

The supporting squadron of 10 Cdn Armd Regt lost two tanks and the Essex a jeep and several carriers. Late in the afternoon Brigadier Cabeldu ordered R.H.L.I. to relieve Lt-Col Pangnan's battalion at Hooghalen. Essex Scot was urged to press on following the main axis while R. Regt C. swung to the right in a wide hook calculated to take the defences of Assen from the right and rear. (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, April 1945, serial 3668, also W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 12 Apr 45; also 10 Cdn Armd Regt, 12 Apr 45)

239. A running fight continued all the way up to the southern outskirts of Assen, the enemy using his weapons skillfully at each obstacle. By carefully co-ordinated manoeuvres, however Lt-Col Pangnan secured a foothold on the edge of the town and began clearing the woods on his flanks. Meanwhile the "Royals", in Kangaroos, swept forward to the east of Assen, where 8 Cdn Recce Regt had reported little opposition. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 12 Apr 45). During the night brigade headquarters found it difficult to keep in contact with the right hook. Communications were bad and added to this many of the vehicles (including 12 Kangaroos) broke down or became mired along the marshy roads. Nevertheless, the column worked its way past Anen (2483) and on to Rolde (2788). At Rolde Lt-Col R.M. Londrum stopped a while, while reconnaissance groups went out to explore to routes north and west of the town. (Ibid, 13 Apr 45) Leaving one company to hold Rolde, "A" Coy was sent on to seize Loon (2491). Here the enemy fired on the column but to no avail, the leading vehicles crashed on into the village with Brownings blazing. It provided a spectacular sight, the Kangaroos going in at 30 miles an hour with all guns in action. Opposition crumpled rapidly and the infantry scrambled out to consolidate. (Ibid)

240. There now occurred an incident which was to have considerable influence on the situation. West of the village of Loon (2491) there is a bridge (2391) across the Noord-Willems canal (this canal is the main water route leading north from Assen). This structure was fortunately seized intact enabling a force to cut the main axis at Leelo (2191), while another struck south towards Assen itself. It was at the main road - bridge north of the town that our troops and the enemy made a dramatic encounter, for as the Canadians appeared the Germans were about to blow up the bridge. In a short but heated action the enemy's engineers were "cut down" and only just in time, some of the enemy troops being killed at the switches they were about to throw. The bridge was thus saved and R. Regt C. entered the town to mop up. (Ibid, 13 Apr 45; also R. Regt C., 13 Apr 45). By this time Essex Scot was also well into the built - up section of the town and between them and the two infantry battalions netted a profitable dividend of 600 prisoners. It had been a good example of simple tactics; the German force completely surprised and beaten and many of the enemy whose task it had been to withdraw and fight other delaying actions, were out of the war. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Apr 45)

241. When Brigadier Cabeldu and his intelligence officer drove into Assen, liberation festivities were already under way:

The population literally were crazy with happiness over their liberation. Crowds cheered every vehicle. Women danced in the town parks and threw flowers to the passing troops. Those of the Bde bent on the more

---

\* Refer to G.S.G.S. 4414 1:25,000 Sheets 3005 - Assen,  
2905 - Zeien,



serious business of clearing the town had difficulty to keep a mind on the job in such surroundings.

(W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Apr 45)

Those among the civilian population who had "backed the wrong horse" were now called on to pay their debts of dishonour, and members of the underground set about rounding up the collaborators and herding them off to gaol. (Ibid)

THE APPROACHES TO GRONINGEN, 13 APR 45

242. The road to Groningen now lay open and it was decided to bring R.H.L.I. forward to take the lead. By 1100 hours 13 Apr, Lt-Col H.C. Arrell had his fighting companies in Assen, but it was 1215 hours before the forward elements were able to get clear of the cheering populace. The situation looked promising; on the left flank, "B" Sqn of the Royal Canadian Dragoons was "beating up" everything in sight and gathering in large numbers of prisoners; on the right the divisional reconnaissance cars were applying increasing pressure, while in the centre of the broad stretch of concrete road to Vries (2298) and Groningen the light infantrymen formed up to resume the journey north. (W.Ds., R.H.L.I., 8 Cdn Recce Regt, 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 13 Apr 45)

243. Within one hour R.H.L.I. was in Vries and, resistance being negligible, the troops pressed on to the main highway junction at Ide (2202). At this point, the Hamilton unit was ordered to follow the western route through Eelde (2105) past the Paterswolder Lake (2108) and into the south-western corner of the city. The brigade commander had carefully appreciated the possibilities of each line of advance and decided that the left route presented fewer natural obstacles than the eastern route beyond the Noord-Willems Canal. Besides, on that flank 8 Cdn Recce Regt was making quite good progress against scattered opposition. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 13 Apr 45; also 2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 13 Apr 45, serial 3924)

244. Along this western route R.H.L.I. met only slight opposition, and by 1600 hours tanks of 10 Cdn Armd Regt reported the the leading troops were about to enter the city. Brigadier Cabeldu ordered Lt-Col Arrell to seize all road and rail bridges in the western half of Groningen, adding that R. Regt C. would pass through to capture similar objectives to the east. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Apr 45). The enemy, however seemed reluctant to give up the city so easily, and, after about two hours of house fighting, it was clear that a set piece attack would be necessary. The brigade commander immediately came forward to size up the situation and after conferring with Lt-Col Arrell decided to put in a planned assault. It was appreciated that if this outer defensive crust could be broken through quickly, then the main defences might collapse and allow the original brigade plan to be carried out. (Ibid)

---

\* Refer to G.S.G.S. 4414 1:25,000 Sheets 2805 - Haren,  
2806 - Hoogeveen, 2705 - Groningen,  
2706 - Woltersum, 2905 - Zeien, Appx "A"



245. At about 2000 hours 13 Apr, R.H.L.I. commenced its attack with the help of engineers of 2 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E., whose task it was to clear the road of blocks and other obstruction. By darkness two companies had consolidated the south-western edge of the city and two others were pressing on toward the bridges. Resistance was by this time extremely heavy: there were snipers everywhere and together with the German machine gunners they took a severe toll. The street fighting continued all night -

...fierce hand to hand encounters - with our men having to clear every room of 4 storey apts and even then the snipers would come back again because our tps could not occupy so much space.

(W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 15 Apr 45)

Quite obviously greater pressure was needed to rout the defenders of Groningen and during the evening the brigadier told R. Regt C. to prepare for an assault across the canal on the right of R.H.L.I. the object being to seize the railway station and clear the canal banks. Meanwhile Essex Scot was moved up to the area of Eelde airport (2204), where, as reserve battalion, it awaited commitment. (Ibid and units, 13 Apr 45)

#### THE BATTLE OF GRONINGEN, 14 APR 45

246. Shortly after midnight 13/14 Apr R.H.L.I. reported that, although they had captured a bridge (214136) on their right, little progress was possible towards the canal north of the railway; for in that area resistance was extraordinarily heavy. As a result, R. Regt C. was ordered to use the recently won bridge instead of attempting the boat crossing previously arranged. At approximately 0200 hours the Royals got their leading infantry over the bridge and began to clear the railway yards and the station area. It was slow work, but by 0930 hours the bank of the main canal had been reached. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 13 Apr 45). At that time Maj-Gen Matthews came forward to confer with his brigadiers, and the plan for clearing the city was revised and discussed. 4 Cdn Inf Bde was given a limited area of responsibility which consisted of all of the built-up portion of Groningen south of the main canal. Brigadier McGill was to bring up his men and advance into the city from the west while the eastern part would be taken care of by 6 Cdn Inf Bde, which would come up on the following day through Haren (2409) and Helpman (2312) (Ibid). Accordingly Brigadier Cabellu readjusted his objectives. While R. Regt C. continued clearing the railroad area, Essex Scot would move to pass through eventually to the east, cut the Haren - Groningen road and link up with 6 Bde (Ibid).

247. By midday 14 Apr the areas occupied by R.H.L.I. and R. Regt C. were becoming quieter and the prisoners were literally pouring in. The Royals now dominated the main highway bridge north-east of the station yards but there still appeared to be much activity around the southern suburb of Helpman (2212). Shortly after midday Essex Scot began to pass through Lt-Col Lendrum's forward line of troops with "A" Company leading. Lt-Col Pangman's orders were to strike north across the bridge and then south towards Helpman where the enemy, who seemed to be

---

\* Reference maps: G.S.G.S. 4414 Eastern Holland 1:25,000 Sheets 2805 - Haren, 2705 - Groningen, Appx "B"



well established, was facing the proposed advance of 6 Cdn Inf Bde from the south. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 14 Apr 45). There now followed an intense bombardment of the area of Helpman, which lasted until approximately 1400 hours when "C" Coy Essex Scot and elements of 10 Cdn Armd Regt began to clear southwards. Meanwhile "A" Coy reinforced by "D" and "B" Coys contained the enemy around the bridge to the north. (Ibid)

248. The positions of Essex Scot around the bridge improved rapidly and by early evening Lt-Col Pangman's men were ready to rush the structure, which, so far, was undamaged. His plan was a most daring one. Three Kangaroos laden with infantry were to crash across and clear the German machine guns covering the bridge; these guns had already driven back a singularly brave effort by a section of "A" Coy with severe loss. The plan went astray however in that the Kangaroos arrived prematurely and attempted to cross the canal alone - a costly gesture which resulted in the loss of one of these valuable vehicles. Nevertheless two of the Kangaroos returned safely and within a short time had loaded the men and were seen roaring across the bridge. At 2000 hours the Essex reported that they had two platoons across. At this stage opposition was heavy but Lt-Col Pangman proceeded to reinforce his gains so that the engineers might check the bridge site for possible demolitions. This proved to be a lengthy task due to the hail of fire which descended upon the area, but within two and a half hours, Essex Scot reported the bridge clear and the bridgehead firm. (Ibid). Patrols were then dispatched into the centre of Groningen. At the same time, further south, "C" Coy stated that it had cleared the Sterre Bosch (2212), taken thirteen prisoners and had isolated another large group near the prison (2212). For the brigade and the Scottish it had been a day of proud achievement; the main route into the city had been forced open, a valuable springboard was ready for 6 Cdn Inf Bde coming up from the south, and a secure right flank had been provided for 5 Bde's entry from the west. (Ibid; also 2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log op cit, April 1945, 12 Apr, serial 3185)

\*

5 CDN INF BDE MOVES IN FROM THE WEST, 14 APR 45

249. Brigadier McGill's advance had begun at 1230 hours when Calg Highrs moved to Hoogkerk (1713) with orders to capture the bridge over the canal there. Once Hoogkerk was firm the brigade commander's intention was to launch R. de Mais against the Stadspark (2012) and the factory (1913-2013) on the right; R.H.C. was to reinforce whichever effort was the most successful. If Hoogkerk proved "soft enough" the Calgaries were to go on to Groningen supported by R. de Mais from the factory. On the other hand, if the seizure of Hoogkerk involved too much fighting then the Black Watch would pass through Calg Highrs to take over the attack on the western part of the city. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 14 Apr 45). As it happened, by 1530 hours Calg Highrs were complete in Hoogkerk and had captured the Class 18 Bridge (174143) there intact. No opposition had appeared thus far. Calg Highrs were therefore instructed to keep going and R. de Mais' attack against the factory area commenced. (Ibid)

