

Stitt, Herbert Dixon - DCM
Corporal
Governor General's Horse Guards
C Squadron 3rd Armoured
Regiment
B 70118



Herbert (Herbie) Stitt was born on December 1, 1921 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the eldest son of Herbert Stitt (b. 1897 in Belfast) and Mary McFee (b. circa 1900 in England). Father Herbert worked as a locomotive stoker, mother was a housewife. They had married September 16, 1920 in Toronto and were members of the Church of England. They had always lived in Toronto, first at 185 Prescott Ave and then at 66 Ostend Ave. Herbie had three brothers and one sister. Brother Walter Robert (1923 - 2005) would also fight overseas with the Canadian Army and within the same regiment as his brother Herbie. Two other brothers were John Frederick (b. about 1925) and Norman Edward (b. about 1929). Their only sister was called Mary Eleanor (b. about 1926). She would marry Thomas Hart.

Herbie was a sporty boy, in rugby a quarterback, and a defender in the ice hockey club. He also played tennis, handball and baseball. He had blue eyes and light brown hair. When he entered military service, he was 5 ft 6½ in tall and weighed 118 lbs.

Herbie went to school for eight years, until the age of 14. He then enrolled at Western Technical School, from which he was eventually expelled without a diploma. During the first two years there, he took car mechanic courses, which actually should have lasted four years.



Then for a year and a half, he took lessons in stenography, but did not complete this two-year program either.

From January to June 1940, Herbie worked at Pulley Works in Toronto as a woodworker. He did not like the job and from December 1940 to March 1941 he worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway as an office clerk. He intended to return there after his military service or else become a sailor in the US Navy. When registering for duty in Toronto on April 30, 1941, at the age of 19, Herbie was unemployed.

He received his General Training at Camp Borden, Ontario, and was eager for adventure and go to war overseas. He left for England as a Trooper on October 7, 1941, just like his brother Walter.

They arrived there on October 18, 1941. Both served with the Governor General's Horse Guards, C Squadron 3rd Armoured Regiment. In England he continued his training in order to become a Gunner, but was expelled from the program. A report described him as a surly person, always looking for more excitement.



Herbert(left) and his brother Walter

In November 1941 and January 1942 Herbie was given a few days' leave. Finding it difficult to adhere to all military rules and discipline, he was regularly punished for ignoring orders and a total of 76 days of pay was withheld as punishment. Nevertheless, he continued training in Shoot Practice and Rifle and was with the 13th Field Ambulance for a few weeks in November 1942. On May 26, 1943, Herbie became a Qualified Driver "C". All the while the men had camped 'in the Field'. But on November 13, they sailed for Italy and disembarked on November 27, 1943. Due to his intelligence, hard work and talent for leadership, Herbie was promoted to

A Corporal on October 31, 1944. From Italy they left for France and arrived there by boat on February 24, 1945.

Herbie's Regiment, the Governor General's Horse Guards, was an armoured reconnaissance and reserve regiment. They used Sherman tanks and were usually attached to other regiments. During the Second World War they lost 71 men and 210 were wounded.

From France they headed north towards Belgium and on March 1, 1945 the entire regiment gathered at Isseghem. Compared to Italy, they had a fairly relaxed time there. Dance evenings in cosy rooms were organized for the men, with beer and music. In addition, the vehicles were being painted and repaired, having suffered a lot from the sun and rain in Italy.

On March 22, they left Isseghem and via Ghent and Antwerp they moved towards Nijmegen, where C Squadron was to support the Irish regiment. On April 1, they crossed the bridge at Nijmegen and C Squadron headed for the town of Andelst. They had an easy time there and even enjoyed an organ concert by Lieutenant Martin at the local village church. There was also a lot of maintenance to do on their tanks.



Herbie, left and an unidentified soldier

Photo: The Remember November 11 Association

This peaceful period was rudely interrupted on April 16, 1945. C Squadron was ordered to cleanse Otterlo from the enemy, together with the Irish regiment. That same evening at 8 p.m. there was a briefing that they were to attack the village of Harskamp the next morning at 7 a.m. and that a patrol had already been sent to it. At 11.30 p.m. that same evening, the Germans attacked the Irish headquarters. Just after midnight, a report arrived that enemy infantry were marching down the road to the village and the patrol on the spot immediately withdrew. The officers sat for consultation in the village church where their headquarters were and could no longer reach their troops.

