Biography- Private Thomas Farrage, 138613

‘D’ Company, 10th Battalion

KIA 19th September 1944

Thomas Oysten Farrage (3 November 1917 – 23 September 1944)

Tom was born in Chopwell, near Blaydon (then part of County Durham) to parents Robert and Isabella Farrage (nee Oram).

In the late 1930s, Tom’s family lived at 6, Front Street, High Spen, Co Durham and consisted of elder brothers Robert b.1908, James b.1910, and Stephen b.1916, who, together with their father, were all miners, and sisters Martha b.1918, Florence b.1915, Beulah b.1920, and Joan b.1922.

Outline Military career

Tom initially enlisted during the early period of the war with the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC), before eventually transferring to the Parachute Regiment in the mid-summer of 1943.

In the early summer of that year, together with several others from his RASC unit, Tom applied for and was accepted to attend the Airborne Training Centre (ATC) at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire. There, he undertook the initial two-week assessment and aptitude course, which he passed with flying colours — earning the opportunity to progress to the next stage of becoming a fully-fledged paratrooper.

The demand for trained parachutists was particularly high that summer, as plans were already underway to recall most Airborne units from the various European theatres, as soon as the Italy invasion campaign was concluded, in readiness for the planned invasion of Western Europe in early 1944. There was no shortage of volunteers, not least because parachutists received higher pay — known as ‘jump pay’ — than the average soldier. Many were drawn by the prestige of serving in elite formations such as the Parachute Regiment, the Commandos, or the Special Air Service.

Most Airborne units were massively understrength on their return to the UK and required immediate reinforcement. It was for this reason that the increased recruitment and training of UK-based potential paratroopers — of which Tom was one —started to take place from early summer 943 onwards in readiness to supplement these returning paratrooper units.

After completing the course at Hardwick Hall, Tom progressed to the parachuting training phase, attending Course 94/95 at RAF Ringway (now Manchester Airport) in December 1943. He successfully passed the course and was subsequently posted to the 10th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, in early January 1944, shortly after the battalion's return to the UK from operations in Italy.

Tom was assigned to 'D' Company, which was billeted in the village of Burrough on the Hill, Leicestershire — one of several local villages accommodating the 10th Battalion.

For the first five months of 1944, training and preparation for the forthcoming invasion of Western Europe continued relentlessly. The 10th Battalion, as part of the 1st Airborne Division, did not participate in the D-Day airborne landings but was held in tactical reserve to the 6th Airborne Division, which had been selected to spearhead the D-Day operation.

Frustratingly, from June to September in the period after the Normandy invasion, Tom and his fellow comrades endured the cancellation of fifteen planned operations before they were finally called into action in September 1944 for Operation Market Garden — better known to the British as the Battle of Arnhem, and later infamously described as "A Bridge Too Far".

Operation Market Garden - Summary

The objective of the operation was for the 1st Allied Airborne Army — comprising 1st British Airborne Division, the American 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, and Polish 1st Airborne Brigade — to capture a succession of bridges along a 64-mile corridor in the Netherlands, spanning the key rivers and canals along the route.

Effectively, they were to lay an 'airborne carpet' over which the advancing British XXX Corps could strike into the industrial heartland of Germany. Arnhem bridge — 64 miles from the start point — was the furthest objective to be reached by the ground forces, and the objective was to reach and relieve the 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem within 60 to 72 hours. They failed.

The beleaguered 1st Airborne Division, facing fierce pressure from ever-increasing German units — whilst their own force shrank daily — held out for nine days, until its surviving elements were forced to evacuate back across the Rhine into Allied-held territory.

Of the 582 men from the 10th Battalion who landed at Arnhem, only 37 were rescued during the evacuation. Ninety-three were killed in action (including Tom), around 400 were wounded and/or taken prisoner, and the remainder became evaders — many aided by Dutch civilians and the underground resistance to eventually make their way back to Britain.

Tom Farrage at the Battle of Arnhem

Note: see attached battle maps

Tom and the whole of the 10th Battalion departed for Operation Market Garden from Spanhoe Airfield at around 11:00 on Monday, 18th September, as part of the '2nd Lift' [the 1st Lift took place the day before]. They dropped onto Ginkel Heath (DZ-Y) eight miles north-west of Arnhem, at 15:00 local time, and faced a fierce firefight taking place below them.

The Battalion had to fight for possession of their drop-zone (DZ-Y) from the Dutch SS and lost several men in the process.

