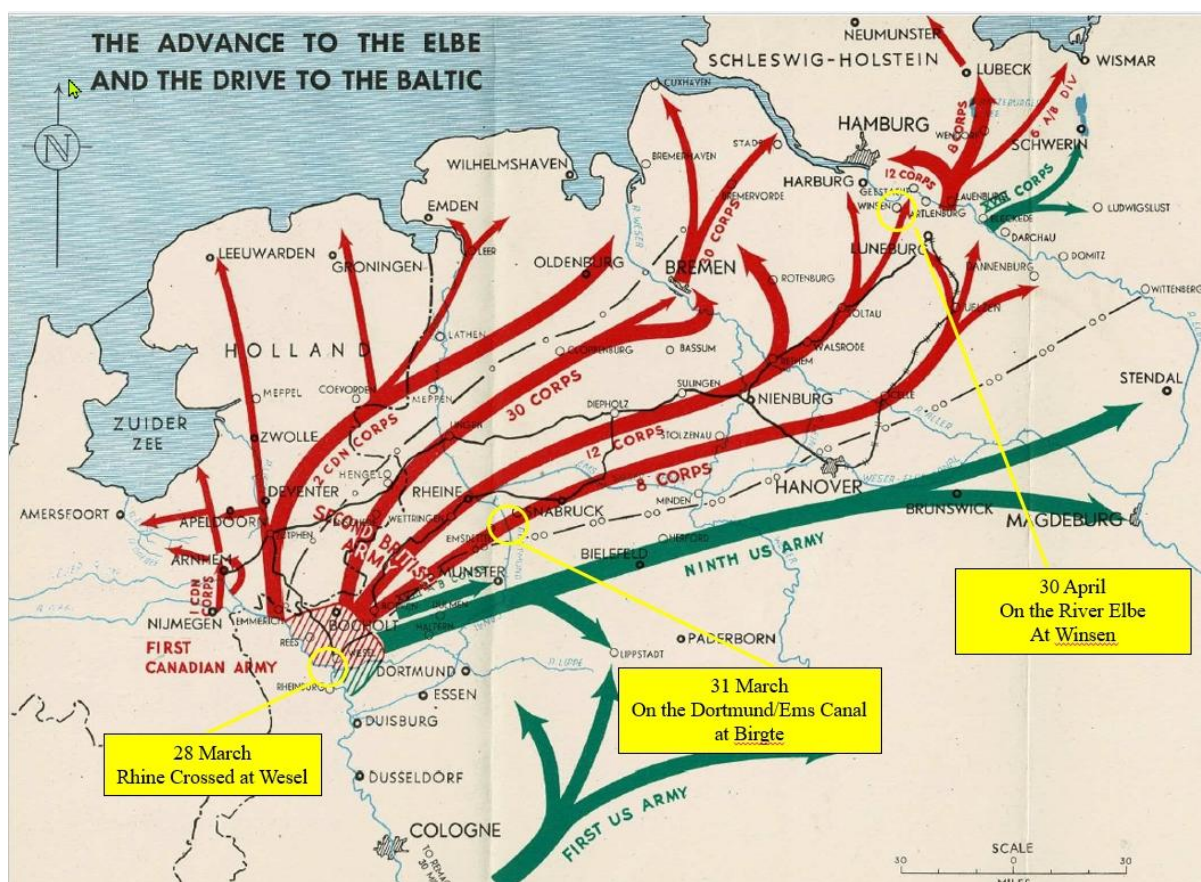
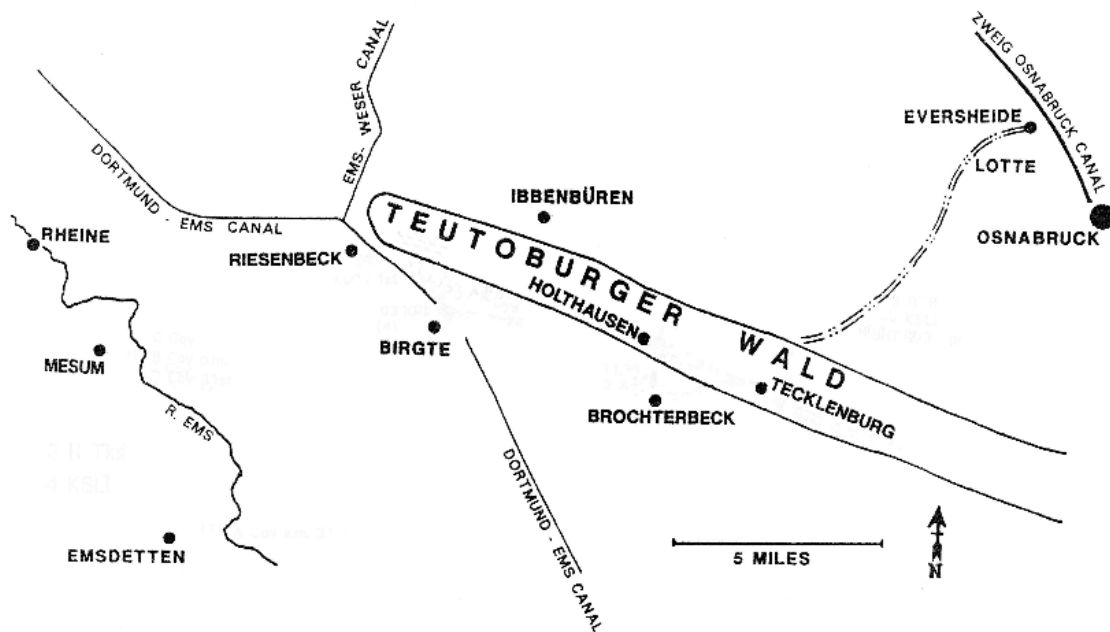


