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# Operation "Canada"

## 5th Canadian Armoured Division's Attack on Delfzijl, 23 April to 2 May 1945

Daniel Byers

Operation "Canada" was the last action fought by 5th Canadian Armoured Division in the Second World War. The battle to open the northern Dutch port of Delfzijl lasted ten days, and cost the Division a total of 62 dead and 180 wounded. Yet it has largely been forgotten.<sup>1</sup> The capture of Delfzijl is interesting enough to be worth studying in its own right. As one of the last Canadian actions in the war, it reveals the level of proficiency achieved by Canadian soldiers by that time. The reduction of the pocket was carried out with a high degree of efficiency, and saw excellent cooperation between all combat arms. It is also a useful reminder that for many Canadians the costly fighting did not end in North-West Europe until the very last days of the war.

The battle for Delfzijl also raises two questions: why was it undertaken so close to the end of the war, and why did commanders continue to advance in the face of strong opposition that was detected early in the operation? The aim of this article is to address these questions, as well as describing the battle itself in some detail. As it argues, the reduction of the pocket was authorized due to a combination of strategic and operational factors. It was continued after the strength of the defences became evident because once the troops were in range of the pocket's defences it was less costly to press ahead and finish the task, at least in the eyes of Canadian commanders, than to conduct a longer holding operation or siege.

\* \* \* \* \*

Delfzijl is located on the coast of the Ems Estuary, facing the German port of Emden. As one of Holland's largest secondary ports, it looked promising to military planners for use in relieving the starving Dutch population following the "hunger winter" of 1944-1945.<sup>2</sup> At first glance it seemed easier to capture than ports in the west of the country, where German occupiers had retreated behind prepared defences against the advancing Canadians. In addition, heavy guns at Delfzijl protected the approaches to Emden, a potential base for last-ditch operations by E-boats, midget submarines, and other naval weapons should Germany continue to resist defeat, as it had so far.<sup>3</sup> Emden was a strategic target for Allied planners, and more importantly for 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, which was then advancing towards it. 5th Division's operations were designed to support that advance by putting constant pressure on Delfzijl, to prevent the defenders from retreating to reinforce Emden.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the attack on Delfzijl was motivated at the strategic level by several factors, which combined to make its capture an important aim.

Unfortunately, the closing of the pocket was complicated by orders designed to protect Dutch inhabitants. Major-General B.M. Hoffmeister, 5th Division's GOC (General Officer Commanding), was asked to mount the operation using nothing more powerful than his usual infantry support weapons: tanks, 25-pounder artillery, and 3-inch mortars.<sup>5</sup> Against these were ranged four troops of large enemy guns from 256 Naval Anti-Aircraft Battery, which were located near Delfzijl, and at the "Reider Spit" to the south and east. All were



*A gathering of generals at 5th Canadian Armoured Division Headquarters, 20 March 1945. Left to right: Brigadier I.H. Cumberland, commander, 5th Canadian Armoured Brigade; Major-General B.M. Hoffmeister, GOC 5th Canadian Armoured Division; unknown; Field Marshal B.L. Montgomery, commander, 21st Army Group; unknown; Lieutenant-General C. Foulkes, GOC I Canadian Corps; Brigadier I.S. Johnston, commander, 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade.*

now turned inland to protect the pocket. Several concentrations of smaller calibre artillery were identified between Delfzijl and the town of Farmsum, while heavy coastal guns were sighted to fire into the area from as far away as Emden and the North Sea island of Borkum.<sup>6</sup>

Besides opposition guns, Intelligence Officers identified at least 1500 German defenders around Delfzijl, mostly naval fortress troops converted to infantry, located in small battle groups of 80-120 men at various strong points. Experience would prove the total to be more than 4000, not including men killed or evacuated to Emden during the battle.<sup>7</sup> Intelligence reports compared the task of taking Delfzijl to that of the "Breskens Pocket" in the Scheldt Estuary at Antwerp, one of the Canadian Army's worst battles of the previous autumn.<sup>8</sup> The terrain around Delfzijl was similar to the Scheldt, consisting of soft polderland crossed by numerous drainage ditches and canals. All vehicles were limited to the weak, narrow roads of the region, and there was little cover anywhere. Much of the area west of Delfzijl had been flooded by the Germans, and the pocket was ringed by a prepared system of mines and trenches, linking strong points centred on local villages.<sup>9</sup>

A tactical problem faced Brigadier Ian S. Johnston, the Commanding Officer of 11th

Canadian Infantry Brigade, and the immediate commander of the operation. Considering the number of enemy troops, the long frontage that would have to be manned, and the artillery superiority of his opponents, Johnston chose to begin his attack on Delfzijl as soon as possible. As he later put it,

There was little cover, the weather was miserable and the enemy shelling was taking it's [sic] toll of casualties. It was accordingly decided to push forward to at least reduce the pocket immediately with the reservation that as the picture developed a pause could be made later when more troops could be rested.<sup>10</sup>

Tactical considerations, then, reinforced strategic ones in the decision to proceed with the reduction of Delfzijl. Although 3rd Division's matching advance on Emden actually went more slowly than planned over the next few days, Brigadier Johnston was forced by his local situation to proceed with his own attack. He had no way to know how close the war was to ending, or the true number of men that his own soldiers faced, and he planned his battle accordingly.

