

ONWARD: THE KING'S OWN CALGARY REGIMENT IN PEACE AND WAR, 1910-1960

Patrick H. Brennan

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From the Arno to Holland and Home

The Final Year

There was a sense of foreboding gazing at the Arno River. To the north lay Kesselring's Gothic Line, which over the previous months had assumed mythic proportions. Everyone in the regiment knew that it was only a matter of time before they headed north to help smash through it and liberate the remainder of Italy. When the time came, their German nemesis would prove as tough as ever, but the terrain and weather would be the more fearsome opponent in what degenerated into a trial of endurance and will. They would endure tough times until finally in early 1945 all Canadian Army units were withdrawn from Italy and reunited with First Canadian Army in the Low Countries for the war's final months.

Waiting

As they tried to cope with the sweltering August heat, Allied forces were hopeful that the enemy was too weak to contest the river itself.¹ The Germans withdrew from Florence on the night of August 10–11, allowing the Allies to deliver food and water to the city's desperate civilian population, now swollen with refugees. Thereafter, except for desultory shelling, there was an ominous quiet. Lt.-Col. Richardson was aware that sometime around mid-month the brigade would once more come under Lt.-Gen. Kirkman's command, with their own regiment rejoining the 8th Indian Division. On August 17, Richardson was able to pass on a clearer picture of the situation to his officers. Basically, the enemy remained dug in on the low hills immediately north of the river, and it was felt most likely that after offering token resistance they'd fall back. But what if they didn't? The Arno was a major obstacle, several hundred metres across and with steep banks. Furthermore, the water level was high for mid-summer, the current swift, and the riverbed mostly a mix of boulders and mud. Anything less

than a full-scale attack supported by tanks and artillery—basically a repetition of the Gari operation—seemed too risky. As assault plans were drawn up, the 8th Indian Division's front stretched from the town of Pontassieve 5 kms west to Sieci. On the right C Squadron would support 17th Indian Brigade, and on the left A Squadron the 19th Indian Brigade, with B Squadron and the 21st Indian Brigade in reserve. The recce officer, Lt. Cawsey, joined patrols of Indian engineers reconnoitring potential approach and crossing points. Fortunately, elements of the 356th and 715th German Infantry Divisions holding the area showed no interest in contesting these, even when they were carried out in broad daylight.² It became clear that the enemy saw the river as a mere nuisance to their foes. At best, they undertook token patrolling and the town of Pontassieve was not defended at all. But of the hill country beyond, not much was known.

Preparations paused briefly on August 20 to permit the new chaplain, Capt. (Hon.) G. E. Darroch, to hold a Dieppe commemoration service. So great had the personnel turnover been in 24 months that few men attending had participated in those grim events—Lt.-Col. Richardson being an obvious exception. Immediately afterward, all personnel save those like the tank crews who were essential to completing preparations for the attack assembled with the rest of the brigade to see Prime Minister Churchill. He arrived “wearing a sun helmet and Palm Beach suit ... and looking perhaps older and more tired than we had expected,” the war diarist noted. The soldiers had gathered on a long hillside with Shermans from the Ontario and Three Rivers Regiments, their guns raised, silhouetted against a cobalt Italian sky. His speech was brief and no tub-thumper, but everyone cheered.³

Two days later A and C Squadrons had taken up temporary positions close to their jumping-off points, only 1,500 m from the riverbank. Indian sappers had managed to open the sluice gates downstream, dropping the river's depth by almost a metre, and had also located a fording point that eliminated the need for bridging.⁴ To provide extra punch, the tanks would be accompanied by a battery of M10 tank destroyers and two batteries of Priests (self-propelled 25-pounders). Supply dumps were filled with fuel and ammunition, and the decision was made to have all resupply carried out by the regiment's modified Stuart recce tanks, with the extra units loaned to them by the Three Rivers Regiment. Secondary theatre or not, the scale of Allied material superiority was impressive. The final reconnaissance was carried out by the COs of the two squadrons who went aloft in a spotter plane so as to get a bird's eye view of their battlefield.⁵

Jumping the Queue

On the night of August 23–24 the 1st British Infantry Division had come under heavy artillery fire as it approached its jumping-off points, a bombardment that continued throughout the day. Alarmed, Corps headquarters ordered the 8th Indian Division on the 1st's right flank to stay put. But in less than 24 hours Lt.-Gen. Kirkman changed his mind. He ordered Maj.-Gen. Russell to lean into the German defences in his sector by sending his 17th and 19th Brigades across the river immediately west of Pontassieve, with the Calgary Regiment's C and A Squadrons following as soon as the assault companies of the 1/5 Gurkha Rifles and 1/Royal Fusiliers had secured a bridgehead.⁶ By 1030, using foot bridges erected by Indian engineers, both battalions' assault companies had made it across, and within half an hour, C Squadron was on the far shore as well. Fearing congestion in the bridgehead, Maj. Gray's tanks were held back at the last minute. Only when it was too late to interfere with the crossing did German artillery finally open up, and then with little effect. By late afternoon, some of the infantry had advanced 2 km inland, whereas others had achieved considerably less. C Squadron had failed to take its first-day objective—the hill-top Villa Tassinato, though two of its Shermans had thrown tracks trying to get there. With no reason to be reckless, the overall attack had been executed cautiously. Until a vehicle bridge could be built across the river, lack of supplies would limit exploitation. Priority was given to consolidation, which included ordering A Squadron to cross the following morning. Everyone was waiting for the enemy's response.⁷

Beyond the Arno

The following day brought some clarification, and a modest advance. It was clear that the German forces—basically the 735th Regiment of the 356th Infantry Division—had withdrawn onto the higher ground around Tigliano and the still higher summits of Monte Cerrone, Calvana and Giovi—rugged country separating the valley of the Sieve from the Arno.⁸ As the war diary put it, their opponents “were stubborn rather than aggressive and relied on shelling rather than counterattack” to hold their positions. British and Indian artillery responded by pounding German positions with high-explosive rounds on what one officer dryly termed “a reasonable scale.”⁹ For now the tanks confined their aggression to joining in the artillery bombardment. The truth is the terrain was unforgiving country for armour, the worst yet encountered, and “reduced [them] to secondary roles.”¹⁰ But it was the lack of progress by the British infantry (supported by the Ontarios) on the attack's left that was the major impediment. By month's end, both tank regiments had become entrapped in

what amounted to static warfare. As the Calgary Regiment's war diarist aptly summarized the situation eight days into the offensive:

Mountain warfare is one of heavy infantry patrolling, light shell-ing, considerable sniping, much recceing of tank routes, cautious encroaching from hill to gully, small scale but sudden and sharp engagements, [and] heavy patrolling once more. Tanks may and do sit inactive for three or four days.¹¹

Kesselring's Confusion—Alexander's Dilemma

The German command was thoroughly confused as to where along the Allied front their opponents would strike, since the US Fifth Army, including Kirkman's corps, occupied the western and central portions, and the British Eighth Army the eastern. Unknown to Kesselring, Alexander had ceded nearly one-quarter of his forces for Operation Dragoon, the landings in southern France. A thrust through the Apennines offered the most direct route to Bologna and the northern Italian plains, but guaranteed the most difficult mountain fighting yet encountered. Pushing along the Adriatic Coast faced its own litany of river and ridge obstacles. In the end, he decided to attempt both.¹²

To the Sieve

As September opened, intelligence, a good deal of it from partisan bands,¹³ pointed to a thinning out of the German line. Increasingly frustrated by the deadlock that had stymied XIII British Corps' advance, Maj.-Gen. Russell was determined to sweep the enemy off their dominating positions. It was clear, however, that only a full-scale attack supported by ample armour could eject the German Army from the two principal defended summits, Monte Calvana and Monte Giovi. Preparations to assault the latter—the Americans had been given responsibility for the former—were literally bogged down by wet weather that kept artillery spotter planes grounded and prevented sufficient numbers of tanks from getting forward. The disappointment was short-lived, however, for patrols found the summits abandoned, and with the Americans not yet in position, "The Pasha" had his infantry occupy both positions the following night (September 8–9) without having to fire a shot. The Germans were again falling back, and by September 10, the 8th Indian Division (and the Americans on their left) had reached—and in some instances crossed—the Sieve River.¹⁴ Since crossing the Arno the Calgary Regiment had advanced fewer than 20 kms, though an optimist might have pointed out they were now only 60 kms from Bologna. But modest though the gains had been, reaching the Sieve was

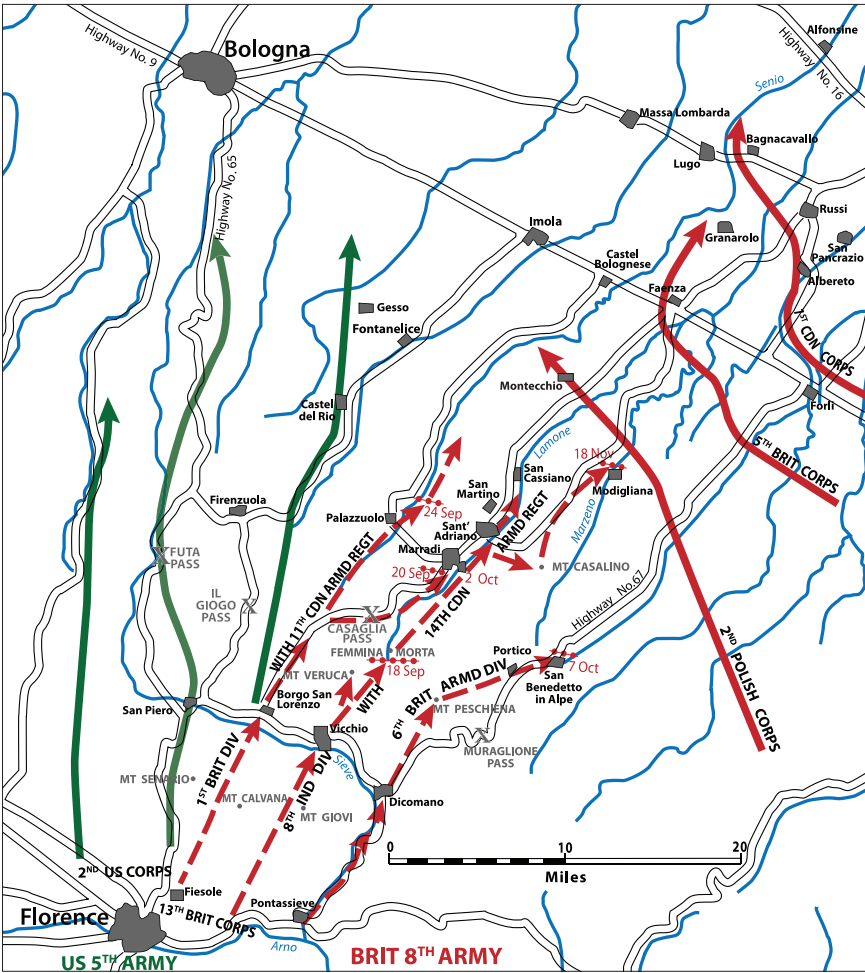
symbolic. At long last, the Gothic Line was in sight, but getting there was going to be a challenge. When Richardson reconnoitred potential routes immediately north of the river, he found the slopes “precipitous” and the roads little more than “wagon tracks [and] goat paths,” dolefully concluding that what he could see would be “utterly impassable to tanks.”¹⁵