Towards The Elbe and The Baltic



On 31 Mar the Battalion was uncomfortably spread out along the road at Leer. 159 Bde Gp was working along the left route and 29 Bde Gp on the right. 29 Bde Gp were pushing on and keeping pace with 6 Airborne. It was then that the Tac R reported the German 15 Panzer Grenadiers moving SE towards Munster. If they came down in force as they were reported it appeared that they could cut across our line of communication and isolate the armour and troops out in front. Therefore the Bn Gp was ordered to take up a strung out defensive position extending over 4 miles to counter any possible attack from the north. It seemed a grim task and we felt very thin on the ground. There was slight spasmodic shelling from an 88 Battery beyond the ridge to the north. Full preparations were made to meet the threatened attack, mines laid on likely approaches and anti tank defences tied up. As the Battalion was likely to hold this area for the next day or so patrols were sent out to check up on suspect woods and buildings. To the north of the road about 2 miles away lay the village of Stelen which B Coy with the squadron of tanks were sent to check and clear if necessary. It was found to be empty but just as the force was organising itself to return to base an enemy lorry, loaded with troops and with one fellow sitting on the radiator, swept round the corner of the street. It was easy meat for the tanks who gave it one 77mm shell and left the infantry to collect survivors. The outsider of the party who was badly wounded argued that it was unfair to fire anti tank weapons at soft vehicles such as his, but the tank men didn't see his point of view! Forty odd prisoners were flushed out during the day from the Battalion area. The anticipated attack never materialised and the next day another long drive through Burgsteinfurt, Emsdetten, Mesum and Rissenbeck brought the Battalion to the Dortmund-Ems Canal at Birgte.

THE TEUTOBURGER WALD



The KSLI had secured a bridge over the canal intact and were holding a narrow bridgehead beyond it. Canals in Germany are anything up to 50 metres wide , not the narrow canals found in England.



The Dortmund Ems canal



Birgte Bridge 2010

Their patrols had located the enemy holding the pass with the wooded high ground just beyond the canal in force. This was to be the Battalion's first big battle east of the Rhine.

Ray Griffiths recalled – April 1st, April Fools' Day, Easter Sunday, however one remembers this day it proved to be a difficult one. From our exposed positions near the edge of the forest the we had a clear view of the activities around the Birgte Bridge and watched with some trepidation the sudden appearance of several enemy fighter bombers who circled around the area and then swooped down and dropped their bombs towards the replacement bridge. The air was full of the sound of aircraft and anti aircraft gunfire, most of the gunfire from the ground forces and the infantry rifle and machine gun fire. The bridge was undamaged but one near miss luckily failed to explode.

