1 KOSB TROARN 18-19 JUL 1944

On this day the 1st Bn would be engaged in its bitterest battle of the Normandy campaign.

At 0815 on the 18th the BN moved off through summer fields hugging the hedgerows to an assembly are near Escoville. For an hour or two the Borderers lay in orchards listening to the distant rumble of the battle knowing their time would come. Around mid-day they buckled on their equipment, everything had to be carried as no transport was allowed and moved out of the assembly area towards Troarn. Phase 0ne was completed without any fighting, the heat was heavy, large dust clouds were being kicked up by tanks, and the ground was rutted and difficult due to shelling.

Moving through the ruins of Escoville the Borderers climbed a long slope and dug in amongst the cornflowers and poppies and waited. Casualties had begun to mount as a German OP in the woods to their left was bringing down effective fire and a steady stream of “moaning minnies”. The CO Lt Col GD Renny was wounded twice but refused to go back, the Jocks were now suffering from thirst and the intense heat.

The message was received that 8th Bde had cleared the village of Sannerville, the CO ordered the advance towards Troarn, in the lead D Company moved across the fields into the village and pressed beyond.

The Germans now reacted viciously the lead Platoon of D Coy ran into accurate Mortar fire as it emerged from the eastern exits of Sannerville and as the rest of the BN moved into the village they came under fire from 88mm and snipers. As daylight began to fade the Rifle Companies edged their way forward through farmyards and along the railway line. Control was difficult the rubble and destruction was everywhere, the Jocks were fatigued, and the only consolation was that the Germans were confused as well with many prisoners being taken.

It was clear that the Germans knew the intentions of the Borderers to take Troarn and he made vigorous attempts to delay the advance with effective Artillery and Mortar fire. He used his local knowledge to site numerous booby traps, B and D Companies were hit hard, and C Company were hit hard from the area of a signal box and sunken road which had been fortified.

By last light the Borderers had pushed the Germans from the orchards and farms between Sannerville and Troarn but were held up by well sited machine guns along the sunken road and various strongpoints on the edge of town.

Casualties were mounting and could not be moved to the rear, rations, water and ammunition were running low, and nothing could get forward due to the terrain. The Borderers were ordered to dig in and attack again in the morning.

A difficult night ensued continual enemy fire, fatigue meant many men never dug in, the mosquitoes descended and the many wounded suffered in pain. The enemy brought in fresh troops and strengthened his position and sent out patrols against A Company inflicting casualties.

First light saw the arrival of food and supplies, through the night bulldozers had been out making the routes passable. The BN now prepared to attack with A&C Companies to lead and secure the junction while B Company would go through to secure the main part of the town, D Company would secure the bridges and eastern exits. At 1030 the gunners put down a 15 minute mission on the sunken road after which the companies moved forward under cover of the railway embankment.

The attack failed.

On the line of the sunken road well sited and disciplined German machine gunners held their fire until C Company were in the open then poured fire into them. On the right A Company were halted by mortar fire, the tanks in support were stopped and fired blindly at the enemy. On the Borderers flanks other BNs were halted by an enemy determined to hold Troarn. The Borderers fought hard and acquitted themselves magnificently with A and C Company still advancing doggedly, the CO ordered them to withdraw to their original positions. Orders were given for a fresh attack from the South at this point the Brigade Commander arrived and gave orders to cancel the attack, to dig in and hold this position and for the CO to evacuate to the rear for treatment to his wounds.

This important action as part of OPERATION GOODWOOD (the destruction of German men and materiel and expand the Allied bridgehead East of the Orne) had cost the 1st BN 152 casualties (12 Offrs, 140 ORs) and would be remembered by the Borderers as a place of great tribulation and discomfort.

ONCE A BORDERER ALWAYS A BORDERER