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Fourth Canadian Armoured Division enters Bergen-op-Zoom, 29 October 1944.

(Photo by H.G. Aikman, NAC PA 113666)

“Where Are Our Liberators?”

The Canadian Liberation of West Brabant, 1944

Geoffrey Hayes

Canadian historians of the Second World War have long been interested in a strategic debate that has waged since 1944: should the Allies have exploited the success of the capture of Antwerp, then the largest port in Northwest Europe, by clearing its western approaches; or should they have sought to “leap” the German defenses along the Rhine, in the ill-fated Operation “Market Garden.”

All Canadian writers on the issue are agreed that the decision to go ahead with “Market Garden” held important consequences for the soldiers of First Canadian Army. As British and American forces turned northeast of Antwerp in the first weeks of September, the Canadians, already committed to opening the Channel ports, were given the additional task of clearing the approaches to the city – the shores of the Scheldt estuary.

The intense fighting in the areas surrounding Antwerp through September and October 1944 reflected the importance the Germans gave to denying the Allies use of the port. Victory in the Battle of the Scheldt, fought from 1 October to 8 November 1944, came at a cost of 6,367 Canadians killed, wounded, or missing.¹

Many of those killed through this time rest at the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery just east of the city of Bergen-op-Zoom in West Brabant. Any Canadian visitor to the site must be struck by the care still given to each white grave. For fifty years, local citizens of the ancient walled city

have tended the graves with extraordinary care. They have not forgotten their Canadian liberators, for their fates were bound together by the same strategic decisions. Indeed, for the people of Bergen-op-Zoom and the surrounding countryside, the months of September and October 1944 were marked by elation, despair, tragedy, courage—and finally triumph through liberation. The liberation seemed long in coming, for despite being only some 25 kilometres north of Antwerp, which fell on 4 September, the city’s Canadian liberators did not occupy its *centrum* until 27 October 1944. What follows is the story of the liberation of West Brabant from both a Canadian and Dutch perspective. It seeks ultimately to examine how the circumstances of war so strongly bound the Dutch citizens of West Brabant to their Canadian liberators.

The citizens of this medieval moated city have been no strangers to war. In 1944, Bergen-op-Zoom was a permanent home to some 30,000 people, though thousands more refugees were crowded within its gates, old stonehouses and winding narrow roadways. Through the city’s northern reaches, where small factories sat alongside neat homes and shops, flowed the Zoom river. Though little more than a creek, its steep banks formed an obvious barrier; throughout the occupation, the Germans installed concrete abutments along the river’s edge. Several hundred yards south of the Zoom is the centre of the old city, the *centrum*. Here the traditional cobblestoned market area known as the “Grote



*Canadian soldiers stand on the outskirts of "BERGEN OP ZOOM."
(NAC PA 113667)*

Markt" is surrounded by a variety of shops, cafes, residences and the "Pepebus," the name given to the medieval clock tower that marks the entrance to the Catholic church.

The city had been under German occupation since May of 1940, but the strain and demands of occupation had deepened as the war continued. Louis de Jong has noted that the Germans held to four primary objectives in the Netherlands: they sought to transform the country into a national socialist state as part of the broader Reich; to develop its economic resources and labour force for German benefit; to purge the country of its Jewish population; and to stop any resistance movements. De Jong has concluded that the German record of success was mixed. Very few Dutch people became ardent National Socialists, though their economic "contribution to the German war effort was not inconsiderable." Dutch Jews were particularly vulnerable; some 82 percent of them (107,000 of an estimated 130,000

Jews in the country) were deported. The Dutch underground tried to save some 25,000 Dutch Jews, but the country was isolated, both geographically and strategically. This made resistance efforts difficult—and very dangerous. De Jong estimates that of the 50,000 to 60,000 members of the Dutch underground, more than 10,000 were shot or died in German concentration camps.²

The evidence is limited, though local accounts do not show West Brabant, or Bergen-op-Zoom, to be very much different from the rest of the country. Piet Hoedelman's account of the liberation of Bergen-op-Zoom, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, notes that there were few Jews in this largely Catholic city, though nine Jewish citizens are known to have been deported. Still he recounts local episodes of what Professor de Jong describes as acts of "moral resistance." These acts varied: bicycles stolen from the German garrison; individuals refused to salute German funeral

processions. National acts of protest were also played out in West Brabant. In April 1943, the German authorities ordered all Dutch men between the ages of 18 to 35 to work in German war industry. Those who refused became *Onderduikers* (Divers) who escaped the German roundups by fleeing into the countryside. Often these men became members of various Dutch resistance groups, such as the *Orange Garde* or the *Orde Dienst*. Still the story of two area men who were shot in August 1944 while transporting banned literature confirmed the inescapable problem of the Dutch landscape: there were few places in the country for large numbers of people to hide and organize.³

News of the Allied invasion in June 1944 brought obvious anticipation, but also a greater danger. This was especially true for the resistance who began to put long held plans into action. In early May 1944, seven men were arrested after an attack failed on a German distribution centre in Bergen-op-Zoom. Five of the seven were executed three weeks later. A string of arrests of the *Orde Dienst* followed through the summer after the German internal forces learned of their membership. But the resistance fought back: on 29 July two members of the resistance bicycled into the city and shot dead one local who had worked actively with the Germans. Tinus Vervest was buried with full German military honours. A city-wide curfew followed his funeral, enforced by members of the NSB (Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging), a much hated fascist group of which Vervest was a member.⁴

