

THE

**GRENADIER
GUARDS**



1939—1945



H.M. the King inspects the 3rd Battalion at Perth, 17th October, 1942.

THE
GRENADIER
GUARDS
1939-1945

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The Maps were drawn by Mr. James Trotter

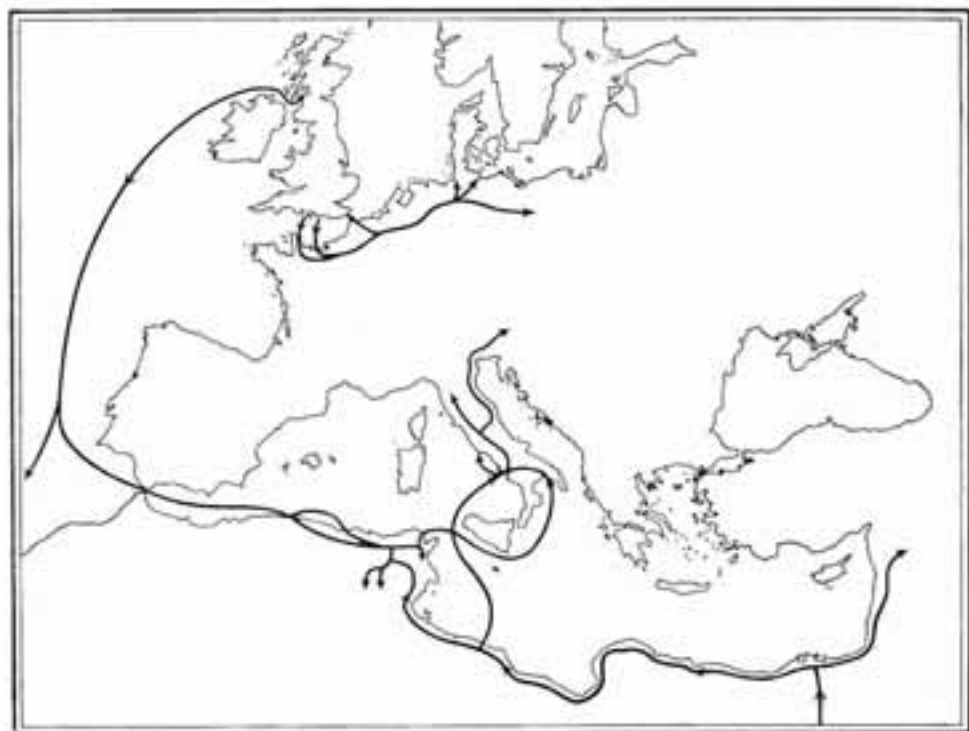


Cecil Beaton

**H.R.H. PRINCESS ELIZABETH
COLONEL OF THE GRENADIER GUARDS**

Introduction

IF YOU WERE TO TAKE a small-scale map of Europe and the Near East and trace upon it the routes taken by the battalions of the Grenadier Guards during the war, it would look like this:—



The map is not so much a plan of the campaigns as it is a record of the long voyages by sea, of the marches, and of the immense journeys overland in trains and lorries: a record, in fact, of the lengthy and complicated process of bringing soldiers to their battlefields at the right moment and in a fit state to fight.

If you were to redraw the map to indicate only the ground which was wrested from the enemy in actual combat, it would be speckled with dots and dashes. There would be one constellation in northern and central Tunisia, another spreading like a rash over the leg of Italy, and a third in north-west Europe, in Normandy, Belgium, and on the lower Rhine. This is the way in which great armies are defeated and whole countries overrun. Not in this war only, but throughout history, it is the battle for limited objectives, a hill-top or a river line, a small village or a wood, which opens the way to unopposed pursuit and startling successes. "Tunis capitulates," "Rome has fallen," "Brussels liberated"—these make the great headlines of the day, but what has made them possible is the defeat of the enemy's battalions by our own in positions of his own choosing. The record of the Grenadiers in this war,

as of every other regiment, is centred round names which were scarcely mentioned in official communiqués. Few have heard of Sidi-el-Guelaa, Bou Aoukaz, Carroceto, or the Cembalina Canal; of Furnes, Viessoix, Pont-a-Marq, or the Valkhof. Yet these places were keys to the Mareth Line, Tunis, the Anzio beachhead and the Po; to Dunkirk, Normandy, Brussels and Nijmegen. This account will deal largely with such battles, small in area, but tremendous in their consequences.

It is the story of the six battalions of a single regiment. The First or Grenadier Regiment of Foot Guards, to give it its full title, is the senior infantry regiment in the British Army. This does not mean that it enjoyed any special privileges, but it does mean that it had a reputation to uphold which was second to none, and that, in common with the other regiments of Foot Guards, its battalions were apt to find themselves incorporated in the best brigades and the best divisions, and to be selected for some of the most critical fighting of the war. The Grenadiers were not ubiquitous. They had no battalions at Alamein, none in Greece, or Norway, or Sicily, and none were involved in the fighting in the Far East. In almost every other campaign Grenadier battalions took a prominent part.

They fought in the deserts of southern Tunisia, in the lush fields of Normandy, at Dunkirk, in the snow-capped peaks of the Apennines, on the crossings of the lower Rhine and of the Po. They landed on foreign beaches among the first troops of three Allied invasions; they were the first to enter many great cities of Europe, and they have heard the cheers of eight nations acclaiming their liberation. Some have fought in tanks (a role which no Guardsman had undertaken before this war), the remainder in their traditional role of infantry; 128 of their officers and 1,127 other ranks were killed, and several thousands more were wounded or suffered imprisonment. There were moments, whole days, indeed, and even weeks, of misery and great suffering, when their endurance under fire and in conditions of extreme heat or cold seemed at the time to be making little contribution to final victory. But those Grenadiers who fought on those fields of Europe and Africa must now be conscious how great in fact was their share. The victory march of the 1st Battalion through Berlin on July 20th, 1945, was a symbol of the achievement of them all.

The main object of this account is to provide the men who fought with the Grenadiers with a short record of their years of service. It has therefore been fully documented with maps. In the text there has only been space enough to describe in detail the most outstanding actions, but in order to make the record consecutive, if not complete, the gaps between the major events have been filled by a form of annotated diary. These periods, as well as the main battles, will be described in detail in the two-volume history of the Grenadier Guards, which is in course of preparation.

I

The British Expeditionary Force, 1939-1940

- 1939 Sept. 3 Outbreak of war. The 1st and 2nd Battalions Grenadier Guards, forming part of the 7th Guards Brigade, mobilise at Pirbright. The 3rd Battalion, part of the 1st Guards Brigade, mobilise at Aldershot.
- Sept. 20 The 3rd Battalion land in France.
- Sept. 29 The 1st and 2nd Battalions land in France.
- Oct. to All three battalions of the Regiment on the Franco-Belgian frontier, digging and manning part of the "Gort Line"; the
- 1940 May 7th Guards Brigade east of Lille; the 1st Guards Brigade fifteen miles to the south-east. For a fortnight in February the 3rd Battalion hold part of the Maginot Line east of Metz, where they suffer their first casualties of the war and send their first patrols against the Germans.
- 1940 May 10 **The Germans attack through Holland and Belgium.**

THE FIRST CONFIRMATION of the German invasion of the Low Countries came on the 8 a.m. B.B.C. news on May 10th. It was not unexpected. The plans which had been so often practised during the preceding six months were put smoothly into operation, and on the morning of May 11th both Guards Brigades moved across the Belgian frontier on the first stage of their journey to the River Dyle. The advance of the B.E.F. was allowed to continue almost unmolested by the German air force, and the welcome given to them by the Belgian army and civilians increased their confidence. The two brigades halted for a few hours in the small villages round Brussels, and then continued on foot towards Louvain.

The rate of advance was then accelerated, since the Belgians were already hard pressed on their eastern frontier and were falling back quickly. Movement was not now so easy. Streams of refugees were flooding back before the Germans. Old men were pushing their wives and household goods in wheelbarrows; mothers, with their babies slung from their shoulders, trudged wearily through the dust; small farm-carts, crammed with twenty people apiece, fought for a place among the luxury cars of the well-to-do and the convoys of Allied troops and lorries moving in the opposite direction. There was great confusion and inevitable loss of temper, but the pitiable sights on the road-side made the men all the more eager to come to grips with the enemy. It was only afterwards that they realised that the refugee crowds had contained many German agents.

On arrival at Louvain the 1st Battalion went forward to take up positions on the Dyle Canal, which flowed into the centre of the town from the north to join the Dyle river in a series of locks and gates. It was not a comfortable position. As originally sited by the Belgians, it had been designed to include the whole city of Louvain, for which there was great patriotic feeling, but by the time the Germans had bombed the marshalling yards, the tangled wreckage of engines and rolling-stock was piled so high that many of the pill-boxes had a view of no more than twenty yards, and were therefore isolated one from the other. To add to these worries, the Regiment of Belgian Chasseurs, whom the Grenadiers found in position, had had no orders concerning the relief, and refused to leave. The British and Belgian companies had therefore to be superimposed, and the crowding was very great.

The 2nd Battalion (Lieut.-Colonel J. A. Lloyd) was in a reserve position supporting the 1st Battalion and the 1st Coldstream Guards. The peace was broken as the enemy approached, and the guns, stationed all round them, fired a barrage which exceeded any fired subsequently in the remainder of the 1940 campaign. The Fifth Column was very active. Arrows would be painted on the house-walls at night, showing the position of headquarters, British trenches would be indicated to the German aircraft by figures scythed out of the long grass. Every civilian became suspect as they wandered over the battle-front. The Luftwaffe had no opposition, and were very active by day and night.

On May 12th the outpost screen reported contact with the enemy some seven miles from Louvain, and withdrew into the main position. In the middle of the afternoon all bridges except one were blown up. The crowds of refugees were still pouring across the Dyle, and it was not easy to keep them on the enemy side of the river while they watched the preparations to destroy their last hope of escape.

The Belgian Chasseurs, having moved in and out of the line several times, received their final order to withdraw just as the leading German motorised troops approached Louvain. The 1st Battalion were left with some awkward gaps in the line as the enemy began to attack. For a time the situation was uneasy, but the main enemy effort was directed against the Coldstream Guards on the left of the Grenadiers, and by morning the line was restored. Twice more it had seemed that the Germans were about to launch a concerted attack, and their patrols were repelled without great difficulty; but then came the news that the French line at Sedan had collapsed, and the 3rd Division were ordered to retire to the River Dendre, west of Brussels. The 2nd Battalion were to provide the rearguard for 7th Guards Brigade. The night was very dark, and the German success signals could be seen rising in the northern sky, where the Belgians had already begun to withdraw. The arrangements went without a hitch. An officer who was waiting to check the battalions as they came past the rendezvous wrote as follows: ". . . it was a queer experience, as one did not know whether the first arrivals would be Guardsmen or Germans. I had two lambs with me who bleated pathetically, and all sorts of other animals turned up, too, looking for a saviour who could give them food and water. The 1st Battalion of the Grenadiers were the first to come through, more or less intact, but already so tired that they could only just march and, having sent away their transport, the men were carrying everything." A few minutes past midnight, the last of the infantry were through, and the 2nd Battalion closed up and moved on behind the column towards Brussels.

The 3rd Battalion's first battle experiences had been much the same. They had occupied reserve positions on the Dyle, at Huldenberg, several miles south of Louvain. They had dug trenches by night, and concealed themselves in houses during the day, while low-flying German aircraft bombed and machine-gunned the river banks ahead of their infantry. The Battalion was never directly attacked. The line was pierced further to the south and, to the dismay of all ranks, a general withdrawal was ordered before they had fired their first shots. They, too, joined the long columns on the road to Brussels.

1940 May 17 The 7th and 1st Guards Brigades continue their withdrawal on foot to the River Dendre, where the 7th Guards Brigade take up positions between Okheghem and Ninove; the left-hand unit of the 1st Division at Ninove was, by chance, the 3rd Battalion, so that though the latter was in a different Corps, all three battalions of the Regiment found themselves in the line side by side.

May 19 A further withdrawal in daylight to the River Escaut. The 2nd Battalion again active as rearguard.

1940 May 21 The 3rd Battalion's defence of the River Escaut.

The constant withdrawals of the B.E.F., which were made necessary by the German break-through at Sedan, were beginning to tell on the endurance, if not on the spirit, of the men. For the greater part of the retreat there were no lorries to lift the infantry, and they marched back, often twenty miles a day, along the same roads up which they had driven so confidently less than a fortnight before. They would arrive dead-tired at the new defence line and immediately start on the construction of a fresh trench system, only to be ordered back once more before they had time to put their trenches to the test of battle. Even the senior officers had little idea of the strategy behind each successive withdrawal, and there was nothing which they desired more than to confront their enemy squarely. At the Escaut it seemed that the chance had come at last.

The 3rd Battalion were deployed with three companies forward on the river bank and one company in reserve. The Coldstream Guards were on their left, at the village of Pecq. For a whole day the enemy had shown little sign of activity, but on the morning of May 21st, shortly before dawn, they launched a sudden and very violent assault and succeeded in crossing the river on the boundary between the Grenadier and Coldstream battalions. Many of the lost trenches were regained by an immediate counter-attack, but a strong force of Germans were still on the near side of the river and were beginning to creep forward through the cornfields to threaten the entire position. They were well hidden by the corn, which was already standing high in the fields, but at intervals a whole line of figures in bluey-grey uniforms would rise to their feet, double forward a few yards, and then sink back into the corn. The Commanding Officer, Major A. H. S. Adair, M.C., ordered the reserve company to attack at once and recover the higher ground on the threatened left flank. "It was a magnificent and inspiring sight," he wrote, "to see the company dash forward through the cornfield and vanish out of sight over the ridge." There they came under intense fire from German machine guns hidden at the base of a long line of poplars, and they suffered many casualties, among them Lieut. the Duke of Northumberland, who was killed at the head of his platoon. At this stage the attack would probably not have been successful had it not been for the action of two individual Grenadiers. The first was Lieut. H. Reynell-Pack, in command of the carrier platoon, who took his carriers across the bullet-swept ground, using them as though they were tanks, and silenced the machine guns on the left by hurling grenades into the midst of the crews: he was killed in his carrier immediately afterwards. The second was L./Cpl. Nicholls. His action, which earned for him the first V.C. to be gained by any soldier during this war, is thus described in the official citation:—

"... His platoon was the right-forward platoon of his company. As he led his section forward he was wounded in the arm by shrapnel. As his company came over a small ridge the enemy opened heavy machine-gun fire at close range. L./Cpl. Nicholls immediately realised the danger, picked up a Bren gun and dashed forward towards the machine guns, firing from the hip. He succeeded in silencing first one and then two other machine guns, in spite of being again seriously wounded in the head. He then crawled forward on to a higher piece of ground and engaged the German infantry massed behind, causing many casualties, and continued to fire until he had no more ammunition left. He was wounded at least four times in all, but refused to give in, even when his ammunition was exhausted. . . ."

Nicholls was reported as "Missing, believed killed," and when no news was received of him for a long time, his wife was handed his Victoria Cross by His Majesty the King. Not long afterwards he was reported to be alive and well in a hospital in Germany, and survived the remainder of the war.

The attack had not yet regained the whole river line, for the enemy's fire from the opposite bank was still too heavy to allow our men to reoccupy their original trenches. But patrols went out that night to find that there were no Germans left on the near

bank; their casualties had been too heavy, and they had withdrawn. The 3rd Battalion had also suffered severely. In all, they had nearly two hundred casualties, including five officers killed and three officers wounded. It had been a stern battle, the first serious clash in which the Regiment was involved, and the line of the Escaut remained unbroken.

1940 May 23 The 1st and 7th Guards Brigades withdraw once more, and hold part of the Gort Line near Roubaix. The line is already out-flanked to the east, and is abandoned before any serious frontal attack develops.

May 26 The withdrawal continues to the River Lys. The 3rd Battalion at Le Touquet, just north of Armentières.

1940 May 27-28 **The 3rd Battalion's attack on the Ypres-Comines Canal.**

A few hours after completing their twenty-mile march from Roubaix, the 3rd Battalion received a written order from 1st Guards Brigade to continue immediately to Dunkirk, and there embark. While Major Adair was settling the details for the march, a second order reached him, countermanding the first, and placing his battalion under the command of the 5th Division. The enemy, it appeared, had crossed the canal north-west of Comines, and though a battalion of the Black Watch had already been sent forward to restore the situation, there was some doubt whether they would be successful, and if the line gave way in this area, the whole defensive perimeter round Dunkirk would be endangered. The Grenadiers were to regain the line of the Ypres-Comines canal by an immediate attack.

"I saw the Grenadiers form up in perfect order," wrote an artillery officer in the 5th Division, "and then advance towards the enemy calmly and cheerfully—it was a most comforting and inspiring sight." Their advance was delayed by the hedges, woods, and streams of this fertile country, and it was already dark when they approached the canal. As they reached the last small rise, they saw a farm blazing in front of Comines, and soon afterwards the men of the Black Watch were silhouetted against the flames as they charged forward with the bayonet. The two leading companies of the Grenadiers joined forces with the few Scotsmen who survived and together they fought desperately to clear the Germans from the west bank of the canal. The commander of 2 Company, Captain R. N. Brinckman, D.S.O., who was himself four times wounded, found that he had no more than two men left—Sgt. Ryder, also wounded, and one guardsman.

"There was a cottage on the canal," wrote Captain Brinckman, "which seemed to be the centre of activity of some Germans. I had five hand-grenades in my haversack, and four of these I threw into the windows of the cottage. Those Germans who were not killed or wounded fled back across a small bridge on to the other side of the canal. I said to Sgt. Ryder: 'We are on our objective, but we must get hold of some more men.' I sent the guardsman back to Major Adair. Sgt. Ryder and myself then proceeded to crawl back to where I had left my reserve platoon. On the way back I was hit again through the back of the right knee, and became unable to crawl or walk. I found myself bleeding very heavily, and decided that my mortar wound was the worst. I put on my field dressing, took off my tie and made a tourniquet of it. Probably due to fatigue and loss of blood, I think I must have fainted, because the next thing I remember was finding myself in daylight on a bed in the very cottage into which I had thrown the grenades the night before, with a German soldier, very much alive, standing over me, and two or three Germans lying dead on the floor around the bed. Through the door was another small bedroom, and on the bed I saw Sgt. Ryder, who was alive and evidently in great pain."

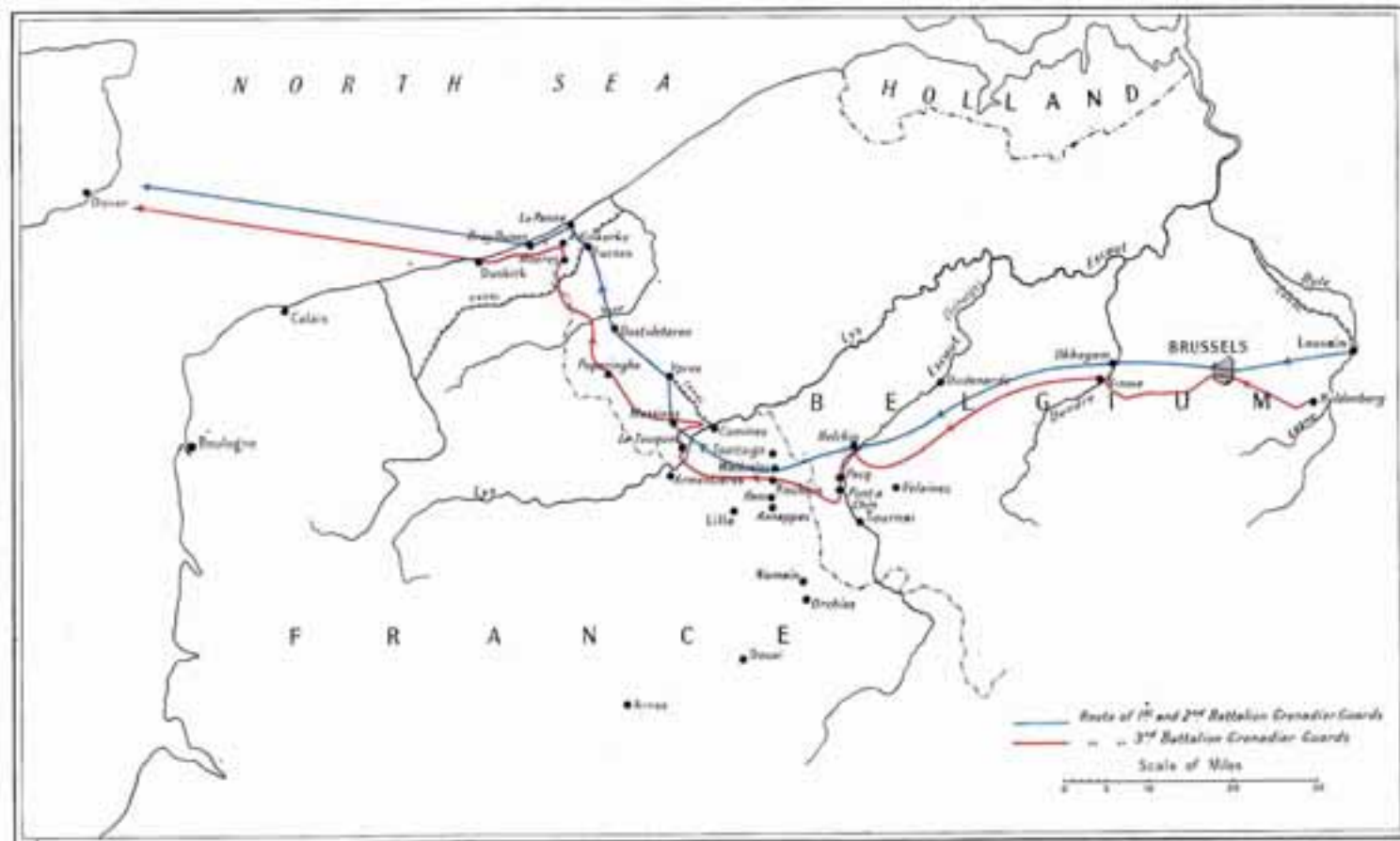
The Battalion, now very much weakened by the loss of 2 Company, consolidated on the ridge overlooking the canal, about a quarter of a mile from its banks. On the

L./Cpl. H. Nicholls, V.C.



Dunkirk, June, 1940.

"Illustrated"



The withdrawal to Dunkirk, May-June, 1940.

next morning the Germans renewed their attacks, and the leading companies were closely pressed the whole day, fighting back among the field-ditches and hedges. They had no food, for it was impossible to carry it forward. Even Battalion Headquarters became directly involved when a platoon of highly skilful German infantry crept round to attack them from the flank: the second-in-command, the adjutant, and the intelligence officer were all among the wounded. The Battalion was ordered to hold firm until 10 p.m., and this they did without surrendering a yard of ground, though at one moment they were almost surrounded. They withdrew with difficulty at the appointed time to Messines, and from there drove in their lorries to Poperinghe, and on towards Dunkirk.

1940 May 29-30 The last stand by 7th Guards Brigade at Furnes.

June 1 The 1st and 2nd Battalions embark off the beaches between La Panne and Bray Dunes; the 3rd at Dunkirk.

On the left flank of the B.E.F., the Belgian army was about to surrender, and on the right the French could do nothing to stem the German tide or close the gap which was widening between the two armies. In a fog of weariness and uncertainty, the 3rd Division drew back to the sea coast and held an outer perimeter of defence which would allow the rearward troops to embark. In the centre of the line, the 7th Guards Brigade was ordered to hold the town of Furnes, where the canal would provide a good temporary obstacle to the advancing Germans. The 2nd Battalion were stationed in the centre of the town, with the 1st Battalion to the south.

As the Grenadiers moved back to take up these positions, the German artillery followed them northwards, and the dive-bombers tore down from the sky with screaming klaxon horns. Refugees caught by the machine guns lay in little heaps on the road, but there was no time to bury them. As the column approached the outskirts of Furnes, the sound of rifle and machine-gun fire could be heard in the streets: it seemed that the enemy had already broken over the canal line. The Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion, Lieut.-Colonel J. A. Lloyd, Major Pakenham and Captain Jeffreys, who had gone ahead to make a reconnaissance, were all killed by a German sniper. It was a critical situation. The streets which were not closed by machine-gun fire were filled with troops of every nationality roaming about in undisciplined crowds, and the town was under the continuous bombardment of the German guns. The only way to avoid casualties, and at the same time to defend the town, was to seize and fortify every suitable house, and by midnight every section was barricaded into a cellar, with orders to live and fight there, and only to come out to evacuate the wounded and collect the rations. Many of the houses were on fire, and the Germans advanced their gun-lines to within two thousand yards of the town to support their repeated attempts to cross the canal. Though they managed to establish one or two platoons on the British side they could effect no major penetration. By this time the Brigade had no artillery support, as all the ammunition had already been fired, and the guns themselves destroyed.

