

K3582 Halbert T.J.

My service with the Can Scots ended at Wagenborgen. I was a Bren gunner in those days. Memory tells me that the date was April 21, 1945. I was in 17 Platoon of D Company, commanded by Major Tony Compton-Lundie, from Duncan BC. We were safely dug in some miles away on the night of April 20 when we were rudely awakened and told that we were going to move into the town of Wagenborgen right away instead of waiting for the whole battalion the next day. As we approached the town on the road leading into it, Major Lundie was leading and I was immediately behind him and slightly to his right. The rest of the Company followed in very loose fashion. Of course we were nowhere near full strength, and memory says Dog Company totaled less than 70 men altogether (maybe 68?), so it did not take much ground for us to spread out pretty well. We came upon a roadblock across the total width of the road that looked pretty formidable. Lundie motioned for us to stop, and about the same time I spotted a German soldier standing on a small knoll to the right of the road, but he ducked out of sight before I could take a shot at him. There was a little shouting in German and then we came under fire from at least one machine gun and several rifles, obviously from well prepared positions. Either they were lousy shots or it was too dark for them to take good aim, but no one got hit. I was about to hit the dirt and shoot back (I couldn't see any target, but I do not like being shot at) when Lundie yelled to fall back and get moving fast, so I followed him and we all ran back as fast as we could go, jumping off the road and running beside it until we came to a big barn into which we all took cover. The walls of the barn were constructed of thick rock, behind which we were safe from small arms fire, so we liked it.

<sup>was</sup>  
The next day, April 21, came pretty fast and with it a lot of gunfire from the enemy, although the rock walls of the barn kept us safe from it. Later in the morning the enemy started some 88 fire into the field opposite to the barn. Later, in the early afternoon when we started our assault, the 88 battery (there had to be more than one gun) popped a bunch of airbursts right over the road as we ran out of the barn. In retrospect it is obvious that the gunfire into the opposite field in the morning was only to range in for the coming airbursts fired over the road. There was a ditch running beside the road and as we ran out of the barn we all jumped into it as fast as possible, and scurried up the ditch to get away from the airbursts. I well remember those damn airbursts, and why I wasn't hit I will never know. As I slithered up the ditch like a little rat getting away from a cat, I noticed a stream of blood coming out of both pant legs of the fellow in front of me. He was a year or two older than I was, and had been a sideshow barker before joining up. I can't remember his name, but he was hit pretty bad in both legs, obviously from the amount of blood that streamed down his legs. He did not slow down at all, but kept scurrying up that ditch in the effort to get away from any more airbursts. I caught up to him and tapped him on the boot, yelling that he was hit. He stopped, looked down at his feet, screamed profanely, and turned back immediately, scrambling out of the ditch and running like hell back to the barn. I met him after the War in Aldershot where he was working in the kitchen, and he told me that he had been hit in both thighs and in both arms, but did not know it until I grabbed his boot and told him. Remarkable.



We kept going up the ditch, heads down, and constantly under fire from the enemy but fortunately there were no more airbursts. I passed a couple of our boys who had got up too high in the ditch and were wounded for their mistake, but most of us got up the ditch in one piece until we were opposite the roadblock I told you about. When we were about halfway there, I heard a Bren gun carrier roaring along the road. Later, I found out it was outfitted with a flame-thrower and the plan was that it would torch the roadblock and anybody behind it before we attacked it. Unfortunately, the Germans had mined the road in front of the roadblock and the carrier hit one, blowing up and burning. We did attempt to charge that roadblock position, once, but failed even to get out of the ditch. I have little memory of what happened, for which I am grateful because it was not nice, but I looked at the records, and we lost 21 killed that day, and I am sure there was quite a few more wounded. Pretty bad, considering the total numbers that went in to the attack. Suffice it to say that nine of us, including a sergeant named Dodds who was the only officer or NCO left, backed up a side ditch and lay in water for a number of hours waiting for dark, before the Germans found us and we were forced to surrender. Incidentally, while we were lying in that water filled ditch, the enemy started firing artillery shells at the barn, setting it on fire. We learned later that several more of our guys were killed in the gunfire, including Tony Lundie.

Incidentally, the Germans trucked us to the coast, a place I think was called Delfzijl, where we were loaded into a barge and towed over at night to Germany. One of our boys, Les Butterick, a kid from Vancouver, who had been badly wounded, died that night on the barge. I cannot remember the names of all nine who were taken prisoner that day, but two of them were Sergeant Dodds (who gave the order to surrender) and my pal from Victoria, Bill Richardson, who passed away several years ago. The whole battalion took up the attack the next day and avenged Dog Company by pasting the Germans and liberating Wagenborgen. For me, the real heroes of Wagenborgen are the 21 Canadian soldiers who died on the 21st.