The Allied advance into Belgium prompted a full celebration on "Mad Tuesday," 5 September 1944. German personnel flowed from the city, their fears fed by rumour. The emboldened Dutch, weary of shortages, began to parade through the streets with whatever the German stores held. According to one local account, the German barracks poured fourth "An uninterrupted stream of white bed sheets..."⁵

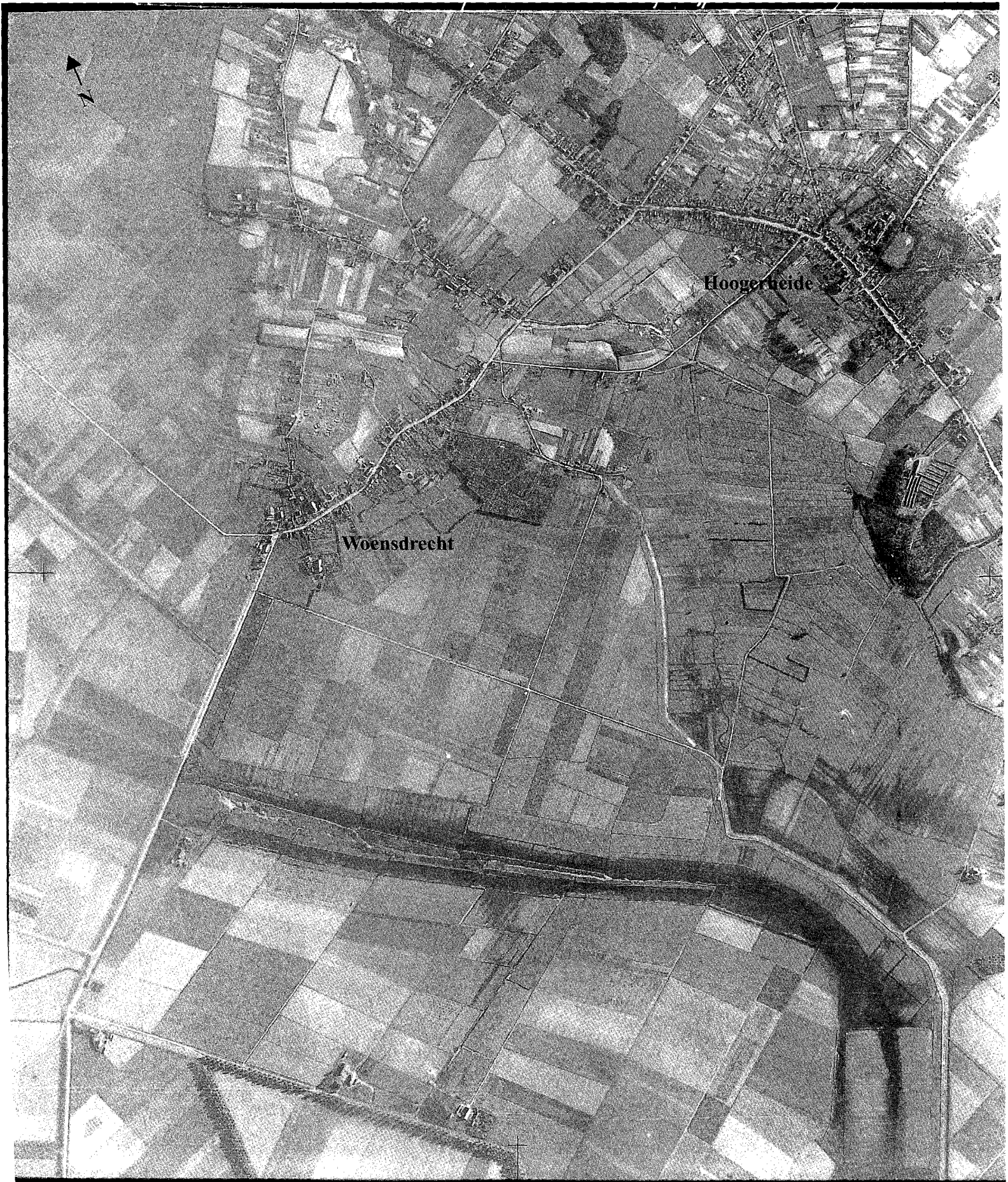
But the festivities were short lived. Antwerp had indeed fallen, due in large measure to the Belgian resistance. Incredibly, the city's port facilities had also remained intact, though most of the bridges over the Albert Canal north of the city were destroyed. Despite urgings from the Belgian White Brigade to capture the one

remaining bridge leading north, the British forces remained in the city. Those living just across the Dutch border saw an important opportunity lost.

