

THE EXCEPTIONAL WW2 6TH AIRBORNE DIVISION 'NORMANDY LANDINGS' M.M. AND 'DJEBEL MANSOUR' CASUALTY GROUP AWARDED TO AND NCO FOR HIS GALLANTRY IN SAVING THE LIFE OF A FELLOW SOLDIER UNDER HEAVY FIRE AT AIRBORNE H.Q, RANVILLE, 9 JUNE 1944. LANDING IN NORMANDY IN THE EARLY HOURS OF D-DAY, HE AND HIS OFFICER WERE THE ONLY SURVIVORS 24 HOURS LATER. PREVIOUSLY, HE HAD SERVED WITH THE 1ST PARACHUTE BRIGADE IN NORTH AFRICA 1942-3, THIS THE FIRST LARGE SCALE DEPLOYMENT OF BRITISH AIRBORNE TROOPS DURING WW2. HERE WAS WOUNDED IN ACTION DURING THE BITTER FIGHTING AT DJEBEL MANSOUR MOUNTAIN, TUNISIA, 4 FEBRUARY 1943



MILITARY MEDAL, G.V.I.R. '7377858 CPL. R. E. JERMEY. R.A.M.C.', 1939-45 STAR; AFRICA STAR AND 1ST ARMY CLASP, FRANCE AND GERMANY STAR, WAR MEDAL 1939-45

M.M. *London Gazette* 19 October 1944.

The recommendation states: 'On 9 June 1944 Divisional Headquarters at 1073 (France 1/100,000, Sheet 7F) was heavily shelled and mortared from 1920 to 2030 hours. About 20 casualties were sustained. Corporal Jermey, after attending to one of these casualties who was bleeding badly from a leg wound, carried the casualty on his own, using the Firemans Lift, to the Main Dressing Station, 500 yards away as no vehicles with stretchers were available at the time. Although shells were literally bursting all round him he never faltered. On two occasions he and his patient were knocked down by the blast of the shells but he collected his patient and carried on immediately. In this case he undoubtedly saved the patient's life as the nature of the wound was such that immediate surgical interference was necessary. His complete disregard for personal safety combined with his coolness and determination has been an example to all ranks.'

Robert Ernest Jerney, was born in Bury St Edmunds on 13 August 1917 and was a married carpenter at Lewes Prison, Sussex. He enlisted into the Royal Army Medical Corps on 18 April 1940 and initially served with 133 Field Ambulance from 26 June 1940, before transferring to 16 Parachute Field Ambulance (PFA) on 13 April 1942, which was the first Parachute Field Ambulance unit to be formed. Interestingly, his old unit soon after converted to airborne itself, being renamed 133 Parachute Field Ambulance.



Attending parachute course 14 at Ringway, which ran between 25 May and 4 June 1942, Jerney was promoted Acting Corporal on 19 June. He served in North Africa from 30 October 1942 and from at least February 1943 was batman to Lt Colonel Malcolm MacEwan, Commanding officer of 16 PFA. MacEwan was a decorated ex WW1 fighter pilot, nicknamed 'Technicolor' due to the number of award ribbons he wore:

https://www.pegasusarchive.org/normandy/malcolm_macewan.htm

16 PFA, with a strength of just 177 (all ranks), was the medical unit that formed part of the 1st Parachute Brigade which took part in Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa in early November 1942. The Brigade, which was the only British parachute unit to be deployed in North Africa, saw constant action over the next 7 months, this being the first major deployment of British airborne forces during the war. Elements of 16 PFA took part in the parachute drops at Bone airfield, Beja and Depienne, before the parachute troops settled into the role of fighting as infantry for the rest of the campaign.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th_\(Parachute\)_Field_Ambulance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/16th_(Parachute)_Field_Ambulance)

