

**FROM THE ROUTINE OF WAR TO THE CHAOS OF PEACE:
FIRST CANADIAN ARMY'S TRANSITION
TO PEACETIME OPERATIONS – APRIL 23rd TO MAY 31st 1945**

by

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the dynamic shift from combat to stability-building operations made by Canadian soldiers in the Netherlands at the end of the Second World War. This thesis is a comparative investigation of the experiences of two Canadian infantry brigades and one armoured brigade. The findings highlight similarities and differences between each brigade as they shifted from combat to peacetime roles depending on their trade specialty and geographical location. These case studies bring to light how the same war ended in different ways, creating unique local dynamics for Canadian Army interaction with the defeated German Army, the Dutch population which had been subjugated for five years, and efforts to maintain the morale of Canadian soldiers between the end of hostilities and a time when they could go home. These situations and experiences demonstrate that the same war ended not with the stroke of a pen, but at different times and under very different circumstances throughout First Canadian Army's area of responsibility in the Netherlands in 1945.

DEDICATION

To my wife Erica and daughter Emily. Your continuous support and sacrifice of countless hours without me as I balanced work, family, and academic life will never go without my admiration and endless thanks. You ladies are my heroes.

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I would like to offer a most sincere and special thanks to my brother Isaac. All figures in this project have been my inspiration that he transformed into reality. The product I desired to be produced for this project only benefitted from his cartography skills, and my own efforts would not have done near as much justice. All credit in this respect is due to him alone and I am incredibly grateful for the time he dedicated in support of my work.

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Introduction

The month immediately following the Second World War saw the seasoned First Canadian Army transition from warfighting to stability operations in the war-torn Netherlands. These Canadian soldiers, accustomed to surviving in a difficult environment as they fought either along the rugged Italian peninsula or the entire European Atlantic coast from France to the Netherlands, now found themselves in a new and challenging role: that of fostering peace and post-conflict stability. This is a lesser known chapter in the history of the Second World War. The historiography surrounding the end of the war is dominated by the events preceding the German surrender. Much has been written on the road to war and the rise of Nazi Germany. Much other work examines the dramatic happenings during the period of hostilities between 1939 and 1945. Two noteworthy examples featuring the war along the Dutch-German border include Louis de Jong's 1990 book *The Netherlands and Nazi Germany*,¹ and Terry Copp's 2006 edition of *Cinderella Army*, which explore the great political, military, and civil society issues at stake as the war raged. Victory in Europe and its aftermath serve as brief closing chapters to their work.²

Since the end of the Cold War Western stability-building operations around the world have generated more interest in military activity indented to support and assist civilian populations and governments in the aftermath of war, not least with regard to the

¹ L. de Jong, *The Netherlands and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

² T. Copp, *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe, 1944-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

disarmament and demobilization of former warring forces. Stability and nation-building operations from the Former Yugoslavia to Afghanistan and Iraq serve as prime examples of this. The case of May 1945 in the Netherlands therefore offers an important case to investigate how the army of the past handled some of the pressing challenges of today. The Canadian Army's post-combat transition experience across the Netherlands highlights the fact that a country's pattern of peacetime life does not immediately return after the capitulation of one military force to another. Signed surrenders do not repair vital infrastructure, return displaced peoples to their homes, or remove the formerly belligerent military forces still present in occupied territory.

This project examines what that transition looked like for officers and soldiers from three different Canadian brigade groups from First Canadian Army. This study reveals the individual experiences and competing priorities of these brigades, offering insight as to the rapid changes made as these forces turned from war to peace. What this study is not is a holistic overview of the First Canadian Army writ-large during this timeframe. Two infantry brigade groups and one armoured brigade group were chosen specifically to observe the range of tasks assigned at a level that offers a window on the experiences of the soldiers on the ground. The brigades chosen fought their last actions at the end of the war in three different corners of the Netherlands, including one that crossed inside the German border. After the fighting ended all three remained in or returned to the Netherlands to assist with stability operations there. This project compares and contrasts how they each experienced the transition from combat to surrender, and then to post-conflict stability operations. This study reveals how the same war ended in very different ways and at different times for this army.

These questions are set within the political landscape that defined the context for military actions. It was determined at the Allied Casablanca Conference in 1943 that only unconditional surrender of Germany would be accepted.³ This thesis reveals sheds light on how Canadian fighting troops imposed that surrender on a defeated German Army still on its home soil, and especially on those German forces in position on sovereign Dutch territory when the shooting stopped. This project looks closely at how these three Canadian Army brigade groups adapted in their transition from combat to stability operations. These were battle-hardened formations, including many long-service veterans who had been away from home for five years and had spend between 11-20 months fighting a well-trained and determined enemy.⁴ The ordeals these soldiers faced varied from 1943 to 1945, but their mission of defeating the German Army did not change. Only the landscape changed as they fought across Europe and finally into every corner of the Netherlands and the adjacent German borderlands in the last weeks of the war. According to the Canadian Army official historian, C.P. Stacey, combat became easier to manage as the brigades and divisions gained more experience.⁵ Essentially, warfighting became a routine that Canadian soldiers proved adept at performing.

³ G. Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-1945* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 71.

⁴ In the instance of II Corps which committed its forces on the 6 June 1944 invasion of Normandy. I Corps having come from Italy obviously had more combat time than mentioned.

⁵ C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Volume I: Six Years of War – The Army in Canada, Britain, and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1966), 4. Stacey's comments on the very first page of the first volume of the Official Histories clearly put Canada's natural historical stance towards military and warfighting in the clear. This point is substantiated by the claim he makes in that "for generations, Canadian government and parliaments, and certainly also the public at large, appeared to be convinced that it was time enough to begin preparing for war after war had broken out." His claim states that every time Canada was pulled into a global conflict its government and military extension was required to relearn how to fight in a modern combat environment.

However, new skills were required and others repurposed when these three brigades adapted to their post-war assignments.

The transition from war to peace varied significantly for the three brigades chosen here mainly due to their unique location. 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade ended offensive activity early, transitioning from combat to uneasy truce, to surrender during a nine-day period in the central provinces. 5 Canadian Armoured Brigade lived through a much different experience during the same timeframe as it fought to the bitter end in the northeastern corner of the Netherlands in a difficult siege on the port of Delfzijl on the Ems Estuary. Lastly, 7 Canadian Infantry Brigade found itself in different circumstances again but only a short distance away on the German side of the Ems Estuary, where they had to carry on fighting and dying several days longer than 5th Armoured Brigade. Their locations at the time of Germany's final formal surrender then shaped their post-conflict assignments. This essay is not exhaustive, as these three brigades represent a sample of some 22 similar sized Canadian formations serving in the Netherlands and the Emden area of Germany in April-May 1945. It is important to note that the main body of this work is based on a close examination of the Brigade war diaries and their extensive operations logs, cross-referenced against regimental histories and the theatre reports from the Canadian Army Historical Section, a substantial body of evidence unto itself. At times records from higher divisional and corps headquarters, smaller units in the field, and specialized units such as Civil Affairs Detachments are consulted, but not exhaustively. There is thus more work to be done and more questions to ask. The project nevertheless sheds light and raises new questions about the Canada's role at the end of

the Second World War in the Netherlands and the resulting unique relationship that developed between these two nations afterwards.

The first chapter below introduces the English-language historical literature on and background to the war in the Netherlands from 1940-45, especially during the 1944-45 period when Canadian units served on Dutch soil. It discusses the organizational structure of the Netherlands under German control during the war, the Dutch government in exile, the underground resistance, and general civilian life for the Dutch people. It also briefly reviews the overall military situation in the Netherlands after the Scheldt operations in the fall of 1944 up to the spring final liberation drive that opened on April 1st, 1945. This chapter sets the contextual stage for how the Second World War unfolded in the Low Countries as the end of the war approached, arrived, and transformed into peacetime operations.

Chapters two through four are dedicated to case studies of 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade from 1st Division, and 5 Canadian Armoured Brigade from 5th Division, both from the long serving 1st Canadian Corps brought over from the Mediterranean in early 1945. The third formation studied here is 7 Canadian Infantry Brigade from 3rd Division, part of the D-Day assault force and thus the longest serving division in 2nd Canadian Corps from Normandy through Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. The most significant common experience for these fighting brigade groups in the post-conflict period was their effort to secure, disarm, and remove German armed forces units from Dutch soil as quickly as possible. Other Canadian and Allied military forces and relief

organizations took the lead on humanitarian and reconstruction efforts for the Dutch people and government.⁶

Overall, this story at war's end is not well known. This essay is among the first to investigate the challenges faced by Canadian combat-arms soldiers in the Netherlands as they transitioned from the violent simplicity of war to the happy chaos of peace.⁷

⁶ Canadian Military Headquarters Reports 172 and 176 can be consulted with regards to more information on Civil Affairs activity during this timeframe in both the Netherlands and Germany respectively.

⁷ Daniel Byers, "Operation "Canada": 5th Canadian Armoured Division's Attack on Delfzijl, 23 April to 2 May 1945", *Canadian Military History: Vol 7 : Iss. 3, Article 4*.



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Figure 1 - Map of the Netherlands

Chapter I: The History of the Netherlands and the Second World War

When the First Canadian Army mounted its final liberation campaign in the Netherlands in April 1945 it entered a complicated landscape of social, political, economic, and military factors that shaped the mission assigned to it on the cessation of hostilities. The final spring liberation drive came only after five long years of occupation and a desperate fall and winter of destructive combat in the southern part of the country during the last seven months of the Second World War.

Nazi governmental control of the Netherlands, commencing in May of 1940, was inherently linked to the strength, success, and progress of Nazi Germany in achieving its strategic aims. There is overwhelming agreement amongst scholars that administration of the Netherlands fluctuated between 1940 and 1945, subsequently towards more authoritarian and reckless means as Nazi Germany began to lose ground to the Allies.

The Dutch people initially expected and hoped for a continued steady state of neutrality as was enjoyed by their country during the First World War. The eventual attack which occurred on Friday, May 10th, 1940, served as “a singular and catastrophic event” which dislodged any such expectations and laid the groundwork for the years of occupation that would follow.⁸ Historians are unanimous that the Dutch population was initially treated far better than other nationalities as a result of their ‘Aryan’ roots and Germanic heritage.⁹ Further, with the Netherlands established as a colonial power, it was in Nazi Germany’s interests to rebuild and establish positive working relations with them

⁸ B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors: The Nazi Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940-1945* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1997), 43.

⁹ B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 42.

less they lose control of the colonies.¹⁰ As a result, Reichskommissar Seyss-Inquart immediately shaped discussions with key Dutch leaders to communicate this governing ideology and executing Hitler's direction that the country be managed via civil government as opposed to military.¹¹ Within days and, in some cases hours, the entire country of the Netherlands had essentially returned to varying degrees of normality.¹²

In an attempt to assuage the Dutch population, this German civil government brought in by Seyss-Inquart initially adopted a policy of "piecemeal" implementation of Nazi ideological aims vice a more structured approach.¹³ By May 29th 1940, this civil government officially took control from the military with Seyss-Inquart at the head and his establishment of four Generalkommissae¹⁴ to oversee administration of the Netherlands. These Generalkommissae controlled Financial and Economic Affairs, Justice and Administration, Higher SS and Police Leadership, and Party and Special Affairs.¹⁵ It was through these governmental pillars that the civil administration planned to roll out what they hoped would be a steady and readily accepted plan of education and Nazification of the Dutch population,¹⁶ allowing them to be won over to a state of "willing collaboration".¹⁷ In an attempt to further smooth relations with the Dutch

¹⁰ M. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2008), 105-106.

¹¹ M. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 105-106.

¹² B. Moore contribution to J. Noakes, *The Civilian in War: The Home Front in Europe, Japan, and the USA in World War II* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992), 132. The on exception to this statement being the city of Rotterdam which had been significantly damaged during the German bombing campaign.

¹³ B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 42. This was actually a much better way to start off the occupation in comparison to other occupied countries, such as France, which were immediately subject to military rule and severe oppression.

¹⁴ Generalkommissae: General Commissioners.

¹⁵ B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 51.

¹⁶ J. Noakes, *The Civilian in War*, 129.

¹⁷ G. Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-1945* (Illinois: Waveland Press Inc, 1997), 131.

people, Seyss-Inquart further arranged the release of the Dutch prisoners of war to commence as early as June 1940.¹⁸ During this initial occupation by the German armed forces and government, the worst that occurred by fall of 1940 was Jewish officials were dismissed from their posts, and those institutions that organized strikes in retaliation were promptly shut down with arrests made.¹⁹ Although this may sound extreme to modern standards it was pale in comparison to the hardships this country as a whole was about to endure.

Three key events took place in the early 1941 timeframe that stoked the fires of controversy within the Dutch population and forced the Nazi government to enhance the Nazification process of the country. The first was the restructuring of the Dutch police forces. Originally “five separate organizations and supervised by three different government ministries”,²⁰ the Dutch police were realigned to mirror that of their German counterparts with an additional establishment created at Schalkhaar to generate ideologically trained units specifically for the persecution of the Jewish population.²¹ This method of policing proved far more effective than the regular police of which many were sympathetic to the resident Jewish population. This special Dutch police force was later refined and reinforced in 1942 with the creation of an auxiliary of about 2000

¹⁸ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 73. This was ultimately Hitler’s decision as carried out by the Reichskommissar.

¹⁹ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 74.

²⁰ B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 199.

²¹ B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 199. Schalkhaar is located to the immediate east of Deventer just to the east of the Ijssel River.

citizens trained and unleashed in their home towns to carry out the ideological aims of the Nazi regime, all with a Dutch face.²²

The second significant event during this timeframe was the February strikes of 1941 which were launched in direct response to the unleashing of these Dutch Nazi police. It has been well documented by historians that this new police branch exercised excessive and brutal force, terrorizing the Dutch population.²³ At the onset of open targeting against Jews in Amsterdam where this new Dutch Nazi police force was first rolled out, specifically with regards to roundups and shipping off of Jews to labour camps,²⁴ a general strike occurred in the city of Amsterdam on February 25th.²⁵ Although taking the Germans by surprise, their reaction was swift and the strike was terminated by February 27th.²⁶ What is so significant about these first two events is that it openly demonstrated the German government's first attempts at Nazification of the Netherlands, and an understanding that it would not be readily accepted.

The third and last event during the 1941 timeframe was one that would endure until the end of the war. This was the steady increase in economic demands of the country as the German war machine continued to establish hegemony throughout continental Europe.²⁷ The Germans quickly dictated occupation agreements which saw

²² B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 199.

²³ B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 200 and M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 75-76. This chapter in *Holland at War* was written by Drs Harry Paape, focusing specifically on the view from the average Dutch citizen. Moore, placing an onus on German thinking regarding realignment of political extensions to better persecute the Jews, focusses specifically on the German mechanics regarding how the process and restructure was carried out. Comparing the two offers an excellent contrast from the German methodology to the end result of their efforts.

²⁴ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 76.

²⁵ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 76.

²⁶ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 77.

²⁷ J. Noakes, *The Civilian in War*, 130.

the economies of Western Europe drastically exploited to the point of poverty. It was here that the Germans forced these countries to cover costs of the occupied forces at drastically inflated rates, the excess of which was used to buy up surplus resources leaving these countries destitute.²⁸

By 1943 it was abundantly clear that the majority of the Dutch population was not going to capitulate to Nazi Socialism.²⁹ Despite their natural 'Aryan' similarities the Germans were faced with far more significant strains on the relationships with the countries they occupied. Up until this point they had been enjoying a relatively hegemonic presence in occupied territory. However, by April of 1943 the future perspective of the geopolitical landscape was far changed from what it had been only months prior. The United States had since entered the war and Germany had completely lost the campaigns in both North Africa and Stalingrad.³⁰ German response to this new reality was swift, and it is here that M.R.D. Foot notes an upward swing in Nazification countered by a decline in conformity to this German hegemony.

The increase in Nazification was seen at the governmental level through rapid increases in Nazi influence within local governments, furthered by the establishment of independent bodies streamlined to realize Nazi ideological objectives.³¹ This drive was then perpetuated by the April 29th, 1943 announcements that all former Dutch Army prisoners of war released in 1940 would again be interned as prisoners of war and shipped to Germany for labour. This obviously did not sit well with the entirety of the

²⁸ G. Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War*, 119.

²⁹ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 78-79.

³⁰ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 78-79.

³¹ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 79.

country as it affected all municipalities, totalling roughly 300,000 people.³² This decision to place the same Dutch soldiers back under arrest resulted in one of the most notable rebuffs of Nazi ideals and German rule. As a result of this decision the Dutch population coordinated a second significant general strike in the April-May 1943 timeframe. This was a multi-city strike directed towards the decision by the Germans to re-establish prisoner of war status on the Dutch Army soldiers of 1940.³³ This strike was more effective than the previous in 1941. It lasted five days, three days longer than the first. It cost 80 deaths by execution, 95 shot dead in the street, 400 seriously wounded, 900 deported to concentration camps, and the removal of office of multiple public officials.³⁴ This heightened level of brutality by the oppressors is what the Dutch would come to live with for the next year until the first taste of liberation came for those living south of the Maas River at the end of 1944.

This increase in Nazi control, the Dutch rebuff of German rule as noted by the general strike, and a noted marked increase in vindictive attitudes towards the Dutch civil population were identified as bringing about a change in the behaviour of the Dutch police.³⁵ This new potential perspective of a post-war Netherlands free of Nazi occupation, likely coupled with the dawning realization that the police were becoming isolated from the remainder of Dutch society for carrying out German demands, led these forces to change their approach and become what the Germans would come to describe as

³² M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 79.

³³ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 79-80.

³⁴ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 81.

³⁵ B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 203.

“at best unreliable”.³⁶ This example revealed the erosion of German dominance within the Dutch social and political order. An additional rejection of Nazi ideals was seen in the increase of Dutch underground resistance. The underground resistance steadily grew in capacity and capability, challenging the German political and military machine through various methods based on the specific objectives of resistance cells discussed below.³⁷

On September 17th, 1944 the third and final strike by Dutch workers was initiated.³⁸ This strike was conducted by the railwaymen, totalling just under 30,000 workers, and designed to support Allied operations to clear German forces from the Netherlands.³⁹ The Dutch railway was vital to the German Army, and disruption in this area would create increased response time to Allied activities in the Netherlands.⁴⁰ Seyss-Inquart took this strike as an affront to Nazi prestige and the German Occupation government’s response was swift, stepping up its terror regime on the Netherlands, requisitioning vehicles from bikes to cars, and strangling food supply to the civilian population.⁴¹ It was this strike specifically that set the conditions for the “Hunger Winter” which would befall the Dutch population throughout the winter of 1944-1945 where daily caloric intake for the average Dutch worker “scarcely exceeded 500”.⁴²

³⁶ B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 203.

³⁷ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 79.

³⁸ L. de Jong, *The Netherlands and Nazi Germany*, 34. This strike was organized in support of the British-led Operation Market Garden, which will not be discussed in this essay.

³⁹ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 30.

⁴⁰ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 29. Van der Zee notes here that the railway was used for transport of supplies, V-weapons, more than 500,000 Dutch people to forced labour to Germany, around 120,000 Jews to concentration camps, and the movement of tens of thousands of political prisoners just to name a few.

⁴¹ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 30-31.

⁴² C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Volume III: The Victory Campaign – The Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1966), 583.

Those that lived south of the River Maas were to undergo what many believed was the most difficult period of their lives, and what transformed the Dutch experience from occupation to a humanitarian crisis in the early months of 1945. This crisis is perceived by historians as the catalyst for launching sustained operations in the Netherlands in 1945 as the Dutch government-in-exile clearly articulated the need for support.⁴³ Allied forces were subsequently ordered “to liberate Holland as soon as practicable...introducing food supplies simultaneously with the arrival of the liberation forces”.⁴⁴ After all, 40% of the country lived in the affected western Netherlands in the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague.⁴⁵ This task of clearing the Netherlands would ultimately fall to the Canadians which will be described throughout this essay.

The government-in-exile served as a constant voice for the Dutch that could not be silenced. This government consisted of Queen Wilhelmina and a small council. There remained a tenuous relationship as the Queen and Prime Minister had different outlooks regarding the political structure of the post-war Netherlands, but their voices rang in unison in the support of their people amongst the Allies. Queen Wilhelmina remained queen of the Netherlands throughout the Second World War, including the occupation and the post-war period. Much like the United Kingdom, the Queen reigned over a constitutional monarchy. With this democratic style of government in place, national policy was governed by three facets: the Queen, the cabinet, and parliament; the latter

⁴³ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 88-90.

⁴⁴ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 584.

⁴⁵ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 582.

two of which fell under a prime minister.⁴⁶ With a formed government in place dictating national policy, this rendered Queen Wilhelmina as more of figurehead with no real executive power vice an autocratic monarch.

The hasty evacuation of Queen Wilhelmina to England after the German invasion into the Netherlands put her in a unique position to influence Dutch governmental affairs with far greater reach than before. This heightened influence stemmed from the inability of the Dutch parliament to also evacuate the country, forcing the creation of an Extraordinary Advisory Council. Whereas parliament had the authority to accept or refuse the Queen's proposed lines of action, the Extraordinary Advisory Council did not.⁴⁷ Queen Wilhelmina employed her increased leverage to reject Nazism and its rule in the Netherlands culminating in the sacking of her current Prime Minister at the time, Dirk de Geer. De Geer was a pacifist that had actually tried to discuss peace with Germany behind the backs of their new British hosts in London, and Queen Wilhelmina quickly and "unceremoniously" had him replaced by the Minister of Justice, Pieter Gerbrandy, who was willing, able, and a staunch anti-Nazi official.⁴⁸

Van der Zee describes Dutch sentiment towards the rapid evacuation of the Queen to England as "surprised, shocked and completely demoralised. They felt "betrayed and abandoned" but quickly came to understand the reasons by that summer, at which point

⁴⁶ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War Against Hitler: Anglo-Dutch Relations, 1940-1945* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1990), 7-8.

⁴⁷ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War Against Hitler*, 7 ; L. de Jong, *The Netherlands and Nazi Germany*, 61-65.

⁴⁸ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter: Occupied Holland, 1944-5* (London: Jill Norman & Hobhouse Ltd, 1982), 91 ; M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War Against Hitler*, 6.

the royal family had regained its popularity having been subject to German rule.⁴⁹ Queen Wilhelmina capitalized on her strong anti-Nazi sentiment to seize the opportunity to denounce German oppression and provide moral support to her people through the use of Radio Oranje.⁵⁰ Such radio broadcasts from the Queen who could not be captured both hindered the efforts of, and infuriated, Reichskommissar Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who was hopeful for a quick integration of the Dutch economy and workforce into the German war effort.⁵¹

The most important roles played by Queen Wilhelmina throughout the war, including the turning point in the 1944 timeframe and onwards, was to maintain her subjects' morale after the Dutch Army had been defeated early in the war. Second to that was her great and persistent influence with Allied governments in voicing the requirement for the immediate recapture of the Netherlands and commencement of humanitarian assistance in response to the infamous "Hunger Winter" as previously described during the winter of 1944.⁵²

While Queen Wilhelmina was a slightly strengthened royal figurehead, Prime Minister Gerbrandy served as the official leader of the government. He was loud,

⁴⁹ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 97 ; J. Noakes, *The Civilian in War: The Home Front in Europe, Japan, and the USA in World War II* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992), 134.

⁵⁰ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 88-89. Radio Oranje was a radio channel on the BBC European service and used by the Government in Exile to stay connected with its struggling population during the war.

⁵¹ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 98. Formerly the Chancellor of Austria for two days before *Anschluss* (annexation) by Germany, Seyss-Inquart was a close confidant of Hitler who was assigned to oversee German occupation and government in the Netherlands throughout the war. He was named Reichskommissar which translates to Civilian Reich Commissioner or, as Commonwealth countries would aptly name, a Governor-General.

⁵² H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 170. Although it was ultimately Prime Minister Gerbrandy who directly appealed to the United States Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) Europe, this was all coordinated prior (and on several previous occasions) through the Queen.

opinionated, and, when paired with the Queen in times of peril, formed a formidable team which emulated the “soul of the resistance”.⁵³ Although the government was unfortunately able to accomplish little given its separation from the country, the Prime Minister, like the Queen, was able to be recognized as the government-in-exile, thus creating a “rallying point for physical and moral resistance”.⁵⁴ According to W.B. Maass, Prime Minister Gerbrandy was unable to directly assert political control until the first Dutch ministers from the government in exile returned to the Netherlands in December of 1944.⁵⁵ Even at this point political control would have been difficult to establish as the Allies had just taken the Scheldt Estuary, opening Antwerp for mass shipment of much-needed supplies.⁵⁶ With the southern provinces of Zeeland, North Brabant, and Limburg liberated, direct political control did not extend north of the Maas River as this geographical feature marked the extent of Allied gains prior to settling in for the winter months of 1944.

To describe the Prime Minister as possessing limited governmental control is accurate but he must also be recognized and measured for what he could achieve given the situation. For example, the government-in-exile demonstrated a limited ability to project its influence when coordinating the railway strikes in 1944 as part of the plan to disrupt German supply lines. These strikes were synchronized with the Allied incursion into the Netherlands with the intention of hindering German logistical operations and

⁵³ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 34-35.

⁵⁴ G. Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War*, 145. Nazi Germany may have taken the country, but they did not achieve their goals of capturing the government which would have made capitulation of the country far easier.

⁵⁵ W.B. Maass, *The Netherlands at War: 1939-1945* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), 188.

⁵⁶ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 422.

allowing the Allies greater freedom of movement.⁵⁷ Further, the Prime Minister issued a directive on January 2, 1945, that forbade any form of Dutch cooperation with German occupying forces.⁵⁸ How effectively it was carried out is not recorded, but it does demonstrate that the government was asserting a limited level of authority while in exile.

