

= Brian Horrocks =

Lieutenant @-@ General Sir Brian Gwynne Horrocks , KCB , KBE , DSO , MC (7 September 1895 ? 4 January 1985) was a senior British Army officer . He is chiefly remembered as the commander of XXX Corps in Operation Market Garden and other operations during the Second World War . He also served in the First World War and the Russian Civil War , was a prisoner of war twice , and competed in the 1924 Paris Olympics . Later he was a television presenter , authored books on military history , and was Black Rod in the House of Lords for 14 years .

In 1940 Horrocks commanded a battalion during the Battle of France , the first time he served under Bernard Montgomery , the most prominent British commander of the war . Montgomery later identified Horrocks as one of his most able officers , appointing him to corps commands in both North Africa and Europe . In 1943 , Horrocks was seriously wounded and took more than a year to recover before returning to command a corps in Europe . It is likely that this period out of action meant he missed out on promotion ; his contemporary corps commanders in North Africa , Oliver Leese and Miles C. Dempsey , went on to command at army level and above . Horrocks ' wound caused continuing health problems and led to his early retirement from the army after the war .

Since 1945 , Horrocks has been regarded by some as one of the most successful British generals of the war , " a man who really led , a general who talked to everyone , down to the simplest private soldier " , and the " beau ideal of a corps commander " . General Dwight D. Eisenhower called him " the outstanding British general under Montgomery " .

= = Early life and First World War = =

Horrocks was the only son of Colonel Sir William Horrocks , a doctor in the Royal Army Medical Corps . Educated at Uppingham School , an English public school , he entered the Royal Military College , Sandhurst , in 1913 . His score was sixth @-@ lowest of the 167 successful applicants for cadetships ? even after the addition of 200 bonus points for an Officer Training Corps (OTC) certificate , which not all the other candidates had . An unpromising student , he might not have received a commission at all but for the outbreak of the First World War .

Commissioned as a second lieutenant into the 1st Battalion of the Duke of Cambridge 's Own (Middlesex Regiment) on 8 August 1914 , Horrocks joined the British Expeditionary Force 's retreat following its baptism of fire at the Battle of Mons . On 21 October , at the Battle of Armentières , his platoon was surrounded , and he was wounded and taken prisoner . Incarcerated in a military hospital , he was repeatedly interrogated by his German captors , who believed that the British Army were using expanding bullets in contravention of the 1899 Hague Convention . Horrocks ' captors refused to change his clothes or sheets , and denied him and a fellow officer basic amenities . Both had temporarily lost the use of their legs , and were forced to crawl to the toilet , which caused Horrocks ' wounds to become infected . Conditions improved after his discharge and transfer to a prisoner of war camp . On his way to the camp , Horrocks befriended his German escort ? he attributed their rapport to the mutual respect that front @-@ line troops share . He was promoted to lieutenant on 18 December 1914 , despite being in enemy hands , and often tried to escape , once coming within 500 yards (460 m) of the Dutch border before being recaptured . He was eventually placed in a compound for Russian officers , in the hope that the language barrier would hinder his escape attempts ; Horrocks used the time to learn the Russian language . Years later , working in the House of Commons , he surprised Nikita Khrushchev and Nikolai Bulganin by greeting them in their native tongue . In the latter part of the war he was held in Holzminden prisoner @-@ of @-@ war camp . His resistance in captivity would earn him the Military Cross , awarded in 1920 and backdated to 5 May 1919 .

Repatriated at the end of the war , Horrocks had difficulty adapting to a peace @-@ time routine . He went on sprees in London , spending four years of accumulated back @-@ pay in six weeks . He returned to active service in 1919 when the War Office called for volunteers who knew Russian .

= = Inter @-@ war period = =

= = = Russia = = =

In 1919 Horrocks was posted to Russia as part of the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War . After landing at Vladivostok on 19 April , he was briefed at British headquarters . The White Army under Admiral Kolchak , with the help of released Czechoslovak Legion prisoners , had driven the Red Army out of Siberia . However , Kolchak 's Czech troops were returning home , and the British military contingent was urgently trying to replace them with Russians . To accomplish this , the British had just two infantry battalions and two small administrative missions , one charged with training and arming the Russians with British war @-@ surplus equipment , and the other with improving the White Army 's communications .

