

## '14 Days in September'

An extract from the war diary of the Second Household Cavalry Regiment 1939-1945 by Roden Orde covering the period of Market Garden. Plus additional images from IWM and personal collection.  
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10th September 1944.

The morning of 10th September dawned misty and cold, but a hot sun soon cleared the atmosphere and the first armoured cars and tanks crossed the Bourg Leopold—Hechtel road shortly after ten o'clock.

Thereafter progress was slow.

The Grenadiers lost several tanks and others were soon bogged in the sand dunes, as were our armoured cars. A large German gun straddling the road from the direction of Bourg Leopold contributed to the delay. "A" Squadron were unable to deploy until after midday, and when they did so immediately encountered anti-tank guns and were fired upon by a self-propelled gun hidden up in some trees. Major Bowes Daly attempted to swing part of his Troops to the west, but they quickly sank up to their axles in the sand; the tanks, although more natural cross-country performers, fared no better. Progress up the main road was neither fast nor spectacular.

A Troop would advance some way on the flanks, then bog itself, or move down the road and draw fire. As soon as an enemy gun was located it would withdraw slightly under cover of the trees and the whole process start again. It was a laborious and nerve-racking day for the armour. Some way north of Hechtel Lieutenant Peake's Troop was ordered to locate a gun which had been holding up the Grenadiers and had already knocked out several of their tanks.

At this point the road ran dead straight until it reached a railway line, crossing it at right angles about two miles short of the Escaut Canal. Being bounded by trees and sand, there was no alternative but to advance along it in tactical bounds.

The Troop had travelled about 600 yards when there was a loud bang and a shell went whistling over the heads of Corporal Ford-Nairn and Trooper Williams in the leading scout car. They found themselves actually under the muzzle of an 88-mm. S.P., which was cleverly camouflaged in some trees at the side of the road. Obviously the shot had been intended for Lieutenant Peake's car farther back. Williams, the driver, swerving round the German gun in a wide sweep through the undergrowth, then ran into another enemy group lining the road and at that moment the engine cut out dead and the car came to a halt in their midst and both were taken prisoner.

Meanwhile more infantry had attacked the other scout car commanded by Lance-Corporal-of-Horse Pulford, and a shot from a bazooka fired at point-blank range scored a direct hit but failed to explode, and under cover of smoke and Bren-gun fire Trooper Niven was able to reverse out of range. By this time the 88-mm. S.P. had fired several more shots at Lieutenant Peake, who with great coolness had been able to observe the flashes and had also spotted a Mark IV tank hidden up among the pines.

The 88-mm. continued to fire down the road, but it failed to hit anything, for by this time nearly all the vehicles had been able to pull in to the verge.

As it fired tracer shot, we could see them bouncing along the roadway like cricket balls, and George Murray, the Heavy Troop Leader, who was at that time some way to the rear of the Squadron, reported that they were still going strong past him." In the meantime Major Bowes Daly had tried to obtain a "Lime-juice," the code word used when support was required from the rocket-firing Typhoons, but for some reason this was unavailable, and for several hours more the enemy continued to hold on to the area of the railway crossing and cross-roads beyond.

Eventually the King's Company and No. 2 Squadron of the Grenadier Guards managed to work round to the right flank in a wide sweep, although greatly hampered by the difficult going and by anti-tank guns. After a sharp engagement they overcame the opposition, knocking out in the course of the battle seven anti-tank guns (mostly 88-mm.), three tanks, one S.P. gun, and a 20-mm. machine gun, as well as all the towing and ammunition vehicles, capturing or killing the crews.

This happened as darkness was falling, and was witnessed by Lieutenant Franklin's Troop which had meanwhile worked up to the railway line on the left. The Troop Leader described the scene of burning and destruction as "a Guy Fawkes' night gone mad."

Meanwhile an important development had been taking place on the right flank which was to result in the Irish Guards capturing a vital bridge on the Meuse—Escaut Canal at the de Groote Barrier, thus effecting a breach in the enemy line which had hitherto cut straight across the Second Army's path of advance. The

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Household Cavalry were to play a leading role in this event, and I have borrowed from the Irish Guards History for the opening of the story.

The 2nd Household Cavalry had been exploring the country side. In advance the Household Cavalry in their scout cars operated on the flanks and often well in front of the Division. They had an admirable habit of suddenly appearing out of a side road or racing straight down the road from the direction of the Germans with a fund of invaluable information and an unquenchable desire to help.

If anyone wanted to know 'whether Jerry was up the road' the answer was always, 'Ask the Household Cavalry to go and see.'

Above all, they could always be relied on somehow and somewhere to find a way round any obstacle, natural or unnatural. This evening the Household Cavalry found something splendid —a fine new unmapped German-built military road running due north from Exel to Overpelt and then turning due left to the Escaut Canal at de Groote Barrier." It had come about in the following manner. During the late afternoon Lieutenant Creswell's Troop had been ordered to reconnoitre a route through Exel and if possible up to the canal bank north of Overpelt, where lay an important bridge at de Groote Barrier. "I was well aware," wrote the Troop Leader, "of the opposition which was being experienced by the Grenadier group on the main road, for several of 'A' Squadron Troops were also engaged there and I could hear their reports on the wireless.

For this reason I could not bring myself to believe that the enemy would be so foolish as to leave an alternative route uncovered, and in fact I stressed in my orders to the Troop the fact that we must expect opposition. Nevertheless, although we drove tactically and with due caution, we covered a distance of twelve kilometres to within about three kilometres of the bridge at de Groote Barrier, having seen but one German standing in a field and demanding to be taken prisoner.

"To attempt to reach the main road from Overpelt, where the Troop now found itself, and join up with the Grenadiers was pointless, for the general advance would gain nothing by this manoeuvre; but if Creswell could move along the canal bank and get behind the Germans, it might be possible to examine the defences of the bridge at close quarters. It was a risk well worth trying and therefore, care-fully avoiding the village of Neerpelt, which was left to the east, the Troop moved north-west for a short distance, halting when nearing the canal.

From this point the road ran parallel to the canal before joining the main road near the bridge, but the latter was found to be hidden from view by a large factory building; neither was it possible

To see the far bank of the canal there since it was also hidden by trees. In addition Creswell decided that if he took the Troop a further, the cars would be heard, the alarm given and the bridge would probably be blown. This was the opportunity for some unorthodox reconnaissance, for time was pressing and it was growing dark. A steadily growing crowd of civilians supplied the means.

"I borrowed two bicycles and, leaving the Troop in command of Corporal Corton, set off for the factory with Corporal-of-Horse Cutler." With the unthinking stupidity of crowds the world over, their departure was given a spirited ovation; and had the bystanders not been promptly silenced, the enemy must surely have been warned of the presence of the British, for already Germans had been noticed patrolling the northern bank of the canal.

The outward journey was accomplished successfully, although just before reaching the factory an enemy patrol was seen on the other side of the canal, and in moving out of sight, Corporal-of-Horse Cutler, who admitted that he was more at home in the turret of a Daimler than at the wheel of a Belgian racing bicycle, toppled off the machine, his Sten gun clattering on to the road.

Fortunately, like the cheering, this mishap went unnoticed. Leaving the bicycles outside the factory, and with a Belgian care-taker acting as look-out, Creswell and Cutler climbed to the top of the building, where the former, by dint of pushing his head through a skylight, could clearly see the bridge.

As an observation post this view-point could hardly have been bettered. A height of one hundred feet above sea-level in those flat Campine Plains of north-east Belgium is worth at least a thousand feet in any other land. Beneath him lay the whole plan of the enemy's bridge defences, spread out as if marked up on an overprint map. Four 88-mm. guns were carefully pin-pointed, and the best lines of approach from the south studied; so were the sand-bagged positions about the bridge, as well as the personnel manning them.

The enemy did not appear to be expecting immediate attack, and Lieutenant Creswell was able to complete his estimate of strength and dispositions before a burst of machine-gun fire from a post by the bridge shattered the skylight and made him duck hurriedly. However, his purpose fulfilled, he now re-joined

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Corporal-of-Horse Cutler on the floor below. Before leaving the factory on the return journey, the patrol was warned by the caretaker that there were eight Germans outside the gates, "searching for them." This unwelcome news decided Creswell to abandon all thoughts of bicycling back and the machines were left behind. Clambering over an outhouse, several rubbish dumps, and a slag-heap, he and Cutler regained the road thither back a lay under cover of bushes.

Here, to their surprise, two cars, a large black Mercedes and another stair car, lay smouldering on opposite sides of the road. and it transpired that these had crossed the bridge from the north at the time the patrol was climbing to the top of the factory. Both cars had run head on into the rest of the troop and had been knocked out, and the Germans reported at the factory by the care taker were in reality the survivors of this episode.

On re-joining Ins Troop, Creswell wirelessed that the route was clear and urged the dispatch of an attacking force without delay, by the same route which he had taken. The Irish Guards were not slow in responding and their group covered the eight miles to the factory at top speed, where contact was made with the armoured cars.

Colonel "Joe" Vandeleur, congratulating the Household Cavalry men of their valuable work, said that the angle of approach appealed to him, adding, "I prefer an oblique approach to dead ahead: obviously bold-ness is the thing we will rush the bridge."

So far the Germans had given little sign that they were expecting trouble, the defenders of the bridge being no doubt lulled into a sense of security by thoughts that their battle group farther south barring the main approach road had not yet been overcome by the Grenadier Guards.

The light was failing when the Irish Guards formed up for attack as silently as possible under cover of the factory.

Then, when it was practically dark, they made their dash. A green Very light described a graceful arc in the sky.

Then followed a red light, and every tank machine gun south of the canal seemed to open up at once. It was too much to expect that the Germans and the bridge with its elaborate defences could be stormed without opposition, and the sappers accompanying the tanks and backed by the infantry were once again compelled to remove the fuses attached to the demolition bombs under heavy small-arms fire.

But what mattered most was that the bridge did not go skywards, and, with surprise on their side, and great dash, the Irish Guards quickly overran the guns and their crews, thus establishing a small and compact bridgehead out of which was later destined to burst the spearhead of the British Second Army's advance into Holland.

Later on in the evening, when they had prevailed over the cross-road defences to the south, the Grenadiers joined up to help in the task of ensuring the safety of this most valuable prize. The Germans had obviously intended and their subsequent actions continued this to hold on to this last safety exit of the de Groote Barrier.

It was to be a holt-hole for those of (their troops remaining, south of the canal, and they were not slow to react to its capture. Sadly enough, one of the first to be killed in the ensuing, series of counter-attacks was Major Peel, Irish Guards officer in command of the Squadron of tanks which had rushed to the defences.

Because of the lack of road space brigade headquarters were today far behind the battle. and the Irish Guards were out of wireless touch; but just after midnight Colonel Vandeleur was with great difficulty able to report through Lieutenant Creswell's wireless straight back to 2nd Household Cavalry Headquarters, who were with the Main Division farther back still, "Bridge captured intact; situation in hand, all fighting has now subsided."

This was cited by General Horrocks as an outstanding example of the excellence of the Regiment's wireless communications. Appropriately enough, the de Groote Barrier bridge was named "Joe's bridge" in honour of Lieutenant-Colonel J. O. E. Vandeleur, commanding the Irish Guards Group.

During the late afternoon "D" Squadron had also moved up to the Escaut Canal, following the route taken by Lieutenant Creswell's Troop as far as Neerpelt. Lieutenant Jonkheer Groeninx van Zoelen's Troop found the bridge to the east of the village already blown, with the Germans entrenched on the far bank.

On approaching the canal to inspect the damage and width of the gap, the cars were quite heavily mortared and had to retire slightly and take up another position of observation. Here, in the course of an interchange of small-arms fire, Trooper George Thomason from the Support Troop was killed.

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Lieutenant Clark's Heavy Troop 75-mm. guns then took a hand in the proceedings and the enemy were soon quietened.

However, the Germans were to remain in this area in some strength, and when the advance was eventually resumed a week later, 8 Corps experienced severe fighting before they were able to force a crossing here. On this occasion the ever-present problem of communications in an armoured car regiment was brought out forcibly.

We have heard how the Irish Guards were out of touch with Brigade Headquarters, and although the vital message regarding the bridge did eventually get through, it was very much touch and go. In the case of "D" Squadron, Major Ward was expecting important orders for the next day's advance, but he also was now out of touch with Regimental Head-quarters, who had found it necessary on this occasion to remain with Division as far back as Beeringen.

The Squadron Leader had there-fore no alternative but to send back his Rear Link car several miles to regain contact. Whether Regimental Headquarters should remain back with the senior formation or move up with the leading battle group was a problem continually confronting Colonel Abel Smith, and to the end of the war it was never really satisfactorily solved, for the governing factor was more one of range of the No. 19 wireless set than of unit organization.

### 11 September

If regimental headquarters were close up behind the leading squadron of armoured cars, it was a safe bet that vital information would come through with Corps out of range and unable to decipher the message. If regimental headquarters were at the headquarters of the higher formation then the Squadrons in their turn would find themselves out of touch with headquarters. The "book" answer to the problem, which was to send out a "Step-up,"\* was all very li tie in theory.

But in action ion reconnoitring Squadrons rarely had the officer personnel to spare. There was also a limit to the number of liaison officers available at Regimental Headquarters for such a task. Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties, not once in all operations in which the Regiment took part in North-West Europe was there a case of a message failing to get through due to a breakdown in wireless communication.

Next morning, as 11th Armoured Division had by now almost taken over responsibility for the right flank, Guards Armoured Division were able to give their undivided attention to the problem of completing the reduction of Hechtel and Bourg Leopold, both of which places were still holding out stubbornly, and to consolidate, although not enlarge, the de Groote Barrier bridgehead.

Since there were still Germans on the south bank of the Escaut Canal, Major Bowes Daly was ordered to reconnoitre westwards with "A" Squadron in the direction of the village of Lommel, while Major Ward, "D" Squadron, relieved of his responsibilities in the Lille St. Hubert and Neerpelt area by the advent of 11th Armoured Division elements, concentrated to the immediate west of what was already known as "Cresswell's Factory," there to await further orders.

It was a confusing morning all round. There was a dense, early-morning mist and the woods west of "Joe's bridge" were found to be sheltering enemy tanks. Several Irish Guards' tanks were reported by civilians to be German, and vice versa.

The unfortunate inhabitants of Lommel, after having twice been assured by the British that there was now plus de danger, only to be promptly shelled by the Germans, finally gave up in despair and took to their cellars, where they remained for the rest of the day, doggedly reporting everything moving, friend or foe, as being enemy.

Lieutenant Franklin's Troop pursued a 75-mm. S.P. gun after being disturbed by it at their breakfasts, but it escaped back into the trees. 'corporal-of-Horse Booth's car in the same Troop pulled into a farm house then someone heard a rumble, looked over a fence and saw an 88-mm. gun pulling out.

- *\*A wireless car positioned between two out of touch stations to relay messages.*
- *\*\*The the bridgehead could not be enlarged too much for fear of giving away future intentions of operation Market Garden.*

Moving along the road 100 yards away were six others, led by a Mall 1V and an SP. With along barrelled 75mm gun/ Lieutenant Cresswell troop then came out of the mist and, ran into the leader of the convoy

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and had an A. P. shot put through the front, wheel of one of the armoured cars, which nevertheless got away without further damage.

Later in the morning Lieutenant Murray's Heavy Troop came up and his Matador engaged the S.P. gun at 1000 yards, registering a direct hit with his 75-mm. at the first attempt and scoring four more in rapid succession, when the vehicle was seen to burst into flames and finally blow up.

" Squadron had a notable day. As part of the preliminary plans for the future airborne operation, General Adair was keenly concerned with the bridge at Valkenswaard, situated eleven kilo-metres north of the Escaut Canal and eight kilometres inside the Dutch frontier.

The full significance of this bridge was of course not appreciated by the Regiment at the time, but the message which reached Major Ward at dawn on the 11th of September was that "a very senior Sunray is most anxious that you find out all about it."

The bridge lay some ten kilometres beyond the Irish Guards' bridge-head and there were no other roads except the direct main route from which it could be approached.

Therefore, on receipt of his orders, the Squadron Leader decided to move his own headquarters up to the Irish Guards group immediately south of "Joe's bridge" and from there dispatch two Reconnaissance Troops (those of Lieutenants Hanbury and Bachanan-Jardine) northwards to the perimeter defences, from whence they would await a suitable opportunity to break out. By the time the Troops had reached their locations and Squadron Headquarters were established with the Irish Guards, the sun had already begun to dispel the early morning mists. There was an indefinable atmosphere of uneasiness surrounding the factory area and the cross-roads immediately south of "Joe's Fridge."\*

The enemy was sniping at the factory itself, "A" Squadron kept sending warning reports of suspicious movement in the woods to the west, and the Irish Guards were suffering from harassing shell fire from guns to the north. If one may be allowed a criticism of Guards Armoured Division as a whole, there was a tendency to establish headquarters on cross-roads, a fault which as time went on, and perhaps because of the overwhelming Allied air superiority, was to become marked through-out the British Army.

On this occasion, staff cars, lorries, tanks and all the paraphernalia which go to make up an armoured group head-quarters were parked more or less on the cross-roads, inviting shelling. There were uncorroborated rumours that two Panthers were at large south of the bridge, but nobody worried unduly.

*\*Not to be confused with the main cross roads to the south where the Grenadier Guards had knocked out the 88mm the previous evening.*

Suddenly the reserve troops which were harboured close to the factory (brewing, up their second go of tea that morning!) were startled by a loud crash, followed by several more explosions. emitting from the direction of the cross-roads.

Solid shots ricocheted off the road and, throwing up a spout of small pebbles, sped past a surprised three-tonner lorry in the direction of Neerpelt. Several more bangs followed, by which time the Rear Link officer had Called up Major Ward to know what was happening.

Through the wireless he could hear the sounds of a machine gun firing and the distinct sound a round being put into the breach. "In action--wait out," answered Major Ward, followed by a succession of inure crashes and thy lull% of a Staghound's gun. The Rear Link jumped into his car and re-joined his Squadron Leader. A gruesome sight greeted his eyes. Several men had. been killed, others lay wounded, and the of a Humber staff car littered the roadway.

An M10 British propelled gun had been knocked Out. Corporal of Horse Connor pointed ruefully to his Matador's gun mantlet ( It had been sliced as if it had been butter), and Captain Waterhouse stood stripped to his waist, his face covered in lather, brandishing a shaving brush in one hand and a pistol in the other. it appeared that a column of German tanks and Ser. guns had motored straight into the Irish Guards' positions, covered in the dense woods leading to Lommel.