The church was barricaded and Sergeant Wood was sent to drive his vehicle up and down the main street and make a lot of noise. He was also instructed not to shoot, because the Irish were still around somewhere. The Sergeants and Corporals were now in charge, attacking the Germans. Sergeant Johnson's tank was hit by enemy Bazookas, wounding him. Corporal Stitt's tank was also shot at by a bazooka bomb. With the shelling turret damaged, he was no longer able to fire from the inside. He then climbed out of the vehicle and, turning the cannon around by hand, continued his shelling for hours, whereupon the enemy eventually retreated. The church with the officers inside and the Irish headquarters had been shelled with grenades and a total of four victims were mourned that night. Many more enemies were killed in the battle for Otterlo, partly due to the courageous actions of Corporal Herbert Stitt in particular. That same morning he received the Distinguished Conduct Medal for this, an award for very courageous actions of non-officers.

A group of 800 Germans intended to move to the Grebbe-line that night, but they encountered the Allies and hard fighting ensued, often in one on one battles that lasted all night. The Irish soldiers kept up their pace and chased away the enemy with their flamethrowers, not only killing but also severely maiming many Germans. Otterlo had been liberated.

That same morning, April 17, 1945, the men returned to their camp and tried to rest a little after working all night. Likewise Herbie Stitt, who had stationed his tank behind the church for repair and decided to take a nap in the tall grass. A petrol truck driver tried to turn his vehicle there and ran over Herbie. He never regained consciousness and died that same afternoon from his injuries in the Field Hospital of the Irish. Herbie, known for his coolness and courage in battle, died in this tragic accident. The whole regiment mourned his death. His Lieutenant said he had lost one of his best fighters and it felt like he had lost a good friend.

Corporal Herbert Dixon Stitt was buried a day later at the Otterlo cemetery and reburied on 30 October 1945 at the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek, grave reference **X1V. G. 16.**

Herbert Stitt received the following awards:

- *1939-1945 Star
- *Italy Star
- *France & Germany Star
- *Defence Medal
- *War Medal 1939-1945
- *Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp
- *Distinguished Conduct Medal



The inscription on his headstone reads:

WHILE YOU DEAR HERBERT
REST AND SLEEP
LOVING MEMORIES OF YOU
WE'LL ALWAYS KEEP

Summary from the investigative report of June 7, 1945 in connection with the death of Herbert Dixon Stitt:

1. Witness Trooper Farren: At 4:00 pm April 17, 1945, I was washing behind my vehicle when I heard Corporal Stitt shout. I ran over and asked what's wrong, he said he was run over. I called for a stretcher and Stitt was taken to the Regimental Aid Post, and I returned to my post. An hour earlier, I had lain in the same place myself and left when Stitt wanted to go to sleep. Other than that, there was no one around except a petrol supplier about 3 ½ meters away.
2. Witness Trooper Hood: I saw a petrol truck moving towards the road, someone yelling and the driver stopped. I heard another soldier calling for a stretcher and saw that Stitt was wounded and taken to the Regimental Aid Post of the Irish Regiment of Canada. There was another lorry a little

further away, but it was a decent place to sleep, they were all tired from fighting all night.

Conclusion in the report: On the basis of the witness statements and because the alleged driver has been repatriated to Canada, it is impossible to make a complete account of the accident at this time. It is an accident due to a combination of circumstances. Thus drawn up by three officers of the GGHG (Governor General's Horse Guards) on June 7, 1945. The lieutenant colonel also mentions in the report: Stitt was on duty at the time and chose a somewhat awkward place to sleep, but he was very tired after an intensive time. The driver is not to blame, he was an employee and could not expect anyone to be sleeping there, so an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances.

A copy of the handwritten letter from Major A.H. Crosbie, which he writes April 21, 1945 to the mother of Herbie and Walter Stitt:

21 Apr. 45

Major A.H. Crosbie, C.A.R. (G.G.H.G.) C.A.M.F.

Dear Mrs. Stitt:

It is with a sad heart and a heavy hand that I write you today. There seems so little I can say to you at such a time which might afford some comfort. However I thought perhaps I might write and tell you something of Herbie's life in the army and the very high regard and respect which we all had for him.