The two commanders of the operation, Hoffmeister and Johnston, were well-qualified to assess the dangers. Hoffmeister was one of three prewar militia officers who rose to the rank of Major-General during the war, after going

overseas as a company commander with the Seaforth Highlanders of Vancouver in 1939. He took over as Commanding Officer of the unit in October 1942, and by March 1944 rose to command 5th Division. Hoffmeister led the "Mighty Maroon Machine" through the rest of their battles in Italy, before they moved to North-West Europe in early 1945. A recent study of Canada's Second World War generals calls Hoffmeister "the best Canadian fighting general of the war."<sup>11</sup> Brigadier Johnston was also a veteran of many years in the prewar militia. He mobilized in 1939 with the 48th Highlanders of Toronto, going from Regimental Adjutant to Commanding Officer by 1943, and taking command of 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade in June 1944.<sup>12</sup> Thus, both men were competent, battle-hardened commanders, who knew their jobs, while remembering what combat was like for the average infantryman. Neither was likely to attack Delfzijl unless convinced of the need, and both did all they could to reduce the costs. When asked to conduct operations without heavy artillery, Hoffmeister reportedly consulted his men down to the level of the other ranks regarding their willingness to carry out the task.<sup>13</sup> To avoid enemy artillery, Hoffmeister and Johnston directed that the operation be carried out as much as possible as a night attack.

To fight the battle, Johnston had under command four infantry battalions: the Cape Breton Highlanders, the Perth Regiment, the Irish Regiment, and the Westminster Regiment (5th Division's motorized infantry). In support Johnston could call on the guns of 8th Self-

Propelled and 17th Field Regiments, and two out of three armoured regiments in the Division, the British Columbia Dragoons and the 8th Hussars. For the first two days, the fighting was led by Brigadier I.H. Cumberland of 5th Canadian Armoured Brigade, who ordered the Westminster and Irish to take over positions in the villages of Siddeburen and Oostwolde to the south of Delfzijl, while the Perths dug in to the north. Johnston formally took command on the morning of April 25, by which time all three battalions were fully involved in combat.

\* \* \* \* \*

The battle for Delfzijl began at 11:00 p.m. on the evening of April 23. Two platoons of the Perth Regiment's "C" Company moved off from Godlinze towards the east, capturing the villages of Groote Nes and Klein Nes before pressing on to their objectives on the coast. They arrived at dawn, just as German artillery zeroed in on their position. Meanwhile, "B" Company advanced south-east towards Holwierde, but soon ran into enemy opposition outside the village. Road-bound tanks of the British Columbia Dragoons' Reconnaissance Troop, which were supporting the Perths, were unable to reach them. Held up by fire from self-propelled guns and other artillery north-west of Nansum, the company could only move forward again at 9:30 a.m., when supporting mortars fired smoke and high explosives to cover them. The company finally reached the edge of Holwierde at about 10:15. Occupying a village was dangerous work, and

*Brigadier I.H. Cumberland, 5th Canadian Armoured Brigade, checking a map with Lieutenant-Colonel G.C. Corbault, Westminster Regiment and Lieutenant-Colonel Jack Eaton, 8th New Brunswick Hussars.*

