

*Official History of the Canadian Army  
in the Second World War*

*Volume III*

**THE VICTORY CAMPAIGN**

*The Operations in North-West Europe  
1944-1945*

## **NOTE**

In the writing of this volume the author has been given full access to relevant official documents in possession of the Department of National Defence; but the inferences drawn and the opinions expressed are those of the author himself, and the Department is in no way responsible for his reading or presentation of the facts as stated.

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IN THE FALSAISE GAP, AUGUST 1944

From a watercolour by Major W. A. Ogilvie, M.B.E.

Men of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade moving forward through the debris of the German armies.  
In the centre is a 7.62-cm. self-propelled gun. Painted on the spot near Ecorches.

**OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE CANADIAN ARMY  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

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*Volume III*

**THE VICTORY CAMPAIGN**

**THE OPERATIONS IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE  
1944-1945**

*By*

**COLONEL C. P. STACEY,**  
O.B.E., C.D., A.M., Ph.D., LL.D., F.R.S.C.  
*Director, Historical Section, General Staff*

*Maps drawn by*  
MAJOR C. C. J. BOND

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OTTAWA, 1960

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## PREFACE

THIS is the third and final volume of the Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. The first and second volumes, dealing respectively with events in Canada, Britain and the Pacific and with the campaign in Italy, were published in 1955 and 1956. A volume dealing with military policy in the broad sense, and thus extending beyond the Army, is in preparation.

The first stage of the Historical Section's work on the Second World War was represented by the three booklets published in 1945-46 under the series title *The Canadian Army at War*. The second was the Official Historical Summary, *The Canadian Army 1939-1945*, published in 1948. For a variety of reasons, the completion of the History proper has taken much longer than was at first planned; but it is believed that the period spent in preparation has helped to produce a better book.

A description of the principles which have been followed with respect to documentation, etc., and acknowledgements to some of the many individuals and organizations, in Canada and elsewhere, whose generous assistance has contributed to this book, will be found in the preface to Volume I, *Six Years of War*. A few remarks should however be made with respect to the present volume in particular. It may be noted that in some quotations from documents abbreviated forms have been written out in full, to assist the reader, without the fact being indicated. In connection with German documents, it should be observed that comparatively few of these have been available to Western military historians on levels below the headquarters of armies. For the final weeks of the campaign, almost no contemporary German documents on any level are to be had. It has therefore frequently been necessary to have recourse to reports of interrogations and to the post-war writings of German officers.

The great campaign dealt with in this volume witnessed innumerable deeds of gallantry, some of which were suitably recognized, while others, as is inevitable in some cases, were not observed or not reported. It is obviously out of the question to speak of all the well-merited awards that were made. A few are mentioned, not necessarily as being the most distinguished, but simply so that they may stand as types and examples of the hundreds of other heroic acts which must necessarily pass unnoticed here.

I am grateful to many members of the Historical Section of the General Staff for help with the volume. Lt.-Col. G. W. L. Nicholson, C.D., the Deputy Director, and Lt.-Col. E. W. Cutbill, D.S.O., E.D., C.D., the Executive Officer, have given constant assistance in too many ways to enumerate. Colonel Nicholson drafted Chapters XVIII and XIX. Lt.-Col. T. M. Hunter, C.D., wrote the first drafts of Chapters I, IV, XIII, XIV, XVII, and XX-XXIII. Captain John Porter drafted Chapter III, and Major D. J. Goodspeed Chapter XXIV. To these

## PREFACE

gentlemen I offer my best thanks. They should not however be held responsible for the content of the chapters as now printed; for all of these have been considerably revised, for better or for worse, by the present writer, who also drafted the remaining eleven chapters. Other members of the Section staff who have made direct and distinguished contributions to the work are Major C. C. J. Bond, under whose most intelligent direction the maps were produced; Mr. A. G. Steiger, whose assistance in connection with the German sources was more valuable than words can express; Captain L. R. Cameron and Captain A. L. Disher, C.D., who successively gave the author inestimable help as research assistants; Staff-Sergeant R. C. Wellstood, C.D., and Sergeant A. A. Azar, who did sterling work in checking quotations and references and preparing the index; and Q.M.S. (W.O.2) M. R. Lemay, C.D., who typed the successive drafts of this volume with the same cheerful and indefatigable efficiency which is acknowledged in Volume I. Other members of the staff have placed me under less direct but still important obligations.

In writing a single volume devoted to so considerable an enterprise as the Canadian Army's participation in the North-West Europe campaign, and addressed primarily to the general reader, it has been necessary to be selective. Much detail which might appropriately have found a place in the story has had to be excluded, and in particular many technical and special matters have had to be left to corps and regimental historians. Those readers who discover errors or important omissions in the volume are asked to communicate with the Director Historical Section, Army Headquarters, Ottawa, Canada.

C. P. S.

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# **THE VICTORY CAMPAIGN**

*The Operations in North-West Europe  
1944-1945*



## CHAPTER I

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN FOR INVADING NORTH-WEST EUROPE, 1940-1944

(See Sketch 1)

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### The Beginnings of "Overlord"

THE tremendous military enterprise known as Operation "Overlord"-the liberation of North-West Europe from German domination-was launched on the night of 5-6 June 1944. It had been long in preparation. The origins of the undertaking can in fact be traced back to the summer of 1940, when British forces were driven from the Continent after a short and disastrous campaign which ended in the capitulation of Britain's French allies.\*

This period of planning and preparation is the theme of the present chapter. Volumes could be and indeed have been written on this theme alone. There is no point in recounting the story in all its complexities here. The aim accordingly is merely to provide an outline, not repeating detail already available in reliable studies, but contributing relevant new facts where these have been elicited, and emphasizing aspects of special Canadian interest. The succeeding chapter will deal with the Canadian Army's own relationship to the development of the "Overlord" project.

From the time of the Dunkirk evacuation the political and military authorities in Britain looked forward to, and planned for, a return to the Continent. An appreciation on future strategy which the British Chiefs of Staff presented to United States officers in the late summer of 1940 said that it was not British policy to try to land on the Continent an army comparable in size with Germany's; nevertheless, when economic blockade and a mounting air offensive had done their work, a relatively small striking force might be sent across the Channel with good prospects of success. As early as 5 October 1940 the Joint Planning SubCommittee of the Chiefs of Staff, the principal planning organ, which had lately been brought under Mr. Churchill in his capacity of Minister of Defence, was giving consideration to the problems involved in the establishment of a bridgehead in France.<sup>1</sup>

Even before this a Commander of Raiding Operations (Lieut.-General A.G.B. Bourne, Royal Marines) and later, from 17 July, a Director of Com-

\*See Volume I of this history, *Six Years of War*, Chap. IX.

bined Operations (Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes) had been appointed to study and practise offensive landings.<sup>2</sup> But as long as the Commonwealth stood alone against Hitler and his satellites invasion of the Continent remained a highly theoretical notion, and the combined operations planned by the Headquarters instituted for that purpose could be little more than pin-pricks. There seems to have been considerable pessimism in British official circles. In June 1941 the Future Operations Section of the Joint Planning Staff declared that United States belligerency had become essential to victory, but it did not dare to think in terms of large American armies operating in Europe: "The effort involved in shipping modern armies with the ground staff of Air Forces is so great that even with American help we can never hope to build up a very large force on the Continent."<sup>3</sup>

The events of 1941 nevertheless altered the picture fundamentally. Russia was brought into the war on 22 June by Hitler's invasion, and the United States on 7 December by Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Thereafter Germany's land forces were involved in a debilitating campaign of tremendous scale in Eastern Europe; and the prospect opened of large American forces becoming available for operations against her in the West. Thus the Allied return to the Continent began to present the appearance of an enterprise that might be practicable.

In March 1941, long before the United States entered the war, there had been military "conversations" between British and American authorities leading to a "staff agreement" known as ABC-1. The outstanding feature of this agreement, which though never formally ratified formed the basis of subsequent AngloAmerican cooperation, was the declared joint determination, in the event of the United States becoming involved in a general war with the European Axis and Japan, to beat Germany first. When the United States entered the war, steps were taken to carry into effect and extend the tentative arrangements already made. This was done at the "Arcadia" Conference, the first of the important conferences held during the war by the British and American political leaders and their principal service advisers, which took place in Washington between 22 December 1941 and 14 January 1942.<sup>4</sup> The conference agreed that "only the minimum of force necessary for the safeguarding of vital interests in other theatres should be diverted from operations against Germany".<sup>5</sup> At this time, however, there seemed to be little possibility of launching a large-scale invasion of North-West Europe during 1942. In the meantime, by setting up the Combined Chiefs of Staff, the conference created an effective instrument for determining and implementing Allied strategy.

The British Joint Planning Staff had outlined in December 1941 an operation ("Roundup") to employ six armoured and six infantry divisions, with numerous supporting units, in an assault on the French coast between Dieppe and Deauville -but this assault was envisaged only for "the final phase", *after a* serious deterioration in German military power. Mr. Churchill was convinced that, in 1942, the "main offensive effort" in the war against Germany should be the occupation of the North African coastline throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>6</sup> This strategic conception was destined to win the day, but only after many months of sharp international discussion.

## Allied Uncertainty, January-July 1942

The half-year following "Arcadia" was a period of travail for the Allied planners. Germany was to be defeated first; but where was the blow to be struck against her? At the beginning of 1942 American military strength was still potential rather than actual. The planners could not overlook the Allies' deficiencies in trained divisions and in shipping. If the problem had been simply one of gradual build-up, training and industrial expansion the solution would have been relatively simple. Unfortunately, time was of the essence; early in 1942 the British and American authorities became increasingly worried about the prospects of continued Russian resistance in the vast struggle being waged in the East.

Apart from the Russian factor the planning of an invasion of Western Europe was complicated by fundamental differences in British and American strategic thinking. Influenced by their grievous loss of manpower in the First World War, and the humiliating campaign on the Continent in 1940, the British authorities were reluctant to order an assault which might be premature and which might lead to disaster. Their caution was founded on bitter experience. They preferred an indirect strategy, exploiting superior naval power to attack the enemy at widely separated points on his extended perimeter, thus compelling him to disperse his resources and eventually to present an opportunity for a decisive offensive. On the other hand, the Americans showed great confidence and great impatience for results. They probably did not, as yet, fully appreciate the magnitude of the shipping problem and they would seem to have underestimated the tactical difficulties of an assault on Western Europe. They favoured a strategy of frontal attack—employing the maximum strength against the enemy over the shortest possible distance, and accepting the probability of severe losses in order to obtain decisive success.

The course of Allied discussions on grand strategy during the spring of 1942 has been described in some detail in an earlier volume.\* It will be recalled that, at the beginning of April, General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, presented to the President a memorandum which recommended Western Europe as the scene of the "first great offensive" against Germany. Apart from immediate raids, two operations were considered: an assault in force which could not be delivered until the spring of 1943, and a limited operation in 1942 to be attempted only if the Russian situation became desperate or German strength in Western Europe seriously declined. The President at once dispatched General Marshall and Mr. Harry Hopkins to London to discuss this plan with the British authorities. The British Chiefs of Staff had been considering the possibility of emergency operations in the West in 1942, but had found no really satisfactory solution to the problem. In these circumstances the London discussions in April produced no final commitment on "Sledgehammer", the limited operation that year; but there was agreement on a major assault (to which the Joint Planners' name "Roundup" was applied) for 1943, and on a programme of raids for 1942.

\**Six Years of War*, 310-23.

During the next few weeks there was pressure both from Moscow and Washington for accelerated action. Another meeting in Washington between Roosevelt and Churchill in June did not result in a definite decision; and when on 8 July the British Prime Minister finally stated frankly the dislike of the scheme for an emergency landing in 1942 which the British strategists had entertained from the beginning, there was some consternation in high staff circles in the United States. The President, who had always been interested in the possibility of action in North Africa, resisted the desire of his senior service advisers to turn away from Europe towards the Pacific. He now sent Mr. Hopkins, General Marshall and Admiral Ernest J. King to London for a decisive discussion. They were instructed to fight for "Sledgehammer", but if unable to convince the British they were to "determine upon another place for U.S. Troops to fight in 1942".<sup>7</sup> The British remained adamant on the "Sledgehammer" issue (the War Cabinet discussed the matter on 22 July and "were unanimously against it"),<sup>8</sup> and it soon became apparent that "another place" could only be North-West Africa. By the end of July this orientation of strategy was firm and planning began for the landings in French North Africa which took place in November.

This decision influenced Allied strategy throughout the remainder of the war. Its basic significance is easily stated: the acceptance of the Mediterranean commitment ultimately postponed the launching of the cross-Channel attack until 1944—not, as some people originally hoped, merely until 1943.

### The Tactics of Assault

While the North African decision was being hammered out and implemented, and while the political and military chiefs were struggling with the strategic problems of the later phases, an assault technique suitable to the problem of landing troops on the fortified coast of North-West Europe was also being evolved. The evolution was powerfully influenced by a succession of operations which took place while it was in progress. Speaking broadly, it may be said that this tactical planning was in the main a British contribution, and that the largest share in it was that of Combined Operations Headquarters.\* This headquarters was directed by Lord Louis Mountbatten, who succeeded Sir Roger Keyes in October 1941.

The British had been accumulating experience in the business of conducting opposed landings since 1940. The minor raids conducted by Combined Operations Headquarters on an ascending scale of size culminated in the considerable enterprise against St. Nazaire on 28 March 1942. The C.O.H.Q. staff immediately began planning a larger operation, the raid on Dieppe, which was found to fit into the programme agreed with the Americans in April, in which large-scale raids in 1942 were a significant element. The operation was carried out on

\*In the United States, the force most concerned with amphibious techniques was the U.S. Marine Corps. No Marine divisions served in Europe during the Second World War, and U.S.M.C. planners concentrated their attention upon Pacific problems. See Jeter A. Isely and Philip A. Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory, and its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton, 1951). The interplay of amphibious experience between the two great theatres has not been much studied to date.

19 August, the 2nd Canadian Division playing the leading part. Dieppe was the only such raid actually executed, and the only major landing attempted against the Germans in North-West Europe before 6 June 1944. It had a powerful influence upon British and Allied tactical conceptions concerning the invasion operation—a larger influence than any other single assault.

The Dieppe lessons have already been analysed in the first volume of this history.\* That upon which the Army laid most stress was "the need for overwhelming fire support, including close support, during the initial stages of the attack". This clearly involved a heavy scale of air attack, which—although the Dieppe report was non-committal on this point—would presumably involve participation by heavy bombers, such as had been proposed before Dieppe but eliminated from the plan. It would also involve a naval bombardment much heavier than anything attempted at Dieppe. For close support, "special vessels or craft working close inshore" were required, and since they did not exist they had to be developed. Means had also to be found for using "the fire power of the assaulting troops while still sea-borne". The Navy considered that the most vital lessons of Dieppe were the necessity for the formation of permanent naval assault forces "with a coherence comparable to that of any other first line fighting formations", and the importance of training army formations intended for amphibious assaults in close cooperation with such forces.<sup>9</sup>

November 1942 brought the landings in French North Africa, conducted in the face of opposition which varied between areas but was nowhere on the scale to be expected from the Germans in France. This very large operation nevertheless taught the British amphibious planners various important technical lessons, including the vital importance of special headquarters ships with extra communication facilities (a need already observed at Dakar in 1940)<sup>10</sup> In June 1943 came the capture of Pantelleria, a bloodless affair whose fortunate result was due in great part at least to a tremendous scale of preliminary air bombardment. It was followed on 10 July by the assault on Sicily.† This undertaking profited heavily by the experience of earlier operations. The heavy scale of naval gunfire support provided was considered to have yielded excellent results (the bombarding force included three 15-inch monitors and several cruisers). As the result of action taken following Dieppe to improvise special support craft for inshore work, a number of Landing Craft Gun (Large) were present; these (tank landing craft converted to carry two 4.7-inch guns each) had little to do because of the light resistance encountered, but were favourably reported on.‡ Another result of Dieppe was the presence of Landing Craft Tank (Rocket)—L.C.Ts. converted to mount 800 (later 1100) 5-inch rocket projectors to "drench" beach defences just before the assault. Also making its first appearance was the Landing Craft Assault (Hedgerow), an L.C.A. able to project a salvo of 24 60-pound bombs a short

\**Six Years of War*, Chap. XII.

†See Volume II of this history, Lt.-Col. G. W. L. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*, Chap. III.

‡The Landing Craft Gun (Medium), to carry 17-pounder guns, was specially built and none was available for the Normandy landings. The Landing Craft Support available at the time of Dieppe carried nothing heavier than a 6-pounder.

distance; its function was to produce, at the moment of the assault, a gap through enemy minefields and wire obstacles through which our troops and vehicles could advance.<sup>11</sup>

Special craft and vehicles, most of them built in the United States, were now appearing in large numbers. Sicily saw the first really large-scale use in the war against Germany of the Landing Ship Tank, capable of landing large numbers of tanks or other heavy vehicles directly on to beaches if the gradient of the latter was suitable. The L.S.T. was henceforth to be a staple support of amphibious operations. The diesel-powered Landing Craft Infantry (Large), able to carry about 200 soldiers, also proved itself, though it was too bulky to use in the first wave of an assault. Finally, the first amphibious vehicle, the American DUKW, a 2½-ton amphibian truck, made its bow in European waters in this operation and, in Admiral Ramsay's words, "fulfilled our highest expectations".<sup>12</sup>

There were valuable administrative lessons. The new equipment, plus the army organization known as the "Beach Brick" (later "Beach Group"), set up to assist in unloading and loading, had made it possible to maintain a large military force by stores landed over open beaches. This opened up the prospect of being able to mount a major invasion without the condition, heretofore considered indispensable, of capturing a large port in the first stage. In the light of the Dieppe experience, which indicated how difficult such a capture was likely to be, combined with the fact that the Germans were concentrating their defences in North-West Europe chiefly around the ports, this was extremely important. But the Mediterranean is an almost tideless sea, and this lesson could not be applied to operations in the English Channel without many reservations.<sup>13</sup>

The large-scale landing at Salerno early in September 1943 produced experience which reinforced that of earlier operations. Owing apparently to the army planners' desire to ensure surprise, there was no naval or heavy air bombardment before the assault. (This was in contrast with the bombardment that preceded the virtually unopposed landing on the toe of Italy a few days earlier, in which the 1st Canadian Division took part.) But in the subsequent fierce fighting on shore the troops were effectively supported by heavy naval ships as well as by both the Strategic and Tactical Air Forces. Some accounts indeed credit the saving of the situation to intervention by battleships; but an Admiralty analysis concludes that the worst of the crisis was over before the *Valiant* and *Warspite* came into action. Vice-Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, the American officer who was in command afloat, reported after the action that heavy preliminary air and naval bombardment was essential before a landing on defended beaches. Combined Operations Headquarters considered that, apart from this, the chief lesson of Salerno was the limitation of the duration of effective air cover that could be provided from aircraft carriers. Fortunately, land-based air support had also been available.<sup>14</sup>

While the experience here so briefly summarized was being bought with blood, experts in England were engaged in analysis and experimentation designed to produce a "tactical doctrine" suitable to the assault on North-West Europe.

The recommendation after Dieppe that permanent naval assault forces be formed resulted in the Dieppe naval force itself being kept in existence. As Force "J" ("Jubilee"), constituted under this name on 12 October 1942 and commanded in the first instance by Commodore John Hughes-Hallett, the Dieppe Naval Force Commander, it worked in the Channel as a practical experimental laboratory and training unit for Combined Operations Headquarters. It carried out no actual operation between Dieppe and the Normandy D Day, though most of its ships and craft were used in the Sicily operation; but its activities made a material contribution to the tactical plan for the Normandy landings.<sup>15</sup>

By the summer of 1943 that great operation was beginning to take shape. The COSSAC staff (see below) was preparing a strategic plan, and it was evident that the Allies' ideas on tactics, equipment and training for the assault required to be reduced to definite form. After discussion with COSSAC, therefore, Lord Louis Mountbatten arranged for a conference (known as "Rattle") to be held at the Combined Training Centre at Largs on 28 June-1 July. Among those attending, in addition to Admiral Mountbatten and Lieut.-General Morgan (COSSAC), were the C.-in-C. Home Forces (General Paget), the Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth (Admiral Sir Charles Little), the Commanding General European Theatre of Operations, U.S.A. (Lieut.-General J. L. Devers), Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory (C.-in-C. Fighter Command) and Lieut.-General A. G. L. McNaughton, G.O.C.-in-C. First Canadian Army; as well as senior officers from the various formations and establishments, of all three services, which would be concerned with the plan.<sup>16</sup>

The conference considered navy, army and air aspects of the projected operation and reviewed the existing state of equipment and the needs of and facilities for training. Of all the problems which received attention, the one most anxiously canvassed was that of support for the assault; and the particular part of it about which most apprehension was expressed was fire support during the period between the lifting of the naval and air bombardment a little before the troops actually reached land, and the time when the army got its own guns into action ashore. Lieut.-General G. C. Bucknall, then commanding the 1st British Corps,\* had been directed by G.H.Q. Home Forces on 29 May to train and equip his corps "to carry out seaborne assaults on the north east coast of France" and to study "and report on the technique of the assault."<sup>17</sup> During "Rattle" Bucknall produced a tentative answer to this support problem which had much in common with the solution that General Crerar of the 1st Canadian Corps was evolving at this same period (see below, page 35). Bucknall did not, like Crerar, propose organizing the support craft in four successive flights according to the range of their weapons, or to attempt to pass the shorter-range flights through the longer-range ones as they approached the beach; but he did propose successive offshore echelons of fire support in each brigade sector, with Hedgerows, L.C.Gs., flak landing craft and small support craft, and L.C.Ts. (Rocket) all playing their parts, and with two regiments of self-propelled field artillery firing from L.C.Ts.

\*Subsequently he was transferred to the 30th Corps, and Lieut.-General J. T. Crocker took over the 1st for the assault.

This was in addition to monitors and destroyers as might be allotted. Bucknall proposed that the initial landings should be made "just before first light". Commodore Hughes-Hallett welcomed these proposals but pointed out that they had revolutionary implications for the naval plan. They involved composite forces of craft of different sizes and speeds which would have to form up off the enemy coast in the dark. This was "almost an impossible problem" from the naval viewpoint. The composite forces could be formed up and could make the assault as suggested, provided the naval and military assault forces trained together; but the forming up would have to be done in daylight. In other words, a daylight assault was clearly indicated.<sup>18</sup> On the final day of the conference this view was endorsed by Sir Charles Little.<sup>19</sup>

At this final session, General Paget made an address<sup>20</sup> which dwelt upon the dangers and difficulties of the proposed assault, "an operation the like of which had never been undertaken in the history of war". He said that no solution had yet been found for the problem of fire support in the last stages of the landing (at this moment, before Sicily, the new support craft had not been tested either in action or in a large combined exercise), but forthcoming tactical trials would carry the matter "a stage further".