250. This attack went in at 1500 hours. "D" Coy's objective was the crossroads at Rozenburg (1912), "A" Coy's, the

---

\* Reference maps as for para 246



rail and road junction some 600 yards to the north. Once these had been taken "C" Coy was to capture the factory (1913) along the canal and "B" Coy would seize the railway bridge (2013) further east. The first phase of the attack progressed well in spite of some delay on the left, where "A" Coy found the approaches to its objective blocked by an obstacle. "D" Coy however had no trouble getting to Rozenburg (1912). While "A" Coy cleared its way forward, "C" Coy, supported by tanks of the Fort Garry Horse, advanced into the factory area. (W.D., 10 Cdn Armd Regt, 14 Apr 45). Here the enemy had several well-sited 20-mm guns, but these were neutralized by the tanks. In the mopping up which followed "C" Coy captured one officer and forty-nine other ranks. Once the factory was clear, "B" Coy, which had passed through "A", swung eastwards past the factory to the railway bridge. The machine guns and snipers which barred the way were quickly disposed of with excellent result. The bridge was taken intact together with the two 20 mm guns which had been protecting it. The enemy tried to blow it up but were foiled in their effort by well directed small arms fire which killed or wounded all five of the demolition party. At about 1815 hours, Lt-Col J. Bibeau, D.S.O., was able to report success on all his objectives. (W.D., R. de Mais, 14 Apr 45). R. de Mais could now turn its efforts to supporting the Calgaries' attack, and in order to relieve Lt-Col Bibeau of any bother on his right flank, R.H.L.I. were ordered to sweep that area with carrier patrols. (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 12 Apr 45 serial 4164)

251. Calg Highrs did not waste much time in Hoogkerk. At 1630 hours, after a quick reorganization, "D" Coy set out for the western edge of Groningen. Supported by artillery and mortar fire the infantry covered the ground steadily and within two hours had a firm foothold on the western outskirts of the city. The situation improved rapidly, "A" and "B" Coys were sent up to exploit and by last light the battalion had consolidated its positions south of the railroad bridge (202147). W.Ds., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde and Calg Highrs, 14 Apr 45). From here Lt-Col W.D. Heyland was urged to press on to the bridge and put a company across if it was still intact. "C" Coy was detailed to this task and shortly after midnight 14/15 Apr it reported that a small bridgehead had been established. (Ibid, 15 Apr 45). It was now the turn of R.H.C. to cross the canal, build up the bridgehead and begin clearing to the north-east. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 14/15 Apr 45)

252. The fate of Groningen<sup>x</sup> was just about sealed. On either flank the armoured cars of the Dragoons and the scout cars of 8 Cdn Recce Regt were rapidly cutting the enemy's last routes of escape from the city and there was fair indication that the compression caused by the advancing infantry on the north-west and from the south-east would soon force the German garrison to surrender or flee in disorder along the few remaining roads to the north. The southern approaches were completely shut off. This had been accomplished by 6 Cdn Inf Bde which had launched Camerons of C. northwards from Haren (2409) at 1600 hours the previous afternoon. Little resistance was encountered by the Camerons of C. until they reached the southern part of Helpman. There the enemy, although pressed hard from the north by the Essex Scot, decided to show fight. His efforts however, were not to last. The four infantry companies (Camerons of C.) went about the task of clearing out and capturing Germans with great enthusiasm and shortly before 2300 hours Lt-Col A.A. Kennedy reported to Brigade Headquarters that Helpman was clear and that "C" and "D" Coys Camerons

---

<sup>x</sup> See Appx "B"



of C. were ready to enter Groningen (W.Ds., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 15 Apr 45) as soon as contact was made with Essex Scot, S. Sask R. and Fus M.R. were warned to be prepared to move up. These two battalions were to pass through 4 Cdn Inf Bde and clear the centre of the city. (Ibid)

253. In the early hours of 15 Apr, while R.H.C. of 5 Cdn Inf Bde passed through Calg Highrs to commence clearing operations on the north-western part of Groningen, Fus M.R. crossed the bridge previously captured by Essex Scot and struck out to sweep the right section of the centre of the city. Lt-Col V. Stotts' battalion soon followed the Fus M.R. and swung west. The clearing of a large built-up area is always a difficult task but our infantry went at it in a most determined manner. Fighting was very stiff throughout the day, many prisoners were taken but among the defenders there were still a fair number of fanatics who refused to give up and had to be driven from their hiding places. By evening, the centre of Groningen (which is surrounded by the canal) was clear of Germans. During the day 112 prisoners fell into the hands of Fus M.R. while S. Sask R's bag totalled 181. These figures included an uncommonly large proportion of officers. Brigadier Allard's other battalion, the Camerons, had also experienced some heavy fighting that morning especially around the power plant to the east of Helpman. However, they collected 140 prisoners and by night reported their area of responsibility free of all resistance. Thereafter, "B", "C" and "D" Coys carried out a systematic search of the sector while "A" Coy moved north to relieve Essex Scot around the bridge over which Fus M.R. and S. Sask R. had passed (W.Ds., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 15 Apr 45; also 2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log 15 Apr 45, serials 4239, 4247, 4246, 4288, 4290).

254. On the western flank, R.H.C. entered Groningen in a novel manner. After a brief reconnaissance by "B" and "C" company commanders, a barge was swung across the canal. In this way all but a few feet of the obstacle was bridged and the two leading companies were able to cross to the east bank without undue trouble by 0600 hours. An hour later "A" and "D" Coys moved up from Hoogkerk and also started to cross. "A" Coy went first, meeting only sniper fire from the Water Tower (206145), but only a few men of "D" Coy had got safely across when a hail of 20-mm gun and machine gun fire raked the barge and made things extremely hot for the infantry. At this point, however, some Dutch barges came to our assistance. They had acquired another barge with decks much lower than the first one and proceeded to lash both together so that the higher barge afforded a measure of cover against the heavy fire. Once on the east bank the battalion sorted itself out and with "A" and "D" Coy leading drove on towards the park (2111-2115). Meanwhile, efforts were being made to swing the railroad bridge into its proper place. This was at last accomplished by the carriers pulling the structure into position (W.Ds., 5 Cdn Inf Bde, R.H.C., 15 Apr 45). This meant that both wheeled and tracked support could now join the assault elements. The diary of the Black Watch gives a colourful description of the fight for this park:

On approaching the park it became necessary for all the coys to take cover and edge their way forward through the back gardens until they reached the houses facing the park itself. Here a pitched battle ensued, lasting over two hours, with our men using PIATs and brens, rifles and grenades, as well as 2" mortars against an enemy dug in in bunkers and slit trenches, returning our fire from 20mm, m.g. and s.a.. The opposition encountered at this stage was by far the heaviest encountered



so far in this operation. At 1555 hrs. all the 2" mortars in the coys. laid down heavily on the park and the flame sections fired a few bursts. Then the rifle coys assaulted the park. The enemy gave ground reluctantly, but upon being convinced that we meant to oust him from his prepared defences fled, or capitulated.

(W.D., R.H.C., 15 Apr 45)

255. The next move was for R. de Mais to go past R.H.C. and swing south and east. This occurred at about 2000 hours, the two leading companies going forward with the tanks of 10 Cdn Armd Regt. Some machine gun and 20 mm fire met our troops but did not stop them. The two remaining companies were then launched and by 2200 hours, R. de Mais had completed the task and taken over 100 prisoners. These together with the 247 already seized by R.H.C. made an impressive total for Brigadier Megill's formation. (W.Ds., R. de Mais, R.H.C., 15 Apr 45). By midnight the area held by 5 Cdn Inf Bde had quietened somewhat and most of the troops were able to get some sleep in order to be fresh for the next day's work. The final clearance of Groningen was thus left to the two brigades already in the city. The greater part of 4 Cdn Inf Bde had moved back to a concentration area near Haren leaving only "C" Coy, Essex Scot in the southern part of Groningen to protect the right flank of 6 Bde by taking up positions about the small wood north-east of Helpman. (W.Ds., H.Q. 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, R. de Mais, Essex Scot, R. Regt. C., R.H.L.I., 15 Apr 45)

\*  
THE SURRENDER OF GRONINGEN, 16 APR 45

256. 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes resumed the business of clearing in the city at first light. Brigadier Megill's men were particularly keen to get the job over with, for Maj-Gen Matthews had told the Brigade commander that as soon as Groningen and its northern approaches were clear the troops would have a day's complete rest. In the north-western section R.H.C. and R. de Mais had swept up to the main canal by 1230 hours; behind them Calg Highrs patrolled from Hoogkerk to the west and north to Dorkwerd (1818). (W.Ds., Calg Highrs, R.H.C., R. de Mais, 16 Apr 45). In 6 Cdn Inf Bde's area the enemy situation had deteriorated completely and by 1230 hours all resistance had ceased; Camerons of C., who were moved into the eastern sector of the city, met no opposition. Within this lovely city the spirit of joy of liberation was felt and shown by young and old alike, and the Canadians were treated royally wherever they went. Groningen had fallen, and with it vanished the enemy's last main centre of communication in Northern Holland. There was still much to be done however; the place had to be secured, the sea to be reached and all means of escape denied to the scattered Germans. Therefore, while 6 Cdn Inf Bde consolidated and scoured the eastern outskirts for prisoners to add to its grand total of 1052 for the past two days, Brigadier Megill was preparing to continue his journey north-eastwards. R.H.C. was now ordered to cross the Groningen Canal and seize a bridgehead. (W.Ds., H.Q. 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes and units)

257. This task fell to "A" Coy R.H.C., but owing to the fact that the engineers were not in favour of bridging at the old bridge site, the operation was postponed for a time. Meanwhile, during the afternoon one officer on a reconnaissance to the west discovered the village of Drachten as well as the ground between it and Groningen had been well searched by the Royal Canadian Dragoons. This made any further move westwards by 5 Bde

---

\* Reference maps as for para 246, Appx "B"



unnecessary. Early that evening "A" Coy's task was reconsidered and begun, barges were lashed together to make a bridge and attack on Noorderhoogebrug (2216) went in supported by the weapons of the carrier platoon. Before darkness set in the Black Watch was firm around Noorderhoogebrug but quite suddenly there was a change of plan and 5 Bde was ordered to withdraw from its present positions and return into Groningen. (W.D., R.H.C., 16 Apr 45). 5 Cdn Inf Bde now settled down to forty-eight hours of comparative relaxation during which the area occupied was given a final sweep over. The next two days were put to good use, the troops rested up their equipment and waited for the order that was to send them eastwards again, this time into Germany. (W.Ds., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 16-18 Apr 45)

258. On assuming responsibility for the sweep to the coast 6 Cdn Inf Bde formed its plan. Each battalion would form a base from which strong patrols could operate in all directions covered by elements of 8 Cdn Recce Regt, which (on the right flank) already had some scout cars of "A" and "C" Sqns roving in the area of Delfzijl (4527) on the Ems estuary: (2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, April 1945, 16 Apr serials 4465, 4469, 4493). On the left and closing to the sea 1 Cdn Armd C. Regt (in assisting 3 Cdn Inf Div) had also made a large contribution towards the completion of Maj-Gen Matthew's task. The Dragoons were at present holding such places as Baflo (1830), which is directly north of Groningen. Some glimpse of the adventures experienced by the R.C.D. may be caught from a message which the Dragoons sent to Headquarters 2 Cdn Inf Div. It arrived at 1710 hours and read as follows:

Fwd tps now at Baflo. Meeting pockets of resistance 15-20 men. Some guns reported but none encountered. Still some of our tps 3 Cdn Inf Div area tying in with 3 Cdn Inf Div. Estimate we have killed and captured over 2000 (conservative estimate) in last 48 hours. Were unable to handle all PW - turned them over to 3 Cdn Inf Div. Handed over 200 to 3 Cdn Inf Div this morning. Op last two days has been a successive slaughter of the enemy. Would like 48 hours to refit vehs after present commitment and before next op.

