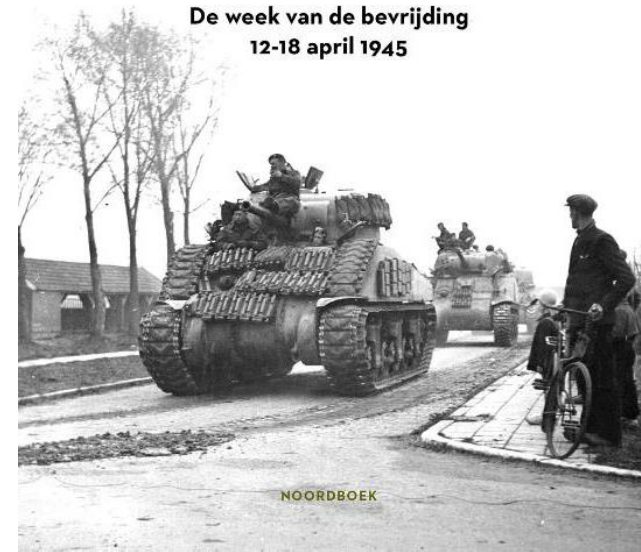




EDWIN MEINSMA

CANADEZEN IN FRIESLAND

De week van de bevrijding
12-18 april 1945



The liberation of Friesland, April 1945

For the Royal Canadian Hussars Association

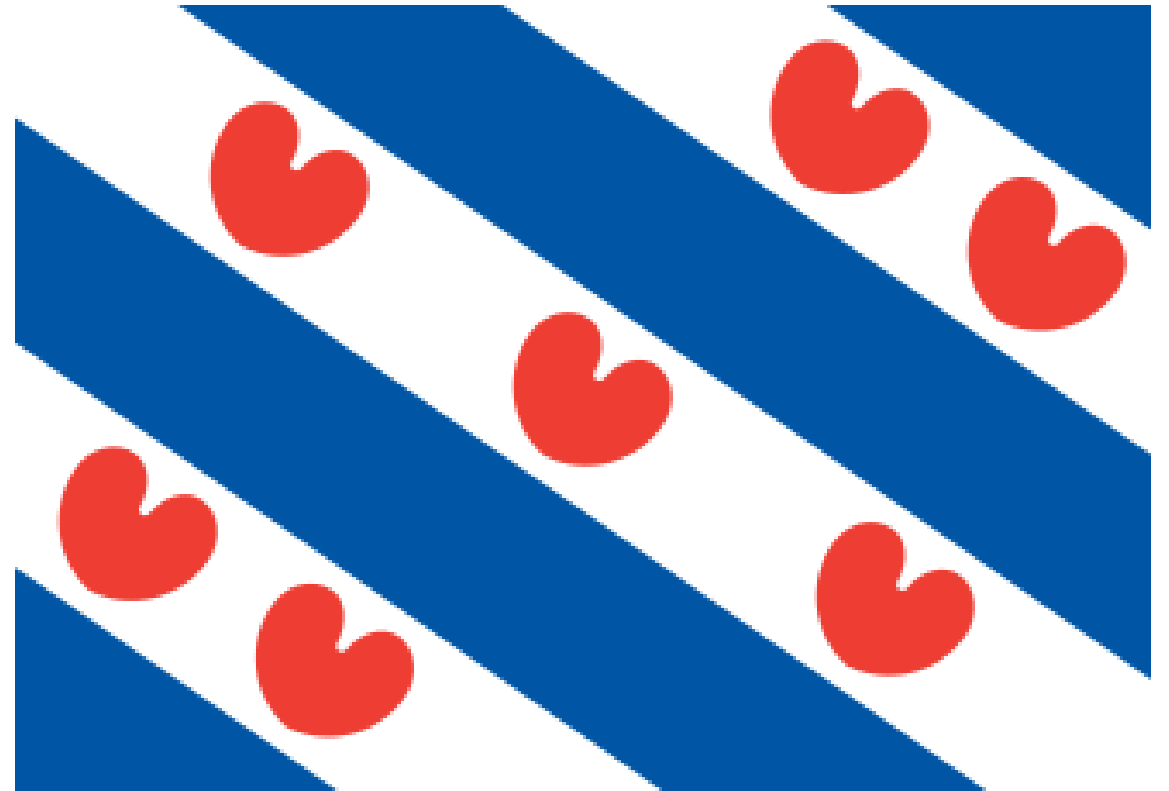
By Edwin Meinsma April 14th 2025

The presentation:

- Introduction to Friesland.
- The occupation.
- The development of the resistance.
- German military in Friesland.
- The actions of 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade and B Squadron 7th Reconnaissance Regiment.
- Questions/discussions.