The Queen and Prime Minister quickly forged a strong bond, united by a common cause of reasserting themselves in their homeland. They were both aggressive and exercised influence by any means of which they were capable, which typically amounted to pressure on the Allies for relief and assistance in their country. Although England was their temporary home, this did not stop the Queen from sending her daughter, Princess Juliana, to the United States to appeal to President Roosevelt (who was of Dutch origin) in 1944 for assistance during the infamous Hunger Winter.⁵⁹ Prime Minister Gerbrandy also served as a vocal reminder and check for the Allies as he appealed to Prime Minister Churchill of the United Kingdom and General Eisenhower as the Supreme Allied Commander.⁶⁰

This common cause between the Queen and Prime Minister was exemplified by their agreement that her voice needed to be heard by their people on Radio Oranje. The Queen personally broadcast 37 messages during the occupation, aimed at frustrating the German forces while lifting the spirits of the oppressed population.⁶¹ Prime Minister

⁵⁷ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 121.

⁵⁸ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 121.

⁵⁹ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 89. Despite the Queen living in England at the time, Princess Juliana was further removed to Ottawa in Ontario, Canada. This offered opportunity for increased Dutch political presence in the western hemisphere.

⁶⁰ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 173-174.

⁶¹ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 94.

Gerbrandy noted after the war that the Queen's words had been "a formidable support for our people and an excellent weapon in the struggle for life and death",⁶² and van der zee himself stated that "[h]er speeches for Radio Oranje were highlights in our lives, especially when she attacked the Germans and the Dutch Nazis".⁶³

When combining the situations of the Queen and the Prime Minister, with their limited government, the historiography makes it evidently clear that exercising power and authority throughout the war was not the crucial role. The symbolism of the government in exile is what emboldened most of the Dutch people in the face of tyranny and oppression the likes of which had never been experienced before. An official report published after the war dubbed the Queen as "the personification of the enslaved and struggling Netherlands".⁶⁴ This symbolism, combined with varying levels of resistance, is what would ultimately keep Nazi Germany from solidifying its grip on the country.

This strong bond that was forged between the Queen and Prime Minister began to deteriorate in the fall of 1944.⁶⁵ With the prospect of victory on the horizon, it is reasonable to assume that thoughts shifted from satiating the spirits of the oppressed Dutch population to what royalty and government would look like in post-war Dutch society. It was no secret that Queen Wilhelmina was never satisfied with the level of

⁶² H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 94.

⁶³ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 97.

⁶⁴ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 98.

⁶⁵ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 9-10.

authority she was granted by her constitution, and that she was angling to retain the influence she gained during exile in this post-war society.⁶⁶

Ultimately, the government-in-exile can be summarized as a symbolic beacon of hope that prevented Nazi Germany from achieving full capitulation of the Netherlands. According to most historians the Queen and Prime Minister were initially united by a common cause, and this would last throughout the majority of the war.⁶⁷ When it came to appealing for assistance from the United States and United Kingdom, it is clear that they conveyed messages in such a method that forced the Allies to keep them in their consideration. Despite lacking power, the government in exile projected other means of influence in support of its people. Although the government did possess some degree of authority over its people near the end of the war, it was relatively impotent from this standpoint. Lastly, as conflict drew to a close, internal strife between the royal family and the government ensued over how a post-war Netherlands would take form.

The Dutch underground resistance has been well documented by scholars, some including Dutch citizens who lived through the war either in their home country or England.⁶⁸ What is constant among these histories is a common theme discussing the maturity of a such an organization. What started as an impotent and ineffective force

⁶⁶ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 9-10. This is not to mislead the reader to believe that Queen Wilhelmina was power hungry; quite the opposite. She was forever dedicated to her country and people, but believed she was entitled to increased influence in her role as Queen.

⁶⁷ L. de Jong, *The Netherlands and Nazi Germany*, 66 ; H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 91 ; M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 8-10. These are three to name a few. Understanding that the reference to M.R.D. Foot is within the context of de Jong's papers, it is nevertheless important as he was content to publish it under his name thus offering his support to the claim.

⁶⁸ Such examples would include M.R.D. Foot, Louis de Jong, Henri van der Zee, A. Martens, M. Mazower, and G. Wright to name a few.

refined itself into task-tailored cells capable of disrupting German control in the Netherlands by employing clandestine methods to provide passive and active resistance.

The quick occupation of the German forces in the Netherlands did not immediately serve as a catalyst for a large underground rebellion. The populations of several countries, including Poland, Norway, Yugoslavia, Denmark, Belgium, and France, all came to adopt a similar docile nature upon occupation.⁶⁹ This was due to two contributing factors: the first being “fear of provoking pointless civilian casualties”.⁷⁰ This train of thought was derived from the possibility in the earliest stages of German expansion (1939-1940) that Germany could be challenged and defeated. However, with the fall of France in 1940 as the last bastion of hope in Western Europe, it was realized that the war would not end anytime in the near future.⁷¹ The second factor was unique to the Netherlands. Partisan and resistance forces in other countries concealed themselves and their movements utilizing sparsely populated hinterlands to their advantage. However, the Netherlands is a predominantly “flat and featureless countryside [making] hiding much more difficult than the wooded hills and mountains of [France]”.⁷² Compounding this problem was a comprehensive network of road and railways which offered no advantages for an insurgent organization to thrive.⁷³ With approximately nine million people living in an area of 30,000 square kilometres at the time⁷⁴ this lack of

⁶⁹ M. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 473.

⁷⁰ M. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 473.

⁷¹ M. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 473.

⁷² H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter: Occupied Holland, 1944-1945* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 109.

⁷³ W.B. Maass, *The Netherlands at War: 1939-1945* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1970), 68-69.

⁷⁴ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 69-70.

geographical features, combined with easy access throughout the country, ruled out the possibility for the conduct of initial active resistance by way of guerilla operations.⁷⁵

Passive resistance was the first method of resistance to be employed against the German occupiers by the Dutch population. Through an analysis of data, it is possible to delineate this passive resistance into three categories. The first category was that of propaganda. The underground presses were churning anti-Nazi bulletins and newspapers as early as May 18, 1940.⁷⁶ These groups further evolved to meet the needs of the general population, printing ration stamps, receipts, identity papers, and other documents all with a view to frustrating the Nazi efforts.⁷⁷

The second method by which the Underground acted was through intelligence gathering. This occurred in several forms, some of which included Dutch civilians obtaining posts that allowed them to convey vital information to the Underground. Another method was the manufacturing of German uniforms and portrayal of German soldiers to gain entry to sensitive areas.⁷⁸

The third method of resistance was overt, with the Dutch population openly refusing to conform to the will of the German Reich. One such example, aside from the obvious strikes as mentioned previously, was the refusal of artisans, farmers, doctors, and others to pay imposed taxes for fabricated guilds designed by the Nazis of which

⁷⁵ G. Wright, *The Ordeal of Total War*, 149.

⁷⁶ W.B. Maass, *The Netherlands at War*, 75.

⁷⁷ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 51.

⁷⁸ A. Martens, *The Silent War: Glimpses of the Dutch Underground and Views on the Battle of Arnhem* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), 140-141. Allard Martens was an active member of the Dutch Resistance throughout the Second World War, offering a unique first-hand perspective regarding events that transpired during this time.

membership would be required with the goal of exerting taxation on these groups.⁷⁹ Further, university students were required to sign a declaration of loyalty, of which only 3,000 of 14,000 did, the remainder being unable to continue their studies.⁸⁰

Active and violent resistance did not take firm root until 1943 which, again, is inherently linked to the tide of war turning against the Axis powers. Although this type of resistance only became prevalent for a short period of time, it marked a significant change in attitude from the Dutch regarding their Nazi oppressors. It was at this time, when Nazification and oppression was in full effect, that overt assassination of Nazi state officials and, in some instances their wives, commenced.⁸¹ Stolen police and military uniforms were employed to gain access to sensitive areas where files and records could be destroyed.⁸² Sabotage was also used to hinder German efforts.⁸³ Contrary to what some may believe, this type of active and violent resistance was uncommon until much later in the war.

The Dutch Underground was no smooth operating body capable of organizing coordinated operations against the German occupation forces. Underground cells developed and evolved based on competing personal motivational factors such as political, military, religious, and humanitarian reasons.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 87.

⁸⁰ M.R.D. Foot, *Holland at War*, 87.

⁸¹ W.B. Maass, *The Netherlands at War*, 140.

⁸² W.B. Maass, *The Netherlands at War*, 140. Maass describes this as becoming an almost daily occurrence after 1943.

⁸³ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 48-49.

⁸⁴ W.B. Maass, *The Netherlands at War*, 184-185.

Van der Zee notes that these Dutch resistance groups were small and fragmented, mostly formed by citizens who lived in the area. His comments mirror Maass', stating that their roles included helping concealing Jews, forging Nazi government documents, publishing newspapers, sabotage, spying on troop movements, prisoner escape, and even murder.⁸⁵ He further notes that they often refused to cooperate with each other as a result of political, religious, and sometimes personal reasons. With the countryside providing little in the way of cover for a resistance to grow, leading to these local cells with competing ideologies, it can be seen that their aims were not necessarily congruent, forcing them to operate independently and without coordination between each other.

The bulk of physical combat with Germans forces in the Netherlands took place between Canadian and Allied forces who first entered this complicated landscape in September of 1944. Plans for combat and the rehabilitation of the country were based on the false premise that complete liberation would be achieved by October 1st, 1944 with the Germans having evacuated via a scorched earth policy and all resources in the country available for use.⁸⁶

Having been on the run through most of France and Belgium since the Allied Normandy breakout, it was British Lieutenant-General Brian Horrocks leading the charge northward against the Germans. Horrocks' XXX Corps which kept the German retreat

⁸⁵ H.A. van der Zee, *The Hunger Winter*, 109.

⁸⁶ Canadian Military Headquarters (hereafter CMHQ) "Report No. 172", paragraph (hereafter para) 45. As mentioned previously, Operation Market Garden will not be discussed in this section. This is due to no other reason than it would detract from the story being told regarding Canadian land operations throughout the Netherlands until the end of the war. To include this specific operation would be to add too large of a historiography that does not contribute to the purpose of this essay, although it most certainly remains relevant to war history in general as one of the more controversial operations ever to take place during the Second World War.

off balance captured Antwerp with relatively little fighting and providing Allied access to the largest (and mostly undamaged) port facility in all of Europe.⁸⁷ Despite the fact that the port could not be used until the Scheldt Estuary was cleared, British forces were redirected to the north and east in preparation for future operations in the drive to the Rhine known as Operation Market Garden.⁸⁸ The responsibility to clear the Estuary and open the waterways for unhindered Allied shipping fell to the Canadian ground forces. This mission marked the beginning of the unique Canadian wartime experience in, and with, the Netherlands.

The first operations undertaken in earnest by Canadians on Dutch soil to capture the Scheldt Estuary commenced on October 6th, 1944 with Operation Switchback. 3rd Canadian Infantry and parts of 4th Canadian Armoured Divisions were assigned to clear the salient of Dutch territory known as the Breskens Pocket. It was bordered by the Scheldt Estuary (north), Atlantic Ocean (west), and the country of Belgium (south).⁸⁹ Although not completed until November 2nd, 1944, enough key terrain had been taken to allow artillery to move into positions of support for the concurrent clearance of South Beveland by 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, known as Operation Vitality.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 37-38. Stacey and Copp are both heavily referenced in this section to apply a necessary balance of perspective. Whereas Stacey's Official Military Histories cover grand strategy (top-down), they were quite accurate but overly lenient and restrained in opinion as military protocol would require. Copp's labour historian background provides a necessary reality check using a bottom-up approach focussing at unit and brigade level. His evidence-based research and freedom of opinion allow well-structured and (sometimes overly) strong opinions on leadership and their decisions.

⁸⁸ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 39.

⁸⁹ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 392. It is important to note that although Operation Switchback did not start until this date, 4th Canadian Armoured Division had been fighting along the Leopold Canal since September 22.

⁹⁰ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 400.

2nd Canadian Infantry Division began its westward drive into South Beveland on October 24th, 1944.⁹¹ This operation was completed in two parts with the Canadians pushing westward on land and elements of the Scottish 52nd (Lowland) Division conducting a flanking waterborne crossing onto the peninsula.⁹² By October 31st the peninsula was secured up to the eastern end of the causeway leading to the last bastion of German resistance denying access to the Scheldt: Walcheren Island.⁹³

Operation Infatuate was the final step in securing the vital terrain surrounding the naval approaches to Antwerp. This operation commenced on November 1st, with elements of 2nd Canadian Infantry Division beginning offensive operations from the east end of the causeway linking the island to South Beveland in a deception plan to force the Germans to divert their attention to this area, away from the west and southern portions of the island.⁹⁴ This operation was essentially a three pronged attack with British Commandos landing at Westkapelle (west) and Flushing (south), along with the majority of 52nd (Lowland) Division assaulting across the causeway by foot and assault boat (east).⁹⁵ With lodgement gained by Allied forces, defeat was inevitable to these cut off German soldiers who subsequently surrendered on November 8th.⁹⁶

These three Canadian-led operations dislodged the Germans from the strategic port city of Antwerp, but it was not taken without significant destruction to local infrastructure. With the effects of the Hunger Winter still being felt, the Dutch towns in

⁹¹ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 401.

⁹² T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 161.

⁹³ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 402.

⁹⁴ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 167.

⁹⁵ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 415.

⁹⁶ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 172.

and around Breskens, South Beveland, and Walcheran Island had been brutally battered. Farm houses, livestock, crops, almost universal destruction of road and rail bridges, the blocking of canals, the destruction of locks, the breaking of dykes; all of this led to “an almost complete paralysis of the local economy”.⁹⁷ Copp’s account of 2nd Canadian Infantry Division’s battle at Woensdrecht describes “deep craters, ruined & flooded farmhouses, together with dead sheep and cattle”.⁹⁸ C.P. Stacey notes that the flooding of Walcheren Island, allowing the salt water to enter the polder country, caused extensive damage which “ruin[ed] its rich farmlands and orchards for years to come”.⁹⁹

With the exception of some a few small actions, these fall operations by the First Canadian Army won the final territorial gains before the winter months. Instead of the desired liberation of the Netherlands Canadian forces were resigned to spend winter on the River Maas.¹⁰⁰ It was now clear that, despite the initial euphoria after the rapid Normandy breakout, the German army was not finished at the end of 1944 and the war would continue into the new year. This unfortunate requirement to halt the campaign for the winter months proved to be debilitating to the Dutch population north of the Maas still under Nazi occupation. The southern provinces, now heavily damaged by gunfire, had an opportunity to rebuild whereas the central and northern provinces would undergo significant hardships. The inability for the Allies to liberate the Netherlands by October

⁹⁷ M. Zuehlke, *Forgotten Victory: First Canadian Army and the Cruel Winter of 1944-45*, (Madeira Park: Douglas and McIntyre Ltd, 2015), 33.

⁹⁸ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 160.

⁹⁹ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 375.

¹⁰⁰ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 424.

1st as originally planned resulted in the severe retribution by Seyss-Inquart and his government over of the Dutch population, resulting in the Hunger Winter.

As a direct result of the substantial increase in Nazi oppression of the Dutch population throughout the Hunger Winter of 1944-1945, the Allied forces deemed it essential not only to continue driving eastward into Germany, but also north and west to provide much needed relief to the Netherlands who had suffered as a result of their support to the Allied cause.¹⁰¹ This task came down to the Canadians from the Commander of the British 21st Army Group to which they belonged, General Bernard Montgomery.¹⁰² Canadian actions from this point onwards were mostly directed towards the Netherlands where they conducted a series of sequential operations as part of a spring offensive designed to eliminate the German presence throughout the country.¹⁰³ These actions commenced on April 2nd, 1945, and consisted of Operations Destroyer, Cannonshot, Anger, and Cleanser.

Operation Destroyer, which occurred 2-3 April, was one of the preliminary operations of 1945 that saw Canadian troops recommence its advance into the Netherlands since its operations at the end of 1944.¹⁰⁴ This operation was designed to clear out the flooded “island” between the River Waal and Neder Rijn west of the Pannerdensch Canal, and command was assigned to Major-General Charles Foulkes,

¹⁰¹ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 548, 568.

¹⁰² C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 548, 568.

¹⁰³ Although Canadian forces did continue to play a significant role in Germany concurrent to their operations in the Netherlands, we will remain mostly focussed solely on the Dutch aspect of operations with the exception of individual brigade case studies.

¹⁰⁴ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 567.

commander I Corps.¹⁰⁵ The British 49th (West Riding) Division under command of Major-General Stuart Rawlins was tasked with clearing the eastern portion of the “island”, and 5th Canadian Armoured Division, under Major-General Bertram “Bert” Hoffmeister, was tasked with clearing north and west. On April 2nd the 49th (West Riding) Division accomplished most of that, clearing Haalderen to Doornenburg, and then the west bank of the Neder Rijn in the vicinity of Angeren and Huissen. The following day they had cleared the Neder Rijn, crossed, and seized Westervoort, finishing up along the southern portion of the river. 5th Canadian Armoured Division experienced similar success, clearing close to Randwijk on April 2, and completing operations by mid-morning the following day when they took the town, followed by Heteren and Driel.¹⁰⁶

Concurrent to Operation Destroyer was II Corps’ offensive actions in securing the east bank of the Ijssel River. 3rd Canadian Infantry Division had largely accomplished this by April 2nd, the same day Operation Destroyer commenced.¹⁰⁷ However, it was not until April 8th that Zutphen was captured, and April 10th when Deventer was wrestled from German hands.¹⁰⁸ Operation Cannonshot then commenced with 3rd Division holding firm on its objectives on the east bank of the Ijssel River, supporting the crossing

¹⁰⁵ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 565. Of note, this was not technically an island but referred to as one as the Germans had partially flooded the area and it was contained by rivers on all sides. The flooding of areas on the Netherlands was a typical German tactic as it greatly hindered Allied movement at both the tactical and operational levels, supporting their continued desire to delay. This was also the first set of actions that introduced I Corps, freshly arrived from the Mediterranean via Operation Goldflake, to operations in Northwest Europe. This marked the first time the First Canadian Army operated together within a shared battlespace.

¹⁰⁶ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 567-568.

¹⁰⁷ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 548.

¹⁰⁸ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 550-551.

of 1st Canadian Infantry Division, temporarily tasked from I Corps for this operation, to the west bank of the river and dominating terrain surrounding Apeldoorn.¹⁰⁹ This operation was spearheaded on April 11th by the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade and focussed on a crossing between Zutphen and Deventer, meeting such success that they were firm on their objectives by night that same day.¹¹⁰ This large-scale success was attributed mostly in part to the fact that the Germans were anticipating the crossing to occur at Deventer where bridges had already been established by engineers.¹¹¹ Canadian experience with strict German adherence to doctrine allowed them to anticipate and easily repel counterattacks, resulting in rapid expansion of the established bridgeheads on the west bank of the Ijssel.¹¹² Between 12-17 April 1st Canadian Infantry Division leapfrogged its brigades through each other towards Apeldoorn until its ultimate capture on April 17th when they assaulted the city with extremely little resistance.¹¹³ This sudden break in German fighting tenacity was a result not just of Operation Cannonshot, but the flanking Operation Cleanser that threatened to cut off all forces east of Amersfoort which will be discussed short order.

Operations Anger and Cleanser both launched concurrent to Operation Cannonshot. While II Corps was fighting west across the Ijssel, I Corps struck out north and west in a drive to sever German lines of communication and cut off a large portion of their forces. This plan commenced with 49th (West Riding) Division conducting

¹⁰⁹ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 551.

¹¹⁰ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 551.

¹¹¹ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 265.

¹¹² T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 265.

¹¹³ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 552, 575.

Operation Anger which lasted from 12-14 April, and consisted specifically of the clearing of the city of Arnhem.¹¹⁴ With Arnhem secured, and maximizing on the mobility and firepower afforded an armoured formation, 5th Canadian Armoured Division pushed through and began its drive north and west to the Ijsselmeer on April 14th as part of Operation Cleanser.¹¹⁵ This drive saw 5th Division move from Arnhem to Otterloo, which was secured on April 16th, followed by a bypass of Barneveld due to high levels of German resistance, and the ultimate capture of Voorthuizen.¹¹⁶ On April 17th Voorthuizen was secure and 5th Division cut off the enemy retreating from 1st Division's assault on Apeldoorn as part of Operation Cannonshot.¹¹⁷ The end in the southern and western Netherlands was near, setting the stage for the early truce and unique ending to the war in the western Netherland between the Allies and Germany. This will be further discussed in the next chapter.

While I Canadian Corps defeated and contained the Germans south of the Zuider Zee, II Corps was also active across a large front at the same time. Not only did it manage the securing of the east bank of Ijssel and Operation Cannonshot with two divisions,¹¹⁸ but it also had three divisions responsible for a huge thrust towards the North Sea. This mission was driven by Royal Navy concerns over continued U-boat launches, including new Schnorkel submarines as well as the need for further port facilities to ease the logistical throughput at Antwerp.¹¹⁹ This mission fell to 2nd Canadian Infantry, 4th

¹¹⁴ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 570-571.

¹¹⁵ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 576.

¹¹⁶ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 578.

¹¹⁷ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 578.

¹¹⁸ Keeping in mind 1st Division was temporarily assigned from I Corps to the command of II Corps.

¹¹⁹ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 276.

Canadian Armoured, and 1st Polish Armoured Divisions who were on the move as early as April 5th.¹²⁰ Canadian operations northwards were supported by a series of airborne jumps by the British Special Air Service, augmented by French and Belgian battalions eager to exact revenge on their German foes before the war came to a close.¹²¹ Jumping into areas surrounding Groningen, Coevorden, and Zwolle on the nights of 7-8 April, their role was to disrupt the German rear area through destruction of communications towers and harassing attacks.¹²² The capture of key commanding terrain features by the special forces enabled Canadian troops to push forward, securing Leeuwarden on April 15th, Groningen the following day, and the immediate area surrounding Delfzijl on April 22nd, thus reaching the North Sea.¹²³

Overall, the situation in the Netherlands was in a constant state of flux during its five years of Nazi occupation. The government in exile was little more than a beacon of hope at the beginning when the Queen and small pieces of government were shepherded away to the United Kingdom. As the years progressed this government reformed, established a means to communicate with its people through Radio Oranje, and ultimately reassert direction and guidance to its civilian population in coordination with Allied efforts. The German government can be seen at the immediate onset of occupation as relatively non-hostile in comparison to the treatment of other countries, but eventually resorted to more excessive and brutal methods in an attempt to Nazify and maintain control of a population resistant to its presence. The Dutch Resistance was relatively

¹²⁰ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 552.

¹²¹ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 270.

¹²² C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 553.

¹²³ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 270-271, 281-282 ; C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 555-556.

non-existent and rather impotent at first, favouring non-confrontational means to disrupt Nazi activities. This movement eventually evolved into a relatively, albeit de-centralized, coordinated group capable of occasionally synchronizing effects to assist in Allied efforts. Lastly, the complete Allied liberation of the Netherlands in 1944 proved impossible. The railroad strikes and subsequent repercussions imposed by the Germans led to rapid changes in the warfighting dynamic with a continued drive into Germany being required, but large-scale humanitarian relief in the Netherlands also deemed essential. It would take a long winter of grim action along the Dutch, Belgian and German borders followed by a renewed general spring offensive before the end of the war in the Netherlands in May 1945. The next chapters investigate how the war ended for Canadian brigades depending on their unique location and circumstances.

Chapter II: 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade: 25 April – 31 May 1945

The story of 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade¹²⁴ reveals how the war to peace transition unfolded in the densely-populated western Netherlands, specifically the provinces of North Holland, South Holland, and Utrecht. Between April 25th and May 31st this brigade saw a series of constant shifts that, although for the better, ultimately proved that the transition from war to peace is never as simple as a few pen strokes. This brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Mortimer Patrick (Pat) Bogert, as a part of 1st Canadian Infantry Division¹²⁵, became one of busiest formations at the end of hostilities. The responsibilities of 2 Brigade saw them almost double in size and stretched very thin across their area of operations. Their task list quickly became expansive including managing, disarming, and processing a defeated army for return to Germany. It is important to identify how these soldiers managed their interactions with both the Germans and Dutch, and how they took care of themselves in this newfound and confusing era of peace.

On April 27th the lead battalions of 2 Brigade secured Achterveld, a small community approximately five kilometres southeast of the city of Amersfoort in Utrecht Province, and pushed patrols as far west as the flooded Modderbeek, a canal bordering the east of the city.¹²⁶ The brigade headquarters had established itself a few kilometres east of Achterveld in the township of Barneveld.¹²⁷ It was here that Bogert commenced

¹²⁴ Hereafter 2 Brigade.

¹²⁵ Hereafter 1 Division.

¹²⁶ 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade (hereafter 2 Brigade), "Operations Log" (hereafter Ops Log), 26 Apr 45: Serial 22. Microfilm: T11077, Vol: 14080.

¹²⁷ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 26 Apr 45. Microfilm: T11077, Vol: 14080.

planning for subsequent operations against German forces which were rapidly running out of territory as they saw themselves pushed up against the Atlantic Ocean.

April 27th saw the first move towards peace in this small part of the European theatre. Bogert was informed by his divisional commander, Major-General Harry Foster, that Allied forces had been in wireless (radio) contact with the Germans via the Dutch resistance as early as April 13th to “discuss ways and means of getting food to the starving Dutch”.¹²⁸ Although no war logs or army headquarters reports state the specific reason for the selection of 2 Brigade for the task, 2 Brigade was selected to facilitate the negotiations between the Allied and German forces. However, when analyzing the terrain, it can be seen the German-occupied western Netherlands consisted of the provinces of North Holland, South Holland, and Utrecht. With 2 Brigade on the doorstep of the first major urban centre of Amersfoort in these provinces it is only logical they received this task having already secured the terrain in the immediate vicinity.

2 Brigade therefore set to the task and prepared a schoolhouse in Achterveld for the negotiations. Orders were received at 2100hrs that same day through I Canadian Corps that a ceasefire would be in effect as of 0800hrs on April 28th in order to facilitate the negotiations.¹²⁹ This presented a very unique situation for Canadian troops in the western Netherlands as the war was still raging throughout Europe, including in the remainder of the Netherlands. However, 2 Brigade found itself in unique circumstances in Utrecht Province with the promise of ceasefire eight days before the German surrender

¹²⁸ Army Headquarters (hereafter AHQ) “Report No. 56”, 18 Nov 52, para 37.