The Attack on the Gothic Line

While Eighth Army’s efforts to press north along the Adriatic Coast was facing fierce resistance, Gen. Mark Clark was confident that his Fifth Army could break through. As part of his command, the XIII British Corps’ role “was merely to keep the enemy under pressure.”¹⁶

Clark’s forces would have to fight their way through unforgiving terrain, altogether “a confusion of jagged peaks and broken ridges interspersed with deep pocket-like valleys, which provided the enemy with a series of excellent ready-made defensive positions.”¹⁷ Only a handful of proper highways crossed from south to north through the Apennines by more or less direct routes. In XIII British Corps’ sector, there were four. The two best were National Route (NR) 67, which connected Pontassieve to Forlì, and NR 65, the main road linking Florence to Bologna, which traversed Futa Pass and had the advantage of decent grades, a major consideration for tanks. Lying between these were two other routes heading northeast from the valley of the Sieve that would be “usable” by mechanized units—from Borgo San Lorenzo across Casaglia Pass and then down the valley of the Lamone River to Faenza, and from San Piero a Sieve over Il Goglio Pass and via the valley of the Santerno River to Imola. A determined defence of these gateways to the plains of northern Italy was the centrepiece of Kesselring’s strategy to grind down the Allies. The deep defensive zone in front of each pass comprised a warren of “concrete pillboxes, anti-tank walls and ditches, artillery bunkers and machine-gun posts” sited and camouflaged to minimize their vulnerability to the Allies’ two trump cards—overwhelming artillery and air power.¹⁸ Fortunately, with the Germans convinced that the infantry and armour for a major assault couldn’t be assembled in such terrain, the Gothic Line proved much less formidable than feared. It wasn’t just overconfidence, however—unrelenting Allied bombing of the Germans’ tenuous supply lines left their garrisons chronically short of everything from weapons and ammunition to food.

On September 8, Alexander unleashed Clark. After nearly a week of severe fighting, II US Corps broke through Il Goglio Pass, with follow-up attacks by the Americans tearing the breach wide open. The secondary attack by the XIII British Corps toward Casaglia Pass proved less spectacular. It fell to the 8th Indian Division, with the Calgary Regiment under command, to advance



MAP 13:
The Gothic Line and the Advance on Bologna, 25 August – 30 December 1944.

from Vicchio across the intervening watershed to outflank the German forces guarding the pass. Russell's force had been allotted the worst terrain. Even by Apennine standards the country was rugged and the roads few and unlikely to support heavy usage, so resupply would be on a shoestring. Of course, armoured forces would greatly strain that shoestring. On the other hand, the sector's apparent inaccessibility hopefully meant it would be more lightly defended.¹⁹

Orders called for the rest of Maj.-Gen. Russell's men to cross the Sieve early on September 12 and seize Vicchio, employing a single brigade (the 21st) supported by B Squadron, with the remaining tanks following closely enough behind to serve as self-propelled artillery. The crossing was almost an anti-climax. Not until mid-afternoon did the Indian infantry encounter any resistance, which B Squadron helped sweep aside. It was late in the day before A and C Squadrons managed to extricate themselves from the horrendous traffic congestion on the south side of the river—every bridge was down—and get across.²⁰

Femmina Morta

The 8th Indian Division's goal was to capture Femmina Morta, a 1,100-m massif dominating Casaglia Pass from the southeast. But the immediate objective was ejecting the enemy from three intervening heights. On the 13th, the 1/5 Mahrattas attacked Monte Veruca. Late the previous evening, Maj. W. G. James had managed to get a troop of his Shermans up a precipitous track to within 1,500 m of the objective. When the platoons of the 1/5 Mahrattas went in, accurate tank fire blanketed enemy strong points immediately ahead of them. The support was a godsend, and the "Indian troops once again showed their touching and even astonishing faith in Canadian tanks by advancing without hesitation ... behind our fire even though the inevitable stray shot felt short." By late evening, the summit was safely in Indian hands, with the defenders having taken much the worst of the casualties.²¹

Still, as Capt. R. T. Currelly of the Army's Historical Branch succinctly put it in a subsequent report, "it was becoming increasingly difficult to move tanks ... and they gradually faded out of the picture."²² Henceforward, the infantry's success would be more dependent on German withdrawals, artillery support, and winning the war of supply so that positions taken could be held with fire-power alone. As the war diary of the 17th Indian Brigade bluntly summed it up, "the problem was now one of [road] maintenance."²³ Or in the words of Kirkman's staff, "the difficulty is to maintain our forces and get forward supporting arms."²⁴ Their extensive training in mountain warfare would prove the 8th Indian Division's salvation, but in many of these operations, as the Calgary

Regiment's war diary frankly acknowledged, "[our] tanks were clearly impotent, if not utterly immobile."²⁵ The Indian brigades' reports confirmed this, usually mentioning only the role field artillery was playing in their advances, though there were certainly exceptions when some tanks could be gotten into position and made critical contributions. The situation did not keep Russell from pressing to get some armour brought forward, knowing they were invaluable in repelling counterattacks and useful as infantry support whenever they could be employed. For his part, given the conspiracy of circumstances confronting his tankers, Richardson knew their prospects of seeing much action in the immediate future were not promising.²⁶

During the next few days the infantry probed more than attacked the 715th Infantry Division's outposts. Having gone weeks without any reinforcement, and short of everything including food, the morale of the latter's soldiers was thought to be low. Whatever their morale, the German units were methodically falling back into higher terrain, until their pursuers had to be supplied with ammunition, food and water by mule trains, since their jeeps were no longer up to the task. By September 17, the heights in front of Femmina Morta had been cleared and on the following day the 1/5 Gurkhas (17th Brigade) overran the summit in five-hour battle. Three days later the 1st British Infantry Division occupied Casaglia Pass unopposed.²⁷ Having broken through the Gothic Line, the victors were disheartened to see terrain spread out below them was just as unsuitable for mechanized warfare as what they had just battled through.

A Sapper's War

Any possibility of road-bound tanks advancing, let alone catching up to infantry, depended on the herculean efforts of exhausted engineers. The extent of the road demolitions gave a new meaning to the term thorough. German engineers had of course destroyed every bridge, but in many instances, even long stretches of their approaches had been blown clean off the cliff side.²⁸ Booby traps were being left now whose sole purpose was to blow up bulldozers and kill or maim their drivers. And when you added heavy rains that frequently swept away repairs as soon as they were finished, the Indian Army sappers faced a Sisyphean task.

Into Reserve

On September 17, word had reached the Calgary Regiment that save for one squadron kept forward to meet any contingencies, they would go into reserve on seventy-two-hour recall. Within twenty-four hours Richardson was bidding bon voyage "with a warning as to behaviour" to eighteen trucks crammed with sixteen officers and 300 other ranks, all grinning at the prospect of a week in

Rome.²⁹ Apart from the usual routine of repairing equipment, there wasn't much else to do for those in harbour but rest. Everyone was still amazed (and relieved) the Gothic Line had turned out to be a sort of paper tiger. Nevertheless, their opponent continued to display a disheartening "ability to withdraw rather than collapse."³⁰

The Advance Resumed

Any significant advance by XIII British Corps awaited the capture of Marradi and San Benedetto. With this achieved by September 25, tanks and supplies could be brought forward and the 14th Armoured "could once more tackle ground which would begin, but only begin, to be tankable once more."³¹ On the 28th, 17th Indian Brigade supported by A Squadron were to set off down the main road through the Lamone Valley toward Faenza, some 35 kms distant, but snarled transport stretching all the way back to Borgo San Lorenzo dictated otherwise, and all units stood down. Two days of torrential rain then ended any thoughts of action, forcing jeeps to use chains, and trucks to be winched up and down the steepest grades. It even made some of the mule tracks impassable to mules! For the wretched infantry, even patrolling had become exhausting. While there was nothing to be done about the weather, it was doubly frustrating because the Americans on XIII British Corps' left flank had managed to make significant progress. When the rain finally let up, A Squadron, with a handful of Ontario tanks temporarily under command, were told to be ready to move on the first of the month.

Once More into the Breach

During the past two weeks Clark's Fifth Army had mounted a series of localized probing attacks to keep pressure on the Germans and at least prevented the front from congealing into static warfare. But Clark now intended to renew the offensive, with American troops mounting the main push on Bologna. To accommodate this, the XIII British Corps would temporarily suspend its own advance toward Faenza and simply occupy the Germans on the Americans' right flank.³² In this role, the 8th Indian Division's first objective would be the road junction at Sant' Adriano, 5 kms northeast of Marradi, which was guarded by the 650-m summit of Monte Casalino, held of course by the Germans. Capturing the town would open a second line of advance along the valley of the Marzeno River to the east of the Lamone.