Friesland

- One of the 12 provinces. Capital Leeuwarden.
- Friesland has its own language: Frisian. It's the second language of the Netherlands.
- Friesland = Fryslân.
- Thinly populated, approximately 500.000 in 1945.
- Agricultural province.
- During WW2 in the centre of the airwar.
- Many shotdown allied aircwrmembers were hidden by civilians. And sometimes helped to get back to the UK.





Friesland, 1945

The occupation

- May 10th 1940 invasion by Nazi-Germany.
- May 14th 1940 German Airforce bombed of Rotterdam and the Dutch surrendered.
- In 1940 the occupiers still behaved reasonably civilized. They tried to win hearts and minds of the Dutch.
- That did not work out. The Dutch were opposed to the Germans, however there was no such thing yet as an armed resistance.
- But this gradually changed when German policy changed into oppression, ending in sheer terror.
- Persecution of Jews and other groups. Of 140.000 Jews more than 100.000 were murdered.
- Furthermore, the Germans introduced forced labour for Dutch men (German war industry).



April-May strike 1943: tipping point in several ways

- April 1943: Germans ordered Dutch soldiers to go back in captivity as POW (and use them as forced labourers).
- This measure affected just about every household.
- Strong reaction: strike announced in large parts of the Netherlands. Occupier intervened with brute force.
- Tipping point in the mentality of many Dutch people.
- Most Dutch soldiers refused to be a POW again and went into hiding.
- Problem: you had to go to a distribution office and show your id and distribution card to get the food coupon.
- The only way to get food coupons for people in hiding was to raid distribution offices.
- Tipping point in resistance action: weapons were now used more often. The armed resistance was born.



Autumn 1944: Allies on the Dutch border. The resistance prepares for the liberation battle

- **Much more and better weapons were needed.**
 - Solution: weapons drops by allied aircraft.
 - First drop in Friesland not until 19 October 1944.
 - Acceleration after 1 November: secret agents 2nd Lt. Lykele Faber and Lt. Peter Tazelaar were dropped with radio transmitters.
 - RAF operator Alfred Springate joined in.
- **Instruction and training were needed.**
 - Most resistance fighters had little or no experience in using weapons and tactics.
 - 9 October 1944: instructors sergeant De Koning and Belgian adjutant Groenewout dropped.
- **More cooperation was needed.**
 - Dutch government in London in exile foresaw major problems if a variety of different groups were mobilized during liberation.
 - 5 September 1944 merger by order: formation of Dutch Resistance Forces (BS).