This was also the first time we had been attacked by enemy Messerschmitt MG 262 jet aircraft and ME 109's, a surprise to all concerned. It was later noted that at least 4 of the attackers were shot down.

A plan was made and the Battalion deployed to sweep through the woods, clear the enemy and secure the high ground. An officer, who took part in the operation, gives the following account:

It was not possible for the tanks to move into the woods with us but they gave support in fire over the open ground. The wood was dense and the going bad and they could not do much to help us. My company was one of those concerned in the sweep, so we moved into the woods to a forming up place, for a normal wood clearing operation. We were going to move one platoon forward and two behind. We got on the appointed start line and into position ready for the word go. Before we were to move it had been arranged for a 5 minute stonk by 25 pounders to be laid on the wood ahead of us, so we lay down waiting. As the first two shells landed, I thought they were a bit close and so did the Coy Comd, but hoped they were only ranging shots. However the salvos landed just as close, and too late did we realise that they were landing on our own forward platoon. Nothing could be done to stop it and before many shells had landed we realized that we had had numerous casualties in the forward platoon. Help was given as soon as possible to evacuate the wounded but several had been killed outright, including the Pl Comd. That meant that the platoon was materially finished before it had even started. We had to push on through these wounded, still hoping that the enemy opposition would be negligible. Suddenly we were halted by a whistling of bullets all around us, and we went to ground. We realized that it was going to be no easy battle for us. The two platoons took up firing positions and returned the fire. The enemy were well camouflaged and very hard to pick out whereas we had been suddenly put to the ground and were not yet able to use the features correctly and many of their men were being wounded. It was decided to put one platoon onto the high ground on their left, and on the way there the Pl Comd was seriously wounded and the Coy 2ic killed. By now the company was reduced to about 50 men who were able to fight. Bullets and grenades were coming at us from all directions and at one time we were completely surrounded. We then formed ourselves into a compact body and arranged ourselves around a bunker, and were able to ward off several fanatical attacks. The 18 set was still working but it was very difficult to give the CO a true picture of the situation. It was soon realised that the position was hopeless and could not be held for much longer. Ammunition was getting low and we had only one Bren left which the CSM was using to very good effect. It was then that orders were received to withdraw to the edge of the wood with what force we had left. There was little time for orders and every man was told to do his best to get back. We made it in bounds and after a dash of about 100 yards I stopped with the 18 set operator hoping to get more news over the air, but when we had just got it fixed up, again behind the bank, an explosion knocked the operator and myself into the set. I hadn't heard the full force of the explosion, as I was wearing the earphones, but I learned afterwards that a bazooka had exploded on top of the bank above our heads. It had actually blown my steel helmet off my head and put the 18 set out of commission. Then remained the last dash to the edge of the wood with bullets still whistling around and we eventually reached the clearing with about

15 men, who at once took up a defensive position along the small bank. At this time German aircraft appeared and strafed the wood and one of the chaps was shot through the leg. That made two casualties amongst the pathetic remaining force, as one had been hit just previously. We were now back with the company wireless carrier which had got as far forward as possible and on contacting the CO on the 19 set we were ordered to pull right back as another company was being put forward for the night. The men got back by making a dash across open fields and trying to evade a persistent stream of Spandau bullets.

We were then faced with the problem of getting back the wounded actually with us. We put them on the wireless carrier, one across the front the other pushed right down alongside the driver. Unfortunately we could not go straight back as one of the company carriers had bogged in a ditch halfway up the hill, and we had to take the wounded into some dead ground where they were handed over to the SBs. We could not get the carrier back this way because of a steep bank, so we had to head again up the hill and out across in front of the bogged vehicle, hoping that we didn't get stuck. We were lucky and got safely through although Spandau bullets splattered around the carrier as we turned. We were only just in time because a few minutes later the ditched carrier was brewed up with the bazooka.

