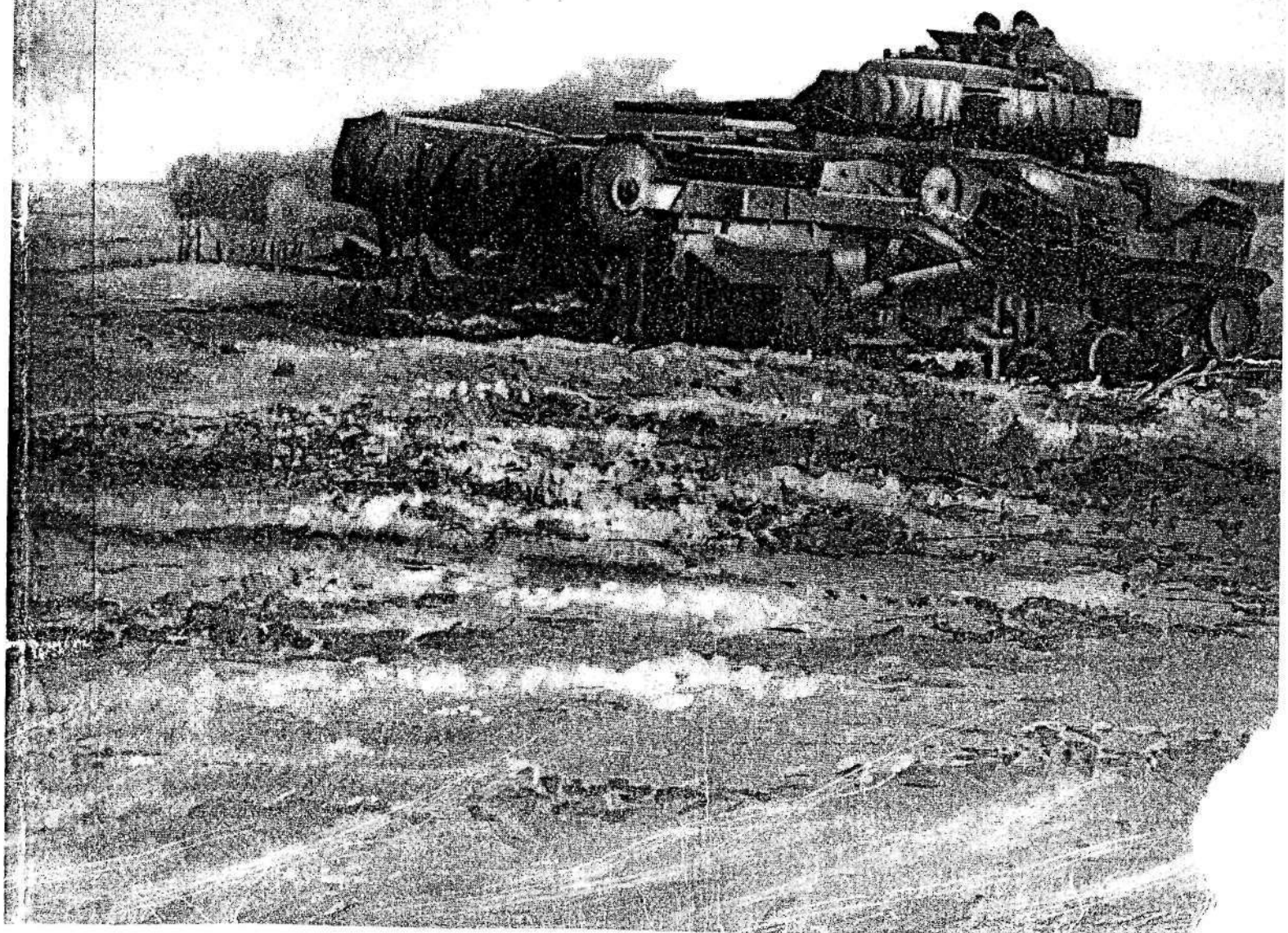


The
WESTMINSTER DRAGOONS

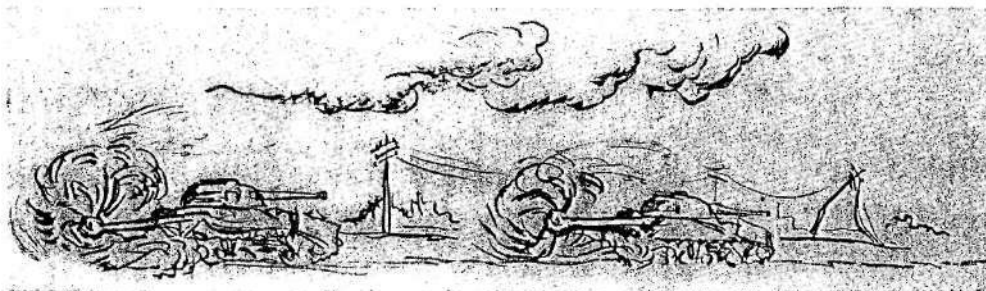
IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE

JUNE 1944 - MAY 1945



THE STORY OF THE
**WESTMINSTER
DRAGOONS**

IN NORTH WEST EUROPE
FROM JUNE 6th 1944 TO MAY 8th 1945



WESTMINSTER DRAGOONS

In presenting a history that is to be readable, and not simply a bare statement of facts and dates there is obviously much in the story of a Regiment overseas that must be left out, many incidents that become lost or minimised in the wider picture of events.

But for those who took part in the actual making, it is in this recalling of times and people, places and moments that will bring other memories to complete each personal record of the Regiment in perhaps, its finest hours.

Germany, June 1945.

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INTRODUCTION

It is felt that a brief outline of the Regiment's activities from the outbreak of war until D-Day, are needed to complete this history.

In September 1939 the Regiment moved to Blackdown and formed the 102nd. O.C.T.U. with pre-war other rank members of the Regiment as cadets.

On the 1st of January 1941 the Westminster Dragoons were reformed as an armoured Regiment in the 30th Armoured Brigade as part of 11th Armoured Division, and in the following year this brigade was switched to 42nd Armoured Division. During this period the Regiment underwent normal armoured training at Helmsley and Warminster.

It was in October 1943 that the Westminster Dragoons on the disbandment of 42nd Armoured Division, became a flail regiment as part of a plan for collating all special armoured devices under 79th Armoured Division. Training in this specialist role was carried out at Burford and later at Orford with other arms of the Division.

The first intimation of the operation in front of the Regiment was when the Colonel and Squadron Leaders of B and C Squadrons were called to London to take part in detailed planning conferences.

In March of 1944 two troops of B and C Squadrons, Squadron H.Q.'s and a skeleton R.H.Q. moved to Bournemouth to join the formation with which they were to operate, and took part in a number of exercises of actual amphibious invasion.

At the beginning of May, A Squadron, who had not originally been included in the actual D-Day plans, were moved to the Petworth Park area — also to take part.

About four weeks before the Invasion B and C Squadrons were already in the wired-in camps where final plans were made and the tanks waterproofed prior to loading onto invasion craft.



ASHORE AT

DURING the early hours of the morning and during the afternoon of Saturday the 3rd of June 1944, B & C Sqns embarked on Landing Craft for the invasion of the Continent. The embarkation took place on the North shore of the SOLENT near CALSHOT, and it was a gloriously sunny day that made war seemed very remote in spite of all the tanks and landing craft.

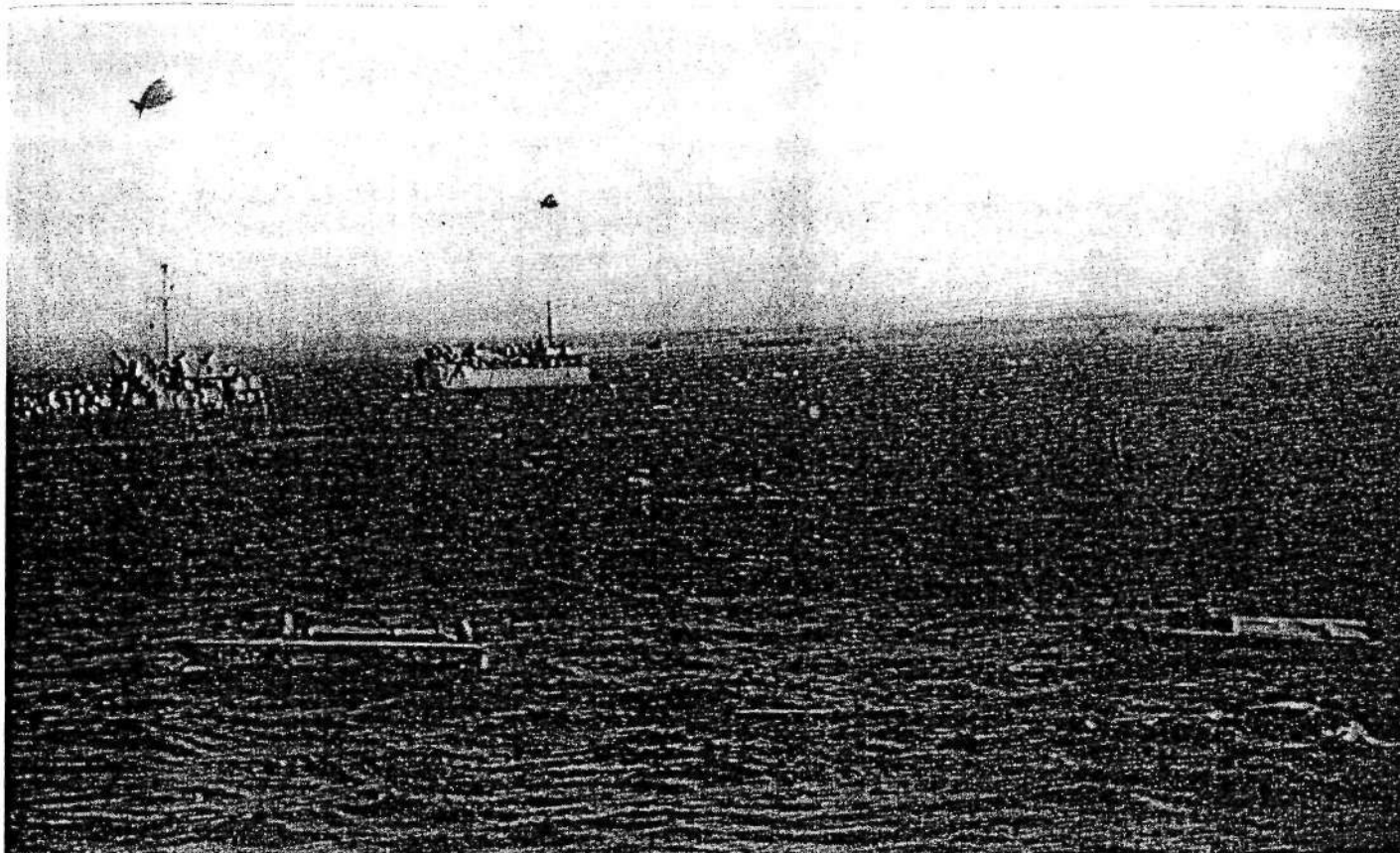
The first feeling when we got aboard the landing craft was one of relief. The past weeks feverish preparation and the strain of planning and physical work had been very great. But once on the landing craft everyone felt oddly enough that they could now relax because if there was anything that had been forgotten, nothing could be done about it now. The tanks themselves had been prepared to the fullest extent of our skill; plans had been made and changed on the latest information and final orders had been issued.

Our rest was to be a short one though, as the Navy announced that D Day was to be Monday the 5th and we should be sailing early on Sunday morning.

The weather however worsened considerably and though we sailed early on Sunday morning we were told the Invasion had been postponed a day, and returned to our moorings.

We sailed again on the Monday morning (5th June) and this time there was no postponement. The sea was still rough and many became sea-sick. Each landing craft was towing a small landing craft which had a special task to perform on the enemy beach, but owing to the weather the tow ropes broke and all but two of these little craft had to be left behind. A more serious affair was the news that all the landing craft with guns aboard for our close support had also got into trouble and were left behind.

As last light faded there were no other landing craft to be seen and it was easy to think that our own little batch of 12 landing craft was going to do a private invasion of their own. Some people were worried by this, and others were too sick to care. But there was the consoling sight of two cruisers away in the distance to our right. They at least were going the same way.



NORMANDY

The beach on which C Sqn was due to land was just to the West of the village of LA RIVIERE. B Sqn were to land on the right of C Sqn by LE HAMEL. There was plenty of information about the beaches and the country beyond, the beach itself was wide and open with 300 yards of sand to cross. In the sea there was a layer of soft clay about 25 yards across which might be an obstacle to tanks, plus, mines intended to blow up the landing craft.

At the back of the beach low sand dunes extended for about 50 yards and then a lateral road. This road ran East to LA RIVIERE and West to LE HAMEL. Between the beach and the road we knew there were more mines.

Beyond the road a marsh, said to be dried up in Summer and passable to tanks. Two roads ran inland across the marsh — one from the centre of C Sqn front, and another from the centre of B Sqn's front.

On C Sqn front the ground beyond the marsh rose to a small ridge overlooking the beach, the top about 600 yards from it. The ground behind that was not visible to anyone on the beach.

On B Sqn front the ground was flat, and thickly strewn with mines, in fact more mines than the Sqns have ever encountered since. The enemy on each Sqn front were about a Company strong with certain other troops including Anti tank guns to assist them. There was a platoon position in LA RIVIERE, which included an 88 mm gun, encased in concrete, covering the entire beach. On the sea-side this concrete was 17 feet thick. Another enemy platoon with two 75 mm Anti Tank guns was on the Eastern end of the ridge above LA RIVIERE. In the centre of the C Sqn area, just over the top of the ridge were four enormous concrete shelters each said to contain a 150 mm gun, designed to fire at approaching landing craft.

Aerial photos also showed some mysterious diggings about 500 yards West of this battery later transpiring to contain machineguns. Back on the beach about 1500 yards West of LA RIVIERE was the third platoon position, entirely in concrete and including one anti tank gun.

The enemy opposing B Sqn had a platoon locality with a 50 mm gun in concrete in the centre,

and two platoons with an 88 mm anti tank gun in Le HAMEL, sighted to fire directly along the beach. Another was sited on the cliffs away to the right and dug in, also with a direct line of fire along the beach.

C Sqn were in support of 69 Inf Bde, the Bde frontage, as no troops were to land opposite LA RIVIERE itself, was about 1500 yards, in effect a German Company position.

B Sqn were with many other troops in support of 231 Bde of 50 (N) Div. This frontage was of similar length and as again no troops were to land opposite LE HAMEL itself there was a gap of some seven miles between the right hand troops and the Americans. •

A. Royal Marine Commando Regiment was to land and capture the small port of PORT-EN-BASSIN, thus securing the link between the American and British troops.

The Plan

The task of B & C Sqns with 81 and 82 Sqns of 6 Assault Regiment, Royal Engineers, was to make gaps or lanes through the obstacles on and behind the beaches. Through these gaps 69 and 231 Inf Bdes and their other supporting tanks, guns, etc., would proceed to their further tasks inland. Obviously these gaps had • to be made before anything else could happen. B and C Sqns and 81 and 82 Sqns therefore were the first to land.

To carry out their task the Sqns had re-organised. Half of C Sqn and half of 81 Sqn combined to form a composite Squadron known as X Breaching Squadron. The other halves combined to form Z Breaching Squadron. X Breaching Sqn was commanded by Major S.P.M. Sutton, with Captain Davis, RE as Second in Command. Z Breaching Sqn was commanded by Major Thompstone, RE with Captain R. F. Bell as Second in Command.

Half of B Sqn with half of 82 Sqn RE combined to form a composite Breaching Squadron, this commanded by Major Elfinstone, RE with Captain B. Taylor as Second in Command. The remaining halves of B Sqn and 82 Sqn RE combined to form a second composite Breaching Squadron. This squadron was commanded by Captain H. P. Stanyon with Captain J. Leytham RE as Second in Command.

Each Breaching Sqn consisted of 3 breaching teams. In C Sqn these were numbered and each team consisted of six tanks, flails and AVRE's, and fitted exactly into one landing craft. The AVRE's from 81 and 82 Assault Squadrons were of three types, Rolly-Poley, Bobbin, and Fascine. In addition there was one with an S. B. G. Bridge in 81 Squadron. Each Sqn had three armoured Bulldozers.

The task of the Rolly-Poleys was to lay matting across the first strip of clay. The Bobbins were to lay steel shuttering across the second strip of clay. Both Rolly-Poleys and Bobbins had further jobs on the beach after their first tasks had been completed. The tanks of B & C Sqns were then to take the lead and flail lanes through the numerous minefields. The Fascine AVRE's were to follow them and lay their Fascines in the Anti Tank Ditch and anywhere else where they might be required. The S. B. G. Bridge was to be dropped across the Anti Tank Ditch at the point where it crossed the centre road on C Sqn front.

An immense bombardment from the sea and air was to precede the landing and there can be no doubt that success was largely due to this. As an example of the scale of the bombardment, the platoon position in LA RIVIERE containing the 88 mm gun in concrete, was due to receive the following:—

4 Destroyers (16 5" guns) for half an hour?
A Field Regt RA (24 25 pdrs) firing from landing craft, for half an hour,
2200 50 lb rockets fired from landing craft.
Bombs from 6 Squadrons of Fortresses.

Many smaller weapons were also to engage this target.

The MONT FLEURY battery was to receive 300 tons of bombs from Lancasters of Bomber Command during the night.

Dawn — 6th June

When dawn broke on the 6th of June the view was very different from that of the night before. For miles and miles in every direction there was nothing but ships and landing craft.

The sky was overcast and the sea was choppy. As the light improved the French coast appeared, a thin faint line in the distance. This view slowly grew in size until through field glasses we could pick out our landing place. The coast looked very much as we had expected, we were approaching the right place, this was encouraging.

The tank crews were going about their normal morning routine — washing, brewing tea, and stowing away their bedding. All of which was peculiarly encouraging.

When we were still several thousand yards off shore a signal came through. We were 10 minutes ahead of time. The whole force halted and we were able to study our battlefield. Suddenly one gun of the MONT FLEURY battery opened fire and landed a shell within 100 yards of a landing craft. The gun was straightaway engaged by one of our LCG's (landing craft carrying two 4.7 inch guns) which drew in very close to the shore. The enemy gun soon stopped firing.

By this time the bombardment was in full swing. There were surprisingly few aircraft about, an

occasional Spitfire or Lightning passed overhead and above the clouds the drone of Fortresses could be heard. One thing seemed certain — there were no enemy aircraft about.

Then we were on the final run-in. Chains securing the tanks to the decks were removed, crews mounted, engines started, wireless sets were switched on and tank commanders fastened their steel helmets.

On the last two or three hundred yards the landing craft began to open fire with their own 20 mm guns. Very little return seemed to be coming back from the beach, and everything looked already very shattered and dead.

The 88 on the Beaches

As our landing craft Couched down the first trouble occurred on the left flank, Captain Bell's tank refusing to start. The engine covers were sealed down for waterproofing, so the only thing was a tow out of the landing craft, when it beached. To the crew's relief, the tank started before leaving the craft — the tow ropes were unhitched and all the tanks were on the beach.

Now we had started. The 88 mm gun behind the 17 ft of concrete, in spite of all the efforts made to destroy it, was still in action. It soon hit and set on fire two of the Rolly-Poley AVRE's. It was Captain Bell who saw these tanks hit and realised at once where the fire was coming from. Turning his tank so that he could fire at the aperture in the concrete from which the gun was shooting he sat for a moment in the line of fire at a range of 150 yards. The 88 mm could have knocked him out at 1500 yards! The tank was standing on the open beach with no cover as he brought the gunner, Trooper H. W. J. Smitfonto the target. Five shots they fired and the fifth shot entered straight through the aperture silencing the enemy gun. Had the 88 remained in action there is no doubt that it would have had a very serious, or even disastrous effect on the landing of 69 Bde.

In the meantime on the beaches the Rolly-Poley and Bobbin AVRE's had little success with their devices, but luckily the strips of clay turned out to be obstacles in certain places only, and in team No. 1 on the right Lt Pear got safely ashore and across them. Cpl. McCall was less fortunate and got stuck in the clay but Lt. Pear carrying on alone flailed a path through the first minefield and reached the lateral road safely. Finding that the marsh ahead of him was after all an obstacle *fflP* turned left along the road planning to turn right up the centre road through the marsh.

Cpl Walker and L/C Savory in Team No. 2 advanced straight up the beach, also crossing the clay without trouble, and flailed a successful lane through the first minefield, they too turned left on the lateral road. Their orders being to pass the turning right and push on towards LA RIVIERE.

The plan became impossible when they found two enormous bomb craters in the road with marshy ground on either side, and in attempting to negotiate these craters both tanks became bogged.

No. 3 team was even less fortunate, Sgt Birch and Cpl Rider advanced steadily up the beach but the first were hit by the 88 mm gun which Captain Bell silenced a moment later. Both shots destroyed the flail on the front of each tank but the crews were unhurt. This left only Lt Pear and Major Sutton, with the bulk of the task still to be completed.