On the evening of May 31st orders were issued for the final withdrawal to the beaches, and the last positions in Furnes were to be abandoned at 2.30 a.m. the next morning. At the appointed hour both the 1st and 2nd Battalions broke contact and drove away on the remaining lorries to the coast. Major R. B. R. Colvin, who had taken over the command of the 2nd Battalion after the death of Colonel Lloyd, described the scene on the beaches in these words: "We reached La Panne in peace, but here we ran into long queues of abandoned vehicles, left by those who had gone before us. We got out, destroyed our engines, and the men surged down the road. This one road, for a distance of a mile, carried the whole of the 2nd Corps, and it was not surprising that the casualties were heavy, as enemy shells started to fall into this welter of men." On the beaches there were troops from every unit in the British army. Offshore there were many ships, but they were a long way out, and the tide was only

beginning to flow; what small boats there were, were used to ferry out the wounded. The majority of Grenadiers therefore continued to march along the beaches towards Dunkirk, rather than wait for twenty-four hours under shell fire among the dunes. "It was amazing to see these thousands of men trekking along the sands, more or less a solid mass five miles in length and about one hundred yards broad. Squadrons of Messerschmitts periodically attacked . . . and at any moment one expected to see the enemy infantry arrive over the sand-dunes, for they had only four and a half miles to go." By the evening of June 1st, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, now split up into many parties along the length of the beaches, had all embarked, and arrived off the cliffs of England next morning.

The 3rd Battalion embarked from the mole at Dunkirk itself. "At the entrance to the dockyard," wrote Major Adair, "I met General Alexander, who had been left in charge when Lord Gort was ordered away the day before. He told me that there was now no question of embarking, except in the short hours of darkness, and he was very doubtful if the French could hold the Germans back another day. I then went on to the base of the mole. The whole area was packed with ambulances bringing along the wounded. There were three anti-aircraft guns, but all their ammunition had been used up during the day, and I noticed that two of their barrels were being used to suspend a wireless aerial. It was now about 6.30 p.m. . . . At last dusk came on, and the Battalion were ordered to move along the mole. This was a slow and nerve-wracking business, as there were several yawning gaps, covered by loose boards, where bombs had fallen. At length we reached the end of the pier, and we were told to get on board the *Newhaven*, an old friend of mine from cross-Channel days. As the ship left, a few parting shots from the shore guns fell near us. . . . When I woke up, our ship was lying off Dover in brilliant sunshine."

Dunkirk, June, 1940.

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II

The Waiting Years, 1940-1944

THE THREE BATTALIONS of the Grenadier Guards which had returned from Dunkirk were reorganised and re-equipped within a few weeks, and then took up positions at scattered points along the coast-line of England, awaiting the invasion which never came. The 7th Guards Brigade (1st and 2nd Battalions) were stationed at first round Littlehampton and Arundel in Sussex, moving later in the summer of 1940 to Stow-on-the-Wold in Gloucestershire, where they acted as a mobile counter-attack and anti-parachutist force, and constructed part of the Green Line which ran across south-eastern England. The 1st Guards Brigade (3rd Battalion) were sent to Louth, near the coast of Lincolnshire, where they remained until June of the next year. Neither Brigade, during this period, had any contact with the enemy. They waited, they dug, and they trained; until in the summer of 1941 the danger of invasion began to pass, and the strength and confidence of the army in England grew with increasing rapidity. The Grenadier Regiment was affected in three particular ways.

In the first place, to the original three battalions, three more were added in the course of a single year. A 4th Battalion was formed in October, 1940, a 5th and a 6th Battalion in October, 1941. All six battalions of the Regiment were supplied throughout the war with reinforcements from the Training Battalion at Windsor.

In the second place, the 3rd, 5th and 6th Battalions were largely released from anti-invasion commitments, and began to concentrate on training for special types of warfare, in the expectation of early employment overseas.

The 3rd Battalion, with the remainder of 1st Guards Brigade, moved to Scotland where they were stationed in turn near Glasgow, Dumfries and Perth and, from these bases, embarked on a series of large-scale manoeuvres, in co-operation with the Navy, among the sea-lochs and islands of western Scotland and in the Isle of Wight. Each of these exercises had a definite operation in view, although the secret of their destination was kept from all but the most senior officers. It can now be stated that among the projects of 1st Guards Brigade, none of which took place, were assault landings on the coasts of Sicily, Norway, the Isle of Alderney, northern France, North Africa, and two other places of which there can still be no mention for diplomatic reasons. The 3rd Battalion were never employed in the combined operations for which they had trained so long. When they eventually went overseas, in November, 1942, they docked peacefully at Algiers.

The 5th Battalion were also earmarked for combined operations and, having completed their basic training in Dorset, they were sent to Loch Fyne in Scotland to experiment with the new types of assault craft. One of the operations for which they prepared for several months was designed to hold open the Straits of Gibraltar in case of sudden Spanish intervention in the war after the North African landings. The Spaniards did not intervene and, having fought with 24th Guards Brigade through the Tunisian campaign, the 5th Battalion had no opportunity to make use of their experience in combined operations until they landed on the beaches at Anzio.

The 6th Battalion, from the day of their formation at Caterham, were set aside for a special purpose. Unattached to any brigade or division, and controlled directly

by the War Office, they sailed for the Middle East as a motor battalion in an armoured division. "The dormitory area of Surrey," wrote their first Commanding Officer, "is unsuitable for the preparation of a battalion for desert warfare," and the Battalion had not progressed much beyond the first stages of its training when it left England to join 201st Guards Brigade in Syria, shortly before the battle of El Alamein. They were the first battalion of the Regiment to go overseas since the evacuation from Dunkirk.

The third important factor which affected the destiny of the Grenadier Guards during the remainder of the war was the formation of the Guards Armoured Division in June, 1941. This decision was reached after many doubts had been expressed as to the adaptability of guardsmen to armoured warfare. It was said by some that the men were too tall to fit into the cramped compartments of modern tanks, that their training and traditions were unsuitable, and that the Army could not afford the loss of their finest infantry. These objections were overcome and never recurred. When the Division assembled in the area of Salisbury Plain for its first initiation into armoured tactics, it included the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Grenadiers (in the 5th Guards Armoured Brigade), and the 4th Battalion (in the 6th Guards Armoured Brigade). The 1st Battalion became motorised infantry; the 2nd were equipped with Covenanter tanks (1941), Crusaders (1942) and, finally, Shermans (1943). The 4th Battalion, which had started as infantry, were re-equipped with Churchill tanks and left the Guards Armoured Division, with the remainder of the 6th Brigade, to become an independent tank brigade, and as such fought through the whole campaign in France and Germany in 1944-45.

The Guards Armoured Division never had any other role than to take part in the invasion of north-west Europe. For three years they trained with this object, first under the command of Major-General Oliver Leese and, from September, 1942, under Major-General Allan Adair, who continued to command the Division all through its operations overseas. In the first year the officers and men were engaged in acquiring the basic skill of their new trade, and then began to range in larger and larger manoeuvres over wide stretches of southern and eastern England. The Division moved to Norfolk in 1943, and later to the East Riding of Yorkshire. In April, 1944, the long period of waiting was at an end. They were concentrated at Brighton on D day, June 6th, 1944, and landed in France three weeks later.

III

The Tunisian Campaign, 1942-1943

THE 3rd BATTALION IN TUNISIA

- 1942 Nov. 14-22 Sail with 1st Guards Brigade from Scotland to Algiers, where they land a fortnight after the allied invasion of North Africa.
- Dec. 3-7 Move by road from Algiers to Beja (Tunisia).
- Dec. 10 Baptism of fire at Medjez-el-Bab. Occupation of Grenadier Hill on the outskirts of Medjez.
- Dec.-Jan. Minor engagements in the area of Medjez and Bou Arada.
- 1943 Feb. 3-5 **Battle of Djebel Mansour.**

AT ONE TIME, during the voyage and later at Algiers, the 3rd Battalion had begun to despair of ever taking part in the North African fighting. Tunis, it had seemed, would fall within a few days, and then the link-up with the Eighth Army in the region of Tripoli would be a matter only of weeks. But Tunis had not fallen, and the Battalion saw their first action not in pursuit of a beaten enemy, but in defence of Medjez-el-Bab. The Germans were attacking. For the moment they slightly outweighed the handful of British, American and French Brigades, which called themselves the First Army, but were little stronger than a single Corps, and 1st Guards Brigade, as one of the few mobile reserves available, found themselves sent hither and thither as one point after another in the allied line became the centre of German attacks.

The battle of Djebel Mansour, the most violent fought by the 3rd Battalion in the Tunisian campaign, was an attempt to capture the hills which formed the watershed between Bou Arada and Robaa, and so relieve the pressure of an enemy attack down the latter valley. The hills were off-shoots of the lower Atlas, as wild and remote as the moorland of the Scottish Highlands, speckled with bushes and spindly pine, rocky, slashed by deep crevasses, misty and very cold. On these unlovely and unknown peaks perhaps a thousand Englishmen and a thousand Germans fought for three days to gain the upper hand. In the end, it was the Germans who remained in possession of the hill.

There were two heights which formed the watershed, Djebel Mansour and Djebel Alliliga, divided from each other by a deep cleft. A battalion of British parachutists had captured Mansour a few hours before the arrival of the Grenadiers and it seemed from their reports that it would be a fairly easy task to clear the summit of Alliliga. Their first attempt showed the Grenadiers that the Germans had already rushed up reinforcements, for as soon as the Guardsmen emerged from the fringe of coppice which veiled the lower slopes they were met by a torrent of machine-gun fire, and grenades came bowling down the hill towards them. They withdrew and made a second attempt, but again the Germans were too strong for them, and casualties were mounting. They tried the next afternoon by another approach, the side of the hill nearest to Mansour, while a third assault was made simultaneously by the original route. The first succeeded; the second once more failed. It was largely the action of a single officer, Lieut. C. O. M. Wills, which gained for the Grenadiers the shoulder of Alliliga above the dividing gully. Leading his platoon up between the rocks, scrambling on hands and knees, and clutching for support at the roots of pines and bushes, he emerged into the open to find himself under direct fire from several German



Winter, 1942-1943. A slit trench in Tunisia.

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machine guns. He rushed forward, shouting and even finding time to blow his hunting-horn, knocked out three machine guns almost single-handed and was continuing along the ridge to deal with a fourth when a bullet killed him outright. The remainder of the company quickly occupied the crest, and dug themselves in to await the result of the attack at the other end. It failed. One platoon for a short time gained a foothold, but after all the officers in that company had been wounded, they withdrew half-way down the slope, and the Battalion found itself split into two halves, held apart by a strong German force astride the centre of Alliliga.

The position was not completely hopeless. There was still a chance of exploiting the success gained on the other shoulder, and for this purpose two companies were switched over to that side, arriving at dawn on the third day of the battle. Then occurred an incident which put the Grenadiers in sudden jeopardy. At the moment when the Germans launched a heavy counter-attack on Mansour, the Parachute Battalion ran out of ammunition, and after defending themselves with bayonets and even stones, the survivors were forced to evacuate the hill. The Grenadiers were now exposed not only to attacks from the rear, but to the danger of complete encirclement. They were withdrawn in daylight under heavy fire.

Feb. 17-22 Defence of the pass at Sbiba by 1st Guards Brigade. German advance halted by mines, tanks, and artillery.

Feb. 23 The Brigade moves to Thala. The enemy withdraw without a battle.

1943 Feb. 25 Advance of the 3rd Battalion to the Kasserine Pass.

The Battalion were well accustomed by this time to sudden calls for assistance from parts of the front of which they knew little or nothing until their arrival; to long drives by night over dusty and indifferent roads; to hasty preparations, almost under the eyes of the enemy, with too little time to do more than scrape a shallow trench, and too few men to hold a solid line. The Brigade was nicknamed "The

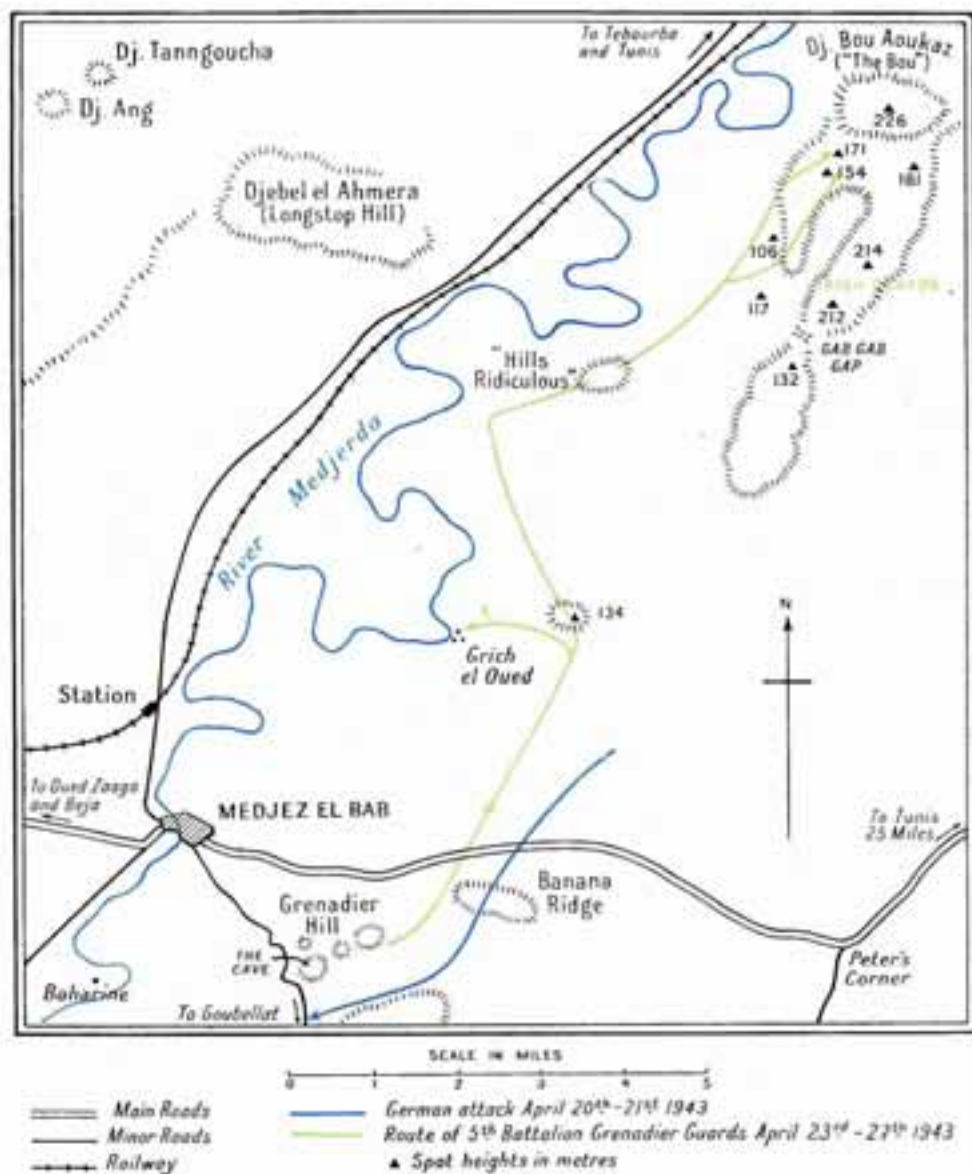


Tunisia, February 25th, 1943. Carriers of the 3rd Battalion advance towards the Kasserine Pass.

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Plumbers"—the men who stop the leaks. The leak this time had become a full flood, for the German armoured divisions had broken through on a wide front, and threatened to roll up from the south the whole communication system of First Army. At Sbiba they had been halted. At Thala they withdrew at the moment when they seemed to have most within their grasp and little to oppose them. They withdrew not under pressure or in panic, but carefully mining every yard of the road behind them, and did not halt until they were back where they started. Their armoured divisions were needed for the blow against the Eighth Army, having crippled, as they thought, the striking power of the First.

On account of the mines, it took two days for our pursuit to cover the twenty miles between Thala and the entrance to the Kasserine Pass. There had been no contact with the German rear-guards in the plain, and it was uncertain whether or not the Kasserine Pass would be held. The Grenadiers set off on foot to find out. There was a great bank of hills on either side of the narrow defile, perhaps eight miles wide as measured on the map, but twelve at least with the rise and the fall and the detours which were necessary. They covered the distance in six hours, so far ahead of their schedule that the Battalion, much to their amusement, were warned by the Americans that they could see the figures of German soldiers moving about on the objective long after the Grenadiers had in fact arrived. They took with them their carriers and their wireless vehicles, which found by trial and hard manual labour a route across the gullies of the lower ground, but the rifle companies were spread out in line up as far as the highest peaks, stumbling over the rocks, hidden from each other in the mist, and so preoccupied with maintaining their direction that they became almost indifferent to the possible presence of the enemy. But there was no enemy. All that they found on the summit were the corpses and the litter of the battle six days before, and, looking southwards beyond Kasserine, they could distinguish not a single movement, not a puff of dust, to indicate how far the Germans had withdrawn.



Tunisia. Medjez-el-Bab and the Battle of the Bou.
April, 1943.



Tunisia. The country round Medjez-el-Bab.

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|------|----------------|---|--|
| 1943 | Feb. 26. | To El Aroussa | } The Battalion is not heavily engaged, but holds various sectors of the line until the danger of German attacks diminishes. |
| | Mar. 3 | To Beja | |
| | Mar. 14 | To Medjez-el-Bab | |
| | Mar. 22-Apr. 4 | Training with 6th Armoured Division near Le Kef. | |
| | Apr. 8 | Attack through Faid to capture Kairouan and link up with the Eighth Army. The Battalion, for the most part, in reserve. | |
| | Apr. 23 | Attack across the Bou Arada plain, mainly by tanks. The Battalion plays a supporting role. | |

THE 5th BATTALION IN TUNISIA.

- | | | | |
|------|---------|--|--|
| 1943 | Mar. 1 | Sail from the United Kingdom to Algiers as part of 24th Guards Brigade, 1st Division. | |
| | Mar. 14 | By sea from Algiers to Bone. | |
| | Mar. 19 | First action east of Beja. Patrolling, but no battle. | |
| | Mar. 30 | Rejoin 24th Guards Brigade at Medjez, and occupy Grenadier Hill. | |
| | Apr. 20 | The enemy attack with infantry and tanks across the front of Grenadier Hill and are repelled. Grenadiers not heavily involved. | |

1943 Apr. 22 to May 5 The Battle of the Bou.

* * *

The 5th Battalion had had a long period of battle inoculation in the Medjerda valley, and by the time they were called upon for their major effort, their efficiency and morale stood at a high level. The task which they were now given was one of great

difficulty. There stood, one on either side of the Medjerda river, two hills, both of which had for five months barred the approaches to Tunis. The hill on the north bank had been re-christened "Longstop." The hill on the south bank was called Djebel Bou Aoukaz—"The Bou." The latter was the objective of 24th Guards Brigade's attack.

It was not a matter of a single or a direct assault, for though the Bou was visible from Grenadier Hill, it was only the last and the highest of a chain of hills, all of which at the start of the offensive lay in German hands. It would have been a more normal procedure to leave the Brigade fresh for their assault on the final hill, using other troops to clear the ground as far as its immediate approaches—if there had been other troops. But there were not. The whole operation, from the start almost to the finish, fell on the shoulders of the Guards Brigade. Thus the preliminary phases of the battle were concerned with the two groups of the nearer and lower hills, each requiring the effort of an entire battalion for its capture, so that when they strode out across the final strip of plain towards the Bou itself they had behind them several sleepless nights and troubled days. They had snatched victory from those hilltops and a cage full of prisoners, but the men were tired before their hardships had truly begun.

It is not proposed in this short account to do more than describe the final phase. By the fifth day since leaving Grenadier Hill, the Battalion had advanced seven miles as far as their penultimate objective, to which they had given the name "Hills Ridiculous," and the Scots and Irish Guards had captured a parallel ridge on their right. Ahead of them the great dark hulk of the Bou rose 200 feet from the end of a long double spur, separated from Hills Ridiculous by an undulating plain of cornfields. They had four thousand yards to cover in broad daylight, and then scale the ridge to seize two heights which lay about one thousand yards short of the summit. The Irish Guards would attack simultaneously up the other spur, farthest removed from the Medjerda river. Finally, the Scots Guards, passing through the Grenadiers, would attack the Bou itself.

As the Grenadiers crossed their start-line, the objective was attacked by seventy-two aircraft and shelled by ninety guns, but the enemy were in great strength and entrenched among the narrow gullies and reverse slope positions where shell-fire could have little effect upon their resistance. As soon as the leading companies emerged from the shelter of Hills Ridiculous, advancing through high corn and in the heat of the afternoon, the men were subjected to salvo after salvo of mortar bombs and, when they approached closer, engaged by innumerable machine guns whose fire it was extremely difficult to return. Casualties began to mount rapidly. As the stretcher-bearers came across the dead and wounded lying in the fields of wheat and poppies, they could do little more for the moment than mark the spot by fixing a rifle upright in the ground by its bayonet. The remainder of the companies, each one maintaining its direction in face of all opposition, pressed onwards through the corn. "It was so thick and heavy," wrote one officer, "that it was like wading through the sea."

Of all the gallant actions performed that evening, there is space to mention only two. Point 171, the Grenadiers' final objective, was eventually taken by Lieut. D. B. Fergusson, M.C., and twelve men after they had captured sixty Germans and four guns. This determined little party remained on Point 171 all night before they could be reinforced. On a section of the ridge further south, 1 Company fought desperately for a foothold, and the only surviving officer, Lieut. P. de R. Shepherd, knocked out two machine guns and captured ten mortars before he himself was killed. At such crippling costs, the 5th Battalion accomplished their task. They seized and held all their objectives. It would be difficult to find in the long record of the Regiment an incident which fairly matched their achievement on that April afternoon.

From April 27th to May 5th, the Battalion remained there under continual fire. The attack by the Scots Guards on the summit of the Bou only just failed, and the

Grenadiers found themselves once more in the front line, clinging with great tenacity to their two rocky hills, and dominated at short range by the huge mass ahead of them. In one way the Grenadiers were at an advantage compared to the Irish Guards: their left flank was protected by the River Medjerda, while the Irish Guards were exposed to attack from three sides. 24th Guards Brigade had carved a deep salient into the German positions—that was indeed the intention of the whole operation—and there were insufficient troops to man the long line of communication which stretched back to Grenadier Hill. The enemy were not slow to discover our weakness. Being determined to regain what they had lost, they began on the second day to launch battle-groups of tanks and infantry through the gaps in the ridge south of the Irish Guards. The German infantry were invariably repulsed in a series of hand-to-hand battles, but the tanks broke through on two occasions, and rolling on to a hillock, Point 117, between the two battalions, not only completely severed communications with the Irish Guards, but were directly threatening those of the Grenadiers as well. The necessary food, water, and ammunition always reached them by a circuitous route, although several vehicles sheltering behind Hills Ridiculous were set ablaze and carrier loads of mortar ammunition had to make the journey forward under the direct fire of the German tanks. The enemy never succeeded in pressing their attack as far west as the river bank. They could not send them there unsupported by infantry, and the Irish Guards held off the infantry day after day, losing so heavily that by the end of the final German attack they had no more than eighty men left.

Bad weather was one of the few forms of suffering which were spared to our men on the slopes of the Bou. It was warm, and there was no rain. But the enemy mortar-fire, spread so thickly over so many days, was almost intolerable. The Commanding Officer of a battalion outside the Brigade visited the Grenadiers on their narrow ridge, and described his experience in these words: "The whole position was systematically bombarded. My note-book which I left on top of my trench, was punctured, my pencil shattered. I had a little leisure to watch the activities of the Grenadiers and my already great admiration for that regiment, and for the whole of the Brigade of Guards, began to grow. It will be appreciated that in those circumstances troops can do one of two things. They can lurk in the comparative safety of their slit-trenches all day, and become trench-bound, or they can take every opportunity to leap out of their trenches when there is a lull. I don't say which is best; the moral advantage of the latter is obvious, and it was that course which the Grenadiers adopted. They took every opportunity to hit back. They manned their mortars. They sent out patrols. They encouraged the men to leave their trenches and perform their normal duties. In all cases it was the officers who were to the fore."

On the night of May 5th, a few hours before the main offensive opened down the Tunis road, a battalion of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment attacked and captured the Bou. They started their advance behind the Grenadier companies, and the Germans, thinking no doubt that this was the same battalion which had opposed them so stubbornly for the last ten days, brought down a concentration of fire which exceeded all their previous efforts. The Battalion then suffered their last casualties of this unforgettable battle. The total, since leaving Grenadier Hill, amounted to: 6 officers and 54 other ranks killed; 8 officers and 208 other ranks wounded; 17 other ranks missing. Only three of the sixteen officers in the rifle companies who were engaged from the start remained unharmed on the morning of May 6th.

It was only later realised what a tremendous contribution 24th Guards Brigade had made to the Tunisian victory. Measured in terms of miles, they had made no very startling advance; they had captured no place whose name was known to the outside world, and had not even taken their final objective, Djebel Bou Aoukaz. That was one aspect, the depressing aspect, of the battle. On the other hand, they had more than fulfilled their ultimate intention in drawing away from the vital sector a part of the German infantry and armoured forces which was greatly in excess of their own strength. They had made so deep a penetration of one of the most sensitive

parts of the line that the enemy thought it necessary to concentrate all the tanks of a Panzer Division and the larger part of an infantry division in an unsuccessful attempt to regain what they had lost.

THE 6th BATTALION IN NORTH AFRICA.

