

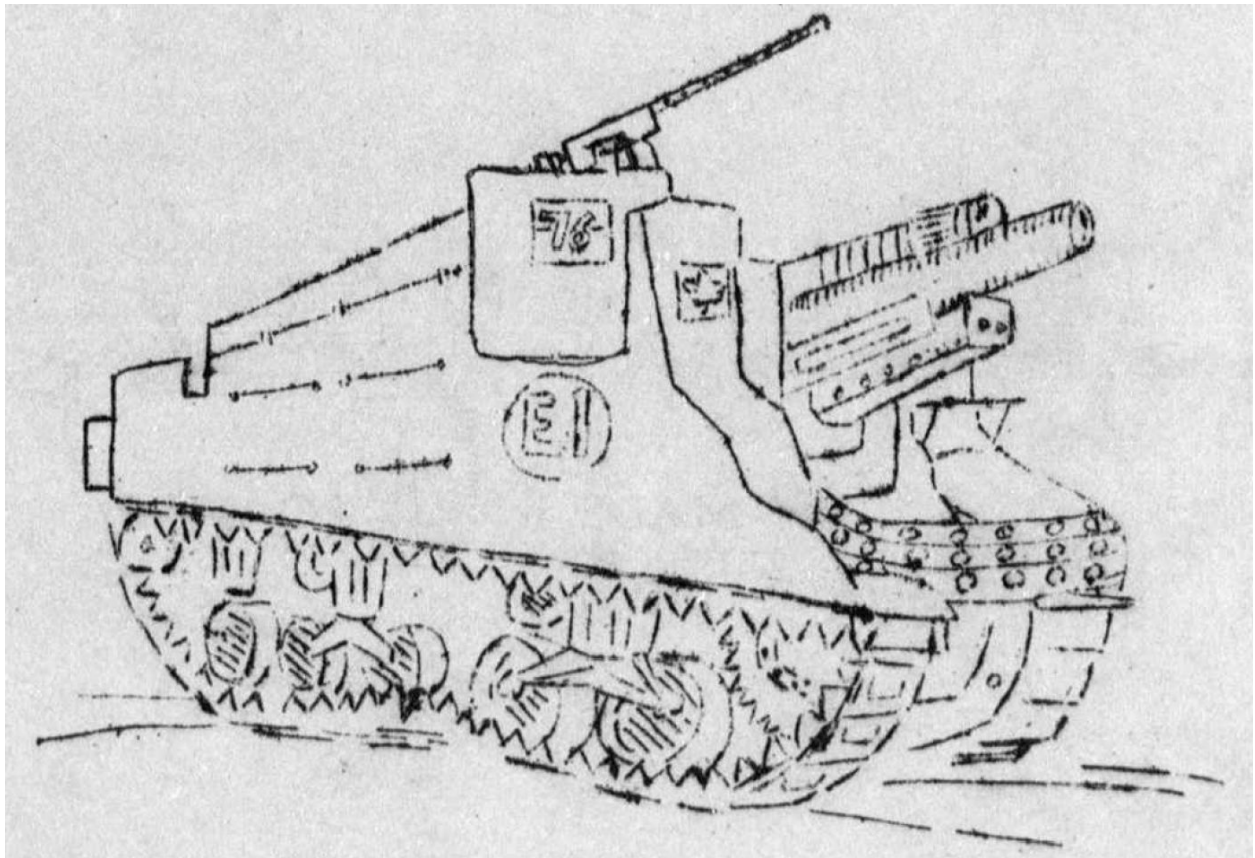
HISTORY OF

8 Canadian Field Regiment (Self Propelled)

Royal Canadian Artillery

From 1 September 1939 to 31 May 1945

WORLD WAR II



February 2018

TRANSCRIBERS NOTES:

This document is a faithful reproduction of Appendix 5 of the August 1945 War Diary of the 8 Canadian Field Regiment (Self Propelled) Royal Canadian Artillery. This appendix appears to have been an attempt to create a formal record of the Regiment's war time accomplishments that was never formally published.

This document was produced by first downloading the appendix photos from the online copies of the microfilm archives. The photos were then edited to create a PDF document. The document was then transcribed using OCR and manual transcribing.

Spelling, punctuation, or spacing errors that exist in the original document were left the way they were originally typed.

Finally, I must admit I am truly privileged to be able to conduct this effort on behalf of the former members of the 8 Fd Regt (SP). This has been a very rewarding experience. Any errors in transcribing remain the undersigned.

Ubique!

S.J. (Steve) Kuervers
Major
Battery Commander
61st Field Battery
20th Field Artillery Regiment, RCA

REVISIONS:

1.0 16 Feb 2018 Transcription completed

ROLL OF HONOUR

"WE SHALL REMEMBER THEM"

BOSTRUM,	HERBERT	Gnr.	ENGLAND	January 1944
CALLAGHAN,	VICTOR J.	Gnr.	ITALY	May 1944
CHIESCHE,	F.J.	Sgt.	ITALY	January 1945
CROSS,	STANLEY N.	L/Bdr.	ITALY	September 1944
DONNELLEY,	JAMES M.D.	Capt.	HOLLAND	April 1945
EDMUNDS,	EDWIN G.	Gnr.	ITALY	May 1944
EDWARDS,	ALFRED R.	Cpl.	HOLLAND	April 1945
EKBERG,	C.G.L.	Gnr.	ENGLAND	November 1940
FARIS,	KEITH DONNEL	Lieut.	ITALY	May 1944
FORTIER,	JEAN LEVIS	Lieut.	ITALY	September 1944
GIDDENS,	WILLIAM S.	Gnr.	ITALY	September 1944
HANLEY,	JOHN	Capt.	ITALY	September 1944
JAZZAR,	ROMEO N.	Gnr.	ENGLAND	May 1942
KOLINIAK,	NICK	Gnr.	ITALY	May 1944
MARSIN,	JOHN A.	Bdr.	ITALY	May 1944
McDONALD,	JOSEPH S.	Gnr.	ITALY	September 1944
McMILLAN,	MELVIN W.	B.S.M.	ITALY	November 1944
McNEIL	H.	Gnr.	ITALY	February 1944
MISIURKA,	PAUL J.	Gnr.	ITALY	August 1944
MITCHELL,	ROBERT	L/Bdr.	ENGLAND	March 1942
NOAKES,	DANIEL H.	T.B.S.M.	ITALY	May 1944
PATTE,	SAMUEL RAY	Capt.	ITALY	December 1944
PELLETIER,	JOSEPH	Gnr.	ITALY	May 1944
PERLICK,	WILLIAM C.	Gnr.	ITALY	September 1944
RANSOM,	ALAN H.	Sgt.	ITALY	May 1944
RILEY,	GEORGE ALBERT F.	Capt.	ITALY	September 1944
ROSENBERG,	DENNIS V.	Gnr.	ITALY	September 1944
ROWAN,	THOMAS S.	Gnr.	ITALY	November 1944
SAUNDERSON,	C.E,	L/Bdr.	ITALY	September 1944
SHERRER,	JOSEPH MAXIMILLAN	Cfn.	ITALY	October 1944
SKAGGS,	KENNETH V.	Gnr.	ITALY	May 1944

