

C SQUADRON 13/18th ROYAL HUSSARS

War Diary

From 6th June 1944 to 8th May 1945

C Squadron landed at H plus 45 (ie 0810 hrs) at LA BRECHE on 6th June 44 in support of 1st Bn Suffolk Regiment who belonged to the 9th Bde 3rd British Inf Div. The Squadron landed from 3 LCT's on Green Beach and suffered no casualties whilst disembarking. Owing to the traffic congestion on the beach, the Squadron were unable to move for some three quarters of an hour during which time they lost all but five of the 15 porpoise loads of ammunition. Eventually they moved inland and concentrated at a small farm some 2,000 yds inland. They then linked up with the 1st Bn Suffolks and an attack was put in on a strong point near COLLEVILLE, about the middle of the morning. This, strong point was soon overcome and a few German prisoners were taken, this was immediately followed up by an attack on a further strong point which was heavily defended. The destruction of this strong point was not completed until late in the evening. The Squadron's only casualty was the Sqn Leader's tank which fell into the German Officers lavatory and broke a track. Whilst this second attack was going on Lt E E Smith and 4th Troop were some distance out of our left flank in open country where unfortunately they met some anti tank guns and had two tanks knocked out. Earlier in the afternoon two other tanks were also hit by AT guns; our total casualties for the day were, one OR died of wounds (Tpr Owens) and seven wounded, (Shreeves, Cpl Collins, Cpl Pickles, Trp Turner, Ward L/Cpl Murphy). We eventually harboured for the night at 2330 hrs at COLLEVILLE.

On 7th June 44 at 0330 hrs we were warned of a threat on the right flank from the 21st Panzer Div which however did not materialise. The Sqn left COLLEVILLE in the late afternoon and went to BENNOUVILLE on the left flank. It was thought that the Squadron would cross the canal and come in support of the 6th Airborne Div, but eventually we went into harbour at 2230 hrs at BENNOUVILLE where we remained until 11th June. During the time at BENNEOUVILLE we were machine gunned from the air several times, luckily sustaining no casualties. There was some sniping the first night in harbour but eventually these were caught and made prisoner, during one search for snipers Tpr Borer was wounded by a shot from one of our own tanks. On the night of 7th June the harbour was bombed but with no ill effects. On the 10th June the harbour area was shelled and although casualties were caused there was none in C Squadron. Prior to this Tpr Gee was wounded by a spent bullet and evacuated.

At 0730 hrs on 11th June the Squadron moved to the high ground near PLUMTOT and took over an observation role from the ERY but nothing was seen all day and we went into close leager for the night. 1st Troop were sent off to act as guard to General Montgomery HQ near DOUVRES. On 12th June the Squadron moved back to BENNOUVILLE, crossed the River Orne late at night and harboured near RANVILLE and came under command of the 6th Airborne Div. There was intermittent shelling all night and next day. A counter attack was expected in the BREVILLE GAP and 3rd Troop moved into BREVILLE in place of a Troop of B Squadron. On 14th June 2nd Troop relieved 3rd Troop at BREVILLE and the remainder of the Squadron took up AT positions at RANVILLE. The Squadron remained in this area until 18th June and during this time the Sqn had a quiet time except for occasional shelling and mortaring. On 18th June, C Squadron came under command of the 153 Bde (51st Highland Div) and the Squadron moved into an area just east of HEROUVILLE and with 2nd Troop with the 1st Gordons; 3rd Troop with the 5th/7th Gordons and 4th Troop with the Black Watch. Sgt York and Tpr Sumners were wounded. 2nd Troop fought a small action killing 12 Germans and capturing 6 others with a mortar and a Spandau. The following day was quiet, 3rd Troop reported 1 SP gun but could not get a shot at it. On 20th June 154 Bde (HD) relieved 153 Bde and 2nd Troop went to the 7th A & SH 3rd Troop to the 7th Black Watch, 4th Troop to the 1st Black Watch. There was heavy shelling and mortaring during all this period and German propaganda leaflets were dropped in the Squadron area alleging that London had been destroyed by flying bombs. On the evening of 20th June Tpr Fisher'56 was removed to hospital with nervous exhaustion.

We remained in this area until 23rd June when at 0400 hrs we moved out as left flank protection for an attack on ST HONORINE la CHARDONERETTE. We held position around the village of ESCOVILLE and the attack was completed by 0500 hrs when a counter attack of some 50 Mk IVs was put in. The Regiment claimed 17 Mk IVs knocked out of which C Squadron claimed 2 tanks and 1 lorry, all knocked out by 2nd Troop (Lt Norris). Sgt Cooper was attached to A Squadron at

this time and claimed 4 tanks knocked out by his 17 pdr gun. Sgt Short's tank was hit but no casualties were incurred, and the tank remained in the battle. No tanks were lost by the Squadron or the Regiment. Great work was done in a forward observation post by Capt Wardlaw and Tpr Urquhart in the Sqn jeep. We remained in observation until 2230 hrs when we returned to 154 Brigade. 3rd Troop did not tank part in the battle but remained with 7th Black Watch and lost three men (Tprs Yates-Smith, Hedgecock and Watt) wounded by mortar shells. On 24th June the Squadron moved out early to ESCOVILLE but nothing happened until dusk when the Germans attacked the 7th Black Watch, and the Squadron instead of going into reserve returned once again to the 154 Brigade. During the night march back to 154 Bde the Squadron Leader's tank ran in to one of our own minefields but suffered no damage. During the day the Sqn MT 14 was blown up by a mortar and Sig Watson received burns on his hand. On 25th June the Sqn was relieved by B Squadron in the evening and went into reserve at RANVILLE. The Squadron remained in this area until 30th June 44 during which time the men got their first bath since D Day. On the 28th 3rd Troop relieved a Troop at LONGUEVAL. On the 30th June the Squadron once again rejoined 154 Bde at LE MESNIL and they remained in support of them until 4th July. Sgt Weir and his tank were loaned to the Recce Troop at LONGUEVAL and Cpl Ellis was loaned with his tank to B Sqn, in order to give both these sub-units a 17 pdr. 148 RAC relieved the Sqn on 4th July and we moved into a rest area at LUC-SER-MER, where Sgt Diver stepped on an S Mine but luckily with no ill effects. Tpr Bates' lorry was blown up by a shell but nobody was wounded. July 5th, 6th and 7th were spent resting and doing recces for the coming battle of CAEN which was due to take place on the 8th July. The Sqn moved out at 2300 hrs 7th July to harbour at CAZELLE.

On the 8th July the Squadron were under command of the 7th Bn Royal Norfolks for an attack on EPRON as part of 159 Bde (59 Div). The Squadron supported from a position south of CHATEAU de la LANDE where it was heavily mortared. Whilst in this position Sgt Cooper was wounded by a mortar hit on his tank. The Squadron moved forward to the outskirts of the village of LA BIJUDE where the infantry was held up by machine guns. At this point Sgt Short received a direct hit on the top of his tank from a supposed 88 mm shell and was killed. A little later the Sqn Leader in an attempt to get the infantry from LA BIJUDE into EPRON was knocked out by a bazooka and had to abandon the tank. LCpl Little was wounded. The bazooka was eventually knocked out by Capt Akers Douglas who had assumed command of the Squadron. Capt Wardlaw who had been dismounted with the infantry up to the present rejoined his tank. Major Cotter remained with the Squadron endeavouring to rally the infantry.

At this period Lt Uttley's tank was twice hit on top of the turret by long range 88 mm guns without causing damage. Shortly after this Capt Akers-Douglas' tank was likewise hit and he was wounded together with his driver Tpr Whotton. Two hours later the Sqn and RHQ motored down the road to EPRON and 1st and 3rd Troops were sent to AUBERGE. 2nd and 4th Troops were responsible for the west flank of the village and were heavily mortared but sustained no casualties. 4th Troop A Squadron under command pushed on to the top of the hill overlooking CAEN where they made contact with 33rd Tank Brigade. The Sqn returned to the CAZELLE area for the night and on the following morning moved into the Chateau with the rest of the Regt for a period of rest until 16th July 44. Maintenance, sports and recreation took place and tank crews were made up to strength.

On the afternoon of the 17th the Squadron moved to a preliminary forming up area south of DOUVRES la DELIVERANDE; in a Regtl column we then moved by night back across the Orne river and canal to a concentration area east of HEROUVILLETTE.

1st Troop had previously rejoined us and had been replaced by a composite Regtl Troop. The Squadron remained in this concentration area until next day, whilst plans and recces were carried out with the 1st Battalion Suffolk Regt, with whom we had landed on D Day. Early the next morning we moved out to the area north of the CHATEAU at ESCOVILLE prior to marrying up with the Suffolks for an attack on the SANNERVILLE. This attack was not to be launched until A and B Squadrons had captured the ground south east of ESCOVILLE and the village of TOUFFREVILLE during which period C Squadron was in reserve but were moved forward during which period C Squadron was in reserve but were moved forward by RHQ to the BUTTE de la HOGUE. After the consolidation by the other Squadrons the Suffolks started their attack and 2nd Troop were sent forward to the high ground north of SANNERVILLE to support the assaulting infantry. The Suffolks entered the village without difficulty and the remainder of the Squadron joined 2nd Troop on the high ground. At the request of the infantry colonel 4th Troop were sent into the village for mopping

up and 3rd Troop to the orchards north east to deal with snipers. As soon as the situation was static the Suffolks consolidated the ground between SANNERVILLE and BANNERVILLE and asked for tanks to be sent forward. Whilst this was going on 4 tanks were knocked out by unseen enemy SPs from the south east, two of the tanks were later recovered by the ARV. From this action Tpr Spavin and LCP Woodcock were killed. Lt Uttley, Tpr Ward (for the second time), Tpr Williams'72, LSgt Ellis, Cpl Barnes, Tpr Waggott, Tpr Denyer and Tpr Foster were wounded. The Squadron returned to the Regtl area and remained for the next 3 days until 22nd July in a counter-attack roll.

On the evening of the 22nd the Regiment withdrew to the area north of ESCOVILLE on account of very heavy shelling. We remained here until 24th July in the same counter-attack role but were able to carry out minor maintenance. The following evening with the rest of the Regt, C Squadron moved to the area LE MESNIL FREMENTIL to take up position covering the railway – road bridges on the CAEN – VIMOUNT railway line and to establish a firm base for the Canadians who were attacking south. The Squadron remained in this area for 36 hrs and were relieved on the evening of the 27th by the 144 RAC. From here we moved back across the canal and river bridges to the area COLOMBES where it was intended to get a weeks maintenance, to re-equip and to replenish with personnel and vehicles before joining our new formation 8th Arm'd Brigade. The period of 28-30th July was so spent, but the Squadron was ordered to stand by at short notice to move further west for an attack. This move eventually took place at 0600 hrs on the 30th and we reached LA BELLE EPINE at midday and came under command of 231 Inf Bde of the 50th Northumbrian Div. The remainder of the day was given up to planning and reces with Battalion Commanders. 1st and 2nd Troops were with the 1st Hants under Capt Wardlaw, 3rd and 4th Troops with the 1st Dorsets under Capt Gale. The Squadron moved up to the Infantry area near CROIX DES LANDES overnight ready for an early morning attack.

At first light on 31st July both the Dorsets and the Hants with our troops were able to reach the start line without opposition; the final objective was the high ground around LA DOUITIE. The whole area was thickly wooded and held by odd pockets of enemy on both fronts, which were cleared by Tanks shooting in and infantry combing. The advance was slow on account of the difficult tank going country but the Hants with 2nd Troop were able to push on and capture the sunken road leading to LICTOT from ECTOT. The Dorsets on the left were held up by even thicker wooded country but were eventually able to gain the same line as the HANTS. 1st Troop with 2nd Troop went forward into the valley and held the area LA RIVIERE. The Dorsets on the left managed to push a patrol across the river with the Tanks but did not consider it safe to consolidate. On returning the leading two tanks were shot at by bazookas, but were able to rejoin the rest of the Squadron at forward rally. During the initial stage of the advance Lt Riviere was wounded with the Hants and also LCpl Zonena and Lt E E Smith with the Dorsets. As a result of the bazooka Capt Gale was wounded and Tpr Bell was killed together with the crew of the AA Tank attached.

On 1st Aug no further advances were made but 1st Troop were under command of the Hants and 4th Troop under command of the Dorsets. The next day 3rd and 4th Troops under command of Lt Norris were sent to the Devons and 1st and 2nd Troops under command of Capt Wardlaw remained with the Hants. The objectives of the attack were LICTOT Pt 147 and the high ground due west of it. At 0700 hrs 3rd Troop with the leading Coy of the Devons crossed the start line under cover of fog and were closely followed by 4th Troop with the remainder of the Battalion. Owing to the fog the pace was slow and the opposition light. 2 Troops of Avries were with Lt Norris and these were used against LICTOT village to clear the remaining enemy from it. 4th Troop gave particularly good protection to the Avries and the infantry went straight through the village and consolidated the ground to the east and south east of the village.

3rd Troop also met no opposition and captured their objective Pt 147. On the right flank 1st and 2nd Troops with the Hants, established themselves without difficulty on the high ground to the west. At dusk the Squadron returned to forward rally. During the day the Squadron sustained one casualty – Sgt Weir who was killed.

On 3 Aug the Squadron left 231 Brigade and came under command of 129 Brigade (43 Div). They moved at midday to LE REPAS and were in reserve and remained there until the following afternoon, when they moved to the area of the BOIS DE HOMME to marry up with 129 Brigade in particular with the 4th SLI. On the evening of the 5th the Sqn had married up with 4th SLI and set off

on a 15 mile night march to LE PLESSIS GRIMOULT. Owing to the difficult roads and traffic congestion the Sqn only reached LA MENARDRIERE during the night. On the morning of the 6th the Sqn again moved forward on a different route and reached ECURIE where it was found B Squadron was held up and C Squadron halted for the remainder of the day. 2nd Troop and 2 sections of carriers patrolled to DANVOU which they reported clear of enemy. The Squadron harboured the night just north of DANVOU. The following morning the harbour area was heavily shelled and SSM Park was mortally wounded. Tpr Hadwin was also killed and Pte Williams (ACC) seriously wounded. In the afternoon the Squadron moved out in support of A Sqn for their attack on Mount Pincon with a task of watching the south and south western flanks. 1st Troop under command of Lt Coates were ordered out to recce between LA VERMIERE and LE PLESSIS GRIMOULT. Owing to the boggy nature of the ground near LA VARMIERE all 1st Troop became bogged and 2nd Troop were sent out to help them; they managed to recover two of these tanks but the remaining two had to be left where they were in enemy country. One of these two tanks were hit and Tprs Challis and Haskayne were killed, the remainder of the crews together with 2Lt Edwards eventually regained our lines on foot later that night. The dismounted crews were returned to the Echelon, but on their way back were ambushed – Tpr Wallace being killed, Cpl Roden and Tpr Whent wounded. The Sqn went into leager for the night which was unexpectedly quiet. On the early morning of the 8th Aug the Sqn took a defensive position near LA QUESNEE. Sgt Haygarth destroyed an enemy SP gun at close range. 4th Troop were sent out to clear the outskirts of the village. The enemy flew white flags but would not come out to surrender. Late in the afternoon the Sqn withdrew to LE MESNIL AZOUF for a rest but later in the evening returned to the line and harboured for the night west of VILLIERS BOCAGE and came under command of 151 Bde (50 Div). During the day, whilst assisting to recover an A Sqn tank, the Sqn ARV was destroyed, killing Cpl Attew and wounding Tpr Dear and Cfn Leeworthy. LCpl Bailey was also wounded during the shelling of the Sqn area.

The Sqn were in support of 8 DLI. The following day the Sqn and the 8th DLI moved to a concentration area near AUNEY-SUR-ODEN. On the 10th Aug the Sqn and the 8th DLI were ordered to clear the ground south of LE PLESSIS GRIMOULT as far as the high ground west of LA GROUNDIERE. The Infantry attacked with 2 Coys up with 4th Troop on the left and 2nd Troop on the right. The attack started at midday with Capt Wardlaw commanding the 2 leading troops. Enemy opposition was light and many of them surrendered. Halfway from the final objective Capt Wardlaw and Lt Norris came under heavy mortar fire. Capt Wardlaw's tank received a direct hit and he was killed. All objectives were finally reached and in the evening the Sqn was relieved by the 8th DLI anti-tank guns and went into harbour at LE PLESSIS GRIMOULT. During the day Lt Downer and Tpr Macdonald were wounded by shelling. Also on this day Tpr Minshull was accidentally killed in B Echelon.

On 12th Aug the Squadron with the 9th DLI attached Pt 262 north of CONDE-dur-NOIREAU, the Squadron was heavily shelled in the FUP but they sustained no casualties. Sgt Scamp knocked out a Panther and a Tiger. Also one 88 mm ground mounted was silenced. The FOOs tank with the Squadron was hit. Once the attack has started enemy opposition was light, and 2nd and 3rd Troops reached their objectives without difficulty. The carriers of the 8th and 9th DLI took over the position of the Squadron returned for a rest period near CULVAIN BEAUMONT south of VILLIERS BOCAGE. The rest period lasted from 13th to 17th Aug during which time the Corps Commander paid a visit (Lt Gen HORROCKS). The tanks were maintained and the men had baths etc. On 18th Aug in the afternoon the Squadron moved to a harbour area south of LE PLESSIS GRIMOULT for preparation for what was to be the great drive across France and Belgium. On 19th Aug the Sqn came under command of 50 Div and moved to ST HONERINE la CHARDONNE. The following day the advance continued from PUTAGNES to SENTILLY. On 21st Aug the Squadron moved to the area of OCCAGNES to mop up any Germans attempting to break out of the Falaise Pocket. In the afternoon they moved to Pt 168 near BAILLEUL and harboured the night at the 'dead horse chateau' which had been a German Div HQ.

On 22nd Aug C Squadron and the 9th DLI were ordered to clear CHAMBOIS but just before the attack was put in, it was discovered that the town was already held by Polish and American Troops and the Squadron returned to harbour SQ of the town. The next day C Squadron with the 9th DLI drove some 35 miles with the object of clearing the FOREST de L'AIGLE. The infantry were to move through the wood with 1st and 2nd Troops moving down the southern edge and 3rd and 4th

Troops down the northern edge. The operation met no opposition and all objectives were reached. The Squadron harboured for the night near FRANCHEVILLE.