Major Sutton had some difficulty landing at all in the first place. By the time his turn came to leave the landing craft, it had floated off and swung sideways so that instead of facing the beach it was now parallel. This meant that the tank would have to come off into deeper water (about 5 feet) and Major Sutton discovered that another landing craft was in his path. He decided to turn out to sea and go round the stern. Fortunately the tank was well waterproofed and only the occasional wave broke over the top of the turret.

On the beach the dry grass in the dunes was now alight in several places. This produced a dense smoke which made it very difficult to see what was going on, and probably hindered the enemy more than us. We at least knew what was happening. They did not.

'7/ You Hear A Bang ...'

When Lt. Pear how rumbling up the road reached the Anti-Tank ditch he was astonished to find that the point where the ditch crossed the road had not been blown up. Reporting on the wireless, that he was about to cross he said that if we heard a loud explosion we should know what had happened, but a moment later he was safely over and a little further on found a bomb crater completely blocking the road. The S. B. G. Bridge on the AVRE Cjhj^rchill was ordered up and placed successfully across the crater.

Lt Pear then turned right and flailed a lane about 1000 yards long along the back of the Anti Tank ditch. This lane was later widened by Major Sutton to the width of two tanks. Shortly afterwards it was used by the whole of B Sqn 4/7th Dragoon Guards who were thus able to get out to the open country.

X Bretffching Sqn had completed its task.

Z Breaching Sqn teams crossed the beach successfully but then their trouble started. Captain Bell, Lt Hoban; Sgt Webb, Cpl Wild and Cpl Moore bogged before they reached the lateral road. Cpl Thorpe managed to cross the road, but was blown up on a mine while flailing just the other side, the ground being too soft for the flail to be fully effective.

Captain Bell and Lt Hoban were towed on to the road by an AVRE and then made their way

by road up to VER-SUR-MER, the others being hauled out later by the Sqn A. R. V.

Fortunately, a track was found just West of LA RIVIERE free of mines and was used by C Sqn 4/7th Dragoons, the path cleared by Cpl. Thorpe being used for light tracked vehicles only, as the ground was marshy.

X and Z Sqns, having completed their tasks, they rallied in an orchard about a mile inland on the outskirts of the village of VER-SUR-MER and re-organised themselves into C Sqn and 81 Sqn.

Five Shermans out of the .13 that landed arrived at this orchard. Captain Bell's tank was still having starter trouble. All the remaining tanks were bogged except the one, damaged by enemy action. The Sqn had suffered no personnel casualties. The Sqn ARV had landed one hour after the tanks and already started recovering. In addition to its crew it had on board the Commanding Officer of the Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel W.Y.K. Blair Oliphant M. C.

As soon as the above situation had been reported to 69 Inf Bde, orders were received to advance inland to assist 6 G.H. It was decided to leave Captain Bell behind to organise the recovery of the bogged tanks while his own tank was repaired. The remaining four tanks set off inland.

They soon became lost on the strange continental maps and it was necessary to halt to ask the v/ay of some French civilians. These were the first civilians we had spoken to and they insisted on shaking hands with all of us. Then, after a distribution of sweets and cigarettes, the correct route was discovered from them. The four tanks then passed through the village of CREPON where a grenade was thrown from behind a hedge at the Squadron Leader's tank. No one was hurt and it was later discovered that over 100 Germans just outside the village had been by-passed by the assaulting troops.

The party eventually found Bn HQ of 6 CLH. but as soon as it arrived it received orders to go to the 7 G.H. instead. Snipers were very active around Bn HQ 6 G.H. and we were not sorry to leave their neighbourhood.

The Fouriy Tigers

- As the party was going up the high street of the village of CREULLY the following message was received by wireless from 69 Inf Bde :— "40 enemy Tigers advancing North East from RUCQUEVILLE." A quick look at the map showed that RUCQUEVILLE was about 5 miles away to the South West which meant the enemy tanks were coming straight towards us.

It was as we topped the rise to the South of CREULLY, that we saw three tanks of the 4/7 D.G. hit and starting to burn, no more than 800 yards ahead. It looked as if the advanced guard of the 40 Tigers had arrived already. Bn HQ of the 7 G.H.

was found in this area and we very promptly got our tanks behind cover. A plan was then made which put two tanks forward in covered positions and two back in reserve.

Contact was quickly made with Captain Bell on the wireless asking him to bring up every tank he could. To everybody's joy he replied that he was already on the way with 7 tanks which meant that Sjt Leach and his crew on the A.R.V. had done a tremendous piece of work.

The 40 Tigers never came. In fact it is extremely doubtful whether so many were in the area at that time.

It was soon evening and with all the tanks now together we were in need of petrol. A petrol lorry of the Sqn should have landed at about 1 p.m. so it was decided that Captain Bell should go off and try and find it. He set-off on foot as we had no transport except our tanks. After a series of adventures he finally got back at 2 a.m. *— without the petrol lorry. Owing to bad weather it had not landed.

It was getting dark, and wireless contact with 69 Inf Bde was lost. We had seen a number of vehicles withdrawing through CREULLY and knew our left flank was very much in the air. The Sqn therefore pulled back in the dark through CREULLY and settled down for the night near CREPON. Shortly before leaving CREULLY two Crocodile flame-throwing tanks joined the Sqn and as it turned out they came in very useful the next day.

At 5.30 a. m. on the 7th of June the Sqn "stood to" and as the light improved it turned out that we were near one of our own batteries of guns and were therefore fairly safe. Captain Bell went off in his tank to see if a nearby tall hedge would be a suitable place, for the Sqn to lie up against in daylight. He reported on the wireless that it would do very well and the Sqn moved across.

We had not been in this new position more than 5 minutes when there was an appalling crash about 10 yards from the Sqn Leader's tank. It was rapidly followed by more crashes, and Trooper Birch, of the A.R.V. was killed. Cpls Gillespie and Adcock and L/Cpl Lennon, all members of the Sqn Leader's crew, and Trooper Kirk were wounded and the Sqn Leader himself was slightly wounded. At this stage of the war we were so raw that no one knew whether the explosions were boriibs, mines, or shells.

Suddenly someone spotted that a gun was firing at us over open sights from the far side of the next field — no more than 150 yards away! The gun and the Germans firing it were plainly visible, and Lt Hoban's tank, further down the hedge moved slightly so that he could see the enemy through a gap. Trooper D. Smith, Lt Hoban's gunner, soon destroyed the enemy gun and its crew, and only sniping continued from the enemy hedge but of a very inaccurate variety for such short range.

In the meantime Cpl Baldwin had been doing splendid work giving first aid to the wounded.

Gpl Adcock, although wounded in two places, insisted on returning into the loader's seat in the Squadron Leader's tank. He then loaded the gun while Sgt Whybrow fired it. Cpl. Adcock continued doing this until he finally collapsed from loss of blood. It was for his courage and determination in this action, that he was later awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French Government.

With the enemy gun knocked out, the Squadron collected its casualties and withdrew under covering fire from the two Crocodiles. A R.A. Regimental Aid Post evacuated all the wounded, except the Squadron Leader, whose injuries were not considered serious.

First Assault

It was then reckoned probable that there were more enemy in the area of the knocked out gun, and it was decided to clear them out. The plan was to use the flame-throwers for this, with an escort of Flail tanks and a few signallers and orderlies from the RA Headquarters as infantry to ride on the tanks. The two Crocodiles, with Flail tanks provided by No. 1 Troop advanced into the suspected enemy locality. A few squirts of flame and 75 mm rounds from the Flail guns produced an immediate reaction, and Germans started to appear from everywhere with their hands up. When the count was completed, it was found that over 100 prisoners had been taken, and, in addition, the area contained one 88 mm gun and four 75 mm guns.

During the day, 3 Troop cleared up two more suspected pockets of resistance. One of these was a false alarm and no enemy were seen but the other produced 15 prisoners. In the evening a message was received from RHQ, ordering the Squadron to rejoin them and B Squadron at BRECY. Accordingly, an early move was made next morning and ended the Squadron's first period of action. Apart from having carried out its flailing task, the Sqn had captured over 100 prisoners and silenced or captured 7 guns. Its losses during this period were 1 man killed and 5 wounded. No tanks had been lost.

Back on the beaches the day before, B Sqn's troubles had started early. The LCT which was to beach just to the East of LE HAMEL was hit several times on the Engine room and bridge before discharging the tanks on the beach. Shelling casualties were suffered by the Naval and Royal Engineer personnel on board but fortunately not by the Sqn. But with the engine room out of commission the LCT could only float with the tide and it was impossible for the tanks to land until midday when the tide left the craft high and dry.

The beaching of the five other craft was uneventful and the tanks started their wade through 5 ft of water at 0725 hrs. At this time the beach seemed

deserted — all the tanks reached dry land without opposition. The whole thing was rather like the exercises carried out at Studland bay and seemed vaguely unreal. It was broken as soon as the leading infantry came ashore debouched from their landing craft about seven minutes after the tanks. Then the later unmistakable sound of machine guns and mortar bombs was heard, gradually at first but rising in crescendo as the infantry scrambled through the water, and up the beach.

Sgt Lindsay's Lone Hand

The right hand Breaching Sqn suffered another reverse as its commander Major Elfinstone R. E. was killed by a sniper's bullet very soon after landing. Capt B. Taylor of B Sqn with Sgt Lindsay quickly started to clear a lane up to the lateral road. Capt Taylor's own tank was damaged on a mine but Sgt Lindsay reached the lateral road and turned right to report to the H. Q. of the Hamps which should have been in LE HAMEL. The infantry were having a bad time on the beach and held up by determined fire from this village. Capt Taylor tried to contact Sgt Lindsay by wireless to tell him that LE HAMEL was still held by the enemy. The wireless had been thrown off net when the tank struck the mine. The last seen of Sgt Lindsay that day was the solitary tank gathering speed as it charged towards the village held by two platoons of infantry. Sgt Lindsay on entering the village proceeded calmly to the Rendezvous where he should have joined up with the infantry. As of course no infantry were about he proceeded to his second task, clearing the road leading from the western end of the village. This was blocked by steel rails planted in the road and Sgt Lindsay was unable to carry out this task. He could not get off the road inland owing to the Anti-Tank ditch and turning the tank round rattled back into the village to find a crossing of the ditch elsewhere. He managed to do this and began his third task of flailing a lane through a minefield lying beyond the ditch.

The tank had just started its slow slog forward when it received two hits from an 88 mih on the cliffs at ARROMANCHES. On the second hit the tank brewed up.

During the whole of this time the tank was of course alone in this enemy held village and accounted for a number of their infantry with its guns, baling out of the burning tank, and suffering from fumes, the crew split into two and endeavoured to evade detection by crawling into a cornfield nearby. Tprs Gray and Field were taken prisoner but their period of captivity only lasted a few days. They evaded their captors later and eventually joined up with the Americans. Sgt Lindsay with the remaining two members of the crew lay doggo for the remainder of the day in the cornfield and eventually made their way to our own troops. For

this action Sgt Lindsay was later awarded the Military Medal.

Meanwhile on the beach life was still somewhat hectic. The left hand breaching team of the right hand breaching Sqn had not managed to progress far, the leading tank becoming bogged some twenty yards inland from the beach. Lt. Townsend Green was in this tank and managed to stop his second tank before it left the beach. Changing places with the Comd tank he took it down the beach towards LE HAMEL in an endeavour to deal with the 88 mm gun on the Eastern edge of LE HAMEL. The 88 mm had the better of the duel and the tank was knocked out.

The left hand breaching Sqn under Capt. Stanyon fared a little better, All the tanks safely reached the beach. The right hand team did not manage to avoid the clay patch on the beach and the leading tank became bogged. The second tank carried on with its task and managed to flail a gap through the minefield between the edge of the beach and the road although patches of the ground were not passable by tanks. The centre, and left hand teams quickly made gaps through the mines up to the road. The Germans who were not killed, quickly made their way to the beach to surrender. The Sqn Ldr himself did not fair at all well. Having seen that the centre and left hand lanes were progressing well he took his tank along the head to see how the right hand team was making out, but was struck by a mortar shell, setting the tank on fire. The crew took shelter in the dunes. As all the tanks had either gone from the beach or become bogged Capt. Stanyon had to conduct the battle on foot. As progress was slow, the frontage small and the number of tanks somewhat reduced this was not difficult.

The Colonel and Moral

Reaching the road the remaining tanks found the road was badly cratered. As a diversion was impossible owing to the boggy ground on either side of the road, two fascine AVRE were called forward. The crater was so large that only by the strenuous efforts of the tank crews unrolling the fascines and laying them by hand was it made passable. Having crossed the flails carried on along the lateral road, then struck inland a short distance from the centre of the Sqn front to carry out the second task of gapping a large minefield which lay on the landward side. Mortar bombs and sniping had been a heavy strain all this time, and the Sqn Ldr taking shelter from a particularly heavy salvo of mortar fire saw, with a shock the Colonel strolling unperturbably along the beach dressed in immaculate white overalls.

What were left of the flails gathered together that night in the small village of MEUVAINES where at varying intervals echelon vehicles with petrol and ammunition joined them, it was a

noisy night, German aircraft came over in a belated effort to bomb the beaches and the considerable amount of shipping lying off shore. As dawn broke on D + 1 it was a good sight to see three of these planes shot out of the sky by the AA gunners.

The morning of D + 1 was spent in recovering as many of the tanks from the beaches as possible. At midday orders were received from 50 (N) Div to move to BRECY a village some seven miles from the coast, only four tanks out of the original thirteen were available, and the move was uneventful. The whole position was still quite fluid, and when on the morning of D + 2 about 50 Germans gave themselves up as prisoners, both parties found that they had spent the night only 300 yds away from one another.

The whole of the D day operation in this sector although costly in tanks was light in casualties. Four men only were wounded and two taken prisoner.

"Albatross" Arrives

While the other two Squadrons fought their way inland on D Day, A Squadron under Major Wallace was approaching the coast through choppy seas. "H hour for the operation on our sector was 7.25 a. m. and at that time we thought of the first wave of the attack just landing some three hours ahead of us.

Shortly afterwards we passed about six or eight largish infantry landing ships at anchor from which the leading infantry had put off in small assault craft some time before. The shore of Queen Beach was now visible and we could see the flash and smoke of bursting shells and hear a continual rumble of guns. Some two miles from the coast we passed a returning rocket craft, blackened by the exhaust of its rockets and the crew wished us luck with a friendly wave.

A few minutes later the enemy heavy batteries in the direction of Le Havre opened up at us at long range. One of the landing craft in our convoy was hit and disappeared in a mass of smoke and flame almost before we realised what had happened. Destroyers rushed up on our port side and laid a smoke screen, between ourselves and the guns and the remainder of the convoy ploughed on through the swell,

We were now getting quite close to the shore and could pick out without much difficulty a tall building at the corner of the road leading away from the beach which we were supposed to take.

We completed the final stages of our waterproofing by sealing the hatches over the heads of our driver and co-driver, slackened off the chains holding the tanks and knocked out the heavy wooden chocks from under their tracks. The fact that the shore batteries ahead were now firing at us lent speed to every movement. The naval padre shook hands with us and wished us luck and I asked him to say good-bye for me to the skipper, who was as busy on the bridge as I was with the tanks.

Along the water's edge was a confused mass of assault boats, landing craft and some knocked-out tanks and beyond them the battered ruins of a row of sea-side villas.

Suddenly with a slight jolt our landing craft grounded at an angle to the beach and the ramp in the bows was lowered. The two flail tanks, being the largest and most cumbersome of the vehicles on board, had been stowed furthest aft and were therefore the last to land. Even so, we must have disembarked within a very few minutes of our landing craft touching down, and we came off in just a few inches of water. All our many hours of careful waterproofing had been unnecessary but we were glad not to have a deep wade.

We made at once for the beach exit which was packed tight with tanks and other vehicles. Forgetting how little my driver, who was fully closed down, could see, I allowed him to drive straight onto a concrete "Dragon's tooth" and for a moment had awful visions of blocking the exit. However we were able to reverse off this obstacle without difficulty and got round it. At the top of the beach I saw the first dead German lying sprawled on his back by the corner of the road.

The enemy were mortaring the beach exits and we were glad to be able to drop off safely from our tank a sergeant of the military police and his motor-cycle, which had been lashed to the turret for the landing.

The next time I met that sergeant was in the Dutch town of Venray, when it was being shelled by the Germans just after its liberation.

Shoils from the Flank

For the actual assault our eight flails were under command of the Staffordshire Yeomanry, recently returned from fighting in the Middle East and at the first crossings inland I was glad to see some of their officers, who had been landed an hour or two earlier for reconnaissance purposes and who waved us on down the road. We exploded the Cordtex fuze, blowing off the waterproofing fabric covering the gun mantle and other vents on the tank and were roundly cursed at by some infantry we were passing. All progress was then halted by a traffic jam and nobody seemed to know quite what was happening in front. Eventually the traffic moved on and we passed through the town of HERMANVILLE-SUR-MER with the French population standing in the doors of the houses and waving. We halted for a short time in some open country south of the town and after going a few hundred yards there were two loud reports by Lt. Bullock's tank. I asked him on the wireless what they were in aid of. He replied that he did not know but discovered that they had damaged his gun and wrecked the flailing device. A few

moments later two more flails were hit, one of them "brewed up". Luckily the crew including Trooper Woodhouse and Trooper Keley who were wounded, were able to get out. A tank of the Staffs. Yeo. and a medical half-track were also knocked out by what appeared to be an anti-tank gun firing from our right flank. We must then have got into dead ground as we had no further casualties and moved on inland to a crest ahead of us where we were joined by Lt. Hall, the other troop leader, with the remaining two flails. The advance continued and another flail was fired on, the commander, Cpl. Loveday wounded, and the tank damaged when it crashed over a steep bank in taking avoiding action.

The Woman and the Cows

We passed through the village of BIEVILLE and took up battle positions just south of the village guarding the left flank, with the leading infantry a few hundred yards ahead of us. We remained here some hours, changing positions from time to time to avoid spasmodic shelling. It was very hot inside the tanks and there was no chance to get a proper meal or drink but we ate some bully beef and biscuits and sucked boiled sweets. During a lull in the firing an old French peasant woman came and milked her cows within a few yards of the tanks.

About five in the afternoon we saw the most inspiring sight of the 6th Airborne Division in a mass of gliders towed by heavy bombers flying in to reinforce our left flank in the area of the River Orne. Some of the machines were shot down by enemy flak and one giant Stirling bomber crashed into the ground a short distance from us, exploding into a cloud of flame and black smoke rising high into the air. Then when we were very tired of waiting came a report over the wireless that enemy tanks were in the neighbourhood and as the day wore on and the sun sank lower in the west I heard the colonel of the Staffs. Yeo. saying over the air "He's doing his old trick again — working round to get the sun behind him".. Dispositions were altered slightly as the Staffs. Yeo. engaged the enemy tanks, brewing up at least one and suffering some casualties themselves.

At last the long summer day drew to a close. It was nearly midnight when darkness fell and the light from some burning farmhouses and the blazing German tank gave flickering illumination as we moved into close lager, parking the tanks in long lines a few yards apart. My own driver was in rather poor shape from seasickness, hunger, general weariness and being confined in the tank for many hours. We gave him a good shot of whisky and made him turn in at once. The rest of us followed as soon as possible except for those on guard, but all had to turn out again an hour or so later when the transport echelon arrived with petrol. At last we crawled between our blankets for what

remained of the short night with the German bombers still droning over our heads and the tracer shells from our anti-aircraft guns criss-crossing in the night sky. It was an eerie feeling lying there with nothing between ourselves and the German tanks a few hundred yards away but I don't think it kept any of us awake. It had been a long, exciting and tiring day, many of us had been under fire for **the first time**, but none of us **who** lay down that night would have wished to miss that day."

Attack on the Gasworks

During the period immediately following D Day A Squadron were in action several times. On D + 2 days Major Wallace and Lt. Hall with four flails took part in a successful attack on an enemy strongpoint around the gasworks at LION-SUR-MER, which was holding up the build-up of supplies and the development of the bridgehead on this sector. While infantry of the South Lancashire Regiment attacked from one side, the flails supported by two S. P. guns went in from another. A lane was flailed through a minefield and a thick belt of barbed wire and the flails were able to make good use of their guns. No casualties were suffered by A Squadron, our infantry losses were light and about eighty very shaken German prisoners were taken.

On 9th June Captain Beaumont with four flails, which were at that time under command of the East Riding Yeomanry supported an infantry attack on the village of CAMBES. Although not called upon to flail, they had plenty of shooting, and during

the action Sgt. Wilson showed considerable bravery in dismounting from his tank to bring back two wounded members, of the crew of another tank which had been knocked out.

On another occasion A Squadron were asked to provide four flails to clear an area containing some four hundred lorry loads of mines around a strongpoint at **OUISTREHAM**, which had **been captured from the enemy** a few days previously. **This** request showed more confidence in the **flail than** knowledge of **its capabilities**, a **not uncommon thing** in those early days. **Happily** a compromise was reached **whereby two single width lanes into the strongpoint were made.**

During this time A Squadron were harboured in some open country near **HERMANVILLE-SUR-MER** about a mile from the sea. The nightly visitation of the German Air Force to bomb the narrow strip of bridgehead, packed tight with troops, stores and equipment, soon taught everyone the importance of digging-in as there are few things better calculated to inspire one with a desire to get below ground level than the crackling roar of a load of anti-personnel bombs. With the enemy bombers constantly overhead the short summer nights seemed all too long and one waited impatiently for the dawn when each day the R.A.F. regained their mastery of the skies and only occasional German planes came over to 'straf whichever of the many obvious targets took their fancy.