1942	June 16	From Liverpool to the Middle East, calling <i>en route</i> at Durban,
	to Sept. 8	in South Africa, for a three weeks' visit.
	Oct. to	In camp with 201st Guards Brigade at Qatana in Syria.
1943	Feb.	One-thousand-mile tour of northern Syria to show the British flag.
	Nov.	
1943	Feb. 7	Overland journey of 2,200 miles to join Eighth Army at
	to Mar. 2	Medenine in southern Tunisia.
	March 6	Battle of Medenine. 201st Guards Brigade destroys seventeen German tanks, almost without loss. The Grenadiers in reserve and scarcely engaged.

1943 March 16/17 Battle of the Horseshoe (Mareth Line).

The 6th Battalion had waited a long time for their first battle and, when it came, it was one of such intensity, involving such hardship and loss, that it can scarcely be matched with any other battle in which the Grenadiers were engaged during the whole war. It was won, and then lost again, during the course of a single moonlit night.

The object of the attack by 201st Guards Brigade was to capture a ring, or "horseshoe," of low hills which were held by the Germans as an outpost immediately south of the Mareth Line. The main coastal road passed through the centre of the hills, which fanned out on either side of it, rising in bare, rocky, but fairly gentle slopes to their highest point in Sidi el Guelaa (500 feet). Two battalions were to attack abreast, the Grenadiers on the right, and the 3rd Coldstream Guards on the left. The attack was to be made by night when the moon would be bright enough for the men to move with ease over the rough country without betraying to the enemy their approach across the open plain.

It was to be a "quiet operation," the sort of attack most suited to troops who were going into action for the first time—in the words of General Montgomery, "A good party"—supported by nearly 150 guns, and against opposition which was believed to be small. The air photographs revealed no sign of mine-laying, but they did show that there were two obstacles of importance. The first was a deep gully, with precipitous sides varying between five and thirty feet deep, known as the Wadi Zess. The second was a system of artificial blocks across the road. On the basis of this information it was decided to split the Battalion into two halves, the three assaulting companies, to whom the obstacles would present little difficulty, and a "consolidation group," including all the heavier weapons such as anti-tank guns and machine guns, which could only be brought forward once an artificial way had been made across the wadi and the road-blocks demolished. This is a perfectly normal form of infantry attack which has succeeded many times. The infantry capture the enemy trenches with the use of such weapons as each man is able to carry, supported by the artillery: once they have signalled their success, the remaining hours of darkness are employed in bringing up to them the ammunition and heavy weapons with which to meet the inevitable counter-attack at dawn. If the infantry for any reason are deprived of this support, their early success turns to their disadvantage, for they are weak and isolated just at the moment when the enemy are strongest. It is a matter half of calculation, half of guess-work. There would be time enough to overcome the known obstacles and allow the vehicles forward—that much was certain. It was estimated that the enemy was weak, too weak to mount a big counter-attack, too weak to lay many mines, and that he would be thrown completely off his balance by the weight of artillery and violence of our assault.



Southern Tunisia, March, 1943. Brigadier Gascoigne, General Montgomery, and
(*extreme right*) Lieut.-Colonel Clive before the Battle of the Horseshoe,
Tunisia. Part of the Mareth Line.

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All these conclusions were mistaken. The enemy was not weak; he had available the greater part of the 90th Light Division, one of the best in the Afrika Korps. He was not unprepared for the attack: by the capture of an artillery officer's map and two Grenadier guardsmen, he had discovered exactly when, where, and by whom the attack was to be delivered. He had not omitted to lay mines; he had laid them so thickly, that in the words of one of his own interrogators after the battle, "it seemed a miracle that even the infantry had managed to penetrate them."

Thus the seeds of disaster were sown before the Grenadiers even left their assembly area. In the confidence of their ignorance, and in high spirits, the great mass of the two battalions picked their way through the thin olive groves and advanced covered by an arch of shell-fire to the edge of the Wadi Zess. They crossed it without difficulty some minutes ahead of their timed programme, re-formed by their companies on the far bank, and waited, as so many have waited on so many battlefields, half in eagerness, half in dread, for the minute hands of their watches to crawl towards zero hour. Some of them found, during this brief interval, a thin wire running parallel to the wadi and close to the ground. They cut it, thinking that it might be connected to a booby-trap. It was not a booby-trap; it marked the outer edge of the first minefield.

They began to move up the hillside towards the German trenches. The enemy machine-gun fire did not worry them unduly, for most of it passed harmlessly in red tracer streaks over their heads, and it was a little time before they realised that the numerous explosions which wrenched the ground and tore at their lower limbs could not all be caused by mortar fire. It was the explosion of mines—shrapnel mines, the Italian box mines, heavy teller mines. As they struggled blindly forward men began to fall on every side, but the survivors did not pause, knowing that their danger could only be lessened by coming to grips with the enemy. Filled with fury and determination, so eagerly that some of them were wounded by the shells of their own barrage, they breasted the final ridge, cleared the edge of a second and yet thicker minefield, and doubled forward in the pale moonlight and smoke of battle to find the Germans lying terrified at the bottom of their entrenchments. Those who refused to surrender were killed by bayonets, and those trenches which were too deep for a bayonet to reach the bottom were plugged with grenades. Not more than ten prisoners were taken.

Silence, except for odd bursts of machine-gun fire, descended on the hills. To those watchers in the plain who had seen the red and green Very lights rise as signals of success over the three Grenadier objectives, it seemed that all had gone extremely well. It is true that the Grenadiers had done all that had been demanded of them, but it had been at appalling cost. 4 Company (Major T. P. Butler, D.S.O.) had already suffered 75 per cent. casualties; they had only two Bren guns in working order, and little ammunition. 1 Company, rallied onto their objective by Major Evelyn's hunting horn, could only muster thirty-five men. They were isolated one from the other, and all of them from Battalion headquarters and the consolidation group. Their light wireless sets worked, if at all, only at long intervals, and they were unable to report their positions or call for artillery fire. The Coldstream Guards had reached the summit of El Guelaa but had not been able to hold it, and strong pockets of German infantry, by-passed by our advance and momentarily stunned by the impact of the barrage, now began to raise their heads and weapons to shoot into the rear of our forward companies and block all approaches to them. A little later, as the moon sank lower on the horizon, enemy infantry began to crawl round the exposed flanks and burst upon our platoons with showers of grenades and bullets. All these attacks were repelled, and the men waited on the efforts of their comrades behind.

Terrible scenes were occurring at the wadi crossing. The sappers, of whom only two were left unharmed in the morning, managed after an hour's work to excavate channels by which a few vehicles could enter and leave the wadi. Ten carriers were

blown up by mines in the wadi-bed itself, and those that gained the far bank found themselves unable to go any further. Wherever a vehicle moved, it would blow up within a few yards, and the crews were lucky if they escaped with their lives. Six officers were killed in this manner and two others wounded, yet the survivors continued to search for a passage, and eventually one was found. Lieut. J. H. Wiggin struck almost by chance a path which was not mined, and running a gauntlet of fire, he took four carriers up to the supposed position of I Company. He never found them. Though Major Evelyn heard his shouts, he was unable to attract Wiggin's attention before he moved off to search another area and, by this unhappy chance, an opportunity was missed which, even at that late hour, might have saved the Battalion.

The casualties among the consolidation group were now even greater than those of the assault companies. The wadi was under direct fire from ten or twelve machine guns, and a blazing lorry illuminated the whole area, focusing German mortar fire on the few vehicles which remained. Just before dawn it became clear that, even if help could be brought to the companies, they would be too weak to withstand further attacks, and now that Sidi el Guelaa was lost again to the enemy, there would be no object in leaving the Grenadiers on the lower ground. At 5.30 a.m. Brigadier J. A. Gascoigne, D.S.O., gave orders for both battalions to withdraw. It might seem that if the companies had succeeded in crossing the minefields to capture their objectives, they would have less difficulty in withdrawing back to their own lines. But this was not so. For one thing, communications were still extremely bad, and I Company never received the order at all. For another, each company was very much weakened and virtually surrounded. It would be a matter of fighting their way back, of leaving the shelter of their trenches under point-blank fire, and crossing the minefields without the assistance of a barrage. It was nevertheless attempted.

The survivors of 3 Company—there was not a single officer left alive among them—were brought back to the wadi with fair success. Of the other two companies not more than a handful returned. Major Butler, the commander of 4 Company, describes his experience as follows: "There is a very close and ever-tightening ring round our position. In the effort to improve the situation I call for artillery fire all round our hill. It doesn't appear to do a great deal of good in spite of shells bursting all round us. After a slight lull the Germans start closing right in, and some bitter close-quarter fighting takes place with grenades." In attempting to knock out a machine gun, Butler was wounded and captured. He concludes: "It was only months later that I heard that the remainder of the company was overwhelmed." Of I Company a few men were rescued in daylight by a second carrier patrol led forward by Wiggin, but all the officers of that company were killed, wounded or captured. The Commanding Officer, Lieut.-Colonel A. F. L. Clive, M.C., was himself wounded at the very last moment, and the remainder of the Battalion withdrew to the same positions which they had left, so strong and so confident, just sixteen hours before.

So ends the story of a gallant failure. How much it had cost the 6th Battalion is shown by the casualty list. 63 other ranks had been killed, 88 wounded, and 104 taken prisoner. Among the officers, 14 were killed, 5 wounded, and 5 taken prisoner. All that good planning, leadership and high courage could do had been done. "I only saw one man," wrote the Commanding Officer, "who showed the fear we all felt, and he came on when encouraged." In spite of all difficulties the Grenadiers had succeeded in their assault. They captured all their objectives and held every one of them until the moment they were ordered to withdraw for reasons quite outside their own control. It must be added that those men did not suffer and die in vain. The Germans came to regard the Horseshoe as the key to the defence of the Mareth Line. They reinforced it before, during and after the battle with troops which they could ill spare when the New Zealanders marched round their right flank to El Hamma, and so forced their withdrawal from the entire line.

- 1943 April 1 Through Gabes to the Wadi Akarit. Grenadiers feign an
to 6 attack between the road and the sea.
April 15 The Battalion mounts a guard of honour for General
Montgomery's entry into Sousse.
April 20 Grenadiers enter Enfidaville.
May 3 201st Guards Brigade moves round to join First Army near
Medjez-el-Bab.

TUNISIA, THE LAST PHASE. 3rd and 6th BATTALIONS.

- 1943 May 6 First Army delivers the final blow. Two infantry and two
armoured divisions attack south of Medjez-el-Bab on a narrow
front. 1st and 201st Guards Brigades, both under command
of 6th Armoured Division, play little part in the opening
phases.
May 7 Fall of Tunis and Bizerta.
May 8 **Battle of Hammam Lif.**
May 12 **End of Tunisian Campaign.**

Having lost Tunis in the same hour as Bizerta fell to an American corps, the Germans still had a small chance of saving what remained of their army by holding the peninsula of Cap Bon long enough to prepare their evacuation by sea and air. All depended on stemming the British advance at the defile of Hammam Lif, the gateway which led from the plain of Tunis into the base of the peninsula. Hammam Lif was a small French town, little more than a coastal resort, and the summer residence of the Bey of Tunis, resting on a ledge of low ground between the sea and the massif of Djebel Bou Kournine. The northern line of houses fronted the actual beach; the southernmost were raised slightly above the level of the town at the foot of the precipitous cliffs. The town formed a complete block. If a way could not be found through the streets, and quickly, the momentum of the whole advance would be lost and the campaign, perhaps, prolonged by several weeks.

Although the enemy were already thoroughly disorganised, their local commanders were sufficiently alert to realise the tactical importance of Hammam Lif. They collected a strong force of infantry from the thousands of stragglers who had escaped south-east from Tunis, posted some of them, amounting to about two battalions, on the peaks of Djebel Bou Kournine, and the remainder at the western end of the town itself. The backbone of the defence was formed by a score of anti-tank guns hastily sited in the gardens of the houses and actually inside any large buildings whose walls they had time to breach.

Outside the town 6th Armoured Division were settling the details of their plan and, while a rain of shells poured into the streets, the 1st Guards Brigade were brought up in lorries. The Welsh and Coldstream Guards scaled the western slopes of Kournine and, after a stiff skirmish, occupied the crest and looked down upon the rooftops of the town. This was not sufficient to dislodge the Germans. The 3rd Battalion of the Grenadiers were ordered to hold themselves in readiness to clear the streets in daylight. The Battalion had started to march towards the sea-coast, where they were to form up for the attack, when news reached them that the Lothians and Border Horse, one of the armoured regiments of the Division, had attacked with astonishing boldness and success. Several tanks had been knocked out even before they had gained the first houses, but others had overwhelmed the German anti-tank gunners before they could fire again. Two troops found the beaches undefended and, ploughing through the actual surf, had emerged behind the town, leaving the defenders at a hopeless disadvantage.

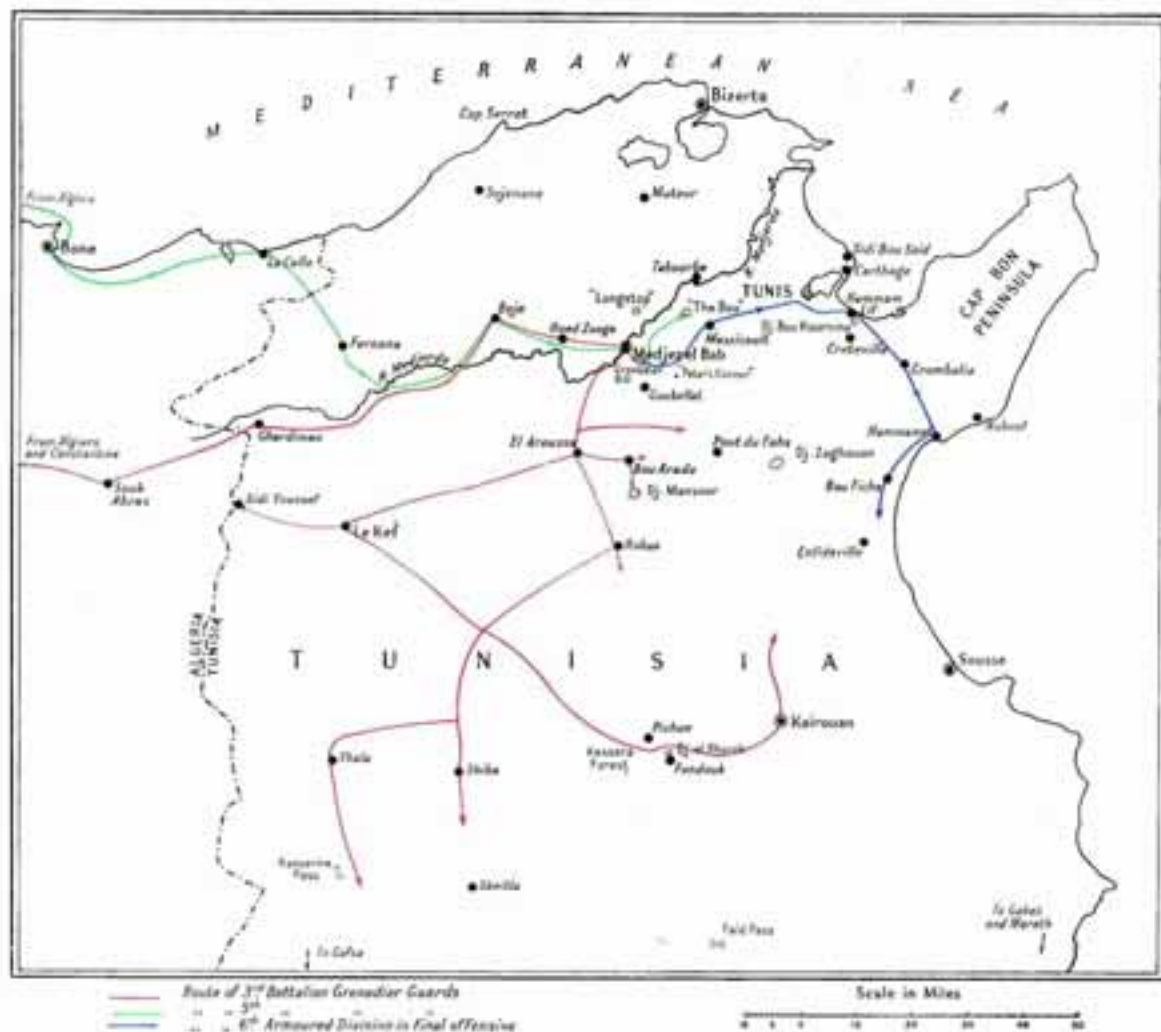
The Grenadiers were immediately dispatched to follow up the tanks and complete the capture of the town. Having started cautiously and methodically to clear the blocks one by one, they soon found that there were few Germans unwilling to surrender without further argument, and the civilian population, French and Arab, streamed out of their cellars to press wine, flowers and kisses on their liberators, making their further progress almost impossible. A small party of Grenadiers entered the Bey's palace, which lay in the central square. They found the Tunisian ministers assembled in the throne-room among a litter of broken glass and gilt chairs, awaiting the British envoys with some apprehension and overwhelming them with offers of alliance as soon as they appeared. The Bey himself was sent for. He enquired graciously after the health of Their Majesties the King and Queen, and offered to invest the British Divisional Commander with a high Tunisian order. It was courteously declined. In the courtyard outside the palace a company of Grenadiers and a detachment of the Bey's own bodyguard had been drawn up to receive the General. Each presented arms in turn while German shells, fired at extreme range across the water, continued to burst harmlessly along the beaches, and columns of smoke to east and south signalled the mounting success of our pursuit.

The thirty-five miles from Hammam Lif to Hammamet, on the far shore of the peninsula, was covered in forty-eight hours. The tanks led the way, moving heavily through the corn, while the infantry followed up behind, each Guards Brigade alternately in the lead, either striking across country to search the encircling hills where no tank could pass, or shepherding the thousands of prisoners into makeshift cages at the roadside. By night the Battalions would be required in turn to protect



Photo: Dr. Eggs

Tunisia, the last phase. May, 1943. Grenadier despatch rider escorting German prisoners.



Northern Tunisia.

the tank harbours while the crews snatched a few hours' sleep. Next morning, long before it was light, the camps would be astir with preparations for the day's march, and the wide scythe-like sweep to the south, delayed now by a demolished bridge, now by a small knot of enemy proudly indifferent to the mass surrenders of their fellows, continued until it was too dark for the tanks to distinguish friend from foe or clear ground from broken.

The Eighth Army remained, during this decisive week from May 6th to May 12th, in static positions between Enfidaville and Bou Ficha, their right flank on the sea and their left on the high ridges which sloped up towards Djebel Zaghouan. Opposed to them were two strong German divisions, who left until too late (if they had ever intended it) their retreat into the Cap Bon peninsula. Once Hammamet was entered by 201st Guards Brigade on the 11th their retreat was cut off and, early the next morning, the guns of the Eighth and the First Armies were shelling the same targets. 6th Armoured Division drove almost unopposed into the rear of the Afrika Korps. A few anti-tank guns were switched round and a few more bridges blown up in an attempt to meet this threat, but, in the late afternoon of May 12th, white flags—sheets, shirts, handkerchiefs, anything they could lay their hands on—began to flutter from the German trenches. The commander of the 90th Light Division, the same division which had opposed the 6th Battalion on the Mareth Line, received a deputation at his headquarters and formally surrendered.

In this last hour of the Tunisian campaign the 3rd Battalion were ordered forward to complete the triumph. Driving across the open plain in their lorries, they passed the leading tanks and rode up as far as the ground would allow into the very foothills, where the Germans were already beginning to leave their trenches and gather by their companies and battalions for their march into captivity. Little more was required of our own men than to assist formally at this great act of surrender. The German troops were excellently disciplined. They had destroyed all their equipment except the barest necessities, and driving northward in their own lorries escorted by a British carrier at the head and tail of each column, they seemed as proud in their defeat as though they had gained a great victory. The camp fires of the First and Eighth Armies, now indistinguishable on the strip of coastal plain, dimly lit up the forms of sleeping men, the lines of marching prisoners, and the shapes of Sherman tanks brought to a halt, not by enemy action, but by the achievement of complete victory.



AFRICAN INTERLUDE. 3rd, 5th and 6th BATTALIONS.

Shortly after the end of the campaign in Tunisia, the three battalions were dispersed to different stations in North Africa, awaiting orders to embark for the mainland of Europe.

The 3rd Battalion waited the longest. They spent June and July, 1943, at Sousse, one of the bases for the attacks on Pantelleria and Sicily. They took no part in either campaign, but assisted the embarkation of other troops and guarded the prisoners who were sent back to North Africa. In August they moved to Algeria, first to Guelma and later to Constantine, where they remained until their departure for Italy in February, 1944.

The 5th Battalion guarded prisoner-of-war camps near Tunis from May to August, 1943, and then moved to Hammamet, where they trained energetically until November. In that month they sailed from Bizerta to Taranto, in Italy.

The 6th Battalion spent two months at Bone, in Algeria, followed by a short period at Sousse. In early August they moved to Tripoli in Libya, and from there sailed as part of the invasion force which landed at Salerno.

IV

The Italian Campaign, 1943-1945

THE 6th BATTALION IN SOUTHERN ITALY.

- 1943 Sept. 5 Sail from Tripoli.
Sept. 9 Landing at Salerno.

THE VAST CONVOY of six divisions, three British and three American, rounded the north-west corner of Sicily and approached the Italian coast on the afternoon of September 8th. The Grenadiers were surprised to see land ahead as early as 4 p.m., for the first troops were not due to touch down until 3.30 the next morning. It was the Isle of Capri. Many thought that perhaps the plan had been changed; that the landing would be unopposed, or even that the convoy would sail straight into Naples harbour. This impression grew shortly afterwards when a launch came alongside each ship in turn and the news was shouted up through a megaphone that the Italians had signed an armistice with the Allies. There was immense jubilation on board. "I took half a bottle of sherry," wrote a Grenadier officer, "which I had been saving to give me courage on the following morning, took it to the bridge and, with the Skipper and First Lieutenant, celebrated the downfall of Italy." The news was confirmed by the six o'clock B.B.C. news-bulletin. When darkness came the convoy was gliding slowly towards the beaches, while on land the Germans were hurriedly taking over from Italian troops, by force or persuasion, the whole system of coastal defences.

The Grenadiers, who were lying some miles off-shore as the leading brigades landed next morning, heard sounds of shooting on the beaches and saw a fire blaze up in the direction of Salerno. The wireless reports showed that the beachhead had been gained against fairly light opposition, and at 7.30 a.m. 201st Guards Brigade were ordered to land with their right flank on the Tusciano stream. They steered in through a smoke-screen laid by destroyers, little disturbed by German artillery fire, which for the most part streaked over their heads towards the bigger transports anchored in the bay, and landed dryshod and secure on a narrow strip of sand. It was the first time any Grenadier battalion had set foot on the mainland of Europe since Dunkirk.

They moved rapidly off the beaches to an agreed concentration area a few thousand yards inland, and here the companies were grouped for an immediate advance to Battipaglia, the key point on the road system in the British sector. The country which lay before them was heavily cultivated, in places with fields of corn which had just been reaped, in others with tobacco plants standing eight feet high, forming a local jungle through which no man could pass silently or with ease. The few open stretches of pasture-land were cut by dykes and ditches, which made tank movement off the lanes and tracks almost impossible. The mountains, on this day, were only visible through a distant haze.

The Battalion set off about 4.30 p.m. through the encircling arms of the leading brigades of their division, but they met trouble within a few hundred yards—anti-tank guns, machine guns, mortars, which inflicted the first casualties and delayed the advance till nightfall. Attempting to push forward in darkness, the leading

company was halted at close range. At dawn, though they made some progress, the infantry were unable to advance far, for the Germans by this time had brought heavy tanks down to the confines of the beachhead and were already better organised for defence than our own men were for attack. A fourth attempt was made during the morning, and this time the Battalion reached the main coastal road without heavy fighting and took up their positions on the west side of the bridge leading directly into Battipaglia. The town itself was strongly held by German infantry and tanks.

The situation at this stage was disappointing, but not alarming. Although the road had been cut, not a single foothold on the whole width of Fifth Army's front had been gained in the hills, and the beaches and shipping were still under heavy fire. 201st Guards Brigade, who had enlarged the beachhead to a greater depth than any other formation, were ordered to remain where they were, and their only offensive action was the attack by the Scots Guards on a tobacco factory which lay just south of the road to the left of the Grenadiers. The attack failed after exceedingly fierce fighting. For forty-eight hours the two battalions held off German attacks across the road. The enemy were probing our defences with small groups of infantry and tanks, infiltrating through the thick vineyards to the rear of our positions. The line was never broken, for the enemy never took full advantage of their superiority, but the situation became increasingly uncomfortable. Every man knew how short a distance separated him from the beaches, and that in the whole British Corps there was scarcely a single battalion in reserve. Under constant bombardment from the hills just ahead, acutely conscious of the gaps in the line to left and right, they were filled with a sense of exposure, frustration, and even of impending disaster—a feeling of looseness, of porosity, where all should have been tightly sealed.