Photo by J.H. Smith  
NAC PA 131033



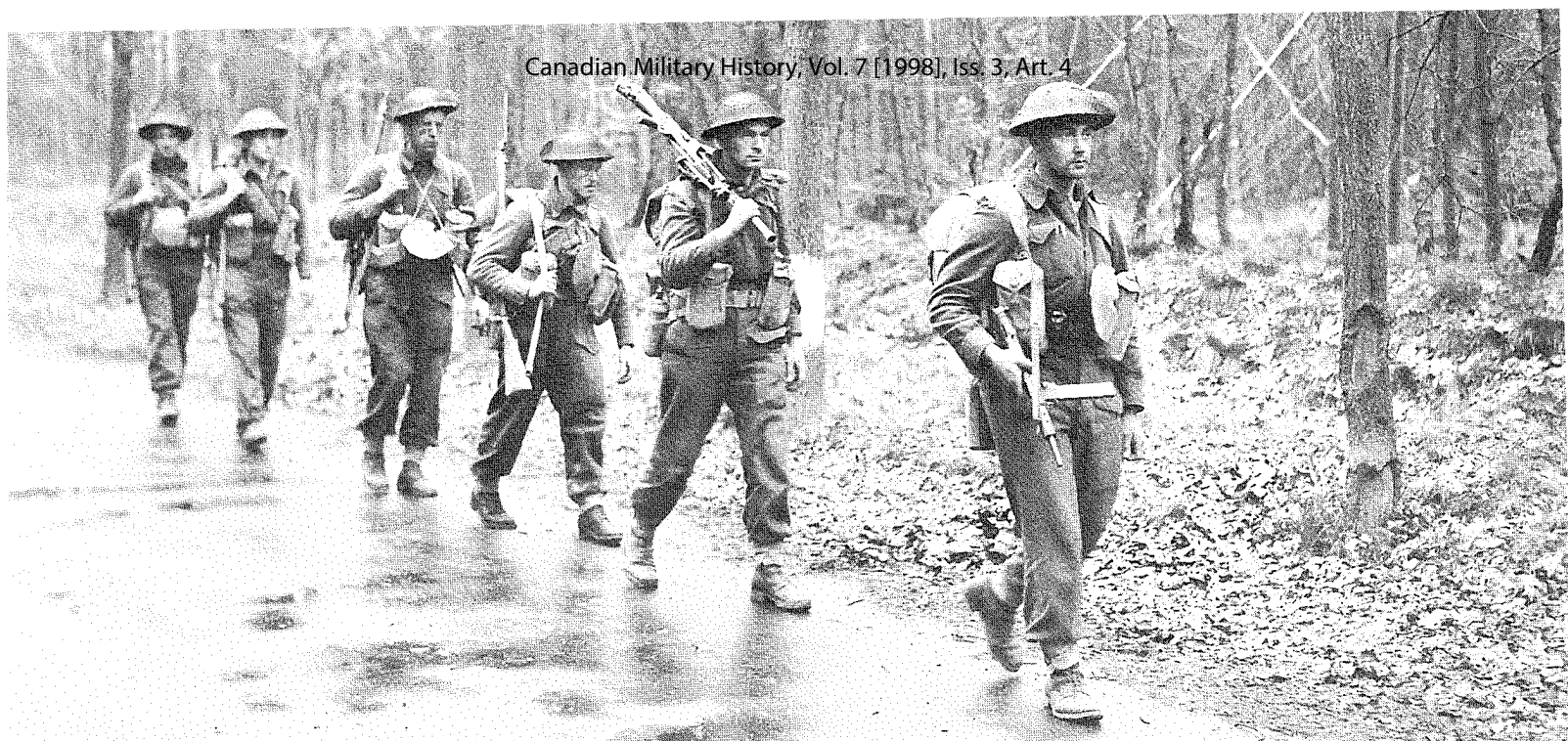


Photo by J.H. Smith, NAC PA 13448

**Above:** Soldiers of the Perth Regiment marching to the front, April 1945

**Left:** Privates V.R. Davis, D.G. Wragg and J.M. Cunningham of the Perth Regiment rest during the 5th Canadian Armoured Division advance, April 1945



Photo by J.H. Smith, NAC PA 134487

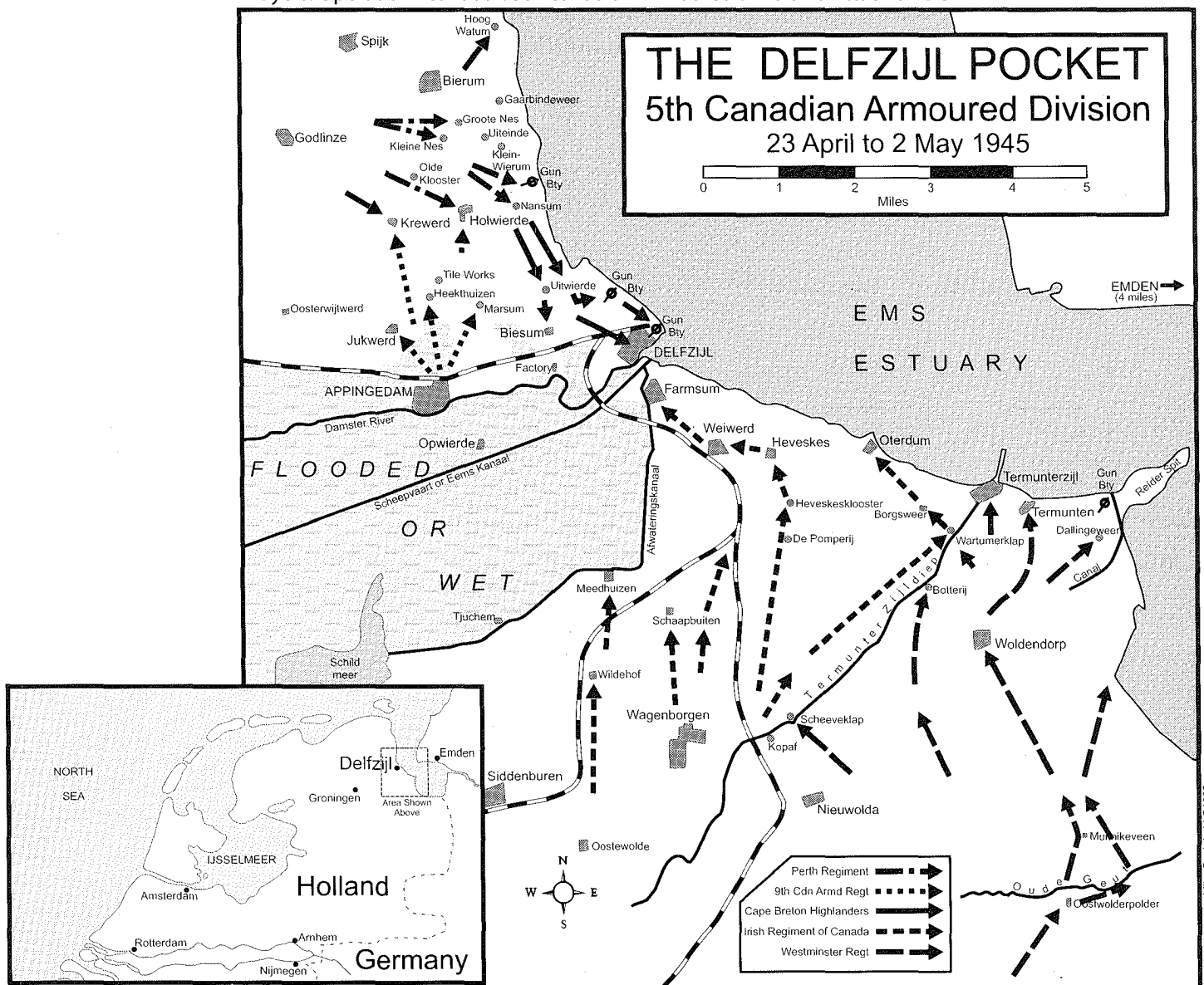
enemy artillery continued to inflict casualties throughout the afternoon. Enemy patrols also probed the lines during the afternoon and again near midnight.<sup>14</sup>

