



Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry

The Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry (RWY) was a Yeomanry regiment of the United Kingdom established in 1794. It was disbanded as an independent Territorial Army (TA) unit in 1967, a time when the strength of the TA was greatly reduced. The regiment lives on in the A (RWY) Squadron of the Royal Yeomanry and B (RWY) Squadron of the Royal Wessex Yeomanry.



The regiment took part in the Boer War as part of the Imperial Yeomanry. In the First World War it fought on the Western Front but saw relatively little action as horsed cavalry. After conversion to infantry it fought in the trenches, notably during the German Spring Offensive in 1918.

In World War II it fought in the Middle East, seeing action in Syria against Vichy French forces, as well as operations in Iraq and Iran. It then joined 9th Armoured Brigade, seeing action in North Africa and Italy. With this formation it took part in the Second Battle of El Alamein, spearheading the breakout of the 2nd New Zealand Division during Operation Supercharge on 2 November 1942.

In 2003 the Royal Yeomanry (including A (RWY) Squadron) contributed troops to the Joint NBC Regiment during the 2nd Gulf War, for which a battle honour was awarded to the unit.

The RWY cap badge is the Prince of Wales feathers on a red baize backing, and vehicles carry the New Zealand fern leaf emblem.

World War II

The regiment began to mobilise in August 1939. Initially it was assigned as Divisional Cavalry to 43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division, then to 4th Cavalry Brigade commanded by Brigadier J. J. Kingstone as part of the 1st Cavalry Division bound for Palestine.

The regiment served there and in Syria, North Africa and Iraq. In North Africa the unit served as a searchlight regiment in ports such as Tobruk and Benghazi. In January 1941, after 150 years, their horses were finally replaced by motorised transport.

In June they were involved in the successful campaign against Vichy French forces in Syria, in spite of being desperately short of equipment and serviceable machine-guns. In July 1941, 4th Cavalry Brigade became 9th Armoured Brigade and participated in the expedition into Persia, with the regiment fighting as motorised infantry. In December, they received their first Honey tanks, finally becoming an armoured regiment.

In May 1942 the regiment moved to Egypt with the brigade, which became an independent brigade placed under the operational control of 2nd New Zealand Division under the command of Lt General Sir Bernard Freyberg, VC. The brigade was in reserve during the Battle of Alam el Halfa and in October began training for the Battle of El Alamein.

El Alamein - Lightfoot

The opening of the battle saw four divisions (9th Australian, 51st Highland, 2nd New Zealand and 1st South African) in the assault on the north of the Axis positions. RWY was in support of 5th New Zealand Brigade (Brigadier Howard Kippenberger) and the aim was for infantry to secure the Miteiriya Ridge during darkness, with the armour to pass beyond them at first light to establish a screen.

By now the regiment was equipped with a mix of M4 Sherman, Crusader and Grant (M3 Lee) tanks.

On the morning of 24 October 1942, A and C squadrons were ahead of the infantry on the western slopes of the ridge. B squadron had been delayed in the Devil's gardens minefields and had lost numerous tanks. Throughout that day, A and C squadrons engaged German panzers on the plain below, and were in turn hit by anti-tank fire. Initially, the heavier Sherman tanks were not vulnerable to this, but when the German 88mm anti-tank guns joined in they took severe casualties.

By midday, the two squadrons were reduced to one Sherman and three Grants and the commanding officer had been badly wounded and evacuated. The 10th Armoured Division was at this stage supposed to pass through and onwards to start the breakout, but seemed to be reluctant to do so.

At 6 p.m. the regiment was ordered to withdraw. It had lost almost all of its tanks and taken 42 casualties killed or wounded.



In reserve, the regiment was issued with new tanks, a hasty mix of Shermans, Grants, and Crusaders (types II and III), mostly salvaged from the battlefield and rapidly repaired. Montgomery had been impressed with the performance of 2nd New Zealand Division and wanted them to spearhead the next thrust, but Freyberg was unwilling to do so without reinforcements as his troops had suffered so many casualties. Monty therefore placed 151 and 152 Infantry Brigades under Freyberg's command for the next phase of the battle.

El Alamein - Supercharge

On the night of 1st/2nd November 1942, the 8th Army attacked again in the north, with 2nd New Zealand Division in the lead. General Freyberg placed 151 Brigade on the right and 152 Brigade on the left. The aim was to attack directly westwards across the Rahman track, with the infantry leading the night assault and 9th Armoured Brigade (now commanded by Brigadier John Currie) again passing through to break the enemy gun line and allow X Corps to break out. The assault went to plan except that opposition on the left was heavier than expected which slowed the advance.

As a result the advancing tanks were highlighted against the dawn sky in the east and began to be picked off by Axis anti-tank fire. The Regiment was in the centre of 9th Armoured Brigade, and the CO lost touch with both his artillery support and close anti-tank support. In the growing light, the B squadron commander (Major M.St.J.V.Gibbs) realised that he was in a ring of enemy anti-tank guns, ahead and to both flanks.

He gave the order to 'Charge' and B squadron over-ran the anti-tank positions, losing some vehicles but destroying the enemy gun line. Meanwhile 21st Panzer Division was counter-attacking A and C squadrons and at 4pm the Regiment (now down to four tanks) was withdrawn. 1st Armoured Division from X Corps were just behind 9th Armoured Brigade but there were no liaison officers between the units and 1st Armoured did not take the opportunity to push on through the broken Axis gun-line.



Dispositions at the end of Operation Supercharge[10]

After the 9th Armoured Brigade's action, Brigadier Gentry of the 6th New Zealand Brigade went ahead to survey the scene. On seeing Brigadier Currie asleep on a stretcher, he approached him saying, 'Sorry to wake you John, but I'd like to know where your tanks are?' Currie waved his hand at a group of tanks around him, replying 'There they are.' Gentry was puzzled. 'I don't mean your headquarters tanks, I mean your armoured regiments. Where are they?' Currie waved his arm and again replied, 'There are my armoured regiments, Bill.' [11]

Nevertheless, the assault of 2nd New Zealand Division had drawn in both 15 and 21 Panzer Divisions, with the result that there was a wide gap in the Axis lines to the south west. Through this gap Montgomery pushed the remainder of his armour, breaking the Afrika Korps line and pushing westwards into its rear areas and supply lines.

By 4 November the battle was won and Montgomery was entertaining the captured Afrika Korps commander, von Thoma to dinner in his caravan.

In an account of the battle published to mark its 25th anniversary, Montgomery wrote:

I must mention the magnificent fight put up by 9th Armoured Brigade - 3rd Hussars, Wiltshire Yeomanry, Warwickshire Yeomanry.... If the British armour owed any debt to the infantry of 8th army, the debt was paid on November 2nd by 9th Armoured Brigade in heroism and blood....

[edit] Syria and Italy

Following El Alamein the 9th Armoured Brigade was withdrawn first to Cairo and then to Syria for internal security duties, where it remained throughout 1942 and 1943. In May 1944 it reached Italy and was placed under the command of 78th Division. The Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry was to support 36th Infantry Brigade, with one squadron in support of each of the brigade's three infantry battalions. In May-June 1944 it took part in the advance on Rome, working its way up in close country between the central mountains and the sea to the west. At one point, 78th Division withdrew but outlying elements of the regiment did not get the message and continued forwards. The Corps HQ diary for the 23rd June records 'RWY water truck reports Vaiano clear of enemy'.



Yeomanry RWY, WY, YH, NSR, SY, CY, YD, NSY, DY
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In July and August, 9th Brigade worked in support of 4th and 10th Indian Divisions in the central mountains south east of Florence, on the approach to the Gothic Line. In August the order was received that all men with over 4½ years service overseas should be repatriated, and this reduced the regiment's strength by half. This made it impossible to function as a fighting unit and it was withdrawn from the line of battle. In October 1944, the regiment returned to England to train reinforcements for armoured regiments still fighting in Europe. It continued in this role until 1946, although the pace slowed after victory in Europe in May 1945.



Image courtesy of the Imperial War Museum Reference NA5754

Photographer: Stg Loughin, Army Film & Photographic Unit

Description: Men and vehicles of the 2nd Wilts Yeomanry Regiment passing through Fleri,
including a Daimler Scout car numbered F47698

9th August, 1943

During the Second World War officers and soldiers serving with the regiment received three Distinguished Service Orders, four Military Crosses and ten Military Medals. The regiment lost a total of 59 dead during the war, with the biggest single loss being 20 dead on or around 2 November 1941 during Operation Supercharge.



Yeomanry RWY, WY, YH, NSR, SY, CY, YD, NSY, DY
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In 1947, the regiment again ceased to exist but the following year was re-established as a heavy tank unit in support of 43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division, equipped with Cromwell tanks and Charioteer tank destroyers

In 1958, the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry left the Heavy Armoured role and became one of 6 Yeomanry Armoured Car Regiments. They took over the Daimler armoured cars, armed with a 2 pdr and a crew of 3, and the Dingo with a mg and a crew of 2. The Regiment who had endured a number of Camps on Salisbury Plain in tanks chose to go to Cornwall instead in their smaller, more manoeuvrable steeds.

The Armoured Cars meant that training could be carried out on public roads and that training areas were not required. Having received the vehicles 10 days before camp, the Regiment conducted driving cadres on the way down, all arriving without mishap.

In May 1961, the Regiment went to Castlemartin in Wales for camp and took part in the usual round of Gunnery, but also an amphibious exercise, ending up having driven all over South Wales. Some of the time was also devoted to rehearsals for the presentation of the new Guidon for June.



DAC F20153.AC235.77ZR03



DSC F340419.S6017.23ZS37



DSC F47808.S2174.06ZS67



Church parade June 1961. John Stratton centre David Gadd right.
 Photo source RWY web site
 Photographer: David Gadd

Description: Daimler armoured car crews circa 1950's



DAC 76ZR75.AC263.F20181 - Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry



Photo source Unknown)
Photographer: Unknown
Description: Daimler armoured car crews circa 1950's



(Photo source Unknown)

Photographer: Unknown

Description: DAC 76ZR99.AC1053.F207340 Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry and crews circa 1950's



Warwickshire Yeomanry

The Warwickshire Yeomanry was a yeomanry regiment of the British Army, first raised in 1794, which served as a cavalry and dismounted infantry regiment in the First World War and as a cavalry and an armoured regiment in the Second World War, before being amalgamated into The Queen's Own Warwickshire and Worcestershire Yeomanry in 1956

The regiment did not mechanise before the outbreak of the Second World War; on mobilisation, it was attached to 1st Cavalry Division, and moved in 1940 to the Middle East, where it saw service in Iraq and Syria in 1941.

It was mechanised as an armoured regiment in late 1941 and transferred into the Royal Armoured Corps, with the division redesignating itself as 10th Armoured Division.

The regiment then saw service in the North African Campaign, fighting at the Second Battle of El Alamein whilst attached to 2nd New Zealand Division. It was deployed to Italy in 1944, where it saw action in June and July.

After the War, the regiment reconstituted in the Territorial Army. In 1956 it amalgamated with The Queen's Own Worcestershire Hussars, forming The Queen's Own Warwickshire and Worcestershire Yeomanry.

The use of **Dingo scout cars** was recorded on the 15th October 1942 in the north african campin 11th Hussars war diary.



Yorkshire Hussars

NO DAIMLER ARMoured VEHICLE USE SO FAR IDENTIFIED

The Yorkshire Hussars were formed in 1794, when King George III was on the throne, William Pitt the Younger was the Prime Minister of Great Britain, and across the English Channel, Britain was faced by a French nation that had recently guillotined its King and possessed a revolutionary army numbering half a million men.

The Prime Minister proposed that the English Counties form a force of Volunteer Yeoman Cavalry that could be called on by the King to defend the country against invasion or by the Lord Lieutenant to subdue any civil disorder within the country.