The 1st British Corps was already working hard at experimentation, though it had not carried out any large-scale assault exercises. A series of planning exercises had given valuable experience to various headquarters. A Corps study period held on 23-26 June, immediately before "Rattle", had crystallized and summarized ideas and experience and given Bucknall a basis for his "Rattle" exposition.<sup>21</sup> Various special tactical aspects had been investigated. Exercise "Kruschen", conducted by the 163rd Infantry Brigade in April, had thrown light upon the means of "driving the Germans out of their concrete defences in the Coastal Areas of N.W. Europe", experimental assaults being conducted against a full-scale model of a German "hedghog". This was not an amphibious exercise.<sup>22</sup> At the same period (March-April 1943) Exercise "Primrose" at Kilbride Bay witnessed what seem to have been the first actual experiments in the employment of self-propelled army artillery firing from tank landing craft in the assault.<sup>23</sup> By the late summer the 1st British Corps was conducting exercises at Kilbride with air and naval cooperation. In "Euclid", carried out by the 49th Division in August and September, no troops seem to have been actually landed; but in "Nimbus" in the latter month an infantry battalion and a field battery were landed covered by attacks by light and fighter bombers.<sup>24</sup> On 6 September the Corps Commander held a discussion which foreshadowed many of the actual techniques to be used on the Normandy D Day; notably, the arrangement by which the DD (amphibious) tanks formed the first wave of the assault, followed some minutes later by the AVREs (Assault Vehicles, Royal Engineers),\* with the leading infantry a short distance behind them. It assumed that fire support before the landing would be afforded by self-propelled artillery, by rocket craft, and by the heaviest possible scale of naval bombardment. Air support was not discussed to any extent.<sup>25</sup>

\**Six Years of War*, 403-4. The intervals between the tanks, the AVREs and the infantry in the final plan were not precisely those recommended at this time.



While the tactics of the assault were thus being evolved, administrative support for the invasion operation was receiving equal attention. Two major exercises deserve mention in this connection. One was "Jantzen", whose object was "to practise the maintenance of a corps and supporting troops through the beaches for 14 days". It began in April and May 1943 with planning by Headquarters 1st British Corps and 61st Division on the basis of a two-brigade assault. In July (the 22nd being D Day) the 1st Corps actually carried out the administrative landings, under the direction of Headquarters Western Command, on beaches near Tenby, South Wales. Only administrative troops took part, but approximately 16,000 tons of stores were physically landed during the exercise.<sup>26</sup> Even larger in scope was Exercise "Harlequin", conducted during August and September. Its object was "to try out the procedure and machinery for passing troops from Concentration Areas through Assembly and Transit Areas to embarkation hards and ports"; the exercise represented an embarkation programme for the invasion of the Continent extending from D Day through D plus 3. Two Corps were involved, one (the 12th British Corps) passing through assembly areas in the Dover and Newhaven sectors, the other (the 1st Canadian Corps, with the 2nd Canadian Division and 5th Canadian Armoured Division under command) through areas in the Portsmouth and Southampton sectors.<sup>27</sup> On reaching the waterside, most of the force simply turned away and dispersed. A certain number of anti-aircraft units, none of them Canadian, were embarked and went for a Channel cruise; for this exercise was being combined with a deception scheme ("Starkey") intended to convince the Germans that an invasion was intended, and to bring on a largescale air battle<sup>28</sup> (see below, page 15). The 21st Army Group reported a trifle sourly that the fact that "Harlequin" formed part of an operation "directed by another Service with a different object" resulted in lack of realism; nevertheless, the enormously complicated machinery for moving an invasion force to the ports and embarking it in general performed well, and valuable lessons were learned which enabled improvements to be made.<sup>29</sup>

Special armoured equipment for the assault had long been under development. The Assault Vehicle, Royal Engineers, had come into existence as a result of the Dieppe experience. The amphibious or DD tank (below, page 00) was to see action for the first time on the Normandy beaches. The Flail tank for exploding minefields had been used, in an early form, in North Africa. The "Crocodile" flame-thrower (which was, like the AVRE, an adapted Churchill tank) had been favourably reported on in Exercise "Kruschen". This special armour was the responsibility of Major-General P. C. S. Hobart, commanding the 79th Armoured Division, who in April and May 1943 received directives requiring him to "develop a technique for the specialised units which have been placed under your command and to train them to form part of formations assaulting either beach defences or inland defended areas in Western Europe". He was instructed to maintain close contact with the 1st British Corps.<sup>30</sup>

## Testing the Assault Tactics

It fell to the 3rd Canadian Division (see below, pages 34-36) to conduct the first full-scale trial of the assault technique which was being developed. This was Exercise "Pirate", staged in October 1943 at Studland Bay, Dorset in cooperation with Force "J" and Nos. 11 and 83 Groups R.A.F. Its object was "to exercise the forces of all three Services in their functions during a major combined operation". The plan included practising embarkation, assault against a heavily-defended beach, the work of the "Turn Round Control" organization. (Turco), which controlled shipping during the build-up phase, and even the rapid construction of an airfield in the bridgehead. Particularly vital was the fire plan for the assault, which was the subject of a detailed memorandum by General Crerar sent to the G.O.C. 3rd Division on 30 August and included most of the elements that had emerged from the operations and studies of the last few months: naval bombardment (destroyer gunfire, supplemented by rocket fire and Hedgerows during the final approach, and close support craft carrying tanks which beached in the first wave to engage the beach defences); air bombardment (attacks by medium and light bombers before the landings, plus cannon and rocket attacks by fighters); and a "beach barrage" by two field regiments of army artillery firing from tank landing craft.<sup>31</sup>

D Day for "Pirate" was 17 October. Unfortunately, the proceedings were disrupted by "bad weather in the opening stage which necessitated a change of the general plan and which shut down again after the assault and terminated the exercise prematurely".<sup>32</sup> "Fog on inland airfields prevented the smoke-laying and bombing aircraft taking off and with the exception of the provision of air cover to the convoy at sea and dummy attacks by Typhoon aircraft against pre-arranged targets on the beaches, the air support plan as arranged was not carried out."<sup>33</sup> In spite of these and other deficiencies (below, page 00), the exercise was judged to have been a success; the conclusion of the 3rd Division's commander (MajorGeneral R. F. L. Keller) and his staff was that the "Combined Fire Plan of RN, RAF and Army proved itself to be workable and feasible, subject of course to further training based on the detailed lessons learned", and that it had been shown that army artillery while seaborne could carry out a successful "area shoot". Hedgerows and AVREs had done their work well.<sup>34</sup> It appeared that a firm foundation now existed for an assault plan, and in succeeding exercises Force "J" and the 3rd Division were able to confirm the soundness of the "Pirate" conclusions.\*

An incidental result of the exercise was to revive the controversy over whether a daylight H Hour was or was not practicable. Air Marshal J. H. D'Albiac, Air Officer Commanding Tactical Air Force, strongly recommended in his report that the Navy reconsider its objections to a night approach and a dawn assault; he held that an approach in daylight would mean heavy losses from artillery fire and air attack. General Paget disagreed. With respect to the artillery menace, he considered that most of the enemy's coast-defence guns would have been

\*On "Pirate", see also below, page 36.

neutralized or destroyed before the assault. As for the danger of air attack, he took the view that if we had not acquired a sufficient degree of air supremacy to prevent really heavy attacks by the enemy air force, then the assault should not be attempted at all.<sup>35</sup> The daylight attack continued to hold the field, and was incorporated in the final plan.

At the time when "Pirate" took place the basic problem of fire support was receiving further formal study. In August 1943 the British Chiefs of Staff set up a special inter-service committee to consider it. It was headed by Air Vice-Marshal Ronald Graham of Combined Operations Headquarters; it included senior representatives of all the services and had the advantage of consultation with many experts, military and scientific. Its report<sup>36</sup> was complete by December. Only its recommendations can be summarized here. The committee concluded that "in general, our existing means of naval and air support are satisfactory". It emphasized however the need for action to improve, if possible, the accuracy of naval and air bombardment; it made recommendations for improving the effectiveness of special support craft; it urged the importance of developing means for dealing with coast-defence guns in turrets and casemates by air bombardment and for destroying obstacles, including minefields and underground shelters, that could not be dealt with adequately by existing means available to the Army. It represented the need for improving the performance of naval high-explosive shell against targets ashore and the arrangements for aircraft recognition and control of anti-aircraft fire. It called for further investigation of "the problem of the best time [of day] for an assault against a heavily defended coast". Finally, it urged that the authorities concerned, including the service ministries, "should be instructed that proposals submitted for improving the degree of fire support in a seaborne assault should receive attention on the highest priority, and, when promising, should be developed in high priority". This basic recommendation was implemented by the Chiefs of Staff on 23 December 1943.<sup>37</sup>

### Allied Strategic Planning, 1942-43

While assault tactics were being developed in this thorough manner, Allied strategy was moving on towards the invasion of North-West Europe in which these tactics were to be utilized. The story has been told more than once, by some of the major participants and others; here, accordingly, it can be briefly summarized.

Long before the Allied landings in French North Africa in November 1942, the British and American leaders had been discussing the next step. The Americans felt certain from the beginning that the African project meant that there could be no major attack in North-West Europe in 1943; Mr. Churchill, while loath to admit this, was considering exploitation operations in the Mediterranean as well as an enterprise in Norway.<sup>38</sup> In January 1943 President Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister met with the Combined Chiefs of Staff in conference at Casablanca. The result, arrived at in the face of strong initial American military opposition, was a decision to exploit in the Mediterranean by

invading Sicily that summer. Along with this, however, went the further decisions to conduct from the United Kingdom "The heaviest possible bomber offensive against the German war effort" as well as "Such limited offensive operations as may be practicable with the amphibious forces available", while at the same time assembling there the strongest possible force (subject to prior commitments elsewhere) "in constant readiness to re-enter the Continent as soon as German resistance is weakened to the required extent". The Combined Chiefs recognized that there was now no chance of being able to stage a large-scale invasion of the Continent against unbroken opposition during 1943. They proposed to prepare for the following possibilities: small-scale amphibious operations; re-entrance to the Continent in the event of a sudden collapse of German resistance; operations to seize a bridgehead late in 1943, in other words a form of "Sledgehammer"; and, finally, "an invasion in force in 1944".<sup>39</sup>

To implement this programme the Combined Chiefs agreed to establish forthwith "a Combined Staff under a British Chief of Staff until such time as a Supreme Commander with an American Deputy Commander is appointed."<sup>40</sup> The result was the appointment in March 1943 of Lieut.-General F. E. Morgan as "Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (designate)" (COSSAC). General Morgan set up his headquarters in London and began work under a directive, approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 5 March, which was superseded by an amended directive on 23 April. This latter paper instructed Morgan to prepare plans for three projects. *First*, he was to plan "an elaborate camouflage and deception scheme" extending over the whole summer of 1943 with the idea of "pinning the enemy in the West" and keeping alive the expectation of large-scale cross-Channel operations that year. There was to be "at least one amphibious feint" intended to bring on a large air battle. *Secondly*, he was to prepare a scheme for "a return to the Continent in the event of German disintegration" at any time, using such forces as might be available at the time. And *thirdly*, he was to plan "a full scale assault against the Continent in 1944 as early as possible".<sup>41</sup> It will be noted that the idea of a 1943 "Sledgehammer" had been dropped.

On 25 May 1943, as the result of discussions at the "Trident" conference then in progress in Washington, Morgan was given a supplementary directive. This fixed the "target date" for the full-scale assault at 1 May 1944. It also specified the forces whose presence in the United Kingdom might be taken as a basis for planning: for the assault, *five* infantry divisions "simultaneously loaded in landing craft", *two* infantry divisions "as follow up", and *two* airborne divisions; while 20 more divisions would be available for movement into the lodgement area as "buildup".<sup>42</sup> It simultaneously emerged, however, that Morgan could not in fact count on using five seaborne divisions in the assault. There were simply not enough landing craft in prospect. The Combined Chiefs of Staff at this same conference adopted the assumption that the British (including presumably the Canadians) would provide "two assault divisions and one immediate follow-up division" and the United States "one assault division and one immediate follow-up division".<sup>43</sup> The "Rattle" conference in June was told, with reference to this assumption, "The two [immediate] Follow-up Divisions would be tactically

organised and loaded in craft, but would not be provided with the right type of craft for an assault".<sup>44</sup> General Morgan, in fact, was limited to an assault by three divisions.

COSSAC organized an "integrated" Anglo-American staff composed of officers of the three fighting services.\* A few Canadian Army officers were included, one of them being General Morgan's Military Assistant, Major R. A. Harris.<sup>45</sup> The COSSAC action taken in connection with Morgan's first two tasks can be briefly described.

The plan for the 1943 deception scheme culminated in Operation "Starkey", of which as we have seen Exercise "Harlequin" formed a part. Much thought and effort went into "Starkey", not to much apparent effect. The object was to convince the enemy that a major amphibious operation was to be delivered against the Le Touquet area of the Pas de Calais. On D Day, 8 September, an "assault convoy" carrying numerous army anti-aircraft units approached this area from the direction of Dungeness. A convoy of some 20 large mechanical transport ships also manoeuvred in the Channel. The German long-range batteries in the Pas de Calais were bombed that morning and the previous night, and there were also air attacks on airfields. Minesweepers were sent out to clear the way for the assault convoy. Considerable air forces covered the naval units and were in readiness to strike at the German Air Force if it chose to offer battle.<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately, it did not. "Enemy fighter reaction was, in general, slight." The German coastal guns did not open fire on the "assault convoy" as it trailed its coat in front of them. The enemy, in fact, in the words of the 21st Army Group's report, refused "to be hoodwinked into fighting on our terms".<sup>47</sup> Available German documents, while not so specific as could be wished, indicate that the enemy had appreciated that a large-scale invasion exercise was in progress. Although not misled into thinking an attack was imminent on 8 September, he was acutely apprehensive that invasion might be impending. The Commander-in-Chief West's situation report for the week ending 13 September remarked, "For a serious attack-despite a maximum commitment of 2500 aircraft on one day-the tempo and sequence of the air attacks were not fast enough.† In spite of this a transition to actual invasion is possible at any moment."<sup>49</sup> Though the deception plan which reached its climax in "Starkey" failed in its immediate object of bringing on an air battle, it did contribute to keeping the Germans on tenterhooks and may well have prevented the transfer of forces to the Eastern Front.

The plan for invasion in the event of German "disintegration" went by the code-name "Rankin" and was complete in outline by the middle of August 1943. It was prepared under three headings: "Rankin Case A" assumed a mere "thinning out" of the enemy forces in North-West Europe; "Case B" assumed complete enemy withdrawal from certain portions of his coastal line while continuing to

\*The staff organization is described in General Morgan's book *Overture to Overlord*, Chap. II, and in Chap. II of Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*.

†By this time the Germans had had important assistance from our side in making their appreciation. On 9 September a joint Admiralty-War Office-Air Ministry communique announced, "A fullscale amphibious exercise has recently taken place in the English Channel."<sup>49</sup>

hold the balance; "Case C" postulated a complete collapse of the Nazi system. This last contingency, it soon appeared, involved many questions relating to the administration of liberated or conquered territories which required attention in connection with the main invasion plan. For this reason "Case C" was developed by COSSAC in more detail than the other portions of the plan. Headquarters First Canadian Army produced a detailed operation instruction covering its part of the plan.<sup>50</sup> But as the Nazi system did not disintegrate until the German armies had been defeated in the field, none of the "Rankin" plans ever came into operation, and accordingly no more will be said of them here.

### The COSSAC Plan for "Overlord"

COSSAC's main task was the preparation of a plan for invading the Continent in the face of opposition in 1944. In preparing this the COSSAC staff had the advantage of being able to utilize the work of earlier planning groups.

On his arrival in London in March 1943 General Morgan was "made free of this vast bibliography" and particularly of the papers produced by or for the "Combined Commanders". This group, the British officers of the three services then designated for the senior commands in the invasion operation, with the Commanding General of the U.S. forces in the European theatre associated with them, had been engaged since the spring of 1942 in studying the problem of return to the Continent.\* In February 1943 the Combined Commanders' planning staff had produced a study entitled "The Selection of Assault Areas in a Major Operation in North-West Europe",<sup>51</sup> which arrived at the conclusion that "an assault by a large force in an unlimited operation would only be possible in the Caen Sector". This sector was described as "Suitable for an assault by a large force provided the East beaches of the Cotentin [the Cherbourg peninsula] are included to secure Cherbourg, and that the assaults on both the Caen and Cotentin Sectors take place simultaneously or closely following one another". Just before the Combined Commanders were replaced by COSSAC, their planners (an Anglo-American team) produced an outline scheme, never formally approved by their chiefs, known as Operation "Skyscraper". This plan envisaged an assault by four seaborne divisions on the beaches between the mouth of the River Orne north of Caen and the estuary of the Vire, and on the southern beaches of the eastern Cotentin. Six other seaborne divisions would be required for the follow-up, and the planners emphasized the importance of having landing craft available for ten divisions simultaneously embarked. Four airborne divisions were also to be used.<sup>52</sup>

This scheme impressed G.H.Q. Home Forces as a satisfactory tentative basis for planning, but it got a cold reception from the British Chiefs of Staff, who on 30 March decided not to consider its principles.<sup>53</sup> This was doubtless due partly to the fact that COSSAC was then already at work, but it is also possible that the Chiefs considered that the Combined Commanders' planners had asked for

\*See *Six Years of War*, 321-2.

more than it was practicable to provide. It is nevertheless the case that the "Skyscraper" plan turned out to be very close to the actual plan finally followed in the invasion of Normandy; considerably closer to it, in fact, than the plan subsequently produced by COSSAC, who was working within the straitjacket of the limited resources prescribed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. In some other respects the COSSAC plan and the conclusions of the Combined Commanders had much in common. How far General Morgan and his staff profited directly by the work of the Combined Commanders, or how far the same facts simply led the two groups to the same results, it would be difficult to say.

The first task facing COSSAC was the "selection of a lodgement area". This problem was considered in the light of (a) port capacities; (b) beach capacities; (c) naval considerations; (d) air considerations; (e) German coastal defences; (f) German reserves; (g) Allied forces available. The factor of air cover limited the possible area of assault to the front between Cherbourg and Flushing. Particularly as a result of (b) and (d), the discussion was soon further narrowed down to two main areas: the Pas de Calais and the Cotentin-Caen area. In both these cases, it was noted, subsequent operations would be required to capture additional groups of ports. Of the two, the Pas de Calais offered certain obvious advantages: particularly, a sea crossing of only twenty miles, promising both optimum air support and a very quick turn-around of shipping, which would lighten the burden of naval escort and protection. And the Pas de Calais beaches, though exposed, had a high capacity. But in the Pas de Calais, just because of these advantages, the German defences were at their most formidable; moreover, to expand the lodgement area by capturing more ports would be difficult, since it involved taking distant Antwerp on one side—which meant advancing across a series of water obstacles—or distant Le Havre and Rouen on the other.

The Cotentin-Caen area, on the other hand, had certain clear disadvantages. It was farther from the British airfields and would therefore reduce the amount of support that could be afforded by short-range fighters; while the longer sea voyage would complicate the naval problems. But there were also great advantages. In the Caen sector the German defences, including coast artillery, were light. The beaches there had a very high capacity and were "reasonably sheltered from the prevailing wind". Finally, the area provided exceptionally suitable ground for the rapid development of forward airfields close to the coast. On balance, therefore, General Morgan and his staff soon reached the same conclusion as the Combined Commanders. The chances of a successful attack and exploitation in the Caen sector were "so much greater . . . than in any other that it is considered that its advantages outweigh the disadvantages".<sup>54</sup>

COSSAC, however, stipulated that certain conditions were essential if the operation—now called "Overlord"—was to be successful. He emphasized three as particularly vital. One, and the most important, was "that there should be an over-all reduction of the German fighter force between now [30 July 1943] and the time of the surface assault". The second was that "The German reserves in France and the Low Countries as a whole, excluding divisions holding the coast,

G.A.F. [German Air Force] divisions and training divisions, should not exceed on the day of the assault twelve full-strength first-quality divisions", and that the Germans should not be in a position to transfer large numbers of first-rate divisions from Russia within the first period of the campaign, or move their reserve divisions against the bridgehead at a rate exceeding three on D Day, five by the second day, or nine by D plus 8. This meant that every effort should be made before the assault to "dissipate and divert German formations, lower their fighting efficiency and disrupt communications". The third condition was the provision by artificial means of "sheltered waters" off the coast to be assaulted; for in the weather conditions to be expected in the English Channel this was essential if maintenance over the beaches was to be carried on for any length of time. The COSSAC plan envisaged creating two artificial ports by sinking blockships. The "Mulberry" harbours in Normandy were ultimately constructed on a much more elaborate basis.

