

The Corps  
of  
Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

A Collection of RCEME Individual  
Unit Histories In North-West  
Europe In World War II

Edited By  
Doug Knight



The RCEME Heritage Archives



A Collection of  
RCEME  
Individual Unit Histories  
In North-West Europe  
In World War II

Version 3.1

## Editor's Note

This is a reproduction of a document that was produced at the end of the Second World War. Each unit in First Canadian Army was required to write a short history of the unit before it was disbanded or returned to Canada. The accounts of the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers' (RCEME) units were compiled into this record. The photocopy from which this transcript has been produced is in very poor condition and is badly faded in many areas, but every effort has been made to ensure accuracy. Illegible words have been replaced by [?].

This is a reproduction, and style of the individual unit accounts was not changed, nor was the accuracy of their statements verified. Some minor editing has been carried out, particularly in eliminating contemporary official and unofficial abbreviations that might not be familiar to a modern audience [*The AWD ws loc nr BARNEVELD* becomes *The AWD was located near Barneveld*]. The date format was standardised, and some punctuation added (one LAD had never heard of the comma, and was quite vague on the use of the period). [Editorial or explanatory comments have been placed in square brackets]. A glossary has been added to define the abbreviations that remain – the original had no glossary, nor did the writers need one. Although the formal unit designation usually includes the Corps (RCEME, RCA, etc.), “RCEME” has been omitted from RCEME unit designations except in the headings. Apart from this, these are the unit's stories, in their words.

The organisation of the units is from the original document, and represents the affiliation of the units to their parent formations when the history was written. It should not be taken to represent the organisation of First Canadian Army during the campaign in North-West Europe. The histories were written in June and July 1945, and some units recorded what they were doing at the time, resulting in the use of the present tense in some of the accounts.

The editor thanks LCol (ret'd) Bob Vincent and LCol (ret'd) Lucas Hellemans for their assistance in transcribing the original. A very special vote of thanks goes to Maryanne Lang for work “above and beyond” in deciphering and typing large quantities of very faint and muddled text.

### A note to version 2.

The original issue did not include a number of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division's units because of missing pages in the source document. Copies of these pages have been found, and the unit histories have been added to this version. I have also added the affiliation of some LADs from other sources. Because some LADs supported several units at different times, the listed affiliation is that which was in effect during the campaign in North-west Europe.

**Version 3** updated the copyright and corrected errors.

**Version 3.1** corrects additional errors that have been discovered.

Doug Knight  
November 2010

## Table of Contents

Editor's Note .....	ii
A note to version 2 .....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
Glossary .....	vii
Ranks .....	vii
Terms .....	vii
<b>DDME Branch, Administrative Headquarters, First Canadian Army .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A Narrative of RCEME, First Canadian Army Troops, in North-West Europe .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Headquarters, Commander RCEME, First Canadian Army Troops .....	3
First Canadian Army Troops Workshop, RCEME .....	5
1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian General Troops Workshop, RCEME .....	7
2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop, RCEME .....	9
3 <sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop, RCEME .....	10
2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop, RCEME .....	13
4 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop, RCEME .....	14
12 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	17
1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Engineer Equipment Workshop, RCEME .....	17
2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Engineer Equipment Workshop, RCEME .....	19
3 <sup>rd</sup> Canadian Recovery Company, RCEME .....	19
1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit, RCEME .....	21
1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Radar Battery Workshop, RCEME .....	22
25 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 11 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Park Company, RCE .....	23
29 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion, RCE .....	25
43 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 25 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment .....	26
92 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Battalion RCE .....	26
93 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 10 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Park Company, RCE .....	27
123 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Carrier Regiment .....	28
126 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to First Canadian Army Signals .....	29
131 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1 <sup>st</sup> Rocket Battery, RCA .....	30
British Units Under Command .....	31
824 Armoured Troops Workshop (British) .....	31
231 Infantry Brigade Workshop (British) .....	31
<b>A Narrative of RCEME, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops, in North-West Europe .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Headquarters RCEME, 1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops .....	32
1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop, RCEME .....	32
1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop, RCEME .....	33
1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Recovery Company, RCEME .....	34
51 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME, attached to 1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Field Park Company .....	35

67 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME, attached to 7 <sup>th</sup> Anti-tank Regiment, RCA .....	36
74 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME, attached to the Royal Canadian Dragoons .....	37
132 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME, attached to 25 <sup>th</sup> Cdn Armoured Delivery Regiment.....	38
<b>A Narrative of RCEME, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Troops, in North-West Europe .....</b>	<b>40</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop, RCEME .....	40
2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop, RCEME, Advanced Workshop Detachment .....	43
No. 4 Heavy Recovery Section, RCEME.....	44
6 <sup>th</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Workshop, RCEME, attached to 6 LAA Regiment, RCA .....	46
40 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to HQ 2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps .....	48
52 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2 Canadian Survey Regiment, RCA .....	50
88 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 25 <sup>th</sup> Armoured Delivery Regiment .....	51
94 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Signals .....	53
95 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME Attached to 8 Field Park Company, RCE .....	56
<b>A Narrative Of RCEME, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, in North-West Europe .....</b>	<b>58</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	58
2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME.....	59
3 <sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	60
2 <sup>nd</sup> Light Anti-aircraft (LAA) Workshop, RCEME.....	61
2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Heavy Anti-aircraft Regiment Workshop, RCEME .....	62
1 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters.....	64
2 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters.....	65
3 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters .....	65
7 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1 <sup>st</sup> Field Regiment, RCA .....	66
8 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Field Regiment, RCA.....	66
9 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Field Regiment, RCA .....	67
10 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1 <sup>st</sup> Medium Regiment, RCA .....	68
11 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 11 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA .....	69
13 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1 <sup>st</sup> Anti-tank Regiment, RCA .....	70
14 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Divisional Signals.....	70
15 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME.....	71
68 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 12 <sup>th</sup> CIB and IV Princess Louise Dragoon Guards.....	72
86 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to the 1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion, Saskatoon Light Infantry (MG).....	73
<b>A Narrative of RCEME, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, in North-West Europe .....</b>	<b>75</b>
4 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	75
5 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	77
6 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	79
3 <sup>rd</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Workshop, RCEME attached to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Regiment, RCA .....	81
16 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade.....	82
17 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to Headquarters 5 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade .....	83
18 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 6 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade.....	84

19 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA .....	85
20 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 8 <sup>th</sup> Recce Regiment (14 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Hussars).....	86
21 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division Signals .....	88
22 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 5 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA .....	89
23 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1 <sup>st</sup> Field Park Company, RCE.....	91
24 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 6 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA .....	93
87 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to the Toronto Scottish Regiment (MG) .....	94
<b>A Narrative Of RCEME, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, in North-West Europe .....</b>	<b>96</b>
Headquarters RCEME 3 <sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division .....	96
7 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	98
8 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	99
9 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	101
4 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Light Anti-aircraft Workshop attached to 4 <sup>th</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Regiment, RCA .....	103
6 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (MG) .....	104
30 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Field Park Company RCE .....	105
31 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division Signals.....	105
32 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 12 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA .....	106
33 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 13 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA .....	107
34 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 14 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA .....	108
35 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment, RCA.....	109
36 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to Headquarters, 7 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade .....	110
37 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to Headquarters 8 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade .....	111
38 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to Headquarters 9 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade .....	113
62 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 7 <sup>th</sup> Recce Regt (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars).....	114
12 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 19 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment (SP), RCA .....	115
<b>A Narrative of RCEME, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, in North-West Europe .....</b>	<b>116</b>
4 Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, RCEME.....	116
10 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	118
DADME – 4 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade LADs and AWDs.....	121
RCEME – Headquarters RCA 4 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division.....	123
4 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Headquarters.....	124
42 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 29 <sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Recce) (South Albert Regiment) .....	125
46 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Engineers .....	126
48 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 10 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters .....	126
49 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Signals .....	127
<b>A Narrative of RCEME, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, in North-West Europe .....</b>	<b>128</b>
Headquarters RCEME, 5 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division.....	128
5 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, RCEME.....	134

11 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	140
5 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to HQ Squadron, 5 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division .....	143
57 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 5 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Signals .....	144
77 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Park Squadron, RCE.....	145
53 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2 <sup>nd</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Lord Strathcona's Horse) .....	146
56 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3 <sup>rd</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Governor General's Horse Guards) .....	147
70 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 5 <sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (8 <sup>th</sup> New Brunswick Hussars) ..	149
71 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 9 <sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (British Columbia Dragoons)...	150
72 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to the Westminster Regiment (Motor).....	153
73 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to HQ 11 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade .....	155
5 Light Anti-aircraft Workshop, RCEME attached to 5 <sup>th</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Regiment, RCA.....	157
58 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 17 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA .....	158
76 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4 <sup>th</sup> Anti-tank Regiment, RCA .....	160
81 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 8 <sup>th</sup> Army Field Regiment (SP), RCA.....	161
<b>A Narrative of RCEME, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, in North-West Europe.....</b>	<b>163</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, RCEME, Activity .....	163
1 <sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	164
59 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 11 <sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Ontario Tank Regiment).....	166
60 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 12 <sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Three Rivers Tank Regt) .....	167
61 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 14 <sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Calgary Tank Regiment) .....	168
<b>A Narrative of RCEME, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, in North-West Europe.....</b>	<b>169</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, RCEME .....	169
54 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 6 <sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (1 <sup>st</sup> Hussars) .....	170
55 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 10 <sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Fort Garry Horse) .....	173
85 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 27 <sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Sherbrooke Fusiliers).....	174
<b>A Narrative of RCEME Lines of Communications Units in North-West Europe.....</b>	<b>177</b>
No. 1 Advanced Base Workshop, RCEME .....	177
War Diary - No. 1 Advanced Base Workshop, RCEME.....	178
Special Commitments by 1 Canadian Advance Base Workshop, RCEME, in Normandy .....	183
No. 2 Canadian Advanced Base Workshop, RCEME.....	184
No. 3 AFV Servicing Unit, REME.....	187

## Glossary

[This glossary has been compiled for a modern audience and did not appear in the original document.]

### Ranks

Gen	General
Lt-Gen	Lieutenant-General
Maj-Gen	Major-General
Brig	Brigadier
Col	Colonel
Lt-Col	Lieutenant-Colonel
Maj	Major
Capt	Captain
Lt	Lieutenant
WO1	Warrant Officer (Class 1)
WO2	Warrant Officer (Class 2)
AQMS	Artificer Quartermaster Sergeant
QMS	Quartermaster Sergeant
S/Sgt	Staff-Sergeant
Sgt	Sergeant
Cpl	Corporal
L/Cpl	Lance-Corporal
Pte	Private
Cfn	Craftsman, Craftsmen

### Terms

2i/c	Second-in-Command
AA	Anti-aircraft – also known as “ack-ack”
AA&QMG	Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General – the senior administrative and logistic officer in a division
“A” Vehicles	Armoured fighting vehicles – tanks, armoured cars, scout cars, etc
Adm O	Administrative Order
AFV	Armoured Fighting Vehicle
AGRA	Army Group Royal Artillery – a group of artillery regiments at Corps or Army level. It had no fixed organisation, unlike the division artillery.
APC	Armoured Personnel Carrier
ARV	Armoured Recovery Vehicle
Att	Attached to
AWD	Advanced Workshop Detachment
“B” Vehicles	Non-armoured vehicles - trucks, cars, motorcycles, etc
BARV	Beach Armoured Recovery Vehicle



BEME	Brigade Electrical and Mechanical Engineer [Senior RCEME officer in a brigade]
BLR	Beyond Local Repair
BRAC	Brigadier, Royal Armoured Corps
BRS	Beach Recovery Section
Cwt	hundredweight – equal to 112 pounds (50.9 kg)
CAB	Canadian Armoured Brigade
CAD	Canadian Armoured Division
CAO	Canadian Army Order
CAOS	Canadian Army Overseas
CAR	Canadian Armoured Regiment
CBP	Corps Backloading Point
CDC	Canadian Dental Corps
CFEF	Canadian Far East Force [The Canadian contribution to the war against Japan formed from the NWE forces. The war ended before it could be deployed.]
CIB	Canadian Infantry Brigade
CID	Canadian Infantry Division
CMF	Central Mediterranean Forces
CMHQ	Canadian Military Headquarters [in London]
CO	Commanding Officer
CREME	Commander, Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers [Senior RCEME officer in a division]
DA and QMG	Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General [the senior logistics officer at corps headquarters]
DADEME	Deputy Assistant Director, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering
DADME	Deputy Assistant Director, Mechanical Engineering
DBP	Division Backloading Point
DD	Duplex Drive [a tank with propellers for operating in the water]
DDME	Deputy Director, Mechanical Engineering [the senior RCEME officer at Army Headquarters]
DDOS	Deputy Director Ordnance Services
DVP	Drowned Vehicle Park
FAMTO	First Aid Motor Transportation Outfit
GO	General Order
GOC	General Officer Commanding
HQ	Headquarters
LAD	Light Aid Detachment
L of C	Line(s) of Communication
LRS	Light Repair Section
LST	Landing Ship (Tank)
MT	Motor (or Mechanical) Transport

NMRU	Naval Mobile Recovery Unit
NPAM	Non-Permanent Active Militia
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
NWE	North-west Europe
OC	Officer Commanding
OFP	Ordnance Field Park
OME	Ordnance Mechanical Engineer
OR	Other rank [non officer]
PAM	Permanent Active Militia
POL	Petrol, Oil, and Lubricants
POW	Prisoner of War
PWD	Port Workshop Detachment
RCA	Royal Canadian Artillery
RCOC	Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps
Recce	Reconnaissance
REME	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers [British]
RCEME	Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
RMA	Rear Maintenance Area
RP	Recovery Post
SP	Self-propelled
Wef	with effect from

## **DDME Branch, Administrative Headquarters, First Canadian Army**

D-Day found this branch, consisting of twelve officers and eighteen other ranks standing by in Ashtead Park in Surrey for its turn to cross the channel to France. An advance party of one officer and one sergeant left for France on 15 June 1944. The remainder of the unit proceeded to Botley, a transit camp in the South of England only to return to Ashtead the following day on the cancellation of crossing orders.

On 25 July DDME Headquarters was established in an orchard at Les Planches in Normandy. No time was lost in digging in both literally and figuratively. Converting “Priests” to “Kangaroos” [removing the turrets and other fittings from M7 self-propelled guns to convert them into armoured personnel carriers] was one of the first priority jobs tackled by the technical experts of the branch - this work was completed satisfactorily.

Dysentery affected almost the complete staff during August.

By 15 September, the unit had moved four times, stops being made at Firfol, Le Bose, Smermesnil and finally at Herbelle, each location was in an apple orchard.

Apart from work, noteworthy points up to this time were the success in bartering for fresh vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs and butter and visits to Vimy Ridge Memorial.

On 27 September, the unit entered Belgium and located at “Chateau d’Oydonck” near Ghent, then proceeded to Antwerp at the end of a fortnight.

Billets and mess halls were procured in Antwerp, and genuine hospitality afforded by the Belgian people was enjoyed by all ranks, the only disturbing factor in this locality was the V-1 and V-2 nuisance. Near misses were recorded but no casualties were reported,

On 16 November, the branch took up quarters at Chasse Barracks, Breda. These barracks had been used by the Germans as a training establishment and accommodation was only fair. After a month in Breda the branch moved to Tilburg, where we stayed until 15 March, the longest stay in any one place.

On 23 December, the headquarters was warned to expect enemy infiltration and possible attacks by parachutists. Preparations for defence were made and everyone went “armed to the teeth” at all times. Weapons were carried, even to meals. Despite this, Christmas dinner was served in style and during the meal the army commander dropped in to address the men.

At 2330 hours on the night of 26 December, the alarm was sounded (four consecutive shots on the Bofors). With Brens, Stens, rifles and grenades, the men were ready to at least put up a good show. However, nothing happened, and a couple of hours later the “All Clear” was sounded. By 9 January, the proposed emergency move back into Belgium was cancelled, and the fighting men began to straighten things out again, prior to their final push to victory.

In January, morale received an uplift inasmuch as leaves to the UK were started, and there was something to look forward to. Nerves had begun to get slightly frayed, but on the whole the spirit of companionship was excellent.

During the past months it had become evident that some reorganization was needed within the branch, to enable it to function more efficiently and smoothly. Therefore, about the middle of January responsibilities were divided along more clearly cut lines under two headings, namely “Organization” and “Technical”. Under the new scheme five Deputy Assistant Directors of Mechanical Engineering (DADME) were appointed as follows:

DADME (Org)	[Organisation]
DADME (AFV Servicing)	[Armoured Fighting Vehicle servicing]

DADME (Wksps)	[Workshops]
DADME (Tels)	[Telecommunications]
DADME (Vehs)	[Vehicles]

DADME (Org) had under him an EME (Org) and EME (Org Learner), also an EME (Rec) [Recovery]. DADME (AFV Servicing) was not stationed at this Headquarters, but was attached to the Armoured Delivery Regiment where he supervised the RCEME elements concerned with the delivery of AFVs. DADME (Wksps) had the responsibility of technical supervision of all workshops and all workshop equipment. Under his supervision also came an EME (Wksps Learner), the EME (Armt) [Armament] and the AIA. The title DADME (Tels) is self-explanatory and he had an assistant EME (Tels). DADME (Vehs) had an EME (Vehs) and also supervised 21 Army Group Civilian Technical representatives and 1 Canadian Field Technical Wing (DDEM) (Civilian).

Events proved that this dividing of duties had been justified; the changes were warranted and successful.

On 15 March the unit was again under canvas at Nebo (near Nijmegen). Plenty of tentage was available which made things more comfortable for all.

24 March was a great day for all, inasmuch as the crossing of the Rhine took place and the feeling that it would soon be over became evident. However, that same night the camp was machine-gunned twice, at 2200 hours and 0330 hours, stern reminders that there was still a war on. A German plane, flying low over the treetops, paid several visits and opened fire twice. A nearby petrol dump was set on fire, apparently by incendiary bombs, and about 20,000 gallons of petrol was lost.

The middle of April saw the unit on the move again, this time to Enschede, and it was in this camp on 4 May 1945 that the news was received that the German High Command had surrendered unconditionally along the complete front occupied by the First Canadian Army. This meant only one thing - our job had been completed.

The following is a nominal roll of officers and senior NCOs who served in the DDME Branch during the campaign in NW Europe.

**DDME Branch Officers and Senior NCOs, 6 June 1944 to 4 May 45**

Brig	G. M. Grant	Capt	J. K. French	Lt	G. H. Mikkelporg
Lt-Col	J. K. Bradford	Capt	H. T. Hargraves	Lt	J. L. Straith
Lt-Col	C. R. Boehm	Capt	L. T. Hore	Lt	W. N. Tripp
Lt-Col	W. McKinlay	Capt	F. R. Kaye	Capt	A. G. Edward
Maj	P. C. Anderson	Capt	B. P. Malley	Lt	L. M. Smith, REME
Maj	D. F. Cornish	Capt	W. V. MacInnes	Lt	C. D. Winters, REME
Maj	D. C. Ferguson	Capt	H. W. Royle		
Maj	P. G. Ingram	Capt	L. B. Sreaton	B.94545	SSM Burditt, M. T.
Maj	D.R.B. McArthur	Capt	R. G. Struthers	A-86053	S/Sgt Smythe, W. J.
Maj	A. S. MacRae	Capt	S. J. Wallace	A-59986	S/Sgt Lane, J. L.
Maj	G. W. Painter	Lt	R. A. Anderson	D-166431	Sgt Eikle, C. E.
Maj	E. G. Pallister	Lt	H. S. Aspinall	D-117368	Sgt Nicholson, E.W.
Capt	A. M. Croft	Lt	N. W. Blakely		Sgt Stone, C. T.
Capt	W. E. Ellis	Lt	D. W. Campbell		
Capt	P. D. Falk	Lt	E. W. Cole		

## **A Narrative of RCEME, First Canadian Army Troops, in North-West Europe**

The following pages represent a short history of all the RCEME units under First Canadian Army Troops command since D-Day and continued throughout the NWE campaign. A few of the units were under command for only a short period of time, while others completed the entire campaign with Army Troops, but irrespective of the length of time served, it is evident that the spirit of co-operation and the hard work exhibited by all ranks were two of the main factors for the success and high praise of the RCEME services.

The history clearly shows how the LADs, and second and third echelon workshops worked hand-in-hand whenever possible, and how during the fast-moving stages of the campaign, new problems presented themselves to the various RCEME units and how they were subsequently overcome.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the RCEME phase of the NWE campaign was the foresight given to the formation of special units to service newly-formed fighting units, such as the “Kangaroo” [armoured personnel carrier] regiment, “Rocket Battery”, “Radar Battery” and others operating under Army Troops command.

Finally, this history shows how high the morale of the RCEME units was, in spite of the long hours of hard work under unfavourable working conditions. At times, weaknesses in policy became apparent due to the ever-changing conditions of the campaign. It is of interest to note how quickly remedies were forthcoming, and greater impetus given to the already effective services of RCEME units under Army Troops command. For instance, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Troops Workshop was under command of Army Troops and functioned as a second army troops workshop. Also 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Recovery Company, which is a lines of communication recovery company, was under command and functioned as an army recovery company. It was found that general headquarters and lines of communication RCEME service could not be readily divorced from Army Troops and the Army Troops area was so large and the units were intermingled.

Signed

G. W. Painter

CREME [Commander, Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers]

First Canadian Army Troops

### **Headquarters, Commander RCEME, First Canadian Army Troops**

On 29 July 1944, the headquarters landed at Courseulles, France and moved up to Fontaine-Henry where we set up in the camp area of Headquarters Army Troops. Enemy night raiders were over very often but were met by terrific flak. All workshops were met as they landed on the beaches and guided to their respective sites. Maj B. H. Miller was promoted to A/Lt-Col and appointed CREME 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Troops. Maj L. P. Baker from 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop replaced Lt-Col B. H. Miller as 2i/c CREME.

All workshops took part in a huge task of converting M7 105-mm self-propelled guns into armoured personnel carriers (Kangaroos). These were used to spearhead the Falaise push and were extremely successful. 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop and 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Troops Workshop were given the job of installing Wasp flame-throwers in Bren carriers. They completed the job in record time.

An Advance Workshop Detachment [AWD] was formed to look after the guns of 9<sup>th</sup> British Army Group Royal Artillery. This AWD was composed of the armament sections of First Canadian Army Troops

Workshop, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Troops Workshop, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop under command of Capt A. C. Drysdale from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Troops Workshop.

On 20 August 1944, a new workshop, 824 Tank Troops Workshop, REME (British), with Maj Pogson commanding, came into the formation as the third line workshop supporting the Polish Armoured Division.

After the Falaise push, a RCEME workshop area was set up in area below Caen, to repair “A” and “B” vehicles “knocked out” along the Caen-Falaise road.

On 29 August 1944, the headquarters moved to Chateau-Lambert near Bernay, France, and set up in an apple orchard. 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Troops Workshop were given the job of installing Wasp flame-throwers in Bren carriers for the Seine crossing. All workshops were phased in for the Seine crossing.

On 7 September 1944, the headquarters moved to an apple orchard near Londinieres, France. Workshops were unable to undertake heavy programme of repairs due to the constant moving.

On 16 September 1944, the headquarters moved to [Ecques], France, a few kilometres south of St. Omer and again set up in an apple orchard. All workshops were experiencing difficulty in obtaining parts – particularly for “A” vehicles. Lt-Col F. J. Lyle made a survey of all workshops and presented cold facts on availability of parts to DDME and DDOS.

On 26 September 1944, the headquarters moved to Gavere, Belgium, into billets after having spent the summer under canvas. This location did not prove central enough, and after ten days moved to the city of Ghent, Belgium. RCEME servicing was laid on for the movement of 100 armoured personnel carriers from Bayeaux to Antwerp on their tracks. All arrived and were completely serviced by 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop. Flying bombs and rockets bothered these two workshops in Antwerp, but the work went on normally.

On 15 October 1944, Lt-Col F. J. Lyle took seriously ill and was evacuated to the United Kingdom and Lt-Col W. M. McKinlay was appointed CREME First Canadian Army Troops from 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop.

On 2 December 1944, the headquarters moved to Breda, Holland, where Christmas was passed under threat of an enemy paratroop attack in conjunction with Runstedt’s “Ardennes Offensive”. All ranks manned “action stations” in barracks. 231 Infantry Brigade Workshop (British) came under command to service vehicles coming into 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Vehicle Park. A V-2 bomb landed very close and V-1s flew constantly over Breda to Antwerp.

On 30 December 1944, the headquarters moved back to Herenthals, Belgium to make room for Headquarters 1 British Corps. 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Troops Workshop and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop were given the task of completely overhauling Weasels [a light amphibious cargo carrier] for the Cleve-Reichwald push. Parts for these vehicles were very scarce, but the job was completed under deadline. Maj L. P. Baker returned to Canada on rotation leave. He was replaced by Maj F. W. Cranston from 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop.

On 22 February 1945, the headquarters moved to Seminary near Vught, Holland. This proved to be “buzz bomb alley”. The armoured personnel carrier repair programme was organised by 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop, and 824 Armoured Troops Workshop (British) to do complete servicing and overhaul in preparation for the Rhine crossing.

On 12 March 1945, Lt-Col McKinlay was posted to DDME branch, Administrative Headquarters First Canadian Army and appointed [ADME]. Maj G. W. Painter was promoted to A/Lt-Col and appointed CREME. The volume of trades testing was extremely heavy with CREME acting as president of the Army Troops Trade Testing Board.

On 26 March 1945, the headquarters moved to Nijmegen, Holland, moving under canvas for the first time this year. An AWD from First Canadian Army Troops Workshop was formed and moved up to Cleve to service 4 and 5 British [?]. 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, newly arrived from Italy, took over servicing of vehicles in 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Vehicle Park from 231 Infantry Brigade Workshop (British), which moved out from under command.

On 20 Apr 1945, the headquarters moved to Enschede, Holland.

On 8 May 1945, the headquarters moved to Ootmarsum, Holland. This was VE-Day.

On 30 May 1945, the headquarters moved to Moenderlo, Holland, several kilometres south of Apeldoorn.

### **General Comments**

Throughout the campaign, there were always 2,000 to 3,000 RCEME personnel under command of this headquarters. The average number of units under command in the Army Troops area was approximately 450, numbering as many as 650 at one time, and all these units had to be allotted RCEME service.

CREME was president of the Army Troops Trade Testing Board, and all applications for trades testing were registered in and out through the Headquarters. A maximum of 800 applications per week were passed through. The staff was inadequate to cope with the high volume of work, but this was handled as efficiently as possible.

In telecommunications work, since the arrival in Normandy, it had been found that all sections were able to keep ahead of the work coming in. Even when all shops were going full out on tank programmes, they were able to keep ahead of the fitters in their work. The inspection problem in Army Troops was very small as there were only six units with any amount of wireless equipment to inspect and Army Signals and 13 [Aif Fmn?] Signals, a Lines of Communication crew came from 1<sup>st</sup> Advanced Base Workshop and did a wonderful job of keeping the equipment up to scratch.

Lack of spares had been a great drawback throughout the campaign, although in the last three months this trouble cleared up very well. The system of backloading all unserviceable sets to salvage to be picked up by third line workshops proved very bad as the telecommunication sets were usually in bad shape when they arrived back due to moisture and sand, etc. The telecommunication crews played a big part in every large-scale operation from the Kangaroo programme right through to the preparations for the crossing of the Rhine.

3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Recovery Company manned Army BLPs, taking these over from the Corps in most instances and handing them over to the Lines of Communication as the Army Area moved forward. This job, in addition to manning road recovery posts in the army area, was a heavy full-time commitment.

### **First Canadian Army Troops Workshop, RCEME**

On 31 July 44, the unit embarked on two Liberty ships at Tilbury Docks, London, with Maj T. G. Quance as OC. Following an uneventful sailing across the English Channel to beach at Courcelles, Normandy, the troops debarked on 4 August 1944 and proceeded to Arguerney and set up shop that evening. The shops were very inactive in this location, but as the front was only ten miles forward at Caen, plenty of night raiders passed over our camp on way to harass the beachhead. An artillery AWD of approximately 50 all ranks was formed a few days after landing in Normandy to service 9 (British) AGRA attached to the First Canadian Army. The AWD was formed from the armament section of the workshop with attached personnel from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Troops Workshop and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop. The detachments set up shop in Caen, France, next to the AWD from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps Troops Workshop. For ten days the men worked ceaselessly from dawn to dusk in the heat and dust. As the Canadian advance gained impetus towards the Falaise Gap, the AWD started a series of seven moves that ended with the

crossing of the Seine River at Rouen. The AGRA pushed on to Le Havre while the AWD took a breather on a V-1 site near Limesy.

Meanwhile, the main shop moved West past Lisieux to Giverville, which became “our town” being first Canadians to be stationed there. The “B” vehicle shop and ancillary shops started getting their first dose of hard work since arrival in this theatre of operations. After a few weeks stay, the unit pushed on uneventfully to Cailly near Rouen.

Following a few days stay at Cailly, CREME, First Canadian Army Troops visited camp with Maj G. W. Painter, disclosing that Maj Painter would take over immediate command of workshop. Maj Quance was posted at once to DEME 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps.

On 9 September 1944, the unit moved from Cailly to Monflieres near Abbeville and set up shop on a former Jerry workshop site. The workshop had no sooner set up here than work for the “B” vehicle shop came rolling in large quantities from all types of units. The unit despatched a small AWD to do a special job for two or three days for the Army Vehicle Park. The workshop next packed up and moved to Ebblingham on 9 September 1944. Replacement parts at this stage had become quite a serious problem and vehicles had to be BLR'd as parts were not available.

With the fall of Le Havre, our AWD moved from Limsey to Boulogne. Here the production reached a peak of an average of three guns per day during the siege of Boulogne and Calais. After the fall of Calais the AWD made three quiet moves to Lecloc, where it settled down while the artillery and infantry blasted away at the remaining Germans still holding on in the Scheldt.

The main workshop next moved from Ebblingham to Ghent, Belgium, which gave the workshop covered accommodation for the first time and the pleasures of town life. The immediate effect was an increase in the volume of work with consequent greater production.

The production during one week in November reached 175 “B” vehicles and motorcycles to say nothing of the work done by other sections. On 11 November 1944 our AWD with 9 AGRA returned home to its parent unit, which brought to an end a very friendly and harmonious relation that had grown up between the Canadian craftsmen of the AWD and the British gunners of the AGRA.

The workshop once again moved as the Army advanced to take up position and consolidate for the push into Germany. The former Belgian barracks in Turnhout were chosen for location and the unit settled in only to be evicted by 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian General Hospital one month later. This brought the workshop to its winter quarters in Tilburg. This location proved to be an excellent site and the morale and health of the troops was good during the winter months.

The “stand to” in this area during the Christmas and New Year’s festivities brought on by the threat of the German Ardennes salient gave the men a taste of trench digging and cold watches.

The buzz-bomb war for the workshop came to a climax when a V-1 landed between the officers’ mess and the Workshop. The unit suffered no casualties.

The proportion of British type vehicle work to Canadian type vehicle work increased to 75%, and with increased commitments due to the proximity of Headquarters First Canadian Army and the Netherlands army vehicles attached to the Canadian Army. It became necessary to employ 30 tradesmen from 21 Special Employment Company and an additional fifteen civilians to release craftsmen used formerly on fatigues.

On 5 February 1945, the entire armament section left Tilburg as an AWD to join 5 AGRA at Mook. The offensive on the Reichswald Forest by 30 (British) Corps started with guns firing over the heads of the AWD. On 16 February 1945, the AWD pushed on to Cleve, which had fallen two days previously. This was the first large RCEME detachment to cross the German frontier on this front. The AWD then ceased to be attached to 5 AGRA and was attached to 4 AGRA. Heavy work on the guns started on arrival at Cleve. Three days later the AWD position came under fire from German self-propelled 88s, and remained



so for next ten days, but luckily no casualties were suffered. When the Canadian Army reached the Rhine, the AGRAs were pulled out and the AWD returned to the main unit at Tilburg. On 15 January 1945, Maj G. W. Painter left the unit to take over command of 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop and Maj J. W. Blatchford took over command of this unit.

In the middle of April the workshop moved from Tilburg and crossed the Rhine and set up in a new location at Hengelo, which was in a lumberyard. Maj C. G. Kirby arrived and took over command from Maj Blatchford who was posted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop. Maj Kirby no sooner got settled in the workshop when he was notified of his rotation leave to Canada and Maj A. C. Drysdale took over command of unit.

On 8 May 1945, the workshop operated on Sunday routine to celebrate VE-Day. Several dances were held for the men in Hengelo and were thoroughly enjoyed.

In regard to the activity in this workshop for the nine months between the landing and VE-Day, the following figures show the jobs done on all equipments.

“B” Vehicles	3,034	
Motorcycles	807	
Telecom	344	
Guns	166	
Instruments	1,212	
Small Arms	15,263	
Tires	307	
Miscellaneous	682	
AWD - when with 9 AGRA		260 guns
AWD - when with 30 (Brit) Corps		59 guns

## 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Troops Workshop, RCEME

1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Troops Workshop was formed in England on demand of DME 21 Army Group at 1 CORU, on 29 May 1944. The unit was mobilized on 30 June 1944, and given mobilization serial #2527/1 and tactical #1006.

On the morning parade of 28 July 1944, the warning order for movement overseas was read to the troops. On Sunday morning at 0900 hours, 30 July 1944, the unit moved from Park Hatch to the London docks. On 1 August, the vehicles were all loaded and personnel on board the American Liberty ship *Frank L. Lever*. The ship sailed from London at 1330 hours, 1 August 1944, with Capt W. D. Schofield as OC Troops.

On 4 August 44, the ship anchored off Bernieres-Sur-Mer, France. Twenty-five vehicles were off-loaded that day on Juno beach. The unloading was completed on 5 August and the unit, complete with vehicles, moved into its first harbour area in France at Beny-Sur-Mer. The unit personnel were all settled and the workshop ready for repair work on the morning of 7 August 1944.

The previous day, before they had an opportunity to unpack their tools and equipment, the complete armament section of five fitters were sent to First Canadian Army Troops Workshop to help form an AWD, which was to be attached to a Canadian AGRA. Thus the unit operated without an armament section from 6 August 1944 until the early part of December.

A week after landing, the CREME, Lt-Col F. J. Lyle, asked this unit to supply one officer and eighteen men to assist 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop in modifying 63 Bren Carriers into flame throwing carriers.

On 1 September, 23 Bren carriers were received into the shop to be modified in one day. They were completed on schedule.

In early September, the workshop supplied fourteen vehicle mechanics to make up two more sections of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit thus production in the shop was cut down. Four days later, a further loss of four lorries with drivers was suffered. They were loaned for four months to RCASC.

Early in December 1944, CREME ordered this workshop to supply an AWD of 22 vehicle mechanics to the Canadian Army Vehicle Park for inspections and first line repairs. This AWD under Lt J.C.G. Jarvis did a good job. The results of this were that the main shop was working with approximately 40 vehicle mechanics away from the shop. To offset these conditions, the workshop employed a number of civilian mechanics. The AWD returned to the unit in the early part of January 1945, having been replaced by a complete second echelon workshop.

On 24 December, a warning alert order was received and the unit was made responsible for guarding and checking of the northwestern outskirts of Herenthals, Belgium. Thus Christmas 1944 was spent with the entire unit confined to barracks and an extra heavy guard on duty.

In the latter part of January 1945, nineteen Weasels were sent into the shop to be repaired in preparation for the advance into Germany. This was a tough assignment as the vehicles had been sitting out in the vehicle park, were all frozen and all needed clutches. The repair was completed by cannibalizing and scrounging the parts. Eighteen out of a possible nineteen were required.

March and April were the two best months of the shop production. During those two months while at Nijmegen, the shop completed an average of over 100 vehicles per week of which only a small percentage were first echelon.

The workshop was set up in Hengelo, Holland at the time of the German capitulation.

Workshop locations throughout the advance were:

**France :**

Beny-Sur-Mer	4 August 1944 to 29 August 1944
Thiberville	29 August 1944 to 8 September 1944
Abbeville	8 September 1944 to 16 September 1944
Dohem	16 September 1944 to 26 September 1944
Croix near Lille	26 September 1944 to 10 October 1944

**Belgium:**

Wieze near Alost	10 October 1944 to 2 December 1944
Herenthals	2 December 1944 to 2 March 1945

**Holland:**

Nijmegen	2 March 1945 to 2 May 1945
Hengelo	2 May 1945 to 31 May 1945
Apeldoorn	31 May 1945 to ---

During the largest part of the campaign this workshop had been working with a considerable number of its vehicle mechanics attached out permanently, so that the work that it had turned out, both in quantity and quality, had been good. Just before the move of the unit from Nijmegen to Hengelo the 2i/c, Capt Wallace, and the workshop officer, Capt R. W. Anderson, returned to Canada on rotation leave. This left three officers to move and run the workshop as replacements were not received until two weeks later.

The workshop was made up of personnel newly arrived in England from Canada, personnel from holding units and training establishments, with only a few who had previous field experience. The first time that the unit had worked together as a functioning workshop was after it had landed in France. The morale and health, of the unit has been good throughout the campaign.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop, RCEME**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop, which could be found camped in the Surrey Hills near Dorking in mid-July 1944, finally received its movement order and broke camp at 0900 hours, Sunday, 30 July 1944. The unit boarded a Victory ship along with 661 Air Observation Post Squadron of the Royal Artillery, and after four and one-half days afloat (waiting for calm weather to unload) landed just outside Beny-sur-Mer.

All ranks were expecting enormous quantities of work, but none at all was forthcoming and the first week on the continent was spent in digging in and discovering that the people of Normandy had little wine and were not very happy about their liberation. One busy section was the gun shop which was split in two on the second day in France, half being sent to No. 1 AWD and the other half to 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop, RCEME.

The vehicle section was given the task of installing Wasp [flame throwing] equipment on 36 Bren carriers. The time limit was one day, and with the aid of fitters from two outside shops, the job was completed in time.

The next task was to repair a large number of tanks from “crocks” in the shortest possible time. The vehicle section was attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop to help put that programme over, while the armament section worked in conjunction with other gun men checking and repairing the tank’s guns.

In the third week in August, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop almost ceased to exist with sections attached to most of the other workshops in the vicinity. At that time, the vehicle section was attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop, the armament section split between 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop and No. 1 AWD, and the carpenters attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop.

This era was the heyday of buckshee captured vehicles. This situation finally cleared itself in the long trek across France and Belgium.

The workshop was on the move for three days, harbouring at night, and carrying on again the following morning. This took the workshop from near Caen across the Seine to a location outside Abbeyville. This location turned out to be a mud-hole. Fortunately the stay there was very short-lived.

The next move took the shop just outside Cassel, which, while not so muddy, still presented difficulties. This location was not far from Armentieres and Lille, and recreational trips were run to these places, which gave all ranks their first real taste of France.

After a month’s stay near Cassel, the workshop moved into Ghent and, it is believed, was the first unit to be stationed in that city. A small uniform factory was used as billets, the shop proper being set up on the concrete foundation of what had once been a German barracks. The reception the shop received in Ghent was marvellous. After a long stay in the muddy fields and bush of France, Ghent seemed like a paradise.

While in Ghent the workshop began to service more and more of the non-Canadian units attached to First Canadian Army Troops. This resulted in quite a variety of vehicles - as many as 54 different makes and types at once - and also a very serious parts problem. About this time the unit was officially made a specialist workshop - specializing in heavy vehicles. This somewhat reduced production, but did a lot to increase the morale and the experience of all concerned.

After a very enjoyable stay in Ghent, the unit moved to Turnhout. The long cold, fireless winter in Turnhout was one of hard work, freezing quarters, and steadily rising production, which saw the unit reach its peak production week of 105 completed vehicles. The Christmas spirit shadowed with the "Battle of the Bulge" and the threat of a German paratroop attack. The Christmas festivities included the customary Christmas dinner with copious beer, extra delicacies, and the officers and WOs in the role of waiters, along with a Christmas party for the local orphans and a Christmas dance.

With the winter over and the impending push to the Rhine, the unit moved to Vught and set up shop directly across the road from the famous concentration camp, which then contained approximately 15,000 Dutch collaborators. Here production soared, with one section of the vehicle shop, composed almost entirely of civilian labour left behind at Turnhout, adding a weekly average of 30 vehicles to the normal production. This was the first wholesale experiment in civilian labour and it proved quite satisfactory. Parts at that time were very scarce and the group at Turnhout relied entirely on the reclamation facilities of the army BLP.

After the Rhine had been crossed, the unit moved to Enschede, its present location, setting up in a textile mill that the Germans had used as a stores depot. The textile mill adapted itself very well to the needs of an Infantry Troops Workshop and has proved by far the best site the shop had ever had.

During this period the unit lost all of the officers except one, had a new 2i/c posted in and lost him as well, all on rotation leave to Canada. This amounted to a turnover of six officers in six weeks, ending up with one Maj and four Lts; three of the latter having just arrived from Canada.

After VE-Day, the unit had quite a splurge of celebrations, finally settling down to work with considerable time allotted to sports, bi-weekly educational trips to points of interest in Holland and Germany as well as lectures on rehabilitation.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop, RCEME**

On Tuesday, 6 June 1944, D-Day, the unit was stationed in a small woods at Longwood near Winchester, England, and was at the time, under command 1 British Corps in preparation for the move to France. In the evening of 7 June, a movement order was received to move to the Aldershot area the following afternoon.

From 8 June to 16 June, the unit put in time in the Aldershot area, awaiting the order that would take us to the port of loading. Training was carried out particularly in the use of mine detectors.

On 17 June, the first flight, consisting of just over half the unit, mainly workshop rather than administrative personnel, set out in convoy for RCPR 4 near Winchester. Maj J. B. Annand was in charge with Capt H. M. Home as second in command, leaving Capt S. L. Erwin in charge of the second flight. A period of waiting then ensued, due to exceptionally windy weather. Gradually, our turn came nearer.

On 26 June at 1330 hours, we were warned to be ready to move off in convoy at 1645 hours. The convoy moved with frequent long halts down to the dock area. The docks were reached at dusk and loading began at 2315 hours. By 0045 hours the next morning, 25 June, the last vehicle had gone on board. Shortly afterwards, the LST moved off shore and dropped anchor until daylight.

The passage across to France was rough, but free of enemy action. By 2130 hours on 27 June, we had dropped anchor in the calm water off the coast of France near the village of Graye-Sur-Mer.

On the next day, 28 June, the LST grounded on the beach at 0615 hours. At 0830 the front was dropped, and the vehicles moved out on to French soil through less than a foot of water.

The workshop location was a very large, open, grain field off the main road between Tialleville and La Delivarande. Other REME and RCEME workshops: six in number, were located side by side along this road. Vehicles had to be spaced eighty yards apart as there was no hope of concealment. We were warned to dig in for the night as a considerable number of anti-personnel bombs were being dropped.

From 29 June to 13 July, the unit remained in the area near La Delivarande. During that period, very little enemy action was experienced. Just the occasional German plane would come over and the AA guns would open up on them, but no bombs were ever dropped anywhere near us. The front at the nearest point to us was some six miles away to the south where it curved around still some miles north of Caen.

The action of our own troops against the enemy was very much in evidence. On 7 July, we witnessed the RAF raid on Caen. Four hundred and fifty Lancasters flew overhead at a few hundred feet. On 9 July, Caen fell to our troops.

Work for the shop was practically nil during the first weeks after landing. Time was put in stripping assemblies off badly smashed or burned tanks in the nearby BLP, a few watches and instruments were also repaired.

On 11 July, we came under command of 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps and on 13 July the unit moved to a new area near Beny-Sur-Mer.

At this location on 17 July, we were joined by the second flight of the unit. Here the work began to come into the shop in quantity. Between 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop and this unit, a Corps Backloading Point (CBP) was established and maintained.

The shop moved on 23 July to a new location about a mile north of Caen near the deserted village of La Folle. Here the difficulty of dead animals was met with. Apart from this, the location was, a good one.

The second night in camp brought in some excitement. About midnight, enemy flares were dropped over Caen, and following that bombs were dropped all around the area by one or two enemy planes. Anti-personnel bombs were dropped in clusters two hundred yards south of camp, and one was discovered next day to have come down between two of our vehicles. An intensive and voluntary programme of digging in deeper took place next day.

The number of "B" vehicles brought in for repair gradually increased. Most of the jobs, however coming from the CBPs were in very bad shape. Often it was a question of making one vehicle out of two or more of the same type. The gun shop had a rush programme on AGRA 5.5-inch guns on 2 August, and for the next few days the fitters were very busy.

On the night of 3-4 August, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop half a mile to the south of us were strafed at night and lost one man killed and twenty wounded.

Despite efforts to protect food and utensils from flies, which were thick in this area, more than half the men at times were suffering from dysentery.

On 21 August, this unit went under command CREME First Canadian Army Troops, who had arrived in France some three weeks previously. On the same day, we moved to a new location some miles south of Caen near Cintheaux, close to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop. Flies were scarce here, and most of the dysentery disappeared.

A heavy programme of tank repair was put on by the tank shops in this location. Officers and men were loaned to them from this unit's shop. "B" vehicle work was not excessive.

A move to La Haye-de-Cailleville took place on 2 September. We stayed here only one day, but we remember this location because it was the first touch of undamaged France.

On 3 September, the unit moved on from Cailleville to St. Andre, a small village some miles past Rouen. The convoy included 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop, and together made a 200-vehicle convoy. The occasion will be remembered by all personnel for the magnificent scenery in the vicinity of the River Seine.

During our stay in this location, from 3 September to 14 September, the unit was chosen to act as guard of honour at the ceremony in which General Crerar presented a plaque to the Mayor of Rouen in commemoration of the city's liberation. This took place on 12 September.

On 14 September, the shop moved to Campagne-les-Hesdin in a field until 1 October. Here contact was made with a good-sized CBP, where jobs were not all third or fourth echelon, and production for this period showed a considerable increase. Periods of rainy weather became more frequent, but it was learned that our next stop would be on hard surface and under cover. The last few vehicles to leave this site on 1 October for Antwerp had to be towed out of the field due to the muddy conditions.

The workshop location in Antwerp was part of a large factory used by the Germans for the repair of Messerschmitt 109 planes, and was exceptionally good. Other sections of the factory were occupied by 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Advance Base Workshop, RCEME. Motor vehicle work was plentiful in the area, and for the first time jobs began to come in directly from units. Towards the end, 60% of the motor vehicle shop work was second echelon.

About the middle of October, the V-2 rockets began. On 19 October, two rockets landed one after the other about a quarter of a mile away from the shop. In the days that followed, the rockets increased in number and buzz bombs were mixed in with them.

Another flying bomb on 2 November dove among some houses a few hundred yards to the north of the shop in the area where the Advanced Base Workshop men were billeted. Fortunately the incident occurred while the men were still at work. Civilian casualties were numerous, mainly due to flying glass.

The workshop moved from Antwerp to the small town of Veghel where the men were billeted with civilians. The men were treated very well and in most cases were accepted as part of the family.

Around the middle of December, trouble began to develop on the American front and, by Christmas day, the German's Ardennes drive was approaching its maximum penetration. For fear of paratroop landings in the north, units in the rear areas were kept on the alert. On 24 December, Christmas Day, and 26 December, the unit stood to in defence positions from 0600 hours to 0800 hours.

On the day before Christmas, the unit gave a party to the children from the homes where the men were billeted. There were over a hundred children present, some families consisting of as many as seven. The whole business was a great success.

During the stay in Veghel, so much work was received direct from units that little or no jobs were taken in from the CBP.

On 21 January, the draw was made for the first leave vacancies to England.

The workshop's one and only fire happened on 1 February, when the receipt and inspection tent went up in flames during the evening. The business was over in about five minutes. A good many of the records and a few watches were burnt.

On 6 March, the unit made a short move to Vught near S/Hertogenbosch in a large modern Dutch barracks and remained there for one month.

On 12 March the body of Private Cromwell was taken from the canal beside which the workshop had been located in Veghel. He had not been with the unit very long when he disappeared on 8 February without leaving a trace. He was the only fatal casualty the unit had.

The next move was into Germany to what was left of Cleve. The stay here was not a long one, but the shop was very busy and a considerable amount of night work was put in and the week of 12 - 19 April showed the highest weekly production achieved to that date.

The shop moved to Groningen, Holland on 21 April. Here the men were again billeted with civilians. Some of the billets were so fine that the men had to take a shower each evening before going to them.

On the evening of 4 May, the news came that the Germans in Holland and North-West Europe had surrendered. Groningen went mad. The centre of the town that night was jammed with people singing and shouting. Some were letting off fireworks.

VE-Day was an anti-climax after the previous demonstrations. The morning was spent in loading equipment for a move the following day to Oldenburg, Germany. A very successful unit dance was held in the evening.

At 0830 hours the following morning, 9 May, the unit moved off to Germany once again, under command of CREME 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps. The location this time was a fair sized airfield where the control tower was occupied for offices and personnel and two large hangars for the workshop. About half the unit went under canvas.

On 2 June the unit paraded, along with other administrative units of 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps for a GOC's inspection by Lt-Gen Simmonds. This was the last formal inspection in which the unit participated.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop, RCEME**

This unit sailed from Canada in June 1943 en route for the UK; and shortly after its arrival was functioning as a workshop, a part of First Canadian Army Troops. In May 1944, it was attached to 1 (Brit) Corps, under which it proceeded to the continent, disembarking on the Normandy beaches on 16 June 1944, being the first third-line workshop in France. The workshop was set up, and work commenced on the following morning.

The first tanks the unit worked on were drawn from the beach casualties, and many had been hit at close range. The unit as a whole pitched in with great industry, and work that normally would have necessitated fourth echelon facilities was accomplished in the fields of Normandy. In some cases, everything but the hull was removed, the shell holes patched up, and reconditioned components installed. Tanks that were beyond the scope of this workshop were complete washouts. On the first workshop site, one of the main factors was the setting up of special ancillary shops that were devoted to the reconditioning of various tank components – elevating gears, traversing gears, transmissions, etc. During this period, a great deal of individual initiative was necessary to overcome unforeseen difficulties. Our Normandy setup was a Mecca of accomplishment “sans red tape” from the craftsman's point of view.

During the last few days in July, a large AWD was sent out to the neighbourhood of Beyeaux to modify “Priests” or Ram tanks into “Kangaroos”, or personnel carriers. This work was specially done to prepare for the Caen-Falaise breakthrough. The job consisted of removing the 105-mm guns and welding on armour plate for the protection of the infantry personnel that the “Kangaroos” were to disgorge in support of armoured formations. A deadline was set for the completion of the task, but by working from dawn to dusk, with an inspired co-operative effort by all involved, it was finished several days ahead of schedule. For the successful effort put forth by all ranks in the AWD, they were publicly thanked by the DDME, First Canadian Army, as well as other high-ranking officers in the British and Canadian armies.

After the mopping up of the Falaise pocket, the unit was kept busy at Cintheux repairing tanks and other equipments, which had been damaged in the Caen-Falaise area.

The next workshop site was at Steenvoorde on the Franco-Belgian border where a number of AFVs, which had taken part in the long pursuit across France, were again put into fighting trim. An interesting sidelight of our stay in this location was a unit church parade to St. George's Memorial Church, Ypres. This service was the first regular one held there since May 1940.

At Mortsel, a suburb of Antwerp, the unit became well acquainted with rockets and "doodle-bugs". These missiles were not soothing to the nerves, but in common with other RCEME units in the vicinity, we managed to keep production going.

In Veghel, Holland, the threat of German paratroop landings during the Christmas season and the necessary stand-to kept the workshop on the alert. Many incidents (including the stopping and checking up of a railway train and the apprehension of a Dutch major-general in mufti) all helped to relieve the monotony of the situation.

While the workshop was in Cleve, the collapse occurred of the Nazi spectre that had clouded the continental skies for the past five years. This news more than compensated those involved for the long months of hard work.

## **4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop, RCEME**

4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop, RCEME was one of the last shops in First Canadian Army Troops to cease work in England; and was taking in and doing repairs right up to the day before proceeding to London to embark for France. From the time of the warning order, the unit vehicles had been waterproofed and each section had been completely packed and on wheels.

The workshop arrived off the coast of France at Courseulles on 30 July 1944. The disembarkation took most of the day, and the vehicles assembled about a mile from the beach and were joined by the marching party. At approximately 2400 hours, the convoy moved to the first unit location on the Caen/Basly road, one mile north of Caen, dispersed the vehicles, and bedded down for the night.

The location was a poor one, a long valley with practically no flat ground with the exception of the road running down the middle of the camp. The unit dug in to some extent, and the sections set up in their allotted portions of the area. Second Corps CBP was about a mile north of the unit and tanks and guns were drawn from there to work on. Repairable "B" vehicles in the BLP were non-existent, all being complete washouts, so the "B" vehicle personnel were used to work on tanks. The weather throughout the unit's stay there was hot and dry, bringing with it the dust, which is so familiar to all troops who stayed in that sector. Then came the flies and wasps to make life miserable, and last but by no means least, the "Normandy Glide" was rampant and spared no one. On 4 August, shortly after midnight, the camp was attacked by three enemy aircraft, which dropped anti-personnel bombs and strafed the area. The camp was dug in but the men sleeping in the tents didn't have sufficient time to take cover. Twenty were wounded and one killed; and the next day, another died of wounds. For the remainder of the period at this location, the majority of the camp slept below ground level. On the same day, Lt-Col W. McKinlay took over command of the workshop, Maj R.A. Mitchell going to 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop.

At this time, an AWD of 60 men was sent to Bayeaux to assist in converting M7 SP gun mounts to armoured personnel carriers, which were used very successfully in the advance on Falaise. Personnel from the unit under Lt H. B. Charters set up 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps BLP at Cormelles and administered the point until the Recovery Company took it over. Twenty-two pioneers were attached to the unit at this time to do reclamation work at the BLP and stayed until after VE-Day.

This was the first time that battle casualty equipments were repaired in the shop, and difficulty was encountered in obtaining spare parts for items which would normally outlast the life of the equipment, but



which were damaged by shellfire. Reclamation from crock parks proved to be the only solution, as it was impossible to predict the items that the stores section should be scaled for.

On 21 August, a move was started to Robertmesnil, just south of Caen on the Caen-Falaise highway. Service Corps transport was unavailable so the unit moved in sections, some trucks running a shuttle service. In the new location, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop, and this unit were grouped in the one area around an Army BLP. The location was a good one with lots of room and level ground. At this point, an intensive tank programme was completed to supply armour for the drive to Falaise and 20 tanks, 5 SPs and one armoured OP vehicle were completed in twelve days. By this time, the "A" vehicle section had modified a Sherman III tank with a damaged turret into an ARV, which proved invaluable as time went on.

Work continued in the shop seven days a week, but the commanding officer started a plan whereby a fraction of the unit was off each day, giving each man one day's rest a week. This was greatly appreciated and the work benefited from it.

The next move on 2 September, was a long one from Robertmesnil to Cailly, twelve miles north-east of Rouen. The reception given the convoy by the French people was tremendous. After this third move, the process of unloading was so well organized that work could be started four hours after arriving at the site and after one day, everything was in full swing.

The workshop was now in the centre of farming country and dairy and farm products provided a welcome supplement to army rations. On off days, visits were made to Rouen where the main attractions seemed to be ice cream, perfumes, and other liquids of unknown character but none the less an improvement over Calvados. Prices seemed high, but were only a fraction of those encountered later.

Since the war was moving quickly and transport was scarce, it was decided to make the unit fully mobile, and ten load carriers from the BLP were repaired and taken into use in the unit.

The Canadian Legion supervisor, Mr. Churchill, did a good job in supplying entertainment and comforts for the unit and a canteen of sorts had always been maintained.

On 13 September, the workshop moved to Campagne-les-Hesdin in the Pas de Calais area. Here the workshop was situated in a large field and was a good site until rains made the footing too soft for tanks and mud holes developed at each entrance. An International half-track was taken into use where wheeled vehicles could not get around. At this point, the "B" vehicle work increased. The vehicles that had been in service since D-Day were finding their way back to the crock parks in a repairable condition. Tank work was normal, but gun work fell off.

The next unit location was Antwerp, where a programme overhauling Ram armoured personnel carriers was expected. In order to obtain spares, a unit convoy was run to Bayeux from Hesdin to 14 AOD.

The trip to Antwerp came up very suddenly on 29 September and the workshop moved on eight hours notice. A light convoy started at 0800 hours and arrived in one day. The heavier vehicles stayed overnight on the Belgian border. This location was in a former Messerschmitt repair shop in South Antwerp. The area was shared with 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Advanced Base Workshop for a week, and then the unit occupied the whole building. Here, for the first time on the continent, the workshop was completely under cover, and the men housed in buildings. There were washrooms, showers, and offices all prepared. The expected tank programme did not come off, but there was plenty of both "A" and "B" vehicle in the nearby ABP. The First Canadian Army Vehicle Park had moved their gun park to Boom and as a result of exposure to the weather, no maintenance, and transportation, well over a hundred guns needed workshop repairs. Second echelon work was done on some SAR tanks and "E" Squadron of 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment supplied a large percentage. Second echelon work on "B" vehicles increased tremendously as there were many units in the area. Army HQ was nearby, and brought with it its quota of caravan work.

By the end of two weeks, V-2 rockets started to land in the city, but not much was known about them, and as none had landed near, no one was particularly worried. On 25 October, Lt-Col McKinlay took over duties as CREME First Canadian Army Troops, and Lt-Col E. H. Miller became commanding officer of the workshop. On the afternoon of 30 October, a V-1 landed in the middle of the camp area.

Approximately 25 men were injured by flying glass, three went to hospital and three were confined to bed in the MIR. Nine-days later a V-2 rocket hit a house right behind the workshop. A rescue crew was organized and got the inhabitants out of the house safely.

Building maintenance and repair occupied a lot of time in the ancillary section as frequently happens in semi-static positions, but production in all sections increased steadily with improved working conditions. Salvage dumps supplied off-time work for the instrument section and the armourers.

A prototype was made here of a modified Wasp flame thrower, experiments were carried out with the Squid exhaust smoke discharger, and an experimental personnel-carrying sled was built to tow behind tanks.

On 21 November, the workshop moved to another part of the factory to make room for 21 Advanced Base Workshop.

Up to this time, expendable stores such as sheet metal steel plate, strap and angle iron had been unobtainable in quantity from Ordnance, but this had caused no particular trouble as German or local stock had always been available near the workshop location. But in a static position, these stocks had become used up and it was only with great difficulty that this material was obtained.

Civilian labour was first employed here and was very useful for general duty tasks, releasing army personnel for other jobs. Gun work from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Vehicle Park increased and 73 artillery equipments were overhauled in 2½ months.

Unit dances became a weekly affair, and Christmas and New Year's celebrations were as enthusiastic as those in England. Forty-eight hour passes to Brussels started that fall.

On 19 December, Lt-Col K. B. McAdam, MBE, took over command of the workshop and Lt-Col B. H. Miller left to return to Canada.

On 8 January, the unit moved to Eindoven. A tank AWD under Capt H. L. Beanlands, had been there for a week and had cleaned up a site for the "B" vehicle shop. The area allotted for the rest of the unit was in the meantime given to a Service Corps supply point so the remainder of the unit was billeted in two schools, which were none too comfortable having had no heat for months. The plumbing conveniences, designed for small children, created quite a problem for six-foot men. After two weeks, space was found in a "B" vehicle section and the men were billeted in private homes in the neighbourhood. The "B" vehicle section was set up as a complete unit in their original location.

Tank work reached its peak in this location, doing two refitment and overhaul programmes for armoured personnel carrier regiments. Fifty-seven "A" vehicles were completed in thirteen days and 77 tanks overhauled in the second flap in twelve days. For these programmes, men from "B" vehicle and armament sections worked on tanks and the whole unit went full out seven days a week and three evenings a week. The remainder of the tank work was taken in exclusively from 3 AFV Servicing Unit (British). Production on "B" vehicles reached sixty vehicles a week.

Several Ram Wasps were modified here, and the flame equipment overhauled and tested.

In April, preparations started for a move into the field again. Thirty tents were manufactured and camp equipment overhauled, and on 28 April, the unit moved to Enschede. The shop site was a large warehouse with good standings but the tent lines were on a sandy field, which was not the best for living conditions. The whole shop personnel worked for a week cleaning the area and fencing it off from the civilians, who came around in droves to barter or buy cigarettes or food. But the work was worthwhile, as the working

area was good, and a good recreation hall was cleaned out. Work was drawn in from 15 ABP and was continuing when VE-Day arrived.

Throughout the whole campaign, very little third echelon work was done. Repair was mainly replacement of assemblies and overflow from second line workshops. The advantage of larger shops and fewer moves showed up in the production as the following summary of work from the continent shows:

“A” vehicles	684
“B” vehicles	1,907
Artillery equipment	126
Telecommunication sets	677
Instruments	2,057
Small arms	3,011
Misc	459

## **12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

This workshop is a little unusual due to the fact that it was formed in the field in Italy on 13 July 1944. The reason for this was that the type of warfare at that time in that particular theatre called for infantry more than armour. 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was to be part of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division.

The brigade was formed, using as a nucleus the 4<sup>th</sup> Princess Louise Dragoon Guards from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Light Anti-aircraft Regt from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops, the Westminster Regt (Motors) and a portion of the PLF (?) - the latter two units being from 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division which were playing a somewhat restricted role in the battle.

12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop left Italy on 1 March 1945 as part of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, proceeding from Marseille through France and Belgium to Oudenarde, the DP, the ultimate destination being Astene just south of Ghent. It was only then that we heard of the Brigade being disbanded to keep the formation uniform with similar formations in this theatre.

Instead of being disbanded, however, the unit went under command 1<sup>st</sup> Echelon (15 March 1945) and eventually came under command HQ First Canadian Army Troops.

The role to be filled now was a servicing unit for First Canadian Army Vehicle Park. The details of this service being the inspection and repair (depending on the intake) of all vehicles received by 1<sup>st</sup> CAMP from the vehicle companies. This work had been, up till this time, carried out by a British workshop. No provision in war establishments had been made for this situation, that is, new vehicles arriving at the Army Vehicle Park unfit for operations or other than class 1 [condition].

## **1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Engineer Equipment Workshop, RCEME**

This unit was mobilized in England during January 1944. The unit was stationed in Epsom until it proceeded to NW Europe on 28 July 1944.

After the sea voyage of two days and two nights on a liberty ship, the unit was landed at Courseulles, France, on 2 August 1944. All personnel and vehicles were disembarked by 1700 hours without incident.

The unit proceeded to La Mer, the first site. Welders were attached to the Kangaroo LAD for the purpose of converting self-propelled guns to personnel carriers. It was here that the unit experienced its first taste of battle. The roar of the heavy artillery, the drone of the aircraft, and the rattling and banging of transport

on the road continuing 24 hours of the day. Our G1098 equipment was collected and found to be in perfect condition.

The beginning of September saw the unit moved to Mondeville, on the outskirts of Caen, adjacent to a dump established by 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Workshop and Park Company, RCE. It was here that the workshop began in earnest and experienced the first difficulties of “repair in the field”. The first task was checking 100 Evinrude Outboard Motors with no navigable rivers this side of the channel. A “canal” was built with steel tanks, and the 100 motors were completed in the record time of three days. The effort here was hampered by an attack of dysentery.

The next area allotted for an engineer dump was Abbeville and after a trip of some 200 miles, the workshop was set up in a technical school at Abbeville. Work here was routine, as only a moderate amount of engineer equipment was in use.

From Abbeville, the unit crossed the border into Belgium and on to the Grand Place, Ypres. The routine of repair on engineer equipment was brightened by the novel job of the assembly of twelve narrow gauge diesel locomotives. In Ypres, the Church of Saint George, dedicated to the units that had served in that sector during the First World War had been forcibly closed during the German occupation. This unit had the singular honour of holding the first service in this church since the liberation. Prior to the service, all personnel gave a hand in preparing the church.

From Ypres, the unit moved to Lierre and set up the workshop in a margarine factory. The site was well suited as a canal bordered one end of the lot. The canal, besides being used as a testing ground for the tugboats and Evinrudes, was also the proving ground of the swimming ability of many members of the unit who had the fortune or misfortune of being “dunked”. The unit sustained much damage to billets and equipment by the repeated visits of V-1 and V-2s, which fell short en route to Antwerp. Luckily all personnel escaped injury. It was here that AQMS Jacobs F. D. earned his Mention-in Despatches and his GOC-in-C’s certificate for his actions during a V-1 attack. The move from Lierre was just in the nick of time, for six hours later, a V-2 reduced the area to a shambles.

The workshop moved from Lierre to a weaving plant in Tilburg. Christmas was celebrated here, darkened only by a possible attack by enemy paratroopers. Work was completely spent on engineer equipment. At noon on 1 February 1945, the workshop was completely demolished, but no personnel suffered major injury. The unit suffered a great loss, however, in that many civilians, great friends of all the personnel, were killed. The CO and a party of five men attended the mass burial service as a token of the unit’s heart-felt grief.

The next location was Groesbeek, a suburb of Nijmegen. This was considered by all to be the most ideal location. The unit was quartered in Nissen huts, which were extremely comfortable. Work here was carried on in great tempo due to the build up for the attack across the Rhine.

From Groesbeek, the workshop moved through Germany at Emmerich back into Holland to Hengelo, where it was located at the cessation of hostilities.

Altogether the unit has occupied nine sites: four in the open, two under canvas, and two in billets made of sheeting and corrugated iron. The workshop register shows that the two turners between them turned out 178 jobs on the two lathes; the two electricians repaired 212 batteries in addition to their work on plant and vehicles, and the remainder of the shop combined together to repair 904 Evinrude outboard motors, 332 Petters, and 38 tug boats and other miscellaneous engineering equipment, amounting to 155 jobs. The workshop was not wholly engaged repairing sapper equipment, as the records also show 412 miscellaneous types of “B” vehicles and 134 motorcycles having been repaired.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Engineer Equipment Workshop, RCEME**

This unit was formed from a nucleus of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian M. E. Workshop and Park Coy, RCE, who were remustered to RCEME on 12 January 1944 to effect repairs to heavy class engineer equipment. This nucleus was reinforced by RCEME personnel and from then on was known as 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Engineer Equipment Workshop (B).

It was not until 30 July 1944 that the workshop boarded the LCTs at dusk and set out for Juno beach in Normandy. Great difficulty was experienced in unloading the heavy vehicles due to the sandy nature of the beach.

In the marshalling area, the workshop was detained until after dark, and given instructions to pull out after ten o'clock to a pasture near Basly and Beny-Sur-Mer. The first mistake on the continent occurred when a wrong road was taken in the dark. Basly was reached about three o'clock in the morning on 1 August.

The workshop stayed at Basly nearly a month. During this time, one hundred and eleven jobs were completed, many of which were drowned transit casualties and operator mishaps. The workshop lines were extremely dusty and dry. The men lived in slit trenches in order to seek cover from shrapnel from ack-ack. The oddity of Basly camp was that, as soon as night fell, Jerry would send over a plane to take pictures. It is the guess of every man in the unit that every ack-ack gun started firing at will at the said intruder.

After the close of the Falaise Gap, the workshop was ordered up to a place selected by the recce party, to an orchard outside St. Pierre-Sur-Dives in the heart of the Calvados country.

While in St Pierre very little work was done by the workshop, a total of twenty-one jobs, as the Canadian Army had surged forward by leaps and bounds, leaving the workshop so far behind that the machines were never evacuated back for repair but held in forward areas.

On 10 August, the unit moved to Hesdin, taking over a Luftwaffe barracks for the workshop though the premises had no doubt been operated as French cavalry barracks. By the time the unit had settled down, the army had moved on still further and the trickle of jobs was small. Only thirty-three were completed, but a lot of road clearance was conducted as this unit was the only RCEME unit for miles. It was at Hesdin that this unit fought its first real battle, which was against the FFI. This band of hoodlums was put in their place.

On 2 October 1944, the unit next moved to Ghent, Belgium. There was a little more activity during the three months spent there. During the last month there was just a trickle, or road clearance of "B" vehicles.

On 31 December 1944, the workshop moved on to Vught, Holland, and New Years Eve was spent very quietly, as no liquor was available. While in this location, 407 major jobs were completed in spite of numerous buzz bombs and German artillery shelling.

On Friday, 20 April 1945, the workshop was convoyed to Zutphen on the [?] River in Holland, and remained there right through to VE-Day. During that period 104 major jobs were completed. On VE-Day unit personnel and civilians joined on the streets of Zutphen to celebrate the all-important day.

During the workshop's activities up to VE-Day, the only death in the unit was that of Pte Cromwell, RCASC, killed in an automobile accident on Christmas Eve. One serious injury occurred, and two members of the unit were "Mentioned in Despatches" for outstanding service in the field.

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Recovery Company, RCEME**

3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Recovery Company, consisting of 200 all ranks, was formed on 23 May 1944 with seventy-five percent of the personnel fresh over from Canada with no practical experience. On 15 June, all drivers

and mechanics were sent to Arborfield for a two-week recovery course. The remaining few weeks were spent in preparation for the North-West Europe campaign.

The unit, under command of Maj W. M. Dalrymple, embarked for France on 1 August 1944 and disembarked at Normandy on 3 August. It was met at the marshalling area by Lt-Col P. J. Lyle and Maj B. H Miller, OC and 2i/c RCEME Army Troops. Later that evening, the unit was moved to its first campsite in France near Cazzele. All personnel had been warned of mines and booby traps and were made to sleep under the vehicles. A few enemy planes were seen overhead but our ack-ack friends soon drove them off. Next morning saw all personnel busy with pick and shovel. The following night, Jerry came over again, and early next morning saw the pick and shovel brigade busy with dig-outs going down another foot or two without the slightest sound of the usual beef that follows this type of manual labour.

On 6 August, the unit was given its first task, forward lifting of tanks. This task was completed by Nos. 3 and 9 sections. Now, with a feeling of security, all were anxious to get into harness. All sections were stationed at the same location, and the first week saw about fifty percent of the unit down with dysentery, which seemed to be general throughout the army.

On 12 August, the sections were divided with HQ, 8, 9, and 10 sections moving to a location south of Caen, between Caen and Falaise. The trip through Caen was the first glimpse of destruction caused by our comrades-in-arms. In this location, the first Army BLP was set up.

No. 12 Section, or Railhead Evacuation Section, was attached to Army Roadhead for all purposes except administration. As the advance had moved ahead so rapidly, this unit was also responsible for clearing the vehicles left in their area. This was not a pleasant task as many of the tanks still contained partly burned bodies that had to be removed to official cemeteries.

On 3 September 1944 the unit moved again; this time in a north-easterly direction passing through St Pierre-Sur-Dives and Lisieux. The French people were very friendly, and at this point, fresh eggs once more became a morning meal. On 7 September, the unit moved approximately eighty miles, and camped in an apple orchard. Another Army BLP was taken over and, by this time, the sections were well scattered, which made administration very difficult.

On 9 September 44, the OC was posted to a workshop, and Maj S.L.A. Bourbonnais was given command. Maj Bourbonnais arrived just in time to receive our first "blast". One of our transport drivers who did not bother to familiarise himself with bridge classifications, drove a loaded transporter over a class-40 bridge, swamping all the pontoons. Needless to say from this point on, all trailers were unloaded where necessary.

By this time, a small town in Belgium was reached called Thielt, where there was a pub every second door and all kinds of glamorous women, a rare treat to men who had seen nothing but ABPs and apple orchards. At this point, the sections were together for a short period. The town held a ball in our honour.

From Thielt the HQ moved to Turnhout, and was spared the flying bombs that Nos. 9 and 10 Sections had to contend with. No. 10 Section, while operating 7 Army BLP in Antwerp had many close calls. No. 9 Section, now stationed in Polycoon, near Antwerp, was in direct line of V-1s and V-2s headed for the port of Antwerp, and had many shivering moments.

By this time Christmas had once more rolled around and, despite the warnings issued by First Canadian Army of the possibility of an attack by paratroopers, sparkling spirits found their way into well-stuffed stomachs of turkey and plum pudding and all were merry. Christmas night saw the first and only casualty. Private Bertrand of No. 11 Light Section was fatally injured while riding a motorcycle.

During the winter months, personnel on recovery posts were kept extra busy due to the icy roads. These posts were often operated by a crew of two men, due to the large number of recovery posts established. This meant twenty-four hour service and a seven-day week. These men could not be replaced because as many as three BLPs at one time were being operated.

The HQ next moved from Turnhout to a seminary near Tilburg and then to Nijmegen. Up to this time the unit had been directly under Administrative HQ First Canadian Army for all work, and under CREME Army Troops for administration. At this point, however, the unit came under CREME Army Troops completely. The next move was to Zenderen and eventually to Ootmarsum from where the glorious news of the cessation of hostilities was heard.

Although we are not a fighting unit, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Recovery Company go back with a sincere feeling of a job well done. Through the medium of Army BLPs, reclamation and controlled issue of spare parts, hundreds of vehicles have been kept in operation. Recovery posts were operated by small crews at widely-spread intervals, whose task it was to keep the roads clear and the supplies flowing through to the front lines.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit, RCEME**

With the formation of First Canadian Army Troops it, was felt by Commander RCEME, First Canadian Army Troops, that owing to the number of small units who had neither LAD nor RCEME personnel attached, he did not have sufficient control over the inspection and supervision of unit maintenance and first line repairs. Five groups of mechanics were formed from the five workshops in Army Troops, allocated so that each would serve a given number of small units. This came into being on 15 November 1943 under command of HQ RCEME First Canadian Army Troops and was administered by a captain.

The first major job was to inspect, and through inspection to educate, the units on care and maintenance, and also to carry out first line repairs on the spot.