SKIDMORE,	CLYDE J.	Gnr.	ITALY	August 1944
STEELE,	ROSS F.	Gnr.	ITALY	May 1944
THOMPSON	C.W.M.	Gnr.	ITALY	December 1944
WILLIAMS	LEWIS J.	B.S.M.	ITALY	May 1944

"UBIQUE"

(Alas Poor Rudyard Kipling)

Ubique means-the gremlins who haunt the Tannoy wire
And change all orders such as "STOP" to orders such as "FIRE",
Ubique is the sneaking knave who dabbles with the cones
And gives, the gunners good excuse for monstrous beaten zones.

He dwells a among the bubbles and in the sighting gear
And twists our knobs and dials about without a trace of fear,
He laughs at our precautions and our silly, futile steps
To make the rounds land in one hole as our O.P expects.

He pisses on the cordite, he gives the fuze a jerk,
He buggers up the quadrant so it will never work.
He knaws away at landyards until the dirty rope
Will rot away, and firing then becomes a forlorn hope.

Ubique means the gremlin who puts the sets off net,
And a well laid line resemble hot spaghetti
It means the cheerful GPO who thinks he's doing fine;
It means the Troop Commander thats caught him way off line.

You see they always haunt us, they're with us every day.
They bring eternal sadness upon the RCA.
They always seem to thwart us no matter who we be,
Their antics arc not covered by volumes one, two, three.

Ubique is the evil one who doesn't give a damn
And whispers in the gunners' ears "of course we never ram"
He fills our shiny barrels with many a cut and sear
And makes the CRA scream out "D'ye report BORE CLEAR?"

He tampers with the zero line and moves the arm and arc
And extinguishes the picquet lights as soon as it is dark.
He makes the sleepy sentry ignore the S.O.S.
Which mikes the faith of infanteers in us a damn sight leas.

Ubique means "move out at night" along the centre line
Armed to the teeth with blanco and buckles all ashine
The enemy is somewhere ahead, ignore all Teller mines
Remember, the armour is with you, tho' many leagues behind.

Ubique means put on your pack and carry blankets too
And march the dusty miles to where the ships are due.
Then clamber down the smelly hole and cram yourself within
And face the plate of "M and V" and still know how to grin.

These gremlins make you lose your leave and cause a grand snafu
But then they make that "88" explode and not hit you
Oh they help us and they fret us and they drive us off our bean
But with them or without them, we're the finest ever seen.

They hampered us and hindered us and made our inside churn
By juggling with the ammo count, and mixing up returns,
So we never got to like 'em but looked with keen dismay
At tho grief their antics brought to the 8th Field R.C.A.

ITALY July 1944 Lieuts. R.R. Johnston and P. Morrison.

8 Canadian Field Regiment (Self-Propelled)
Royal Canadian Artillery

WAR HISTORY

MOBILIZATION AND TRAINING IN CANADA

During its existence through almost six years of war the 8 Field Regiment (SP) RCA saw changes in organization, equipment, and even in name. It did not exist as a regiment in Canada in the real sense of the word, although a skeleton Regimental Headquarters was formed in Regina on 1 December 1939, Lt Col F E. Wootton, MC, was the Commanding Officer. The units from which the regiment was later formed consisted of four NPAM batteries from the four western provinces. These units were 61 Field Battery from Edmonton Alta., 71 Field Battery from Brandon Man., 107 Field Battery from Cranbrook B.C., and 113 Field Battery from Regina Sask. All the batteries were mobilized on 1 September 1939. Recruiting was completed by both 61 and 71 Batteries by about 20 October 1939. 113 Battery was up to full strength about 20 November, and 107 Battery by 30 December. On 20 October 107 Battery moved from Cranbrook to Edmonton, where it carried on its organization and training at the Prince of Wales Armouries. In January 1940 these four batteries were ordered to proceed overseas and on 28 January they sailed from Halifax on the "Monarch of Bermuda". This was the first time that the batteries were all together and personnel were taken from the batteries to fill the ranks of RHQ, which until then consisted of only a few officers.

Although the four batteries were widely separated and had no affiliation with one another in Canada, their activities were much the same owing to the nature of the equipment available at the time. Training consisted of foot and rifle drill, route marches, 18 pdr. and 4.5" how. gun drill. and lectures on military law, elementary tactics and organization. The dress was breeches, puttees, tunic (World War 1 pattern), leather bandoliers and forage caps. Late in December the new uniforms arrived and each man was issued with one suit of battle dress. Clothing and kit were not plentiful and everything could easily be carried, in one kit bag and a small pack.

In general, morale in Canada was high. However the four batteries along with the rest of Canada's energetic and eager Armed Forces were anxious to get overseas and "come to grips with the Hun". Although the spirit was present, the equipment and facilities for training were not. From 10 December to 31 December 1939, and from 10 January 1940 until leaving Edmonton for Halifax, 107 Battery was quarantined for scarlet fever. The novelty of foot drill and route marches wore off. All ranks were glad when embarkation orders were received and the long awaited move overseas began. On sailing from Halifax the Battery Commanders were Major F A Ford in 61 Battery, Major A W Bennett in 71 Battery, Me W A Townsley MC, in 107 Battery and Capt Robertson in 113 Battery.

MOBILIZATION AND TRAINING IN ENGLAND

The "Monarch of Bermuda" dropped anchor at Gourroch, Sootland, on 8 February 1940 and personnel of the four batteries and RHQ arrived in Bordon, Hants, on 10 February, and took over Louisburg East Barracks. It was here that Regimental Headquarters was really formed and the regiment began to function as a regiment. Its name was to be 4 Army Field Regiment RCA, but at Bordon this was changed to the 8 Army Field Regiment RCA, to commemorate the 8 Field Brigade CFA, of World War 1. The four batteries were consolidated to become 61/107 Battery and 71/113 Battery, each composed of three troops, Lt Col F E Wooton MC, was Commanding Officer, Major W A Townsley MC, was Second-In-Command and the Battery Commanders were Major F A Ford of 61/107 Battery and Major A W Bennett of 71/113 Battery.