On 6 September, Bergen's mayor, H.A.F. Lijnkamp, was busy preparing his welcome speech, when the local German garrison commander called him to his office. Reinforcements were coming, the mayor was told, and reprisals would follow if the population did not stay in check. The mayor posted a request later that day urging that all articles taken from the Germans be returned. Many simply gave back things useless to the Germans, although one mother of thirteen children reportedly returned twelve Edam cheeses.⁶

The euphoria of Mad Tuesday returned briefly a few weeks later when waves of aircraft brought droves of citizens into the streets, waving to the armada overhead. The aircraft were heading east towards Nijmegen and Arnhem: Operation "Market Garden" had begun. For many, the operation marked "the beginning of the end of the Third Reich." A strike of Dutch rail workers erupted throughout the country, prompting the Germans to cut food supplies to the west of the country. In West Brabant, funeral processions held for flyers brought down in the area grew into demonstrations against the Germans. Some locals also began trying to move local resistance members through the lines.⁷

Again this was dangerous work, for the Germans in the area were gaining valuable time to reorganize and prepare their defences. On 22 September, Bergen's city police were disarmed. At all levels, the importance of denying the Allies the use of Antwerp was made clear. The German 15th Army was to defend to the last the line from Antwerp to the cities of Tilburg-s'Hertogenbosch further east. The key to the western edge of the defence line was the village of Woensdrecht, some 7 kilometres south of Bergen-op-Zoom. Aerial photographs of the area show an unspectacular collection of houses and small farms amidst the flat, (and to the south, flooded) polder lands. To the west of Woensdrecht, a series of raised narrow roads and railines curve to a neck of land bounded by water on the north and south. This was the only route to Walcheren Island. Without control of this island, the port of Antwerp remained useless to the Allies.⁸



By 6 October, the distant percussion of artillery could be heard in Bergen-op-Zoom; with it came the message that the Canadians had crossed into the Netherlands. On that same day, "Battle Group Chill" moved to West Brabant. The Battle Group was formed from remnants of the German 85th Division. Its commander was Lieutenant-General Kurt Chill, an officer whose "greater skill and uncommon energy" and aristocratic bearing were acknowledged by both Canadians and Dutch alike. Chill's Battle Group formed the German's "fire brigade" which according to C.P. Stacey was "always found where the emergency was greatest."⁹ At the core of Chill's Battle Group was the 6th Paratroop Regiment, "a first-class formation" of about 1,500 "fanatical and eager young parachutists" under Colonel von der Heydt.¹⁰

Chill found area defences already well prepared on his arrival in West Brabant. Dutch forced labour had done much of the work. Hundreds of men had been swept from movie theatres and factories in September to dig trenches, tank traps and "Rommel asperges"—wooden pikes intended to deter paratroop landings. The German's main concern was defence and delay; on 7 October, the city's wharves were demolished and scuttled barges blocked the entrance to the city's harbour.¹¹

With the battle approaching the villages of Woensdrecht and Hoogerheide, some 800 refugees began entering Bergen-op-Zoom. Their arrival made even more desperate the demands for food and shelter. After 29 September, the city's electrical supply was cut off each day from 1700 hours to 2300 hours; oil shortages cut off the pumps supplying the city with water; on 13 October, the pumps themselves were hit by gunfire. By then, food was severely rationed, down to one litre of milk a week for each person. An occasional shipment of cheese brought long lineups.¹²

The arrival of the first Canadian prisoners in the city on 10 October offered grim evidence of the battles being waged to the south. The 2nd Canadian Division's repeated attacks met with ferocious German resistance. Each of the divisional infantry battalions took grim casualties. On 7 October, the Calgary Highlanders and the Régiment de Maisonneuve were the first units to

face the German defences outside Hoogerheide and Woensdrecht. As the towns changed hands for the next few days in almost constant fighting, both sides began despatching more troops to the area. On 10 October, Field Marshal Model, commander of the German Army Group B, ordered the Fifteenth Army to hold the area "at any price."¹³

The Canadians also began reinforcing, in some cases, with members of the Dutch Maquis. Yet unlike the German high command, the Allies were still divided over where their strategic priorities lay. While Canadian units pressed limited and costly attacks across the polder lands, the Allied generals further debated the direction of the Allied advance. On 15 October, Field Marshal Montgomery conceded that the attack on the Ruhr had failed; henceforth, Antwerp was to receive "top priority."¹⁴

Until that decision was made, 2nd Canadian Division continued its costly attacks. On Friday, October 13 (Black Friday) elements of the Royal Highland Regiment, the Black Watch, were (in the words of their intelligence officer) "slaughtered" in their carefully prepared assault on Woensdrecht. The cost was 145 men, 56 were killed or died of wounds, while another 27 were taken prisoner.¹⁵

On 16 October, Field Marshal Montgomery finally issued the directive giving first priority to "the free use of the port of Antwerp." He noted: "The right wing of the Army will be pulled over towards Antwerp, so that its operations can exert a more direct influence on the battle or possession of the area Bergen-op-Zoom—Roosendaal—Antwerp. Possession of this area is necessary in order to enable us to operate freely westwards along the Beveland isthmus..."¹⁶ The orders came too late for the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry who were committed to Woensdrecht on that day. The "Rileys" suffered casualties equal to those suffered by the Black Watch three days before. Still its men could not break the German defences to the north of Woensdrecht. The Canadian 2nd Division, far outnumbered, had paid a high price for Allied indecision.