(Ibid; serial 4498)

259. Early on 17 Apr 6 Cdn Inf Bde began its trip north. Camerons of C. went first and established themselves at Ten Boer (3020). Next S. Sask R. firmed up between Zuidwolde (2319) and Bedum (2423); Fus M.R. tailed along to settle around Thesinge (2719). The move was completed by 1200 hours and all three units detailed their outpost positions and patrols. There being no sign of the enemy, the men were able to rest and refit (W.Ds., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 16-17 Apr 45). In completing its task, 2 Cdn Inf Div had pretty well established a record of which history must obviously approve. In the 20 days from 29 Mar to 17 Apr the division had advanced 120 miles from their crossing of the Rhine at Rees to the proximity of the North Sea. Nearly 5000 prisoners had been taken, the divisional engineers had erected eighteen bridges including sixteen Class 40 Baileys and a total of 1540 miles of signal cable had been laid. These achievements, however, were not gained without a great sacrifice; the division had lost 44 officers and 768 other ranks in killed, wounded and missing since 29 Mar. (AEF: 45/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket II: Monthly Summary of Ops and Activities, H.Q., 2 Cdn Inf Div, 1 Apr 45 - 30 Apr 45; Appx "A"; Statistical record of mileage covered and prisoners taken; Appx "B"; Brs constructed by R.C.E. 2 Cdn Inf Div after crossing R. Rhine; Appx "D" Casualties 2 Cdn Inf Div 30 Mar - 16 Apr 45)



OPERATIONS OF 1 POL ARMD DIV, 11-18 APR 45\*

260. All the time that the infantry divisions had been reaching out for the sea coast to the north, the parallel armoured thrusts by 1 Pol and 4 Cdn Armd Divs were making steady progress against a gradually stiffening resistance over country which was ideally suited to German defensive tactics. Maj-Gen Maczek's troops had the following tasks:

- (a) To advance NORTH on axis COEVORDEN V3252 - EMMEN V4467 - NIEUWE SCHANS Q6410
- (b) To construct a class 40 br at HAREN V6768 and adv NORTH on axis HAREN - PAPENBURG V7899 - LEER Q8116 and patrol to EMDEN Q6531
- (c) To develop class 40 Route from LEER to NIEUWE SCHANS

(AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/C/H, Docket V: April 1945, Liaison Officers Reports 101600 B, S02 Liaison 2 Cdn Corps, para 2)

Aided by the Belgian Special Air Service troops who were holding the area of Coevorden and patrolling the western flank towards 2 Cdn Inf Div's sector, the Polish armoured reconnaissance regiment and motor battalion, situated at Oosterhesselen (3162) and Emmen (4366) respectively, started to probe forward on the morning of 11 Apr. The routes to the north, however, were not easy ones to travel over and the going was very slow. Nevertheless by the evening of 11 Apr, while 3 Pol Inf Bde Gp was moving up to the main line of resistance, the armoured reconnaissance regiment was patrolling in force towards the western flank (2473) on the left while on the right the motor battalion had struck out from Emmen (4466) to reach Valthe (4372), Odoorn (4073) and Exlo (4176). (Ibid, G.O. 4 of 111100B, also) (AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/H, Docket I: Ops Log 11 Apr 45, serials 49, 67, 78, 80; 12 Apr 45, serial 38)

261. During the night 11/12 Apr 3 Pol Inf Bde Gp moved past Emmen and headed east and by 0900 hours (12 Apr) held a fairly secure line astride the route Weerdinggermond (5175) - Haren (6665), but at this point several obstacles in the form of blown bridges were discovered and it became clear that no armoured advance would be possible until these bridges were repaired. Throughout 12 Apr the infantry brigade group held its ground and patrolled northwards. Further to the west both the armoured reconnaissance regiment and the motor battalion managed to edge forward during the day and their movement continued slowly but steadily throughout the night and the early hours of the following day. By 0700 hours 13 Apr the armoured reconnaissance regiment was on its way up the left flank to Rolde (2788) where it was eventually to contact troops of 2 Cdn Inf Div. At the same time, in the centre, one group from 10 Pol Mot Bn was meeting stiff opposition on either side of Borger (3681) which it was trying hard to take out so that some assistance might be rendered to the hard pressed French paratroops (SAS) around Gasselte (3686) further south. On the right 3 Inf Bde Gp had made by far the most progress. Onstwedde (5393) had been taken by a detachment of the Special Air Service regiment operating under Maj-Gen Maczek's command, Vlagtwedde (5793) had been seized and the approaches to Rhede (6896) were being secured. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, op cit, 13 Apr 45; serials 15, 16; also 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log, op cit, 13 Apr 45; serial 23)

\* Reference maps; G.S.G.S. 4083, Holland 1:50,000 Sheet 22 - Coevorden, also G.S.G.S. 4416, Central Europe 1:100,000 Sheets M1 - Groningen, M2 - Oldenburg. See also Appx "A".



262. The general situation improved rapidly as the hours passed. Although 10 Pol Armd Bde Gp was still unable to move eastwards until the route to Haren was repaired, the security of the route was strengthened and operations to the north and north-west were kept moving. On the western flank, the Poles contacted elements of 8 Cdn Recce Regt at Rolde (2788), took Gieten (3590), and relieved the French (S.A.S.) at Gasselte (3686). In the centre elements of the Belgian S.A.S. having forced the canal at Veele (5794) had secured Wedde (5597) and were moving on Blijham (5601); at the same time, on the right, Boertange (6390) was being threatened. Further south along the road to Haren the Polish sappers were working feverishly in order to provide a road for the impatient armour. It was a slow, trying process but finally the work was completed and Maj-Gen Maczek sent a message to the Commander of 2 Cdn Corps saying that all would be ready for 10 Pol Armd Bde Gp to advance at 0815 hours on the following morning. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, op cit, 14 Apr 45, serials 3, 11, 12; 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log op cit, 13 Apr 45, serial 44; First Cdn Army Ops Log op cit, 14 Apr 45, serial 20)

263. The Polish armour crossed the Ems early on 14 Apr and turned north. Progress was very slow throughout the day for deployment was difficult and there were more than a few obstructions along the northern road. However, by nightfall the leading troops of the armoured brigade group were within 3000 yards of the Kusten Canal but were being held up by a blown bridge around which the enemy had established a strong defensive position. West of the Ems River 3 Pol Inf Bde had 8 Inf Bn thrusting out of Boertange (6390) in a wide pronged effort north towards Rhede (6896) and south in the direction of the line Dersum (6885) - Dorpen (7185). The enemy in this region occupied particularly good positions and took such good advantage of the defensive characteristics of the terrain that a slugging match ensued. Very little headway could be made towards the river itself. In Blijham (5502) the S.A.S. were similarly being held up by obstacles rather than by resistance. Moreover, since these airborne warriors were at present deprived of the use of their armoured jeeps (their only means of transport), they could not move on Winschoten (5306). The most successful operations for the day were on the left, where 1 Pol Inf Bn had spread out its line of advance to take Veendam (4201) and to capture a bridge at the road junction 4000 yards north of that place. It now held the surrounding hamlets of Nieuwepekelé (4696), Meeden (4605), Westerlee (4805) and Heiligerlee (5006), thus securing the western approach to Winschoten (5306). On the far left a firm contact was being kept with the scout cars of 8 Cdn Recce Regt. The intention now was to capture Winschoten with 3 Pol Inf Bde and to advance on Papenburg with the armoured brigade while elements of the motor battalion swung north from Haren to follow the west bank of the river and clear northwards. (2 Cdn Corps Op Log op cit, 15 Apr 45, serials 1, 10, 20; also 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log op cit, 15 Apr 45, serial 4)

264. Offensive operations continued all across the Polish front on 15 Apr. On the right, the armoured brigade's effort met with little success. An attempt by 9 Pol Inf Bde to force the Kusten Canal\* failed and Maj-Gen Maczek asked that he

---

\* Polish troops had taken over this area from 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, who had previously relieved troops of 10 Cdn Inf Bde.



be given the support of <sup>"</sup>~~G~~rocodiles. As these weapons were not to be available for some time, additional support in the form of 4 Cdn Med Regt was dispatched to assist in creating the bridgehead. Along the west bank of the river Ems 10 Pol Mot Bn succeeded in clearing up to the Dutch-German frontier and in so doing liberated a number of prisoner of war camps; because of the demolished bridges part of this advance was made on foot. By far the best news came from the Headquarters of 3 Pol Inf Bde, which stated that the enemy's line of resistance east of Boertange (6390) had been broken (but only after the Poles had repelled several German counter-attacks) and that the area south of Rhede was in our hands. Besides this Winschoten and the village of Beerta (5608) to the north-east had fallen to a combined assault by 8 Pol Inf Bn and the S.A.S. Further to our northern flank Eexta (4809) and Oostwolde (5312) had been occupied, the road between these two places being firmly held by 1 Pol Inf Bn. The next task was to reduce the village of Nieuwe Schans (6409), and with this aim in mind 3 Pol Inf Bde started to re-group. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log op cit, 14 Apr 45, serials 38, 42; 15 Apr 45, serials 1, 10, 20, 23, 33, 39, 41; 16 Apr 45, serials 1, 4, 13)

265. On 16 Apr, while the armour on the east side of the Ems River continued to probe the enemy's positions covering the Kusten Canal, the left flank made good gains. The motor battalion cleared up to Rhede from the south, another battle group which had travelled north to seize Stapelmoor (7204) was within two miles of the larger community of Weener (7408), which from all accounts was heavily defended. The advance on Nieuwe Schans (6409) had also gone well; the outskirts of the village were reached and a start made on rebuilding the bridge. The place itself appeared to be deserted. Further to the north-west Polish patrols were closing on Wagenborgen (4617) but in this area the enemy was reacting with some violence. Apparently he still had in the vicinity several good artillery pieces with which he harassed the Polish soldiers continually. These guns were in all probability part of the outer flak defences of Emden. There still were many small but well organized pockets of Germans and the wiping out of them was to take up a good part of the next 48 hours. (Ibid, 16 Apr 45, serials 13, 16, 21; 17 Apr 45, serials 1, 10, 17; 18 Apr 45, serial 4)

266. Widespread activity by strong fighting patrols and small battle groups was the order for 17 and 18 Apr. On the left the road junction of Siddeburen (4211) was consolidated from Eexta (4808) and Oostwolde (5411) 8 Pol Inf Bn pushed on east to Finsterwolde (5711). Local encounters were numerous. Rhede was captured after a stiff fight and the troops pressed on to Midwolda (5111) while the motor battalion swept up from the south to cover the area of Borsum (6993). To the south of Borsum a squadron of the Polish Armd Recce Regt went in to mop up Heede with orders to consolidate this hamlet, which had long been a local stronghold for the enemy. By 2030 hours 18 Apr Borsum and Heede were declared clear. At about this time it became evident that to advance further would be to tempt the main defences of Emden with its long range naval guns and it was decided that the weight of the division was to be thrown behind 10 Polish Armoured Brigade's effort on the Kusten Canal. A regrouping was at once ordered to make this possible and the motor battalion and one armoured regt took over responsibility for all ground west of the Ems to its contact boundaries with 2 Cdn Inf Div. 10 Pol Armd Bde, now faced with the task of assaulting across the Kusten Canal, was reinforced with extra



infantry. The tentative timing for the attack was 1030 hours 19 Apr, but there was a chance that this operation might have to be delayed until the promised crocodiles arrived to add their support. (Ibid, 18 Apr, serials 14, 16, 20, 21; also 2 Cdn Corps Liaison Offrs Report op cit, 171800B, G Ops, H.Q.; also 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log as above, 18 Apr 45, serials 1, 23, 70)

