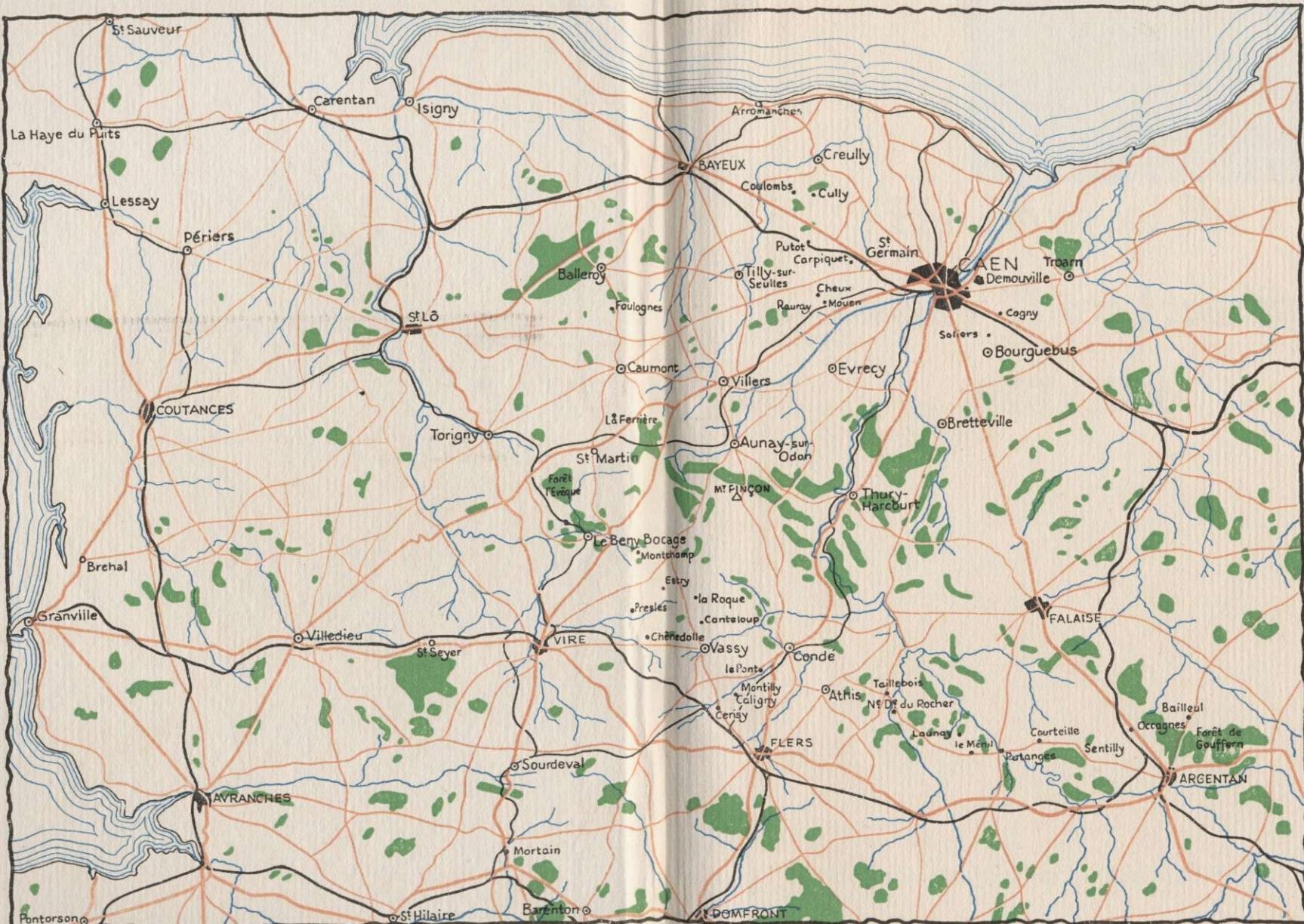




The Story of the Twenty-Third Hussars

1940-1946



Normandy  
1944

The Story of the  
Twenty-Third Hussars  
1940 - 1946

Written and compiled by members of the Regiment

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To our friends who died in battle

## FOR E W O R D

This is the story of the Twenty-third Hussars, a regiment that was formed in 1940 in the time of our greatest emergency and disbanded in 1946, when that emergency was over and the Army had to be reduced. It is a story no different in essentials from many other regiments formed under similar circumstances, but it has been written so that those who served in the Regiment might have something tangible to remind them of their time as Twenty-third Hussars. It is not in any sense written to try to prove that the Regiment did more than its share. We did not see action until the Normandy invasion and our casualties and battle honours cannot, of course, compare with the regular and territorial regiments which fought their way from Africa to Germany. But we are proud of the part we played in Europe, and this story has been written for those who helped the Regiment to play that part.

We are also proud that we were members of the Eleventh Armoured Division, particularly as this meant serving under General Roberts, for whom all ranks had the greatest admiration. Co-operation between all arms of the Division was brought to a fine art. No armoured regiment can fight a battle without infantry, gunners, sappers and all the various services; and to the members of those arms who worked with us we owe a large part of our success. Our chief infantry colleagues were the Eighth Battalion, the Rifle Brigade, commanded by Lieut-Colonel Hunter, and there has seldom been a happier or closer partnership. 'H' Company, commanded first by Major McKenzie, but for a long period by Major Bradford, was with us in nearly every battle we fought. 'G' Battery of the Thirteenth Royal Horse Artillery, commanded by Major Gaunt, was always in support, and the skill of the Battery Commander was only matched by the bravery of his two OP Officers, Captain Davidge and the late Captain Budgeon. We were all the best of friends and a "regimental group" was a very happy party.

Behind the tanks in all our advances came the Echelons of wheeled vehicles bringing up necessities of every kind. Their duties were not of a spectacular nature, and they are consequently not frequently mentioned in this story. But we could never have had any of the success we achieved unless the Echelons had done their job, and they never once let us down. It is anything but pleasant to ride in a three-ton lorry filled with ammunition or petrol, or in a jeep, along roads under shell-fire, in the dark, with few maps and often without a clear idea where the enemy is. Many 'baled-out' tank crews have said that they would far rather ride in a tank than in the Echelon. So, if members of our Echelon feel that they have not had sufficient mention in these pages, they can be sure that it was not because we did not appreciate their efforts, but because their very reliability made any particular incident difficult to single out. They were commanded most ably for the majority of the campaign by Major Garcia, and Lieut. Martin, the Quartermaster, was his very capable assistant in 'A' Echelon. The Squadron Sergeant-Majors rode in jeeps and brought supplies up to their Squadrons every night. It was a most thankless, tiring and frequently dangerous task, always most efficiently done. Captain Sandford commanded the 'A 1.' Echelon immediately behind the tanks and he was a great loss when he was badly wounded in Germany.

Mention must be made of Brigadier Harvey. He formed the Twenty-third Hussars in 1940, but in 1941 went to command his own regiment, the Tenth Royal Hussars, in Africa. There he won the D.S.O. and bar and eventually commanded an Armoured Brigade in the advance to Tunisia. To our great pleasure, he was given command of our own brigade, the Twenty-ninth Armoured, before D Day. He commanded the Brigade to the end of the war, earning a second bar to his D.S.O. and making us feel all the time that it would be impossible to serve under any other Brigadier. Lieut-Colonel Harding had taken command of the Regiment in 1941 and trained it for three years before it saw action. He was able to see his training bear fruit, for he never missed a single day's action from June 1944 to May 1945, though frequently in far from good health. His determination, his dash, his disregard for danger and his very individual sense of humour, allied to considerable shrewdness, gave everyone the greatest confidence in him. No regiment has ever owed a commanding officer more. He won a bar to his D.S.O. in the first of our battles. His assistant in action, as Adjutant, from first to last, was



Brigadier C.B. Harvey DSO and Lieut-Colonel R.P. Harding DSO.  
"No Regiment has ever owed two men more"



"Our Masters say . . ." Major-General "Pip" Roberts C.B., D.S.O., M.C. and Brigadier C.B. Harvey who commanded the Division and Brigade throughout the campaign.

Captain Shearman, who also never missed a day's action. Because of his unassuming character, few realised what a very fine adjutant he was, and if he does not get much limelight in this story it is because his job was unspectacular, though vitally important. One mistake from an adjutant can put a regiment in jeopardy but Captain Shearman did not make mistakes.

Before writing this story it was decided that names of individuals should be mentioned in order to make it more interesting. The drawback to this is, of course, that there will be members of the Regiment who may feel that they were just as entitled to be mentioned by name as many of those whose names do appear in the narrative. It is hoped that those who may feel slighted will accept our apologies now. There may also be inaccuracies, but these should be few as the facts have been checked with squadron representatives. It may be noticed that the narrative seems disjointed in places but, as no fewer than five different authors have been involved, this is unavoidable.

In very many stories of the campaign in North West Europe the accent has been on the spectacular dash through France, the liberation of Brussels and Antwerp, the Holland battles and the advance through Germany. Normandy is, of course, mentioned but never seems to be given the importance it deserves. In point of fact we sustained 75 % of our total casualties in the River Odon, Point 112, Caen and Chenedolle battles, and there is no doubt in any of our minds which was the decisive part of the campaign. This is mentioned because so many members of the Regiment were wounded in the early days and therefore missed all the spectacular parts. Those who came through to the end would like them to realise that our subsequent engagements, unpleasant though some of them were, could not compare in severity and importance with those Normandy battles. It is hoped that this story will be of interest to those who did not complete the journey and never heard in detail what happened to us after they were wounded. Many of those who fought with the Regiment joined us during the fighting, their own regiments having been disbanded through no fault of theirs. Particularly does this apply to the Twenty-fourth Lancers, though many other regiments were represented as well. It is hoped that the earlier pages will not bore them, and that they realise how warmly we welcomed them to the Twenty-third Hussars and what a respect we had for their fighting qualities.

The chief topics of conversation at the present moment are disbandment, demobilisation, the post-war and 'civvy street'. And quite rightly so, for it is a period of change. Most people are unavoidably saying goodbye to a different friend almost daily, and partings are a commonplace. It is hoped that this story will make old Twenty-third Hussars remember the 'old days' and the spirit of comradeship which made those years seem less of a waste than they might have been. It is also hoped that this story will help to keep alive the memories of those of our friends who fell in action. No words can do justice to their sacrifice and it is to their memory that this book is proudly dedicated.

## CHAPTER I

### FORMATION

1940

—  
1943

On December 1st 1940 the Twenty-third Hussars officially came into being.

This new armoured regiment was to be formed, in the first place, by a nucleus of approximately eight officers and fifty NCOs and men from each of two regular regiments - the Tenth Royal Hussars and the Fifteenth - Nineteenth Royal Hussars; to which was to be added a direct intake, straight from civilian life, of a then unknown number of men.

In fact, however, the new Commanding Officer and his Adjutant did not leave their own unit until December 4th, when they reported to the authorities at Western Command, Chester, in whose area the new regiment was to start life. After being given the rather scanty information and detail which was all that seemed to be available at the time, they departed for Teddesley Hall, Penkridge, near Stafford, which was to be their first home. This turned out to be a large empty house, standing in a park, in which the first signs of Nissen huts were beginning to be seen.

By December 7th, the officers and men forming the backbone of the Regiment had arrived, to live, inevitably for a time, in some discomfort, until the organisation got going and the wheels began to turn. This was made difficult for several reasons. First of all, from a national point of view, the disaster at Dunkirk was only a few months back, and therefore equipment of all kinds, and especially transport, was in extremely short supply. Also the Quartermaster could not be released from his previous employment until December 9th, those crucial days when he was so badly needed. Thirdly, nearly everyone who came was doing a new job - corporals were sergeants, sergeants were SQMSs, and so on. This also applied in many cases to the officers.

It may be of interest at this point to give a list of the officers who formed the original cadre, with their respective regiments.

Commanding Officer	Lt-Col. C. B. Harvey	XRH
Second-in-Command	Major M. F. Morley	XRH
Adjutant	Capt. C. G. Seymour	XRH
Technical Adjutant	Capt. E. Starling	15/19 H
Quartermaster	Lt. J. Garcia	XRH
'A' Squadron Leader	Major J. Holford	15/19 H
	Lt. J. G. Hanson-Lawson	XRH
	Lt. J. J. Whyley	15/19 H
'B' Squadron Leader	Major Lord George M. D. Scott	XRH
	Lt. J. Brooke-Hunt	15/19 H
'C' Squadron Leader	Major R. Milbanke M.C.	XRH
	Lt. H. R. P. Lloyd	XRH
	Lt. C. V. O'Reilly	XRH
HQ	Major J. Watson	15/19 H

Capt. T. D. Wilson, M.C., 15/19 H, acted as Signal Officer until the arrival on December 17th of Lt. J. C. Stephenson, 15/19 H, and then went as Second-in-Command to 'C'Squadron.

RSM Marks arrived within a day or two from the Sixteenth-Fifth Lancers and proved a great asset to the Regiment.

The RQMS was RQMS Griffiths 15/19 H.

The SSMs were:-

- 'A' Squadron - SSM Wass
- 'B' Squadron - SSM Martin
- 'C' Squadron - SSM Burkinshaw
- HQ Squadron - SSM Rowbotham, who was very soon succeeded by SSM Perkins.

The MQMS was not posted until later. His name was MQMS Malcolm, R.T.R.

The task which confronted the Colonel and his small staff of officers and NCOs is worth considering. The forming of a brand new regiment is an unusual undertaking and consequently presents problems of considerable dimensions. Probably only those who know the Army and its ways can really appreciate the difficulties. Moreover the Regiment was to be largely made up not of experienced soldiers, not even of recently trained recruits, but of civilians drawn haphazardly from all walks of life and from every corner of the British Isles.

The men who would soon be walking up the drive of Teddesley Hall were to be changed from a crowd of widely differing individuals into a powerful team, capable of defeating the fanatical, battle-proved troops of the Wehrmacht, of fighting in any part of the globe side by side with Regiments who had scores, or even hundreds, of years of experience and tradition behind them. These citizens of Britain - painters, cobblers, farmers, clerks, whatever they might be - must become capable of enduring fatigue, hunger and danger, must acquire the mechanical skill necessary for a member of a tank crew and the courage and resolve to fight when all seems lost. Finally they must be equipped with the intangible weapon, most powerful of all, of morale.

How was all this to be achieved? The training part of it would need ingenuity, hard work and enthusiasm, but it was comparatively straightforward. There was something else, however, which was a cause of much greater concern. It was a matter of vital importance for on it alone, however well everything else progressed, would depend the success or failure of the whole venture: esprit de corps. When a man is so tired that he cares no longer for his own life, or when his courage has been shaken from him by the exhaustion and shocks of battle, there is one thing that will cause him to fight on. It is called esprit de corps - the will to fight for one's comrades. How was this to be achieved? It was not easy to say. But the single fact of which we may be most proud today and which is perhaps most remarkable in the story of the Twenty-third Hussars is the growth of a Regimental spirit, second to none, which resulted in acts of great self-sacrifice and gallantry and which united all the members of the Regiment in a strong and lasting friendship.

There was no time to lose as information was received that the intake would arrive on December 18th. The Quartermaster got away in the nick of time to produce from a faintly horrified Sub-area Commander the thousand and one necessities for the life of a brand new unit.

Duly, on December 18th, the tramp of feet was heard coming up the drive, and crowds of civilians, many of whom were to complete the epic march to Germany five years later, began to arrive from all parts of the country and from all walks of life. Two hundred and eighty-one men reported that day.

During the next two days everyone worked feverishly. Every man was medically examined, clothed, interviewed and allocated to a

squadron. As a further complication, no doubt to the joy of the men, but to the horror of the "staff", Christmas leave started on December 20th to continue until the 29th. Those officers and men who were not lucky enough to get home for Christmas Day itself were treated to a remarkable Christmas dinner, a tribute to the hard work and organisation both of the Second-in-Command and the PMC.

The Regiment in fact had begun well, if under difficulties, and it was a good augury for the arduous, and as it turned out, lengthy training ahead.

The first six weeks of recruits' training started on December 30th. At this time the equipment available consisted of some Ross and a very few Enfield rifles; a few .303 Besa machine guns and Bren light machine guns, two "impressed" vehicles (one of them was an "Evening Standard" type delivery van) and one Medium tank. The latter was only with us owing to the failure of all the efforts of our predecessors at Teddesley to move it and it remained at the top of the drive to the end, threatening, gaunt and useless.

Even this meagre collection was, however, enough to start on for men who had to learn a new profession from the beginning. Every effort was made to make the work as varied as possible and drill of all kinds was interspersed with lectures on every branch of Army life and plentiful physical training.

Our newly appointed Brigadier, C.H.M. Peto, Ninth Royal Lancers, paid us a visit on January 10th, and by the end of the month Brigade Headquarters of Twenty-ninth Armoured Brigade had been formed in the village of Penkridge, with Major Sir John Marling, 17/21 Lancers, as Brigade Major. Six more officers and some more recruits had meanwhile joined the Regiment.

During February training proceeded apace. 'A' Squadron won a P.T. and drill competition on February 3rd, while on the 7th a marching and arms drill competition between two squads each from Twenty-third Hussars and our sister regiment, the Twenty-fourth Lancers (formed under exactly the same conditions ten miles away at Cannock), was won by our 'A' Squadron.

Then came the beginning of a cycle of training which was repeated every year until the Regiment went into action. It started with

Individual Training, the purpose of which was to make every man proficient in his particular job as driver, wireless operator or whatever he might be. This usually took place during the winter months when outdoor activities were least pleasant and often impossible. It was followed by Troop Training, during which tank crews learnt to work together, each crew under its own tank commander and commanders learnt to manoeuvre under, and carry out the orders of, their troop leaders. After Troop Training came Squadron Training, then Regimental Training and so on, until the year's work culminated in large-scale exercises designed primarily for the benefit of Brigadiers and Generals. Tank crews, however, learnt the necessary art of living in a tank for days and weeks on end and of washing, shaving and sleeping in the open. Boring though it often was for the tank crews - a gunner, for instance, would sit for hours on end bumping along, cramped in his fighting compartment, with nothing to do other than carry out occasional fictitious fire orders - these Exercises did make a welcome change from the monotony of parades and fatigues. Moreover, the gentle technique of "scrounging" was soon assimilated by all crews, and if the district was a hospitable one the "scheme" was considered enjoyable enough.

Specialist training started on February 10th to train the first of many Driver Mechanics and Driver Operators that were required. All the men had their first chance of firing the rifle on the open ranges, underwent the alarming experience of testing their respirators in a gas chamber and were "turned out" at short notice for the local defence scheme. We were beginning to take shape; a squadron spirit was growing, to be followed shortly by the regimental spirit, which perhaps first appeared upon the arrival of forty men as a draft from the Infantry Training Centre of the Kings Regiment.

On March 4th and 5th the Regiment made the first of its many moves round England to Knaresborough, Yorks, where the Squadrons were well-billeted and had their first experience of being independent of each other. We took over from the Forty-first Royal Tank Regiment.

A further excitement on the day before we moved was the appearance of our first real, live, running tank - a Valentine Mark II\*. After that vehicles began to come thick and fast and by the end of the month the strength was:-

- 3 tanks (2 Mark III Valentines)
- 5 personnel carriers
- 12 motor cycles
- 14 "utility" cars
- 2 3-tonners
- 6 15-cwt trucks
- 1 office truck
- 2 impressed vehicles

The Commander of the newly formed Eleventh Armoured Division, of which we were a part, Major-General P.C.S. Hobart, C.B., D.S.O., M.C. visited us on March 31st. He was to be the enthusiastic initiator of much arduous and realistic training and of not a little heart-burning. The divisional sign was a black bull on a yellow background, and it was "the Bull" that General Hobart was henceforth called.

The next five months' training continued with little of interest to record and with no interruption beyond that occasioned by two further moves of station, one on June 14th to Nawton Camp, near Helmsley, followed exactly two months later by the second to Whitby. Our increasing amount of equipment, particularly of vehicles of all shapes and degrees of reliability, made these moves a more complicated and eventful performance than might be realised. The Weapon Training Officer (Lieut. Lloyd), in particular, always spent a blasphemous time with large quantities of bulky and odd-shaped gunnery equipment, which remained with us until we went abroad.

Nawton Camp was chiefly remarkable for its picturesque surroundings, its inaccessibility, its fine weather and for the fact that the squadrons had their first opportunity there of Field Training.

By August we had no less than twenty-eight Valentines of various Marks, and we had our first memorable week on the open ranges at Fylingdale, (though by no means the last at that unsalubrious spot) firing the 2-pounder gun and the Besa. This was followed immediately (August 14th) by squadron camps, which were much enjoyed by all ranks, though the hazards (and bogs) of the North Yorkshire Moors had patently been overlooked, or, at any rate, underestimated by the Powers That Be. 'A' Squadron will no doubt remember the day when every one of their tanks became bogged almost simultaneously.

At this time the Second Fife and Forfar Yeomanry came over from Ireland to join the Brigade. They remained our comrades-in-arms both in England and throughout the European campaign.

Major Watson's place as O.C. Headquarter Squadron had now been taken by Major V.A. Dunkerly, 13/18 Hussars.

On September 1st 1941, the Regiment gathered together from squadron camps for a regimental camp at Commandale, a splendid camping ground at any time. Our enjoyment of it was, however, marred by the news that Colonel Harvey had been offered and had naturally accepted the command of his own Regiment, the Tenth Hussars, who were under orders for the Middle East. He departed on September 2nd, taking Major Milbanke with him, both sadly missed by all ranks.

However we were fortunate in getting as their successors Lt-Col. R.P. Harding, D.S.O., and Major C. H. Blacker, both of the Fifth Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards, who arrived on September 12th and 18th respectively.

The new Colonel was just in time to lead the Regiment on our first Brigade scheme, Exercise Chris, on September 15th-17th, the forerunner of innumerable exercises and schemes which were to continue until D Day.

We visited Fylingdale again from September 30th to October 2nd. Then, on October 9th, almost complete to our establishment of tanks - Valentines and Matildas - we took part in Exercise Percy, up to then the biggest exercise ever to take place in England. We travelled to Northumberland on "war-flats" and spent a wet and energetic time round Hadrian's Wall, returning on the 16th. This, in fact, ended higher training for the year and individual training started on October 22nd and lasted through a hard winter.

As a relief from this, an inter-regimental tank point-to-point was held on November 20th over several miles of "fair tank country", over which the competitors were directed by wireless. This was won in thick fog by the Twenty-fourth Lancers.

From November 26th to December 5th we paid our first visit to the ranges at Castle Martin, Pembrokeshire, where we wallowed in the Welsh mud and fired to our hearts content.

Soon after this a new consignment of Mark IV Valentines arrived and we also received our first Anti-Aircraft Light Tank VIB, which was not a popular vehicle.

\*

The year 1942 brought no let-up in the training; if possible it intensified. But slogging along does not make very interesting reading.

We were unfortunate in losing RSM Marks in January, who was commissioned and went as Quartermaster to the North Irish Horse. He was ably succeeded by SSM Wass. Several officers were also lost during this period to the Middle East but replacements were not difficult to find as new officers were joining the Regiment all the time.

After squadron camps in March a warning order was received on the 31st to be ready to move to South Eastern Command. After a certain amount of delay the move finally took place on April 25th-26th to Plumpton, Sussex, with Headquarter Squadron on the race course and the three "Sabre" Squadrons installed in houses and farms in the vicinity.

On May 9th Captain Shebbeare, who had been at Brigade Headquarters for sometime as a liaison officer, became Adjutant and Captain Seymour became Second-in-Command of 'C' Squadron.

On May 19th, after a period of squadron training on the Downs, the Regiment departed on Exercise Tiger, another mammoth exercise which took place in Kent, when we had our first experience of being commanded by General Montgomery and also of seeing the Canadian Army "in action".

Immediately on our return we began to dispose of our Valentines and Matildas and to re-equip with Covenanter and Crusader tanks. There ensued a period of intense individual training and of courses for learning the new tanks, interspersed with a system of combined camps, in which the following visits took place:-

'A' Squadron at Goat Farm were hosts to 'D' Company Kings Shropshire Light Infantry and 'G' Battery Thirteenth Royal Horse Artillery.

'C' Squadron at Warningore were hosts to 'A' Company KSLI and 'R' Battery Seventy-fifth Anti-Tank Regiment, R.A.

'B' Squadron visited the 4th KSLI.

This was a most successful attempt to foster friendship, co-operation and knowledge of other arms within the Division. It might have been even more successful if we ourselves had had more time to spare, but we were occupied with trying to learn our new weapons, which were arriving continuously.

In May we lost our Brigadier, who was replaced by Brigadier O. L. Prior-Palmer, late Ninth Lancers.

August was even more hectic. Four days firing with the new tanks took place at Seaford ranges from the 1st to 4th. The Commanding Officer was stricken with appendicitis on the 3rd; Exercise Black Bull was held on the 6th and 7th; finally the Regiment moved to Rushford Belts, near Thetford, Norfolk, on the 10th. As Major Morley was also away at the Senior Officers' School at the time, all this devolved on Major Dunkerly.

At the same time Major Lord George Scott left to become Second-in-Command of the Second Northants Yeomanry (The Divisional Recce Regiment) and was sadly missed by all ranks of the Regiment and particularly by 'B' Squadron. A few days later Major Holford was also posted away and a further shuffling of Squadron Leaders ensued: Major Dunkerly now commanded 'A' Squadron, Major Seymour 'B' and Major Hanson-Lawson HQ.

To crown all, and to the intense excitement of everyone, mobilisation orders were received on August 16th. The Regiment was working in the tank park (a wet wood) at the time engaged in a Signal exercise in order to learn the newly instituted W/T procedure. Few present will fail to remember with a thrill how we were suddenly summoned to parade and told the news by Major Dunkerly. Naturally we were not told our destination, but Africa somewhere was thought to be a certainty. We little knew that it was to be the great North African landing, and what trials of patience, and what a bitter disappointment finally awaited us.

In the meantime, all set to work with enthusiasm to get ready. We visited Linney Head again on August 20th, during which we fired our new 6-pounder guns, while the visit was further complicated by the fact that five days' embarkation leave was going on at the same time. Back at Thetford, one hundred and twenty-three men arrived as reinforcements to the Regiment, together with several officers.

September was generally regarded as the month of our departure, but September came and went, with troop and squadron training continuing in the rather confined area at our disposal, and still the word never came. We said goodbye to General Hobart, whom it was sad to see depart, for he had watched us all grow, so to speak, from childhood to man's estate; and we were inspected by the new G.O.C., Lieut.-General B.M. Burrows, D.S.O., M.C., on October 17th, after we had moved into "winter quarters" at Chippenham Camp, a vast collection of Nissen huts outside Newmarket. Each squadron, however, took it in turn to carry out a week's training in the old area.

By November it seemed clear that, in spite of the North African landings, we were not wanted immediately, and spirits were in consequence at a low ebb. They were somewhat revived, however, by the institution of a proper fourteen days' embarkation leave, which started on the 26th. Before this, some regimental training took place from November 5th to 9th, in training tanks, (i. e. non-operational vehicles), and these were passed from regiment to regiment, to their increasing detriment.

December passed and leave continued. We visited Castle Martin yet again from December 29th to January 3rd 1943. Between January 9th and 13th a further seventy men arrived to make up the strength of the Regiment.

Suddenly, on January 18th, things began to move again, and First Reinforcements, consisting of eighteen men were despatched to the port of embarkation (never incidentally to be seen or heard of again).

On January 21st orders were received to have all vehicles and stores ready to move on February 5th. Vehicles were loaded, labelled, weighed, reloaded, paraded and paraded again. Tanks were glistening with countless coats of paint, and suffered from every conceivable modification. All was ready - would we start?

Surprisingly, on February 5th, we did start. Ten tanks (six of 'A' Squadron, four of 'B') with crews, were loaded at Newmarket station and departed, and all the wheeled vehicles, under Major Blacker, set off, with Africa as their destination.

Alas for all our hopes: the tanks were in fact loaded on board ship at Birkenhead, only to be immediately unloaded again; the wheeled

vehicles got to Doncaster. There they were informed of the sudden change of plan which sent them ignominiously home again.

This was known for ever afterwards as Exercise Turnabout.

All the vehicles and personnel were back again at Chippenham by February 10th. It was some time before any explanation for this drastic reversal was forthcoming, but it was eventually given out to the disappointed men that it had been decided by the Prime Minister himself, after visiting the front, that no more reinforcements of armour were required and that an infantry division had been sent instead. The message had apparently not been received until February 6th.

The reaction from the preceding six months of almost continuous expectation and hard work was considerable, but on the whole the spirit of the Regiment was magnificent. Luckily few speculated that it would be more than another year before we set forth again to war.

Unfortunately, for the moment, despite all the military dicta to the contrary, there was not much to do to keep us busy. The mileage allowance on War Establishment tanks was exhausted and we had long since got rid of the training tanks. Accordingly we gave ourselves up to the manly pursuit of gardening in the unprofitable looking area round the Nissen huts, into which entered a considerable spirit of competition. Troops were also allowed off on forty-eight hour "rambles", where they pleased, and much initiative was shown in the variety of goals reached and distances travelled.

In the meantime we were visited by the new Corps Commander, General Herbert Lumsden, on March 31st, and two further drafts of men arrived on March 24th and April 9th. By this time the Regiment had been reorganised into squadrons of five troops each, instead of four, with four tanks on each Squadron Headquarters.

One interesting sidelight on the future invasion of the Continent was the departure of a scout car on April 11th for "wading trials", the forerunner of a brand new phase in training. We shall hear more of this mystery later.

On May 1st we went to the Stanford Battle Area for a week's camp and training as a Brigade, where we took part in an impressive demonstration of fire power and movement for the benefit of the Secretary of State for War. We then took part in Exercise Sabre from May 16th to 20th, which proved to be the swan song for the

Crusader tanks, for immediately afterwards we received our first two Shermans, whose arrival was greeted with the awe and excitement befitting the victor of the Desert battle.

On June 7th we moved to Bridlington, thus coming full circle back to Yorkshire, but mercifully not to the North Yorkshire Moors. Instead we had the whole of the Yorkshire Wolds, that pleasant farming country recently taken over en bloc for training, a course which subsequent events abundantly justified.

Shermans were arriving by every train and, at one hectic period before the Crusaders were handed over, the Squadrons had a double complement of tanks on their charge.

We were given a month to learn how to drive and maintain the new machines, and then were launched on our first Exercise with them, Exercise Eagle, on July 7th. This was followed by a regimental camp at Butterwick Whinn, up on the Wolds, and an Eighth Corps Exercise, Hawk, on the 22nd. These exercises gave everyone great confidence in the new tank, though it was nothing like as comfortable as its predecessors.

We then had our first gunnery practice on Hornsea ranges, followed by more at Spaunton Moor and Riccal Bridge. It took some little time to get accustomed to the new dual purpose 75-millimetre gun, and the arguments over such trifles as range cards, marking of hand wheels, and the "smallest possible bracket" were long and furious.

In addition to these changes, by a scheme known as Reefer, an exchange of NCOs and men took place in August between all Home and Middle East units. The Regiment despatched thirty-five NCOs and men abroad and received in exchange eighteen (though many of these, it must be regrettably said, were of the "compassionate posting" type, not necessarily sent for their fighting qualities).

We also lost Captain Stephenson who volunteered for parachuting and who subsequently lost his life while flying over Yugoslavia.

Throughout August and September vehicles of all kinds continued to arrive. We were being rearmed and equipped on a lavish scale. In addition to Reefer, mentioned above, an even scheme bigger now took place, which consisted, as far as the Brigade was concerned, in the exchange of the Twenty-fourth Lancers with the Third

Royal Tank Regiment, a Battalion in the Eight Armoured Brigade, lately returned from the Middle East. This was to give each home brigade a "backbone" of battle veterans from the Desert. An interchange of officers also took place, which resulted for us in the loss of Major Hanson-Lawson to the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry and the arrival from that regiment of Major H. Gold. All this had been initiated by General Montgomery.

At this time both the Corps Commander and Brigadier Prior-Palmer were posted to the Middle East. The former was replaced by General O'Connor, who had been a prisoner for some time, and the latter, by an amazing and fortunate coincidence for us, by our old Colonel, now Brigadier Harvey, D.S.O. and Bar. Another considerable asset to the Brigade in general, and the Regiment in particular, was the arrival from the Middle East of Major Henri LeGrand, D.S.O., a Belgian Horse Gunner who, having escaped in 1940 from the Germans, got to the Middle East and saw service with several armoured regiments, including the Tenth Hussars. He was a gunnery expert to the core and he gave his knowledge, energy and enthusiasm to the utmost, and his loyalty to the Twenty-third Hussars was touching. A detailed chapter might well be written as a tribute to this officer, who was killed while serving with the Regiment.

But before this happened we suffered another sad loss in the Second-in-Command, who was posted to the same appointment with the Tenth Hussars, still in the Middle East. Major Dunkerly became Second-in-Command and Captain Wigan O.C. Headquarter Squadron. At the same time Lieut. Shearman became Adjutant and Captain Shebbeare Second-in-Command of 'B' Squadron.

From September 24th to October 3rd we took part in another big scale exercise - Blackcock - and on October 24th we visited the ranges at Kirkcudbright, admirably suited for Sherman tanks and squadron battle practices.

From September onwards, until the Division moved to Aldershot, our time was divided between frequent range firing at Fylingdale and Hornsea, and "sealing" and "wading" all the types of vehicle which we possessed, to which passing reference has already been made. It had become common knowledge that, at some not far distant date, an assault was to be made across the Channel. It was considered, therefore, that all vehicles must be prepared for wading ashore

through a few feet water from specially constructed boats. Every crack and hole on the tanks would therefore have to be sealed with special materials to make them completely water-proof. Training for this ambitious and novel project was put in hand, instructors departed on the inevitable courses, "mock-up" boats were put up everywhere to practice driving on and off, and tanks and wheeled vehicles were constantly being sealed with varying, but slowly increasing, degrees of success in any stretch of water available. A certain static water tank in the most devastated and dismal part of Hull was particularly popular, and was visited both by day and by night.

There was a small interruption for a bout of active training on November 15th, when we were initiated by a Battalion of the Sixth Guards Tank Brigade into the mysteries and drill of "I" tank work - tanks used in close support of infantry for a planned attack - in case we should be called upon to perform such a role in action. This lasted a week, after which we returned to our gunnery and sealing, together with countless other items of individual training which continued throughout the winter.

## CHAPTER II

### 1944 AND OPERATION OVERLORD

In the New Year - 1944 - training went on with the same intensity as previously but there was a change in its character. No more large tactical exercises were envisaged. Classes for driver-operators and driver-mechanics and so on were a thing of the past. Everyone was still very busy. But now the classes were on water-proofing. In gunnery little time now was spent in the classroom or in a tank learning how to strip a gun. We spent many days each month on the ranges. We were going through the final period of revision, making sure that all the lessons were well and truly learned before the day came when we should be called forward to cross the Channel and come to grips with the enemy, who this time would not be wearing a soft hat to distinguish him from a friend wearing a tin hat, nor ride in a tank marked with a yellow cross to distinguish him from the friendly model which had no cross at all. In the past much paint had been used just before exercises in an effort to distinguish friend from foe. No paint was necessary now - at least not for that purpose. The enemy would be only too easily recognised. If he wasn't, he would very soon take steps to declare himself.

As in the month preceding Exercise Turnabout, so now much new equipment was arriving. Besides the usual replacements needed to make up for normal and abnormal wastage to keep everyone equipped to scale, and new vehicles to replace those that had broken down, we were getting "toys" of various kinds that were completely new. There was the 17-pounder Sherman, originally known as the Firefly - "Top Secret" and not to be seen by anyone. The normal Sherman with the 75-millimetre dual purpose gun had proved a match for the German Mark IV tank in the desert. It was still a very useful tank. But the Germans had produced the Tiger tank with an 88-millimetre gun and much thicker armour. Except at close range the seventy-five's armour-piercing shot tended

to bounce off without doing much damage. The Sherman was therefore modified to take the 17-pounder gun which had a much greater armour piercing performance. These now began to come in so that the Regiment was eventually to have twelve, of which four were allotted to each Sabre-Squadron. Nothing was known about them. They were only just past the experimental stage. It was reported that there was a tremendous "flash-back", that the loader was apt to get his eyebrows singed if he did not look out when the gun was fired. Even this was Top Secret, but somehow the crew found out and nothing very dreadful happened. In fact experience showed that it was nothing very serious at all. The tank, though ugly and ill-balanced, as was inevitable as it had not in the first place been built to mount such a gun, proved to be a very valuable anti-tank weapon and later was used to very good effect on many an occasion.

At the beginning of this year too the Recce Troop began to be equipped with the American Stuart tank. Originally, in the Plumpton days when it was just formed, the Troop was to have Scout cars. But they never came because a definite decision was never made as to whether or not the Scout Car was the best vehicle for the job it was likely to have to do. By the time the North African landings were made the Troop had been fully equipped and trained with Universal Carriers, popularly known as Bren Carriers - a better name for the infantry man! - a small and light tracked vehicle. In many ways it would have been ideal. Above all it could be easily hidden. But it had no "punch" at all, and its performance across country was not good. It could never go fast enough to keep ahead of the tanks on exercises, when the only thing that could knock a tank out or make the commander go rather warily was an umpire. And umpires could not be everywhere and were often Subalterns - a great disadvantage when the man with his head sticking out of the turret spoke like a Lieut-Colonel, and probably was one, even though no badges of rank were visible. At any rate it was more tactful - and it usually paid - to make that assumption.

In the interim period between the Carrier and the Honey tank the troop had trained with Crusaders which were then being considered as a possible vehicle. The idea for some reason was not accepted, and it was at last decided to have Stuart tanks, or "Honeys" as the Americans called them, though they bore little resemblance to the

glamour girl usually addressed by that name on the screen. They carried a 37-millimetre gun but for reconnaissance purposes had the disadvantage of standing too high. They were thus very difficult to conceal. After our first battle the Troop had the turrets removed from half its tanks.

It was in January 1944 too that the anti-aircraft tanks first arrived. The Troop had been formed in Chippenham days and they spent many hours on classes in aircraft recognition, waiting with growing impatience for the arrival of the tanks. They were a very long time coming. Eventually, however, they began to come. They were Crusader tanks with a turret very much modified to mount twin Oerlikon guns. It was not till March that an opportunity was given them to fire the guns from the tanks and then the opportunities for practice were very limited. As it turned out the troop, as such, did not exist for very long. In the battle of Caen the casualties of the Regiment were such that the members of the Ack-Ack Troop had to be drafted to the other squadrons as reinforcements and the tanks were disposed of. But in that short time they had proved their worth. Just before the crossing of the Odon they had, by the accuracy of their fire, driven off some enemy planes which had no friendly intention towards the tanks sitting at the time more or less in the open just north of the Caen-Villers railway; and shortly after the battle of Caen, just as the Regiment was moving back from Demouville to St. Germaine Des Blanches Herbes, they brought down one plane.

And so the training went on. Some had to learn the intricacies of new equipment. Others spent their time in revising the lessons of the past. And all the time there was an emphasis on sealing or waterproofing the tanks and, when they had been waterproofed, of driving them through the water both as a test of the water-proofing and to accustom the drivers, and co-drivers too, to driving a tank through water deep enough to drown them if the water-proofing should be faulty. There were the ranges too - Rolston, Fylingdale, Midhope, Hornsea. There was scarcely a day when someone wasn't shooting somewhere.

There were also visits from the Great. At Helmsley Mr. Churchill had inspected the Division. When we were at Chippenham just before Exercise Turnabout the Duke of Gloucester visited the Brigade and watched it march past. Shortly after, the whole Brigade para-

ded with all its vehicles painted and polished as never before for inspection by the King himself. Then in February 1944 General Montgomery, recently brought home from the Eighth Army in Italy to be given command of 21st Army Group, visited Bridlington and walked round the Brigade - one cannot say inspected it - in the grounds of Bridlington Grammar School. It was during the time when he was touring England, as he put it, so that he could get to know the troops and the troops could get to know him. As one soon learnt from the National Press this performance was the same everywhere. The troops were drawn up in a square while the General walked round and looked at them rather than inspected them. Then came the order to break the ranks and gather round his Jeep to hear the speech which in the course of two or three months he must have delivered hundreds of times. "I wanted to come here today so that we could have a look at one another - so that I could have a look at you and you could have a look at me. We have a job to do together". And so on. It was nothing very profound but at the end of it one felt that every man present had complete confidence in his leader. One Nazi at least - Dr. Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda - had already been beaten at his own game. Finally in March the King and Queen visited Bridlington with the two Princesses and drove through the streets past the troops lining them. There was no doubt that the great day must be sometime this Summer. How soon no one knew, though things were clearly working up to a climax. Meanwhile the tanks were sent to Bridge Hewick to wade and the wheeled vehicles to Hull, and there was keen competition between regiments and squadrons to get to the ranges at Hornsea.

Towards the end of the month there came what was to be the last change of station in England. The whole move was shrouded in deep mystery. The advance party left at dead of night - an accident probably because they had a long way to go, but it seemed designed to prevent anyone seeing them - and it was not till they were moving off that they were told where they were going. Even then those who were left in Bridlington were not supposed to know, though in a few days it was common knowledge. There was, after all, no postal censorship in England as yet. So gradually the news leaked out and spread. It was southwards to Aldershot - the Mecca of the English Army. We were to be housed in part of the Cavalry Barracks, appropriately enough, and had no cause to feel, as did one of our friends in the Eighth

### Officers of the Twenty-Third Hussars

April 1944



Top Row: Lieuts Sandford, Fish, Turner, Russell, Thorne, Wex, Robson, Young, Cornwall, Pratt, Cochrane, Proctor, Harte.  
Standing: Lieuts Bishop, Crouch, King, Evans, Blackman, Capts Mitchell, Clarke, Jones, Walter, Garcia, Scott, O'Reilly, Lieuts Weiner, Addison.

Sitting: Capts Hagger, Whitehill, Shearman, Majors Wigan, Seymour, Dunkerly, Lieut-Col Harding, Majors Blacker, Gold, Legrand, Capts Watt, Shebbeare.

Bottom Row: Lieuts Bates, Hansen, Hawkins, Riley, Geikie, Byard, Kerton, Payne, da Canha.

Rifle Brigade who were also housed in the Cavalry Barracks, that, every time he sat down do dinner in the Mess, the inanimate portrait of a Cavalryman of the past, which hung on the wall, seemed perceptibly to turn up its nose and mutter in a voice full of scorn "By gad, sir, the Foot". What matter if few now could ride - except in a tank:- the spirit was there.

The main party reached Aldershot on March 31st and there began the final period of preparations. There was still a certain amount of wading practice and general training. But on the whole the days of training were over now. In April there were lectures on "beach organisation". Everyone learnt what to expect and how everything was to be organised on the other side; how, having got ashore, one went first through a transit area to an assembly area and thence to a concentration area; what the signs would be for tank routes, what for wheels and so on. These were things that everyone must know. Everyone went through a gas chamber once more just to make sure that he knew what to do to protect himself should the enemy use gas. Tank commanders visited an exhibition of German war equipment at the Imperial War Museum. The climax to years of training could not be far away now. There could be no second Exercise Turnabout.

In the meantime Top Secret letters arrived almost hourly. The amount of organisation was tremendous. We were told what rations, how much water, how much petrol and ammunition we were to carry, how vehicles were to be prepared for the crossing, how to get a replacement for a vehicle which broke down at the last moment, how the postal services were to be organised when censorship was introduced. Nothing was omitted. All this could be done while we were still in Aldershot. Later there followed another instruction dealing more particularly with what happened on the move from the concentration area to the marshalling area and thence to the embarkation area.

By the end of May all was ready. May 28th was the date by which preparations had to be completed, a fact which was signified by a message which arrived in the middle of the night and read "Cornelius May 28th Ack" or something to that effect. By this time all vehicles were sealed, packed and ready to move as soon as the word was given. On May 30th the Divisional Commander, Major-Ge-

neral Roberts, inspected specimen vehicles to ensure that all was ready. It was. Tanks and wheeled vehicles were drawn up on the Square, sealed and packed ready to move off as soon as the word was given. It was an impressive parade. On those vehicles, in which they knew they were going to fight, the crews had spent hours of labour. To prepare a tank for a channel crossing and to be sure that it would be battle worthy when it landed on the other side was not the work of a moment. Besides, each crew had made its own modifications according to individual taste. Standard gadgets, authorised by the Department of Tank Design after hours of discussion, were removed in a second and replaced by others designed by the man who rode in the tank and knew what was wanted to make his own particular body comfortable. Each had his own ideas about the small things needed for his own personal comfort, so far as comfort could be achieved. June 6th arrived and there was a feeling of suppressed excitement in the air. We knew now at least on what part of the Continent we should be landing. The Intelligence Officer was kept very busy getting the latest information on the progress of the operation in which everyone was vitally interested.

Then on June 8th the first movement to the ports of embarkation began. Major Wigan, at this time commanding Headquarters Squadron, went off with a convoy of the so called light vehicles - jeeps, 15-cwt trucks and the like. They were to embark at Tilbury and face the long voyage through the straits of Dover, and thence to the Beaches. There was no great excitement at their departure. We had been waiting a long time for this and we knew we should be seeing them again very soon. On the following day the advance party - Major Dunkerly, the Second-in-Command, with three men in a half-track, departed. Their job was to reconnoitre the area where the Regiment was eventually to concentrate on the other side and sub-allot squadron areas. Finally on June 11th the main body, consisting of tanks and heavy vehicles, moved off from Aldershot to the marshalling area just north of Gosport.

The Regiment was now on the move with the exception of one small party who were L.O.B., or left out of battle. This party consisted of a small number of tank crews intended as a reserve to make up for any casualties suffered in the first battle. Other reinforcements would no doubt be available, but experience in the Middle East had

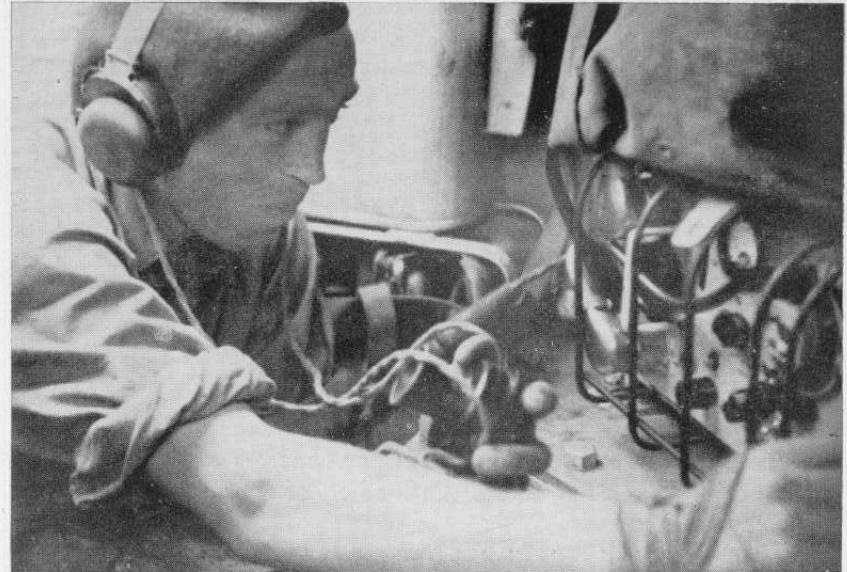


"Sealed and packed ready to move"  
An 'A' Squadron group on the Barrack Square at Aldershot.

shown how useful it was to have amongst the reinforcements crews of experience and, in this case, crews who had trained with the Regiment for a long time. There was also left behind a small number of vehicles which would not be immediately necessary on landing, two of the cooks lorries, for example, indispensable later on but not for a while so vital while everyone was living on pack rations, and the office truck which would certainly not be wanted until things had settled down sufficiently to allow the "paper war" to begin again. Captain Shebbeare, at this time Second-in-Command of 'B' Squadron, was left in command of the party. Hard though he tried, he could not altogether conceal his extreme disappointment. To be left out of the first battle was a bitter blow to him. He rejoined the Regiment (with his party) about six weeks later, nearly a week before he was expected.

While the main body was on the way to the marshalling area, the "light" party was embarking at Tilbury. They disembarked two days later on June 13th, on 'M' Beach near Courseulles-sur-Mer. The main party reached its camp in the marshalling area on the evening of the 11th and then came two or three days of most tedious delay. There was little to do and to be kept hanging about, when what everyone wanted was to get to the other side as quickly as possible, was almost unbearable. The loud speaker in the camp was continually calling various "craft loads" to prepare to move to the embarkation point but our turn seemed never to be coming.

To divide the vehicles into "craft loads" was one of the first jobs to be done on reaching the marshalling area. Crews travelled with their vehicles. There were two types of vessels used for the crossing, the LCT, or Landing Craft Tank, and the LST, or Landing Ships, which were much bigger and had two decks on which vehicles could be stowed. The tanks, of course, went on the LCTs - seven to each vessel. The LSTs carried the wheeled vehicles. On each vessel the senior rank was in charge, in each case an officer except for one notable case, the LCT carrying the three armoured recovery vehicles (one per Squadron) and the two scammels of the L.A.D., on which Sergeant Smith, REME., thereafter known as the Admiral, was in charge. When vehicles had thus been allotted to the crafts which were to carry them across the Channel there was little else to do but await the word to go. The final stages of waterproofing had still to be carried out, since the vehicles had moved by road from Aldershot and



"Dead on net": L/C Essex (C Squadron)



"Roger — Cut": Tpr Slater (HQ Squadron)

could not be completely sealed before leaving. There were also some last items of equipment to be drawn. We were given lifebelts called Shirley Temples to distinguish them from the more developed and more buoyant Mae Wests and - awful warning of what might come - each man added to his list of kit "Bags, Vomit - three".

When each man had thus been "completed to scale", to use the Quartermaster's parlance, and the vehicles finally checked and prepared there was little to do but to go to the Camp Cinema or sit in one's tent waiting for the loudspeaker to call one's own craft load forward. For two full days nothing happened. We were told that there had been some delay, or that the Channel was too rough. No one seemed to know. And then during the afternoon of June 14th the loudspeaker began to call for us "Craft Load number 395", or whatever it was, "prepare to move in three zero minutes". And so we began to move down to the "hards" or concrete ramps which had been constructed to facilitate the loading of the tanks on the landing craft.

Some embarked and sailed that night. Others spent a most uncomfortable night on a pavement and did not embark until next morning. Nor did they sail then but moved a short distance away out into the Solent and there waited for the rest of the day while the convoy was assembled. It was a glorious day which most spent asleep in the sun. But no one worried. There could now be no possibility of a second Turnabout. The crossings on the whole were uneventful. In the dark the convoys split up somewhat and, to those who knew nothing of the way these things worked, it was perhaps a little shattering to start off in a convoy of thirty vessels, all close together and apparently sailing in some sort of formation, only to wake up in the morning to find but four or five vessels in sight. However the Navy did not seem to be worried, and in the last week they had done the trip more than once, so that we felt that there was no cause for alarm.

The scene just off the beaches was an unforgettable one. There were hundreds of ships of all kinds crowded into a very small area. What a perfect target that vast conglomeration of vessels offered to the Luftwaffe! But very few planes came over, and those that did had such a warm welcome that they thought better of it and departed without accomplishing anything. The only interference that could come was from the air as the land forces were now fighting some six

or seven miles inland in the region of the Caen - Bayeux road and just beyond it.

When signalled-in from the shore the landing craft moved as near as possible to the beach, dropped the ramp at its nose and the vehicles started up and drove off. Some got ashore almost dryshod. Others went into four or five feet of water. One or two which had the bad luck to drive into a bomb crater filled with water and were drowned but such accidents luckily were exceptional. By now the organisation on the beaches had become perfect through practice. As each vehicle reached dry land, whether wheeled or tracked, it found its path well marked and at once set off into the unknown leaving the sand behind it in but a few minutes.

They set off into the "unknown" though everyone knew very well what the procedure should be. Had it not been explained in detail in many a lecture even before we left Aldershot? But others had been there before us. The explorers had found their way. They had left signs so that those that came after might know where to go. So many had explored. Arrows pointed every way and in the end it was by devious routes that the vehicles eventually found their way to the Regimental concentration area near the village of Coulombs. In theory there should have been an assembly area just clear of the beaches through which each vehicle should have passed and where sufficient of the sealing material should have been removed to allow the vehicle to proceed a further few miles without catching fire or breaking down. In fact, it did not quite work that way. Some followed the right arrows. Others of a more independent turn of mind chose their own routes and hoped for the best. "Sixteen Charlie", in particular, the well known troop leader of RHQ Troop, determined to reach his destination by his own route and in his own time, set off as if bent on beating the World's land speed record in a Sherman tank - he was always an optimist - and as usual on such occasions his wireless had broken down. He heard nothing. But others did and marvelled at the wealth of invective that flowed from 'Sunray's tank. So fast did he go that the Honey following at full speed behind, in a vain attempt to keep up, caught fire!

But by whatever route, and at whatever pace, at last we reached Coulombs and harboured there just north of the village.

By June 17th the Regiment was complete and concentrated once again for the first time since we left Aldershot. There followed nine days in which we made the final preparation for battle and, so to speak, became acclimatised. Coulombs was a pleasant little Norman village which lay on the southern edge of the coastal plain about half-way between Caen and Bayeux and just north of the main road connecting the two. The war had passed very quickly over this pleasant countryside. Except on the beaches themselves, amongst the villas on the coast and the villages just inland, which had been shattered beyond repair by the initial bombardment, there was little sign that here the liberation armies had made their assault on the Fortress of Europe.

It was the time of the year when in peace time we might have been thinking of spending a holiday here. But there was a good deal of work to be done. The tanks and wheeled vehicles had to be unsealed and made completely ready for battle. However, such work as was to be done took no more than three days and we were to stay here for nine. Everyone was in good spirits and eager to get on with the job. There was a feeling of suppressed excitement in the air. It seemed a pity to be sitting about doing nothing. But the time was not wasted. There was an 88-millimetre gun not far from our area. Everyone went to see this German "answer" to the Sherman tank and shuddered to see its long and menacing barrel aimed at the burnt-out hulk of a Sherman some fifteen hundred yards away. In the end the gun too had been knocked out and it was at least something to know that eighty-eights could not go on for ever. Quite near too were three Shermans - a troop quite clearly - all now dead and lifeless. There were rough graves near them, yet it was not the graves one heeded most. The main thought was: "Had I been in that tank where would I have gone? Could I have avoided the menace of that gun?"

A sight of considerable interest was a farm house ringed by mine-fields which had once been a German Headquarters. Every day the souvenir hunters walked out to it and rummaged amongst the mass of papers and discarded equipment littering the floors of the rooms, searched the dug-outs or gazed with morbid interest at the still exposed hand of a German hastily buried in a ditch. He had died for his Führer . . . . Someone in 'C' Squadron found a 20-millimetre anti-aircraft gun. The mechanical experts spent hours trying to make it work and great was the triumph when it was eventually per-



Captain Whitehill briefing the members of Headquarters Squadron at Coulombs before the Odon battle.



Echelon drivers, fitters and wireless mechanics get "the dope".  
They often worked day and night to keep the tanks serviced and supplied.

suaded to fire a round at a German aircraft. Like most trophies found in the early days it was soon discarded. There was not much point in taking an ack-ack gun home to England and in any case the chances of going back to England for some while were remote indeed, unless one were to become a casualty. That there must be casualties when the fighting started everyone knew, but probably no individual thought that he personally would be chosen by the fates.

So the days passed quietly by, followed by somewhat noisier nights, when the Luftwaffe ranged over the beachhead in a fruitless endeavour to damage the countless ships anchored off the beaches only to be met by a hail of fire which poured up into the sky from innumerable guns of all calibres. Then, as the end of June drew nearer, conferences became more frequent. The Colonel would go off to Brigade or Division. On his return squadron leaders would be summoned post haste and would arrive to hear the latest plans, complete with maps, notebooks and china-graph pencils. No detail must be missed. Finally it became known that Monday June 26th was to be the day. On the Sunday the last conference took place. The final preparations were made and everyone settled down to take full advantage of what might be the last opportunity for proper rest for some time to come. The stage was now set for the first battle.

## CHAPTER III

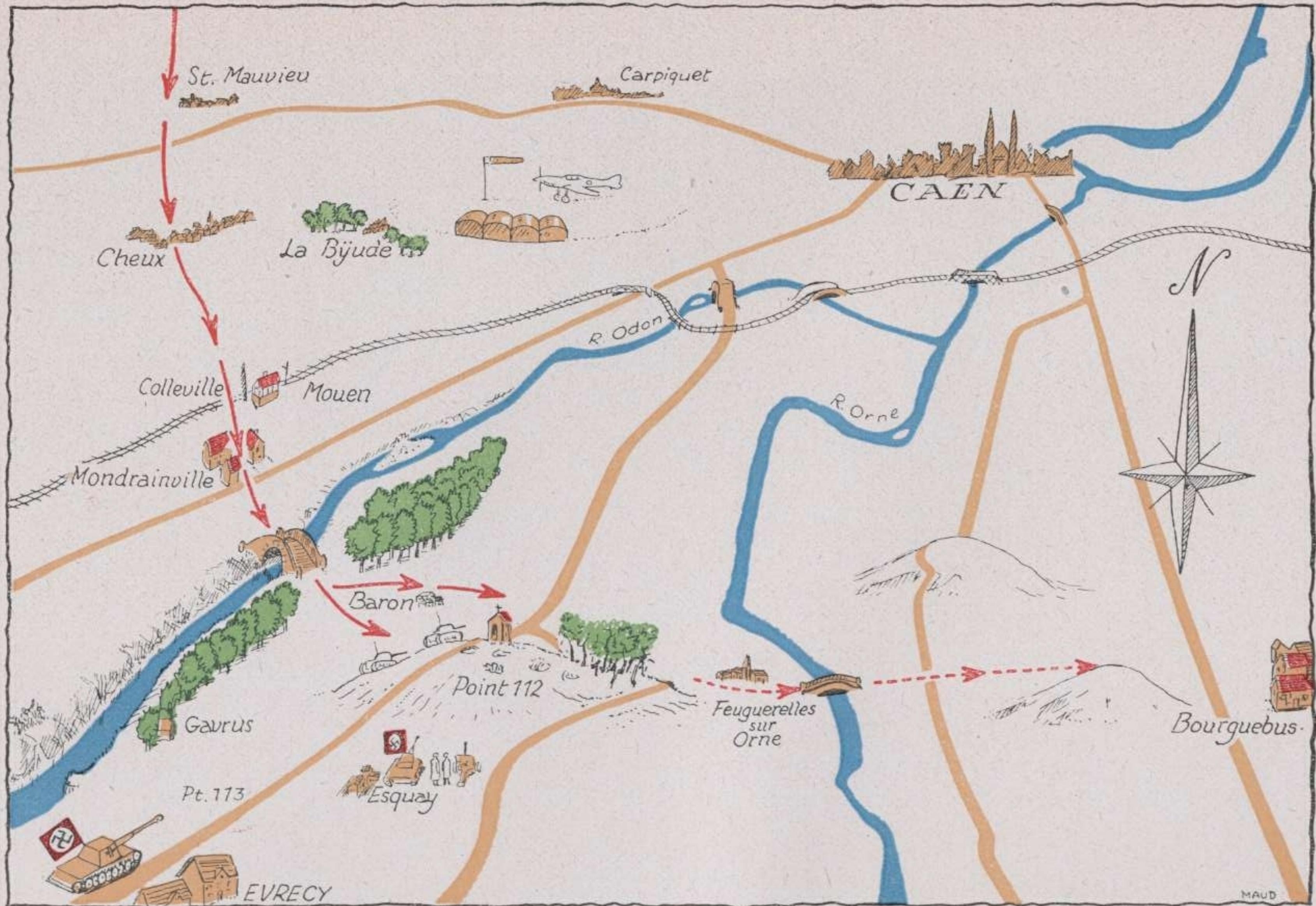
### THE CROSSING OF THE ODON AND THE BATTLE OF POINT 112

June 26th—30th

On the morning of June 26th the Division began to move forward from the area of Cully to take part in Eighth Corps' attack which was designed to break through the enemy positions west of Caen. The plan which had been discussed in very great detail while we were in harbour at Coulombs was in reality an ambitious one, though no one really thought so at the time. It was very much like preparing for another exercise, and exercises, after all, always go according to plan if the umpires are keen on their job. As will be seen, a great deal was in fact achieved in this first battle in which the Division had taken part, though the amount of ground covered was nothing like that envisaged by those responsible for naming the ultimate objective. The difficulty was that there were far too many Germans about.

The general situation at this time was as follows: within a week of the original landings the various beachheads had been linked up. There had followed some very bitter fighting in difficult bocage country in which often at the cost of heavy casualties the perimeter had been pushed out to give enough room to house the reinforcements, which were being landed daily, and to store the enormous quantities of petrol, ammunition and supplies of all kinds that would be needed when the attempt to break out of the beachhead was made. All this had gone very well and by the end of June the time had come for the first attempt to break out of the beachhead. It was part of the plan that the Germans should be drawn into the eastern sector of the beachhead and at this time they had already committed six Panzer Divisions in the area. Round Caen which was the pivot of the whole front the fighting had been and still was particularly fierce.

Now the intention was to break out of this beachhead with Eighth Corps consisting of the Eleventh Armoured Division and the Fifteenth



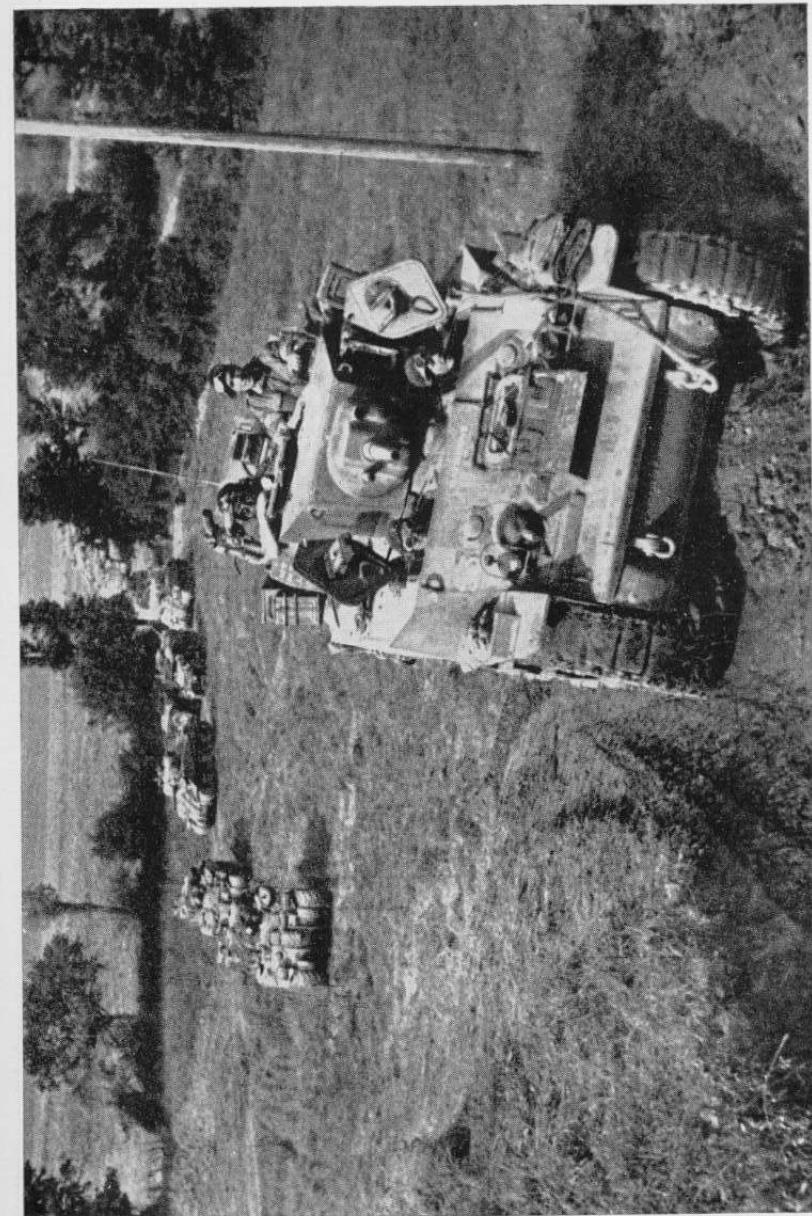
The Battle of the Odon and Point 112  
JUNE 1944

Scottish Infantry Division with two independent Tank Brigades. Briefly the plan was this.