To the south, the Irish Regiment was relieving 3rd Division's Canadian Scottish Regiment in Wagenborgen. Waiting to be relieved, the Scottish had not pressed forward, and the rest of the town had to be cleared by the Irish, with the aid of two troops of tanks from the 8th Hussars.<sup>15</sup> Farther east, the Westminsters took over from the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in Oostwolde, accompanied by two more Hussars troops. At

6:00 p.m. on April 24, "A" and "C" companies moved off along the road running north from the village, "C" splitting off to advance along a canal on the right. Despite sounds of enemy movement and a few artillery rounds, they made no direct contact with the enemy, and they continued to move forward cautiously until 1:00 p.m. the next day, reaching a point about two miles south and east of Woldendorp.<sup>16</sup>

The British Columbia Dragoons received one of their least pleasant orders on April 23. Crews from two squadrons were told to "dismount" and act as infantry in Appingedam, in the centre of





the pocket. “A” and “B” Squadrons left their tanks and formed four groups of one officer and fifteen men each, plus a headquarters of twenty-one. “C” Squadron also contributed crewmen from two of its troops.<sup>17</sup> Part of the town was still in German hands, and for the next ten days the Dragoons conducted active patrols in the face of heavy shelling. While one might question the use of troopers as infantry, there were not enough trained soldiers to man the entire perimeter of the pocket. The Dragoons were assigned a fairly simple holding role in the centre, in order to free everyday infantrymen for more active roles to the north and south. This is just one example of the many expedients on which Canadian and other national armies were forced to rely due to chronic shortages of infantry throughout the North-West European campaign.

Once the various units had moved into position around the Delfzijl perimeter, the next forty-eight hours were similar for all of them. Enemy shelling continued while plans were prepared for further attacks. In Appingedam, the British Columbia Dragoons were shelled so heavily that one squadron had to move its headquarters into an air-raid shelter, and communication lines were cut faster than they could be repaired.<sup>18</sup> To the north, the shelling was broken for small periods by the few air support missions that were flown during the Delfzijl battle. The afternoon of April 25 saw an attack by fighter-bombers on targets north of Delfzijl, although they arrived before smoke could be fired to mark targets, and "the bombing was ineffective."<sup>19</sup> Twenty Spitfires and Typhoons returned the next day, but heavy clouds and



Photo by J.H. Smith, NAC PA 131043

*A Sherman Firefly, modified with extra armour, of the 5th Canadian Armoured Division, moves through the town of Putten, Holland, 18 April 1945.*

drizzle then set in across the region, becoming a constant feature for the rest of the fighting.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, troops were happy to welcome the 109th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery, to the area south-west of Appingedam, in an attempt to match the enemy's superior guns. They were soon joined by one battery from 1st Heavy Regiment, R.A.<sup>21</sup>

The period April 26-27 saw fighting resume for all units in the Delfzijl pocket. The first to advance were the Irish to the south, who moved out of Wagenborgen in mid-afternoon on the 26th, facing little direct opposition but heavy artillery fire. "C" Company passed through the lead company, "A", at about 4:30, and continued along the road to Heveskes until 6:00 p.m. "D" Company then moved off on the left, struggling forward against strong opposition until 11:00 p.m., when all three companies dug in.<sup>22</sup>