The success of the formation of the five groups led to the establishment of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit on 15 May 1944. This unit is comprised of six sections fully equipped with tools, technical equipment, and first line MT spares. The sections are fully mobile and its success can be attributed to the fact that each section calls on the units it serves, not waiting for the units to have trouble first.

The next major job of work performed by 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit was supervision and training in waterproofing. When the new vehicle equipment was issued for operations, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit completely reconditioned and set all tolerances to ensure that, after waterproofing, the vehicle would have a more than even break for trouble-free performance. A waterproofing park was set up under supervision 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit and the respective smaller units directed to the park, which insured a complete RCEME inspection. The waterproofing of all units in First Canadian Army Troops was highly successful.

1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit landed in Normandy on 3 August 1944, and the respective sections were attached to strategically located units (for rations and quarters) and each apportioned a number of units to service. This method of operation has proved most successful; having such close contact with the units enabled the HQ 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit to have correct unit locations at all times and easily keep up with the fast movement of units, and also to act as advance information post covering RCEME services, which proved invaluable due to the great distance between the forward and rear areas.

On the formation of L of C Terminals and their coming under command for services, it was found necessary to form two more sections of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit to serve the thirty-odd new units. DDME authorized the attachment of fourteen bodies from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Troops Workshop, thereby enabling 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit to perform first line repair and give inspection to all units served by 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit under command First Canadian Army Troops Area. To show the volume of work, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit have completed 13,000 first line repairs and inspections since landing in Normandy on 3 August 1944.

The final phase of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit work (besides carrying out unit line repairs) will be the classification of vehicles for turn-in on the disbandment of First Canadian Army Troops Area Units, which they serve.

Through giving first line repairs to units who were without fitters or driver mechanics, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit have through “preventative maintenance”, prevented hundreds of minor vehicle discrepancies from developing into major workshop overhauls. 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Servicing Unit also ensured that all “A” and “B” vehicle modifications were carried out, and brought first-hand technical information to all units.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Radar Battery Workshop, RCEME**

In July 1944, the requirement for a radar battery employed in a counter mortar role was felt, and the DDME branch CMHQ was consulted as to whether or not a battery employing about ten radar equipments (Radar, AA, No. 3, Mark 2) could be serviced by RCEME. The artillery was informed immediately that this could be undertaken, provided about six weeks warning was given to train the necessary maintenance personnel in the equipment. No further word was heard, however, until the middle of September when the order was given to prepare the groundwork, and a copy of the proposed war establishment (21 Army Group) was forwarded to the DDME branch. A special course was laid on with the War Office to commence forthwith, and a unit AFG 1098 was drawn up. The principle feature of the war establishment was the attachment of armament artificers and a “ZL” [repair van] with each set for first echelon maintenance and repair, and two echelon detachments with an officer and an armament artificer, etc., one at each troop HQ. This gave a total of three officers, with one at battery headquarters, and eight armament artificers in a total war establishment of 39 all ranks.

On 14 November 1944, the unit was fully equipped and left Borden and proceeded to the marshalling area at Tilbury, landing at Arramanches on 18 November after a very slow channel crossing. From there it proceeded by easy stages to St. Leonards, northeast of Antwerp, where it joined the Radar Battery.

The OC of the workshop had joined the Battery on 5 November near Dunkirk where they were undergoing training. The battery had been mobilized in France and had received equipment that had already been in use in the theatre and was not in good condition. It early became apparent that, unless the radar equipment was at the optimum peak of performance, mortars would not be located. The reason for such a high percentage of armament artificers and officers in the workshop war establishment was now apparent. To use an equipment that was intended to pick up planes to locate mortar bombs in flight was demanding something far beyond the intention of the designers. However, as a similar battery was already in operation with the British, 21 Army Group was approached for all the available information and constant liaison was maintained thereafter with that headquarters.

On arrival at St. Leonards where the remainder of the personnel joined the unit, an immediate start was made to thoroughly check the equipments and modify them for the special role they were to be employed in. On 2 December 1944, the unit moved from St. Leonards with the battery deploying on Nijmegen Island. The sets seemed to work well and some mortar locations were given. However, Jerry flooded the island the following day and the sets had to be withdrawn. On 5 December, “A” troop with its RCEME detachment deployed facing the Maas near S’Hertogenbosch and from the start got mortar locations. A day later “B” Troop deployed southeast of Nijmegen. From then on it was practically a matter of routine, with the occasional maintenance problem arising. Six sets were deployed on a front stretching from about ten miles southeast of Nijmegen to twelve miles west of S’Hertogenbosch. As the line was fairly static, maintenance was not too difficult and the sets at once began to show improvement in performance. However, one problem did arise -- repair of Lister Diesels. It was originally intended that this would be done at the nearest suitably equipped RCEME workshop. However, this was most unsatisfactory as it appeared that no shop was scaled in Lister parts, and by the end of January it was touch-and-go as to whether the Radar Battery could continue to function. Immediate steps had to be taken and a couple of



fitter MV were attached to a British HAA Workshop (115) to service the battery diesels under supervision utilizing the British workshop stores. An application was made for an amendment to the war establishment, changing two radio mechanics for two fitters MV. As a similar amendment came forward at the same time from our British counterparts no difficulty, only delay, was experienced in getting it through.

Late in January, high power magnetrons, CV 120s, were secured and immediately trouble ensued with burnt out dipoles. This was partly offset by the better results obtained, but very shortly no more spare dipoles were available in the theatre. A safe upper limit in power output was established by the use of an echo box on the transmitter output but no other remedial action such as the use of better dipoles could be arrived at. However, by dint of robbing BLR'd sets, no equipment was out of action at any time for more than two hours. When the distance involved and the difficulties on the roads are taken into consideration this was quite an achievement.

In February, the advance through Cleve commenced with four sets deployed in this area. Hard work really began. Some stations moved nearly every day and maintenance periods were practically non-existent. By the time the Germans were cleared from the left bank of the Rhine, every man had had a turn of dysentery. However, on 11 March, a short period of rest ensued, due to the need for a build up for the Rhine crossing, and the sets were removed to S'Hertogenbosch for complete overhaul and major modification. After a week's hard work at S'Hertogenbosch, the sets were fully modified and thoroughly overhauled. They were immediately deployed facing the Rhine near Cleve but due to difficulties in terrain and lack of mortaring, no great success here was achieved.

On 31 March 1945, the first set with its attached RCEME crossed the Rhine. In anticipation of this event each "ZL" had been equipped with all the available spares. As was expected, due to the speed of the advance and the long front over which the sets were deployed, necessitating almost daily crossing of the Rhine, it was found almost impossible to visit the various sites as frequently as could be desired. The armament artificer with each equipment was on his own and the equipping of each "ZL" with plenty of spares now showed to advantage. One troop of the battery, with the attached RCEME personnel, continued on the long chase up through northern Holland and into western Germany. On numerous occasions excellent service was rendered especially at river and canal crossings.

Meanwhile on 10 April, the other troop with its RCEME section deployed on the Arnhem front. Around 13 April, there was great activity on that sector and the sets rendered excellent service. However, by the end of April, the usefulness of the radar sets was practically at an end. On 3 May, instructions were received to be prepared to concentrate immediately at Hengelo, and on 8 May this was put into effect.

A period of cleaning up and preparation for eventual disbandment now ensued. On 13 June the unit moved to Zeist, near Utrecht, and the order to disband on 21 June had been received.

Of the lessons to be learned from operations in the theatre, the one outstanding is the fact that the Radar Battery and workshop should have been formed much earlier. The need for an equipment of this type for mortar location was urgent. However, much excellent work was done and without the loss of a single RCEME life, in spite of the danger of deploying a large vulnerable equipment of this type so near the front lines.

## **25 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Park Company, RCE**

No. 25 LAD was attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Army Troops RCE in February 44. The formation was then given four months specialist training in assault bridging. Eventually the formation and the LAD landed in France on 29 July 1944.

The first week in the NWE theatre of war was spent getting the vehicles de-waterproofed and at the same time carrying on with roadwork.

On 16 August, the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Park Company, RCE, to which the LAD was attached, moved to the Artillery Barracks in Colombelles, on the outskirts of Caen. Here work continued, but with diminished vigour because of dysentery. A week later, the unit moved to a spruce reforestation area near Falaise. The battle of the Falaise Pocket was on, the breakthrough had been successful, and the army was driving rapidly eastward. On 26 August, the formation moved off towards the Seine River and the LAD followed. On 28 August, the LAD arrived within three miles of the River Seine at Elboeuf (near Rouen) and was kept busy doing normal repairs and inspections and trying to keep track of available workshops. Thus, with the crossing of the Seine, 25 LAD moved quite rapidly from Rouen to Boos and on to Abbeville and St Omer where good workshop and barrack accommodation was found.

The LAD left St Omer on 16 September 1944 and passed through Brussels and on to Bourgleopold near the Dutch border. Here 30<sup>th</sup> Corps Troops Workshop and one of the Brigade shops from 51<sup>st</sup> Division did some of the LAD's work, but as parts for Canadian type vehicles were scarce, a lot of jobs were carried along until a Canadian workshop could be contacted. On 22 September, the unit started to move toward Eindhoven and arrived there the following day, and the next few days were among the busiest for the LAD.

On 25 September, the formation started to move back to Bourgleopold. All the bridges except one at Arnhem were intact, and infantry and armour were more in demand than anything else. 25 LAD had the doubtful honour of being one of the very few Canadian LADs to move up on the famous "50-mile advance on a 40-foot front".

The unit spent a few days in Bourgleopold and then moved back to Capelle St. Ulric near Brussels for refitting, and from then until 2 November, the LAD performed routine functions while the unit was busy on a woodcutting assignment.

On 2 November the formation moved back into the mud and dust between Oploo and Deurne in Holland and back under 2<sup>nd</sup> British Army. Here the land was very low and wet and there was no accommodation whatsoever. Log huts were put up for living quarters and brush and tarp shelters served for workshops. Under these conditions, the quantity of work dropped.

On 5 December, the formation moved to Veghel and came back under the Canadian Army. Workshops were very handy so inspection follow-ups were simple. By the end of January, almost all the vehicles had received a six-months inspection and much of the necessary repair work was completed.

On the night of 21 December, a general alarm was sounded and all units "stood to". The enemy drive in the Ardennes was in progress and there was serious danger of paratroop landings in the Canadian sector. Christmas dinner with canned turkey was held on the afternoon of 24 December and everyone had a good time. The curfew and special guards made it necessary to break up the party at about 1600 hours.

During the last week of January and the first days of February, while the build-up for the spring offensive was in progress, the LAD supplied a breakdown vehicle and crew to stand by at night at a difficult bridge approach at the canal bridge in Veghel.

Here the LAD lived under canvas and the workshop had a hard surface to work on. There was lots to do for the LAD as White scout cars held by the companies had been replaced by 15-cwt armoured GMCs and hence the Whites had to be checked before being turned in. This work started here.

On 16 March, the unit moved back to a location near Grave to reorganize for the Rhine crossing. Inspection and repair of vehicles continued. Most of the White scout cars were handed over. On 28 March, the units arrived in Cleve and the LAD set up shop again. On 30 March, the Emmerich Bridge across the Rhine was started. Again the LAD supplied a breakdown and crew at the traffic control point to keep the road open. About 600 vehicle loads had to be moved over secondary roads under cover of

darkness. A routine check of Ingersoll Rand compressors was started with a view to having the necessary overhaul work laid on. This was thought to be an opportune time as the compressors were not in use. On 5 March, the unit moved again to Deetinchem, in Holland. The LAD set up in a civilian garage and work and inspections continued.

On 6 March, some civilians detonated three enemy "R" mines, near the workshop. Six civilians were killed and the breakdown vehicle was damaged.

On 11 March, the formation moved to Zutphen and the LAD set up shop on a boulevard on a quiet side street. On 15 March, bridging operations started and the breakdown went out on traffic duty. Work continued as usual in the workshop area.

On 26 April, the unit moved again into Germany in a field between Longingen and Cloppenburg. Here the news of the end of the war was received. The end of the war has made little difference to the LAD. Work continues as usual and probably will continue to do so until all the equipment has been turned in.

## **29 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion, RCE**

The LAD landed at Courseulles, France on the evening of 28 July 1944, and took up their first position in an orchard directly ahead of their own artillery. It later moved to Carpiquet where the battalion had a project repairing the airport. The LAD utilized the best hangar available for setting up shop, and they slept in dugouts. This spot was especially memorable for continued bombing raids.

In September the LAD moved up to the Seine, where they recovered many enemy vehicles and put them in good running order for the battalion. They kept one truck, which proved most useful in their own work. The breakdown was very busy assisting the engineers in road repair work and bridging at this location. This included such things as loading tar barrels, winching heavy Bailey bridge equipment across the Seine at Rouen, and supplying spot lights for special night work.

In October, the unit moved to Deist, Belgium, where the LAD acquired a large garage for their workshop. Once again the Diamond T breakdown vehicle was used to assist the battalion in constructing a permanent Bailey bridge across the Albert Canal.

The next move was to Stockhem, Belgium, where the LAD spent most of the winter. The boys were exceptionally busy here, and did all their work in the street directly in front of their billets, which were part of a nuns' school. The nuns were very friendly to the LAD and helped the men in many ways (especially with their laundry problem). The LAD did some novel work assisting in the recovery of a pontoon Bailey bridge from the Maas, which proved quite successful.

In February another move was made to Grosbeek, a few miles from Nijmegen. In March the LAD acquired a large twenty-foot German trailer. They showed remarkable cleverness and ingenuity in converting this into a special machinery lorry and improvised with everything and anything available.

The LAD moved into Germany near Emmerich in the beginning of April 1945 and then moved to Zutphen, Holland, where the battalion constructed (or at least helped to construct) the Harry and Crerar bridges. After this project the battalion took on a similar job at Zwolle, where they started work on another permanent Bailey bridge, which was about eleven hundred feet long. The LAD managed to requisition a suitable civilian garage where they set up their workshop and living quarters as well. At the time of writing this history, they are still in Zwolle on the normal repair and maintenance of the Battalion vehicles needed in the bridge work.

## **43 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment**

The LAD landed in France at Le Hartel on 23 July 1944, from an LST. The whole unit was assembled with the LAD in the lead, and proceeded to our camp area in Bayeaux at 2200 hours. On arrival the LAD dug in under the trees in an orchard, quite close to the town of Bayeaux, and enjoyed very good weather with plenty of work. The LAD personnel were scattered among the unit fitters and the whole split into crews of six or seven men with one senior NCO in charge. Capt Parker was responsible for the work on all tanks.

After one month in Bayeaux, the unit moved to St. Aignan and set up in another orchard. The war was quite far off by this time near the Seine River, but the area was still littered with burnt equipment, knocked out tanks and many shallow graves. The weather was very warm, the flies bad, and dysentery broke out. After working from early morning until late evening for two or three weeks, a stock of armour in first-class condition was made ready, but out of reach for the forward units who were now across the Seine.

The LAD moved next to the small village of Pierreval and again settled in an orchard. A month of holidays followed while waiting for the tanks to cross the Seine at Elbeouf.

In late September, the LAD moved to Antwerp into Fort 4. Due to mud conditions, this move took about two weeks and kept the LAD busy all the way. Antwerp gave the LAD its first chance at enemy machine tools, and the personnel experimented with all manner of lathes, drills, etc. The LAD was not overworked here, but buzz bombs and V-2s were plentiful.

The next move was north of Antwerp to Pollygon into an airfield and Belgian cavalry barracks used as a concentration camp by the Germans. The ground was soggy and the tanks bogged down or ran into drains. Christmas was spent in the barracks with buzz bombs coming over and the American AA guns went up among our tanks to keep things interesting. Quite a number of bombs were brought down, but none in our area. Antwerp was "Out of Bounds" because of the menace, and we had to find recreation in the nearby town. After Christmas, we started loading tanks on flat cars for the first time. We only dumped one of the few hundred that we loaded, but it was work enough to reload it. On New Year's Day, the Germans came over in fighters as we were loading our convoy to move. That day, two were brought down but not in our area.

2 January 1945 found the LAD in their first civilian billets with Dutch hosts in Eindhoven. Capt Parker left and was replaced by Capt Otto who brought the LAD to Eindhoven. Four months were spent here, and while the snow came and went, the LAD completed many tanks, learnt a few Dutch words, and made some very good friends.

In May, the unit moved to Enschede and once more into tents, where there was very little work to do. The war was at an end or was to be ended very shortly, so sports and rest was the main topic. VE-Day passed quietly with only the LAD issuing transport, and most of the boys went back to see their friends in Eindhoven.

## **92 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion RCE**

The 92 LAD left the concentration area in England on 27 July 1944, passed through London, and on to the embarkation area.

The channel crossing was uneventful and the unit landed at Graye-Sur-Mer on the morning of 2 August 1944, and kept on to St-Loup Hors, where a halt was called for a few days.

The LAD then pushed on to Martragny, where contact was made with a British workshop. However, the only help they were able to give was spare parts, as they were very busy. After only two weeks, the unit moved on to La Bossiere and the LAD settled down on a V-bomb launching site. During the period of time spent in this location, the LAD was kept busy, especially the recovery section, as the main highway ran through nearby Lisieux and the road was crammed with convoys, which meant many breakdowns and accidents.

The next move was to Bruges, which took place at the beginning of October. The LAD's location was at this point between the infantry at Zeebrugge and the armoured division just outside Bruges. As the unit was employed on a special rush job (laying petrol pipelines) the LAD was kept busy doing work of all kinds. Fortunately, there were several Canadian second echelon workshops close by, whose help was much appreciated.

After approximately one month, the unit moved to Rode St. Genese, a few miles from Brussels. Here, between the buzz bombs, the LAD began the task of overhauling the unit vehicles. This proved a big job as spare parts for Canadian-type vehicles were very scarce, and the result was the LAD was changing motors at the rate of three or four all during the winter months.

Following the German breakthrough in the Ardennes a few days before Christmas, orders were received to build and guard all roadblocks in the area. All work stopped accordingly for one week while all LAD personnel stood their guard. Following the collapse of the German salient the LAD went back to their normal routine until the beginning of April when once more the unit moved to Nijmegen.

Only ten days were spent in Nijmegen pending the liberation of Arnhem, when the unit moved in to build a bridge across the Rhine into Arnhem. The unit was located here from then on to the end of hostilities. It was while in this location that the LAD had, for the first time in Europe, a second-echelon workshop allotted to it for vehicle repairs.

## **93 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Park Company, RCE**

In October 1942, 93 LAD was formed at Borden, England, operating on a field return basis ever since 1 November 1942 when it was first attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Field Park Company, RCE. The strength at that time was 12 ORs. In July 1943 the LAD was attached to 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Park Company, RCE, and later went with them to the continent.

It was not until January 1944 that the LAD personnel underwent a three-month training course on mine clearing, waterproofing, and recovery. Then, in March 1944, the unit was equipped with new vehicles, but it was not until July that orders were received to move over to the continent.

Finally, on 12 July 1944, the formation landed on the beaches of Normandy and several days later the LAD saw its first battle experience. Chief repairs were those caused by shellfire (radiators, windshields, tires, wheels and canvas). Difficulty was experienced in carrying out these repairs, as shellfire was very constant. At this point much attention was given to dugouts by all personnel. However, morale remained high throughout this period.

In September 1944 the parent unit was attached to 30 British Corps for a special operation, which took us through enemy territory and into Nijmegen. At this time the LAD dealt with British workshops and sub-parks, and although their cooperation was the best, considerable difficulty was experienced in obtaining Canadian vehicle parts.

On completion of this task, the unit moved to the line of communications area for a few days rest. The LAD still had work to do, and the V-1 and V-2 bombs added to that was not much of a rest for the men.

## **123 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Carrier Regiment**

123 LAD or as it is more commonly known, the “Kangaroo” LAD was really formed in an embryo on 5 August 1944. The high command had hit on the idea of removing the guns from M7s [self-propelled howitzers], adding some frontal armour, and using them in the Caen-Falaise battle for carrying infantry through to their objectives, with consequent saving in casualties. For maintaining these equipments, “Kangaroos” as they were called, an ad-hoc LAD of 31 all ranks was formed on the basis of servicing 36 Kangaroos for a supposed period of ten days to two weeks. Personnel were obtained from 32, 33, and 34 LADs and placed under command of Capt H. Duncan of 33 LAD. The equipment and a stock of spare parts were obtained from the same sources. The LAD gathered at Bayeaux on 5 August and moved up to the area of the Royal Regiment of Canada outside Caen where the 36 Kangaroos were harboured prior to going into action with the regiment on the opening night of the attack. There were a considerable number of light repairs required just before action, especially after several trial lifts with the infantry.

The attack went in during the first night, and for the next four days, the LAD had a great deal of work gathering up the numerous Kangaroos that had fallen by the wayside through breakdown or enemy action. Very little time out of operations was given during this and the later stages of the breakthrough, so the LAD was kept very busy. Then, to make matters worse, another 36 Kangaroos that had to be loaned to 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division on another sector were returned. This now meant a total of 60 M7s to be serviced by the unit. On two occasions during this operation, help was given by 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshops to carry out rapid repairs, some of a heavy nature. None of the M7s had any tools -- not even grease guns. Then too, the crew of a Kangaroo consisted of one man who could do practically no maintenance. It was during this period and until the end of August that administration from a higher level was almost nil.

After Falaise was taken, the Kangaroos were given two days to get patched up again and then the M7s and the LAD moved to Curcy near Trun. During the stay in the Trun area, a great deal of useful equipment in the line of cooking utensils, canvas, etc was gathered from the ‘pocket’.

On 28 August, the news came from Army HQ that a squadron of carriers was to be formed consisting of the 55 remaining M7s, 100 drivers, 4 troop officers, and an OC Squadron. It was to come under 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment for administration only, and for operations under command of various infantry brigades or divisions.

The squadron and LAD then started on the long move to Le Havre for the first organized action with the 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division. A break was made at Harcourt for two days to get equipment and stores from 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment. The Squadron and LAD then proceeded on to Le Havre to work with the 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division. This action was highly successful and there were very few casualties to Kangaroos and none to the infantry.

Then came the actions against Boulogne and Calais. The Kangaroos were moved on transporters to the Boulogne area, which considerably reduced the repairs required. The M7s were standing up very well to the heavy use they were receiving. During these two actions, only about two carriers were written off due to mines and shelling. Some heavy recovery work was required. By this time, Kangaroos were becoming well-known and the administration was much improved.

Orders were received after the Calais operation to proceed to the area of Cassel, where 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop was located. On arriving there it was found that all the M7 carriers were to be turned into the workshop, and new Ram carriers were to be drawn near Rouen. The squadron left for Rouen, and the LAD received orders from CREME Army Troops that it was to be a night stopover point at Wervick near Mennin, in Belgium, during the move up of 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment and the Kangaroo squadron. Here the LAD remained for 10 days during which time the squadron had all passed through on their way to Antwerp where the Rams were supposed to go into third echelon shops for repair.

Instead they came under command 2<sup>nd</sup> British Army for action in Holland. A British LAD was attached to gain experience on the equipment. A message came through from the squadron OC asking that the LAD be brought up, because the British personnel were inexperienced. Permission was obtained from the OC 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment to proceed, but the LAD was stopped in Antwerp and ordered not to move on until released by the DDME. The LAD was then attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop for about a week just as the buzz bombs were becoming more plentiful, and one fell in the workshop during this period.

In the last week of October, word came of the formation of a regiment of carriers. Thus on 24 October, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Carrier Regiment came into being with resultant changes in the LAD. Tilburg was chosen as the point at which the regiment was to be formed and built up. The LAD proceeded to this area on 1 November to join the squadron, which had just come out of action, and was given seven days to get the carriers shaped for proposed operations. This did not materialize fortunately, and the regiment had November and December in which to get organized and to draw the remainder of the Rams and "B" vehicles. It was at this time that 123 LAD really came into being as such, with a greatly increased establishment of 52 all ranks.

Reinforcements and vehicles were obtained, and during this period the unit was kept extremely busy repairing the original Rams of "A" Squadron and checking and repairing the new ones drawn. The LAD then was administered by BEME, 31 British Brigade, in all matters except personnel, and derived a great deal of pleasure in working with Maj Easter, the BEME, who gave real assistance in many matters.

Early in January, two troops of "B" Squadron were in action for two days at Wanssum Wood on the Maas River, and a section of the LAD accompanied them. Eight carriers ran onto a minefield. Recovery operations were very difficult as this sector was under direct enemy observation. Operations had therefore to be carried out at night with much care and a great deal of difficulty, owing to the cold, snow, and intermittent mortaring. However, in two days, seven out of the eight Rams were recovered and repaired and sent back to Tilburg.

In the meantime, the regiment as a whole moved down to Winterslag in Belgium for operation "Blackcock", which was to relieve the pressure on the Ardennes sector. Conditions were at their worst in this operation that last two weeks. Icy roads, snow, sleet, fog, intense cold, and long hours gave the LAD one of its Maj tasks. The men of the LAD did a splendid job under these trying conditions and were congratulated by the BEME and Lt-Col Churchill, the CO of the regiment.

About 17 January, the regiment moved back to Lindhoven for refit in preparation for operation "Veritable" – "The Big Do". On the night of 8 February, they began 29 days of steady fighting through some of the worst tank country imaginable due to the flooding and mud. Here again, the recovery crews and fitters were working all hours of the day and night keeping the carriers working through the continually tough going caused by the boggy train. Again there were about 60 Kangaroos pulled out of the mud or repaired after anti-tank or bazooka fire.

Once more the regiment withdrew for a rapid re-fitting ready for the final blow – Operation "Plunder" -- the crossing of the Rhine. On 27 March, the regiment and LAD crossed the Rhine at Rees over the great Bailey pontoon bridge. During the whole operation until VE-Day, the LAD operated in squadron sections. The last action was by "A" squadron on 5 May at 0700 hours. The war in Europe ended three days later.

## **126 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to First Canadian Army Signals**

Before landing in Normandy on 26 July 1944, the LAD had been busy waterproofing vehicles. The few weeks after this was completed, was spent waiting for the movement orders.

After landing in Normandy, work commenced immediately on evacuation of vehicles to workshop and a programme of 857-B inspections started. Before VE-Day came, almost all vehicles had been given two of these inspections.

In September, the LAD was attached forward with No. 1 Company, which comprises the line construction and maintenance sections. After two months of operations, these vehicles required a good deal of attention and were usually too far forward for LAD attention when the latter was back with HQ.

The end of September found the LAD in Belgium, first at Ghent, then Antwerp on 10 October 1944. At Antwerp, things were the busiest ever, but facilities were also the best. The LAD was located in a large garage complete with hoists, pits and other equipment.

Subsequent movements took the LAD to Breda and then to Tilburg for Christmas and the New Year. At the time of the German break-through at the Ardennes, the LAD along with everyone else was called to "stand to" in defence against paratroopers.

In January rumours of UK leave brightened things up and the first man was away in February. Hospitalization hit the LAD hard - in the latter month, three NCOs including the S/Sgt and Sgt all being struck off strength.

Two more moves found the LAD first at Grave and then at Borne. The LAD was at Borne when the "Cease-Fire" sounded and VE-Day was quietly celebrated.

The LAD was attached to First Canadian Army Signals during the campaign in N.W. Europe. Its history had not been exciting, its work comprising, for the most part, repairs and inspections. Recovery did not play an important part, any unusual jobs being recovery of vehicles out of minefields and two out of canals. Overall, the LAD had been very busy as First Canadian Army Signals had between six and seven hundred "B" vehicles on their establishment.

### **131 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Rocket Battery, RCA**

131 LAD was formed originally as 127 LAD, Type "F", on 19 January in 1945 on a field return basis and consisted of nine all ranks. It became 131 LAD on 31 March 1945. The LAD joined 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Rocket Battery RCA at Hilvarenbeek. To most of the LAD personnel, the rocket equipment was new, but after watching a few shoots, a plan of action was soon planned and the LAD was kept busy. Besides the rocket projectors the LAD had 78 "B" vehicles and 100 other artillery instruments of various sorts to maintain.

From 7 February to 9 March the LAD saw field action. During this time a wide variety of work was done and ingenuity was the order of the day as the unit was operating in some cases in front of our FDLs, so that evacuation of vehicles was almost impossible.

Between 9 and 20 of March, with an increased compliment up to 150 OR [this seems high] and one officer, the LAD began a complete inspection of all the battery's equipments so that on 20 March the battery went in to action again in good mechanical shape.

From the beginning, the biggest problem of the LAD was its need for an electric welding service and a battery charger. This was overcome soon, however, as a KW Arc Welder (double operator) luckily "fell" into the hands of the LAD and hence a serious problem was solved. It seemed that the LAD's chief role was to improvise in order to keep up with the demands of rocket warfare, and that coupled with the fact that the LAD had to be ready at all times to move off within 20 minutes notice, was a real accomplishment.

And so it went until 9 May when the unit moved to Enschede, where a decent building was given over to the LAD. Here a routine check was given to every piece of the unit's equipment, the results of which were very satisfactory.



Thus the ceaseless job of keeping 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Rocket Battery ever ready for action came to an end and the LAD personnel looked back over the months that had passed with a feeling of pride that comes when a job is well done.

## **British Units Under Command**

### **824 Armoured Troops Workshop (British)**

824 Armoured Troops Workshop (British), which later became 824 Armoured Troops Workshop (Type B) came under command on 20 August 1944. They stayed with Army Troops until 22 May 1945, when they went under command 2 British Army on moving from Helmond in Holland to Falling-Bostel in Germany. This workshop proved a valuable addition to Army Troops and it was with mutual grief that they left the command. They had participated admirably in all AFV repair flaps participated in by are other two third line workshops (2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop). They actually joined the Army Troops family when they took up a location in the RCEME enclave at Cintheaux in France. They were then very green, having been newly formed in the UK only a short time prior to dispatch to the theatre, but it did not take them long to get into the swing of things.

### **231 Infantry Brigade Workshop (British)**

231 Infantry Brigade Workshop (British) was the second-largest British REME unit to come under command Army Troops. They did not function as an Infantry Brigade Workshop, but as a “B” vehicle servicing unit in support of the First Canadian Army Vehicle Park. They joined the RCEME family early in December 1944 in Belgium. Maj Hunter, the OC, did not take very long to organize his unit on the new basis and before very long they had solved to a great extent the problem of vehicles being issued to fighting units in an unserviceable condition. They actually functioned as a part of the Vehicle Park, moving with the from location to location. They were finally withdrawn from under command while at Nijmegen, from whence they went back to the Antwerp area to come under command CEME Base Workshops.

In addition to the two British workshops mentioned above, Army Troops had under command four British LADs:

LAD attached 13 Air Formation Signals

LAD attached 23 Airfield Construction Group, RE

LAD attached 24 Airfield Construction Group, RE

LAD attached 25 Airfield Construction Group, RE

These LADs, unlike our Canadian LADS, were commanded by WOs 1. They presented a quite difficult administrative problem due to the fact that they were moving in and out of command of Army Troops quite often and were widely scattered. However, while under command, they were apparently very happy and functioned to everyone’s satisfaction.

## **A Narrative of RCEME, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops, in North-West Europe**

### **Headquarters RCEME, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops**

Headquarters RCEME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps troops arrived in North-West Europe early in March and set up headquarters at Albeke in Belgium. The headquarters being the first RCEME in Corps Troops to arrive complete was able to arrange workshop sites and administrative details for the workshops well in advance of their arrival, thus making their arrival into a new area as smooth as possible.

Leave allotments at this time were very generous and many personnel of the headquarters and workshops were able to take advantage of them and visit the UK.

After a very pleasant month in friendly Belgium, RCEME headquarters moved to OSS in Holland. Work had now increased to a point where nearly everyone was busy, but any additional work being thrust upon us in this theatre was more than compensated for by the pleasantness of our surroundings. During the actions of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, recovery posts, AWDs, and road patrols were furnished from the resources of RCEME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops not to mention the continuous heavy repair being carried out by the third line workshops.

After a period of about five weeks in OSS, the headquarters moved to an area north of Arnhem. Here it was decided to concentrate all our workshops to aid administration and to take advantage of the excellent building facilities offered. Every workshop was able to have its own recreational building where movies could be shown or dances held.

Since the time of our arrival in this area, work has proceeded very smoothly. The type of services rendered has been varied to say the least. Everything has been done from repairing civilian staff cars to building generating sets for recreational centres. It is not being immodest to say that every service has benefited by the work of RCEME both that war and now in the peace.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop, RCEME**

This shop arrived in North-West Europe late in March 1945, and after a short spell in Belgium, moved up to Nijmegen, Holland, in time to take part in the final operations of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps in Holland. Cease-fire found the unit set up on a large airfield a few kilometres north of Arnhem. At this time the shop was still backing 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division as it had since the landing in Sicily.

After almost two years in Italy, the unit arrived in Holland with the same equipment and vehicles that were issued in England, with the exception of one 15-cwt which was lost in a gorge with a blown bridge. The shop also brought from Italy three Italian trucks, one German and one French truck.

The unit mascot "Sadie", a statue acquired in Lanciano, was given a new dress of paint upon arrival in Belgium and proved very popular with the civilians. A special box has been constructed to transport her back to Canada where she may yet grace a RCEME unit or training centre.

Since VE-Day, many civilian cars are finding their way into the shop. These are a welcome change at this time because the mechanics are able to brush up on the techniques of civilian vehicle repairs in preparation for the approaching day of return to civilian life. Personnel are also being switched about the shop to give them experience that they will feel will be useful in their future jobs.

Work has not yet slackened and at present we are employing well over 100 Dutch tradesmen. Lately much of our transport has and is being used to augment the heavily committed RCASC transport column.

Living and working conditions in this theatre are the best encountered to date, including England. Recreational facilities are of a very high standard and include a theatre, dance hall, recreation rooms, canteens, wet and dry, baseball field, and a concrete swimming pool nearing completion. All these have been self-developed and followed with keen interest by the men. All ranks have made a tour to Amsterdam, and tours to Rotterdam are now operating.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop, RCEME**

1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop left Cesenatico, Italy, on 26 February 1945 and moved in four stages to Lammie Camp, Naples, arriving on 1 March 1945. The workshop was split up for the boat trip to Marseille. The advance party with the majority of the vehicles arrived on 9 March. The convoy moved off from Marseille staging camp on 17 March.

A small repair detachment always brought up the rear of the main convoy of 95 vehicles and 30 trailers to carry out running repairs on any vehicle broke down.

The trip to Nijmegen, Holland, was made in seven stages of about 285 miles each and the convoy arrived in Nijmegen on 23 March. The workshop was set up here to function for the first time in North-West Europe. It is estimated that the unit convoy travelled approximately 1200 miles by road over and above the sea voyage from Naples to Marseille.

In Nijmegen the workshop was located in the cattle market, which provided a large covered hard standing and lent itself to a good workshop layout. The available covered standing was divided between the vehicle, armament, and Allied trades sections. The stores lorries were parked in the walled enclosure at the rear of the building, which was also used as a unit vehicle and equipment park and gun park. A park across the street was used by the recovery section to park the backlog of vehicles. Private billets were obtained by canvassing the vicinity and obtaining the necessary authority from the town major.

The workshop operated in this location from 23 March until 29 April. The vehicle section was very busy on priority work for Headquarters 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps and Headquarters Administration Army Staff Cars. As the front advanced, more and more of the work came from Line of Communications units.

1<sup>st</sup> Canadian AGRA, usually consisting of five medium artillery regiments and two heavy artillery regiments, had considerably more equipment than an infantry brigade. In operations such as the Liri Valley in Italy, where lines of communication were stretched and roads poor, it was felt that the AGRA should have an AWD in support, while forward, rather than be based on the main workshop, which was up to 30 miles in the rear.

The AWD consisted of the armament and instrument sections, a small increment from the stores section with all armament stores, and a small detachment from the vehicle section. Small arms and telecommunication personnel were attached when necessary to meet operational requirements. The strength of the AWD varied between 85 and 105 all ranks under command of a captain, usually the 2i/c of the main workshop, and the officer in charge of the armament section.

The last AWD left the main shop at Nijmegen, Hollins and was located at the Arnhem airport on 20 April, about ten miles from the AGRA area in the vicinity of Otterloe. Another move was made to Ede on 2 May after the AGRA had moved up towards Barneveld. It is felt that the last AWD was not justified as the roads in this country are excellent, and a distance of 30 miles to workshops is not considered excessive.

At the Arnhem airfield, the workshop joined 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Recovery Company Headquarters and Sections, and CREME Headquarters, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops. The name "RCEME Centre" was adopted. The concentration of workshops, equipment, and personnel had many advantages and obtained much favourable comment.

Ample covered workshop space was provided and a practical workshop layout was achieved. Good billets were provided for the men and the pooling of recreational facilities worked to the advantage of all units.

A sports field was prepared and baseball and volleyball schedules drawn up including Corps Troops RCOC and RCEME units. Intersectional unit sports made it possible for many ORs to participate.

During this period, prior to VE-Day, the Canadian Army organized and sent food convoys to the Dutch behind German lines. This workshop provided a road patrol consisting of one NCO and two men, and a 15-cwt to service these convoys.

Capt D. W. Thomson left the workshop on 8 May 1945 to take up his duties in Amsterdam on scheme "Eclipse".

The workshop moved from RCEME Centre on 1 June 1945 and located near Soesterburg, which was closer to Corps Troops units based on this workshop.

This location also provided sufficient covered hard standing for the workshop, but the sections were more decentralized than in the two previous locations. However, billets and recreational facilities were very good, including a well-equipped gymnasium and a large recreation hall for dancing and movies. A sports field was prepared for baseball, and the unit team continued to participate in the Corps Troops schedule. Intersectional sports (baseball, volleyball, and basketball) were organized and games were played every afternoon.

The "Padre's Hour" was started and much interest and favourable comment was apparent among the men. Rehabilitation lectures were given by Capt T. E. Bradshaw and Capt E. K. MacEachern.

Maj E. C. King left the workshop on 10 June to fly to England on CFEF. Many other ranks have left the unit on CFEF and on posting to COF units, and some of the sections, notably the vehicle section, are considerably below strength.

Maj E. A. Perry arrived to take over command of the unit on 11 June 1945. At this time, the volume of work output is diminishing, and the principal efforts are towards preparing the unit equipment for turn-in on 8 July, when the unit will be disbanding.

It is fitting to take this opportunity of thanking all ranks for their cooperation and efforts in this unit, and to wish them success and their new ventures.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Recovery Company, RCEME**

1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Recovery Company, after having completed 14 months operations in Italy, and operating recovery posts and doing field recovery in connection with the actions at the Gustav, Adolf Hitler, and Gothic defence lines, moved from Italy to the North-West Europe theatre in sections.

3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Light Recovery Section arrived at Marseille on 18 February 1945, followed by Headquarters Section on 21 February, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Section on 25 February, and 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Section on 2 March.

3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Light Recovery Section operated in southern France from the date of the landings until the end of April. It was responsible for recovery from Marseille to Macon, a distance of approximately 250 miles, during the move 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps from the port of disembarkation to Belgium and the North-West Europe Theatre of operations. It operated under orders of 9 Lines of Communication (British).

The two staging camps in their areas were located at St. Rambert and Macon. The two recovery posts were established between Marseille and St. Rambert, a distance of 160 miles. The headquarters of the section was situated in the staging area at St. Rambert, and operated a repair post there. At Macon, another repair post was set up and two recovery posts set up between St. Rambert and Macon.

The repair posts performed the greatest part of the work and were kept busy throughout the move of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, while the recovery posts had only a few jobs to look after in keeping the route free of casualties. The repair posts were set up for the purpose of doing light repairs and first echelon work. However, it was impossible to keep to this and quite a bit of second echelon work was done, such as changing major assemblies. Vehicles that could not be repaired were BLR'd and later backloaded to the British Port Workshop, Marseille.

Early in May, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Light Section rejoined the headquarters and other sections of the company in the RCEME Centre, established four miles north of Arnhem and took over the operation of "G" and "H" 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian BLP from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Sections.

1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Section move from Marseille to Mouscrom, Belgium and awaited arrival of RCEME workshops in the area, then moved up to the Nijmegen area. On 17 April, the section moved to the RCEME Centre established four miles north of Arnhem. Tank casualties were taken over from 5<sup>th</sup> Division and "G" 1<sup>st</sup> CBP was set up at the RCEME Centre, to which point all tank casualties in the area were collected. On 10 May 1945, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Heavy Section move to a camp site four miles east of Hilversum and "C" 1 CBP was handed over to 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Section for operations.

2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Section moved from Marseille to Marke, Belgium. Vehicle casualties were brought forward to the area for repair by workshops, and which were subsequently BLR'd were backloaded by this section to 156 RVP Antwerp; most of the backloadings were made from 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop. On 4 April 1945, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Section moved to Nijmegen, Holland, where it assumed full responsibility for recovery throughout 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps area. Recovery posts were established at Nijmegen bridge and floating bridge Ijssel. Tanks were backloaded from the army BLP to 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop for repair. Tank transporters were busy every night for three weeks backloading and forward lifting tanks from 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop and 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Tank Brigade Workshop. On 23 April, the section moved to RCEME Centre, and took over the operation of "H" 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian BLP. Tank transporters recovered a few tanks from the area and backloaded them to "G" 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian BLP. On 10 May 1945, the section moved to a campsite four miles east of Hilversum together with the Headquarters Section and 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Section.

Prior to the "Cease Fire" on this front, food was being sent behind the enemy lines to the Dutch people. It was the job of recovery to sweep the road from Wageningen to the point where the foodstuff was dumped at the barrier and evacuate any vehicle breaking down in this area. A recovery post was set up at Wageningen and manned by two breakdown vehicles and two dispatch riders who patrolled the road, and a repair crew from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop, RCEME.

After the "Cease Fire", recovery was called upon to backload enemy equipment and vehicles to the Eclipse dumps. 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Section had a detachment in Amsterdam, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Section as detachments operating in the Hague, Rotterdam, and Haarlem-Den Helder, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Light Section as a detachment at Utrecht. Recovery vehicles from Haarlem evacuated enemy vehicles from as far north as the causeway. This work still continues with all available equipment in use.

## **51 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME, attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Field Park Company**

51 LAD embarked at Naples onto Liberty ships with all our equipment. We proceeded to Marseille in France where we were unloaded at night and went to a concentration area. From there, the LAD proceeded in convoy up through France and into Belgium, which was a very exciting trip, but very tiresome. We stopped in a small town in Belgium named Flobecq, where we stayed about three weeks.

We then moved on to Schaijk, Holland, then to Nijmegen where the engineers again went into action to put a bridge across the river into Arnhem. We then moved up to Arnhem, thence to Baarn and then to our present location at Blaricum, Holland.

During the time from 25 October 1943 until 8 May 1945 and on to the present time, 51 LAD has been busily engaged. The breakdown lorry has seen a great deal of service at all hours of the day and night. The storemen have also been busy making trips to the Ordnance Field Park for spare parts to keep the engineer's lorries on the road. The welders and electricians have always been busily engaged on lorries, and the vehicle mechanics have had their hands full keeping up to the demands made upon them. In addition to all the routine work, the LAD was busily engaged in making trailers for several months in Italy. For a while we worked nights to keep abreast of the work.

## **67 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME, attached to 7<sup>th</sup> Anti-tank Regiment, RCA**

The unit embarked at Naples, Italy, and disembarked at Marseille, France. It was necessary to check all the vehicles after the long convoy up to Belgium and eventually Holland. While at Marseille, a White scout car broke the main rear spring, and its motor lost its compression in two cylinders. As it was impossible to get a spring, it was necessary to evacuate it while at the camp. This we managed to do since a REME camp was set up at the staging camp there.

On the move up, more trouble developed, one gun and limber was lost. The eye of the limber broke, and the result was that the gun and limber went over a bank. The LAD recovered them, but was unable to repair them, so had to have them BLR'd at a recovery post while in transit. Except for other small jobs, which we were able to handle, the trip was very successful.

On arrival in Belgium, work was begun at once to check all equipment. New M-10 self-propelled 17-pounder guns arrived in place of our old M-10 self-propelled 3-inch guns. However the new tanks were all sent to third line workshops to be checked and serviced as the time element was not the main problem to cope with. With repairs on "B" vehicles and modifications on towed guns, the LAD was kept busy.

While in Belgium, we received twelve Crusader tanks to act as tractors for the 17-pounders. To say the least, these tanks were useless. On initial inspection, it was necessary to send twelve to the third line workshop due to leaks in the air system for steering control, oil lines breaking, clutches burnt out, and steering brakes gone. By the time we reached Holland, we had five left. These were later BLR'd without once being used.

Towards the end of March, the unit left for Holland. Once again a gun and limber was lost due to the breaking of the trail eye. This gun had to be BLR'd likewise. On arrival at the new camp, all trail eyes of the towed guns were inspected and rewelded where necessary. While here, the unit was changed to infantry for a special task, and we moved up in front of Arnhem as a holding force. The LAD personnel for its first time acted as infantry, and the LAD men on patrol claimed they enjoyed it. This state of affairs lasted until the end of the war in May.

After cessation of hostilities on the 21 Army Group front, all the heavy equipment of the regiment was collected in one area and the LAD combined to check it and to put it in first-class condition. After inspecting and classification, the guns, half-tracks, tractors, and self-propelled guns were turned in. On 27 June, the LAD was disbanded and the commanding officer of 7<sup>th</sup> Anti-tank Regiment expressed his appreciation of the work of the LAD. At the time of the disbandment, five of the men joined the CFEF, one to COF, and others were posted to other workshops. Thus the end of 67 LAD attached to 7<sup>th</sup> Anti-tank Regiment, RCA.

## **74 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME, attached to the Royal Canadian Dragoons**

Being an attempt to outline the activities of 74 LAD, both in the static repair section and the forward recovery section since shaking the mud of Italy of our feet in Marseille on 16 March, this résumé stresses the military side and does not delve into the social side.

Landing at Marseille about 1200 hours on 14 March, we unloaded our vehicles and after refuelling, followed the GF route out to our first staging camp about sixteen miles out of Marseille. Here we remained two days, underwent the medical examination and delousing, and also changed our Italian currency for the tender of France. On the morning of 17 March at 0430 hours, we set out for St. Rambert. Traffic was not heavy; however we had several stops and had one scout car on tow when we reached our destination. This vehicle was disposed of with the BLR tag. Thus ended our first 140 miles up the Rhône Valley. At Macon, 70 miles further north, we arrived early without any trouble en route. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, after several stops and one vehicle in tow, we stayed overnight in Les Laumes. We had an all-night repair job here. Next day we bypassed Paris, and with little trouble passed on to Rosay-en-Brie in some of the most beautiful French countryside. On 21 March, we did the last lap of our long trip and arrived in Grobbendonck, Belgium, after passing through Brussels.

To say our stop in Grobbendonck was a pleasant one would be putting it mildly. After many months of social abnegation, smothered emotion, and heartrending abstinence from all that was pleasant in life, we availed ourselves of the nightlife of Belgium with considerable success.

Then Field Marshal Montgomery launched his bridgehead across the Rhine at Emmerich, and we knew that we would soon follow. On 4 April, we crossed the Rhine and harboured in Doetinchem, Holland, after crossing a narrow section of the Third Reich. After a stopover of three days, we proceeded towards Deventer.

On the morning of 8 April, due to the threat of heavy vehicle casualties, the LAD divided up into two groups; the recovery section following with tactical headquarters to be ready for recovery work at very short notice. In this way, we moved through out the whole mobile campaign, which finally carried us to Leeuwarden on the North Sea, the Mack [heavy recovery vehicle] crew forward, and the main body doing a praiseworthy job on the increasingly constant flow of vehicle casualties that such a swift campaign involved.

The first Staghound [armoured car] that required our attention was a "B" squadron vehicle, which had been hit by a bazooka. The next day, three Staghounds were picked up after bogging down in the soft earth. On the morning of 9 April, we were awake at sunrise and before eating we picked up two more Staghounds, bogged in enemy-contested ground, the latter being exposed to hostile mortar fire from across a nearby canal.

The change of plans from Corps headquarters, received on 10 April, necessitated a long trip which brought us to Hooegeveen where for a short stay we rejoined our repair section of the LAD. On this trip, we were halted West of Ommen to retrieve a Staghound and scout car from a boggy road. Arriving in Hooegeveen late that night, we found shelter in a former German quartermaster store. Here the repair section stopped for one week. Five of our boys left here on UK leave, which imposed an extra strain on the shoulders of the lads left. For new Staghounds were introduced to replace losses and these had to be checked and fitted. A half-track brought back from the front had to be repaired en route owing to a blown bridge. The foregoing instances are just two of the many tasks that confronted our fitters. Meanwhile the Mack crew pushed on to Dwingelo, and thence to Fredericksoord. One Staghound and one scout car required our attention here. Next morning at 0900 hours, we moved with tactical headquarters on to Oldeberkoop, from which base, aggressive action by our squadron enabled them to seize two canal bridges intact. However, casualties in men and equipment were heavy. A Staghound, East of Mildam, was a victim of a bazooka and from Mildam village itself we salvaged a half-track and a Staghound. These

were both suspended tow jobs; we were given protective fire from the boys with Bren guns in the nearby slit trenches. Owing to two Staghounds bogging down North-West of Mildam requiring our services, we missed our tactical headquarters convoy to Leeuwarden, so we backtracked to Oldeberkoop and spent the second night there. The next morning, we waited in this village for the "A" echelon convoy to Drachten. This we followed past Drachten and on to Leeuwarden, arriving there about 1300 hours to join tactical headquarters again.

Here in the capital of Friesland, we received a hilarious welcome. Nothing was too good for the first Canadians. Mobs of people crowded the streets. Our vehicles were engulfed in a wave of exuberant humanity, even the threat of a German counterattack failed to disperse the crowd. The Canadian spearhead by the Royal Canadian Dragoons had reached the North Sea and the hearts and homes of Leeuwarden were to be had for the asking.

The feeling of regret, the next day about noon, we took leave of Leeuwarden to pick up the scout car in Dokkum, 50 miles northeast. This vehicle we delivered to the main body of the LAD in Drachten and then we forged ahead to Gypskerk where we found billets for the night. Again the Mack crew was called to salvage a half-track ten miles out of town.

Thus ended a spectacular dash through Northern Holland that aggregated our Regiment over 4,000 killed, captured and wounded. The next day, we rejoined our main section of 74 at Ede near Vries in southern Holland, where we remained to rest and refit for four days. This breathing spell enabled us to get abreast of our work once again and we knew that the final collapse of Hitler's Third Reich was not far off.

After our rest and refitting, we proceeded into Germany and joined up with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division for the final assault on the weary Wehrmacht.

We found parking space for our vehicles in the muddy lane just out of Friesoythe. We found refuge from the inclement weather in tents and hay barns. Bad weather and soft ground prevented our armour from being used, so we stayed here in the mud for two weeks.

On 2 May, when the squadrons went in again, the recovery section was again called forward. Two Staghounds were picked up near Westerstede and on 6 May, the Germans surrendered in NWE.

Thus the active service activities of 74 LAD, attached to the Royal Canadian Dragoons, was ended. The affiliation since 1941 with this fine regiment will always remain in the minds of the members of the LAD.

## **132 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME, attached to 25<sup>th</sup> Cdn Armoured Delivery Regiment**

This unit was organized on 9 April 1945 at No. 1 COMERU, England, at very short notice, all equipment and personnel being organized in a period of six days, which entailed constant work on the part of the unit during this time in order to get the equipment together in time for movement orders.

Lt A. T. Roberts, previously OC 120 LAD, was put in command of this unit and personnel were selected by him from No. 1 COMERU and 120 LAD. The majority of personnel from No. 1 COMERU were previously instructors in the school at No. 1 COMERU in the personnel from 120 LAD were chosen on their qualifications and merit of their previous work.

The first Part 2 Orders were issued on 21 April 1945, and movement orders were received on 2 May 1945. The unit proceeded from No. 1 COMERU at 0900 hours 3 May to the Tilbury docks, London, England for embarkation. During the trip to the embarkation docks, the convoy made excellent time and no difficulties were encountered with the exception of a plugged fuel line on the 60-cwt stores lorry, which was corrected in a short time. Upon arrival at Tilbury docks, Lt Roberts contacted the ESO for further orders. Personnel were given a hot meal, vehicles were refuelled and everything was made in readiness for embarkation at 0400 hours the following morning.



At 0400 hours the following morning the convoy was escorted by military police to the embarkation docks where all equipment was loaded on a landing ship tank and personnel allotted to quarters. This operation was completed by 0900 hours. The LST moved out into the Thames, and lay at anchor until the following morning when we proceeded into the English Channel in convoy with many other craft. The weather was fine, and our LST docked at Ostend, Belgium, at 1600 hours the same day. Immediately upon docking, disembarkation followed and all equipment was unloaded without mishap. The vehicle convoy was then organized and proceeded to the transit camp at Ostend. Lt Roberts made inquiries as to our destination and we were informed that we were to proceed to 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment presumably situated near Eindhoven. As it was getting late and as it was also necessary for the OC to procure maps and rations for the following day, it was decided that the unit would remain at the transit camp for the night and proceed to Eindhoven in the morning.

The following morning, 4 May 1945, the convoy departed from the transit camp at Ostend at 0700 hours. Periodic stops were made for refuelling at petrol dumps and for meals. The convoy arrived at Eindhoven and located the rear party of "F" Squadron, 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment and it was learned that the regiment had moved and was now located at Enschede, Holland. Owing to the vehicles requiring maintenance and the 60-cwt stores lorry having a cracked frame, it was decided to remain in Eindhoven for the night and proceed to Enschede the following morning. The 60-cwt was taken to a REME workshop for immediate repair. However, on returning that evening, the work done did not meet with the approval of the OC, and it appeared likely that the frame would crack again. The following morning, the convoy proceeded to Enschede at 1000 hours and on reaching Nijmegen it was discovered that the frame on the 60-cwt had broken again. In order to prevent further damage to the vehicle, and considering the distance we had already travelled, it was decided to spend the night at Nijmegen and proceed to Enschede the next day. Arrangements were made by the OC, and we were put up in RCASC billets for the night, and the 60-cwt was successfully repaired by unit personnel.

The following day at 0900 hours, the convoy proceeded to Enschede and arrived at Headquarters, 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment where the OC reported to Col Stuart, commanding the regiment. Unfortunately it was then learned that the LAD was to be attached to "B" squadron at Nijmegen and it was necessary to return there and the convoy proceeded the same day. The return route took the convoy through Holland, across the frontier into Germany and passed through the German towns of Cleve, Calcar, and Goch, and arrived in Nijmegen at 2000 hours the same day. All personnel were very tired as the trip that day had been a long one and the roads in Germany were in bad condition. Upon arrival at Nijmegen, the OC reported to Maj Leggett, OC "B" Squadron, 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Delivery Regiment, and owing to the fact that tents were not available, we were billeted in a school in Nijmegen until tents were procured. When the tents arrived, camp was set up in the area of "B" Squadron (MR 685591) and the next few days were spent in clearing the area for the LAD to set up. Information was received by the OC that "B" Squadron had been selected to handle all tanks of the Canadian Army for reallocation to England and other points. This entailed necessary work such as de-ammunitioning, de-kitting, preservation of armament, and classification of "A" vehicles. The OC organized his personnel and work commenced on 19 May 1945. During the following week, personnel were very busy and approximately 600 tanks were put through, which was considered excellent work considering the number of men on the job.

During the process of this work, the OC made contact with CREME, ADOS, and DDME, and the clerk notified all concerned of our location and submitted weekly and monthly returns. Today approximately 2,000 tanks have passed through for necessary work, and classification has been carried out in accordance with instructions as laid down by 21 Army Group. At the same time, the vehicle mechanics were busy doing necessary work on the "B" vehicles of the squadron, and the classification of all "B" vehicles was carried out and a report submitted to the commanding officer of "B" Squadron. To date, this work has been completed with the exception of a few tanks that are still in the workshop and have yet to pass through the squadron.

## **A Narrative of RCEME, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Troops, in North-West Europe**

The following pages are a brief account of the movements and activities of all RCEME units under command of HQ RCEME 2 Canadian Corps Troops, from the date of their landing in France up to and including the date of disbandment on cessation of hostilities.

Several other RCEME units were at various times under command, but no account has been given for them, because this narrative pertains only to those units within the formation at the time of disbandment.

Throughout the campaign, HQ RCEME travelled with and was at all times situated close to the workshop. This enabled direct liaison to be maintained without the aid of wireless communication, which was never used.

The historical events concerning 2 Canadian Corps Troops RCEME are set out in more detail in the individual War Diaries, for it has been necessary in some cases to rely solely on unit records and the memory of individuals to write this narrative.

(FW Cranston) Lt-Col  
Commander, 2 Canadian Corps Troops, RCEME

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop, RCEME**

In this brief narrative pertaining to the activities of 2 Canadian Corps Troops Workshop during the campaign in NW Europe, it is thought advisable to mention the unit's arrival in the marshalling area within the vicinity of Southampton docks on 7 July 1944. An account of the foregoing is chronicled in the unit's war diary of that date, but the confusion on the part of the marshalling area staff is worthy of note.

At 2345 hrs 7 July, half of the unit under command of Capt B. J. Wallace proceeded to the dock area and embarkation on American LSTs. At 0130 hrs 8 July the remainder of the unit under command of the OC were scheduled to move, but final embarkation was not completed until 1115 hrs. On the completion of all loading the LSTs moved out into the harbour of Southampton to await further orders and to form in convoy with other ships.

The trip across the Channel was quiet and uneventful with the exception of the drone of our own planes overhead and the distant rumble of artillery fire. The first half of the unit landed on the shores of France at 0500 hrs and the remainder at 1845 hrs 9 July, on the beach just north of the village [Villiers de ?], and each proceeded to an assembly area where final instructions and locations were given.

The unit left the assembly area at 0200 hrs 10 July and proceeded to its new location near the village of [Villiers de ?]. All driving was under blackout conditions for the sound of enemy aircraft overhead made it necessary to carry out those precautions. The morale of the unit was of the highest order and all were eagerly looking forward to what the future days would bring.

The workshop commenced vehicle repairs on the morning of 11 July to a Ford 60-cwt on charge to 2 Canadian Corps Troops Signals which had run over a German mine, and from that day to 8 May 1945 many such vehicle casualties were returned to operational use.

Because of the advancing front line, word was received that the unit would move to a new location in the vicinity of [?] at 0300 hrs 13 July and work commenced in this area at 0900 hrs. This present site was ideally situated between two hills, which was immediately called "Happy Valley" and it was here where the unit really began to work, although later on in the campaign it was proven that one workshop in the Corps are could not maintain all commitments, and this point is noted elsewhere in this narrative. During

our stay in “Happy Valley” the protection of the adjacent hills gave some comfort from the activities of enemy aircraft as well as our own ack-ack fire, although one casualty did occur, but it was of a minor nature. Slit trenches were utilized and some of these were lost from the heavy rains, which almost flooded the camp during the night of 21/22 July. Our meals, under the circumstances were quite good and it was not until a few weeks later that the compositions became most unsatisfying – especially that known as [M and V].

On 23 July the unit moved to a new location in the village of [?], nothing of which was left with the exception of demolished houses, dead cattle and sheep in the streets and thousands of flies. To guard against disease, petrol was used to burn the carcasses, but unfortunately very little could be done in regard to the flies, which proved a menace during our early days in France. Slit trenches were dug immediately on arrival, after which the workshop began work on several equipments which were brought forward. It was in this area that vehicle casualties began to arrive to such an extent that it was necessary to work from 0800 hrs until 2100 hrs each day, with the exception of Sunday, when the shop closed at 1300 hrs. We remained in this location until the battle of Caen was won. During this period the Corps Commander’s “Staghound” [armoured car] was altered and made into an observation vehicle which he used throughout the remainder of the campaign.

The next move was carried out 17 August to Fontenay-Le-[?] located south of Caen and completed without casualties at 2000 hrs. The danger of mines was always prevalent and the field in which we set up shop evidently had been the scene of a “hard fight” for German dugouts were dotted about the perimeter. Because of the rapidly advancing front line, our stay in this area was short and the first Corps Backloading Point that was laid out was never used. The shop was never fully occupied for we were too far behind our units, and on 23 August we moved to a new location St. Pierres sur Dives – a distance of approximately sixty-five miles.

The shop was set up in a large field on the edge of the village of St. Pierres sur Dives and the people gave us a most enthusiastic welcome. The next day (24 August) a Corps Backloading Point was established near the workshop and manned by personnel of the unit. Being more closely situated to the Corps unit, plenty of work was available for us and all sections with the exception of the instrument section were kept busy. Many pieces of German equipment and trinkets had been picked up by the men and held as souvenirs. Radio reports of our rapid advances in all French sectors had been a great stimulant for morale, which had been kept on a very high level, and everyone was in good spirits.

On 31 August we left for the vicinity of La Haye du Calleville, and after a 60-mile drive arrived at our destination at 1645 hrs – many stops being necessary en route due to traffic congestion. Once again our location was in an orchard that was very clean and tidy. We were now well into France and our advance was very noticeable on the map compared to what it was a few weeks ago. As our front line had again advanced so far and so rapidly ahead of us, vehicles were not unloaded or workshops completely set up as it was rumoured another move would take place within the next 48 hours. As a result of this, only sleeping quarters were erected. People nearby were very friendly and the men received cucumbers, tomatoes, and even fresh eggs, which were a treat for us.

On 2 September reveille was at 0500 hrs and the unit left for its new location at 0700 hrs arriving in the vicinity of St. Andre Sur Cailly at 1345 hrs. As before, the workshop was not set up nor the vehicles unloaded as it was anticipated we would be moving on within the next 48 hours. The time spent here was considered as a rest period, and this had not been well earned. En route the hurried exit of the Germans was once more in evidence for damaged vehicles, horse drawn tractors, and German equipment could be seen along the roadside.

Our next move took place at 0600 hrs 5 September and we arrived in the environs of [?] at 1000 hrs - another 50-mile drive - and throughout the trip a hearty welcome was given by the French as they lined the roadside to see us pass. Again we did not set up shop for the line was rapidly moving ahead of us and again we bivouacked in this area awaiting the sanction of [?] Moves [movement control] to carry on.

Word had been received and we left from the village of Campagne des Hesdin on 7 September. The trip was completed without mishap, although on arrival heavy rains almost made the entrance to our area impossible. Many of the adjoining French farmers visited the unit and quite freely told us that we were occupying the field belonging to a French collaborator. It was in this area that we first saw the shaven heads of girls who had consorted with German soldiers – a miserable sight. The people here were very kind and many of the men were invited into their homes. Our stay here was longer than before due to the advance being held up for the Boulogne and Calais shows. The corps backloading point was located in an adjoining field and before leaving this area it was well filled with vehicles and tanks.

On 13 September we were on our way once again to the vicinity of St. Sylvester sur Capel arriving there at 1000 hrs. This move was approximately 105 miles, and was made in surprisingly good time. It was while we were in this area that the vehicle shop reached the highest weekly output since our arrival in France. The unit established its backloading point at Dielt and men were dispatched to look after it. On 20 and 21 September, the unit drove to Vimy Ridge Memorial and this was enjoyed by all.

Amid darkness and rain the unit left for its new location in Belgium at 0530 hrs 23 September – this was to be the longest move to date and we arrived without mishap at 1445 hrs at Wiesmunster [?] and set up shop in an ideal location – a field with hard standings. Our first meetings with the Belgian people were very friendly and continued to be so until we left a few weeks later. It was in this area that all departments were quite busy, particularly that of the armament section who were converting 60-cwt vehicles into longer chassis for Corps HQ caravans.

At 0745 hrs 14 November we left for Grave Barracks in Holland and arrived there at 1500 hrs. This was the best accommodation we had the opportunity of using since our arrival on the continent, and the first time personnel did not use canvas for sleeping quarters. The workshop sections set up in covered sheds and the production accomplished showed the effect of proper shop conditions. This area being located in the Nijmegen salient brought us once more quite close to the front line and nearer to our units. Apart from one shell that landed close by, and numerous V-1 and V-2 bombs overhead, very little enemy activity was experienced. It was a great disappointment to receive word that we were to vacate this area on 12 December, for we had counted so much to have a suitable place for our Christmas festivities.

We arrived in the village of Geffen at 1100 hrs 12 September and spent the remainder of that day and night parked in the village streets while awaiting the only available accommodation, which was being occupied by a British unit on rest. On the morning of 13 December, we moved into the most dismal area that it had been our experience to see.

Here billets were in two vacant schools that had been considerably damaged by bomb and shellfire and the workshop area was a sports field plus a railway siding. It was in this area where Christmas was spent, and under the circumstances all personnel enjoyed themselves. A Christmas party was given by the men to the children of the village, and the people during our stay were most kind.

On 13 January 1945, Major F. W. Cranston, who brought the unit to France and remained with it until this date, was posted to HQ Army Troops and the unit was taken over by Major P. C. Ingram. Until Major Ingram's arrival, Capt R. E. Simpson was acting OC and held this capacity for several weeks.

In February the unit moved to Cleve, Germany and while there experienced considerable activity from enemy fire which resulted in three casualties. Due to the devastation of the town, workshop facilities were not ideal. Several German civilians were employed in menial duties, and proved very docile and caused no trouble at any time.

The next move was to the area of Lochem in Holland, and by April the unit was once again in Germany in the vicinity of Meppen and was still there on VE-Day, 8 May 1945. One of the highlights of the unit's production capabilities was the construction of a mobile bath on a 5-ton trailer. This was complete with three bathtubs, and elaborately finished in suitable colours. It was made for the corps commander, and heating element plus all accoutrements proved highly satisfactory.

On 11 May the unit moved to Oldenburg, Germany, and remained there until the latter part of June when it returned to Holland, in the vicinity of Enschede, where disbandment took place on 8 July 1945, thus ending, for many, an association which they were reluctant to lose.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop, RCEME, Advanced Workshop Detachment**

The AWD was formed to service 2 Canadian AGRA and commenced operations at Cairon, France, on 15 July 1944. It comprised practically all the armament section of the workshop, an instrument lorry, and personnel from 2 Canadian Tank Troops Workshop, and a "B" lorry with personnel from 3 Infantry Troops Workshop. A few days later it was decided that this arrangement could be improved by deriving all requirements from the parent workshop and, as a result, the equipment personnel from 2 Canadian Tank Troops Workshop and 3 Infantry Troops Workshop were released, and throughout the remainder of the campaign the AWD was a part of and under the direct administration of OC 2 Canadian Corps Troops Workshop.

After the breakthrough at Caen, the AWD moved into that city on 27 July, and set up shop in a street in the south side. Capt S. J. Wallace was in command with Lt B. O. Dick as 2i/c. While the AWD was in this area, they were subjected to bombing and shellfire on two different occasions and, as a result of this, two men were wounded and two technical lorries were a complete loss.

After the stay in Caen, the detachment moved at all times with the AGRA and was completely self-contained, having returned to the parent unit once in September at Campagne des Hesdin, but only for three days.

During the shelling of Calais and Boulogne, in which the AGRA took a most active part, the AWD moved several times and carried on their work, on occasion, under the most adverse conditions. Lt B. O. Dick was posted to command an LAD attached to one of the medium regiments.

While in Belgium, the detachment first set up in the vicinity of Brugges and serviced the AGRA during the "cleaning up" of the Scheldt area. In October Capt S. J. Wallace was posted to HQ First Canadian Army, and the AWD was taken over by Lt J.E. McCann. While under the latter's command, the AWD moved into a tramways building in St. Nicholas, and remained there until 14 November when the parent unit moved to Grave Barracks in Holland, and rejoined the workshop for the first time since September.

On 13 December, the AWD moved to a vacant factory in Nijmegen and remained there until February of 1945. During the Christmas season, a dance was held in one of the cafes and all personnel fully enjoyed the evening. At this time Capt R. C. Sentence was posted from the parent workshop to take over command and Lt J. E. McCann returned as workshop officer.

The next move was to Cleve, in Germany, where the detachment was once again subjected to shellfire with the result that two men were wounded, and they were forced to move to another area on the outskirts of Cleve. Due to the rapid advance of the forward troops, the combatant role of the AGRA was by this time diminishing, and correspondingly the responsibility and work of the AWD dropped to an all time low.

In March the detachment returned to the parent workshop for the last time, and remained with it until disbandment on 8 July 1945.

The AWD received several commendations from the brigadier commanding 2 Canadian AGRA and from DDME HQ First Canadian Army for the splendid work that was performed during the campaign, and it may be said that it was due to their untiring efforts and enthusiasm that the guns of the AGRA were available at all times.

Capt S. J. Wallace received the MBE and AQMS H. J. Millen the BEM for their outstanding work during their association with this detachment.

## **No. 4 Heavy Recovery Section, RCEME**

The Section, 2 Officers and 67 men, landed near Courseuilles-sur-Mer on 2 August 1944 under the command of Captain Louis Bourbonnaise. It was the last of the four recovery sections of No 2 Recovery Company to arrive on the continent. The equipment consisting of eight breakdowns, five transporters, three 7½-ton Trailers, one D-8 tracked tractor, and one universal carrier was brought over by a variety of crafts such as tank landing craft and tank landing ships. Captain Bourbonnaise stayed with the section until 11 September 1944 when he was transferred to 3 Canadian Recovery Company as Officer Commanding that unit. During this period a goodly number of breakdowns were out on point duty in and around the Caen-Falaise area. The transporters were very active on recovery and the unit was much split up while moving through such places as La Folie, Fontenay le Larmion, St. Pierre-sur-Dives, St. Andre-sur-Cailley, Gamaches, and Campagne de Hesdin. Recovery work at this time was heavy and part of the job consisted of cleaning the dead from knocked out and damaged vehicles.

Capt Bourbonnai left the section at Campagne de Hesdin and command was assumed by Captain Lauria who was the OC during most of the path into Germany. Shortly after the change in command the section moved to Cassel on 13 September 1944. Recovery in this area was fairly light. Normal work of maintenance and inspection, breakdowns and transporters on point duty, and recovery being carried on.

After the series of short moves as shown above, the section moved to Ruyssslade, our first stop in Belgium and remained there from 18 September 1944 until 3 October 1944. Bad weather and rain set in for three or four days making the movement of heavy vehicle very difficult. In fact the breakdowns were fitted with mud tracks on their rear wheels. During this stop a number of our transporters were working with the RCASC on special priority work.

On 3 October 1944 the section moved to Ecclo in Belgium and it was here that the Seventh Victory Bond objective of \$1925.00 for this unit was oversubscribed by \$100.00 on the very first day. Some of the breakdowns were out on point duty with the provost, and the transporters and other breakdowns were on the special job of clearing K-2 CBP at Antwerp. Sunday 22 October 1944 saw the section on the road again and headed for Elversele, Belgium, where camp was made for the next three weeks.

At Elversele a most unfortunate accident occurred, in which one the heavy breakdowns on recovery, 29 October 1944, was forced off the road by another vehicle. It struck a tree and immediately caught fire. The driver, a corporal, managed to get out of the vehicle, but suffered bad burns. The co-driver, a craftsman, was pinned in the vehicle and burned to death. This was our first death casualty, although three other slight accidents had occurred previously. One through a motorcycle accident, one by accidental discharge of a pistol, and the third by which S/Sgt Peters was blown up by a booby trap.

Work was extremely heavy while at Elversele, all breakdowns and transporters being used for days on end. A good deal of difficulty was experienced once again because of heavy and sustained rainfall. On Wednesday, 15 October 1944, the section moved off in bad weather for the new location at Grave, Holland.

Grave will long be remembered by the boys of No 4 Canadian Heavy Recovery Section because it was here that they spent almost two months at a very critical stage in the war. Here too the first Christmas on the continent was enjoyed and many other new and exciting experiences. This was one of the longest stopovers on the way up through France, Belgium, and Holland. While at Grave, General Simmonds, the GOC in C of 2 Canadian Corps visited the camp on 20 December 1944 and delivered a Christmas greeting. The general, noting that the men were quartered under canvas, was instrumental in the procuring of some Moody huts. During the early part of the this stay at Grave, the transporters were used extensively by Ordnance to transport supplies, this being a new and different job from what the men were

used to. Recovery, backloading, and point duties were comparatively light except one short period when the vehicles worked night and day to clear L-2 CBP. While still at Grave on 16 September 1944, a move was ordered and cancelled, the section standing by for two days, at the end of which a very short move was made to another point in the Grave area. Things were getting pretty hot at this time owing to the German offensive through the Ardennes. Enemy paratroops were reported landing in the Canadian sector and extra guards were put on. Vehicles were to be destroyed in case of a breakthrough. In the midst of this tense atmosphere, the Christmas party went off with a bang, the officers and senior NCOs serving dinner to the men. There was a day's rest for everyone and an ample free issue of chocolate bars, peanuts, beer, cigarettes and cigars. This latter being due to the efforts of Captain Lauria and Lt Roxburgh, the 2i/c. On 29 December 1944, orders were received to CB the whole camp, issue extra ammunition, and no one was to undress at night. Some of the men were sent to guard a maintenance company and all the camp warned of possible enemy action. This was the closest to action that the section has been. Two days later with tension still high, a large force of enemy aircraft flew over the camp at a low altitude. One plane was shot down by nearby anti-aircraft fire and the pilot bailed out. His parachute failed to open and he was killed. The stay at Grave was ended on 4 January 1945 by a move to Schaijk, Holland.