From identifications taken it was revealed that the enemy was a composite unit from the NCOs infantry training school at Hanover. Ray Griffiths, after the war met a German soldier who had fought in the engagement -

Doctor Wolf Berlin was a young soldier stationed at Bergen, where together with Officers and Trainee Officers and NCOs from their School near Hannover, they were instructed to march overnight for each night between 2nd March and 1 April, a distance of approximately 200 kms, carrying all their weapons, food and ammunition. After this exhausting journey, the group comprising about 3000 men circumnavigated to the North of Ibbenburen and finally approached the Western end of the Teutoburger Wald. They then followed the forest paths and approached the top of the Riesenbecker Ridge where they joined up with others and were able to observe the British forces assembled on the South side of the Wald. Shortly after their arrival, they were engaged in heavy fighting with the 3 Mons who had made their way up the slopes and pathways towards the top of the ridge on the 2nd April 1945.

This makeshift force fought well and had every advantage of ground on their side. Reg Worton recalled: we saw stragglers, young boys and if they did not put their hands up, empty, we shot them.

A&D Coys were withdrawn from the wood and the Battalion consolidated on the edge of it. The following day 3 Mons tried to roll up the position by a left flanking attack but experienced the same difficulty, enemy infiltration through the dense trees and undergrowth; they likewise were called off after suffering heavy casualties. The Battalion's casualties from this attack were 2 officers and 10 ORs killed 2 officers and 36 ORs wounded and 13 missing. It was the first and only time the Battalion could not recover its dead and wounded and the first time in battle that we had men missing. Another unpleasant feature about the Dortmund-Ems operation was the frequent bombing and strafing from the air. Regularly, about 1700hrs, a dozen or so planes would attack the position with heavy anti personnel bombs. The bridge appeared to be their target but intense a fire from every tank and individual weapons put them off their aim. It was a heartening sight to see one of them come roaring down and crash in a ball of flame on the wooded ridge in front of us. Everybody who had fired a weapon claimed the kill and there was much argument as to who should claim the credit. Despite the concentration of these attacks however no casualties were suffered. In the afternoon and evening of

the 3 Apr, the Battalion was relieved by a Battalion of 4 KOSB and concentrated ready to bypass the opposition and continue the advance.

Ray Griffiths recalled - A and D Coys moved from the protection of their slit trenches and moved into the forest towards the part of the Riesenberger Ridge, known locally as Josefs Height and also to the left of the Ibbenburen road. They climbed upwards through the dense clinging undergrowth and the closely packed trees. The armour of 2 Fife and Forfar were in close support up to the tree line and when it was realized that they would not be of useful support, they withdrew to their position near the canal.

We had almost reached the top of the ridge when they were met with fierce resistance from the entrenched German forces. At the same time the other companies bringing up the rear were met with what was thought to be enemy mortar fire and heavy gunfire and all the companies were ordered to withdraw to their original start point. A large number of casualties was suffered, including 21 officers and other ranks killed [it was identified later that most of these were the result of 'friendly fire' when our own support artillery and tank gunfire fell short or struck the top of the trees.] The German force comprising SS officers and Hitler Youth still had command of the ridge and the road, although they too had suffered casualties.

Night time fell on this troubled day and we consolidated at the edge of the forest and prepared for the next day, but were always alert for any counter attack from their fanatical opponents. As a further sufferance, it rained heavily that night; nothing makes an English soldier more fed up and miserable than rain, running down his neck, forming puddles in which to stand at the bottom of your slit trench, and soaking your boots and socks. Many were the moans of 'I only put these socks on clean on 3 weeks ago'.

The infantry man's normal practice, when having 'dug in', meaning the excavation of a grave like trench, using the soil as an additional barrier on the perimeter, but more importantly a door from a house or farm building would be scrounged and laid across one end of the trench, the spare soil put on top of this and one of the pair occupying the trench would be able to rest as comfortably as the cold and wet would allow, while the other one would be on guard at the other end. Doors, however, were not available at this time.

This aspect of 'togetherness' built up an aura of companionship, camaraderie and respect for each of your comrades which would stand us in good stead through the coming days when more desperate and frightening experiences occurred.

2nd April *With the reversal of fortune which the we had suffered and the realization that the enemy were entrenched on top of the Riesenbecker Berg ridge in greater numbers than anticipated, the Mons were ordered to penetrate into the forest and clear the ridge from West to East to eliminate the enemy opposition and clear the route to Ibbenburen for the Div's armour and infantry. It would be a long and arduous route, they would have to travel through a densely wooded area, with tangled and bushy undergrowth, and with irregular valleys and depressions, climbing upwards without the use of any useful transport, having to leave the carrier platoon and the anti-tank platoon with the Bn HQ on the edge of the forest.*

Communication by radio proved to be difficult, the signallers carrying the wireless on their back, accompanying the officers, were conspicuously exposed; however a telephone line was run out behind the attackers and proved to be a useful aid later.