The Fifteenth Scottish Division, the majority of whom, like ourselves, had not so far seen action, were to break through the enemy defences and establish themselves astride the main road running south-west from Caen to Villers. They were to be supported by Churchill tanks including some flame-throwers. As soon as this was done the Eleventh Armoured Division was to pass through them and seize the crossings of the river Odon and establish itself on the high ground between the confluence of the river Odon and the river Orne. It was then to push forward and reconnoitre the crossings of the river Orne with a view to getting over and consolidating on the high ground south of Caen, astride the main road from Caen to Falaise. Caen was still in enemy hands and to establish a force on the high ground south of the town would make the position of the enemy holding it well-nigh untenable.

Twenty-ninth Armoured Brigade leading the Eleventh Armoured Division moved over the Caen - Bayeux railway to the west of Norrey-en-Bessin and then prepared to move two regiments up with the Second Fife and Forfar Yeomanry on the right, Twenty-third Hussars on the left and the Third Royal Tanks in reserve. So far nothing of importance had happened. The fighting had moved on and the infantry were engaged some way ahead. Special tank tracks had been constructed from the concentration area with the aid of bulldozers in order to relieve the strain on the roads, which at that time were being put to a severe test by the enormous number of vehicles passing along them. The routes were well signposted and there was no need for map reading to keep on the right route. That was perhaps just as well. We were to discover later that with the maps issued it needed something more than accurate map-reading to arrive at a given place by a given route. One felt at times that the cartographer had for some reason or other been compelled to do a good deal of his work from memory and that his memory had frequently let him down.

As was the normal practice then, 'H' Company of the Eighth Battalion Rifle Brigade, commanded by Major Mackenzie, was moving under command of the Regiment. Major Gaunt of 'G' Battery, Thirteenth Royal Horse Artillery was with Regimental Headquarters,



"Into Battle"  
A Honey leads as the tanks wind their way towards Cheux

as he continued to be throughout the whole campaign, ready to bring down fire from the guns whenever necessary. Though we did not perhaps realise it then, it was certainly not long before we learnt how useful it was to have someone about who could bring down a "stonk" when the enemy showed signs of becoming too cheeky.

After crossing the railway the Regiment halted for some time as the infantry ahead were advancing only slowly in the face of stubborn opposition. There was no cover available so the tanks were obliged to stay in the open. There was some slight shelling, probably directed at the Fifteenth Scottish Division, which did us no harm though a few rounds fell close enough to make it necessary to move slightly. This was the first time that many of us had been under shell-fire. Here too for the first time we saw German prisoners being led back. It was a novel and thrilling experience.

Meanwhile the Fifteenth Scottish Division had cleared the village of St. Mauvieu, though the searing fire of a Churchill flame-thrower could still be seen consuming some post more stubborn than the rest as the Division moved on to Cheux. When they had practically cleared it the Regiment was ordered to advance. 'C' Squadron, commanded by Major Blacker, led and was directed to bypass the village to the east. They found the going very difficult and slow. The country was very much like the Bocage which we were to experience later - very enclosed with thick hedges growing on the top of steep banks which were in fact tank obstacles. The ground too was heavily pitted with shell-craters as a result of the opening barrage. However they found a way through and came out on the high ground to the east and slightly south of Cheux, overlooking the Caen - Villers railway ahead of them and the enemy strongpoint of Carpiquet, which protected the western approaches to Caen. The rest of the Regiment in the meantime moved up through Cheux. The going was better on the road but progress was slow owing to its narrowness and the fact that in places it was almost blocked by the débris from battered houses. It was during this move up to Cheux that the Regiment suffered its first casualties. Lieut. Da Cunha and Trooper Pilling of 'B' Squadron were wounded by shell-fire which descended during a brief halt and caught them outside their tank. About the same time, too' a 'B' Squadron tank, commanded by Sergeant Dowling, fired the first round in the Regiment. A loose shell in the bottom of the tank is



Past St Mauvieu  
"The searing fire of a Churchill flame-thrower could still be seen"

reported to have rolled on to the firing button when the tank slid into a crater and sent one of the seventy-five's high explosive shells into the ground about twenty yards ahead. Neither the comments of the tank commander nor of those near him were recorded.

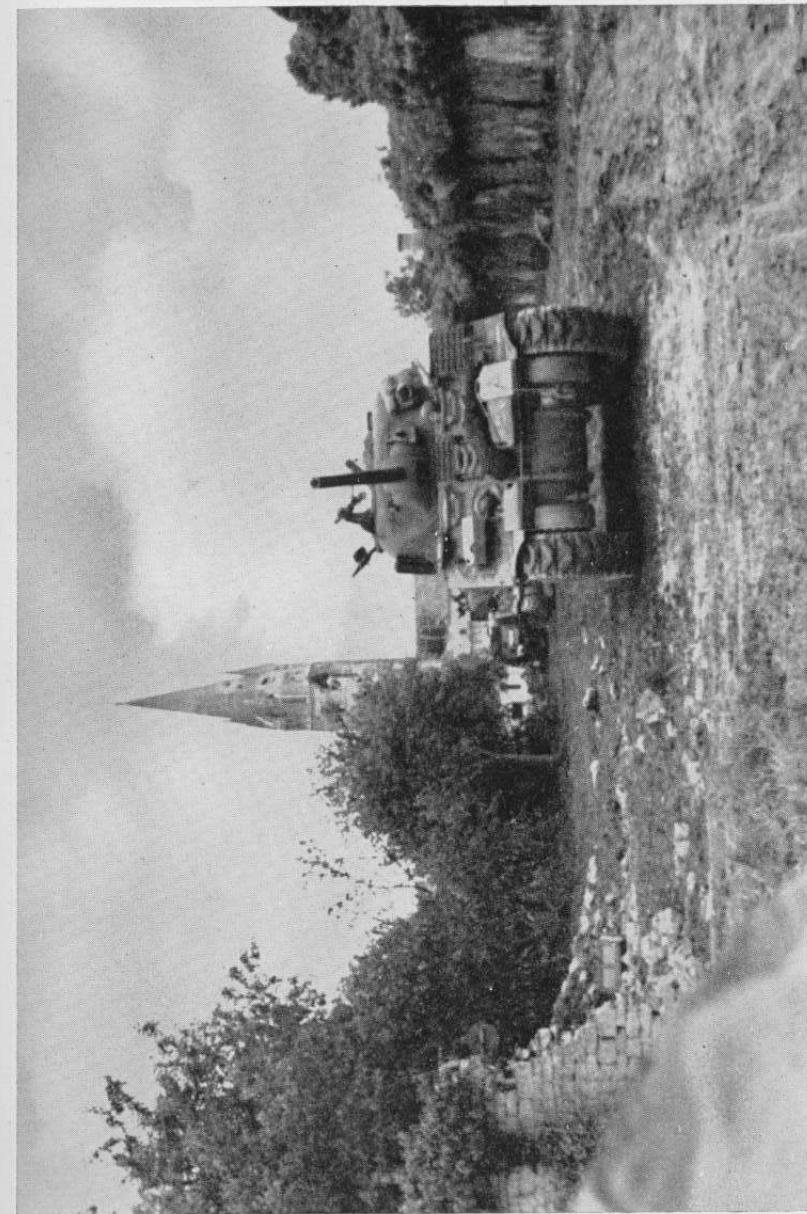
'C' Squadron had by this time taken up positions overlooking La Bijude. The infantry advancing southwards towards Colleville were meeting stiff opposition nor could the Churchill tanks supporting them make much progress. As soon as one of them showed itself over the crest it drew fire and there were already three or four in flames just in front of us. 'B' Squadron moved up past the Churchills and began to engage targets in the valley and 'C' Squadron was ordered to probe forward and see what they could do towards helping the infantry down the slope and on to their objective.

Third Troop under Lieut. Robson nosed its way over the crest while First Troop commanded by Lieut. King pushed up into a position from which it would be able to give fire support, if necessary. The enemy, however, were well dug-in and apparently had plenty of anti-tank guns covering the front. As with the Churchills, so with the Shermans. As soon as the leading tank showed itself it was hit and set on fire. This was the first tank of the Regiment to be destroyed in action.

Those who witnessed it will always remember the shock of seeing for the first time one of the Regiment's tanks go up in flames. One moment an impregnable monster, with perhaps a crew containing some of one's best friends, forging irresistibly towards the enemy: the next, a crack of terrific impact, a sheet of flame - and then, where there had been a tank nothing but a helpless, roaring inferno.

The driver, Lance-Corporal Hogg, was killed but the remainder of the crew got out, two of them badly burnt. They hid in the corn, which was now just ripening, and made their way back later on under cover of darkness.

Shortly afterwards Lieut. King's tank was hit and knocked out. The rest of the Squadron began to move up and Captain Walter, the second-in-command, went forward to see what had happened to the crew of Lieut. King's tank and, as he did so, an armour piercing shot went through the rear idler of his tank. His driver Trooper Litchfield, having inspected the damage and decided that the tank might still



"The rest of the Regiment in the meantime moved up through Cheux"

be moved, got back in and reversed it out of action though with some difficulty. He was later awarded the M.M. for his gallantry and coolness at this time. Not long after this the Squadron Leader's tank was also hit by a 50-millimetre shot and immobilized though it was recovered successfully.

It was now getting dark and rain had begun to fall. 'C' Squadron were therefore ordered to pull back and join the Regiment in harbour just behind the hill. So ended our first day in action. It had begun very quietly. Except for desultory shelling and the fact that St. Mauvieu, as we passed it, was in flames and Cheux a shambles, we might well have imagined ourselves on another exercise on the Yorkshire Wolds. Nothing of real note had happened until 'C' Squadron went into action in the evening. Then, in a very short time, four tanks were hit and there were some casualties. But the action had not been unsuccessful. With the support of the tanks the infantry had got companies down into Colleville and it had been clearly proved that now that the test had come the Regiment could and would do all that its performances during the long period of training in England had led one to expect of it. Particularly noteworthy was the behaviour of the wounded on this occasion. Owing to the congestion on the roads the Medical Officer was unable to get up for some time and they were not evacuated until three o'clock in the morning but they behaved perfectly.

The rain continued for most of the night but it really didn't matter very much. As it was midsummer the hours of darkness were so short that there was little time for sleep and, when the opportunity came to bed down, most were so tired that it would take more than rain to upset sleep. It must be remembered that the tanks could never be moved into harbour for the night until it was dark when all possibility of observation by the enemy was excluded; and when they did come in - in those days probably at about 11 p. m. or later - they had to be replenished with petrol and there were all sorts of odd jobs of maintenance to be done. The crews too had to eat, though the menu was not extensive. Suppers were usually cold and based largely on bully and biscuits.

We were up very early the following morning. It was essential that the tanks, which had come in very close together for the night, should shake out again before daylight came. 'A' Squadron, command-



"Cheux — a shambles"



Cheux: "A Tiger had worked round through the village"

"At about eleven o'clock we began to move forward"



ded by Major Gold who came to us in the Bridlington days from the Sherwood Rangers, was ordered forward to the crest to get into a hull-down position there and engage any enemy in sight. It was not long before something was spotted. They opened fire on some 88-millimetre guns and on a tank and claimed hits, but it was never possible to verify their claims. The rest of the Regiment by this time had dispersed in the open ground behind the crest of the hill, there being no cover, to minimise the effect of any possible visit from the Luftwaffe.

For quite some time there was no forward movement. The position down on the railway line was very uncertain owing to the fact that the forward companies of the infantry had got out of touch with their Battalion Headquarters during the night. But we were not idle. A Tiger tank - or so it was reported - had worked round through the village of Cheux and was firing on the Recce Troop which was in the rear of the Regiment. Two Honeys were knocked out by a single shot and Sergeant Scott, who was asleep in one, was killed.

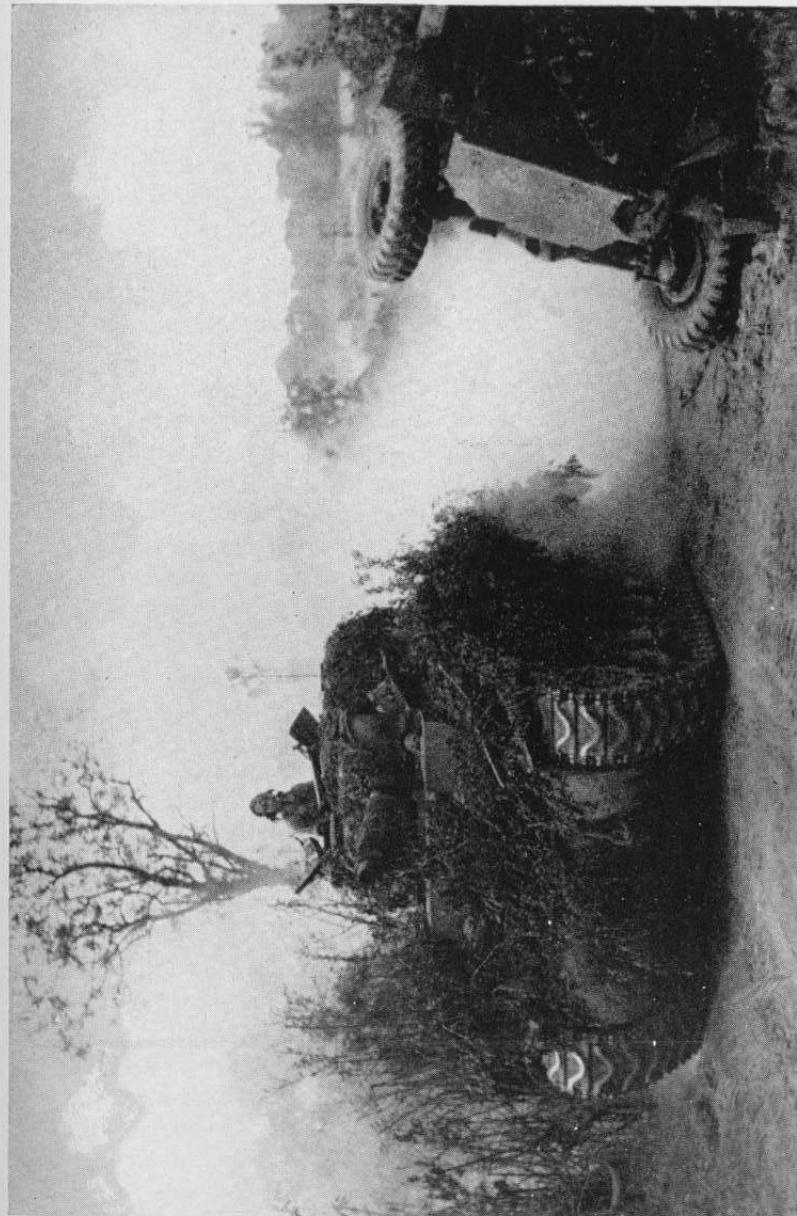
At about eleven o'clock we began to go forward. The Recce Troop led, followed by 'B' Squadron. It was not long before the enemy reacted. One Honey was knocked out by a self-propelled gun from the direction of Mouen down on the railway and slightly to our left. Another S. P. was sighted further to the west. 'B' Squadron opened fire on these and also on some Tiger tanks which seemed to be trying to work in from the flank from the direction of the Haut du Bosq feature. The Second Fife and Forfar Yeomanry, who were on the right flank, were also engaging them. However the Squadron managed to push on and, swinging somewhat to the east, reached the railway line in the area of Mouen. Sergeant McConnell's tank was hit and the crew had a very uncomfortable time dodging enemy infantry before they eventually made their way back to our own lines and to safety. At one time, while hiding in a ditch, they were in fact inspected by a Boche who was so surprised that he turned and fled. The Squadron finally made its way through very difficult and enclosed country and took up position just to the north-west of Mondrainville which the Fifteenth Scottish were now clearing.

While here, one 'B' Squadron tank knocked out a German lorry on the other side of the Odon at a range of three thousand yards getting a direct hit with the third round - a very good piece of shooting indeed.

Meanwhile 'C' Squadron had moved over the railway line followed by RHQ with 'A' Squadron in reserve. A Tiger tank was knocked out by the combined efforts of Sergeant McIntosh, 'C' Squadron, and the Intelligence Officer. To level the score the enemy knocked out Sergeant Craig's tank while he was engaging another Tiger. It was all very confusing. The country just over the railway was thickly wooded. It was impossible to see exactly what was going on but we were making progress and giving as good as we got. At about this time on our right the enemy were reported in some strength and were holding up the advance of the Fife and Forfars. 'C' Squadron, therefore, went into position just behind 'B', facing towards the high ground west of them, on which stood the village of Grainville sur Odon. The Recce Troop were sent out in front of 'C' to give early warning of any movement that might come from that direction.

Actually none came, but on our left, in the direction of Carpiquet, things were far from quiet. A troop of 'A' Squadron under Lieut. Byard were sent out in the direction of Mouen to deal with an enemy tank reported there and came under fire from an unknown number of anti-tank guns. Major Henri LeGrand, D.S.O., had also gone out with this troop. Of the four tanks only one escaped. Major LeGrand was killed - a great tragedy. His one ambition had been to return to Belgium with a British unit.

In Mondrainville, though it was by no means clear, both the infantry and tanks were making progress if not without difficulty. Two tanks of 'B' Squadron were hit, the Sherman with the Bulldozer attachment as usual broke down and two other tanks trying to get round by pushing across country were ditched. Progress through the village itself as a result was rather slow. But by this time a small party of infantry had forced their way down to the bridge over the Odon and found it intact. 'C' Squadron was therefore ordered to find a way through or round Mondrainville, as 'B' Squadron were still far too much involved, and to get over the bridge and hold it. It was not an easy task. Mondrainville was like a wasp's nest that has been only partially smoked out. The main Caen-Villers road which was absolutely straight and had to be crossed was covered by enemy tanks and anti-tank guns. The tracks, too, were bad and not at all accurately marked on the map. But the leading Troop Leader, Lieut. Pratt, showing a great deal of skill and contempt for the enemy found a way



"Progress through the village, as a result, was rather slow"

round and the Squadron going with great dash reached the bridge and crossed. They ground along in low gear up a steep and twisting track through still very wooded and difficult country until they came out just south of the village of Tourmauville where, for the first time, they were able to fan out on ground which gave a good field of fire.

The ground rose in a gradual slope before them covered with rough grass and completely open. On the ridge, in the distance, a straggling line of trees and bushes commanded the whole area. Commanders and gunners strained their dust-filled eyes watching for the slightest movement. Were some of those bushes in reality camouflaged tanks? Then, as they arrived, one German at least experienced what was probably the greatest shock of his life. He appeared quite suddenly in a small civilian car from the direction of Esquay. Lance-Corporal Essex, the Second-in-Command's gunner, put a seventy-five armour piercing shot through the car from a range of about twenty yards. Surprisingly the driver managed to get out and, though pursued by Corporal Hoggins with a Sten gun, he got away and was last seen going very fast in the direction of Esquay. This was followed almost at once by a short engagement with some guns and infantry in the area of Gavrus, a village on the Odon a little to the west. They too seemed surprised to see our tanks.

As soon as it was known that the bridge was intact, 'C' Squadron was ordered to advance followed by the Recce Troop and two tanks of RHQ, while 'A' Squadron were to remain where they were on the railway line until some reconnaissance could be made of the ground south of the Odon. Even now the journey through Mondrainville was not without its excitements. The road was not clear. Beside the tanks of 'B' Squadron which had been damaged or ditched a Panther had been knocked out and lay with its long barrel stretching right across the road. The result was a good deal of congestion. Two Honey tanks were hit and added to the mounting list of derelicts, and had the enemy's shooting been good the number must inevitably have been higher. The command tank itself had been taken on as a target by the German gunners as it came through Mondrainville and those listening on the Forward Link were amused to hear the Colonel come up on the air in the middle of the battle saying, "Get behind me, Sixteen Charlie, there's some b . . . shooting me up the dock!"

Gradually, however, things were sorted out and by devious routes we made our way down to the river and over it though the C.O.s tank was well and truly ditched just at the approach to the bridge and he had to continue in a Honey - a poor command tank compared with a Sherman.

By now it was about seven o'clock in the evening. Two Squadrons were firmly established across the river and a secure bridgehead had been formed. 'H' Company of the RBs, who earlier in the day had been engaged in evicting snipers from the orchards near the railway line, had been brought up and were in position round the bridge itself. The rattle of machine guns and the thunder of tank guns and shell bursts raged all around. Burning vehicles, houses and haystacks filled the air with acrid smoke which formed a cloud over the valley. But things seemed to be going well and the Second-in-Command, Major Dunkerly, was ordered to bring up the rest of RHQ and the reserve Squadron. Unfortunately the enemy command had by now quite definitely heard of the intrusion and had begun to show signs that he resented it. The distance from the railway to the bridgehead was some two or three miles and there was nothing out on the flanks to protect us. The Germans began to bring in tanks towards Mondrainville both from the east and the west and the village became even less of a health resort than it had been earlier on in the day. The I.O.'s tank was hit. He was wounded and taken prisoner. Major Gaunt, 'G' Battery Commander, also lost his tank and three Ack-Ack tanks were knocked out. Lieut. Kerton the Troop Leader of the Ack Ack Troop, moving across country to what he thought was a likely looking piece of cover, ran straight into an enemy position. The tank was destroyed and the whole crew captured as they were trying to make their way back. 'A' Squadron meanwhile were preparing to deal with the expected counter-attack. Nothing more serious developed, however, and eventually, when it became clear that Major Dunkerly's party would not get through before the light failed, they were ordered to make arrangements to spend as comfortable a night as possible where they were.

In the bridgehead itself there was little interference. The actual bridge was shelled and mortared from Esquay. From Esquay, too, we saw "moaning minnies" rising for the first time and heard them "crump" somewhere behind us and thanked the gods that we weren't

still at the bridge itself. No enemy tanks appeared, which was perhaps just as well for them. We were in a good position. Our neck was somewhat stretched and the Germans were making a determined effort to cut it but were paying little attention to the head. When darkness fell the tanks closed in to harbour with 'H' Company who had now come up from the bridge.

No one had much sleep that night. In the circumstances it was more than essential that every tank should be in position again by first light as the enemy had by now had ample time to review the situation and to decide what they were going to do about it. Almost as soon as it was possible to see, a target presented itself. Two German Mark IV tanks were spotted about twelve hundred yards away on the high ground just above Esquay. One was knocked out before its crew had roused themselves. The other was also hit but managed to limp away. 'B' Squadron was then ordered to advance and establish itself on Point 112 or Calvary Hill as it was later known. 'C' Squadron remained where they were to give 'B' covering fire as they moved forward. Skirting the ruins of Baron, 'B' Squadron approached the hill from the north as the lie of the ground gave most cover for an approach from that direction and most of the enemy fire seemed to be coming from the southern slope of the hill. They went well for some time over open, undulating country which was good going for tanks, reminiscent of the Yorkshire Wolds. One tank was hit by a 50-millimetre shot which broke its track, and Lieut. Cochrane's tank was hit and destroyed. The crew got out and came under heavy fire from both sides. They found some cover in a cornfield where at least they could not be seen but, though unseen, they seemed to be the target for all machine guns, mortars and artillery in the area. To get some protection they dug shallow trenches for themselves with jack-knives and their fingernails. Eventually they got back, though it was not till thirty-six hours later that the last of them came in.

The Squadron meanwhile, by moving round a little further to the east, had established itself on the northern half of the hill. The enemy opposition in the area consisted of dug-in tanks and infantry in position in a small wood. Their tanks had alternative sites to move to under cover and were almost impossible to get at. An attempt was made to knock them out with some self-propelled guns which were under our command and were sent forward with 'B' Squadron. It

was unsuccessful. Medium artillery was tried without effect. Finally rocket-firing Typhoons were called up but the Tigers were well-camouflaged and the pilots were unable to locate them. The Gunners put down red smoke to indicate the target. One round fell amongst our own tanks and the hillside was immediately covered in yellow smoke, tins of which were issued to each tank so that it could signal to our aircraft and assure them that it was friendly. It often worked. On this occasion the C.O. dropped the smoke in the turret of his tank to the great amusement of those who were near enough to see what happened and the discomfiture of his crew who found it rather overpowering.

Just before this happened two troops of tanks had come up from the 270th Forward Delivery Squadron. This was in effect a reinforcement holding unit for the Brigade and, so far as we were concerned, the tanks were crewed by some of the oldest members of the Regiment. The whole object of the unit was that it should be at hand to supply reinforcements on just such an occasion as this. The tanks travelled with the Brigade Echelon and were available at call when needed. We had by now lost a number of our tanks and the first line reinforcements came up to replace them. 'B' Squadron were now leading and had had some losses, so it was decided to send up the reinforcements at once onto Point 112. They made their way, hull down by the same route as their predecessors until they reached the Squadron on the hill. Almost at once Corporal Clear's tank was hit and destroyed. He had gone just a little too far over the crest. Very soon afterwards Captain Clark's tank was also knocked out; so too was Lieut. Helyar's. Both officers died soon afterwards from their wounds. It was a most unfortunate occasion. In the space of a few minutes we lost some good friends and some of the best reinforcements ever sent up to us by the Forward Delivery Squadron which served us well then and continued to do so until the fighting finished.

'B' Squadron had until now been fighting nearest to the Point 112 feature. Their strength, as with the other Squadrons, had been reduced owing to casualties received on the previous day and their losses had been increased during the advance on the hill. With them were 'H' Company of the RBs and one troop of self-propelled anti-tank guns and this force was commanded by Major Seymour, O.C. 'B'

Squadron. It was he who conducted the battle there until the Colonel arrived and, indeed, he almost made it his own personal fight. The dug-in Tigers especially annoyed him. At first he went out on foot to find positions from which the S.P. guns might move them. When that was unsuccessful he suggested to the Colonel that 'H' Company be put in to the wood to clear it, and it was largely due to his efforts that we got such a firm foothold on the hill that day.

By now the threat to the centre line which had developed on the previous evening had been dealt with. The enemy had given up his attempts to sever the head from the body and the rest of the Regiment was moving up from Mondrainville from which the enemy had finally been cleared, closely followed by the Third Battalion, Royal Tank Regiment. 'C' Squadron was therefore sent forward to come up on the left of 'B' Squadron. Lieut. Pratt got his tank to within three hundred yards of an enemy Panther or Tiger and disabled it. But it was still not possible to locate the rest of the enemy tanks and bring our own guns unto them. Armour-piercing shot and H.E. were coming from all directions, including our rear. Major Blacker and Corporal Webster conducted a Tiger hunt in the wood on foot. They spotted one but it was impossible to bring up anything to deal with it, so well had the enemy chosen his positions.

While this was going on Regimental Headquarters and 'A' Squadron had moved up to the hill while the Recce Troop had been sent out to the right to watch Gavrus, an area into which the Fourth Armoured Brigade were reported to be coming up. When the Recce Troop reached Gavrus it was empty but they had not been there long before the enemy appeared. Some tanks of the Fourth Armoured arrived at about the same time, which was lucky for the Recce Troop. Shermans looked better game than Honeyes and, while the Germans fired at them, the Honeyes quietly slipped away. They had done their job. There was no point in keeping them there any longer. At the same time things on Point 112 had livened up somewhat. Numerically we were overwhelmingly superior in tanks but the position was a commanding one and the enemy knowing its importance full well had taken every step possible to deny it to us. He need not actually occupy the hill. He could cover it from Esquay as the C.O. found to his cost. When he arrived on the hill he could not find a place from which he could see what was going on, so he

moved round to a position which not only gave a good view of the hill but overlooked the village of Esquay where the enemy, obviously very surprised, could be seen running about and proceeding "to take up action stations". As an observation point the position was excellent but, though it offered a perfect view of a pleasant stretch of country, it was nevertheless quite without cover and obviously no place to stay in in the circumstances. As RHQ moved away the C.O.'s tank was hit and destroyed but luckily the whole crew escaped.

During the whole of this time there was a good deal of shooting going on. The enemy seemed to be everywhere. The wood on the hill especially was giving trouble. As has been mentioned 'H' Company had been sent in to clear it and had done so at the cost of some casualties. But by this time many of the tanks were running short of ammunition. There was no question of having any lorries sent up and so, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, the Third Royal Tanks were sent up to relieve the Regiment on the hill and we were drawn back into reserve at Tourmauville. We remained there until about midday the next day, June 29th. This was the first respite after several days of continuous fighting. No one had had much sleep. The nights had been short. Crews had to stay cramped in their tanks during the hours of darkness and they could never afford to have less than two members awake and alert, watching for intruders. Now, as the tanks drew up along the perimeter of a small field and the weary troops dismounted, their begrimed faces wore an expression of intense relief. "So, I did make it . . ." They knew now that they could stand the strain of battle, that they would never let down their comrades. And they knew, too, that they were a match for the enemy. The Colonel walked round chatting to the men, asking them how they had got on. Later he called us together and spoke for a few minutes, thanking us all for the success of the first battle, reminding us too that it was only the beginning period. It was a bedraggled group of men that surrounded him, clothed in the comfortable untidiness necessary for fighting a tank. The dust of Normandy, which was to irritate us throughout these early battles, had got into their clothes, and into the chapped pores of their skins; had reddened their eyes and parched their throats - so that many commanders had practically lost their voices. But there was an expression of confidence in those unshaven faces, which was due very largely to the man who addressed them now. His resolute and encouraging voice over the air had held them to-

gether as if he were personally standing at the side of every tank commander. It was good to have a proper wash and to get a fair night's sleep. The Echelon also came up and we were replenished with ammunition and petrol. During the past two days they had had a most unpleasant time. They were in "soft" vehicles but never far behind the tanks. Their job was to come up at night and bring up the necessities, the petrol, the ammunition, the replacements and also the luxuries of life, the mail, the most important thing of all, the Naafi ration and the various odds and ends which one found one wanted and had forgotten to put in the tank or had lost in the confusion of battle. It was not an easy job. They moved in the dark along roads which were no more than tracks. They were under fire and had their casualties. If in England it was an easier job to maintain a lorry than a tank, in battle and certainly in these earlier battles it was almost safer to be in a tank.

The next morning the troops assembled again for a short service held in the centre of the field where Captain Clarke and four riflemen of the RBs were buried.

At about midday on June 29th the Forty-fourth Battalion, R.T.R., who had followed up behind us and had come up on our right making for the high ground in the area of Point 113, reported a good deal of enemy movement in the area of Gavrus. They had had a number of tanks knocked out by enemy tanks or self-propelled guns which were thought to be in the woods which ran along the valley of the river Odon. The Regiment was therefore ordered to move forward into a position east and slightly south of Tourmauville where it could protect the rear of the Point 112 position, which was now being heavily shelled and mortared. Here they could deal with any attack which might come in from the direction of Gavrus where the Forty-fourth Tanks had been roughly handled and were beginning to pull back under cover of smoke. It was not long before armour-piercing shot began to whistle over our heads. 'B' Squadron, less one troop which was sent back to cover the bridge over the Odon, and 'C' Squadron were pushed out with 'B' on the right and 'C' on the left to watch out to the west towards Gavrus and the woods lining the river valley. There was a good deal of shooting going on and the smoke only added to the confusion. 'A' Squadron were in reserve with orders to be ready to support an attack by the 159th Infantry

Brigade through the woods along the river towards Gavrus. A 1. Echelon - a small group of vehicles never far behind the tanks and carrying only the most urgently needed supplies - meanwhile had been organised for the defence of its harbour in Tourmauville where their activities had been considerably livened up by some very "accurate" shelling which later was strongly suspected of having come from our own medium guns. The E.M.E., Captain Scott was especially active behind a P.I.A.T. which on such an occasion seemed to attract him far more than a spanner.

By seven o'clock in the evening the noise of battle began to die down. We had no casualties though some tanks were hit but not vitally. We claimed to have knocked out a number of enemy tanks and self-propelled guns though none could be substantiated. Our own tank losses were nil. One tank had been hit and disabled but was recovered later. It was on the whole a satisfactory affray. The enemy attempt to come in on our rear had definitely failed. But on Point 112 itself the Third Tanks and RBs were having a very uncomfortable time. The shelling and mortaring was intense. The enemy was obviously loth to give up the position and had it well covered. For the time being the tanks could go no further. It had been decided therefore to withdraw the armour from the hill and leave the 159th Infantry Brigade holding a bridgehead extending as far as Tourmauville. This was done during the night. The Third Tanks and RBs were withdrawn from the hill and passed back through us and at about three o'clock on the morning of June 30th the Regiment began to withdraw. A 1. Echelon went first, followed by 'A' Squadron, then 'C' Squadron, then RHQ. 'B' Squadron covered the withdrawal. A composite troop of 17-pounder Shermans, their fire directed by Major Seymour, engaged an enemy tank and claimed a hit. It seemed a pity to be giving up ground so hardly won but it was a satisfactory end. The enemy had taken far more punishment than he had given and the importance he attached to the Calvary Hill feature was only too clearly shown by the battles later fought for that vital piece of ground.

In the early hours of the morning no one seemed at all sure where we were supposed to be going but at about midday, after the Recce Troop had been directed once more to Cheux and there suffered some casualties from shelling, we arrived again in the area of Cully

and joined the rest of the Echelon. There was time for a bath of the Active Service kind, where two inches of water is made to cover six feet of body. And there was time for sleep, a great blessing after four days of fighting. Then a hasty conference was held, and we were on the move again to hold a "watching brief" just behind Putot-en-Bessin.

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During the Regiment's first five days in action (from June 26th, when the advance on Cheux began, to June 30th, when we returned from Hill 112 to Putot-en-Bessin) the following casualties were sustained:-

Killed	2 officers 34 other ranks
Wounded	6 officers 30 other ranks
Prisoners of War	2 officers (both wounded) 6 other ranks

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BATTLE OF CAEN

July 1st — 22nd

July 1st found the Regiment in harbour near the railway line by the village of Putot-en-Bessin. We had never been in better spirits. The action on the Odon and Point 112 had won the Regiment a name second to none. We had inflicted much heavier casualties on the enemy than we had received ourselves. Everyone had supreme confidence in his leaders, and we had proved in action that those wearisome years of training had not been wasted. We were, however, to have another fortnight of waiting before we went into action again.

When anyone looks back and thinks of Normandy as it looked at that time, he will remember the scene of that harbour as a typical piece of that unfortunate countryside in July 1944. All around were dusty tracks, with streams of traffic passing up and down them. Three very battered little villages lay close to us. The fields were pitted with shell holes and disfigured by the inevitable dead cows, while three German Mark IV tanks, burnt out and deserted, still squatted in the positions in which British guns had left them.

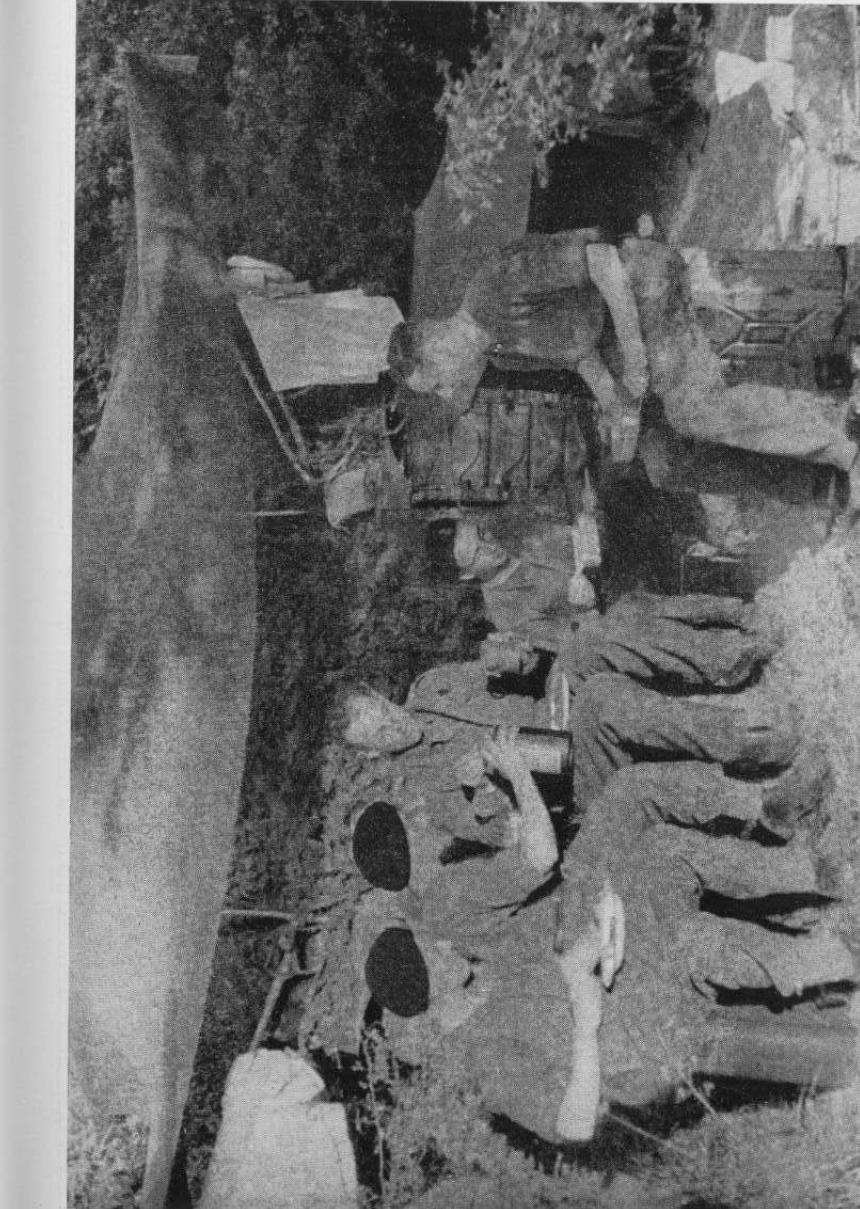
The first change that befell us was that the Second-in-Command, Major Dunkerly, left us to command the Thirteenth-EIGHTEENTH Hussars. It was a great loss to the Regiment, and his subsequent series of successes, which led to the award of a D.S.O., came as no surprise to us. His place was taken by Major Blacker, who handed 'C' Squadron over to Major Shebbeare, who had by this time wangled himself out from England. Major Gold also left us to rejoin his old regiment, which had had heavy casualties, and Major Wigan took over 'A' Squadron. Many will remember the depressed face of Major Wigan in the Odon battle, when he was convinced he would never manage to escape from the Echelon in time to take part in a tank battle before the war ended. He was tactfully not reminded of this a month later,

when he had the unenviable distinction of having two tanks knocked out under him in twenty minutes.

Most people will remember that harbour by the great daylight bomber raid on Caen. We had a front stall view, and few will forget our first sight of what air power really meant. It was, of course, the prelude to an all-out attack on Caen from the north, and it says a lot for the toughness of those Germans that even after that raid, they still fought viciously the moment it was over.

The next day we moved to Rauray. We sat in the open behind some infantry and were there in case the Germans should launch a counter-attack, which many good judges thought very likely. It was a pity they did not, as few stretches of ground have ever had so many tanks and guns crammed into them, and the difficulty would not have been in hitting the Germans, but in missing each other. In fact we had to tell some keen anti-tank gunners that the house was full and that there was just no room for them. The infantry sat in front of us, in a line of trees round Rauray, and they suffered a certain amount of shelling. We only received a few "overs" but no chances were taken and everyone had a good hole under his tank. All the tanks were deployed in the open and positions were reconnoitred to deal with the expected counter attack. It was a very boring week. The infantry did some patrolling, but got extremely little change from the Panzer Grenadiers of the Ninth SS and apart from a little shelling the Germans did not worry us at all. Every morning we "stood to" at a very early hour, and did the same again at a very late hour, which is of course one of the disadvantages of summer fighting. During the day we slept or sat about doing nothing in particular. No one did nothing in particular so restfully as Major Seymour, and his visitors share with 'B' Squadron the pleasant memory of seeing him looking cheerfully efficient on his canvas chair, beneath an awning slung from his tank, complete with side hat, cigarette holder and bottle of whisky. 'C' Squadron, whilst they were waiting for Captain Walter to return with enormous slabs of butter from Bayeux, even ran sports, which were terminated abruptly by two dive bombers in the middle of what promised to be a master-piece of invective from Captain Jones, at that moment engaged in the obstacle race.

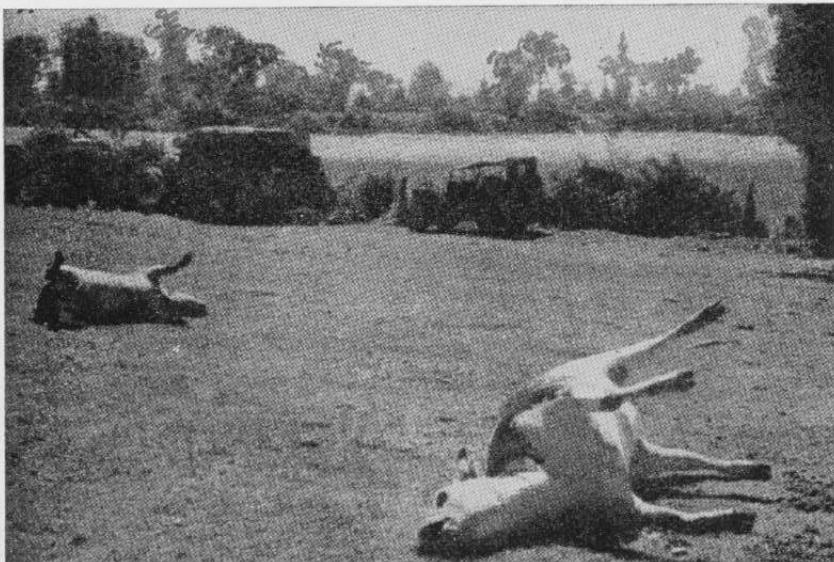
'C' Squadron also conducted a trial shoot of our weapons against the front of a Panther, with rather depressing results. The open piece



"During the day we slept or sat about doing nothing in particular".  
Major Taylor and his crew enjoy a well-earned meal improved by Normandy butter.



"There was an 88-millimetre gun not far from our area. Everyone went to see this . . . and shuddered to see its long and menacing barrel"



"Normandy . . . a typical piece of that unfortunate countryside . . . disfigured by the inevitable dead cows"

of ground on which we were sitting, contained about eight knocked-out Panthers, all bearing signs of considerable disorder in their ranks. We learnt later that our friends the Twenty-fourth Lancers had been responsible both for their disorder and their battered condition. They had, however, been knocked out from the flank, and we were anxious to see what effect a Sherman would have on the front of a Panther, should we find ourselves in the unfortunate position of having to tackle one, or more, frontally. It was found that a 75-millimetre gun made no impression on the front at all, unless it was lucky enough to hit the turret ring, a very small target indeed. The 17-pounder was more encouraging (as related earlier we were equipped with one 17-pounder tank for every three seventy-fives) for it penetrated the front of the Panther's turret at three hundred yards, though it did not always go through the sloped front plate of the hull. On the whole, we decided that head-on Panthers should be treated with circumspection. In point of fact we found ourselves in just that position a few days later, and the results were just as unhappy as our trial shoot indicated.

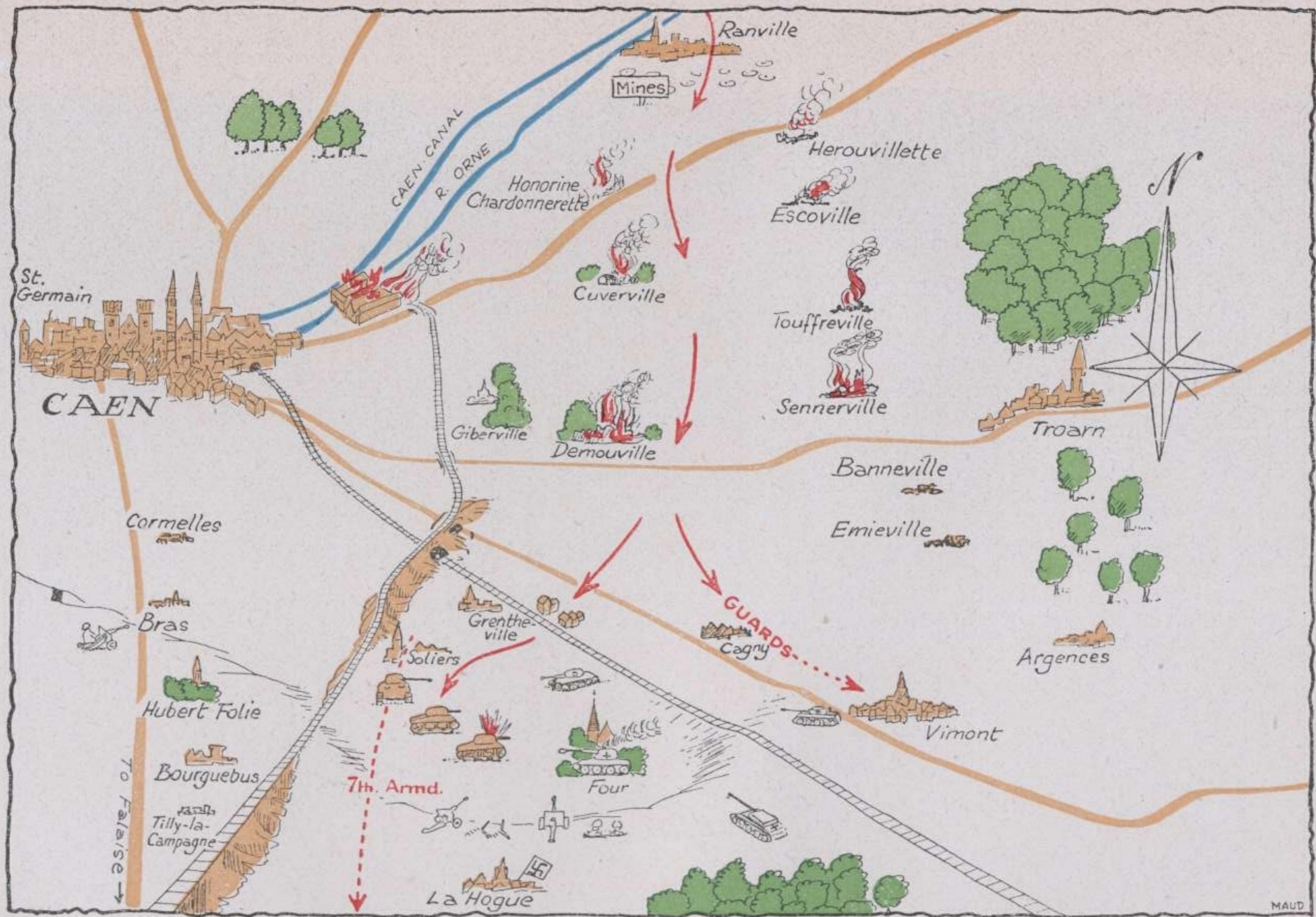
All this time the Echelon remained at Cully, which was our base at the time, and we hoped to return there for a few days for a "wash and brush up". On July 15th we did return there, but only for one day. Big things were in the air.

Now, in order to understand this story, it is necessary to give the outline plan of the armoured attack east of Caen, and, without too much detail, it was as follows. The intention was two-fold. First, to attract all possible German armour to the British front and, secondly, to break through to the good tank country south of Caen, there to fight a battle which would end the stalemate. It was to be fought by General O'Connor's Eighth Corps, which consisted of the Eleventh Armoured Division, the Guards Armoured Division and the Seventh Armoured Division, and that Corps had trained together in England with the express purpose of performing such a breakthrough. The whole Corps was to be concentrated east of the Orne river, north-east of Caen, and this had to be done in the greatest secrecy. Then, preceded by an air and artillery programme of huge proportions, the armour was to be launched in a solid wedge in the order Eleventh, Guards and Seventh. The Eleventh were to take the high ground of Bourgebus and Tilly la Campagne, the Guards were to protect the

southern flank toward Vimont, while the Seventh were to exploit the gains of the Eleventh towards Falaise. The Divisions were to advance on a very narrow front and the Eleventh Armoured eventually moved off with the Third Royal Tank Regiment on the right, Second Fife and Forfar Yeomanry on the left and Twenty-third Hussars in reserve. The front was so narrow that each tank was only to be thirty yards from its neighbour and, when it is remembered that one Company of the Rifle Brigade and one Battery of the 13th RHA moved with their respective Regiments, it will be realised that the mass of vehicles in a small space was going to be something never seen before. The axis of advance was to be roughly Demouville - So-liers - Bourgebus and this will be seen on the map. Our flanks were to be protected by the Canadians in Caen, and first, by another division in the wooded area towards Troarn, and later, as has already been shown, by the Guards. It was hoped that the shock of the bombing, immediately followed by the impact of the mass of armour, would be enough to give us the high ground we wanted, and the whole operation was timed to begin at first light on the morning of July 18th.

And so, on the 16th, the Twenty-third Hussars prepared themselves for battle in the usual way, and while they were so preparing, the first hitch occurred. In the early days of the invasion, the British front in the area which we were to use as our forming-up place had been weaker than was comfortable. The division holding the line had accordingly laid a minefield in front of themselves as a precaution. This division had in the meantime departed to another sector and the existence of the minefield right across our axis was only discovered on the 16th, two days before the attack. It was therefore necessary to make lanes in this minefield and only three could be made in time. This was obviously going to cause a bad bottleneck and seriously slow up the impetus of the advance which, of course, was the one thing that was not wanted. However, it was decided to carry on with the original plan despite this handicap, though many experienced officers had grave misgivings about the traffic jam, which was bound to be formed, and which did in fact have a serious effect on the operation.

However, on the night of the 16th, the Eleventh Armoured Division moved across the Orne. It was all done with the greatest secrecy. Camouflage officers were attached to each unit and we were told that



The Battle of Caen  
JULY 18<sup>th</sup> 1944

it was vital that we should all be in and camouflaged before first light. It would not be true to say that our march was without hitches. The night was dark, the dust was appalling and the route badly marked. The combination of these three things resulted in two-thirds of the Regiment going the wrong way within two miles of the start, and they eventually reached the harbour by a route that was highly original if nothing else, twice practically motoring into the sea. It was extremely fortunate that the morning of the 17th dawned foggy, for there were still a few stragglers coming in, after the time for normal first light had passed. However, camouflage was eventually accomplished successfully, and the day passed quietly and uneventfully. We were to move to our forming up position as soon as it got dark. Final orders were given out, and the Regiment was to advance with 'B' Squadron on the right, 'A' on the left, Headquarters in the middle, and 'C' in reserve, with our guns and infantry closed up tightly behind. We were to follow the two leading armoured regiments as closely as possible, and the order to the whole Brigade was to keep moving on, whatever happened.

As twilight gave place to darkness, the Regiment sprang to life, the tanks shook themselves free of their camouflage and began to move out of harbour.

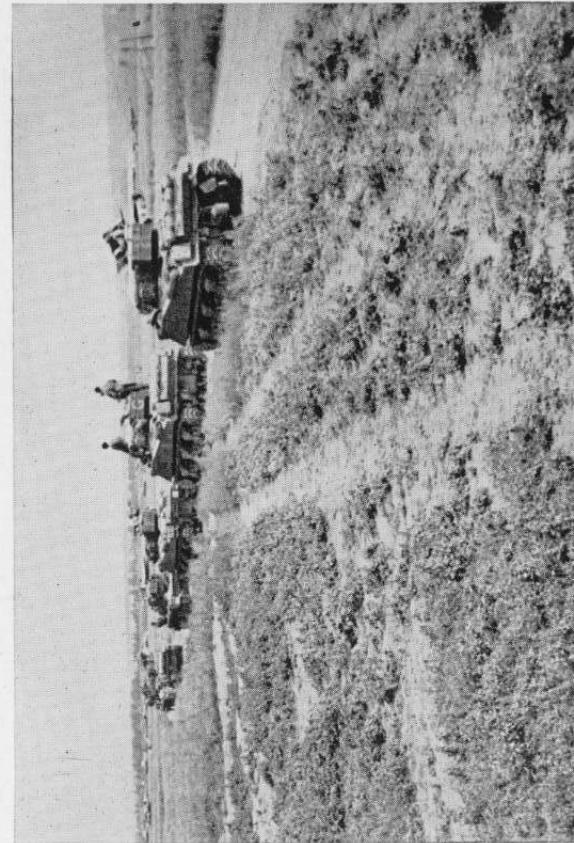
Vast palls of dust, like a thick fog, obscured the drivers' vision and hurt the eyes, but this time no mistake in the route could be made, for it was clearly marked. Eventually we crossed the river Orne by a Bailey Bridge, and by degrees we found and entered the concentration area. It was already crammed to bursting point with the leading regiments, with their tanks, attached guns and riflemen's vehicles, interspersed with enormous and weird-looking objects which loomed blackly all around us. They proved to be derelict gliders, for we were in the open space in which the Sixth Airborne Division had made their landing on D Day. We huddled up against the sides of the gliders, and, beating off continual mosquito assaults, we slept for what was left of the night.

Dawn broke mistily, revealing the promise of another gloriously sunny day. It was July 18th, a day which we were not easily to forget. Gradually, as the light grew stronger, one could see the entire Armoured Brigade group drawn up in its full battle array. The formations of tanks, guns, half-tracks, carriers and every other weapon of assault,

had nothing of the precision of the parade ground, but this rugged mass of armour looked none the less impressive for all that. Back in England, we had trained for the moment which was to herald the full scale breakthrough into Nazi Europe. That moment, we believed, was upon us now, and our division was in the lead, only waiting for the word to advance, to unleash its full power upon the enemy. No doubts assailed our crews as we waited on that misty morning, and a feeling of excitement, mixed with the usual hollow sensation in the stomach, was the most that we experienced. Nothing, surely, could stand in the path of that weight of armour, backed by the air power and artillery barrage that we knew were coming.

The sun broke through the mist, glinting on the periscopes of tanks and the windscreens of the half-tracks, its rays casting grotesque shadows round the smashed and twisted gliders which sprawled amongst the Brigade's vehicles. For a square mile there was a solid mass of armour. Surely we must start soon, or the enemy would see us and begin to shell this great concentration. But as the mist finally rolled away, the familiar throbbing drone of a vast number of bombers made us look upwards. There, above, were the great black Lancasters that we had been promised, moving steadily ahead, with more, and still more, following the leaders, as far as the eye could see. They kept coming, a never ending, inexorable stream, while high above them, Spitfires twisted and rolled, weaving their trails across the sky. We waved and cheered as they began to unload their bombs on the villages in front of us which had been converted into strong-points. A heavy rumble and vast clouds of brickdust from stricken houses showed that their task was well begun. The noise of bursting bombs grew fainter as the later arrivals unloaded on more distant targets, and then came the Marauders, speedy and glistening white in the sun. A whistling scream and crash shook everyone's attention away from the sky to find that a jettisoned bomb had fallen beside Fourth Troop, 'B' Squadron, just as the Troop Leader was talking to his men. Lieut. Cochrane was badly wounded and two men were killed.

This tragedy sobered everyone down and, as the last aeroplane droned away, and the roar and rumble of six hundred guns began, we settled down in our tanks and fixed on our headsets. Commanders took a quick look at their maps and told their drivers to "start up".

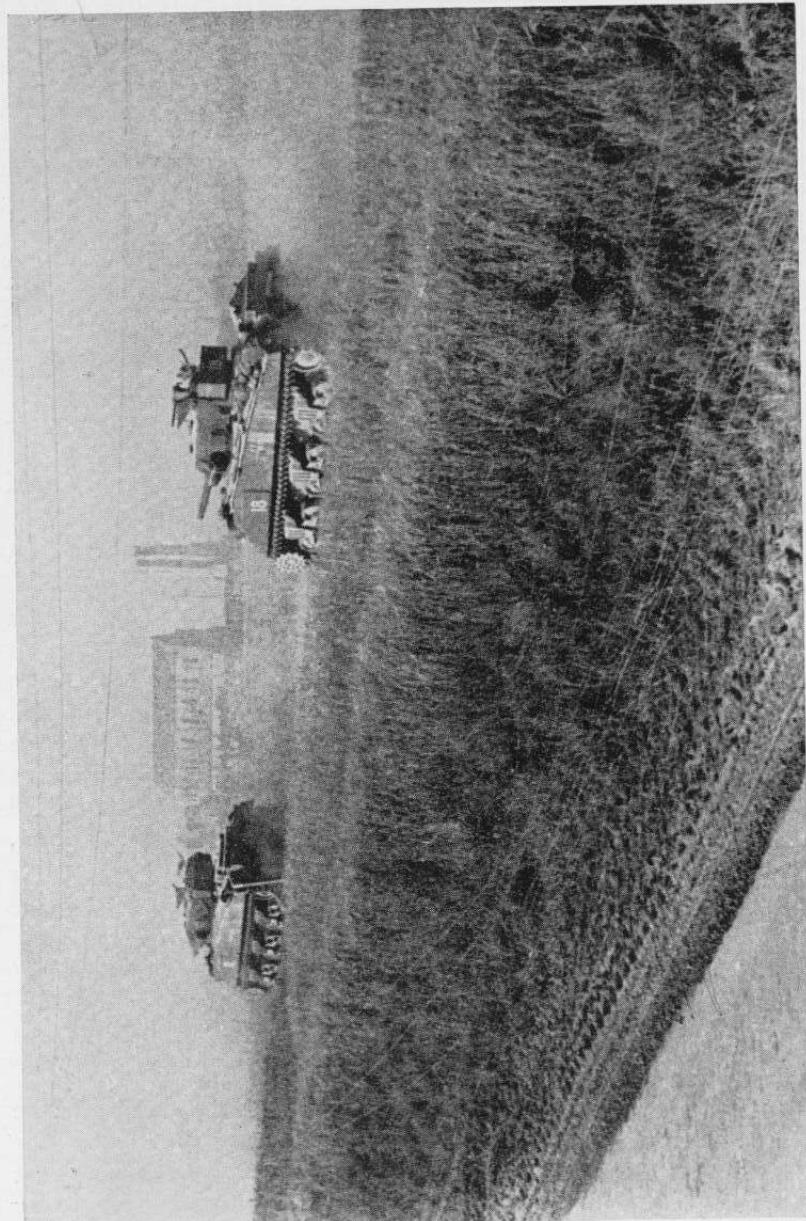


Queuing up for "tank alley" on the Glider Field.  
"For a square mile there was a solid mass of armour".

Ahead, the leading regiments were beginning to move, clouds of dust were rising as the Shermans revved up their engines, and the motley throng of self-propelled guns, half-tracks and "flail" tanks jerked and jolted forwards behind them. For the first time one felt slight misgivings. Would that long tail of supporting arms ever manage to keep up with the leading tanks? One thought of the gaps through the minefield, and remembered that each regiment's "tail" was supposed to move in line a hundred yards behind the tanks, with ourselves three hundred yards behind that. From the very straggled appearance of the mass of vehicles in front, even before the minefield had been reached, it looked as if the maintenance of correct distances was not going to be more than a pious hope. If we, as reserve Regiment, were going to be left behind, how much more so were the Guards, and the Seventh Armoured. But it was only a passing misgiving, soon dispelled, as the tremendous mass of closely packed armour rumbled and clattered remorselessly forward towards the entrances to the minefield.

Those entrances were soon found, clearly marked with white tape, but so narrow that vehicles had to pass down the lanes in single file. On the far side, almost in enemy country, the straggling lines that had been caused by the bottleneck had to try and reform into the mass formation that had been ordered. It was not possible to do this, for the leading tanks had to keep up with the artillery barrage which was bursting only one hundred yards in front of them. Consequently their "tail" got badly left behind. When we emerged from the minefield, we paused for a moment to get back into our formation, but by the time we were all assembled and ready to move forward, the leading regiments were one mile in front of us instead of three hundred yards, and there was a confused medley of supporting vehicles straggling over the intervening distance. In the middle of these, the Brigadier could be distinguished, his earphones clamped over his red hat, which he firmly refused to abandon in favour of a steel helmet.

The open country over which we were advancing was flanked on each side by woods, which had been heavily bombed. We knew also that other divisions were working through them, but they clearly could not be expected to go as fast as we could across the cornfields. As reserve regiment, therefore, our chief danger would obviously come



"Keep moving, whatever happens"

from enemy tanks and guns in the woods, after they had recovered from the first shock. But, for a mile, our flanks were quiet, and, very soon, dazed and shattered German prisoners began to come back. They were mainly infantry from a G.A.F. Division, but there were also some from the redoubtable Twenty-first Panzers. They all looked white and stunned by the bombing. For every prisoner who surrendered there were at least six more who merely sat dazedly in their dug-outs, occasionally popping up to snipe at tank commanders' heads. The infantry were soon busy dislodging them, but plenty were left behind. In fact, Corporal Jackson of 'C' Squadron, whose tank was stuck in a bomb crater, while waiting for assistance, amused himself later by looking in all the dug-outs he could see. He collected twenty Germans without any difficulty, long after the whole Brigade had driven over them. There was also the most extraordinary collection of scent, cognac and women's clothing in these dugouts, and one German in the Regimental Aid Post was so drunk that he could hardly stand.

We arrived at the first railway line, between Demouville and La Carrières, without having to deal with more than snipers in the corn. There we came to a halt because the straggling mass of vehicles in front of us had stopped. We could see some of the leading tanks on fire and sad little parties began to come back on foot. They were the surviving members of the leading crews, and obviously there had been some trouble. They all looked smoke grimed, as does anyone who has just jumped out of a burning tank, while, beside the more active members, staggered the black-skinned figures of badly burned men. Some of the parties carried stretchers, on which still figures lay.

We gave these groups a passing glance and watched our flanks intently. The sharp crack of an eighty-eight sounded as a Tiger opened up upon us from the east. It was supported by more than one Panther and, in the battle which followed, Second Troop of 'C' Squadron destroyed two enemy tanks and a Nebelwerfer. Captain Hagger destroyed a Tiger, though 'A' Squadron lost two tanks before the opposition was silenced.

The Fife and Forfar had by now crossed the second railway line and were advancing upon Soliers and Four. It was unfortunate that the barrage was due to stop at this feature, for it was just here that the serious trouble was encountered. The ground was completely

open and lay in a cup, entirely dominated by the high ground on which Bourgebus stood. As the Fifes advanced across this open country, they were subjected to withering cross fire from hidden German tanks and in their mass formation they fell easy victims. The lines of Shermans were raked and shattered by hidden Panthers, and so easy was the mark that, had the German gunners been able to load their guns quickly enough, barely one would have escaped. Their C.O.'s tank was knocked out, the Second-in-Command's had already gone. There was no communication with Brigade Headquarters, but the Brigadier, realising that something had gone badly wrong, ordered us forward to the Fifes' assistance. We crossed the railway line with no idea of what the true situation was. 'B' Squadron advanced into the centre of the ring of blazing Fife and Forfar tanks before they saw that there appeared to be almost none left in action. One of the Fifes' Squadron Leaders ran up to say that, as far as he knew, there were only four tanks left in his regiment. Later this total was found to be unduly pessimistic, and after stragglers had come in eighteen were mustered. But that was much later. While he was giving us this information, the whole of 'B' Squadron's First Troop were hit and blazing in a matter of seconds. Sergeant Bateman hit a Panther and was immediately killed by a shell which penetrated his turret. Captain Blackman also scored a hit, but his tank went up in flames within the next minute. 'B' Squadron began to reverse to the nearest hedge, firing back with all they had. The Colonel, down inside his turret in conversation with the Brigadier on the wireless, received most energetic attention from a Panther, which was knocked out by the Second-in-Command's gunner, RSM Wass, who scored a hit on its turret ring with a brilliant shot. Eventually the remaining tanks of 'B' Squadron, together with RHQ, got back to the doubtful cover of the hedge. They were still in view of the Panthers and completely outranged by their guns. It was a most helpless and hopeless situation, for nearly all the 17-pounders had been knocked out, and the seventy-fives were virtually useless under the circumstances. Every five minutes there was the crack of an armour-piercing shot passing through the air, the shattering crash as it penetrated a Sherman, the shower of sparks, the sheet of flame, and then black figures silhouetted against the orange glow as they jumped to the ground, sometimes pausing to drag a wounded comrade after them. Then the slow crackling as the tank began to burn, black smoke pouring from the turret,

and later, at intervals, the vivid crimson flashes and violent rendings as the ammunition blew up. But 'B' Squadron held their ground and fought back, while 'A' Squadron hurried to come up on their right flank and influence the battle.

