

‘Ham and Jam’

Many of us will remember watching the famous 1962 film, *The Longest Day*, about the D-Day Normandy landings on the 6th June, 1944. Richard Todd (who, as a paratrooper, jumped that day) played the part of Major John Howard.



pilot, Staff Sergeant Jim Wallwork DFM, who still sported a large scar across his face from being thrown through the cockpit screen on landing. He and the other pilots controlled the ungainly wooden Horsa gliders, swooping down onto the bridges and landing

with such consummate flying skill and accuracy that they took the local German troops completely by surprise.

Pegasus Bridge

The real Major John Howard DSO led an audacious glider-borne attack on two bridges between Bénouville and Ranville with 180 men of D Company, 2nd

Battalion, The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, landing just after midnight on D-Day. The bridges over the Caen Canal and the River Orne were vital links both for the Germans attempting to reinforce the landing beaches and as an essential supply route



for the 6th Airborne Division. Howard and his men secured the objective within ten minutes of landing and held it until relieved. The bridge over the canal was later re-named *Pegasus Bridge* in their perpetual honour. As a young infantry officer I had the privilege of meeting Major Howard and listened spell-bound to him re-tell how in the face of insurmountable odds they achieved their mission and transmitted their famous success signal “Ham and Jam”. I also spent time with Major Howard’s glider-

Shout to the Heavens

Shortly after the battle, John Howard was

severely injured in a road accident, left the army in 1945, and settling in Burcot with his wife, Joy.

He died in 1999, aged 86, and is buried in Clifton Hampden near Oxford. On the 70th Anniversary of the *coup de main*, members of his family, serving and retired members of

the armed services, and children from the local primary school all gathered to remember him and his men at a wreath-laying service at his grave side. Two of his comrades in arms on the bridge, now well into their nineties, were present, surrounded by children asking insightful questions. At the end of a moving service, where the hymn *Abide with Me* was sung with great gusto, everybody present shouted out “Ham and Jam” to the heavens.

Tom Shannon