

None of us really knew what was happening as we had had no word from Duggie who was miles away, so we all went to bed expecting a message to arrive. At three in the morning, I was woken up by 'Dear old thing, are you awake?' This was James having come the whole way back in his 'Weasel' from Duggie with our orders. He was unable to cross the bridge over the Elbe against the traffic so had swum it in his 'Weasel'. The orders he brought were for us to leave at first light for the American bridge at Bleckede where we had priority. Dennis had already received this message in morse but Duggie had been unable to hear the acknowledgement owing to the bad wireless, so had sent James.

So on 2 May 1945 we commenced our last march of the War. Our route was via Neetze, over the bridge at Bleckede, to just short of Boizenburg then to Bengerstorf where we all halted for breakfast and for further orders. As we set off that morning we passed Tony Bonham outside B Echelon looking very tired, having never gone to bed that night as they had arrived very late, and Ted Acres who had a very bad attack of poisoning, was more or less unconscious and could not do anything. Nevertheless Tony gave us a cheery wave. At breakfast a lot of released prisoners came up to us overjoyed at being free and seeing the British Army. Even the Germans appeared pleased to see us for they were glad it was us and not the Russians, whom they dreaded. Meanwhile the 1st Canadian Parachute Regiment were mounted on the back of C Squadron tanks, and they had commenced the advance to Wismar on the Baltic at first light. The telephone between the War Office and 21 Army Group hummed all morning about the necessity to reach the Baltic, thereby preventing the Russians from getting to Denmark. 11th Armoured Division were therefore directed on Lübeck and 6th Airborne Division with ourselves on Wismar. I hoped that we might reach Wittenburg that day but it was entered unopposed at half-past ten in the morning and Gadebusch one and a half hours later. The remainder of the Regiment was about four hours behind C Squadron and were going flat out, trying to catch up. The sight on the road was amazing for there was no resistance, the enemy's only thought being to escape from the Russians; consequently we first met all their base workshops and Corps HQs coming streaming down the road in good order, the infantry marching in three's and the vehicles in convoy. Generals were sitting

upright in their cars being driven by their ADCs. Gradually one got nearer the fighting troops who were acting as rearguard to this endless column retreating from our 'Allies'. Most of the German soldiers brought their wives or mistresses for whom there were special 'Families' Buses'. The order of march of our column was Recce Troop, the Colonel in his Dingo, 3 Para Brigade Commander on a DR's pillion, then C Squadron, and when Sgt Randall arrived at the level crossing at Bobitz he found a trainload of SP across it. He was told not to knock out the engine as that would block the road. The train soon moved on and when Duggie saw another approaching he stuck his Dingo across the line and stopped it. The Recce Troop rushed on to Wismar where all the barriers across the roads were down. This did not delay them as the civilians soon pushed them away allowing them to drive in, and in so doing we reached the Baltic. Duggie noticed a lot of low-flying planes so set out with two sections of Recce Troop to find the aerodrome which they soon came across outside the town. Here there was great excitement, some Germans rushing up to surrender, as pleased as Punch, and others starting to fire at our tanks till they discovered they were British and came up to apologize, having mistaken them for Russians. Duggie caught a lorry-load of soldiers getting away so gave them a burst of fire from his Sten which soon made them change their minds. C Squadron and their infantry arrived and took up positions round the town, the latter all remarking: 'I never knew tanks could go as fast as that.' By this time the remainder of the Regiment had arrived and John Gunn and his Squadron had great fun collecting a lorry-load of pistols from a hospital train at Bobitz. At nine o'clock that night, two scout cars and two motorcycle combinations drove in from the east manned by Russian troops of both sexes armed with Tommy guns and demanding the way to Denmark. They were very disappointed that we had cut off their line of advance but soon drowned their sorrows in vodka!

And so, on 2 May 1945, we ended the War with a grand hunt of a sixty-mile point and at least eighty as the Hun ran, and with the honour of being the first British troops to meet the Russians.