I was Signalling Officer at Aldershot in 1942 when I first became aware of the Stitt brothers as they started their training for qualification as operators. Both Herbie and Walter were the two quickest qualified operators in the reg't. The normal course was ten weeks but they completed it in three. Apart from being very clever Herbie always offered an argument on any and every subject and we use to call the two of them "our mad Irishmen". In those days Herbie was an out and out individualist and held very definite opinions (not too favourable) on army routine. Long after the day's work was done and the others had left Herbie and I would argue on all sorts of subjects from socialism to the latest daily reg'l. order. I always regretted I never had any more operators like the Stitts for there was certainly never a dull moment while they were around.

Just before we left England Herbie was transferred from "C" SQN to H.Q. as everyone felt a change might do him good and give the Officers & N.C.O.s of "C" SQN a rest! At that time I was looking after H.Q.s and we got along very well until the day we left Brighton. All day we were working on the tanks unstowing the ammunition. At about noon we suddenly saw a tremendous number of

Veray lights go up in the tank park which was in the middle of the town. Of course it was Herbie who wanted to see what they looked like.

During the Hitler line action Herbie was still in R.H.Q. and didn't see much action. By the time the Gothic line action began last fall I was back as second-in-command of "C" SQN and Herbie was still with R.H.Q. He was getting thoroughly fed up with this life as he had little opportunity to get in a fight. Just before the Coriano battle began we received a tank from R.H.Q. to help us and Herbie came along as part of the crew. He did so well that we immediately asked to have him transferred to the SQN. When he came back he went to 1st troop and stayed with them for the rest of the time.

Herbie was only with us for a short time when it became obvious that he was one of the best fighting soldiers we had and was quite capable of becoming a very good leader of men. Consequently he became an N.C.O. and was given his own tank. The great argument against giving him a stripe was no matter how good he might be in action that he wouldn't behave as an N.C.O. out of action and enforce the various orders which the army insists upon.

However responsibility and recognition of his worth wrought quite a change in Herbie and he began to do as good a job out of action as in it. Perhaps you noticed the change in his letters for I think he was much happier and settled down when he realised that he was doing a good job and had won the respect of his comrades in arms. In action, at all times, he did a magnificent job showing no fear and maintaining a constant aggressiveness in killing Germans. As a matter of fact the only trouble was to find a crew for him as everyone thought he was a bit too aggressive for once he knew the enemy was about he wouldn't stop until he got into a fight with them.

The finest example of his courage was the night before he died. On that particular night we were with the Irish reg't., during the day we had advanced rapidly against a defeated enemy, and, consequently, we were rather careless and didn't expect the Germans might attack during the night. However between mid-night and dawn we got us the toughest, hardest fight the SQN. has ever had for over 800 Germans started sneaking into our positions and to attack at just about midnight. After the alarm went I was talking to Herbie on the wireless set and I ordered him to move his tank along the road to a corner and prevent the Germans from penetrating along this road. But I was too late for the Germans were already along the road digging in as fast as they could. Herbie had just got his crew in the tank when he found that it was surrounded by Germans who shouted out "Canadians surrender---surrender"'. Herbie replied with a few quick grenades from the turret of the tank which put a sudden & rather painful end to that non-sense. He then got his tank on the road and his traversing mechanism was knocked out so that he

couldn't move his gun around from inside the tank. Herbie promptly climbed out of the tank and pulled the gun around by hand so the gunner could shoot at the enemy who were no more than 15 yds away. This continued until daylight and Herbie killed or drove away all the Germans on the main road and prevented them from advancing along that route. These are the acts of a very brave man indeed. All the time I was in touch with him on the air and I don't mind admitting that I was a very worried individual for no man could tell the outcome of the battle. However old Herbie's voice was full of confidence and most enthusiastic so that I use to like to call him up on the air just to hear him reply.

The next day he brought his tank into head-quarters to get the gun mechanism repaired. I was up visiting a forward troop and when I came back I planned to see Herbie to tell him what a fine job he had done the night before. Just as I drove in one of the men reported to me that Cpl. Stitt had been run over by a petrol lorry and had been taken into the Field Ambulance unit which was next door to us. Apparently he had gone in behind the church in which we were staying to get some sleep in the tall grass. One of the lorries supplying us with petrol arrived up and in turning around backed in over the grass behind the church without seeing Herbie. He suffered no pain for he never recovered consciousness and passed away just after we took him over to the Field Ambulance. We buried him the next day beside the men who had been killed by the Germans in the local graveyard.