Between 24-26 Aug the Squadron had an unexpected rest and a thorough maintenance was carried out. 2Lt Belcher joined the Sqn and was posted to 2nd Troop. On the afternoon of the 27th Aug the Squadron moved forward to spend the night in the FOREST de CONCHE. Early on the 28th the advance continued through EVREAUX and finally crossed the Seine at VERNON at 1600 hrs, and harboured the night about a mile east of the crossing. The advance was continued the next day, the Regiment having reverted to the 8th Arm'd Brigade, C Squadron started in reserve but at FOURGES they were moved off the main axis as A Squadron were held up. The Squadron successfully bypassed the obstruction and rejoined the axis at BRAY. 2nd Troop were now leading and met no opposition until they reached ST CLAIR SUR EPTE where the leading tank knocked out an enemy anti tank gun and took some prisoners. A halt was called here to allow the Regiment to join up. During the halt an enemy SP gun moved up and hit Cpl Pink's tank, killing him and Tpr Banks and wounding Tpr Dunn. The SP gun was later destroyed by 2nd Troop. The Squadron were then ordered with B Coy of the 12/60th KRRC to capture and hold the bridge at DANGU. This task was successfully carried out by 3rd and 4th Troops. The Squadron went into close leaguer for the night south of DANGU and on the morning of the 30th Aug the 4/7th Dragoon Guards passed through the Squadron. The Squadron followed on through GISSORS and harboured the night at LE HOUSOYE. The following afternoon they moved on again to a village just south of AMIENS. On 1st Sept C Squadron continued the advance, and were slightly held up at DOULLENS but reached IVERGNY that night, having a riotous welcome at BOQUEMAISON. Tprs Silk and Wilcox were injured at this time when their tank overturned.

No move was made on the 2nd Sept but on the 3rd they moved through ARRAS and LENS and harboured the night at LOOS. From 4th Sept to the 6th the Sqn with the 9th DLI did left flank protection at TEMPLEMARS. On the afternoon of the 6th the Squadron entered Belgium through TORNAI and reached NISOVE. On the 7th Sep the Squadron moved through BRUSSELS where they had a tremendous reception, moved on through LOUVAIN, HERSCHOULT and reached GELRODE for the night.

The following day the advance was continued to the Albert Canal which was crossed late in the afternoon at BEERINGEN. The night was spent at BEVERLOO. A1 Echelon moved up to join the Squadron that night. At breakfast time on the morning of the 9th Sep the Echelon was heavily attacked and 2nd and 4th Troops were sent down to deal with the situation. During this action Tpr Robinson'56 was mortally wounded, Tpr Bone wounded and the following personnel were missing after the action and presumed prisoners of war – Tprs Gledhill, Hughes, Woodward, Archibald, Hibbert and LCpl MacLeod. The Squadron took up defensive positions around BEVERLOO with the Dutch Brigade. On the evening of the 10th Sept they moved up to KORSPAL with B Coy, 12/60th KRRC and remained there for the next three days in defensive positions. On the afternoon of the 13th Sep the Squadron moved back to BEVERLOO for 4 days rest and prepare for the advance into Holland. On the morning of the 17th the Regiment moved to the concentration area at HECHTEL and C Squadron made plans for the advance with 129 Bde (43 Div). The Squadron remained in this area until the morning of 20 Sept and eventually it was decided that C Squadron would be under command of the 5th Dorsets in 130 Bde. The Squadron entered Holland at about midday and drove on until midnight when they harboured for the night 2 miles south of GRAVE. The advance was continued at 0530 hrs the next morning and reached the outskirts of NIJMEGEN at about 1000 hrs having linked up with the infantry. 2nd and 4th Troops cleared the western outskirts of the town and the bridge was reached about midday. The Squadron crossed the river in the afternoon and harboured the night under the railway bridge. Early on 22 Sept it was planned that C Squadron with the 5th Wilts (129 Bde) would push on through ELST to ARNHEL but this was eventually cancelled as the infantry were not ready until after dark that night and the Squadron returned to its previous nights harbour. The Squadron moved off early on the morning of 23 Sept with the 5th Dorsets and by a left flanking movement reached the NEDDER RIJN just west of ARNHEM in the afternoon. During the march the Sqn was shot at by a Mk IV near ELST without doing any damage, this was eventually smoked off and the remainder of the Squadron passed through safely. The Squadron took up a defensive position in the area of DRIEL with 2 Troops forward, 4th Troop being near the railway bridge over the river and 1st Troop just west of them. The whole area was heavily shelled all the afternoon. The 24 Sept the Squadron was machine gunned by approx 50 German aircraft but without causing any casualties. 4th Troop knocked out an enemy

machine gun and its crew near the railway bridge. During the night 1st and 4th Troops laid down harassing fire on the northern bank of the river to cover ferrying of reinforcements and supplies across the river to the 1st Airborne Div. On the 25 Sept the Squadron was again machine gunned, but without casualties, and that night 1st and 4th Troops again gave covering fire across the river, but this time to cover the withdrawal of the 1st Airborne Div to the southern bank.

On the 26th Sept the mortaring and shelling of the Squadron area decreased, but on the 27th the German Airforce was again much in evidence and the Sqn M14 was hit by an AT gun, luckily only lost a track and no one was hurt. Eventually on the 28th Sept the Squadron moved out to a rest area at OOSTERHOUT on the north bank of the WAAL just west of NIJMEGEN where they remained until the 1st Oct 44. Routine, maintenance, baths etc were carried out, the only event of significance being the unsuccessful attempt of the Germans to blow up both the road and railway bridges across the river using long distance swimmers with explosives. The railway bridge was completely destroyed but the road bridge was re-opened on the morning of the 30th Sept.

On 1st Oct after a night of considerable bombing, Sqn HQ, 2nd and 3rd Troops were suddenly ordered to join 4th Wilts at EIMEREN near VALBERT and ELST. Although nothing happened during the morning there was a flap in the afternoon, and 2nd and 3rd Troops moved up in support of C Company. The flap died down in the evening but 2nd Troop remained in moral support of C Company all night. 3rd Troop joined B Coy near ELST.

Sqn HQ did not move and were joined in the evening by 1st and 4th Troops. The following morning the Sqn were told that an attack was put in against C Coy so the whole Sqn less 3rd Troop and the whole of the 4th Wilts moved up to C Coy area. On arrival it was found that the attack was not being put in there but further east, so the whole party moved back to its old area, 2nd Troop remaining with C Coy. 2nd Troop were badly shelled during the morning and in the afternoon supported C Coy in an attack on some enemy infantry who were in position along the railway line from ELST to ARNHEM. After two abortive attempts 2nd Troop managed to get C Coy on to the railway and there they remained. On 3rd Oct 4th Troop relieved 2nd Troop in the morning and were heavily shelled and in the afternoon fought a small action in which they succeeded in knocking out one enemy SP. During the battle Cpl Plackett was wounded in the leg by a mortar and Tpr England was accidentally injured. The remainder of the Squadron moved up to join the 5th Wilts at GANZENBURGH and spent the night there. On 4th Oct the Sqn were relieved by C Squadron of the Scots Greys. During the take over 1st Troop had a tank hit by mortar fire and had a track and two bogie wheels blown off. The tank had to be abandoned and Tpr Humphries was wounded. The Squadron moved back in the afternoon to the south of the River Waal and into billets at WEURT.

After 4 days of rest and maintenance the Regiment on 9th Oct came under command of the 82nd US Airborne Div and moved to the area of DEKKERSWALD, south east of NIJMEGEN. C Squadron were in reserve and at 24 hrs notice. On 10th Oct for some unexplained reason the Sqn was put at one hours notice. The Sqn remained there until 17th Oct 44 during which time individual training was carried out and all Officers and NCOs were lectured by the Corps Commander (Gen Horrocks) on past, present and future plans.

On 17 Oct C Squadron were due to take over the forward role of B Squadron but this was suddenly cancelled and the whole Regiment moved over to the island again and were in support of 101 US Airborne Div. 1st Troop were located at HIEN, 3rd Troop near OPHEUSDEN and the remainder of the Squadron at ZETTEN. The Squadron were in direct support of 327 and 502 Regiments. There was nothing to report for the next three days except for a small amount of shelling in 1st Troop area on 19th Oct. On 21st Oct B Squadron of the SRY relieved C Squadron who moved back to a rest area at WINSEN. 2nd and 4th Troops moved in daylight but 1st and 3rd Troops had a very long and dark night march.

On 22nd Oct saw the opening of ANTWERP and BRUSSELS for leave and the Squadron sent Lt Downer and Lt Jamieson and 10 ORs to ANTWERP and 25 ORs to BRUSSELS for 48 hrs leave. On 23rd Oct the Regt lost the final of the Brigade football cup by 2 goals to 1 against the Essex Yeomanry. Cpl Pickles and Tpr Jenkins were playing for the Regiment. On the 24th the Brigade Commander inspected C Squadron in the morning and in the evening the Squadron attended the Brigade Concert Party in which Tprs Williamson and Bateman took part.

On 25th being Balaclava Day the day was spent as a holiday. C Squadron were defeated by HQ Squadron in the first round of the football. An excellent Regtl Dance was held at NIJMEGEN in the evening. 26th Oct was spent looking at a new area at MOOK, south east of NIJMEGEN and on the 27th the Regt moved into that area in support of 43 Div. C Squadron with 214 Brigade and in particular the 1st Worcesters. The Squadron were located in the middle of a wood and each tank had to dig its own foxhole in which to live. The Squadron were in counter attack role and were chiefly responsible for the GROESBEEK area. On 28th Oct 214 Brigade were relieved by 219 Bde and the Squadron came under command of the 4th Wilts. The Squadron Leader received the DSO on 29th Oct and Tpr Macdonald the 'MM' on 30th Oct for bravery during the Normandy campaign. We remained in this area until 2nd Nov during which time the Squadron sustained the following casualties:- Tpr Shipley – died of wounds, Lt Jamieson, LCpl Murphy, Tprs Wallace and Willcox wounded (all these casualties were due to accidents and not through enemy action).

In the afternoon of the 2nd November, 1st and 4th Troops under command of Capt Akers-Douglas moved to CUIJK and came under command of the 7th Hants who were defending the river line near GENNEPP. Their arrival caused considerable shelling of CUIJK that evening. The remainder of the Squadron moved to MOOK and were in reserve and at 12 hrs notice 2nd and 4th Troops did a successful indirect shoot on 4th Nov into enemy held country on the other side of the river. This was repeated by 1st and 3rd Troops on 6th Nov; during this time Lt E E Smith and Lt Riviere returned to the Squadron and took over 3rd and 1st Troops respectively. Lt J W Smith was posted to C Squadron. On 7th Nov the 7th Hants were relieved by the 4th SLI but the Squadron role remained the same. Later that evening the Squadron received preliminary orders for a move on the 9th Nov. 9th Nov saw the Squadron move by tank transporters to the area of SITTARD just north of MAASTRICHT, having harboured the night in the open, in appalling snow and rain the Sqn moved to billets at BRUNSSUM. On 11th Nov C Sqn came under command of 4th SLI and recces were made for billets for the first time in Germany. The Sqn entered Germany at 0730 hrs on 12th Nov and moved to positions at PANNENSCHOOP with 2nd Troop at TEVEUREN, which were a few miles south west of GEILENKIRCHEN. There was slight shelling during the evening. On the following day the shelling became more accurate but luckily no casualties were sustained. On 14th Nov the Sqn registered targets in BAUCHEM a suburb of GEILENKIRCHEN for an indirect shoot in support of B Squadron's attack on that place on 17th Nov. C Squadron also made recces for their attack with the 4th Dorsets on STRAETEN. 15th and 16th Nov were filled with conferences and final plans being made. On 17th Nov C Squadron fired 2,000 rds from 1230 hrs to 1530 hrs into BAUCHEM with extremely good effect. The tanks were under command of Lt E E Smith and Lt Downer with Capt Akers-Douglas acting as FOO. In the evening the Squadron moved to GILRATH which was heavily shelled. Sgt Diver, Tprs Stannard and Moulton were wounded. On 18th Nov the STRAETEN attack was postponed until 19th. On the 19th it was postponed until the 20th and on the 20th it was finally cancelled. On 21st Nov, 1st and 3rd Troops relieved 2nd Troop of B Sqn in support of the 4th Dorsets. 3rd Troop were in a wooded area south east of STRAETEN and 1st Troop in RISCHDEN. Capt Gale acting as LO with the infantry. The Squadron remained at GILRATH. 22nd and 23rd Nov saw heavy shelling of GILRATH particularly in the Squadron harbour area but for some unaccountable reason no casualties were incurred. On 24th Nov the remainder of the Squadron moved to NEIDERHEIDE and relieved A Sqn of the 4/7th RDG. 1st and 3rd Troops had to remain in their old positions as the mud would not allow them to move. 4th Troop joined 1st Troop at RISCHDEN. Owing to shelling in the 3rd Troop area Cpl Haddow was wounded. LCpl Helles received the 'MM' on 25th Nov for bravery in Normandy. There was some heavy shelling on this day and in the early morning of the 26th when the Sqn HQ received a direct hit but nobody was wounded. In the afternoon 2nd and 4th Troops under command of the Sqn Leader fired on TRIPSRATH in support of the 5th Wilt who were clearing the northern half of the village. Their fire was so successful that the 5th Wilts sustained only 4 casualties and took 60 prisoners. In the evening the Squadron received a message of thanks from the Brigade Comdr of 129 Bde. It was hoped to relieve Capt Gale and 3rd Troop on 27th Nov as the ground had dried considerably after 2 days sunshine but it had to be eventually postponed to the following day when it was successfully accomplished. Unfortunately it brought down some heavy shelling on 1st and 4th Troops and Tpr Merriman was wounded. 29th and 30th Nov was spent in the same area, but nothing took place except the usual occasional shelling.

1st and 2nd Dec were spent in the same place but on the 3rd the Squadron was relieved by 147 RAC (34 Tank Bde) in the morning and the Sqn moved out to rest at MOORVELD between SITTARD

and MAASTRICHT. Unfortunately owing to the 52 (Lowland) Division requiring that area the Sqn had to move to ULESTRATEN about ¼ mile away. The next few days were spent in preparing for operation 'Shears' with 52nd (Lowland) Div. C Squadron were to support the 6th HLI. On 8th Dec the Squadron performed exercise 'Linney Head' for the benefit of 4/5 RSF and later did a practice shoot. On 15th Dec the Regt was told to move to the EINDHOVEN area for a period of two months to retrain and refit. Billeting parties were sent off on 18th Dec.

By 20th Dec the German counter offensive in the Ardennes had become so serious and a second was expected from the HEINSBERG area that the move was cancelled and the Regt came under command 12 Corps. They moved into the GANGELT area with 52 Div, the Squadron being at STAHE with 5 HLI and 3rd Troop at BIRGDEN with 4 EOSB. We took over the area from the 2nd Grenadier Guards. We remained in this area until 27th Dec when we were relieved by C Sqn, Notts Yeomanry. The Regt moved back to the SCHINNEN area in an anti parachutist role. The following days were spent in celebrating a belated Christmas and New Year. C Squadron party was slightly spoiled as the 17 pdr gunners had to go to LOMMEL Ranges to shoot on 31st Dec.

The first 10 days of the New Year were taken up with Regtl Courses and refitting. As a result of the refitting each troop now had 2 x 17 pdr tanks and 2 x 75 mm tanks with an extra 17 pdr for Sqn HQs. On 10th Jan the Sqn moved back to the STAHE area and relieved 4/7 RDG A Squadron. We only remained there two days as on 12th Jan we were relieved by 3rd Scots Guards, and moved back to ULESTRATEN in preparation for operation 'Blackcock'. Just before the Squadron arrived at ULESTRATEN A 'V' 1 landed near the cookhouse causing considerable damage but only slightly injuring Cpl Prince and Tpr Allan'01. The next 3 days were spent in preparing for 'Blackcock' which was designed to clear the Germans out of the area between the River Maas and Roer. C Squadrons task was to act as left flank guard to the Regt, during their attack on WALDEFEUCT. The Sqn had under command B Coy 12 KRRC, F Troop, 129 A Tk Batty RA. 16th Jan should have been D Day and the Sqn was ready at 0830 hrs but as 7th Arm'd Divs attack on DIETEREN and SUSTEREN was so slow there was no move, until the following evening and then only for a short distance to SCHIMMERT where we remained until 0430 hrs 19th Jan. The plan was then changed as our route was blocked by a blown bridge and we were ordered down the KONIGSBOSCH road. About halfway along the road to KONIGSBOSCH we met resistance and were in contact with the enemy all day. 1st and 3rd Troops bore the brunt of the fighting, 1st Troop losing two tanks and 3rd Troop 3 tanks. Sgt Diver and Tpr Mason were killed, and Lt E E Smith, LCpl Hendick, LCpl Heslop and Tpr Cowley were wounded. Sgt Diver before being killed claimed to have knocked out 1 tank and 1 SP gun and Sgt Miller also claimed 1 SP gun as did Sgt Smith. The following day the Squadron tried to continue its advance with 7/9 RSF but soon came up against well sighted SPs and 88 mm guns. Major Cotter's tank was hit killing Sgt Bradley and Tpr Read. Lt Downer's and Sgt Carr's tanks were hit but there were no casualties. The Squadron eventually moved back to its old harbour area for the night. On 21st Jan the Sqn moved without difficulty to AAU de SCHOOL in support of B Squadron during their attack upon WALDEFEUCHT. It was a quiet day as was the following day. On 23rd Jan the Sqn moved to BOCKET in reserve with the 7th Cameronians. During the move Lt Bethell struck a mine but incurred no casualties. The Squadron remained at BOCKET until the morning of the 25th Jan when they moved out in support of the 4/5 RSF who were ordered to capture HAAREN, DRIESCH and VINN. There was no opposition and 10 prisoners were taken. Lt Bethell again struck a mine, but again there were no casualties. The following day the Squadron moved back to KONIGSBOSCH for a rest. Capt D R Tetley joined C Squadron in the evening. It was thought that the Squadron would move to the BEEK area on 28th Jan, but this was cancelled and we remained at KONIGSBOSCH until 2nd Feb when we were ordered to move to the NIJMEGEN area for Operation 'Veritable'. The Squadron moved at 0815 hrs on 2nd Feb and staged the night at MOLL. We moved on at 0915 hrs on 3rd Feb and driving all night reached BERG EN DAL (south east of NIJMEGEN) at 0800 hrs on 4th Feb. As there were no billets available the Notts Yeomanry very kindly billeted the Squadron in their area. The Squadron was under command of the 5th Canadian Brigade (2nd Canadian Div). The next 3 days were spent in preparing for Operation 'Veritable' which was designed to clear the Germans out of the area between the River Maas and Rhine. C Squadrons task on the first day was to support the 5th Canadian Brigade in WYLER. The Squadron moved out at 0530 hrs on the 8th Feb and moved up into fire positions about 2,000 yards south of WYLER. Owing to the appalling mud 5 tanks got stuck but the remainder under Capt Tetley were in position by 1000 hrs. They fired on the WYLER until 1230 hrs and the town was eventually captured after heavy fighting by 1600 hrs.