Three days after the first landings at Salerno it became clear that the Fifth Army could not hope to break out in the direction of Naples before the link-up with the Eighth Army advancing from the toe of Italy. On them depended more and more the very survival of the Salerno beachhead. Prisoners of war reported that an all-out German attack was impending. In one place, not in the Guards Brigade sector, the enemy penetrated to within 1,500 yards of the beaches, and even DUKWs and amphibious jeeps took up hull-down positions in the dunes a few feet from the breaking surf. To meet this threat the line was shortened. The Brigade was withdrawn on September 12th from the main road to a new position a mile in rear, where the battalions were more closely interlocked and the Brigade could even afford to use the Grenadier battalion in a role of close reserve to the other two. The shells of the heavy German guns and British warships cruising in the bay arched over their heads day and night, but the situation never again looked so desperate after the withdrawal. On the 17th the Eighth Army linked up with the Americans south of Paestum and the combined force swung northwards towards Pompeii and Naples.

1943	Sept. 19	Close fighting in the hills north of Salerno.
	to 27	
	Oct. 10	In position in the streets of Capua. The Battalion prepares for an assault crossing of the River Volturno, which is cancelled at the last moment.
	Oct. 17	Capture of successive hilltops leading from Capua towards
	to Nov. 2	Cassino, including Point 860, which falls to the Grenadiers after a long advance by night.
	Nov. 7-10	First Battle of Monte Camino.
	Dec. 3-10	Second Battle of Monte Camino.

The name of Monte Camino never found its rightful place with Salerno, Anzio and Cassino as one of the great battlefields of the Italian campaign. In later months

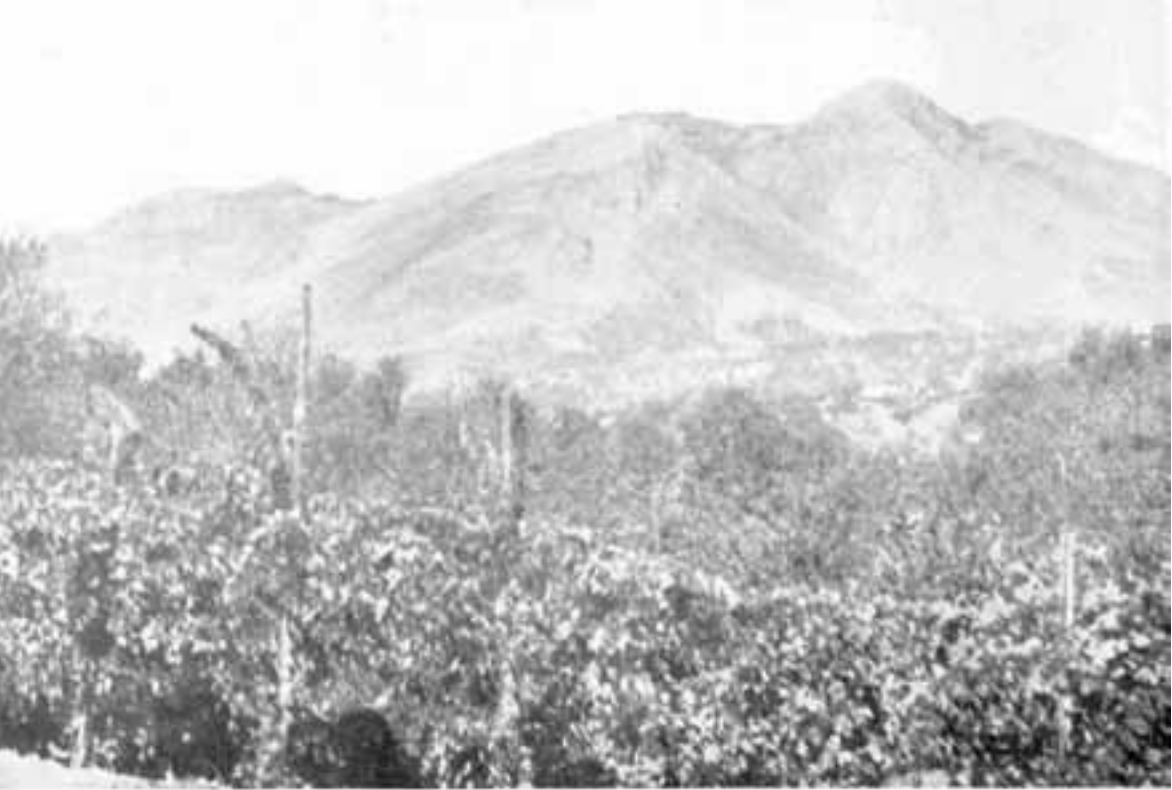


201 Guards Brigade cross the Volturno river.

Monte Camino. Evacuating casualties of the 6th Battalion.

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November, 1943. Monte Camino. Monastery Hill is the pyramidal hill on the right. Bareback Ridge in centre.

Closer view of Bareback Ridge from Calabritto.

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the soldiers of the Fifth and Eighth Armies would skirt its eastern slopes, hurrying northwards up the main road from Naples to Rome, without so much as a glance at its lonely summit. To them, unless they had taken part in the battle, it was just another mountain mass, a vast hulk of grey rock, no higher than many in the central Apennines, filling the gap between two valleys with outstretched ridges and grasping chasms. But the French troops, who had not fought there themselves, chose Camino for the site of their memorial to their fallen British comrades. There it still stands, a marble slab set among the boulders close to the spot where the Grenadiers made their great demonstration of courage and endurance. It bears this inscription:—

AUX COMBATTANTS BRITANNIQUES
TOMBES GLORIEUSEMENT AU MONTE CAMINO
NOVEMBRE-DECEMBRE, 1943
LES GOUMS MAROCAINS

The Guards Brigade had not expected very heavy fighting. Camino, like Sidi-el-Guelaa, was reported to be lightly held, an outpost to the German winter line which ran through Cassino. It seemed to be a matter of a long trudge up the mountain slope followed by a quick cut and thrust to gain the summit; they had ample time to prepare and the artillery support was overwhelming. It was the type of operation which they had carried out successfully time and time again, but on this occasion the preliminary information was at fault and, far from being a mere outpost, Camino formed part of the winter line itself and was very strongly defended. In brief the story of the battle was this: The Grenadiers gained all but one of their objectives, and fought to retain them for four days under insufferable conditions; they were then relieved by other troops and, shortly afterwards, the mountain was abandoned to the enemy, not to be recaptured until a month later. In the end the task which had been allotted to a single battalion was only accomplished by the deployment of an entire corps.

At 2 a.m. on November 7th the Grenadiers, in a long column, began moving up the southern spur, which they named (but not in such polite terms) "Bare-back Ridge." (see map, page 42). A circle of heath fires, ignited either with intent by the Germans or accidentally by our own smoke-shells, lit up the whole mountain bowl through which they had to pass, and scarcely had they left behind them the last covering position of the Coldstream Guards, when enemy machine guns began to play on the crest and slopes of the ridge. This danger was avoided by hugging a convenient fold in the ground. There was no further interference by the enemy until they neared the summit, but the approach march was even more exhausting than they had feared. The ridge was built of great boulders separated by narrow crannies in which the men's feet would catch and stumble. The column was soon pulled out into a long and straggling line. Three or four times the leading company thought they had gone far enough, only to find that they had reached a false crest and it was necessary to spur the men on to yet another effort. The first objective, Point 727, was reached while it was still dark, and it was found unoccupied. There was still another thousand yards to go to the summit, and the two forward companies only found themselves within striking distance just as the dawn was beginning to lighten the sky. Nevertheless, their own safety, and that of the remainder of the Battalion behind them, depended upon a quick assault. This was carried out with great success, for the Germans turned and ran as our men reached the top. The first phase had been accomplished at small cost. The real battle of Camino had scarcely begun.

The group of hillocks which formed the crown of the Camino massif was arranged in the form of an inverted triangle. Its southern apex, Point 727, lay at the upper end of Bare-back Ridge, its base extended from Point 615 through Point 819 to a pyramidal hill called Monastery Hill at the eastern end. At 6 a.m. on the morning

of November 7th, 4 Company was on 727, and 2 and 3 Companies closely grouped round 819. 1 Company and Battalion Headquarters were still on their way up Bare-back Ridge and coming under heavy fire in the gathering daylight. It is important to realise that, during the first battle of Camino, neither Monastery Hill (which had not been one of the original objectives) nor Point 615 were ever captured, and the thousand yard gap, "The Saucer," which lay between 819 and 727 was undefended ground, open to enemy patrols operating from either flank.

The enemy had not withdrawn far and seemed determined to regain what they had lost. At first they contented themselves, from their positions of superior observation on Monastery Hill, with directing heavy machine-gun fire on the two forward companies and mortar fire on the two rear companies and Battalion Headquarters, but that night and all subsequent nights they sent strong patrols between the two halves of the Battalion, cutting the supply route and attacking each platoon in turn and from every direction. Sometimes the mist was thick enough for them to repeat the same harassing tactics in the daytime. Casualties reduced 2 and 3 Companies and a company of the Scots Guards, which went to their assistance, to a total strength of one hundred men; and the hill was so enormous that no troops could be spared to attempt the capture of 615, or Monastery Hill, which became essential to the security of the whole position.

A series of messages from Divisional Headquarters emphasised that the retention of Point 819 was of the utmost importance. For four days the Battalion hung on. Enemy aggressiveness and the deterioration of the weather brought increasing hardships. The rain and the hail soaked the men to the skin; the intense cold and the mortaring and a tearing wind from the east deprived them of any chance of sleep. After the first night, when supply parties managed to reach Point 819 with containers of cold Irish stew, the forward companies were without food except for their own emergency ration-packs and those they took off the bodies of the dead. The severely wounded lay out on the mountain peak for two or three days, and at least a dozen of them died of exposure before stretcher-bearers could work forward past enemy patrols. It then took five hours, with eight men to each stretcher, to bring the casualties down to the doctor's hands. On the morning of the third day, as though every resource of man and nature were combining to complete their utter distress, there was a small earthquake which dislodged a few boulders on the summit.

On the same day the Germans redoubled their efforts. Six or seven attacks were launched and resisted on Point 819. All except two of the Grenadier officers in 2 and 3 Companies were killed or wounded, but the Germans, calling on them to surrender, were met with oaths and a fusillade of bullets. As their ammunition drew low they reported on the wireless that the end seemed near. But they were saved by an attack launched by two companies of the Scots Guards and a battalion of another brigade, who cleared a passage for their withdrawal. Out of the 483 Grenadiers who had gone up the hill, 263 returned. Some could scarcely move from frost-bite, and others arrived back at the foot of the mountain in a state of such exhaustion that even the prospect of a hot meal after all those days of cold and near-starvation could not rouse them to stir another yard.

Three days later the order came for the total evacuation of Monte Camino, and the Brigade withdrew for rest to Caserta, only to be recalled a fortnight later for a second attempt to capture the mountain. This time the Guardsmen were not alone, and theirs was not the major role, for they did not enter the fighting until after the Queen's Regiment had captured the dominating peak of Monastery Hill. 201st Guards Brigade, who had spent two miserable days on Point 727 under mortar fire and in pouring rain, were at last able to move forward. Their first bound took them without great loss to the Acquapendola spur, and from there they struck west and north, overcoming a series of German posts day by day until, on December 9th, a patrol of 3 Company slipped up a crevice in the cliff face and entered the village of Rocca d'Evandro unopposed. It was the end of the battle for Camino.

1943	Dec. to	In static positions near the mouth of the River Garigliano.
1944	Mar.	One attack by the Grenadiers results in the capture of two small hills.
1944	March 8	The Battalion fires its last shot. They are withdrawn from the line, some of the officers and men being amalgamated with the 5th Battalion, the remainder returning to England.
	April 22	Arrival in the United Kingdom.
	Dec. 4	The 6th Battalion is disbanded.



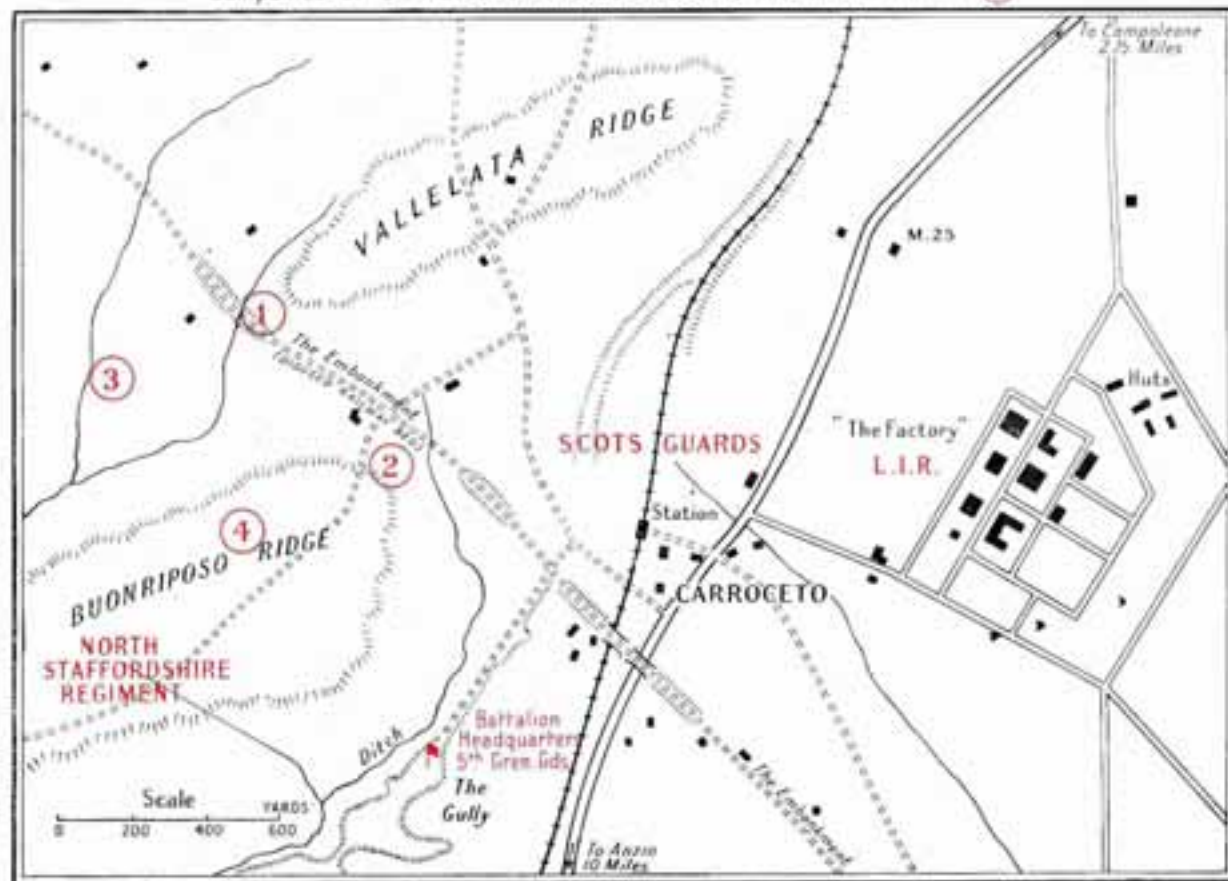
THE 5th BATTALION AT ANZIO.

1943	Nov.	The 5th Battalion land at Taranto and spend the next two months at rest in southern Italy.
1944	Jan. 20	The Battalion embark at Castellamare, near Naples, as part of the Anzio assault force.
	Jan. 22	Landings at Anzio, virtually unopposed.
	Jan. 25	The Grenadiers capture "The Factory," ten miles inland, after stiff fighting.
	Feb. 4	Heavy German attacks begin with the object of eliminating the entire beachhead.
	Feb. 7-8	Defence by the Grenadiers of the Gully and Embankment at Carroceto.

The full story of the Anzio campaign is one of absorbing interest. Only after five months of wastage and acute suffering were the tactical aims of this great expedition finally realised. What follows is an account of a single incident lifted from the days of greatest danger. The Grenadiers fought many other battles at Anzio, but never before or after did so much depend upon them: never were they pressed so hard, nor contribute so much by their efforts. It is the story of two nights and a single day out of the six weeks they spent fighting in the beachhead.

There was only one road which led northwards from Anzio towards the Alban Hills; it ran like a skewer through the middle of the beachhead. Upon this road three points marked the successive stages of the Allied advance and, subsequently, the stages of their withdrawal, each in turn becoming the centre of the most critical fighting. They were: "The Fly-over," the bridge by which a lateral road was carried over the main road eight miles north of Anzio; the embankment and factory at Carroceto; and the junction of roads and railways at Campoleone, which was the furthest limit of Allied penetration until the breakout in May. Of all these it was Carroceto which saw the fiercest engagements. The Grenadiers had captured the village and "The Factory"—in reality it was no factory, but a Fascist agricultural settlement called Aprilia—four days after the first landings, and when the Campoleone salient had been driven back the main British positions rested astride the road in exactly the same area. The factory and Carroceto station remained in our hands; but further east and west our defences rested on the embankment, a disused railway bed which crossed the road, and a light railway running parallel to the road by two bridges, two cavern mouths, which pierced the embankment just south of Carroceto. On the evening of February 7th the Grenadiers held the western approaches to the bridges, with their companies disposed as shown on the sketch on page 34. These positions were finally adopted twenty-four hours before the German attack. Everything seemed fairly quiet. Dumps of food and ammunition were moved up, and the men busied themselves with laying mines and wire. There was not much rest at night. "We all had a blanket apiece," wrote a platoon commander, "but that is not much protection when even the puddles freeze."

ANZIO BEACH-HEAD :- The Embankment and Factory Area
 Positions of our own troops on February 7th 1944 marked in Red
 Companies of 5th Battalion Grenadier Guards shown thus.....**(3)**





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R.A.F. photo by permission

The Anzio Beachhead. The Gully is in the foreground, the Embankment and Carroceto station in the centre, and the Laziali Hills in the distance.



General Alexander and Major Sidney, V.C.

The enemy sought that night to isolate the Carroceto salient by three main thrusts. One towards Carroceto itself, and the factory; a second along the embankment towards the bridges; and a third to cut the road further south. The Grenadiers found themselves in the central and most crucial position of all.

The first to bear the weight of the assault was 3 Company. One platoon after another was attacked from all sides, and whenever they attempted a counter-attack it would coincide with a fresh onslaught from a new direction. After a bitter struggle the position was completely overrun and the company commander, with nine survivors, withdrew to the north to join forces with 1 Company. The latter were themselves soon hotly contesting the possession of a ridge which overlooked their stretch of the embankment from the north. The Germans were attacking in greatly superior numbers from three sides, and as it appeared that the embankment would soon be cut behind them, they decided that their best course, after all communications with their Battalion Headquarters had ceased, was to link up with 2 Company and hold a narrower perimeter. Few would question the rightness of this decision. It was a sad blow, when they started to withdraw, to find that the embankment was already straddled by an enemy force a hundred yards east of their original position. 1 and 3 Companies were now completely surrounded, and though many small groups attempted to work their way back to our own lines, none was successful.

Half the fighting strength of the Battalion had thus evaporated before the German attack mounted to its climax. The enemy had also broken clean through the nearest companies of the North Staffords and were threatening to deal with 4 Company in the same way as they had disposed of the first two. To avert this danger, Lieut.-Colonel Huntingdon ordered 4 Company to fight their way back to new positions just west of the gully where he had set up his headquarters. This they did, but were so hotly pursued that one platoon was soon afterwards overrun before they had had time to dig in. 2 Company were also reporting that the tide of the attack was already beginning to beat against their own positions, and the Scots Guards in Carroceto were likewise heavily engaged. At 1 a.m. it seemed doubtful whether the line would hold. There was no longer any depth to the British defence, and a further breakthrough would take the enemy directly across the road. On a few men depended the safety of a corps, the success of the whole enterprise.

The German infantry were now on top of the Buonriposo Ridge, and nothing but a stretch of broken, empty ground lay between them and the gully which sheltered a handful of officers and men of the Headquarters. The Germans contented themselves for a while with shooting down into the floor of the gully from their higher ground, searching every corner with their machine guns, mortars and grenades. Shortly afterwards, having formed up behind the crest, they charged forward, shouting hysterically. The first hundred yards was covered in less than a minute, but then they were brought up short within fifty yards of the gully, by an obstacle which they had not expected. It was a ditch—a V-shaped ditch, about fifteen feet deep, and filled almost to the brim by thick brambles. At one point only was there a crossing-place, hewn by some Italian peasant long ago in happy ignorance of the part it would one day play in history. It was immediately opposite that part of the gully which was defended by Major W. P. Sidney* and half a dozen men. After a frantic search which exposed them in the moonlight to a crushing weight of bullets, the Germans found this crossing place, and those who were not mown down in the attempt poured towards the gap to menace the gully directly from above. While two guardsmen primed grenades for him, Major Sidney held off the attackers single-handed, and though twice wounded, once by a premature explosion of a grenade which killed one of his own men, he continued to hold the gap until help reached him and he was too weak to continue. Without question his action prevented an irruption into the floor of the gully, the consequences of which would not have been confined to the Grenadiers alone. He was awarded the V.C., the second to be gained by the Grenadiers during the war.

* Now Lord de Lisle and Dudley, V.C.

Thwarted in one place, the Germans were not yet beaten. They turned north along the lip of ground which separated the ditch from the gully and tried to scramble down at a place higher up. This second threat was met by two other officers, Lieuts. Chaplin and Dugdale, and a few guardsmen. Leaving the shelter of the gully at its northern end they started to work southwards along the lip, shooting Germans as they went, and dropping grenades into the ditch wherever they heard voices. "This advance," Chaplin wrote afterwards, "amongst the thorns and patches of shadow on top of the gully, went well enough until we both saw four columns of breath rising into the frosty air only about ten yards away. A few seconds later four Germans rose and advanced on us." By this time they had exhausted their supply of grenades, Dugdale's tommy-gun had jammed, and Chaplin's Bren gun, which he attempted to fire from the hip, was also out of order. Chaplin picked up a German rifle and hit one of the men with his third shot. In the confusion both officers jumped down into the gully, a thirty-foot drop, which left them uninjured. The attack died down. When dawn came there were only dead Germans left immediately in front.

During the hours of daylight, February 8th, there was no actual attack, but a rapid exchange of fire across no-man's-land. By six o'clock in the evening rain began to fall heavily and the gully soon became, according to its natural function, a streaming watercourse. It was clearly no place for a headquarters, but the gully had to be defended for half the succeeding night before they could withdraw. Twenty-nine Grenadiers remained in the area, four of them wounded, and about forty-five American soldiers of a parachute company, who had come up on the right. This little force was split up most carefully to guard the most vital approaches, the men lying out in the open on the forward lip so that they could directly overlook the ditch. The rain began to turn to sleet. It was terribly cold. At 9 p.m. the Germans renewed their assault. "There now followed," wrote Chaplin, "the familiar advance to the ditch and the sight of more miserable Germans walking up and down trying to find their way across. Those who did entrust themselves to the bed of the ditch made almost as much noise splashing as they did shouting. The 36 grenade again proved itself the most valuable of all weapons for night work, and it again saved the situation." When the Grenadiers and the few vehicles which could be moved left the gully at 3 a.m., their departure was not hastened by a single shot.

Having lost the equivalent of three companies, the Battalion withdrew to the immediate area of the bridges and held them against further attacks, while the Scots Guards fought their way out of a ring tightening round the station. The factory also fell into enemy hands, and the beachhead was contracted to the line of the embankment. "Now we were back where we started," is the tragic record of the War Diary, "having inflicted and suffered tremendous losses: and the future was obscure." The whole of the 24th Guards Brigade was relieved that night and returned into reserve between "The Flyover" and the beaches.

The whole beachhead, up to the very docks at Anzio, was within range of the German guns, so that those nominally at rest were continually under fire. There was no relaxation in the offensive. The embankment was captured on February 12th, and soon afterwards the Germans started to attack down the east side of the road with six regiments of infantry and sixty or seventy tanks, penetrating at one moment to within 100 yards of "The Flyover." The contracting outline of the Anzio beachhead became a familiar feature in the newspapers of the world. General Alexander assured the Allies that there would be no evacuation; the German infantry were told by their commanders that the English were already re-embarking. It was a terrible, wasteful conflict, in which the enemy suffered such casualties that they lacked that final driving force which would have carried them to the beaches.

The Grenadiers were not called upon again, except to occupy reserve positions near "The Flyover." They were too weak to fight another battle such as that at Carroceto. Nine officers had been killed, 10 wounded and 9 taken prisoner; amongst the other ranks 52 were killed, 222 wounded, and 303 missing. On March 8th they re-embarked for Naples.

THE 3rd BATTALION IN ITALY.

1944. Feb.	2	The 3rd Battalion sail from North Africa to Naples.
Feb. to		
March		Defensive fighting in the hills north of the River Garigliano.
April and		
early May		Occupation of Cassino.

From the Garigliano Hills it was possible to see simultaneously two great clouds of smoke. One came from the crater of Vesuvius, then in full eruption, the other from the steaming ruins of Cassino.

In contrast to the static warfare on the remainder of the front, Cassino had been under constant bombardment and attack. It had become for the whole world a symbol of the ferocity of the fighting in Italy, and when the 1st Guards Brigade received orders in early March to relieve the New Zealanders in the cellars and rubble trenches which marked the limit of the Allied advance into the heart of the town, there were many who foresaw conditions even more unpleasant than those which they had just left in the hills.

