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3rd MEDIUM REGIMENT

ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY

The 3rd Medium Regiment was formed in 1942 combining a battery from each of our coastal provinces, and reinforced by members drawn from all parts of the Dominion. It was therefore a representative body of Canadian gunners. An attempt is made here to sketch in broad strokes the pattern of its experience in North West Europe omitting its trials and tribulations in Canada and England which are a story in themselves.

The Regiment never cared nor attempted to impress would-be admirers. Instead, it concentrated with quiet determination on the objective of impressing Nazi minds with the folly of their ambitions and desires. The unit possessed that spirit of "all for one and one for all" to an extent that it is impossible to sort out personalities contributing to its worth in battle. The unit possessed an appreciation of the important. It was its indifference to the unimportant that hid its quality from common view reserving it solely for the satisfaction of itself.

After the mastery of a prodigious volume of administrative, technical and other preparatory detail the Regiment left its English standings in Chipstead, Surrey, "Normandy Bound". The regiment was fully trained, confident and ready for battle. The importance of the task ahead was evidenced by the buzz-bombed streets of London and environments as we moved to the ships lying in bay at Tilbury Docks, that grey and cloudy morning of 4 July 1944.

At Tilbury personnel and equipment were loaded into the appropriately named liberty ships. We passed into the blue waters of the Thames Estuary awaiting the formation of our sea-wagon convoy. At last we were away from the congestion of English life. After formation of the convoy and the issuance of orders we slipped into the open waters of the North Sea and English Channel. This was a pleasant restful experience. Some slept, others wandered aimlessly around the decks, some gambled, others simply watched the clouds float by contemplating the past with intermittent visions of the future, all delighted in investigating the mysterious contents of the Compo Packs.

During the evening hours of a glorious day we approached the coast of Normandy. The deep rumble of battle could be heard, louder and louder as the minutes passed by and as the ships slipped forward through the calm coastal waters of Grey-sur-Mer. The bay was crowded with everything the mind could conceive to float, from the largest of battleships to the smallest of craft. All were set to an evening sky a maze of golden banners and rich hues beyond the grasp of even the artist. If nature, even through its beauty, omens the future, a prophecy was portrayed that evening. Soon the harbour was engulfed in darkness. The peace of the moment was broken only by the distant din of battle and the loud belching of HMS RODNEY in support of the land forces. The stars shone forth with twinkling brightness in contrast to the earthly violent replies in angry red -- a beautiful and magnificent stage for the unimaginable beauty of the fireworks display from the ack ack tracer shells in pursuit of a fleeting enemy aircraft.

On the 10th July 1944 we scrambled on to the sandy beach via lighters and proceeded up into a concentration area where we sorted ourselves into tactical groups, dewaterproofed, and generally made ourselves ready for the battlefield. Our first gun position was at Vieum Cairon, a sad little Norman village. The position was quickly prepared. The unit by this time was master of the art. An Observation Post crew was despatched and the unit awaited anxiously its first contribution to the battle. It came in the form of a bombard scale 5 at 2045 hours, 13 July 1944. From this moment to the end, the 3 Medium Regiment smashed, pounded and mauled the Nazis with increasing precision and efficiency.

In the course of events and passage of time, orders were received for the mammoth attack on Caen. This was launched one clear morning by thousands of aircraft which caused the earth to tremble with the crashing of bombs. The guns bellowed forth in a chorus with enemy anti-aircraft batteries as targets. Then the barrage began and the infantry and tanks waded forth in the Norman wheat fields. The work of the unit consisted of counter-battery fire, combined fire-tasks and the engagement of opportunity targets when called for by higher formation or our Observation Posts covering the front. With the capture of the River Orne and Faubourg de Vaucelles, the unit was ordered forward. On the 18th of July 1944 it moved to St. Contest Galmanche. Reconnaissance parties were despatched and the main body arranged itself for the move forward (one eye on the ground, the other on the sky). The move was carried out up the axis of advance, through miles of traffic. Vehicle wrecks and German dead littered the area. Clouds of dust filled the air. It was certain death in minefields to wander aimlessly off the road. Everywhere, there was to be seen feverish activity, bitter, grim determined faces of battle-weary young men. It was a most disturbing exhibition of the destructive and all-embracing results of the weapons and methods of modern war. French peasants trickled back, bewildered, frightened and overwrought from their experiences. Their dwellings were smashed. Many of their families lay in the rubble that was once

their homes. Arriving at our new area we found it saturated with the stench of dead, unburied Germans.

The unit engaged the enemy continuously and the great operations were only marked by a terrific increase in tempo which subsided as consolidation by the infantry and planning and arranging by the operations staffs were carried out. Our armour was engaged in a vast flanking sweep around Caen, while the Canucks smashed in a tighter circling movement through Faubourg de Vaucelles. A fabulous amount of fire-power was exchanged. Eventually our superiority slowly but surely forced the German, step by step backwards until our crossing and the bridgehead across the Orne running through Caen were assured. The enemy reacted to our drive with counter-attacks on our right flank. Our gunners swung their 5.5's around to meet the threat. Hour after hour in a downpour of rain target after target was engaged, simultaneously and consecutively. The gunners worked like devils--as if they were prepared to settle the outcome of the war then and there. The guns became boiling hot. The counter-attacks were smashed. The gunners, whilst throwing everything they had at the enemy in a combined verbal-artillery barrage, prepared for the move. Never had they worked so hard, or so successfully.