There is little more I can say--I have Walter with me now in my own tank and along with Herbie I do not think I have met any finer soldiers. This I do know that Canada has lost one of her best fighting men, that the SQN. has lost an inspiring leader of men and I feel deeply the passing of a personal friend. Therefore on behalf of the whole SQN. and his many friends throughout the reg•t. I extend our sympathy and kindest regards to all of you at home in this sad hour. If I can offer any comfort at all it is in this letter by which I have tried to give you some idea of the high esteem and deep respect which we here, both officers and men, had for your son. Once again I give you my deepest sympathy and hope that we may soon be able to return Walter home to you and that I may have an opportunity to meet the parents of two of the finest soldiers I have ever met in the Canadian army.

Yours

Alexander Crosbie



FACES TO GRAVES

Stichting Faces to Canadian
War Graves Groesbeek

Levensverhaal: Liesbeth Huisman-Arts, Research Team Faces To Graves.

Bronvermelding:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Library and Archives Canada

Familie Stitt (brief Majoor Crosbie)

Otterloo Revisited door Sgt. Colin Rowe

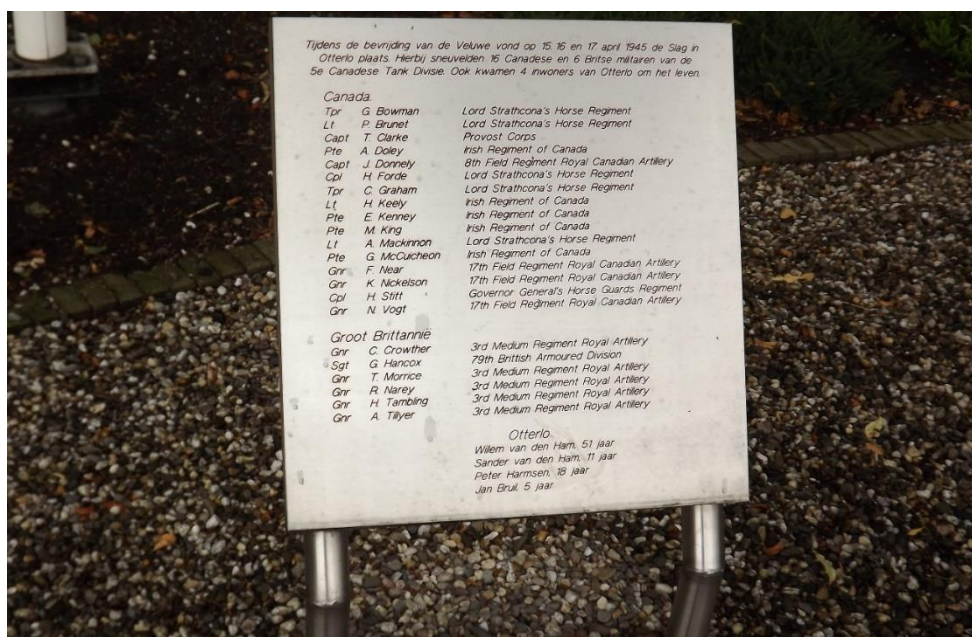
map.project44.ca War Diaries GGHG

<http://veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/2232782>

De Slag om Otterloo

The Remember November 11 Association

In Otterloo, at the back entrance of the General Cemetery, is a memorial to the war victims.





Walter Stitt

Herbert Stitt

Ed Stafford



Veteran Ed Stafford at Herbert's grave, May 2015.

Cemetery find:





The only Horse Guard to be awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal during the war.

Veterans Remembered



CPL HERBERT DIXON STITT, DCM

1 December 1921 - 17 April 1945

Pro amicis mortui amicis vivimus,

We live in the hearts of friends for whom we died

by

Sgt (Ret'd) Colin Rowe

As we approach another Remembrance Day, we are again reminded of the sacrifices made by our Veterans, past and present, that have allowed us the privilege of enjoying a way of life that so many around the world still yearn for. Among those sacrifices was the loss of life by a young Horse Guard, Corporal Herbert Dixon Stitt, on the morning of April 17, 1945. However before I recount his tale of heroism and tragic passing which is documented in our Regimental history, let me go through a series of events that have taken place in recent weeks.