Horrocks ' first task , along with a party of 13 British officers and 30 other ranks , was to guard a train delivering 27 carriages of shells to the White Army in Omsk , 3 @,@ 000 miles (4 @,@ 800 km) away on the Trans @-@ Siberian Railway . The journey took more than a month , and as the only party member fluent in Russian , Horrocks had to deal with many of the difficulties encountered . At every station , he had to ward off station masters intent on acquiring the cars . While stopped in Manchuli , the British officers ' presence provoked a duel between two Cossack officers . Horrocks accepted an invitation to act as a second , but the pair were arrested before the duel could take place . He managed to defuse the situation before it came to trial , by claiming his faulty Russian had been the cause of the misunderstanding . The train eventually arrived in Omsk on 20 May , with a full cargo .

His next assignment was in Yekaterinburg in the Urals , where he was appointed second in command of a training school for non @-@ commissioned officers attached to the Anglo @-@ Russian Brigade . He found this post frustrating , having to dismiss nearly a third of his initial cadre on medical grounds , and struggling to get supplies and support from the White Army authorities . Despite this , he developed a rapport with his men and an admiration for the Russian soldier .

Although British forces were ordered home shortly afterwards , Horrocks and another officer , George Hayes , remained to advise the First Siberian Army . The White Army was in retreat , and Horrocks joined them as they fell back to Vladivostok , 3 @,@ 000 miles (4 @,@ 800 km) away . He was captured by the Red Army on 7 January 1919 , in the town of Krasnoyarsk , and spent 10 months as a prisoner , narrowly surviving severe typhus . The British government negotiated a prisoner release , and Horrocks left Russia on 29 October , returning home on the Royal Navy cruiser HMS Delhi .

= = = Back home = = =

Horrocks rejoined his regiment , based in Germany with the British Army of the Rhine , and followed it to Ireland , then embroiled in the Anglo @-@ Irish War . His duties included searching for arms and dealing with ambushes and road @-@ blocks , which he called " a most unpleasant form of warfare " . This was followed by a short period in Silesia to deal with tensions between the Polish and German populations .

On his return to Britain , Horrocks took up the modern pentathlon . He competed successfully in army tournaments , and was picked for the British Olympic team for the 1924 Paris Olympics , where he finished 19th out of 38 . Horrocks spent the remainder of the inter @-@ war years in postings that included adjutant for the 9th Battalion , Middlesex Regiment of the Territorial Army (1926 ? 1930) ; student at the Staff College , Camberley (1931 ? 32) ; Staff Captain at the War Office (1934 ? 36) ; brigade major with the 5th Infantry Brigade (1936 ? 38) ; and instructor at the Staff College . The Territorial Army posting , which Horrocks considered to be among his happiest periods , provided experience in dealing with citizen soldiers , which would prove highly valuable during the Second World War . He received a brevet majority in 1935 , and was promoted to substantive major in 1936 , and brevet lieutenant colonel in 1937 .

In 1928 , Horrocks married Nancy Kitchin , daughter of an architect for the Local Government Board

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= = Second World War = =

At the outbreak of the Second World War , Horrocks was working as an instructor at the Staff College , Camberley , where he had taught since 1938 . After helping organise a new , shorter , officer @-@ training course , in December 1939 he was promoted to substantive lieutenant colonel . The following May , he was despatched to France to command the 2nd Battalion , Middlesex Regiment , a machine @-@ gun battalion directly subordinate to the 3rd Division headquarters of Major @-@ General Bernard Montgomery . British doctrine at the time retained heavy machine guns under the direct command of a corps or division , rather than as an organic part of subordinate formations . He joined the battalion during its retreat to Dunkirk , and after only 17 days had impressed his superiors sufficiently to be given the temporary rank of brigadier , and the command of 11th Brigade . The brigade 's previous commander , Kenneth Anderson , had been promoted to General Officer Commanding (GOC) 3rd Division during the evacuation , when Lieutenant @-@ General Alan Brooke , commander of II Corps , was recalled to the United Kingdom and Montgomery took over the corps . On Horrocks ' return to Britain , he was given command of 9th Brigade and assigned to defend against a possible German invasion . A short stint as Brigadier General Staff of Western Command followed , before promotion to acting major @-@ general and command of 44th (Home Counties) Infantry Division on 25 June 1941 . In addition to his acting rank , he was promoted to substantive colonel on 28 May 1941 (with seniority backdated to 1 July 1940) .