On 15 June A Squadron left 1 Corps area and moved west to join the remainder of the regiment at **JUAYE MONDAYE**.



BRIDGEHEAD BATTLES

From BRECY B & C Squadrons were ordered to move to JUAYE MOND AYE about five miles south of BAYEUX. The tanks moved on the evening of the 11th and arrived to find the place consisted of a small row of houses, a Church and a Monastery, all in very close country extremely near the Germans. The Colonel was commanding a mixed force consisting of a company of engineers, two troops of Anti-Tank Guns, a Platoon of Medium Machine Guns, and his own two depleted Squadrons. This force was under command of 231 Brigade in 50 Div and was to hold a hill about 600 yards south of the village. The next five days we worked hard, then passed into Corps reserve. The battle drew further away and on 15th June A Squadron came over from 1 Corps front.

When we had arrived we had made open lager at night and by day harboured under a thick hedge, out of sight. We could hear firing of small arms and our own guns some way behind keeping up a pretty constant barrage — now the guns were in our midst and we spent the nights under our hedge. The real village of JUAYE MONDAYE lay about half a mile to the north, and this was only a kind of suburb which the locals referred to simply as MONDAYE. South of the road were the Monastery and Church; to the north a row of about a dozen villas, and several large crumbling farms of grey stone. The

echelon trucks came up and we all settled in a field alongside the row of houses. In the nearest one RHQ was set up, together with an Officers' Mess. There in the wet and the squalor and the mud which later became white dust, covering everything, we spent June and July. JUAYE MONDAYE became a kind of regimental base from which Squadrons went out when they were required for operations and to which they could come back for a rest and refit.

It is best to relate the experiences of each Sqn in turn rather than in actual order, but first mention must be made of the combined action of B & C Sqns at LA BELLE EPINE on the evening of the first day the Regiment arrived at JUAYE MONDAYE. This composite Sqn was ordered to the assistance of the 2 DEVONS who, having fought continuously since D day, had been repulsed from LA BELLE EPINE, and the task of the composite Sqn was to support the 2 DEVONS back into the Village.

The Sqn arrived in the forming up area just before dusk and in the failing light it was impossible to distinguish any definite enemy points as the information was also scanty. It was therefore decided as the objective was only some 300 to 400 yards from the start line that the flails, used as ordinary tanks should bring maximum fire to bear on the village, all the hedges and likely enemy held positions.

In the dusk it was a terrific sight. Tracer streaked through the gloom, and fires caused by the 75 shells from the tanks guns lit the scene with a red glare.

The attack was successful, and no casualties were incurred by either B or C Sqns.

On the afternoon of June 17 the regiment was ordered, at short notice, to produce tank support for 2nd Bn the Hampshire Regt of 231 Bde in an attempt to capture the village of LA SENAUDIÈRE some two miles to the south of Point 112. Six flails of C Sqn, commanded by Lts Hoban and Pear, were dispatched for this purpose and contact was established with the Hampshires. After a hurried order group, the force moved to form up in the area of the village of BERNIERES BOGAGE. The flails were to support A Coy, the left-hand leading company, at that time only one platoon strong. Owing to mechanical failures eventually only four tanks crossed the start line.

All went well at first and an advance of a thousand yards was made, several casualties being inflicted among the enemy infantry by the fire from the tanks. Then, immediately after pushing through a thick hedge, Lt Pear's tank was engaged at close range by an enemy anti-tank weapon, later believed to have been a dug-in tank. Lt Pear ordered the crew to bale out after the tank had been hit twice and all members of the turret crew wounded. Another tank, the commander, Cpl McCall, believing that he had put the enemy gun out of action, pushed

through the same hedge and was in turn knocked out. The commander alone escaped.

Lt Hoban's tank was meanwhile covering the infantry in their withdrawal from a wood to the north when a corporal in the Hampshires told him that there were two or three German tanks in the wood and while moving, to a better fire-position, Lt Hoban's tank was hit in the suspension, lost a track and had to be abandoned. Lt Pear and his crew having baled out, a shell landed very close and the driver, Tpr Bromby, was seriously wounded and unable to walk any further. Lt. Pear, although wounded himself, ran back in the face of enemy machine-gun fire to try and get a carrier, though this proved impossible and Tpr Bromby had to be left behind and died of his wounds before he could be evacuated. The total number of casualties in the regiment resulting from this action was 5 killed 4 wounded.

At the end of June C Squadron moved out, for an attack on the SS held positions around ST. MAUVIEU in an attempt to make a break-through to the River ODON.

The Squadron moved to RUCQUEVILLE and harboured alongside 9 R. T. R. who had just arrived from England. After two days of planning and orders they moved at night to just north of SECQUEVILLE-EN-BESSIN arriving in harbour at dawn, sleep and then at eleven o'clock that night a move down to the start line for the attack south of NOREY-EN-BESSIN. The noise of the move was covered by every A. A. gun in the area firing continuously for hours, but somehow the noise of the tank seemed clearly audible, and when the forming up place was reached at four o'clock it seemed more than likely that the approach had been heard.

The attack went forward steadily but slowly, due to the fact that the resistance of the S.S. troops was fierce and the return shelling very accurate.

During the afternoon the Colonel, Padre Rhymes and Lt. Sutton visited 2 and 3 troops and had to make a hurried exit chased by shells from an S. P.; just before diving for cover in a sunken road the Padre was hit; fortunately nothing more serious than a scratched knee.

By five o'clock ST. MAUVIEU had been taken without any mines being met and the Squadron was ordered to a place one mile east of ST. MAUVIEU to support C Squadron 9th R. T. R. On arrival there, very short of petrol, it was decided to remain on the Start line and only go forward if required.

By now it was pouring with rain, making visibility practically nil and wireless communication extremely difficult. A demand for more petrol over the wireless was received but by dark it still had not arrived and the flails were out of touch with 9 R. T. R. It was very difficult to tell exactly what was happening, with shells falling all around and

the rain still pouring down, so it was decided to remain there Lor (he night).

"The following day dawned fine, and with the sun everything immediately improved, touch was established with 9 R. T. R. and the Squadron was ordered a 1,000 yards back to refuel. Before long SSM. Mahoney came up with the Echelon, we breakfasted, washed and were ready for what the day had to bring. In the afternoon we moved to an orchard.

Carpiquet aerodrome one mile due west and fully visible 200 yards from the orchard, was still held by the enemy. Regularly three times a day at meal times one gun on the aerodrome fired into an area of which the orchard was the centre, fortunately no one was hit largely due to the wind and wonderful dug-outs.

Finally came the bombing of Carpiquet Aerodrome by 350 Lancasters and we were ordered to return to JUAYE MONDAYE."

By the end of June the makeshift atmosphere began to disappear from the campaign and life became more organised. The artillery no longer complained of the danger of a shortage of ammunition. Hospitals were set up and men were no longer sent to England for minor wounds and ailments (we had lost one man who had reported sick with an inflamed finger which had been caught in a turret flap, and was shipped back to England the next day). English nurses were seen in BAYEUX and mobile bath units arrived. A civilian bathhouse in the same town was requisitioned for the use of the troops, and Parties went off to the cinema and even the theatre. 50th Division had taken over the only theatre in BAYEUX within a week of D-Day and were running a "Stars in Battledress" Show. In fact the bridgehead began to get woefully overcrowded. The battle seemed to be going rather slowly and we even wondered if we should spend the winter in Normandy. The Regimental Tec. Adji, however assured everyone that Monty's driver had said that Monty was very pleased at the progress of the battle so all was well.

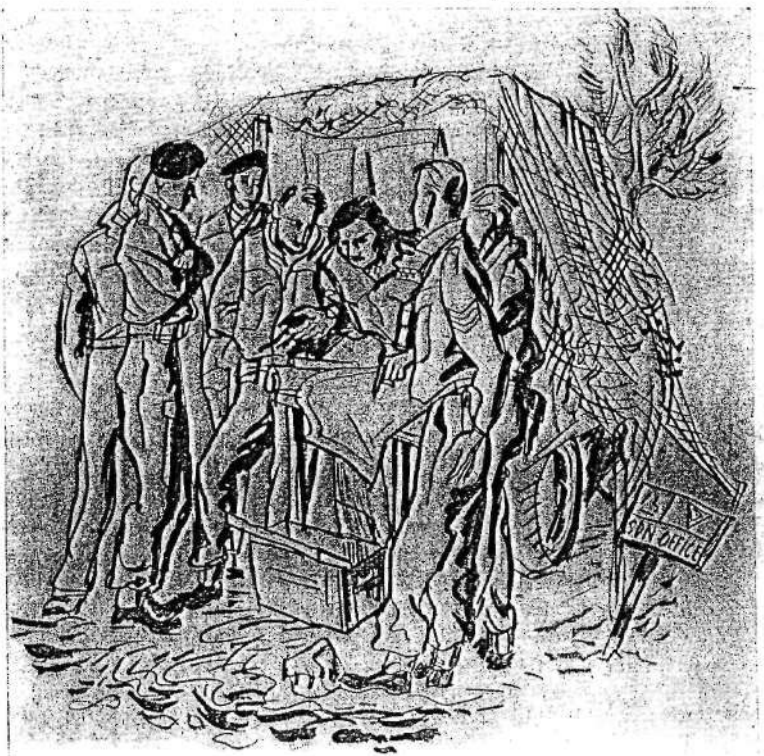
Apart from early morning P.T., and an hour's gentle tank maintenance, the day was passed in keeping dry, if it was wet, or sunbathing of sitting round a mysterious continual brew-up of tea or soup or dinner or dirty linens according to the time of day.

Not all the inhabitants of Normandy were as lucky as those of BAYEUX. Squadrons moving lip to join formations for operations often found the roads blocked by vast horse-drawn carts, piled high with mattresses, furniture and homeless civilians, jerking their way through the dust and the heat back to whatever was left of a peasant's farm.

B Squadron

Early in July B Sqn tanks were again called upon. As part of the policy of giving the Germans no rest and at the same time extending the bridgehead, 50 (N) Div were to carry out a series of Brigade attacks on successive clays in the region GRANVILLE—HOTTOT. The attacks were also designed to straighten the front opposite the Div and to cut the main CAEN—HOTTOT—CAUMONT road. Under command were elements of 8th Armoured Brigade, and B Squadron was to support the attack and ensure that lanes were quickly made through any minefields to maintain the momentum of the attacks.

56 Inf Bde were the first to attack on the 8th July on a two Battalion front, and No. 1 tp and No. 3 tp of B Sqn were to support the tanks allotted to each battalion. Three tanks of 3 tp moved off at H hour with two troops of the 4H DG's in support of the S. W. B.'s and initially the attack went very well. GANVILLE fell quickly to the infantry and the tanks and infantry moved on towards their final objective. But resistance stiffened, though minefields encountered were not extensive, and gaps were quickly made. A setback occurred to the 3 tp flails when some 200 yards from the objective. Extremely high banks topped by thick hedges surrounded these Normandy fields. Two of the tanks became 'stuck' while trying to cross one of these high banks. The third tank lying back to support the movement



forward of the other two went to their assistance and while tow ropes were being fastened to pull them from their precarious positions two members of the troop were wounded by mortar fire. The tanks when freed pulled back some thousand yards, the right hand company by this time having reached their objective.

Meanwhile the remaining two tanks of 3 tp were called upon to clear mines for the left hand company. The infantry were having great difficulty in getting forward, enemy resistance was extremely heavy. Finally the flails having cleared a gap they found that no use could be made of it as the infantry could not get forward.

With the Essex Regiment difficulty was also experienced, the infantry being held up by a very determined enemy, and I troop were not called upon.

The Squadron rallied afterwards, and the following day recesses were made and plans issued for an attack by 231 Inf Bde on HOTTOT. This village strongpoint had been a thorn in the flesh for some time and had withstood a series of attacks. It was hoped that this time the attack would be successful, and No. 3 Troop. A Sqn under Lt. Dick was lent to help B Sqn. Troops moved to the forming up position at first light on the 10th.

The infantry met heavy resistance from the start and progress was very slow. The country in this area was heavily wooded and targets were never visible at distances greater than 200 yards. Each foot of ground was heavily contested and the infantry suffered severe casualties. The flails with the 2 DEVONS were not used and the crews spent an unpleasant day being heavily mortared. No mines were encountered on the 1 HAMPS front but in the afternoon the troop of A Sqn was called forward to assist the infantry with gun fire. Suddenly a Panther was spotted creeping through the trees some 200 yards away, and AP rounds poured at the German tank. Although the troop commander was certain hits were scored it could not be claimed as a knock-out. No. 3 troop went to relieve the A Sqn troop and spent the night 10/11th July on the alert, with enemy's troops some 100 yards away.

A Squadron

On the morning of the 11th the Sqn learned that 50 (N) Div had cancelled the operation, and they were released to return once more to JUAYE MONDAYE.

On 15th July A Sqn moved forward again to LOUCELLES where it was placed in support of 33 Armoured Bde for operations with the 59th Division. For the operation only two troops of the Sqn were finally required and Captain Beaumont with one tank plus 1 and w Troops were placed in

support of 144 Rgt RAC. The remainder of the Sqn were held in Brigade Reserve. The usual conferences, sorting maps, a really large supper and a good strong brew of tea, then a move to within three miles of the enemy's forward lines, under cover of darkness. The idea was an attack by the Infantry supported by tanks at dawn. The night was extremely dark and the armour moved nose to tail in a long line, the route being across country with no lights. There were periods of artificial moonlight which helped enormously and by sheer good driving and forceful language the tanks arrived at the right place at the right time.

It was not long before the call for flails came. 59 Inf Div were attacking southwards and a minefield had been located to the North of QUEUEDEVILLE—East and West of the CHEUX-NOYERS road. Forward patrols of the infantry had passed through but the 144 RAC had lost six tanks on the minefield.

Capt Beaumont went forward with Lt-Col. Jolly commanding 144 RAC. A short conference, a quick look at an air photograph, in a slit trench, and the plan was formed. Lt. Hall with 4 Troop made a lane through the minefield to the West of the CHEUX-NOYERS road and Lt. Ingram with I Troop to the East of the road. There were no anti-tank guns covering the minefield which was extremely fortunate, and the Squadrons of the 144 RAC passed through. After the operation the flails collected together and harboured just to the North of the minefield.

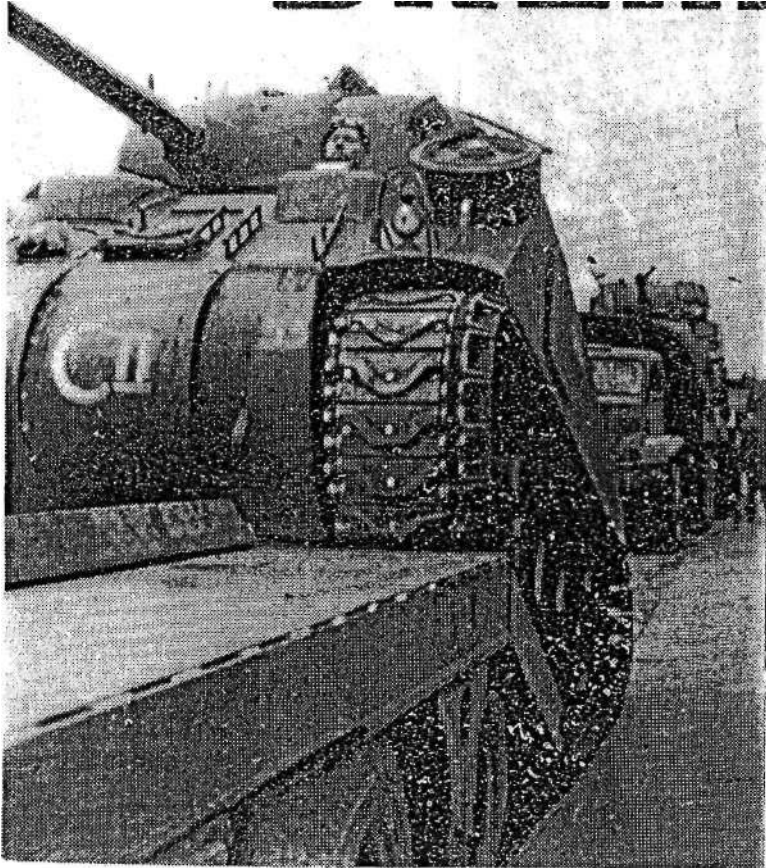
By this time it was seven o'clock in the evening and mortaring was rather heavy at intervals of about twenty minutes, and lasted until about nine o'clock by which time the infantry got into NOYERS. At last light the Germans counter-attacked at NOYERS, supported by a few aircraft. The planes chose as their target an area which included 'A Squadron's harbour. This caused several casualties but fortunately did not last longer than about ten minutes. A small stock of smoke ammunition was set off by one bomb and over the whole area a thick smoke cloud made visibility practically nil, and for a short time confusion and darkness reigned. The rest of the night was spent in this area and on the following morning 1 and 4 Troops moved back to ST. NICHOLAS FARM and joined the rest of the Sqn. Three days later the Sqn returned to the JUAYE MONDAYE Harbour. During this operation casualties due to enemy mortar fire and the air attack were Trooper Overton killed, and Captain Beaumont, Trooper Cannon and Trooper Beard wounded. The latter subsequently died of his wounds.

The arrival in France of the rest of the Regiment on 14th July was a welcome event and they filled up several fields and an orchard, until each Squadron had four flail troops and one roller troop, besides

lavish scale *oi* wheeled vehicles. Shortly afterwards, we received the unpleasant news that the War Establishment of a flail regiment was to be reduced to three flail troops in each Squadron. This meant that in each Squadron one flail troop and the roller troop were now surplus. Some of the crews who had to go came back later as reinforcements.

Meanwhile the new arrivals were yearning for battle, and in return for accounts of D-Day, they produced several exciting stories about buzz-bombs. The weather had now become very hot and one could lie in the grass and watch a great cloud of white dust move slowly across the field from every vehicle that passed.

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A Squadron

After nearly two months of bitter fighting during the build-up of men and materials the breakout from the bridgehead was just beginning when A Squadron finally moved out from JUAYE MONDAYE and made a night march to join the Seventh Armoured Division. The dust and darkness made visibility extremely bad and towards dawn a halt was made for a few hours near TORTEVAL. Then after some breakfast the march was continued in dense traffic as far as shell-shattered CAUMONT in what had been until recently the American sector. Here the squadron harboured in an apple orchard near the headquarters of Seventh Armoured Division for three days until moving on with the advance of 5th Inniskilling Dragoon Guards at first light on 5th August towards MAISONCELLES PELVEY. Lt. Bullock's tank flailed a short distance at LE BAUQUET and during the course of the next few days the squadron advanced with the Seventh

Armoured Division as the breakout all along the front was gaining momentum. A major bridgehead had been established over the River Orne north though as it happened the flails were not required, but were sufficiently far forward to be shelled and had one man wounded. Two days later the squadron followed up the battle under command of 53 Division and swung south from the Forêt de Cinglais towards FALAISE. While the famous gap was being closed round the entrapped German forces A Squadron spent a week harboured at a farm a few miles west of FALAISE itself and then rejoined the Regiment at GACE after a long march.

Three days later A Squadron moved to Brigade workshops near the town of ORBEC for a routine overhaul of all the tanks and remained there until it joined the regiment once more and crossed the River Seine at VERNON on 2 September on route for DOMELIERS.

"C Squadron"

"After moving from JUAYE MONDAYE the Squadron was placed in support of the 50th (Northumbrian) Division. For the attack the Squadron was divided into two halves. The right half was allotted to 56 Infantry Brigade and consisted of No. 3. Troop and later No. 1. Troop. The left half consisted of No. 2. Troop and was allotted to 231 Infantry Brigade. No. 1. Troop was in reserve for the first few hours of the attack. Nos. 2 and 3 Troops were each in turn divided into halves. Lt. Hubble commanded half of No. 2. Troop and Lt. Robinson the other half. The halves of No. 3. Troop were commanded by Lt. Bright and Lt. MacKichan. Major Sutton commanded the right half, and Captain McMillan the left half.

By the evening of the 29th July Lts. Bright and MacKichan had each joined battalions of 56 Infantry Brigade and Lts. Hubble and Robinson were together with a Squadron of the 13/18 Hussars. After much study of maps and air photographs by candlelight all was set for the next day.

THE SEINE

Lt. MacKichan with the right forward battalion of 56 Infantry Brigade was to flail a track for carriers and other infantry vehicles up to the present front line. This was successfully carried out, and Lt. MacKichan was then asked by the Infantry to engage a Spandau machine-gun that was holding them up. He went up a track ahead of the infantry to do this but after advancing some fifty yards his tank struck a mine. He tried to reverse but promptly struck another mine, and the combined effect of these two mines cracked the bottom of the tank, wrecked the tracks and made it immovable. Attempting to bale out the crew were promptly engaged by Spandau fire from close range. The infantry were still twenty-five yards behind and unable to advance. The enemy were about twenty-five yards in front. The tank was stranded in no-mans-land.