¹²⁹ 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 27 Apr 45.

was announced and ten days before the unconditional surrender was signed. This significant step marked what would become the beginning of the transition to peace in the western Netherlands.

April 28th saw the first visible signs of peace. Bogert crossed through the Loyal Edmonton Regiment's lines into German held territory at 0800hrs once the ceasefire came into effect.¹³⁰ Contact was eventually made after some initial confusion regarding the rendezvous, forcing Bogert and his team to venture deeper into enemy lines.¹³¹ With white flags flying on vehicles and two tired armies staring at each other, Bogert received a "tired Nazi salute" from Reichsrichter Ernst Schwebel, Judge Advocate for the Occupied Netherlands.¹³² A small level of formality was also reciprocated by the Canadians, with Bogert placing Scwebel's party in jeeps blindfolded but having Schwebel seated in his personal staff car.¹³³ The German party was then transported to Achterveld via an indirect route where they were met with Allied representatives. A testament to the significance of this venture, the Allied party constituted representatives from 21st Army Group, 1st Canadian Army, Dutch, and Russian delegations, and other representation from air and naval forces. Key personalities in attendance included Montgomery's Chief of Staff, Major-General Francis de Guignand; Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands; Commander I Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Charles Foulkes; and

¹³⁰ Hereafter Eddies. It is important to note that despite 'regiment' being in the names of several infantry battalions during the Second World War, they were only battalion strength (~800 per battalion). Therefore, the infantry brigades, such as 2 Brigade, consisted primarily of three fighting battalions (vice three battalions per regiment which could lead one to think an infantry brigade had nine battalions) and a defence platoon for the brigade headquarters.

¹³¹ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 39.

¹³² 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 28 Apr 45. With 'Richter' translating to 'judge', this was a title for judges during the reign of Nazi Germany.

¹³³ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 40.

Commander 1st Canadian Division, Major-General Harry Foster, amongst several others to discuss the feeding of the Dutch population in the western provinces.¹³⁴

Negotiations continued under Canadian control throughout the 29th and 30th of April. On April 29th Foulkes and Bogert coordinated the details of UN demands with the German Lieutenant-General Plucher, Commander of the German 6th Parachute Division.¹³⁵ Prospects for an agreement grew on April 30th when Schwebel and Plucher were joined by Reichskommissar Seyss-Inquart, the Nazi governor of the Netherlands and “#1 war criminal in Holland”.¹³⁶ These negotiations also consisted of Dutch personnel responsible for the distribution of food. The first positive results of these negotiations were demonstrated on May 2nd. At first light 270 lorries crossed over 49th (West Riding) Division’s lines into German occupied territory to deliver vital food supplies to the starving Dutch population.¹³⁷ These supplies delivered by ground complimented the 2600 tons that had been dropped by the United States and British Air Force the day prior.¹³⁸

Despite the formal cessation of hostilities by way of unconditional surrender on May 7th, the closing days of April saw the scaling down of hostilities and initial moves toward peace in the western Netherlands. These moves brought with them the initial tasks for the stabilization of a damaged country which the Allies would be required to

¹³⁴ AHQ “Report No. 56”, 18 Nov 52, para 40.

¹³⁵ 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 29 Apr 45.

¹³⁶ 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 30 Apr 45. ‘Reichskommissar’ was another Nazi Germany title, synonymous with ‘governor’.

¹³⁷ 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 2 May 45.

¹³⁸ 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 2 May 45. The air drop mission for supplies was known as Operation Manna, with the Canadian ground delivery named Operation Faust.

execute, such as the influx of food to the starving country. However, most importantly, it marked the start of the transition from war to peace.

This ceasefire period was not without great tension, and it would be folly to assume that it was anything other than tenuous. The Allies and Germans had for years endured a daily routine of firefights, bombardments, and killing. Getting these soldiers to abide with the ceasefire as of April 28th at 0800hrs was simple enough for the leadership of the belligerent parties to agree on, the enforcing of such was another matter altogether. There were no fewer than three instances where 2 Brigade was subject to hostile action during this ceasefire period. The first occurred on the afternoon of April 28th when a Canadian soldier was ‘sniped’ and killed.¹³⁹ Records indicate that not even an hour had passed before friendly artillery was being fired at German soldiers in what could be construed as reprisals. These actions saw 2 Brigade again communicate its direction throughout the formation and ensure the ceasefire was respected.¹⁴⁰ Elements of 2 Brigade were again subject to both mortar and sniper fire on May 1st. Evidence suggests friendly artillery was used to silence the two enemy mortars, and discipline appears to have prevailed with no retaliatory shots fired by Canadian troops when two of their soldiers on guard duty became subject to sniper fire.¹⁴¹ On May 2nd the Brigade headquarters issued a caveat to the ceasefire that allowed for the use of small arms (rifles, machine guns) for direct targets and indirect fire for counter-battery and counter-mortar use, although there was to be no offensive patrolling or artillery duels.¹⁴² On May 3rd at

¹³⁹ 2 Brigade, “Ops Log”, 28 Apr 45: Serial 15.

¹⁴⁰ 2 Brigade, “Ops Log”, 28 Apr 45: Serial 17-19.

¹⁴¹ 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 1 May 45. 2 Brigade “Ops Log”, 1 May 45: Serial 17-18.

¹⁴² 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 2 May 45.

1705hrs it was reported from Divisional headquarter that Germans planned to resume hostilities the following day. Within less than two hours both Canadians and Germans had ambush patrols out and were engaged in small-scale skirmishes throughout the remainder of the night. The outcomes of these skirmishes were negligible as they occurred at long range.¹⁴³

Layered on top of these peaceful negotiations and the tenuous ceasefire was the ever-present fog of war which led to the uncertainty of situations and information presented to 2 Brigade headquarters. Two incidents occurred on May 4th that led to confusion regarding future events. The first was information obtained from a Dutch SS prisoner during interrogation by the British 49th (West Riding) Division. This division was attached to 1 Canadian Corps at the time and situated south of 2 Brigade as, at this point in the war, they were en route to secure The Hague and Rotterdam by way of the main highway south of Utrecht.¹⁴⁴ The information obtained by 49th Division stated that Admiral Dönitz, who had succeeded Hitler after his suicide, had issued orders to “hold Holland at all costs”.¹⁴⁵ This is difficult to believe as the German surrender order came down that same day. However, the fact remains that it was important enough for the soldiers of 2 Brigade to communicate to their headquarters. The second incident commenced on May 4th at 2212hrs and lasted intermittently until the following day at 0825hrs. During this time one of the battalions from 3 Brigade positioned in De Hoef on the eastern outskirts of Amersfoort engaged the Eddies’ forward ‘D’ Company which was

¹⁴³ 2 Brigade, “Ops Log”, 3 May 45: Serial 21-30.

¹⁴⁴ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 572.

¹⁴⁵ 2 Brigade, “Ops Log”, 4 May 45: Serial 2.

positioned 500 metres away in Vinkenhoef. This same incident occurred twice throughout the night and had been reported throughout the battalions as friendly fire.¹⁴⁶ What makes the event stand out is that the same battalion from 3 Brigade engaged the same company from the Eddies twice, but that the second occurrence transpired after the official ceasefire came into effect at 0800hrs on May 5th which was brokered by the Allies and Germans. Orders for this ceasefire had been issued the day prior at 2300hrs,¹⁴⁷ yet the second friendly fire incident still occurred 25 minutes after the order was to have come into effect. Further investigation into these incidents indicate that the truce officially ended on May 2nd at 1615hrs. However, a non-offensive stance was maintained by order of 1st Division, with only sniping permitted. This directive was issued as other formations close to 2 Brigade were subject to far more hostile German activity throughout the ceasefire period leading to more defensive postures.¹⁴⁸

2 Brigade was nevertheless ready to maintain a high degree of warfighting competence despite anticipation that the war was drawing to a close in Europe. As early as April 28th the brigade began plans for the establishment of an NCO School to meet its operational requirements.¹⁴⁹ Specialized training continued to ensure that soldiers were properly trained on equipment while officers were sent back to England for company, platoon, mortar, and carrier command training.¹⁵⁰ The war was still raging in other parts of the world and a professional army had to maintain a high level of readiness.

¹⁴⁶ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 4 May 45: Serial 31-14 ; 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 5 May 45: Serial 5.

¹⁴⁷ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 4 May 45: Serial 40.

¹⁴⁸ 3 Brigade, "War Diary", 2 May 45. Microfilm: T11138, Vol: 14086.

¹⁴⁹ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 28 Apr 45, Ser: 23 ; 29 Apr 45, Ser: 5 ; 26 May 45, Ser: 6 ; "War Diary", 4 May 45.

¹⁵⁰ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 22 May 45, Ser: 14.

Throughout this timeframe the Dutch population ensured that Canadian troops were informed on German movements. The 2 Brigade operations log cites examples between April 25th and May 3rd where Dutch citizens provided the brigade with intelligence on enemy movements and terrain, and served as guides to assist in friendly troop movements.¹⁵¹ Regardless as to whether common civilians were aware of the rapidly changing dynamic between Germans and Allies at the time, it is evident that that they were taking no chances and wished to ensure that Canadian troops were best supported to defeat the Germans.

The official surrender of the German Army in Europe was a three-day process composed of several gateways. These gateways were pivotal to minimize casualties between armies and civilians until the formal surrender occurred. 2 Brigade confirmed on May 4th at 2350hrs that orders were issued by Admiral Dönitz to all German forces to surrender in the Netherlands, northwest Germany, Denmark, and the Frisian Islands, to 21st Army Group under Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery.¹⁵² The next two days saw a flurry of activity taking place as planning began detailing the employment of Canadian soldiers in the post-war Netherlands. On May 6th Bogert briefed his battalion commanders on their new post-conflict tasks. The immediate issue was oversight on the dumping of all German Army equipment at predetermined stockpile locations. Once complete the Germans would proceed to predetermined marshalling areas where they would fence themselves in..¹⁵³ It is interesting to note the identified need to employ

¹⁵¹ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 26 Apr 45, Ser: 7, 31 ; 27 Apr 45, Ser: 20 ; 28 Apr 45, Ser: 5, 22 ; 29 Apr 45, Ser: 17 ; 2 May 45, Ser: 10 ; 3 May 45, Ser: 24, 29.

¹⁵² 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 4 May 45 ; C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 609.

¹⁵³ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 6 May 45 ; 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 6 May 45, Ser: 20.

Canadian guards on these concentration areas not just for the sake of managing the Germans but to protect them from the civilian population.¹⁵⁴ Both the regimental histories of the Patricia's and Royals note that it became their duty to protect the Germans from the Dutch Resistance members interested in "paying off old scores".¹⁵⁵ After ten months of combat against the Germans in Northwest Europe and a climactic battle to liberate the oppressed Dutch population it now fell upon Canadian soldiers to assure the safety of surrendering German soldiers from a vengeful population. In addition to establishing guards on the concentration areas was the need to detail guards on the food and clothing dumps for security purposes, keeping the Germans as self-sufficient as possible prior to getting marched out of country. 2 Brigade's objective was to disarm the Germans within their area of operations and move them to Germany within a two-week period.¹⁵⁶ The Brigade also confined members of the Dutch SS. It was necessary to treat these individuals as German soldiers until further direction emerged lest they find methods of escape.¹⁵⁷ These were a core group of hardliners borne of the NSB who were specifically trained and unleashed in their hometowns, of which they had intimate knowledge, to enforce the will of the German Nazi Party. This group was both ruthless and brutal, terrorizing their country in the relentless persecution of the Jews throughout the war.¹⁵⁸ The beginnings of this demobilization policy included strict rules regarding

¹⁵⁴ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 6 May 45.

¹⁵⁵ Jeffrey Williams, *Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry* (London: Compton Press, 1972), 66 ; G.R. Stevens, *The Royal Canadian Regiment, Volume Two: 1933-1966* (London: London Printing & Lithographing Co., Limited, 1967), 194.

¹⁵⁶ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 6 May 45.

¹⁵⁷ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 6 May 45, Ser: 20.

¹⁵⁸ B. Moore, *Victims and Survivors*, 98, 121, 157, 199.

fraternization with Germans and their associates. This included any friendly interaction with German soldiers, gift exchanges, and interaction with women.¹⁵⁹

Finally, on May 7th, two days after Germany capitulated in northwest Europe, the unconditional surrender was signed and all offensive action ceased bringing a formal end to the war in Europe.¹⁶⁰ Bogart met with Lieutenant-General Barentin, the General Officer Commanding the 20th German Parachute Division at Aerdenhout to discuss the surrender terms within their area of operations.¹⁶¹ It is interesting to note that during this transitional timeframe German officers (less SS and parachute forces), military police, and those guarding equipment dumps were still permitted to carry personal weapons. These would not be taken until all German troops had penned themselves into holding areas in accordance with Allied direction.¹⁶²

Ultimately the real surrender occurred on May 5th even if it took until May 7th to become official. The effectiveness of the confirmed ceasefire throughout the Netherlands on May 5th proved invaluable given the intelligence Allies had received until

¹⁵⁹ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 6 May 45, Ser: 20 ; Headquarters 2 Brigade, Part I Orders, 6 Apr 45. Examples included shaking hands, allowing children to climb in military vehicles, association on familiar terms (especially women), visiting houses, drinking, playing games or sports, making or accepting gifts of any sort (including to or from children), attending dances and other social events, accompanying them anywhere outside of official business, and communication regarding any subject other than official business. It was also noted that those examples were not exhaustive, leaving the door open for interpretation in the instance other events transpired that violated this order but were not listed. Essentially, interaction with Germans was to be a business affair only.

¹⁶⁰ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 7 May 45, Ser: 3.

¹⁶¹ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 7 May 45. The surrender terms included a proforma found in the war diary which gave detailed directions to the Germans regarding how they would integrate into, and work with, the Allied chain of command. They were also required to report their numbers by rank category, provide locations of these soldiers, identify dumps of stores and equipment, and also identify areas still determined to be hazardous (such as non-cleared minefields).

¹⁶² 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 7 May 45, Ser: 21, 37.

that point indicated a possible resumption in hostilities. The transition to peace had commenced, albeit with both sides still holding weapons close at hand.

2 Brigade units were informed on May 6th that after the surrender the German Army would be demobilized and marched back to Germany via the IJmuiden Causeway. This task would become a significant logistical undertaking and require an elaborate plan to ensure it was carried out properly. The planning began as early as April 25th when Foster met with Bogert to discuss the future employment of 2 Brigade. This was followed up at a meeting two weeks later, on May 5th once the official ceasefire had gone into effect.¹⁶³ Post-war activities required a re-shaping of the current doctrinal structure of the infantry brigades. 2 Brigade was originally a Western Canadian formation comprised of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Seaforth Highlanders of Canada,¹⁶⁴ and the Loyal Edmonton Regiment. However, the new occupation duties saw the Eddies were re-assigned to 1 Brigade as part of the new Berlin Brigade, being formed for the occupation of the post-war German capital. In return 2 Brigade was reinforced with The Royal Canadian Regiment and the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment from 1 Brigade, bringing its strength to four infantry battalions.¹⁶⁵

With this new order of battle 2 Brigade set to the task of occupying the western Netherlands. The headquarters immediately set to work coordinating with the German 20th Parachute Division to confirm the locations of their food and equipment stockpiles. The information yielded from this coordination transformed into orders for this oversized

¹⁶³ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 25 Apr 45 ; 5 May 45.

¹⁶⁴ Hereafter referred to as Patricia's and Seaforths respectively.

¹⁶⁵ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 6 May 45. Hereafter referred to as Royals and Hasty Pee's respectively.

brigade to move out and occupy its assigned area, ensuring both Canadian and German guard details were tasked appropriately. 2 Brigade began to occupy its new area of operations in the western Netherlands on May 8th.¹⁶⁶ The Royals were assigned to the Fortress Ijmuiden area, located roughly 10 kilometres northwest of Amsterdam along the coast. The Hasty Pees occupied Santpoort, situated just north of Haarlem and roughly 10 kilometres from Amsterdam. The Patricia's set up in Bloemendaal, located west of Haarlem along the coast, with elements dispatched to the Hook van Holland, located southwest of The Hague along the coast. The Seaforths occupied Amsterdam and The Hague. 2 Brigade headquarters established itself in Aerdenhout, a small town in the south of Bloemendaal.¹⁶⁷ Movement into all these areas was met with a cheering and adulating crowd of Dutch citizens which temporarily slowed down the movement of 2 Brigade. Williams recalls in his work on the Patricia's that "all along the route buildings were decked with flags and the roads were lined with cheering Dutch people" which quickly "engulfed" them and restricted movement.¹⁶⁸ The Seaforths also noted their move into Amsterdam as delayed as the "pent-up emotions burst over [them], the first Regiment to enter the town".¹⁶⁹

The brigade began relieving the Germans within their respective areas on May 9th. It was also on this day that the brigade order of battle grew further to support the of disarming Germans in the western provinces. In spite of the newly assigned reinforcements, the Dutch population density in their heavily urbanized area of

¹⁶⁶ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 8 May 45, Ser: 24.

¹⁶⁷ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 7 May 45 ; 8 May 45.

¹⁶⁸ J. Williams, *Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry*, 66.

¹⁶⁹ R.H. Roy, *The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada*, 438.

responsibility stretched 2 Brigade's troops and vehicles to ensure they had presence everywhere. This increase in brigade strength was an iterative process with the first additions being the British 56th Heavy Regiment, Royal Artillery and 1st Canadian Survey Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery to help occupy Beverwijk at the north end of the IJmuiden Fortress.¹⁷⁰ May 16th saw the further addition of the Royal Canadian Dragoons from I Corps. The Dragoons were subsequently split to provide assistance to 56th Heavy and 1 Survey Regiments with disarmament in the Beverwijk region, and the remainder dispatched to occupy Haarlem.¹⁷¹ Finally, on May 17th the 4th Search Light Battery came under the command of 2 Brigade and occupied the town of Nordwijkerhout, between the Hook van Holland and Haarlem.¹⁷² In two weeks 2 Brigade's order of battle grew from a defence platoon and three infantry battalions to over double in size, encompassing a fourth infantry battalion, an armoured regiment, a survey regiment, a royal artillery regiment, and a search light battery, all of which were now performing tasks related to German disarmament vice their primary roles. This much larger brigade now spanned geographically along the coast from the Hook van Holland to Beverwijk and east as far as Amsterdam. 2 Brigade's area of operations thus expanded rapidly to encompass a portion of terrain that would previously have taken multiple divisions to manage during combat.

Bogert identified the requirement for closer integration with the German 20th Parachute Division. On May 9th he saw to it that liaison officers and land lines were

¹⁷⁰ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 9 May 45. Known hereafter as 56 Heavy Regiment and 1 Survey Regiment respectively.

¹⁷¹ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 16 May 45.

¹⁷² 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 17 May 45.

established between their respective headquarters as well as relevant subordinate headquarters, ensuring a well-established network and mechanism for future coordination.¹⁷³ Rules were quickly imposed to regulate the Germans and ensure order. Such direction to the Germans included the immediate implementation of a curfew of 1900hrs daily to be back in their concentration areas.¹⁷⁴ Unnecessary luxuries would also be removed from the Germans, permitting them basic resources for transport but no more. In addition to the removal of vehicles was the confiscation of bicycles, leaving a ratio of one for every 100 German soldiers, and five for a divisional headquarters.¹⁷⁵ Considering these bikes had been stolen from the Dutch by the Germans they were simply going back to their original owners. On May 7th 1 Canadian Corps headquarters directed that German key officers and other ranks (specifically military police) would carry concealed pistols at a ratio of one for every 100 soldiers in order to maintain order and discipline amongst themselves.¹⁷⁶

Local commanders at battalion level found themselves in the unenviable position of managing the public in addition to their task of disarming the Germans due to lack of Civil Affairs assistance at their level. The Canadian Civil Affairs teams planned for the liberation of the Netherlands in the fall of 1944. Unfortunately, their planning only considered a complete German withdrawal by Oct 1st 1944 by way of scorched-earth policy with all if the geographic, economic, and political resources of the Netherlands

¹⁷³ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 9 May 45, Ser: 22.

¹⁷⁴ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 9 May 45, Ser: 20.

¹⁷⁵ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 13 May 45, Ser: 52; 59.

¹⁷⁶ AHQ "Report No. 56", para 81 ; 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 13 May 45, Ser: 52; 59.

available which obviously did not come to pass.¹⁷⁷ Further exacerbating the problem, were the limited numbers of Civil Affairs officers who operated in small teams, and mostly at Army and Corps level.¹⁷⁸ Brigade and battalion commanders thus coordinated directly with the local Burgomeisters in the conduct of their daily activities.¹⁷⁹ 2 Brigade soldiers quickly discovered that disarming thousands of Germans was only one of several tasks they would need to manage. C.P. Stacey understandingly phrased it best as he stated “[w]hen one considers the treatment [the Dutch] were given during the German occupation, the Dutch civilian population was a model of good order and restraint, during the evacuation”.¹⁸⁰ The task of regulating the Dutch population can be broken down into three categories:

The first and most critical issue to manage was the aftermath of the Hunger Winter which saw the brigade occupying the majority of space in which 4.3 million civilians were in an advanced state of malnutrition.¹⁸¹ While managing this issue soldiers of 2 Brigade were required to field complaints from the Germans regarding Dutch civilians stealing foodstuffs items from their camps to include basic staples such as beef and potatoes.¹⁸² There were also several instances throughout the transition to peace where large-scale theft was carried out by the Dutch. In once case they had effectively

¹⁷⁷ CMHQ “Report No. 172”, para 45.

¹⁷⁸ AHQ “Report No. 13”, para 13 ; AHQ “Report No. 9”, Appx C, para 12. To better contextualize the Civil Affairs plan: 34 officers and 62 ORs were slated for 1st Canadian Army Headquarters, and 9 officers and 16 ORs to 2 Canadian Corps in Germany.

¹⁷⁹ Burgomeister is a local magistrate or mayor.

¹⁸⁰ AHQ “Report No. 56”, para 91.

¹⁸¹ CMHQ “Report No. 172”, para 51.

¹⁸² AHQ “Report No. 56”, 18 Nov 52, para 92

coordinated their efforts to steal coal from multiple barges as well as food from 12 others, further highlighting the dire situation these people had been suffering.¹⁸³

The second issue was traffic control and routine patrolling tasks. The Dutch SS, German soldiers, Nazi party officials, war criminals, and other hardliners had not been rounded up and there was concern of their escape through blending in with the civilian population. Measures were instituted to regulate the population through the use of a pass system to ensure movement of civilians was strictly controlled.¹⁸⁴ 2 Brigade established a fully manned barrier and checkpoint system throughout its area of operations and battalion commanders ensured Burgomeisters adopted a stricter policy with their population to ensure only necessary movements of civilians between areas were requested.¹⁸⁵ Patrols and clearances throughout the day and night were a requirement not only to enforce order and discipline amongst the Canadians, Dutch, and Germans, but also to ensure any German forces in hiding did not escape.¹⁸⁶

The last issue the soldiers of 2 Brigade faced in addition to their task of demobilizing the Germans was managing all the requests and information pouring in from the locals surrounding their respective areas. The Seaforths serve as an excellent example on this point. Despite their well-received entrance into Amsterdam they were immediately bombarded with a myriad of varying concerns from the population which further stretched their already strained personnel resources. Such issues included

¹⁸³ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 16 May 45, Ser: 36, 46.

¹⁸⁴ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 5 May 45 ; 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 5 May 45, Ser: 10.

¹⁸⁵ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 8 May 45, Ser: 18.

¹⁸⁶ Reginald Roy, *The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada: 1919-1965* (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1969), 440-441.

demands by the local authorities and civilians for vehicles and fuel, the arrest of known collaborators, inquiries regarding the pass system, and ownership disputes ranging from items as small as radios to expensive items such as horses and ships.¹⁸⁷

A picture can now be formed of the sheer size of job assigned to 2 Brigade. These soldiers quickly found themselves managing and regulating the civilian population in a drive towards stabilizing the country in addition to the disarming of German forces. This myriad of tasks imposed a serious demand on soldiers which quickly became a coveted commodity. Stacey aptly described the situation as having “a thousand and one problems [crop] up for which there were no answers in the book, and no book”.¹⁸⁸ Fortunately, brigade and battalion commanders were authorized to employ Dutch Resistance forces in certain tasks such as guarding German stockpiles, guard duty, and patrols, thus allowing the brigade to focus on its immediate task of rapidly evacuating the Germans from the Netherlands.¹⁸⁹

May 10th marked the first day that German disarmament commenced. With the vast bulk of German forces concentrated in the western Netherlands it was determined that they would all cycle through this area for processing and disarmament prior to the march home. Processing included the screening of SS, Gestapo, war criminals, loot, and so forth. Once processed these Germans would be marched in groups across the

¹⁸⁷ R.H. Roy, *The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada*, 440-441.

¹⁸⁸ AHQ “Report No. 56”, 18 Nov 52, para 92.

¹⁸⁹ AHQ “Report No. 56”, 18 Nov 52, para 94 ; 2 Brigade, “Ops Log”, 29 May 45, Ser: 39 ; 31 May 45, Ser: 26.

IJsselmeer causeway for the long march home.¹⁹⁰ 2 Brigade would become involved in this task.

The Royals established themselves in the Fortress IJmuiden area, positioning their battalion headquarters close to a very large building selected specifically for the purpose of processing German soldiers. The process developed for this task was the German soldier entered, deposited his weapons and any other relevant equipment in various assigned rooms, exited, and was promptly marched to assigned housing on the western end of the fortress where they awaited future instruction.¹⁹¹ This building became fittingly known as the “Sausage Machine” and effectively processed 5,900 German soldiers on its first day of operation.¹⁹² The Royals continued to serve as the primary hub for disarmament in 2 Brigade’s area of operations. The Patricia’s and 56th Heavy Regiment were next to send their German charges through the Sausage Machine on May 11th, and the Seaforths were one of the last battalions to push theirs through on the 16th. By the end of the day on May 16th 2 Brigade had effectively processed and prepared over 21,000 German soldiers within their area of operations for onwards movement back to Germany with only those remaining on guards, obstacle clearances, or other duties remaining to be processed.¹⁹³ Working with Stacey’s numbers of 120,000 Germans to be dispatched from the western Netherlands, this figure of 21,000 represents the processing

¹⁹⁰ AHQ “Report No. 56”, 18 Nov 52, para 85-88.