Visibility was severely restricted, in places limited to a few yards. Soon the advance was stopped by the heavy sniper and machine gun fire, however a few infantry men reached the top of the ridge where they were soon counter-attacked by a strong enemy force, who were firing from the hip and charging with fixed bayonets. It was at this point where Cpl Edward Chapman, showing great bravery and great heroism and valour, fought back; firing a Bren gun from the hip he succeeded in preventing the German force from overrunning his platoon's position. For this action he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

As far as it is known or recorded elsewhere, this fierce engagement of the Second World War between the British and German forces on 2/3 April was the only one where a Truce was called mid term to allow the dead and wounded of both sides to be gathered and attended.

A young German officer cadet, who could speak English, explained the situation regarding the dead and unattended wounded of both sides to a 3 Mons prisoner and both of them with a white handkerchief prepared to go over to the British position to obtain a cease fire, to enable the wounded to be collected. 3 Mons CO agreed, the guns were silent and the British medical staff and stretcher bearers collected the wounded. The young German then returned to his unit and the shooting started again.

On the 4th it was a long drive to catch up with the 29 Armd Bde Gp which had been making good progress whilst the Inf Bde Gp had been wrestling with the enemy at Ibbenburen (above). The route lay through Tecklenburg, Lotte and onto Osterkappeln which was reached about 1500hrs. There the company started to brew up and settle in for the night but it was not so easy as all that. Enemy had been reported moving about in large numbers in the woods and general areas around the village of Buttebohn. With a groan and a sigh, partly cooked food was either hastily swallowed or preserved for future consideration and in a race against darkness the Battalion speeded over the intervening 20 miles. It was essential to make contact with the enemy by daylight as it would be well nigh impossible to locate them in such a big and vague area once it had become dark. Whips were cracked and no time wasted. On arrival it was found that the 15/19 had mopped up a number of enemy groups but to clean the area thoroughly and round up all that enemy would be a long winded and unproductive operation. It was therefore decided to let sleeping dogs lie and to preserve our energy for our own role of pushing straight ahead. Other formations following up behind would deal with trouble of this sort.



The 13 Field Squadron Royal Engineers bridge over the canal

Schlusslbург Bridgehead

Next day the Battalion group raced forward to try and secure a bridge over the river Weser. Passing through the KSLI Gp at Laversloh with troops entangled speed once again became the war cry. The air was full of exhortations for more speed and villages with white flags fluttering as a sign of surrender and as an unspoken appeal not to brew them up were passed by in rapid succession. The first trouble was encountered at Glissen where the leading tank was knocked out. D Coy was detached to deal with the situation while the remainder of the group pushed on towards the river. B Coy with their squadron of Fife and Forfar went off NE as soon as the trouble was met at Glissen and reached the river at Schlusslburg without opposition. The remainder of the Battalion continued along the main axis to Musleringen, due West of the point where B Coy had rejoined after they had cleared up the village of Diersmwhich yielded 9 PoWs.

There was no bridge at this point of the river, only a ferry. B Coy made their way across in one boat found on the bank and was later followed by C Coy using assault boats.

A Class V Raft was procured and after a delicate and lengthy ferrying operation the MG PI with their Vickers and two anti tank guns were sent over to support the bridgehead. The whole operation was completed without ground interference and the two companies with their supporting arms formed themselves into a tight defensive position based on a group of farm buildings. A Coy assisted by the

Pnr Pl, assumed responsibility for ferrying supplies etc and took up a position on the home side of the river with Battalion HQ just behind them.

The bridge head position was open to enemy infiltration all the time, especially by night. A heavy patrolling programme was laid on and patrol encounters were numerous. The enemy was holding positions in strength in the close country to the south and constant alertness was necessary. During the first night the right flank of the bridge head was invested by the enemy, so much so that it became necessary to attack at dawn with a platoon to clear the perimeter.