World War I

On the September 1, Lord Feversham formed a first line regiment of Yorkshire Hussars who volunteered to serve abroad, which was designated 1/1st Yorkshire Hussars. The 2/1st Yorkshire Hussars remained on coastal duties until being sent to Ireland in 1918 under the command of Lord Deramore, they were mainly 45 and 50 year old men. A third line regiment, 3/1st Yorkshire Hussars was formed to supply drafts.

In February 1915, the 1/1st Yorkshire Hussars split up to be employed as Divisional Cavalry B Squadron deployed to France in February 1915 with 46th (North Midland) Division.

C Squadron deployed to France in April 1915 with 49th (West Riding) Division.

A and HQ Squadrons deployed to France in April 1915 with 50th (Northumbrian) Division.

A Squadron seeing action at the 2nd Battle of Ypres, B at the Battle of Loos and C at the Battle of Aubern Ridge.

On May 16, 1916, the 1/1st Yorkshire Hussars reassembled under Lieutenant Colonel W Pepys as Corps Cavalry to XVII Corps and were present at the Battle of Arras. The Regiment was reorganised and re-roled in August 1917. After six weeks infantry training at Etaples, the bulk of the Yorkshire Hussars were drafted to the 9th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. The Battalion was titled the "9th (Yorkshire Hussars) Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment" and wore The Yorkshire Hussars cap-badge and West York collar-badges. The Battalion saw much hard fighting taking part in, the 3rd Battle of Ypres.

Between the Wars

On reforming the TA, the 14 senior Yeomanry Regiments remained horsed cavalry regiments (6 forming the 5th and 6th Cavalry Brigades). The Yorkshire Hussars and The Queen's Own Yorkshire Dragoons being respectively 3rd and 9th in seniority formed together with The Sherwood Rangers 5th Cavalry Brigade (with its headquarters in York).

World War II

In World War II the Regiment was a part of the 6th Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, which later became the 10th Armoured Division which meant the Regiment had to convert to armour and started tank training with Stuart tanks as part of the 9th Armoured Brigade.

In March 1942 the Regiment became the Armoured Striking Force in Cyprus with Cruiser and Valentine tanks, and from there to Egypt in January 1943, taking over Sherman and Crusader tanks, before returning to England at the end of the year.

They then in 1944 converted to become an Infantry Division Recce Regiment being attached to 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division, then transferred to the 61st (South Midland) Infantry Division so the missed out on the D-Day landings.

From April to August the Regiment split up into Squadrons to take over and run "D" Day Embarkation Camps.



Yeomanry RWY, WY, YH, NSR, SY, CY, YD, NSY, DY
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In August the Regiment reunited and the drafting of all tank-trained personnel began in earnest , the Regiment becoming a 'Recce Holding Unit' for refresher training and drafting of returned wounded Recce personnel.

In June 1945 , the Regiment reorganised as a Light Armoured Regiment (Churchills). It was placed in 'suspended animation' March 1946.

Post war

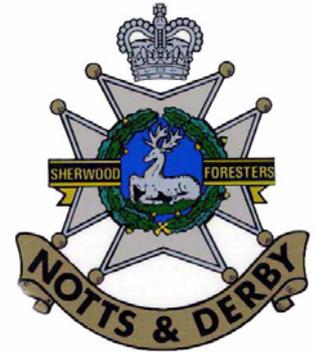
After the second world war the yeomanry regiments in Yorkshire were amalgamated into The Queen's Own Yorkshire Yeomanry, which was formed on April 1, 1967 as a TAVR III unit with the RHQ and 'A' Squadron at York, 'B' Squadron at Doncaster and 'C' Squadron at Hull, then on April 1, 1969, they were reduced to cadre and finally reformed on April 1, 1971 as 'A' Squadron The Queen's Own Yeomanry



Nott's & Derby (Sherwood Rangers) Yeomanry

The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment) was an infantry regiment of the British Army from 1881 to 1970.

112th Regiment RAC was formed on 1 November 1941 by the conversion to the armoured car role of 9th Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters.



This was an infantry battalion raised in 1939 that had seen action at Dunkirk and had since been serving in the lorried infantry role in the Support Group of 1st Armoured Division.

The battalion had been under orders to accompany 1st Armoured to the Middle East, but these were cancelled and the men returned their tropical uniforms to store.

In common with other infantry units transferred to the Royal Armoured Corps, 112's personnel would have continued to wear their Foresters cap badge on the black beret of the RAC, and the regiment continued to add the parenthesis '(Foresters)' after the RAC title.

The first Commanding Officer was Lieutenant-Colonel Claude Lancaster, a Member of Parliament and Reserve officer who had raised 9th Foresters and commanded it at Dunkirk. He was made an Honorary Colonel in the Royal Armoured Corps when his term of command ended.

112 RAC was assigned to the newly formed 42nd Armoured Division as its armoured car regiment.

The regiment's initial equipment was the Bison concrete armoured lorry with extemporised armour and Standard Beaverette armoured cars handed over by 42nd Division's Reconnaissance Regiment, with Daimler Dingo scout cars as armoured command vehicles.

112 RAC left 42nd Division in February 1943[8] and later became a draft-finding unit for other armoured car regiments fighting in Normandy.

One of the regiment's last duties was to carry out trials on the 95mm gun version of the Harry Hopkins light tank, even though no-one in the regiment had ever seen a 95mm gun.

Despite personal appeals from the Commanding Officer, Lt-Col A.G. Miller, DSO, to General Miles Dempsey commanding Second Army in North-West Europe, and from Col Lancaster to the War Office, to allow the unit to go overseas, 112 RAC ceased to exist on 14 October 1944, when it reverted to the title of 9th Foresters, which was placed in suspended animation.

The last entry in the War Diary notes:

The history of this Regiment is a pure example of the complete inefficiency of 'A' Branch at the War Office, in as much as many hundreds of officers and men have wasted valuable years of their lives training for precisely nothing.



(Photo sourced from Bovington Tank Museum Collection
Photographer: Unknown

Description: Daimler Scout car of the Sherwood Rangers on training exercises in the UK,



Staffordshire Yeomanry

SY

NO DAIMLER ARMoured VEHICLE USE SO FAR IDENTIFIED

EXPAND AS DETAILS ARE FOUND



Cheshire Yeomanry

During World War 2 the regiment was part of the 6th Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division and remained mounted until 1942, seeing action in Palestine, Syria and the Lebanon. As one of the last regiments of the British Army to fight on horseback, the Cheshire Yeomanry found it particularly painful to lose its horses and to re-role as a Signals Regiment,

when its role changed in 1942 to the 5th Lines of Communications Signals Regiment. After leaving the Middle East the Regiment was re-designated the 17th Line of Communication Signals (Cheshire Yeomanry) for service in North West Europe.

On May Day, 1947, the Cheshire Yeomanry reformed as an armoured regiment, equipped with Cromwell and Comet tanks. It continued as such until 1958, when it re-equipped with Daimler Armoured Cars.

The defence re-organisation of 1967 led to the disbanding of the regiment except for a small cadre, but happily in 1971 The Queen's Own Yeomanry (QOY) was formed from four old yeomanry regiments, including the Cheshire Yeomanry.

This lasted until 1999 when the regiment, as part of the Strategic Defence Review, was amalgamated into The Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry.

Trooper George Comer served with the Cheshire Yeomanry Territorial Army between 1956 and 1960. After joining up chiefly to obtain a driving license at the governments expense (obtained in a 1 ton Austin truck). He found to his pleasure that he was charged with becoming a driver of both Daimler armoured cars and dingo's.

These were based at Gilwern Park barracks and were used to patrol in and around Chester.



Yorkshire Dragoons

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EXPAND AS DETAILS ARE FOUND



North Somerset Yeomanry

NO DAIMLER ARMoured VEHICLE USE SO FAR IDENTIFIED

EXPAND AS DETAILS ARE FOUND



The Leicestershire & Derbyshire Yeomanry

The Derbyshire Yeomanry was a yeomanry regiment of the British Army, first raised in 1794, which served as a cavalry regiment and dismounted infantry regiment in the First World War.

And provided two reconnaissance regiments in the Second World War, before being amalgamated into The Leicestershire and Derbyshire (Prince Albert's Own) Yeomanry in 1957.

the regiment was first formed as the Derbyshire Corps of Fencible Cavalry in 1794, as a regiment of full-time fencible soldiers for home defence. The regiment changed shortly thereafter to the Derbyshire Corps of Yeomanry Cavalry, a part-time yeomanry regiment, and was dispersed in individual troops



In 1834, the troops were regimented as the Derbyshire Yeomanry Cavalry. sponsored two companies of the Imperial Yeomanry in 1900, for service in the South African War, and in 1901 was itself reorganized as mounted infantry as the Derbyshire Imperial Yeomanry. In 1908 it was transferred into the Territorial Force, returning to a cavalry role and equipping as dragoons, under the new title of The Derbyshire Yeomanry

In August 1939, the regiment was duplicated, producing the 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry and 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry, both of which mobilised along with the Territorial Army on the outbreak of war in September. They were equipped with armoured cars, serving as reconnaissance units.

Both regiments saw service in the North African Campaign; in 1942, the 2nd Derbyshire fought at the Battle of Alam el Halfa and the Second Battle of El Alamein (as part of 7th Armoured Division). The 1st Derbyshire, meanwhile, had landed in Tunisia in late 1942 as the reconnaissance regiment of the 6th Armoured Division, fighting at Medjez el Bab; during the race to the Tunisian coast, it fought at Kasserine Pass and Foundouk, finally reaching Tunis in March 1943.

The 1st Derbyshire then moved to Italy with the 6th Armoured, where it saw heavy fighting during May 1944, including action at the Battle of Monte Cassino. Through July and August it fought in the advance to Florence, and in April 1945 saw action at the Argenta Gap and Fossa Cembalina. Returning to the United Kingdom in 1943, the 2nd was assigned to 51st (Highland) Division, where it served as the divisional reconnaissance regiment until the end of the war.

It received battle honours for action in August, fighting at Dives Crossing, La Vie Crossing and Lisieux during the crossing of the Seine; in September and October, it received honours for fighting on the Lower Maas, and in January 1945 for fighting at Ourthe during the Battle of the Bulge. They received battle honours for fighting in the Rhineland and the Reichswald in February, and crossed the Rhine in March in Operation Plunder.

After the War, the regiment reconstituted in the Territorial Army. In 1957 it amalgamated with The Leicestershire Yeomanry (Prince Albert's Own), forming The Leicestershire and Derbyshire Yeomanry.



(Photo sourced from <http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk>)

Photographer: Army Film & Photographic Unit

Title: THE BRITISH ARMY IN TUNIS

Description: Daimler Scout cars **F47258** & **F47234** and also Armoured cars of 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry, 1943

Derbyshire Yeomanry, January 1944 – May 1945

Extract from the book "The Mad Recce" by Frank Knappett

Part Two, THE EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER 6 Blighty — Preparing for the Second Front

All too quickly my fourteen days' disembarkation leave was over and I was instructed to report to the Regiment's new location at Aylesbury.

My first introduction to Aylesbury was when my peaceful slumbers were disturbed by something thumping the foot of my wooden bed. I opened one eye lazily and my befuddled brain slowly took in a pair of hairy knees with a tartan kilt above, a battledress blouse with Sergeant's stripes, and a fierce ginger moustache topped by a tartan tam-o'-shanter.

From the mouth of this seemingly ten feet high and four feet wide apparition issued forth a roar of broad Scots, emphasized by the use of a three foot knobby staff, "Wakey, wakey, rise and shine ye lazy shower, sun's scorching ye eyeballs," which seemed to indicate that it was his earnest desire that I should rather hurriedly leap forth from my blankets and prepare myself for whatever the day may bring forth.