The barracks were in very poor shape, the weather very wet and cold, and there was a great deal of sickness in the regiment before the men became acclimatized. The training facilities were even more discouraging than they had been in Canada, but in spite of the difficulties everyone did everything he could to learn his job. Gun drill was done using crudely constructed "saw-horses" as guns. Early in April the regiment was issued with the first 25 prs that came off the general production line in Britain. The transport of the regiment consisted of a few army vehicles and also requisitioned commercial vehicles, some of them complete with civilian drivers. Due to lack of equipment the principal form of training was still foot and rifle drill, lectures on organization, tactics and gas. There were also courses for acks and signallers. On 17 April 1940, Lt Col (later Brigadier) H O N Brownfield CBE, MC, assumed command of the regiment.

The 8 Army Field Regiment attended its first practice carp at Okehampton from 7 May 1940 to 31 May. After returning from the camp the unit came under command 1 Canadian Infantry Division, and was completely equipped with guns and British made vehicles. Actually it was the first regiment in the British Empire to be equipped with 25 prs, - the BEF, British units in the United Kingdom and 1 Cdn Inf Div were at the time equipped with 18/25 prs. Early in June the regiment was put on 24 hour notice to go to Franco, but Dunkerque and the fall of France altered this plan. During the remainder of the summer of 1940 the regiment was part of "McNaughton's Travelling Circus" and made a series of "one night stands" throughout southern England. Visits were made to Northampton, Ashvale, Forest Hill, Banstead Woods, Oxted, Horsley East and North Park. After this summer of "sight-seeing" and quick movements which made one Canadian division appear to be much larger and more mobile than it really was, the regiment eventually came to rest at Cobham, Surrey. Here personnel were billeted in private homes and were well received by the local inhabitants. In August the British vehicles were exchanged for new Canadian made vehicles. Lt Col (later Brigadier) E C Plow DSO, was appointed Commanding Officer of the regiment on 28 August 1940.

In October 1940 another change in organization was made. The two batteries were broken down into three batteries of two troops each, "A" and "B" Troops going to 61 Bty., "D" and "E" Troops to 71 Bty, and "C" and "F" Troops to 107 Bty. The name of 113 Bty was dropped from the regimental organization.

Trips were made to practice camp about every five months. The training of gun crews, acks, signallers and drivers was carried on daily. There were frequent officers' lectures and sessions of miniature ranging. Periodically the regiment was called upon for coast defence duties. In this role gun positions were occupied in the areas of Heatings, Rye, Pett, Brighton and Worthing. There were also several large exercises every spring and summer. With few exception the role of the Regiment until it left England for Italy in November 1943 consisted of training and coast defence.

The first large manoeuvre in which the Regiment, participated was "HUMPER" in September 1941. After this exercise thirteen months of Utopian existence in private billets in Cobham and evenings in London came to an end and the unit moved to Pett, Kent. The guns were deployed in widely separated gun areas, on coast defence duties. On 30 November 1940 the unit moved into reserve and concentrated in Wadhurst, Sussex, and carried on with training. During the summers of 1942 and 1943 accommodation was under canvas and during the winters in requisitioned houses or nissen huts. Privilege leaves were granted to all personnel approximately every three months. In general morale was high. There was good "esprit de corps" in the Regiment and personnel were healthy and fit. Only one officer married but the O.R's were much more energetic in this respect and many took unto themselves as wives the cream of England's fairest womanhood. Training was occasionally interrupted by road building programs to improve regimental areas. The largest construction task was at Heathfield Park, Sussex, in the spring of 1942 when personnel of the Regiment built a camp consisting of half a dozen nissen huts, laying a mile of water pipe, and constructing several miles of good road through a morass of mud. From 1940 to 1943 the Regiment was under command of 1, 2, 3 Cdn Inf. Divisions and 5 Cdn Armd Div., C.C.M.A., 1 Cdn AGRA and 2 Cdn. AGRA. The only formation in which the regiment did not serve was the 4th Cdn Armd Division. Firing practice camps were attended at Larkhill, Afriston, and at Builth Wells and Sennybridge in Wales. The regiment learned a great deal from the manoeuvres in which it participated which included "TIGER", "BEAVER", "HAROLD", "SPARTAN", "GUN-BUSTER", and "PIRATE". On 23 September 1941 Lt. Col. L.M. Jones, E.D., assumed command of the Regiment.

In August 1943 the 8th Army Field Regiment was attached to the 3rd Cdn Infantry Division as the extra regiment required for its role as an assault division. This called for conversion to a self-propelled regiment. Personnel were sent to Canadian Armoured Corps training centres for instruction in driving and maintaining tanks and armoured fighting vehicles. Eight 105 mm Priest SP guns were issued to the Regiment and a very ambitious training program was begun.

However in October the plan was changed suddenly and the Regiment was ordered to join 5th Cdn Armoured Division and proceed to Italy. The advance party of five officers and fifty O.R's embarked at Liverpool on 26 October 1943, and the main party left England from Bristol on the "Cynthia" on 12 November. All equipment with the exception of office and kitchen equipment was turned in to Ordnance prior to sailing.

ACTIVE SERVICE

(a) With Central Mediterranean Force

The 8th Army Field Regiment, RCA., embarked for the Mediterranean theatre of operations on 12 Nov. 43 at Bristol. The voyage was uneventful and on 27 Nov. 43 Algiers was reached and the three batteries disembarked. They remained there for approximately three weeks and a vigorous hardening program of route marches and P.T. was carried out. RHQ proceeded to Phillipville and then on to Naples, which was reached on the last day of the month. At Afrigola near Naples, R.H.Q. joined the regiment advance party which had taken over old vehicles and equipment from 7 Br. Arm'd Div. (the Desert Rats). All hands set to work on repairs and maintenance and on 6 Dec. 43 it was possible to make the long trip over the mountains to Gravina where 5 Cdn Arm'd Div was concentrating. It was a strange convoy as all ranks and trades in RHQ were employed as drivers, the three batteries having not yet arrived in Italy and all their equipment therefore having to be transported for them. H/Capt. J.R. Millar, the Regimental Padre brought up the rear of the convoy leading six "Honey" tanks driven by drivers borrowed for the trip from the British Columbia Dragoons. Eventually the three batteries arrived at Gravina on 22 Dec. 43.

The equipment situation is an interesting study in itself. The Regiment took over the equipment of the 3 Field Regiment, R.H.A., of the 7 Br. Arm'd Div., which was leaving for England. This equipment had travelled from El Alemein to Tunis and then some. Its condition beggars description and was a great shock to our men who had left well maintained and fairly new equipment behind in the U.K. Guns (25 prs) and vehicles had had very hard usage and were in a poor state of repair and maintenance. Almost all the vehicles were British type 4x2's. The view of one gunner typifies the general feeling of disappointment in the regiment. Said he, "No wonder the b-----s never caught Rommel". The guns were calibrated and used far practice camp and were then turned in. But the vehicles did Trojan service for the Regiment and stood up to very heavy usage largely due to the stout efforts of the unit drivers and mechanics. The bulk of these vehicles were in use during our period on the static Ortona Front and during the Liri Valley operations. Many were still in use during the break through the Gothic line. Only one however remained still on our Unit charge on 5 May 45 when the "Cease Fire" was ordered. This vehicle was an armoured light recce car and was still in good running order.