Weapons received in containers

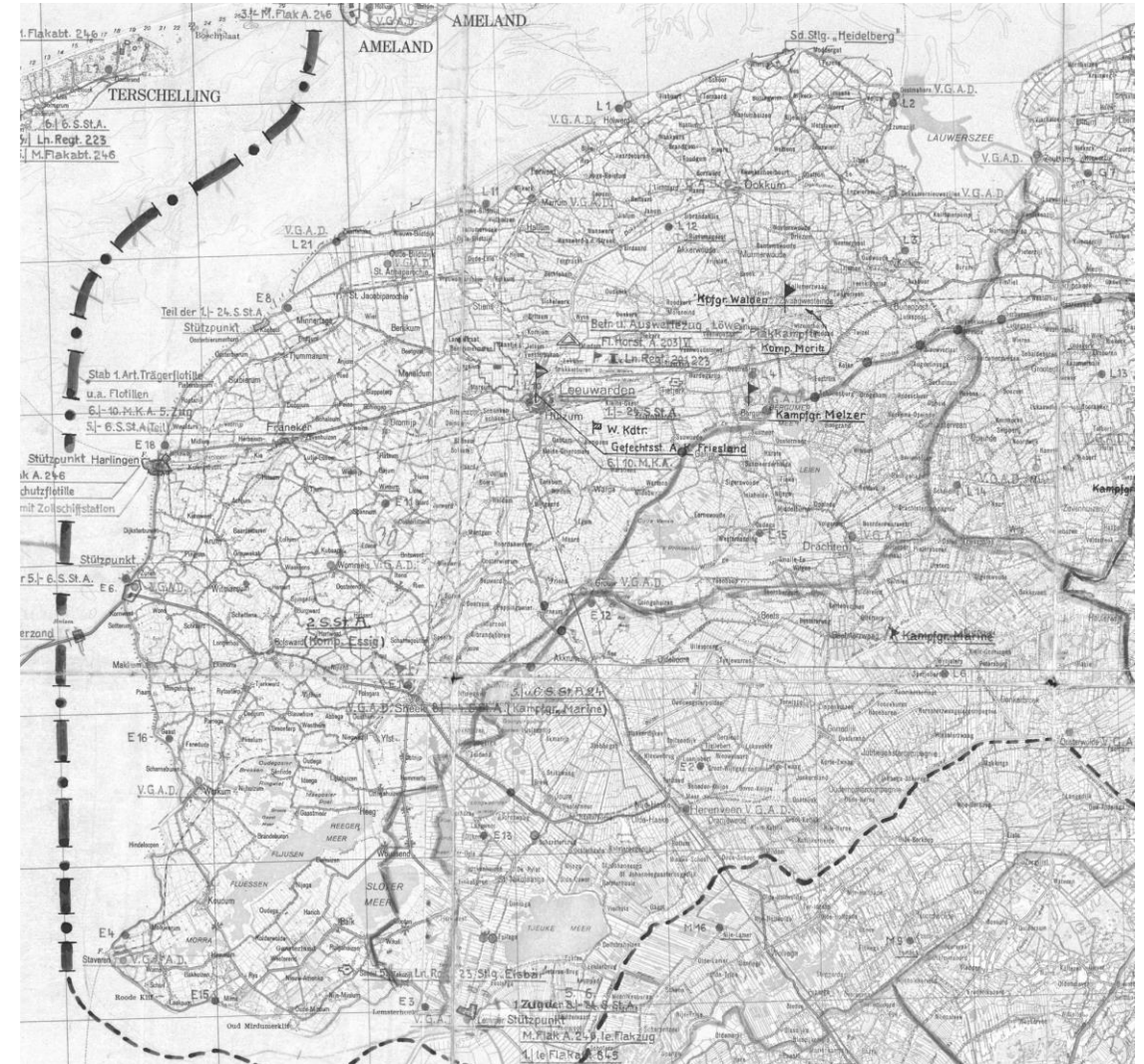




Group of resistance fighters

German military Friesland april 1945

- Friesland part of German coastal defences. Troops were concentrated in coastal area and along waterways (bridges).
- Support points: Leeuwarden, Lemmer, Harlingen, the entrance to the causeway.
- But military capability had been completely eroded by April. Best units transferred and hardly any heavy weapons.
- Strategy April 1945: keep an open route over land and water with North Holland and Germany as long as possible so that the military could eventually be evacuated.
- Tactics: delay through blockades and blowing up bridges. And defend the causeway and some of the ports.
- Old, very young, poorly armed troops mainly from Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine.