267. The reasons for the relative slowness of Maj-Gen Maczek's operations must be sought in the prevailing conditions of ground, weather, resistance and of that most important factor, morale. In dealing with these factors in that order it can be safely stated that the ground is not in any way the best an armoured formation could hope for. The acres north of Coevorden bounded by the Ems River on the east and the Dollart to the north are low lying and intersected by thousands of minor canals and deep drainage ditches. The land is generally flat with little cover; the roads are good only in dry weather but, rain or shine, there is no deviation from them for the purpose of manoeuvre by military vehicles. Across the vast expanse of waterlogged country, the condition of the roads dictated the tactics, and in so doing restricted the use of armour on the only three routes northward. On the left travel was possible from Oosterhesselen (3162) then to Borger (3681) along two inferior roads; through Schoonoord (3472) or through Emmen (4366) and Odoorn (3973). Passage through Emmen was also necessary to get on to the other two routes, the eastern through Ter Apel (5676) and Haren (6665) to follow the west bank of the Ems. The nearer route must also pass through Ter Apel (5676) in order to reach Boertange (6390) - Heede (6697) and larger places like Winschoten (5306) which barred the way to the sea. Only when the line Rolde (2788) - Gieten (3590) - Onstwedde (5393) was secure could there be any larger choice of lines of advance.\*

268. The enemy's task was to delay and his answer was the defence of vital points, crossroads, bridge sites, and railway embankments. He did not require any defensive armour, only the odd infantry-gun\*\* or anti-tank gun, a few men at each vital point and an arrangement for mutual support in his delaying action and the withdrawal which followed. The manner in which the German soldier applies his weapons to the ground has always been admirable. It did not fall short of its usual high standard in opposing the Poles. Perhaps his best example of the relation of defensive outposts to his plan and the situation were the positions in the hamlets of Rhede (6896), Borsum (6984) and Heede (7188). These three little places which lie along the west bank of the Ems River east of Boertange (6390) were actually a light flank protection screen to the Germans who faced 9 Pol Inf Bn (10 Pol Armd Bde Gp) on the Kusten Canal east of the Ems. All three hamlets were ideally located for flank defence, being almost unapproachable from the west or south. However, this temporary invulnerability lay not only in their choice locations but in the excellent adoption of the principle of security by demolition. Similarly, in many other outposts the enemy was able to delay us by blowing the bridges and culverts and forced the infantry to retain the initiative without close support. For the enemy these tactics meant valuable hours, for the Poles they meant casualties and dispersal on ground which, soggy and exposed as it was, did not invite individual effort.

---

\* Reference maps: G.S.G.S. 4416, Central Europe 1:100,000 Sheets M1 - Groningen, M2 - Oldenburg, N1 - Almelo.

\*\* A German short range weapon (75-mm How) specifically designed for the close support of infantry. Six of these pieces are normally found in the heavy weapons company of a German regiment.



269. Such trying conditions invariably result in a severe set-back to morale, but added to this the Polish officer and soldier had another worry. The area of Maj-Gen Maczek's activities was known to contain several concentration camps in which there languished hundreds of Polish women. Many of these were wives of men serving in the Polish formation. The first camp (6172) was overrun by 2 Pol Armd Regt on the evening of 12 Apr in a small wooded area some 7000 yards north-east of Haren and just off the Weerdingermund (5173) - Haren Road. At this place of horror over 1700 Polish females were found in dire need of help. The Poles, though overjoyed at the prospect of reunion with members of their families, also experienced the utter sorrow of seeing how their countrywomen had been treated. It only remains to say that with each liberation the hatred for the nation responsible increased. (G.S.G.S. 4416, Map Central Europe 1:100,000 Sheet M1-GRONINGEN; First Cdn Army, Ops Log op cit, 12 Apr 45, serial 157)

#### OPERATIONS OF 4 CDN ARMD DIV, 11-19 APR 45\*

270. While Maj-Gen Maczek's Polish troops had been battering away at the enemy's defences astride the Ems River, Lt-Gen Simonds' other armoured thrust by 4 Cdn Armd Div had made spectacular progress against some fanatical resistance and all under the most trying of ground conditions. It had been a continued struggle against Germans and the mud, but these endeavours were made to show considerable profit for by 18 Apr Maj-Gen Vokes' men were across the Kusten Canal. However, in order to prove the significance of the effort it is necessary to trace the operations of the "green patch" division from 11 Apr. On that day Maj-Gen Vokes' men struck out from the line of Borgerwald (8486) - Borger (8679), Sogel (8571) - Werlte (9672) with 10 Cdn Inf Bde on the left and 4 Cdn Armd Bde on the right. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde and units, 10 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 11 Apr 45)

271. Brigadier Jefferson's group, which was now composed of Alq R. and 28 Armd Regt, had the task of securing the division's left flank as represented by the line of the Kusten Canal. With this aim in view, a battle group made up of "A" Coy Alq R. and "A" Sqn of the armoured regiment was hurled against Breddenburg (9184), where the enemy was located on a strong defensive position. (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde; Alq R., 11 Apr 45). Meanwhile another company ("B"), together with "B" Squadron of 28 Cdn Armd Regt, held Borgerwald (8586). At this time "C" Company and "C" Squadron were located around Neuborger (8184) while "D" Company remained further to the west astride the original centre line (the road to Papenburg). The attack on Breddenburg which began at 1000 hours was carefully planned, and just as well that it was, for "A" Company and the tanks met with terrific opposition. The fierce fight, which lasted until 1400 hours, was, however, totally successful. The Algonquins killed thirty-two Germans and captured fifty-four, thus accounting for the entire enemy force in that area. Our own losses were four killed, including an officer from the supporting armour,

---

\* Reference maps: G.S.G.S. 4414, Western Germany 1:25,000 Sheets 3209 - Haren, 3210 - Kl. Berssen, 3111 - Sogel, 3112 - Werlte, 3001 - Esterwegen, 3012 - Neuarenburg, 2913 - Friesoythe; G.S.G.S. 4416, Central Europe 1:100,000 Sheet M2 - Oldenburg. See also Appx "C".



and eight wounded. It was a remarkable feat which could only have been accomplished by troops thoroughly imbued with the spirit of battle. (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, Alq R., 28 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 Apr 45)

272. As soon as our position at Breddenburg was consolidated, Lt-Col R.A. Bradburn (Alq R.) sent his carriers through to cut the main road leading to the north-east from Lorup (9380) and a strong fighting patrol north towards Esterwegen (9388), where it settled for the remainder of the day. On the northern flank around Borgerwald (8585) and Borger (8679) things were quiet; neither "B" nor "C" Companies had much to report except routine patrols to ensure the security of their respective areas. (W.D., Alq R. 11 Apr 45)

273. Although the infantry brigade had been gaining ground steadily, the limelight on 11 Apr was held mainly by Brigadier Moncel's troops, who had begun widespread operations at first light. First to move was Lake Sup R. (Mot), which had the task of clearing the wooded areas north-east of Sogel (8571). Then at 0810 hours the brigadier ordered 21 Cdn Armd Regt with "A" Coy A. & S.H. of C. to take Borger (8679). This did not prove to be a hard task and by 1100 hours the place was ours. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, Lake Sup R. (Mot); 21 Armd Regt; A. & S.H. of C., 11 Apr 45). The tactics involved were simple - one squadron formed up on the reverse slope of the hill south of the town, while another squadron moved to the right flank. Suddenly the southern force cleared the crest of the hill and dashed toward Borger with all guns firing; at the same time the right hook came in to mop up. The enemy was in no mood to put up any struggle against such forceful tactics. (W.D., 21 Cdn Armd Regt, 11 Apr 45)

274. With Borger clear and with the "Superiors" firm at Spahn (8974) and advancing on Harrenstatte (9275) (after clearing the wooded area north-east of Sogel), the right flank force of Linc & Welld R. in Werlte (9672) was busy sweeping through the village. By 1100 hours only a few snipers remained in Werlte (9672). While the rifle companies dealt with these Lt-Col Coleman had his carriers patrol north along the road to Lorup (9380). That route was reported clear of enemy but well obstructed by a road block about half way up; this, however, was soon tackled by the pioneers. Then, at 1345 hours, the general plan for Linc & Welld R. was changed, the battalion being ordered to move towards Lindern (0732). For this task "C" Company was recalled from Sogel (8571) and within a short time the new advance was under way with "A" Company on the right and "C" Company on the left. Led by some reconnaissance tanks of 21 Cdn Armd Regt the column went forward, but not very far; the tanks came under heavy fire and one was hit. The volume of fire made it clear that the enemy was lying in wait and, after a tactical reconnaissance plane had confirmed that the bridge on the main road was demolished, the attack was called off. The infantry returned to Werlte where another change in plan awaited them. Meanwhile A. & S.H. of C. had arrived in Werlte to take over the town and Linc & Welld R. was ordered to march north to occupy Lorup (9380) by first light on the following day. (W.Ds., Linc & Welld R., A. & S.H. of C., 11 Apr 45)

275. The advance on Lorup from Sogel had involved some interesting manoeuvre and clearly displayed the value of movement by mutually supporting battle groups. A glance at the map is sufficient to convey the ground picture. From Sogel to Lorup a centre line runs over fairly high country through two small built up areas (Spahn and Harrenstatte) and several large woods.



The well wooded left flank provided a marked danger as did the open right flank until the dominant spot heights were seized. Brigadier Moncel fully appreciated that Lorup might prove a centre of heavy resistance if it were not soon taken and in his orders he stressed the necessity for speed. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 11 Apr 45)

276. By midday 11 Apr Harrenstatte (9275) had been left behind and the advance on Lorup was under way. On the right along the main road was 22 Cdn Armd Regt (commanded by one of Canada's youngest and most brilliant commanding officers, Lt-Col E.A. Amy, D.S.O., M.C.) with elements of A. & S.H. of C. and Lake Sup R. (Mot). At the same time "C" Company of Lake Sup R. (Mot) swung out to the left flank from Spahn to follow the secondary road which runs over the high wooded area west of the road Harrenstatte - Lorup. On the main axis, "D" Coy of Lake Sup R. (Mot) moved first, advancing on the left of the road while the main armoured column travelled straight for the high ground astride the road Werlte - Lorup which dominated Lorup itself. By 1600 hours "D" Coy was overlooking the open area south-west of the town and the armour was in an equally favourable position, having established itself on the woody heights immediately south of Lorup. At this point, while the main armoured force and "A" Coy Lake Sup R. (Mot) consolidated the dominating ground, Lt-Col Amy ordered "D" Coy A. & S.H. of C. to assault the town from the firm base. Within the hour the Highlanders had secured the southern part of Lorup and had taken over twenty prisoners; "A" Coy Lake Sup R. (Mot) was then ordered to move in. Lorup was reported clear at 1825 hours and Lt-Col Amy was instructed to firm up for the night on the wooded hills to the north-east. This was finally accomplished but only after some fairly heavy fighting by the tanks and the Superiors around the northern outskirts. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 22 Cdn Armd Regt, Lake Sup R. (Mot), A. & S.H. of C., 11 Apr 45; 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log op cit, 11 Apr 45, serials 40, 46, 63, 57, 60 and 85)