The move through ghastly Caen was carried out in the pitch black of night along ruined and battle strewn roads. A Caen reduced to rubble was engulfed in a deathly silence. Only the odd pointsman gave visible signs of life. Arriving at the east side of Faubourg de Vaucelles, the unit set about to dig its new home. To our left flank, the British artillery was pounding away like a thousand hands on a huge drum in support of the allied forced engaged in the vast flanking movement. To our front there was silence whilst our infantry consolidated and made ready for the morning and the inevitable counter-attacks. Wandering about our area we were continually startled by investigating dugouts and finding therein either sleeping British soldiers or dead "Jerries". You were never certain which.

This occupation was the beginning of a slugging match with the German artillery. "Jerry", realizing the threat of our positions started piling up his panzer divisions against us in order to stop the flood that was threatening to encircle his Normandy forces, and to open the gates to a sweep across France into Germany. To him, the Caen front had to be held and smashed. To us, this drawing in of German forces served our purpose, but increased our burden. This gathering in of forces loosened up resistance on the American front to our right, enabling them to begin an encircling movement commencing on their extreme right flank, designed to encircle forces opposing the remainder of their front. "Jerry" was determined to keep us from advancing, to prevent our locking in his forces, and to keep the path of the retreat open. Having gathered in his forces it was our task to either destroy those opposing us and close the gap or to close the gap and push them into the pocket for final annihilation. On no account were they to be allowed to retreat back into France. As these forces were gathered in they were subjected to a continual pounding by our artillery.

During the day the Regiment engaged targets called for by our ground OPs and Air OPs. It continually bombarded enemy gun positions and carried out fire-plans for local infantry and tank assaults. At night we subjected the enemy to a pounding with harassing fire, wearing him down, softening him up, dislocating his forces and preparing them for our next great operation. The plan was proving successful. The Americans had commenced their encircling movement and the time had arrived when we had to smash our way forward to complete the trap and prevent the disengaging of his forces. "Jerry" at first kept filling up the pocket but suddenly our pressure brought him to his senses. However, it was too late for him to do much about it. It was now a race to see if we could seal off the Normandy pocket before he had a chance to withdraw his multitudinous divisions from it. Remembering the abnormal opposition piled up on our front to keep the gap open, it was apparent that it would not be an easy task.

The importance of this moment merits clarification and

possibly repetition. After the establishment of our bridgehead, the German strategy was to attempt, by overwhelming force, to drive us back into the sea. We established a bridgehead but found it resisted by an iron ring. We needed space for buildup in order to acquire, on the continent, sufficient forces to destroy the German armies opposing us. This necessitated ever increasing pressure on the bridgehead perimeter. Finally, after progress in this regard we could find no soft spots through which to penetrate. Remembering that on the water leading back into England were vast forces ready to pour through such a weak spot, to tear into the enemy's vitals and destroy him, it was necessary for us to create such a circumstance. First a mammoth threatening drive through Caen, concentrated German forces there weakening other parts of his front. Then our almost endless line of forces struck at the soft right flank and commenced encircling and embracing the German Normandy forces. The German at this stage had one possible out. Providing he could hold the Caen Front, he could retire behind the Seine River and fight another battle. If he did not hold the Caen front all was lost in France. Our job therefore was both vital and difficult. It was at this moment that Operation "SPRING" was conceived and launched. Its purpose was the closing of the Falaise Gap and the ultimate destruction or capture of the German armies in N.W. France.

At the commencement of this operation the unit was deployed near the vital communications centre of Faubourg - the fulcrum of the whole operation. Owing to this we were subjected to the full fury of "Jerry's" assault on this point, from the air and by his artillery. Enemy night bombing and artillery fire kept blowing up our ammunition, killing and wounding our personnel, destroying our guns and vehicles, and bringing all to within an inch of their lives. No fire commitment was missed throughout the onslaught. This was our proving in battle.

Operation "SPRING" proved unsuccessful. The enemy stood firm and no matter how hard our infantry threw themselves at him he stood, determined not to yield. This necessitated further weeks

of continual artillery pounding and probing the infantry. A reshuffle of our forces took place. Our former partners, the 4th Cdn. Armoured Division moved into the line - a Division we were destined to support in our mad dash across France "on the heels of the Hun". The 4 Div. HQ moved into our area, but were shortly convinced that only damned fools would remain and moved to the rear.

Operation "TOTALIZE", an operation which eventually broke the back of the German forces in Normandy was teed up. It began at 2330 hrs., 2 August 44. It was a plain, brutal, frontal assault, and it was obvious that success would only be found in a sea of blood. Not only did we have fanatical and large forces opposing us, but we were continually fighting up the sloping terrain leading to Falaise, giving the enemy at all times the advantage of ground observation. The operation progressed slowly but surely. It was a process of walking over the smashed forces rather than that of forcing them back.

An unfortunate incident occurred at this time. Troops had been concentrated in the area for the attack. The day was bright and clear. Overhead was heard the droning of American Fortresses. Personnel vacated shelters and came out into the open to see what was a very beautiful sight. The silver "Forts" against the blue sky and in the sunshine are something well worth seeing. Suddenly to the amazement of all, the bomb bays opened and the bombs streamed forth crashing into the troop laden earth. Personnel scrambled for cover, angered and dismayed at the incredible experience. Respite was only brought about by a Mosquito pilot who, taking matters into his own hands flew at the formation waving his wings in warning fashion. Still no attention was paid to him, and finally he commenced shooting them down. One bomber fell and the remainder took the hint, but only after several hundred troops had been killed or wounded.

Throughout the drive to Falaise, the 3rd Medium was the

first medium artillery to move forward, usually well up into the infantry front lines, striving continually to reach back into the enemy forces to prevent his reinforcement of his front lines and to make his defeat an all embracing one. The unit was subjected to a lacing by mortars, 88 mm and heavy artillery fire, However, our previous training stood us in good stead and kept our casualties at a minimum.