At Gravina there a shortage of accomodation and RHQ only could be billeted in the town. The three batteries were concentrated under canvas in open country near by. It was not a happy arrangement in view of the rains, wind and cold. While at Gravina much work was done on our vehicles and firing practices were carried out. Then in January the regiment moved north to San Vito, turned in the 25 prs, and took over the old SP equipments of the 98th Field Regiment RA, which had been serving under command of 1 Cdn Infantry Div.

After spending almost four years as "Army" troops, and being very proud of its Canadian Army artillery patch, on 1 January 1944 the 8 Army Field Regiment RCA, sewed on the maroon patch of the 5 Cdn Armd Div and became the 8 Field Regiment (SP) RCA. At first this was not a popular move for personnel of the regiment, but in time the very high "esprit de corps" of the division seeped into our veins and we also felt with our brothers-in-arms in the division that we were by far the best formation in the Canadian Armed Forces. On 24 Jan 44, Lt Col A H Birks succeeded Lt Col E M Jones as Commanding Officer of the regiment.

The regiment's new guns, SP 105 mm Priests, had seen long and hard service and required considerable maintenance. At San Vito many repairs were effected and some firing out to sea was carried out. Then on 9 Feb 44, four years to the day after landing in England the 8 Field Regiment (SP) RCA, went into action near San Leonardo on the Ortona front.

The front was static. The 5 Cdn Armd Div sector was held by the three battalions of 11 Cdn Inf Bde and the Westmr Regt (M). The 8 Field Regiment (SP) RCA, supported the Westmr Regt (M). BCs took turns as CO's Rep at Bn HQ, and two OPs were continuously manned. Considerable effective shooting was carried out and much valuable experience obtained during this period. RHQ was established in a farm house near San Leonardo with personnel living in caves in the adjacent hillside. Battery positions were in the area immediately north of RHQ and of the village of La Torre. There were very few houses in the area and the rain and wind were very heavy indeed. Morale was very high nevertheless and great ingenuity was shown by all ranks in the construction of dug-out command posts, bivvys and stand easy positions. Mud conditions became so bad that it was not possible to get ammunition and supplies to "E" and "F" Troops by truck and a section of mules was placed under command to keep the troops supplied. The Indian muleteers added colour and scent to the regimental picture. They also seemed to increase in numbers until by the time the position was vacated we had far more mules and muleteers than we know what to do with. 107 Bty HQ was well established in La Torre, where Major F E Goulding was declared Town Major. His duties were not onerous as there were no civilians in the area.

On 9 Mar. 45 the Regiment came out of action and proceeded to Lucera for intensive training with 5 Cdn Arm'd Div. It was a disappointment to all ranks to come out of the line and the bad weather and lack of billets at Lucera did not improve matters. However intensive training in fire and movement in support of 5 Cdn Arm'd Bde. was carried out and two full dress exercises with tanks took place. This training was invaluable for operations yet to come. Gun and vehicle maintenance reached a very high level during this period. On 18 Apr. 44 Major A.J.B. Bailey, MBE, was appointed Second-In-Command of 1st Medium Regiment and was succeeded as O.C. 71 Bty. by Major E.M. Hodson. Late in April twenty new S.P. 105 mm Priests were issued to us. Before turning in the old guns a very careful check was made and the best four of the old guns were kept. These were completely re-equipped and overhauled. Our fighting state was now very satisfactory with all vehicles in good shone. The guns were calibrated under the direction of Major G.E. Ward.

When the great May offensive commenced the regiment was concentrated near Capua. With the break through the Gustav Line and the fall of Cassino we moved forward to a concentration area near Mignano. On 19 May 44 the Regiment crossed the Gari River and advancing to Pignataro deployed in an area which had been hastily prepared by the advance parties. Reps and FOO's reported to their respective armoured regiments as follows:- 61 Bty., Major G.E. Ward, Capt W.K. Savage, Capt J. Gordon to Ld.S.H. 71 Bty. Major E.M. Hodson, Capt. J.P. Gilmour Capt G.A.F. Riley to 8 N.B.H. 107 Bty. Major F.E. Goulding Capt. J.A. Handley, Capt. W.W. Hood to B.C.D. 64 Jovp Bty R.A. was placed under command 8 Field Regiment S.P. and it was decided to employ it as a fourth battery with sets on the regimental net and normal deployment orders from 2 i/c Tanks were provided for jeep battery FOO's to work with LdSH and 8NBH. One rep and one FOO were also supplied by 2 Cnd. Med. Regt. which was placed in support of 5 Cdn. Armd. Bde. On 23 May 44 the Regiment took part in the fire plan supporting the attack of 1 Cdn Inf. Div. on the Adolf Hitler Line. The Regiment then came under command 5 Cdn. Armd. Bde. The C.O. moved his "Z" group to Bde. H.Q. The Regiment moved forward at 1900 hours to a position in the Adolf Hitler Line. Movement was very difficult as routes were congested, and enclosed and very hilly terrain did not permit cross country movement. Some targets were called for by the FOO's with BCD's but heavy Artillery support was as yet not required. On 24 May 44 Ld.S.H. passed through BCD's, their task being to reach the Melfa River and with the Westmr Regt. (M). to establish a bridgehead. In order to be in a position to cover the vital bridgehead it was necessary to move the guns to the Pontecorvo area. And in order to assure continuous support the position there had to be prepared as soon as the Ld.S.H. were clear whereupon batteries were brought forward one at a time.

Very strong opposition was encountered by Ld.S.H and the whole area was subjected to very heavy enemy artillery fire. The Second-in-Command, Major W.P. Doohan