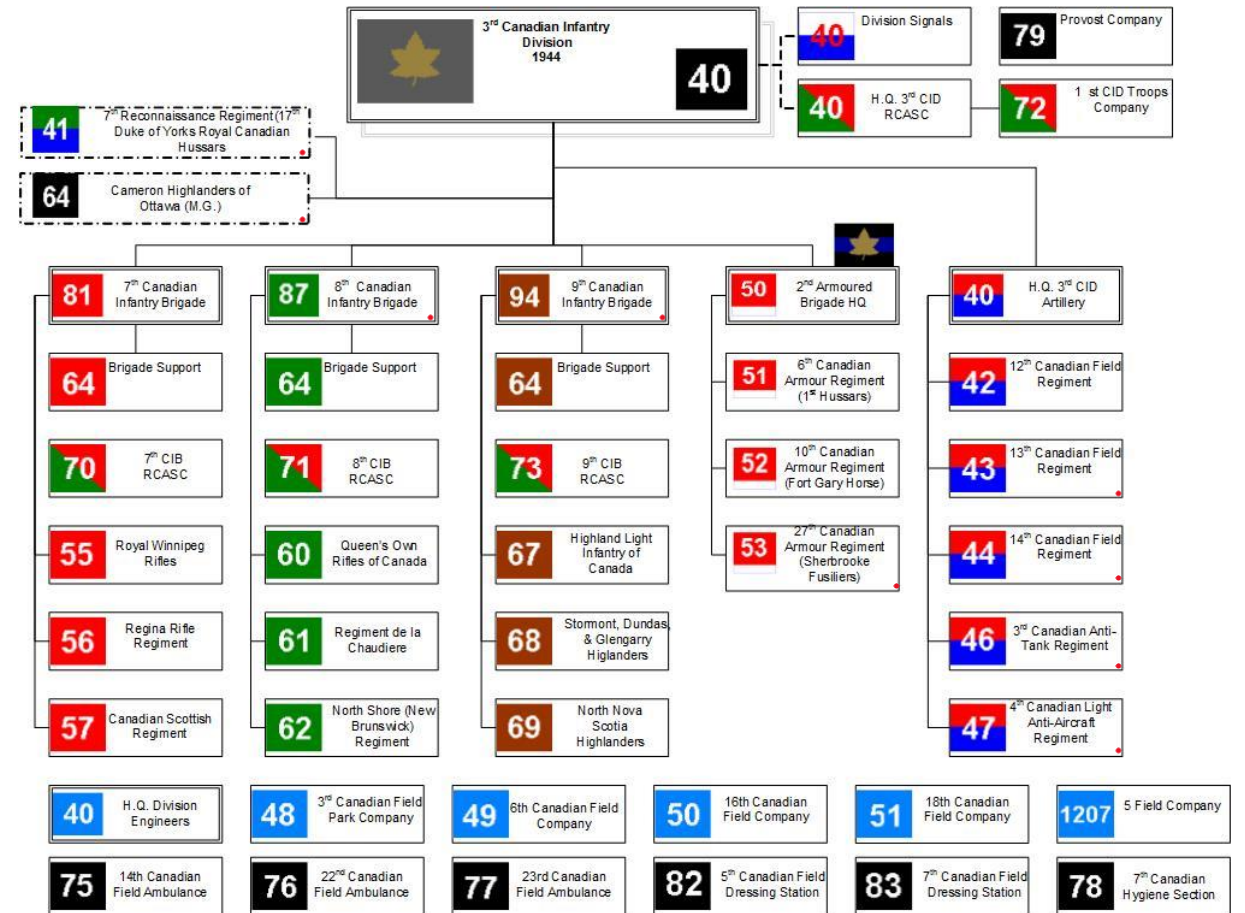
Liberation of Friesland: two phases

- In retrospect, we can conclude that the liberation can be divided into two phases.
- Phase 1: April 12th – April 15th : Charge to Waddenzee (extreme north) by 1st Armoured Car Regiment Royal Canadian Dragoons.
- Their task was to protect the flanks of the infantry and disrupt German defences,
- Phase 2: April 15th – April 18th: Employment of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division.
- So what were the tasks of 3rd Canadian Infantry Division?