The section remained at Schaijk from 4 January 1945 until 27 February 1945. On 9 January 1945, while at Schaijk, a report at 2100 hrs gave information that enemy paratroopers were thought to have landed in the area. All precautions were taken and the guard doubled, but the report was cancelled within an hour. Work was very heavy in this sector with no time left for rest or entertainment. The transporter group distinguished themselves with some excellent work near Schaijk on 11 February 1945. Four transporters were sent on a special job, and carried their loads to within 500 – 1000 yards of the front line. On their return they were mortared very heavily and hit by shrapnel in many places. Pte Syntak was killed, he being our second death casualty. Sgt Roulston was in charge of the convoy, and when it was mortared was signalling the group over a railway. A mortar shell dropped on the track and killed two British infantry soldiers standing nearby. The sergeant took cover as the bomb landed and then continued his signalling when the debris cleared. The same NCO, when near S'Hertogenbosch, was strafed while returning from an ABP near Turnhout to his section lines. On this occasion he ignored the German plane strafing over the camp. Anti-personnel bombs were dropped, a sergeant and a corporal were wounded, and three motorcycles destroyed. While anti-personnel bombs were dropping, Sgt Morrison, Sgt Slumkofske, and Cpl Greene were inspecting a chore horse at the CBP office. All three heard the whistling of the bombs, but thought it was a doodlebug. When the bombs started falling, they dropped into the mud for cover. Sgt Morrison was between the other two and they were wounded, while he was unhurt. Sgt Slumkofske took quite a ribbing from all hands, as he was wounded in the rump. Later on the same day, the Hun came in to strafe again, but was driven off by RAF planes after one had been shot down about 400-500 yards from the camp. The next move on the way up was to Mook Station where we spent the time between 27 February 1945 and 6 March 1945. Here, on 4 March, the section enjoyed their first billets, but only for a short time, as the next move to Cleve, Germany, came up on 6 March. It was a long trail to Germany, but at last we had arrived. Very little of the drudgery and hard work have been placed in this narrative.

The short stay at Mook with comparatively little work was the calm before the storm which came at Cleve. This stop lasted until 4 April 1945, during which a number of new experiences came up. At 1100 hrs on 7 March 1945 an experiment was carried out in the field opposite our camp by unknown officers. A Sherman tank was covered with wire netting to act as protection against panzerfaust fire. Three shots were fired, one being low and hitting the bogies, one striking the wire net and ricocheting over the tank and the third exploding on the screen. The experiment was therefore considered a success. Here too, the area was heavily shelled by German artillery but no shells dropped in the immediate camp area. Again on 25 March 1945, a German plane strafed the camp but there were no casualties or damage.

Now begins another series of moves with only very short stopovers at each camp. On 4 April 1945 the section moved to site near Emmerich where it remained until 6 April 1945 before moving on to Locham.

While at Locham, Captain Lauria left the section to become OC of No. 2 Canadian Recovery Company and is now a Major. Captain H. Bapty took over command of the section on 10 April 1945, and remained as OC until after VE-Day, whereupon he then moved to CAOOF. Work was very heavy during this period, with all vehicles being used continuously. The heavy work still continued while at Meppen until 27 April 1945. At Meppen, Sgt Slumkofske had a particularly heavy job near the Kusten canal. About 12 to 15 tanks were badly bogged down near Friescythe and one transporter and the D-8 caterpillar went in for the recovery work. The tanks were recovered, but not before our D-8 had been bogged down so badly that it was necessary to borrow another D-8 to haul it out. The job lasted about one week and was heavy going.

27 April 1945 saw us on the move again, this time to Neuarenburg, German where we stayed until 7 May 1945. While there, Cpl Younis, D 166848, Cfn Debrowolski, L 58616, and Cfn Desormeaux C 9429, with a tank transporter and the D-8 gave assistance in recovery to Captain McNeil of 2 Canadian Armoured Brigade LAD. This was a vital job as the equipment was used immediately. Two SPs and two Kangaroos [armoured personnel carriers] had been holed by panzerfaust fire, but were still runnable. An enemy patrol had broken through in this area, and the area commander ordered all civilians out of the houses and burned down the nearby buildings. He also detailed two tanks and one infantry platoon to give covering fire to the recovery crew. While enemy sniping and shellfire continued, all four vehicles were pulled out and running in three and a half hours. The following morning two Germans were captured near our transporter, which had remained in the area that night. This fast and courageous work by our crew greatly assisted succeeding operations in the area.

Also in Neuarenburg one of our despatch riders (DR) came face to face with the enemy while on reconnaissance. C 33246 Pte Tobin J. M. was ordered to recce the area Eddewich – Jeddewn for a Sherman tank and a carrier, which were reported for recovery. At Jeddewn the DR was told of two enemy SP guns in the vicinity and that patrols could not locate them. He continued on his recce and on stopping near the edge of a wooded area saw the nose of a tank protruding through the bush on his right and another on his left. Both tanks were facing each other with motors running. A German soldier with his back to the DR stood in front of the left hand tank. The DR turned his motorcycle around and returned to Jeddewn to report his discovery to the tank officer in charge of the squadron based there.

On 7 May 1945 we broke camp at Neuarenburg and arrived in Oldenburg, Germany, in time to hear the news that hostilities had ceased. This was what everyone had been waiting for, and we could see it coming for some time past. So ends the “Path of Glory” for No. 4 Canadian Heavy Recovery Section with Captain Bapty as Officer Commanding.

## **6<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Workshop, RCEME, attached to 6 LAA Regiment, RCA**

The 6 LAA Workshop personnel were introduced to sudden night moves with their departure from the regimental concentration area at Hatch Park (near Ashford, Kent). Awakened at 0200 hrs on 4 July 45 with orders to move at 0600 hrs, it was a mad scramble in the darkness to finish packing, but the job was finished before the deadline. Then followed an hour and a quarter wait for the regiment to get on the road.

The convoy to marshalling area camp S6 (East of Rolford) was completed by 1600 hrs. Very few breakdowns and accidents occurred to everyone’s amazement.

The sub-sections were now concentrated with HQ Section and all vehicles loaded on the American Liberty Ship “Robert Henri” at Tilbury Docks on 6 July. Next day, personnel went aboard and the ship proceeded down the Thames, anchoring off Southend. At 2000 hrs 8 July, the ship weighed anchor and proceeded into the English Channel. After a quiet trip the anchor was dropped off the Normandy beachhead at 2100 hrs 9 July.



Some of the workshop vehicles were unloaded the next morning, but by noon the sea was so rough the LCT broke away from the ship taking Capt Little and eleven workshop men with it. The craft could not be brought alongside again, so these seasick parties were landed at 2045 hrs. The following morning the remaining vehicles and personnel were landed and the workshop concentrated with the regiment between Banville and St. Croix sur Mer. The sub-sections returned to their respective batteries.

At midnight on 12 July the workshop arrived in the battle area near Le Vey. There they swallowed dust all day and listened to the medium guns fire all night. The former condition was alleviated by patronizing the mobile bath unit for the first time on the 16<sup>th</sup>, and the arrival of the first beer issue on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

At noon on 22 July the workshop set up in the yard of an abandoned dairy in [?]ville. Sleeping quarters were located in nearby cellars and an air raid shelter, which proved exceedingly fortunate during the next few days. Within the hour the first enemy shells dropped in the area. These continued intermittently.

On the night of 24 July there was a heavy air raid, many anti-personnel bombs being dropped in the area. The 30<sup>th</sup> Battery sub-section was crowded in the same yard as 30<sup>th</sup> Battery HQ (BHQ) when a bomb set the BHQ petrol and ammunition trucks on fire. The tarpaulin on the sub-section stores lorry caught fire, but was extinguished through the efforts of the sub-section members. For his work in organizing the fire fighting amid exploding ammunition and bombs, S/Sgt Eric Rule was recommended for the Military Medal by the Adjutant on the instruction of Major Smythe of 30<sup>th</sup> Battery. However, he was later awarded the BEM instead. Cfn H. Brown received a slight shrapnel wound in the back and, in the excitement and flood of casualties, was evacuated to a British general hospital near Bayeux, where Capt Little located him on 27 July and brought him back to the unit.

The two following nights there were again heavy air raids. While none of the workshop vehicles were damaged, several vehicles and guns of the regiment were, and this created a great deal of work. The heat and flies were troublesome at this time, and the scourge of dysentery struck for the first but certainly not the last time.

On the evening of 13 August the workshop moved to Verrieres. The following afternoon, Capt Little, S/Sgt Rose and S/Sgt Clark were checking up on some Bofors deployed among the medium guns when the RAF commenced to bomb the area. A considerable part of the next hour and a half was spent in slit trenches. When a survey was made after the raid, only one of the Bofors had been hit but a bomb had exploded over the stores lorry of the 112<sup>th</sup> Battery sub-section, killing Pte O. J. MacDonald and seriously wounding S/Sgt Borden. The stores lorry, trailer, and all stores equipment and kit were lost in the fire, with the exception of the jeep, which was away with the three other men of the sub-section. Within two days, a replacement 3-ton lorry and 10-cwt trailer were obtained. Meanwhile a move was made to Gouvix. Many men were still suffering from dysentery at this time. Then began the long series of moves through France, which started on 19 August following "Diamond Up" [route] with steps near Jort, Le Panquay, Le Gros Thiel, across the Seine at Elbeuf to Boos, through Rouen and on to Beaurainville (between Montreuil and Hesdine) finally settling down at St. Omer on 9 September. While the regiment reorganized, the workshop stripped the guns under the supervision of S/Sgt Bakken, carried out modifications, and also inspected vehicles. A garage was occupied here and the men were able to work and sleep inside.

On 1 October, the workshop moved with the regimental convoy to an area west of Ghent, Belgium. By 6 October it was set up within the city of Ghent, with working space and living quarters under cover.

The regimental convoy from Ghent to Nijmegen, Holland, on 9 November started at 0645 hrs and ended at 2400 hrs. This was the longest, slowest, and coldest convoy the workshop was ever in.

The first twelve days in Nijmegen and were spent in a small soap factory where the accommodation was very limited. However a number of residents nearby volunteered to billet the men in their houses, which was very much appreciated. When the regiment came under command of 74 Brigade, Royal Artillery, the

workshop moved into the “Autopalace” Garage. This was later shared with 60 HAA Workshop, REME. The men lived in a schoolhouse next door.

Nijmegen was occasionally under shellfire during the entire period the workshop was located there, but only on 20 December did this cause any difficulty. Three shells landed at the rear of the school and a fourth struck the corner of the building, breaking most the windows and disrupting the billets somewhat, but no one was hurt.

A warning of possible paratroop attack was received on 21 December, necessitating an increased guard but nothing developed.

The outstanding events of December were the commencement of short leaves to Brussels and the investiture of S/Sgt Eric Rule with the BEM by Field Marshal Montgomery. This took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> at Greve Barracks and was witnessed by Lt Col H. D. Dow, CO 6 LAA Regiment, and Capt Little.

The regiment having finished its operations with 74 AA Brigade, the workshop was turned out of its garage and billets on 31 January and had to work in a football field belonging to the “Quick” club. The men were billeted in private homes opposite this field.

Leaving Nijmegen on 24 February, the workshop moved to the Reichswald Forest near Cleve, Germany, where it endeavoured to work in spite of heavy mud until 14 March. Then it returned to Holland between Jimegen and Grosbeek while the regiment concentrated and its equipment was put in shape for the drive across the Rhine.

On 24 March, the workshop returned to the Reichswald within a few hundred yards of the previous location, but on much harder standing this time. As there was not much work to be done for the regiment, this opportunity was taken to clean up and paint the workshop equipment.

The Rhine was crossed at Emmerich on 5 April and the workshop entered Northern Holland and camped near Etten until 13 April, when it went about three miles east of [?]. Three days later, it moved to Germany, about ten miles north of Meppen and remained there until 24 May.

The final concentration of the regiment took place at Krupps artillery proving ground near Meppen. Workshop personnel supervised the care and preservation of the guns, instruments, and small arms prior to their being turned in. General Simmonds inspected personnel in 2 Corps artillery units on 31 May.

The workshop went to Zeist, Holland with the regimental convoy on 15 June and there packed its equipment. It was demobilized on 24 June 1945 and personnel went to the RCEME transit camp at Arnhem.

## **40 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to HQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps**

40 LAD landed in France with our regiment on 9 July 1944, and were heavily shelled during our first night just north of Caen.

Preparing to move the night before the extensive bombing of Caen, the convoy was machine-gunned and mortared, causing two “soft” vehicle casualties, one of which was recovered later that night, despite counter fire. All “B” vehicles were supplied with ¼-inch radiator guards, to be used when halted.

The LAD White scout car and driver were loaned to the infantry to assist in the breakthrough before Falaise. He returned some days later with a broken front drive shaft, towing two of the regiment’s scout cars used in the same action.

All through the Falaise show, personnel had experience with German patrols, shelling etc., as recovery crews and repair crews were sent out to casualties.

The regiment was the first to cross the Seine River, and even the LAD moved up to thirty miles in advance of the leading 4 Canadian Armoured Division elements. Opportunities arose to take prisoners as stragglers tried to surrender, but we were too busy, and were moving too fast.

The regiment swept into Belgium from France, and rapidly liberated Ostend, De Haan, Zeebruges, and Bruges, against light opposition. Here the tire problem became acute, and exceedingly long trips were made back to supply points and knocked out vehicles to keep vehicles in action.

The recovery crews were called out to assist a Staghound armoured car, and on arrival in the area were heavily mortared and machine-gunned. Fortunately the breakdown was not severely damaged, and personnel dug in until darkness fell. Recovery was then effected and all returned safely.

The remainder of our stay in Belgium was luxuriously spent in excellent quarters in De Haan. Vehicles were inspected and refitted.

During the winter months, the regiment was in a holding role along the banks of the Maas River. The LAD was well set up in towns three to five miles back of the line. Recovery crews had some excitement along the dykes. Armament and vehicle inspection teams visited squadrons, but had only minor experience under fire.

The LAD acquired its own cook and kitchen from the regiment and became entirely self-sufficient. From this time onward we moved independently, and set up in areas of our own choice. This arrangement proved most satisfactory later on.

After the campaign Cleve-Xanten, south of the Rhine in Germany, the regiment did active recce work in Northern Holland. We followed the last squadron through the entire area, doing extensive recovery and repair work. During the latter part of this operation, the entire regiment, less the echelon [support elements], moved through [?] and receded an area of approximately 200 square miles without any assistance. The LAD was set up 10 miles north of the leading infantry of 4 Canadian Armoured Division. The recovery vehicle was sent out many times into isolated areas, but always with heavy armed escort, and only after the situation had been thoroughly assessed.

Our locations were frequently tactically very unsound, but German resistance was scattered and disorganized. It proved very beneficial to the regiment's operations to have the LAD close at hand.

In the Cleve-Xanten thrust, only one squadron of the regiment was actively employed. One breakdown was attached to squadron HQ throughout the operation. This vehicle and its crew were the only ones in the area, and worked day and night for our regiment, and for the infantry and tank regiments in the area. No casualties were sustained, despite the heavy action, and much good work was affected. The LAD remained fairly well back, and due to the few very bad roads in this sector could effect very little work. We concentrated with the regiment just a mile from [?], while that town was being stormed, but all bridges across the Rhine were reported blown, and we all moved back to Holland.

The last operation of the war, across the Dortmund-Ems canal to area north-west of Oldenburg was a difficult and strenuous period. The roads were unbelievably bad, and recovery crews had no rest.

At one point a vehicle was stuck half way across a moor. We entered a by-passed German village, commandeered all the male population, horses, and wagons, and built 100 yards of corduroy road to the casualty. It was during this operation that one member of the recovery crew took prisoner two German paratroopers.

Our biggest single recovery job [was] north of the Zusten Canal. One half of a squadron had been deployed up a narrow mud road which, due to heavy rains, became impassible, and they could not return. Recovery crews worked shifts, and we winched vehicles individually over a ¼-mile stretch of mire for 36 hours. The area was isolated, but no action was encountered through out the job.

Our heavy breakdown was blown up on a mine just a week before the end of the war, and the driver and co-driver slightly wounded. The vehicle was repaired and both personnel have returned to the LAD.

From a war-like point of view, recovery crews saw the most action, but all members of the LAD were exposed to shell and mortar fire on many occasions, and on two occasions we were attacked by small enemy patrols. There was always a tenseness too when the regiment was on active recce work. We always stayed with an echelon, or RHQ who were in many very unsound positions.

## **52 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2 Canadian Survey Regiment, RCA**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Survey Regiment, RCA, was formed in England late in 1943, and the LAD was attached to them complete with their equipment from another parent unit, the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa.

During the first week in July 1944 the regiment and LAD moved from the concentration area at Folkestone to Tilbury, the port of embarkation. During this move the only two vehicles casualties were two trailers, which were lost, one by an accident, and the other by a failure of the towing hook. This move showed immediate results of the inspection and repair program.

The regiment and LAD landed in France on 7 July 1944 and proceeded through the de-waterproofing area to a concentration area, and from there to Le Vey, France, where the regiment was first deployed in action. The first vehicle casualties were received during the next week, and these were all caused by enemy artillery and mortar fire.

The policy of inspection and repair was still being carried out, and the troop commanders made arrangements with the LAD to have their equipment in whenever it could be spared.

The regiment and LAD then crossed the Orne River at Caen and were located in a field south of the city that was under observation by the enemy. In this location the regiment suffered casualties in both personnel and equipment, and the LAD was kept extremely busy with repairs. Due to this, with the exception of the deployed bases, the regiment and LAD moved to Couloubelles.

On 8 August 1944, bombs were dropped from American bombers. These were dropped across the battery HQ and two troops. A large number of casualties resulted in men and equipment. During the afternoon and evening, fifteen vehicles were recovered to the LAD by the LAD breakdown. The total number of vehicle casualties was over forty, with about fifteen completely ruined. All repairable vehicles were repaired by the LAD by 2000 hrs the next evening.

About a week later, when the unit had moved down the Caen-Falaise road, more casualties were suffered as a result of bombing by the RAF.

After the Falaise Gap, the unit was moving almost every day and only minor repairs were carried out. Outside Boulogne, the regiment was again completely deployed and work was again continued. A slight drop was noticed in the standard of maintenance being carried out, and the CO of the regiment took steps to improve it.

During this period, the LAD recovered a half-track under twelve feet of water. The vehicle had gone through a railing of a bridge and had been submerged for 18 hours, and a great deal of work was necessary to put this vehicle in first class conditions.

After about two weeks at Boulogne, the unit moved to Ghent, Belgium. Here the unit was all concentrated together, and the time (over a week) spent here was devoted to maintenance of equipment. The LAD carried out a very heavy inspection programme. At this time the regiment's RCEME personnel came directly under the LAD, and the LAD was formed into four sections i.e. vehicles, small arms, instruments, and wireless.

After this period, the regiment was again deployed west and north of Eccloo, eventually moving up to Breseins. During this period the LAD completed, for the second time, a complete inspection and repair of all equipment on charge to the regiment.

In November 1944, the unit moved from this location (in one jump) to Nijmegen. Here, very static conditions prevailed, and it was relatively easy to carry out a prearranged schedule of inspections. The unit stayed in this location until February 1945, and by that time maintenance was exceptionally good and the condition of the equipment excellent. Four new sections were formed during this period - mortar location sections. They were supplied with a new type of sound ranging recorder, the No. 2 or 4 pen. To get results and maintain this equipment in action took a lot of time and experimentation in the wireless section. The technical faults in this equipment were eventually found to be in the manufacturing tolerance on the values of the resistors. The equipment by the end of February 1945 had been satisfactorily modified to be reliable and give good results.

During the winter, the LAD received its only casualty in personnel, one man was wounded by shrapnel in the shop.

During the fall it had been found that vehicles operating in axle-deep mud soon had no brake drums or linings. A policy was adopted that any vehicles operating under these conditions were to have the wheels pulled, cleaned and repacked at the earliest opportunity. This proved to be a lot of work, but during the winter with a very poor supply of lining and drums available, the LAD was able to keep all vehicles in good condition.

By the end of January 1945 all equipment in the regiment had been completely inspected and repaired for the third time. The LAD by this time had, by experience and by disposal of inefficient and incompetent personnel, become a very efficient unit, and was capable and did turn out an enormous amount of excellent work. Relationships between the LAD and the unit were good, and the CO of the regiment backed up the LAD 100%.

In February the unit moved to Cleve, Germany, where they stayed for a number of weeks after which the Rhine River was crossed at Emmerich. With one stop near Lochem the unit proceeded to Allmelo[?], Holland and after a few days to [?] near Karen, Germany, where they remained until VE-Day.

The efficiency of the LAD on the rigid maintenance system suggested by the LAD and enforced by the unit, and the continual inspection and repair programme carried out kept the regiment at all times capable of carrying out its task despite heavy losses at times of technical equipment.

## **88 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 25<sup>th</sup> Armoured Delivery Regiment**

We landed on French territory on the morning of 12 July 1944, after an uneventful crossing of the channel. Our three weeks of conscientious and tiring waterproofing was of no avail, for we landed in a mere three inches of water. Directly on landing we proceeded to the de-waterproofing area. It was here that the first pangs of hunger made themselves prevalent. We were then allowed to eat our one and only 24-hour ration. This was repeated for two or three days, and having already eaten the ration we were forced to forage for a bite to eat.

Our next move took us to Fontaine Henry, and an unprotected open field. Here, for the first time, we set up a shop, and began making our new issue of tanks battle worthy. What spare time that was available was put to use by attempts to dig foxholes in the rocky clay. We found these holes were quite useful, for we were strafed several times. After each strafing everyone seemed happy to be able to dig just a little deeper.

Our sincere attempts at camouflaging seemed to draw fire rather than distract it. Fortunately we were able to discontinue this practice as we advanced.

On arriving at Muillon Des Boissons we set up shop in an orchard, which sheltered the graves of some of the less fortunate. With a damp day making this atmosphere quite heavy, and a mess tin full of camp rations, there were many of us that were forced to lose their appetites. It was during the period of our stay at Muillon Des Boissons that our biggest job was given us. The front needed tanks and more tanks. We gave them tanks and also built up a surplus. Nearly every hour of every day was hard slugging, but the tanks were going through. During this rush there was an epidemic of diarrhoea, a near plague of ear-wigs, and much night bombing and strafing. All of these cooperated on letting no one get a good night's sleep. During the day the air was filled with choking sand, thrashed up the tanks. We were certainly more than pleased to receive orders to pack for a move.

After passing through much battered Caen we stopped at Fauls-de-Vaucelles, our location was in a field of clay formerly used by the artillery. Work in this place was to be quite slack to what we had been used to, so it was decided that a well-earned rest was in order. Next morning we were on the move again. At Lorguichem was set up in a mosquito bound grain field. Work went on as usual, during which we had time to make an opinion of our new AQMS. It was indeed half the battle when we unanimously decided that he was 100%.

The next few moves were short, uneventful, with the exception of checking, rechecking, and repairing vehicles after each move. Short stopovers were made at Le Breul, Beauficel, Pierreval, Visse, Bloville, and Tardechem.

The next move took us out of France into Belgium. Our first stop was at Molenhosh[?], which is half way between Brussels and Antwerp. We were kindly received by the people of this district, and within a week there were innumerable dances being held to entertain us. Many were invited to private homes to share what food and refreshments were available. These signs of gratitude, and the news of the daily advance of our front line troops, were all that were required to keep the morale at a surprisingly high standard. All went well until the rain set in. A few weeks of rain and the tanks combined, reduced our solid pasture to a field of oozy mud about eighteen inches deep.

Forced to move from Molenhoeh, we located in the town of Breendonk, two miles distant. As before, we had dances and our friends to help spend our off-duty hours. About this time, Antwerp was first being subjected to V-1 and V-2 bombings. A few stray missiles were making us a little dubious about our safety so far behind the front. It was indeed a job to convince our friends that they were quite safe when we, ourselves, didn't believe a word of it. When the town streets showed signs of wear, we moved to Breendonk Fort. After a month it was decided that we were too far in the rear, and were given the order to move.

Our first stop in Holland was at Veghel, along the banks of the canal. For a shop we used a burned out factory that had left half of its walls and less than half of its roof. The billets were in a school in town, half a mile away. Winter was setting in, making colds and quick tempers not an uncommon thing among our personnel. We experienced many hard all-night tank recovery jobs. Tanks that were half in the canal, or completely in the 7-foot ditch that bordered the other side of the icy road. We were well pleased by the unselfishness some of our personnel showed when a bomber crashed near the workshop. They actually crawled inside the flaming plane, in an attempt to rescue two trapped fliers. It was here too that we suffered our first casualty. One of our drivers was sideswiped by a truck and immediately sent to a nearby hospital.

Next stop was in S'Hertogenbosch. For the first time on the continent we were billeted with civilians. In these homes we spent a really enjoyable Christmas, and New Years. Work was stepped up again for a few weeks, during which time we were continually being pestered by the V-1 and V-2. On New Year's Day, a flight of German planes sighted our location. Luckily they weren't in a strafing mood, or else there would

be a few less in our small detachment, as they were very low and directly overhead before they were noticed. As it was, we were shelled every day for about three weeks. Two men were wounded during this shelling; one sustained a dangerous head wound, while the other merely a skin wound. The former has since returned to the unit. Our billets were well battle-scarred when we moved from S'Hertogenbosch.

Cleve, Germany was our next field of operations. Here we had a whole town of furniture, or what was left of it, with which to make our billets comfortable. For lighting, we rebuild an old charging plant. But as before we were shelled nightly. This time, a gasoline dump was blown up quite close to our billets by a direct hit. Fortunately no casualties occurred. Many tank recovery jobs had to be done while we stayed at Cleve. This had to be done at night because of the roads being under observation, and we were few enough to do our regular jobs.

From Cleve we moved into Doctinchem, Holland. The billets were a section of a furniture factory, and a section of a machine shop. Not at all like our well-furnished homes in Cleve. But we were satisfied just to be able to advance a few miles towards the end of hostilities. Tank work in this area had slackened considerably, but road clearance, recovery, and repairs to passing convoys more than made up for it.

Back into Germany, we moved again knowing that soon the finish would come. Our spirits were dampened by another casualty among us. A gasoline explosion was the cause of evacuating one more man to the U.K. When word finally did come of the surrender, no one was hysterical; it just came as we knew it would. Work dropped to nil for about two days, and restarted at the same rate as usual. When the chance came to volunteer for the Far East Force, eleven out of twenty-five took that chance.

## **94 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Signals**

The tale begins weeks before the touchdown on Normandy's shore, with every man jack of the detachment working day and night supervising and checking the waterproofing of vehicles. The job was further complicated by last minute replacement of deficiencies, and shortages every now and then of waterproofing material, because somehow or other the unit seemed to have more vehicles than the cursory count indicated. But at last all was set, and the long haul from Dover to Tilbury began. There were a few breakdowns on the way, necessitating the trouble detachment tearing back the route we'd come to shepherd in the laggards - one of them was the RSM who almost didn't make it!

The efficiency and quality of the supervision and checking were shown when not a vehicle was drowned. But the whole thing had to be gone through quickly in reverse, so that the unit's vehicles would be able to roll unhampered by layers of sticky "goo".

La Fresne Cailly saw the detachment sharing a small field with everybody and his brother including [?]WS, 3 TM, and 13<sup>th</sup> Provost Company, but things straightened themselves out somewhat, although everybody felt pretty naked as flares dropped around at night and our ack-ack made life a little precarious.

At Lasson we harboured on the side of a field between the exit to main Corps HQ and a tank track. For the weeks we were there, limitless clouds of dust blanketed the vehicles, and the rumble and roar of tanks going by made sleep a little difficult, to say nothing of the nightly visitations of enemy aircraft. There, we had the nasty and unhappy job of dumping on nearby junk pile the shattered jeep in which Sgt Hannay and Cpl Shirlow were fatal casualties.

St. Hubert Folie saw us beginning to serve our apprenticeship in the exacting art of slit trench digging. We became more and more efficient as we moved to Bretteville-Sur-Laize, Jort and St. Foy De Montgomery[?].

At Le Fanguay and Le Gros Thiel, we harboured respectively in a lovely orchard and on the edge of a stubble field. On moving from the latter, the wrecker was busy dislodging more than one vehicle from the miry clay.

Over the Seine and on to a wood near Auffay, where the detachment went SS hunting with resultant excitement but nothing to show in the way of a bag. Le Mesnil-Reaume saw us converting stocked grain into shelter from the rain, while at Moyaeville we sought the shelter of orchards again. Near Montreuil the fatal fascination of stubbled fields was again felt, and the wrecker worked for nearly two hours pulling out bogged vehicles. At Colembert, a one night stand, the detachment was prudent enough not to venture down the grassy slope, but other vehicles did so and once more the wrecker hauled them out. The long run to Cassel was comparatively without incident, and this was the first place of any size we struck which had been relatively undamaged. In this neighbourhood, the traffic in eggs proved good, and sightseeing to heavily bombed V-1 sites was a feature. The trek back to the vicinity of Colembert landed us in a heavily wooded area not far from Boulogne and Calais where we vegetated for a month, hard by the small village of Licques, and had a grandstand view of the heavy bombing of Calais.

On the long run to Bestelberge, near Ghent, one or two vehicles required attention, but on the whole it was a fairly uneventful trip. Here, the boys' social life picked up considerably, and there was a good of concentration on French and Flemish. The club in Bestelberge proved a pleasant spot, and soon the fellows developed enough social confidence to strike out on their own – with noticeably successful results. After wallowing in mud in a pasture for nearly a fortnight, we moved into a posh one-time garage belonging to a large factory, where working conditions were greatly improved. It was near the trolley line into Ghent too, and that was regarded as an advantage.

The hop to Wijchen was the longest we had made to date, and all vehicles of the convoy managed it without delay. The inevitable hunt for a convenient place to set up and work was rewarded when the OC took a first mortgage on part of a planning mill. The presence of a number school desks and benches in the said premises made some of the younger members of the detachment feel at home! Social activities were somewhat restricted, but more than one of the detachment seems to have been able to overcome the hurdle of an unfamiliar language and to have done very well!

The Christmas season ushered in Capt Straith to replace Capt Wachamuth, who moved on to 18 Canadian Armoured Car Regiment; it also saw the entire LAD along with the parent Signals unit, play Santa Claus to several hundred Dutch children – needless to say the “Canadese” were more like children than the Dutch youngsters. The New Year (1945) came in like a lion, as Jerry strafed our area several times on 1 January during his attempt to cripple our air forces. Also, at this period, there were constant alerts to greet potential paratroop landings and Wijchen became buzz bomb (V-1) and V-2 alley. The V-1 and V-2 were a constant source of annoyance throughout January and early February, and were directly responsible for the one and only S.I.W. [self-inflicted wound] case in the detachment's history. During January and February, all Signals, 13 Canadian Provost Company, and Corps HQ Defence Company vehicles were thoroughly inspected and put into first class condition. Many useful recovery jobs were successfully undertaken, the most outstanding being the recovery of two Jeeps and one Weasel from the Waal, as well as one half-track and one 3-ton line vehicle from the east side of the river – all of them in a period of two hours, and while the main Waal bridge was being shelled. Also during this period, all personnel were given every opportunity for entertainment, and remained quite happy as the build-up for the last big push reached its completion.

At approximately 2200 hrs 7 February, we were given orders to prepare to move within 48 hours. Within 15 minutes we knew the reason for the order, as all hell broke loose with artillery and bombers banging away at Jerry. Everyone was up early on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>, as the artillery did their best to get us up at 0500.

Early February found the LAD on the outskirts of Cleve, in midst of 155-mm's [guns], 5.5's [guns], field guns, armour and infantry, all of which added to the duties of Signals and Provost, as well as the LAD



who had to keep them rolling. We set up camp in the Reichswald and stayed put until the end of March when we crossed the Rhine. During this period, all LAD personnel participated in the Hochswald show, when Signals got ahead of the infantry (over 100 vehicles were recovered by our lone wrecker on this occasion). The LAD suffered two casualties as the 15-cwt tangled with a Sherman in the blackout, and the motorcycle touched off a mine - no one seriously injured but the vehicles were "kaput" and had to be replaced. Also, all Signals, Provost, and LAD vehicles were completely overhauled, wire cutters installed in all jeeps, cable layers manufactured and installed on 53 jeeps and six Weasels, and the breakdown was busy from morning until dark. The rain and cold of early February turned to pleasant warmth, so our stay was not untenable. However, Jerry did send numerous planes over, and shelled the area on several occasions, but the thousands of our aircraft which passed over daily more than offset this.

April 1<sup>st</sup> (approximately) found us on the move again, as we crossed the Rhine and moved by stages to Emmerich, S'Herenberg, and Lochem, the latter standing out vividly in everyone's memory as we spent approximately one week surrounded by more mines than any of us ever dreamed existed. From Lochem we moved to Meppen (in Germany again), where we again took root as the forward units had difficulty crossing several canals. Although our area at Meppen was very sandy and not conducive to pleasant working conditions, all the Signals and Provost vehicles we could get into the LAD were once again overhauled and, as usual, the breakdown was kept busy.

On approximately 2 May, the unit made its last long drive to the east as we moved to the Oldenburg area. Here, we were very fortunate to find a former German air force barracks in good shape, so our occupational home was quite comfortable. May 7 and 8 found very little celebration because VE-day came too much as an anti-climax, but as the days passed, all ranks became more cognizant of what victory meant, and began planning on a great scale for their return to Canada. Rehabilitation, recreation, sports of all descriptions, and the inevitable parade commenced immediately following VE-Day. Despite this, and increased allotments of P.L. vacancies, over 200 Signals, Provost, and Counter-bombardment Office staff vehicles were brought up to their highest possible classification. In most cases, this meant 2<sup>nd</sup> and sometimes 3<sup>rd</sup> echelon repairs, and of course there were the inevitable and welcome calls for assistance from our beloved breakdown. During our stay in this area, Patsy, our mascot, gave birth to puppies. Cfn Campbell was sent home on one of the first Repatriation Drafts, and the excellent recreational facilities offered in Oldenburg were used liberally by all.

2 Canadian Corps was withdrawn from Germany on approximately 18 June, and the LAD, after a hectic drive during which 29 accident jobs (mostly Corps HQ) had to be handled, arrived in the Enschede area in Holland. The next two weeks were spent in assisting Signals in their disbandment program, and saying goodbye to a lot of our Signals friends who left for home or other units. The evening of 1 July was the occasion for the LAD farewell party, which was held in an Enschede club - plenty of food, liquor, girls, and music plus the presence of a lot of old friends including Lt-Col J. T. North, OBE, and CO of the Signals, made the event a complete success.

3 July was disbandment day, and so 94 LAD passed into history. During its stay in Europe, following its arrival in Normandy, the LAD completed over 1800 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon repairs to vehicles, carried out 600 recovery jobs, and completed innumerable miscellaneous jobs. Over 15,000 miles were driven by the storeman in obtaining spare parts. It is also noteworthy that the detachment became known as the "Fighting 94<sup>th</sup>", dubbed such by the "Maple Leaf" when they reported the several hunts staged by LAD personnel for SS troops. None of these hunts were entirely successful but, as the name stuck, there were many embarrassing moments before we were able to live it down.

In conclusion, it is a source of pride to all former 94 LAD personnel to remember the kind and generous words spoken on behalf of their efforts by the CO Signals in the presence of the entire Signals unit during his farewell address. The record of achievement attained by the LAD is due, in large measure, not only to the co-operation received from other RCEME units, but also to the splendid co-operation and assistance which was freely given by the CO Signals and his 2i/c, Major Paul Layard.

## **95 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME Attached to 8 Field Park Company, RCE**

During the period of action on the continent of the Canadian Army, 95 LAD was at all times attached to 8 Canadian Field Park Company, RCE, and served the formation RCE, 2 Canadian Corps Troops. For the invasion of NEW, this formation was in a “build-up” role and its vehicles were waterproofed in the Folkestone, England, concentration area. This LAD was formed in England in 1942, before there was any Field Park Company or other properly constituted 2 Canadian Corps Troops Engineers, and in CMHQ Administrative Orders authorizing formation and mobilization, the LAD was shown only as attached 2 Canadian Corps Troops Engineers (no unit). This fact, together with the LAD having a separate mobilisation serial number, probably explains the misunderstandings of British Movement Control in first insisting the LAD move overseas with HQ RCE instead of the Field Park Company, cancelling that, and then when HQ RCE had gone, changing their minds again, and moving the LAD separately in a vain attempt to catch them up. 95 LAD left Folkestone for the marshalling area on 4 July 1944 under a separate movement order, spent four nights forgotten about by HQ on Wandstead Flats dodging buzz bombs, and finally embarked on 8 July 1944. We spent four days on an American LST, eating better than at any time since leaving Canada, drinking real coffee, and not an Englishman in sight. We disembarked in France on the evening of 11 July 1944, making a dry landing, and the next morning we were joined again with Field Park Company, who had left after us and arrived before us.

Our first month in France was spent at St. Contest, north of Caen. Arriving shortly after the fighting in this area, we had to become acclimatized to dead Germans, horses, and cows, and to live mines, flies, mosquitoes and wasps. Calvados was never quite mastered, even the product of the LADs own still, using cider. “Distillate” is a better word. For a week or more, we had an honoured position in the centre of two complete AGRAs. The LAD serviced, in addition, 5 Canadian Field Company, which had gone over with 3 Division, until the arrival overseas of their own LAD. Although LAD personnel and equipment escaped unscathed, enough shells and bombs arrived to keep the breakdown busy evacuating vehicles to the workshop. Replacements were very good at that time, and everything was BLRd by workshop, so in order to keep some of the special engineer types of equipment which were not in good supply, the LAD did quite a few repairs to derrick lorries, coles crane, machinery lorries RE, transporters, etc. Jeeps, because of the short supply, were also repaired even to straightening and welding frames and rebuilding with assemblies from the ground up.

On 18 July 1944, units of RCE 2 Canadian Corps Troops commenced operation of bridging the Orne River and opening routes through Caen. The LAD breakdown was sent out with transporters and the heavy engineering equipment, just after the 2,000 heavy bomber raid in the morning. In the evening the driver was wounded by bomb fragments and evacuated to hospital. He could not get under the breakdown when the bomb was heard, because too many others were there ahead of him. The OC LAD went in with another driver the next day, and brought the breakdown out along with a bombed engineer jeep found in the centre of Caen. The breakdown was not sent to cover bridging operations again, and although it has been in many tight spots, the same vehicle is still in possession of 95 LAD.

This casualty was the first and last to personnel of the LAD due to enemy action. During operations, a total of nine men were replaced, the others leaving due to sickness in three cases, one hurt on a street car in Brussels, one man breaking his ankle twice, and two men transferred, All personnel of the LAD suffered the Normandy complaint at least once.

On 10 August 1944 the LAD moved with workshop part of 8 Field Park Company to Mondeville, just after the push for Falaise had cleared the enemy from the area south of Caen. We remained in this place in very hot weather for ten days, and it seemed that most of the time we were fighting flies. On 21 August the LAD moved to St. Pierre Sur Dives, and started the period of fast movement along with 2 Canadian Corps Advance HQ. This period is still known as the “Orchard days”, when we stopped never longer than four days and often only overnight in apple orchards in the vicinity of Plainville, Averville, Cressy,

Ramburelles, Montreuil, Ardres and reached Steenvoorie on the France-Belgium border on 27 September 1944. It is thought that only divine providence or superior intelligence at Corps HQ, with which we were keeping pace, saved us from disaster. More than once we passed Division HQs and even went through infantry positions laid out with forward defence lines, etc. Location and recovery here suffered for lack of maps.

In the evening of 27 August 1944 at Plainville, LAD personnel while looking for eggs were asked by French family to rout out two Germans who were hiding in a bush and who had just robbed the farmhouse. Somehow the number of the enemy reached the Orderly Room as fifteen. The 2i/c of 8 Field Park Company gave permission for 20 men or so to try and capture them with small arms and light machine guns, but not to stay out after 2300 hrs. After firing into one woods where the Germans could be heard, screams were heard from a farmhouse. They found that the two Germans had been there, and had run into another small woods. This was surrounded and riddled with SA fire and as it was 2300 hrs and nothing further to be heard, the party withdrew and returned to camp. Meanwhile, a message had been sent to OC 8 Field Park Company, 70 miles ahead with the advance dump, and he read the figure as 150 Germans, so spent all night rushing back to see if he had any company left.

The Field Park Company and LAD stayed 2 weeks at Steenvoorde, while some of the RCE formation assisted in clearing the channel ports. We then moved into Belgium and spent 6 weeks at Loreren, between Ghent and Antwerp, while the engineers were active in the Schelde operations. Things remained fairly quiet and steady, and the opportunity was taken to overhaul the transport of the formation.

On all moves up to this time, the LAD moved with the basic part of the Field Park Company in packets of no more than six vehicles and thus did not come under movement control. On 9 November 1944, we moved at 0800 hrs in one convoy as a formation of RCE 2 Canadian Corps Troops, and finally arrived at 0600 hrs the following day at Wijchen near Nijmegen – under Movement Control. It was later proven many times that four hours travelling was all that was necessary. This, with our experience in France, proved to us that our system of moving in packets, in charge of NCOs if necessary, was much the more efficient method. It was always used thereafter in operations.

After four days in a field in the cold and rain, we managed to get into billets and working space in Nijmegen. We spent the winter there from 13 November 1944 to 22 February 1945. The LAD carried on much the same as in England. On 1 January, we started and by late in February completed, with the aid of 2 Canadian Corps Troops Workshop and mechanics attached from each company, a complete renovation of all vehicles in the RCE formation.

On 22 February 1945, we moved to Donsbruggen, Germany, near Cleve, and remained for two weeks. On 7 March 1945, starting in the afternoon and continuing into the night, 4-inch mortar shells fell all around 8 Field Park Company and the LAD, shooting from across the Rhine about four miles away. They were very accurate. Several vehicles, including the dental clinic were hit and the YMCA supervisor wounded. The next day, the LAD moved into the middle of another barrage and got out safely, moving about three miles back into the Reichswald Forest. We remained there while the engineers bridged the Rhine, and then crossed ourselves at Emmerich on 3 April. We spent two days near Zeddum, Holland and moved to Ruurlo on 5 April. On 13 April 1945 the LAD moved back into Germany to Meppen. The engineers were engaged in bridging on the Ems and Leda Rivers, when the cease fire was given on 5 May 1945. On 8 May we moved to Bad Zwischenahn. The engineers carried on road repairs, etc., in this area until relieved by 2 Division. On 1 June we were inspected by the GOC 2 Canadian Corps, on 16 June the LAD moved back to Oldendaal in Holland, and on 20 June 1945 to Puttan, joining 3 Canadian Infantry Division Canada Group for repatriation.

## **A Narrative Of RCEME, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, in North-West Europe**

The history of RCEME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division in North-West Europe begins with the arrival of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division in Marseille, France from Italy during the first two weeks of March. The narrative covers the two-month period from the landing in France to the end of hostilities in Holland on 8 May 1945. The first month was used to re-equip and reorganize the division to correspond with Canadian divisions in the new theatre. During this time the division moved through France, Belgium, and into Holland. The second month saw the division in active operations in Holland. The activities of RCEME in this period were very limited and very little battle action was experienced. Working conditions were, in general, better than in Italy and there was a greater availability of spares and replacements. It was considered that Canadian troops in NWE fared much better generally in equipment, supplies, amenities etc.

(F.W. Cranston) Lt-Col  
RCEME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division

### **1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

In Marseille, France, on 11 March 1945, the largest intake of work on the records of this workshop began – over one hundred jobs in two days. All these vehicles were jobs left by units passing through Marseille. A large AWD was sent out from this point and assisted the movement of the division through France. The unit finally moved off from Marseille on 23 March 1945 after repairing 164 vehicles, 4 guns, and 13 trailers.

On 28 March 1945 the unit arrived at Herenthals, Belgium . It was soon found that in the theatre of operations a brigade workshop adhered more to the schedule of repairs than it did in Italy. For instance, large repair jobs were far better BLR'd [classified "Beyond Local Repair"] and the vehicle replaced as stocks were much more plentiful in NWE. It was also noted that all supplies were in much greater quantity than they were in the CMF(?).

On 4 April 1945 the unit moved to Cleve, Germany. The short stay in Germany impressed on all ranks how much Germany had paid for her part in the war, as the town of Cleve was well-bombed and destroyed. At this point the unit vehicles were brought up to full war establishment for the first time since the formation of the infantry brigade workshops in January 1943.

The unit moved to Holland on 10 April 1945, but was unable to set up a workshop. Two subsequent moves brought the workshop to a location in Apeldoorn, Holland. At this location, the most desirable billets, recreational rooms, etc., were set up as the unit was in Queen Wilhelmina's Royal Stables. A dance hall was arranged in the stables and the friendliness of the Hollanders was a most pleasant contrast to Italy. While in this location, VE-Day was announced. Dances, picture shows, and sports were laid on and all these things assisted in the days of repatriation of men back to Canada.

In Apeldoorn on 3 May 1945, Brig Grant, DDME, First Canadian Army inspected the workshop while in operation and expressed himself as well satisfied. On 23 May 1945 the unit moved to Schieday, near Rotterdam. At this place the unit opened up a cabaret club known as the "88" Club which was a great success providing dances, a good place for the men to gather in congenial surroundings and enjoy themselves for a few hours.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME

At 0700 hours on 14 March 1945, two Liberty Ships, the *Thaddeus Kosciusko* and the *Joseph Warrant*, conveying the personnel and equipment of the workshop weighed anchor and sailed out of Leghorn Harbour in Italy, bound for France.

At 1030 hours, 15 March 1945, the two ships docked in the port of Marseille, after an uneventful voyage. An hour later the first vehicles came off and were dispatched in groups of ten to the petrol point and thence to the staging camp, eighteen miles to the north. Among the first impressions made by the new country were the excellence of the debarking organization, the sound of the new language, the appearance of the people, and the beautiful roads. The first two days in France were occupied chiefly with administrative matters, such as changing Italian lire into French francs, getting the unit personnel inspected for infectious diseases and having them dusted with anti-lice powder. On the evening of 17 March, the marching orders were received and the composition of the convoy in which the unit would move, was detailed.

One hour before the main convoy moved off, an advance party consisting of one officer and the cooks and helpers left for the next staging camp, where they reconnoitred the site allotted them, and prepared the evening meal and haversack lunches for the next day's noon meal on the road. This procedure was repeated each day. Before starting the first day's move, the importance of security was impressed on all personnel once again, and they were warned to guard against using the Italian expressions, which had become part of their vocabulary, and against talking to the French civilians.

The staging camps were situated near the following places: St. Rambert, Macon, Les Laumes, 40 miles southeast of Paris, and Cambrai. The weather throughout the trip was good, the roads were excellent, and well-signed and controlled by U.S. Army Provost. Camp organization was unusually good, so that the journey of approximately 700 miles was quite enjoyable.

On 23 March 1945, the convoy arrived at its final destination in the town of Kalines, north of Brussels, and the shop was set up for operations in a lumberyard. The shop soon settled down to the old routine under new conditions as the work started to flow in. The only parts immediately available were some Ford engines, and a week later a few Chevy engines.

The stay in Kalines was very enjoyable, and the contrast in conditions found here and in Italy, sent morale soaring. Everyone was in good spirits also over the prospect of an early leave in the UK, the first group having left on 31 March. A highlight of the period here was a very successful unit dance, held in a large hall in the town – the first unit dance since leaving the UK in June 1943.

The divisional gun shop was set up again for a short while in the town of Duffel, and one of its first jobs was to carry out a modification to some 2500 Sten guns. This modification, a safety device to prevent the gun from firing when dropped with the magazine attached, was completed by the gun shop in less than three days.

On 4 April 1945, the unit moved to Cleve, Germany, and set up shop in a shoe factory. From this area, an AWD on a divisional scale was sent out from this workshop. This AWD consisted of a complete armament section (personnel and vehicles), two complete vehicle sections, and miscellaneous personnel for administrative duties, etc. This was the largest AWD ever sent out from this unit, with personnel in its composition numbering over 60. This AWD set up near Zutphen in Holland.

On 10 April, the remainder of the shop moved to Little Hengelo in Holland. Work soon started to flow in as units were informed of our location. A division collecting point was established in our unit, which was cleared at regular intervals by a recovery company.

On 19 April, the shop moved again to a large park on the outskirts of Apeldoorn. The parts situation improved considerably and as result the work output was greatly increased. Some excitement was caused

one night when it was claimed that group of Germans had been sighted in the area, a 20-man guard was maintained all night, but nothing was seen of any Germans, much to the disappointment of the men.

On 25 April, a better workshop site was found in a schoolyard in Apeldoorn and the unit moved to this spot. During the month of April, the unit telecommunications section carried out an inspection of the wireless equipment of 1<sup>st</sup> Anti-tank Regiment, RCA, and during the course of the inspection, was under heavy mortar and artillery fire from the enemy who were less than 1,500 yards away. This was the closest point the section was to the front line throughout the campaign.

On 3 May 1945, Brig Grant, DDME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army made an inspection tour of the unit and met the officers in charge of the LADs normally based on this workshop. A dinner for him was given later in the officer's mess and was attended by Lt-Col A. De Maio, CREME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division and the commanding officers of the other brigade workshops.

An AWD left for Leiden on 15 May, where a workshop and division collecting point were established to service units north of The Hague.

The stay in Apeldoorn also saw the successful completion of the 8<sup>th</sup> Victory Bond campaign, where over \$11,000.00 was subscribed, helping to place RCEME in the lead of the division with 150%, the cessation of hostilities in Holland on 5 May, and VE-Day on 9 May.

Sports shields for presentation to the winners of the division sports meet were made in this workshop. Shields were made, one for each brigade, each shield carrying the badges of the regiments. There were also shields for the division artillery and division troops.

On 26 May 1945, the stay in this very pleasant town was ended when the unit moved to Rotterdam and set up for operation in a large garage. Work soon started to flow in, and a large number of the personnel being on leave or out with the AWD, it was necessary to employ every available man, regardless of trade, in the motor vehicle section in order to keep ahead of the work. The men very soon made themselves acquainted with Rotterdam and made many friends. For this reason, morale and orderly room cases very low. A well-organized and very successful dance was held in the ballroom of the Stock Exchange building on 7 June.

The rapid turnover of men due to postings to Canadian Army Pacific Force, Canadian Army Occupation Force, and Repatriation Drafts to Canada, and the resulting postings from the UK made administration very difficult and necessitated almost a complete reorganization of the unit.

On 10 June 1945, a representative group of 65 men and the instrument lorry took part in a farewell divisional march past for the army commander. On 22 June the shop closed in Rotterdam and moved to a new location at Utrecht.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

After a two-day voyage in Liberty Ships from Leghorn, Italy, the unit arrived in Marseille harbour, France, on 18 March 1945. The workshop, after the unloading was completed, moved off to a staging area about eighteen miles north of the city, where they stayed for three days. This period was devoted mostly to administration, medical inspections, changing of the Italian money to French, and also in checking and preparing the vehicles for the long trip through France.

On 21 March the unit set out from the Marseille staging camp at daybreak, thus began a 6-day trip north, staging each night in prepared camps, and travelling each day an average of 100 miles. After two years of Italian roads, it was a pleasure to drive convoy along the magnificent highways of France, through country that showed hardly any sign of war. This trip, which brought us to Liege, Belgium on 27 March, was completed without a single major breakdown in the units transport, due largely to the excellent condition of the vehicles, and the fine manner in which the individual drivers carried out their daily

maintenance on route. Due to the untiring efforts of both officers and NCOs, security was maintained at the highest standard. The men were consistently reminded that they must avoid using Italian expressions which had by this time become part of their vocabulary, and were warned against speaking with civilians, or throwing away typically Canadian cigarette packets, or similar actions which would have identified them as Canadians.

In Liege, the workshop saw its first flying bombs, but fortunately no casualties were experienced. From here, a special detachment was sent out under Capt Maloy to form what was known as the Division Caravan Shop. This detachment, along with a number of civilian carpenters constructed several very fine caravans and trailers for Division Headquarters of which the ones for ADOS and ADMS and the map trailer for 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters, received wide spread comment and praise.

The unit moved to Cleve, Germany on 7 April, which area was in such filthy condition that most of the stay there was spent in cleaning up. We crossed the Rhine on 19 April and proceed north to Hengelo, Holland. Our stay here was uneventful, and our work chiefly routine. On 19 April, the unit moved again, this time to Apeldoorn, Holland, where the three brigade workshops were set up quite close to one another. Here, for the first time, it was necessary for the unit to send out patrols against straggling enemy raiding parties, which were hanging on the nearby heavily wooded area.

The unit was in Apeldoorn for the 8<sup>th</sup> Victory Loan, and sales were so successful that we topped the other RCEME units, and with a total of \$14,100 helped place RCEME in the lead for the division, with 150% of their quota reached. This may be attributed to the partly to the high state of morale which existed at the time, due to the fine reception the troops received at Apeldoorn, and the unit dances and other functions, which became a weekly occurrence.

During this period, the shop constructed, under the supervision of Lt G. O. Grant, a plaque for Maj General C. Vokes, former GOC 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division. This plaque was in the form of a large shield, bearing the map of Italy in metal, surrounded with the badges of the divisional units. Three shell cases were suspended from the bottom in the form of a dinner gong with a 48<sup>th</sup> Highlander drumstick as mallet.

On 3 May, DDME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army, Brig Grant, visited Apeldoorn, and inspected the three brigade workshops. On arriving at this workshop, he was introduced to the unit officers, and the officers in charge of the LADs normally based on this shop. The unit moved to Rotterdam on 25 May, and immediately set about inspecting and overhauling the divisional equipment preparatory to turning it in.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Light Anti-aircraft (LAA) Workshop, RCEME**

2<sup>nd</sup> LAA Workshop arrived in Marseille, France from Leghorn, Italy on 18 March 1945. After a few days in Marseille the unit moved on five consecutive days up through France, stopping finally in Belgium at the town of RU\*\*ST for a period of nine days during the stay in RU\*\*ST, some personnel of 2<sup>nd</sup> LAA Workshop went on leave to Paris. After the stay in Belgium, the unit then moved into Germany and stopped for five days in the Reichswald Forest. The next move was from Germany to Holland where the unit made camp by the railway station at Gorsel. The first action encountered by the unit was on the crossing of the Ijssel River. After this was done the unit again made camp at a position near Devanter, from there the unit moved into the town of Apeldoorn, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battery Workshop sub-section went out with the regiment personnel hunting stray Germans and finally returned with five prisoners.

From Apeldoorn the unit moved to Kootwijk. There we changed several coal-burning vehicles into gas vehicles for transport of underground personnel that were attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Regiment, RCA. From Kootwijk, the workshop and part of 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Regiment concentrated into an "X" area. From Leiden we moved to an area at Soesterberg where all the division artillery LADs and 2<sup>nd</sup> LAA Workshop were concentrated into a divisional RCEME camp. While 2<sup>nd</sup> LAA Workshop remained

at Soesterberg, a dance was held as a farewell party. It was a big success, and a good time was had by all personnel of 2<sup>nd</sup> LAA Workshop, RCEME.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Heavy Anti-aircraft Regiment Workshop, RCEME**

This workshop has the distinction of being unique in the Canadian Army. There are a number of British Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments, but just one Canadian one, and as a result, its attached workshop is the only one of its kind. Because of this we have had problems of a somewhat different nature from those encountered in the average shop. This was particularly true when considering the performance of the 3.7-inch guns firing in the ground role.

The overseas story of the workshop began early in August 1944. After a long and successful stay in the V-bomb area of Southern England, the unit moved to France, landing at Juno Beach on 6 August. At that time, the shop was under command of Capt L.T. Baird, with Lt J. A. McKinnon in charge of the telecommunications section. After the usual upheaval of disembarkation, and several quick moves, the shop set up the area of Beny-Sur-Mer and settled down to work. At this time the regiment was firing at Caen in a ground role for the first time, and there was great interest shown by army headquarters in the performance of the guns. The workshop examined the guns at very frequent intervals to determine what affect the ground firing would produce. Our next move was to a site near Caen, where the regiment were now supplying anti-aircraft defences. In this location a large supply of native liquor, called Calvados was “liberated” and nearly managed to replace the unit water supply.

The next workshop location was near St. Pierre-Sur-Dives where Lt J. R. Shires joined the shop taking charge of the mechanical transport and gun shops. After a short stay here, the unit moved to the Lisieux area, with its important “bottleneck” bridge, which the regiment was defending. The next move, from Lisieux, provided the most unfortunate convoy of the campaign when five workshop vehicles were involved in an accident. This was caused when a workshop trailer came loose from its tow, and five vehicles behind piled up to avoid hitting it. However, all these vehicles arrived eventually under their own power at the next site in the vicinity of Abbeville. After this, quick moves took us to Hesdin and thence to Devres just outside Boulogne, where we arrived about the middle of September.

In the siege of Boulogne, the guns of the regiment received their most severe test in the ground role. The effect of this type of firing on the guns was a matter of great interest because of the high rate of fire and also the very low quadrant elevation [the elevation of the gun when fired]. Despite the fact that oil in the recuperator systems [these return the gun into firing position after recoiling] was boiling and the barrels sufficiently hot to droop visibly, all the guns remained in action. Most of the packings had to be renewed after the shoot but no serious damage resulted to any of the guns. Examination of the bores disclosed that the rate of wear had increased only slightly as a result of the rapid rate of fire which was four to five rounds per minute for periods up to an hour.

The workshop’s next move was to Marquise in the Calais area, where we came under fire from the big German coastal guns of Cap Gris Nez. This shellfire quickly revived a latent interest in digging. At this site the gun shop was busy with inspections to check on the results of the Boulogne shoot.

After the capitulation of Calais, the regiment and workshop moved to the Dunkerque area, becoming part of the Dunkerque forces under command of the Czech Armoured Brigade. Our first location in this area was the town of Zeggerscappel where we were greeted as liberators, being the first allied troops to occupy the town. On the Sunday after our arrival, the OC and a delegation from the workshop attended a service in celebration of the freeing of the town.

When it became evident that Dunkerque was going to hold out for some time, the workshop moved to better accommodation in the village of Arneke and settled down for the winter. Beds and furniture were obtained from the German barracks at Calais, a canteen was built, and indoor working space provided for most of the work in the shop, which spent nearly five months in this location. Our Christmas season was



very successful with the usual turkey dinner and all the extras, and was considered by many of the shop personnel to be their best Christmas dinner in the army.

A great deal of mechanical transport work was done in the shop because of the bad road conditions. Leaking Ford radiators were a continual source of trouble, and several new mountings were tried in an attempt to overcome this difficulty. One sheet metal worker, which our establishment allows, was unable to handle all the radiator and bodywork required. The workshop recovery equipment was found to be adequate and handled with great success an unusually large volume of recovery work encountered.

The biggest single job undertaken by the shop was the complete stripping and overhaul of all the guns in the regiment. The first six were done in the open, but with difficulty because of the cold weather which caused moisture condensing on the metal parts to freeze, and made them nearly impossible to handle or keep clean. For the rest of the job, an abandoned theatre with a very high ceiling was requisitioned in Bailleul, about 20 miles from the shop. Good quarters were available, so the gun shop moved in and completed the gun overhaul quickly and efficiently.

In the telecom section, in addition to the usual radar work, a large volume of wireless work was being done, most of it coming from the British regiments in the area. The "CZ" lorry was found to be too small and a shop was set up in a large warehouse to permit greater working capacity.

A change of command of the workshop took place during the period, Capt Baird leaving the shop early in November on posting to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Troops Workshop. His successor was Capt T. Bromage, who had previously been 2i/c of 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Brigade Workshop.

The ordered routine of the Arneke stay was ended early in February by an order to move to Middelkirke to anti-aircraft practice camp. Here the workshop was admirably situated in a large civilian garage, with room for nearly all our own vehicles and ample additional working space.

The next event was a very sudden move to Sambeek, on the Maas, which was made in one-day convoy of over 200 miles. Despite the length of the trip, all vehicles arrived successfully. The regiment was now firing in support of 30 British Corps. A great deal of firing was done, but little work was required on the guns apart from frequent wear measurements.

At the next site, across the Maas in the Gennep area, the shop was located on the main road from Gennep to Nijmegen and ran a roadside filling station to all and sundry. Because of this and the very poor accommodation available, everyone was glad when the next movement order came. This took us to Wetten, south of the Xanten pocket where we were able to get excellent workshop and living facilities. The main incident in this location was the use of the workshop breakdown vehicle to remove the girder above a low door in a barn so our vehicles could enter. Somewhat too late we discovered that the whole structure depended on this girder.

Our next move was to the Cleve area where the regiment was firing across the Rhine. The workshop site was an excellent one, but in the dubious position of being ahead of the guns. In this location, aided by good standings and fine weather we set up an assembly line procedure on engine changes. This procedure employed the vehicle mechanics chiefly in the capacity of overseers and for doing the skilled work, and utilized the drivers of the regiment for the manual work. This system resulted in our changing 27 engines, including several Mack and FWD engines in fourteen days, which restored the regimental transport to good shape. Also in this location, a completed set of new barrels were installed in the regiment's guns under workshop supervision.

Crossing the Rhine, we stopped briefly in a concentration area at Terborg before moving to Laren in the vicinity of Zutphen. With a baron's mansion for quarters and a spacious lawn for standing, we spent a very pleasant and not too strenuous few days. Our next move came in the form of a slow and tedious convoy covering 90 miles in eleven hours, to Meppen in Germany. On this convoy, one of the guns broke

its pintle while crossing a pontoon bridge and was repaired on the road by the workshop using the “KL” lorry.

The regiment left this area to go under command of 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division and the shop moved to Friesoythe near Oldenburg. The workshop site was a burned-out sawmill and the wood piled around kept the unit tents warm and comfortable. The main job in this area was the construction of a motor generator unit for regimental headquarters using a 4-cylinder auto engine with German 230-volt generator.

The last job of the regiment was the guarding of some 3,000 Dutch SS prisoners at Harskamp in Holland. At this location a fire in the workshop sergeant’s mess and quarters caused great excitement. Some equipment and a good deal of personal kit was lost, but no one was seriously injured. The next move was to Soesterburg, near Utrecht, to go under command of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division in preparation for the turn-in of stores and final disbandment.

Throughout the campaign the workshop has been very successful in servicing the guns of the regiment. This was partly due to the fact that the guns themselves stood up admirably and gave very little trouble, and also because the regiments care of the guns was excellent. More trouble was experienced with vehicles, chiefly owing to the difficulty of keeping up required standards of unit maintenance.

## **1 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters**

This unit disembarked on 11 March 1945 at Marseille harbour, complete with personnel and equipment. The following morning the unit moved with 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters convoy up the Rhone Valley through France. The complete convoy reached its destination at Ostmalle, Belgium after five days travelling. All vehicles, including brigade headquarters reached their destination and the repair work carried out on the road was negligible.

The unit remained at Ostmalle for two weeks while the brigade was reorganized to a certain extent. Vehicle inspections were carried out here, but the unit was hampered to a certain extent by the lack of workshops and Ordnance units. The next move was to the Reichswald Forest, Germany (Map Reference 818538 Sheet 6). After five days here, the brigade moved to Eefde (MR 008005 Sheet 5), and stayed there prior to the brigade assault across the Ijssel River. In the following operation, the LAD staged in four areas before reaching Apeldoorn on 17 April. On 19 April, the LAD moved to Map Reference 611018 sheet 32W, and remained there until hostilities ceased, officially on 8 May 1945. During operations in North-West Europe, no casualties occurred in the LAD and there were no changes in personnel until 8 May 1945.

On 6 May 1945, the unit was informed that they were to join the Berlin Brigade, which was being formed for the temporary occupation of Berlin. Unit vehicles were painted and unbattleworthy equipment replaced. The unit moved on 12 May 1945 to Nijverdal to the Berlin Brigade concentration area at Map Reference 013018.

For four weeks the unit remained here, repairing vehicles in the brigade and attached units, while awaiting word that permission had been granted to enter Berlin. Extra RCEME personnel were attached to unit to look after the heavy commitments in repair work for the brigade. On 9 June 1945, the brigade was broken up, and the various units in the brigade returned to their original formation.

On 14 June 1945, the LAD moved with the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Headquarters convoy to Soest (MR 350985) and has remained here to the present date.

## **2 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters**

The unit embarked in Leghorn, Italy aboard American Landing Ships (Tank) and sailed to Marseille with the brigade group where we moved into a concentration area.

Two days were spent in this area where the LAD was very busy. Most of the jobs done here were of a minor nature.

During the move through France, the breakdown vehicle and fitter's lorry were posted at the tail end of the brigade group to pick up and repair any vehicles that dropped out along the route. Thus all vehicles reached the final destinations with the exception of one that ran into a steamroller and was left at a REME recovery post for backloading.

The LAD set up in Hystopdenburg (?), Belgium, in a brick factory where normal work was carried out. All 6-pounder anti-tank guns and mortars in the battalions were inspected by fitters from 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop and normal inspections were carried out on small arms and vehicles.

After about two weeks in this area we moved to the Reichswald Forest, and while there, the Brigade Commander advised the brigade EME that for the forthcoming action universal carriers were to be used for towing 6-pounders instead of 15-cwt trucks. A check showed that one battalion had only four carriers equipped with tow bars. Towing bars were made up and installed by the LAD.

The LAD moved to a concentration area just east of the Ijssel River. There was some shelling here but no casualties. We crossed the Ijssel the day following the assault, and after several moves arrived in Barneveld where we carried out normal work and inspections and were situated there on VE-Day.

After VE-Day, we moved with the brigade group and set up in (?). While in this area, we did inspections on all vehicles and guns in the brigade group. Two battalions from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade who had come under command received the same treatment. We borrowed a 40-ton transporter from 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop and a low-loader from the Royal Canadian Engineers to backload German vehicles and equipment to Operation Eclipse dumps.

We later moved to Bilthoven where we assisted units in doing heavy preservation on small arms and instruments.

## **3 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters**

On 23 March 1945, the LAD arrived with 3 Brigade Group in Lier, Belgium. The trip through France was very enjoyable with good weather throughout. The Belgian people were friendly. Work was normal. The vehicles stood up well. The move had been made in easy stages and transport was not abused.

On 4 April 1945, the unit moved into Germany to the Reichswald Forest with 3 Brigade Group. (MR 827495 near (?), Germany).

On 10 April 1945, we moved into Holland, near Zutphen with the brigade group, MR 964806.

On 12 April 1945, we moved with the brigade group to a concentration area near division headquarters MR 002989. The Ijssel River crossing was underway, the LAD waiting to move across.

On 14 April 1945, we moved across the Ijssel River to (?) area MR 888033. Our guns were active at night. Work normal. Brigade group moving very rapidly at this time on drive for (?) and LAD getting left behind.

On 18 April, the LAD moved to Barneveld (MR 557953) to brigade headquarters. Our brigade group reached here to find 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division already there. A large number of Germans were

bypassed in the wooded area en route. These are giving themselves up to units in rear areas. The LAD recce party moving ahead of main body picked up three Jerries trudging along the road and took them to brigade headquarters. The LAD set up shop at Voorthuizen (MR 537000) just north of Barneveld.

On 22 April, moved to Nijkirk MR 460058 to be near brigade group. Normal vehicle work.

On 8 May 1945, the LAD moved to Delft (MR 682840) with the brigade group and received a very joyous welcome en route and in the town. Joined in festivities of civilians in outdoor celebrations.

On 10 May 1945 the unit moved to Wateringen (MR 620840) near Den Haag. The recovery vehicle was kept busy on transporting German heavy equipment to central dumps.

This whole period has been unspectacular and repairs and recovery has been of the ordinary every day variety and, on the whole, work has been light.

## **7 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

The unit arrived at Marseille, France on 18 March 1945. After five days travel from there, camp was set up in Whalem in Belgium. In the following two weeks, much work was done to put the vehicles in shape after the long trip. It was here we heard the enemy's V-1 for the first time but none landed near.

Two more moves brought the LAD to the Reichswald Forest, across the Rhine River, and on into Holland. The pontoon bridge at Emmerich proved its worth as our Diamond T breakdown vehicle towed two quads [artillery gun tractors], a 25-pounder gun, and a limber across the Rhine in one trip to avoid a traffic jam.

In the drive across the Ijssel, the unit moved with the regiment, stopping first near Deventer and a few days later at Foort Huizen. By this time isolated groups of enemy troops were to the rear. Upon receipt of information from the Dutch underground movement, the OC LAD and four men took the unit jeep and rounded up five German prisoners a short distance from camp.

The next move was to Kijkerk and at that position, "Cease Fire" orders were received and a truce declared. On the evening of the same day, German artillery fired on the Kijkerk area for about half an hour.

At this position, news of the unconditional surrender was received and on VE-Day we moved into the enemy occupied area. We received a warm welcome everywhere, and while going through Rotterdam our convoy was slowed down almost to halt by civilian celebrations. Camp was made at Schravendeel.

A week later a short move was made to Zwijndrecht. Here preparations for the demobilisation of guns and vehicles began while the regiment was handling the turning-in of enemy arms and equipment.

## **8 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

The unit embarked from Leghorn, Italy in two groups. The first boarded their LSTs with the main body of 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Regiment, RCA, on 7 March 1945. The second left on 9 March and after one day at sea landed at Marseille, France. The men were looking forward to some of the famous American rations on board ship, and were very unhappy to find only Compo [British composite rations] being used.

After a night in the huge concentration area north of Marseille, the LAD in conjunction with the regiment started on their long drive to the north. The country was certainly a change to that which we had known in Italy and some of the famous towns and cities, through which we passed will always be remembered. The happy, smiling people in St. Rambert, Macon, Lyons, Dijon, Cambria, and the rest, stood out in sharp

contrast to the general attitude of the Italian people. Finally, after six days, we arrived in Boom, Belgium, which was the final destination of our unit.

This little town about seven kilometers from Antwerp was for most of our men just what the name implied. For these boys, almost 18 months away from England, the town was a boon. You could go out in the evenings, dance, and talk to the girls in a language that was known to each other, and above all buy a glass of beer, something unknown in Italy. Many a happy hour was spent in Belgian pub. Also most of these men had their first experience with flying bombs as Antwerp was continually bombarded.

After sixteen days of resting, the LAD moved through Belgium into Holland. At last, as we passed Nijmegen, and into the battered Reichswald Forest area we could see that the Western Front had had many a grim battle. Our resting place in the Reichswald Forest proved very miserable due to a spell of bad weather.

However, after three days, we moved out again, this time back into Holland and our next destination was in a railway station near the small town of Gorsel. As our vehicles arrived in the area, we were subjected to some violent shelling, and there was plenty of scrambling and running for cover as the boys took to shelter. But we were back in action and everyone was happy.

For the first two days, our guns supported 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division. The ammunition was just pouring in and on two occasions our breakdown vehicle had to pull out the heavy lorries that were packing in the ammunition. There we learned that 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division was to attempt to cross the IJssel River just in front of our position. The LAD was landed with the regiment "B" echelon, and would move with them so as not to have too much traffic if our attack across the river was successful.

On the afternoon of 11 April, the attack went in but it was not until 15 April that we moved, this time to a flour mill in the village of Twello. Things were relatively quiet and the only sign of any warfare was a German 88-mm gun in our front yard, which had been completely abandoned as the Germans took flight.

We moved again on 18 April, this time through Apeldoorn to a sports ground just on the outskirts of that town. The boys were just beginning to realize how enthusiastic and friendly the Dutch people could be. Apeldoorn was the scene of much celebration and we had several dances for the LAD personnel. The fact that German troops were lurking in the woods north of us did nothing to damp the spirits.

On 20 April we moved again to a farmyard near Voorthutzen. Things had become very quiet and on 26 April we moved again, this time to another farm near Teerschur. Everyone had the feeling that something was about to happen. Then finally the announcement of Victory in Europe was made. Now came thoughts of rehabilitation, Army of Occupation and the Pacific.

In the next few days, the LAD was informed of all enemy troops in the Rotterdam area. On 8 May, we moved to S'Gravendall and then on 11 May to Skikkerveer. The breakdown vehicle was used to haul German vehicles to the Eclipse dumps while part of the personnel are actually employed in the dumps.

## **9 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

At 1030 hours on the morning of 12 March, the LAD, with the parent unit, 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Regiment, RCA, disembarked from the ship at Marseille. They proceeded to DBS Staging Camp, where they checked over their vehicles in preparation for the coming move through France.

The move up through France, which started on Saturday 18 March, took five days of hard driving in order to arrive at our destination. By driving all day, this meant that the LAD personnel had to service the regiment's vehicles at night. It was very hard on everyone to say the least, but as the colonel said after the move was over, the LAD did a good job and that's the main thing. Our breakdown vehicle was working to capacity all during the move and at one time had a 60-cwt, two 15-cwts, a GT, two limbers, and a 25-

pounder in tow all at the same time. The terminating point of the move was Terhagen in Belgium where the LAD and the regiment received a rousing welcome from the inhabitants.

On the morning of Tuesday, 3 April, the LAD started their move out of Belgium, a move that was to eventually wind up in the division going into action. On Wednesday, the LAD set up shop in Germany in the area of Cleve. It remained here until Saturday, when it moved to a location in Holland where the division was formed ready to go into action.

On Sunday, 15 April, the LAD moved from their location in the woods and made their way to approximately one mile north of Wilp on the main road from Wilp to Hoven. This move was the start of a series of moves that eventually led to the end of the war in Holland.

On Tuesday, 17 April, we moved again, this time to a small town called Beerbergen, just outside Apeldoorn. So far the regiment had not fired its guns, and to compare this campaign with the Italian campaign is like comparing night and day.

On Thursday, 19 April, the LAD moved again, this time to MR 570968, which is approximately 2 miles east of Barnevelt. This was not an excellent position by any means so the OC went out to recce another location.

On Saturday, we moved to our new location, which means we had left "B" echelon, who we were travelling with, far behind and it brings us right up with guns. Sunday morning we were greeted by the sounds of gunfire as we got up and were very surprised to find that it was our own guns that were firing. This is about the second time that our guns have opened up during this campaign, and this morning they put over a small fire plan to cover our infantry. Our work has increased since we have been in this area, and it is probably due to the constant moving which is hard on the vehicles.