The Squadron was released at 1700 hrs and returned to NIJMEGEN where we came under command of the 43rd Div Recce Regt. Earlier in the day Tpr Sanders was wounded by our own artillery fire. 9th Feb was spent linking up with the 43rd Div Recce Regt, 1st and 3rd Troops under Capt Akers-Douglas with A Squadron, 2nd and 4th Troops under Capt Tetley with B Squadron. Orders were received to move at 0230 hrs on 10th Feb but no move actually took place until 0430 hrs. As the roads were blocked with traffic the move was extremely slow and NUTTENDEN was only reached by midday. 4th Troop and one Tp of the Recce Regt were sent to SAALHOF but were held up. There was no further move on 11 Feb, but on the 12th, 1st and 3rd Troops together with part of the Recce Regt moved forward to KLOOSTER south east of CLEVE at 1000 hrs. 2nd Troop with one troop of Recce moved off early through MATERBORN to patrol down the GOCH road; they met trouble early on and all 3 tanks of 2nd Troop were knocked out and 3 cars of the Recce by long range fire from 88 mm guns. Sgt Scamp and Tpr Wilcox were killed. 4th Troop and Capt Tetley withdrew to MATERBORN. 13th Feb was spent in the same area. Major Cotter proceeded on leave and Capt Akers-Douglas took over command of the Squadron. Early on the 14th Feb the Squadron was released from 43 Recce and ordered to join the 5th Dorsets (130 Bde). The 5th Dorsets had ordered for an attack southwards towards GOCH. The Squadron moved to the area of BEDBURG and were billeted in a lunatic asylum. The attack was due to start on 15th Feb but was eventually postponed until after dark. The Sqn could not take part and the attack failed. The attack was renewed at 0900 hrs on 16th Feb. They attacked with 2 Coys up, A Coy with 4th Troop on the left and C Coy with 3rd Troops on the right, and B Coy with 1st Troop in reserve. The objectives were some 2,000 yards away. 3rd Troop with C Coy met little opposition and reached their objective quite easily. 4th Troop with A Coy had a hard battle against SPs and German infantry. Lt Downers tank was hit by an SP and later by a bazooka, but the tank remained fightable and there were no casualties. Sgt Carr's tank was hit by a mortar and he was wounded in the face. 4th Troop fought extremely well and the objective was finally taken when 1st Troop moved up to assist. A heavy counter attack was put in but repulsed. Lt Downer knocked out an SP. 2nd Troop having reformed rejoined the Squadron at midday and relieved 4th Troop who came back into reserve. On 17th Feb no move was made except 4th Troop relieved 3rd Troop. The Squadron was relieved on 18th Feb by the 9th Canadian Brigade and returned after dark to BEDBURG and came under command of 4th Welsh (160 Bde or 53 W Div). During the next three days the Sqn linked up with the 4th Welsh who came over to inspect the tanks. In the evening of 23 Feb C Squadron moved up into the 4th Welsh area just north of GOGH. The original plan was the 4th Welsh with C Squadron to form a bridgehead over the stream north of WEEZE. 1st Troop supported A Coy, 2nd Troop D Coy, 3rd Troop C Coy and 4th Troop B Coy and gave fire support during their attack. No enemy were met but extremely heavy shelling and mortaring was experienced once they were in position. Lt Bethell was wounded and later Lt Downer accidentally broke his arm. In the evening 1st and 3rd Troops under Capt Tetley came under command 2nd Monmouths and relieved A Squadron. That night the 4th Welsh were attacked by the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry and crocodiles and had several casualties. Luckily none of C Squadron Troops were involved. The following day 4th Troop were fired on by SP guns and Sgt Haygarth's tank was damaged and later Cpl Balerinil's tank brewed up and Tpr Reeve was slightly burnt. The Squadron were withdrawn in the evening and put into reserve with the 6th RWF in GOCH where they spent 2 days maintaining and refitting. Lt Charles and Lt Richardson joined the Squadron. The Squadron moved out at 0015 hrs on 28th Feb in support of the 6th RWF to go to help the East Yorks who had been counter attacked east of WEEZE. 2nd and 3rd Troops with 2 Coys of the RWF went forward into the East Yorks area. 2nd Troop had some difficulty in getting over the bridge owing to SP and artillery fire. They were in action most of the day and killed a considerable number of German infantry. 3rd Troop were fired on by SPs and Sgt Miller's tank was hit, however the tank remained in action and claimed to have knocked out an SP and a gun. In the evening 4th Troop relieved 2nd Troop and 3rd Troop were withdrawn. There was considerable shelling all day. The Squadron spent the next 3 days in a wooded area east of WEEZE in support of the 6th RWF.

On the 4th March we moved to KEVELAR and on the 5th moved on to WERT near GELDERN and remained there all day. The Regt was in action on 6th March but C Squadron was not committed except for Capt Aker-Douglas who acted as LO with the 4th Welsh for A Squadron. C Squadron moved up to ISSUM in the afternoon, and in the evening 1st Troop under command of Lt Norris, and 2nd Troop relieved A Squadron in the wooded area south west of ALPON where they suffered heavy shelling all night. The remainder of the Squadron came under command 2nd Monmouths on 7th March but 52nd Div relieved 55 Div in the afternoon and the Squadron came under the 6th Cameronians and 4/5 RSF. These two Battalions attacked ALPON in the afternoon of 8th March

but the Squadron were unable to give effective fire support as it was not possible to find good fire positions on the high ground from the south west. It was a very hard battle and the objectives were not taken until well on into the night. No tanks could go forward until the following morning as the bridge had been blown up. 3rd Troop got into the town early on 9th March and later 1st and 2nd Troops crossed the bridge and supported the 7th Cameronians in an attack on the factory area. Sqn HQ gave very effective smoke support and the attack was very successful although the Infantry suffered some casualties. 1st and 2nd Troops remained in the factory area all night but were relieved as were the whole Squadron at first light on 10th March by the 9th RTR (34th Tank Brigade) and the Squadron returned to billets at ISSUM. LCpl Crerar was severely injured in the head during the attack on the factory. The Squadron remained at ISSUM on the 11th March 45. The Squadron moved back to GOCH on the 12th March and stayed there until 23rd March, cleaning and preparing tanks for the Rhine assault.

All 75 mm tanks of the Squadron under command of the Sqn Ldr moved out of GOCH on the 23rd March to the area of WISSEL to fire 'pepperpot' on to ESSERDEN prior to 51st Highland Div assault across the Rhine. They fired 200 rounds per gun between 1900 hrs and 2200 hrs. No counter 'stonk' was put down. At 2200 hrs operation 'Turnsiren' started. All Squadrons were standing by on the 24th March to cross the Rhine but no move was made. On 25th March the 17 pdr tanks under Capt Akers-Douglas left GOCH and joined the Squadron in the area of WISSEL in the morning. The whole Squadron then moved in a series of bounds towards the river and eventually crossed during the night. All Squadrons had safely crossed the river by 1000 hrs on 26th March by using Class 50/60 ferry, and landed a mile west of REES. We then moved into a concentration area at ESSERLEN and spent the day and night there.

On 27th March we moved out at 0415 hrs in support of the 5th Wilts (129 Bde, 43 Div) in an attack towards the Autobahn north of MILLINGEN. The attack started at 0900 hrs with 2 Coys up supported by 1st and 2nd Troops. First objectives were taken without opposition and a few POW came in. 2 Coys then passed through with 3rd and 4th Troops and met quite stiff opposition chiefly consisting of Spandaus and paratroopers. Fighting continued all day and the area was not finally cleared until 1930 hrs. 214 Brigade passed through during the afternoon and captured the line of the Autobahn. Capt Tetley and Sgt Miller were wounded the former by mortar fire and the latter by sniper. The Sqn returned to MILLINGEN for the night.

The Squadron moved to BIENEN in the morning of 28th March to join the 5th Dorsets. 1st and 2nd Troops under command of Capt Akers-Douglas transported 1 Coy up to the line of the River Issel at LANGFORD near ANNOLT. The Battalion did the assault crossing at night and the bridge was taken by early morning and the 2 troops joined their companies in the bridgehead. Slight 'stonking' was experienced. 2nd Troop cleared the road north of ANHOLT in the evening and met no opposition. They claimed one anti tank gun destroyed.

During the morning of 30th March 2nd Troop with one company cleared two woods. Slight opposition was encountered but the task was completed without casualties to ourselves or the infantry. Both Troops rejoined the Squadron at midday south of ANHOLT to prepare for the pursuit. We were put on one hours notice to move at 1300 hrs with 1st Worcs (214 Bde, 43 Div) as left flank guard the Guards Arms Div. We moved at 0830 hrs on the 31st March and crossed the River Issel and finally concentrated in the area of SINDEREN and remained there all day.

The Squadron moved off at 0615 hrs on 1st April as leading Squadron with leading Battalion of 214 Brigade. The Loyals and 43 Recce Regt were in front of us. We moved fast all day through AALTON, RISERLO, BORCULO and tried to get the bridge over the canal at GOOR. 3rd Troop who were leading troop got to within 15 yards of the bridge when it was blown by the enemy. Lt J Smith's tank got bazooka'd and Tpr Witham was wounded by Spandau fire. Tpr Marshall was seriously wounded in the head and later died. Sgt Bristow, Tpr Shakeshaft and Tpr Fiddler were missing presumed POW.

On the move up Lt Uttley's tank tried to cross a bridge which collapsed and the tank turned over in the river. All the crew got out except Tpr Macdonald 'MM' who was not released for some hours. The Squadron withdrew to DIEPERHEIM for the night.

During the evening of 2nd April the Squadron withdrew to NORDIJK near BEEDE. On 3rd April we moved up to the area west of BORCULO in the evening. (BECHUM) we remained at BECHUM for the 4th and 5th April and at 1000 hrs on the 6th April were ordered to move to NORDHORN. We eventually moved at 1730 hrs arriving there at 2030 hrs. Orders were issued for an advance on the following day. We moved on the afternoon of the 7th to LINGEN where we spent the night. We moved in the early morning of the 8th April to BARWINKEL. We remained at BARWINKEL for the 9th, 10th and 11th April. The Squadron played inter-troop football etc. As a result of an injury received whilst playing Cpl Wright went into hospital. Sgt Haygarth and Cpl Pickles were notified of the award of the 'Mention in Despatches'.

We moved in the early morning of the 12th to HASELUNE with the 1st Worcs where we remained all day. We moved in the early morning of 13th April to OLDENDORF, 15 kms west of CLOTTENBURG and remained there all day.

14th April saw us move again early in the morning and we took over advance guard with 1st Worcs. The task was to reach crossroads, a distance of approx 10,000 yards. 2nd Troop with leading company met only light opposition, but came across craters in the road every 600-700 yards. 1st Troop took over the lead half way. Progress was slow and when LETHE (2,000 yards short) was reached it was found that the bridge over the stream had been blown. A smaller bridge 200 yards down stream was found to be intact and a bridgehead formed with 1st Troop and 1st Coy. During the night another Coy and Troop crossed the bridge. At dawn on 15th April the enemy put in a counter attack consisting of 140 men and 4 Panther or Tiger tanks. 1st Troop and A Coy were forced to withdraw slightly but managed to take up their old positions approx later in the morning. During the counter attack Lt Uttley's tank was damaged by a bazooka. In the afternoon C Coy and 1st Troop supported by 2nd Troop re-took A Coys original positions with opposition. Sgt Goodman's tank was hit by indirect fire from an 88 mm and as a result the track was broken. This was repaired on the spot by means of the spare tracks carried, and the whole troop withdrew to the courtyard, when the infantry's anti tank guns and men were well established in the position. Tpr Whitehead took 6 prisoners during the day. Later in the evening the German Coy Commander surrendered with 25 men. Altogether during the day just over 40 POW were taken and 30 dead counted on the ground. The crossroads were taken during the day by A Squadron with the 4th SLI without opposition.

1st and 2nd Troops returned to Sqn HQ in the early morning of the 16th to replenish. 1st Worcs and C Squadron cleared 5,000 yards of wood to the north of CLOTTENBURG – ANHOLT road. No opposition was met but a few enemy were seen retiring northwards. 2nd and 3rd Troops met extensive minefields with A Coy 1st Worcs, which caused casualties to the infantry. The Squadron moved to the Regimental concentration area at ANHOLT crossroads in the evening. No move was made during the 17th, maintenance and rest was carried out. Slight shelling was experienced.

The Squadron moved at 0600 hrs on the 18th to join the 51st Highland Div near HARPSTEDT arriving there at 0830 hrs. C Sqn were under command of 154 Brigade. 4th Troop were sent out to B Coy 7th Black Watch in the evening near HORSTEDT. The remainder of the Squadron remained at Battalion HQ. 19th April was quiet and the only news was that 1st Black Watch had relieved 7th Black Watch. 20th April 154 Brigade moved forward together with 3rd and 1st Troop and SLI. Cpl Patterson's tank was mined but no casualties were incurred. 2nd, 4th and HQ Troops remained at HARSTEDT.

Lt Morris is notified of his award of the Croix de Guerre. The Squadron moved at 0900 hrs on the 22nd April to rejoin 43 Div at BRUCHAUSEN south east of BREMEN to prepare for the attack on BREMEN. The Squadron came under command of the 5 DCLI in the area HARSTEDT but remained concentrated.

5th DCLI did limited advances on the 24th in the area TUCKTEN and had a bridgehead over the Autobahn to the north. 1st Troop were sent off during the night with DCLI to blow up bridges north of BASSUM but this operation was not successful, and D Coy Group returned to TUCKTEN. The Squadron came under command 130 Brigade and joined the 4th Dorsets. In the evening the Squadron and the 4th Dorsets cleared the area between OYTERDAMON to the Autobahn 5,000 yards north. 94 POW were taken without a shot being fired. The final objective was consolidated by 0200 hrs 26th April.

The Squadron concentrated at 0900 hrs on the 26th in the area of the 4th Dorsets HQ. The Squadron with the 1st Troop came under command of 214 Brigade. At 1900 hrs a night advance prepared on BREMEN for clearing the town beyond 129 Brigade objectives. As the latter did not achieve their objectives as early as expected 1st Worcs group moved at 0230 hrs and passed through 129 Brigade to their objective without opposition. All objectives were finally consolidated by 0900 hrs. At 1145 hrs, 1st Worcs group was ordered on to clear the rest of BREMEN to the west and then on to the bridges over the river Lesum south of LESUM. BREMEN was cleared without opposition to the extreme north of the town where they were ordered by the Brigade Commander to remain and consolidate. C Squadron concentrated and remained the night. Capt D G Hannah joined the Squadron as 2nd in Command.

C Squadron moved at 0630 hrs on the 29th April to rejoin the 1st Worcs in OSTERHOLZ area who were in Brigade reserve. 1st Worcs group moved at 1600 hrs and reached WILSHELVESTEDT where they remained the night. The Troops moved out to companies for the following day, 1st Tp to A Coy, 2nd to C, 3rd to D and 4th to B Coy. 1st Worcs Group task on 30th Apr was to clear the area north west of WILSHELVESTEDT to the main road LILLIENTHAL-TARNSTEDT. This task was achieved without opposition but the ground was quite unsuitable to tanks. The Squadron was fortunate in only getting two tanks bogged. The Squadron was unable to give much support and indeed more was required. The Troop remained with their respective companies. The Squadron move to TARNSTEDT on the 1st May still under command of 1st Worcs who were clearing further NW from the previous days objectives with the Squadron on call if necessary. We were not required. The Squadron remained in TARNSTEDT for 2nd, 3rd and 4th May. At 0800 hrs on the 5th May unconditional surrender on the whole of 21 Army Group front was announced and the Squadron moved to a concentration area near QUELKORN with the Regiment.

The whole Regiment attended a church service at 1115 hrs on 6th May and the rest of the day was spent resting and re-equipping with new clothes. The Squadron Leader was summoned to an O Group late in the evening and as a result the Regt were going to move on the 7th May to 52nd Div area in BREMEN.

At 1000 hrs on 7th May the Regiment left QUELKORN and moved to ROCKWINKEL on the BREM – HAMBURG Autobahn. 52nd Div moved into an area north of BREMEN and inclusive of BREMERHA EN, the north part of which was occupied by German troops who had dumped their arms. The Division concentrated in the southern part sending one Battalion (SMLI) into the German area to take over the arms dumps and generally supervise the area. The Squadron remained the night in ROCKWINKEL.

The Squadron moved at 0900 hrs on the 8th May to meet the recce party of the 6th HLI and the German Officer representatives and proceeded to Corps Ems HQ located in the German area. One troop of 52 Recce Regiment and 2nd Troop did a short tour to make show of strength. During the afternoon 3rd Troop did a further tour. The Squadron returned to harbour at OSTERHOLZ-SHARNBECK. The Prime Minister makes his speech announcing that all hostilities with Germany officially cease at 0001 hrs 9th May 45.

BERLIN DETACHMENT

On 25th June the Regiment was ordered to send a Squadron to Berlin to relieve the Squadron of the Life Guards on the 27th June. The short notice did not give time for people to react very noticeably to the prospects of life in Berlin as it entailed a certain amount of detailed and hurried preparation. The advance party left with Captain Denney and SSM Warrington 'MM' on the 26th June accompanied by a ceremonial guard for the Commander in Chief's Residence in Berlin. The Squadron moved in two columns, early on the 27th June, in the pouring rain, a fast column of armoured cars and wheeled vehicles under Captain Riviere, the slow column of tracked vehicles under Major Norris. The fast column never gave anyone much cause for alarm as to whether they would reach Berlin safely, as in fact they did. The slow column did however, cause a certain amount of worry as for the past months the tracked vehicles had not done any long distances. The thought of a 150 mile journey in one day and the possibility of breakdown in the Russian Occupied Zone might have had alarming consequences. Captain Riviere's fast column arrived in Berlin just after lunch on the 27th without any trouble. The slow column which had left 10 minutes later in the

morning arrived at 1700 hrs with one carrier and the fitters half tank still 60 miles outside Berlin. These vehicles arrived at 2100 hrs just at the time when ardent discussions as to what should be done about them were going on. It was a great relief to see them and in fact meant that the whole Squadron had arrived up with each vehicle on its own tracks or wheels and no major calamity. The journey itself was uneventful and rather tedious. It was a very hot day on the 27th and the long drive down the Autobahn became very tiring for the drivers and all concerned in the tracked column.

The barracks we were to occupy were Wavell Barracks, Spandau typical German Cavalry barracks built in 1936. They were comfortable and well appointed buildings which the Life Guard Squadron had left in perfect condition for us, and despite their hurried departure, had been more than generous and helpful to us on our equally hurried arrival.

The Squadron came under command of 5th Guards Brigade (Brigadier Lord Tryon DSO) on arrival in Berlin who throughout our stay showed us extreme kindness and consideration in all matters. We were mobile reserve for 5th Guards Brigade in case of any insurrection from the Berlin population. Our daily tasks were firstly the ceremonial guard on the Commander in Chiefs Residence which was a night guard of 6 men and 2 NCOs. When the Commander in Chief was in residence this guard was increased to 24 hrs with one officer, 15 ORs and 2 NCOs. Secondly the safeguarding of the Town Guard Room which was situated in Wavell Barracks. This was the CMP Guard Room for the whole of Berlins British Zone so we could expect to find any nationality, civilian or otherwise, always represented in it. We were responsible for keeping these people in safe custody till such time as the CMP were ready to deal with each case.