Armour Stymied

The autumn downpours having resumed, A Squadron finally managed to get to Marradi during the night of October 1–2, and were immediately engaged

in laying down directed fire on targets in the hills overlooking Sant' Adriano. Unfortunately, efforts to reconnoitre usable tank routes over the next few days proved fruitless. With the tanks reduced to playing "a spectators' game," Maj.-Gen. Russell had his infantry attack on their own. Even a visit to A Squadron's mess by Field Marshall Alexander and Lt.-Gen. Kirkman did little to raise the tankers' spirits—letting others do the fighting had never been their regiment's way. Though the weather gods remained unco-operative, A Squadron's goal remained getting at least a few tanks forward to support 19th Indian Brigade's attack on Monte Casalino.³³ Brig. Dobree's men had already captured the lower slopes, but efforts to follow up those gains had been stymied. A night patrol by the 3/8 Punjabs, which Capt. Quinn accompanied, did locate a possible route that infantry and armour could have jointly used to attack the massif from the rear, but only if the ground dried. Regardless, with field artillery reduced to a meagre twenty rounds per day, finding routes to move and supply tanks was a low priority.³⁴

The Calgary Regiment's various units were now spread out over 50 kms of road, with only the two forward squadrons even in touch by radio. Richardson spent his days just trying to see all the scattered elements of his command and maintain some sense of cohesion. Years later, he recalled "the terrific problems that confronted us ... with very, very limited roads or trails that we could use [for movement or resupply] There was really no hope of what you might call tank warfare ... so we were ... a type of moving artillery ... and hoping for the best."³⁵

Ten days of off-and-on attacks by Indian infantry failed to wrest Monte Casalino from the enemy. But as larger operations couldn't proceed until that part of the line had been cracked open, a major assault went in on October 17. After three days of savage fighting against diehards who refused capture, the Gurkhas obliged them, taking only five prisoners in clearing the summit as other Indian battalions secured the slopes. The attack had been aided by the enterprise of A Squadron, which had somehow managed to get two troops to a site where they could blast enfilading German defences on nearby Monte Martino. But for the most part the infantry had had to claw its way forward without close armour support, their heavy casualties bearing that out.³⁶

Back into the Fray

"The closing stages of the "long night" of tank inactivity were taking place," the regimental war diary rejoiced on October 22.³⁷ Once again, the Germans—in this case the 578th Grenadier Regiment—were falling back. The 8th Indian Division was now advancing along two parallel axes toward its Sant' Adriano objective, Sword route, the main road north of Marradi through Brisighella, and to its east, Planet route, a lesser highway leading to Modigliana. Brig. Tom

Dobree's 19th Brigade (supported by Maj. Taylor's A Squadron), and Brig. Charles Boucher's 17th Brigade (supported by Maj. James' B Squadron), edged forward in fog and rain. Unlike the 8th's artillery, whose batteries were still short of shells, German gunners were unusually active, and the tanks paused to fire neutralizing HE salvoes at anything suspicious spotted in the surrounding hills.³⁸ Richardson ordered C Squadron forward all the way from Vicchio so it could be employed quickly if needed. But in the rain and slop, prospects of pressing more aggressively remained dim—some days visibility was so bad even tank shoots were impossible. But with only a single road in the divisional sector deemed fit for wheeled transport, the worst problems as usual were logistical, as evidenced by the two infantry brigades' getting nothing more than mule resupply some days.³⁹

A Looming Winter

Recognizing that his forces had little more to give before ice and snow claimed the mountains, Gen. Clark finally called off the offensive on October 27. Simply to keep the Germans under a measure of pressure, active hostilities were to continue when nature permitted. Indeed, the weather, and not the German Army, was now "the most uncompromising foe of all,"⁴⁰ with the prospect of spending a second winter trapped in the Italian mountains depressing everyone.

November initially brought improvement neither in the weather nor in the cautious pace of the localized, intermittent advances. The frequency of German shelling increased, and tank positions appeared to be among the primary targets, a sort of back-handed compliment the regiment would happily have done without. On November 7 and 8 the good old days briefly returned, with B Squadron taking advantage of a short break in the wet, foggy weather to lob 600 HE shells onto German positions. Save for limited reliefs, most of the formations in the XIII British and II American Corps had been in the line continuously for over two months, under the most trying conditions of geography and steadily worsening weather; they were utterly worn out. But as Maj.-Gen. Russell emphasized over and over, "[officers and men] are being asked to make an all-out effort, as success here, even though it may not be spectacular, will directly contribute to far-reaching results elsewhere."⁴¹ Of course he was right, but it was little solace to those serving under him. While the morale in Murphy's brigade remained positive overall, there was "a certain amount of bitterness" about the absence of home leave for the longest-serving men, Ottawa's handing of the Zombies (the home defence conscripts, a few thousand of whom were finally headed overseas), and the lack of information on the much-rumoured post-war programs for veterans.⁴² After all they had been (and were) going through, the interrupted deliveries of imported beer must have seemed

especially cruel. There was always Italian beer, but this could only be obtained if empty bottles were turned in, making these the most prized commodity in the brigade for a time.

With both routes snaking back and forth from one side of their respective valleys to the other, and repeatedly blocked, advances were measured in a few hundred metres of road. By November 18, however, several B Squadron troops had finally reached Modigliana and A Squadron were making progress on their route north of Sant' Adriano. As a captured German report observed, Indian and British infantry typically advanced along ridges parallel to the valley bottoms to which the armour and other motorized elements were bound. Apart from the difficulties of the terrain itself, the rifle companies had to subdue strongpoints that barred their advance. This was the role where the tank proved its worth. Registered shoots in support of the infantry were often just as much for morale as material assistance, though usually delivering both.⁴³

By November 25, the westernmost corps of Eighth Army, on XIII British Corps' right flank, was investing Faenza and about to cut directly across the face of the 8th Indian Division's own advance, which effectively squeezed the latter out over the next few weeks, brigade by brigade. Richardson could see his regiment "would be out of business," and with the rest of Russell's division, go into reserve. The imminent prospect of warmer and drier accommodation and leaves to Florence raised spirits, but this was still one of the regiment's lowest points during the entire campaign.⁴⁴

With the D-Day Dodgers in Sunny Italy

Allied soldiers serving in Italy—whether British, Commonwealth, or American—keenly felt others' disinterest in their campaign. It was bad enough before the Normandy landings, when the view back home was that Italy was just a tune-up that could excite only next of kin, but after D-Day things got much worse. With the bulk of the Allied forces pouring into North West Europe, public interest in Italian goings-on plummeted.⁴⁵ For the soldiers stuck there, anger turned to disillusion, and disillusion to cynicism, as epitomized in the improvised lyrics sung to the melody of the immensely popular (on both sides in the Mediterranean Theatre) German love song "Lili Marlene." The original version of "The D-Day Dodgers" was written by L/Sgt. Harry Pynn of the 78th British Infantry Division, but there were plenty of variations, some rather more colourful than others. However, the closing verse was common to all versions, and poignantly expressed the men's personal sense of abandonment and loss:

*If you look round the mountains and through the mud and rain,
You'll see the rows of crosses, some which bear no name,
Heartbreak and toils and suffering gone,
The boys beneath, they linger on,
They were some of the D-Day Dodgers,
And they're still in Italy.*

The Forgotten Among the Forgotten

Even among Canadian war correspondents, interest in Italy waned. Like many of the senior Canadian commanders, quite a few departed for England during the winter of 1943–44 to cover the Second Front, with Ross Munro and broadcaster Matthew Halton leading the exodus. Among the top tier, only the CBC's Peter Stursberg stayed on.⁴⁶ Censorship was a constant problem, and getting despatches cleared was a lot harder than in North West Europe. Most of the time, covering the Canadians in Italy meant I Canadian Corps fighting its way up the Adriatic Coast.⁴⁷ Separated by hundreds of kilometres from the main Canadian force, the 3,000 odd officers and men of 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade might as well have been fighting on Mars, or for that matter not fighting at all.

The first substantial reporting of the Calgary Regiment's experience in Italy consisted of a few detailed Canadian press reports on Motta and San Leonardo, with the first of these not appearing in the *Herald* until early May 1944.⁴⁸ Like most contemporary war reporting, the stories focused on individual acts of heroism and incorporated the names of as many soldiers and their home towns as possible.⁴⁹ The veritable flood of front-page coverage on the Gustav and Adolf Hitler Line operations was delayed less than a week, but it is doubtful there would have been near as much if the entire Canadian contingent hadn't been participants. Albertans would certainly have caught references to "tanks of a veteran formation" and "a western Canadian regiment [having] proved themselves" in fighting their way across the Gari and through Aquino.⁵⁰ But as the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade battled their way north to the Arno, newspaper reports were hit and miss, and beyond the Arno, all but disappeared.⁵¹

The daily and weekly newspaper in Alberta still carried the bulk of the war news, but CBC radio's innovative on-site coverage, which was often delayed only a day or two before reaching Albertans' homes, was more intimate and immediate. Stursberg covered Honker and in several instances the pursuit to the Arno as well. Like all radio men, he had a knack for telling a vivid "picture

story” while keeping the censors from “massacring it.”⁵² A recording made during the Lake Trasimene operations gives a good impression of this skill. He and Richardson, he told his unseen listeners, had watched:

one of his squadrons [which] was supporting a British unit and from the hill top we could see the black beetles of the tanks on the bright green and yellow checker board of the countryside—the ancient hills and dales had lost none of their beauty through the passage of time.⁵³

About a month later, as the regiment fought its way through the Chiana Valley, he conjured up an image of the incongruity of combat amidst such beauty:

The lush Tuscan countryside with every village ... turned into a fortress ... our tanks had to shoot up the buildings to drive the snipers and machine gunners out ... We’ve suffered losses—black hulks of knocked out tanks mar the beauty of these ancient hills But we’re surging ahead now.⁵⁴

In a second report that day, Stursberg reminded his listeners that while the three Canadian regiments “are crack troops, they’re not as well-known as other Canadian units in Italy.” But ask any British or Indian infantry and “they’ll tell you how good they think these Canadian tanks are—they’ll tell you alright—in fact they won’t stop telling you.”⁵⁵ The only other reporting of their exploits recounted the epic withdrawal from the snowbound Apennines at the end of December. Ironically the CBC had picked up that story from the NBC network’s Fifth Army Radio program and a BBC report based on an article in the Canadian Army newspaper *Maple Leaf*.⁵⁶

La Fine

By early December Russell’s infantry, which he deemed utterly spent, continued to edge ahead in fits and starts, but the supporting armoured operations to all intents had ceased. Orders to begin dismantling Bailey bridges so they could be used elsewhere pointed to this becoming a permanent state of affairs.⁵⁷ What would have been a bitter moment was sugared somewhat by the Eighth Army commander’s fulsome praise of the 8th Indian Division’s performance during the entirety of the Gothic Line operations. Sharing McCreery’s praise with his command, Russell pointed to the 17th Indian Brigade as being particularly deserving of recognition. In penning his own congratulations, Brig. Boucher made special mention of “the supporting arms whose efforts made this success possible at comparatively little cost to the infantry.” Having taken

pains to point out that “the pressure of tanks of B Squadron 14 CAR on the battlefield was always decisive,” he then quite rightly added that “it was mainly due to the fine work of 7 Field Company Indian Engineers that [the tanks] were able to support the infantry throughout these operations.”⁵⁸ Such formal acknowledgements were often embellished for morale-building purposes, but they were much appreciated by their Canadian recipients whose recent efforts had been pretty much a thankless trial.

Not being needed in the line, Lt.-Col. Richardson concentrated the bulk of his command in Marradi and nearby San Martino where they could at least resume a regular program of maintenance and training. Officers and men threw themselves into the task of improving their billets with all their usual Canadian ingenuity.⁵⁹ And leave of a sort resumed as well, with a three-day university course on Renaissance art in Florence attracting 130 officers and men, some no doubt more enthused in the subject than others.

Fireflies

During this period the regiment received its first Sherman Fireflies, an upgraded model of the tank equipped with the powerful 17-pounder (76-mm high velocity) anti-tank gun that was already seeing use in France against the more heavily armoured (and armed) Panthers and Tigers.⁶⁰ For now, the plan was to equip each of the three regiments in the 1st Armoured Brigade with a dozen Fireflies, fewer than half the number Richardson had personally recommended. Unfortunately what the new gun added in armour penetration, it lost when firing high explosive rounds, almost the tanks’ sole work during the past six months. Consequently, each armoured regiment was also allotted six Shermans armed with the 105-mm howitzer. The remainder of their Sherman strength would still be equipped with the 75-mm dual-purpose gun which had proved its worth in the infantry support role.⁶¹

Stalemate, a Sad Parting, and a Merry Christmas

Behind the scenes, Generals Clark and McCreery and their staffs were endlessly debating how—or increasingly, if—to break through to Bologna and the Po Valley during the winter. As the year came to an end, Field Marshall Alexander finally intervened—they would go on the defensive and prepare for spring.⁶²

Just a week earlier, word had come that the 8th Indian Division would soon be transferred to the far left flank of the American Fifth Army. The Indians “left without ceremony,” the war diary lamented, but “better no farewell than a sad one.” It had been a remarkable partnership, “unmarred by failures or differences,” which had overcome cultural and language barriers.⁶³ The trust vested in the Calgary Regiment was real. When paired with other armour during their

subsequent advance north, sepoys from the 1/5 Mahrattas pressed their brigadier, "Where are our own tanks?" And asked to choose a regiment for post-war affiliation, the Indian officers of the 3/8 Punjabs unanimously chose the 14th Canadian Armoured Regiment. These feelings were reciprocated. Asked by a war correspondent what it was like to fight with Indian troops, a young lieutenant had bluntly responded "we're happy as hell."⁶⁴ Years later, Stoney Richardson summed up his regiment's experience with the 8th Indian Division during the campaign north of the Arno River:

We had all the confidence in the Indians and the Indians had great confidence in us. If this had not happened we certainly would not have been so successful in [that] terrible mountainous country ... It really boiled down to a battle of supply, food, ammunition and tough terrain. And, of course, the outstanding feature of the whole thing was the morale, the ambition, and the fighting spirit of our Calgary tanks as well as the Indian Division people that we were supporting.⁶⁵

As the 1st Armoured Brigade's war diary touchingly acknowledged, "one of [our] greatest regrets in leaving Italy will be saying good bye to such a superb fighting machine whose men have never let us down and whose friendship we will never forget."⁶⁶

On Christmas Eve, Richardson confided to his officers that Brig. Murphy had just informed him the brigade would soon withdraw to XIII British Corps' reserve area at San Donato near Florence for a long overdue period of rest and refitting. And long overdue it was, with the Calgary Regiment itself having been operationally committed for 346 of the past 482 days.⁶⁷ The 25th dawned clear and blanketed in white, but only the temperature was cold. Following British Army tradition, the Christmas meal, preceded by rum punch (more rum than punch), was served by the officers. It was truly a feast: roast chicken and lamb, creamed potatoes, peas, cauliflower, plum pudding with custard sauce, oranges, a chocolate bar, and a bottle of vermouth to top up the coffee for each trooper and NCO. Far from home and loved ones, in a war that was won but not yet over, the value of the regiment as family had never been more clearly displayed.

The Longest Day

On Boxing Day afternoon Richardson and two of his squadron commanders drove to 1st Brigade headquarters, where Murphy briefed them on their pending withdrawal. In one respect it was their good fortune since both sister

regiments were fated to remain holed up in the frigid mountains for several more weeks.⁶⁸ But a winter withdrawal in mountainous country filled Murphy with dread. Early on December 28, the advance party set off, with the remaining elements to follow a day or two later—in total, almost 650 men as well as over 100 wheeled vehicles (all equipped with chains in anticipation of the worst) and seventy-odd tracked vehicles. Conditions were treacherous, especially the first thirty-odd kilometres to Borgo San Lorenzo. As the war diary described it:

[The ordeal] commenced as A Sqn pulled out [at 0200] along rutted, frozen ... roads towards Borgo Steel tracks, weighted down by 30 tons, refused to grip on the glazed surfaces. Tracks revolved without the tanks moving more than inches The wind was cutting, and [with only the drivers inside] frozen tank crews walked hour after hour through the night, frequently huddling around the exhaust while they crept yard by yard up to the mountain pass. By daybreak, the tail [of the convoy] was only a few miles below Marradi With daybreak came the hovering snow storm, making the road still more dangerous It was harrowing ... to watch a vehicle slide ponderously and helplessly toward a four hundred foot drop, finally crashing heavily against the frail protective bank At the pass [Maj. James] organized Italian labour to repair and gravel the surfaces. Luck and steadfast driving got the first twenty tanks through by 1000 hours, [and] the rest followed by 1400 hours [I]t was dark many hours before the last tank reached San Donato—some 17 hrs after the start.⁶⁹

The route covered roughly 120 kms, with only the first half of it hard going. But the tanks had still averaged barely 7 kph. Murphy considered their feat “one of the finest [the regiment] has performed and I bear in mind in saying so the outstanding work ... performed in the face of the enemy.”⁷⁰

A Retrospective from Shangri-La

Exhausted men awoke on the last day of 1944 in another world, greeted by clear skies and comparatively balmy temperatures. The new billets offered steam heating, electric lighting and the unspeakable luxury of hot showers.⁷¹ With their weeks-long ordeal in the winter-bound Apennines, the most inhospitable tank country imaginable, finally over, it was possible to look back at their achievements in 1944. The year’s final war diary entry summed things up well:

The year's successes were out of proportion to the losses suffered, which is the most that any formation could wish for. The Calgary Regiment was fortunate in its leaders, fortunate in the actions it fought, and fortunate in its infantry and artillery associations. Yet successes were not undeserved, for it fought with considerable versatility, being by turns cautious, daring, slippery, or dogged, usually as the occasion demanded. It tried to follow the twin golden rules of never taking unnecessary chances, but if necessary risking everything rather than letting the infantry down.⁷²

By early January the entire front had effectively shut down, with active patrolling by both sides the only belligerent activity, but they were a long way from any of that.⁷³ Anticipating their involvement in a breakthrough assault come spring, everyone worked hard to revive dormant armoured warfare skills. When they learned that the 4 Mahrattas,⁷⁴ the 8th Indian Division's anti-tank regiment, was going to give up their 17-pounders for American M10 tank destroyers, a Sherman derivative, some of the drivers volunteered to set up a training course for them.⁷⁵ Overall, their stay proved a pleasant, productive interlude. As the war diarist concluded with tongue firmly in his cheek, "such climate and scenery offer the long sought explanation of why Europeans winter in Italy."⁷⁶

Off to the Senio

All good things must end, some more abruptly than others, and on January 24 Richardson received orders from brigade to close the training schools, cancel leave and get his command ready to transfer to the Adriatic sector. For Richardson's men the move would be almost a pleasure trip compared to what faced the 11th and 12th Regiments in extracting themselves from their frozen Apennine redoubts. Richardson soon grasped that they were going to relieve British armour supporting the 56th British Infantry Division who were holding a section of line along the Senio River immediately north of Faenza. Convinced they had been tabbed for something rather more dramatic, the disappointment was palpable as the news filtered down. The terrain greeting them a week later was bleak—flat farmland criss-crossed by ditches and canals, the odd blasted grove of trees, and everywhere mud. The remaining inhabitants were surprisingly congenial in spite of their pathetic circumstances. As Maj. Ritchie, the second-in-command, glumly noted, it was just going to be "more sitting, shooting, watching and waiting."⁷⁷

