

ACCOUNT OF THE PART PLAYED BY 'C' COMPANY 5TH BATTALION OF THE SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS
IN THE BATTLE FOR THE VILLAGE OF GROIN, GERMANY.
ON 25th MARCH, 1945

My orders were to attack and secure the farm buildings at 2. And the buildings in the main street of the village at 4., with the final objective of taking up a position astride the main road, this preventing the Germans from reinforcing or withdrawing on that axis.

I decided to attack both objectives at the same time – 13 Platoon under LT. Stone to attack the farm buildings on the right and 14 Platoon, under Sgt. Goldney, to engage the buildings on the street to the left.

15 platoon I held in reserve with COY HQ.

There was a great deal of shooting going on in 13 Platoon Area, and, in the absence of any progress report, I decided to go forward with my runner to find out what was happening. I managed to contact Lt. Stone, in a shallow slit trench in one of the back gardens.

He reported that the first building had been cleared, but on working their way towards the second building, his men walked into a very heavy concentration of Spandau and grenades. They were badly knocked about, and at least one section had been taken prisoner. At the moment, he could only account for 8 men. The position was extremely grave, and it was evident that immediate action was required. I had just informed him that I would send the reserve platoon under Lt. Rhodes on a right hook, with a view to getting behind the objective, when a stick grenade exploded about three yards away, and a number of Germans appeared round the corner of the nearest building, firing automatic weapons and shouting as they came.

I took to my feet and cleared a four-foot hedge, landing in a heap in the field on the other side. My runner landed beside me, and was about to get to his feet, when I grabbed him and told him to stay where he was and not move. There was a shell hole nearby, and we slipped in and turned to face the foe.

I could clearly see the faces of the five Germans as they approached because of the firelight's glow from the burning buildings. When the leader was abreast of us, he was no more than 10 feet away. I had already decided not to get involved unless absolutely necessary, deciding that, in this instance, discretion was the better part of valour. Consider the set up.

There were two of us and five of them. I had a revolver and my runner had a rifle, while they had automatic weapons. Not only were we outnumbered we were outgunned. I let them move on for thirty or forty yards and then instructed my runner to make his way back to COY HQ. He did not require a second bidding! He took off smartly, and I followed a few seconds later. I had only gone a few yards, when there was a sudden burst of fire from behind us, and I at first thought we had been spotted. However, we managed to reach Coy HQ without mishap. It was not until hours later that I found out what happened to the 5 Germans. It appears that after they had passed us, they found an opening in the hedge, and came through and continued in the direction of 14 Platoon. They then had the misfortune to run into Sgt. Goldney's Bren guns. The burst of fire I had heard on my way to HQ had been fired by one of my own guns! Three Germans were killed, one wounded and the fifth was taken prisoner.

I ordered Lt. Rhodes to carry out a right hook on the farm buildings at 2. The attack fared no better than Lt. Stone's and eventually the remnants of the platoon withdrew without their Platoon Commander, who had been wounded in the elbow. He eventually got back under his own steam.

It was now obvious to me that the farm buildings were very strongly held, and I decided to reinforce success and concentrate on the main street buildings at 4. I collected the survivors of the other Platoons and went forward to contact Sgt. Goldney, who was making slow but steady progress. I explained to him that it was necessary to clear all the buildings and get astride the main road before dawn. This was eventually achieved, but Sgt. Goldney was tragically killed in the process. I now had only one Platoon commander left, but had the satisfaction of knowing that the centre of the village was securely held.

Captain Jock Gardiner O.C. 'D' Company came forward and informed me that Colonel Sym had given him the choice of attacking the buildings at 2 and 7 or going for the original objectives of 5 and 6. Jock said that he had decided to go for 2 and 7, and that he would attack from my firm base.

The attack on the village was carried out under very trying conditions.

Many of the buildings were on fire with roofs caving in.

Some of the buildings had cattle trapped inside and the stench of burning hide and flesh was quite nauseating.

As the men moved from building to building their figures were silhouetted and made them much easier targets than they would have been, had it been a dark night. Looking back after 50 years it seems remarkable that the troops performed so valiantly under the circumstances.

O.C. 'C' Coy.