But it was not so. For a brief respite the Allied offensive was called to a halt. Cassino lay in ruins, shared almost equally between the German parachutists and ourselves; and of all the 1,500 men who faced each other along the length of those shattered streets, there was not one who dared or needed to emerge in daylight and confront his enemy. They lived a cellar existence, usually a platoon of twenty-five men to the remains of each house, with only one or two sentries, encased in rough pill-boxes of rubble and sand-bags, to keep watch above ground. There was good shelter in these ruins from the weather and the enemy's fire, for the collapse of the upper storeys of each building piled a great heap of masonry, a ready-made revetment, on to the lower floor and made the cellars virtually shell and waterproof. Here the men could heat their rations on tommy-cookers, they could read and write letters and sleep and talk in far greater comfort and security than had been possible in the hills. There were very few casualties; there was no need to patrol. It was a matter only of waiting and watching.

That was the bright side of life in Cassino. The grimmer side, for the men who remained for a fortnight at a time underground, was the cramp and the boredom and the feeling of being cut off even from their nearest neighbours. Their only connection with the outside world in daylight was the telephone (the line would be cut by shell-fire as often as not in the early morning, and could not be repaired till after nightfall), the wireless sets, and the machine guns which were sited at the corners of each house, and by the close network of their interlocking fire did something to dispel the impression that each platoon was an isolated unit.

Even so, the majority of the men preferred to remain in their positions for days on end rather than undertake frequent reliefs up and down Route Six, which was the only approach to the Grenadiers from the outside world. This great highway runs up to Cassino from the south, and is dominated along the last mile by the Monastery which gave to the town its great importance both in peace and war. There were four bridges on this stretch, all of which had been blown up by the Germans in their retreat and replaced by Bailey bridges, until these, too, were destroyed by shell-fire. On either side there was nothing but waterlogged fields lying below the level of the road. The road surface itself, even had the bridges been intact, was quite impassable to vehicles, for it was pitted with craters, littered with the burned-out hulks of tanks, and was under constant shell, mortar and machine-gun fire. This was their supply route. Nightly the Grenadier porters of the reserve companies would make their way forward with heavy ruck-sacks over the twisted girders of the bridges, past wrecked buildings, derelict vehicles and unburied corpses, and so up into Cassino, where their arrival was the most important event of the twenty-four hours. During nights of bright moonlight there was a great risk that the porters would be seen walking

Cassino. Grenadiers
on the morning of the
capture of the town.



Cassino, May, 1944.
R.A.F. photo by permission



among the ruins, just as our own men in the forward platoons would frequently see German supply trains moving in and out of the town. To lessen the risk the artillery would fire smoke-shells into the German sector and maintain the smoke-screen until one or two o'clock in the morning, by which time the porters had delivered their supplies of food, water, petrol and ammunition and had passed the danger zone on their way back. The barrage of smoke-shells, a soft explosion followed by the feathery whisper of the three falling canisters, will recall to those who were there, the atmosphere of that grisly scene—even better than the accompanying sounds of frogs, nightingales and cicadas.

At 11 p.m. on May 11th, 1944, the great Allied offensive in the Liri valley opened with the thunder of seven hundred guns. Cassino was not itself attacked. It was by-passed by a double assault across the river to the south and on Monastery Hill to the north. 1st Guards Brigade thus found themselves in a comparatively calm oasis between two of the fiercest battles of the Italian campaign. After six days and nights the ring had almost closed behind the town. At the last moment the Germans rose from the ruins which they had held with such tenacity and made good their escape over the shoulder of Monastery Hill. The Grenadiers saw them swarming up the hillside, darting from rock to rock in search of shelter from the storm of shells and bullets which rained down among them. The Battalion was faced at dawn with a town which was deserted by all but a few stragglers, and for the first time the guardsmen could emerge from their dugouts and gaze around at the scene of utter devastation which had been their home for so long.

* * *

THE ADVANCE UP ITALY. 3rd and 5th BATTALIONS.

1944.	May 11	Opening of the great offensive in the Liri valley. The 3rd Battalion in Cassino; the 5th in the hills north of Isernia.
	May 27-8	The 3rd Battalion's battle for Monte Grande at the approaches to Arce. After a temporary success, enemy counter-attacks force them to withdraw.
	June 4	The fall of Rome. Neither battalion directly engaged.
	June 13	5th Battalion fight a sharp action at Bagnoreggio, ending in the capture of the village.
	June 18	The 3rd Battalion engaged in close fighting south of Perugia, and are the first troops to enter the city.
	July 16	The 1st Guards Brigade storm and capture the hills immediately west of Arezzo, leading to the city's fall.
	August	Advance by the 5th Battalion along the crest of the Chianti hills immediately south of Florence. The 3rd pursue a parallel course up the Arno valley.
	Sept. 17	The forcing of the Gothic Line. 5th Battalion operate north of Pistoia. The 3rd attack Monte Pesciana, one of the hills forming the watershed between the Arno and Po valleys.
	Oct. 2	Attack by 5th Battalion on Monte Catarelto in the northern Apennines. The enemy withdraw after very fierce fighting.
	Oct. 11	The defence of Monte Battaglia by 1st Guards Brigade.
	Nov. to	The Allied advance halted. 3rd and 5th Battalions in static positions at Fontanelice and Monte Sole respectively.
1945	Feb.	

During the ten months so baldly summarised above the fortunes of the 3rd and 5th Battalions were very similar. They followed roughly parallel routes up the central valleys, rarely separated from each other by more than thirty miles, though they operated under the command of different corps. Both battalions acted as the lorried infantry in armoured divisions (the 3rd in the 6th British, and the 5th in the

6th South African Armoured Divisions), a role which spared them the terrible fighting in the Liri valley at the outset of the offensive, but later involved them in exhausting hill fighting, with little rest between the different phases of the advance. No battles were fought during this period by either battalion on the scale of Anzio, Salerno or Camino, and it is not intended in this brief account to weary the reader



R.A.F. photo by permission

The River Po at the point where it was crossed by the 3rd Battalion. This photograph was taken while the Germans were still ferrying over their vehicles; both the ferry itself and some forty lorries can be made out.

with details of each small action. There are a few which stand out, but the casualty lists of quite ordinary days show how their strength was gradually drained away in minor skirmishes. What they do not indicate is the strain imposed on the men by the continual movement, by the actual or threatened danger.

The guardsmen and the junior officers, on whom fell the main burden, had little knowledge of the general course of operations. To them an advance of a dozen miles would mean a jolting journey with the prospect of another battle for a hill

or a river crossing; or at the best, a cross-country march to outflank an enemy position, knowing from bitter experience that their next step might mean the loss of a foot or leg on a mine, or lead them into an ambush. They would receive one order, which would quickly be followed by its cancellation; they would have settled down for a promised night of rest, only to be roused a few hours later for a sudden move forward to attack an objective which they had probably never seen and of whose tactical importance, in relation to the whole, they knew little or nothing. Such disturbance is unavoidable in a fast-moving battle. And there are undoubtedly compensations. It was satisfying to have the upper hand, to know that in a reserve area one was at least safe from attack, to hear recorded on B.B.C. bulletins the name of the town or village which the battalion had captured that very day. Added to this, our divisions were moving through country and in a climate which for sheer beauty have few equals in the world, "where the scars of battle," wrote a Grenadier, "are scarcely discernible in the green freshness of an Italian spring: every day was a day of sunshine, and each night so warm that any field or orchard would make a pleasant resting-place. The Italian peasant welcomed us with bunches of cherries and bottles of white wine. Even those who emerged white and shaken from the ruins of their houses would greet us with relief and often with delight. I think that they were relieved to find that their country was to be occupied not by the rapacious brutes whom German propaganda had led them to expect, but by warm-hearted Englishmen who had few other demands to make of them than the use of their roads."

Take, for example, this contemporary account of the occupation of Perugia by the 3rd Battalion: "After two days' fighting in the southern outskirts, a Grenadier patrol of four jeeps entered the inner city at eight in the morning. In the main square there were few people as we drove in. They stopped to stare for a few seconds and then rushed towards us, cheering and flinging out their arms. All the doors and windows were suddenly thrown open and a great crowd welled into the street converging on our dusty little caravan. I had the impression of thousands of laughing faces, of people stretching out their hands to be shaken or even just to touch my grubby pair of shorts, people throwing carnations and roses and lilac, so that soon our jeep looked like a float in a *fête des fleurs*. Finally, we came to a halt before the cathedral. They swarmed round us. I have never seen such looks of wonder and genuine happiness. They seemed unable to believe that the English would look like other men, and we for our part caught their spirit, laughed off their embraces, and sent back by wireless, a little self-consciously, the message that Perugia was indeed liberated."

How rare were these moments of exhilaration in those summer months of fighting in the Apennines. Let one of the 5th Battalion's battles stand for a dozen others in which glamour and excitement were stifled by utter weariness and fear. The climax of many days had come with an attack on a main peak of the Chianti hills, from which it was possible to see in the distance the brown roofs of Florence. This hill which, having no other name, was later christened "Grenadier Ridge," ascended in a series of steep wooded heights broken by open fields, affording the attackers the best possible conditions for a daylight advance. The South African tanks struggled up slopes which few other regiments would even have attempted, and accompanied the leading infantry on to the final spur. The ridge was so narrow that there was only room to accommodate a single company astride it; the remainder of the battalion were strung out behind them, guarding the communications against flank attack. By this advance the Grenadiers had driven a deep salient into the enemy lines, and looking down from the ridge crest, they could hear Germans shouting and see their guns firing in the valleys on either side. At dawn the next morning the Germans counter-attacked. There was a battle at such close quarters that our artillery was unable to intervene, and it was fought out with grenades and savage bursts of automatic fire. At the moment when our men were running seriously short of ammunition, the enemy cut their losses and withdrew.

How, it may be asked, was the conquest of Italy achieved by such minor actions in unending chains of hills? Think not of one or two battalions, but of a hundred. Remember that each of them fought not one such action, but half a dozen within the space of a few months. Remember, too, that the grain of the country ran parallel to the direction of our advance and that once we possessed the crowning hill-tops the valleys would drain automatically of German troops. Thrust, hold, probe, and thrust again—this was the method by which the Allied armies were able to flow sluggishly, but without pause, towards the north. They cleared Umbria, Tuscany, reached Florence and Pisa, crossed the Arno, and then there came a change. For beyond Florence the Apennines swing round in a quarter circle to seal off central Italy from the north, and there, in those high escarpments overlooking the Tuscan plain, the Germans had built the bastion beyond which no Allied soldier would pass. They called it the *Gothen Stellung*, the Gothic Line.

The Gothic Line was penetrated first on the Adriatic coast and, later, in central Italy in the region north of Florence. Of the part played in this great operation by both Grenadier battalions there is no space to speak, beyond recording that both carried out successfully the comparatively minor tasks allotted to them. When the line was broken, and our troops were able to inspect at leisure the concrete and the wire of those much-vaunted defences, there was a short and sudden wave of tremendous optimism in all parts of the Army. The Germans, it was said, were retiring to the Alps; it was merely a matter of repairing the roads before the armoured divisions could drive straight into Bologna. Even if the enemy continued to resist in the Apennines, the maps showed the hills shelving off into lighter and lighter shades of brown, and long green fingers stretched deep into the hills to welcome the Allies to the valley of the Po: now that we had topped the watershed we should surely always be coming down on the enemy from above. But it was all very different. Whatever the maps might suggest, there remained ahead an enormous expanse of apparently equal ridges, and it became clear that the strength of the Gothic Line lay not so much in the prepared defences as in the series of natural positions which lay behind it.

The weather broke in the same month as the soldiers were obliged to leave the rich orchards and villas of the lower Arno for the bleak, pathless mountains of the north. Autumn, 1944, brought torrents of rain such as the peasants had never before experienced. In spite of it the 5th Battalion fought grimly onwards up the Setta valley and the 3rd, on Monte Battaglia, remained in conditions of appalling hardship for days on end, waiting for the Germans to renew their attacks and repelling them when they came. "The rain filled their trenches," wrote an officer, "and a trench was the only place where a man could find shelter from shell-fire. He was permanently soaked to the skin and permanently in danger. He spent his day among shattered trees, hundreds of water-logged shell-holes, the unburied corpses of American and German soldiers, sopping blankets and rusted ration tins. Night brought him little rest, no relief from rain or shell-fire, and the added danger of German raids. The position lay at the terminus of a long earthen causeway which was only wide enough to carry a single track, and was pin-pointed by the enemy mortars and swept by gales of driving rain. As it was in use by 150 mules and 100 men of the ration parties night after night, its surface soon became a knee-deep glutinous morass. It would take stretcher-bearers three and a half hours to carry a casualty to the nearest point which even a jeep could reach."

The first snow fell on November 9th, the same day as Field-Marshal Alexander, visiting 1st Guards Brigade, saw in the far distance the hard blue outline of the Alps. The coming of the frost was welcomed by all, except the drivers of heavy lorries, with unqualified relief. The mule tracks, on which their existence depended, were frozen into something like their normal state, and though many of them were sitting all day and night in trenches as much as 2,000 feet above sea-level, their Christmas season was not without cheer. They were comparatively dry, their supplies were excellent,



**The 5th Battalion in
the Northern
Apennines.**

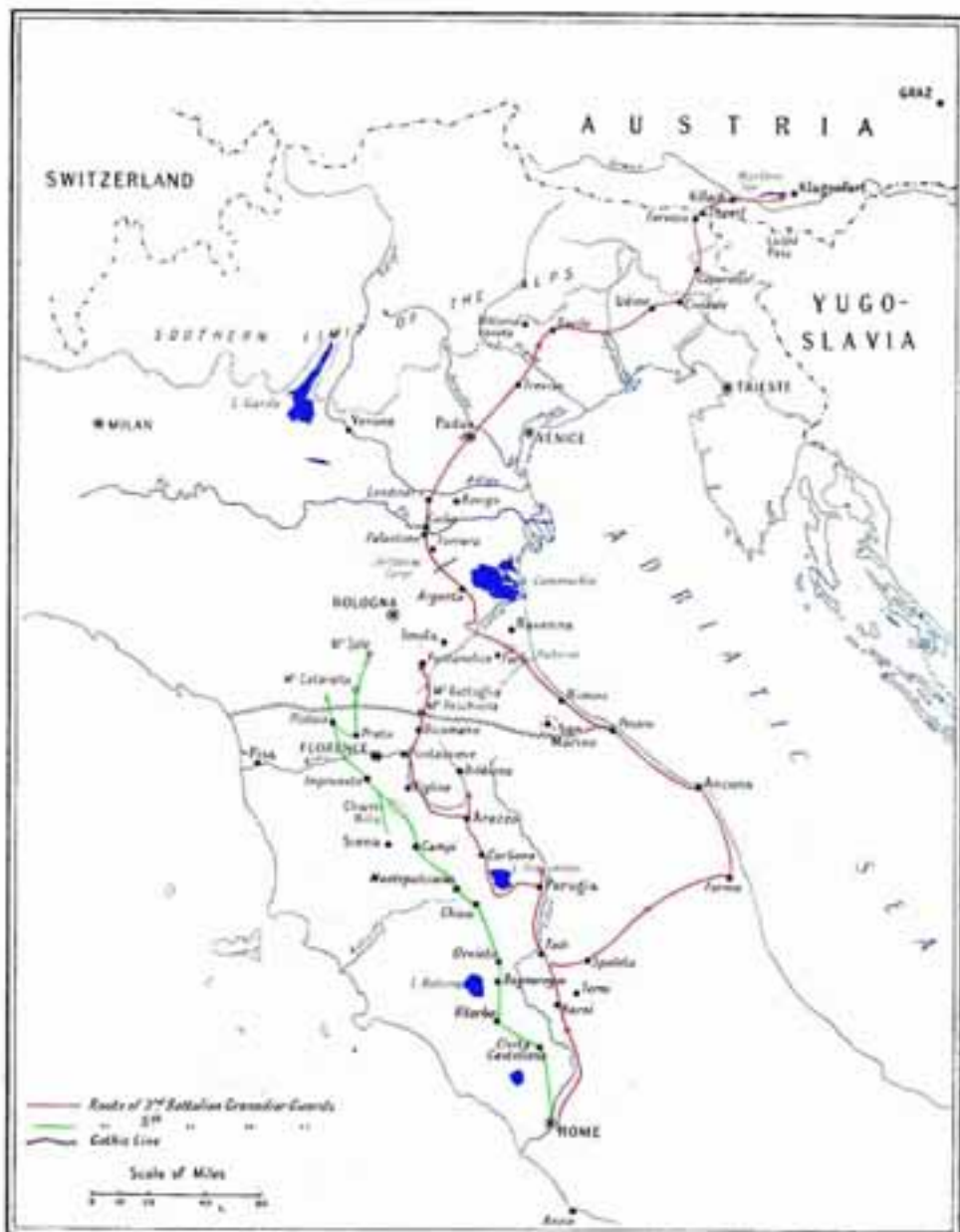
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**The 3rd Battalion's
winter line,
Fontanelice (Northern
Apennines),
January, 1945.**

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and the fighting had temporarily ceased. The projected attack by the 5th Battalion on Monte Sole had been indefinitely postponed, and the 3rd Battalion remained quietly on watch among the snowfields of the Santerno valley.



Northern Italy. Rome to the Austrian Frontier.

- 1945 Feb. Both Guards Brigades withdrawn for rest first to Florence, and later to Spoleto. The veterans of both Grenadier battalions are collected in the 5th, the younger soldiers in the 3rd Battalion. The former return to England, leaving the 3rd Battalion as the only Grenadier unit in the Mediterranean.
- March 30 The 5th Battalion arrives back home.
- May 15 The 5th Battalion is formally disbanded.



THE END OF THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN.

- 1945 March The 3rd Battalion at rest at Fermo, on the Adriatic coast.
- April 9 Opening of Eighth Army's final offensive with the crossing of the River Senio.
- April 21 The Grenadiers cross the Cembalina Canal: only light opposition.
- April 25 The 3rd Battalion lead Eighth Army in the crossing of the River Po.**
- April 26-27 Advance from the Po to the Adige.**

Successful as the operation had been, the 6th Armoured Division were not yet to know that at the Cembalina Canal they had broken the last line of resistance which the Germans were capable of organising in Italy. It was difficult to believe that the Po, an obstacle as great as the Rhine, would not be defended strongly enough to make an assault crossing a most costly operation. All the bridges had long since been demolished by the Air Force, but the Germans had undoubtedly managed to ferry across a large number of troops and vehicles and, when the Grenadiers came up behind the tanks and peered between the eucalyptus trees across the broad silver stream, they could see German soldiers waiting in their trenches on the far bank. They were allowed to remain in peace. We wished to give the impression that only patrols had reached the south bank, and that no crossing was contemplated at that point. Behind the lines the necessary equipment was assembled to carry the Grenadiers over the river thirty-six hours later.

The place chosen was a stretch of the Po ten miles north-west of Ferrara, where the stream was 1,300 feet broad, nine feet deep, and running at a speed of about five knots. On both sides there were artificial floodbanks twenty-five feet high, which concealed all our preparations on the near side, but made it impossible for any vehicle to gain access to the river except at those points where the Germans had constructed roads leading down to their ferry sites. One such ferry existed between the villages of Palantone, on the south bank, and Gaiba on the north. Though the piers had been partly demolished, the approach roads were still in good condition and could take the heavy amphibious vehicles in which the Grenadiers were to make their assault. In addition to the normal weapons, they were to have the support of a squadron of submersible tanks, never before used during the Italian campaign, which were to beach on a bed of hard gravel on the far side. The attack was to be carried out without any previous artillery bombardment in order to gain maximum surprise.

It was a night of bright moonlight. At 1 a.m. the Grenadiers embarked in their craft in the village square of Palantone and mounted the ramp on to the southern flood-bank. For a distance of several hundred yards the road ran along the top of the bank before turning north down to the water's edge, and for a few minutes the whole armada was exposed to view from the far side, silhouetted by the moonlight and aircraft flares. Not a shot was fired at them until they entered the water. A

single machine gun opened up wide of the mark when they were half-way across, and a single mortar bomb exploded alongside one of the craft without doing any damage. The guardsmen jumped ashore over the bows, amazed at their good fortune, pushed inland to find Gaiba deserted, and by 4.30 a.m. were holding a firm bridgehead about a mile deep and a mile wide. From a few German stragglers picked up by patrols they discovered that they had crossed on the one sector of the Po where the enemy had not completed their preparations. A fresh regiment was in the process of arriving at the very moment of our assault, having just completed a long journey from north-east Italy. One of the riskiest operations ever undertaken by the battalion had been carried out with the loss of only three casualties.

To throw a bridge over the Po was not an engineering feat which could be accomplished within a few hours, and though the Brigade was kept well supplied with essentials by a busy ferry service of many different types of craft, they found themselves almost the only force on the north bank capable of continuing the pursuit. Supported by the few tanks which had managed to cross, the infantry took legitimate risks and pushed rapidly across the fifteen-mile belt of plain which separates the Po from the River Adige. For the most part the Germans were disorganised and of low morale, but there were always one or two who were prepared to blow up the bridges and shoot from the rubble of neighbouring houses. The Grenadiers operated in battle patrols which struck over the fields in order to forestall the destruction of the next bridge, or commandeered civilian bicycles to probe up country lanes. In thirty-six hours they had reached the Adige north of Lendinara, and the Germans, unable to cross the river, were blowing up their own equipment and surrendering in large numbers.

It was the end of the fighting. From the top of the high campanile in Lendinara there was a view embracing a wide stretch of the Adige plain and the southern foothills of the Alps. It was possible to see in the distance, above the clouds of smoke rising from the river bank, a haze of dust raised by the American armoured divisions of the Fifth Army as they raced eastwards from Verona. It was obvious that there was no escape this way for the mangled German battalions which had managed to cross the Adige, and those who fled by other routes only arrived at the Alpine passes to find the entrance to each one closed by a brigade of Italian partisans.

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|------|-----|---|--|
| 1945 | May | 2 | 1st Guards Brigade follow the New Zealanders through Padua to Udine and link up with Tito's partisans at Cividale, just east of Udine. The German forces in Italy formally surrender. |
| | May | 8 | VE Day. The Brigade cross the Italo-Austrian frontier and occupy the Austrian town of Villach. |

* * *



The 1st Guards Brigade cross the frontier
into Austria.

*Brigadier
G. Vessey*





Photo: C. Jones

June 6th, 1944. Grenadiers waiting on the outskirts of Rome read the news of the invasion of North-West Europe.

V

The Campaign in North-West Europe, 1944-1945

1st, 2nd and 4th BATTALIONS IN NORMANDY.

1944	June	6	D Day. The Guards Armoured Division is concentrated in and around Brighton, awaiting orders to join the British Liberation Army.
	June	18	The 1st Battalion embarks at Tilbury and, after being delayed off Southend pier by Channel gales, lands near Courseulles, in the Normandy bridgehead, a week later.
	June	30	The 2nd Battalion embarks at Gosport and lands in France on the following day.
	July	18-22	The Battle of Cagny.

ALTHOUGH IT HAD been known for some time that the Guards Armoured Division would not assist in the breaching of Hitler's West Wall, the delay in leaving England came as a big disappointment. The first excited notices of the invasion, chalked on the walls of Brighton and Hove, where the 1st and 2nd Battalions were finishing their preparations, raised hopes of a quick break-out of the bridgehead which were soon dispelled. The Germans rushed up enough troops to contain the Allied forces, and only fears of further landings in the Pas de Calais deterred them from using sufficient forces to throw the Allies back into the sea. Some ten days after the invasion, Channel gales seriously hampered the landing of reinforcements and supplies, and by the time they had subsided the Germans had stabilised their front—infantry, not armour, was the crying need of both sides. The rich province of Calvados, which included the whole of the British sector of the bridgehead, was vastly different from any of the armoured training areas in England; small orchards and wooded hills, divided by many a deep and winding combe, offered the tanks little escape from the narrow roads which ran between precipitous banks and thick hedges.

The lull after the storm found the 1st and 2nd Battalions waiting in the centre of the densely-packed bridgehead near Bayeux, and it was not until July 18th that sufficient men and supplies had been landed to launch a major offensive. Three armoured divisions were massed in the 8th Corps, and while an infantry corps was making a diversionary attack south-west of Caen, this armoured force was ordered to break out of the bridgehead south-east of the city and then strike south towards Falaise. In this sector of the front alone did the terrain seem suitable for a tank attack, and accordingly the Guards Armoured Division adopted the formation in which it had trained for so long in England. The 5th Guards Armoured Brigade and the 32nd Guards Brigade each had their specific role; the armour of the former were to make the initial punch, and the lorried infantry of the latter to follow up and consolidate the gains or deal with the centres of resistance. To give each of the armoured battalions a small and highly mobile reserve of infantry, the three motor companies of the 1st Battalion moved into battle under command of the battalions

which they had come to know so well in England—the King's Company with the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment, 2 Company with the 2nd Armoured Battalion, Irish Guards, and 4 Company with the 1st Armoured Battalion, Coldstream Guards.