¹⁹¹ 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 10 May 45.

¹⁹² 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 10 May 45.

¹⁹³ 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 11 May 45 ; 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 16 May 45.

of 17.5% of all Germans by one Brigade in an area that spanned two divisions in a period of seven days.¹⁹⁴

The German soldiers did not sit idle after being run through the Sausage Machine. The battalions needed labour and 2 Brigade headquarters was willing to provide it by way of German soldiers.¹⁹⁵ German labour parties became a frequent demand and were called upon by various units almost every day until their final departure on May 28th.¹⁹⁶ These labour parties performed obstacle clearance, including the removal of minefields and other dangerous unexploded ordnance.¹⁹⁷ Disposal of panzerfaust rockets, grenades, and clearance of ammunition dumps was also a task the brigade preferred that the Germans performed.¹⁹⁸ German soldiers also provided a pool of basic labour for regular tasks such as cleaning and preparing buildings for use as an NCO Academy or for social events.¹⁹⁹

May 22nd saw the first movement of German soldiers depart from 2 Brigade's area of operations under German control and supervised by Canadian units. Ijmuiden Fortress transitioned from serving as a processing centre to a staging point for German soldiers moving out of country. This location was important it also served as a Royal Navy hub for control of German transports that would move those unable to march

¹⁹⁴ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 87. 1st Division and British 49th (West Riding) Division (later replaced by 3rd Division) all took up positions to process Germans in the western provinces during this timeframe.

¹⁹⁵ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 14 May 45, Ser: 10.

¹⁹⁶ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 13 May 45, Ser: 26 ; 15 May 45, Ser: 32 ; 16 May 45, Ser: 58 ; 17 May 45, Ser: 45 ; 19 May 45, Ser: 37 ; 21 May 45, Ser: 43-44 ; 22 May 45, Ser: 41-42 ; 23 May 45, Ser: 35-36 ; 24 May 45, Ser: 43, 58 ; 25 May 45, Ser: 48 ; 26 May 45, Ser: 38 ; 27 May 45, Ser: 11, 22.

¹⁹⁷ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 12 May 45, Ser: 13, 34, 42.

¹⁹⁸ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 16 May 45, Ser: 58 ; 31 May 45, Ser: 13.

¹⁹⁹ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 24 May 45 ; 29 May 45 ; 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 28 May 45, Ser: 12-13 ; 29 May 45, Ser: 21 ; 30 May 45, Ser: 17.

back.²⁰⁰ The remainder of the staging areas were established outside of 2 Brigade's area north of Beverwijk. From that point onwards the Germans would be regulated by task forces primarily consisting of 2nd and 5th Canadian Medium Artillery Regiments on either side of the Ijsselmeer causeway, eventually being handed over to 5th Armoured Division to monitor the route march to Germany.²⁰¹ German forces cycling through IJmuiden Fortress and other staging areas would be subject to random searches for loot. By the time the German's started departing 2 Brigade's area of operations the Royals had already collected some 2 million Dutch guilders which would be returned to the Netherlands.²⁰² Limitations were also imposed on German transport. For the purposes of the evacuation march, Canadian troops recognized a German company as 180 to 220 soldiers with a battalion consisting of four companies. A regiment consisted of five to six battalions, and a division comprised a headquarters and two regiments. Transport was allocated for battalion-level elements and above with battalions permitted one car, two motorcycles, 12 bicycles 20 wagons and 40 horses. Regiments were permitted six transport trucks, and divisions a total of 40.²⁰³ Most of the 120,000 Germans that needed to evacuate from the western provinces had to walk. In one last blow to German morale as they departed direction was issued from Bogert to enforce a no-singing policy.²⁰⁴ It was apparent the intent was to get the Germans out of the country quickly and quietly, a

²⁰⁰ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 87.

²⁰¹ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 88. The route march to Germany via the northern Netherlands will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

²⁰² 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 22 May 45 ; 28 May 45. At the time of liberation the rate of exchange for \$1 US was approximately 2.7 Dutch guilders.

²⁰³ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 20 May 45, Ser: 11.

²⁰⁴ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 23 May 45, Ser: 2.

task of which 2 Brigade proved more than up to the challenge. On May 28th, seven days after the German exodus began, the last major body of German's departed 2 Brigade's area of operations.²⁰⁵

While all this unfolded in May, maintaining good drill and discipline were also seen as critical. Bogert issued a directive on dress on May 12th which articulated specific direction to be enforced amongst his soldiers. This direction included details on dress, hygiene and hair, proper wearing of badges, and polishing of boots.²⁰⁶ Military parades became a regularity in this new peacetime environment, ranging from army to battalion level as a way of improving morale and reaching out to the general public. The most significant event for the brigade was the Victory Parade on May 21st in The Hague. This was an army-level event with General Crerar and Prince Bernhardt in attendance along with other key political and military figures.²⁰⁷ Other parades at battalion-level would follow throughout the remainder of the month in their respective areas of operation to either celebrate victory, pay respects to the fallen, or both.²⁰⁸

Brigade and battalion leadership needed to step in at times to ensure discipline was maintained. On one occasion the local Dutch population lodged complaints on May 9th regarding Canadian soldiers playing soccer with the Germans as well as trading cigarettes for pistols.²⁰⁹ This obviously needed to be addressed as it was poor form for the liberators to be enjoying time with the oppressors in front of the victims. It was also

²⁰⁵ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 28 May 45.

²⁰⁶ 2 Brigade, "Directive on Dress", 12 May 45.

²⁰⁷ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 21 May 45.

²⁰⁸ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 23 May 45 ; 31 May 45.

²⁰⁹ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 9 May 45, Ser 11.

in clear violation of the fraternization policy. Another example of the maintenance of discipline occurred when a company commander had all soldiers associated with the theft of four German vehicles from a German compound charged under the military justice system.²¹⁰ These two examples provide insight into how drill, dress, and deportment played a key role in post-war 2 Brigade. These elements are what maintain a professional army and sets them apart from others. The fact that there were so few disciplinary occurrences serve as a testament to the professionalism of the Canadian soldier during this timeframe.

A rigorous sports and social calendar was soon developed for all ranks of 2 Brigade. These soldiers were working hard to demobilize the Germans, manage the civilian population, and display a high level of professionalism through their dress and deportment. It was therefore only fitting that morale boosts such as these were implemented. 2 Brigade formed teams for tabloids, volleyball, track and field, boxing, horseshoes, tennis, and softball, and there was ample opportunity to participate both within the brigade and in competition with others.²¹¹ Bogert saw to it on May 2nd that the brigade sports committee began to draw up plans for its conduct of sports in the post-war environment to include participation in an already planned division-level competition slated for May 24th.²¹² In another example, records indicate the Patricia's leveraged May 17th, the timeframe after the Germans had been disarmed but before they had begun the

²¹⁰ 2 Brigade, "Ops Log", 24 May 45, Ser: 47.

²¹¹ 5th Canadian Armoured Brigade, "Sports Instruction", 26 Apr 45.

²¹² 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 2 May 45.

march back to Germany, to host a sports meet at the battalion level with brigade staff and ladies from town invited to observe.²¹³

The battalions immediately began increasing their social interaction with the local population as soon as they had settled in their new locations. Such activities included the first picture show put on by the headquarters with civilians able to participate on May 10th. It was such a success that it was decided they would become a regular event.²¹⁴ A vibrant mess atmosphere came to life, and “demand was greater than supply” regarding invitations to dances and other social activities hosted by the Dutch which became a daily occurrence.²¹⁵ The first official social event hosted by 2 Brigade occurred on May 31st in Zandfoort according to the war diary.²¹⁶ This coincides very closely with the departure of the last Germans from 2 Brigade’s area of operations and is logical that they would have been unable to carry out successful social functions prior to that date given their task load for the month of May. These sports and social programs are discernable as serving two purposes: firstly, they provided the soldiers a break from the stresses of combat and post-war tasks; secondly, they served to build trust and foster relationships with a population that had been terrorized for the past five years.

With such an onus placed on the morale of the soldiers it is unfortunate to read what G.R. Stevens described as a “short-sighted innovation” in his history of the Royals. During the month of May the Canadian Army introduced direction regarding ‘territorial

²¹³ 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 17 May 45.

²¹⁴ 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 10 May 45.

²¹⁵ R.H. Roy, *The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada*, 440 ; 2 Brigade, “War Diary”, 14 May 45, 18 May 45 ; 2 Brigade, “Ops Log”, 25 May 45, Ser: 15 ; 29 May 45, Ser: 23.

²¹⁶ 2 Brigade “War Diary”, 31 May 45.

cross-posting' which saw soldiers posted from their current unit to others based on the hometown geography of the soldier and the units.²¹⁷ For example, if a soldier serving with the Patricia's (a western unit) came from Ontario (an eastern part of the country), he could easily have found himself posted to the Royal Canadian Dragoons with no expertise as an armour soldier or history in that unit other than they both originated from the same geographic location (Ontario). On a positive note, however, 2 Brigade began shipping its first soldiers home on May 31st.²¹⁸

Relations between the Canadians and Germans shifted rapidly throughout the closing days of the war and the transition to peace. These two sides saw themselves engaged in hostile action, brokering a tenuous truce, transitioning to a surrender, and then evacuating the Germans from the Netherlands. This was a transition that spanned four weeks, shifting initially from combat to integration of headquarters between former belligerent nations. It is also apparent that management of the Germans was not the sole task to be managed by 2 Brigade. Their operational strength and area of operations rapidly expanded as they were tasked to concurrently manage a civilian population in need of rehabilitation concurrent to the disarming of the Germans. The references support there being no doubt as to the extremely positive relations between the Canadians and the Dutch. However, primary evidence within the war diary and operation logs of the brigade clearly indicate strict rules needed to be emplaced to regulate this population. To put it quite simply, the management of the Dutch was arguably just as intensive a task

²¹⁷ G.R. Stevens, *The Royal Canadian Regiment, Volume Two*, 196. Specific mention of this is also made in Chapter IV when discussing 5 Brigade.

²¹⁸ 2 Brigade, "War Diary", 29 May 45 ; 31 May 45

as getting the Germans out of the country and it was not simply a happy social time. The war had ended but a professional army still had tasks to perform.

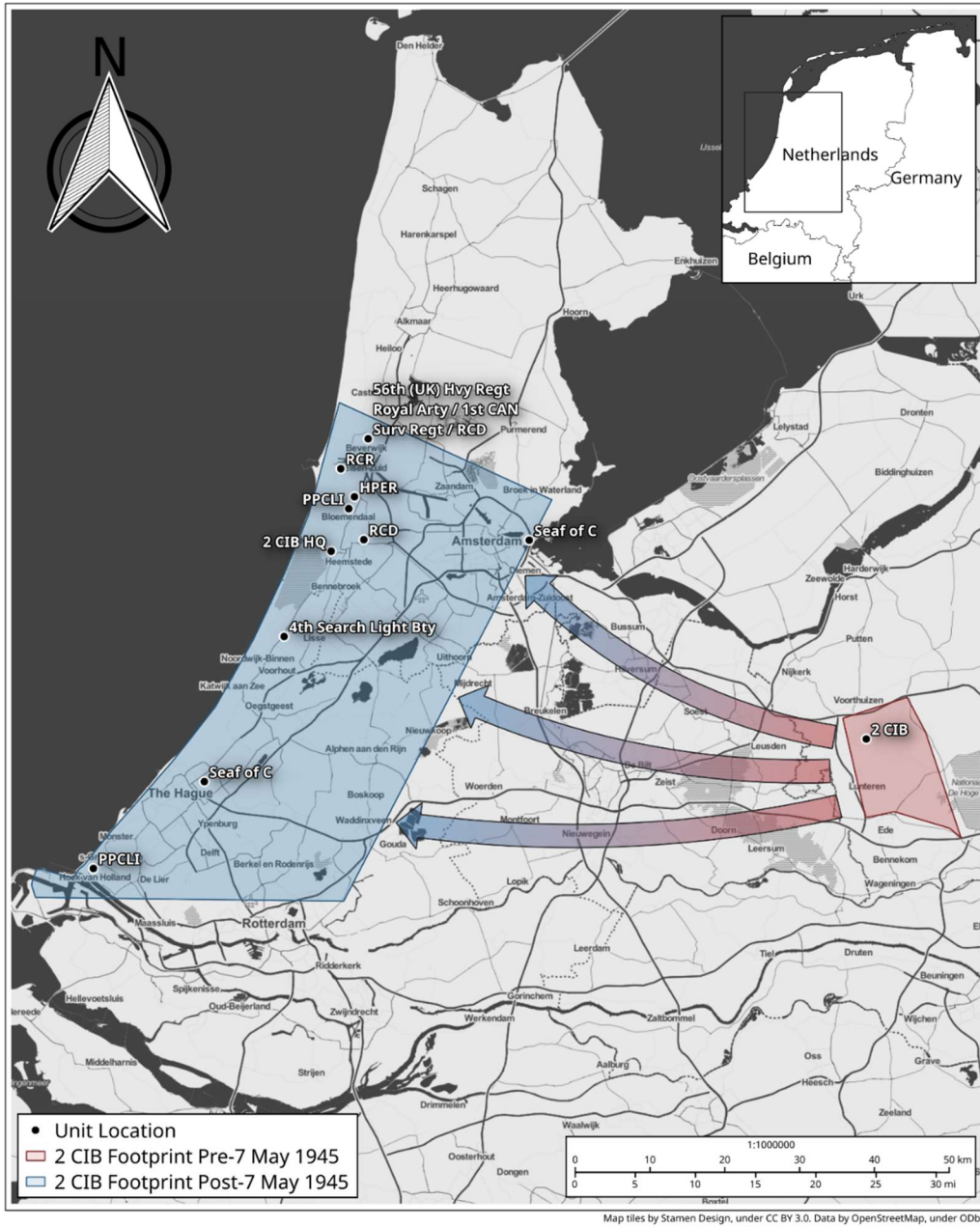


Figure 2 - 2 Brigade Footprint

This map highlights the rapid expansion of 2 Brigade as it transitioned from combat to postwar stability operations.

Chapter III: 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade: 23 April – 31 May 1945

The transition to peace for 7 Canadian Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Ralph Gibson, was marked with experiences unique when compared to other Canadian fighting formations at the time. This brigade fell under II Canadian Corps and found itself northwest Germany during the German surrender. Unlike 2 Brigade, 7 Brigade troops found that interactions with both the Germans and the local population varied greatly depending on what side of the Dutch-German border they were operating. These interactions spanned from combat operations to management of the civilian population.

The last days of the war required II Corps to clear the northeastern Netherlands, the Emden Peninsula, and eastern Frisian Islands in support of larger Allied strategic objectives in Germany.²¹⁹ This area encompassed the Dutch port city of Delfzijl and German port cities of Emden and Wilhelmshaven. Eisenhower required larger ports farther east in Germany to continue supporting the rapid gains the Allies had made that spring. He was also eager to avoid a similar situation they had faced in the opening of Antwerp port facilities several months prior where the Allies would have lost their momentum had the Scheldt Estuary not been captured.²²⁰ The benefit of capturing the Emden peninsula and its approaches through the Frisian Islands was ownership of both the Ems and Weser Rivers which offered shipping deeper into Germany and closer to the

²¹⁹ The Emden Peninsula is the piece of land in northwest Germany bracketed by the Ems and Weser Rivers. These objectives were detailed by Montgomery although the war drew to a close before 2 Corps focussed its attention on the Frisian Islands.

²²⁰ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 589.

front lines.²²¹ The Weser River connected to the German city of Bremen where the United States Second Army was focussing its attention, therefore offering a direct shipping connection with a littoral region.²²²

The commander of II Corps, Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds, was acting as army commander at the time of these operations. Simonds directed 5th Canadian Armoured Division to take over the Delfzijl area from 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, commanded by Major-General Ralph Keefer, of which 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade was a part.²²³ Orders were delivered on April 22nd and 5th Division assumed responsibility of the Delfzijl area from 3rd Division the following day.²²⁴

7 Brigade relocated ten kilometres south of its previous positions near Delfzijl as they prepared for the drive eastward to Germany. The Canadian Scottish Regiment occupied the area surround Eexta; the Royal Winnipeg Rifles occupied Oostwolde, and the Regina Rifles immediately joined in the action to clear the way to the Dollard Bay.²²⁵ The Canscots then remained in reserve as the Winnipeg Rifles pushed onwards to seize the small communities of Ganzedijk, Hongerige Wolf, and Drieborg.²²⁶ 7 Brigade operations in the Netherlands concluded on April 25th with the capture a battery of four 10.5 centimetre artillery pieces approximately three kilometres north of

²²¹ Daniel Byers, "Operation 'Canada'"; C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 590.

²²² C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 590.

²²³ Hereafter 3rd Division.

²²⁴ 7 Brigade, "War Diary", 23 Apr 45. Microfilm: T12018, Vol: 14132.

²²⁵ 7 Brigade, "War Diary", 24 Apr 45. Battalions known hereafter as Canscots, Winnipeg Rifles, and Regina Rifles respectively.

²²⁶ 7 Brigade, "War Diary", 24 Apr 45.

Hongerige Wolf which served as gatekeepers to the waterways along the northern Dutch-German border .²²⁷

The Germans mounted half-hearted delaying actions to buy time for units to escape to German territory as fighting in the northeast Netherlands drew to a close. Some officers abandoned their positions overnight on 24-25 April to flee across the Dollard Bay and Ems Estuary to Emden, Germany.²²⁸ Other German defenders established obstacles and barriers by blowing road craters, demolishing dyke systems to flood main approaches, and planting teller mines to immobilize Allied vehicles.²²⁹ Despite these delaying tactics four separate reports reached Brigade headquarters of German troops surrendering to 7 Brigade forward units by April 25th. In some instances 7 Brigade fortunately received surrenders prior to commencing assaults on German held positions. For example, the Regina Rifles found a white flag already flying when they approached the four-gun battery north of Hongerige Wolf, and took it without having to fire a shot.²³⁰ Newly captured German prisoners revealed provided useful information used to plan the last actions around the Ems Estuary.²³¹ 7 Brigade's situation on the northern Dutch-German border varied considerably from the late April truce established in 2 Brigade's

²²⁷ 7 Brigade, "War Diary", 25 Apr 45. The town of Hongerige Wolf was located using the Military Grid Reference System at grid 596 136. The 10.5 cm guns were reported at grid 598 163, which places them 200 metres east and 2.7 kilometres north of the town. Following a map this grid places these guns precisely on the coast of the Dollard.

²²⁸ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 25 Apr 45.

²²⁹ 7 Brigade, "Operations Log" (hereafter Ops Log), 25 Apr 45, Ser: 16, 23. Microfilm: T12018, Vol: 14132. A road crater is created through the use of explosives to create an artificial gap which cannot be crossed by vehicles and therefore hinders momentum. Teller mines were designed as anti-tank and also served the purpose of denying approaches to advancing forces.

²³⁰ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 25 Apr 45, Ser 11, 13. In fairness to the Winnipeg Rifles it was their battalion that identified the surrender from their position at 0835hrs and the Regina Rifles who took the surrender at 0950hrs.

²³¹ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 25 Apr 45, Ser 4, 11, 13, 15.

area of operations at the time. Nonetheless, the common experience for both two brigades was meeting many German troops who had lost interest in fighting on Dutch soil. It is evident that the morale inside the German Army was collapsing despite their orders to fight on. German commanders were therefore hampered in their effort to buy time to broker a peace with the Western Allies.

Between 26-28 April 7 Brigade relocated to a three by five-kilometre piece of land just inside the German border to the south of Leer. The Ems River to the west, the Leda River to the north, and the main north-south highway connecting Meppen to Leer formed their eastern boundary.²³² Simonds' plan called for 3rd Division to drive into the Emden Peninsula to clear the east bank of the Ems River and capture of Emden in accordance with Field Marshall Montgomery's direction.²³³ 7 Brigade would thus secure the staging area south of the Leda River and then support 9 Brigade's assault across the Leda and into Leer in 'Operation Duck'. Once 9 Brigade had gained lodgement 7 Brigade would then cross the Leda and expand the bridgehead by attacking into the adjacent town of Loga and surrounding woods. The end state of these operations oriented 9 Brigade towards Emden and 7 and 8 Brigades towards the city of Aurich and subsequently Wilhelmshaven.²³⁴ Morale throughout the brigade suffered during those last days of the war. The soldiers could feel victory was in the air, yet once again found themselves fighting and suffering losses inside Germany.²³⁵ In addition to continued offensive operations, the 7 Brigade members regretting leaving behind their warm Dutch

²³² 7 Brigade "War Diary", 26 Apr 45.

²³³ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 594.

²³⁴ 7 Brigade "Operation Order Duck", 28 Apr 45

²³⁵ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 26 Apr 45.

welcome. Instead, 7 Brigade, veterans of the bitter Rhineland fighting in Germany earlier in the year, once again experienced First Canadian Army's non-fraternization policy and did not look forward to the social restrictions that accompanied operations in Germany.²³⁶

The German Army adopted a much more rigid defensive posture fighting within their borders compared to their last few days in the Netherlands. The Canscots fought off multiple enemy counter-attacks and negotiated obstacles as they cleared the south bank of the Leda throughout 26-27 April.²³⁷ They took more casualties from artillery, mortars, and heavy machine gun fire as they cleared the highway from Irhove to the Leda bridging site.²³⁸ Over two days 7 Brigade lifted more than 600 mines in preparation for the April 28th attack by 9 Brigade across the Leda and into Leer.

In addition to the German attacks and obstacles, the civilian population in 7 Brigade's area hindered their efforts. Unlike the welcome reception 2 Brigade consistently received as they advanced through the Netherlands, 7 Brigade learned on April 24th that a lukewarm reception was the best they could expect as they advanced into Germany. The Regina Rifles noted as they approached the border that "no flags decorated the streets, no crowds milled about cheering...[t]hey seemed faintly pro-German".²³⁹ On April 27th a civilian was identified as replacing mines that had already been lifted resulting in one soldier killed, one wounded, and damage to a Wasp flamethrower vehicle.²⁴⁰ As a result 7 Brigade troops removed all civilians to the rear of

²³⁶ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 26 Apr 45.

²³⁷ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 26 Apr 45; 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 27 Apr 45, Ser: 44.

²³⁸ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 27 Apr 45.

²³⁹ Luxton, *1st Battalion Royal Regina Rifles*, 62.

²⁴⁰ Roy, *Ready for the Fray*, 442.

their area to avoid reoccurrences and better protect their men.²⁴¹ Only in a few instances did a handful of German civilians come forward to provide information on German positions.²⁴² It became clear that civilian interaction in Germany would not be as satisfying as those experienced by 2 Brigade with the Dutch.

9 Brigade put its attack in across the Leda River at 1500hrs on April 28th, the same day the truce came into effect in the western Netherlands.²⁴³ These soldiers quickly gained a lodgement despite the initial resistance experienced by 7 Brigade on the south of the river. Although fighting continue throughout the day, white flags appeared in portions of the city and 9 Brigade pushed over 290 German prisoners back to 7 Brigade.²⁴⁴ 7 Brigade crossed the Leda next and attacked towards on Loga on April 29th, having similar success to that of 9 Brigade, bagging some 400 prisoners by the end of April 30th.²⁴⁵

Offensive actions for Operation Duck ceased on May 1st, when those German units that could escape fled north to Aurich, a key communication hub on the peninsula between Emden and Wilhelmshaven, Germany's critical North Sea naval bases.²⁴⁶ As the Germans abandoned Leer and the Leda River sector they left behind a series of mined and cratered roads as far as 400 metres outside of Loga in 7 Brigade's area. They blew holes in the roads 30-40 metres wide requiring the installation of bridges and rendering

²⁴¹ Roy, *Ready for the Fray*, 442.

²⁴² 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 25 Apr 45, Ser: 20, 37 ; 26 Apr 45, Ser: 7 ; 1 May 45, Ser: 1.

²⁴³ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 595.

²⁴⁴ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 28 Apr 45, Ser: 24.

²⁴⁵ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 29-30 Apr 45.

²⁴⁶ CMHQ "Report No. 152", para 51.

Canadian forces unable to maintain the pursuit.²⁴⁷ 7 Brigade unit war diaries indicate that contact with the Germans was lost for hours at the closing of Operation Duck. 3rd Division was forced to consolidate north of Leer and Loga as their engineer units came forward to repair craters so that vehicles and heavy support weapons could get to the front.²⁴⁸ The German delay succeeded for a while, but it remained to be seen whether or not it mattered with Germany on the verge of complete collapse.

The first sign of reduced hostilities on 7 Brigade's front came on May 2nd when a lone German plane flew over 3rd Division's area. It was clearly German and reported by 16 different units, but none fired a single shot at it.²⁴⁹ On that day 7 Brigade offensive operations halted as 8 Brigade assumed the lead towards Aurich. During 2-3 May 7 Brigade conducted sweeps for German soldiers and navigated obstacles as the battalions prepared for a potential two-brigade assault on the city if it proved necessary.²⁵⁰ Hopes for avoiding a renewed attack increased dramatically as it was announced on May 3rd that Berlin had collapsed and surrendered unconditionally the day prior.²⁵¹ Yet discussions of surrender between 8 Brigade and the local German commander at Aurich, a Kapitän zur See, were strained. The German commander's superior, General-Admiral von Friedeburg, was still in discussion with Montgomery regarding the situation in western

²⁴⁷ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 1 May 45, Ser: 15, 30, 32, 52, 58.

²⁴⁸ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 95.

²⁴⁹ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 2 May 45.

²⁵⁰ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 2-3 May 45 ; 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 2 May 45, Ser: 1, 15, 30, 37, 39, 40.

²⁵¹ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 3 May 45.