To the north, the Perth Regiment's attack began shortly after. "D" Company led off at 12:35 a.m., followed closely by "C", and both were near the coast of the Ems Estuary by 4:00 a.m. "D" Company then began to face increasing small arms fire. 8th Hussars tanks arrived to help, and together they reached their objective. Strong resistance continued, and one tank was knocked out. The company commander made two

requests for additional armour over the next two hours, before the enemy finally surrendered the position, along with forty-two prisoners. The tanks continued to be exposed to heavy artillery fire for some time thereafter.<sup>23</sup>

While the Perths were advancing in the north, a Westminster attack was getting underway at the other end of the perimeter. Covered by massed guns of supporting tanks, 17th Field Regiment, and six new 105-mm Hussars tanks dug in as artillery, "A" Company passed right through Woldendorp before their opponents recovered. They were promptly cut off, and trapped for the rest of the day. That evening, a counter-attack came in from all sides, and the company only survived the hour-long battle thanks to supporting fire from their own artillery and tanks, and captured German arms that they pressed into service. "C" Company launched an attack on Woldendorp two hours later, taking the rest of the night to reach their comrades. Together, the survivors resisted another counter-attack, and the two companies began to clear the town. They were heavily shelled, but managed to complete their task by noon.<sup>24</sup>

As the Westminsters attempted to free their men in Woldendorp on the night of April 27/28, on the left two companies of the Irish began



Photo by J.H. Smith, NAC PA 131030

*Canadian armour, including a Sherman "Flail" tank, receives a warm welcome as it passes through the streets of Putten, Holland, 18 April 1945.*

another advance. "C" Company forced its way through wire and considerable opposition throughout the night, first light finding them 500 yards short of Heveskes. Meanwhile, "A" Company moved off to the north-east, following a canal that ended at Termunterzijl on the coast. As they approached their objectives, small arms fire increased, and the company was suddenly surrounded. Only one platoon escaped the trap that had been laid, and the rest of the company found itself in the same position as that of the Westminsters the day before.<sup>25</sup>

To the north, the same night saw the Perths launch a complicated four-company assault on Nansum. "C" Company moved off at about 1:00 a.m., heading towards the heavy guns that had shelled them for days. Unfortunately, the men were trapped in a minefield about two hours later, the Company Commander and Lieutenant killed by the first mines. Patrols could not find a gap before daybreak, and the whole Nansum attack was delayed. All companies were heavily shelled during the morning by enemy guns, which were now firing at almost point-blank range. "D" Company finally managed to move again at 3:15 that afternoon. Meeting slight opposition, they called down their own artillery, and ruthlessly set fire to houses to drive out German defenders and maintain their advance.

They were finally halted by German artillery and a self-propelled gun at about 4:30. Smoke was fired over the positions, and one platoon struggled onto the company's objectives. The battalion's leading platoon drew up just short of the Nansum guns at 7:15 p.m., and the reserve company was ordered to pass through. At 10:00 p.m. they, too, called for smoke, and twenty-five minutes later they requested artillery fire to neutralize the guns. "C" Company finally took the fortified position at about 10:45 on the evening of April 28, capturing 117 prisoners in the process.<sup>26</sup>

The capture of Nansum was completed overnight. "A" Company led the advance, but had a difficult time crossing the last 300-400 yards in front of the town. They were stopped by a machine gun at about 1:45 a.m., and remained 200 yards short of Nansum four hours later, when they called for more ammunition. A counter-attack followed shortly after. Although they were never cut off, the men of "A" Company were forced to rely on captured weapons and ammunition to hold their position, just as the Westminsters thirty-three hours earlier. Supporting artillery fire helped to end the fight, and the company's ammunition lines were reopened. It was not until 2:30 p.m. that the last of the day's obstacles were overcome and the



## An die Verteidiger vom Kessel Delfzijl

Himmler hat heute den Alliierten bedingungslose Kapitulation angeboten um weiteres unnützes blutvergiesen zu vermeiden.

Wir Kanadier nehmen an, dass Ihr bis jetzt noch keine Ahnung davon habt.

Der Krieg ist praktisch aus.  
Ihre Pflicht ist getan.

Schickt einen Parlamentär mit der weissen Flagge herüber zum Zeichen der Uebergabe.

*Thirty thousand leaflets like this one were fired into the Delfzijl pocket in specially modified smoke shells on 29 April. The translation reads:*

To the defenders of the Delfzijl Pocket.

Himmler has today offered unconditional surrender to the Allies to prevent further unnecessary bloodshed.

We Canadians assume that up to now you don't know about this.

The War is practically over.  
You have done your duty.

Send a representative over with a white flag as a sign of your surrender.