And bring forth it certainly did, for the first fact to emerge was that the Regiment was now a member of that famous fighting force, the 51st Highland Division who had just returned from Italy.



We were to be designated Divisional Troops under the direct control of the Divisional Commander, our role being armoured reconnaissance and offensive patrolling.

We now knew that we had been brought home to take part in the long talked about Second Front, an assault which everyone surmised would be somewhere on the coast of France, but for obvious security reasons at that stage, no one knew when or where.

Having been re-equipped with Daimler armoured cars, life at Aylesbury began to gather momentum. I was made up to Troop Sergeant and given No 1 Troop under Lt. Eric Lace.

We soon found that after desert warfare we had a great deal to learn. The vast expanse of the desert had given us room to manoeuvre, it could almost be likened to naval warfare, squadrons of armour advancing for battle in line abreast formation.

It became obvious that fighting with armour in the close country of Europe was going to be a far more hairy experience, for much of the time, especially in winter, the vehicles were going to be confined to the roads which added enormously to the hazards.

Unlike the First World War there was going to be no fixed trench warfare, but a fast moving, very mobile war, and armour advancing along a road became extremely vulnerable at every bend in the road where lurking round the corner could be dug in anti-tank guns. Briefing and training became endless to fit us for the change in terrain.

However, in spite of all this we were able to get into Aylesbury at night for the sinking of many pints at The Dark Horse or The Bull Inn. Getting back to billets late, beyond pass time, presented no problems when we found a convenient hole in the wire of the perimeter fence adjacent to our billets, allowing us to by-pass the guard room.

One day the whole Division was transported by lorries and paraded in a field somewhere in Hertfordshire when there was a few inches of snow on the ground, where we were to be addressed by the Army Commander. As usual we were ready a couple of hours before time and I well remember the 'bull' that went on for that parade.

To achieve a perfect 'dressing' of the Regimental lines, the RSM even laid down lines of string for us to line up our heels on.

And there we stood and waited until at last Monty himself appeared in his staff car. As soon as he climbed out he typically shouted, "Break ranks lads, gather round and sit down." He totally disregarded the snow. So much for that meticulous parade!

He then proceeded to put us in the picture, no times or places of course, but more or less what we had suspected. We were to go into intensive training for the Second Front. He exuded confidence when he said that although not faced with an easy task and there would be many obstacles to overcome, we would beat the Hun in the end. He also said that it was very likely that we would renew our acquaintance with our old enemy of the desert, Rommel.

No doubt it was intended to be, and did in fact achieve a great boost to the morale of the troops.

As the fighting died down in Italy, the English countryside began to bristle with troops and armour, all getting themselves ready for the great assault.

Sometime around late April we were moved to Stanford battle ranges in the Brandon district of Norfolk, to get in some real live battle practice in close country. A vast area of the countryside had been evacuated of all civilian and animal population and was given over to live ammunition battle practice. This meant plenty of hard work, not the least being the inevitable gun cleaning after firing all day.

One surprising and personal aspect of this posting was that through correspondence with my mother it turned out that there was a branch of her family living in Brandon, quite near to our camp. I lost no time in looking them up and they made me most welcome in their homes when I found time to get out.



Photo sourced from Tanks in Camera 1940-43 by David Fletcher BTM
Photographer: Not Known

Description: - Dingo and Armoured Car of 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry 6th Armoured Division in Tunisia
Date: 1943

Stemming from this they invited my wife Betty up for a visit. This was most welcome and we both made the most of it. I used to borrow the troop DR's motor cycle and dash into Brandon to spend as much time as possible with my wife.

Just after that pleasant interlude the fun and games started in earnest. In order to prepare for a wet landing on the beaches, all our vehicles had to be waterproofed to ensure that when, as we expected, they were dropped in several feet of water, the engines would continue to run even though submerged.

This operation proved to be the most complex and in many ways comical, that we had ever to undertake on our vehicles. They had to be literally stripped right down to the bare bones and every vital part sealed and made watertight, even to an extension to the exhaust pipe sticking way up in the air to prevent the sea getting in. It was of course essential that the vehicles would continue to run (we hoped) when driven off a ramp into several feet of water when the landing was made.

Well, I never did see such a carnival! The large concreted hard standing areas were strewn with such an assortment of pieces of armoured cars, carriers, half tracks and the Squadron's 'soft' transport lorries that it appeared that they would never get them reassembled and serviceable again, ever.

But, sure enough after many teething troubles, flames coming out of places where flames shouldn't be and much scratching of heads and cursing, eventually the whole exercise was completed.

Now of course the vehicles were waterproofed ready for D-Day and their movement was strictly limited.



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www.daimler-fighting-vehicles.co.uk

Shortly after this in about the middle of May we left Stanford and made our way south for an unknown destination. This eventually proved to be the side of the London to Southend road at Aveley in Essex, familiar ground to me, only 20 miles from my home town of Southend-on-sea.

There, an astonishing sight met our eyes. Surely there had never been such a concentration of troops, vehicles and equipment. This was obviously the staging area for embarkation at nearby Tilbury docks. As we were to find out later, this was but one of many staging areas near strategic ports of embarkation for the Channel crossing. Excitement was running high.

Our vehicles were parked under guard on the roadside verges while we lived in a nearby tented area, fortunately the weather was good. For security reasons everyone was strictly confined to camp, and there was a tenseness in the air, especially when as D-Day drew near, we were briefed and briefed on the assault strategy and what we could expect at the initial landing.

On Friday June the 2nd we kitted up for battle and moved to the docks at Tilbury, where we found that we were to be ferried over the Channel in an American Landing Ship Tank.

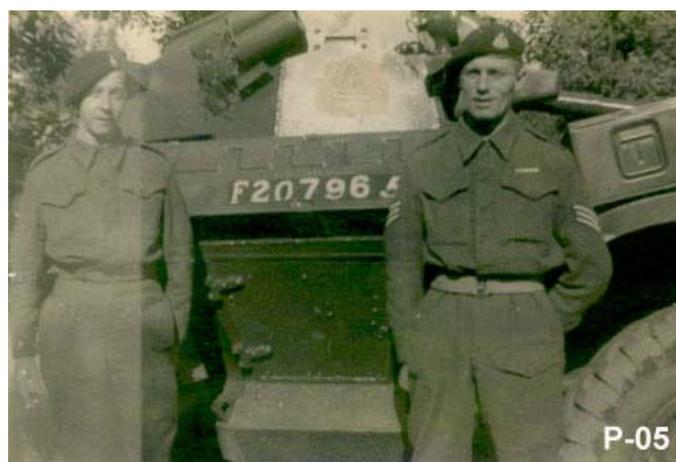
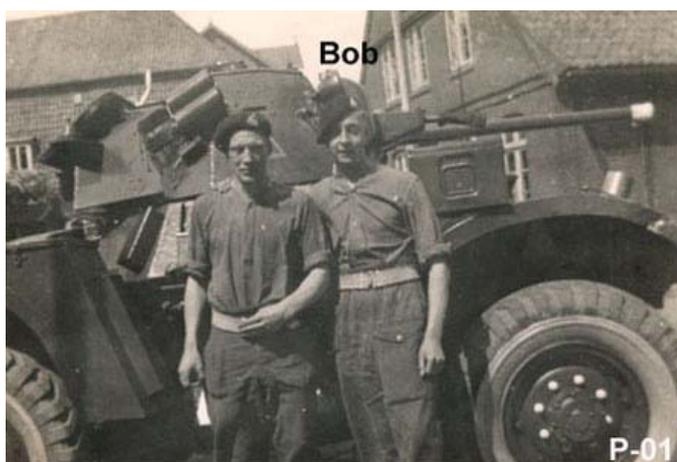
Loading the armoured cars was a bit hairy. Each Troop Sergeant was responsible for getting his vehicles on board, they had to be reversed up a pair of very narrow ramps at a steep angle on to the deck of the ship.

The drivers whose view was limited to their small front facing visors could not of course see where they were going and had to rely entirely upon the Sergeant's visual directions.

A few inches out on either side would have meant disaster. However, all was accomplished without mishap, and as our cars were to remain on the open deck, they had to be secured with shackles and chains, the hold of the ship being reserved for tanks and heavy guns.

Eventually we moved out down river and took up position just off the end of Southend Pier to await the assembly of the convoy. I could almost see my mother's house from where we lay, which produced some nostalgic thoughts. I wondered if I would ever see it again.





(Photo courtesy of Barry Smith)

Photographer: Unknown

Description: Daimler Scout and Armoured cars of Derbyshire Yeomanry,
Circa WW2, 'Bob' is Trooper Bob Smith **DAC F207965**

(Photo sourced from <http://flickr>)

CHAPTER 7

D-Day to VE Day

Up to now the weather had been a perfect English summer and all was set fair for D-Day. Then, dramatically it changed to lowering skies and gale force winds. This was an anxious time for Eisenhower, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces and for Churchill. Here they were with a massive invasion force, poised ready for the assault, and they had to make the nail-biting decision whether to proceed or wait for the weather to settle. The longer they delayed the greater became the chance of enemy reconnaissance planes sighting the force, while to proceed would mean that many of the smaller landing craft, and indeed even the larger LSTs would not be able to unload in the rough weather on the beaches, and the whole operation would be put in jeopardy. So, it was decided to wait. We lay off Southend for four days, and then, although the wind had dropped considerably, but not by far ideally calm, the great task force set sail for the beaches of Normandy, moving off down the Thames Estuary in darkness, hugging the Kentish coast, past Margate, Ramsgate, etc.

This was our first experience of life in the American Navy and we found their way of life like a clip from a Hollywood film. Loud hailer frequently blared out, "Now hear this, so-and-so report to so-and-so ON THE DOUBLE!" However the food was good if a little unusual, although by now, out of the shelter of the Thames Estuary, the sea was quite choppy and quite a few of the troops were feeling seasick and food was the last thing in which they were interested.

As we got well on our way across the English Channel it became obvious to us what a small part of the whole vast operation we were. Convoys from all along the Channel ports with strong naval task forces in attendance were converging on the Normandy beaches. The sky was crowded with our fighter planes and bombers going in to 'soften up' the enemy, to destroy the thickly sown underwater obstacles and to try to knock out his coastal defence guns.

The sandy beach grew closer and ships of all shapes and sizes were preparing to run inshore until they grounded, and then came the order 'Down ramps'. The din was terrific, like all hell let loose. Standing a short distance out to sea was HMS *Hood* pounding away with her big guns at targets far inland, while just to our left was HMS *Warspite* putting up a terrific naval bombardment, the decks of both ships piled high with empty shell cases. A Landing Ship Tank close to us carrying part of the 43rd Division hit an underwater obstacle and just disappeared, littering the sea with wreckage and bodies, while other LSTs and landing craft personnel were hit and destroyed all around us. The RAF were strafing the beaches to detonate enemy mines, all in all it was like Dante's inferno. To add to the general din and flying death, Jerry was blasting away at the invasion force with his remaining coastal defence guns, while his heavy machine-guns were sweeping the beaches with enfilading fire.



Finally our ship gently bumped the shore and dropped the ramp. As soon as it was lowered it was the job of a ship's officer to test the depth with a long dip stick. Much to his consternation it went down and down registering quite deep water, when in fact it should have been only four or five feet. It was discovered that our ramp had dropped right over a large bomb crater in the mud. Anyhow they decided to try unloading but with dire results. The first to attempt it was a heavy 3.7 gun and trailer. He just canted over and was left hanging half on the ramp and half in the water, thus blocking the exit for everyone else. We just had to wait on the exposed decks like sitting ducks, expecting to be blown up any minute, until bulldozers of the Sappers were brought up to fill in the crater and push the offending gun into the water so that unloading could continue.