We occupied gun positions at Garcelles Sequeville on the 9th of August 1944, and moved to Cintheaux on the 11th. It was here that the tragic R.A.F. bombing of our own troops occurred. For two solid hours we were subjected to a hail of bombs such as we had never before experienced. In spite of all our ground signals, and endeavours of our Air OPS, it continued until the completion of the R.A.F. programme. It was as if we had created a mighty monster that we were unable to control, one that threatened to destroy us. Fortunately, the blow was not a mortal one.

Soon we were pushing forward again. We moved to Rouvres on the 15th of August 1944, our target being the escape highway from Falaise to Trun. Our task was to pound it to ensure that it was not of use to the retreating German forces. Three days later we moved to Barou to gain complete domination of this escape route. The operation was a success. At last our troops had reached Falaise. The American forces commencing their classic encircling sweep were driving towards us from the South and the closing of the Falaise Gap began. Here the artillery and the rocket firing Typhoons played a major part in the trampling of the German forces attempting to escape. Moving up to our gun position at Barou, we saw the destruction that had been caused. Tanks, vehicles, dead horses and German dead littered the fields and roadsides as we passed through them. At 1630 hrs. on the 19th of August 1944, the Falaise Gap was reported closed, bringing to a conclusion what must be the Canadians' most difficult, most significant and most successful operation of all times.

Upon the completion of the closing of the Falaise Gap our forces were again re-shuffled and the Regiment was to give medium artillery support to the 4th Canadian Armoured Division in its race across France to catch the few remaining Germans that had managed to escape and to drive a wedge into Germany to dislocate resistance there before it was organized.

The dash across France involved moves of approximately 50 miles each day. Normally, the Division column stretching for miles, commenced movement up the axis of advance in the early hours of the morning. The regiment sent its advance parties and leading battery with the forward elements of the division. Regimental headquarters and the other battery moving at the rear of the tactical column. Each night we deployed together in the same regimental area ready for counter attacks. The movement was usually quite uneven. Each time our forward elements struck resistance the column halted for a few hours, then movement would commence again. Sometimes we would get word of Germans hiding in haystacks and a group of men would go after them bringing them out at the point of Bren guns, hands high in the air and frightened to their wits end. Many times due to traffic congestion, the unit would strike up side-routes, over tracks and trails of all sorts. Sometimes we moved through country untouched by Allied forces. Many times we were stopped by the Maquis with waving arms and loud chattering in French, warning us of Germans in the woods ahead. At such halts the French children would swarm over our vehicles, throwing their arms around our necks asking for chocolate or cigarettes "pour papa". The French women would rush into their homes and come out with jugs of Calvados. It was their first view of "Les Canadiens", their liberators. The menfolk would simply smile and shake hands, thoroughly happy to see us. The French countryside was beautiful, ever so green and only marred by the untidiness of the small French homes. Many times we travelled few hours at top speed without halts along wide smooth highways through archways of tall, lovely trees. At one stage

two Canadian divisions bottle-necked at one point. There was a reunion of many old friends, lorries loaded down with infantry, tanks with black-bereted protruding heads, motorcycles, jeeps, 3 tonners, wireless vehicles, large bridging companies - all converged at this point. It was the only bridge intact and there was not time to build others. Over the bridge, we again fanned out to our respective axis.

Our route took us from Barou to Louvleres en Auge through LeSap to Bernay. The population in Bernay went mad over us. Such a welcome! On the 26th of August 44, we moved into Les Clos Bins in preparation for the crossing of the Seine. After some bitter fighting and harrowing experiences we managed to capture the high ground on the far bank and the unit crossed the river in small outboard ferries. Evidence of the bitterness with which "Jerry" fought was seen throughout our gun area. It was evident from the bodies in view, that much hand-to-hand fighting had taken place.

From Igoville we moved to Martainville-Eprville, then on to Bois Herout. For days we had been promised rest, time for maintenance and a general refit. We needed it. For weeks we had moved all day, deploying and in action during the night. Each time, however, our rest was cancelled. The Huns must be chased, caught and sent to the cages. We moved to the Somme at Abbeville. "Q" Bty made a fast move into Hocquincourt. "Jerry", however, pulled out and we were at last sent to Rambures for a rest and refitting, and to make ready for the battle of the French ports.

After a refit and a false alarm on the arrival of our new 4.5" guns, we left 4th Cdn. Armed Division which drove on striking towards the Dunkirk and Brugge areas. 2nd Cdn. Inf. Div. headed for Dieppe to settle an old score. 3rd. Cdn. Inf. Div. headed all out for Bologne and Calais. We awaited our disposition on this array. Finally it came. We were to move to Calais in support of the 3rd. Cdn. Inf. Division. This involved long pleasant

drives along beautiful French highways until we reached Les Bardes, outside Calais. This commenced the most fascinating artillery duel ever experienced by the unit.

The task of the 3rd Division was twofold - the capture of Bologne and Calais, keys to the solution of the problem presented by our long lines of communication. 7 Bde was despatched to the area of Cap Griz Nez and 8 and 9 Bdes deployed themselves in front of the Port of Bologne. These fortresses were the most heavily defended areas of German resistance. They had been constructed for a seaborne attack, but all large coastal guns had a 360 degree traverse, enabling them to fire in any direction. The emplacements and dugouts were found in certain cases to be covered with 15 metres of concrete requiring the heaviest of bombs to even disturb the occupants. Defended localities of artillery and machine-gun posts were spread out in a protected and co-ordinated fashion on the high ground surrounding these ports. It was almost the perfect defensive system designed for all eventualities (other than the Canadians).

