

The advance from Conde-sur-Noireau to  
Brussels between Aug 29 & Sep 3rd.  
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At about 0300 hrs on 29 Aug 44 the Prince of Wales Company as advance guard to the Bn. left its rest area which was half way between Conde-sur-Noireau and Flers. The column was due to reach its first stopping place at about 1000 hrs, but in fact, owing to traffic blocks, it was five hours late. The night was spent ten miles from Laigle, a distance of 90 miles on the first day.

On 30 Aug the advance continued from Laigle to a harbour area five miles east of Vernon, a distance of 50 miles.

On 31 Aug after another first light start, we went from Vernon via Beauvais, to Breteuil, 55 miles.

On 1 Sep we started off at 0600 hrs, went eight miles and then halted for four hours. The advance was extremely slow. Then suddenly about 1500 hrs the Commanding Officer appeared, and said, "There is nothing in front of you now, go straight for Arras, and hold the north-eastern sector of the town". After that we sailed ahead, and reached the outskirts of the town about 1800 hrs. We were told that there were few enemy about. I ordered the Coy to debus and march in and I led them myself in my jeep, with a section of carriers and a troop of S.P. guns for protection. To those of us who had lived in Arras for seven months in 1940 and who had held it to the last, it was a great event to enter the town again on its first day of liberation. The reception we had received in every town and village was tremendous, but Arras was the best we had met up to date. We were showered with flowers, fruit and drinks. In fact it was impossible to sight A.tk guns in the streets owing to the crowds. It had been a most satisfactory day and we had done 50 miles.

The next morning we got up late. I was visited by Brig. Sir A. Stanier, whose Bde, the 231st, had been following us up, and now had just arrived in Arras. As there was time to spare I visited St. Nicholas, the village where the Prince of Wales Coy had been stationed in 1940. It had not altered at all. Our friends turned out in full force with wine and food and a marvelous reception was given me. I was very pleased to collect most of the kit I had left there four years before, but my suitcase had been cut open by a German officer and my uniform taken out by a Pole. There were many enquiries for Major Makins, Capt Moore-Gwyn, Lt Serocold and Lt Martin Smith, also for "Le Colonel" (Brig. Copeland Griffiths). That afternoon the advance was continued to Douai, a distance of 20 miles. In the evening we were told that we should be forming a regimental group with the 2nd Bn. the next day, and that our orders were to start at first light and reach Brussels by nightfall at all costs, a distance of 100 miles. It was accordingly arranged that we should meet the 2nd Bn. on the road the next morning. I decided to recon our route to the start point, and I discovered that all bridges over the railway and canal were destroyed including the one on the main Divisional Centre Line. The map I found most inaccurate. I got completely lost and failed to find a route to the S.P. This had to be rectified by the Divisional Provost during the early hours of the next morning.

On 3 Sep Reville was at 0330 hrs. We left the Bn. S.P. with a French Gendarme as guide at 0530 hrs and met the 2nd Bn in Douai at 0600 hrs. The Prince of Wales Coy was to act as advance guard to the Bn, as it had been doing all the way. The order of march was to be No. 1 Squadron, commanded by Major Leatham, Prince of Wales Coy embussed, with its own A.tk guns, mortars, carriers and pioneers from Support Coy, then No. 3 Squadron, Bn. Command Post, the remainder of 2 W.G. followed by 1 W.G. I was to travel in the carrier behind the Squadron Leader's tank and Col Jim Lewis was with the leading Sqn also.

Shortly before 0600 hrs we met the 2nd Bn in Douai and linked up



at 0600 hrs. The Household Cavalry Armoured Car Squadron travelling in front of us, moved off. At 0630 hrs. our advance began. We were obliged to go round the town of Douai by a long and complicated route. Shortly before reaching the Franco-Belgian frontier we were held up by a minefield across the road, but we managed to find a way round this. By 0930 hrs we were sailing over the border all set for Brussels. The reception we had been accorded in France was magnificent, but the one we received in Belgium was even better. We were greeted on the frontier with a bottle of champagne, and the whole way along we were cheered and given flowers and fruit. We were slightly surprised to find that some Americans had crossed the frontier before us and we were afraid that they might reach Brussels before us. However this was not the case.

Our route took us through Antoing and Louze, where there was a report of enemy, but they had been driven out by the Americans. A few miles the other side of Louze the tanks were held up by an anti-tank gun. No. 1 Pl was quickly brought up and put in an attack along the side of the road, supported by fire from the tanks. They made good the ground where the anti-tank gun was supposed to be, but it had gone. They managed, however, to collect about 15 prisoners and kill 10 Germans. The 2nd Bn. then decided to refuel their tanks. Whilst this was happening Major Leatham was shot by a sniper, when he was standing by his tank. No. 2 Pl, riding on a troop of tanks, was then ordered to clear some woods on our right flank. This they did without loss, bringing in about a dozen prisoners.