'C' Squadron had by this time come up on 'B's left, but were out of sight over a ridge within three hundred yards of Four. Some enemy tanks from Cagny were seen at once and engaged successfully by their Second Troop, who destroyed a Tiger and a Panther. Suddenly, with no warning, the whole squadron was subjected to a terrible concentration of fire from Four, virtually at point blank range. With no time for retaliation, no time to do anything but to take one quick glance at the situation, almost in one minute, all of the tanks of three troops and of Squadron Headquarters were hit, blazing and exploding. Everywhere wounded and burning figures ran or struggled painfully for cover, while a remorseless rain of armour-piercing shot riddled the already helpless Shermans. Major Shebbeare's tank was one of the first to be hit. He was never seen again. Dazed survivors ran to and fro helping the many wounded, beating out flaming clothing with their hands, until the intense heat and violent explosions drove them back to the cover of the railway line. Captain Walter was getting out of his tank when he was wounded in the hand by an A. P. shot. Despite this, he supervised the collection of the wounded, took them back and saw that they were looked after. He then took over a 17-pounder tank, from which he organised the remnants of the Squadron and personally destroyed a Panther. He refused to be evacuated for twenty-four hours and was later awarded the D.S.O. Sergeant Abbott won the M.M. for returning on foot to the scene of the action an hour later to search for wounded, though the area was enemy controlled and under fire.

All too clearly we were not going to "break through" today. We had suffered a very "bloody nose", and it was going to be a matter not of how much further we should advance to-day but whether we should be able to hold on to what we had gained. A determined enemy advance just at that moment would have been very hard to deal with. But all those Shermans were not blazing in the cornfields for nothing. Many a Panther blazed there too, and their comrades contented themselves with using their long-range advantage over us.

'B' and 'C' Squadrons retired behind the railway line, which made a very good hull-down position, while 'A' Squadron looped west of

Grentheville to take our assailants in the flank. This they did with some success, though their position was far from comfortable, particularly as the village itself still contained many active Germans. 'H' Company therefore advanced and duly cleared it, taking some prisoners and about ten abandoned Nebelwerfers as they did so.

Now the damaging effects of the minefield were clearly evident, for those behind were not getting through. The Guards should have been up on our left by now, but they had been so delayed that they were only just starting to arrive. Of the Seventh Armoured there was no sign at all. The whole impetus of this great armoured attack had been lost, its effect spent, and its spearhead blunted. True, the R.A.F. and artillery had swung into action and were pounding any enemy tank that showed itself, but with every hour the Germans recovered from their surprise, and moved up more troops to plug the gap that had been made. They retaliated with all the artillery they had, and a steady stream of shell fire and "moaning minnies" descended amongst our positions. But the armour-piercing fire from the Panthers grew wilder and more inaccurate, as the tanks of the First (Adolf Hitler) SS and the Twelfth SS moved back under our barrage from the ruins of Soliers and Four to the comparative safety of the woods round Bourgebus.

On our right the Third Tanks had also had very heavy losses. For our Brigade it had been a sad and damaging day. Out of the great array of armour that had moved forward to battle that morning one hundred and six tanks now lay crippled and out of action in the cornfields, while the survivors had been brought to a standstill behind the railway line. Behind us a long, sad trail of stretcher bearers and medical vehicles took back the casualties, which had not been light. Many a crew was still unaccounted for, and later it was found that nearly all the missing had died in their tanks. But that evening no one knew very clearly where or who the casualties were. It was the only occasion in the whole campaign when the medical services behind were swamped and, unable to compete with the numbers of casualties, Captain Mitchell worked heroically, having at one time seventy badly wounded men, which he could not get evacuated, lying in his Regimental Aid Post. The orderlies, hopelessly overworked, did wonders, and some of the more lightly wounded also deserve the greatest credit for what they did.

The shelling continued as the sun went down. The knocked out tanks before us were beginning to burn themselves out and only an occasional flicker of light came from them. Over the battlefield hung a haze of smoke, and the acrid, bitter smell of burnt out vehicles was never absent. We drew back into close leaguer for the night. As we did so, a heavy concentration of shelling was put down upon us, wounding Major Seymour badly. He was carried off, and we had lost one more able and gallant Squadron Leader that day. Major Wigan was quickly switched to command 'B' Squadron, while Major Watt took his place in 'A'. A few lorries came up with replenishments, and a few more very welcome tanks from the Forward Delivery Squadron. Back in the Echelon German bombers put in a heavy attack upon the lorries, which were now on the glider field. We suffered casualties among the fitter staff, and the baled out tank crews lost a few more valuable men. The Fifes were even more unlucky. They lost forty tank crews in that one raid. Along the railway line the shelling ceased.

We resumed the same position next day and were soon withdrawn behind Brigade Headquarters. The stretch of ground before us was still completely covered, and the Brigade now tried to reach Bourgebus by swinging right, almost to the boundary of Caen itself. Two bitter battles at Bras and Hubert Folie were fought and won, but we remained in reserve, our only excitement being an abortive attack by some twenty Messerchmidts. Captain Walter was at last persuaded to allow himself to be evacuated and Major Hagger took command of the remains of 'C' Squadron.

The morning of July 20th was very foggy. 'B' Squadron moved to watch the main Caen-Falaise road from Hubert Folie and after some navigational difficulty reached their positions without incident. At midday the Seventh Armoured took over and we retired two miles back to Demouville for some much needed reorganisation. The weather broke with a vengeance and the rain teemed down, defeating all forms of waterproofing and filling up the slit trenches. There we remained until July 22nd, when we moved back to refit in St. Germain, a battered suburb of Caen.

We could not be blamed for being in low spirits. We had not achieved what we expected, and we had had heavy losses. But later events showed that there was not such need for gloom as we thought.

One of the decisive factors of the Normandy campaign was the tenacity with which the Germans clung to the open country south of Caen, realising it to be the hinge of the whole front and using up sufficient quantities of armour to permit the spectacular American breakthrough near St. Lo later on. That they were forced to employ such forces was due to the determined and courageous attacks of the British Second Army, in which the Regiment had played its part in this action. But it had been costly. We had lost two fine officers in Major Seymour and Major Shebbeare, both very old friends of the Regiment and extremely able Squadron Leaders. We had lost Lieut. Pratt and Lieut. Cochrane, both gallant troop leaders, and a great many others besides. A large number of our best NCOs and men had gone, and there is not sufficient space here to pay them all the tributes they so richly deserve. Apart from the deeds of gallantry already recorded, everyone who was there will remember a dozen little unpublished acts of bravery and comradeship from different officers and men during that fateful day. Nor will anyone who saw it ever forget the bravery of our wounded, their courage and unbelievable cheerfulness in the grim ordeal they underwent. The Regiment has fought many battles since then, but none will be remembered more vividly than the action we call the "Battle of Caen".

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During the battle on the Caen Plain, on July 18th alone, the Regiment sustained the following casualties:-

Killed	2 officers
	23 other ranks
Wounded	5 officers
	27 other ranks

## CHAPTER V

### LE BENY BOCA GE, CHENEDOLLE AND LE BAS PERRIER

July 22nd — August 7th

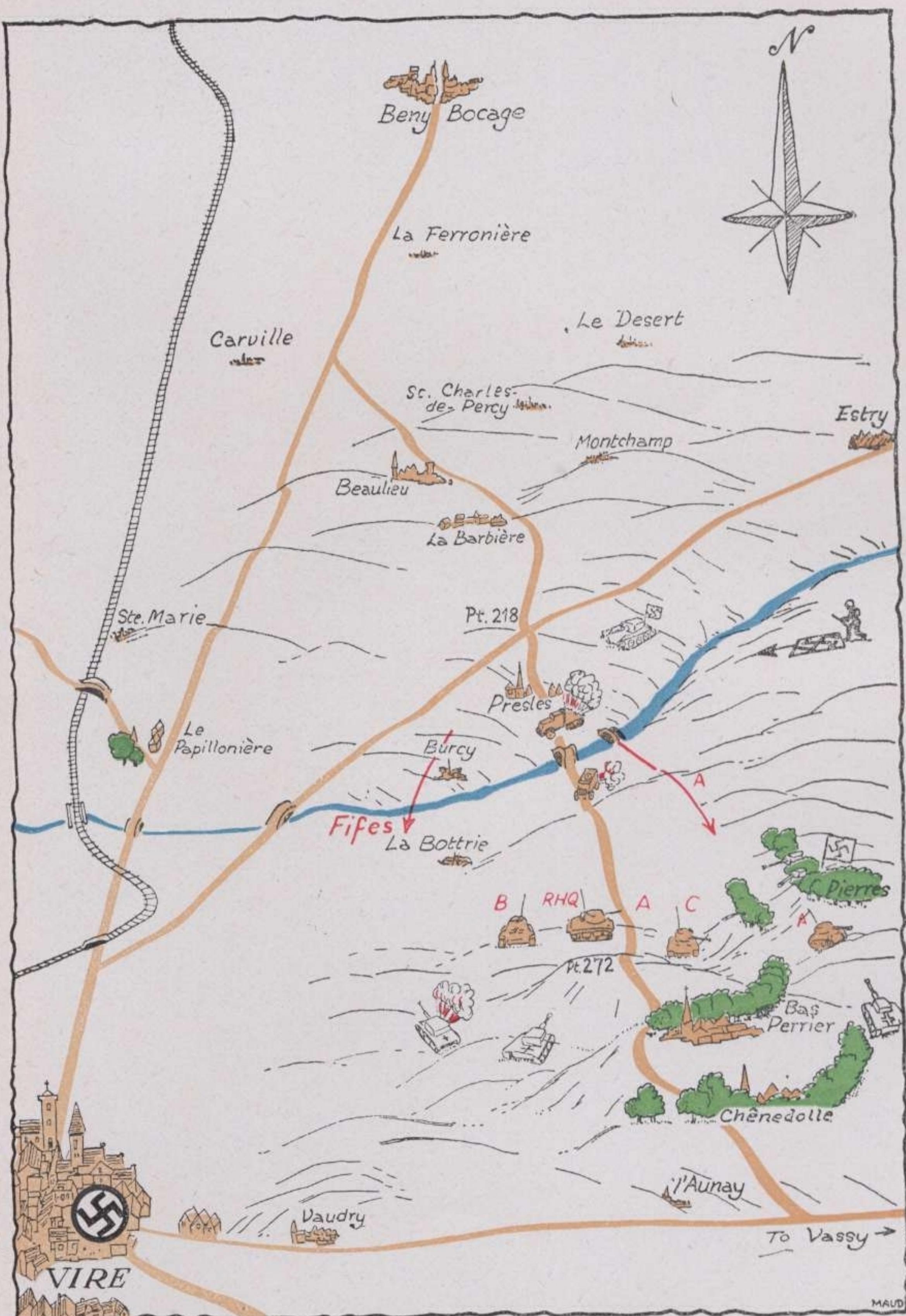
The Regiment stayed for a week at St. Germain and the time was spent in reorganisation. In order to fill the depleted ranks of the tank crews, the Ack-Ack Troop had to be disbanded and the Recce Troop reduced to three tanks. With these crews and some welcome reinforcements from the Royal Gloucester Hussars each Squadron was able to man the correct number of tanks by the time fresh orders came through.

From having fought our last battle on the extreme eastern edge of the bridgehead, we were now to switch to the extreme west of the British front, which lay round the town of Caumont. Once we were there the whole British line was to make a left-handed southward swing, keeping, as it were, on the inside of the Americans, who by now had begun their spectacular sweep through Brittany. The Eleventh Armoured Division was to be on the outside of the British swing, in contact with the Americans on the right and with its objective the main road from Vassy to Vire. The Guards were to be on our left, and beyond them, directed on to Aunay, were to be the Seventh Armoured Division. The Canadians, meanwhile, were continuing their hard battle towards Falaise, and it will be seen that the well laid and patient plans of General Montgomery were now beginning to take visible shape, and that this was the manoeuvre which ended in the German disaster of the "Falaise pocket".

At 1 a.m. on the morning of July 29th, the Regiment moved across from St. Germain to the thick bocage area south of Balleroy and north of Caumont. It was, as usual, a very dark night and only slow progress was made, and, in fact, the last tank did not creep into its harbour until about ten o'clock that morning. There was not

much rest that day, for there was a great deal to be done. The battle was to commence on July 30th, and therefore we only had what was left of that day to make all our tanks battleworthy, get out orders, and most important of all, study the tactics we were to adopt. In our two previous battles the country had been fairly open and we had worked with very little direct infantry support. Now we were to operate in the thickest of thick Normandy bocage, where often a troop leader could not see his other tanks, where frequently it was impossible to go across country and where it was a paradise for the bazooka-man, the sniper and the aggressive German infantry. No tank could advance for long without infantry close by and, in fact, the best tactics were for a platoon to advance, followed by a troop which gave supporting fire the moment the infantry got into trouble. This method worked well in practice, but it was a very severe test for a troop leader, who was constantly losing sight of his other tanks and also, unavoidably, of the infantry particularly when they crossed a bank over which the tanks could not follow them. Also, an advance of several miles across bocage country was a great strain on the drivers, who, by the time they had negotiated (closed down) hundreds of steep banks and sunken lanes, began to feel rather jaded. However, in fairness, it must be said that the country was a worse handicap for the blinder and clumsier Panthers and Tigers than it was for our Shermans, and, of course, no German anti-tank gun could ever get a good field of fire against us because visibility was so limited.

The front opposite Caumont was held by a German parachute division which, though thin on the ground, was made up of tough and tenacious fighters. In the line against them were our old friends the Fifteenth Scottish Division, and the Eleventh Armoured was to pass through them to commence the breakthrough, while the Scotsmen assisted us to attack the well fortified little village of Sept Vents, around which there were known to be several minefields. Our axis of advance, as marked on the map, was roughly:- Sept Vents - Point 137 - St. Jean D'Essartiers - St. Martin de Besaces - La Ferrière - Le Beny Bocage. As many side roads as possible were to be used and, as some which were clearly marked on the map turned out either to be non-existent, hopelessly narrow, or to run in an unexpected direction, our route was not an easy one. The Fife and Forfar were to attack on the right and the Twenty-third Hussars on the left. The Third Monmouths were to be our infantry colleagues and our time together was



Le Beny Bocage, Presles and Le Bas Perrier  
AUGUST 1944

a very successful one. They were a splendidly tough battalion and we all had tremendous admiration for them by the time our partnership was over. There is no doubt that in that bocage country the infantryman had to do the lion's share of the work, and right well they did it. They were commanded by a very fine soldier in Lieut-Colonel H. Orr, who was not only cool and unperturbed by any situation, but had a remarkably good idea of how armour should be used. His tragic death much later in Holland came as very bad news to us, for in this battle he became a great friend of ours. We were also given some A.V.R.Es, which were Churchill tanks commanded by Sappers, and which were capable of firing a charge of explosive at any obstacle in our path. They later proved very successful at making gaps in high banks. They were commanded by a very pleasant Sapper officer who wore a perpetually puzzled and bewildered expression, and, when one remembers some of the extraordinary predicaments in which he found himself before he left us, this was not surprising.

At first light on the morning of July 30th, the Regiment was deployed on the start-line at Villeneuve, just north of Sept Vents, with 'A' Squadron on the right and 'B' on the left, each with their companies of Monmouths deployed before them. Though the morning was cloudy we could see that our attack was being preceded by a substantial air bombardment. This time one did not see fleets of bombers going over, but rather now and then a Lancaster would dive out of the clouds and roar away. Then began the barrage which was to continue till we penetrated the German line. One of the very first 5.5 inch rounds dropped right in the middle of the Monmouth's left hand leading company, wounding the Company Commander and virtually putting one whole platoon completely out of action. When the necessary adjustments had been made, we advanced. Opposition was not heavy until we reached Sept Vents, but the country was so awkward to negotiate that the squadrons had the very greatest difficulty in keeping with their respective companies. Not only did the banks and lanes slow up the tanks but also it was soon found that 'A' Squadron were in a minefield and they did in fact lose two tanks in it. 'B' Squadron continued to the outskirts of Sept Vents with the loss of Lieut. Blackman's tank, which was put out of action by a high explosive shell. Opposition stiffened considerably here, and the Monmouths suffered casualties, though 'A' and 'B' Squadrons were doing all they possibly could to support them, and the Fifteenth Scottish were

battling vigorously in the eastern edges of the village. 'C' Squadron were told to try to encircle Sept Vents from the east, but they immediately lost a tank on a mine and had to give up the attempt. Flails were sent up to 'B' Squadron, who were also hampered by mines, and eventually a lane was made through which the Regiment could pass. By then the Monmouths were in possession of what was left of Sept Vents after a fairly severe battle, and very shortly the whole group was able to push on south, still moving with the infantry walking in front and still hampered by the bocage. We made slow and steady progress, fighting no serious engagement, but having an occasional brush with enemy infantry and light vehicles. It was growing dusk when we reached the outskirts of St. Jean D'Essartiers and found that it was German-held. 'B' Squadron engaged the enemy frontally, while 'C' Squadron came in from the eastern flank and their Third Troop knocked out a 75-millimetre gun as they did so. The opposition then collapsed and we entered the village in almost pitch darkness except for one enormous fire which kept shooting sparks all over any tank that passed it. Our entry into the village had been from two directions, and what with this, the darkness, the fire and the narrowness of the lanes, a traffic jam of considerable dimensions had to be sorted out before the Regiment and the Battalion eventually crammed themselves into a very small field for the night. During that day the Monmouths had fought a serious battle at Sept Vents, had broken through the enemy line, and had then made seven miles of ground, marching and fighting all the way. Our assistance owing to the poor going had not been as great as we had hoped, but there is no doubt they had put up a very fine performance.

The night was very short, but we did not advance again next day until about one o'clock as the Eighth Rifle Brigade and the Third Tanks had passed through us and were attacking St. Martin de Besaces, which proved a tough nut to crack. When this village was in their hands, we pushed through them towards the Forêt L'Evêque, with 'C' Squadron leading. We had decided by then that, now that the resistance was noticeably lessening, it would pay us to push on more quickly, and we went on straight down the road with each company riding on the tanks of a squadron. To our great surprise the Forêt L'Evêque, a perfect defensive position, was completely clear of Germans, and this lent strength to our growing conviction that we were



The Third Monmouths. "They were a splendidly tough battalion".



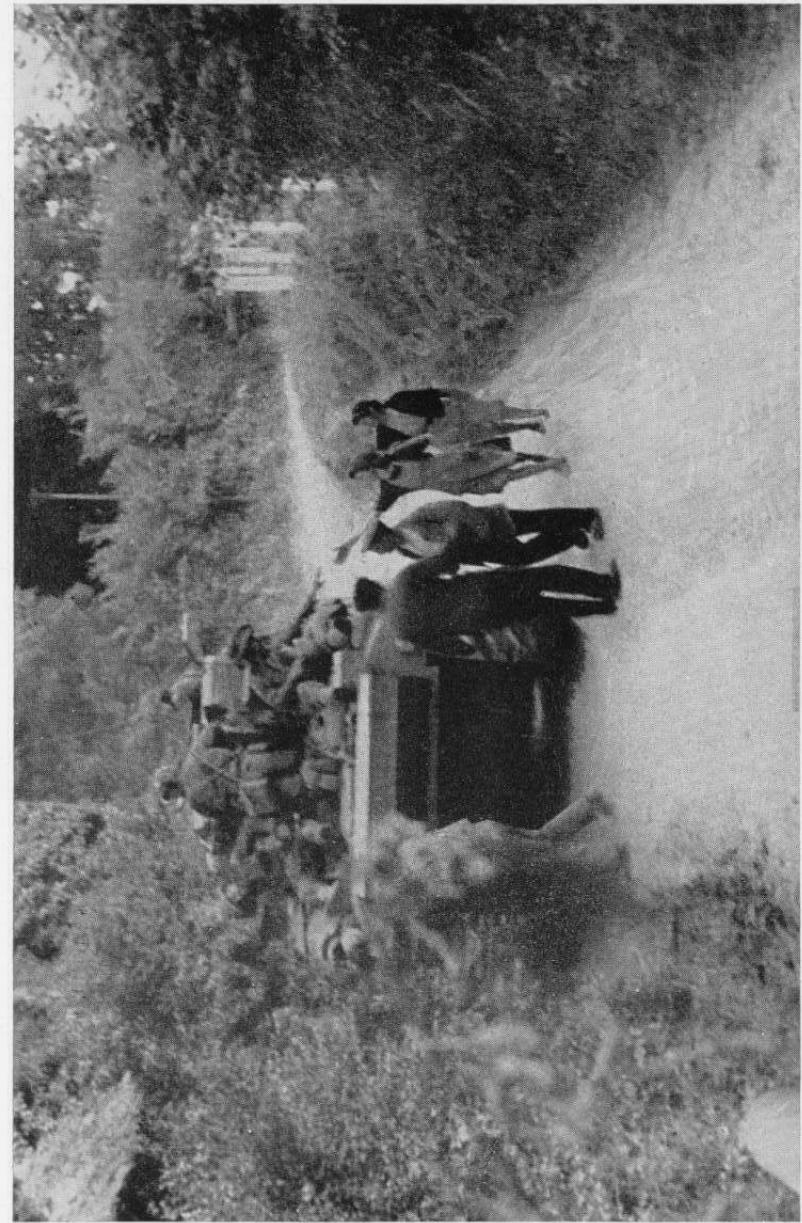
"During that day . . . had fought a serious battle . . . had broken through the enemy line . . . had then made seven miles of ground, marching and fighting all the way".

now through the main defensive line. We determined to move on at all speed, realising that the faster we went the less organised opposition we would meet and the less time would be given for a German counter-attack to be organised. It was a tonic to everyone to be able to push forward into France without fighting every mile of the way, as we had grown used to doing. And at La Ferrière, the next village, we received the long-awaited flowers and cups of cider, handed to us by delighted French girls, and we had our first taste of the cheering and jubilation which was to be our normal lot during our advance that autumn. The unconscious form of Sergeant Matthews, who had concussion, was lowered to the ground to await the Medical Officer and was immediately covered in flowers and embraced by anxious French maidens, an experience which was quite lost on the central figure who remained oblivious to the last. So warm was the welcome, so enjoyable the cider and so friendly the populace that it was becoming more and more difficult to induce the gallant 'liberators' to continue the advance, when a sudden explosion made the villagers scurry back to their houses. The noise was being made by 'B' Squadron who were now in the lead and were destroying some 105-millimetre guns and some machine-guns on the main road. Captain Blackman's troop was responsible for this, assisted by Major Wigan in person, who swung his turret so vigorously that the unfortunate Monmouth company commander went flying off it into the ditch.

The next objective, the crossing over the River Souleuvre, was now only just over a mile ahead of 'B' Squadron. The river here ran through a deep valley, flanked with thick woods on both sides, and the road to Le Beny Bocage ran upwards through these woods to a high ridge on which stood the little town. If the valley had been covered by fire from the woods on the far side it would have been a very difficult crossing to force, and everyone expected some form of opposition as we approached the bridge. It was soon seen that a troop of Household Cavalry armoured cars were already there. They reported that they had seen nothing, so 'B' Squadron began to cross. Suddenly there was a loud explosion from one of the leading tanks and two Monmouths fell off the back of it, seriously wounded. Feeling sure that an enemy gun had opened up from the high ground, 'B' Squadron put down smoke and swung off into the steep woods to gain the ridge and locate the trouble. The Colonel decided that,

while 'B' Squadron struggled upwards through the trees, 'C' Squadron should continue up the road to Le Beny Bocage and at any rate try to reach before nightfall the high ground which dominated the town. So Major Hagger pushed his Squadron over the bridge and made good progress until, fifty yards short of the top of the hill, the leading tank of First Troop was destroyed by the explosion of three mines which went off simultaneously and swung the tank round, blocking the road. The mines were covered by enemy machine gun fire and the Troop Leader, Lieut. Bishop, took his tank up to the derelict one and destroyed these posts. The company of Monmouths then dug themselves in and it was decided that 'C' Squadron should try to advance no further that night. In the meantime, 'B' were at the top of the hill, having been restricted to one very difficult and narrow track. They had found nothing which could have fired at them and have caused the explosion, and it was later discovered that the casualties had been caused by a P.I.A.T. bomb, which one of the infantry had placed on the back of the tank and which had been exploded by the heat of the engine through the plate. However, 'B' Squadron found some real opposition on the top of the hill in the shape of a self-propelled gun which fired a few rounds at the leading tank. Sergeant Taylor replied and, having set the SP's ammunition and petrol trailer on fire, saw it withdraw. 'B'Squadron were then pulled back and the whole Regiment harboured by the bridge, while the Monmouths manned the ground we had gained during the day.

On August 1st at first light we renewed our attempts to enter Le Beny Bocage. 'B' Squadron went back to their hill through the woods to guard the flank and, in doing so, discovered an abandoned quartermaster's store, which caused much excitement until it was found to contain nothing of any great interest. 'C' Squadron, with the help of some Sappers, cleared the mines and began to push forward to Le Beny Bocage when orders came from above that the Third Tanks would move through us. 'C' Squadron's Third Troop nearly reached the centre of the town, and Sergeant Sear, in the leading tank, there disabled a German Mk IV tank, which limped back round a corner and was destroyed by its comrades. The Third Tanks occupied Le Beny Bocage with no opposition and pushed through it to guard it from an enemy counter attack. The Twenty-third Hussars were then separated from the Monmouths, and we moved into the little town on a beautiful sunny afternoon to have a brief rest. It



"The long-awaited flowers and cups of cider".

Le Beny Bocage. Sergeant Sears, having destroyed a tank, receives his just reward.



was a charming place, a big village rather than a town, and the inhabitants were so friendly that everyone hoped we would not hear the cry 'push on' for at least another twenty-four hours.

But the afternoon and evening were all the respite we were given. Despite the non-appearance of the Guards on our left, owing to heavy fighting near their start line, it was decided that the Division should try to gain the Vassy-Vire road, regardless of exposed flanks. This was of course a perfectly justifiable risk and one which has been taken many times since, sometimes with spectacular results. On this occasion it certainly paid to take the chance, though during the next few days many strange situations resulted from it and we became involved in one of the toughest battles we ever fought. Our infantry colleagues were now to be the Eighth Battalion, the Rifle Brigade. It was the first occasion on which we had worked together as a group and force of circumstances parted us after only three days, but the experience laid the foundations of a remarkable partnership between our two units which soon became almost a permanency for any operation and about which more will be written in a later chapter. We decided we could move on a company-squadron basis but, as the Riflemen had their own armoured vehicles, they naturally rode in them and not on the tanks as the Monmouths had done. Our road ran south from Le Beny Bocage, through Le Desert, up to Point 218, down the valley through Presles, up again to the high ground of Bas and Haut Perrier, and on to Chenedolle and our objective. The Fife and Forfar were on our right, and our left, as has been shown, was open.

August 2nd was an eventful day from the start and the leading tank of 'B' Squadron, commanded by Sergeant Williams, neatly knocked out two armoured cars which were trying to get away to announce our arrival to their bigger brethren. They were identified as belonging to the Ninth SS Panzer-Division, and 'B' Squadron continued with a sharp look-out, as we did not suppose we had seen the last of this redoubtable formation. All was quiet until on Point 218 there was some infantry opposition. It was speedily dealt with, though the Commanding Officer's operator, Sergeant Walke, chose an inconvenient moment to give Sergeant Jones, of 'B' Squadron, a netting call. It happened to coincide with a battle Sergeant Jones was having with a German, armed with a bazooka, in a hole a few yards from his tank. After a few minutes of patiently answering to interminable tuning alphabets and reports of signals, he found that he really could not

allow this extremely belligerent German any more latitude and, throwing restraint and wireless discipline to the winds, he cried into the microphone: "For God's sake give me more time!", and despatched both the German and the bazooka. He then expressed his willingness to be put 'on net'.

After this, 'B' Squadron advanced into the village of Presles without incident, but on the other side they spotted two self-propelled guns and, having knocked one out, saw the crew abandon the other. While this was going on Regimental Headquarters halted on the cross-roads at Point 218 with 'A' Squadron behind them. Major Blacker then had occasion to walk over the cross-roads to remonstrate with our Medium OP officer, who was briskly firing his tank gun at the Fife and Forfar, visible in the distance on our right. Having explained his error to him Major Blacker was returning to his tank, when, while in the middle of the cross-roads, he happened to glance in the direction of Estry. It was well he did, for only one hundred yards away was a Panther, advancing down the main road towards him. Fortunately the Panther did not react quickly. Equally fortunately the tanks of RHQ were protected from it by a bank, which, however, was too high to allow their guns to bear on it. A good deal of confused firing on both sides then ensued, the Panther letting off an armour-piercing and a high explosive shell and a burst of machine-gun fire in quick succession. It succeeded only in knocking a telegraph pole down over Sergeant Roberts' 17-pounder which had been sent to the rescue. This stalemate was broken by Lieut. Payne's troop, which assaulted the Panther in flank and destroyed it. One or two of its friends were lurking fairly close, but withdrew without damage to themselves. RHQ was then relieved to find that 'B' Squadron had moved on through Presles and that it was possible to hand over this rather too eventful spot to someone else.

With Panthers liable to arrive so unexpectedly, it was thought better to push 'A' Squadron out as a left flank guard, and they continued parallel to the main axis down a very narrow track, without their company of RBs. 'B' Squadron was still pushing on and had reached Bas Perrier when sounds of battle were audible from 'A' Squadron, who at the time were a mile away to the left. They had at last managed to quit their narrow track and spread out in a field.

At the other end of the field, playing the 'lying-in-wait' game which was the delight of the German tank man, lay hidden a number of Panthers. At close range, and with well distributed fire, they all opened up at once with deadly effect. All but four of the 'A' Squadron tanks were hit and blazing within a matter of minutes, and the remaining four fought their way back to cover, destroying three Panthers as they did so. Major Watt's tank was one of the first to be hit and the crew 'baled out', comparatively unhurt. Seeing the plight of his squadron and realising that he could not control the battle without using a wireless, Major Watt ran back to his tank, which was not yet on fire, but which he well knew to be in full view of the enemy. When he jumped onto the turret to seize the microphone, a Panther opened up on him at point blank range and Major Watt fell, badly wounded. Corporal Harris, his driver, rushed forward and pulled him to safety, though under very heavy fire all the time. Having done this, Corporal Harris went forward alone with a Sten gun to assault the enemy infantry, which were threatening to advance upon them. Major Watt refused all medical treatment until the other wounded could be attended to and kept trying to resume command although his wounds made this quite impossible. The baled-out crews ran about under heavy fire helping the wounded. Captain Taylor had in the meantime, with great coolness and courage, reorganised the survivors. The Recce Troop were sent across to evacuate the wounded and after a brisk battle, which cost them one man killed, they fought their way back down 'A' Squadron's route, which by now had been cut by some very aggressive Panzer Grenadiers. When he was satisfied that all possible survivors had been evacuated, and that there was nothing more that could be done Captain Taylor brought the remnants of the Squadron across to the main route and joined the rest of the Regiment. One crew which was missing was that of Sergeant Roberts, who had been isolated by the Germans and could not get back. They had to spend two very uncomfortable days amongst the German lines, being heavily shelled by our guns and having constantly to hide from German patrols. Eventually Sergeant Roberts managed to rejoin the Regiment, bringing his whole crew with him, and having gained much useful information about the enemy positions.

While 'A' were fighting their battle on the left, 'B' Squadron had also bumped trouble, though not in such a serious way. The village

of Chenedolle lay in a hollow below the rise up to the Vassy-Vire road, which was our objective. The villagers seemed to have some premonition of the horror that was to befall their little community during the next seven days, for they appeared quiet and apprehensive as the leading tank appeared. Almost immediately, there was the familiar crack and whistle of a German anti-tank gun, followed by a sickening thump and flash as Sergeant Allsopp's tank was knocked out, fortunately without much damage to the inmates. The crew commander walked calmly back past the rest of the Regiment with his crew, looking rather irritated, like someone whose car has broken down at a tiresome moment.

The Riflemen dismounted and with a troop from 'B' Squadron started to try to clear the village. They had not got far when a Panther appeared in the main street and advanced upon them. A rifleman promptly put two rounds of P.I.A.T. through its turret, and was furious when it merely emitted clouds of smoke and drove away, though everyone in the turret must have been dead.

While this situation was being dealt with, the news of the 'A' Squadron disaster began to come in. The first reaction was to try and send another squadron across to their rescue, but the country was so impossibly thick that it could not be done. When Captain Taylor rejoined with his remaining four tanks, we began to realize that Chenedolle was not going to be very easy either. The thought uppermost in most people's minds was that we had a completely open left flank for four miles, and only too obviously there was a strong force of German armour placed in an ideal position to assault it. That the main German force was on our left, or east, side was obvious from the information we had just received that the Fife and Forfar, the other side of us, were on their objective without meeting any opposition. And so it was decided to withdraw from Chenedolle and take up a firm position for the night on a piece of high ground above the little village of Le Bas Perrier, about a mile short of the farthest point 'B' Squadron had reached during the day. The night passed quietly, and August 3rd dawned with the promise of a really hot summer's day. And hot it proved eventually to be, though not altogether in the way we expected.

Orders came through during the night that we were to advance no further until the Guards had caught up to cover our left flank.

They had still been prevented from reaching even as far as Le Beny Bocage, so there was a most vulnerable and exposed gap stretching from our position for about five miles back to where the most advanced Guardsmen were battling. Apart from our immediate west, which was covered by the Fife and Forfar, we expected trouble from any direction, but not, it must be admitted, quite as soon as it came.

Our position was on a hill of the usual Normandy type, covered in high hedgerows, banks and cornfields. It was not big enough for the number of tanks we had, and overcrowding could not be avoided. The road from Presles to Chenedolle ran over this hill and it divided 'B' Squadron, who were on the west side, from 'C', who were responsible for the east. 'A' Squadron were in reserve on the northern slopes of the ridge and the Rifle Brigade companies were, of course, still with us.

Our hill was a high one, and a splendid panorama of unspoilt Normandy country lay behind us. Directly to our north the ridge of Point 218, running parallel to our own, was visible two miles away, and beneath it lay the little village of Presles, which we had liberated the day before. Between us and Presles stretched a rich green valley, running east and west, apparently open, but in reality honeycombed with sunken lanes, banks, high hedgerows, orchards, and all the other intricacies of the 'bocage', terminating in thick woodland to the east. Far in the eastern distance, we could see the spire of German-held Estry, the rock which was later to break the assault of two successive British divisions and which was the last fortress to be abandoned by the Germans when they began to disappear into the vortex of the Falaise pocket. But although we could see clearly to the north, the view to the south was very different. Below us, completely obscured by orchards and woods though only half-a-mile away, was Le Bas Perrier. A wooded ridge immediately south of our own prevented us from seeing Chenedolle, but it also looked as though it would be impossible for many Germans tanks to engage us from it at the same time, owing to its undergrowth. The trees, however, stretched down into the little valley to within two hundred yards of our position, making a covered approach easy for an infantry assault upon us. Knowing that Chenedolle had been held the night before, we expected trouble to come from the south, but a keen watch was kept all round our hill.

The tanks had been going now for four days with very little respite, and we therefore ordered up the fitters to carry out a few repairs. They set off from A 1. Echelon, which was in Le Beny Bocage, led by Major Whitehill and Captain Sandford in a jeep. Their little column consisted of the three fitters' half-tracks, followed by a Rifle Brigade scout car and an ambulance, which was required by the M.O. They passed through Presles at about 10 a.m., without seeing anything unusual, and began to cross the valley.

Up on our hill, the crews that were not on 'look-out' duties were peacefully washing or writing letters in the sunshine. Down in the valley a faint noise broke the stillness and aroused the attention of one of the look-outs. He shouted that there were Germans in the valley and that they were walking about on the road behind us. Immediately tanks were manned, and through glasses there could be seen a puzzling sight. About six khaki clad figures were standing in the road, apparently examining us with binoculars, for their hands were raised before their faces, whilst behind them a wisp of smoke wreathed slowly upwards. Suddenly a figure in field grey stepped into view before them. He held a weapon in his hand - and at once we realised what had happened. Our fitters had been ambushed, and it was some of the survivors that we could see with their hands raised, standing before their captors. Simultaneously another look-out pointed excitedly towards Presles. There, on the main cross-roads in the village, was the unmistakable shape of a Panther. Immediately the tanks of RHQ opened fire upon it, but it was at least two thousand yards away and no damage could be done to it. Before a 17-pounder could move into position, it waddled back behind a house. Major Whitehill and Captain Sandford then arrived in their jeep, having run the gauntlet and had the narrowest of escapes, due to their vehicle being the leading one and a small target. They told us some of the story, but it was not till later that we really knew the full details. Half-way across the valley, the leading half-track, which was 'C' Squadron's, received a direct hit from a shell, probably from a German tank, which killed Sergeant Beresford and half of his crew. The half-track slewed sideways, preventing the others from getting past, and forced them to a halt. As the crews jumped out, they were surrounded by German infantry and overwhelmed without a chance of fighting, though in the confusion Sergeant Kellett, Sergeant Cookson and a few others managed to disappear into ditches and crawl back

to safety. The survivors from the 'C' Squadron half-track were all wounded, some more seriously than the others. Lance-corporal Bradley though shaken by blast and burns, pulled Lance-corporal Legg, who was more seriously hurt, to some cover, from which he eventually helped him back to our lines. On the way he had several skirmishes with the SS infantry and shot two with his pistol and took another prisoner, whom he handed over on arrival. Private Barnett, of the RAMC, who had been in the ambulance, refused to take cover and went to look after a seriously wounded man. He refused to obey the Germans' orders to leave him and, despite the numbers of the enemy troops which surrounded him by this time, he calmly walked past them with his patient, and eventually regained friendly territory. Whenever a German stopped him he pointed to his Red Cross armlet, and on every occasion they let him pass. It was a remarkable display of courage and endurance, for the wounded man could hardly walk, and Barnett knew that the Germans round him were SS men and quite capable of shooting them both.

We had seen enough by now to know that the battle for our left flank was about to begin. Sure enough, down the valley from the east came large numbers of enemy infantry, walking in open order on a wide front, but with the clear intention of occupying Presles. We engaged them, and must have killed a few, though the hedgerows and orchards were a great handicap to us. Soon we saw them creeping into the village, and spreading out round it. Two Germans went into the church, with the obvious intention of using it as an O.P., but a few high-explosive shells on the spire made them bolt out again like rabbits. We had our artillery support in action by now, but the enemy were so spread out and so well concealed that it could not be very effective. There was no counter-attack force available and the Germans were now astride our only supply route. In short, we were cut off. But we had refilled with ammunition, we had plenty of food and being stationary needed no petrol. Evacuation of wounded was going to be a problem and obviously we should have to conserve our ammunition, but otherwise we were confident that we could keep our end up till a counter-attack could materialise. To launch a counter-attack of our own was quite impossible, as it meant descending from our high ground into the valley and, with the tanks road-bound by the high banks, the enemy would have had an easy time of it. Also

we fully expected an attack from the south as well as from the north, for we could by no means ignore the threat from Chenedolle.

It was not long before enemy tanks began to work along the side of the hill above Presles to support their infantry. There were not many of them, but they seemed to be nearly all Tigers and Panthers, using sunken lanes down which they would crawl until they could see a target. Then they would fire a few shots and draw back to cover. They had several advantages over us. They could choose their fire positions, which we could not, being wedged to our stationary position on the hill where we had to sit on a forward slope with camouflage as the only cover. It would seem from this that we had chosen a bad tactical position, but, in fact, the circumstances of the day before had forced it on us with no alternative, except to retire a further two miles, which we would not do. Another advantage the Germans had was that the battle was fought at long range, which virtually discounted our seventy-fives for anti-tank work, and left us only our seventeen-pounders, of which we had nine left, to compete on equal terms. Another handicap was that our shells went off with a big flash and puff of smoke, which gave the tank's position away, whilst the Germans had flashless and smokeless powder in their ammunition. It was, therefore, almost impossible to spot a German tank when it fired. Sometimes if one happened to see the shell's tracer coming towards one, a rough guess could be made as to where it started from, and occasionally the German gun would blow away some of its camouflage and expose the turret. But usually one knew nothing until the German shell arrived.

So artfully did the Tigers and Panthers get into position that we did not at first notice their arrival. But we were not long left in suspense. A series of resounding cracks followed by sudden puffs of dust rising around our tanks announced that we were under fire from their guns. 'B' Squadron and Regimental Headquarters were on the most exposed side of the hill and had to bear the brunt. RHQ had a hedge which partially concealed them, but 'B' Squadron were unavoidably in full view. They fired back but the range was too great for the seventy-fives of the Shermans to have any effect. Gradually those ominous puffs of dust began to creep nearer to our tanks as the Germans found the range. The crack and whistle of enemy armour-piercing shot grew in intensity, mingling with the roar of our

seventeen-pounders as they retaliated. Inevitably, there was soon a crash and a spurt of flame. A cloud of black smoke rose from a 'B' Squadron tank which had been hit. A few minutes later Major Wigan's tank was hit low down and began to smoke threateningly. He refused to bale out without permission, though clearly the next shot would complete his tank's destruction, and he calmly rang up the Colonel to ask if he might dismount. The Colonel was engaged, and Sergeant Walke said "Wait-out". Major Wigan accordingly waited - a most unpleasant few minutes. Eventually he rather anxiously enquired again and this time Sergeant Walke was more encouraging for he said "O.K.-over". He got no reply from Major Wigan, who lost no time in taking advantage of this permission, followed through his hatch by Sergeant Hutchinson, enveloped in a monstrous swarm of codes, papers, maps and note-books. Major Wigan took another tank, which met the same fate twenty minutes later, this time giving the crew no choice whether they remained in or out, for it caught fire at once. His third tank managed to avoid trouble.

Meanwhile, yet another 'B' Squadron tank was burning while behind it men were bending over some still figures. The battle was not going well. Gallantly as 'B' Squadron fought, they were completely outranged and indeed practically never caught a glimpse of their target. On 'C' Squadron's side, Sergeant Hoggins had managed to put a shot through a Tiger's turret with his seventeen-pounder, and other commanders made claims which could not be substantiated. We kept slogging back, straining our eyes for targets, and within another few minutes one of our attached self-propelled guns was knocked out. Then the H.E. shells started to arrive, at first from the high velocity tank guns. The whistle and crash of the explosions occurred almost simultaneously. Then, as the afternoon wore on, heavier guns were moved up against us. Salvos of shells began to fall around the hill, causing casualties to the RBs as they crouched helplessly in their slit-trenches, and badly wounding Sergeant Straughan of 'B' Squadron. The Medical Officer had many wounded collected in his Aid Post, which was in a small sunken lane behind the RHQ tanks. It proved to be the hottest corner of all, a fate which was to dog Captain Mitchell wherever he moved during the next two days. One of his half-tracks was hit and some of his staff killed and wounded. Then the German tanks spotted RHQ behind its hedge, and concentrated upon them. The Battery Commander's tank was hit at once, quickly

followed by a medium gunner OP tank. Then a Rifle Brigade motorcycle next to the Colonel's tank sprang five feet into the air, struck by a heavy armour-piercing shot. The Colonel wisely decided to move to the other side of the hill, but RHQ was almost pinned down by fire. Lieut. Turner, the Troop Leader, most coolly put down smoke, giving his own position away completely but covering RHQ as it moved amid a rain of different missiles to its new position. As the tanks moved a heavy H.E. bombardment began and a 'C' Squadron petrol lorry exploded with a tremendous roar and flash. Flames rose high in the air and the combined noise was so great that for a moment complete confusion reigned on the hill. Wounded figures ran to and fro while a trail of stretchers, borne by the surviving members of the baled-out crews, marked the progress of the R.A.P. to a secluded orchard on the west side of the hill. Captain Mitchell proclaimed this a perfect spot until he discovered it was outside our perimeter and was not defended by anyone. Exasperated, he refused to move again and, spreading out a large red cross, he hoped for the best. Without delay an American Thunderbolt, apparently failing to see the red cross, swooped upon him and discharged all its rockets at the Aid Post. Another half-track was destroyed but miraculously no one was hurt. RHQ's new position was also far from ideal, for if the enemy attacked from the south it would be liable to be even more involved than it had been on the north of the hill, being the first tanks the enemy would meet. But there was nowhere else to go, and the tanks were thickly covered with branches for camouflage, a precaution which almost certainly saved them from destruction during the next few days.

As visibility decreased, the German fire grew much lighter and we had a chance to review our position. If the Germans made a repetition of this the next day we should lose more tanks, but, provided our ammunition did not run out, we would not lose the hill. The most serious worry was the condition and numbers of the wounded. Both Captain Mitchell and Captain Wilcox of the Rifle Brigade were running short of medical stores and there seemed less chance than ever of being able to evacuate the casualties for at least another twelve hours. Both doctors were magnificent in this crisis and inspired the whole force with confidence by their complete and unshakeable calmness. Captain Mitchell worked tirelessly, at times under intense fire

and under circumstances which could not have been more trying. Beside him worked Padre Taylor, displaying a devotion to duty which no one who saw it will ever forget, and which will remain in all our memories as the perfect example of how a regimental padre should behave. It is impossible to estimate how much we all owed to those two men during that twenty-four hours and later.

From the Brigadier came the news that an infantry battalion was to counter-attack Presles that night, make its way across the valley and relieve the RBs. This news cheered everyone considerably. Darkness fell, though all around light flickered from smouldering tanks, half-tracks and the petrol lorry. In slit trenches and underneath the tanks those who were not on guard duties slumbered uneasily, while 'look-outs' strained their eyes and ears for the enemy. But apart from the roaring of tank engines in the distance and an intermittent shell, silence reigned.

At midnight, the Second Warwicks attacked Presles and took it. By dawn they were up to the hulks of our unfortunate fitters' half-tracks in the valley, meeting but little resistance. Obviously the enemy had withdrawn, temporarily at any rate, and at midday the road, to our relief, was open again. First priority was given to ambulances and fifteen of them were on their way to us in a matter of minutes. The leading company of the Warwicks arrived and by 3 p.m. the change-over was under way, with two companies of Warwicks gradually getting into position, and with all the RBs departed to Presles except for one company, which had not yet been relieved. Just at this highly inconvenient moment the unmistakeable 'whirr, whirr' of several 'moaning minnies' was heard in the distance. The air was filled with their throbbing moan as everyone rapidly went to ground, and the next ten minutes were extremely unpleasant. As the bombardment began to ease, our ears caught the rattle of a Spandau machine gun, this time from the south. The enemy were counter-attacking us through the woods from Chenedolle. Immediately Colonel Hunter of the RBs rallied his mixed and rather disorganised force of infantry to meet the attack, and our tanks poured H.E. shells into the thick trees. The divisional artillery opened up with their medium 5.5-inch guns on Chenedolle, which we reckoned was sure to be the forming up position for the enemy reserves. 25-pounders were fired to burst in the trees just in front of us. This treatment had an

excellent effect on the Germans and they abandoned the attack. But they remained in Le Bas Perrier village and in the trees, sniping at anyone who moved on the hill and harassing any patrol that entered the village very roughly. The Warwicks then completed the hand-over and the Riflemen went back to defend Presles which, although constantly shelled, was never directly assaulted again. The enemy were obviously concentrating on making their effort from the south to-day, and it was very fortunate that it was almost impossible for an enemy tank to get into a fire position from that direction.

Later in the evening another heavy bombardment heralded the second counter-attack, but it was dealt with in the same way as the first, and another fairly peaceful night was passed.

The morning of August 5th found Bas Perrier hill still firmly held. It presented an extraordinary picture, with the peaceful fields disfigured by the ugly shape of tanks, pitted with shell holes and torn up by tracks. Burnt and blackened vehicles dotted the hedgerows, and beside many of them were a few rough crosses made of two twigs with a beret or a rifleman's steel helmet resting upon each of them. Spoil from slit trenches was heaped between the tanks, and below ground crouched the riflemen not on look-out duties, together with the small number of echelon personnel who travelled with the tanks. Most of the latter's vehicles had been knocked out, and they had the unnerving job of sitting quite inactive while those around them had a definite part to play. The tank crews were tired but still full of fight. Most of them had not spent more than thirty minutes outside their tanks for forty-eight hours, and were destined to do the same for another two days. The tanks could not move for fear of giving away their positions, and many in the end had been stationary and camouflaged for five days - a very considerable strain. No one doubted that the Germans meant to take Bas Perrier hill.

On August 5th we sustained and beat back three counter-attacks of a very similar nature, using the same methods as on the day before. Chenedolle must have been a shambles by that time.

During the preliminary bombardment of the first of these counter-attacks a distinguished visitor in the shape of the Brigadier was glad to accept the hospitality of the hole underneath the Colonel's tank. So many officers from Brigade and RHQ took shelter in this hole

on this occasion that the Quartermaster, Captain Garcia, was left outside. When the shelling ceased he was still standing outside, waving a Naafi cheque he had brought for signature and saying plaintively, "Isn't there any room for me?". That particular shelling had a less humorous result, however, as Captain Mitchell, whilst crossing the open field to attend to some wounded, was badly hit in the chest. His loss was a severe blow to everyone and it says a great deal for his successor, Captain McBeath, that he was able to restore confidence as quickly as he did.

The last two counter-attacks of the day were mainly notable for the extremely cool and competent handling by Lieut. Harte of 'B' Squadron's Second Troop. He first of all destroyed a 75-millimetre gun which the Germans had man-handled into position in the trees and were firing at us. He was then ordered to accompany a platoon of Warwicks into Bas Perrier village, where they were surrounded by enemy infantry, and had a very difficult time, with almost no visibility. Sergeant Pike came face to face with a Tiger at very close range in the street and, although he hit it three times without effect, one shot from its gun was enough to knock out his 75-millimetre Sherman. He brought his crew back intact, and eventually the whole troop were ordered out, having done valuable work.

Meanwhile, back in Le Beny Bocage, great excitement and alarm was being caused by shelling and by reports that Tigers were coming from the east. Captain Geikie, who was in charge of A 1. Echelon at the time, was ordered by a despairing staff officer to be responsible for the left flank of the entire Eighth Corps and to hold Le Beny Bocage at all costs. Captain Geikie accordingly arranged his forces before the town, but was slightly dubious as to whether they would be a match for a force of Tigers. Apart from his lorries and their crews, he had two seventy-five Shermans, one of which was immobile, and a seventeen-pounder Sherman, whose gun would only fire once in every five attempts and which, when it did fire, was very uncertain in its accuracy. Fortunately for everyone, the Geek Force was not called upon to fulfil its important role, but its members no doubt passed some very uneasy moments.

Apart from its commitments in Le Beny Bocage, the Echelon still had to send columns up during the day and night. These had a nerve-racking time in the valley between Presles and our hill, for German

patrols were still liable to appear in it. Every time a vehicle crossed the valley the Germans blew the most eerie sounding instrument, rather like a hunting horn, which appeared to be some sort of alert. By night there was an unpleasant self-propelled eighty-eight, which knew that transport was using the road and kept banging away in the hope of hitting something. It never did, but the knowledge that it was there was rather unsettling. Despite all hazards, however, the echelon crews were always in great heart, and had very few casualties.

By the evening of August 5th it really began to look as though the Ninth SS Panzer Division had had about enough. They had made no ground and the only casualties they had inflicted on us that day had been from shelling. Our ears were by now very well tuned to hear any noise that might be an approaching shell and everyone certainly knew the quickest way into his slit trench. By staying in our tanks or slit trenches, and by doing the minimum walking in the open, our casualties could not be greatly increased by shelling alone, and the enemy appeared to be tired of counter-attacking. It was decided to withdraw 'A' and 'B' Squadrons that night, and to leave 'C' Squadron with a troop from 'B' to take over the whole regimental position and support the Warwicks. In the darkness the two squadrons withdrew to La Barbière, and the next morning there was only RHQ left to watch 'C' Squadron take up their new positions. All was quiet until about midday when the unmistakeable crack of an eighty-eight put everyone on the alert. For the first time the enemy had worked a Tiger up onto the ridge to our south and, concealed in the trees, it could not fail to see most of our tanks on the south side, which had been completely immune from A.P. fire for the last three days. Luckily we were all covered with cut branches, or it might have been serious, for it was quite impossible to see where the Tiger was. It first of all put three shells through a RHQ scout car, but, although its shots were passing within ten yards of the RHQ tanks, for some reason the Tiger did not notice them, though every moment it seemed more certain that they could not fail to be seen and destroyed eventually. A tank in 'C' Squadron began to fire back, and must have worried the Tiger, for it turned its attention towards the other side of the road. Without delay it knocked out a self-propelled seventeen-pounder, one of a troop which had been sent to our support. This SP happened to be surrounded by slit trenches filled

with men of the Warwicks and, seeing that if the ammunition began to explode it would undoubtedly injure them, Lieut. Robson and an infantry officer courageously jumped into the burning vehicle and began to throw out the rounds. This very brave action cost them both their lives, for the Tiger, seeing movement on the SP, put two more shells into it, killing them instantly, and depriving the Regiment of a very gallant and popular young officer.

The Tiger evidently was also having difficulty in seeing, and he either withdrew or ceased fire, for no more was heard from him for a while. Regimental Headquarters withdrew and the 'C' Squadron force was left covering the whole hill.

The Guards, meanwhile, were slowly closing the gap on our left flank, and were level with Le Beny Bocage. They were unable, however, to advance any further, because Estry proved to be an exceptionally well-held strong-point. Moreover, their own left flank was having its share of counter-attacks, and there was no prospect of a further advance by them for several days yet. On our right the Fifes and the Herefords had had much the same sort of a battle as we, with the advantage, however, that we were on their left flank. But the Americans were now well into Brittany, and the speed and direction of their advance gave most cheering indications of what might be in store for the Germans.

On Bas Perrier hill the situation looked quite satisfactory for complete peace reigned for the early afternoon and everyone began to think that the worst was over. But, as on so many occasions in Normandy, the quietest hour was but the prelude to the storm. It burst upon Bas Perrier hill at four o'clock - a concentrated bombardment by all the artillery the Germans could muster. The first concentration of 'minnies' landed all round the Warwicks' Battalion Headquarters. It caused casualties and handicapped the measures which had to be taken at once to deal with the German counter-attack coming in from the south. Very soon the rattle of Spandau came closer through the trees and the same Tiger, which had appeared in the morning, began to fire again, this time with two or three friends to assist him. Immediately our artillery swung into action, giving finer support than ever. It was answered by German guns of all calibres and the shelling of our positions continued unabated, while our tanks hurled high-explosive into the trees and tried to destroy the Tigers with

their 17-pounders. Soon, however, the leading company of the Warwicks was driven back, and the enemy closed in to our main position. 'C' Squadron were beginning to lose tanks. Captain Phillimore, having destroyed a Panther, was severely wounded and Corporal Gilbertson's tank and crew were also victims. Trooper Duck distinguished himself by pulling Corporal Gilbertson and his gunner to safety under heavy fire. Sergeant Johnson moved his tank forward into an exposed position, knowing it to be the only means of dealing with the enemy tanks. He fired, but a Tiger retaliated, knocking off his tank's track. Sergeant Johnson got out with his crew and coolly mended it under intense shelling. In the village a company of Warwicks were in a serious condition, harassed by tank fire, and Major Hagger sent a troop down to assist them. It was commanded by Sergeant Smith and, by the time it reached the village, it consisted of only Sergeant Jackson's tank besides his own. Sergeant Jackson had just arrived in a replacement Sherman, which was in a hopeless mechanical condition, and it broke down on the outskirts. Sergeant Smith continued alone into the village where he gave valuable support. At one moment he found himself within thirty yards of a Panther on the other side of a house. Neither could move for fear of putting himself at the mercy of the other, and, while they remained still, the house gave protection to each of them. Small arms fire was hitting his turret and Sergeant Smith had to remain in this unpleasant predicament until the Panther managed to withdraw. He was then called back to the Squadron and on his way found Sergeant Jackson, who had been surrounded by German infantry in a narrow lane in his immobile tank, but had refused to abandon his now almost useless machine despite all attacks and although told to do so by the Squadron Leader. Both Sergeants and their crews descended from their tanks and, although under fire, managed to tow Sergeant Jackson's back to the hill.

The battle continued unabated, and despite all efforts by ourselves, the Warwicks, and the artillery, whose guns were nearly red hot by now, the enemy began to creep round the left flank. As darkness was falling they reached the top of the hill and began to 'bazooka' the tanks. The fact that this serious situation was overcome was due very largely to the bravery of Lieut. Bishop, commanding the left hand troop, who was quite unshakeable and whose coolness put fresh heart into the Warwicks. When light failed, the tanks drew back into a

close leaguer with the infantry in order to beat off a night attack. Shortly before this Lieut. Treanor, who had just joined the Regiment, was killed.

The Germans did not continue their onslaught after dark and when dawn came we were able to re-occupy most of our positions. Sporadic and half-hearted attacks were launched during the morning, but in nothing like the strength of the previous day. When patrols were able to go into the woods in front of our position the reason for this was obvious, for the slaughter was found to have been terrific. We knew later that the last counter-attack was made by the newly arrived Tenth SS Panzer Division, whose orders had been to take our ridge and that of the Fife and Forfar whatever the cost. But the cost had been too high and that badly mauled formation never fought again until much later when, with its equally battered brother the Ninth SS, it was launched against Arnhem.

'C' Squadron and the 'B' Squadron troop were relieved at midday, having fought a magnificent battle. Particular praise is due to Major Hagger, whose first big engagement as a Squadron Leader it was, and whose determination and coolness had been a great factor in the holding of Bas Perrier on August 6th. His leadership undoubtedly had a most excellent effect on the hard-pressed Warwicks.

The Regiment re-assembled at La Barrière and began to reform for the next battle. All ranks were able to look back on a week of great achievements. For rather less casualties than at Caen, the Regiment had inflicted heavy damage on the enemy and had advanced a substantial distance. They had withstood every kind of assault and had given far more than they got. Moreover, everyone felt that the enemy could not withstand such treatment for long and that some day soon we should be advancing into France with the Americans, leaving the battered slopes of Bas Perrier ridge many miles behind.

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During the week of August 1st to 7th, the advance to Chenedolle and the battle on the hill cost the Regiment the following casualties:-

Killed	2 officers
	19 other ranks
Wounded	6 officers
	47 other ranks

## CHAPTER VI

### THROUGH THE FALAISE POCKET

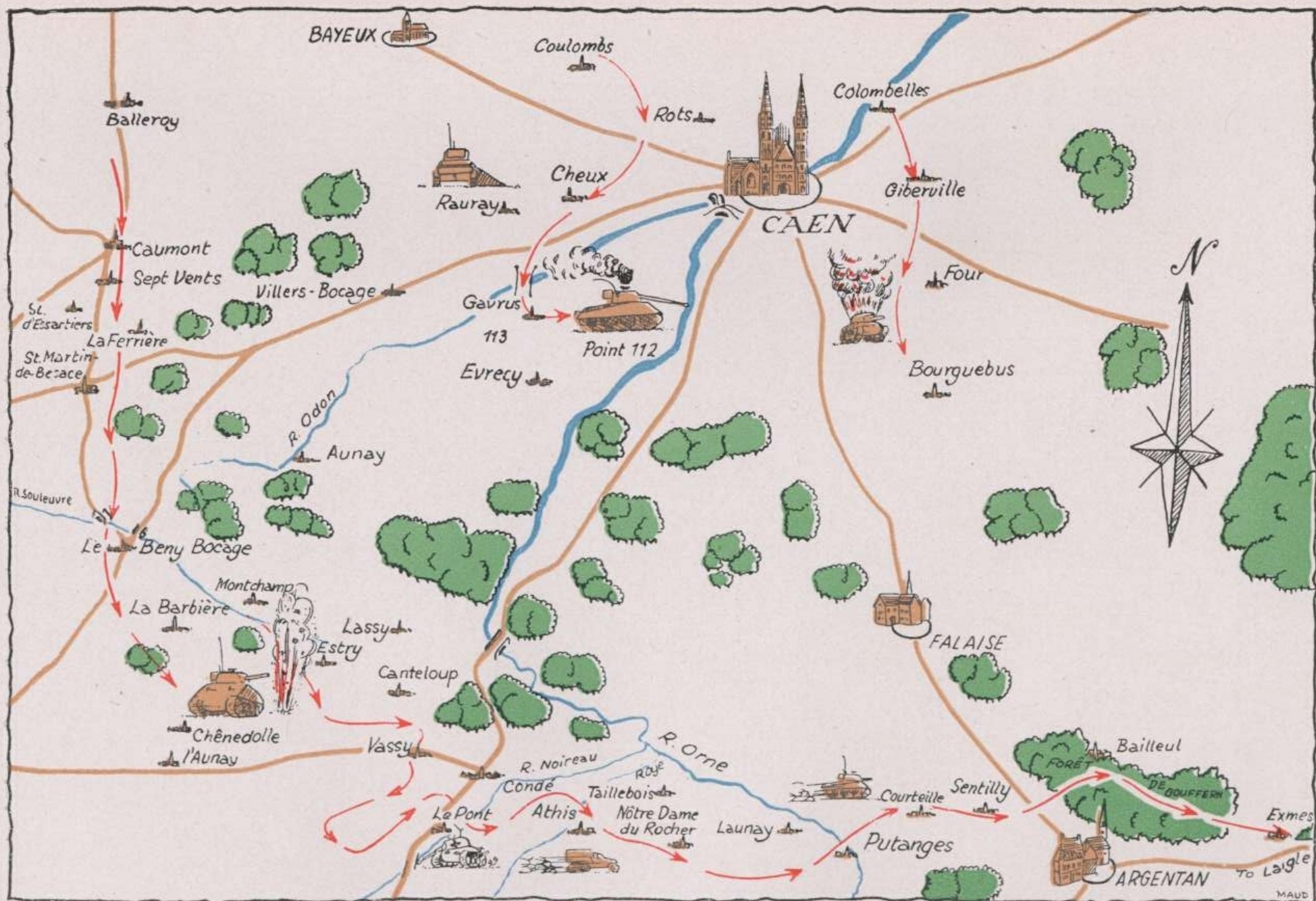
August 6th — 22nd

La Barbière was a very pleasant change from Bas Perrier. 'A' and 'B' Squadrons and Regimental Headquarters had been there for twenty-four hours when the dusty and begrimed 'C' Squadron party rumbled in. Those twenty-four hours, however, had been for the most part passed amid the shattering roar of the whole divisional artillery, in position next to us, as it pounded the enemy attacking Bas Perrier and Burcy. On the evening of the 6th it rose to a crescendo. People walked about uneasily, saying very little. Four miles in front of us the battle was not going well. 'C' Squadron were losing tanks and the Warwicks were in retreat to the crown of the hill. There was no mention of any question of retiring from the position which we had defended for five days with such tenacity. It was not going to be lost now. The wireless crackled, the urgent voices of the 'C' Squadron tank commanders were faint as they gave quick orders or information. Our battery commander, Major Gaunt, incessantly gave instructions to his guns for more and yet more support, a call which was nobly answered. The OP on the hill went "off the air". Major Hagger passed the fire orders backwards and forwards. "East two hundred yards". "No, now north one hundred yards". "That's exactly right. Well done." The voices on the air grew fainter as the crackling of the wireless grew louder. The only man who could hear them was Sergeant Walke, picking up almost inaudible words with uncanny accuracy. The Germans were creeping up to the crest of the hill in the failing light. The roar of the guns was accompanied now by flickering red flashes as they fired. It grew dark. The defenders were withdrawn into a tight ring, infantry and tanks together, all very tired. The faint voices now had a slight ring of irritation and strain. But the hill was not lost and was not going to be. The Germans

had had enough, and the next day the Regiment was concentrated together in La Barbière, this time free from the roar of guns.

Our rather depleted ranks were filled by the very welcome arrival of reinforcements from the Twenty-fourth Lancers. They had been formed at the same time as ourselves, and we had, as it were, grown up together. After they had left our Brigade, to be replaced by the Third Tanks, they had landed in their new brigade on D Day. While we were at Coulombs they had already been fighting for a fortnight and had had severe losses in the savage 'bocage' battles of the early days. We had heard of the reputation they had made for themselves and could deeply sympathise with them that their early losses had merely meant their disbandment to provide reinforcements elsewhere. When they arrived we were greatly impressed by the way they had taken their bitter disappointment and by the cheerful manner in which they were determined to 'fit in'. In the days to come we came to admire these good Twenty-fourth Lancers more than ever. Major Turquand took over 'A' Squadron, for Captain Taylor had been slightly wounded on Bas Perrier. Many people had been baffled by the Colonel's inquiry over the air a few days previously whether 'the boxer fellow' had arrived. Now he was with us. Captain Hart also came, only to be killed most tragically a few days later. Lieut. Drake brought his complete troop. It had a particularly fine record, which it kept to the end, of never having had one of its members killed. To fight through the thick of the battle from D Day to V Day with that record is a notable achievement. It became 'A' Squadron's Second Troop. Many other good tank crews and fitters also joined us, and much later Lieut. Leather and Lieut. Garai arrived.