Continually the large coastal guns laced at our forces, landing large naval shells into our midst. These guns, using sound ranging devices were particularly accurate against our guns, but fortunately never on them. We had two advantages. One was the fact that the ground was soft and these shells buried themselves before exploding, and the other, many of them were duds-- a familiar occurrence with German ammunition. In one instance, a large ack ack gun nearby was hit dead-on. However the shell failed to go off resulting in the destruction of the gun but no injury to the crew.

Having been placed under the noses of these Cap Griz Nez guns and being subjected to their lashing, an O.P. crew was despatched to observe their activities and to bring fire on them immediately they became active. Many times the O.P. brought down direct hits on these guns. Our shells were not heavy enough to

accomplish anything other than a quietening effect. They simply bounced off the top. We did manage however, by continual pounding to put a few out of action.

It was impossible for the time being with only one Bde to close in on them for they had impenetrable all-round defences consisting of the large guns in the centre, then a circle of fanatical SS to shoot up the outer circles if they attempted to give in. These consisted of 88 mm guns and banks of machine guns, barbed wire and the like. They were stocked with food to last them for months.

During the assault on Bologne by the other brigades and artillery, the role of the Regiment was to contain, in conjunction with the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment, the Port of Calais. Reps and OPs were despatched to various sectors of the front to pound any signs of activity. This we did. One OP officer and crew managed to join a squadron in an as yet untouched French village, and had themselves a lively few weeks, drinking the best Champagne and enjoying all the comforts the little village could provide. War is not without its amusing moments. One sunny day the bombers were over Bologne, and its assault had commenced by 3 Div. including a good portion of the artillery in the army. This was a bitter fight but eventually we were again successful. When subjected to our assaults, "Jerry" stood firm at first, but a point was always reached after which he fell to pieces.

After the fall of Bologne, Calais was next and the job of actually assaulting it was given to 7th Brigade with 3 Medium Regiment in close support. This was a role we relished and also one the 7th Brigade were particularly happy about for they liked to have the "big babies" right up with them. Regiment after regiment moved up into support, but ours was to be close, their's simply to give softening up and large fire plan support.

We despatched OP's to each battalion of infantry and rep

to Brigade Headquarters and the attack began. There was bombing of course, but it was a foot-slogger and gunners task. The whole area had been laid out in one massive fire-plan. By pushing button "A" the full weight of the artillery could be brought to bear on any particular point. Our regiment provided the quick medium observed support through our OP's with the leading infantry. At times four tasks were engaged simultaneously, targets for our OP's, fire plans for headquarters and engagement of active enemy batteries by the Air OP. Hour after hour this went on. One OP officer fighting along the sea coast with a battalion of Infantry found resistance springing up to his rear! Undisturbed, he knocked it out carrying out observation of rounds by facing his own guns. Another OP officer observing fire being brought down on a fortress, observed the rounds falling around it. With a few quick commands on the wireless, he adjusted fire into the fortress and created havoc, causing its quick surrender. Another time, he managed to just squeeze in a vital fireplan before the evening wireless crash set in, blanking out communications. This fire-plan enabled our infantry to rush an enemy gun position and capture the crew before they had a chance to return to their guns. Several hundred prisoners were put in the bag. Another OP officer worked himself along a railroad leading into Calais under enemy fire and entered a tower where he had his ears singed with machine gun fire. All these experiences were undergone by our OP crews. There were many more. Having closed to the outskirts of the town, it was decided to rake the town with artillery fire until the Germans surrendered. First of all a period of time was allotted for the evacuation of civilians. Some 10,000 moved into the surrounding countryside. Then the bombardment started. We completed our first raking and were about to begin again when the surrender came. White flags appeared everywhere and then our troops moved in. A wild night of enjoyment ensued in Calais. "Jerry" had left loads of Champagne and other forms of enjoyment. They were put to full use. No sooner however had the battle of Calais finished than we were

ordered to move on. On to Belgium and the battle of the Schelde. Our OP's caught up with us on the move.

After a long road move we arrived with 2 Cdn. AGRA at Woumen, Belgium, for a week's rest. It was here that we were singled out for the particular honour of receiving the new set of 4.5" guns, capable of reaching over 11 miles and the most accurate artillery piece in the allied forces. It was longer and more beautiful than the 5.5" gun. Whilst in this area a great deal of celebration took place with the local populace. Pleasant evenings were spent by many members of the Regiment in Dixmude. More enterprising souls even stole a peek into Ghent and larger surrounding towns.

One morning orders were received for recon parties to proceed to Donk to prepare our entrance into the battle of the Schelde Estuary, and opening of the Port of Antwerp - key to the battle of Germany. Our infantry were deployed along the Leopold Canal and any attempt to cross it was savagely beaten back by the enemy. The ground was soft and the battlefield was a semi-flooded area. The enemy troops were fresh and well prepared for the defence of this vital zone. On moving into this area we discovered that civilian snipers were still active and the local populace not too unfriendly with the "Jerry".

In all this dismal area the Canadians discovered a precious pearl -- Brugge. The Canadians will long remember the city of Brugge, with its moats and castles, its friendly inhabitants and its atmosphere of a grand and glorious past. It was unique among all others.

For many weeks our guns pounded away at the enemy. Abortive attempts at frontal assaults across the Leopold were made. Eventually from a comprehensive and complicated plan we managed to gain a small bridgehead across the canal, later to prove an effective toe-hold. The enemy counter-attacked, mortared and shelled in a

fashion evidencing his experience in Normandy. He was learning the lesson of concentrating his fire power on vital places all too well. Our infantry hung on with their teeth. To counteract his long range weapons, the unit established an OP near Zee-brugge on the top of a high church tower. Various members of the unit visited this O.P. and engaged targets with our new long range weapons. Jerry, realizing where the observation was being made from, frequently shelled this tower over open sights. Some shells would skim over the top, some would hit the dust at the base and some smashed into the tower. It was of sturdy construction and could take such hits without being demolished. Fortunately our crew was always located at other points than those of impact.

