

Private 3975654

## **Geoffrey Worgan Phillips**

The Parachute Regiment, A.A.C. 1st Battalion

1923 - 1944

Private Geoffrey Worgan Phillips was initially posted to the Army Air Corps on enlistment and died at Arnhem 18<sup>th</sup> September 1944, aged 21, participating in Operation MARKET GARDEN.

### **Airborne Forces**

In 1940 Sir Winston Churchill, prompted by the successful use of the parachute and glider forces by the Germans, ordered the training and formation of an airborne force of 5,000 troops. The success of early British airborne operations prompted the War Office to expand the existing airborne force, setting up the Airborne Forces Depot and Battle School in Derbyshire in April 1942, and creating the Parachute Regiment. The fledgling force received another boost following the German success in the Battle of Crete, when the War Office issued a communiqué stating that officers and men in any regiment or corps, may apply for transfer to a parachute or glider-borne unit of the Airborne Forces.

In 1942 the Glider Pilot Regiment (GPR), the Parachute Regiment and later the Special Air Service (SAS) were formed under the banner of the Army Air Corps (AAC). It was decided that a glider-borne force should complement the paratroops. Troops were loaded into gliders which were towed into areas behind the enemy's front line. Each glider needed to have sufficient capacity to airlift a platoon of infantry, or a jeep and gun with its detachment. Larger gliders would be needed for freight and ammunition. The glider pilots then fought as infantry soldiers after landing. As the gliders were made mainly from timber the furniture industry was mobilised to manufacture them.

The Horsa glider was used operationally for the first time on 19th November 1942 for the famous raid, Operation FRESHMAN, on the Vemork Heavy Water plant in Norway, portrayed in the 1965 feature film "The Heroes of Telemark". Unfortunately both Horsas and one towing Halifax aircraft were lost in appalling conditions. A more qualified success was achieved when large numbers of gliders were used in the invasion of Sicily in July 1943.

The next major glider borne operation was as part of the invasion of Normandy. Some 250 Horsas and Hamilcar gliders were then employed later on 6th June 1944 to deliver troops and supplies behind enemy lines in the early hours of D-Day. The successful capture of the bridges across the Orne River and Caen Canal (Pegasus Bridge) with these glider borne troops in the early hours of D Day, is one of the most celebrated successes of Operation OVERLORD.

# Operation Market Garden

The immense risks taken by these new glider borne troops was demonstrated in September 1944, during Operation MARKET GARDEN at Arnhem when the overall strength of the GPR was reduced by a third due to troops being either captured or killed.

Field Marshal Montgomery's strategic goal was to encircle the heart of German industry, the Ruhr, in a pincer movement. The northern end of the pincer would circumvent the northern end of the Siegfried Line giving easier access into Germany. The aim of Operation MARKET GARDEN was to establish the northern end of a pincer ready to project deeper into Germany. Allied forces would project north from Belgium, 60 miles (97 km) through the Netherlands, across the Rhine and consolidate north of Arnhem on the Dutch/German border ready to close the pincer.

*Waves of paratroops land in Holland*

The operation made massed use of airborne forces, whose tactical objectives were to secure the bridges and allow a rapid advance by armoured ground units to consolidate north of Arnhem. The operation required the seizure of the bridges across the Maas (Meuse River), two arms of the Rhine (the Waal and the Lower Rhine) together with crossings over several smaller canals and tributaries.

Several bridges between Eindhoven and Nijmegen were captured at the beginning of the operation. Lieutenant-General Brian Horrocks' XXX Corps ground force advance was delayed by the initial failure of the airborne units to secure bridges at Son and Nijmegen.

At the furthest point of the airborne operation at Arnhem, the British 1st Airborne Division encountered initial strong resistance. The delays in capturing the bridges at Son and Nijmegen gave time for German forces, including the 9th and 10th SS panzer divisions to organize and retaliate. Immortalised in the film "A Bridge Too Far", Arnhem was the scene of bloody fighting involving an advance force of British airborne forces which eventually proved to be beyond the reach of reinforcements due to a combination of bad weather and dogged German defence.

*Four men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Paratroop Battalion at Arnhem take cover in a shell hole 17th Sept 1944*

In the ensuing battle, only a small force managed to capture the north end of the Arnhem road bridge and after the ground forces failed to relieve them, the paratroopers were overrun on 21st September. The remainder of the 1st Airborne Division were trapped in a small pocket west of the bridge, having to be evacuated on 25th September.

## Memorials

Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery contains the graves of most of those killed during the September landings, and many of those killed in later fighting in the area.

There are now 1,691 Commonwealth servicemen of the Second World War buried or commemorated in the cemetery. 245 of the burials are unidentified and two casualties are commemorated by special memorials. There are also 79 Polish, three Dutch and four non-war graves in the cemetery.

PHILLIPS GEOFFREY WORGAN United Kingdom Private '3975654' The Parachute Regiment, A.A.C. 18-9-1944 21 1. C. 20.

Geoffrey is also remembered on a plaque in Langstone Village Hall.

The Newport cenotaph was unveiled by Lord Tredegar in June 1923, to commemorate the local people who died in active service in the First World War. It now also commemorates people who died in subsequent wars. There are no names on the memorial but Private 3975654 Geoffrey Worgan Phillips's name appears on the listing.