Thus began an ordeal that lasted for five and a half hours. Lt. MacKichan and his crew used their 75mm gun and then Browning machine-gun, Sgt. Birch and Cpl. Savory in their tanks attempted to come forward to the relief of the knocked out tank but were unsuccessful. Any attempt by infantry to approach the tank was promptly stopped by close range enemy fire, but eventually an attack was successful and Lt. MacKichan and his crew were relieved.

Lt. Bright and the other half of No. 3. Troop were with the left forward battalion of 56 Infantry Brigade and were not required until about mid-day. At this time they went forward to the village of TORTEVAL from which the infantry were proposing to advance to the ST. GERMAIN d'ECTOT — CAUMONT road. They were soon held up by suspected mines and by Spandau fire. Lt. Bright and his half troop therefore did some flailing and engaged the areas suspected to contain the Spandau machine guns. The infantry then advanced successfully up to the road.

Further to the left No. 2. Troop were advancing in support of a Squadron of the 13/18th Hussars. The first incident occurred on the start line when the flail of Sgt. Steele's tank was damaged by shell fire, then at 6 p. m. orders came through to split into half troops and for each half troop to support an infantry company in a further advance.

After a few hundred yards the infantry were held up by Spandau fire and suspected mines. Flailing failed to set off any mines but some

shooting by Lt. Hubble and Cpl. Nicholls settled the Spandaus and the infantry occupied their objective.

In the meantime the other half of No. 2. Troop under Lt. Robinson's command were having an unpleasant time. They had been joined by a troop of Crocodiles (flame-throwing tanks). Their line of advance took them up a very narrow lane through the centre of a wood. The infantry were held up near a bomb crater in the middle of the wood. As they attempted to go round the crater the infantry suffered casualties from antipersonnel mines. Lt. Robinson then called up the crocodiles to assist in removing the casualties. This entailed a great deal of manoeuvring and eventually failing light caused the attack to be postponed. Finally Lt. Robinson and his tanks had to reverse back down the track up which they had come. Throughout this time the tank commanders were being sniped at by hidden riflemen.

Early next morning Lt. Bright's half of No. 3. Troop found themselves taking-part in an attack on ST. GERMAIN d'ECTOT. They flailed across a meadow, up a lane and through an orchard. The country was quite unsuitable for flails and the



sigh! of them smashing their way through hedges and uprooting small trees was a fearsome one. They were followed by a troop of tanks from the 13/18 Hussars and a troop of AVRE. All these tanks engaged the village at close range and the infantry went in and captured it.

The objective for the next phase was the LAUNAY RIDGE. The attack was carried out by the 2nd Battalion of the Essex Regiment supported by an artillery barrage, machine-guns and mortars, a Squadron of tanks (the 13/18th) and Nos. 1. and 3 Troops of C Squadron. The whole affair was arranged in extreme haste and it was very satisfactory to see the attack take place entirely according to plan. There was slight trouble on the start line when some shells of the barrage fell rather short and startled No. 3. Troop. The matter was quickly put right, and once again the flails led the attack but it was soon realised that there were very few mines about. As a result the lanes so carefully made by Nos 1. and 3 Troops were little used. Lt. Hoban was actually told by an infantry officer to stop flailing because he was "making too much dust".

As dusk fell the flails were released and returned to the Squadron harbour.

On the 2nd August the two halves of the Squadron re-united and joined 69 Infantry Brigade. Before the Squadron left 56 and 231 Infantry Brigades, Major Sutton and Captain McMillan were both warmly thanked by the Brigadiers for the support given by the flails during the three days.

When the Squadron arrived with 69 Infantry Brigade it was found that an attack was about to be launched and at 2 a. m. on Sunday morning, the 6th of August, the Squadron Leader was summoned from his bed to report at once to the headquarters of the 4th Armoured Brigade. But the Squadron did no fighting, and two days later moved 30 miles East to the village of LA TOQUE where RHQ was already established.

It was now the 15th August. The battle for the breakout from Normandy had been going on for a fortnight. American armoured thrusts further West had made great strides and the possibility of a large German force being trapped; in the FALAISE neighbourhood could, be foreseen by the most amateur strategists. People were thinking beyond FALAISE, thinking of the road to PARIS, of the liberation of all France, even of Victory.

It was therefore with great excitement that we heard that the 11th Armoured Division was to lead the British advance out of Normandy and that C Squadron was to go with them as their Squadron of flails. C Squadron joined the 11th Armoured Division on the 16th August and for the next week moved 8 or 10 miles with them

every day. On the 18th the Squadron passed through FLERS and received a great welcome from the French. There was no doubting their joy at seeing us. Whenever the column stopped in the town each tank was at once surrounded by admiring French who shouted, waved; threw flowers and losses, and produced Calvados. On the 22nd August the Squadron was near ECOUCHE — only a few miles from ARGENTAN. The battle of the FALAISE gap was practically over and the advance was beginning to go extremely fast. Enemy mines had long since ceased to appear in any quantity. And so to our great disappointment we were left behind and joined R. H. Q."

8 Armd Bde and B Sqn were ordered that same evening to move south for an armoured advance on the following day. In failing light the Squadron harboured south of CAHAGNES amid a tangle of destroyed houses, dead cattle, wrecked vehicles and mines.

A twenty four hour delay occurred here and doubts as to a "Swan" were raised. But next day saw the Squadron on high ground to the south which in turn was dominated by Mount Pincon away to the left. The mountain had a detached and forbidding atmosphere about it and dominated the whole surrounding area to such an extent that one got the feeling that it was all a trap and that camouflage was useless. After heavy fighting 8th Armoured Bde reached the top, the mountain was tamed, and all counter attacks successfully repulsed with heavy losses.

Across the Seine

Now followed a very hurried regrouping of forces to exploit to the limit the opening that had been started and which by now promised to become the awaited "swan".

Major Buckingham took over command of B Squadron on the following day which was spent resting and sorting out the maps that had been arriving steadily for 24 hours until it was impossible to get any more into map boxes and bins'.

The Squadron moved out after tea and joined 8th Armoured Bde, climbing the road over Mount Pincon again early next morning and so down into LE PLESSIS GRIMOULT where we had a first close up view of an undamaged Royal Tiger.

Blown bridges were causing many detours by this time and wreckage was everywhere as the FALAISE pocket was slowly compressed to the north. We were now rattling at full speed for ARGENTAN, and as evening came on the weather became atrocious and without lights, in pitch darkness, the column advanced at a walking pace and finally stopped at about 0300 hrs, everyone dog tired and wet through.

We had a brew up about 0700 hrs, and carried straight on, and reaching ruined ARGENTAN where the Americans were hard at work clearing routes

through the gardens, parks and any open space that was suitable.

The enemy were wide open, the Americans were nearing PARIS, and it was vital that the Bde group should reach the Seine as quickly as possible. The Swan was on.

In all villages and hamlets deserted by the enemy the local populace were lining the road waiting for us to arrive and we were invariably greeted with flowers and fruit if on the move, and wine and eggs if we found an opportunity to stop.

GACE, LAIGLE and RUGLES were liberated in quick succession but opposition was encountered in the wooded area between RUGLES and BRETEUIL and caused a delay which was used to good advantage by the tanks while infantry cleared the wood.

The SEINE was now only ten miles away but both men and tanks were tired out and filthy. The pace had been gruelling and sleep almost non-existent, but the infantry reached the river and crossed it against negligible opposition.

While a bridge was being thrown across and rafts constructed everyone seized the opportunity to bring tanks up to fighting trim again, do personal laundry and have a good rest.

The weather had been perfect and everyone was complaining of sunburn, blisters and cracked lips. So much in the way of eggs, wine and fruits were showered on us everywhere that they became a major stowage problem. Maps were now in short supply. If you were lucky you had a 1/100000 sheet but the majority had only 1/250000.

Rafting finally proved impracticable owing to marshy banks but a bridge was constructed in record time with very little interference from the enemy. We crossed on 26 August and spent that night right on the river bank north of the bridge, until the infantry had cleared the high wooded ground in front of us.

The leading Squadrons of two Regiments together with one troop of flails were now across and Brig. Prior-Palmer on his James two-stroke motor cycle became Bde Tac HQ. We moved forward on to the high ground, and on 28 August the advance continued.

All real enemy resistance had now crumbled and even time bombs left by the retreating enemy did not deter the local population who turned out en masse and calmly ignored every explosion in the town. Against very slight opposition the high ground overlooking BEAUVAIS was reached the same day, and entered so early next morning that civilians were caught in bed and many became so excited that they forgot to dress and stood outside their houses in a variety of interesting creations!

As we neared the flying bomb sight area, however enemy opposition increased.

It was hoped to reach AMIENS on the 30th but darkness descended while we were still seven miles short, and we harboured and replenished the almost

dry tanks, had our first hot meal of the day and snatched three hours sleep. Next morning it was decided to bypass AMIENS which could be cleared by infantry and to try and reach ARRAS in one day.

The river SOMME was crossed at DREUIL-LES-AMIENS where Brig Prior-Palmer by means of hand signals personally guided the leading group of tanks over a crazy wooden bridge which groaned and sagged but, to everyone's surprise, stood up to the strain.

White flags were seen in ever increasing numbers as small parties of Germans gave themselves up, and passed back down the centre line.

BEAUVAL was rushed at top speed and the high ground overlooking DOULLENS reached in the early afternoon. It was here that the only heavy fighting took place, and in clearing enemy from the town it was reduced to a mass of blazing and wrecked buildings.

To the amusement of the Sherwood Rangers, the flails were too wide to go through the arch in the centre of the village, of LUCHEUX but a way round was found and we joined them at SUS-ST-LEGER in the early hours of the morning. ARRAS was still twelve miles ahead.

Just as we were about to move off the next day, 1 Sep, orders were received that all special devices were frozen. Regretfully we saw the others[^] move off then set about making ourselves comfortable and collecting the Squadron together. So the first swan came to an end.

B Squadron

On the 29th of the same month B Squadron rolled out the harbour again. This time to support 8th Armoured Bde under command of 43 Inf Div, intention being to push forward as fast as possible in the direction of MONT PINCON. This was a Corps attack, and on the right of 43 Div an attack was being launched by 15 (S) Div. The whole affair was, to be preceded by a heavy bombing of German targets. On 43 Div front a limited attack was to be launched at H Hour with 2 troop of the Sqn, designed at forcing a bridgehead over a small stream some 1000 yards from the start line. As soon as this bridgehead was secured the weight of the attack was to be launched.

At 0800 hrs on the 30th the attack to secure a bridgehead over the stream commenced. From the start the infantry found the going particularly difficult and there was heavy spandau and mortar fire. 2 tp flailed encountering very few mines, but unfortunately the troop leader's tank was blown up on a mine, and two members of the troop wounded by mortar fire while dismounted from the tank.

By the afternoon the attack had not-secured a bridgehead, and as the attack by the 15 (S) Div had gone extremely well it was decided to exploit their



success. The 13/18 H with 1 tp in support were despatched with infantry of 43 Div through the gap made by 15 (S) Div to attack the enemy opposite 43 Div from the rear. Although 1 tp were not required to do any flailing they had the satisfaction of claiming a number of enemy infantry killed, in an extremely successful attack.

Dovmeliers

The tide of war swept on, too fast for the enemy to lay any mines, and the WESTMINSTER DRAGOONS halted until a stable front should form again. B Sqn who had been in the lead with 8th Armoured Brigade stopped near LUCHEUX. RHQ with A and C Squadrons moved in a separate column and harboured in two villages some twenty

miles south of AMIENS, C in LE CROCQ and the rest in DORMELIERS.

The sudden change from active service conditions was almost too much at first, and the Signals Officer and the R.T.A., immediately organized an attack on a farm where they had seen Germans through the window. The HQ fitters half-track, a formidable engine, armed with two aircraft Brownings and a Bren attacked the farm, and the farmer rushed out begging for his life while the two Germans peacefully continued eating eggs in the kitchen. The Signals Officer sprang into the house and fell upon one of them, who actually had a pistol.

The next day an excited Frenchman reported that there were several Germans armed with Tommy guns in a small copse near DOMELIERS. Two tanks of A Squadron bombarded the copse and the crews searched it on foot but found no Germans, dead or alive. Similar highly-coloured and alarming reports of German activities were made by local inhabitants almost daily and without exception proved on investigation to be false or grossly exaggerated. Odd enemy stragglers were, however, collected from time to time during Our stay, but these always gave themselves up quite peaceably.

To the villagers we were the first Allied troops they had seen and therefore liberators and they were extremely enthusiastic in their reception. Billeting was by invitation and many of us had a bed to sleep on for the first time since landing in France. The Second-in-Command had thoughtfully selected for RHQ Officers' Mess, a large house full of charming evacuees from AMIENS. A great many of the local inhabitants were evacuated from AMIENS and they were all very keen on parties. A party might begin anytime, out of anything, and for no reason at all, and it very often did. Such celebrations were much assisted by consignments of champagne from RHEIMS, and Calvados, the local fire-water, which is colourless except for a slight haze over the glass, like heat coming off a road in summer. Flies coming over too low were liable to be overcome by the fumes and fall in. Quite a lot of WESTMINSTER DRAGOONS were overcome at first, but we all learnt to cope with it well enough to manage one glass, and it was found to work very satisfactorily in petrol lighters.

The first Sunday the village priest held a special Mass for the Liberation, and the Church was packed. A small muscular woman rang the bell as it had never rung before, beaming all over her face and whisking several feet in the air as the bell rope went up, a tremendous performance. The priest had organised the local F.F.L. and had kept the arms and ammunition in the loft of his Church. He had arranged the local resistance while visiting his flock, and was a very excellent sort of man. He preached a tremendous fighting sermon, and then led everyone out of the Church to sing patriotic songs, and ended

with the Marseillaise. The English then sang God Save **the King**, with tremendous applause from **the French**, and **the priest who had a powerful growth of beard** embraced **the Commanding Officer on both cheeks**.

The war was so far away **by then that the Post Corporal was quite unable to get to the Brigade Post Office and back in one day**, and we had two Post Trucks running in relays on alternate days. The Signals Officer erected a tremendous wireless mast, and the roars of the operators trying to contact Bde HQ nearly a hundred miles further away could be heard all over the village.

In a few days we were actually training. One Troop Leader flailed a path of such accuracy and length that he felt compelled to draw attention to it. It lay, a neat brown line, straight across a large green field, to the professional eye it was a faultless lane. Unfortunately the Second-in-Command knew all about Agriculture, and it appeared that the green field was not grass, but lucerne. A new branch of training began the next day — the instruction of all officers in Crop recognition. In fact we helped

the farmers a great deal with transport and harvest parties, there being very little else to do, although officially it was illegal to use Army lorries for un-military purposes. The farmers were extremely grateful, and refused to believe that payment was not expected. There was one **particularly embarrassing moment when the General arrived just as an aged farmer produced from a sack a huge goose and deposited it on the floor of the Adjutant's Office, followed by a shower of vegetables.**

After the first few days dances began. The French had their own method which was a smart trot, entirely unrelieved by any subtleties, and performed to a continuous very fast foxtrot. It was really not possible to do anything else to the tunes they played and when dances started later in AMIENS or ARRAS, everyone jitterbugged. So the Liberators found it all rather difficult but invariably fun.

Meanwhile the armoured advance finally stopped, and after nearly three weeks we moved north through AMIENS to LUCHEUX and a fortnight later, through BELGIUM to HOLLAND.

Holland • + Winter

All the shades of Autumn coloured the fields and trees as under mild blue skies, the Regiment moved across Belgium on transporters and harboured at BEERINGEN. From here the journey was continued on tracks up the road North to EINDHOVEN and beyond. This was the route of the thrust to the Rhine at ARNHEM, and the wide, white road held in its ditches the battered trucks and enemy guns that had been swept aside to clear a way for the supplies moving up the narrow corridor. ARNHEM had failed, and with it hopes of a quick end of the war before Christmas. The skies were still blue and the leaves just falling from the trees, but the land round the Maas was flat and soft. What rain and snow and cold was going to make fighting like in winter was only a thought at that moment.

But it began to get suddenly cold in the bivvy at night — and first thing in the morning when two jerseys would have been comfortable. B Squadron were at WINSEN in the Nijmegen area under 8th Armd. Brigade. There was talk of an attack towards

CLEVES, and maps were issued to tank commanders — first maps of Germany.

The high-command plan was the clearing of the ground between the Maas and the Rhine, the next move after the ARNHEM attempt. The Germans were preparing to fight bitterly for every small town and village in the muddy flatland of South Holland before the Maas.

Overloon and Vetiray

A Squadron under command of 6 Guards Tank Brigade in support of 3 British Division left for operations in the OVERLOON and VENRAY area, moving to a concentration area near OPLOO with 4 Tank Grenadier Guards. They arrived after dark complete with the Squadron leader's A.G.V., a very shaky old half-track which once again just staggered in to everyone's amazement and the fitters delight.

'H' hour for the operation was 1200 hrs., the following day 12th October. The attack was preceded by a very heavy barrage, to which the German artillery replied in kind. After about two hours, orders were received to move forward and contact 4 Tank Coldstream Guards who, in support of 8 Infantry Brigade, had run into a minefield North of OVERLOON and lost several tanks. The Squadron Leader made contact with the Colonel of the Coldstream Guards at the edge of the minefield, and Lt. Sutton and Sjt Harmston of 3 Troop flailed a lane down a track into OVERLOON. Unfortunately Lt. Sutton's tank was blown up on a mine on the way back thereby completely blocking the lane, all efforts to tow it clear failing. Sjt Harmston and one flail from 2 Troop flailed a detour some twenty yards to a flank as the intervening space was blocked by the wreckage of other vehicles. Meanwhile the remaining three flails of 3 Troop under Cpl Bowden had flailed two lanes to the east of OVERLOON down which the Guards tanks advanced. Darkness had now fallen and all the tanks concerned except Lt. Sutton's joined the rest of the Squadron in harbour.

The next day 13th October Lt. Cooper and Lt. Hall with 2 and 4 Troops flailed south from OVERLOON (now securely in our hands) ahead of the Coldstream Guards. No mines were encountered but Lt. Hall engaged a Panther. Squadron Headquarters with 3 Troop followed the Coldstream's R.H.Q. and halted for some time in the battered remains of OVERLOON under more or less continuous shell fire. At the end of the day the Squadron harboured in a field north of OVERLOON, Lt. Cooper's tank being blown up on a mine on its way back.

On 14th October 2 Troop with 2 Squadron Coldstream Guards continued the advance south of OVERLOON and flailed a road where earlier R.E.



mine lifting parties had conic under small arms fire. The advance was held up by a Tiger which suddenly appeared and knocked out seven of the Guards tanks. It then tried to engage Lt. Cooper's tank which was behind a ridge, by destroying the ridge with H.E. before engaging with A.P. Luckily the Tiger finally moved off for some reason before completing this task, and the troop waited until darkness and pulled out. 3 Troop also did some "back area" flailing during the day. After much needed maintenance, 2 and 4 Troops made an early start on 16th October in the pouring rain. With the Coldstream Guards they lead the advance south towards VENRAY. The operation was made more difficult by the boggy ground and a small canal called Molen Beek, an anti-tank obstacle that stretched right across the whole front. On the whole Divisional front only one of four crossings over the Molen Beek succeeded on the first day, and Sjt Garter's tank led the advance over this covered by smoke from the remainder of the troop, which then crossed, followed by the Guards tanks. The whole area was under almost continuous shell fire and Lt. Hall had to change tanks when his own tank became a casualty. The bridge over the Molen Beek began to give way and eventually no further traffic could cross until repairs had been carried out. This left 4 Troop and half 3 Troop on the South side of the Beek and the remainder of the Squadron on the North for the night.

The following day all three troops carried out more flailing. Two tanks of 2 Troop were blown up on mines. During these operations the Guards frequently asked for flails to sweep roads for mines, which caused a very high wastage of chains and by the end of the day most of 4 Troops flails were unserviceable until chains were replaced. Both 3 and 4 Troop were in action during the day, 4 Troop killing or wounding 24 and assisting infantry to take 20 prisoners.

On the next day 18th October, A Squadron came under command of 4 Tank Grenadier Guards and 2 and 4 Troops, (which were by this time reduced to 3 and 2 tanks respectively) were in action again. Lt. Cooper with 2 Troop and L/Sjt Carter's tank from 4 Troop entered VENRAY with the Guards and flailed mines laid in rubble in the main street and engaged the enemy on the far side of the town, which was under continuous shell fire. Trooper Kirkland was wounded by shrapnel and L/Sjt Carter's tank was blown up on a mine while withdrawing through VENRAY on completion of the task. Apart from some back area flailing by 3 Troop next day, A Squadron's part in these operations ended with the capture of VENRAY on 18th October.