Apart from these, the daily routine for the next week or so was the inevitable minor alterations to the barracks, an intensive maintenance and painting programme on all vehicles and many other administrative details which arose as a result of a move to a new district. We had several visits during our first few weeks here, starting off with Brigadier Lord Tryon DSO, the next was from Lt Gen A Galloway CB, DSO, GOC 30 Corps District and the following day one from the MGA, Rhine Army, Major General NCD Brownjohn CBE, MC. Shortly after this we were visited by BRAC, Rhine Army, Brigadier R de Winton CBE and at the beginning of August by GOC Rhine Army, Lt General Sir Richard McCreery KCB, KBE, DSO, MC who was also accompanied by GOC British Troops Berlin, Major General EP Nares CBE, MC.

We were fortunate in being stationed in that part of Berlin which is near the famous Olympic Stadium built in 1936 for the Olympic Games. It is a really magnificent layout, the main arena containing a perfect football ground surrounded by an excellent, firm, red brick dust running track with all the appurtenances such as long jump, high jump pits and so forth. Outside the main arena are numerous good cricket grounds, hockey stadiums, 2 more running tracks, football fields and outdoor gymnastic kit. There is a further stadium, all part of the Olympic Stadium, which contains an outdoor and indoor swimming bath both of which have to be seen as no description is adequate.

Surrounding these within the building, are badminton halls, fencing rooms, massage rooms, PT gymnasium and, in fact, facilities for all types of games both indoor and outdoor. It need hardly be mentioned that the Sqn made every possible use of this marvellous opportunity. We at once entered the BTB Cricket league with a certain amount of trepidation being only a Squadron amongst many much larger units. Our first match against the local RASC provided a reassuring win but so far no further matches have been played. Cricket within the Squadron was enthusiastically played and matting was put down on the old riding school square at Wavell Barracks and there are always several people at the nets every evening.

Berlin itself offered plenty of scope for entertainment, amusement and interest. The first mentioned was lavishly supplied by the Army Welfare in the form of canteens, cinemas, theatres which all seemed to have recent shows and frequent changes of programmes. Amusement, one suspects, was largely supplied by black market matters. All streets in Berlin were invariably fully of small groups of people presumably with the intention of bartering goods for luxuries such as cigarettes and chocolate. The interest of Berlin was naturally in examining and comparing the bomb damage of the entire city and of visiting the world famous buildings such as the Reichstag, Chancellery, the magnificent street, Uter den Linden and many other places. I think it is true to say that the middle

of the city and the whole of the Russian Occupied Zone of Berlin had suffered more damage and certainly more concentrated damage than any other place in Germany. One could drive for miles in the Russian Sector and see rows and rows of buildings which were mere shells. Spandau itself was fairly undamaged apart from the occasional house and a certain amount of damage to the back entrance of the Olympic Stadium. As we drove down the Kaiser Damm and on through the dejected Tiergarten towards the Brandenburg Gate, one passes several large and important buildings such as the Opera House, School of Science, The Reichstag, which had been burnt out as part of the Nazi Policy, the Brandenburg Gate itself, The Adlon Hotel – all these had been severely damaged. Through the Brandenburg Gate which marked the boundary of the Russian and British Sectors the damage, starting with the Chancellery and several Embassies became increasingly worse. The destruction and ruin of Berlin is a grim and very real sight which could easily merit an article to itself. To the casual visitor or Troop stationed there they merely go to show what had been done to the German capital and that, though there are grim sights and tragedies in the United Kingdom, nothing was really comparable with Berlin.

In conclusion, it is correct in imagining, I feel, that Berlin is a reasonable place to be stationed in for a limited time, but it is a city full of vice and crime and has the enormous disadvantage of not being able to get out of Berlin except for specific duties.

By Captain J H Richardson

Part I

Chapter I

Although Germany had been entered before, during the 'Battle of the Winter' at such places as GEILENKIRCHEN and HEINSBERG, the main battle for Germany as far as the British Second Army were concerned began with the assault across the Rhine. However no account of what happened after this great achievement would be complete without some mention, first, of that essential clearing of the area between the MAAS and the RHINE which contained the northern end of the SEIGFRIED Line; and for which the fighting was as bloody and unpleasant as any during the whole campaign.

The Regiment finished up its action on the ROER Sector in the last week of January 1945, with RHQ at KONINGSBOSCH. At that time I was acting as RHQ Tank Troop Leader in the absence of Lt B E Edwards who had been wounded. The Regiment was then being commanded by Maj A A K Rugge-Price, during the absence of Lt Col The Earl of FEVERSHAM TD in England.

On 2nd February 1945, the Regiment moved to MOLL in Belgium, where it remained for a night and a day before moving on up to NIJMEGAN. Both of these long road marches were uneventful, except that the latter was done at night, and was very wet and bitterly cold.

We arrived at first light at HQ 3rd Canadian Division, to which we were attached, to find our allotted accommodation not nearly large enough, and very bad at that! For instance, that given to RHQ and HQ Squadron was a barrack block devoid of all windows; all water pipes burst; and with no form of heat, light or blackout. The ground floor was unusable, being entirely covered with sandbags – most of which had burst due to the flooding – and all the rest of the building was flooded as well. 3rd Canadian Division were far too busy to look for alternative accommodation for us, so the morning was spent by various Squadron and Departmental representatives in combing the area for billets.

By the end of the day, A Squadron, HQ Squadron and RHQ were settled in NIJMEGAN itself, with B Squadron at BEEK and C Squadron at BIRGENDALL. The billets had been hard to come by, as the town was packed with troops at the time. RHQ were very well set up, with the Command Post and Orderly Room in a bakers shop and the Officers' Mess next door in a rather exotic flat which had belonged to a Dutch plantation manager in the East Indies who was then interned by the Japanese. Judging from her photographs, his wife was a hard-boiled blonde, and this woman – with a succession of German Officer amees had lived there until the liberation of NIJMEGAN, when she was arrested for collaboration. The flat still had a highly perfumed aroma, and when compared with the usual Dutch austere standards, was exquisitely furnished.

We spent nine very comfortable days in that flat, in leisure hours playing through the large collection of gramophone records on a very expensive radiogram, and dining by candlelight from a refectory table. During this period the Commanding Officer returned from England.

The operation about to commence was called VERITABLE, and the object was to clear the area still held by the Germans between the MAAS and the RHINE, and to link up with the Americans. All this was to prepare for the assault across the Rhine, and the final fight for Germany itself.

Normally the push was to be done by the 1st Canadian Army. In actual fact this consisted of the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions, plus a very much swollen British 30 Corps from the 2nd Army, comprised of the 15th Scottish, 43rd Wessex, 51st Highland, 53rd Welsh Divisions, with three Armoured Brigades – the 8th, 34th and 6th Guards Independent, plus the usual specialist armoured elements from 79th Armoured Division. Later the Corps was increased further by the addition of the 3rd British Division, the 52nd Lowland Division, and an independent Guards Infantry Brigade, the Guards Armoured Division and elements of 4th Armoured Brigade and 11th Armoured Division. This mass of troops, more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of which were British, was still known as the Canadian 1st Army, and was publicised as such in the newspapers, a fact which led to a certain amount of bitterness

amongst our own troops. It is surprising to record that when we contacted the American 9th Army at the end of the month, they expected to find Canadian Troops, not British.

A large number of these troops, and 4 Divisional Headquarters, were situated in and around NIJMEGAN itself, and the traffic congestion – or rather the lack of it – was unbelievable, for the Canadian Provost Corps Traffic Control was wonderfully efficient. There was a traffic standstill in the town from dusk until dawn for all vehicles not having a divisional authority to move during these hours.

During the first few days of our stay at NIJMEGAN, I was sent out to try and find the Regiment's bulldozer which had become detached from the column on the journey from MOLL. I eventually located it on the old 'Victoria' route between GRAVE and EINDHOVEN. This route had become almost impassable due to the rain, and was feet deep in mud most of the way. I came back along the Canadian 'Blue Diamond' route through s'HERTOGENBOSCH, which was very much better, but had an endless line of vehicles in convoy, all headed for NIJMEGAN just before the 'standstill hour'.

Chapter II

Operation VERITABLE started on the 8th of February 1946 at 0530 hrs, with a tremendous artillery barrage, which barrage continued practically unceasingly into the middle of the morning.

The guns were all situated in and around the town, and the noise was deafening.

B Squadron, who were supporting the Regina Rifles of the 3rd Canadian Division, got a troop through the floods, which had been caused through the Germans blowing the dams, into the village of ZYFFLICH.

A Squadron were unable to support the Brigade of the same Division owing to the floods, but C Squadron, who were supporting the 2nd Canadian Division, found a position from where WYLER could be shelled, which they did all day, later returning to NIJMEGAN in order to come into support of the 43rd Recce Regiment, which was directed round the northern edge of the REICHSWALD towards MATERBORN.

Next day, the dyke road leading to ZYFFLICH collapsed, and the village literally became an island on which B Squadron had to abandon their three tanks, the crews returning to pick up new ones.

On the 10th, C Squadron in support of 43rd Recce Regiment left NIJMEGAN. They found progress very slow owing to heavy traffic, and the bad conditions of the roads. Most roads on the Canadian sector were flooded, and they had to take up their supplies by DIKWS or BUFFALOES.

On the 11th, A and B Squadrons left their Canadians and came back to NIJMEGAN to join up with the 4th Dorsets and 7th Hampshires respectively; the two infantry battalions of the 130 Brigade, 43 Division, which they were to support from henceforth.

The whole attack was going extremely well, but was impeded considerably by floods in the north, and back roads and mud in the south.

The Regiment, during the next few days, was at short notice to move, meanwhile C Squadron were having trouble on the north eastern corner of the REICHSWALD; a large forest just across the German border south east of NIJMEGAN. A composite patrol of one troop of Armoured Cars of 43rd Recce and one troop of tanks from C Squadron were moving south, when they were suddenly fired on by SP guns; the road was extremely narrow and there was little room to manoeuvre. The whole of the armoured car troop and three out of four tanks of C Squadron were knocked-out and brewed up – two other ranks of C Squadron being killed; a very costly business altogether. Wireless communication with C Squadron was very difficult owing to their distance from RHQ and many times I had to go out as "step-up; the official name for an intermediate wireless link.

Eventually, on the 14th, after being held up in NIJMEGAN for six days; mainly due to the appalling road conditions; we left for MATTERBORN. 130 Brigade less its tank support had already gone on

the previous day. We left at 1400 hrs and made a long detour south and up through the REICHSWALD. During the march I saw my first German jet-planes, streaking across the sky at incredible speeds: tremendous Ack-Ack fire was directed on them, but all the bursts appeared to be miles behind.

We met our recced parties which had gone on ahead at the MATERBORN crossroads and learnt that we were to harbour in the village of BEDBURG about two miles to the east; C Squadron were already there having left 43rd Recce. The whole Regiment was now together, again in support of 130 Brigade and all three sabre Squadrons and RHQ were to be harboured in BEDBURG as I have already stated. 130 Brigade HQ was also there. A1 Echelon was in CLEVE and A2 in NIJMEGAN.

We entered the village just as darkness was falling, and as always the question of billets arose: RHQ had to be near Brigade HQ and as C Sqn were occupying the only houses near the shop in which it was situated the answer appeared to lie in a school building next door to Brigade HQ; the snag being that the cellars were occupied by several families of Germans and all their worldly belongings: they had gone there from CLEVE when that town had been bombed by the RAF prior to the start of VERITABLE. We were too close to the enemy to use the upstairs rooms so the Germans just had to go. As this was my first meeting with Germans I was extremely keen to observe the reactions of these members of the "master race" to the order to "get out". I went down into the cellars with the Intelligence Officer and the interpreter; a Dutch Sergeant; the reactions were varied; the old people were just plain scared and seemed unable to understand that we were victorious British troops on German soil. The younger folks, all women, did their best to make us believe that they were really quite pleased to see us; in fact several actually claimed to be Dutch and not German at all! However, as soon as we told them they had to move, the sullen "boot-faced" looks appeared, and the excuses began to pour out "My old mother is sick and will die if we have to leave here" – this of an extremely robust and healthy looking old woman. "But where are we to go?". However, we got them all out eventually and sent them to a large mental hospital in the village where the German authorities were billeting homeless civilians.

Now came the business of moving into the vacated cellars of which there were four in all. Into these had to go the whole of RHQ group; about 40 persons in all, the cellars had not only to serve as billets but as the Command Post as well. The RHQ tanks were parked close against the school building, and long extension leads from the wireless sets were run into the largest of the cellars, a room 20ft x 15ft, and this cellar became the Command Post from where the next day's battle would be controlled. In here also the seven officers of RHQ, including the Colonel, were to sleep! What a contrast to our quarters at NIJMEGAN which we had just left.

Just after we had got settled in and got ourselves organised with candles and hurricane lamps, for the electricity was cut off, the Commanding Officer came back from 130 Brigade HQ and put us "in the picture". 130 Brigade were to attack south from BEDBURG towards GOCH, B Squadron supporting the 4th Dorsets were to start at 0730 hrs. Forming-up points, start lines and objectives were all given out in succession. After a hasty meal I set off for 8 Armoured Brigade HQ – a distance of four miles – in a Scout Car, to get the full picture of the Corps front and to find out what chance there was of getting out A2 Echelon up from NIJMEGAN. It was now about nine o'clock and a very dark night, the only light was provided by "Artificial Moonlight" which was produced by batteries of searchlights directed on low clouds. We had to travel without lights and map read our way, so progress was slow. Twice I was stopped by sentries and challenged: I gave the Divisional password at which they just scratched their heads and said that they'd never heard of that one but that they had one of their own about those parts. After a long argument I managed to convince them that I was not a German spy, and went on my way. It was after midnight when I returned, and everyone was in bed and asleep in the Command Post with the exception of one officer who was manning the wireless; the crackle of morse from this was the only sound. As I had no information of importance I did not wake the Colonel but went straight to bed, thankfully for I knew I should have to be up early for the start of the battle.

Chapter III

At 0730 hrs on the 15th February the 4th Dorsets with B Sqn in support crossed their start line and the attack had commenced. I followed the course of the battle on the wireless at Command Post,

marking the dispositions on the map as the reports came through. Opposition was fairly stubborn and soon we heard that one troop had lost two tanks. When a set was transmitting the actual noise of battle could be heard over the air as a background to the crew commander's voice.

About half way through the morning Lt Peter Flood appeared in the Command Post; he looked terribly shaken, and his face was all blackened and his eyes bloodshot, his tank had been hit simultaneously by an SP gun and a bazooka and had caught fire instantly. Peter himself and the Coy Commander whose company he was supporting and who was in the tank with him were the only persons able to get out, the rest of the crew perished. He was taken to the Regimental Aid Post where it was found that he was suffering from severe shock but that his burns were only slight. It was his first battle.

By lunch time the 4th Dorsets had gained their objectives and had consolidated. Opposition had been fairly tough and there had been some shelling. B Squadron had lost five tanks in all, but, with the exception of Peter Flood's crew and one other man, there were no fatal casualties.

The attack in which C Squadron were to support the 5th Dorsets in the afternoon was called off but at 1430 hrs A Squadron in support of the 7th Hampshires passed through B Squadron and advanced about one mile. A thick mist descended and visibility was down to 30 yards – most unpleasant conditions in which to fight a battle. The infantry lost their way in the fog and A Squadron took the objectives alone without their help. They now had to sit there without local protection at the risk of being stalked and bazookad by Boche infantry. However the 7th Hampshires arrived in due course and the situation became less nerve-wracking. During the advance they KO'd an 88 mm SP at 30 yards range which suddenly loomed out of the mist. They themselves lost one tank bazookad and one mined, with one OR killed and one Officer and another OR wounded.

There were no further advances that day and the battalions dug themselves in deeper for the night. During the night a certain amount of chaos occurred when the 7 Hampshires and the 4th Dorsets fired on each other, each thinking that they were counter attacked. Matters were made difficult as there was no communication between them. However this nasty situation was at length stopped.

In the morning A Squadron continued their attack with the 7th Hampshires still with visibility down to 30 yards. The shelling was very heavy, and said by some to be as heavy as that in Normandy. C Squadron attacked in the direction of LOUISENDORF and reached the first objective by midday. They were counter-attacked later in the day losing one tank by bazooka fire.

The 4/7th Dragoon Guards in support of 214 Brigade in the face of fantastic shelling and pushed B Squadron out of the line, and they were able to return to BEDBURG.

Whilst this fighting was going on RHQ had expanded its quarters a bit, the Command Post having a cellar to itself; however all the officers were still sleeping in one cellar. A feature at this time which surprised me was the frequency and the enormous size of the meals which one's crew kept producing. This was of course Germany and although the slaughtering of animals was officially not permitted large numbers of chickens, ducks, and quite a few pigs and sheep unaccountably died a violent death. We seemingly had some good butchers, and the average British soldier is a reasonable cook – a fact which their wives would probably never believe – so a succession of poultry, roast pork and lamb appeared at regular intervals throughout the day. As well as this livestock, the cellars of all the houses round about – and this seemed general throughout the Rhineland – were well stocked with eggs, potatoes and all manner of bottled fruits and vegetables. We did not go short of food and it was a very welcome change from the rather monotonous Compo rations.

RHQ was rather noisy at this time for it was right in the centre of the gun lines, 25 pounders in front, and the mediums behind, for hours on end the whole world would seem filled with continuous, deafening crash of those guns. There was also a battery of rocket projectors firing a carpet of missiles covering a large area. This went off with an incredible roar and was directed on the Forest of Cleve, a square wood forming the right boundary of our line of advance, and from which the attacking troops had been subjected to intense Spandau fire.

On the 17th the situation was quiet as far as the Regiment was concerned but 214 Brigade was still having a hard fight to the south. B Squadron was at BEDBURG refitting and A and C Squadron were still in position with their respective battalions.

The next day found B Squadron once more in the line supporting the 4th Dorsets in clearing the Forest of Cleve where it was thought that some enemy still remained. No opposition was encountered and contact was made with men of the 53rd Welsh Division who had come in from the east. One prisoner was taken. In the evening of that day B Squadron were again called into the line, this time to support the 4th Wilts of 214 Brigade who had been counter-attacked on the extreme west flank. The attack was repelled but B Squadron remained in position all night.

That night the 9th Canadian Brigade started to arrive to take over our part of the line. C Squadron returned to BEDBURG and A went to MATTERBORN.

The following morning B Squadron were relieved by 4/7 Dragoon Guards and went to HAU the whole Regiment was now out of the line. The escarpment overlooking GOCH was in British hands and the town itself had been entered by elements of the 51st Highland Division from the west. The battle for GOCH escarpment was now over.