A dark and dusty night drive was not completed until 4.30 a.m. on July 18th and, as dawn broke little over an hour later, the whole Division, concentrated on the high ground north of Caen, was awakened by the thunder of a thousand Lancasters flying in from the sea to bomb the suburbs of Caen and the enemy defences to the south-east. This was the first daylight onslaught by British four-engined bombers in close tactical support. The early hour found the enemy defences unprepared, and before long the whole area south and south-east of the town was blotted out by a turbulent cloud of smoke and fire. Several hundred guns of every calibre took up the bombardment as soon as the aircraft had gone, and shortly after 8 a.m. the 2nd Battalion and the King's Company led the 5th Brigade across the Orne and south through the narrow gap in the enemy minefields, hard on the heels of the 11th Armoured Division.

The armour took some time to pass through the bottleneck at the gap, but the 11th Armoured Division quickly overran the forward enemy positions, and by mid-morning the leading squadron of the 2nd Battalion was engaged. The tank commanders, peering out of their turrets through dusty goggles, saw the plain of Caen stretched out before them; thick hedges and belts of tall trees limited their vision across the corn and root fields and spoilt what would otherwise have been good country for tanks. Soon after 10 a.m. the roofs of the village of Cagny, the southernmost objective of the heavy bombers, came into view above the surrounding orchards, and before long billowing clouds of black oily smoke rising from the burning Shermans showed where the 11th Armoured Division had run into the enemy anti-tank screen protecting Cagny. The leading armour veered off to the south-west, and 2 Squadron of the 2nd Battalion moved towards the village. Every advantage lay with the defenders: the ground haze was thickened by the dust churned up by the armour, and almost immediately two or three tanks were in flames. A frontal attack would clearly prove a costly business, and two troops of 1 Squadron moved round the left flank to take the village from a more covered approach. When Captain J. A. P. Jones, M.C., emerged from a belt of trees just north of Cagny his tank was hit and set on fire, but he was on top of the enemy anti-tank guns, and his crew manned their guns and fired five or six rounds after the tank had started to blaze.

Meanwhile, 3 Squadron had been engaged in sharp skirmishes on the left flank and rear, where the enemy were making sorties from the woods with Panther and Tiger tanks.

The scene was now set for the final assault on Cagny, and the King's Company deployed and cleared the village from north to south without meeting opposition. The enemy, however, had by now brought up sufficient reserves of tanks and anti-tank guns to halt the advancing armour, and before dusk the attack had petered out.

All three armoured divisions had suffered heavy losses in tanks in the course of the battle, and the advance was not resumed on the following day. The infantry took over the line, and before long the armour was withdrawn to Caen, leaving the 1st Battalion to hold reserve positions in the tank graveyard round Cagny.

When, on the evening of July 22nd, the Guards Armoured Division was finally relieved and withdrawn to Caen, the first and only battle in which it fought with separate armoured and infantry brigades was over. From start to finish the whole operation had been both confusing and confused, and despite the intensity of the preceding air and ground bombardment, there seemed to have been a great deal more taking than giving. The German general, Sepp Dietrich, then commander of the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps, had resorted to an old trick learnt on the Russian front: by putting his car to the ground he was able to hear the British tanks advancing some miles away and to bring up a reserve of tanks and guns to meet the threat. That may

be so, but it appeared that there was too long an interval between the bombardment and the attack on Cagny, an interval caused largely by the narrow bottleneck of the minefield gap through which this great tank force had to debouch into open country. On the credit side both battalions had had a very instructive baptism of fire from weapons of all calibres, and casualties had not been unduly heavy.

- 1944 July 18-20 The 4th Battalion embark at Gosport on July 18th and 19th and disembark on July 20th on the Normandy beaches a few miles from Arromanches.
- July 23-29 The 1st and 2nd Battalions rest in the bomb-ravaged suburbs of Caen.
- July 28-29 The 4th Battalion concentrate north of Caumont on the right of the British sector with the 15th Scottish Division. The Guards Armoured Division leaves Caen on July 29th and moves south from Bayeux towards Caumont.

**July 30 to
Aug. 13 Fighting in the Bocage.**

After the failure of the armoured thrust across the plain of Caen, it was decided to punch a hole through the German lines at the junction of the British and American sectors south of Caumont, and thus conform with the more ambitious American sweep further to the south-west. Here the country was totally unsuitable for armoured warfare; even the Churchills with their monstrous weight would find it difficult to plough through the solid banks and dense hedges which divided the small orchards and bordered the narrow lanes. This was the Bocage country. It was hoped that the difficulties of the terrain would be more than overcome by the power of the preceding bombardment and by the fact that three divisions were to attack on a comparatively narrow front against troops of doubtful quality.

The 4th Battalion as part of the 6th Guards Tank Brigade, was to receive its battle inoculation in support of the 15th Scottish Division, with which it had trained for some time in England, and which had already proved itself in the earlier fighting. This division was the centre of the three attacking divisions, and its axis of advance lay along the main road running south from Caumont to Vire. The 4th Battalion, supporting the 227th Brigade, was the first battalion of the 6th Guards Tank Brigade to go into action and, following close behind an intensive bombardment of several hundred guns, it had little difficulty in supporting the infantry on to their objectives. The enemy anti-tank defences were overwhelmed by the onslaught, and in the middle of the morning the other battalions of the Brigade passed through. Although later in the day the battalion was heavily mortared and shelled, the first phase of the battle was over.

On August 1st the Guards Armoured Division, which had been held in Corps reserve north of Caumont, was passed through in order to effect a breakthrough to the south. Although the enemy withdrew during the night after a show of force, and enabled the 1st and 2nd Battalions, now combined in one battle group, to lead the Division unimpeded for six miles as far as the River Souleuvre, they established themselves in commanding positions on the high ground on both sides of the ravine through which the river flowed. The bridge which carried the main road over the river was captured intact, and the Grenadiers were ordered to push eastwards onto the high ground to allow the Irish Guards, who were following close behind, to pass down the main road towards Vire. For the next two days both Battalions were involved in bitter close-quarter fighting: the dense and mountainous countryside split up the battle into a series of Company engagements which the tanks of the 2nd Battalion found it difficult to support. The spotlight falls on 2 Company and 3 Squadron who bore the brunt of the fighting.

The Grenadier Group, as it was now called, was ordered to open the road running east along the southern banks of the Souleuvre towards Vassy, and 2 Company and



August, 1944. Tanks negotiating a typical lane in the Normandy Bocage.

August, 1944. Infantry shelter from mortar fire in the advance south of Caumont.

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3 Squadron on the right flank were allotted the task of seizing a dominating hill south of the river, capturing the hamlet of Drouet just beyond it, and clearing the northern fringe of the dense woods which ran away to the east. The Company drove across the river in their transport, and after securing the high ground, cleared the village without difficulty. Major R. H. Bromley, the Company Commander, decided not to wait for the tanks which were having difficulty in negotiating the tortuous tracks, and the Company continued the advance along the edge of the beechwoods. There were no thundering guns or rumbling tanks to break the silence as the infantry crept forward: only the occasional snap of a twig or the crunch of a withered leaf betrayed the presence of the enemy, but the Company was too small a force to undertake more than a game of hide and seek, and it was only when the left-hand platoon moved out into a clearing that the enemy reacted. At once a number of machine guns opened up at point-blank range. The Platoon Commander tried to rush a machine-gun post, but his Sten gun jammed and he was badly wounded by another burst of fire. The other forward platoon crawled through the wood round the right flank and succeeded in outflanking the enemy positions. The northern edge of the first large wood had now been cleared, but the situation was not happy. One platoon was several hundred yards in front of the remainder of the Company, and the enemy infiltrated behind it. Almost immediately three heavy enemy tanks approached the position from the front, and as they had no weapons capable of destroying them the platoon was forced to withdraw. The Company, now reinforced by 3 Squadron and a Gunner Observation Tank, took up positions on Drouet hill and anxiously awaited the dawn. It was obvious that the enemy meant to follow up this withdrawal, because during the night grenades were fired into the position from close range, and several enemy patrols blundered into the Company lines.

On the following morning, August 3rd, the enemy launched a series of attacks to dislodge the Company and Squadron off the hill, and thus cut the main road along which the supply columns of the Irish Guards were passing. The small bare hill-top was surrounded on three sides by fields of growing corn, and the German machine gunners were able to crawl up to within a few yards unobserved: at the same time the position was overlooked from the east, and the enemy were able to bring down heavy shell-fire all through the day. A tank drove up to the ridge a few yards from the leading platoon, and under cover of this the enemy made several sorties with grenades: the final and most violent attack came late in the afternoon, when, after moving up some light mortars to a point just below the crest, the Germans attacked the position from three sides. Despite every advantage of terrain, the enemy, all young fanatics of the 20th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment, failed to press home the attack against resolute opposition, and before nightfall they withdrew disconsolate. In the course of the day 2 Company had suffered about fifty casualties and 3 Squadron had lost a number of tanks burned out by direct hits from heavy shells.

It was on this day that three battalions of the Regiment were engaged in the same battle. The 15th Scottish Division passed through the leading positions of the 1st Battalion to clear the enemy off the high ground to the east, and in this attack they were supported directly by the Churchills of the 4th Battalion and indirectly by the 3-inch mortars of the 1st Battalion and the Shermans of the 2nd Battalion. For the next few days the 1st and 2nd Battalions moved slowly southwards, while the 4th Battalion, in a number of squadron engagements, assisted the 15th Division to push the enemy back eastwards towards Vassy.

On August 6th 2 Squadron of the 4th Battalion was ordered to support the leading Brigade of the 15th Division on to the high ground overlooking Vassy, and, as a preliminary move, to capture the little town of Estry about a mile short of the objective. The Bocage round Estry was at its worst and thickest: the closely planted orchards offered the Churchills no escape from the narrow lanes, and the Squadron was remorselessly shelled as it wound its way slowly up to the town behind the

infantry. The field of view was so limited that the tank commanders had to go forward on foot to guide their drivers or find the nearest infantry commander, and several of them were hit by fragments.

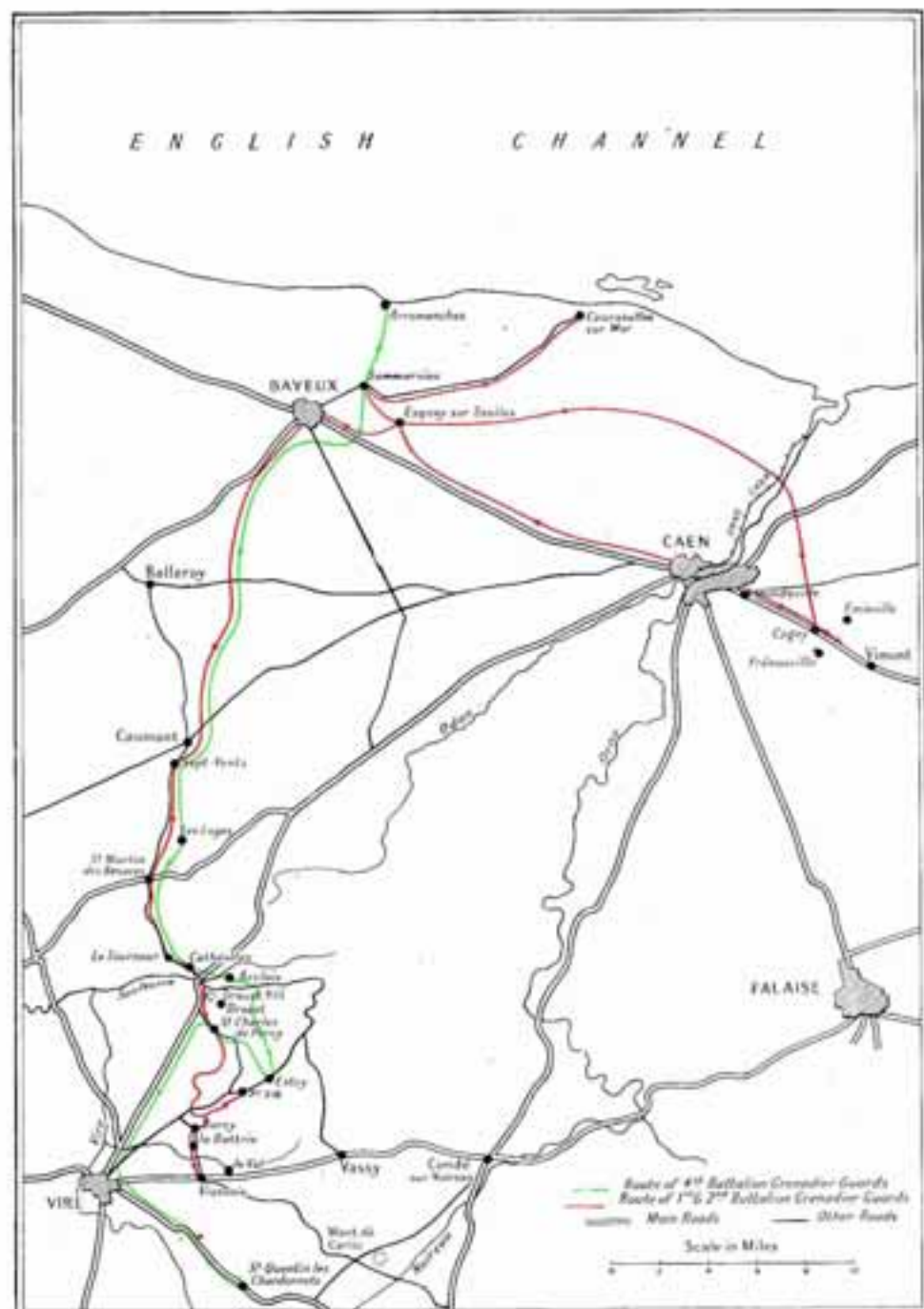
In Estry itself there were a number of 88 mm. anti-tank guns and dug-in Tiger tanks, and a combination of these and fierce opposition from the defending German paratroops held up the advance. Eventually, after chasing the enemy out of the orchards and houses at the point of the bayonet, the infantry reached the cross-roads in the western part of the town, but a thickly sown minefield just short of here halted the tanks, and despite valiant efforts to bypass this obstacle, it was not found possible to dislodge the enemy from the rest of the town. Often the enemy would be overrun by the tanks, only to rise up in their tracks and shoot at them from the rear with Bazookas and small arms. Lieut. Lord Oliver Fitzroy rounded a corner and found himself facing a Tiger tank at point-blank range: after expending all his armour-piercing ammunition unavailingly at the front plate of the monster, he was just backing his tank through an orchard when a German sniper, perched in a tree immediately above him, shot him dead. Two days later 3 Squadron supported two battalions of the same Division in another assault on Estry, but despite an intensive artillery bombardment and the use of Crocodile flame-throwing tanks, the defence was as stubborn as before, and the town remained in enemy hands. For the next three days, under fierce shell-fire, the Squadrons in turn invested the town until on August 11th the enemy, isolated but undefeated, withdrew eastwards into the rapidly narrowing Falaise pocket.

The sleepless nights, the exhausting hours spent in the tanks with all hatches closed, and the sickening smell of dead cows scattered over the fields had combined to make this vigil over Estry one of the most unattractive tasks of the whole campaign.

* * *

The story must now return to the Guards Armoured Division. On August 11th, after holding the line near the village of La Bottrie, the 1st and 2nd Battalions were ordered to lead the 5th Brigade in the most ambitious advance yet planned in the Bocage. With the 3rd Division on its right and the 32nd Guards Brigade on its left, the Group was to cut the main Vire-Vassy road at Viessoix and push on to Mont de Cerisy, which overlooked the important communication centre of Flers. A road block of felled trees in front of an old stone bridge half a mile short of Viessoix did not delay the column long, but the bridge and its immediate approaches were mined, and two tanks and a carrier were disabled. It was a cleverly laid trap, for as soon as the infantry and sappers started to clear the mines the whole area was heavily and accurately mortared. Two platoons of the leading company pushed forward on foot, and entered the village without opposition, where they were joined by a troop of tanks as soon as a path had been cleared through the minefield. Another platoon and troop were sent off to Le Val, a village a mile north of Viessoix, but here again the road was heavily mined and further progress became impossible. As soon as the party which had entered Viessoix showed itself on the far side of the village, it was greeted with salvos of mortar bombs from the enemy entrenched on the dominating ground south-east of the village. Thirty-seven men had gone into Viessoix, and within three-quarters of an hour twenty-five were casualties.

The Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, Lieut.-Colonel E. H. Goulburn, decided to employ the King's Company and 2 Squadron to force a way along a track running between the two villages. As at Estry, every advantage lay with the defenders, and the advance had not made much ground before the infantry were engaged at close range by machine guns and the tanks stalked by Bazooka teams. Suddenly an ambulance, prominently displaying a red cross, drove down a sunken lane to within a few feet of a troop leader's tank: the door was flung open, and like the Trojan horse, the ambulance disgorged a horde of armed men. Seeking cover behind a



The Normandy Beach-head. Summer, 1944.

bank they destroyed the tank with a Bazooka and killed the officer with a grenade. It was now late in the afternoon, and as the columns on either flank had made even less progress, the Commanding Officer was ordered to maintain his hold on the vital road junction at Viessoix. By dawn the next morning the enemy had withdrawn, and the Group had fought its last battle in Normandy.

1944 Aug. 14-27 As the battle sweeps away to the east the Guards Armoured Division finds itself stranded like so much seaweed in the wake of the advance. While the enemy is racing back towards the few remaining Seine crossings, the 1st and 2nd Battalions rest and reorganise in the rich Normandy orchards.

Aug. 14 to Sept. 7 The 4th Battalion rests and trains with the 3rd British Infantry Division near Vire and Flers.



1st and 2nd BATTALIONS IN BELGIUM AND HOLLAND.

1944 Aug. 28 to

Sept. 4 **The Pursuit to Brussels.**

Aug. 28-30 The tanks of the 2nd Battalion leave Flers on transporters, and, after unloading five miles short of the Seine, cross the river by the newly constructed Bailey bridge at Vernon into the bridgehead recently won by the 43rd Division. The Grenadier Group, leading the 5th Brigade, move off as soon as possible, and by nightfall are harboured on the tail of the 8th Armoured Brigade near Auneuil.

Aug. 31 The Grenadier Group, still in the lead, advance to the Somme, and seize a bridgehead at Corbie.

Sept. 1 The Group, moving in rear of the Brigade, establish themselves by mid-afternoon at Neuville, north-west of Arras.

Sept. 2 The Guards Armoured Division concentrates for rest and maintenance near Douai.

Sept. 3 **The Guards Armoured Division liberates Brussels.**

The King's Company and 2 Squadron fight a highly successful action at Pont-a-Marcq near the Franco-Belgian frontier against spirited opposition from a German rearguard.

Sept. 4 The Grenadier Group continue the advance eastwards to Louvain, the scene of the Grenadiers' first encounter with the enemy in 1940.

Twice during the campaign the crossing of an historic river opened a momentous chapter of success. As the Guards Armoured Division moved up to the Seine the battlefield had lost its horizon, and stretched with incalculable possibilities over the Low Countries to the heart of Germany. 30th Corps, under whose command the Division was now placed, could not afford to wait for the concentration of the armour before exploiting its bridgehead at Vernon, and the 8th Armoured Brigade was pushed on in advance towards Gisors and Beauvais to take advantage of a disorganised enemy. By mid-day on August 30th, after an exhausting night and day drive up from Flers, the 5th Brigade, with the Grenadiers in the lead, was ready to move on in pursuit of the 8th Armoured Brigade and seize a crossing over the Somme. That night, after a pause of a few hours near Auneuil where the leading troops were held up, the Grenadiers made a diversion, and by the next morning were in the lead, had liberated Beauvais and were going hot-foot for Corbie, a few miles upstream from Amiens on the Somme. There was little opposition on the river-line, and by nightfall the Group had established a bridgehead. On September 1st the Welsh Guards took the lead: the main body of the Grenadiers followed in rear along a



August 31st, 1944. The 1st and 2nd Battalions pause in Villers Bretonneux before seizing the Somme crossings.

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September 1st, 1944. British armour rolling across Northern France towards the Belgian frontier.



route full of names and memories from the First World War. The Germans were in panic-stricken flight and there was much booty of every sort on the high roads and by-roads, where the enemy transport had been overwhelmed or abandoned in their swift retreat. Back near the Somme 2 Company and 3 Squadron were engaged in a small battle at Albert, which they had been ordered to clear, since it was a threat to the Division's right flank: the enemy garrison was too strong and they were unable to do more than contain the town until the arrival of a battalion of infantry.

On September 2nd, while the Battalions were resting near Douai and regaining their breath for a further spurt, the orders were given out for a momentous advance on the following day. "The Guards Armoured Division will advance and liberate Brussels. That is a grand objective." These words of the Divisional Commander, Major-General Allan Adair, foretold the longest advance ever undertaken by any Division in the world in one day. Two roads were chosen: on the right the 32nd Guards Brigade, with the Welsh Guards Group in the lead, were to follow the main road which ran through Tournai and Enghien to enter Brussels from the south; and on the left the Grenadier Group was to lead the 5th Brigade along a minor road running parallel to the west. The main road provided a shorter route than the twisting lanes to be followed by the Grenadiers, but it was anticipated that it would be more heavily defended, and in the great race for the Belgian capital the betting was about even money. To assist in this advance it was proposed to drop an airborne corps along the Belgian frontier near Tournai, but at 2 a.m. on September 3rd this project was abandoned owing to indifferent weather, and all the kudos for the liberation of Brussels was left to the Guards Armoured Division.

At 6 a.m. both columns passed their starting points and the great race was on. The Grenadiers, led by the King's Company and 2 Squadron, made good progress. Major F. J. C. Bowes-Lyon, the Squadron Leader, determined to be the first into Brussels, was in the leading tank and had just increased the pace of the advance as he came out into more open country, when, on rounding a corner, his tank was hit by an anti-tank gun firing from a small wood on the outskirts of Pont-a-Marq. The crew recovered sufficiently from their surprise at this unexpected interruption to destroy the offending gun, but the tank was immediately hit again from a different angle and set on fire. Again the crew succeeded in knocking out the gun, but by now the tank was blazing fiercely and the crew were forced to bale out. A quick reconnaissance showed that this was not just a repetition of the hastily improvised and half-hearted opposition which had been met north of the Somme, and the King's Company at once deployed and advanced on foot to the northern fringe of a wood half a mile from the village. The intervening stretch of ground was flat and open, and whenever the tanks tried to move forward into positions from which they could support the infantry into the village, they were shot at by anti-tank guns. A properly co-ordinated infantry attack was clearly necessary if the enemy were to be driven out, and after the King's Company and 2 Squadron had been told to do what they could, the remainder of the column was turned round and despatched along a diversion to the east.

As the main body gathered way and sped on towards Brussels, a fierce battle developed in the outskirts of Pont-a-Marq. The enemy, firmly entrenched in the houses and gardens of the village, were able to sweep the flat, open country to the south with fire, and the King's Company, deprived by the terrain of normal tank support, were faced with an unenviable frontal assault. Showing great determination and courage, the Company advanced relentlessly under a hail of bullets and mortar bombs, closed with the enemy and gained a firm footing in the village. Casualties had mounted at an alarming rate, but once established in a factory which afforded excellent observation over the German positions further to the north, the Company was better placed to retaliate. The tanks were now able to move up, and in a series of forays a number of prisoners were taken and much equipment destroyed.



Brussels. September 4th, 1944. Maj.-General A. H. S. Adair, D.S.O., M.C.,
Commander of the Guards Armoured Division, enters the city.

"Studio L'Esprit", Brussels

The approaches to Nijmegen. September 19th, 1944. The 2nd Battalion
carrying troops of the American 82nd Airborne Division.



*Russell Lee
1st Battalion
101st Airborne
Sept 1944*

Meanwhile the rest of the Group was pursuing its way uninterruptedly through southern Belgium, where the civilians gave their liberators a welcome no less vociferous and genuine than had the French. The only suspicion of trouble came at Lessines, some twenty miles south-west of Brussels: civilians reported that about two hundred Germans with horse-drawn transport were in the town and that the local Resistance forces were being hard pressed. Like most civilian reports encountered during the advance, this story was grossly exaggerated. What Germans there were had already been rounded up and herded into the local gaol, and their horses were lying dead beside the road. A number of enthusiastic amateur butchers were already at work cutting the meat off the carcasses and grabbing what they could.

By 5 p.m. in the afternoon the advance was under way again, and despite unfounded reports of anti-tank guns barring the way, the column started to move into the outskirts of Brussels about an hour before dusk. As the noise of the tanks and half-tracks echoed down the streets, the people poured out. In an instant movement was impossible. A seething mass of Bruxellois jammed the roads, clambered on to the vehicles, kissed the crews, smothered them with fruit, cakes and even cigarettes, alternately sang and wept, got drunk and encouraged the Guardsmen to do the same. Slowly, very slowly, the column progressed, but it was chopped up into a hundred different sections, each with its attendant crowd. In the centre of the city the Belgians were making great bonfires with the stocks of German booksellers. Portraits of Hitler were thrown out of windows and shattered themselves on the ground. Eventually the Companies and Squadrons were able to reach their allotted stations on the road junctions and canal bridges in the northern part of the town, and the joint headquarters established themselves in the grounds of the Chateau Royal at Laeken. The noises of rejoicing continued far into the night and, despite the fact that reveille on the following morning was delayed until 7 a.m., few members of either Battalion can have been allowed much sleep. As soon as returning daylight allowed the Group to take stock of its surroundings, a vast German warehouse containing thousands of cases of looted wine, cigars and tinned foods of every description, was "liberated," but to everyone's disappointment the order to continue the advance eastwards to Louvain arrived before the possibilities of this latest capture could be fully exploited.