It had been an extremely arduous week with more flailing than the Squadron had done during the whole of the rest of the campaign put together and with heavier casualties to tanks. Weather conditions were appalling most of the time and boggy grounds plus lack

of good roads increased the difficulties, The Squadron could never have performed the task without the excellent work of the litters recovering and repairing damaged tanks, and without the echelon bringing up supplies under trying conditions. The good work put in by the Squadron was recognised by the award of the Military Cross to Lt. W.S. Hall on the special recommendation of the Colonel of 4 Tank Coldstream Guards, and in addition Lt. Cooper and L/Sjt Carter were Mentioned in Despatches.

At the conclusion of the operations a Special Order of the Day was issued.

On October 21st A Squadron moved from OVERLOON to ST. OEDENRODE to come under command of 33 Armoured Brigade, which was in support of 51 Highland Division for operation "Colin" in the area South of s'HERTOGENBOSCH. The operation began at one minute past midnight on night 22/23 October, the anniversary of the battle of El Alamein, and A Squadron less 2 Troop were in support of 144 Regiment R.A.C., and advanced with them during the night and next day as far as SCHIJNDEL. 2 Troop, which was at first in Brigade reserve, was subsequently placed in support of 1 Northants Yeomanry, and flailed tracks through the woods for them. Lt. Cooper's tank was blown up on a mine and its driver, Trooper Wells, wounded. Apart from this the Squadron was not called upon to flail and on 26th October moved to harbour near ST. MICHIELS-GESTEL.

C Squadron who had been harbouring with A Squadron near MILL also moved out on 11th October under the Command of 6 Guards Tank Brigade for operations in the OVERLOON and VENRAY area. To start with the Squadron was in reserve but on the evening of 12th came in support of 4 Tank Grenadier Guards, for an attack just west of OVERLOON next day.

The move began at four o'clock on the morning of the 13th along a very narrow, boggy track with a deep ditch on each side. The attack was to start at 0930; and at 0915 a message came through that there was a mine-field just short of the start line. 2 Troop went forward with the leading troop of 3 Squadron in order to clear a path through. Reaching the minefield it was discovered that the ground was extremely broken, — almost impossible to flail. No further mines were met that day, the attack being perfectly successful.

The following day 2 Squadron Grenadier Guards with 3. Troop in support continued the advance of the previous day with an objective a mile beyond. Trouble was soon met from mines, a Guards tank being blown up very shortly after crossing the start line. No. 3. Troop moved up with Sjt. Birch and Cpl. Shaw flailing. The mines did not seem to be laid with any regularity, small areas very thickly strewn with mines were met at irregular intervals;

Lt. Pear therefore decided to continue flailing until the corner of a wood 1,000 yards ahead. Half way there Sjt. Birch's tank was damaged by a mine, Sjt. Walker taking over and continuing with Cpl. Shaw up to the corner of the wood. Just before reaching it, Sjt. Walker's tank was damaged and the same happened to Cpl. Shaw when just round the corner of the wood.

The Guards passed through but very soon again had a tank blown up. Lt. Pear with Cpl. Rider, the only two tanks left in the troop, undertook to flail the rest of the way on to the objective, a distance of some seven hundred yards. With Lt. Pear leading they flailed a path right on to the objective blowing up several mines in this area and killing several enemy infantry on the way, one as close as 30 yards, who attempted to knock out Lt. Pear's tank with a bazooka. As a result of this the Guards were able to reach the objective without any further tank casualties from mines.

3. Troop that afternoon flailed for a distance of just under a mile, blew several mines and made the success of the attack possible with minimum casualties. Their work was very highly praised by the Squadron Leader of 2 Squadron Tank Grenadier Guards and for this action Lt. Pear was Mentioned in Despatches. *

The following morning was the 15th. 1. Troop supported an attack made by 1 Squadron but were not required to flail. That evening a path through a wood leading to the start line for the attack next morning was found to be mined, and Sjt. Walker dealt with it successfully. On the 16th October a large attack was made across the MOLEN BEEK due east of VENRAY in order to enter the town while the enemy's main attention was directed at the attack coming from the North in which A Squadron were involved. The weather that morning was filthy. Raining and cold, the countryside looked bleak and miserable as Sjt. Burnett and Cpl. McCormack of 2. Troop moved down the track out of the wood, leading the attack. They flailed right up to the MOLEN BEEK, then reversed back making room for the AVRE troop to come up and drop their fascine into the stream. Cpl. McCormack then attempted to cross. When the full weight of his tank was on the fascine, it tilted, the tank slid side-ways, one end in the stream, and the tank remaining half on and half off the fascine, immovable, and blocking the crossing.

The attack then held fire until two o'clock when a Churchill bridge was brought up and finally put across the stream. Six Guards tanks crossed but very soon became bogged, and it was evident that the attack would have to be called off for that day. 1. Troop who were then near the stream, had two tanks badly bogged in full view of the enemy, and unrecoverable. Sjt. Burnett of 2. Troop while flailing a track round the proposed harbour area for that night blew up on a mine.

At this time the Squadron had only nine fit tanks of which three were the Squadron H.Q. tanks, and about five o'clock in the afternoon a wireless message came from RHQ Tac, to say the Squadron was to move back immediately to join another formation. Lt. Hubble was left behind to sort out the bogged and damaged tanks while Squadron HQ and three tanks started back.

The route lay along a track and one corner, owing to the number of tanks that had already been round, was impassable. The leading tank stuck on its way round. Just then a Churchill recovery vehicle came down the track in the opposite direction and very kindly pulled each tank round the corner.

Reporting to the Colonel at RHQ Tac, the Squadron Leader was ordered to send one troop off immediately to join 29 Armoured Brigade who were nine miles to the east; the remainder of the Squadron to join 159 Infantry Brigade by ten o'clock the next morning. That evening Lt. Bright had rejoined the Squadron and a composite troop consisting of the fittest tanks and the least tired crews was formed under his command. They moved off at midnight, reaching 29 Armoured Brigade by four o'clock next morning.

Two tanks of the troop were attached to 23rd Hussars and two to the 3rd R.T.R. The following morning they moved off with the intention of cutting the VENRAY-DEURNE road, with the 23rd Hussars on the left and 3rd R.T.R. on the right. The 23rd Hussars were soon held up by mines. Unfortunately Sjt. Barnes became badly bogged whilst moving up, so Cpl. Wild continued flailing by himself, blowing several mines until his flailing gear was damaged. That night Lt. Bright and Cpl. Erasmus were transferred from 3 R.T.R. to 23 Hussars, and the following morning they carried on flailing where Cpl. Wild had stopped the day before. They flailed about a mile down to the main VENRAY-DEURNE road.

Here 23rd Hussars took over the lead again, and Lt. Bright fell in behind the leading troop. They were very quickly fired at by an Anti-Tank Gun. Lt. Bright spotted it and Tpr. Vessey, his gunner, knocked it out.

Moving on again, a mortar landed on the front of Lt. Bright's tank between the driver and co-driver, fortunately causing no more than a few damaged blankets, and that evening the same crew assisted the leading troop in overcoming a German Company Headquarters taking sixty prisoners.

The remainder of the Squadron able to move, three flails and Squadron H.Q. had joined 159 Infantry Brigade on the 17th at 1000 hrs. to find that a troop was required to support the Herefords in an attack, north-east of DEURNE. With only the sketchiest idea of what was to happen, Capt. Bell, Lt. Pear, and Sjt. Birch moved into the

column of vehicles behind the last tanks of the 15th/19th Hussars. They spent the morning sitting on a road with a bog on each side being very accurately mortared. In the afternoon things began to move slightly faster until the leading tank of the 15th/19th Hussars was blown up on a mine in the road, and also knocked out by an Anti-Tank Gun from the right.

Covered by smoke from the leading Squadron Sjt. Birch followed by Lt. Pear flailed past the knocked out tank and for fifty yards beyond without blowing any mines. The advance then continued to the objective, where a small mine-field was discovered along a track. While flailing this Sjt. Birch's tank was damaged by a mine and had to be left there for the night.

Eventually on the 20th the Squadron re-gathered in a field just north of DEURNE. On the 22nd Major Sutton rejoined from hospital, and on the 23rd they moved back into billets at BAKEL.

s'Hertogenbosch

After a very pleasant stay of approximately two weeks at WINSEN near NIJMEGEN B Squadron were suddenly ordered to join 53(W) Division in the general area* of HEESCH.

Although the area had been subaUotted, the worst had happened and the "funnies" had been forgotten. Resort was therefore to the principle of "squatters rights" and no one succeeded in moving the Squadron from its billets during the two days then spent there.

Rumour was rife as to what was "on" but in the main, secrecy was well maintained, and it was not until troops had moved into forming up areas that it was generally known that s'HERTOGENBOSCH, TILBURG and the whole south bank of the River Maas was to be cleared to make it possible to use ANTWERP as a supply port.

Major Buckingham and 1 Troop were with 7th Armoured Division, 2 Troop and Gapt Taylor with 53(W) Division. 3 Troop and Capt Cooper were in Corps reserve.

53(W) Division were attacking down the dyke road from GEFFEN into ROSMALEN and then on to s'HERTOGENBOSCH via the main road.

It was hoped to capture intact the bridge over the canal in the centre of the town. With this in view a flying column of all arms had been organised. 2 Troop were in support of 5 I.D.C.'s who were leading the column along with 53 Div Recce.

The attack started early in the morning and moved forward steadily, if somewhat slowly, until NULAND was captured just before noon. It was then decided to unleash the flying column 2 troop was about 3 miles behind the leading vehicle of the column and no one quite knew how they were to operate if the leading vehicles encountered mines.

Special Order of the Day

by

Lt. Col. W. Y. K. Blair-Oliphant MC
Commanding Westminster Dragoons
Royal Armoured Corps

The Commanding Officer wishes to congratulate all ranks of A and C Sqns on their splendid work during the recent operation in the Overloon pocket in support of the 6th GDS Tank Bde and the 11th Armoured Division.

For a long period under the most trying weather conditions crews were in action against a stubborn enemy, and acquitted themselves well, cheerfully carrying out all and indeed more than was asked of them.

The fitter staffs also showed untiring energy and courage in their work of recovery and repair.

The good work done by the Regiment has not gone unrecognised by others, and the Commanding Officer has received tributes from the commanders, 6 GDS Tank Bde, 29th Armoured Bde, and the G. O. C. 8 Corps, Lt-General Sir Richard O'Connor, K. C. B., D. S. O., M. C., who remarked on the fine fighting spirit of the Regiment, and wished all ranks to be informed of this.

M. J. Eedy, Captain

22 Oct 44 Adjutant Westminster Dragoons
BLA Royal Armoured Corps

They were not left long in doubt. The Recce Sqn reported determined opposition from bazooka teams. A Sqn 5 DGs therefore took over the lead and No 2 Troop were ordered to move up behind the leading group of tanks and Kangaroos.

Almost at once the leading tank of the 5 DGs was blown up on a mine, when approaching BRUGGEN. The second tank had been firing as 2 Trbop moved up, but reported all guns jammed and pulled back. The remainder of their Sqn was jammed behind the Kangaroos.

In failing light and with complete absence of any sign of the promised close support, 2 Troop decided to clear the road and cross-roads area, and provide their own support with the help of the infantry who by now had left their Kangaroos.

Two crabs flailed down the road closely followed by a command tank, and "cleared" the road (No

mines encountered). They then proceeded to beat up the enemy in the houses. Every house yielded its bag of prisoners and things were going well when the troop was ordered to consolidate the cross roads to cover the harbouring of the column for the night. At that moment an Anti-Tank gun opened up from the southern flank. In the failing light and owing to smoke from burning buildings no tank was hit. Some of the misses were definitely "near" and as the location was still unknown, no time was lost in withdrawing from the top of the flood bank to a healthier spot.

To make life trickier, the troop was shelled by one of our own guns in harbour that same night, but beyond a few holes in stowage bins, no damage was done. Next day the gunners apologised.

A night attack by infantry cleared ROSMALEN and everyone accordingly moved up there the following day.

Soon after reaching there the SQMS arrived in his mobile office and proceeded to issue NAAFI and rations. This must have been a signal to our gunners who promptly put twelve rounds of air burst so short that they burst overhead. The assembled crowd with one accord dived for cover. Even the SQMS left his stores and money unguarded. One man was seen to make a flying leap at a wire fence; despite a truly valiant effort, he did not quite clear it and landed with a terrific splash in the ditch on the far side. However, the importance of NAAFI issues could not be overlooked and selling was quickly resumed.

During this time, 1 Troop were clearing mines in the tangle of woodland to the south in support of 5th Royal Tanks. They were switched to 1 R.Tanks at SC*HINDEL and with them pushed on through ST. MICHAELSGESTEL, ESCH and HELVOIRT to UDENHOUT. By this time, the troop was known unofficially as No 5 Troop A Sqn 1st R.Tanks and was working as part of the Squadron.

The advance continued and on the next day, during which the troop was credited with the destruction of an enemy SP, reached VOORT. It was there that the civilians stopped tanks running on to mines and were able to point out every mine and booby trap that Jerry had so carefully fixed up. The flails were completely eclipsed!

s'HERTOGENBQSCH was liberated the following day.

On the liberation of OOSTERHOUT, the troop returned to the Squadron, now harboured at ESCH from whence they moved to winter billets at BERJEIK.

Tilburg

A Squadron was concentrated in a field just large enough to hold them, EAST of ST. MICHAELSGESTEL on the night of 26 October when orders were received, to detach one troop

to come under command 15th Scottish Div in direct support of the 4 Tk Coldstream Guards of the 6th Guards Tk Brigade for operations in the TILBURG area. This was No 4 Troop under command Lieut S. Hall, and the whole party was to be commanded by Capt P.J.S. Squirrell in his own tank.

"About 1000hrs on the 27 October five Flails and one Command Tank moved out onto the road, tearing it up once again, and went to the rendezvous SW of BOXTEL. The first part of the journey was very lonely. We met no one on the road and got that queer feeling that perhaps we were on the wrong road and that a nasty bang would be heard at any moment. This only lasted for a short while. We became stuck behind a convoy of 3 ton lorries, with not the slightest chance of overtaking.

The traffic got worse and we seemed to be behind a never ending stream. We knew we had to move quickly to reach our R.V. on time, but could do nothing about it.

Men were sitting on the back of the tanks using the engine doors as warm seats, and smoking. Lieut. Hall and Capt Squirrell had a conference at a traffic halt and tried to think of a way of pushing on by side roads.

On we went behind this mass of vehicles, getting annoyed and dusty. An M.P. tried to hold us up to let another convoy cross our path, but an M.P. cannot compete with the jib and rotor of a Flail and we had to get to the Guards, quickly.

Eventually we arrived at the R.V. and Capt Squirrell was met by the 2 i/c of the Coldstream Guards in his jeep. Capt Beaumont, 2 i/c of A Squadron W Dgns had just arrived at the same time and gave us the maps we needed.

They arrived at RHQ just as the Colonel of the Guards was ending his "O" Group, and were welcomed, as always, with remarks such as 'Hurray, the floggers have made it', or, 'What you again!' etc., etc. The Colonel put us quickly in the picture, but there was not much time left for detail. He produced a guide book town map of TILBURG, (we had to rely on 25,000 maps) and said there were no mines as far as he knew, but wanted us on tap, and attached us to his leading Squadron.

We dashed back to the tanks and got moving again, feeling a bit tired by with no hot meal since breakfast, and began to move up the road led by an L. O. of the Guards in a "Honey". Traffic was nose to tail and we stopped and started and covered a mile in about 30 minutes. It began to get dark, drivers were tired and all of us needed a rest and some food. We could'nt get off the road due to blown bridges and small minefields and just dawdled behind the vehicles ahead.

We were on the road in the middle of a wood when we finally halted and Capt. Squirrell asked for permission to harbour off the road for the night.

This was granted and the tanks pulled off" the road into the wood, and commenced, to put bivouacs and cook food under cover. The order was then received over the air, that there would be no move before 0500hrs the next day. A guard was organised and the rest of the men got down to some much needed sleep. Shelling and small arms fire seemed close, but nothing came near enough to worry us.

The next morning we were up and about at 0400hrs and had just breakfasted when the order came through on the air to move behind the leading Squadron of the Guards. We watched the Churchill's roar past and then tucked in at the back.

We went about two miles and near TILBURG itself. The bridge has been blown on the SOUTH side of the town, and there was some opposition near the bridge. This was being dealt with by a Squadron of the 3/4 CLY who had been called in to assist the Netherlands Brigade who had suffered many casualties.

We moved on and the column halted again. An order came from the Colonel of the Coldstream Guards for us to come up the line and lead the column. We thought there might be a mineclearing job to do and overtook the Guards Squadron as fast as we could. It was a brilliant sunny morning, everything looked fine and there were no nasty noises in front to bother us.

We reached the makeshift bridge but could see no one except the Colonel of the Guards in his Scout Car, waving and smiling at us. Still we had no more orders and just pushed on. It was then that the trouble started. No sooner had we reached the first few houses of TILBURG proper than the whole population seemed to pour into the streets — a mass of people screaming and shouting, waving flags, trying to jump on the tanks, throwing apples, streamers, orange ribbons etc — the whole place seemed to be going mad.

The tanks drove on, shoving a way through a wall of people who didn't seem to want to get out of the way. Capt Squirrell then received the order to halt in the middle of the town, in the High Street, and this we did. A Guards L. O. with two D.Rs stopped us outside some houses — the pavements could not be seen for people who were shouting and waving their arms. We then tried to dismount which was almost impossible for as fast as we got out, Dutch people got in. The turret was swarming with small boys and the tank was covered with people all asking for cigarettes.

After fighting a few of them off, we managed to cook our lunch under the jibs of the Crabs which made a strong four walls. We were pestered for cigarettes all the time and offers of accomodation until at last we couldn't see the funny side of it. But the complete enjoyment and happiness of the people was infectious and we couldn't send them away.

We were then released from command of the Guards and told to wait for orders, so Lieut Hall and his Troop Sjt arranged billets for the men in nearby houses. Capt SquirreH and Lieut Hall found a house just opposite that had an excellent cellar which had already been opened in celebration.

We stayed there for three days in supreme comfort, fighting off the civilians who just didn't want to go home. They gave us anything we asked for and forced us to drink with them nearly all day and night. The men were entertained royally and had comfortable beds and baths.

We then received orders to concentrate with the rest of the Squadron, and our liberation of TILBURG was over.

Around the middle of the month B Squadron moved again — this time to BOXTEL under 33 Armd Brigade who were with 51st Highland Div for the clearing of the area West of s'HERTOGEN-BOSCH. Although this went through successfully, no flail tanks were required and on the 22nd of October the Regiment moved to BERGEYK, a small village south west of EINDHOVEN that was destined to become the base for most of the Winter operations in Holland, Belgium and later Germany.

Cambrai-day, traditional tank-regiments' holiday was to be celebrated by a number of interesting items but A Squadron had to make a sudden move,



and the tanks rumbled through the little main street of BERGEYK as they were to do several times in the coming months, bound for operations designed to drive the enemy from the banks of the Maas.

C Squadron Operations

Meanwhile C Squadron was resting in comfortable billets at BAKEL. The Germans had counter-attacked the American 7th Armoured Division across the canal at MEIJEL, and during the last few days the counter-attack had been going well. But, though MEIJEL was only a few miles to the South, C Squadron felt remote from the battle.

At supper on the evening of 30th October, the officers of C Squadron were playing poker in the Mess. At about 1030 p.m. the game was interrupted by the arrival of a breathless Squadron Clerk, with an urgent message. C Squadron was to go forthwith in support of 15th Scottish Division — a Liaison Officer was to report at once to the GSO 1. The cards were dealt and the holder of the lowest card, Lt. John Hubble departed. The game of poker continued.

Two hours later Lt. Hubble returned. The Squadron was to be in support of 6th Guard Tank Brigade who were supporting 15th Scottish Division. One Troop of the Squadron was to join the Tank Coldstream Guards at UREEKWIIK early next morning. Lt. Hubble was: again unlucky in the draw and No. 2. Troop found themselves making an early start the next morning. The task of 15th Scottish Division was to drive the Germans back across the canal at MEIJEL.

No. 2. Troop joined the Coldstream Guards as arranged, and very shortly after their arrival mines were reported near LIESEL. Three tanks flailed a total distance of 200 yards but no mines were set off. The advance continued. Mean time the remainder of the Squadron moved to the badly smashed village of VLIERDEN.

On the next day the Coldstream Guards again reported mines. 2. Troop flailed again and this time set off five mines. L/C. Rashleigh's tank was severely damaged by blast and the tank was withdrawn to VLIERDEN for repairs.

On the 2nd of November the Coldstream Guards and 2. Troop with the *m, were withdrawn. The Grenadier Guards with 3 Troop, commatided by Lt. Pear, took their place. A full scale attack was put in and met practically no opposition. By the end of the day an advance of three miles had been made and the leading troops had met no mines.

But 3. Troop had trouble. Lt. Pear was approached by a very harassed Major of Artillery. This officer had apparently lost one of his carriers in a mine-field. He had followed in another carrier hoping to assist, and had been blown up. Could the flails help?

In the subsequent assistance two tanks were damaged by mines, one so badly that it was written off.