On Wednesday, we moved again, this time to a location not far from Barnevelt on the Barnevelt - Amersfoort road (MR 512950 Sheet 378 1/25,000). The following night, after we arrived in our new position, we were lulled to sleep by the sound of Jerry's guns and we were surprised to note that some of his shells were coming our way. Most of the men took cover in a farmhouse, but the shelling, although being persistent was not heavy and after a while they went back to sleep again in their respective tents. Work has become heavier and the regiment has asked us to help paint their vehicles with our compressor on the Diamond T. It was in this position that the cessation of hostilities in Holland was declared, and later the end of the war in Europe. All these events were taken very calmly by the men as though it was the normal way to end the war and now their thoughts were turned to the "when are they going to send us back home" trend of thought.

On Tuesday, 8 May, we moved again, but this time we don't have to worry about Jerry, and we finally ended up near Ridderkirk where the regiment are starting to round up the Jerries in the vicinity and where they are going to start an Eclipse dump where they may concentrate the enemy equipment. During our stay up here, the breakdown vehicle was out every day from morning until late at night helping tow in the enemy equipment. It got so bad eventually, that we had to put two crews on the job so they could get some sleep.

## **10 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Medium Regiment, RCA**

This LAD embarked with the parent unit (1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Medium Regiment, RCA) in Naples Harbour on 11 March 1945, and arrived in Marseille harbour on 13 March. A few of the unit personnel had crossed with the equipment a week previously.

The following day the complete unit with equipment moved north up the Rhone Valley to proceed to the North-West Europe theatre of operations. On 19 March, the unit arrived in Harelbeke, Belgium, where it

remained for a week in order to overhaul equipment. On 27 March, the regiment moved up to Nijmegen, Holland, and went into action under command of 49 (British) Division.

Positions were subsequently taken up near the village of Angeren (1:100,000 Sheet 5, MR 770697) on the island, south-east of Arnhem, on 15 April, and after the capture of Arnhem, near Otterloo (1:100,000 Sheet 2 MR673900) on 18 April.

The next position and the last in action, was taken up near Barnevelde (1:100,000 Sheet 2 MR 527927) on 26 April. It was in this position that the announcement was received on the German surrender on 4 May 1945.

1<sup>st</sup> Medium Regiment was subsequently assigned the task of disarming German army formations in the concentration area of Den Helder, north Holland. The LAD moved up with the regiment on 8 May, passing through Amsterdam en route, and north to an area near Den Helder. A very warm welcome was received from the civilian population on the way.

The following day a position was taken up in the village of Julianadorp (1:100,000 Sheet 2AA MR 992817). 10 LAD was responsible here for the maintenance and repair of unit mechanical transport for both 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Medium and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Medium Regiments, RCA, which were under command of "Powis Force".

On 17 May, the LAD breakdown vehicle with a crew of three men were attached to "Walker Force" Army Demonstration unit to tour Holland in a demonstration of army equipment, returning on 10 June.

On 31 May, the first Repatriation Draft for Canada left the unit with four LAD personnel, including the WO II. From this period the LAD has operated with greatly reduced personnel.

On 14 June, the LAD left the Den Helder area with the regiment, and subsequently took up a position near Soesterberg (1:100,000 Sheet 2 350959).

## **11 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 11<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

11 LAD, attached to 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Regiment, RCA, landed at Marseille on 17 March 1945, and moved across France to Belgium in a period of five days bringing all vehicles and guns in excellent condition. We moved into the village of Zonnebeck near Ypres, and set up shop in a cotton mill.

On 25 March 1945, we received orders to move to Holland and were stationed in the village of Dinther, a small village near Tilburg, where we were stationed for one week.

On 1 April 1945, we moved to the Nijmegen area in support of 49 (WR) Infantry Division. Immediately we were ordered to Emmerich in support of 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division in their crossing of the Rhine at Emmerich. The wrecker only accompanied the regiment on this move and were back again for the attack on Arnhem in support of 49 Infantry Division.

We departed to recover one of the unit's carriers, and a 60-cwt in front of the wrecker set off a mine causing two occupants of the 60-cwt to be killed. We returned at approximately 0300 hours with the carrier in tow. We immediately set to packing our belongings in preparation for a move to join 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division on the drive from south-east of Holland to Apeldoorn. In this position we remained for one night, as a number of SS troops broke through and gave 17<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Regiment, RCA, a fair dusting up with several casualties.

On 18 April 1945 we left Barneveldt to join 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division on the crossing of the Ems River and the attack on Leer. This position was very wet and the wrecker worked night and day staying with the guns and gun tractors. We were also shelled three miles from the river on the main road, and had to leave the wrecker and take cover in a farm house. There were approximately thirty recovery jobs done

here including five for 12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA. The wrecker remained with guns for the rest of the period in action.

On 1 May 1945, we moved to the Emden-Wilhelmshaven area to join 1<sup>st</sup> (Polish) Division. This area was very heavily mined. There were some slight repairs, but for the most part the work was done on the move. In this position, the Jerries broke through and were within two kilometres of us, when they were stopped by the Polish tanks and infantry. This was a very strenuous night. While standing to, two tanks came in sight and everybody thought at first that they were Jerries, but they turned out to be the Poles which was very comforting to everyone concerned. We proceeded to Freidburg in the Wilhelmshaven area and we remained with the Polish Division at this place until the end of hostilities. We were in occupation for two days at Freidburg. On VE-Day we crossed Northern Holland and proceeded to the airport near Arnhem, the closest village being Handerlool. At Arnhem airport, the guns were turned in and the vehicles classified.

### **13 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Anti-tank Regiment, RCA**

13 LAD RCEME type "A", attached to 1 Anti-tank Regiment, RCA, arrived in North-West Europe on 17 March 1945 when it docked at Marseille, France along with other units of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division. The division had brought its own equipment from the Italian theatre. This equipment moved up through France and Belgium to the Antwerp-Turnhout area.

On approximately 1 April, the regiment was notified that it was to be equipped with Valentine self-propelled 17-pounder anti-tank guns and that 13 LAD RCEME was to become a type "D" LAD, i.e. for a self-propelled anti-tank regiment. The LAD immediately started drawing vehicles and equipment for this much larger establishment. On 19 April, another officer, Capt G.W. Procnier, who had had experience with Valentines was posted to the LAD, the former officer Capt E. F. Lee was posted to 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. Reinforcement personnel were received gradually until by 3 May the unit was up to strength. As soon as sufficient reinforcement personnel and equipment were available, LAD sections were made up for each battery of the regiment. This being completed by 11 May, the batteries of the regiment were committed in operations from the first week in April until 4 May, then from May to July the LAD continued to service the regiment, which was engaged in the liberation of Western Holland.

### **14 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Divisional Signals**

On 10 March 1945, 14 LAD assembled with the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division Signals at the harbour of Leghorn in Italy prior to the move into North-West Europe. The trip from Leghorn to Marseille in southern France was uneventful and the ship arrived in the harbour of Marseille at noon on 11 March 45. In the afternoon, all the vehicles disembarked and assembled in a staging area outside of the harbour.

During the two-day stay in the staging camp, the LAD personnel were very busy repairing vehicles that had developed trouble on the previous move. On 14 March 1945, the LAD set out behind the main division headquarters convoy. On the move through France and into Belgium, the LAD was very busy, as the LAD was responsible for the vehicles of main division headquarters as well as the signals vehicles. The breakdown vehicle on loan from 1001 Heavy Recovery proved very useful, as recovery posts were few and far between on the route.

The LAD arrived in Belgium on 23 April 1945 and located themselves in the village of Heyst Op Den Burg. The people in the town gave the troops a real welcome on the entry, and did everything to make the stay in Belgium as pleasant as possible. While in that location the LAD received a new Diamond T breakdown vehicle, and the vehicle and crew from 1001 were returned to their parent unit.



On 4 May 1945, the LAD left Belgium with the Signals and the division prepared to go into action with the enemy in the North-West Europe theatre. The LAD passed through the Reichswald Forest and crossed over the IJssel River in Holland. After four stops, with a few days in each location, the LAD took up location on 2 May 1945 in a forest west of Apeldoorn. During this period, the rainy weather was the most trying problem, and the LAD breakdown vehicle was out every day on several recovery jobs.

On VE-Day, 8 May 1945, the LAD moved behind division headquarters into Rotterdam. The Canadians were the first allied troops that the inhabitants of Rotterdam had seen and the people gave the troops a royal welcome. While in Rotterdam, the LAD began and completed the classification and inspection of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division Signals and 1<sup>st</sup> Provost Company's instruments and vehicles prior to hand in. In Rotterdam, the LAD set up in a civilian garage, and for the first week or so the LAD was very busy repairing enemy staff cars and vehicles, which were being turned over to our division. The last divisional march-past of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division was held in Rotterdam on Sunday 10 June 1945. The LAD formed up in the parade with the Signals group.

On 21 June 1945, the LAD moved into the town of Utrecht. While in this location the LAD had considerable recovery work to do. The LAD AQMS and Sgt returned to Canada on Repatriation Draft while in Utrecht, and when the LAD left that location it was comprised of only six men and an officer. The LAD moved into Hilversum on Friday, 28 July 1945.

## **15 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME**

15 LAD embarked at Leghorn, Italy and disembarked at Marseille, France on 15 March 1945 and proceeded to No.1 G.F. Staging Camp.

On 17 March 1945, the unit moved off in the rear of 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Company, RCE, following the route of the Rhone Valley – arriving in Zanthoven, Belgium on 23 March 1945. Workshop was set up in the tramway terminal, Zanthoven.

Immediately on arrival, the Commander, Royal Engineers, asked to have all Class 3, 4, and 5 vehicles reconditioned to Class 1 and 2 and the remainder BLR'd [Beyond Local Repair]. This was completed by 27 March. 43 vehicles were BLR'd.

On 28 March 1945 the unit moved off to Schaijk, Holland, near Nijmegen, and shop was set up in a house.

During the Italian campaign, it was found necessary to change over tipper mechanism and bodies to the new 60-cwt 158-inch wheelbase chassis. The work in Italy took three days per vehicle with the facilities that the LAD had available at that time. At SCHAIJK, Holland, it was necessary to complete the remaining nine vehicles in one week as they were required for coming operations. With this in mind, a section from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop was attached to the LAD with a "KL" lorry – this job was then completed in six days.

On 8 April 1945, a recon party from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division Engineers with the OC 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Park in charge took the wrong road and drove into enemy territory. They ran into very heavy enemy machine gun fire which knocked out all vehicles including one jeep, one 15-cwt GS truck, and one motorcycle, leaving two men wounded who were brought out later by armoured cars. As the division had not yet gone into action, for security reasons the vehicles had to be evacuated as soon as possible. The LAD was called on for this job, the breakdown crew proceeding at 2100 hours under cover of darkness with the support of a Bren gunner from the Seaforth Highlanders. Recovering was completed by 0400 hours, 9 April 1945, during which time slight enemy machine gun fire was encountered. No damage or casualties were suffered due to intense darkness. This action took place 150 yards from the enemy lines.

On 9 April 1945, the LAD moved to a new location at Efde near Zutphen (MR 969973) and shop was set up in a farmyard.

On 12 April 1945, the first crossing of the Ijssel River was made. The breakdown and crew were called out soon after to recover two 15-cwt armoured cars that had run into very large bomb craters. While recovering the first of these, enemy shells landed approximately 75 feet away with no damage. Later in the day, two 60-cwts were brought in to repair damage to the radiator, body and motor caused by shrapnel.

On 13 April 1945, unit moved to a new location across the Ijssel River (MR 932033) – shop was not set up in this location due to the fast moving front. On the 14<sup>th</sup> the unit moved off at 0645 hours to a location Posterenk (?) (MR 894030) – shop was set up in a civilian garage.

On 16 April the unit moved off to a new location across the Alba Canal south of Apeldoorn. The unit did not set up shop in this location due to the fast moving front and moved off again at 1630 hours to follow 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade through the forest south of Apeldoorn arriving at Barnsveld (MR 532969) at 1000 hours on 18 April.

At 1700 hours on 18 April, word was received that the division engineers were to move on and the LAD moved off at 1730 hours to Voorthuizen, five kilometres from Barnevelde and the unit remained there until VE-Day, 9 May 45.

The LAD moved off on VE-Day in the rear of the divisional engineers to Heemstede near Haarlem – shop was set up in a large garage that had previously been used by the Germans, and a very large stock of mechanical transport parts were found, many of which were applicable to Canadian vehicles. Parts unused were eventually turned over Eclipse.

A very hearty welcome was given to the Canadian troops in the area. The work was just routine with the exception of the welder and equipment, who was employed most of the time with the engineers removing road blocks and obstacles.

On 13 June 1945, the OC left on the Canadian Army Pacific Force draft. On 23 June 1945, 1<sup>st</sup> Division RCE and the LAD moved off to a new location MR Z316039 in the village of Baarn.

## **68 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 12<sup>th</sup> CIB and IV Princess Louise Dragoon Guards**

68 LAD sailed from Leghorn on 1 March 1945, arriving at Marseille on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. They immediately left on the trip up through France arriving in Deinze, Belgium on 8 March 1945.

At this time the LAD were serving 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade and so were attached to 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade Headquarters. However on 15 March, 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade was dissolved and the LAD was attached to the IV Princess Louise Dragoon Guards (IV PLDG). At this time the IV PLDG were transferred from infantry back again to a reconnaissance regiment, and as a consequence, the LAD were very hard pressed to get the regiment in shape to go into action by 1 April.

On 19 April, the unit left Deinze, Belgium and moved in two days to Putten, Holland on the Zuider Zee. Here the regiment was on patrolling duties and scattered along the whole shore of the Zuider Zee. The combination of new drivers and dispersment of the unit meant that the recovery section and repair crew of the LAD were on the move day and night to keep the vehicles on the road.

With the capitulation of Germany on 8 May 1945, the IV PLDG was the first unit to move into Rotterdam. A royal welcome was accorded the regiment and the LAD. But as first units into the town and particularly the first RCEME unit there, it meant servicing everybody, including Dutch, American and British units that were transporting food to that area.

On 13 June, eleven men of the thirteen left were sent to the army of occupation and after the move to the airfield at Hilversum on 18 June, the LAD was engaged in preparing its own and the unit equipment for turn-in preparatory to disbandment.

## **86 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Saskatoon Light Infantry (MG)**

The LAD landed at Marseille, France on 18 March 1945, 28 hours after leaving Leghorn, Italy. The voyage in an American LST was very good, though the OR accommodation was somewhat crowded. The battalion then proceeded to a transit camp some eighteen miles from Marseille.

After an uneventful stay in the transit camp, the battalion left the area 20 March, arriving in Hoogstraten, Belgium, on 25 March after a very enjoyable trip through France. Stopovers were St. Rambert, Macon, Les Laumes, Melun, and Cambrai. The weather was ideal. There were no vehicle casualties and few minor repairs.

The LAD picked a very good location in a big storehouse with a partial glass roof. Billets were found in private homes near the warehouse. It was the best setup the LAD had had so far. As the division was well dispersed, the workshops were a considerable distance from the LAD.

Flying bombs (V-1) were first seen here. They were sent over in the evenings and early mornings. Anti-aircraft sites in the immediate vicinity shot down a considerable number of the bombs, two of these landing only some 400-500 yds from the LAD. No damage was done except to roofs and to windows of civilian buildings. The first flying bomb came over the village on the evening of 29 March.

Most of the vehicles taken to the workshop were BLR'd as the supply of major assemblies was very poor. The LAD fitters were busy every day and it was very satisfactory to be able to work in comfortable roomy quarters, in view of the fact that there were some very heavy rains.

In contrast to the Italians, the Belgians were found to be very sociable and very clean. All the personnel enjoyed their stay here, and left with some regret on 4 April.

After an uneventful stay in the Reichswald Forest, the LAD moved with "C" Company on 10 April to a small forest near Zutphen (MR 977865) in the immediate vicinity of battalion headquarters, main division and rear division headquarters. The following day, moved to a forest at MR 007003. This was the first location in this theatre where the LAD was anywhere near gun sites. However, no enemy shelling was experienced in this area. UK leave allotment for LAD personnel started to come through.

On 17 April moved with the battalion to MR 091013 near Busloo. The policy has been, in this theatre, that battalion headquarters move with main and rear division headquarters and is located near them. As the ground was very wet the location was not very satisfactory. However, the site was only temporary. AWDs were very close to the LAD.

Moved to Kootwijkerbroek (MR 582966), in the vicinity of Barneveld on 18 April. Except for the first few days, the weather was generally bad and the ground got very soft. The LAD had a fairly good spot with some hard standing. Strong winds were common and there were no windbreaks.

The next move, on 3 May, was to a wooded park on the outskirts of Barneveld. The location was much better than the last one as there was shelter from the wind and the standing was not too bad. The news that enemy forces in Holland had surrendered was joyfully received on 4 May.

A memorable occasion was the move into Rotterdam on 8 May. The rousing reception everyone received will never be forgotten. The LAD found a good garage to work in and billets in private houses were plentiful. It was an ideal location, though at first it was quite a problem keeping the civilians out of the shop.

Canada Repatriation, Canadian Far East Force and Canadian Army Occupation Force drafts accounted for loss of personnel from the LAD. However, the remaining personnel were sufficient to carry on with the work that came to the LAD. Carriers and stationary "B" vehicles were all classified in preparation for handing in.

The LAD moved from Rotterdam to De Bilt (MR 251935) on 21 June. The LAD located in a garage about one mile from battalion headquarters. Workshops moved into Utrecht, which is not far from the LAD. Here all carriers were turned in to the demobilisation vehicle park at Arnhem.

## **A Narrative of RCEME, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, in North-West Europe**

H Comd RCEME  
2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division  
31 August 45

The “cease fire”, ordered on 4 May 1945, brought to a close ten months of operations in this North-West European Theatre of operations. During that time, the division moved from Courseulles-sur-Mer, on the beaches of Normandy, to a point well within Germany (Oldenburg), a distance of over 1,000 miles.

Four phases of operations were joined in by the RCEME of 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division:

- (1) The static fighting period in the Caen area, when many equipment battle casualties kept the workshops and LADs extremely busy;
- (2) The move across France and Belgium from Falaise to Antwerp when LADs and AWDs did most of the recovery and repair;
- (3) The long waiting period in Nijmegen, which was spent in getting all equipments inspected and unserviceable equipment put in a battle worthy condition preparatory for the push into Germany;
- (4) The last phase in which the division pushed from Nijmegen to Oldenburg, Germany, when again heavy battle casualties kept the workshops operating to maximum capacity.

Throughout the campaign RCEME constantly employed AWDs. Distances between the combat troops and the maintenance area became so great that it was necessary to have a heavy repair element well forward. The LADs were then able to be responsible for the recovery of equipment back to AWDs, who in turn recovered rearwards to parent workshops work beyond their capacity.

The workshops in addition to the normal repair of vehicles, guns, etc., spent many hours in modifying equipment to suit a particular place of attack.

Morale of the personnel within the many units comprising RCEME was always particularly high. The tradesmen were never happier than when they knew that good jobs turned out would make the fighting soldier’s job that much easier.

On the ensuing pages will be found short histories of each unit, which went to make up the RCEME organization of 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division.

(J.R. Dunlop) Lt-Col  
RCEME 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division

### **4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop under command of Maj R. Johnson disembarked from LSTs at Embouchure Beach in Normandy on D-plus-30 (6 July 1944). All vehicles had been waterproofed, but this was not required, as we landed dry.

The shop took up its first operational site in Rosel. While here, the battle casualties commenced to come in at a steady stream; guns, vehicles, and small arms kept the shop extremely busy.

When still in this location the shop was to be dealt a severe blow. On 22 July 1944, one of our breakdown lorries ran over a mine and became a casualty. Maj Johnson went to supervise its recovery, when the trailer behind the breakdown set off another mine, killing Maj Johnson instantly. Other men were also badly injured.

That afternoon the major was buried at Beny-sur-Mer, and a large group of workshop personnel attended as mourners.

Maj T. D. Wallace took command. He had previously been 2i/c of the unit.

The unit moved to St. Germain, on the outskirts of Caen, on 23 July 1944. We were situated in an apple orchard, and stayed there until 10 August 1944. This period was a very trying one, as the division was in very fierce fighting in the drive to close the Falaise Gap, and casualties to men and equipment of the division were high. Work was being turned out at the average rate of 20-25 jobs a day. The enemy was over every night, and anti-personnel bombs were dropped in the immediate area five nights in a row. This, and the heavy ack-ack deprived the men of much needed rest, but the volume of repairs carried out did not slacken. A further handicap was an epidemic of dysentery, which plagued the unit until the end of September. The unit's work was not confined to repair and maintenance alone, for one time they delivered all their Brens, PIATs, and 40 rifles to "F" echelon of the Fusiliers Mont-Royal, due to short supply of these items at that time. On another occasion, they had to dispatch a burying party to assist a padre in burying the hundreds of dead at St. Andre-sur-Orne.

The AWD was formed towards the middle of July under Lt J. M. Elliott, and was very active. They did a great deal of recovery of both enemy and allied vehicles, and were under bombardment a great deal of the time. They were usually ten to twenty miles ahead of the parent shop.

From 10 August to 9 September when we entered Belgium, the unit moved twelve times, and carried out repairs and maintenance at all but two one-night stands. Liaison with Headquarters RCEME was difficult during this period: the wireless link did not function well at any time, and liaison was kept up by jeep and motorcycle despatch riders.

On 14 August 1944, while we were stationed at Pont-du-Fresnay, Lt J. M. Elliott was reported missing from the AWD. However, on the next day he was reported admitted to a British hospital suffering from numerous cuts and possible fractured skull, due to a motorcycle accident.

More air raids were experienced on 14 and 15 August 1944; on the 15<sup>th</sup> an anti-personnel bomb landed on Capt Dolan's kit, and in the morning little shreds of clothing and personal effects were found hanging on the nearby trees.

Our first location in Belgium was Crombeke, near Poperinghe, where we stayed eleven days until 20 September 1944. There was a great deal of work done there, with up to 87 major jobs in the shop at one time, as a result of the continuous actions through France. We managed to hold a very successful dance in Poperinghe, and most of the populace tried to attend, as it was the first public dance since the German occupation. Eggs and fresh vegetables were plentiful here.

Our next move was 100 miles to Wilryck, on the outskirts of Antwerp. We were stationed there for three weeks, and took full advantage of that then-gay city. In this location we first started to install Wasp flame-thrower equipment in carriers.

On 12 October 1944 we heard German flying bombs for the first time. They were to be a familiar sound for the next four months, and had a bad effect on everyone's nerves during that time. On 14 October, a flying bomb landed on the Mobile Laundry and Bath Unit while a number of our men were under the showers. Two were killed and 20 wounded. Another man, Private Legere, was killed on 5 November 1944 when a flying bomb landed near his vehicle in Antwerp.

On 10 November 1944 we entered Holland. After spending two days in Oss, we moved to Nijmegen, where we stayed for four months. Supplies and spare parts were very scarce, due to the strain on the lines of communication. Shortly after arriving in Nijmegen, we dispatched three vehicles to Bayeux for MT spare parts. When they arrived there, they were loaded with winter clothing destined for the infantry, who required heavy clothing on a high priority.

The winter was not too severe, but coal was scarce, and it was very damp. The shop was greatly occupied on the repair of Daimler armoured cars and the installation of flame-throwing equipment. Flying bombs were over continuously, and on several occasions low-flying enemy aircraft were over the lines, apparently trying to bomb the strategic Waal bridge.

Early in January there were reports of German paratroops in the area. This necessitated a double guard. Double guards continued until 12 February 1945. During that time, the shortage of manpower was further felt by the extensive inspection programme of brigade equipment as well as men proceeding on short leave and privilege leave to the UK. Maj T. D. Wallace was posted to 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armed Brigade Workshop, and Maj M. F. Carriere took command of the unit on 28 January 1945.

We moved into the Reichswald in Germany on 28 March 1945, where we stayed until we crossed the Rhine on 2 April 1945.

Due to the scarcity of cars 5-cwt we then undertook a jeep rebuilding programme. This, together with the volume of work on armoured cars and modifying caravans, kept the shop well occupied during the month of April.

VE-Day passed with mild celebrating, and work increased when we moved to Oldenburg on 9 May 1945.

Early in May we started dispatching men on rotation leave to Canada. On 31 May 1945, our first draft left from Aurich on repatriation to Canada.

Towards the end of May, the Army Educational Programme on Rehabilitation was introduced, and, to date, is being carried out with a great deal of enthusiasm being shown by all concerned.

## **5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

The history of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop falls into four periods, namely that period spent in four countries – France, Belgium, Holland, and Germany.

The unit assembled on arrival in France at Rosel and, as soon as the division was committed to battle, set up shop near Rots. Here the unit experienced its first taste as a workshop in action, and as a consequence had casualties. Low-flying aircraft machine-gunned the area, and two men were wounded.

From this location an AWD was sent forward to Maralet, a village on the edge of Carpiquet Airport.

At this time only two bridges were available across the Orne, and no recovery rearwards across the river was permitted, so the AWD was sent across the river to Fauberg de Vaucelles to take care of all the forward casualties, and all LADs of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade worked into the AWD. The AWD was extremely busy at this time, and Capt Sentance, OC of the AWD, received a commendation for excellent service rendered at this time.

The main shop from Rots moved into the city of Caen. Here the men were subjected to nightly bombing, and consequently much interrupted sleep. They quickly found the slit trench to be the only place of safety, and were later to find that that type of accommodation was to be their lot for many months ahead. Work in the shop at this time became quite heady indeed, and the men were working in good spirits up to twelve hours a day.

Soon after this heavy spell of work, the division forward troops had helped to close the Falaise Gap, and had started on a chase across France. This was the cue for the workshop to make frequent moves, and workshop sites changed almost daily for the next two weeks.

One location near Laize-la-Ville the men will long remember as “Death Valley”. All three brigade workshops were located in a very small area in a type of valley. Enemy aircraft had spotted the concentrated of vehicles, and came over each night to bomb the location. Private Coombes was wounded here and died an hour later in hospital, and in addition three other men were severely wounded.

During this period, the AWD was continuing its good work, and was continuously up with the forward elements. Liaison was difficult and rearward recovery detailed a long turn-around of about 100 miles. As the division moved forward, the AWD moved through Rouen, Dieppe, St. Omer, and finally rejoined the workshop at Poperinghe, Belgium. Here the division went into a one-week rest, the first, but the unit soon discovered that rest for the division meant hard work for RCEME. Inspections were carried out, and all unserviceable equipment of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade Group was again made battle worthy.

Belgium appeared to be a very picturesque country and there seemed to be little destruction in evidence. This fact was confirmed in our next location – Antwerp, where the workshop had its first opportunity to appreciate the hospitality of the Belgium people and recreation facilities. When the division crossed the canal, heading up to Bergen-op-Zoom, the workshop moved to a location outside of Merxem. The AWD was sent out again, and spent a very uncomfortable time on a thinly-held right flank of the spearhead just north of Putte, Holland, on the Scheldt Estuary. About this time the first V-bombs arrived in Antwerp, and when the Beveland fight was over, no one was sorry when the main workshop headed for Holland.

Before the main workshop moved to Holland, the division moved back in the vicinity of Lierre for a week's rest; again the workshop was working to capacity. Guns and flamethrowers seemed to be the main jobs brought in. In this location, the men were able to observe that the flying bombs were falling short of their intended target, Antwerp.

From Lierre the workshop moved into Holland with the division, making several short stops and finally moving into Mill. Here it was believed that we would remain static for the winter months, so the men became comfortably settled in billets. Due to an unexpected change, the workshop moved into the bush where we set up the workshop under canvas. Working conditions were very poor in this location and the weather was bad with the men having to work in the rain and mud. Consequently, everybody was in a very depressed mood as Christmas was drawing near, and the thought of settling down under such conditions was not very appealing. Fortunately, the workshop was able to make a move back to S'Hertogenbosch and billets again. A very enjoyable Christmas was spent, and there was a great improvement in working conditions.

After a few weeks in S'Hertogenbosch, where privilege leaves commenced and morale again came to a high level, the workshop finally moved to Nijmegen, where it was in a good position to witness the final show, which took the division into Germany. Although billets were very good, even though unheated, conditions for working were not very favourable. Here the men increased the "canine" establishment, and it would be interesting to note that many of those pets are still with the unit.

In Cleve, the men experienced their first baptism of enemy shell fire, as the workshop was shelled incessantly, day and night. The men stood up to it remarkably well, and in this location the workshop turned out, over a stated period of time, the largest volume of work in its history. Protection against shell fire was very inadequate, due to the flooded condition of the area; however, men slept under stair cases, behind thick walls, and the most fortunate ones in dry basements. Surprisingly enough, there was only casualty, S/Sgt Goyette, who got a shrapnel wound in the leg. The AWD was fortunate enough to move out this "Hell's Fire Corner", and it was not long afterwards that the main workshop made a move across the Rhine. Turning north, the division found itself once again in Holland. During our short stay in this part of the country, the workshop virtually liberated the town of Dwingello. This location was a considerable distance off the main axis of advance. From here the workshop moved into Germany again, arriving in Wildoshausen.

A few days before VE-Day, rumours of werewolf [German underground] activities founded on reports from a Polish unit turned the workshop into an armed camp. However, nothing happened; but the experience will long be remembered.



VE-Day came and the workshop, after clearing up a large number of vehicle casualties, proceeded to Varel, where the AWD returned to the main workshop, and the men were absorbed into the various workshop sections.

## **6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

A very green, but very enthusiastic group of tradesmen landed in Normandy on the afternoon of 7 July 1944. Tradesmen that were soon to become acquainted with many aspects of war; tradesmen that were soon to become soldiers while still performing their vital task of “keeping ‘em rolling” for the combatant troops.

It was in Rosel, four miles northwest of Caen, in the heart of the bocage country, that the first operational workshop site was opened. There busy days followed one after the other, with frequent Luftwaffe visits by night. Work was principally battle casualties, with many vehicles and guns knocked out by direct enemy fire. The formation, as a whole, as all other Canadian formations, were well equipped with new vehicles and this was a happy situation, for it gave few worries in the initial stages for maintenance breakdowns, and allowed almost full time to repairing fighting vehicles which proved to provide plenty to keep us busy.

As soon as the northern bank of Orne River had been cleared, the unit moved to the northern part of the town of Caen known as St. Germain. Here work continued very heavy. It was here that the first big programme was undertaken to install Wasp flamethrowers in Universal Carriers for 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment. These equipments were entirely new to us, but in spite of a rather stiff time limit for the completion of the job, they were all completed and handed over to their unit in very good time.

8 August 1944, when the big push started south of Caen, was the beginning of a war of movement and rapid change. Successive movements and locations were taken up near places such as Fleury-sur-Orne, Laize-la-Ville, and Breteville-sur-laize. Work continued quite heavily, but conditions were difficult. Locations had to be taken up in open country, with perhaps slight protection in the form of an orchard or other small trees. Dust was everywhere, and it was difficult to keep equipments and components mechanically clean. Most of the country had been the scene of heavy fighting, and with the prevalence of summer pests such as flies, wasps, and the like, the health of the men suffered in the form of diarrhoea of very aggravated form. In one location, another nuisance made its presence known – the Luftwaffe. This was in an open valley with no cover at all from the air. The nights were bright with tracers of ack-ack fire as the German airmen made regular trips over our area, dropping anti-personnel bombs and heavier stuff as well. Our valley became known as “Death Valley”, although we were fortunate enough not to have suffered a single casualty as the result of enemy action, but there were not a few who left it with a feeling of thankfulness and slightly frayed nerves.

All through this area, it will be a constant source of admiration for the air forces, for such thorough preparation for our advance in the form of bombing. It was unfortunate that on a few occasions mistakes were made and our troops were bombed by our own aircraft. The heavy bombing affected workshops directly too, for, with the single exception of Caen itself, there were no buildings left in which to set up shop; always we were obliged to take to the fields or orchards and set up in the open country. We followed our formation south to the closing of the Falaise Gap. Once this operation was completed, our axis of advance shifted toward the east, and then began a journey after the fleeing Hun. St. Pierre-sur-Dives, Liveret, Briennes(?), and Fervacques were passed, and on the night of 1 September 1944, the workshop crossed the Seine River near Rouen. Cleres, Abbeville, Verton, and St. Omer was the route followed up to the Belgium border. These moves, many of which were from 60 to 80 miles at a jump, followed day after day. On one occasion two moves were completed in one day. It was totally impossible for the workshop to set up properly for such limited times, and it was equally difficult to attempt to service units that might be perhaps a hundred miles ahead. It was here that the AWD, sent out from this

unit, performed very useful service. Moving directly under the command of brigade or CREME, it was always close on the spot to the fighting units, and made the services of RCEME second-line repairs always available to the people who required it. It provided some anxiety at times, however, for the AWD would get “lost” for several days at a stretch – on one occasion communications were not established for a week.

The second week in September we crossed the France-Belgium border, and, shortly afterwards, on 21 September 1944, arrived in the Antwerp area. Here we remained for close to two months, all through the long slow process of clearing the Scheldt Estuary so that the port of Antwerp could be made available.

At this stage the workshop was able to settle down to more static conditions, and catch up on a great deal of work. This workshop was able to set up in a former Luftwaffe experimental station, which provided a certain measure of cover. Another Wasp flame-thrower programme was undertaken here, this time for the infantry battalions.

It was a strange situation in Antwerp. The enemy were still in the northern suburbs of the city when we moved in, and would make nightly raids into the dock area, in various attempts to lay demolitions. This unit was located just south of the city at that time, in the suburb of Wilrijk. When the enemy had been cleared to a line further north, we moved to the village of Schooten, and subsequently to Capellan(?). The country was becoming very flat – many dykes had been opened by the retreating Germans, leaving flooded country with no suitable areas for any of the services, particularly workshops. In addition, the weather was not improving, the winter was coming on, rain was frequent and heavy, making hard standings very difficult to find. The Germans started the flying bomb campaign against Antwerp, which provided still another nuisance to working conditions in general.

In the beginning of November the division was taken out of the line for a “rest”, and concentrated in the area around Mecheln and Willebroek. The “rest” for the troops was a good opportunity for the workshop to get more work done, as all equipments were readily available. This is precisely what occurred – but, the rest did not last long enough. We did not get as much work done as we would have liked, particularly as regards armament.

Around 12 November 1944, the unit arrived in Nijmegen area, and then began the long period in this location. This was a static set-up, and work was conducted much as it had been in England, with the exception that there was a fairly constant flow of medium-calibre shells overhead during the long winter nights. One of them was unlucky enough to be a direct hit on the “I” and “M” machinery lorries, as well as on two other vehicles. These vehicles were soon replaced by new ones.

The workshop site was a paper factory, a good one though slightly cramped for space. There was adequate cover for the shops, and a machine shop that was a help in many jobs.

On 8 February 1945, the tremendous push started southward around the tip of the Siegfried Line into the Reichswald Forest, which accompanied by a general offensive all along the Allied fronts, brought us to Germany and to the Rhine. Conditions in this phase were extremely difficult due to mud and water, and a brisk trade was done in vehicle transmissions and clutches.

It was in Cleve that this workshop was as near the enemy lines as it would be in its whole history. In full view of a German observation post, work was carried on in the streetcar barns of the “Cleve Stranzenbahnen”, vehicles and men more or less keeping not too conspicuous as 88-mm shells dropped frequently in the area. As before, good fortune was again on our side and no casualties were sustained.

On 3 April 1945, the workshop crossed the Rhine. Such a clean breakthrough was made here, that the situation took on an aspect reminiscent of the days back in France in the fall of last year – days of rapid movement and change.

It was in Assen, Holland that the unit had about the finest site of its history – a former naval barracks. There was excellent accommodation for all shops, and it was put to use in a special “jeep” rebuilding

program. The supply of these vehicles had become rather short due to their high mortality rate, and this programme was instituted in an effort to alleviate the condition. It was done by rebuilding various stages of “crocks” into a runable serviceable vehicle. In one week, sixteen jeeps were thus made available to the division.

Events were moving rapidly at this stage toward the obvious end of the war. Two more moves were completed, both into Germany, when on 4 May 1945, the news was received that the “Cease Fire” would take effect at 0800 hours the next morning.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Workshop, RCEME attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Regiment, RCA**

The LAA workshop arrived on the continent early in July with 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division and received its baptism of fire very soon afterwards as the first location taken up after the regiment was committed was in the village of Carpiquet. The workshop had to move back to Rots the next day as the shelling was too heavy, luckily there were no casualties. In the early stages of the campaign in the Caen-Falaise area, the guns were in action most of the time as the Germans were using all available aircraft. It was during this period that new type shells with a 14-second tracer came into use and with them the barrels of the Bofors [anti-aircraft guns] started to bulge. This caused a great many headaches as nobody could give a satisfactory explanation for it, and barrels continued to bulge until the cessation of hostilities. During the ten months the regiment was in action, more than one hundred barrels were condemned for bulging.

During the long advance across France and Belgium up to Antwerp, the workshop was too busy keeping up the regiment to do much work, but there were three or four halts of a day’s duration that helped to keep the equipment moving. The three-day “rest” at Dieppe was necessary to get all the vehicles in shape for the long move to the Calais area and then into Belgium. On these moves the breakdown crew never stopped when the rest of the workshop were sleeping, there were always vehicles off the road somewhere about thirty or forty miles behind, they would generally catch up in time for the next day’s move.

In the Antwerp area, the workshop was ordered to stand to when the Germans broke through in our sector. Two 40-mm gun vehicles were in for repairs, and they were manned by workshop personnel, but the enemy never got as far as the workshop. While on the airport in the Antwerp area, the enemy were shelling the airfield at regular intervals and hit several planes and the NAAFI canteen, several of the men had some close misses, but there were no casualties. After two days of this we moved into one of the forts on the airfield grounds, which gave us more security and a chance to do some work.

During the attack on South Beveland, the breakdown was busy night and day as the country and some of the roads were flooded and vehicles were getting bogged down everywhere.

After South Beveland, the division went into rest in the Brussels area, and the workshop carried on with the task of overhauling 40-mm guns. This job was taken on in the Antwerp area, and guns were taken as they could be spared and given a complete stripping, overhaul and modifications brought up to date. The gun tractors were also checked at the same time.

On 9 November the workshop moved to Nijmegen where they spent the winter. Ever since the Bofors had been used in the ground role, the gunners had been crying for some kind of range drum for the guns so the workshop with the EME RCA and officers of the regiment designed one, which seemed to suit the purpose. 25-pounder [field gun] shell cases were collected and taken to Antwerp to be remelted and cast. The rough castings were machined, partly by brigade workshops and partly by this workshop. They were fitted to the guns in time for the “Pepperpot” [a concentration of artillery fire] on 7 February 1945 and everyone was satisfied with the performance. During the winter the overhaul of guns and tractors was completed.

The move into Germany was made on 14 February to a location east of Cleve. Decent workshop sites were very scarce but one was found, the only fault with it was that the enemy was only seven hundred yards away, but no shells landed in the workshop area, although a road crossing a quarter of a mile to the rear was mortared continuously. The workshop had to post its own guards at night and work in the daytime also.

For the last month and a half of war the regiment went from an anti-aircraft role to a ground role, taking over a brigade sector. On this task a battery of field artillery, a troop of self-propelled anti-tank artillery, a troop of medium artillery and some tanks were attached to the regiment. This meant considerable more work and of a different type than anything previously encountered.

During the whole campaign, the workshop sites were usually a field or an orchard with no hard standing or cover, which at times made gun repairs impractical and vehicle repairs very difficult. During the first month and a half of the campaign, guns were being knocked out quite regularly and, as the role was almost static, vehicle repairs were much less than anticipated. Later, vehicle repair and recovery took up most of the time of the workshop. During the last stages of the campaign, recovery of vehicles from the forward areas were practically non-existent, due partially to the role the regiment was in, and partly to the fact that the drivers had learned to handle their vehicles to perfection.

## **16 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade**

The LAD landed in Normandy on 6 July 1944 at Bernieres-Sur-Mer. The brigade was grouped and made ready for action at Bretteville, and they saw their first action in the attack at Verson. The breakdown did especially good work here, clearing and recovering casualties very far forward. They came under indirect fire several times. Later on, it was decided that, because we were attacking prepared positions and our whole area was under constant observation both from the air and from the ground, that the breakdown should operate only at night, since it drew fire every time it appeared near the forward area.

From Verson, the brigade moved up to the Caen area, where the LAD was engaged in clearing away casualties from their immediate area. As the brigade echelons were moving up across the plain towards Bretteville-Sur-Laize, they were bombed in error by a Royal Air Force heavy task force. Great destruction was caused and the LAD was again engaged in clearing the roads. Nearly all the casualties were beyond salvage, having been burned up.

After regrouping at Bretteville-sur-Laize, the brigade attacked across the Falaise plain towards Rocquencourt and finally Falaise itself. Casualties were extremely heavy, since they were attacking uphill against very strong natural positions, fanatically defended. As a result, the brigade paused to rest and regroup after the fall of Falaise, and the LAD was extremely busy repairing and refitting the Bren carrier sections.

From Falaise, the brigade attacked towards Denville, to close the Falaise Gap. The whole brigade area at Danville, was heavily bombed at night, but by much hard work and some cannibalization on the spot, the LAD and the unit fitters managed to make 70% of the casualties roadworthy for the attack a couple of days later. The brigade fought forward to Elboef by which time the gap was closed.

From Elboef we turned east and north and broke through completely, to advance unchecked all the way to Dieppe. During this period, repairs were carried out on the run, but all vehicles managed to reach Dieppe. This was the only brigade to arrive intact.

At Dieppe, the division staged a victory parade in commemoration of the previous Dieppe raid by some of the same men in August 1942. Here again the brigade was rested and regrouped, preparatory to the dash across Belgium, and again the LAD was extremely busy.

We entered Belgium near Poperinge, passed through the town, and dashed north and east towards Antwerp. Here again, repairs as necessary were carried out on the march, with remarkably low losses. The brigade group bypassed Antwerp itself to the south, but was engaged in bitter fighting in the area around Merxem. However, they took the perimeter of forts there and drove slowly north through Capellen and Putte towards the mouth of the Scheldt Estuary. After very heavy fighting the brigade established themselves across the causeway leading to the South Beveland peninsula, then turned west, and in extremely heavy going, took the peninsula after a little under week's stiff fighting along the dykes. Here for the first time a forward recovery post was established at brigade headquarters and remained there for the whole of this action. Casualties at first were extremely heavy, mainly due to the terrain.

After the South Beveland fight, the brigade was sent up to Nijmegen to take over the southern part of that salient from the American airborne forces. Their job was to hold the Reichswald Forest area and protect the vital Nijmegen bridge, while our forces were built up for an all-out assault. They were in this area for over twelve weeks and, on the whole, the LAD was quite comfortable, although quite busy repairing "A" and "B" vehicle casualties.

In January 1945, General Montgomery cracked the Siegfried Line in the Reichswald Forest area, using British and Scottish troops. The brigade did not see any real action again until Cleve fell, and then they were thrown into a running fight down through Calcar and the Hochwald Forest to Nanten, where the Rhine crossing bridgehead at Emmerich was secured and held. An AWD was placed under control of the brigade EME at this stage to facilitate recovery and repair. The system worked very well.

On completion of this action, the brigade was withdrawn from action for a two-week period in the Reichswald Forest area for resting, regrouping, training, and re-equipping. After the Rhine crossing, they crossed at Emmerich and were thrown into the fight at the north-east corner of the bridgehead salient. They advanced steadily, crossed the main Ijssel canal, turned west into Holland at Deventer, then north to take Groningen. Here again repair and recovery were carried out on the march. After the fall of Groningen, we turned east and captured Oldenburg in Germany. As we were advancing from here towards the outer defences of Wilhelmshaven, the unconditional surrender of the German army was announced. In the Oldenburg area, after all our own casualties were cleared and the brigade re-equipped, we were engaged mainly in clearing enemy vehicles from our area to a dump in Wilhelmshaven.

## **17 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to Headquarters 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade**

This LAD attached to Headquarters 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade landed on the Normandy beaches on 6 July 1944 with 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division. The 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade landed dry and all the waterproofing was for naught. It was anticipated that ignition trouble would be the major problem after salt water wading and a large stock of coils and points were on hand.

By the time the brigade crossed the Orne the greatest problem was repair of tires and guns but difficulties were overcome successfully. The LAD was fortunate in not having any casualties in the Caen-Falaise show.

In the pursuit to the Seine, the LAD moved very close to brigade headquarters, and brigade headquarters was crowding the leading companies, with the result that one night the LAD had three casualties: AQMS Houghton, Cpl Robinson and L/Cpl Whittick. Two days later, a delayed action bomb went off about 5 o'clock in the morning, but only put a few holes in the top of the jeep and a few in the recovery vehicle.

After crossing the Seine, the aim was for Dieppe and in this case the LAD got well out in front of the reconnaissance [unit] when they missed the turn-off to brigade headquarters. The reconnaissance [unit] caught up with the LAD, and the next day brigade headquarters moved up as well. No incidents occurred to mar this unofficial scouting job of the LAD.

During the move across France and into Belgium, running repairs were the limit of the LAD as everybody was on the move.

At Antwerp, the LAD was situated in Fort No. 2, which was later nearly destroyed by V-1 bombs. The brigade did a job on South Beveland as far as Goes, but the LAD never got quite to Goes.

The brigade came out for a rest and the LAD moved back to Lier near Brussels. From there the brigade moved to Nijmegen area.

After nearly three months in the area of Mook, the LAD moved to the east of Cleve and moved down with the brigade in the clearing to the Rhine at Xanton. At this time, 5 Brigade Workshop was in Cleve and any shelling we experienced during this operation was when we had to go to the workshop. Most of the vehicles evacuated were universal carriers.

After a 14-day rest (which meant a busy time for the LAD) at Berg-en-Dal, the brigade moved across the Rhine and pushed on to Groningen. The next move was into Germany to positions near Delmonhorst (?), west of Bremen.

By the time Oldenburg was occupied everyone knew that something in the way of surrender by the enemy was pending and the day after LAD moved into Oldenburg the "Cease Fire" came into effect.

On one recovery job just before Oldenburg, the recovery crew were sniped at by a 20-mm gun but were fortunate enough to get out without any damage.

The LAD despatch rider, Pte Smith, was ambushed one day and lost his motorcycle which we never did recover even with the help of the Black Watch who took about 180 prisoners over this particular incident.

## **18 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade**

On 6 July 1944 the LAD left the port of London and landed on Juno Beach in Normandy. Both the crossing and the landing were uneventful except for a bit of shelling as the convoy rounded Hell's Corner in the Channel.

The brigade first moved into action north of Caen, at which time the LAD began its work of recovery and repair in earnest. Recovery work carried out in the wheat fields south of Caen gave some exciting times to the crew. One man was wounded by mortar fire. During the air raids on Caen, the AQMS was wounded and later the MT sergeant was injured, leaving the LAD without senior NCOs.

After Caen came the slow moving of Falaise, and then the made dash halfway across France. During this period, the stays in one spot were so short and the interruptions by enemy shell fire so frequent that the LAD hardly had time to unpack their equipment and set up shop. The main portion of the work consisted of evacuating equipment to the workshop and making hasty make-do repairs.

On reaching Dieppe, the LAD was represented in the glorious march through the city, and after a short rest made a 250-mile trip to Veurne in Belgium in September.

It was the practice for the LAD to stay and move with the brigade "A" echelon. This put the LAD in the proper position between the fighting sections of the parent unit and the workshop.

Around Veurne, Belgium, recovery work became very heavy, mostly picking up vehicles damaged by shellfire. During one such job the recovery crew were startled to find the infantry behind them firing Sten [sub-machine guns] over their heads at the enemies in front. Needless to say the job was completed in record time.

The brigade's next job took them north of Antwerp to clean out the enemy threatening the port from Walcheren Island. The LAD set up near Capellen and were able to function more effectively, staying in one place for a reasonable length of time.

During a recovery job in this area, at which the retiring LAD officer Capt Osler and the incoming officer, Capt Dolan, were present, the first pull made on a carrier being recovered set off a mine. The crew were all knocked over but the only casualty was Capt Dolan, who was sent to hospital with broken eardrums, and a Cameron officer who was temporarily blinded.

The breakdown lorry, which had a rather hectic career throughout operations so far, added a final chapter to its history by diving into a canal at Antwerp and submerging in fourteen feet of water. The LAD received a new breakdown at once.

The end of the Walcheren campaign took the unit back to the town of Boom and thence to the Nijmegen area in November, where the winter months were spent. The following period meant comparative rest for the parent unit work and refitting for the LAD.

It was almost impossible to carry out the inspections of equipment in action, but we drew equipment out of action a little at a time and put it in good condition.

The stay in the area gave the men a refresher however in the form of social activities. On 6 December 1944 all the children of the country around Bier were entertained and feasted and later the Echelon and LAD graduated to the older native populace and held a dance. The burghers turned out in all their finery including a new coat of paint on the clogs.

On 17 February after the opening of the attack on Germany, itself the LAD moved through the Reichswald Forest to Bedburg. Again the men were lucky in escaping injury during a strafing attack by German jet-propelled planes. Although one man was injured by the explosion of a booby trap, the luck held out when the LAD found itself caught in the cross fire of an artillery duel and it escaped unharmed.

From Xanten the brigade returned to Groosbeck and the LAD set to work on refitting equipment. On 28 March the unit crossed the Rhine, and continuing northward passed again to Holland. One LAD move took the unit through the town of Ulf, and from the absence of other troops and the tremendous enthusiasm of the inhabitants, the LAD considered itself the liberators of Ulf.

Again the troops were moving fast and furious, reminiscent of the days after Falais. Arriving at Hengelo, the LAD set up shop and then were warned by civilians that Germans were lurking in some houses down the street. This was a chance for some fun and the 1098 [the document listing the scale of issue] of grenades and Bren ammunition was considerably depleted, even though Germans were not captured or even seen.

The moving slowed down around Croningen, only to be cut short by a trip to Oldenburg, Germany. Here VE-Day was celebrated rather uneventfully. Soon after the LAD again joined brigade headquarters and settled down in Zurich to await the breaking up of the unit and subsequent return to Canada.

## **19 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

This LAD attached to 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA, landed on the beaches of Normandy with 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division on 7 July 1944, and has remained with the regiment throughout the campaign. Although the conditions proved quite different from those encountered in England, the LAD soon adapted itself and adopted an efficient routine for delivering work to the shops, drawing spare parts, and handling its own first echelon tasks.

The first days in France were rather hectic. The LAD took up a position with "A" Echelon on Carpiquet airport and soon received its baptism of fire. During the week spent in the area, shells came in regularly

and kept everyone on the jump in and out of slit trenches. Tubes and radiators were constantly being punctured, and much of the repair work had to be carried out in these trenches. At the next position near Fleury-sur-Orne, the LAD was again under fire, shells landing right in the area, but fortunately there were no casualties in vehicles or personnel. Near Orbec, where the regiment arrived shortly after the closing of the Falaise gap, the LAD and “A” Echelon ran into more heavy shelling. Although “A” Echelon had several casualties in vehicles and personnel, the LAD was again fortunate enough to come through unscratched. The remainder of the campaign in France was quieter as the regiment joined in the pursuit of the Wehrmacht back towards Germany, with stops at or about Rouen, Dieppe and the Pas de Calais.

The regiment moved into Belgium near Ostend and Bruges. These were relatively quiet days, which everyone rather enjoyed. Then came the return to the Dunkirk area in France, where the regiment hammered the German garrison for a while. Antwerp, the huge Belgian seaport, was the next stop, and it proved a very interesting and enjoyable one, which everyone hated to leave. The feeling was soon to be accentuated, for the regiment’s next task was a part in the clearing of the Scheldt Estuary – a very difficult and grim task carried out under extremely adverse weather and ground conditions. These were busy days for the LAD too, especially for the breakdown and crew who worked overtime recovering bogged-down vehicles. In the later stages of this campaign, the regiment dashed back through Antwerp and Ghent around to the south bank of the estuary to support the attack on Walcheren Island.

After a brief rest period in Belgium, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division moved up into the Nijmegen salient and wintered there in defensive positions. This was a slack period for the LAD, the chief jobs being the usual routine vehicle, gun, and instrument inspections, along with a flurry of stove building for the cold weather. Finally, on 8 February, the big spring offensive to clear the west bank of the Rhine began and the LAD found itself operating under conditions somewhat like Normandy, except the rain and mud were prevalent instead of heat and dust. Much work was done under trying conditions during this time, as the division fought down through Cleve and Calcar to Xanten – vehicles and guns were damaged by shellfire and mines, and were repaired or evacuated if necessary. The guns, which were firing heavily and beginning to show signs of old age, required considerable attention.

After another brief rest period in the Reichswald Forest, the last big operation began with the crossing of the Rhine. The ensuing period was one of the constant movement – first up through northern Holland to Groningen, then back down and into Germany and up to the Oldenburg area, where the LAD was located at the cessation of hostilities. During this period of movement, only hasty minor repairs could be done, though the breakdown had a lot of recovery work to do, as is usual on long and frequent moves. One particular incident marred this last period of activity for the LAD – our only casualty was suffered when Cfn Calhoun, the storeman, was wounded by a sniper and lost to the unit.

The jobs done by the LAD during ten months in action on the continent were limited to small and very routine ones, but played a most essential role in the successful career for 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment. The object of the LAD’s existence was to keep all the regiment’s equipment serviceable, and this was managed efficiently through the campaign, despite conditions which were at times almost insurmountable – as on South Beveland and on the west bank of the Rhine.

## **20 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 8<sup>th</sup> Recce Regiment (14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Hussars)**

On 5 July 1944 we sailed from the London dock area for the beaches of France, and after weeks of waterproofing we had a dry landing right on the beach. The regiment proceeded to the harbour area to do the first stage of de-waterproofing. Only one casualty occurred, a half-track that burnt out a clutch. After de-waterproofing vehicles, the regiment went into action on the outskirts of Carpiquet airport where we received our first battle casualty, a Humber light reconnaissance car which received hits in the petrol tank from enemy mortar fire. Fitters did a good job of patching up the holes with material obtained on the spot.



From the airfield, the regiment moved to Norrey-on-Bessin, where all the vehicles were left in the harbour area and the personnel went into action as infantry. Fitters completed the final stage of de-waterproofing and then carried out an inspection of all vehicles. While in this harbour area we were machine gunned by enemy aircraft, but no casualties occurred amongst the fitters while on the inspections, although there were some close calls. We obtained a German ambulance, which we built into an office trailer.

While the regiment was fighting their way to Dieppe we had an unusual recovery job. A Humber armoured car fighting in the streets of Rouen ran over an underground air-raid shelter. The weight of the vehicle caused the roof of the shelter to give way and the car fell through nearly out of sight. We recovered this vehicle with our breakdown lorry using holdfasts. From Rouen the regiment moved into Dieppe where a big parade was held by 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. This was a good opportunity for us to inspect all the vehicles; we obtained ten men from the workshops to help us out with inspections. While in this area were repaired a Humber armoured car, which had the radiator guard and armour plate shot off by an 88-mm shell. Excellent work was done by the electric welder in its repair as it was really a job, a tough job. The regiment then moved out of Dieppe to Belgium. On the way we recovered a universal carrier from a canal where it had overturned pinning the driver in the front wall. The air in the well kept him alive long enough for him to dig his way out into the water. Just after moving over the border into Belgium the regiment received new Daimler armoured cars in place of the Humbers. Personnel were kept busy inspecting them as they came in. Some trouble was encountered with the fluid flywheel leaking at the bushing, and one had to be evacuated after inspection owing to this trouble. While in the area of Antwerp, the gears were stripped on the winch lever on the breakdown lorry, and as this vehicle was needed at all times and could not be evacuated, the gears were repaired at the base workshop in Antwerp.

While near Braschart, Belgium we recovered a Bren carrier that had been in German hands since 1940, and we had to rewire the vehicle completely as they used a different wiring system.

We moved from Belgium into Holland where the breakdown lorry was kept busy with recovery work and due to being too tired the driver fell asleep. As the winter was coming on, we built in the backs of the 60-cwt lorries with timber, so that the storemen could work in them without getting too cold.

The LAD then located in Haps, which was not a very good location as most of the work had to be done outside. The Dutch winter was found to be exactly the opposite of what we had expected, and it was wet with plenty of mud in the latter part of January. We also learned by experience that an LAD does not require the surroundings that most civilian mechanics were used to in order to keep vehicles on the road. We had our LAD breakdown working 24 hours a day while in this area. The roads were just mud and ruts and English ammunition carriers were having trouble getting through. In one day we recovered 26 vehicles. We also had two breakdowns attached to us from 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop to help out as we found the work was too much for our one breakdown.

When the spring offensive opened, the regiment concentrated in a German barracks in Nijmegen. The LAD remained static for five days and during this time we checked over and painted the vehicles. From here we proceeded to Cleve in Germany, where we were located near headquarters squadron. We then pushed on from Cleve to Xanten, which resulted in many vehicle casualties from enemy fire, most of them beyond second echelon repair. The regiment, since the Germans had been chased across the Rhine, moved back in the vicinity of Cleve where all squadrons were engaged in a holding role. At this time we decided to inspect and repair as many vehicles as possible and enlisted the aid of ten men from the workshops. Much good work was accomplished.

From Cleve, the regiment moved across the Rhine and from there up into northern Holland. The LAD remained in Zuidlaren for one week, where we had plenty of work after the mad chase from Germany. Although there were not so many battle casualties, there were quite a few minor repairs needed on all vehicles. From here we moved back into Germany and just before VE-Day the breakdown crew were out recovering three armoured cars when they came across 60 Germans, who surrendered their arms to the crew and the Germans were taken prisoner.

## **21 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division Signals**

Saturday, 7 July 1944, just one month after D-Day, saw 21 LAD assembled in the concentration area at Arramanches, Normandy and preparing itself for operations. The landing at Gold Beach, through two feet of water, had been quite uneventful, and the few enemy aircraft that attempted to interfere had been driven off by our intense anti-aircraft fire.

There followed several days of de-waterproofing and very minor work when, in the small dark hours of 11 July, the LAD moved up to Carpiquet, which immediately showed itself to be a most unpleasant spot. The air was heavy with the smell of the dead and the Germans, a scant mile away, were throwing things at us with their mortars and not resting any too long between rounds. We were therefore not displeased when, in the afternoon, the order came down to move back.

One week later provided us with a repeat performance when, on 20 July, we moved through Caen, crossed the River Orne and set up at Fleury-sur-Orne. Again we found ourselves under mortar fire, but this time with one feature added – snipers. A tripled guard was posted that night. And so, once more, we moved back, taking up a location on the outskirts of Caen. Here the men took up quarters in a cellar, tried rather unsuccessfully to keep clean with a most minute ration of water, and spent much time swatting mosquitoes.

We remained three weeks in Caen, during which time we were interestedly following the progress of the fighting towards Falaise, which was to culminate in such a grand victory. During our first month, recovery was by far the most active item of business. In respect to repair, the LAD was not required to work anywhere near capacity. This of course, was due to the nature of the units serviced, namely, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division Signals and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Provost Corps, neither of which suffered particularly from the battle casualties.

As the campaign progressed and time went on, the work required of 21 LAD showed a steady increase, relatively unaffected by the day-to-day changes in the severity of the fighting. In other words, “fair, wear and tear”, rather than casualties, governed us.

It was only after the breakthrough beyond Falaise that, like other units, we could safely begin to live above ground. Up to that time “digging in” was always the first job undertaken on arrival at a new location. The digging of slit trenches never again became highly important, as enemy air activity steadily decreased to the point where it was a negligible quantity.

The beginning of September found us at Dieppe and we took our place with 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Signals and many other units of 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in the great victory parade which was held there on 3 September.

Nothing of specific interest occurred during the long trek into Belgium, during the relatively static conditions around Antwerp, the clearing of the Scheldt or the move up into the Nijmegen salient. The so-called five days rest period at Bornhem following the Scheldt operation was one of intense activity for the LAD

At Nijmegen, we settled down for the winter, living in billets and with our shop set up in a garage.

During this time Auxiliary Services were more prominently on hand with entertainment, but there was never too much of it. It was at Nijmegen that we suffered our first and only battle casualty when on a Sunday afternoon in November, Honourary L/Cpl Hardtack, our dog, was hit by a bomb fragment and had to be shot. Sickness casualties became rather high at this time and we lost the OC, Sgt, and one L/Cpl to hospital. Leaves to the UK started in February, and these did much to keep morale at a reasonably high level.

2 February saw the end of static conditions in Nijmegen, and there followed the two month's heavy fighting which brought 2<sup>nd</sup> Division up to the Rhine. LAD activity during this period was quite uneventful

and was slightly reminiscent of the Normandy days but with increased work. Living conditions would have been rather grim had we not provided ourselves with two large tents which, with the aid of two small wood stoves, were neat, dry and comfortable and added greatly to the efficiency of operations.

21 LAD crossed the Rhine with division headquarters on the morning of 29 March. Though completely without incident, all ranks quite obviously felt this move to be one of the highlights in their war experiences.

During the rapid advance up into Holland and across again into Germany, our recovery crew more than earned their living. The breakdown tractor was in constant use and on more than one occasion was itself in difficulties. It was in this phase that we discovered by using our spare wheels as duals on the front, a Diamond T could be taken over otherwise impassable ground.

On 7 May, 21 LAD was stationed on the outskirts of Oldenburg. News of the cessation of hostilities was received quietly, though it was apparent that, had conditions afforded it, a celebration of some sort would have taken place. And now remains the last operation, the longest move of all – westward and homeward.

## **22 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 5<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

The moment we had been waiting for had come as our vehicles crawled out of the ship's belly and slowly made their way up the metalled roadway that ran up to the beach. We were on the French mainland – Normandy – a name that will ever be remembered in history. For us the job had just started in earnest – the moment for which some of us had waited nearly five years. It was 8 July 1944.

It seemed a shame that the work, the worry, and the cussing during the past weeks of waterproofing were to no avail, for not a vehicle went over its axles in water.

We moved up the road, directed by numerous signs, to a concentration and de-waterproofing area and commencing removing the toil of many days. Our work, from that moment on, began in earnest and it was many weeks of sweat and long hours before we could call a minute our own.

The morning of 10 July, after a more or less sleepless night due to excitement, ack-ack, German planes, and bombs, we moved up to go into action.

Those first few days were full of excitement, we moved often and there was always something new ahead. One day we counted six German planes shot down in a matter of minutes. It was a great thrill to see the pilots come floating down through the sky, hanging from their parachutes.

At Carpiquet it got a bit tough, we had moved up with regimental headquarters into a position that was under observation from the enemy and he let us know it. Mortars and shells were bursting everywhere, and when we pulled into position, it was found that there was no room for the LAD, so we turned around and went back a couple of miles to "A" Echelon of 73<sup>rd</sup> Battery.

The next few days were some of the worst for the regiment. At least 25% of the vehicles of regimental headquarters were out of action with holed radiators and tires torn by shrapnel. Jerry had the position labelled and you could not move without drawing shell fire. Sgt Kielly and the fitters did a great job towards keeping the vehicles on the road. Much credit must also be given to L/Cpl Tims, the driver of the breakdown lorry, who was out day and night under all conditions. Lt McCallum had plenty to keep him busy; there were trips to the workshops, field park, reconnaissance parties, and recovery. AQMS Dobson had his work cut out for him too. Once the guns began firing the big barrages, which were the order of the day, there were repairs to be done, and inspections and examinations to be carried out. The guns had to be kept in action.

Then Caen was taken. Up to that time there had been a terrific amount of devastation, but the damage done to Caen overshadowed anything we had seen. Our next gun positions were outside of Caen, across

the river, where we stayed for three weeks. Here, the guns fired their biggest barrages sometimes five hundred rounds a night. The 25-pounder [field gun] certainly showed the punishment that it could take during those days and nights. Here we had a chance to work on the vehicles. Our clerk, L/Cpl Ramsay, also appreciated the pause, as it gave him a chance to catch up on the dozen and one reports, etc., and all the paper work that an LAD is burdened with. Sgt Kielly was struck-off-strength at this position and Sgt Johnston took his place.

After Caen – Iff, and here we saw the main battlefield. Canadian and German dead were on the ground, black from the hot sun under which they had lain for several days. Guns and vehicles were knocked out everywhere and the breakdown crew found plenty of work.

There were many short moves after Iff, full of incidents. We had no “A” Echelon at this time and travelled up with regimental headquarters, which was, often as not, ahead of the guns. By that time, the boys had forgotten that using a shovel was work, and it was a competition to see who could dig the deepest and most comfortable slit trench in the least time.

None of us will forget Falaise, the final phase of the hard fighting in France. The roadsides all through this area were literally covered with thousands of vehicles, guns, and tanks, knocked out our planes and artillery. Here we saw, at first hand, what a crippling blow the enemy had been struck in the Normandy campaign. Shortly after this time Cpl Desjardins was struck-off-strength and Cfn Chambers replaced him.

Then came Dieppe, where a proud 2<sup>nd</sup> Division marched through the streets to the skirl of the bagpipes. At Borburgh, we were shelled pretty heavily and had a number of casualties in the regiment. We had to move the LAD vehicles to a bit safer place as shrapnel more than once had found our trucks.

Our next move was one of the longest, up through Rouen, where we received a tremendous welcome, through Belgium to Antwerp. Thanks to the fitters of the LAD, the regiment arrived at their new position without the loss of a vehicle. There was plenty of work in the way of minor repairs in this position, and the boys kept busy. It was just as well we moved after a few days though, for most of the boys found that the city had other interest besides being a great port, and it was a question of how long they could stand the hard days and late nights. Sgt Johnston and Cfn Wilson were struck-off-strength at this point and Cfn Ward taken-on-strength.

After Antwerp we moved north, and Putte stands out as a highlight. As the regiment moved into town, machine guns were chattering on three sides of us, and the LAD took over from the Black Watch. Jerry wasn't fooling either, and for three hours he mortared and shelled our lines. It was here that Sgt Reid came to the unit.

The Scheldt Estuary was one of the toughest battles in the campaign as far as ground and weather conditions were concerned. We hated the sight of water by the time we pulled out of there.

Our next stop was Lier – Belgium. A rest period for the regiment, but not for the LAD. But even with inspections and examination and a thousand other small jobs, we found time for other diversions and there were plenty of them in the town.

Seven days later, we began a long trip up through Holland and took over from the British. The regiment was stationed outside Nijmegen, in the bush of course, and the winter was spent in dugouts. It took a lot of hard work and ingenuity, but after a week we were quite comfortable and settled. We built a small workshop that would take a jeep and a gun and where L/Cpl Kirby, our welder, could tear things apart and put them together again to his heart's content.

While stationed in the bush a complete change over of gun fitters took place with Cfn Barlow and Cfn Ward being replaced by Cfn Jacobson and Cfn Thompson. L/Cpl Tims was also struck-off-strength in this position with Cfn Hillier filling the vacancy after his driver-mechanic's trade test. Pte Stoddard was taken-on-strength to take over the batman's duties.

On 8 February, 1,400 guns opened up and the big push across the Rhine had started. The battle continued fanatically for a week or so, and we had advanced to just outside Cleve.

On 22 February, Capt C.A. Barrett of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop took over the LAD from Lt McCallum who went to the workshop. This was just outside of Cleve, and quite a hot spot as there was considerable shelling and German air activity. From there on, there was a series of short moves down to the Hochwald Forest.

The fighting in this area was fanatical and slit trenches or cellars were a very necessary evil. The regiment had considerable casualties, but the LAD was in luck. In Xanton, at one particular location, shells fell all around us to such an extent we were moved out. At the end of this campaign, we returned to the Reichswald Forest, where a complete inspection and overhaul was carried out. Small arms, instruments, wireless, cookers, vehicles, and guns were completely inspected and repaired. Great assistance was obtained from 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop for this work, as the refitting period was something less than ten days. Now came a great thrill as we moved out one morning to cross the Rhine just below Emmerich, where we proceeded to attack the high ground north of that town. A steady advance was maintained and we crossed into Holland. There was no let-up in the fighting, and there were many moves, sometimes as many as four in one day, until we had cleared the north-east section of Holland, including the towns of Assen and Groningen. During this time, the LAD found it impossible to do a great deal of work due to the many moves. Here, we were moving so quickly we often found ourselves ahead of the infantry. On one occasion, the LAD could not be accommodated with regimental headquarters and was told to hunt a place for themselves. Capt Barrett went out on a reconnaissance and finally found an uninhabited farm house a mile across country down a back lane. The LAD was set up there and commenced to work. Sometime later, the Royal Regiment of Canada came creeping up on us and were amazed to find RCEME in possession, as it had been their objective for the day. There was always a great amount of recovery and small repair jobs, but these were done on the fly, so to speak. After a few days in Groningen the division was moved south to Germany again, and went into the work of clearing that part of Germany running to the North Sea, south and west of Wilhelmshaven, and including such cities as Oldenburg, Delmonhorst, Varel, Brake and Nordenham. Here again, our breakdown was found to be a most valuable asset to the regiment, for this country was of a marshy, low nature, and sometimes practically the whole regiment would have to be pulled out of a position. In fact, just outside Delmonhorst, 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade LAD was called upon to assist in pulling out the regiment as well as our own breakdown which had become mired on a mud road.

Reaching Nordenham as hostilities ceased, there seemed to be a general “let down” feeling prevalent amongst the boys, and everything seemed too quiet. There was no roar of guns and we listened on the wireless to big celebrations in London and all over the world. With cessation of hostilities, vehicles and equipment were again put in A-1 condition prior to their being turned in.

## **23 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Field Park Company, RCE**

8 July 1944 saw the beaches of Normandy near Benny-sur-Mer lined with landing craft of many types. Silhouetted on the horizon to the left, the Rodney [HMS Rodney – battleship] belched flame and thunder as she turned her guns on Caen. Overhead Spitfires zoomed and swooped, accompanied by that characteristic high-pitched whistle so familiar to Allied troops. It was a blazing hot day and heat waves shimmered and danced over the white sands of the beach. In the foreground three LSTs drifted slowly forward coming to a shuddering halt as they grounded on the beach. The ramp of the nearest folded out and down. There was a period of waiting as the tide crept out leaving the ramp of the vessel on dry land. Suddenly, accompanied by a roar of engines, a Diamond T breakdown rode over the edge of the ramp and wheeled forward and down onto the dry beach, the first vehicle to land. The figures “48” in white over

RCEME colours could be seen painted on the bumper. Such was the picture that greeted this RCEME unit as it first landed on the shores of France.

Less than a week later, we had our first taste of enemy fire. While camped in a field near Rots, heavy artillery shells landed around us. Enemy planes were seen; some shot down by our ack-ack. Never at any time during those first days in France were the boys far away from their slit trenches.

The first unusual job that confronted the LAD was the driving of the water purification sets. These were originally equipped with Petter (?) engines, which gave continual trouble. Also the supply of Petter parts was practically non-existent. After much discussion, it was decided to revamp the mounting and install jeep engines. This work was done by the workshops and proved a successful move. These units gave no further trouble throughout operations, and often pumped as much as 50,000 gallons per day as against 30,000 gals, which was the top figure for the original set.

All through Caen, Falaise, Dieppe, Rouen, and into Belgium the role for the LAD was very normal. Recovery work, and repairs to vehicles and equipment was carried out in a normal manner. During this time, we had no casualties or exciting jobs out of the ordinary. Once at Fleury-sur-Orne, two members of the LAD recovered a couple of 1<sup>st</sup> Field Park Company men from the middle of a minefield where they had been hit and wounded by "S" mines. The boys, on hearing the wounded men call, procured a mine detector and swept a path to the two men, applied first aid to their wounds, and evacuated them to the nearest field ambulance in the caves at Fleury-sur-Orne.

For a time when advances were so rapid, the unit moved almost daily and the bulk of our work was packing and unpacking. Inspections of WD(?) equipment was carried out in any spare moments available, and it was often quite difficult in this fast moving period to keep up with the required number of returns. However, morale was high and everyone worked with a will. Finally, near Antwerp in Belgium, we stopped for a rest and had a breathing space. Here we enjoyed the hospitality of the Belgian people and the cafes and amusements of Antwerp, the first big town encountered that had not been shattered by the ravages of war.

Soon this period of rest was over and the division moved on towards the Scheldt. There was hard fighting during this phase of the battle and a larger number of vehicles than usual were knocked out. This coupled with the flooded nature of the ground gave our recovery crew a busy time. However, the regulations demanding all recovery to be done at night had been relaxed by that time, and the work was completed in daylight greatly facilitating the job.

The winter was spent in Graves, Holland, from November to the first part of February. This served as a refitting period and vehicles were brought up to first-class condition whenever possible. It was a very busy time for the welder and fitters. Units were greatly interested in winterizing their jeeps and caravans, and in this LAD lent great assistance. Christmas was very successful in that plenty of good food was available as well as a liberal supply of spirits. Two nights after Christmas, the bridge at Graves was shelled by German rocket artillery. The garage where we were stationed was directly in line with the bridge, and twelve of the shells burst almost in the yard. All our vehicles except one were hit by shrapnel, and a most unpleasant night was spent by all concerned; however no casualties occurred to our personnel.

The spring offensive started on 8 February, and the unit moved to Nijmegen and Cleve. Cleve was the first stop in Germany; there we saw the destruction created by our bombs. There was much looting done here and when the unit moved on, the 60-cwts [trucks] were bulging with acquired materials, which were later discarded. The advance continued across the Rhine and back into Holland and up as far as Groningen. Vehicles showed the effect of the winter's work spent on them and they gave very little trouble. There were few casualties in vehicles during this phase, either from mines, shells or mechanical defects. We retraced our steps again, and went back into Germany near Linden and advanced towards Oldenburg. Here jeep engines started to give out and the supply appeared to be nil. Every opportunity to

pick up wrecked or derelict jeeps on the road was taken, and by using the motors out of these we were able to keep the jeeps on the road.

Oldenburg was finally reached, and with it, the end of the fighting. Victory in Europe had become realized. Celebrations were in order and carried out in true Canadian style. With the cessation of hostilities vehicles and equipment were inspected and painted. Those not up to standard were evacuated or repaired. The remainder was prepared for the hand-in, in accordance with instructions.