The first tank had motored to within a few hundred yards of the cross-roads without being seen, then it must have realized that its best chance of escape lay in firing of a few rapid rounds, skid turning and making off via the trees.

No one agreed as to what exactly did happen within die next minute or so, but, piecing individual accounts together, these salient facts emerge.

The first two German shells had crashed into Reconnaissance Troop of Honey tanks belonging to the Irish guards. killing seven their men and wounding others.

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A young gunner standing at an anti-tank gun had shouted to his crew to hold their fire as he thought the suspect vehicle might be British. It was his last act. For by his fatal hesitation he was killed with his crew with the next shell.

All was then confusion and for a time (the only gun able to shoot back was Major Ward's in his staghound. With great coolness he and his crew, Corporal of Horse Strowbridge, and Corporals Thompson and Houghton, stood their ground tiring as fast as they could go at the German tank.

There was no chance of penetrating the enemy's frontal armour but it was hoped that by rapid fire that the tank's attention might be distracted from the numerous soft vehicles at its mercy long enough to enable a heavier gun to arrive and knock it out. This was precisely what happened. And while the household cavalry pop gun was blazing away with the greatest

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intrepidity," an M10 belonging to the anti tank regiment quietly pulled into the middle of the road and with unhurried calm destroyed the German with its first shot.

The muzzle flash provided the comic relief to this otherwise confused and unsatisfactory battle by burning the eyebrows and much of the hair of the Irish Guards R.S.M. a fine figure of a man who doubtless saw little to laugh at the time.

The wrecked car proved to have contained Colonel Vandeleur's kit, which was a total loss.

Meanwhile the other German vehicles had turned off the road and moved to a flank, knocking out two more of the Irish Guards tanks on the Way. They then backed by a company of mixed S.S. and infantry launched a determined attack along the canal bank, threatening to recapture the bridge, but were eventually seen off by the Irishmen and, after retreating back by the way they had come, were caught by grenadier column moving up from the south.

While this fracas had been taking place, Lieutenant Buchanan-Jardine had been examining the possibilities of slipping out of the bridgehead and into Holland.

The commander of the forward infantry positions had reported being forced to withdraw slightly that morning by shell and machine-gun fire, and from somewhere on the sand dillies to the north an enemy gun had been dropping shells into the tiny bridgehead with regularity.

However, after scanning the long straight road through his glasses, and things appearing to be fairly quiet. Lieutenant Buchanan-Jardine decided to make his attempt. He left his two armoured cars hidden up in some trees because in the circumstances they offered too large a target and would be more of a hindrance than a help.

Since one of his scout cars was temporarily out of action, he borrowed a second vehicle from Lieutenant Hanbury's Troop.

In this car were two tried veterans of 3 Troop, Lance Corporal-Horse Brook and Trooper Bateman.

Lieutenant Buchanan-Jardine decided to lead himself, with Trooper Buckley as his driver.

The Irish Guards wished them luck, promised not to shoot them up if they returned, and the party set off. German infantry was soon encountered and for a time the two cars were compelled to hide up in the trees.

Then the Troop Leader felt that in the undergrowth there was more danger in being stalked while doing nothing and so resumed the advance at increased speed.

"I felt sure that we should encounter more of these damned little men in green and in the circumstances speed was preferable to the cautious tactical advance at this stage."

Luck was with them. By two o'clock in the afternoon they were several miles inside the Dutch border and halted at a spot reasonably screened from observations. Having run the gauntlet of three separate parties of Germans. All too surprised to fire.

The bridge over the River Dommel could be clearly seen, immediately beyond lay the small town of Valkenswaard. A preliminary report that the bridge was still intact was wirelessed back.

Doubts that it might be too fragile to hold the Shermans were soon put at rest by the sight of a German Mark IV tank which moved slowly forward out of Valkenswaard and settled like a giant toad squatting in the middle of the bridge.

From enemy movement in the surrounding area, it appeared to be guarding in somewhat nervous manner the only approach into Valkenswaard from the south.

There was a small café at the side of the road close to where Lieutenant Buchanan-Jardine's party had halted, and from it now emerged a band of overjoyed Dutchmen, welcoming the first soldiers to set foot in Holland.\*

They, like the villagers on the Escaut Canal, could hardly have done more to give away the Household Cavalrymen had they tried, but their intentions were of the best. The Troop Leader calmed their understandable excitement and tried to find out what he could about the enemy.

Then, having warned the Dutch that his appearance did not necessarily presage the immediate arrival of British forces, he bade them good-bye and good luck.

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They in their turn warned him that there were many "Muffen" lying in ambush on the road back. The departure was speeded by pathetic entreaties for an early return, but as events transpired, Valkenswaard was to have to wait nearly a week before being freed from enemy yoke. There was no doubt as to tactics on the way back to the bridgehead. The Troop Leader ordered full speed ahead and the gallant little Daimler scout cars really showed what they could do. Nose to tail, with their fluid flywheels screaming defiance, they raced southwards at well over sixty miles per hour. Before the ambushing bazooka men could even raise their weapons to their shoulders the party was through. Everything on the outside of the cars was punctured and broken by small-arms fire "including the precious cooking utensils," but the bridgehead was reached safely with the occupants unscathed. There was a sad sequel to Valkenswaard's day of rejoicing, which only came to light when Mr. A. C. Lemmens, a Dutch official working in the Burgomaster's office, wrote to me after the war. His letter, apart from the omission of a few sentences having no bearing on the history, is reproduced in its entirety.

*\* The Grenadiers' historian claims that his Regiment provided the first soldier to set foot in Holland, citing a patrol which crossed the frontier on (he 12th of Sept. The author cannot at the time of writing have been aware of the above Household Cavalry patrol. Which was carried out a day previously and on the express order of the Divisional commander. Major-General Adair. Lieutenant Buchanan-Jardine was subsequently awarded, as well as the M.C. the order of the Bronze Lion by the royal Netherlands Government for being the first allied soldier to set foot in Holland since the German occupation.*



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VALKENSWAARD,

June 2nd, 1947.

DEAR SIR,

*First of all I must apologize for not having written before, but I hope you will understand that it has taken quite a long time before I got some photo-graphs. I am very pleased I am able to give you some particulars about the two armoured cars which came to Valkenswaard on September 11th, 1944. On Monday, September 11th, at about two o'clock in the afternoon, we saw a lot of German soldiers running along the houses holding their rifles in their hands, while their helmets and uniforms were camouflaged. They looked like rascals and so they went to the Belgian frontier. After those foot passengers came the "Deutsche Wehrmacht." It is impossible for me to describe all the things they went to fight with (prams, bicycles, cases on wheels which they took from the children, etc.). I must not forget to say that we also saw some tanks. At the same time (two o'clock) the two armoured cars arrived in Valkenswaard. They did not go any farther than the first café on the road between Belgium and the first Dutch bridge they had to cross. When they arrived at the above café they left the cars and went into the café. In the twinkling of an eye the cars were surrounded by the civilians. When the first English soldiers arrived there were standing a lot of German cars with dead bodies beside the road. I need not tell you that the civilians took the opportunity for taking everything they wanted (wheels, tyres, etc.). At four o'clock the English soldiers went back to Belgium after having warned the Dutch people that they were not liberated yet. Just after their return, the Germans came back. Within a few minutes all the civilians had gone. The Germans went in to the cafe and asked for inquiries. Of course nobody knew about the English visit. In the meantime the orange knots disappeared, but notwithstanding all this, the Germans shot three civilians (see the mark on the photograph; this is one of the killed men). After all this we had a terrible week; we were waiting and waiting... Day in, day out, we saw German soldiers and women going in the direction of Eindhoven. They stole bicycles and they sent the Dutch people to the frontiers to dig holes. September the 17th, the day of our liberation. The fight was very hard. All day long we had to hide from the rascals. At about three o'clock in the afternoon the bombardment started (English). They bombed four cigar factories and a lot of houses and shops. After the bombardment we were liberated. Well, this is all, and I hope that you can use these particulars. I would be very pleased if you will send the photographs back, and I would like very much to receive a book when you have finished it.*



Hoping to hear from you once more, Yours sincerely, (Signed) A. C. LEMMENS.

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### 12th September 1944

Although the Germans continued to filter through from the direction of Lommel, they were most stragglers from farther west, where increasing pressure by 50th Division expanding the Anvil Canal bridgehead at Gheel was forcing, the enemy back across the Escaut Canal.

During the past few days the battle had bid fair to become one of the "bittiest" and most involved actions ever fought by Guards Armoured Division, but gradually the general situation was clearing itself up and affairs to the south were looking much more tidy.

It was true that Hechtel was still holding out, in spite of all the efforts of the Welsh Guards group, but to everyone's relief, Bourg Leopold, with its enormous barracks now gutted by shell fire, had at last fallen.

However, so impatient had the B.B.C. become at the delay that it had decided to make the place surrender on the previous day's one o'clock news, at the very moment when a message from the Brigade Commander was saying over the wireless that, "Bourg Leopold is full of Boche and I have told my chaps to sit back outside it until I can lay on a proper attack with artillery support."

As far as the exhausted Foot Guards were concerned, the B.B.C. version did not go with a swing, particularly with the Coldstream group, who had incurred heavy casualties already and looked like having to face another hard day's fighting.

11th Armoured Division could now report having made firm contact with elements of 2nd U.S. Armoured Division advancing on the axis Hasselt—Asche Sittard.

During the day they reduced the village of Peer after strong resistance and then moved on to occupy Petit Brogel with relative ease. With the Inns of Court Regiment now patrolling up to the Escaut Canal from Neerpelt down to Bree, all anxiety on the score of that flank came to an end.

"B" Squadron, who had been protecting the guns of 55th Field Regiment, were relieved of their responsibilities and moved forward on to the Heath near Vlasmer, while "C" Squadron had already joined Regimental Headquarters, who, after their wireless difficulties of the previous twenty-four hours, had themselves moved up to a new location in the woods west of Hechtel.

Anticipating that at any moment the Welsh Guards might flush numbers of the enemy out of Hechtel, Colonel Abel Smith ordered Major Herbert to station some of his Troops to watch the eastern and north-eastern exits of the village, but the day closed with nothing having been seen of the enemy.

Not until a set-piece attack had been put in by the Welsh Guards group, supported by a heavy artillery barrage in which guns from 11th Armoured Division joined in on the 12th of September to pound Hechtel into a heap of rubble, did its defenders at last give in.

Out of a garrison of approximately a thousand men, nearly 350 were found to have been killed and 400, including wounded, taken prisoner in. Most of them paratroopers, had fought incredibly hard and bravely and to label them as "fanatic" as one broadsheet chose to was as inexact and stupid as would have been so to denigrate the valour of the Welsh Guards who had had such a hard battle to overcome them.

The working of the "propaganda" mind was sometimes hard for the British soldier to fathom.

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In the closing hours of the battle for Hechtel, "C" Squadron, which was still patrolling the north-eastern exits of the town, collected a considerable number of prisoners who had managed to evade the Welsh Guards' ring, and Lieutenant van Cutsem's Heavy Troop became so engrossed in its work that, according to Corporal-of-Horse Shepherd, "Mr. van Cutsem quite failed to notice the green trace of three 88mm. shells whizz past over the top of his head.

In addition, at the finish of the Hechtel show, about fifteen Jerries' walked, or I should say ran, smack into us. Mr. van Cutsem lined them up and ordered Corporal Woods and Trooper Sloper to search them while he stood glowering over them.

They were a villainous-looking bunch, and one of them, a huge hulk of a man (I believe he was a member of the Hermann Goering Division; he was dressed entirely in black with a skull and cross-bones on his chest), started protesting when his turn came to be searched to which Mr. van Cutsem proclaimed in his rather particular tone of voice used on such occasions, 'Deal with him, Woods.' Well, Woods was a big fellow, but this German made two of him, and I cannot think that Woods's heart was entirely in his work as he stepped up to this chap.

Fortunately for all concerned, the big fellow gave in first, much to Woods's relief ! " Although for a few days small pockets of Germans were to remain south of the canal, this was more due to lack of escape routes than by intent. The fall of Hechtel meant the virtual elimination of all resistance in the sector enclosed by the line of canals Escaut—Meuse Albert.

### 13th September 1944

By the 13th of September the entire Regiment was harboured south of the Escaut Canal on a pleasant stretch of open heathland near the village of Vlasmer, and just off the main road along which trundled the supplies and reinforcements for the bridgehead.

For some reason this area came to be known to the Regiment as "The Blasted Heath" —we could have been in many worse places.

The blowing up of all the Albert Canal crossings had been a forewarning of what was to come. From now onwards advances were to be hard and slogging, with the bazooka more and more ousting the 88-mm. gun as the main eliminator of our armour.

There were other and more far-reaching causes for the slowing down of the momentum of advance, the main being the great difficult-ties of supply and communications.

The British Army was still being fed from the Normandy beaches, and the Germans, knowing only too well what were (lie problems, were determined to deny to the Allies the port of Antwerp for as long as possible. This they could do most effectively by holding the Scheldt estuary.

Where guns precluded all shipping from using Europe's second largest port.

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However, that which concerned us for the immediate future was the message from the Corps Commander, which read : "Top up tidy up tails up and no move for several days."

It was acted upon with whole-hearted alacrity, Guards Armoured Division had most certainly earned its rest and yet, welcome as were the words, we felt in our hearts that they could have but one interpretation. Official hopes that the war might be ended before the advent of the floods and snows of winter had now all but vanished.

The succeeding days passed rapidly. There was much work to do making good the ravages of a campaign which had taken us many hundreds of miles in the last three weeks.

The weather was generally fine, although people were glad of their greatcoats when the sun went down, for night frosts had already touched up the near-by apple orchards. Brussels was but two hours' journey by road and many managed to slip in a brief semi-official twenty-four hours' leave in that delightful city, fast returning to normal. In the evenings of leisure on "The Blasted Heath," when work was done, there were the wines and the cigars from the Brussels dump and pleasant inter-squadron visits and after-dinner conversation.

Speculation was rife as to what the future held in store. Good news came through that all the members of Lieutenant Bethell's Troop, which had been knocked out in the For de l'Eveque in Normandy, were safe, most being prisoner in Germany; but Lieu-tenant Bethell, together with Lieutenant Smallwood, of "D" Squadron Heavy Troop, had been picked up by the Americans on their entry into Paris and were now back in England slowly recovering from their wounds.

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### 15th September 1944

By the 15th of September there grew the feeling that a renewed advance could not be long delayed, and one felt that the small bridge-head beyond "Joe's bridge" was the clue to the likely direction of any new thrust.

To add weight to this theory, a pompously worded little handbook had but recently been circulated informing all officers that the Dutch "were a very clean people.

" After which followed a series of rumours. Inquisitive Troop Leaders paid visits to Regimental Headquarters, but had to come away with nothing more satisfactory in answer to their questions than a wise look and a guarded, "I wouldn't know really" which, of course, was true, but certainly not intended to be taken that way.



"THE BLASTED HEATH," VLASMER, BELGIUM

15th September, 1944 : Officers and Corporals-of-Horse assembling to receive orders for the forthcoming battle leading up to Arnhem

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### 16th September 1944

Then on the 16th of September Lieutenant Haskard's jeep arrived back from divisional Headquarters loaded with a complete new set of maps covering, the Low Countries up to the Zuider Zee, and the secret was out. A warning, to stand by for orders came round to every squadron. Colonel Abel Smith would arrive, any moment.

When he had finally finished speaking to the last Squadron and answered all questions it was late afternoon, but by then every trooper knew that the morrow would see the Household Cavalry on its way to Holland, bound northwards initially along the same road traversed by lieutenant Buchanan-Jardine's two scout cars six days previously.

I well remember that "D" Squadron were the last to receive their orders, for they were not to be employed in the early stages, and that when Colonel Abel Smith got to the "Intention" paragraph he gave out that, "2 HCR, once beyond Arnhem, will crack about from Apeldoorn to Nunspeet and the sea beyond"; adding with infinite gusto for the benefit of those already immersed in maps and studying the fearful blue maze of rivers and other menacing-looking water obstacles, "disrupting the enemy's communications.

Lieutenant Hughes was even informed that he might be required as temporary L.O. with the Airborne force" had he got his parachute ready?

Which question made the "D" Squadron Echelon Commander stroke his nose reflectively. There was one rare and greatly appreciated feature about this operation whatever might be in store for us, at least it did not presage a start at first light.

Evening came, we drank our champagne, and over "Willem Twee" cigars and coffee fortified with the last remaining dregs of calvados, discussed the prospects of the morrow. It was a dark but fine night, and not until the early hours of the morning did the last lamp go out.

### "THE WIDTH OF ONE ROAD"

"MARKET-GARDEN," for such was the name given to the joint Anglo American operation in which we were about to take part, was a bold and ambitious attempt to turn the enemy's Siegfried Line defences by outflanking them to the north.

If successful, not only would it cut off communications between Germany and the Low Countries, but it would throw open the entire North German Plain and the road to Berlin to the Allied Armies. We looked upon it as a final all-out effort, aiming at winning the war on the Western Front before the winter set in. Before elaborating on the Regiment's part in the operation, it is necessary to understand fully what the task involved and to know who was to carry it out.

The essential feature of the whole plan was "the laying of a carpet of airborne troops" across five successive major water obstacles on an extremely narrow front. These were the Neder Rijn at Arnhem, the Waal at Nijmegen, the Maas at Grave, and two important canals, the Wilhelmina, north of Eindhoven, and the Zuid Wilhelmsvaart, running parallel to the Maas and linking the towns of Helmond and Hertogenbosch.

For this purpose one British Airborne Division and two American Airborne Divisions, as well as, later, a Polish Parachute Brigade, were to be employed all except the last preceding the advance of the ground forces.

The 1<sup>st</sup> British Airborne Division was to capture the road and railway bridges over Neder Rijn at Arnhem, while latter the Polish Parachute Brigade was to land to the immediate south of the bridges.

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82nd United States Airborne Division was to seize the bridges at Nijmegen and Grave, in connection with which the capture of the high ground between Groesbeek and Nijmegen was vital.

101st United States Airborne Division was to capture the bridges and defiles on 30 Corps axis between Grave and Eindhoven.

These included the bridge over the canal at Zon, whence the Division was to advance south and take Eindhoven; the bridge at Veghel; and the area north of Zon, with the object of capturing the St. Oedenrode bridgehead.

The main object of all these landings was "to facilitate the passage of 30 Corps," whose intention it was to "thrust north with all possible speed from the Meuse—Escaut Canal bridgehead, linking up along the airborne carpet eventually to secure the general area Arnhem Nunspeet.