It seemed as if the enemy had withdrawn back across the canal. The plan for the day was that No. 3. Troop would flail a lane through the mines on the road and then the Reconnaissance Regiment would go through to regain contact with the enemy. No. 3. Troop would have the support of eight Churchill tanks from the Grenadiers.

Early in the morning 3. Troop started flailing, Sjt. Birch leading, Cpl. Shaw next and Lt. Pear at the rear. They passed a Churchill and an Armoured Car that had been blown up on mines the previous day. To avoid these they had to go into a field on the right of the road, Cpl. Shaws tank struck a tree which put his flail temporarily out of action, and Lt. Pear therefore took his place.

Suddenly, when the flailing was almost complete, Sjt. Birch's tank was hit by fire from an Anti-Tank gun; the crew were uninjured and the tank did not start to burn, but Lt. Pear ordered Sjt. Birch to bale out. Sjt. Birch replied that every time he tried to, a machine-gun opened fire on him. Hearing this the Churchill tanks of the Grenadiers put down smoke around Sjt. Birch's tank.

Lt. Pear then announced his intention of coming up to use his tank as a shield in front of Sjt. Birch's tank, enabling the crew to bale out.

The smoke made it very difficult to see exactly what was happening. Through gaps in the smoke both tanks were suddenly seen to be on fire. In the meantime Cpl. Shaw's tank hit a mine and was unable to move. He ordered his crew to bale out, and a few minutes later their tank, too, was set on fire by the Anti-tank gun.

The Grenadier Guards gave fire support and put down smoke for another hour in spite of the fact that they themselves were having casualties. It enabled Cpl. Shaw and his crew to crawl back to safety. Of Lt. Pear's and Sjt. Birch's crews there was only one survivor, Tpr. Whitford. He was wounded and taken prisoner. The loss of this excellent officer, his Sjt. and their very gallant men was a sad blow.

The volume of fire produced by the Germans on this mornjng was so great that all operations by 15th Scottish Division were postponed for 48 hours. It was decided to launch a full scale attack on the 5th November, and for this No. 1. Troop, commanded by Lt. Hoban, took the place of No. 3. Troop in support of the Grenadiers.

On the morning of 5th November the Grenadiers met mines on their start line at SCHELM. Sjt. Barnes and Cpl. Wild were therefore sent forward to deal with them. Under considerable enemy shelling they began flailing. Both tanks were successfully setting off mines when Cpl. Wild's tank was itself blown up.

Sjt, Barnes continued flailing alone and got through the minefield. A Churchill advanced up, and in passing Cpl. Wild's tank pulled out of the lane and was blown up, blocking the lane. Sjt. Barnes turned round and opened the lane once more. This operation was done under heavy enemy shelling, and Cpl. Wild and his crew remained in their blown-up tank giving covering fire to Sjt. Barnes.

As soon as Sjt. Barnes had re-opened the lane, Cpl. Wild and his crew baled out. A moment later their tank was hit and set on fire.

On this day, too opposition was so heavy — only two platoons of infantry crossed the start line and the Grenadiers lost 23 tanks in 1 hour — that further operations were postponed indefinitely. The Squadron withdrew to VLIERDEN to re-organise, as more than half the Squadron's flail tanks had been destroyed or damaged. 3. Troop had been especially hard hit. It had lost its troop officer, troop serjeant and nearly half its men. It had also lost four tanks totally destroyed out of five, the fifth being damaged. Lt. Bright rejoined the Squadron and took command of No. 3. Troop.

For its efforts on the 3rd and 5th of November, the Squadron received the following letter from Major General C. M. Barber D.S.O., commanding the 15th Scottish Division.

"I want to thank you on behalf of the 15(s) Inf Div for your efforts to get through the minefield SOUTH of SCHELM this morning and for similar efforts yesterday. I'm sorry to hear of your various losses but would like your men to know we realise they did all that was possible in the adverse circumstances." (Sgd) C. M. Barber Maj Gen.

Comd.

15(s) Inf. Div.

The period from the 6th to 19th of November was a quiet one for C Squadron. It remained in support of 6th Guards Tank Brigade and 15th Scottish Division. One attack was planned during this time and required several members of the Squadron to go out on patrols with the infantry. It was on one of these that Sjt. Barnes was killed, another sad loss for the Squadron.

On the 18th November the enemy that we had been trying so hard to push back across the canal suddenly withdrew voluntarily. This was chiefly because his position was being outflanked by another British attack further South. It was decided that a pursuit should be organised 'at once and C Squadron found itself on the move once more, this time in support of the Tank Scots Guards.

Early on the morning of the 20th of November, Cambrai Day, the Squadron moved out of VLIERDEN, crossed the MEIJEL Canal and joined the Scots Guards on the far side. Squadron HQ joined

Battalion HQ and each troop joined a Squadron of the Scots Guards. Steady advances of about 2000 yards each day were made against slight enemy opposition and heavy mud. This was the Battle of the Echelons — the Echelons being that seldom-praised but extremely important part of the Squadron that brings up rations, petrol, ammunition, water, and most important, mail. In spite of a long stretch of extremely bad roads the echelons never failed to deliver the goods, that enabled the tanks to continue advancing the next day.

On 23rd November the Squadron entered the small but important town of HORST. After a pause of two days the advance was continued again to TIENRAIJ. The enemy was still offering slight resistance, but his shelling caused more nuisance than casualties.

By 28th November the 15th Scottish Division had reached the River MAAS. This was to be the end of the advance and accordingly the Scots Guards and C Squadron were released. On 30th November C Squadron made the long march back to BERGEYK — about 60 miles — to rejoin the rest of the Regiment.

November Episode

No one who has not been there can have any idea of the utter dreariness and desolation of that part of Holland known as the Peel Marshes during the winter of 1944. The country is completely flat and waterlogged. There is hardly a tree to be seen, few houses and no roads worthy of the name. Mud tracks are the main means of communication and these were often impassable to wheeled vehicles due to huge lakes of rain water which turned them into a sea of mud. Shell holes filled with muddy water, a German gun upside down in a ditch, a shattered farmhouse, surrounded by white tape and notices "DANGER — BOOBY TRAPS". Half a dozen box-mines lying uncovered by the side of the road, a Bailey bridge spanning a small stream and beside it the shattered stone bridge blown by the Germans. Perhaps a knocked-out Sherman tank, and nearby three or four neat white crosses to mark the graves of those of its crews who died for England in this dreary waste.

This was the country east of the small town of DEURNE through which 3 Troop A Squadron, under Lt. M. A. Sutton moved on 21st November to support 23 Hussars in their pursuit of the enemy falling back towards the River Maas. There was little information about the enemy, but he was thought to have no anti-tank guns in the area. One tank of the 23 Hussars had been blown up on a mine earlier that morning and Lt. Sutton was ordered to send two flails to open up a lane through the minefield to enable the advance to continue. Taking his own and one other flail with him, he arrived at the area and advanced, flailing in his own tank down the track on which the mines had been

located. Covering him were tanks of the 23 Hussars and his other flail. Straight away machine guns started firing from some farmhouses two or three hundred yards ahead. Their fire was returned and the tank Hailed on steadily past the knocked-out tank of 23 Hussars, exploding a number of mines. Suddenly from the right flank an enemy self-propelled anti-tank gun opened fire at long range. Two of 23 Hussars tanks were hit and brewed up. To continue the advance until the anti-tank gun had been dealt with would only have been asking for further trouble and Lt. Sutton was ordered to withdraw. As the track was narrow and strewn with mines he decided to flail forward to a place where he could turn round more easily and then come back up the lane he had cleared. At this moment his own flail was hit twice, and damaged to such an extent that further flailing was impossible. The driver reported that the tank could still move. Lt. Sutton ordered to reverse and at dead slow speed the tank backed up its own lane. As they passed one of the knocked-out tanks Lt. Sutton saw a badly wounded member of its crew by the side of the track. Although under heavy fire from the enemy machine guns ahead, he dismounted, and dragged the man back to his flail. With the help of his operator, L/Cpl. Milburn, they succeeded in hoisting him aboard and taking him back with them. The rescued man died of his wounds shortly after, but for the bravery shown by this officer, he was subsequently awarded the Military Cross, and L/Cpl. Milburn was Mentioned in Despatches.

A further attempt to clear a way through this area was made a day or two later. On this occasion no enemy were encountered but the flails, although exploding a number of mines, were not fully effective due to the very heavy mud. After several of them had themselves been blown up on mines, the attempt was abandoned as our troops had already by-passed to the south. It is worth recording that while recovering the damaged flails from the minefield during the next day or two, the first anti-flail device which the regiment had encountered was discovered by personnel of the Royal Engineers.

Broekhuizen

Towards the end of November 1944 there were only one or two pockets of German resistance left west of the River Maas. One such pocket was that at the village of BROEKHUIZEN on the west bank of the river and the neighbouring KASTEEL, where a company of tough paratroops from 20 Para Regiment were holding out. Supplies reached them at night by means of a ferry over the river at that point. One attack on the Kasteel by a platoon of 9 Bn. Cameron Highlanders had been successfully repulsed, the platoon being wiped out almost to a man.

On 29 November orders were received for two troops of A Squadron to proceed from DEURNE where the Squadron was then located, to the BROEK-

HUIZEN area to support 3 Bn. Monmouthshire Regiment of 11 Armoured Division in an attack on this strongpoint the following day. Leaving Capt. P. J. S. Squirrel! to bring the tanks of the Squadron up the twenty odd miles, Major Wallace went ahead with Lt. Hall and Lt. Cooper, the troop leaders concerned, to carry out a reconnaissance of the enemy positions and contact the troops with whom the Squadron was to co-operate. They arrived at the village of STOCKT just west of BROEKHUIZEN with only about half an hour of daylight left, and were taken forward by an officer of 3 Mons. through the deserted and battered village to an observation post in the last house from which one could see across to the Kasteel about 200 yards away. One at a time they peered cautiously through a hole in the roof and saw a large and solidly built two-storied building with a moat on the near side. Of particular interest were a few small wooden pegs in the ground, which it was suspected marked the minefield. Local Dutch inhabitants had said this protected the enemy position on its south side. There was not a sign of life about the Kasteel. At intervals single shells burst in the air above it in a small black cloud, and in the failing light the place had a vaguely sinister air. The officers hurried back to the scout cars at the other end of the village as they were due almost immediately at an "O" Group at the battalion headquarters of 3 Mons. a mile or so away. On arrival they met officers from the artillery and 15/19 Hussars, who were also supporting the infantry. The Colonel of the Battalion outlined the plan for the next day's attack and final details were tied up between the supporting arms and infantry. At the conclusion of orders the three officers went back up the road to a rendez-vous previously arranged with Capt. Squirell and were pleased to find that he and the tanks had already arrived and were harboured along the edge of a wood. The Squadron Leader gave his orders for the following day and after a hot meal all except the guards turned in for the night, hoping that no German patrols from across the river would arrive suddenly to disturb their night's rest. The German artillery from across the Maas shelled the area spasmodically throughout the night and the sound of each shell-burst was magnified many times as it echoed and re-echoed through the silent woods. One had little idea whether they were a mile or two away or only a few hundred yards.

Next morning the flails moved off through the woods towards the start line ahead of a squadron of 15/19 Hussars who had been harbouring nearby. The route lay along a typical Dutch mud track which threatened to disintegrate at any moment beneath the weight of the tanks. Within a short time its banks had collapsed in two places, two of the flails became bogged blocking the route, and it looked as if they might prevent all the tanks behind them from reaching the start line on time. One was towed out without much loss of time and it was found

just possible to get tanks past the other. At 1000hrs. the first three flails of 2 Tp. advanced ahead of the infantry towards the Kasteel, the first objective, supported by mortar and artillery concentrations. The two tanks of Squadron headquarters took up positions in a gap between two small woods, from which they could engage both the Kasteel and BROEKHUIZEN, which was the objective of the second phase of the attack. After going about a hundred yards the flails started exploding mines, one was put out of action and Serjeant Bee commanding another wounded when his tank was hit by an enemy shell. The crew of the damaged tank were ordered to "bail out" after putting down local smoke and got back safely. Another flail was sent forward to take their place and all three lanes were successfully completed to within a few yards of the Kasteel although the infantry following behind them suffered heavy casualties from the enemy artillery, which was putting down heavy and accurate fire

using the Church tower at ARCEN on the other side of the Maas as an observation post. Having done their job the flails of 2 Tp. returned, and were ordered to make a lane up to the Kasteel from the west. Here they ran into bad ground and both got bogged. At eleven o'clock three flails of 4 Tp. under Lt. Hall advanced towards BROEKHUIZEN for the second phase of the attack, and the fire of the Squadron HQ tanks, which up till now had been firing at the Kasteel and putting down smoke for 2 Tp, was switched onto this new target. One could see little spurts of flame from German machine guns among the buildings and round after round of H. E. was fired at the houses. The flails did their job magnificently and made lanes up to the village for the infantry, who were being held up by the enemy's machine gun fire.

After completing his lane, Lt. Hall's tank was hit by a bazooka and brewed up, luckily not before the crew were able to "bail out". Lt. Hall and his operator, Tpr. MaCartney, were wounded and evacuated at once to a nearby medical post. By this time the infantry had got into BROEKHUIZEN and dealt with the enemy there. But outside the Kasteel, the defenders were putting up a desperate defence, inflicting casualties on our men every time they showed themselves outside the ditches in which they were taking cover. Orders were received to clear the route to the Kasteel from STOKT, and, sending the remainder of the flails to rally a few hundred yards to the rear, the Squadron Leader took two round to the village. One commanded by Serjeant Bailey swept the road to within a few yards of the entrance to the Kasteel and then became bogged. Major Wallace met the Colonel of 3 Mons, in STOKT and gave him what information he had. A few minutes later the Colonel of 3 Mons. was killed while very gallantly trying to lead his men in person into the Kasteel. It seemed impossible for the infantry to take the place by frontal assault, and so tanks of the 15/19 Hussars came up the lanes that had been-made and bombarded it at point blank range until eventually the enemy surrendered.

Operations of comparatively small scale such as this can very often be more costly to the units concerned than much larger battles. 3 Mons. lost 10 officers and 100 Other Ranks in clearing up this enemy pocket and at the end of the day had a Serjeant in command of one of their Companies. During this operation A Squadron had one officer, Lt. G. S. Cooper, killed and one officer and two Other Ranks wounded. A Special Order of the Day was issued by the Commanding Officer at the conclusion of this operation.

Special Order of the Day

by

Lt. Col. W. Y. K. Blair Oliphant MC
Commanding Westminster Dragoons
Royal Armoured Corps

The Commanding Officer wishes to congratulate all ranks of A Squadron for their part in operations on 30th November in the Broekhuisen Area in support of the Third Battalion, the Monmouthshire Regiment.

All the tasks given to the Squadron were carried out with complete success in most difficult conditions.

The Commander 159 Brigade and the Acting Commanding Officer of the Battalion have spoken most highly of the excellent support of A Squadron, without which the operation could not have been brought to a successful conclusion.

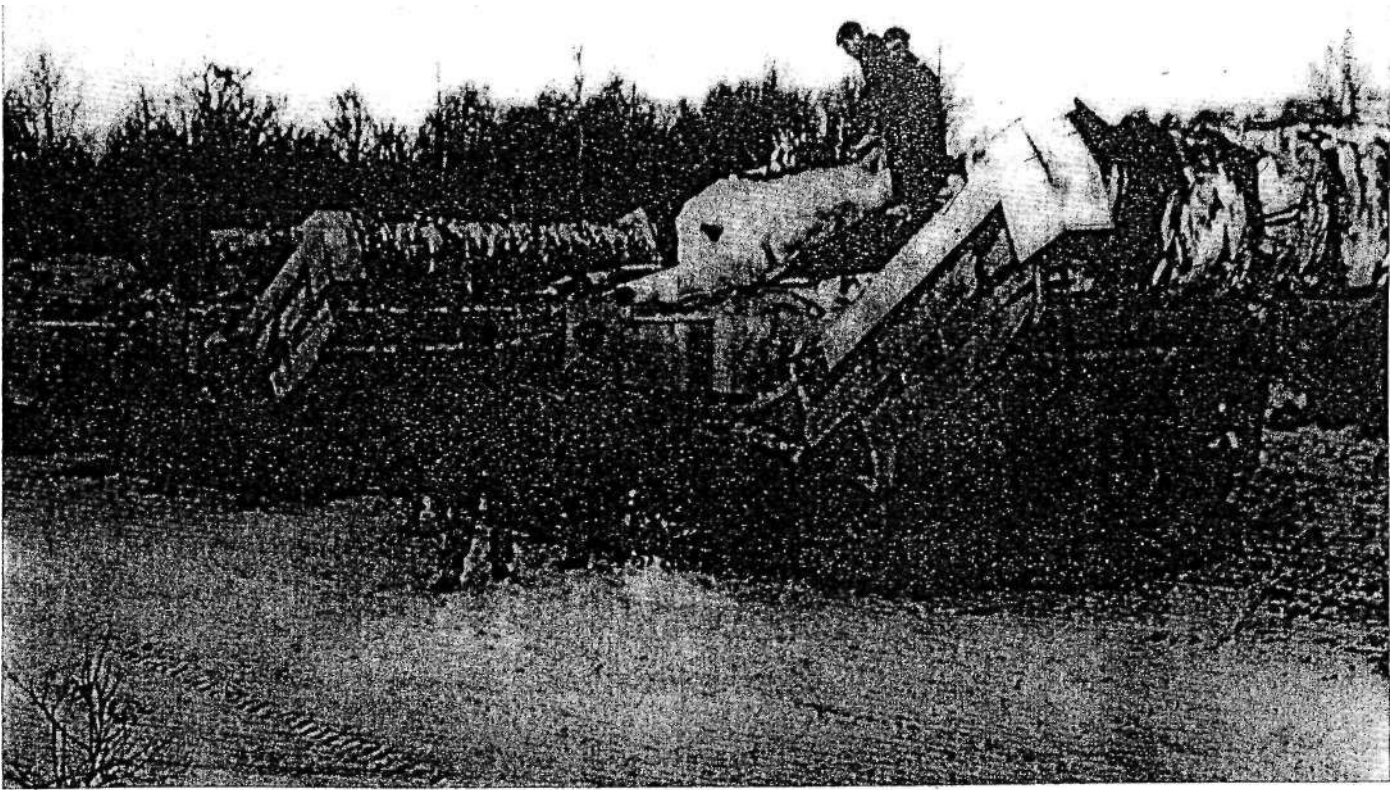
W. Y. K. Blair-Oliphant

Lieutenant Colonel

Commanding Westminster Dragoons
Royal Armoured Corps

4 Dec 44

BLA



BELGIUM AND GERMANY

After the series of battles described in the previous chapter, the Regiment was pulled out for a well earned rest in the WESTERHOVEN—DOMMELEN—BERJEIK area. Here, some of the mud of OVERLOON and VENRAIJ was removed from tanks, clothes and bodies. The rest, however, was short lived. At the beginning of December the Regiment was ordered to move to an area as yet unknown, with the prospect of at last entering Germany. The concentration area allotted was the coal mining town of WINTERSLAG in Belgium. For many this meant the comfort of spring mattresses and clean sheets.

After a few days stay at WINTERSLAG Tac HQ and the three Squadrons moved to an assembly area on the German-Dutch Frontier near GEILENKIRCHEN some three to four miles behind the line. BRUNSSUM was the town allotted to C Squadron and WAUBACH to Tac HQ, A and B Squadrons.

As this was the first time the Regiment had been on the German border a certain amount of competition ensued to see who was the first member of the Regiment to set foot on German soil. Actually this distinction fell to Major Wallace and Trooper Mortimer of A Squadron who crossed the border in a scout car on the afternoon of 5th December.

For the operation which was being planned, known as "SHEARS" and designed to clear the Germans from their bridgehead west of the R. ROER the whole Regiment was placed in support of 43 Infantry Division.

Planning and recess for the operation were the order of the day, and the weather deteriorated steadily. Rainfall was heavy and the ground became a morasse. Fear that the ground would become so bad as to make the passage of tanks impossible was confirmed and D day for the operation was postponed again and again in the hope that rain would give way to frost and so allow the tanks to give maximum support to the Infantry. But the forecasts of the meteorological experts were gloomy and eventually the operation was cancelled.

Thus it was that the Regiment found itself once again out of the line in that most hospitable of towns WINTERSLAG. And here it was hoped that Christmas 1944 would be spent. Plans were soon set afoot to make this Christmas as good as was humanly possible in the short time available. Hard words were heard on all sides when orders were received on the 22nd December for the move of the Regiment back into Holland, but hard words were softened when it was known we were to return to our good friends in the WESTERHOVEN area. To have but one day in which to make all arrangements for Christmas seemed far too short, but everyone entered into the spirit. The Medical Officer provided an ample stock of cotton wool, the Dutch supplied what few paper decorations they had, Dining Halls soon took on a festive appearance. At the conclusion of that Christmas Day many were heard to say that it was the best Christmas ever spent in the Army.

The next few weeks were quiet ones for the Regiment. The Ardennes push was at its height and though the German order was ANTWERP in five days, confidence in the outcome of that battle never failed.