moved immediately behind the Ld.S.H. with his advance parties and prepared the position near Pontecorvo under heavy and continuous fire. Casualties of 11 killed and 16 wounded were suffered and several vehicles were destroyed. At one stage of the battle the traffic was so congested and the centre line was so heavily shelled that it was found necessary for the regimental advance party and 71 Bty and 107 Bty guns to return to their original position and continue firing from there directed by our Reps and FOOs and the Air OP. 61 Bty did a "crash action" by the side of the road where their gun positions were heavily shelled and three more were killed and three were wounded. Capt. G.A.F. Riley observed enemy guns some 3000 yards away on a hillside on our right flank firing on the advance party. These were engaged with good results. In the evening the whole regiment returned up the now bloody "Heart" route and made an occupation soon after dark. The following day, 25 May 44, saw the 8 Field Regt (SP) with 64 Br. Jeep Bty under command the only regiment of artillery in position to support an attack by 11 Cdn Inf Bde to extend and consolidate the Melfa bridgehead. The Regiment was placed under command 11 Cdn Inf Bde. Adjustments were made for FOOs and Reps. The FOOs were unable to position themselves to observe and most observed shooting was done by the Air OP. Two Air OPs. were under command the 8 Field Regt (SP) and were up continually all day one after the other. Unfortunately one of them was shot down by a salvo from our own guns. They directed fire from the regiment on eighteen regimental targets. Ammunition trucks which were frequently halted on the congestion blocked trails made their way across country and unloaded ammunition directly onto the guns where it was soon fired, and then hurried back for more. Everyone had a feeling that this was revenge for the preceeding day. A feeling of fierce pride overcame the bitter memories of our sad losses of the previous day, and morale was high. That night we were subjected to a most unpleasant bombing by a few low flying planes. Lieut. Gillan ordered his troop to open fire with their .50 calibre Brownings and the sky was filled with what looked like tracer fire of a whole Ack Ack regiment. No one was hurt but from then until we came out of action slit trenches were twice as deep and twice as numerous.

On 26 May 44 the 8 Field Regt (SP) came under command CRA and moved forward across the Melfa, the first artillery regiment to do so. Many targets were engaged from this position upon call from the Air OP and FOOs. The regimental area was subjected to shelling from enemy guns on the high ground on the right flank. One of these guns could be seen firing and Capt. W.K.G. Savage and Sgt. Harry Brown of 61 Bty. took an S.P. several hundred yards away from the battery position and successfully engaged the Hun over open sights much to everyone's satisfaction. Here the Regiment engaged a target with 10 rds gun fire at 2700 yds which necessitated a slew of 170 degrees from zero line. One sweating gunner remarked, "Why don't they put bayonets on those damn things?"

On 28 May 44 the Regiment came under command 5 Cdn Armd Bde. again for the pursuit battle up the Liri Valley and a gun position was occupied east of Ceprano.

Few civilians had been seen up to this point in the advance but they began to appear now in ever increasing numbers laden down with all the chattels they could carry. Overawed by our gestures of friendliness they made exaggerated gestures of friendliness and servility lest the "Canadesi Soldati" kill them all as the Germans had told them we were in the habit of doing. Dead horses and cattle killed by the hastily retreating Germans decomposed very quickly in the intense heat and had to be covered over with earth as soon as possible to make the air in their vicinity breathe-able. The roads were torn up by the armour and heavy traffic and were soon covered with six inches of dust which billowed up in great clouds and hung in the sky all day. The general scene put one in mind of a "Hollywood version" of a huge advance and was very encouraging for us of the winning team. The advance towards Rome continued and on 29 May 44 a position was occupied southwest of Pofi. The following day another move was made to Aranara where 71 Bty was deployed in a vineyard on the side of a very steep hill. The drivers managed to drive their 22 ton SPs to gun platforms with skill that would turn a mountain goat green with envy. On 1 June 44 the Regiment came under command CRA and was ordered to concentrate south of Pofi. So ended a very successful campaign in which the Regiment was able to operate as an SP regiment in close support for the first time. Our training had not been in vain.

On 15 June 44 the regiment moved to Alvignano in the Volturno Valley where 1 Cdn Corps was concentrated for the summer. The guns were calibrated and personnel were sent on leave to Bari, Salerno and Rome. A Regimental rest camp was opened at the beach near Mondragoni. During the summer another infantry brigade, the 12 Odn Inf Bde was added to 5 Cdn Armd Div. and our old "rivals" and sister regiment from Borden days, 11 Odn Army Field Regiment, RCA, joined the divisional artillery. Several small one day exercises were carried out but the training was not strenuous. Thanks to Italian choice of crops we were able to have frequent "corn feeds" which were missed during the previous four summers in England. Our greatest enemy during the summer was the germ responsible for diarrhoea which made many a stout warrior remain very close to his home seat lest he be caught by surprise farther than running distance from Camp. Our only other foe was the mosquito net which must have been designed to trap a human and give a mosquito all the advantages. The long lazy summer ended on a trumpet note when on 31 July 44, 107 Bty had the honour of representing the regiment at a large inspection of personnel and equipment of 1 Cdn Corps by "General Collingwood", i.e. King George VI.

On 2 Aug 44 the Regiment, shorn of all distinguishing patches, unit and formation signs, once again hit the trail. For the long 350 mile trip north it took the wheeled vehicles three days, and the tracked vehicles five days. The long drive was made without mishap. The original plan was to concentrate near Lake Trasimeno prior to going into the line near Florence but this plan was changed during the move and the Regiment was re-routed to a concentration area near Foligno.

An Italian having heard that the "terrible Canadesi" were coming up, was gratified to find instead the "Inglesi"; this he confided to us much to our amusement, not to any chagrin. Apparently our security efforts had been successful. Starting on the 16 Aug 44 and for two days thereafter the Regiment broken into three different groups moved from Foligno across the Appenine Mountains to a concentration area near Jesi. Very elaborate details and strict orders regarding camouflage were issued. The forthcoming operation was to be a surprise offensive up the Adriatic Coast, and we made an all out effort to keep the secret.

Planned as a quick breakthrough, the battle of the Gothic line proved a long and bitter struggle with a strong resolute foe and an uncompromising, often antagonistic, combination of weather and terrain. Both of these were almost as fierce as the Hun himself. The campaign was launched on an optimistic note. Our Intelligence Reports, both Corps and Div., were sanguine and talked of a "weakened and disorganized" enemy with "negligible artillery" and "little or no transport". But these, like the almost mythical "last ridge" and "last river barrier" before the Po Valley were to become grim and stale jokes.

The plan was for 1 Cdn Corps to take over from 1 Polcorps when the Metauro River was reached. Then 1 Cdn Inf Div was to attack across the Metauro and 5 Cdn Armd Div was to follow up and pass through 1 Cdn Inf Div. On 22 Aug 44 the 8 Cdn Field Regiment (SP) deployed near Mondavio, north of the Cesano River. No firing was done from this position and on the following day the Regiment moved forward to near Rupoli to a position from where the guns were well in range to support the attack across the Metauro. A silent policy was adopted until 2300 hours 25 Aug 44 when 1 Cdn Inf Div attacked. The Regiment fired on the fire plan supporting the attack. By 28 Aug 44 the Regiment was out of range and moved forward to a concentration area near Saltara across the Metaura. An epidemic of jaundice was beginning to take heavy toll of the regiment, and especially officers. By the middle of September almost 100 all ranks were evacuated to hospital with jaundice. On 27 Aug 44 Lt. col A.H. Birks was smitten by the malady and the 2 i/c Major W.P. Doohan, assumed command of the Regiment in a temporary capacity until the CO's return on 13 Sept. On 30 Aug the Regiment deployed again near S. Angelo and COs Reps and FOOs reported to the armoured regiments, which were to support the attack across the Foglia River. The advance continued at a fairly good pace but resistance was stiff and casualties were quite heavy. The weather became very bad and freak electrical storms made wireless communication impossible. Torrential rains washed out bridges and made roads impassable. In one bitter week of battle we lost 2 officers killed, 4 seriously wounded, and 11 OR casualties including 4 killed and 1 captured. Throughout this action we encountered very heavy shelling and mortaring and almost nightly bombing. A considerable number of anti-personnel bombs were dropped on the regimental area, wounding 7 ORs and destroying one gun. On 13 Sept 11 CIB took Cariano Ridge and 5 Cdn Armd Div was relieved.