Release from Purgatory

It had always been Ottawa's intention that the Canadian Army would be reunited when military circumstances permitted, and while the British agreed—they could hardly do otherwise—there was little sign this was imminent at the end of 1944. However, once it became clear the Americans were determined to win a decision in North West Europe, and transfer formations from Italy to achieve it, the log-jam broke. On February 5, the War Office informed Canadian Military Headquarters (London) that all Canadian units in Italy would soon transfer to that theatre. In fact, preliminary planning for Operation Goldflake was already complete.⁷⁸

A Brief Taste of the Senio

However, all this lay in the regiment's future. By February 2 they had relieved their British predecessors and were adapting to a rather new style of fighting. The daylight hours were generally quiet, with the raiding and counter-raiding taking place at night. In the absence of much to shoot at during the day, fire support tasks also took place at night.⁷⁹ Given that the 56th's commander, Maj.-Gen. G. T. Whitfield, insisted he would not send his men into battle without tank support they could count on, and an assault across the Senio must come, the squadrons commenced training with their paired infantry battalions. They were shocked to discover that one of the 56th's brigades had had no systematic training in infantry-armour co-operation at all, which at least made the rifle companies receptive to what they were told.⁸⁰

On February 10, Lt.-Col. Richardson was summoned to brigade headquarters for briefings, and unbeknownst to any of his officers, was soon winging his way to First Canadian Army headquarters in Belgium. In quick succession, contradictory orders landed on Maj. Ritchie's desk—to prepare to be relieved beginning February 18, and to be ready to support 56th British Division's attack on February 19 or 20! Wisely, the acting-CO gave priority to the former, because the attack would be put off.⁸¹

Operation Goldflake

About the same time, Murphy was finally permitted to brief his widely dispersed command—in addition to the Calgary Regiment near Forlì on the Senio, both the Three Rivers Regiment and brigade headquarters were still well to the north in Borgo San Lorenzo, and the Ontario Regiment almost at Porto San Giorgio on the Adriatic. The news that they were packing up was, to say the least, well received, and the destination hardly mattered. Murphy and his staff feverishly set about co-ordinating the complex logistical arrangements to

move three armoured regiments from one side of Italy to the other.⁸² Four days later, Maj. Ritchie briefed his officers about their pending move to the vicinity of Leghorn. Tight security would require the removal of all unit indicators from both men and machines. Even casually discarding cigarette packages was prohibited. By early afternoon on February 26, the last of five trains ferrying the regiment's Shermans, Stuarts, and M3 half-tracks steamed out of Forli station on a circuitous 800-km rail route that would end at Harrods Camp, "a sprawling city of tents" built on a stretch of sandy flats on the outskirts of Pisa. On March 1, following a rather more direct road route through Florence and down the Arno valley, the wheeled vehicles and remaining personnel set off to join them.⁸³

The camp seethed with rumours about where the various units were headed, so Ritchie made it official—Belgium.⁸⁴ D-Day Dodgers no more, morale soared. Of course there were regrets that the task for which they'd risked their lives—and their friends had died—would now be completed without them, but there was little nostalgia for Italy or the Italian Campaign as the war diary made abundantly clear:

To leave poor Italy with its mud, destruction and ignorance of sanitation was, for most members of the Regiment, nothing short of a prison parole. Like a prison term, the chief properties of [our] recent existence ... had been boredom, inactivity and apparent lack of any future.⁸⁵

Loading the regiment onto LSTs for the crossing to Marseille took two days. As the first convoy slipped away from the docks early on March 5, their naval escort hovering in the distance, it was as if Italy itself was saying *arrivederci*. In a postcard view, the sea was a mirror with the purple coastline set against a brilliant dawn sky. Unfortunately, the fine weather didn't hold, and the second and third convoys encountered heavy seas. A disaster was barely averted when one of the LST's threw a propeller and was left wallowing with a tank that had broken loose from its moorings sliding dangerously into the thin sides of the cargo hold. While the American crew watched on, having conspicuously doffed their boots just in case, Lt. George Thring and a few of his mates quickly managed to secure it.⁸⁶ All the LSTs were successfully unloaded at the Marseille docks on March 8 and immediately set off for a sprawling encampment 30 kms outside the city.⁸⁷ By late on the following afternoon, all the armour and their crews had entrained, steaming northward that very night. The remainder of the regiment drove off in their own jeeps and trucks, spending the nights at a series of American-run transit camps along the route.⁸⁸

Vive la France

The picturesque Rhône Valley, largely untouched by war even after Dragoon and the subsequent push north by the American and Free French troops, offered a sharp contrast to the impoverished, battle-scarred villages and farms they had become used to (and so despised) in Italy. So did the paved, well-maintained highways. A large billboard proclaiming “Visit Sunny Italy—the Land of Sunshine and Art” elicited plenty of laughter as they drove past on their first morning.⁸⁹ The greatest trial was having to refuse the incessant offers of locals bent on selling them bread, eggs, and wine. Security protocols forbade it. As they passed through northern France and into Belgium, civilians “were increasingly hospitable ... with much waving of hands and smiles of encouragement, something that had been rarely seen in southern France and practically never in Italy.”⁹⁰ Road weary from their 1,300-km journey, but in good spirits, the convoy pulled into their new home, the Belgian town of Dottignies (now Dottenijs) not far from Courtrai (now Kortrijk).

Dottignies

Nothing prepared the officers and men for the warmth of their reception in Dottignies, where they were billeted in civilian homes for the entirety of their three-week stay.⁹¹ After greeting his men, Richardson informed the officers and RSM they would not be participating in upcoming British operations to cross the Rhine. That would at least permit the resumption of training and maintenance as well as limited leave to London, Paris, and Brussels. Squadrons would be reorganized to match theatre practice, each now comprising four troops of four tanks each, two 75-mm-gunned Shermans and two Fireflies.⁹² Surely the most welcome announcement was that dances would be organized and the local pubs declared in-bounds from 1700 till 2200. Toward the end of the month the entire regiment paraded under an overcast sky for an inspection by Brig. Murphy in the town square. After speaking briefly, he placed a wreath at the town war memorial. The ceremony ended with the singing of “O Canada,” “God Save the King,” and the Belgian anthem, and was followed by a banquet and no less than four dances. Toward the end of their stay, all of the tank crews had an opportunity to practise their gunnery, which was particularly welcomed by crews converting to the Firefly. The range work took a rather novel form: the gunners simply pumped their allotted rounds into the German defences at Dunkirk, whose garrison had continued to hold out.⁹³ But as the officers and men revelled in their fine new surroundings, and enjoyed a break from combat, far to the east a very painful story was unfolding.

Der Brotmarsch

As the Nazi regime entered its death throes in early 1945, it was grimly determined to delay the liberation of the roughly quarter million Allied prisoners of war held in German camps. For those whose camps lay in the path of the advancing Red Army, it meant forced evacuation westward during an especially harsh winter. The treatment meted out to the columns of POWs depended greatly on the attitude of the guards escorting them and the civilians they encountered along their route. Planning was minimal, food and medical care scarce, and discipline arbitrary and sometimes cruel. Almost 80,000 prisoners of war—including the NCO and other rank members of the Calgary Regiment captured at Dieppe—suffered through this ordeal before being liberated in April by British, American, Free French and on rare occasions, Soviet forces.⁹⁴

The majority of the Dieppe prisoners had been transferred from Stalag VIII-B (Lamsdorf) to Stalag II-D (Stargard) in January 1944. Generally they remembered conditions there being somewhat better, and that German reasonableness increased in lockstep with the prospects of Allied victory.⁹⁵ On January 23, Tpr. Forbes Morton penned a quick *kriegsgelangenpost* note to his parents and siblings reassuring them that he was well, looking forward to his twenty-third birthday in five days' time, eagerly awaiting the arrival of his October next-of-kin parcel, and keen to get home and find a wife—though probably not in that order.⁹⁶ It would be the end of April before he could write them again, and it would be as a free man.

On the Road

For Tpr. Denis Scott, the ordeal began on February 5 when the commandant told the assembled prisoners that they had to gather their belongings and what food they could carry and prepare to start moving west in 24 hours. Scott and about 200 other POWs soon found themselves marching through the rubble-filled streets of the Baltic port of Stettin, all but disappearing in the sea of refugees—women, children and old men—carrying their few goods in wheelbarrows and baby carriages or piled atop carts, all wailing “Russky Kommen, Russky Kommen!” In miserable weather and stalked by hunger, they pressed on, trudging along backroads for several days before stopping for a night in some unheated barns and sheds, repeating that ritual for weeks. “We were ready to eat anything,” Scott remembered. The prisoners’ condition rapidly deteriorated, and dysentery was rife. After over five weeks on the road and utterly exhausted, they reached Stalag X-B near Bremerhaven. When a convoy of International Red Cross “White Trucks” arrived carrying food parcels, “it was better than Christmas,” Scott remembered. But after a few days, they

were ordered to move on, the SS needing the camp for inmates from Belzen concentration camp. What Scott saw the next morning as he and his comrades departed was forever seared in his memory:

There were trucks and wagons loaded with bodies ..., they were piled high like so many broken dolls Those who could walk were crying and moaning and begging us for food [and] the goons with wooden clubs beat them mercilessly When we left down the same road we actually stepped over bodies ... [and] most of us were crying.⁹⁷

Fortunately their column wasn't strafed, such friendly fire accidents being all too common, and with the British Army sweeping through the area, liberation was only days away.

Tpr. Don Craigie's group of prisoners left a few days after Scott's. They reached the outskirts of the port of Rostock just as Bomber Command was levelling the city, sheltering in a jail for a week after the senior officer among their guards warned them the locals would kill them if they showed themselves. On the march again, the men without great coats or proper boots suffered terribly from cold. Fed nothing but raw pork, the prisoners wolfed it down. But they would spend a week on a farm where the wife fed them as well as she could in return for work.⁹⁸ It was like that, with some civilians hurling abuse (and worse) at the haggard columns, and other instances where German refugees shared their last scraps of food.