277. The basic plan for 12 Apr was for Lt-Col Keane's troops (Lake Sup R. (Mot)) to press on to Neuvrees (0396) and for 21 Armd Regt to capture Vrees (0276). To this end the Foot Guards handed Borger over to troops of 10 Cdn Inf Bde and began their journey south towards Werlte. In the meantime the companies of A. & S.H. of C. which had recently been brought forward in "Kangaroos" to Werlte, had deployed to rest and reorganize for the next days work. That same night Linc & Welld R., also under new orders, sent its "D" and "B" Companies on to the area of Lorup. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde and units; also A. & S.H. of C., Linc & Welld R., 11-12 Apr 45). At first light 12 Apr the battle group of Foot Guards and Argyles commenced its advance on Vrees (0276) by way of Bockholte (9874). There was no opposition, but a road block forced the armour to by-pass Bockholte (9874), which was left in flames for the infantry to clear. Although progress was mostly slow, by 0900 hours elements of A. & S.H. of C. were in Vrees. Two hours later, after sweeping through the town, the infantry were given the task of clearing the Forst Klemenswerth (0481) which lies north of the town. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 21 Cdn Armd Regt and A. & S.H. of C., 12 Apr 45; also 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log op cit, 12 Apr 45, serials 10, 11, 15 and 30)

278. Meanwhile Lake Sup R. (Mot), working ahead on the proposed divisional centre line (Lorup - Neuvrees - Friesoythe), had reached Neulorup (9987) and had patrols probing north-west to Neuscharrel (0290). By that time Linc & Welld R.



had also arrived in Lorup and Lt-Col Coleman was instructed to move his troops forward to Neuarenburg (0186) and then to advance on Markhausen (0683) accompanied by elements of 22 Cdn Armd Regt with a view to forcing the river west of that place. Darkness found Linc & Welld R. positioned in the woods less than 1500 yards from their objective; a reconnaissance of the route to it had been completed and patrols reported Markhausen (0683) clear but the area very heavily mined. On the northern flank Lake Sup R. (Mot) had been luckier; Lt-Col Keane's patrols had crossed the water obstacle east of Neuvees and, since no contact with the enemy had been made, Brigadier Moncel ordered that a motor company be pushed forward under cover of darkness to a position around the second road junction south-west of Friesoythe (0892). "B" Company was selected for this job and at 0200 hours 13 Apr the infantrymen crept forward. The advance met no resistance and before first light "B" Company had dug itself into a firm position from which the enemy's movements in Friesoythe could be observed. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, Linc & Welld R., Lake Sup R. (Mot), 21 Apr 45; also 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log op cit, 12 Apr 45 serials 63, 13 Apr 45, serial 12)

279. The measure of resistance already met in such places as Lorup indicated to Brigadier Moncel that Friesoythe, the next large town and itself a road centre of some importance, would probably be well defended. Furthermore, elements of 1 Brit S.A.S. Regt which were operating south-west of the town had earlier sent Maj-Gen Vokes the following message:

Infm re FRIESOYTHE as at night 11/12 Apr. Fifty ambbs in town. Also eight 20-mm quadruple AA guns HD. 4 HD 88-mm guns along road TERBROK - FRIESOYTHE twelve 20-mm guns also four trees ready to be felled as rd blocks. Estimates str in town of enemy all ranks five to six hundred. CCS appears to be in town. Feel that if proper attack put in enemy will get out.

(4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log as above,  
12 Apr 45, serial 64)

In anticipation of the need of extra weight of fire power, air support had been requested and one of the high-lights of the days operations had been provided by the smooth co-operation between the A.S.S.U.,\* the Contact tank and the men in the air. Between them they smashed much of the opposition which confronted the armoured brigade. (W.D, H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 12 Apr 45)

280. The provision of close air support is always a difficult problem, for it is apt to be both dangerous to our own troops and wasteful. For a long time it had been felt that some definite contact between ground and air was needed to correct any instructions which may have been given in the demand for air support submitted earlier. To quote Brigadier Moncel:

What we needed was an Air FOO - a man who could talk to the aircraft in their own language and who could, above all, live with and get to know the ground troops that he was supporting.

(AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/F, Docket II:  
folio 6, The Contact Tank, some brief notes  
on its origin and employment by Col R.W.  
Moncel, D.S.O., O.B.E.)

---

\* Air Support Signals unit



At the beginning of the second week in April, 1945, an aerial F.O.O. did, in fact, make his appearance at Headquarters 4 Cdn Armd Bde, bringing with him a tank which the brigade had been instructed to send back many months before to be fitted with V.H.F.\* wireless equipment for use as a contact tank. Although at the time of its departure few members of the Brigade headquarters had ever hoped to see it again, on that spring day Brigadier Moncel was surprised to see the faithful machine reappear, but with a strangely assorted crew.

The tank was commanded by an R.A.F. pilot officer who felt very much out of his element and appeared to be decidedly unhappy. He announced that he was "Longbow Nan", for such was his call sign and needless to say that became his name for all time.

(Ibid)

281. . It must be noted that the operations at this time were of a widespread fluid nature, the brigade operating in four different battle groups. Hence it became imperative to have a means of aerial contact well forward with the main effort in order to get the fighter-bombers onto the target quickly and accurately. The enemy operating around such pivots as Lorup and Friesoythe was delaying us considerably while he built up the canal defences to the rear. The approaches to Friesoythe were typical of the average stronghold in this area. There were only three roads leading into the town from the west and south and, although they were all in fair condition, the enemy had deployed a series of defensive outposts (some of these mutually supporting) which our infantry would have found extremely costly to overcome. Furthermore, the ground bordering these roads did not lend itself to manoeuvre by armour since it was too soft nor by infantry since it was more or less devoid of cover. The arrival of the Contact Tank therefore opened "new fighting horizons" for the armoured brigade. Its commander stated:

We had a new weapon, one that could move at a tremendous speed, could observe the enemy, could be directed, and could strike with devastating effect. It did not take long for the old fear of the Tiffies to disappear and by the time we had captured Friesoythe, Longbow's fame had spread throughout the entire organization. During this battle, Longbow was operating from Brigade Headquarters directing aircraft on pre-arranged targets - it was difficult country and the condition of the ground made deployment impossible - tanks were limited to the main roads. Energetic patrolling under cover of darkness and smoke had uncovered most of the enemy strong points and, with the coming of light, it was an easy matter to direct the aircraft onto known targets.

(Ibid)

Small wonder that 4 Cdn Armd Bde placed such high value on its "Longbow".

282. Throughout 12 Apr 10 Cdn Inf Bde guarded the line of the Kusten Canal from Borgerwald to Esterwegen (9338). During the afternoon one of the Alq R. - 28 Cdn Armd Regt battle groups

---

\* Very high frequency



found its way into Neuscharrel (0290), around which elements of 1 Brit S.A.S. Regt were also operating as a flank link with the armoured brigade. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 12 Apr 45). On the division's southern flank a squadron of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt was maintaining contact with troops of 43(W) Inf Div. These armoured cars had entered Lindern (0372) and were continuing to probe to the north, east and south. (W.D., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 12 Apr 45; also Appx 12, map depicting routes of squadrons 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt; also 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log op cit, 12 Apr 45, serials 13, 19, and 40). With his flanks thus secured, the commander of 4 Cdn Armd Bde now planned to seize Friesoythe and reach the canal to the north. But some regrouping was necessary and late on 12 Apr, 21 Cdn Armd Regt and "A" Coy A. & S.H. of C. were ordered to move from Vrees to Neuvrees to reinforce the main effort. By this time, however, the route through Lorup was too heavily burdened with traffic and the route running through the Forst Klemenswerth was blocked by obstacles. Some time therefore had to be devoted to reconnaissance of other roads over which the column could pass. Finally, late on 12 Apr the Foot Guards column began to plod its way to Neuvrees over the route which runs due north-west of Vrees then swings right to follow the western edge of the Forst Klemenswerth and thus approaches Neuvrees from the south-west. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde and 21 Cdn Armd Regt, A. & S.H. of C., 12-13 Apr 45)

283. Early on the morning of 13 Apr 4 Cdn Armd Bde opened the attack on Friesoythe with Lake Sup R. (Mot) moving on the town from Ellerbrok (0487). At the same time further to the south Linc & Welld R. was to strike out from Markhausen (0683) to the east to cut the road Friesoythe - Cloppenburg. At 0900 hours "A" Company Lake Sup R. (Mot) pushed out from the battalion's forward line and, accompanied by the scout platoon, approached the town on foot. The advanced elements got within small arms range of the town's outskirts when suddenly they were engulfed in a hail of fire - rifle, machine gun and mortar. Finding it impossible to proceed any further, the infantrymen dug in on the left of the nearest road junction south-west of the town. Casualties were heavy; two men were killed and nineteen others wounded including the company commander. Nevertheless, Major R. Colquhoun refused to leave his men in such dire straits and he remained at his post until the battered company was ordered to withdraw later. At 1430 hours "C" Coy relieved "A" Coy and spent the remainder of the day in observing and shooting up the enemy's positions. After dark Lt-Col Keane re-adjusted his company areas in order to be able to support A. & S.H. of C. in their attack on the following day. "C" Coy was moved forward to within 500 yards of Friesoythe astride the main road and "B" Coy was then shifted to the right of "C" Coy to overlook the Cloppenburg road. From these positions, the Argyles were to be given close support when they assaulted the town. (W.Ds., 4 Cdn Armd Bde, units; A. & S.H. of C., 13 Apr 45)

284. While the Superiors manoeuvred for position south-west of Friesoythe, Linc & Welld R. and 21 Cdn Armd Regt made great progress on the right. The sappers bridged the stream west of Markhausen and shortly after first light two of Lt-Col Coleman's companies were in the village, which was found to be well mined. The engineers immediately set about "delousing" the area and a patrol from Linc & Welld R. was dispatched to contact the Superiors at Ellenbrok (0587). The advance then continued eastwards towards Mittelsten - Thule (1285) with "B" Coy leading. Late that afternoon Linc & Welld R. was ready to enter the village but, since the bridge was out, no close supporting arms could be brought up. Nevertheless the infantry



set about clearing the buildings, and while this went on the engineers started to work on the bridge. It was hoped that this bridge would be completed by first light so that the advance northward to link up with the forces attacking Friesoythe could be resumed. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, Linc & Wellb R., 13 Apr 45)

#### THE ASSAULT ON FRIESOYTHE, 14 APR 45<sup>\*</sup>

285. The direct assault on Friesoythe went in at first light 14 Apr. The plan of attack was one of the boldest ever drawn up. In order to facilitate the problem of communications the heavy 19 sets of the Argyles, normally carried in vehicles, were to be taken along strapped on stretchers and man-handled by the assaulting troops. Now that the Lake Sup R. (Mot) threatened the south-western approaches along the main highway, it was hoped that the better part of the enemy's strength would be pre-occupied in that direction. An opportunity would thus be provided for carrying out a surprise out-flanking move from the right. At 1800 hours 13 Apr Lt-Col F.E. Wigle, D.S.O., O.B.E., outlined his plan. The scouts would first tape out a route to the south-eastern outskirts of the town. Then at 2330 hours the rifle companies and Tactical headquarters would be taken by T.C.V. to a debussing point on the main highway some two miles from Friesoythe. From there the troops would move on foot to the east, cross the main road Friesoythe - Cloppenburg and form up south-east of the town between the road and the railway. The forming-up place was to be occupied by 0200 hours 14 Apr. (W.D., H.Q. A. & S.H. of C., 12 Apr 45). Lt-Col F.E. Wigle moved to the head of his troops and at the appointed hour led them off in single file into the darkness on their urgent journey; the noise of the movement being covered partly by an artillery programme fired by the divisional guns. (R.A. Spencer, History of the Fifteenth Canadian Regiment, R.C.A., p. 251.)