In March 1942 , Horrocks was given command of the newly formed 9th Armoured Division and gained the temporary rank of major @-@ general on 27 June . Horrocks , an infantry soldier with no experience in dealing with cavalry , was an unusual choice for commander of an armoured division . He trained the division hard , organising exercises to improve the effectiveness of his troops , and to familiarise himself with armoured warfare . Despite never having commanded a division in battle , he was further promoted to acting lieutenant @-@ general and sent to Egypt to command the Eighth Army 's XIII Corps , under Montgomery . General Sir Harold Alexander and Lieutenant @-@ General Montgomery had decided to make a " clean sweep " when replacing the dismissed Claude Auchinleck as Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief (C @-@ in @-@ C) Middle East and Eighth Army commander respectively . Officers perceived to have failed under the old regime were removed , and Montgomery 's favoured commanders were brought in . Among these was Horrocks , an officer whom Montgomery felt was " exactly what was wanted for the job that lay ahead " .

= = = North Africa = = =

On arriving in North Africa , Horrocks ' corps was ordered to defend the Alam el Halfa ridge from an expected attack by the Afrika Korps . Concerned that heavy casualties would jeopardise his planned El Alamein offensive , Montgomery instructed Horrocks to repel Erwin Rommel 's forces " without getting unduly mauled in the process " . Horrocks prepared for a purely defensive battle , with his armour dug in around the ridge . When the Germans attacked on 30 August , they failed to lure the British tanks towards their 88mm guns ? a tactic that had previously been used with great success ? and found themselves battered by both artillery and the Desert Air Force . The battle ended with the Germans in control of Himeihat hill , but at a high cost , and the Allied forces unwilling to try to re @-@ take it after a failed attack by the 2nd New Zealand Division . The army 's defensive success raised morale , and Horrocks was praised by his subordinate , Brigadier George Roberts , for his " wonderful knack of inspiring confidence and enthusiasm wherever he goes " . Montgomery , too , was pleased , saying " he deserves great credit for his action on that day " .

Horrocks was offered the command of X Corps , an armoured corps , in the planned Alamein battle . He refused it , believing that Major @-@ General Herbert Lumsden , a cavalry officer , would be more suited to the role . Instead he retained command of XIII Corps , and was given the task of

making a feint to the south to deceive Axis forces , while the main thrust was made by XXX Corps and X Corps to the north . Montgomery told Horrocks that he was not to incur tank losses , so XIII Corps ' offensive operations were limited to small @-@ scale raids . In the aftermath of the landmark British victory that followed , Horrocks ' corps was assigned to the reserve , and was reduced in size while the rest of the Eighth Army pursued the retreating Axis forces . At one point the only formation under his command was a salvage unit clearing the wreckage of the battlefield , which he visited daily . In December , he took over command of X Corps , the lead corps in the advance of the Eighth Army , after Lumsden 's dismissal for poor performance during the pursuit . Horrocks was appointed a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order on 31 December 1942 .

Following the fall of Tripoli in January 1943 , the remaining Axis forces retreated to prepared defences in Southern Tunisia , in front of the Mareth Line built by France before the war . Here in March , Horrocks carried out one of his most successful actions . His corps , composed of the 1st Armoured Division , a Free French brigade and the attached New Zealand Corps (which included the 2nd New Zealand Division and the British 8th Armoured Brigade) , was ordered to attack as part of Operation Supercharge after XXX Corps failed to breach the line . He carried out a flanking manoeuvre through a pass judged by the Germans to be impenetrable , rendering the Mareth position untenable and forcing the Axis into another retreat . Three Italian divisions were destroyed , and the German 15th Panzer Division , 21st Panzer Division and 164th Division were heavily depleted . Horrocks was then transferred to the First Army to take over IX Corps after its previous commander , Lieutenant @-@ General John T. Crocker , was wounded in a training accident . He led this corps in the final Allied offensive in Tunisia during April and May 1943 , capturing Tunis and accepting the surrender of the remnants of Rommel 's Army Group Africa . He was mentioned in despatches on 24 June , and for his service in Tunisia , was appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath on 5 August . He was also given the rank of temporary lieutenant @-@ general and war substantive major @-@ general .

In June 1943 , Horrocks sustained serious injuries during an air raid at Bizerte , while watching an amphibious rehearsal . Bullets from a strafing German fighter struck his upper chest and carried on through his body , piercing his lungs , stomach , and intestines . He underwent five operations and spent fourteen months recovering . This injury caused him pain for the rest of his life , and continuing health problems later led to his early retirement from active service .

