

Major Oliver Peter HAIG.

1st Airborne Division, Divisional Headquarters. Divisional Assistant Provost Marshal.



Commissioned into the 4th (Territorial) Battalion of the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in June 1939, he was mobilised and served with the Battalion in France and Belgium in 1940. Returning to the UK he later transferred to the Reconnaissance Corps serving alongside the 52nd in the 31st Infantry Brigade (Later 1st Airlanding Brigade).

At Arnhem he was the Divisional Assistant Provost Marshal and commanded the 1st (Airborne) Divisional Provost Company, Corps of Military Police.

Twice wounded he was evacuated across the Rhine during the withdrawal of the remnants of the Division.

In the February 1945 edition of the Regimental Journal (Vol 17 Number 96) appeared an article on the battle that he had written and is quoted below:-

“I was with part of the Parachute element of Divisional HQ. and we were detailed to drop on D plus one (September 18th, 1944), our dropping zone being about six miles to the west of Arnhem and just north of the river. As the main landings had been carried out the previous day the Boche had started to react and we ran into a curtain of flak over a wood on the way in and three planes were shot down. We landed in the right place but found we were under fire, not heavy, but sufficient to be unpleasant, perhaps because we hadn't had time to get acclimatized. It turned out to be some S.S. youngsters who were doing the shooting and they soon shut up when they saw the form.

Well, that all took a bit of sorting out and it was not until later on in the evening that I managed to make my way to Divisional HQ. which was about three miles nearer the town. On the way up we passed the remains of the German area commander half out of his car; whoever shot him up had made certain of him. I believe he was a major-general. I found the rest of my party, who had arrived the previous day by glider, intact including the jeep, but at this time the general was missing and "Pip" Hicks of the Air Landing Brigade was running the show. There were quite a few prisoners coming in; about 120 at that time. There wasn't any-where much to keep them though we put them on some hard tennis courts surrounded by the usual sort of wire netting. They were a pretty mixed bag of S.S. and Wehrmacht; their ages ranged from 17 to 20, then a gap up to 40. One S.S. officer, who turned out to be the Kaiser's valet, was 56. We also collected 4 women; one was an A.T.S. or whatever the Boche equivalent may be. She washed the socks and did a bit of cooking and in her spare time made herself a blouse out of parachute silk obtained from the reserve supply drop. These domestic arrangements we found rather complicated, but this was left for the Polish interpreter to deal with.

The weather on the whole was not good, and the Polish Parachute Brigade, which should have turned up on the third day, could not take off. They finally dropped on the south side of the river on the fourth day and were immediately involved in a battle, and all efforts to get them across the river seemed fruitless and in the end only a very few were got across. The reserve supply also broke down. In the first place on account of the weather and secondly due to the concentration of flak and the very limited area left to them in which to drop. Nevertheless they put up a wonderful show and although towards the end most of it went to the Boche, we did get a bit. As time passed things became rather unpleasant as the enemy produced more men and equipment, including tanks, Sp guns and flame throwers, all of which were difficult for us to deal with. We had on the other hand by this time artillery support from the south side of the river, which really saved our skins. Mortaring and shelling became very heavy.

Air Landing Brigade HQ. got an unlucky hit by a "moaning minnie" which went in the door and killed some of the staff, including Moy Thomas. I stopped a piece of a mortar which burst in a tree while I was digging out my trench on the last day but one. By D plus 8 we were in not too good shape. Certain types of ammunition had run out and no rations had been issued for three days, water had to be carried from a well. The water was dirty and the excursion dangerous. At 1500 hrs on September 26th, 1944, we were ordered to withdraw across the river that same night. The withdrawal itself was a bit tricky as we held barely a thousand yards of the river bank and the last few hundred yards were very exposed. The thing was only made possible by the fact that two companies of the Dorsets had managed to get over to the north side during the previous night and their efforts together with a terrific barrage kept the Boche busy. It was a dirty wet night which was in our favour too. At this point the river is about 150 yards across and there were some Canadian sappers from 43rd Division working some boats. Having crossed the river we made our way Nijmegen, the first 5 or 6 miles on foot, then by Duck and finally by lorry, arriving in the early hours of the morning of September 27th.

After spending a couple of nights there we were whistled back to Louvain and flown home from Brussels Airport on the afternoon of September 30th, the whole party having lasted just a fortnight."