In the meantime the gallant Sappers had been busy clearing mines and obstacles and marking out safe lanes up the beach, aided by the Military Police. Those Sappers and Military Policemen were doing a magnificent job, sorting out the chaos and directing the various units to their start lines once they got off the beach. The job could not have been done without them, but they were under blistering enemy fire and their casualties were heavy. Jerry was now very active, plastering the beaches with enfilading heavy machine-gun fire and there were many who did not get off that horrific beach alive. The sands were littered with khaki clad bodies and were red with blood.

Our turn came to disembark and we trundled off the ramp into the water and struggled on to dry land. At least all our hard work on waterproofing the vehicles proved to be an unqualified success. We lumbered up that dreadful beach and made it safely on to the hard ground beyond the sea wall.

The 6th Airborne Division had been dropped in large Horsa gliders towed by planes, at first light, and had secured and were holding the road bridges over the Caen Canal and the river Orne at Ranville. Our first objective was to link up with them and render support.

One amusing incident, although it could well have turned out otherwise, was that our 'chuck' wagon containing all the rations, became separated from the Squadron and dashed off down the road on his own. Seeing no British troops, he cracked on hoping to catch up with us. Instead he reached the outskirts of Caen which was strongly held by the Germans. Dusty Miller the driver, was puzzled to see troops in field grey uniforms moving about and vehicles bearing Swastikas. The penny dropped, and Dusty carried out the fastest turn round in his life and beat a very hasty retreat. The Germans were so surprised to see a British Army lorry that he was gone before a shot was fired!

Moving along the road towards Ranville we were surprised to be troubled by French civilian snipers firing on us from the odd house or from trees. Our first contact with the paratroops was when we came upon a patrol mounted on horses which they had 'acquired' from the fields. The Airborne lads had not been idle, apart from handing over several prisoners they had built a Bailey bridge across the Orne, not far from the existing bridge, which they had named 'Pegasus' bridge. It was our job to hold both bridges to keep the road open. Jerry of course knew that the river crossing was vital to our advancing troops and he was doing his best to destroy the bridges. I remember vividly that particularly troublesome was an 88 mm coastal defence gun at Ouistram at the mouth of the river Orne which Jerry had hastily turned round and was pin-pointed on the bridge. His shelling was pretty accurate too. We would hear the crack of the gunfire and almost simultaneously the shell would land, either hitting the old road bridge or landing too close for comfort, showering us with dirt and shrapnel. Other artillery fire scored direct hits on the Airborne's nearby ammunition dump which gave a spectacular display.

We moved our cars down on to the towpath by the bridge to secure against a possible attack by German paratroops. No paras appeared but we were subjected to shellfire, heavy bombing and strafing. Bombs dropped all round us, one landed right behind my car. The Troop DR had left his motor cycle leaning up against the back of the car. It just disintegrated into a heap of scrap metal. Bomb fragments penetrated our main petrol tank, tore holes in the armour, blew three tyres off and snapped off a heavy tree which fell across the turret, pinning us inside. We could smell strong petrol fumes from the ruptured tank and expected the lot to go up at any minute. None of us particularly fancied being roasted alive in our car so it was number one priority to get out. But how? Now the turret of an armoured car is not exactly noted for its freedom of movement, but, after some highly complex acrobatics and contortions we all managed to wriggle out of the driver's door. Funny how one remembers the small things, but mounted on the rear engine cover was a metal box for kit which was securely fastened. Inside was a brand new greatcoat, just issued to me, and when the box was opened, that coat looked like a pepper pot. It was peppered and



burned by hundreds of small fragments of red hot shrapnel. I still don't know how it got inside that locked box.

We looked round and took stock. The bridge was still intact but our car was a sorry sight. We left the heap of scrap metal that had once been a motor cycle and somehow managed to bump our way back to Squadron HQ. The driver of one of the other cars of our troop took off his beret and found a sizeable chunk of shrapnel lodged behind his cap badge. A narrow squeak for Bluey Wilkinson!

Altogether it had turned out to be a most uncomfortable night. I had to take my car straight away back to divisional workshops for urgent repairs, namely three new wheels and tyres, a new petrol tank, plus a bit of welding up of holes, for it was essential that we were operational without delay.

By this time the beach-head was expanding and other troops arrived to take over to allow us to probe further forward.

About D plus 8 the Regiment harboured for the night in a triangular field, later to become known as mortar meadow, and not without good reason! The armoured cars were dispersed around the field under the hedges and we got down into a deep dry ditch, and for the first time since we had left England, we took off our boots. Oh what a relief! However relief was to be short-lived for just before first light Jerry opened up and literally plastered that field with heavy mortars from only a few hundred yards away. He knew we were there all right. At that time there was so much British stuff ashore and so little room to manoeuvre that we and Jerry were on top of each other, often just a few hundred yards apart. Anyhow everyone shot up out of the ditches, piled into the armoured cars and tried to get out of that field fast. We suffered quite a few casualties there, including our Commanding Officer, Lt-Colonel Palmer, who had not been with us very long. A new CO replacement, a Lt-Colonel Serracold was sent out straight from Catterick to take over the Regiment.

Having got out of 'mortar meadow' we probed forward along a road leading to the villages of Escoville and Herouvolette to try to flush out Jerry who was causing us so much trouble. It was about this time that the 2nd I/C of C Squadron, Captain Roger Oyston and his crew disappeared off the face of the earth on their way back from Regimental HQ to the Squadron. Their wrecked armoured car was found later but we never heard a word about what happened to them.

It was also while probing along this road that Sergeant 'Pinky' Simpson's car was hit, killing him and the wireless operator, leaving the driver, Bill Taylor on his own with a dead crew. He put his foot down and got away fast, not stopping until he reached the rear echelon located a few miles back in an orchard at St Aubin. Bill stayed with the echelon for a while, but unfortunately that orchard came under heavy fire and Bill, along with several others was blown to pieces. I really felt that, for Bill Taylor had been my own driver for quite a while both in Blighty and in the desert and we had shared many adventures together.

Before we reached the first village we came under heavy fire and it soon became obvious why. The spire of the village church obviously housed a German OP who was directing artillery fire straight on to us, pinning us down. Lt. Richardson had his wireless aerial shot away, that's a bit too close for comfort. We opened up with our 2-pounders trying to demolish the spire, but our 'pea shooters' were not man enough for the job and only managed to chip bits of masonry off. So, we got a nearby battery of 6-pounder anti-tank guns to have a go. They successfully demolished the spire, bringing it crashing down with the Jerry OP still inside it (we found him later in the ruins) thus taking the artillery pressure off us for a bit. Now we probed forward cautiously to the village to find it was crawling with Jerries. Then followed a right old ding-dong, all the Squadron attacking, with house to house fighting by the Assault Troop, backed up by the armoured cars. We finally drove Jerry out but not without fairly heavy casualties on our side. I remember finding Corporal Jack Jones lying in the churchyard with a hole in the middle of his forehead and his brains oozing out. We gave him morphine and got him back to the medics on the bonnet of a jeep.

A curious situation now developed in that village. By day we occupied the village and would then draw back at night, and Jerry promptly moved back in. He would move out at first light and we would move back in. With support Jerry was driven back further and we advanced to an orchard on top of a slight rise, giving us a good view of the immediate surrounding country. The fields all round us were high with summer corn which proved to be excellent cover for German infantry patrols. It was a jumpy situation and we had to set up a listening post a hundred yards out in the corn in front to try to detect any enemy movement.



There were not many volunteers for that job! Evidently we had been spotted for we were soon subjected to heavy mortar fire, some hitting the apple trees and bursting overhead, peppering one or two of the Bren carriers, putting them out of action.

Things had been pretty tense since D-Day and the strain was beginning to tell. My wireless operator became very jumpy, and while we were in that orchard he suddenly grabbed the mike and shouted over the air to Squadron HQ that the field next to us was full of Germans, coming out of a wood and advancing upon our positions. Worse than that, he had picked a grenade up from the rack, pulled out the pin, and was sitting in the turret with it in his hand. If he had dropped it that would have been the end of us, for the turret was crammed with high explosives. It was with some trepidation and gentleness that I persuaded him to quieten down and was able to make the grenade safe.

All this was a figment of his overwrought mind, and I had a hell of a job explaining to the Squadron Leader. Poor bloke, he had really cracked up and as soon as we could we got him sent back to Squadron HQ from where he was sent back to base and eventually to Blighty.

By now, Jerry had no doubts that this was not just another coastal raid in force but a full scale invasion, coming not as he half expected in the Pas de Calais area, but right here in Normandy, and as a consequence, he was desperately trying to rush up troops and armour to stem the push.

The beach-head was enlarging all the time, masses of men and material were being landed at the cleverly devised artificial Mulberry Harbour, resulting in a large invasion force being compacted into a small area with little room for deployment. It was therefore essential that the forward troops push on further inland, but Jerry was stubbornly defending the area around Caen which was our next objective.

One night we were warned of a projected 1,000 bomber raid to take place the following morning on Caen to 'soften up' the enemy before we went in. As we were so very close to the bomb line, we were told to 'go to ground'. We promptly dug slit trenches and ran the armoured cars over them for added protection. Sure enough, right on time, the leading Pathfinders came over and dropped their target indicators. They were followed by wave after wave of bombers. The tragedy of it was, the indicators had dropped short and because we were so near to the bomb line, they had landed right on our FDLs (front line defences) including us!

Helplessly we watched the first wave of bombers open their bomb bays and counted fourteen bombs tumble out of each plane to drop smack on our own troops. Frantically all units set off yellow smoke recognition signals and huge yellow sheets were spread out on the ground in an attempt to alert the bombers to their error. I well remember in the next field to us was a Polish brigade and one of their chaps took off in a Lysander spotter plane and got in amongst the Liberators and Flying Forts, firing off yellow recognition signals from a Very pistol, a very gallant gesture, for he was liable to be shot down himself. The fighter escort milling around above the bombers appeared to realize what was going on, and from the ground it looked to us as though they were trying to divert them. Four Flying Forts and several Liberators were shot down in flames, whether as unlikely rumour had it, by the fighters or by ack-ack we never knew, probably the latter.

When the attack was finally diverted on to the correct target, Caen itself was totally obscured by thick clouds of smoke and dust. Jerry took a real pasting there.





Yeomanry RWY, WY, YH, NSR, SY, CY, YD, NSY, DY
The Daimler Fighting Vehicles Project – Part D6a
www.daimler-fighting-vehicles.co.uk

Photo courtesy of Lt. Dennis Randall & John Chaffe
Photographer: Lt Dennis Randall
Description: Trooper Owen Boddicombe of the Derbyshire Yeomanry
Circa Summer 1945

But what of our own misfortunes? The tally was very depressing. Many casualties were suffered by a number of units, among them the 51st Highland Division whom we were told lost 60 men killed and 300 wounded. An ammunition dump went up, our 25-pounder batteries, further back the 3.7s and 5.5s and even further back the heavy 9.2s batteries, together with a Canadian Corps HQ had suffered severe damage. A dismal day indeed! If we had not had the additional protection of our armoured cars over the slit trenches, we would undoubtedly have been numbered among the casualties.

Replacements were quickly forthcoming so that the planned attack on Caen could go ahead. Even after that terrific pounding the enemy fought back bitterly, but the town was finally taken together with many prisoners. The remainder of the German Army fled up through the Falais Gap.

In order to try to cut off their retreat we raced forward on a night move towards Falais. Now, moving an attacking force at night, which included much armour, is no easy task. To mark the line of advance, Bofors guns were lined up and fired continuous rounds of tracer shells so that the attacking force could proceed between the lanes created by the tracer. However, in the pitch darkness many tanks and vehicles disappeared into bomb and shell craters, of which there was no shortage!