The 43th Division was coming out of the line for a short rest. However the Regiment was to be transferred to the 53rd Welsh Division in support of 160 Brigade consisting of the 4th Welsh, the 6th Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the 2nd Monmouthshires. It seemed likely that we should have a few days respite though so everyone made themselves busy refitting their vehicles and themselves. Baths and change of clothing was organised for the men by 8th Armoured Brigade. The "Fox's Mask Baths" opening up in CLEVE – perhaps I should explain here that the emblem of the Brigade was the mask of a red fox on a yellow background. RHQ still at BEDBURG, expanded itself further, the Orderly Room and Officers' Mess trucks arriving together with batmen. The Officers found accommodation for themselves in the few habitable rooms in the houses round about, and the Intelligence Officer, Pip Coates, who was also PMC organised a mess. I geared up a bath for myself in the kitchen of our house – the first I'd had since the 14th January, it was wonderful.

On the 20th and 21st there was much activity by German jet propelled aircraft, flying extremely high and fast they appeared mainly engaged in reconnaissance, but occasionally swooped down and dropped anti-personnel bombs. As usual an enormous amount of flak was shot at these intruders which, as always, was far behind the fast moving planes. As a German aircraft, and especially a jet, was an uncommon sight by then, people used to dash out of their cellars and houses to watch them and their attendant display of rather abortive British fireworks. It was during one of these jet sorties that one, rather braver than the rest, came hedge hopping in at zero feet, catching everyone completely by surprise. He dropped two anti-personnel bombs, one of which landed outside the door of RHQ and the other on a jeep belonging to HQ 9th Canadian Brigade. The Orderly Room Sergeant had a finger removed by the first, and the second caused a fire in the jeep and amongst a stock of about 100 jerricans full of petrol. What made the situation rather more exciting was the fact that there was a large pile of 75 mm ammunition next to the jerricans. Everyone had taken cover when the bombs dropped, but they now began to emerge. I quickly organised a party to move the ammunition and as many of the jerricans as possible and went myself to move the two jeeps which we parked next to the burning one. I got the first one away alright, but had difficulty in starting the second, whilst I was struggling with the choke and accelerator the petrol tank of the jeep on fire burst and showered petrol over the one I was in, the hood and the nearside tyres caught alight and things started to get rather warm so I had to abandon the driving seat. However by that time someone had organised a scout car with a tow-rope and we pulled it clear and were able to put out the fire before the jeep became a dead loss. All the ammunition and most of the jerricans were recovered. The total damage done was:- one finger, one jeep burned out, one jeep damaged, about ten jerricans of petrol burnt and a hole in the windscreen of the second in commands jeep which is there to this day.

After this episode people weren't so keen on dashing out to look at jet planes.

On the 22nd there was a conference at 160 Brigade HQ on the forthcoming operation, to be known as "LEEK" and on the next day the Regiment moved into GOCH; arriving about dusk. The traffic on the road between MATTERBORN and GOCH was very dense, and there were long halts due to

jams. It was lucky that the weather was bad, otherwise havoc could have been caused by a few German aircraft.

We arrived at dusk and RHQ settled in, in a cellar, slightly more spacious than the one at BEDBURG. The Squadrons went straight to their battalions, A Squadron to the 2nd Monmouthshires, B to the 6th Royal Welsh Fusiliers and C to the 4th Welsh.

The plan was for 160 Brigade to attack WEEZE, two battalions up – the 2 Mons on the right and the 6 RWF on the left, the axis to be the main road from GOCH to WEEZE. The 4th Welsh were to remain in reserve. The idea being to advance quickly and obtain a crossing over a large anti-tank ditch just north of WEEZE before the bridge was blown. A combined force of two sections of our reconnaissance troop under Lt Charles and the Scout Platoon of B Coy 12/60 Bn, King's Royal Rifle Corps – the 8th Armoured Brigade's Motor Bn, under Lt A Burnaby-Atkins, MC and bar, was to make a flat out dash for the bridge – a distance of 5000 yards – and held it until the arrival of the Infantry Bns with their supporting Squadrons. Happily this arrangement was later cancelled, for if it had taken place, the light tanks and Bren carriers of this force would have been doomed to a suicidal failure the moment they had crossed the start line.

The operation started at 0600 hrs on the 24th February, and from the outset it was evident that the quick capture of WEEZE was not going to materialise, opposition was tough and bitter, and the counter shelling tremendous.

B Squadron on the left had the easier time and by midday had taken the small village of HOST; collecting over 150 prisoners, and estimating that at least the same number had been killed. They, however, suffered themselves; losing two tanks on a minefield and having two knocked out by SPs. Three men were wounded but there were no fatalities.

B Squadron got no further than HOST that day owing to the fact that A Squadron and the 2nd Mons were having a very tough time on the right. Their axis lay through a large wood, the fight to gain it had been bad enough, but once there they were subjected to the most devastating "stonking" that had been seen since Normandy. Most of the shells burst in the tree tops: this has a far worse effect than a ground burst, because a trench is no protection, the blast and splinters going straight in. The poor Monmouthshires were suffering terribly and A Squadron had lost a number of tanks.

Later in the afternoon I was ordered to go and relieve Captain John Walker second Captain of A Squadron, who was manning a wireless set at the 2nd Mons HQ in the southern outskirts of GOCH. He had been wounded in the leg that morning and so far had had no attention. I went down in a scout car and found John in a cellar with the CO of the Monmouthshires. He was very white and obviously in pain. He went back in my scout car.

I had two wireless sets to work on, one in connection with the Squadron Leader, and one in connection with RHQ there was also a telephone line to RHQ through the 160 Brigade exchange. The whole of the wood had by now been captured and C Squadron were in the process of passing through with the 4th Welsh, to occupy another wood to the south; known as Star wood, on account of its shape. The battle as far as A Squadron was concerned was almost over, all I had to do was to pass information and orders between RHQ and the Squadron.

There in that cellar I was brought face to face with an aspect of war which was new to me, the aspect of a leader whose unit was taking a terrible hammering. Tired through weeks of hard and bitter fighting in the knee deep mud of the Reichswald; tired after bringing his men up to their positions during the previous night; tired after fighting his battle since dawn that day; he sat there, dirty faces, unshaven, eyes red-rimmed and bloodshot. He was out of touch with his Companies on his own low-powered infantry wireless set, live communication constantly being out by enemy shell fire, his only communication being via the supporting tanks of A Squadron through my set. Knowing that his men had won their battle and gained their objectives he sat and listened to the news that they were still being knocked to pieces down there in that wood by the murderous shell-fire. There was nothing he could do - no going forward, or coming back, nothing, they just had to sit and take it.

A number of days later I passed this wood and there was not a single tree in it that had a branch on it, let alone leaves, it looked like a forest of battered telegraph poles.

A Squadron pulled out at nine o'clock that night and returned to GOCH. I rejoined RHQ. They had lost three tanks on a minefield and four had been brewed up by SP guns. A further two were bogged down beyond immediate recovery, this was half the Squadron. One Officer was wounded, and three men killed and four wounded.

During the next two days A Squadron remained in GOCH refitting with new tanks. C Squadron also came back, leaving the 4th Welsh and coming into support of the 6th RWF, B Squadron remaining at HOST in a counter-attack role and under command of 71 Brigade.

On the evening of the 26th the Colonel told me that because C Squadron were down to one troop officer, he was able to grant a request I had made on joining the Regiment, namely that I should be given a troop in a sabre Squadron. Lt Charles was coming with me, and we were to report at 0900 hrs the next morning.

From now on this narrative must necessarily become more personal. In RHQ it was possible to keep fully in the picture as to what each Squadron and battalion was doing. In a sabre Squadron although we were always told what everyone else was doing, and kept the information marked on our maps, the impressions gained during the fighting were confirmed to one's own Squadron, indeed in most cases to one's own troop.

It was with mixed feeling that I went to bed that night, looking forward to the fact that I was at last going to fight a troop of my own- and wondering what exactly it was going to be like and whether I should last the war out.

Chapter IV

C Squadron was badly depleted in the way of Officers when I joined them. The Squadron Leader, Sir Deval Cotter, DSO was in the UK on leave; the Captain AG Akers-Douglas was in command, with Captain David Tetely as 2IC. Lt R E Norris was acting second Captain, and the only subaltern troop leader left was Lt J W Smith, commanding 3rd Troop. Lts Downer and Bethell had been wounded during the star-wood battle and Lt D C B Riviere had dropped a turret lid on his hand crushing it.

I was to take over 2nd Troop and Lt R J Charles to take over 4th Troop, 1st Troop remaining under the leadership of Sgt Goodman. Before I was taken to meet the troop, a short conference was held at Squadron HQ. Details of the latest situation were given out, but apart from the fact that the 6th RWF who we were supporting were likely to do something soon, no information of a pending move was available.

I was then taken round to meet my troop in their billet. I had only three tanks instead of four at that time, two 17 pdrs and one 75 mm. This latter was my own tank. The 17 pdr tanks have a crew of four and the gun has a very good performance as an AP weapon, but owing to the small size of the shell, and the very high muzzle velocity, the HE effect is poor. On the other hand the 75 mm gun has a moderate AP performance but an exceedingly good HE shell. Tanks equipped with the 75 mm gun have a crew of five.

At the time of my joining them the crews were organised as follows:-

	Commander	Wireless Op	Gunner	Hull Gunner	Driver
Tp Leaders Tank	Lt J H Richardson	L/Cpl Crerar	Tpr Young	Tpr Hegecock	Tpr Lay
Tp Sgts Tank	Sgt Wright	L/Cpl Shawcross	Tpr Whitehead	-	Tpr Borton
Tp Cpls Tank	L/Cpl Liddel	Tpr Bowker	Tpr Davenport	-	Tpr Isherwood

Each crew had a room to itself in the house, and after I had made my little introductory speech, we had dinner which was cooked on a crew basis.

The afternoon and evening were spent in talking, interspaced with a Troop Leaders conference at tea-time when we were told that we were moving soon and had to get the tanks packed up with the exception of our bedding.

At 10 o'clock we were told that there would be no move before 5 next morning, consequently we unrolled our bedding and prepared to get as much sleep as possible.

The floor was hard and as my mind was full I didn't go to sleep easily. I must only have been asleep about two minutes when I was woken by a runner from Sqn HQ shaking me, I looked at my watch and saw it was only 11 o'clock. The runner said "Troop Leaders to Sqn HQ immediately, you must be ready to move in 45 minutes, check wireless net at 1130 hrs sir".

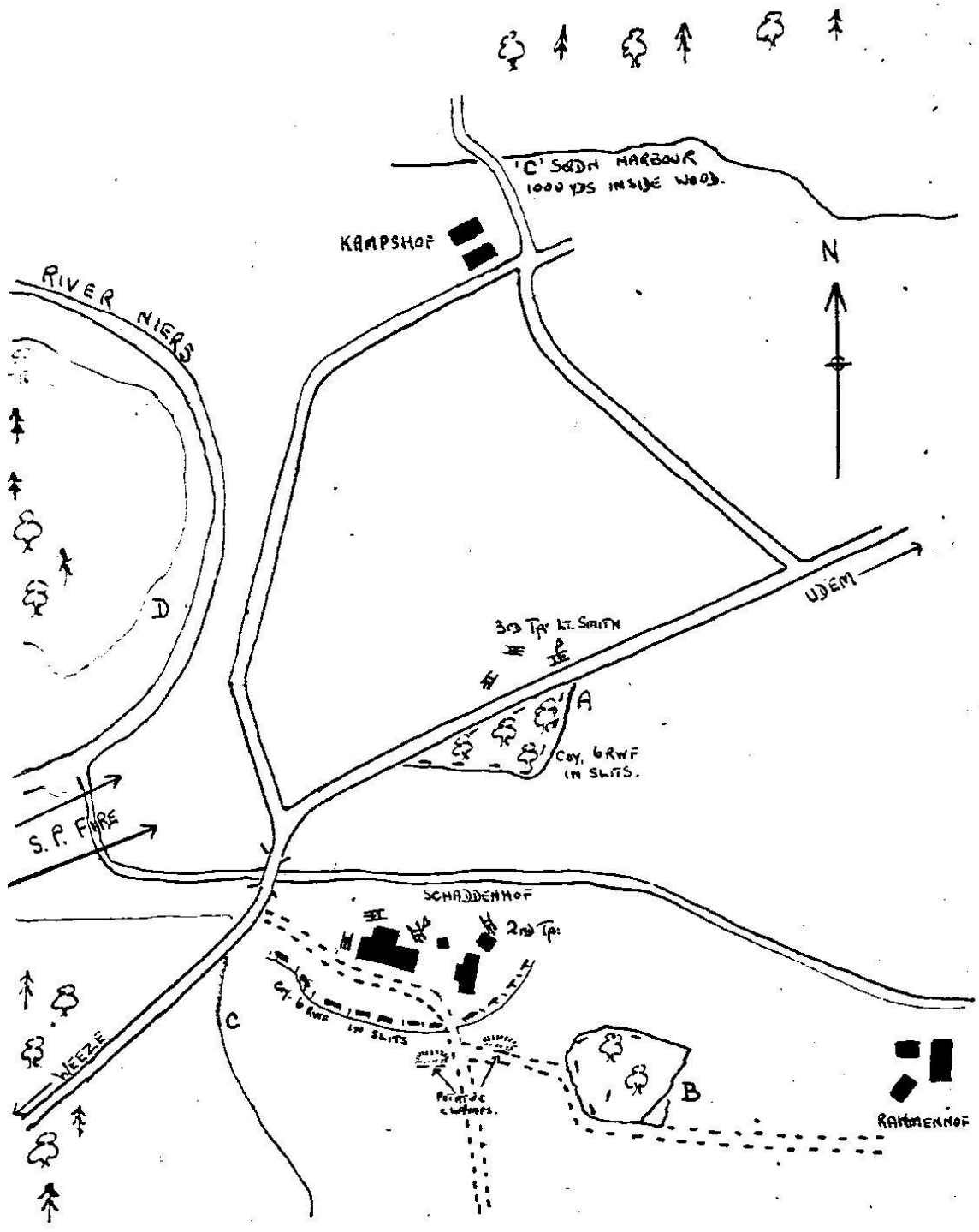
Hastily pulling on clothes and grabbing my maps and notebook I tore off to HQ telling my crew to roll up my bedding. The news was not encouraging – a company of the East Yorks, from 3rd Div who were holding a small bridgehead over a tributary of the river Niers, east of WEEZE had been heavily counter-attacked and it was reported had been driven back over the river. Further a group of Officers of the 6th RWF who had been making a recce of the position, with a view to taking over from the East Yorks next day had all been either killed or seriously wounded by a shell burst in this attack. The 6th RWF had immediately been called forward with C Squadron in support to try and rejoin the bridgehead.

The orders were vague in the extreme, but we had to move east out of GOCH, cross the Niers, turn south and rendezvous with battalion HQ of the 6 RWF in a wood about 2000 yards north of the scene of the counter-attack.

We moved off dead on time and took the road to the east, moving fairly rapidly until we came to the bridge over the Niers where there was a traffic block. Here I swapped L/Cpl Liddels tank, which was a 17 pdr for another 75 mm from 1st Troop commanded by L/Cpl Davies. The object of this was that I should have greater fire power against counter-attacking infantry as no tanks had been reported and I was leading Troop.

After we crossed the bridge we crawled on at snails pace, as the 6 RWF were marching on their feet in front and we were following their carrier platoon. As we neared our rendezvous the scene was semi-illuminated by artificial moonlight and we could see the dark shape of the wood our rendezvous point, and beyond there came that very nasty staccato rattle of the German Spandau machine guns, and streaks of which tracer showed through the trees, superimposed on the pop-pop-brrrrrr of the Spandaus came the much slower steady thump of British Bren guns with their red traces. Occasionally there was a glare of light followed by a muffled, soft explosion as phosphorous grenades were thrown.

I was wondering at the time whether I should have to go into action straight away and wasn't relishing the idea much in the dark. However as we approached the wood the firing died down, and when we met Roddy Norris who had gone ahead to contact the HQ of the 6 RWF, he gave us the news that the situation was temporarily restored and that the 6 RWF were not sending down their relieving companies until dawn.



We harboured in the trees and got down to what sleep we could snatch in the hour that was left before stand-to at dawn. It was obviously not worth getting bedding out as no-one knew what we would have to do at dawn, but it was pretty certain that most of the Squadron would be engaged.

Jim Smith was first to move off, right at first light to support a company into a firm base position in a wood on the north side of the Niers. Perhaps it would be as well here to refer to the attached sketch map.

C Squadron were harboured in the woods at the north, and the farm buildings at SCHADDENHOF where the scene of the counter-attack on the East Yorks. 3rd Troop led by Lt J W Smith were to take up their position with a company of 6 RWF in the small wood marked 'A'.

No sooner had Jim moved off that it was reported that his leading tank had been mined, just before leaving the wooded area, however there were no casualties and soon afterwards it was reported that he had reached his objective.

It was while my troop was cooking breakfast that I was called to Sqn HQ and told that my troop was to support a Company of 6 RWF in an attack through the East York's bridgehead which was still held, and that I was to report to their Bn HQ immediately for details. Hastily grabbing a sausage and a hunk of bread I went round, met the commander of the company I was to support and listened to orders by the Bn Commander. They were extremely vague and also optimistic. The information was as follows:-

"The enemy, after failing to retake the bridgehead had retreated into the woods 600 yards to the south of SCHADDENHOF; the East Yorks were holding the farm itself, and patrols had been up to 1000 yards down the road to WEEZE. Another company of East Yorks were in the farm at RAHMENHOF, and 3rd Troop and a company of RWF were firmly established in the wood at 'A'. The intention was that my troop in support of a company was to pass through 'A' and the East Yorks at SCHADDENHOF and dig in between them and the woods to the south. A further company would then pass over the bridge and down the main road to WEEZE." It all sounded very simple. I talked it over with the company commander and arranged to meet him in 20 minutes time on the road. He had only just joined the 6 RWF from England and wasn't very happy about the thing as the information was so vague.

I returned to Sqn HQ and told the Sqn Ldr the plan, he said OK but I was on no account to stay out in the open between SCHADDENHOF and the woods, but was to get under cover. The most likely place seemed to be the small wood 'D' the bulge of the Niers was still held by the enemy and needed to be watched.