286. As the morning of 14 Apr dawned, the weather became cold and a bitter north wind blew down upon the Highlanders, but they had not long to wait; the signal was given and in the gloom of the early light three infantry companies rose up and headed for Friesoythe. It soon became apparent that the bold plan was working, for by 0700 hours the troops were well into the town and not meeting heavy opposition. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde; A. & S.H. of C., 14 Apr 45). The house-clearing operations continued but it must be assumed that certain bodies of the enemy had been by-passed for quite suddenly Lt-Col Wigle's tactical headquarters was heavily counter-attacked. The enemy appeared without warning and the Argyle's controlling staff was soon involved in a terrific fire-fight. The enemy, obviously elated to find such a prize unattended, closed in and some fierce hand-to-hand encounters took place. It was during this close-quarter fighting that the German paratroopers sprayed machine gun fire into the very building from which Lt-Col Wigle was conducting the battle. Amid this hail of fire Lt-Col Wigle walked calmly from one position to another encouraging his men, then suddenly as he crossed the hallway he was struck down. Thus a gallant officer died. (Ibid)

---

\* Refer to map 1:25,000 Sheet 2913 - Friesoythe



287. The enemy's attack did not last long. The Highlanders fought like madmen and held their own until "A" Coy was pulled back from the centre of the town to reinforce the headquarters group. By 1030 hours the town of Friesoythe was clear and soon afterwards the engineers had completed a bridge (0891) so that the tanks of 22 Cdn Armd Regt could enter the town to assist in the consolidation. (Ibid: and W.D., 22 Cdn Armd Regt, 14 Apr 45). Meanwhile some assistance had been given to A. & S.H. of C. by the Lake Superiors, who had initially contributed to the main attack by giving fire support from the western outskirts and then moved into the town. Actually some of Lt-Col Keane's troops had got forward in time to join in the battle around the Argyle's headquarters, supported by two tanks of the Canadian Grenadier Guards. The action west of the town had started at first light when "C" Company (Lake Sup R. (Mot)) crossed the water obstacle and cleared the area bounded by the railway on the north and the canal on the west. This secured the necessary bridgehead to allow the sappers to start work on the bridge. Unfortunately, the equipment was not readily at hand, but, rather than wait, Lt-Col Keane used a scissors bridge tank to span the gap. This enabled "C" Company, its vehicles and its armoured support, to get on. After the enemy's efforts against the Argyles had subsided, the motorized infantrymen passed through to the north-east to attack and capture the area south of the school (094927) and thereby secure the left flank of Linc & Welld R's objective on the high ground at Altenoythe (0992-1092). (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 22 Cdn Armd Regt; Lake Sup R. (Mot) 14 Apr 45)

288. Since there was a good possibility that the Kusten Canal could be reached before dark, fresh orders were given to Lt-Col Keane's other companies. "B", which had been holding the right flank and patrolling towards Linc & Welld R., was ordered to go through "C" Coy. The Commanding Officer's scout platoon (No. 13 Pl) was to follow up and had special instructions to pass through "B" Coy at the first opportunity and rush ahead to seize the bridge at Edewechterdamm (137994). "D" and "A" Coys were to remain in Friesoythe with battalion headquarters and would await developments. If the bridge was taken, it was Lt-Col Keane's intention to put his entire battalion across the Kusten Canal. (W.D., Lake Sup R. (Mot) 14 Apr 45)

289. At 1800 hours "B" Coy began its advance along the centre line but against strong opposition. While it did so the rest of the unit mounted vehicles and waited north-east of Friesoythe, ready to make a run for the Canal. Finally the leading elements reached the first objective (the houses south of Pirgo (114948)) and the scout platoon took up the task. The scouts got to the small bridge (122960) over the Lahe stream and three of their carriers crossed it; the fourth vehicle was not so lucky for the enemy suddenly blew the bridge. Of the Three Germans involved in this incident one was killed and the others taken prisoner. Undaunted by this unfortunate event, the scouts sought a way around the demolition. They found one on the right flank, where another bridge existed across the Lahe, north of Wolfstange (125949). It was over this route that "B" Coy was directed, but here again the mud and bad "going" forced many of the vehicles to a standstill and the infantrymen were obliged to go ahead on foot. "B" Coy finally firmed up due north-east of the bridge around a large crater which blocked the main road. An attempt was now made to move the rest of the battalion around to the right, but in a short time the light bridge (1295) over the Lahe collapsed and the advance bogged



down once more. Until a suitable road across the crater could be made further advance was impossible. "B" Company and the scouts therefore proceeded to consolidate what ground had been gained. A covering force then established itself astride the main road east of the wrecked bridge, thus allowing the engineers to work. The remainder of Lake Sup R. (Mot) could do little else but return to the main axis, remount on what vehicles were available, and wait for the sappers to open the route. (W.Ds., 4 Cdn Armd Bde, Lake Sup R. (Mot) 14 Apr 45)

290. The armoured brigade's southern effort by Linc & Welld R. had also been successful. By 0630 hours the bridging task west of Mitttesten - Thule (1185) was finished and the rifle companies were all firm in that village with "C" Coy on the main road ready to start clearing the way north. (W.D., Linc & Welld R., 14 Apr 45). An hour later the advance began against moderate opposition which was suitably disposed of by the supporting tanks of 21 Cdn Armd Regt. Progress was slow, mainly on account of several obstacles, but by 1430 hours Lt-Col Coleman's leading troops were within 3000 yards of Friesoythe. Since this town was already in our hands the brigade commander ordered Linc & Welld R. to switch its line of advance eastwards to a final objective on the high feature at Altenoythe (0992). Thence the surrounding ground could be dominated and a perfect seal would be established across the escape route from Friesoythe. Led by "A" Coy, the Linc & Welld R. pressed on throughout the afternoon and evening, but the water-logged fields prevented the tanks from following and they had to remain on the original axis until another route could be found for them. Nevertheless, the infantry made the best of it and by 2230 hours were firmly established on the Altenoythe feature. (Ibid and 21 Cdn Armd Regt, 14 Apr 45; also 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log op cit, 14 Apr 45, serials 15, 17, 41, 83 and 87; also AEF 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/D Docket II: Folio 5, Operations of Linc & Welld R., 31 Mar - 6 May 45, by Lt-Col R.C. Coleman)

291. On the following morning, while Linc & Welld R. sorted itself out prior to moving further east towards Kronsberg (1390) and Bosel (1490), Lake Sup R. (Mot) was instructed to maintain pressure towards the Kusten Canal. At the same time A. & S.H. of C. and one squadron of 22 Cdn Armd Regt took on the responsibility of the left flanking areas towards Schwaneburg (0695) and Kampe (0699). (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 15 Apr 45). Advanced elements of the Lake Sup R. (Mot) began moving slowly at first light; "B" Coy rose out of its positions around the crater and after a short march was able to see the canal. The enemy was observed and engaged; in turn he retaliated to delay the Canadians and, as if to signify his grand finale in that sector, he blew up the bridge which spanned the Kusten Canal. It now rested with Lake Sup R. (Mot) to close up to the water obstacle and consolidate. This it accomplished but only after being severely mauled by shell and mortar fire on the way up. Finally by mid-day "B" and "C" Coys were in new positions on either side of the road and within a few yards of the canal itself. It was clear at this point that the remainder of the motor battalion could not be immediately fitted into the narrow salient leading to the canal because the road was too narrow and vehicles could not be deployed. The two sub-units employed at present were considered sufficient to hold the axis, and so Lt-Col Keane was ordered to move back his motor column, which had been waiting patiently on the road for several hours. This move, which entailed turning the entire motor column around on a road which showed every sign of collapsing, was completed with great difficulty, but some compensation was forthcoming to the



weary soldiers. When the troops reached their new concentration area around Altenoythe they were told that the present task of the armoured brigade was over. A. & S.H. of C. and Linc & Welld R. were to revert to command 10 Cdn Inf Bde at 1800 hours. Later that evening the Argyles would relieve the motorized infantrymen who now held the approaches to the Kusten Canal. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde and units, 15 Apr 45)

292. Meanwhile the operations on the flanks by A. & S.H. of C. and Linc & Welld R. had also produced some measure of success. North of Friesoythe two companies of Highlanders together with elements of 22 Cdn Armd Regt had pushed along the roads of Kampe (0699) and Schwaneburg (0695) and swept the area to secure the left flank. (W.Ds., A. & S.H. of C.; 22 Cdn Armd Regt, 13 Apr 45; also 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log op cit, 15 Apr 45, serials 19, 43, 50). South of Friesoythe Lt-Col Coleman's men had followed up their patrols towards Kronsberg (1390) and linked up once again with tanks of 21 Cdn Armd Regt, which had found a route up from the road Mittelsten-Thule - Friesoythe. After Kronsberg was consolidated by "A" Coy, orders were issued for a full-scale attack on Bosel (1490) and Osterloh (1690). This advance began at 1620 hours with the infantry going forward against light opposition. "A" Coy still led the way along the centre line, forcefully knocking out any resistance it met, while on the flanks "B" and "C" Coys mopped up. As the day ended the leading troops found themselves in Osterloh (1690), and there "A" Coy firmed up. Behind it and between Kronsberg and Bosel "C" Coy occupied a good position on high ground and patrolled northward in strength. Further south "B" Coy consolidated between the main road and the railway and despatched patrols towards Sudkamp (1488). By that time "D" Coy had also been brought forward to settle astride the main road at the southern edge of the Kronsberg feature. With this much accomplished in so short a time Linc & Welld R. now awaited new instructions from 10 Cdn Inf Bde, who had reassumed control of its senior infantry battalion. (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 10 Cdn Inf Bde, Linc & Welld R., 21 Cdn Armd Regt, 15 Apr 45; also 4 Cdn Armd Div Ops Log as above, 15 Apr 45, serials 16, 19, 54, 73, 99)

#### 10 CDN INF BDE TAKES OVER THE ADVANCE, 15-16 APR 45\*

293. The take-over by Brigadier Jefferson's headquarters implied that the current phase of operations was over in so far as the armoured brigade was concerned. A pause for regrouping and rest was in order. The armoured units (less 28 Cdn Armd Regt, which remained with 10 Bde) were therefore ordered to concentrate for reorganization and refitting. Rarely was a relief so welcomed by all ranks. Throughout the past two and a half weeks the battle had been continuous, especially so for the motor battalion whose operations had bordered on the spectacular. It remains only to add that if and when tactical investigators are called upon to select a model operation and one which will provide a multitude of valuable lessons for future wars, there can be no doubt but that the work of Lake Sup R. (Mot) during that fortnight will stand out above all others. Brigadier Moncel's troops could now take their well earned rest knowing that they had accomplished a tremendous task in a magnificent manner. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 16 Apr 45)

---

\* Map reference: G.S.G.S. 4414, Western Germany 1:25,000 Sheets 2913 - Friesoythe, 2813 - Edeweicht.