*The appeal was apparently unsuccessful.*

*[From the War Diary, 5th Canadian Armoured Division HQ, May 1945. App. 1 / 1A.]*

advance on Nansum resumed. Artillery fire was directed on the village, and "A" Company finally entered it at 4:50 p.m. Patrols continued to meet opposition for the next hour. Meanwhile, "C" and "D" companies spent the day clearing the recently-captured coastal guns and the area between Holwierde and Nansum. In all, the Regiment took 295 prisoners for the day, and its men were ready for a well-deserved rest when the Cape Breton Highlanders relieved them that evening, in preparation for the final attack on Delfzijl. "D" Company stayed in action for the time being, taking over "B" Company positions in Holwierde.<sup>27</sup>

That night, the British Columbia Dragoons launched their most complicated and potentially dangerous operation of the battle, a combined infantry-armoured attack to link up with the Perthes. All available tanks were enlisted to support the assaulting troopers, and Reconnaissance and even Headquarters tanks were pressed into action to fill out the order of battle. The force headed off at 10:15 p.m., moving north and then turning to come in on the town of Marsum from the west, "after liberally

shooting it up."<sup>28</sup> Despite their preparations the Dragoons were quite happy to find the town abandoned, although it was heavily shelled as soon as they entered it. One troop of tanks was sent towards Holwierde to contact the Perthes, closing the ring in the northern half of the pocket.<sup>29</sup>

To the south the Delfzijl perimeter was closing as well. The Westminsters launched an attack towards the coast before midnight, and "B" Company found itself 1000 yards short of Termunterzijl by first light. They chose to risk running across the final stretch of open polder rather than staying in their exposed positions. By 5:15 a.m. the company was firmly in town and patrolling towards the water, having closed a major evacuation centre, and trapping about 500 German prisoners. To the right, "A" Company took control of the town of Termunten a short time later, and began patrolling east to the Reider Spit, the battalion's last objective. That afternoon "C" Company moved to within sight of German crews loading and firing the guns that tormented the Westminsters. The position was well-defended by mines, wire, and concrete,

however, and the only friendly artillery were six 105-mm Hussars tanks, and one 7.2-inch howitzer from 1st Heavy Regiment, R.A. The men were ordered to pull back to less exposed positions while a two-company daylight attack with full artillery support was prepared.<sup>30</sup>

By then, the Cape Breton Highlanders had moved into position for the final attack on Delfzijl. At this point it is worth remembering that Brigadier Johnston had hoped to rest his troops after reducing the perimeter of the pocket. But most of the guns remained active, and the Canadians were now in point-blank range. In the end, it proved less costly to have the CBH push on and end the battle as quickly as possible. Their C.O., Lt-Col R.B. Somerville, prepared an intricate plan for the advance on Delfzijl, which was to take place in several deliberate stages. "A" and "B" companies were to lead off and capture points on the coastal dyke east and slightly north of Uitwierde. "C" Company would pass through and take the battery of coastal guns north of Delfzijl. "D" would then continue the advance and seize a group of guns in the harbour, to be followed by an attack on the railway station at the northern edge of the port. From there, troops would clear the town itself.<sup>31</sup> The attack was planned to begin the night of April 29/30, but Somerville was forced to change plans when poor weather washed out roads in the rear.<sup>32</sup> A further shock came in the form of one man killed and two wounded as "A" Company came up to relieve the Perths, when a German prisoner being escorted to the rear accidentally stepped on a mine. To top off a miserable night for "A" Company, the weather was cold and wet, rations did not get through due to a bogged tank blocking the road, and the men were shelled during the night. The opposition met by the Perths in Nansum, and the need to clear the minefield they had discovered, also influenced the Cape Breton CO's decision to substitute an intermediate attack on Uitwierde, which began just before midnight. "A" and "B" companies reached their objectives within about three hours, meeting moderate opposition and taking 240 prisoners along the way.<sup>33</sup>

The CBH launched their final attack on the port of Delfzijl at 10:00 p.m. on the night of April 30.<sup>34</sup> "C" Company soon ran into a minefield, and the pioneer section went to work. The infantry broke free before 11:00 p.m., only to

meet more active resistance. Forty-nine prisoners were taken following a short fight, and by midnight the men were moving ahead again. By morning, "D" Company got within 100 yards of the Delfzijl guns that were the target of their advance, before being pinned down short of ammunition. As daylight approached, enemy defences were clearly stronger than expected. The New Brunswick Hussars lost two tanks helping "B" Company forward, but went on without them to capture one of the company's objectives, a rare example of armour leading infantry onto an objective, and proof of the degree of cooperation achieved by units of 5th Division by the end of the war.

By this point, "D" Company was urgently in need of help. They were still pinned down, and unable to send anyone back to guide in their ammunition. A reinforcement platoon finally reached them under cover of smoke, gathering up a stray supply party along the way. Now that "D" Company's position was secured, "B" was ordered to move on to the Delfzijl railway station, and another troop of Hussars tanks was sent to help. They reached the station at 10:14 a.m., and captured several hundred prisoners during and after their attack. It was during this advance that the third Military Cross of the operation was won.<sup>35</sup> Major Tim Ellis, who was temporarily commanding "A" Squadron, describes the action that won the M.C. for one of his Lieutenants:

I sent Bill Gerrard's troop in, only to have it shot to a standstill part way there. Bill stood in his turret while the Jerries were finishing off his disabled tank and gave a detailed description of the fortifications and gun positions, camouflaged to look like houses, then made it safely back up the ditch along with his crews.<sup>36</sup>

Gerrard's own gunner reportedly knocked out two of the three anti-tank guns that opposed the troop, before the crew finally evacuated the tank.<sup>37</sup> Another of the crew members, who helped the wounded men into the ditch, remembers that German machine-gunners stopped firing for a moment to allow them to get to safety.<sup>38</sup>

By 11:20 a.m., Delfzijl had been split in two by the combined CBH-8th Hussars attack. The remaining defenders began heading to sea in boats, but not before the Cape Breton Highlanders brought their prisoner count for the past three days to over 1500. To the south,

German gunners also evacuated the Reider Spit overnight, the Westminsterers hearing the guns go silent at 3:00 a.m. A freed Russian prisoner arrived to report that the crew had left the Spit, and a patrol went in to confirm the statement that afternoon, after smoke cleared from around the guns and a white flag became visible. Except for some shelling from Emden, a minor nuisance compared to the Spit guns, the rest of the Westminsterers' day was quiet.<sup>39</sup>

One final pocket of German troops remained, located between Delfzijl and Farmsum. The task of eliminating it fell to the Irish Regiment. "A" Company set off from Heveskes one minute after midnight on May 2, following a supporting artillery barrage into Weiwerd. The company raced through, seizing bridges on the western outskirts of the town before they could be destroyed. "C" Company soon arrived to help clear Weiwerd, and despite strong opposition they completed the task by about 3:00 a.m. "B" company in reserve moved up and passed through Weiwerd two hours later. Supported closely by Hussars tanks, the men moved down the road toward Farmsum. The advance brought on an immediate fire fight, and opposition continued until 6:40 a.m., when the senior German leader in the pocket finally requested terms of surrender. Lt-Col L.H.C. Payne of the Irish Regiment officially accepted the unconditional surrender of the Delfzijl garrison a few minutes later.<sup>40</sup>

After the surrender of the last German defenders, the Irish, British Columbia Dragoons and Cape Breton Highlanders continued to clear the area between Appingedam and Delfzijl, establishing contact shortly after noon.<sup>41</sup> Helped by the German commander, German and Canadian engineers began clearing Delfzijl's port area of mines. The Canadians reportedly tore out demolition charges without even stopping to search for booby-traps.<sup>42</sup> Over the next two days, the pocket was fully cleared and units either pulled back to rest areas or settled down to coast-watching duties on the Ems Estuary. The long-awaited news of the German surrender in North-West Europe came on the evening of May 4, and for 5th Division the war formally ended the next morning.

\* \* \* \* \*

Despite the late date of the Delfzijl battle, and the speed with which peace followed, the operation was carried out with dash and efficiency. Sixty-two men sacrificed their lives to seize the port, against formidable opposition. In hindsight, the usefulness of the fighting might be questioned. As has been argued, however, at the time of the attack it was made for what seemed to be valid reasons. Commanders hoped to use Delfzijl to land relief supplies, and it was an important defensive link to Emden, a strategic target where 3rd Division was still operating. Once units were in place around the pocket, enemy artillery combined with orders limiting the use of supporting weapons led Brigadier Johnston to begin his attack immediately, to reduce his frontage and the dangers to his troops. As the fighting continued it became evident that his position would not improve until the pocket was completely eliminated, and so the battle continued. It is only after the fact that we know just how near the war was to ending. Years later, Brigadier Johnston made a comment that probably best summarizes the sacrifice of the sixty-two men of 5th Division who gave their lives in late April and early May of 1945: "They were determined in the capture of Delfzijl when victory was in our hands and life once more was precious."<sup>43</sup>

## Notes

1. The most detailed account is a brief description of operations in C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, vol.3, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1960), pp.591-94.
2. Major-General B.M. Hoffmeister, letter to author, 1 March 1991.
3. On Allied fears of such weapons, see National Archives of Canada [NAC] Record Group [RG] 24, Vol. 10941, File 245.C5023(D1), "5 Cdn Armd Div: Intelligence Summary No. 132," 27 April 1945. Also John Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, vol.1, *October 1944-August 1945* (London: HMSO, 1956), pp.15-18, and F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations*, vol.3, pt.2 (London: HMSO, 1988), pp.625-41.
4. Stacey, *Victory Campaign*, p.593.
5. Hoffmeister to author, 18 January 1991. For comments on concerns for Dutch civilians, see Terry Copp, *A Canadian's Guide to the Battlefields of North-West Europe* (Waterloo: Laurier Centre for Military, Strategic, and Disarmament Studies, 1995), p.216.