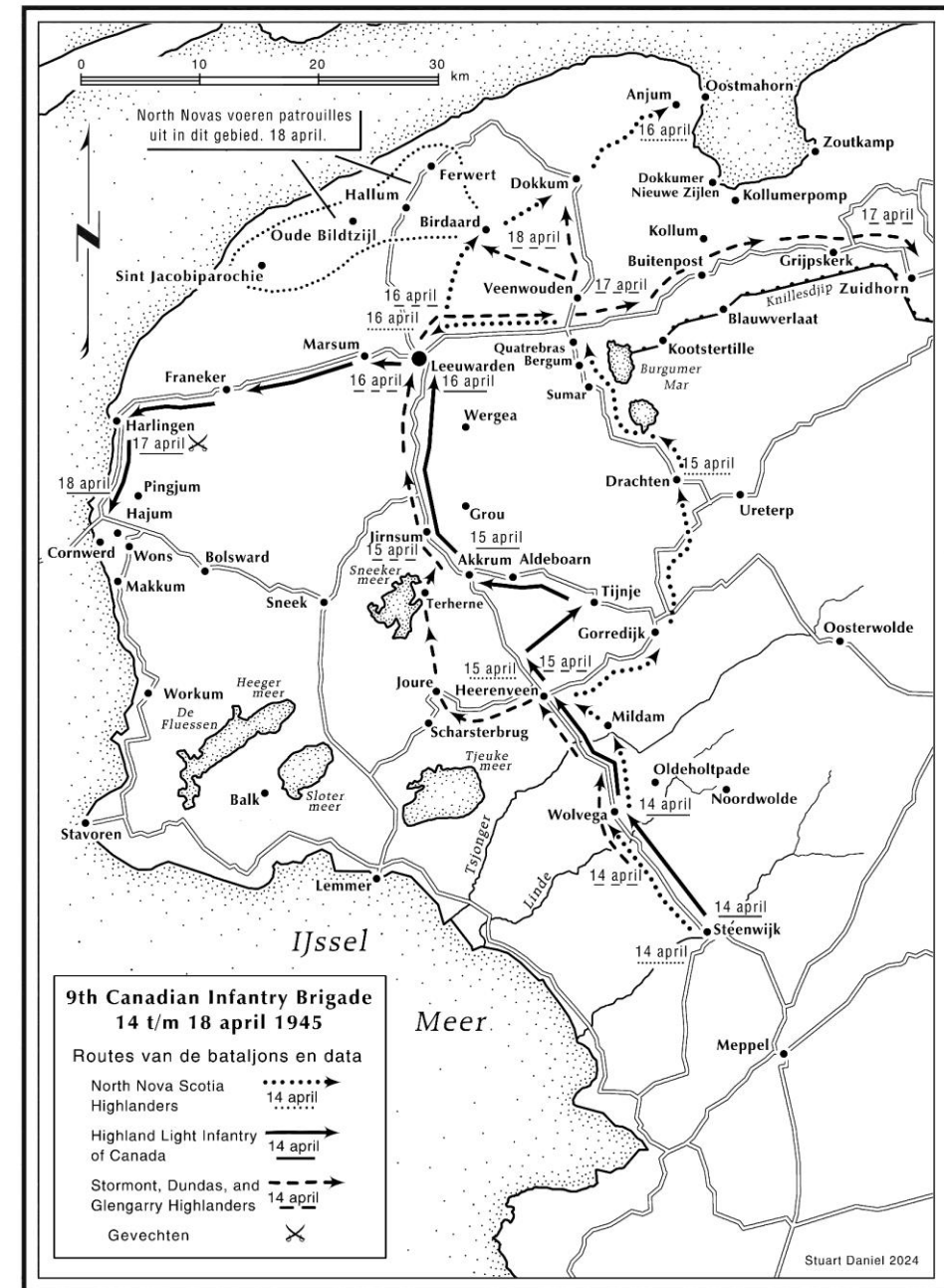
3rd Canadian Infantry Division

- Had to clear the province of Friesland.
- A Division (Division) was a military unit that could operate completely independently.
- Many arms included: infantry, scouts, tanks, artillery, engineers, signal, anti-aircraft, anti-tank etc.
- About 2/3 of division went to Friesland.



9th Canadian Infantry Brigade

- Goal 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade: Leeuwarden, Noord-Friesland and coast Waddenzee including Harlingen.
- Consisted of three battalions:
 - North Nova Scotia Highlanders.
 - Highland Light Infantry of Canada.
 - Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders.
- 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade + C Squadron 7th Reconnaissance focused on the southwest and causeway.



7th Reconnaissance Regiment Duke of Yorks Royal Canadian Hussars

- April 14th: First unit of 3rd Canadian Infantry Division in Friesland.
- Operated in front of infantry with fast armoured cars and scout cars.
- Tasks:
 - Find safe and efficient route for Division to Leeuwarden and Harlingen.
 - Locate enemy.
 - Hit the enemy wherever possible.