"Given these conditions", wrote General Morgan, "—a reduced G.A.F., a limitation in the number or effectiveness of German offensive formations in France, and adequate arrangements to provide improvised sheltered waters—it is considered that Operation 'Overlord' has a reasonable prospect of success".\*

As we have seen, Morgan had been allowed only three seaborne assault divisions. He planned to land them on a front of roughly 35 miles from north of Caen to Grandcamp, with approximately three tank brigades and an additional infantry brigade group following them in on the same day. A force amounting to two-thirds of a British airborne division (all for which aircraft were expected to be available) was to capture Caen. COSSAC did not propose to attempt any landing on the beaches of the eastern Cotentin. He feared that forces "separated by the low-lying country and river systems in the area of Carentan-Isigny" (the estuary of the Vire) would be exposed to defeat in detail. Indeed, the forces allotted to him were unequal to such an extension. However, he proposed an early attack towards Cherbourg; and he hoped, optimistically, that by D plus 14 about 18 Allied divisions would have been landed, Cherbourg captured and the bridgehead extended some sixty miles inland from Caen.<sup>55</sup>

COSSAC's "Overlord" plan was submitted to the British Chiefs of Staff on 15 July 1943. After careful consideration by them, it was sent to Quebec for discussion by the Combined Chiefs of Staff at the "Quadrant" conference, which began there on 14 August. The Combined Chiefs, not without much argument as to the precise degree of priority to be given "Overlord" at the expense of the operations in Italy, on 15 August approved Morgan's outline plan and endorsed the action already taken by the British Chiefs of Staff in authorizing him to proceed with detailed planning and with full preparations.<sup>56</sup> This decision was incorporated in the final report of the conference, the target date remaining 1 May 1944. This report also envisaged continuing pressure on the Germans in Italy designed

\*The quotations in these two paragraphs are from "Digest of Operation 'Overlord'", a brief summary of the plan prefixed by General Morgan to his report. The "Digest" is published as Appendix "A" to Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*, and should be consulted for further details.



to create conditions favourable to "Overlord". Offensive operations against Southern France as a diversion connected with "Overlord" were approved. Mr. Churchill's favourite "Jupiter" scheme for action in Norway was still mentioned as a possible alternative in case circumstances rendered "Overlord" impossible. And "highest strategic priority" was given to the Combined Bomber Offensive, designed to effect the "progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system, and disruption of vital elements of lines of communication, and the material reduction of German air combat strength". The broad substance of these decisions, not including the date but including the limiting conditions to which Morgan attached so much importance, was communicated to the Russians when Messrs. Eden and Hull visited Moscow in October.<sup>57</sup>

No Supreme Commander for "Overlord" had yet been appointed, nor was the appointment made until the last days of 1943. At Quebec the Americans concurred in the British suggestion that Admiral Sir Charles Little (who was later replaced by Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay) should be Naval Commander and the A.O.C.-in-C. Fighter Command, R.A.F., Air Marshal Sir Trafford LeighMallory, should be Air Commander.<sup>58</sup> About the same time the idea implicit in the decisions of the Casablanca Conference (above, page 14), that the Supreme Commander should be British, was abandoned, since it was clear that over the campaign as a whole the United States forces engaged would be much the larger. Mr. Churchill proposed to Mr. Roosevelt that an American be appointed, and broke to Sir Alan Brooke the news (which seems to have surprised him more than might have been expected) that his earlier offer of the appointment to him could not be implemented.<sup>59</sup>

The appointment of a Supreme Commander was now up to the President. It was assumed that the post would go to General Marshall. But there was unexpected delay. In October, Churchill urged the importance of a decision. Then the British became aware that the Americans desired that Marshall should command both the North-West Europe and the Mediterranean theatres. There was still to be a commander for each theatre; but above them both—and above the Strategic Air Forces engaged against Germany also—would be the Supreme Commander, whose decisions however would be "subject to reversal" by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Early in November the British Prime Minister made it clear, informally but in very strong terms, that he would never accept such an arrangement. Nevertheless, at the Cairo ("Sextant") conference which began later in the month the Americans made the suggestion formally. It was promptly rejected by Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff in separate memoranda. The British disliked the idea on both national and military grounds. They felt that what Churchill called "the principle of equal status which must be maintained among the great Allies" required that they should have the supreme command in one theatre. They felt also that the Super-Supreme Commander would be, in the words of their Chiefs of Staff, "an extra and unnecessary link in the chain of command". They undoubtedly considered that a commander possessing such powers would be beyond the control of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and that

to grant such powers to an American would in effect deprive both the British Chiefs of Staff and the British Government of any effective share in the direction of the war against Germany.<sup>60</sup>

The Americans now perforce dropped their plan. At the conference ("Eureka") at Teheran at the end of the month, Marshal Stalin, with his usual directness, made it clear that he considered there should be no further delay in making the appointment. A few days later President Roosevelt, obviously feeling, in Churchill's phrase, that "the command only of 'Overlord' was not sufficient to justify General Marshall's departure from Washington", appointed General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who as commander in the Mediterranean had given evidence of a special genius for coordinating the efforts of allies." The appointment was announced on Christmas Eve, along with that of a British officer, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, as Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean Theatre. On 27 December it was announced that Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder would be Deputy Supreme Commander to General Eisenhower.<sup>62</sup>

Although Naval and Air Commanders-in-Chief had been appointed under the Supreme Commander, no C.-in-C. was designated for the ground forces. Whether such an appointment was seriously discussed between the British and American authorities at this time does not appear. It was discussed in the Operations Division of the United States War Department and went to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff but no further. The reasons are thus explained by an American official writer: "The concept of a ground commander seemed objectionable on practical grounds. Since the supreme commander would be American, it was considered in September that the ground commander, if there was one, would also have to be American. But, as one officer in OPD pointed out, the 'ruling factor' determining in practice the nationality of the ground commander would be the availability of a suitable individual to fill the position. He observed further that no U.S. commander had the battle experience and reputation to challenge the qualifications of the British generals, Montgomery and Alexander, for the job. The conclusion was obvious: it would be impolitic of the Americans to suggest the creation of the job."<sup>63</sup>

While it was argued on military grounds that in the later portions of the campaign no intermediate headquarters should be placed between the Supreme Commander and the three Army Groups serving under him,<sup>64</sup> nobody suggested that a ground commander was not required for the all-important assault phase. The decision was that this responsibility should fall to the Commander-in-Chief of the (British) 21st Army Group. On 29 November 1943 General Morgan, who had lately returned from consultations with General Marshall, issued a directive<sup>65</sup> to the C.-in-C. 21st Army Group (at this date still General Sir Bernard Paget), informing him that he would be "jointly responsible with the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief and the Air Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Air Force, for the planning of the operation, and, when so ordered, for its execution *until such time as the Supreme Allied Commander allocates an area of responsibility to the Commanding General, First [U.S.] Army Group*".\* General Eisenhower

\*Italics supplied.

indicated a preference that General Sir Harold Alexander should command the British Army Group;<sup>66</sup> but the British War Cabinet did not agree, and the appointment of General Sir Bernard Montgomery was announced on 24 December. General Paget became Commander-in-Chief, Middle East.<sup>67</sup>

### The COSSAC Plan Is Altered

The appointment of commanders led immediately to alterations in the COSSAC plan of assault. We have seen that Morgan had been allotted very limited resources, and his plan had been constricted accordingly. At Quebec Mr. Churchill had said that "every effort should be made to add at least 25 per cent. strength to the initial assault" and advocated a landing on the "inside beaches" of the Cotentin as well as in the Caen-Grandcamp area.<sup>68</sup> Changes were now to be made along these lines.

Whether it was Eisenhower or Montgomery who first suggested these changes "on the military level" is perhaps immaterial; what matters is that the two were in full agreement as to their necessity. General Eisenhower relates that on some apparently unrecorded date late in 1943 he received a "sketchy outline" of the COSSAC plan through an American officer. He thought the front too narrow and the provision for an early capture of Cherbourg inadequate. He saw Montgomery before the latter left the Mediterranean, explained these doubts and authorized him to act as his representative in examining and revising the ground plan.<sup>69</sup> On 26 December Mr. Churchill telegraphed the British Chiefs of Staff, "both Eisenhower and Montgomery have expressed themselves entirely dissatisfied with what they have heard of the present plan for 'Overlord', and I gather they will demand a far larger first flight".<sup>70</sup> Montgomery broke his journey to England at Marrakesh on New Year's Day. There he saw for the first time a copy of the COSSAC plan and immediately told the Prime Minister that the front of assault was too narrow.<sup>71</sup> During January 1944 General Montgomery was at work with the naval and air commanders-in-chief on an actual assault plan. This emerged on 1 February as an "Initial Joint Plan" called by the code name "Neptune", by which the assault phase of Operation "Overlord" was thereafter known.

The new plan provided for dividing the front of assault between two Armies—the First United States Army on the right, the Second British Army on the left. A total of five British infantry brigades and three U.S. regimental combat teams would land from the sea in the first assault; these formations were directed on D Day by five divisional headquarters, two American, two British and one Canadian. With respect to airborne forces, uncertainty concerning availability of gliders, troop carrier aircraft and crews led to changes in the plan. The original version envisaged dropping one airborne division on the American flank in the beginning, and a second, either there or on the British flank, twenty-four hours later. The ultimate arrangement, when it was found that adequate means would be available, was to drop two airborne divisions on the American flank, and one airborne division on the British flank, during the night preceding D Day. (On

both flanks some glider-borne elements landed only on the evening of D Day.) These final arrangements were the outcome of long and earnest discussion.<sup>72</sup>

We have seen that the original target date given COSSAC for the operation was 1 May 1944. The Initial Joint Plan postponed the date to 1 June 1944 (subsequently altered by an amendment to 31 May). The postponement was dictated by the chief controlling factor in the administrative situation at this moment—shortage of landing craft. The increase in the assaulting force meant a still larger requirement for craft, and the additional month's production was important to the plan.

The landing craft problem was closely connected with the much-controverted question of a landing on the Mediterranean coast of France in conjunction with the main landing in Normandy. As we have seen, this project had been approved at Quebec. At Teheran, Marshal Stalin strongly supported it; and that conference's agreement concerning operations in 1944 began with the provision "that 'Overlord' would be launched in May in conjunction with a supporting operation against the South of France on the largest scale that is permitted by the landing craft available at that time".<sup>73</sup> The South of France operation was designated "Anvil".

Through the early months of 1944 there was continued controversy over this operation, in great part arising from the shortage of landing craft for the main attack. The British authorities, however, were doubtful of "Anvil" on other grounds. They questioned whether so distant an enterprise would really be of great utility to "Overlord"; and they feared its effect upon the Italian campaign, particularly in the light of the new commitments resulting from the landing at Anzio, carried out on 22 January 1944.\* The Americans differed strongly; but it was obviously absurd to persist with "Anvil" at the price of reducing "Overlord", and it became more and more doubtful whether there were landing craft enough for both. Late in March, on General Eisenhower's and General Wilson's recommendations, "Anvil", as an attack simultaneous with "Overlord", was cancelled.<sup>74</sup> But the story was not over. The landing on the south coast of France was to take place in due course, though only after much further debate.

### Operations Before D Day

Operation "Overlord", properly understood, began long before the first Allied soldier stepped on to the soil of Normandy. For months before D Day the Allied air forces had been engaged in operations which were vital to the success of the invasion.

The Tactical Air Forces—the R.A.F.'s 2nd Tactical Air Force, the U.S. Ninth Air Force, and the Air Defence of Great Britain, formerly known as Fighter Command—were under General Eisenhower's command, exercised through Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory, from dates late in 1943; though the Ninth was not actually released from its commitment to assist the U.S. Strategic Air Force in Operation "Pointblank", the combined bomber offensive against Germany, until

\*See *The Canadians in Italy*, 372-75.

10 March 1944. As for the Strategic Air Forces, comprising the R.A.F. Bomber Command and the U.S. Eighth Air Force, they were employed in "Pointblank" under the British Chief of the Air Staff acting as representative of the Combined Chiefs of Staff; and something of a struggle occurred before they were placed under the Supreme Commander. Eisenhower, however, took the view that it was vital that he should have them. "Overlord", he argued, was no ordinary operation, and in a crisis, when the last ounce of available force was needed, he should not be "in the position of depending upon request and negotiation to get it". The Combined Chiefs of Staff finally agreed that the Strategic Air Forces should be under his command from 14 April 1944. They were not, however, placed under the Air Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Air Force, but directly under the Supreme Commander. Eisenhower delegated to his Deputy, Air Chief Marshal Tedder, the general supervision of all air forces.<sup>75</sup>

All this did not imply that "Pointblank" was not related to the success or failure of "Overlord"; much the contrary. The strategic air operations carried on under the "Casablanca directive" (above, page 14) and its successors had a great deal to do with creating the conditions which made the invasion possible. At the "Trident" conference in Washington in May 1943 the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed upon a carefully-drafted plan for the Combined Bomber Offensive. The six industrial target "systems" which it specified as "principal objectives" were the industries producing submarines, aircraft, ball bearings, oil, synthetic rubber and tires, and military transport vehicles. It also stated as "an *Intermediate* objective second to none in priority" the fighter strength of the German Air Force.<sup>76</sup> The phrase, in the words of an American official writer, had "more force than clarity";<sup>77</sup> but the reduction of German fighter strength was never in practice a secondary part of the programme. It was vital if the bomber offensive itself was to succeed; and, as we have seen, COSSAC specified it as an essential condition of the success of the invasion operation.

The attacks delivered against the German aircraft industry had less effect than might have been expected; indeed, as the result of expansion programmes approved long before, production actually increased tremendously during 1944, acceptances of single-engined fighters by the *Luftwaffe* from the factories rising from 1531 in January to 3506 in September. (These figures include damaged aircraft returned after repair.)<sup>78</sup> But losses in action were large, and pilots were much harder to replace than aircraft. In the first five months of 1944 the German air forces in the West lost no less than 5009 fighters. The *Luftwaffe* had in fact suffered a decisive defeat. Even at this late date there is no reason to disagree with the basic conclusions stated by General Eisenhower in his report published in 1946: "Our D-Day experience was to convince us that the carefully laid plans of the German High Command to oppose 'Overlord' with an efficient air force in great strength were completely frustrated by the strategic bombing operations. Without the overwhelming mastery of the air which we attained by that time our assault against the Continent would have been a most hazardous, if not impossible, undertaking."<sup>80</sup>

It was of the first importance to "isolate" the prospective battlefield in Normandy so as to make the approach of enemy reserves as slow and difficult as

possible. Accordingly, a "Transportation Plan" was developed, aimed chiefly at the railway network of North-Western France; an essential part of it was blows at maintenance and repair facilities. The Strategic as well as the Tactical Air Forces participated; this involved for the R.A.F. Bomber Command a switch from its long-established technique of area bombing to the precision bombing of small targets. The attacks on railway objectives began in earnest in March.<sup>81</sup> There was much hesitation about the programme, chiefly because of the obvious danger of heavy casualties to French civilians. Mr. Churchill, indeed, invited President Roosevelt to consider the question, obviously with a view to modifying the scheme; but the President declined to interfere.<sup>82</sup>

Road and rail bridges leading to the battle area were a target-group of special importance. Doubts were entertained as to how effectively aircraft could strike them until a month before D Day, when Ninth Air Force fighter-bombers gave a convincing demonstration on a bridge across the Seine at Vernon. Thereafter the campaign went forward, directed principally against bridges over the Seine, along with some others over the Oise, the Meuse and the Albert Canal. Bridges over the Loire, and in the "Paris-Orleans gap" between Loire and Seine, were (with some exceptions) left alone until after D Day to avoid giving away the secret of our landing area. The Seine bridges would have been equally important had we landed in the Pas de Calais.<sup>83</sup> The bridge attacks were eminently successful. The German Commander-in-Chief West's daily situation report for 28 May<sup>84</sup> observed,

Due to attacks of last four days Seine railway bridges between Paris and Rouen destroyed or impassable. Exception: railway bridge St. Germain [on the western outskirts of Paris]. . . . C.-in-C. West insists on immediate restoration in each case.

In spite of the Germans' skill and energy in making repairs, there is no doubt that the damage done by these operations and under the "Transportation Plan" as a whole was a most fundamental embarrassment to them and a great contribution to the Allied victory in Normandy.

Specifically military objectives in the assault area, important in connection with the projected landing and subsequent operations, provided the air forces with many targets. Miscellaneous military targets attacked during the preparatory period included ammunition and fuel dumps, camps and headquarters. The "neutralization" of coastal batteries was obviously a vital task which could scarcely be left merely for the final bombardment on D Day itself. We know of 49 such batteries capable of firing on our shipping as it approached the chosen beaches. The Strategic and Tactical Air Forces shared the attack on them, which began in mid-April. Between 10 April and 5 June, there were 2495 sorties of aircraft against coastal batteries in the assault area. Since it was so essential not to reveal the sector where we proposed to land, more than twice as many attacks—6270 sorties in all—were made during this period against batteries outside the area.<sup>85</sup>

Radar stations were another vital target. The Allied naval and air forces selected those most likely to enable the enemy to detect and interfere with our plans, and a comprehensive campaign was waged against them from 10 May onwards. Again, two targets outside the assault area were attacked for every one



within it. The results were excellent and most valuable. During the night in which the Allied invasion fleet crossed the Channel, the number of enemy radar stations active in the assault area was "only 18 out of a normal 92", and no station was heard operating between Le Havre and Barfleur.<sup>86</sup>

In order to reduce the enemy's air interference to a minimum, it was necessary to "neutralize" his important airfields within 150 miles of Caen. This involved attacking 40 fields; while 59 others in France, Belgium, Holland and Western Germany also received attention with a view both to avoiding any indication of the selected assault area and to interfering with the enemy's air effort generally. Great damage was done, the effect being to place German fighters under the same handicap as the Allies' by forcing them to operate from fields distant from the assault area. These measures, along with the attrition of the German fighter force produced by the air battles of the early months of 1944, and the threat to Germany itself represented by the continuing activity of the Allied strategic bombers against the homeland (they took time out from attacks on "Overlord" targets to begin the offensive against German oil plants in May) are the explanation of the extraordinary absence of air opposition to our invasion.<sup>87</sup>

### The Anglo-American Debate

By the end of May, the target-date specified in the Initial Joint Plan, all was in readiness. On 8 May General Eisenhower had accepted 5 June as the actual date for the assault; if the weather that day was unsuitable, considerations of moon and tide would permit postponement to the 6th or 7th (see below, page 00). The operation now imminent was the product of four years of planning and preparation. It was also the outcome of a very long debate on strategy between British and American statesmen and officers. The tortuous story of this controversy, of which we have given some glimpses, is fully told in other books;<sup>88</sup> but a brief comment upon it is in order.

From the spring of 1942, when they produced their scheme for an early attack in North-West Europe, the Americans showed themselves consistent believers in the strategy of direct approach, as represented in the concept of a frontal attack across the English Channel. They directed their efforts in a succession of conferences towards obtaining a firm agreement by the British to make such an attack on a definite date, and the earliest date possible. The British showed little enthusiasm for the idea. They put a stop to the dangerous plan for an "emergency" landing in France in 1942, and succeeded in diverting the main Allied effort that year to the Mediterranean. Thereafter, without opposing the basic conception of a cross-Channel attack as the final phase of operations against Germany, they consistently put the case for Mediterranean operations as the expedient of the immediate future. They favoured a flexible and an opportunistic strategy and were reluctant to commit themselves to what their Prime Minister called "lawyers' agreements". The Americans saw primarily the great strategic dividends that might result from a successful assault across the Channel. The British were more conscious



of the perils of the operation and its possible cost in human life. Sir Winston Churchill has recorded that while "always willing to join with the United States in a direct assault across the Channel", he was "not convinced that this was the only way of winning the war" and knew that it would be "a very heavy and hazardous adventure". The casualties of the Western Front in the First World War were never far from his mind.<sup>89</sup>

The Americans on their side were, it is evident, distrustful of British policy and suspicious lest the British should not be really loyal to the invasion project. They were afraid that adventures in the Eastern Mediterranean might lead to a Balkan campaign (though Churchill emphasized that he never contemplated sending an army into the Balkans);<sup>90</sup> they were afraid of finding themselves fighting for British imperial interests.\* In part, this may have been the result of the British strategists' failure in 1942 to declare frankly at an earlier date their opposition to "Sledgehammer" (above, page 00); for this left the Americans feeling, not quite justly, that the British had gone back on an engagement. In part also, doubtless, it had its roots far back in American history. But the Americans need not have worried. In spite of urgings from Field-Marshal Smuts of South Africa, who intensely disliked the "Overlord" scheme,<sup>91</sup> the British carried out their undertakings, and by March 1944 their Prime Minister was writing to General Marshall that he was "hardening very much on this operation as the time approaches, in the sense of wishing to strike if humanly possible, even if the limiting conditions we laid down at Moscow are not exactly fulfilled".<sup>92</sup>

In the end, the combination of American impetuosity and British caution produced an excellent result. The British prevented the Americans from attacking prematurely in the days when Allied resources were unequal to the task; the Americans spurred the British on to attempt the enterprise when the growth of those resources had produced a situation in which frontal attack was sound policy. The course of the continental campaign which began on 6 June 1944 suggests that the decision to undertake the campaign was an eminently sound one, and that the timing of the assault could scarcely have been improved upon.

\*On the U.S. suspicions, see Kent Roberts Greenfield, *The Historian and the Army* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1954), 52. Mr. Greenfield makes the important point that the tremendous scale of the logistical support required for an operation like the Normandy invasion was a powerful argument for long-term planning and against an opportunistic strategy.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CANADIAN ARMY AND THE INVASION PROJECT

(See Sketch 1)

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THE background of Canadian participation in Operation "Overlord" is as long a story as the preparation of the operation itself. Through the years from 1940 onwards when the operation was being planned, Canadian troops were present in the United Kingdom in increasing numbers, and it was always assumed that when Allied forces returned to the Continent the Canadians would have a considerable share in the invasion. This chapter attempts to trace the development of their part in the project, which passed through many changes during four years of planning.

#### The Strategic Background, 1939-43

Readers of the previous volumes of this history are aware that the 1st Canadian Division arrived in Britain in December 1939. The assumption that the role of this division and those that followed it would be participation in a campaign in France alongside the British Expeditionary Force was dispelled by the disastrous battles of 1940 and the expulsion of British forces from the Continent. For a long period thereafter the immediate task of the Canadians in Britain was limited to preparation for defence against a probable invasion; but when the invasion did not come, and when during 1941 Soviet Russia and the United States were successively drawn into the war on the side of the Commonwealth, planning for a return to the Continent assumed a more realistic aspect, and the Canadian connection with these schemes became a matter of increasing importance.

In Volume I\* we have said something of the Canadian relationship to the invasion plan produced in 1942 known as Operation "Roundup". The situation was unstable and there was no really firm basis for planning, but in September 1942 it was assumed that if and when "Roundup" was carried out the role of the First Canadian Army would be to "follow up" through a bridgehead secured by an American army. General McNaughton described the plan in these terms to the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of the Canadian General Staff on

\*Chap. X.

3 October.<sup>1</sup> On 19 November the Chief of the Imperial General Staff told McNaughton that "large scale raids of limited scope and duration" against the U-boat bases in the Biscay ports were planned for about April 1943; it was hoped the Canadian Army would participate.<sup>2</sup> Early in 1943 there was talk of a limited cross-Channel operation, along the lines of the previous year's "Sledgehammer" plan; it was suggested that Headquarters First Canadian Army would control the whole operation, with a British assault division under command (see Volume I, Chapter XII). But in describing Exercise "Spartan" to the authorities in Ottawa at the same period, General McNaughton pointed out that the role of First Canadian Army in this exercise—the breakout "from an established bridgehead"—was the one which it was expected to play in actual major operations.<sup>3</sup> On 10 February 1943 he asked General Paget, the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces, for a firm statement on this matter. Paget replied that he was quite certain that the Canadian formations should be used for the mobile task of exploiting the bridgehead. It had been decided that the initial attack would be under the direction of Headquarters First Canadian Army; but to conduct the actual assault Lieut.-General F. E. Morgan's 1st British Corps of three infantry divisions would be placed under it. Subsequently the two Canadian corps would be employed for exploitation, and two British Armies would be brought in. It was emphasized that such a campaign could be undertaken only if some deterioration in German morale was evident.<sup>4</sup> At this time, as a result of the initiation of the North African campaign, there was less than a single United States division in the United Kingdom, and any immediate operation based on that country would have had to be almost exclusively British and Canadian. Looking back on the developments of this period, it is evident that the plans being considered at the War Office for action in France were extremely vague and fluid.