When I returned to the troop they were all ready to move, and we set off. On meeting the Coy Commander he said that he didn't wish me to advance with him in case I drew fire, but asked me to wait until he had reached the wood 'A'. I therefore arranged my troop with LCpl Davies leading, myself and Sgt Wright bringing up the rear with the 17 pdr. We advanced close behind the rear platoon of the infantry until we got to the farm at KAMPSHOF, where I waited and let them get ahead. There was a slight mist about and I lost sight of the main body of the company, however, the rear platoon hadn't got very far down the road before it became obvious that they were in serious trouble, as I could see nothing I decided to advance. I left Sgt Wright in a covering position at KAMPSHOF and set off with Cpl Davies, keeping close together and going very fast because it was so open. On reaching the point where the rear platoon had gone to ground I sent the leading tank ahead into the cover of the wood 'A': there was intense Spandau fire, and I couldn't tell where it was coming from, but the most likely place seemed to be the wood on the other side of the Niers, being the nearest point at which the enemy had been reported. I accordingly started shelling it. After much shouting I managed to contact the platoon Sgt, he couldn't say definitely where it was coming from but he thought the buildings at RAHMENHOF. For the benefit of the layman I might explain here that a bullet going directly overhead makes a crack like a whip, and unless you know where the gun is, or can see it, it is most likely impossible to tell from which direction the shots come. As I assumed my information about the East Yorks being in RAHMENHOF to be true I took it that the fire was coming from 'D'. However a few minutes later small arms fire struck my tank on the other side. I still hung on to my beliefs about RAHMENHOF and assumed that it must be long range shooting from the woods to the south as we were in full view of these.

Having collected just over a section of infantry I instructed them to walk in the lee of my tank to the wood 'A'; this we did, and I called up my third tank in case I needed smoke support from his 2" bomb thrower.

We had almost reached the wood when there was a tremendous "stonk" and the infantry instead of seeking refuge in a deep ditch at the side of the road were running back from cover over the open fields towards KAMPSHOF and suffering casualties from the Spandau fire; however, Sgt Wright was laying a very adequate smoke screen which soon covered them. I was now right out of touch with the infantry so I decided to get into the little wood at 'A'.

I arrived to find that LCpl Davies and two tanks of Lt Smith's troop were in action against two SP guns which were firing at about the range of 1000 yards from the direction of WEEZE. The flashes of these guns and the noise of the solid shot could be quite clearly seen and heard. To add to the general fun and games, a Squadron of spitfires proceeded to bomb and shoot up the wood at 'C'. This seemed far too close to be healthy – in fact had our own troops been where they were reported to be they would have 'had it' to use the RAFs own expression. We hastily let off all the coloured recognition smoke we could find, but stray cannon shells continued to whistle overhead for some time.

It was obvious that had my troops gone forward we would have been under direct fire from the SPs for about 400 yards so I called up our gunner rep and asked for smoke from our own SP battery. This soon arrived and was thickened up by the 2" bomb throwers of 3rd troop. Together they produced a dense fog of smoke and we dashed down the road and over the bridge. As I had no knowledge of the whereabouts of my company of 6 RWF I presumed the troops I could see in the farm at SCHADDENHOF to be East Yorks. Accordingly I took my troop into the woods at 'C' thinking the 6 RWF must have gone on. Seeing no sign of them I dismounted and ran back to the farms. I found that the troops there were the company I had been looking for, I also learnt to my consternation that they were the most forward troops and there was no-one in the wood. I quickly ran back to my troop, turned them about and went into SCHADDENHOF itself. I arranged the tanks so that the road from WEEZE was covered by the 17 pdr and I put myself and LCpl Davies behind the farm buildings in a position from where, with a short movement we could meet a counter-attack from the front.

Our arrival had of course not been observed and the farm was subjected to a very heavy artillery concentration for about ten solid minutes. When it had abated I dismounted and went to find the company commander and get the form about the enemy.

The reason that he had come no further than the farm was firstly that the East Yorks were so depleted that they could not have held the bridgehead; secondly he had lost his rear platoon as I've already said, and thirdly the enemy were still in the wood at 'B'! less than 200 yards away. He had about 50 men. The remainder of the East Yorks, excluding a large number of wounded, were only about 10 in number, and in any case were exhausted and out of ammunition. There was actually another Sherman tank in the yard belonging to a gunner fire controller working with the East Yorks but he also had expended all his ammunition the night before.

I made a tour of the company positions and studied the surrounding countryside. The farm itself was a complete shambles, large numbers of dead cows and horses, some from the previous night, others from days before when the farm had first been captured, the latter swollen and distended like balloons. A few surviving animals were still in their stalls but the majority of these were dying from their wounds or the lack of food and water. Dead men also were everywhere, in no definite order so one could have said that the Germans had held one side of the farm and we the other, but all mixed up, inside and outside the farm buildings, evidence of the chaotic hand to hand struggle which must have taken place – the smell of death and corruption hung everywhere. The tank belonging to the fire controller had a great shining gouge along one side, the result of an engagement with a Panther which had made an appearance during the fight, luckily it only had one shot before retiring, the crew commander must have thought that there was a whole troop of Shermans there instead of only one. Out in front, between the enemy and ourselves there were about 15 dead German paratroopers. This then was the scene.

As I was getting back in my tank after my recce I was amazed to see a section of Boche run from the farm at RAHMENHOF where the other company of East Yorks was supposed to be – this of course was the answer to the Spandau fire of earlier in the day. LCpl Davies saw them and gave them a long burst, however, they gained cover behind the wood.

Nothing much happened during the rest of the morning except that we were subjected to continual “stonking”, but in the early afternoon two Germans got up from behind the left one of two potato clumps which were only about a 100 yards from the farm. This caught everyone with their fingers off their triggers and they reached the wood without a shot being fired. LCpl Davies was first to open up followed by all the Bren guns of the infantry. I started shooting HE into the wood and then at and around the potato clumps. After a few minutes a white flag waved from behind the right hand clump. All fire ceased and one German ran out into the infantry positions. I quickly dismounted to get an identification as the IO had been clamouring for one all day, I found that he was from the 8th Parachute Division. He said that he had two wounded comrades behind the clumps and would we go and bring them in. The infantry were just gearing up a stretcher party when there was a burst of Spandau fire from the wood. This made everyone put their heads down again, and the stretcher party was called off. Soon after enemy movement was again noticed in the wood, and once more we opened up with everything we’d got. The movement ceased, but some time later a couple of red cross flags started waving from the end of the wood, firing again ceased and three German medical orderlies, two of them carrying a stretcher came out and walked over to the potato clumps and disappeared behind. I got someone in the infantry who could speak German to improvise a megaphone out of a sheet of tin and shout to them that they were to bring the wounded into our lines and under no circumstances to take them back to their own. This to our surprise was answered by sharp bursts of fire from two machine pistols from behind the clumps. A number of our infantry who had their heads up having a look were wounded. I was livid at the injustice of this act and shelled the area as hard as I could. No further movement was seen after that. A few days later I again passed this point and noted with satisfaction that there were two dead bogus medical orderlies – both armed – behind that potato clump.

Nothing happened for the rest of the day but the very heavy shelling continued. Another company of RWF passed down the road to WEEZE and a carrier got through to evacuate the wounded.

I now had practically no ammunition left and consequently Lt Charles was sent up with 4th Troop to relieve me after dark. I then pulled back into our harbour of the previous night with the rest of the Squadron; 3rd Troop came back as well.

It wasn’t until I reached harbour that I learnt that Lay, my driver had dropped the heavy turret lid on his hand before we set out that morning. It was very swollen and he must have been in pain all day, but he didn’t mention it at all. He was evacuated and I didn’t see him again as he contracted pleurisy and was sent to England. I also discovered that whilst in the farm a shell had burst underneath the rear of my tank perforating one radiator complete and making it unserviceable.

After taking Lay to the aid Post I returned to my troop, found that they had already re-fuelled and replenished with ammunition, and were cooking a meal. I was so exhausted however that I got my valise undone, put it in a rut in the ground, climbed in and fell straight asleep.

Chapter V

The next day, 1st March, dawned with the situation unchanged. We remained in the wood, and as we were still occasionally shelled we dug ourselves fox holes, the ground was extremely sandy, and even when boarded up the walls of these were always collapsing. Lt Charles remained at SCHADDENHOF with his troop until the morning of the 2nd, he was heavily shelled, but not counter-attacked.

The rest of the Regiment was out of the line at this time except for A Sqn who spent the 1st doing left flank protection for 160 Bde during which time they had no action and nothing to report.

Further attacks on the WEEZE defences were launched and by dark on the 1st it had been surrounded on three sides. Patrols entered the town that night and by 1000 hrs next day it was found to be clear of the enemy. This coupled with the news of the 9th US Army’s rapid advance NE

from the Roer River, gave grounds for belief that the enemy was pulling out completely from west of the Rhine. Consequently the Corps Commander, General B G Horrocks, CB DSO MC, ordered that 8th Armoured Brigade plus the 1st Ox and Bucks should form a mobile column and pursue with all haste. The Regiment having born the brunt of the recent fighting was left out of this to form the reserve. The column set off from the heap of rubble that had been the Rhineland town of WEEZE in the early afternoon of the 2nd but was stopped almost at once by extensive craters in the road. However it reached KEVELAER on the morning of the 3rd and had linked up with the Americans in GELDERN by evening.

On the 4th the Regiment less B Sqn which remained at HOST still, moved to KEVELAER where we spent the night. Next day C Sqn moved to the little village of WEERT about a mile north west of GELDERN.

The plan from here was to strike east from GELDERN along the road to WESEL on the far side of the Rhine. The Sherwood Rangers had already progressed slightly along this road and had been met with strong opposition.

160 Bde with A Sqn supporting the 2nd Mons and the 4th Welsh were to continue the attack and capture the high ground above ALPEN, the last down before the Rhine. Captain Akers Douglas was attached to A Sqn for this battle.

The attack started at 0400 hrs on the 6th March and right from the start the going was tough. We ourselves in C Sqn left WEERT after lunch, passed through GELDERN and arrived at ISSUM a few miles up the road to ALPEN. Here B Sqn with the 6 RWF passed through us to come up on the right of A Sqn who had reached their objective but were still fighting hard against very stiff opposition.

Just after dark we learned that myself, with 2nd Troop and 1st Troop under Lt Norris were to go up with Captain Tetly and take over some positions from A Sqn. After a hasty O Group we set off for the battalion HQ of the 4th Welsh where we were to get final orders.

The journey up was somewhat tricky as it was a very dark night and we had to map read our way across open country. Eventually we reached the farmhouse where the 4th Welsh had their headquarters, there we found Major Akers-Douglas and our FOO in the command post with the Colonel of the 4th Welsh.

The battle was still in progress and Major Derek Wormald, commanding A Sqn was up with his own tank pushing what Germans remained off the top of the escarpment overlooking ALPEN. Actually nothing had been heard of him for an hour and we were beginning to get worried. We were surprised eventually when he walked in himself. He reported that the enemy had been beaten off the escarpment and that our own infantry were well established, he proposed to withdraw his squadron to harbour as they had had heavy losses – in the severe fighting that day. Roddy Norris and myself were to go up and relieve his two forward troops, Roddy on the escarpment near where the road dipped down into ALPEN and myself to the right overlooking a hamlet to the south of the town. I was guided up to the position by the Colour Sgt of the company concerned who was taking up rations. After much grinding around in the woods we eventually reached the company HQ.

I found the Company Commander asleep in the cellar of the house, surrounded by the family of the house. It was always a problem to know what to do about civilians whose premises one used as battle positions. It was obviously inhumane to turn them out so near to the fighting and in every case they would probably have given our positions away. Usually one had to find some corner of the house in which to confine them. However, this house was so small that the one and only cellar contained all the civilians, Coy HQ wireless ops, medical orderlies and wounded men, and furthermore what seemed to be a fair proportion of the farmyard, including a goat and a pig.

The Coy Commander having had a tough fight for the position and reaching it after dark had but a hazy idea of his own platoon positions and he told me that Lt Spencer's troop which I had come to relieve had left him to return to harbour some time ago. Not knowing the platoon positions it was pointless to do anything else until first light when I could find out where his platoons were. I

accordingly harboured close to the farm and we settled down to get what sleep we could in our tanks, leaving a troop guard out to rouse the troop should anything happen.

I had hardly fallen into a doze when I was awakened by someone calling into the tank, much to my surprise I found it was Lt Spencer. He told me that his troop was in position on the top of a nearby hill which I could just dimly make out, there was also one platoon of infantry there. He had heard me come in and wondered who I was having had no indication that he was to be relieved. As he said that the only possible way to the west for tanks was narrow and tricky I decided to remain where I was until first light. Lt Spencer withdrew his troop to rejoin his squadron in harbour.

At dawn I took the troop up into position. I found that it was impossible to get in a direct fire position owing to a thick belt of trees on the forward slope of the hill, but that the reverse slope offered a perfect indirect position. I therefore scrounged some signal cable from the infantry and using a couple of German field telephones we had found, established an observation post on the forward slope. From here I could see ALPEN to the left and RHEINBERG far away to the right and in front very nearly as far as the Rhine itself.

The scene seemed to be quite peaceful and I discovered that B Sqn were in the little hamlet under my hill. The Guard Armoured Division on our left flank however were being subjected to pretty constant Nebelwerfer fire.

From my little observation post I watched all morning. Suddenly with no warning at all a heavy salvo of enemy shell-fire came down right on the crest. I hastily retired to the bottom of my hole but next moment there was a terrific bang which seemed to lift me in the air and deposit me somewhat sharply in the hole again completely deafened and half-blinded with dirt. The shelling ceased as abruptly as it had started and I cautiously edged myself out of the hole. Gone was my telephone and next to my little OP was another hole just as big which wasn't there before; there was only six inches or so between the crater and my OP – I considered I had had a fairly near one, and moved my position to a somewhat deep and more protective slip trench some 50 yards off.

We were shelled spasmodically throughout the rest of the morning until about 2 pm when things quietened down again.

During the afternoon I watched an American attack coming in from our right. It was preceded by a terrific barrage and appeared to be going splendidly. The attack was backed up by a squadron of Thunderbolts; they were painted silver with red engine cowlings, and they made a fine sight as they dived almost vertically on to their targets.

It was while I was watching this that the 'Moaning Minnie' which had been stonking the Guards Armoured all day suddenly turned on our hill and I had to make a brisk run for a slit trench.

During the course of the day the 52nd Mountain Division had been relieving the tired and battle weary 53rd and at about 5 o'clock a company of the 4/5th RFS arrived to take over from my Welshmen. As expected 8th Armoured Brigade were not to be relieved but were to remain in support of the 52nd. However the new company brought a whole platoon of 6 pdr anti-tank guns with them and my troop was released to return to Sqn HQ which remained together with Bn HQ of the 4/5th RSF at the same farm as the previous night. Apart from the fact that we were out of the threat of an immediate counter-attack, it wasn't really restful as the area around the HQ was shelled solidly all night. Two of the half-tracks of the platoon of A Company 12/60 Bn KRRs which had come up to give 1st and 2nd Troops local protection being destroyed during the night.

The next morning was spent tidying up a bit and in the afternoon 1st Troop and 2nd Troop supported two companies of 4/5 RSF into the attack on ALPEN itself. This could hardly be called a success as we were firing indirect from the wood on the top of the escarpment overlooking the town, and had no means of observing or correcting our fire. However the attack itself got home.

Meanwhile the two other troops, the Sqn Ldr and the other half of the Sqn HQ had joined us and Lt Charles was supporting a third party.

That night we spent in harbour in the same position as previously and were again shelled.

The following morning 1st and 2nd Troops were sent forward to bolster up two companies of RSF. One of which was holding the railway station, about 300 yards east of the town, and the second a factory another 500 yards further on.

We trundled down into ALPEN with first troop leading, past third troop and out along the main road beyond. The leading tank of first troop had just crossed the level crossing when it came face to face with a German tank behind some buildings. The crew commander managed to get one shot in which promptly bounced off, the enemy then reversed further behind the buildings. As he was entirely unsupported by infantry and as the tank behind was not in sight, coupled with the fact that a lot of square-headed characters with bazookas started to appear the crew commander returned to ALPEN pretty sharply.

Lt Smith of 3rd Troop told us that the road we had been trying to get up was dominated by the German tank in question and also another gun of some sort. These also covered a loop road to the station which led off to the left. As we had to contact the two companies Lt Norris and myself and a runner ran very fast over the distance between the last houses in the town and those around the station; for some reason we were not fired on.

We found both company commanders in the houses and their story was somewhat different from the one we had been told at HQ. The station was not in fact in our hands but only the buildings on the town side of it and one of the companies was holding these. The company commander I was to support hadn't seen or heard anything of most of his unit for 4 hours when they had gone forward into the factory. No wireless contact had been made and he couldn't get a runner through as there were no Germans in the station. There didn't seem much we could do for them at the moment so we footed it back again into ALPEN. Having reached there we were told to report to Sqn HQ for orders; it was now about 1400 hrs.

At Sqn HQ we learnt that two further companies were to attack; one the station and farm immediately beyond; and the second was on the factory as soon as the first objective was gained. 1st Troop was to support the attack on the station whilst my troop and Sqn HQ covered the factory with smoke. We were to do this from a farm halfway between ALPEN and the station; first being right up with the infantry.

Once the first objective was gained my troop and Sqn HQ would move up to the railway line and shoot the second attack in from there.

It was while we were assembling for this attack that a recce party of the 9th RTR of 31st Tank Bde arrived to take over from us! This was a great surprise, but more the less welcome. However it was obvious that they could not take over immediately, so it was arranged that they should come back early next morning.

The attack went in as planned, but 1st Troop and the infantry had a hard fight for their objective. Not only was the opposition from the enemy infantry stiff, but there was heavy shelling as well. A set back occurred when the leading platoon dashed round a corner to take the last building of the objective, they were met by the concentrated fire of about four Panzerfausts. As these are anti-tank weapons it was unusual for them to be used in this manner, but their concentrated effect from so short a range had a very horrible effect on our poor infantry. Also two concealed Spandaus opened up at the same time and what remained of the platoons was driven back. A second platoon was thrown in with close tank support and finally took the farm, but with heavy loss to our infantry.

My troop and Sqn HQ immediately moved up to the railway line and started pounding shells into the factory as hard as we could go. Suddenly my gun ceased firing and the gunner reported misfire. Nothing happened for a few moments and glancing down I saw my loader, LCpl Crerar lying in a pool of blood on the floor. He had been bending down to pick a round of the floor when the gun had fired and the recoil had hit him in the head. He was unconscious but delirious and struggling weakly. There was so much blood around that it was difficult to tell the extent of the damage but it was evident that he had an extensive fracture of the skull and that this condition was

extremely serious. We bound his head up as well as we could which was tricky as I was afraid to put much pressure on.

By this time the second company had reached the factory unopposed and occupied it. I therefore asked permission to send Crerar back to the nearest RAP in my own tank and transfer myself to another, this was granted and grabbing my map case and a sten gun I got into Cpl Liddel's 17 pdr and told him to take my tank back.

I then went to Sqn HQ and received orders for the night.

1st Troop was to harbour up with the company in the station, and I was to contact the commander of the company in the factory and see what use I could be to him. Accordingly with Lt Campbell, the platoon commander of some KRRs which had just arrived for my troops local protection, walked over to the factory.