The group of prisoners Tpr. J. D. White accompanied spent a month marching along a meandering route westward, trudging 20 kms or more each day. The men considered themselves fortunate that their guards were from the camp—perhaps familiarity would soften their treatment. Throughout the ordeal, they never laid sight on a Red Cross parcel, and the German ration was a loaf of rock-hard black bread each day, which half a dozen men shared. Occasionally they were able to barter some cigarettes for a bit of flour or a few turnips.⁹⁹ The prisoners had been sternly warned that scavengers would be shot, but constant hunger overcame any fears and men would slip away at night to try their luck.

Liberation

The Free French liberated Tpr. J. D. White's group, then trucked them to a nearby town and simply told them to live in any of the homes they wished and wait for the Americans. Not surprisingly, the local population were docile. After a few days mostly sleeping and eating, the Americans duly arrived and in short order, White and his mates were ferried back to England.¹⁰⁰ As for Tpr. Denis

Scott, the camp they had finally reached was liberated by Scottish soldiers on April 28. Thirteen days later he was in an English hospital, being thoroughly checked over, as were all the ex-POWs. He was almost 35 kgs lighter than the day he surrendered.¹⁰¹ In the 60-odd days since he and a group of other Dieppe prisoners at a work camp had been given all of three hours to pack whatever food they could onto an improvised sledge before trudging off into the unknown, Tpr. Vern Richardson had trekked almost 750 kms. He had seen and endured his share of the misery. By the time they had reached Bavaria toward the end of April, their guards, who were now clearly worrying about their own fate, promised there would be no atrocities, a fate prisoners understandably feared—when the Americans arrived, they would simply hand them over. On May 1 they met up with a recce unit from an American armoured division, and the next day GIs escorted the now ex-POWs to a nearby village, divided them into groups of six, and told them to find a house and make themselves at home, but not be rough. Richardson and his chums tried to calm the terrified residents down, though not too much. During their two-day stay, he and his friends “liberated” all the food and anything else of value they came across. It wasn’t long after that, crammed aboard American transports, they were ferried back to England.¹⁰²

Not everyone’s liberation experience was quite so painless. Tpr. Archie Anderson’s group were freed by the Red Army. Worried they might be held for weeks, Anderson and a few others, including an American POW who spoke passable Russian, literally escaped from their liberators, finally managing to make contact with British paratroopers who treated them to “more sweet tea and stew than they could eat.”¹⁰³ On VE Day they flew to England in the belly of a Lancaster bomber.

The Allied Plan

After the Allies had defeated the German Ardennes offensive (the Battle of the Bulge) in December 1944, their plans shifted to forcing the Rhine River and then encircling the Ruhr Basin. After the Americans had gotten across first, Operation Plunder, a major Anglo-Canadian thrust, followed in the Wesel area. Plunder opened the way to the whole of northern Germany as well as the final encirclement of the Ruhr, which Allied forces completed on April 1.

The first operation of the now reunited Canadian Army was carried out on April 2–3. It called for Lt.-Gen. Charles Foulkes’ I Corps to evict the Germans from the Nijmegen-island sector, the stretch of land between Nijmegen on the Waal [Rhine] River, and Arnhem on the [Neder] Rijn River.”¹⁰⁴ Bypassing the 85,000-strong German garrison of *Festung Holland* would have spared Canadian, British, and Polish soldiers’ lives but have risked famine claiming

many more lives and the enemy laying waste to the economy. Clearing the “island” was a necessary preliminary to crossing the IJssel and Neder Rijn and capturing Arnhem, which in turn were prerequisites to clearing the remainder of the country. It was as part of that liberation offensive that the Calgary Regiment was now committed.¹⁰⁵

Into Action Again

On the evening of April 3, Lt.-Col. Richardson received orders that his regiment would move into southern Holland. While the thought of being so close to the German frontier electrified everyone, their new surroundings, less than 10 kms behind the front lines, were a bleak sight, with all the nearby buildings badly damaged and littered with trash. On April 9 they were ferried by truck to the southern edge of the Reichswald Forest where they met up with their train-borne tanks. From there they followed a circuitous two-day approach that took them across the Waal at Nijmegen and up to the Rijn River where they would provide indirect fire support for Operation Anger, the 1st Canadian Division’s assault on Arnhem.¹⁰⁶ By early on April 12 the last of the Shermans had taken up their firing positions. A sleepless day followed a sleepless night as HE shells—to the tune of 350 rounds per tank—were carefully unloaded and stacked, crews briefed and guns surveyed, all under the watchful eyes of 11th Field Regiment officers who would control the bombardment. At 2040, the silence was shattered as the barrels of three armoured, three field, and one medium artillery regiments erupted simultaneously. For two hours the fire was relentless. Then, after a brief respite, the fusillade resumed, reverting to on-demand fire until early morning when it tapered off for a time before commencing yet again. No one feeding the guns forgot that the lives of the infantry depended on their maximum effort. The 14th’s war diarist tried to capture the experience:

Who has ever forgotten the unnatural quiet after a night attack? There is only the occasional burst of [machine gun fire] in the distance ... or an occasional shell. Bleary-eyed men crawl from a blanket or a turret after an hour’s sleep, or refuse to wake at all for 0900 breakfast. There is little conversation and large indifference to everything, except to ask “How’s the battle going?” “Haven’t heard.” Back in a gloomy room of half folded maps, cigarette butts, half eaten sandwiches, and unmade bedrolls and dirty cups, a telephone rings [with new no-fire lines]. Traced on the map, [they cut] out a third of Arnhem. Good news. 49 Division is well across the river and into the town. For us, it but remains to supply

all targets for the mopping up. The squadrons are very weary; but not so [weary] as the infantry.¹⁰⁷

As darkness fell once more, Richardson arrived back from his London leave to reassume command from Maj. Ritchie. Around midnight, with its last defences cracking, and Arnhem “another weary milestone” on the victory road, his tanks, save C Squadron’s, finally fell silent.¹⁰⁸

Operations Re-framed

Follow-up plans were once more in flux. There were now hopes that negotiations with the German Army might substantially reduce casualties, both military and civilian (which proved to be the case). On April 13 Montgomery issued orders that the Canadian thrust into western Holland would proceed but more slowly. Although 1st Armoured Brigade’s three tank regiments were ostensibly meant to hold the Neder Rijn, they ended up supporting offensive operations to the north and west, which in the following days liberated the entire central area of Holland. According to Intelligence there was now not a single German tank in the country, but there were anti-tank guns, the usual plethora of *panzerfausts* and *panzerschrecks*, and likely some *StuGs*, and of course plenty of anti-tank mines. For Canadian armour, as for Canadian infantry, these final engagements were filled with danger.¹⁰⁹

Ede

Shortly after reaching their new harbour in the Zetten area, A and C Squadrons were ordered to return to Arnhem to join a push by the 49th (West Riding) Division’s 147th Brigade westward along the north bank of the Neder Rijn to clear the enemy from the area around the towns of Ede and Wageningen. It would turn out to be the regiment’s last significant attack of the war. Both squadrons were in place by the morning of April 16, occupying what had been a well-to-do residential area of the city before it had been pillaged. Richardson and his two squadron commanders, Maj. D. C. and R. R. Taylor, formulated a plan with the commanding officers of 11/Royal Scots Fusiliers and 1/Leicesters.¹¹⁰ Ede, the first objective, was thought to be held by 200–300 members of the Dutch SS (in fact there were 150 Dutch SS as well as some German troops). A Squadron, with three rifle companies carried on their tanks, would dash straight into town and overwhelm the garrison, while C Squadron would outflank Ede and block any escape route.

Abruptly, around mid-afternoon, as plans were being finalized and before a proper recce had been carried out, the British and Canadian commanders were told to prepare to attack in two hours. Given Ede was 25 kms distant, this

meant the assault would go in in fading light, leaving everyone shaking their heads. Still, there was an understandable confidence that their “superiority of equipment was so great that whatever methods were adopted, we would probably end up in Ede anyway.”¹¹¹ Around 1730 they were on their way, a most satisfying display of Allied power in front of the hundreds of haggard German POWs who looked on disconsolately as the engines of dozens of Shermans coughed and then roared to life. But only twenty minutes later, L. S. Forest’s lead tank was hit as it rounded a slow curve. It was dud, but before the Sherman could reverse, a second shot penetrated the frontal armour, killing the driver, Tpr. R. H. Hofer, badly wounding the co-driver and setting the tank alight. In the rapidly fading light, the force prudently hunkered down for the night.¹¹²

A new plan was hatched that called for C Squadron, screened by smoke, to overrun a dominating hill north of the road, then stay there to provide direct fire for A Squadron’s follow-up frontal assault. Only two companies of the Royal Scots would participate in the latter, with the third, assisted by several troops of tanks, assigned to root out any anti-tank guns lurking in the woods between the start line and the farmland covering the final few kilometres into the town.

Launched at dawn, both the clearing operation and C Squadron’s assault went like clockwork. Two hours later the main force moved off. They were met with heavy machine gun and rifle fire, and Richardson radioed his tanks to neutralize it—an order they executed with enthusiasm. As the advance finally closed in on the suspect factory buildings, a bombardment was laid down at almost point-blank range. Finally, a troop under C Squadron’s Capt J. W. Rainey drove forward to ram gaping holes in the walls so several Wasps (universal carriers equipped with flame-throwing equipment) of the Royal Scots could drench the interiors with blazing fuel. Survivors who scrambled to escape found a hot welcome from the machine guns of Lt. Maltby’s troop from A Squadron, which had used the commotion to slip around to the rear of the factory area. Many of those fleeing were cut down before they could surrender. Organized resistance collapsed, leaving the tanks and infantry to cautiously clear out the remainder of the town. In what was chiefly a tank show, deploying overwhelming firepower had guaranteed the attackers’ casualties as well as losses among the civilians they were trying to liberate would be modest. Half of the defenders were killed or wounded, and corpses, many charred beyond recognition, lay about. No one in the regiment would have felt this butcher’s bill was an unfair exchange at this—or any other—stage of the war, and for some it was overdue payback for German treachery at Aquino on 23 May 1944.