## **24 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 6<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

After spending over three years as a field unit in training in England, this LAD landed in France on 8 July 1944 on the beach near Courseulles. This was the climax to a lot of arduous and frequently tiresome training, and every man was glad to be seeing action in that at last he had the feeling that he was really part of the Allied fighting machine rather than a bystander.

Our first taste of life in action came early in the morning of 12 July 1944, after the regiment had occupied a position during the night in the fields southwest of the Carpiquet airport. The regiment was shelled by long range enemy guns, and every man very quickly realized that a slit trench was just about the best spot imaginable. The regiment had several vehicle and gun casualties from the shell fire, and the LAD immediately got down to the business for which they had trained so long. It was in this position that we had our first experience with an ammunition premature [shell exploding at, or in, the muzzle of the gun]. We had all seen samples of prematures, but this was the first time that we had encountered one first hand, and the gun was quite a museum piece for a few hours.

From Carpiquet the regiment moved to a position east of Bretteville-sur-Odon on the road to Caen. During the move, the convoy took a wrong turn with the result that the LAD at the rear of the convoy was halted at what was then known as “Hell Fire Corner” in Bretteville-sur-Odon. No damage was done, but we surely spent an anxious half hour.

The LAD carried out its first battle casualty recovery job in “Mortar Bomb Alley” at Ifs the morning after the regiment crossed the Orne River. The casualty was a carrier, which had been knocked out by mortar fire. Recovering this vehicle was quite a “thrill” for the recovery crew, although it soon became an everyday occurrence.

After the closing of the “Falaise Gap”, the division went into what was supposed to be a 72-hour rest area, but at which we stayed only one night. The breakdown remained behind on the move and was led up by the jeep during a very dark night. The enemy air force very conveniently dropped flares enabling the two vehicles to travel quite fast. We usually disliked the flares but this time they were really useful.

From the so-called rest, the LAD moved on to a position west of Orbec where we took our worst shelling of the campaign. Two men were wounded (the only casualties of ten months in action) and our jeep was temporarily knocked out. Altogether the personnel spent six hours in the slit trenches during two separate barrages.

From Orbec we, as part of regimental headquarters of the regiment, joined the mad chase to the Seine River. At times the regiment was out in front of the leading infantry and, on one occasion, at our first flying bomb site, we watched the infantry advance towards us across a stubble field. It was during this rapid advance that we had to travel 100 to 120 miles to make a return trip to the field park or workshop. On many occasions it was impossible to make the trip, and it required a lot of ingenuity and improvisation to keep the regiment’s vehicles on the road and the guns in action.

We crossed the Seine during the night in what proved to be the most nerve-wracking convoy of all. We drove through the Foret-de-la-Londe without lights of any kind and the regiment had only one casualty.

The floating Bailey bridge over the Seine was the first of its kind that we had encountered, and in the dark it gave everyone rather a sinking feeling to feel it rise and fall with the weight of the vehicles.

From the crossing of the Seine, we went to Dieppe where we had, for three days, our first rest after two months in action. The stay at Dieppe was really enjoyed by all, as it was first time we had had the opportunity to associate with the French people.

From Dieppe, we proceeded in stages, without seeing any action, all the way to Avescappelle, Belgium. During one night convoy the breakdown crew took four prisoners and got two L-38 pistols. On the move into Belgium, the convoy was shelled by the gun of an enemy fort, but no damage was done.

During our stay in Avescappelle, we were shelled quite heavily, resulting in three vehicle casualties in regimental headquarters of the regiment and a very busy time for the LAD.

Our next move was to Adinkerke, near the French border where the regiment took part in the siege of Dunkirk. During this time, personnel of the LAD with the breakdown helped to put three captured 155-mm guns into action. The guns were used to good effect firing on Dunkirk. Two of the men were in the picture on the cover of the "Canada Weekly", and this was kept as a souvenir by the men concerned. We also put an enemy 75-mm gun into action at close range, and got quite heavily shelled for our trouble, but fortunately we were able to take shelter in a concrete fort and no damage was done.

The Antwerp area was our next stop, and here the men really enjoyed themselves in their free time. This was the first large European city we had ever seen, and the people really gave us a grand welcome. During our stay in this area, the LAD jeep was again temporarily knocked out by shell fire.

From Antwerp we went north and then west into Holland and the South Beveland mud and flood. During this stage of the battle, the breakdown and crew were out almost continuously in order to keep the regiment's ammunition vehicles moving.

After the South Beveland show, we got a 72-hour rest back in the Antwerp area, and then proceeded into Holland and up to Nijmegen, where we spent a very boring winter in barracks. The regiment did not do much firing, and the most of the LAD work was in winterizing various jeeps.

On 17 February, we left our winter quarters and crossed into Germany through the Reichswald Forest. Everyone was in high spirits, because at long last we were finally fighting on the enemy's home ground. Another good point was the ease with which the kitchens could get fresh meat once more. The steaks were really good. During this phase, the regiment had by far the worst premature that we had seen. The gun was completely demolished leaving no useful parts whatsoever.

After the clearing of the west bank of the Rhine, we had what was virtually a two-weeks rest around the Cleve area. It gave us a chance to get most of the guns overhauled and a lot of vehicle repairs caught up.

On 27 March, we crossed the Rhine and subsequently swung back into Holland and, as part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Group, took part in the dash to Groningen. Near Groningen, we again had a lot of mud to deal with, and spent several hours one day getting the regiment's ammunition vehicles off one gun position.

From Groningen we went back into Germany near Lingden and subsequently as far as Oldenburg where we celebrated VE-Day. During the move up to Oldenburg, the breakdown and crew spent about five hours winching the majority of the regiment's vehicles through one bad crossroad.

## **87 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to the Toronto Scottish Regiment (MG)**

87 LAD landed with the Toronto Scottish Regiment (MG) on 7 July 1944. We located originally near Rosel and then on to Caen. The unit was very busy keeping the mortars and machine guns serviced.



Vehicles did not give much trouble during this period, but later on the carrier vehicles proved to be the biggest source of work.

Few incidents are worth noting during the push of the division from Falaise to Belgium then to Holland. On one occasion, when the battalion was fighting on the Scheldt, they reported that the ground was too soft to support the heavy mortars, so that the OC of the LAD in conjunction with the A.I.A. from Headquarters 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps and the senior armourer of the division did a lot of experimental work in devising a modified type of base plate. The modified base plate was soon put to test and found to be a great success.

The LAD, after the chase across two countries, finally arrived in Nijmegen where they were to sit for the winter months.

In February, the push from Nijmegen commenced, and our roadwork commenced again. Eighteen carriers were knocked out at one time, and much sweat and blood was lost in getting them back into action.

During this period the Toronto Scottish Regiment were spread over the whole division front, which meant the breakdown, was on the road most of the time. On one occasion, near Xanten, a mortar bomb landed beside the breakdown and blew out all the tires on one side of it. Tires at that time were almost unobtainable, but the Ordnance Field Park did an extra special job for us, and we got replacement tires in three days time.

The LAD on VE-Day found itself near Oldenburg, and after the excitement of hearing of the end of hostilities, the personnel settled down to putting the much-used vehicles in first-rate condition preparatory to demobilization.

## **A Narrative Of RCEME, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, in North-West Europe**

9 October 1945.

The individual stories of 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division RCEME units in North-West Europe follow very much the same pattern. Almost without exception they landed in two or more flights, experienced the same treatment from the enemy, and passed through the same towns.

The first RCEME personnel to land in Normandy were, strangely enough, the second flight of Headquarters RCEME under Maj Hamilton 2i/c. [*Hand written note, signed "H": Proctor Neil's (?) ARV with 1<sup>st</sup> Hussars was probably the first RCEME to land*]. The artillery LADs landed as Type "D", but all except the anti-tank LAD were changed to type "B" when the division reverted to a standard infantry division and the field regiments lost their self-propelled guns.

The flow of work into RCEME was of a spasmodic nature. After three weeks of extremely hard work cleaning up invasion damages, the three workshops became quite slack, lasting until the division went into rest on 4 August. Then began an expansive programme of vehicle inspection and overhauls by workshops in order that the LADs might have a share in that well-earned rest. All RCEME units were active however. In fact the term "rest period" came to have a special meaning for RCEME. Similar programs were undertaken in Nijmegen in November and in Cleve early in March. The later inspections were of greatest value, as the equipment had time to develop mechanical troubles.

While in Normandy, the shops were located together and moved in RCEME convoy with the division administrative group. As longer moves became necessary, the advantages of "leap-frogging" shops became evident, and the practice enabled them to maintain a semblance of contact with the LADs during the chase across France, and at the same time allowed workshops to prepare for movement by backloading or "forward" loading to their own shops without loss of equipment to the division.

When shortages of spares made repairs to the "cars 5-cwt" difficult, 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop specialized in their repair, and the other shops evacuated this vehicle type BLR to them for repair or for cannibalizing. For the same reason, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop specialised in armoured cars while 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop built all the special ambulance jeeps. A considerable amount of caravan work fell to 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop.

An active interest in sports was maintained in this formation throughout the campaign, regardless of location. Organized events were successfully undertaken at Moulineaux on Dominion Day, and in Nijmegen during the winter. In both cases the sports were held no farther than three miles from the enemy lines and well within shell fire range.

It can easily be understood that the task of maintaining the standard equipments plus the large number of specialized equipments used by the Water Rats has been a job requiring extensive training and plain hard work. The men of 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, RCEME, are justly proud of the part they have played.

Time of signature 1145 B hrs.

Signed by (F. W. Cranston), Lt-Col  
RCEME 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division

### **Headquarters RCEME 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division**

The first representatives of Headquarters, RCEME, were scheduled to land at H plus 7 hours on D-Day, but because the sea was too rough for the transfer of vehicles to Rhino ferries, they were not allowed to land until the afternoon of D plus 1.

Maj Hamilton, 2i/c, brought the first detachment ashore on the afternoon of D-Day leading his vehicles across the beaches strewn with dead and entering the village of Graye-sur-Mer. The inhabitants weren't too sure that the allies were there to stay and it showed in the welcome our troops received.

The party then advanced towards Elbow Frankie transit camp where it was found on the following afternoon by Lt-Col Shields and his advance party. The unit experienced a great deal of rifle fire in this spot from the many snipers in the area. Capt Kogan, the EME wireless, was shot at while in this area, and it made it an exciting and entertaining story for weeks ahead.

After a second night here where the headquarters was given its share of attention by low flying Luftwaffe, the party moved on to Banville near Reviere where model slit trenches were dug. The nightly air raids brought anti-personnel bombs in the area and, to keep the daylight hours interesting, the enemy supplied snipers operating less than half a mile away. Capt Carriere suddenly found he was a sniper's target but escaped injury. A party of four set out to eliminate the German, but did not make contact. Perhaps it was fortunate because enthusiasm is no substitute for that game.

From Banville, headquarters moved on June 13 into a green valley below Moulinaux, a huge cave offered shelter and an orchard provided working space. The first casualty occurred here when Pte Brown received a shrapnel wound in the leg. In spite of the fact that attacks and counterattacks were taking place four miles ahead, the headquarters enjoyed comparative peace and quiet - sunbathing, volleyball, baseball were the pastimes. On Dominion Day a sports rally was held for 3<sup>rd</sup> Division RCEME which 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop won by a large margin.

Towards the end of July, the headquarters arrived in Bieville in preparation for the assault on Caen. 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division participated as part of 2<sup>nd</sup> British Army and equipment casualties were sufficient to keep RCEME busy. The ensuing rest period of one week, however, meant real action for Headquarters RCEME units. While the shops worked at full capacity on inspections and overhaul, the administrative work at headquarters maintained an equal pace. When 3<sup>rd</sup> Division returned to action equipped as a standard type of infantry division, every piece of equipment had been examined thoroughly.

It was not realized how valuable this checking and overhaul period was to be. The division returned to action to drive back the enemy from Bretteville to Falaise, assist in cleaning up the Falaise pocket, and then take off across France after a beaten enemy.

At Boulogne and Calais, Headquarters RCEME organized the acquirement of valuable workshop materials. By this time, particular shortages such as steel and brass stock and welding rod were being noticed. Local sources were becoming more important.

After the Scheldt Estuary job, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division turned to find the Canadian front was now over 100 miles away at Nijmegen. The trip was happily delayed for a week while operation *Relax* was undertaken in October. Headquarters RCEME participated and helped to perpetuate the memory of the Canadians in Ghent.

Then came the static winter on a baron's estate just south of Nijmegen. Christmas day saw Headquarters RCEME's first unit dinner, and thanks were voted to the two cooks, Private Cope and Private Boudreau, for their efforts.

In January, Lt-Col Shields was replaced as CREME by Lt-Col T. G. Quance.

The advance in February brought Headquarters RCEME outside Cleve on the edge of Reichwald. Contact was made with elements of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps at this location and a great number of old acquaintances renewed.

Next followed a period of intense RCEME activity in preparation for the crossing of the Rhine. Lt-Col Quance took a tactical group over first, and came in for a considerable amount of shelling from Emmerich, the remaining resistance point on the Rhine. Capt Kogan, the EME telecommunications

officer, rescued a wounded driver from his burning carrier at considerable risk to himself, when he arrived in the outskirts of Emmerich before the town was captured.

After the capture of Emmerich, we began the long chase north through Holland after the desperate enemy. RCEME was busy moving itself over these long distances and had little time to work on the increasing number of vehicle casualties. Headquarters RCEME settled down once near Herrenveen for two weeks and caught up with much of the backlog of repairs.

Another long move followed, taking Headquarters RCEME to Winschoten, where the division was again overhauled preparatory to moving into Germany. By this time the headquarters was quite adept at maintaining itself and keeping the division in a good state of repair.

On 3 May, the headquarters moved into Germany again and set up near Leer. It was here that news came of the capitulation of all German forces in North-West Germany and Holland took place.

On 7 May, Headquarters RCEME moved into barracks north of Aurich in company with the division headquarters. It was on the last move that VE-Day was quietly celebrated.

Thus ended the participation of Headquarters RCEME, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division in the North-West European Campaign.

## **7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

This was the first infantry brigade workshop in operation on the Canadian sector of the beachhead in Normandy. It was first represented as a beach recovery section operating on Mike beach under Capt W. J. Sutherland from 8 June until 12 June, when Maj R. G. Storms brought the main body ashore and opened shop near Mouligneaux. Our overwhelming air superiority gave the shop freedom to work during the day, but the gratitude of 7<sup>th</sup> Workshop towards the RAF faded toward evening as our airmen scooted off to their hotels in London and left the ground troops to worry about Jerry's brilliant aircraft flares and anti-personnel bombs. Although sleep was difficult, the armament, vehicle, and wireless sections maintained a high rate of production showing a fine disregard towards the permissible repair schedule for a second echelon workshop. On 20 June, two land mines that fell in the area did much towards improving slit trenches and camouflage without doing any damage to men or equipment.

As the month of June progressed, 7<sup>th</sup> Workshop established its reputation in the division, partly due to the abundance of replacement parts and the co-operative spirit of British and Canadian Ordnance units, and partly due to the remarkable enthusiasm of the craftsmen which kept them going from daylight till dark.

As 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshops came into operation, work eased considerably. On 1 July, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division RCEME was able to have a sports meet at Mouligneaux, which 7<sup>th</sup> Workshop won by a wide margin.

The end of July found the shop in Bieville, where it first came under shell fire from across the Orne. At this stage, so many formations were accumulated on the beachhead that the maintenance troops were necessarily crowding the fighting echelons, and therefore got their full share of attention from the enemy. No casualties were caused, but shrapnel caused great damage to radiators, tires, and tarpaulins.

On August 5, the AWD went out under Capt Sutherland and did not return to the parent unit until Christmas.

As Caen fell and the Falaise pocket was cleaned up, the shop moved on Iffs, Fontenay Le Marmion, Langannerie, and on August 25 began the chase after the brigade as it followed the Germans across France. The men of 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop will long remember the scenes of death and destruction along the road to the Seine. And the people of France must remember that trip too, as the boys supplied the children with chocolate, the men with cigarettes, and the women with memories.

9 September found 7<sup>th</sup> Workshop set up at Wailly Beaucamp, east of Boulogne, where it was soon found to be the most convenient located shop in 30<sup>th</sup> British Corps. Consequently the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division work became a very small proportion of the total.

When Boulogne and Calais fell, the shop moved on to Wynghene in Belgium, then to Cliet, and finally set up in Eecloo, where it stayed for the start of the costly Scheldt Estuary campaign. On 21 October however, 7<sup>th</sup> Workshop was selected to build a mobile mess for the senior officers of division headquarters and for that purpose a semi-permanent site in Ghent was selected. Four officers and 70 ORs under Maj Storms took up quarters in Ghent, while the balance of the shop under Capt Currie joined 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Workshop in Sas Van Gent, in Holland. This lasted until 3 November.

On 4 November began operation *Relax*, six days in Ghent with nothing to do, and 7<sup>th</sup> Workshop as usual excelled. On November 11 the long move began, which eventually brought the shop to an open field at Grave near Nijmegen, where they took over from some very tired troops of the US 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. But this location was not suitable for work, and on 15 November an attempt was made to move into Nijmegen towards Groesbeek.

The shop arrived there first in time to encounter concentrated enemy shelling, which cost them six ORs wounded to hospital, including AQMS Goddard, and seven vehicles damaged. The shop withdrew to Alverna. Waterman won a Commander-in-Chief's certificate for his work in attending to the wounded while under fire. Here began a series of negotiations for accommodation, which finally landed the shop in the cattle market in Nijmegen on 21 December.

This location suddenly became available when two shells came through the roof the previous day. The stay in Nijmegen was punctuated by countless V-1s which passed overhead, and a few which didn't, some shells, and an occasional jet plane. The only casualties were caused by a stray burst of 20-mm rounds that came through the roof and seriously wounded Cfn Stothers. Three others had minor injuries.

The stalemate in Nijmegen was finally broken towards the end of February and on 11 March, 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop moved into Cleve in Germany. The town was subject to shelling by the Germans on the east bank of the Rhine, but none fell in the area. On 21 March, the workshop changed command when Maj H. C. Jockel replaced Maj R. G. Storms. All ranks paraded to give Maj Storms their best wishes.

On 3 April, the shop had its first experience of mines when it moved into a Dutch farm north of Emmerich. Sgt Coyle was wounded here by stepping on a *Schu* mine. His wounds were not serious, but an RCE Sapper who assisted in the removal of the mines had his foot blown off. S/Sgt Murray showed great courage by entering the minefield to remove Sgt Coyle.

After a short stay here, the division began its arduous pursuit of the Germans through Holland again and back to Germany, taking the shop through Vorden, Nijverdaal, Raalte then to Groningen, where an overwhelming number of jobs came in. An AWD was despatched to Winschoten, Papenburg, then Leer in Germany having an uneventful time. 5 May found the shop in Leer and the AWD in Hesel. The great news of capitulation was not greeted with the violence that might have been expected. Even VE-Day, 8 May, was spent quietly by most. Already the men were beginning to wonder when they would be home.

## **8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

On D-Day, 6 June 1944, at 1630 hours the first detachment of men from this workshop, comprised of one officer and nineteen ORs, arrived off the beach of France at Courseulles aboard an LST. This force included mechanics, electricians, gun fitters, artificers, soldiers, and craftsmen, with their tool kits in assault packs and rifles in their hands.

For over two months these men had been undergoing intensive training for this memorable day. In England, under conditions similar to that which they expected to meet on the continent, the men marched

and waded from their barges, up and down the beaches under the weight of 100-lb Yukon packs. They had dug slit trenches in the hard ground, working through the cold rains and winds of the English spring. Now they were prepared both technically and physically for the real thing.

Unfortunately the channel was quite rough, and it was not until 0530 hours on D plus 2, after being on the water for six days, that the first RCEME personnel from this unit landed in Normandy. However, the corps was right in the front lines and although no casualties occurred, the unit experienced their baptism of enemy fire from strafing attacks by Luftwaffe fighters. The remainder of the workshop sailed on 18 June, and after a rough crossing and coming under enemy fire made their landing on 21 June. No stop was made in the transit area, but the unit proceeded directly to the assembly area and then to the division administration area where they dug in for the night. The first night was uneventful, but the sleeping in foxholes and the incessant roar of planes and AA guns made the men realize that they were now playing for keeps.

The first few weeks were spent in relative peace and quiet in muddy foxholes not far from the beaches. The men worked from dawn to dusk de-waterproofing vehicles, dismantling and draining petrol tanks, drying distributors and putting them back on the road as runners, up to 100 drowned vehicles a day. As to be expected, meal hours were when time could be found, and Jerry planes were over nearly every night, strafing and bombing supplying the day's recreation. These early days were rather hard on boys whose main training was of a technical nature. True they did not personally account for enemy casualties, but the equipment they repaired and kept repaired gave our side the opportunity of doing so.

On 12 July the workshop moved to Columby-Sur-Thaon, where nearly a week was busily spent repairing vehicles and guns that had been damaged by enemy action. On 17 July, a move was made to Villons-Les-Bussons where four difficult days were put in. This location was nicknamed "The Dust Bowl" for apparent reasons, and everyone was happy when word came through to move on, as it was almost impossible to work here. Next move was to Balinville, where the unit suffered its first battle casualties. On 23 July at 2245 hours, the workshop site was strafed and bombed, four anti-personnel bombs landing in the officers' lines. Lts Clappison and Millar, Sgt Purdy, and Cfn Platt, Nightman and Bulmar were driven to 6 Casualty Clearing Station, accompanied by Capt Wilson who suffered minor head injuries. About this time, the AWD were also subjected to a few bombing and strafing attacks, but suffered no casualties, other than vehicles.

Early in August modifications were carried out on RCA half-tracks to convert them to troop carriers, also a lot of work was done on frames for ambulance jeeps in order that they could be used by the RCAMC.

The next move was to Ifs on 11 August, but after three days the site was advanced to St. Martin De Fontenay. The next day a fire broke out in one of the stores binned lorries, and with the aid of a good wind quickly got out of control. All other vehicles were saved, but the loss of this lorry with its stores was quite a blow as spare parts were rather hard to replace and had taken considerable time to build up.

Only a short stop was made at this site, and on 18 August the workshop moved to Lacroix. Work was more than plentiful at this time and, for the first and last time, one of the sections, the wireless shop, had to close its doors and refuse any more work in order to get caught up with its backlog. This situation was of a temporary nature and lasted only a few days.

The Allies were advancing across France very rapidly at this time and moves were fast. On 28 August the unit moved to Courcy, and on 2 September to Le Gros Theil Toures-En-Vineau. Three days later on to Fresnay Folny. It was at this time that the second court martial of unit personnel was held since its formation. Neither one was requested by the OC and both were for Absence Without Leave. The first one was requested by a dissatisfied infantry private, who had been transferred to RCEME against his wishes, and the outcome was satisfactory to all when arrangements were made for his transfer back to infantry.

2 September found the workshop in Wailly-Beauchamp, where it spent two weeks in what could then be called a static position. Petrol was the main problem at this time, and only a few days supply was on hand.

However the Service Corps boys came through just in time to prevent a serious crippling effect on the work.

The next location was near Enquinhault where on 24 September, while the shop was just getting settled, a Lancaster bomber crashed quite near by. Two of the crew were saved and spent the night with the unit resting up from their shock. Three crew members lost their lives, and a service was said next day for them before their bodies were sent to England for burial.

On 3 October, the location was changed to Cassels, where only a short halt was made for two days before leaving the first country in which they had landed for Belgium soil. The first stop in Belgium was made at Wynghene, where a week was spent before moving on to Waarschoot. This position was the most permanent one to date, and lasted from 12 October until 12 November. This was the first time that the unit was actually located right in a town, and it was a break for the men as it gave them someplace to spend spare time in the evenings. The next move following the advance was made to Nederasselt. This site was quite unsuitable for a workshop, and five days were lost in reconnaissance and negotiations before the unit was set up in a railway station at Veghel. The weather was turning quite cold by now, and although the shop was set up in the open, billets were found for the men. This welcome change helped to keep up the spirits of the men.

On 4 December, a gala Santa Clause party was held for the children of Veghel, which was a huge success. The children received gifts and candy and in return presented the unit with an 8-week old puppy. Early in December, the AWD started experimental work on a rocket projector, which was completed on 20 December at the workshop and inspected the next day by Brig J. A. Roberts whose baby this was. The projector was tried out on 27 December and proved a great success. [This was the "Land Mattress".]

The Jerries were backed up to the Rhine now, and a stalemate was encountered for some time, resulting in a static position for the unit from 17 November 1944 to 24 February 1945, the longest that the shop had been in any place up to date. On the latter date was made the long awaited change to the enemy's soil, and the men felt that the beginning of the end was now in sight. The men were again set up in a building and, since they remained in this spot until 3 April 1945, a very static situation was encountered. The next move was back to Holland, where the unit remained until May. The advance had speeded up again and the workshop was often on the move. The day before VE-Day, a move was made to Aurich, so that when the Germans surrendered the workshop was once more on German soil.

From D plus 2 day until VE-Day the workshop followed the advance fairly closely, moving through the different occupied and now liberated countries until they finished up in Germany itself.

Fortunately the unit suffered few casualties, but were often close to the scene of action. The morale of the personnel was quite high most of the time, and when nerves were becoming frayed from constant work, loss of sleep, and near-by shell fire and bombs, the fire fortunately abated or grew more distant.

The work was sometimes slack, but as a rule most of the sections were very busy and often overloaded. When the army was advancing rapidly the work was slack, as all equipment was in use, but whenever stops were made, work poured in as damage and hard usage were accompanied by extensive repairs. Although only a second echelon workshop, the unit was often required to carry out work far beyond its scope in order that the units that it serviced might carry on their rapid advances. As a rule the weather was rainy and very muddy. Conditions slowed up work numerous times.

## **9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

Like other workshops of 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, this shop supplied a beach recovery section, which landed in France on D plus 2 under Capt T. Bromage. Due to the success of the division's waterproofing of vehicles, this section was not overworked on the beaches, but they managed to serve a useful function by forming a

crook park from vehicles damaged on and beyond the beaches. The park was of great value to other RCEME units carrying out repairs by cannibalization.

The main body of the shop under Maj L. P. Baker came ashore 23 June 1944, and took up position with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshops at Moulineaux. By this time a period of consolidation on the bridgehead had been started, and the other shops had the work under control. CREME decided not to open 9<sup>th</sup> Workshop until the next move took place.

On June 28 Capt Bromage took out an AWD which set up at Cambes and had an exciting time there.

For the balance of the shop however, the first month ashore became an anti-climax. After months of strenuous preparation in England for amphibious operations, the shop had made a dry landing, driven quietly to its location and remained closed for work until 24 July. However German aircraft flares and bombs helped to maintain the boys' interest in the course of the war.

Towards the end of July, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop moved into Bieville, where it was immediately flooded with work. On 1 August, they were subjected to their first shelling when the enemy across the Orne opened up for an hour. No casualties or damage were caused. On 4 August, the unit changed command with Maj R. A. Mitchell replacing Maj Baker.

When Caen fell, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop moved on to Iffs, then to St. Martin De Fontenoy. As the Falaise pocket disappeared, the AWD was increased to two officers and 60 men for the special job of clearing roads in the long march across France. The workshop followed through Lacroix, Totes (south of Lisieux), Le Gros Theil, Bose Le Hard, and Montreuil. It was here that the shop suffered its first fatal casualties when S/Sgt Morrison and Sgt Turtle were killed in a road accident. In this same location, the men had a close up view of a Lancaster bomber, which crash-landed in the next field with one wing on fire.

When Boulogne and Calais fell, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop was on the job repairing equipment for 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and many other formations.

During the Scheldt Estuary operations, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade Workshop was located at Sas Van Ghent in Holland. At this point, intensive study and repair of flame throwers was undertaken by the shop, which paid dividends later as 3<sup>rd</sup> Division continued its role of house clearing and pill box assaulting throughout Holland.

After a short rest in Ghent, during which everybody quit work but nobody rested, the shop made the long move up to Nijmegen and set up in the railway station there.

On 26 November, disaster overtook the AWD when a German jet-propelled aircraft dropped a parachute bomb close by killing one and wounding nine. It was indeed a sad day for the workshop.

The winter in Nijmegen was fortunately uneventful. With the enemy some three miles away in Groesbuk, the men still managed to enjoy swimming, dancing, Christmas parties, concert parties, and cinemas. Just before Christmas, it was learned that enemy paratroops were concentrating nearby and the stand-to caused mild concern in the unit. The civilian population were greatly alarmed, but no paratroops appeared.

When the February offensive got under way, 9<sup>th</sup> Workshop was close behind and on 3 March moved into Cleve, Germany, arriving just in time to be shelled by Jerry from across the Rhine. No casualties were caused. The boys soon learned that this was to be a regular feature, and each night for the next week some part of Cleve received the shells. Five vehicles suffered minor damage.

No one was sorry to leave this spot. As the advance continued, the shop moved across the Rhine at Emmerich, then back into Holland through Vorden, Leeuwarden, and Winschoten.

VE-Day saw the shop moving into Aurich, Germany, feeling very happy about everything. The shop came through the campaign with only one man killed by enemy action, and considering the risks to which they had been subjected, the men were fortunate.



## **4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Light Anti-aircraft Workshop attached to 4<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Regiment, RCA**

This was the first RCEME unit of any size to go into operation on the beachhead in Normandy.

Scheduled to land [on D-Day] at H plus 7, the LST carrying the first flight was unable to land its troops due to the ineffectiveness of the Rhino ferries in the heavy sea, and was obliged to lie offshore until the afternoon of 7 June. After a rough night on board ship with illumination supplied by the Luftwaffe and sound effects by HMS Rodney [battleship] 100 yards away, the LST ran ashore and the first flight went ashore under Capt G. R. Currie and set up in a quarry near Revier to join the assault battery of the regiment. Equipment casualties were rare, but the shop was kept busy by transient trade. In the absence of 40-mm gun work, three enemy 20-mm AA guns were overhauled, one of which was completed just in time to be tested on an FW 190 [Focke Wulf 190 fighter aircraft]. The gun was better than the marksmanship.

S/Sgt France brought the second flight ashore on 18 June and joined the shop at Rots.

When the regiment landed, battery sections were sent out and soon found themselves loaded with work. At Anguerny, the "M" lorry suffered slight damage to the cab when a single mortar shell landed nearby.

The workshop suffered a severe loss when S/Sgt Reg Eidt was killed at Fauberge die Vaucelles by an anti-personnel bomb during a night raid. He was buried at Beny-sur-Mer.

At this point the supply of radiators and tires was becoming short due to fragmentation bombing and shelling. S/Sgt Ross solved the problem by acquiring a stock of steel sheets from Mondeville and shielding radiators and tires with them.

Early in August, the shop underwent a change of command when Capt F. B. Munroe took over as OC.

From the Falaise Gap, the shop moved north-east and crossed the Seine, and after a period of constant moving arrived at Henneveux close to Boulogne. It stayed in this area during the capture of Boulogne and Calais. Nothing of unusual interest occurred here, except that on one occasion when the workshop officer and several men were out looking for angle iron. They were passing through the forest of Hardelot, south of Boulogne, when they drew enemy small arms fire and were forced to retreat at a high rate of speed down a heavily mined road, the marking of which was sketchy at best.

After the fall of Boulogne and Calais the workshop, after a series of moves, settled down in the area north of Ghent and south of Leopold canal. At this time the guns were beginning to be employed in a ground role to give close support to the infantry and the workshop was busy outfitting the regiment, troop by troop, with deflection sights and range drums. These were made from the base of 25-pounder shells. A great deal of recovery work was done here too because it had rained intermittently for over a month and the ground was soft and sodden.

After the Leopold Canal and Walcheren show was completed, the shop moved into Ghent for a two-day rest and following a preliminary concentration, moved via Tilburg and S'Hertogenbosch into Holland. It stayed first in the area south of Nijmegen and then moved into the town itself.

The shop wintered in Nijmegen from 16 November 1944 until 25 February 1945. The men were billeted in private homes during this period and made many friends among the civilians. Here the workshop refitted all the regiment's guns with a new type range drum and deflection sight made from the base of 3.7" heavy anti-aircraft shells. The regiment was frequently employed in a ground role and, due to faulty ammunition, a great number of barrels were lost through prematures. It was here also that half of the self-propelled guns in the regiment were turned in for towed guns using Bedford tractors. A great deal of work was done by the workshop before the tractors were battle worthy.

On 28 February, the workshop moved, following the line of advance, to Qualburg, Germany, in the vicinity of Cleve. It was busily employed keeping the guns in action, as they were consistently used in a ground role at the Hochwald and during the Rhine crossings at Emmerich. Prior to making the assault crossings at Emmerich, the division concentrated in the area of Cleve to rest and refit. The workshop was kept busy here getting the regimental equipment in shape. A great deal of recovery, as well as normal MT work, was carried out in this area, and it was not until after the regiment reached the high ground on the far side of the Rhine that it diminished in intensity.

From Emmerich the shop moved north to Deventer, Zwolle, Meppel, and Leuwarden and from here east to Groningen, Winschoten and into Germany again. It moved into the area south-west of Leer. When the Ems River was crossed, it moved into Leer and was here when VE-Day arrived.

## **6 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (MG)**

This LAD was attached to the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (MG) regiment and was not called upon for service in the North-West Europe theatre until July 1944. After an anxious night off the coast during which they were attacked by enemy bombers, Lt Merryweather brought the LAD ashore the morning of 12 July at Courseulles-Sur-Mer, and took it to Basly, where they joined regimental headquarters, some 300 yards from the front line. Two days were spent here on de-waterproofing, after which the LAD moved with the regiment to Cambes. It was here that they had their first taste of enemy aircraft and spent many an anxious hour in slit trenches dodging enemy fighters and 'friendly' AA [what goes up must come down].

Lt Merryweather's service with the LAD came to an end on 19 July, when he was injured in a road accident and evacuated. Lt W. Mills replaced him. The LAD moved uneventfully to Mondeville, Villons Les Buissons, and Lebisey while the brigades were being shuffled in preparation for the assault on Caen. On 9 August, enemy bombers supplied a little excitement and that same evening an American B-17 Flying Fortress was shot down nearby. In the middle of August, they moved to Fontaine Le Marmion where they received the standard evening treatment of flares and bombs. No hits were scored in the LAD area until 21 August at Quilly Le Tesson, when several bombs landed near their vehicles. No damage or casualties resulted. The next moves took the LAD to Cousey and Bironne, then off over France, over the Seine at Elboeuf, Londineeres, St Quentin Lamord, finally to Saker from which they were forced to withdraw by enemy shells. No casualties resulted to the LAD, but the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa lost three killed and several wounded. When Boulogne and Calais were taken, 6 LAD followed its regiment to Ardeigo, Herzeele, and Ursel where the LAD changed command, Capt W. Clappison replacing Lt Mills on 14 October.

After the Scheldt operations, the regiment went to Ghent for a week's rest, but this meant only increased activity for the LAD.

Then came the long trip to Nijmegen and a quiet uneventful winter there. Came 11 March and the LAD set up in German Cleve, to share the long-range shelling without casualties. After two weeks there, German resistance across the Rhine had started to fold. The LAD followed through Emmerich back in Holland north to Winschoten at the end of April. Here they established friendly relations again with the natives and moved back into Germany, crossing the Ems River at Leer on 2 May.

As with most units, the news of surrender on 5 May was quietly received and work went on as usual. The LAD was fortunate enough to come through the campaign with no fatal casualties.

## **30 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Park Company RCE**

This LAD was attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Park Company, RCE. It first appeared off the Normandy coast on the afternoon of the 16 June and went ashore the following day, making a wet landing in one foot of water. After a slight delay due to reorganization of assembly areas, Lt Marks established contact with 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Park Company at Maisefield, and on the same afternoon opened the LAD for work at Thaon. Here they were given the usual beachhead treatment by the enemy, using shells and aircraft bombs, mostly anti-personnel. No casualties or damage resulted, but the night of 22 June brought them several bombs and heavy sprinkling of AA fragments. At this stage, slit trenches were suddenly modified to provide overhead cover.

From Thaon, the LAD moved to Cambes, then to battered Caen, where they set up in a basement garage. The men were grateful for this protection, particularly in the last week of July when four successive nightly attempts were made to bomb the Bailey bridges over the Orne. At the end of July, 30 LAD moved back to Thaon for a rest, where they enjoyed swimming parties, sight-seeing trips, movies, and even a Canadian Army Show.

The LAD was fortunate in escaping both the American and RAF close support bombing efforts in August. The next moves took them through Cormelles and Estrees La Champagne and after a short pause they began the long chase through France, through Louvagny, La Croix de St. Martin, Rowen, Eu, and Neufchatel, arriving at Mesnil on 15 September. The trip was an expensive one in cigarettes and chocolate, but the boys had not yet had the experience of liberating Belgians and Dutch, and so they were generous. It was at St. Andre Sur Cailly that Lt Marks and L/Cpl Hawryluk ran into a pocket of SS troops not quite ready to surrender. The FFI came to the rescue. When Boulogne and Calais were captured, the LAD moved on to Leubringham then into Belgium to Den Hoorn and Eecloo. At this point Capt J. O. Gage replaced Lt Marks as OC.

30 LAD missed out on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division rest period in Ghent, and on 10 November moved to Holland arriving in Nijmegen on 12 November. A busy winter passed, during which 3<sup>rd</sup> Division engineers rebuilt countless roads and bridges with consequent wear and tear on equipment and work for the LAD. Christmas was marked by an alert for enemy paratroops, who failed to turn up.

As the winter offensive progressed, 30 LAD followed into Cleve on 17 February, where it was concentrated with the rest of 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. The German shelling of the town cost them two cans of brake fluid and a few nights' sleep. On 22 February, the boys had a good view of a German jet, which put on a 20-minute show, dropped a bomb 300 yards away, and caused a terrific explosion.

1 March saw the LAD set up in Udem, where they encountered heavy enemy shelling causing fatalities among British troops on the opposite side of the road. After a move to Sonsbeck, the LAD returned to Cleve where they waited with 3<sup>rd</sup> Division to cross the Rhine. This was effected at Rees on 25 March, and the LAD set up in Emmerich where they were again shelled without casualties.

At this point, enemy resistance on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division front at Emmerich was broken, and while the American and British raced across Germany, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division went north into Holland. 30 LAD followed through Stokkam, Bathmen, Heino, Mepple, Leeuwarden, Winschoten, Nieuweschans arriving in Leer, Germany on 2 May. It was here that the news broke on 5 May that the Germans had given up.

## **31 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division Signals**

This was a Type "B" LAD attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division Signals. Sgt Bourne brought the first flight of five men and a breakdown vehicle ashore on D plus 2 at 0300 hours, and proceeded to

Beny-sur-mer where they stayed four days before moving to Camilly. There they meet Lt Ambrose and the main body who landed on 16 June. Three enemy motorcycles and a Volkswagen were rapidly acquired, and just as rapidly disposed of under Corps orders.

On June 21 the LAD joined Signals at Rear Division Headquarters in Thaon. At this location the LAD suffered attacks by the Luftwaffe, enemy artillery and from stomach cramps. Work at this stage was mostly motorcycles.

The first damage by enemy action occurred at Rots on 9 July, when a number of 88-mm shells dropped in the area. Minor damage to the breakdown vehicle resulted.

As the month of July progressed, a number of LAD personnel began to show signs of battle fatigue. The nights were always hard on the nerves and it was difficult to sleep.

When Caen fell, the LAD moved in immediately and on 29 July was treated to another concentrated air raid followed by shells in the morning. August saw the LAD back in Thaon for a rest with the division, but as usual there was heavy work waiting for them. This caused a delay in leaving Thaon, which was fortunate for the LAD because it kept them out of the American close support bombing, which wounded Major-General Kellar and cost 3 Division Signals six vehicles. The LAD then moved to Cormelles, Verrieres Roquancourt, and Bretteville Le Rabet. Then, when the Falaise pocket was cleaned up, they began the march across France.

31 LAD was located at Henneveux during the Boulogne and Calais assaults. They spent a very busy period there getting the equipment in shape again after the long trip through France.

Early in October, 31 LAD left France for Belgium and set up near Eecloo. At this stage, it was difficult to set up an LAD above water level but work progressed nonetheless. 1 November saw the LAD in rest with 3<sup>rd</sup> Division at Ghent.

Then came the trip to Overassalt, near Nijmegen, and the very cold winter there.

On 13 February, the LAD left their many friends in Overassalt and moved on to Ubbergem in preparation for offensive. Three days later, the LAD changed command when Capt F. S. Newman took over from Lt Ambrose. On 17 February, the LAD set up in Cleve to be one of the first Canadian RCEME units operating in Germany. They stayed there until 28 March after some exciting jobs in the Hochwald, and crossed the Rhine at Rees to take up position at Vrsasselt. They were shelled by Jerry here, but escaped damage.

As German resistance crumbled east of the Rhine, a series of rapid moves followed for the LAD taking them through Heerenberg into Holland again to Baaksonemar, Raalte, Oranjewoud, Winschoten, and Weener Moor, then back to Germany. They crossed the Ems at Leer on 2 May. They had only time to complete a few difficult recovery jobs when the news came that the war for them was over.

31 LAD came through the entire campaign without battle casualties.

## **32 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

This was a Type "D" LAD for the invasion, while 12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment to which it was attached, was equipped with self-propelled guns. When these were replaced by towed 25-pounders early in August, the LAD reverted to Type "B".

This LAD was probably the first Canadian RCEME unit to sustain casualties after the big day. Landing just after midnight, early on D plus 2, Capt T. C. Hastings brought his advance party up to Banville, then on to Sequeville on 13 June, where they encountered German anti-personnel bombs before they had time to dig slit trenches. Two casualties were caused, one serious, but not fatal.

Following the bitter fighting at Buron, 32 LAD moved in on 12 July and after burying numbers of Canadian and German dead, they had the singular experience of digging out a live German soldier from the ruins.

Apart from the nightly raids, events passed smoothly enough until 14 August when the RAF bombed their rock quarry at Hautmesnil. The regiment sustained 35 casualties and lost nearly a complete battery of guns. The LAD fortunately escaped casualties, but had three vehicles put out of action.

It was not until 3<sup>rd</sup> Division reached Boulogne that 32 LAD came under fire again. On September 6 they set up within five kilometres of Calais, and immediately were fired on by coastal artillery in that town. This shelling cost the regiment sixteen injured and three killed, but the LAD escaped with only jangled nerves. After Calais the LAD moved to Maldegem in Belgium, where they remained for a month until 4 November.

By this time the brigades had cleaned up the Scheldt Estuary, and all of 3<sup>rd</sup> Division moved into Ghent for a well earned rest. The march up to Holland brought 32 LAD to Winssen, near Grave, and after a week they moved up to Nijmegen and spent the winter there until 14 February. Then followed stops in Cleve, Calcar, Udem, Emmerich and after a mild shelling on to Zutphen, Heino, Zwolle, Gronigen, and Winschoten right up to Oldenburg in Germany on 27 April.

On May 1 the LAD returned to Wilhelmshaven, and remained there for VE-Day.

### **33 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 13<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

This LAD landed on D plus 2 as a type "D" LAD, but was converted to a type "B" on 8 August, when 13<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment to which it was attached lost its self-propelled guns.

Capt Duncan brought his first flight ashore and set up near Banville. After the usual nightly entertainment, the LAD moved up near Bots where on 5 July, they were subjected to heavy mortar fire, followed by anti-personnel bombs that night. Three sappers and two civilians were killed, but the LAD escaped injury. On 9 July, Cfn Tyers accounted for the LAD's first German, when he encountered a Jerry officer in a forward area, and shot him before he could draw his Luger. Tyers then drew the Luger himself. In the middle of July, the LAD moved into Epron. Until the end of the month, Jerry continued to make his nightly visits, and on the night of 21 July, a low-flying fighter drew several burst of flack in the area. Cfn Humphreys was hit, and died a few minutes later. The LAD turned out in strength for his burial at Beny-sur-Mer to pay their last respects to Cfn Humphreys.

A period of intense activity for the LAD followed, which lasted right up until the chase across France began. The LAD changed command on 8 August, when Lt D. W. Henderson replaced Capt Duncan.

At Boisney, west of Bernay, the LAD was bombed as it was trying to make contact with the enemy. Damage to the welding lorry and a few converted atheists were the only results. They crossed the Seine at Elboeuf, and eventually set up ten kilometres east of Boulogne, where they remained for the Boulogne-Calais assaults.

After a memorable rest in Ghent, the LAD followed the regiment to Grave and after a great deal of difficulty over quarters and working space, finally set up in Haterr, near Nijmegen. Towards the end of November, S/Sgt Buttee just managed to keep his name off the Roll of Honour, when an 88-mm shell landed less than nine feet from his lorry. Damage to the vehicle body was caused, but no casualties.

Like other 3<sup>rd</sup> Division units, 33 LAD spent an uneventful winter in the Nijmegen area and early in March moved onto Bedburg, Uden, and Cleve, where they had their share of German shells. They crossed the Rhine at Rees on 1 April and after a series of rapid moves, set-up in Joppe. Here they were neighbours of some 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division units for the first time.

From 1 to 25 April, 33 LAD was set up in sixteen different locations and still managed to turn out work.

On 2 May, the LAD entered Leer and had the pleasure of turning the German owner out of his garage-home, to provide working space and billets. VE-Day was celebrated in this location.

### **34 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 14<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

The LAD breakdown vehicle and five men were scheduled to land first at [D-Day] H plus 4; a second group of twenty men and Lt Munro were to land with a later wave. When the breakdown touched down, at Graye-sur-mer, the first job, welding to the traversing gear on a British tank gun, was completed before they had proceeded fifty yards up the beach.

After leaving the beach, they proceeded to the rendezvous point (Elbow-Eddy) a few miles distant. Being the first vehicle to arrive at this point, they experienced some confusion; finally an officer instructed them to enter either one of two fields. One field had mustard weeds and some ploughed land; the other one was a pasture with a few horses grazing in it. They chose the latter; later on in the day when RCASC vehicles started to pull in the adjoining field they had heavy casualties from mines.

The breakdown crew contacted the second LAD group, who were with "A" Echelon, 14<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA, on D plus 2. This was only a few hundred yards behind the guns, and to relieve the gunners and drivers who were loading ammo, the entire LAD were on guard for a couple of nights. Fortunately no trouble cropped up. The RCA boys had been on the go almost continually since they had landed and were nearly exhausted, so none of the LAD boys felt that they were being imposed on.

The next few weeks were more or less routine. The LAD moved into a chateau in Mondeville and really had a hot time. Every night they had a few anti-personnel and HE bombs land in the location, and during the day the shelling was almost continuous. It was here that they had their first fatal casualty; Lance/Cpl Simpson was killed by an air burst [shell]. He was one of the most popular members and his death was a shock to all of us. He was buried the following day in the Canadian Military Cemetery at Beny-sur-mer.

The unit then returned to Bayeux and reorganized to a "B" type LAD. Although CREME instructed that the LAD's were to rest as much as possible during this period, and have the brigade workshops do the work, 34 LAD went through one of its busiest periods.

The first day back in action will always be a memorable one. The RAF slipped up on the bombing and the LAD was on the receiving end near Bretteville for a couple of hours, but fortunately had no casualties. During the chase across France after Falais, the LAD was always two or three days behind the regiment. This was due to recovery and heavy pressure in the work. Most of the time the LAD was without maps, and it was mainly by good luck that it finally contacted the regiment. During this period, seven German prisoners were captured by LAD personnel.

The trip up the channel coast and the Scheldt Estuary were uneventful and a quiet winter was spent in Nijmegen.

When the offensive into Germany first opened up, the LAD was able to do gun repairs in the shop in Nijmegen. Two nights in a row, the LAD worked all night on repacking. The first day in action on the outskirts of Cleve was very busy, especially on recovery. Cpl Lymyk was wounded while out with the breakdown lorry and was evacuated.

The ration situation improved after we got into Germany, and the LAD always had good sleeping quarters. Up until the Rhine crossing, nothing out of the ordinary occurred. After crossing the Rhine, the LAD experienced one of the more pleasant stages of war, that of liberating Holland.

After crossing back into Germany the LAD was held up before Weener, due to a very bad stretch of road. Theirs was the only breakdown vehicle in use where at least five would have been kept busy. Before they

could recover their own vehicles, the road had to be cleared of vehicles belonging to nearly every regiment in the brigade. Some of these vehicles had been stuck for eighteen hours.

The road was finally cleared after four hours or more of recovery work. The ground in this area was very soft. The breakdown was on the go almost continually and, in one position, they were unable to move the loaded ammunition vehicles. So a caterpillar tractor was borrowed from the engineers, and in this way they were able to move the ammunition, which otherwise would have had to be moved by hand.

On the morning of 4 May 1945, the house in which the LAD was billeted came under shellfire and received one hit. The same evening news was received that hostilities would cease at 0800 hours the following morning.

### **35 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment, RCA**

This was a Type "D" LAD throughout the North-West Europe Campaign, and after 10 August was the only "D" Type LAD under 3 Division. It operated as a headquarters section and four battery sections.

The history of 35 LAD contains many strange chapters and deals with various types of work. To begin with, the LAD landed ashore on D-Day with very little trouble. They landed from three LSTs; [hand-written note in margin states: WD says landed 7 June] Capt Bourne with the wrecking crew was fortunate enough to proceed to "Elbow Eddy" without having to do any recovery work on the beaches. On D plus 2, the LAD was settled in "Beny-sur-mer". Sgt Maze and two men went out cannibalizing for parts, as three of our M-10s [the American "Gun Motor Carriage M-10" was a self-propelled anti-tank gun] were casualties by then. Unfortunately Jerry came over and dropped anti-personnel bombs, and having very little cover, two of the three men were wounded. The men worked hard and repaired two out of the three, by changing the guns on two, and the suspension on the other. On D plus 3, the sections left the peaceful haven of Beny-sur-Mer with its snipers and proceeded to their respective batteries. Sgt Hall took his section to Bretteville where 94<sup>th</sup> Battery were supporting 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade. Sgt Freeman and his boys of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Battery to Le Bosons supporting 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, while the sections of Sgt Maze (105<sup>th</sup> Battery) and Sgt Coote of 4<sup>th</sup> Battery worked together. At this time, 105<sup>th</sup> Battery was all self-propelled guns, and 4<sup>th</sup> Battery in a reserve role. As in all places on the front, it was rough go and no picnic. In Bretteville, over half a troop was wiped out by 88-mm fire, and the LAD section was subject to continuous shell fire. Our own artillery shelled Bretteville, and our position was so close that many shells dropped in our area. During the same period, three carriers and two 6-pounders [anti-tank guns] were shot up by small-arms fire. Before the next move, three men lost their lives from anti-personnel bombs, which made the men realize the value of a slit trench.

After crossing the Orne, the batteries became widely separated and headquarters saw less of the sections. Just outside of Caen, the section with 52<sup>nd</sup> Battery caught a bomb in the centre of the vehicle park. Fortunately the tires were protected from shrapnel, but it played havoc with the windshields and bodies. At Colomby, two motorcycles, two carriers, and one gun were put out of action, but were repaired within 24 hours with the aid of the workshops. Then came the little rest at Caen, with plenty of liquor for a "morale builder". Headquarters section were in a convoy when the American Air Force made a slight mistake and bombed our own troops, and two or three days later the RAF repeated the same performance, only on a much larger scale. After leaving Caen and Falaise the moves came fast and furious, and to keep bogie wheels and brakes on the carriers was more than keeping the men busy. At Bologne, Headquarters, 4<sup>th</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup> Batteries guarded the radar station, which was no easy or pleasant job, for it rained for days on end, and the men had work to do during the day. During the battle for Sluis, the heavy breakdown worked day and night, and some of the jobs were practically pulled out from under Jerry's nose. After several days in Ghent, Belgium, the next move was to Nijmegen, Holland where all but 4<sup>th</sup> Battery found a spot to work in out of cover from the weather.

While in Nijmegen the LAD was under heavy shell fire a good deal of the time and Sunday was Jerry's field day...it never failed. Headquarters section was situated in a large garage on the south end of the town. In their garage was a showroom, which was cleaned up and used for a dining hall, and later for a dance hall for the Xmas celebration, when the LAD got together and had a grand time. On 8 February, we started out for Germany and Cleve was our first stop. The LAD and 3<sup>rd</sup> Anti-tank Regiment were very close together, which caused most of the men to be a little afraid of air attacks with so many vehicles out in the open. After a few days in Cleve, 4<sup>th</sup> Battery Section had a very close call when a bomb landed next to the buildings in which they were; two of them were seriously hurt. At the same time the section were being shelled and a shell landed in a petrol and ammo dump not two hundred yards from the billets. Then came the final phase, the crossing of the Rhine. Sgt Fleming and three of his men from 95<sup>th</sup> Battery Section crossed the river on a barge with a trailer full of fast moving spare parts. The crossing was a very rough one, and the shelling was quite heavy, along with many strafing jobs. At last Jerry showed signs of weakening and everything seemed to end up in a hurry. VE-Day found the LAD north of Aurich in Germany, all sections together, operating as a unit.

### **36 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to Headquarters, 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade**

The afternoon of 6 June 1944 saw the advance party of 36 LAD under the leadership of Lt R. A. Evans and AQMS Walker busily concerned with the clearing of the Normandy beaches. Following closely on the heels of 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, the LAD spent the first two weeks recovering, repairing and digging slit trenches. After settling down near Bray for a ten-day period, the LAD was unfortunate in losing AQMS Walker, wounded on 5 Jul 1944 by a piece of flak while watching the anti-aircraft guns shoot down a German aircraft. He did not return to the unit until August. The middle of July saw 36 LAD stationed in Caen with the brigade, and many heads were kept low one night as an anti-personnel bomb came through the roof of their improvised garage.

After Caen had been well cleared and the division withdrawn to a rest area, the LAD spent a busy two weeks checking and inspecting the brigade vehicles in preparation for the next phase of the operations.

While in the concentration area below Caen, the fitter Cpl was evacuated after losing two fingers when a 25-pounder fuse blew up in his hands.

Near Falaise, a Typhoon [aircraft] crashed in the LAD area and a hectic fifteen minutes was spent in moving vehicles. A few days later the RAF dropped their loads in the wrong spot. Fortunately, no casualties were suffered on either of these occasions.

After Falaise the LAD was split into two sections, and the recovery section was kept with the brigade for the race through France. With recovery as the most difficult problem, and few or no parts available, the LAD stayed with the brigade until it stopped to besiege Calais. Entering Calais on 1 October, the LAD had a one-night stand and little or no work was done that night.

Leaving Calais, the division travelled in comparatively easy stages and the LAD found itself on the Scheldt, where recovery was again the chief difficulty, due to mines and the soft ground. On one job Lt Evans had a hole shot through his windshield, but finished the job before beating a hasty retreat.

Arriving in Ghent the first week in November and expecting to be there for only two days, the LAD closed up shop and enjoyed their first day off since D-Day. The four-day sojourn in Ghent proved to be enjoyable, although very few of the LAD were really rested when the word came to move again.

Moving easily northwards, the LAD finally came to rest in Nijmegen, where three months were spent with but one or two minor moves. Under the static conditions a steady routine came into effect, and all brigade vehicles were checked and overhauled. The flat lands along the banks of the river Waal provided



some interesting and difficult recovery jobs, the recovery carrier built by 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade being used very advantageously.

Early February saw preparations in full swing for the coming offensive, and Lt Evans was transferred to 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, Lt G. R. Ambrose becoming OC. From Nijmegen, the next set up was in ruined Cleve, and from Cleve, Udem, Sofsbeck(?), and Xanten were repair setups for the LAD crew.

The end of the Siegfried Line saw 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade encamped in the Reichwald Forest for a ten day period. Here another repair and inspection programme was carried out by the LAD before the final assault across the Rhine began.

Crossing the Rhine with the brigade group, the LAD kept up a steady routine of repair, recovery and backloading as the division moved through Emmerich, Deventer and Zwolle to Groningen. Groningen proved to be a welcome respite before moving back into Germany and into Leer. Near Leer, the LAD lost their breakdown on a recovery job. It was finally returned to the LAD after three days of hard work.

8 May found the LAD near Aurich, where the announcement of the cessation of hostilities was greeted very quietly. During the following week, the biggest job tackled by the LAD was the building of a reviewing platform for a brigade inspection.

From 6 Jun 1944 to 8 May 1945, 36 LAD faithfully performed their duties, and throughout the campaign, through France, Belgium, and Holland, Germany provided completely satisfactory RCEME service to 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

### **37 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to Headquarters 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade**

The first section of the LAD consisting of the WO II, welder, electrician, vehicle mechanic (motor vehicle), and breakdown driver landed at H plus 7 hours with medium breakdown and motorcycle, tool kits and spares for minor repairs. [Hand written in margin: supported by Pt II orders and WD.] The second section, consisting of the remainder of the LAD that was scheduled to land at H plus 7 hours, was several hours late due to the confusion on the beach. After being subjected to enemy bombing for several hours, they finally landed on Mike beach and made their way to the concentration area. After completing the first stages of de-waterproofing, they proceeded to Angerny and married up with the first section. En route to Angerny came the first experience with enemy snipers, who fortunately were not accurate.

The LAD picked up its first "prize": a Jerry six-wheel vehicle, which they were able to keep going for six hours or more. They also repaired a Germany kitchen lorry, which was later used by the officer's mess at brigade headquarters for several months.

The next move took them to Bray. As the brigade was more or less static for about a week in this area they were busy only on mechanical defects.

During the next move, the LAD set up in an orchard by themselves, and from here on were seldom in the same field as the headquarters. Soon after, they started their own kitchen and were self-contained, much to the delight of the men. Cfn Johnston was the able cook, and his pancakes and other delicacies soon became famous.

The LAD had just moved into a field at Bretteville when Jerry decided to shell the town in earnest. The first shell landed in an ammunition dump that an English armoured brigade used for storing ammunition from tanks in for repair. Fortunately there was a ditch along the field and all took cover there for about an hour. The work began in earnest in this area, but an AWD from 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop came out and helped the LAD maintain the pace.

The most beautiful sight of the whole war was the night that Caen was bombed. The bombers returned at tree top height and flew directly over the camp.

The next move took them back to Cambes to prepare for crossing the Orne River. They were busy here for several days, and crossed the river the day after the infantry. The first night was spent just above the bridge, and the men did not get much sleep as it poured rain, and Jerry was determined to take the bridge out that night, but failed. The next day they moved into the Cormelles area and remained there for one week.

For 37 LAD, this week was probably the most hectic week of the war. They were situated between the 105s [field guns] and 5.5s [medium guns], and in a very vulnerable spot for Jerry counter-battery fire. Most of the men slept under the floor of a powder magazine and the balance in slit trenches. Jerry planes came over regularly every night dropping bombs and anti-personnel bombs, but fortunately we were well dug-in and suffered no casualties.

The very good news finally was passed around that 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was being relieved the next day and was going back to Fontaine for a week's refitting. The last night in this area was probably the noisiest of the week, and everyone was glad to move the next morning, even battered Caen looked good to them.

This week, although the LAD was busy, was enjoyed by us all, as it was not possible to sleep above ground in comparative quiet, after the previous week. Most the LAD was able to spend half a day in Bayeux sight-seeing in a Packard V-12 picked up the week previous.

After this short rest, the LAD moved back through Caen to the same building at Cormelles, but by this time the big push was on and the men were fairly comfortable for the few days spent there. On the move up, the North Shore Regiment received heavy casualties from the US Air Force, when they bombed near Caen.

The next few moves were routine, through the stench of the Normandy fields. The big news at this point was that the Falaise gap was about closed, and the RAF were coming over to finish it off. When the heavy bombers appeared every man turned out to see the show, little expecting that he was standing in the middle of it. Plane after plane trooped over the LAD site, released its bombs and wheeled back. After the first load, the LAD took to a crater and stayed there while the bombs rained down. After the raid it was learned that the headquarters had lost several vehicles, and hence the LAD spent a very busy evening recovering vehicles from the quarry.

The next move brought them to the Seine, and finally across it and a race to catch up with the brigade. They picked up four POWs and carried them for a day before they caught up with any Provost who would take them.

The next few weeks took them to Boulogne, Calais, and then the long move to Belgium with a stopover of two days at Cassel, then to Eecloo area for several weeks. The boys enjoyed this area as there was plenty of beer and cognac. They lost the medium breakdown here and had to be content with a light breakdown, which was not satisfactory.

After the Scheldt was cleared, they moved back near Ghent for a week and were kept busy preparing for the next move. They moved to Oudenarde with the brigade for a so-called week's rest but only remained two days. The boys slept in their first beds since England.

After an all-night move on 11-12 November, they arrived at Nijmegen and settled in for the winter. After a few small moves, they finally found good billets (a house to ourselves), but were forced to do all work outside. Just previous to moving on, in February, they drew a medium breakdown again.

They moved from Nijmegen to the Siegfried Line, to a position just outside of Cleve in February, and from here down through the Hochwald feature. The breakdown crew worked night and day for the next week recovering carriers and "B" Vehicles. After this area was cleared they moved back to the Reichwald

Forest for two weeks, re-fitting in preparation to crossing the Rhine. The weather was ideal for camping, and everyone enjoyed their stay in this famous forest.

On 28 March, the LAD crossed the Rhine at Reiss [in handwriting: Rees?] and from there continued to Emmerich and north back into Holland. More quick moves followed, bringing the LAD back into Northern Holland, at Sneek. After a few days' rest at Wolvega, they moved with brigade to Winschoten. They again ran into bad roads and the recovery crew worked all night at times, keeping the road clear.

They crossed the Ems River at Leer and were near Aurich when VE-Day brought hostilities to a halt.

### **38 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to Headquarters 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade**

38 LAD was one of the last detachments operating in England prior to the final briefing and D-Day.

On D-Day this unit embarked in three LSTs, landing in Normandy twenty-four hours apart; the first two sections landed on D-Day and the third on D plus 1. No casualties occurred and the personnel, due to excellent briefing had no trouble locating brigade headquarters, which had moved to Beny-Sur-Mer.

The first two weeks of operational work was very difficult, due to lack of proper facilities. Tire and radiator repairs were top priority jobs. The supply of motors was very limited for that period, but due to the grand co-operation received from the Beach Ordnance Detachment, they were able to get the necessary motors without the usual enveloping red tape. During this trying time, morale was high and the personnel of the detachment worked untiringly throughout every hour of light.

[The first line at the top of page 20 in the original is missing] ... and an anti-tank gun (6-pounder).

After Caen, they moved out on the Caen plain, where difficulty was experienced in recovery due to being under enemy observation from high ground in direction of Falaise.

About this time, the brilliant manoeuvres resulting in the forming of the Falaise pocket were executed, and the LAD moved on in the wake of our brigade, engaged in mopping up operations which destroyed virtually all of the Jerry equipment in the area and precipitated the memorable rout of the German Army from France. From this point on, we embarked on the chase, which took us to Rouen, Abbeville, and Semar. During this period, great difficulty was experienced by the LAD in backloading work to workshops, keeping contact with the brigade headquarters, and supplying recovery facilities for the brigade during these long, fast moves. When they arrived outside of Boulogne at Samar, they were able to set up shop and repair and inspect most of the brigade equipment, which had been subjected to long service without overhaul. Here they encountered heavy shell fire from the bastion of Boulogne and spent much of the time dodging stray shells.

Boulogne, Calais, and Cap Gris Nez finally fell to the hard-hitting 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, and another long trek began which ended in the Scheldt. Here the LAD went into one of their most strenuous actions. The ground was a mire, many vehicles were knocked out, mines very numerous, and many vehicle parts were in very short supply. It was here that Sgt Gibson and his recovery crew, operating with a unique combination of universal carrier, Willys engine and transmission, and a Diamond T winch, performed many outstanding feats of recovery. To add to the general difficulties of rain, mud, etc., they were constantly subjected to very heavy shelling from an obstinate enemy. It was with a very real sense of relief that we saw this phase of the battle end without suffering a single casualty.

Then followed a week's rest period in Ghent, which was well earned and enjoyed by all concerned.

The few days following the rest were a nightmare of activity, refitting and repairing equipments for the long haul to Nijmegen. Bogey wheels, track pins, ditched vehicles, and road service were the order of the day and night, until finally they drew into Nijmegen, and occupied our first reasonably comfortable billets since arriving on the continent.

Once again a complete inspection of all equipments held by our units was carried out. In a few cases, it was necessary to perform these in the forward entrenched position, which our troops had taken over from the Americans.

For the next three months we occupied a static role, maintaining unit equipments as necessary and in continual inspection.

In February, they were again on the move and owing to early thaw and flooding of large areas, our difficulties of recovery and repair were increased greatly. In many instances it was necessary to resort to the Weasel [small amphibious truck] to visit the units and to use Buffaloes [an amphibious, tracked landing vehicle] for recovery of amphibious equipments.

Cleve, Udem and the Hochwald followed in rapid succession. Once again the recovery carrier fulfilled its function in the numerous recovery problems in the soft ground and confined spaces of the Hochwald. It was after the successful completion of these operations that the brigade moved back into the Reichwald Forest to rest, refit and repair in preparation for the assault across the Rhine. During the two-week period which followed, every vehicle, weapon, and instrument was thoroughly inspected and repaired. The daylight hours were the working hours of the day, and it was with a great deal of confidence that the LAD watched the units move up for the Rhine crossing. They knew that their equipment would back them to the limit.

Three days after the initial crossing, this unit moved across the Rhine and joined its brigade. For over seven days, not one single equipment casualty occurred. Our work and sweat in preparation had paid off and for the next two weeks, the only equipment casualties were the result of shelling.

Once again, short stops and long moves were the order of the day and night, and for the LAD, excepting a small amount of recovery, the advance became a tour. Through Emmerich, Heerenburg and North to Zutphen, Deventer, and Leewarden. Here they remained for one week resting and enjoying the hospitality of the town folk. The next move was to Winschoten and then on into Germany. Our function was to continue the constant inspection and repair, concentrating on the policy of preventative maintenance.

Then came the crossing of the Ems by our 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade with the usual increased activity before the operation, and so through Leer and North, where the ground was a bog and rain was experienced every day.

It was at this location in Leer that the great news broke that the war with Germany had ended, and that the end of inspections, repairs and recovery was in sight after eleven months of action during which time, despite many "close ones", this unit did not sustain a single casualty.

## **62 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 7<sup>th</sup> Recce Regt (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars)**

7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment, to which this Type "A" LAD was attached, did not play an active part in the early stages of the invasion, and therefore the LAD did not land until 15 June. Their LST beached at Grey-sur-Mer at 2315 hours, and they had the disagreeable experience of disembarking during an air raid on the beaches, in a rain of flack. Capt D. C. West set his LAD up at Camilly.

In the initial stages, 62 LAD had very little to do. The reconnaissance regiment was being used as infantry, and their regiment's equipment was in first class condition. Late in June, however, 7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment returned to its proper role for the assault on Carpiquet Airfield, and the LAD was soon loaded with repairs and some uncomfortable recovery jobs. In the middle of July, the regiment took up a holding position at Caen, and for the first time since landing the LAD felt safe enough to sleep out of their slit trenches.

In the evening of 30 July, 62 LAD [added in hand writing: attached to a divisional reconnaissance unit] suddenly came under air burst shell fire at Fauberge de Vaucelles. AQMS Rose was seriously injured and Sgt Roberts and Cfn Langben were also hurt. L/Cpl Cromwell W. W., showed great coolness in tending to the wounded during the shelling and probably prevented QMS Ross' [original says Ross despite Rose three lines above] death from loss of blood.

They were shelled a second time here, before moving ahead to Mondeville where they encountered the enemy's heaviest raid on 3 July. Neither of these incidents caused damage or casualties, but the LAD appreciated the rest period that followed at Thaon.

During the push across France, 7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment kept in close contact with the enemy, and the LAD kept pace with them, with the result that they were shelled near Orbec and again at Etables. They suffered damage to vehicles at Samer, near Boulogne, the twelve men of the LAD took three German officers and 93 men prisoners.

An anxious few days passed here, while the regiment stretched itself into thin lines, to contain Boulogne and Calais, pending the arrival of infantry. Fortunately the garrisons made no serious sorties.

From Calais, 62 LAD moved to Ghent, and eventually to Druten, near Nijmegen, where they passed the winter. Again their vehicles were damaged by enemy shell fire on 5 December. On 8 January, a V-1 landed near the LAD and shook the real estate without causing them any damage.

On 21 March, Lt J. Malcolm replaced Capt West who returned to Canada with the best wishes of his men.

A series of refit moves then took the LAD to Cleve, Rees, Emmerich and back through Holland. They re-entered Germany at Papenburg and when May came, they were operating in Weener, North-east of Leer. Cessations of hostilities were celebrated by a normal working day, followed by a film show in the evening.

## **12 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 19<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment (SP), RCA**

This was a Type "D" LAD, attached to 19<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Regiment (SP), RCA. For the first two months of the invasion, 19<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment was attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and therefore 12 LAD came under the direction of Headquarters RCEME, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, and remained so until 4 August 1944.

12 LAD was due to land at 1700 hours 6 June, but due to rough weather and the absence of the Rhino ferries it did not come ashore until 0300 hours, D plus 2, when Capt D. C. Little brought the first flight to Elbow Eddy assembly area. They joined the regiment on the same day.

The first casualty occurred the following day, 9 June, when L/Cpl Harrison was wounded by a sniper while on a recovery job. The remainder of the LAD arrived 13 June, and immediately the battery sections were sent out to join their batteries.

On 5 July this LAD has its first taste of enemy shells, when at Anguerny they opened up a mild counter-barrage. Although several shells dropped in the area, no damage or casualties resulted. For the next month, 12 LAD moved with its regiment and were subjected to strafing and bombing, as were most units on the bridgehead. Although the regiment lost twelve killed and a larger number wounded, the LAD had no casualties.

On 1 August, the regiment was withdrawn for a rest. Two days later, Capt Little was replaced as OC by Capt W. F. Wilson. On 4 August, 19<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Regiment, RCA, was taken from command of 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, terminating relations between Headquarters RCEME, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and 12 Canadian LAD.

## **A Narrative of RCEME, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, in North-West Europe**

[This page in the original document is signed by ? Jones, Capt, for E.G. Pallister, Lt-Col, CREME, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, 261200B June 1945.]

The march of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division RCEME units across France, Belgium, Holland and Germany may be divided into eight phases, indeed this is true also of other Corps.

First, before the breakthrough at Falaise, there was a period of feverish preparation, repairs in the composite AWD south of Caen, and of curtailed recovery.

Second, the fast march through France and Belgium to Bruges and Ghent was a period in which recovery was difficult, and the AWDs presented a problem in keeping up with the units and accomplishing much work.

Third, the holding role of the division along the Leopold Canal brought about a period in September and October of many repairs and modifications.

The fourth phase would comprise the march from Bruges and the Eecloo area to the Tilburg, Vught, S'Hertogenbosch, Boxtel area. Recovery was difficult during this portion of the campaign.

The winter months, from the fourth week of November to the last week of February were spent in excellent sites – workshops were near Vught concentration camp and the division was dispersed about the area. An average load was sustained throughout this fifth period, and overhaul and inspections were thoroughly done.

During the last week in February, the division moved to the Reichwald forest, and fought through to Xanten and the south of the Hochwald in two weeks. Recovery and repair commitments were high in the sixth period – in the two workshops, the stock of “A” vehicles on hand was regularly between 70 and 80. Many casualties were suffered from mines. Traffic was high and roads were poor. Road clearances were necessary on all recovery and LAD and recovery officers did much work late at night and early in the morning.

The seventh phase consisted of a move back to Boxtel, S'Hertogenbosch, Tilburg area for the second and third week of March. The division had suffered heavily and the long march for the armour caused many mechanical casualties. Repair commitments were heavy and production and stock remained at the high figure established in the battle West of the Rhine.

Phase eight, the move across the Rhine and through eastern Holland, Segel, and Friesoythe, to the area of Oldenburg, Restede, and Varel, where VE-Day found the division, was characterized by long moves, heavy recovery of tanks and self-propelled equipments from peat bogs, difficult communication, and a modification load on the workshops.

The narratives of the various units are presented herewith, to enlarge on the difficulties and triumphs of the campaign.

### **4 Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

The workshop embarked from Gosport near Portsmouth in three sections or serials on 23, 24, and 25 July 1944, and arrived in France a day later. The crossing of the Channel was completed without mishap. A recovery detachment was attached to the armoured regiments, which sailed from the Thames and did not arrive in France until 28 or 29 July 1944. The unit concentrated at Meuvaines near the beachhead and moved with the division to St. Germaine on the outskirts of Caen on 29 July.

While located in this area, the workshop did not operate as a complete unit. An AWD was dispatched to Caen and all work was carried out by this detachment. Their work consisted of preparing the vehicles of the division for action. Welders were particularly busy welding track to the hull of the tanks to give added protection. Recovery was not carried out while in this sector due to the following reasons:

- Only one bridge was across the Orne River at this time and supplies and ammunition for forward troops had top priority.
- It was not practical to recover battle casualties as the whole area was under enemy observation and heavy recovery vehicles made an excellent target.

The policy of the AWD carrying the brunt of the work was continued during the offensive from Caen to Falaise. In the case of this workshop, this applied particularly to “A” vehicles and in order to do this, the majority of the tank section was dispatched to the AWD with complete equipment for carrying out all types of work.

This AWD was actually a composite one, comprising men from the workshop and an equal number from 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, who carried out repairs on “B” vehicles and carriers. The AWD was under the command of Capt McGinnis of 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop.

During the offensive against Falaise, the AWD came under intense bombing from our own planes, which caused the loss of only one man wounded.

During the fast advance across France, the AWD and main workshop carried out repair, inspection and modification of all vehicles that came into their respective shops, and completed these jobs on schedule in spite of many poor harbours and adverse weather.

