

Blackfriars Bridge - Longest Bailey Bridge in the World



“...Bailey Bridging made an immense contribution towards ending World War II. As far as my own operations were concerned, with the Eighth Army in Italy and with the 21st Army Group in North-West Europe, I could never have maintained the speed and tempo of forward movement without large supplies of Bailey Bridging.”

....Field Marshall Montgomery of Alamein

Donald C. Bailey of the Royal Engineer Experimental Bridging Establishment designed the Bailey Bridging system in 1940 to replace the different types of military equipment bridging that were in Allied use at the start of WW II. The Royal Engineers carried out the first operational deployment of a Bailey Bridge in Tunisia in 1942 during the North African Campaign. The Allies erected some 4500 Bailey Bridges during the Italian Campaign and in North-West Europe in 1944-45. The remarkable flexibility of this equipment resulted in it being an important element in the Allied Forces' success during the Second World War.

In March 1945 the Allies needed high capacity bridges to cross the Rhine River to support their advance into Germany. On 25 March, Royal Canadian Engineers of 2nd Canadian Corps Troops moved into position to construct a Bailey Pontoon Bridge at Rees, Germany.

The bridge was designed to carry Military Load Class 40 vehicles and was named “Blackfriars Bridge.” Its length was 558 m (1814 ft) including the ramps at each end. The 34 m (110 ft) landing bays were constructed to Military Load Class 70 standard and the end floating bays were reinforced to provide extra strength. The full floating section comprised 34 connected spans of 42-foot length and one span of 32-foot length. Construction of 825 meters of new road was started immediately.

Construction of the ‘home bank’ was assigned to 30th Field Company while the far bank was the responsibility of 29th Field Company. 31st Field Company was tasked with the construction of the floating bays. Each company was augmented by British pioneers. Bridge construction began mid-day on 26 March but was delayed due to slow delivery of stores and heavy fog. All-told, some 227 truck-loads of bridging stores were man-handled and some 9500 man-hours were employed in constructing the bridge. At 1803 feet total length, it was identified as the longest Bailey Bridge at the time.

The bridge was opened for traffic about noon on 28 March 1945, only two days after construction began. The officer in charge of construction of Blackfriars Bridge was Lt. W. F.

Brundrit from 30th Field Company. Lt. Brundrit was awarded the [Military Cross](#) for his courage and leadership on this bridging project - from the earliest reconnaissance until completion of the task.