The resultant reorganisation occupied our time for the next few days. One incident was of especial interest. Quite suddenly, and to the utter astonishment of everyone, who thought they were seeing a ghost, in walked Lieut. Weiner, long since given up as dead! His story was a remarkable one. He had been captured by the Twelfth SS when his tank was knocked out on the approach to the River Odon. Narrowly escaping summary execution at the hands of his captors, who were about to shoot him when a less brutal officer intervened, he was borne away past rows of Panthers waiting to counter-attack our bridgehead. He had been slightly wounded in the leg and was taken to a hospital in Rennes where he received the usual primitive treat-



Normandy Landmarks  
1944

ment. One day, the noise of guns was heard and it grew louder. The Americans were arriving, and in due course they liberated him. Nobly refusing their insistent offers to send him to England, he duly 'escaped' from them and arrived back with the Regiment. When we were convinced that he was the genuine article and not a ghost, everyone was, of course, delighted to see him.

While we made ready for our next battle, the general plan of campaign was unfolding before us.

The enemy's failure to break through the American corridor, a general advance along the whole length of the British front and a vast encircling movement by American and French armour from the south resulted in the Falaise 'pocket', of which the four corners roughly were the towns of Falaise, Argentan, Mortain and Vire. This 'pocket', enclosing more than twenty of the enemy's divisions, was firmly taking shape when the Regiment began its next move. Beginning near its north-western corner on August 13th we pushed along the whole of its length in the space of a week and cut the main Falaise-Argentan road on August 20th in the area of the so-called 'shambles', the scene of the enemy's final disintegration in Normandy.

On the late afternoon of August 12th, therefore, we left La Barrière, where we had all spent such a pleasant week and had been able to recover and refit from the shock and wounds of Bas Perrier. In the heat and dust of the end of the day, we carried out a peace-time march to Montchamp, where we camped down for the night in a tight defensive position round a farm. The situation in the area was not very clear. Nothing as yet pointed to a definite withdrawal, and there were continuous reports of enemy infiltrations. So throughout that sultry and bright moonlit August night there was a steady exchange of fire close by to the south.

The following morning the three rifle companies of the Eighth Rifle Brigade arrived. 'A' Squadron were joined by 'G' Company, 'B' Squadron by 'F' Company, and 'C' Squadron by 'H' Company. Battalion Headquarters and the Support Company did not arrive for another two days. These 'marriages', which were to be permanent, at once proved themselves successful both in work and play, surviving the shock and strain of battle, the dust of Normandy, the mud of the Maas, and the cobbles of Germany in harmony and friendship.

'B' Squadron and 'F' Company moved out during the early afternoon, directed towards the important road junction of Vassy, between Vire and Condé. The road along which they were to move rose to a ridge of high ground which continued south for some miles until it dropped down into the Vassy valley. No sooner had they reached the northern edge of this when they were held up by mines and obstacles. The Sappers were called for but the clearing took longer than expected, and the Squadron withdrew for the night, leaving a troop in possession of an important cross-roads slightly in rear.

The remaining obstacles having been cleared at first light, 'B' Squadron group moved forward again and reached the first feature. 'C' and 'H' at once passed through to take up the lead, but as their leading tank approached the central and highest point, it was fired on and destroyed. So was the one behind. Both belonged to Fourth Troop, one to Lieut. Steinhart, the other to Corporal Harvey. It was quite obvious that the fire came from the area of a small cross-roads a few hundred yards ahead. But this was the 'bocage' country at its worst - hedge-bound and tree-bound and perfectly suited to mobile defence. The riflemen were sent to comb out the country towards the left whilst Third Troop went round to the right. This combined manoeuvre finally established the identity of two German Mark IV tanks and forced them to retire. All this took the best part of a dusty, hot and sultry day. By four o'clock, however, the whole 'C' Squadron group was established astride the ridge at its highest point, half-way to Vassy, and 'A' Squadron and 'G' Company were pushed through them to secure a high stretch of ground to the east of a village called Canteloupe, known on the wireless as 'the fruity bit'. This small place lay in a hollow, down a track to the east of the main road, and as the leading tank approached it, it was destroyed. It was commanded by Sergeant Oldham, one of our youngest and most popular sergeants, and he was killed. Captain Budgeon, one of our undauntable gunner OPs, thereupon undertook to prove his contention that the enemy 'had now gone', by running his tank up and down the road in full view. Suitably encouraged, First Troop under Lieut. Bates continued but were only able to approach the village down a deep, narrow and foliage-covered lane. Lieut. Bates being wounded, Lieut Drake was then ordered forward with another troop-platoon group for another attempt. By night-fall they had reached and cleared the perimeter of the village of all enemy but,

owing to the dark, had to withdraw. A fine 'stonk' that night destroyed a Mark IV tank and caused the enemy to abandon the village.

On the next morning 'A' Squadron went right into and through Canteloupe and established themselves on a feature dominating the valley to the east of Vassy and the road to Condé. By a series of uncharted tracks 'B' Squadron made their way through 'A' across to another hill more to the east and there spent the night.

All this was dull, dangerous and unspectacular. Slow, grinding work. During it the 159th Brigade, led by Third Tanks, was coming up on our right also heading for Vassy and the Fifes were working up on our left through Lassy and La Rocque. These converging movements resulted in our being 'pinched out' - a welcome term and a happy condition which to our minds only too rarely befell us!

The following morning, therefore, the Fifes assumed the lead, heading south towards the River Noireau and 159th Brigade entered Vassy. Prisoners, many of them Polish deserters, now began to surrender in groups and one began to have the feeling that henceforth things might move faster. 'C' Squadron, indeed, were sent on an abortive mission to speed things on, along a mapped but non-existent track towards the Noireau. When they returned we were following the Fifes through Le Pont and Cérisi Belle Etoile, in the cool breeze of a sunny afternoon, through villages which bore clear signs of pillage and vandalism. Though it grew dark we were being urged to push on through the Third Tanks at their bridgehead over the Vère River, a tributary of the Noireau. Colonel Hunter, of the RBs, and Major Blacker went on to investigate this for a suitable harbour area and found that it was indeed held - but by the enemy. In the end, we flopped down beside, in, or under our tanks, on one of the dustiest roads in Normandy. We had put ten miles behind us.

'C' Squadron led the next morning. We passed through the bridge-head where our 'harbourmasters' had been so rudely received the previous night, and then through Athis, picking up a few stragglers, one of whom obligingly told us that the German plan was to withdraw nightly by ten-mile bounds from river-line to river-line. Rightly enough the advance continued unopposed until we reached the River Roye at Taillebois. Here the bridge spanning a deep gorge was blown. The enemy, concealed and emplaced on the other side in Notre Dame du Rocher, was mortaring and machine-gunning and there was evi-

dence of one or two tanks or heavy self-propelled guns. The Colonel, however, went down to look for a crossing and by two o'clock 'C' Squadron and 'H' Company had passed over a ford, down and up the steep sides of the river bed. 'A' Squadron group followed, crossed the ford and went forward. Then throughout the afternoon they fought their way up the steep, high-banked road leading into Notre Dame, in the face of heavy fire. Though they had cleared most of the village by nightfall, they were compelled to withdraw into a close leaguer for the night, during which both they and 'C' Squadron remained under constant and accurate fire.

We were still in the lead the following morning, and the whole Regiment crossed whilst the bridge was being completed. 'B' Squadron group passed through both 'C' and 'A' and led on towards Putanges. The enemy again had vanished in the early hours, but everywhere there were signs of a chaotic and hasty withdrawal - abandoned or self-destroyed tanks and vehicles; bedraggled, tired, despairing prisoners of whom we collected over fifty. Everywhere, too, could be seen signs of the havoc wrought by the air, a havoc, indeed, which was to take on tremendous proportions as we penetrated deeper into this area of the 'shambles'.

By twelve o'clock 'B' group found itself on the high spur overlooking Putanges from the west. Not unexpectedly the bridge over the Orne was blown, but few of us, who had been in the battle for Point 112, had dreamed that we would be crossing it only six weeks later, forty miles upstream, virtually unopposed.

Whilst 'B' Squadron began to explore for a crossing south of Putanges, 'C' turned off to the left to attempt to cross by a bridge downstream. The approaches to this, however, were covered by a strong enemy rearguard in the village of Launay, which lay in a hollow astride the road. And, after spending the remainder of the day attempting to attack and outflank, the group was withdrawn. The Germans had made a good defence of their last escape bridge over the Orne.

'B' Squadron and 'F' Company, in the meantime, were mostly occupied in bloodlessly beating off an American column of tanks, which was using the same route, but going in the opposite direction! The whole matter was amicably settled in our favour, and Major Wigan was invited to smoke the Pipe of Peace with the American commander that evening. In the afternoon the Third Monmouths

came up and prepared themselves for a night crossing of the Orne. By this time they had only four officers left in the Battalion. They made the crossing against light opposition, and one squadron of the Fifes went through in the morning, enlarging the bridgehead and establishing themselves on a rise beyond Putanges on the road to Argentan.

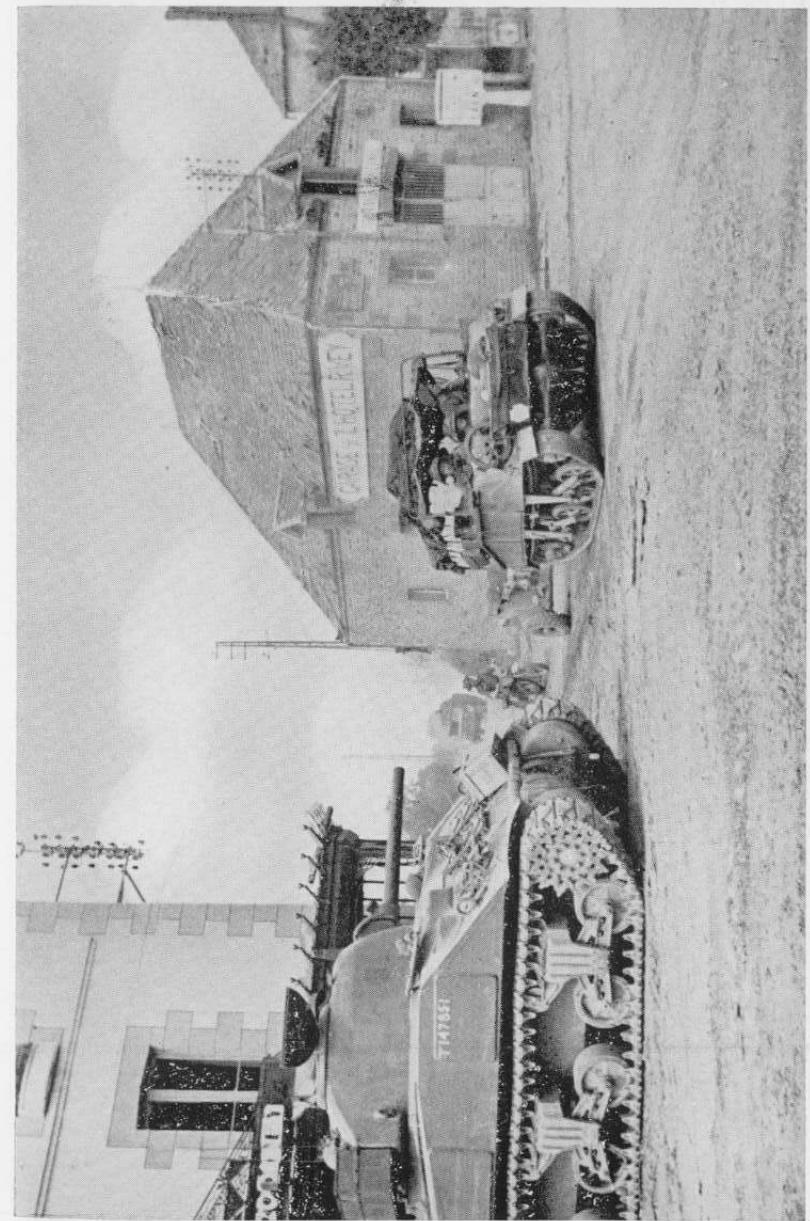
We moved off again towards midday, 'B' Squadron leading, and crossed the Orne. We passed through the Fife's position beyond, and assumed the lead. A horse-drawn column was overrun and a company of anti-tank gunners complete with their self-propelled equipment surrendered. In a matter of minutes prisoners were streaming in. They testified to the speed of our advance, to the confusion wrought by the 'air', to the disruption of their own communications, and the collapse of the enemy's morale. 'B' Squadron pushed on, reaching the high open ground beyond Courteille. Suddenly Eighth Platoon of 'F' Company working with Fourth Troop spotted two Panthers in a field. In the pouring rain Major Wigan came up to place the seventeen-pounders. Commanders were out of their tanks guiding them into position. The RBs placed themselves along the road. But the Panthers showed no sign of life. After much discussion, they were approached and investigated and found to have been abandoned and put of action. After this a more active and mobile opponent appeared quite unexpectedly in the shape of the 15/19th Hussars! Being one of our parent units it was indeed fortunate that we avoided the crime of matricide.

So, in the growing darkness, we turned off the high ground and off the main road which led to Argentan. We passed through a small village called Sentilly and harboured in some fields beyond it. As dusk fell an advance guard from 'A' Squadron pressed on through Cui, but the leading tank was hit and destroyed. Some of the crew were taken prisoner but set free in the morning. It was a black and rain-swept night. A 1. Echelon behind brought its tank into action and destroyed two self-propelled guns which had rudely attempted to interfere. The whole area was infested with Germans. Throughout the night the air was filled with planes and flares and the long rumblings and vivid flashes of explosions. Ahead of us lay the Falaise-Argentan road, the very neck of the Pocket, and beyond rose the black mass of the Forêt de Gouffern, one of the largest assembly points, tank harbours and ammunition dumps in the whole of the battle area.

Soon after dawn the following day, both 'B' and 'C' Squadrons were ordered to send out strong patrols towards the main Falaise-Argentan road. 'C' Squadron's patrol passed through Cui, where 'A' Squadron had lost a tank the night before, and captured a large hospital containing over a hundred wounded and a hundred staff and attached. Here Sergeant Harris and Trooper White who had been wounded the previous night were freed.

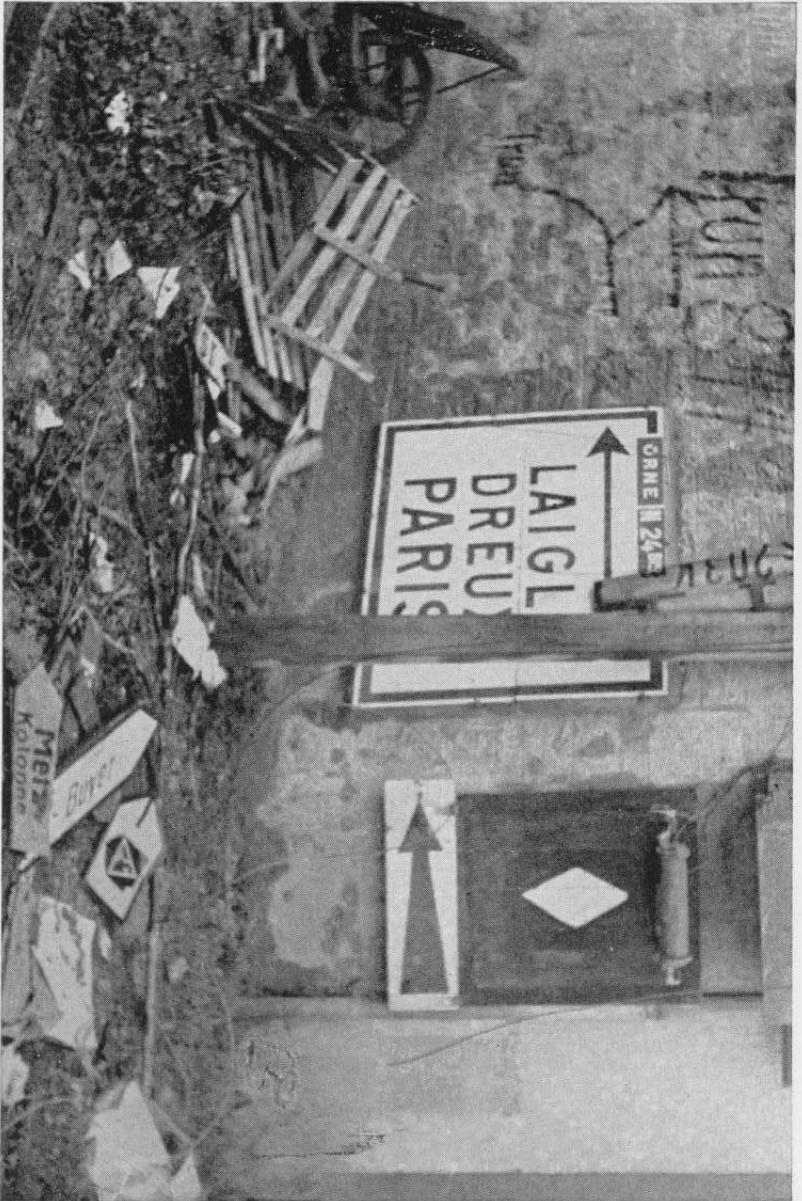
The rest of the Regiment halted in the hospital grounds, while the patrols moved forward. It was known that there were Panthers about. The hospital had once been a pleasant country chateau but there was little of its beauty left that morning. The house had a shabby and neglected air, in common with all requisitioned buildings anywhere. Many of its windows had been broken by the previous night's bombardment, and in the big main doorway stood a group of dejected German attendants. The main driveway in which we were parked was a litter of all that is unpleasant in modern war. In a ditch nearby a blackened Sherman lolled on its side. Tank tracks disfigured and tore up the grass and gravel. The grass of the lawns was unkept and strewn with German bodies, many of them twisted and shattered into grotesque attitudes. We tried not to look at the three dead horses in the gateway, hideously swollen in the sun. Their smashed carts were spilling their contents over the gravel - all the personal kit of the dead or routed Germans, a sordid grey tangle of clothing, eating utensils and steel helmets. The most vivid memory of all is the smell. The acrid smell of the burnt-out Sherman, the sickly smell of decaying corpses and the all-invading sharp odour which always clung to German soldiers and their belongings, were all mingled together. This scene was being enacted in thousands of similar spots as the Allied armies and air-fleets closed in and pounded into defeat the trapped Germans of the Falaise pocket. By now it had very nearly become the merciless slaughter of a defenceless and confused foe. Very nearly - but not quite. As the two patrols crossed the main Falaise-Argentan road, two Panthers fired upon the 'B' Squadron party from the Forêt de Gouffern and destroyed one tank. Two men in it were killed. They were swiftly revenged by 'B' Squadron and by 'C' Squadron's Fourth Troop, who between them destroyed both the Panthers.

Soon 'B' and 'C' Squadrons, with the RBs out of their vehicles clearing the woods, were entering the Forêt de Gouffern. Every-



An RB carrier crosses the Falaise-Argentan road, "the very neck of the Pocket". The sign points back to Caen.

The sign points forward to Paris.



where lay abandoned equipment, piles of ammunition, burnt-out half-tracks, Volkswagen and tanks. Most of them had been destroyed by the Germans but the air forces had clearly been busy as well. The horrid and familiar sight of disembowelled horses, smashed carts and littered equipment was ever-present. Occasionally there was a burnt-out lorry or car in the ditch, and sometimes the blackened and twisted corpses of men were visible inside, while other crushed, torn bodies lay around. Again, and everywhere, there was the smell of burning and decay. This was a terrible retribution for the Wehrmacht, indeed.

At four o'clock 'A' and 'G' were pushed through and continued through the thick forest. Occasionally the turret of a Tiger or Panther would loom suddenly in the underground, but it was always abandoned. We reached the rise overlooking the little village of Bailleul. Below us, and before us, was the valley which was the final killing-ground, the point at which Canadians, Poles, British and Americans converged that evening upon the pulverised remnants of the German Army in Normandy. Already Canadian gunfire could be heard, as they battled southward from the carnage of Falaise.

As we wended our way down the hill, a large manor house was found to contain a most resplendent party. Two streamlined cars were crammed with arrogant and immaculate German staff officers, while in their midst sat General Kurt Badinsky, the Commander of the German 276th Infantry Division, one of those which had been wiped out in the pocket. He was anxious to surrender with the minimum of trouble, and was even keen to shake hands and treat the whole contest as if it had been a football match. A typical German mentality, one supposed, and he was passed back to Brigade Headquarters with little ceremony. With great difficulty, we managed to extract the two cars from Corps Headquarters and the Colonel became the owner of a resplendent Horch, while Colonel Hunter took over an equally magnificent Lincoln Zephyr.

'A' and 'G' were so fascinated by their capture that it was only with great difficulty that their interest was forced back to the fact that we still had some way to go, and that it was getting late. We crawled into harbour in pitch darkness and it began to rain heavily. Close by we could hear the sound of a fierce tank battle in the valley. It was the death knell of the Germans in the 'Pocket' which by morning had ceased to exist.

We awoke wet and muddy, surrounded by scenes which need no further description. We did not know what the plan was now, for no one was clear how far the Allied armies had reached. To the south of us Argentan had been captured, but there was no other news. However at ten o'clock we moved forward in reserve and took the road south to Argentan. We then turned due east along a fine main highway. We seemed to be well behind the leaders, for we immediately began to move at high speed. Our Echelon waved to the tanks from a field as we passed, and the battle appeared to have moved well ahead. After about twelve miles of this exhilarating progress we turned off through Exmes, which had just been liberated by the French Armoured Division. Their vehicles kept getting into the middle of ours and, every now and then, Americans would also become entangled with our column. Then we turned off again, this time in the lead, with 'C' Squadron in front. By the evening we had advanced ten miles but were held up by an eighty-eight as it grew dark. We woke on a sunny morning, and the Fifes cleared St. André d'Echauffour in front of us. We passed through them, 'C' Squadron in the lead. After the village, the Regiment split. The village lay north of the river Rile, which flowed eastwards towards Laigle. There were routes on both sides of the river leading to that town, but the main one lay on the southern bank. 'A' and 'B' were ordered to continue north of the river and to cross it much further east. This they did with great success and joined the main road further up. 'C' Squadron found the bridge blown at St. Gauburge and a large tangle of mines and wire. A patrol found a ford a short way downstream, but it was very boggy. The General arrived to spur us on. About four tanks, including the Colonel's, got ditched or bogged on the approaches to the ford. After a great deal of sweat and blasphemy had been expended, we were across. A good main road stretched before us, but rows of mines, laid across it at intervals, slowed us up. The Sappers had got stuck and 'C' Squadron had to deal with the mines. No one felt very confident, but eventually a rope was rather apprehensively attached to them and they were towed out of the way. The Sappers arrived in time to deal with the last row, and 'C' Squadron noted with interest that their treatment had been correct except that the Sappers used a much longer rope!

This obstacle surmounted we had a clear run to Laigle. The slight irritability which had been caused by the earlier delays gave way to

a real holiday mood. Cheering, waving crowds thronged the village streets as we passed, throwing flowers at us and proffering cups of cider. We waved back in high spirits, which were even further raised by the news that we were to look for a harbour where we could have a real rest. Harbour parties went off and the column still moved on towards Laigle. The Sappers had looked upon the wine when it was red, and were in the highest spirits of all. The Normandy countryside was green and untouched by war. The horrors of the Falaise Pocket were behind us. Soon we pulled into some pleasant fields beside the river Rile for a few days rest. Everyone was at the top of his form.

One incident marred our day. An officer patrol in a scout car was sent to the bridges east of Laigle. Lieut. Cornwall was chosen and set off with the driver, Lance-corporal Botting, and commander, Trooper Epathite. Nothing was heard of them till the next day, when the scout car returned. Both Lieut. Cornwall and Epathite had been killed by machine-gun fire near one of the bridges, and the driver had brought the body of the former back, having spent the night in enemy country.

The next few days were very pleasant ones. The weather was hot and sunny and the cool river was excellent for bathing. Old friends began to return from England, recovered from their wounds, Captain Addison and Captain Taylor among them. New friends arrived as reinforcements. The Echelon rejoined us. Even Ensa made an appearance!

The 'big picture' was a dramatic one. The great chase across France had begun. Paris was liberated and vast areas of France were cleared of Germans. The British were closing up to the Seine.

History was being made, and on the 27th we moved forward to our next adventure.

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The seventeen day's push through the Falaise pocket from La Barbière (where a few losses were sustained) to Laigle - August 12th to 27th - cost the Regiment the following casualties:-

Killed	2 officers
	10 other ranks
Wounded	1 officer
	12 other ranks

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SEINE TO ANTWERP

August 28th — September 5th

The Seine was about eighty miles away from Laigle, and upon this great French river the eyes of the world were now fixed. It had been crossed below Paris, and there was another American bridgehead at Mantes-Gassicourt. Farther north, at Vernon, British infantry were about to make an assault crossing. Nearer the sea, British and Canadian troops were approaching Rouen, where the only bridge left over the Seine was jammed with fleeing Germans. The situation seemed more than satisfactory for the Seine had always been considered the biggest obstacle in France, and yet the Americans were already across it and were sweeping towards Rheims and Verdun.

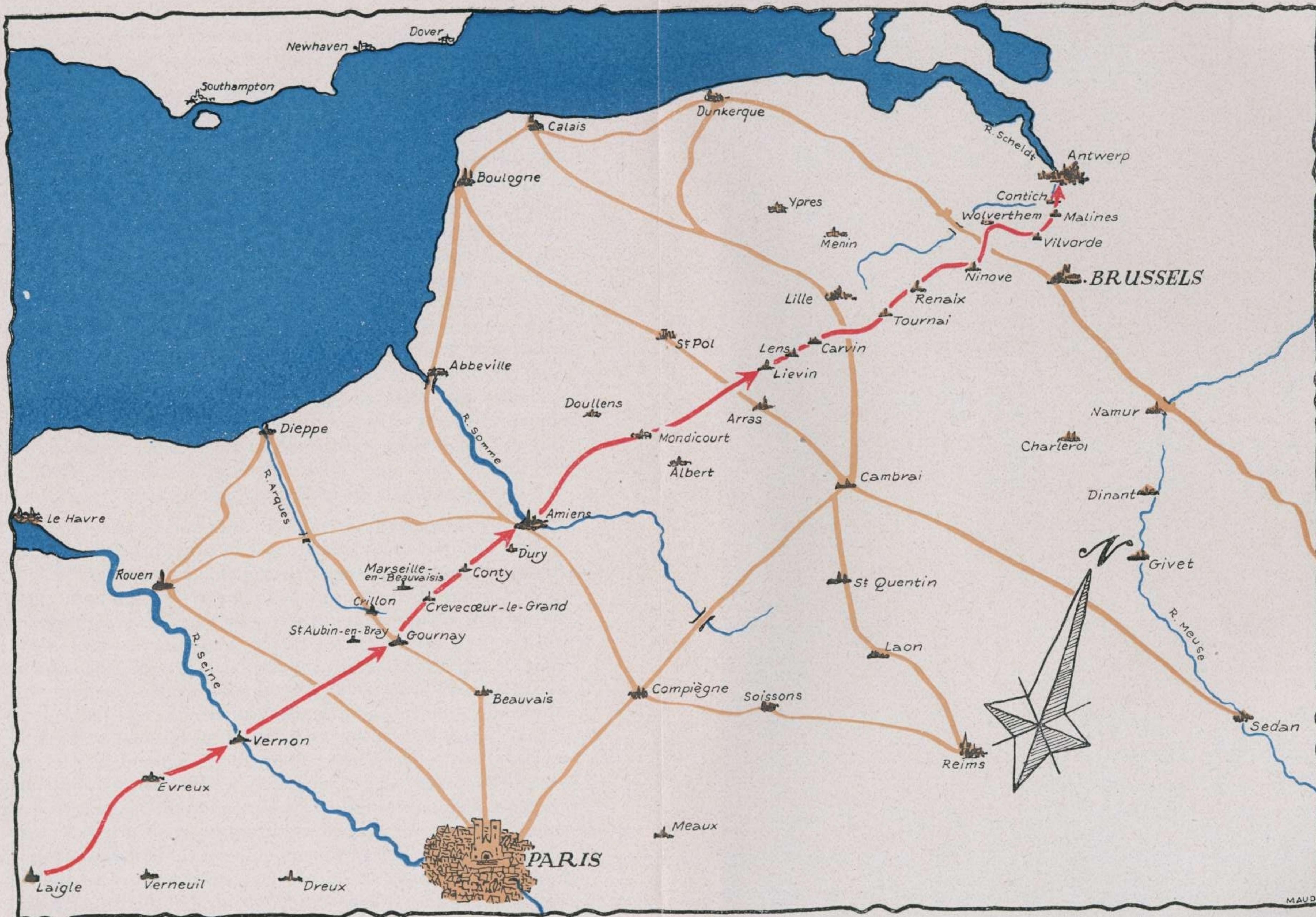
It was thought, however, that the German Fifteenth Army was still an operative force, and could be used to counter-attack these crossings. At Vernon there was quite strong opposition on the far bank. We did not then realise how thin was the crust and our optimism was tempered by the thought of several more battles yet to be fought in France. The idea of 'Antwerp within a week' never crossed our minds.

While the assault at Vernon was being made we moved on the early morning of August 28th to our concentration area near the Seine. It was a hot and irritating march, remarkable for traffic jams and for a peculiar type of dust which inflamed the eyes until they were swollen, red and streaming. By four in the afternoon we had arrived, and all round us the Brigade lay concentrated. Vehicles ran busily back and forth from the bridgehead, which appeared to be going well. Just as we were preparing for a night's rest, there was a sudden rush of orders. Harbour parties were to move at once, cross the river and find a place for us within the bridgehead to spend the night. At 7.30 p.m. the Regiment moved off, and, heavily involved

in the usual traffic jam, did not reach its area until two o'clock in the morning. It had been a steep climb up a wooded hill, on which a black and formidable-looking Tiger had been earlier knocked out. Farm houses round our harbour were blazing as we went to sleep, for the ground here had only recently been won.

On the following morning it poured with rain, and we followed the Third Tanks as reserve regiment. The day passed uneventfully and the advance was fairly slow. By evening we were twenty miles from the Seine, but some burning Shermans in the half-light indicated that the Third Tanks had met some trouble. 'C' Squadron and 'H' Company moved up to support them and engaged a gun and some infantry as darkness fell.

We went into the lead early next morning, expecting a day of slow but steady advance, possibly losing two or three tanks. But we were too pessimistic, for, apart from the incessant and penetrating rain, it proved to be eventful, quite enjoyable and perfectly safe. Overlooking the river Epte, we passed through the Third Tanks, and with Third Troop of 'B' Squadron in the lead crossed the bridge. Some enemy infantry scuttled into a wood and a few gave themselves up. Then on to St. Aubin en Bray, cutting the main road from Gournay to Beauvais and Paris, meeting no opposition at all. At Crillon, a few mortar shells burst harmlessly near us and a farmyard full of anti-tank guns was captured. The country was becoming open and rolling now, and we had left the 'bocage' forever. We moved in open order, spread out in formation, and sometimes we might well have been doing squadron drill on the Yorkshire wolds. This was the type of country for which we had been trained, where initiative, good map-reading, and tactical sense would pay good dividends. We could look three and four thousand yards ahead now, and from a ridge could sweep the country before us with our binoculars. Soon a column of fleeing German transport was spotted and the Shermans' seventy-fives came into their own as they reduced it to a blazing shambles with their high explosives. A German petrol lorry received a direct hit - a splendid sight. Tank commanders in their enthusiasm had to be restrained from wasting ammunition. We moved forward again, the regiment of Shermans making an impressive sight as they forged on a broad front across the plains of Northern France. At Marseille-en-Beauvaisis another column was destroyed and we had to stop for some more



MAUD

petrol. Barely a shot had been fired at us all day and we began to have an inkling that Amiens, our next objective, might not be such a distant prize as it had seemed that morning. We were already half way there.

The rain stopped as we waited for our petrol. The Third Tanks, who had refuelled further back, moved through us into the lead. We did not know it, but the "Gallop" had begun. General Horrocks, now our Corps Commander, had summed up the situation. To our Divisional Commander, General Roberts, he made the oft-quoted remark "It's moonlight to-night". He meant that he intended to take the risk of pushing the Eleventh Armoured Division on, through the night, to cover the fifty miles which separated us from Amiens in the darkness. It was a risk which turned out to be a brilliant success. To our Regiment belongs little credit for the execution of this order. Such credit belongs properly to the Third Tanks and the Fifes, who had to find the way, while we followed in reserve. Their leading tanks must have had a most unenviable task, for map-reading at night is never easy, and they knew that any vehicle they met in the darkness was bound to be hostile. And it was far from being moonlight. The rain poured down and clouds made the night very dark indeed. We rumbled forward with a feeling that anything might happen.

The night closed in upon us and the rain teemed down. Apart from the unfortunate crews in front who had to find the way, at any moment expecting a German gun to open up on them, most tank crews very soon lost any feeling of excitement. It became a struggle between an intense desire to go to sleep and an equally intense fear that, if one did so, one's tank would go the wrong way and lose the column. The idea of waking up to find oneself lost in pitch darkness in enemy infested country, possibly with the rest of the column behind also misled and demanding furiously to know where they had been taken, was too bad to contemplate. Possibly the rain was a blessing in disguise, for everyone soon became so uncomfortably wet that a shivering stupor was one's nearest approach to sleep, at any rate for a while. But as the night wore on, there were frequent halts, presumably while the unfortunate leading troop leader consulted his map, or sometimes while the column circumnavigated a broken-down Sherman in the road. During these halts, the head would nod, the eyes begin to close and perhaps even

shut. Then a sudden frantic start as consciousness returned, an anxious gaze into the darkness to see if the tank in front was still there, the dash down the road in pursuit of the column, and finally the relief when the tank in front loomed up through the darkness again.

The wireless crackled, and occasionally sleepy voices would ask for a "report of signals", a request which was rarely granted. Occasionally some unusually sleepy operator got a piece of one of his superior's mind. The drivers drove on doggedly, straining their eyes for the column in front. No news seemed to be coming back from the leaders, so presumably all was well. Now and then a German lorry would get into the column, and many an extraordinary incident took place. But the Germans were showing no fight, and the Eleventh Armoured Division was moving slowly but surely to Amiens and the River Somme. A wet and miserable dawn revealed rolling arable land stretching to the far horizon. Ahead, the Third Tanks were entering Amiens, finding large columns of Germans marching to their breakfast. The German Army had been completely taken by surprise, and the gamble had come off.

The Fifes were coming in from the left or south-west. We ourselves broke off to the right and began to establish ourselves between two main roads four miles south of the town. 'B' Squadron went into Dury and did violent execution among a crowd of startled Germans. The rest of the Regiment waited for the order to enter Amiens.

The clouds cleared with the rising sun and it turned into a fresh bright morning. Some of the Rifle Brigade and 'A' Squadron had engaged a convoy of staff cars on the main road. Major Blacker, with unerring instinct, went across and procured for himself, amongst other things a large and powerful Horch. This, in turn, produced maps of every scale showing in the minutest detail the intended German positions from Switzerland to the Channel. Giving the line of the Somme, the Marne and the Upper Moselle, these maps, though of historical interest, were to be rendered obsolete in the course of that one day. The car contained every form of evil-smelling Teutonic luxury, and it was soon found that the convoy belonged to General Eberbach, the commander of the German Seventh Army, who had controlled the battle in Normandy. Unhappily, except for one driver,

the distinguished occupants had fled, only to be netted a little further on by the Fifes. So began our most successful day.

Towards nine o'clock we received the order to capture Amiens and the crossings over the River Somme. 'C' Squadron and 'H' Company were ordered into the heart of the city to seize the main bridges, 'B' Squadron being sent into the eastern outskirts with a view to taking the bridges in that part of the town. The remainder established themselves on a high open hill immediately south of, and overlooking, the place - the largest that a British force had invested since D Day.

"No one knew", writes 'C' Squadron's chronicler, "how this great strategic prize would be defended, and it was thought certain that the approaches to the main bridge would be mined and that the bridge itself might be blown.

"The route to the city, almost a mile away, lay across open country. The map showed a track leading from Dury almost directly to our objective, but after we had moved down it over the crest of the hill, to within full view of the city, it petered out completely. A way, however, was found into the outskirts and soon we reached the built-up area, where excited civilians crowded round - one of them a schoolmistress who spoke good English - and told us that enemy tanks had pulled out to the east, but that there were still Germans in the town intending to blow the bridges.

"We moved on at once towards the centre. At a road junction we joined 'H' Company, who had entered previously and by another route. The order now came to push on with all possible speed. With First Troop leading we entered by the Rue St. Fuscien. Everywhere the clatter of tanks and carriers on the cobbled road brought excited spectators to the windows, hardly able to believe their eyes at this sudden and unexpected sight of British tanks right in the heart of their city and so very much on top of the Germans. After a moment's halt in the Place du Maréchal Joffre to make certain of directions, the leading tanks swung right into the tree-lined Boulevard d'Alsace Lorraine, and made for the bridge. Still advancing at speed they had approached to within a hundred yards of it when they were brought to a sudden halt by fire from buildings on the opposite side. The bridge, though intact, was prepared for blowing and ominous black holes across the centre span might well have been mines. But a chance had to be

taken. The RBs had dismounted and taken up fire positions on either side of the road. A crowd of Maquis, including women, armed with rifles and grenades had suddenly appeared. The leading tanks and carriers darted across, wildly followed by the Maquis who rushed on in pursuit of the scattered German rearguard. Leaving Fourth Troop to guard the river bridge, First Troop again went forward to secure the crossing of a viaduct vitally important to the advance, and again, with the assistance of the RBs and the Maquis, a small German counter attack was driven off. Now the whole Squadron group moved across and established a tight, firm bridgehead.

"Our position was, however, dominated by high ground to the east from which we were fired on by at least two Panthers. Taking what cover we could behind buildings, two of our seventeen-pounders opened up at them and, although no direct hits could be observed, the Panthers were driven off. Meanwhile infantry and anti-tank guns from other units of the Division were pouring into our little bridgehead, expanding it, and fortifying it, and making of our small and swift beginning a great, significant event".

Whilst Regimental Headquarters and 'A' Squadron watched from their hill south of the city, 'B' Squadron could be seen down in the valley probing vainly into the easternmost outskirts. Led by Third Troop they could make no advance against a powerful anti-tank position. On the hills opposite a constant stream of vehicles disappeared in flight. From the city itself, a black jumble of roofs, distinguished only by its tall cathedral spire, there rose an occasional puff and the rumble of an explosion or a sudden burst of fire. Far over to the east we could see the open, bare ridges overlooking the Somme for which our fathers had fought. Nearer, there lay the shattered, sprawling wreckage of Amiens airfield.

At two o'clock, 'B' Squadron led the rest of the Regiment into the town and across the main bridge, now alive with infantry and guns. Then a piece of great good fortune occurred. The road out of the town, which 'B' Squadron should have used, was covered by a large Flak site. Fortunately a slight error of map-reading was made and they did not use that road. Instead, they took a smaller one which brought them out in open country in the rear of the Flak site, which still had its guns pointing down the road they should have taken. After one incredulous glance, 'B' Squadron opened up with all they

had, assisted by RHQ and the leading troop of 'C' Squadron. The defenders were completely surprised - they had at first supposed that our tanks were German. As we opened fire, frantic activity began. Large guns began slowly to swing towards us, but each one in turn received a direct hit before it could get any tank in its sights. One by one they disappeared for a moment in a sudden cloud of grey smoke and dust. The black figures of their crews could be seen flying through the air, to land some yards away and lie still. The big, long barrels one by one ceased turning towards us and tilted drunkenly towards the sky. Panic spread through the Flak site as the rain of fire increased. The gun crews began to run blindly towards the nearest wood, while every minute a shell would land amongst them and a few more Germans would fall. A troop of Shermans suddenly dashed forward, straight into the middle of the guns. It was Captain Blackman's Troop, exploiting the confusion and panic of the defenders to put the guns finally out of action. All around his tanks shaken figures in field grey rose to their feet, hands above their heads. He counted over a hundred German casualties, including a full Colonel, four heavy anti-aircraft guns and six light ones destroyed. While he was engaged in collecting the prisoners, Sergeant Roberts of 'A' Squadron destroyed one of the few King Tigers ever 'killed' in France. 'A' Squadron also knocked out fifteen light ack-ack guns. The whole Regiment then moved northwards in open formation to harbour on a calm summer evening round the little village of Cardonnette. Everyone was tired but happy, for on that day we had at last done what we had always looked forward to doing. We had advanced swiftly across open country with the Germans in flight before us.

September 1st rose clear and sunny. We were in the lead, with 'C' Squadron on the main centre line on the left and 'A' on a parallel minor road on the right.

Sergeant Haynes was commanding the leading tank of 'C' Squadron and set off at such speed that the other tanks had great difficulty in keeping up with him. It was soon discovered that his haste was due to his belief that he was following another squadron which he had allowed to get too far in front of him! When he found, to his horror, that he himself was in the leading vehicle of the Regiment the pace became more sedate. But it was a good pace none the less and, when we saw that there was no opposition, we abandoned cross country

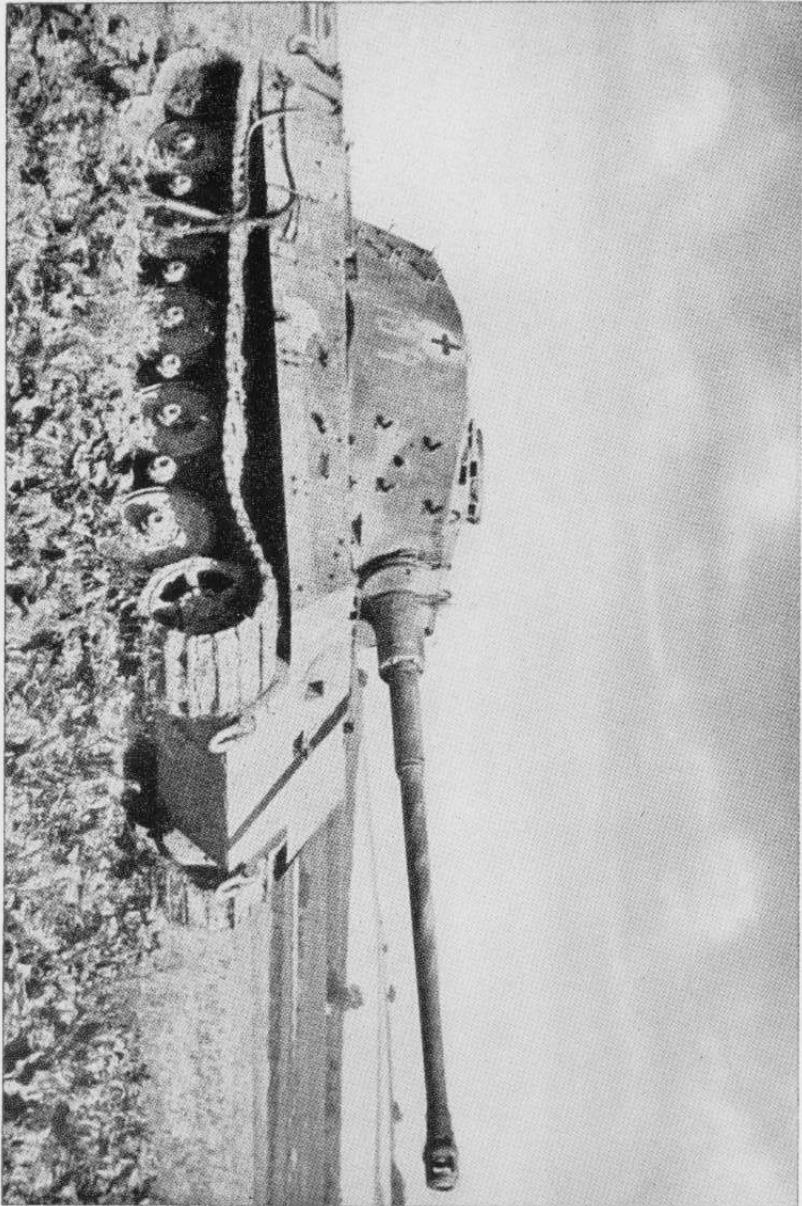
movement and merely motored down the road, only pausing to shoot at distant and fleeing columns. We reached the bridge over the River Authie to find wild scenes of enthusiasm in the village the other side. Cheering country people thronged the road, while the men of the Maquis rushed from side streets. They were almost beside themselves with excitement and were firing their rifles into the air quite indiscriminately. They would advance in the most friendly manner to shake hands, while in the left hand a fully loaded rifle pointed straight at one's stomach. In their enthusiasm they were far the most dangerous individuals we met that day.

On we went, the pace growing faster as we realised that nothing was going to show fight. We rolled off our one-inch maps and had to use quarter-inch. Frantic officers from Brigade Headquarters rushed up the column, presenting us with little pieces of paper showing us the continuation of our route. The French people screamed and waved at us, rushing forward with bottles of wine and fruit. We became fired with tremendous excitement - an impatient urge to get forward, to move faster, and a feeling that nothing could stop us. The General was nearly always with the leading troop, his White scout car and red flag flashing up and down the column, urging us on. The signpost said 'Arras - 5 km'. History had been made on these rolling plains thirty years ago, and across them in more recent times the B.E.F. of 1940 had struggled painfully back to Dunkirk. It was blitzkrieg in reverse, thrusting northwards like a knife, cutting the threads which were the supply lines to the German Channel garrisons. We listened to the BBC news on a spare set. It was hopelessly out of date. We were advancing farther and faster than we had ever thought possible. Fifty miles had been covered when at 4 p.m. we finally came to rest at an important cross-roads ten miles north-west of Arras. The crews got out their cookers and arrayed their collections of bottles of wine and fruit before them. The Brigadier drove up with the news that the following day we would liberate Brussels. If anything was needed to raise our spirits even higher, this was the news to do it. The Echelons arrived, amazed at the distance they had had to travel to catch us up. All the while the 'Maquis' brought in terrified German prisoners, many of them with black eyes and broken noses. They had done a great job in rounding up stragglers and looking after prisoners. Always their cry was for arms, ammunition, any sort



"The General was nearly always with the leading troop . . ."

"Sergeant Roberts of 'A' Squadron destroyed one of the few King Tigers ever 'killed' in France". This particular victim was even more heavily armoured than the original King Tiger.



of weapon to continue the good work. This was their day at last and they made the most of it.

We set off in the lead early next morning, making for the coal-mining districts of Northern France, so full of memories of the 1914 war and for the B.E.F. of 1940. The weather had changed, and it grew cold and rather miserable. The black slagheaps in the distance looked more ugly than ever. To our east, the white glimmer of the Vimy memorial could be seen. The Guards Armoured had now come into the picture and was advancing level with us, having taken Arras the night before.

We passed through Lens at ten o'clock. This black and dreary town was packed and jammed with cheering, shouting, waving people. They hurled fruit and biscuits wildly at us, they dashed forward with cups of coffee and bottles of wine and beer, they scrawled their names in chalk on the sides of tanks. Crowds of girls flung their arms round the necks of carrier crews, the most convenient target. Crowds of people scrambled up on to the tanks, feeding the crews with fruit and cakes and making them drink out of bottles. At times, forward movement became impossible - the people were in a kind of delirium.

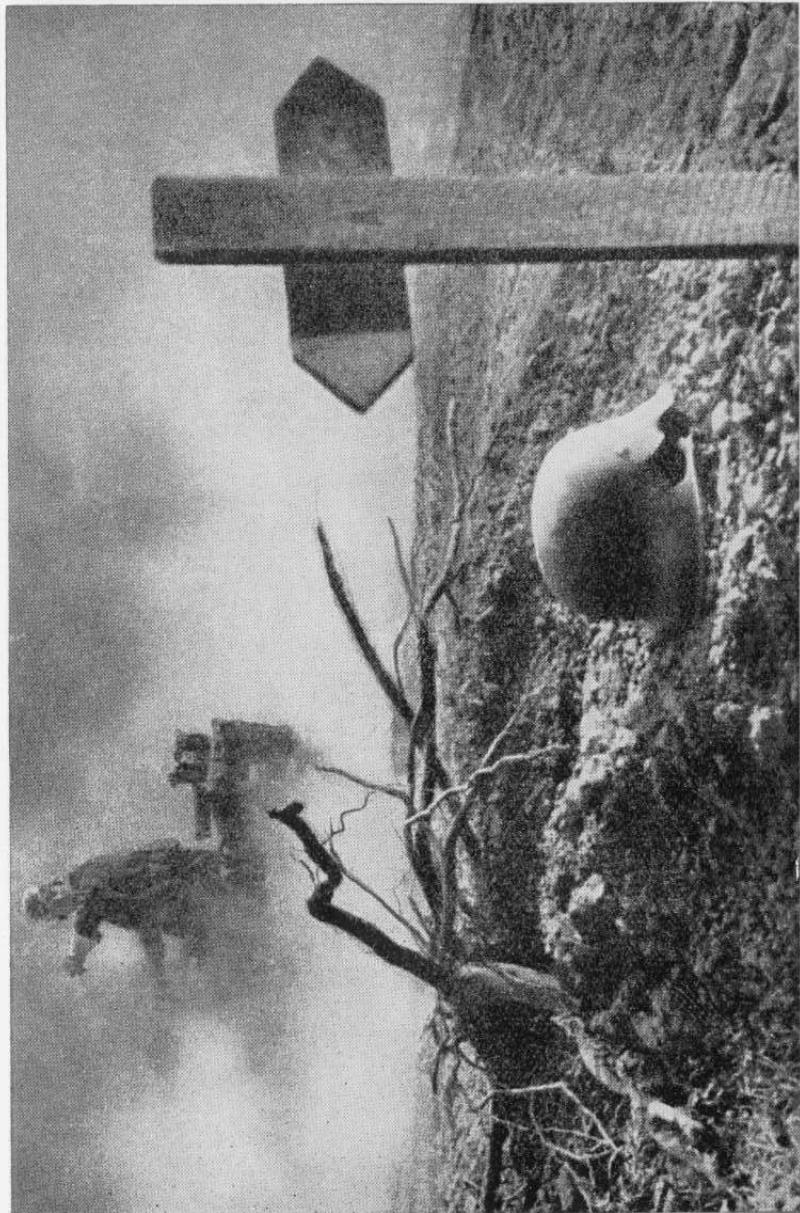
Early in the afternoon we halted on the outskirts of Carvin, spread out round the slag-heaps on a hideous bleak plain. We were told that we were to spend the night there and could not understand the delay. Evidently a change of plan on a very high level was being made and a standstill order had been imposed. That evening we were informed to our bitter disappointment that the prize of Brussels was to be given to the Guards. We were to drive on Antwerp, a greater prize strategically and, with its ring of forts, likely to be more strongly defended. Our objective, one hundred miles away, was to be reached in one day.

We left at seven next morning in brilliant sunshine. Almost to the hour, we crossed the Belgian frontier on the exact anniversary of the beginning of the war and took the broad highway leading to Tournai. There 'A' Squadron, who were leading, met not only the advanced elements of the Guards but also the Americans, all trying to use the same bridge. Almost simultaneously, General Horrocks arrived and personally disentangled the mêlée. After a delay, we moved forward through the town to get our first taste of Belgian welcome. As soon as they saw us the people went absolutely crazy.

They packed the streets and thronged the square so full that it was nearly impossible to move forward. They filled the air with one continuous, deafening roar of cheers. A rain of apples, pears and cakes descended upon us. As far as could be seen was a seething mass of waving handkerchiefs, above a blur of faces, all of which seemed fixed in one frantic expression of delight. It was an extraordinary experience to see what our arrival meant to them. We moved slowly through the packed streets. Now and again, over the heads of the crowd, a shop with broken windows had the word 'Collaborateur' scrawled across it in chalk. Occasionally a group would hurry down a sidestreet with a half fainting woman in their midst, to the accompaniment of boos and catcalls. But the outstanding impression was that of a crowd of beings so mad with joy that they could not make enough noise to express it. As we left the town the noise faded gradually into the distance. On the outskirts stood one old woman dressed in black. She was standing quite still and was not cheering or waving, but tears rolled down her cheeks as she watched us go by.

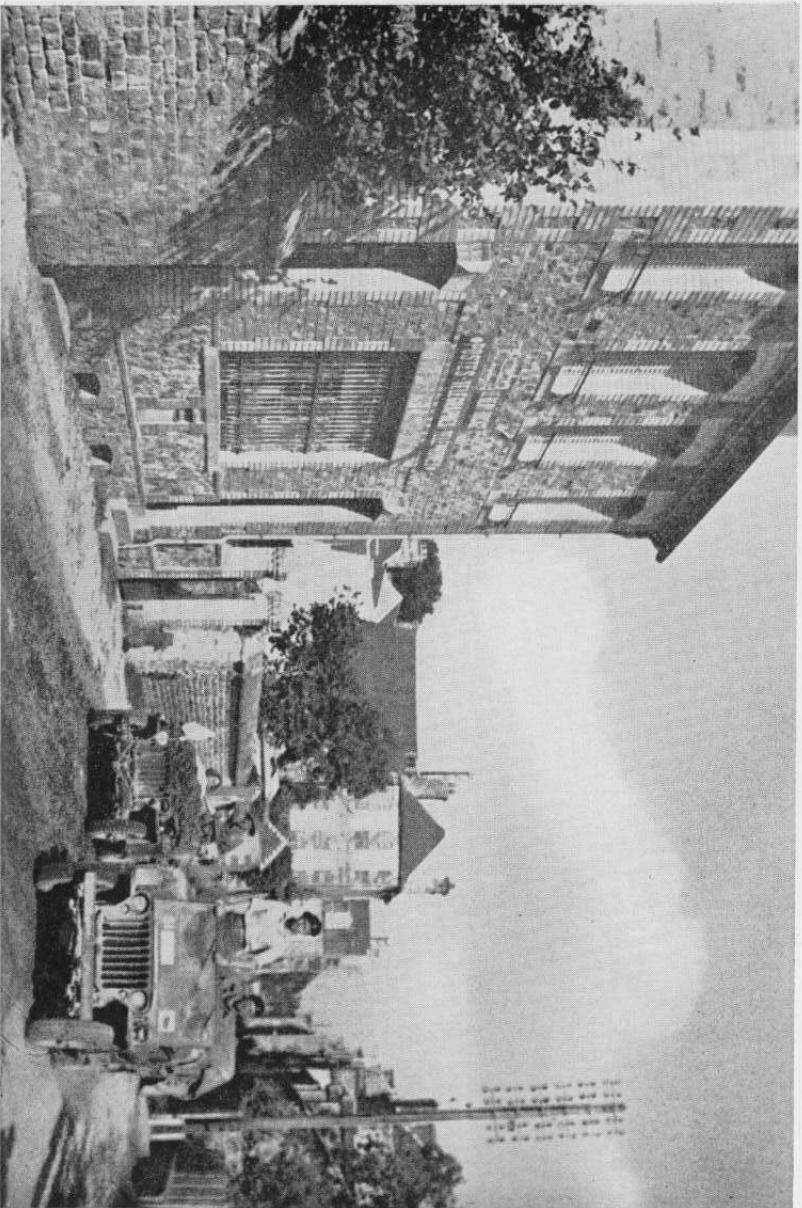
We rattled down the Belgian roads at a good pace, meeting no opposition and delayed only by the tumultuous welcome we received everywhere. On we went through Renaix and down the main road to Brussels, stopping at Ninove to cool the rubber on our bogies. Ten miles short of Brussels we turned north and, as we by-passed the capital, it began to grow dark. By nine o'clock 'B' Squadron reached one of the main roads to Antwerp at Wolverthem, and it was decided that we should wait for the following day to advance upon Antwerp itself. We had covered eighty-eight miles in one day and barely a tank had dropped out.

'B' Squadron enjoyed little rest in Wolverthem. The main body of the Squadron was in the village and Second Troop was on a crossroads beyond it. As they were parking their tanks in the main square a German despatch rider suddenly turned the corner at the head of a column of lorries. A driver who was out of his tank fired his pistol at him but missed four times. A tank commander seized a Sten and in pitch darkness fired it at the column, some of which had gone past him. He hit one lorry fair and square, killing a German crouching by an ack-ack gun mounted on a trailer. Tank guns opened up on the column and a shell crashed through a house in mistake for a truck, bringing down showers of bricks and glass. The Germans



The end of the New Order.  
"It was the Blitzkrieg in reverse, thrusting northwards like a knife."

A 'B' Squadron jeep. Lt Evans and Capt Blackman following up the advance.

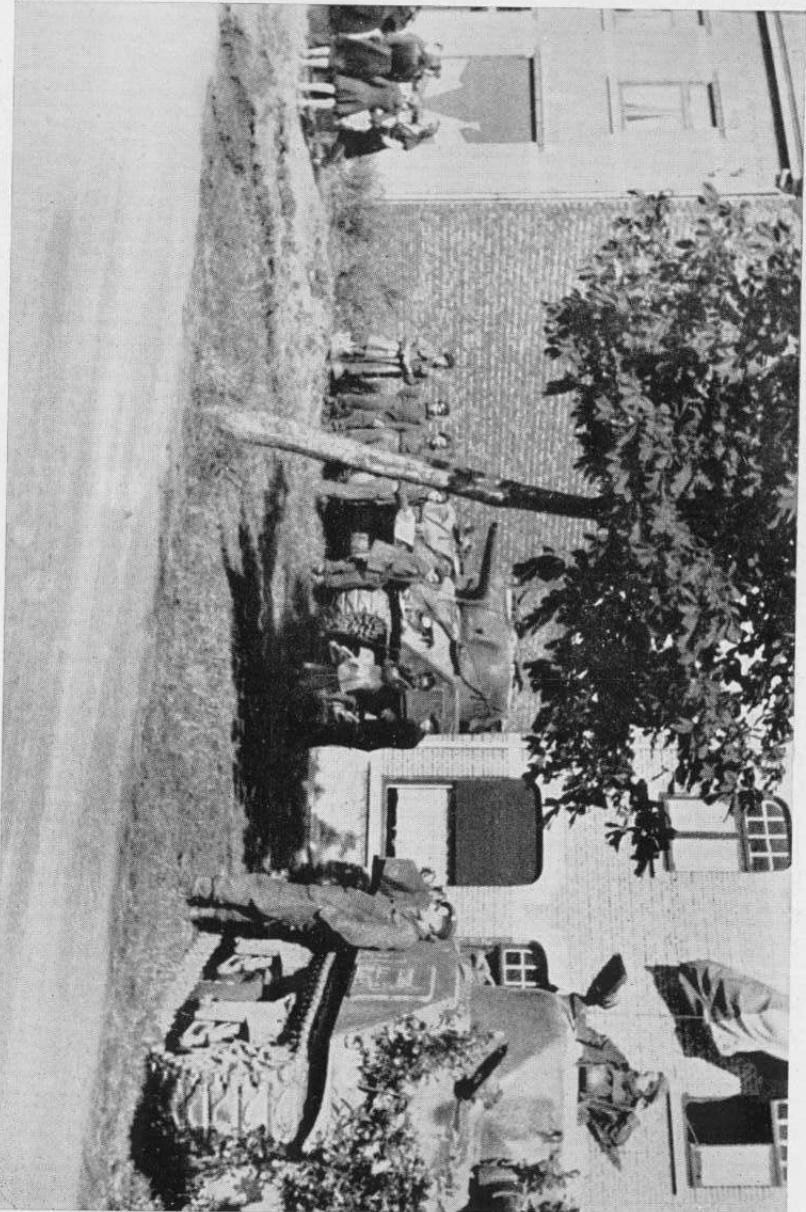


retaliated with bazookas and hand grenades, and a state of remarkable confusion reigned in the square.

Second Troop had been warned of the German D.R. and the remnants of the column and were ready. Lieut. Harte missed him with his pistol, but Trooper Packwood had more luck and finished him off. Packwood then walked over to the body and bumped into another German. Both equally startled, they made a grab at each other, seized each others weapon and made off into the darkness, the German to learn the intricacies of a Sten and Packwood those of a German rifle! The column was stopped, but the Germans continued to lob grenades and fire desultory shots. The Troop passed a most uncomfortable night surrounded by disorganised but belligerent enemy.

In the square the bedlam which had reigned began to die down. Captain O'Reilly fought a protracted engagement with a German in a ditch. After half-an-hour's duel, in which he expended a vast amount of ammunition and received a great deal of encouragement from the Colonel over the air, the German and several shops were found to be severely damaged. In the morning, the scene which was revealed fulfilled our expectations. Some sixteen vehicles had been destroyed, some carrying speed boats; and four dead Germans, bazookas, arms and ammunition, in the wildest disorder, littered the village.

At first light a vanguard under Major Blacker went forward with orders to reach Antwerp with minimum delay. It consisted of 'H' Company, 'C' Squadron and the Recce Troop. Various canals blocked the way and it was known that some of the bridges were blown. After a wide search, a bridge was found by 'C' Squadron at Vilvorde, not before, however, Third and Fourth Troop of 'C' had destroyed what was commonly held to be the 'Last Train to Berlin', full of U-boat commanders and beautiful spies. The Third Tanks on the left, in the meantime, had had a much clearer run, for they were led over the bridge at Boom by a Belgian engineer and were on the main road to Antwerp. We increased our pace after we had found our bridge and were soon going well for Malines. As we entered the town the leading troop of 'C' Squadron saw a few Germans scuttling away from the bridge which was intact. Across the centre, however, was an enormous bomb. No one was at all confident that it might not blow up at any moment but our Sapper officer coolly cut the wires and to our relief



A short halt in the brilliant sunshine: an 'A' Squadron tank, Captain Young's crew, on the left, and Captain Davidge's tank, one of our OPs, on the right.

nothing happened. Our road was then found blocked by a tram, which Sergeant Hoggins majestically towed away with his tank. We moved on through the town at speed, and the only visible German emerged from a factory extremely drunk, waving and cheering us as we went by!

While Captain Weiner followed his usual practise of ringing up the next town, which was Antwerp itself, to find out the situation there, 'C' Squadron dashed on down the big arterial road. In Contich, a slight error took place. Our route was a smaller road leading into the city, but 'C' Squadron went straight past the turning, down the main road. 'A' Squadron, coming behind, took the right turning and found themselves to their surprise in the lead on the left.

Antwerp is surrounded by a city wall and a ring of forts, which makes it a very difficult town to attack. Between the suburbs and the city wall, which rings the town itself, is an open piece of ground. The Third Tanks, fortunately for them, found this uncovered and drove into the town unharmed, but quite a different situation existed on our route. The roads were mined and a Flak site covered the open piece of ground. There were also anti-tank guns in some of the forts and on the roofs of houses. As we entered the suburbs, crowds of people rushed to greet us. Amongst them were innumerable secret agents, each with a more important plan of Antwerp than the last. As they closed in upon us we heard the news that the Third Tanks were in the city itself and were able to inform the agents, to their incredulous dismay, that their plans were already out of date. They nevertheless persisted in pressing pieces of paper upon us, and they all talked loudly, at great length and simultaneously. One of them assured us that he was in direct touch with Mr. Churchill and although this may have been quite true, it had little bearing on the battle which was developing. 'C' Squadron had done considerable execution on some staff cars containing German officers and were about to leave the suburbs to cross the open space before the city wall. Suddenly a Belgian Boy Scout rushed up and stopped the leading tank. He jumped up beside the commander and said that there were guns covering the road and mines across it. With great clearness, and what later proved to be most accurate detail, he outlined the defences in front of us. Of all the thousands of wildly enthusiastic Belgians in the street at that moment he was the only one who really was

quietly and materially helpful. Fantastic scenes were taking place. Tracer bullets ripped down the street and shells were crashing onto the roofs, but the people still swarmed on to the tanks, apparently so mad with joy that they felt no fear. Two civilians fell dead from a tank into the road, but it made no difference.

The 'White Army' dashed about offering advice. One of them insisted that it was safe to go round the corner in front of us. He had tried it, he said. He appeared quite oblivious of the fact that he was in civilian clothes and that if someone in khaki tried it the result might be different. Our Boy Scout said emphatically "No, there is a machine gun trained on it." Eventually stung by the Belgian's insistence that it was safe, Captain Bishop walked round the corner. A machine gun bullet ripped through his breast pocket, and he darted back unhurt, but wiser. From the window of a luxury flat the vanguard commanders surveyed the defences through their binoculars, while their hostess pressed them to take cocktails with her. The 'C' Squadron road looked hopeless, for it was mined and the Flak guns could be seen securely dug-in and covering the open ground. 25-pounders would not do them any harm, and we seemed to be stuck.