Europe and northern Germany.²⁵² The Aurich garrison commander therefore argued he could not yield the city as he was still awaiting orders from his superior. Discussions outside Aurich lasted from 1400hrs to 1800hrs on May 4th when Brigadier-General Roberts, commanding 8 Brigade, announced that his troops would march into the city at 0700hrs the next morning and he would raze it with artillery if one enemy shot was fired at his men.²⁵³ This was a cunning ploy given that that 3rd Division's artillery was not yet in range of the city to follow through with Roberts' ultimatum.²⁵⁴ Fortunately, for the soldiers of both 7 and 8 Brigades, the official surrender was released two and a half hours later at 2030hrs with all German forces in northern Germany, the Netherlands, Heligoland, Denmark, and the Frisian Islands surrendering unconditionally as of 0800hrs on May 5th.²⁵⁵ The war was finally over for 7 Brigade members and they began celebrating "in their own inimitable way".²⁵⁶

²⁵² 7 Brigade "War Diary", 4 May 45 ; AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 105-106. The NATO equivalent to Kapitän zur See is Captain (Navy) which is a rank equivalent to Colonel in the army. General-Admiral is equivalent to full Admiral. Von Friedeburg had just succeeded Dönitz as commander of the German Navy and was responsible for the management of the area in which 3rd Division was fighting.

²⁵³ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 105-106.

²⁵⁴ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 102.

²⁵⁵ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 4 May 45.

²⁵⁶ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 4 May 45.

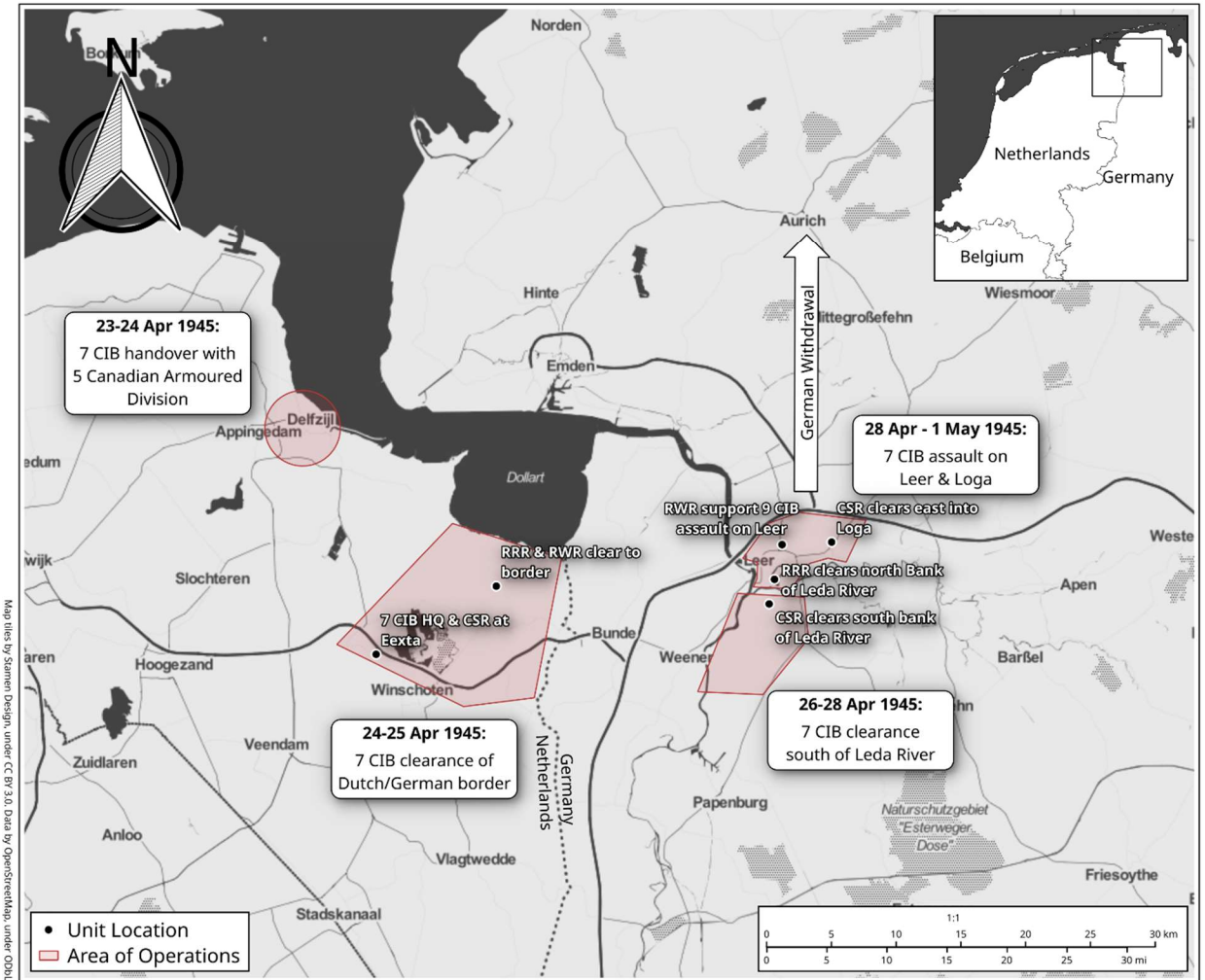


Figure 3 - 7 Brigade Combat Operations

This map follows the movements of 7 Brigade from the handover of Delfzijl to final combat operations in the vicinity of Leer and Loga.

3rd Division headquarters directed its brigades that because the German Army had officially capitulated prisoners of war would no longer be taken. Much like in 2 Brigade's area in the western Netherlands, German units in the Ems peninsula would manage themselves under Allied command as they were disarmed and prepared for

demobilization.²⁵⁷ 7 Brigade was relocated to the northern end of the Emden Peninsula on May 6th to assist in disarming and demobilizing of German forces. The Winnipeg Rifles occupied Esens, the Regina Rifles taking over Uтары, and 7 Brigade headquarters and Canscots moved into Webershav Sen.²⁵⁸ On this same day the 7 Brigade Intelligence Officer linked in with the local German commander and provided the first direction to German troops.²⁵⁹ Even with direction passed to the Germans it was evident the transition period would be difficult. 7 Brigade still met German troops trying to surrender despite the direction for German leadership to control their soldiers. The brigade war diarist captured this new situation:

“This without a doubt has been the queerest and most fantastic day of the war. German troops trying to surrender all over the place – not knowing where they are to go or what they are to do. Russians, Poles, Yugoslavs, Italians, Frenchmen wandering looking lost. Civilians in some places waving and smiling – in other places spitting and looking glum. The whole thing, on the part of the Germans is chaotic – they have been thoroughly and badly beaten and they are apathetic – they just don’t understand how it all came about – and now they are like a ship without a rudder.”²⁶⁰

The surrender became official on May 7th.²⁶¹ The transition to peace was complete and 7 Brigade units began a new phase of post-conflict stability-building operations to impose order in the chaos and confusion that reigned at the moment the order of war ended. It became clear that both the Canadians and Germans needed a grace period to adjust to this new post-conflict environment. The 7 Brigade war diary recorded

²⁵⁷ 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 5 May 45, Ser: 3.

²⁵⁸ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 6 May 45. Of note, Webershav Sen is not located on any modern maps, but is reported in the war logs as being 4 kilometres east and one kilometre south of Esens. This draws attention to the vicinity between Stedesdorf and Werdum.

²⁵⁹ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 6 May 45.

²⁶⁰ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 6 May 45.

²⁶¹ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 7 May 45.

how its soldiers were “spending the time getting used to their new areas, and trying to straighten out the tangle of German soldiers and civilians who are wandering around all over the place not knowing what to do”.²⁶² The Regina Rifles Regimental history defined the situation as “a comic opera effect was given to the first few days of peace by the armed parties of German soldiers seen on the roads and roaming the countryside”.²⁶³ Similar to events concurrently unfolding in the western Netherlands, a decision was rendered that German soldiers would be left to themselves for three to four days. This grace period would allow the Germans, now under the command of General Erich von Straube in East Friesland, the opportunity to overcome their broken communications lines, provide direction, and restore order among their soldiers.²⁶⁴ However, German leadership remained apathetic until spurred by Gibson May 9th directive that German soldiers seen outside of their concentration areas would be arrested.²⁶⁵

Unlike the Canadian divisions situated in the Netherlands at the closing of the war in Europe, 7 Brigade was required to execute disarmament duties employing “essential differences in the tasks imposed and the methods applied”.²⁶⁶ These ‘essential differences’ referred to the variations between countries under Civil Affairs policies vice those under Military Government. The newly liberated Netherlands was one of many European countries subject to Civil Affairs transition governments which “performed[ed]

²⁶² 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 7 May 45.

²⁶³ Eric Luxton, *1st Battalion The Regina Rifle Regiment 1939-1946* (Regina: Regina Rifles Association, 1946), 63-64.

²⁶⁴ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 7 May 45 ; AHQ “Report No. 56”, 18 Nov 52, para 124-125. East Friesland comprises the Emden Peninsula south to Papenburg, east to just before Wilhelmshaven, and west to include the surrounding islands.

²⁶⁵ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 9 May 45.

²⁶⁶ CMHQ “Report No. 140”, 10 Jul 45, para 14.

its functions by a friendly and close cooperation with the governments and peoples of the liberated territories”. In contrast Germany, at least in western parts, was placed under the control of Allied Military Government where additional functions were added to the Civil Affairs teams working in this country.²⁶⁷ Under this form of government, Germany’s power was strictly managed and regulated by military commanders and governors, allowing these commanders the authority to “issue orders to approved civil organisations [sic] and to the civil population, which have the force of law”.²⁶⁸ The fundamental difference between these two forms of government saw the former working with the local governments until such a time as they could effectively function independently, whereas the latter provided direction and guidance to the civil organizations and populations to regulate them in a manner best determined by the occupiers.

7 Brigade took the opportunity to familiarize themselves with their new surroundings in their new area of operations while the German forces reorganized themselves. Much like 2 Brigade, 7 Brigade found themselves stretching their personnel resources as they placed guards on equipment dumps and critical infrastructure. Early on the Canscots were ordered to assign a company to both guard an ammo dump and new secret German aircraft at an airfield, while also pushing out a platoon to guard a hospital.²⁶⁹ The brigade also provided escorts to essential German military and civilian personnel as they managed their affairs.²⁷⁰ As the brigade was operating in a former

²⁶⁷ CMHQ “Report No. 140”, 10 Jul 45, para 15-16.

²⁶⁸ CMHQ “Report No. 140”, 10 Jul 45, para 16.

²⁶⁹ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 7 May 45 ; 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 7 May 45, Ser: 1, 3.

²⁷⁰ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 7 May 45 ; 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 7 May 45, Ser: 3.

belligerent country strict orders were passed to prevent looting.²⁷¹ This pre-emptive direction was either successful as there are no disciplinary records in the war diary, or they were not included.

The grace period offered to German troops did not remove the immediate priority to identify German minefields and remove all ammunition and explosives. Liaison with local German units was quickly established on May 7th and most areas were identified the following day.²⁷² By May 13th 7 Brigade coordinated with ordnance teams to commence the safe removal of ammunition and explosives.²⁷³

Another critical task performed by 7 Brigade was to disarm German forces in their area. Following a process similar to that being carried out in the Netherlands, The Winnipeg Rifles took the largest share of German troops in the brigade area, rounding up 2000 in Esens by May 8th.²⁷⁴ In addition to demands for guard and disarmament tasks was the requirement for coordinated security sweeps. 7 Brigade units ran patrols to locate Allied prisoner of war and German stragglers. This task was transferred on May 10th to 3rd Division's reconnaissance regiment.²⁷⁵

7 Brigade soldiers found that overseeing German disarmament was just one facet of post-conflict stability building they learned to manage. On two occasions during their eight-day stay in the Emden Peninsula 7 Brigade units sorted out mixed nationalities from varying concentration camps. The first occurred on May 6th near Utarp when soldiers

²⁷¹ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 7 May 45, Ser: 1.

²⁷² 7 Brigade "War Diary", 7 May 45 ; 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 8 May 45, Ser: 4.

²⁷³ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 11 May 45, Ser: 5.

²⁷⁴ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 8 May 45 ; 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 9 May 45, Ser: 2.

²⁷⁵ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 10 May 45. This unit was the 7 Reconnaissance Regiment, known as the 17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars.

from the Regina Rifles identified a Russian prisoner of war camp.²⁷⁶ The Germans complicated matters by refusing to release their Russian captives despite the surrender order having been given.²⁷⁷ Two days later French prisoners who had escaped from Langeoog Island found their way to the Winnipeg Rifles lines. The French troops reported how they had swum to escape the island to report it still occupied, and that the German troops manning the camp were threatening the inmates.²⁷⁸ Both incidents were reported to divisional headquarters for further attention and the two French soldiers were sent up for debriefing.²⁷⁹ Once the issue with the Russian concentration camp was resolved, 7 Brigade units provided medical care and food to the former inmates who had suffered in captivity.²⁸⁰ The management of these refugees from varying nations was executed through the use of displaced personnel camps separated from the Germans.²⁸¹

Much like 2 Brigade, 7 Brigade emphasized visible military professionalism in post-war Germany through the enforcement of dress, drill, and deportment. Officers once again subjected their soldiers to routine inspections of personal equipment and vehicles which, in the words of The Winnipeg Rifles, created an “intense revival of Rifle traditions to sustain discipline in its new role of garrison duty”.²⁸² Personal equipment which would have been acceptable with dirt and stains during combat service “now

²⁷⁶ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 6 May 45.

²⁷⁷ 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 6 May 45, Ser: 7.

²⁷⁸ 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 8 May 45, Ser: 9. Langeoog Island is one of seven East Frisian islands to the north of mainland Germany. It is located north-north-west of Esens.

²⁷⁹ 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 6 May 45, Ser: 7 ; 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 8 May 45, Ser: 9.

²⁸⁰ Luxton, *1st Battalion Royal Regina Rifles*, 64.

²⁸¹ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 8 May 45.

²⁸² Bruce Tascona, Eric Wells, *Little Black Devils: A History of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles* (Winnipeg: Frye Publishing, 1983), 190-191 ; 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 11 May 45 ; 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 11 May 45, Ser: 3 ; 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 14 May 45.

reappeared as spotless black”.²⁸³ Vehicles previously dirty and adorned with personal charms and effects now had “all [indicators], toys, flags, souvenirs, and good luck charms [removed].”²⁸⁴ Reviewing officers for inspections and parades varied in rank up to and including the corps commander.²⁸⁵

The brigade also maintained a professional demeanour and fighting posture by continuing to train soldiers and development of leaders. 7 Brigade sent drafts of officers and NCOs on courses during the brief stay in the Emden Peninsula.²⁸⁶ However, it was not all business, and extra-curricular activities were quickly arranged to keep troops occupied when off duty, partly with entertainment. In addition, significant efforts were made from unit to corps level to prepare soldiers for reintegration to civilian life. Soldiers received educational lectures, films, and courses each day after drill to prepare them for their eventual return to Canada.²⁸⁷ 7 Brigade members benefitted from reading rooms, indoor games, “picture show” halls, daily showers, and daily sports each afternoon.²⁸⁸ Further, the non-fraternization rules did not stop the brigade from establishing messes for both officers’ and men for “liquid refreshments” and “sing song”.²⁸⁹ Those soldiers fortunate to earn leave passes could tour the United Kingdom, Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels, Ghent, Rotterdam, and many other large cities, using hotels

²⁸³ Tascona, *Little Black Devils*, 191.

²⁸⁴ 7 Brigade, “Daily Orders”, 5 May 45, para 1.

²⁸⁵ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 14 May 45.

²⁸⁶ 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 11 May 45, Ser: 11 ; 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 12 May 45, Ser: 2. These instances refer to a Captain from the Winnipeg Rifles being sent on a company commander course and an NCO from the Canscots being sent on a signals course.

²⁸⁷ Roy, *Ready for the Fray*, 447 ; 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 10 May 45.

²⁸⁸ Roy, *Ready for the Fray*, 447 ; 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 8-9 May 45.

²⁸⁹ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 9 May 45.

taken over by Canadian military authorities to serve as leave centres.²⁹⁰ The chain of command demanded a lot from its soldiers but repaid them in kind.

The notable difference between 2 and 7 Brigades, not surprisingly, was their interaction with the civilian population. Whereas 2 Brigade's battalions were delayed in their post-conflict stability building tasks by the grateful Dutch, those of 7 Brigade were met by quite the opposite in Germany. 7 Brigade described the general German public mood in its area as apathetic after May 5th. They noted "the civies didn't appear to be very happy about the war ending – but they hastened to make sure that we had what we wanted".²⁹¹ The Winnipeg Rifles regimental history noted that "the transition from war to peace was almost the reverse", as they "were not the most welcomed troops to march down the main streets of Aurich [with] the streets...lined by mute people seemingly stunned by a spectral procession".²⁹² The civilians were especially unhappy with billeting Canadian soldiers in their homes and communities, but came to "accept the inevitable".²⁹³ Distance was maintained on practically all fronts to include sustenance. Daily orders issued on May 5th dictated that soldiers must be self-sufficient with their rations and not take food from the German economy, nor would looting be tolerated.²⁹⁴ To deter or perhaps incentivize the troops from violating this direction the instructions explained how taking German resources would further destabilize the country requiring Canadian forces to occupy the place longer. This was a unique way to keep in line

²⁹⁰ Roy, *Ready for the Fray*, 447-448.

²⁹¹ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 5 May 45.

²⁹² Tascona, *Little Black Devils*, 190.

²⁹³ Luxton, *1st Battalion Royal Regina Rifles*, 64.

²⁹⁴ 7 Brigade, "Daily Orders", 5 May 45, para 3.

soldiers who wanted nothing to do with Germany. In contrast to the liberties and social pastimes 2 Brigade enjoyed in the Netherlands, 7 Brigade troops learned that the German civilians initially thought the Canadians would “kill all women and children and burn the town down”. The civilians warmed slightly to the brigade as they demonstrated their professionalism and compassion. The Winnipeg Rifles provided a burial party and rites for a German officer who had recently died. Smiles and greetings replaced spitting when Canadian troops passed by as the Germans civilians came to believe that the western Allies could protect them from the Russians.²⁹⁵

While 7 Brigade conducted duties in Germany the reality sank in that the war was only over in Europe and still raged on in the Pacific theatre. They also learned that an occupation force was being assembled for Germany and many became apprehensive about what the future had in store. Various rumours circulated about whether they might be transferred to fight in Burma, assigned as occupation troops, or returned home quickly to happily retire to “civie street”?²⁹⁶ Commanders had no answers readily available until May 12th when 7 Brigade members learned 3rd Division was to be transferred from II Corps southwards, down to I Canadian Corps to assist with the disarmament and transfer of German units in the western Netherlands.²⁹⁷ After a two-day handover with 6 Brigade of 2nd Division, 7 Brigade closed out operations in Germany and moved back to the

²⁹⁵ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 7, 10 May 45.

²⁹⁶ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 10 May 45. “Civie street” is a term still used in the Canadian military today regarding life outside of military service (i.e. “he retired and got a job as a banker out on civie street”).

²⁹⁷ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 12-13 May 45.

Netherlands on May 15th.²⁹⁸ The instructions detailing the move to the Utrecht area was fittingly named “Operation Fraternize”.²⁹⁹

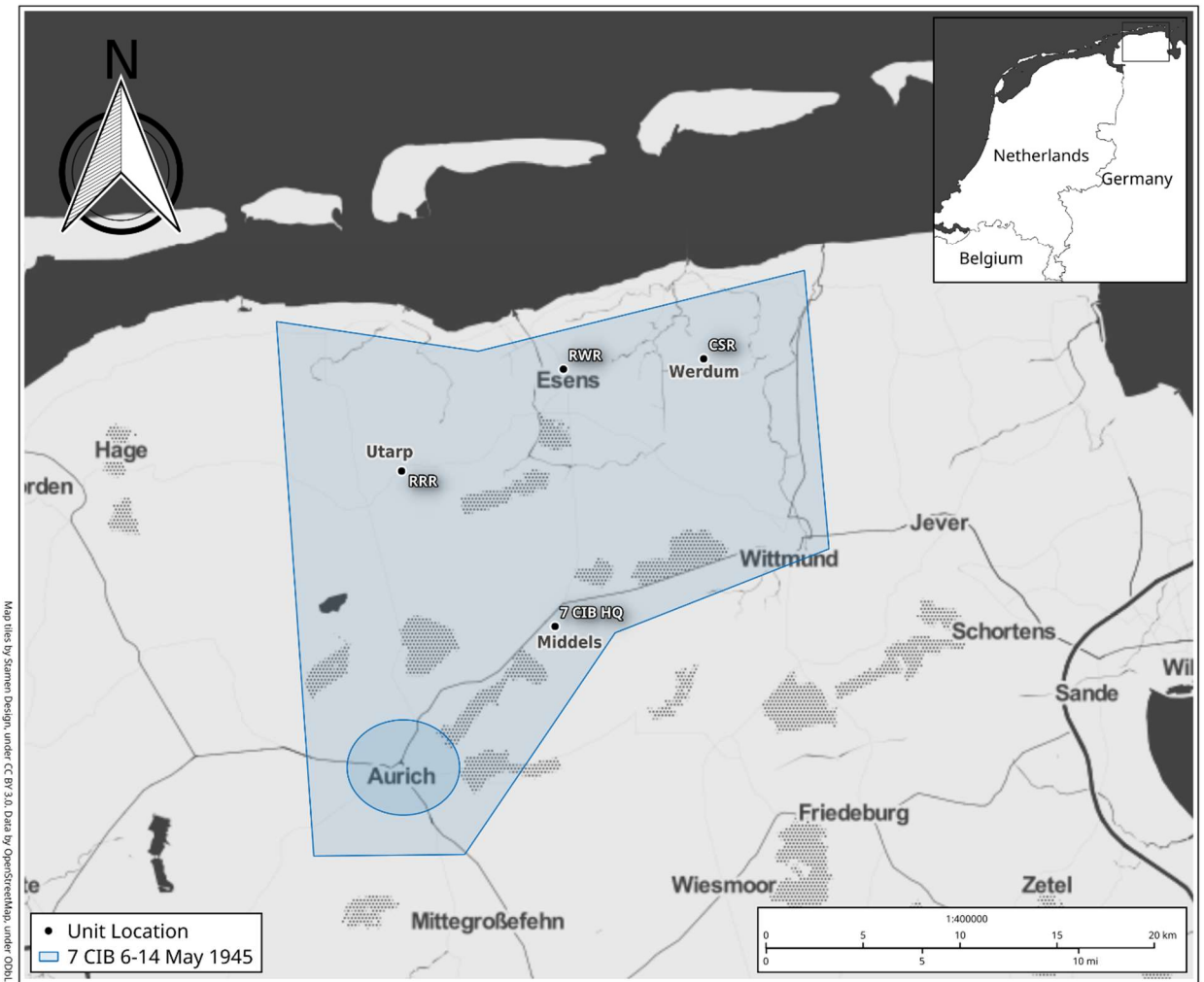


Figure 4 - 7 Brigade Operations in Postwar Germany

This map highlights the footprint of 7 Brigade in the immediate aftermath of the war conducting peacetime operations in Germany until May 14th, 1945.

²⁹⁸ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 13 May 45 ; 15 May 45.

²⁹⁹ 7 Brigade “Op Fraternize”, 14 May 45.

May 15th saw 7 Brigade units complete their handover with 6 Brigade and then spent most of the day driving the roughly 300 kilometres from northwest Germany southward to the village of Harskamp, 55 kilometres east of Utrecht.³⁰⁰ On May 16th 7 Brigade commanders and staffs linked up and handed over from 146 British Infantry Brigade from 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division.³⁰¹ On May 17th the brigade assumed responsibility of Utrecht and outlying areas to perform the same tasks as nearby 2 Brigade in disarming German forces stationed in the western provinces. 7 Brigade headquarters and The Winnipeg Rifles positioned themselves centrally within the city. The Canscots moved to the west end and outlying areas occupying the ‘Huis de Nijenrode’.³⁰² The Regina Rifles occupied the east end of the city.³⁰³ The Canscots “quickly learned that, if [the Netherlands] was free of Germany, it was certainly not free of Germans”.³⁰⁴ 7 Brigade assumed control of 8000 German troops who were subsequently divided into three large and a fourth smaller camp.³⁰⁵ Canadian morale took a hit when 7 Brigade personnel learned the Germans they were guarding had the best billets in the province and could not be moved due to orders, with the Germans having a “good laugh at [their] expense”.³⁰⁶ The ill-feeling among Canadian troops in

³⁰⁰ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 15 May 45 ; Luxton, *1st Battalion Royal Regina Rifles*, 64.

³⁰¹ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 16 May 45. Also known as the “West Riding’ Division, the 49th British Infantry Division is the same group that liberated Arnhem and served under the First Canadian Army I Corps.

³⁰² Roy, *Ready for the Fray*, 446. This castle is more easily identified today as Nyenrode Castle, located outside the village of Breukelen.

³⁰³ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 16 May 45.

³⁰⁴ Reginald Roy, *Ready for the Fray: The History of The Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary’s), 1920-2002* (Calgary: Bunker to Bunker Publishing, 2002), 446.

³⁰⁵ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 16-17 May 45.

³⁰⁶ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 17 May 45.

Utrecht was not surprising given that the Germans were the former enemy, had killed Canadians, and subjugated the Dutch for years. However, 7 Brigade accepted reality and focussed their attention on issues they could influence. Upon their arrival in Utrecht these troops found a much warmer social atmosphere than their experience in Germany. Like most other Dutch towns and villages, Utrecht opened its clubs, hostels, canteens, and dance halls for civilian and soldier alike.³⁰⁷ The officers mess held a “house warming” party on May 17th with “gals...commandeered from the British hospital in town and from some of the local Dutch population”.³⁰⁸ The troops had yet to spend 24 hours in their new area and they wasted no time integrating with the public. Dances became a nightly occurrence in what appears to be a rotational pattern between the officers, NCOs, and ORs hosting and inviting each other.³⁰⁹

While primarily tasked with the disarming and then removing German soldiers from the western Netherlands, 7 Brigade continued to carry on tasks similar to those previously conducted in Germany. Battalions carried out routine duties as guards, escorts, and security during intermediate halts whenever German troops had to move outside their cantonment areas.³¹⁰ Escorts primarily ensured the Germans were not accosted by the Dutch population while performing routine duties such as the transport of food stores to their camps.³¹¹ Unlike the experience of 2 Brigade there is little mention of managing a checkpoint system for military and civilian traffic in Utrecht to screen and

³⁰⁷ Roy, *Ready for the Fray*, 447.