The civilians in West Brabant shared in the suffering, especially those who chose not to leave the area south of Bergen-op-Zoom. Piet

Hoedelmans notes that some 200 refugees took shelter in the oven and cellar of a brick factory in Korteven, just south of Bergen; another 87 were in the cellar of Woensdrecht's church presbytery. There a housekeeper cooked soup and prepared meat butchered from dead livestock. Members of the Red Cross and others moved through the area to tend to the wounded and those hiding in the village ruins. On Saturday, October 14, an urgent call from Woensdrecht brought a fire engine from Bergen-op-Zoom onto the battlefield. Two drivers repeatedly took the vehicle through German posts and returned to Bergen with the worst casualties. One account of those returning to the city remembered the Germans using a bulldozer to fill a mass grave of soldiers.¹⁷

The sixteenth of October marked the forty-second day since the fall of Antwerp. The civilians of West Brabant could very well have asked "Where Are Our Liberators?" That question was then finally being answered. Second Division's relief came from units attached to I British Corps, which was then under command of First Canadian Army. Beginning on 20 October, a four division push into Holland would ease the pressure on 2nd Division, which was to continue west toward Walcheren Island. On 18 October, the plans for Operation SUITCASE were finalized. Bergen-op-Zoom was not to be liberated by the long-suffering 2nd Division, but by 4th Armoured Division's 10th Infantry Brigade.¹⁸

Major-General Harry Foster then commanded 4th Armoured Division. It was truly a national division, with its New Brunswick machine gun company, its Ontario infantry, motor and armoured battalions, as well as its two western tank units. Some of these units had already been committed to aid 2nd Division, but after 16 October, the entire division moved from its support of 3rd Division in Breskens and followed the Maple Leaf route, concentrating north and east of Antwerp.

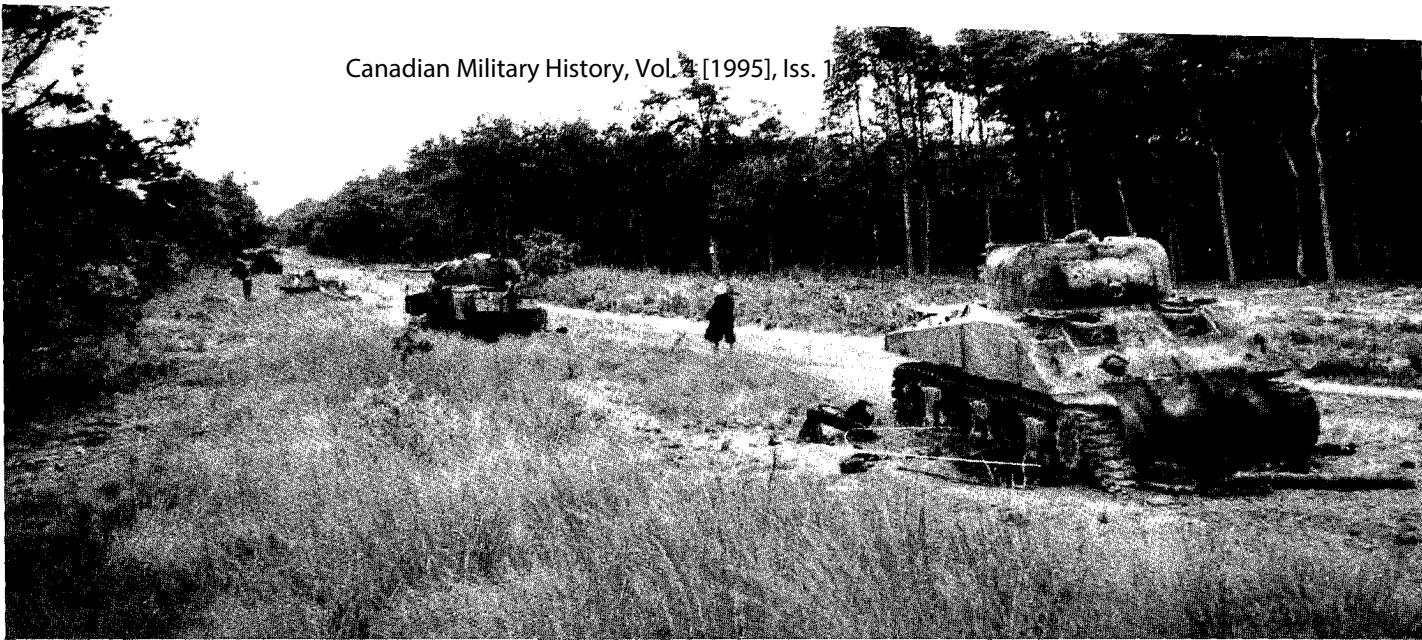
Foster's division launched its first attacks towards Esschen on the "wet and chilly morning" of 20 October. Both of Foster's brigades (10th Infantry and 4th Armoured) met little human resistance, (some German units reportedly gave up en masse) though the sandy soil and thick woods were cluttered with mines and booby traps. A bold night march ordered by 10th Infantry

Brigade Commander J.C. Jefferson found elements of the Lincoln and Welland and Algonquin Regiments in Esschen on the morning of 22 October.¹⁹

