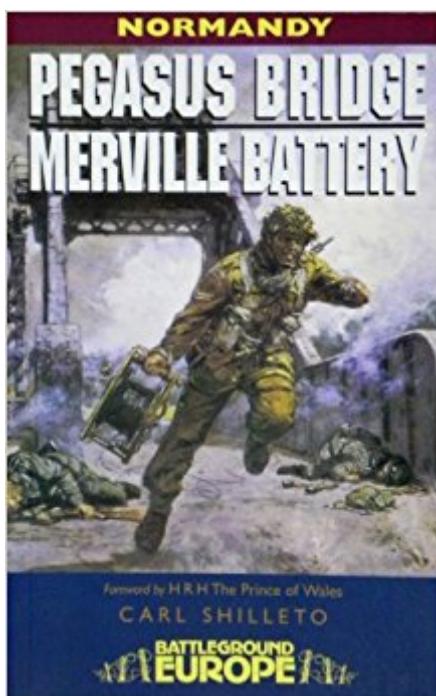


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# Pegasus Bridge And Merville Battery: Normandy (Battleground Europe)



## Synopsis

On D Day, 6th June 1944 the greatest seaborne assault ever was launched against Hitler's Fortress Europe onto the beaches of Normandy. This battlefield guide tells in detail, how these objectives were achieved and relates the battles to the area as it is today. The book contains details of museums, memorials, cemeteries, tours and associated organisations all of which will unravel the history of the area to the visitor and armchair traveller alike.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Good book that doubles as a guidebook for touring the area. I am finding it very useful as I am planning a trip to the area soon. The book is written with a historical description of the action at a specific area followed by a description of the area as it is now, with landmarks and places to visit highlighted.

This volume of the Battleground Europe series covers the actions of the British 6th Airborne Division in Normandy, mostly on 6 June 1944 but with some mention of post-D-Day activities. Obviously, the main focus of the book is on the two most dramatic and successful actions, the capture of Pegasus Bridge and the Merville Battery on D-Day itself. While Pegasus Bridge has certainly been covered in other books, the seizure of the Merville Battery generally gets less attention and the demolition of numerous bridges over the Dives River gets almost none, which this book aims to correct. While primarily a tour guide of the modern battlefield, this volume does an effective job of putting the contributions of the 6th Airborne into proper perspective. For American readers who want to know

more about what the British airborne did in Normandy and want to go beyond just the Pegasus Bridge incident, this volume serves that purpose admirably and at a modest cost. The author graciously begins the book with pertinent background on how the British airborne operations fit into the overall Overlord plan and what the three main objectives of the 6th Airborne were. The locations, units and drop schedules are listed, along with excellent aerial photos of the objectives. A good section on the German defenses is also provided. This first chapter is quite good and sets the stage for the rest of the book. Well done! The remarkable assault on Pegasus Bridge is covered in 33 pages, which include excellent contemporary aerial photos. While the British planning and execution were superb - it probably is not possible to conduct a better raid than this one - the British were also aided by some lucky breaks. American readers familiar with this action from the movie *The Longest Day* will quickly realize that the movie did not do this attack justice. For one thing, Major Howard's force was only alone at the bridge for thirty minutes before other paratroops starting reinforcing the bridgehead; within two hours there was most of a battalion at the bridge and the British had fanned out into the nearby villages. The Germans reacted quickly and during 6 June, Howard had to fend off enemy tanks, fighter-bombers, gunboats and frogmen. I was also amazed to learn that the British actor Richard Todd, who portrayed Major Howard in the *Longest Day*, actually served as a lieutenant at Pegasus Bridge. It is certainly unusual for an actor to have served in the battle he is portraying. The only defect in this section is the limited information provided on the exact organization of Major Howard's group and their casualties. Equally well done is the section on the Merville battery, a German artillery battery that threatened the British sea borne landing beaches. Excellent photographs and diagrams are provided to supplement the text. The assault plan is discussed in detail and there are even several photographs of the German battery commander. Unlike Pegasus Bridge, the British plan for assaulting the formidable Merville Battery quickly went awry when 80% of the British airborne battalion failed to land on the correct drop zone near the battery. The British commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Otway, was forced to make the decision to attack with only 20% of his men and with few supporting weapons or abort. He chose to press on. LTC Otway notes, "in the parachute regiment, giving up is not an option." American readers should consider the similar situation which confronted Colonel Beckwith at Desert One in 1980, and how he chose the opposite course. In any event, Otway pressed on and assaulted through the minefields surrounding the Merville Battery and eliminated most of the garrison. Merville was a very deadly company-level battle, with 66 of the 150 British assault troops killed, but it shows what well-trained troops are capable of accomplishing. One interesting incident at Merville was that of the 22 Germans captured, one medical orderly who assisted both German and British wounded was

recommended for an Iron Cross medal by LTC Otway. The British commander sent a recommendation for the award back to the Germans with one of their wounded officers. Unfortunately, the remainder of the book gets bogged down in tourist guide detail and the primary focus of the first three chapters is lacking. While the effort by the rest of the 6th Airborne to blow up the Dives River bridges and establish blocking positions is interesting, it is somewhat incoherently portrayed in these last two chapters. While the 6th Airborne suffered over 30% losses in Normandy, it is clear that the British got their moneys worth from these well-trained and motivated troops. An appendix at the back of the book lists the complete order of battle for the division. This book is highly recommended for its military detail, maps and excellent photographs.

In the early morning hours of June 6th, the British 6th Airborne Division was dropped at what was to be the eastern-most position of the Allied landings. It is the capture of the bridges over the Caen canal and the Orne river ('Pegasus' Bridge) which is most remembered today, but they were also tasked with neutralizing a battery of four concrete gun emplacements near the village of Merville. While this book depicts the capture of the bridges, it also covers this less well known action beautifully and in good detail. Further information on museums where one can visit is included and it has a particularly interesting feature of showing photographs of the area as it existed in 1944 and also now. I don't really know why, but I found comparing the pictures to be quite interesting. This book is part of a book series entitled "Battleground Europe". I don't currently own any others from this series but I hope they prove to be as good as this one because I'm now going to buy others from the series!

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