Following the publishing of Sgt. William "Bill" Forsythe's obituary in the last newsletter, I received 60 photographs from the collection of GGHG Veteran, the late Cpl John Angus MacAskill who served in Europe with both Cpl Stitt and Sgt Forsythe as members of "C" Squadron. The photos were put together and sent to me by Dave Gilhen, a friend of John Angus' son Dan. While preparing this edition of the newsletter I received a photograph of Cpl Stitt's grave in the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in Holland. It turns out that Association Member Cpl Michael Clarking was in Holland and made an impromptu visit to the cemetery where he not only made a toast to Cpl Stitt but left a bouquet of tulips and a copy of last year's Memorial Dinner at the graveside. In the meantime, these photographs have led to communication with the widows of Sgt Forsythe who appears in several



A bouquet of tulips and a copy of last year's Memorial Dinner program, placed at the graveside on 10 October 2013 by GGHG Association Member, Corporal Michael Clarking.

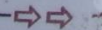
photographs with John MacAskill and was present at the burial of Cpl Stitt after his death.

The following is an account of the Regiment's only real battle in Holland, which took place through the night of April 16, 1945 following a day where they had earlier liberated a grateful Dutch community:

At last light Tac Headquarters moved with Brigade to a farmyard three miles west of Otterloo and the Regiment settled for the night. We were very widely separated and communications were difficult. The long months in the winter, when we had relied almost entirely on telephones to the exclusion of wireless, had left an unfortunate legacy, and operators seemed to have forgotten the basic principles. In addition, atmospheric conditions were deplorable. Communications were atrociously bad in the daytime; but at night, when interference inevitably in-

creases, they became impossible and we were totally out of contact. Every formation was having the same trouble, and as the Division was scattered in a series of small islands across many miles of country, the situation was dangerous. There were still large pockets of enemy left on the flanks of our advance, and as a result even the echelons were menaced.

For the first time we were fighting the book version of an armoured battle, and a front, in the conventional sense, had



We were also requested to cover the road junction just east of Otterloo and First Troop was ordered to seize it. Sergeant Johnston led the troop to the position, discovering that it was then held by the enemy. He was at once engaged by bazookas, and although he was himself wounded in the head by a rifle bullet, none of the bazooka bombs scored and he continued controlling his troop. L/Cpl. Spence drove into the enemy position, firing at point blank range and crushing the Germans under the tracks of his tank. The tank under command of Cpl. Stitt, H.D., had been struck by a bazooka bomb, which made the traverse unworkable, but with his usual almost legendary coolness the corporal climbed outside the turret, and, pushing the gun by hand, continued to engage. In the end the Germans withdrew and began to dig in along the road.

It was decided to counterattack at first light to complete the defeat of the enemy, but, as the attack was about to go in, 'B' Company of the Irish reported six enemy tanks approaching their positions from the east. The report was at once confirmed, as three shells struck the church and a fourth hit the Irish headquarters. 'C' Squadron remained unscathed, but as two of the Irish were killed and three more wounded, First Troop was ordered to take on the tanks immediately. The troop demurred, as they were convinced that they were Churchills, but the order was repeated and they opened fire. They knocked out the leading tank with a round of HE, but at this point the hostile force was definitely identified as Churchills, and the battle ceased before there was any more damage. The crew of the tank was uninjured and their officer apologized profusely, announcing that he had mistaken our



Cpl John Angus MacAskill remained on duty while the wounded were being evacuated from the battle zone. John passed away on July 15, 1996 in Sydney NS at age 74. We owe a debt of gratitude to his family for the collection of photos donated to the Association.

troops for Germans.

As the situation was still confused, the mistake was understandable, but the tide was about to turn. In a few minutes the Irish flamethrowers were sweeping up the road, blasting the enemy ditches. Their appearance created stark terror in the ranks of the enemy, who fled in precipitate disorder, leaving about seventy charred corpses as mute testimony to the flamethrower's prowess. Even our own troops were sickened by the sight of retreating Jerries suddenly converted into leaping pillars of fire.

As the area between Otterloo and the woods to which the Germans were racing was a flat open field, those who had escaped the flamethrowers fell easy prey to the guns of Third and Fourth Troops, who mowed them down like ninepins. Any hope of reorganization had vanished and the battle was over. Otterloo was secure. Third and Fourth Troops assisted the Irish in mopping

up, knocking out two 50-millimetre A/Tk guns and capturing sixteen prisoners.