³⁰⁸ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 17 May 45.

³⁰⁹ 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 19, 25-26, 29 May 45..

³¹⁰ Roy, *Ready for the Fray*, 447 ; 7 Brigade “War Diary”, 22 May 45.

³¹¹ 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 25 May 45, Ser: 1.

seek out war criminals. The reason for this is not mentioned but that work was likely completed days earlier by 146 British Brigade that controlled the area at the time hostilities first ended. 7 Brigade was aware of the direction to separate Gestapo, SS, Nazi Party officials, and other similar types from the regular German troops and send the former to staging areas in Bilthoven for further processing.³¹² The Germans under 7 Brigade control were all subject to the same general rules as the rest of their brethren staged throughout the Netherlands. That included the 2000hrs curfew and the authority for German officers and Military Police on duty to carry concealed pistols to maintain discipline amongst their ranks.³¹³ Specialized German staff such as doctors and medical assistants did not require the same passes required for the majority of Germans in order to travel outside of their concentration areas. These special staff were permitted permanent passes in the conduct of their regular duties to manage the various German camps staged throughout the city and outlying areas.³¹⁴

The massive evacuation march of the German garrison from the Netherlands began not long after 7 Brigade took over Utrecht Province. To the west, 2 Brigade's Fortress IJmuiden became a staging area for the German route march back to Germany. 7 Brigade was one of the brigades involved in organizing packets of disarmed German soldiers through IJmuiden either to be loaded onto sailing vessels or marched on foot

³¹² 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 22 May 45, Ser: 5 ; 7 Brigade "War Diary", 22 May 45. Bilthoven is a village on the northern outskirts of Utrecht. Of note, there is one instance in the Ops Log on 28 May where it mentions transition to the Dutch military to authorized passes for crossing the Grebbe Line. Passes were obviously therefore required but the evidence suggests much of the confusion was managed prior to 7 Brigade's arrival to Utrecht.

³¹³ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 17 May 45 ; AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 81.

³¹⁴ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 17 May 45, Ser: 9.

northwards across the IJsselmeer Causeway for the long walk back to Germany.³¹⁵ The original planned date to begin the German removal was May 25th, but I Corps started them moving as of the 22nd.³¹⁶ 7 Brigade's started pushing German troops westward towards 2 Brigade on May 21st!³¹⁷ The Germans departing 7 Brigade's area of operations were subject to the same transport restrictions as those imposed by 2 Brigade regarding car, motorcycle, bicycle, and cargo truck allotments.

Managing the continuous flow of Germans entering and exiting the Utrecht area presented unique challenges to 7 Brigade. Corps level orders for the German evacuation were formally issued on May 22nd in preparation for a planned start date of May 25th. However, it is apparent enthusiasm to remove the Germans from the country prevailed and the divisions started moving them early without the official orders.³¹⁸ The Corps orders allowed the divisions a significant amount of flexibility to execute parts of the mission. It is very likely that the delay of this order making its way down to battalion level did not have much influence on the actual execution of the task. The largest problem was communications between the Germans and Canadians. In some instances, 7 Brigade received unanticipated German packets. Those groups they did anticipate did not necessarily arrive in the numbers forecast.³¹⁹ In one case 7 Brigade anticipated the arrival of 150 German troops only to receive 900.³²⁰ The only way to adapt was to allow common sense to prevail and make due. In certain instances 7 Brigade simply deferred to

³¹⁵ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 88.

³¹⁶ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 86.

³¹⁷ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 21 May 45, Ser: 2.

³¹⁸ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 21 May 45, Ser: 2 ; 1st Canadian Corps – General Staff. "War Diary", May 1945.

³¹⁹ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 21 May 45, Ser: 4, 6.

³²⁰ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 21 May 45, Ser: 6.

common sense, allowed German packet commanders to site improvised concentration areas to account for swollen numbers instead of adhering to the established camp plan.³²¹ By May 24th the original German removal plan was amended to reflect no rest days in an attempt to expedite the throughput and get them across the causeway.³²² By the end of the month 7 Brigade had coordinated the movement of approximately 21,500 Germans throughout Utrecht.³²³

7 Brigade units disarmed the German forces in Utrecht at the same time they maintained a high standard of drill, dress, and deportment. Like all brigades in the Netherlands 7 Brigade was required to send representation to the Victory Parade at The Hague for which The Royal Winnipeg Rifles had the honour.³²⁴ Parades were also conducted locally within 7 Brigade's area in Utrecht. By the end of the month, after the German removal mission was complete, they were well underway in planning and practice for a massive divisional parade scheduled for June 6th that was to be the biggest and best to date.³²⁵ Dress policies were enforced and vehicle operational readiness was maintained demonstrating the continued professionalism of most members of the brigade.³²⁶ However, there were nevertheless instances of indiscipline amongst some. The Regina Rifles logs indicate the conduct of courts martial during this time although

³²¹ 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 21 May 45, Ser: 6.

³²² 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 24 May 45, Ser: 2.

³²³ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 22, 25 May 45. This figure of 21,500 represents Germans that passed through 7 Brigade's area and is not to be confused with the 8000 they personally processed for onwards movement to 2 Brigade.

³²⁴ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 21 May 45.

³²⁵ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 30 May 45.

³²⁶ 7 Brigade "War Diary", 21 May 45 ; 7 Brigade "War Diary", 30 May 45 ; 7 Brigade "Ops Log", 29 May 45, Ser: 4.

the reasons for which were not specified.³²⁷ Another Regina Rifles case describes the riflemen assigned to guard German troops did not do so “without a certain profit to themselves”.³²⁸ Given what these soldiers had experienced for the past several years it is understandable to accept that there would be breaches in discipline in this post-conflict environment.

One of the most significant issues that was enforced amongst 7 Brigade and the civilian population concerned the treatment of Dutch collaborators. There were “stringent instructions that no reprisal action [was] to be taken against collaborators except through courts”.³²⁹ This direction referred to Dutch forms of justice such as the shaving of heads of women who were German sympathizers and consorts. Canadian soldiers were ordered not to participate, or even to watch. “Severe disciplinary would be taken” against those who disobeyed.³³⁰

Despite that unpleasantness, social life significantly improved for 7 Brigade once back in the Netherlands. These soldiers enjoyed all the programs available to them while in Germany with the added benefit of more relaxed policies and the restoration of their freedoms. These liberties included the ability as of May 19th to write home with details on their geographical locations.³³¹ Further clarity was also issued regarding the Canadian commitment to operations in the Pacific. The Canadian Army offered an incentive to those soldiers willing to volunteer for the war against Japan. They could go home

³²⁷ 7 Brigade “Ops Log”, 25 May 45, Ser: 7.

³²⁸ Luxton, *1st Battalion Royal Regina Rifles*, 64.

³²⁹ 7 Brigade, “Daily Orders”, 24 May 45, para 3.

³³⁰ 7 Brigade, “Daily Orders”, 24 May 45, para 3.

³³¹ 7 Brigade, “Daily Orders”, 19 May 45, para 1. This was not permitted during the war as interception of personal correspondence was a threat that could compromise the Allies and their operations.

immediately for 35 days of leave prior to redeployment to the Pacific theatre.³³² Little did these volunteers realize at the time that they were luckily first home to Canada and there at the time the war in the Pacific ended. These volunteers thus unintentionally avoided the lengthy rehabilitation in war-torn Europe and protracted return to Canada.

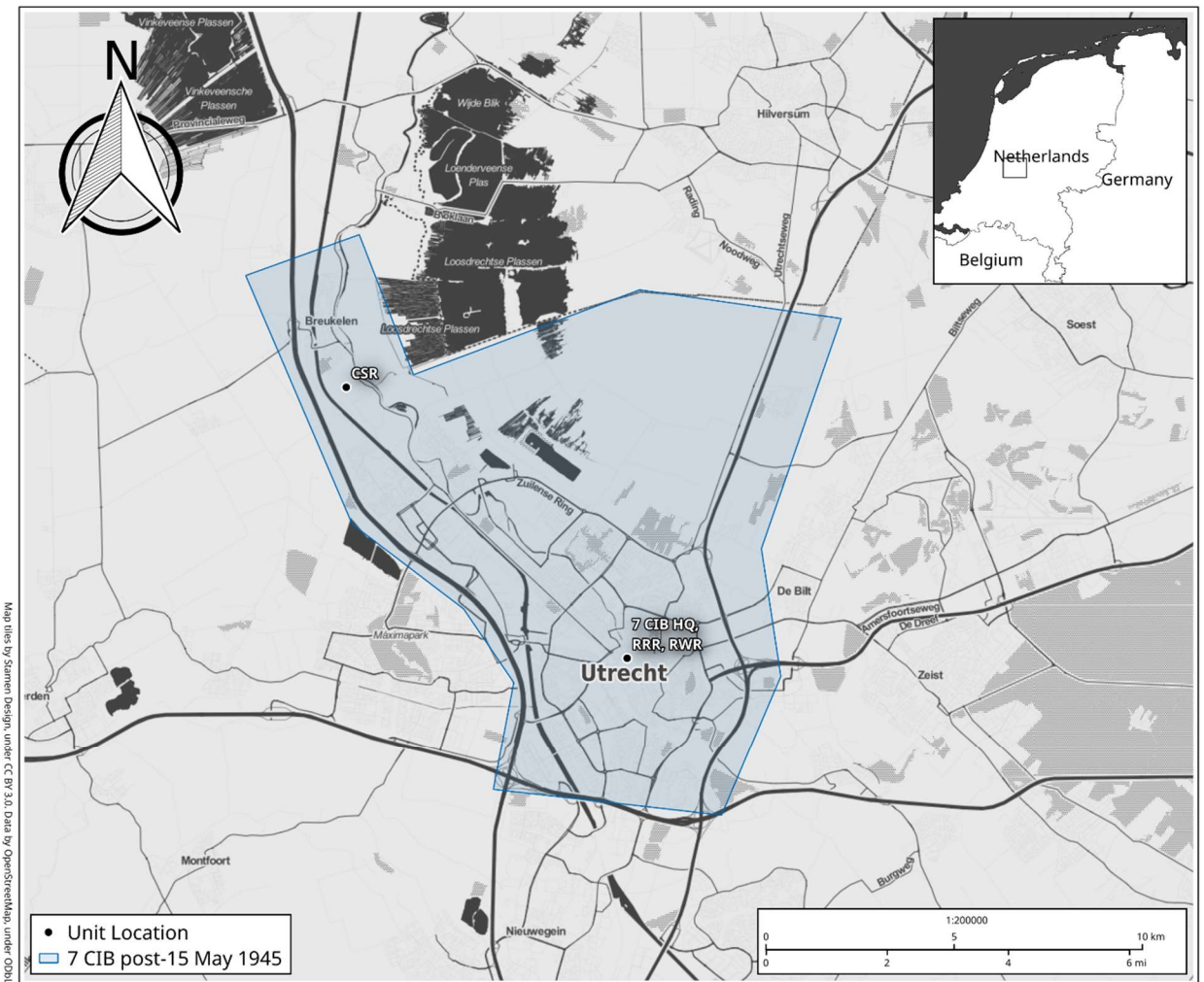


Figure 5 - 7 Brigade Operations in Postwar Netherlands

This map demonstrates the increased area of responsibility of the brigade in postwar Netherlands. Formerly a multi-divisional task, 7 Brigade saw themselves managing an entire city in May 1945.

³³² Tascona, *Little Black Devils*, 191; Luxton, *1st Battalion Royal Regina Rifles*, 64.

Ultimately 7 Brigade and 2 Brigades shared similar experiences at the close of the war. Dress, drill, deportment, interaction with the Dutch, interaction with the Germans, and overall tasks were all regulated through guidance provided by higher levels within the chain of command. However, it was the geography that provided the greatest contrast. Clearly the difference between ending hostilities early in the Western Netherlands on April 28th, made 2 Brigade members a much happier lot than 7 and 8 Brigades who had to fight on around the Leda River in Germany for another full week. 7 Brigade troops also got a real taste what it was like to meet the people of a defeated Germany. Whereas 2 Brigade enjoyed peace and good company with the civilians, 7 Brigade troops had to keep physical separation up to and including removing them for operations. It could be argued that 7 Brigade had less to worry about as they were unconcerned with German civilian perceptions of them compared to the Dutch. However, understandably, managing good relations with the Dutch was far preferred to occupation duties in Germany. Lastly, 7 Brigade records make far more references to their own organized sports, recreational activities, leave, and social events in comparison to 2 Brigade. These trends indicate that although 7 Brigade was occupied, it was “working” as much as 2 Brigade therefore allowing the soldiers to focus on rehabilitation and other key issues earlier than others. Ultimately, fighting ended a week apart and in far different ways for these two Canadian infantry brigades at opposite ends of the Netherlands and inside the German border. The situation was both similar and different again for 5 Canadian Armoured Brigade in the northern Netherlands.

Chapter IV: 5th Canadian Armoured Brigade: 24 April – 31 May 1945

Simonds had decided in late April that 5th Canadian Armoured Division would fit take on the mission of squeezing the vice on the German pocket around Delfzijl near the Dutch-German border.³³³ This had freed up 3rd Division for the attack into the Emden Peninsula as part of the wider in order to meet the needs of Allied strategy to secure the Ems and Weser Estuaries for shipping while Delfzijl, one of the largest northern Dutch ports, would serve as a critical maritime supply hub particularly for Dutch relief materials.³³⁴ As the only armoured division discussed in this project that included both tank and motorized infantry units usually operating in combined-arms teams, this chapter features units from both 5 Canadian Armoured Brigade and 11 Canadian Infantry Brigade.³³⁵

5th Armoured Division, commanded by Major-General Bert Hoffmeister, transferred to the northern Netherlands in the last two weeks of the war after completing Operation Cleanser west of Apeldoorn. There they joined 2 Corps' effort to clear out German garrisons on both the Dutch and German sides of the Ems Estuary. Hoffmeister regrouped his 5th Canadian Armoured and 11th Canadian Infantry Brigades, to tackle one of the last heavily fortified bastions of German military power in the Netherlands.³³⁶ Hoffmeister divided the Delfzijl port fortress sector in two and assigned 5 Armoured Brigade to the north and western sector along the coast north of the city. 11 Brigade was

³³³ Hereafter 5th Armoured Division.

³³⁴ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 591-592 ; Daniel Byers, "Operation "Canada"".

³³⁵ Hereafter 5 Armoured Brigade and 11 Brigade respectively.

³³⁶ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 592.

tasked as the main effort in the south and eastern sector which included the city of Delfzijl itself.³³⁷ Within these two brigade zones, 5th Division repackaged its mix of infantry and tank units in its typical all-arms task forces. By April 26th the smaller 5th Armoured Brigade Group, commanded by Brigadier-General Cumberland, included Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) and one tank squadron from the 8th New Brunswick Hussars as its only native units. Additional divisional units included the heavy reconnaissance regiment, the Governor General's Horse Guards, 4th Anti-Tank Regiment, and a battery of artillery from 17th Canadian Field Regiment.³³⁸

11 Brigade Battle Group, commanded by Brigadier-General Johnston and tasked with the seizure of Delfzijl and outlying areas, consisted of its native battalions, the Perth Regiment, the Cape Breton Highlanders, and the Irish Regiment of Canada. They were reinforced for its siege mission with The British Columbia Dragoons, and one squadron of Hussars as well as their 105mm howitzer-equipped close support tanks, all from 5 Brigade. Johnston was later assigned the division's only other infantry battalion, the Westminster Regiment (Motor) also from 5 Armoured Brigade.³³⁹

Hoffmeister's decision to attack into Delfzijl so close to the end of the war has come under more scrutiny in recent history. C.P. Stacey describes it as part of a II Corps

³³⁷ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 592.

³³⁸ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 592. It is important to note here that a regiment of armour is equivalent to a battalion of infantry, the same as an armour squadron is equivalent to an infantry company, and an armour troop the same as an infantry platoon. Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), 8th New Brunswick Hussars and the Governor General's Horse Guards will hereafter be known as the Strathconas, Hussars and Horse Guards respectively.

³³⁹ 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 24 Apr 45 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 24 Apr 45, Ser: 1148; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 26 Apr 45, Ser: 1306. The Perth Regiment, Irish Regiment of Canada, and Westminster Regiment (Motor) will hereafter be known as the Perths, Irish Regiment, and Westies respectively.

coordinated effort directed by the corps commander (Simonds) to 3rd Division and 5th Armoured Division (Keebler and Hoffmeister) as part of the plan to open port facilities to the north of the country.³⁴⁰ Terry Copp contests this and argues that the attack should have been postponed until the capture of Emden and its coastal batteries by 3rd Division, which would have allowed 5th Division an easier go at Delfzijl without having to endure heavy German coastal artillery fire from across the bay.³⁴¹ Dan Byers noted that the decision to attack into such a densely populated city was complicated by orders to protect the inhabitants, leaving Johnston only with his own infantry, armour, and divisional artillery support. Heavier artillery, air or naval bombardment were out of the question.³⁴² Copp also challenges Stacey's argument that Delfzijl was required for its port facilities. That may have been true of Montgomery's drive to the major German North Sea ports, but Delfzijl could not open to shipping until the Frisian Island of Borkum and its coastal gun batteries were silenced.³⁴³ Regardless of the criteria the decision to attack Delfzijl was taken creating yet another unique experience for the Canadian Army in the last two weeks of the war. In this case 5 Brigade tank crews advanced slowly and steadily into heavily fortified German positions, backed by strong artillery firepower all in a Dutch urban area.

³⁴⁰ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 592.

³⁴¹ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 279-282.

³⁴² Daniel Byers, "Operation "Canada".

³⁴³ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 279-282 ; C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 590. Stacey does mention the guns at Borkum but only in the context of German artillery supporting Delfzijl. He does not reconnect this to his earlier statement of the orders given by Montgomery to take the Frisian Islands which Simonds (rightfully) did not prioritize at the time due to larger commitments.

The German fortress garrison was determined to hold the city, backed by a wide range of field and coastal artillery fire support from Delfzijl, the Reider Spit, Borkum, and Emden.³⁴⁴ Their defensive position further included an interlocking trench system around the city, protected by an intricate obstacle network consisting of wire, mines, and craters, and canalized by the flooding of the Ems Canal which inundated a large area outside the city to the south and west.³⁴⁵ This flooding resulted in a decision by Johnston for a two-pronged attack on either side of the water barrier.

Johnston first deployed his troops to encircle and contain the long front around the 1500-man German garrison on the southern and eastern approaches to Delfzijl. He first split the Hussar squadron between the Irish Regiment and Westminsters. The Westies were also given the 105mm Hussar close support tanks to help them as they extended furthest out to the east.³⁴⁶ On April 24th both the Irish Regiment and Westies set off east from Groningen and swung north toward Delfzijl. The Irish Regiment occupied Wagenborgen while the Westies pushed farther northeast to the Reider Spit and the battery of coastal guns located there. At the same time, the Perths joined the British Columbia Dragoons to close the ring on the northwestern side of the flooded Ems canal area. The Perths occupied Kreward and Holwierde.³⁴⁷ The Dragoons were situated in Appingdam where each squadron dismounted the majority of their tank troops so they

³⁴⁴ Daniel Byers, "Operation "Canada". The Reider Spit is the tract of land east of Delfzijl that protrudes into the Ems Estuary and Dollard Bay.

³⁴⁵ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 593.

³⁴⁶ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 592 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 24 Apr 45, Ser: 1148.

³⁴⁷ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 592.

could thicken the Canadian infantry force at the edge of the inundated area.³⁴⁸ This deployment of 11 Brigade Battle Group created a ring of infantry battalions and armoured regiments to the west, south, and east, which slowly and methodically pressed towards the Delfzijl fortress trapping the German garrison from all directions as they were deliberately pushed back toward the Ems Estuary. Cumberland completed the investment and isolation of the Delfzijl fortress by pushing Strathconas armoured patrols along the coast, backed by artillery, to prevent reinforcement or withdrawal by sea to the Frisian Islands or across the Ems Estuary.³⁴⁹ This regimental group was responsible for aggressively patrolling along a broad 35-mile coastline distributed into individual squadrons assignments based out of Warfum, Winsum, and Uithuizen.³⁵⁰

The fighting in the Delfzijl fortress area was by the far the toughest that the soldiers of 5 Armoured Brigade faced in the last weeks of the war. The first few days saw stalwart German resistance, specifically from the powerful German artillery and mortar batteries inside the fortress. The weight of enemy artillery was so strong that Johnston ordered his men to carry out siege warfare, advancing at night and digging in deep by first light each day, as they closed in on the city.³⁵¹ The 5 Armoured Brigade operations logs recorded that local German forces adopted a scorched earth policy and “systematically demolish[ed] all houses” in contested areas outside of the city.³⁵² This

³⁴⁸ Reginald Roy, *Sinews of Steel: The History of the British Columbia Dragoons* (Kelowna: Charters Publishing Company Limited, 1965), 402.

³⁴⁹ J.M. McAvity, *Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians): A Record of Achievement* (Toronto, Brigdens Limited, 1947), 241 ; 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 25 Apr 45, Ser: 1289-1293 ; 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 26 Apr 45, Ser: 1321.

³⁵⁰ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 236-237 ; 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 24 Apr 45. These are all small villages north of Groningen and west of Delfzijl, close to the North Sea.

³⁵¹ T. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, 282.

³⁵² 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 24 Apr 45, Ser: 1190.

removed cover and protection for the Canadians operating on flat polder country, leaving them vulnerable to accurate, pre-registered German fire. 11 Brigade and its attached 5 Armoured Brigade units were shelled day and night, and received fire heavy enough to be reported on nine occasions throughout the first three days spanning from 23-26 April.³⁵³ The British Columbia Dragoons and Perths to the west bore the brunt of the enemy artillery fire which resulted in the Dragoons in Appingdam evacuating the civilians out of fear the Germans deployed agents among them to call in fire due its high level of accuracy.³⁵⁴ The night of April 24th saw all buildings occupied by 'B' Squadron of the British Columbia Dragoons struck to some degree, serving as testament to the efficacy of the German artillery.³⁵⁵ The Perths had their worst day on April 25th where they lost a total of one officer and seven NCOs killed by German shelling and another 23 wounded.³⁵⁶ During this time German soldiers only surrendered in small groups ranging from 10-12 as they fought to retain as much ground as possible.³⁵⁷

Over the next two days, from 27-28 April, the southern prong of the assault into Delfzijl made the best progress. Both the Irish and Westies advanced close to the coast with the Irish Regiment reaching as far as the southern outskirts of the village of Heveskes.³⁵⁸ The Westies drove towards the Reider Spit gun battery but lost momentum

³⁵³ R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 403 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 24 Apr 45, Ser: 1150, 1160, 1162, 1181, 1190, 1197-1203 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 25 Apr 45, Ser: 1245, 1295.

³⁵⁴ R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 403.

³⁵⁵ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 24 Apr 45, Ser: 1162.

³⁵⁶ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 25 Apr 45, Ser: 1245.

³⁵⁷ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 24 Apr 45, Ser: 1153, 1154, 1169, 1172, 1218 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 25 Apr 45, Ser: 1246.

³⁵⁸ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 593.

when they became overwhelmed by the enemy in the vicinity of Woldendorp.³⁵⁹ To the northwest, the Perths and British Columbia Dragoons were unable to take as much ground as the rest of the battle group as they were the main subjects of German artillery fire. The Perths advanced roughly one kilometre to the village of Nansum. Their advance was so hindered by German defences that the Perths “ruthlessly” called down their own artillery on built up areas and lit houses on fire in attempts to root out Germans defenders.³⁶⁰ The Dragoons remained locked in Appingdam where they continued to negotiate the flooded Ems in addition to heavy enemy artillery fire, after several attempted advances on Marsum to the north in the direction on the Perths.³⁶¹ What is significant about operations during this timeframe is that it marks one of the few instances in which Canadian units disregarded Dutch infrastructure as they pushed onwards to drive the Germans out of Delfzijl. This experience is vastly different than those experienced by 2 Brigade who preserved civilian infrastructure in the western provinces when possible.

The 5 Armoured Brigade task force in the northwest had a much easier time through 27-29 April than the units assigned to 11 Brigade battle around Delfzijl. The war diary recorded how when Cumberland went out to visit units there was time for ‘bagging’ multiple ducks along the way.³⁶² The Strathconas patrolled 35 miles off to the north and west and took opportunities to enjoy this time. Their history notes that “these were lazy

³⁵⁹ Daniel Byers, “Operation “Canada””. Woldendorp is a town east of Delfzijl along the coast at the point where the Ems Estuary and Dollard Bay meet.

³⁶⁰ Daniel Byers, “Operation “Canada””.

³⁶¹ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 593.

³⁶² 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 27 Apr 45 ; 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 29 Apr 45.

days”, not just of bagging their own waterfowl but also in getting acquainted with the farmers while the younger men acquainted with their daughters.³⁶³ Their main problem was the German dumping of injured Dutch civilians by ferry on the mainland shore in their area from Borkum Island. Several incidents occurred throughout 25-27 April, apparently as a result of the German Army medical personnel being unable or unwilling to treat the Dutch civilians themselves. Instead, the Germans pushed the problem to the Allies rather than spend precious resources on personnel other than their soldiers.³⁶⁴ In one particular case on April 27th, the Strathconas had to fire warning shots at Dutch fishing boats that had been instructed via the Underground not to sail during the fighting lest they be mistaken for enemy vessels.³⁶⁵ This incident is the sole example found in this research of Canadian soldiers deliberately firing their weapons, even if only warning shots, to force the compliance of Dutch civilians.

The 29-30 April timeframe saw the noose tighten further around the Germans in Delfzijl. Despite their rigorous defence, the German pocket at Delfzijl was gradually ground down and reduced by continuous, if cautious, Canadian offensive pressure. To the west the British Columbia Dragoons took no chances and attacked Marsum only “after liberally shooting it up”.³⁶⁶ They were fortunate to arrive to find the town deserted and therefore quickly linked up with the Perths to the north.³⁶⁷ At that point the Cape

³⁶³ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 241.