However the regiment remained in action until 16 Sept and answered calls for fire from both 1 Cdn Inf Div and 4 Br Inf Div. After five days of rest, maintenance and cleaning up the Regiment again joined battle in support of 12 CIB. The gun position was actually on the reverse slope of the "last ridge" before the Po Valley and the long awaited dash across the Lombardy Plain was thought to be close at hand. FOOs reported to the armoured Regiments of 5 Cdn Armd Bde., the GGHG, and RCD. However the many canals and frequent rains proved to be just as great an impediment to progress as the hills had before. Sky ladders were built on the OP tanks to enable the FOOs to observe from tree top height. No FOO in the Regiment ever admitted that he had been in such a desperate predicament as to make the use of this aid to artillery absolutely necessary.

Towards the end of September the weather was abominable again. Slit trenches became flooded, vehicles became stuck in the mud, bridges were washed away, and bedding and clothing were soaked. But morale remained high despite these miserable conditions, possibly because the Regiment was eating wonderfully well. The menu consisted of roast pig, chickens and rabbits depending on what unfortunate creature strayed into camp and did not answer the password challenge. Amateur butchers, cooks, and poachers sprang up over night and the Regiment divulged an amazing propensity for living off the land.

On 11 Oct 44 the 5 Cdn Armd Div moved back to Riccione for a rest, and 8 Cdn Field Regiment (SP) RCA less one battery came under command CRA 1 Cdn Inf Div to support the advance west along Highway 9 towards Cesena. One battery at a time was sent to Riccione for four days rest and maintenance. On 13 Oct the Regiment returned to 5 Cdn Armd Div and moved north to Pisignano. 107 Bty was placed under command "Greenlay Force" and did detached duty in support of the GGHG for their advance up the coastal section through Cervia and across the Savio River. Everywhere the ground was badly water logged and the Germans had blown great craters in the roads, around which it was very difficult to build diversions. It was possible to make most of the houses habitable and by crowding the Italians into one or two rooms, sufficient accommodation was usually found to keep everyone under cover on their off-duty hours. The great offensive had petered out and both men and equipment required a rest. To make this possible and at the same time to keep advancing slowly the Canadian Corps was divided into small independent groups, such as Porterforce, Cumberforce, and others, which carried on the fight with the help of some British troops, Popsky's Private Army and Italian Partisans. On 2 Nov 44 the 8 Cdn Field Regiment (SP) came out of the line and moved to Cervia for rest and maintenance after 9 weeks of relentless action which saw the unit move some 70 miles northward.

The billets, though crowded, were dry and comfortable and the Regiment settled down into a rather easy-going schedule with just the odd fling at spit and polish and customary warnings regarding saluting officers. The guns were calibrated and considerable general maintenance was carried out. Threatened with several large parades and inspections the Regiment stood firm and undismayed, but succumbed to a general rejoicing when those were cancelled.

On 29 Nov 44 the Regiment moved into the line again at Montanari. The plan was for 1 Cdn Corps to attack across the Montone River and move north and west to the Lamone River. Then 5 Cdn Armd Div was to turn east and take Ravenna. On our own divisional front 12 CIB made a silent attack across the Montone at 0900 hours 2 Dec 44. The attack was a complete surprise to the enemy. Armour was taken across the river close behind the infantry and worked in close support with the infantry. There was not much resistance and the FOOs called for very little fire. In this operation one officer was killed and two ORs were wounded. The weather was cold and wet, but as there were plenty of good houses and the people were very friendly everyone managed to live fairly comfortably. Ravenna was taken on 5 Dec 44 and the division redeployed along the Lamone River to prepare for the next phase of the battle. On 10 Dec 11 CIB attacked across the Lamone River and 1 Cdn Inf Div put in a similar attack farther south. The bridgeheads were established but poor weather and murderous German fire from the dykes and other vantage points across the low swampy ground made further progress very difficult and costly. The Regiment had FOOs with the armoured regiments of 5 CAB which were working in close support with the infantry of 5 Cdn Armd Div and also 1 Cdn Inf Div. The FOOs called for fire far in excess of our ammunition allotment. However the policy of the Regiment was to answer these calls for fire and ascertain its value later. By 22 Dec the Senio River was reached and the regular infantry battalions were withdrawn from the line for Christmas and personnel of anti/tank, Ack Ack and Recce Regiments took over. Although the regiment was in action and the guns were ready to fire everyone had sufficient time off duty to eat a huge turkey dinner with all the trimmings and drink copious quantities of Italian vino and NAAFI beer. One target was fired during the morning.

On 1 Jan 45 the regiment deployed near Mozzano along Highway 16 to support an attack by 5 Cdn Armd Div north to Lake Comacchio. Reps and FOOs reported to 8 NBH and BCD. At 0500 hours 2 Jan 45 11 CIB attacked and having reached their objective by 0745 the armour passed through and continued to advance. The Regiment moved forward several thousand yards during the day. By the night of 4 Jan patrols had reached San Alberto. The enemy had been taken completely by surprise again. In a desperate counter-attack to get in behind the tanks and follow up the divisional axis they lost over four hundred prisoners and two hundred killed. On reaching San Alberto the BCD moved east towards the coast. To provide artillery support 107 Bty was detailed to move north and deploy near San Alberto. As the ground was too soft for half tracks and wheeled vehicles only tracked vehicles were used for the deployment. To make this possible spare OP tanks were borrowed from the other two batteries. On 14 Jan 45 the Italian Cremona Battle Group took over the 5 Cdn Armd Div sector and on 15 Jan the Regiment moved back to Cervia.