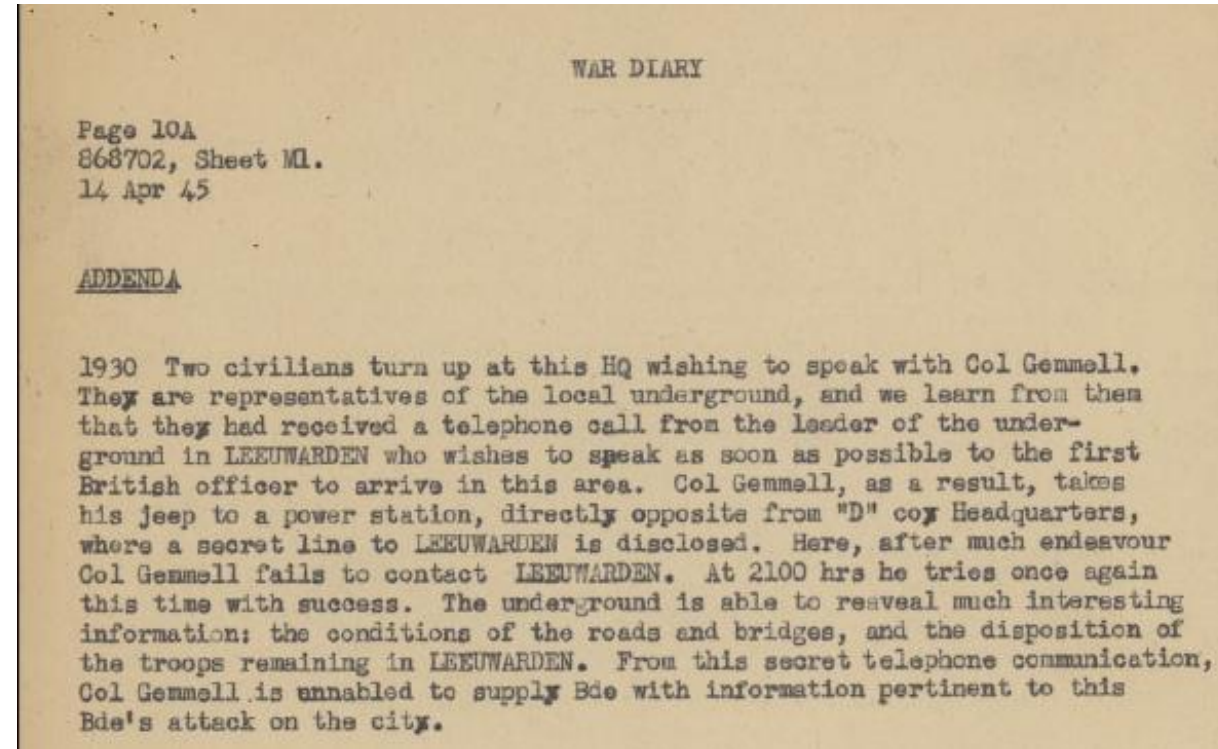
Sherbrooke Fusiliers

- Armoured regiment of 3th Canadian Infantry Division in Friesland.
- Sherman, Firefly en Stuart tanks.
- Tasks in Friesland: support and carry infantry.
- The Germans in Friesland were not supported by any armoured unit.



14 April resistance contacted Canadian infantry

- Infantry in contact with resistance Leeuwarden using the inductor network: a fully separate telephone system that could not be intercepted by the Germans.
- Contact in Leeuwarden provided much intelligence on possible routes, the state of bridges en route and the locations of German troops.
- Secret agents cycled through Friesland with transmitter on the back of the bike (hidden in a small suitcase).
- And locked themselves in transformer house in Leeuwarden sometime between 8 and 14 April. And the kept transmitting information.
- This was the first of many contacts between the resistance and the Canadians.



9th Canadian Infantry Brigade 15 april

- 14 April evening parts of Heerenveen (in the south) liberated by North Nova Scotia Highlanders.
- The rest followed on 15 April.
- Next objective: Leeuwarden (in the centre).
- Direct route to Leeuwarden interrupted by blown bridges, including the Hooi-bridge.
- 7th Reconnaissance Regiment looking for alternative routes.