³⁶⁴ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 25 Apr 45, Ser: 1243 ; J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 242. Borkum Island is one of the Frisian Islands that lay directly north of 5 Armoured Brigade Battle Group’s area of operations during this time.

³⁶⁵ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 27 Apr 45, Ser: 1354.

³⁶⁶ Daniel Byers, “Operation “Canada””.

³⁶⁷ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 29 Apr 45.

Breton Highlanders passed through the Perths, seized the village of Uitwierde pressed towards the western outskirts of Delfzijl on April 30th. On the southeastern front the Irish Regiment advanced to the Ems Estuary shoreline Oterdum and Heveskes.³⁶⁸ The Westies and their supporting 8th Hussars troops pushed as far as Termunten along the coast to the east of the Irish Regiment.³⁶⁹

What was left of German morale began to crumble and their losses convinced many to surrender in the last days of April. 700 German prisoners were taken on April 29th.³⁷⁰ The war diary accounts for a large number being taken again the following day but does not provide specific numbers.³⁷¹ However, the definitive number of prisoners taken on April 29th serves as an excellent contrast to the few that were being taken only a few days prior. It was apparent that the Delfzijl garrison would soon fall. Indeed, that fall was heralded by large explosions heard in German held territory, attributed to the detonation of ammunition dumps.³⁷²

The Hussars' regimental history describes the combat action at Delfzijl as:
*“Far off to the east and south, Russian and Allied troops were already strangling the last gasps of life from the German Fatherland but still the Nazi garrison battled for this Dutch port as though El Alamein and Stalingrad had never been fought. The Canadians fought that way too.”*³⁷³

³⁶⁸ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 593.

³⁶⁹ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 29 Apr 45.

³⁷⁰ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 29 Apr 45, Ser: 1409.

³⁷¹ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 30 Apr 45.

³⁷² 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 29 Apr 45, Ser: 1409.

³⁷³ D. Howe, *The 8th Hussars: A History of the Regiment* (Sussex: Maritime Publishing Co. Ltd, 1964), 346.

Yet, in the opening days of May the garrison finally fell. On May 1st the Cape Breton Highlanders, were ordered to take Delfzijl under the cover of smoke. The British Columbia Dragoons provided a diversion by using their tanks to fire an indirect feint barrage to the south. The Westies contained the German east flank, preventing any escape.³⁷⁴ The Cape Breton Highlanders took the port that day. The final act was done on May 2nd when the Irish Regiment moved in from Heveskes and secured the smaller towns of Weiward and Farmsum by way of surprise in the early hours of the morning. The local commander surrendered the garrison at 1000hrs this day.³⁷⁵ By May 3rd the total count of prisoners taken in and around Delfzijl amounted to 109 officers and 4034 other ranks.³⁷⁶

While the surrender at the port finally ended combat actions for the 11 Brigaded led Delfzijl siege force the situation was different for the reduced 5 Armoured Brigade force in the north. As early as May 1st we can see the first recorded instances of a Canadian unit, the Strathconas, hosting and attending dances with local civilians in their area of operations given there was so little to do on “what [they] laughingly referred to as [their] front”.³⁷⁷ It was very common for soldiers to go on leave behind the lines after intense fighting at the front to enjoy recreational time amongst the local civilian population. What sets this example from the rest is it demonstrates the first recorded instance of a Canadian unit hosting such activities at the front-line while hostilities continued. The evidence indicates how the task of patrolling the Ems Estuary was

³⁷⁴ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 1 May 45, Ser: 3.

³⁷⁵ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 2 May 45.

³⁷⁶ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 593.

³⁷⁷ J.M. McAavity, *LdSH(RC)*, 242.

mundane, but it was nevertheless part of the front as 5 Armoured Brigade remained on guard against interference from German units stationed on the Frisian Islands. The previous chapters recounted 2 Brigade troops accepting social invitations from the Dutch in the early days of May. Comparatively, 7 Brigade did not have the opportunity to socialize with locals until they relocated from the Emden Peninsula to Utrecht on May 17th. In the end, all Canadian units got their chance to celebrate the end of the war with the newly liberated Dutch.

The role played by the Dutch Underground in support of both 5 Armoured and 11 Brigade was particularly helpful from a tactical perspective. 11 Brigade Group benefitted from a consistent flow of intelligence from Dutch Underground forces and local civilians, receiving key information about German positions on at least six occasions between April 24th and May 5th.³⁷⁸ This included locations of local commanders, bunkers, general enemy positions, enemy movements, obstacles and barriers, and the condition of local infrastructure such as bridges.³⁷⁹ The Underground sometimes also enabled the safe movement of units on the battlefield, including their advice to the British Columbia Dragons to relocate their headquarters under observation from German positions, and in guiding the Cape Breton Highlanders to their concentration areas in preparation to pass through the Perths and launch the final attack into Delfzijl.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 24-26 Apr 45, Ser: 1174, 1190, 1194, 1213, 1222, 1250, 1304 ; 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 5 May 45, Ser: 133. As can be seen, the majority of reporting occurred during the transition timeframe with 3rd Division and during the first major pushes against the German garrison.

³⁷⁹ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 24-25 Apr 45, Ser: 1174, 1190, 1194, 1213, 1222, 1250 ; 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 5 May 45, Ser: 133.

³⁸⁰ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 24 Apr 45, Ser: 1183 ; 1228.

The Underground also assisted the 5 Armoured Brigade battle group patrolling the Ems Estuary shoreline. The Strathconas occupied a stretch of territory vacated by a Dutch SS unit that left behind a well-established communications infrastructure, including a phone network and wireless sets. The Strathconas quickly established a communications network between themselves and the Underground using the recently acquired enemy wireless sets. This allowed the Strathconas and Underground to coordinate efforts and dispatch combat resources to respond to any enemy action based on reports either from their own soldiers, the Underground, or local civilians.³⁸¹ By May 4th the Underground was trusted to take over areas occupied by 5 Armoured Brigade soldiers as they cleared out in preparation for other tasks. In preparation, the Hussars secured two heavy and four light machine guns along with seventy rifles and substantial amounts of ammunition for the Underground to assume operations in Godlinze.³⁸²

³⁸¹ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 240.

³⁸² 5 Armoured Brigade, "War Diary", 4 May 19. Godlinze is a small village five kilometres north-west of Holwierde, close to the North Sea.

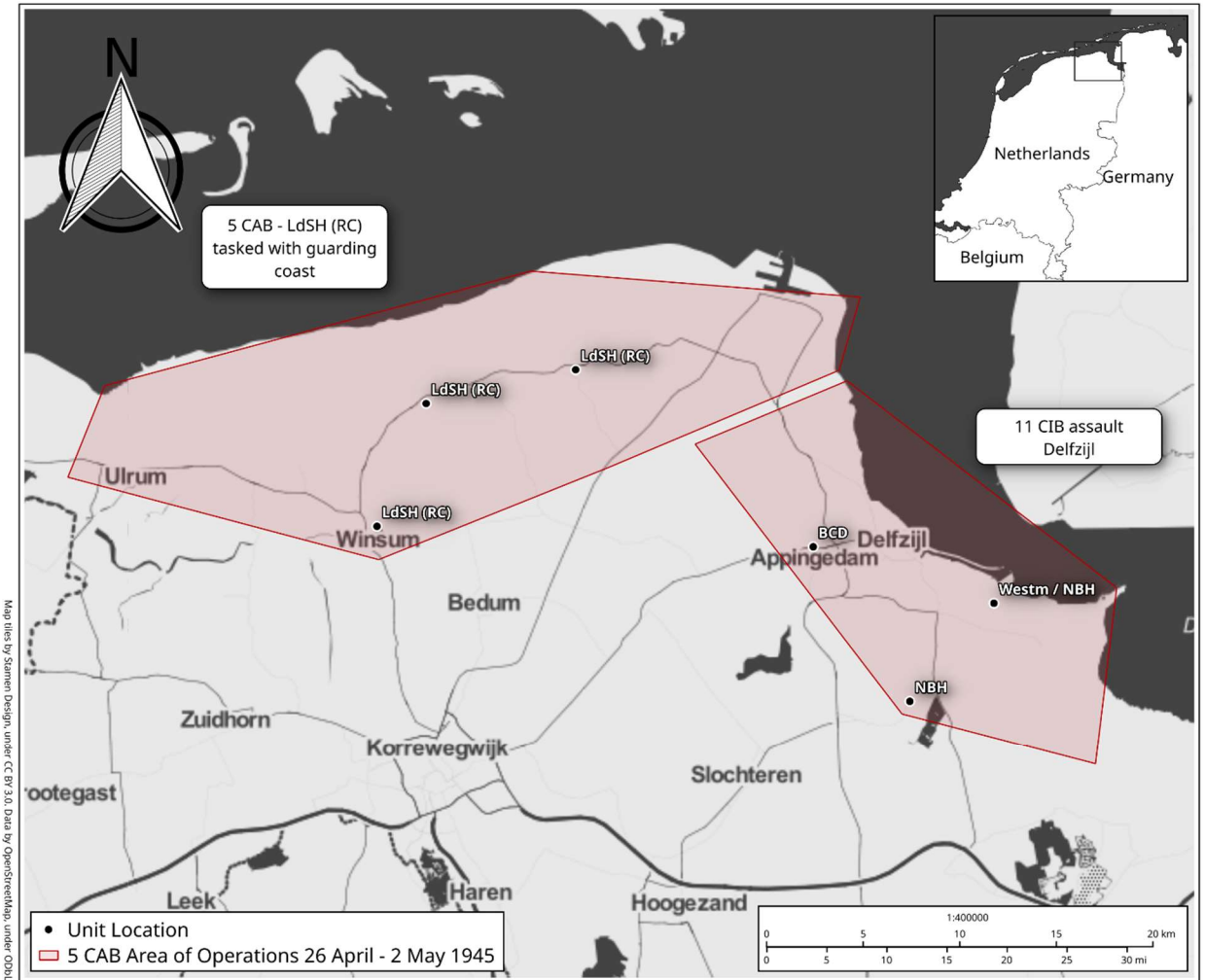


Figure 6 - 5 Armoured Brigade Combat Operations

This map depicts the area of responsibility of 5 Armoured Brigade as its forces were split between its own brigade and that of 11 Brigade during the assault on Delfzijl.

After the German surrender at Delfzijl all 5th Armoured Division units fell back under regular formation command. The scattered Germans left in the area were sent to prisoner camps for processing. Yet the war was still had a few more days to rage inside Germany, including 7 Brigade and 3rd Division's battle for Leer. While 11 Brigade remained in the Delfzijl area to clear the city of German troops and their equipment, the

majority of 5 Armoured Brigade moved into and around the provincial capital at Groningen, recently captured by 2nd Canadian Division after an intense urban battle in mid April. The Westies occupied immediately south of the city sending its squadrons to Norg, Donderen, Tynaarlo, Zeijen, and Vries.³⁸³ The Strathconas remained in their original positions to the west maintaining security of the Ems Estuary and ensuring nothing from the German garrisons on the Frisian Islands landed to cause trouble. They would eventually relocate to Groningen on May 10th.³⁸⁴ The British Columbia Dragoons assisted with occupying Groningen on May 3rd, but also sent a squadron group to Loppersum to provide additional security facing the Frisian Islands. The British Columbia Dragoons were tasked with “preventing sabotage, stopping raiding parties from the Frisian Islands’ garrison from landing on the mainland, taking custody of German troops surrendering from either the islands or the mainland, guarding against terrorism of the local population by pro-Nazi elements, and eliminating enemy spies”.³⁸⁵

Two uneventful days followed the relocation of 5 Armoured Brigade soldiers on May 3rd. On the 4th at 2120hrs the brigade received the same good news that spread throughout the First Canadian Army (along with a double rum ration) – that Germany’s unconditional surrender would take effect on May 5th at 0800hrs.³⁸⁶ One hour and

³⁸³ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 3 May 45. Two points to note is the war diary records Zeijen as ‘Zeuviv’ and Tynaarlo as ‘Tinarloo’. Although the latter is easy to interpret as a misspelling made by the brigade, it is only assumed that the former is Zeijen. Based off of the grid locations provided in reference to the known towns, combined with the fact that Zeijen sits right in the middle of the other towns occupied by the Westies at this time, it is logical to assume this is the location to which they were referring. No other references have yielded corroborating or contrary evidence, so it important to note this assumption to allow the reader the opportunity to formulate their own opinion.

³⁸⁴ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 10 May 45.

³⁸⁵ AHQ “Report No. 56”, 18 Nov 52, para 100. Loppersum is a small town roughly nine kilometres directly west of Appingdam and close to the North Sea.

³⁸⁶ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 4 May 45 ; 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 4 May, Ser: 123.

twenty-five minutes later, at 2245hrs, an order was issued to the brigade to cease all offensive operations.³⁸⁷ Although the surrender was a welcome reprieve to the soldiers who had been fighting for so long, it was met with less enthusiasm than might well have been expected. For 5 Armoured Brigade units, “[the surrender] did not closely affect us for all the Germans [in our area] were on their way to the P.W. Cage [sic] or dead”.³⁸⁸ Most of German garrison in the Dutch northeast had already gone into prisoner cages following their surrender at Groningen and then Delfzijl. The Strathconas welcomed the ceasefire announcement with some “cheers and whistles”, but when reported to the Dutch locals it induced absolute “bedlam”.³⁸⁹ The news elicited a similar response from the British Columbia Dragoons which was described as “anti-climax” in their history, with “some wild celebrations among the civilian population”.³⁹⁰ The Hussars picked up the slack in enthusiasm from their fellow regiments. Once the news was heard they arranged a dance that evening and started celebrating.³⁹¹ The Hussars celebratory attitude continued throughout the formal surrender on May 7th when they used paraflares and 2” smoke bombs as fireworks to mark the occasion.³⁹² Needless to say, the morale of the brigade and throughout the division was best summarized by a private from the Westies who woke up on May 8th, looked into his shaving mirror and said “boy, am I glad to see

³⁸⁷ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 4 May, Ser: 127.

³⁸⁸ AHQ “Report No. 56”, 18 Nov 52, para 99. P.W. is a short form for Prisoners of War.

³⁸⁹ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 243.

³⁹⁰ R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 407.

³⁹¹ Hussars, “War Diary”, 4 May 45.

³⁹² 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 8 May, Ser: 198. Short for ‘parachute flares’, paraflares are illuminating flares launched into the sky and float down on small parachutes. They are designed to illuminate an area when dark for a short period of time.

you”.³⁹³ The lack of enthusiasm for most soldiers in 5 Armoured Brigade is understandable. They had just spent the closing days of the war in two intense and rushed operations some 200 kilometres apart, the second of which included intense combat for what some described as a needless waste of life.³⁹⁴ The civilians were understandably more enthusiastic given their previous five years of subjugation finished off and an end to German and Canadian shells laying waste to their city and outlying villages. Of the three brigades examined in this project, 5 Armoured Brigade’s experience at Delfzijl and its outlying areas was by far the hardest hit in comparison to 2 Brigade peacefully moving into an area of undamaged infrastructure and 7 Brigade ceasing combat operations in Germany. The Official History records that 5th Division casualties there numbered some 78 Perths, 67 from the Irish Regiment, 68 from the Cape Breton Highlanders, and 23 from the Westies. As the Hussars largely played a supporting indirect fire role with their tanks, they appear to have not merited inclusion in the overall casualty list. However, evidence from their after-action report indicate eight tanks were knocked out throughout the operation due to artillery, mines, and anti-tank fire.³⁹⁵ Casualties in the fight for Delfzijl are therefore staggering when compared to operations in 3rd Division’s fight for Leer and Loga which totalled approximately 80 all

³⁹³ J.E. Oldfield, *The Westminster’s War Diary: An Unofficial History of The Westminster Regiment (Motor) in World War II* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press Limited, 1964), 206.

³⁹⁴ Daniel Byers, “Operation “Canada”.

³⁹⁵ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 593-594 ; Hussars, “War Diary”. The Hussars battle damage indicates that upward of 40 soldiers could have been killed or injured depending on injuries per vehicle. This figure of eight tanks is also only inclusive of those being completely knocked out of battle and not minor damage, such as to the gun system, forcing a crew to withdraw.

combined.³⁹⁶ This number is even more sobering contrasting with 2 Brigade who were operating under a ceasefire truce.

Orders from 5th Armoured Division came down on May 7th which directed “all units to stand down, [concentrate] in [squadron] areas, and make themselves as comfortable as possible”.³⁹⁷ With no German troops to manage, at least not yet, 5 Armoured Brigade troops happily concentrated in Groningen and its outlying areas by May 11th. The Strathconas and the British Columbia Dragoons moved right into the city, whereas the remainder relocated just south with 5 Armoured Brigade headquarters at Haren and the Hussars at Paterswolde.³⁹⁸ The coming weeks were quite quiet compared to the soldiers in the western Netherlands who immediately jumped into the task of disarming the large German garrisons in the urban coastal provinces. No similar tasks were assigned to 5 Armoured Brigade until May 19th when the great German Army evacuation march began.

The future for 5 Armoured Brigade remained unknown for quite some days in early May. There were rumours of relocating to Meppen, 87 kilometres south of Groningen and 19 kilometres west of Emmen, but there is no indication in the brigade records as to why. The brigade despatched reconnaissance parties down to plan the route and staging areas between 12-14 May.³⁹⁹ On May 15th the planning began for 5 Armoured Brigade to join in the German demobilization and removal effort and

³⁹⁶ C.P. Stacey, *Official History, Vol III*, 596.

³⁹⁷ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 7 May 45.

³⁹⁸ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 10 May 45 ; 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 11 May, Ser: 225.

³⁹⁹ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 12-14 May 45.

Cumberland briefed his unit commanding officers.⁴⁰⁰ On May 19th a warning order was issued explaining the I Corps plan to disarm and evacuate 140,000 Germans from the Netherlands back to Germany.⁴⁰¹ 1st and 3rd Divisions (which comprised 2 and 7 Brigades) were to finalize the German disarmament program already in progress in the western provinces, after which they would be send northward across the IJmuiden Causeway. 5th Division would then take control and be focussed on their evacuation across the northeastern region to the German border. The Germans would march in groups of ten-thousand upwards of twenty miles per day, resting at transit camps along the route operated by elements of the 18th Canadian Armoured Regiment (Manitoba Dragoons) and 5th Armoured Division. The plan stipulated that, having formally surrendered, German troops would march under their own command “the only responsibility of the [division would be] to see that the one hundred and forty thousand bodies arrived safely at the German border”.⁴⁰²

The divisional order for the German evacuation was released on May 20th. The route back would be split into left, centre, and right areas of operations managed by the Manitoba Dragoons, 5 Armoured Brigade, and 11 Brigade respectively. The Manitoba Dragoons were responsible for receiving the Germans at the north end of the IJmuiden Causeway at Harlingen and securing the route to Beetsterzwaag, a small town just south of Dracthen. At this point 5 Armoured Brigade would assume responsibility for the route as far as Veendam, a secondary road junction town south-east of Groningen, near the

⁴⁰⁰ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 15 May 45.

⁴⁰¹ Accounts vary from 120,000 to 140,000. 140,000 is, by far, the most commonly used number and will be used hereto after as the accepted and accurate number.

⁴⁰² 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 19 May 45.

German border. Finally, 11 Brigade would take over the remainder of the route to the Dutch-German border itself.⁴⁰³ The overall route saw the Germans marching back starting at Harlingen, then onwards to Bolsward, Sneek, Raerd (recorded as Rauwerd), Akkrum, Aldeboarn, Beetsterzwaag, Kortenenmen (recorded as Kortehebben), Een, Zuidlaren, Nieuwe Pekela, Beerta (recorded as Beeta), and then on to the German frontier under II Corps to Weener, Leer, and farther upwards into the Emden Peninsula.⁴⁰⁴

The 5 Armoured Brigade area of operations was subdivided with each armoured unit assigned to control a route segment. The Westies were tasked with far west, receiving German march groups from the Manitoba Dragoons, providing route security from Beetsterzwaag to Norg, and with establishing Transit Camp #12 in that section. The Hussars took the next sector to the east, managing the route from Norg to Tynaarlo, and Transit Camp #13. To their east the Strathconas would take responsibility of ten miles of road east of Tynaarlo with Transit Camp #14 to Zuidlaren. The British Columbia Dragoons controlled the easternmost part of the route and Transit Camp #15 out of Veendam.⁴⁰⁵ Although the evidence is not clear, it is evident that 5th Division assigned 5 Armoured Brigade to the mission of managing the longest stretch of the evacuation route through the rural northern Netherlands on account of their greater mobility. Similar cases also occurred in other sectors with escort and patrolling duties being taken over by mounted units while infantry brigades, with fewer vehicles, took on more static tasks.

⁴⁰³ 5th Canadian Armoured Division General Staff (hereafter known as 5th Armoured Division Gen Staff) "War Diary", 20 May 45. The Germans to be received were the very same who were disarmed by the likes of 2 Brigade and 7 Brigade and sent to Ijmuiden for staging and onward movement across the causeway.

⁴⁰⁴ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 87.

⁴⁰⁵ 5 Armoured Division Gen Staff "Operation Evac", 20 May 45 ; 8th Hussars "War Diary", 23 May 45 ; J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 247-248 ; R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 411.

New coordinating measures were established to work directly with the German march groups and to prevent problems with Dutch communities along the route. Orders were also given to ensure that any vehicles driven by Germans had basic identification means only, such as registration and plates. Swastikas, iron crosses, and anything else of the sort were to be removed.⁴⁰⁶ In addition, all German soldiers were subject to random spot checks for loot.⁴⁰⁷ Finally, in accordance with the same direction that was given to all Canadian troops in the Netherlands as identified in previous chapters, German officers and military police (less the SS and para troops) were permitted to retain their personal weapons to enforce discipline within their ranks.⁴⁰⁸

The initial date to start moving the German Army across the northern Netherlands for the long trip back was set for May 25th. However, like 7 Brigade's experience around Utrecht, the desire to remove the German Army as soon as possible accelerated the start date to May 22nd. It would take several days for the columns to march through North Holland and over the Closure Dyke causeway before they reached 5 Armoured Brigade lines.⁴⁰⁹ 5 Armoured Brigade units were as prepared as they could be, and routine daily inspections by the brigade ensured that the routes were properly picketed and transit camps established to a high standard.⁴¹⁰ On May 27th the first German soldiers entered the 5 Armoured Brigade area. The old military axiom proved true that no plan survives

⁴⁰⁶ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 26 May, Ser: 303.

⁴⁰⁷ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 27 May, Ser: 313.

⁴⁰⁸ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 29 May, Ser: 345.

⁴⁰⁹ AHQ "Report No. 56", 18 Nov 52, para 86.

⁴¹⁰ 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 24, 26, 27, 30 May 45. Picket in this case is referring to observation of the route by Canadian forces.

first contact. Only 41 officers and 558 NCOs were received by the Westies from the Manitoba Dragoons – hardly the 10,000 they were expecting.⁴¹¹

On the second day, May 28th, it was determined that an additional transit camp was necessary to allow the marching Germans a rest day along the route back. Subsequently, the Hussars Transit Camp #13 was broken into two separate camps, #13A and #13B.⁴¹² On that day, the Westies received 100 German vehicles loaded with supplies at Transit Camp #12 that they were not anticipating. The Germans explained they had written orders to move from Denover [sic] direct to Emden in Germany to provide food to German troops landing there by barge. They provided a signed authorization from Brigadier-General E.R. Suttie of 1st Canadian Army Group, Royal Artillery, who commanded the artillery regiments operating on either side of the causeway.⁴¹³ After some confusion and confirmation they were permitted to pass but not long after the Westies were again surprised to receive 205 more German vehicles sent as overflow because the Manitoba Dragoons did not have the capacity to hold them, resulting in a bypass of Transit Camp #11 direct to Camp #12.⁴¹⁴

May 29th continued to yield un-forecasted problems such as suitability of routes. For reasons not recorded the Hussars' Transit Camp #13A became untenable and required an adjustment to the marching route. This resulted in the camp pushing groups through until they could close it off and relocate nearby with the assistance of a 120-man

⁴¹¹ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 27 May, Ser: 316.

⁴¹² 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 28 May 45. Evidence provided in the war diary for this day indicate that the transit camps were manned by an officer and sixty ORs.

⁴¹³ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 28 May, Ser: 325. 'Denover' is better known as 'Den Oever', the first town on the western end of the Zuider Zee causeway.

⁴¹⁴ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 28 May, Ser: 327.

strong German work party.⁴¹⁵ Although the evidence is not clear, the likely reason for this camp relocation is due to the route being situated on backcountry rural roads not designed to support tens of thousands of people marching back with supporting vehicles.

While the plan was to move 10,000 Germans a day through each transit camp, the reality was quite different. 5 Armoured Brigade reacted to problems in the opening days, repositioning camps during the move, and managing numbers that did not reflect the original plan. The flexibility required from this brigade to maintain peace and order among thousands of German soldiers and Dutch civilians across 150 kilometres is a testament to the professionalism of its soldiers. The fact remains that the First Canadian Army moved all 140,000 Germans safely back into the Emden Peninsula in just over two weeks, by June 7th. Despite these confusing and frustrating times there were occasions where proper respect and coordination were demonstrated between the two armies. Local German commanders coordinated with 5 Armoured Brigade and unit staff to send un-forecasted personnel and equipment throughout various transit camps in order to supply the marching forces with food and fuel.⁴¹⁶ However, the 5 Armoured Brigade soldiers also assisted injured German soldiers who were unable to carry on marching.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 29 May, Ser: 346, 354 ; 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 30 May, Ser: 362.

⁴¹⁶ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 29 May, Ser: 347 ; 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 30 May, Ser: 377.

⁴¹⁷ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 31 May, Ser: 398-402.

