

The Regiment's "Toughest Scrap" Operation Blockbuster February 26, 1945.

I am not a Historian. Ever since I read about SGT Aubrey Cosens actions on February 26, 1945 I have been interested in the battle that took place in the Rhineland that day for the Queen's Own Rifles. Sgt. Cosens bravery was but one piece of the overall events. A few years ago I tried to find a complete narrative of the battle to accompany the Sergeant Aubrey Cosens Scholarship Award. However, I was unable to find a single account that chronicles the Regiment's entire battle including the actions and comments of the survivors. There is no doubt that it was one of the hardest fights, perhaps the hardest, that the Queen's Own fought in WWII. The Victoria Cross, (the first to be awarded to the 3rd Division) three Distinguished Service Orders, with a fourth awarded to Maj. Dunkleman two days later, one Military Cross, and the Military Medal were awarded for this engagement. (Only nine DSOs were awarded to the Regiment during the war.) There were over a hundred casualties. The under-strength Rifle Companies suffered four officers killed and three wounded, twenty-eight other ranks died with five dying later from their wounds, and sixty other ranks were wounded along with one battle casualty. By common military standards an infantry unit becomes ineffective after 10% casualties and at 20% it is out of the fight. Yet during this battle companies continued to attack when left with thirty or forty survivors and in one case part of one objective was captured by only three men. Over three-hundred prisoners were taken, most of them paratroopers. I have studied WWII military history and I cannot recall an instance where more bayonet assaults and hand to hand fighting occurred. I am sure there are inaccuracies in this account some are my fault, others are caused by conflicting accounts in the articles and books that I used as sources. The references are listed on the last page. COL (Ret) William C. Ball



"No enemy formations had put up such bitter resistance in the course of the entire war as the paratroopers fighting for the Rhineland." Field Marshall Montgomery (26-326)

**"Probably no assault in this war has been conducted under more appalling conditions of terrain."
General Dwight D. Eisenhower (6-134)**

"This will be the toughest scrap we've ever been in. A lot of us won't make it. Those who do, well, they'll remember it for a long time." Major Dick Medland, A Company, 1st Battalion, Queen's Own Rifles. (6-140)



Properly dressed for the occasion, the Queen's Own Rifles move out on patrol from the Nijmegen salient, January 22, 1945. (B. J. Gloster, National Archives of Canada, PA-114073)

Montgomery's Master Plan

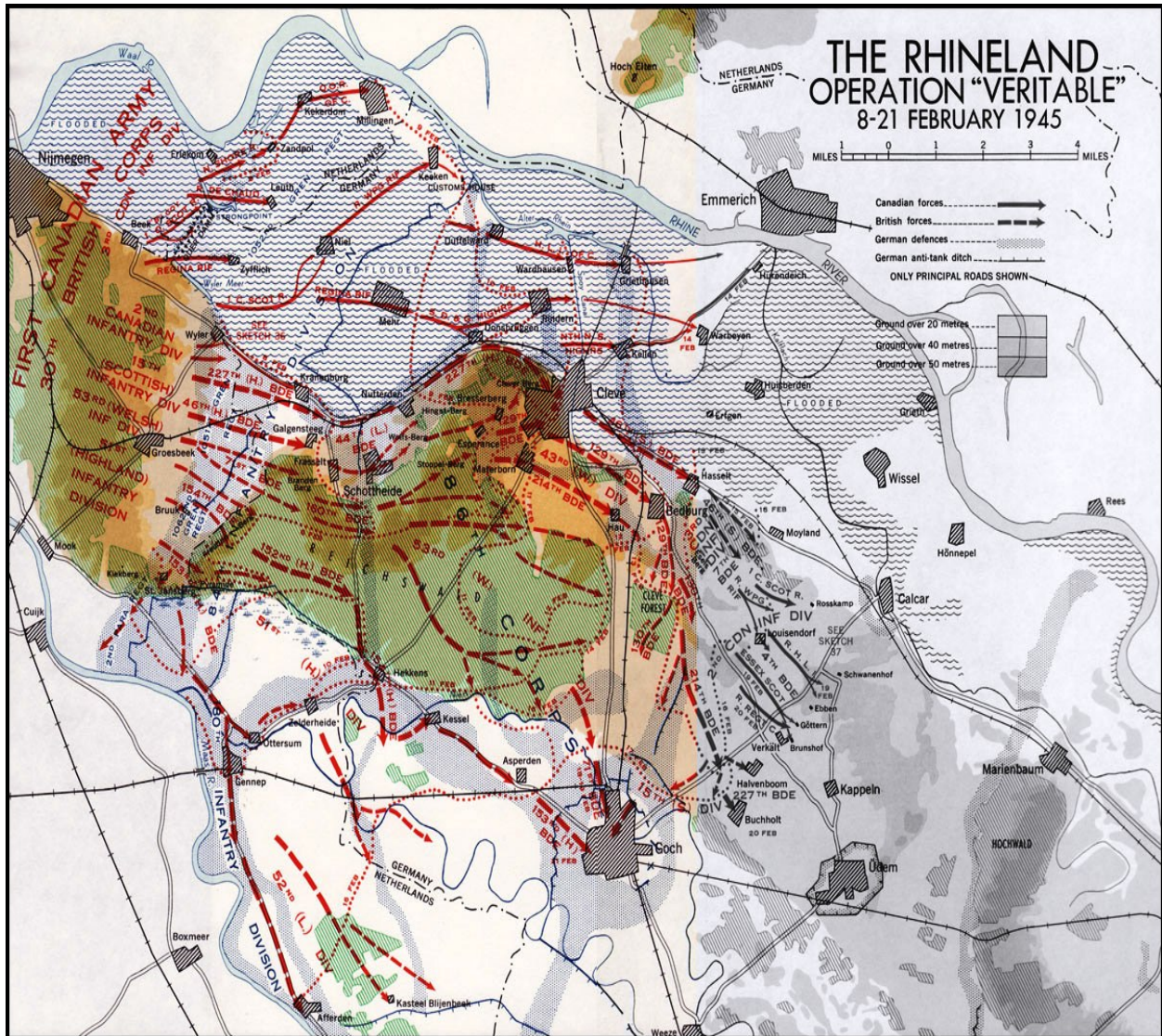
1st Canadian Army with the British 30th and 1st Corps under its command would launch Operation Veritable from the Nijmegen area. The Canadians would drive the Germans off of the west bank of the Rhine and then meet the US 9th Army moving Northeast from the Roer river in Operation Grenade. Converging, the two Armies would trap the all German forces west of the Rhine. Every German soldier was to be killed or captured. The Canadians would lead off. The enemy always gets a vote. In this case the Germans opened the Roer river dams and flooded the river preventing the US 9th Army from crossing and launching Grenade on time. Until they could 1st Canadian Army was on its own. After the brutal fighting in the Scheldt the Queen's Own had relieved a unit of the US 82nd Airborne Division and spent the winter months in the Nijmegen area. During the fighting in the Scheldt the Canadian 3rd Division had 2,077 casualties, 231 were listed as missing. Their bodies were most likely swallowed by the bog. An official report listed Battle Exhaustion casualties at 18% (10-350). In October, II Canadian Corps reported that the Canadian Army had some 870 deserters and 166 self inflicted wounds since D Day. The infantry units were tired. Reinforcements were not keeping up, many Infantry Companies that normally would have 120 men averaged 65. The 800 man Infantry battalions during this time were short 200 men on average. Having based their estimate on the totals from the desert fighting, the Allied Command had seriously underestimated the casualty rates for Europe or the "human wastage". Their estimate called for 48% casualties for the infantry it was actually 76%. There were some

120,000 National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA) conscripts guarding Canada, these were the Zombies and a source of great discontent among the combat troops. There were also 90,000 Canadian non-infantry in England. (10-363) Anti-aircraft and anti-tank units had been deactivated and sent to the infantry, service corps and other headquarters personnel had been combed out and transferred. The infantry training these men had received varied greatly some had never thrown a hand grenade many never fired a Bren gun or knew what a Piatt was. One Queen's Own officer stated that "a lot of these men were killed in their first engagement because they didn't know what they were doing". Three-hundred and fifty Canadian soldiers were evacuated due to battle exhaustion during February. At least 1/3 of those had either been wounded before or had been previously treated for battle exhaustion. The next most common characteristics were short service (less than a week in action) and exceptionally long service. One Canadian psychiatrist, Dr. Travis Dancey, commenting on the "frequent appearance of the war-weary" described a typical case in these terms: "He had led a section for several months, had been blown up eight times, but had always carried on with his duties. Recently he had lost his confidence, was unable to make decisions, had become unduly cautious and felt that he was a bad influence on his section." (19)

These reinforcement problems hit the Canadian newspapers in mid September 1944 and after much infighting Prime Minister King was forced in November to order 16,000 NRMA men overseas against their will (10-365). Eventually only 2,463 conscripts served in Europe (10-387). The hard fighting from D Day through the channel ports and the Scheldt had taken a toll on the survivors and morale suffered under the constant combat. For many it seemed that the only way out was either severe wounds nervous breakdown or death. Sergeant John Missions remembered one young private that received a Dear John letter from his girl along with a piece of wedding cake telling him that she could no longer wait for him. The soldier put his Bren gun in his mouth pulled the trigger with his foot and blew his face off. (10-358)

Operation Veritable

Operation Veritable kicked off on 8 February 1944. The 3rd Division and the Queen's Own Rifles reverted to their role in the Scheldt fighting where they had earned the nick name the "Water Rats". They were to clear the area along the banks of the Rhine. An attempt was made to lessen the enemy fire from the German side of the Rhine by maintaining a smoke screen on the river. However, they still received machinegun and artillery fire from the enemy side. The Germans had breached the dikes and flooded the area and most movement had to be done by boat or in the lightly armored Buffalo amphibious vehicles. As the water continued to rise many units took to the second floors of the buildings and were stranded until they could be evacuated.



Operation Veritable: The QORC objective was the town of Millingen in the top left of the map where the Maas River joins the Rhine River. The Calcar-Goch Road in the right center where the 4th Brigade is shown for Veritable would be the start line for the Regiment in Operation Blockbuster. The escarpment can be seen by the shaded area stretching from Calcar to Udem. To the right of Udem the railway track goes through the center of the Hochwald Gap. (Official History of the Canadian Army, Victory Campaign, Historical Section G.S. Department of National Defense P490)

Operation Veritable

The town of Millingen was the major objective for the Queen's Own during Veritable. Daily events are recorded in the following War Diary pages. Note the level of the water rising on the 10th and 11th. Although they didn't have to fight for Millingen, on the 14th two men were killed by shell fire and others were wounded during their stay by machinegun and sniper fire. The Regiment also managed to sink a barge. On the 20th the Regiment was pulled out and by the 23rd they arrive in the area of Roland Germany to begin their preparations for the next phase, Operation Blockbuster.

"Operation Veritable had not progressed as favourably as had been previously hoped. Bad weather and stiff resistance had hampered the offensive, which, as such, was virtually concluded with the final objectives yet to be reached. The momentum had been kept up to the second phase of the original plan before it became obvious that the strong; lay back defences which blocked the way to the Rhine were, in turn, covered by a series of well sited positions to the west". (22) The Canadian 2nd Division and the British forces to its south had been stopped by the determined defence along the Calcar-Goch road. The four phased Operation Blockbuster was conceived to continue the push through the Hochwald and onto the Rhine. Phase one would prove costly for the Queen's Own.