On the left, 'A' Squadron had found to their surprise that 'C' Squadron was not in front of them but, owing to the hold-up on 'C' Squadron's road, had drawn level with them and were about three hundred yards away. The leading tanks came under fire from the flak site and hastily took cover. Lieut. Bowers, who had shown great dash throughout the advance, was in the lead and at once said over the air: "Hello Able-Two, they are firing 'black' at me. What are you going to do about it?" This brought an instant retort from Captain Taylor: "What do you think they are firing at me - confetti? Out!" 'A' Squadron retired behind a railway line but could not go forward under the bridge without coming under fire. A 'stonk' was brought down on the guns but it did them little harm, for they were well dug-in. Captain Budgeon conducted this shoot standing in the open but camouflaged by a large crowd of girls who surrounded him. A 'C' Squadron tank commanded by Lieut. Evans attempted to come in from a flank to attack the flak site but was riddled with shot as soon as it showed itself. All the crew except for the driver, Corporal Job, were killed. Rapidly the situation became a stalemate. 'A' Squadron could not go under the railway bridge and

'C' Squadron could not go round the corner. 'H' Company could not produce one quarter of the infantry necessary to clear up the opposition, and obviously a night attack with an infantry battalion was going to be necessary. The Third Tanks, meanwhile, had captured the docks and were passing through the streets of Antwerp amid scenes which beggar description. Soon it began to grow dusk and we withdrew to Contich, where we passed the most comfortable night we had spent since we landed in France.

In the morning we entered Antwerp unopposed, harbouring round the Pulhof, a large villa on the southern outskirts. The "Gallop" was over. In one week we had advanced three hundred and fifty miles and had helped to capture Europe's largest port. We had suffered very few casualties. It had been a week which will probably be better remembered than any other in our lives. No one can forget the frantic unbounded joy of the liberated millions which we witnessed or the hundred little dramas and human touches that are fixed in the mind. Probably never again were we to experience such a feeling of high adventure - the thrill of driving remorselessly forward deeper and deeper into enemy-held territory. A complete book could be written about that week, so packed with incident and excitement, and nothing that followed it could ever avoid giving the impression of anti-climax. It was the highest point our morale ever reached but our jubilation did not allow us to forget the many friends whose sacrifice had made possible this tremendous advance. If it is possible to enjoy war, we did so that week and the only thought that marred our pleasure was the absence of those friends from the operation we call "The Gallop".

\*

The advance from Laigle to Antwerp was achieved with the loss of only one man. At Antwerp itself two officers and seven other ranks were killed.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ANTWERP, HELCHTEREN AND HOLLAND

September 6th — 25th

The capture of Antwerp and the seizure of its dockyards concluded a definite chapter of the Division's campaign. Although we joined in some fighting, as described below, to clear the northern suburbs of the city, the role henceforth assigned to us was that of "flank protectors". For three months we were not in any sense the main performers. This, to be frank, we considered quite fair; though we became a little tired of it after a time.

The full prize of Antwerp eluded us for many months. When we arrived the enemy had let the main part of the town go with hardly a fight, vanishing in a panic. But he had as suddenly turned and dug-in in the suburb of Merxem, north of the Albert Canal. Within a few weeks of his expulsion, he attacked the town with V-bombs. Only a few of us, therefore, were lucky enough to exploit the idolatry with which the "Bull" was everywhere received.

All we had was one clear night. On September 6th, in the early afternoon, two troops of 'A' Squadron with Squadron Headquarters went to support the infantry across the Canal into Merxem. The Fourth King's Shropshire Light Infantry had already established a bridgehead and at first the leading troop under Lieut. Drake, M.C. made good progress. But they very soon became badly involved with a thoroughly obstructive infantry position, supported by anti-tank guns. No progress could be made there. Lieut. Unwin's troop was sent round another way but two of his tanks became bogged near the Canal within view of the enemy. After a vain attempt to recover these - great help being rendered by the Third Monmouthshires - a most unpleasant night was spent there. On the following morning the remainder of this troop attempted to continue forward, but the leading tank was hit almost at once and the crew were killed in baling out.

As further progress was impossible, and as it had been decided to withdraw the KSLI bridgehead, 'A' Squadron was recalled. At midday two troops and Squadron Headquarters from 'C' Squadron were sent down to assist in the KSLI's withdrawal over the river. This was accomplished by a massed artillery and smoke barrage, thickened by fire from the tanks. No losses were sustained and 'C' Squadron rejoined the Regiment.

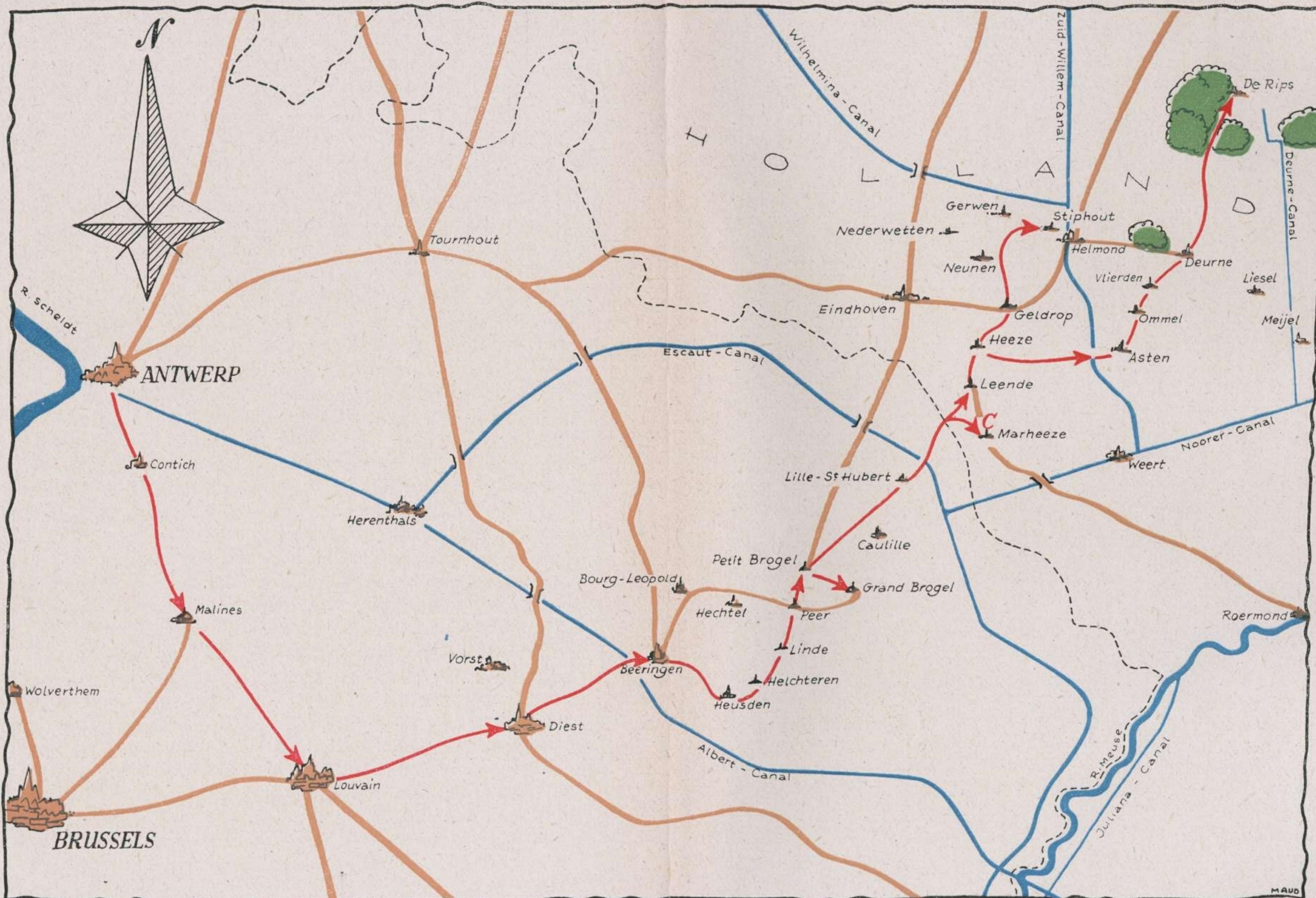
The following day the Regiment turned away to follow the general advance into Holland. The enemy, in fact, were not expelled from the Merxem position until the great Canadian offensive four weeks later.

Apart from all this the air was filled with exits and alarms and multitudinous reports of enemy movements. 'B' Squadron and 'H' Company were therefore employed in manning posts for our defence.

On September 8th, the "Bull" left with a sorry and disappointed look. The fleshpots of Antwerp had escaped its grasp; the burnt offerings remained untouched. We passed back down the road to Malines the way we had come, turning east to Diest and coming to rest at a big cross-roads beyond it during the afternoon. Our role as guards to the "Guards" had begun.

The following morning we moved across the bridge, which they had made over the Albert Canal at Beeringen, and took up positions at Heusden to the east. The Fife and Forfar were ahead and had reached a cross-roads at the village of Helchteren but could make no progress beyond. We remained at Heusden during a day full of small and enlivening incidents. Neither side quite knew where the other one was, nor did we give the Germans much chance to find out. One party of them blithely came marching down the road in fours - very blithely, very fatally! Enthusiastic members of the White army ran about excitedly, stalking Germans in the villages and giving tank commanders a great variety of information. They had their own way of fighting and on this occasion they adhered to a strict time-table. Major Hagger, on asking one of his tank commanders how his Belgian friends were progressing in a sniping affray in his area, received the reply - 'Nothing further to report for the moment as the Belgians have knocked off for lunch. Will be back at two!'

But the snoopings and prowlings and killings of occasional Boches at Heusden were small fry compared with the battle we fought on the



Into Holland  
SEPTEMBER 1944

following day. The Fifes were turned north towards Hechtel and we were ordered to advance eastward through the position east of Helch-teren which had so stubbornly blocked them on the previous day.

Before doing so however, we were once more joined by our friends the RBs. We had previously fought together at Chenedolle and up the whole length of the Falaise Pocket, but our permanent co-operation was not finally established until the following months. No Regiment could have been more fortunate in its partners, few friendships more intimate. From the highest to the lowest rank the team-work established between us was in practice perfect and in spirit su-staining. The equipment, communication and organisation of a motor battalion are of course far more suited to the role of co-operation with armour than those of an ordinary infantry battalion, where the infantry have normally to be carried on the tanks themselves and only the most primitive means of inter-communication exists. In this too, therefore, we were lucky. So, as before, "marriages" were arranged between 'A' Squadron and 'G' Company, 'B' Squadron and 'F' Company, and 'C' Squadron and 'H' Company; whilst Regimental and Battalion Headquarters once more were joined in conjugal harmony!

This was, however, more than the usual "military wedding". 'C' Squadron and 'H' Company moved off to pass through the Fifes at Helchteren. They had found stubborn opposition in attempting to drive eastwards out of the village though the precise nature of the opposition was not known. The eastern end of the village was already half destroyed. Therefore the leading infantry platoon dismounted from their half-tracks and, supported by the leading troop of tanks, moved off cautiously through the smoking ruins down the tree-lined, deserted road ahead. They had only advanced some fifty yards when suddenly without a moment's warning the ground shook with exploding mortar shells. The leading section on the left were able to dive for cover but the right-hand section, caught in the open, were unable to save themselves, and when the dust cleared there were dead and wounded who had dropped in their tracks. Almost simultaneously a German anti-tank gun opened up from the left flank and a round of solid shot crashed through the church steeple. Thus began our battle at Helchteren. It was a full day in which all Squadrons and Companies eventually took a part, and it deserves a full account as in a sense it was a model action.

The road from Helchteren was straight and level. About half a mile beyond the village it passed through a large wood which stretched out patchily on either side. Based on the forward edge of the wood, and between it and the village, the enemy had placed a Parachute Battalion in position. On either side of the road stretching away from the village there was an occasional house with its garden and hedges. On the right, beyond the houses, there were fields for a few hundred yards and then scrub and woods. On the left the country was more open, although the edge of the big wood curled inward at a distance of some eight hundred yards, and rose to a slight eminence in the area north of Kunsel.

The enemy positions revealed during the course of the battle were simple and "according to the book". One company lined the sides of the road, two platoons forward, one in rear. Two other companies lay dug-in to either side of the centre company with their flanks based on the woods to north and south. Finally the reserve and heavy company, with its mortars and heavy machine guns, lay back on the rising ground and the woods to the north, whilst two anti-tank guns covered the road from behind the central company.

All this was pretty straightforward. The position was found to be well-sited and the individual posts well-placed and dug-in, taking full advantage of garden hedges and the small accidents of the ground. What came as a surprise was the altogether exceptional quantity of bazookas and the tenacity of the opposition in view of the lack of heavy support. We had in fact struck one of the first of a seemingly unending line of so-called Parachutist Battalions which continued to baulk our progress for the rest of the campaign until the British Army had reached the Rhine. In a sense it was true to call them "parachutists" because they had indeed left the air for the ground. They were grounded Luftwaffe crews - mostly young men of high morale and fine physique and a spirit born of fanaticism and desperation. They were armed on a scale of almost one-per-man with bazookas - a weapon, they were told, which would finally defeat the Allied tanks. Being German they believed this and fought on. Throughout the winter they suffered frightful casualties but always reappeared under the same commanders by whose names they were known - "Grassmehl", "Hübner", "Hardegg". They fought on until the bitter end, although they could scarcely have experienced a more

unpleasant fore-taste of what was to come than that of Helchteren. By the evening of that day we had counted more than three hundred dead and some one hundred and fifty prisoners. Not only had we driven into and through their position but it had been encircled from both sides and 'A' Squadron and 'B' Squadron had reached the road well in rear of it.

'C' Squadron and 'H' Company spent all day fighting their way along the road. The artillery were very short of ammunition and the attack had therefore to be conducted without their support. In view of this the Squadron Leader and Company Commander decided that the infantry and the tanks must work in very close cooperation and that the lack of artillery should be compensated by intense fire from the tanks. The plan of attack was simple. One platoon and a carrier section was to work up the main road closely supported by Third Troop on the left and Second Troop on the right. Fourth Troop with a platoon were to make a wide sweep to the right or south to get behind the enemy position, to destroy their mortars and to cut off their line of retreat. First Troop were to act as left flank protection and to endeavour to knock out the anti-tank gun which continued to fire at intervals. Squadron - Company Headquarters would follow down the centre line.

Progress was slow but sure down the road. The enemy were strongly entrenched. A house, which contained snipers, was blown to pieces and a windmill reduced to a pile of rubble. During a brief lull one section of infantry on the right made a bold attempt to clear an open stretch of ground but came under very heavy fire. A Sergeant and a Rifleman were killed and several wounded. By this time "blood was up" and every available weapon poured fire into the enemy's position. Second Troop, led by Sergeant Johnson, M.M., were systematically clearing fox-holes and trenches with grenades and phosphorous bombs. The Germans grimly held their ground until it was strewn with their dead. Then prisoners started coming in, first in ones and twos and afterwards mostly in small parties of six and eight at a time.

Meanwhile First Troop on the left had spotted and destroyed the anti-tank gun, but were held up by a small stream. Fourth Troop and the platoon on the right were steadily rolling up the flank in the face of tenacious opposition.

Ammunition now began to run low, but despite the mortaring the Echelon came up to reload the tanks within a few hundred yards of the enemy. Each troop was withdrawn in turn to replenish and First Troop replaced Third on the main road.

Thus progress was maintained and, house by house, ditch by ditch, the enemy were steadily driven back or wiped out. It could not however be accomplished without casualties. On the right Sergeant Ball's tank was working its way cautiously through a patchwork of small fields. The centre of the fields were mostly out of bazooka range from the hedgerows surrounding them, and it was while Sergeant Ball was crossing from one field to the next that, without any warning movement ahead and in spite of the hail of bullets spurting from his machine guns, his tank was hit by a bazooka and burst into flames. Shortly after, when it seemed as though the enemy positions had been completely penetrated, Lieut. Proctor's tank was hit in the same way. Some of the crews of both tanks were badly wounded, but fortunately none were killed.

Once more that day the tanks went back one by one to replenish and, as the light began to fail, the end of our task was in sight. Lieut. Gordon-Smith on the right had resolutely fought his way around the enemy's flank, destroyed their mortars and now covered their line of retreat.

'B' Squadron came in from the right to push through 'C' Squadron in order to secure the next cross-roads. Their tanks, headed by a section of carriers, threaded their way past. But no sooner were they clear of 'C' Squadron than the leading carrier was hit and ditched, the crew being thrown clear. There was a further delay while a 25-pounder barrage plastered the cross-roads ahead. Then, darkness having fallen, the tanks moved into close leaguer beside the road. The noise of battle abated. Houses and haystacks burned on all sides and by their flickering light small huddles of commanders, receiving orders for the next day, could be seen. Crews and fitters clambered over the tanks, carrying out repairs, refuelling, loading ammunition and getting food out of their turret bins. The stillness of the night was disturbed by the crackle of burning timber, the clinking of a fitter's spanner, and the whining engines of supply lorries ploughing through the mud in bottom gear. There were enemy dug-outs and trenches close to, and even between, the

tanks. In them sprawled many German dead, and here and there a slight movement would betray the presence of a live German who was soon dragged out, dazed and shivering. Then gradually the sounds died down and the weary crews crawled under or into their tanks for a few hours sleep. All was quiet, save for the occasional coughing and muttering of men on guard and the distant rumble of artillery.

'C' Squadron had been heavily committed that day, but the whole group had been engaged. Quite early on when it was seen that 'C' had hit something pretty hard and tough, 'B' Squadron and 'F' Company were sent round to the right to explore a track which appeared to outflank the position. They fought along it most of the day but found themselves moving through scrub and thick wood with enemy appearing constantly from every side. By nightfall, having returned to the main road to pass through 'C' Squadron, they had made good progress beyond them; and in the morning it was in fact found that they had reached the rear edge of the enemy position, some eight hundred yards beyond Helchteren.

In the early afternoon when it appeared that 'B' Squadron had only a limited chance on the right, 'A' Squadron and 'G' Company were turned north at Helchteren crossroads, to attempt to encircle from that side, while 'E' Company was fortifying the cross-roads against a counter-attack. By a wide sweep through the woods and over boggy ground and a large anti-tank ditch they were successful in reaching the main road about half a mile in rear of the enemy's position as darkness fell. It was a brilliant manoeuvre which finally turned the enemy's position and broke his back.

On the following morning the three squadrons joined up again and with 'A' Squadron leading the Regiment continued eastwards. It was a beautiful, clear autumn morning and strangely peaceful after the bangings of the day before. The enemy had vanished as in a dream though the many dead we left behind provided a strange sequel a few days later when "higher authority" charged us with the responsibility of burying them - a task which was politely refused, with the rejoinder that that had not been the object of our killing them!

Nevertheless, after we had turned northwards towards Peer slight opposition was encountered from snipers and bazooka men. 'A' Squadron went into the centre of the place and cleared it, whilst 'B' pushed

out eastwards to cover that flank. Again one of their tanks was bazooka'd and Lieut. Evans, having been wounded, was taken prisoner, only to be fortunately recaptured a few hours later. But the advance continued and by the early afternoon we had reached Petit Brogel, a few miles north of Peer. Squadrons were allotted areas and told to prepare for a stay of several days. 'B' Squadron, however, were sent that afternoon to reconnoitre north-westwards through Caulille for a crossing of the Meuse-Escaut Canal. But as soon as they had reached Caulille and were within range of the bridge they were heavily engaged by eighty-eights, heavy mortars and infantry. One carrier of 'F' Company was lost and two of Second Troop's tanks were destroyed. It was a highly unpleasant engagement and no progress could be made for the last thousand yards up the straight road to the bridge. This, however, was seen to be destroyed, and at nightfall the whole party was recalled.

Our stay at Petit Brogel and for the last two days at Grand Brogel between September 11th and 20th was conspicuous for much consumption of liquid booty, for the usual troop and squadron festivities and for our first real rest since crossing the Seine over a fortnight before. Both the Brogels lay south of the Dutch frontier and the Meuse-Escaut Canal and east of the main road into Holland.

On September 18th the Guards Armoured Division was launched northwards from a small bridgehead across this canal to link up with the Airborne Forces which were being dropped at centres all the way to Arnhem, a distance of over sixty miles. In the meantime the Third British Infantry Division was establishing a bridgehead north of Petit Brogel to enable us to move along and protect the eastern flank of the advance. This we set out to do on the morning of the 20th, though we moved off in reserve behind the Fifes. At about eleven o'clock we crossed into Holland over a narrow, cobbled road across a boggy, foggy heath - a bleak and featureless vista with which we were to become distressingly familiar. Undeterred as yet and little suspecting that most of the British Army would have to spend the winter in these dreary parts, we continued on. We entered Heeze from the west and remaind there for the night. The Fifes passed through from the south and moved on to Geldrop. 'C' Squadron and 'H' Company, however, were detached in order to



The newspapers were very optimistic about the Arnhem "do" but this Twenty-Third Hussar knew it wasn't so easy.

"Any questions?" An 'A' Squadron-'G' Company "O" Group. Major Bell, Major Turquand and Lt Ramsden



influence an engagement which the 159th Infantry Brigade were fighting in the area of Maarheeze. In the late afternoon, in fact, they made contact with a company of enemy infantry dug-in on the edge of a forest north of the village. By nightfall, they claimed twenty prisoners and half the company destroyed.

So far there had been few enemy and we had suffered no casualties. The Guards Armoured also appeared from scanty reports to be going well. The role of flank protection seemed a fair picnic. The following day, however, brought a decisive engagement.

On the 21st we were ordered to continue northward through Geldrop and across the railway linking Eindhoven and Helmond. The latter was reported to be held by a large force of tanks and infantry, some of which were believed to be ahead of us at Nunen, Gerwen and Nederwetten. Towards three o'clock 'A' Squadron and 'G' Company were detached and sent out to the western flank to take Gerwen from the Nederwetten side. 'B' Squadron with 'F' Company led the rest of the Regiment. They crossed the railway without incident and entered Nunen unopposed.

But as the leading troop (Third) left the outskirts of the village enemy tanks, skilfully concealed on the south edge of Gerwen, opened fire on them knocking out Sergeant Dowling's tank and wounding all five of the crew. The Germans also covered the ground with mortars and small arms and there was some difficulty in rescuing the wounded. Lance-corporal Johnson managed to drag some of them back, showing considerable disregard for his own safety (for which he was later Mentioned-in-Despatches). Soon afterwards Sergeant Jones' tank was also hit, but luckily the crew escaped. No further progress could be made that way.

'C' Squadron was therefore sent on a reconnaissance in the Helmond direction towards a small village called Stiphout and referred to over the wireless as 'strip-tease' or 'Jane'. These code-names, invented on the spur of the moment, probably fooled as many tank commanders as enemy on some occasions! First Troop moved off and were passing down a narrow road flanked by a thin belt of trees, when the sound of tank engines coming towards them caused them to swing hurriedly off the road and hide in the trees. They waited, watching and listening intently. The sound of engines grew louder

and in a few moments the dark shapes of Panthers came into view, lurching in and out of the scrub, broadside-on to our guns. First Troop held their fire. A group of Dutch peasants huddled in an evil-smelling shelter in their garden muttered and moaned wild-eyed with apprehension. Suddenly the gun-muzzles flashed and the blast of the explosion shook the leaves from the trees, and reverberated among the farm buildings. Sergeant Smith's seventeen-pounder sent up a little spurt of flame from the leading Panther. A second lurched violently and sank into the boggy ground, its immense barrel pointing skywards. Altogether three of a force of five Panthers, on their way to reinforce Gerwen, were destroyed. In view of this threat 'B' Squadron took up defensive positions in Nunen. 'A' Squadron, on the other hand, had swept round to the west side of Gerwen and advanced to within half a mile of the village before they were fired on. It was decided to launch a full-scale Squadron-Company attack, preceded by a heavy 25-pounder concentration. This took a little time to arrange. In due course, however, shells poured into the village and the attack began. The tanks moved off, but they did not go far before there were two sharp reports from the village and two Shermans went up in flames. Again there was difficulty in extricating the wounded, and this time it was Sergeant Baldwin of 'G' Company who went out under enemy fire to bring them to safety. By now it was dark and the attack was postponed until the morning. When daylight came, however, the Germans had flown.

In this area there was a larger number of enemy than we had met for some time. They were usually difficult to spot in the trees and scrub and, that night, as it grew dark, a single shot from an eighty-eight rang out behind Nunen and three RB carriers, lined up in a row, were destroyed.

This short action against the 107th Panzer Brigade - one of the latest "Pocket Panzer Divisions" - and a Battalion of Panzer Grenadiers was later described by the Corps Commander as having saved Eindhoven and the main supply line to Arnhem at a critical moment in that battle. The enemy force whose movement west we had so fortuitously blocked moved north the following morning and cut this route nearer to Arnhem. It was only dislodged after the whole of the Tactical Air Force had been thrown in against it. The Regiment, however, had fulfilled its task and the following

morning the whole area between Helmond and Eindhoven was clear. The canal bridges, on the other hand, had all been blown.

During this time the Third Tanks were clearing the western approaches to Helmond, and the Fifes were having one of their bitterest engagements in their bridgehead over the Bois de Duc Canal at Asten. That night, therefore, we concentrated behind them, and moved through, the following morning, with 'A' Squadron and 'G' Company in the lead. As they moved out of Asten into a small hamlet called Ommel their leading troop was engaged by a hidden anti-tank gun. All that day they sat in Ommel doggedly trying to work their way out, road-bound and shelled and "minned" throughout.

When they eventually established that they had driven back the anti-tank gun, 'C' Squadron pushed through them and reached the hamlet of Ommel Bosch without incident. From the rising ground upon which this hamlet lay could be seen the village of Vlierden. Covered by Squadron Headquarters and Second Troop the vanguard moved forward. Just as it started the Germans sent over a very heavy "minnie stonk" and among our casualties was Padre Taylor, who was later awarded the M.C. He had on this occasion, as always, been with the leading troops; no better padre could have been wished for being universally popular and an inspiration to all.

The vanguard moved cautiously on but just short of the village the leading carrier was demolished by a direct hit from what proved later to be an anti-tank gun. Light was beginning to fail and no further progress could be made that night.

At the same time as 'C' Squadron had taken up the advance, 'B' Squadron and 'F' Company had been ordered to make a wide sweep to the right to come in behind Ommel Bosch. This they succeeded in doing. Driving through rain, dense pine woods and over minor tracks, they reached the centre-line between Vlierden and Ommel Bosch. But it was too late to further the attack and they, with the 'C' Squadron group, harboured for the night.

During that day some thirty prisoners were taken - raw and lousy recruits, convalescents and ex-Marines, fighting with obstinacy born of despair. Hoping to persuade more of this desperate body to give themselves up a propaganda louspeaker went to Ommel that night to attract them with "Lili Marlene" and give them inducements

and instructions for surrender. This was used again the following day when, the enemy having left the vicinity of Ommel, a pocket of them held up our advance at the approaches to Vlierden.

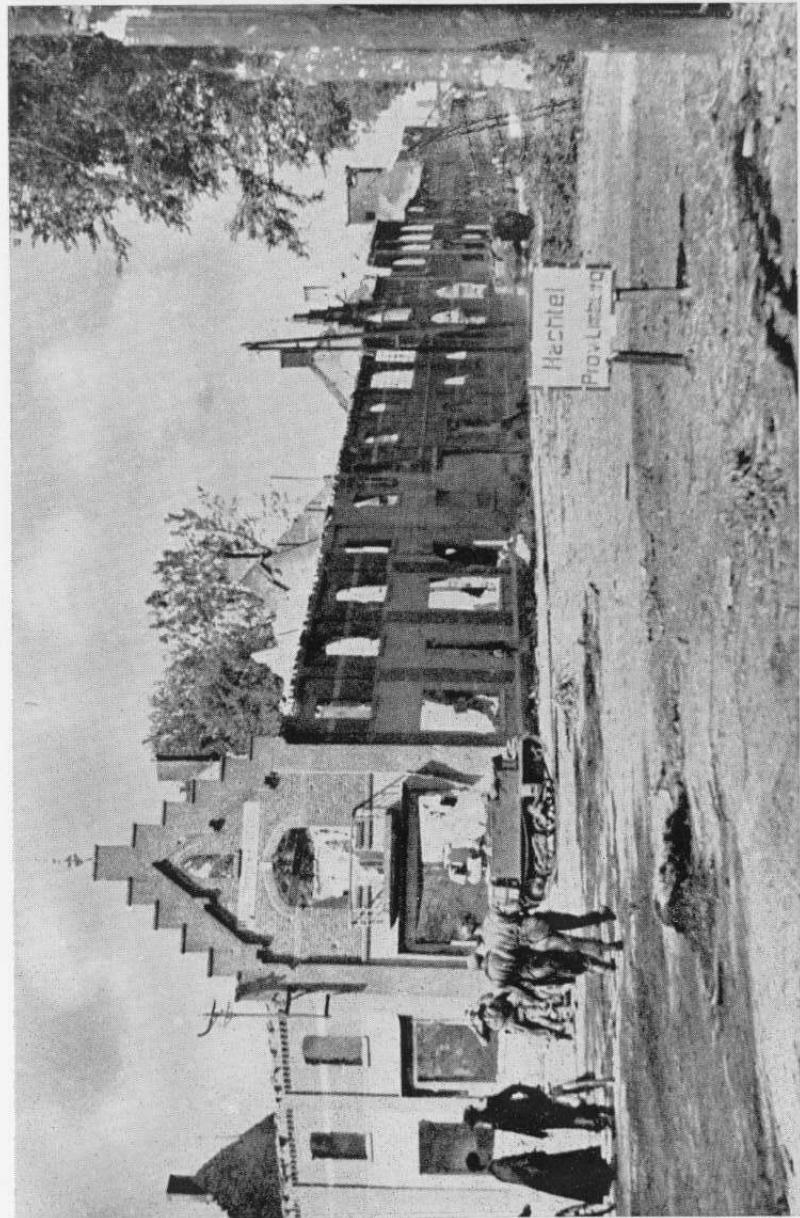
'C' and 'H' had moved off half an hour before dawn. 'H' Company sent a patrol up the centre-line to see whether the Germans had withdrawn over night. They reached the village just as dawn was breaking only to be met by a withering hail of fire from the first house. This pinned them to the ground until they were relieved about an hour later under cover of an attack by Second Troop and a platoon of 'H' Company. The Germans fought pugnaciously. A vanguard of 'C' Squadron and 'H' Company commanded by Captain P. May (8 RB) was sent on a right hook, whilst the remainder of the group attacked from the centre. The troops on the right made excellent progress and Lieut. Gordon-Smith was mainly responsible for their disrupting the enemy's left flank position, which enabled the vanguard to establish themselves behind Vlierden on the road to Deurne.

Meanwhile the propaganda machine was having great effect.

"Why, German soldier, oh why, be killed in the last weeks of the war?" seemed then a pertinent and compelling refrain. Seventy prisoners were taken all told.

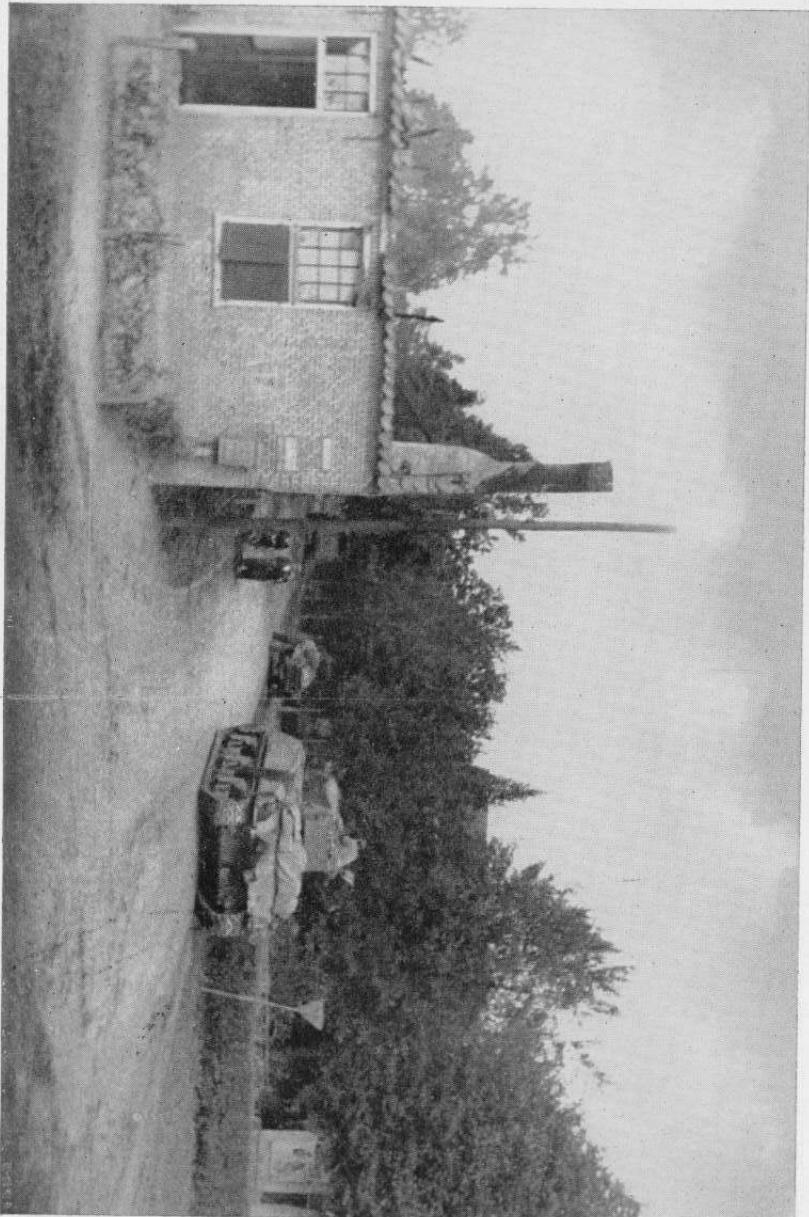
The value of this form of bloodless warfare, however, lay more in giving instructions on the "hows" of surrender than on the "wherefores". The latter needed - or rather seemed to need - no amplification. Rarely, either then or later, did the Regiment meet such brutish, verminous, underclothed, underfed and underarmed troops. Only once again, at Venray, were similar troops encountered. Yet though these seemed to be the very dregs of German man-power and though it was a fact that they were untrained, often convalescent and always abandoned by their officers, these troops more often than not clung leech-like to their positions and fired to the last round. Men have rarely sacrificed themselves so sheepishly and so willingly as cannon-fodder.

Vlierden having been cleared by midday, 'C' Squadron led on to Deurne, the Third Tanks converging on the town from the south-east. Both Regiments harboured there for a night which was disturbed by an occasional shell or "minnie".



Hechtel cross-roads. It was the same at Helchteren.

Deurne: "the tanks rumbled on northward toward St Antonis"



On arrival at Deurne we heard that a German had telephoned from Helmond, claiming to be a British officer with Allied Troops in the town. Knowing that Helmond had as yet been spared what might have been a painful "liberation", it was thought worthwhile to return the compliment. The Intelligence Officer, who was alleged to be sufficiently qualified, was duly despatched and, pretending to be the Adjutant of the German garrison in Deurne, finally managed to lure the German in Helmond to the 'phone. Having been so unmasked, the German immediately retorted by accusing the IO of speaking the lingo with a "typical English slang". Unable to deny this, his conversation ended in an even more typical Teutonic slanging match. After this dangerous contest, Helmond was telephoned again the following morning: the German and all his tribe were gone. However, the 159th Infantry Brigade passed through Deurne that day to Helmond and we did not move on until midday.

It was September 25th. The Guards had failed to relieve Arnhem and the operation on which we had so hopefully been launched had failed by a hair's breadth.

The tanks rumbled on northward towards St. Antonis and the Maas. Ahead of us enemy tanks and infantry were reported to be attempting to cut across our axis eastward towards Germany. The most amusing incident for us of the move were the activities, and the Colonel's comments thereon, of our Sapper Reconnaissance Officer. Accidentally he overshot 'B' Squadron's tail without realizing it and carried out a fine piece of liberation in unsuspecting isolation. The more he reported the failure of his efforts to catch up the Squadron he had already passed, the more vivid became the Colonel's comments on the length of 'B' Squadron's column.

After that we moved on slowly with orders to take up positions along the road running through De Rips, facing both east and west, against both the enemy in flight and against the enemy who might come back. The enemy in flight certainly intended to fight his way out. Within a few minutes of halting at De Rips we heard the frightful news that a German half-track trying to cut across our road some miles ahead had killed Colonel Silvertop of the Third Tanks and Colonel Orr of the Third Monmouthshires, and wounded the Brigadier and the Brigade Major.

Little did we dream then that we should be sitting here for the next three weeks or that the "Pocket" we had left to our right in the bend of the Maas opposite Venlo - a miserable, partially reclaimed peat-bog, known as Peelland - would keep us engaged, actively and inactively, for the next two months.

\*

During the seventeen days fighting from Antwerp to De Rips the following casualties were sustained:-

Killed	4 other ranks
Wounded	4 officers
	25 other ranks

## CHAPTER IX

### MUD, MINES AND THE MAAS

September 26th — December 14th

The three names which make up the title of this chapter were to be ever present with us from the time of our arrival at De Rips until our departure from Holland. The period comprised quite the dreariest, most depressing, and most unpleasant piece of the campaign that we ever experienced. The shocks and crises of Normandy were always slightly offset by perfect weather and a pleasant countryside, while the glamour of being "in the news" always helped to soften the blows we received. But here in Holland we settled down to an uncomfortable and unspectacular winter, rendered the worse because our swift advance had given everyone hopes of victory by Christmas. Nevertheless the early winter of 1944 will not always be remembered by the Twenty-third Hussars as one without pleasant and sometimes humorous moments, and it was remarkable how much we enjoyed the limited comfort we got from time to time. A trip to Brussels, a few days in Helmond, a warm room, a hot shower, an Ensa show, were all intensely anticipated and as intensely pleasant.

When we arrived at De Rips, the Arnhem operation having failed, it was obvious that now we could not win by dash and surprise, but by slow and patient slogging in the Normandy style.

Two rivers barred our way into Germany, first the Maas and then the Rhine, and it was evident that the Germans would fight to the last to hold them both.

Our advance to Deurne and De Rips, as already shown, was carried out as a right flank protection to Thirty Corps, which had crossed the Maas at Grave and the Rhine at Nijmegen. Without the capture of Arnhem, however, these two crossings availed them nothing, for an advance from Nijmegen was barred by the Neder Rhine and by floods, while an advance from Cleve on the Maas would involve a battle in

the Reichswald Forest. This battle did in fact take place in February, in order to clear a way to the crossing of the Rhine at Wesel, but it was very costly and involved breaching the Siegfried Line. In October 1944 the Second Army was far too stretched for a pitched battle of that nature, and when it was realised that our supplies still came from the Normandy beaches, and that the RASC were therefore doing some of the most exhausting lorry drives of all time, it is no wonder that the advance came to an end.

The Army's role, therefore, became temporarily one of holding on to its gains, at the same time performing the vital job of opening the ports, of which the chief was Antwerp. The most that could be done in the way of offensive action towards the frontiers of Germany was the clearing up of various "pockets", to facilitate the launching of a "Spring offensive".

Being on the right flank and nearest to Germany, our particular pocket was based on the Maas. The enemy hoped to prevent us from reaching the banks of that river, and kept a strong bridgehead stretching from Boxmeer in the north to Roermond in the south. It was manned by parachute troops, tough and aggressive soldiers who fought, it must be admitted, a skilful and most successful delaying action back to the Maas during the next few months.

The country favoured defence, and an advance from Deurne to the Maas had to be carried out over the Peel country, probably the worst tank 'going' in Europe. It was all reclaimed land, which became almost flooded in winter, and each field was surrounded by a deep dyke. The roads were incapable of standing up to heavy traffic, and the utmost ingenuity had to be used in order to keep supplies going, even in static warfare. No tank could leave the track, and a cleverly placed minefield was enough to disrupt the day's operation to a considerable degree. It was ideal country for the cunning defence of which the German paratrooper showed himself to be a master, and it was the worst country in the world for the leading tank of an advance, for it was virtually certain to meet a mine or an 88-millimetre gun sooner or later, with no chance of avoiding either. The country was flatter than one could have thought possible, and a rise of five feet was enough to earn the designation of 'high ground'. It bore the appearance of a sodden but cultivated marsh, punctuated by regular fir woods, desolate farmhouses, and the occasional cluster



De Rips and Leunen  
OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1944

of houses round a church, which was a village. The weather was invariably as grey and damp as the countryside, and members of the Regiment cannot be blamed for striking the Peel country off the list of places in Europe they wish to revisit.

To our south the Americans were assaulting Aachen, but at the end of September the British front was quiet. The Eleventh Armoured Division remained in position between Oploo and Deurne, watching a long area of desolate country and awaiting fresh orders to move on.

The Regiment was stretched along the road between De Rips and Deurne, watching eastwards. Each Squadron-Company group was fairly well established in a farmhouse, though many troops were permanently out on guard or patrol. 'E' Company of the RBs rather limited their comfort by burning their farmhouse to the ground one evening. One of their members poured what he took to be water into his dixie to cook his meal, but found too late that it was really petrol. A most spectacular conflagration resulted, and the entire establishment was laid in ruins.

On the evening of our arrival at De Rips, Regimental Headquarters installed themselves in a large monastery, and commenced trying to regain touch with the enemy, who had made no determined effort to resist since we entered Deurne. It was clear that they had withdrawn across the waste-land separating us from the Maas, but no one knew quite how far. The Recce Troop, which now consisted of three turret-less Honeys, commanded by Lieut. Schoelles, were accordingly despatched to make contact and they set off down a muddy track running due east from our positions. They made first for a Radar station, known to be situated four miles from us and on the other side of which was a small canal running north and south, which would prove an effective barrier should the bridges over it be blown. The Radar station appeared to be thoroughly destroyed and deserted, but enemy infantry were soon engaged on the canal bridge, apparently digging in around it. Farther north, enemy sappers were found to be busily placing explosives under another bridge, and succeeded in detonating the charges before they could be dealt with. The enemy seemed quite determined not to be moved from the canal bank and, just before dark, three rounds of A.P. shot were fired from the woods on the far side, narrowly missing the troop leader's tank. The patrol then with-

drew, but returned the following morning to observe from a group of houses near the Radar station. A brisk burst of Spandau greeted them from the other side of the canal, and simultaneously the remaining bridge went up. First Troop of 'C' Squadron then arrived, supported by Captain Budgeon as OP, and were ordered to do what they could to clear the situation up. This proved rather easier said than done, for the country to the canal was open and, owing to lack of bridges, a tank could not cross even if it did succeed in getting to its banks. The far side was covered in thick woods, in the middle of which was a high wooden tower, obviously containing an enemy OP. Captain Budgeon put down a heavy 'stonk' on these woods, and the troop began to advance across the open country towards the canal. Immediately an A.P. weapon again opened up from the far side and, having missed with three rounds, changed to H.E. and eventually hit Sergeant Smith's tank, which caught fire. This tank was a veteran seventeen-pounder, which had been put out of action twice before, at Caen and at Helchteren. Fortunately on this occasion the fire died down and it survived to fight another day. The driver had been wounded, but otherwise the crew were unhurt. The remainder of the troop withdrew into a wood, realising that they were doing no good in remaining where they were. Major Hagger came up and, under cover of a smoke screen and with the assistance of Sergeant Smith REME and his armoured recovery vehicle, succeeded in recovering the seventeen-pounder without untoward incident. The Shermans then withdrew, leaving the Honeyes in observation. Later in the afternoon a shower of armour-piercing and high-explosive shells fell all round them, and obviously there was some sort of fairly strong opposition in the woods over the canal. Second Troop of 'C' Squadron this time appeared but could locate nothing which they could engage, and the activity died down. Captain Budgeon climbed a tower he found in a wood, and danced about on top of it waving his map board - to draw fire, he explained. But the enemy were not tempted even by this performance to give away their positions, and the day ended quietly, apart from a Honey running over a mine on the return journey.

However, it was clear that a properly organised attack would be necessary in order to deal with the enemy, and we were ordered merely to remain in observation for the next few days, and not to attempt any more offensive action.

The Germans were not by any means content to sit in their slit trenches without trying to get a little of their own back on us. They very soon got to know which tracks our patrols were in the habit of using, and one morning two Rifle Brigade carriers were blown up on mines laid during the night. Carriers do not go over mines without casualties, and, together with some riflemen, Lieut. Unwin, who was riding in one, was killed. The RBs started some offensive patrolling to put a stop to this, and one night they actually succeeded in catching a party of Germans laying mines across one of our tracks. The resulting affray was most enjoyable from the riflemen's point of view. But, nevertheless, German patrols did still slip through, and even penetrated occasionally to the main road from De Rips to Deurne, down which used to travel our supplies and lorries bearing men to whatever recreation there was in Deurne. RSM Wass was the first to fall a victim when the Jeep, in which he was returning from an evening's recreation, went over a mine laid in the road just before he arrived. He was pulled from the wreckage and dispatched to hospital, where he was found in better shape than was first supposed. Some nights later a truck carrying a gunner officer and his BQMS was stopped on the main road by a torch being waved in front of it. When the officer enquired what was the matter he was rudely ejected by a German patrol and both of them were marched away into captivity. The truck, which had carrier Naafi stores, was ransacked by the Germans, but for some reason they overlooked the whisky, and this was found next day by 'A' Squadron, still in the truck with a formidable array of German mines. Oddly enough, we captured the officer who had led this patrol a fortnight later, and it was from him we heard the story of what had happened.

These weeks were an odd mixture of peace and war, for despite the patrolling, the squadrons all found time for a certain amount of gaiety, and various concerts and amusements were organised. A conspicuous blot on our daily life was the issue of German rations, some fresh, some tinned, and nearly all of them equally unpopular. Squadron Quartermaster Sergeants will not easily forget the circle of suspicious faces which greeted them on their arrival with the rations and the subsequent recriminations which invariably followed the disclosure that we were indeed to "eat German" for a least one more day. Even the British rations that we received were fresh and far

from suitable for distribution down to tanks. Many voices were raised to protest that they were not getting their "fair share", and no one greeted the reappearance of AFV packs with more relief than did the Quartermaster, who has no reason to remember De Rips with any form of pleasure.

Meanwhile the "Maas pocket" still remained undiminished, and the Germans were known to be making their positions fairly strong. At the beginning of October there arrived in our area the Seventh US Armoured Division, which came under the command of our Eighth Corps. They were there, they confidently predicted, to roll up the enemy within a few days. Their attack was to start from Oploo and was to run due south, parallel to the Maas. When it advanced nearly to our Radar station, we were to assault our canal and join up with them. These Americans had not experienced any positional fighting so far, but had arrived in time to assist in the "gallop" across France. Their morale was therefore rather higher than their skill, but the lesson they eventually learned here stood them in good stead later, in the Ardennes, for no division fought better there than did the Seventh US. Their answer now, however, to every situation appeared to be to "turn on the heat", which consisted of the launching of some of their escorting Thunderbolts on to anything that held them up. This did not always work, as we had learnt very early on Point 112, and remembering some past incidents, every one of our vehicles took care to expose its pink recognition panel with great clarity towards the sky.

The first village they had to take was Overloon, in which our neighbour's patrols had located anti-tank weapons and possibly tanks. The attack went in in fine style one morning, and the "heat" was turned on with great regularity. All around us every form of artillery piece made speech impossible, and we made ready to play our part in the advance, feeling that the Americans must surely be nearing our Radar station. But that evening they were no nearer taking Overloon than they had been in the morning. No amount of "heat" or artillery seemed to be able to dislodge the defenders and several American tanks had been knocked out. The next day exactly the same performance was repeated, and again the next, but in spite of it all the Seventh US remained exactly where they had started, with Overloon still untaken. Slightly discouraged, even more fury was unleashed on the battered little village and the woods around it - but to no avail;

and at the end of a week the Americans gave it up as a bad job, and departed from our area in disgust.

And so a new plan had to be made, and October 14th was to mark the start of the next attack. This time the Third British Division, assisted by the Sixth Guards Tank Brigade, equipped with Churchills, was to perform the assault on Overloon, and to continue the advance south until it took the key town of Venray. On October 15th, the Eleventh Armoured Division, with 23rd Hussars - 8th Rifle Brigade group leading, was to cross our canal and drive towards Venray from the east, by-passing the town to the south and taking the road to Venlo on the Maas. It was hoped that this operation would be completed by a direct assault on Venlo by the Fifteenth Scottish Division to our south, and once the Maas was reached opposite that town, the 'pocket' would have ceased to exist.

On the appointed day, the Third British duly assaulted Overloon and by evening, after a desperate battle, the leading brigade had taken it, with heavy casualties. Apart from German artillery and cunningly sited tanks, the ground was found to be sown both with 'R' mines, which badly hampered the Churchills, and with the deadly little 'Schumine', which caused much damage amongst the infantry. The follow-up brigade was passed through and by nightfall a distinct advance had been made.

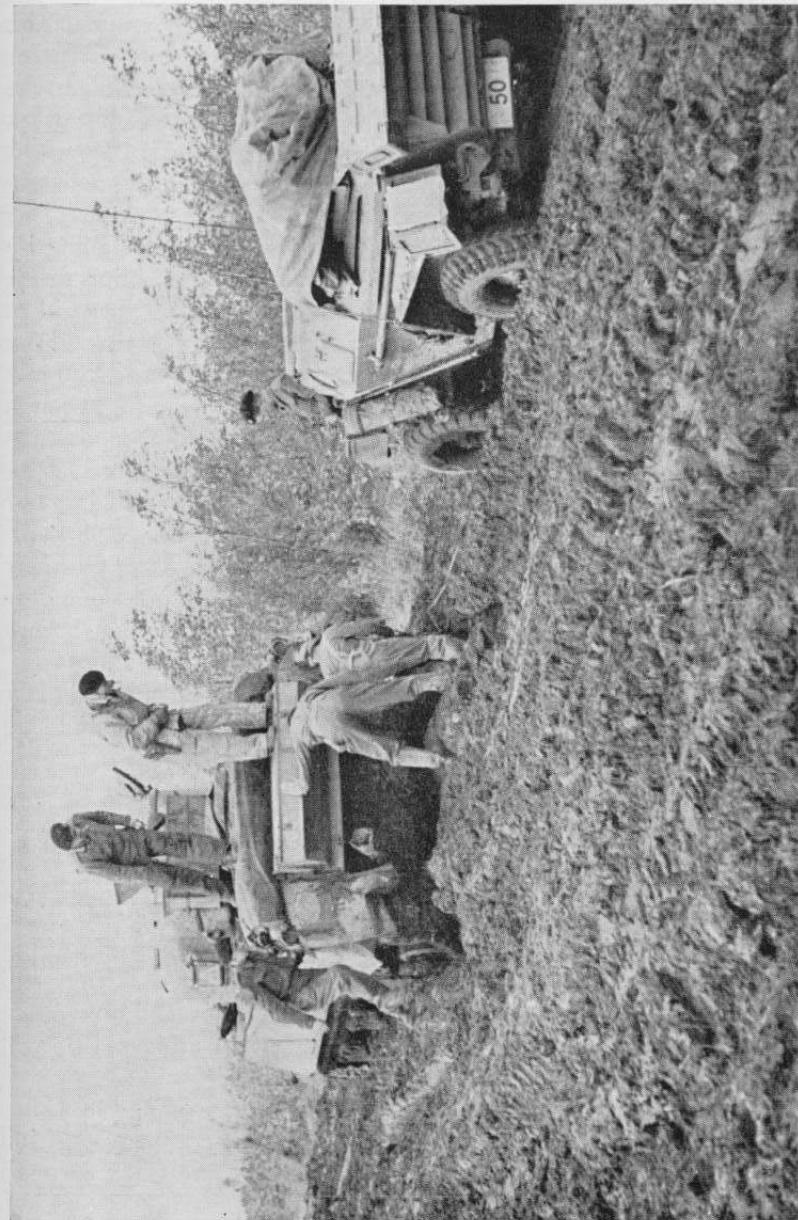
At the same time 'C' Squadron and 'H' Company had been ordered to cross the canal and establish a bridgehead, with the aid of Sappers, by the evening. This they did with no opposition, for the Overloon battle had drawn the canal's normal defenders away, and by dark they were all across. The rain teemed down, and no one will forget the tuning call of Captain Straker of the RBs over the wireless, in which he solemnly repeated "It's a dark and stormy night" until his signals were received satisfactorily by control.

The whole regimental group advanced the next day, preceded by the Recce Troop, which was to pass through 'C' Squadron and reconnoitre the track to Merselo, the next village. The Honeys had not gone far beyond the bridgehead when one of them ran over what must have been two R mines joined together, for the unfortunate little tank was completely destroyed, and Sergeant Dale and one of his crew were killed, the rest being wounded. A flail tank was produced to deal with the mines, and after a long delay 'B' Squadron and 'F' Com-

pany were able to move along the now almost disintegrating track into the village of Merselo. They had met only scattered resistance but a considerable quantity of both mines and mud. It had not ceased to pour with rain all day, and it continued all night with the result that our centre line, a moderate track at the best of times, threatened to become almost impassable to wheeled vehicles.

It was, therefore, essential that we should reach the main Deurne-Venray road the next day, so that our supplies could come from Deurne direct on a good metalled road. A maze of boggy tracks led south from Merselo to this road, and in the centre of a tangle of dykes, marshes and thick woods lay the key village of Haag, soon to be known over the air as the "old woman place". It was a village which had to be captured before we could reach our objective. 'A' Squadron and 'G' Company duly advanced at first light but on the outskirts of Haag they were confronted by a large and impassable crater across the track. It was impossible to leave the road, and it was soon found that the Germans had this crater very accurately registered by their mortars, and that to approach it on foot was suicide. 'G' Company did their best in the thick woods to locate the enemy infantry, but it was a hopeless task, and meanwhile three tanks had become firmly bogged in trying to bypass the crater. Some very heavy shelling started, and a concentration of "moaning minnies" up to the Bas Perrier standard added to the difficulty of the situation. Major Turquand tried to find other tracks to circumvent the obstruction, but none were fit for tanks and the fact remained that the crater had to be crossed if Haag was to be taken. Eventually a scissors-bridge was produced to span it, but Corporal Newell was killed by a mortar the moment he dismounted to guide his tank over it. Fortunately 'C' Squadron and 'H' Company had meanwhile found a track parallel and west of the one 'A' Squadron were on, which bypassed Haag, and they made slow progress down it, with some opposition by German bazooka-men, and under constant shelling and "minnie" fire.

By late afternoon 'A' and 'G', with the aid of several powerful "stonks" were more or less masters of the situation, but by that time the track was blocked by bogged tanks and a morass of churned-up mud, and it was quite evident that they were going to need some time to sort themselves out. 'C' and 'H' were by now in Weverslo and



"Our centre-line, a moderate track at the best of times"

only a large wood separated them from the main road. They were, however, involved in a brisk battle with a company of German infantry, and a full scale attack, in which 'H' Company suffered casualties and two tanks were bogged, was necessary before twenty Germans were killed and thirty taken prisoner. It was discovered from the prisoners that the large wood in front was held by another company, ordered to hold out to the last man, and that the track through it was mined. A flail tank was accordingly sent up, but it immediately broke down. A long delay, punctuated by heavy enemy artillery fire, was necessary before another arrived, and dusk was falling by the time it began to flail its way down the track. Without delay, it disabled itself on the first mine it blew up, and thus put paid to any hopes there might have been of clearing the track that night. 'C' Squadron's Second Troop by-passed the wood in an effort to reach the main road before dark, and this they succeeded in doing, though on their arrival they had a brisk battle with a number of German self-propelled guns on one of which Sergeant Johnson scored a hit with his seventeen-pounder. Despite their success in reaching our objective, the darkness and going prevented the possibility of consolidating it, and Second Troop were reluctantly withdrawn. On their way back in the darkness Lieut. Turner's tank was bazooka'd and he was fatally wounded, dying in hospital a day later. He had been a very brave Troop Leader, who was much missed. 'C' and 'H' concentrated in the Weverslo area, still under heavy artillery and mortar fire. The rain continued unabated, and a bad night was passed by everyone, particularly by the drivers of wheeled vehicles, who had to find their squadrons in the darkness, travelling down boggy tracks which did not appear on any of their maps. How none of them were blown up on a mine or motored into the enemy that night is a miracle, though certainly most of them were bogged sooner or later. Equally unenviable was the task of the crews of the armoured recovery vehicles and the Light Aid Detachment, who worked all night in pouring rain and under heavy fire to extract the several tanks that were still bogged. When daylight came these tanks were all out, and how much work, ingenuity and courage were necessary to achieve this will never be known.

Early in the morning of October 17th 'B' Squadron and 'F' Company passed through 'C' and 'H' to deal with the company position which still denied us the main road, and to open the track through

the wood. Apart from a little opposition from a few miserable-looking Germans, who appeared to have passed an even more uncomfortable night than we had, and who very soon gave themselves up, the main road was soon reached after an attached flail tank had disposed of a few mines. 'B' and 'F' consolidated the road and advanced cautiously up it towards Venray, with the intention of turning south towards Heide and Leunen just short of the town. A few scattered infantry were met and dealt with, and a heavy bout of enemy shelling slightly wounded 'F' Company commander. Soon, however, opposition decreased and 'B' Squadron's Fourth Troop advanced more confidently along the straight tree-lined road. Suddenly the leading tank was hit by an anti-tank gun and the crew baled out, the commander being wounded. This brought the advance temporarily to a halt, but the situation was restored by a manoeuvre by Second Troop which resulted in the destruction of the gun. At the same time the Fife and Forfar on our right were having a rather heavier battle with German tanks, and succeeded in destroying a Panther and a self-propelled gun, not, however, without loss to themselves.

'B' and 'F' were soon advancing again, and Second and Fourth Troops turned south to the outskirts of Heide, which was soon christened over the air "Colonel Gates". The connection baffled many people till they recollect the distinguished officer of "Hi-de-Hi" fame, who had recently featured in the daily press. This veiled speech on the wireless was necessary for security, and competition ran high amongst senior officers to invent the most apt name for the various villages that had to be mentioned. The Colonel was seldom defeated and another example of his efforts was the village of Walle, which he promptly dubbed "Mrs. Simpson". "Colonel Gates" was held in rather a disorganised fashion by an apparently small party of Germans, who disappeared into some houses. These houses were promptly demolished and the Germans were dealt with as they fled into the fields. Those that were capable of it gave themselves up, and as they were walking back towards the tanks the crews suddenly noticed to their slight alarm that they were surrounded by a large number of the enemy, who had been lying in the ditches within a few yards of the tanks. These Germans fortunately wanted to do nothing other than surrender, and soon there were nearly two hundred

red of them. They looked absolutely miserable, soaked to the skin, shivering, white as sheets, and completely beaten. They admitted that they would have given in long ago but for their officers, most of whom had now deserted them. One of the officers that we did capture here, however, was the leader of the successful patrol mentioned earlier. Having collected up these unhappy specimens of the Wehrmacht, the leading troop pushed into the village, and was able to create havoc with a German transport column which was just leaving in a hurry. Light failed as 'B' and 'F' were a mile short of Leunen, and there they settled for the night.

Back in Heide, excited Dutchmen were telling rather nervous harbour parties that there were still many Germans in the houses, but it was getting too dark for any more investigations, and the rest of the Regiment settled in without incident. Next morning four Germans scuttled out of the barn occupied by Regimental Headquarters, and that afternoon when Brigade Headquarters had moved into RHQ's farm, they found still more undiscovered enemy in the same barn. They promptly registered a complaint that we had not left our area clean. October 17th had been a successful day, not only for us, but for the Third British Division, for Venray had fallen to them. Much bitter fighting had been necessary to achieve this and their casualties had been heavy. It did, however, seem that the crust had been broken, and that the enemy were beginning to get disorganised and, in fact, we felt sure that we should be well on the road towards Horst and Venlo next day. But outside issues prevented any further advance, and we had to be content only with occupying Leunen on the 18th. We had orders to make it secure against counter-attack, and 'A' and 'G' positioned themselves in the southern end of the village, with 'B' and 'F' in the northern. 'C' and 'H' held some scattered farmhouses along the mile of road which separated Leunen from RHQ's farmhouse, while Brigade Headquarters occupied Heide. The Echelon remained in Deurne. It was as well, for morale purposes, that we could not foresee that the Regiment would be in those positions for a month, but so it was to be. The story of Leunen could well occupy a chapter, so many were the incidents, humorous and tragic, which filled our daily lives, and the memories of it are probably less likely to die than those of many other more spectacular days.

The reason why we had to halt, apparently on the verge of a successful advance, was that the supply position was becoming serious. It was growing more and more essential to open up Antwerp, and this could not be done unless parts of western Holland were cleared. The two chief towns in the area affected were Tilburg and Hertogenbosch, and to help in the assault upon them, the Fifteenth Scottish Division was moved across from the area south of us to come under command of Twelfth Corps. This left no division to carry out the assault on Venlo as originally envisaged in the plan and, in fact, our battle was temporarily abandoned in favour of the more vital 'battle of the ports'. Unfortunately this meant that inside the now rather reduced 'pocket' of the Maas, the Germans had plenty of time to throw up fresh fortifications, sow the area with mines and guns, and generally make a renewal of our attack a most unpleasant prospect. Moreover, we were now within range of the bigger guns across the Maas, as well as a host of smaller guns and mortars, which the Germans very soon crammed into the 'pocket' when they saw they had a respite.

The view from Leunen was typical of the Peel country and the many woods prevented anyone on the ground from getting a good look at the enemy positions. This disadvantage was soon rectified by our two valiant OPs, Captain Davidge and Captain Budgeon, who ascended the church tower and took it in turns to remain there all day for a month. It was frequently shelled and rapidly began to shed its tiles. Very soon the wind howled through gaping holes in its fabric, and the whole edifice shook like an aspen leaf when a shell burst near it. On one occasion shells actually passed through the church tower underneath Captain Budgeon as he sat on his very rickety and unsafe perch. It was not until the spire became so tattered that the watcher as he sat aloft could be clearly seen by the enemy, that these two gallant gunners were forced to abandon their perch for the top of a house in the village.

Very soon after 'A' Squadron's arrival in Leunen, Major Turquand hurt his hand in a turret flap, and Major Taylor took command. A few mines were cleared from the village and the Regiment began to settle in without much interference from the enemy. Unfortunately an RB officer, making a reconnaissance, stepped on a mine and was blown to pieces, which warned everyone that they must

tread warily. The village was not badly damaged when we arrived, but anyway it was soon found that the only accomodation that really mattered was underground. The civilians were a primitive folk and generally lived almost in the same room as their livestock. Few will forget the wafts of hot air which greeted anyone who opened the kitchen door of a typical farmhouse. The local people obviously had very few ideas about the war, and decidedly preferred life before we arrived. Most of them could not determine which side they disliked the least. Some became quite friendly after a suspicious start, while others, it must be regretted, undoubtedly passively, and sometimes actively, helped the Germans. They found it very irritating that they were not allowed to walk down the road towards Horst and considered the reason given, that the Germans were there, quite inadequate. Eventually they became resigned to this ridiculous game of being confined to their village but soon, when the shelling began, they became very frightened indeed. Most families then lived permanently in the cellar, and loud were the prayers and wailings when a "stonk" was heard to fall outside.

The shelling started on the 19th and for a fortnight it was fairly continuous. For the last two weeks the enemy concentrated more on the neighbouring village of Veulen, where the Third Tanks resided, but Leunen was undoubtedly the favourite target in the early stages, and a good second favourite in the later.