With the appointment of General Morgan as Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (designate) in April 1943, and that of General Paget in July to command the 21st Army Group, planning entered a more definite stage. In order to keep himself informed of the progress of this planning—a matter which had always been difficult—General McNaughton, on Morgan's invitation, appointed to the COSSAC headquarters a Canadian liaison officer, Major-General G. R. Turner. General Turner represented General McNaughton, not in the latter's capacity as an Army Commander but as "the accredited military representative of the Canadian Government in the U.K." The British Chiefs of Staff were "lukewarm" to the idea of this appointment, but General Morgan told a staff meeting on 24 April that they had "tacitly conceded" its desirability.<sup>5</sup>

As we have already seen, by the middle of July 1943 COSSAC had completed a plan for the invasion of North-West Europe. This plan assumed that Canadian forces would not take part in the actual assault, but that this would be shared between British and United States divisions. A map, included with the plan, which illustrates the situation as envisaged after two days' fighting in Normandy, shows no Canadian formations ashore. But another, of the situation as it would have been six days later, shows a Canadian corps of three divisions in the centre of the Allied front; and the plan assumed that by D plus 14 the Allied force

ashore would consist of an American army of seven divisions on the right, a British army of six divisions on the left, and in the centre a Canadian army of five divisions "organised in an infantry corps of three divisions, facing South, and an armoured corps of two divisions moving South-East". The Canadian army headquarters would have been the third such headquarters to land. It was recommended that a British Army Commander should control the assault.<sup>6</sup>

The command pattern could not be made final until a Supreme Commander had been appointed and had considered the proposed plans with his chief subordinates. In the meantime various possibilities presented themselves. On 7 December 1943 a meeting of "Joint Commanders-in-Chief" (Admiral Ramsay, General Paget, and Air Marshal Leigh-Mallory) approved a "system of command and control" by which the assault would be directed by the First U.S. Army, under the 21st Army Group and with the 1st British Corps and one U.S. corps under command. In the second phase, this plan provided, "As soon as two British Corps are established in France, First Canadian Army will land and take command of these two Corps at a time to be agreed mutually between Commander, First US Army and Commander, First Canadian Army".<sup>7</sup> Under this scheme, the Canadian Army would have had no concern with the assault but would have landed ahead of the Second British Army.

This proposal was cast aside when Generals Eisenhower and Montgomery were appointed and proceeded to recast the COSSAC plan. With a wider front of assault agreed upon, it was decided that the front should be shared between two armies, operating under the 21st Army Group; and that they should be the First U.S. Army and the Second British Army. On 8 January 1944 General Montgomery, in conversation with Brigadier Charles Foulkes (Brigadier General Staff, First Canadian Army) "confirmed that the Cdn Army would be used as a follow-up army".<sup>8</sup> It is possible that this final decision was influenced by the fact that at that moment First Canadian Army was without a commander.

### First Canadian Army in Transition

During the months in 1943 when the COSSAC plan was being developed and approved, the situation of the Canadian Army changed materially. As has been described in Volume II of this history, in April a decision was made to dispatch the 1st Canadian Infantry Division and the 1st Canadian Army Tank Brigade to take part in the assault on Sicily which was delivered on 10 July. Although it had been tentatively considered that these formations might be brought back to the United Kingdom after the Sicilian campaign, policy developed in the opposite direction. Early in October a further decision was taken. Not only were the 1st Division and the 1st Army Tank Brigade to remain in the Mediterranean theatre, but the Headquarters of Lieut.-General H. D. G. Crerar's 1st Canadian Corps, the 1st Canadian Corps Troops and the 5th Canadian Armoured Division were also sent thither. Thus for the next period of the war the Canadian field army was divided. With one corps headquarters, two divisions and an armoured

brigade in Italy, there remained in the United Kingdom for participation in the approaching campaign in North-West Europe only the army headquarters, one corps headquarters, one armoured division, two infantry divisions and one armoured brigade, along with a large number of corps, army and G.H.Q. troops.

This situation raised the question of the future of the First Canadian Army, more particularly since just at this moment the personal position of the Army Commander also came under consideration. In December 1943 General McNaughton relinquished the command, and Lieut.-General Kenneth Stuart took it over in an acting capacity, at the same time becoming Chief of Staff, Canadian Military Headquarters, London.\*

On 18 October General Paget had told General McNaughton what changes were planned as the result of the 1st Canadian Corps' impending movement. It was proposed, he said, that for the invasion the 21st Army Group would be composed for the time being of "an American Army, the Second British Army and a combined Anglo-Canadian Army". The 12th British Corps would be placed under the First Canadian Army. He added that in these circumstances it would be desirable to include in the staff of the Canadian Army a proportion of British officers.<sup>9</sup> When McNaughton reported this General Stuart (then still Chief of the General Staff at Ottawa) read more into Paget's suggestions than McNaughton had stated. Stuart wrote to the Minister of National Defence<sup>10</sup> in part as follows:

I am in favour of this proposal for the following reasons:—

(a) The British will undoubtedly request that, initially at least, this new Army will be commanded by a battle experienced British officer who will be supported by a number of battle experienced British Staff Officers. Such an arrangement, in my opinion, is in the best interests of Canada and of the 2nd Canadian Corps.

(b) If, at a later date in the war, the bulk of our Canadian formations were serving in the same theatre, it would be possible to reconstitute a First Canadian Army by utilizing the framework of the proposed Anglo-Canadian Army.

(c) There is only one practical alternative to Paget's proposal, that is to disband H.Q. First Canadian Army and fit our 2nd Cdn Corps and our ancillary units into one or more British Armies. Paget's proposal, for the reason stated in (b) above, is the more attractive. I have not given any consideration to the retention of H.Q. First Canadian Army in its present form simply because it is not a practical proposition; the British would not accept it. This is borne out by Paget's proposition.

In November the Minister and Stuart went to England to discuss these questions and to enable Mr. Ralston to visit the Canadian troops in Italy. During their stay in London General McNaughton's resignation took place and the question of the future of the Army became urgent. The event proved that Stuart's judgement of the situation had been inaccurate. The British authorities do not seem to have attempted to procure the appointment of a British officer to command the First Canadian Army. It is evident that Ralston had no intention of accepting such a solution, and it is very unlikely indeed that his colleagues in

\*See *Six Years of War*, 222-3, and *The Canadians in Italy*, 343-4. The interim appointment of Stuart was suggested to the Minister by General Crerar on 29 November, after he had heard of McNaughton's impending departure and the possibility that he would himself become *Army* Commander. Stuart told the Army's Chief of Staff, Brigadier Mann, that for security reasons he did not wish to be informed of the detail of tactical plans. In these circumstances Mann carried an extra responsibility during the interim period.

the government would have accepted it. In a memorandum of a discussion with Ralston on 14 November, General McNaughton wrote, "He spoke of insisting on a Canadian Commander for First Canadian Army, and we spoke of Crerar, and I told him of my endeavour to develop him and to shield him from the controversy in which I had necessarily been involved."<sup>11</sup> Headquarters First Canadian Army continued to exist, essentially in the same form and under a Canadian officer.

On 4 January 1944 the War Office wrote to Canadian Military Headquarters making formal proposals for "amending the present relationship between First Canadian Army and 21 Army Group".<sup>12</sup> These proposals had already been informally discussed and agreed upon. Since July 1943 the Canadian Army had been "associated with 21 Army Group for operational direction and formation training related thereto". It was now proposed that First Canadian Army should be "detailed to act in combination with 21 Army Group" under the terms of the Visiting Forces Acts—that is, actually placed under its command. The War Office letter proceeded:

2. In the event of this being agreed the Commander-in-Chief, 21 Army Group, will wish to carry out certain interchanges of formations between First Canadian Army and the British component of his force. In anticipation of this it is therefore considered desirable that certain appointments on the staff of Headquarters First Canadian Army should be filled by British officers. It is proposed that the proportion of British officers should not exceed 50 per cent, the actual numbers of appointments, and the interchange of formations, being agreed mutually between the Commander-in-Chief, 21 Army Group, and the General Officer Commanding in Chief, First Canadian Army.

3. It is further proposed that the Commander First Canadian Army should be appointed by the Canadian Government after consultation with His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom.

Colonel Ralston told the Cabinet War Committee on 1 March 1944 that the form of the clause concerning the manner of appointment of the Army Commander was his suggestion. He said that he had considered it desirable to avoid any implication that the appointment of the Army Commander could be made otherwise than by the Canadian Government; at the same time, since so many British troops would now be included in the Army, it had seemed to him only proper that the appointment should be made after consultation with the United Kingdom.

The War Office proposals were immediately accepted.<sup>13</sup> The obvious Canadian candidate for the command of the Army was Lieut.-General H. D. G. Crerar, then commanding the 1st Canadian Corps in Italy. The British authorities agreed to this appointment, subject to a favourable report being received upon his performance in Italy. There were no major operations during his command there, and in point of fact no formal report was made, though the matter was discussed between Generals Brooke and Montgomery.<sup>14</sup> On 1 March 1944 the

Cabinet War Committee in Ottawa was told that General Crerar was being appointed to command the First Canadian Army, with the concurrence of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and of General Montgomery. He formally took command of the Army on 20 March.

In practice the proportion of British staff officers appointed to Headquarters

First Canadian Army never approached the 50 per cent provided in the Anglo-Canadian agreement. No British formation came under the command of Canadian Army Headquarters until after it had moved to France, and this had some effect on the question. The staff list of H.Q. First Canadian Army for 19 July 1944 shows 28 British officers out of a total of 200 listed—that is, 14 per cent.

There were other changes besides the change of Army Commanders. Lieut. General Sansom, who was in hospital, was succeeded in the command of the 2nd Corps by Major-General G. G. Simonds, who had commanded the 1st Division with notable skill in Sicily and Southern Italy and subsequently commanded the 5th Armoured Division after its arrival in that theatre. Simonds now became a Lieutenant General. The 2nd Infantry Division was taken over by Major-General Charles Foulkes when Major-General E. L. M. Burns went to Italy to succeed General Simonds in command of the 5th Division. Major-General F. F. Worthington was succeeded in the command of the 4th Armoured Division by a much younger officer, Major-General George Kitching, aged 33, who had been the 1st Division's senior General Staff Officer in Sicily and later commanded the 5th Division's armoured brigade for a short time.

Other officers who had distinguished themselves in the Mediterranean campaign were brought back to give the benefit of their experience to the Canadian formations still in England. Brigadier R. A. Wyman, who had commanded the 1st Armoured Brigade in Sicily and Italy, took over the 2nd for the Normandy landings; Lt.-Col. E. L. Booth, who had commanded the 12th Armoured Regiment (Three Rivers Regiment), and Lt.-Col. J. C. Jefferson, who had commanded The Loyal Edmonton Regiment in the Mediterranean fighting, were promoted to command respectively the armoured and infantry brigades of the 4th Armoured Division. Brigadier A. B. Matthews, Commander Royal Artillery of the 1st Division, became Commander Corps Royal Artillery in the 2nd Corps, and Lt.-Col. Geoffrey Walsh, the 1st Division's Commanding Royal Engineer, became Chief Engineer of the 2nd Corps.

Among senior staff officers, Brigadier C. C. Mann became General Crerar's Chief of Staff at Army Headquarters (the appointment now ceased to be termed Brigadier General Staff). The senior administrative staff appointment at Army Headquarters (Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General) continued to be held by Brigadier A. E. Walford. Brigadier N. E. Rodger, a former Personal Assistant to General McNaughton and more recently an infantry brigade commander, became Chief of Staff to General Simonds at H.Q. 2nd Corps. Brigadier H. V. D. Laing was and remained D.A. & Q.M.G. 2nd Corps.<sup>15</sup>

It is evident from the examples that have been given—and the list could be lengthened—that sending the 1st Canadian Division to the Mediterranean for Operation "Husky" had returned a considerable dividend. It gave the First Canadian Army a proportion of battle-experienced senior officers with which to face the North-West Europe campaign. Their experience in the south had not been long, but it was very much better than none at all, and a great asset. And the action taken in the spring of 1943 had resulted in Canadian soldiers having a share, active and distinguished if not very large, in the fight against Germany for

a good eleven months before the Normandy D Day. All this was good. Not so much can be said for the later decision, taken on the Canadian Government's strong urging, to send the 1st Corps to the Mediterranean (Operation "Timberwolf"). As has been explained in Volume II, the fact that the units had to be sent without equipment kept them inactive in Italy for months. The Corps finally took over a sector of the line at the end of January, but the line was static. Not until 23 May 1944 did the 1st Corps deliver a major attack as a Corps—the onslaught on the Adolf Hitler Line. By that time the Normandy assault was only a fortnight away; the Canadian Government, as we shall see, had already gone on record as favouring the reunion of its troops under a single command; and the Canadians in Italy were already looking to such a reunion with hopeful anticipation. It did not take place until 1945. Viewed in the light of hindsight, "Timberwolf" cannot be termed a profitable venture.

### The Canadian Assault Force

Although the expectation, so long entertained, that the First Canadian Army would not be used in the actual landings on the coast of France, proved in the event to be accurate, a considerable number of Canadian troops did take part in the assault. This was arranged nearly a year in advance. On 3 July 1943 General McNaughton informed General Crerar, commanding 1st Canadian Corps, that the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, which had been commanded since September 1942 by Major-General R. F. L. Keller, had been selected for assault training with a view to taking part in the Overlord assault. He added that the plan for this operation would not be available "for some months", and told the Corps Commander that it was intended that his headquarters should be responsible for the Division's "training and operations".<sup>16</sup>

It thus happened that the first stages of the 3rd Division's preparation for the assault were conducted under Crerar's direction, and had things gone differently the 1st Canadian Corps might well have been one of the assault corps in Operation "Overlord". However, when that Corps was moved from the United Kingdom to the Mediterranean in October, the 3rd Division was deprived of its guidance. As an interim measure the Division was taken directly under the command of Headquarters First Canadian Army; at the same time the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, which was to be associated with the Division in the assault, came under its command. It was now proposed that the Canadian assault formations should form part of the 1st British Corps; and on 12 November 1943 General McNaughton issued an order providing that the 3rd Division as then constituted, which included the 2nd Armoured Brigade, would "be associated with 1 Brit Corps for operational direction and the training related thereto for the purpose of Operation Overlord only" from 1 December. The Division was to remain under First Canadian Army for all other purposes. This period of "association" ended on 30 January 1944, when the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was placed under the actual command of the 1st British Corps for further training, operational planning and operations.<sup>17</sup> This command relationship lasted until after the Division had carried out its mission in the Normandy assault.



The training of the Canadian assault formations was carried out in four phases,<sup>18</sup> which can be described only in outline.

The initial phase was preliminary training. It involved, first, a study of the principles of combined operations and, secondly, practice in embarkation and disembarkation, scaling obstacles, clearing minefields, etc. These activities were carried on during the summer of 1943 at the units' stations in southern England. Mock-up landing craft were built on parade grounds and embarking and disembarking were practised with men and vehicles. During August division and brigade staffs were engaged on a preliminary planning exercise known as "Dipper".<sup>19</sup> In the last week of July the 1st Canadian Corps held a Combined Operations Study Period which ended with a summary by General Crerar. He emphasized the need for overpowering fire support to get the assault on to the beach and through the defences, and suggested that the required weight of fire might be provided by using four successive flights of craft approaching the beaches, each of the four (ending with the personnel craft carrying the infantry) being capable of laying a pattern of fire on the beaches at varying distances from the shore. The flights would engage the beach defences as they came within range, those with the longer-range guns allowing those with shorter-range weapons to pass through them so that a crescendo of fire would be laid on the beaches by the time the flight carrying the assault troops landed.<sup>20</sup> On D Day no attempt was made to pass the flights through one another, this presumably being too complicated from a naval standpoint; instead, the flights carrying the longer-range weapons fired from the rear or from the flanks of the craft carrying the troops. In other respects the D Day plan resembled Crerar's. The general theme of both, that of the heaviest possible fire support, of course reflected the basic lesson drawn from the Dieppe operation (Volume I, Chapter XII).

The second phase was basic training in the mechanics of assault landings. This was carried out by brigade groups during August and September 1943 at the Combined Training Centres at Inveraray and Castle Toward in Scotland. Here the battalions did exercises involving actual assault landings supported by artillery fired from landing craft and by smoke-laying aircraft. This training advanced in the course of a fortnight or so from company training with dummy landing craft up to full-scale brigade exercises. It was not, of course, limited to the infantry, but was also carried out by the artillery, the engineers and the other arms and services, each practising its own function.<sup>21</sup>

The third stage, assault training by brigade groups, was marked by increased realism. It was carried out in the Portsmouth area in conjunction with Force "J", the naval assault force which, as we have seen, was in fact the Dieppe force which had been kept in being as a laboratory in combined operations, and which was to remain associated with the 3rd Canadian Division until after the assault.\* The 7th Infantry Brigade began this phase of training early in September 1943, while the 8th and 9th Brigades were still completing the second phase in Scotland. That month Divisional Headquarters was set up at the Balmer Lawn Hotel,

\*Force "J" was commanded during the early part of this training by Commodore J. Hughes-Hallett, who had been Naval Force Commander at Dieppe. When Hughes-Hallett left late in 1943 to take an appointment in the Home Fleet, Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian succeeded him. In February 1944 Commodore G. N. Oliver took over Force "J" and commanded it in the assault.

Brockenhurst, in the New Forest (Hampshire). In the following April it moved a short distance to Otterbourne, near Winchester.<sup>22</sup>

A significant landmark, not only in the training of the 3rd Canadian Division but also in the development of the assault tactics for the operation as a whole, was Exercise "Pirate", referred to in the previous chapter, which was carried out at Studland Bay, Dorset, on 16-19 October 1943. In this exercise the assault was delivered by the 7th Brigade, with the build-up phase being enacted by the remainder of the Division and its attached troops. The execution of the exercise was far from perfect. Apart from the fact that bad weather compelled the abandonment of the intended Turn Round Control and Build-up phase entirely, and also led to cancellation of the R.A.F. bomber effort, the actual shooting by the 3rd Division's artillery while seaborne did not turn out well, the fire falling several hundred yards short in the opening stages. This was the less surprising as the guns used were not self-propelled weapons on tank chassis but wheeled guns lashed to the decks of the tank landing craft.<sup>23</sup>

The fourth and final phase, collective divisional assault training, was carried out concurrently with later exercises on the brigade group level. It may be said to have begun about 30 January 1944, for it was at this time that the Division began its detailed planning; a divisional planning staff spent nearly a month in London on this task.<sup>24</sup> The relationship between these "collective" exercises and the final divisional plan for Operation "Neptune" is very close. The exercises were, in fact, rehearsals carried out on the basis of the actual plan for the landing. One of particular importance was "Trousers", carried out at Slapton Sands, Devon, on 12 April and designed to exercise Force "J" in the passage, approach and assault landing and the Division in signal communications and fire support in the assault.<sup>25</sup>

The only exercise approximating to a complete rehearsal of the invasion as a whole was "Fabius", held early in May. This was divided into six parts, numbered from "Fabius I" to "Fabius VI", of which only "Fabius III" concerned the Canadian force. "Fabius I" was for Naval Force "O" with its U.S. army formations, which were to land at Slapton Sands. "Fabius II", "Fabius III" and "Fabius IV" were for the three British naval assault forces, "G", "J" and "S", with their army counterparts, including the 3rd Canadian Division; these landings took place east of Portsmouth, at Hayling Island, Bracklesham Bay and Littlehampton respectively. (The remaining assault force, "U", the American force intended for the most westerly of the Normandy beaches, held its final rehearsal, Exercise "Tiger", separately at the end of April.) "Fabius V" and "Fabius VI" exercised the machinery for loading personnel and equipment in the Thames Estuary and East Coast ports and preparing the invasion "build-up" in the Southampton-Portsmouth area. Since most of the landings were made in inhabited areas, no actual firing was done except in "Fabius I".<sup>26</sup>

After a postponement of 24 hours caused by heavy seas, the 3rd Canadian Division began its landing at Bracklesham Bay on 4 May. Conditions were still unfavourable, however, and the naval authorities were forced to put a stop to disembarkation before the exercise was completed.<sup>27</sup> In spite of this, "Fabius"

produced valuable results, particularly in the practice it afforded in the marshalling, embarkation and sailing of the assault forces.

During this long process of training the 2nd Armoured Brigade worked closely with the Division and the individual units with which the armoured regiments were to cooperate. Equipment posed special problems for the tankmen. The brigade was to use Sherman tanks in the operation, but as late as 23 January 1944 it possessed only 10 of these. The changeover from the Rams and Valentines which were used for training was not in fact quite complete until the end of May, and many of the new tanks received required modification. The units' fitters and the brigade Electrical and Mechanical Engineers had to put in "Trojan work" to ensure that the regiments would go into action with battleworthy equipment.<sup>28</sup>

Two of the armoured regiments—the 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars) and the 10th (The Fort Garry Horse), which were to lead the assault on the 7th and 8th Brigade beaches respectively—were equipped with amphibious tanks, one squadron of each regiment however retaining the normal Shermans. The "D.D." (Duplex Drive) tank was an ordinary Sherman equipped with flotation gear. The tank, floated by means of a thick canvas screen which could be raised, was pushed through the water by two propellers. While thus swimming it could not fire its guns. On landing the struts supporting the screen were broken and the tank became an almost normal land tank.<sup>29</sup> Until after the assault, the D.D. tank was a very closely guarded secret. The regiments' training with it took place at Great Yarmouth under the supervision of the 79th British Armoured Division, the formation which had been set up to provide "special armour" of various types for the 21st Army Group.<sup>30</sup>

The divisional artillery had rather similar problems. In addition to its own three field regiments, the 12th, 13th and 14th, the Division had been given the 19th Canadian Army Field Regiment, so that each assaulting brigade could be supported by two regiments. All were equipped for the operation with American 105-millimetre self-propelled guns ("Priests"). These guns began to arrive at the end of September 1943.<sup>31</sup> The question of whether or not fire by seaborne army artillery was likely to be a really useful contribution to the assault seems to have remained open until Exercise "Savvy", carried out on 12 February 1944. Many distinguished observers attended this exercise, among them King George VI and General Montgomery. The firing was considered "a great success", no small relief to the divisional artillery staff, which had suspended detailed planning pending the results of the exercise.<sup>32</sup>

There were many visitors. ("Everyone seems to want to look at us", remarked one diarist.)<sup>33</sup> On 28 February General Montgomery went round the 3rd Canadian Division, travelling some 50 miles in the course of his inspection. On 25 April the King honoured the Division, spending several hours with the units. On 13 May the Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower, paid a visit; instructions had been issued in advance that there would be no rehearsals for the brigade parades held in his honour. The Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. King, was at Divisional Headquarters informally on 18 May, but did not visit units.<sup>34</sup>

General Crerar had suggested that Mr. King be given a chance to see something of Exercise "Fabius", but this was discouraged by General Montgomery, who preferred "to have no 'non-professional' people about".<sup>35</sup>

As may be imagined, this month of May 1944 was one of extreme activity and tension for the units of the assault force. On 15 May Commanding Officers and staff officers were briefed by General Keller at Divisional Headquarters at Cranbury House, Otterbourne. Similar briefings at brigade headquarters for commanders on lower levels followed a week later.<sup>36</sup> On 26 May all camps in the teeming concentration areas close to the South Coast were sealed; no one could now get in or out without a special pass. On that day all officers of the assault force were briefed in closely guarded rooms containing maps, aerial photographs and plaster and sand models. But the maps bore bogus names and coordinates; Caen was "Poland", Courseulles "Alba", and so on.<sup>37</sup> Only after embarkation, when sealed packages of maps were opened, were junior officers and men told their actual objectives.<sup>38</sup>

In the last days of May the men of the Canadian infantry units began moving into the Marshalling Areas adjacent to the ports, from which they were to be called forward for actual embarkation. Even the most skeptical now began to feel that this was just not another exercise. "At long last", the diarist of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles wrote on 31 May, "this looks like the real thing." On 1 June the Canadians began embarking at Southampton and Stokes Bay, and the process went on until the 4th.