What was left of the factory was in a very isolated position and was surrounded by masses of rubble and twisted wreckage; moreover the ground was exceedingly soft between the railway and the factory, it was going to be very difficult to get the tanks up particularly as it was now pitch dark. The infantry was right inside the factory buildings and after consultation with the company commander it was agreed that my troop should harbour up in the station as it was only a matter of a couple of hundred yards away and in direct telephone communication.

The night passed uneventfully and we stood to at dawn and waited for the 9th tanks to relieve us.

They arrived at about 8 o'clock and as we were drawing away their Churchills resumed the advance to the Rhine.

My troop rejoined the Sqn at ISSUM, and there we started to clean up, and organise baths, etc. We learnt that night that we would return to GOCH on the 12th and remain out of the line for two weeks while we prepared for the Rhine crossing. Further Brussels leave would start for this period and I was told that I could go on the 15th March.



PART II

Chapter I

The rest period in GOCH was spent in planning and getting ready for the great assault across the Rhine. All tanks were given a thorough cleaning, both outside and in, restored and repainted. There were also numerous armament and ammunition inspections. In fact the feeling that this was the final effort spurred people on to equip themselves and prepare themselves in the best manner possible so that nothing should be wanting.

A double tragedy occurred on the 12th March when an HE 262 dropped a canister of anti-personnel bombs outside RHQ just as a large number of men from recce troop were returning from their tea; 7 were killed and 28 seriously wounded. Later that night a shell of heavy calibre demolished a B Sqn billet killing one man and wounding 4.

Shelling of the east side of GOCH occurred fairly frequently during this period. However we in C Sqn being in the west end were not troubled at all.

The Regimental band arrived during our rest and played for guard-mounting, and led a full Regimental Parade through the town.

By 22nd March the majority of men had had BRUSSELS leave, and everything was buttoned up and ready for "Operation Plunder" as the Rhine crossing was called.

The plan was that 51st Highland Division should make the assault on the 30 Corps front at a point opposite REES. They were to be supported by the Staffordshire Yeomanry with DD tanks. The 75 mm tanks of the Regiment were to add to the supporting barrage with indirect fire at ranges laid down by 43rd Div RA. 8th Armoured Brigade was then to cross with the Wessex Division behind the Highland and take the left flank.

On the night of 22nd we were told that we would move early next day. At midnight we learnt just how early – 0300 hrs! This was goodbye then to the comparative comfort of GOCH with its beds, its improvised baths and its hurriedly set up Officers' Mess and back to a hole in the ground and mess tin meals.

All troops were now up to their full scale of four tanks each, but as they were not to be used in the 'pepper-pot' shoot the 17 pdr 'Fire-flys' were left in GOCH to be brought on later.

We left at 0300 hrs and by 0700 hrs had reached the position from where we were to do our shoot, a flat piece of ground just east of a village called WISSEL. We could not see the Rhine for the bund which forms its banks, and in any case it was screened by a continuous wall of smoke, laid down by special generators, to cover our preparations and to keep the enemy on the opposite bank guessing as to what was going on.

We tucked ourselves in behind a high bank in troop blocks and disguised ourselves with masses of camouflage netting we had carried for the purpose, although that we looked anything else but a squadron of camouflaged tanks I am sure was not so. However we had no cause to worry as a constant stream of tempests flying overhead kept any enemy aircraft well away. These together with a regular service of rocket firing typhoons on their way to 'sweeten up' the Boche, were a very heartening sight. Occasionally an odd shell whistled over into WISSEL, and one hit an ammunition dump. This provided a firework display which caused a diversion, but on the whole we spent a very restful day. The weather was perfect.

At 1700 hrs the Corps artillery opened up the preliminary bombardment, and we started lining up the tanks, taking bearings, and adjusting the guns to the correct range. At 1900 hrs the full force of the bombardment commenced and we started our shoot. We had to fire almost as fast as we could, it was very warm and gunners and loaders were stripped to the waist. Most of the rounds were ordinary burst-on-contact HE, but as a variety on occasional delay fuse, and a solid shot or two were included.

The whole effect was incredible; we were right in the centre of the field gun lines and their constant flashes combined with our own 75 mm. Cherry red balls of Bofors tracer, firing on fixed lines at ground targets streaked overhead and now and then the express train noise of a medium battery's 'hate' could be distinguished amongst the stupendous batter of sound.

As we fired the pile of empty shell cases mounted outside my tank, and indeed inside as well, for the loader had insufficient time to put them all out through the port.

After 45 minutes we had a spell to clear the turret and restock the turret with ammunition and then on again.

At 2300 hrs the order to cease fire came through and we found that in my own tank alone, 286 shells had been sent on their way in 90 minutes!

While this barrage was going on, the Staffordshire Yeomanry, supporting 153 and 154 Brigades who were ferried in the 'Buffaloes' of 30 Armoured Brigade had crossed the Rhine and established the bridgehead.

Early next morning the Airborne Corps passed overhead and started to drop north east of WESEL. It was a grand sight and the air seemed to be full of Sterlings, Dakatoes, Albermarkes and gliders of every description.

Fighting was tough in the bridgehead and the enemy flung in the 15th Panzer Grenadiers to defend REES. The Regiment had a quiet day, making the most of the early spring sunshine. We received orders to move that night but they were cancelled owing to the fact that the bridgehead was not yet large enough. Another day of ease, but that night we really did move and joined up with our 'Fire-flys' which had come up from GOCH that day, at a point near the river bank. A period of waiting, during which time we were bombed by one or two enemy aircraft one of which was brought down in flames by our Ack-Ack fire, and then at 0400 hrs the first tank in C Sqn, the Sqn Ldr's crossed the Rhine on the raft.

The crossing was a long job for there were only two rafts, and these were operated by balloon barrage winches, hardly powerful enough to pull a 35 ton tank and often broke down. However by 1000 hrs the whole squadron was across and having a scratch breakfast on the other side.

A and B Sqn were in action that day supporting the attack on MILLEGAN and we were summoned late in the evening to an O Group at the HQ of the 5th Wilts. The plan being that that 5th Wilts with C Sqn in support should attack north from MILLEGAN astride the 43rd Div axis and make good the ground between the town and a half constructed Autobahn some 2000 yards further on. C Sqn was to leave harbour at 0330 hrs and join up with the battalion in MILLEGAN.

After a few hours sleep under our tanks during which we were bombed, we moved off in pitch darkness and reached MILLEGAN at 0500 hrs; it was a semi shambles and several houses were in flames. A further O Group. A tie-up with the company commander I was to support and hurried breakfast and we were on the start line. The company was attacking up the line of a stream and 2nd Troop was supporting from a track 300 yds to their right flank, the objective was a straggling hamlet about 600 yds from the start line.

The preliminary barrage opened and we advanced. I soon found my way blocked by an anti-tank ditch and the whole troop had to make a detour of 400 yds to the right across very open ground. There were a few breathtaking moments as the front tank, commanded by Cpl Lamont, went flat out across this open space and into a farm, but he drew no fire, and one by one the troop followed. One German came out of the farm and started to aim a Panzerfaust but thought better of it and threw it away and surrendered. The infantry had by this time entered the hamlet and after another short speed burst we joined them – a bloodless victory - the village was not held. 1st Troop on the right of the axis had also reached their objective.

We quickly consolidated and prepared to support the advance of 4th Troop and another company who were to pass through us and reach the Autobahn. Unfortunately their supporting barrage fell right on top of us, pinning the wretched infantry in their half finished slit-trenches and causing the

tanks commanders who had dismounted to make detailed observations to dive hastily for their tanks. I frantically sent word back by wireless and the barrage was lifted, but too late for the enemy had played his well known trick of shelling the area of our barrage so that our advancing troops would walk into it. It was extremely unpleasant, and also for a time I was still under the impression that it was our own barrage and continued to scream down the mike for it to be lifted. However after 5 minutes I was sarcastically told that if I had it lifted any farther it would be falling on BERLIN!! So it was an enemy stonk after all.

Apart from making things unpleasant for us it held up 4th Troop for a time, but they were soon on their way. However unlike my troop they soon ran into withering Spandau and mortar fire from the enemy, dug in on the Autobahn and the infantry were forced to ground, although Sgt Haggarth of 4th Troop managed to force his way on to the objective but no infantry were able to push through with him and he had to withdraw. 3rd Troop which was supporting another company on the right of the axis was also held up. Captain Tetly arrived then to see if he could help 4th Troop forward but no sooner had he reached them than an 81 mm mortar bomb fell on the turret of his tank about 9 inches in front of his face. How he escaped having his head blown clean off was just another miracle, but he was carried back extremely badly wounded with his jaw smashed by a large splinter, which had gone on and embedded itself in the roof of his mouth, I was also completely deaf and partially blinded by intrepid fellow as he was, he staggered back to my position fully conscious and with blood soaking the front of his tank suit.

The position could not be improved and we remained as we were, being occasionally shelled, until dusk, when another brigade with the 4th/7th Dragoon Guards in support passed through. They succeeded in crossing the Autobahn, but not before losing many men, and a number of tanks.

We returned to MILLEGAN for the night. The next morning RHQ arrived in MILLEGAN and C Sqn moved south a couple of miles to BIEVEN. A and B Sqns with the 7th Hampshires and the 4th Dorsets attacked northwards from the Autobahn to the line of the river ISSEL, south of ANHOLT, the next sizeable town. The attack went well at first but SP guns opened up from the left flank and A Sqn lost two tanks. However by nightfall their objectives were secured.

The 5th Dorsets were that night to make an assault crossing of the ISSEL at a place called LANDFORT, some two miles west of ANHOLT. They had to establish a bridgehead through which the rest of the brigade could attack ANHOLT. Two troops of C Sqn – 1st and 2nd were to carry the leading company up through the existing line, dump them and laguer-up until a bridge was built, when we would cross to their support. The remainder of the battalion was to be brought up in TCVs and dropped further back.

Our two troops were being commanded by Captain Akers-Douglas, while the remaining two troops and Sqn HQ were to return to MILLEGAN and remain in reserve.

We set off at dusk and made our way through MILLEGAN and across the Autobahn and up to a village called MEGCHELEN. Here we dropped the infantry and started to harbour up for the night. Just as they set off a 20 mm flak gun started shelling the area from the north, these guns fire at a very quick rate and the tracer shells looked like a string of luminous cherries, appearing to increase in speed as they got nearer until they exploded with a vicious crack about 10 feet above ground. Although the shells are tiny compared with ground artillery, they can be extremely unpleasant and harassing to infantry.

Next morning we learnt that the crossing of the ISSEL had been successful and we were called forward to support the battalion. We crossed the bridge at 0830 hrs and 1st Troop went to the left whilst I was directed to the right in support of D Company. I found Company HQ in a large house some 500 yds out of ANHOLT. There was a wooded bank opposite, facing north, an ideal situation for me to deploy my troop in a hull down position and one which I was quick to take advantage of. Almost immediately Cpl Lamont was in action against a 75 mm anti-tank gun placed in the woods about 600 yds to our front, he knocked it out with three rounds.

At 0930 hrs A and B Sqns passed through with the 4th Dorsets and the 7th Hants and captured ANHOLT. One of B Sqns tanks was mined. At about midday after a quiet period there were three loud reports in quick succession. At first we thought that it was one of our own 17 pdrs firing from

behind, but actually it was the astounding noise an 88 mm solid shell makes when passing low overhead. We were not left long in doubt of this as there was another vicious crack, followed instantaneously by a shattering crack and a shower of sparks and our Sherman bulldozer which was parked about 100 yds down the road burst into flames. Fortunately there were no crew inside but Tpr Beecham the driver who was standing on the back had a lucky escape. It was puzzling as to where this 88 mm was firing from as we appeared to be well behind cover. After making several observations we decided that it must be firing blind from behind the woods to the north, as the shells were dropping at quite a steep angle. The gun probably had the road registered and hearing track movement had started shelling. A thick column of black smoke was soon rising from the burning tank and indicating to the Boche gunner that he had scored a hit. We were accordingly subjected to a period of heavy 'stonking' both HE and AP.

Late in the afternoon my troop supported another company of 5th Dorsets in clearing a stretch of road north of ANHOLT. This was unnecessary as we met up with some of our own troops at the other end. We returned and harboured with the same company next door to battalion HQ.

The next morning, the 30th, 2nd Troop supported D Company again in some wood clearing north of the position. There was slight opposition from one Spandau but the crew took to their heels and fled into the woods. The enemy had shown a remarked reluctance to stay and fight during the last two days. Our wood clearing done we returned to Battalion HQ to learn that our half squadron was to leave the 5th Dorsets and join up with the rest of C Sqn in the woods south of ANHOLT. This we did arriving at 1400 hrs.

We had an O Group immediately and were told that the Guards Armoured Division had broken out of the bridgehead and that resistance had slackened. 43rd Division with 8th Armoured Brigade were to also break out and come up on the left of the Guards, the forming flank protection for 30 Corps. The Canadians were to come up on our left. The Regiment was in support of 214 Brigade and C Sqn married to the 1st Bn the Worcester Regiment. The column was to be completely mobile, the infantry travelling in TCVs until action was imminent and then the leading company was to travel on the leading tanks. The column was to be headed by the Royals followed by 43rd Div Recce Regiment, then the leading troop of C Sqn followed by the rest of the column.

The afternoon was spent in cleaning up and sorting out a great mass of new maps we had just been issued with, and in the evening I went to meet the company commander of D Company of the Worcester Regiment whom my troop was to support.

The wood was packed with troops including 43rd Div HQ, 214 and 8 Armd Bde HQs. That night I went to sleep in the open without fear of enemy shelling, we were already far behind the line.

Chapter II

We were up early next morning and having joined up with our respective companies, moved off. 4th Troop was in the lead followed by 3rd, then my own and finally 1st. Going was very slow owing to demolitions, and midday found us only six miles the other side of ANHOLT. Here we were told we would not be able to proceed until the following morning and so harbour areas were found for Coy Troop groups. D Company and 2nd Troop made themselves comfortable in a farm just south of SINDEREN crossroads. One thing of significance was that we were once more in HOLLAND and amongst the happy and hospitable, if somewhat suspicious Dutch, instead of surly, dispirited and bewildered Germans. The farmer who was our enforced host had already started to repair the roof of his farm buildings, most of the tiles on which had been smartly removed when a Typhoon had rocketed an 88 mm two days before. The remains of this gun and eight graves of the crew were just outside the farm gate. German civilian reaction to this sort of thing was one of complete lethargy and hopelessness and they seldom seemed to make any effort to repair damaged property.

That evening before settling down we were told the plan for next day – we were to advance with all speed and attempt to capture intact a bridge over the Twenthe Canal just south west of GOOR. The route was via VARSSVELD – LICHTENVOORDE. The same order of march with the leading company of infantry travelling on the backs of 4th troops tanks.

We were up at 0400 hrs to snatch a brief breakfast and were on the move by 0600 hrs. As we went along the road was lined with jubilant Dutch all trying to sell eggs for cigarettes!! There was also wrecked enemy equipment. As always there seemed to be numerous hold ups but between these the pace was very fast. At midday the Royals met opposition in Borulo and 4th Troop under Lt Uttley were directed to try and find a way round. Whilst doing this a bridge collapsed when the leading tank was halfway across and the tank fell upside down into the river. The wireless operator was unable to get out and was trapped. All efforts were made to move the tank but it proved impossible from our side of the river and it wasn't until the opposition had been overcome in Borulo that two ARVs raced past the column and arrived at the bridge from the enemy side! Meanwhile the tank was sitting in the mud and Tpr McDonald was in danger of being drowned. Eventually the ARVs managed to jerk the tank into a position where he could be rescued. He had been several hours up to his neck in water, but emerged none the worse for his experience.

We pushed on and just as dusk was falling DIEPENHELM, 3000 yds short of the canal. Here we learnt that the Royals had got a car on to the bridge earlier in the afternoon but had been forced off and had had a small battle in DIEPENHELM itself, a blazing Daimler armoured car remained behind in evidence. 3rd Troop under Lt J W Smith made a dash out of the town in a flat out bid for the bridge, they were rounding a corner only 50 yds from the bridge when the leading tank, commanded by Sgt Bristow, was bazookad. Although the gunner was killed and the tank was blazing he carried on and was with a mere 15 yds of the bridge when the ammunition started to explode and he was forced to evacuate the remainder of his crew just at the very moment the bridge was blown. Lt Smith's tank was also bazookad at the same point. There was more of our infantry up in support as the tanks had outstripped the column by 500 yds and the enemy were in the wood all round 3rd Troop. Spandau fire was intense. Lt Smith and his crew managed to escape by baling out into a ditch and crawling back and on the way back he took command of an Infantry Platoon and brought that back as well as they were also surrounded by Boche.

After this we all felt terribly disappointed after having advanced 40 miles that day, only to have our objective snatched from after a very gallant attempt to reach it. Lt Smith was later awarded the MC for this action.

We harboured for the night in a nice green looking field which turned out to be half a bog and nearly all my troop got stuck, it took half the night to get them out, and to make matters worse it started raining.

There was no news of the crew of Sgt Bristow's tank until next morning, when the driver was found mortally wounded alongside. It was found impossible to get closer to the tank to see inside owing to heavy Spandau fire from the other side of the canal. In fact it was over a week before anyone could reach it to find the body of the gunner. Sgt Bristow and his wireless operator were wounded when baling out and taken prisoner. They were liberated two weeks later by the Canadians.

That afternoon we moved south to NOORDJK, the rest of the Regiment being in NEEDE. 214 Bde was having a short rest while the other two Bds continued to advance.

We moved again the next evening to a concentration area just south of HENGELO in the small village of BECKUM. The Regiment was again in support of 214 Bde and ourselves once more with the 1st Worcester. However as the plan was not made yet down to our level we did not marry up with our respective companies but remained together as a squadron. The troops were dispersed in several small forms and everyone was fairly comfortable.

One was struck immediately by the thinness of the children and by the tiny meals they ate, all the farms were really very poor but despite that the people were very hospitable and cheerful. One welcome feature about this short rest was that the officers mess truck arrived with clean laundry and a certain amount of champagne and brandy. This was the first time we had seen it since GOCH.

The Guards Armoured Division were held up at LINGEN, and as their axis and that of 43rd Division both passed through this point before fanning out again, we could not advance. We therefore remained at BECKUM until the evening of the 6th April when at 1815 hrs we made a fast run up through HENGELO and OLDENZUAL across the boarder to NORDHORN in Germany once more.

How different from the Dutch; surly, truculent looks, wails and moans about having to move out of their houses for us. An amusing story is told of NORDHORN about an affair of the Regiment – who shall remain nameless – who whilst making a billeting recce was confronted by a house owner beaming with smiles; this seemed unusual for a start and he was even more surprised when the man gave him a bottle of gin. You can imagine the effect of the next part of the act when he lead the officer to a door, flung it open and said proudly “For you Herr Kapitan, mein daughter!” and there standing in the middle of the room was an extremely attractive young girl without a stitch of clothing!! The officer fled, and no troops were billeted in that house, which may or may not have been as the householder intended.