Instructions regarding preparation of War Diaries (which will be kept from first day of mobilization, creation or embodiment) are contained in FS Regs Vol 1.			WAR DIARY		3/19A MFM 11 40/P&S/37 (5028)
Title pages will be prepared.			OR		Original, duplicate and triplicate to be forwarded to OIC 2nd Echelon for disposal.
			INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY		
			(Erase heading not required)		
Page Three					
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information		Remarks, references to Appendices and initials
UBBERGEN	9 Feb 45	1430	(cont) "A" Coy arrives in MILLIGEN meeting no opposition, and contacts "C" Coy. "B" Coy at objective in MILLIGEN at 1530 hrs, meets no opposition, captures one PW and two civilians. Coy assembles in area ship yards in MILLIGEN and takes up defence role. "D" Coy house clearing according to plan. Minefield trace Mortar Fire plan Adm orders "Veritable" RCA task table & amendments Arty trace Illumination areas in Sp 7 & 8 Cdn Inf Bdes O. O. 29 "Veritable"		Appx 18 Appx 14 Appx 15 Appx 16 Appx 17 Appx 18 Appx 19 <i>Sh</i>
MILLIGEN	10 Feb 45	0530	Reveille - Fair & Mild Town of MILLIGEN and area very badly flooded owing to enemy blowing dykes. BHQ situated at MR 85666421.		
		1200	Water rose five inches in the last three hours, and is still rising. Coys moving to higher ground.		
		1630	"C" Coy moves to town of BEMMEN, GERMANY, Square 8563, encounter no opposition except civilians who are immediately ordered to stay in their homes. Map NIJMEGEN (East) 1/25,000 Map MILLIGEN 1/25,000 Map NIJMEGEN (East) 1/25,000 Map CALCAR 1/25,000		Appx 20 Appx 21 Appx 22 Appx 23 <i>Sh</i>
MILLIGEN	11 Feb 45	0800	Reveille - Cloudy with rain. Water risen two and a half feet during night, making movement in this area impossible without boat. "B" Coy is moving to area MR 86486182.		
		0830	8 pl, "A" Coy took two PW (Wermacht) this morning, PW apparently wandered into Coy lines. "A" Coy to take over "B" Coys old position. NSR to take over "B" Coys responsibility. "B" Coy has taken over many LMG posts beside the river, they afford an excellent view of the river. Arty fire is brought to bear on MR 843654, presumed enemy movement of vehicles.		
		2130	Contact patrol to NSR. All coys on fifty percent stand to until first light. Map MILLIGEN, D.F. 1/25,000		Appx <i>Sh</i>



Operation Veritable with the amphibious "Buffalos". (Note the ladder going up to the second floor.)



Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks, references to Appendices and initials
MILLINGEN	12 Feb 45	0630	Reveille - Fair and mild Royal Engineers are smoking the dyke in this area, making it very difficult to observe enemy activity on other side of River Waal. Situation quiet on Coy Sectors at present, supplies in ducks arriving regularly.	Sub
	13 Feb 45	0800	Reveille - Cloudy with ground mist. Fifty per cent coy stand-to replaced with two men guard. 12 pl "B" Coy take a German Civilian into custody, who had apparently been living on island on "B" Coys front. Island was inspected, nothing found.	
		1245	Five Dutch Civilians cross Rhine River in Boat waving white flag. They were taken and held by "A" Coy for investigation. Impossible to see across other side of dyke in some areas, owing to very heavy smoke laid down by Royal Engineers.	Sub
		1455	MG 42 firing at "B" Coy Area.	
		2020	"B" Coy area was shelled, no casualties. NSR to evacuate to mainland, "A" and "B" Coys to withdraw on 13 Feb remainder on 14 Feb. QOR of C with under command "B" Coy C.H.of O. to hold Bde Area.	
		2037	Enemy artillery active on MILLINGEN area, 10 seconds time of flight. Enemy movement of vehicles seen on dyke 85648663. "A" Coy at MR 83896458, "B" Coy at MR 86486192, "C" Coy 85166347, "D" Coy 84156434.	
MILLINGEN	14 Feb 45	0730	Reveille - Mild and Cloudy. BHQ moves to Burgomasters office in MILLINGEN MR 85666421.	
		0745	Approx three hundred enemy shells land in MILLINGEN area, direct hits on 8 Pl "A" Coy HQ. Sgt C. Webber, Provost Sgt, and Capt Bean, 2i/c "C" Coy were killed in this barrage. Tug boat seen on river so Bn on hundred per cent stand to immediately.	
		0900	Stand down.	
		1200	"D" Coy moving to take over posns. from NSR at KEKERDOM Square 8164. C.H.of O. to take over "D" Coys sector.	Sub
		1330	"D" Coy arrives KEKERDOM.	
		2130	Two boat loads civilians across River Waal from enemy lines.	
	15 Feb 45	0800	Reveille - Cold and wet. Water receding slightly. Captain and Sgt (Belgian) arrive from AMGOT to interrogate civilians we have in custody. The majority of the pls are ignoring compo these days, as fowl and beef (on the hoof) are plentiful.	Sub
		1055	Enemy MG 42 firing on "B" Coy area, Coy retaliated with Bren Gun.	

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks, references to Appendices and initials
MILLINGEN	16 Feb 45	0800	Reveille - Mild with Ground Mist Water still receding slightly. It is evident this morning that enemy barge activity took place during the night as two of their barges are resting on the river off MILLINGEN.	Sub
		1030	MG 42 firing on "B" Coy area. C.H. of O. retaliated with Vickers, enemy MG was not heard again. Royal Engineers have stopped smoking the dyke. Water has receded low enough, to make it possible for some pls to move back into houses.	
	17 Feb 45	0700	Reveille - Mild and cloudy. Fifty per cent stand to discontinued.	
		0930	Barge was seen by "A" Coy on Rhine river floating towards Neder Rhine. All available small arms fire was brought to bear, setting it on fire.	Sub
MILLINGEN	18 Feb 45	0100	Reveille - Cold and cloudy. An enemy patrol, believed to have been seven or eight men strong, infiltrated near 9 pl "A" Coy posn. It was shot up and it is believed casualties were inflicted.	
		1130	MG 42 fired approx three hundred rounds in area of "B" Coy.	
		1310	11 pl posn was shelled, no casualties.	
		1600	Our C.P.s report our arty falling short into ship yard.	
		1610	"B" Coy area was shelled very heavily.	Sub
	19 Feb 45	0025	Reveille - Cloudy and mild. Number of trip flares and booby traps were set off in area of Dyke. "A" Coy opened up with LMG and rifle fire.	
		0910	Enemy MG 42 wounded one man in "B" Coy.	
		1755	Boat seen on River Rhine, so LMG fire was brought to bear. No fire came from boat, but MG 42 retaliated from other side of river.	
		1643	A man from 7 pl "A" Coy who was walking along dyke, was shot through heel by sniper on the other side of River Rhine.	Sub

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WAR DIARY

3/19A MFM 11
40/P&B/37 (6028)

OR INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

Original, duplicate and triplicate to be forwarded to OIC 2nd Echelon for disposal.

Title pages will be prepared.

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Page Six

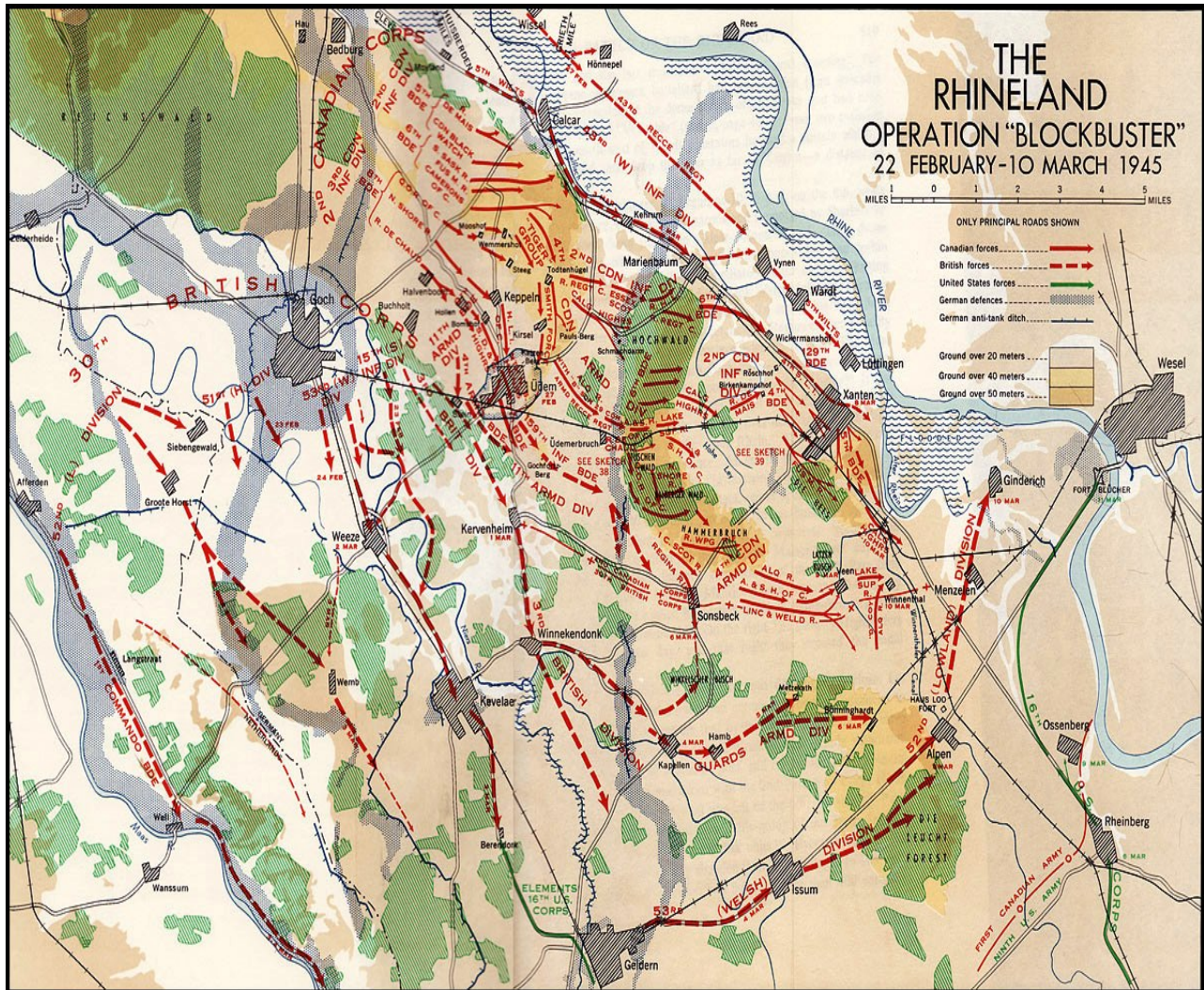
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks, references to Appendices and initials	
MILLINGEN	20 Feb 45		Reveille - Cloudy and mild.		
		0900	Bn is ordered to return to area UBBERGEN via buffalos to BEEK.		
		1130	"A" and "C" Coys will not move today.		
		1220	"B" and "D" Coys embark on buffalos for BEEK after being relieved by elements of 43 Br. Div.		
		1430	"C" Coy area was shelled considerably three or four 8.8 cm guns. "C" Coy HQ received direct hit.		
		1530	"B" and "D" Coys reported back at BEEK and leave for their old posns at UBBERGEN, in area NIJMEGEN.		
		1700	"A" Coy reports that barge fired at yesterday was sunk in river, west of MILLINGEN. Movement was observed on it.	Jnh	
					Jnh.
					Jnh.
					Jnh.
ROLAND GERMANY	21 Feb 45		Reveille - Cold with rain.		
		0001	"A" Coy shelled very regularly every 20 minutes.		
		0930	"A" Coy embarks on buffalos for BEEK, by 1600 hrs they are back in old posns in UBBERGEN.		
		1030	"C" Coy embarks for BEEK. Command taken over by 43 Div.		
ROLAND GERMANY	22 Feb 45		Reveille - Fair and mild.		
		0015	Coys are all settled down for a good night's sleep, but no such luck. Bn receives orders to move.		
		0330	Coys prepare to move on RV's.		
		0540	Convoy leaves area NIJMEGEN and proceeds via GROSSBEEK, through REICHS WALD FOREST, on road recently constructed by Royal Engineers. Then through CLEVE, DONSBRUGGEN, and arrives at destination area ROLAND, GERMANY.		
			BHQ situated at MR 932514. "A" Coy at MR 930511; "B" Coy 926510, "C" Coy 922522; "D" Coy at MR 929505; "Sp" Coy 927503.		Jnh.
ROLAND GERMANY	23 Feb 45		Reveille - Fair and cold.		
		0800	Coys commence general clean up. Weapon inspections.		
		1330	Afternoon consisted of sports and P.T. Not one house in area has escaped being hit by our arty, giving proof of the effectiveness.		
		1445	Field Marshall B L MONTGOMERY visited this area today.	Jnh.	
ROLAND GERMANY	24 Feb 45		Reveille - Fair and mild.		
		1500	"C" Group at BHQ for Coy Comdrs. Trace ROA operation Blockbuster	Appx 25 Jnh	

On 21-22 February the Regiment was in the town of Ubbergen on the way to Roland. The CO had ordered everyone CB'd (confined to barracks). Dick Medland, the A Company Commander, recalled telling this to his driver Rfn. Tommy Twynam who replied "Jeez, Boss the boys aren't going to like that a whole helluva lot." Changing his mind during his Company O Group, Medland told his platoon commanders that anyone could go into town if properly dressed, had his weapons inspected and his sergeant knew where to find him in a hurry. As it was they received three hours notice before moving out. Medland stated that they left Ubbergen early morning of the 22nd without a man missing. He also noted; "Oh, if somebody wanted to be critical, there were some in no condition at all for fighting." (6-138) they pulled into their area near Roland, Germany that night. They were close to the enemy and it was raining. The Regiment spent the 23rd and 24th cleaning up and resting. The officers were briefed on the 24th and conducted reconnaissance of their objectives beginning with the Battalion and Company Commanders followed by the company level officers. They received their detailed orders on the morning of the 25th from the CO Lieutenant-Colonel Lett.