Esschen straddles the Belgium-Dutch border. Bergen-op-Zoom is only some 12 kilometres to the northwest. Between the two towns lay elements of the German 67 Corps, whose commanders took every advantage to delay the Canadians' approach. The picture that emerges over the next five days details a series of intense, isolated battles for the small villages of Wouwsche Plantage and Centrum. On Tuesday, October 24, the men of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada thought they had surprised the enemy in Wouwsche Plantage, but the characteristic German counterattacks, combined with well positioned mortar and gun emplacements left the Hamilton, Ontario unit in tatters. A company of Lincoln and Wellands (from St. Catharines, Ontario) tried to reach the village, but its attack across open country faltered 500 yards from the woods on the town's edge. Eleven Lincs were taken prisoner; those who could withdrew under a smokescreen. "C" Company of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment lost half its strength that day. The Canadian infantry finally took the village the following day with the help of tanks and mounted flamethrowers.²⁰

The armour's vulnerability severely slowed the advance, especially on the wooded approaches to the city's southeast entrance. On 25 October, a company of Linc infantry and some tanks from the South Alberta Regiment moved north from the village of Huijbergen, acting on civilian information that Bergen was clear of enemy. The progress was slow: the woods, verges and sandy tracks were heavily mined. With nowhere to go, the armour became easy targets for the German artillery set ahead on the road bends. The elements of the Hermann Goring Regiment that Chill sent south of the city knew well the tactics of delay.²¹

The Germans had gained valuable time, though they were worn down and stretched to the limit. Two Canadian divisions were approaching from the south and southeast; further British and American advances from the east threatened the next main German defence line: the Maas river. On 26 October, Field Marshal

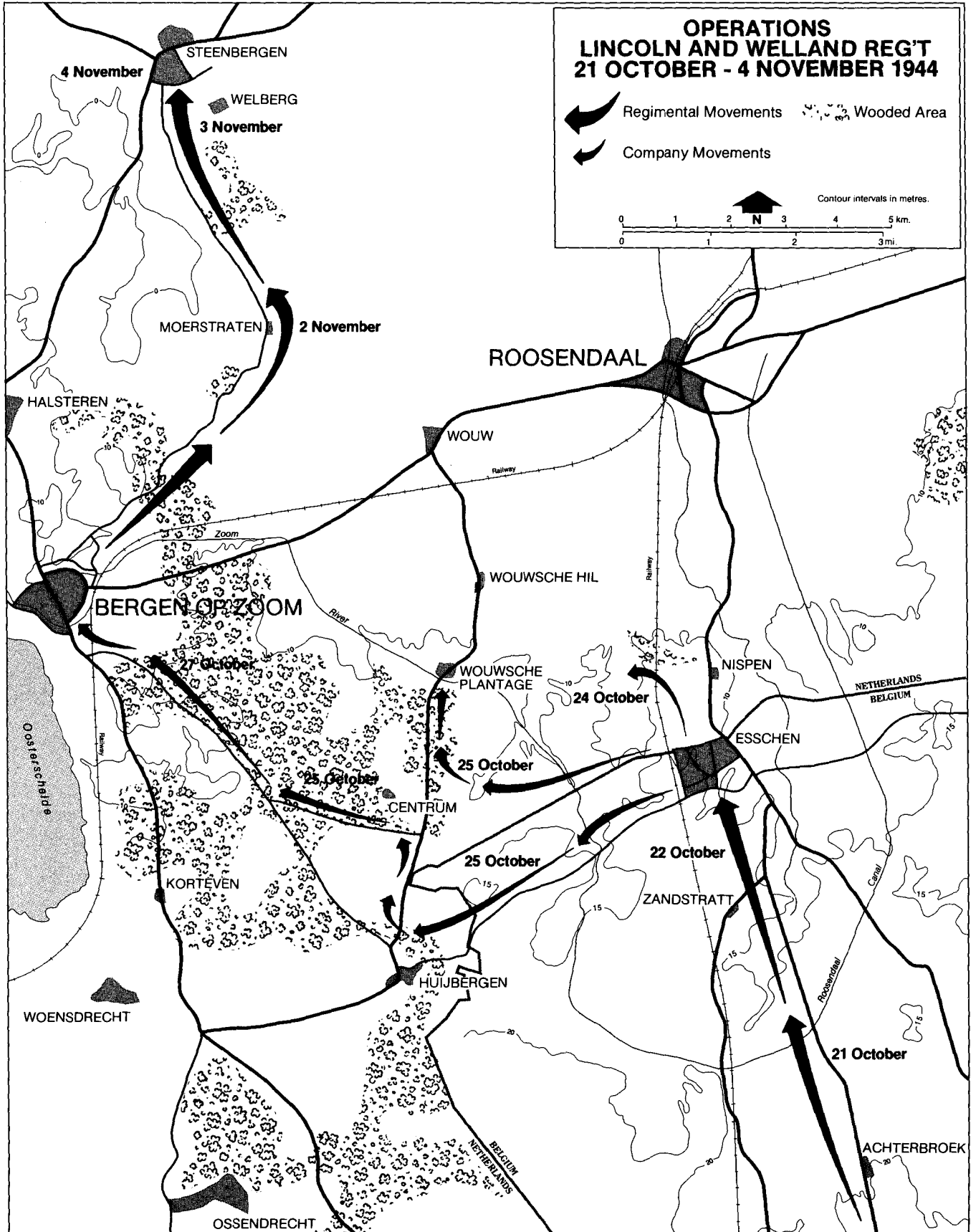


This series of photos illustrates the vulnerability of the Canadian armour during their thrust to Wouwsche Plantage. At the top are Shermans of the South Alberta Regiment. Above and to the left are shots of a Churchill tank "brewed up" by a mine on the road. (Author's collection)

Von Rundstedt decided to withdraw his 15th Army "to the general line Bergen-op-Zoom-Roosendaal-Breda-Dongen-west of S'Hertegenbosch."