After many weeks of constant pounding, the enemy began to loosen up. A new plan was involved, entailing a flanking sea-borne landing. Fire plans were issued and the battle began with a crashing of artillery fire. The flanking movement was successful and each day our troops blasted themselves forward. Slowly but surely the enemy began to fold. The unit was ordered to move to IJzendike. Our gun positions here consisted of whatever dry spots of land that were available. From here we supported the advance of 3 Div as they smashed their way westward along the Schelde. After passing out of range we moved to Groede and swung our guns northward facing Walcheren Island. This island fortress guarded the entrance to the Port of Antwerp our ultimate goal.

A vast sea-borne landing operation was planned involving the use of British Commando's. The unit despatched an OP officer and crew to their support. This was carried out in the greatest of secrecy. In the meantime to the East 2 Div had had passed through Antwerp and had captured the port installations intact and were approaching the island from the East up a narrow stretch of land meeting only mines and soggy ground to hold up their advance. The task remaining was to clean up resistance to permit ships to pass unhampered down into the Port i.e. the capture of Walcheren Island.

The unit despatched a rep to the support of 2 Div. After some bitter attempts and a great cost of lives, the crossway of the causeway leading to the Island was abandoned and the sea-borne landing from the West - the alternative - was put into effect. The island was bombarded from land, sea and air before our land forces attacked in successive waves. On landing they met a dazed and half-mad enemy. This was a very costly operation for it was estimated that, of the initial assault force, four out of five of the personnel involved were casualties. Our rocket batteries had terrified both the enemy and ourselves. It was the entree of the rockets into the European melee. The Island folded up surprisingly quickly, and the battle of the Schelde Estuary, one of the most important and costly for the Canadians, came to a successful conclusion. The allied casualties totaled 40,000 - a staggering blow to our manpower. We began to wonder if there would be enough Canadians left to finish our part in the war, for to date all our battles had been of the most difficult type. There had been little easy going, most metres of advance being paid for in Canadian lives.

We were to have a rest now in the area of St. Nicholas, Belgium. This involved a long night move back through the battle strewn area, through Ghent and into Vracene, near St. Nicholas. We received a rousing welcome and excellent billets from the towns folk, and settled down to what we thought would be a week's fun. An AGRA dance was held at the end of which we received the surprising news - no rest, we must move on.

During our battle in the Schelde, the British and American forces on our right flank had reached the Rhine and were moving up to it in strength. The British Guards Armoured Division had struck for Arnhem to relieve the hard-pressed Airborne troops, among them famous 101 US Airborne Division of Bastogne. The Canadians were to take over from the forces in this sector in order to permit them to concentrate in the centre of our line for a break into the industrial Rhur. Our specific task was to take over from the

7 Med Regt RA. This meant that were the first Cdn. Artillery to deploy in the Nijmegen salient. The move up was a long one carried out under cover of darkness. Added to this was a terrific downpour of rain throughout the move. We concentrated at Uden, and our batteries were then allocated their areas. "P" Bty was to move to Alpehn, and "Q" Bty and RHQ was to move to Nijmegen. "P" Bty was to support the Cdn forces holding that sector of the front and "Q" Bty was to support the 101 US Airborn Div. forces, all whilst the reshuffling of our forces took place. An OP and reps were despatched in the Nijmegen sector and all appeared quiet on the Western Front.

The 2nd and 3rd Divisions moved into the area and took over from the American and British forces. "P" Bty at Alphen had their area peppered with artillery fire and after a short but hot stay rejoined the remainder of the Regiment at Nijmegen. The experiences there form a separate story which it is better for some one else to reveal.

Commencing with our arrival in the Schelde, small numbers of unit personnel proceeded on short leaves to Ghent, Brussels and Antwerp. These leave arrangements were excellent, particularly in Brussels where Belgian girls gave us the short Whirl. It must be left to the individual to relate his experiences on these leaves (or those which he feels can safely be told). They were appreciated and enjoyed by all.

Our front in the Salient was divided into artillery sectors each with its own fire-plan arrangement. All artillery was concentrated in one sector and then would move to another, softening up the enemy and generally engaging in a plan of deception leaving the enemy wondering where we actually would strike. Further, Air OP's, sound rangers, and flash spotters working in conjunction with the artillery pounded the enemy's vitals. To cover the western sector the unit moved to Beunigen in support of the 48 British

Infantry Division. From here in conditions of grim mud, we pounded enemy batteries and infantry localities. Our men dwelt in home-made huts as billets were unavailable. As the weeks wiled by the weather set in. The time now was late November and December 1944. However, the advent of cold weather brought along the Christmas and a joyous period of celebration. The Christmas dinner was excellent and many dances were held. Again life in Nijmegen forms a separate story.

On New Year's Eve, it was decided to wish "Jerry" a happy New Year with a regimental salvo, precisely at midnight. It appeared however that the remainder of the artillery and every one else on the whole front including the enemy had the same idea in mind. At 2400 Hrs. the whole front blazed forth. The Artillery roared, the machine guns rattled, the ack ack sent streams of tracer shells into the air, "Jerry" let go with V2's that streaked up into the sky out of sight, - tokens of love from both sides. Broadway had little on us.