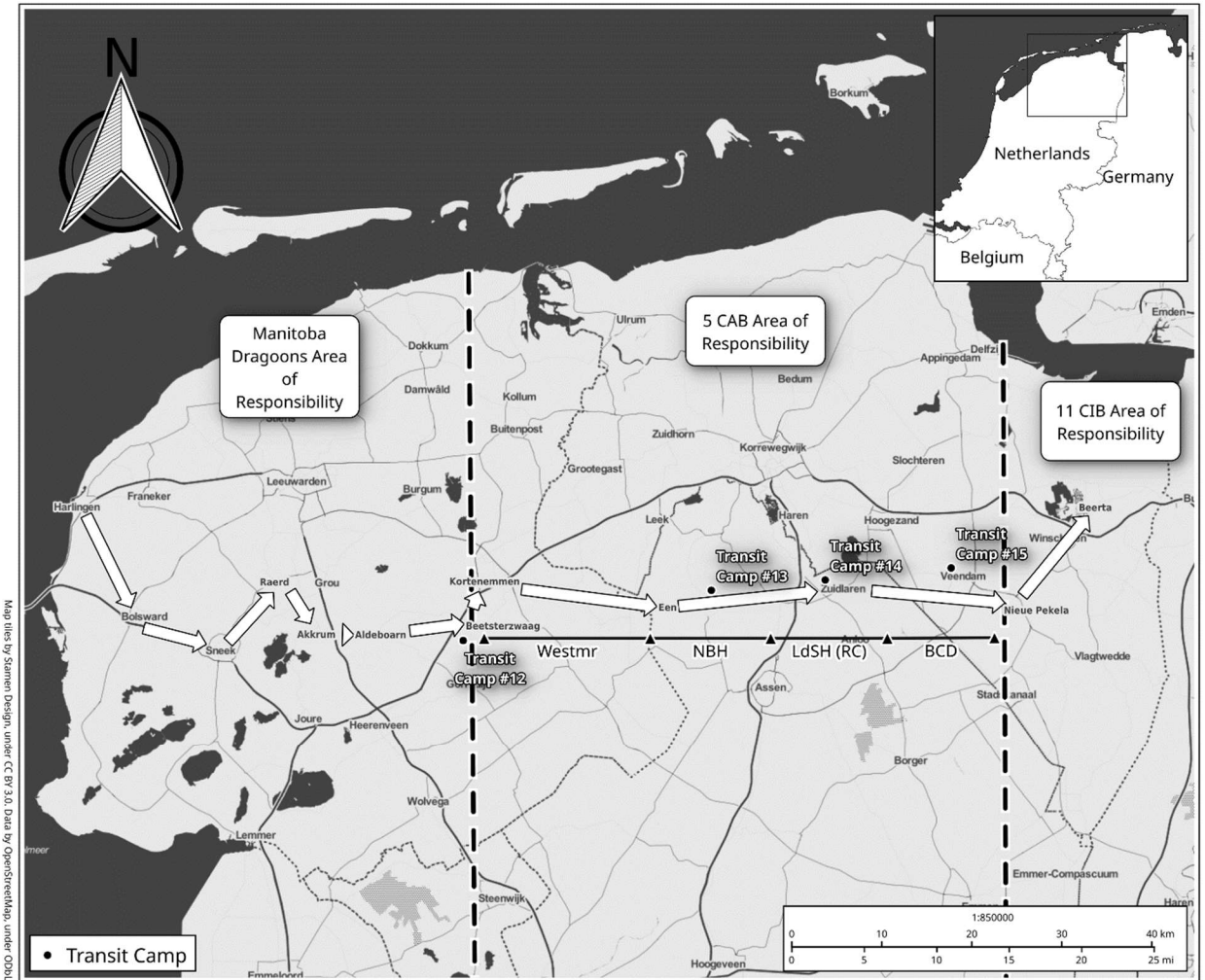


Figure 7 - The German Exodus from the Netherlands

This map identifies areas of responsibility at division and battalion level as well as the general route taken by the German Army as they evacuated the Netherlands.

All the while managing the evacuation of the Germans, recruiting and despatching members for the Occupation and Pacific Forces, and shuffling the territorial redistribution to enable the Canadian Army's eventual return home, troops still had routine tasks to perform as well as maintaining a high standard of readiness. The war in Europe may have ended, but the army was still required to maintain a high level of proficiency and

combat readiness. Within the time period examined in this essay it is clear that the maintenance of skill sets was a high priority for the soldiers of 5 Armoured Brigade. A large variety of courses dedicated to fieldcraft and soldier skills were run, to include crew commanding, map and compass reading, gunnery, forward observation officer, War Staff course, company and platoon commander, and aircraft recognition.⁴¹⁸ Technical courses and instructors were also a requirement to maintain the equipment and ensure proper passage of knowledge. Gunnery instructors were sought to teach armoured basic and advanced gunnery, soldiers learned driving and maintenance skills, and Technical Adjutants were trained which, when paired with advanced gunnery soldiers, allowed for a higher degree of equipment maintenance.⁴¹⁹ Soldiers were even sent on cooking courses demonstrating a high level of post-war hygiene.⁴²⁰

Unlike 2 and 7 Brigade, 5 Armoured Brigade has few records about the immediate aftermath of surrender. On one occasion the operations log indicates that patrols were conducted to ensure both the Germans taken prisoner and civilians were kept in line, and that obstacles such as minefields were lifted.⁴²¹ There are no records of guards, manning checkpoints, the separation of war criminals, that we see in other chapters. In general, the evidence suggests that the rural nature of Groningen Province, coupled with the fact that the majority of Germans had already been removed from their

⁴¹⁸ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 27 Apr 45, Ser: 1348 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 28 Apr 45, Ser: 1366 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 6 May 45, Ser: 182 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 22 May 45, Ser: 269 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 26 May 45, Ser: 310 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 30 May 45, Ser: 373.

⁴¹⁹ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 28 Apr 45, Ser: 1402 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 30 Apr 45, Ser: 1423 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 1 May 45, Ser: 4 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 11 May 45, Ser: 226 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 17 May 45, Ser: 1402.

⁴²⁰ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 4 May 45, Ser: 97,

⁴²¹ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 6 May 45, Ser: 175.

area, led to a far quieter and reduced tempo compared to those Canadian units involved in disarming the Germans in the western Netherlands. Only later in May did 5 Brigade's work flow pick up for the German evacuation.

Much like 2 and 7 Brigades, 5 Armoured Brigade headquarters declared "it was essential that the troops be kept occupied and fairly contented as circumstances would permit" once it was identified there was insufficient shipping to get the troops back to Canada in a quick manner.⁴²² A large emphasis was placed on dress, drill, and deportment as well as parading the troops. The soldiers of 5 Armoured Brigade would drill for two hours per day after the war ended, and inspections became a regular agenda item with the brigade commander inspecting.⁴²³ Dress quickly became regulated with 5th Armoured Division dictating shirts were to be worn with sleeves rolled to the elbows and web belts were to be worn, and suspenders were not to be worn over the shirts. As described by the 5th Armoured Division orders, uniformity within units were placed "in effect forthwith".⁴²⁴ Log books, gun record books, and wireless books were all to be made current, and vehicle inspections to include all tooling would become a regular Saturday occurrence.⁴²⁵

Parades became a mainstay of post-war life as well. Although, like the other brigades, smaller level parades were frequent, there are three specific events worth noting

⁴²² R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 409.

⁴²³ R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 409-410.

⁴²⁴ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 12 May 45, Ser: 232.

⁴²⁵ Hussars, "War Diary", 18 May 45. Record books, such as gun log books, are used to track serviceability of equipment. For example, a tank can fire different types of rounds, each of which places various amounts of stress on the cannon and system. Once a certain number of rounds has been fired the vehicle must undergo inspections until eventually parts are requirement to be replaced.

for this particular brigade. The first was the Victory Parade in The Hague which was discussed in previous chapters and attended in a certain capacity by all units.⁴²⁶ In the case of 5 Armoured Brigade this specific event cost them the pipe bands of the Cape Breton Highlanders.⁴²⁷ The second instance worth noting was a visit from General Crerar. During a four-day span covering 17-20 May General Crerar visited the soldiers of 5 Armoured Brigade, touring each unit in turn. He initially arrived on May 17th spent the day at brigade headquarters. Between May 18th and 19th he toured British Columbia Dragoons, Strathconas, And Hussar lines respectively, departing on May 20th to continue his tour across the units.⁴²⁸ The third instance was a divisional parade fittingly named Operation Finale. Initial concepts for this mounted parade commenced on May 11th with a march past in downtown Groningen.⁴²⁹ The orders for the parade to occur at the Eelde airfield just south of Groningen were distributed by the division to its brigades on May 19th,⁴³⁰ and every detail was planned down to the very last in this 20-page order, including instructions for all tank guns to be at an elevation of 60 mils.⁴³¹ This parade, which would see General Crerar return as reviewing officer, took place on May 23rd and included 2,000 vehicles and 15,000 men in what would be the only time the entire division was ever in one place at a given time in the Netherlands.⁴³² 5 Armoured Brigade

⁴²⁶ This parade was the one attended by Prince Bernhardt, General Crerar, and others as the Victory in Europe parade.

⁴²⁷ 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 16 May 45.

⁴²⁸ 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 17, 19, 20 May 45. Interestingly enough these visits by General Crerar are not mentioned in the war diaries or histories of other units.

⁴²⁹ 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 11 May 45.

⁴³⁰ 5 Armoured Division Gen Staff, "Appx 44", 19 May 45.

⁴³¹ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 22 May 45, Ser: 290. Of note, this divisional order was larger than many operations orders issued during combat!

⁴³² 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 23 May 45 ; R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 410-411.

headquarters reported in its war diary that the parade was incredibly successful with the men looking great, the vehicles going “past the reviewing stand with good spacing and alignment”.⁴³³ The divisional war diary lavishes further praise stating the parade was “an unparalleled success” with “speed, spacing, appearance of [vehicles] and smartness of personnel was reported as excellent”.⁴³⁴ The Strathconas were not so kind in their regimental history, stating the roll past (vehicles driving by for the salute) was an “ambitious plan” with vehicles lined up two abreast driving alongside each other, and quickly fell apart after the first few units.⁴³⁵

Even though the troops were kept as occupied as possible, some of them still managed to get themselves into trouble. On three separate occasions throughout the month of May soldiers of the brigade managed to cause damage to local civilian infrastructure. The first occurred on May 5th when an unknown type of vehicle from Strathconas damaged some houses in Winsum, requiring a claims officer to come out and assess the damage.⁴³⁶ The second instance occurred on May 21st when a British Columbia Dragoons tank struck a power pylon causing damage, leaving including wire and debris on the road before driving away.⁴³⁷ The last case took place on May 29th

⁴³³ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 23 May 45.

⁴³⁴ 5 Armoured Division Gen Staff, “War Diary”, 23 May 45.

⁴³⁵ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 246-247. It is also perhaps fittingly ironic that the one part of the plan that fell through completely was the lack of 300 fighter bombers supplied by 84 Group RAF due to weather. The entire campaign in northwest Europe has been criticized to some degree by historians the likes of C.P. Stacy and T. Copp regarding the lack of air power dedicated to ground units at the tactical level as strategic bombing was the named priority.

⁴³⁶ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 5 May 45, Ser: 152. This may sound mundane, but it actually marks the first instance where Canadian are causing damage outside of combat operations and taking appropriate action to rectify the situation.

⁴³⁷ 5 Armoured Brigade “Ops Log”, 21 May 45, Ser: 287. This case marks the first recorded instance Canadian troops did damage and failed to take appropriate action.

when a lorry backed into the doorway of a house in downtown Groningen and drove away without reporting.⁴³⁸ It should be noted these were the only cases that were reported and recorded in the operations logs.

Chapter 3's examination of 7 Brigade's post-conflict stability operations revealed how Canadian soldiers were strictly forbidden to partake in Dutch justice against collaborators. This rule apparently did get broken in 5th Division's area in the north. R.H. Roy noted "there were other sights for memory to cherish too:...the sight of the Dutch manhandling the collaborators in their midst, shaving their heads, ostracizing them, casting them into prison".⁴³⁹ Commanders could not keep on eyes on their soldiers at all times to enforce such policies and Canadians had been exposed to German atrocities since landing in Normandy in June of 1944.⁴⁴⁰ Roy was himself an officer and platoon commander, indicating that junior leaders could just as easily break the rules.

Morale was taken heavily into consideration in the post-conflict aftermath. Amenities, including hot shower facilities became consistently available as early as May 16th.⁴⁴¹ Similar to lulls during periods of conflict, access to chaplain services became a regular part of the lives of the soldiers. Chaplains made routine stops at company level each week. The unit and brigade levels are where most post-war activities were

⁴³⁸ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 30 May 45, Ser: 355. Fortunately, in this case (although not for the operator of the vehicle), the vehicle was found later at the fish market in Groningen and impounded, awaiting pickup from the likely guilty party.

⁴³⁹ R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 351.

⁴⁴⁰ T. Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy – Second Edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 71. To better contextualize, the specific reference here is in regards to the actions of the Hitler Youth of 3rd Battalion, 26th Panzer Grenadier Regiment who carried out the execution of 26 Canadian prisoners of war at the Chateau d'Audrieu west of Caen in the immediate aftermath of the June 6th D-Day landings.

⁴⁴¹ Hussars, "War Diary", 16 May 45.

regulated. Similar to 2 and 7 Brigade, life at the mess became a large portion of evening activities. Drinking messes began standing up on May 6th and were the home to many social activities filled with libations, dances, and movies. These messes were managed by officers and NCOs nominated for various positions to ensure a steady schedule of events and supply of beer transported from as far away as Belgium.⁴⁴² Further, sports became a routine function during the day and included activities such as basketball, swimming, tennis, softball, volleyball, and shooting.⁴⁴³ Much like the mess culture these sporting activities required committees at all levels from unit to division along with officer nominations to fill such billets in order to ensure and maintain a viable sports program for the men. These programs were taken very seriously as committees at various levels met every two to three days.⁴⁴⁴

Post-war demobilization and rehabilitation were also taken very seriously in 5 Armoured Brigade. Cumberland and his staff launched a strong program as of May 15th, distributing pamphlets from higher headquarters and appointed Educational Officers to begin acclimatizing the troops to life after their return home.⁴⁴⁵ Soldiers appointed as Educational Instructors took a five-day course geared towards preparing for the troops on reintegration into civilian life.⁴⁴⁶ 5 Armoured Brigade was spread across the northern Netherlands conducting the evacuation of Germans as they were unable to take full advantage of the rehabilitation opportunities provided until after the conclusion of the

⁴⁴² 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 6, 14, 19, 23, 24, 27 May 45.

⁴⁴³ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 246 ; R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 409 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 18 May 45.

⁴⁴⁴ 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 3, 4, 8, 9, 15, 16, 21 May 45.

⁴⁴⁵ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 15 May 45, Ser: 261 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 16 May 45.

⁴⁴⁶ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 24 May 45, Ser: 293.

operation.⁴⁴⁷ This was unlike the 2 and 7 Brigade which performed more static roles and had more opportunity to participate.

At divisional level and beyond was where the grander activities were planned. 5th Armoured Division organized a divisional recreation centre in Amsterdam, Belgian beer halls, three theatres, reading and writing rooms, a riding club, swimming facilities, and sailing and boating opportunities, all available to 5 Armoured Brigade members.⁴⁴⁸ The most lavish events put on through the division for these soldiers were city tours of historic Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht, as well as other old towns and ruins, universities, art galleries, and First World War battlefields.⁴⁴⁹ All of these activities saw standard military troop carrier vehicles swapped out for busses that began making frequent trips throughout the divisional area in order to facilitate these newly created opportunities for the soldiers.⁴⁵⁰ Given the rural nature of Groningen it can be surmised that such measures were instituted to support the division since these soldiers were very separated from the more densely populated western provinces.

As was noted by 2 Brigade, one of the more problematic command decisions taken during the evacuation of the Germans from the Netherlands was the regional redistribution between units to better geographically align soldiers for their return home. This cross-posting saw armoured soldiers from the Strathconas transferred to infantry battalions and armour regiments hailing from eastern Canada whereas they took onboard

⁴⁴⁷ 5 Armoured Brigade “War Diary”, 28 May 45.

⁴⁴⁸ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 246 ; R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 409 ; Hussars, “War Diary”, 16 May 45.

⁴⁴⁹ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 249 ; R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 409.

⁴⁵⁰ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 244.

those who originated from the prairies.⁴⁵¹ The British Columbia Dragoons also lost their soldiers who hailed from other places in Canada, in turn taking on Westerners who had served with eastern-based units. They also reported how it did not necessarily matter what trade the newly assigned soldiers came from as regional repatriation took priority. From a bureaucratic standpoint organizing regional packets of troops was an easier way to manage the logistics of transport back to Canada allowing efficient ship to rail dispersal. From a morale perspective it was not well received as brothers in arms were forced to say their goodbyes and transfer to units of whom they had no history or prior affiliation.⁴⁵² Compounding this issue was the steady repatriation and transfer of individual soldiers with high point scores, especially long service Italy veterans, those who volunteered for the occupation force in Germany or service in the Pacific.⁴⁵³

Interaction with the Dutch population continued vigorously throughout May mirroring the experience of the other brigades. In the case of 5 Armoured Brigade, May saw large-scale dances or other social events, including the Dutch every two to three nights.⁴⁵⁴ The events did slow down slightly at the end of the month when the 5 Brigade tankers spread out across the north to help with the German evacuation march across the northern provinces, when units were dispersed to run transit camps.

⁴⁵¹ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 248. This is the same topic that was briefly discussed in Chapter II with 2 Brigade.

⁴⁵² R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 354.

⁴⁵³ J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 248 ; R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 354 ; 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 23 May 45. Point scores were derived from a series of factors to include time spent in the army, injuries, etc.

⁴⁵⁴ 5 Armoured Brigade "War Diary", 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, 26, 30 May 45 ; J.M. McAvity, *LdSH(RC)*, 242-243.

5 Armoured Brigade made a strong effort to build positive relations with the Dutch people who had been oppressed for so long. On May 10th the brigade put on a divisional display of Canadian equipment at the Ossenmarkt in downtown Groningen. The display included all types of vehicles used by the division, including the brigade's Sherman tanks in both 17-pounder and 105mm variants, a Stuart tank, a Badger, and a Valentine bridge layer.⁴⁵⁵ 5 Armoured Brigade also engaged their sports teams with local teams and, to everyone's surprise, managed to defeat the Dutch team from Bedum in soccer 2-1!⁴⁵⁶ Positive interactions also extended into rebuilding local infrastructure. The Strathconas worked with civilian linemen to restore telephone communications in the vicinity of Onderendam.⁴⁵⁷ Despite these positive engagements there was a difficult side to the relationship with the population. The people in Groningen Province suffered from lack of basic necessities such as transportation and fuel, leading the brigade to push demands for the arrival of Civil Affairs teams to help. In some instances the Dutch resorted to acts of theft of 5 Armoured Brigade's stores and equipment, and the establishment of a black market between soldiers and civilians for items such as cigarettes.⁴⁵⁸

There are as many variations as there are similarities when comparing the experiences of 5 Armoured Brigade to 2 and 7 Brigade at the end of the Second World

⁴⁵⁵ 5 Armoured Division Gen Staff "War Diary", Appx 25. Originally used as a cattle market, the 'Ossenmarkt' is an open square that is nowadays used for fairs. It is a large open area in downtown Groningen and served as an excellent location to place vehicles for display.

⁴⁵⁶ 5 Armoured Brigade, "War Diary", 24 May 19. Bedum is located ten kilometres north of Groningen.

⁴⁵⁷ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 7 May 45, Ser: 186. Onderendam is a small town located 4 kilometres north of Bedum and 14 kilometres north of Groningen.

⁴⁵⁸ 5 Armoured Brigade "Ops Log", 19 May 45, Ser: 284 ; R.H. Roy, *Sinews of Steel*, 410.

War. 5 Armoured Brigade faced something very similar to that of 7 Brigade as they engaged in combat operations almost to the very end. The key differences there was the certain end to combat operations on May 2nd for 5 Armoured Brigade, after half of this formation enjoyed a much quieter period patrolling the Ems Estuary since late-April. 5th Armoured Division's high casualties reveal that the number of days in combat in that last week of the war did not equate to fighting intensity. This brigade also demonstrated the most interaction and operational integration with the Dutch Underground of the three considered here. Likewise, while 5 Armoured Brigade participated in the great evacuation of German forces out of the Netherlands, their role in this was significantly different compared to the infantry brigades. While the infantry units tended to perform more static tasks of disarmament in the western Netherlands, it was the highly mobile armour regiments that managed and coordinated the longest and most rural stretches of the evacuation route. Even within 5th Armoured Division it can be seen through the illustrations (Figure 7) that 11 Brigade's piece of terrain in this operation was a fraction to what 5th Armoured Brigade controlled.

5 Armoured Brigade found itself with far fewer competing tasks to manage. However, their displacement over a stretch of 150 kilometres of evacuation route more than made up for what the infantry brigades managed in the western provinces. The soldiers of this brigade found themselves stretched to the point that it had an impact on their ability to participate in the initial rehabilitation and education training. Fortunately, their geography and task load allowed for a much quicker and happier integration into the civilian population which was arguably one of the more critical factors for the troops. Despite the benefits of operating in general isolation from the giant humanitarian mission

that had unfolded in the west, the soldiers of 5 Armoured Division still kept very busy and demonstrated a high level of professionalism regulating themselves and the general population despite some hiccups along the way.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this thesis reveals that the Second World War did not end with the stroke of a pen. It ended at different times under different conditions depending on a wide variety of local circumstances. The work required in the aftermath might have been expected but remained difficult to prepare for while fighting the war. This thesis offers a glimpse into the post-war aftermath for three brigades of the First Canadian Army until May 31st 1945. It reveals that further research on more units and other unique corners of the Netherlands, on higher formation level questions, and on the transition into a formal post-war occupation force in northwest Germany in the summer of 1945 would add value to our understanding of how this war ended. What makes this study unique and necessary is that so little is known about the complexity of those first weeks after the shooting stopped.

The case studies discussed herein highlight the sudden switch from war and combat to stability building activity. Whereas the war officially ended for the First Canadian Army on May 7th, along with the rest of the forces deployed to Europe, the end of combat and subsequent transition to peace occurred at different times for each brigade. 2 Brigade's combat stopped on April 28th when the unique ceasefire came into effect with the large German force still occupying the western urban and coastal provinces, ending the Hunger Winter there. At the same time 7 Brigade faced a week's fighting at Leer, Loga and on towards Aurich, and 5 Armoured Brigade was waging siege warfare around Delfzijl. The transition to peace for 5 Armoured Brigade did not start until May 2nd with the collapse of the German garrison at Delfzijl. The story surrounding 7 Brigade was even more unique with 3rd Division preparing for an assault on May 5th as a result of

confusion throughout the German chain of command and their refusal to capitulate. The luck of location meant that 7 Brigade members faced death days after their countrymen began to celebrate.

The transition to peace for these brigades also demonstrated how difficult post-conflict operations can be. During the war, Canadian brigades carried out specific missions in a comparatively small local footprint seldom extending beyond five or six kilometres. Immediate post-war stability operations required the Canadian Army to control of every corner of the Netherlands, resulting in a large expansion in the footprint for each brigade. Whereas the capture of and expansion beyond a city was normally a multi-divisional affair the likes of Operation Anger discussed in Chapter I, the post-war Netherlands mission required single brigades such as 7 Brigade occupy the same amount of terrain. In the case of 2 Brigade their forces were even further dispersed as some individual units, like the Seaforth Highlanders, were split between the management of multiple densely populated areas. Widely dispersed forces adapted to a range of new tasks intended to rehabilitate a broken country and remove the former enemy. The exodus of the German Army was clearly the primary task for the majority of these forces, including first disarming it and ultimately removing it from Dutch territory. However, while they focussed on the German army, Canadian units also helped to feed a hungry population and to support the return of law and order by maintaining patrols, sifting out criminals, disposing of German war materiel, providing routine traffic control, regulating the Dutch underground, protecting defeated German troops from Dutch reprisals, all while managing the welfare of their own war-weary troops. These case studies demonstrated that Canadian units first took on these post-conflict missions with a degree

of organized chaos. Ultimately though, their military organization and discipline enabled them to adapt to the new job and get it done. Perhaps the best examples of this were the difficulties experienced regulating the movement of the Germans back to their country. The units and brigades quickly overcame those initial problems and repatriated the vast majority of the large German force in the Netherlands within a month of surrender, nothing short of a monumental achievement. The quick Canadian Army transition to peace highlights an outstanding level of professionalism and ability to adapt. This was further demonstrated by the ability of these Canadian forces to immediately liaise and integrate with various German headquarters elements which allowed for more productive coordination. Given the size of the task it can only be imagined what more could have gone wrong had the Canadians and Germans not been able to cooperate so professionally.

There are some other common themes that run throughout the First Canadian Army during this timeframe. Maintaining a disciplined army in a peacetime environment most definitely presented new challenges which were met by efforts at all levels from battalion to corps. Balancing post-war work with robust leave and sports programs, increased social life, and a drill regime kept soldiers occupied for the most part. The examples provided herein also demonstrate that, despite the trying workload, the typical day for a Canadian soldier when not managing the German exodus consisted of drill in the mornings, sports in the afternoons, and a very energized social life in the evenings. However, contrary to most published literature, not surprisingly there were still disciplinary issues as well as blows to morale associated with territorial cross-posting, uncertainty regarding the Pacific campaign, and uncertainty regarding repatriation.

Previous literature on this topic has demonstrated that the Canadian interaction with the Dutch population was by and large very positive. These case studies largely reinforce that description but deepens our understanding of what it looked like in practice in different provinces. What these case studies offer beyond this already established baseline is that the Dutch population was subject to rules and regulations in addition to the near legendary celebratory interaction with Canadian soldiers. In several cases there were curfews and boundaries requiring passes established to better regulate the population while hunting Nazis. Black markets still existed and there were instances of civilians stealing from both the Canadian and German stores. Dutch civilians also petitioned Canadian battalions with issues and requests that stretched the latter beyond their ability to support. The end of the war was fantastic for all, but it is important to remember that May 7th only marked the beginning of Canadian soldiers helping the Dutch to pick up the pieces in the Netherlands after long years of war and occupation.

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