This attack, although supported by artillery, mortar and MG fire, was repulsed with heavy casualties and several of the wounded were left lying between the enemy positions unable to get back to our lines. The Coy sniper went forward again on his own with the Bren gun to within 30 yards of the enemy positions under heavy fire and attempted to cover the wounded out. Three of the wounded managed to get back under this cover, but three were unable to move. He then returned to his company and found two SBs who volunteered to go forward with him to collect the wounded. Waving a Red Cross flag he exposed himself to the enemy and fearlessly led his party forward to the wounded chaps when they safely evacuated.

The rafting operation was fraught with difficulties and it described by a member of the pioneer platoon as follows:

It was soon decided that the swiftly flowing river was going to give us no end of trouble. After unsuccessfully attempting to put a rope across to assist us it was decided to start rafting with paddles only and the jeeps etc were brought to the bank. Before any further progress could be made the first bombing attack started on the armoured brigade's bridgehead to the north and we were subject to a short low level machine gun attack from the fighters protecting the attack. This was soon over and the first Jeep was loaded and taken across. On account of the current, instead of landing at the ramp across the river the Jeep was eventually beached 300 yards down. Trouble from the air really started at this point. As the raft was on its return journey it was machine gunned but luckily came through in one piece, and for the next hour we were subjected to continuous strafing. Guns, ammunition, carriers etc. were sent back to the tree lined avenue 100 yards from the river. No one in the boating parties had had time to dig themselves a pit, so they used the two OP tanks for protection, dodging first from one side then to the other as the planes came in. All types of planes came at us continuously: FWs, Messerschmidts, Stukas and Dorniers, but fortunately there were no casualties. The attack slackened off about 1900hrs, when it began to rain heavily, and by 1930 hrs we were able to start rafting again. First across was an anti tank gun followed by the MTO's Jeep and ammunition etc by this time it was dark and it was decided to leave the operation until the morning.

On one trip we were honoured by the presence of the CO and 2ic who both had their views as to how the raft should be managed. Despite the swift stream, their continued efforts were successful, to their obvious satisfaction and the amusement of all concerned.

Rafting recommenced about 0600hrs and by 0730hrs 2 more jeeps and the second 6 Pounder were safely ferried to the other side, without enemy interference. During the morning the bank was quiet except for occasional planes coming over and a terrifying period when 20mm AA guns were fired in the ground role.

The return journey commenced at 1400hrs that afternoon and was completed by 1930hrs the only trouble met in this phase of the operation occurred when ferrying the first 6 Pounder. As the raft was crossing to pick up the gun, three FWs suddenly appeared up river and dived

towards the crossing. Spotting the raft in the centre of the stream and the activity on the banks, they dropped lower with obvious intent.

Six weary men, rather worn out from the previous machine gunning gave up their paddling as the planes opened up. None had much hope in his heart of getting away with it. All of a sudden as the left hand plane opened up on the banks, six Tempests appeared from nowhere, and before those six men could realise it, the FWs were being chased all over the sky. We had the satisfaction of seeing one hit the deck. From then on the raft broke all records, paddles were grabbed and driven into the water with such fury that the raft leapt straight across the remainder of the journey despite the current.



The raft and boat crossing at Schlusselfburg

It was at Schlusselfburg that Bob Price and those LOB (Left out of Battle) rejoined and recalls the journey:

We travelled northeast throughout the day first crossing the river Maas at Venlo. Travelling in the back of an open truck wasn't the most comfortable way to travel as you can imagine the roads were in a terrible state and the nearer we got to the town of Wesel where we crossed the Rhine the worse they became this was the town that received the massive artillery bombardment we witnessed before we returned to Belgium. The town was completely reduced to rubble the bulldozers had cleared away from the bridge straight through the town and we've got caught up in the queue of traffic of every description trying to get over the river. This took much longer than anticipated so by the time we cleared the town it was late so we decided to find somewhere to spend the night. We pulled into a field and set up camp some of us slept in the trucks others in makeshift shelters using the tarpaulins out of the trucks. The next morning we set off quite early following a route we had got marked off on our maps. We got lost a few times and the roads were very bad in places making progress rather slow. Even so we reached our marked destination in the evening only to find the Battalion had moved on. This didn't come as any surprise really we were half expecting it but it was a start line for tomorrow. That night we slept in wooden huts the few remaining ones from a small German camp. This was a big mistake. The next morning we were covered in flea bites it was a good job we didn't get undressed.