We managed to reach the Falais road by morning. Shortly afterwards along this road we came across Rommel's Mercedes staff car overturned in a ditch, riddled with holes and blood everywhere*. It transpired that on his way back from an Army Group Conference at La Roche Guyon, his driver took to the tree-lined side roads to avoid the many burning and derelict vehicles, victims of the RAF. But there were eight Typhoons circling menacingly overhead, and when the Mercedes emerged on to the main road, two of them dropped to within a few yards of the road and roared along it after the now racing car. The leading Typhoon opened up with machine-gun and cannon fire which tore into the Mercedes. The driver, fatally hit, lost control and the car overturned into the ditch. Rommel, two other officers and a Sergeant bodyguard were all seriously wounded but were quickly whipped away by the Germans. All this happened not long before we arrived on the scene, so it could be said that we had just missed putting our old and to some extent respected adversary Rommel, The Desert Fox, 'in the bag'. What a prize that would have been for the Regiment!

After the capture of Falais, the next fortnight saw the Division fighting through close country towards Lisieux. It was bad country for armoured warfare and the Regiment lost many armoured cars and carriers to anti-tank weapons and we suffered many casualties. The RAF often mistook us for the enemy which didn't help much at all.

The leading car of a patrol, often with Troop Leader and crew were frequently destroyed by enemy 88 mms, easily camouflaged in the thick hedgerows bordering the narrow lanes. This happened so often that the order of march was altered to conserve officer material. So, the Troop Sergeant's car took over the lead position. Bully for Troop Sergeants!

Patrols were mostly in enemy territory, creeping down narrow lanes, with possible destruction waiting round every bend. Of course from the enemy's viewpoint he would delight in firing nasty AP (armour piercing) projectiles at the advancing armour. When, as did occur all too frequently, a hit was secured on the turret, usually one of three things happened, depending upon the thickness of the armour surrounding the lucky people inside!

(a) The case hardened shell would penetrate the turret, and as though it didn't want to hang about, would promptly disappear out the other side. The trouble was, that in the course of its short journey it would nearly always separate the Car Commander and the gunner/operator's heads from the rest of their anatomy, and rearrange them in unrecognizable form on the inside wall of the turret; or,

(b) It would penetrate the armour and as if it couldn't be bothered to go any further, remain inside the turret in a highly agitated state which resulted in the vehicle exploding in a great sheet of flame, causing the crew inside to take no further interest in the war effort, or anything else for that matter; or,



(c) It would penetrate only part way, causing the point of impact inside the turret to glow white hot and slivers of white hot metal would start to fly around inside. Now, inside the turret of an armoured car is not perhaps the best place on earth to be when white hot pieces of armour are whizzing around. They not only get in one's way frightfully, but cause one to decide, if still capable of making a decision, to vacate the accommodation rather hurriedly with full vacant possession. Or to put it briefly — BALE OUT!

Mind you, this whole process has a reciprocal effect upon the enemy when we fire our nasty AP shot at his vehicles.

So all in all, given such conditions, who could blame the troops for fortifying themselves by doing their level best to reduce drastically the stocks of the local apple brandy called Calvados. This, diluted with red wine or rough cider produced a delectable bouquet, nicknamed 'Stupor Juice', which apparently helped to persuade the lads that it was 'Oh what a luvverly war!'

Our next objective was St Silvain, still in enemy hands, and a troop of our B Squadron, recce-ing ahead was fired on by heavy 14-inch guns from Le Havre, quite some distance away, and believe me when one of those babies lands near you it is distinctly unhealthy!

Anyhow the Canadians launched a large scale attack with the 51st Highland in support. C Squadron were to recce ahead, but this time with two troops of tanks in support, which was comforting. The armour for this attack was provided by the Polish Armoured Division and we moved on ahead of them, but as we approached Jerry positions, the leading armoured car was knocked out by an anti-tank gun, and the car commander was wounded. He was successfully evacuated due to the courage and resourcefulness of his driver who was later awarded the MM. By last light the enemy was in full retreat.

Continuing the advance, the Squadron secured a crossing over the river La Liette at a place called Castillon, after a running fight during which a Jerry half track was knocked out and the crew taken prisoner.

It must have been somewhere about this time that we lost an armoured car in my troop and it was promptly replaced with an American 'Staghound', the like of which we had not seen before. For a start it was much heavier than our Daimlers and had many refinements which our cars lacked. It had a Grant tank turret, 8-inch thick armour, a power operated turret, electrically fired .5 Browning machine-guns, but rather strange to us only a 37 mm gun for the main armament, smaller than our own 2-pounders. For power it had two 34 HP General Motors engines, mounted side by side, while our Daimlers had only a single 27 HP engine.

It had power assisted steering and the transmission was entirely automatic, and in spite of the rough country it traversed under very tough conditions, we never heard a murmur from that gearbox. Perhaps one disadvantage was that it would not take off until both engines had reached a working temperature of 180 degrees so the driver, 'Bluey' Wilkinson, just had to sit in his compartment, surrounded by dials, like the cockpit of a bomber, and wait. And sometimes we had not got a lot of time to wait. It was the only one of its kind in the Regiment and all in all it wasn't a bad old bus.

After a reconnaissance by B Squadron, together with some Maquis, into some extensive caves which were said to have been converted to underground factories, and being fired upon by a Spandau for their pains, killing a trooper and a couple of Maquis, C Squadron went in to deal with the enemy. Although up to the previous day there had been some 200 SS troops there, all we found, apart from the Spandau gunner, who in turn got shot for his pains, was a group of about twenty Russian captives who had been doing forced labour. The rest of the Germans had escaped over the Seine, the crossing of which was our next objective.

We crossed at El Beouf with orders to swing north to lead the Division to St Valery to avenge their sacrificial stand during the last days of the BEF in 1940.

With the Colonel's incessant orders over the air to 'crack on' we raced on, fortunately meeting no resistance, but we did notice a peculiar feature of the landscape. The flat fields along the way were criss-crossed with tall poles with cables stretched between them, and suspended from these cables were some nasty looking bombs. We presumed this was to discourage Allied aircraft and airborne troops from landing.



As we 'liberated' each town and village we passed through, Rouen, Yvotot, Yerville, Etretat, Luneray and Fecamp, the inhabitants gave us a tumultuous welcome. They climbed all over the cars, smothering us with flowers and kisses shouting joyously, "Vive la France, Vive la Britain" and many toasts were drunk from bottles of wine, miraculously produced from nowhere! At Luneray the Mayor laid on a civic reception for us where we sat down to roast duck. They made us feel like heroes.



Image courtesy of the Bovington Tank Museum

Dingo Scout car and crew of the Derbyshire Yeomanry, date or location unknown



Well, we had 'cracked on' at such a pace that we had outstripped the Division by two days, but with the arrival of the Jocks themselves in St Valery, the population went even more mad with a joyous welcome to outwelcome all welcomes. It was quite fantastic. They left no doubt at all that they were so pleased to see the Division return in triumph to avenge their epic stand in 1940, and to see la salle Bosche driven out of their country for good. There was a ceremonial parade, kilts, pipes, drums, the lot, which was followed by a civic reception given by the Mayor. After being occupied by the Hun, it was amazing where they got the food from, and the wine, which was flowing pretty freely. But then, in spite of German thoroughness and ruthlessness in looting and destroying, he quite evidently didn't know all that was going on under his Teutonic conk! It is very possible that the townspeople and villagers had 'stashed away' these reserves in secret hiding places with the unswerving faith that one day the Jocks would be back. And back they certainly were! It was, after all a welcome break for the whole Division who had enjoyed little relaxation since the landings.

It is perhaps a little difficult for our people back home to fully understand all this jubilation. I know that the people of England had to suffer devastation of their homes from enemy air raids, the loss of loved ones and the acute shortages of everything that made life bearable, but in addition to all that, these people also had to suffer the indignity of the physical presence of an arrogant enemy army with all the humiliation of being treated with contempt, as well as having their personal treasures looted from their homes. Well enough they referred to them as la salle Bosche. And so their joy at being liberated from the Hun yoke was so very overwhelming. Understandable? I think so.

Well, all good things come to an end, and the time came for the Division to leave and get on with the job, for there was still a long way to go and a lot more war to be fought yet.

And so the Regiment moved on towards Le Havre, taking up positions to observe the approaches to the port. From one of our observation posts the Divisional Commander General Rennie and staff surveyed the situation and planned the attack. This was preceded by a heavy artillery 'stonk' in which the Regiment's anti-tank batteries took part, followed up by a heavy bombing raid by the Allied Air Forces. Surprisingly the port and its installations were captured in a few hours. Our armoured cars were not used in the actual attack, but the Regiment's assault troops were and put three officers and over 300 Jerries 'in the bag'.

Well, that was another obstacle out of the way, and the Division had a short rest while they regrouped.

We now headed for the Belgium/Dutch frontier via Abbeville and Arras and so into Belgium, skirting enemy held Antwerp, and proceeded to an area north of Eindhoven, with the task of helping to hold open the Nijmegen Corridor. Jerry was very anxious to cut this vital road and mounted many attacks on the flanks to prevent the Allied advance to Nijmegen and so secure the great road bridge crossing over the river Waal.

Our troop had left the road and proceeded up a narrow track with our assault troop in support, until they came across mines in front of us. They appeared to form a screen in front of a wood, excellent cover for the enemy. The cars were all facing this wood but we wanted to turn them round so that we could negotiate the track back to the road, driving forwards, it was far too narrow to attempt it in reverse. So it was essential that the mines were cleared from the verges to give the drivers room to manoeuvre. We dismounted and helped the assault troop to search for mines and cleared enough ground for the cars to turn round. We were still dismounted when a horde of Germans came crashing and yelling out of the woods, using machine-guns. We all raced to get back into our cars, while the assault troop opened up on the enemy.

As I was about to climb into my turret I saw Corporal Willy Wise hit and go down, causing him to drop the Bren-gun he had been belting away with, so I dashed up to him and heaved him into the ditch. While all this was going on, the Troop Leader was blasting away at Jerry with everything he had got, slowly withdrawing down the track. I am sure Jerry must have seen Willy and me go into that ditch for he was parting the blades of grass with bullets inches from our heads, so I helped to ease him back along the ditch to get within shelter of the cars, thinking each second was our last. Part of that crawl involved wriggling through a section where the ditch was piped, with water in the bottom! Anyhow we finally got level with my car and came up, when I heaved Willy up on to the front where we had some protection from that murderous machine-gun fire, and held him on.



Yeomanry RWY, WY, YH, NSR, SY, CY, YD, NSY, DY
The Daimler Fighting Vehicles Project – Part D6a
www.daimler-fighting-vehicles.co.uk

The prompt action of Lt. Lace, supported by the other cars, had halted the attack and Jerry withdrew to the woods. Now, as we slowly withdrew down the track, a troop of our tanks which were halted at the road end, saw us and thought we were the enemy and promptly opened fire on us, so making us feel like the meat in the sandwich. Fortunately we were recognized before any casualties were suffered. All in all it was a lively encounter, but it did stop Jerry from cutting the Corridor, and Lt. Lace was awarded the MC for his action.

The Division was relieved by the 15th Scottish to allow us to relieve pressure in the north and open up Antwerp. The Regiment advanced to St Michaels Gestel where there was some confused fighting.

By the end of October some twenty to thirty miles' progress had been made and S'Hertogenbosch had been taken. The Regiment was engaged in observation of the enemy dug in on the north bank of the river Maas.



(Photo sourced from <http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk>)

Photographer: Carpenter (Sgt) No 5 Army Film & Photographic Unit

Description: Daimler armoured car of 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry, 51st Highland Division, passes a burning house in St Michielsgestel, during the drive on Hertogenbosch whilst supporting Infantry of 51st Highland Division,
24 October 1944.



The campaign now entered a cold, wet and soggy winter with much of the countryside flooded, which did little for the comfort of the troops. I will say that the tank suits issued to us, a sort of tough well padded waterproof overall, were a boon for keeping the weather out, and we soon got used to squeezing in and out of the turret without too many rips and tears.