Operation Blockbuster

As 1st Canadian Army continued with the overall plan, LTG Simons 2 Canadian Corps would launch Operation Blockbuster on the North or left while the British continued their attack in the South or right. The strongest German positions were on the North side. The start line was the Goch-Calcar road and the

objective was to drive on through into the Hochwald Gap and beyond to the Rhine. (2-193) "In the mammoth shift to reposition his various Divisions for the new thrust, Simons made the mistake of immobilizing the bulk of his units for four days." (2-194) His German opponent General Schlemm commanding the German 1st Parachute Army used this time to reposition and strengthen the German defenses along the horseshoe shaped escarpment stretching from Calcar to Udem. Any approach across the flat open farmland broadside to the six mile ridge would bring the units under German observation and fire. This was the mission given to the 3rd Division. The Canadian 2nd and 4th Divisions were tasked to attack the ridge head-on. The 8th Brigade was given the task of opening up the approaches to the Calcar-Udem escarpment supported by two squadrons of tanks from the 1st Hussars.



In the upper left of this map during Blockbuster the QORC attack is protecting the right flank of the 6th Brigade while securing its four objectives. The North Shore Regiment is to its right about 1500 meters away with its objective the town of Keppeln. On the 8th Brigades far right the Chauds would attack Halvenbach. (Official History of the Canadian Army, Victory Campaign, Historical Section G.S. Department of National Defense P518)

The 3rd Division was to capture the villages of Keppeln and Udem as well as the hamlets and farmhouses which dotted the countryside around them. The Queen’s Own Rifles of Canada would lead off 8th Brigade’s attack, moving forward through rising, open fields as soon as the barrage lifted. The

QORs had been allotted a squadron of 1st Hussar tanks and some of F troop from 52nd Battery (self-propelled 17- pounder guns) of the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment, RCA, but the artillery program for their sector was severely limited. The QORs were, according to the Blockbuster master plan, simply securing the lower slope of the ridge, conforming to the movements of the 2nd Division. This meant the barrage would move on to the crest relatively quickly. (19)

Now that they were fighting on German soil the opposition became quite fanatical and the Canadians were faced by hard-fighting paratroopers of General Alfred Schlemm's 1st Parachute Army. They formed a core around which gathered "old men and young boys who had hand grenades and old rifles and hearts full of hate" (17-225). The delay of Operation Grenade and the US 9th Army's crossing of the Rhine allowed the Germans to reposition some of those forces facing the Americans to the 1st Canadian Army's sector; "transferring north from the American front, nine divisions (between 135,000 and 180,000 men), equipped with the greatest concentration of mortars and guns ever assembled by the Germans anywhere on the whole Western Front- 1,054 guns and 717 mortars. Army intelligence reported the Germans assembled 451 field guns, 179 mediums, 195 anti-tank guns, 229 dual-purpose 88mm guns, 581 heavy mortars (80 and 120mm), and 136 super-heavy mortars (150-210mm)" (23-322).

Brigadier Jim Roberts had wanted to employ Kangaroos, the defrocked Priest armored artillery vehicles. With their tops removed and extra armor plating along the sides they could carry a section of infantry into battle and save casualties, but the limited amount of Kangaroos were being used by the 6th Brigade in their attack to the north. The Brigades armor support was also lacking with only two Squadrons of the 1st Hussars Regiment assigned to the Brigade.



The Kangaroo, a defrocked "Priest".

The attack plan deviated from the normal procedures where two Battalions advanced with a third in reserve. For Blockbuster each of the Brigades' Battalions would go forward separately and at different times. The Queens Own would lead at 0430 on the Brigades left flank to capture the small hamlets of Mooshof, Wimmershof, and Steeg. The Queen's Own was to move first because the movement was timed to protect the right flank of the 6th Brigades' attack. Then at 0830 the Chaudiere Regiment on the

far right of the Brigade would kick off in the direction of Udem taking Halvenboom, Hollen, and Bomshof. Finally, fifteen minutes later, the North Shore Regiment would attack up the middle to take Keppeln. From its objectives the QORC was to provide covering fire for the North Shores even though they would be some 1500 meters away.

The CO, Lieutenant Colonel Steve Lett disliked the plan intensely. "The Germans had all that could be desired for a defensive position. The country was is open and flat. Behind this excellent tank country lays the horse-shoe shaped Calcar-Udem escarpment, while still farther to the east lays the Hochwald, an ideal gun area." He was unable to effectively reconnoiter the ground ahead because of the "flat open country completely under enemy observation." It was impossible to see the Regiments objectives or the German strong points just over the crest of the escarpment. (3-324)

The enemy troops holding the Queen's Own objectives were first class soldiers from the 6th and 8th parachute regiments (13-247). ***(This is probably an error. The German 6th Parachute Regiment was not in the area, it was fighting against Americans and was near Bonn at this time. The main parachute unit was the 7th Parachute Division with its Regiments 19 through 21; the 6th Parachute Division was defending the Calcar area, with Regiments 16 - 18. The 7th Parachute Regiment was defending Udem. The Germans fed the Parachute Regiments in piecemeal as they arrived and often formed ad hoc battle groups. Perhaps this reference actual refers to the 16th and 18th Regiments?)***

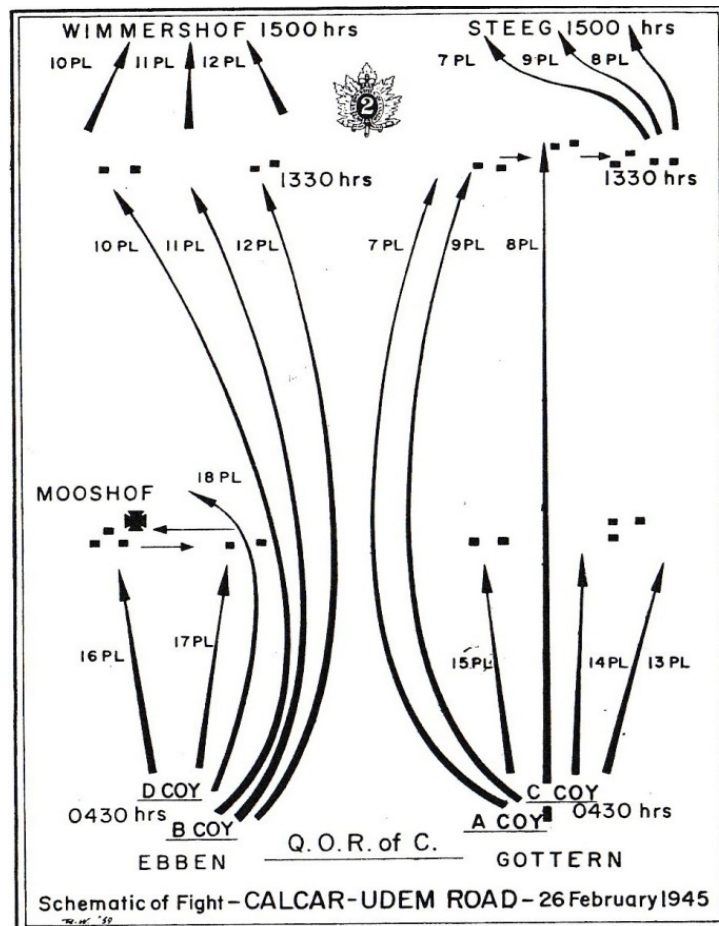
Even at this stage of the war the parachute units still contained young and motivated soldiers. Although most had never jumped from an airplane they were well armed and well trained for their defensive mission. There were still enough veterans of Italy, Russia and Normandy to provide the leadership. Parachute units were allotted more automatic weapons and mortars than the German infantry units. Sections were formed around a machinegun normally the MG 42 and had at least two MP 40 machine pistols or equivalents per section. Their forward defensive line was located in reinforced concrete positions and farm houses scattered across the front. Secondary positions were prepared and some wire, tank ditches and many mines were in place. From these positions the Germans had full view of the Brigade's attack area. The flat muddy terrain rose slightly uphill from the Canadian positions and provided the paratroopers with excellent observation for artillery fires, grazing fire for their machineguns and no cover for the Regiment.

George Blackburn, an artillery FOO supporting Blockbuster, describes his feelings before the attack; "You find yourself sighing too much, and your mouth is cracking dry, your palms are damp. You try to concentrate on the Calcar sheet of the maps they've given you to invade Germany, which have been printed on the backs of maps the Germans had printed to invade England. You turn over the map and study the 'Grantham sheet of Lincolnshire' – now overprinted with the word "cancelled." (23-273)

26 February 1945

Ben Dunkleman had been with the Regiment since D Day and now Commanded D Company, he recalled that morning. "We were roused at 0330 hours, a dreadful time to awaken and realize your chances of never waking again are pretty high. As usual, we were all fed hot coffee, rum, and sandwiches, and the men's equipment and weapons were checked. The artillery had reached a crescendo as we moved off towards the start line at 0400. Our first objective was a little village named Mooshof; previous attacks on Mooshof, Steeg and Wimmershof had been thrown back with heavy losses by crack German paratroopers, who had succeeded in halting the whole Allied advance on this front. We knew we were in for a real scrap." (5-132) Sergeant Aubrey Cosens checked his men. Finding Private Don Chittenden struggling with his wet web equipment, he knelt in front of him to get the buckles done up. Chittenden felt as if he were being fussed over by an anxious mother, and when he looked down at Cosens they both laughed loudly. Private Don Cowling knew it was going to be a different affair from their previous experience when he saw Dunkelmann walking around waving his pistol and yelling, "Who's ready for war?" (14)

Sergeant Aubrey Cosens was 23 years old, from Porquis Junction near Latchford, Ontario. He spent his youth exploring Temagami's lakes and forests prowling for weeks on end. He learned resourcefulness and gained mental and physical toughness from wilderness survival and solitude. He was a bit of a fitness buff, tuning his muscles by wrestling and weight lifting and his mind by tests of will. He loved sports and played hockey on the police hockey team. He was somewhat of a loner by inclination and a leader by nature. (2-198). Aubrey finished the seventh grade and went to work as a railway hand. In 1939 he decided not to wait for conscription, but his first choice, the Air Force, turned him down. Aubrey joined the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in Hamilton in 1940. He served with this regiment in Jamaica and Kiska; he was promoted to Corporal and then moved with it to England when it became part of the 4th Armoured Division. Cosens transferred into the Queen's Own as a reinforcement on 1 August 1944. His letters to his girlfriend Jewel indicated he had found a home in the Army and intended to make a career of it. "I've had another promotion so it's Sergeant now and what a lot of work there is to do and I have a lot of dirt flung at me from all angles. But I'll beat it if it kills me. I was platoon commander for two weeks or more. That's a lot of responsibility to take, and it makes you think (about) am I doing this right? How many men will come back and so forth? If I get gray hairs you can guess the reason. The word responsibility is a big one in the army. I've learned that." In his last letter to Jewel he mentioned that he was acting CSM and states again his intention of remaining in the permanent force and making CSM. In his last letter to his foster parents he talks about soon getting a leave to England and that he should have one to Canada after June. (6-156-157)



The Regiment's plan.