The services of the recovery section and their equipment in aid of the engineers engaged in bridging operations, was utilized during these operations as well as the usual recovery of battle casualties.

Liaison between the workshop and Headquarters RCEME and the AWD was conducted mostly by wireless during this advance. At times even this was not possible, due to the great distance which existed on some occasions between them. Motorcycles and jeeps proved the most valuable mode of transport these days.

During the advance across France, the main workshop travelled under the command of the Headquarters Administrative Group while the AWD came under “A” echelon. After crossing the Seine River this was changed, and the main shop moved up under “A” echelon and the composite AWD was dissolved. At this time each workshop sent a separate AWD into the field.

In spite of the many commitments, the AWD still managed to bag some prisoners on more than one occasion. In one day, the AWD captured some 30 Germans in a farmhouse and the surrounding area.

The workshop crossed into Belgium on 8 September 1944. The fighting in the Scheldt Estuary allowed the workshop to settle down in the town of Eccloos from 19 September until 16 October 1944. A large volume of work was carried out here, and the AWD was called into the shop as their commitments in the field were practically nil at this time. This was the first real occasion that the workshop had to function as a main body. The unit changed command while in Eccloos, when Maj J. H. Mellor and Maj W. M. Dalrymple exchanged commands.

Following the relief of the division by another Canadian formation in the Scheldt, the armoured brigade was moved to the area east of Antwerp, and started a drive leading to the Bergen-op-Zoom – Rosendaal area in southern Holland.

East of Antwerp, there was a great influx of work, particularly artillery and tank work, as a result of the Scheldt Estuary battle. Workshops were busy and working all daylight hours under adverse conditions in order to bring units up to strength for the drive through southern Holland.

After two intermediate stops, the shop went under cover for the first time in the Vught – S’Hertogenbosch area.

Prior to this settling in, an AWD was kept out at all times, and took care of jobs that could not be reached by the workshop due to canals, shortages of heavy class bridges, etc.

The shop remained in this site over Christmas and on into February. While here, things were generally uneventful, except for the odd recovery job, and AWDs that were established occasionally for special purposes, such as the Ardennes breakthrough activity, etc.

There followed in February, the preparation for the offensive into Germany to the Rhine. All vehicles of the formation were checked and rechecked, and an AWD dispatched to travel with the rear brigade headquarters. The AWD was established in Cleve shortly after the city fell, and the workshop moved into Cleve a few days afterward.

There was not a great deal of work in the workshop, due to the fact that the road conditions were such that vehicles and equipment could not be backloaded to the shop. Accordingly, the AWD was enlarged, and the second AWD was established to leapfrog from one brigade collecting point to another.

The workshop was established in Cleve at this time, and due to heavy shelling which killed one man and wounded five more, it was necessary to vacate the site in the city and moved to a new location in a field near Calcar.

Here the workshop was bombed twice by jet-propelled aircraft, and when leaving this site, the rear party was severely shelled within 20 minutes of the workshop’s convoy departure. One man was killed and three wounded.

At this time, in March 1945, the entire 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division was pulled back to Tilburg, Holland, for a rest and refit period. It was during this time that the workshop turned out what was probably its greatest volume of work. Full daylight hours were worked, as the workshop was given only twelve days to completely refit the units who had suffered heavy losses in vehicles and equipment during the muddy and heavy going in the Cleve – Calcar – Udem area. At this time, 76 tanks were completed by the tank section in twelve days, and a comparable number of “B” vehicles were completed.

The next phase of operation this was the Rhine crossing, and the chase across Germany and North-east Holland into Germany again, with the cease-fire order finding the workshop operating in the Friesoythe – Sogel area. During most of this chase, things moved so fast that it was necessary to spread the workshop out to a great extent. At one time, two rear parties were completing work in two different areas behind the workshop, while two AWDs were operating in advance of the workshop. The distance from the forward AWD to the rear rear party was approximately 180 miles. This, of course, created administrative problems, but close liaison work kept things under control.

At the conclusion of hostilities, this workshop took up a position near Varel, Germany, and prepared for the return to Holland.

## **10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

D-Day, 6 June 1944, found this workshop together with other units of 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, concentrated in the East Grinstead – Crowborough area of Sussex, England. The arduous task of waterproofing an armoured division was being completed and all personnel were prepared to face the long-anticipated second front.

On 20 July 1944, the unit left Crowborough en route for the embarkation concentration area.



It was found necessary to load the unit on three separate LSTs. All the heavy equipment was put on one vessel, five stores lorries on another, and the balance on a third. The last of the workshop reached France on 24 July.

The first concentration area in France was near Courseilles, and from there the unit made a hectic blackout trip to Meuvain. In the course of attempting to stay on the right hand side of a narrow road on a dark night, many of the vehicles were ditched.

On 23 July, the recovery section had its first dose of recovery under fire when their attempts to recover the kitchen lorry attracted the unwelcome attention of the German plane. There were no casualties to men or vehicles.

Because of the very poor roads and the many different traffic circuits involved, workshop traffic was kept to a minimum. The repair load on the workshop at this stage was comparatively light. Near the end of July, the front had advanced sufficiently to enable the shop to move closer to Caen and on 1 August the unit moved to an abbey in St. Germain overlooking Caen. While there, the great Canadian offensive from Caen to Falaise commenced and the workshop had a "grandstand seat" to witness the air attacks, and artillery preparations preceding the drive. By this time, an AWD was functioning in the cavalry barracks in the south suburb of Caen.

During this period, many units in the Caen area were subjected to air attacks but this shop was left alone. The AWD experienced a few close shaves with 88-millimeter guns, but suffered no casualties. On 10 August 1944, the workshop moved again to set up in a wheat field at Andre-Sur-Orne. By this time work was coming in in quantity. For the first time, the shop was located in the midst of an over-run battlefield and burial parties were kept busy burying our own and enemy dead.

By 13 August, the unit was operating at Roquancourt. In this area, the enemy attempted to start fires by incendiary raids at night. Though a few vehicles of neighbouring units were burned, no workshop vehicles were damaged and all fires in the area were extinguished. At Roquancourt, the unit again had excellent seats for the Royal Air Force raid some five miles to the south in preparation for the advance on Falaise. The AWD was uncomfortably close to the bomb line and many potential "track and field stars" were uncovered during the attack. Both the workshop and AWD witnessed the unfortunate bombing in error of our own neighbouring troops during this raid. Slit trenches became popular overnight!

At this stage of the campaign, it was decided by CREME that the workshops would provide sufficient personnel to form two composite AWDs of equal strength and similar composition. Both AWDs serviced units of both the infantry or armoured brigade and the divisional troops group. Emphasis of repair at this stage lay upon armoured fighting vehicle work and, in the Soignolles area, many tanks were repaired and put back into action. This report therefore covers the activity of the main workshop and the composite AWD staffed by officers from this workshop.

The unit moved on the 21 August to the Jort area, and while there endured a rainy period and the general discomfort of leaking, makeshift tents, augmented by frequent epidemics of the "Normandy Glide". On 23 August, the AWD started off through "Dead Horse Gulch" (an area of which seemed to be one vast graveyard for animals) on the way to Bettou. Considerable difficulties in road moves were experienced due to blown bridges.

The latter part of August was spent in attempting to keep within 50 miles of the disappearing front line. Frantic moves were made, at times two moves in one day. Moves at first light appeared to be popular depending mainly upon the disposition of the commanding officer, the weather, or the possibility of a good breakfast.

At the end of the month, the workshop had arrived in the Le Neubourg area and the AWD had set up near La Have Malherbe, both in readiness to follow the division across the Seine River and near to Abbeville. At this stage of the campaign, it was decided that the workshops would leave the "family fold" of the

Administrative Group, and follow the divisional advance by travelling with the respective brigade "A" Echelons. The role of the division was to thrust into Belgium as far as possible and bypass the coastal sectors en route. A composite rear workshop detachment was therefore formed to service the administrative group, and the 6 September, the workshop together with other units of 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade "A" Echelon started off, Belgium bound. At approximately 2100 hours on 7 September, the workshop crossed into Belgium. The convoy were shelled en route, but suffered no vehicle or personnel casualties. By this time the workshop was ahead of the BBC "Mark Your Map" line, so it was difficult to form any idea of the large war picture.

Finally the workshop set up in Loppem (southwest of Brugges) when the division closed in for an assault on Brugges. The move through Belgium had been amply applauded by the burgers, and any really important shop activity such as a meal parade, or a sponge bath in a non-returnable petrol tin, was sure to draw a good gate.

On 12 September, Brugges was cleared and the division was allowed to taste the fruits of victory by taking a rest in the city. The workshop, however found that the word "rest" did not apply to them, and the first real busy repair period commenced. Stragglng vehicles arrived from various parts of Europe each day. One workshop repair crew arrived by scout car after an absence of over two weeks, having become lost in the areas south of Abbeville. During their attempts to find the workshop, they had toured most of liberated Europe including such resorts as Ghent, Antwerp, Ostende and St. Omer!

On 18 September, the workshop moved to Eecloo. The division at this stage was actively employed in containing an enemy pocket between the Leopold Canal and the Scheldt Estuary. The month spent in Eecloo was a busy period from a repair standpoint, and the general refitting of the division was carried out.

On 18 October, the unit moved to Schooten in the Antwerp area. During the trip through the Antwerp tunnel, an introduction to a continental variety of the V-weapon was made when one landed near the tunnel exit.

The next move, on 23 September, was to an airfield South of Bergen-Op-Zoom, Holland. This was the first time on the continent that any use had been made of buildings for billeting. The officer's mess was set up in Flak Stand No. 1. Again, it was a case of "business as usual" during the period of rather stiff fighting to clear the northern approaches to the Scheldt.

On 13 November 1944, but workshop moved to Vught and occupied in areas secured by the AWD. The billets, formerly occupied by the SS troops, were the Friderick Neinrik Barracks. Good workshop accommodation and hard standing were available. For three months, the workshop remained in this area while the division of assumed a semi-static role as a garrison on the River Maas.

After very active period of overhaul and repair (in preparation for the forthcoming operations in Germany) the workshop again formed and AWD, which on 23 February 1945 moved to the Cleve area in Germany, -- the first entry to reach the Reich.

During the afternoon of 3 March, the AWD site was shelled for approximately four hours, but apart from jangled nerves and a few torn vehicle tarpaulins, there was no damage. The main workshop in the meantime had moved to Moyland, five miles east of Cleve, on 1 March and was immediately hard at work on repairs. The two-week campaign of clearing to the Rhine, will long be remembered as a battle with rain and mud. Bad road conditions resulted in many suspension and power train failures in the vehicles. Clutches and transmissions were also common assemblies requiring replacement.

Despite appalling weather conditions and a large volume of work, morale of all ranks was high.

On 14 March, the workshop moved 50 miles to an area on the Vught-Boxtel road in Holland. Though no buildings were included in this area, it was a picnic spot compared with other available areas. Operations in Germany and the long road moved back to Holland resulted in a great influx of "A" and "B" vehicles

for overhaul and repair. The workshop spent probably its most active two weeks in this area carrying out a refitting program.

At the end of March, the unit again followed the division to Germany and harboured in the Reichswald Forest. On 2 April, the workshop crossed the Rhine at Rees and proceeded to Varseveld, Holland, to harbour within the administrative group area.

Again on 6 April, a move was made to Borne where an overnight stop was made and the workshop again moved to Ootmarsum, Holland, near the German frontier.

The workshop AWD, however, during this period remained to service elements of 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, which were mopping up enemy resistance on the canal between Delden and Wierden -- generally West of Almelo. While located at Bornebroek, the AWD proved to be rather too close to an enemy pocket approximately 500 yards across the canal. Since the infantry were in positions ahead, it was necessary to form defence platoons from the brigade "A" echelon personnel (including the AWD and the LAD).

The location at Ootmarsum was a very poor production site for the workshop, since all vehicles had to stay on the road surface due to the soft standing in the fields. After a rather uneventful unproductive state at Ootmarsum, the workshop moved on 13 April to a field approximately six miles south of Sogel (MR 794574 Germany). A good workshop site was found and in nine days the backlog of repair work was eliminated.

Since the front had advanced a distance of some 50 miles, the unit moved on 23 April to Freisoythe and set up in a farmer's field. In general, all vehicles were strictly road bound in this area and the recovery section of the workshop was in great demand.

On 6 May, the workshop made its last move before the official VE-Day when the unit set up in a location near Oldenburg, Germany. On arrival in that area, information was received to the fact that the workshop had been selected to participate with a Canadian Brigade Group that would proceed to Berlin for the occupation of the former capital by British, American, and Russian forces. This news was received with even more enthusiasm than VE-Day itself and the media preparations for the trip commenced.

The workshop made a 150-mile move on 12 May to concentrate with the Canadian Berlin Brigade at Nijverdal (MR 129199 Holland). The remainder of the month was devoted to painting vehicles and equipment, fitting battle dress and web gear, drilling, marching, and all other activities relevant to a "spit and polish" programme.

The climax of the month's training came with an inspection of the workshop on 30 May by Brig C.B.D. Smith, commander of the Canadian Berlin Brigade, and Brig G. M. Smith, DDME First Canadian Army. The inspecting officers addressed all ranks and expressed their satisfaction in regard to the state of training and efficiency of the unit.

On 8 June, information was received to the effect that, due to conditions in Berlin, the Canadian Berlin Brigade would not participate in any occupation and would be disbanded to permit the unit to return to their parent formations.

## **DADME – 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade LADs and AWDs**

[Col R.H. Hodgson has a handwritten note on the original document. He states: *this piece was written by the adjutant at CREME's Headquarters. He wrote it on his own, completely disregarding the facts, nor did he consult any of the LADs.* 5 August 1963]

Not much can be written about the activities of the four LADs or the various AWDs working under command of DADME from 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, as their work was almost entirely routine throughout [*not true – RHH*]. The LADs were:

- 41 LAD (attached to the Lake Superior Regiment) [*did terrific work – RHH*]
- 47 LAD (attached to 28 Canadian Armoured Regiment)
- 75 LAD (attached to 21<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment) [*received 1 Order of the Orange Nassau – a Dutch award – RHH*]
- 84 LAD (attached to 22 Canadian Armoured Regiment) [*received 1 Military Cross – RHH*]

The LADs have their first experience in recovering and repairing battle casualties immediately after the brigade crossed the Orne, just beyond Caen. It was not until the brigade attacked north and west from Brettville that the LADs really had any battle experience. Here, as comparatively green troops, they were frequently under heavy fire and all the armoured LADs did excellent work in recovering tank casualties from exposed positions.

The LADs were able to keep pretty well up with their respective regiments until after the closing of the Falaise Gap, then, during the pursuit across France, they were confronted with a new problem, either to try and recover crooked tanks and repair those within their scope and become hopelessly lost from their units, or to keep as much in contact with their unit as possible and pass up many chances of repairing lightly damaged tanks. The latter plan was followed with the result that until Belgium was reached, the LADs could do little, if any, work beyond sending fitters forward to help the unit fitters in the lightest, quickest, sort of roadside repair.

When the tempo of the pursuit slow down during the fighting across Belgium and into southern Holland, the LADs were able to assume of their normal role and kept in close contact with their parent units.

During the winter stalemate along the Lower Maas, the LADs were almost entirely [doing] inspections, checking over new tanks coming up from the tank delivery squadron, and in keeping the unit wheeled transport in good condition. Nearly all of the LADs suffered some casualties during this period when engaged in recovering tanks along the Maas River.

In February, when the brigade moved up into Germany for the campaign that resulted in the clearing of the West Bank of the Rhine, the LADs were kept more than busy. The heavy fighting around Kappelen, Udem, Calcar, and particularly in the Hochwald, resulted in heavy tank losses. Recovery was particularly difficult and dangerous in the Hochwald, but was necessary owing to the slow, slogging advance, which gave the Germans an opportunity to “brew up” tanks that had been previously knocked out, if they were not recovered to our rear areas at once.

Owing to the regiments’ habit of keeping their LADs back with the static part of “A” echelon [*not true -- the author of this portion found it inconvenient to record the facts – RHH*], it became necessary to send AWDs forward of the LADs in order to reduce the distance that the tanks had to be recovered and to speed up repair work. Following the capture of Kappelen and again while the brigade was in the Hochwald, both No. 1 and No. 2 AWD from 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop were sited well forward of the “A” echelons. Both AWDs, although in quite exposed areas, did excellent work under very difficult weather conditions.

After the crossing of the Rhine, the LADs were kept close up to the fighting echelons, but as the majority of the tank casualties suffered during the drive across Northern Germany were “brew ups”, the LADs again had little to do except routine work.

One outstanding thing about both LADs and AWDs was the excellent type of senior NCOs that staffed these units. Technically, they were well trained, and as soldiers and NCOs left but little to be desired. The greater part of the success achieved by RCEME units of the brigade was a result of their loyal and untiring work.

## **RCEME – Headquarters RCA 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division**

Herewith is a short history of the operations of the following RCEME units throughout the campaign in North-West Europe:

- 44 LAD (attached to 15<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Regiment, RCA)
- 45 LAD (attached to 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Anti-tank Regiment, RCA)
- 104 LAD (attached to 23<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Field Regiment (SP), RCA)
- 8<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Regiment Workshop

The above LADs moved to a marshalling area at Wanstead near London during the week of 16 July 1944, and on completion of the final stages of waterproofing, embarked at Tilbury docks. After four days on board ship, they disembarked via landing craft on the beaches at Courseulles-Sur-Mer, France, and moved inland to bivouac in the area of Courmelles for three days.

After the removal of waterproofing, the division moved in to relieve 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division in the area near Tilly-La-Campagne, with the guns deploying on the southern edge of Caen. The LADs remained with the echelons near Authie. After a few days, it was realized that this was too far from the gun position, so the LADs moved up to Caen. During the two-week stay, all gun work was carried out on the gun positions while tank and vehicle work was carried out at the LAD, approximately a mile behind. Throughout this day, the area was steadily shelled with a few vehicle casualties.

During the first week of August, the area was accidentally bombed by American aircraft. This resulted in seven casualties to LAD personnel, of whom three were killed. There were also some six vehicle casualties to LAD equipment. On 5 August 1945, all the armoured 15-cwt trucks of the LADs reported to 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters to carry infantry into action during the initial stages of the breakout down the Caen-Falaise highway. This task was carried out very effectively, and infantry were dropped off in the forward defence lines with a loss of three vehicles and one LAD person killed.

Following this, the LADs moved with the regimental echelons by short jumps down to the Trun area where the Falaise Gap was closed. Throughout this phase, equipment casualties were heavy, and the LADs were kept very busy, often working directly under fire. At Trun, 44 LAD operated for a short while in an infantry role during a German counterattack.

Following this action, the division began its run across France and up to the Leopold Canal in Belgium, where it remained in a holding role for approximately one month and finally supported the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division attack across the canal. During this period, all LADs carried out extensive overhaul programs and equipment was put in its best possible condition. Twenty-four-hour passes were commenced for all ranks and personnel were given an opportunity to meet and know the people of the countries being liberated. Morale reached a particularly high level.

In October 1944, the move to the area north of Antwerp took place, followed by fighting which resulted in the capture of Bergen-Op-Zoom and the closing up to the Mass River. Observation post tank casualties were high in this operation, and quite a lot of work was carried out on these equipments at the observation posts. Heavy mud in the Steenberg area resulted in an increase in all types of work.

In November, the move to the S'Hertogenbosch area took place, and the formation remained static for approximately 3 months, with the exception of the move to Breda during Christmas week. There is little outstanding to report on this period, as all work was very normal. The repairs due to accidents showed a sharp increase, as did those due to normal running. Rest centres for other ranks were established in S'Hertogenbosch, and 48-hour leaves on the continent were in full swing. Also seven-day privilege leaves to the UK were started.

On Christmas Eve, the formation suddenly moved to the Breda area in anticipation of a German counterattack across the Maas, which never materialized. Christmas was rather cheerless, with most personnel billeted in barns or under canvas. All ranks cooperated, however, in arranging Christmas dinners and other festivities.

This period was followed in February by the move into Germany and the closing up to the west bank of the Rhine between Nijmegen and Wesel. In this operation, the worst mud conditions yet seen were encountered. Recovery facilities were given no respite and worked under very difficult conditions. Enemy shelling and mines also caused a great deal of work. During this operation, particularly around the Hochwald Forest, there were a few RCEME casualties due to enemy shelling. This was to quite an extent caused by the policy of using artillery regiments much closer to the front than had normally been the case. The echelons and the LADs were seldom more than a couple of miles away from the gun positions.

In March, the formation came out of action and concentrated in the (?) - Tilburg area for two weeks and all the equipment was put in good condition. Entertainment and leave facilities were well organized and all ranks enjoyed a well-earned rest.

In preparation for the final phase of the war - crossing the Rhine and closing up to the Oldenburg area - the artillery regiments were moved to the Calcar area in the latter part of March to support the operation. As the regiments were deployed well up to the river, there was quite a lot of counter-battery work resulting in a few vehicle casualties. Quite a lot of firing was carried out, particularly by the 40-millimeter equipment. This resulted in a high wastage rate of barrels and an increase in work on these equipments.

The crossing of the Rhine at Rees took place on 1 April 1945 and the formation moved into action along the Tente canal in Northern Holland. From there, up to the Kusten canal in Germany was in many respects similar to the run across France. The LADs were scattered along the route leaving small parties to complete work and catch up to the regiments. Recovery was not heavy until the Friesoythe area was reached. Here mud became heavy and recovery work was carried out with the aid of D-8s [heavy caterpillar tractors] from a heavy recovery section. Over the Kusten canal, enemy shelling was heavy resulting in the lot of vehicle casualties. The LADs were kept very busy until the end of the campaign in North-West Europe.

Following the cessation of hostilities, a programme was commenced for putting the equipment in a condition for turning in to Ordnance. This work continued until the move from the Bad Zwishenden - Oldenburg area to the Ruffelo area where it was again resumed. On 8 June 1945, the LADs participated in a mounted march past of artillery equipment prior to the turning-in of the equipment. Arrangements are now in progress for an extensive period of rehabilitation, training, and education. Throughout the campaign, all RCEME units worked steadily and cheerfully wherever and whenever they were required. Morale was always at a high level. All the artillery regiments have expressed great satisfaction with their work.

#### **4 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Headquarters**

A type "B" LAD attached to the division headquarters of 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. This LAD likewise did not have a spectacular role during operations, but nevertheless had the important job of keeping the main and rear divisional headquarters' equipment in serviceable condition.

The LAD personnel had their baptism of fire shortly after arriving in France in the latter part of July 1944. The despatch rider and two recovery men were called out one night to recover a damaged half-track. Just at that time, some enemy planes came overhead dropping flares and anti-personnel bombs. There were a few anxious moments at that time as there was no cover whatsoever. About a week later the LAD was

camped quite close to the front and everyone soon found out about the famous Jerry mortar. Fortunately there were no casualties in either personnel or vehicles.

Coming up through France and Belgium, the LAD experienced a few thrilling moments at various times. On one occasion, two of the men were returning from the ordnance field park after dark, when they took a wrong road and ended up watching German tracer bullets crisscrossing over the road in front of them. Needless to say they immediately turned about and took off at high speed, passing tanks and infantry going up in the dark.

The LAD moved through Belgium and then into Holland, spending the winter in the latter country. On New Years Eve there was a little excitement for the men, when some Polish troops stationed nearby began celebrating with their small arms and machine guns. The LAD, fully armed, was called out as it was thought that this was the German paratroop landing, which everyone was expecting about that time.

The LAD then moved into Germany and after only a few weeks there, moved back with the division to Boxtel in Holland. This was a pleasant surprise to everyone as this happened to be their favourite town in Holland. After two weeks in Holland, a second move was made into Germany. On this move, the LAD crossed the Rhine and harboured near Emmerich for a short time. After a series of moves over very bad roads in North-West Germany, the LAD finally wound up at Eastede near Oldenburg. At this point the war in Europe ended, and it became possible to bring about an improvement in the living conditions and entertainment facilities for the men. Movies and stage shows were held in local cinemas, and a men's mess with a reading and writing room was set up in a local hotel.

In the 11 months of conflict on the continent, the LAD lost only one man. His passing was due to an accidentally fired round from a Sten gun.

## **42 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 29<sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Recce) (South Albert Regiment)**

A type "C" LAD attached to 29<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (Recce).

Early in the battle, it was learned that by using old tank tracks, the Shermans could be given additional armour protection, which proved satisfactory. This was first started in Caen on 1 August, only having been on the continent since July 1944. At first, in France, a considerable number of Tiger tanks were knocked out and the tracks from these proved excellent for armoured protection. At least one recovery vehicle was kept busy hauling in tracks all the time. Later on, not so many Tiger tanks were available and the LAD resorted to worn Sherman steel track, which also proved satisfactory. This work was carried out on every new tank received by the regiment during the campaign. All LAD personnel spent many long hours at various times doing this work, and it was felt that it was of considerable benefit to the tank crews.

On 15 August 1944, the LAD moved from the area of Caen to the small town of Rouverres, France. It arrived fairly late in the evening, however, everyone dug in as well as possible in the fast-disappearing light. Trenches were not as deep or as good as they might have been, and vehicles were not as well camouflaged in the dark. At 2330 hours, a German plane came overhead and dropped flares throwing the area into brilliant light, exposing some of the vehicles. Following the flares, a bomber dropped numerous quantities of small anti-personnel bombs. Two men were injured from flying shrapnel. The officer, Capt E. A. Weir, was also severely injured from a bomb landing on the edge of his slit trench. From a letter we received from the officer later on, the LAD learned that he had lost a leg. One of the most amazing escapes of all, was by one of the men. One bomb exploded at the foot of his trench, while another penetrated an improvised roof and pinned his greatcoat, which he was using as a pillow to the ground. The bomb happened to be a dud, and was not discovered until the next morning.

The only time anyone of the LAD personnel was actually in the front lines was about 4 August 1944, when the rear division headquarters asked for the LAD armoured scout cars and drivers to report to

division headquarters. Apparently they were short of armoured vehicles to go to the front lines. The LAD scout car towed a 17-pounder anti-tank gun into position ahead of the infantry. It was knocked out before it was ever fired. The scout car was brewed up. The driver escaped injury miraculously by crawling into a slit trench, but was not able to get back to the unit for about eight days.

On 17 April 1945, the LAD moved into Molbergen, Germany. While at this harbour, a group of German soldiers, nine in all, three officers and six other ranks, came right into the harbour area in a wagon. This was the only time that the enemy came right into the echelon to give themselves up as prisoners of war.

## **46 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Engineers**

A type "B" LAD attached to 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Engineers. On 14 August 1944, the LAD was stationed south of Caen, France, and on that occasion was bombed by Royal Air Force Lancaster bombers for one and one half hours. Everyone spent the afternoon in slit trenches.

This was one of the most harrowing experiences of the war for the LAD. There were no personnel or vehicle casualties during the day. Then in the evening, the Luftwaffe pulled off a short and annoying raid to really give everyone the jitters.

On 2 September, the LAD contributed in no small way to a successful bridging operation carried out by 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Field Squadrons, RCE, over the Somme at Fort Remy near Abbeville. Between 2359 hours, 2 September, and 1200 hours 3 September, three Bailey bridges were thrown across the Somme. A total of 230 feet of bridging was used. The operation was unique in that the bridges were in series over three branches of the Somme. Thus the bridges had to be built consecutively rather than simultaneously. The LAD medium breakdown vehicle was used to great advantage at the bridge sites for recovery purposes. On several occasions, heavy Diamond T bridging lorries became bogged down on this very restricted bridge site, and the breakdown vehicle was successfully used to keep the bridging rolling to the site and thus aid materially in a most important operation.

In March in the Lemheke(?) area in Germany, the LAD was heavily shelled by German medium artillery all afternoon. The crossroads near the LAD location was carrying a very large amount of traffic, which the Germans apparently had under observation. The fire was all very accurate and nearly everyone was very shaky at the end of the day. There were no casualties among the LAD personnel, but a driver of 8<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron, RCE, who had a truck in for repair was instantly killed by shrapnel from one of the shells. During the same afternoon, the medium breakdown vehicle was sent out into "no man's land" east of Sonsbeck to recover a D7 engineer tractor. The breakdown crew was assured that it was quite safe by the engineer officer. However, when they arrived on site, the Jerry's immediately brought down a considerable amount of mortar fire. The breakdown suffered several small holes and cut cables, but the crew brought it back to safety in very short order after their narrow escape.

## **48 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters**

A type "A" LAD attached to 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division.

The LAD first came under fire at Caen, France, shortly after arriving on the continent. Being a new experience for everyone, not all the men took to their slit trenches -- some watching the fireworks above ground while others remained asleep. Shortly afterwards, two men from the LAD investigated a report from the French civilians that there were some Germans in a nearby barn. This resulted in the capture, by two very surprised LAD men, of ten German prisoners including two SS men. On one occasion, while



sitting in a wheat field waiting to cross the Seine River, an Allied fighter plane passed overhead and in some manner its extra petrol tank broke loose. It fell on the LAD area, but fortunately no one was hurt and the only casualty was the breakdown lorry, which suffered minor damage. Several of the men however had a good bath in high-octane gasoline.

The LAD moved into Germany during the latter part of February. Around Udem, the mud was so bad that reconnaissance for recovery was carried out on horseback using captured German horses. This also afforded protection from anti-personnel mines, which the Germans had liberally sown in that area. After the Germans were forced backwards across the Rhine, the LAD moved back into Holland with the brigade. Although this was a rest for most of the brigade personnel, it proved to be a very busy time for the LAD.

On the second move into Germany, the Rhine River was crossed and nothing out of the ordinary took place until the Kosten Canal in north-west Germany was reached. At this point, the LAD was called upon to provide a fighting platoon to hold a portion of the front. Two patrols went up on successive nights, the first evening being quiet and the second evening just the opposite, as Jerry decided to drop in for a fight. However, he soon withdrew when he found things a little too hot for him. On this occasion two *Honey* tanks were used in support of the LAD. Through the whole campaign in North-West Europe, there were no men lost through enemy action. One of the men, Cpl Poss(?) was honoured with a certificate from Field Marshal Montgomery in recognition of his service and devotion to duty through the campaign.

## **49 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Signals**

A type "B" LAD attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Headquarters Signals. Although the role of the LAD during operations was not spectacular, it nevertheless was an important one and many long hours were put in by all LAD personnel to keep the signals vehicles and equipment in operation.

During the campaign in France, at the time of the Trun-Falaise Gap, it was realized that 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division might soon be making a quick dash across a France. For this operation, one of the big problems with which to contend would be communications. The American type "A" frame was a simple and efficient method of laying lines of communication, but these were in short supply at that time. It was therefore necessary to have some such device constructed locally, so in the LAD was approached on the subject. A test frame was made from a few pieces of angle iron, and a couple of improvised bearings were set in to carry the shaft on which the cable drum was mounted. The whole assembly was mounted on the back of a Jeep and a test run was made. The test proved satisfactory, and this device was used exclusively on all jeeps belonging to Signals, as well as to many belonging to other units. They proved to be a very great assistance to Signals, not only during that operation but also throughout the remainder of the campaign.

The most important vehicles the LAD had to service were the armoured command vehicles and the wireless vehicles, and these presented the biggest problems in that respect. Each armoured command vehicle out of action meant a serious increase in the communications of the remaining ones, and therefore it was up to the LAD to keep them on the road at any cost. Many hours were spent driving to the various workshops in endeavouring to obtain parts for them. Most of the time, the parts were not available and it was necessary for the LAD to carry out improvised repairs wherever it was at all possible.

## **A Narrative of RCEME, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, in North-West Europe**

### **Headquarters RCEME, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division**

The narrative of RCEME 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division in North-West Europe commences with Exercise *Goldflake*. This exercise was a movement of the formation popularly known as the “Mighty Maroon Machine” from Italy to North-West Europe departing from Leghorn, Italy, and landing at Marseille, France, and thence by road through France to a concentration area in Belgium.

Lt-Col L. D. McGee, CREME, was the first member of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division RCEME to arrive in Belgium, having flown with other heads of services from Florence, Italy, to Brussels, Belgium, arriving on 14 February 1945. This was the first advance party and numerous conferences were held discussing the movement of the formation and the areas for concentration. As exercise *Goldflake* was a movement of Top Secret nature, many amusing incidents cropped up particularly on phone calls. Conversations ensued by DDME *Goldflake* or CREME *Goldflake* often left the recipient of the phone call wondering if “something new” had been added to the army or if there was a sudden rush on the advertising of Goldflake cigarettes.

Capt J. S. Kitto, Adjutant at Headquarters RCEME 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, was in charge of the second advance party and accompanied by Capt E. C. Cox, 2i/c of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, two staff-sergeants representing 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop and 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, and two drivers left Leghorn, Italy, by LST on 17 February 1945 arriving at Marseille, France, on 18 February 1945. They travelled by road from Marseille, France, to Coutrai, Belgium, where they met CREME. All members of the second advance party were immediately detailed by CREME to inspect workshop sites, and make arrangements for billets, requisitioning of buildings, etc. Capt E. C. Cox and all the other ranks stopped off at Roullers, Belgium, where 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop was to be located. CREME and the Adjutant proceeded to Ypres where a temporary headquarters was established.

Shortly after arriving in Ypres, CREME and the Adjutant proceeded to Commines, France, where 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop was to be established, and made arrangements for billets and the requisitioning of workshop sites. CREME, at this time, was informed that the division would lose 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade as it was 21 Army Group’s policy to reorganize CMF formations on the same basis as equivalent formations operating in this theatre. Information passed to the heads of services was to the effect that certain units of the brigade, which included 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, would be disbanded and others would be reorganized as corps and army troops units. Plans were therefore made to transfer certain personnel and equipment from 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop to other workshops in the division to fill existing personnel vacancies and complete equipment deficiencies.

During the period 20 February 1945 to 8 March 1945, units were quickly arriving from Italy and concentrated in the general area of Dixmude, Ypres, and Roullers, Belgium. 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop arrived in Roullers, Belgium, on 5 March 1945, and 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop arrived in Commines, France, on 6 March 1945. All LADs travelled with their parent units arriving at various dates. Headquarters RCEME under the command of Maj J. A. McTavish, 2i/c CREME, and Capt R. K. Mulford, EME (Telecommunications), arrived at Dixmude, Belgium, on 7 March 1945, this being the town where Rear Headquarters 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division was to be established.

Due to the equipment policy in this theatre, armoured and artillery self-propelled regiments on arrival were re-equipped with tanks and self-propelled guns mounting the type of armament used by other

armoured divisions operating under 21 Army Group. The 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade and artillery units were also issued with International Half-tracks, which replaced the odd collection of vehicles formerly used by these formations to tow 6-pounder and 17-pounder guns. Badger [Ram tank] flame throwers were also introduced to the division as new equipment, and issued to Headquarters 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade. All workshop resources were fully involved in this changeover programme as new equipments were checked by RCEME personnel prior to issue to the units to ensure the equipment was battle worthy as regards mechanical condition. Workshop personnel did not object to this heavy programme as practically all were billeted in private homes and had for the first time in many months clean sheets in which to sleep, soft beds, and an attitude of friendliness on the behalf of the civilians, which was unknown to them in Italy. The many pubs proved to be very popular, and dance halls were crowded every night. Morale soared to a particularly high level, especially when information was received that nine-day leaves to the UK, or seven-day leaves to Paris, were being made available to all ranks.

During this period of concentration, all vehicles, tanks, armament, small arms, and instruments were carefully checked by the workshops and LADs in preparation for an operation which was known to be forthcoming. It is interesting to note that extremely few casualties were encountered on the long move from Italy, which was over 1,000 road miles. This definitely points to a high standard of maintenance and a thorough check of vehicle maintenance by units prior to their departure to the North-West European theatre. CREME, during the period of concentration was extremely busy inspecting workshops, to ensure that all work was progressing smoothly, and obtaining information on EMERs [Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Regulations], tire pressures, lubricants, spare parts, etc. Col J. W. Bishop, DDME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, visited CREME Headquarters and both workshops on 11 March 1945, and appeared very satisfied with the work in progress, and particularly the check being done on new tanks and self-propelled guns being received for issue to units.

Word was received about mid-March that 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop would not be disbanded, but would be converted to form a line of communication workshop under command of Canadian Section 1<sup>st</sup> Echelon 21 Army Group. Plans which were in hand as regards disbandment of this unit were therefore ceased, and the workshop passed from under command of the division.

Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery visited division headquarters on 18 March 1945, and gave an extremely interesting talk to all officers and senior NCOs. He was very satisfied with the condition of the personnel and equipment and stressed the fact that he was very pleased to have 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division under command. The army commander, General H.D.G. Crerar, paid a quick visit to 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Headquarters on 24 March 1945 and had a short talk with all senior officers. He explained that, as much as he would like to visit all units of the division, it was impossible at this time due to heavy operational commitments in Holland.

During the latter days of March, a large-scale welding programme was instigated when Lt-Col C. H. Drury, AA&QMG [Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General] 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division advised that tank tracks would have to be welded on the front and sides of all tanks to conform with the extra protection used on tanks in this theatre. This appeared to be an extremely large commitment, and it was estimated that approximately one month's time would elapse before the programme would be completed. All of available welding plants were employed on this task, and it was finally completed within 20 days. The added protection proved highly valuable, as armoured regiment LADs at a later date reported that tanks in their regiments had been hit by enemy bazookas and 75-millimeter armour-piercing shot, and no damage occurred other than the track armour was blown off. This undoubtedly saved a number of lives and reduced tank casualties considerably.

The next long move of the formation was from Dixmude and surrounding districts to Nijmegen, Holland. Workshops were concentrated in Nijmegen, and some of the units went into action on Walcheran Island.

The LADs were, however, not kept very busy, as a fairly static role ensued and casualties to tanks and vehicles were very slight.

During our stay at Nijmegen, Maj J. A. McTavish, 2i/c of this headquarters, was called to 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps Headquarters to fill the appointment of DADME. Maj R. J. Birss, OC 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, came to Headquarters RCEME as 2i/c, leaving Capt E. C. Cox as acting OC of the workshop. Maj J. M. Harding, OC 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, who proceeded on leave during the latter part of March was reported as being ill in the UK. Capt R. A. MacDonald was therefore detailed on 27 March 1945 to command 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop in an acting capacity.

On 10 April 1945, Brig G. M. Grant, DDME First Canadian Army, accompanied by Col J. W. Bishop, DDME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, inspected Headquarters RCEME, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop and 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop. Brig Grant was very pleased with the layout, accommodation, production, and work in hand of both workshops and commented very favourably. After the inspection, Lt-Col L. D. McGee, CREME, entertained Brig Grant, Col Bishop, the acting officers commanding the workshops, DAME 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, 2i/c Headquarters RCEME, and the Adjutant at a luncheon held at the Brass Hat Club in Nijmegen.

Headquarters RCEME was particularly busy during mid-April, revamping CREME Circular Letters in accordance with RCEME policy in this theatre. Many long hours were spent by all members of the staff, and a large number of CREME Circular Letters which applied in CMF but did not apply in the North-West Europe theatre were cancelled. This necessitated rewriting numerous Circular Letters. Most returns were found to be different than those used in CMF, and all LADs and units had to be acquainted with the new type of returns. Leaves to the UK progressed further rapidly during this period, and a list of personnel eligible for rotational leave to Canada was submitted to second echelon. Sport periods were started when time was available, and unit softball teams were formed.

On 15 April 1945, a divisional push was started, which took our units from the Nijmegen area to Arnhem. In preparation for this operation, the division was concentrated south of Arnhem. The 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop moved to Kilder on 11 April 1945, and 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop moved to Wehl on 14 April 1945. As it was expected that the workshops would not remain very long in their areas, divisional BLPs were established at both workshop sites. On 13 April 1945, Headquarters RCEME moved from Nijmegen to Didam, Holland, passing en route through the Reichwald Forest.

Shortly after the arrival of the rear divisional headquarters at Didam, word was received that Arnhem had fallen, and that the fighting elements of the division were to concentrate immediately south of Arnhem prior to occupation of the same. In order to service the division as regards repairs and recovery, an AWD from each workshop was dispatched to accompany the brigade groups to Arnhem. On the move forward, LADs were involved in quite a bit of action and recovery crews were kept busy.

On 16 April 1945, information was received that Arnhem had been cleared of enemy troops, and reconnaissance parties were sent forward by rear division headquarters. The reconnaissance parties, on arrival, found that Arnhem had only just been cleared, and there was still considerable mortaring and small arms fire on the outskirts of the city. Arnhem had been completely looted and the houses badly damaged by the retreating Germans. Many fires were burning and many dead lying around. An excellent location was found for Rear Division Headquarters, but due to the proximity of a German paratrooper battalion on the right flank, it was decided not to move into the area. A central location in town was chosen and Rear Division Headquarters, which included Headquarters RCEME, was established on some side streets near a prisoner of war camp. Immediately on arrival in Arnhem, a reconnaissance was made by CREME and his 2i/c to endeavour to locate suitable workshop sites. This reconnaissance proved to be somewhat hazardous, as mines had not been cleared from the streets and it was necessary to proceed with caution. Three possible workshop sites were selected and advance parties were called forward from both workshops to finalize and hold the ultimate locations. The two workshops which were at this time located

near Didam were warned to be prepared for a quick move as information was received that the class 40 bridge over the Neder Rhine River was likely to be removed, and that only the class 9 bridge on the down route would be available for crossing.

On 17 April 1945, both workshops moved to Arnhem and although space was very limited, they opened up shop and commenced working. The two divisional BLPs, which had been established south of Arnhem were closed and all vehicles collected there were forwarded to Arnhem.

The two AWDs that were operating in Arnhem were advised that 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division would next move north with the intention of reaching the Zuider Zee. Arrangements were completed for the AWDs to move forward in support of their brigade groups, and that all moves would be coordinated by the respective brigade headquarters. Due to the rapidity of the action that ensued, it was necessary to establish additional divisional BLPs as the AWDs moved forward. Most of the equipment that was collected at these points was later backloaded to the divisional BLP at Arnhem prior to the workshops moving forward from Arnhem.

On 17 April 1945, Main Division Headquarters moved to Otterloo and established camp. During the night of the 17-18 April, an enemy attack was made from the right flank on Main Divisional Headquarters, and 17<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Regiment, RCA. This proved to be an enemy force of 500 to 800 strong, which had been squeezed between 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division on the right flank and 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division in the centre. An indication was received of their arrival and "stand to" was ordered at 2300 hours, 17 April 1945. On the morning of 18 April, at 0100 hours, forward elements of the enemy patrols were encountered and the enemy attack commenced. Batmen, cooks, general duties, and all ranks mustered quickly and dug in, taking a defensive role. 17<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment took the brunt of the attack and commenced firing with their 25-pounders over open sights. 58 LAD, attached to 17<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Regiment and under command of Lt D. H. Leckie, were right in the midst of it and members of the LAD captured a number of prisoners. One casualty was suffered by the LAD, but was not of a serious nature. At a very critical moment, when it looked as if the enemy might have had the upper hand in the battle, four *Wasp* flamethrowers arrived on the scene and practically paralyzed the enemy troops. That was the turn of the battle, which concluded with the mopping up of approximately 400 prisoners.

During the period 15-18 April, due to the rapidity of the advance, the AWDs of 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop and 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop were continually on the move forward, and handled a considerable volume of repair and recovery work. Many "stand to's" were ordered during this time as the AWDs, although operating in rear of the forward fighting elements, were endangered by isolated parties of Germans, who continued their efforts to rejoin their own troops forward of our lines. All fighting equipment in the AWDs for repair was utilized to form a ring for defensive purposes, and many fitters did guard duty at night and carried on with repairs in the daytime. On 18 April, Headquarters RCEME moved to a woods just south of Otterloo and harboured for the night. After the previous night's battle, very heavy guards were placed about the camp, and a "stand to" was ordered at 0300 hours on 19 April. Reports were that many enemy were still in the woods, and this was confirmed when Maj R. J. Birss, 2i/c CREME, picked up one prisoner about three quarters of a mile from camp. However the night was uneventful, and Headquarters RCEME proceeded to Barneveld the following day.

On 19 April, the Zuider Zee was reached by one armoured regiment and the Westminster Regiment (Motor). The AWD of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade workshop had, by this time, moved slightly north of Barneveld and again was extremely busy. The recovery section was in particular very busy, as some soft marshy ground had been encountered and considerable recovery work on tanks was necessary. Shortly afterwards, both workshops were brought forward and concentrated in the area of Barneveld.

Headquarters RCEME was called on at this time to submit a report to the AA&QMG on RCEME operations for the period 15 to 18 April inclusive. As both AWDs and recovery sections had been extremely busy, the report turned out to be quite lengthy, covering all points, and CREME, the 2i/c, the Adjutant, and the Superintendent Clerk worked until 0400 hours on 21 April to complete it. The Adjutant

left the same morning at 0600 hours to make a reconnaissance of a new area, as a report had been received that a move further north was to take place. On 22 April, Headquarters RCEME moved to Groningen, a distance of 125 miles, and set up camp in a small park in the town. 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop also moved on this date to Herron, and as sufficient room was not available for work to be carried out, they moved to the Eelde Airfield (MR Q 228050) where they are presently located. 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop moved on 21 April to Wolvega and, after a short stay of four days, moved to Groningen and opened up shop on the site of a large sugar factory. Both workshop sites were very excellent, providing good accommodation for personnel and hard standings to work on. In the meantime, the LADs were operating with their units, the latter mainly holding defensive positions along the northern coast of Holland. 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was regrouped and prepared for a drive towards Delfziel. 72 LAD, attached to Westminster Regiment (Motor), under the command of Capt A. H. Caldicott and 73 LAD, attached to Headquarters, 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade under command of AQMS K. W. MacDonald and supervised by BEME, 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, Lt W. L. Sambrook, took a very active part in this operation and quite a number of German prisoners were taken by LAD personnel.

During the latter part of this last operating period, the Eighth Victory Loan drive was put in progress, and RCEME finished up at the end of this campaign with 109% of its quota, being in second place in 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, the RCAMC having taken the lead. It appeared at that time that the division would stay in Groningen and recreational facilities were speeded up. A Beaver Club for other ranks was established. A warrant officer's and sergeant's club, a junior officer's club, a senior officer's club, and a transient officer's hotel, etc. were opened. Two swimming pools with facilities in the buildings for serving hamburgers and coffee were also established. A riding academy was made available, and this location being near the Paderswolde Meer made bathing and boating facilities readily accessible.

On the evening of 3 May, news was received the war in Holland was over and that festivities were in order. On 8 May 1945, news was received that the complete capitulation of the German army had taken effect and this called for further celebrations. Many conferences were called shortly after this by DDsME and CsREME. A programme was quickly outlined for the preservation and turn in all equipments. Many orders and pamphlets were received on the rehabilitation and disbandment of personnel and educational and sports activities now in progress. It is, however, impossible for RCEME to take an active part in the educational and sports programme due to the very heavy commitments in the workshops and LADs.

Capt E. C. Cox at this time was made A/Maj and appointed to command 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop. Maj J. M. Harding returned from the UK on discharge from hospital and resumed command of 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop. Shortly after this time, Maj R. J. Birss, 2i/c CREME left for Headquarters 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps to take up the appointment of DADME.

81 LAD attached to 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Regiment, RCA, under command of Capt C. F. Starr was selected to represent RCEME and to service the artillery batteries of 8<sup>th</sup> Field and 5<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Regiments that were proceeding to Berlin for participation in a mounted march past. On 12 May, the LAD moved to Holten, Holland, the concentration area for the "Berlin Brigade". Some new vehicles were received by the LAD, and a heavy programme of paint up, clean up, and tune up was laid on. However, after a month's stay in Holten, the "Berlin Brigade" march pass was cancelled and all units returned to their formations.

A GOC's church parade was held on 13 May 1945, and after the church service a march past was held with Major-general B. M. Hoffmeister taking the salute. Reports received indicated that personnel representing the workshops that were under command of Capt J. S. Kitto, Headquarters RCEME, made an excellent showing. After the completion of the divisional church parade, attention was diverted to preparations for 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division mounted march past, which was scheduled for 23 May. The production of the workshops declined during this period, to a certain extent due to the large repainting programme and the final tune up of the vehicles prior to the march past.

On 23 May, General H.D.G. Crerar, General Officer Commanding First Canadian Army, arrived at Eelde airdrome where the complete division was drawn up for inspection. General Crerar inspected each troop in turn, driving about the field in a Jeep. After lunch at the Pavilion at Paterswold Meer, at which all Commanding Officers and Heads of Services attended, a mounted march past was held at which General Crerar took the salute. This was a most impressive sight as the tanks and armoured vehicles rolled by in pairs followed by the services. The workshops and LADs put on a splendid showing, which did justice to the high reputation held by RCEME in this formation.

After the march past, a large-scale programme was instituted by CREME for the preservation of all equipments held in the formation. Guns and self-propelled guns were all inspected and put into a state of preservation. All "A" vehicles and half-tracks were thoroughly checked over and classified. Lt J.I.Z. Valiquette (EME (W)) and his telecommunication mechanics have been very busy inspecting and repairing wireless equipments, mine detectors, etc. Artificer QMS Kelly, the senior armourer of the formation, has had unit armourers repairing and putting into a state of preservation all PIATs [Projector, Infantry, Anti-tank], light machine guns, medium machine guns, and small arms generally. A divisional finito(?) park was established at Eelde airfield and administered directly by Headquarters RCEME, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. The call-in of the equipments is well in hand, and the facilities of RCEME have been heavily taxed with all the inspections and preservation that are necessary prior to the equipments being turned in. With the disbandment of the corps and brigades, a number of units are coming under command of this formation, namely 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Section, 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Light Recovery Section, plus all the LADs attached to five armoured regiments and 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Car Regiment. Since the cessation of hostilities, it has been found that the commitments of RCEME 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division have been increased rather than lessened.

On 18 June, CREME attended a meeting at DDME's office, Headquarters First Canadian Army, to discuss the disbandment of certain RCEME units and the re-allocation of personnel from these units. This meeting proved most interesting, as information was outlined covering the disbandment of certain formations such as corps and brigade headquarters and the eventual disposition of equipments and personnel.

On 20 June 1945, CREME held a meeting of workshop commanders, officers commanding LADs, and formation electrical and mechanical engineers to discuss plans for the contraction of RCEME facilities of the division and to pass on information received at Brig Grant's meeting as to the method to be employed as regards the repatriation of all RCEME personnel. As it was apparent that, after 15 July, many shifts of RCEME personnel will have taken place, plans were made to complete the preservation and turn-in all of as many equipments as possible by that date, with the ultimate object of reducing divisional RCEME organizations to enable them to cope with repairs to "B" vehicles and certain small arms only. Information was also imparted to the effect that machinery lorries and tools no longer required by the workshops would be put in a state of preservation in accordance with instructions now at hand. All surplus spares and workshop materials were also to be sorted out and boxed ready for return. Proformae were issued to all units for the purpose of compiling information thereon in connection with the Repatriation Point Scores of all RCEME personnel in the division. These proformae, on completion, are to be passed to DDME, First Canadian Army, who will be responsible for the organized dispatch to Canada of personnel in accordance with their respective point scores, and on the basis that certain key personnel may have to be retained in order to allow efficient functioning of RCEME skeleton organizations, which will be required to service divisional groups until the last "B" vehicles are turned in.

The morale of RCEME 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division personnel has been excellent at all times, but is now at a particularly high level due to the fast strides being made towards repatriation and rehabilitation. A few officers and quite a large number of other ranks have volunteered for the Canadian Far East Force, and that this date it does not appear that all can be absorbed in the CFEF drafts. Quite a large number of personnel from the LADs have already been dispatched to Canada for repatriation, and it is hoped that in

the not-too-distant future that all RCEME personnel of this division who have served so faithfully and have contributed so greatly to furthering the interests and aims of their Corps will be returned to a well-deserved position in civilian life.

## **5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

The history of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop in North-West Europe began with the arrival of the unit in Marseille harbour at 1620 hours, Sunday, 25 February 1945. With a new adventure lying ahead, and the dirt and filth of Italy 36 sea hours behind, the spirits of all ranks were high. The anticipation of seeing more new countries and linking up with fellow Canadians in this theatre imbued the unit with a keen desire to move on quickly and complete the first phase of their movement from Italy to North-West Europe.

The unit had been placed under a security blackout at the commencement of the movement from Italy. All division and Canadian markings had been removed from vehicles and clothing, instructions had also been issued to all ranks prohibiting conversations with civilians. This latter order proved difficult to enforce as numerous civilians invaded the unit lines at each staging area eager to barter eggs, bread, and wine for cigarettes. On the whole however, the security was excellent and everyone cooperated in the endeavour to keep the purpose of the exercise as secret as possible.

The trip north through France was interesting, but uneventful, and after staging successively at St. Rambert, Macon, Les Laumes, and Cambrai, the unit finally arrived at Roullers, Belgium, at 1300 hours on Sunday 5 March, just seven days after arrival at Marseille.

At Roullers, the unit was billeted in private homes, the beds were comfortable, cafés were open, and there was plenty of good beer. Morale was excellent and reached a new high when a UK leave allotment was immediately received for 20 other ranks.

By Tuesday, 7 March, the unit was fully operative for the first time since its departure from Cervia, Italy. During the first week of our stay in Roullers, the shop was visited by Lt-Col L. D. McGee, CREME, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division and Brig I. N. Cumberland, commander 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade.

As the armoured brigade and the artillery group were being issued with a number of new tanks and self-propelled guns, the workshop was soon involved in a programme of inspecting and servicing these new equipments. The first equipments received were 24 Sexton self-propelled guns, which on completion of checking were issued to 8<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA. While the new tanks and self-propelled guns were being checked, the shop had a number of visitors including the DDME, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, Col J. W. Bishop, and the AA&QMG 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, Lt-Col C. H. Drury.

An inspection programme was also instituted to check the wireless equipment in the new tanks, and a “Z” wireless lorry and crew were attached to the workshop from 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop.

News was received on 17 March that Field Marshal Montgomery was to visit the division area. A representative group from this unit lined part of the route taken by the Field Marshal on his trip and were fortunate to have “Monty” stop and chat to them about their experiences in Italy.

The men have now been in Roullers for some two weeks, and the novelty has begun to wear off, but it is quite remarkable that, after the lowered standard of social living in Italy, the men have quickly become civilized again. Living like human beings again has been good for all of us, from the OC down to the craftsmen, and having clean sheets and a soft bed is an indescribable pleasure.

On 21 March, a unit paint programme began to changeover from the Italian light brown vehicle camouflage paint to the North-West Europe olive drab. The programme was set up to complete two vehicles per day and it is estimated that it will take two months to repaint all the unit vehicles.



A distinguished visitor, namely Gen H.D.G. Crerar, GOC First Canadian Army, accompanied by the GOC 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, Maj-Gen B. M. Hoffmeister, made a quick tour of the workshop on Saturday, 24 March, to inspect the work being done on servicing the new tanks and self-propelled guns, which were still rolling through the tank section in copious quantities.

Fifty men were taken on a tour of the last war battlefield at Vimy on Sunday, 25 March. Artificer QMS Fraser was in charge of the party and reported the trip to be very interesting. Monday, 26 March dawned wet and cold, and to add to the “blue Monday” and “after Sunday” depression came word that we were about to move into our first North-West Europe action. An urgent call was received to complete 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (GGFG) tanks by Monday night and the tank section worked until late in the evening on this task.

Tuesday, 27 March was a busy day as word of a move came in, and an advance party of one officer and nine other ranks was “tee’d up” for the next day. All the non-repairable vehicles were backloaded to 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Troops Workshop. At this point, all unit personnel received their third diphtheria inoculation, completing the series begun in Italy.

We were requested that this time to submit to second echelon a list of all personnel eligible for rotational leave to Canada. This was a long and tedious task for the orderly room staff, and involving the calculation for each individual of the number of months spent in the UK, Italy, and North-West Europe, but the job was done quickly and cheerfully, for we all wish to see the long-service lads get a well-deserved break. Another Scammel transporter was received on Thursday, 29 March, and will be of great assistance in the coming move to carry engines and other assemblies. Capt Harrison, Canadian Dental Corps, arrived the same day with a mobile dental clinic and two other ranks. He was attached to the unit for an indefinite period, and was a valuable addition to the unit as dental work had been sadly neglected for some time.

Friday, 30 March saw our four breakdown vehicles busily loading tracks on the sides of all armoured regiment tanks. It was spot-welded in place for extra protection, a standard tank drill in this theatre, but one that was impossible in Italy, because it was difficult to get sufficient replacement track let alone use it for extra armour. Just another instance of the difference in support in the two theatres. We lost our OC temporarily at this point for Maj R. J. Birss was attached to Headquarters RCEME in the capacity of 2i/c. Capt E. C. Cox thus became A/OC. On Saturday, 31 March, the first men to leave the unit for Canadian leave were on their way. They were Cfn W. Gibb and H. J. Hunt. The month of March, our first full month in the new theatre, closed with the unit in high spirits and quite happy in their new surroundings.

1 April found us still in Belgium, but ready for our first North-West Europe move, which finally came on 2 April, when our tank transporters carrying two recovery tanks, the D-8 Caterpillar and some tank engines, tied in with the BCD tank transporter convoy at 0600 hrs. The men were quite downhearted at the thought of leaving the nice homes they had lived in for the past four weeks. On Wednesday, 4 April, the main body departed from Roulers, heading for Nijmegen by way of Denyze, Ghent, Antwerp, Breda, Tilberg, and Hertogenbosch. At Antwerp, the unit had the interesting experience of passing in convoy through the large Ghent vehicular tunnel under the Waal River (the Dutch name for the Rhine). At this point, the Rhine, now the Waal, became the Scheldt estuary, and is very wide. Arriving in Nijmegen in the early hours of the morning, the unit was set up in three streets in the centre of Nijmegen and the men were once again, to their delight, billeted in private homes.

At this point in the unit’s history, a pause is necessary to comment on the large amount of extra work handled by the orderly room. No one else in the unit will admit that the orderly room does anything but lose important papers, but here in 21 Army Group, we found ourselves surrounded by a multitude of new forms and returns, and so the orderly room staff worked overtime on workshop activity reports, daily armoured fighting vehicle states, major equipments repaired in the last 24 hours, weekly activity reports, weekly LAD personnel returns, and so on...

On Monday, 9 April, we were warned to expect a visit from Brig Grant, DDME, First Canadian Army, so an intensive cleanup and paint up programme immediately got underway. When on Tuesday, 10 April, Brig Grant arrived, the shop was in A-1 condition and we were highly complimented both on the shop and the work being turned out. Brig Grant was accompanied by Col J. W. Bishop, DDME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps and Lt-Col L. D. McGee, CREME, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. Later in the day, the official party had lunch at the posh Brass Hat club in Nijmegen, the former home of the Jergens people of Jergens lotion fame, and to this luncheon the OCs of the unit and of 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, also in Nijmegen, were invited.

On 11 April, Lt J.I.Z. Valiquette, our wireless EME, was given the additional duties of EME (Telecommunications) at Headquarters RCEME, replacing Capt R. K. Holford(?), who left for the UK on leave. Another move appeared imminent when we were notified to have an advance party sent to Wehl, in the East of Holland. The next day, 12 April at 2030 hours, the AWD consisting of Capt L. K. Shrum(?), Lt Bowman, and 115 other ranks left for Wehl and accepted all work in that area until the main body arrived on 14 April. In that two-day period, the AWD became overloaded with tank work, mostly resulting from recovery who brought in several tanks.

On the arrival of the main shop at Wehl in the afternoon of 14 April, the AWD immediately began packing and at 2300 hours left for Arnhem, which had just been taken the day before. We were keeping right on the Hun's tail at this point. The people in the Wehl area had never before seen armour, as the Germans had used horse-drawn equipment, and our heavy recovery and armoured fighting vehicle equipment caused them to gape in amazement. The countryside here too was a maze of camouflaged trenches and huge anti-tank ditches, none of which the enemy had a chance to use. The roads were lined on both sides with slit trenches at about five-yard intervals, and about every hundred yards was a camouflaged vehicle shelter. Our air power seems to have had Jerry thoroughly frightened.

The main shop stayed in Wehl for only two days (15 and 16 April) and on 17 April arrived in Arnhem where it occupied several streets. The Germans had evacuated all civilians from Arnhem, and since then had systematically looted all the homes. This, coupled with their earlier shelling, had left the houses in a rather a mess, but even so the men found a lot of furniture intact and made themselves very comfortable in the homes surrounding and in the workshop area.

In the meantime, the AWD which had reached Arnhem on 15 April moved just north of Arnhem to MR E760783, where it stayed until the afternoon of 18 April. During this time, on 16 April, an advance party was sent to reconnoitre an area near Barneveld, some 40 miles north of Arnhem, and on the way to Rear Headquarters 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, was mortared and fired on by the enemy who were attempting to cut the road to the brigade. Fortunately, no casualties resulted. The AWD was to remain in its temporary location north of Arnhem for one day only, but so much "A" vehicle work came in that the section did not move until the afternoon of 18 April. One of the jobs received was a flail tank of the Lothian and Border Yeomanry, RAC. This was the first flail encountered by the unit and the crew was submerged with questions from our men.

The main shop remained in Arnhem from the afternoon of 16 April until the afternoon of 19 April, just three days. During this period the "B" vehicle shop was extremely busy and CREME ordered us to set up division BLP no. 3 (3 DBP). We mounted a six-man guard on this dump, which was set up in a roundabout near the main shop. While in Arnhem, the unit had a change of officers when Lt Kidd came from 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop and Lt Leckie left for 58 LAD attached to 17<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA. Lt Kidd was given the duties of adjutant and headquarters security officer. Capt Waite, "B" vehicle officer, was also placed in charge of the armament and small arms sections that were formerly in charge of Lt Leckie.

When the workshop moved to Barneveld on the afternoon of 19 April, all BLRs [vehicles beyond local repair] were turned in to 3 DBP and a rear party was left to guard it until it could be cleared by the corps recovery company. We reached Barneveld (MR E537975) at 1600 hours on Thursday, 19 April, and sat

down in two large fields. The AWD was now just 300 yards further north, in a woods on the opposite side of the road. Two nights before, the enemy had infiltrated into an artillery unit lines nearby and had inflicted casualties, so we mounted a very heavy armed guard and sited weapon pits, but fortunately no trouble was experienced.

The AWD, which had been in its present spot near Barneveld since 19 April, had been extremely busy with tank work and had received twelve Stuart reconnaissance tanks from "G" squadron 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Tank Delivery Regiment. These tanks required towing hooks welded on the rear. Three other Sherman tanks from the Lord Strathcona's Horse that had been blocking the up-route from Arnhem had been brought in by the AWD recovery section. By 20 April, the AWD had 26 tanks in the yard for repair.

We were again ordered to set up a DBP, this time 4 DBP. It was situated in the AWD area. Capt E. C. Dodds, RCOC, arrived at the unit on 21 April to take charge of the stores section, which had been left without an officer due to the promotion of Capt Westcott to Major. Capt Dodds had been with the unit previously, from January to March 1945.

On 21 April, all work in the main shop was cleared up, and the BLRs evacuated to 4 DBP, in preparation for a move of 150 miles to Northern Holland. The AWD had so much tank work in hand that it was ordered to remain behind and move later. Finally, at 0500 hours on 22 April, in the rain, the unit left for Heerenven in Northern Holland. The rain stopped by 0900 hours, and we made good time to Meppel, little more than halfway toward destination. At Meppel we should have gone north-west, but the provost on duty sent us north-east after a discussion during which he insisted his orders were correct. So we reluctantly turned north-east on an unknown route, which gave us no idea as to our final disposition, but about half an hour later the brigade liaison officer caught us and informed us that the division area had been changed and 5<sup>th</sup> Division would now be concentrated around Groningen, so we continued on our way, in now excellent weather, arriving at Haren (MR Q240090) at 1500 hours, logging 128 miles. We sat down in a small field, unsuitable for work and were told not to unpack.

Two days later, on 24 April, we moved eight miles south to a spot on a large airfield near Eelde at MR Q228050. It was ideal as a workshop site. There were also billets for the men in various brick buildings on the airfield. The AWD, meantime, had left Barneveld at 0900 hours on 23 April, and arrived at the main shop in the afternoon, while we were still at Heren. They remained packed and moved with us to Eelde the next morning. 4 DBP at Barneveld was left in charge of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop advance party. The unit was now whole again, after being split for 15 days.

The victory loan drive was meanwhile underway, and when it ended on 5 May, the unit had bought \$11,500 of bonds for 105.5% of our quota. This figure is for the RCEME personnel only, and does not include the RCOC personnel with the unit. RCEME itself ended in second place among the services and regiments, second only to the RCAMC.

After four days rain, the tank section moved five tanks into the hangar on the airport and the men who were billeted in the hangar were dispersed in some houses partly occupied by the Lord Strathconas Horse. Leave to the UK had been restricted to 5% of the unit away at one time, and so the allotments had been very small. Another order allowed men to visit friends on the continent, and a number of personnel requested permission to revisit Roullers. An experiment in reinforcements was tried at this time, when CREME decreed that eight LADs (5, 53, 56, 57, 70, 71, 72, and 76) would send an extra copy of their AFW 3609B to this unit. We consolidated it and sent one copy to ARCO. Reinforcements for these eight LADs arrive at the workshop together with our own reinforcements every Thursday, and we are then responsible for posting these new men to the LADs. At first the scheme was not successful, as we had difficulty in distinguishing between our own reinforcements and those of the LADs, but in the next two weeks, the plan was modified and LAD reinforcements came in so marked. The scheme, by the third week was working very well and the reinforcement situation has never been better.

Just after our move to Eelde, we were notified that Maj R. J. Birss had been finally posted to Headquarters RCEME as 2i/c, and Capt E. C. Cox was given temporary command of the unit. Subsequently, Capt Cox on 1 May, was promoted to A/Maj with effect from 1 April 1945, and given command of the shop. Another change of officers occurred when Lt Barton from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Recovery Company exchanged jobs with Lt F. H. Bowman, our recovery officer. It was a straight switch between units. Capt G. C. Shand, the unit paymaster, left for UK leave on 2 May, and Lt J.I.Z. Valiquette left for Paris leave on 1 May. Both, then, were in the capitals of the two countries and were able to take part in the peace celebrations when the good news arrived on 4 May and 7 May of the surrender of the various enemy groups.

On 3 May, Lt D. H. Isbester arrived from 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, CBRD to bring the unit up to its full complement of officers. A minor annoyance at this time was the cancellation of the individual purchase of £0-4-6 postal notes for cigarettes. We were now forced to hold cigarette parades in conjunction with pay parades, in order to obtain nominal roles signed by the paymaster to the effect that the money for cigarettes had been drawn from pay and allowances. The weather having been good until 27 April suddenly turned poor, and we had ten days of rain, hail, snow, and cold winds. But, on 7 May, the weather took a turn for the better again. Unfortunately, the spell of wet weather had served to turn the airfield into a quagmire, churned into deep mud by the tanks and recovery vehicles.

VE-Day (8 May) dawned clear and warm, and the unit was given the afternoon off. All personnel assembled in front of the hangar and heard Churchill's speech over the public address system. The speech was followed by a double issue of rum. Work went on the next day just as if nothing had happened. There is no change in unit morale. It was difficult indeed to believe that everything was all over. In a group of reinforcements received on 3 May, we discovered a barber and he was immediately set up as the regimental barber, something badly needed here as we have a normal strength of nearly 300 men. The first change from war to peace came when CREME allowed us to cut our working day by one hour. By agreement with 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, both units will take the hour off from 1600 to 1700 hrs. One hour's drill from 0800 to 0900 hours has also been ordered. By 10 May, work began to slow down in the tank section, as replacement parts for tanks were not been received.

The division move on 22 April had left tanks and vehicles strewn over the 130 miles or more of the route, and recovery had been and still was working long hours in recovering the various equipments, plus a few others scattered over Northern Holland as a result of the final few days of operations. On 12 May, the last officer to get privilege leave, Lt Kidd, left for England. There were still about 80 men to go on leave, but CREME asked for the complete number still to go and hoped to get our allotment increased.

Word was received on 14 May of a division inspection and march past, the inspection to take place on the airfield. All vehicles were given a painting and a thorough cleaning and when, on 23 May, the inspection took place, our unit looked its very best. The big event was called "Exercise Finale", an appropriate name, and was an impressive sight. The salute was taken by General H.D.G. Crerar, GOC First Canadian Army.

Plans are formulated for unit lectures, and Capt Schrum was instructed to attend a two-day Educational Instructor Course in Groningen. During the last ten days of the month, Capt Waite and Lt Kidd attended a three-day course in Groningen on Rehabilitation. These officers will be lecturing every day on rehabilitation and the return to civilian life.

Unit morale at this time was high, for the Dutch here have treated us like conquering heroes and several section parties and dances have been held. The elections were in the offing at this point, and on 22 May, Capt E. C. Dodds, the unit returning officer, attended an election conference at Hengelo about the provincial election.

Three 8<sup>th</sup> NBH tanks managed to get themselves stuck in a bog, and after an unsuccessful attempt to extricate them, recovery was forced to call in the engineers to build a road into them. The ground looked solid, but there was a crust of about 30 inches, and just wet mud beneath it. Thus the recovery tank as well

as the original three had broken through the crust. After nearly a week, the tanks were successfully recovered by the expedient of laying a platform of planking to the tanks from the rubble roadbed laid down by the engineers. It was an excellent job of recovery and they deserve praise for their work.

Voting in the provincial election closed on 4 June with 52 men having voted. The federal election closed on 9 June, and in this election 139 men voted, approximately 50% of the unit. Rehabilitation lectures were now being given daily by Capt Shrum, Capt Waite, Lts Kidd, Barton, and Isbester. Work has suffered accordingly with time of for lectures, drill and with a shorter working day, but even so "B" vehicle section was the only section that was really busy.

Preparations for the turn-in of equipment are underway, and all armour is to be turned in to the division Finito Park situated on the airfield. RCEME is to be held responsible for checking the state of preservation of the various equipments turned in. By 8 June when this history closes, the park was almost in readiness and all routes had been marked. It will be an interesting site.

### General

**Amusements** - We have been fortunate in having with us a SA supervisor, Mr. Bissett, and the unit has, wherever conditions permitted, had two movies per week. In our last location at Eelde, the supervisor set up the reading and writing room, and has supplied prizes, tea, etc., for the various parties. Liberty trucks have been run regularly from Eelde to Groningen, and the men have taken advantage of this privilege. Prior to that, in Roullers and Nijmegen, the men had ample facilities for amusement and relaxation. Canteen supplies have not been good, but have been sufficient.

**Leaves** - By 8 June, allotments had been received sufficient to complete the whole unit in privilege leaves and several 72-hour leaves have also been available to Brussels.

**Morale** - Has never been higher. The novelty of sleeping in good billets, leaves to the UK and the difference in fighting conditions, supplies, better equipments, improved reinforcement situation, beverages, etc., of all contributed to the keeping up of morale. Another contribution was the increased chance of rotational leave and the speeding up of normal mail, both due to the difference in the two theatres of war, CMF and NWE.

**Health** - In the three months spent in Europe, the unit health has been consistently good. Since 29 March, Capt Harrison, CDC, has been with the unit and dental work in the unit is now in excellent condition.

**Reinforcements** - Have been continually good and the men themselves have been of the satisfactory standard. Even with recent rotational leaves, repatriation, and CFEF drafts, the unit is still up to strength.

**Sports Programme** - We have done little in the way of sports because of the continued pressure of work. The division scheduled a tabloid sports meet for Saturday, 9 June, but RCEME for the first time did not participate. Each section however, has softball equipment that is used frequently. Softball games between sections were planned in May, but rain and work cancelled most of these, only three being completed.

**Trades Training** - The unit has always had a fairly large trades training programme, and in the period spent in Europe, we have completed the following tests:

Trade	Took Test	Passed	Failed
Driver mechanic	65	37	28
Fitter	2	2	
Welder	1	1	
Vehicle Mechanic Motor Vehicle	20	19	1

Vehicle Mechanic Armoured Fighting Vehicle	18	18	
Motor Mechanic	4	4	
Electrician	4	4	

**Telecommunications Section** - this section, under command of Lt J.I.Z. Valiquette, consists of one officer, one Sgt, one Cpl, and nine other ranks and has not been specifically mentioned in the unit history has been consistently busy. During our stay in Europe, the section has, on occasion, been attached out in turn to the armoured regiments in the brigade to make routine checks on wireless equipment. They have also repaired many welfare sets.

**Unit Equipment** - The supply of equipment has been much better in North-West Europe. Since arriving in Europe we have received a new “ZL” Lorry, a “KL” machinery lorry, two 8-cwt wireless HUPs [Heavy Utility Personnel truck] (from (?) Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop), one new “M” lorry, received after VE-Day, and one new trailer, 15-cwt, vehicle servicing, which was badly needed and also received after VE-Day. The recovery section obtained one new Diamond T 6x4 transporter with a 40-ton trailer, two used Mack heavy breakdowns, and three Scammel 30-ton 6x4x8 transporters. Three 20-cwt trailers were also received.

Workshop equipment generally has been very satisfactory and there has been no adverse comment on any equipment presently held by the unit.

**Improvisations** - There were two noteworthy improvisations. One was the adding of armour plate shields on the noses of the Badger Flamethrower guns. This was done to prevent small arms fire entering the tank through the flamethrower opening. The other was the welding of the bulldozer blades onto the top of the tank on the long trip from Barneveld to Haren. This job caused considerable discussion in the unit, but Maj Cox proved his point when both tanks were ditched on the way up without the blades moving the slightest. Normally the blades had been carried on transporters.