Held as the 4th Parachute Brigade's 'backstop' overnight on the 18th/19th to protect the Brigade's rear from German forces moving against them from the west, they advanced eastwards into action the following day at 03:30. By mid-morning on the 19th, they and the whole of the 4th Para Brigade were held up by an armoured German SS 'blocking line' which proved impossible to circumvent. **See Map A**

Tom's 'D' Coy was involved in the heavy fighting at the vanguard of the battalion's advance, trying to move alongside the main Amsterdamseweg, where they lost many men. **See Map B**

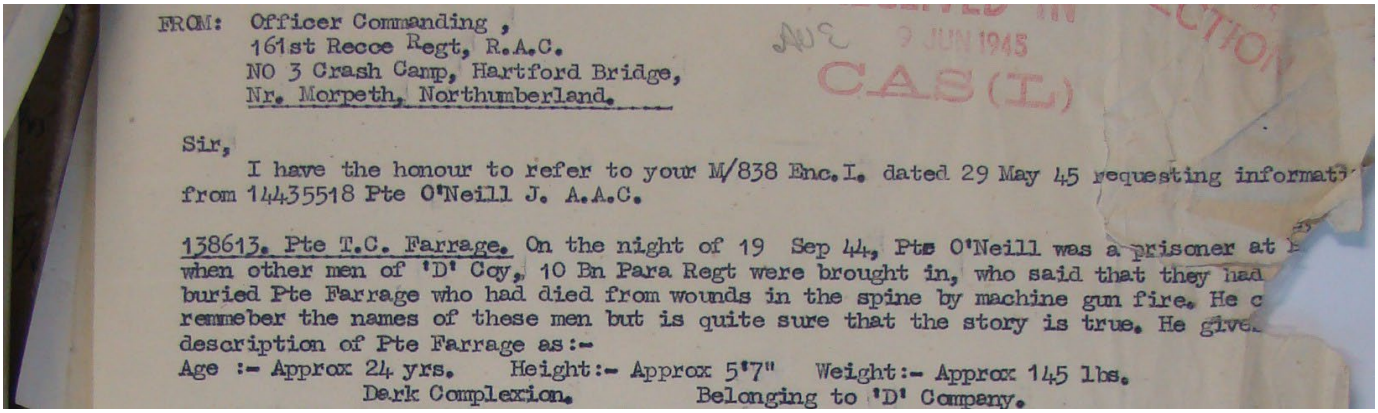
By mid-afternoon, on 19th September, when in danger of the being completely cut off by German forces advancing from their rear, the battalion were ordered to withdraw to ***Wolfheze*** rail crossing and hold this point to protect the rest of the Brigade attempting to cross the rail line into the relative safety of the southern side: from there they would move into the Divisional Perimeter, at the time being formed around the Hartenstein Hotel in Oosterbeek.

The withdrawal across open ground while being harried and pursued by German forces was disastrous for both the Battalion and the Brigade, which consequently began to disintegrate. During the fighting and subsequent withdrawal to Wolfheze on this day, the Battalion ***incurred the highest daily death toll of any British airborne unit which fought at Arnhem.***

During the late afternoon/early evening of the 19th, the Battalion was deliberately split up into smaller fighting groups in and around the village of Wolfheze to defend the village and it was either here, or while attempting to reach the village crossing Landing Zone -L that Tom was probably fatally shot in the back by a burst of machine gun fire and later lost his life.

There is no known definitive report which specifically identifies the location and burial of Tom. A small number of men who died this day were apparently quickly buried by their comrades in unmarked makeshift graves, and, still to this day, their bodies remain undiscovered. These men are commemorated at Groesbeek Memorial, near Nijmegen. Tom's name appears on Panel 9.

Although his death is recorded as the 23rd Sept, there is strong evidence to the contrary and that he died of his wounds on the 19th Sept when the Battalion were retreating from the 'blocking line' or moving towards and around Wolfheze. This is supported by the testimony of a fellow 'D' Coy comrade, Private James O'Neill, already wounded and a POW on the night of the 19th Sept, who formally responded to War Office enquiries about missing men and comments about Tom's demise.



FROM: Officer Commanding ,
161st Recce Regt, R.A.C.
NO 3 Crash Camp, Hartford Bridge,
Nr. Morpeth, Northumberland.