At 0345 the entire 2 Canadian Corps artillery began firing in support of the attacks. A total of 1,034 guns fired on enemy positions. Before the 2nd Canadian Corp advanced with ground troops, the Canadian Artillery fired more than 500,000 rounds or 400 to 700 rounds per gun. The Germans offered little resistance to the tremendous shelling. For Phase one of Blockbuster seven field and two medium regiments supported the Queen's Own attack with fire at a "walking pace". The Field Regiments for the 3rd Division were the 12th, 13th and 14th Regiments. The 12th Regiments Intelligence summary for the 26th records; "Zero hour for the 3rd Division was the next morning at 0330 hours and we fired in support two hundred and thirty rounds per gun before 1400 hours. The Signallers had a difficult time keeping their lines in, as the 4th Armoured Division tanks were milling around our position all day and even the tannoy wires were ripped up." The Forward Observation Officers from the firing batteries accompanied the Infantry Companies into battle and often suffered casualties among the FOOs and their Signallers. "Major Gilbert was the third officer killed or wounded from the Regiment since the 9th of February." (21)

The Queen's Own Companies moved forward from the FUP (forming up place) following white tape that guided them to their positions on the start line. Four huge searchlights came on bouncing the beams off of the clouds creating artificial moonlight and turning night into day. There was no ground mist, visibility was excellent. Major H.E. Dalton, the Regiments 2IC, said afterward "It backfired; it did us more harm than good. In that kind of hand-to-hand fighting, to clear houses, you didn't need light." There was no surprise, the Germans were waiting and saw the companies coming before they reached the start line. When the companies moved out behind a rolling barrage the Germans would follow their usual tactics of dropping their artillery just behind our barrage to catch our men. Lieutenant-Colonel Lett ordered his two lead companies to make one adjustment in the Divisional plan: "they were not to cross the start line at the scheduled hour in the hope they would be able to observe and avoid the inevitable counter barrage which the Germans would direct behind the moving allied barrage (11-213)." The lead companies crossed the start line about ten minutes late at 0440 hours. In spite of this some of the counter fire caught A Company which lost seven men just reaching the start line.

Lett used the standard attack formation; two up and two back. D Company was on the left followed by B Company and C Company was on the right followed by A Company. Each company would have a FOO (Forward Observation Officer) with them to direct artillery fire. The mud became an obstacle for Major Jake Powell's C Squadron tanks who were unable to match the infantry's pace, the Hussars were delayed as they slowly churned their way to the start line. The Queen's Own C and D companies under Major Allen Nickson and Major Ben Dunkleman started the attack without them, counting on the tanks to catch up later.

Dunkleman describes D company's attack; "As we advance we keep as close as possible to the creeping barrage. Shells explode as little as ten yards ahead. Although it is four o'clock on a February morning it's as bright as day because Monty as usual is supplying us with artificial moonlight, produced by searchlights playing on the clouds above. I advance in the center of the company; 16 platoon to my left, 17 to my right, and 18 under John Hancock, following behind. We move as cautiously as we can, keeping close to the creeping barrage. Overcoming enemy resistance we reach our objective- the farm buildings of Mooshof. So far, so good. Not a single casualty! But I know what's coming and I roar out instructions to the platoon commanders to spread out ahead, and get dug in well away from the captured German positions. The enemy's defensive tactics are brilliantly conceived, and carried out with tenacity by some of the best soldiers in Europe. No rigid defence: under attack, they hold on as long as possible in their excellently concealed slit-trenches, then withdraw to prepared positions a little farther back. Instantly, previously ranged mortar and artillery fire is poured on the positions they've just vacated-even if a few of their own men are still there. The shelling is co-ordinated with infantry assaults to retake the ground

they've just lost. Superb tactics. That's precisely what they're doing now. No sooner have they pulled back from the farmhouses than they begin their counter-attack (5-133)."

On reaching Mooshof the enemy was found to have prepared positions throughout the area and to have strong points in three farm buildings. In the noise and confusion 16 Platoon had not pulled off the objective. The plan called for 18 Platoon to go through and flank the enemy by swinging around the front of 17 Platoon striking 16 platoon's objective from the right flank (see map). As 18 Platoon passed through they strayed too far to the right following a couple of tanks (13-249). This opened McKay's 16 Platoon to an attempted infiltration attack. The enemy then counter-attacked in strength. In the darkness, and aided by their knowledge of the ground, the Germans succeeded in infiltrating into the positions which Number 16 platoon had hastily taken up. In bitter and confused fighting, this counter-attack was beaten off, but not until the platoon had suffered heavy casualties, including the platoon commander. With one tank in support the platoon counter-attacked. (see Lt McKay's citation) 16 Platoon engaged in a fierce exchange of gunfire before the Germans broke it off. They were then hit hard by artillery and mortars. Lieutenant Lloyd McKay was seriously wounded and an entire section was wiped out (3-326). Shortly after this they began falling back to 17 Platoon's positions.

Lieutenant Lloyd Carlton McKay, MC,

1st Battalion, The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada. His citation reads:

On the attack on MOOSHOF, Lieutenant Lloyd Carlton McKay commanded 18 Platoon of D Company 1st Bn The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada on 26 February 1945. This platoon, upon reaching its objective, came under extremely heavy mortar and shell fire and the platoon was immediately counter-attacked by strong enemy forces.

Without regards for his personal safety, Lt McKay refused to take cover and directed the fire of his platoon under the most hazardous conditions. He then personally led three attacks against enemy counter-blows, completely disorganizing the attacking enemy forces.

At this point Lt McKay was seriously wounded through the chest and legs. Despite his wounds, he climbed on to the top of a supporting tank and, although still under intense enemy fire, directed the tanks into the buildings held by the enemy. In these buildings McKay killed ten Germans and took 12 prisoners. Through his supreme courage and magnificent leadership the company was able to consolidate its position and hold off all enemy attempts to retake it. Lt McKay's extreme bravery and coolness in action was an inspiration to all ranks and is an example of the highest standards of a Canadian officer. (The citation is in error Lieutenant McKay commanded 16 Platoon.)

Major Dunkleman continues; "a runner comes over to tell me that 16 Platoon, which hasn't moved off the objective, is caught in a fire-storm as the bombs rain down, and is taking a battering. I run over there to find that all hell has broken loose. Every minute more men are hit. Men from 17 Platoon come over to help get the wounded out of there, and are caught in the same deadly fire. The whole area is turning into a shambles; the bodies of the wounded, dead and dying lie everywhere you look. It's a nightmare." (5-133) Dunkleman helps patch up the wounded to save them from bleeding to death and then helps carry the bodies to cover as the counterattack slams home. "The onslaught continues murderously effective. We try to hang on, but an enemy counter-attack secures the buildings once occupied by 16 Platoon. The fight sways back and forth attack and counter-attack, with heavy losses on both sides. The struggle for Mooshof—and a lot more- hangs in the balance." (5-134)

What remained of 16 Platoon fell back on 17 Platoon's position. Rifleman Norm Selby remembers. "The Germans were waiting for us we were lying in shell holes. They had MG-42s upstairs in the barns. God, they were wicked guns." Rifleman Don Chittenden, Lt. McKay's runner, recalled "I went through the most horrendous artillery fire I ever experienced. It was extremely accurate, it winkled the guys right out of their slit trenches. We had terrible casualties (2-197)". Rifleman Norm Selby was pulling back slowly

when Lance Corporal Edward Fraser shouted, "Speed it up, you guys." As Fraser dashed around the corner of the building he was killed by a burst of Schmeisser fire through a window and fell dead. Selby chucked in a grenade through the window and killed the German (3-326). Fraser was one of Chittenden's best friends; "I just stood there, stunned, staring down at Fraser's body. I was shocked because he was the first one of the guys I'd been close to (2-198)."

The citation for Aubrey Cosens Victoria Cross was in error, Cosens' Platoon Commander was not killed. Shelby recalls; Our Platoon commander, Lieutenant Lloyd McKay (awarded the MC for this action) was wounded, not killed. We know because Don Cowling and I grabbed McKay's webbing and dragged him out of there. Cowling and I had been in a shellhole. Corporal Gough had come by and said, "Let's go fellows." The fire was on someone else when we moved. That's how we made it. When it was over 16 Platoon didn't exist anymore. Out of maybe thirty there were only eight or nine left". On the fortieth anniversary of the battle Norm went back to Mooshof there he met the German farmer who as a kid of 16 had hid in the cellar during the battle. He told Norm 'When you people had left we came out, maybe in the early afternoon, and we were in shock. All those clumps of khaki in our field.' "That was 16 Platoon out there, taken out by mortars and artillery." (6-153)

It was at this point that Sergeant Aubrey Cosens took charge of the survivors of the platoon. Despite the platoon's terrible condition Cosens led them on two attacks on the last three farm buildings. They were beaten back each time. Of the thirty or so men in 16 Platoon that had crossed the start line only Cosens and eight or nine remained. "After our Platoon Commander, Lt. Lloyd McKay was wounded, Sgt. Cosens took over," remembered Corporal H.F. Gough. "He asked me to gather up the men who were not wounded. There were only four of us left. He asked us to give covering fire while he made a dash to find a tank." (14) (The QOR history lists the following men as the four with Cosens, but Shelby and Chittenden were certainly there as well perhaps not behind the tank) Cpl. G. Dasser, Cpl. H.F. Gough, Rfn. A.W. Ferrell and Rfn. G. W. Parsons. (13-251). Cosens was determined to retake the buildings. Shelby recalled that Cosens was wearing a tank suit with lots of pockets and carried a pistol, "Aubrey was my Sergeant. He knew what he was doing. I liked him. I never saw him with a rifle or Sten". (3-326) Cosens ordered his four men to provide covering fire and he armed himself with a Sten gun and grenades. Cosens called for tank support.

Archie McQuade: "We were occupying a building on the road that was maybe, oh, half or three-quarters of a mile away. I didn't know Cosens had called for a tank. It stopped at our building." McQuade had no idea what the tank was for, but assumed it was to blast the snipers out Aubrey Cosens' building. When told where he was to go, the tank commander (Sergeant Charlie "Andy" Anderson) said "To hell with you, I need two guys to lead me up there. One yard one way or the other off the road and I'll be stuck forever in the mud." So two men guided him up to the building. (6-152)

It was about now that this 1st Hussars tank showed up in 16 Platoon's area. Cosens dashed twenty-five yards through the exploding mortar rounds across the bullet swept ground to the tank commanded by Sergeant Charles Anderson. Finding that the telephone on the rear of the tank was broken he climbed up beside the turret to point out the location of the MG 42s in the buildings and had Anderson place fire on them with the tanks main gun.

Don Cowling recalls two tanks being involved. (This may have been the earlier period when the platoon was counterattacking the German penetration of their position and Lt McKay took action with one of the tanks.) "I got paired off with Gough (section Corporal) and we tried some house clearing. But at the start I was with Selby. We had come under fire from some houses and Cosens told us to dig in. Not long after two tanks headed for the trench. Someone shouted 'its okay guys, I can see ya.' But the noise, instead of getting fainter, got louder. The second tank came right for us. Close, but no damage. The next thing I remember is Lance-Sergeant McKay coming by. Had I seen Corporal Finch? So I ran into one of the houses – sounding sort of silly, I suppose – calling out, 'hey Finch, hey Finch. All I got from that was a voice saying, 'Was ist das?' I found him later. His back was to the wall. He'd taken mortar fire; there was

shrapnel in his stomach. They tell you, don't try to pull it out; it could be like an iceberg and do wider damage, so wait for the stretcher-bearers. Later I saw him again, still in the same position. But dead. I'll tell you the sad thing in our particular section is that when Norm and I got there as reinforcements, we were green, and Pocock and Joe Sereres – they'd been soldering for some time- took us under their wing and kept us from harm. They were killed in the attack." Both Don and Norm were from Toronto, they had gone to school together, joined up together and arrived as reinforcements together. (6-154)



German Fallschirmjagers with the MG 42.