Much needed personal and vehicle maintenance were the order of the day in Cervia. Personnel were sent on leave to Rome and Florence. Auxiliary services arranged movies, concerts and dances. On 7 Feb 45 warning was received that a long move was in store for 5 Cdn Armd Div. Presumably it was to a rest area in the south but strictest security was to be observed so that the enemy would not know that we were being moved into reserve. On 9 Feb orders were received to turn in all the SPs. Capt P Morrison was given the honour of leading our tried-and-true Priests to the 8 Army Ordnance park at Cesena. The general consensus of opinion was that this was being done prior to being issued with 25 pr Sextons in the south. However when all "Tommy guns" were handed in the next day it was generally realized that this was not to be an ordinary move. On 11 Feb 45 the wheeled Vehicles moved from Cervia and three days later the convoy arrived in Leghorn. There it was announced that 1 Cdn Corps and 1 Cdn Armd Bde would join 1 Cdn Army in North West Europe. Vehicles were repacked and cleaned for the voyage which was to be made on LST's of the American Navy. The tanks and carriers travelled in separate groups for the entire trip from Cervia to Belgium. Personnel and vehicles of the main party were also divided into small "boat groups" for the voyage, but the majority of personnel and vehicles were loaded on 22 Feb 45 at Leghorn. After a very smooth crossing the convoy arrived in Marseilles on the morning of 24 Feb 45.

(b) North West Europe

Due to the marvellous efficiency and organization of the Movement Control Staff at Marseilles, the task of preparing for the long move north through France was accomplished quickly "without pain or suffering". By noon on 24 Feb 45 all personnel and vehicles were unloaded. Vehicles were "topped up" and driven to a large transit camp; personnel were transported to the camp and fed; two hundred men who had arrived several days earlier were waiting for us; money was changed; drivers were issued with accident reports and maps; five days rations were drawn and issued to the kitchens and orders were given for the long move. The half-tracks were sent to join the carriers and tanks which were to make the journey by rail. At 0600 hrs 25 Feb the wheeled convoy began its long drive which was to continue for five days. Each night a stop-over was made at a well organized staging camp, vehicles were petrolled-up, and personnel were fed and entertained with a movie. The route was well marked and the country-side was new and interesting. Our greatest inconvenience was the "non-fraternization order" which forbade conversation with civilians lest they discover that we were Canadians from Italy. They all looked very friendly and clean compared to the Italians and they lined the streets and waved as we passed through. The journey took us through Lyons, Dijon, east of Paris, Cambrai and across the Belgium border to Comines. Major E M Hodson and the advance party had arranged accommodation for everyone in private homes. The wheeled convoy arrived in Comines, Belgium, on 2 Mar 45. We could not have been better received by the civilian population if we had been their actual

liberators. The tank party had arrived several days before, after a three day train trip from Marseilles and already they were "well established" in the town. The houses were undamaged by the war and contained all the "modern conveniences". Largo leave allotments to the United Kingdom were received and filled. We almost forgot there was still a war on.

In the second week of Mar, the regiment received its new guns. They were 25 pr Sextons which was a bit of a disappointment. There was much work to do cleaning them and learning to use them. However everyone set to work on the job without complaining. On 13 Mar 45 Field Marshall Montgomery visited the divisional area. He gave a short informal talk to personnel of the regiment and was given a great hand when he left. In spite of the parade clashing with our other Sunday afternoon social engagements we were honoured and pleased by his visit.

On 23 Mar 45 the regiment deployed, near Dunkerque. Course shooting into the German-held pocket was carried out. On 24 Mar the 8 Cdn Fd Regt (SP) fired on a fire plan issued by 17 Br AGRA. This consisted of firing on enemy aircraft locating radar stations while the planes carrying the airborne troops for the Rhine crossing were passing over the English Channel. This practice gave us experience and confidence in our new guns. After returning from Dunkerque the guns were calibrated near Ostend.

On 5 Apr 45 the people of Comines lined the streets and amid much weeping and cheering we departed on a 200 mile trip to Nijmegen. The tanks and SPs made the journey by rail. After staying over night near Nijmegen the regiment deployed on the island on 6 Apr 45 to await the forthcoming attack on Arnhem. By noon the following day 750 rds per gun of smoke and 200 rds per gun of HE had been dumped on the gun position. The plan of attack changed several times within the next week. Even the troops and formations to make the attack changed. At 1930 hours on 12 Apr we fired our first rounds on a fire plan issued by HQ RCA 5 Cdn Armd Div. The plan called for artillery fire only, supposedly in support of a non-existent diversionary attack on the west side of Arnhem, to draw attention to that sector until the real attack by 49 br (WR) Div went in east of Arnhem at 2310 hours. After firing several targets for HQ RA 45 Br Div during the night the regiment opened fire on a pre-arranged observed smoke screen at 0840 hours 13 Apr 45. The screen was 4000 yds long, 11 Cdn Army Fd Regt RCA being responsible for the northern half and the 8 Cdn Field Regt (SP) for the southern half. A steady rate of fire was maintained all day until the order to "Stand Easy" was given almost twelve hours later at 2025 hours. In the 25 hour period of firing the regiment expended 6487 rds of HE and 12960 rds of smoke. Every available man was employed carrying and preparing ammunition to achieve this regimental record of 810 rds per gun in one day. At 2200 hours, under cover of darkness the regiment came out of action and moved to a new concentration area. The route was through Nijmegen and across a corner of Germany through

Cleve and Emmerich to Didam in Holland. The following day COs Repts and FOOs reported to LdSH, 8NBH, BCD and Westmr Regt (M) and the regiment was placed under command 5 Cdn Armd Bde. The plan was for 5 Cdn Armd Div to pass through 49 Br Div after Arhem was cleared and advance north-west to the Zuider Zee. The regiment deployed in Arhem late that night and at 0600 hours 15 Apr 45, 8NBH and BCD attacked. A Cdn Air OP and one battery from the 5 Br Med Regt RA were placed under Command 8 Cdn Fd Regt (SP). The advance was very rapid and met only scattered resistance. The 2 i/c, Major E M Hodson, and the advance party prepared a gun position near Deelan in the afternoon. In addition to the normal preparations they also captured and "do-souvenired" 120 prisoners including a Lieut-Colonel and his "lady". Before the gun group arrived the advance party had moved on again to prepare another position and the guns followed along. At dusk the regiment occupied a position about 4 miles south of Otterloo. During the deployment in the dark Lieut S M Macsymic mistook, what from prisoners reports the next day indicated the departure of a German Panzer company, for the arrival of his own battery guns, and unsuccessfully dashed across the field shouting at the top of his voice and fleshing a light. Fortunately for their lone pursuer, the tanks got away. On 16 Apr the chase by 5 Cdn Armd Bde continued and the regiment moved through Otterloo to a position several miles east of Barneveld. The Cdn Air OP was replaced by a British Sqn which kept planes in the air continually but the observers were only able to spot a few targets. The regiment took another 80 prisoners during the day and "uncovered" two American fliers and a British Secret Service agent. In the evening several souvenir collectors from RHQ made contact with the enemy about a mile behind the gun position and were forced to send for help to extricate themselves. The Paymaster, Capt S F Donnelly, gallantly led his "RHQ Commandos" to the rescue. Capt E M Evans, working as FOO with 8NBH, saw activity and brought fire to bear, necessitating a slew of 185 degrees from zero line. The final result was 5 men from RHQ and attached RCCS Signal Section wounded, the 2 i/c's half-track bazooka'd and the Paymaster and one OR spending a cold night in the long grass hugging Mother Earth. Souvenir hunting away from the gun position ceased after this episode !! On 18 Apr tanks of 8NBH reached the Zuider Zee north-west of Putton. In three and one half days 5 Cdn Armd Div with 5 Cdn Armd Bde setting the pace had advanced 50 miles, and fought off a determined counter-attack on Divisional HQ. The guns of the 8 Cdn Fd Regt (SP) RCA were always close behind the leading tanks and ready to answer calls for fire at any point of the compass. On 19 Apr the regiment fired a salute of 3 rds salvo and 5 rds gun fire in memory of personnel of the regiment who had fallen in battle. Presumably these were to be the last shots fired by the regiment in World War II. Ten minutes later the regiment "took post" and fired in anger at the enemy.