294. 10 Cdn Inf Bde had already begun to concentrate near Friesoythe some hours before the command of the sector changed hands. The role of flank protection along the Kusten Canal was handed over to 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt by Alq R. and 28 Cdn Armd Regt who were soon to be given the task of assaulting across the water obstacle at Edewechterdamm (1399). Once this relief and that of the 4 Bde's forward localities was completed, Brigadier Jefferson and his staff took stock of the brigade's situation and began to plan for the crossing. The enemy's defences were tested on the main axes leading north of Friesoythe (Kampe and Edewechterdamm) but, after careful consideration had been given to the ground condition of each route, it was decided to attack on the right (at Edewechterdamm). (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 13-15 Apr 45 incl). In order to soften up the German positions north of Kusten, Maj-Gen Vokes promised the commander 10 Cdn Inf Bde a full programme of air support for the next day and sent him the Contact tank which Brigadier Moncel had used to such good advantage. (Ibid)

OPERATIONS ON MAJ-GEN VOKES' RIGHT BY  
29 CDN ARMD RECCE REGT, 14-16 APR 45<sup>2</sup>

295. While the enemy was being driven back to his canal defences by the armour, Maj-Gen Vokes' armoured reconnaissance unit had broken out from Vrees (0276) on the right flank and was scattering the enemy in all directions. Under the command of Lt-Col G.D. Wotherspoon, D.S.O., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (The South Alberta Regt) had the task of seizing Garrel (1984), forming up there, and then swinging over to Friesoythe. For this operation the armoured reconnaissance regiment was to co-operate with a squadron of 1 Brit S.A.S. Regt. At 1130 hours 13 Apr "C" Squadron moved out of Vrees and headed in a north-easterly direction to Neu Markhausen (0779). After a considerable amount of reconnaissance a bridge-site was selected at Neu Markhausen and, with the help of "B" Squadron, "C" began to cross at 1800 hours. The commanding officer then decided to build another bridge east of Vrees; this was completed at 0400 hours 14 Apr and a short while later "A" Squadron was over. (W.D., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 13 Apr 45). Only scattered resistance was encountered. The tanks went through Gronheim (0976) at 0700 hours and by mid-day "A" Squadron was well beyond Dwergte (1076) heading for the bridge across the Soeste Stream north-west of Resthausen (1576). At about this time "B" Squadron also crossed the obstacle and swung to the north-east of Dwergte (1076) into a position equidistant between "A" and "C" Squadrons, which had been ordered to proceed to the bridge which Linc & Welld R. was building at Mittelsten - Thule (1185) to cross the stream there. As darkness fell "A" Squadron, having bridged the obstacle at Neumuhlen (1477), was firm on the rising ground between Resthausen (1576) and Stedingermuhlen (1474), "B" Squadron was in the area of two projected bridge sites north of Neumuhlen while "C" Squadron waited at Mittelsten - Thule (1185). (Ibid: 14 Apr 45)

---

\* Reference maps: G.S.G.S. 4414, Western Germany 1:25,000  
Sheets 3013 - Markhausen, 3014 - Garrel,  
3015 - Grossenkneten, 3112 - Werlte,  
3113 - Molbergen, 3114 - Cloppenburg.



296. During the night 14/15 Apr the engineers completed a bridge in "B" Squadron's area north of Neumuhlen (1477); the tanks crossed the river at 0300 hours (15 Apr) and at once began to expand the bridgehead. By 1000 hours the South Albertans had taken some fifty prisoners, and, shortly after, "A" Squadron passed through towards Varrelbusch (1877). Varrelbusch fell at about 1300 hours after a sharp fight and the tanks rolled on north towards Garrel (1984). During the afternoon Lt-Col Wotherspoon regrouped his force. "B" Squadron which had so far not ventured from the bridgehead, was ordered to guard the left flank and approach Garrel from the south-east. "C" Squadron, which had spent most of the morning in shooting up the heavily wooded areas south-west of Garrel, was directed to swing around the southern part of Varrelbusch (1877), then turn north to seize first the airfield which lies east of the Battel - Cloppenburg railway and then the community of Amerika (2081). "A" Squadron would press its attack towards Garrel. In accordance with these orders "C" Squadron passed through Varrelbusch at 1730 hours and quickly turned to the north. (W.D., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 14-15 Apr 45)

297. The airfield was captured without too much trouble, but at approximately 2000 hours, as the armour plunged on towards its final objective, the enemy showed his hand. Two self-propelled guns and a heavy tank engaged our troops and a bitter exchange of shot followed. The lighter German vehicles were soon put out of action; the tank, however, continued to put up a terrific fire fight until darkness came. A spectacular attack was then launched under parachute flares, but the Germans withdrew under cover of the smoke from the burning buildings nearby. The squadron ("C") now firmed up together with a troop of the Special Air Service and laid on its patrols, one of which contacted the British troops of 43(W) Inf Div presently employed in combing out the country north of Cloppenburg. West of the railway line "A" Squadron had also run into serious difficulties. Many craters obstructed the road from Varrelbusch to Garrel and, after several attempts had been made to approach Garrel along this route, the Commanding Officer decided to pull his tanks back to harbour. A properly co-ordinated attack on Garrel was clearly necessary and to this end Lt-Col Wotherspoon began to arrange his plans. (W.D., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 14-15 Apr 45; also AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/D, Docket II: Folio 3, Memorandum of Interview given by Lt-Col G.D. deS. Wotherspoon, 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, to Hist Offr 4 Cdn Armd Div, 19 May 45)

298. The attack on Garrel was launched at first light 16 Apr. "B" Squadron was directed toward the north-west section of the town; "A" Squadron was to cut the road leading out to the north-east; and "C" Squadron was ordered to secure first the crossroads at Amerika (2081) and Tweel (2183), then press on to seal off the town from the east. At 1100 hours, just as "A" and "B" Squadrons gained the first objectives, the civil authorities in Garrel offered to surrender. Lt-Col Wotherspoon's reply was that he would cease offensive action against the town providing his tanks were allowed to enter Garrel unmolested. As things turned out the first tank to enter the town was set aflame by bazooka fire and from then on the South Albertans wasted no time in either making or accepting peace overtures. Wherever a sign of opposition appeared, our tanks swamped it with fire. By early evening most of Garrel was clear but the existence of many mined areas right in the town prevented the Canadians from retaining physical control of the place. Therefore the squadrons were pulled back to the laagers occupied throughout the previous night. During the night, while Garrel was being heavily shelled by the enemy, our tank crews lingered outside of the town. Besides refitting and replenishing their



vehicles, they managed to recover eight other tanks and armoured recovery vehicles which had bogged down earlier. (Ibid). Garrel itself was to be swept out on the morning of 17 Apr and for this task "D" Coy Line & Welld R. came under command of the armoured reconnaissance regt. (Ibid)

299. In every operation there occurs some incident which causes speculation. The operations by 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt on 16 Apr produced one which might well have had startling results for all concerned. In the afternoon reconnaissance patrols had disclosed the presence of two companies of German infantry deployed along the line of the Aue stream east of Garrel. These troops, with a fair sized gun area to their rear, held positions to the north and south of the bridge 1800 yards east of Dannenkamp (1983). Lt-Col Wotherspoon appreciated that if his men could cross this obstacle and push through the gap in the Hintern Esch (2084) the way to Oldenburg would be clear. Alas, the only scissors bridge available at this time was some distance back at Varrelbusch. This was immediately sent for, but unfortunately the bridge-vehicle ran over a mine whilst crossing the airfield and blew up. But for this piece of bad luck, the river would have been crossed, the last defence line west of Oldenburg would probably have been broken, and Lt-Col Wotherspoon might well have entered Oldenburg on the following day. The incident shows clearly how the fortunes of war are (like the puppet) governed by the manipulation of many strings, and, should even the smallest of these strings snap, then the show must be stopped until suitable repairs are made. (Ibid)

#### 10 CDN INF BDE CROSS THE KUSTEN CANAL, 17-18 APR 45\*

300. The next step in Maj-Gen Vokes' operations was quite obvious; an assault must be made across the Kusten Canal. For this task he nominated 10 Cdn Inf Bde. In turn Brigadier Jefferson handed over responsibility for the attack to Lt-Col Bradburn's Algonquins, who, together with 28 Cdn Armd Regt, had been operating along the division's left flank. There was no doubt but that the enemy had sensed our intentions and was ready to offer considerable resistance in the defence of the Kusten Canal. Once crossed, there would be an unhindered passage to the great naval base at Wilhemshaven. From prisoners taken lately at Esterwegen (9390) it was learned that part of the canal line was held by marine battalions, \*\* probably fortress troops from the naval bases further north. Other identifications at Bosel (1490) and Kampe (0698) lent weight to the belief that 7 Para Div, which had so far been delaying our advance, had pulled back to cushion positions behind the Marines, who were to hold the canal line. (W.Ds., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div; 10 Cdn Inf Bde; Alq R., 16 Apr 45)

301. At approximately 1630 hours 16 Apr the commanding officer of Alq R. summoned his orders group and, in the presence of Brigadier Jefferson, outlined the plan of attack. The

---

\* Reference maps: G.S.G.S. 4414, Western Germany 1:25,000  
Sheets 2913 - Friesoythe, 2813 - Edewecht.

\*\* AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/L/F Docket I: Intelligence Summaries  
Intreps Nos 143, 14 Apr 45; No. 146, 17 Apr 45; No. 147,  
18 Apr 45.



battalion was to cross to the west of the main road; three companies ("B", "C" and "D") were to take part in the actual assault while "A" Company held the south bank secure and provided close fire support. As related beforehand elements of Lake Sup R. (Mot) had been first to reach the canal banks and had reported the bridge blown. The approaches to the bridge were not the choicest; the road itself was of secondary class and its foundations soggy from the spring thaw. On either side of it the "going" for armour was impossible, the area being mostly peat bog. Lt-Col R.A. Bradburn's plan was to move "A" Coy up to the south bank of the obstacle late on 16 Apr to deploy astride the main road. Later, under cover of darkness, a boat-erecting point would be established slightly to the rear of the forward troops on the east side of the road and the infantry would proceed there to pick up their boats. Having been allotted their collapsible craft, the companies would then be guided over a previously taped route to a forming up place west of the road where the troops would wait for H hour. At that time the companies would be formed up in extended line west from the bridge in the following order, "B", "D" and "C". "B" Coy, commanded by Major P.A. Mayer, was given the responsibility of seizing the initial bridgehead by establishing its platoons astride the old bridge-site and thrusting forward some 400 yards to the first group of buildings. While this was being done the other two companies would be sorting themselves out on the north bank of the canal. As soon as "B" Coy reported success, "D" Coy would move over to the east side of the road and "C" Coy would pass through to firm up further north along the main axis. "B" Coy, relieved of its tasks east of the road and ahead, was to use its free platoons to extend its holding westwards along the canal. For support, a timed artillery programme was laid on and in addition the heavy machine guns of 10 Cdn Indep M.G. Coy (N.B.R.) were brought forward to the south bank of the Kusten to provide close overhead fire for the crossing. (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 16 Apr 45; also Appx 5, The Assault Across the Kusten Canal - Personal Account by Major P.A. Mayer, Offr Comd "B" Coy: Alq R. 25 Apr 45; (also W.D., Alq R., 16 Apr 45))

302. The difficulties of the assault crossing of a canal at night are too numerous to mention. Success depends entirely upon the initiative of the men who paddle across the water, very often under a hail of fire against which their canvas craft offers no protection whatsoever. If caught by small arms fire in mid-stream, the soldier therefore must fire his own weapons from the boat and neutralize the opposition before he can land. Once he has landed, he must plunge into the darkness beyond to seek out and destroy his enemy in close combat. Such is the lot of the infantrymen. But, before he can launch his boats, the commander on the spot has much to plan - the forming up, local protection, supply of ammunition, communications, and a thousand and one other things. In consideration of the many intricate details of the plan which one of the assaulting companies followed, the company commander later wrote -

My plan was to form up the coy with its even boats in single file at the rear FUP. I would then go up to recon the south bank of the canal just to make sure of the ground ahead. Upon my return the boats were to be guided forward to the south bank, on approaching which the coy was to execute a RIGHT FORM. This meant that the boats would be in line abreast facing the canal. The line of boats would then move forward until the boat guides reached the road which runs parallel to the water; at this point the boats were



to stop. Each boat crew would lay its craft down quietly to the ground and lie down beside the boat. At H Hour (defined by the firing of the MMGs of 10 Cdn Indep MG Coy) each boat would be pushed into the water, loaded and paddled across. During the journey over the Brens in the bow of each boat were to fire at the crest of the opposite bank. We were to work along the lines of a definite drill. At H Hour as soon as the M.M.G. fire started each boat would head for the opposite bank. On the touch down the point man would get off to fasten the boat while the remainder of the boat load did a Right Form on him and went to ground. This would put the attacking force in line on the north bank.