1ST PARACHUTE BATTALION'S BATTLE FOR DJEBEL MANSOUR

'On 2 February the 1st Parachute battalion assaulted Djebel Mansour Mountain with No. 1 Section attached. The ground was unsuitable for vehicles and the section could only take what they could carry by hand. The terrain also hindered casualty evacuation and it took ten hours, to bring the wounded from the front line to the medical post, by which time the stretcher bearers could go no further. In the situation Lieutenant-Colonel MacEwan, brought the remainder of 16 PFA forward to assist with the wounded, No.4 Section being sent to the top of Djebel Mansour. MacEwan established a relay of stretcher bearers that cut the evacuation from the top of the mountain down to three hours. The battle continued until 5 February and by that time everyone not involved in surgery, apart from three men were used as stretcher bearers. By the end of the battle the men of 16 PFA had treated 201 casualties.'

It was towards the end of the battle, on 4 February 1942 that Corporal Jerney was wounded. Colonel MacEwan's report for the operations, 2-5 February 1943 is published in full in the superb 'Red Berets and Red Crosses' by Niall Cherry and here MacEwan describes the events leading to Jerney's wounding:

"..When there was an apparent lull in firing, I called for four volunteer stretcher bearers and accompanied by Captain Wright, I went forward to the Ravine Post to see what damage had been done. As soon as we started to cross the open ground, the enemy opened up again and the fire became so intense we had to turn back. I sent Captain Wright and the stretcher bearers back to Post 'B' but as I was very worried about the fate of the ravine, I went forward with my servant. Believing that two individuals would not draw their fire as much as a group. In this, however, I was mistaken but we got through and found the post intact. As I came away from the post, the enemy dive bombed the ravine and my servant, Corporal Jerney was wounded. We again went back to the Ravine Post and found it still intact..."



How long it took Jerney to recuperate after being wounded is not known, his service records do not mention but he was not evacuated and remained in North Africa, so presumably he was back at Colonel MacEwan's side relatively quickly.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_airborne_operations_in_North_Africa

TRANSFERRED TO 6TH AIRBORNE AND D-DAY

Posted home on 5 June 1943, Jerney transferred to 224 Parachute Field Ambulance and was confirmed Corporal 17 September 1943. 224 PFA was part of 6th Airborne Division, and it seems Jerney must have transferred Lt Colonel MacEwan, who transferred at the same time to become Officer commanding Headquarters Medical units of the 6th Airborne Division. Jerney remained on Home Service until 5 June 1944, when he landed in France during the early hours of 6 June (D-Day) during Operation Mallard. Jerney is confirmed as being with MacEwan and the small Medical HQ, 6th Airborne, which landed in Glider 81 at 03.15 hrs, the glider was reported to have been hit twice by flak during the crossing. MacEwan's DSO Bar citation tells how

"..Landing by glider in Normandy on the 6th June 1944, he was within 24 hours left with one other rank as the sole survivor of Medical Headquarters"

Clearly this other rank sole survivor was Corporal Jerney, who as batman to MacEwan, would have stayed with the Colonel throughout, as he did at Djebel Mansour until wounded.

MacEwan's DSO Bar citation continues; *"In spite of this tremendous handicap he retained control of his field ambulances. Although working under continuous fire and being frequently isolated in the early stages the medical services continued to work perfectly. During the whole of the division's three months in Normandy, this high standard was maintained although casualties in the medical units exceeded 50%."*

On 9 June 1944, three days after the initial invasion, 6th Airborne Divisional HQ came under intense German artillery and mortar fire, during which Corporal Jerney, his position strafed by exploding shells, courageously left cover to go to the aid of a stricken comrade who was badly wounded in the legs. With complete disregard to his own safety, he firstly applied field dressings then despite shells falling to left and right, hoisted the man onto his back and although knocked down twice from the blasts of exploding shells he, encumbered by the dead weight of his stricken comrade, finally managed to cover the 500 yards to the comparative safety of the Casualty Collection Post and in so doing, certainly saved the man's life. For his outstanding bravery, he was rewarded with the well earned award of the Military Medal.

On 9 June 1944, Headquarters War diary notes:

"Div HQ heavily shelled and mortared, followed by enemy counter attack in the immediate vicinity."