With action obviously approaching, there were undoubtedly some individuals who shrank from the formidable prospect of attacking the well-advertised and redoubtable Atlantic Wall. ("Channel fever" was the contemporary label of their complaint.) Every man in the Allied assault force had to overcome deep unspoken fears within himself as D Day drew slowly nearer. But observers who watched these Canadian soldiers who had waited for action through the long years in Britain recorded that the approach of the climax did not find them wanting. Commodore Oliver, the commander of Force "J", later wrote in his report, "During embarkation and prior to sailing the high spirits of the soldiers of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division were outstanding; their enthusiasm infused itself throughout the Force."<sup>39</sup> In such a mood did the division approach its first battle.

### First Canadian Army Prepares for Action

Training for an assault landing is an exact task. The target area is normally well known and closely studied. A detailed plan is made on this basis, and every unit and sub-unit, and to a certain extent every individual, has a definite task which is thoroughly rehearsed. This was the process followed with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division and the troops attached to it in Operation "Neptune". For the formations of the First Canadian Army, whose task as we have seen was to be exploitation from an established bridgehead, the situation was quite different.\* No one could foretell the circumstances in which they would be

\*For a general narrative of the training of the Canadian Army Overseas, see *Six Years of War*, Chap. VIII.

committed to the battle, and there was no basis on which they could make a detailed plan. They might study and plan for hypothetical future operations, but there was no certainty that they would ever be called upon to carry out these operations, at least in the form in which they were studied. And in fact the operations of the First Canadian Army, when at length its headquarters took over a sector of the front in Normandy, were to be rather different from anything specifically anticipated during the planning period.

The basis for the Army's planning was directives received from H.Q. 21st Army Group. The first of these, dated 1 March 1944, defined its tasks as follows:

2. The role of First Canadian Army will be to land after Second British Army over the beaches between Maynooth [Asnelles] and Wigmore [Ouistreham] and subsequently to assume responsibility for the left-hand sector of the bridgehead. For this purpose one corps (with appropriate increment of Army troops) from Second British Army will come under your command after you arrive in the bridgehead area. As operations permit, you may expect 3 Canadian Division and 2 Canadian Armoured Brigade to revert to your command after you arrive.

3. After taking over the left-hand Sector of the bridgehead it is probable that First Canadian Army will be required to advance Eastwards and to capture the ports of Whitstable [Le Havre] and Clarence [Rouen].

The Army's immediate prescribed tasks were the preparation of "build-up priority tables, staff studies, and administrative instructions" for the movement to the Continent of Headquarters First Canadian Army, Army Troops and the 2nd Canadian Corps less the 3rd Canadian Division; along with a study of the problem of capturing the ports of Le Havre and Rouen, to be known as Operation "Axehead".

Army Headquarters was told that in studying "Axehead" it should consider the possible employment of a "seaborne lift" equivalent to one Naval Assault Force (that is, a force capable of lifting one army division), one airborne division, and D.D. tanks. It was pointed out that the crossing of the Rivers Dives, Touques, and Risle, and of the River Seine below Rouen, was a highly specialized engineer operation for which it might be assumed that specially trained engineers from G.H.Q. Troops would be available. The Canadian headquarters was warned, however, that engineer units under its command should "undergo special training as early as possible". Headquarters 21st Army Group sent to First Canadian Army on 20 March a more detailed appreciation of Operation "Axehead" containing information to assist in planning.\*

The most serious aspect of the prospect thus opened was the contemplated assault across the Seine in the face of opposition. This river in the lower part of its course is a formidable obstacle, and Army Headquarters proceeded to prescribe a careful programme of planning and training accordingly. In the latter part of March the 1st Canadian Army Troops Engineers began training in the crossing of wide tidal rivers at Goole, in Yorkshire, near the head of the Humber estuary. The 1st Canadian Army Troops Engineers comprised three field companies and one

\*General Crerar sent his own headquarters' detailed appreciation of "Axehead" to General Montgomery on 12 April. It is of interest that his covering letter questioned the soundness of an assumption made in the Army Group appreciation, that "most of the mobile divisions at the enemy's disposal" were likely to have been drawn away from the sector by the time the operation took place.

field park company, and an additional field company was attached from the 2nd Army Troops Engineers.<sup>40</sup> Subsequently the scope of this training was extended to include all arms. On 11 April Headquarters First Canadian Army issued a directive to the 2nd Canadian Corps requiring it to conduct an exercise employing the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division in conjunction with specially trained engineers. It was to practise an infantry brigade headquarters in planning a brigade assault over a tidal estuary, and an infantry battalion group of the same brigade in carrying out its part in the plan. It was explained that engineer and other limitations precluded assaulting on more than a front of one battalion. However, if the Corps Commander desired, he might exercise two brigade headquarters in planning, and a succession of infantry battalion groups in the assault role.<sup>41</sup>

The exercise, christened "Kate" ("Crossing a tidal estuary"), began on 26 April on the River Trent, which runs into the Humber just below Goole; and training was still going on there late in May. Both the 4th and 5th Infantry Brigades practised the assault and build-up, the battalions crossing the river in stormboats propelled by outboard motors. The engineers erected rafts on the spot and used them to move heavy equipment across the estuary. Amphibious vehicles, including tracked "Buffaloes", were tested in the course of the training.<sup>42</sup>

Similar but less intense training was given to the 4th Armoured Division. Beginning late in April, the battalions of its infantry brigade (the 10th) trained with the divisional engineers on the River Medway in Kent on assault boating and bridge crossing.<sup>43</sup> Thus before D Day the Canadian units likely to be required to make the Seine assault had had considerable specialized training; and the Army Troops Engineers and other sappers had built up a fund of experience concerning the engineer aspects of such operations.

In addition to these special activities, the Canadian formations laboured at the general perfecting of their training, particularly emphasizing the operations which might be involved in a breakout from a bridgehead. Thus between 1 and 9 April the 2nd Division carried out Exercise "Step", a full-scale exercise designed to practise commanders and staffs in handling troops during a breakout operation, the advance of a division on a single "thrust line", the crossing of a river and an assault using live ammunition. One field regiment and two medium regiments of artillery were in support. Large elements of the 4th Armoured Division took part.<sup>44</sup> The 4th Division devoted these final weeks to hard general training, highlights of which were a cross-country route march of 25 miles carried out by each unit; joint infantry-tank training by the infantry and armoured units; street fighting practised by the infantry units in Eastbourne; and on 18 May an exercise at Alfriston Artillery Ranges in which the divisional artillery plus a regiment from the 2nd Division fired a barrage over the heads of the battalions of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>45</sup>

Special exercises were held for formation and unit headquarters. Notable among these was Exercise "Last", a 2nd Corps signals exercise held in mid-April. It was designed to practise headquarters down to and including the unit level in passing information and conducting the operations involved in breaking out of a bridgehead. From 5 to 11 May the headquarters of First Canadian Army and

No. 84 Group R.A.F. held Exercise "Flit" at Box Hill, near Dorking. It was designed to practise Army Headquarters and H.Q. No. 84 Group in setting up and operating in an integrated manner in the field.<sup>46</sup>

Mention of 84 Group brings up the vital question of the arrangements for air support for the First Canadian Army. These took the form of provision of a composite tactical R.A.F. group of the sort first tested in the United Kingdom in Exercise "Spartan" (Volume I, pages 250-51). This group, composed entirely of fighter-type aircraft including fighter-bombers and reconnaissance machines, was not under the Army Commander, but its headquarters was set up alongside Army Headquarters and moved with it, and the group's normal function was to provide the tactical air support which the Army required.

The first R.A.F. tactical group formed for Operation "Overlord" was No. 83. It included 15 squadrons of the Royal Canadian Air Force, about half the group's total strength; its headquarters, however, was entirely British. To Canadians it seemed appropriate that it should be assigned to support the First Canadian Army, and (although in the first instance it was decided that it should be affiliated to the Second British Army and merely give the Canadian Army facilities for training when possible), after Canadian representations it was assigned to the First Canadian Army in June 1943.<sup>47</sup> It worked with that Army until January 1944, after General McNaughton's departure, when a change took place. On 26 January Air Chief Marshal Sir T. Leigh-Mallory, Commander-in-Chief Allied Expeditionary Air Force, told a conference that No. 83 Group would now support the Second British Army "and not the 1st Canadian Army, as in the original plan".<sup>48</sup> The reasons for this decision-which had the regrettable effect of separating the R.C.A.F. component in North-West Europe from the Canadian Army-are not stated; but it seems likely that it was considered desirable that the older and presumably better-trained group should support the army which was conducting the assault. In consequence No. 84 Group, which contained no R.C.A.F. squadrons, became affiliated with First Canadian Army and supported it most effectively throughout its campaign.\* Leigh-Mallory had held out the hope that the R.C.A.F. reconnaissance wing (three squadrons) would be transferred from 83 to 84 Group,<sup>49</sup> but this was evidently found impracticable. No. 84 Group was commanded in the first period of the association by Air Vice-Marshal L. O. Brown, and from 10 November 1944 by Air Vice-Marshal E. C. Hudleston. It is worth noting that an R.C.A.F. intercommunication flight was provided for H.Q. First Canadian Army at General Crerar's special request.<sup>50</sup>

### The Responsibilities of the Canadian Army Commander

Something must be said of the position of the First Canadian Army with respect to other Commonwealth forces, and of the national responsibilities of its commander. These matters, the result of constitutional developments since the

\*Nos. 83 and 84 Groups, along with No. 2 (Bomber) Group, made up the bulk of the R.A.F.'s 2nd Tactical Air Force, commanded by Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham. The Headquarters of the 2nd T.A.F. was associated with that of the 21st Army Group in the same manner in which the tactical groups were associated with the two armies.

First World War, received considerable attention during the months before D Day. We have already seen (above, pages 32-3) that the First Canadian Army was formally placed "in combination with"—i.e., under the command of—the 21st Army Group in January 1944.

It had been General McNaughton's custom as Army Commander to submit to the Canadian Government formal reports concerning the feasibility of operations in which Canadian troops were to take part. He had done this before the Dieppe raid, and also before the invasion of Sicily.\* This procedure had pleased the Government, which desired it to be applied in the case of Operation "Overlord" also. Early in 1944 cables to C.M.H.Q. from the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Ralston) and the Chief of the General Staff (Lieut.-General J. C. Murchie) indicated a desire for information concerning the Canadian share in operational planning and the facts available concerning future plans. On 21 February the Minister cabled General Stuart.<sup>51</sup>

... Like you I am looking forward to the time when the Army Commander and the Chief of Staff [presumably of C.M.H.Q.] will be submitting to the Canadian Government reports regarding the feasibility of the operation proposed similar to McNaughton's report on Sicily. It would be useful if we could know to what extent the Army Commander or the Chief of Staff has had an opportunity to consider and comment on the tactical plans which Canadians are expected to carry out before they are finalized so as to influence the tactical dispositions and the support and supply arrangements, insofar as they affect Canadian participation and ensure reasonable prospects of success.

I am sure that I am the last one to raise an abstract question. The reason for it is the necessity for being in a position to assure Canadian homes that Canadian staff and commanders are assured of timely opportunity to get all the information they need so as to be in a position to exercise their judgment for the benefit of the Canadian troops for whom they are responsible to Canada.

When Stuart referred this requirement to General Crerar, the latter took the view that the Government's approval for Canadian formations' participation in the forthcoming operations had been implied, if not formally expressed, in the action taken to place the First Canadian Army in combination with the 21st Army Group. He pointed out that the War Office, SHAEF and Headquarters 21st Army Group certainly held this view, "as the detailed planning of the last few months could only have been undertaken on that basis". Crerar went on to say that he had confidence in General Montgomery, "under whose direction the Allied Armies will launch the invasion of the Continent", and added that the plans and preparations for the operation had been soundly conceived and carefully made.<sup>52</sup>

Ralston replied asking for something more specific.<sup>53</sup> He wrote, "The Canadian Government has responsibilities to the people of Canada and before troops are embarked on the proposed operation the Canadian Government would expect a report by the Army Commander advising whether or not he is satisfied that the tasks allotted are feasible operations of war and whether in his opinion the plans formulated for Canadian formations with the resources which are to be made available can be carried out with reasonable prospects of success. This

\*Volumes I, page 333, and II, page 26.



course would seem to be in keeping with and part of the responsibilities of the Army Commander to the Canadian Government which are fully recognized by our Allies. It would not appear that there should be any undesirable reactions since this is a matter wholly between the Army Commander and the Canadian Government." With this renewed request before him, Crerar, after asking and receiving from the 3rd Canadian Division the detail of its assault plans, sent the Chief of Staff C.M.H.Q., for transmission to the Government, the following statement.<sup>54</sup>

I am satisfied that the tasks allotted the First Canadian Army, including the 3 Canadian Infantry Division and 2 Canadian Armoured Brigade, in the forthcoming invasion of enemy occupied Europe, are feasible operations of war and that the plans formulated for these Canadian formations, with resources available, are capable of being carried out with reasonable prospects of success.

On 1 May 1944 General Stuart cabled the Minister of National Defence suggesting that official instructions should now be sent to the Army Commander, and that the Army Commander and himself should see the instructions in draft form before they were formally signed. He added, "Crerar and I consider that the following expressed as desires of the government would strengthen our hands. The first being that except in cases of emergency the government would like Canadian formations to work together under First Cdn Army. The second being that when an armistice with Germany has been signed that [*sic*] the Cdn formations in Western and Southern Europe should be united under First Cdn Army"<sup>55</sup>

Instructions were drafted and forwarded for comment overseas accordingly. After considerable cabled discussions<sup>56</sup> the amended instructions were approved by the Cabinet War Committee on 24 May. During the discussion on that date the Prime Minister reported to the Committee that while in England he had had a discussion with General Montgomery and had assured him that although the Government felt it desirable that Canadians should serve together no "political" considerations of this sort would, ever be permitted to interfere with military operations.

The instructions to General Crerar are printed as Appendix "A" to this volume. It will be noted that emphasis was laid upon' the fact that the Army Commander, and the commander of any detached Canadian force, possessed the right of reference to the Canadian Government if he considered that the welfare of his troops required it. The Army Commander, it was further pointed out, possessed the right to withdraw his force from "in combination"; but such action should be taken only in extreme cases.

With respect to the reunion of the Canadian formations in Western and Southern Europe, the Government chose to make a stronger statement than Crerar and Stuart had recommended. The Cabinet War Committee agreed on 3 May that this reference should not be restricted to the post-armistice period; and the instructions as approved expressed the desire that "as soon as military considerations permit" the formations serving in the Mediterranean theatre, as well as field formations and units elsewhere, should be grouped under unified Canadian

command. General Stuart communicated this desire to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.<sup>57</sup> Mr. King, whose conversation with General Montgomery has been mentioned, was absent during the discussion on 3 May; but he was present when the instructions were finally approved on the 24th.

While these instructions were in preparation, a special matter related to them was discussed by the Canadian military authorities overseas with General Montgomery and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (General Brooke). It arose out of a relatively small incident, the visit of General Eisenhower to the 3rd Canadian Division on 13 May. No intimation of this visit to the Division, which of course was not under his operational command, was made to General Crerar until he heard of it from the Division itself that morning. The Army Commander accordingly wrote General Stuart at C.M.H.Q. remarking that under existing conditions there was "certainly a tendency on the part of SHAEF and HQ 21 Army Group" to forget the special position of Canada. Describing the incident, he wrote, "I do not propose to make an issue of this, but it would be very desirable if the proper procedure in these matters could be clarified on the political level, and explained to SHAEF, while our Prime Minister is now here. If the special position of the Commander, First Canadian Army, is not understood at the outset, I can see further and more embarrassing, incidents occurring in the future."<sup>58</sup>

As a result, after further consultation with Crerar, Stuart wrote the Chief of the Imperial General Staff on 18 May<sup>59</sup> referring to the incident and making the following comment:

As you know I am not anxious to tie any strings to Canadian Formations cooperating with those of the U.K. or the U.S. There is one string, however, that we must insist upon and that is the right of reference to the Canadian Government of our senior commander in any theatre. The corollary to this is that in the Western European theatre of operations Harry Crerar serves, in a sense, in a dual capacity. He commands the First Canadian Army and he is also the Canadian national representative in respect to all Canadian Formations and Units serving operationally in that theatre even though some may not be under his operational command. This dual role is inescapable because the Canadian Government quite rightly holds the senior Canadian Commander in any theatre responsible for all Canadian Formations and Units employed operationally in that theatre....

I hope you do not misunderstand me. As you know Harry and I and the whole Canadian Army have complete confidence in the commanders concerned. All I ask is that Harry's responsibility for all Canadians in the theatre, whether under his actual command or not, be recognized by 21 Army Group and by S.H.A.E.F. The application of this recognition would not involve any interference in the normal chain of command, it would merely call for consultation in the pre-planning stage....

On 25 May General Stuart had a long talk with General Montgomery, and subsequently he received a personal letter from Montgomery<sup>60</sup> which included the following passage:

We all want to win the war as soon as we can.

I admit the right of Crerar to refer any point to his Government, whenever he likes—through you I presume.

I admit that Crerar is responsible for the general welfare and administration of all Canadian troops in the theatre of war.

I do not admit that Crerar has any operational responsibility for Canadian troops serving temporarily in another Army.

I do not admit that Crerar has any special right to be consulted by me when making my plans for battle—apart from the normal consultation I would have with my Army Commanders at any time.

Stuart was disposed to accept this situation, but Crerar felt that the principle involved should be maintained. He added however that he had great faith in Montgomery as a military leader and did not believe that any trouble would ever arise in practice. Crerar's letter on the subject concluded, "To sum the matter up, while I consider that you will need definitely to maintain the principle of Canadian autonomy in your intended exchange of views with the CIGS, and to indicate that, in the last resort, my responsibility to the Cdn Government for the employment of all Cdn troops in 21 Army Group cannot be questioned, you would be quite safe to assure him that I have no intentions of allowing that autonomy, and that special responsibility of the Cdn Comd, to endanger a military situation, or to cause bad personal and professional relations between Monty and myself."<sup>61</sup>

On 16 June, after further detailed consultation with Crerar, Stuart again wrote the Chief of the Imperial General Staff,<sup>62</sup> referring to General Montgomery's views and the Canadians' disagreement with them. The last paragraphs of his letter ran:

4. I think that the difficulty mainly arises from Montgomery's interpretation of "operational responsibility", which to him means that Crerar would require to be consulted, and to approve, orders issued by another Commander to Canadian troops not under Crerar's command. This, of course, would be quite impossible, and the last thing Crerar would desire, or accept. At the same time, any Canadian Formation Commander, temporarily serving under other higher command, has the right to, and indeed by Government instructions must, appeal through Crerar, to C-in-C 21 Army Group if such Canadian Formation Commander considers that the demands made on him and his troops are, beyond doubt, improper, and remedial action has been refused. In this national sense, and in this very remote contingency, Crerar has an "operational responsibility" from which he will not be released by the Canadian Government.

5. Crerar does not expect to be consulted more than any other Army Commander as regards operational plans, but the Canadian Government does expect Crerar to be consulted prior to any regrouping of Canadian Formations which would result in their detachment from Canadian command. In practice, no issue should ever arise because Crerar will have an opportunity to discuss any particular Canadian issues during what Montgomery describes as "normal consultation".

6. For the reasons I have given, I feel that issues will never really arise between the C-in-C 21 Army Group and the Canadian Army Commander even though the former tends to "turn a blind eye" to the latter's separate national responsibilities. In the circumstances, therefore, I do not press that these constitutional points be now clarified with Montgomery. He has immense military responsibilities at this time and nothing should be done to "take his eye off the ball". I do consider it important, however, that there should be no misunderstanding between the War Office and C.M.H.Q., at any time, concerning the relationships and responsibilities of the Canadian Commander hence this letter.

In reply, Sir Alan Brooke thanked General Stuart for "the very practical outlook which you have taken in approaching the case" and added, "I feel quite confident that no difficulties should arise, but should you feel that at any time there was a danger of a misunderstanding please let me know at once."<sup>63</sup>

Here the matter stood, the Canadian position having been made quite clear. In accordance with his instructions from the Canadian Government, General Crerar issued formal directives to the General Officer Commanding the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and the Officer Commanding the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion,<sup>64</sup> informing them that they had the right to refer to him and through him to the Government of Canada in case of urgent need. The final paragraph of both letters (*mutatis mutandis*) ran as follows:

4. Unless you consider that the circumstances warrant otherwise, such reference will be made only when the remedial or other action deemed by you to be necessary has been represented by you to your superior Commander and he shall have failed to take appropriate action. The authority to withdraw the Canadian forces or any part thereof under command of 21 Army Group from being 'in combination' is vested in me and no action will be taken by you in such matter without my instructions.

The expectations of General Crerar and Stuart were fully realized. The right of reference thus established remained purely theoretical. No use was ever made of it during the campaign in North-West Europe.

### The Eve of D Day

The dispositions of the Canadian formations in Britain as D Day drew near were of course related to their tasks in the invasion. The 3rd Division and the 2nd Armoured Brigade remained at the south coast adjacent to the ports where they were to embark for the assault. The 4th Armoured Division stayed in the Ashdown Forest area of Sussex. The other formations of the 2nd Corps, however, made moves with the object of attracting German attention to South-East England and away from the ports opposite Normandy.\* In April Corps Headquarters and the Corps Troops moved from Sussex into Kent, and the headquarters was set up in Eastling Wood, a few miles north of Dover. The 2nd Infantry Division also moved into this area and set up its headquarters on the outskirts of Dover itself.<sup>65</sup> These formations were of course not to take part in the assault, and the manner in which they would be committed to the battle would be decided by the course of operations in the days following the landing.

Like the assault formations, those remaining under First Canadian Army had many distinguished visitors during these weeks. They too were visited by the King. The Prime Minister of Canada, during his visit to the United Kingdom in the spring, had closer contact with them than with the assault troops, and witnessed an impressive review of the 4th Division on 17 May. The Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower, made it his business to visit the Canadian formations.<sup>66</sup> So did General Montgomery, whose tour was described by General Stuart (then still commanding the Army) in a communication<sup>67</sup> sent to the Minister of National Defence on 8 March:

\*See below, page 75. On 23 May, Generals Montgomery, Crerar and Simonds met at a rendezvous outside of Dover and, accompanied by members of their staffs, proceeded to make an intentionally obvious visit to the town, inspecting the harbour, meeting the mayor and visiting Dover Castle.

Have recently completed a five day tour of Canadian troops with General Montgomery in his private train. . . . General Montgomery met and talked individually with every one of our senior commanders and staff officers. He looked over the men in groups of about 5000. Each group was formed up in hollow square with one side open in six to eight ranks depending on strength of group. The front three or four ranks were about turned and Montgomery slowly walked through the third and fourth or fourth and fifth ranks. His purpose was to look the officers and men well over and also to let them look him over. Then he mounted a jeep with loud speaker and told the parade to break ranks and come around the jeep. He then made everybody sit down and he talked to each group for about fifteen minutes. We did as many as five groups in one day and altogether we saw and he spoke to more than a hundred thousand all ranks.