Cosens was directing the fire of the tank and his small group onto enemy positions in the buildings and surrounding area when another counter-attack hit them. "Cosens continued to direct the fire of the tank and his small group to break up a second German counter-attack. Once again, the enemy counter-attacked savagely in force. Remaining on the tank and completely disregarding the enemy's superiority in numbers and the withering fire Sergeant Aubrey Cosens led and inspired the defence. He plunged the tank, in the blackness, into the middle of the attackers. His bold tactics resulted in the complete disorganisation of the enemy force, which broke and fled after sustaining many casualties". (21)

Sergeant Anderson recalls heavy sniper fire coming from the farm buildings. "We fired 75mm shells into the building." It was probably at this point after some heavy fire had been thrown out that Cosens told Anderson about his plan to ram the first house. Trooper Bill Adams, the driver recalls; "I put her in bull-low and advanced. When I hit, I bounced back about two feet and didn't do too much. Then I tried again and this time I did a pretty good job and went in quite a way. I was pretty careful about ramming those stone walls. Usually there's some kind of basement. We wouldn't be much use to anyone with a thirty ton Sherman tank lying around in a farm cellar." (3-327) (14) "The Germans tried to pick him (Cosens) off with tracer fire", Chittenden recalls. "It was just like bloody rain bouncin' off that tank. He stayed out there in the open with his Sten while the tank knocked out the farmhouse."

Rifleman Selby recalls; "There were only four of us by then; we needed a leader, somebody to say, 'Ok let's go.' We realized if we stayed there we were going to get killed or captured. Cosens was screaming at the top of his lungs from the tank, 'Follow me!' So we got behind the tank and ran in behind to give him fire support. The tank rammed into one of the houses and bashed the hell out of it, firing its turret gun into the house. Cosens jumped off the tank and tore into the house and the Krauts started coming out the other door. We got them all corralled." It was still dark. Cosens spotted the body of Corporal Fraser in the path of the tank by the flash of artillery fire. He dismounted and ran forward to Don Chittenden's location. Chittenden: "He came running over to me yelling, 'Chit get your ass out of here. You're going to get shot.' He grabbed Fraser's body by the collar and straps and dragged it to one side. 'A tank is coming up this way', he said. 'I don't want it to crush Fraser's body.'" (2-198)

Cosens then continued his attack on the second building he had the tank fire into this building and forcing the door open, entered it alone, the enemy had already fled. He then continued his assault under the covering fire of the tank and his remaining men. Cosens crossed the road and attacked the third building, a heavily defended two story farm house. He cleared the building killing more Germans in the process and on discovering that some were hiding in the basement he calmly stood at the door and talked them into surrendering. Some fourteen to sixteen German paratroopers gave up. He had personally killed some twenty Germans and captured another twenty seriously disrupting the German counter-attack. Sergeant Cosens told Don Chittenden and Rifleman Norton to take the prisoners to the rear. "When we had cleaned out the last farmhouse, Selby recalls, "Cosens said take up defensive positions. I'm going to the company commander and report to him.' Then he started off. I guess he got about 8 or 10 feet from me and plink! Down he went-that was it. Where the sniper came from I don't know." (2-199)

Cpl Gough: "He appeared on the top of the tank and directed fire which broke up the German counterattack. The Germans in disorderly fashion ran for their building. They started to open fire on us from there with automatic weapons. As he could not stop the withering fire he crouched on the tank and had it ram the first building. With his pistol in hand he wounded one German. After clearing the first building he had the tank move towards the building alongside. Before reaching the building he jumped off the tank to remove Lance Corporal Fraser's body from the path of the tank. He had the tank fire a shell into the second building. The tank then gave covering fire while he himself cleared the building. He forced his way in the front door and alone cleared the building. He then continued across the road with covering fire from the tank and cleared the third building. We followed him from building to building gathering the prisoners. The last I saw of him was when he told me where to sight my Bren gun and then

he dashed off to seek the company commander to tell him that the counterattack had been broken up and the objective taken.” (14)

Sergeant Charles Anderson of the 6th Canadian Armored Regiment reported, “I, B19526 Sgt. Anderson C R, 6 Cdn Armd. Regt testify that during the battle of 26 February 1945 which took place after we had reached our objective [Mooshof], a Sgt of the Queen’s Own Rifles climbed on my tank and directed my fire upon the enemy who were making a heavy counterattack. Then he directed me toward some buildings where there were heavily held positions, all the while he was on top of the tank. In all his movements he was harassed by snipers. He directed me to ram the building with my tank which I did. After that he went into the building to clean out the enemy. He took several prisoners out of the building. The Sgt then went to other buildings to clean them out while my tank gave him covering fire. There was a great deal of sniping and mortar and shell fire during the whole action in which he directed my tank.”(14)

Norm Selby had a swastika flag that he had acquire earlier. All four men Sereres, Pocock, Selby and Cowling had signed their names on it and it is now displayed in the Sergeant’s Mess along with Sergeant Cosens Sten gun. The men of D Company recalled Aubrey Cosens as a remarkable man and leader. Don Chittenden of 16 Platoon said, “With all due respect to the platoon commander, it was Cosens who ran the platoon, who took care of morale, who knew tactics ... while the rest of us were trying to save ourselves, Cosens was off trying to win the war.” Jack Staples of 16 Platoon said, “Cosens liked to be with the boys and was always joking. He was also very commanding. He knew how to handle our platoon of 38.” Company Sergeant Major, Bill Ives recalled, “The very first thing he did was look after his men. He was just more caring about other people than about himself. He always seemed to know how to lift morale.” (14)

Dunkleman; “There were now dozens of dead and wounded in 16 and 17 platoons, which, to all intents and purposes had ceased to exist as fighting formations. With enemy fire still raining down there wasn’t much we could do, except hang on; aided by John Hancock’s 18 Platoon and a few supporting tanks, and hope that the enemy counter-attacks would stop. That was exactly what happened. Cosens’ heroism had broken the enemy counter-attacks; we had won the position by the simple expedient of just sweating it out. “There were only 36 fighting men left in my company, out of the 115 who had crossed the start line. I was the only officer to come through unwounded along with only one NCO.”(5-135) Dunkelman recognized the promise in the young soldier, (Sergeant Cosens) commenting, “He was an outstanding, good looking man, a perfect noncommissioned officer, and carried as much as 80 pounds of ammunition on his back when his platoon went into action. I cannot speak of him too highly as a fine, clean-living soldier.”(14)

B Company passed through D Company and took their objective, Wimmershof, without a fight.

Bill Bettridge: “Our platoon (Scouts and Snipers) came up in the afternoon and took over the position. Buck Buchanan and I came across a sergeant’s body. My compass had been damaged. I took his. There was no way at that particular time to know who he was or what had happened.” (6-155)

C Company

C Company pushed off for their objectives at the same time as D Company headed towards theirs. C Company Commander Major Nickson: The Calcar-Udem road is something even now I can’t remember precisely or properly sort out all the details. Perhaps at that point I was a bit fed up with the war. I had seen so many die. Our platoon officers were killed and wounded before I even got to know their names. And I began to think that maybe my own luck was running out. Crossing the road in open formation, shells were overhead both ways- theirs and ours. The going was slow. Casualties were heavy. By early afternoon we had consolidated around farm buildings our objective.” (6-149)

“They were struck by the same type of murderous fire from the paratroopers holding nearby farm buildings and adjacent dug outs. 15 Platoon was pinned down until one section slipped out to the right and drove in with swords fixed to take the buildings from the rear. “Hand-to-hand fighting resulted. The Rifleman’s sword, so seldom used in battle, here came into action. The enemy fought bitterly, tenaciously. The other two sections came up and eventually after suffering many casualties, were victorious.” The remnants of 15 Platoon provided covering fire for 14 Platoon as they gained the second group of buildings. They were assisted by a troop of 1st Hussar tanks that came up. As had happened with D company, as C Company consolidated on its objective the German artillery and mortars struck. The first salvo killed 14 Platoon’s Lieutenant and Sergeant.” (3-325)

A Company

The plan called for Dick Medland’s 8th Platoon to pass through C Company on the first objective about a thousand yards in front of the start line and set up a fire base slightly forward of it. 7 and 9 Platoons would sweep left to get at the flank of A Company’s objective. Medland was supposed to receive word from C Company when it was on its objective. “Right away we drew small arms fire.” Medland could no longer see C Company through the smoke. “I never got the word from C Company.” The near constant sheet-ripping sound of MG 42 machineguns and exploding hand grenade blasts told him there was heavy fighting out there. “But I could see for myself. There was some close-in action in their area. I judged the situation in hand. So I told 7 and 9 to push on, go. The Germans contested every foot. They put up one hell of a fight for a solid two hours it was sheer madness. Sometime in this inferno our company wireless network became useless for the worst of reasons: all the platoon commanders had been killed. I decided to move up a bit, closer behind 7 and 9, so I could at least try to see what was going on. They were bounding forward in small groups. And only a few yards at a time. Hand-to-hand fighting was everywhere. For only the second time since D-Day I watched in dread as the men took to using their swords. There was little I could do. To call in support fire would have caused as much damage to us as to the enemy. Everything was so close.” (6-141)

“The enemy’s most lethal weapons, the mortar and Nebelwerfer, continued to account for 70 per cent of all allied casualties, but German technical superiority in the design of light machine guns, armoured fighting vehicles, and anti-tank guns had a profound effect on the battle field.” (12-262)

Charles Martin, A Company Sergeant Major, describes the fire: “all that morning the fire continued to fall on us- artillery and mortars, machine-guns, Moaning Minnies, a horrendous and continuous racket of death and destruction.” (7-119) The artillery was a mix of 75mm and the deadly 88’s.

Medland continued moving with his CP group: “In one of these bounds I noticed a German helmet, just ahead and to the left. I shouted: “Down”. Penny and I made it. But Rifleman Thorell, a few feet behind with the heavy wireless set, didn’t. Penny kept the German occupied and I went back to Thorell. He was dead. His wireless was a mass of machine gun bullet holes. Now Penny and I had a German with a Schmeisser right in front of us. We took care of him quickly.” (6-141).

Charlie Martin describes the assault with 7 Platoon: “They had to take a fortified farm building that contained an 88 and several machineguns. The Lieutenant was D.D. Chadbolt, 21 years old, the Sergeant Joe Meagher, and the Lance Sergeant Harold Clyne. They captured the building by about 6 a.m., but the fighting was fierce. The Lieutenant was killed and Joe was wounded in the spleen, so Harold took over the platoon. Then on to the next building, another 88, another heavy machinegun. Harold Clyne, Bill Grier and Charles Nahwegezhik went after this one. They got it at about 7:30 a. m. My good friend Harold was killed and Charles took a serious wound that would later cost him his life. When the chance came I went out to get him. Two machineguns were still in action and they opened up. I got him back, but one of their bullets hit Charles in the arm and another grazed my left leg, just enough to draw blood and scare me near to death. The remnant of the platoon had two-thirds of their objective. We pulled them together and took out the remaining three buildings. It was about nine-thirty in the morning.