We continued our journey gathering information as we went, what surprised me more than anything was the quietness everywhere. We didn't see any civilians and sometimes it was hours before we even saw any of our own lads. We were beginning to get a bit concerned we weren't quite sure where we were, there wasn't any sound of distant gunfire. It was a lovely sunny day the hawthorn hedgerows were just bursting into leaf it all seemed so unreal.

We must have covered nearly 100 miles since we crossed the Rhine and we hadn't even found anyone of our division yet. I never anticipated it would take so long to get back to the company and I was worried at what I would find when I did. I was sitting at the rear of the second truck when I first noticed it just a speck in the sky. We were travelling down a long straight road at the time but my eyes were fixed on the aircraft that had banked towards us and was now approaching us very quickly straight down the road from the rear. A few seconds later and there was no mistaking that fixed undercarriage and inverted gull wing - a Junkers 87 stuka dive bomber. By now everyone was watching it. I shouted out a warning and in seconds the truck screeched to a halt and everyone bailed out. What happened next I still can't explain. I remember racing across the field trying to get as far away from the road as possible. I turned round just in time to see the bomber pass over the trucks it didn't fire a shot. If it was only trying to scare us - it succeeded. It was then I realised I was on my own everybody else had gone to the opposite side of the road. I watched the plane disappear into the distance then slowly walked back to the trucks but in between the road and me was a hawthorn hedge and an 8 foot high chain link fence. How I got over that fence I'll never know I tried to climb back but couldn't in the end I had to walk along the hedgerow until I came to a gate leading into the road. All I can remember is jumping out of the truck and the next minute I was racing across the field. It's amazing what fear and a surge of adrenaline can do. The excitement over we climbed back on the trucks and continued our search and for the first time met a small convoy of trucks carrying our Div sign the black bull. We asked where the Herefords were and they gave us a map reference which turned out to be a small village called Schlusselfeld about 10 miles away near the river Weser. It didn't take us long to reach the village the trucks dropped some of us off the rest went on to their own companies further up the road. In the centre of the village were a few of our trucks parked on the side of the road. The drivers were sitting on a wall drinking tea and we went over to find out where A Coy was and was surprised when they told us they were on the other side of the river. Apparently they were ferried over there yesterday to protect the engineers who were surveying a bridging site nearby. The good news was that they'd found a better site about a couple of miles downstream at Stolzenau and our lads were being brought back over the river later to day. All we got to do was sit tight and wait for them to return to the village. I settled down on the front steps of one of the houses facing the river with a mug of tea I'd scrounged from one of the drivers. I noticed 2 lads come out of a house opposite. I think they'd been up in the loft having a sleep. They hadn't left very long when I noticed smoke coming out from under the eaves. Then a woman clutching a child came screaming out of the front door. There wasn't anything anyone could do the house was made of timber with an attic full of hay for the cattle. In a minute there wasn't anything left; I'd never seen a house destroyed by fire so quickly. There was a little lad he'd be about 10 years old who kept dashing into the house trying to save some of the furniture he managed to rescue a few chairs but very little else. One of the onlookers had to grab him in the end, his attempts were becoming suicidal. He struggled for a time before collapsing on the floor the tears running down his smoke blackened face. If there is a moral to this story it must be if you smoke in the hay loft make sure your cigarette is out before you throw it away.

After all the excitement we settled down again wondering if the fire had been an accident or deliberate nobody seemed to know who the 2 soldiers were so we shall never know. Then suddenly we were reminded there was still a war on; 2 German planes roared overhead heading for the bridge that was being constructed at Stolzenau. They strafed and bombed to the side and quickly disappeared over the wooded hillside beyond the river. No sooner had the enemy plane disappeared than two of our fighters arrived on the scene. Unfortunately they couldn't stop with us for long because of the distance they'd come. It was a very frustrating situation for the engineers working on the bridge for no sooner had our planes gone when the Germans were back again. This happened several times over the next couple of hours even the onlookers were getting frustrated and opened fire on the enemy planes with any small arms weapons they could lay their hands on. Then the Germans luck ran out 4 of their planes arrived at the same time as 2 of our Tempests. Three were shot down immediately the 4th turned and ran with a Tempest hot on its tail but before our fighter could open fire the German pilot bailed out. All this happened right in front of us, the pilot landed about 300 yards away and was quickly rounded up. By now we got a cab rank¹ of planes reaching the bridging site and beyond so all German planes in the area were soon destroyed. Unfortunately this didn't solve the engineers problem. The bridge was still under persistent machine gunfire, shelling continued throughout the day a number of the pontoons were damaged and the approach roads partly wrecked. The engineers pressed on gallantly but their casualties mounted at a disturbing rate. It was decided until the bridge head could be appreciably enlarged little progress on building the bridge itself would be possible.

