces were able to remove the Germans and set up their defenses for the expected German counterattack.

Lieutenant John Dolan set his men in positions so that they would be able to fend off the first attack. He had his two bazooka teams dig-in one on each side of the bridge. This would allow the bazooka teams to hit the tanks coming across the bridge in their weaker side armor. A 57mm AT gun was concealed in the bushes toward the rear of the estate on higher ground with full view down the causeway. Light machine guns were positioned to protect the bazooka crew from infantry approaching up the causeway. The remaining elements of A company and other stragglers were dug-in behind the machine guns to block any German breakout.



The German counterattacked in the afternoon on June 6th. Led by three captured French Renault tanks, a regiment of Panzergrenadiers were seen advancing up the causeway. The two bazooka men dug-in on the south side of the bridge were gunner Leonold Peterson and loader Marcus Heim (pictured above). They opened fire on the two lead tanks and together with the other bazooka crew and 57mm gun crew were able to knock out the three tanks. This stopped the German advance and though receiving numerous casualties A company was able to keep their hold on the important bridge over the Mederet River. For their action in the fight, Peterson and Heim received the Distinguished Service Cross.

The next day elements of the 1057 Regiment made another attempt to reclaim the bridge. The situation became so desperate that only those seriously wounded were pulled from the line. As the battle progressed, the Germans waved a Red Cross flag and negotiated a cease-fire in order to remove their wounded. At this time Dolan was asked what action he would

would like the forward platoon to take. He replied with the message “I see no better place to die.” The men of A company held on to their objective and were relieved by elements of the 325th Glider Regiment the following day.



References

The First Men In, Ed Rugero, 2006

All American, All the Way, Phil Nordyke, 2005

Picture One, 505 PIR drop locations: http://www.ww2-airborne.us/division/82_overview.html

Picture Two, La Fiere bridge and causeway: <http://www.wargamer.com/Hosted/CloseCombatOmaha/lafièrè.htm>

Picture Three, Marcus Heim: http://www.ww2-airborne.us/units/505/505_trp.html