Objectives achieved, but 7 Platoon paid an awful price. There had been no time to release the livestock. Most of the cows, horses and other livestock were killed or badly shot up. 9 Platoon now made ready to take out the final buildings and complete the job. Their Lieutenant J.J. Chambers and his Corporal, Bob Dunstan, led the charge for the first group. Chambers was killed. Dunstan was wounded in the arm but still took over the platoon. (7-119-120)

Medland: "We moved forward again and watched the two platoons take over their objectives. It was barely eight in the morning, not four hours since the barrage had begun. For us in A Company it was three officers and twenty other ranks killed; thirty-nine other ranks wounded. Our company strength was now down from a normal fighting level of ninety or so to about twenty-two (the actual number was 42 men). There were two NCO's surviving – Bert Shepherd, our good and reliable Corporal and CC. I was the only officer left." ("CC" was Charlie Martin's patrol code everyone in the unit fell into the habit of calling him CC.) We had taken a cluster of buildings, small barns and storage sheds at a tiny hamlet called Lookerhof. Steeg, the Battalion objective, was still about seven hundred yards ahead. A hedgerow off to our right was still causing trouble. They say at that stage I rather dazedly asked Shep to check it out, find out who was there. His reply was profane, but practical." (6-142) CC remembered the incident: "Shep's classic reply: What the *? &! @ do you think is out there firing all those machineguns? The *&!@# enemy, of course!" (7-121). So we did our best to settle down and consolidate, getting ready for the counter-attack that surely would follow. Miraculously it didn't. Only the 88s and the ever-present shell fire persisted." Medland use the FOO radio to report his position to his HQ and asked for the jeep and carrier to be sent up with badly needed extra Bren guns, ammunition and rum which were delivered. Medland communicated to Steve Lett using some invented code words that he knew Lett would understand. He wanted him to know just how badly A Company had been hit. A short while later Lett called back and using the same code and directed him to take C Company's objective, the village of Steeg. He told Medland that C Company couldn't do it and that A Company was in a better location. Lett also promised all the support he could muster for A Company's attack.

Medland continues: "The three of us- CC, Shepherd and I- quickly sketched out a plan for our pitiful remnant. We were vulnerable and our position was untenable. Bert and a small section would be the assault force. At that point it was clear from Shepherd's face that he thought I'd gone over the edge. But he said nothing, not a Shepherd characteristic. So I got back on the blower and asked for tanks. Later on we learned that a few tanks had in fact got up to support the other companies. But only one had made it to our position. And it had been knocked out by an 88. And we would need in our support a flight of Typhoon aircraft with those wonderful rockets of theirs, all the artillery fire they could pour in, and a section of flamethrowers." (In accordance with the Brigade plan, at 1100 hours the 1st Hussar tanks had been pulled from support of the Queen's Own and stopping only to rearm and refuel went on to support the North Shore's attack on Keppeln.) Lett called back to confirm the flamethrowers, Tiffys (Typhoon fighter bombers) an M10 tank destroyer, a regiment of twenty-five pound field guns along with one battery of medium and one battery of heavy artillery would be supporting the attack.(6-143-144)

CC recalls Medland reporting back to HQ: "I saw the Boss get on the wireless to report the objective captured and held, but as he spoke the tears were streaming down his face." CC then got busy evacuating some of the casualties. As they dug in on the right flank, Al Murray and Rick Brown shared a slit trench. Someone shouted something about a wounded soldier. CC and J.A. Riddell went to investigate. They found that a sniper had shot Brown between the eyes and had put another round through Al Murray's left eye which exited the back of his head. Al was barely nineteen years old and his colour and pulse were good. CSM Charles Martin describes what happened next: "so first of all we took care of the sniper. We spotted him in a clump of trees about 150 yards off. No nonsense here. The artillery observer called for a barrage right on the area. To make no mistake about it, the Boss called for the Typhoons to follow up. This was extreme overkill, but we were pretty upset at the time." (7-121)



This fortified farmhouse near De Steeg was A Company's first objective. It was sketched later that day by Major Medland. At the time the fields were littered with the enemy's fallen. The root cellar to the left was three meters deep and filled with the dead. To the right is the 1st Hussar's Sherman that was knocked out by 88mm fire.

CC describes how they evacuated the wounded. "Al weighed 170 pounds and it was a struggle to get him out of his slit trench." Back at the house (Lt Chadbolt's objective) some of the wounded had been taken back by Dick Klintworth using the jeep. Martin was left with the Bren carrier. Two of the cases left, Charles Nahwegezhik and Murray were critical. CC was the only driver available and Medland gave him permission to go. They all piled into the carrier and the rest of the wounded; Bill Lennox, Bob Dunstan, H.S. Keeton, Charles Antonese, Pennell and Les Sheppard held the stretchers of the two critically wounded men down for the bumpy ride ahead. Dunstan was grumbling he didn't want to go back because he wanted to take over as Platoon Sergeant. It was a mile to the Battalion aid station and as they started out another German mixed barrage struck. They made through this and across two mine fields to reach the aid station. The medical assistants put Murray aside to die. At this point CSM Martin ordered Dunstan, Pennell, Lennox and Sheppard to pick up Murray's stretcher and directed: "Follow me. We went into the operating area and they put him on one of the tables." The five of them stood there in silence. "my attitude was far from polite. I don't know all that was said, but I remember saying to Dr. Wayne, this man still has a good pulse. He needs attention right away." Dr Wayne stared at CC for a while and then said "I'll look after him for you." CC went over to Al, tears streaming down his face, held his hand and patted his shoulder telling him "You'll be fine now, Dr Wayne has promised to take care of you." (7-122) Then CC took the carrier and went back to the war. When he spoke to the Doctor he was covered in blood from head to toe, during the fighting he had heard an 88 gun breach slam closed and had dived into a pig sty. The round went through the sty killing all the pigs and soaking him in blood. So Dr Wayne faced an angry, obviously distraught Sergeant Major covered in blood with his pistol stuck in his belt and tears streaming down his cheeks. It was probably a good decision on the Doctors part.

Rifleman Charles Nahwegezhic would not survive. Charles was 26 years old, born in Sheguindah, Ontario. He was an Ojibwa from Manitoulin Island. Charles Brother had died serving in the Hastings and

Prince Edward Regiment. Rifleman Charles Nahwegezhic was awarded the Military Medal posthumously and now lies in the Groesbeek Canadian Military Cemetery. His citation follows:

"On 26 February 1945, number 7 Platoon 'A' Company, 1st Battalion, the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, attacked a strongly held enemy position over flat open ground . . . The platoon suffered heavy casualties including the Platoon Commander and Platoon Sergeant. Rifleman Nahwegezhic was seriously wounded in the head but kept advancing. Finally the platoon had to withdraw. Rifleman Nahwegezhic refused to go back and stayed behind with his Bren gun to cover the withdrawal. His accurate and determined fire enabled the balance of his platoon to pull back and reorganize for a further successful attack. In displaying this supreme courage and devotion to duty Rifleman Nahwegezhic was in large measure responsible for the capture of the platoon objective."

CC continues: "Bernie Bruyere and Bert Shepherd were looking after the noon meal and Parsons and Wilson were guarding twenty prisoners." They had not sent the prisoners back because there was a Gestapo officer among them and they needed an escort. Bruyere found another Gestapo man hiding in a cupboard. "We knew that the Gestapo were cruel, ruthless and dedicated to Hitler. As soon as the second Gestapo man came over the first officer who had his hands on his head, went for a grandstand play. He pulled a pistol from a hidden holster between his shoulder blades and fired two quick shots at me from ten feet. One drew blood from my right ear; the other went through my camouflage net. Two shots from my .38, one in each shoulder. He was lucky I hadn't lost my temper!" (7-123). CSM Charles Martin was not your typical Sergeant Major his dress somewhat resembled that of a pirate. Battledress trousers with a flannel shirt tucked in, a leather belt on the outside with his pistol tucked into it and no helmet just a camouflage net on his head to break up the outline. From different accounts during the war he was something of a shootist an old west gunslinger using a Texas cross-draw and deadly with his .38.



**The Queens Own Wasp carriers they had internal tanks, but could also tow a trailer with extra fuel.
Four of these men would not survive the war.**



A 1st Hussars M4A4 Medium Sherman tank with a short barrel 75mm main gun and two 30 caliber machineguns, extra track pads were often welded to the frontal armour to provide more protection.

Medland adjusted his plan based on the fire support at his disposal including the heavy 50.cal machinegun on the M10 from F Troop 52nd Battery, 3rd Anti-tank Regiment which had come up to support the company. "The simple way, however, is often the best tactic. So I decided on a direct approach. We split our remainder and gave Bert Shepherd slightly more than half. The flame throwers would move up with him. The others would provide the covering fire." This refers to the M10 as the firm base along with the extra Bren guns that were brought forward and the FOO. "CC carefully organized the covering fire group. Bert Shepherd collected his dozen. They made ready to start off over the open ground. I can't describe my feelings as they moved out. We were all filthy and covered in mud. Bert and his men were being asked to behave as if they were five times as many. They went into the job with courage and heart. Shepherd had been with us from the start, one of the best marksmen in our 3rd Division, irreverent, but always reliable, and this was a case where his regard for duty was over-riding his common sense." Medland felt badly staying with the cover-fire group and watching Bert's small section moving out in skirmishing formation. Bert was in the center of the first line with a smaller section following behind the first. "CC picked up on my feelings as usual. He didn't say anything, just gave me a hand wave. He moved out to be with Bert, just a few yards behind him. Bert and his section, in two's and three's, made the best use of every speck of ground cover. Moving with them, the flamethrowers were firing their stuff at anything that even remotely looked like a place that contained enemy soldiers." (6-144-145) Sergeant Wilf Mercer who had been with 7 Platoon on D Day came forward in charge of the Wasp flame-thrower carriers and told CC that the Wasps would go forward with the lead section. Their range was short and they had to get in close to be effective. (3-329)

As they set off they had about five-hundred yards to cover over open, bare, sloping ground to reach Steeg. In a matter of seconds 88 millimeter guns had knocked out all the Wasps except the one with Mercer onboard. His struck a mine and Mercer was trapped in the flaming wreckage by a mangled leg. CC: "Two Riflemen rushed over to him and I followed, getting a needle of morphine ready. The Riflemen couldn't shake him loose so I had to give him the needle right through his tunic. All the time he was shouting at us to get away. He knew the flamethrower could go up at anytime. Somehow- I don't know how we did it- we yanked him out and managed to get twenty yards away before, sure enough, up it

went, both the unit and the carrier towing it. Not a scrap of metal hit anyone, but the heat was terrific. Our clothes were scorched.” (7-124) Mercer was evacuated and survived.

Medland: “They got near Steeg. Bert and his men were closing in, we could see. Their groups were on the move and very close. Suddenly it happened. The white flags came out.” Medland estimated the prisoner count near one-hundred and thirty- not all from Steeg, and there were over two-hundred German bodies in their area.

We will never know why the Germans at Steeg gave up. They had been hammered by Medland’s supporting artillery, Typhoons and the M10’s 3 inch main gun and .50 caliber machinegun. They certainly must have feared more Wasps coming up and they knew that units of the 4th Armored Division and 6th Brigade were behind them heading for Udem cutting off their retreat. There had been plenty of hand-to-hand combat and sword/bayonet work that day, something the Germans didn’t care for. It doesn’t really matter Bert and his men were ready to take them on. There was a reason that the Germans called the Canadian infantry ‘Tommy SS.’



An Canadian M10 Tank Destroyer armed with a 3 inch main gun (76.2mm) and M2 50 cal machinegun.

“The Queen’s Own captured more than 300 prisoners ‘practically all of them paratroopers’ in a series of tank infantry assaults. Lett was effusive in his praise of the 1st Hussars, noting that ‘the excellent work of the tanks in supporting the infantry was the deciding feature in ousting the enemy from his well dug in positions.’” (11-214)

The CO of 1st Hussars said a few days later that his unit had suffered serious losses during Blockbuster-40 officers and men and 21 tanks supporting the Queen’s Own Rifles and the other 8th Brigade units during the operation. “The troops were exhausted. I found two crews asleep in their tanks before the area they had helped capture was mopped up. The tanks were manned by composite crews of knocked out tanks, regardless of Squadron or Troop. The resultant teamwork, thanks to good training, was splendid. I have never been prouder of the Regiment.”(18-198)

In light of what had happened on the 26th the Regiment's Battle Diary for this day is disappointing to say the least. Perhaps the recorder didn't yet understand the extent of the fighting or perhaps he was just tired.

But Blockbuster was not over for the Queen's Own. On the 27th the Regiment moved to the area of Kirsell where they rested and re-organized. The tanks of the 4th Armoured Division attempted to rush the Hochwald Gap, but were ambushed and suffered heavy casualties in tanks and troops. The Hochwald to the north of the gap and the Balberger Wald to the south would have to be cleared by infantry before the armour could attempt to break through again.