= = = Europe = = =

It was a year before Horrocks recovered sufficiently to tell Alan Brooke , the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) , that he was " very anxious to be given another corps " . Restored to the acting rank of lieutenant @-@ general in August 1944 , he was sent to France to assume command of XXX Corps during the cataclysm engulfing the trapped German 7th Army and 5th Panzer Army in the Falaise Pocket . Montgomery had been dissatisfied with the performance of the corps and its commander , Gerard C. Bucknall , since the landings in Normandy two months earlier . Horrocks retained control of XXX Corps during the advance through Belgium , taking Brussels , and at one point advanced 250 miles (400 km) in only six days . Supplies were a constant concern , with the major French deep @-@ water ports still in German hands , and Allied supply lines stretching perilously back to the Normandy beaches . Montgomery 's 21st Army Group was by now operating 300 miles (480 km) from its ports ? twice the distance logistical planners had accounted for ? so XXX Corps was diverted towards Antwerp to secure its docks and harbour . The city and port fell to the 11th Armoured Division in early September , but Montgomery halted XXX Corps for resupply short of the wide Albert Canal to the north of the city , which consequently remained in enemy hands . Horrocks regretted this after the war , believing that his corps might have advanced another 100 miles (160 km) with the fuel available , although it is doubtful this could have been achieved without delays . Unknown to the Allies , at that time XXX Corps was opposed by only a single German division . The pause allowed the Germans to regroup around the Scheldt River , and by the time the Allies resumed their advance , General Student 's First Paratroop Army had arrived and set up strong defensive positions along the opposite side of the canal . The task of breaking the

strengthened German line , which stretched from Antwerp to the North Sea along the Scheldt River , would fall to the First Canadian Army in the month @-@ long , costly Battle of the Scheldt . By mid @-@ September , XXX Corps had been diverted again , this time to the east .

In September , Montgomery , now a field marshal , made his ambitious thrust across the Rhine and into Germany 's industrial heartland , codenamed Operation Market Garden , a priority for 21st Army Group . XXX Corps under Horrocks was to lead the ground assault , passing along a corridor held by airborne forces in order to link up with the British 1st Airborne Division in Arnhem within four days . In the event XXX Corps never arrived , and although 1st Airborne clung on to their tenuous position for a further five days , by 21 September almost three @-@ quarters of the division was destroyed or captured . Postwar analyses have been divided , some stressing a perceived lack of urgency on the part of Horrocks ' men , while others note that German defences in the area were severely underestimated by First Allied Airborne Army 's intelligence . Particularly important was the failure to identify the remnants of two SS Panzer divisions , which after Normandy had been sent to the Arnhem area for rest and refitting ; intelligence had stated that only " a few infantry units and between 50 and 100 tanks " were in the Netherlands . A series of counterattacks by Army Group B under Field Marshal Walter Model kept Horrocks ' units on the defensive , and delayed their advance by forcing the British to halt and secure their flank . The terrain over which Horrocks ' men had to move was unsuitable , restricting the vanguard (Guards Armoured Division) to a single narrow raised highway through flat or flooded countryside . Additionally , the Nijmegen Bridge , just 8 miles (13 km) from Arnhem , was not captured by the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) on the first day as planned , and XXX Corps had to assist in its capture on their arrival in Nijmegen two days later , causing a further delay of 36 hours . Horrocks was not personally blamed for the operation 's failure ; during this period Major General James Gavin 's U.S. 82nd Airborne Division came under Horrocks ' command , and Gavin later wrote :

He was truly a unique general officer and his qualities of leadership were greater than any I have ever seen . In lecturing at the American service school I stated frequently that General Horrocks was the finest general officer I met during the war , and the finest corps commander " .

During the Battle of the Bulge , Horrocks was temporarily relieved of his command of XXX Corps by Field Marshal Montgomery and sent back to England to rest . Montgomery had taken this move because Horrocks had become " nervy and difficult with his staff " and had " attempted to act foolishly " with XXX Corps . The corps was temporarily commanded by Major @-@ General Gwilym Ivor Thomas , GOC 43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division .