Professors Copp and Vogel have noted simply that 67 Corps troops "interpreted [the] Bergen-op-Zoom-Roosendaal [defence line] rather liberally and abandoned the former city..."²² It appears, however, that the Germans were planning initially to make their stand

within the city. On 18 October, Kurt Chill himself inspected the city's defences that formed the western end of his divisional sector. German troops were then tearing up rail lines and preparing concrete road blocks. A number of factors, including citizens' actions, may have forced a change of plan. Certainly the growing numbers of refugees into the city made control of the population difficult. Hoedelman's account notes that some nine Dutch civilians, most of whom were evacuating wounded, "deserted" to



the Canadian side. Some of them, he notes, provided information about German defences and transmitting stations. At least one deserter actually shot at a German soldier on 22 October. Remarkably, those questioned about the shooting were released four days later, 26 October. No one then could explain the German behaviour, (it "was far from their standard way of doing things.")²³

The Germans were in full retreat north of the Zoom through the previous days. With little time even to bury their dead, perhaps they considered the artillery fire falling throughout the city a sufficient check on the population. On 26 October, Bergen's Mayor Lijnkamp reported to Colonel Von der Heydte's headquarters in the Grote Markt. He was told that he had 24 hours to evacuate the city to Dordrecht. Hoedelmans' sources note that the mayor refused categorically. He argued that the city's population had almost doubled with the flow of refugees and an evacuation was impossible. Von der Heydte kept insisting, but the mayor stood firm.

It was a dramatic moment as the German officers left the mayor to confer. Finally they announced that they would not hold the city. They did impose four conditions that were hastily posted throughout the city. It was in the interests of the people to keep peace and order. Troublemakers would be shot. Gatherings were forbidden; no one was to be out on the streets. All German weapons, ammunition or explosives, military uniforms and blankets were to be handed in at the city hall at noon the next day. Finally the Germans warned that if there was any unrest, the city would be bombarded with incendiary shells.²⁴

Bergen was not left unscathed, however, for German demolition squads quickly began destroying anything that could be used against them. Throughout 27 October, at least three church towers, (possible observation posts) crashed down. Radio transmission towers also fell, the telephone exchange was blown up, rail cars were overturned and more rail lines were torn up. The city's wharves were further damaged. Finally, in the late afternoon of the 27th, the last German units had moved through the city centre; Von der Heydt's headquarters in the Grote Markt

was emptied; the main bridges leading across the Zoom were demolished or blocked to prepare the next German defensive line north of the river.²⁵

It was a dangerous time. At least 38 citizens died immediately prior to the liberation, mostly from the artillery fire that had been falling throughout the city for at least three days. Most took shelter in basements, under stairs, wherever they could. On Rembrandtstraat in the south of the city, the Schoonen and Wiericks families dug an emergency cellar in their gardens, covered with timber, doors, sod and sand. The memories of tragedy, enormous luck, extraordinary bravery, even acts of humane understanding seem especially vivid from this time. Some recalled that a Wehrmacht soldier inspected some shelters, and advised those in danger to move.²⁶

The Canadians were on the outskirts of Bergen-op-Zoom by the late afternoon of Friday, 27 October. Two infantry companies from the Lincoln and Welland Regiment had moved ahead on tanks to the Huijbergsebaan, a roadway just south and east of the build-up of homes. It was cold and pouring rain. Intelligence reports were confused. The BBC had reported two days before that 6 Paratroop Regiment was still holding Bergen-op-Zoom. Growing groups of civilians were urging the Canadians to enter the city. The Germans, they said, had gone.²⁷

Conflicting reports left the commanders in the field, (Lieutenant-Colonels Wotherspoon of the South Alberta Regiment and Cromb of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment), with a difficult decision. Should the civilian reports be trusted? Finally, in words that have become legendary to both Canadians and Dutch alike, Wotherspoon reportedly turned to Cromb and said "Hell Bill, let's take the damned place." The orders went forward to the cold, wet troops ahead. By nightfall, the Canadians were in the Grote Markt, where tanks were placed at the head of each street branching from the square to the north.²⁸

An Oranje Edition of *De Zoom* newspaper came out on the morning of Saturday 28 October 1944. Its editors and typesetters had secretly prepared the edition in a basement recess. Its headline read "27 Oktober 1944." Miss van Dierendonk wrote in her diary that

day: "De Tommies zijn er" (The Tommies are here). The Grote Markt became the centre of celebrations. People climbed on tanks to kiss or exchange gifts with the tank crews and soldiers. Wilhelmina van Steen gave the first Canadian she saw her silver brooch. Dutch flags (previously banned) were unfurled. The Dutch national anthem was sung, and Mayor Lijnkamp welcomed the liberators in English with the speech he had prepared the previous month.²⁹

Then the mood darkened. A child climbing on a Canadian tank accidentally pushed the trigger of a machine gun: at least two died and another two were injured. The gunfire brought German and Canadian artillery and mortars into the city once again. The streets again emptied; the shelters filled. The Blom and Smit families were sipping champagne in their shelter that night when a German shell wrecked a nearby chimney and sealed them in.³⁰ Bergen-op-Zoom was still not liberated, for the Germans were still holding the north of the city beyond the Zoom. Local, but intense fighting across the narrow waterway continued for the next two days. The Germans abandoned the city altogether on 30 October, though it was not until the first week of November that Bergen-op-Zoom was beyond the range of German guns. By 8 November, the Battle of the Scheldt Estuary was finally over. Bergen-op-Zoom was finally free.

