

Sgt Mervin George Durham, 9th Fd Sqn, MM

Background

The role played by the 9th Field Squadron during the Kapelsche Veer battle is told in the article [*Engineer Gallantry at Kapelsche Veer*](#).

In his book, **Canada and the Liberation of the Netherlands, May 1945**, Lance Goodard includes some words from George Durham describing the action at Kapelsche Veer.



"Things were going good in Holland for a while until this snow came down and ice — it was a real Canadian winter so to speak. That was when the battle of Kapelsche Veer took place. I was in charge of building that bridge — partly Bailey bridge and partly improvised — on the Maas River. We were about four days getting that bridge together. We got strafed, and then the battle did go in with the Lincoln and Welland Regiment. They lost a lot of people in battle on that island.

"The bridge was called the Mad Whore's Dream, makes you think of what that description brings to mind. When my officer called me one day from Waalwijk on a telephone system set up, he said, "How's it going?" And I said, "Sir, it's a mad whore's dream." It was that bad, there was quite a bit of small arms fire. They were not too far from us, the Germans were dug in, and they were using machine guns a lot to try and keep us off this bridge that we were building. So then they finally started to use mortars, which is a nasty thing to do. That was one of the nastiest deals of the whole campaign, Kapelsche Veer. The Lincoln and Welland Regiment was the one that got the fame, it's well deserved."

[Sergeant Mervin George Durham, MM \(Ret'd\)](#) died on 26 May 2006 in Saskatoon, SK at the age of 84 years.

Citation

Before the operation against Kapelsche Veer commenced it was vital to the success of the operation that a bridge strong enough to carry tanks be constructed at E.148487. This gap was situated on the only route available that could carry traffic into the east side of the German strong point. The site for the proposed bridge was only about 400 yards away from the enemy and any work that was to be done had to be done silently. Also, the approach road to the proposed bridging site, and the immediate vicinity of the site were under observation by the enemy, and the whole area covered by mortar and machine gun fire. After careful reconnaissance it was decided to build an improvised bridge over the existing demolished bridge, and to transport the stores required down to an adjacent canal, and by farm cart down the existing approach road. Work was started one week previous to the operation and was carried out in two shifts, day and night. Sergeant Durham, the Troop Sergeant of No.3 Troop, was in charge of the day shift. Work done during the daylight had to be carried out underneath the bridge; otherwise the crew would have been easily visible to the enemy and a



prey to their snipers. Several times during daylight hours the bridge was severely and accurately mortared by the enemy. During all this mortaring Sergeant Durham ordered the crew into slit trenches, with the exception of one or two key personnel whom he kept with him to carry on with vital work on the bridge. On one occasion a mortar bomb landed in the water beside Sergeant Durham causing a severe concussion and numerous cuts in his arms, legs and back. Despite this, Sergeant Durham carried on with his vital work until he was relieved by the night shift. Several times during construction the bridge and surrounding area was raked by machine gun fire but Sergeant Durham kept his crew at work although the bullets were bouncing off the deck of the bridge and landing around the feet of the working party. In carrying out this arduous task Sergeant Durham showed great leadership, presence of mind and unselfish devotion to duty which greatly inspired his men. It was largely due to his efforts that the bridge was completed in time for the operation, thus making possible a successful attack.