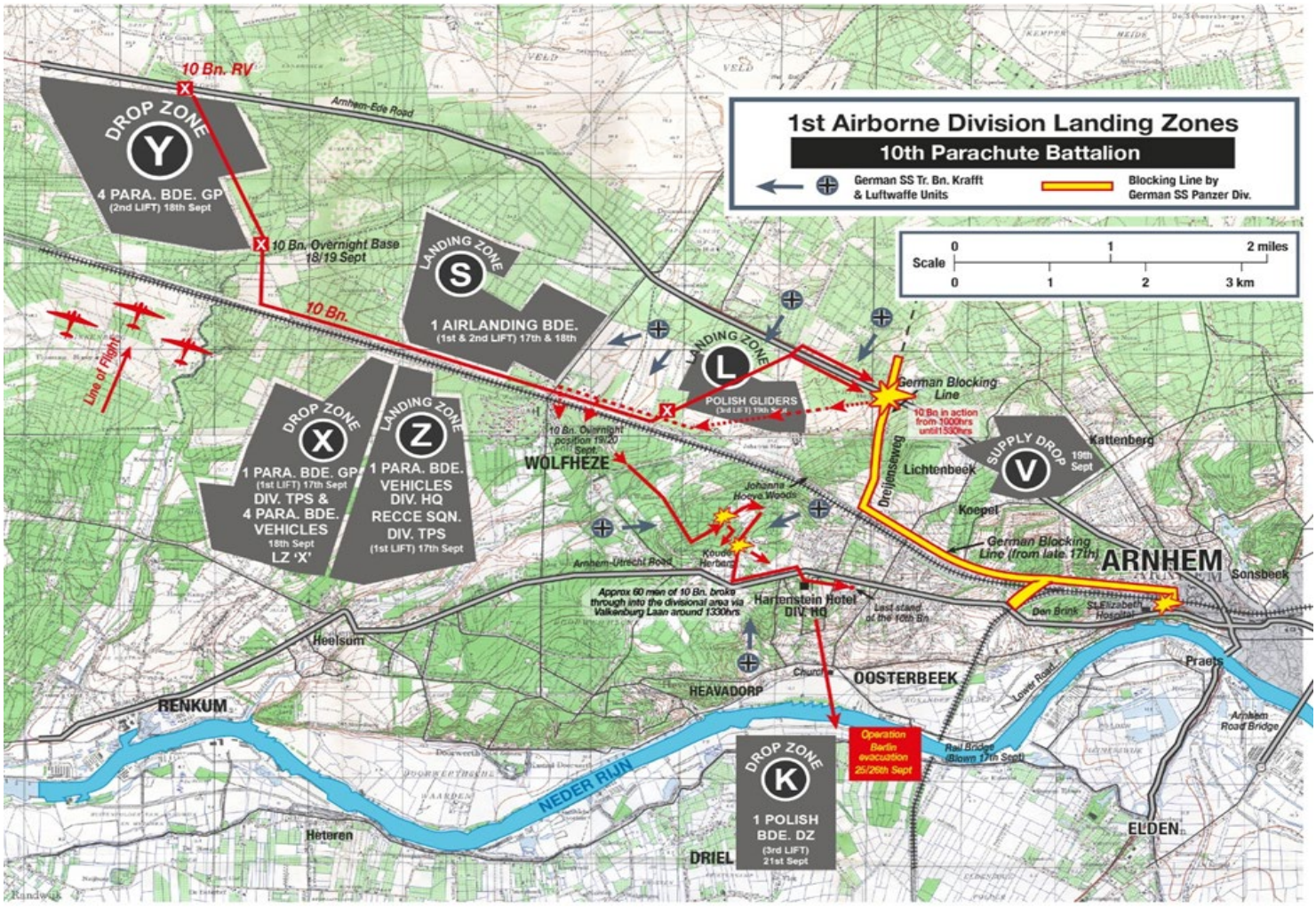
9 JUN 1945
CAS (I)

Sir,

I have the honour to refer to your M/838 Enc.I. dated 29 May 45 requesting informat
from 14435518 Pte O'Neill J. A.A.C.

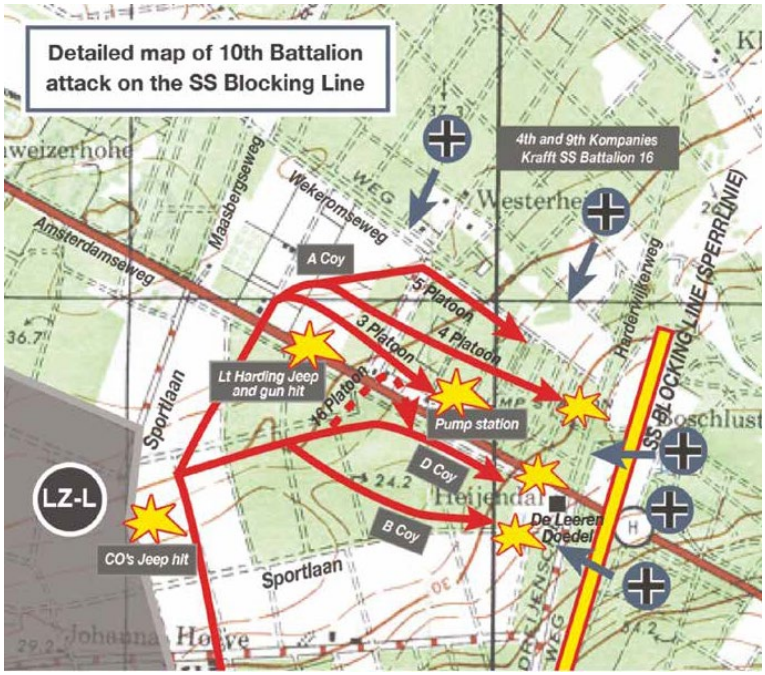
138613. Pte T.C. Farrage. On the night of 19 Sep 44, Pte O'Neill was a prisoner at
when other men of 'D' Coy, 10 Bn Para Regt were brought in, who said that they had
buried Pte Farrage who had died from wounds in the spine by machine gun fire. He c
remmeber the names of these men but is quite sure that the story is true. He give
description of Pte Farrage as:-
Age :- Approx 24 yrs. Height:- Approx 5'7" Weight:- Approx 145 lbs.
Dark Complexion. Belonging to 'D' Company.