## 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop, RCEME

The main body landed at Marseille over a two-day period, 28 February and 1 March, at a camp about eighteen miles from Marseille. The only missing personnel were Lt Kidd with a batman-driver, 15-cwt and trailer. He had been left as rear party officer in Leghorn, and landing on 3 March, was just one day behind the unit, since the main body stayed in the first staging camp until 2 March. From the moment we landed in France, it was apparent that everything connected with the move had been planned well in advance of our arrival on the continent. We convoyed from the South of France through to Belgium and back into France again to our destination at Commines, travelling on roads that were very well marked with “GF” signs (for Exercise “Goldflake”) and through towns that had Provost at every turn guiding us through. The trip through France took six days and we arrived at Commines very tired indeed. But the people made us so very welcome that in an hour’s time some of the lads were all spruced up and out with a “friend” on one arm. One large-sized job done in Marseille by the orderly room was the changing of Italian money to French currency, which involved a tremendous sum. The long move was made in good order, convoy discipline being good, and no mishaps or breakdowns occurred on the trip.

In Commines, France we were royally welcomed, and treated like heroes; the men were billeted in private homes, the filth and mud of Italy were far behind, and life was good. The cafés had beer (the Belgian beer was much better) and unit morale went sky-high.

The stores section, in Commines, developed problems of its own, for although apparently supplies were plentiful, our demands on 205 Sub-Park were not filled for some time, so the section went on frequent

expeditions to Ordnance Field Park installations in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps until DDOS requested that they discontinue the practice. It was both interesting and gratifying after Italy to see the abundance of spares in these units. An expedition to a 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps unit was arranged for the purpose of allowing our storemen to see and inspect a Norton engine. The last one received by this section was in May 1944, and some of the storemen had never seen one.

The short time spent in Commines was devoted almost entirely to the improvement and expansion of France-Canada relations. The workshop site in Commines was excellent, with all sections undercover in a large factory. We sent crews to 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop for training in tank work, as it had been decided that this workshop would in future be responsible for the repairs to 8<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment's self-propelled guns. We stayed three enjoyable weeks in Commines, and all were sorry to leave.

Our first move in operations in Europe was to Nijmegen in Holland, and at this point the spare situation improved steadily until, by the early part of May, the stores section had a greater quantity and variety of stores than at any time since the departure from England. Although, at times, it was necessary, due to the rapid advance of the division through Holland, to make trips of up to 70 miles to the Sub-Park, in general the stores section gave faster and more complete service to the other sections of the workshop than ever before.

In Commines and in Nijmegen, the unit had received several leave allotments for the UK and everyone was most optimistic about an early leave in Blighty. The unit health has been consistently good, only one man being hospitalized at this point. The first two men to leave the unit were returned to Canada on rotational leave.

Another Commines incident was the failure of the OC, Maj J. M. Harding to return from leave. It was later discovered that he had been hospitalized in England and the proper authorities had not been notified, but through no fault of Maj Harding. He was finally returned to the unit in Groningen in Northern Holland.

Two days after we arrived in Nijmegen, we were inspected by Brig G. M. Grant, DDME First Canadian Army. The highlight of the inspection was the medical inspection room, which was spotless and painted blue and white. We were highly complimented on the condition of the unit. We stayed in Nijmegen for two weeks, and while here, the men were again billeted in private homes.

We left Nijmegen for Kilder, in Southeast Holland and stayed there for four days. On the last day, the AWD under Capt Twist, left for Arnhem on 15 April, and operated for just four days, but they were hectic days. For that period, they moved into Arnhem and then to Deelon on 18 April. At Deelon, the stand-to order was received, and the AWD hastily dug in. The 6-pounder and a Wasp [flamethrower] in the yard were readied for action. The stand-to ended an hour later. Before lunch could be eaten, they were ordered to move to Otterloo, but shortly after arriving there, the rear brigade headquarters that they had moved in with, was sent to join main brigade headquarters. The AWD were then left exposed, so moved for the third time that day to join "A" echelon of the Irish Regiment of Canada.

The men finally ate their lunch five hours late, but it was topped off with a double rum issue, so everyone was happy. While at Arnhem, the AWD was set up in the yard of the broadcasting station from which Mary of Arnhem had poured forth propaganda. Capt Twist had the doubtful pleasure of sleeping in Mary's bed. On the fourth day, 19 April, 1<sup>st</sup> Division had come up on our flank and the enemy danger was over. The AWD then moved to Barneveld to join the main body. In the meantime, the main shop moved from Kilder to Arnhem, staying there four days, and then moved north to Barneveld. We stayed there another four days and then moved over 150 miles to Wolvega on 21 April, where we stayed for four days and then moved to Groningen, our present location.

In Groningen, we were cited in a large sugar factory, a good workshop site, but the men were in tents. We remained here until 24 May, when we moved to the southern edge of Groningen. Here the men were

billeted in untenanted houses once more and the unit, although under cover, was spread over two streets. We lacked a place for overflow work, but they are now sending the extra vehicles to 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, and they are brought back here when we are ready to work on them.

The recovery section has been kept busy with people who don't yet realize that the canals of Holland are for barges and not military vehicles. The good roads have considerably reduced the number of vehicles bogged down, but have added to the number unable to take corners at high speed, resulting in a recovery job.

All in all, the duration of our stay in Europe has been interesting, exciting, and thoroughly enjoyable and has been a real pleasure - in no way comparable with our Italian stay.

### **General Notes**

**Amusements** - The chief forms of recreation have been movies and dances. When the unit was in Commines, weekly unit dances were held for all ranks. The civil population were extremely responsive and the parties were all marked successes. In Nijmegen, two unit dances were held in the men's mess hall, which was fairly suitable. The sergeants had a fine mess in a café in Nijmegen and they had two parties. On moving from there, operations and locations prevented further dances until the unit settled in Groningen. Three extremely good dances were held for the men in a local ballroom before it was requisitioned as an officer's club. At the present time, dances are held every Saturday evening in the men's mess hall, a former gymnasium. These are well attended and enjoyed by all. The sergeants and officers have also had parties in their respective messes. Altogether, the civilians have been found to be most cooperative and enjoyable company, a situation not widely found in Italy.

Movies have been regularly showing twice weekly, when operations permitted, by Supervisor Stephenson of the YMCA. These have generally been held in the men's mess hall, although a real theatre was used in Commines, France. The pictures are usually old and battered, but attendance in general is good.

Special entertainments have been arranged occasionally including a large concert staged by the people of Commines for the unit, an ENSA show in Nijmegen and an evening of boxing put on by Dutch civilians in Groningen.

**Unit Inspections** - Only one formal inspection of the unit has been held since landing in North-West Europe. This was carried out on 10 April by Brig Grant, CBE, DDME First Canadian Army. The shop was then at Nijmegen, set up in a fair location in the yard of a large electrical plant. Brig Grant was accompanied on the inspection by Col J. W. Bishop, OBE, DDME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps and Lt-Col L. D. McGee, MBE, CREME 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. The brigadier congratulated the officers and men on a fine showing, stressing particularly the multitude of signs and the layout of the shop which used all available space to the maximum advantage.

A most interesting incident took place when Field Marshal Montgomery visited 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. On that day, a party of one officer and 50 other ranks were sent to line part of the route of the visiting party. On approaching the unit representatives, the Field Marshal stopped his Jeep, gathered the men around and spoke most informally and pleasantly a few words of welcome. He was sent off with a rousing cheer.

Another informal visit was made on 2 June by Maj-Gen B. M. Hoffmeister, GOC, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. He spoke to the men of the unit on the occasion of his leaving to command the CFEF force. His farewell talk was highly complementary to the shop and everyone in it. He was wished Godspeed by Maj Harding and three heartfelt cheers were given by all as a tribute to a highly respected commander.

**Unit Functions** - A formal church parade and ceremonial parade was held in Commines in March. The unit led by the pipe band of the Cape Breton Highlanders marched from the shop to the mess hall where a church service was held. Then they marched to the town square, where after a brief ceremonial march drill by the band, the acting OC, accompanied by the town mayor and members of his council, laid a



wreath on the local monument to the Great War dead. The unit then marched to a cemetery where the mayor placed flowers on the graves of British soldiers who fell there in 1940. The parade was cheered by very large crowds throughout. A newsreel was made and some of the personnel who viewed it at the local theatre later reported that it was very good.

The workshop also took part in the inspection and mounted march-past held by 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division at Groningen after the cessation of hostilities. The GOC First Canadian Army took the salute and was highly impressed by the turnout.

## **5 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to HQ Squadron, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division**

5 LAD arrived at Marseille on the 21 February 1945, after a successful crossing by LST from Italy. Upon arrival, the LAD was split up into two parties, one going with the advance party and the other part with the main body of vehicles. Our first staging area was approximately eighteen miles north of Marseille. The convoy was uneventful for the first day's travel. Our second staging area was at Valence after travelling from 0500 hours until 1600 hrs. There was one vehicle to be towed due to a gas line stoppage. Our third day's convoy took us to St. Rambert, passing through the well-known city of Lyons where we received a grand reception by the people. The roads were excellent, particularly after the Italian roads. On our third day, we started at 0600 hours and arrived at 1600 hours. The officer's mess kitchen lorry broke down and had to be towed to our staging camp where the trouble, a leaky radiator, was repaired. We left at 0600 hours on our fourth day's convoy and arrived at our staging area north of Les Laumes at 1400 hrs. Minor repairs were carried out on the road. Reveille was at 0400 hours on the fifth day and we pulled out at 0600 hrs. We arrived at Melun at 1430 hours, which was east of Paris by approximately 30 miles. On this day, only one motorcycle broke down which was put on the back of the breakdown and later BLR'd to a British workshop. Our sixth day's convoy brought us to Cambrai. The spirits of the LAD were very good and the security was perfect as everybody realized the necessity for it. Reveille was at 0600 hours for our seventh day, the weather was very chilly, and we moved off at 0830 hrs. The signposts on this day were really reminders of the last war, the names of Mons, Ypres, Le Quesnoy, and Amiens appearing frequently. The route to date was excellently marked and one could not go wrong. Many cemeteries appeared along the side of the roads, being cemeteries of the last war. We crossed the French-Belgium border early in the day and arrived at Dixmude at 1330 hours, 28 February 1945, which was our concentration area.

At Dixmude, the LAD was stationed in a fairly large wagon shed with very good covering. Personnel were billeted in private homes, which made everybody happy after roughing it for the long trip. Work now started to pour in due to the trip from Marseille. Parts were very hard to get, but on the whole it was much better than the parts situation in Italy. Leaves started to the UK and this helped the morale of the LAD immensely, as most personnel had either wives or relatives or friends there from their previous stay in the country. The war news at this time was very good and the end seemed at last to be in sight. Sports were a highlight although mostly played after supper because of the amount of work to be done. The auxiliary services did a very good job of entertaining in the way of cinemas.

From Dixmude, we moved to Ewijk and stayed there for two weeks. At this place, Capt Horvath, OC 5 LAD, left for Canada. Capt E. F. Lee took over and work carried on as usual. Our new Mack heavy breakdown was exchanged for a Diamond T medium breakdown. The weather turned quite warm and the balls and bats really came into the limelight and softball took the lead as the favourite sport. We then moved to Arnhem and were there for three days. From Arnhem we move to a spot in the woods on the road to Appeldoorn. The Germans had only been pushed out from there the day previous, so a stand-to was ordered in the morning and heavy guards were employed. Our next move took us to Barneveld where we stayed for another three days. These all being short convoys, there was very little repair work to be done. At Barneveld, softball took top place again as there were numerous places to play.

The next move was a long one from Barneveld to Groningen in North-east Holland. We were fortunate to secure excellent billets for the men in this location. A programme of vehicle painting and inspections was started, which included the LAD equipment as well as the rear division headquarters vehicles.

Hostilities ceased on 4 May 1945 in Holland, and everyone celebrated this important event. The LAD remained in Groningen and entertainment was extremely good. There was swimming, horse riding, sailing, dances, and shows. Unit sports took top priority with everyone attending. Bath parades and swim parades are attended by all. A large representation of the LAD attended the GOC's church parade and march past. An inspection by Gen Crerar, our army commander, was the next large parade, and all vehicles and personnel did credit to the division. A reinforcement storeman and fitter arrived, bringing the LAD up to strength. There was a rehabilitation questionnaire to complete as to whether you would volunteer for the CFEF, COF, or go directly home on repatriation to Canada. Out of this came the volunteering of three members of the LAD to go to the Pacific theatre and they have already departed to Canada. Educational classes started and to date a lot of valuable information has been received on rehabilitation.

On 17 June, the LAD moved from Groningen out of the gymnasium to the other end of town in a suburb called Helpman (?). At present the work is coming in very fast and it keeps all personnel busy. We are short one driver-mechanic and one vehicle mechanic.

The A/GOC gave a lecture to the officers of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division and told them that it would likely be sometime before 5<sup>th</sup> Division personnel would get home. The feelings of the LAD were pretty low when they heard this news, but after the first shock of it they have resigned themselves and surprisingly are taking it very well.

The morale of the present is very good and the health of the LAD is excellent.

## **57 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division Signals**

The main body of the unit and all its equipment arrived in Marseille from Italy on 28 February 1945. The staging camp was located eighteen miles north of the city, and all personnel were confined to this area. The LAD was too busy with maintenance and minor repairs to worry about seeing Marseille. Cambrai, France, was given as our dispersal point when we broke camp at 0600 hours on 2 March 1945. We had gone less than ten miles when the breakdowns began. The first was a caravan trailer with the frame broken. This proved to be the most common trouble. Several trailers were left en route, and the majority that reached Holland had been repaired, including the GOC's. The LAD breakdown truck could not travel with the convoy because of its many stops, towing, and its slowness. It carried a crew of three, including a Sergeant, and a good stock of spare parts. A Cpl fitter accompanied the Scammel on a motorcycle. Morale on the trip was good, partly due to the efficiency of the planners. The sign posting of the route and staging camps were far better than we expected. The spirit was good in spite of the meals that were served on the trip, they were almost all meat and vegetables, even for breakfast at times. The accident rate was almost nil. One truckload of Americans ran into an armoured command vehicle and wrecked their truck, but there was no damage to the armoured command vehicle. From Cambrai we drove to Dixmude, Belgium. The LAD set up two miles from Dixmude in the village of Beerst. We were welcomed into clean, friendly homes that reminded us of our own. The LAD started work in a schoolyard. Leaves to the UK were started, and all were able to get them in the next few months. Visits were arranged for personnel to see the Vimy Memorial, but other short leaves were not permitted due to the amount of work on hand.

On 28 March, we moved to Ewijk near Nijmegen, Holland. The move was probably the longest single day trip we have made yet as we were on the road for sixteen hours. There were no spare armoured command vehicle tires in the convoy, and two blowouts caused considerable trouble. One wheel and tire assembly was exchanged at an Air Force station and the other was obtained from ordnance. On 12 April

1945 we started to move north into action with stops at Didam, Arnhem, Otterloo, Barneveld, and Heerenven reaching Groningen on 22 April. It was at Otterloo on 17-18 April that the LAD contacted the enemy, the only time in this theatre. One man, Cfn H. Leclair, was badly wounded and has since died. During the night, our camp was under small arms and mortar fire and in the morning it was discovered that the Germans had taken up positions in houses a hundred yards from the nearest LAD vehicle. A lively encounter followed in which WO II Burton and Cfn Leclair, Crittenden, and Guthrie took part. When the Germans had been disposed of, the LAD set to work. One radiator was removed and repaired and several other vehicles fixed. Three vehicles were evacuated to Arnhem the same day.

With the termination of the war, the important thing for the men was to get home. Two left for Canada in May and five during June. Of these, three are headed for the Far East. The cessation of hostilities seem to make the repair of vehicles less important, but it did not decrease the amount of work required of us. In fact, it was necessary for us to carry out a larger inspection programme than we have done before and assist in preservation, besides handling about the same amount of repair work as before. Since VE-Day the LAD, as a unit, has taken no time off except Saturday afternoons and Sundays, and some men have had to work on Sundays. However, there have been days when it was possible for four to six men to go on the afternoon sports parade that is held daily by Signals. Every possible advantage has taken of swimming and other recreational facilities.

In June, 57 LAD ceased to look after the main division headquarters' equipment except tanks, armoured cars, and scout cars. This reduced our work considerably, but vehicles have been added to the Signal's strength from units and headquarters that had been disbanded. All these vehicles are given initial checks and some require extensive first echelon repair. Leaves to the UK have started again, the unit is gradually going home, Groningen is pleasant, work is plentiful. Morale is excellent.

## **77 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Park Squadron, RCE**

This detachment arrived in the North-West European theatre of operations with its parent unit, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Park Squadron, RCE, in the second week of March 1945 and was billeted for a period of one month in the city of Ledegham, Belgium.

After a year and a half of campaigning in Italy and the two-week sea and road trip from one theatre to another, the overwhelming hospitality of the people of Belgium raised the morale of the men to a point never reached since the unit left Canada in the fall of 1941. Within three days of our arrival, all the men with wives in England were on their way to the UK on nine days leave. As this meant that four of the thirteen men in the unit were away at once, and the remainder had to work night and day to put the motor transport of the divisional engineers in a battle-worthy condition after the long road trip from Western Italy. But, with quantities of beer available and the knowledge that they too would soon be away on UK leave, the men worked with unlimited energy. Unit dances and auxiliary services movies were provided to entertain the men when they could be persuaded to leave their civilian billets.

In early April, the unit moved into Holland to the Nijmegen area. Here the living conditions were more like those in Italy, but the possibility of impending operations and the thought of proving to the rest of the Canadian army just how good 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps was kept the unit morale at a very high pitch.

The LAD with 4<sup>th</sup> Field Park Squadron supported the division's field squadrons in the assault on the Arnhem area. In preparation for the latter exercise, the LAD was located for a week in the town of Valborg, a half-mile from the Rhine River. In the actual battle, the support was rendered from the towns of Didam and Arnhem itself. From here, the LAD followed the sappers to the Barneveld area. A minimum of work was necessary during these operations. Most of the work was done in situ as recovery was severely restricted.

From Barneveld the LAD moved to Groningen, its present location, to support sapper operations in the Appingadam (?) and Deefzijl (?) area. Excellent billets were obtained here. The LAD's work consisted mainly of recovering vehicles from the numerous canals.

The work done in this theatre has been greatly facilitated by the availability of spare parts. Little or no improvisation has been necessary. The LAD has now completed its classification of all the divisional engineers' vehicles preparatory to turning them in, now that hostilities have ceased.

Two other ranks have been struck off strength to the Canadian Occupation Force, and the remainder are carrying on with regular RCEME work and in addition are commencing vocational training courses to better fit themselves for the return to civilian life.

### **53 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Lord Strathcona's Horse)**

It is somewhat difficult to write a comprehensive history of the LAD functions since arrival in North-West Europe, as the regiment to which the LAD is attached was involved in only one major operation - a drive from Arnhem to Harderwijk in Holland.

At the beginning of the operation, it was not definitely known how to employ the LAD and the recovery tanks to the best advantage. The operation was almost completed before the most advantageous arrangement was worked out.

It may be of interest to compare briefly the differences in RCEME first echelon operations in Italy and in North-West Europe. In Italy, the policy found to be most convenient, was that of having a fairly large part of the LAD forward with "A1" echelon on a level with the recovery tanks, which were based well behind "F" echelon, but at the forward bound of the "A1" echelon areas. This arrangement allowed for free road movement of the recovery tanks to forward areas with very little traffic interference, and at the same time gave first echelon repair facilities in a forward area, eliminating the necessity of towing vehicle casualties over narrow, crowded, rear-area roads.

In North-West Europe, however, it was found that good roads were much more numerous and wider, allowing for two-way traffic. As a result of "A" echelon being well forward, and there being few traffic difficulties, the "A1" echelon LAD was disbanded and the LAD was operated as one complete group in "A" echelon. The recovery tanks were moved forward and operated immediately in the rear of the reserve squadron. This permitted rapid locating and recovery of casualties. Little faith was put in casualties being reported over the air, most casualties being located visually by following the centre line. The difficulty with reporting over the air was that the net is so busy with action traffic that there is no time to squeeze in a casualty report. Another drawback was that the squadron commander seldom knew anything about a tank casualty other than that a tank had fallen behind or had been knocked out.

Operating well forward meant that the recovery crews were quite frequently fired upon, and on several occasions were called upon to engage the enemy. During the one large-scale operation, the recovery tanks and the unit fitters (in 15-cwt armoured trucks) captured over 30 enemy infantry and beat off one attack on "A1 Hard" echelon.

At this point, it should be noted that the recovery tanks in use were two standard Sherman Mark V tanks and not armoured recovery vehicles. These tanks carried almost a full complement of armament and ammunition, and the crews were quite capable of handling the guns, thus having quite good protection. This type of tank was found to be quite satisfactory for recovery work, there being few cases where an armoured recovery vehicle had to be called in from the workshop. It is the opinion of the writer that a suitable recovery combination is one armoured recovery vehicle and two Sherman Vs.

The foregoing gives a general review of the recovery activities of the regimental recovery tanks, which were manned by regimental drivers and operators, with the crew commanders being RCEME sergeants, and which came under command of the LAD officer. The armourers were provided with a three-ton lorry from the regiment and travelled and worked with the LAD. Thus all RCEME personnel attached to the regiment were grouped together under the EME.

As a general rule, it was found that the LAD was busier in times of rest than during action. In rest, there were tank and armament inspections, small arms inspections, and "B" vehicle inspections, on top of the normal repair work on such equipments. The tank auxiliary generators usually required complete overhauls after each series of major operations. There were occasional modification programs to carry out, such as modifying the Stuart M3A3 tanks as ammunition and petrol carriers. The LAD stripped and rebuilt six of these tanks in ten days.

During action, only essential work was done to return "vehicle-off-the-road (VOR)" casualties to the road. The time was used by the LAD to "put our own house in order". LAD vehicles and equipment were checked and overhauled and any outstanding work completed.

It may be of interest to note that this unit had a Lorry, 3-ton, 4x4, Machinery, CAS, which was not on the war establishment. During the whole of the time in the Central Mediterranean Force, and in North-west Europe, one of the fitters spent his full time manufacturing tools, couplings, flanges, hydro-burners, nozzles, rings, and many such parts that could not be obtained in any other manner. Without the service of such lorries in the armoured LADs, there would have been a considerably greater strain on the second echelon workshop lorries, which were already overworked. It is considered that this piece of equipment is invaluable to the efficient functioning of a type "C" LAD.

One piece of equipment that proved a source of trouble was the Tractor, Breakdown, Heavy, 6x4, Mack. It made an excellent highway vehicle but was useless in mud, even when fitted with a set of tracks. It could not cover ground that the ordinary 4x4 lorry could pass over, and was subject to too many breakages of the winch mechanism and rear pulley mounting plates. The Diamond T 6x6 medium breakdown, even without chains, was exceptionally mobile in soft ground. Of interest to observe is that, during the eight months prior to the end of the war, all tank recovery was done with recovery tanks or D8 tractors, and not once was a breakdown lorry used, indicating a reduced importance of the heavy recovery vehicle on the war establishment. In the opinion of the writer, two medium breakdown vehicles are much more suitable to an armoured LAD.

During the operations in North-west Europe, there were no battle casualties to the LAD or the recovery tank personnel, and the general state of health of the men was quite good.

The policy on privilege leaves was to dispatch a higher percentage of RCEME personnel while the unit was in action, as the leave allotment from the regiment to non-fighting personnel was higher during operations. An additional reason was that the LAD had less work to do during an operation, as previously explained. Within two months of arriving in this theatre, all of the RCEME personnel had been granted leave to the UK.

The morale and esprit-de-corps of the LAD were always quite high. The men always showed remarkably good conduct and had a good "family spirit". The most important factor for the happiness of the men was that the detachment was always on good terms with the regiment - a factor that contributes so greatly to the success of an LAD.

## **56 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Governor General's Horse Guards)**

This unit landed in Marseilles in small groups and definitely not as an LAD. The men travelled through France to Belgium with various convoys, which to the men was a bit puzzling. However, all of them

pitched in and worked on any vehicles that happened to drop out of their particular convoy, acquitting themselves very well according to reports that were received later.

On arrival at Iseghem, Belgium, the men were billeted in homes. Also, they were informed that leave to UK would commence immediately, and that good beer was available in some 200 pubs. Morale (which had always been high) soared to a new height.

The LAD was located in an excellent spot in Iseghem, in a warehouse capable of holding 100 vehicles. A great deal of work was done in this location as our tanks (in excellent condition) were taken from the regiment, and replacements (of doubtful condition) were received from other regiments. The task of welding track on the tank hulls and turrets began. Extra help was required and promptly provided by HQ RCEME. Work was carried out on a 24-hour basis with three eight-hour shifts a day. Before this work was completed, the LAD moved to Nijmegen, and the regiment went into the line on Walcheren Island. Action was limited and work was carried at squadron locations until the track welding was completed. Here, the LAD resumed its operational organization. Under the LAD ("C" Type) commander, were fourteen unit mechanics, four battery men, all the charging equipment, and the recovery tank troop. This arrangement proved quite successful as regards the distribution of work, and fostered a spirit of co-operation between the unit and LAD.

When in action, the LAD operated from "A" echelon under the Armament/Quartermaster Sergeant. The LAD officer, with a 15-cwt truck, a jeep, three armoured fighting vehicle fitters, and the recovery tank operated from tactical regimental headquarters. The LAD officer personally supervised all recovery work, and the fitters were on hand for any possible immediate repairs that could be effected.

Communications were maintained with the LAD by wireless, and personal contact was made as often as the situation would allow. This system of operation proved quite efficient.

While operating on the island, the LAD had a fair amount of recovery work to do, as the tanks bogged down easily in the soft ground, and frequently the road shoulders gave way beneath them.

The LAD next moved to Arnhem, with a one-day stopover at Didam, and from here it was a rapid push through to the coast. The first stop was at Deelen, and the LAD operated wherever required. It was here that the LAD was formed into a fairly strong defence platoon, which participated in patrols and all "stand to". The enemy were not encountered, and no casualties were suffered by this unit. We next moved from Deelen to Ermelo via Barneveld, where the chase suddenly ended. Our tank casualties during this time were of a light mechanical nature. At Ermelo, we learned that, in one case, the track we had welded onto the tanks had stopped a 75-millimeter armour-piercing high explosive direct hit. The only damage was that the track was blown off the hull. This information was ample compensation to the men who had worked so hard on this job.

Up to this point, the men had worked anywhere that the jobs happened to be. The LAD headquarters stopped with "A" echelon in woods, fields, roads, etc.

Leaving Ermelo, the LAD moved to Heerenveen, stopped for 24 hours, and then moved on again to Leeuwarden, a total distance of 150 miles. This move created a great deal of work for the LAD as the long continuous run proved hard on the tanks. Several recovery jobs were completed on "A" and "B" vehicles.

At Leeuwarden, an excellent site was provided for the LAD, which was apparently an old bus depot. Our good luck was short lived, for we were again moved on to Grijpskerk and the squadrons went into the line in the Delfziel area. An extreme shortage of idlers and bogies caused a great deal of difficulty, as repairs could not be effected and the tanks were forced to remain on the road. After three days in this location (a field of extreme mud) the echelon and the LAD moved to Haren, stopping for three days in a railway roundhouse, and from there to Scheemda, arriving on 5 May. This was an excellent spot for the men, the villagers holding parties and dances, and all ranks had a great deal of recreation. We were located in an

old paper factory, and at last we were in one place long enough to commence our “A” and “B” vehicle inspections.

While in this location, the war ended and the LAD problems were increased as several lorries, tanks, etc., fell into the canals, This kept our own recovery troop and that of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop rather busy. One of these tank recovery jobs was rather interesting, due to the fact that a man was trapped inside the tank, which was upside down and, being a 17-pounder (Sherman Vc tank), it had no escape hatch. We managed to tip it onto its side with a three-to-one hitch, using a Stuart light tank on the other side of the canal for an anchor, releasing the driver who had spent a few nerve racking hours in water up to his chin, wondering if he would be around on gratuity day.

In Scheemda, work was commenced on the regiment’s tanks and vehicles to prepare them for the coming division inspection. After this inspection, work was started on the preparation of vehicles, instruments, etc, for turn-in.

This area has been excellent for sports and recreation. Every afternoon, as many men as possible attend sports parades. At least four dances a week are held for the men, and an excellent club room has been opened for ORs. For the first time we have had men on sick parade, trouble being experienced with a mild form of dysentery, that affected the entire regiment.

We have lost several men to Canada drafts, and one to the COF, and expect to lose more shortly. We have also managed to get men to the educational lectures, and discussions of “Civvy Street” are now the current subjects of the day.

## **70 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 5<sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm’d Regt (8<sup>th</sup> New Brunswick Hussars)**

Eighteen days after leaving Cervia in Italy, the unit arrived at Roullers, Belgium (MR 757709 sheet 41) and billets were found in the private homes of the Belgian people of Dixemudest-Eenweg. For a workshop, the LAD took over a former cotton factory which had been turned into a garage by the German army in 1941.

All our vehicles made the entire trip, although two were forward-loaded the last 200 miles behind the Scammells, and many of them needed minor repairs and adjustments,

The Belgian people were very friendly and, after being, so long in Italy, this place was like heaven. Leaves to the UK started on 3 March 1945 and came at regular intervals. To date every man in the LAD has had his PL, all but two to Paris and two to Belgium, and the rest went to the UK

The establishment of tanks for the regiment was changed, and more 17-pounder tanks were issued between 9 and 15 March. On 16 March, the new tanks were taken to the ranges at Gravelines, near Calais, to shoot in their guns. The LAD had their hands full for a week. Both the recovery tanks and gun fitters were very busy, but we were able to end up with all guns and instruments serviceable.

On 24 March, a programme was started to weld tracks on the sides, front, and turret of all Sherman tanks as extra armour. The track arrived the same day on RCASC trucks, and work was started on welding fixtures.

The LAD received orders on the 28<sup>th</sup> that the regiment would move. A month’s welding work lay ahead of us and, as tons of track was on hand in the yard, the move presented some difficulties. The track was piled on the back of the tanks for transportation, with all hands working all night, and we moved off at 0500 hours 31 March to MR 760672 sheet 2A-3A, 12 kilometres south of Nijmegen.

The people of Roullers were very sorry to see us leave, and were up to see us off. Many of our men have returned to Roullers on leave.

At Nijmegen, we were once more living in a field in tents and in our trucks. It rained almost every day here, which not only made it uncomfortable, but greatly hindered our welding programme. There were quite a lot of German weapons to be repaired and the armourers were kept busy working on these. The recce troop was issued with new tanks and it was found that the 37-mm guns were in very poor condition. As they were warned that they were going into action in the near future, an immediate programme was instituted by the LAD to make these tanks battle worthy.

“B” squadron of the regiment took over a section of the front on Arnhem Island, in a static role and the two recovery tanks went with them. There were four recovery jobs in this section, and one radial engine clutch was replaced in situ, but there were no casualties due to enemy action.

On 12 April we moved off to a jumping-off area at Wehl, MR 933753 sheet 2A-3A, and on 13 April completed welding the track armour on the last tank.

On the afternoon of 14 April we again moved off into Arnhem, which had not yet been completely captured. It was a very slow journey due to a long Bailey bridge at Arnhem, which would only hold one tank at a time, and it was after midnight when we finally reached the city.

Just inside Arnhem, the artillery observation post tank attached to the regiment broke down. While towing this tank, Cfn CO West and Sergeant WR Taylor were thrown from the recovery tank by a low hanging wire. Cfn West was run over by the towed tank and killed. Sergeant Taylor narrowly missed the same fate suffering only a cut lip and minor bruises.

The attack went in on the morning of 15 April, and we were called upon shortly afterwards to do some more recovery work. From then on, we were kept very busy, and on the following day we got cut off by enemy troops and then ambushed. Two of the regiment's trucks were knocked out, but fortunately no one was seriously wounded.

On 17 April while moving into Putten at night, the LAD moved up with the rear squadron. When the fight started, we captured fourteen German prisoners. After three days in Putten, the brigade moved to Assen. All tanks and vehicles were in by 1000 hrs the following morning after an extremely hard day and night of work.

The unit again went into action in Friesland. The nature of the country made it very unsuitable for tanks, and the recovery tanks and crews were kept very busy,

Since the LAD came to North-west Europe we have had seven men SOS, two men, Cfn JW Alderson and Cfn PG Sumons went to Canada on rotational leave and L/Cpl OF Jackson and RE Millar were SOS as a result of accidents. Cfn CS Jennings and S/Sgt RR Parks were SOS due to sickness. The LAD received four reinforcements, one electrician, one storeman, and two general duties men.

In April, just before going into action in this theatre, both Scammells were turned in and replaced by a Diamond T and a Mack. The stores lorry, which was completely wrecked in an accident on the move from Putten to Assen was replaced by a Ford 3-ton GS lorry.

After the end of hostilities, the regiment moved back to a town near Groningen called Paterswolds. Here, after two weeks of celebrating, a general march past was held for General Crerar, and then work was started on getting the vehicles and tanks ready for turn-in.

## **71 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 9<sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (British Columbia Dragoons)**

The LAD left Cervia, Italy on 13 February 1945, arriving at Leghorn, the port of embarkation on 15 February. Embarkation for France was spread over several days as the LAD vehicles and personnel were shipped on different LSTs, depending on the type of vehicle to be transported. The port of arrival was



Marseilles where a concentration camp was established. The last of the vehicles to arrive were the breakdowns on 21 March 1945.

From Marseilles, the unit proceeded up the Rhone valley to Roullers, Belgium, in five easy stages from 21 to 26 March, halting each night at a transit camp where canvas and cooking facilities were provided.

During the entire land trip from Cervia, the tanks were lifted by rail and were manned by four-man crews. The soft vehicles moved under their own power.

Security measures were very strict and men were not permitted to leave the transit camps with the exception of limited duty personnel.

At Roullers, the men were billeted in private homes and given a very warm and hearty welcome by the townspeople. The LAD established a workshop in a large storage depot which proved to be an excellent site. It was a treat to be in a country that really even scrubbed the sidewalks after the filth of most parts of Italy.

The men were given a few days to settle down after their long trip, and then on 1 March 1945 an inspection and repair programme was commenced on all soft vehicles. The tanks, although they had done very little mileage since their inspection in Italy, were checked and the necessary repairs and adjustments completed.

It was less than a week after our arrival in Roullers that privilege leave to the UK was inaugurated. It was a great morale booster to get back to the UK after a year and three months in Italy, and to have your language understood. Arrangements have been made for all personnel to be given leave to the UK as quickly as the exigencies of the service will permit.

New Sherman VC and IC [tank versions] tanks arrived in the middle of March to bring the regiment up to its war establishment on 17-pounder tanks. On 18 March, the new tanks were driven to tank ranges at Gravelines near Calais, to "T and A" and fire the guns. The LAD sent two recovery tanks and a gun fitter crew.

Captain JP Sherren was given the job of experimenting with welding track on the two sides, front, and sides of the turret of a Sherman tank, along similar lines to those used by regiments fighting in this theatre. The pilot tank was passed by the brigade commander and commanding officer, and it was decided to commence a programme to add track to all the Sherman tanks in the regiment. Track arrived by RCASC transport, and a programme commenced on 24 March 1945, with the welder and two operators from 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop to help with the work.

On 28 March 1945, the LAD was warned that a move was impending, so the welding program was halted on 29 March. Unwelded track was loaded on the back of the tanks. The move commenced at 0845 hrs 1 April 1945, and the regiment arrived at the new location at Maldon near Nijmegen in Holland that night.

The next day, work was commenced on the track welding programme on a round-the-clock basis. Every available welder in the regiment was mustered. Tanks were passed through a welding shed on a production basis, and by 10 April, all Shermans with the exception of the two recovery tanks were completed. The welders from the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop returned to their unit with their equipment.

During the stay at Maldon, the personnel were billeted in a shack adjoining the workshop shed. Meals were eaten in the open air. Baths were provided in Nijmegen. There was so much work to be completed and the weather was so wet that very few men felt like going to Nijmegen on recreational trips.

Early in the morning of 11 April, the LAD was put on a two hours notice to move. Camp was broken and late in the afternoon the move commenced. The final destination was Wehl, Holland, but the move took us through the Siegfried line in the Reichswald Forest, where the historical washing was hanging on the line, and then across the Rhine at Emmerich before returning to Dutch territory.

The recovery tanks were with tactical headquarters near Zevenaar under command of the Armament Quartermaster Sergeant, as Captain JP Sherren, the LAD OC, was on leave.

During action, the LAD normally was divided into two sections:

- a) A recovery section of two Sherman recovery tanks and one White scout car that travelled with "F" echelon of the regiment.
- b) A rear section, consisting of the remaining vehicles and personnel of the LAD that travelled with "A" echelon of the regiment.

The system proved satisfactory both in Italy and in this theatre. However, with the rolling country and wider, more numerous roads in North-west Europe, it was possible to keep the rear echelon relatively more forward than in the previous theatre of operations.

On 15 April, 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (BCD) was assigned the task involving a thrust north-west from Arnhem to the IJsselmeer. The recovery section of the LAD advanced with the regimental headquarters group, encountering considerable shell and sniper fire. This sniping rendered many trucks of the forward "A" echelon casualties. Here the White scout car of the recovery section was employed to great advantage as a light recovery vehicle, immediately towing back some of the knocked-out vehicles and crews under fire. In this instance, the heavy breakdown would have been useless, owing to its height and total lack of armour. The recovery tanks moved forward with the regimental headquarters group, clearing the road and rectifying minor mechanical troubles, and so enabling the tanks to maintain a steady advance.

The rear section of the LAD at regimental "A" echelon, carried out first line repairs on the shot-up trucks, and evacuated to the advanced workshop detachment from 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop those vehicles requiring second echelon repairs, and sent forward spare parts. During action, the rear LAD is normally engaged in the evacuation of vehicle casualties, minor repairs, and maintaining the forward supply of spare parts as called for by the recovery section. There was one notable exception, however. On the night of 16/17 April, the enemy put in a heavy counterattack from the right flank on Headquarters, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, and the divisional rear echelons. The rear section of 71 LAD were called upon to aid in the protection of 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (BCD) "A" echelon and accordingly provided outlying pickets until the counterattack was repulsed.

The whole action from Arnhem to the Zuider Zee took four days, and was a much faster advance on anything encountered in Italy. To keep supply lines open, it was necessary to restrict recovery to road clearance only during the action.

One casualty was suffered by the LAD during the operation. The Armament Quartermaster Sergeant was killed by shell fire at the first halt just outside Arnhem.

The operation was coded *Cleanser*.

The LAD was now near Voorthuizen, where preparations were hastened for an impending move. The move commenced the evening of 21 April 1945. It was a wet, dark night, which made the trip very miserable. The first stopover was at Vreis, south of Groningen, and the LAD located in the market square. The trip was nearly 200 miles, and many of the tanks had been driven well over their allowable speed, which necessitated numerous bogey wheels, idler sprockets, and top roller changes on their arrival.

The next operation, *Canada*, was a push from Groningen to Delfziel. This was chiefly an infantry "do", with very few tanks involved, so that the LAD was not called on to send any men forward. During this operation and until VE-Day for 21 Army Group, 5 May 1945, the LAD was kept busy inspecting tanks, welding sprockets, and making minor repairs to all types of vehicles.

The LAD then settled down to prepare for the final exercise before the turn-in of the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (BCD) fighting equipment. The exercise was known by the code word *Finale* and

consisted of a mounted march-past of the entire 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division before the GOC First Canadian Army, General HDG Crerar, CB, DSO.

The exercise was well conducted and the army commander was high in his praise of the division's turnout and its record during the war.

With *Finale* behind us, the work in hand was to prepare all "hard" vehicles, guns, wireless and instruments for turn-in. The LAD had a considerable part to play in checking the mechanical condition of the equipments, and doing any repairs within its scope.

Recreation and leave facilities have been on a very generous scale. The LAD takes part in 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (BCD) sports.

## **72 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to the Westminster Regiment (Motor)**

This unit is a type "B" LAD attached to a motor battalion. Its equipment consists of a jeep, an HUC (surplus to war establishment), a stores truck, a 3-ton lorry GS, a medium breakdown, and a 15-cwt GS truck fitted as a welding truck (also surplus to war establishment), and three trailers. It has the necessary tools for the tradesmen and a few special tools. The unit this LAD is attached to is essentially motorized infantry, made mobile with carriers, half tracks, scout cars, 3-ton and 15-cwt lorries, jeeps, motorcycles, and Stuart V light tanks towing six-pounder anti-tank guns.

The LAD arrived from Italy with the regiment in North-west Europe on 8 May 1945, after a very pleasant and trouble-free trip up from the South of France. We were billeted in private houses in Deinze, Belgium. Morale was high because of the friendly attitude of the people, the prospect of leave in England, and the comfort and cleanliness of the billets. There was a fair amount of work to do after the long trip made by the vehicles, but it was not excessive due to the maintenance carried out while waiting in Italy. Until now, we had been part of 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, which was disbanding. We then were placed under command of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, and were immediately ordered to move to Meulebeke closer to the brigade headquarters. Here the billets were not quite as good, but we had a huge garage for a workshop, which also housed all the vehicles of the two companies stationed here. Work started pouring in, Field Marshal Montgomery visited us, and a sudden move came up on 21 March.

The regiment moved up to a holding position on the River Waal opposite Tiel. We were now under command of 49 (British) Division. It was a very quiet front except for a few mortar bombs and flying bombs. We were all very comfortable here, even at the front, where the men were billeted with the civilians. Parts were easy to obtain from the British ordnance field park, and the British workshop gave us excellent service. On the night of 4/5 April, we were relieved by the Belgians, who gave our recovery much work. They drove their vehicles in at night without lights, and as it had been raining hard, a long stretch of the road was very slippery. Consequently, they had upset and ditched twelve vehicles. The next morning, the LAD had a very busy time pulling them out.

On 6 April, we moved up to another holding position opposite Arnhem. Here it was totally different. There was more shelling, much damage, and not a sign of any civilians. We picked out houses to live in and a shop to work in, cleared away the wreckage, and made ourselves as comfortable as possible. All carriers were inspected while in this position for a reconditioning programme. This was difficult as the carriers were spotted in defensive positions. Half-tracks were issued here in exchange for our White scout cars. They were in poor condition as they had been issued without checking and a lot of work was required on them.

On 12 April, now under command of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade again, we moved with the brigade to a concentration area north-east of Arnhem. Here we were issued with *Wasps* [flamethrowers] and were told we were going to get twelve *Honey* tanks to tow the six-pounders in place of the light anti-aircraft

gun tractors we had been using. We were to go in on an attack towards the Zuider Zee to cut off the enemy. We moved into Arnhem and here split the LAD into two sections, one with "A1" echelon and the other with "A" echelon. We started moving forward on 15 April, occasionally being cut off from our rear by the Germans. At Voorthuizen with "A1" echelon, most of the LAD section went on a scouting expedition to round up stray Germans. A Dutch patriot led us to their hideout. We got into a bit of a fight, but ended up capturing 35 Germans. At Halvinkhuizen, our Sergeant fitter got involved in an accident with a German halftrack, which we had captured, and was seriously injured. On 19 April, the companies concentrated at Putten, having reached our objective.

We moved again on 21 April. It was a long move as we were to make a push towards Delfziel. Our Armament Quartermaster Sergeant ran into some bad luck here and twice went into a canal. The first time with a jeep and the second time with a 3-ton GS lorry loaded with two motorcycles and towing a carrier also loaded with two motorcycles. The second job was too difficult for us to handle, and we were obliged to call on the workshop for help.

The attack in the Delfziel area went well. Few vehicles were knocked out and all those were recovered. Near our objective, the Colonel ordered our Technical Adjutant and the OC LAD to organize a party and clear an area of Germans. We patrolled the area on foot and found no Germans, so continued towards the objective, arriving there just after the enemy had surrendered to "C" Company. Much loot was picked up, including several enemy vehicles and enough bicycles for our little party to ride back to our vehicles.

On 2 May, the regiment was relieved by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Armoured Recce Regiment (GGHG), and then we moved to Norg. In this latter location, the LAD was kept busy assisting the regiment in preparing for participation in the division mounted march-past which was held in the latter part of May. The regiment was also given the task of escorting German prisoners of war from the Amsterdam area to the German border. At one of the staging areas for the prisoners, the LAD was called on to recover a number of German vehicles which it became bogged in the soft ground.

During the month of May, reallocation forms were completed for the fourteen men in the LAD. Five men volunteered for the CAPF, and one for COF.

Until now, the chronological events of the LAD and regiment have been stated, but a few points should be enlarged upon. The LAD is too small to be split up and functions best as a unit. While the regiment was concentrated, or in a holding position, the LAD always remained as the body. With the possible exception of a light arc-welding plant, its equipment and personnel are sufficient to do any work required of it. While the regiment was in the attack, the LAD was broken up, part going to "A1" echelon and part to "A" echelon. The OC and his batman in the HUC, and a driver and fitter in the breakdown, made up the "A1" section. The remainder stayed in "A" echelon. This was found to be quite satisfactory and speeded up recovery considerably. The only drawback was that the main LAD was left without a breakdown and some juggling was required to get around the difficulty.

In a battalion move, the technical adjutant and the LAD officer had laid down a drill which worked very well. In a battalion column, the company fitters travelled at the rear of the companies. If a vehicle dropped out, the fitters stopped to locate the trouble and if possible repaired the vehicle. If the casualty could not be repaired immediately, then the fitters either flagged the breakdown at the rear of the column, or left instructions for the driver to flag it down. With this drill, very few vehicles were ever left behind.

In operations, this LAD's main job was recovery and repair. During rest periods, we tried to do as much inspecting as possible, but were not always able to do as much as we would like to have done. This was partly due to being swamped with work that was not of an essential nature, and had been accumulating during operations. It was also due to the numerous parades that we were required to go on, and to the fact that personnel were away on leave. In conclusion we wish to state that where and when inspections were carried out, they repaid many times over the time and trouble spent. We also discovered that lack of

maintenance was the cause of almost all the vehicle trouble we ran into, except of course those caused by enemy action and accidents.

## **73 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to HQ 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade**

On the move from Italy to France, an advance party under AQMS MacDonald KW arrived at Marseilles on 22 February 1945. The remainder of the unit landed on 25 February under command of the OC, Lt CF Starr. Our stay in Marseilles was rather brief, approximately four days. During that time, the unit lived under canvas, which was very miserable. Not much in the way of work was done, except a major job on the Diamond T breakdown. New valves were required, and after much searching were finally secured from a US army depot. This job was completed on time and the breakdown was ready to move off with the convoy on 28 February. The morale of the unit increased noticeably upon landing in France, as the men were glad to leave Italy, and were also looking forward to leave in the UK. The journey through France to the concentration area in Belgium was uneventful. A few motorcycles broke down, and that constituted most of the repair work. Our own unit of vehicles, with the exception of the 15-cwt, made the trip in excellent condition.

In Belgium, brigade headquarters was located in a small town called Poperinghe, and the LAD was set up in a modern garage in that town. This was by far the best location for the past 18 months. Privilege leave to the UK and Paris were granted to the personnel, most of the men preferring to spend their leave in the UK. We were billeted in private homes. This was quite an improvement to the living conditions in Italy. The health of the unit was excellent; these factors plus leaves resulted in a high state of morale.

Considerable work was undertaken during our stay in Belgium in preparing the brigade vehicles for action. All types of jobs were handled, mostly the refitting of new vehicles. However the brigade vehicles were in pretty good shape, so we were able to handle the work without backloading or requiring extra assistance from the workshop. One noticeable feature at this time was the ease in obtaining spare parts. With the exception of Willys' parts, the ordnance field parks had an abundant supply. Compared to all the troubles we had in Italy in this connection, the situation seemed almost unnatural. A fair programme of amusements was set up for brigade headquarters. This consisted mostly of dances, shows, and probably the most appreciated, Belgian beer. An interesting trip to Vimy was arranged by the brigade education officer. A number of the unit personnel took advantage of this opportunity and enjoyed it very much. Another highlight of this time was an inspection by Field Marshal Sir BL Montgomery. The inspection took place on the town square, and afterwards he gave a brief address to the troops.

On 26 March, we were warned for a move to a concentration area in Holland, and immediately started the necessary preparations. As is always the case, there was the usual number of last-minute jobs to attend to. The move started on 27 March and took us to a staging area at Nijmegen, Holland, where we spent the night. The next day we moved a few miles further north to the other side of the town. At this time we were quite busy as the brigade was in action and a good deal of night work was handled. In particular, our breakdown was very busy bringing out casualties. Most of this recovery work was for British units. At this time, HQ RCEME laid on a carrier inspection, which was very difficult to do as most of the vehicles were in action. However as soon as a vehicle came out, we called it in for inspection and managed to do quite a number. We also supplied two men to brigade headquarters to assist them in handling first echelon work. We were living under canvas and the interminable rain made conditions very difficult and working conditions unpleasant. On 12 April, the unit moved again and passed through Germany before moving back to Holland. Only one vehicle casualty was encountered on this move.

Then followed the 5<sup>th</sup> Division sweep across Holland to the Zuider Zee, and this resulted in one move after another for the LAD. Our greatest difficulty at the time was keeping in contact with the workshop and ordnance field park. Due to the close proximity of the Germans, we were continuously on the alert and the guards were increased. Shelling was mild, there being no comparison to that encountered in Italy.

Our longest move was 160 miles across country to Heerenveen in North-west Holland. Considerable trouble was encountered en route with carriers. This proved again that carriers cannot stand up to the speed of a fast-moving wheeled convoy. A few recovery jobs were handled, mostly pulling vehicles out of canals. Moving again on 24 April, we proceeded to Ten Boor and remained there for a short time. Our location was an open field and we were living under canvas. Working conditions were very bad due to the weather. Considerable work was handled in preparing the brigade for the attack on the port of Delfzijl. In addition, periodic inspections were carried out, mostly on headquarters vehicles, as the unit's vehicles were in action. Recovery work was very heavy. On 2 May, we set up in a modern up-to-date garage in Slochteren, and the men were billeted in private homes. On 4 May, Lt RH Stevenson took charge of the LAD as Lt Starr had been posted to 81 LAD. Cfn TA Christensen, one of the old-timers, left on rotational leave to Canada. At this point, the opportunity was taken to overhaul the Diamond T breakdown. Parts for this vehicle were unobtainable and we made them ourselves. During the short time our breakdown was grounded, the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop handled the recovery.

The night of 6 May will be long remembered by the unit as it was the occasion of a victory party. The following two days were observed as holidays, with only a skeleton crew on duty. This was the first holiday, except for the odd Sunday, that this unit has had since going into action in Italy. An interesting event took place at this time when the people of the community presented the LAD with a beautiful basket of flowers. This act was much appreciated by every man. The YMCA set up a theatre and conducted dances, which were very successful. A large volume of work was handled and the opportunity was taken to carry out vehicle inspections, with special emphasis being laid on carriers. In this inspection, the unit was assisted by a crew from the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop. Compulsory daily education lectures were started, and also a weekly parade and inspection by Brig IS Johnson. All this contributed to the difficulty of working conditions as a good deal of time was spent out of the shop. The unit was present at the operation *Finale*, and also the inspection and farewell address of the GOC at Ten Boor. On 4 June, one of the driver mechanics reported sick and was evacuated to hospital. On 5 June the unit moved to Haren, on the other side of Groningen. Personnel were billeted in private homes and the LAD was set up in a garage. During our stay there, the inspection of the carriers was completed, and a start made on "B" vehicles. These vehicles were classified in preparation for turn-in. When the turn-in of the carriers was completed, the workload was lightened considerably. For the remainder of June, a steady program of inspections was carried out on "B" vehicles. Education parades continued daily and interfered considerably with our work. Sgt Pickford returned to Canada and Cfn Getz went to the CAPF. No replacements were available, which resulted in the remaining personnel taking on more work.

On 19 June, the unit moved to Leeuwarden and set up in a large roomy garage. On this move we were accompanied by a small AWD from the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop to handle second echelon repairs until we were based on a workshop. Our old workshop did not move, but remained in Groningen. The unit is billeted in a school and living conditions are quite comfortable. The setup for the men's mess is the very best this unit has ever had, which is greatly appreciated. Recreational facilities are excellent in this town, and include a theatre, swimming pool, dance hall, lending library, and boating trips. The unit as a whole have not had much time to enter sports, but several men play on various brigade headquarters' teams. Education parades still continue. A fairly large volume of work was handled and a large number of second echelon jobs were completed by the AWD. As soon as 1 Canadian Tank Troops Workshop was set up in Steenwyck, the AWD personnel returned to their workshop. On 24 June, we lost two more men, A/Sgt JH Hunter, and Cfn G McKissock who left on repatriation draft to Canada. These two men have been with the LAD for years. With a war establishment of fifteen, this unit is five men short. The work comes in as steadily as before, and due to the cooperation of all hands, we manage to stay on top of it. Recovery work has noticeably increased lately and is due primarily to the large number of accidents on the highways. Morale is fair at present, due to the lengthy stay in this country before repatriation to Canada. No reinforcements have been received by this unit since coming to North-west Europe. The health of the unit has been excellent. Since last winter only one man has been a hospital.

## **5 Light Anti-aircraft Workshop, RCEME attached to 5<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-aircraft Regiment, RCA**

Friday 2 March 1945 broke bright and clear. Our convoy which it sailed from Leghorn, Italy, on 27 February put in to Marseilles harbour at 1100 hrs. Personnel and vehicles were immediately disembarked and proceeded to a staging area about ten miles from the city. A few men had been separated from the workshop vehicles, but found accommodation with some vehicles from the regiment.

On arriving at the staging camp, all personnel were fed and busied themselves arranging kit in their vehicles in preparation for the trip to North-west Europe. Italian currency was turned in, and French francs were received in exchange. After a supper at the staging camp mess, a crap game was soon underway and some of the boys played penny-ante poker. As the evening wore on, the groups became smaller and soon everyone was wrapped in blankets which were none too plentiful. The nights were still cold.

Saturday morning, we moved off in regimental convoy with the workshop in the rear. During the day we travelled 152 miles, and about 1800 hrs made camp at St Rambert. En route we ate at the regimental headquarters kitchen. The fare was usually meat and vegetables, however in spite of strict security regulations, eggs and French bread mysteriously appeared.

Health was good and everyone was in high spirits and anxious to see more of this new country.

Another day on the road brought us to Macon. All vehicles arrived with no mechanical failures. Again meat and vegetables for supper, there was no show, but a game of ball was played.

He was a long trip to our destination at Reninghelst in Belgium. En route we stopped overnight at Macon, Les Laumes, Rozay-en-Brie, and Cambrai. While at Rozay-en-Brie, all vehicles were washed and oiled as we expected to travel through Paris. To everyone's disappointment, we did not see the famous city.

From Cambrai, one vehicle proceeded to Reninghelst with an advance party of four men to receive suitable billets and a spot for the workshop. When the main body arrived, we were billeted with civilians who welcomed us with great enthusiasm. Billets were very clean, dress and general appearance was stressed to a high degree. Showers were available.

The pubs in the town did a tremendous business for a few days. As the men became accustomed to the Belgian beer, the drinking tapered off.

At this time it was announced that all personnel with six month's service abroad would get privilege leave to the UK or Paris. A lottery was held to determine in what order we should go. Two men chose to take their leave in Paris.

While at Reninghelst, liberty trucks were freely granted to Ypres, and there were shows in camp. The men did not lack for entertainment.

The usual shop work was carried on. Vehicles were given an overhaul, washed and oiled. One battery went to Ostend on a practice shoot. Sliding scales for the guns were manufactured in the workshop, and installed. Regimental vehicles came in continually for minor repairs and checkovers.

On 19 March, eighteen new Canadian 40-millimeter self-propelled guns were received by the regiment, and inspections and modifications were carried out by the workshop. Four 10-cwt trailers and two 20-cwt trailers were received, which helped to improve our mobility greatly. Weather was fine with frequent showers. Health and morale was good.

On 31 March, one OR was SOS to the X-8 list, proceeding to Canada on rotational leave. The strength of this unit at the time was one officer and 26 ORs.

On 1 April, orders were received to prepare for a move to Nijmegen, Holland. This move took place on 4 April. The convoy followed the Maple Leave Up route to the destination. The men were billeted in an old

sanatorium, which had been left filthy by the previous occupants. Nijmegen, though crowded with troops, provided a variety of entertainment.

Shortly after arrival in Nijmegen, the regiment relieved the infantry. The SP guns were parked in our lines, and modifications were carried out to the brackets supporting the barrel.

Six of the workshop personnel volunteered to haul ammunition to the front with one of the 60-cwt lorries. The operation was carried out at night due to enemy observation of the roads. No casualties were suffered, but the men had some thrilling experiences, the first since arriving in this theatre.

The Canadian Legion presented some very good shows while our workshop was in Nijmegen, and civilian guests were allowed. This was our first contact with the Dutch.

Our stay in the sanatorium ended after two weeks, when orders were received to prepare for a move to the Groningen area. On this move, the first staging area was at Epe, where it rained steadily for two days. Meals were poor, and we had to sleep under the vehicles. Two sections, made up of one S/Sgt and four ORs each, were attached to No. 47 and No. 88 batteries. Each section took with it a jeep, and a 15-cwt truck and sufficient FAMTO to carry out first line repairs. The remainder of the workshop prepared to move. Owing to adverse living conditions at Epe, this was very popular among the men.

The convoy to Groningen was poorly organized, due possibly to the many twisting roads and poor signs for night convoy driving. Several vehicles lost their way. Finally we found refuge in some unknown village, where we took shelter in barns and other out-buildings. When morning came, we started on without breakfast and reached the dispersal point at Assen and then on to Groningen.

On arrival in Groningen, we immediately recced a spot for the workshop. Two houses were requisitioned, which provided excellent billets for the men. Radios and furniture were supplied by the underground, and living conditions were the best we ever enjoyed. In the city of Groningen, there are officer's clubs, Warrant Officers and Sergeants clubs, and ORs clubs. There are two cinemas operating for the troops and two dance halls. Dancing is allowed once a week in the billets. There is a small lake near the town where sailboats are available. There is also bathing in the lake, as well as in the indoor pools. The daily routine includes a rehabilitation lecture for one hour in the morning and then shop work until noon. In the afternoon, there are sports and there is no shortage of entertainment in the evenings. The weather could be better.

While in Groningen, an inspection of the regiment's vehicles was made. Guns were inspected and greased. Small arms inspections were started, and plans formulated for the preparation of unit equipment for turn-in.

Five reinforcements joined the workshop recently, and the unit strength at the time of writing (15 June 1945) is one officer and 31 ORs.

## **58 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 17<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RCA**

1 March 1945 found the unit complete at the staging area near Marseilles in France after a successful trip from Italy. The move began across France and into Belgium. The journey covered a distance of approximately 1,000 road miles and took six full days. Many strange and interesting sites were encountered en route, and a vast difference was noted in the cleanliness of the country and the people in this theatre. The staging areas on the roads were well-organized, and every possible convenience was established for the men's comfort. Shows were held at each staging area, and canteens were set up at the majority of the staging areas, thus helping to break the dullness of the journey.

The unit arrived at Wervico, Belgium, at 1300 hrs on 7 March. A garage was secured in which to set up shop, and billets were located for the men. Work began on the minor repairs that developed on the long



trip from Marseilles. All guns were inspected, and also the trailers were sent to the workshop for repair along with several guns found to be NBW. Numerous equipments were BLR'd including several vehicles. Rotational leave and privilege leave began while we were in Wervico, and we managed to get a couple of men away on leave. We stayed here for one month, and a vast change for the better took place in the equipment. The morale of the men improved greatly, due mostly to the friendliness of the people of the town.

Finally the day came that we were to go into action in Holland with the First Canadian Army, the day we had long awaited. Many friends were made in our stay here and parting in some cases was very difficult. The unit moved off for Holland on Sunday, 25 March and stopped at a jumping off place (Newlands Vinke) prior to going into action. The remainder of the division was still in the old area, so arrangements were made with 1 Corps Troops Workshop to handle our major repairs. A gun which suffered a loose trail bracket on the journey to this area, and a jeep requiring a new motor, were sent to the workshop in our short stay of three days at this location.

The unit moved to the village of Hess on the outskirts of Nijmegen and set up shop in an open field, as this was the only area available. The weather was wet and cold with rain almost every day, so work was almost nil, owing to the location of the unit. The LAD stayed in this location for approximately seven days and then moved to a location near Turnhout on the island between Arnhem and Nijmegen. As the regiment was involved in static warfare, work was light except for a few minor repairs. Much was accomplished in this area, as all our vehicles received a complete checkover and a fresh coat of paint. All tools and equipment were checked and put in good shape. While in this area, calibration of the regiment's guns was also carried out. This was completed on 15 April shortly before word was received to move to Arnhem.

We arrived in Arnhem at 0600 hrs on 16 April and remained there for the night. Shop was set up in the area of the 75-millimeter tank guns as the LAD travelled as close to the regiment as possible during this action. We left Arnhem at 0830 hrs with regimental headquarters at the head of the column en route for Otterloo. We arrived in Otterloo at 1700 hrs on the evening of 17 April. Guards were posted and the remainder of the men were made comfortable for the night. "Stand two" was called at 2300 hrs and the battle for Otterloo began. The morning of 18 April at 0100 hrs found a withering small arms fire being laid down by the enemy, and our unit digging in to defend its location. At first the men were very jittery, but as the morning wore on and the small arms fire kept up, accompanied by mortars and shells, the men became calm. The enemy got within 300 yards of our position, and at the critical moment, *Wasp* flamethrowers arrived on the scene and routed the enemy. Approximately 500 prisoners were taken in the area and many enemy dead were found the next morning. One casualty was suffered by us, but none of a serious nature. Damage was inspected in the morning, and three guns and two Field Artillery Tractors were found to be out of action. These were notified to 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop for recovery. Several of the regiment's vehicles were a total loss, being destroyed by fire. The regiment spent the night in the area, and then move to a new location at Muller.

The regiment moved to Muller on 19 April to await further action. Camp conditions were not of the best, as there was no cover for the men or for working. While there, three guns were received to replace those lost at Otterloo. Two of the guns were very poor condition and were BLR'd.

The next location was in Leeuwarden and the LAD was housed in German billets. A unit cleanup campaign was the main activity as repairs to unit equipment were few.

The defence role of the regiment ended and we moved into action at Siddeburen. The LAD was located at Bellum in a farmyard for this action. Conditions are suitable, except for baths. A rainy spell set in later and ground conditions made work difficult. An inspection of guns began here and was completed after the gun positions were moved to Wagenborgen. Results of the inspection during this action showed the guns in a good state of maintenance, but some had worn breech mechanisms. Some of the wear was due to so much travelling. A few vehicle repairs were necessary to the regiment's equipments due to the mobile

warfare and a shower of mortar shells. Several guns were sent to the workshop and BLR'd. One gun developed a circumferential crack, 18 inches from the gun muzzle. One other gun developed an expanded chamber which resulted in the breech block and jamming in the breech ring. An observation post tank casualty was caused by a German 88-millimeter anti-tank gun, with the suspension being damaged. The 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop was notified to look after its repair and recovery. While in this area, the rations were quite good and the entertainment by the Legion was regular. The action ended here when the regiment moved to Winschoten on 4 May.

The LAD was located in a spacious garage and civilian billets were obtained for the troops. The regiment at this time began a maintenance and repair programme on all equipments. The LAD carried out inspections on all equipments and classified them. The 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade Workshop supplied personnel to assist in the inspection of the guns, tanks, and instruments. Repairs to equipments were light, and only a few "B" vehicles and a number of instruments required our attention.

## **76 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 4<sup>th</sup> Anti-tank Regiment, RCA**

76 LAD, RCEME, landed with complete equipment at Marseille, France on 25 February 1945. After a brief rest at a nearby staging camp, the LAD proceeded with the regiment towards the First Canadian Army area. The move through France, a distance of 760 miles, was completed in six days and ended at Warneton, a border town in Belgium. Here, under ideal working conditions, the unit vehicles were inspected and overhauled as necessary.

The LAD morale was never higher. Personnel were billeted with civilians and were treated as liberators, although the civilians had been liberated for months. UK leaves were started and old friendships were renewed.

After a month's stay in Warneton, the LAD proceeded with the regiment to the Nijmegen area. The LAD crew with the 49<sup>th</sup> Battery, a towed 17-pounder battery, was the first to see action. This was on the island between Arnhem and Nijmegen, but since the battery was in a holding role, very little work resulted from this action.

Whilst in the Nijmegen area, the LAD drew for the first time, a machinery "KL" lorry, which proved to be a most useful piece of equipment, since the majority of welding on 17-pounder M10 self-propelled guns and towed 17-pounders was arc welding.

In Arnhem, which was entered when the 49<sup>th</sup> British Division was still mopping up, the LAD had a novel experience when 49<sup>th</sup> British Division, which started an attack back of the LAD lines, passed through the LAD lines to the accompaniment of mortars and machine guns set up in rear of the LAD vehicles.

The LAD suffered its only two casualties in the North-west Europe theatre at Otterloo, Holland, when two men of the heavy breakdown crew were wounded by small arms fire from our own tanks, which were coming in as support against an almost successful enemy counterattack.

During the many moves, very little trouble was experienced, due to the excellent condition of the regimental vehicles, and good driving by regimental personnel. The few breakdowns that did occur were recovered by the heavy breakdown vehicle, an old Scammel that had seen service in Africa, Italy, and was finally condemned in Holland. It was a feature of every long move to see the heavy breakdown lumber in two or three hours later than the convoy, but never once did it break down. Ironically, seven days before hostilities ceased on the 21 Army Group front, the LAD received a new Ward-LaFrance heavy breakdown, the ideal vehicle for heavy recovery.

A few days before the German surrender to 21 Army Group, the 82<sup>nd</sup> battery section of the LAD, having completed all repair jobs, reverted to an infantry role and captured three German prisoners in the best infantry style, thus proving that they were good soldiers as well as good tradesmen.

The LAD has been extremely fortunate in its possession of a wide variety of equipment, particularly a machinery lorry CAS(?). Many items have been made in the machinery lorry, which were unobtainable through Ordnance, and a great deal of time was saved by not having to go to the workshops, which were often a considerable distance away. One unusual task allotted to the LAD was the making of a 12-inch model of a towed 17-pounder for presentation to the GOC 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division by the Commander, Royal Artillery, 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. The model was made of brass, true to scale, and partially working, and it drew great praise from the GOC.

The factor of distance affected the operation of the LAD greatly in this theatre. At times, the regiment was scattered over a 100-mile stretch. Fortunately, having an LAD section of six to eight men with each battery, besides a regimental headquarters section, meant that skilled personnel were available at once and in most cases could repair a breakdown without delay.

## **81 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 8<sup>th</sup> Army Field Regiment (SP), RCA**

This unit arrived in Comines, Belgium, on 2 March 1945. All personnel were billeted in private homes and the reception given the soldiers by the Belgian people was overwhelming. Everyone was in very high spirits, as after Italy this was almost unbelievable. Each soldier had a home and was treated better than one of the family. Apart from our own entertainment, the Belgian people arranged parties and dances for the troops and the Belgian Red Cross opened a canteen for the regiment and its attached personnel.

After the long trip across France, the LAD was kept quite busy making repairs to "B" vehicles. Almost immediately, leave allotments started to come in for leave to the UK. On 7 March 1945, the regiment was issued twelve Sexton self-propelled 25-pounder guns. The next morning, the LAD commenced checking engines and guns. The guns were found to be in a poorly maintained condition, and required a great deal of work to get them into shape. On 8 March, an additional twelve Sextons came in, and the LAD was rushed getting all guns and vehicles in battle condition as soon as possible.

On 19 March 1945, Lt R. A. MacElroy was evacuated to hospital. It was learned later that he was suffering from diphtheria and would be away for at least six weeks. On 23 March, twelve men from the LAD accompanied the regiment to Dunkirk for a two-day shoot prior to the calibration of the guns. These men returned on 26 March. On their return, all the guns were measured in preparation for calibration.

On 5 April, amid tears and long goodbyes, we moved from Comines to a new location between Nijmegen and Arnhem, Holland. Lt R. A. Starr came to the unit on 12 April and assumed command at that time. The LAD moved again on 14 April by way of Cleve, Germany to Arnhem. From here, the unit moved regularly, recovering and repairing vehicles as required. On 22 April 1945, after the armoured spearhead had reached the Zuider Zee, the LAD moved across to Ten Boer, approximately seven miles north of Groningen. On VE-Day, the unit was at Loppersum, Holland. The next day we moved to Vries, approximately 10 miles south of Groningen.

This LAD was chosen as the RCEME unit to service the artillery section of the Berlin Brigade. On 12 May 1945, the LAD moved to Holten, Holland. A programme was immediately started on vehicle painting and cleaning of personal equipment. Being the only RCEME unit in the vicinity, we were called upon to recover and assist in the repair of many vehicles other than the artillery section of the Berlin Brigade. After one month in Holten, with early-morning physical training and many parades and also a sports schedule, we learned that the Berlin affair had been called off. On 12 June, the unit returned to the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division area.

Usually, the LAD operated in battery sections; however, for the last six weeks they have all been together. During this period all leaves were frozen by the regiment, and many of the men have had no leave as yet. Even in view of this, a high standard of morale has been maintained, and it is hoped that those who have not yet had leave will be able to get away by 24 June 1945.

## **A Narrative of RCEME, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, in North-West Europe**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, RCEME, Activity**

With service in Sicily and Italy, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade commenced sailings from Leghorn, Italy, to Marseille, France, on 1 March 1945. The grouping and cover plan in Italy for this operation affected RCEME of the formation considerably. For instance, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop moved from Florence to Porto S Georgio on the Adriatic, back across Italy to Leghorn. With the move through France to Menin, Belgium, this workshop covered over 1,200 miles with the loss of one motorcycle through accident. Another highlight of the operation was provided by 61 LAD attached to the 14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment. This LAD moved directly from the line at Faenza to Leghorn, and was the last unit of the brigade out of the line, the 14<sup>th</sup> Regiment having preceded the LAD the day before.

The crossing from a Leghorn to Marseille by LST was enlivened by extremely rough weather off the coast of France. Several LSTs had tanks break their moorings on the tank decks. In each case, RCEME did the recovery and eased the situation.

The move from south to north of France went smoothly, although RCEME of this formation worked overtime on vehicle casualties. This was chiefly due to the scarcity of repair posts on the route. However it can be said that RCEME of this brigade successfully swept the route across France.

**Concentration of the Brigade for Refitting.** By mid-March, the brigade was completely concentrated in the Menin-Courtrai area of Belgium. On arrival in this area, the brigade was officially declared in rest for a refit. The rest, as far as RCEME was concerned, was purely theoretical. Refitting involved the inspection and servicing of 72 17-pounder Sherman tanks, 24 Sexton self-propelled guns, six Ram Gun Position Officer's vehicles, and 33 Stuart VI light tanks. This programme was directed by the DADME of the formation, Maj J. A. Stewart, OBE, and the work carried out by the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop under the command of Maj R. H. Ramsey, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop under Maj W. G. Cooke, and 59, 60, and 61 LADs commanded by Capt L. G. Patton, MC, Capt E. K. McEachern, and Capt H.A.G. Kingsmill, MC, respectively. At this time, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Heavy Recovery Section commanded by Capt B. F. Grimmelt, was with the formation. Toward the end of March, the 98<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, RA, (Surrey and Sussex Yeomanry) rejoin the formation to continue the association that had started in Sicily. Capt A. E. Richards commanded the LAD attached to this regiment.

Fortunately, a thorough RCEME inspection and repair programme on all AFVs in the formation was undertaken in Italy during February 1945, and put through to completion despite many difficulties. This programme proved its worth as only one tank was evacuated from the formation is unbattleworthy prior to the move to North West Europe. It also meant that the tanks present with the brigade on moving into the concentration area in Belgium were in good shape. Thus the full strength of RCEME tank fitters was utilized in the servicing of the new 17-pounder Sherman's being issued to this formation to conform to the North-West Europe establishment.

A point of interest regarding the 174 75-mm Sherman tanks brought from Italy, is that 51 of these tanks were originally issued to the brigade in Scotland prior to the Sicily operation. These tanks, in spite of high mileages were completely battle worthy. However, 33 of these tanks were withdrawn to make room for the 17-pounder tanks.

A highlight of the servicing operations was provided by the armoured brigade workshop. 24 Sextons were received for issue to the 98<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment. These self-propelled guns were in very poor condition, and the armament had to be completely stripped and overhauled. The workshop rose to the occasion and

turned the tanks out in five days, enabling the 98<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment to proceed to the ranges for calibrating the 25-pounder guns according to schedule.

In addition to servicing tanks, an ambitious programme of welding track onto the Shermans as added protection was undertaken. This meant LAD and stores officers spent much time on the road hunting for armoured fighting vehicle track and welding rod. The 14<sup>th</sup> Regiment were particularly successful in these operations. Actually, when in action in April, the commanding officer of this regiment considered six lives were saved due to the welded track on his tanks.

**Operations.** On 23 March 1945, the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment with 59 LAD and an AWD from 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Brigade Workshop moved to Nijmegen, Holland, to support 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Br) in the job of clearing Nijmegen Island. On 7, 8, and 9 April, the remainder of the brigade came forward to the Reichwald Forest, Germany, and the whole brigade was fully involved against the enemy.

By 15 April 1945, RCEME of this formation had assumed responsibility for 1 Belgian Infantry Brigade and for a force from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops called Hutchison Force.

As usual, regiments of the brigade were operating on a widely separated axis. The 12<sup>th</sup> Regiment, supported by 60 LAD and No. 2 AWD from the brigade workshop were dispatched to support the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division in the Deventer-Zutphen area. The 14<sup>th</sup> Regiments and 98<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment were operating on the Nijmegen Island in support of 1 Belgian Infantry Brigade, 1 Belgian Fusiliers, and three companies of Dutch troops. The 11<sup>th</sup> Regiment supported by 59 LAD and No. 1 AWD from the armoured brigade workshop were involved with 49<sup>th</sup> British Infantry Division in clearing Arnhem and the area.