After several days rest and maintenance, on 23 Apr 45, the regiment came under command 5 Cdn Armd Bde and moved to Northern Holland. Due to the lack of bridges it was a long roundabout journey of over 150 miles

through Apeldoorn, Zutphen and Assen to Groningen. The original plan was to occupy Northern Holland in a coast defence role, but this was changed during the move and orders were received for 5 Cdn Armd Div to clear up the Delfzijl pocket. The regimental advance party prepared a gun position near Wiorden in the afternoon and the wheeled vehicles of "F" echelon arrived in the evening. The guns and tanks travelling in a later convoy from Putten arrived on the gun position during the night. In one sense the occupation was unique. It was accomplished with only a few 1/250,000 maps and one 1/25,000 map scrounged by the 2 i/c, Major E M Hodson. Information regarding our own troops was scanty and the plan was very vague. The CO, Lt Col A H Birks DSO, reported to HQ 5 CAB as CRA's Rep and CO's Reps and FOOs reported to BCD, Westmr Regt (M), and the Perth Regt. As the Westmr Regt sector was out of range of our guns our Rep and FOO had to call on 17 Cdn Fd Regt RCA for fire. The Delfzijl garrison was surrounded by flat open flooded country across which armour could not move. The divisional plan was changed and the available forces were regrouped. On 25 Apr, 11 Cdn Inf Bde took over the front and one sqn of BCD and two sqns of 8NBH remained to support the infantry where possible. As the front was very large, the plan was to move towards Delfzijl from the south and the north to decrease the enemy pocket to a reasonable size. After this was accomplished the garrison itself would be attacked. The fact that the enemy had plenty of ammunition and were not afraid to expend it was very clear to everyone near the battle. The German fire was accurate and frequent. The weather was very wet. Daily we over-expended our ammunition allotment on targets for Reps and FOOs, the Air OP, and HQ RCA. Slowly the size of the pocket decreased due to the unrelentless efforts of the three infantry regiments of 11 CIB and the Westmr Regt (M). On 2 May the Commandant of the Delfzijl garrison surrendered to the CO of the Irish Regt. However the war was not ended for the regiment. 61 Bty came under command CBH and deployed near Biorum to cover the Ems Estuary. 107 Bty came under command HQ 5 Cdn Armd Bde and deployed north of Roode-school facing the North Sea. At 2340 hours 4 May 45, RSM W M Cuthbertson, on duty at the RHQ, Command Post received the following message from HQ 5 CAB, "Cease Fire, All offensive operations to cease at 0800 hours to-morrow, 5 May 45." So ended the Active Service in battle of the 8 Cdn Fd Regt (SP) RCA.

With the cessation of hostilities a great honour was bestowed on the 8 Cdn Fd Regt (SP) RCA when RHQ, "F" Troop RCCS Signal Section, 81 LAD and 107 Bty were selected along with 63 Field Battery (SP) RCA, 105 A Tk Battery RCA and 88 LAA Battery RCA to represent the Royal Canadian Artillery on the Victory Parade in Berlin. RHQ and a composite battery formed from 61, 71 and 107 Batteries concentrated at Holton, Holland and came under command 1 Cdn Inf Bde (i.e. "The Canadian Berlin Brigade"). After a month of preparations for the trip the plan was cancelled and RHQ and the composite battery returned to Haren where the remainder of the regiment was concentrated.

The Regimental Group at Haren had been assisting in the guarding of German prisoners passing through North Holland and in transit from West Holland to Germany. They also had a last grand fling at spit-and-polish for the very impressive divisional march past for General H D G Crerar CB, DSO. Throughout its long service the regiment only spent approximately six months in actual combat with the enemy and suffered casualties of six officers and twenty OR killed and nine officers and 57 OR wounded (See Appx "B"). During its existence many officers passed through the regiment. Two BsRA, Brigadier H O N Brownfield CBE, MC and Brigadier E C Plow DSO, and one CRA, Brigadier W S Zeigler DSO, served with the regiment. The regiment produced 13 Commanding Officers of RCA regiments. Over 100 officers were commissioned from the ranks through OCTU channels. Despite many changes in personnel about 250 NCOS and men who came overseas with the regiment were still on strength on V-E day. However only two original officers, Major J A Pringle and Capt G W Myers were still serving.

APPENDIX "A"

COMMANDING OFFICERS

Lt Col W E Wootten MC	1 Sep 39 to 16 Apr 40
Lt Col (now Brig) H O Brownfield CBE, MC	17 Apr 40 to 27 Aug 40
Lt Col (now Brig) E C Plow DSO	28 Aug 40 to 21 Sep 41
Lt Col L M Jones ED	23 Sep 41 to 18 Jan 44
Lt Col A H Birks DSO	24 Jan 44 to 12 Jun 45
Lt Col J D Watt ED	24 Jun 45

APPENDIX "B"

OFFICER CASUALTIES

(a) Officers Killed

CMF.....	5
MWE.....	<u>1</u>
Total	<u>6</u>

(b) Officers wounded

CMF.....	8
NWE.....	<u>1</u>
Total	<u>9</u>

APPENDIX "C"

OR CASUALTIES

(a) OR Killed

CMF.....	19
NWE.....	<u>1</u>
Total	<u>20</u>

(b) OR Wounded

CMF.....	49
NWE.....	<u>8</u>
Total	<u>57</u>

APPENDIX "D"

HONOURS AND AWARDS

The following Honours and Awards were won
for service with 8 Cdn Fd Regt (SP) RCA:-

Officers

Distinguished Service Order	1
Military Cross	3
Mention-in-Despatches	2

Other Ranks

Military Medal	9
Mention-in-Despatches	6