It was during our stay in the Jijmegen Salient that Runstedt's Ardennes offensive was launched. Our whole front became aggressively alert for paratroop landings or other offensives, designed to close in a pincer movement on Antwerp, our vital supply inlet. Nothing other than a shuffle of forces in a feinting movement occurred. With the overcoming of the German threat, the way was paved for operations to clear the West bank of the Rhine. The outcome was certain now, for it was calculated that the enemy no longer had the resources for another large scale offensive. We were to find out however that he still had a lot of fight remaining.

To divert for a moment, it should be realized that previous to the Ardennes offensive, a grouping of our forces to cross the Rhine had taken place. Further during this whole period our supply build-up was progressing. However, it took time. The German offensive not only disarranged our grouping but cut into our stocks of supplies. After overcoming the offensive, however, we regrouped

again and awaited the supply build-up. The offensive delayed our offensive a month or so only. For this small reprieve Germany destroyed all hope of holding up.

The plan for the clearing of the West bank of the Rhine was received. It was simple, sound and effective, in true Montgomery fashion. It involved a concentrating of British and Canadian forces in our sector for a drive to the Rhine then switching south to meet the American Ninth Army driving northwards. The bridges across the Rhine and enemy retreat here were to be handled by the Air Force. The objective was the destruction of the German Armies west of the Rhine.

The operation for our drive through the Reichswald Forest was one of the most carefully planned and executed operations ever experienced. No means of deception or preparation were over-looked. The slightest foot prints in the snow out of place received the greatest reprimand. Vast forces of infantry, armour and artillery were concentrated in the area. 30th British Corps with 200,000 troops under command of the First Canadian Army were to perform the task. It was indeed a gigantic one, involving the breaking through the formidable Siegfried defences.

To catch the atmosphere of this momentous moment one need only recall the night of February 7, 1945. At this time we found ourselves awaiting the grandiose attack which would lead us to our final objectives in the clearing of the West Bank of the Rhine. It was a beautiful night, the stars were out above, small white clouds were gliding gracefully in the sky lit up by the silver beams from the searchlights skimming playfully into the heavens. Aircraft were soaring above - Germany bound. On earth brilliant flashes of light illuminated the countryside, the guns were barking, the tanks were rumbling, the fist was closing for another mighty blow. Men steeled their nerves and "screwed their courage to the fixing place". It is not an easy experience to forget.

At 0500 hrs. Feb. 8, 1945, Operation "VERITABLE" finally commenced. Hour after hour the continual rumble of the barrages and concentrations was heard. 1000 guns and 1,000,000 rounds of ammunition were involved. Slowly but surely we edged our way into the Reichswald Forest. It was an attack on a four divisional front. Progress was best on the left flank where it was impeded only by mines and mud, all resistance having been destroyed by our preparatory arrangements. The operation was designed to take anywhere from 3 days to 3 weeks. After the initial breakthrough by the infantry, the armour was to pass through and exploit to the banks of the Rhine at Xanten and Wesel and if possible, seize the bridge at Wesel. We however were not so fortunate. The weather became mild and the ground became impossible. Progress was particularly slow on our right flank where fanatical resistance had developed. As the days went by progress was slight. There were no roads and the water was rising hourly. On the left flank 3 Div. again came to the fore. Mounting Buffaloes they fought their way over the water in a sweeping movement around the Reichswald. Gradually the whole wooded area was cleared and progress to the south was sufficient to permit a firm axis of advance for heavy equipments. The unit passed up this axis and deployed east of the Cleve Forest. Due to the vast number of troops in the area, it was terribly congested, 4 or 5 regiments occupying the area normally taken by one. Bombing by enemy planes in sneak raids was again experienced. The Americans having settled with Runstedt were pushing northwards having cleared to to Cologne. The enemy realizing the trap and also that the industrial Ruhr was at stake decided to make a last stand - a do or die effort, hoping always that a secret weapon or some magic would come to his rescue.

Our drive to and through the Hochwald Forest against such resistance was a bloody one. Infantry - armour teams were formed and allotted their objectives. They fought their way to the Hochwald situated on high ground. Through this forest was

one gap, through which we attempted to pass. Jerry, however, covered this with all he could muster. Each time we protruded through it, we were met by a hail of fire. Finally however, our forces punched their way through and a gradual clearing of the remainder of the forest took place. The unit at this time was supporting recon elements to the right, the 4 Armoured Division in the centre and British forces striking at Xanten on the left. Our long range made us a versatile unit.

To give an idea of what life in this drive to the Hochwald was like, one has only to relate the experiences of Regimental Headquarters near Louisendorf. Mortars were heard crashing into the nearby town and then suddenly artillery shells were heard immediately in front of the depression each time coming closer. They made a pattern around the edges of our depression. Fortunately nonlanded on it. The Command Post was above ground to the right in the depression, a shell landed a short distance from it. Everyone looked at the other but work continued. The I. O. was outside marking up the intelligence map. The next shell landed within five or ten yards of him, fortunately on top of the bank and the blast passed over us. The map and I. O. however were sprayed with dirt. Each time a shell lit, there was an olympic demonstration of personnel dashing for protection. Our luck strangely enough was ever with us.

"Jerry" would not move. It was a matter of killing or capturing him where he stood. Eventually, however, threatened with complete encirclement, he withdrew to Wesel on the East bank of the Rhine, destroying one of the last remaining bridges.

Before going on, however, it would be wrong to neglect a brief description of our deployment in the Hochwald Forest. Our area was bounded by three roads. On each side by an axis of advance, and on the enemy side by a lateral route, i.e., near two vital communication centres, the area being at the end of the line. To add to this, we were under direct observation from the enemy peering

out of the church at Xanten. Occasionally traffic jams occurred resulting in large concentration of vehicles, tanks and the like. Each time such a target was presented, the enemy plastered the area. Regarding the Command Post, it was "hunched" that it was a highly undesirable spot and it was immediately moved to a position protected by a wall. A few moments later a mortar landed where the Command Post had been. Lack of this movement would have resulted in this brief article not being written. Strangely enough, in spite of the casualties suffered by our neighbours, the unit was almost unscathed.