Once the firing ceased, the townsfolk scrambled from their basements and mobbed C Squadron, which had assembled in the town’s main square. As

the startled crewmen opened their hatches, they could not help but notice that “[the] faces were stamped with the mark of malnutrition or downright starvation.” While the liberated did most of the celebrating, the majority of the liberators, “satisfied with a job done” but pretty worn out, tried to catch some sleep.¹¹³

A Sort of “Phony War”

The following day word came from brigade headquarters to retire to the Zetten area and resume assisting the Belgian Brigade as it slowly advanced westward, clearing the strip of territory between the Neder Rijn and the Waal. But further aggressive action by I Canadian Corps was soon suspended, no one in the British or Canadian high commands having any stomach for casualties at this stage of the war—a view certainly shared by all fighting units. Moreover, the Allies had agreed to a *de facto* ceasefire as part of their negotiations with German military and civil authorities in occupied Holland, which they hoped would spare further suffering by the population. The Calgary Regiment received its stand-down orders early on the evening of April 19, though they were allowed to respond to fire until a week later when Richardson passed on orders that, short of repelling an attack, all firing, even of small arms, was prohibited without brigade approval.¹¹⁴ The prospect of general inactivity at least enabled the men to attack the maintenance backlog. Most crews were especially keen to weld on spare track links to thicken their turret and hull armour until some of the Shermans looked like they were moulting.¹¹⁵ And there was also time for a bit of infantry-tank training with the recently raised Belgian units. Encamped in front of the Ochten canal, the cold, wet weather reminded most of their miserable few weeks on the Senio. Whenever they could, officers and men huddled in small groups around radio sets, hoping to hear the latest war news on the BBC. At least comrades were no longer dying, and as the war diary put it, “home was nearer to us all.”¹¹⁶

Victory Won

By early May the front line had become very quiet. Having learned in Italy the need to deal with animal carcasses, Richardson quickly gave permission for their bulldozers to assist local farmers. Plans to resume organized sports were also well underway. Then, just before 2100 on the evening of May 4, word spread like wildfire that the BBC had announced the surrender of all German forces in the Netherlands, news confirmed within minutes by I Canadian Corps. Acting on Murphy’s orders, Richardson authorized a special issue of rum for all troops and invited officers and many other ranks to the officers’ mess to toast their regiment. The sky was lit up for hours with signal flares

fired in impromptu celebration. As the night dragged on the euphoria subsided, most soldiers turning to more sombre thoughts about those who'd paid for this victory.¹¹⁷ Appropriately, May 5 dawned sunny and warm but caution was still in order until it was certain all enemy units had received the news.

Plans now had to be hashed out to deal with the masses of German POWs who would soon have to be processed and disarmed, as well as to apprehend Dutch SS members. Any advance would be impossible until engineers, hopefully with Germans' co-operation, had cleared the countless mines and booby traps. And it was also clear that the movement of Dutch civilians would have to be controlled to prevent epidemics, if nothing else. Finally, troops were told they should intervene in popular acts of revenge against former collaborators before they became too ugly.¹¹⁸

On May 7, word reached the regiment that the morrow would officially be VE Day. The following afternoon, Lt.-Col. Richardson assembled as many of his officers and men as duties would spare to listen to Churchill's speech over the BBC.¹¹⁹ Since most soldiers in Holland were still recovering from earlier celebrations, the local Dutch population had to compensate, which they surely did. In his personal message, Richardson reminded his officers and men that their impressive list of battle honours had exacted a bitter toll in lives, wounds and imprisonment, and "it is most appropriate that we ... consider what they sacrificed in order [to] celebrate this day." Surely no one needed to be reminded. He then asked them to bear in mind that their regiment's reputation would also rest on how they carried out their duties while awaiting repatriation. He hoped their return to their homes, loved ones and friends would happen quickly, and reminded them that "with the training and experiences you have all had in the years of war there is no doubt ... you will be able to make a real contribution to the country we all love and for which we have fought."¹²⁰

The erstwhile enemy, initially remarkably uncontrite, soon found the co-operative spirit, which was welcome news. At first, it was "an eerie sensation to pass by trucks full of well-armed German soldiers, or to see them standing by their now idle flak guns."¹²¹ But within days, the men got used to seeing them crammed into a tawdry array of horse-drawn wagons or marching in bedraggled groups, guarded by a mere handful of soldiers, some columns taking a couple of hours to pass. Dutch civilians paid no heed to the Germans' misfortune—they were more interested in chatting to Canadian soldiers and staring longingly at the field kitchens busy preparing the men's noon meal. While senior officers immersed themselves in preparing for their new prisoner of war responsibilities, most of the regiment were honing their mathematical skills calculating precisely how many points they'd accumulated under Ottawa's demobilization regulations announced in the latest issue of *Maple Leaf*.¹²²

Demobilization Plans and the Veterans' Charter

The war years saw the recognition that the state, and especially the federal government, should play a major role in improving ordinary Canadians' lives. Some of this was the result of lessons absorbed from the Great Depression. But Ottawa's success in managing the war economy illustrated the good that might be accomplished if the state intervened in peace time. There was also a widespread feeling that Canada had not done right by its Great War veterans in reintegrating them into post-war society. Certainly by 1944 the King government, urged on by the progressives in caucus and the cadre of very able civil servants who had masterminded much of Ottawa's war effort, accepted that generous assistance to the nearly one million new veterans—the likes of education and job training programs, housing assistance, and cash grants like the wartime gratuity—were essential to creating a prosperous post-war Canada. The creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1944 was tangible evidence of this commitment, even if it would always have a somewhat fraught relationship with its constituency, and similarly the Veterans Charter passed by parliament in the same year. The array of veterans' programs and initiatives were far from perfect, too often embodied traditional class biases (the DVA invariably treated officers and enlisted men differently), and certainly did not abandon the long-standing commitment to individual responsibility. But as historian Peter Neary has concluded:

By 1945, Canada had a rehabilitation program in place for veterans that was comprehensive and purposeful, could be seen as honouring the obligation of the country to those who enlisted, was clearly explained to its intended beneficiaries in the mass-circulation pamphlet *Back to Civil Life*, and enjoyed broad public support.¹²³

And, one might add, broad support among veterans themselves, young men who had given up so much of their youth to the Great Depression and the war. But the burning desire to get home ensured the government's promise of rapid demobilization along modified first-in-first-out lines, a system taking into account the years and type of service as well as family status and the Canadian economy's employment needs, had every bit as much appeal.

A Love Affair With Canada

Preparations were gotten in hand for the regiment's participation in the Canadian Army's victory parade scheduled for the Dutch capital of The Hague on May 21. Altogether, ten officers, sixty-six other ranks and thirty-two tanks

took part. The Calgary Regiment's were the first Allied tanks the city's population had seen, and they were mobbed when they rolled into the central square late on the afternoon of May 20. Within an hour only a handful of unhappy troopers remained behind to guard the Shermans—"everyone else had already made many friends and was out visiting for the evening."¹²⁴ The parade itself proved a great success, though it barely managed to navigate streets jammed with throngs of grateful men, women, and children amidst a sea of union jacks, Dutch tri-colours, and orange streamers (for the Dutch royal family). Simply put, it was a day for Canadians—they were the toast of the town. A very different kind of parade three days later saw 7,000 German POWs held by the regiment march through the gates of Tiel camp at the start of their long trek back to Germany.¹²⁵ Thousands more followed in the succeeding days. Both armies had come a long way from Dieppe.

Farewells

On May 25, a tragic accident cost the regiment their last fatal casualty in Europe when a recce squadron Stuart escorting German prisoners rolled off a dyke road, crushing L/Cpl. J. P. Rowles. With the war over, his death seemed especially tragic, and a large number of officers and men attended his funeral.¹²⁶ Rowles, who had enlisted in December 1943 and had only been with the regiment a short time, left a widow and two small children. Within a few days, Richardson had written Bessie Rowles, explaining the circumstances of the accident and reassuring her, in the fashion of such letters, that her husband had been killed instantly. It would be the last of the many such letters he had composed.