The Germans, as was their custom, gave our area very regular attention. For the first two weeks their gunners did not appear to rise early, and the first salvo of 105s would not arrive before 9.30 a.m. This dose was repeated at hourly intervals during the morning, but there was generally a good siesta after lunch. It was found that this was a good time for officers to inspect their troops' positions, provided that they were back near their shelter by 4 p.m. About this time a very special effort was frequently laid on, including a few loads of "moaning minnies", and on one occasion an extremely large projectile, said to be 210-millimetre mortar, which made a very big bang indeed. Usually all was quiet till about 6 p.m. when it was beginning to get dark. That was generally marked by the start of the "variety programme", and one could expect almost any kind of missile. Perhaps the most original was an incendiary mortar filled with oil, which once set fire to two

haystacks, thereby attracting the attention not only of every German gun in the area but of a German bomber as well. This programme lasted about an hour, and was always the most lively of the day. Until 10 p.m., there was an occasional rather milder "stonk", just to prove to us that their gunners were still awake. During the night there was usually very little artillery activity except that the gunners across the Maas had obviously been told that it was their turn to do some work. They accordingly sent over one 150-millimetre shell every half hour, and though these never did any damage, their long, slow whistle through the air attracted everyone's attention, and it was always interesting to try and estimate where they seemed likely to drop. We "stood to" at first light and, during the last week we were there, the Germans appeared to have plotted the position of Regimental Headquarters from our wireless transmissions, for at the exact moment we "opened up", down came the shells all round our farmhouse.

All this activity was not taken lightly by our own artillery. Apart from the lonely vigils in the church spire, Major Gaunt, our battery commander, was constantly on the alert taking bearings, spotting flashes, and using his considerable skill in bringing down counter battery fire whenever he had the vestige of a target.

It must be admitted that one enthusiastic medium gunner dropped a shell in the middle of RHQ's farmyard one night. It destroyed Colonel Hunter's car and frightened everyone considerably, but, by some miracle, caused no loss of life. Major Gaunt, who had been far too close to the shell for his comfort, speedily and angrily discovered which battery had been responsible, and a very nervous battery commander arrived next day to apologise.

Life in Leunen during this time resembled a scene from "Journey's End". It was not possible to live anywhere except underground or in a room on the right side of a very thick house with a tank drawn up to the window. Most troops were in a tactical position, and therefore lived in muddy holes underneath their tanks and, except in cases of bare necessity such as the collection of rations, no one felt particularly inclined to do much wandering about in the open. There were, of course, a few casualties, but many were the miraculous escapes. One rifleman was seated in a row of six latrines in the village school, when a shell removed four of them, leaving him enthroned in splendid isolation on one of the remaining two! Everyone became

very sensitive to any noise which might herald the arrival of a shell, and Lieut. Drake, after one near miss, christened the unfortunate village space the "Bomb-Hippidrome". It was, in fact, remarkable how used everyone became to this shelling, and a noticeable feature was the derision which was caused by the sight of a "stonk" falling on the area occupied by higher authority. Those in Leunen were always highly diverted to see the Regimental Headquarter's farmhouse in trouble and, in turn, members of RHQ would all come out and laugh heartily when Brigade Headquarters received its share of attention. This amusement was not always shared by the receiving end, and several impatient queries would come forward over the air as to whether 'that gun had been spotted yet'.

Shelling was by no means our chief preoccupation when darkness came, for both sides carried on active patrolling. The RBs were always trying to find out where the enemy posts were, so that they could receive attention from our artillery next day, and the German paratroopers had much the same idea. The enemy was assisted by his knowledge of the ground, which was better than ours, and by the fact that civilian agents used undoubtedly to carry information to him. Whether they were renegade Dutchmen, or Germans in disguise, no one ever found out, but certainly someone with a very good knowledge of the neighbourhood was giving information to the enemy. Frequently German patrols would get right into Leunen, and creep about amongst the houses occupied by our troops. It was an eerie business to try and locate them without doing damage to our own side and, in the morning, a house to house search had to be made to ensure that none were lying hidden in the village to spot for their artillery. From the accuracy of some of the shelling, it was strongly suspected that there might be a German with a wireless set somewhere in the area, passing back the exact locations of our troops.

The worst incident of this nature did not occur in Leunen, but in the 'C' Squadron position, which was spread out in a line of farmhouses between Leunen and Regimental Headquarters. The RBs had been relieved by the Third Monmouthshires who had suffered severely recently and were consequently not, at the time, up to their usual standard. So great, indeed, had been their losses that the strength of their companies was scarcely

sufficient to defend the positions they took over. At any rate many reasons have been given to explain why their guard allowed a German patrol right into the Squadron Headquarter's position, for that is what occurred one night. This patrol was among the tanks when it was seen by Sergeant Hoggins, who picked up a Sten gun from a Monmouths soldier and waited till the Germans were right upon him. He then pressed the trigger and the Sten misfired. A German promptly threw an hand grenade at him, which missed him, but sounded the alarm. Meanwhile members of a crew sleeping snugly beneath their tank were awakened by a German waving a torch in their faces, and, miraculously escaping death, made off into the night with cries of horror and dismay. Captain Addison, the acting Squadron Leader, had been roused by the explosion of a bazooka-bomb on the window beside him. He at once tried to leave his room to man his wireless set, but found himself denied exit from the house by a stream of Spandau bullets passing across the doorway. Another German patrol had arrived by this time from the opposite direction, and the honours seemed definitely to be with the attackers, who followed up their success by firing their bazookas at a tank. The crew had been sleeping peacefully inside it, and sprang out alarmed and slightly singed, while the tank burned merrily. Two enterprising Germans sprang on to another tank and fastened a charge on the turret bin, whilst the inmates of the turret still slumbered peacefully only a yard from them. A deafening explosion rent the bin from its moorings and awoke the sleepers with a rude jerk. Rather naturally the whole Regiment was awake by now, and were much concerned by the explosions and sounds of battle that were proceeding from the 'C' Squadron area. Anxious enquiries over the wireless got no reply from the Squadron Leader and the handfull of tank crews with him, who were expecting to fight their last engagement in the room in which they were pinned by Spandau fire; and everyone feared that the worst had occured. Eventually the confusion became so great that the Germans evidently felt that the situation had got beyond their control, so withdrew into the night. From the noise and smoke of battle, one might have supposed that casualties had been heavy on both sides, but in fact no Germans or Twenty-third Hussars were touched though one Monmouth soldier was killed. One tank was a "write-off", another damaged. Altogether there is no doubt that the Germans had won the round on points.

After this incident, our suspicions that certain civilians were helping the enemy became a certainty. The whole affair had been far too well organised to have been merely a normal patrol, and for two German parties to have arrived simultaneously from different directions at a farmhouse eight hundred yards behind the front line, argued conclusively that someone must have guided them. It was therefore decided that all civilians must be evacuated from Leunen and our regimental area, and the exodus took place next day. It was a formidable and pathetic task to uproot every man, woman, and child from the farmhouses in which they had spent their whole lives, particularly as a great deal of their livestock had perforce to be abandoned. However they spared no effort to remove every possible animal and great was the confusion on the road when the series of caravans began to move out. It was soon found that the one animal that cannot be evacuated is the pig, and after several hideous scenes, most families gave in, and left their styes full. Chickens proved to be almost equally uncontrollable, and many of these were also left in residence. But most of the other animals were coerced by various means into joining the family party on the road, and great was the ingenuity shown by the different families in attaching their various chattels to their battered old carts. These people had no cause to love us, nor had we cause to love them, but there is something about the evacuation of a simple country village that is infinitely sad, and the pathetic processions that toiled down the road that morning could not fail to earn the sympathy of all who saw them.

All the same, however sympathetic one felt, it was a great relief not to have the civilians there any longer. For one thing it was very much more comfortable, and for another the defence of the whole area could be effected very much more efficiently. Another advantage, which could not be overlooked, was that the remaining livestock could not be kept alive indefinitely and would therefore be of much more use as a supplement to the rations. Judicious and economical slaughtering of pigs and chickens began, and everyone enjoyed the best food they had had for the whole campaign, which was one bright spot in a depressing period. The pigs became rather wary after a few days and were not easy to catch. They did not seem to be conversant with the defence "lay-out" for two of them eventually blew themselves up on our mines, and lay tantalisingly in the open

under the eye of the enemy. No one felt greedy enough to try and recover them, and it was thought that to ask for a smoke screen from the RHA would be stretching military necessity too far, so they were never salvaged. Another pig, to the fury of its pursuers, burst from the village in full flight and galloped off down the road to Horst, straight into the arms of the Germans, who presumably meted out to it the fate it deserved.

The RBs, having been relieved for a time by the Monmouths, came back for a week. They were then again relieved by the Fifth Goldstream Guards, who also stayed for a week, and were duly impressed by the scene of desolation which Leunen by this time presented. The Guardsmen got off to a poor start by having a carrier platoon commander killed the moment he arrived, and by losing a complete section during the night to a German patrol, which pounced on it before it was properly organised. After this, the Guardsmen appreciated the situation rather better and kept their end up in fine style.

As we were obviously not going to be relieved for some time, it was arranged that a third of the Regiment went to Helmond for five days' holiday at a time. It was not possible to procure any very special comfort for these parties, and Helmond was by no means an outstandingly gay town, but it was a complete rest from the guards, shocks and alarms that everyone had experienced without a break for so long, and did the Regiment a great deal of good. Short leave to Brussels and Antwerp was also started and, though the vacancies were few and far between, the lucky men who managed to go there returned with glowing accounts of their adventures.

Meanwhile the rain continued to fall and the lorries began to have great difficulty in reaching Leunen at all, for the unfortunate little road had by this time completely collapsed under its unwonted stream of traffic. The Sappers performed prodiges with bulldozers, and even constructed a five mile road of logs running parallel to the front, which was designed as a lateral artery for supplies. On its completion they placed a notice on the entrance to it, which expressed the hope that the vehicles would not take quite so long to get along it as it had taken them to construct it.

Each day was much the same as the last, the only variation being the timings of different German "stonks" and the variety of their

missiles. For the last fortnight the Third Tanks in Veulen received most spectacular attention from "moaning minnies" and, on one occasion, they formed up one entire squadron to discharge its guns in the direction of the Germans. Whatever slaughter this manoeuvre may have caused in the enemy ranks, it certainly stirred up a hornets' nest of unpleasantness in reply, and everyone in the area had to keep below ground for quite a period.

No description of Leunen would be complete without a mention of the German counter attack on Meijel, which for a few days caused considerable alarm and despondency. Meijel had always been the gap in the defences to our south, watched only by a light screen supplied by the American Seventh Armoured Division. Through this screen one day lunched a considerable force of Panzer Grenadiers, supported by Tigers. Meeting virtually no opposition, they motored up the road towards Deurne. Deurne was a centre for most of the echelons of the Division, including our own, and there were also many headquarters there. Ten miles further down the road lay Helmond, the headquarters of Second Army itself. Great was the commotion in these two towns when it was learnt from refugees that Tigers were in Liesel and, worse, were indeed within four miles of Deurne. Little bands of desperate men from the staffs of various headquarters were organised to repel the expected attack, and the excitement in our echelon ran high. The few tanks that were "left out of battle" at the time made ready to fight to the last. In Helmond Second Army Headquarters vanished into the night, leaving the perimeter of the town to be defended gallantly by Eighth Corps REMF, reinforced by the clerks that had had to be left behind for lack of space on the evacuating lorries. But the situation was soon restored. The long-suffering Fifteenth Scottish Division was rushed across from Tilburg, and after a week's bitter fighting, succeeded in driving back the Germans to beyond their start line.

During our stay in Leunen the battle of Walcheren was won and Antwerp was opened. And so at last the news came through that the next item on the agenda was the "Maas pocket". The attack was to start from the south and the whole of Twelfth Corps had been brought across from Western Holland to assault from the Weert area north-eastwards to Venlo. When they had won certain objectives, the Fifteenth Scottish Division was to attack north-eastwards from

Meijel, and Eleventh Armoured Division was to attack eastwards towards Horst, when the Fifteenth Scottish had reached the Deurne-Venlo railway. The "pocket" was thus to be split up and eliminated.

Our own Infantry Brigade (159th) was therefore ordered to be ready to attack directly eastwards down this railway, swinging east to Horst from Amerika, and 29th Armoured Brigade were to start a day later, with the task of driving across the waste and marshy land towards the same objective from the West. The Twenty-third Hussars and RB's group were to lead. The centre line ran from Usselstein down a boggy track towards Meterik and Horst. The track crossed several dykes and was overlooked by a collection of sand-dunes known as Bree Hei. On this piece of "high ground" there were many trees and, judging by an unsuccessful sally that the Fifteenth-Nineteenth Hussars had attempted, apparently many guns as well.

Preparatory to this attack, we therefore moved from Leunen to Usselstein, which had been shattered already by the assault of the 159th Brigade, a month earlier. There we waited for the word to advance. Twelfth Corps were having a certain amount of success, and very soon the Fifteenth Scottish swung into action. Then on November 20th, the 159th moved forward along the Deurne-Amerika road, meeting no opposition other than mines and craters in their path.

On November 21st, a strong suspicion was born that the enemy had withdrawn from the pocket altogether, and 'B' Squadron was ordered down the centre line to discover whether or not it was defended. So began possibly the most courageous and unpublicised little engagement in the Regiment's history. It was, as usual, pouring with rain. The Squadron's first objective was the bridge over a small stream by a hamlet called Erika Hoeve, and Second Troop covered forward Third Troop, who were accompanied by a troop of flails. The centre line was down a narrow track, which was obviously not going to carry many more tanks than a troop before becoming impassable. It was also flanked by deep dykes, and it did not need much military knowledge to realise that the leading tank was certain either to hit a mine or to be hit by an anti-tank gun. But this had to be accepted as a risk of war, and Sergeant Austin took his tank forward in the lead. Half a mile short of Erika Hoeve, it went up on a mine, and immediately accurate shell and Spandau fire descended upon it. Unable to dismount to mend the track, Sergeant Austin however ma-

naged to pull into the side and to allow a flail tank to pass and try to clear the mines. On such a very narrow track an hour elapsed before this could be achieved, and the enemy put it to good account by bringing up a self-propelled gun to Bree Hei. This duly knocked out Sergeant Austin's helpless tank, killing three of the crew, and then disabled Sergeant White's tank, which had been forced to halt on the track behind.

The rest of the troop withdrew under smoke from Squadron Headquarters, as, owing to very accurate Spandau fire, it was impossible to go and search for survivors. Most of them managed to return after very nerve-wracking experiences, in the course of which Sergeant White was killed trying to search for the other members of his crew.

The next day 'B' Squadron advanced again, and the leading tank, commanded by Sergeant Green, went up on a fresh set of mines laid short of the original disabled tanks. Fourth Troop decided to try their luck across country to gain the bridge, and Sergeant Barradell, who set off in great style, managed to get within a quarter of a mile of it before being blown up on three mines simultaneously. His tank was tipped over at such an angle that he could not use his guns, and he baled out with his crew, under accurate Spandau fire. However, he continued his reconnaissance on foot, having to pass through machine gun fire, a deep and watery dyke and two minefields before he rejoined his Squadron. He reported that the bridge was blown and uncrossable by any means we had at our disposal, which was just the information that was required. 'B' Squadron then withdrew for the night, leaving another two disabled tanks behind, but having noted that no armour-piercing weapons had fired at them that day, which was significant.

The next day the Sappers tried to bridge the Erika Hoeve stream, but the track was by now so bad that no vehicle could get down it, and it seemed as if we had no possible centre line to Horst. This did not however matter, for our Infantry Brigade, meeting no opposition, had swung north to Bree Hei and had very kindly taken all our objectives for us. It was obvious that the Germans had decided that they had held us long enough in the "pocket" and that the Maas defences were now prepared enough for them to retire discreetly behind them. This they had done in good order, and there is no doubt that, successful though our operation was, the holding of the

"Maas pocket", and the eventual withdrawal over the Maas, were a miniature classic of a delaying action in the face of superior strength. In a day or two British forces were on the river along its entire length, but very few prisoners had been taken, and very little opposition met, other than mines and booby traps, which abounded everywhere.

Captain Blackman spent the next two days recovering the derelict tanks in the middle of a thick minefield, and eventually this task was accomplished. It was found that the Erika Hoeve defences were most brilliantly planned, and that a network of underground tunnels stretched to several alternative positions, from which accurate Spandau and mortar fire could be sustained with minimum risk to the defender. Seventy mines had to be removed before the wrecked tanks could be recovered, so how many more there were in the area can only be guessed at. It had been a most discouraging action, which had tested the discipline and initiative of those concerned to the full, but had nevertheless been extremely well executed.

The Regiment remained at Usselsteijn till November 28th, when we joined the Echelon in comparative comfort in Deurne, where they had been briskly bombed a few days earlier. Here we learned, to our great delight, that our brigade was to be the first to be equipped with the new Comet tank and that better still, we were to withdraw to Belgium to carry through the re-fitting and instruction.

Advance parties left on December 10th, and after spending four days in Geldrop, the Regiment arrived in extremely comfortable quarters in the historic town of Ypres, where the hospitality of the citizens boded well for our immediate future. It was certainly a great change from De Rips, Leunen and Usselsteijn.

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The period from our arrival at De Rips on September 25th until the end of the fighting at Usselsteijn on November 28th cost the Regiment the following casualties:-

Killed	2 officers
	11 other ranks
Wounded	16 other ranks

## CHAPTER X

### ARDENNES CHRISTMAS

December 19th, 1945 — January 14th, 1946

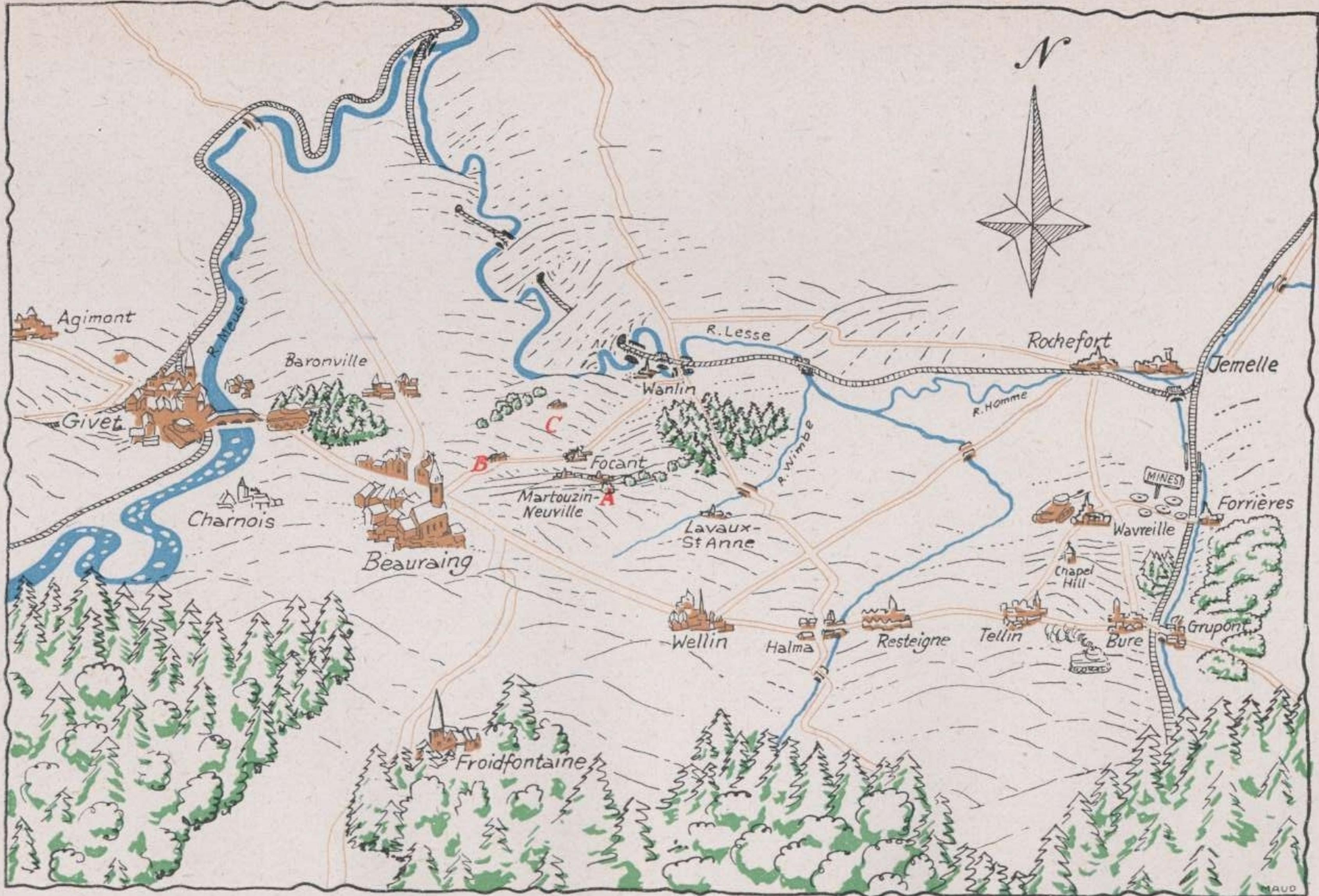
Our installation at Ypres was leisurely and sedate. Although an ambitious six weeks' training programme existed on paper, taking little account of the festive season, the fact that the new Comet tanks had not arrived and that all, excepting a few of the old Shermans, had been dropped off at Brussels, encouraged lively plans for Christmas and a natural instinct to make the best of superabundant hospitality. The four Squadrons all had a generous area of the town and troops were billeted in private houses. 'B' and Headquarter Squadron shared the famous reconstructed Cloth Hall for a mess room, while Regimental Headquarters lived in a chateau on the outskirts of the town in sumptuous seclusion. On all sides people got "stuck in", their feet well under the table and, some said, their boots under the bed! By the sixteenth there was general agreement that the prospects were extremely good.

"While these plans were maturing", writes Field-Marshall Montgomery, in a somewhat different context, in his own official account of the campaign, "the enemy too was busy. The severe attrition he had experienced during the past two months had not prevented the re-equipment of his strategic reserve. Sixth SS Panzer Army was ready for battle . . . On the 16th December the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes broke. Our plans were postponed".

Although the reference is to different plans, the effect remained the same. Nevertheless the full weight of the German offensive was not immediately apparent nor, if the truth be known, expected. The re-equipment of the SS Panzer Army had been known, but no one had credited the German Commanders either with the ability or even the ambition of proposing such a bold design, which was aimed at nothing less than the capture of Liège and the Meuse crossings, a drive across Belgium and the seizure of Antwerp, effecting the encirclement of the whole of the British front and of two American Armies. It was

thought - and the Germans had managed to produce good evidence to the effect - that German intentions were, at the most, confined to a decisive counter-attack against the impending offensives into the Reichswald area and across the Roer river. But extremely bad weather had precluded satisfactory air reconnaissance, and the German concentration was carried on with a high degree of secrecy. The result was surprise - one of the most potent battle-winning factors in wars, but a factor which in the circumstances proved only of limited value. When, therefore, the full implications of the German attack were established, all available men and arms were switched against it, and within less than three weeks 'a dangerous drive' had become 'an ugly rout'.

At first, everyone dismissed the possibility of our being involved with a brave smile and a certain air of conviction. It seemed hardly credible that the only Armoured Brigade on the whole of the British front which had been withdrawn for rest and refitting with the latest British tanks would have to be called upon. In any case we had no tanks, and the whole thing was a minor affair on a remote and unimportant part of the front in which the Americans had justifiably been caught napping! Christmas plans must continue to mature, be the enemy ever so busy. But our illusions were rapidly to be swept aside. By the 19th the German attack was beginning to take on a threatening air. A clean break-through had been achieved in the area of the Monschau Forest, the highest part of the Ardennes, and it was known that Sixth SS Panzer Army was thrusting in a north-westerly direction towards Liège with the Fifth Panzer Army in a wider wheel on its left. But that was about the sum total of the information. The enemy had struck right into the rear areas and apart from the wildest rumours nothing was known of his real progress. Nor did he fail to fan the general panic. All the devices of 1940 were re-employed, with added refinements. Parachutists were dropped in Allied uniforms and a group of desperadoes under the famous Skorzeny, of Mussolini fame, was reported to be on his way to murder General Eisenhower at Versailles. A whole regiment of Shermans manned by G. I. Germans was operating on the front, and the number of Hun-conducted jeeps was said to be without number. Finally the Germans were reported to be in a desperate mood. This was the gamble on which they staked all. If it succeeded, they thought, the war might



Ardennes  
CHRISTMAS 1944

yet be won, or the end might in any case be indefinitely postponed. If it failed, nothing could stop defeat.

The telephone in RHQ Mess rang at three o'clock on the morning of the 20th. The Colonel was to meet the Brigadier at eight o'clock in the Orderly Room, and till eight o'clock that was all we were to know, though there was no doubt that something was in the air, and those who knew of the message realised that our plans for celebrating December 25th would now almost certainly not materialise. At eight o'clock the Colonel, accompanied by the Adjutant, met the Brigadier. The Adjutant was dressed ready to go on short leave to Paris, but at one minute past eight, all thoughts of visiting Paris had been abandoned. During the night the Brigadier had been summoned to report to Twenty-first Army Group in Brussels as soon as possible and the Brigade was put at two hours notice to move. We knew little of what was going on except that we were likely to move to the area of Brussels. Squadron Leaders were hastily summoned and were told, to their consternation, that they must be ready to move complete by eleven o'clock. Tank crews were to collect the Shermans once more and the Echelon was to be packed up and ready for war. We had brought back with us seven 17-pounder Shermans and four Honeys. These were to move to Brussels on their tracks under Captain Blackman. The remainder of the Regiment was to travel in the lorries, except for a small rear party which was to be left behind to keep a loving, and not unwilling, eye on our interests in Ypres.

Had such an order been issued in the days in England, the man who gave it would have been freely described as mad. Now no one questioned it. It was a little shattering but could be done. It was done, and the rush was so great that no one had any time to have any headaches about it. The time for the move was constantly changed. At two o'clock in the afternoon eventually the Regiment was forming up and the C.O., who was leading the column in his Humber, was beginning to move off when a despatch rider drove up with a note to say that the move was once again put back one hour. Perhaps that further hour's respite was just as well. At the head of the column things looked all right, but rumours were abroad that, in the town, kit was still being thrown into lorries, and men were rushing out of their billets to jump on board just as the vehicles were

beginning to move off. At three o'clock the column did get going. Though the delay of an hour had meant perhaps that fewer things were left behind, it gave us an hour less daylight for travelling. It was damp, cold and misty, and not till eleven o'clock at night did we reach the rendezvous where we were to meet the Second-in-Command who, as usual in such cases, had gone on ahead with a harbour party.

So ended the first stage of a move which was certainly the fastest the Regiment had ever been asked to do. That it went off so well and, on the whole, so smoothly only showed how accustomed everyone now was to doing what at first sight appeared impossible. Each man knew his job and did it. Each man knew what bit of equipment he was responsible for and took it with him. So far as is known only one large item of equipment was left behind - a water trailer. Its absence was not discovered till Brussels when a very worried lance-corporal approached his Squadron Leader and made his awful confession. Throughout the long journey from Ypres to Brussels he had been worried. He knew there was something not quite right. And then, when he halted in Brussels, an idea flashed through his mind. Hoping for the best but fearing the worst, he climbed down from the driving cab of his three-tonner, walked round behind and found that the Thing was not there. He had forgotten to hitch on the trailer which must still be reposing, where it had been behind his lorry, in a side street in Ypres.

That night we harboured in the streets of Brussels near the Second Armoured Re-inforcement Group where we were to collect once more the tanks we had handed in only a week before and had thought that we should never see again. Those who had time to sleep were made welcome in the houses, but most had work to do. A general idea of the plan was now known. The Brigade was to take up positions as quickly as possible covering the bridges over the Meuse at Liège, Namur and Givet. We were allotted the bridge at Givet. 'H' Company, Eighth Rifle Brigade who were to come under command were already on the way there. As they still possessed their vehicles, it had not been necessary to halt in Brussels. 'C' Squadron were to take over their tanks first and follow as soon as possible, and the rest of the Regiment as soon as it was ready. It was not until after midnight that we were told which tanks we were to take. When the list was

received they were allotted to the squadrons, and in the darkness the job of taking them over was begun. It was not easy to find the right tanks when one could not see the numbers. When they had been found they had to be checked for battle worthiness. When we had handed them in we prided ourselves that they were in as good condition as could be, considering the miles they had done. Since then "the mice had got at them". Some had no wireless sets, or sets that would not work. In others the machine guns were missing. It was a case of every man for himself. Whether out of the stores or from the tank next door, the various bits and pieces were collected. At nine o'clock that morning 'C' Squadron was on the move to Givet, which they reached about four o'clock. By midday the rest were ready to move, but Captain Blackman's party was expected to arrive at any minute and it was decided to wait for them before moving off. They came in at about one o'clock, were given a short time to refuel and finally, at about two o'clock, the party set off.

The journey was not without its incidents. The Military Police were charged with the duty of conducting the column through Brussels and, apparently oblivious of the imperative need for us to reach Givet with all speed, or possibly with the object of reassuring the townsfolk who had heard rumours that all was not well in the Ardennes, they took us on a sightseeing tour of the city before setting us off on the road leading south to Charleroi. Thus it was that at one moment the tanks were seen proceeding down one side of the street in one direction while on the other side were the wheels going the other way. It had its funny side, but we knew we were urgently needed elsewhere though we had no accurate information of what the situation was and, in any case the more of daylight we wasted in Brussels, the longer would we have to travel in the dark. It was a long drive. Some tanks broke down, as was inevitable, but by eleven o'clock that night, December 21st, we were moving into Givet little more than thirty-six hours after the warning order had been given to prepare to move from Ypres. It was an achievement of which everyone rightly felt proud.

Then followed three remarkable days. No one had at the moment any clear idea of what was going on. The Germans had broken through and were moving towards the Meuse. How far they had advanced was not known. There was an American Reinforcement

Holding Unit in Givet, quite unperturbed. Georgie Patton was somewhere away to the south, so it was bound to be all right. When 'C' Squadron arrived they found them queuing up to go into a cinema. They had made no preparations for defending the bridge. No slit trenches had been dug or positions prepared. In any case they were short of weapons. The local population, on the other hand, seemed to expect the Germans at any moment. The Burgomaster of Agimont, in whose house Regimental Headquarters had been established, called on the Colonel hourly to find out what the situation was. He got his answer "Bon" or "Bien", depending on the Colonel's preference at the moment - as he explained, they both meant the same - and then went off to get another drink. That was what we suspected. We never saw a bottle; we did not find any ourselves; but we saw the signs, and made our deductions. The women folk disappeared one day with cases containing, one imagined, their tooth brushes and jewelry and reappeared the next, having decided that things were not so bad as rumour had it after all.

Meanwhile the Squadrons were in position down on the river. 'A' Squadron went forward daily to a place from which they would have done great execution on any German vehicles trying to approach the bridge. 'C' Squadron with 'H' Company were in Givet, charged with the immediate defence of the bridge and reading "Horatius" for hints on how to do it. 'B' Squadron were in reserve west of the river, but had reconnoitred positions on the other side to which they were to move if the enemy should be reported as approaching. The plan was then that everyone should fight forward of the river, and the bridge if necessary was to be blown behind. But the plan changed daily, and this dramatic act was never played. The difficulty was that reliable information as to what was going on was not to be had. Except that we did know that the bridges at Dinant and Namur were held by units of our Brigade, little was known of what other troops there were in the area or what they were going to do should the enemy appear. In particular, there was a bridge to our south about ten miles away. It was not known who was there, so the Second-in-Command was sent to find out. He discovered an American sapper officer with about fifteen men. He explained his plan. He had a jeep about six miles out. As soon as the enemy began to appear the jeep would come back and report and the bridge would be blown. He had very few men but was quite confident. His NCO however was not so

happy. As he explained to the Second-in-Command's driver "The Loostenant thinks he's going to blow this bridge but he won't. He ain't got enough dynamite".

Daily at Regimental Headquarters in Agimont there were conferences. There was one, in particular, which will always be remembered by those who were present. Major Bradford, who was commanding 'H' Company, produced two French officers who had two companies of infantry covering a bend in the river where they said the Germans had crossed in 1940. An interpreter from 'H' Company was brought along to smooth out any difficulties of language that might arise. After the introductory sentences his services were dispensed with and he settled quietly into the background. The French were keen on fighting. The Colonel was proud of his French. "En quarante" said they "Les Boches passent ici. Aujourd'hui ils ne passeront pas. Vive la France". "I'll take six to four" replied the Commanding Officer, varying it occasionally with "Grand" as the conversation proceeded and became more enthusiastic. The French were tremendously keen and willing to go anywhere. They asked about various places which they thought good positions and looked somewhat dismayed when they got the answer "Ah! Ce n'est pas dans mon arrière" which was intended to indicate that the place referred to was not in the area controlled by the Officer Commanding the Twenty-third Hussars, but to them meant nothing, or was just a glimpse of the obvious. There was no need for a close inspection to see that the Colonel's "arrière" was incapable of hiding the villages or hills referred to.

Gradually the situation became clearer. The Germans were not advancing as quickly as had been expected. Communications were now established. Ten carrier pigeons had even been taken on the strength, in case all other means should break down. Infantry were beginning to come in to take up positions on the river and the danger period was as good as over. On December 24th 'B' Squadron as well as 'A' took up positions over the river. The advanced elements of the enemy ran into the Third Tanks, who were holding the bridge at Dinant, and it was possible that they might also try the Givet crossing. They did not, and that evening orders were received that next day we should move forward as a whole.

Christmas Day broke brilliantly fine and bitterly cold. The full force of the German thrust appeared to be spending itself and there

were grounds for believing that the Germans were running out of petrol and supplies, which it was reported were being dropped from the air, and that some tank formations had become stranded. In view of this, the news that we were to move forward to go 'tank hunting' was received with great applause. 'Brewing Tigers' instead of roasting turkeys was to be a novel pastime for Christmas Day, though our hopes did not materialise and no enemy was seen.

We moved across the River Meuse in the morning leaving the Echelons behind. The plan was to take up positions forward of Beauraing, which 'H' Company was to fortify as a firm base, and to lie up in wait in the valley beyond, astride the main road from the east, from Wanlin on the river Lesse.

No more suitable tank trap could have been found. It was a flat open valley about a mile across at its widest point, flanked on either side by a ridge. The road from east to west led straight down the middle and could be overlooked throughout its entire length, except for one or two villages. The ridge on the northern side was wide and open, but contained scrub and a small village with orchards on its easternmost spur. This hamlet overlooked Focant in the valley below. On the southern side the ridge first rose gently and then very steeply, through a beech wood, to over nine hundred feet. On its lower slopes, halfway between Beauraing and the Lesse there were the twin villages of Martouzin-Neuville, completely dominating the road below. Nothing could be more ideal for the purpose in hand. Let them only come! 'A' Squadron, therefore, were placed into Neuville, with positions on the forward edge facing east and forward across the valley. 'C' Squadron put two troops into Focant to block the road, whilst Squadron Headquarters and the remaining two troops placed themselves in the village above. 'B' Squadron, in reserve, lay back astride the road, in a counter-attack role. Regimental Headquarters, at the lower edge of the wood on the southern ridge, proudly surveyed the scene. Let them only come!

Actually no one ever came. The Regiment occupied the same positions from dawn to dusk for four days, withdrawing into Beauraing for the night. But the enemy never crossed the Lesse and never exposed himself to our welcome. Nevertheless they were memorable days which none of us will easily forget. First, there was all the excitement of lying-in-wait. After the surprise the enemy had sprung on

us, we were not prepared to let him catch us napping. Besides, there was no telling which way he might turn next or with what impetus he might renew his drive. Secondly, we found ourselves in positions second to none, with opportunities for cover and concealment combined with fields of fire, all unique. Thirdly, we were in country which was as beautiful and exhilarating as the Maas and Flanders had been dull and depressing. And, despite the intensity of the cold, the air was crystal clear and dry, giving to the rays of the sun an unexpected warmth, and to the sky the purest of all blues. Above us, hour after hour, flew streams of Fortresses, Lightnings and Thunderbolts, drawing long lines of vapour trails behind them. Beyond the Lesse and to the north-east could be heard the long, low rumblings of explosions carrying for miles across the snow in the pure still air.

For the first three days we all returned to our previous positions. Christmas Day was memorable for a Christmas dinner of iced bully and frozen cheese sandwiches. In the evening, proper billets were found in Beauraing, for it became obvious at once that there was no question of camping out in a field, or "bedding down" in a barn, or, perchance, "kipping" inside our tanks. We would have all frozen to death, and as no one had the least desire to experiment in that form of decease, it was thought best to make certain of comfort and warmth at night, the enemy being in a like plight. During the day no fires could be lit and Regimental Headquarters found that the splendour of its post was more than outdone by its coldness and that the sun never reached it all day and never would. However, it stuck there for the following days, while the three squadrons "basked" in the valley below, keeping itself warm by tobogganning on map-boards or improvised sledges, or by attempts by its members to push one another down the hill.

On the second day three Honeys were despatched to reconnoitre south-eastwards towards a crossing of the river Lesse at Chanly. They did so, reaching a hill overlooking the bridge which was blown. On the other side they could see two enemy half-tracks.

Finally, on the third day, we were joined by a squadron of the Sixty-first Recce Regiment. They, at once, went forward along the whole length of the river Lesse and proved invaluable to the Brigade in the later stages of the battles. At about the same time gunner OPs from the Hertfordshire Yeomanry joined us, and were

to remain with us for the rest of the battle. By a queer coincidence their's had been the battery which had run one of the transit camps through which the Regiment had passed on its way to embarkation for Normandy.

In the meantime, north of us, the Third Tanks were successfully engaging the spearhead of the German advance, four miles east of the Dinant crossing, in the area of Sorinne. It was the furthest west German tanks and forces reached, and the column was heavily repelled. Together with American forces, which advanced from the north the following day well over forty tanks were captured, some of them destroyed, but most of them out of petrol. Tank crews and infantry also surrendered in large numbers, frozen and hungry and exhausted. It was obvious that the German drive had spent itself and that, whilst the initial impetus of an armoured thrust had carried far and deep, the enemy's weakness in transport and supplies could not maintain it and the brilliant turn of weather had given the air forces their golden opportunity.

However, some of the initial confusion remained, and the situation was not being saved without some of the hardest fighting of the war. On either side of the salient, the Americans had recovered brilliantly from the initial shock and we watched daily, on our maps, with growing admiration, either the progress of their relentless pressure against its sides or their indomitable tenacity in defence. Stavelot, St. Vith, Malmedy, Vielsam, places which held for days, despite encirclement, and blocked the enemy's main supply routes. Above all, there was the key point of Bastogne, holding on magnificently, holding on for Georgie Patton!

For some days yet, however, the situation remained obscure and confused. We suffered from a dearth of information which was reminiscent of the days of 1940. Nor were we enlightened by innumerable liaison officers who came to us from the Field-Marshal himself, frantically in search of "dope". We enlightened them as best as we could, the Colonel very often outlining the grand design of the battle from maps covered with bold, and perhaps inaccurate, arrows whilst the LOs stood by, wondering whether they had come from, or had arrived at, the Field-Marshal's HQ!

From December 28th onwards, only 'C' and 'A' Squadrons sent out two troops with their Squadron Headquarters. These took

up positions in their former areas as a safeguard against surprise. 'B' Squadron kept two troops permanently on the alert in Baronville. The weather had begun to turn by then, and for the last two days of the year they moved out in a thick fog. But by then the danger had receded sufficiently and the American counter-offensive was beginning to go full blast. On the 31st we received orders to cease our patrols, and we prepared ourselves for a proper New Year.

These days at Beauraing and for 'B' Squadron at Baronville always bring back happy memories. No place ever showed a better welcome or gave more solid proofs thereof. In any event, New Year's Day made up for Christmas Day, and there was hardly a man who was not dined and wined for many hours in the grandest style.

For the next two days, in fact, we continued to be idle, wondering whether we would take part in the battle at all, for the American counter-offensive had got into its stride, and the great Ardennes "bulge" was slowly, but very visibly, shrinking. The news indeed was such that it was quite expected that this "pocket" might still be sewn up, but the Germans again, after all their experience, proved themselves masters at the gentle, but in the end unprofitable, art of extricating.

Apart from an American Armoured Division which had arrived hot-foot from California, the British Sixth Airborne Division had now crossed the Meuse, and had come up to re-inforce our front. A bridge was built at Chanly on the Lesse, and a brigade of Airborne crossed with the Fifes on January 3rd, with orders to capture crossings over the River Homme. All went well at first, but within a mile or so of the river the advance was held up, and there ensued one of the toughest little battles in the history of the campaign - a battle which is rightly immortalised in the history of the Sixth Airborne, but for which no credit was given either to the Fifes, or later to one of our Squadrons, both of whom had been in the thick of it, suffering nasty losses. This battle was for the possession of the little village of Bure, a hamlet a thousand yards before the river, entirely covering its approaches.

The Fifes fought there all day on the 4th losing about a dozen tanks, whilst a battalion of the Sixth Airborne suffered two hundred casualties. The same day we moved out of Beauraing to concentrate in and around Wellin. By this time the roads were getting into an

appalling state, and our awkward top-heavy Shermans skated about on their steel tracks like a stampede of drunken elephants. The further we got, the worse it got, and by the time we left, the frozen snow had been compressed into a fine sheet of ice. Progress could not help, therefore, being painfully slow.

On the following morning 'A' Squadron moved out very early indeed with orders to have another crack at Bure. By dint of going across country they reached Tellin, the last village before Bure, by ten o'clock. Now Bure lay at the foot of a very high hill to the south of it and, the original plan having been scratched, or rather failed, 'A' Squadron were ordered to reconnoitre this high ground in order to cover infantry into Bure from the right flank. This hill, steep, wooded and covered in snow, lay half shrouded in mist. The infantry, the Twelfth Parachute Battalion was contacted, and the plan discussed. First Troop was to advance in support of infantry along the main road into and through Bure whilst Third and Fourth Troop with Squadron Headquarters slowly climbed out of Tellin up a steep and narrow track in an attempt to reach the crest. This track was covered with ice, the visibility barely thirty yards, and the progress murderously slow. But the crest was reached and, Lieut. Leather leading, Third Troop pushed on to the vital eminence above Bure. Behind them, however, the enemy had laid an ambush. Taking advantage of the mist and snow and of the wooded nature of the ground, the Germans had concealed a party which now laid mines across the track, and brought bazookas unto action.

First Sergeant Huthwaite's tank, coming up with Fourth Troop, went up on a mine, and immediately behind him Sergeant Roberts was bazooka'd and killed and the Regiment lost one of its most popular and able tank commanders. The tank, however, remained intact and Sergeant Huthwaite, by an act of great daring and enterprise which won for him the M.M., gathered the crews of both tanks together and brought them all back on his tank.

That incident in itself was enough to show the hazards of the undertaking. Tanks were not made to fight blindly, in fog, up icy mountain tracks, and it soon became obvious that the whole enterprise was doomed, if not to disaster, at least to failure.

By early afternoon it was therefore decided to withdraw and abandon the attack. The mined tank, however, had to be retrieved,

and the armoured recovery vehicle, manned by Sergeant Wright and his crew, and protected by 'H' Company, went up to fetch it in.

In the meanwhile First Troop was fighting its way through Bure with the remainder of the Battalion. It was found that the Fifes and another Battalion had, in fact, cleared the larger part of it at great cost to themselves and with heavy casualties to the enemy. But the enemy still clung to the eastern edge of the village and some of the remaining ruins. The attack to clear these positions at first went well, and good progress was made towards the river at Grupont.

There, however, the tanks moved forward more warily down the narrow village street. The Troop leader, Lieut. Goss, led with the utmost determination and bravery. But it was all in vain and both his own and the tank following were hit and destroyed. Four of the crews were killed, the wounded having to make their way back under fire. Bure was, in fact, one of the nastiest spots the Squadron had ever been in. The Germans clung to the houses and ruins, hid in cellars and catacombs, fighting and sniping grimly to the end. It wasn't a place for a depleted battalion and half a troop of tanks. Finally the attack was abandoned and our forces withdrawn. 'A' Squadron fell back on Tellin and occupied defensive positions around it for the next few days.

'C' Squadron meanwhile had pushed on through Tellin north-eastwards to Wavreille. A battalion of the Sixth Airborne was already in possession of the place, but the road down to Forrières on the Homme River had not as yet been cleared, and was known to be mined. Furthermore the enemy was attempting infiltrations and some of his tanks could be seen moving through the snow west of the River. 'F' Company of the RBs, who had manned a high wooded hill between Bure and Wavreille, had also to be relieved, at a vital point which could not be allowed to fall to the enemy. 'H' Company were sent up and 'B' Squadron followed. After two days 'B' and 'C' changed places. It was an unenviable "swop" for 'C'.

"Chapel Hill", as it came to be known, was almost two thousand feet high. It had one windowless building, from which it took its name, and a young pine wood which covered the last few hundred feet - and snow which covered it all. It was in view of the enemy, so no fires could be lit. The ground was frozen solid and no shelter could be dug. There was nothing for it but to camp out. Everyone

did as best he could, but the most desperate measures hardly sufficed to keep one warm, and three nights were more than enough for anything living or human.

Perhaps the worst part of it all were the feeding arrangements. As no fires could be lit, and all visible movement had to be avoided, the food had to come by cook's truck before dawn and after dusk. But the tea froze faster than one could drink it, and the stew turned into iced jelly. No one thought it very funny in the snow, in the cold, and at seven in the morning.

Chapel Hill was an episode shared by 'B' and 'C', from which 'A' had been spared. The only incident of note had been the discovery of an abandoned German self-propelled gun, perfectly intact, but without petrol, a few hundred yards down the enemy side of the hill. 'C' Squadron found it, taking great care when they drove it away to swathe it in every kind of recognition signal. It ran smoothly back to Brigade Headquarters where it was taken on strength.

'A' Squadron had had a battle. Nevertheless on the 9th they were ordered to support the advance of the Twelfth Devonshires through Bure to Grupont. This time the main thrust was to be made along the valley, with Fourth Troop supporting from the high ground to the north and with First Troop on the south. But the enemy had withdrawn completely by now, leaving an incredible ruin of a place and many dead. Owing to the absence of further opposition, the Squadron moved no further than Bure and returned to Tellin at night. The Devons went on, crossed the river at Grupont and advanced behind the retreating Germans, blocked only by clever demolitions and many mines.

'B' Squadron had in the meantime also advanced from Wavreille in support of the First Royal Ulster Rifles. These had patrolled forward on the afternoon of the 8th and had found the area between Wavreille and the Homme clear except for a few mines. Two troops had accompanied them, and two tanks had been damaged by a light type of wooden mine which could not normally be detected, particularly in the snow. The following morning, both 'B' and the Ulsters advanced and crossed the river at Forrières by a half-blown bridge. 'B' remained for the night whilst the Ulsters went on, covering some twenty miles that day.

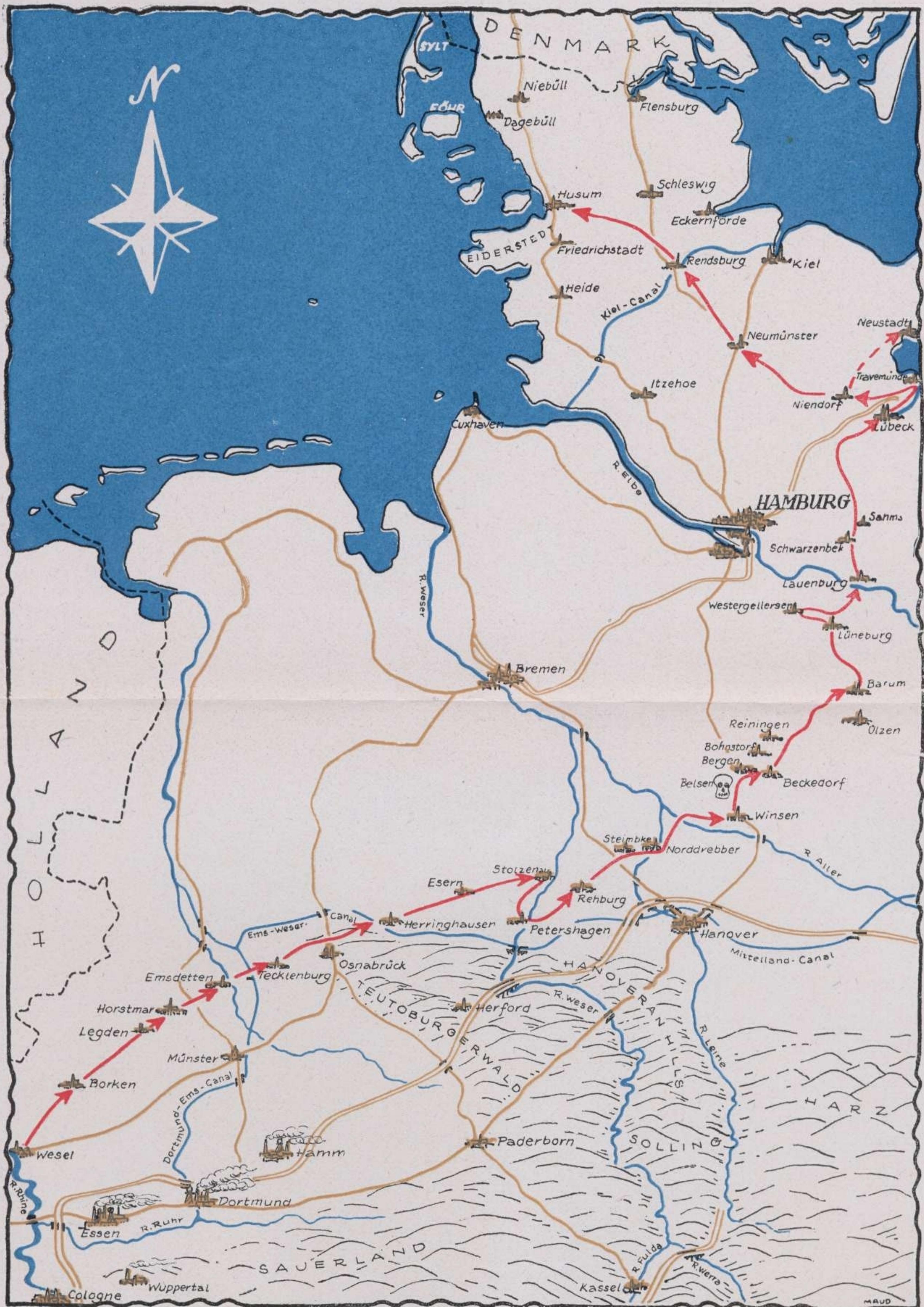
The truth of the matter was that the Germans were now in full retreat, and all contact had been lost. The "pocket" was collapsing like a pricked balloon, and our own job was done. Nor could our tanks compete with the speed of the advance. Nothing can describe the condition of the roads - snow beaten down to ice, and ice polished by steel tracks. Our interest had somewhat flagged, the Ardennes had become a sideshow, and we were itching to go back to the comfort of Ypres and the promise of our new tanks.

Between the 10th and the 14th the Regiment concentrated back in Tellin and Resteigne. Resteigne itself had been a pleasant little village where Regimental Headquarters and A 1. Echelon had gone into hibernation, and had installed themselves in pleasant comfort. A final scheme was set on foot to form a composite regiment of all the three regiments in the Brigade, and this entailed the formation of a composite squadron. But the scheme came to nothing, and the Regiment started to move back on January 13th.

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The following casualties were sustained during the fighting in the Ardennes:-

Killed	7 other ranks
Wounded	1 officer
	7 other ranks



Across Germany  
MARCH - MAY 1945

## CHAPTER XI

### ACROSS GERMANY

March 28th — May 9th

By January 20th, the Regiment had slithered its way back to Ypres along icy roads, and the "hireling" Shermans had been handed back in Brussels without regret. Apart from 'A' Squadron's sad losses at Bure, the Ardennes interlude had, on the whole, been a pleasant and interesting one, and the Regiment had made many friends amongst the kind people of Beauraing and Resteigne. Back in Ypres, we were received with open arms, and each man was quickly swallowed up by his old billet, the warmth of his welcome soon thawing the chill of the Ardennes winter from his bones.

Our first major engagement was, of course, a suitable celebration of Christmas, for we had spent December 25th in action stations, with no chance of doing justice to the occasion. Our Christmas fare had been stored in Ypres pending our return, and everything was made ready for a bumper celebration on January 24th. The day passed with considerable gaiety, and was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone except the Town Major, who had had his Christmas already and was not particularly amused by the sounds of revelry which kept him awake until the small hours. The good people of Ypres, however, thoroughly entered into the spirit of the festive season, and every member of the Regiment voted it the best 'Christmas' we had ever had.

When feverish heads had cooled, training began. The first Comets arrived and were received with approbation. They were altogether a vast improvement on the Shermans, possessing a higher speed, a lower silhouette, thicker armour and a very good gun, the 77-millimetre. When we tried this gun out at the range at Gravelines everyone was amazed by its accuracy, which more than compensated for its slightly lower penetrating power compared to a seventeen-pounder. For a period, therefore, the Regiment went "back

"to school" and the tank crews passed temporarily from the control of their Squadron Leaders to be formed into squads by the regimental instructors. Leave had by now begun, and many were the difficulties in combining everyone's training to coincide with the coveted 'vacancies', which had been won by ballot; but despite a few hard cases, this was done successfully.

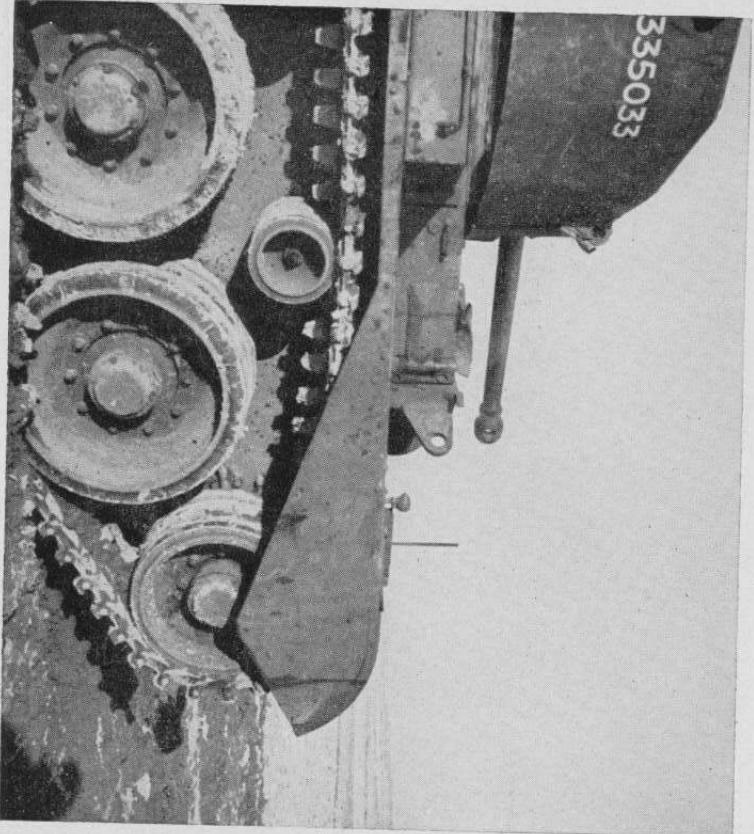
And in this manner February passed comfortably by, with weekly dances and an occasional concert to vary the evenings. Now and then, we spared a thought for our comrades of the Eleventh Armoured Division, who were now fighting the bitter battle of the Reichswald forest, a battle which, from all accounts, we were very lucky to miss, and in which the Fourth Armoured Brigade took our brigade's place in the Division. By the end of the month we knew that our days of comfort and ease were numbered, for the Rhine had been reached, and preparations for its crossing were in progress. We knew that shortly we would be called upon to play a part in the 'Battle of Germany' and, in due course, orders came through for a move to a concentration area in North East Belgium. The Regiment was fully equipped and trained with Comet tanks, and on March 14th, for the second time, we moved out of Ypres to do battle. The people knew we were not coming back this time, and gave us a most heart-felt send-off. Although the move was a secret one, in the usual way every civilian appeared to know about it and duly turned out to wave good-bye. Many a Twenty-third Hussar has since heard from these kind people, and to this day the appearance of our divisional sign in Ypres is the signal for the wildest enthusiasm.

Our new area was a distinct come-down in the comfort line, cosy billets being replaced by the floors of chilly schoolrooms. The area was north of Diest, and was centred on the villages of Veerle, Vorst, Petit Vorst and Schoot, with the rest of Eleventh Armoured Division, which had been withdrawn, grouped round us. There was a small training area, which was put to good use while we were waiting for the second D Day, as the impending operation was frequently called. From the traffic on the roads, the preparations did indeed appear to be on the same scale, and the amphibious equipment that could be seen daily pouring towards the Rhine showed that, as usual, little was being left to chance. Suddenly, there was a lull, the roads became empty again, and the busy bustle of preparation gave way to



Our new Comets firing on the ranges at Gravelines

Another close-up of the Comet.



an atmosphere of tense expectancy. The stage was set, and a vast audience was waiting quietly for the curtain to go up on the last act.

The rumble of guns along the Rhine, which preceded the assault of the Scottish Divisions, was too far away to reach our ears on that March morning. Our countryside appeared quite normal, and no one, for a while, realised that the final battle had begun. But at mid-day we looked up and saw the Sixth Airborne Division going over. It was a great sight. With a throbbing drone, the Dakotas and gliders filled the sky, moving steadily and purposefully towards the Rhine, and Germany. A few short minutes before, the people of Southern England had been watching the same magnificent sight, those same people who stood and watched in silence the German air fleets passing over not so very long ago. The last lap had indeed begun. Many of us remembered a summer's evening in Aldershot, nine months before, when we had stood and watched a similar armada pass over towards France upon that other D Day. The same feeling of excitement and expectancy possessed us now.

Most of us knew the general plan for the employment of the Eleventh Armoured Division, and it sounded a promising one. The Second Army Commander was using us as his reserve, to be launched on his personal authority at whatever he considered the most likely point for exploiting success. Three army corps were operating over the river, Eighth Corps, Twelfth Corps and Thirtieth Corps, and whichever one of them made a breakthrough first, that Corps immediately was to be given the Eleventh Armoured Division, with orders to push straight to the River Elbe. We were proud to be the only possessors of the Comet Tank, and to find ourselves entrusted with such an important and spectacular task.

On March 28th the Regiment moved forward, the tanks travelling on transporters, and we crossed the German frontier just east of Venlo. We expected to halt for a night before crossing the Rhine, but such encouraging reports of the fighting were coming back, that it came as no surprise to us when the Regiment got further orders to concentrate on the far side that same night. We also learnt that Eighth Corps had made the deepest penetration, had linked up with the Sixth Airborne Division, and that Eleventh Armoured and the "Birdmen" were to come under General Barker's command for the coming thrust to the Elbe.

Forward on the last lap: "We were proud to be the only possessors of the Comet tank".



Late that afternoon the advanced elements of the Regiment crossed the Bailey bridge over the swift-running Rhine, and entered the town of Wesel. Much has been written about the destruction that had been meted out to it by the softening up it had endured, but no description could do justice to it. It was utterly wrecked, and a most tortuous route had been made through the rubble, bearing no relation to any of the original roads on the map.

The morning of March 29th found us concentrated, with 'H' Company under our command, on the wooded slopes near Brunen. All round lay smashed and twisted gliders - what a long time it seemed since we had formed up in their company for the ill-fated battle of Caen!

Smoking, shattered farmhouses and twisted German bodies, which were still lying where they fell, bore testimony to the fury of the Airborne's assault. Now they were fighting well on ahead, whilst the Seventh Armoured were twelve miles on, in Raesfeld, still going strongly against light opposition. It was undoubtedly high time we got on the move to reduce their lead.

When we advanced next day, it was as reserve regiment, and by nightfall the Brigade had reached Heiden without opposition. March 30th found us moving behind the Third Tanks through Velen and Geschen at a fair speed, for the leading troops were meeting occasional parties of 'bazooka men'. After Geschen the Regimental group took the lead and, with 'A' Squadron in front, ten miles were covered at a good pace. However, on the outskirts of Holtwick, we ran into a fairly large bazooka party, the first of many we were destined to encounter in Germany.

The 'bazooka' plays such a large part in the following pages that it is worth recording that Hitler, when the invasion of Germany threatened, had tried to rally his shaken ranks with the promise that he would place the 'invincible panzerfaust' in every German's hand. He had certainly placed it in a great many German hands, but the invincible part of the promise was not fulfilled quite so thoroughly. It was, however, a nasty little weapon, based on the 'hollow charge' principle, and fired from the hip. We had met it before, particularly at Helchtern, but never in such quantities as now. We were very glad to be in our Comets for their armour proved far tougher than that of a Sherman, which was not only always

penetrated by a bazooka but usually caught fire as well. The Comets were much safer. Very frequently the bazooka, did not go through the armour at all, particularly if it hit the track plates which we had hung on the turret. But sometimes it did go through, and caused casualties. It was a weapon which had to be taken very seriously.

The Holtwick party which 'A' Squadron had encountered were full of fight, but fortunately extremely inaccurate in aiming their bazookas. They exploded everywhere but on the side of a tank. The Germans were very hard to see until they jumped up to fire their weapons, after which they disappeared into their 'foxholes' with great rapidity. These holes were dug in the gardens of houses and in orchards, and there was not much a tank could do about getting their occupants out. 'A' Squadron fired their guns into the orchards and at the buildings, hoping at least to frighten the Germans into the open. A cottage caught fire and a few enemy leapt from their holes and scuttled away. A few more houses caught fire and the tanks crunched their way over the trim flower beds and vegetable patches at the back of the cottages. No civilians could be seen, for they were hiding in their cellars, probably quite unaware that their houses were burning over their heads. Many German families were roasted or asphyxiated while they crouched in terror below ground until it was too late. This happened all over Germany until the fighting finished. In Holtwick, 'H' Company were now on the scene, methodically 'winkling out' the bazooka men. Slowly the village was cleared. Someone caught sight of a large dim shape moving about on the far side, but could not see whether or not it was a German tank. In view of later events, it obviously was. 'A' Squadron eventually reached the last houses and were about to come out into the open when their leading troop, Second Troop, got into trouble. A bazooka hit one tank's turret and the crew 'baled out' unhurt. The leading tank had gone past the scene of the trouble, and was also attacked. In taking evasive action, it was bogged in a sticky piece of ground. Another tank was hit in the bogies and immobilised. Lieut. Drake himself was pinned to the side of a house and could not advance. But in their usual way, the troop managed to restore the situation without suffering any casualties. When this was done, 'B' Squadron moved through into the lead.

Higher authority had in the meantime become rather fretful about this delay, for the quick advance from the Rhine had made everyone

think along 'swanning' lines. 'B' Squadron were therefore considerably spurred on from behind. Every farmhouse and small copse on the road to Legden held a few bazooka-men and no fewer than thirteen bazookas were fired at the tanks as they went by. There was no time to stop and deal with them, and every tank merely went as fast as it could past farmhouses and woods, hoping that its speed would make the Germans miss. All went well, and this policy even worked going through the village itself, which was full of German soldiers still in a belligerent mood. But our luck did not hold. First Troop, commanded by Lieut. Shelbourne, who had been showing great dash, issued out from a thick wood to find itself assailed on all sides. A loud and dramatic cry over the wireless of 'Bale out!' from Lieut. Shelbourne was followed by an ominous silence. His tank had been knocked out by a self-propelled gun, fortunately without hurt to the crew. Lieut. Burnett's tank was bogged and he was slightly wounded.

The remaining tanks of the troop gave cover for Second Troop to move through and continue the advance, but the leading tank went up in a sheet of flame as it entered the next thick wood. A "stonk" was put on the suspected enemy positions, after which the next tank moved past the blazing leader into the wood. It went fifty yards, and then too blew up in flames, destroyed at close range by an eight-eight, which obviously had the road completely covered. In the failing light, 'H' Company moved into the wood to try and clear it, but the task was too great in the semi-darkness. Several men were still missing from the knocked-out tanks, but no one could get up to look for them. 'B' Squadron Headquarters suddenly noticed a Panther sitting quietly only two hundred yards behind them and before it could become offensive it was neatly knocked out.

The situation was not a pleasant one. The delay caused by this battle had induced those behind to cry "Forward" with great insistence, while those in front, if they did not exactly cry "Back", knew that there was no chance of advancing till the enemy could be seen and dealt with. At the moment, the Germans held the whip hand, for the whole Regiment was in line along a road which could not be left owing to high banks, and the leading Squadron and Regimental Headquarters were stuck fast in a wood, with blazing tanks and an eighty-eight blocking the only road, and with German infantry creeping about amongst the trees. The tanks were clearly illuminated

by the light given off from the burning and exploding Comet and Panther, and to stay in the wood meant at best no rest for anyone, and at worst a good deal of bother with bazookas. So with great difficulty the whole Regiment reversed down the road, and went into close leaguer in various fields, where the night was passed without incident.