The Guards Armoured Division was to be the spearhead of the advance "with the ultimate task of dominating the area between Apeldoorn and the Zuider Zee." 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment, once the Division had broken out of the Meuse—Escaut bridgehead, would lead the advance on one centre line which was to be not only that of Guards Armoured Division but of 30 Corps as well.

This ran through Valkenswaard, Eindhoven, St. Oedenrode, Veghel, Uden, Grave, Nijmegen and on to Arnhem. To widen what would be a dangerously narrow corridor, 8 Corps were subsequently to move up over the Escaut Canal on our right and 12 Corps on our left—the latter being the stronger of the two formations, for it was anticipated that when the larger part of the German Fifteenth Army found itself cut off in Western Holland it would react strongly, if only in a desperate attempt to regain its own lines.

This, to a certain extent, was what happened, but, inconveniently for 30 Corps, some time elapsed before 12 Corps came on to the scene. "Market Garden" appeared to possess certain unique features. In the first place, the air part of the scheme was to be the largest Allied airborne operation ever to be undertaken.

In the second place, the hazarding of an entire Corps along one single narrow road,\* with no chance of deployment for over sixty miles, and inside enemy occupied territory the whole way, was an extremely bold move which had never before been attempted, even in North Africa.

Another aspect, about which we knew nothing at the time, was that the whole operation had only been decided upon at the last minute.

*\*Horrocks salient was about forty feet wide. That was all it needed just the width of one road.*

One presumed at the time that the operation could only have been deemed possible because of the chaotic state of Wafts within the German camp. Subsequent lighting was to prove that the enemy had in fact regained his balance to a remarkable degree and was not quite so groggy as imagined.

We were well aware that the plan was dangerously dependent on good weather for the airborne forces : that the balance between success and failure was a delicate one, closely related to the most detail J. traffic control the assembling and marshalling of forces requiring the most careful organization.

It had to be so flexible that once Guards Armoured Division had broken through, the Corps Commander could call forward any body of troops he required. Thus, at no time could an order of march for over 20,000 vehicles be prescribed. Should any of the bridges at Grave, Nijmegen or Arnhem be found destroyed, it was of paramount importance that the Regiment fan out along the banks to seek out new points suitable for crossing. Bridging "on a vast scale" had been assembled in the Bourg Leopold area and organized in columns to be held in readiness to be called forward at a moment's notice.

During the course of our regrouping, the enemy made a number of small counter-attacks against the bridgehead and, disturbing fact, it was becoming increasingly evident that he was succeeding in the organization of a co-ordinated defensive system.



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However, during the 'light of the 16th /17th September, 11th Armoured Division, now forming part of 8 Corps, put in some feint attacks and probed away steadily to our right in the area Lanklaer—Bree.

We hoped that the enemy might be deceived.

### 17th September 1944

Because of flying conditions in England and over the North Sea there was doubt up to the last moment as to whether operation "Market-Garden" could take place at the appointed time, but at half-past twelve (midday) General Horrocks at his forward headquarters overlooking the canal received the signal he was awaiting. The air-borne forces had left their bases in England and France.

Over Belgium the skies were a clear blue, and those in the Regiment not immediately concerned with the initial stages of the advance walked over to a sandy eminence, hoping to catch a glimpse of the aerial armada as it appeared over the tops of the pine trees.

They had not long to wait. Far to the west the first tiny dots could already be seen. These grew rapidly in size until it was possible to distinguish numbers on the wings of the leading, planes. Then with a dull roar die aerial convoy veered northwards into occupied Holland mid was lost to sight.

Not one enemy plane took to the air to meet them.

Zero hour, the time at which the land attack was launched, was at twenty five minutes to three.

The Irish Guards group lined up across "Joes Bridge" and close behind them waited Major Wignalls Squadron "B".



Trooper Strange and Benstead in their Dingo of the 2HCR at Aalsterweg, north of Eindhoven during Market Garden.

Date 17th Sept 1944

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Boschdijk, south of the Woenselsestreet (with the yellow air recognition 'cloth' on the back of he tank).  
Date 17th Sept 1944



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"Tac" Regimental Headquarters took up their allotted station close to 5th Brigade Headquarters, while Major Herbert's Squadron ("C") moved into place to their immediate rear.

Shortly after two o'clock in the afternoon, a heavy artillery barrage (300 guns), intended to soften up the enemy defences, crept inexorably up the cobbled road towards Valkenswaard, probing and blasting both sides. Medium guns opened up close behind the two reserve squadrons, "A" and "D,"\* adding their noise to the infernal din of hundreds of shells whistling and screeching overhead.

After twenty minutes or so the barrage lifted and the tanks of the Irish Guards began to move out of the bridgehead. Then, as the range gradually became too great for the guns, the first squadron of rocket firing Typhoons took on the task, swooping to the attack and following one another on the "cab rank" system controlled by an R.A.F. officer in a contact car with the leading tanks.

To those of us who were, as yet, onlookers, the sudden dive, followed seconds later by a terrifying hiss ending in the dull roar of an explosion, was shattering enough. To the enemy, sheltering in their trenches or behind their gun shields, the effect must have been appalling.

The first wave of Irish Guards tanks bore through, the enemy having evidently gone to ground, but stunned as the Germans must have been, no sooner had the barrage ceased than they reappeared. In quick succession nine tanks were knocked out by 88 mms. and bazookas, many of the Guardsmen being killed by machine-gun fire as they left their burning turrets. Still, the attack was pressed home.

Prisoners began to trickle back over the canal; they were a tough lot one of them managed to secrete and then throw a grenade into a carrier at the side of the road, killing a sergeant. At half past three the Germans in their turn began shelling the road and several lorries went up in smoke. Then one of the Typhoons unfortunately knocked out two Sherman tanks. "B" Squadron, not yet directly engaged, never-the-less lost two armoured cars belonging to Lieutenant Kavanagh's Troop.

The road was being heavily mortared by the Germans after the Squadron had passed across the Dutch frontier, and there was a jam of tanks, armoured cars, lorries and half-tracks waiting to move forward. Suddenly Corporal-of-Horse Johnson saw a half-track trying to pull across the road on to the grass verge, which was mined. "Get off that verge!" shouted Johnson in warning, but he was too late.

The half-track disintegrated in a violent explosion which must have been caused by a land mine. All the crew except the officer in command, who died of wounds some hours later, were killed instantly; Johnson, standing in his turret, had both his eardrums blown in and was badly concussed, but before collapsing remembered putting his hands to his head "to see if it was still there, it felt so light.

*\*A & D squadron were to wait on the Blasted Heath until such time as developments allowed them to be ordered forward to escort the Guards Armoured Division echelon and the RASC columns.*

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Corporal Britton, in the other Daimler car, was wounded by bomb splinters in the head, but after having, been taken to a barn serving as a first aid post, insisted on getting back to his car which was, together with its companion, lying wrecked at the side of the road, with the body and suspension blown off the wheels. When it became obvious that the car would have to be abandoned.

Britton found an infantry officer, got the car dragged off the main road, where it was blocking the way, and suggested that it might form a pill-box for his troops, who were at that time holding the flank with some anti-tank guns.

The officer fell in with the suggestion readily and his men were given a brief demonstration on how the 2-pounder worked. Having done this, Britton's wounds took effect, and he collapsed.

Grimly the Irish Guards fought their way along the road against stiff opposition.

As they put it, "The Intelligence spent the day in a state of indignant surprise: one German regiment after another appeared which had no right to be there." Already identification had shown that two parachute battalions and two battalions of 9 S.S. Division were in the area the latter formation a complete surprise.

Valkenswaard was reached by dusk where it was decided that Major Wignall's Squadron should now take over the lead from the Irish Guards and continue the advance next day.

Double summer time had only just ended and darkness appeared to fall with unexpected suddenness.

The worried German commander at Eindhoven rang up the Town Clerk at Valkenswaard, with instructions to the garrison to hold on at all costs a message which the Town Clerk took great delight in delivering in person to the Irish Guards!

On this note ended the day's fighting.

### **Night 17th September 1944**

The night was bitterly cold and it was raining hard. Fires from burning houses and hayricks lit up the sky, and in the distance glowed what remained of the factory which produced those excellent "Willem "Uwe" cigars.

Regimental Headquarters and most of "B" and "C" Squadrons slept by the side of the road, with a long line of vehicles double-banked back into Belgium.

Thank goodness," wrote a trooper, "there was little enemy shelling and no enemy planes."

### **18th September 1944**

It was a decidedly bedraggled column which prepared to move again at dawn on the 18th of September.

The regimental intention was that Major Herbert's Squadron should seek out a possible alternative route to the east of Valkenswaard.

Carry out patrols ahead of the Welsh Guards group, while Major Wignall's Squadron should continue reconnaissance of the centre line and, in particular, make contact with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division troops.

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Information as to the progress of which was still very vague. It was believed that they had not yet reached Eindhoven.

"C" Squadron soon ran into strong enemy opposition three miles east of Valkenswaard, and further attempts to find a way round were halted by the collapse of a small bridge at Zeelberg.

Corporal John Smith's scout car was hit by a bazooka and both he and Trooper Way, whose first day out as driver this was, were seriously wounded, Smith dying of his wounds the next day. In wooded country such as this the bazooka, wielded by resolute infantry against the armoured car patrol, was proving a most formidable weapon.

There was really little answer to it except the keenest observation. The Welsh Guards group came up with artillery support, but progress on this flank remained negligible although fighting continued all day. On the main axis, the story is best opened by following the leading "B" Squadron Troop.

Early morning visibility was extremely bad and Colonel "Joe" Vandeleur, commanding 3rd Irish Guards, under whom "B" Squadron were operating, rightly refused to allow Major Wignall to move off until the light had improved sufficiently to enable the scout car commander to see some way ahead.

Even so Lieutenant Tabor moved off just before half past five, in no way put out by the discovery on waking that he had spent the night next to three dead Germans and an unexploded Typhoon rocket. The plan was for the whole squadron to advance up the main road, with Lieutenant Tabor's Troop one and a half miles ahead. In the event of the latter meeting opposition, the second and third Troops were to loop to the east and west respectively and try to find an alternative way round.

Corporal Sparrow was in command of the leading scout car. The road out of Valkenswaard ran for several miles through dense pine-woods, opening out at a later stage into flat, sandy country. It was misty and visibility was down to 400 yards when, after advancing approximately two miles, Sparrow suddenly sighted a Panther tank and two self-propelled guns in a side turning.

The crew of the Panther were sitting on top of their tank and he gave them a long burst from his Bren gun before retiring out of sight. Lieutenant Tabor, on reporting this opposition, was ordered to remain in observation pending the arrival of the tanks of the Irish Guards.

However, the infantry arrived first and the position was explained to them. Before anything could be done about it, however, there was a rumbling sound and all three German vehicles drove out of the side turning and were off up the road towards Aalst. The two scout cars were after them like terriers, and after another mile or so one of the self-propelled guns was sighted on the outskirts of Aalst. Meanwhile, on first receipt of the report of enemy armour, Major Wignall had ordered two more Troops to start off on their loops. The Troop to the east, like "C" Squadron farther south, soon found itself held up, in this case by impassable water obstacles.

But to the west Lieutenant Palmer's Troop began to make effective if slow progress!

It is with this story that we are now concerned, returning to Lieutenant Tabor's Troop la latter on.

Travelling with Palmer's Reconnaissance troop was a Humber scout car commanded by Captain Balding and carrying, in addition, an American sergeant with a wireless set whose task was to try to establish contact with his airborne compatriots at the earliest opportunity.

Captain Balding's aim was to liaise with 101st U.S. Airborne north of Eindhoven and then keep the Regiment informed of the developing situation.

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At first the small streams spanned by fragile wooden bridges baffled all attempts to cross them. But with admirable perseverance the Troop kept pegging away. Eventually a way was found across the River de Run, and thereafter the route improved.

Enemy were encountered but were soon dealt with, for clearly nobody expected the armour to attempt such a cross-country run, and shortly before mid-day Lieutenant Palmer linked up with the Americans to the north of Eindhoven near a village called Woensel. \*

The Troop was enthusiastically greeted by Brigadier Higgins, second-in-command of 101st U.S. Airborne Division. From him it was learnt that the northern approaches to Eindhoven were not yet clear of enemy and that the Germans had blown up the bridge at Zon when the Americans were but two hundred yards from it.

This was bad news, for several valuable hours would be lost in repairing it. However, Captain Balding was able to pass back over the wireless the exact measurements of the gap and other R.E. requirements, which enabled the necessary bridging material to be brought forward in the Divisional column ready for the sappers to start work the moment Zon should be reached.

In addition, he was able to forward the request that a telephone call be put through to "Zon 244." This unorthodox manoeuvre straight through the German controlled telephone exchange was carried out with complete success, and an American officer was able to inform Divisional Headquarters that the airborne engineers were already hard at work preparing the approaches for them.

The information that "Stable Boys \*\* have contacted our Feathered Friends" created great excitement at Divisional Headquarters. It was the first of the three vital link-ups which would be necessary before the British Airborne could be relieved in their turn at Arnhem. In the meantime, on receipt of news of a way round to the west, the

*\*The Troop picked up several U.S. paratroopers who had dropped in the wrong place and took them on to re-join their comrades north of Eindhoven.*

*\*\* One of the more polite nicknames by which the Foot Guards referred to Household Cavalry.*

Grenadiers had sent their tanks to follow the armoured cars, but the wooden bridges proved unequal to carrying the weight of the Shermans.

The leading tank came to grief at the first stream south of the village of Waalse, where the bridge collapsed and threw vehicle and crew into the water with, luckily, no more serious casualty than that of an unfortunate sergeant who swallowed so much filthy water that he was sick for days afterwards.

The remainder were unable to follow and were compelled to return to the main road.

More attempts were made at different places, but the result was always the same the 'bridges would not take the strain.

Meanwhile, as the Irish Guards group were fighting their way up the main road from Aalst, severe fighting was also taking place north of Eindhoven for possession of the Eindhoven Bostel and Eindhoven St. Oedenrode Y-roads.

Without control of this important junction, further advance southwards into Eindhoven would be difficult for the Americans. By three o'clock in the afternoon, forward patrols had advanced south to as far as the railway line north of the town, but the American paratroopers were not too happy about their western flank, which in places was beginning to be hard pressed.



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Lieutenant Palmer had already met some wounded Americans who told him that they would be grateful for help in repelling German attacks on the bridge they were holding west of Zon.



As further immediate patrolling by the Armoured Car Troop was now curtailed by the blown Zon bridge, Major Wignall gave permission for Lieutenant Palmer to go to the aid of the Americans, and until dusk the troop fought by their side, finally being ordered to withdraw, which they did, bringing the American sick on top of the armoured cars to Zon.

We must now pick up the main advance which we left on the out-skirts of Aalst, temporarily held up by a self-propelled gun.

The Irish Guards tanks which had been called to the support of Lieutenant Tabor took some time in arriving, having to pass through "B" Squadron as well as the transport of most of the infantry on the narrow road, and as the situation remained quiet the Troop Leader decided to probe forward himself to see what was brewing up.

He soon encountered a group of German infantry, who scattered when fired on. Shortly afterwards the tanks arrived on the scene and the commander of a Firefly\* set about dealing with a German self-propelled gun.

He took five shots at it, obviously hitting it several times, but there was no reply or movement, whereupon Tabor decided push on and discovered that the vehicle had been abandoned due to a damaged track.

At this stage the patrol met a Dutch civilian, who supplied Tabor invaluable information about the enemy dispositions including a sketch map of the German defences outside Eindhoven.

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Unfortunately, it was impossible to understand most of what he said and he was passed back with his map to the Irish Guards. It subsequently transpired that he was the manager of Philips Electrical Works at Eindhoven, and his information proved accurate even down to details of individual gun emplacements.

At the northern end of Aalst was a small bridge over a stream which, when the patrol approached it, was found to be covered by another self-propelled gun 200 yards distant to the north.

This was reported and Tabor's four-man patrol dismounted and crawled into the ditch to observe. They saw a motor-cycle combination drive up to the gun from the direction of Eindhoven and halt. "We gave it a good long burst of Bren, which must have annoyed the S.P. gun as it fired three rounds of armour-piercing shot at us in quick succession."

In his reports, Lieutenant Tabor, like Captain Cooper, always evinced the greatest surprise when his aggressive tactics annoyed the Germans! After a minute or two the S.P. started up and moved off down a side road to the right, where it was joined by an armoured half-track.

These could be heard driving off together, and as by this time the tanks were in Aalst, Tabor decided to move on. Keeping close to Lance-Corporal-of-Horse Sparrow to give him fire support, the two scout cars crossed the bridge about a hundred yards apart.

Rather naturally, their weather eye was on the right of the road, which was the way taken by the ST. gun, and it was therefore a nasty surprise when two 88-mm guns in emplacements opened fire from the opposite side at a range of no more than 200 yards.

Sparrow put down smoke and reversed, but Tabor could not do the same for fear of blinding Sparrow's driver, Trooper Price. He therefore opened fire with his Bren to distract the enemy gunners.

Both crews got back to cover without being hit, although the guns fired seven rounds at the retiring scout cars in rapid succession. The leading tanks were "very enthusiastic about the little drama at the bridge," and grateful that the planned German ambush had been foiled.

As it had become obvious that the scout cars would be unable to carry on the advance farther without assistance from the Irish group, Lieutenant Tabor was ordered to hand over temporarily the advance to them, so he next set about finding a suitable O.P.

"We were successful in finding the top window of a near-by house ran out a remote control to it.\*

*\* A long remote control wire connected to the 19 radio set, invaluable to commanders when in an exposed position.*

Our O.P. gave us limited observation over the area occupied by the 88-mm guns, but unfortunately we had to run the gauntlet of small arms fire for about fifty yards.

Once installed, we called for artillery fire and were given good support, we had several shoots at the 88mm and as the result of another shoot there was a large explosion which I believe to have been an S.F. gun destroyed by a direct hit."

It was now about midday, and as there seemed to be some delay about clearing up the opposition, Lieutenant Tabor went back along the village street to report to Major Wignall at Squadron Head-quarters, which were then about half a mile away.



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He left his driver, Trooper C. Jones, in charge of the O.P.

Squadron Headquarters were found comfortably ensconced with some of them having a haircut in a nearby shop."



Corporal of Horse Mc McNeil and Trooper Reginald Holmes in Woenselsestreet north Eindhoven

The situation was explained in detail to Major Wignall, who proceeded to "hot up some action from the supporting troops, as the operation was running well behind schedule by now," due principally to the great difficulties arising from there being only one road on which to bring up the various supporting- arms, each clamouring for priority of movement.