In fact the ground was so wet and boggy that there was little the armour could do for the time being, a bit different from the sands of the desert!

I celebrated my eighth wedding anniversary by having 24 hours out of the line which I spent at a Highland Division rest camp in Eindhoven, where they had taken over a monastery for the purpose. Took off my boots and slacks for the first time for a long time and had a night's sleep. What a treat to have a night's sleep! After a wander around Eindhoven I got back to the monastery about 1 o'clock, after first having a shower and a complete change of clothes, first for many weeks. Then it was back into the line at Schydel and Schutsboorn.

From here we moved back to Stock, between St Michaels Gestel and S'Hertogenbosch, where I slept on a mattress and a spring bed in a huge seminary. Jerry was in occupation in the morning but we drove him out during the day and took over in the evening.

Entering the merry month of November, we stayed one day at a farm in the middle of nowhere, from whence we made our way to Ginnesburg, a village of about six farms. Jerry had just pulled out over the Aftswaatering Canal, leaving an incredible mess behind, houses ransacked and looted. We lived in one for a couple of days, lit a fire and tried to make ourselves comfortable. We had to restrict our movements though for Jerry could see us from a tower over the canal.

Next we moved via Helvoirt and S'Hertogenbosch to St Michaels Gestern, thence to Gefern, where we were billeted in a brewery! defunct as such now. There had been quite a battle in the yard with tanks, one 'brewed up' setting fire to a cellar where civilians were sheltering. The nearby church was badly knocked about, first by our artillery to drive out a Jerry OP and then by Jerry when we were using it as an OP to direct fire on to S'Hertogenbosch. Then it was completely destroyed while we were there when German ammunition blew up. He had stored it in the church!

Back to St Michaels Gestern where we had a short stay at the large Deaf and Dumb Institute, sleeping in cubicles in the former children's dormitory. This amazing building had suffered little damage and was a most interesting place. Completely electric when the power was on in happier days, it was equipped with very fine workshops, tailors, engineers, machine joiners shops and a complete printing press room, in fact just about everything. It was staffed by Brethren who were most hospitable, making our short stay a comfortable one.

Moving on, approaching Kessel, C Squadron armoured cars became bogged at Eijndt, and we were attacked by a large enemy force, which was safely beaten back. Probing ahead cautiously, we found that the enemy had cleared out of Kessel, and we handed over the east bank of the river to the 7th Argylls. And then blow me! at last light Jerry put in a strong counter-attack with infantry and SP guns, causing the whole of C Squadron to go into action. After some heavy 'stonking' by artillery of the 51st, Jerry decided he had had enough and retired. 154 Brigade Commander, Brigadier Oliver congratulated the Squadron on its work.

First light next day saw us on the move again, this time to Nijmegen, where our task was to guard the famous bridge from floating mines and frogmen who had already managed to blow one span. We were given *carte blanche* on the use of ammunition. Our cars were stationed on the river bank at the side of the bridge with orders to shoot at anything at all floating down river. As well as attempts by frogmen, Jerry used to fix explosive charges to logs or other floating objects in the hope of hitting the piers of the bridge and destroying them. We really had a whale of a time firing at everything that moved, which earned us a blast from the Canadians on the other side of the river because our bullets were ricocheting off the water and landing amongst them!

Nijmegen was quite a large town with fine river bridges, one carrying the railway, which had been blown by you know who, and the impressive road bridge which was now the only link over the Waal. The town around the bridge approaches was flattened, blown up and burned by the same lovable characters.



Yeomanry RWY, WY, YH, NSR, SY, CY, YD, NSY, DY
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The second day we were there a Mustang crashed 200 yards from us in the cobbled square, narrowly missing our billets. He must have hit the deck at about 700 miles an hour and dug himself deeply into the ground and catching fire. The pilot had baled out and landed in the river. When he was fished out OK he told us that a few hours ago he was enjoying lunch in Cambridge!

Between spells on the bridge we were living in the cellar of a knocked about house. Jerry was slinging plenty of big b s at the bridge trying his level best to destroy it. The trouble was that too many landed beyond the target, gradually reducing our house down to the level of the cellar in which we were living. My duties on the bridge were pretty arduous as NCO I/C when on duty, usually every other day, with little chance of sleep, I was getting very tired.

There were however some compensations, and most appreciated perhaps was when off duty, hot showers were available at a big power station down near Shaef, especially as I hadn't had my pullover off for a long time, let alone a good wash. I rolled up my shirt sleeves one day and what was left of the sleeves of my winter vest fell out at the bottom. Next time I removed my slacks, the rest of it fell out. I spent the next 24 hours on the bridge, which was heavily shelled.

Then came a very welcome break. Some of the Regiment were allowed three days' leave in Brussels and Antwerp. A very unpleasant feature now began to appear, enemy rockets and flying bombs began to come over at an alarming rate. Just as I was about to go on leave to Antwerp, one of these babies landed on a cinema there, killing several from the Division, while two of our own troopers in the audience just disappeared without trace.

Anyhow in due course I arrived in Antwerp about 12.30 and got fixed up at the Caledonia Hotel in Stoopsradt. In the afternoon I, along with some pals, booked seats for the State Opera in the evening where we enjoyed a performance of La Boheme. The rest of the time was spent looking around the shops, which in spite of the war and the recent occupation, were wonderfully decorated for Christmas, with plenty of luxuries, at luxury prices too! Not much food about for civilians but ours was quite good. We found a beautiful antique shop in the shadow of the Cathedral, where my limited funds enabled me to get a few souvenirs. Just to make us feel at home there were plenty of flying bombs landing, one landed in the middle of the main street while we were there.

More shop gazing next day; nearly had it now, back tomorrow! We left Antwerp about 1.30 and arrived back at Nijmegen about 6.30 p.m., then back on the bridge again to be greeted by more shells. Still plenty of flying bombs about. They used to say about them that as long as one could hear their engines going you were safe, but as soon as the engine cut out, that was the time to take cover!

Mid-December saw us on the bridge for the last time before the Regiment was due to be relieved.

So next day found us on the road all day, driving down into Belgium again because Jerry was posing a threat to Brussels and Antwerp. On through Louvain up to northern Belgium and driving all day back into Holland, through Maastricht to Ubagsberg. I wondered if we would settle long enough for Christmas this time? We were sleeping in the barn of a Dutch farmhouse, bitterly cold, everything frozen solid. Christmas morning dawned, still at Ubagsberg, all set for Christmas this time! Had breakfast, cleaned up, donned my best suit and shoes, and was just about to write to my wife when, you've guessed it! Orders came, move! The cooks had just started dinner too.

We learned of Von Rundstedt's offensive thrust up through the Ardennes and that the Division was under orders to move in support of the US XIIth Corps who were taking the brunt of the German thrust.

As we withdrew and made a start we were subjected to heavy shelling and several of our vehicles were damaged.

It was a bitterly cold journey down through Liege and on to Ombret Rousa on the banks of the Meuse.

Yet one more Christmas away from home, feeling a bit homesick. I wondered what 1945 had in store for us. Our Christmas dinner this day was one slice of bully and a spoonful of soup, with guard duty that night to round off the celebrations.

At Ombret Rousa we were sitting on the main Namur-Liege road in case Jerry broke that way, guard all the time, day and night. Oh, our belated Christmas rations turned up, a pork chop with a small piece of tinned turkey, a chunk of fresh beef but no veg whatever. At the time we were staying in a Belgium house where we managed to rustle up a few spuds to go with dinner. Included in the rations were some beer,



cigars and cigarettes, together with an orange and a small piece of NAAFI Christmas Pud, so we were thankful for small mercies.

The cold was now intense, everything was frozen stiff.

Somewhere about the 28th of December we left Ombret Rousa and went to another village about twenty miles away. Got billets fixed up, unpacked the cars and got some grub on the go when, wait for it, came orders to move again, and would you believe, back to exactly the same billet at Ombret Rousa! What a war!

A couple of days later we again left this location, this time to establish WT communications between SHQ and RHQ. The job turned out to be a right old cock up at first and it took us until 10.30 that night to sort out. Half the troop was in Beux Rothiux, with my car and Corporal Brennan's in a village some ten miles further on. The icebound roads amid the hills were like a TT track. We lost a box of rations off the back of the car rounding a hairpin bend, while our light recce car finished up in a ditch and had to be left all night. We spent that night on the stone floor of a cafe — Brhh! about three hours' sleep.

The following day saw us frigging about on the road all day, trying out all the high ground endeavouring to establish wireless contact with HQ and eventually we finished up in the dark in a little hilltop village called La Grande. Our rations had nearly run out so we didn't have much of a meal. Bitterly cold, the roads were snow and icebound, while to keep us company flying bombs were continuously coming over in bunches of three and five at a time.

The next morning, New Year's day we were relieved by No 2 Troop and went back to a billet in a cafe at St Severin, on the main Namur-Liege road. Very tricky driving on icebound roads. Flying bombs still coming over in bunches, all day and all night, he must have had a huge stockpile of them! Some of them landed very close to us, distinctly unhealthy, and they never ceased the whole of the six days we were at St Severin; talk about bomb alley!

Our next move was to Hamois, snowing and bitterly cold, where we were billeted on a farm with a very decent Belgian family. After three days here, came a sudden move at 11.30 p.m. because Jerry had made a breakthrough in the Battle of the Bulge. Roads were of course snowbound, and it was so bitterly cold that we had to stop every few miles to bring life back into numbed limbs. If you put your bare hand on the armour you left the skin behind as though burned. We harboured in the early hours in a cottage at Rondeaux; no sleep. Melted a bucket of snow to make tea!

We set off before dawn to recce La Roche only to find it strongly held by the enemy. We lost three cars on mines concealed in the snow. As we pushed slowly through the main street heavy mortars were raining down upon us thick and fast, but we kept up the advance with death and destruction all around us. Mine was the first armoured car through the ruins and utter devastation of the once busy tourist centre of the Ardennes. There were some 400 dead civilians found beneath the wreckage, there was literally nothing left standing. Jerry was fighting a strong rearguard action all the way out. We lost another car on mines, that made four in this action.

While all this was going on we heard that Regimental HQ had been bombed and attacked by enemy armoured cars. The Adjutant and the Intelligence Officer were killed, while the Second-in-Command, the Technical Adjutant and the Padre were seriously wounded, and all the Squadron's reports of the link up were destroyed. Our Squadron Leader, Major Alec Langley-Smith was made Second-in-Command and Captain Pat MacNaughten was promoted to Major and made Squadron Leader of C Squadron. A very sad and nasty blow for the Regiment.

We proceeded on an advance patrol down to a river line to see if we could link up with the Americans, but found no one there. All went well until we were coming back along the road, approaching the front line defences of the 7th Argylls who were dug in, in front of a wood. Seeing us approach from enemy territory they took us for Germans. They let our leading car, Sergeant George PowelPs get within a hundred yards of them and plonked a Piat mortar bomb right through the front. The driver, Ben Hampshire was severely wounded while the operator/gunner, Jimmy Birch was wounded in the arm. George escaped unhurt. There must have been a slip up somewhere in communications for the Argylls should have been warned that we would be approaching their positions from the enemy side. The car was still drivable, but it was tricky with the brakes and lights shot away.



Order was now restored in the Battle of the Bulge and we moved back from Laveaux to Marche via La Roche. Roads were snowbound through the marvellous scenery of the Ardennes. As a diversion, a Pathe Gazette newsreel team was given permission to travel back with us to secure, as they told us, some newsreel pictures of victorious British troops linking up with the Americans. Well we travelled some way before we came across a group of Yanks, and then the news men got us to lean out of our turrets with wide grins on our faces to shake the extended hands of the grinning Yanks, and presumably that is what the cinema audiences at home saw on their screens with captions like 'Victory in the Ardennes, historic link up of British and American troops'!