For both Dutch and Canadian, the liberation festivities were memorable. On the morning of 28 October, the authorities allowed the flag of the Netherlands to fly once again. Dutch authority had returned after four years. The Canadians had fought hard for nearly two weeks, and for several days, while some fighting continued, they were the toast of the city. While Canadian officers enjoyed a Halloween banquet at the Hotel de Draak on the Grote Markt, the men took in movies, meals and dances. They also drank from a distillery liberated during the fighting on 28 October. Harry Lumsden remembered being ordered to secure the building: "You couldn't stop anybody. They were coming in the doors, windows, everywhere, throwing cases out. I said, 'OK. One case per man only...' I don't think anybody there was sober." The drinking may have gotten out of hand: on 30 October, the Dutch Military authorities forbid civilians to give liquor to

soldiers. Others were not happy that the Canadians had taken over a dormitory that the Dutch had established as an emergency hospital.³¹ Still the grumblings were relatively minor. On Sunday, November 19, 1944, pipers led 4th Division troops through the streets of Bergen-op-Zoom. In church services, the Dutch and Canadians gave thanks together. They celebrated again. Then the Canadians were gone.

Michiel Horn's sympathetic and insightful article, "More than Cigarettes, Sex and Chocolate: The Canadian Army in the Netherlands, 1944-1945" offers some perspective on the liberation of West Brabant. Horn was a six-year-old boy who welcomed the "Tommies" into his town of Baarn, south of Amsterdam, on 7 May 1945. Horn's article shows that, despite the sincere gratitude the Dutch people held for their Canadian liberators, the Canadian presence after the war often had broader economic and social consequences. Canadian soldiers often profited from American cigarettes worth 5 guilders when a Dutch skilled labourer earned just 40 guilders a week. So too did the Canadian soldier take advantage of the shortage of Dutch men to court Dutch women. The resulting public outrage brought understandable criticism. Horn is careful in his conclusions: "On the whole relations between soldiers and civilians were remarkably good." Still he argues "The exuberant gratitude of the early days of liberation was bound to weaken." As one Canadian soldier admitted: "It was time to go. We had grown slack and we were wearing out our welcome."³²

Horn's piece reveals just how exceptional was the liberation of Bergen-op-Zoom and the surrounding area. The long wait for the arrival of the liberators was frustrating, though it was far shorter and less traumatic than in the rest of the country. Much of the Netherlands remained under German occupation until the very end of the war. The severe shortages of September and October 1944 in West Brabant paled against the widespread starvation

Opposite: Three views of the Grote Markt.

Top left: The Lincoln and Welland Regiment located their headquarters in the Hotel de Draak, on the Grote Markt in Bergen-op-Zoom. (Author's collection)

Top right and bottom: Tanks of the South Alberta Regiment fill the Grote Markt below the "Pepebus." (NAC PA 142088 & 131261)



suffered through the winter of 1945. While Horn and his family still awaited liberation further north, Bergen-op-Zoom dissolved its military government on 6 April 1945. Queen Wilhelmina had already visited the city in March and one month before, the city had received its first ships into harbour. Bergen-op-Zoom was still not free of danger—a V-2 rocket killed ten people on 25 February 1945, and the threat continued until April—but the city was well recovered when the war finally ended.

The recovery was speeded by the simple fact that the city was spared. The damage was considerable, but the repair of essential services was remarkably quick; gas and electrical services were resumed by early November.³³ Through the winter came supplies of glass, wooden shoes and coal. Whether due to the stubbornness of Bergen's mayor, or simply the pressures that the Allied advance placed on the Germans, Bergen-op-Zoom was not devastated. There was little love for the German soldier, or for those who fraternized with them; a roundup of German appointees, girlfriends and black marketeers began in earnest on the day of liberation.³⁴ Still Hoedelman's account describes the German soldier with a begrudging respect. Colonel Von der Heydte, who spared the city, is described as a "baron," an "upright, catholic aristocrat." Though often ruthless, Von der Heydte is remembered as having maintained a highly disciplined, often humane force, even in retreat. The individual acts of bravery—the soldiers who checked bunkers and helped the wounded—were not forgotten.

The unusual circumstances of the liberation only reinforced the admiring views of the Canadian liberators of West Brabant. One Canadian soldier once noted wryly that his battalion always received a warmer reception in towns already cleared of Germans. No doubt a fight for the entire city would have hardened the Dutch view of both German and Canadian alike. The fighting across the Zoom after 27 October only bolstered the Canadians' reputation. It also gave the citizens themselves a chance to act as guides and interpreters. Indeed, the Canadians did no patrolling without a member of the Dutch resistance with them.³⁵ Quite rightly could the Dutch of West Brabant take some credit for their own liberation.