During the fighting we had four men wounded. Sgt. Johnston and Cpl. McCaskill were able to remain on duty while Sgt. Elinesky and Cpl. Lee had to be evacuated. Unfortunately, during the morning our casualty list was extended, as Cpl. Stitt, H.D., was killed by a truck which ran over his body while he was resting beside his tank. It seems paradoxical that one who had come unscathed through the thick of so many engagements should have lost his life in an accident when the last real scrap was over.

The battle of Otterloo was the only real fight which the Regiment encountered in Holland, and the NCO's who had led the troops without officers had done an excellent job. ■



Temporary graves in Holland before final interment of Canadian soldiers in The Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery.



GGHG ASSOCIATION 2013 Annual General Meeting

WHEN: Tuesday December 10, 2013

TIME: 7 PM - 11 PM

WHERE: KATZ'S DELI (accessible by transit & parking available)
3300 Dufferin St, Toronto

Christmas Cheer and a light buffet for all who attend

simply ceased to exist. Everyone was potentially front, as we were very soon to discover.

As the enemy was still known to be in Haarskamp, Lieut. Col. Payne, the C.O. of the Irish, had decided to attack in the morning, using his own 'C' Company and three of 'C' Squadron's troops. Just before last light, with a platoon of the Irish, Fourth Troop had moved out to the northern edge of the woods to act as a standing patrol and keep observation on Haarskamp.

Maj. Crosbie called an 'O' group for 2330 hours to go over the plan of attack, and the discussion had just started when it was suddenly interrupted by loud shouts and bursts of small arms fire outside the church which Squadron Headquarters was occupying. An enemy patrol had entered the village, making a great deal of noise and shooting up the building next to the church which was held by the Irish Headquarters. With this warning of unexpected developments everyone barricaded windows and doors and prepared for a siege.

They had not long to wait. Shortly after midnight the battery of the 17th Field Artillery, which was in the woods to the north of the village, reported that large numbers of Germans were moving south through the woods. At the same time the standing patrol of Fourth Troop and the Irish found their position surrounded. The darkness made recognition impossible, so, spiking their guns, the artillery retired and the patrol began to withdraw. As the officers were all at the 'O' group when the attack began, they were pinned in the church and unable to rejoin their troops. For the whole night the troops were led by the sergeants and NCO's. Sgt. Toffan organized Fourth Troop, and carrying the Irish on the backs



For GGHG Association Member Michael Clarkin, a trip through Europe, took a detour to Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands, where Corporal Stitt is laid to rest.

of their tanks, they withdrew through the enemy to a position with Third Troop and 'C' Company on the northwest edge of the village. Cpl. Foulds then reported to the Company Commander and was asked to place his tanks in the best position to support. This he did with considerable courage, as the whole area was being swept with enemy fire.

In the village itself, the enemy was forming in strength, and began digging trenches to consolidate his gains. The capture of Otterloo would have cut off most of the division, who were many miles to the west and in danger of complete isolation. 'C' Squadron Headquarters had barricaded their windows and doors and the whole officer body was preparing a last ditch stand. The Irish had requested that a tank drive up and down the streets to intimidate the Germans, so Sergeant Wood set out in a Squadron Headquarters tank, moving up the road to the east, from which direction the enemy was advancing. As the

Irish and the Germans were closely intermingled, the tank was ordered not to fire, but simply moved up and down, with the Germans running beside it shouting "Canadians Surrender, Canadians Surrender."

The two troops to the west were also unable to fire because of the darkness and confusion, but although the attack was coming from the opposite direction, they, too, became slightly involved. The artillery, who had moved to the village, requested volunteers to evacuate two of their wounded, so Troopers Allan and Kuffner, of Fourth Troop, advanced into town to collect the casualties. In addition, they picked up twenty-two prisoners from the Irish, who were too busy to handle them, and took them back to their positions.



A sombre moment for members of the Governor General's Horse Guards as they stand at attention while the Padre conducts the funeral service for Corporal Stitt.



Sgt Bill Forsythe takes a moment to pause at the graveside. According to his family, it was a loss he never overcame. Caption on this photo read, "Brother buried there H. Stitt".