1944	Sept. 4	The Grenadier Group capture Louvain against scattered opposition from snipers.
	Sept. 5	4 Company and 1 Squadron occupy Aerschot, twelve miles north-east of Louvain, without opposition.
	Sept. 6-9	The whole Division advances to the Albert Canal, and the 32nd Brigade secures a bridgehead at Beeringen.
	Sept. 10	The Group strike north across open country between the two German strongpoints of Bourg Leopold and Hechtel, and gradually push the enemy back towards the canal. In the late afternoon a wide sweep by the King's Company and 2 Squadron brings them to within two miles of the canal, and results in the destruction of much enemy equipment.
	Sept. 11-16	For two days the 1st Battalion assists in holding a bridgehead over the canal, which has been won in a gallant dash by the Irish Guards.
	Sept. 17-20	The Drive up the Airborne Carpet.
	Sept. 20	The capture of the Waal bridge at Nijmegen.

When the battle of Normandy had been irretrievably lost, the Germans pulled back the élite of their army behind the barrier of the Siegfried Line. In their triumphant sweeps northwards and eastwards none of the Allied Armies had met more than scattered rearguard opposition, and petrol and food replaced bullets and shells as the pressing needs of the hour. The American Armies in the south, after driving

victoriously across the whole breadth of France, found themselves at the very gates of Germany with insufficient petrol to launch an onslaught against the Siegfried Line. The Second British Army, despite the fact that its supplies had to be brought up from the beaches of Normandy, was better placed, and Field-Marshal Montgomery still had up his sleeve the Airborne Corps unused in the advance to Brussels. Three Airborne Divisions should be sufficient to seize the crossings over the waterways of Holland and open up a path for the land forces to turn the northern flank of the Siegfried Line and drive eastwards into the North German Plain.

At mid-day on Sunday, September 17th, the vast air armada darkened the sky over the Grenadiers as they waited in their tanks and half-tracks for the Irish Guards to break out of the bridgehead over the Escaut Canal. In spite of a violent barrage by several hundred guns and close support from squadrons of rocket-firing Typhoons, the Irish Guards met stubborn resistance soon after entering Holland and lost several tanks before they were held up just south of Eindhoven on the evening of the following day. The Grenadiers were switched from the main road to by-pass the town and link up with the Americans who had dropped to the north. This move proved abortive since most of the bridges over the numerous little streams were too weak to carry the tanks, and eventually, after much waste of breath and energy, the Group moved back on to the original road and drove slowly through newly-liberated Eindhoven to the Wilhelmina Canal five miles north of the town.

The bridge over the canal was blown, but the sappers worked all night, and at dawn the advance could be continued. The Group, with 2 Company and 3 Squadron in the lead, raced unimpeded up the main road through the villages of Veghel and Uden, and by 10 a.m. the column had crossed the great bridge spanning the Maas at Grave, which had been captured intact by the 82nd United States Airborne Division. All the way up the road the American paratroops greeted the Guardsmen with a wave and a cheer, for their arrival heralded the first replenishments for their now dwindling supplies. Soon after the leading troops had crossed the bridge, General Browning, the Commander of the Airborne Corps and an old Grenadier, summoned the two Commanding Officers to his headquarters, and the column was diverted up a side road to Marienboom, a south-eastern suburb of Nijmegen.

The two vast bridges spanning the Waal were still intact although the operation had been in progress for forty-eight hours, and Dutch underground workers, who had been moving about the town for the last two days, reported that the morale of the enemy holding them was low. General Browning decided that an immediate attempt by a composite force of armour and infantry to rush the bridges would have a good chance of success, and in the late afternoon two columns of tanks, half-tracks, carriers and American paratroops moved off through the streets of Nijmegen towards the river. Following immediately behind them was a subsidiary force detailed to seize the post office in the centre of the town, which was reported to be the German headquarters and also to house the apparatus for blowing the bridges. The leading platoon and troop of tanks in the column on the right, making for the main road bridge, reached a point some five hundred yards short of the bridge before the enemy awoke to their danger. The Germans, entrenched on a roundabout dominating the slope down to the bridge, opened up with everything they had at the approaching column, and for some minutes the fighting was furious: the leading tank claimed two anti-tank guns before it was itself destroyed, and the infantry succeeded in working their way through some back gardens and climbed up into the top room of a house immediately above the roundabout. For a while they were able to play havoc with the enemy scurrying about in the gardens underneath, until an anti-tank gun near the bridge scored a direct hit on the house and caused them to withdraw. By now three of the four tanks were knocked out, and a frontal assault on the bridge would have been suicidal. The other column, making for the railway bridge further downstream, had been equally unfortunate: they too had caught the enemy unawares, only to find themselves greatly outnumbered when the leading

tank was on the point of mounting the bridge. The only success on this first evening was achieved by the force which seized the Post Office after a spirited fight, although they too failed to dislodge the enemy on the roundabout.

Early the next morning there was no guarantee that either bridge would still be standing, and, with the enemy now thoroughly alert, a plan was made to deploy the whole Group and clear the town methodically northwards until the time was ripe for an assault on the road bridge. The companies leap-frogged through one another in a series of carefully co-ordinated attacks, supported by the tanks of the 2nd Battalion, and by mid-afternoon Guardsmen stood on the southern banks of the Waal four hundred yards west of the bridge.

A three-pronged assault was now launched. On the right the American paratroops were to sweep over the roundabout; in the centre, 4 Company were to move through the ornamental gardens and seize a tall tower which was a focal point of the German defences; on the left the King's Company were to clear the Valkhof, a heavily wooded open-air fort honeycombed with underground passages and entrenchments, a bastion from which the gallant Dutch had resisted the Germans for three days in 1940. By climbing up a steep bank and cutting their way through a wire obstacle on the top, the King's Company surprised the enemy in the Valkhof, and were in among them with Sten guns and grenades before they could answer back. The Company Commander, Capt. the Hon. V. P. Gibbs, was shot dead at close quarters, but the Company pressed on through the fort, and eventually one platoon established itself on the embankment leading to the bridge itself. 4 Company and the Americans on the right had to cross some open ground at the beginning of their assault, and they lost a number of men very quickly. By burning the enemy out of the houses with phosphorous bombs they were able to creep forward, and when a platoon of 4 Company had rushed into the tower the scene was set for a dash over the river.

At about 6.30 p.m. a troop of 1 Squadron which had been held in readiness by the roundabout, edged forward on to the bridge, but it was still too light: they were met with anti-tank gun fire and forced to withdraw to cover. By 7 p.m. it was a little less than half light and the troop moved out again firing their guns into the gathering gloom round the bridge. They moved swiftly down the slope, gained the bridge and disappeared out of sight of the watchers on the near bank. Two tanks were hit by anti-tank fire, but the remaining two, avoiding the missiles which the enemy dropped from their perches high up in the girders, reached the far end of the bridge, skidded broadside through a road block, and after knocking out two anti-tank guns by the side of the road came to a halt at a railway bridge a mile further on up the road. Here they met the remnants of a gallant body of American paratroops who had crossed the river earlier in the day some two miles downstream. Two more tanks joined the party shortly afterwards, and the position was hastily prepared for defence. The night was anxious for this isolated spearhead, for although the Irish Guards passed over the bridge to form a bridgehead, no contact was made in the darkness. Meanwhile on the southern bank of the river the remainder of the Group settled down to a peaceful night after a hectic and glorious day.

- 1944 Sept. 22-30 On September 23rd the Group clear the enemy off the supply route which has been cut between Uden and Veghel, and three days later capture the village of Heesch lying on the main Grave-s'Hertogenbosch road. A full-scale attack by tanks and infantry swiftly overcomes half-hearted opposition, and subsequent patrols round up a number of prisoners hiding in the farms and hedges.
- Oct. 1 to Both Battalions are in reserve with counter-attack roles
Nov. 12 near Grave and Nijmegen.



Nijmegen Bridge.

Daily Herald



- 1944 Nov. 13 to Dec. 21 The 1st Battalion, supported by tanks of the 2nd Battalion, holds a quiet sector of the line near Gangelt, just inside the German frontier north-east of Maastricht—extensive minefields protecting the German positions make patrolling a dangerous undertaking.
- 1945 Dec. 21 to Feb. 21 The Grenadier Group move rapidly south to positions near St. Trond in Belgium to counter any German break-out over the Meuse as a result of Von Rundstedt's Ardennes offensive. The advance is halted, and after training whenever the snow and ice permit, both Battalions move north to Tilburg in Holland on February 7th. On the following day a large-scale operation is launched to drive the enemy back through the Siegfried Line and over the Rhine, but progress is so slow that the Battalions do not move up to Nijmegen until February 21st.



THE 4th BATTALION IN HOLLAND.

- 1944 Sept. 7-29 The 4th Battalion trains near the Seine. The General Staff does not feel that Churchill tanks are suitable for the rapid advances now in progress: the 4th Battalion are to be given their chance to alter this viewpoint at the end of the campaign.
- Sept. 29 to Oct. 3 The Battalion moves up to Holland via Albert, Mons and Louvain.
- Oct. 3-6 The Battalion holds a defensive line along the banks of the Neder Canal near Nederweert. There is little activity apart from patrolling.
- Oct. 6-12 The lightning advance of the Guards Armoured Division into Holland has established a long narrow salient, the tip of which lies on the "Island" between the rivers Waal and Neder Rijn. Already this salient has been cut by the Germans and now that the airborne operation at Arnhem has failed, it is clear that the 2nd Army must expand its flanks. On the west these operations have for their main object the securing of the valuable supply road running from Nijmegen through s'Hertogenbosch and Tilburg to the great port of Antwerp: on the east the plan is to drive the enemy back across the boggy peat as far as the banks of the Maas. On October 6th the Battalion concentrates south of Grave for an offensive designed to capture the town of Venraij, a few miles west of the Maas.
- Oct. 13-19 The attack on Venraij is a slow and, for the infantry, a costly business. As a result of nearly a month of static warfare the enemy have entrenched themselves firmly at the approaches to the town, and, less subdued than they have been since Normandy by the British artillery barrage, react quickly with anti-tank and mortar fire. The advance is frequently halted by the wide dykes which bisect the flat and sodden countryside. The approaches to these obstacles afford little cover, and the enemy anti-tank defences, consisting of well-sited guns and heavy Riegel mines capable of destroying even the thickly armoured Churchills take their toll. On October 18th Venraij falls.



November, 1944. Churchills of the 4th Battalion moving up to meet the German counter-attack near Meijel in Holland.

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November, 1944. A Churchill ploughs its way through the Dutch mud.

Associated Press



1944 Oct. 24-29 The Battalion supports the 15th Scottish Division in the capture of Tilburg. Mines, craters, blown bridges and floods prevent the tanks from giving any close support. On October 28th the enemy launch a counter-attack on the east of the salient, and the 15th Scottish Division and the 6th Guards Tank Brigade recross the salient to stave off this sudden threat.

Oct. 30-Nov. 5 The Battle of Meijel.

By mid-day on October 30th operations were under way against the enemy. After recapturing Meijel the Germans had pushed north-west and established themselves in the village of Liesel. For three days squadrons of Churchills supported battalions of infantry in limited attacks which cleared Liesel and brought the leading troops within striking distance of Meijel itself. A large-scale attack was launched on Meijel on November 5th. 2 Squadron were to move with the Royal Scots Fusiliers round the back of the enemy positions to the east and south-east of Meijel wood, which would bring them within six hundred yards of the enemy anti-tank guns on the far side of the Deurne canal, which ran parallel with the line of advance. This manoeuvre, covered by a smoke screen along the banks of the canal, would, it was hoped, divert the enemy's attention from an assault, by an infantry brigade supported by the rest of the Battalion and a squadron of Crocodile flame-throwing tanks, on Meijel itself. Every advantage of terrain lay with the Germans: on the right there was a bog, and on the left the Deurne canal and more bog. Between these two lay a minefield some twelve hundred yards in width covered by a number of machine guns, several anti-tank guns, and infantry firmly ensconced in farm buildings. In addition the enemy on the far bank of the Deurne canal had complete freedom of manoeuvre, and could move their self-propelled anti-tank guns at will to threaten the rear of any flanking movement on Meijel.

At 7.30 a.m. the first smoke screen was laid along the canal, and under cover of this 2 Squadron nearly succeeded in reaching the north-east corner of Meijel wood. Here, however, the Squadron became involved in a bog and a minefield, and every effort that they made to move forward only resulted in more tanks being disabled on mines or buried in the mud: at the same time they were under heavy anti-tank gun and mortar fire. Eventually the Squadron Leader was ordered to withdraw what tanks he could behind the start line, but out of the whole Squadron only four tanks were still runners, although only about half of the remainder had been disabled by enemy action. The Royal Scots Fusiliers pressed forward as best they could across the flat marshy heath, and all bogged tanks whose armament was still in fighting order supported them by engaging any known enemy positions in the woods and farm buildings. As the day drew on all prospects of a successful attack gradually disappeared, and the crews of any bogged tanks still in action were ordered to remove the wireless codes, immobilise their armament and make their way back to their own lines. One troop leader, Lieut. G. B. Sheffield, evacuated his tank and jumped into a ditch to avoid the mortaring and shelling which was now intense. Here he found some Germans engaged in a heated game of whist, and obligingly joined in the game before returning safely to base with his fellow gamblers as prisoners. By midnight all the tank crews including the wounded had been safely withdrawn, despite the fact that, armed only with revolvers, they had to pass through the enemy positions.

Meanwhile the main frontal assault on Meijel was proving no more successful. 1 Squadron, supporting the leading Battalion, ran into a minefield early in the day and lost five tanks almost simultaneously. The infantry succeeded in reaching the little hamlet of Schans, their first objective, and one troop of tanks, showing the greatest determination and courage, threaded its way miraculously through the mines, only to lose all its tanks to anti-tank guns beyond the village. By mid-afternoon it had become clear that bogs, minefields and cleverly-sited anti-tank defences would

allow no further tank progress. The enemy shell and mortar fire was growing in intensity, and the Divisional Commander called off the attack. Tired and sadly depleted the Battalion drove back in drenching rain throughout the night to Helmond. Only twenty tanks, nearly all in 3 Squadron which had never been committed to the battle, had survived the day.

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| 1944 | Nov. 6-Dec. 1 | 1 | The Battalion rests and reorganises at Helmond. |
| | Dec. 1-15 | | The Battalion waits in reserve at Zijlburg, a small town just east of Deurne, for another offensive operation against the east flank of the Nijmegen salient. |
| 1945 | Dec. 20-Jan. 13 | 13 | The Battalion concentrates with the remainder of the 6th Guards Tank Brigade near Maastricht behind the threatened British sector west of Geilenkirchen. |
| | Jan. 13-26 | | Operating in deep snow, the squadrons assist battalions of infantry in limited attacks to drive the enemy east of the River Roer—a leisurely operation which meets with only slight opposition. On January 26th the Battalion moves north to Marienboom near Nijmegen to take part in the large scale offensive designed to clear the west bank of the Rhine. |

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1st, 2nd and 4th BATTALIONS. FROM THE MAAS TO THE RHINE.

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| 1945 | Feb. 8-11 | | Early on February 8th, behind a massed barrage of guns on a scale unknown since Alamein, five infantry Divisions, all supported by armour, surge forward to assault the Siegfried Line where it runs through the Reichswald Forest between the Maas and the lower reaches of the Rhine. On February 11th Cleve is captured against light opposition. |
| | Feb. 11-18 | | The 4th Battalion rests in reserve in Cleve. The Germans have blown the Rhine winter dyke system and seventeen inches of water cover the Cleve-Nijmegen road: all supplies have to be brought up from Nijmegen by amphibious DUKWs. |
| | Feb. 18-28 | | The Battle of Goch. |

The town of Goch, surrounded by an anti-tank ditch and bisected by the River Niers, was a bulwark of the German positions between the Maas and the Rhine. It was believed that elements of three divisions had been collected to man the defences, and despite an aerial and artillery bombardment it seemed likely that the enemy would offer stout resistance. The 4th Battalion was made responsible for forcing its way over the anti-tank ditch at crossing places already secured by the infantry, and then for supporting a brigade of the 15th Scottish Division as they cleared the town as far south as the river.

The attack started in the afternoon of February 18th, and from this moment fog descended upon the field of battle both metaphorically and in actuality. 1 Squadron covered the bridge-laying tanks as they swayed uncertainly forward to deposit their charges over the ditch. Two attempts were made by the bridge layers before a bridge was successfully planted across the obstacle, and a troop of tanks from 3 Squadron then made its way over. By this time, however, it had grown prematurely dark, and as the infantry advancing beyond the ditch were held up by savage mortar fire, the attack was called off until the following morning. The next day the squadrons supported the three Scottish battalions in a series of attacks to clear the northern half of the town, an operation which proved surprisingly simple as the enemy defences were completely unco-ordinated and devoid of anti-tank support.

For the next two days the Battalion sat in Goch under very unpleasant shell and mortar fire, until it was called upon early on February 23rd to help the same brigade of infantry to clear a large wood south of the town. Opposition on the ground was not as heavy as expected although the infantry suffered heavily from shelling, and by nightfall the task had been completed without the loss of a tank. For four days the Battalion helped to hold the line, and on February 27th the squadrons moved forward again, this time in support of a brigade of the 3rd British Division who were to clear a dense wood, and then cut the important lateral road running between the towns of Weeze and Udem. Throughout the morning the two leading squadrons battled slowly forward through the woods: fanatical German paratroops, quick to spot their blindness as they lumbered through the twining undergrowth, shot at the tanks with Bazookas, and the enemy mortar bombs bursting in the tree tops took heavy toll of the infantry.

By mid-afternoon a troop of 1 Squadron and a Company of the East Yorks had reached the main road, and then they swung westwards to seize a vital bridge which carried the road over a small stream. They were subjected to intense mortar and machine-gun fire, but pressed on with great bravery and captured the bridge intact. At dusk the tanks were withdrawn north of the river, and the infantry were left holding a small bridgehead. The enemy kept up an almost continuous fire against the troops across the river, and after they had launched a counter-attack which was repulsed with difficulty, some tanks of 1 Squadron were brought up to the bridge to strengthen the defences. Here they passed a most unpleasant night, being sniped at by Bazookas and being themselves unable to retaliate with their heavy armament for fear of giving away their position. Their presence, however, saved the situation, for at 4 a.m. the Germans hurled a furious counter-attack against the bridgehead which was only beaten off by intense fire from the tanks.

No one was sorry when late on February 28th all squadrons were withdrawn north of Goch. This wood clearing had been both unpleasant and tiring, largely because the infantry, exhausted after months of hard campaigning and weakened by casualties among their leaders, were not prepared to advance any great distance in front of the tanks. Visibility was very limited in the dense woods and any tree might have concealed its Bazooka party. The narrow tracks were soon so churned up by the tanks that they became almost impassable, and when one troop decided to move without its infantry round the outside of the wood it lost all its tanks to Bazookas.

For the troop leader, above all, it had been a difficult operation: even in a relatively straight-forward battle there are a hundred and one things for him to do. He has to guide his tank, make full use of the ground, keep in constant touch with his infantry, scan the landscape for the enemy, direct his gunner on to the targets, position his other tanks, pass messages back to his Squadron Leader over the air and at the same time be on the alert for all the unexpected situations that arise. Fighting in woods makes these tasks even harder: the trees are natural obstacles for tanks and he has to guide his driver with the utmost care. He has to protect his flanks and yet prevent his gun from hitting the trees. He feels curiously alone and unprotected—even though the infantry, hidden by the undergrowth, may be all round his troop. It is dark and very frightening.

- 1945 Feb. 23-Mar. 3 The 1st and 2nd Battalions, having moved south from Nijmegen, hold a sector of the line east of Goch.
 Mar. 6-10 After driving south through Weeze and Kavelaer the Grenadier Group pass through the 3rd Division at Kapellen, and moving behind an artillery barrage force their way up on to a high and wooded ridge west of Bonninghardt. For a short time the enemy react violently with small arms and mortar fire, but once the Guards Armoured Division has expanded

- 1945 Mar. 6-10 (contd.) its foothold on the Bonninghardt ridge, the enemy bridgehead west of the Rhine crumbles rapidly.
- Mar. 1-26 The 4th Battalion rests near Geldern.
- Mar. 11-28 The 1st and 2nd Battalions rest near Gennepe.

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1st, 2nd and 4th BATTALIONS. THE DRIVE INTO GERMANY.

- 1945 Mar. 27-29 The assaulting waves of infantry and amphibious tanks cross the Rhine in the cold dawn of March 24th. As soon as a Bailey bridge capable of carrying their Churchill tanks has been flung across the river, the 4th Battalion crosses over, to link up, in common with the remainder of the 6th Guards Tank Brigade, with the 17th United States Airborne Division. However, there is only a thin crust to the enemy defences to the east of the Rhine bridgehead, and the Battalion is placed under command of the British 6th Airborne Division.
- Mar. 29 The squadrons carry the paratroops to Coesfeld, twenty-eight miles to the north, which is occupied against light opposition.
- Mar. 30 **Red and black berets sweep on to the Ems.**

On March 30th the objective for the 4th Battalion and the 6th Airborne Division was even more ambitious—to capture the vital bridge over the River Ems at Greven, thirty-five miles away to the north-east. This time 1 and 3 Squadrons were in the lead, and apart from the leading troop, which carried no infantry so that the guns could be traversed and fired immediately opposition was encountered, each squadron carried forward a company of paratroops. About five miles beyond Coesfeld both squadrons were held up by 88 mm. guns and Bazookas, but the paratroops leaped off the tanks and dealt swiftly with the opposition. Both squadrons then raced on neck and neck, but 3 Squadron dropped out of the race when they ran into a series of road blocks, which, though not defended, imposed sufficient delay to prevent them reaching Greven in daylight and compelled them to harbour at Darfeld. Everything now depended on 1 Squadron. Their advance was unimpeded until they reached Altenburg, five miles west of Greven and the river, where they ran into a German column scurrying away to the north: all the guns traversed quickly and machine-gun bullets streamed into the retreating enemy. There was no time to stop and count the bag, and in the fading light the column dashed on down into the valley and towards the distant chimneys of Greven. Five hundred yards short of the river the tanks dropped off their paratroops who rushed for the bridge and seized it intact within ten minutes. Unfortunately they had been prematurely April-fooled, as their new possession led only on to an island in the middle of the river. Twenty minutes later their real objective, the main bridge three hundred yards upstream, was blown up with a deafening crash almost in their faces. In compensation for this bitter disappointment a passenger train carrying German soldiers on leave from the Russian front came steaming into Greven station. The paratroops allowed the soldiers time to kiss their wives, and then marched them off to spend their leave and several extensions in a prisoner-of-war cage.

- 1945 Mar. 30 The Guards Armoured Division, still under command of the 30th Corps, crosses the Rhine at Rees, and by nightfall, with the Grenadier Group in the lead, has driven a wedge into the stoutly held German defences on the northern flank of the Rhine bridgehead, and has occupied the town of Aalten just inside the Dutch frontier. Vast craters spanning the road and heavy mortar fire in the town itself combine to slow up the advance.

- 1945 Mar. 31 After meeting more craters and demolitions the Grenadier Group continue the advance swiftly up to Groenlo, and then more slowly to Eibergen where they are held up by enemy protecting the crossings over the river. A night assault in pouring rain by the 1st Battalion finds that the enemy have withdrawn, and secures a crossing-place intact. On this day too, the 4th Battalion, many miles to the south-east, crosses the River Ems and reaches the Dortmund-Ems canal to find all bridges blown by the retreating enemy.
- April 2 The delay in bridging the Dortmund-Ems canal gives the enemy time to take up strong positions on the high ground at the approaches to Lengerich, eight miles east of the canal. Despite stout opposition by pupils of the Hanover training school, supported by self-propelled anti-tank guns, men of a parachute battalion storm the heights.
- April 3 The advance sweeps on to Osnabruck and by nightfall the 6th Airborne Division and the 4th Battalion are investing the town from the west and south-east.
- April 3 **The Battle of Bentheim.**

While the 4th Battalion and their airborne passengers were making their spectacular drive into the north German plain, the Guards Armoured Division was battling slowly forward on the left flank of the 2nd Army. After securing their Eibergen bridgehead, the 1st and 2nd Battalions were in reserve while the Irish Guards pushed across the corner of Holland through Enschede and Oldenzaal to the German frontier near Gilderhaus. Here the Irish Guards had a fierce battle against determined German paratroops, who were not finally evicted from the village until the early hours of April 3rd. A few hours later the Grenadier Group passed through, with their objectives the old castled town of Bentheim and the River Ems near Schuttorf, a few miles to the east.