Instructions regarding preparation of War Diaries (which will be kept from first day of mobilization, creation or embodiment), are contained in F.S. Regs. Vol. 1.

WAR DIARY
OR
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

MPM. 11
40/P & S/37 (6/42)

Original, duplicate and triplicate to be forwarded to O. i/c 2nd Echelon for disposal.

Title pages will be prepared.

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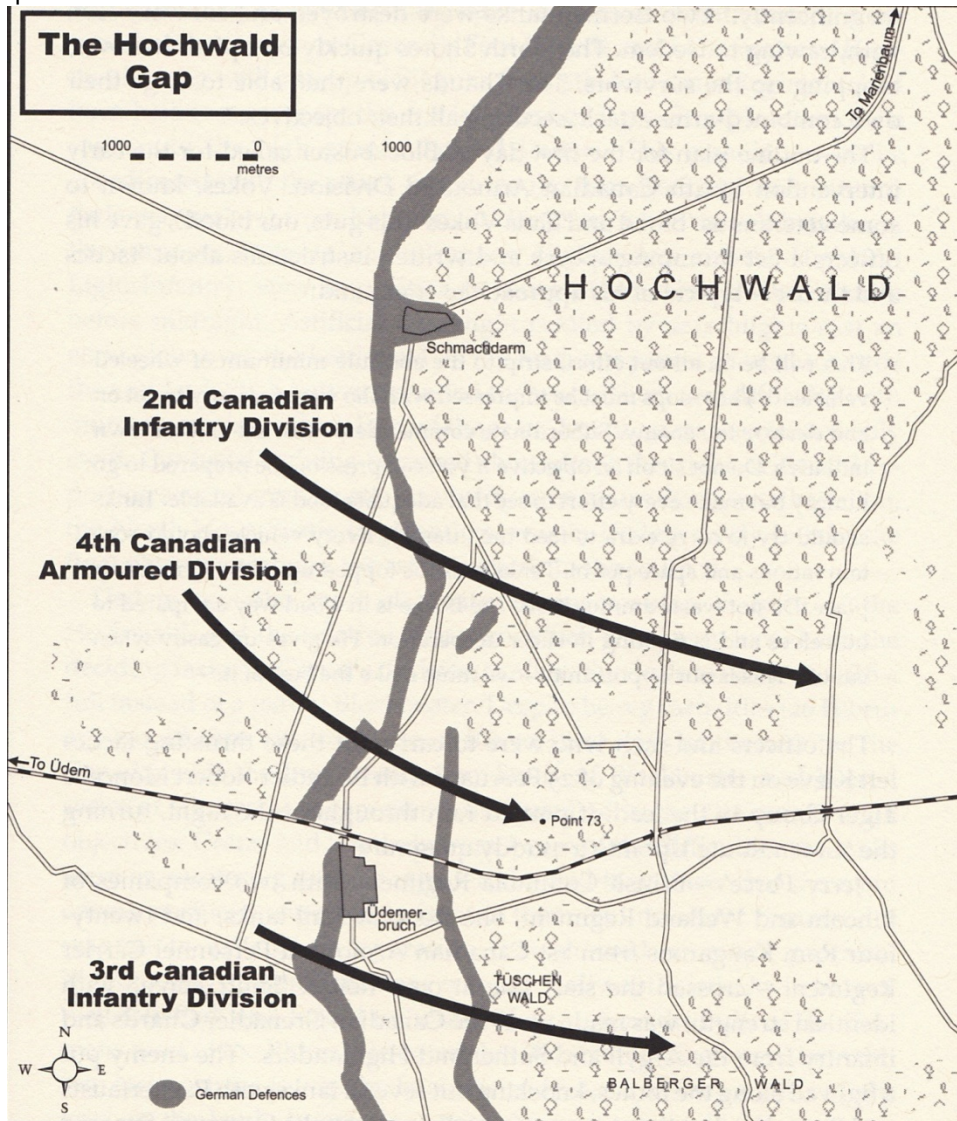
Page Seven

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks, references to Appendices and initials
ROLAND GERMANY	25 Feb 45	0800	Reveille - Cloudy and mild. Coys preparing for coming operation "BLOCKBUSTER".	Snh Appx 26 Appx 27
		1900	Coys leave concentration area for Assembly Area MR 962465, arrive 2030 hrs. Arty Trace, Phase I RCA Task Table #1 BLOCKBUSTER	
	26 Feb 45	0400	"D" and "B" Coys cross S.L. "D" Coy advances to objective QUER, where they are counter attacked savagely by enemy paratroops from objective OLD. Enemy attack was unsuccessful. "D" Coy reports that they have no platoon commanders left.	Snh Appx 28 Appx 29 Appx 30 Appx 31 Appx 32
		0845	Tanks report that CHICKEN is clear of enemy. "A" Coy on objective OLD at present, ask for fire on targets, 3511, 3513, 3514.	
		0850	"B" Coy moving to area "OLD", having trouble from enemy snipers. Sunray asks "A" Coy if they can support friends on right with fire.	
		0925	M 10's firing on "A" Coy posn. Fighting in the darkness was very vicious, and also confusing.	
		0930	Our M 10's leave to support Bn on our right flank.	
		1445	"D" Coy reported at ROOSTER. All coys to stand fast on ROOSTER and OLD until further instructions are received. During the attack enemy mortar and arty fire was very intense, and owing to darkness, house clearing was very difficult. Two Stretcher Bearers from "C" Coy were taken prisoners, and were not released for four hrs. until a friendly tank forced their captors to relinquish hold on them. Bn received approx 100 casualties in the action but left in its wake, fields littered with German dead. No. of PW taken was very hard to estimate owing to speed of attack but must have been at least 300, including many paratroops. Coys dug in present posns, 50 percent stand to all night. Map CLEVE, 1/25,000 Map KANTEN, 1/25,000 Message concerning civilians Shellreps and mortareps Map UDEM, 1/25,000	
KIRSEL	27 Feb 45	1100	Reveille - Cloudy and mild. Coys move to area KIRSEL and dig in. BHQ MR 003437. Coys holding line from MR 005433 to MR 007437. Took over from A & S Hrs.	Snh

March 2nd

Clearing the Balberger Wald was given to the 8th Brigade. The attack started on the afternoon of March 2nd with the Queen's Own on the left and the North Shore Regiment on the right. No reinforcements had reached the Regiment. Ben Dunkleman reacted when Lett told them the Battalion would clear the Hochwald. "I was astounded. I told him that I had thirty-six combat soldiers, with one NCO, Sergeant Jones, and no officers, and that the company was unfit for action." (Regimental history lists an additional two Corporals with forty-five men total) There was no change in the orders, Ben was told to follow behind the other companies and do what he could. Lieutenant-Colonel Steve Lett recalls; "We had been

fighting for over a month, steady. We were getting pretty ragged in those days.” (2-230). The advance began at 1500 with a troop of 1st Hussars (four tanks) supporting each company. B Company followed by D Company was on the right or southern edge of the woods. The B Company scouts walked into a minefield and several of them stepped on shu-mines while at the same time one of the tanks hit a Teller mine and had a track blown off. One of the crew jumped out of the tank and he stepped on a mine. The wounded men were lying on the ground and everyone was screaming in agony. Dunkleman went forward to find that neither B Company nor the tanks were prepared to move. He wanted one of the tanks to lead the way through the mines but the commander refused even after Dunkleman threatened him with his pistol.



Dunkleman then gathered D Company and told them they were taking the lead. He asked for ideas. If you were planting a mine field in the woods how would you do it? Someone mentioned it would be hard to do with all the roots. Dunkleman seized on this idea and had his men advance through the forest by leaping from tree to tree. They were out of the minefield in an hour. Later that evening Company Sergeant Major Billy Ives somehow negotiated his way through the same minefield to bring a hot meal to the company. (5-138)

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

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Page One 1st Bn The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada (AF)

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks, ref to Appendix initials
KIRSEL MR 003437	1 Mar 45	0800	Reveille - Cloudy and cold Coys still in area KIRSEL. ' Cdn Inf Bde in reserve Second Div who are on edge of HOCH WALD Forest.	986 986 Appx 5 Appx 6
		1800	Bn assembles in area BHQ, KIRSEL for second part. OP "BLOCKBUSTER". British rocket projectors are still active on our front. Summary - Catwire fence Amendment - Location statement	
KIRSEL	2 Mar 45	0200	Reveille - Cloudy and cold. Bn moves to Assembly Area sq 0040. Ref sheet UDEM and digs in. Location P.W. Cage 3 Cdn Inf Div	986 Appx 7
Sq 0040	3 Mar 45	0700	Reveille - Cloudy and cold "C" Coy moved towards S.L. area. UDEMERBRUCH in rear "A" Coy. "A" Coy runs into anti personnel mines and opposition consisting of small arms and mortars.	986 986 Appx 8 Appx 9 Appx 10 Appx 11 Appx 12
		1000	"D" Coy moves to S.L. in reserve of "B" Coy with three tanks in support and commences house clearing. Very heavy enemy mortar and arty fire on leading company's front. Clearing of woods BALGERWALD was very slow owing to infiltration tactics. "D" Coy arrives first objective at approx 1600 hrs and digs in MR 043382. "C" Coy on left flank could not proceed owing to "D" & "B" Coys meeting opposition, so "C" Coy digs in with "A" Coy for the night. Appx "A" & Trace "P" for BLOCKBUSTER Location Statement Location Statement - 8 Cdn Inf Bde Location Bde P.W. Collecting Post Target list	
BALGERWALD	4 Mar 45	0800	Reveille - Fair & Cold Enemy shelling bn posns very heavy with multiple barrellèd mortars and 88 mm guns. Bn is to clear remainder of woods.	986 986
		1300	Companies have first hot meal since beginning of attack. Roads are very poor owing to incessant rain making it impossible to get rations and supplies up to company areas on schedule. Quartermasters are resorting to horse and buggy transportation, sometimes even this was not successful owing to stubborn disposition of horses in this neighborhood.	

Even the German horses fought back.

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

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Page Two

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks, ref to Appendix initials
(Con'd)	4 Mar 45	1600	Clearing remainder of woods begins. "A" Coy reaches objective MR 06053825 at 1730 hrs meeting no opposition. The coy had 8 wounded during the entire operation but took 45 PWs and killed approx 60 enemy during second part of OP "BLOCKBUSTER". "C" Coy arrives objective after encountering enemy MG and Mor fire. "D" Coy arrives objective MR 058380 after successfully using PIATS on enemy MG 42's. "B" Coy arrives MR 059389 after encountering light enemy small arms fire. There was heavy enemy shelling during night.	986 Appx 1 Appx 1 Appx 1 Appx 1
		1900	Ninth Cdn Inf Bde moves through our posns and clears area SE of Forest BALBERGER WALD "I" Summary 8 Cdn Inf Bde Map UDEM 1/25,000 with A rty targets Map XANTEN 1/25,000 with Arty targets Map UDEM 1/25,000 with Bde axis of advance	
BALBERGER WALD	5 Mar 45	0800	Reveille - Cloudy with rain BHQ at MR 04603850. "A" Coy - 06053825, "B" Coy 05903890, "C" Coy 05783800, "D" Coy - 05503810. Enemy still shelling area heavily.	986 986 Appx 1 Appx 1
		2000	Bn moves to SDG posns in front of BALBERGER WALD to area BOGEL KATH. Ref sheet XANTEN MR 063378 Map XANTEN 1/25,000 with Bde Axis of advance "I" Summary 8 Cdn Inf Bde	
BOGEL KATH	6 Mar 45	0800	Reveille - Cloudy and cool. New positions are an improvement, compared to old ones in forest. Bn is in buildings and farm produce is plentiful. BHQ at MR 063378, "A" Coy - 062378, "B" Coy 067372, "C" Coy 058375, "D" Coy 055373.	986
BOGELKATH	7 Mar 45	0800	Reveille - Fair and mild. No enemy shelling on area during the night. Coys cleaning weapons and maintenance on vehicles. Roads are still very bad, and showing no signs of improvement. Air photographs of BALBERGER WALD Forest Control of German civilians	986 Appx Appx

In spite of the mines and enemy fire half of the woods were cleared by nightfall. CSM Charlie Martin had left A Company to get them a hot breakfast thinking that they would still be planning the next days' attack by the time he returned. He included a couple of bottles of rum in the food pack he was carrying. When he reached the company he found that Medland had been given an urgent mission to attack a farmhouse at the bottom of the hill that was a threat to Battalion HQ. CC describes the scene; "the Boss had sent two platoons of about fifteen men each down the forward slope and through the trees. The woods were full of anti-tank mines and booby-traps. Before long they were pinned down by terrific machinegun fire and exposed to sniper activity. The Boss (Major Medland) at the start point had stepped on a shu-mine and was badly wounded. CC knew if they stayed where they were the platoons would be picked off by sniper fire and if they dropped back they'd suffer the same fate. He was working his way forward with the pack on his back when he caught a flash and spotted a nest of snipers in a tree platform. Then he moved up and took out one of the snipers. This attracted more fire at the group. "Picking up the rum I worked my way over to Jackie Bland and suggested we get out of there fast. (Sergeant Bland was the Platoon Sergeant of 7 Platoon. He had been left out of battle (LOB) for the attack on the 26th. Canadian infantry units routinely left some of their officers and NCOs out of battle in order to have a cadre left to rebuild the unit after suffering heavy casualties.) We would fix swords and charge straight on. I turned to Wilson, the Bren gunner, and said keep that gun on automatic. He said 'Charlie I can't.' We were desperate and I flared at him. Then he showed me his right hand. It was shattered. He was a brave guy; he told me if I'd take the Bren he'd stay with me and carry extra magazines in his left hand. In the midst of this crazy charge we sensibly took time to think of the rum. It was left behind a tree to be picked up later."