In early 1945 , XXX Corps took part in Operation Veritable , during which the German Army was finally forced back over the Rhine . The corps employed firepower on a massive scale , and " every trick that had been learnt during the past two and a half years was brought into play , and several new ones added " . For a short period XXX Corps had nine divisions under its command . Before the operation , Horrocks accepted an offer to use Bomber Command to attack the town of Cleves , assisting the advance of the 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division . The bombers released 1 @, @ 384 long tons (1 @, @ 406 t) of high explosive that devastated the town . Horrocks later said that this had been " the most terrible decision I had ever taken in my life " and that he felt " physically sick " when he saw the bombers overhead . Operation Veritable was successful ; by the evening of 9 February (D + 1) XXX Corps had broken through the Siegfried Line and into Germany with only light casualties . Bremen was captured on 26 April , exposing the Sandbostel concentration camp , Stalag X @-@ B. The corps had reached Cuxhaven by the time hostilities ceased .

Horrocks received two further mentions in despatches for his service in north @-@ west Europe on 22 March and 9 August 1945 , and was appointed Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire on 5 July . In addition to his native country 's recognition , he was honoured by the governments of Belgium (the Croix de Guerre 1940 with Palm and Grand Officer of the Order of the Crown with Palm) , France (Croix de Guerre and Commandeur of the Légion d 'honneur) , the Netherlands (Knight Grand Officer of the Order of Orange @-@ Nassau) , Greece (Commander of the Order of King George I) , and the United States (Legion of Merit) .

= = Post @-@ war career = =

Horrocks continued to serve in the armed forces after the war , initially as GOC @-@ in @-@ Chief of Western Command , receiving substantive promotion to lieutenant @-@ general in 1946 , with seniority backdated to 29 December 1944 . He briefly commanded the British Army of the Rhine , until he fell ill in August 1948 ; he was invalided out of the service early in January 1949 by the lingering effects of the wounds he had received in North Africa . Promoted to Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath in the King 's Birthday Honours that year , he served as Honorary Colonel of a Territorial Army unit of the Royal Artillery . In 1949 he was appointed Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod , a post traditionally held by retired officers ; this appointment was confirmed on the accession of Elizabeth II in 1952 . Black Rod has the responsibility of supervising the administration of the House of Lords , controlling admission to it , and taking part in ceremonies . In 1957 , Horrocks had the unusual duty of ordering Vivien Leigh out of the House when she interrupted proceedings to plead that the St James 's Theatre be saved from demolition . On other occasions , because the Black Rod had to remain in place during long debates , Horrocks relieved his boredom by completing football pools coupons . This had the advantage of looking like note @-@ taking to the assembled lords . Horrocks held the post of Black Rod until 1963 .

Horrocks became interested in writing , and submitted articles about military matters to newspapers and magazines including the Picture Post and The Sunday Times . This led to a short but successful career as the presenter of a series of television programmes , British Castles (1962) , Men in Battle and Epic Battle , produced by Huw Wheldon . In these , Horrocks lectured on great historical battles , " highlighting excitement and interest " to allow the programmes to appeal to the widest possible audience . He was interviewed extensively for the Thames Television series , The World at War , and , to his embarrassment , appeared on the cover of the BBC 's Radio Times magazine . After his television career ended , he served on the board of the housebuilding company Bovis , and continued writing , contributing a column to The Sunday Times and editing a series of British Army regimental histories . In 1968 Horrocks collaborated with J & L Randall as editor of the ' Merit ' board game ' Combat ' . His portrait and signature appear on the box and in his introduction to the game he states " In war no two battles are ever the same because the terrain is always different and it is this , more than anything else , which influences the composition of the different armies and the tactics employed by the rival Commanders " . His autobiography , A Full Life , was published in 1960 , and he co @-@ authored Corps Commander , an account of his battles in north @-@ west Europe , published in 1977 .

Horrocks acted as a military consultant for the 1977 film A Bridge Too Far , based on Operation Market Garden . The actor Edward Fox played Horrocks in the film , and later commented :

I enjoyed all of the films but A Bridge Too Far is the one I enjoyed the most because of the character I had to play , Lieutenant @-@ General Brian Horrocks . Brian was alive then and I knew him well ? we were friends until his death . He was a very particular type of general and it was important that I play the role correctly .

Horrocks died on 4 January 1985 , at the age of 89 . The memorial service , held at Westminster Abbey on 26 February , was attended by Major @-@ General Peter Gillett and Secretary of State for Defence Michael Heseltine , who represented the Queen and Prime Minister respectively . Thirty regiments and many other formations and associations were represented at the service .