Frankly I have never seen such a splendid body of men in my life and as Montgomery said to me you would not see such a body of men in any other army in the world. Their turn out was excellent but what impressed me most was the very fine type of men we now have throughout the Army. They seemed so keen, so interested and so intelligent looking. To see and study the faces of the thousands of grand young Canadians as they listened to Montgomery was the most impressive and inspiring sight I have ever witnessed. . . .

Montgomery was tremendously impressed with what he saw. He was most complimentary and he not only told the men what he thought of them but also wrote letters of appreciation to each of our formation commanders....

Such was the Canadian Army in the United Kingdom on the eve of D Day. Its time had come at last. The value of the training it had received during the long years of waiting would soon be put to the ultimate test.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GERMANS IN FRANCE, 1940-1944

(See Map 1 and Sketches 2 and 3)

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THE coast which British, Canadian and American forces assaulted in Normandy on 6 June 1944 had been in German hands for four years. For two of those years Hitler's engineers had been constructing defences which the dictator hoped would render it impregnable; and for five months before our attack this work had been pushed with particular energy.

The availability of German records makes it possible to describe the enemy's strength, defences and organization with considerable accuracy. These things are the themes of the present chapter. No attempt will be made, however, to tell the story in all its detail. Much has already been published on the subject elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Our object therefore is to summarize the essentials, adding such significant new information as is available and dwelling in detail only upon those aspects which are of special interest to the Canadian Army.

#### The Creation of the Atlantic Wall

As we noted in an earlier volume,\* the victorious German armies that came out upon the French coast in 1940 were not thinking of defence, but of attack; and it was only gradually that the changing aspect of the war forced German minds towards the concept of a fortified defensive front along the Channel. By the end of 1941, Hitler's plans "to crush Russia in a swift campaign"<sup>2</sup> had miscarried. In December of that year the United States entered the war. As the Russian front created an insatiable demand for men and materials, the West became of secondary importance to the German High Command, and was to remain so until "Overlord" burst upon them. Even after the full mobilization of German manpower and resources under Albert Speer in 1942, the German leaders were forced to supply the needs of the eastern front at the expense of the west. It was this shortage of manpower to conduct war on such a grand scale which led to the idea of a "new West Wall" along the coast of France.

Hitler first laid down the principle of extensive fortification against seaborne attacks in his Directive No. 40 of 23 March 1942.<sup>3</sup> Fears that the Allies might

\**Six Years of War*, 349.

land in France to relieve pressure on the Russians gave urgency to the work. At conferences on 2 and 13 August Hitler was reported by General of Engineers Alfred Jacob to have said that there was but one front, the other could be a defensive one only, held by small forces. Thus on the principle of "the stronger the fortress, the smaller the number of troops required",<sup>4</sup> the defences were to be such that they could be taken neither frontally nor from the rear except by an attack lasting for weeks. The successful repulse of the raid on Dieppe a few days later reinforced the belief of Hitler and at least some of the senior commanders in the effectiveness of strong fortifications in defeating a seaborne invasion on the beaches.\* Lured on perhaps by the belief that an actual attempt at invasion had been defeated, they were convinced of the need to extend defences along the whole coast.<sup>5</sup>

Field-Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, then 67 years old, was again made Commander-in-Chief West, and Commander of Army Group "D", in March 1942.<sup>6</sup> This appointment he was to retain, with the exception of a short period during the North-West Europe campaign, until March 1945. On 25 August 1942 (a week after Dieppe) he issued a basic order for the development of the Channel and Atlantic coast defences stating that the "Wall" would be built in such a way "that no attack from the air, the sea or the land shall appear to have any prospect of success. . . ."<sup>7</sup> He ordered that during the approaching winter half-year, 15,000 installations of permanent fortress-like construction were to be built, 11,000 of them on the coasts of Belgium and France as far as the Loire, 2000 on the Bay of Biscay, and 2000 on the Dutch coast. It was intended that these installations would fortify the coasts "continuously throughout their entire length after the pattern of the Upper Rhine front",<sup>8</sup> in addition to providing protection for the U-boat bases, harbours and heavy coastal batteries. Construction was to be undertaken by the Army's fortress engineers and the Organization Todt,† the latter being, in the main, responsible for it. Rundstedt required an overall construction plan for the entire coastline, showing the number of installations to the kilometre, to be submitted to him by 15 September. But it was one thing to draw the blueprint for the Atlantic Wall; the colossal task of construction was another. It was not easy to find the required quantities of labour and concrete and steel. Soon there were to be competing demands for resources from the Navy for U-boat installations and gun emplacements, and from the O.T. itself for its other tasks of repairing bomb damage, and, in 1943, for building launching-sites for the V-weapon offensive against England.<sup>10</sup>

What was the actual picture which the Germans had in their minds of the finished Atlantic Wall? "Wall" was a propaganda term. To build a continuous barrier along the 1200 miles of coastline from the Netherlands to the Spanish border would have taken unobtainable quantities of steel and concrete. What did

\*The condition of the German defences up to the Dieppe raid, and the effect of the raid on German thinking, have been dealt with in *Six Years of War*, Chaps. XI and XII.

†Named after its first head, Fritz Todt, designer of the *Autobahn* and the West Wall (Siegfried Line); a par-military organization employed as the construction arm of the *Wehrmacht*. It was, however, under the Ministry of Armament and War Production. The Reich Labour Service and impressed foreign workers made up its labour forces.<sup>9</sup>

develop, as Colonel-General von Salmuth, commander of the German Fifteenth Army, complained (with considerable exaggeration) in October 1943, was not a wall but rather a "thin, in many places fragile, length of cord with a few small knots at isolated points".<sup>11</sup> By July 1943 about 8000 installations\* had been reported completed or in various stages of construction.<sup>13</sup>

Rundstedt had comparatively little faith in fortifications, but to Hitler they were a part of his strategy of "defence by the millimetre".<sup>14</sup> He forbade retreat and demanded resistance to the last, for to his mind fortifications were made to be held, even if in holding them commanders were forced into operations as inflexible as the concrete they were to defend. In an "Estimate of the Situation on the Western Front" written in the autumn of 1943, von Rundstedt expressed the view that fixed defences were necessary as protection against heavy bombardment and thus were "indispensable and valuable for battle as well as for propaganda".<sup>15</sup> He saw disadvantages, however, in placing infantry with heavy weapons in concrete shelters. They would probably not emerge at the crucial time, and would, furthermore, be bound to them and unable to exploit the ground as the situation demanded. He remarked, "It is better to have a few installations really completed, camouflaged and therefore fit for defence than to begin many works which lie unfinished, without camouflage, and obstruct the field of fire, and which can only be of use to an enemy force that has landed, by affording it shelter." He emphasized the point that fieldworks were an indispensable supplement to the concrete structures.<sup>16</sup>

Even more rigidity was introduced into the defence system in January 1944, when twelve important coastal positions in the Netherlands and France were designated as "fortresses". This fortress policy, designed to deny large ports to the Allies, was in fact to be a considerable embarrassment to them; but it also tied down great numbers of German troops and a great deal of equipment.<sup>17</sup>

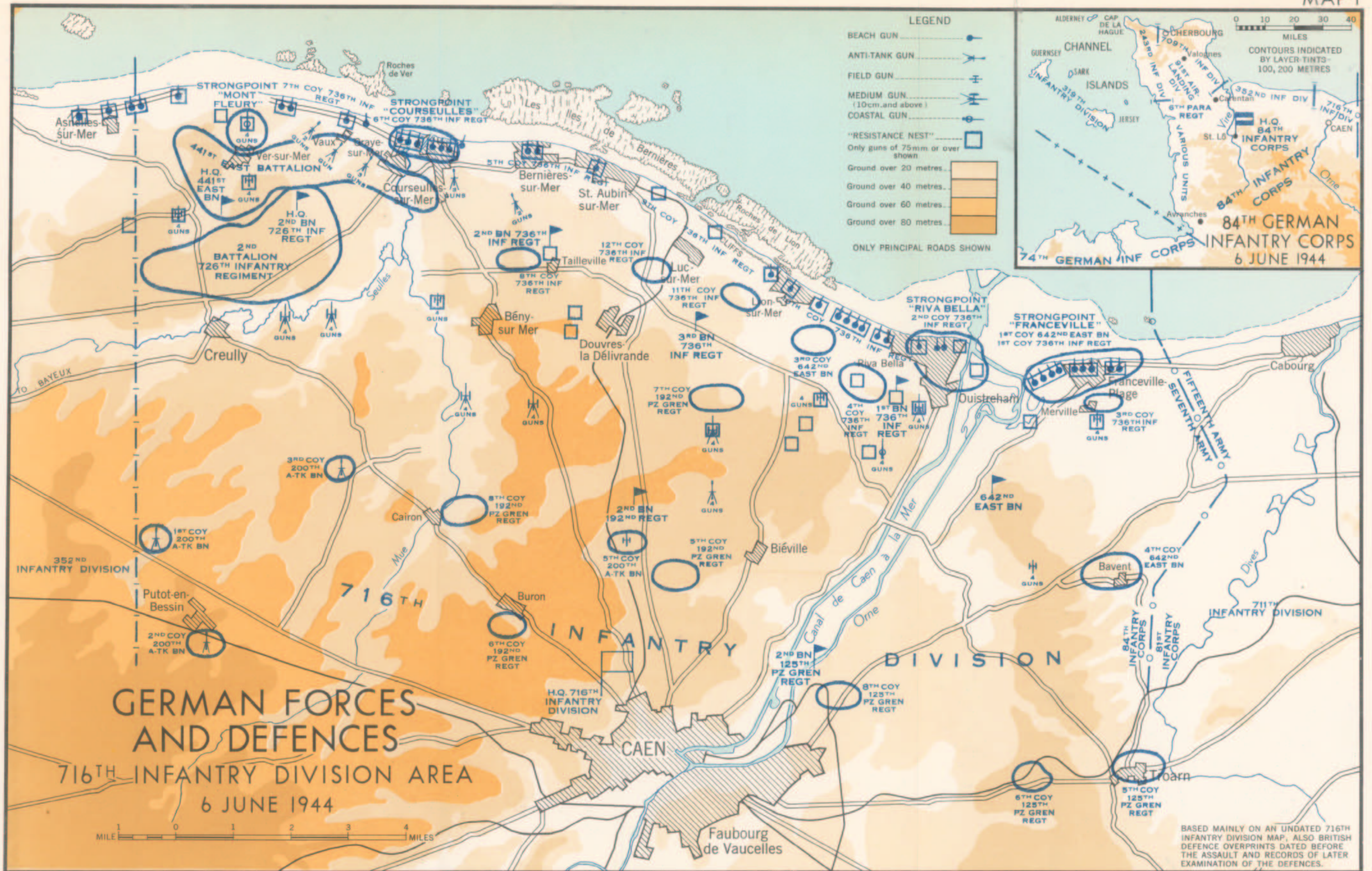
### German Forces in the West

The inadequacies of the Atlantic Wall were not offset by the calibre of the troops which were to man it. After the opening of the Russian front, occupied France and the Low Countries served as training areas for German formations. Here they would be formed, built up, quartered and trained before being shipped off to the Eastern front, and in many cases when they had been virtually destroyed the remnants would be brought back for refitting and rehabilitation. Thus the mere Order of Battle of the German Army in the West does not give an accurate picture of the forces which Rundstedt could expect to be available should he be required to defend the coasts.

\* The design of these installations depended upon their use and the number of men who were to occupy them. In general a "fortress-like" construction corresponded to 2.5 metres of steelreinforced concrete.<sup>12</sup>

† Ijmuiden, Hook of Holland, Dunkirk, Boulogne, Le Havre, Cherbourg, St. Malo, Brest, Lorient, St. Nazaire, and the northern and southern sections of the Gironde estuary. Jersey, Guernsey and Alderney were added to the list in March.





**GERMAN FORCES AND DEFENCES**  
**716TH INFANTRY DIVISION AREA**  
**6 JUNE 1944**

- LEGEND**
- BEACH GUN
  - ANTI-TANK GUN
  - FIELD GUN
  - MEDIUM GUN (10cm. and above)
  - COASTAL GUN
  - "RESISTANCE NEST"
- Only guns of 75mm or over shown
- Ground over 20 metres
  - Ground over 40 metres
  - Ground over 60 metres
  - Ground over 80 metres
- ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS SHOWN



BASED MAINLY ON AN UNDATED 716TH INFANTRY DIVISION MAP. ALSO BRITISH DEFENCE OVERPRINTS DATED BEFORE THE ASSAULT AND RECORDS OF LATER EXAMINATION OF THE DEFENCES.



DISTINGUISHED OBSERVERS AT EXERCISE "TROUSERS", 12 APRIL 1944

On the beach at Slapton Sands, Devon. From left to right in the foreground, Admiral Ramsay; Brigadier H. W. Foster; Admiral Vian; General Montgomery; and General Dempsey.



INFANTRYMEN OF THE ASSAULT FORCE IN TRAINING, 18 APRIL 1944

Firing over their comrades' heads, men of The Regina Rifle Regiment use a 2-inch mortar to lay smoke during an exercise on the Downs north of Southampton.



**THE ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY LANDS THE 9TH BRIGADE**

Men of The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders landing at Bernières-sur-Mer on the morning of D Day. Note the bicycles.



**THE BROKEN ATLANTIC WALL**

This watercolour by Capt. O. N. Fisher represents a typical German gun-position on the Normandy beaches. It is one of the casemates on the beach west of Courseulles.

When the Allies invaded North Africa in November 1942, the Germans occupied Southern France. Despite this additional commitment, the C.-in-C. West saw his forces reduced in 1943 as a result of the series of reverses which overtook the German cause. During January the Sixth Army was being destroyed at Stalingrad, and by spring the once-glorious *Panzer Armee Afrika* was nearing the end of its long retreat from El Alamein. Despite the repeated efforts of Rommel to have it brought back for the defence of Europe,<sup>18</sup> it shared the same fate of captivity as the other Axis forces in North Africa.

When the North Africa campaign was over, the next Allied move was a puzzle to Hitler and the German High Command. The forces now available to the Allies might be used for an attack anywhere along the Mediterranean coastline from the Spanish border to the Balkans, or they might join with those assembling in England for an invasion across the Channel.<sup>19</sup> Five days before our invasion of Sicily supplied the answer, Hitler had made another fateful move with Operation "Citadel", a counter-offensive on the Russian front, which absorbed his major reserves. The wisdom of the operation was questioned in the light of the new threats in the West, but Hitler overrode the advice of his staffs and ordered it to begin on 5 July.<sup>20</sup>

Rundstedt had little hope of stopping the drain on his resources. "Citadel" had taken some of his formations designated for Plan "Alarich", which had been devised in May to deal with the possible defeat of Italy. Soon it was to be necessary to give up formations\* to the Italian campaign as well. On 27 June von Rundstedt pointed out that the mobile formations which he had left were such in name only, and requested that they be re-equipped. To this the High Command replied that holding the Atlantic Wall was the way to defeat enemy landings.<sup>21</sup> In all, between October 1942 and October 1943, 36 infantry and 17 armoured and motorized divisions, including such good formations as the 7th Panzer and the S.S. Divisions "Adolf Hitler", "Das Reich" and "Totenkopf", left the West for other theatres.<sup>22</sup> This loss was not of course absolute, since some divisions had arrived or had completed their training or recuperation during that period. The German order of battle chart for 26 October 1943 shows 40 divisions in the West, in addition to nine in process of formation (see Sketch 2); but Rundstedt represented that there had been a great decline in quality during the year.

Most of the divisions involved in the continual shuffling were of the better type. Defence of the coastline proper was mainly in the hands of the static (*bodenständig*) divisions. In the autumn of 1943 there were 19 of them on the west coast.<sup>23</sup> Like the fortifications, they were to be permanently installed to bear the brunt of any invasion. Frequently their best personnel were taken in mass drafts as reinforcements for the East. In the autumn of 1943, 45,000 men were removed in this way, and in return the commanders were promised the newly called-up 18-year-olds.<sup>24</sup> In time the static divisions came to be made up of very young men ("babes in arms", the commander of the Fifteenth Army called

\*E.g., the 1st Parachute Division and the 26th Panzer Division. The effect of the Italian capitulation on German strategy has been dealt with in *The Canadians in Italy*, Chaps. VII-IX.

them),<sup>25</sup> men over thirty-five, those with third-degree frostbite, and the *Ostbataillone*. These "East Battalions" reflected the seriousness of the German manpower shortage. Formed from Red Army prisoners of war from the many ethnic groups around the Caucasus and Turkestan, they could not, for obvious reasons, be employed in the East, but in the West the disadvantage of their questionable loyalty to Germany was offset by the urgent need to reinforce the coastal defences somehow.<sup>26</sup>

The static divisions were similarly denied both the most modern equipment and priority on replacements. Their "little anti-tank guns and baby cannon"<sup>27</sup> were out of date; some of them had machine-guns of First World War type. Within the divisional artilleries of one Army there were ten different gun types, many of them captured pieces. Of the divisions under the Commander-in-Chief West, 17 had two regiments or the equivalent instead of the normal three; most had limited mobility, and there was much horse-drawn transport; six had less than two battalions of artillery; and in a number of cases the division's training was considered unsatisfactory in greater or less degree.

These depressing facts were part of the long and frank "Estimate of the Situation", already referred to, which von Rundstedt forwarded to the High Command on 28 October 1943.<sup>28</sup> Only that command, he pointed out, knew Germany's political objectives and had the resources to achieve them. However, if an invasion in the West was to be defeated, the unrealistic policy of stripping the defences must be reversed. Rundstedt argued that the sector which the Allies were most likely to choose for attack was the narrow part of the Channel, even though this was where the defences were strongest. He thought an attack here, likely to be combined with one against the French Mediterranean coast. On many portions of his long front, "defence", he said, was in fact impossible; all that could be effected was some "security", and on the Biscay and Mediterranean fronts nothing better than "a reinforced 'observation' ". The principles of defence which he laid down were these. "The coast and its fortifications must be held to the last" with a view to weakening the enemy as much as possible; but the fact must be accepted that the enemy would inevitably succeed in landing large forces, particularly in areas where the defences were weak:

Conclusions: In spite of all fortifications a "rigid defence" of the long stretch of coast is impossible for any considerable length of time.

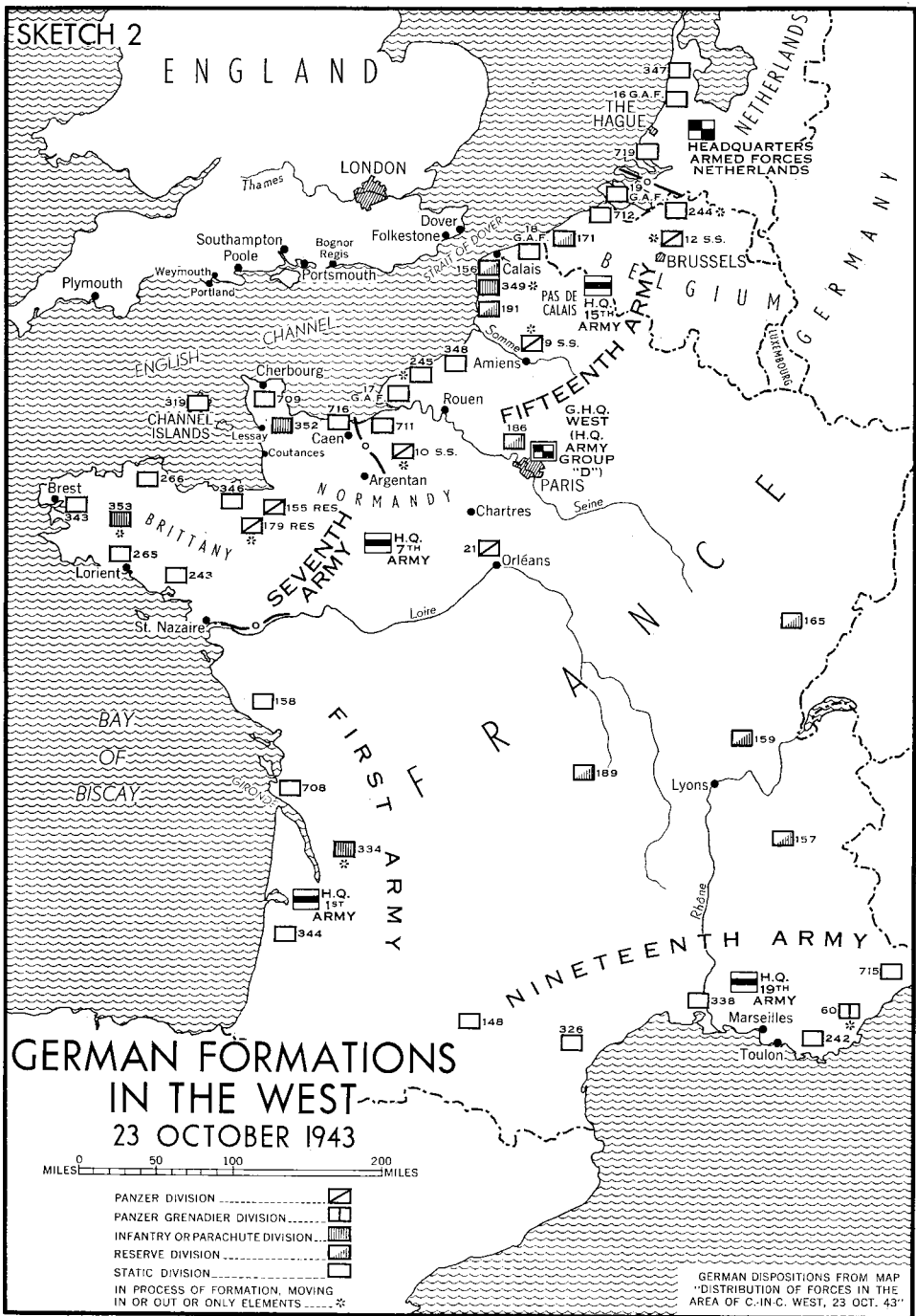
This fact must be kept in mind.

The defence therefore is based primarily on the general reserves, especially of tanks and motorized units. Without them it is impossible to hold the coasts permanently. But these reserves must not only be available in sufficient number; they must be of such quality that they can attack against the Anglo-Americans, that is, against their material, otherwise the counter-attack will not go through.

What was needed to defeat invasion was, first, a reinforcement of the defensive power of the coastal fronts by providing triangular (three-regiment) divisions with three-battalion artillery regiments (including one heavy battalion), adequate antitank armament, enough supply troops, and sufficient mobility to enable divisions manning unattacked sectors to be withdrawn thence and committed as field formations against the enemy's points of main effort. Secondly, to provide the

SKETCH 2

ENGLAND



mobile reserves which were the most essential element in his plan, Rundstedt calculated that, taking the Mediterranean coast into account, nine "completely fit armoured and motorized divisions" were required for his area of command.