By 0500hrs word came through that A Coy had been ferried back across the river. Understandably I started to get a bit apprehensive which of my mates were still alive had Tom and Maurice survived. My questions would soon be answered I could see them coming up the lane towards us. They looked tired and with a week's growth of beard on their faces it was difficult for me to recognise them. I started to walk towards them and as they got nearer I could see Jim our section leader followed by Simo the Bren gunner and his number 2 but no Tom or Maurice; Simo grinning all over his face shouted a few choice remarks when he saw me.

Tom's alright he's behind somewhere he cried he anticipated what my next question was going to be. Tom and I met on that little lane neither said a word we threw our arms around one another I was too emotional to say anything I feared the worst when he wasn't with the rest of the section eventually I asked what happened to Maurice.

He's all right the lucky dog, Tom replied he's landed himself a good job looking after the prisoners we've been rounding them up by the 100 this week. We walked slowly back up the lane to the village and after a hot meal we settled down with the rest of the platoon for the night in one of the houses. We sat on the floor our backs against the wall and shared a cigarette it was there that Tom described the battle that had taken place on 1 April where so many of the Company had died trying to capture the Teutoburger Wald.

A bridge across the river was under construction about 2 miles north of the Battalion. When nearing completion it received a direct hit from one of the aforementioned air attacks and it was decided to abandon the crossing at this point, for the time being, and to use 6 Airborne bridge at Petershagen

¹ - The 'cab rank' was a new tactic where aircraft, mostly rocket firing typhoons, tempests and mustangs would circle over the battlefield where they could be called directly by the units on the ground to provide an almost instant attack on a target. The act of calling them in was often referred to as 'Lime Juice'.

about 12 miles further up the river. For this reason our troops forming the bridgehead were withdrawn and the Battalion concentrated in the evening of 6 Apr ready to cross the Weser at Petershagen the following day.

[Griffiths] Once released from the actions of the Teutoburger Wald and having forced our way through the other road at Tecklenburg, the 11 Armd Div became the spearhead Division – travelling North Eastward towards Osnabrück and Hannover, which were bypassed as Armoured units are not able to capture and secure such areas. Progress was partly impeded by the capture of so many German prisoners and also by the release of so many slave workers, captured Russian soldiers and civilians and of many other nationalities. Many British and Canadian Army and Royal Air Force prisoners of war were also released, with much celebration.

Upon arrival at the River Weser on 5/6 April it was found that all the bridges were demolished at Schlusselfburg, Stolzenau and Petershagen. We had assembled on the West bank of the fast flowing river and C and D Coys were ordered to cross by the use of rubber assault boats to form a protective bridgehead at Schlusselfburg while the demolished bridge was examined for its repair suitability.

After digging slit trenches on the opposite bank of the river, 13 Pl set out to recce the area, taking the roadway which led from the demolished bridge, while 14 Pl which included Cedric Holdnall took their path through the adjoining orchard on the right of the road. Both platoons came under heavy machine gun and small arms fire from a distant farmhouse, 14 Pl taking the full brunt of this. We were all ordered back to the river bank and about 30 minutes later, two of our Medical Orderlies, suitably identified with a Red Cross flag, walked up to the farmhouse, met the Germans therein and negotiated the removal of the dead and wounded. We learned later that Cedric had been killed and four others wounded, one of these, the section Corporal died of his wounds later.



Infantry of the 1st Herefords mounted on a Cromwell of 2 F&FY waiting to cross the Bailey Bridge over the River Weser at Petershagen