

## Canadian War Museum Finding Aid

**Title:** Brigadier James Alan Roberts Fonds

**Collection Date(s):** 1944 - 1950

**Accession number:** 20090112-019

**Extent:** 18.5 cm linear centimeters: 1 box

**Creator:** Brigadier James Alan Roberts

### Biographical Sketch:

James Alan Roberts was born 1907 in Toronto, Ontario. After graduation from the University of Toronto, James Alan Roberts entered into the insurance business and other business dealings, but, through an interest developed by mutual friends, he joined the Governor General's Horse Guards in 1933 commissioned as a Second Lieutenant. According to his autobiography he spent most of his spare hours with militia training and activities. When the war broke out in 1939, Roberts sought active service, as his militia unit had not yet been mobilized. This opportunity came when he was offered a position with the Toronto Scottish in April 1940 and was posted to Quebec for machine-gun training. While stationed in Quebec, Roberts took the opportunity to meet with friends in the Royal Canadian Dragoons and secured a transfer, becoming one of the regiment's junior officers at 32 years of age. When the Royal Canadian Dragoons were ordered to Great Britain, Roberts accompanied his new unit. Through his dedication to the unit and its training, Roberts was shortly promoted to Major and became the regiments second in command. In May 1943, Roberts was transferred as second in command to the 12th Manitoba Dragoons (18 Canadian Armoured Car Regiment) and by August was promoted again to Lt. Colonel and full command. On July 7, 1944, Roberts and the Manitoba Dragoons were deployed to Normandy with their Staghound armoured cars.

The regiment was involved in the fighting in Normandy after the successful Allied landings and Roberts received the Distinguished Service Order for his effective leadership and performance of the regiment for the advance from Falaise to the River Seine. Roberts recounted receiving word of his award from his driver upon returning from a short leave in England (Roberts, p.92). When the ribbon bar was personally pinned on him by Field Marshal B.L. Montgomery in November 1944, he had already been promoted to Brigadier and was in command of the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 3rd Canadian Division. After taking command of the 8th CIB, Roberts led it through the North-west Europe campaign, actively involved in the battles of the Scheldt Estuary, the breakout from Nijmegen, the clearance of enemy troops from Holland and the Canadian advance into Northern Germany. For his efforts in the liberation of Holland, the Dutch Government awarded him the Order of Orange-Nassau, Commander (Roberts, p. 145). In early May 1945, Roberts was involved in the surrender of German troops in the East Friesland Peninsula by General Erich von Straube. Roberts does cover this event in detail on pages 135-145 of his autobiography, but the interesting link is to the flag offered. The initial efforts of surrender were initiated by the German garrison commander, stationed at Blucher Barracks, Aurich. Roberts refers to him by name as Jahnke but the main discussion was with Jahnke's English speaking adjutant, Lieutenant Fischer.

Discussions were tense as the garrison commander and German civic officials in Aurich were trying to get confirmation that the highest levels of the German command were in discussion with the Allies. In the meantime, the local commander and officials were attempting to enact terms with Roberts, while armed German troops were still in the area observing a delicate truce. Eventually, as official word came down, Roberts was assigned to escort General von Straube to 2nd Canadian Corps Headquarters for the formal signing of the surrender document. Though the first surrender initiatives with Jahnke were overtaken by events, his family indicated that he was presented with the German naval flag by Lieutenant Fischer after the surrender was signed. After the war ended and Canadian troops started to be repatriated to Canada, Roberts was expecting the same when circumstances brought him back to Blucher Barracks in Aurich.

At the end of December 1945, Roberts was appointed as one of four senior court officers in the war crimes trial of SS commander Kurt Meyer. Roberts served alongside fellow court members Brigadier H.A. Sparling, Brigadier Ian S. Johnson, Brigadier H.P. Bell-Irving, and Lt. Colonel W.B. Bredin. After the trial, Roberts returned to Canada to resume his life, but not without personal changes. During his time in Europe, he met and fell in love with a Dutch woman which led to divorce from his wife Helen. With his new partner in life, Roberts went on to a post-war career in business as the president of the Mercury Mills (yarn goods) in Hamilton. In 1959 he was invited by the Honourable Gordon Churchill, Minister of Trade and Commerce in the Diefenbaker Government to become a deputy minister. He held the position until 1964 when he was appointed Canada's first Deputy Secretary-General of NATO. He served in this capacity until 1968 and in 1969 was appointed Canada's ambassador to Switzerland until 1972. Roberts passed away in 1990.