This gloomy report brought some results. On 3 November 1943 Hitler issued his Directive No. 51 in which he stated, "I can no longer justify the further weakening of the West in favour of the other theatres of war. I have therefore decided to strengthen the defences in the West, particularly at places from which we shall launch our long-range war against England."<sup>29</sup> In general the strengthening was to take the form of greater fire power and mobility. Artillery for coastal protection, and the number of anti-tank guns and machine-guns for the static divisions were all to be increased. Panzer divisions were each to be brought up to a strength of 93 Mark IV tanks or assault guns. All available men from training schools, convalescent units and security groups were to be formed into operational units. The *Luftwaffe* was ordered to increase its effectiveness "to meet the changed situation". The Navy was to prepare "the strongest possible forces suitable for attacking the enemy landing fleets". The S.S., the Nazi Party's security army under Himmler, was called upon to relieve as many men as possible for combat duty.<sup>30</sup>

If the demands which it contained could have been met, the Fuhrer's directive would have meant an important change in policy. Undoubtedly the West did receive more men and materials as a result, but by this period German strength had been dissipated to such an extent that the directive is an indication of the unrealities in which Hitler was to deal increasingly in the coming year. New tanks, flame-throwers, jet aircraft and V-weapons were all to fire his imagination and lead him to make promises to his commanders which could never be fulfilled.<sup>31</sup> The suggestion that the *Luftwaffe*, in its sorry state, could "meet the changed situation" shows little appreciation at Hitler's headquarters of the weight of air power that was to support the assaulting forces. In the Army sphere, however, there were considerable improvements. By 6 June 1944 the total number of divisions in the West had been materially increased. The armoured force had reached the strength, though not the standard of quality, for which Rundstedt had asked; there were now 10 panzer or panzer grenadier divisions in the West, though four of them were not fully ready for battle. But the static divisions that would have to take the first shock of the attack were still much as they had been in October 1943, weak in strength, equipment and mobility.

### The Advent of Rommel

At this time Hitler made an important change in the system of command in the West. Field-Marshal Erwin Rommel, with the staff of Army Group 'B',\* was appointed what might be called Inspector General of Defences in the West.<sup>32</sup> Rommel, who had shown himself in Africa an energetic leader and an extremely

\*Rommel and his staff had been preparing to take over the Italian theatre (*see The Canadians in Italy*, 265, 269). In the autumn of 1943 Army Group "B" was sometimes referred to as "Army Group for Special Employment".

able tactician, enjoyed high prestige and popularity in Germany; and in the circumstances of the moment energy was necessary. Moreover, his appointment might provide a fillip to morale.

Army Group "B" was in the first instance a headquarters without troops. Its assignment was to submit proposals on the coast defences and to prepare studies for offensive operations against Allied landings; and it was to be directly under Hitler.<sup>33</sup> Rommel was at first concerned with Denmark and did not arrive in France until 14 December.<sup>34</sup> His appearance there placed him in an anomalous relationship with Rundstedt, who until this time had had under his command the German troops in the Netherlands (for tactical purposes), the Fifteenth Army from the Dutch border to west of the mouth of the Seine, the Seventh Army thence to the mouth of the Loire, the First Army on the Bay of Biscay, and the Nineteenth Army on the Mediterranean coast.<sup>35</sup> Although Rommel had direct access to Hitler, and was empowered to make recommendations, he had no authority over any of these forces. This situation was changed at the end of the year when Army Group "B" was given command of the troops in the Netherlands and the Fifteenth and Seventh Armies. Thus Rommel took operational control of the anti-invasion forces in the most threatened sector. He continued, theoretically at least, to be subordinate to Rundstedt as Commander-in-Chief West, but he did not hesitate to deal directly with Hitler.<sup>36</sup> Before the invasion began the other two Armies, the First and the Nineteenth, were formed into *Armeegruppe* "G" under Colonel-General Johannes Blaskowitz.<sup>37</sup> (An *Armeegruppe* was a formation of lower rating than a *Heeresgruppe*, the appellation of the other Army Groups in the West.)

Unlike many other senior German commanders, Rommel had felt the weight of the Allies' powerful tactical air weapon. Even before the Battle of El Alamein, it appears, he had come to the conclusion that British air superiority now limited the Germans to a more or less static defence. ". . . We could no longer rest our defence on the motorised forces used in a mobile role, since these forces were too vulnerable to air attack. We had instead to try to resist the enemy in field positions which had to be constructed for defence against the most modern weapons of war." He now felt that the same factor invalidated any plan of defence in North-West Europe which depended upon major movements by mobile reserves. Pushed to their logical conclusions, these views simply implied that the war was already lost; but it is doubtful whether Rommel as yet admitted this even to himself. With characteristic energy he set to work to reorganize the defences in accordance with the facts as he saw them, with the Atlantic Wall strengthened to the utmost and the reserves disposed close behind it ready for immediate intervention. On the last day of 1943 he reported to Hitler, "The battle for the coast will probably be over in a few hours and, if experience is any judge, the rapid intervention of forces coming up from the rear will be decisive."<sup>38</sup>

These opinions led Rommel into a fundamental conflict with von Rundstedt. The latter, with his wider responsibility, favoured the retention of the few armoured formations, when they were ready, as centrally-located reserves ready to be thrown into a powerful counter-attack at the strategically correct moment.



Both views had much to commend them. Rommel argued that the coastal divisions would not stand up to the heavy naval and air bombardment and the airborne landings that he foresaw. Furthermore, the Allied air forces would so retard the movement of the armoured formations from their central locations that they would arrive too late. Rundstedt's reply was the simple one that if the reserves were close to the coastline they might, considering Allied skill at deception and feint, be in the wrong places. There was general agreement that the danger area would be in the Fifteenth Army's sector around Calais or on either side of the Somme estuary, but Rundstedt was reluctant, in the absence of reliable intelligence, to tie down the mobile formations. Both opinions had adherents among senior commanders. In January, Hitler, with whom final decisions rested, supported Rundstedt, but later in the spring Rommel was able to convince him that Army Group "B" should have control over some of the armour.<sup>39</sup>

To offset the Atlantic Wall's deficiencies Rommel planned to make extensive use of mines and obstacles. He wanted a mined zone, five or six miles deep, along the coast, capable of being defended against assault either from the sea or from the rear. He felt that by following the British pattern at Tobruk, the Germans would be able to hold the attacker at least until his point of main effort could be determined. To carry out such a plan around the coasts of France, it is estimated, would have taken 200 million mines. Some four million were laid in the Channel sectors by 20 May 1944.<sup>40</sup>

Rommel was somewhat more original with his foreshore obstacles to impede landing craft, and his "asparagus" stakes in the fields behind the coasts to prevent aircraft from landing. The foreshore obstacles, mined at the tips (see below, page 101), were arranged in such a way that landing craft would stick on or be destroyed by them at various tide levels. Rommel realized that time was short for such preparations, but he calculated that when the Allies became aware of what was going on they would have to change their method of approach, as in fact to some extent they did (below, page 88). The obstacles were also thought to have the advantage of requiring a great expenditure of artillery fire and bombs to destroy them, and where the Allies undertook to do so might reveal where they intended to land. The air landing obstacles were ten-foot stakes, driven into the ground about one hundred feet apart. They were to be mined and connected with wire. Although extensive areas were "staked" by the end of May, the wiring and mining had not progressed so rapidly.<sup>41</sup>

### A Confusion of Commands

Hitler had ended his directive of 3 November with the words, "all authorities will guard against wasting time and energy in useless jurisdictional squabbles".<sup>42</sup> It would have been more to the point had he exerted himself to create a system of command that would have obviated such squabbles; but this he would not do. He had concentrated vast powers in his own hands; but he was afraid to concede to his commanders the powers which they needed to win his battles for him.

In February 1938 Hitler himself assumed the functions of War Minister and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The Navy he left at first to Raeder and later to Donitz, and the Air Force to the trusted but inefficient Goring. Under Himmler there grew up the especially indoctrinated party army, the S.S.<sup>43</sup> As for the Army, Hitler, increasingly distrusting the General Staff, took over the active command of it himself in December 1941.<sup>44</sup> As a result there developed a dual control of military operations. The High Command of the Army (*Oberkommando des Heeres—O.K.H.*) under the Army Chief of Staff, was responsible for the Russian front. The High Command of the Armed Forces (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht—O.K.W.*) under its Chief of Staff, Keitel, and the Chief of its Operations Staff, Jodl, conducted the war in other theatres, including the West.\* This system, militarily quite illogical, doubtless had from Hitler's viewpoint the advantage of minimizing other men's power over the military machine. Hitler, at the head of this dichotomous structure, directed all fronts, and came increasingly to demand that decisions, even in matters of detail, be referred to him. We shall note occasions when his strategical intervention was disastrous for the Germans. Nevertheless, as the records of the Fuhrer's conferences which have survived indicate, matters of strategy were not his chief or only concern. Like an obsessive neurotic he increasingly spent time and energy on minutiae to avoid the insoluble problems of general policy.<sup>46</sup> Apoplexy at the centre led to the inevitable paralysis at the periphery. All the three armed forces, the S.S., the Reich Labour Service and other para-military organizations were able to retain varying degrees of control of their forces in the field.

Field-Marshal von Rundstedt, as Commander-in-Chief West, found himself preparing against invasion with limited and inadequate authority. He was not, like Eisenhower across the Channel, a true Supreme Commander with authority over the naval and air forces as well as those of the Army. Hitler's basic directive on coast defence of March 1942 (above, page 48) had paid lip service to the principle of unity of command. It designated commanders in various theatres who were to exercise such command; in the case of the occupied West, including the Netherlands, the officer designated was the C.-in-C. West. These commanders were to have authority "over tactical headquarters of the services, the German civil authorities, as well as units and organizations outside of the armed forces that are located within their respective areas". But this authority was constricted "within the framework of coastal defence tasks". As a result, the scope of the orders which Rundstedt could issue to the air and naval commanders in his area—the commanders of the 3rd Air Fleet and of Naval Group West—was limited. In all matters which could not be represented as connected with coast defence they were independent of him and functioned on the same level of command as himself.

Certain peculiarities of German organization aggravated the effect of this

\*This division of the German war effort into the O.K.H. and O.K.W. theatres, which postwar accounts consider to be its main structural weakness, does not seem to have been defined formally in any directive by Hitler, but rather to have developed from usage, particularly when Zeitzler replaced Halder as the Army Chief of Staff in the autumn of 1942. Thereafter, as General Westphal puts it, the Army Chief of Staff was "no more than Chief of Staff on the Eastern Front".<sup>45</sup>

situation. Of the coast artillery batteries, some were manned and directed by the Navy, others by the Army; there were also some Army batteries under naval orders. There were disagreements between the two services on the position and employment of batteries. It was laid down that until after an enemy had landed the naval batteries firing at him would be controlled by naval "Sea Commandants"; only when he had come ashore would they pass to the control of army artillery commanders. At the same time, almost all the anti-aircraft artillery units serving with the Army were part of the *Luftwaffe*, as were also the parachute divisions; these units and formations were under the air force for administration and the army's control of them was not complete. The position of the *Waifen S.S.*, the S.S. formations, was similar; though under Rundstedt's tactical control, they were under Himmler in his capacity as *Reichsführer S.S.*, just as the *Luftwaffe* units were under Goring in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the air force. Each of these distinctions tended to create additional friction in the machine.

In addition to the authorities already mentioned, there were two Military Commanders (*Militarbefehlshaber*), really military governors, one in Paris, for France, and one in Brussels, for Belgium and Northern France. These, with the security troops under their command, were also independent of Rundstedt except for strictly tactical purposes. In the Netherlands a slightly different system prevailed. Here there was a Commander Armed Forces in the Netherlands, with headquarters at Hilversum, who took his orders from O.K.W. and was subordinate to the C.-in-C. West only for coast defence or in case of actual enemy attack. But the German army formations in the area were under the G.O.C. 88th Infantry Corps (termed Commander of German Troops in the Netherlands), with headquarters at Utrecht; and this officer was responsible for training, equipment and administration of army units in the area, under directives from the C.-in-C. West.

This was still not quite the whole story. The anomalous relationship of Rommel to Rundstedt has already been described. In November 1943 another headquarters was set up, on Rundstedt's initiative: Panzer Group West, located at Paris and headed by General Baron Geyr von Schweppenburg. This had the function of forming and training all armoured formations in the West and advising the C.-in-C. West on the employment of armour. Geyr von Schweppenburg, though he did not always see eye to eye with Rundstedt in everything, in general agreed with him on the question of the disposition of the armoured reserves, and was one more party to the discussion of that much-vexed problem.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, dominating the whole scene, was the remote control which Hitler insisted on exercising from his headquarters in East Prussia. This was concretely represented by the fact that four of the efficient mobile divisions on which the defence so greatly depended (1st S.S. Panzer, 12th S.S. Panzer, Panzer Lehr, and 17th S.S. Panzer Grenadier) were in the spring of 1944 placed in "O.K.W. Reserve"; that is to say, they could not be moved into action without O.K.W. authority—which meant, in practice, the personal authority of Hitler.<sup>48</sup>

All in all, the German command organization in the West in 1944 was weak, confused and chaotic. When Field-Marshal von Rundstedt told Canadian interro-

gators after the war, "As Commander-in-Chief West my only authority was to change the guard in front of my gate,"<sup>49</sup> he merely exaggerated a situation which was absurd almost to the point of insanity.

### German Knowledge of Allied Plans

Through the spring of 1944 the German commanders could do little more than speculate about the coming invasion. Their intelligence staffs were unable to penetrate the screen of Allied security and deception.

In part, this failure can be attributed to the rivalry between the various German intelligence services. Both the armed forces and the Nazi Party operated secret services abroad, the former the *Abwehr* and the latter the *Sicherheitsdienst (S.D.)*. Hostility between the two reflected the hostility between the armed forces and the Party. Very few of the higher officers whose task it was to appraise information had any great knowledge of countries outside of Germany, and they were clumsy at interpreting political situations. At Hitler's headquarters all unpleasant reports were regarded as deliberate defeatism; this frequently led the intelligence services to falsify or withhold information which was unpalatable. Much of the information which came in was from neutral capitals, but the checking of agents' reports for reliability was poor. There was always the suspicion that some brilliant scheme of deception was being played out.<sup>50</sup>

One piece of good fortune for German Intelligence, much publicized after the war, was "Operation Cicero", as a result of which a number of documents appear to have found their way from the British Embassy to the German Embassy in Ankara. By this means the Germans would seem to have obtained some information on our plans, but it is doubtful whether this went further than the code name "Overlord" and the fact that a second front was to be opened in 1944.<sup>51</sup> It may have been the "Cicero" papers which enabled Hitler to say at a conference on 20 December 1943, "There is no doubt that the attack in the West will come in the spring. There's absolutely no doubt about it."<sup>52</sup> Such knowledge was little comfort.\* Nothing was known of the time, place or weight of the invasion. Nor could secret intelligence allay German fears that the Allies might attempt feint landings in the initial stages to tie down the limited garrisons and reserves.

It was, of course, impossible for the Allies to conceal the concentration of forces in the south of England. Deception measures, designed to give the impression that the landings would be launched from south-east England towards the Pas de Calais, were however in general successful. On 20 April 1944, Foreign Armies West, the branch of O.K.H. responsible for intelligence concerning the Western Allies, stated that the confirmed picture of dispositions supported previous

\*The "Cicero" information seems to have been restricted to a very small circle in Germany, and the German documents now available throw no light upon it. Franz von Papen, the German Ambassador in Ankara, states in his memoirs, "our knowledge of Operation Overlord was limited to the name". This, if true, invalidates the statement of his subordinate Moyzisch that the thievish servant known as Cicero supplied "complete minutes of the entire conferences both at Cairo and at Teheran". It is in any case improbable that such minutes would be in the hands of the British Ambassador in Turkey.

conclusions to the effect that the main attack was likely to come in the area of the eastern Channel ports, and on 13 May it reported, "The focal point of the enemy troop movements is becoming more and more defined as the South and Southeast of the island."<sup>53</sup> This movement of troops southward led it to discount the possibility of an invasion of Norway except perhaps on a minor scale.<sup>54</sup>

The lack of information from air reconnaissance is striking. In contrast with the situation in 1942, it was only occasionally now that the *Luftwaffe* ventured across the Channel. In the Folkestone-Dover area there actually seems to have been no flight between 26 July 1943 and 24 May 1944, and in the Poole area none between 12 August 1943 and the same date. The Weymouth-Portland area was not reconnoitred between 21 January 1944 and 24 May. Other references to air reconnaissance in the reports of Foreign Armies West are few. After these flights of May 1944 it was reckoned that the Allies had available landing craft and shipping for sixteen and a half divisions.<sup>55</sup> The greatest miscalculation of German Intelligence was their version of the Allied strength and order of battle. In all, 78 divisions were thought to be available to General Eisenhower in England. This exaggerated total was made up of 56 infantry, seven airborne and 15 armoured divisions. The Allies were credited in addition with five independent infantry brigades, 14 armoured brigades and six parachute battalions.<sup>56</sup> (The force actually under Eisenhower on D Day was 37 divisions—23 infantry, 10 armoured and four airborne.)<sup>57</sup> One of the Allies' most closely guarded secrets, the artificial harbours, never became known to the Germans, who therefore continued consistently to think that a large port would be our first objective.<sup>58</sup>

Nothing illustrates the shortcomings of German Intelligence more clearly than its picture of the Canadian Army in England. On 22 March 1944 Foreign Armies West commented as follows<sup>59</sup> on the publication of General Crerar's appointment to command First Canadian Army:

The appointment of General Crerar, former Canadian Chief of the General Staff, and until now in Italy, as Commander of the First Canadian Army in England, along with an as yet unconfirmed report about concentration of the Canadian forces in England (altogether 5 infantry divisions and 3 armoured divisions) in the Wiltshire area, seem to indicate that the highly-rated [*hochbewerteten*] Canadian formations are to play a role in the forthcoming operations. Whether they will operate independently or under Army Group Montgomery cannot be foretold as yet.

At this time there were three (not eight) Canadian divisions in England; and they were not in Wiltshire. Nevertheless, until D Day the Germans continued to make the same faulty assumptions of strength. Their map of the enemy picture on 6 June 1944 shows the following Canadian divisions: the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Divisions and the 4th Armoured Division definitely identified (to this extent they were right); the 6th and 7th Infantry Divisions tentatively identified;\* two form-

\*As explained in *Six Years of War*, Chap. V, the 6th, 7th and 8th Divisions were home defence formations which never left Canada. The 7th and 8th were disbanded, and the 6th reduced, in September 1943, and this action was publicly announced. It is not inconceivable that the Germans construed the announcement as a clever deception scheme to cover the movement of these divisions overseas. It is also possible that there was deliberate sabotage in the German intelligence organization.

ations believed to be Canadian divisions (one of them armoured); while among formations whose whereabouts was unknown but which were believed to be in Britain or Northern Ireland was included a Canadian armoured division tentatively designated the 1st. Such absurdities could scarcely have been perpetrated had the Germans maintained and heeded a moderately consistent review of the Englishlanguage press; and it is a rather extraordinary fact that such a review, supplemented by information from other sources concerning the Canadian formations, exists among the captured German documents.<sup>60</sup> It is interesting also that the Germans failed to record the movement of Canadian formations into the toe of Kent, which had apparently been ordered as part of the Allied deception plan. Their D Day map showed the 2nd Infantry Division at Bognor and the 2nd Canadian Corps in East Sussex. Nevertheless, one of their few agents in England had reported the 2nd Division's headquarters in the Dover area on 22 May.<sup>61</sup>

Seven weeks after D Day, Foreign Armies West lamely confessed that it had come to the conclusion that one Canadian infantry division and two Canadian armoured divisions (!), heretofore believed to be overseas, were in fact still in Canada. It explained that the information of their movement to Britain had come from "a reliable source", their serial numbers being given; it was now assumed that in fact it was only drafts of reinforcements that had moved.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately for the reputation of Foreign Armies West, the three serial numbers which it had obtained somewhere, and believed to be those of divisions, actually belonged to the 21st Armoured Regiment (The Governor General's Foot Guards), the 4th Medium Regiment R.C.A., and the 1st Battalion of the Algonquin Regiment.

Some information did reach the enemy. Before D Day he knew the approximate locations of all the British assault formations; the 3rd British, 3rd Canadian and 50th Divisions appear on his map in the Portsmouth-Southampton area. On 22 May the Commander-in-Chief West pointed to this area as "a focal point of preparations".<sup>63</sup> But the paucity and inaccuracy of the intelligence reflected in the German reports justify the generalizations that the enemy got remarkably little accurate information out of England, and that he did not make particularly good use of what he did get.

### The Final German Preparations

From the beginning of 1944 until the day of the invasion the Germans sought desperately to strengthen their defences in both men and materials. Construction of the Atlantic Wall fell far behind schedule, particularly as the Allied air forces and the French Resistance stepped up their attacks on the French railways. Thousands of men were taken from work on the fortifications to repair bomb damage.<sup>64</sup> This chronic lack of resources also helped to prevent Rundstedt from developing a second line of defence in rear of the coast. He had ordered the construction of such a line in the previous October; but General von Salmuth immediately raised the question of where the labour was to come from; and in April 1944 Rommel ordered work on the second line discontinued.<sup>65</sup> Thus the defences on the shores of Normandy remained a coastal ribbon, entirely without

depth. Demands were continually being made for materials and explosives for the shoreline obstacles and mines, but the number of these provided was but a small part of what was considered necessary.

During the winter new divisions had been formed from training and replacement establishments and surplus air force personnel, from the remnants of formations destroyed in the East, and anywhere else the men could be found. Some few of the static divisions had their status raised to that of infantry divisions with some capacity for attack. There had been by the end of 1943 some movement of coastal divisions to strengthen the Fifteenth Army's sector and the right wing of the Seventh Army, that is along the Channel from the Dutch border to the Cherbourg Peninsula.<sup>66</sup>

It proved impossible to carry out Hitler's direction that there was to be no further movement of troops out of the West. Of the few armoured divisions which had been nurtured and were coming up to strength, the whole of the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps, comprising the 9th and 10th S.S. Panzer Divisions, was rushed from France in March 1944 to meet a crisis in the East. The 1st S.S. Panzer Division which had been intended for the West was kept on the Russian front until it suffered such heavy losses that it was brought to Belgium for rehabilitation. The Panzer Lehr Division, formed from training establishments, had to be sent to Hungary when that country was occupied in March, but when the situation there had settled in May it was able to return to France. The Hermann Goring Panzer Division which had been promised from Italy was kept there after the Anzio landings.<sup>67</sup> The West thus had but little armour at the time when Allied preparations were reaching their height.