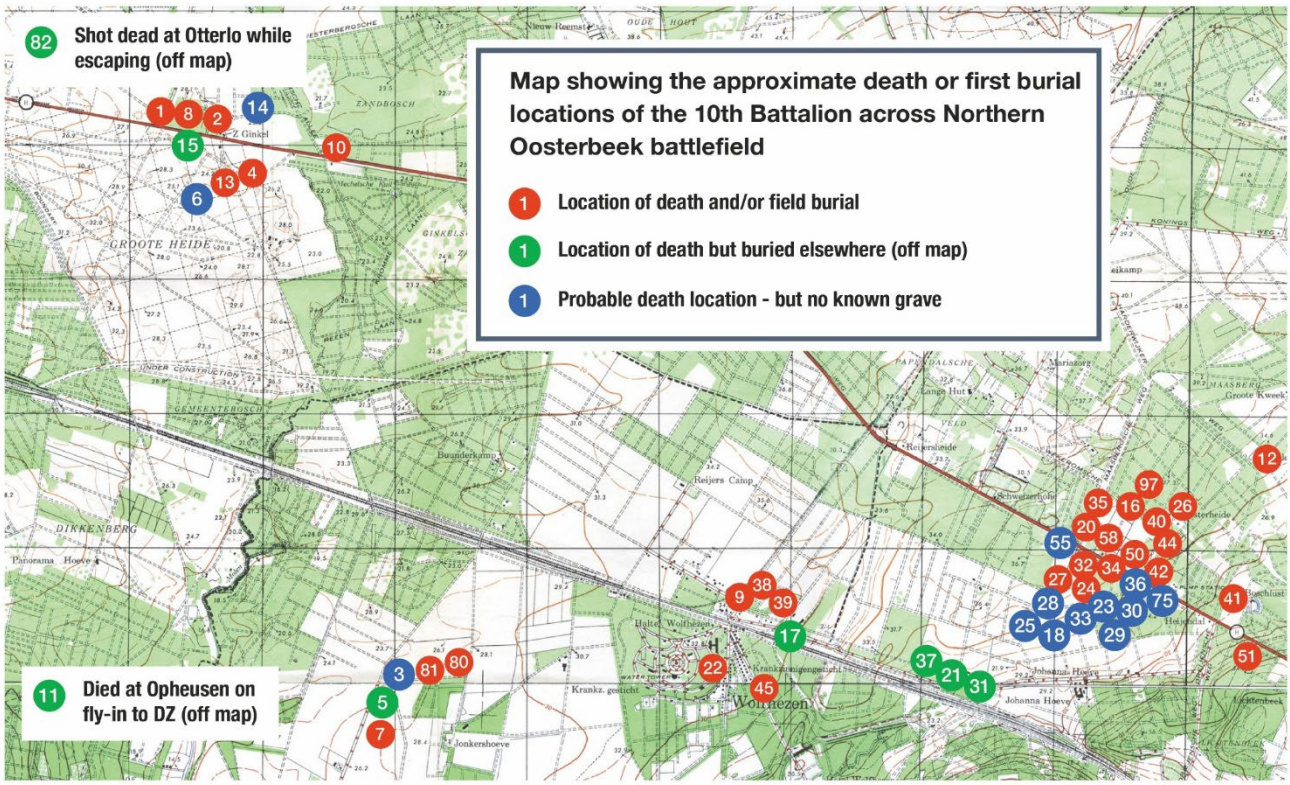
Map A



Map B

Advance of Tom's 'D' Coy against the 'blocking line' 0930-1500 19th September





This map shows the actual or approximate locations of where the dead of the 10th Battalion fell or were buried during 18th-19th September.

Tom Farrage is shown as #75 in a blue circle. He could have fallen anywhere between the shown location or between # 9 to #17 if he made it back to near Wolfheze.

The number of blue circles (total of 9) in the area where the majority of deaths occurred are all 'no known graves' which is significant in terms of Tom's possible death location