Nor did the Canadians outstay their welcome. While Bergen-op-Zoom slowly

returned to normal through the winter of 1945, the Canadians were not there to interfere. French troops billeted in the area in early 1945 often fought with the reorganized Dutch forces, but the Canadians were gone. They were neither black marketeers, nor seducers of Dutch women. They were only liberators; when the first ship arrived in the city's ports in February 1945, its captain was a Canadian.³⁶

Fifty years on the people of Bergen-op-Zoom and West Brabant have not forgotten the Canadians. Canadian travellers are always warmly received, particularly at the city's Hotel de Draak, where the Canadians had a command post fifty years ago. From there a walking tour may uncover the Lincoln Bridge, "Canadalaan" and "Gen. Simondsstraat."

But it is during the anniversary years that the full weight of Dutch feeling comes out. In the fall of 1984, and again this past autumn, busloads of aging veterans and their families were unloaded onto the Grote Markt in Bergen-op-Zoom. The sight of Canadian flags—dozens of them posted on every lamp standard, in nearly every shop window—is the first measure of their status. The visit begins. Each Canadian has a Dutch host, who after repeated visits has often become a close friend. Each day's ceremonies, tours and parties are carefully planned and wonderfully conducted. No matter how hard they may argue the point, a Canadian cannot buy a drink.

The most poignant moment of these visits comes at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. A major highway runs just yards from the cemetery entrance, but the thick stands of surrounding trees quiet the site. The ceremony is now familiar. A Dutch band plays hymns and both national anthems. A trumpeter blows the last post. Flags are carried by old men who parade to the central cross. In their blue blazers, gray flannels and berets, they stand at attention while wreaths are laid. The ceremonies over, the Dutch hosts wait at the roadside while the Canadians stroll through the markers, pausing as they recognize a name. The cemetery soon empties and the visits go on. The half century old bond between the Canadian soldiers and the Dutch people has once again been renewed.

Notes

1. See C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. Volume III: The Victory Campaign. The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945*. (Ottawa, 1960); Chapters XV and XVI; Terry Copp and Robert Vogel, *Maple Leaf Route: Scheldt*. (Alma: 1985); W. Denis and Sheila Whitaker, *Tug of War: The Canadian Victory that Opened Antwerp*. (Toronto, 1984).
2. See Louis de Jong, "The Anti-Nazi Resistance" in *The Netherlands and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1990); pp.38-50
3. Piet Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen: een relaas van de period 1944-'45 in Bergen-op-Zoom en omgeving*. (Jeeps & Poppies: An Account of the Period 1944-'45 in Bergen-op-Zoom and Surroundings.) (Bergen-op-Zoom: 1990); pp.16, 17 & 126. I am much indebted to Mr. William Jeronimus of Waterloo, Ontario who translated this work.
4. *Ibid.*, p.16: On the Dutch organizations that rivalled the NSB, see Gerhard Hirschfeld, "Collaboration and Attentism in the Netherlands 1940-41," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16:3 (July 1981) pp.467-486.
5. Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, p.22.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p.29.
8. Copp and Vogel, *Scheldt*, pp.30-41.
9. Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, p.41; Stacey, *Victory Campaign*, pp.381-2.
10. Copp and Vogel, *Scheldt*, pp.28, 32.
11. Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, p.62.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Copp and Vogel, *Scheldt*, p.32.
14. *Ibid.*, pp.32, 43.
15. Copp and Vogel, *Scheldt*, p.38; Terry Copp, *The Brigade: The Fifth Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1939-1945* (Stoney Creek, 1992), p.148.
16. Cited in Geoffrey Hayes, *The Lincs: A History of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment at War, 1939-1945* (Alma, Ontario: 1986), p.57.
17. Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, pp.54-55.
18. Copp and Vogel, *Scheldt*, p.46.
19. Stacey, *Victory Campaign*, p.390; Hayes, *Lincs*, pp.60, 62.
20. Hayes, *Lincs*, pp.62-63.
21. *Ibid.*; Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, p.72.
22. Copp and Vogel, *Scheldt*, p.50
23. Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, pp.58, 63.
24. *Ibid.*, p.66.
25. *Ibid.*, pp.67ff.
26. *Ibid.*, pp.64, 65 & 78.
27. *Ibid.*, p.74.
28. It is interesting that Hoedelmans questions whether Wotherspoon actually made the famous quip to Cromb. He suggests that it may have been invented by a reporter for the Canadian forces newspaper, *The Maple Leaf*. *Ibid.*, pp.74-75. The phrase is noted in R.A. Paterson's *A Short History: the 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade* (1945), though not in Louis Rogers' *History of the Lincoln and Welland Regiment*. (1954). See also Hayes, *The Lincs*, p.64.
29. Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, pp.79-81.
30. *Ibid.*, p.81.
31. Hayes, *The Lincs*, p.68; Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, pp.84, 86.
32. Michiel Horn, "More than Cigarettes, Sex and Chocolate: the Canadian Army in the Netherlands, 1944-1945," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'etudes canadiennes* 16:3,4 (Fall, Winter, 1981) pp.170-171.
33. Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, p.88.
34. Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, pp.86-87.
35. See Hayes, *The Lincs*, p.52; Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, p.84.
36. Hoedelmans, *Jeeps & Klaprozen*, p.115.

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