6. "5 Cdn Armd Div: Intelligence Summary No. 132," 27 April 1945, op.cit., and NAC RG 24, Vol.14160, War Diary [WD], HQ 11 Canadian Infantry Brigade, April 1945, Appx. 6: Brigadier Ian S. Johnston, "Report on Operations: 11 Cdn Inf Bde (for period 20 April 1945 till 2 May 45), 'The Battle for Delfzijl,'" 28 May 1945, p.2.
7. The final prisoner count was 109 officers and 4,034 other ranks. NAC RG 24, Vol.13798, WD, HQ 5th Canadian Armoured Division, 3 May 1945.
8. Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence, Ottawa [DHH], File 112.3M1009(D114), "2 Canadian Corps Intelligence Summary," No. 160, 20 April 1945.
9. On German preparations at Delfzijl, see also *Ibid.*, No.159, 18 April 1945; NAC RG 24, Vol.10941, File 245.C5023(D1), "5 Cdn Armd Div: Intelligence Summary No. 131," 25 April 1945; and DHH 112.3M1009(D121) "First Canadian Army Intelligence Summary No. 300," 26 April 45.
10. Johnston, "Report on Operations," pp.3-4.
11. J.L. Granatstein, *The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), p.180. Granatstein discusses Hoffmeister on pp.189-202, which are excerpted in *Canadian Military History* Vol.2, No.2 (Autumn 1993), pp.57-64. See also Stacey, *Victory Campaign*, pp.264 and 384; W.J. McAndrew, "Hoffmeister, Bertram Meryl," *Canadian Encyclopedia*, Second Edition, 1988; and biographical information on NAC RG 24, Vol.10786, File 224Cl.069(D1).
12. *Ibid.*, and G.W.L. Nicholson, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, vol.2, *Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1960), p.692.
13. Hoffmeister to author, 1 March 1991.
14. See DHH 145.2P1011(D1), Captain C.D. Hood, "Report on Operations of the Perth R for the period 22 Apr to V-E Day," and NAC RG 24, Vol.15137, WD, Perth Regiment, 23-25 April 1945.
15. NAC RG 24, Vol.15087, WD, Irish Regiment, 24 April 1945
16. NAC RG 24, Vol.15283, WD, Westminster Regiment, 24-25 April 1945
17. NAC RG 24, Vol.14230, WD, 9th Canadian Armoured Regiment (British Columbia Dragoons), 23 April 1945.
18. See the Dragoons' WD for 24-25 April 1945.
19. WD, Perth Regiment, 25 April 1945.
20. WDs, Perth Regiment and British Columbia Dragoons, 26 April 1945. Also DHH 112.3M1009(D121), "First Canadian Army Intelligence Summary No. 301," 27 April 45.
21. NAC RG 24, Vols. 14335 and 14451: WDs, HQ Royal Canadian Artillery, 25-27 April, and 8th Field Regiment, 27 April 1945.
22. WD, Irish Regiment, 26 April 1945.
23. WD, Perth Regiment, 27 April 1945.
24. WD, Westminster Regiment, 26-28 April 1945.
25. WD, Irish Regiment, 28 April 1945.
26. WD, Perth Regiment, 28 April 1945.
27. *Ibid.*, 29 April 1945.
28. WD, British Columbia Dragoons, 29 April 1945.
29. *Ibid.*
30. DHH 145.2W1011(D1), Lieutenant-Colonel G.C. Corbould, "Report on Operations for Period 24 Apr-1 May 1945: Operation 'Canada'," p.5. Also WD, Westminster Regiment, 29-30 April 1945.
31. DHH 145.2C5013, Lieutenant-Colonel R.B. Somerville, "Report on Operations of the Cape Breton Highlanders, Holland, for the period 27 March 1945 to the 8th May 1945," p.2.
32. Johnston, "Report on Operations," p.8.
33. See Somerville, "Report on Operations," p.2 and NAC RG 24, Vol.15048, WD, Cape Breton Highlanders, 29-30 April 1945.
34. The following account of the battalion's actions is from their WD for April 30-May 1, unless otherwise noted.
35. Two Military Crosses were awarded to Forward Observation Officers, Captains W.T. Thompson (8th Field Regiment) and D.G. Pyper (17th Field Regiment), for actions earlier in the operation. Captain Pyper's signaller, Gunner David Fehr, also won a Military Medal, suggesting both the hazards of such duties and the nature of the larger battle. For further details, see G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Gunners of Canada: The History of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery*, vol.2, 1919-1967 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), p.442 fn.2.
36. H.R.S. Ellis, "Down Memory Lane: Glory Days," *The Sabretache* (8th Hussars' Regimental Association Newsletter), n.d. A copy of this account was kindly provided by Mr. Ellis in a personal letter, 16 February 1991.
37. Douglas How, *The 8th Hussars: A History of the Regiment* (Sussex, NB: Maritime Publishing Company, 1964), pp.347-48.
38. Robert Ashton, telephone conversation, 7 February 1991.
39. WD, Westminster Regiment, 30 April - 1 May 1945.
40. WD, Irish Regiment, 2 May 1945.
41. WD, Cape Breton Highlanders, 2 May 1945.
42. Hoffmeister to author, 1 March 1991.
43. Foreword to Stafford Johnston, *The Fighting Perths* (Stratford, ON: Perth Regiment Veterans' Association, 1964).

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