It was interesting in this connection to wonder exactly what effect the German propaganda machine had had on the average citizen – whether they really believed that we would rape all the women and shoot all the old men and children.

There was an O Group at RHQ soon after we arrived and the plan was that an advance guard consisting of the 13-18th Hussars, B Company 12/60 KRRC, 511 Bty Essex Yeomanry SP guns; 2 troops of C Sqn 43rd Recce and the 7th SLI was to press on ahead of the rest of 214 Bde. This advance guard was in turn split into advance and main sections – A Sqn with the leading company of 7 SLI, 2 tps 43rd Recce; B Coy 12/60 Rifles and RA recces parties, forming the van. The whole force was to be at one hours notice from 1000 hrs next morning.

In actual fact we didn't leave NORDHORN until 1500 hrs in the afternoon. There were many delays owing to congestion on the roads and we didn't reach LINGEN until the evening. There were reports of SP guns and bazooka-men in the woods beyond and there was a hold up again. Eventually A Sqn with the 7 SLI on the backs of their tanks charged up the road Georgie Patton style with all guns blazing into the woods on either side, and in 20 minutes captured their objectives 3 miles up the road. The rest of the column harboured by the side of the road on the outskirts of LINGEN for the night.

Next day A Sqn and the 7 SLI resumed the advance, and we followed on. For some reason we were bypassed during the morning and B Sqn and the 5th DCLI went up behind A Sqn.

The amount of traffic on the road was enormous and the stream of vehicles, often double banked, endless. Between short hold ups the pace was just about as fast as our tanks would go, the weather was very hot and clouds of gritty dust pounded out of the road by hundreds of trucks and wheels, made our faces raw, and somehow even got inside our goggles and into our eyes.

By mid afternoon we were at BAWINKEL, a small village about 7 miles short of HASELUNNE where the river Hase had to be crossed. A Sqn was engaged in clearing the woods on the left of the road up as far as the river while B were on the right. The bridge at HASELUNNE was blown and the town reported to be strongly held.

The 7th SLI were to make an assault crossing that night from BUCKETTE, 5 miles NW of HASELUNNE, A Sqn were to support them from the south bank. B Sqn and ourselves harboured in BAWINKEL that night.

A Sqn returned to BAWINKEL the next day, and the whole Regiment rested there for three days. The mess truck once again came up and we were able to have clean clothes and baths. The mess was billeted in a shop and here we found lots of useful things – combs, collar studs, soap flakes to wash our clothes in and roles of brightly coloured cloth of varying pattern, out of which we were able to make scarves. Here also we carried out extensive maintenance on our tanks and when we moved up to HASELUNNE on the 12th we were 100% fit for battle again. I had to leave my Troop Sgt, Sgt Ruane behind as his tank was still undergoing an overhaul.

We rejoined our respective battalions there but there was no move that night. We were told in fact that there was no move until 1000 hrs the next morning and the Sqn Ldr gave his permission for the troops to let themselves go a bit on a goodish quantity of drink that had been found in the town. There was consequently many sore heads when we were hauled out of bed at 0500 hrs and told to move in an hour.

C Sqn and the 1st Worcesters were to be the advance guard again, and 2nd Troop the scout platoon of B Company, 12/60 KRRC under Lt Andrew Burnaby-Atkins, MC and bar, and D Company 1st Worcesters were to lead.

We advanced rapidly from HASELUNNE through LONNINGEN and in 4 hrs had advanced 30 miles to a point about six miles short of CLOPPENBURG. Here we halted and awaited further orders. These came through at midday and were to the effect that 130 Bde was to capture CLOPPENBURG and make a firm base so that 214 could pass through and advance on the strategic point at ALHORN crossroads where the road from OSNABRUCK and MINDEN in the south to OLDENBURG in the north, crossed the road to BREMEN on which we were travelling.

During the afternoon the scout platoon left us, but there were also some new arrivals in the shape of a troop of Kangaroos and a troop of AVREs.

The battle for CLOPPENBURG was hard fought and continued throughout the night.

The next morning D Company the 1st Worcesters carried in Kangaroos, preceded by 2nd Troop with a section of Worcester carriers in front advanced out of CLOPPENBURG. The sides of the road were thickly wooded, ideal country for bazookas. Accordingly we advanced with all machine guns firing into the verges. Our progress was soon halted by two large crates blocking the road. After a short delay we found a way round and went forward again, only to be stopped 300 yds further on by a road block, this was blown away by one of the AVREs and we started again. This time the carriers dropped behind and the infantry advanced on their feet around us. Our machine gun fire killed four Germans and two more gave themselves up. We managed to proceed for about 1000 yds when we were again stopped by craters. This time there was no question of going round and we had to send for the armoured bulldozer. While it was working several enemy came down the road on bicycles apparently quite unconcerned, we held our fire until the leading cyclist turned into a group of buildings, we then opened up. Utter confusion reigned and they scattered in all directions. The crater was soon filled and we went on. Shortly afterwards a German staff car appeared over the crest about 2000 yds ahead of us. This also evidently failed to spot us and motored on towards. My gunner got it in his sights and I called out the ranges as it got nearer. It started to slow down near the buildings so I gave the order to fire. This first shell hit the car smack on the radiator and destroyed it completely. A pity because it was a nice car. We continued the advance but with the constant firing into the verges had used up nearly all our machine gun ammunition and we had also used a lot of 75 mm HE. Consequently 1st Troop under Lt Uttley came up and took our place and we went back down the line to replenish.

At the replenishment point we picked up Sgt Ruane's 17 pounder which we had left behind at BAWINKLE. We were soon filled up and rejoined the column but this time at the rear.

Lt Uttley meanwhile had come across more cratering which held him up, but by late afternoon he had reached the bridge at a small hamlet called NEULETHE some 2500 yds short of ALHORN. This bridge was of course blown. However Lt Uttley did a foot recce and found a small bridge some 200 yds to the south which the enemy had neglected to blow, he therefore took his troop across this and into the houses. Here the first serious opposition was met and there was a short battle, Lt Uttley's tank was bazookad in the rear but not put out of action. The Worcesters sent up another company and the position was learned, the two companies pushing platoons up a little way into the woods beyond. The situation remained like this until nightfall when the remaining two companies of which second troop were supporting one moved up to within a thousand yards of NEULETHE. A plan was made to build a Bailey bridge across the river and C and B Companies with 2 Tp and 3rd Tp would pass over and capture ALHORN at first light.

However at about 0300 hrs a strong counter attack launched by two companies supported by either two Panthers or two Jugal Panthers. A and D Companies and 1st Troop were taken completely by surprise and the sappers were driven off the bridge. The Worcesters were driven out of the woods and back into the buildings. 1st Tp was pinned behind these buildings and unable to move much, moreover the village square was full of Kangeroos and motor transport of all kinds and the confusion was great. One Panther advanced within 20 yds of the building which housed A Company HQ. Fortunately the tanks were protected by the houses and suffered hits, however the Panther proceeded to shoot through the houses and things in the square were very unpleasant

indeed. Eventually one of 1st Troops tanks managed to manoeuvre into a position where he got a couple of shots in. Both of these bounced off the front of the Panther, in a shower of sparks. Nevertheless it had the effect of making him withdraw. This was the turning point of the battle as at this moment the Worcesters who were fighting from the cellars finally drove off the German infantry. Casualties on both sides were very heavy.

While this was going on I was called to Sqn HQ and given what information there was, which was little, and told to take 2nd Troop down to reinforce 1st Troop. I dashed back to the troop and we got away as quickly as possible. Cpl Lamont's tank developed engine trouble and had to be left behind.

The main bridge was of course still blown so we went down a track to the right and over the smaller bridge. As I have stated our information was exceedingly skimpy and I expected to find the hamlet securely held and the line about 800 yds to the east of it. It was somewhat shaking therefore when about 200 yds from the first houses three shots of solid cracked by a matter of a few yards in front of my tank. Looking to the right I saw a Panther sitting on a crest about 600 yds away. The track was closely lined with trees and it was impossible to swing the guns round so we put on all speed and dashed into the village without mishap. A troop of 17 pdr SPs which were following us was not so fortunate however and one of them was knocked out.

On reaching that hamlet I immediately pushed two tanks out to the right through some gardens to engage the Panther, however he must have decided discretion was the better part of valour for he had withdrawn. I dismounted and contacted Lt Uttley. After a brief conference with the commander of A Coy we altered our dispositions slightly so that my two 17 pdrs were covering the open ground to the right and my own tank next to Coy HQ covering the front. Lt Uttley's troop covered D Coy and the left flank. There was then a half hour "truce" while our medical orderlies went out to collect the wounded of both sides. The remnants of the right hand German Coy were offered surrender but they declined and stated that would rather stay and die for their Fuhrer. Thirty minutes later they thought better of it and came in to give themselves up! About 40 of them.

The rest of the morning was uneventful but in the afternoon D Coy and A Coy supported by Lt Uttley's troop and my own pushed forward to the far edge of the wood again. No opposition was encountered. A little later A and B Sqns captured ALHORN crossroads with a north flanking movement. The remainder of the afternoon was quiet except for some long distance shelling from SP guns. That evening extensive preparations were made against another counter attack and mines were laid across all tracks. While this was being done the left hand German Company of the counter attack which had been laying in the wet fields all day came into our lines and gave themselves up complete with officers.

In the middle of the night we were woken up for an O Group and informed that the Worcesters and C Sqn were to clear the woods to the north of the CLOPPENBURG – ALHORN road next morning. This had already been done by A Sqn and the 7 SLI to the extent of 500 yds but it was thought that there were still enemy further back who might form up to counter attack and thus cut the axis.

We accordingly left NEULETHE early in the morning and after an hour back at Squadron HQ, replenishing and having breakfast we again joined A Coy. Then the whole battalion advanced north through the woods down four separate lanes each about 500 yds apart; four Coys up and one troop to each Coy. The northern edge of the wood was reached at midday, the only opposition being from half a dozen German stragglers who quickly surrendered.

On reaching the objective, one platoon of A Coy, one section of carriers and one mortar section also with their carriers formed a mobile column with 2nd Troop under command of Major Peter Hall of A Coy. The platoon rode on the back of the tanks and we set off to make a wide sweep through the woods to the left. Going was extremely difficult, being confined to narrow tracks through the trees and on two occasions we had to make wide detours because of a deep anti-tank ditch. All was quiet in general except that there was some mortar fire to the north and we once came across a section of the wood which was burning furiously. In mid-afternoon the going was so slow that Major Hall halted the column and as we were not far from the limit of our route sent on the carrier section alone. They returned in about 20 minutes and the officer reported that he had reached the objective and found a Canadian Light tank gently brewing on a minefield. A local inhabitant stated

that there had been a battle there earlier in the day and the Canadians had driven through northward.

It was then decided to push on north from where we were and then turn east to join the Battalion. However no sooner had the leading carrier advanced about 50 yards when it was mined. The carrier was blown on its side a smoking wreck, of the driver there was very little trace and the commander and gunner were severely wounded. I grabbed a first aid box and ran forward, I had almost reached the group around the wounded men when there was another deafening explosion – the carrier platoon Sgt had very foolishly tried to lift a half exposed mine which was lying on the track, as usual it was booby trapped, and he blew himself to pieces. This caused a 'flap' and everyone became extremely jittery, there were also three more casualties, another rifleman had been severely hurt, the carrier platoon officer had had most of the skin blown off his face and although not seriously hurt was a shocking sight, streaming with blood and half blinded. Major Hall also had a splinter of steel in his eye, which although it luckily missed the pupil was extremely painful.

There was slight chaos for a couple of minutes after this and Major Hall decided to call off the patrol as it seemed certain that the enemy had left the area, otherwise the events of the preceding minutes would have brought down fire on us. Consequently ambulances were sent for and the column made its way back to the rest of the battalion. Here I was informed that the 43rd Division was going to remain on the line it held until the end of the war which seemed imminent. This was the 16th April. We however were as usual to be transferred to another Division, the 51st Highland, to support their attack on DALMENHORST.

After a quick meal we moved and concentrated with the rest of the Regiment at ALHORN. Here we learnt that the next day was to be spent in maintenance preparatory to moving across to the 51st Div.

The maintenance on the following day passed off uneventfully except for one or two odd shells from a gun somewhere to the north, no damage was done however, and after an after tea briefing on the morrows march we retired to bed early.

Chapter III

The next morning the Regiment left ALHORN at 0600 hrs, C Sqn being at the rear of the column. 4th Troop under Lt Charles was leading, followed by 1st Troop under Lt Reviere who had rejoined the Squadron the night before after a period of sickness, myself with 2nd Troop and Lt Uttley with 3rd Troop.

Our harbour area was just east of WILDESHAUSEN which we reached at about 0900 hrs. We remained there until the evening when C Sqn moved up through HORSTEDT. 1st and 4th Troops were immediately sent up to support two forward companies; they reached their objective without incident except that someone fired a PIAT at Lt Charles' tank by mistake, luckily it missed him.

We remained in this location for three days in all resting and refitting. 1st and 4th remained with their companies but there was no action. During this time B Sqn supported a successful attack on DELMENHORST by 152 Bde.

On the 22nd April the Regiment moved again to come once more under command of the 43rd Division who after all had not remained on the ALHORN line, the plan being to clear an area east of BREMEN as far as the BREMEN – HAMBURG Autobahn.

BREMEN itself was being attacked from the east by the 52nd Division and 4th Armoured Bde and from the south by the 3rd Division.

We spent the night of the 22nd at GELBERGEN, moving at midday on the 23rd and crossing the WESER at VERDEN. C Sqn went into harbour that night in a wood some 3000 yards off the BERDEN-BREMEN road. At 0400 hrs the next morning 1st and 2nd Troops moved up to support two companies of the 5th DCLI of 214 Bde. We arrived at first light and spent the morning observing the front to the north. 3rd Troop passed through at about 10 o'clock and advanced up a track. They hadn't gone more than 300 yards when the whole troop was bogged down. The

country in this part consisted of peat bogs and the tracks were not strong enough to take the tanks and soon collapsed. At lunch time we were on the move again, my troop travelling behind the leading company ready to give support if required. The objective was to secure a hamlet on the other side of the Autobahn. The advance was terribly slow and by teatime we had only reached SCHANZENDORF a village about 1000 yards from the Autobahn.

Here it was decided to lay on a set-piece attack across the Autobahn to the farms and hamlets on the further side up to a depth of 1500 yards. The reason for this plan was that a troop of 43rd Recce Regt had been over earlier in the afternoon and had had a couple of cars bazookad, it was consequently thought that the enemy was occupying these buildings in strength, particularly as A Sqn and the 4th Dorsets had been fighting a stiff battle all day a few miles to the east.

It was to be a two company attack the right hand company supported by 1st and the left hand by 2nd Troop. The attack was preceded by a heavy artillery and mortar concentration thickened up by a company of medium machine guns giving indirect fire. We crossed the start line about 1800 hrs and the first objectives were easily reached and with no opposition at all. 2nd Troop was giving covering fire with smoke onto the last objective, a large farm when an ancient man of about 80 summers dashed out of the farm and came hobbling towards us apparently undeterred by the smoke shells which must have been passing very close to his head. We stopped firing immediately and watched in amazement. The ancient eventually arrived at my tank and shouted "Mienen! Mienen!" pointing a few yards in front. I hastily dismounted and sure enough the whole track for about ten yards in front of my tank right up to the farm. I blessed that old man then. The first and last time I've ever felt well towards a German! This of course halted my troop but the infantry were able to go forward and occupy the position. 1st Troop and the right hand company were also successful and no opposition, had been met anywhere the enemy having pulled out. A little later there was some desultory air bursts sent over but they soon ceased. As some 6 pounders had been brought up by another was both 1st and 2nd Troops were recalled to harbour the night with Sqn HQ at SCHANZENDORF.

The next morning was spent in gun cleaning and we learnt that Major Wormald DSO, MC and bar, was leaving the Regiment immediately to go to BURMA to become 2IC of the 25 Dragoons, Capt Ackers-Douglas left us that morning to take his place as A Sqn Leader and Capt D G Hannah came from HQ Sqn to be 2IC of C Sqn.

The main attack on BREMEN by the 52nd Division had started at 2300 hrs on the previous night and was going extremely well, because of this the Lowland Division was to confine its operation to the main part of the town and the 43rd was to come in from the east and clear up the northern suburbs. Consequently after a brief concentration in BASMEN at midday, A Sqn supporting the 7th Hampshires advanced down the road towards BREMEN. There was considerable resistance but by 1700 hrs they had reached their final objective at OSTERNOL, 10000 yards from the start point.

In the evening C Sqn and the 5th Dorsets passed through them to capture the locality of BLOCKDIEH just north of A Sqn. 2nd Troop was supporting one company on to the first objective and 1st Troop was to pass through with another company. As we turned off the main road into BLOCKDIEH we were confronted with a jubilant crowd of liberated PWs and DPs and lunatics for there was a large asylum in the area. It seemed unlikely with so many people about that there would be any opposition, and so it proved and all objectives were quickly occupied.

The following morning was spent in rest and gun cleaning and about lunch time were told the latest plan. The 52nd Division were doing well and it was decided to push the 43rd right through the northern suburbs, and to try and "bounce" the bridge at BURGDAMM which carried the road leading to WEMERMUNDER and BREMERHAVEN. 129 Brigade with the Sherwood Rangers supporting was to lead followed by 214 Bde and the 13th/18th Hussars.

The garrison commander of BREMEN surrounded by fanatical SS men were putting up a do-or-die resistance in the Burgerpark but by midnight the place had been taken and the survivors surrendered, the garrison commander was captured but the Gauleiter of BREMEN and his wife had staged a highly dramatic if somewhat messy suicide act.

129 Bde had had a hard fight and 214 came up to pass through with 2nd Troop of C Sqn leading with a platoon of KRRs under Lt Piercy for local protection. We crossed the start line at 0100 hrs

and advanced into the pitch darkness. It was trepidous work, at each street crossing we expected a blast from a Panzerfaust or an 88 mm, also all the tram wires had been brought down by air raids and hung at turret level, one had to keep a sharp lookout to avoid being decapitated. However we met no opposition and reached our objective just as dawn was breaking.

This was our first experience of a German city which had been subjected to heavy RAF attack and the sight which met our eyes as the sky lightened is well nigh indescribable. We were in what had been a large area of well to do flats – had been because now 75% of the buildings were reduced to heaps of rubble and the remainder to gutted shells. The air as putrid with the smell of burst drains, and the unmistakable stench of death. Numbers of corpses lay in the streets and goodness knows how many were buried under the rubble. It was like a city of death, not a sound was heard and not a soul was seen except for our own troops who crouched in position behind the rubble.

As it got lighter a column of some two hundred men came marching down the road escorted by a solitary British soldier. A motley crew mostly in uniform of some sort but a number of civilians. They were being taken to the POW cage, but soon after they came marching back, for they were not soldiers, but tram drivers, railway employees and various other civil workers. The city began to come to life.