### **Scope and Content:**

Fonds of Brigadier James Alan Roberts containing reports, notes, diary and memos on 21 Army Group and 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade Operations towards the end of the Second World War, including operations "Veritable" and "Blockbuster" as well as reviews of campaigns in Northwest Europe. The diary covers his personal command of 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade beginning near the end of 1944. Also included are menus, programs, invitations for events both during the war and the following years. In addition the fonds includes a folder containing material relating to the War Crimes trial of Bridageführer Kurt Meyer, Waffen SS. Brigadier Roberts served as a member of the court.

**Arrangement:**

The arrangement of this collection is in the order that it was placed by the creator.

Arrangement: Titles based on content

File Number	File Title
<b>58 A 1 328.1</b>	Veritable and Blockbuster
<b>58 A 1 328.2</b>	Brig. J.A. Roberts
<b>58 A 1 328.3</b>	Paraphernalia
<b>58 A 1 328.4</b>	Reports and Ephemera
<b>58 A 1 328.5</b>	Property of Brig. James A Roberts
<b>58 A 1 328.6</b>	21 Army Group Operation "Veritable"
<b>58 A 1 328.7</b>	Notes on the Operations of 21 Army Group
<b>58 A 1 328.8</b>	Newspaper Articles and Clippings
<b>58 F 1 6.5</b>	War Crimes Trial

**Access Points:**

Names: Brigadier James Alan Roberts, Kurt Meyer, Brigadier H.A. Sparling, Brigadier Ian S. Johnson, Brigadier H.P. Bell-Irving, and Lt. Colonel W.B. Bredin.

Subjects: War Crimes trial of Bridageführer Kurt Meyer, operations "Veritable" and "Blockbuster", 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade.

Forms: Documents: typescript and handwritten, diaries, notes, memos.

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### Detailed Listing

File Number	Description	Date(s)
<b>58 A 1 328.1</b>	Veritable and Blockbuster	
	A folder containing a series of topographic maps, field reports, and transcripts pertaining to operations "Veritable" and "Blockbuster" in the Netherlands during the Second World War.	Feb 1945
<b>58 A 1 328.2</b>	Brig. J.A. Roberts	
	A folder containing a series of battlefield reports as well as a series of Dutch cartoons with a handwritten note attached to them. Also included is a topographic map of the city of Almelo in the Netherlands with a field report stapled to it.	1944 - 1945
<b>58 A 1 328.3</b>	Paraphernalia	
	A folder containing a series of cards, pamphlets, reports, and magazines. There is a Christmas greeting card, an invitation to a mess dinner, lunch menus, programmes, a folder titled "Tactical Handling and Administration" containing reports written by James A. Roberts.	1944 - 1950
<b>58 A 1 328.4</b>	Reports and Ephemera	
	A folder mostly containing field reports from 1945. There is a magazine titled "Canada's Weekly", magazine pages, pamphlets, memorandums, a photograph, and opinion letters.	1945
<b>58 A 1 328.5</b>	Property of Brig. James A Roberts	
	A folder containing a black planner belonging to Brig. James A. Roberts, a red booklet titled "A Short History of The Royal Canadian Dragoons", and a burgundy notebook (no title or description).	1944 - 1945
<b>58 A 1 328.6</b>	21 Army Group Operation "Veritable"	
	A book containing battlefield reports, marching orders, field notes, and maps of the Netherlands pertaining to operation "Veritable."	8 Feb - 10 Mar 1945
<b>58 A 1 328.7</b>	Notes on the Operations of 21 Army Group	
	A book containing battlefield reports, marching orders, field notes, and maps of the Netherlands relating to operations conducted by the 21st Army Group.	6 June 1944 - 5 May 1945
<b>58 A 1 328.8</b>	Newspaper Articles and Clippings	
	A folder containing newspaper articles and clippings about the Second World War between the years 1944 and 1945.	1944 - 1945
<b>58 F 1 6.5</b>	War Crimes Trial	
	A manila envelope containing material relating to the war crimes trial of Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer, Waffenn SS, from the files of Brigadier James Alan Roberts, D.S.O., a member of the court.	1945