On the 14th January however B Squadron was ordered to move once again to WINTERSLAG. This move as with all moves over long distances was carried out on transporters and was uneventful. On arrival at WINTERSLAG it was found that the push by the Germans in the ARDENNES having been contained and the Germans themselves pushed back, the projected operation of December to clear the enemy from their bridgehead West of the R. ROER was to take place. The name of the operation had been changed from "SHEARS" to "BLACK-COCK."

After one day in WINTERSLAG the Squadron moved on its tracks and came to rest in the small Dutch village of MERKELBEEK. Owing to the icy state of the roads some of the tanks took 24 hours to complete the journey of 35 miles. The first work to be carried out on arrival was painting the tanks

white to assist in camouflage whilst operating over snow covered countryside.

Once again the Squadron found itself in support of 43 Infantry Division, which had under command the 6th Guards Armoured Brigade. As this time there was only one Squadron of flails in support of 43 Div, as opposed to the whole Regiment in December, it was anticipated that a busy time was ahead. The whole of the ground over which the operation was to take place was known to be covered with German anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. The hardness of the days ahead was softened somewhat when it was realised that at last this was Germany over which the Squadron was to fight. After a long track across France, Belgium and Holland a part of the Regiment was at last to enter the much vaunted Reich.

The operation opened for the Squadron on the 20th and concluded on the 26th January. During this period the tanks of the Squadron destroyed some 150 German anti-tank mines and an unknown but considerable number of anti-personnel mines. Some idea of the work done is shown in the fact that during the seven days of the operation the Squadron was in active support of some eight attacks put in by the various Brigades of 43 Div on BREBEREN, SCHIERWALDENRATH, PUTT and SCHIEFENDAHL to name but a few. In addition to active support in these attacks the Squadron's flails were used frequently in the opening up of supply routes along roads which had been mined.

Tank casualties were heavy, seven of the Squadron tanks being blown up on mines. Fortunately personnel casualties were extremely light, one officer only being wounded.

The German system of defence in the area was based upon a number of village strong points and 43 Div plan was to attack all these strong points



from the rear. The normal days routine was for the tanks and infantry to set forth round about 3 a.m. from the Assembly area moving across country to arrive at the backdoor of the objective by first light. Fortunately the Germans were reluctant to move out of the comfortable cellars in which they spent the night, to man their trenches and defend their countryside. In many cases they were only too willing to give themselves up to the attacking infantry.

The strain on both officers and men during the operation was heavy. The ground was frozen solid and the temperature well below freezing point. From the time of departure from the assembly area at 3 a. m. until night in the harbour area no hot food could be prepared. The evening meal however

was good and the odd chicken removed from a deserted German farmhouse was a tasty addition to the normal rations. After this came the daily tot of rum and then sleep, never for more than four or five hours.

The good work of the Squadron during this operation was recognised by a letter of congratulations from the Commander of 12 Corps to all officers and men operating the special devices, and also by the award of the Military Medal to Sergeant G. A. Glover.

After concentrating at the conclusion of the battle the Squadron once again moved back to WESTERHOVEN to rejoin the Regiment.

BETWEEN THE RIVERS

On 29th January, in the absence of both the Commanding Officer and Second-in-Command, OC C Sqn, reported to 53 (W) Div HQ to receive the first details of Operation "Veritable".

This attack was to be a very big affair, designed to join up with an American attack from the Cologne area, in order to clear all Germans from the area between the MAAS and the RHINE. It was to have maximum artillery and air support.

The task of 53 (W) Div was to attack, and go through the SIEGFRIED LINE, where that line ran through the REICHSWALD FOREST. The start line was at GROESBEEK and between GROESBEEK and the FOREST mines were reported and there was an Anti-Tank ditch. The task of B and C Squadrons with 2 Troops of AVREs carrying fascines and 4 AVREs carrying bridges under command, was to produce four crossings of the Anti-Tank ditch with mine-free approaches.

C Squadron made a preliminary move from DOMMELEN to DONK on 31st January. On 2nd February 3 Troop assisted by a Churchill bridgelay, gave a demonstration of how the Squadron proposed to do its task on the day.

The vast concentration of troops south of NIJMEGEN was shrouded in great secrecy. All moves to the area were made by night. On the night 5/6th February B and C Squadrons moved up to the village of MALDEN.

6th and 7th February were days of final feverish planning, studying of air photographs and maps, reconnoitering the next day's battlefield and tying up final plans.

On 8th February, the day of the attack, both Squadrons moved up from MALDEN at 0600 hrs., to the F.U.P. at GROESBEER arriving at 0830. The noise of the barrage, which had begun at 0500 hrs., was now so great that it was impossible to hear voices.

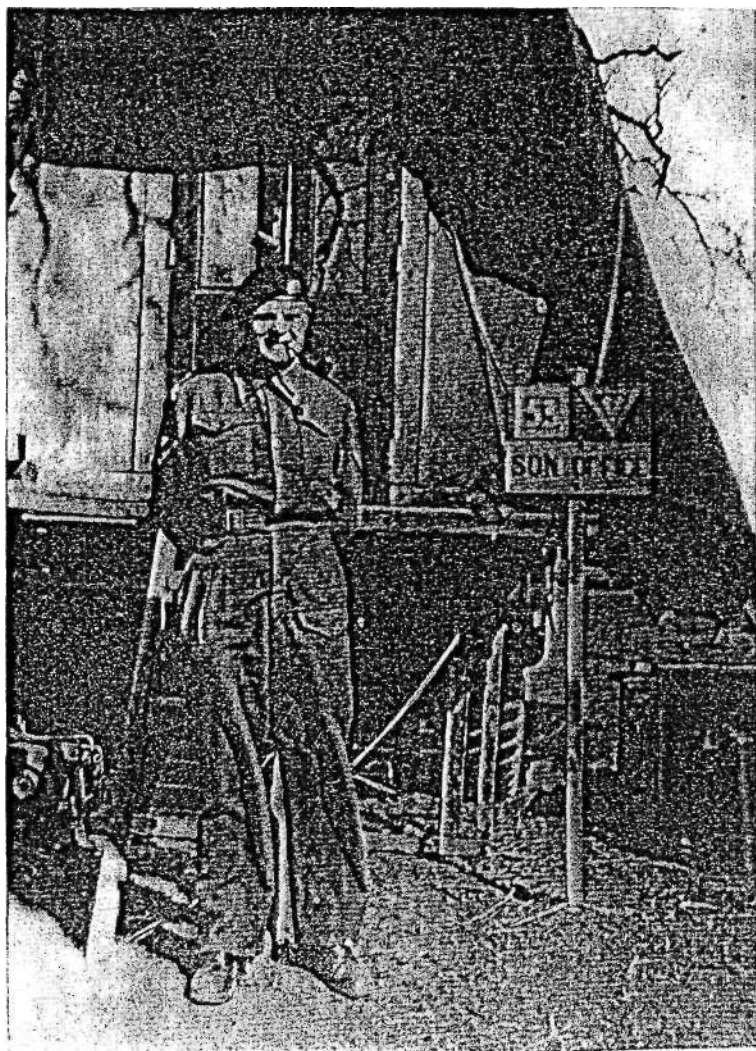
The attack was not due to start until 1000 hrs., and it was during this wait in the F.U.P. that Captain J.C. McMillan, acting Second-in-Command of G Squadron, was most unfortunately killed by a shell.

Soon after the attack started the tanks of both Squadrons got into trouble with the very heavy going. Eventually all were bogged, and it became evident that they would not reach the suspected

minefield. Fortunately there were far fewer mines than had been expected, and therefore the absence of flails did not affect the advance.

C Squadron Leader changed tanks, going forward in an AVRE to the Anti-Tank ditch, and taking with him a Churchill bridgelay, which quickly effected a crossing, used by B Squadron, 147 R.A.C. Eventually four crossings were made on the Squadron front.

On B Squadron front the bridge over the ditch on the Centre Line was still intact, but a fascine





was dropped on each side of the bridge, in case they should be needed.

The rest of the day was spent in recovery, and by that night, thanks to the untiring efforts of the A.R.V. crews, most of the tanks were out of the bog. After four days in this area both Squadrons returned to MALDEN.

B Squadron remained in MALDEN for about a week and then proceeded back to BELGIUM to practise crossing rivers by means of rafts, with a view to the eventual crossing of the RHINE.

On 16th February C Squadron moved from MALDEN in support of 52 (L) Div, who were making an attack down the east bank of the MAAS from GENNEP towards AFFERDEN. The first day was uneventful except for slight mortaring. On 17th February it was decided to use the Squadron as ordinary tanks. The task was to carry an infantry company of the Royal Scots forward to their start line and then to support their advance with fire, should they be held up.

The infantry were delivered safely at their start line, and the advance was successful. The infantry established themselves on their objective without calling for fire support.

Their success however produced violent reaction from enemy mortars, which had the range of the Squadron exactly right, several salvos fell among the tanks. All crews slept in their tanks that night.

The following day further attacks were made, but the opposition had stiffened so considerably,

that it was decided no further advances would take place for the moment. The Squadron therefore moved into a pleasant ride in the wood out of range of the enemy mortars, and remained there for ten days until the 28th February.

On 25th February the Squadron received a very unusual order. 2 Officers and 30 OR's were to report to 82 Assault Squadron, R.E., near GOCH in order to assist them in making Assault Bridges and Fascines. Working throughout the night on a job for which they were quite untrained, and under regular and accurate shelling and mortaring, they completed the task returning early on 26th February.

In the early hours of 28th February, the Squadron moved across to GOCH, in support of 8th Armoured Brigade, part of the route lay along a railway line which was quite unsuitable for tanks and in addition had craters in it which were quite invisible. 3 tanks were left along this railway line and the fitters were still working there several days later.

That night an attack was put in on strong German positions covering the main approaches to WEEZE. Their front was covered by two parallel Anti-Tank ditches, with mines being between them. The object of the attack was to get a bridgehead over the second ditch, our task being to destroy the mines between the ditches.

Just before moving off Major R.S.S. Allen, an old member of the Regiment and Padre Rhymes both arrived expressing a wish "to see the battle" and both travelled on the back of the Squadron Leader's tank.

The attack began at 0100 hrs. The opposition from the start was very severe. A bridge was made across the first ditch, but was wrecked by the first tank that attempted to cross it. It was decided to cancel further attempts to get tanks across on this flank, thus dropping the flailing operation between the ditches.

Shortly before first light permission was received to proceed to rear rally. While doing this it was reported that the enemy had put in a counter-attack which was being led by a Churchill. This attack caused confusion for a time, Cpl. Thorpe, whose tank was bogged near the ditch, was ordered by an infantry officer to abandon the tank and withdraw. This was done, but the tank never fell into enemy hands.

The counter-attack was held on a line between the two Anti-Tank ditches and that was the end of operations for the day.

About mid-day on 2nd March information came through that the enemy who had been so stoutly defending WEEZE only 36 hours before had withdrawn South. A mobile force was thus formed, the advance guard of which consisted of 4/7th Dragoon Guards with C Squadron less 2 Troop in support and 1 Oxon and Bucks in Kangaroos.

3 Troop moved with the leading Squadron of the 4/7th Dragoon Guards, Squadron HQ with RHQ of 4/7th Dragoon Guards and 1 Troop with the reserve Squadron. On the Southern edge of WEEZE an enormous crater was found blocking the road and mines laid in the fields on either side of the crater. 3 Troop in attempting to flail a path round the crater found the ground too soft and became bogged. A wide detour was therefore made to pass the obstruction.

2 miles ahead where the road went through a wood another crater and more mines were found. Sjt Wright commanding 3 Troop, made a plan with the 4/7th Dragoon Guards Squadron Leader and started forward. Just as he was approaching the crater, the R.E. half-track there was hit by A. P., and set on fire. 3 Troop were ordered to halt at once. The clearance of this obstruction and the enemy covering it was done by 1 Oxon and Bucks during the night 2/3rd March. . !

KEVELAER was reported clear on 3rd March and it was on this day that C Squadron 4/7th

Dragoon Guards at 1540 hrs joined up with the American Army coming from the South.

By the night of 3rd March we were about a mile north of GELDERN. The enemy had now withdrawn into a bridgehead covering the bridge over the RHINE at WESEL.

Here 2 Troop who had been in support of the Sherwood Rangers advancing down the East bank of the River NIEERS since 1st March rejoined the Squadron.

The next day the axis of advance turned east through ISSUM and opposition became much suffer. Few mines were met, and on 8th March the Squadron was placed in 21 Army Group Reserve. That night the move back from ISSUM to NIJMEGEN was done on tracks, and at NIJMEGEN after a roadsle breakfast the tanks were loaded onto transporters and taken back to DOMMELEN .where they unloaded and marched to RIETHOVEN. The 55fe£r«f DOMMELEN and RIETHOVEN m which the Squadron had been billeted at Christmas time, turned out to give a very touching welcome.



"PLUNDER"

With the area between the Maas and the Rhine clear after fighting that had been as bitter and furious as any in the European theatre, the crossing of the Rhine, Germany's greatest river and last barrier before the unstoppable Allied armies, was only a matter of time.

"Rafting over the Rhine!" had become a joke but halfway through February when the flat barren countryside of Holland in winter was showing the first sign of early spring, A and B Squadrons moved to the little Belgian village of MEESWYK by the Maas to train in raft crossings of river obstacles. The jokes still went on; but they were a little grimmer.

As a diversion came the arrival of "Tabby", the secret infra-red lights that enabled tank drivers, with special driving binoculars to run by night without visible lights. It was at MEESWYK, too, that George — A Squadron's mascot goose of regimental fame, was abducted by a local farmer. Unable to (race him by enquiry, a Jeep was driven

round the village with the horn sounding at full blast, and George always sensitive to its challenging sound responded with wild calls from his prison pen — hidden near the main road.

So came the day when the Regiment moved, parting a little sadly for the last time from the South Holland harbours. On the long, clanking transporters to the Maas where the rubble dust of much fought for and shattered VENLO clouded into the air beneath the wheels; over the border into Germany through the broken villages, torn trees and abandoned equipment, suddenly familiar again but with an important difference. It was German homes and German streets that lay ruined after the recent fighting.

In the concentration area, just North of KERVENHEIM and about ten miles from the river, the Regiment harboured near a road junction — signposted as "Amen corner" by ironic predecessors. There preparation went ahead for the crossing of the Rhine, as March moved on with weather hot enough for June, and the crews teed-up their tanks

to the last word, often stripped to the waist in the sunshine.

A Second D-Day

As always before the bigger shows, it seemed as though Nature was determined by demonstration of her loveliest moods to dissuade mankind from his task of destruction. Though the guns rumbled through the day and night from over the hill, where the softening up programme was already under way for the crossing, it seemed strangely unreal to worry over maintenance and preparation. — All the tanks had to be prepared, once the crossing was achieved, to move without halting, deeper and deeper into Germany — to force the enemy into another retreat so swift that the 'swan' beloved of armoured troops might again develop as it had through France and Belgium.

The air of unreality slowly disappeared as the details of the assault, the roles and assignments became known. The whole operation was known by the euphemistic code-word "Plunder". Three crossings were to be made nearly simultaneously on Corps fronts, 30 Corps to the North, 12 Corps in the centre between REES and WESEL, and in the south the Americans. In addition there was to be a Commando attack on Wesel and both British and American Airborne divisions were to be dropped on D-day beyond the river, and having gained certain objectives, were to link up as quickly as

D-day for the operation was the 24th March, and the Regiment were at two hours notice to move from H hour. Even the Colonel was not sure how or when Squadrons might be called upon once a bridgehead had been established on the East bank of the river. Information about the far bank seemed to indicate that there were no mines which might need flailing but of the country beyond no one was sure; the enemy was known to be flinging up new defences far to the rear. As H hour approached one imagined the Buffaloes and D. D. tanks of the division nosing down into the water, and realised that in a few hours rafting points would be established and the first pontoon bridges stretching across the Rhine. During the morning from ten o'clock onwards we watched the Airborne forces sweeping overhead at about 500 feet, gliders and transport planes as far as the eye could see — wings, engines, towing cables — the sun glinting on fins and rudders of the whole vast assembled fleet, moving relentlessly and endlessly through the sky. Nearly the whole regiment was out to watch and few will ever forget the sight.

By the afternoon of D plus 1 a pontoon bridge had been constructed across the Rhine. That night, the B. B. C. nine o'clock news announced rather prematurely that the Westminster Dragoons in company with other named regiments were already across the river but at that time only Squadron harbour parties had reached the far side. It was

AND BEYOND

possible with the remainder of the assaulting forces. The Westminster Dragoons were initially under command of 12 Corps With RHQ, A and B Squadrons in support of 15 Scottish Division, and C Squadron in Corps reserve. Subsequently B and C Squadrons were placed in support of 53 (W) Div and 7th Armoured Division respectively.

Those who stood outside at the end of those warm Spring days, for a last cigarette before turning in, watched the almost endless stream of tanks and men that pouring past Amen corner into the rapidly filling concentration area, late into the night. And when they had gone, the guards watched the ack-ack tracer curving up into the black sky, streaming a net of fire against the German spotting planes. Once again, it was clear that Field Marshal Montgomery was amassing that size of force that guaranteed success — and it seemed more than likely that his promise to his troops in his D-1 message that "together we shall crack about in the plains of North Germany" would soon be fulfilled.

not until first light the following day, the 26th March, after a night march following a series of orders and counter-orders that the first tank of the regiment commanded by Major Wallace crossed the Rhine by the pontoon bridge at XANTEN, followed by the tanks of A and B Squadrons and RHQ and harboured on the far side.

There was a little shelling and bombing the first night on the far side, and squadron guides spent an uncomfortable night by the bridge as they waited to guide the echelon in — but the ack-ack display for those who watched was tremendous. It was fairly obvious that the enemy was taken by surprise — the speed and weight of the attack had overwhelmed the not very substantial defences on the river banks. To the North, around REES however, the fighting was harder with German paratroop and Panzer elements resisting stubbornly. In the immediate vicinity of the Squadrons, the litter of abandoned equipment, rifles, grenades and larger items indicated that the troops in that area had not had a great deal of stomach for it.

There were rumours of defences with mines inland and it was also thought that the regiment might be used solely as gun-tanks — we were still among the first armour on the east bank. While the Sdn. Ldrs. based at RHQ for information, the tanks kept ack-ack watch with turret mounted brownings, and the crews cleaned guns, cooked, and watched Typhoons peeling out of a blue sky as they rocketed the German pockets holding out against airborne troops and the linking forces.

By the evening of D plus 2 the link up was fully effected and without pausing, the expansion of the bridgehead became a movement of gathering momentum, North-East. A Squadron moved again, joined up with RHQ already forward in the airborne's late dropping zone. Silk parachutes became the property of most of the tank crews — eggs appeared to be more plentiful in Germany than the rest of Europe. The first to own a German car was Lieutenant Meerman — A Squadron's Dutch Interpreter, who acquired an Opel.

A Squadron and RHQ were now in support of 8 Corps and already starting the succession of moves that was to carry them across the plains of Germany. Throughout the advance, A Squadron in Corps reserve, never made actual contact. Moving in leaps of fifty miles and over every day or so their progress was a list of German villages and towns, Bocholt, Borcken, Coesfeld, Lengerich, Diepholz, Nienburg. The days became a strange panorama of dusty roads, untouched German villages" with perhaps a shattered roadblock and a countryside of woods and hills. The hordes of brave, wretched slave workers who cheered and watched the flails go past — sometime? it seemed as though there were more foreign workers in the land than Germans but always among the tattered Dutch, French, Poles and Russians were the grey uniforms — German prisoners making their way back to the cages — dazed and shaken. The rubber tired bogeys gave trouble as the tanks' mileage increased, but everyone worked to maintain the pace — to keep the flails at hand should they suddenly be called for. It was a strange existence — unlimited eggs for breakfast, tea and cigarettes to fight fatigue during the day — moving across the large scale maps of Germany, and watching the grim unsmiling faces of the German people, so much in contrast to the waving, laughing, joyous crowds of every French, Belgium and Dutch village and town.

Twelve hours behind the airborne troops A Squadron moved into CELLE, largish town North East of HANNOVER, and there for them the race ended. To the disgust of the crews who had fought, if not the enemy, most mechanical troubles known to Shermans in fast and frequent moving, they found the Squadron taking over guard duties in

; this German town. As the airborne men moved out, the tanks moved in — parked in a large granary. In practice the idea was rather novel — guards were responsible for the safety of grain stores, sugar stores, and the railway station — patrolling the streets with arms in daylight. Later RHQ provided half-tracks and men to assist in the curfew and night patrol. The streets and town area presented an odd background of shattered buildings, factories; and of people too — the shaken, bewildered Germans who saw the stream of tanks and guns and lorries pour never-endingly through their town. The cosmopolitan crowds of dirty, cheery, toughened cynical slave workers — "Russkis" in green coats, Poles with beards and dust grimed faces, Hungarians with soap box carts and Frenchmen with treasured loaves and looted gin — all trudging the way home before the relief organisations had yet reached them. The evil shadow of BELSEN concentration camp North of the town seemed to touch CELLE. — The bread queues and troubles that the ordinary tank soldier worked firmly but understandingly to control; the ruin and dead bodies; the flattened railway station; the streams of military traffic, the sunlight on the river and the lake in the town centre; and the black emptiness of the city at night — these were the impressions of CELLE.