6TH AIRBORNE DIVISIONAL HQ, D-DAY - OPERATION MALLARD

At 03:35, the 6th Airborne Division headquarters landed by glider in the landing-zone cleared by sappers. Only a few gliders missed the landing-zone, due to the poor weather and errors in navigation. Once the headquarters staff and accompanying airborne troops had been gathered together, the headquarters was moved to the Le Bas de Ranville area and set up there. Contact

was established with the headquarters of 5th Parachute Brigade at 05:00, and with the headquarters of 3rd Parachute Brigade at 12:35, and the division linked up with 1st Special Service Brigade as it advanced from the invasion beaches at 13:53.



Mallard was the final wave of the 6th Airborne Division's landings and consisted of 220 Horsa and Hamilcar gliders, carrying the 6th Airlanding Brigade and other units. The gliders arrived at their landing-zone, coming under heavy small-arms and mortar fire from nearby German positions as they landed. Casualties were light and within ninety minutes the glider-borne troops had gathered at their rendezvous points. By 00:00 7 June, the entire 6th Airborne Division had been fully deployed on the eastern flank of the invasion beaches (with the exception of 12th Battalion, Devonshire Regiment – part of 6th Airlanding Brigade – that was due to arrive by sea on 7 June).

The division ended the day with the 3rd Parachute Brigade holding a 4-mile (6.4 km) front, with 9th Parachute Battalion at Le Plein, 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion at Les Mesneil, and the 8th Parachute Battalion in the southern part of the Bois de Bavent. The 5th Parachute Brigade had the 12th Parachute Battalion occupying Le Bas de Ranville, and the 13th Parachute Battalion holding Ranville, while the 7th Parachute Battalion had been moved into reserve. The 6th Airlanding Brigade was poised to commit its two battalions to extend the bridgehead. The 1st Special Service Brigade, which had temporarily come under the command of the division, was holding villages to the north and north-east of DZ N.

The 6th Airborne Division suffered a total of 800 casualties between 5 June and 7 June, out of the 8,500 men deployed.

The Airborne medical units attached to 6th Airborne Division on 6 June 1944, were 195 Airlanding Field Ambulance, 224 Parachute Field Ambulance, and 225 Parachute Field Ambulance. These under overall command of Colonel MacEwan

NORMANDY AND BEYOND

Specifics of Jerney's movements over the next few weeks and months are not known, however, again, it is safe to assume they would have been the same as MacEwan's. Remaining in North West Europe until 27 September 1944, he was one of the men of 6th Airborne who were presented with their Military Medals in the field by Field Marshall Montgomery on 1 September 1944. An official photograph of Montgomery pinning the award to Corporal Jerney's breast can be seen here:



CORPORAL JERNEY BEING AWARDED THE M.M. BY MONTGOMERY

Films of the presentation, held in the IWM archives, can be found here:

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060008473>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060008472>



MEN OF THE 6TH AIRBORNE AT AWARD CEREMONY

Corporal Jermey was then posted back home and was posted to 'Y List' on 30 October 1944 and then to 2 Company on 20 December that year. On 15 May 1945, he was again posted 'Y List' "B" before being rejoining 2 Company 2 weeks later. He was discharged from the army on 19 September 1945, due to being permanently unfit for any form of military service. His medical card notes under disability; 'Anxiety State, Mild, Chronic', which suggests he was likely suffering from PTSD. On discharge, his character was noted as 'Exemplary'

Service papers confirm entitlement to the Military Medal, 1939-45 Star, Africa Star, Clasp 1st Army, France and Germany Star, Defence Medal. His campaign medals issued 27 September 1948. Service noted as 'HQ 6 Airborne Div'

Robert Ernest Jermey died in July 1993, aged 75, at Brentwood, Essex.



Condition GVF. Sold with research (digital), including service papers, M.M. recommendation, history of 16 PFA in North Africa, 6th Airborne reports etc.

Only 67 M.M.s to 6th Airborne for the Normandy campaign, just 3 of which were to PFA units, including Jermey