Completing these tasks, we were moved back to Nijmegen for a rest, whilst preparations for the crossing of the Rhine were made. Day after day a thick smoke screen hit our movements and preparations from the enemy. Again the plan was produced. The British and Canadian forces were to sweep around the north of the Ruhr and join the Americans sweeping around the south of it. Our final deployment areas were not occupied until immediately before the operation began, the unit remaining hidden in the woods behind. The programme of advance as laid down was carried out almost to the letter. Bridges were built and units crossed on schedule. Again "Jerry", fearing the loss of the Ruhr fought hard. Anticipating an airborne attack to establish a bridgehead, he withdrew his forces and concentrated them to the rear, ready to repel the landings. However, our ground forces slipped in and established the bridgehead. The enemy then rushed forward to repel them and at this moment, the airborne forces landed behind, capturing his gun areas and some 5,000 prisoners. This unit was the first British Medium Artillery to cross the Rhine and did so at 0200 hrs. March 29, 1945, in complete darkness.

On crossing the Rhine, the Canadian forces turned northwards with the object of liberating Holland. The British and American forces were in the process of encircling the Ruhr. The German

resistance was crumbling to the south, but our front as usual still resisted bitterly. The enemy withdrew very reluctantly despite continual bombing and artillery fire. Possibly he feared for his troops in Western Holland being caught and experiencing the ensuing wrath of the starving Dutch people. The outcome, however, was apparent now. Gradually the enemy's back was being broken, and soon our forces would swirl with ease through the German countryside to achieve final domination of this nation.

On the night of 30/31 March 1945, the whole front was shaking with the reverberations of shell fire and the crashing of enemy mortar concentrations. The whole front was ablaze and gave evidence of a most violent exhibition of force. At the time one wondered how it was possible for anyone to live through it. The purpose and worth of war is sometimes best assessed at times like these.

For a brief period the unit supported both 3 and 2 Divs., simultaneously and for a short period was also under command of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division which it eventually supported to Wilhelmshaven. Perhaps to give an illustration of our activities with the 2 and 3 Canadian Infantry Divisions at this stage, it is best to include the comments of one of our O.P. Officers. On 1 April 1945, the Unit had representatives with 4 Cdn. Armoured Division and 5 Canadian Infantry Brigade and two Forward Observation Officers with the 4th Canadian Recce Regiment. Following are the comments by one of the Forward Observation Officers:

"The day following our crossing of the Rhine, "Q" Bty. Commander, "C" Troop Commander and myself were attached to 6 Canadian Infantry Brigade to support the attack going north and northwest from Praest. I was assigned to the 8 Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment.

The following morning, "C" Squadron, to which I was sent, worked into the town of Netterden with the Queen's Own

Cameron Highlanders. Little opposition, other than a few machine guns and snipers was encountered. The infantry went into cellars, etc., as "Jerry" began to mortar heavily. The armoured cars tried to work their way to the west and north. But roads to the west were flooded and they were wary of an S.P. gun reported covering the road to the north. Shelling and mortaring began to cause heavy infantry casualties, and I received loud howls from both the infantry and reconnaissance to stop the shelling with counter-battery. As the infantry could not seem to pinpoint any mortars I shot at two or three likely looking localities which I chose from bearings taken. Fortunately the shelling stopped, either by coincidence or due to luck. The infantry then withdrew, leaving the town to the Recce Sqn. and ourselves.

I was using a roof-top at the time for an OP but decided to shift into the centre of the town where there was a high steeple. Up went my ack and myself, praying that the flimsy ladders and woodwork would hold us. A door in the top gave us good vantage point and then set us office. During the course of the rest of the day, we engaged many targets, some mortars, some guns and a good many troops working in and around buildings, in the town ahead. The 24 power telescope was invaluable as the weather was good and you could almost see the wild expressions on the faces of the Jerries as a salvo of sixteen 4.5" shells would crash into their midst. We did manage to stop all further defence preparations and drew plenty of fire on our pet vantage point. Shells brewed two half-tracks and a carrier near the church, besides causing four hits in the main body of the church and two at the bottom of the steeple.

Although I was in communication with recce cars who had a fair OP a few hundred yards on my flank, I was not able to get sufficiently good bearings to pin-point the cause of the trouble. When we shelled two or three spots, their shelling ceased but never permanently.

That night we took shifts and flash bearings and sent

in a great number of shell reps.

The following day, we were switched to A Sqn. who were to recce a route up to the right of the main 5 Brigade drive. I had to stay with Squadron HQ most of the day, but in the middle of the afternoon, a troop sent in a rush call for support. Up we went and found them held up in a little town just south of Terbourg. There was some machine gun fire from the area of the town hall which had not yet been cleared out. An SP gun situated at a Y roads was holding up any further northward advance. A huge church steeple was again the only suitable OP. Just as we got up, shelling began. The signaller down below us in the carrier was having an awful time getting through and the relay was not helping with its long ramble of unnecessary procedure. It took us $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours to get the first fire order through. During that time, a shell cut into the top of the steeple and four went into the main part of the church. The armoured lads were well down in cellars and any other solid looking spot.

Once our fire did start to come, it was marvelous. The response was terrific. The first salvos crashed simultaneously right on the target. By bearings, we deduced the location of the shelling and after one particular bombard was bothered no more, other than by air-bursts from a single gun. Targets were engaged early in the evening before the Black Watch went in to take Terbourg.

