

Descriptif résumé de l'Opération Loyton

(Extrait de « Missing Parachutists », rapport du major Barkworth 2ème SAS)

2nd S.A.S. OPERATION LOYTON

Both these operations were planned and mounted during the late summer and autumn of 1944. They were intended to disorganise the enemy's rearward communications during the retreat, and the hitherto swift advance of the Americans made it appear probable that the area would be overrun by the end of September.

Loyton was planned to be operationally complementary to the Maquis activity, although entirely separate organisation was maintained. A Jedburgh team from Special Forces, consisting of Capt. Gough, Capt. Barreaux and Sjt. Seymour, was attached for the purpose of liaison with the French, and such matters as the reception of parachute supplies were organised with French assistance.

The S.A.S. advance party dropped on the night of 12/13 August near La Petite Raon. Within four days the area had become extremely unhealthy as a result of the organisation directed by Schneider (see page 11).

In a series of small actions fought on the high wooded ground between Moussey and the Plaine valley during the period 17/18 August, Pct. Hall Sjt. Lodge, Sjt. Davis and Sjt. Seymour became separated. Sjt Seymour had sprained his ankle on the drop and had been carried on a stretcher by four French. Seymour and Hall were taken prisoner on 17th August, and Sjt. Davis was captured early on 20th August at Le Sauley. (See cases 2, 3 and 4, and Chapter 6).

By the night 1/2 September the advance party had reorganised sufficiently to receive the first group of the main body commanded by Lieut. Col. Franks, at a D.Z. near Veney, and the second followed a week later at a D.Z. near Pexonne. From this second parachutage Sjt. Fitzpatrick, Pct. Conway and Pct. Elliott did not contact their stick commander on landing. They must have been carried further by the wind. Elliott broke his thigh, and the three hid near the farm of La Fosse at Pexonne where they were captured on the 16th Sept. (see case 5 page 65).

So much activity in the northwestern foothills had again provoked enemy retaliation and about the 9th of September it was decided to transfer the main body from Pierre Percee to the Moussey area, where conditions appeared to be quieter. A rendezvous was given at Lac de la Maix.

Meanwhile three men, Sjt. Terry-Hall, Cpl. Ivison and Pct. Crosier lost touch with the rest of their group during an action against enemy transport on the Col de la Chapelotte, and sheltered at the house of the scierie La Turbine. Here they were joined by the party under Lieut. Black who was on his way to the rendezvous at Lac de la Maix. A French informer who had seen the first three men at the scierie La Turbine, brought back a S.D. detachment, and this group of eight was captured after an exchange of fire (see case 6 page 69)

Pet. Griffin who had lost his way shortly after leaving Pierre Percee arrived at the R.V. before the agreed time and was captured alone (see case 11 and chapter VI page 48).

The following weeks were reasonably successful for S.A.S. and jeep reinforcements were dropped on a very difficult D.Z. near Moussey.

The bad weather and impossible flying conditions which hindered the despatch of supply aircraft, coupled with the difficulty of selecting D.Zs free of enemy supervision in such unsuitable terrain added however to the difficulties of the operation.

At the beginning of October as the American advance had been halted West of the River Meurthe, S.A.S. Brigade instructed Lieut. Col, Franks to exfiltrate his party.

During this withdrawal Pct. Brown was captured near Senones by the German crew of a captured S.A.S. jeep (see case 8).

Pct. Puttick is listed as missing. He must also have been taken prisoner as he was seen at Etival under guard of the Kommando Wenger (see case 10).

Lieut. Silly and Pct. Lewis were made prisoner near the crossing of the River Meurthe (see cases 8 and 9).

Capt. Gough who was on a detached mission and a Frenchman Henri de Bouvier fell into enemy hands at the beginning of October (see case 11 and chapter VI page 48).

When the main body left Moussey area to cross the lines, a small rear party of 6 was left under Lieut. Dill to await the return of Sjt. Neville and two men, who were on a detached operation near the Col du Hantz at the time the order was received.

Unfortunately this rear party was attacked and surrounded by a detachment from an armoured division believed to have been an S.S. Panzer unit, and was made prisoner. (See Cases 7 and 11, also chapter VI page 48.)

Sjt. Neville and his two men were taken prisoner a day or two later, probably in the area of la Petite Raon.

Major Reynolds, who had been wounded in the hand and the head during an ambush against German transport, remained at Pierre Percee with Capt. Whatley Smith. Both were captured at La Trouche near Raon l'Etape on the 30th October. The difficulties of this operation should not be underestimated. The weather in the autumn of 1944 was particularly wet and cold. Food was short as aerial resupply was difficult in the mountainous country during bad weather, and suitable D.Zs were hard to find.

Between 90 and 100 all ranks were employed, of whom 31 were taken prisoner. Only one has returned.