(The Assault Across the Kusten Canal, op cit).

303. At 2130 hours that night the T.C.V's picked up the three assaulting companies and took them forward to a point some 2500 yards from the canal. From there the troops marched, following the road which was already under shell and mortar fire. There were frequent stops to take cover. The enemy knew that the attack must come along this road, for it was the only good one in the area. At that time it was crowded not only with marching troops but with R.C.A.S.C. lorries, heavily laden with bridging equipment. Besides all this, engineers' vehicles with other materials needed for the proposed bridge waited patiently for the attack to go in. H Hour was timed for 2400 hours. The commander of "B" Coy Alq R. can best relate what followed:

Owing to the slowness by personnel at the Boat Erecting Point, the attack, originally slated to go in at 2400 hours, was postponed until 0100 hours. This change in time gave us ample opportunity to get assembled and by 0045 hours the company was lined up in complete silence a few yards away from the south bank of the canal. The enemy who could be heard on the far bank apparently realized that something was afoot and a good deal of rifle and machine gun fire was directed onto the ground on which we were lying. A tribute to the discipline of the troops here is evident from the fact that although 4 men were hit, not one cried out to give our intention away. Finally at 0100 hours the MMGs began to fire, our shells started to pass over and as one man the company rose, picked up its boats and, having loaded up, pushed off across the darkened waters. The 15 yards width of canal was covered against fairly heavy fire which some of the enemy, standing on the north bank, poured onto us; but our own Brens in the bows of the boat replied and neutralized the opposition long enough to allow us to disembark. Our plan then proceeded without a single hitch.

(Ibid)

After a brief period of reorganization by the water's edge, the regimental war-cry resounded through the night and the infantrymen rushed forward to the assault. Twenty minutes of brisk hand-to-hand fighting and house-clearing followed, at the end of which the leading company was on all its objectives and had taken twenty-one prisoners. (Ibid)



304. In quick order "D" and "C" Coys passed through and adjusted themselves according to plan. The enemy had realized the importance of Maj-Gen Vokes' effort and began to rake every inch of the bridgehead with shell and mortar fire. As a result of this, bridging operations could not proceed and it was now up to the infantry to hang on until the tank support could be passed over the canal. (Ibid: and W.D., Alq R., 17 Apr 45). The battalion's position was poorly suited for defence, the centre line being bordered by many trees and crossed at right angles by numerous drainage ditches which were in turn lined by thick hedge-rows. The ground itself was very marshy and slit trenches reaching a depth of more than twelve inches immediately filled with water. In short, it was ideal terrain from the enemy's standpoint. He was soon to make excellent use of it. (AEF: 45/4 Cdn Armd Div/C/D, Docket II: Folio 4, "Ops and Activities of Alq R." - Apr-May 1945, by Maj L.C. Monk, 2 i/c)

305. The morning light failed to bring any physical form of retaliation, but it did reveal the tremendous toll taken by our artillery support and by the Vickers machine guns of the New Brunswick Rangers. The chatter of these guns had been most heartening during the original crossing and much of its success may be attributed to their presence on the south bank. The enemy had been so occupied by this stream of fire that he had not been able to stop the Canadian boats. Tribute to the machine gunners is paid by the Alq R. historian, who states:

The presence of these guns so close up attracted all the enemy's attention, as soon as he had recovered from his initial shock, he proceeded to pour mortar and shell fire among them. The crews took a terrible beating during those minutes, but their guts and determination was of the greatest value to the crossing.

(G.L. Cassidy: Warpath, p. 312)

#### THE ENEMY'S COUNTER-ATTACKS, 17-19 APR 45<sup>\*</sup>

306. As the hours of 17 Apr passed it became clear that our normally superior mobility was not going to count for much in this peat bog and our troops had to accept battle on the enemy's terms. Infiltration on a large scale began at about noon. It commenced on the left flank, where "B" Coy was being harassed by hidden snipers. Then, in the centre, "C" Coy, well forward on the main axis, was soon being counter-attacked by fire on three sides. Reports stated that the enemy was closing in. There now commenced a terrific fire fight in which our ground troops were supported not only by the divisional guns but by all available mortars and a squadron of Typhoons. By last light the situation was becoming critical; line communications were being severed as fast as they were repaired. Company headquarters were in many cases under direct small arms fire; then at 2000 hours, just after Lt-Col Bradburn had reinforced his position to the left of the bridge site, the German counter-attack came in. "C" Coy was overrun and had to withdraw. As it did so the artillery poured heavy volumes of fire into the area, which became a veritable hell for Canadians and Germans alike. The enemy led by a self-propelled gun actually got within fifty yards of the bridge site before he was forced back by our overwhelming gunfire. (W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, Alq R., 17 Apr 45; Ops and Activities of Alq R. op cit, para 16; also 4 Cdn Armd Div Intrep No. 147 as above.)

---

\* Reference maps as for para 293



307. A pause for breath during which the Algonquins took stock of the situation followed the enemy's withdrawal; but still the infiltration on the flanks continued. There was every indication that the enemy had lost heavily for, apart from 76 of his dead which were buried during the day, many other corpses in the field gray of the Wehrmacht and the dark blue of his Marine battalions littered the ditches. Throughout the day Brigadier Jefferson reinforced his canal positions; A. & S.H. of C. were moved across onto the western flank, relieving "B" Coy Alq R., which was thrust forward to regain the ground lost earlier along the centre-line. Added to this a company of Linc & Welld R. was pushed across the canal and directed towards the railway on the right flank. Back at the bridge shelling still prevented the engineers from spanning the obstacle, but, undaunted by their own mounting casualties, the sappers had managed to build a raft to ferry across ammunition, food and more anti-tank guns to the hard pressed foot soldiers. (Ops and Activities Alq R. op cit, para 17)

308. By last light 18 Apr the situation had improved considerably, thanks to the concentrated effort of the Typhoons sweeping down continually to rocket and strafe everything that moved ahead of our positions. These air attacks quietened the enemy mortars and guns sufficiently to allow bridging operations to proceed slowly and it was hoped to have the structure completed by dawn the following day. At this time Brigadier Jefferson's dispositions were as follows. Alq R. held the centre line from the bridge northwards for about 600 yards. On the left A. & S.H. of C. (commanded by Lt-Col A.F. Coffin) held the area to the left of the main road westwards to the first road and dyke junction and northwards as far as the first east-west track some 900 yards from the canal bank. On the right Linc & Welld R. (recently relieved at Bosel by the armoured brigade) had passed its "C" Coy through to the east to secure the line of the railway, but this force was now heavily involved in trying to reach the tracks so that "A" Coy could push on through to the north. Both flanks were difficult to keep secure, especially the left where the Argyles beat off no less than three sharp counter-attacks. As darkness descended on the battlefield the forward troops, tired though they were, settled down in their wet slits to watch and wait. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 18 Apr 45)

309. From the prisoners already taken the intelligence staff at Maj-Gen Vokes' headquarters was able to piece together a fair summary of the opposing forces in the Kusten bridgehead. It was established that the large counter-attack of the previous night had been launched by marine troops of 364 Marine Fortress Battalion, which had been rushed down from Wilhelmshaven and committed with special orders to force the Canadians back.

The bn was supported by a pl of paratps and three aslt guns, the parent units of which had NOT yet been identified. Apparently the marines were persuaded fwd by the paratps at the pistol pt. Cas are reported to have been very hy, one Sgt insisting that he was the sole survivor of his coy and another PW describing how from his weapon pit he could count fifty dead in a circle of thirty yds radius.

(W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 4  
Cdn Armd Div, 18 Apr 45)

These prisoners' reports represented a high tribute to the Canadian gunners, who, when informed, generously passed their



praise on to those stalwart friends of the infantry, the FOOs.\*  
Capt R.A. Spencer in his History of the 15 Cdn Fd Regt made special note of their work when he wrote:

Thus much of the credit for holding this bitterly contested bridgehead throughout these three days of almost incessant attack goes to the FOOs who coolly directed the devastating concentration of fire on the fanatical attacking infantry advancing in the open. Never before was the effect of shell fire so noticeable on the ground. The few houses along the road north of the canal into which the enemy had infiltrated were beaten into a mass of match-wood and rubble; trees were torn to gaunt skeletons; fields were covered with masses of shell holes; even the road was badly cratered as a result of the weight of bursting shells.... Throughout the 18th the guns spent a busy day. Gunners and command post staffs, spurred on by reports of the critical situation in the bridgehead, worked with a will and the response was never better. They had the satisfaction of knowing that it was their work which made it possible to retain a foothold over the canal.

(R.A. Spencer, History of the Fifteenth Canadian Field Regt, R.C.A., as above, p. 257)

310. But the canal line was even yet not secure. Realizing all too well the significance of this bridgehead, the enemy at about 0100 hours 19 Apr made his final bid to expel the Canadians. Unknown to the latter he had been infiltrating steadily for some time and suddenly, as the line of the canal was being subjected to the fiercest of bombardments, the forward companies felt the full impact of his savage assault. For the Algonquins it was a particularly bad moment. "B" Coy and its headquarters found itself beset from all directions and soon were being forced back along the main road.

The enemy attack was directed down the main axis and from the front Right flank. His supporting fire was very intense, but our own SOS, arty and mortar fire was maintained from 0100 hours until approx 0800 hours 19 Apr with telling effect. "B" Coy was, however, forced back some 300 yds into the "C" Coy area.

("Ops and Activities" Alq R.  
op cit, para 18)

Gradually the enemy's effort made itself felt all across the front. Both A. & S.H. of C. and Linc & Welld R. fought hard to hold their gains, but once more the power responsible for checking the German onslaught came from the artillery. At the gun pits the crews sweated to comply with orders for gun fire on the many choice targets which the FOOs observed. At the front the infantrymen also sweated in close combat with countless numbers of Germans who appeared as if by magic out of the night's haze. Casualties were heavy on both sides but by 0600 hours (19 Apr) the enemy had obviously had his fill. He could not dislodge the infantry, nor could he reach the Kusten Canal. His powerful march forward was now turned into a most bloody withdrawal and, as he pulled back, our guns blasted the very paths beneath him. (Ibid: also W.Ds., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 19 Apr 45)

---

\* Forward Observation Officers: one is normally attached to each forward company.