After our enforced delay the triumphant advance was continued through Ath and Enghien, with no opposition from the enemy, but just a few stragglers whom we disarmed or shot as they ran away. After Enghien we caught up with the tail of the fleeing enemy column. Many vehicles were shot up and many Germans killed. They just fled in all directions and the road was littered with blazing wrecks. They even left their horse transport vehicles in the middle of the road and hid in the ditch. Many we did not see as we sailed through at 40 miles an hour. They were soon rounded up by those following behind. It was a satisfactory sight to see this German column just completely routed. I understand Bn H Q. as they came up, managed to deal with another one and take 70 prisoners.

As the leading tank entered Hal it was fired at by a S.P. 88 mm gun. This stopped the advance. No. 1. Pl was again ordered up and put in an attack on this gun from the left flank. Just before they closed in on it, it withdrew and the tanks were able to go on. We then sped forward on the last lap of the journey to Brussels. All the way along Germans were being shot up or captured, which was wonderful for those in the tanks, but not always so good for those of us who were sticking out of the tops of carriers.

By this time we had many civilian guides, all of whom had different information about the enemy. At the railway bridge on the outskirts of the city there was a road block covered by M.G. fire. This caused a little delay, but was eventually removed by the patriots. Our triumphal entry into the heart of the city now began. The Household Cavalry, the Press and the Gaumont British War Reporter tried to jostle us out of the way as soon as they realised that we had removed all opposition. However, we overcame them by driving two abreast, and the first Allied troops to enter the city of Brussels were No. 1 Sqn, 2 W.G. and Prince of Wales Coy, 1 W.G.

The reception was truly magnificent. It had to be seen to be believed and was an event which will never be repeated again in a lifetime. The whole population turned out and were beside themselves with excitement, showering us with flowers, fruit, wine and cigars. Our vehicles were laden with civilians who climbed all over them and brought them to a standstill. We were only able to proceed at the pace of a snail.

We had three strong points to form in the city but owing to the crowds it was impossible to get to these. As we drove up the Grande Boulevard an enemy MG suddenly opened fire through the crowds. A number of casualties were caused and the situation was



a little difficult until the enemy, numbering about 15, were destroyed. I turned down a side street and was met by a hail of bullets, my carrier comd. getting a wound in the face and my wireless operator a bullet through his steel helmet. However, no harm was done and in the next street we were again mobbed by a crowd. Everything was most difficult as we were either mobbed by a crowd or shot at by enemy M.Gs. I got cut off from my Coy but when I found them they had established themselves at an enormous place called the Cinquante Naire, which consists of three vast triumphal arches and a huge square. It is the master-piece of Brussels. The remainder of both Bns had settled themselves in the Grande Boulevard for the night.

The only Allied troops to enter the heart of Brussels on 3 Sep were the 1st and 2nd Bns Welsh Guards and 32 Guards Brigade Headquarters.

During the night M.G. fire whipped across the square and through the arches, and a German half-track drove straight through the Coy area. A rapid exchange of fire took place and nobody on either side was hit. By 0800 hrs an enormous crowd had collected in this square, mostly concentrated round my tent. We had to erect a rope round the Coy area and keep inside it rather like animals on show. With difficulty it was possible to drive through the crowds to Bn, H.Q. and back again.

In the afternoon the Bn moved a short distance away to a harbour area just outside the city. We had a full Coy parade and marched half way, followed by our vehicles. This caused great pleasure to the populace.

And so ended an operation which not only made regimental history but also world history. We had covered 360 miles in six days. On the last day we had done over 100 miles, which is by far the longest advance ever made by any armoured division in one day, even in Russia. The co-operation with the 2nd Bn had been excellent. The number of Germans we had killed or captured was most satisfactory. The reception we had been given was wonderful beyond all words. The Welsh Guards were the first allied troops to liberate the city of Brussels, and I had the honour to command as fine a Coy as anybody could wish to have and the first one to enter the city.

The senior members of the Company were:-

Coy Comd	=	Major J.M. MILLER.
2-in-C	=	Capt Sir E.G.F. BEDINGFIELD.
No. 1 Pl.	=	Lt D.A. ROGERS and 72 Sjt JONES.
No. 2 Pl.	=	Lt A.F.C. SHULDHAM and Sjt HAGLAND.
No. 3 Pl.	=	Lt H. MITCHELL and Sjt SEARNS.

04 C.S.M. DAVIES and C.Q.M.S. LEWIS.

No casualties were suffered.