On returning to his car, Tabor found that Trooper Jones had been directing a very successful artillery shoot on to the German positions. As the latter had never been taught any-thing about it, and was not even a wireless operator but merely knew what he had picked up as driver listening to his Troop Leader, this was a most remarkable achievement.

About mid-afternoon Tabor noticed several civilians on the road about a mile away towards Eindhoven. This was a significant sign for it was unlikely that they would have been there if the German guns were still in operation, so the Troop Leader and Lance-Corporal-of-Horse Sparrow crossed the bridge on foot, silenced

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two or three Germans on the right of the road and found that the gun positions had been recently abandoned.

"After all this delay we were most impatient and now really got the bit between our teeth. Casting caution to the winds, we moved up the main road at top speed, through Eindhoven and out on the other side before the Dutch realized what was happening.

Within an hour we had reached the blown bridge at Zon, where we had to remain and settle down for the night."

It will be seen that the main burden of the advance along the road to Eindhoven, as far as it concerned the Regiment, had been under-taken by four men in two scout cars, and to the west, from which direction was effected the first link-up, by one Reconnaissance Troop and a liaison officer's car.

Some idea of the difficulties of employing armour in such country can be gathered by the fact that at no point in the day's fighting were the British tanks ever able to use their numerical superiority, due to the impossibility of deployment off the road. Thus a few S.P. and 88-mm guns had sufficed a disorganized enemy to slow down the advance of an entire armoured division to walking, pace throughout the day.

As the Irish Guards entered Eindhoven with the rest of 'B' squadron and Regimental Headquarters the joy of the population, which contained many thousands of workers from the Philips Electrical Works, was most touching to behold.

It may have lacked the slightly more Latin flavoured exuberance of the Belgians. But it was nevertheless quite as spontaneous.

Orange banners and the national hag appeared everywhere, and stolid faces broke into broad smiles as the more vociferous bellowed their welcome in the woolly gutturals of what must surely be the ugliest language in the world.

The armoured drive through seething crowds in a double-banked column, swaying mudguard to mudguard, was, as the Adjutant, Captain Collins, remarked, "a terrifying experience for drivers and car commanders alike."

As in Belgium, the population seemed to possess inexhaustible supplies of chalk with which they tried to scribble their names on the cars as they sped by. By a miracle nobody was run over.

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Armoured cars of the 2HCR pass through central Eindhoven September 18th.

A fine night with no moon followed the eventful day and it was hoped that the blown bridge at Zon would be repaired by six o'clock next morning. It was said that the German prisoners working for the Sappers became so infected with the urgency of their task that one inquisitive Gunner officer who came to see how things were progressing was bluntly told in English to move out of the way as he was hindering operations!

Back. on the Escaut Canal, 8 Corps were completing plans to force a crossing after midnight near Lille St. Hubert, while on the other bank 12 Corps had secured a lodgement across the canal near Lommel during the day and were building up on the north bank in face of considerable opposition.

With the thought of what was expected of them on the morrow, Guards Armoured Division were beginning to feel rather "flank conscious."

"Joe's Bridge" and "Creswell's Factory" were both subjected to a sharp bombing attack, but neither place suffered much damage, while on "The Blasted Heath" "A" and "D" Squadrons and the regimental echelon

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under Major Williams had their sleep disturbed by some enemy planes dropping anti-personnel bombs, which also caused no serious casualties.\*

*\* In the afternoon a hostile plane had flown over "The Blasted Heath" on recon-naissance. After dusk three or four more German planes flew over and scattered anti-personnel bombs over the harbour area. Somebody started a rumour that they were "Butterfly" bombs—a delayed action type liable to explode if touched. Major Williams ordered the Squadron echelons to remain where they were until a search party had cleared and checked the grass tracks. The alarm about "Butterfly" bombs proved false, but somehow in the general excitement Lieutenant Oliver in his "Gin Palace" failed to receive the "all clear" message. What he did get was a summons to attend the Squadron Leader's orders, about 300 yards away in the direct path of where the bombs had supposedly been shed. The Troop Leader made that journey protesting volubly to himself and all who cared to listen, convinced that every step would be his last. Nor did he ever forgive Major Williams for what he considered to have been a most unwarrantable risk of a valuable M.T. officer's life!*



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### 19th September 1944

Zon bridge was completed before schedule, and a few minutes before six o'clock in the morning on the 19th of September Lieutenant Kavanagh's troop crossed over the canal on the next lap of the journey to Arnhem.

"B" Squadron, who could not be relieved because it was not possible to bring up "C" Squadron through the traffic, were now working under command of the Grenadier Guards group, who had relieved the Irish Guards group.

The Americans had already ensured the safety of the water obstacles from Zon onwards to Veghel and the advance thereafter was rapid. Shortly after eight o'clock in the morning Kavanagh's Troop made contact with elements of 82nd U.S. Airborne Division on Grave bridge, an advance of twenty-five miles in two hours which left the tanks well behind.

The Americans had captured intact this vital 250 yards steel structure spanning the Maas, a very fine performance indeed, and now the second vital link-up had been effected by the regiment. A brief halt and talk with the commander on the spot elicited the information that Nijmegen bridge, spanning the River Waal, had also been captured.

This news unfortunately proved to be quite incorrect, for the Americans farther north had found the approaches to be far too strongly defended for their limited resources to be able to overcome without further aid. Lieutenant Kavanagh's Troop, however, pressed on in high hopes until it got to within two miles of Nijmegen, where it was found that another bridge carrying the road over the Waal Maas canal at Neerbosch had been badly damaged, having been partially blown, and it would therefore be too weak to carry the tanks.\*

However, with the help of the American paratroopers, another bridge to the east near Heumen (Malden) was soon discovered, over which the Grenadier tanks were able to cross.

In the meantime the troop at Grave bridge was forced to wait until the sappers had dealt with several other "nasty-looking bombs attached to the structure and thereabouts" before it could resume the advance up the main road. While the sappers were at work Kavanagh was unluckily injured by his own scout car reversing as he was making his report to Major Wignall, who had come forward to see for himself what was the situation and state of the bridge.

He was knocked over and the wheel passed over his leg, breaking his ankle and several bones in the foot and leg.

*\*this was a typical example of the value of armoured cars to an armoured formation.*

*By warning Guards Armoured Division of the damaged bridge in good time and having the sappers up with the leading Troop (Lieutenant Kavanagh's) not only was the correct amount of bridging rapidly moved up the column, but general Adair was able to divert the Grenadiers' tanks east immediately they had crossed the Grave bridge instead of then being committed farther north and then having to turn on the main road. With all consequent dislocation of traffic and delays.*

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In consequence, Lieutenant Tabor, whose Troop had led during the previous day, was once again called upon to continue the advance as soon as the sapper had confirmed that the bridge would carry the armoured cars.

By the railway bridge on the outskirts of Nijmegen he met a German party!, but not wishing to become involved and delayed in the town, he looped to the east, where he eventually met a Dutchman who led him to an American battalion headquarters.

Shortly after-wards he was joined by Captain Cooper in his Humber her scout car, and both were directed by an American colonel to his forward platoon, which was in position on a high escarpment overlooking the road to Reek.

On the way Tabor and Cooper entered a hospital bell tower, but observation was not sufficiently good to remain there and the party moved on. The hospital appeared to have been evacuated in a hurry because the disturbed beds were exactly as they had been left by the patients.

The American platoon was soon reached and found to be experiencing trouble from enemy "flak," 88-mm guns in emplacements on the low ground about 400 yards from the river.

The guns were something over 2,000 yards from the escarpment and therefore out of range of the Americans' machine guns and 75-mm which were sited too far back in the town.

The escarpment gave a fine view over Nijmegen bridge except for the southern approaches, which were out of sight.

The observation would also have been good towards list and Arnhem, but was unfortunately slightly obscured by mist at the time. However, the German 88-mms were clearly marked on the defence overlay map which had been supplied to Troops before the operation, and Tabor brought up his two Daimler armoured cars, whose 2-pounder guns had just about the range of the enemy emplacements.

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This would hardly be the type of shoot for which the gunners had been trained at Linney Head, but the crews were equal to the occasion.

Both cars elevated their guns for maximum range and fired salvos of A.P. shot into the emplacements. Observation was not easy at that range and neither car had any H.E. shells available, but the shooting had the desired effect and after a few minutes the Germans evacuated their gun positions.

Shortly afterwards another 88-mm on the north bank of the river, obviously attracted by the gun flashes of the 2-pounders, opened fire with air bursts, so Lieutenant Tabor retaliated by calling up an artillery shoot by wireless.

This was a map reference shoot, and the gunners scored a direct hit with their first salvo which effectively silenced the Germans in that area.

The enemy next moved up four 105mm guns into an orchard between the village of Ressen and the Nijmegen Arnhem railway and opened fire.

This shelling was particularly severe on the Americans, but Tabor could not obtain further support from the gunners for a message had come through that ammunition was desperately short and all available shells required for a divisional attack which then was being "laid on."

Tabor's troop was ordered to withdraw at about four o'clock in the afternoon, leaving Captain Cooper with the Americans to relay back information.

The latter's account gives an excellent picture of the situation on that sector during the afternoon's fighting:

*"On the outskirts of Nijmegen I was informed that there were Germans in the town. Skirted round the suburbs to the east and saw only a couple of Germans shot at them and went on. Finally (a great relief), met a company of U.S. Airborne in the suburbs, who told me of another company of theirs farther on and nearer the bridge, from which, he said, they had been driven off. Eventually reached them on high ground overlooking the bridge and the far bank. [He has now joined up with Lieutenant Tabor's Troop.] Collected a member of Dutch Underground people, who gave me a lot of valuable information. He is staying with me indefinitely. Climbed a church tower and picked out a lot of German positions and guns and sent this information back to R.H.Q. and to the U.S. platoon which was being sniped from some houses. Hid the scout car in some trees and went forward to their trenches, where we exchanged information which I sent back. They are badly in need of supplies which have not been dropped and they were glad to see us. Wirelessly back for support.*

*In the meantime we had a great shoot on some dug-in 88-mm's with my Bren gun dismounted from the scout car. The enemy crews eventually abandoned their gun sites, carrying off the dead and wounded. Also shot a German off his bicycle and shot up a three-tonner, and shot at Germans going in and out of pill-boxes at the north end of the bridge the best shoot I've had yet. Twenty minutes later the Germans opened up on us from the other side of the river. We could see the gun flashes this part was hell, for a great many of the shells were air-bursts. Got into car with Towler as one burst in the tree above us which carried away the aerial for the second time today, holed the front tool box, and sent a large piece through the top of the car, missing us by inches. Decided to get into trench with the Americans and stayed there for one and a half hours, by which time completely deaf and covered with dust. Got back into car and helped to direct our artillery on to the enemy guns, which appeared to knock out at least one of them. By 4.30 in the afternoon Nijmegen was being steadily shelled, although the Grenadier tanks had not yet arrived. Every time we moved somebody shoots at us from the houses —Americans eventually mop them up. Ordered to*



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*stay in this position, as it is said to be important. I captured a German range-finder and lots of maps and talc from the abandoned gun position."*



20 September 1944, First allied vehicle to enter the Willemsweg Nijmegen

In the meantime Captain Balding, had made contact with both the Airborne Corps Headquarters and 82nd U.S. Airborne Division Headquarters in the forest on the high ground some live miles south of Nijmegen.

From them he learnt that the situation was thought to be as follows. The northern sector of Nijmegen was still in German hands. The road bridge over the River Waal was (as the Regiment knew already) held at both ends by the enemy, but the Americans held the high ground commanding the south-eastern approaches to the town.

The perimeter of their defences ran roughly in a circle bounded by the southern portion of Nijmegen—Groesbeek—Mook—Grave, thence along the main road back to Nijmegen. They explained that so large a commitment meant that they were not strong enough to hold key points and at the same time launch an attack in sufficient strength to hope to succeed in capturing the road bridge.

Moreover, owing to deteriorating flying weather, much of their force had not yet arrived. We could not help thinking that it was curious that no troops had been dropped to the north of Nijmegen road bridge, for this country which formed an island would have been easier for airborne troops to defend, being almost impregnable to tank attack, and would have given access not only to the southern and easier approaches to Arnhem bridge but, above all, to the open and northern end of the great Nijmegen bridge, the master key to the whole enterprise.



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Meanwhile little was known of what was happening to the British Airborne at Arnhem except that they were hard pressed, and this thought which hung like a gloomy cloud over us all was to persist for several more days.

The tantalizing sight of the huge road bridge, over 2,000 feet in length, whose centre span towering over the surrounding district was so vital a link, spurred on the Grenadiers. They fought on all afternoon and by seven o'clock, after bitter combat, had in conjunction with the Americans reached a traffic roundabout only 300 yards short of the bridge.

But there, after a final tank attack had been beaten back by the enemy, it was realized that an assault was not possible without large-scale artillery support, and they were withdrawn at nightfall.

The forward American positions nearest the bridge were shelled heavily all through the night, and many houses were hit and caught fire.

Captain Cooper and his crew were still with them. "We had three near misses in the trench, but managed to get in a Few hours' dozing. This sort of shelling is perfectly bloody and gives you a splitting headache and seems to jar the whole system.

Every now and again the Spandau's opened up from the other side of the river and bullets whistled over our heads. These American troops are splendid types extremely brave, very cheerful and indifferent to the worst.

The bridge, an enormous girdered affair, has been wired for blowing, which the 'Underground' have twice cut, and is covered by every conceivable German weapon." Not until long after midnight did the fighting in this sector die down, and meanwhile, progress on the two flank corps was, as Montgomery put it, "depressingly slow."

Before carrying the general story forward into the next day, let us return for a while to "The Blasted Heath." Here, by midday on the 19th of September, the large and unwieldy divisional echelon and R.A.S.C. supply column was assembling in preparation for its move northwards, protected by "A" and "D" Squadrons, and under the over-all command of Major Ward.

Its collection of assorted transport consisted of over 800 vehicles and, in addition, a number of anti-aircraft guns, bridging equipment and various engineer units.

The responsibility for so large and vulnerable a cargo was an unenviable one and the difficulties of control were soon manifest.

The possibility of being able to defend the hundreds of soft vehicles from enemy flank attack was in reality non-existent, and the most that could be done was to space the armoured cars, at intervals, one to about twenty vehicles and hope for the best.

It was found that on an average each Troop was responsible for about sixty vehicles, and the car commanders could never see more than a dozen of their charges at any given time. The leading vehicle of the column moved off in the late afternoon, and not until it had almost entered Eindhoven did the last lorry follow still from "The Blasted Heath."

From the moment of entering Dutch territory rumours of the enemy began to circulate down the column. The more they were officially denied, the more, it seemed, did they become wilder in their nature. We thought at the time that they must have been of civilian origin, but their persistency gave rise to the suspicion that some at least must have emanated from fifth column sources.

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In addition, the Germans really were making the first of a series of efforts to cut (the centre line. Elements of 107 Panzer Brigade, described as "a small but well-equipped pocket Panzer division," coming from the area of Venlo, launched a sharp tank attack, well supported by 88-min. guns, against Zon bridge.

This was eventually repulsed before attaining its objective, but resulted in a further batch of rumours.

There then occurred a curious incident.

Major Ward had ordered forward his Rear link officer in his Staghound accompanied by Lieutenant Metcalfe in a scout car, to try to establish contact by wireless with the Regiment, by this time in Nijmegen.

A temporary halt had been called just south of St. Oedenrode to pass a difficult message, when a Dispatch Rider appeared, covered in mud.

Slowing down and only pausing long enough to shout "There's a pocket Panzer division on the road moving south towards you and orders are that you have got to turn round," he was off again in a flash.

Before he could be grabbed by authority he had dashed down a large part of the column, spreading his alarming message. There was no wireless with the lorries, and unfortunately a batch of R.A.S.C. vehicles took him at his word and, without more ado, turned about and made off at full speed back the way they had come.

Corporal-of-Horse Booth, of "A" Squadron, who was in one of the rear blocks, said afterwards that at one moment he was in the centre of a line of some twenty lorries and the next he could see an empty space up to his Troop Leader's car. Eventually the lorries were collected together again in a field near Aalst and they re-joined the convoy, but the mysterious D.R. was never run to earth and disappeared for ever into the unexplained pages of military history.

When but half the convoy had passed through Eindhoven, it was already beginning to grow dark. Worried by the rumours and uncertainties, the officer in command of the Dutch Resistance, sole garrison in the town, ran along the streets advising the inhabitants to lock their doors and stay inside.

Once the convoy had passed through, the town would be more or less defenceless until the rearward flanking formations had caught up. All of a sudden a cluster of parachute flares lit up the sky.

Then came more. The streets were illuminated as if by daylight and those within the orbit of their glare felt unbearably exposed. Immediately after the flares, the first enemy bombs began to fall.

The Luftwaffe pilots, who were probably men chosen for their intimate knowledge of Eindhoven airfield and district, bombed accurately and systematically.

Some of the planes dived to within 300 feet of the cars, pin-pointing targets and machine gunning.

The "A" Squadron armoured cars nearest the scene fired back into the inky blackness above the flares, but with little hope of hitting the enemy. It was all over rapidly.

One block of Philips factory was in ruins, blazing fiercely from end to end. So were many houses silhouetted against the sky. A tragic ten-minute for happy liberated Eindhoven. In the initial attack, half a dozen ammunition lorries received direct hits and at once the shells within them began to explode, adding their own unpleasant brand of noise and danger to the deeper detonation of the bombs.

Presently a line of petrol lorries caught fire as well and their flames spread to other vehicles loaded with small arms. Bullets exploded everywhere, and it "now seemed that the city was being engulfed by every sort of explosion at once."

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In all, eighteen R.A.S.C. lorries were destroyed; a grievous loss at the best of times, but one to be doubly felt when the shortage of ammunition at the front had already begun to assume serious proportions.

Realizing that the immediate problem lay in getting the disrupted column on the move again, Captain Profumo, second-in-command of "A" Squadron, mustered all the available civilians together to help in clearing away the debris blocking; the road a task which he achieved "with great rapidity and calm efficiency."

But ill fortune seemed to dog this supply convoy. Shortly after the head had passed through Veghel, a commander senior in rank to Major Ward bluntly informed him that he proposed to take his unit off the road and into an adjoining field thereto rest and await day-light.

He refused to admit of the urgency of getting forward without delay and stuck to his point in spite of all argument. He was left to his own devices and Major Ward pushed on with the rest of the convoy.