Upon arrival in Marche we got fixed up in very comfortable civvy billets with a nice old couple who couldn't do enough for us.



Photo courtesy of Lt. Dennis Randall & John Chaffe
Photographer: Lt Dennis Randall

Description: Crew of an Daimler Armoured cars of Derbyshire Yeomanry Relax and listen to a tune or two after a hard days advance.
Circa Summer 1945

There were only six of our Troop left now!

After a few days here, rumour had it that we were to move again, but it was put off until the next day. So we were up at 4.30 a.m. and moved off at 6 a.m. in pitch darkness and bitter cold on icebound roads. I travelled on George Powell's car to relieve him at driving the shot up vehicle, no lights and no brakes. After covering 106 miles we landed up at Oud Turnhout and found a billet. Blizzards and heavy snow kept the roads covered. I drew 400 francs to pay NAAFI bills, etc. and we found a cafe in the village and had a few beers.



On about the 23rd of January we left Oud Turnhout, still driving the wreck of George's car on the icy roads. We continued up and on through Eindhoven once more and finally came to Best in Holland. It was peaceful there now, and the civilian population were occupying their shell damaged houses. The previous time we went over the bridge between Eindhoven and Best it was under heavy enemy shell fire, and one just did not hang about on it. Also the crossroads at Best were, at the time, taking a pasting from 88 mms 210 mms and flying scooters. We learned that we were here for a rest and to get ourselves up to strength again, both in men and vehicles.

Well, it certainly was peaceful now and we were billeted with some grand people, Mynheer Roojackers, a Dutch architect, his wife and family in their lovely house. George and I had a real civvy bed, which was just the job. It was a real treat to see a bit of family life again. Their young daughter Gonny gave us many an hour of amusement, trying to teach us some Dutch words while we tried to teach her some English. Frau Roojackers really looked after us well and made us very comfortable. And so the next fortnight passed very pleasantly for us, a really -welcome break, in spite of more snow!

At last, this pleasant interlude, like all good things, came to an end, and on about the 7th of February it was time to move on. Frau Roojackers cooked us a good lunch and we were all very sorry to leave there, we had been so comfortable. Their young daughter Gonny cried as we left. The fortunes of war!

Anyhow that first night we landed up at Haaren where I slept on the stone floor of a cafe. Pulled out of there next day, travelling all day, finishing up at Gassel, near Grave and south-east of Nijmegen in a ruined school. As a change from snow it was now pouring with rain.



Photo courtesy of WW2 Talk web site & 'Stolpi'

Photographer: British Pathe from film 'Goch Grabbed'.

Description: Daimler Armoured cars of the Derbyshire Yeomanry advance towards Goch as part of Operation Veritable Date: Feb 1945

Our next objective was Aaldonk where No 2 Troop had all three cars knocked out on the German border. There were five killed, a bad show. The rest of us were mortared to hell and suffered several more casualties. More mortaring next day, our water truck and a half track sustained direct hits. Everyone was getting a bit jumpy.



Yeomanry RWY, WY, YH, NSR, SY, CY, YD, NSY, DY
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Amid bags of mud, our next job saw us back at Mook on Divisional Traffic Control and having completed that we moved back to the Squadron at Cloisters, a tiny village between Aaldonk and Zelderheide. While here we were sent out on a wireless step up between brigades, where we had to sit bang in the Camerons' FDLs, a very hot spot, well into Germany. A 210 mm hit the house we were in and there were plenty of heavy mortars. No sleep. That job done we returned to the Squadron at Cloisters under an hour's notice to move.

The Division now came under the command of 30 Corps, Lt-General Brian Horrocks, for the assault on the Siegfried Line and to break down resistance in the Reichswald Forest, for which 1,200 tanks and 1,400 guns were assembled.

C Squadron with 153 Brigade went into the line on the right of the main attack. What a forbidding, gloomy atmosphere it was in the Reichswald. Dark and sinister with tall straight pines, made one think of the old German folklore, werewolves and all that. Ideal cover for German infantry, definitely not the place for armoured cars. We waited while the Jocks went in and forced him back. We next moved past the end of the Reichswald, over the river Mers to harbour in a wood near Hassum, where we remained for nearly two weeks. There was some shelling by the enemy, close enough to make me shift my bed.



Photo courtesy of Lt. Dennis Randall & John Chaffe

Photographer: Lt Dennis Randall

Description: Daimler Armoured cars of the Derbyshire Yeomanry 1st and 5th Troops halt for a brew up
Circa Summer 1945.

About the first week in March we left our harbour near Hassum at 9.30 p.m. in pitch darkness and travelled all night, back again through Holland, into Belgium, out of Belgium and into Holland again, landing up eventually in civilian billets at Hiejthuisen, having covered 105 miles, arriving at 8 a.m. next morning. We passed through this place last year when we got our bashing up that track in the Nijmegen corridor on the push to Venlo, it is about 10 kilometres from Roermond.

The 17th of March dawned. What is so special about the 17th of March? I will tell you. It was the day I left the Squadron at Heijthuisen to go to rear echelon to proceed on leave to Blighty, and to me that was very special! The following morning I left the echelon to go by road to Burgh Leopold, arriving there about

11.30 a.m. I filled in the waiting time with a shower, dinner, pictures and tea, and then boarded a train for Calais at 7.30 p.m., stopping *en route* at Lille for a cup of tea. Having arrived at the transit camp at Calais I changed my money into English, had breakfast and a clean up. Boarded the boat at 1.30 and sailed at 2 p.m., arrived at Dover at 3.20 p.m., thence by train to Victoria arriving at 6.30 p.m.



After a drink and fish and chips I caught the 9.25 p.m. from Paddington which arrived at Cheltenham at 2 o'clock in the morning. I now had to get to Tewkesbury, 10 miles away, with not much prospect of transport. But nothing was too good for the soldier home from the wars. The station phoned the YMCA, and up came a private car to take me there, where I arrived about 3 a.m., and believe me it was very much appreciated.

Just in case the reader is confused about me spending my leave in Gloucestershire when my home at the time of my call up was in London, I should explain that our London home was bomb damaged and my wife moved back to her native Tewkesbury.

So, at last, how marvellous it was to be home with my wife Betty again and to taste some of the delights of civilization once more, what there was of them these days. And how very quickly those days passed, until the day came, the 27th of March to be exact, when it had to be goodbye, with very great reluctance on my part I can tell you!

After boarding a train at Victoria I arrived at Folkstone where I stayed the night at the Lyndhurst Hotel, and sailed next morning to arrive at Calais at 11.30 a.m., from whence I entrained for Burgh Leopold. Left there at one o'clock in the morning and landed up at Mook, not knowing the location of the Regiment. I obtained this information next day and finally arrived back at the echelon and spent the night there.

Back to the Troop the following day, who were employed on a traffic control point at Mariansburg, a very smashed up German village this side of the Rhine.

In the meantime preparations had been going ahead for the Rhine crossing. A continuous smoke screen had been laid on our side of the river, while as well as a heavy artillery barrage, the air forces mounted intensified attacks on enemy positions and lines of communication on the other side.

On the 23rd of March, the historic crossing of the Rhine, code-named Operation Plunder, began, with the Regiment providing detachments with wireless sets to pass information to and from Divisional HQ and the assaulting troops.

At this time the Division suffered a severe loss when Major General Tom Rennie, the Commander of the 51st Highland Division was killed when his jeep got a direct hit as he was returning from the Rhine crossing. He was a most able and popular Commander and he would be sadly missed. He was succeeded by Major-General G. H. A. MacMillan.

The Regiment crossed the Rhine, passed through shattered Rees and Isselling to reach Dinxperloo where we harboured at a farm, with me browned off after coming back from leave and wishing I was home again. Five days later we took over Bad Bentheim from the Guards Armoured Division, travelling via Aalten, Enschede and Gronen.



By way of a welcome, my Troop was out all night on a wireless step up. Benthien was a very large railway centre with considerable marshalling yards, which had been given a right old bashing by our bombers. Even so, it was amazing the amount and variety of goods in trucks and in warehouses.

There appeared to be an abundance of everything, from which I acquired one or two 'souvenirs' of manageable size. During our stay there we slept in ex-Jerry barracks which were filthy.

Our chaps were having a great time riding up and down the surviving railway lines on hand operated trolleys, and even found a locomotive still intact on a siding, which they stoked up, got up steam and drove it up and down!

When we moved out of Benthien in the early morning, C Squadron took the lead on one side of the front, driving towards Norhorn, having secured a bridge over a canal at Hesepe.

This enabled the Squadron to advance to Engen, leaving behind a detachment in occupation. Many prisoners were captured, mainly Volksturm, little more than young boys of fourteen years of age and upwards, fanatical little Nazis no doubt.

C Squadron, on the left of B Squadron made good progress despite road blocks and mines. Scattered resistance was encountered in farms and houses and was successfully dealt with, inflicting many enemy casualties and taking many prisoners.

When the river Ems was reached, it was to find the bridge blown and strong enemy detachments on the far bank. The Regiment's Assault Troops in rubber dinghies in the face of stiff resistance forced the enemy back, and secured the crossing.

Along came the Sappers to throw a Bailey Bridge across which they named 'Derbyshire Bridge' in recognition of the Regiment's achievement. We moved forward through Schwarm to recce Ankum, delayed by further road blocks and mines.

C Squadron then moved forward to Badbergen, still encountering mines and trees felled across the road. Enemy opposition, although stiffening, was overcome until the outskirts of Badbergen, where the Squadron halted to consolidate.

After an hour or two we pushed on through the town and captured the bridge intact. An enemy Mark IV tank appeared and opened up causing the Squadron to withdraw a little, but we still held the bridge.

My Troop, along with others were sent to recce bridges to the north, and we got to within a hundred yards of the bridge at Balheim when Jerry blew it! We let him have it with all we had until they sheered off.

C Squadron then crossed the river and swung east to contact 52 Recce Regiment in Dinklance, from where they mounted offensive patrols to Goldenstedt. We moved forward to Wildenhausen and Barglay where contact was made with the 3rd British Division.



Photo courtesy of Lt. Dennis Randall & John Chaffe
Photographer: Lt Dennis Randall

Description: Daimler Armoured cars of the Derbyshire Yeomanry Leaguered outside Wildenhausen, Lower Saxony.
Circa Summer 1945



Photo courtesy of Lt. Dennis Randall & John Chaffe
Photographer: Lt Dennis Randall

Description: Daimler Armoured cars of the Derbyshire Yeomanry, crewed by the commander (Sunray) Syme of 3 Troop in Vechta, Lower Saxony.
Circa Summer 1945



Photo courtesy of Lt. Dennis Randall & John Chaffe

Photographer: Lt Dennis Randall

Description: Carriers and Armoured cars of the Derbyshire Yeomanry Leaguered in the town square of Quackenbruck, Lower Saxony at 2100 hours.

Circa Summer 1945



These were hectic days, we were on the go from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. recce-ing all day, I for one was dog tired!

The Division now regrouped for an all out attack on the strongly defended Delmenhorst.

A message was received from Divisional Command which read: 'The Division has advanced 100 miles in 8 days, despite obstructions, and it was thanks to the 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry's resourcefulness and energy. I thank the Regiment.'

C Squadron now joined with the 2nd Seaforths in an attack on Ganderkesse, south of Delmenhorst. With the line firm again, we entered Immer where contact was made with a Canadian Recce Regiment. From here we moved back a bit to an airport near Annen.

It had been a marvellous place with blocks of barracks around great hangers, where the Fokke Wulfe planes were made.

Moving along to Winkeldorf we patrolled along the Bremen-Hamburg Autobahn via Rotenburg and Selzeigen to Zevern, where the Division was poised for an attack on Bremervorde. C Squadron had the job of patrolling north of the town, but taking with us this time a battery of the Hertfordshire Yeomanry for support which made us feel less lonely!