Aldskou 15 april

- 7th Reconnaissance Regiment sent two patrols to find a route to Leeuwarden.
- Both ended at Aldskou: again they found a blown bridge.
- But the resistance had prepared and offered help!
- In the afternoon they built a makeshift bridge.
- Leeuwarden liberated by Royal Canadian Dragoons in early afternoon.
- 7th Reconnaissance Regiment shortly after Royal Canadian Dragoons in Leeuwarden.





B Squadron in Akkrum





Sergeant Dunlop in Aldskou



Lt. Harris in Aldskou





Civilians remove the remains





And repair the bridge

B Squadron on its way to Leeuwarden



Jirnsom, Grou, Wergea 15 april

- While the emergency bridge at Ald Skou was still under construction, 7th Reconnaissance Regiment already sent two small patrols ahead.
- Motor patrol of Sergeant Dunlop put across with the help of civilians. Liberated Jirnsom and then drove on towards Leeuwarden.
- Patrol led by Lt. Arthur Frederick Harris drove through Akkrum to Grou. And there was loaded onto barges by civilians and sailed to Wergea.
- Wergea only village liberated by water.





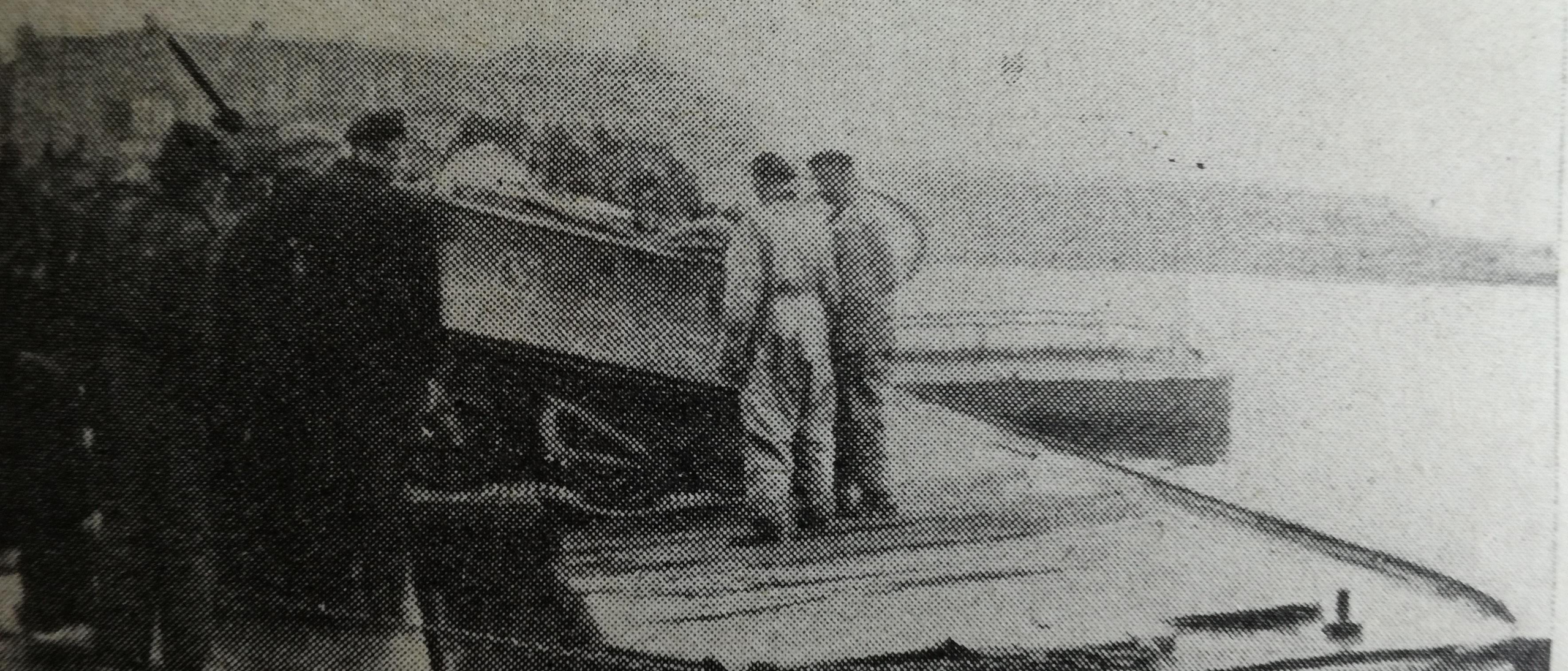
7th Reconnaissance in Grou





7th Reconnaissance in Grou





7th Reconnaissance in Grou

North Nova Scotia Highlanders to Leeuwarden

- Meanwhile, Leeuwarden - the main objective of 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade - had been liberated by the Royal Canadian Dragoons in the early afternoon.
- And B Squadron 7th Reconnaissance arrived in the afternoon.
- But they desperately needed infantry reinforcements.
- North Nova Scotia Highlanders late evening on ram tractors rushed from Heerenveen to Leeuwarden. (alternative route)



16 april preparation of attack on Harlingen

- 7th Reconnaissance via Leeuwarden, Marsum to Franeker.
- Reconnaissance locations enemy on edge of Harlingen.
- Patrol of Major Charles Wesley MacLean reached Midlum and provoked German fire to locate the enemy.
- Combined with all information from resistance, aerial reconnaissance (Auster) was very well known where the enemy was positioned.
- MacLean awarded with DSO.



16 april attack on Harlingen