At Uden part of the front portion of the column took a wrong turning in the village, and could not be halted until nearing Nistlerode, which place was only two miles from Heesch, an enemy strong-point, so ran the Dutch civilian's story.

Again the circumstances were peculiar, and one wondered whether fifth column work or German sympathizers might not have had a hand in the proceedings, for it was found that a divisional sign in Uden—plain and unmistakable was pointing down the road in the wrong direction.

When the mistake was realized it was past one o'clock in the morning and pitch dark. Captain Waterhouse and I went out on foot to search for a likely spot at which to turn the lorries.

Nistlerode, the likeliest place, consisted of one street and a collection of houses whose inhabitants, somewhat naturally, were all sound asleep.

Eventually, after much banging on doors, two sleepy Dutchmen opened up. We asked them as best we could whether they knew if the Germans were in the next village. "Ya," said one. "Me," muttered his companion. "Deutsch Panzers?" bawled Captain Waterhouse. "Ya," said the other one. "Ne," said number two.

We left them to argue it out. In view of the somewhat meagre information which we had brought back, Major Ward decided that there could be no question of risking so many urgently required soft vehicles by taking a loop through Heesch which would have brought us back eventually on to the main road.

The column was to be turned round. Not only was the cobbled road barely wide enough to take a line of traffic, but from both verges there was a six foot drop into a ditch filled with water. The 3.7 inch anti aircraft guns accompanying the column were towed and the drivers said that there was not enough room in which to turn about without going over the bank.

One mistake, and we should be confronted with the unpleasant prospect of half the column facing one way and half the other, neither being able to move.

At this juncture an enemy plane flew up and down the main road and then turned off to drop a flare on the very spot where it was calculated that the column should have been had it not taken the wrong turning! .

The next few hours were to be an ordeal of bent wings and dented radiators and officers moving up and down the line of vehicles trying to rouse sleepy drivers who kept falling asleep at the wheel.

Eventually everything was sorted out and the head of the column moved on towards Grave bridge, which was reached at dawn. From here the various unit groups dispersed to their locations.

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Three Focke-Wulf planes made a half-hearted attack on part of "D" Squadron Head-quarters and some of the troops. Every type of weapon let fly and optimistic marksmen claimed a hit, but oddly enough no crashed German plane was ever reported.

By far the best thing which came out of this episode was the sketch made on the spot by Corporal Meade-King.



GRAVE BRIDGE, HOLLAND

*"D" Squadron escort to Guards Armoured Division convoy being attacked, as it crosses the River Maas, by Focke-Wulf fighter, 20th September, 1944. The artist, Corporal Meade-King, is one of those depicted at the bottom of the embankment.*

During the afternoon "A" and "D" Squadrons re-joined the Regiment in the woods south of Nijmegen, and "D" Squadron learnt that they were due to operate again on the morrow.

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### THE BATTLE TO REACH ARNHEM

20th September 1944

THE tasks allotted to the Regiment for the 20th of September were threefold. Firstly, to give support to the Americans holding on to the high ground east of Nijmegen town these soldiers were being subjected to strong pressure by the enemy coming from the direction of the Reichswald; secondly, to reconnoitre to the west of the axis between the Rivers Waal and Maas; and thirdly, to reconnoitre east and west of the corridor south of the Maas, for we were still, as the official reports stated, "very naked on the flanks."

The country beyond the eastern suburbs of Nijmegen is thickly wooded and enclosed, a kind of coniferous Welwyn Garden City, totally unsuited for armoured cars, and any assistance which these vehicles might be able to give the hard-pressed paratroopers would be moral rather than material.

It was a different story on the other flank. Here, thousands of disorganized Germans, actually outnumbering the available 30 Corps troops which could be spared to deal with them, were trapped and divided in mind as to whether to rally and fight on in isolated groups until the situation became stabilized, or cut and run for it across the single British line of communications. As has so frequently happened before in war, the enemy did both and at the most inconvenient of times.

"'Never," wrote a Divisional staff officer at the time" can those who like this kind of thing have had any dull moments. Patrols of the Household Cavalry, dispersed to the four winds, as much as thirty miles apart, were reporting fantastic engagements. In one place, cut off entirely from us, they were directing artillery...in another they had discovered a ferry in perfect working order, but on the far banks they were in telephonic communication with the Dutch on the bank, who might be persuaded to bring it across might they use it? 'No'- they were already far enough afield."

We find Major Herbert's Squadron engaged on "defensive recces" to the east along the River Maas.

These were of necessity of a rather vague order, because little was yet known about the enemy on that flank. Part of the Squadron's task was "to find out the German intentions in that area," and therefore strong efforts were made to push along both banks of the Maas. Good progress was made and many prisoners taken.

Eventually, after shooting up barges found to be ferrying soldiers both ways such was the confusion of the German command at that period and after several brushes with infantry hidden up along the flood banks and in farms adjoining the river, the Squadron was halted decisively by well sited anti-tank guns.

Nevertheless, Troop patrols had by then succeeded in penetrating upstream as far as Cuyk on the northern and Mook on the southern bank of the Maas.

To the south, patrols of 8 Corps were still many miles distant and, from all accounts, finding the going extremely heavy. Great importance had been attached by higher command to the finding of adequate aerodrome sites as close to Nijmegen as possible, because it was visualized that during the early stages of the fighting most of the Airborne's supplies would have to be flown in to relieve the already overloaded road artery. Therefore, Major Wignall's Squadron spent the first few hours of daylight probing in the area of (grave and west of the Corps centre line. it is a countryside honeycombed with canals and intersecting drainage dykes, with few fields of sufficient length to provide runways for aeroplanes.

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However, by noon two good sites had been found, and the troops were then released to carry out their work of patrolling farther afield to the west. One of these patrols, commanded by Lieutenant le Poer Trench, penetrated deep into enemy territory and up to the approaches of s'Hertogenbosch before being held up.

When halted it had travelled a distance of over seventeen miles from the axis at Grave, and although it could get no farther and had in fact been ordered back to base, it was fired by rumours of a large food dump which was stated to exist in the area.

Close questioning of the local and rather "cagey" peasants had produced no results worth mentioning; understandably, Dutch were themselves hoping to benefit from such a place as soon as the Germans had cleared out.

Nevertheless the search was intensified on the return journey, and on switching across to a hitherto unexplored part of the country a melancholy low-lying district actually below the river level and bounded to the north by the Maas the Troop reached the small town of Oss, situated on a branch railway line running into Nijmegen.

There appeared to be few Germans in the vicinity, and the patrol eventually came to a series of railway tracks forming part of a siding leading up to a large square-built warehouse. This proved to be the food dump in question.

Its contents exceeded all expectations, and before the goggling eyes of the Household Cavalry men lay revealed sacks of flour, tinned meat, jars of Bols gin and mountains of sugar.

There was much else in the provision line, but it was the sugar and gin which caught Lieutenant Trench's eye, and his laconically drawn message announcing the discovery belied the subsequent speed of his actions.

Within the hour, "B" Squadron were in possession of a heavily guarded lorry load of these estimable commodities. The news of the discovery travelled like wildfire up to the highest levels, and before the day was out long lines of R.A.S.C. lorries were queuing up on the Grave road ready to make a quick dash into "No-man's-land."

However, Regimental Headquarters' counter-move was inspired, and when the first vehicle moved off, there, waiting in almost unctuous politeness, ready to escort and protect the column both ways, was an entire squadron of armoured cars.\*

It was said that there was enough food in Oss to feed the British Army for several months.

This was perhaps underrating the British soldier's appetite, but it does at least denote the importance of the find, which was to prove of the utmost value when the enemy made his most serious attempt at severing communications a few days later, and for a time 30 Corps' ration situation was critical. Oss was to remain for over a week a land of fabulous promise. It tempted the steadiest into a sense of reckless plunder and adventure.

Records show that even Divisional Headquarters temporarily dispensed with its protection Troop of tanks, which in a few carefree hours of freedom met the enemy head-on, fought a spirited action, and finally returned laden with drink and prisoners, the latter, we were informed, mostly bakers.

When a more orderly system of pillage was eventually brought in, and buccaneering expeditions were organized on a unit basis, the storehouse was nominally left in charge of a supply officer from Division detailed for the job, but he felt rather lonely at night and could be tempted to relax from the strictest interpretation of his orders by an offer of protection from the armoured cars.



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"D" Squadron hit upon the further original idea of turning up with troops commanded alternately by a life Guards officer and a Blues officer. The second arrival would explain that he came From a different unit. Then a third person, using the ruse successfully employed by Captain Ward in Albert, would explain that the stars on his shoulder denoted a branch of the R.A.M.C, whose patients required a special diet.

Yet a fourth attempt at obtain illegal food and drink failed after it had been planned to pass off "D" Squadron's Jonkheer as representing Dutch forces.

*\*Magor Herberts "C" Squadron, plus all the three tonners he could muster!*



Comrade of Charles Sunnucks. cpl Eric Rose & Trooper John Senior killed by bazooker 27.10.44

In the early days following the discovery of Oss, the Germans, wise to the fact that our troops were practically non-existent on this flank, exploited the situation and also made daily food raids on the unguarded warehouse. By tacit agreement, the British drew rations in the morning while the enemy helped himself to what he wanted in the afternoon. The Dutch caretaker on the premises was therefore forced to play a somewhat tricky diplomatic role, and with Nordic earnest-ness insisted that both sides should sign for what they had taken in a ledger set aside for the purpose. The unwritten agreement worked smoothly, apart from one notable exception which might well have ended in tragedy. But this story belongs to succeeding pages and will be recorded in due course.

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Two paramount tasks faced 30 Corps throughout the 20th of September:

- (1) to capture the Nijmegen road bridge intact or to force an assault crossing of the River Waal at some other place;
- (2) to relieve the 1st British Airborne Division.

As it was then considered almost a certainty that the bridge would at any moment be blown by the Germans, "B" Squadron in its westward patrolling was to be closely concerned with the finding of a suitable jumping-off ground for a crossing in force west of Nijmegen. With this in view, Lieutenant Palmer's Troop probed along the south bank of the River Waal.

Lieutenant Jonkheer Groeninx van Zoelen, from "D" Squadron, was also working with this Troop.

As his Squadron had been held back in Belgium during the initial stages, he had asked for permission to take part in the battle for Nijmegen, which so intimately concerned the future of his native country. In this case his orders were to try to establish telephonic contact with Arnhem by means of the Dutch civil exchanges there had, as yet, been no wireless contact established with the British Airborne.

The telephone scheme was not as far-fetched as it might appear at first sight. There was a possibility that the Arnhem post office might still be in British hands, or if not, at least in those of the Dutch Resistance.

We remembered Captain Balding's success at Eindhoven. The route traversed a stretch of land bounded by the Waal and the Maas up to where the two rivers almost join near the village of Heeselt.

It is a country with an atmosphere of its own which Groeninx van Zoelen noted with care.

"The country is absolutely lovely here and fine castle at Wijchen beautifully restored. It is very flat and the roads are lined with tall poplars. All bent to the prevailing wind. And here and there are clumps that hide another ancient castle – all of them alas now in ruins or publically owned.

After advancing many miles without encountering anything exciting apart from some eggs and a few bewildered Germans a halt was made at the village of Wamel when it was found that the Troop was getting out of wireless range.

On the opposite side of the river lay the village of Tiel, and moored alongside the far bank was a flat bottomed ferry, of the sort worked by a hand-operated continuous chain. The Germans were crossing in small parties farther down the river, but a local inhabitant told Groeninx van Zoelen that it might be possible to manoeuvre it across, because there were quite a number of civilians on the opposite bank.

Back at Regimental Headquarters this news caused a great stir. At one stage Colonel Abel Smith considered that it might even be possible for Major Wignall's entire Squadron to ferry itself over to the northern bank.

Once over, the armoured cars, backed by the infantry of the Support Troop, might well have staged a diversion of considerable nuisance value or even held and consolidated a small bridgehead pending the arrival of reinforcements. However, the prospect of staging a minor D Day on a single flat-bottomed barge of doubtful vintage was a problem demanding further careful examination. In the end the plan was vetoed by General Adair. Perhaps it was as well that the ferry in any case refused to budge from the mud bottom.

The patrol then moved off to Leuwen, which promised to provide good observation post, and Groeninx van Zoelen, whose message had already been put through one telephone exchange before being cut off, tried to put through another call to Arnhem.



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Meanwhile there was a new diversion.

The look-out scout car was surprised to see a tug-boat towing three large barges approaching at a steady four to five knots. The tug was flaunting the Nazi Swastika flag at the masthead and sailing upstream towards Nijmegen presumably out of touch with the latest situation. Rapid messages passed over the wireless. Dutch or German, "it must on no account be allowed to progress any farther." The not them bank was still entirely in enemy hands and, apart from the Regiment's armoured-car patrols, there were as yet no British troops west of Nijmegen on the south bank. In view of the importance of the convoy, Lieutenant Palmer decided to "persuade" the Nazi tug-master to heave-to and come quietly ashore.

Moreover, it was felt that the barges might be more usefully employed later on as forming, part of a ferry service than they would at the bottom of the Waal.

Corporal-of-Horse Kendrick placed himself with the two armoured cars overlooking as much of the river possible. If the enemy refused to stop then the tug and barges would be sunk. Peremptorily the man at the wheel was hailed, but he either failed to hear or was forced at pistol point to ignore all order to halt.

And so both the 2 pounder guns opened rapid fire aiming at the waterline while the BESA's sprayed the decks.

It was a one-sided if unorthodox fair from the start.

The armour-piercing shots tore through the sides of the tug and fearful clanking noises came from within. Steam began to hiss from the holed deck and, with a despairing wail on its siren, the wretched vessel attempted to turn with its screw threshing wildly.

The barges with full way on were unable to conform and soon became inextricably entangled with their own hawsers. In a short time and to a chorus of cheers from a gathering Dutch audience, the tug sank, while the barges, riddled with holes, settled into the mud.

Meanwhile, to complete the scene, "on the bank, about half a mile upstream, and eating enormous bunches of grapes," both officers waited for the telephone from Arnhem to ring.

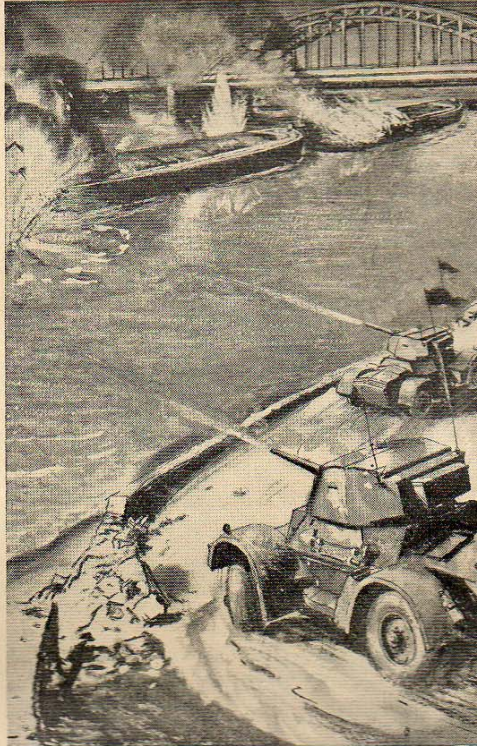
The Troops message, "Am engaging," followed by an equally terse report of the termination of the engagement, had all the traditional brevity of the Navy, and Headquarters Guards Armoured entering into the spirit of the occasion, wirelessed back, "Congratulations on a brilliant naval engagement splice the main-brace! "

It was not long before the Daimler works heard of the episode, a colourful version of which was produced as an advertisement, complete with sinking barges, explosions, spouting machine guns and flying pennants. Background to the scene was Nijmegen bridge, and over all the triumphant inscription, "It has been ascertained that the armoured cars were Daimler" !

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### 'NAVAL ENGAGEMENT'

'Congratulations. Brilliant naval action. Splice the main brace.' Such was the message flashed by Divisional Headquarters to a squadron of the Brigade of Guards after an armoured car patrol of the Household Cavalry had sunk at Nijmegen Bridge three of a string of four enemy barges. (*vide The Times, October 9th, 1944.*)

It has been confirmed that the armoured cars were DAIMLER.

**Daimler**  
**goes**  
**to war**

THE DAIMLER COMPANY LIMITED · LONDON AND COVENTRY 13

Having witnessed the destruction of their river convoy from the far bank, the Germans decided to send over a fighting patrol at nightfall. Crossing some miles downstream, they even ferried over an anti-tank gun, and a sharp little action was fought between them and the Troop close to Wamel which resulted in the Germans beating a hasty retreat westwards, leaving their dead behind.

After which, its work over for the day, the Troop returned to Squadron Headquarters, close to Grave Bridge.

The tale of the day's patrolling having necessarily drawn us away from the main centre line, we must return once more to the approaches to the vital Nijmegen road bridge.

The enemy, having frustrated the Anglo-American attempt to storm the bridge on the evening of the 19th, was now fully alerted and resisting all efforts to dislodge him from its approaches.

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During the night of the 19th /20th September he had been reinforced from the direction of Arnhem with a strong leavening of S.S. troops to boost up the supposedly falling morale of the Wehrmacht. It was now planned to capture the bridge by another joint Anglo / American effort.

All morning of the 20th was taken up in clearing the town as far as the southern approaches, and the brunt of the fighting fell upon the Grenadier Guards and the American 504 Regimental Combat Team, already established in the area. The Regiment was not involved, but Captain Cooper was still with the forward outposts where, with Troopers Carroll and Towler, he had remained without a break for the past twenty-four hours his task that of keeping Headquarters in touch with developments in that hotly disputed sector.

Early on, in the half light of dawn (20th), the Germans attacked .... It was a half-hearted affair, but it was unpleasant all the same. They eventually cleared off, leaving behind a few dead and some prisoners. In retaliation we lobbed a few grenades into a machine-gun post.

This annoyed the enemy, who started to come back and succeeded in manning an 88-mm. gun site, deserted since the previous evening because of its exposed position. "But," continues the narrator, "we let off a good number of Bren magazines into them and now, having finished all our ammo, had only a tommy-gun left."

At about eight o'clock in the morning the guns of the Leicestershire Yeomanry came into action with telling effect and for a time were directed on to targets across the Waal by Captain Cooper. He was by then situated on top of a hospital roof, and finding it "rather un-pleasant because they [the Germans] immediately replied with heavy mortars and high explosive shells."