By dusk the town had been taken, and next morning our patrols were out at first light, 'persuading' German civilians to clear blocked roads, and we reached Barchel and Hainmuhlen area, capturing six large field guns in the process.

A patrol of B Squadron moving towards Ringstadt were surprised to see a senior German officer approaching on foot. Upon being called upon, he was prepared to surrender the village, but only at Divisional Command level. A truce was arranged to accomplish this.

In the meantime, C Squadron, back in Bremervorde were kitting up their cars to be ready for first light patrols next morning.

Then, while this was going on — Wham! — The BBC nine o'clock news reported that all German Forces in NW Europe had surrendered unconditionally!

Well, you never saw such a carry on. In our jubilation we fired off everything we had got, 2-pounders, Besa machine-guns, Bren-guns, pistols and even smoke bombs. Honestly for about half an hour there was as much lethal stuff flying around as in a full scale battle!

Now perhaps we, (as well as the reader) could pause and take breath. Reading through this account of the European Campaign seems to record the bustling, breathless sense of urgency and lack of pause right from D-Day to VE Day. And that is how it seemed to us, who took part in it.

The enemy was never given the chance to recover from ruthless blow after blow, until he finally reeled to a halt — defeated. From our point of view I can tell you it was all go!

And so, Montgomery's confidence was fully justified when he addressed us in that field in Hertfordshire that in spite of many obstacles, we did beat the Hun in the end.



Imperial War Museum

B 11218

(Photo sourced from <http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk>)

Photographer: Carpenter (Sgt) No 5 Army Film & Photographic Unit

Description: Daimler armoured car of 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry, 51st Highland Division, passes a burning house in St Michielsgestel, during the drive on Hertogenbosch whilst supporting Infantry of 51st Highland Division,
24 October 1944.



CHAPTER 8 The Occupation

Well, well, what was to be the form now we wondered? The first thing that transpired immediately was that the Regiment was busily engaged in escorting high ranking German officers to Divisional HQ. The Commander of Corps Ems, Lt-General Raspe, and the General Officer Commanding 15 Panzer Division (old adversaries of ours) and Major-General Roth were brought in and treated with strict courtesy. General Roth was put in charge of all German troops in the area, and ordered to disarm them completely, and also to disarm the booby traps and repair the roads and bridges.

On the 10th of May the Regiment held a Victory Day Supper, when the cooks really did us proud, which was followed by a considerable intake of beer, after which most of us had some difficulty in reaching our bedrolls!

Our Troop was presented with one more task when we went to meet a German Commander in Linteg, who led us to his Corps HQ to formally hand over. We escorted him and his staff officers to Wesermunde and then back to Linteg. It gave one a strange feeling walking about amid the Wehrmacht. They travelled in their own staff cars with their own drivers with our armoured cars fore and aft. Very smart they looked in their long field grey overcoats and gold braided peaked caps. I wondered at the time what their thoughts were now, and whether, after their victorious conquest of most of Europe, they felt quite so devoted to their little ex-corporal whose fanaticism had brought them to this ignominious defeat for their beloved Fatherland.

We then retired to a farm about five miles outside Wesermunde, not far from Bremerhaven where preparations began in earnest for the 51st Highland Division Victory Parade to be held in Bremerhaven. And naturally this spelled for us, 'Bull, bull and more bull.' First came the cars. After all the European winter and scraps they had been subject to, they had to be thoroughly cleaned and then sprayed with khaki paint, followed by 'beezing' up our personal gear. Where they got all the blanco and brasso from I will never know! The cars were finished off and taken up to the start point of the parade and left there under guard for the night.

And so on the 12th of May 1945, the 51st Highland Division marched in triumph through Bremerhaven. The 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry split into two columns to lead the Division, an armoured car column commanded by the Colonel, and a marching column of 8 officers and 88 men commanded by Major Langley-Smith. Then came the kilted Jocks with fixed bayonets led by the massed pipes and drums. What an impressive sight it was. The salute was taken by Lt-General Brian Horrocks, Commander of 30 Corps.

Then followed a public parade ordered to witness the ceremonial handing over of their personal arms by all senior German officers. Our armoured cars formed a ring around the saluting dais for this ceremony. Again Pathe Gazette newsreel cameras were there in force to produce this historic film record to show the people at home.

One of the Regiment's last acts of winding up this bitterly fought campaign was the holding of a Memorial and Thanksgiving Service at Lene Church, Wesermunde.





Photo courtesy of Lt. Dennis Randall & John Chaffe
Photographer: Lt Dennis Randall

Description: Daimler Scout and Armoured cars of Derbyshire Yeomanry on the Victory Parade
Bremerhausen,
17th May 1945

The following day, the 18th of May, Regimental HQ moved to Stade, 20 miles from Hamburg while the Squadrons took up occupation of small villages until leaving Germany. This part of Germany, up on the Cuxhaven Peninsula was known as the Alten lands, a big fruit and cherry growing district.

C Squadron occupied a picturesque village called Steinkirchen which was on a canal about a half a mile from the Elbe, almost opposite Hamburg. We expected to stay here for some time, at least while Corps Ems was being disbanded.

An impressive portico'd house in the centre of the village was commandeered for Squadron HQ and the Officers' Mess, while the equally impressive looking Burgomeister's Headquarters were taken over as billets where, among others, some of us Sergeants lived. I don't know what happened to the Burgomeister himself, if he was still around, he certainly kept a low profile, but we found that after some initial persuasion, his physically strong and somewhat intimidating secretary was prepared to give us her grudging co-operation. She hadn't got much choice anyway!

Our Troop took over an empty house for a billet, quite a nice place, but the previous occupants had removed every stick of furniture, couldn't blame them I suppose. Anyhow a persuasive chat with the Burgomeister's secretary soon saw them fixed up with a few home comforts.

Every so often we had a few tasks to perform such as occasional house to house searches for concealed arms and war criminals, and curfew patrols up through Stade, quite a pleasant little town.



The strict Army HQ rule of no fraternizing with German civilians was not so easy to comply with, especially with the children who soon got used to seeing us around, after appearing to be afraid of us at first.

The girls of the village were a different cup of tea. Many of them were good looking, typical blonde Aryans with everything very well arranged, and who were, I'm convinced, taking it out on the blokes on purpose. They would parade their ample charms up and down the main street, knowing perfectly well that the chaps, bound by the non-fraternization rule, couldn't do anything about it. The blokes all had eyes like organ stops! And perhaps not without reason for these damsels were not at all fussy about stripping off their dresses and lying on the grass to sunbathe, fully aware that the British Army was watching for all it was worth.

This was particularly so with a house which faced on to our car park and parade ground. There was a girl there who made Grable look flat chested, and who always conveniently arranged to get out of bed every morning as the Squadron parade was taking place. There were no curtains at her windows and there she used to parade and strip off and dress. It is not hard to imagine where the eyes of the parade were! In fact it is a wonder that the Squadron Sergeant-Major didn't shout, "Organ Stops — Shun!"

Maybe a little strangely, but I cannot recall any of our virile specimens of British soldiery forming any permanent attachments to these statuesque blonde goddesses. Early days probably; perhaps later on with the relaxation of the non-fraternization rules, some of our single and unattached chaps might have succumbed to their charms, who knows?

The NCOs had taken over a very fine house for a WO and Sergeants' Mess where we proceeded to make ourselves very comfortable. Then followed C Squadron's own VE day supper and celebrations. Officers and Sergeants, following tradition, waited table which really groaned under loads of excellent food. The evening was rounded off with a first rate concert by 'The Balmorals', and then a free for all with beer and rum flowing like water. I vaguely remember staggering to bed about 4.30 a.m. and there I stayed until lunch-time. Just as well there was not a VE day every week. However it was something very well worth celebrating.

There was no definite news about demobilization, but I didn't think I would be out that year, it seemed to be working on the basis of first in, first out. There developed a general air of unsettlement among the lads. Rumour was rife, somebody was always coming up with a 'buzz' about something or other, while we constantly heard of well known units being broken up or being amalgamated with others. To help combat this restlessness, educational courses were started to help fit the chaps for return to civvy street, under some first class instructors from Divisional HQ many with excellent academic qualifications. I threw myself with gusto into these courses, hoping to broaden my knowledge of English and Maths, with a spot of typing thrown in, which, hopefully would be of benefit in civilian life.

The summer months passed reasonably pleasantly, with plenty of long hot sunny spells, but with the arrival of the bleak German winter came plenty of snow. Yet one more Christmas away from home surely this should be the last?

Rumours of my demob group coming up very shortly were very strong now, and chaps who had formed close ties of comradeship amid the most trying and dangerous conditions were rapidly beginning to disappear from the scene. Although we all desperately wanted to get home for good, one could not but feel a certain sadness that the Squadron was breaking up.

Well, the day arrived in February when my group number did come up. After many farewells and good wishes I found myself with many others bound for Cuxhaven to board a ship for Hull and thence to a demobilization centre at Taunton, where all the formalities of discharge were gone through. These included sorting out pay and allowances and our uniforms being substituted for a Saville Row double-breasted pin-stripe suit. At least I think that is where it came from, which Saville Row I wouldn't care to say!

And so, after five years in khaki, taking part in two major campaigns, it was back to my wife Betty and to pick up the threads of civilian life again.

Would it ever be the same I wondered? For a start it was virtually impossible to get a house back in London after all the bomb damage to property. So, during my last few months in Germany I arranged with Post Office Headquarters in London to transfer, upon my resumption of civilian duties, to Cheltenham, the nearest town of any size to Tewkesbury at which I could be employed.



Yeomanry RWY, WY, YH, NSR, SY, CY, YD, NSY, DY
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I don't doubt that many others, both men and women, found that life was not quite the same as when they first donned uniform five or six years previously.

As far as the medical hazards were concerned, I was lucky to escape, apart from fairly minor ailments. I can only conclude that I was very much more fit then than I am now.

As for the rest, well, how I ever came through those five years unscathed, when so many comrades in arms were killed or wounded, I will never know. After all the task of any Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment is a hazardous one for most of the time, operating as they do out in front of the main front line defences acting as the eyes and ears of the Division, gathering and reporting information on enemy movements, only too often at tragic cost.

It was strange but we always maintained that we would not have the job of the infantry for all the tea in China, while the tough Jocks of the 51st Highland Division swore that they wouldn't have our job for all the Johnnie Walker in Scotland.

So perhaps it was not for nothing that they nicknamed their own Reconnaissance Regiment, the 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry, 'The Mad Recce'.



(Photo sourced from <http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk>)

Photographer: Carpenter (Sgt) No 5 Army Film & Photographic Unit

Description: Daimler armoured car of 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry, 51st Highland Division, passes a burning house in St Michielsgestel, during the drive on Hertogenbosch whilst supporting Infantry of 51st Highland Division,
24 October 1944.



(Photo sourced from <http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk>)
Photographer: Carpenter (Sgt) No 5 Army Film & Photographic Unit

Title: THE BRITISH ARMY IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE 1944-45

Description: Daimler armoured car of 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry, 51st Highland Division, passes a burning house in St Michielsgestel, during the drive on Hertogenbosch whilst supporting Infantry of 51st Highland Division,
24 October 1944.



(Photo sourced from the internet & Simon Hamon)
Photographer: Unknownt

Description: Believed to be a Daimler armoured car of 2nd Derbyshire Yeomanry, due to the similarity to the stowage and marking of the vehicles previously shown.

Except that this car has the prominent allied forces star painted on the turret lid in the manor of the Innes of Court or Household cavalry Regiments

Date Unknown circa 1944-45



(Photo sourced from <http://www.paoyeomanry.co.uk>)
Photographer: UNKNOWN

Description: HQ Sqn, Leicestershire & Derbyshire (P.A.O.Yeomanry) on Parade c1960's.
You can clearly see the TAC signs on the Dingo SC



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