First light revealed that the Germans had withdrawn, leaving behind them a dead Panther, four eighty-eights, four half-tracks and six lorries. Our own losses had been six tanks destroyed, five men killed and six wounded, all from 'B' Squadron.

'A' Squadron had been more fortunate, their only casualties being Major Harte and Sergeant Benson, whose tank had become attracted by a tree while moving at high speed. As 'A' Squadron's chronicler rather unkindly relates, the Squadron Leader and his operator looked even worse than usual with cut faces! But, plentifully covered in plaster, they remained at duty.

'B' Squadron resumed the advance, which was uneventful, except that their leading tank, whose commander, after the previous night's events, was rather quick on the trigger, briskly engaged a small vehicle which appeared on the road in front. The "dingo", for that was what it was, reversed violently into a ditch, while two terrified and furious members of the Inns of Court Regiment sprang from it, and hurried back to their Headquarters to complain. Shortly afterwards, a rather curt conversation on the Brigade net showed that the matter had been taken up with "higher authority".

Soon after this little incident, to our great pleasure, we joined up again with the whole Eighth Battalion Rifle Brigade, the usual Squadron/Company groups were formed, and the association continued till the fighting ended. This was obviously a necessary move, for the quantity of woods and bazookas showed that any hopes of "swanning" we may have entertained were not going to be fulfilled, and that there was much less chance of a repetition of last night's situation if our "foot friends" were there too.

For the rest of the day we moved on through Horstmar and Emsdetten behind the Third Tanks, and by midnight we were across the River Ems, harbouring at an important cross-roads east of it. The bridges over the Dortmund-Ems canal appeared to be blown but it was decided that the Division would spend the next day in recon-

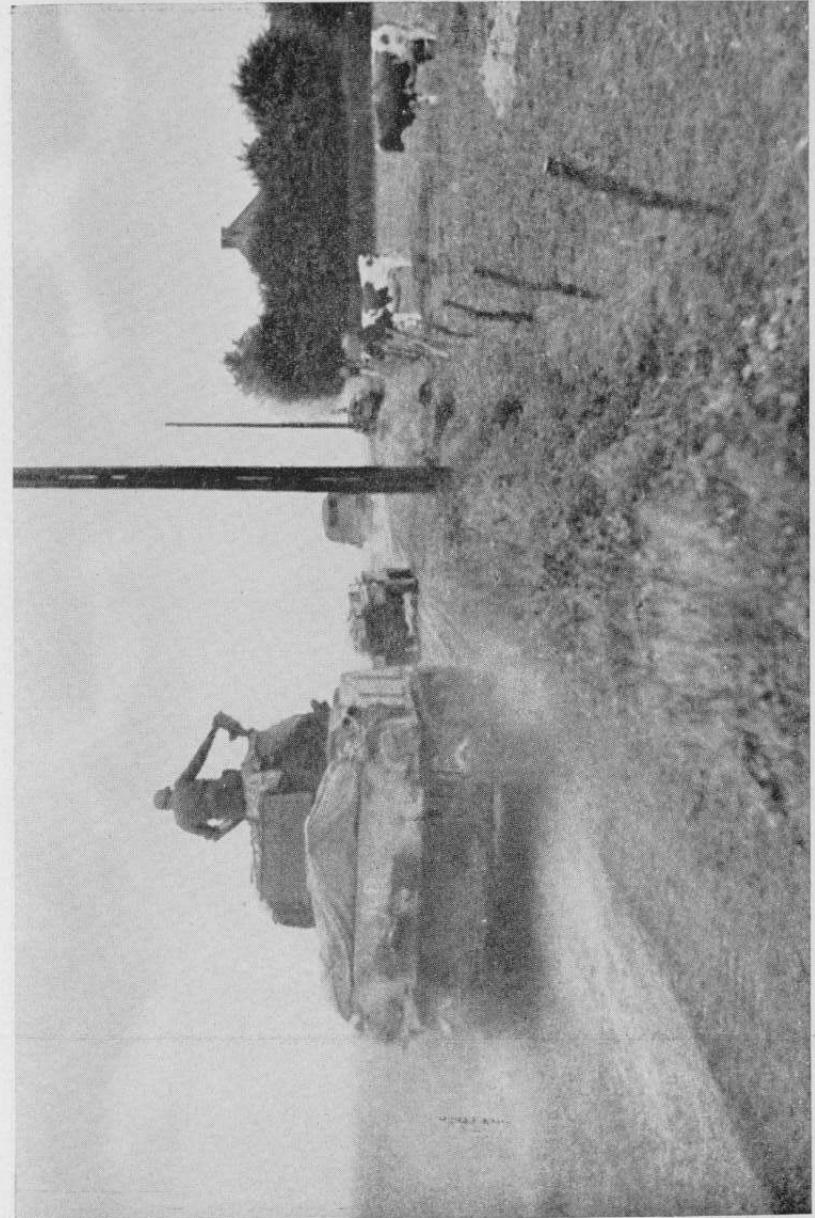
naissance of possible ways across this obstacle. It was overlooked on the far side by the high and wooded ridge of the Teutoburger Wald, the defence of which in ancient times had once repelled the Roman invaders of Germany. By this time we had caught up with the Sixth Airborne and the Seventh Armoured, and our Division was that night mentioned on the B.B.C. as being in the lead.

April 1st was 'C' Squadron's day. The rest of the group remained "in situ", but the 'C' and 'H' combine was sent to Saerbeck to clear it and look at the canal bridge. The village was unoccupied, but they met a heavily defended Flak position on the eastern outskirts, whose defenders made it clear that they were to be taken seriously. The flak guns were situated in a clearing inside a wooded area, a site chosen with a view to anti-aircraft action as opposed to ground defence. Consequently Major Hagger was able to make a personal examination of the position on foot from a farm only two hundred yards away. 'H' Company, two troops and Squadron Headquarters occupied these buildings without loss, while Captain Budgeon, RHA brought down a brisk stonk from his twenty-five pounders. He directed this shoot, as usual, from a completely exposed position, and was shot through the heart by a sniper. So died one of the finest officers we had the fortune to meet. His complete disregard for his own safety had become a byword in the Regiment, and the familiar sight of "Stonker Bill's" cheery face, bowling forward in his tank to help us on, had always done everyone good in times of trouble. The tragedy changed the action from a routine engagement to an opportunity for each man in the group to inflict his own personal revenge upon the Hun without delay. The tanks and riflemen moved forward immediately to the attack, pouring shot and shell furiously into the enemy positions. The last stretch of ground was open and the Germans fought with desperation. A corporal fell, leading his section; his men surged forward and slaughtered a dozen enemy as they crouched in their dug-out. All rules were forgotten as the position was savagely and bloodily overrun, and when resistance ceased fifty Germans lay dead, one hundred and fifty were prisoners and eight 88s were in our hands.

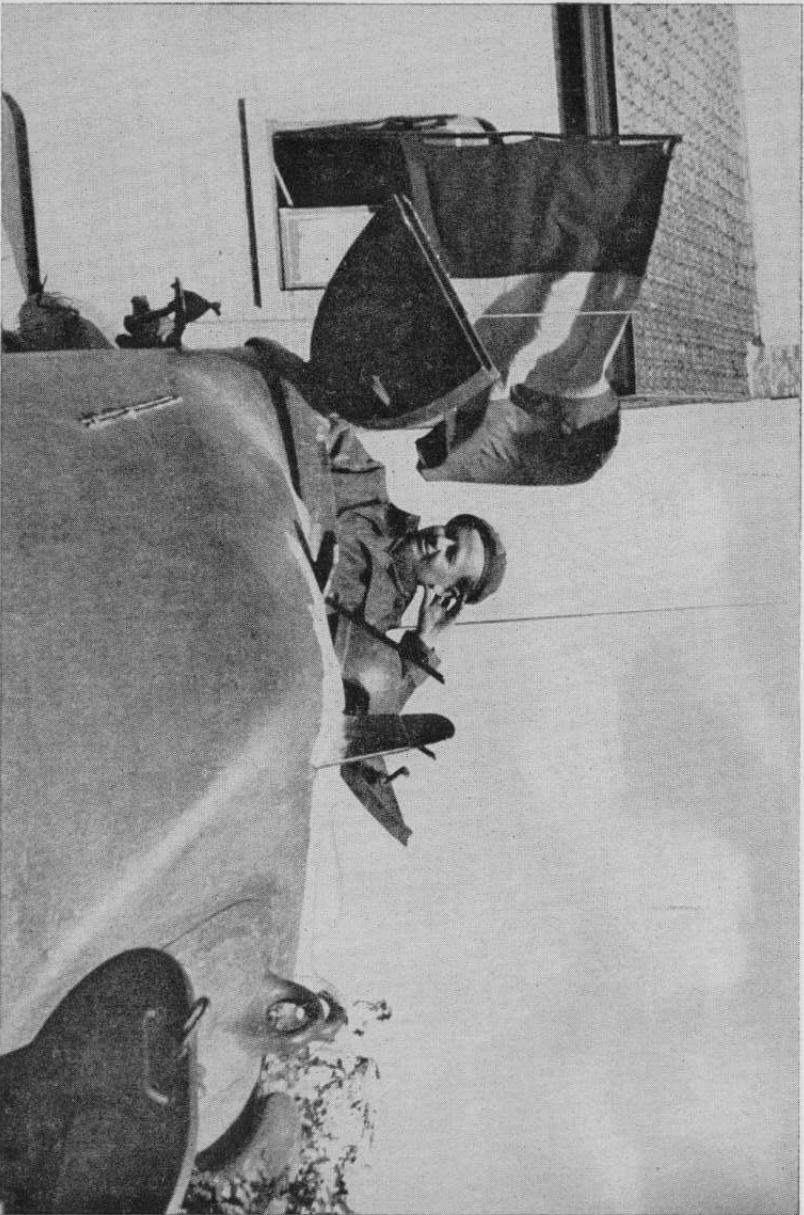
The group pushed on to the bridge, which was blown, and they were engaging another flak position when darkness fell and the battle was broken off.

Meanwhile, the King's Shropshire Light Infantry had crossed the Dortmund-Ems canal with little opposition, and a bridge over it was built during the night. By twelve o'clock on April 2nd we were across, forming up behind the Fifteenth-Nineteenth Hussars who were fighting hard on the wooded slopes of the Teutoburger Wald. Soon we had passed through them, 'B' Squadron and 'F' Company leading, and began to wend our way upwards through the steep and narrow gorge, without meeting any enemy. This was fortunate, as a better defensive position never existed. We gained the top and the leading troop, Fourth Troop, 'B' Squadron, began to enter the small town of Tecklenburg. A most suspicious quietness reigned there and the usual white flags were not in evidence. Accordingly the leading tank advanced down the main street with extreme wariness but his caution availed him nothing, for he was promptly bazooka'd at the main cross roads. The Troop leader reversed through a convenient jewellers shop, and the battle was on.

It was a hard and bitter engagement for not only were the enemy troops fanatical and cunning, but for the first and only time in our campaign the "Volkssturm" turned out and fought alongside the regulars. The news that German civilians were shooting at our men made our pleasure in destroying their township all the greater, and the Colonel remarked to the Brigadier that under the circumstances he proposed to deal with Tecklenburg with great thoroughness. And properly destroyed it was. Systematically, the buildings in which the Germans were lurking were burnt over their heads. They retaliated with fury - a bazooka blew an 'F' Company platoon commander off a 'B' Squadron tank and killed him, while the riflemen fought many a savage engagement in trim cottage gardens. The tanks battled their way slowly down the narrow twisty streets, which by now were littered with broken glass and burning timbers from the old fashioned houses. It was chiefly an infantry battle - 'H' Company was sent in to assist 'F', and gradually, house by house, the defenders of Tecklenburg were killed, taken prisoner or driven back. 'C' Squadron looped north to take the town in the rear, but became heavily involved in bogs and narrow tracks. Those tanks that did get through mistook the way, but entered into the spirit of the engagement. A row of farm houses, far removed from the battle, went up in flames, with a rapidity and thoroughness which revealed the presence of Lieut. Gordon-Smith's troop, while streams of tracer bullets from the same



"Bowling forward in his tank to help us on";  
the unmistakeable silhouette of the late Captain "Bill" Budgeon M.C., 13 RHA



Captain "Garry" Davidge M.C., 13 RHA who fought with us in every battle.

Our other "undauntable OP":

source bounded all over Tecklenburg with superb disregard for friend or foe.

A 1. Echelon had followed us up through the Fifteenth-Nineteenth and were ascending the narrow gorge, when they were violently assaulted by a party of Germans, which had crept up through the woods. This situation, the first one in which the Echelon had been directly attacked, found them thoroughly equal to the occasion. They sprang from their vehicles and enthusiastically discharged their weapons at the Germans, one of whom was brought down from a tree like a wood-pigeon, by a jeep driver with a sten gun. With the assistance of 'E' Company, Eighth Rifle Brigade, the situation was soon under control, but not before both Captain Sandford and Captain Geikie had been badly wounded. As A 1. Echelon Commander and Signal Officer respectively, they had served the Regiment faithfully and well through all our bad times, and their loss was hard to realise, so much a part of the Regiment had they both become. Captain Tonks took over A 1. Echelon, and Captain Young returned from Brigade Headquarters to succeed Captain Geikie as Signal Officer.

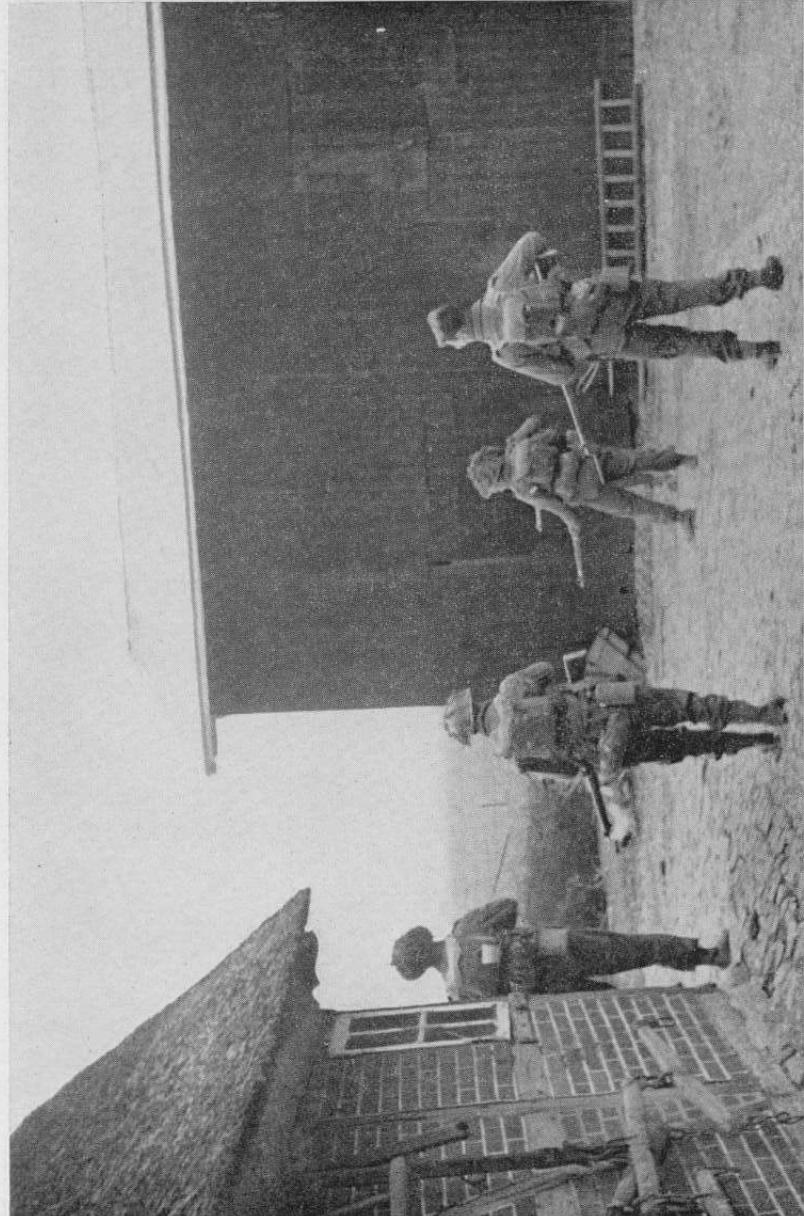
The engagement in Tecklenburg was well in progress by the time the full details of the Echelon battle came in, and we all felt relieved to know that the General had not been involved in the same incident, for he persisted in moving behind us in his Humber staff car, with no escort and a large flag, to the alarm of everyone except, apparently, himself.

The enemy in Tecklenburg had been forced back into the woods by nightfall, and the battered little town was ours. The final enemy blow was struck by a German bomber which dropped a bomb very close to 'B' Squadron Headquarters, knocking Major Blacker and Major Wigan flat on their faces in a ploughed field, but causing no material damage. 'C' Squadron moved into the town hoping for an hour or two's respite but by now we knew that, if we did not reach our objective by day, we were expected (in the Amiens style) to get there by night. Rain began to fall as the Third Tanks passed through us from the south at about midnight to continue the advance towards Osnabrück in pitch darkness. Their column appeared to move in fits and starts and at about 1. a.m. it halted. The leading tank had been bazooka'd and the infantry were clearing the centre line. Then on

they went again, halted again, then advanced again. Rain still poured down. 'H' Company of the RBs dispensed excellent Moselle in the public house in which they had set up their Headquarters, but otherwise the situation was cheerless. At 3 a.m. the Third Tanks were clear and 'C' Squadron advanced, followed by the rest of the Regiment. Tank commanders peered miserably, by the light of waning torches, at rain-sodden and unreadable maps, hoping, without much optimism, that they were on the same road as the tank in front had used. A watery dawn revealed morale at its lowest ebb and it needed a very strong brew of tea, with (for the lucky ones) a dash of whisky in it, to improve the bedraggled condition of the crews. The downpour had most decisively defeated even the "tank-suit" and few tank commanders could claim that they were not completely soaked to the skin.

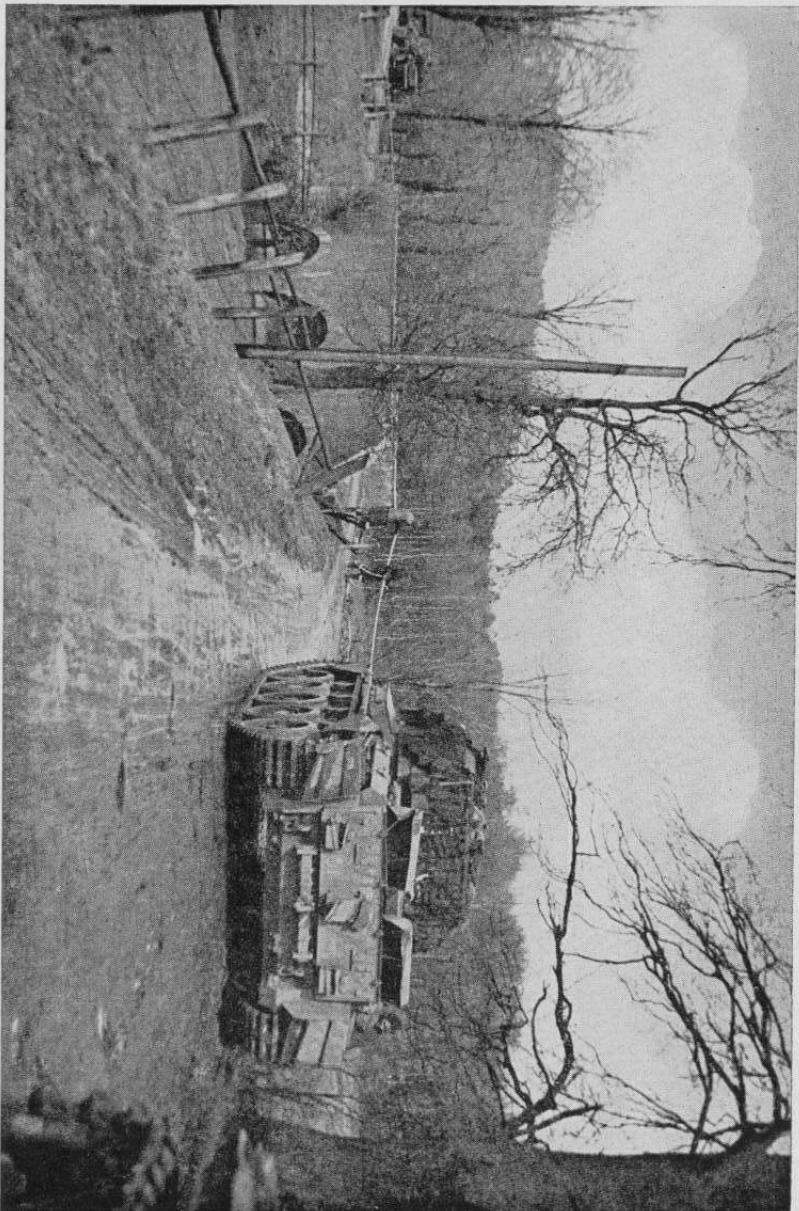
'C' Squadron followed the Third Tanks until our route parted from theirs and pushed on towards Osnabrück, meeting sporadic opposition, which prevented a speedy advance. 'B' Squadron made a loop to the north and destroyed a position consisting of no fewer than twenty 20-millimetre guns, arranged in groups of two or three. 'A' Squadron and 'G' Company were accordingly sent into the lead, and the northern outskirts of Osnabrück were reached after crossing a canal bridge which appeared about to collapse at any moment. The Sixth Airborne and the Sixth Guards Tank Brigade were entering the town to our south, and it was difficult to make out which of the many explosions were friendly and which were enemy. German vehicles, including self-propelled guns, were very liable to appear suddenly from side streets and the whole situation was extremely confused.

'A' and 'G' pushed north from the town, but after three miles had been covered, the two leading tanks commanded by Lieut. Bates and Sergeant Munro were knocked out by armour-piercing fire. Sergeant Marsden's tank was also hit, but managed to reverse out of harm's way. After a delay for a "stink" to be brought down and to allow 'A' Squadron and 'G' Company to manoeuvre against the hidden guns, 'B' Squadron and 'F' Company were passed through, to find three eighty-eights abandoned. Then orders were received that our group had to capture intact the bridge on the Ems-Weser canal at Herringhausen, some twelve miles away, before nightfall. As it



"It was chiefly an infantry battle . . . and gradually house by house the defenders were killed, taken prisoner or driven back"; men of the 8 RB "on the job".

"The northern outskirts of Osnabrück were reached after crossing a canal bridge which appeared about to collapse at any moment": sappers at work on the bridge as one of our tanks waits to cross.



was then 4 p.m., whips were got out, and the wireless sizzled from Brigade to Regimental Headquarters to 'B' Squadron and back again. A road block was encountered. It was demolished at hectic speed, but 'C' and 'H' were looped south to continue parallel to 'B' and 'F' towards our objective. The two groups were level as the miles sped by, leaving gaping German soldiers, dismayed and inactive in the ditches. Lieut. Steinhart spurred his Fourth Troop of 'C' Squadron forward, and, completely out of wireless touch with everyone, he hurtled down the cobbled roads through the failing light towards the bridge, which he reached in time to prevent the startled Germans from demolishing it. His troop arrived five minutes before Second Troop of 'B' Squadron, whose own wireless net had been so overheated that no one realised that 'C' Squadron were trying to reach the same bridge simultaneously. Accordingly an enemy tank was reported to be on the bridge, and a shot was sent whistling through the twilight towards the 'C' Squadron troop, fortunately failing to score a hit. A rapid and rather confused wireless conversation eventually straightened out the situation, but the salient fact emerged - the bridge was intact, and ours!

Next morning we patrolled forward and met no trouble. We did, however, capture a few very ancient and ineffective Germans, who had only been in the army four months. Another equally elderly German appeared riding a bicycle - he had come, he said, to make sure the bridge had been blown!

The Third Tanks moved through us and we followed them for most of that uneventful day. We passed through them at Rahden and harboured the night at Esern, arriving there, as usual, in pitch darkness.

On April 5th we went into the lead again, and 'B' and 'F' were ordered to repeat their successful dash to capture a bridge intact - this time a more important prize, the crossing of the river Weser at Stolzenau.

The advance was all the more exciting, because our Infantry Brigade (159th) were on our right and, led by the Fife and Forfar, had been ordered by their Brigadier to be in Stolzenau before we were. A most thrilling race ensued, our only obstacle being a dead German tank which had looked so "live" in the distance that the leading tank automatically and sensibly, slowed down. But with the wireless

becoming as hot as the pace, we defeated our rivals by five minutes in an exciting contest, and so became the occupiers of Stolzenau. It was a race which, during the next few days, many of us felt we would have done better to have lost, for the bridge promptly went up in our faces, leaving us to make a bridgehead, and wait for a new one to be built.

It proved to be a most uncomfortable and profitless delay. The Germans had obviously recovered from the initial shock of the breakout, for their troops manning the Weser were far younger and tougher than the unhappy specimens of the Wehrmacht which we had met to date, and which, though sometimes fanatical, had been very poor soldiers. Clearly the German Army meant to stand on the Weser and had brought up all the artillery it could lay hands on to prevent a crossing.

The Eighth Rifle Brigade were immediately ordered to make an assault crossing and form a bridgehead. This was done by 'H' and 'G' Companies, with the very sad loss of Captain Philip May, who was killed by a 20-millimetre shell.

They established themselves rather precariously on the far bank, under heavy shellfire and stiff opposition from what was found to be the training battalion of our old Caen enemies, the Twelfth SS (Hitlerjugend). These young thugs fought true to their tradition, savagely, and absolutely without any code of honour or fair play, which made their opponents feel that they were not killing other men, but exterminating vermin.

'B' Squadron did everything possible in the way of support for the RBs on the far side, but we could really help them very little. The rest of the Regiment remained outside the town as a counter-attack force, the only other noticeable incident that day being the discovery of an enormous wine dump by 'F' Company. This dump became famous throughout Eighth Corps and, during the next two days, so many unit representatives appeared, that it was found necessary to signpost the way to the dump with the words "To Hock Point". Eventually we got tired of guarding it and, as no one seemed anxious to relieve us of the responsibility, we withdrew our sentries. Despite the depredations of almost the entire Corps, a considerable quantity of wine remained, and this was much appreciated by the multitudes of 'displaced persons' in the area, who immediately began

to sample it. Soon the streets were filled with riotously happy representatives of the United Nations, all delightfully beyond the control of any authority and thoroughly enjoying themselves. By that time we were fortunately moving away, so were not put in the position of having to sober them down.

This, however, was only the lighter side of the next two days. Fairly regular shelling of Stolzenau had begun, and the town was far from healthy. In the afternoon of the 6th the Luftwaffe came on the scene. It had made frequent tip-and-run raids upon us during the last week, but this was as big an effort as it was, presumably, capable of making. It could only put a very scratch team in the field, however, for a mixed bag of about twenty Heinkels, Junkers and Stukas appeared above us. Immediately the uproar was terrific. Every man seized an automatic weapon of some kind and discharged it into the sky, and the crash of bombs was mingled with a chattering chorus of small arms and the whine of ricochets. Tracer flew all over the sky, giving those who had not managed to seize a weapon as much anxiety as the falling bombs, for the enthusiasm of the marksmen far exceeded their accuracy. In fact, the only thing that was destroyed was a farm house, which had had the misfortune to be between a Bren gunner and his target, and was set on fire by an incendiary bullet. The Luftwaffe flew slowly away, after what must have been one of the noisiest and safest engagements of the war. No bomb hit anyone, no machine gun, as far as one knew, hit an aeroplane, but it had been an exciting interlude. The RAF made no appearance, but it can well be understood that we had outstripped their fighter bases, while the Germans had aerodromes within a few minutes flight of the Weser.

In the meantime 'A' Echelon had not been so lucky, for as they were crossing the bridge over the Osnabrück canal, a German aeroplane made a low-flying attack upon them. It had clearly aimed its bomb at the Second-in-Command's Horch, in which Major Garcia was riding, but his preference for a more comfortable seat and more impressive vehicle stood him in good stead, for the bomb missed the Horch, but shattered his jeep, wounding his driver, Trooper Dutch. The officers' Mess lorry was also much inconvenienced, for it was riddled with holes. There were several casualties in the column, though Lance Corporal Dearnley was the only serious case.

The Sappers were having a very difficult time trying to bridge the Weser, for enemy aircraft kept strafing them and shells fell all round their pontoons. By nightfall, only the smallest beginnings of a bridge were complete, and the RBs were still fighting gallantly in their bridgehead. They had sustained fairly severe casualties, and were due to be relieved by the First Commando Brigade in the morning. Shelling of the town continued, and early on April 7th our Regimental Aid Post suffered a disaster. A stray shell scored a direct hit on the Medical Officer's half-track, seriously wounding him, mortally wounding his batman, and putting out of action his entire staff. Most fortunately, Corporal Preston, the Medical Officer's assistant, arrived at that identical moment from 'A' Echelon, and with great calmness and efficiency he dealt with the casualties. It was with great sorrow that we saw Captain McBeath, cheerful as always, borne away in an ambulance. It had never seemed possible that anyone so full of energy could be laid low and ever since that murky day on Bas Perrier ridge, he had given the most outstanding service to the Regiment. Captain Watson-Jones arrived to take his place, and speedily the R.A.P. was put to rights after its sad shock, the second it had received since the campaign began.

Soon the RBs began to march back from their bridgehead, which had now been taken over by the First Commando Brigade. They had sustained a gruelling battle with heavy casualties, but it was with great pleasure that we learned later that Major Peter Bradford, of 'H' Company, had been awarded the D.S.O. for his very skilful direction of this battle, in which so many of our friends had been lost. It was satisfying to hear that the riflemen had dealt the Germans on the other bank a severe blow which was to have its effect on later battles.

In the afternoon, more aerial activity began, but this time the RAF were there, and we had the pleasure of watching three Messerschmidts shot down in as many minutes. But, quick as our airmen had been, they had not been able to prevent a severe low-level attack on the nearly completed bridge, and a bomb scored a direct hit upon it. The Sappers, who were working in the middle of the fast flowing Weser on pontoons, suffered terrible casualties. The bridge was destroyed and the survivors staggered back into the town. Simultaneously a German bomber roared low over Regimental Headquarters,

and dropped a bomb on the Regimental Headquarters tank troop. It missed the tanks by twenty yards, and the crews were in their slit trenches before it dropped, so fortunately escaped. Most of the tiles were removed from the roof of the Colonel's house, while dust, broken glass and displaced flower pots thoroughly disorganised a party of officers who were peacefully sampling the Stolzenau hock within. Outside, a tragedy had occurred, however, for Captain Rolt, the popular and hardworking Staff Captain at Brigade Headquarters who was also a Twenty-third Hussar, had been killed instantly while alighting from his scout car to visit us.

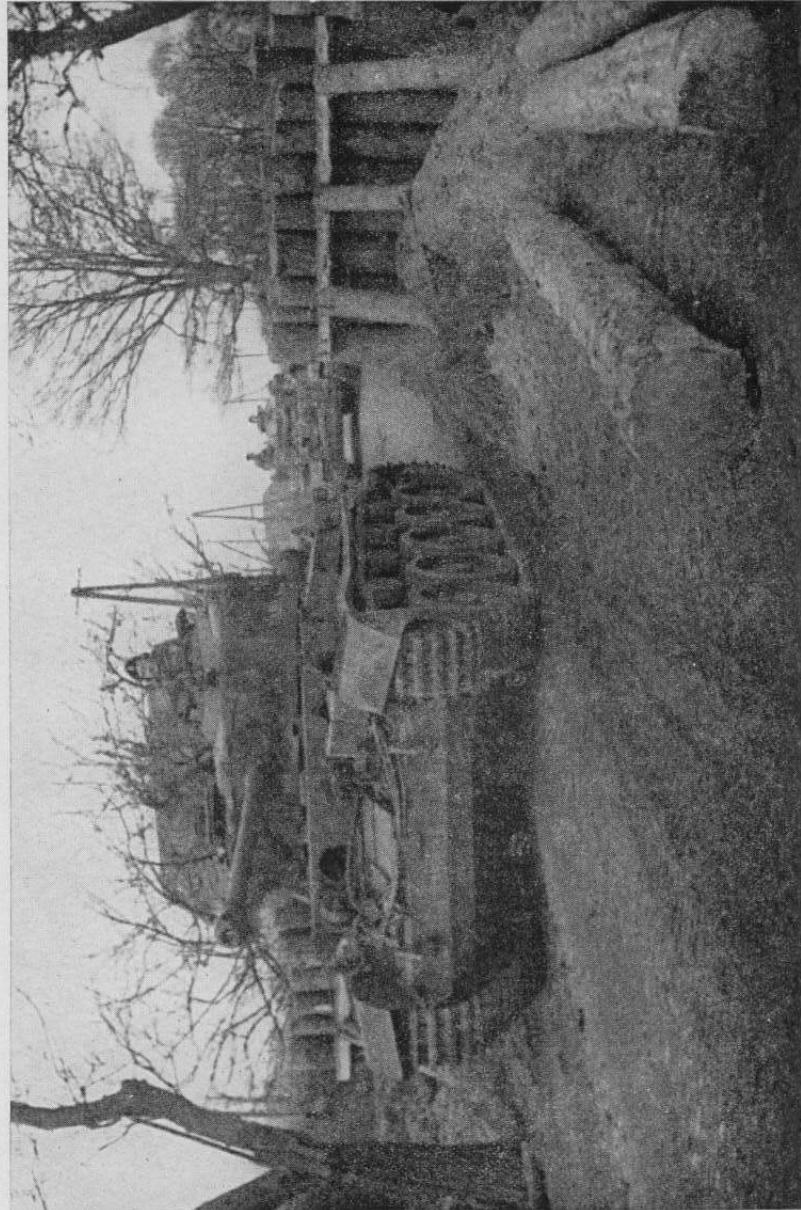
The Commandos were finding the going on the bridgehead tough. The enemy appeared to have a large number of 20-millimetre guns, and their wicked little shells could cause many casualties. Occasionally they fired a few of them into the town, hitting roofs and walls of buildings with a vicious little "pop". Late in the afternoon, however, the Commandos were in a position to assault the village of Leese and, supported by fire from 'A' Squadron from our side of the river, they were in the outskirts before nightfall. The news had come through, meanwhile, that the Sixth Airborne had built a bridge at Petershagen to our south and were across the Weser. We were, next day, to follow them over it, swing north and resume our advance. No one much liked the idea of the Eleventh Armoured Division being forced to use a bridge established by another division because we could not make one of our own but, in fairness to ourselves, later events proved that the farther north one fought, the harder became the resistance, as the Germans were clearly falling back on Bremen and Hamburg.

Failure to achieve an object is always disappointing - everyone had done their best to cross at Stolzenau, and many gallant lives had been lost in the attempt. Eventually, no doubt, we would have succeeded, but as a bridge to our south was now in existence, it obviously was a saving in time and lives to use it.

'C' Squadron left at dawn on April 8th, crossed at Petershagen and came under command of the First Commando Brigade for the attack on Leese. This was successful, and they advanced as far north as Landesbergen where a large V bomb factory was discovered. The rest of the group crossed late in the afternoon. It was a boiling hot

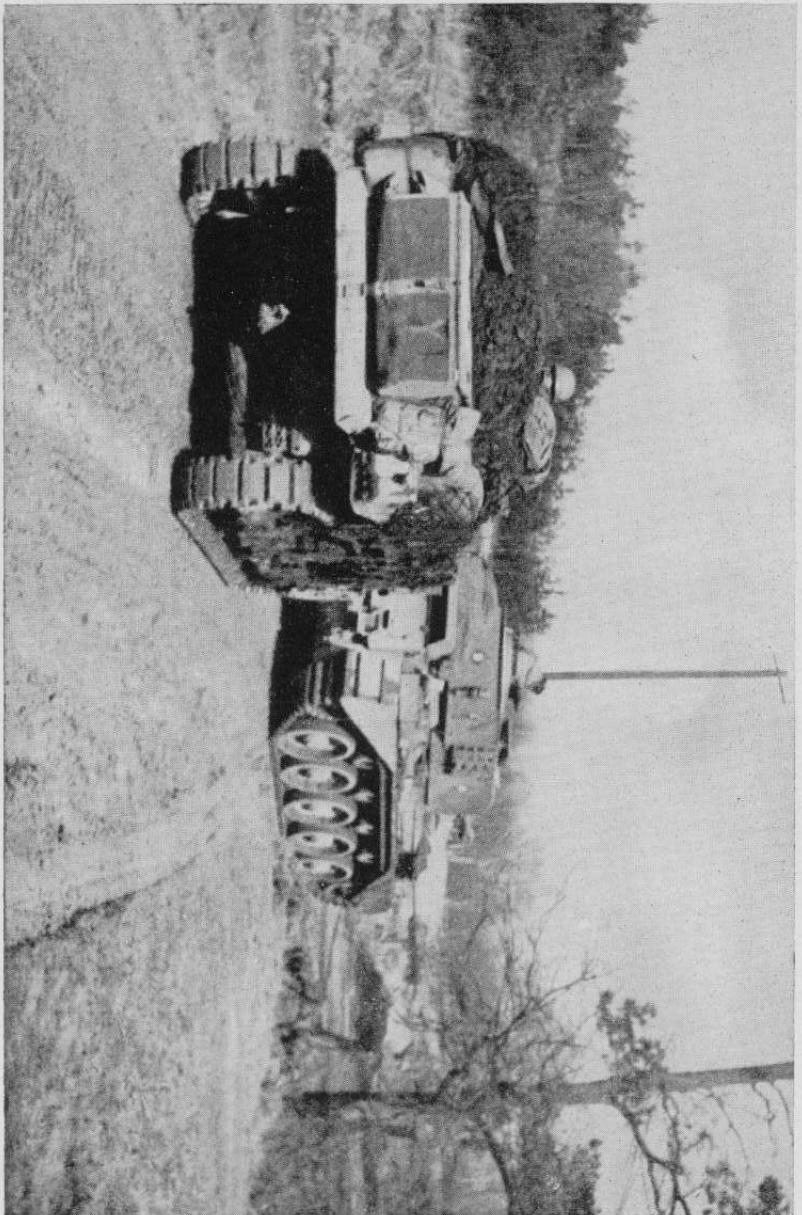
day, the sky was blue and the roads were packed with every military vehicle known to man. Vehicles from the Sixth Airborne, lorries from every Regiment of gunners, tanks from our brigade, troop transporters from the 159th Brigade, and a great variety of transport columns, all combined to make our march to Petershagen a jerky, complicated, and very slow affair. Rumbling along in a tank, frequently halting and then moving on, it was possible to sum up in one's mind the impressions gained since we had crossed the Rhine. It must be admitted that uppermost was a slight feeling of disappointment. Surely we should be going faster. But every day seemed to produce something to check us, something to prevent us achieving successes equal to the dash across the Somme and the overrunning of the defenders on that memorable advance to Antwerp. Just when we appeared to be gaining momentum, just when the Germans appeared to be most disorganised before us, and we were beginning to look for the next map to put on our boards, "bang" would go a bazooka, and then we would be involved in the slow process of rooting out a determined enemy, with the riflemen bearing the brunt. We had looked forward to cruising down autobahns, but instead we found twisty country lanes, innumerable woods and many streams and rivers, where dash and the speed of our Comets availed us nothing. Perhaps we had been optimistic. After all, the Germans were now fighting in their own country. But we could not be blamed for hoping for a chance to show what we could do, and unfortunately it had never really come. What had been most amply shown, however, was the courage and skill of the tank crews, for the leading tank was virtually certain to have at least a bazooka fired at it before it went very far. If our casualties had not been heavy, we had by no means been unscathed, while many familiar faces in the Eighth Rifle Brigade were missing. Bullets do their work impartially, whether the date be April 1940 or April 1945, but the leading crew had never allowed this to daunt them and had always pushed ahead.

We wondered about the German civilians, and how they differed in different districts. The Rhineland and Westphalia had been a mass of waving white flags, flags from every window, flags on every isolated farmhouse. In some villages people had even waved to us. Near the Ems, this had changed. In undamaged Emsdetten, one had caught an occasional bitter glare from the eyes of a woman in a window, covertly watching us pass. Then Tecklenburg, with civilians,



"Every day seemed to produce something to check us, something to prevent us achieving successes equal to the dash across the Somme"

"We had looked forward to cruising down autobahns but instead we found twisty country lanes, innumerable woods and many streams and rivers where the dash and speed of our Comets availed us nothing"



whipped up by the Gestapo, fighting savagely at the side of the German soldier. After Tecklenburg, a dull, cowed, treacherous people with no fight left. After the Weser, what then? Would they be looking over their shoulders at us with indifference or even relief, their eyes fixed on the East, where the Russians loomed, or would they turn and fight to the last? Would the Werewolf movement ever start? One had seen no signs of it so far. Would the Germans capitulate before we met the Russians? It did not look as though sufficient control was left to Hitler for him to order it even if he wanted to. More likely, individual units would fight on, while others capitulated, until the Wehrmacht disintegrated into a chaotic mass of fragments, some pounded into dust, others still sharp and dangerous. What fearful bedlam were we heading for, when every one of the millions in field grey at last realised that Germany was without hope, defenceless, at the total mercy of the foes she hated and dreaded, and upon whom she had committed terrible crimes? Only time could show. And so our thoughts ran on idly, as the tanks rumbled jerkily onwards in the April sunshine.

In due course we crossed the Weser and thrust northwards with very little incident through Loccum, Rehburg and Schneeren, where we passed the night. Near our harbour the KSLI had encountered another company of the Twelfth SS Training Battalion, and had had the sort of battle one would expect with them. In the course of it, their medical corporal was shot as he was bending over wounded with a large red cross on his arm, and two KSLI men who had been captured, were later found dead, slaughtered in cold-blood by these very typical specimens of the Hitler Youth.

We knew that there were three more companies of this notorious battalion still in the area, so were fully prepared for them when we passed through the Third Tanks on the morning of April 9th, 'A' Squadron and 'G' Company leading. Soon Third and Fourth Troops of 'A' Squadron had the pleasure of knocking out two eighty-eights on tow behind half-tracks, together with a 75-millimetre gun, before approaching the village of Steimbke. On entering it, Corporal Anderson's tank, which was in the lead, was bazooka'd and set on fire. He and his crew coolly extinguished the flames and continued to fight. Soon it was clear we were up against a company of the Twelfth SS, and accordingly no quarter was asked or given. 'G'

and 'H' Companies began to clear the village, while 'A' Squadron surrounded it on three sides, firing at it with all they had and converting it into a masterpiece of destruction. Soon an alternative route to the south was found, and 'B' Squadron and 'F' Company thereupon bypassed Steimbke and made for our next objective, the river Leine. The rest of the group remained engrossed in the liquidation of Steimbke, which soon assumed most spectacular proportions, nearly every house being ablaze. Regimental Headquarters decided that this was a party that should not be missed, and joined in. Eventually the historic moment arrived when the CO's gun went off, for the first time in the campaign. The round did considerable damage to a house, but even more damage to the vast collection of codes, orders and maps which the Adjutant, as gunner, had perforce to abandon on the floor of the tank, in order to discharge his duty. So great was the confusion in the turret, that grave fears for the success of future operations prevented the experiment from being repeated!

Very soon the Hitler Youths began to display signs that they did not like this treatment, and a considerable quantity bolted out of the village towards a wood to the north. This could not have suited 'A' Squadron better, for the open ground they had to use was completely covered by a trooper, and the SS men were mown down in heaps as they crossed it. From the village, sullen, greasy looking, striplings, with the SS flash, came running, hands raised, their faces contorted with pain whenever the heavy boot of a rifleman was applied to a tender spot. Steimbke, smoking and wrecked, was clear, after a model operation, which cost the enemy one hundred and fifty casualties.

The limelight now switches to 'B' Squadron. With 'F' Company, they reached Nord-Drebber, but the leading RB carrier was bazooka'd at the outskirts.

Immediately the village was set on fire, and after a tough fight against German Marine troops, many of whom were killed or captured, 'B' and 'F' were able to push on. Fourth Troop of 'B' Squadron got within sight of the Leine bridge, but were fired on and could not approach it before it was blown. When Second Troop tried to support them, Lieut. Vickers' tank was knocked out by a seventy-five, the crew baling out with sufficient rapidity to avoid being hit by the second round, which followed the first without delay. Lieut. Cuddy

in the next tank, spotted the gun and knocked it out, but we could make no further progress towards closing up to the river.

The situation facing the Division at the moment was an awkward one, for we were at the confluence of two rivers, the Leine and the Aller. If we captured the Norddrebber bridge, only one mile beyond it, we would have to capture another bridge over the Aller. Naturally the enemy knew this to be a danger point and, helped by thickly wooded country, he was determined to make this his next stop line. On our south the Sixth Airborne had temporarily dropped out, to be replaced by the Fifteenth Scottish, who were now endeavouring to force the Leine. On our northern flank, the Seventh Armoured had not yet drawn level with us, and before them had a stiff fight to force the crossing of the Aller.

The next three days were very boring, but while we chafed at having to sit still for so long, 159th Brigade made a crossing at Mandersloh. On the 13th, we crossed behind the Third Tanks, and harboured quietly between the two rivers, though the Third Tanks were now across the Aller, having a very unpleasant day with Tigers and 105-millimetre anti-aircraft guns, which proved to be most effective anti-tank guns as well. Early on April 14th we, too, crossed the Aller, and followed the 15/19th Hussars towards Winsen, which they did not capture until evening, and which was a hard nut to crack.

We were all talking at this time of an incident which had occurred just before the Aller crossing. A large German staff car, bearing a white flag, had suddenly motored into the Divisional lines. From it stepped a Colonel Schmidt, who demanded to see the General. From the General he was passed on to the Corps Commander, and to him he explained the object of his mission. There was, he stated, a camp of some sixty thousand political prisoners on the far side of the Aller, many of whom had typhus. He expressed the fear that should fighting break out in the area of this camp, the prisoners might escape and spread disease far and wide, and he suggested a forty-eight hour truce to allow the German forces out of this area. He would leave the Aller bridges intact and make ready to renew the battle two miles north of the danger area. Asked to point out the position of this camp on the map, he indicated a small village in the middle of a thick wood, called Belsen. Discussions upon points of detail immediately began, but the German suggestion, that they should be allowed to

withdraw unopposed, was rejected on the grounds that the line on which they proposed to re-form did not allow the British forces sufficient room to deploy north of Belsen. Eventually negotiations virtually broke down, and the only points on which both sides were in agreement were that the entrance to the camp should be clearly marked, that there should be no fighting within the camp area, and that the Hungarian SS, who were to be left to guard the prisoners, were to wear white arm-bands and were to be as inviolate as umpires on a scheme. In our innocence, the thought did cross our minds that the prisoners must be exceptionally vengeful to require such strict precautions against a break-out, but no inkling of their real condition occurred to anyone.

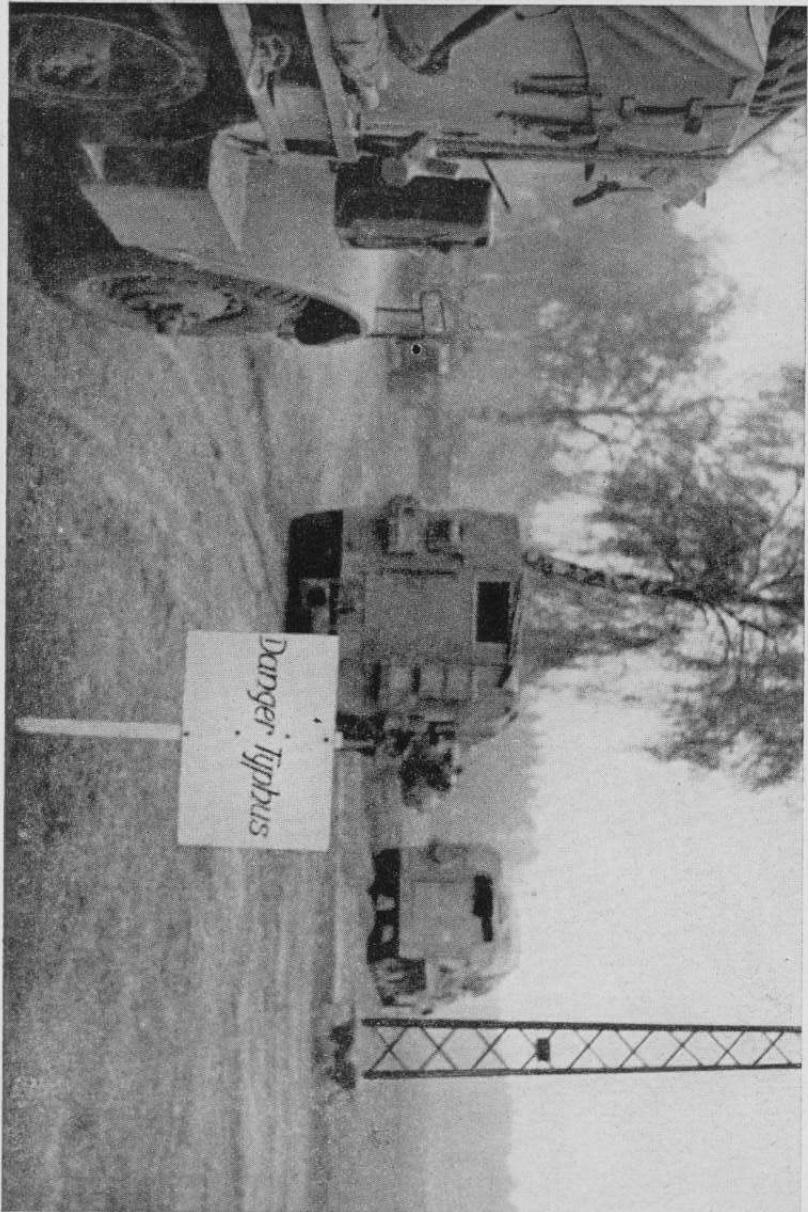
At any rate, the Aller had to be forced, the woods cleared and Winsen taken. 'B' and 'F' were again in the lead on the morning of the 15th and meeting scattered opposition and mines, they reached the first notice proclaiming a typhus-infected area. They pushed on, followed by the rest of the Regiment, the first British troops to enter Belsen. Lining the road were brown-uniformed, swarthy little Hungarians with white armbands, quite unabashed and occasionally even having the impudence to give the Fascist salute. A few sullen Germans were seen, also sporting white arm bands. In the woods, on the sides of our route, one could see the spiked iron bars of the prison camps and the roofs of the huts, but we only caught a fleeting glimpse of the inmates, a glimpse which was vivid enough to make us realise that this was no ordinary prison camp. A big iron gate, firmly bolted, held back a crowd which swarmed in a spacious courtyard. On our side of this barrier, prostrate on his belly, lay a Hungarian, tensely gripping a machine gun which, on its tripod, was pointed unwaveringly at the mob which clamoured at the gate.

A quick glance, which was all one had time to give to the scene, gave one the impression that there was something odd about this crowd, something primitive and animal about the way they pressed intently against the bars. The very attitude of the Hungarian showed he had no illusions about them, and, only a few days later, when our medical personnel gave us the details which were soon to shock the world, did we realise quite what a plague-spot we had uncovered. Everyone knows now the true facts about Belsen. It is sufficient to say that they have not been exaggerated.



"The next two days were very boring, while we chafed at having to sit still for so long": our tanks in a typical harbour in a typical German field.

"They reached the first notice proclaiming a typhus-infected area": 8 RB half tracks with whom we were the first to enter Belsen.



By midday, the infested area was behind us and we occupied Bergen without difficulty. 'A' and 'G' then encountered opposition at Beckedorf, which they reduced without much difficulty, taking many prisoners, and liberating a large Allied Prisoner of War camp. They then swung north towards Bornstorf, which had already been entered by the Recce Troop. Captain Turquand's "Dead End Kids", by which rather uncomplimentary nickname the Honey crews were known, had had a great deal of new blood injected into them just before the Rhine crossing. During the campaign of the last fortnight, several of these keen new members of the troop had complained that "they ain't seen nothing yet".

None of them made a similar complaint again after they emerged from Bornstorf. The troop had been ordered to capture the bridge in the village intact and, going with great dash, Lieut. Farquhar's section accomplished this without delay, brushing aside the opposition and knocking out some horsed transport. Once on the bridge, the troop disposed itself in tactical position but, by the time this was done, it became all too obvious there were large numbers of belligerent Germans in the village and that the Recce Troop was surrounded by them. Fierce interchanges of fire began, but the troop, knowing they had to hang on to the village, held their own. Sergeant Wheeler's tank was bazooka'd, but the crew baled out safely. A few German prisoners were taken, and they imparted the news that the village was full of Germans, many of whom were SS. That they were right was soon clear, for enemy bazooka teams began closing in on all sides, creeping up hedgerows and round houses, obviously encouraged by the fact that the tanks they were up against were much smaller than usual. Another Honey was knocked out, the commander being wounded and the gunner killed, and the situation began to look ugly. To the Recce Troop's great relief, 'C' Squadron and 'H' Company arrived at the right moment and set about clearing the village, a task which had by now become almost a drill. Most of the village was soon alight, in the approved style, but although 'C' Squadron lost one tank, in which the driver was wounded, in the end, the bodies of seventy SS men were counted, with a considerable number of prisoners taken. The Recce Troop had certainly taken on a substantial task in holding Bornstorf.

'A' and 'G' were, in the meantime, thrusting northwards to rejoin the Regiment, and at a group of farmhouses six hundred yards south

of Regimental Headquarters, they encountered an enemy position. This they assaulted with their customary vigour, which must have been very uncomfortable for the enemy, but was just as uncomfortable for Regimental Headquarters, which was in the direct line of fire and received all the "overs". In the end they extracted a hundred prisoners from the buildings and surrounding foxholes.

As darkness was falling, 'B' and 'F' thrust north towards the village of Hetendorf, frightening off some of the Hungarian SS who were holding the woods, and the small bridge in front of their objective. When they were installed in their night positions, their Echelon made a rather hazardous trip up to the tanks, for roving bands of SS men were on the war path. The small bridge, which had nobly borne the weight of all 'B' Squadron's Comets, met its Waterloo when the robust SSM Beynon essayed to cross it in his jeep, for, with an agonised groan, the whole structure collapsed beneath him.

Next morning we were ordered to capture the river crossing three miles away at Reiningen. 'B' and 'F' pushed forward through the woods, meeting scattered mines, but no opposition. On the outskirts of the village, the leading carrier was knocked out and a vicious battle followed. We were again up against the Hungarian SS, and they fought like their German equivalents, using accurate sniping and bursts of Spandau to try and kill commanders. Our infantry had some casualties, and the village began to blaze in the usual way. Sergeant Green, after a hazardous foot "recce", reported that the bridge was blown. While standing on his tank directing some fire, Lieut. Woodland was gravely wounded by a sniper. His operator got out to help him, but could not get back again owing to rifle fire, which set the tank's tarpaulin alight. Eventually, after Lieut. Woodland had been evacuated in a carrier, the gunner, Trooper Shilton, coolly commanded the tank, which was now smouldering, back to cover, being directed by Corporal Kipping who was talking to him over the infantry telephone. One of the Squadron Headquarters 95-millimetre Cromwells, commanded by Captain O'Reilly, moved up short of the bridge to lay smoke. From this position, Captain O'Reilly dismounted and under heavy spandau fire, he dragged in a wounded Sergeant from 'F' Company. A few minutes later he himself was wounded in the face and eyes, while directing the laying of smoke. While the crew were struggling to render him first aid,

and to lay their smoke at the same time, a large portion of one of the blazing houses collapsed on the top of their tank, setting it on fire. This forced them back under cover, and there the fire was controlled and Captain O'Reilly evacuated. It was now decided that we were to withdraw from this village, and to come into Brigade reserve on the main centre line, which was now clear. 'C' Squadron had been working parallel to 'B', but had met many mines and could make very little progress. The whole group therefore concentrated, and a comparatively peaceful march was made for some distance behind the Third Tanks, and we spent the night at Wriedel.

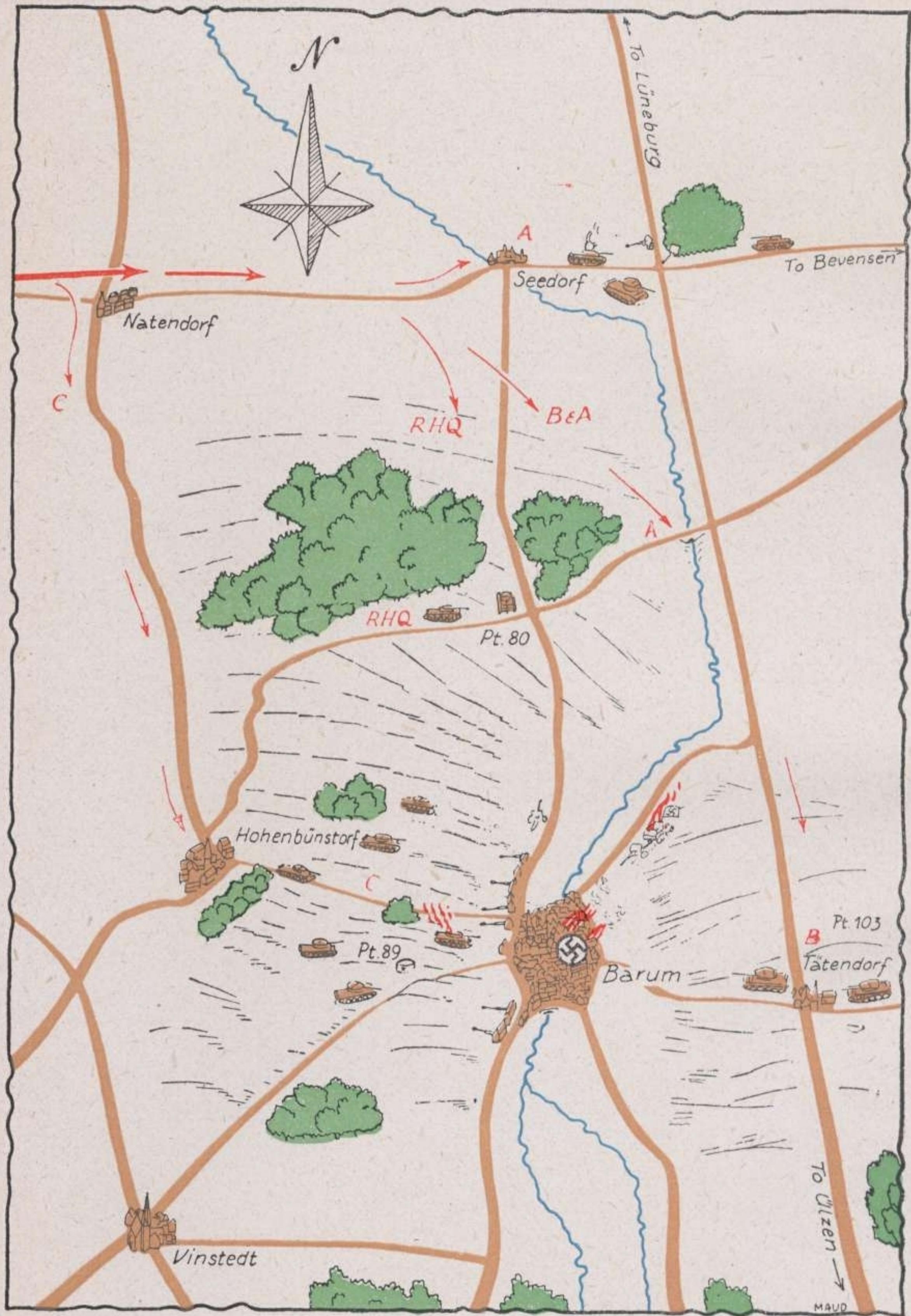
That evening we had the pleasure of pinning to our map-boards the sheet which included the river Elbe. But it was not to be our next objective for, to our south, the Fifteenth Scottish had been halted at the gates of Uelzen. Before they were to make their final onslaught upon it, the Eleventh Armoured were to swing round the north of the town to encircle it and cut the enemy's escape routes, while the Sixth Airborne thrust round the east to complete the trap.

Our job was to cut the main Uelzen-Lüneburg road and to lie in wait for the unsuspecting enemy as they withdrew northwards, in front of the Fifteenth Scottish. With 'A' and 'G' in the lead, we moved off on the clear spring morning of April 17th, across rich undulating country, without meeting any trouble until we turned east to cut the main road.

When the two leading tanks of 'A' Squadron were within two hundred yards of their objective, disaster befell them. They had advanced almost into the mouth of two eighty-eights which with furious energy reduced them to flaming wrecks within a few seconds. At this point-blank range casualties were of course heavy, and among those killed was the popular Sergeant Littlewood and several old 'A' Squadron friends. The crossroads and wood were bombarded by every kind of artillery piece, and eventually the Typhoons reduced the position with their devastating rockets. 'A' Squadron, manoeuvring north and south, destroyed two eighty-eights, which were being towed away. While the position was finally being cleared up by 'G' Company, with the discovery of three more eighty-eights, 'C' and 'H' were ordered to swing south through Hohenbünstorf and Barum, to cut the main road near Uelzen. They set off across the

undulating country, preceded by a vanguard commanded by Captain Bishop, consisting of the usual tank troop, carrier section and platoon in half-tracks. Hohenbüinstorf yielded a handful of prisoners, but as the leading troop was ascending the high ground which overlooked the village of Barum, desultory fire opened up from a wood on the right of the road. This was soon silenced, but tank commanders searched the entrance to the village with some suspicion before moving on. No sooner had the leading tank crossed the ridge than it was fired on from the village. It was hit twice, but by an extraordinary chance neither shot penetrated the armour, the first smashing the side bin and the second striking the driver's periscope and lodging in the gun mantlet. Simultaneously, bazookas opened fire from the wood, and the tanks drew back behind the ridge. It was evident that the wood would first have to be cleared, and the riflemen proceeded to do this. After a pillbox had been demolished, the group were able to reach a crest overlooking Barum itself. It lay in a cup formed by sloping hills on either side, an ordinary little village which might well have been English. All was peace, possibly rather too peaceful, the only movement coming from the quietly grazing cows.

The whistle of a 25-pounder shell, followed by the crunch of falling masonry, as the RHA registered on the village, broke the stillness. From our position, the ground sloped gently down into the bottom of the cup, absolutely bare and open. Somehow it had to be crossed, a risky proposition when one remembered the gun which had already hit our tank. Speed in gaining the main road was the prime need, so it was decided that a dash should be made for it. First Troop was ordered to advance at full speed towards the village, followed by a platoon of halfttracks, slightly to the flank and down a road. This expedition was covered by another troop and Squadron Headquarters. A heavy concentration of artillery fire was put down on the near edge of the village and the leading three tanks charged down the hill at full speed, making two hundred yards before the hidden anti-tank guns came to life. The air was suddenly alive with tearing, scorching shot, and a volley of reports like the cracks of a giant whip shook the ridge. Firing started again from the pill box and from the woods behind, and for a moment chaos reigned. The two leading tanks, commanded by Lieut. Procter and Sergeant Smith,



The Barum Battle  
APRIL 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945

went up in a sheet of flame, the third ducked back behind the crest. Smoke fired from Squadron Headquarters made an incomplete screen before the burning tanks. On the road the leading halftrack was hit by a 50-millimetre shell. The smoke screen was quickly thickened by the RHA to enable the baled-out crews to escape, for they were crouching behind their tanks, still under fire. Eventually everyone of them returned unscathed, and it was found later that the crews owed their lives to the speed of the Comets, for the German gunners had underestimated the "aim off" and had hit both tanks in the engine compartment.

Obviously Barum was not going to be a simple proposition. While another plan was made, 'B' and 'F' were passed north of the village, joined the main road and turned south towards Tatendorf. The defenders of this village put up little resistance, and four eighty-eights were destroyed. The weak defence of this village did in fact seal the fate of Barum, for it was all part of the same plan of defence. Its fall enabled 'B' Squadron to get into position due east of Barum, and over the roofs of that village 'B' could see 'C' Squadron formed up on the ridge due west of it. With 'A' and Regimental Headquarters in position to the north, the entire cup in which Barum lay could be traversed by our fire. This excellent manoeuvre had in fact completely surrounded the Germans in the village, for 'B' and 'C' could cover the south as well as east and west. Now it was just a question of how long the cornered rat would fight, and it fell to 'C' and 'H' to play the part of the terrier which dashes in to finish it off, risking the last vicious bites of its victim.