It was also noticeable that the German aircraft were more active than at any other time since the days of Caen, and from the hospital roof they could be seen attacking and shooting down the supplies being flown in to Arnhem.\*

*\* "During the day," recorded Captain Collins in the War Diary, "as many As sixty planes were seen in the air at the Same time."*

Captain Cooper was now joined by a Gunner officer, who arrived in a self-propelled gun "just as a hell of a battle was going on in the town and both sides were shelling each other non-stop." The noise was reaching its deafening climax when round a corner quietly appeared both Generals Horrocks and Adair. They had come up to see for themselves how their plans were progressing and were taken to the vantage point in use. "They told me," noted Cooper, "that it's one of the best O.P.s. ever and were delighted at the Regiment having found it.

The day wore on. Slowly, and not without serious casualties, the Grenadiers crept closer and closer to the river. There was much bitter hand-to-hand fighting. By mid-afternoon the Americans and Grenadiers had advanced through an ornamental garden, overrun the large roundabout, one of whose roads led to the bridge, seized a small tower which was the focal point of the German defences, and cleared the Valkhof, a heavily wooded open air fort honeycombed with under-ground passages and entrenchments, from which bastion the Dutch were said to have resisted for three days in 1940.

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Dominating the ruined buildings of the waterfront, the huge steel framework of Nijmegen bridge still towered aloof and impersonal. Below, Germans and Allies tore into one another with renewed fury. By late afternoon it appeared as if half the town were on fire.

Thick sulphurous fumes from a burning warehouse curled upstream over the tired and dusty troops. Tracer streaked to and fro across the water, weaving fantastic patterns, while on the far bank, flashes from what seemed to be one continuous rumbling explosion lit up the darkened sky. It was a grim scene and, to those who witnessed it, one never to be forgotten. Yet, miraculously, the bridge still stood. Darkness had fallen when Captain Cooper's party was recalled to Regimental Headquarters for further orders, but by then they had been at their post of vantage long enough to witness the final culmination of the day's struggle—the storming of the road bridge by the ranks of the 2nd (Armoured) Grenadier Guards.

A regimental history has little space available in which to record the deeds of other units, but the capture of Nijmegen bridge was of such importance that brief mention must be made of this gallant exploit. The attack was a pattern of Anglo-American co-operation. After the previous day's experience, direct frontal assault, except in the last stages, was considered out of the question. It was therefore decided that a crossing of the river should be made by the Americans during the afternoon of the 20th at some distance west of the railway bridge; the intention being that they should eventually work round to the north side of the road bridge (the objective), thus threatening it from the rear. When this had been achieved, a direct frontal assault on the road bridge would be launched by the Grenadier Guards.

Thirty-two British-built type assault boats were lent to the soldiers of 504 Regimental Combat Team. These were frail craft, and the Americans had never before held a paddle in their hands, but this did not in the least deter them from trying. The selected crossing place was about a kilometre west of the railway bridge, was over six hundred yards wide, and was dominated from the northern side by a strongly defended emplacement—an ancient moated fortification known as the Haatz van Holland, said to date back to the days of Charlemagne.



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The Germans must have had suspicions that all was not well and began to plaster the assembly area with shells.

In spite of this the Americans launched themselves into the swirling, current, supported by the fire of the Leicestershire Yeomanry 25-pounders and tanks of 11th Irish Guards. Bobbing and spinning, the frail little craft soon found themselves, up against heavy weapons and small arms fire from the in bank.

An ineffective smoke screen trailed downstream at the mercy of an averse breeze the Americans remained totally exposed the length of the crossing.

Few of the first wave reached other side, but a second wave, their boats so punctured with by holes that only by baling with their tin hats could the Americans keep afloat, managed to get across.

Others soon followed, some of the men swimming, during the last stages, with their weapons kept above their heads. Gradually a small bridgehead, at first barely a hundred yards wide and less in depth, was gained.

How bitter was the struggle was shown by the fact that within the space of sixty yards of that bloody perimeter, the corpses of 138 dead Germans were afterwards counted.

There was now another menace to face. The Germans had now 88-mm. guns on the Haatz van Holland and these threatened to blow the bridgehead back into the river. But the fort was surrounded with a moat filled with muddy green water, and by some instinct of preservation the pinned-down paratroopers sensed that a small zone remained free from fire, and owing to an oversight on the part of the Germans their guns were sited so that they could not be depressed far enough to cover this gap.

Realizing their predicament, the Germans troops bring up machine guns at the double, but they were too late and Americans were on them before they could fire. A further 75 German's were left dead in the moat alone.

Thenceforward the Americans moved eastward to capture the railway bridge on the northern end, continuing along the high embankment, they finally cut main road to Arnhem about a mile north of the road bridge. Now was to come the turn of the Grenadiers.

A Troop of tanks had been held in readiness, but its first attempt was driven off due to accurate 88-mm. fire from the opposite bank. There was in addition a self-propelled gun shooting directly across the bridge. Another the difficulties was that the structure, itself 700 yards long, then that embankment of equal length on the far side, thus making it unsuitable for tracked vehicles to leave the road for a distance of nearly mile.

However, in the gathering gloom, the same Troop tried again firing at anything that moved, it reached the main structure and rapidly disappeared from the sight of observers on the near bank.'

Sherman tanks were quickly knocked out, but a third somehow avoided the bazookas and other missiles aimed at it by the men Perched up in the girders of the bridge and reached the far end unscathed. It skidded broadside through a road-block and, after knocking out two anti-tank guns, finally came to a halt a mile beyond, to join up with the gallant remnants of 504 Regimental Combat Team.

In the meantime, travelling behind the fifth tank (second Troop over) Lieutenant Jones, a Sapper officer dashed across to cut the wires, thus neutralising the demolition charges which had been set up. He discovered that although the chambers constructed in the main buttresses were empty of explosives. But



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charges had been laid with great care running the full width of the bridge under the second span from the northern end.

Some idea of the size of the structure can be obtained from the fact that Lieutenant Jones and his men collected over seventy prisoners while searching for charges. Most coming from the chambers built into the buttresses. The reason why the Germans failed to blow so vital a structure will perhaps for ever remain a mystery. There were several theories put forward.

It was stated that a member of the Dutch Underground had cut the wires, but this was said of practically every bridge captured by the advancing Allies in North-West Europe. Had he done so, the exploit must have taken place long before the actual storming, for no civilian could have lived long on the bridge (nor was seen) at the height of the battle. And why, assuming that the wires had been cut earlier, did the Germans not repair them? their own troops were using the bridge both ways almost to the end.

The blowing of a bridge under enemy pressure is at the most favourable of times a tricky operation, being almost invariably a question of being too early or too late. Perhaps it is more reasonable to assume that the Germans, in Army parlance, were "pushed," and when soldiers are "pushed" at times of crisis, mistakes occur.

Hopes were now again high that the British Airborne would be relieved within the next twenty-four hours, but these were doomed to disappointment.

Guards Armoured Division was ordered to renew the advance to Arnhem at maximum speed and at all costs to make contact with the Airborne Force before it was too late. However, the country between the rivers, which came to be known as "The Island," was quite unsuitable for tanks.

The main road was built on a high embankment and no tracked vehicle could hope to leave it.

Drains and impassable ditches criss-crossed the land. Infantry, the correct arm to employ in such circumstances, was in short very supply, and already committed to both flanks south of the bridge and in the bridgehead as well.

There was therefore no alternative but to make the best of things and carry on with the available armour, pending the arrival of 43<sup>rd</sup> Division, whose 130<sup>th</sup> Brigade was then in the course of moving up the centre line from Eindhoven.

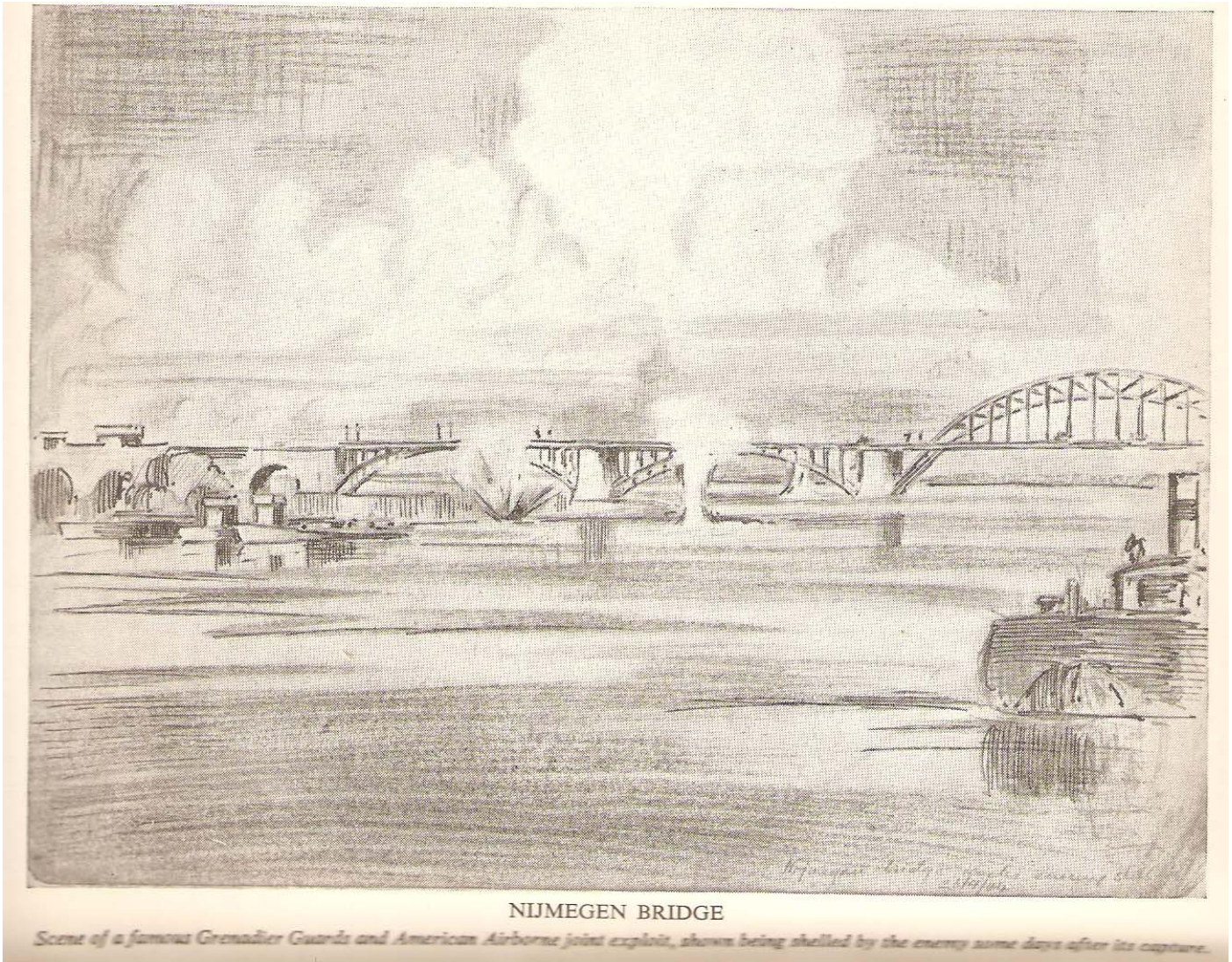
"D" Squadron spent the night of the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> September by the side of a sandy track in the woods south of Nijmegen. They slept soundly in spite of the noise of the overhead barrage. For nothing is more tiring than a long convo drive. They were roused from their slit trenches at four in the morning and the message passed round that -the Grenadiers have made it. Those who had gone to sleep wondering when they would be awakened by that dull reverberation denoting, yet another bridge destroyed could hardly believe their ears.

The Irish Guards were already across the river, holding the small bridgehead and preparing to move forward during the morning. "D" Squadron were to join them at once and screen their advance north-wards, at the same time probing the flanks for weak spots.

Now familiar with the intricacies of Nijmegen's burning streets, Captain Cooper was arriving from Malden (Regimental Headquarters) to guide the Squadron to the Waal. A detour would be necessary because some of the centre streets were still not clear of enemy.

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NIJMEGEN BRIDGE

*Scene of a famous Grenadier Guards and American Airborne joint exploit, shown being shelled by the enemy some days after its capture.*

### 21st September

A gulped breakfast of cold baked beans and a mug of chlorinated tea is not the best send-off at half-past four in the morning, and it lay heavy and regurgitating on the stomachs as the men climbed into their chilly turrets.

Sounds of street fighting echoed between the houses as the cars circled the eastern part of the town. Towards the river bank could be heard the harsh crack of shells bursting on the cobblestones. The Squadron wheeled past the roundabout and its knocked-out guns. Poor Nijmegen suburban and rather genteel before the war, one suspected now looked indescribably forlorn.

Broken glass and discarded equipment lay strewn about the place and a damp mist shrouded the roofless houses. In the half-light the mass of the bridge loomed up, gigantic and seemingly out of focus. There was a smell of cordite in the air, and pallid waxen corpses sprawled grotesquely across the pavements, bearing testimony to the severity of the previous day's fighting.

Many Germans had also been killed on the bridge itself, and lay crumpled beneath the spot whence they had been shot down from the girders. A slumped figure was still strapped aloft, shot dead as he had tried to



## '14 Days in September'

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snipe at passing traffic. One could not but admire the courage of such men, and again one felt the label "fanatic" to be a rather cheap jibe.

However, warnings that others were still very much alive made every car commander peer upwards intently, ready to spray the steel framework with bullets at the slightest sign of movement. The Irish Guards informed Major Ward that the going ahead was "extremely sticky." They had made no advance from last night's positions.

The road north to Elst was firmly held and any British tank movement was promptly shelled with accuracy. Accordingly, A Troop Was looped eastwards and after some time it managed to link up with the Americans lighting in the area of Bommel. But it could advance no farther and was recalled. It was the same story to the west.

Now back again with "D" Squadron, Lieutenant Jonkheer Groeninx van Zoelen made several attempts to loop in the direction of Valburg. But came up against well sited anti-tank guns dominating the approach routes.

Further attempts along the main load fared little better, but Lieutenant Ainsworth's Troop was able to pinpoint six 88mm guns and warn the Irish Guards. Later, these same guns were to account for several of their tanks.

The real villain of the piece, however, was the country. Dykes, low-lying swamps, waterways, and orchards which reduced visibility, all made the task of the tanks extremely difficult, and it was impossible for them to get off the road. Progress was measured in yards while the situation at Arnhem grew hourly more desperate. Typhoon support had been promised, but for some reason this was not forthcoming.

The Irish Guards lost three tanks in rapid succession, victims of a Tiger tank, and as the leading vehicle looked back at nearly fifty more Sherman's silhouetted, one behind, the other, on the embanked road, there seemed really no valid reason why these should not eventually all share the same fate. The only available artillery support was to come from one regiment of field guns, but it was over an hour after the call that the first shells landed.

With such a deadlock, and a target of several miles of closely packed vehicles to choose from, the enemy guns now decided to range on the bottleneck north of the bridge, and "D" Squadron Head-quarters, together with Lieutenant Metcalfe's Support Troop and two reconnaissance Troops, came in for half an hour's intensive shelling. Major Ward's Staghound was hit, had its tyres blown off and most of its offside equipment neatly stripped. Next came the turn of the Rear Link car, followed by a Daimler and the three White scout cars in succession.

However, from all this unpleasantness only one person, Corporal-of-Horse Thompson, was slightly wounded. There are few things more trying to the nerves and temper than being shelled with no immediate chance of retaliation, especially when the fall of shot coincides with every change of position with the greatest accuracy. This was no routine harassing fire on to the bridge approaches, and it was therefore with great satisfaction that we learnt that the Irish Guards had captured three civilians suspected of directing the German fire from an adjoining house. After this, as anticipated, the shelling abated. In the early afternoon a message came through that the Polish Airborne Brigade was on its way from England.

The proposed drop was farther west than originally planned, but from there, close to the of Elst, it was hoped that use might be made of the Heveadorp ferry and thus make contact he made with the British

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Airborne opposite. All hope of capturing the Arnhem road bridge had already been abandoned as it was now known that the town was entirely in enemy hands and that what remained of the British Airborne force was probably concentrated some miles to the west.

The first Dakota transport planes were sighted at a quarter past four and the Germans greeted them with a heavy barrage of flak which swept up to meet them from positions half a mile ahead of the leading Irish Guards tanks and "D" Squadron cars. The pilots, un-deterred by the bursting shells, deviated neither right nor left, but flew straight on with extreme gallantry, intent only on dropping their human freight over the selected zone.

Many planes could be seen to have been hit and crashed before attaining their objective. The others enveloped in bursting shells and appearing to the ground onlookers to be terribly cumbersome and slow, carried on. All at once the air seemed filled with hundreds of parachutes like so many swinging mushrooms floating slowly down to earth. One failed to open and plummeted to the ground. The rest disappeared behind the horizon and the village of Elst. Then as suddenly as it had filled, the sky was once more empty, while away to the west the drone of the homeward bound Dakotas grew fainter and fainter.

Unfortunately the Poles had dropped nearer the village of Elst than had been intended and they were to suffer considerable casualties from the German forces which lay between them and our own leading troops. The ground battle, which had appeared to halt momentarily to gaze skywards at the arriving Poles, was quickly jerked back to its own sphere of action by a thud, followed by the crackle of exploding bullets, as yet another Irish Guards tank was hit and burst into flames.

Traffic piled up behind the stricken Sherman and although several other tanks tried every trick they knew to get off the road and continue cross-country, they only succeeded in getting themselves hopelessly bogged down. Brigadier Norman Gwatkin arrived on the scene shortly after, resplendent in a brilliant bird's-eye silk scarf and quite imperturbable, to see what could be done to initiate further action in the long line of stationary vehicles representing so much wasted lire power. However, after a brief conference with his commanders, the difficulties of the situation were only too obvious to him. Infantry was the one hope of forcing a way up the road to Elst, and they could only achieve their object if supported by an adequate artillery barrage.

Throughout the day acid comments had been passed about the feeble shelling of our own guns, quite unlike what we had been accustomed to in the past from the gunners. The reason for this unusual inactivity, and which was not known to the forward troops, was that Germans had cut the only line of communication farther back at Veghel and we were perilously short of ammunition.

In fact so serious were the possible consequences of this cut that General Horrocks was compelled to order the RAF to ground strafe on recognition within the bomb line. This unorthodox and necessarily risky procedure was carried out with great skill by the air arm, and the road was eventually reopened with practically no damage to our own vehicles. Later in the day information came through that units of 43rd Division would be taking over from the Irish Guards group next morning, and "D" Squadron were ordered to withdraw over the river for the night.

