THE ROLE OF 56th (INDEPENDENT) INFANTRY BRIGADE DURING THE NORMANDY CAMPAIGN JUNE-SEPTEMBER 1944

Abstract
Comprised of three regular battalions of infantry, 2nd Battalion The South Wales Borderers, 2nd Battalion The Essex Regiment, 2nd Battalion The Gloucester Regiment and Brigade HQ, 56th (Independent) Infantry Brigade was only formed in early March 1944. Its specific task was to land ‘under command’ of 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division on D-Day. This Division itself was made up of three brigades of very experienced infantry. What is remarkable is that 56th Infantry Brigade’s infantry battalions had all been on Home Service since June 1940 and were not experienced in battle. Despite this, within only thirteen weeks of formation, 56th Infantry Brigade task was to land on Gold Beach on D-Day as follow up troops and fight inland taking the town of Bayeux by nightfall. After this the Brigade was expected to provide infantry for 7th Armoured Division in a quick push south to take Villers-Bocage. This study traces the journey made by the three battalions of 56th Brigade from 1940 through to a very concentrated forming up and training period specific to the Normandy landings in 1944. It follows their actions from the landings through to the taking of Le Havre in September 1944, by which time the Brigade had served in four different divisions and lost its ‘Independent’ title to become a permanent member of 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division for the remainder of the war in North West Europe. No study has previously been made of 56th Infantry Brigade and extensive use has been made of primary evidence from The National Archives and other sources in this investigation. A considerable amount of new evidence has been gathered by interviews with surviving veterans of 56th Infantry Brigade. The evidence is used to explore issues that shed new light on life in the Army at home during the war, training for war and the Normandy Campaign.

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The role of 56th (Independent) infantry brigade during the Normandy campaign June-September 1944. View/Open. THESIS (9.429Mb). Comprised of three regular battalions of infantry, 2nd Battalion The South Wales Borderers, 2nd Battalion The Essex Regiment, 2nd Battalion The Gloucester Regiment and Brigade HQ, 56th (Independent) Infantry Brigade was only formed in early March 1944. It follows their actions from the landings through to the taking of Le Havre in September 1944, by which time the Brigade had served in four different divisions and lost its 'Independent' title to become a permanent member of 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division for the remainder of the war in North West Europe.