A few of the more timid members of the garrison tried to cut and run for it, but got short shrift at the hands of 'B' Squadron. Lieut. Payne, the RHQ Troop leader, opened fire from a wooded ridge overlooking Barum three thousand yards to the north. Most of the members of Regimental Headquarters, including many of the Eighth Rifle's HQ, were grouped on the back of his tank in great excitement, all proffering useful and useless gunnery advice, as he tried to hit an eighty-eight in a churchyard. He succeeded in destroying it with his third shot, but the enthusiasm and self congratulations of his helpers were rather tempered by the discovery that it was not an eighty-eight at all, but a large bier with a plank sticking out of it!

In the meantime 'C' and 'H' had rushed the pillbox and inflicted thirty enemy casualties.

All this had taken time, and the sun was beginning to set when the final plans for the assault were made. The enemy showed no signs of giving in, and still that deadly piece of open ground, on which the two Comets blazed, had somehow to be crossed. 'H' hour arrived, and suddenly the centre of Barum received the impact of a whole regiment of medium artillery. The deep "crunch" of their explosions filled the air with smoke and red brick-dust from the stricken village, and soon the barrage lifted to be replaced by the lighter crack of 25-pounders, heralding the moment for the advance. Smoke shells slanted down from the sky, falling between the village and 'C' Squadron. The other Squadrons opened fire from the flanks, a barn full of ammunition went up in an enormous blaze, while 'A' Squadron and the Second-in-Command's tank shared the destruction of an eighty-eight near it. Barum was an inferno as the Squadron and Company advanced, the infantry walking doggedly through the smoke in ragged lines, the tanks rumbling along beside them, with Major Hagger in the lead and Major Bradford standing in his tank beside him. Two hundred yards away from the first houses, Second Troop dashed forward into the farm buildings, as the barrage lifted to the centre of the village. Riflemen leapt forward and disappeared into the gardens of the shell-torn, smoking houses; then some tanks, then more riflemen, then more tanks, churning up the soft ground and adding dust to the pall which hung over the village. A few minutes later tanks were in the centre of Barum and, by the light of blazing houses, the enemy were finally vanquished.

This battle was one in which the Regiment can take great pride, for it was a triumph of skilful manoeuvre by the Commanding Officer and all squadrons had played a vital part in its success. The co-operation and timing between all arms had been a model, and as an example of an armoured regimental group's attack upon a strongly held position, it is not immodest to say that it can seldom have been bettered. The results speak for themselves. For the loss of four tanks, five men killed, five men wounded, two riflemen killed and two wounded, we had destroyed that day ten eighty-eights, two seventy-fives, four thirty-seven millimetre Flak guns, a great many halftracks, armoured carriers and transport, killed sixty Germans and taken one hundred and fifty prisoners, all against determined opposition.

Quite apart from the central episode that day, 'B' Squadron sent their Fourth Troop eastwards to the railway line at Bevensen, to contact the Sixth Airborne or to destroy any fleeing Germans. This was rendered difficult by the knowledge that the Sixth Airborne were riding in captured vehicles, so they could not be sure if they were shooting at a German vehicle or at a lorry owned by the "Birdmen". But, nevertheless, execution was done to the right people, and next morning contact was made with the Airborne.

The "Uelzen trap" was now closed, but slightly late. By midday April 18th, it was obvious that little was to be gained by waiting any longer, so we turned round and pushed up to Lüneburg behind the Third Tanks. While they reconnoitred forward into the town, which did not appear to be held, we bypassed them to the east and pushed northwards to the River Elbe. The main body stopped at Bärendorf, but 'A' Squadron went forward to Neetze, with orders to send patrols to Kartze and the big river. A seventy-five was knocked out in Neetze, and First Troop engaged what they took to be enemy transport skulking in a wood. Transport it was indeed, but not the sort they imagined. Further search revealed that the destroyed vehicles were the caravans of a circus! Two lions lay dead as a token of the accuracy of 'A' Squadron's aim, but it was understood that two bears had made off into the wood unscathed. Next morning it was found that the circus was Belli's, which had performed under Bertram Mills at Olympia in 1939. The attractions which had been spared by 'A' Squadron included two elephants, many ponies, a monkey whose turn consisted of plucking the feathers from a resigned-looking chicken, and several fat women. They saw fit to celebrate the occasion by a drinking bout which made them extremely merry and rather over-friendly.

On the night of the 18th, the Eleventh Armoured were reported on the B.B.C. as having reached the Elbe, the first troops to reach the river which had looked such a long way off, even on a quarter-inch map. So now there was nothing much for us to do but wait for its crossing. We accordingly settled down in the little village of Westergellersen, where we rested and waited for the bell to signal the start of the "last round".

We had only the slightest military commitments and it was a peaceful ten days. The only novelty was the proximity of the inhabi-

tants of the village. For the first time we were living not in the farms of French, Belgians or Dutch, but of Germans. For the first time we experienced the problems of non-fraternisation. We certainly did not wish to be friendly with these enemy civilians but the rule, that every house should be evacuated before we occupied it, raised a host of difficulties. What was to happen to the old Grandmother who could not be moved and the young woman who had given birth only the day before? Where were the expelled occupants to go? It was soon found that the village, like any other, was packed with refugees even before some fifteen hundred soldiers, all determined to be comfortable, moved in. It speedily became a choice between women and children living in the fields with no cover at all, or a large part of the Regiment doing the same. In the end a fairly satisfactory compromise was reached, but many cases could still be cited of Germans living in greater comfort than English soldiers, and it was clear that until we hardened our hearts and drove helpless mothers and children out into the open, that situation was bound to arise. Such were the difficulties that faced every occupying regiment at that time, and the easiest part of the problem was the attitude of the Germans themselves, which was cowed, subservient and ingratiating.

The days passed quietly. Everyone rested, maintained the tanks, and in the end grew slightly bored. Occasional aerial activity by marauding German fighters was the only excitement, and most of us felt glad when we heard that the "last river" had been crossed. When we saw our prospective route it was clear that our eventual objective was Lübeck - and the Baltic. We had heard of Lübeck on the B.B.C. news when it was bombed earlier in the war, but it had always seemed such an impossibly long way off that it came as almost a shock to think we might be there in two or three days. But distances hardly seemed to matter then and, if we had been told to go to Berlin next day, it would not have come as a particularly great surprise. On April 30th, the whole group moved forward, and became involved in one of the biggest traffic jams that we had ever seen. The Fifteenth Scottish had formed the bridgehead, and we were due to pass through them that evening, with our group leading. But their transport was as determined to cross the Elbe as we were, and a solid tightly-wedged mass of vehicles was formed. Slight damage was done to the bridge by enemy aircraft, and this delayed matters still

further. In fact it was pitch dark when 'A' and 'G' started to cross, and, though we expected to harbour the night on the far side of the river, it was not to be, and we pushed ahead through the darkness. In Schwarzenbek we passed through the outposts of the Fifteenth Scottish and began to advance into enemy country. The blackness was beginning to give place to a murky half light, when Third Troop of 'A' Squadron arrived at the outskirts of Sahms. Suddenly, furious activity began. Sleepy tank commanders further back in the column woke with a jerk to find armour-piercing shot and small arms fire buzzing around their heads. Towards Sahms, two ugly spirals of smoke began to rise, and the crackle and splutter of tanks, which have been knocked out and are starting to burn, was all too audible. The two leading tanks of 'A' Squadron had fallen victims to a self-propelled gun, which must have been covering the road. They now blazed in the centre of the road, while survivors dragged back two wounded men, leaving four dead still in the tanks. It was clearly futile to try and deal with the situation until we could see something, and 'A' Squadron withdrew until it grew light. Then 'G' Company began to patrol into the village and 'A' Squadron manoeuvred round it, meeting fairly stubborn opposition. 'C' and 'H' tried to get down the main road north of Sahms, but it was completely blocked by fallen trees, blown bridges and a plentiful crop of mines. They began to try and by-pass this obstacle to the west and north, but it was a slow process, involving the clearing of three villages and the taking of a few prisoners.

'A' and 'G', after stiff fighting and some heavy shelling, had by midday succeeded in clearing Sahms and, capturing the bridge over a small stream, 'B' and 'F' were pushed through to make for Kankelau, but were fired on by what appeared to be a Tiger and were held up. Meanwhile 'C' and 'H' had managed to rejoin the main road north of the obstacle, and we all hoped that they would be able to catch the defenders of Sahms as they retired along it, and even knock out the Tiger. But soon after their arrival they too were fired on, either by a Tiger or a heavy self-propelled gun and Sergeant Sear's tank was knocked out. Lieut. Patterson hit their opponent three times but failed to penetrate the thick front plate of the German A.F.V. 'C' Squadron then spent a rather uncomfortable two hours under fire from both shot and shell, while 'B' and 'F' tried to make their way to the main road. It was a highly involved performance, for their

route was a maze of mines and a carrier was blown up in the process of getting through them. A certain amount of shelling was coming from Kankelau and it was clear that this village was the centre of most of the trouble. 'C' and 'H' accordingly advanced and cleared it, while 'B' and 'F', by now free from mines, pushed straight northwards up the main road. Our route turned north-west at Talkau, and the leading group had a slight brush with a German seventy-five, which was duly destroyed. Our maps had shown the road we took as a reasonable one, but it could not cater for a regiment of tanks. A parallel one was selected, but the Fifes and Brigade Headquarters had already made it a mass of churned up mud. The harbour parties eventually got through, but the rest of the Regiment less 'C' Squadron sank with all hands. Exasperated oaths from tank commanders mingled with muffled churnings of tracks and roaring of tank engines, but darkness fell to cries of despair over the wireless, the clash of hammers on broken track-plates, and the sight of tanks and carriers, some tilted to the right, others to the left, but all thoroughly and absolutely sunk and stuck. The Regiment was immobile at any rate until it got light. 'C' and 'H' had been fortunate enough to be in the rear and had avoided this mêlée by staying on the main road for the night. The rest of the Regiment toiled through the darkness, but the real work of recovery could not start till daybreak.

Consequently we started that historic May 2nd at a severe disadvantage and, as our Comets hummed along the Lübeck autobahn that afternoon, with the Fifes entering the city itself before us, we could not be blamed for feeling slightly vindictive towards that muddy track which had prevented us from making a race of it.

At first light 'C' and 'H' were ordered to make the long détour by the main road, in order to open it for some much needed petrol lorries to come up. They had only advanced a mile, however, when two terrific explosions rent the air and shook the ground for miles. When the dust cleared, two vast craters in the road were revealed, and further investigation showed that the explosions had been caused by enormous sea mines, one on each side of the road, and fitted with trembler fuses, which had been set in motion by the vibration of the leading tank. One RB carrier was hurled into the air and fell upside down into the ditch, the crew by some miracle escaping a major injury. When everyone had got their breath back, German prisoners

were produced to fill in the crater for 'H' Company, who were finding the going difficult, while 'C' Squadron pushed on and took the next little town. By mid-morning, Fifth Division had come up on our right and 'C' and 'H' were able to rejoin the rest of the Regiment, which, after many oaths and much sweat, were extricated and removed quantities of mud from themselves.

Suddenly, our brief respite was broken by a rush of fresh orders. "C.O. to Brigade at once" - "Regiment to come on and meet him ten miles up the road" - "Move at once". Stew was gulped down, mess tins clattered back into bins, dregs of tea decanted on to the ground, everyone dropped what they were doing, and the Regiment was off. The road to the rendez-vous was blocked with the inevitable gunner transport, whose complaints that they had priority were speedily dealt with. Captain Blackman in a half-track did policeman in front of the column, and vehicles were ruthlessly pushed on one side to let the group go through, while all the time the wireless kept up a furious chatter - "You must hurry", "I don't care if you are blocked, you must push them out of the way and GET ON", "I can't tell you the reason over the air, but unless you get to the R.V. in ten minutes you will be too late", "Don't argue, PUSH ON". All so familiar, but perhaps even more urgent than usual.

In little groups, in fits and starts, the Regiment battled its way through the mêlée and arrived breathless in a big field, where the Colonel was waiting.

Tank commanders, their maps flashing white, sprang from their turrets and ran to get their orders.

The fever of the chase possessed everybody, the crews were on their toes, keyed up, excited. Something big was happening. What was it, where were we going?

The little group of intent figures bending over maps in the middle of the field suddenly broke up, turned, and every tank commander ran back to his crew. Breathless, his hurried orders still far from clear in his head, each one jerked out the news. It was Lübeck, as fast as we could get there - the Baltic, as fast as we could go, and we had to get there that afternoon. The Fifes, using their lead, were on their way down the autobahn, but perhaps we could catch them and make a race for it. 'B' and 'F' were moving out of the field, down the road, northwards to the autobahn. The rest followed - surely we could go

faster. But the road was twisty and we had to be patient. The wireless still crackled urgently, we heard that on our left the 159th Brigade had captured Himmler's private train. Perhaps we should capture Himmler; anything was possible today. Ahead lay a graceful viaduct. It was the autobahn at last - two gleaming white ribbons of speedway leading to victory. As we turned on to it, we heard that the Fifes were already entering the city, but that we were to by-pass it to the north and reach the Baltic. Our disappointment was soon blown away by the rush of air past our faces, as we sped along, the squat low Comets appearing to revel in at last being able to show their speed. Tracks screeched on the white concrete, commanders held their hats on as their drivers, leaning over the sticks, pressed down their accelerators as they had never pressed them before. Bits of equipment and small comforts flew off the back of the tanks into the faces of carrier and half-track drivers, whose vehicles crashed and swayed from side to side in one mad, glorious, exciting rush. Trees, telegraph poles, villages, all sped by. Troop leaders cried encouragement over the air to urge their tanks to even greater speed, but it was not necessary. The hunt was up.

Through the afternoon sunshine, two slender spires were visible, the shape of lower buildings grew clearer, a distant city came into view. It was Lübeck. Our pace along the autobahn slowed, as we passed the turning that the Fifes had taken to enter the city. In the docks ahead, pillars of smoke rose lazily as hasty and ineffective demolitions took place. A small train puffed into view amongst the orchards to our south, guns were trained upon it, but it disappeared into a tunnel. Ahead of 'B' Squadron was a dense crowd of humanity, and the leading tank stopped to examine it. A wild, delirious crowd of Allied prisoners-of-war surged forward, many of them British. They swarmed round the tanks, white, emaciated, hungry, footsore, but riotously happy. Few things can give greater pleasure in war than the liberation of one's own countrymen, and it was a great moment. Soon, comparative order was achieved, the German war-dogs surrendered, together with many dusty, weary members of the Wehrmacht, who trooped back down the autobahn. The General in charge gave himself up, the first of many. Down the road came crowds more German soldiers, a hopeless, defeated mob, caring nothing but that they should be able to surrender, lie down and sleep,

and not worry about fighting any more. They came in large cars, small cars, dusty yellow lorries, in carts, bicycles, and on their weary feet. They came in hordes. They came not to fight, not even to argue but to surrender to the British. Every branch of Hitler's army was represented in this defeated tangle of humanity - Marines, Panzers, Gunners and even the once redoubtable SS. When 'A' and 'G' pushed through towards the Baltic, it was the same story all the way. Thousands upon thousands of men in field grey, sitting dejectedly beside the road, waiting for British orders. They sat so thickly, that the fields in which they sat, looked, in the distance, like patches of over-blown bluebells, which careless trippers had trampled underfoot. Generals arrived in twos and threes, politely or arrogantly, but all to surrender. They were packed ignominiously into a three-tonner - the days when a General was a 'big catch' were gone. In the hot May sunshine, the procession toiled by in never-ending streams, watched by grinning tank crews. In the intervals of pushing the slower Germans down the road to their collecting areas, there was time to think of what happened that day. True, the war was still officially in progress. But to our south we knew that the Sixth Airborne had met the Russians at Schwerin, the meeting that the world had been waiting for. And here in Lübeck was the Wehrmacht which had fled before us, until it could flee no more, and here it was laying down its arms. At the back of everyone's mind was the triumphant and exciting thought, that here at last was victory, final victory over those same soldiers who once had stood in their triumph on the English Channel, while behind the ramparts we had trained in ancient vehicles on the Yorkshire moors, for just this very day. Now the Twenty-third Hussars were on the Baltic in the most modern tanks in the British Army, and the end of years of boredom, sweat and danger was in sight at last.

'A' Squadron was four miles short of Travemünde by the evening. The great bay was alive with shipping, some of which had been engaged by the Fifes from Lübeck as it tried to escape. The southern side of the bay was black with fleeing German troops and transport, all trying to get away from the Russians, now coming up fast from the east. Occasional sniping was soon silenced, a Jagd Panther was taken intact, and still the indescribable, confused mass of prisoners kept rolling in. Darkness descended on the tramp and rustle of weary

feet down the autobahn, and we fell asleep while the German Army trooped past in defeat.

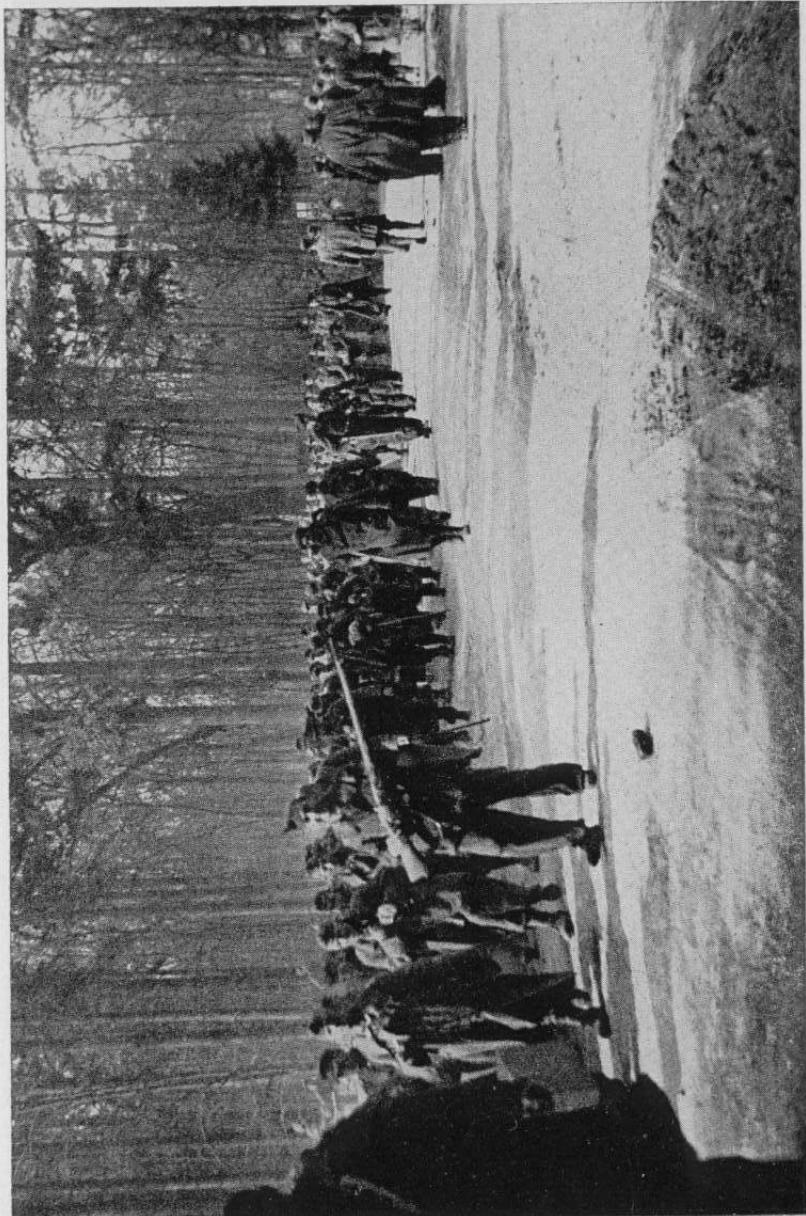
'B' and 'F' went forward next morning into Travemünde to clear it up, for darkness had prevented 'A' and 'G' from entering it. An indescribable welter of prisoners greeted them, and though most of them were docile enough, an occasional SS or Hitler Youth tried to take advantage of the 'holiday mood' of their captors. These foolish Germans were speedily and violently made to behave themselves. The riflemen, and our tank crews, too, had many an old score to settle with these gentry, and they duly did so with an excellent will.

Some shipping was engaged as it tried to slip away, and Captain Weiner negotiated the surrender of still more vast numbers of enemy, many of whom had their wives with them. There were Germans of every sort and kind, and the seething mob can be no better described than by 'B' Squadron's chronicler, who likens them to the rats in the "Pied Piper" - "Grave old plodders, gay young friskers, big ones, small ones, lean ones, fat ones".

In fact, in military parlance, mopping up continued.

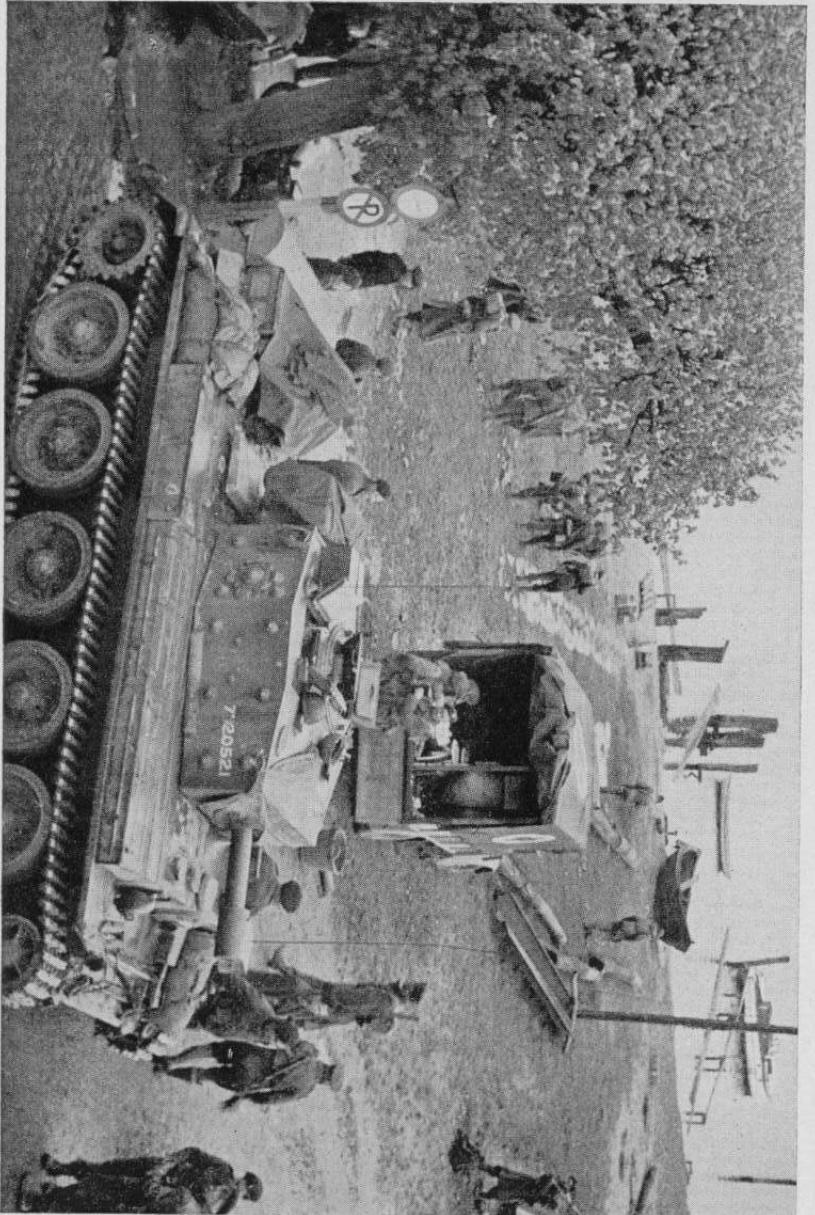
Meantime, we felt no longer envious of the Fifes for being in Lübeck, for what we then called the "foreign slaves", later to be known as "DP", were tasting the fruits of liberation, and had drunk to their freedom in no uncertain manner. Widespread looting began, and terror-stricken German civilians flung themselves upon the British for protection. The climax was reached when a train load of vodka was discovered in a siding, and the resulting explosion of high spirits made guards all over the town a strict necessity.

'C' and 'H' were ordered to advance northwards to the port of Neustadt, twenty-five miles distant. They set off with every intention of 'swanning', in the true Amiens-Antwerp style, but their start was not propitious. The road proved to be blocked by a large railway truck filled with stones, while thick woods and ditches made a détour out of question. While the maps, which seemed to be of doubtful accuracy, were being consulted, a German general in a staff car, accompanied by a cortège of delapidated lorries, drove up with the now familiar request to surrender his unit. His command proved to be located on the way to Neustadt, and soon a mixed and strange-looking column set out upon their way. It was led by the General in his car, accompanied by Lieut. Schoelles and an interpreter, follo-



The Wehrmacht in defeat:  
"In the hot May sunshine the procession toiled by in never-ending streams".

Major Wigans's tank at Travemünde.



wed by a scout car, the tanks and the German lorries. Soon the General's unit was rounded up and sent back to Lübeck, but to his great indignation, he was ordered to continue in the lead of the 'C' Squadron column to Neustadt. His bitter complaints that such conduct was in utter contravention of the Geneva Conventions fell on deaf and thoroughly inconsiderate ears.

It was not like 'swanning' through France and Belgium. The jubilant, waving crowds were now replaced by silent, sullen and fearful knots of people, and the only flags visible were white. Straggling groups of horse-drawn vehicles, cyclists and weary foot-sloggers were turned off the road by a wave of the leading tank commander's hand, and the only reason to pause was to stoke the wretched General's car, which was of the woodburner variety. Finally the Squadron, having passed along the sea shore for several miles of pleasant holiday resorts, surmounted the rise which overlooks Neustadt Bay. In the harbour several submarines could clearly be seen, and as the tanks deployed three RAF Typhoons went in to attack them. Anti-aircraft fire opened up from the U-Boats and other shipping in the Bay, and 'C' Squadron joined in the fun, opening up on all the vessels they could see. Two ships, considerably larger than the others, blazed from end to end after a Typhoon attack and finally capsized. 'C' Squadron, in the meantime, entered the town with no opposition, to find the Mayor only too anxious to surrender it as soon as possible.

While formalities were being completed, a ghastly tragedy was revealed. Into the square, at first in a trickle, then a stream, then a flood, there staggered the emaciated, half-naked remnants of a huge number of political prisoners, the survivors of the two large ships still blazing in the bay. These wretched souls had suffered all the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp and had then been crammed aboard ship for deportation to an unknown destination. The majority had had no food for eight days and the stories they told of mass shootings on board and unimaginable atrocities can never be forgotten by their hearers. On the appearance of the RAF, the SS guards had opened fire, run up a Nazi flag and then made off, leaving those prisoners who were too exhausted to move to burn alive. Many threw themselves into the sea and, too weak to swim, were drowned. The survivors presented a terrible spectacle. Some, unable to walk, sank to the ground, while others tried to drink from the

puddles in the road. The crews did all they could to help. All German soldiers were stripped of food and of their coats and blankets, civilians were made to produce bread and cheese. So frenzied with hunger were the wretched Nazi victims, that it was necessary to fire volleys over their heads to prevent the ravenous souls from fighting and killing each other as they ate. The spectacle of human beings reduced to the mentality of wild animals by the bestiality of our enemies made all who saw it realise, with greater clarity than ever, just what we had been fighting against. No one who has not either fought against an SS man in battle or has not personally witnessed scenes such as these can realise the depths of inhumanity to which a German could sink. It is a knowledge which cannot be attained through books or pictures, but only by personal experience. Many members of 'C' Squadron gained that experience in Neustadt.

While this drama had been going on, the rest of the Regiment had moved northwards to the villages of Niendorf and Struckdorf, and 'C' Squadron joined them in this pleasantly rural area on May 4th, when their job in Neustadt was finished. There we waited impatiently for the orders to advance to Denmark, but they never came. Wild rumours filled the air, and the only certain thing seemed to be that the German Army had no fight left. Scattered bodies of Wehrmacht occasionally wandered back down the road and delapidated lorries crammed with German soldiers rattled past all day to their collecting points in Lübeck. The Inns of Court had assembled a great many prisoners further up the road and they too passed back through our lines. An enthusiastic body of 'searchers' from the Regiment stood on the road all day and had a not unprofitable wait. One German, however, was quickly passed through. He arrived waving a piece of paper, which he proudly proclaimed to be a pass issued to him by a British soldier further up the road, its production allegedly securing him a safe passage to his home. It read, "This man has been thoroughly searched - you've had it!"

We had only a very little to do and everyone was restless. The days seemed endless and life seemed very flat, while we waited for the official surrender. When the announcement was finally made, it did not at once create the stir that might have been expected. Everyone felt quiet and extraordinarily aimless. But, after all, this was VE day and had to be celebrated as such. Plans for the evening's enter-

tainment had already been thought out, and as great a quantity of alcohol and fireworks (military type) as possible had been collected. As darkness fell, bonfires began to blaze, the flames crackling merrily as they devoured the broken German vehicles that had been heaped together. Verey lights soared upward, while parachute flares exploded with a pop and a shower of silvery balls in the best Brock tradition. The mutter of Bofors guns firing a salute was heard in the distance, and the volleys of Verey lights increased in answer. The Sappers contributed by letting off large lumps of gelignite, which caused thunderous explosions and many broken windows. As the evening wore on, the fun grew fast and furious, and even the staidest members of the regiment were leaping and shouting with the best. More enterprising members began to let off the tank machine guns into the air but this normally terrifying performance was greeted by high good humour. 'Two-inch Smoke' was discharged in all directions, German lorries were driven headlong into the bonfires, the driver leaping from his seat as he neared the flames, and one enthusiast had to be prevented from firing his 77-millimetre gun to add to the gaiety. Revelry continued far into the night and only ceased when the legs of the last man collapsed beneath him. It had been a party which can only be described as one that did justice to the occasion.

Probably most members had not thought only of VE day as an excuse for a celebration, though no better one could be desired. As the sun went down, while quietness still reigned, there was time to pause and think of some other aspects of the day which will be so much remembered in years to come. One could see, from our hill, a beautiful leafy contryside in the first flush of summer. The rolling fields failed to hide the distant spires of Lübeck, just beginning to fade into the evening haze. Cows were being driven in to be milked and only the restful noises of a summer's evening broke the stillness. Even the tramp of weary German feet was hushed. All was peace, and the war in Europe was over. Most of us would probably never have to fight again. How many of us, we wondered, had really expected to be sitting in a German field watching the sun go down on the German day of defeat. How many had been quite certain that they would come through? Not many, probably; and a quiet spirit of thankfulness and relief filled the mind. We had indeed been luckier than some. The woods and fields faded for a moment, to be replaced by a bleak heather-covered moor, upon which some old Valentines

were slowly moving backwards and forwards. They came together, halted, and the crews sprang out to cluster round for a brief discussion. One looked at the faces of that group of men. Some seemed less distinct than others, but they were all very familiar faces. They grew misty, disappeared and reappeared. This time it was summer and the same men, with others equally familiar, were moving round some pleasant country buildings. White tents were scattered in the fields. In the background was a steep high ridge with a big 'V' of trees upon it. Again the scene grew dim, to be replaced by many, many others, and always the same faces, with the addition of a few new ones, reappeared, sometimes laughing, sometimes dusty, sometimes bored, sometimes tired, sometimes cheerful, but every expression familiar. As the mind's eye saw again the bleak moors and wolds of Yorkshire, the pines and firs of Cambridgeshire, the Sussex Downs, and finally the blood and dust of Normandy, one paid more attention to some of these faces than to others. Those were the faces we would never see again, save in memory, for they had died that we might stand in this German field on Victory Day, while exultant crowds thronged the streets of our homeland. Their faces seemed very clear that evening. They were doubtless very clear that evening to many a lonely woman at home, watching the cheering crowds go past her window. Then there were other faces, equally familiar, but this time we knew that we would see them again, though probably not as we had known them of old. Many weary months in hospital would see to that, and one thought of cheerful letters from those friends who had given up their activity and their health, that we might be sound and healthy. Yes, we had been very lucky and, as the same faces crowded round again, they seemed to realise that we, and the whole world besides, were grateful beyond words to them for their sacrifice. Gradually they faded away, to reappear from time to time as long as memory lasts, for they will never be forgotten. A chill breeze rustled the grass. It was nearly dark and stars were beginning to appear in the sky, marking the approaching end of this tremendous day. The distant mutter of gunfire beat upon the air - the first salute to Victory in Europe.

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The Regiment suffered the following casualties in Germany:-

Killed	17 other ranks
Wounded	6 officers
	23 other ranks



The end of the journey:

Lieut-Colonel Harding and Lieut-Colonel Hunter at Lübeck.  
No Regimental Group has been more fortunate in its leaders.



Lieut-Colonel Harding, Captain Malcom, Major-General Roberts and Lieut-Colonel Hunter. Another group at Lübeck.

## CHAPTER XII

### ECLIPSE AND EPILOGUE

There is a readjustment between war and peace which cannot be made in a day. VE Day did not end our story. This great and catastrophic war in which we had been engaged daily for years, in training and in action, ended now not with a bang but a whimper, with a sigh and not a roar, with every kind of procrastination and delay, with order, counter-order and disorder. We had come through Germany, from one end to the other, straining at the leash, like turtles held in tow. Now we had got to one corner of it, a small village in the wilds, and we had been sitting there, for over five days, and ahead of us remained delectable parts as yet unliberated. Armistice or no armistice - we were impatient to get to the end of the journey.

The joke of it all was that no one really knew where the journey was to end. The most popular bid, of course, was to get into Denmark, or anyhow as near the frontier as possible. That was at first knocked on the head by the news that we would be asked to occupy Kiel. As no one imagined that Kiel was a very salubrious place, or had been made any more so by the RAF, no news could have been worse. But that scheme was abandoned after a day or so and our eyes were directed northwards to a little town on the west coast of Schleswig-Holstein. The town was called Husum. There the Colonel was to set up his headquarters as Military Commander of Husum Kreis.

Immediately, far reaching enquiries were set on foot and every possible source of advance information was tapped. But few Germans seemed to have heard of the place and those, who had, variously regarded it either as a first class bathing resort or as a squalid little fishing village. Speculation was therefore rife.

There was a cheering piece of news of a large barracks near to the place but as it was also known that Brigade Headquarters had designs on this, our hopes were hardly improved.

All the time, however, we were being held back and it was forbidden to send anyone to have a look-see. When, therefore, the word to move was given on the 10th, the advance party set off determined to beat all comers. Our future for many months might depend on it.

This advance party went twenty-four hours ahead of the Regiment only to find that units of the Seventh Armoured Division had already invaded parts of the town. A little later Brigade Headquarters arrived and confirmed their intention of moving into the barracks. This was a bad moment indeed. But Major Blacker, nihil desperandum, managed to win both the former and the latter, convincing Seventh Armoured that they were outside their area and the Brigadier that he would be better placed in Schleswig!

After that, work could begin in earnest. The immediate problem was, of course, to get the Regiment installed. They were expected on the morrow and the barracks would have to be cleared by then. The only trouble was that there were still over two thousand men in the barracks and that they were still marching about, mounting guard, with steel helmets and rifles slung as though nothing had happened at all! So the order to clear out at once, lock, stock and barrel, within twenty-four hours, astonished and alarmed them considerably. But the thing was done, except that locks, stocks and barrels were, of course, left behind and none but the barest personal necessities were moved. We did not intend to sleep on bare boards.

Not all the Squadrons moved into Husum barracks the following day. 'A' Squadron went to Hockensbüll wireless station, a modern group of buildings on the north side of Husum, near to the sea. There they stayed until the end of October.

The remainder moved into the Marine School, a brand new barracks and a model of what a barracks should be. Each Squadron was allotted a block which had room to spare. There was a large building with mess-rooms, canteens and Sergeants' Messes and a hall, which was converted into a camp cinema. There was a large drill hall which at first was the arms dump and later became a stables and a first class riding school. There were large store rooms, workshops and tradesmen's wings. There was a gymnasium, with every form of modern equipment, and a running track and sports field. There was an unfinished swimming pool, which we soon had completed, a building for a C.R.S., a building for an Education Wing, married quarters to



be used as officers' messes, flats for senior officers, ponds for ducks and geese, and allotments kept by the squadrons. Finally there was a large power house, the very heart of the whole, the pride and show place. It was not difficult here to wallow in comfort and space. This then was to be the setting for the life of us all, and where Occupation began. Compared with other units we were more than fortunately placed.

The operation on which we now embarked was known as Eclipse. Eclipse was the business of Occupation. This involved disarmanent, de-nazification and the enforcement of Allied authority. The objects were quite clear, the means were at hand, but the methods had never been clearly explained. The conditions in which Germany would collapse had been anybody's guess, and it had been quite impossible either to foresee them or to prepare for them. Furthermore the situation was bound to vary from place to place. A rural unbombed area, untouched by fighting or war, was bound to differ from



The Marine School Barracks at Husum  
"a model of what a barracks should be"

devastated cities or the shattered industrial centres of the Ruhr. Nevertheless our Kreis, instead of providing easy and immediate fruits of victory, was choked at first with some of the thorniest problems of occupation. Quite unexpectedly this little road and railway centre provided a focal point for the lives of hundreds of thousands of Germans. The civil population had been overwhelmed by refugees. In the town itself a normal population of twelve thousand had increased to fifty thousand. In the countryside the population had doubled or trebled. Husum itself contained a large German headquarters, the Seekommandant, Nordfriesland, in control of the Naval, Army and Air Force's establishments from the Danish frontier to the Kiel Canal to a depth of twenty miles inland. This Headquarters, which fortunately had all the food dumps under its control, was at once confirmed in its authority and a stay-put order to all Wehrmacht personnel was given. Within a few days it transpired (no direct orders were ever received) that all German prisoner-of-war troops were to move to the adjoining peninsula of Eiderstedt (since vacated by the Rifle Brigade who had occupied it at first). It was to be known henceforth as Concentration Area 'G'. After conferences with the Seventh Armoured Division arrangements for transit were made, as over two hundred and fifty thousand prisoners-of-war were expected to pass through from Denmark and the north. The German command was ordered to divide the Kreis into five districts with transit headquarters, camps and billeting areas. A German Military Police force, four hundred and fifty strong, was set up. At the same time the food dumps were brought under direct control, ration scales rigorously reduced and luxury articles withdrawn for use by Allied ex-prisoners of war and displaced persons, henceforth to be known as PWX and DPs, a term embracing all the nationalities deported by the Germans and displaced by the war.

Within a week of arrival German prisoners were pouring through our area at the rate of ten to fifteen thousand daily - a figure which was variously maintained for over one month. Every day, down the roads from the north, trudged enormous columns, stripped of arms and equipment, weary, dusty and grimy and often in rags, dragging pathetic little handcarts with the miserable remnants of their belongings. It was a sight for sore eyes and the final act of defeat. To cope with the many stragglers the local station master was ordered to run a daily train - a practice which was stopped by higher authority on

being discovered. But as Husum was a bottleneck through which the majority of German troops had to pass into Area 'G', the order never really became effective.

Apart from the control of the passage of German Troops and of the movement of prisoners, the main preoccupation was the disarmament of German troops in area, which included Naval establishments ashore and afloat. At the end of May the Barrack's dump included 10,700 rifles, 440 machine guns, 3 six-inch guns and tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition.

Other problems included the actual control of Luftwaffe personnel under nominal RAF control (camps where Nazi practices continued to be uncovered) the collection of German service women and the segregation of SS.

What amazed us most in all this, perhaps, was the full cooperation of the Germans. We were not very surprised at the gratifying absence of "werewolves" who were to have made life so intolerable for us in Germany. But we never expected to be received with such subservience or humility, with such an urgent desire to please and do, if anything, more even than we told them. We were pleased that life would be so easy, though, of course, we had to exercise direction and control. On the first day Major Blacker entered what was to be Regimental Headquarter's Mess and was shown round by the owner, a woman. She appeared quite worried about whether we would be comfortable enough.

All this was a good augury for a pleasant, unmolested stay in Germany, though the majority of us who had been through the fighting could not help despising the Germans for it.

At first, however, things were very busy. An immense amount of work had to be done on the barracks, though this was mostly done by German SS labour. Tank crews were busy on overhauling their tanks for the first time since entering Germany. Finally Echelon drivers were stretched to capacity. They will not soon forget those days. Daily they plied to and fro between this camp and that - Camp Seven and Camp Nine, Four and Six - Ostenfeld, Winnert, Wittbek, Schleswig - with their human cargo of Russians and Poles, French and Italians, with loads of wood and stores, fuel and food, straw and clothes - the most primitive necessities for all these thousands whom

we had found in such distress. There were over eight thousand of them in our area when we arrived, PWX and DPs together. Of these the Russians comprised three thousand six hundred, equally divided between the two. The Poles were the next largest group with fourteen hundred PWX and one thousand DPs. And there were eight hundred and fifty French and some five hundred Italian ex-prisoners of war and almost a thousand Baltic DPs.

The ex-prisoners were, of course, the worst off. Almost all of them had been marched great distances during the previous months to prevent them being overrun by the Allies. They were bootless and in rags, often starved and diseased, and always plagued by lice. Two thousand of them were lying on mouldy straw, on rotting floorboards, under leaking roofs in the former concentration camp at Englesburg, four miles up the Flensburg road. Over two hundred of them sprawled about on the floor of one large room, eating their daily meal of swedes and turnips out of old tins and bits of stovepipe.

Fortunately the Kreis contained quite a number of small camps in a fair state of repair. Also we took over two villages - Högel and Ahrenviöl - to accomodate the Russians at first and later the Poles. Högel was run by the Fifes and Ahrenviöl by our 'B' Squadron, with whom it soon became a very popular place; clearly the duties and burdens there being well offset by nightly native revelries and other amenities. The little party were very loathe to withdraw even at the beginning of October. Nevertheless under the influence of Captain Vickers, acting as burgomaster, and the strong impartialities of the succeeding Sergeants - Grocer, Austen and Pike, "Little Russia" and "Little Poland" were eventually induced to administer themselves. Other camps more or less ran themselves though many tiresome guards had to be done on some, and Sergeant Hutchinson will not forget his lonely vigil among some six hundred ravenous DPs in Camp Two nor Corporal Urquhart in another camp.

All the time lorries were running to and fro providing for the daily needs and wants of all these people and trying to give some compensation for the miseries and discomforts of the previous years. In this we were very lucky as there were large stocks of clothing and supplies at the barracks which the Quartermaster for once literally rejoiced in getting rid of! gladly!! and with a smile!!! He and his staff had rarely been so busy and Trooper

Starkey painstakingly issued some 5500 rations daily for almost two months. It was a great achievement. The organisation of all these commitments devolved upon the Intelligence Officer, Captain Weiner, who was generally up at six o'clock each morning and returned about nine o'clock each night. His command of the German language really came into its own and it is hard to say how we would have managed without him. One only caught fleeting glimpses of him in those days, sometimes speeding along in a jeep with an intent expression, or darting in and out of a column of three-tonners, or vehemently giving some unfortunate German a piece of his mind.

At the end of May the French all went off by lorry to Lübeck. After that the Russian repatriation began and by the middle of July the only large groups remaining were the Poles and Balts. The work of looking after these people now also reduced itself as various bodies such as UNRRA began to move in and take over.

All this time the squadrons were doing patrols of their area and on June 6th we took the tanks out for a final round. It was in honour of the King's Birthday, and Major Blacker, as acting-Colonel, took the salute in Husum Square. It was the last time the Regiment went out in its tanks. At the beginning of August we finally saw them go, with perhaps a tinge of regret. It was a certain sign that our days were numbered and we reverted to a "dismounted establishment".

Apart from all, this many will remember their turn at Area 'G' guard, a somewhat farcical institution designed to cut off the whole of the P.O.W. concentration area from contact with the outside. Long and countless were the instructions which flowed into the hands of guard commanders, besieged by Germans both from within and without. On either side of our guards stood posts and patrols of Poles and Italians, judiciously kept apart, whose zeal with firearms was as dangerous to the Germans as to themselves.

Apart from these guards no one had much reason to complain of an excess of military duties.

By the end of June the swimming pool in the barracks was finished. It was one of a number of aquisitions which helped to make the last few months of the Regiment's life more pleasant. We were not slow to make use of anything which, though enjoyed until now by the people of Husum, had been denied us during the years of war.

And so there were horses for those who wished to ride, motor launches and sailing boats for those who liked the sea, Föhr holiday island for holiday makers and an abundance of shot-guns for the shootin' members of the Regiment and so on.

Perhaps the most important feature of Regimental life at this time was the setting up, under Captain Patterson, of an Educational wing. The realistic and enthusiastic way in which the wing was run undoubtedly helped a large number of soldiers to prepare themselves for civilian jobs and others to relieve their boredom.

At the end of August Colonel Harding relinquished command of the Regiment. The news came as a blow to all ranks for never has a Commanding Officer won greater admiration and confidence from his men than he had. It was with satisfaction, however, that we learnt that Major Blacker, whose popularity was a byword in the Regiment, was to guide our fortunes in his stead.

From now on there were many farewells. Some men were drafted to the Far East during the period before the end of the Japanese war. Others were demobilised. At the beginning of October Major Wigan began to assume a distinct civilian air and was soon rumoured to be taking parades in a green Tyrolean hat. He was replaced by Major Walter, whom we had last seen rallying the remnants of 'C' Squadron at Caen. At the end of October Colonel Blacker called the Regiment together to address them for the last time as "a separate and distinct entity".

He had arranged that the large number of soldiers, with still some time to serve, should go together to regiments of the veteran Seventh Armoured Division in which it was hoped they would find good 'homes'. In exchange came troops of that Division who were awaiting their discharge within the next few months.

Before these drafts left, all ranks had been contributing sums of money to the Dependents' Fund, later to be known as the Widows' and Orphans' Fund, which had already been able to disburse sums to next-of-kin of men killed with the Regiment. It was hoped that the fund could be raised to an amount large enough to continue to be used after the disbandment of the Regiment. This was in fact achieved and circulars to that effect were sent out. At the same time it was decided to hold regular reunions and dinners in the future.

Christmas came and was perhaps one of the most festive of the Regiment's history. Although a great many Twenty-third Hussars had already left, the fact that it was the last caused us to make the most of it - and it was celebrated with something of the extravagance of the last feast of a man about to die!

Soon after Christmas two big release groups went away and there was scarcely an original Twenty-third Hussar left. Within a few days an order was received stating that the Regiment was to be broken up by January 30th and that Kreis Husum was to be handed over to the Greys.

\*

War has truly been said to consist of long periods of boredom, interspersed with short periods of intense fear. We can admit to having experienced both. Boredom we had in plenty during the weary years of training and waiting. No amount of urgency can compensate for the feeling that a hard-won business is going to rack and ruin and for the longing for a well-known home and well-loved family. Nor, for others, can it compensate for the feeling that each year of war that passes is one more year's delay in finding and beginning a permanent occupation. And there are many who find army life wearisome and irritating. No one can say that our time in the Regiment has been free from boredom. Nor can many say with perfect truth that it has been altogether without fear. War is an unpleasant game. Vivid memories come to mind - the sight of a burning tank, still figures lying under blankets, the crack of an eighty-eight, the noise of a 'moaning minnie', and the news that a friend has been killed. Moments of excitement and exhilaration there have undoubtedly been, but very few of us indeed will want to go to war again. No experience, however, can really be a total loss. All of us have met and made many friends, and our minds have been broadened by the contacts with men from all walks of life. We have seen a hundred little acts of humanity and bravery for every one we would have seen in peacetime. We have many lasting memories and we have been happy in the companionship that existed amongst all ranks. Our Corps Commander inspected us at Husum and said to the Colonel: "I always like inspecting your Regiment because everyone looks cheerful and has a grin on his face". That is a great compliment because it can only be deserved by a Regiment that is proud of itself and of its

record, and is at the same time a 'happy family'. As these words are being written, the Twenty-third Hussars are going through the sad process of disbandment, in common with all other wartime units. The name of the Regiment will be crossed off the records, but the spirit will not die so easily. In the years to come, we shall meet together and talk about the 'old days', conscious that boring, destructive, ruinous and tragic as this war has been, we yet have many memories which we do not regret, and which will never fade.

Husum

January 1946

Germany



Lieut-Colonel Harding and Lieut-Colonel Blacker drink the last toast.

APPENDICES:

Honours and Awards

Roll of Honour

Wounded and Prisoners

## Honours and Awards

won by

Members of the Twenty-third Hussars

### BAR TO DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER

Lieutenant-Colonel R.P. Harding D.S.O.

### DISTINGUISHED SERVICE ORDER

Major P.C. Walter

### DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL

Sergeant D.N. Smith

### MILITARY CROSS

Lieutenant-Colonel C.H. Blacker  
Major L.D. Hagger  
Major D.C. Turquand  
Major J.L. Watt  
Major A.D. Wigan  
Captain G.S.C. Bishop  
Captain G.P. Mitchell (R.A.M.C.)  
Captain C.V. O'Reilly  
Captain H.L. Blackman  
Lieutenant M.A. Gordon-Smith  
Lieutenant J.G. Proctor

### MILITARY MEDAL

SQMS F. Kitto  
Sergeant E. Abbott  
Sergeant A.H. Ball  
Sergeant R. Baradell  
Sergeant R. Gilbertson  
Sergeant E. Harris  
Sergeant A.H. Huthwaite

### MILITARY MEDAL

Sergeant F.T. Jackson  
Sergeant G. Johnson  
Sergeant T.K. Roberts  
Lance-Corporal A.R. Bradley  
Lance-Corporal G. Litchfield  
Lance-Corporal G.E.D. Noble  
Trooper F. Harrop  
Trooper J. McTavish  
Trooper W.A. Melvin

### MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES

Captain H.L. Blackman M.C.  
Captain F.J. Shearman  
Lieutenant M.A. Gordon-Smith M.C.  
Lieutenant B.B. Hansen  
Lieutenant S. Bates  
Sergeant H.L. Corke  
Sergeant D.E. Marsden  
Sergeant D.G. Pike  
Sergeant A.E. Smith (R.E.M.E.)  
Sergeant A. Walke  
Lance-Corporal A. Brewer  
Lance-Corporal F. Duck  
Lance-Corporal W. Johnson  
Trooper J. Hall  
Trooper G. Hughes

### CROIX DE GUERRE

Major T.E. Harte  
Sergeant B.R. Dowling

## ROLL OF HONOUR

### Cheux and Mondrainville

**27 June 1944**

Sergeant D. Hemming  
Sergeant L. Scott  
Corporal R. Roach  
Lance-corporal G. Hayes  
Lance-corporal E. Hogg  
Lance-corporal R. Wheway  
Trooper G. Balding  
Trooper A. Bristol  
Trooper W. Chestney  
Trooper D. Clark  
Trooper J. Eyres  
Trooper W. Glanville  
Trooper L. Larcombe  
Trooper P. Parkinson  
Trooper A. Phillips  
Trooper W. Pope  
Trooper C. Redding  
Trooper B. Sacco  
Trooper W. Seasman  
Trooper P. Sharpe  
Trooper G. Sheppard  
Trooper R. Thorpe  
Trooper J. Weston  
Trooper R. Whittaker

### Point 112

**28 June 1944**

Captain R. G. Clark  
Lieut. P. G. Helyar  
Lance-corporal L. Ball  
Lance-corporal C. Franklin  
Lance-corporal R. Holt  
Trooper J. Brown  
Trooper G. Pearce  
Trooper J. Sawyer  
Trooper J. Stebbings

**29 June 1944**

Trooper G. Pollard

### Cheux

**30 June 1944**

Sergeant H. Lowis  
Corporal E. Edwards  
Corporal G. Reekie

### Bretteville

**5 July 1944**

Trooper T. Hollis

### The Caen Plain

**18 July 1944**

Major W. G. C. Shebbeare  
Lieut. M. A. Pratt  
Sergeant G. Bateman  
Sergeant B. Horrobin  
Sergeant A. McConnell  
Sergeant D. McIntosh  
Sergeant J. Webster  
Corporal J. Adams  
Lance-corporal J. Roberts  
Trooper S. Ashley  
Trooper H. Blundell  
Trooper R. Burrows  
Trooper T. Callender  
Trooper K. Chaney  
Trooper R. Cutting  
Trooper H. Degg  
Trooper B. Hillier  
Trooper L. Hiscock  
Trooper K. Lane  
Trooper F. Robinson  
Trooper G. Slack  
Trooper W. Stevens  
Trooper S. Walton  
Trooper J. Wood

## ROLL OF HONOUR

### Chenedolle

**6 August 1944**

Lieut. P. J. W. Robson  
Lieut. P. M. Treanor  
Trooper S. Beazley  
Trooper C. Danks  
Trooper A. R. Harrison

### La Barbiere

**9 August 1944**

Corporal P. Packman

### La Caverie

**14 August 1944**

Trooper C. Moore  
Trooper A. Terry

### Canteloupe

**15 August 1944**

Sergeant E. Oldham  
Lance-corporal T. Hunter  
Trooper J. Stock  
Trooper A. Withers

### Notre Dame du Rocher

**18 August 1944**

Captain R. H. Hart

### Argentan

**20 August 1944**

Trooper R. J. Cheshire  
Trooper J. H. Insley

## ROLL OF HONOUR

<b>Laigle</b>	
<b>22 August 1944</b>	
Lieut. J. B. Cornwall	
Trooper G. J. Epathite	
<b>Wolvertham</b>	
<b>3 September 1944</b>	
Trooper C.T. Sarson	
<b>Antwerp</b>	
<b>4 September 1944</b>	
Lieut. R. H. Evans	
Trooper J. K. Bushnell	
Trooper F. J. Cook	
Trooper A. E. Watts	
<b>7 September 1944</b>	
Lieut. R. Cotterell	
Lance-corporal R. Williams	
Trooper R. Collins	
Trooper C. Smith	
Trooper E. Stenner	
<b>Helchternen</b>	
<b>10 September 1944</b>	
Sergeant B. Drysdale	
Trooper R. Jordan	
Trooper J. Marwood	
<b>Gerwen</b>	
<b>21 September 1944</b>	
Sergeant E. Wilson	

<b>De Rips</b>	
<b>7 October 1944</b>	
Lieut. R. G. H. Unwin	
<b>Mersela</b>	
<b>16 October 1944</b>	
Sergeant C. Dale	
Trooper R. Lloyd	
<b>De Haag</b>	
<b>17 October 1944</b>	
Lieut. F. M. Turner	
Corporal E. Newell	
Trooper E. Peterson	
<b>Leunen</b>	
<b>21 October 1944</b>	
Trooper T. George	
<b>Deurne</b>	
<b>4 November 1944</b>	
Trooper E. Newton	
Trooper M. Winster	
<b>Usselstein</b>	
<b>21 November 1944</b>	
Sergeant W. White	
Lance-corporal J. Raper	
Trooper J. Forbes	
Trooper D. G. Manders	

## ROLL OF HONOUR

<b>Antwerp</b>	
<b>16 December 1944</b>	
Trooper G. Hanscom	
Trooper C.V. Joliffe	
<b>Baronville</b>	
<b>27 December 1944</b>	
Trooper T. Boal	
<b>Bure</b>	
<b>5 January 1945</b>	
Sergeant T. K. Roberts	
Lance-corporal J. Gearing	
Trooper T. Mather	
Trooper J. Roche	
Trooper S. Wassell	
<b>Tellin</b>	
<b>11 January 1945</b>	
Trooper T. Worsley	
<b>Legden</b>	
<b>30 March 1945</b>	
Corporal H. Edkins	
Trooper F. Gibbons	
Trooper L. Malbon	
Trooper G. Plant	
Trooper R. Richardson	
<b>Sahms</b>	
<b>1 May 1945</b>	
Sergeant C. Patrick	
Corporal G. E. Hoggart	
Lance-corporal B. Taylor	
Trooper G. Pugh	

**Members of the Regiment who were wounded or taken prisoner**

**26 June 1944**

Lieut J.W. DaCunha  
Lieut D. F. King  
Trooper H. Pilling

**27 June 1944**

Captain M. H. Taylor  
Lieut K. N. Byard  
Lieut J. F. S. Russell  
SSM C. Shipton  
Sergeant D. Craig  
Sergeant A. Smith  
Corporal F. Inskip  
Corporal V. Lowe  
Lance-corporal J. Hewitt  
Lance-corporal W. Parker  
Trooper C. Baker  
Trooper W. Cardy  
Trooper S. Crawshaw  
Trooper R. Crosbie  
Trooper R. Gander  
Trooper S. Hornett  
Trooper C. Jury  
Trooper B. Lagar  
Trooper T. Mattison  
Trooper H. Patterson  
Trooper G. Pugsley  
Trooper R. Roberts  
Trooper N. Rugman  
Trooper A. Spy

**P.O.W.**

Lieut A. L. Kerton  
Lieut J. M. Weiner  
Corporal W. Noble  
Trooper G. Baker  
Trooper G. Rolfe  
Trooper A. Lowe

**28 June 1944**

Lieut N. H. Riley  
Corporal J. Sewell  
Lance-corporal C. Clear  
Trooper E. Blount  
Trooper A. Harrison  
Trooper D. Jones

**29 June 1944**

Trooper R. Ball  
Trooper E. Thomas

**P.O.W.**

Trooper W. Chatterton  
Trooper W. Collie  
Trooper A. Cook

**30 June 1944**

Sergeant T. Palmer

**18 July 1944**

Major C. G. Seymour  
Captain W.T. Jones  
Lieut A. S. Cochrane  
Sergeant O. Evans  
Sergeant A. Munro  
Sergeant W. Sharp  
Sergeant C. Stanton  
Corporal W. Baird  
Corporal A. Bellamy  
Corporal R. Drayson  
Corporal A. Ward  
Lance-corporal T. Green  
Lance-corporal F. Minter  
Trooper F. Allen  
Trooper J. Barker  
Trooper A. Barratt  
Trooper R. Bayfield  
Trooper L. Beaver

**Members of the Regiment who were wounded or taken prisoner**

(† later killed)

**18 July (cont)**

Trooper A. Binns  
Trooper A. English  
Trooper H. Hinton  
Trooper J. Lynham  
Trooper H. Mattison  
Trooper A. McGrath  
Trooper R. McLarty  
Trooper J. Roche  
Trooper G. Schofield  
Trooper L. Twitty  
Trooper A. Wood  
Trooper H. Wright

**19 July 1944**

Lieutenant J. M. Addison  
Trooper A. Phipps

**20 July 1944**

Captain P. C. Walter  
Sergeant J. Littlewood †

**30 July 1944**

Trooper D. Ford

**1 August 1944**

Sergeant H. Dixon  
Lance-corporal G. Langstone  
Trooper T. Fear  
Trooper R. Gavigan

**2 August 1944**

Captain J. L. Watt  
Lieut M. Gunyon  
Sergeant C. Weldon  
Lance-corporal R. Crowther  
Lance-corporal H. Lockwood  
Trooper C. Broom  
Trooper W. Franklin  
Trooper B. Gardner  
Trooper D. Hallam  
Trooper R. Lindsay

**3 August 1944**

Sergeant H. Corke  
Sergeant M. Straughan  
Lance-corporal A. Kerr  
Lance-corporal N. Reynolds  
Trooper T. Bell  
Trooper W. McCloud  
Trooper H. O'Malley  
Trooper F. Newbury  
Trooper K. Payne  
Trooper W. Staniforth  
Trooper R. Walker

**4 August 1944**

Sergeant L. Lundy  
Sergeant J. Sear  
Lance-corporal A. Bradley  
Lance-corporal J. Legg

**P.O.W.**

Corporal C. Freestone  
Corporal R. Martin  
Trooper G. Behr

**5 August 1944**

Major H. S. Whitehill  
Captain G. P. Mitchell, RAMC  
Trooper L. Smallwood

**6 August 1944**

Captain C. W. Crouch  
Captain J. B. Phillimore  
Sergeant W. Garnett  
Corporal N. A. Brown  
Corporal G. Yeates  
Trooper P. Anderson  
Trooper H. Corbin  
Trooper W. Melvin  
Trooper A. Povey  
Trooper G. Tunnicliffe  
Trooper E. C. Woodard

**Members of the Regiment who were wounded or taken prisoner**  
 († later killed)

**7 August 1944**  
 Corporal W. Dorrington  
 Corporal R. C. Gilbertson  
 Trooper F. Bealing  
 Trooper L. English  
 Trooper G. Hughes  
 Trooper H. Joyner  
 Trooper H. Redman

**9 August 1944**  
 Lance-corporal J. Hutton  
 Trooper B. Raffo  
 Trooper H. Waterhouse

**14 August 1944**  
 Trooper R. Nosworthy

**15 August 1944**  
 Lieut S. Bates  
 Trooper S. J. Clark  
 Trooper A. Spear

**20 August 1944**  
 Sergeant E. Harris  
 Trooper L. Darby  
 Trooper J. Honess  
 Trooper E. C. Johnson  
 Trooper A. Tate  
 Trooper J. White

**9 September 1944**  
 Sergeant C. Patrick †

**10 September 1944**  
 Lieut B. A. Bowers  
 Lance-corporal J. Griffen  
 Trooper R. Bryant  
 Trooper K. Cranford  
 Trooper F. Grainger  
 Trooper J. McGrindle  
 Trooper F. Jones

**11 September 1944**  
 Lieut J. H. Evans  
 Sergeant G. Williams  
 Trooper C. Crunkhorn  
 Trooper R. McKenzie  
 Trooper F. Pitman

**21 September 1944**  
 Lieut B. Garai  
 Sergeant B. Dowling  
 Trooper J. Goodhead  
 Trooper R. Heywood  
 Trooper P. Hainsworth  
 Trooper W. Johnson  
 Trooper A. Mullard  
 Trooper E. Netttingham  
 Trooper G. Telfer  
 Trooper G. Watkinson

**23 September 1944**  
 Lance-corporal A. Armitage  
 Lance-corporal C. Gordon  
 Trooper F. Bluck  
 Trooper S. Matza  
 Trooper J. Sambrook

**24 September 1944**  
 Captain S. M. Young

**7 October 1944**  
 RSM C. Wass

**16 October 1944**  
 Trooper C. Land  
 Trooper H. Richards

**17 October 1944**  
 Trooper E. Pollard

**18 October 1944**  
 Sergeant S. Allsopp

**19 October 1944**  
 Sergeant F. Harvey

**Members of the Regiment who were wounded or taken prisoner**  
 († later killed)

**21 October 1944**  
 Sergeant A. Embleton  
 Trooper M. Winster †

**31 October 1944**  
 Trooper L. Cumper

**2 November 1944**  
 Trooper F. Harrop

**4 November 1944**  
 Lance-corporal G. Cotterill

**16 November 1944**  
 Trooper H. Forshaw

**18 November 1944**  
 Trooper C. Preston

**21 November 1944**  
 Trooper C. Jakeman  
 Trooper B. Shillitoe  
 Trooper R. Ventress

**16 December 1944**  
 Trooper W. Hopkinson

**27 December 1944**  
 Trooper J. Quigley

**5 January 1945**  
 Sergeant R. Willson

**11 January 1945**  
 Corporal R. Hewitt  
 Trooper V. Lagar  
 Trooper G. Robertshaw

**30 March 1945**  
 Lieut H. Burnett  
 Sergeant C. Urry  
 Trooper A. Charlesworth  
 Trooper A. Marsden  
 Trooper J. Nott  
 Trooper E. Rockall  
 Trooper H. Swinton

**2 April 1945**  
 Captain I. S. Geikie  
 Captain J. W. G. Sandford  
 Sergeant R. Barradell  
 Trooper H. Sutherland

**5 April 1945**  
 Corporal E. Nicholson  
 Trooper I. Dearley  
 Trooper J. Dutch  
 Trooper J. Mahoney

**6 April 1945**  
 Captain J. H. McBeath, RAMC  
 Trooper J. Booth  
 Trooper C. Hopkins  
 Trooper W. Morton

**9 April 1945**  
 Trooper C. Maber

**15 April 1945**  
 Lance-corporal R. Ely  
 Trooper C. Torr

**16 April 1945**  
 Captain C. V. O'Reilly  
 Lieut G. Woodland

**17 April 1945**  
 Lieut S. H. Goss  
 Corporal F. Bearder  
 Trooper W. Hopkinson  
 Trooper J. Nixon  
 Trooper E. Ray

**1 May 1945**  
 Trooper C. Carroll  
 Trooper J. Flockton