Easter Sunday morning we by-passed a blown bridge beyond Terbourg and proceeded on to Doetichem where again the forward troops asked for assistance. The target indicated me was a camouflaged defence position about fifty yards away. A high bank protected the vehicles until they were within thirty yards. I pointed out that that was no artillery target unless the recce wished to withdraw a bit. A.S.A.S. jeep rolled to a stop beside us and asked the trouble. Seeing what it was, the officer drove

ahead to where he was exposed and opened fire with his twin Brens. A white flag went up from the post. The Dutch lad driving called to the "Jerries" to come out with their hands above their heads, which they did. The Calgary Highlanders, who were moving up with the Recce then collected some twenty-five "Jerries" and discovered an 88 mm gun, not the supposed machine gun.

An anti-tank ditch prevented further movement up the main road. Going around side streets, we found the ditch continuous. Soon hundreds of cheering civilians were out with shovels filling it in. Within fifteen minutes we continued on our way.

I shelled some mortar position from a roof top and found the guns to be shooting short on a map reference. Taking this into account in the next targets, the first shells hit the spot. It was here that wandering up beside the leading armoured car to enquire into the delay, I was caught in the midst of a fair amount of cross-fire. A "Jerry" lay a few feet away where he had just ridden unsuspectingly around a corner on his bike. Hearing a warning shout from the lad inside the car, I looked in front to see a helmet moving along a kitch ten or fifteen yards away. A turn exposed him so that I got a shot at him. It later proved that my first pistol shot fire had caught him in the left shoulder. I thought it better to be wise than dead and withdrew to the shelter of a nearby house from where the S.A.S. Officer had been shouting at me.

Later that day we went to another troop which had made progress around the right of the town and found the enemy gone. We took a joy ride of ten miles toward the Twente Canal but found no opposition or bridges blown. The enemy had flown. That night we returned to the regiment".

By 3 April 45 our armour had cleared to the Twente Canal. On 4 April the infantry crossed the canal near Delden and the Division commenced its movement over the water obstacles. "Jerry"

withdrew to the left behind a small canal running north and provided a thorn in our sides as regards forward movement. Eventually we arrived at Meppen. By 8 April 45, Meppen was cleared and the Division moved up to Borger with little resistance. During this drive water obstacles proved the chief delaying factors. However we usually moved daily, sometimes as much as fifty miles. This was by far the most interesting type of artillery employment. The unit moved well, like a well oiled, smooth running machine. However, within the division, a certain amount of confusion was caused by lack of proper communications in the control of recon parties.

From outward appearances the agricultural people of northern Holland showed little evidence of much suffering, due to adequate food obtainable from their farms. Only the town folk suffered tragically, i.e., from what we could observe. Few men were to be seen. Only the aged and decrepit were in evidence. A redeeming feature to the scene however was the beautiful weather we experienced.

From 10 April to 13 April 1945, the unit worked its way slowly up to the Kusten Canal and supported an abortive attack on Friesoythe. It was in this area that we tangled with training elements of Hitler's paratroop boys. Deployed near Friesoythe the unit found itself pounding the enemy to the north and also supporting the South Alberta Tank Regiment 150° to our right flank which was seeking to draw enemy forces from our main point of effort. Friesoythe, after a severe pounding was captured and the Division fought its way up the Kusten Canal. Progress was slow due to a variety of reasons. Chiefly, that many water obstacles were encountered and all bridges had been blown necessitating the Division to confine itself to one axis of advance. It was a matter of driving this armoured spear into the enemy's vitals without flanking aids -- always a difficult and costly operation. Further,

with the end of the war in sight some had lost a portion of their daring and aggressiveness, but there were notable exceptions who almost over-compensated in their recklessness. This however was entirely understandable and it was the desideratum that as few lives should be lost as possible.

The guns at this time were proving most accurate in predicted fire, amazingly so. The work and time spent on calibration was not in vain. At ranges of 6,000 to 8,000 yards the m.p.i. was time after time exactly on the target.

On the 20th April 1945, it appeared that the hold-up on the Kusten Canal would involve another all-out show on the part of 2 Cdn. Corps with co-ordinated divisional tasks. Our forces were drawing unto themselves strong concentrations of enemy who fought viciously. His limited resources, however, permitted the turning of his flanks by divisions approaching from other directions, namely the Polish Armoured Division and 2 Canadian Infantry task. Some criticized the 4th Canadian Armoured Division unjustly. It was an armoured division which of necessity found itself continually in non-armoured roles. Inadequate counter battery arrangements cost our division considerable delay and annoyance. The bridge across the Kusten was knocked out by enemy artillery fire. However, sound rangers, radar and the air OP commenced work and eased the situation.

The weather was excellent permitting the rocket firing Typhoons and bombers to carry out operations. We were wearing down the enemy's resistance by continual artillery fire and probing attacks and at the same time were arranging and preparing our knock-out blow to the sea. On the 22 April 1945, a roving gun was sent forward into the infantry lines to pound at Oldenburg with the hope that the enemy would suspect, due to the forward movement of artillery, an immediate attack on Oldenburg and would accordingly withdraw to its defence enabling us to step across the canal with

ease. On the 25 April radio news reported that the Russians and Yanks had linked. Also 1 and 5 Canadian Divisions had smashed their way through Arnhem and were driving westwards through Holland.

The end was in sight now. Our attack across the Kusten was successful and we fought to within gun range of the sea. We had finally put him with his back to the wall. In our final deployment area we had to clear the enemy out by an exchange of rifle fire before moving in the guns. Fortunately we suffered only one casualty. At 0800 hours on the 5th day of May 1945 hostilities ceased on our front -- the end at last !