- Highland Light Infantry of Canada accompanied by tanks of Sherbrooke Fusiliers to Harlingen.
- Harlingen still full of Germans (Navy). Port important for evacuation. City therefore really defended.
- After artillery shelling, infantry with tanks goes on the attack around 7.30 pm.
- Inner city under control approximately 4.00 am April 17th. 450 Germans taken prisoner.
- Relatively little damage. Thanks to resistance, 7th Reconnaissance and RAF Auster Aircraft (air observation post).



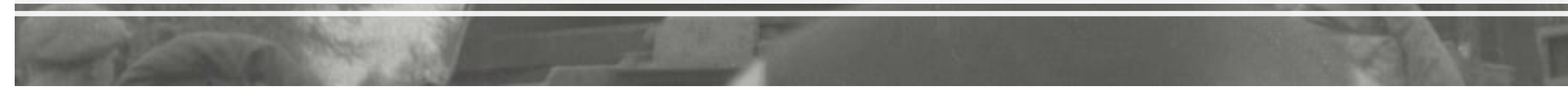
7th Reconnaissance cleared the north

- The area north and northwest of Leeuwarden had to be cleared.
- Another patrol of B Squadron 7th Reconnaissance.
- Hardly any German resistance.
- Canadians in the centre of celebrations.





7th Reconnaissance in Sint Annaparochie





7th Reconnaissance in Sint Annaparochie



7th Reconnaissance in Sint Annaparochie

Wrap up operations 9th IB and 7th Recce

- April 14th: B Squadron 7th Reconnaissance entered Friesland. It helped to liberate Heerenveen.
- April 15th: 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade entered Friesland.
- April 15th: B Squadron 7th Reconnaissance managed to reach Leeuwarden with help of the resistance.
- April 16th: North Nova Scotia Highlanders - an infantry battalion of 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade reached Leeuwarden.
- April 16th: Troops of B Squadron 7th Reconnaissance cleared road to Harlingen and located German positions.
- April 16th: Other troops of B Squadron 7th Reconnaissance cleared the northern part of Friesland.
- April 16th – April 17th: Battle of Harlingen. With help of 7th Reconnaissance, the resistance and air observation post of the RAF.



Friesland was liberated April 18th

Lest we forget – Opdat wij niet vergeten



Wilfred R.G. Berry



William Thomas Buddell



Alexander Cockburn



Joseph Alexander Elliott



Walter Leslie Jackson



Donald John MacDonald



Gordon William Ouderkirk



Harry Horace Pennell



Frederick Richard Shepherd



Leonard Howard Taylor



Walter Samuel White



Lucien Potvin en
Archibald Henri Nelson

Thank you
for your
attention