It was dark when the last "D" Squadron Troop re-crossed Nijmegen bridge on the way back to harbour. There had been no time to bury the German dead, who still lay thick on the ground. Among them, close to the water's edge, an American paratrooper with gold rings in his ears was unconcernedly rattling dice with two tough-looking companions. They stood up and grinned, shouting a greeting, before resuming their

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interrupted game, squatting on tin helmets which had belonged to three German corpses huddled against an anti-tank gun. These Americans, someone remarked, "are so eternally cheerful that nothing ever appears to worry them."

Meanwhile "B" Squadron, carrying on with their previous day's task, had continued to patrol to the west, particularly in the direction of s'Hertogenbosch, where extensive reconnaissances had brought troops to within a mile of the town. Along the River Waal, Lieutenant Tabor's scheme of "annoying" the Germans at every opportunity was brought to a temporary close when he was wounded near Tiel trying to blow down an enemy occupied house with his PIAT mortar.

"C" Squadron profitably continued to escort R.A.S.C. lorries from the Oss warehouse. So ended operations for the 21st of September a bitterly disappointing day after all the promise of the previous twenty-four hours, and the high-light of the Grenadiers' capture of Nijmegen Bridge.

The story of the part played by the Regiment in the renewed attempts at relieving the British Airborne at Arnhem is best opened by Colonel Abel Smith's own narrative of the orders he originally received and the action which he took to carry them out.

"Late in the evening of the 21st the following orders were received by the Household Cavalry Regiment: 'Intelligence believes that the enemy will withdraw during the night, the 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division will relieve the Guards Armoured Division during, the night. and continue the advance the next day. One squadron will advance to Arnhem covering 43<sup>rd</sup> Division at first light.'

Upon receipt of the order I immediately drove off to 43rd Division Headquarters as the Intelligence appreciation of the enemy intention appeared extraordinary. The enemy had fought most tenaciously all day, and if they could hold us a little longer, the airborne troops would be doomed. The G.1 was soon found. He was not yet in the picture, having only just arrived to take over.

The Divisional Commander had gone to bed, giving orders that he was not to be disturbed. The following orders were therefore given by me to Major Herbert, 'C' Squadron: The enemy may be withdrawing. 43rd Division are to advance to Arnhem tomorrow morning. "C" Squadron will join up with the Poles immediately south of Arnhem, and will advance at first light.

It was appreciated that the enemy could hold all the direct routes to Arnhem; therefore patrols would in the first place move east and west along the north bank of the Waal in the hope that the enemy would not expect us in that direction. Should either patrol get through, after two or three kilometres, it would move north to the Neder Rijn."

Dawn came with a thick mist. From the point of view of air re-supply, conditions were considered "even worse" than those prevailing in the past two days. Yet in the circumstances, for the armoured cars they could not have been bettered. After the slow and slogging progress of the last forty-eight hours, everything was to happen with a rush. "The Household Cavalry," later wrote Major Hennessy at Division, "saw their opportunity and slipped through.

Perhaps this was their most brilliant action. Major Herbert, commanding "C" Squadron, fully realized that "D" Squadron had been given an almost similar role the day before and had been decisively halted on both flanks. Therefore if the Germans were to be deceived, speed of action before the fog lifted was imperative.

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Accordingly, two Troops, one moving east and the other west, were ordered across the Waal immediately. Squadron Head-quarters and reserve troops were held in readiness to take advantage of the slightest indication that the enemy had withdrawn, and were located at a suitable point on the perimeter of the bridgehead.

The original appreciation that the westerly route would offer the best chance of success was soon confirmed when Lieutenant Corbett's Troop reported itself held up by an anti-tank screen on the outskirts of Remmel to the east of the main road, whereas 5 Troop (Captain Wrottesley) made excellent progress.

His cars could see no more than fifty yards ahead of them and could hear the Germans talking on all sides. "but we reckoned that they were as blind as we were, certainly could not see enough to man their weapons, and if they heard us, probably thought that we were friendly vehicles anyhow that was what we hoped to be the case, and the desperate situation of the Airborne warranted corresponding risks on our side. Map reading was in the circumstanced difficult. And at one time or another all cars took a wrong turning, but succeeded in joining up again without mishap.

By eight o'clock in the morning the troop had motored clean through the enemy defences and had linked up with the Poles. A solitary German had been met on the way, and he was allowed to disappear into the fog, that the sounds of shooting might not give the game away.

The Poles had not experienced too happy a time. They had incurred severe casualties on landing, had not been able to effect any contact with the British on the opposite bank, and were very short of anti-tank weapons and ammunition. They were delighted to see the Household Cavalry cars and greeted them with acclamation.

Meanwhile, wasting no time, Major Herbert had already dispatched 2 Troop, commanded by Lieutenant Young, with orders to join Captain Wrottesley at all costs. The fog was beginning to lift very slightly - a doubtful blessing in the circumstances. He followed the same route which ran initially west along the river bank for about six unites and then struck north, arriving at Driel from the west side along the Neder Rijn bank by a road running from Heteren to Driel.

"Things were exceptionally quiet at this time," wrote Lieutenant Young, "and as for myself, we passed several Mark IVs which we liked to presume at the time had been knocked out, but these we discovered later from Peter Herbert proved to be very much alive ! " On the way several Air Force pilots and air crews were picked up. They had been shot down and were in temporary hiding. One of them. an Australian War correspondent, subsequently wrote an article in one of the London papers describing the meeting.

He was particularly impressed with the bearing of Corporal McNeil, one of the scout car commanders, whom he described as "that cool, calm and good-looking pipe-smoking Corporal ! " a designation which he was not allowed to forget in the N.C.Os.' Mess for many a day to come.

On coming on to the raised road which served as a dyke and ran parallel to the Neder Rijn, the Troop saw some Germans on the far bank. These were engaged, but as there was practically no return fire it was assumed that they were stray bodies. Of the British A borne there was still no sign of life. On reaching Driel, Lieutenant Young found that a full-scale battle was in progress, with the Polish soldiers hard pressed to deal with attacks coming in simultaneously from the direction of Arnhem and Fst. It was therefore arranged that Captain Wrottesley should remain with the Poles, his main task being to act as wireless link between them and 30 Corps for his message had been the first communication received From that body since they had landed.

In addition, Wrottesley's troop was to help the Poles in stemming the German armour which was continually infiltrating into their positions from the east. Lieutenant Young NW. now ordered to investigate the river bank

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east of Driel to try to discover a suitable crossing place for the DUKWs (amphibious craft) which it was proposed to bring up with supplies as soon as possible.

In the course of this patrol contact was made with two British Airborne soldiers (who had swum the river during the night) and a Polish Airborne soldier. Battle was then joined with an enemy patrol, and eventually a large-scale map belonging to the river engineer at Driel was captured. This gave details of the river currents and bank surfaces and was to prove most useful in helping to decide on future possible crossing places for the relieving body. Later on the patrol moved farther east with the object of attaining the area of the Arnhem railway bridge. "I took two scout cars; in one was Trooper Holmes and myself, the other contained Corporal McNeil and Trooper Gadsden. We investigated the river bank almost as far as the railway bridge, but were fired on by the enemy's anti-tank guns from the opposite bank and were compelled to retire. We then encountered one German patrol, which we subsequently discovered was part of the main attack about to be put in on Driel. We then returned to Driel, to discover from the Poles that no one had previously been along the road in daylight because of the fire from the far bank. Their supplies were scattered all along this area, and because they were without armour it was quite impossible for them to retrieve the stuff they so much wanted. The main attack on Driel began shortly after eleven o'clock, and at this point I had difficulty with the Polish general, who was anxious that we should use our cars as tanks, as there was still enemy armour in the area. The Polish general was charming but quite fanatical, and if he had thought it the least possible would have asked us to fly our armoured cars into battle! This attack, which was a particularly vicious one, lasted with little intermission until dark, and the Polish Forces were extremely grateful for the added fire power of the two Troops, for by now most of their automatics were worn out or the ammunition expended. They were also short of food and water."

The news of the link-up with the Poles, which was considered a great triumph and the penultimate stage in the relief of the British Airborne, set hopes on high again. As soon as the first message arrived, 30 Corps began to organize a mixed relief column from 43rd Division aiming to force a way through the enemy opposition west of the main road to Fist, but this naturally took some time and in the meantime "C" Squadron were to be kept busy.

Major Herbert had already decided to go forward himself with his headquarters to see at first-hand how things stood. Throughout in the terms of his official report 'his had had been the driving force and his the initiative in seeing that all possible exertions were made to hasten forward the means of relieving the Airborne.'

Unfortunately, the fog was already showing signs of lifting when Squadron headquarters, led by Lieutenant Hopkinson's Troop, prepared to pass through the outposts of 43rd Division. Captain Clyde, Major Herbert's second-in-command, describes the scene and what followed. "The first mile and a half after crossing the bridge was parallel to the river and on a narrow road banked six feet high on either side. If you want to present yourself as a target there's nothing like having to get nose to tail well silhouetted against the sky line, and on a road where at no place could you begin to turn round even a scout car let alone the series of three-tonner lorries which we always had up with us."

Arthur and Dickie (Lieutenant Young & Capt. Wrottesley) had reported no opposition and no visibility.

They had mentioned one or two surprised 'Krauts' cooking breakfast, but they were swallowed up in the mist before either side could do anything much about it. For reasons of wireless touch, morale, and because we couldn't think of any good reason why we shouldn't, we followed the same route..... I followed directly behind Harry Hopkinson's Troop, leading Headquarters. In the first half mile we had to pass a lot of infantry vehicles carriers and lorries parked by the side of the road. They belonged to troops who had been dug in for the night on the perimeter.

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As a result we debouched from their forward positions very much bunched up, and in that instant the mist began to clear. In a matter of minutes visibility was normal, and as the leading scout car of Harry's Troop became level with the first village. (The height of the road above ground level gave this effect to the eye), There was an unpleasant crack, a puff of smoke, and that was the scout car, I saw a figure jump clear and roll down the embankment. It was Corporal Bland. Trooper (Harold) Read, the driver, was killed on the spot. Then the chaos started. "At this moment Peter Herbert was getting back wireless news from Dickie Wrottesley and Arthur Young that practically the whole of the civilised world was waiting to hear and God knows how big were the 'Sunrays' listening in, and chipping in, on the Rear Link set.

Harry Hopkinson couldn't move back his Troop until we moved, we couldn't move until the three-tonners moved, and damned if the infantry carriers weren't coining up behind them just to make it more like Piccadilly circus than ever.

Luckily the German shooting was erratic, I knew full well that we were all sitting like pheasants on the bough of a tree. Smoke seemed to be the immediate answer and then try to back each vehicle out of trouble Needless to say my own smoke tended so carefully through the length and breadth of England and across, half northern Europe, went off like a damp squib at a range of live yards!

Peter and Philip Armes were yelling their heads off on the wireless in their cars trying to pass back a message, and Harry had got back under cover of the embankment on his feet, and I kicked open the door and dropped to the floor of my Staghound to get out and make a plan with him. There was another nasty crack and I looked up to see that the periscope had been shot away, just at the back of where my head had been a few seconds before. I then knew that I was clearly destined for some far more unpleasant fate later in life, like living in a Socialist State ! "

To recount all the individual adventures which befell people on this day would fill many more pages than possessed by this history a few must suffice. There proved to be more than one German tank firing down and across the dyke road, some being hidden in the buildings of Oosterhout village, and backed by about a hundred infantrymen and a self-propelled gun which kept firing into the hulk of the burning scout car. Corporal-of-Horse Brown, on seeing that he could not move back owing to the press of vehicles immediately behind him, managed to pass round the scout car and open up on what he saw was another tank hiding behind an outhouse. He had only the smoke and flash of a gun to go on and, being unable to move over the six-foot drop from the road to the field beneath, was unable to observe results. He was, however, able to smoke out the farmhouse area and blind the German vehicle while the infantry of the Wiltshire's then deployed across country.

Later that evening the tanks of the 4th/7th Dragoon Guards confirmed that a Mark III tank had been found knocked out and abandoned, Corporal-of-Horse Brown claiming with justification a "kill." The Wiltshire's • subsequently encountered strong resistance in Oosterhout village and this was not cleared up until the arrival of the tanks, by which time Major Herbert had been ordered to with-draw his Headquarters out of range of the German armour. ' he knowledge that the two armoured cars were still at Driel, both with their wirelesses in full touch, produced the inevitable result. For every one message sent back by them to Regiment, Corps sent forward two further questions to be answered. Was the Arnhem railway bridge blown?" "Yes, it was." "Who is holding the northern end?" "By the shots that are being directed at us from that area, I presume t ultra be the. Germans." "What about the ferry?" "The Heveadorp ferry has been destroyed"

Can you see ifthier are any other ferry boats lying about

The gunners are interested in your information about the enemy northe of the railway bridge – can you move up and report on the effect of their shooting.?

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What is the state of the tracks leading to the river's edge and will it carry the Dukws without bogging?"

"The C.R.E. 43 Division wishes to know the width of the gap in the blown railway bridge can you send back a bridging report."

The very full wireless Log Book for the day shows that at ten minutes to one in the afternoon, Lieutenant Young sends back a report that "the southern bank is now under continuous fire at the place recommended for crossing—I am about to look for a better place." A quarter of an hour later, Captain Wrottesley's Troop is off to help the Poles to repel another attack, wirelessly that "Resistance has thickened up considerably and there is concern at the state of ammunition," both for the Poles and his own armoured cars. Yet again, five minutes later, he calls up for fire on to the south bank of the river where the enemy are forming up. The medium guns respond magnificently and the attack is broken up before it can get going. Meanwhile, during the afternoon, Major-General Urquhart, commanding the British Airborne Division, judged it indispensable to send two officers across the river to acquaint his Corps Commander, Lieutenant-General F. A. M. Browning, of the now truly desperate situation at Arnhem.

For this purpose he chose Lieutenant-Colonel C. B. McKenzie, G.S.O.(1), and Lieutenant-Colonel E. C. Myers, the C.R.E. These two gallantly made the crossing of the Neder Rijn under fire in a small rubber boat and eventually found the Polish Headquarters, where, in their words, "there was a battle going on and we couldn't make out which were Poles and which were Germans! Here, using the Household Cavalry Wireless net, the G.1 spoke to the B.G.S., 30 Corps, his messages being relayed through R.H.Q. of 2 H.C.R., and for the first time the outside world had confirmation of what it feared must be the case. "We are short of food, ammunition and medical supplies; we cannot hold out for more than twenty-four hours; all we can do is to wait and pray."

The general plan of 43rd Division, when it had once broken out of the bridgehead, was to advance with two brigades up; 129th Brigade on the right keeping to the main Nijmegen to Arnhem road, while on the left 214<sup>th</sup> brigade was to keep more or less to the route taken by the two C Squadron troops..

Unfortunately when the two Household Cavalry Troops had first got through, it was considered probable that the Germans had withdrawn, and the commander 43rd Div kiwi, Major-General Thomas, in order to save precious time, cancelled his fire plan. His attack therefore met: with considerable opposition and it became necessary to "reculer pour mieux sauter," with all the delay entailed in such a manoeuvre. The lifting of the fog had given back to the enemy their eyes, and throughout the rest of the day progress was to be painfully slow. By last light, 129th Brigade were still short of Elst, but earlier on, however, 214th Brigade made some progress in the area of Valburg. They thereupon pushed forward a mobile column, consisting of the 5th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and a Squadron of tanks belonging to the 4th /7th Dragoon Guards (8th Armoured Brigade), with Dukws laden with supplies, through Valburg.

It was during this advance that a sergeant-major in a rear carrier of the column turned to his driver and quietly said, "Don't look now, but we are being followed by Tigers!" With commendable presence of mind, the column continued on its way, followed by the Tigers at meticulous road spacing. A message was then sent by D.R. warning an officer farther up the column of this jungle drama, and an ambush of PIATs was quickly dropped off. In due course the unsuspecting Tigers appeared round a bend in the road and the leader was knocked out at short range. A second ran into it and the remaining Tiger, followed by four Panthers, ran into the ditch in its confusion. The mixed column made contact with the Poles by half past eight in the evening, but the link-up was marred by a most unfortunate incident which occurred in the half-light.



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On hearing the rumble of tanks, Lieutenant Young's Troop had moved forward cautiously to investigate, having been warned that a relieving force was on the way, but quite prepared for the noise to be caused by further German tanks. Soon the leading scout car caught a glimpse of a Sherman turret, and Lieutenant Young gave orders to the Poles nearest him to show recognition panels. The armoured cars likewise brought out their yellow strips. They then advanced down the road to welcome the British Force, carrying in addition yellow smoke cartridges which they fired off fairly liberally. However, the leading tank failed to recognize the signals and opened fire on the Troop, which was half exposed. The first shot caused superficial damage to Young's car, carrying away the toll box, a tyre, etc., but the second shot drilled a hole in the front armour plate of the scout car, killing Trooper Reginald Holmes out-right. The Troop's immediate reaction was to imagine that the Sherman's were being used by the enemy, and several of the Poles who had witnessed the event were keen to take them on with their bazookas, but then the sound of an English voice was heard and it was realized that there had been a tragic mistake.

Even so, the fiery Poles were beside themselves with rage, and it took all Lieutenant Young's powers of persuasion to stop them knocking out the first tanks to arrive. Trooper Holmes was buried the next day in Driel churchyard with all military honours. It was a sad ending to the day's operations for a Troop which had done so well. Apparently, although fullest details of location had been sent back on the wireless, the message had never reached the relief column, which moved up not expecting to find any British armour with the Poles. The unit involved in this tragic incident made full acknowledgment in its own history, deeply regretting the mistake.

The situation of the Arnhem defenders was now very serious. Efforts during the day to fly in medical aid for the growing numbers of wounded had only been partially successful, a high percentage of packages falling into German hands. The defenders, hourly growing weaker, were reduced to drinking rain water caught in their tin helmets and waterproof capes. Moreover, the German tanks, because of the British shortage of anti-tank weapons and ammunition, were now able to close in and blast the soldiers from house to house almost without reprisal. Assault boats had formed part of the mixed relief column and preparations were begun for a crossing of the river during the night.

Well aware of this move, the Germans kept shelling and mortaring the assembly points. The swift flowing current was too strong and the rafts were swept away. In addition, the drizzling rain of the past few days had so softened the banks that the wheels of the Dukws failed to grip.

To make matters worse, the banks themselves were steep and had to be prepared under continuous shell and small-arms fire. Only a limited amount of supplies could be ferried across on rafts during the hours of darkness, and at the first sign of dawn this had to cease. One important factor governing the whole of 30 Corps' operations at this stage must be borne in mind. There had been a second complete cessation of forward traffic because the Germans had again succeeded in cutting the centre line between Uden and Veghel on the 22nd of September.