As the leading tank wound its way through the streets of Gilderhaus the commander looked down at his map and wondered how long he would follow the route marked on it before the crash of an anti-tank gun shattered the sides of his turret. Armour formed the spearhead of all the Second Army thrusts into Germany, and for each column the orders were the same: in nearly every case the objective was the limit of the day's advance; the tank and infantry commanders marked the route to be followed on their maps, and once the time of starting was known there were no more instructions to be issued until first contact with the enemy was gained. As these armoured columns were thrusting forward their tentacles every day, there was neither the opportunity to make a careful reconnaissance of the positions of the enemy rearguards ahead nor the guarantee that those positions, encountered in the evening, would still be there the following morning. At the same time, a set-piece attack would have limited drastically the day's advance, and might well have proved a waste of time and ammunition. With complete air superiority and against a broken enemy the long columns of armour and infantry moving along the main roads were both the speediest and easiest to control: the Guards Armoured Division could never have driven ninety-five miles to Brussels in one day nor could the 4th Battalion have carried its paratroops into the heart of Germany if they had been ordered to deploy from the outset. Yet set against this was the nerve-racking strain imposed on the leading tank commander, for whom every yard and corner of the advance held a promise of death. East of Gilderhaus trouble came soon.

Three hundred yards beyond the leading sections of the battle-worn Irish Guards the first three tanks were knocked out by self-propelled guns, and the commanders had to cope with the problem of two vehicle-bound battalions strung out like a snake or several miles to the rear. The King's Company, nearest to the scene of trouble,



April, 1945. A tank crew of the 2nd Battalion bivouac near Oldenzaal in Holland, on the eve of the Battle of Bentheim.

Germany, April, 1945. The spearhead of the Second Army. The 4th Battalion and troops of the 6th Airborne Division pause in Mellendorf, north of Hanover.

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at once leaped out of their vehicles and drove the enemy out of a small wood in front, under cover of which the 1st Battalion could form up for an attack on Bentheim itself. Soon after midday the Battalion attacked on a two-company front behind a barrage fired by the Leicestershire Yeomanry, and supported by tanks of the 2nd Battalion. Before long the tanks were bogged in the heavy going, and when 4 Company on the right of the advance emerged from the shelter of some thick woods, they ran into heavy machine-gun fire from houses on the outskirts of Bentheim and suffered a number of casualties. Supported by fire from the lightly armoured Bren carriers, the attack was pressed home, and by late afternoon both leading companies were established in the town. Bentheim, itself on an eminence, and surmounted by its impregnable-looking castle, offered the enemy every scope for a resolute defence, and as the troops worked their way up the narrow streets they felt that their troubles were only just beginning. The enemy had put up a desperate defence in low-lying Gilderhaus, and had done their best to block the approaches to Bentheim, but for some reason they withdrew from the town that evening. By midday on April 4th the whole of Bentheim was in British hands, and from the summit of the castle tower the Guardsmen, as they lay and sunned themselves, looked out for many miles over the flat country to the east where the white flags of surrender were already fluttering from the windows of Schutterf.

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| 1945 | Apr. 4 | The 4th Battalion advances from Osnabruck to Minden, an advance of forty-two miles, and the longest in the history of the Churchill tank. |
| | April 5 | The airborne troops secure a bridgehead over the Weser supported by 2 Squadron of the 4th Battalion. |
| | April 6 | 3 Squadron of the 4th Battalion, in support of the 5th Parachute Brigade, breaks out of the Weser bridgehead and seizes a bridge intact over the River Leine at Bordenau north of Hanover. |
| | April 7-16 | The 4th Battalion, by now well ahead of the other spearheads of the 2nd Army, rests by the shores of the Steinhuder lake. |
| | April 8-17 | The Guards Armoured Division breaks out of its bridgehead over the Ems at Lingen and battles slowly eastwards through flat and thickly wooded country. On several days the Grenadier Group are in the lead, but only near Kettenkamp do they find the enemy resolved to fight to the last. Elsewhere Bazookas and a dearth of passable roads slow down the advance. |
| | April 12-22 | The drive to the Elbe. |

While the 4th Battalion was resting by the Steinhuder Lake, the remainder of the 6th Guards Tank Brigade pushed on north-eastwards towards the Elbe. The town of Uelzen proved a tough nut to crack, and on April 16th the 4th Battalion and the 6th Airborne Division were called up to throw a steel ring round the town. Surprisingly enough the Germans scarcely contested this encircling movement at all: in one or two villages through which the Grenadiers passed, Bazooka teams put in a fleeting appearance but the self-propelled guns which had been left to support them were all found abandoned. In one village inside the ring a German colonel was found sunbathing in his garden. He did not bat an eyelid when a troop of Churchills drove on to his front lawn, and lost no time in explaining how delighted he was to meet the Brigade of Guards again, since he had stayed with the Coldstream in 1911.

For the final dash to the Elbe the 4th Battalion was transferred to the command of the 5th Division, newly arrived from Italy. Early on April 21st the two leading squadrons set off in pouring rain, and for many miles raced each other unimpeded by the enemy. On the left 3 Squadron reached a point only two or three miles from the

Germany, April, 1945. An outpost of the King's Company in Zeven.

Associated Press



river when they were held up by anti-tank guns and infantry, but the Germans had been thrown into confusion by the speed of the advance and they withdrew over the river during the night.

On the right 2 Squadron were not so lucky: a battalion of desperate Hitler Jugend, supported by anti-tank guns, halted the advance from strong positions near Hohenzethen. Several tanks were knocked out, and both infantry and tank crews suffered heavy casualties from intense machine-gun fire. Capt. F. E. Clifford was among the more fortunate: a well-concealed anti-tank gun manned by female flak-gunners fired eight times at his tank without scoring a single hit. Gradually the enemy were forced back over the river, and when the west banks were firmly in the hands of the infantry, the tanks were able to withdraw.

April 19 to

May 1

The 1st and 2nd Battalions strike north towards Cuxhaven.

After a brief rest the Guards Armoured Division was transferred to the command of the 12th Corps and given the task of striking north into the Cuxhaven peninsula and cutting the escape routes from beleaguered Bremen. The Grenadier Group led the 5th Guards Armoured Brigade up the road already followed by the 7th Armoured Division as far as Tostedt, where the column swung left-handed to cut the Bremen-Hamburg Autobahn at Gross Sittensen. Despite boggy ground and scattered opposition near the autobahn the Group achieved this task, and by nightfall on April 19th reached the village of Wiertzen.

During the night the Germans brought up reserves to block the approaches to Zeven, the only communication centre in the peninsula still in their hands. The Grenadiers, continuing their advance westwards, had to overcome stubborn opposition from the 115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment before capturing the villages of Wiersdorf and Heeslingen, two miles east of Zeven. For three days the Group remained in these positions under heavy shell-fire while patrols probed the enemy defences to the west. In the early morning of April 24th a Brigade attack was launched on Zeven. The 1st Battalion, advancing from Heeslingen through the pinewoods, quickly overran the German defences, although the supporting tanks soon became bogged in the low-lying ground. On this day too, a composite force of armoured cars, infantry and a squadron of the 2nd Battalion made a wide sweep to cut the main roads running north from Zeven at Selsingen.

The Germans, by now desperately short of equipment and information, were relying on extensive demolitions to delay the British advance long enough for them to escape over the Elbe into Schleswig Holstein. For four days the sappers worked untiringly to bridge the vast craters blown by aerial bombs and sea mines from the dockyards of Bremen. Meanwhile the Grenadiers, balking in their efforts to push on north by these demolitions, were ordered to liberate the concentration camp at Sandbostel near Selsingen, where typhus was reported to be causing three hundred deaths a day. The enemy had blown the bridge over the river at the approaches to the camp, and an assault crossing at night was launched by the King's Company to secure a bridging site. An initial foothold was gained on the far bank of the river, but at daybreak the Germans, ensconced on the wooded heights near the camp, overlooked the Guardsmen vainly trying to entrench themselves in the marshes below. The enemy fire was so heavy that one after another the platoons had to be withdrawn: less than a dozen sodden guardsmen from the last platoon were able to regain the near bank. After this failure a full-scale attack was made: the 1st Battalion crossed the river in boats some distance down-stream from the camp, and, supported by the guns of the Leicestershire Yeomanry, drove the enemy from the approaches to the camp. The Nazi gaolers had been reinforced by SS troops, but by the evening of April 29th the camp was in British hands.



June 9th, 1945. Tanks of the 2nd Battalion lined up for the "Farewell to Armour" parade on Rotenburg aerodrome.

July 20th, 1945. The 1st Battalion march past Mr. Churchill in Berlin. *Keystone Press Agency*



By May 1st relief teams had sealed off the disease-ridden precincts from the outside world. A sweep to the north showed that the enemy had withdrawn behind yet more demolitions, and the 1st and 2nd Battalions, who had unknowingly fought their last battle in the war, moved to the small village of Mulsum near Bremervörde. Here, a week later, VE Day overtook them.

1945 April 30 to May 3 On April 30th, after the infantry have forced a crossing over the Elbe, the 4th Battalion crosses the river and protects the right flank of the drive to Lubeck. Fighting virtually ceases, but progress is severely hampered by the roads blocked with refugees and long columns of prisoners. On May 3rd the Battalion enters Lubeck on the tail of the 11th Armoured Division.

May 8 to

June 9

Operation Eclipse and Farewell to Armour.

On VE Day the three battalions of the Regiment in Germany were in reserve, but none of them was given a chance to sit back and sigh with relief or stand up and shout with joy. The 1st Battalion was sent to Stade near the west bank of the Elbe north of Hamburg; the 2nd Battalion moved to the small port of Freiburg on the Elbe estuary, and the 4th Battalion drove north to billets in pleasant seaside villages near Kiel. The three battalions all began their occupational role in country untarnished by the breath of war, but there were many problems to be faced. Operation Eclipse embraced them all—the disarming of the German forces, the segregation of the S.S. and ardent Nazis from their more harmless comrades in arms, the collection of displaced persons for repatriation, and all the functions of local government necessary to keep the civil population fed and employed. Towards the end of May, with the more urgent of these tasks completed, the 1st and 2nd Battalions moved to another area of occupation south of Bremen. Here their chief preoccupations were the control of the lawless bands of displaced persons who emerged from their hideouts in the woods to ravage German farmsteads, and the apprehension of self-demobilised German soldiers trying to infiltrate their way back to their homes in the west.

Soon after the end of the war it became known that the Guards Armoured Division and the 6th Guards Tank Brigade would lose their tanks and resume their traditional role as infantry. A massed farewell parade was arranged on Rotenburg aerodrome, but the Churchills of the 4th Battalion were too far away to take part, and were quietly and sadly handed in at a vast dump near Hamburg. The Shermans of the 2nd Battalion were polished and painted for a fortnight, and on June 9th made their final appearance when the whole of the 5th Guards Armoured Brigade drove slowly across the arena. The sun glinted on the barrels as the turrets swung in their last salute to the Commander-in-Chief, and then the long columns wheeled away, over the hill and out of sight. Thus, four years almost to the day after the entry of the Brigade of Guards into the field of armoured warfare, the Guards Armoured Division and the 6th Guards Tank Brigade passed into history.



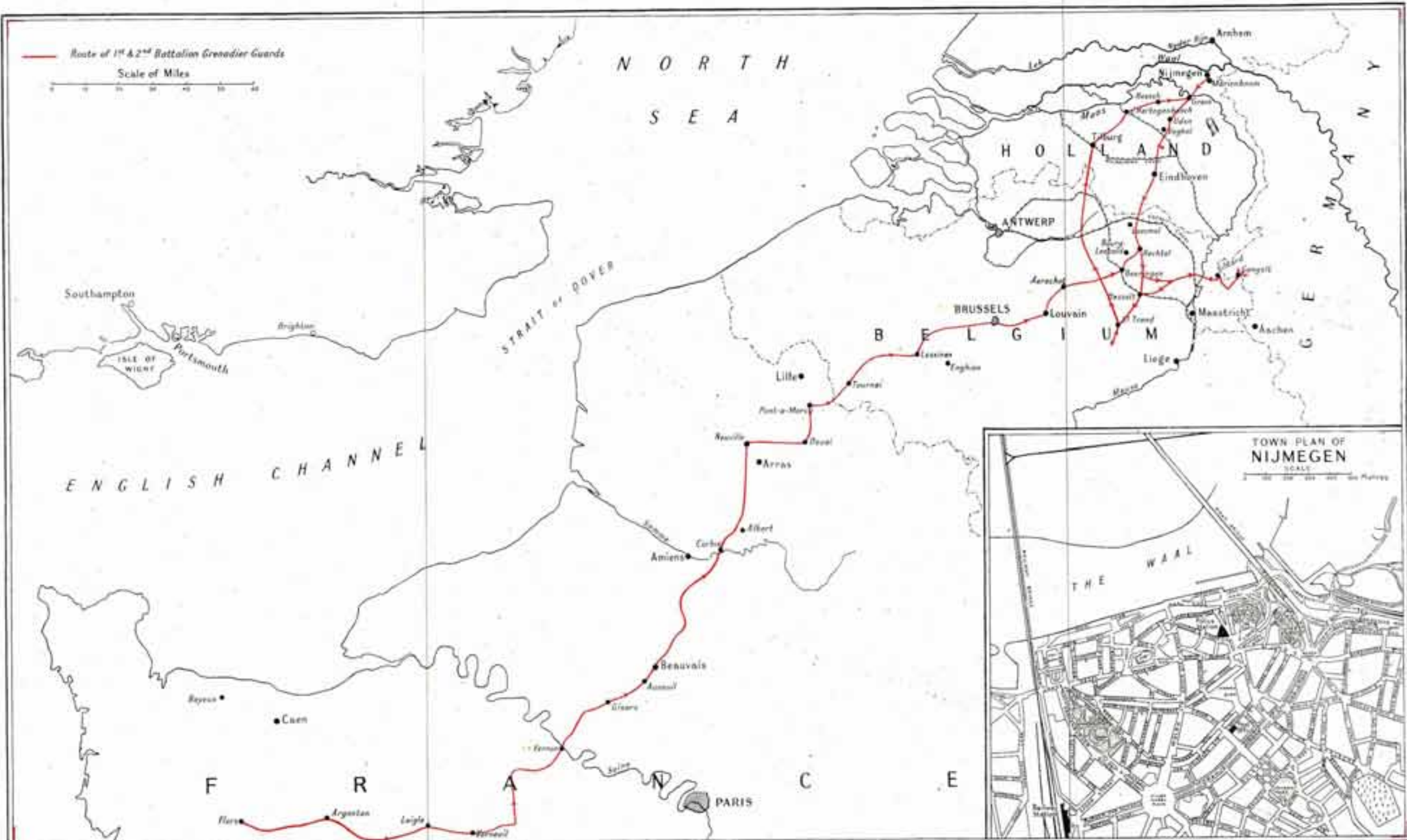
The End of the Journey

1945 July 4 to
Aug. 3 The 1st Battalion in Berlin.

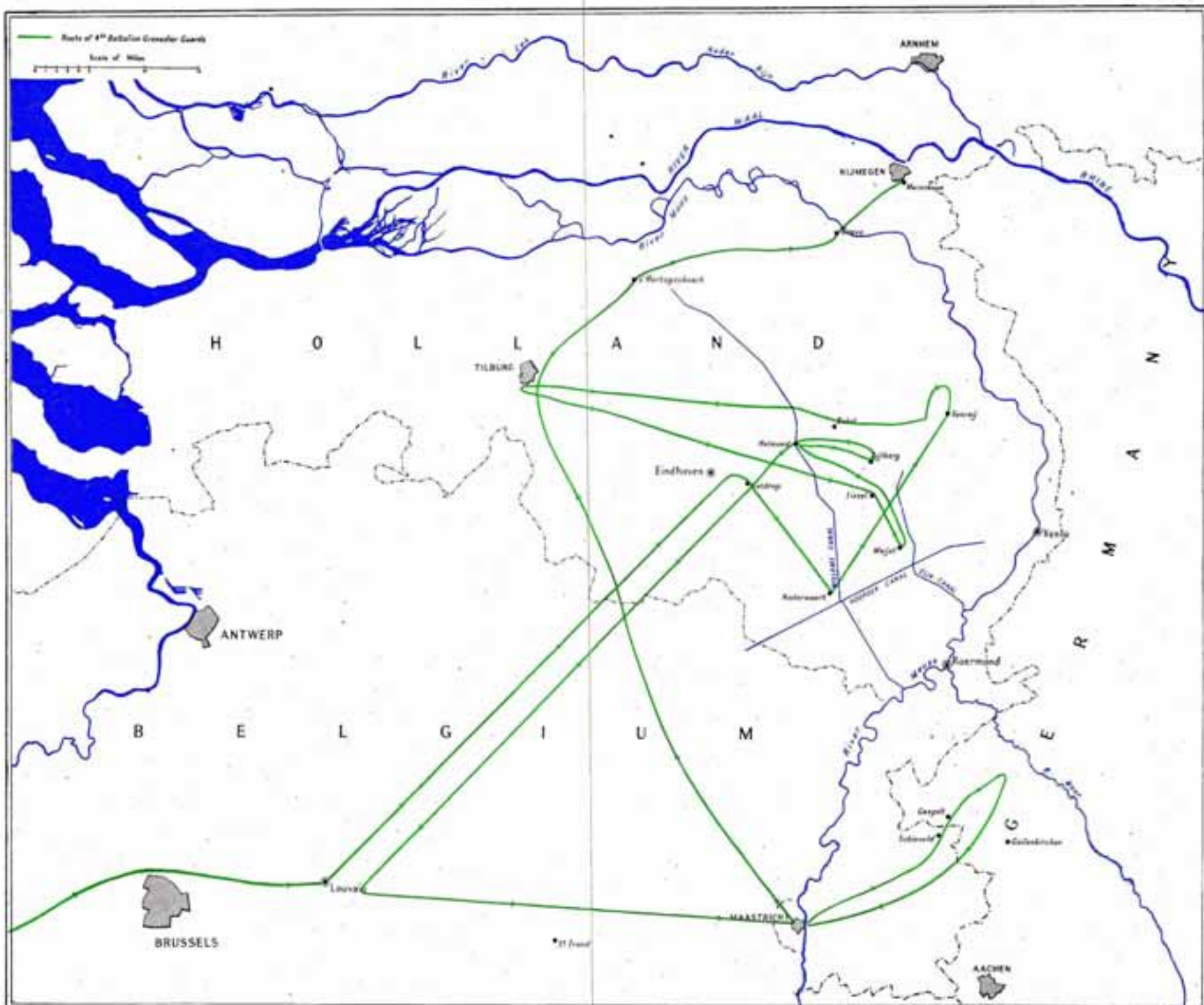
After a delay of nearly two months, the 1st Battalion were at last ordered to prepare for an immediate move to Berlin. The news of the British entry had been much publicised in the press and on the wireless, and it was surprising when the column was halted at Magdeburg, and the Adjutant was led at the point of the bayonet before the local Russian General, whose forces had only relieved the Americans in the town a few days before. He had heard nothing of British troops moving through the Russian Zone, and was not in telephonic communication with the capital. After an hour's discussion, the column was allowed to continue. In Berlin, press photographers and news-reel cameras were waiting to record the ceremonial entry, and the Battalion drove past the Commander of the 7th Armoured Division to their allotted areas in the northern part of the city. Their quarters were in the former Hermann Goering barracks in the suburb of Wedding. These barracks, badly damaged by the R.A.F. and by the Russian artillery, were in a disgusting condition: flies swarmed everywhere in the filth, bodies still lay unburied beneath the ruins, there were no fittings, no furniture, and at first no sanitation. In their first two weeks of occupation, the Battalion, assisted by a small army of Germans, who were only too willing to work in return for extra rations, made the barracks habitable.

Within two days of their arrival, the Battalion took part in their first ceremony. It was the hoisting of the British flag on the Grosses Stern, the monument in the Charlottenburger Chaussee which commemorated the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War. The Union Jack, it was said, was the same which the 7th Armoured Division had flown at El Alamein, and flying from the top of the monument, there was already an unofficial but triumphant French Tricolor. On July 12th the Battalion provided a Guard of Honour at the Brandenburg Gate for the Russian Marshals Zhukov and Rokossovski, when they were presented by Field-Marshal Montgomery with the G.C.B. and K.C.B. respectively, and on the following day the whole Battalion took part in a big parade with 7th Armoured Division. On July 15th, Mr. Churchill arrived by air for the Potsdam conference, to be greeted by a Guard of Honour from the Battalion, and five days later they took part in the last and most impressive of all the Berlin parades, and one of the most memorable in which a battalion of the Regiment has ever participated.

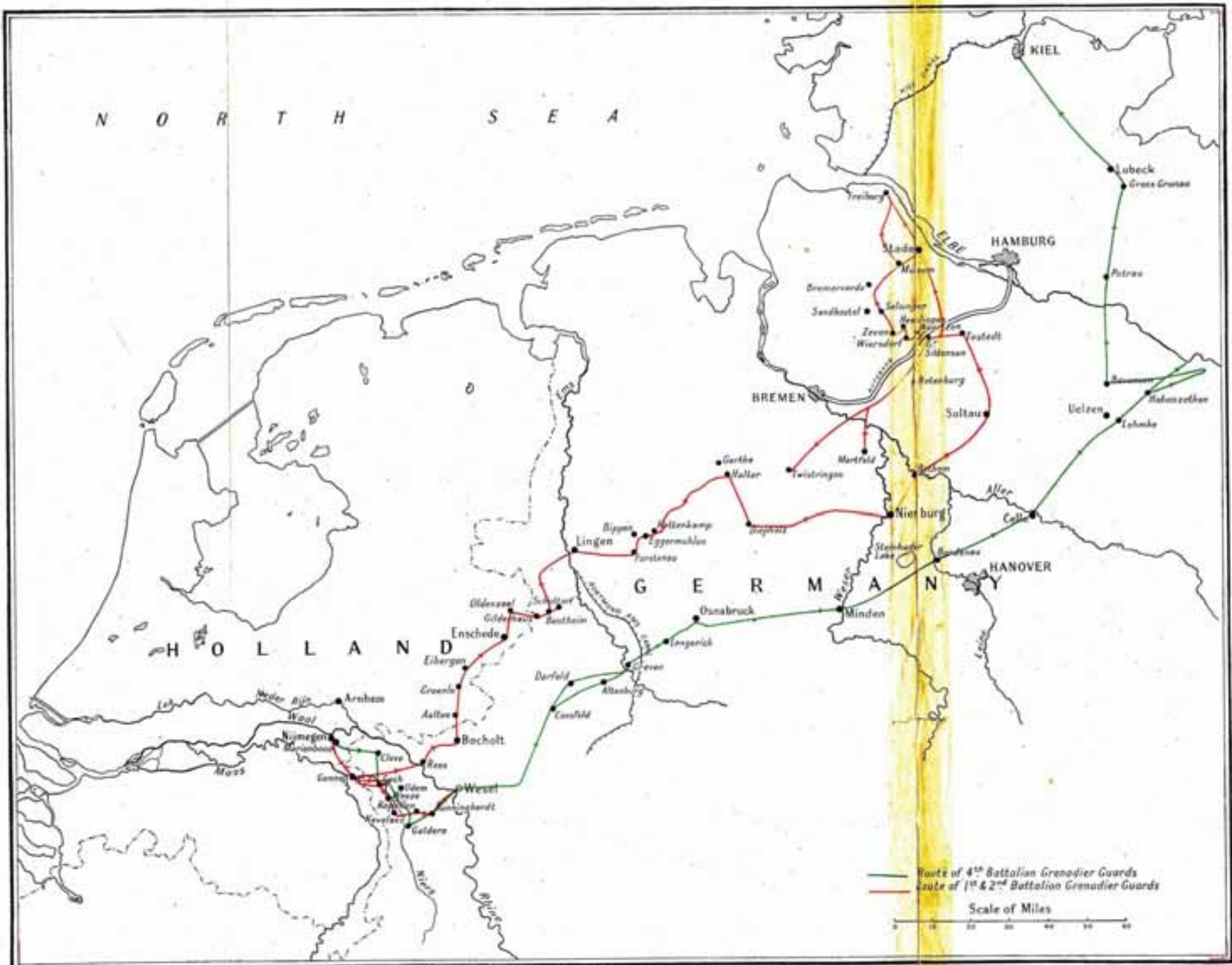
When the Prime Minister and his entourage arrived at the saluting base in the Charlottenburger Chaussee, they were greeted by salvo after salvo from the guns massed around the base of the Grosses Stern. The party then climbed into four half-tracks provided by the Battalion—the same vehicles which had carried Field-Marshal Montgomery and his attendant generals round Rotenburg aerodrome a month before—and drove slowly past the lines of guns, tanks and infantry. The wheeled and tracked columns were drawn up between the Grosses Stern and the Brandenburg Gate, and the Battalion, with other infantry units, were positioned along a road running north through the Tiergarten. After the inspection, the columns of armour and infantry drove and marched past Mr. Churchill. Led to the saluting base by a naval detachment with the Marine Band at the head, the Battalion marched past to the "British Grenadiers" played by the massed bands opposite the saluting base. No peacetime Nazi parade through an undamaged Berlin could have equalled in splendour the scene of these victorious Englishmen marching past their leader. For Churchill, it marked the climax of his career. For the Grenadiers, not only of the 1st Battalion, but of all battalions scattered throughout Europe, it symbolised the end of the Second World War.



Holland, Belgium and Northern France. August—December, 1944.



The 4th Battalion in Holland. October, 1944—January, 1945.



The Last Phase in North-West Europe. February—May, 1945.