At month's end, the regiment moved to a new harbour near Driebergen east of Utrecht, where the first repatriation draft—seventeen other ranks—said their goodbyes and set off for Canada.¹²⁷ After the swell of emotions surrounding the end of the war, the federal election on June 11 was rather an anti-climax, but the men still showed a lot of interest and voted in impressive numbers.¹²⁸ On June 8, all personnel and tanks from the three regiments assembled near Amersfoort to participate in a final march past for their brigadier. It culminated in a moving tribute to fallen comrades, the officers and men saluting and each tank lowering its cannon as the "Last Post" sounded. Brig. Murphy had chosen the Calgary Regiment to provide the guard of honour. Very pleased with their discipline and polish, Lt.-Col. Richardson ordered a special rum ration and seventy-five cigarettes for all ranks and declared June 9 a regimental holiday.¹²⁹

In another demobilization milestone, over the four-day period starting June 16 all tanks—painted, cleaned, and greased to look like they had just rolled off the assembly line in Detroit or Schenectady—were turned in.¹³⁰

Understandably, it was emotional experience for crews. That task done, it was time for the Calgary Round Up, a much-anticipated farewell party for other ranks. Unquestionably the highlight was the appearance of 186 suitable dance partners provided by the YMCA Hospitality Bureau in Amsterdam. The festivities went onto in the wee hours, with music provided by Holland's foremost pre-war dance band, *The Ramblers*. Even the notoriously fickle Dutch weather co-operated.¹³¹

Restlessness

In the weeks since VE Day, petty indiscipline and minor crime had increased noticeably, and while such was to be expected, it could not be allowed to get out of hand. Transgressions from dangerous driving on the bicycle-clogged country-roads to incidents, albeit isolated ones, of drunkenness, black-marketeering and looting began to sour relations. Warnings were backed up by severe punishments for offences against civilians.¹³² Stoney Richardson remembered the orderly room becoming so jammed with men up on charge that a message had to be sent, though he certainly understood his men's frustration over not knowing when they'd be going home, and having nothing meaningful to do while it was sorted out. Fortunately, he embraced the view that a little more drill and a lot more sports and educational and training programs offered the best prospects for focusing the men's energy on worthier pursuits, and it seemed to work.¹³³ For some time small groups had been departing, either reposted or having volunteered for the Canadian Army Pacific Force. But the floodgates were opening, with three officers and fifty-five other ranks (including the RSM) departing on June 20, followed two days later by a further seven officers and sixty other ranks. As the war diary lamented, these marked "the start of the more serious disintegration of the regiment."¹³⁴ It was not just a question of friends being wrenched apart. The point system, fair though it was in principle, qualified many who were indispensable to the regiment's smooth functioning to leave first.¹³⁵

Franeker

To everyone's disappointment, Driebergen was not going to be their final camp before returning to England and then home. That would be the village of Franeker, only a few kilometres from the North Sea coast in northern Holland. Untouched by any fighting, it offered excellent camp facilities, but the local population never warmed to their Canadian guests.¹³⁶ As July—and the repatriation process—dragged on, morale suffered accordingly. The uncertainty was especially hard on those with British wives (and children) who worried about how Ottawa was going to handle the moving of dependents to

Canada.¹³⁷ At least there were now many vocational and educational courses on offer, mostly taught by officers, and in part for lack of anything better to do, these were heavily enrolled.¹³⁸ With the good summer weather, various sports leagues flourished, the contests against teams from other regiments being especially hard-fought affairs. Sailing or swimming outings, or visits to some of the nearby communities where traditional Dutch dress and other customs were still in vogue proved popular, too.¹³⁹ But the overarching problem was clear and no one's fault—the Canadians didn't want to be in Holland anymore, and the Dutch, despite never forgetting Canadians' role in their liberation, had become just as keen to see them leave.¹⁴⁰

A Fighting Regiment No More

In August, word reached all three armoured regiments that, barring shipping bottlenecks, repatriation would commence no later than the end of the year. Forty officers and men, all of whom had participated in the raid, were able to attend the third anniversary ceremonies at Dieppe. A few days earlier the last of the liquor supply confiscated from the German Army in May had been divided up amongst the squadrons with orders to see them consumed it—orders that were followed to the letter.¹⁴¹ Just on its own, the adoption of the point system ensured there would be no returning of complete units to Canada. But the army also intended to cross-post as many soldiers as possible to units returning to soldiers' home military districts. For an armoured unit like the Calgary Regiment, which had drawn many officers and specialists from other parts of the country, this launched a second wave of departures toward the end of August, and with it another round of farewell parties.¹⁴² Finally, on September 8, the log-jam broke. Richardson informed all ranks returning to Alberta that they would be moving to England on September 21 (subsequently pushed back to the 27th), with those bound for other parts of Canada heading off around the same time. Since the rumours had settled on early November, this was exciting news.¹⁴³ Preparations—from packing personal gear to medicals—consumed most of the last few days in Franeker. Right on schedule, their convoy pulled out and headed for Nijmegen where, after a brief layover, they boarded ships for England.¹⁴⁴ There were smiles all round that day.

Home at Last

Most of the Dieppe POWs reached England by mid-May, and all of them passed through No. 4 Canadian Army hospital in Aldershot. Apart from receiving medical treatment, the staff bent over backwards to cater to their needs. Those who were otherwise fit received new uniforms intended to make them feel like soldiers who had done their duty. They also got a portion of their back pay and

some leave to enjoy it. But there were also efforts to prepare them for the dramatic changes they would confront in Canada.

Among the Canadian servicemen (and women) jostling to get home, it was the former POWs who were given the highest priority.¹⁴⁵ Tpr. John White crossed the Atlantic on the *Île de France* and then crossed the country in sleeper cars. Word always seemed to leak out that there were prisoner of war passengers on a train, and crowds would gather at every station to cheer. When he finally reached Calgary, his mom and dad were on the platform to greet him. Tpr. Don Craigie had been awestruck by the distant lights of London as he flew into Southampton. After being checked out and fattened up a bit at Aldershot, he and twenty other Dieppe POWs boarded the *Queen Mary* bound for New York. During their brief stopover before entraining for Montréal, they were treated to a Yankees baseball game, the US Army generously paying for all their beer and hotdogs. When their presence was announced on the public address system, the crowd stood *en masse* and cheered. Craigie reached Calgary on July 15 and was officially demobilized on Labour Day. Like so many others, he had only one thought—how his new life on “civvy” street would unfold.¹⁴⁶ What being a POW would mean over the long term remained to be seen, but *kriegies* would face their share of difficulties as the years passed.

The rest of the regiment came home somewhat later, many of them in smaller groups of Alberta veterans drawn from all three services. The biggest party, numbering about 250 and including Lt.-Col. Richardson, finally reached Calgary on December 1, where the large crowds gathered along 8th Avenue welcomed them home as they marched to the armoury.¹⁴⁷ Mewata was jammed with family members who witnessed the CO dismiss his men for the final time to loud cheering from all ranks. Among them was George Thring who had risen from the ranks to become a lieutenant and troop commander by war’s end. Thring and his wife had become engaged in the autumn of 1939, but he could not afford an engagement ring until just before they got married during his Christmas 1941 leave. In April 1943, after many months of training, he finally went overseas, where he saw plenty of action. In a memoir, Thring described his homecoming:

Dorothy, our two mothers and the other folks and relatives were told to meet us inside [so] we rushed [in] ... What a thrill it was to hug Dorothy and our moms. Many [times] I never knew if I would be returning! ... Dorothy had booked a suite in the Palliser Hotel. We invited the officers and wives to come too. Well, what happened next? Hard to believe but all the wives and families were seated around the perimeter of the suite—where [were] we? On

the floor in the centre of the room playing “craps.” We had been together through such stressful times it had bonded us like family.

After the initial celebrations, the two went on a second honeymoon just so they could get to know one another again. “I knew I had changed drastically and thank goodness she hung in there.”¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

The Calgary Regiment’s role in the Italian Campaign from the crossing of the Arno through to breaching the Gothic Line remains obscure. The general anonymity of the D-Day Dodgers supplies part of the explanation, but even more they suffer from the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade’s separation from the rest of the Canadian Army in Italy. Fighting under British command and supporting British and Indian troops has never endeared its story to the country’s military history buffs or for that matter its military historians. At the same time a candid examination of their operations reveals plenty of courage and skill but only a modest military contribution, one that became progressively more modest the further the tanks penetrated into the heart of the Apennines.

The Army Historical Section’s assessment of the fighting through central Italy—which we know closely reflected Stoney Richardson’s own views—was that up to the Arno “our tanks had slowly and systematically helped their infantry forward from one position to another,”¹⁴⁹ and in light of this the strains large armoured formations placed on overstretched logistics was probably a fair trade-off. But once north of the Arno, and particularly of the Sieve, deteriorating weather, unforgiving terrain, and the near collapse of logistics emerged as a more formidable opponent than the German Army, with the result that opportunities for close infantry support and bombardment—the three regiments’ bread and butter—simply faded away. By mid-December 1944 it was obvious even to the tank units that “our usefulness to the 8th Indian Division was ended.”¹⁵⁰ From September onward, the Calgary Regiment had done its best. At least the nature (and for long periods, absence) of fighting had cost few casualties.

From an operational and not simply a national perspective the Calgary Regiment’s extraction from northern Italy made sense, but it was the latter—national identity politics—that made it happen. Unfortunately, the timing meant they arrived in the North West European Theatre too late to play more than a brief role. After V-E Day, everyone simply wanted to get home, including their prisoner of war comrades. Several months of quasi-occupation duty in Holland was an anti-climax. By the time summer ended, a finely honed fighting machine had been dismantled. The men were soon on their way home, confident they had done their duty, and mostly full of hope. All carried memories of friends who would never see Canada again.



6.1 KOCR reservists participating in a training exercise at Camp Wainright. Their Sherman looks like it could have fought at Ede. While still adequate for the purpose in the summer of 1956, it was a far cry from the Centurions equipping the regular army. (KOCRA, P-600-10-0013)



6.2 Reservists from The King's Own Calgary Regiment train on the frozen prairie at Camp Wainwright during the winter of 1948–49. Coping with insufficient (and inadequate) equipment, the inevitable personnel turnover of part-time units, and the ill-defined defence goals of successive Canadian governments, the reserves struggled to maintain their relevancy during the post-World War II years. (KOCRA, P-600-10-0049)



6.3 Local reservists practise civil defence rescue techniques at the “Greggsville” training facility, c. 1965. They had built it themselves at Sarcee Camp only a few years earlier. (KOCRA, P-600-10-0136)



6.4 KOCR reservists proudly parade with their regimental guidon, Mewata Armoury, c. 1960. (KOCRA, P-600-10-0008)



6.5 Mewata Armoury, c. 1940–45. Completed in 1918, the complex has been central to the life of Calgary's militia and reserve units—including The King's Own Calgary Regiment and its predecessors—ever since. (Glenbow Archives, pa-3538-24)

6.6 Cpl. Nathan Hornburg, killed in action in Afghanistan, 24 September 2007. Thousands of reservists have volunteered to serve in peacekeeping, peace enforcement and other international missions, particularly since the end of the Cold War. The King's Own Calgary Regiment has provided more than its share. Unfortunately few Canadians are aware of the magnitude of the reserves' contribution. (KOCRA)