Then the thirty or forty of them that were left fixed swords and charged straight ahead screaming like Apaches. It was a do or die affair, they couldn't stay and they couldn't go back. The enemy kept up a steady fire for a time, but then they broke and ran, some of them carrying their guns and ammo boxes. They suffered many casualties and lots of prisoners were taken. CC thought that D Company which was on their right and pinned down heard the command and went forward at the same time. He recalls "I remember rushing one of the two farmhouses. Around the corner an enemy soldier appeared. He was just as surprised as I was. I took a bayonet wound over my left eye and a bad cut on my left hand as I tried to ward off his weapon. I fired my Bren at the same time. A few rounds went into his side, wounding him and putting him out of action." (7-127-128)

In D Company Dunkleman had just made his runner Paradis, a Sergeant – against the man's wishes. "You're a Sergeant now, I told him. He looked unhappy at the idea because he never wanted a promotion. But I insisted." The company came under fire and was pinned down. Dunkleman had a replacement officer with him and told him to take some men with him go around the side to see if he could get whoever was firing at them. Paradis volunteered to go with the officer. "They set off around the flank, as I told them. But the officer inexperienced and excited, led them around the wrong side of the knoll- straight into the enemy's line of fire. Paradis was killed." (5-139). On the morning of 4 March the attack resumed only to find that the Germans had left. The 9th Brigade passed through and the 8th Brigade and the Queen's Own went into reserve. In clearing the Balberger Wald the Queens Own suffered another twelve ranks and two officers killed and two officers and twenty ranks wounded with one battle injury. The Regiment pulled back to the Reichswald forest to reorganize. Camouflage sniper jackets were issued to everyone. (13-254-255) For the Regiment Operation Blockbuster was over.

Operations Veritable and Blockbuster would be one of the most costly military operations carried out by the Canadian 1st Army during the war. Some five thousand three-hundred and four were dead, wounded or missing. Two-thousand-six-hundred Canadians became casualties during Blockbuster alone. "German fire-power in the Rhineland was more heavily and effectively applied than at any other time in the Army's fighting during the present campaign". General Crerar, Commander, 1st Canadian Army. (23-273)

During the Second World War, out of a population of 11 million, approximately 1,159,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders served. The number of deaths totalled 44,090. Each family received a telegram notifying them of the death of a husband, father, brother or son.

14 P.M. 227
S.M. 9-24 (1943)
H.Q. 1173-29-128

**CANADIAN NATIONAL
TELEGRAPHS**

TELE

FILE H.Q. 405-C-29,668

CASUALTY (REPORT DELIVERY) OTTAWA 4 MARCH 1945

TO:-
MR CHARLES EDWARD COSENS
LATCHFORD ONT
38859

REGRET DEEPLY 246406 SERGEANT AUBREY COSENS HAS
BEEN OFFICIALLY REPORTED KILLED IN ACTION TWENTYSIXTH FEBRUARY 1945
STOP YOU SHOULD RECEIVE FURTHER DETAILS BY MAIL DIRECT FROM THE
UNIT IN THE THEATRE OF WAR STOP TO PREVENT POSSIBLE AID TO OUR
ENEMIES DO NOT DIVULGE DATE OF CASUALTY OR NAME OF UNIT

PREPAID *22*

DIRECTOR OF RECORDS *5*



Sergeant Aubrey Cosens



Major Ben Dunkleman DSO, the D Company Commander, returned to Toronto to his family's clothing business, Tip Top Tailors. In 1948 he slipped through the British lines with a forged passport to assist in Israeli's war of liberation. Ben Gurian placed him in charge of the Israeli 7th Infantry Brigade which played a key role in the siege of Jerusalem and help win the war in the north. There is a bridge near the Lebanese border called Bens Bridge.



The A Company Commander, Major Dick Medland DSO, CD would recuperate from the injuries inflicted by the shu-mine in hospital until July 1945. He later rejoined the Canadian Army and served with the Royal Canadian Regiment in Korea and retired from the Canadian Army in 1968.



Charlie Martin, center, the pirate with the .38 in his belt.

CSM Charles Martin "CC" on April 16th during the attack on the village of Sneek, Holland. CC was following 8 Platoon's attack. 8 Platoon was in the ditch on the opposite side of the road. CC missed it when 8 Platoon stopped and he continued up his side of the road with 9 Platoon following. Unknowingly, he had become the point man. Just after he crossed the bridge a German with a Schmeisser fired a burst of dum-dum bullets striking CC in the right leg and left arm. As he went down without drawing the pistol from his belt Charlie fired one shot hitting the German in the bridge of his nose. CC's war was over and he would not wake up in hospital until VE Day, the 8th of May, but he would eventually recover from his wounds.



Pictured are Joe A. Sereres, D. Pocock, Norm Selby and Don Cowling with a Dutch civilian. Sereres and Pocock were the veterans who took Selby and Cowling under their wing when they came in as reinforcements. Both Sereres and Pocock were killed at Mooshof on 26 February 1945. They were the original four to sign Norm Selby's Nazi flag that today resides in the Queen's Own Sergeant's Mess.

Men like Norm Shelby, Don Cowling and Bert Shepherd returned home to pick up their lives and do their best to forget the things they had seen and done. There was no PTSD counseling or even awareness in those days it was called "old soldiers disease" and you just learned how to live with it. Most of them were successful in piecing their lives back together. Quite a few joined their local Legion to be among those who would understand what they had experienced.

The citation in the London Gazette of 18th May, 1945 for Sergeant Cosens award of the Victoria Cross follows:

In Holland, on the night 25/26th February, 1945 the 1st Battalion The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada attacked the hamlet of Mooshof. Sergeant Cosens' platoon, with tanks in support, had as their objective enemy strong-points in three farm-buildings. They were twice beaten back and were then fiercely counterattacked. Their casualties were heavy, including the platoon commander killed. Sergeant Cosens assumed command of the few survivors of the platoon, and placed them so as to give him covering fire while he crossed open ground to the one remaining tank and directed its fire. After a further counter-attack had been repulsed, Sergeant Cosens ordered the tank to attack the three farm-buildings, the remaining men of his platoon following in close support. He himself entered the three buildings in turn, alone, and killed or captured all the occupants. Immediately afterwards he was shot by a sniper, and died almost instantly. His outstanding gallantry, initiative and determined leadership resulted in the capture of a position which was vital to the success of the future operations of the Brigade.



Aubrey lies in Groesbeek cemetery with the rest of his family of 16 Platoon that died that day. Nearby are Rifleman Nahwegezhic and others from A, B, C and D Companies that gave their last full measure on 26 February 1945. In 1986 in Latchford, Ontario, the arch bridge spanning the Montreal River on Highway 11 was dedicated in Aubrey's name. A monument was erected in the nearby veteran's park for "A Magnificent Canadian" Sergeant Aubrey Cosens, VC. 1921 – 1945.

I used the following sources in my attempt to piece the battle together. In the cases where I plagiarized someone else's work I used the following order, the reference followed by the page, (2-158). It's not the standard reference procedure, but it simplified things.

1. "Battle Diary 1st Battalion QORC".
2. "The Rhineland", Whitaker & Whitaker.
3. "Forgotten Victory", Mark Zuehlke.
5. "Duel Allegiance", Ben Dunkleman.
6. "Canadians, A Battalion at War", Roy Whitsed.
7. "Battle Diary", Charles Cromwell Martin.
8. "We Will Remember Them", Charles D. McGregor.
9. "In Peace Prepared", Charles D. McGregor.
10. "Fight To The Finish", Tim Cook.
11. "A Nation at War" Terry Copp.
12. "No Price Too High", Terry Copp.
13. "The QORC One Hundred Years of Canada", Barnard
14. The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada in the Rhineland, 1945 - Warfare History Network. Article by Angus Scully, educator and historian.
15. "The Lions of Carrentan" Fallschirmjager Regiment 6, 1943-45 Volker Griesser pg 229
16. "Storming Eagles" German Airborne Forces in World War Two James Lucas, pg 173-176.
17. "Out of the Shadows "Canada in the Second World War, W.A.B. Douglas, pg 224.
18. "The Best Little Army in the World", The Canadians in Northwest Europe 1944-1945, J.L. Granatstein, pg 198.
19. Legion magazine "Operation Blockbuster Begins: Army, Part 44, 2003", Operation Blockbuster Begins: Army, Part 44 - Legion Magazine
20. "Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Volume III, THE VICTORY CAMPAIGN, The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945".
21. Sgt Aubrey Cosens shatters the Germans at Mooshof – World War II Today (ww2today.com)
22. Directorate of History National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K2. Report Number 171, Operation "Blockbuster", the Canadian Offensive West of the Rhine, 26 February-23 March 1945. Preliminary Report; Declassified September 18, 1986.
23. "The Guns of Victory", George G. Blackburn.
24. Queen's Own Rifles Museum; <https://qormuseum.org/soldiers-of-the-queens-own/cosens-aubrey/>, Panorama Video 1964 interview with Ben Dunkleman and Don Chittenden.
25. "Jump Into Hell", German Paratroopers in World War II", Franz Kurowski.

Maps and Photos

1. Operation Veritable and Operation Blockbuster: Official History of the Canadian Army, Victory Campaign, Historical Section G.S. Department of National Defense Pages 490 and 518.)
2. The Regiments Plan: "One Hundred Years of Canada", Bernard P250.
3. The Hochwald Gap, "Cinderella Army", Terry Copp, P233.
4. Picture: Amphibious Buffalos: #1 Pinterest.com. #2 Battle Diary, Charles Martin, P80.
5. Picture: The Kangaroo a defrocked Priest: www.Pinterest.com.au.
6. Picture: German Fallschirmjagers: www.Pinterest.com.
7. Sketch by Major Medland fortified farmhouse near De Steeg: "Canadians A Battalion at War", back dustcover.
8. Picture: Queens Own Wasp carriers: "One Hundred Years of Canada", Bernard, P209.
9. Picture: 1st Hussars M4A4 tank: "Fight to the Finish", Tim Cook, P184.
10. Pictures: the telegram, Dick Medland, Ben Dunkleman, and Aubrey Cosens: The Queen's Own Rifles Museum website.
10. Picture: Charlie Martin, Article by John Boileau, www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/charles-martin.
11. Picture: Sereres, Pocock, Selby and Cowling: "Canadians A Battalion At War", Whitsed, P152.