First day over the Rhine B Squadron had shared the same harbour area near WESEL with A, but after that the ways parted as B moved forward with the C. L. Y., and 44th R. T. R., towards DINGDEN — stopping there for a few days as the leading armour had still failed to contact mines. The tank crews with the memories of nights in the Reichwald still rather fresh, found harbouring in even somewhat damaged houses a more pleasant prospect. Some even felt the first weight of the conqueror's burden — non-fraternisation. Strictly on business Major Stanyon and his officers were dealing with a steady flow of unlovely German womanhood pouring out a stream of woes and troubles. On the 30th March, B Squadron reverted from 53 (W) Div to 21st Army Group reserve, moved to WINTERSWYK in Holland and settled in — to watch on maps now, the rapidly ending race to the Elbe.

2 and 3 Troops of C Squadron had crossed the Rhine at XANTEN on 27th March with the leading armoured regiments of 7th Armoured Division, the remaining tanks of the Squadron following the next day. The advance went far more quickly than was at first expected and on the night of the 27th these two troops found themselves east of BRUNEN about 8 miles over the Rhine, very little opposition had been met during the day and no mines had been encountered.

The next day the opposition stiffened slightly but again there were no mines, so that except for spasmodic shelling 2 and 3 Troops had another

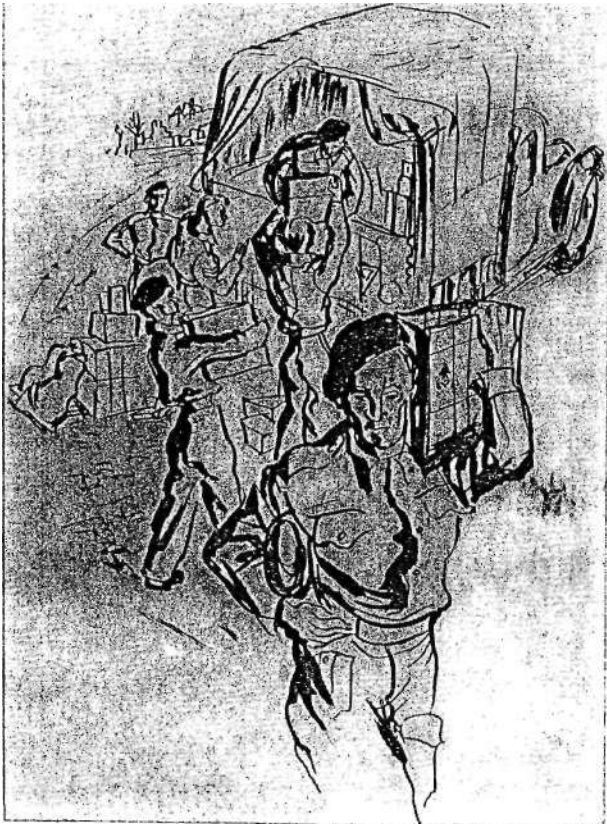


easy day, harbouring that night near BORKEN and in BORCHUM respectively. On the night of the 28th as still no mines had been met it was decided that the Squadron should come under Divisional control and follow along after the advance in case it was needed.

About 5 o'clock in the evening of the 2nd April when moving from AHAMS to RHEINE the Squadron was ordered to proceed immediately to 12 Corps HQ, about 3 miles away, to assist in its defence, as it was in imminent danger of attack and there were no other tanks to assist. The Echelon were dumped off on the side of the road and the Squadron raced there at all possible speed, everyone readjusting his mind very rapidly from the rather peace-time atmosphere of a road march to one of immediate action. On nearing Corps HQ it was quite obvious that something was in the wind owing to the number of soft vehicles flying in all directions, which reduced our speed to snails pace. Men were hurriedly digging in at the side of the road and except for six soldiers who were calmly kicking a football about in a field everyone was working frantically.

It was discovered on arrival that there were already there and in position a Squadron of 1 R. T. R., and a Company of the Queens Regiment.

By just after dark the tanks had taken up positions, but still there was no sign of an attack.



The night proved to be a frightful one, pitch dark and pouring with rain, and many eyes were strained trying to find the cause for any suspicious noise.

Morning came without any attack having developed and it was then decided to release the Squadron and we moved to our original destination to dry out our clothes and have a well deserved meal.

Once again our role became one of following on. On 11th April we left a very nice harbour round a farm at ELTE for BAHREN BORSTEL a march of some 85 miles, a long distance for tanks in one day.

Fortunately the weather was fine and all seemed to be going well except for the expected number of tanks falling out with bogey trouble. Then a Jeep from Bde HQ stopped the column and summoned the Squadron Leader to Bde HQ immediately. The Squadron carried on to its destination under Capt. Jameson.

It turned out that the Squadron was under command of 8 Inf Bde, 3 Brit Div, and was to proceed to WILDESHAUSEN to be prepared to go into action as normal tanks next morning at first light.

This was a very tall order as WILDESHAUSEN was another 30 miles on, making a total of about 120 miles for the day, and already 8 tanks had fallen out needing new bogeys.

However, when the Squadron Leader reported to 8 Inf Bde it was arranged that we should get as many tanks there as possible by 10 o'clock the next morning.

The fitters under Sjt Wiswell worked all night, on tanks which were spread out along the road for 60 miles. However by the next night all but two were with the Squadron.

The role for us was to assist in the defence of WILDESHAUSEN a small but rather nice country town which was held by a Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. For this task the Squadron was divided into four troops, the fourth composite troop being under command of Sjt Walker.

The town was surrounded on three sides by Germans, and there was some doubt as to whether the one approach road for us to get down to the town was cut by the Germans or not.

1 Troop was dropped off to support a Company about half a mile from the town. As this was taking place an S. P. opened fire on to the road, and cover was sought in the wood whilst the gunners dealt with the S. P. most effectively.

Infantry patrols were then sent out down to the wood to see if the road through was clear.

After waiting an hour Squadron HQ, 2 and 3 Troops took an alternative route along a track to the town. Five hundred yards of this track were overlooked by the enemy and any movement brought the expected shelling.

3 Troop was dispatched immediately on arrival in the town to help in the withdrawal of the road clearing patrol. They had a most uncomfortable 2 hours sitting on a road in the middle of a wood in which there were thought to be German infantry and in which enemy S.P's could clearly be heard moving about, however just before dark they moved back to the town and took up position at the road junction at the North East corner of the town.

The town just after dark was a mass of vehicles some moving in, others moving out, all of which created sufficient noise to let the enemy know that something was "on", with the result that threw everything they had into the town, fortunately little heavy artillery, but there were enough S.P's and mortars to make the place most unhealthy.

2 Troop who had been to link up with a Company in the South of the town were held up by the stream of traffic and it wasn't until 10 o'clock before this was sufficiently clear for them to move. Their experiences are best related by the account written sometime afterwards by Sjt Bingham, one of the tank commanders:

"It was eerie entering the Southern part of the town — everything seemed dead — towering buildings (or so they seemed in the dark) loomed up on each side of us. It was gruesome and seemed a town of the dead.

The troop stopped and the Troop Leader, Sjt Whybrow dismounted to contact the infantry. This was difficult as it was very dark by this time and the infantry sentries were lying low, not being able to discern whether we were British or German.

We moved on at funeral speed — then it came — a deafening report, a blinding flash, and a shower of gleaming red sparks — Cpl. Rashleigh's tank was reported hit by H.E. We waited for the A.P. which usually follows but none came — all that came was a small car, which sped down the column before anyone could stop it and was lost in the darkness. Investigation proved that Cpl. Rashleigh's tank had been fired on by a Bazooka which had just missed him, hitting a petrol pump by which the tank had stopped.

A few scratches caused by ducking for shelter by those who were dismounted were the only injuries.

Contact was eventually made with the Company of Infantry and we took up positions on the outskirts of the town; it did not take us long to realise that S.P's were very near as they were continually shelling us. One even dared to poke its nose around the corner at our rear, but it was difficult as a

certain target and as we had camouflaged ourselves well we did not want to give our positions away.

In the interval between shelling there was a graveyard silence broken only by the crackling of many nearby fires; one particularly, a large heap of coke, quite near to use, gave a blue glow to everything and cast wierd flickering shadows, which did nothing to ease our already strained nerves and imagination. The fact that our first day there was Friday, the 13th, added the final' touch to this macabre scene.

An enemy staff car, which had obviously mistaken our lines for its own, came in full view of Cpl. Rashleigh's tank, got a very rude shaking and was rendered immobile.

During three days and three nights of very little sleep we held WILDERSHAUSEfa; we tasted almost everything, sniping, shelling, machine gunning, and a mistaken bombing by the R.A.F."

3 Troops experiences were much the same; they had even more trouble from S.P's. Sjt Wright's tank was engaged by an S.P. firing direct from a hidden position in the woods. It fired five rounds all of which fortunately missed, and retired back into the wood. Lt. Bright while snatching a quick bath in the back room of a nearby house was considerably disturbed by shells bursting in the back garden quite close to the window.

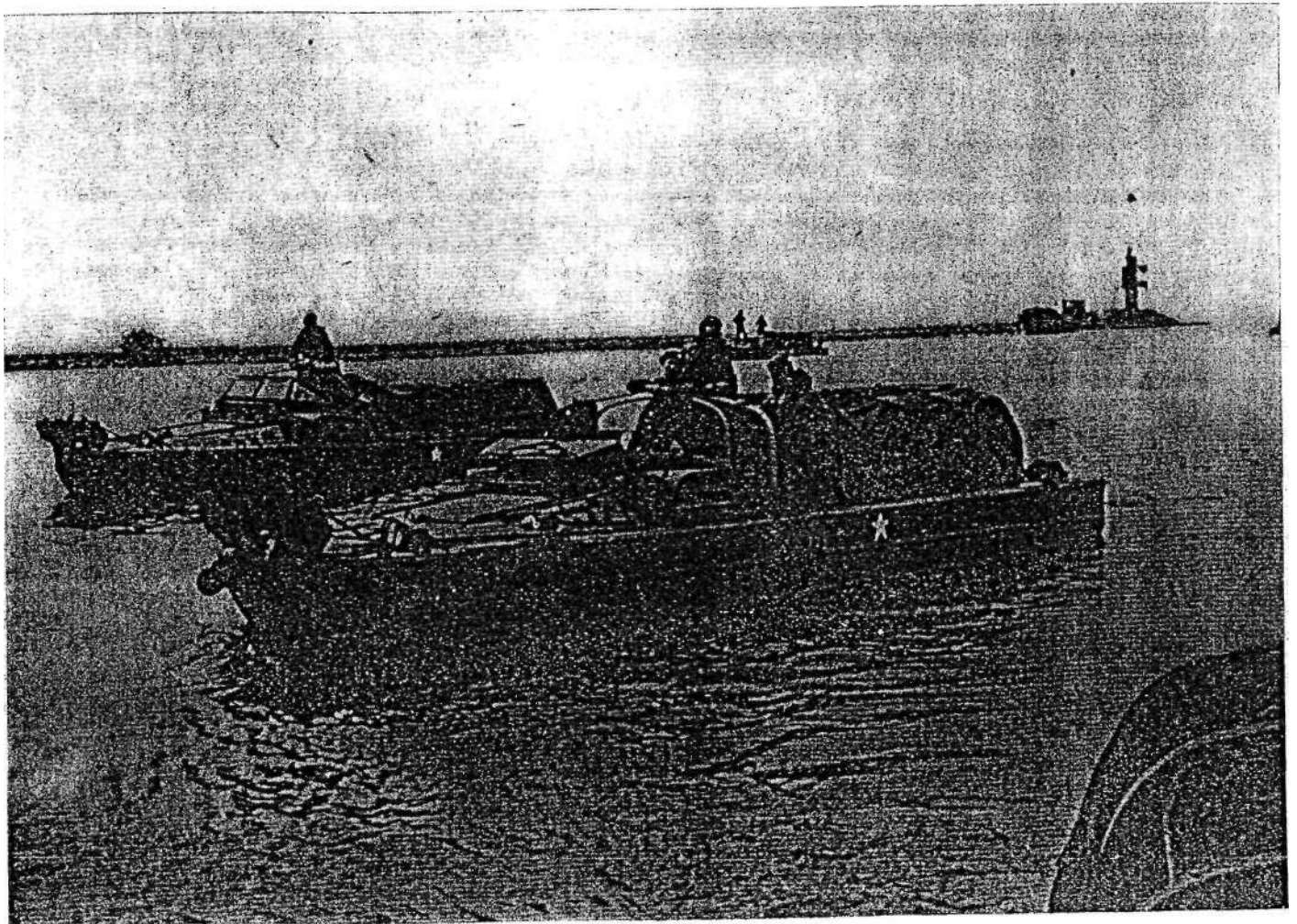
On the 13th in the morning it was discovered that some Germans had infiltrated during the night into a house 150 yards up a track in the wood from Sjt Wright's tank. A preliminary infantry platoon attack was met by heavy Spandau fire. It was then decided that a further attack with tank and artillery support was necessary to clear the five houses on the left of the track. At 1230 hrs., fifteen minutes before the attack was due, about 20 German infantry ran across the track towards the houses, Sjt Wright spotted them, engaging them, inflicting several casualties. The attack went in, enveloped in smoke. Sjt Wright advancing up with the infantry engaged all the houses in turn with 75 mm liaising closely with the Platoon Commander throughout with such good effect that the attack this time was ^completely successful, the only casualty being one man wounded. On return the Platoon Commander said that it was the best tank co-operation he had experienced since "D" Day. A fair tribute!

On the 16th April the Squadron pulled out to catch up with some lost sleep and to consume some of the Dutbh gin, which had been found in large quantities in the town.

FAREWELL TO FLAILS

On April 19th RHQ and A Squadrons moved from CELLE under command of 79th Armoured Division to WARPE, west of the river Weser, and concentrated there with C Squadron. The news poised on the brink of victory — the Germans were within days of defeat on the main continent of Europe. Norway, Denmark and the Frisian Islands remained as question marks. And something was definitely in the air. The regiment knew it as an undercurrent of rumours that centred round changed roles, new vehicles and future battles. The next day

it was out of the bag — in three weeks time the Westminster Dragoons were to be converted from a flail tank regiment to a D.D. regiment. In less than a month the tank crews would be manning the still rather secret amphibious tanks that had first landed on D Day and later crossed the Rhine in the first assault. Probable battle areas were the Frisian Islands and Norway where untouched German Army formations were still strong. Beyond — who knew? The Coral isles of the Pacific and Japan stretched into the future!





Quietly, and efficiently but at high speed the Regiment settled down to grasp and master the conversion table. New Squadron and troop organisations, wireless, gunnery and mechanical brush-up of knowledge, tactical refreshers for tank commanders. Then in the middle Lieutenant-Colonel Blair-

Oliphant, M.C., was suddenly posted away from the regiment. With hardly twelve hours notice to move "Colonel Bill" said good-bye to everyone, and in his going left a realisation; and a sudden feeling of a gap, with every man of the Westminster Dragoons.

Somehow the odd feeling of unreality that had started to dominate the new training increased. The Hails were taken to the Delivery Squadron for disposal without that regret which is so commonly supposed to mark the parting of the modern cavalryman and his mount. Tankless — except for a few straight Shermans — and some Valentine S.P's., (the new D.D's were reputed to be Valentines), the Regiment concentrated once again in Holland at Oldebroek Barracks, near KAMPEN on the shores of the Zuyder Zee on 2nd May, where B Squadron rejoined the Regiment from WINTERSWISK.

Here Lieutenant-Colonel Ward, DSO, MC, arrived to take command of the Regiment. Already possessed of considerable experience of armoured warfare both in Africa and N.W. Europe he created at once an impression of confidence in the new role of the Westminster Dragoons, facing future battles no longer as Squadrons but as an armoured regiment once again. But the fates had willed it otherwise — on 5th May 1945, the Cease Fire on 21 Army Group front was sounded. The little grey-white message form that brought the pencilled tidings made the end of the war in Europe. And for each man the realisation came either slowly or quickly, and each had his own thoughts and reflections.

The training continued for a short while and then the order came for its abandonment. A number of changes took place — Major S.P.M. Sutton, MC, left the regiment to further his army career as G.II in 11th Armoured Division — his place was taken by A Squadron Leader, Major Wallace, whose second-in-command Capt. Beaumont, took over A Squadron. Lt. Bullock returned to the Regiment after his spell in Italy as a flail advisor, and rejoined A Squadron.

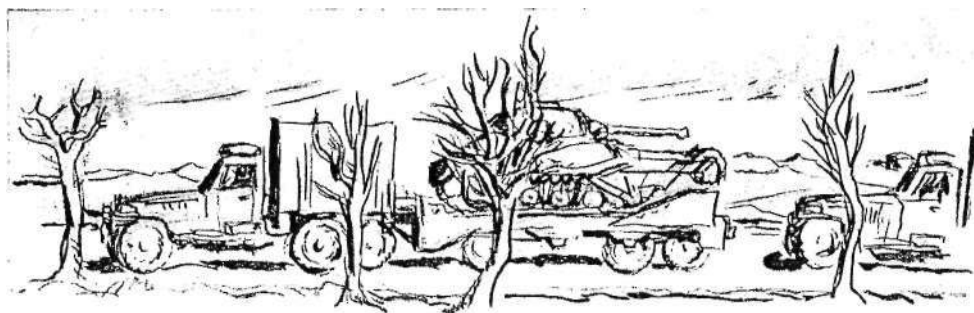
On 2nd June H.R.H. Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands inspected the Regiment on parade and afterwards took the salute at the March Past. Perfect weather favoured the occasion, and the regiment were fortunate in having the services of the band of the Royal Tank Regiment for the day. After the inspection His Royal Highness and members of his staff had lunch at the Officers' Mess.



After six very enjoyable weeks in Holland the Regiment returned to Germany on 13th June to take up its occupational duties.

On 19th June, a little after D-plus one year General Sir Percy Hobart, KCB., CBE., DSO., Commander of the Division, held a regimental parade, somewhere just south of Hamburg. Standing in a Jeep he spoke to the men and officers who surrounded him. In the background a morning breeze freshened the red, gold and purple of the regimental flag against a high blue sky.

"Many of you", said General Hobart, "will soon, once again become civilians. Some of you may go to the Far East and Japan where there is still a war to finish. You will forget many of the things that happened in this last year. The hard times and the unpleasant moments and — many other things. There is however one thing that none of you will ever forget. And that is a memory of the spirit of comradeship, and the spirit of the Westminster Dragoons."



ROLL OF HONOUR

CAPT. J. C. MCMILLAN

LIEUT. G. S. COOPER

LIEUT. B. H. PEAR

LIEUT. A. R. POSTON

SJT. A. W. BARNES

SJT. A. G. BIRCH

CPL. A. S. RIDER

TPR. L. B. BEARD

TPR. A. J. BIDDLECOMBE

TPR. L. C. BIRCH

TPR. G. S. BLAKE

TPR. D. C. A. BROMBY

TPR. J. J. CLEARY

TPR. F. H. DOWNES

TPR. J. F. LANG

TPR. R. MILLER

TPR. A. W. MUIR

TPR. F. D. OVERTON

TPR. G. T. PAGE

TPR. E. B. A. PENNINGTON

TPR. E. WHITEHOUSE

LIST OF HONOURS AND AWARDS

MILITARY CROSS

Major	S. P. M.	Sutton
Major	H. P.	Stanyon
Major	R. F.	Bell
Capt	B.	Taylor
Capt	M. A.	Sutton
Lt	W. S.	Hall

MILITARY MEDAL

Sjt	R.	Lindsay
Sjt	G. A.	Glover

MEMBER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Capt	M. J.	Eedy
Lt (QM)	J. J.	Reynolds
ROMS	W. H.	Evans
MQMS	E.	Carmen
TQMS	L.	Fry

BRITISH EMPIRE MEDAL

Sjt	R.	Harwood
Sjt	D.	Wiswell

MENTIONED IN DESPACHES

Major	• B. A.	Wallace
Major	H. P.	Stanyon
Lt	B. H.	Pear
Lt	D. C.	Potter
Lt	D. C.	Bright
Sjt	D.	Poole
Sjt	C. R.	Carter
Sjt	T. W.	McMahon
Sjt	C. E. J.	Whybrow
Sjt	R.	Byrne
Sjt	J.	Wilson
Sjt	M. W. J.	Fowler
Cpl	A. R. N.	Adcock
Cpl	A. T.	McCall
Cpl	J. E.	Thompson (REME)
L/Cpl	A. W.	Milburn

CROIX DE GUERRE WITH SILVER STAR

Lt	D. C.	Potter
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CROIX DE GUERRE WITH BRONCE STAR

Cpl	A. R. N.	Adcock
Cpl	H. W.	Roberts

COMMANDER - IN - CHIEF'S CERTIFICATE

SSM	A. J.	Webb
SQMS	P. A.	Hudson
SQMS	C. G.	Hunt
ORQMS	A. V.	Waldron
Sjt	R. F.	Dawson
Sjt	A.	Potts
Cpl	E. J.	Richardson
Cpl	F. H.	Bennett (REME)