An interesting factor in operations at this time were four Sherman bulldozer tanks which had been rigged by the brigade workshop. These tanks proved invaluable in clearing roadblocks.

VE-Day found all units of the brigade involved in a holding role.

**After VE-Day.** VE-week provided RCEME with much work. The concentration of enemy vehicles in two enemy vehicle parks on the Nijmegen Island called for our assistance. Also at this time, due to 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Company, RCASC, being dispatched to the Berlin Brigade, RCEME was called upon to provide workshop facilities for two platoons of RCASC vehicles, and a light field ambulance, RCAMC.

On 10 May 1945, Brig G. M. Grant, DDME First Canadian Army, and Col J. W. Bishop, DDME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, visited 1 Belgian Infantry Brigade Workshop at Elst and 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Brigade Workshop at Nijmegen.

On 8 June 1945, RCEME units, along with all other units of the brigade, paraded in an official farewell to the tanks.

The casualties suffered by RCEME of the formation in operations from 10 July 1943 to 8 May 1945 were four killed, nine wounded, and three missing believed prisoners of war. Awards and decorations received by RCEME of the formation were three Military Crosses, two Military Medals, two Orders of the British Empire, two Members of the British Empire, and four Mentions-in-Dispatches.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

The brigade workshop arrived on 6 March in North-West Europe at Marseille. We located on the city's outskirts in an erstwhile American camp situated on high ground. For the next four days, we travelled north to Belgium, staying overnight at staging camps. One NCO was injured by a passing vehicle on the trip. We arrived in Menin on 10 March.

The ensuing month was to be a rest period for the regiments as they had been constantly active throughout the Sicilian and Italian campaigns. The brigade had not been out of the line for any period over at day or

so during these campaigns. On the other hand, our workshop had the task of refitting all vehicles and equipments which required second echelon work, so that the units would be in a position go into action at the end of the rest period. There was no organized entertainment within the unit at this time, but seven-day and weekend leads were laid on by Army, to Paris, Brussels, and the UK. One dance for the men was held in Menin, which was very successful and a large part of the unit attended. The unit personnel, being billeted around the town as they were, made many friends among the local populace, who were very generous and friendly. The workshop locations were fair. Workshop spaces were spread over several small yards and garages.

While in Menin, we carried out repairs and complete inspections of all the brigade equipment, including 72 17-pounder Shermans, newly-acquired, 24 Sextons, and 30 Stuart tanks. 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Tank Troops Workshop located in Mouscron assisted considerably in this work. Here, for the first time, four brigade tanks were equipped with bulldozer attachments. Also considerable "B" vehicle and armament work was carried out.

In Menin, the men had all the prerequisites for high morale; beer, girls, shows, leaves, and a good day's work behind them, so it is not surprising that they were in good spirits.

When two weeks had passed, the 14<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment were informed that they would be moving up into Arnhem area and an AWD was formed to support them with second echelon repairs. The regiment, and with it our No. 1 AWD, moved up on 23 March. The AWD, now 150 miles from its parent unit, did considerable work and performed well.

Shortly after our arrival in Menin, General Montgomery arrived to welcome to North-West Europe the formations from Italy. He inspected the men, who were lined up alongside the road and then addressed the officers in a hall in Ypres.

On 7 April, the workshop cleaned up and prepared to move forward. The next day we moved up to S'Hertogenbosch to find that a further move must soon be made to Cleve. The workshop set up in Cleve on 10 April, in Germany for the first time. This was a good harbour. The sections of the workshop were all together. Work continued and there was some work on tanks.

On 14 April, No. 2 AWD was formed to support the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment in action. The front was now advancing very rapidly, so much so that it was difficult for No. 2 AWD to complete work and still maintain contact with its regiment, since the latter often made moves of more than 30 miles in a day. Fortunately, there were only four major jobs to be carried out until the front became static.

When the front became static about ten miles east of Apeldorn, the men were allowed to spend evenings in town where shows and other forms of entertainment were available.

The workshop itself remained in Cleve for a week and then moved to Nijmegen where it supported the Belgian Fusiliers, Belgian Brigade, and the 14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (The Calgary Regiment).

The tank section of the workshop had now supplied fitters to two AWDs, and with its depleted strength, the volume of work kept them very busy. The "B" vehicle section, also busy, was catching up with its backlog of outstanding work. Since there was no lines-of-communication workshop in this area, L-of-C vehicles were brought into 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, which became an unofficial L-of-C workshop for all Holland. This involved considerable work, since on average, an intake of ten damaged vehicles a day could be counted on. These vehicles were from every Allied army except the Russians.

During our stay in Nijmegen, leaves continued as usual. The health of the personnel was good during this period, as it had also been at any time during the campaign.

At this time, the Eighth Victory Bond drive took place and the unit exceeded its quota of subscriptions, showing a high morale.

On Thursday, 26 April, a quota of Repatriation Draft vacancies arrived. This caused an immediate rise in unit morale.

On VE-Day, and for the following four or five days, the Dutch civilians celebrated. They fired off captured enemy weapons, rifles, pistols, mortars, flares, etc. Fires were kindled with cordite and petrol. It was surprising that no casualties were sustained during the celebrations.

The shop was inspected on 10 May, by Brig Grant, DDME First Canadian Army, Col Bishop, DDME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, and Maj Stewart, DADME 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade.

On 22 May, the shop left Nijmegen for its next location at Geldermalsen. A large volume of "B" vehicle work passed through the shop at this harbour, a large part of it being on staff cars for commanding officers in and out of the brigade. Inspection, repair, and preservation of tanks was commenced at this harbour. Recreation was limited to sports here, and an occasional show sent in by the Auxiliary Services.

From Geldermalsen, on 31 May, the shop moved to Naarn and work was carried on as previously. While here, a men's canteen was set up which met with the men's unanimous approval and was voted a great success. Work at this time was interrupted to prepare for the brigade official farewell to their tanks. The brigade personnel were to be inspected by Gen Crerar, GOC First Canadian Army, at a march past. The whole event turned out very well.

Throughout the campaign in North-West Europe, the health of the men was excellent and morale was high, chiefly due to the vastly improved conditions over those in Italy.

## **59 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 11<sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Ontario Tank Regiment)**

59 LAD arrived in Marseille France, on 6 March 1945 after a stormy 36-hour voyage from Leghorn, Italy. The voyage was uneventful, except for one man being killed on another boat and our two breakdown vehicles being slightly damaged due to tanks breaking loose in the LSTs. We travelled from Marseille to Mouscron, Belgium, taking from 7 to 12 March, and travelling approximately 700 miles with only about four serious vehicle breakdowns in the regiment on the way.

All ranks were treated very well by the Belgian people, who practically gave us a home away from home. The social life and entertainment was very high, with parties and dancing galore. Meanwhile, preparations were underway to ready our men and tanks for battle, which was expected to take place soon in Holland. An ambitious programme of welding protective track on all fighting tanks commenced. Leaves in the UK started at this time, and were highly appreciated. Field Marshal Montgomery made a welcoming speech to all troops in 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps recently arrived from Italy.

The LAD moved on 23 March to an area near Nijmegen, Holland, having an AWD from 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop along for second echelon tank repairs. Work was carried on with the 49<sup>th</sup> British Division, who agreed to handle all second echelon "B" vehicle work.

Our tanks first went into action in this theatre on 2 April, clearing the island between Nijmegen and Arnhem. Only one tank casualty occurred, and this was due to a mine. This tank was quickly recovered and evacuated as it was beyond local repair.

On 13 April, 49<sup>th</sup> British Infantry Division, supported by the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment, put in an attack across the IJssel River, designed to force the fall of Arnhem. The LAD recovery tank was one of the first tanks across the river, this to keep the far bank clear of casualties. Not much recovery work was encountered around Arnhem, but the recovery tank crews had a few close calls when they were fired on by a German flak gun, and later were stonked. One tank was saved from a bazooka by the track that was welded on. On 24 April, our recovery tank Cpl was wounded and taken prisoner when sent on a reconnaissance with faulty information from regimental headquarters.



Shortly after this, we went into rest, and a painting programme was carried out on all of the regiment's "B" vehicles. The 17-pounder breechblocks were checked for binding, and fitted were necessary. Instrument inspection was held during the second week in May. Quite a number of tank motors were changed during this period.

The Eighth Victory Loan drive was well in hand by this time and the LAD led the regiment in per-capita sales. After VE-Day, our Mack breakdowns were used to help clear and consolidate dumps of German vehicles. Educational and sports programmes were given high priority and entertainment was well organized and adequate.

During the first two weeks of June, our tanks were completely inspected and classified. An inspection and march past was held by Gen Crerar, GOC First Canadian Army and on 18 June, all our tanks were turned in to the Army Turn-in Depot.

Throughout our short operational period in North-West Europe, the health of the men remained very good. Morale was never higher, no doubt due to the change for the better after Italy.

## **60 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 12<sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Three Rivers Tank Regt)**

60 LAD landed at the port of Marseille, France on 6 March 1945, after a rough crossing from Leghorn, Italy. The two recovery tanks of the LAD were forthwith loaded on railway cars and shipped with crews to Menin in Southwestern Belgium. The wheeled vehicles of the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment and the LAD proceeded by road, making the trip in five days.

On arrival in Menin, the regiment went into a rest and refit program, and 17-pounder Sherman tanks and Stuart VI tanks were issued to the regiment. On the personnel side, new battle dress and kit was issued, which was much in order, due to leaves to the UK being authorized.

The outstanding event of stayed in Belgium was the visit of Field Marshal Montgomery. This was most interesting to the men, as many of the LAD had been in Sicily and Italy when "Monty" commanded there.

On 10 April the regiment, with the LAD, moved to the Reichwald Forest, southwest of Cleve in Germany. The armoured brigade concentrated in the area under command of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps. On 14-15 April, the regiment's tanks moved up to the southwest of Apeldoorn, and in support of 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division put in an attack with Apeldoorn as the objective. Shortly after the successful operation, the LAD crossed the Ijssel River and set up in the vicinity of Apeldoorn. While in this location, Capt MacEachern was posted to 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps Troops Workshop and his place taken by Capt J. N. Kuenzig.

The regiment had considerable mechanical casualties during this period, and much good work was done by No. 2 AWD commanded by Capt Wardman. However, only one tank battle casualty was suffered throughout this action; a hit through a suspension.

After VE-Day, the regiment was given an occupational role in which the three squadrons occupied widely separated areas for approximately three weeks. Three 3-man sections of LAD personnel, accompanied squadrons to Haarlem, Rotterdam, and Apeldoorn.

On 1 June, the regiment concentrated in the town of Veenendaal near Ede. The LAD managed to occupy five garage buildings, which proved a big help in the inspection and repair programme undertaken in preparation for the turn-in of the regiment's tanks. Under ideal conditions, much was achieved in preparing the tanks, armament, small arms, and instruments for turn-in. All the tanks were painted, chiefly for the inspection, which was held on 8 June in the National Park south of Amersfoort. Gen Crerar, GOC First Canadian Army, was present for the final review of the tanks and the march past of personnel of the brigade.

The final classification of the tanks was made during the third week of the month. At this time, Capt J. N. Kuenzig left for Canada as he had volunteered for the CAPF. He was replaced by Capt Gage.

## **61 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 14<sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Calgary Tank Regiment)**

61 LAD arrived in the North-West European theatre in the middle of March 1945 from Italy. The move from Italy to Belgium was called *Goldflake* and took the LAD and regiment two weeks to complete. It was a remarkably smooth move. The only casualty was a burnt-out wheel bearing on one Mack recovery vehicle. We had to leave it in a recovery post.

Our first harbour in the new theatre was a little town called Dottignes, near the French-Belgian border. The local citizens took the men into their homes to live, complete with beds with white sheets on them, and all the comforts of home. The men were completely bewildered at first. It was nearly two years since any of us had seen such comforts with such hospitality. We stayed in this town for 26 days. At this time, we started leaves to the UK. We soon became accustomed to the thought of these leaves to the UK, but when we first heard it, the men felt that, for them, the war was over.

While in Dottignes, the regiment drew 31 new tanks. The establishment for tracked vehicles went from 54 to 85. The new tanks required essential modifications. This kept us very busy, with the usual pressure of lack of time, to keep us going all day and every day. Over and above this, we were requested to weld protective plate (tank track) on the front, the sides, and turret of all Sherman tanks in the regiment, a total of 64 tanks. This job took us exactly one month. It was completed one week before the war ended. The problems involved were, where to get the track and the welding rod, as well as an extra "KL" lorry [a welding truck]. On top of this, we had to adapt ourselves to the ever-changing tactical commitments of the regiment.

When we moved out of Belgium, we went across Southern Holland into Germany. We harboured in the Reichwald Forest for four days. It was the only time that we were in Germany as a unit. Most of the men were let down. The Germans we did see looked much too dull and stupid for *Herrenvolk*.

From this area, we moved up onto the island north of Nijmegen. Except for one day, the regiment remained there until a few weeks after the war was over. At this time, the tactical picture was changing hourly. We were very busy welding tracks on tanks. Everyone was very happy to get back into action again, and we were all looking forward to a glorious sweep through Holland. The morale of the unit and of the regiment was probably never higher. It was perfect fighting weather, with perfect roads to move on, something we had never had before. We finished the war in this state of mind. The regiment had one day of offensive action, in which they took the town of Ede. They had one tank knocked out and we had it cleared to the AWD in Arnhem in 24 hours. The rest of the regiment's commitments were that of a holding role, supporting very green Belgian troops on Nijmegen Island.

In the North-West Europe theatre, we did very little recovery work, and nothing remarkable in the way of special jobs. In fact we found that the regiment did not depend on us nearly as much as they did in Italy. This was due mainly to the good roads in the flat country in which the regiment moved. Also, the abundance of new equipment, and the ease with which workshops could be reached, took a load off our shoulders. On the other hand, we were all a little disappointed, as we felt that we were left out of the little bit of action that the regiment did see. In their battles in Italy, our recovery work was often a key factor in keeping the regiment up to strength and tanks. In this theatre there was literally "no business".

Looking back on this unit's history in this theatre, I can safely state that we did little out of the ordinary. We never had a shell drop anywhere near our harbour, and suffered no casualties of any kind. The men were remarkably healthy throughout, and we have had very little change in personnel. The only thing that we did that was original was build a fancy washing machine while waiting for the war to end.

## **A Narrative of RCEME, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, in North-West Europe**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade Workshop, RCEME**

In the planning of the assault landings on the coast of France, the workshop was broken down into the following groups:

Beach group - to land on D-Day and be attached to 23 Beach Recovery Section REME to work on drowned vehicles.

AWD - to land on D-Day plus 1 and to function as a small-scale workshop prior to the landing of the main body.

Main Workshop Group - to land on D-Day plus 2.

Residue Group - to land on D-Day plus 17.

The actual landings differed from the plan and the entire workshop less the Residue Group landed either late on D-Day plus 1 or early on D-Day plus 2. The workshop was set up and started to function at a location one mile north of Riviere on the road from Courseulles. For several days, due to lack of workshop facilities in the bridgehead, the volume of work was extremely high, and the lack of spare assemblies increased the difficulties. A large number of vehicles, both "A" and "B", were repaired in spite of handicaps and the results in reclaiming drowned vehicles were very good.

On 13 June 1944, the workshop moved to a more suitable site near Molineaux. A decrease in the number of vehicle casualties, together with the arrival in the beachhead of other RCEME workshops, eased the critical condition that had prevailed formerly.

During the ensuing period, which ended with the closing of the Falaise "pocket", the volume of work continued high but, with the improvement in the spare parts supply, no difficulty was experienced in maintaining sufficient serviceable tanks in the formation.

In the operations to clear the channel ports, the armour was used as infantry support and the bulk of the casualties were caused by minefields. Extensive damage to suspensions and holes resulted in several "Z" and "W" casualties.

In the fighting to clear the area south of the River Maas, heavy rains and low-lying ground led to a considerable number of bogged down tanks, most of which were recovered later with little or no damage by enemy action.

Due to heavy enemy opposition west of the Rhine, a large number of tank casualties were encountered, but an adequate supply of spares enabled repairable equipment to be returned to service promptly.

After the crossing of the Rhine, no great volume of work was experienced due to crumbling enemy resistance. During this phase, practically all vehicle casualties were handled by the two AWDs working with the regiments.

Throughout the campaign, it was found that an AWD was very effective in reducing the time equipment was kept out of action for repairs. The size of these detachments was raised to suit the volume of work, and on occasion consisted of reinforcements attached to the AWD concerned.

In general the supply of spare parts was adequate to cope with work commitments. Some changes in scaling were found advisable from time to time.

Little or no use was found for tank transporters as recovery vehicles, due to bridge limitations and restrictions enforced on the use of these vehicles in forward areas. These vehicles were used mainly to transport major assemblies on unit moves.

With few exceptions, the present workshop organization was found quite suitable and sufficiently flexible to meet the varied conditions of operation.

## **54 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 6<sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (1<sup>st</sup> Hussars)**

**Pre-invasion in Britain.** Owing to the fact that the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (1<sup>st</sup> Hussars) was part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, which was attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division during the pre-invasion period in Britain, it had to take part in the first wave of the assault in the invasion of Europe. For this task, the 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment, to which 54 LAD is attached, had to be equipped with special equipment. The onus of servicing and repairing all this new equipment was placed on this LAD.

Due to the extensive training programme carried out by the tank crews of the parent unit prior to the assault on the beaches of Normandy, the work involved in servicing and repairing was greatly increased for the LAD.

**Phase 1 – Invasion.** 54 LAD, consisting of one of its recovery tanks and crew landed on the beaches of Normandy between La Riviere and Courseulles-sur-Mer on 6 June 1944 at 0800 hours. This tank had the honour of being the first recovery tank to land in our sector of the beaches.

Immediately upon landing, the LAD began its work. Tanks were recovered out of LSTs, which had been blown up by sea mines while under enemy fire. The greater part of D-Day was spent on the beaches where the repair of tanks was carried out. At nightfall, the LAD, now complete, moved inland, and in the inky darkness of the night and amidst the confusion of battle, assembled all its personnel and vehicles on a side road.

After a few hours sleep, the men of the LAD upon awakening, stared at each other in surprise when they observed about 75 Germans escorted by a few infantry shuffling along the road in the grey dawn of morning. These German soldiers had been made prisoners about 50 yards from the LAD's encampment.

In the following few days, repairs and recovery of tanks were carried out through out the entire day and partly in the night without respite. The work was interrupted by frequent enemy shelling but was carried out successfully nevertheless.

With the capture of Norrey-en-Bessin, where five tanks were recovered under heavy enemy fire by the LAD recovery crews, the 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (1<sup>st</sup> Hussars) had completed its role in the initial assault and finally retired to Basly to regroup and to be reequipped. There the LAD fitters redoubled their efforts towards the preparation of the regiment's tanks for the next role, the crossing of the Orne River at Caen.

**Crossing of the Orne River at Caen.** After stiff engagements at Gauchy and Chesy(?) on the approaches to Caen, the regiment and the LAD assembled at (?) in a long ravine, prior to the large-scale assault across the Orne River. Enemy shelling from high-velocity 88-millimeter guns and mortars was extremely heavy all the time. The Luftwaffe paid frequent visits to the area, dropping bombs, strafing, and generally making it uncomfortable for the men of 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment and the LAD. On 18 July, Cfn (?) of the RCEME fitters attached to the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment died of wounds sustained during a period of heavy enemy shelling.

In spite of these difficulties, the tanks were finally prepared to undertake the crossing of the River Orne, which took place at Colombelles(?), a suburb of Caen. In this operation, eight of the tanks were knocked out by mines in the field near a large factory at Colombelles. On 18 (?) July 1944, while attempting to

recover some of these tanks out of this heavily mined field, Cfn Cullen(?) of the LAD recovery section was killed instantaneously by a mine. One of his friends, Cfn(?) who was present at the time of this unfortunate accident, sustained injuries to his eyes and ears, which necessitated his evacuation to hospital and finally his return to Canada.

After the capture of Colombelles(?), the LAD moved up to the outskirts of Ifs near (?). There, extensive repairs were carried out by the LAD in preparation of the role that the tanks of the regiment were to take in the capture of the high ground overlooking the approaches to Falaise.

At one stage of the battle for the high ground before Falaise, one of the recovery tanks ventured out at night to recover a tank that was about 400 yards ahead of the Forward Defense Line. As the recovery tank neared to the disabled tank, the enemy promptly illuminated the area with flares. After a few uncomfortable minutes, the disabled tank was hooked onto the tow bars of the recovery tank. As the two tanks began to move away, they were followed by the angry chatter of machine guns amidst bursts of artillery and mortar shells from the enemy.

In the area of Vaucelles and Ifs, the LAD had to carry out its work under the most difficult and perilous conditions that it ever faced during the entire campaign in North-West Europe. Heavy mortaring, shelling by high velocity 88-millimeter guns by the enemy, and frequent visits by the Luftwaffe made work and mere existence extremely hazardous. Quite often by day and by night, shells and bombs landed in the immediate LAD harbour area. On 8 August 1944, allied planes bombed part of the regiment's vehicles and personnel, which were camped about 200 yards away, causing a heavy toll of damage and casualties to them.

In spite of all this, the LAD suffered no casualties and very little damage to vehicles to speak of.

**Falaise Gap.** After the high ground overlooking Falaise was finally captured from the Germans, the regiment and the LAD moved to Grasmenil. On 14 August, the day that the Royal Air Force staged a large air assault on the defences before Falaise, prior to the land assault in which tanks of the regiment took part, bombs were dropped by our own air forces about 200 yards away from the LAD harbour area. Fortunately men and vehicles of the LAD escaped injury.

After the closing of the gap at Falaise, the regiment regrouped at Louviers-en-Auge, where repairs were carried out on tanks and trucks by the LAD.

One of the most interesting features of the long treks from the Falaise area to Calais was a wonderful performance of the vehicles of the regiment. It was very gratifying to the LAD and regimental fitters to notice the absence of breakdowns of tanks and trucks during these long trips.

**Calais.** In this operation, which began on the night of 18 September 1944, quite a few tanks bogged down in the marshy areas near Calais. Tanks were recovered in many minefields, and marshy land, and under heavy enemy fire at times.

**Journey through Belgium into Holland.** Again the long journey through Belgium, which was undertaken in two laps lasting a day and night, was highlighted by the splendid performance of the tanks and trucks of the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment and the LAD.

**Capture of Breda.** At Baarle-Nassau, before the attack on Breda was launched, the LAD did repairs on some of the tanks. This work was carried out under the occasional enemy artillery and mortar shelling which was fairly accurate. The building in which the LAD was housed at the time was struck by enemy shells several times, but fortunately no one was injured. After the fall of Breda, the regiment and the LAD remained in the town for several weeks to regroup and rest.

**Winter campaign, Nijmegen sector.** On 9 November, the regiment and the LAD moved to Molenhoek where the tanks of the regiment assumed a static role of holding the lines in support of the infantry until after Christmas. At Molenhoek, the LAD carried out the usual repairs out of doors in all sorts of inclement weather thus keeping the tanks in very good condition. After Christmas, some of the regiment's

tanks moved to an island across the Waal River in front of Nijmegen to support infantry, which were holding a line on this island. Later on in January, the rest of the regiment and the LAD moved to Lent(?), a village on the island. Recovery work carried out during the battle of Zetten was extremely difficult owing to the soft and boggy nature of the ground, which was covered with soft snow and ice.

At one time the work was so difficult that the recovery tanks themselves were bogged down and the aid of D-8 [Caterpillar tractors] had to be enlisted.

**Battles of Keppeln, Udam, Hochwald, and Xanten.** On 20 February 1945, the regiment and the LAD moved to the Reichswald, where much time was spent in preparing the tanks for the coming battles in Germany. In these battles, fought west of the Rhine, many tanks were made casualties and caused a lot of work to the recovery crews and the LAD. This work, most of the time, was carried out under enemy fire. On 1 March 1945, near Moyland in Germany, about fifteen planes of our own air forces attacked the LAD harbour while some of the men were repairing tanks. The planes bombed and strafed the LAD harbour for a few minutes. Trucks of another unit, which were parked near the tanks undergoing repairs, were hit by the bombs and were set on fire very easily as they contained gasoline and ammunition. No one in the LAD was injured and the vehicles escaped damage somewhat miraculously.

**Battle of Apeldoorn.** On 2 April 1945, the regiment and the LAD moved across the Rhine at Emmerich and harboured near Zeddam in Holland to prepare for the crossing of the Ijssel River and the battle of Apeldoorn. Owing to the fact that a bridge had not been spanned across the river at the time, the tanks were ferried across one by one. In the early stages of the battle across the river, repairs were carried out by the regimental fitters, who later on were joined by some of the LAD men, after permission for them to cross the river had been secured. On 14 April 1945, L/Cpl Stanfield H. R. and Trooper Bethell(?), both of the recovery crews, sustained injury when the recovery tank ran over a mine. Their injuries necessitated their hospitalization for several weeks. After the capture of Apeldoorn, the regiment and the LAD moved to Lorup in Germany.

**End of the war in Europe.** After spending some time in repairing the tanks while in the area of Lorup, the regiment and the LAD moved to Westersomets(?). In that area, the tanks took part in the few minor skirmishes without suffering any casualties except two of the recovery tanks. In fact the last tank casualties that the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment suffered were inflicted on these two recovery tanks. During the night of 1 May 1945, a number of German slipped through the lines and discharged their Panzerfausten at the recovery tanks and damaged two of them. One of them was damaged enough to require second echelon repairs. The other had its armour patched up in no time by the LAD's welder. The crews of the tanks were fortunately uninjured in this little incident.

From this area, the regiment and the LAD proceeded to Bad Zwische(?)hn, where repairs were carried out on the tanks and trucks by the LAD.

On 8 May 1945, the war in Europe was officially declared at an end, but the LAD personnel and the regimental mechanical staff still carried on with their work on the regiment's tanks and trucks.

**Recapitulation of tank casualties.** For the entire campaign in North-West Europe, the total of tank casualties sustained by the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (1<sup>st</sup> Hussars) are on record as follows:

1204	X casualties
397	Y casualties
120	brewed
25	beyond economical repair

Although the above-mentioned figures are not exactly correct, they are a fair indication of the number of casualties sustained by this regiment, and an approximate number of man-hours spent on recovery and repair work by this LAD.

## **55 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 10<sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Fort Garry Horse)**

The activities of 55 LAD in North-West Europe can be divided into three distinct periods. The first was the assault on the Normandy beaches and the build-up and breakthrough. The second period covers the pursuit through France to Antwerp, and the third the operation in the Low Countries.

The early hours in Normandy were, quite naturally, most confused, and the LAD as such did not land with the assault troops. The three armoured recovery vehicles under command of the LAD waded ashore with the tanks, and a group of fitters with a jeep, breakdown lorry, stores lorry, a motorcycle, and the "KL" lorry came in some hours later. This group might better have been phased in one day later because the shifting and milling on the beaches and surrounding country made it almost impossible to maintain contact with the parent unit, let alone take care of any casualties which may have occurred. As the beach became organized, and something like a line of communication began to take shape, it became possible to move out and undertake certain light jobs. The absolute lack of spare parts at this time rendered anything but patching and temporary repairs out of the question. However, most of the casualties were well beyond our, or anyone else's, echelon of repair and a good deal of time was spent learning how to stay alive. After the second day, brew-ups ceased to be the only casualties. There arose a demand for fast-moving parts and there was a very limited supply. Thus, cannibalization became a necessity. It finally became necessary to set aside an NCO and two men as a permanent scrounging crew in order to keep the equipment running. While the practice was necessary, it was unfortunate that it wasn't more carefully controlled in the early days. Abandoned equipment, which was not very seriously damaged, was strewn all over the country. Components were removed with no thought given to damage caused to neighbouring ones. There were facilities available for concentrating all this equipment in guarded parks. It would have saved us all time and manpower to have contributed men to form permanent staffs for the systematic stripping of equipment and preparation and preservation of components. By the ninth day, the bulk of the LAD had landed and we had established ourselves as a self-contained unit, reinforced by the crews of the three armoured recovery vehicles and certain of the regimental fitters.

By this time, the parent unit had begun a period of almost continuous action, which was to last for the next 40-odd days. We had very little time for rest.

Tank casualties were heavy and replacement equipment scarce. In order that the unit could keep fighting, recovery and repair gangs were on the hop all their waking hours. The brigade workshop was usually overloaded, so we undertook all types of jobs ourselves. We exchanged engine assemblies, guns, complete suspension units, and even put a new floor in the hull of one of the armoured recovery vehicles which ran over one too many mines. As the beachhead developed into a front, things became easier. New replacement parts became available and new equipment began coming in. For a time, the LAD was able to go back to performing only first and very light second-line repairs. The replacement equipment was ample to fill in vacancies when the brigade workshop became overloaded. By this time, the front had become extended. Squadrons of the parent unit began to operate some distance apart. The original organization controlling all recovery and repair from one place became impractical, so it was broken down along more conventional lines. The armoured recovery vehicles were turned over to the squadrons, and the central workshop made up of Armoured Corps and RCEME men was reduced in size. Then came the breakthrough with new problems. For more than a month, we operated at distances always greater than 30 miles from the workshop and Ordnance Field Park. Long moves were almost a daily occurrence. It became necessary to divide all available craftsmen into groups. When a piece of equipment became a casualty, a group was assigned to it and remained with it until it was repaired and caught up to the unit. It was not an economical use of manpower, but was necessary because, due to poor communications and extended lines of communications, replacement equipment had once more become almost nonexistent. At times, the LAD was spread over 40 or 50 miles, doing everything from first to light third-line jobs. The mad rush finally ran itself out in Belgium. From there, we crossed the Dutch border into the mud. From

then on, our problems were mainly maintenance and recovery. The equipment was becoming worn, and inspections were necessary. The late fall and early winter settled in, and the easy holding role in the Nijmegen area provided the opportunity to get everything into shape for the offensive into Germany. For us, the worst of the war was over. All through the campaign in Germany, we were able to operate in a most orthodox way. When we became separated from our workshop, we had AWDs with us and so were able to concentrate on maintenance and inspections, which produced quite satisfactory results.

With the termination of the war, the brigade went into concentration and after a paint up, clean up, and tune up programme, an inspection was held by the brigade commander. Shortly after, our tanks were all turned in, and information was received that the brigade would be broken up at the end of June. The regiment and the LAD proceeded to Hoogezand and came under command of 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. It is expected that the regiment will remain in this area until disbandment or repatriation is forthcoming.

## **85 Light Aid Detachment, RCEME attached to 27<sup>th</sup> Cdn Arm'd Regt (Sherbrooke Fusiliers)**

This unit touched down at Mike Beach, Normandy, France, on D-Day and proceeded to join "A" echelon of the parent unit.

A serious casualty was suffered in the channel crossing in the loss of one heavy breakdown vehicle, and one 60-cwt stores lorry complete, due to enemy action. The eight personnel were UK survivors.

With the parent unit engaged in all-out battle with the enemy, a very heavy schedule of repair work was on hand. The above-mentioned loss of vehicles and personnel was keenly felt and considerably impaired the efficiency of the LAD. Four ORs were later borrowed from the workshop to assist the already overworked personnel and were a great help indeed.

On 14 July, the LAD moved forward with the parent unit to Camilly, where a "breather" was being had for reorganization. At this stage, the recovery section, consisting of three armoured recovery vehicles and crews, were placed under the administration of the LAD. This followed a decision to adopt a fluid system of recovery rather than static, thus allowing a reclaiming of the casualties which otherwise might be lost due to the fluctuation of the battlefield. The fluid policy called for operations as close to the area of battle as a reasonable degree of safety would allow, and although somewhat more dangerous, subsequent operations proved this method highly satisfactory.

In mid-June, our rear party of five vehicles and four personnel joined up with the LAD.

With the LAD continuously on the heels of the fighting echelon, the month of June was an extremely busy one from the standpoint of work to be done. When considering that the unit was often subjected to enemy shell fire during the day, and suffered considerable loss of rest due to enemy night action, the quality and amount of work accomplished was a credit to all concerned.

**July.** Early July saw heavy fighting with the LAD being split into two sections, the stores and administration being situated at Colombe-sur-Thaon, while all available fitters and mechanics were located a short distance ahead, immediately to the rear of "F" echelon to facilitate quick repair work to damaged armoured fighting vehicles. It was at this point that seven of the personnel who had been UK survivors during the channel crossing returned to the unit, and the resulting allowance of proper distribution saw the LAD operating much more efficiently. A nightly "stand-to" was the regular order for a short period at this time, as a heavy enemy counterattack was feared and 50% of the LAD was on guard each night. 9 July saw the start of the push on Caen, and for the next seven days, every available moment was utilized for maintenance of the armoured fighting vehicles.



On 15 July, the parent unit stood down and with the LAD moved to a rest camp at Epron, with considerable work to be done in the line of check and repairs. After three days, the camp was subjected to heavy enemy shelling on the night of 18 July, and a hurried evacuation was made at dawn of the 19 July. The unit and LAD moved across the river Orne to a town on the outskirts of Caen by the name of Fauberg de Vaucelles. The LAD was in a poor location to accomplish their work at this point, being set up immediately alongside a main highway, and were subjected to regular nightly bombing and intermittent shelling by the enemy. As the parent unit was in continuous contact with the enemy to the south and southwest, a regular running schedule of repair work was on hand at all times.

A decision was made this month to modify all tanks with all available old track, welding the same to the hulls for protection. This means a great deal of extra work for the welding section, and it has now become quite evident that an LAD of this type, serving in an armoured regiment, could easily do with an additional "KL" lorry and welder. With our war establishment calling for two driver-operators, and having been unable to obtain any through regular reinforcement channels, the regiment this month loaned one to the LAD.

**August.** We are still located at Fauberg de Vaucelles with regular routine repairs taking place. One new heavy breakdown vehicle arrived early this month, replacing the one lost in the channel. Recovery is kept regularly busy reclaiming battle casualties, and the centralized control resulting from being placed under command of the LAD is proving to have been definitely a move in the right direction. The latter part of August saw the LAD with the parent unit moving through Fleury-sur-Orne, Brionne, and on to Elbouf. Up to this date, the LAD has been receiving "Compo" rations of their own and providing the cooking the best way possible, but have now started to receive their meals from one of the unit's kitchens.

**September.** With two long convoys in early September, the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month saw the LAD with the parent unit at Hazebrouck, France. A period of three weeks were spent here and an entire vehicle check completed keeping all personnel busily occupied. While located at this position, the LAD had the opportunity of taking a tour to Vimy Ridge and seeing the Canadian Memorial from the last war. Practically all personnel took advantage of this outing, and it was a decided success. The condition of the AFVs was brought to a good standard, and the latter part of this month saw us move on a lengthy convoy to the town of Contich, just south of Antwerp, Belgium. There was some light contact in this vicinity with the enemy, and a few light routine repairs.

**October.** The first part of October saw this unit on a short move forward to Oostermalle, Belgium, where an AWD was added to the regiment as the distance back to the base workshop was too great for backloading repairs. Three more short forward moves toward the latter part of this month found our unit located in open country, with the regiment being in occasional light contact with the enemy. There was a fairly light schedule of repair work lately. The morale of the personnel has been kept at a satisfactory level right along, which is usually the case when they are steadily occupied.

**November.** November saw the regiment standing down and, with the LAD, located on the outskirts of Nijmegen. This setup was very undesirable as far as working conditions were concerned, but we remained here for three weeks. Also, the damp, wet weather set in in earnest and this added to the discomfort. We moved about two miles southwest of Nijmegen on 23 November and located our workshop in a fairly decent garage at a small place named Alverna. The personnel managed to obtain comfortable billets locally, and conditions were a big improvement all around. A complete artillery and vehicle check of the AFVs began in late November, and we also commenced the installation of infantry telephones on all tanks. The LAD decided to construct a bath unit for the regiment, but as the proper material was found to be unavailable, the plan was discontinued. Weather was very trying all of this month.

**December.** Mid-December saw the balance of the vehicle checks completed and the rest of the month entailed only a light routine manner of work. A Christmas dinner was held by the regiment in a local hall and rather a good time was had by all, with gifts and favours being distributed by the Auxiliary Services.

**January 1945.** We moved on New Years Day to Boxtel, Holland, and vicinity to stand by in the event of a parachute invasion, and were greeted in the early morning by Jerry strafing. That was all the enemy action that took place during our week's stay there. During the week we were there, the "B" vehicles were greased and serviced under the supervision of the LAD. We returned to our former location at Alverna on 7 January. The welding section was steadily active in an endeavour to finish up the telephone installations as soon as possible. On 21 January, we moved on a short convoy to Bergzicht, Holland, and after an uneventful stay there of one week, again returned to our previous harbour at Alverna, Holland. January was a quiet month all around with the weather being mostly clear and cold.

**February.** In February we remained in the same location with conditions quiet and a light schedule of work taking place.

**March.** We moved into Germany with the regiment in early March, where the regiment saw a brisk action at Calcar and Cleves, and the LAD were again working at top speed repairing AFVs to a state of battle-worthiness. On 10 March, the regiment stood down and moved back to Mook, Holland, for a ten-day rest period and vehicle check. On 20 March, we moved to the Reichswald Forest and on 28 March crossed the Rhine River to the vicinity of Emmerich. Considerable mechanical repair work was necessary on the vehicles at this time, and the LAD had little time to spare. The recovery section has had its hands full of late as the territory in which the regiment is operating is soft ground and there is a good deal of bogging on the part of the AFVs. Considerable wet weather this month and living conditions are far from comfortable.

**April.** 1 April saw us moving back to S'Heerenven, Holland, endeavouring to contact the enemy. There were approximately a dozen moves made this month, finally taking us through Deventer, Meppel, Heerenven, Leeunwarden, and we wound up in Winschoten, Holland. About a week was spent here and we ran into some difficulty with motor replacements supplied by the workshop. These rebuilt motors were proving very unsatisfactory and several had to be returned to the shop shortly after being installed. Several tanks were casualties due to enemy action in this sector, and the recovery section was steadily on the go and the LAD had their time fully occupied.

**May.** We moved on 1 May to Leer, Germany where the regiment had been in contact with the enemy. We were located in splendid indoor billets with first-rate dining hall facilities, which can also be used for the Auxiliary Services picture shows. While situated here, 8 May arrived, bringing with it the cessation of hostilities in North-West Europe, which was a great day for one and all. Considerable celebration was to be seen around and about, which was quite in keeping with the prevailing spirit at the time. On 11 May, we moved on to Lingen, Germany, and were billeted in barracks where it was the intention that we should stay for some time. However, these plans underwent a change and on 21 May, we again moved to the town of Steenderen, Holland. At this point, all the regiment's AFVs were given a thorough check as to classification, artillery, etc. They were painted inside and out, and by the early part of June were turned in. The last few weeks have been very busy ones for all hands, but with the turn-in of the AFVs, there will be more than enough time to spare.

**June.** Early June saw the completed check and turn-in of all the regiment's AFVs. Conditions were quiet with only a few light repairs to "B" vehicles taking place. We moved to the vicinity of Doetinchem, Holland, on 24 June.

**July.** We were located near the town of Doetinchem, Holland, with a few light repairs on hand at now and then. A fine programme of organized sports is set up with some events taking place every day of the week, helping to keep all personnel occupied mentally and physically. Also an educational course of studies has been set in motion, with classes of various kinds being held each day of the week. At present the LAD personnel are luckily situated in a vicinity that is able to provide the use of a fine swimming pool, good tennis courts, and there is a dance and picture show at least once a week for all. Although some of the personnel are somewhat disgruntled at the prospect of several months elapsing before they will be repatriated, the morale in general is in good shape.

## **A Narrative of RCEME Lines of Communications Units in North-West Europe**

### **No. 1 Advanced Base Workshop, RCEME**

The history of this unit under its present name is associated with that of No. 1 Heavy Repair Shop (MT), RCASC, Canadian Army Overseas, in that, in the course of events, the above workshop was transferred from RCASC to RCOC en bloc to form the nucleus of the present units.

No. 1 Heavy Repair Shop (MT), RCASC, was formed and recruited in Ottawa (Military District 3) and came to the UK under the command of Lt-Col G. M. Parker.

Prior to the unit coming overseas, an advance party under the command of Capt E. W. Coleman was formed on 6 January 1942 by RCASC, CAO, in the UK and despatched to Slough to commence the design and construction of the plant and buildings requisitioned from the Slough Trading Estate, the principal portion being a part of the building occupied by the Weston Biscuit Co.

The main body of the unit was taken on strength of the Canadian Army Overseas on 2 May 1942, and the main body of the AFG 1098, which was of Canadian origin, commenced arriving shortly after.

On 31 August 1942, the unit was transferred practically en bloc to RCOC and became known under a provisional establishment as Advanced Component No. 1 Canadian Base Ordnance Workshop, RCOC, under command of Maj J. R. Dunlop.

On 25 November 1942, Lt-Col W. L. Thompson was posted in as A/OC.

During the period from December 1942 to February 1943, all personnel were given basic training and battle drill, under the direction of Lt A. J. Greathed, attached from (?), trade tested under RCOC standards and groups were sent to 1 CORU for refresher courses in motor vehicles and other trades.

On 16 April 1943, following approval of the establishment AFG 1098-946 by Army Headquarters and CMHQ Administrative Order No. 51 (?), dated 29 March 1943, the unit became known as No. 1 Advanced Base Workshop, RCOC, and all personnel were posted to it within the establishment (504 all ranks) by ranks and trades to the unit or to No. 1 CORU as the case might be. A start was made on fitting the tools and equipment to the new AFG 1098.

Previous to the approval of the establishment, arrangements had been made with 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Base Ordnance Workshop (CBOW) to trained personnel for the "A" vehicle section (tanks), the telecommunications section, and the instrument section. These were now organized and attached to 1 CBOW for all purposes.

The workshop output at Slough for "B" vehicles, guns, motorcycles, engine reconditioning, machine shop, and manufacturing was closely correlated with 1 CBOW in order to obtain the maximum output as governed by equipment, personnel, and workshop layout.

On 18 May 1943, Lt-Col W. L. Thompson was appointed to command No. 1 Advanced Base Workshop, RCOC.

The summer and fall of the balance of 1943 was spent in concentrating on production consistent with the training and upgrading of the personnel

Early in December 1943, it was decided as a part of the training programme to close up the shop, pack up the equipment, and move by train from Slough to the tank hangars in Crookham, Hampshire. On 17 December 1943, this exercise was started. A report was rendered and included in our war diary.

Following this move, the shop again concentrated on production and adjustments to AFG 1098 as experience indicated.

A 26 April 1944, we came under command of 21 Army Group – (?) - Headquarters Advanced Base Workshop, REME, in accordance with Admin. Order No. 3, CMHQ Great Britain.

On 15 May 1944, all personnel were transferred from RCOC to RCEME.

A detailed of our activities from D-Day to VE-Day follows.

### **War Diary - No. 1 Advanced Base Workshop, RCEME**

6 June 1944. The long-awaited D-Day has arrived and after a year of work, training, and teaching men for the special jobs they will be called upon to do. The unit is ready and willing to go, the only question is, when? And so here we are at the Tank Hangars, Leipzig Barracks, Crookham Cross Roads, Hants, England. With D-Day, the release for 20 GS 158” 60-cwts came as unit equipment for our move overseas.

7 June 1944. Unit training on embarking and disembarking goes on, on specially-built training ramps. The transport boys are really doing a swell job with the “heavies”.

14 June 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson in London at Headquarters 21 Army Group getting special instructions and information. He meets Col C. Farrar, Chief Electrical and Mechanical Engineer, Headquarters Base Workshops, REME.

15-16 June 1944. “Jerry” air blitz in our area, but all workshops and equipment are safe.

18-19 June 1944. Buzz bomb parade all around and over the shops, no damage.

20 June 1944. Captain L. T. Poulter and Lt J.M.S. Hart returned to unit with complete telecommunications section for overseas move. Loading of equipment goes along in a fine manner.

22 June 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson addressed all unit officers on their part in the coming operations and what he and the army expected from them.

24 June 1944. Capt P. Robertson completed loading the machine shop and all No. 3 Company equipment at 1630 hrs.

27 June 1944. The unit is down to Scale 3 equipment, and A.V. battle dress issued.

29 June 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson laid on a special training set up to accustom the unit for overseas work. All men went through the gas chamber for a final check on gas equipment.

5 July 1944. Capt J. Duncan replaced Capt W. L. Rand as the unit paymaster.

6 July 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson went to CMHQ, London, and got 200 pairs of patches so we could complete the unit. Maj H. W. Thomas, 2i/c, left for France.

13 July 1944. Brigadiers McQueen and Keenleyside with Col Pope inspected the unit and said goodbye to all officers.

15 July 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson inspected the unit in complete overseas equipment.

20 July 1944. The movement order is in and the whole unit worked late into the night.

21 July 1944. Up to 0500 hrs, the train party in charge of Capt M. D. MacKay, adjutant, with Lieutenants Pritchard and Miller and 406 Ors left Fleet Station at 0900 hrs to Fareham and into Camps A7 and A17. Capt H. A. Rice arrived with 34 vehicles and Supervisor A. C. Hanks, CLWS, arrived at 1700 hrs at A7. The bulk of the unit is at A17.

25 July 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson arrived at A7 and A17.

26 July 1944. The first parties are away for France.

27-28 July 1944. All sitting on LCTs out in the bay. Lt Z. Miller and one OR were hit by antiaircraft shell fragments at Camp Site in Normandy.

29 July 1944. France, headed for Gold Beach, Normandy. Finally landed on Juno. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson made it ashore, we had too much of a load and had to wait for the high tide.

30 July 1944. The unit is all ashore and pushed off from the beach at 2300 hrs. What a drive with our heavy equipment, pulled into the camp site outside Bayeux at 0230 hrs. We are up ahead of our own heavy guns, so lots of noise.

1 August 1944. The Orderly Room, Post Office, and switchboard are in operation. The tank shop under Lt A. E. Pritchard is already at work out in the field. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson and Maj H. Thomas are laying out the workshops in our cow pastures. S/Sgt Foster and party are off to 17 Army Ordnance Depot to supervise the inspection and issue of guns.

2 August 1944. Capt M. D. MacKay and Supervisor A. C. Hanks are away to find 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelons. Hanks found the film exchange and got two films for the boys. "Jerry" planes were overhead at 0300 hrs.

4 August 1944. The first picture show for the boys in France. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson returned from the front area at 2000 hrs.

5 August 1944. Lt J. Young and 52 ORs have been attached from 175 (Br) Pioneer Company. Workshops are popping up all over the place.

7 August 1944. An outside phone line has been installed by the Signals. "Jerry" over as usual.

12 August 1944. The first unit show was put on in the Legion. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson opened the show.

16 August 1944. Part of the unit is moving to a new site. There was a stand to on account of "Jerry" paratroops, but we missed the show, it was not near us.

18-24 August 1944. Rain, rain, we work in a sea of mud.

28-29-30 August 1944. Completing the unit move to the new site on the Bayeux-Caen road. The weather is a little better.

2 September 1944. Gen Murison inspected the workshops.

4 September 1944. Maj-Gen Montague and Col Drew, Premier of Ontario, visited the workshop.

6 September 1944. Brig Caffyn and Brig Storrar visited the shops, also came the rain.

7 September 1944. A sea of mud, first issue of rum for all tonight. Everyone and everything soaked.

9 September 1944. The first issue of English beer, what excitement.

10 September 1944. Capt P. Robertson, Capt L. T. Poulter, with a detachment of men are away on a special IVT rush job. Lt J.M.S. Hart left the unit on posting to HQ AOD.

14 September 1944. Brig Caffyn and Col Guy visited the shops.

16 September 1944. A shell exploded in a tank, slight wounds to two men. Capt M. D. Mackay away to try and find where 1 Canadian Echelon had hidden itself.

17-27 September 1944. Rain, rain, working under terrible conditions, 50% of the unit are down with colds.

29 September 1944. The first leaves have been arranged to Deauville under leave arrangements with the Canadian Leave Centre. 50 ORs and four officers. Col Farrar and Lt-Col W. L. Thompson are checking RVPs for parts as the parts shortage is serious.

30 September 1944. Lt R. J. Hopwood-Jones joined unit as W.E.O. Still raining.

3 October 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson away at 0700 hrs for Antwerp in a heavy rainstorm.

4 October 1944. Rum issued at noon as everyone is soaked. Aldershot shelter caught fire in a lightning storm at 0400 hrs.

6 October 1944. 60 men are away on a special carrier job, if they can find them in the mud. Still it rains.

12 October 1944. M60096 Cpl McCall, E. C., received bullet wound in accident in small arms section, and returned to England by air. Still raining.

16 October 1944. Two Romneys coming down for shipment forward. Still it rains.

17 October 1944. Lt T. E. Simpson in bed, Capt H. A. Rice and Capt W. Beddard tottering about. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson and Maj H. W. Thomas are both on-the-job but should be in bed. Half the unit is sick.

18 October 1944. A gale with rain, trees are down and one Romney was damaged and had to be taken down.

19 October 1944. An average of four men a day to the hospital, will the rain never end?

23 October 1944. Capt W. Beddard SOS unit and Capt J.N. Cram and R. G. Struthers taken on strength. Raining.

31 October 1944. The month ends, and it is still raining.

1 November 1944. Starting to pack up for our move to Brussels. All the shop concentrated on carriers.

3 November 1944. Lt. T.E. Simpson away to Brussels to report to CEME.

6 November 1944. Maj H. W. Thomas left for Brussels at 1730 hrs on a rush job from CEME. Lt A. E. Pritchard admitted to hospital.

7 November 1944. Still raining, Capt P. Robertson in bed. Sergeant Major Allen and 17 ORs away to Brussels to new site. Rum and hot coffee being issued all ranks. 65% of unit down with flu.

9 November 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson, Capt M. D. MacKay and RQMS Fraser all out chasing rubber boots for the men. No go.

11 November 1944. It is still raining. Seven 10-ton jobs away for the new site at 0700 hrs. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson got 100 pairs of rubber boots.

12 November 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson, Capts Rice, MacKay away in fog and rain to recon sites for convoy camps.

15 November 1944. Still raining. The first convoy was away at 0800 hrs. Capt MacKay in command with Capt R. G. Struthers, Duncan, Lts Hopwood-Jones and Pritchard, just returned from hospital. 204 ORs, convoy made first stop in pouring rain.

16 November 1944. Convoy up at 0530 hrs to make Arras second stop at 1700 hrs, in driving rainstorm.

17 November 1944. Whole convoy soaked, advance party into Brussels at 2000 hrs.

18 November 1944. Balance of convoy into Brussels at 0800 hrs.

19 November 1944. Balance of shop move of under Capt H. A. Rice at 0830 hrs, on way to Brussels. The last vehicle out was the D8 (Caterpillar tractor).

20 November 1944. Capt M. D. MacKay and Lt T. E. Simpson completed all arrangements had Headquarters 4 L of C Reed administration and stores, etc, in the new area. We are settled in Machelen, a small town in the corner between Vilvoorde and Brussels.

- 21 November 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson arrived in Brussels after a fast trip via Paris to pick up Maj-Gen Vannier's car there.
- 22 November 1944. The final convoy of the unit under Capt H. A. Rice came in at 1100 hrs. Still it rains. Excellent shops and the ranks billeted out.
- 25 November 1944. The first Reallocation Draft received, we part with "A" category men. We commence organizing our engine shop in a shop formerly used by the Germans.
- 26 November 1944. Lt A. E. Pritchard and 49 ORs away to Holland on a special job with 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division working on LVTs.
- 27 November 1944. A parade of flying bombs and V2s commenced, they come over every few minutes.
- 29 November 1944. Brig Caffyn in to inspect shops with Lt-Col W. L. Thompson. Lots of flying bombs.
- 1 December 1944. Seven special jobs in on White Scout Cars. Not a special public address systems to call on "Jerry". Lots of V2s.
- 2 December 1944. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson giving the men this afternoon and next Saturday afternoon off for Christmas shopping.
- 4 December 1944. B67332 Cfn Snider, F.N., returned to unit after being absent without leave for one year.
- 13 December 1944. Capt M. D. MacKay and Lt R. J. Hopwood-Jones on special P.A.D. course for flying bombs.
- 22 December 1944. What a month, snow, rain, cold. 100 men and two officers on duty at the shops 24 hours per day, "Jerry" dropping paratroopers. We take on the role of third echelon shop for 30 Corps.
- 25 December 1944. Christmas dinner for the men with real turkey from the Canadian Legion. Brig Caffyn and Col Farrar were guests of Lt-Col W. L. Thompson at the dinner.
- 26 December 1944. Capt M. Jacques arrived to take over as medical officer. The gun shop work overtime to meet demands.
- 29 December 1944. "Jerry" planes over, one shot down just passed No. 3 company building.
- 31 December 1944. "Jerry" came over at 0010 hours, and we really had a fireworks display.
- 1 January 1945. At 0930 hrs, "Jerry" came over and strafed the airfield, set off an ammunition dump, and raised a lot of hell. Grand dogfights all over the place.
- 3 January 1945. A buzz bomb hit a lot of our equipment out on the gun job. All the men are okay but the equipment was knocked out.
- 8 January 1945. Capt Cram SOS and Lt L. E. McClelland TOS.
- 17 January 1945. First UK leaves and what joy.
- 19 January 1945. Maj-Gen E.L.M. Burns inspected the shops. Very pleased.
- 31 January 1945. C9458\* Cpl Soule, G. A., No. 2 Company killed in accident to tank which went into an old bomb crater.
- 3 February 1945. Big write-up on the unit in the Maple Leaf.
- 7 February 1945. Lt Clements, the new telecommunications officer, TOS, also CSM Garrison who will be RSM. The gun shop is working day and night as a third echelon shop on 5.5-inch guns from Cleve for 53<sup>rd</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> Medium Regiments.
- 10 February 1945. Capt R.G. Struther SOS the unit.

13 February 1945. QMS Green and Sgt Evans being returned to Canada on 30-day leave. Lots of V2s.

26 February 1945. 135 UK leaves in allotment for March. Great joy.

1 March 1945. We can now say officially there are jet aircraft here, as if we did not know.

7 March 1945. Another paratrooper flash, but no action.

13 March 1945. Capt H.A. Rice, Capt P. Robertson going to Canada on leave. Maj H. W. Thomas in bed with the flu.

16 March 1945. Capt M. Jacques into hospital with pneumonia.

18 March 1945. Capt Woodman, replacement medical officer, arrives.

20 March 1945. CSM Garrison promoted to RSM.

21 March 1945. Capt J. H. Hallett TOS, Lt R. J. Hopwood-Jones returned from hospital. Capt J. Bell, Padre, into hospital.

23 March 1945. New Padre, Capt Shaw arrived. Weather getting a little warmer.

1 April 1945. The tank shop is just about clear. Lt A.E. Pritchard is really doing a job.

2 April 1945. Maj H. W. Thomas is to return to Canada.

5 April 1945. Maj A.E.G. Penny, the new 2i/c arrived. We clean up third echelon job on over 100 33<sup>rd</sup> Armoured Brigade Shermans.

10 April 1945. Supervisor A. C. Hanks is back from special service at Vimy. Bert was there at the last show.

13 April 1945. The RCEME team, Canadian Army, won the championship of the Army Hockey league at Antwerp. It was a honey of a game.

14 April 1945. The death of President Roosevelt was a great shock to all ranks of the unit.

16 April 1945. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson officially opened the new recreation centre in the Belfort building. Supervisor A.C. Hanks as a super set up for the boys.

19 April 1945. Brig Secord visited the shops with Lt-Col W. L. Thompson.

21 April 1945. The allotment of UK leave for May is 180. Good show, fine weather.

23 April 1945. Inspection teams from 1 Canadian Echelon were in at 1000 hrs. The unit got a fine report.

26 April 1945. Capt T. E. Simpson going to Canada. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson and Supervisor A. C. Hanks could have gone but are staying to finish the job.

30 April 1945. Snow fell today, yes snow.

1 May 1945. The death of Hitler announced.

3 May 1945. Maj-Gen Fielding, DQMG, Brig Caffyn, DME, in to see Lt-Col W. L. Thompson, also Mr. Gibson, Ministry of Supply, and 2 Chrysler experts, Mr. Brugman, and Mr. Lazelle. Capt M. D. MacKay attended the administrative meeting at 20 L of C.

4 May 1945. All German armies facing General Montgomery's 21 Army Group quit.

7 May 1945. Lt-Col W. L. Thompson received word that tomorrow is officially VE-Day.

9 May 1945. The Burgomeister of Machelen gave a party for Lt-Col W. L. Thompson and all his officers at 1400 hrs. Then all went to pay homage to the Unknown Soldier of the last war. And do endeth D-Day to VE-Day.



10 May 1945. We work as usual.

### **Special Commitments by 1 Canadian Advance Base Workshop, RCEME, in Normandy**

Commencing before our entire workshop was in Normandy, an artillery reorganization program was carried out in 17 A. O. D. Parks and consisted of servicing and testing 423 guns, in the main consisting of 293 - 25-pounders, 93 - 17-pounders, with a few 7.2s, 5.5s, 4.5s, and 6-pounders, with 358 artillery trailers. This called for a daylight until dark workday under adverse working conditions, but all commitments were met on time.

A modification program on 390 Field Artillery Tractors for 17-pounder ammunition storage was carried out in the workshop.

In order to allow quarter turning of 5.5-inch medium artillery barrels, to additional dowel holes were cut by means of a shaper in 91 barrels.

Glacis plates were strengthened in the 17 Churchill tanks by welding on additional plates.

Welders, welding machines, material, and other equipment assisted in the preparation of the Ram self-propelled tanks converted to armoured troop carriers for the Falaise gap show.

Our telecommunications shop, with assistance from our own welders and other shops, installed wireless sets in 110 LVTs for 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division.

We commenced in the 17 A.O.D. vehicle parks and finished up at our own site, with all the shop concentrated on carriers and a few armoured cars for a total score of some 820 units in the last six weeks of our stay in Normandy.

Within a few days of arriving in Belgium in late November 1944, our tank section moved to Bergen-op-Zoom to assist 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division in a LVT overhaul program for a six-week period.

Having taken over a workshop, equipped with engine stands, fan breaks, dynamometers, and some machine tools, immediately on our arrival in Belgium we commenced organizing and equipping to rebuild petrol and diesel engines of both North American and British types as designated by Ordnance. Under the supervision of 10-15 key soldiers, the personnel and 150 civilians of this shop by VE-Day were producing 50 engines per week.

During the Ardennes show in late December, we acted as a third echelon shop for 30 (Br) Corps. We did a quick overhaul of some 155-millimeter guns for Ordnance, 15-17 ACD, and later in January did third echelon work for 5 AGRA – 5.5-inch guns.

In early February we acted as the third echelon shop for 53<sup>rd</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> Medium Artillery Regiments near Cleve.

During March and early April, our tank shop completed the overhaul of just over 100 tanks for 33<sup>rd</sup> Armoured Brigade, meeting their schedule for the final battles in Germany.

Since VE-Day, we have continued our workshop operations at a high level of production. On 7 June 1945, we ceased to repair “A” vehicles and concentrated on “B” vehicles and engine overhaul production.

Previous to VE-Day, we had dispatched officers and ORs under the Rotation Leave Plan, and with the commencement of the Repatriation Drafts, CPAF and COF Drafts, and the diminishing quantity of work, the situation was studied early in June with a view to disbanding the unit.

As it was essential that the engine overhaul shop continue for a period, arrangements through CEME - Headquarters Base Workshops - REME with the DME - 21 Army Group Headquarters have been completed to leave essential equipment from our AFG 1098 with No. 1 Base Armament and General Workshop, REME, who have now succeeded to the operation of the shop at our present site.

On 13 June 1945, we posted personnel from our telecommunications section to form No. 2 L of C Telecommunications Workshop, RCEME, as approved under CGS 139 – 15 May 1945 and attached for all purposes.

At this time, 19 July 1945, our target date for disbandment is 31 July 1945, all shops have ceased productive work and are sorting out tools and equipment and packing as they become available.

Canadian units such as 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Port Workshop, 2 Canadian Advanced Days Workshop, one Canadian Rehabilitation Center, and certain COF units have been given a choice of tools and equipment deemed essential and advantageous to their operations. The balance will be preserved and packed awaiting disposition arrangements.

As of 31 July 1945, all personnel in strength be posted to 2 Canadian Advanced Base Workshop and the unit will be disbanded.

### **No. 2 Canadian Advanced Base Workshop, RCEME**

The following short history of No. 2 Canadian Advanced Base Workshop, RCEME, covers the period from 15 October 1943 up to the cessation of hostilities in North-West Europe on 8 May 1945.

The unit was authorized to mobilize in England, as of 15 October 1943, when the OC was appointed.

No active organizing was attempted for eight weeks. The total strength during that time was: the OC, a chief clerk, a driver, and a batman.

By 15 December, preliminary planning was completed, accommodation arranged, preliminary stores demands placed, and key officers selected.

First reinforcements, and drafts were taken on strength during the third week of December.

The early build-up was done at Leipzig Barracks and Crockham Tank Hangars, near Aldershot, Hants.

During the first week of January 1944, the unit, as then constituted, moved complete to Burnham Camp on the outskirts of Slough, Bucks. A modern Nissen hut camp accommodated the personnel. Several modern factory buildings within the Slough Trading estate accommodated the workshops. Both the camp and workshops had previously been occupied by 1 Canadian Advanced Base Workshop and therefore made early problems of organization less arduous.

The unit was rapidly reinforced up to the middle of February so that from that time onwards it has never been handicapped due to being understrength in accordance with the war establishment.

From March to June 1944, the workshop functioned on a normal operating basis. During that time, many difficulties of early formation were ironed out. These difficulties were considerable due to the fact that:

- All advanced base workshops mobilized in Great Britain were formed on war establishments and AFG 1098s, which had not been proven.
- The war office original plans did not call for mobility, in this type of REME workshop.
- The exact role and capacity of an advanced base workshop in a theatre of operations had not been established or proven.
- There was no outline available to officers commanding for a method of handling such a workshop intended for fourth echelon of the repair organization.

The work between March and June provided answers, or a substitute, for all of the problems outlined.

The war establishment was proven to be not too badly out of balance. Many items of equipment within the AFG 1098 were necessary, while there were also many omissions. Omissions were filled by authority

to demand obviously deficient items, and then such items were later added to the AFG 1098 by means of amendments.

The mobility of the unit was obtained by securing the loan of 20 6-ton lorries, 20 3-ton lorries, and to 40-ton transporters and trailers. These vehicles in addition to unit vehicles on the war establishment permitted the movement of the complete shop and equipment, plus some expendable raw materials i.e. bar iron and steel, paint, bronze, bolts, nails, etc.

The employment role of an advanced base workshop could not be completely established in England and had to be built up in the actual theatre of operations. The organization of such a shop was pretty well within the control of the individual commander and was governed by the usual rules of shop organization - always of course anticipating that mobility could be attained but that long static periods should normally be anticipated.

On 25 April 1944, the unit passed to the command of 21 Army Group Mechanical Engineering Directorate, from command of CMHQ. ME Directorate wisely decided not to disturb training programs, etc., that were then in effect. The result was that useful production in all shops and sub-shops was continued. Good training opportunities were available both technically and regimentally.

In addition to routine repairs of "A" and "B" vehicles, several pre-invasion commitments were completed. Two such items were conversion of several 6-ton Diamond T GS lorries to "L" type woodworking machinery lorries, and some 150 standard jeeps to cable laying types, suitable for the airborne forces.

A further workshop commitment was the preparation of all unit vehicles and equipment to provide for a "wet" landing across the beaches of the invasion beachhead. Such a prospect required the vehicles and machine tools, stores, etc., would be protected for a wade of 4 feet in depth and protection against an additional 3'6" splash or a total of 7'6".

All load-carrying vehicles and trailers were made to care for such a condition, by making watertight all vehicle boxes. The vehicle engines, etc., were waterproofed to standard specifications. By loading all stores in watertight vehicles, the necessity to protect each individual item was obviated, and loading simplified. All equipment was loaded and the unit was ready to be called forward by 15 July 1944. It was no one that there would be no movement before 7 August, so that during the period from 15 July to 7 August, a strenuous and complete training program of regimental training was put into effect. A complete review of basic arms training, range practices, route marches, and general conditioning were carried out. This period was under the direct supervision of infantry training officer instructors, who were well qualified to carry out such a program.

The move to North-West Europe commenced on 8 August and was completed on arrival in the Deliverande area by 13 August.

The unit moved into a field adjacent to the 1<sup>st</sup> (Br) Corps backloading point. The site was far from satisfactory from every point of view.

Drainage was nil with the resulting sea of mud in wet weather; a cloud of dust prevailed during dry periods. There was no accommodation for personnel. All of these factors were those that would be anticipated for forward echelons of workshops. It was impossible to establish the shops on this site. No attempt was made to fully unpack, nor was any attempt made to build permanent roads, buildings, etc. It was known that the state in this location was to be very temporary, and that just as soon as the armies moved forward, then a search would be made for more permanent accommodation.

Work at Deliverande consisted chiefly of sorting out the Backloading Park or "crock" pile. Several tanks were repaired by cannibalization. Instruments, small arms, and guns were rebuilt to a limited extent - on a similar basis of cannibalizing. Some 1,600 "B" vehicles from drowned vehicle parks were put back on the road.

Late in August, a prototype of a railway wheeled, three-ton lorry was developed. It proved to be satisfactory beyond expectations. The consolidation and rapid development of the lines of communication after the rapid advance of the armies across the Seine River eliminated the necessity for such extemporisation, being developed in all of its ramifications.

In the early days of September, a reconnaissance of possible advanced base workshop sites was made along the lines of communication through North-West France. A site was finally selected in Mortsel, a close in suburb of Antwerp. The building chosen had been used during the German occupation as the Areo motor repair plant of the Daimler-Benz organization. It had ample covered area, but was deficient of close in parking areas suitable for storage of vehicles.

Accommodation close to the plant was available for personnel. The prospect of development into a suitable site was favourable.

A small holding party was left on the site, while a large advance party was prepared and brought forward. This advance party made the move from Deliverande to Antwerp in two days arriving on 23 September. All personnel not required to act as drivers were forward by this date.

The main party, consisting of drivers and co-driver shop personnel, packed all equipment and came forward by 29 September. The shop had closed, reloaded, and moved forward 380 miles in less than 14 days. Preliminary operations were commenced in the new location by 30 September. The shop opened for production on full-scale on 7 October.

The lack of a supply base (AOD) in the Antwerp area during October and November was overcome by running a continuous service of stores lorries and trailers between Antwerp and Bayeux. All parts required for tanks, guns, and lorries came forward by unit transport. One officer, 23 men, and ten 6-ton lorry's and ten 6-ton trailers were used for this purpose.

The V1 flying bomb in V2 rocket attack on Antwerp commenced on 12 October. This workshop had the dubious honour of collecting one of the first of such missiles on 13 October. Considerable property damage was done, but only minor personal injuries inflicted. This was just the first of many such incidents to follow. It is most remarkable that no fatal or even serious injuries or casualties were occasioned. This attack continued from mid-October to the end of March, without abatement and with varying degrees of intensity. The official map plot of incidents shows that the workshop was well within the area of greatest incident concentration, which makes the low casualty rate all the more remarkable.

Personnel withstood the nervous tension of the bombardment very well. There were very few incidents of "battle fatigue", and those who did succumb were personnel who had been misdirected into this area by SFOs from forward areas. Such personnel had been sent to the workshop as normal reinforcements.

During December, 140-ton tank transport trailers were converted to a design to provide for bulk load carriers. The design used permitted sidewalls of the trailer to be carried at all times, and yet the tank-carrying capabilities of the trailer were not destroyed. During March 1945, some trailers for carrying long timber were produced from a design suggested by the Canadian Forestry Corps. These trailers were built up from chassis and wheels of salvaged six-ton Mack trucks. They provided for the carrying of 65-foot pilings, to be used for the Rhine River crossing L of C bridges. They could handle up to 25 tons of piling at one lift. All reports indicated that the results obtained were eminently satisfactory.

The repair and complete overhaul of duplex-drive tanks - a vehicle on the "most secret" list - was a commitment of the shop throughout the campaign. Some 100 of this type tank were repaired and made battle and seaworthy.

The repair of 300 DUKWs was required. By means of cannibalization and extemporising, it was possible to return about 200 to service. No spare parts of any kind were available in the theatre, so much manufacturing was necessary.

Continuous manufacturing programs were being demanded. 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division were frequently in need of special Browning anti-aircraft and combination machine gun mounts and pintles. Some 500 were manufactured for this division alone.

Due to a shipment lost at sea, it was required that some 3,000 circlets for two-inch "Mattress" Rockets be produced in five days. Failing to meet this requirement would have meant that much less of a rocket barrage in preparation for the Rhine crossings.

Reference to these few special shop commitments mentioned, is made only to stress the fact that in addition to the routine production of tank and vehicle repairs, there are many unexpected manufacturing jobs required. Not a day passed without some job being done that was of interest, out of the usual, or urgently required. The variety of work done is difficult to catalogue in any recording.

Through the whole campaign, morale was always highest when there was much to do, and when all ranks could see the results of their labours going forward immediately to those who were about to use it in battle.

This unit acted as the "defect station" and "PC Barrel Station" for both armies of 21 Army Group. Much equipment reported defective was shipped to England for further investigation. Other reported defects were investigated by workshop personnel. Many interesting results were obtained.

Appended is a series of photographs [not attached to the source document] showing the workshops and sub-shops as that the time of the cessation of hostilities. Also appended [not attached to the source document] is the ground plan of the complete shops which totals approximately 350,000 square feet.

### **No. 3 AFV Servicing Unit, REME**

The unit formed with a cadre of 30 men and one officer during the months of April and May 1944, first at Woolwich and later at No. 10 Command Workshops, Mill Hill.

About the end of June, instructions to receive to mobilize, and all personnel except the Canadian quota, which was about 25%, reported for duty. After several visits to the Canadian Military Headquarters, the Canadian quota came along in about four groups, and, in the middle of July, the unit found itself complete to scale for vehicles, stores, and men.

On 5 August, orders were received to proceed to a concentration area near Tilbury, and we boarded an LST on the morning of 7 August. We arrived in France on 11 August and pitched bivouacs in the inevitable orchard near Bayeux, alongside our sister unit, No. 2 AFV Servicing Unit.

For a while, life was not easy as the weather was discouraging and we had no covered accommodation either for working or sleeping except one "Aldershot", but, after about three weeks, we obtained tents for the camp and to semi-Romney shelters for the workshop. Production of serviced tanks was slow at first as most of our men were lacking "A" vehicle experience, but after a slow period of about four weeks, our output became a fairly steady 10 or 11 tanks per day, and when we left there Bayeux, we had an overall average of nine tanks per day.

We moved to Antwerp in the middle of September. In fact, our advance party was an occupation of Fort 5 before fighting had finished in the town, and after the move there was no delay in starting work again. There is no doubt that the amenities of Antwerp, such as good battles, clubs, cinemas, etc., were responsible to a large extent for the high morale standard within the unit, and every man could be relied on to give a good solid day's work. During this period, the average output was a little lower than that Bayeux, but much of this was due to the high numbers of special tanks being passed through.

We moved to Eindoven on 27 and 28 December and came under the command of First Canadian Army. Our flow system immediately came in for criticism and was altered in various ways. Proposals for the increase of personnel were put forward and an increment of thirteen men did arrive. We also received

authority to inspect tanks before they were sent forward to vehicle parks, so that the number of rejects to second line workshops could be reduced. Even so, production was not satisfactory, and rejects from First Canadian AFVI were alarmingly high.

Eventually, the OC was posted, and a replacement arrived on 30 March 1945. Relative to the previous paragraph, his farewell to the unit, attached as an appendix, is interesting. Under the new OC, the unit knitted together again.

On 22 April, an advance party went to Enschede and a new circuit was laid out. Unfortunately, the circuit, although full of promise, was never really tried out as the build-up of tanks at the delivery squadron was not big enough to maintain the flow we required and gaps appeared frequently in the circuit, until, on VE-Day, there were only a few tanks to be completed.

While awaiting instructions as to policy after VE-Day, we ran a fairly extensive sports program, and our softball team was particularly successful.

In conclusion, we would draw attention to the fact that within the past three weeks, we have written off charge the first item of our 1098 equipment - the Morris Utility. We managed, by careful use of the equipment, to complete our task with what we brought with us, and we feel we have done what was intended that we should do - which was to service tanks so that the user would have a weapon he could trust and which would not let him down by mechanical inefficiency.

The health of the unit has been excellent throughout, sick averaging less than 1%, and morale has been consistently good. We are very soon to lose our Canuck quota; they were good fellows and good comrades. We wish them all the best wherever they may find themselves.

**Officers who have served with the unit in order of joining and with appointment.**

Lt W.F. Nuttall, REME,	EMAE	21 May 1944
Maj K. M. Case, RCEME,	EME and OC	24 May 1944 – 20 March 1945
Capt S. G. McMullen, RCOC,	OO	29 July 1944
Capt D. C. Nevin, REME	EME and 2i/c	2 August 1944 – 28 January 1945
Capt F. H. Wyman, REME	EME and 2i/c	3 February 1945
Maj M. V. MacInnes, RCEME	EME and OC	30 March 1945 – 25 June 1945

**Special message from Maj M. V. MacInnes, RCEME – 21 June 1945**

In view of the Canadian personnel (including myself) leaving the unit, I wish to take this opportunity of expressing my thanks to all personnel for the fine job of work you have done while I have been in command.

Though it has been a short stay for me, it has been an enjoyable one, and I am happy to say that I have been with the unit is well organized or better than any I have seen in the army.

Your response to discipline and the way you have accepted the harrowing tasks of a Servicing Unit have been excellent.

As we are all nearing our "objective" of getting home again, I can only wish you all the best of luck in getting there soon.