At first light on the 23rd of September, Colonel McKenzie, the G.1 of the Airborne Division, decided that he must see his Corps Com-mander at his headquarters near Nijmegen without delay, and so prepared to set off, escorted, as had been arranged, by Captain Wrottesley's Troop. The Troop Leader put Colonel McKenzie in his own seat of the first armoured car, while he himself led in a scout car.

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Presently the party drew near to a windmill where a still-burning German tank blocked part of the road. Captain Wrottesley dismounted to signal the armoured car past the obstruction.

Then, at the moment the armoured car was passing through the gap a Panther tank suddenly appeared out of a side road, and "with its dirty green nose," opened up on the Troop. A brief fire fight ensued, in which Colonel McKenzie with admirable coolness acted as loader to the 2-pounder, and managed to get off eight rounds. History does not relate what happened to the German tank, but Colonel McKenzie eventually found himself upside down in a ditch and was forced, together with the two other members of the crew, to take to the fields.

For a time it was feared that they had been captured or killed, and so it was with relief that shortly afterwards "the G.1 was recovered, after making a detour across the fields," and, in the further words of Colonel Abel Smith, "safely delivered to his Corps Commander."

In the meantime Lieutenant Corbett's cars had set off to relieve the remaining Troop (Lieutenant Young's) with the Poles, but ran into several tanks and mobile guns between Elst and Driel. Corporal-of-Horse Jenkins's car got itself bogged and found itself under fire from a self-propelled 75-mm. which fired seven shots in succession, "which," said Corporal Chennel, "made us think that the German gunner must have been cross-eyed, for he kept firing at exactly the same place and always just missing us.

However, as the car was completely stuck, Mr. Corbett decided that we should evacuate it, and we eventually got back to the others, including a section of the Support Troop who were farther on. I must say that the driver of our car, Trooper Gardner, was remarkably cool throughout this episode, but seemed to think that we should have stayed put with the stranded car.

Personally I think that this was because we had a large amount of food aboard and Gardner was a great lover of his food. Efforts to relieve the Airborne were to continue for a further two days. These were attended by much gallantry and loss of life.

### 22<sup>nd</sup> September

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September about 250 Poles had been ferried across the Neder Rijn. On the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September a further infantry detachment crossed the river, but intense fire from the high ground on the north bank put a stop at first light to these operations.

Bad weather, which had dogged the whole operation, necessitated the cancellation of a plan to fly in the 52<sup>nd</sup> (Air Portable) Division.

Fighting continued violently in the vicinity of Bommel and Elst, which meant that the ground route was never really clear for the relieving supply columns. The main axis was cut for the third time on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September and traffic was not able to resume until the following day.

All these factors, coupled with the fact that on only two out of eight vital days of the operation had the weather permitted "even a reasonable scale of offensive air support and air transportation". Decided the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group Commander (Montgomery) to order the withdrawal of the gallant Arnhem Bridgehead.

### 24<sup>th</sup> September

## '14 Days in September'

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C Squadron were withdrawn to south of the Waal into reserve on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

In a small but nevertheless vitally important way the Household Cavalry Regiment had played a prominent part in the closing stages of the ground operations.

To the drive and initiative of Major Herbert was due the detailed knowledge which enabled 30 Corps to plan for all the assault equipment to be sent forward with the relief column as early as it was. Only by the speedy and bold action of his two Troops could these efforts have come to fruition.

The time taken by the relief column to reach the Poles is in itself an indication of what might have happened had the Troops not seized their chance before the mist rose. Although both Troop Leaders had rightly refused to allow their Troops to be embroiled in dog fights and used as tanks by the Poles, there had been no refusal to accept all enemy targets as they had presented themselves, and when the mixed column eventually arrived both Troops were down to their last few rounds of Besa ammunition, complaining bitterly that it was "rather wasteful to use up 2-pounder shots on German infantrymen!"

The Polish general, on the day following the relief, and before the departure of the two Troops, insisted on inviting both commanders for a drink in his temporary headquarters, and congratulated them on the part which they and their men had played in the operation.

Turning to other sectors of the front and south of the main battle:

Major Daly had relieved Major Wignall's Squadron on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, to continue reconnaissance towards s'Hertogenbosch.

Patrols radiating from Grave had several brushes with the enemy, but in no place could the territory be said to be held by the Germans they were by now in a state of complete disorganization, and it became more a case of rounding up prisoners and moving from village to village, some of which were found to contain groups of infantry, while the majority were unoccupied.

One Troop penetrated as far west as Rossum, fourteen kilometres due west of Oss, while another Lieutenant Franklin's, was able to watch the enemy concentrating in s'Hertogenbosch. A town which was to hold out until the last days of October. (Lieutenant Franklin's Troop in the course of its patrol picked up some U.S. Airborne Irony. who most have dropped too far west).

Lieutenant Creswell set off on patrol along the south bank of the Waal to the same area, near Tiel, where Lieutenant Tabor had been wounded on the 21<sup>st</sup>. There were reports from the Dutch that enemy had been crossing in numbers.

On reaching the village of Leeuwen the Troop Leader was hailed in I by a civilian. who turned out to be a Dutchman, Walter Proehl by name, who had been in hiding from the Germans in a farmhouse across the river until warned of the approach of the British cars. He had then rowed over under the noses of the enemy. Proehl. who had married an English girl compelled to flee from Holland in 1940 on the advent of the Nazis, offered his services to the Regiment in any capacity so long as it had to do with fighting the Germans.

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Interpreters had not yet been officially recognized by the Division, but here was obviously a man eminently fitted for the job. A note was therefore hastily scribbled and forwarded to the Princess Irene's Regiment (Dutch), which was in the neighbourhood of Grave, and it was pointed out that as Proehl was "illegal" with no rank and a civilian into the bargain he might be shot if caught by the Germans. The Dutch regiment proved co-operative, and practically offered to give him any rank he chose, but without pay! This didn't worry Proehl in the least, who, to his satisfaction, joined 2 H.C.R. officially, thus becoming one of its first interpreters. Later, interpreters were officially recognized by the authorities and given the rank and scale of pay of sergeant. Proehl was seriously wounded later on in the campaign and flown back to England, where he was reunited with his wife some days before the end of the war in Europe.

Towards evening Major Bowes Daly received an urgent message to recall his troop as quickly possible as the Squadron was required elsewhere. It appeared that the enemy, at from the north-west, with tanks, lorried Infantry and self-propelled guns, had breached the centre line between Uden and Veghel. It was another thrust from our old friends the "Pocket Panzer Division" (107 Panzer Brigade).

To meet this thrust, General Horrocks had ordered Guards Armoured Division to release 32nd Brigade from the Nijmegen area to move down south as soon as possible to the threatened area. "A" Squadron were being placed in support of them in a reconnaissance role. By late evening contact had been made with the enemy, but no decisive action took place that night, and for twenty-five precious hours the supplies so urgently required to maintain the offensive were prevented from moving up the Corps life line.

The 23rd of September was to be another day of mist and intermittent rain, and while the Grenadier and Coldstream groups composing 32nd Brigade were engaging the enemy near Uden. 'A' Squadron continued to operate under them on the flanks.

In addition, the Squadron took part in several skirmishes of their own both near the centre line and when advancing eastwards to the River Maas. In particular, the Support Troop under Lieutenant Wordsworth had a good day and collected a substantial haul of prisoners from places as far afield as the villages of St. Antonis and Oploo.

"My Squadron," wrote the Troop Leader, "was harboured in the area of Zeeland at the time about four kilometres north-east of Uden. There had been wild civilian rumours of thirty enemy tanks roaming about at will in the vicinity and we had been ordered to find out what was happening to the east. My whole Troop was sent out in support of No. 2 Troop under Peake to St. Antonis, with Jack Creswell's Troop at hand if required, in order to prevent the Germans approaching the centre line from the east. We thought that we were in for a quiet day, but it turned out to be quite the opposite.

Two largish bodies of enemy entered the village at different times during the day, and as a result of a lot of running about on their flat feet by my chaps, the bag at the end of the day was two lorries, one motor-car (a runner which eventually did several journeys to Brussels), two motor-cycles, seven killed, four wounded (one of these an officer who was prodded in the behind with a bayonet by one of my chaps because he refused to run fast enough), and fifty prisoners. We suffered one cut finger. Corporal-of-Horse Coles got a bit bored sitting with No. 5 Troop being out of the battle and decided to join in, which he did most successfully, running around with a Bren gun.

This was one of our best days, for, as you know, most of October was to be spent crawling around the banks of the Maas on our tummies."

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Nearer the centreline Lieutenant Franklins Troop as held up close to Volkel, where resistance was to take the Colstram Guards some time to eliminate.

The following description, a composite effort, is based on individual recollections of the day by members of the Troop, principally Corporal-of-Horse Booth.

"On being called away from our patrolling west of the main road towards s'Hertogenbosch (evening of the 22nd), we had moved up to and passed through Heesch.\* It was a nice little village and the inhabitants were very friendly, although naturally worried by all the alarming rumours. The next morning we found ourselves located near Volkel. Lieutenant Franklin had halted the Troop and we were all in a position to observe a line of 88-mm. guns in a row. These guns were partially concealed by an embankment a kilometre to our east at a place called Oosterens.

We had brought with us a Dutchman picked up at Afferden. He very bravely volunteered to go forward to find out what he could about the enemy. It was hoped that as he was dressed in civilian clothes the Germans would not pay much attention to him. After a time the Dutchman returned, and Lieutenant Franklin duly reported his findings, which proved to be remarkably accurate. The Troop was ordered to advance no farther, but to keep the enemy guns in sight and await the arrival of the Coldstreamers, who were coming forward with tanks and infantry.

"Suddenly the Troop was amazed to see what they thought must be another airborne landing. American planes towing gliders were arriving and being heavily shot at by the 'flak' guns which must have been hidden on the far side of the village of Oosterens. As the result of the enemy shelling several of the planes were forced to cast off their gliders. One came down in a field beside us complete, the Dakota and the glider, and one of the engines had dropped off, setting the wheel of the plane on fire. Within a short time, fourteen para-troopers in the most spotless order, their trousers beautifully creased, came over towards us.

They had breakfasted in England, and on being asked how it was looking, one of them replied, 'As sweet as a green pea!' This was about their third attempt to get to Arnhem, they said, as they had had to turn back owing to weather being so bad. One glider on this journey had been ditched in the Channel. I have never seen anything like their kit. They had jeeps, rifles, grenades hung all over them, chewing gum, and even brand new frying pans. They even offered us a jeep which they couldn't remove from a smashed glider! "Say, boys, which way is the battle?" demanded one of the Americans. We pointed in the direction of the 88mms. and warned them that there were about. We also suggested that they should be careful about showing themselves when going forward to observe with their jeeps and that we had been ordered to await the arrival of tanks and infantry reinforcements.

Say buddy remarked one big fellow we came here to fight and that's what we're going to do. With that remark the entire party complete with jeeps motored off towards the enemy guns. Franklin had arranged with their commander that if they must go they should carry a white flag on their return journey as a recognition signal to avoid being shot up in error. This they agreed to do and we saw them disappear round a bend in the road. All at once there was a tremendous burst of firing and the sound of a load explosion

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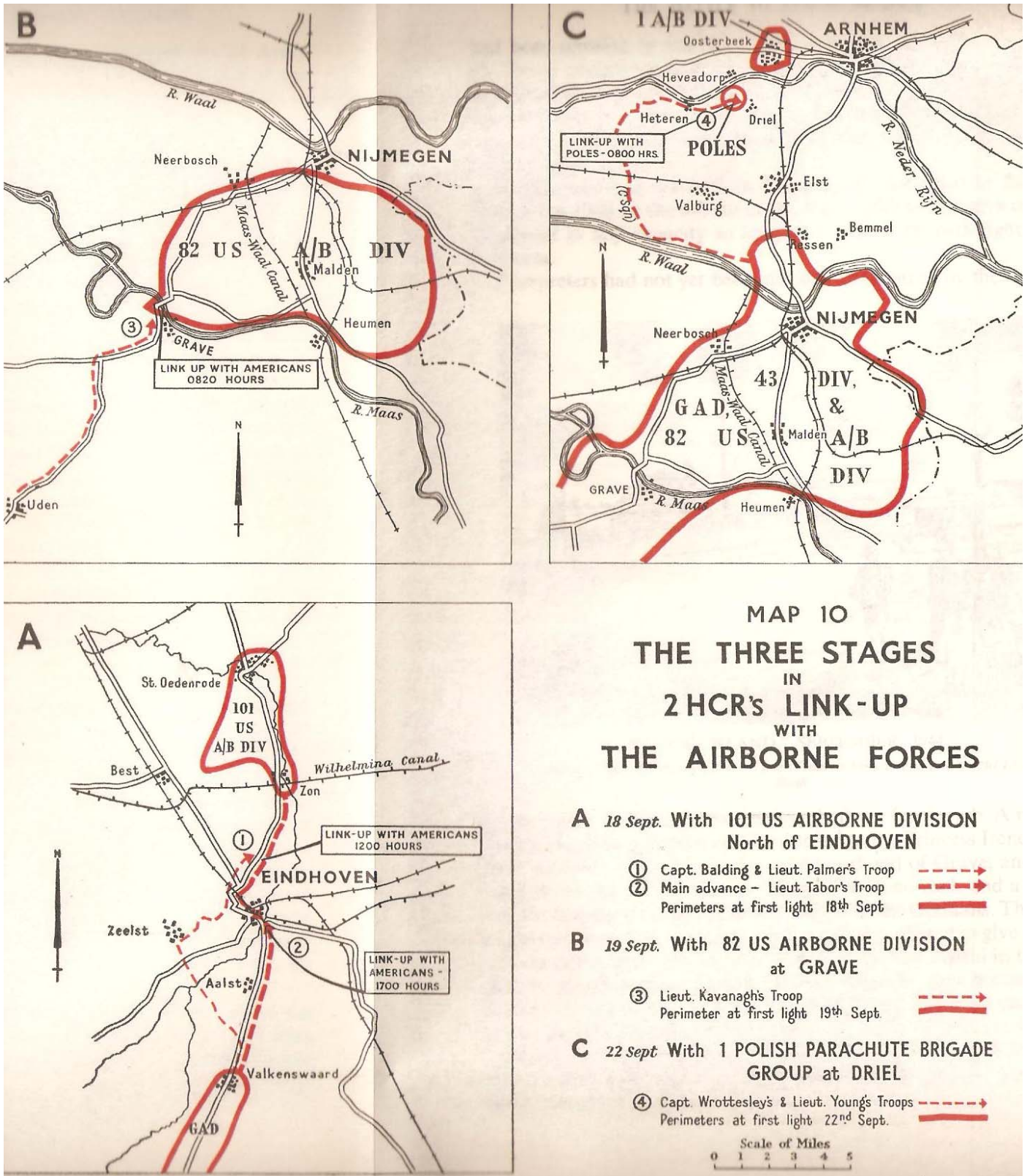
and much shouting. After an interval the survivors came back waving the flag as instructed.





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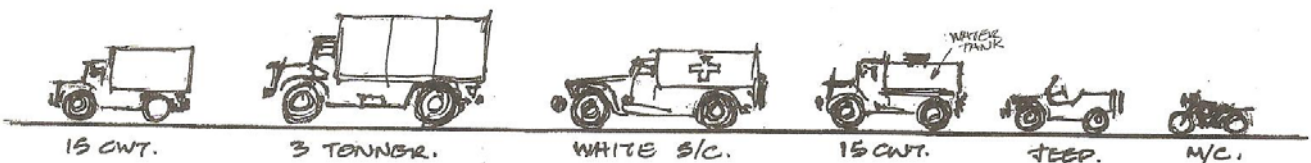
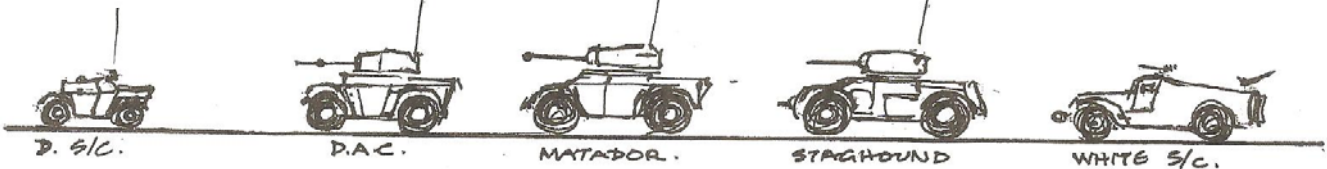
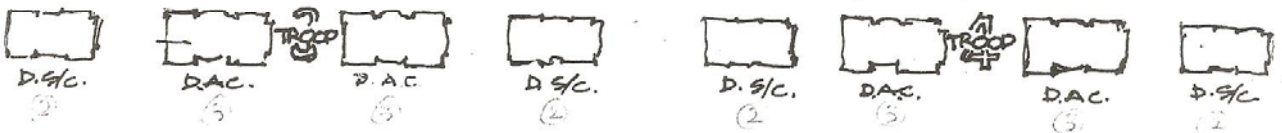
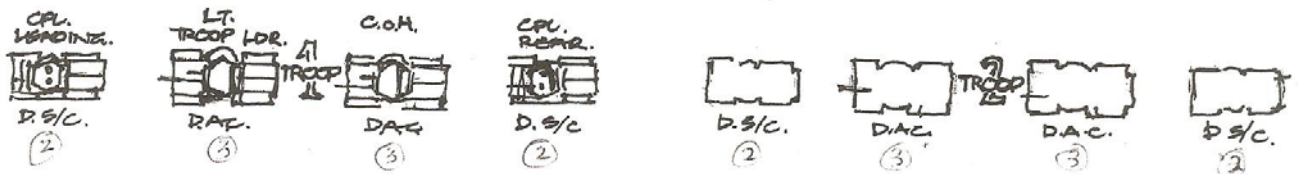
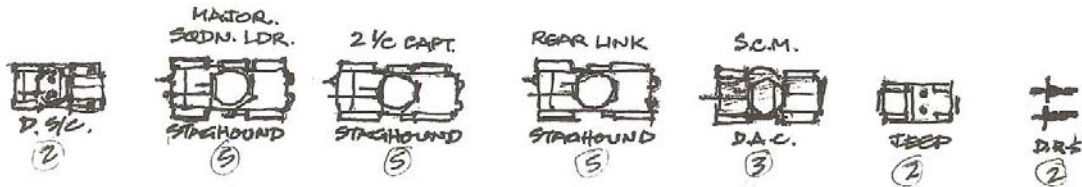




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