When the Russian spring offensive subsided, the moves to the East were stopped.\* By the beginning of June the mobile reserves in the West had been built up to nine armoured divisions, three of which were still being formed, and one motorized division which was also still incomplete. The dispute about the disposition of these reserves was never settled. Hitler vacillated between the conflicting views of Rommel and Rundstedt until eventually he compromised by dividing the mobile divisions. Three (the 2nd, 21st and 116th Panzer) were given to Rommel, three were with *Armeegruppe "G"* in the South (including one directly under the First Army), and four, as we have seen, were retained in *O.K.W.* reserve.<sup>68</sup>

The final location of these armoured formations, whether under Army Group "B" or in *O.K.W.* reserve, reflected a sudden and belated interest in Normandy, rather than the Pas de Calais, as the most likely invasion area. Hitherto, the Fifteenth Army's sector had received the greater share, in both quantity and quality, of the resources available; but late in April and early in May Hitler insisted on strengthening the Seventh Army's sector in Brittany and Normandy, including the Cherbourg peninsula. The origin of this new attention to Normandy—whether it was information from "Cicero", or mere intuition, or something else—remains problematical. It is worthy of note, however, that Hitler seems to have

\*The Soviet summer offensive began only in the fourth week of June.

emphasized the menace to the Cherbourg and Brest areas rather than the beaches where the first landings actually took place.<sup>69</sup>

In April, the 12th S.S. Panzer Division (*Hitlerjugend*) was moved from Belgium to Normandy and placed some fifty miles behind the coast between Elbeuf and Argentan. The Panzer Lehr Division was in the triangle Le Mans-Chartres-Orleans. These two divisions were in *O.K.W.* reserve. The 21st Panzer Division, under Army Group "B", was in the Caen area by 6 May, with some of its units very close to the coast (below, page 67).<sup>71</sup> Thus three of the five panzer divisions ready for action in northern France were within one hundred miles of the invasion sector. The remaining two were north of the Seine, between Rouen and Doullens.<sup>72</sup>

It is interesting that early in May Rommel recommended that a good part of the armoured *O.K.W.* reserve be moved up to the Normandy-Brittany sector, and his request was refused. On 29 April the C.-in-C. West issued an order informing his subordinates of his belief that the Allied assault was now close at hand. He added emphatically, "All movements and regroupings must now end!"<sup>73</sup> Rommel nevertheless made his submission some days later. It is thus recorded in the C.-in-C. West's war diary under date of 4 May:

The Commander-in-Chief of Army Group B has reported that in his view the best way to strengthen the defence potential of Normandy and Brittany is to move up and bring under command the [following] High Command Reserves: Corps Headquarters 1st S.S. Panzer Corps, Panzer Lehr Division and 12th S.S. Panzer Division.

C.-in-C. West cannot concur in this premature commitment of the sole and best operational reserves. This in order to safeguard the possibility of moving them quickly and at all times to any threatened sector.

C.-in-C. West reports to *O.K.W.* in this sense.

In a retrospective I-told-you-so memorandum dated 3 July Rommel stated that "at the end of May, when the threat to Normandy became apparent" he asked that 12th S.S. be moved to the Coutances-Lessay area south of Cherbourg, and Panzer Lehr to an (unspecified) position where it could strike immediately against landings either in Normandy or Brittany; these requests were, he said, refused.<sup>74</sup> It seems possible that he was writing from memory and was actually referring to this incident early in May.

Along the coast or close behind it. Army Group "B" had 32 "non-mobile" divisions of varying types and quality. Of these 18 were under Fifteenth Army, 11 under Seventh Army and three in the Netherlands. Thirteen such divisions were in *Armeegruppe "G"*. In all, in the West at the beginning of June there were 58 divisions of all types. One of these was moving to Italy, and 11 were being formed or rehabilitated.<sup>75</sup> (See Sketch 3.)

As summer drew on the Germans studied in vain the pattern presented by tide tables, Allied bombing and coded radio messages to the French "underground". The area of assault remained uncertain, for the recent attention to Normandy was far from decisive. The last weekly situation report issued by the Commander-in-Chief West before D Day, dated 5 June,<sup>76</sup> was notably noncommittal:



The centre of gravity between the Scheldt and Normandy is still the most probable focal point for the attack. The possibility of extension up to the north of Brittany, including Brest, is not excluded. *Where* within this entire sector the enemy will attempt a landing is still obscure.... As yet there is no immediate prospect of the "invasion"...

On the timing of the invasion, indeed, the Germans were quite at sea. On 4 June Admiral Krancke, Commander Naval Group West, very incautiously committed himself to the opinion that Allied measures were "a well calculated mixture of bluff and preparations for invasion at a later date".<sup>77</sup> The German Naval Operations Staff, with its usual penetration, was more realistic. The messages from Britain to the French Resistance led it to conclude that invasion by 15 June "at the latest" was probable; although it added that this signalling might possibly be for training purposes.<sup>78</sup> There is some reason to believe that on or about 3 June the senior Gestapo official in Paris made strong efforts to convince the military that the invasion was actually imminent. If this is true, he failed, and it is evident that the German commanders did not regard 5-6 June as a particularly dangerous period. On invasion night Field-Marshal Rommel was at his home in Germany, on his way to see Hitler.<sup>79</sup>

It has sometimes been argued<sup>80</sup> that German weather forecasting was less efficient than the Allies', and that this contributed to our achievement of surprise on D Day. This does not seem to be true, at least in any important degree. We now have the German weather forecasts, and they do not differ significantly from our own, particularly with respect to the improvement early on 6 June which was so vital an element in our calculations (below, page 89). *Regierungsrat* Muller, Liaison Meteorologist at Rundstedt's headquarters, forecast at 5:30 p.m. on 5 June that departure flights from British airfields that night would be "on the whole possible without serious difficulties", and that both the wind and the sea in the English Channel would fall somewhat "towards morning".<sup>81</sup>

### The Defences of the Normandy Coast

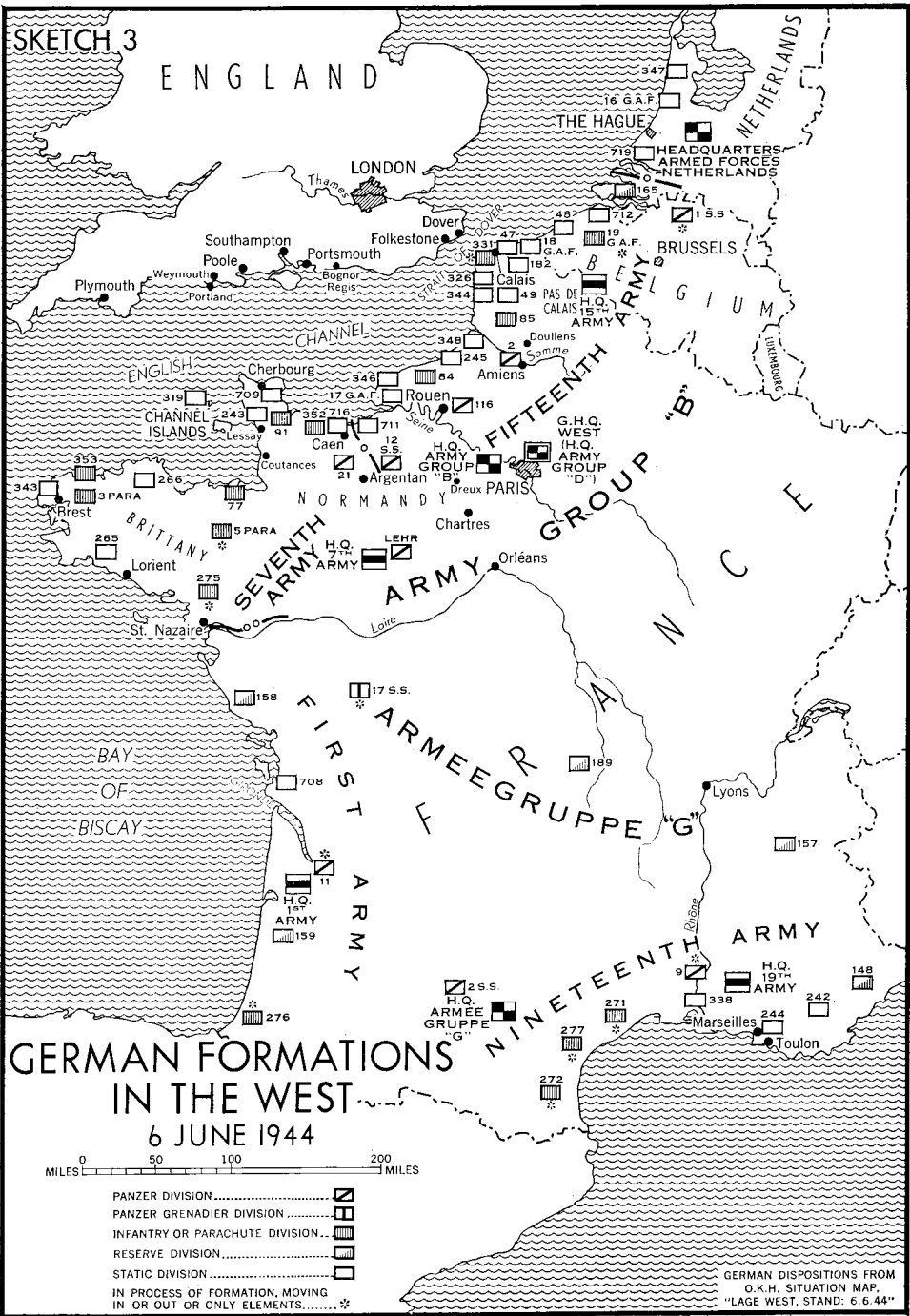
Almost the whole of that part of the Normandy coast through which the Allies chose to break into France was held by the right wing of Colonel-General Friedrich Dollman's Seventh Army.\* The coastline from Avranches around the Cherbourg peninsula (the Cotentin) to the eastern side of the Orne estuary, as well as the Channel Islands, was the responsibility of the 84th Infantry Corps under General of Artillery Erich Marcks. The garrison of the Corps sector consisted of the heavily reinforced 319th Infantry Division, with a battalion of tanks, locked up in the "fortresses" of the Channel Islands; the 243rd Infantry Division in the northwestern portion of the Cotentin; and the 709th Infantry Division in Cherbourg and along the east coast as far as the western side of the Vire estuary. The 352nd and 716th Infantry Divisions shared the long front between the Vire and the eastern side of the Orne estuary.<sup>82</sup>

With the exception of the 352nd, which had been inserted between the 709<sup>th</sup>

\*The British airborne descent east of the Orne fell in part upon the extreme left flank of Colonel-General Hans von Salmuth's Fifteenth Army, held by the 711th Infantry Division under the 81st Corps.

SKETCH 3

ENGLAND



GERMAN FORMATIONS  
IN THE WEST

6 JUNE 1944

MILES 0 50 100 200 MILES

- PANZER DIVISION.....
- PANZER GRENADIER DIVISION.....
- INFANTRY OR PARACHUTE DIVISION.....
- RESERVE DIVISION.....
- STATIC DIVISION.....
- IN PROCESS OF FORMATION, MOVING  
IN OR OUT OF ONLY ELEMENTS.....

GERMAN DISPOSITIONS FROM  
O.K.H. SITUATION MAP,  
"LAGE WEST, STAND: 6.6.44"

and 716th in March 1944, all these divisions were static. The lower western side of the Cotentin was in the hands of a miscellaneous group of East Battalions and training units. An independent battalion of tanks had been stationed on Cap de la Hague, the promontory north-west of Cherbourg." Early in May, when the Germans became concerned about Normandy, particularly the peninsula, they put in the 91st Air Landing Division and the 6th Parachute Regiment as an Army Reserve between Valognes and Carentan, and as far south as Periers.<sup>84</sup>

The main blow of the invasion was, therefore, to fall on the 352nd and 716th Divisions, and on the southern elements of the 709th. The area had been belatedly and, as it proved, inadequately reinforced. Two divisions instead of one now held the coast between the Vire and the Orne, but it was a very long front. As early as December 1942, when the 716th Division was responsible for the whole of it, the Divisional Commander had written, "major landings in the sector are improbable".<sup>85</sup> This view, supported by naval opinion, does not seem to have changed during the following year and a half.<sup>86</sup> It was apparently based chiefly on the existence of the offshore shoals, although these were not in fact a hindrance to small craft at high tide.

The area assaulted by the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was a part of the "Coastal Defence Sector Caen", which was held by the 716th Infantry Division commanded by Lieut.-General Wilhelm Richter. This division, formed in May 1941, had been in the Caen area since March 1942. As just noted, it was responsible for the whole front between the Vire and the Orne until March 1944, when the 352nd Division took over the left sector. The 716th thereafter held the coast from (but excluding) Asnelles to Franceville Plage on the east side of the Orne estuary, a distance of approximately 19 miles. Divisional Headquarters was at Caen.<sup>87</sup>

The 716th Infantry Division was a static formation. Its ration strength on 1 May 1944 was 7771 all ranks.<sup>88</sup> It had only two infantry regiments : the 726th (of which moreover the headquarters and two battalions were under the 352nd Division) and the 736th. In addition it had two East Battalions (above, page 52). Of the four sub-sectors into which its front was divided, the most westerly (from the divisional boundary to just west of Graye-sur-Mer) was held by the 441st East Battalion plus one company of the 2nd Battalion of the 736th Regiment. The single battalion of the 726th Regiment was in immediate reserve behind this sector. It was unusual to put an East Battalion in the line, but it appears that the 441st was considered unusually reliable. (It nevertheless ran away on D Day.) The left central sub-sector, including Courseulles and Bernieres, was held by the 2nd Battalion of the 736th with two of its three available companies on the beach and the third in reserve. The right central sub-sector, including St. Aubin and Lion-sur-Mer, was held by the 3rd Battalion of the 736th with two companies on the beach and two in reserve. The most easterly sub-sector fell to the 1st Battalion of the 736th, again with two companies up and two in reserve. In this area also was the greater part of the 642nd East Battalion; it appears to have had one company on or near the beach in the Franceville strongpoint, but it is reported that two other companies were scattered across the division's front on construction work.<sup>89</sup>

It is thus evident that Richter's 19-mile divisional sector was comparatively weakly held. Of his six infantry battalions, two were of doubtful quality and only one did not have a good part of its strength deployed directly in the beach area. On the other hand, the prepared defences compensated in some degree for the weakness in personnel, and important reserves were close at hand. Several mobile units of the 21st Panzer Division were stationed in the 716th Division's area. Two panzer grenadier battalions and the divisional anti-tank battalion were spread across the sector some five miles inland. A reinforced company of one of these panzer grenadier battalions was stationed in field positions south of Lionsur-Mer under the 716th Division's command. The 21st Panzer Division as a whole was, as we have seen, in Army Group "B" Reserve. None of its tanks was north of Caen.<sup>90</sup>

In artillery the -716th Division sector was strong, even though almost all the guns were French, Czech, Russian or Polish. The divisional artillery amounted to three battalions, but of the heavy battalion only one battery (six 15-centimetre—5.9-inch-howitzers) was present, the rest being under the 352nd Division. The other two battalions consisted of four batteries each; one of the eight batteries was with the 352nd Division. In addition, a motorized battalion (three batteries) of the 21st Panzer Division artillery was stationed in the 716th Division sector and was under General Richter's tactical command;<sup>91</sup> there were also a G.H.Q. heavy artillery battalion of three batteries, and two batteries of a G.H.Q. coast artillery battalion (see below). All told, there were in the divisional sector 16 batteries of artillery, armed with a total of about 67 guns of calibres ranging from 10-cm. to 15.5-cm.\* This does not include anti-tank guns or the guns in the beach defences (below).<sup>92</sup>

The 716th may be accounted a better-than-average static division. Rundstedt in his report of October 1943<sup>93</sup> had described it as "mobile under certain conditions (to be motorized)". It had not been motorized, but since the date of Rundstedt's report its artillery had been strengthened and a second anti-tank company had been organized. The Field Marshal had characterized its state of training as "Good; not uniform, owing to an exchange of age classes and detachments". His general comment on it was, "Completely fit for defence". It may be said that on D Day the Division justified his statement. Heavily outnumbered and smitten by a tremendous weight of metal by land, sea and air, it nevertheless contrived to give a good account of itself. It was the first of the many German formations, officially accounted by our Intelligence as of inferior quality, which gave us serious trouble during the campaign in North-West Europe.

The fortifications in the Caen sector,† as on other parts of the coast, fall

\*One battery whose strength in guns is not stated has been assumed to be of four guns. A German *batterie* (roughly equivalent to a British or Canadian troop) was normally of four guns.

†This account derives mainly from three sources: reports prepared after the invasion by the (British) Army Operational Research Group and by Combined Operations Headquarters,<sup>94</sup> both in part on the basis of examination of the defences by experts; and a detailed German map of the dispositions in the 716th Division sector,<sup>95</sup> which unfortunately suffers somewhat from having been compiled after the assault. Some use has also been made of the excellent Allied maps of the enemy defences prepared, mainly on the basis of air photographs, before the assault.

into two main categories: the installations housing the coastal and field batteries, and the beach defences proper.

The most massive defences were those of the batteries, but these were also the least complete on D Day. The batteries were installed at various distances from the coast, but most of them were within two miles of it. There appear to have been only two completed concrete battery positions in the 716th Division's area on 6th June, both of them manned by units of the divisional artillery and each mounting four Czech 10-centimetre howitzers; one was at Merville on the right flank and the other at Ver-sur-Mer on the left. The heaviest weapons in the divisional sector were 15.5-cm. French guns; a battery of four of these was manned by the divisional artillery in half-completed concrete positions south-west of Ouistreham. It was found, however, that these guns had been removed before D Day, possibly to alternative positions in rear. There were in the sector only two batteries manned by G.H.Q. coast artillery units (batteries of the 1260th G.H.Q. Coastal Artillery Battalion): four 12.2-cm. Polish guns at Mont Fleury (one under concrete on D Day, the others in open positions behind); and four or perhaps five 15.5-cm. French guns in unfinished positions south of Riva Bella on the right flank. The great majority of the guns in the sector were in open field positions. One such battery which received rather disproportionate attention in Allied reports was the four 10-cm. guns near Beny-sur-Mer (also spoken of as the Moulineaux battery).<sup>96</sup>

As for the beach defences proper, these were not and could not be continuous. They took the form, normally, of a series of "resistance nests" (*Widerstandsnester*)—defended localities well sited immediately above the beaches and commanding them. These localities were placed close enough to each other to ensure that so long as they remained in action no enemy could land at any point on the beach without coming under small-arms fire. On ordinary sections of the 716th Division's front the average distance between them was approximately 2000 yards. While there was considerable local variation, the pattern of these resistance nests was fairly standard. In some cases they centred on a massive concrete pillbox or casemate (with seven feet of concrete on the roof and seaward side) mounting a 50-, 75- or 88-mm. gun which was invariably sited to fire down the beach in enfilade, usually in only one direction. The embrasures of these works were protected from fire from seaward by heavy "buttresses" which proved effective on D Day, the more so as our Intelligence had not been able to inform the Navy of this feature. In half a dozen cases 50-mm. anti-tank guns were mounted in rather lighter concrete shelters, shielded from seaward but open on the land side and able to fire down the beach in both directions.\* These various concrete structures were surrounded and supplemented by trench systems and mortar and machine-gun positions which were often of the "Tobruk" type, i.e. concrete-lined pits with their upper edges flush with the ground. Additional 50-mm. guns were sometimes found in open concrete positions. The localities as a whole were well protected with mines and wire. Each was usually designed to be manned by an infantry platoon.<sup>97</sup>

\*For illustrations of typical positions, see facing pages 51 and 114.

At certain points considered to be of special importance (and this included all harbours, even the most minor) the defences were thickened up with more concrete and additional artillery and other weapons to form "strongpoints" (*Stützpunkte*). Sometimes a battery position was included within one of these strongpoints or was close enough to it to form a single defended area.<sup>98</sup>

On the basis of examination by British operational research investigators after the assault, the total number of guns mounted in the beach defences on the front attacked by the three British and Canadian infantry divisions was 25: two 88-mm., seven 75-mm., fourteen 50-mm., and two 37-mm. Of these, one 88, three\* 75s and six 50s were on the beaches assaulted by the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division.<sup>99</sup> Among other weapons in the defences, the 8.1-cm. mortar seems to take pride of place on the basis of casualties inflicted on us on D Day. There appear to have been 11 of these mortars on the British and Canadian fronts, chiefly mounted some distance inland from the beaches.<sup>100</sup> Beach-defence weapons also included a few electrically-fired static flame-throwers, none of which came into action on D Day.<sup>101</sup>

Heavy mining, integrated with the beach defences, had been completed to a depth varying from 300 to 800 yards inland, particularly at possible exits from the beaches. There had been no mining of the beaches themselves, although almost all the foreshore obstacles had mines attached to them. These obstacles were in belts as far as 1200 yards from the high water line. Lack of materials and time restricted the number that could be prepared. The foreshore obstacles varied in type and density at different points. In general they were sited within the upper half of the tidal range and were all submerged at high tide. A normal pattern of arrangement was, starting from seaward, first, rows of wooden or concrete stakes; ramps of logs or steel rails driven into the sand at the seaward end and raised some six feet at the other; "tetrahedra" (pyramid-shaped obstacles formed of three concrete, steel or wooden bars); and "hedgehogs" (obstacles made of three lengths of heavy angle-iron bolted together at their centres to form a large double tripod). In some areas, including those around Courseulles and Bernieres in the Canadian sector, there were also what were known as "Belgian gates" or "Element C"—sections of the steel anti-tank obstacle which Belgium had erected in pre-war days along her frontier with Germany. All these obstacles were frequently armed with Tellermines (anti-tank mines) or artillery shells fitted with pressure igniters. The Germans hoped that they would prevent the approach of landing craft or damage or destroy those which persisted in the attempt to beach.<sup>102</sup>

It remains to describe in some slight detail the defences of the beaches which were attacked by the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division on D Day. These beaches extended from Graye-sur-Mer on the west to St. Aubin-sur-Mer on the east, both inclusive.

In this area the heaviest defences were those of "Stützpunkt Courseulles", guarding the small harbour of Courseulles-sur-Mer. The east side of the harbour

\*The operational researchers seem to have included one of these, in the casemate north of Vaux (below, page 70) known as "La Riviere 1", in the 50th Division sector.

entrance was covered by a casemated 88-mm. gun and a 50-mm. anti-tank gun. About 500 yards to the east another concrete emplacement housed a 75-mm. gun. Six machine-gun posts were also embedded in this short stretch. On the west side of the harbour entrance between the sea and the loop of the River Seulles there were another 75-mm. and two 50-mm. anti-tank guns. The smaller weapons here consisted of six machine-guns and two 5-cm. mortars. The next 75-mm. casemate was about 1300 yards farther west, at a point north of Vaux, the western limit of the Canadian beaches.

Between Courseulles and Bernieres a German map shows a resistance nest, and Allied maps based on air photographs show construction activity here; but it would seem that no active position existed at this point. In the resistance nest at Bernieres itself the main defences were in front of the town along the sea-wall, which was from 6 to 10 feet high. There were one log and one concrete 50-mm. gun emplacements, and seven concrete machine-gun posts. Back from the beach about 150 yards were two 8.1-cm. mortar posts. At St. Aubin there was a resistance nest at the west end of the village which had "exceptional command of the beach"; it possessed a 50-mm. gun, several machine-gun posts, and apparently three 8.1-cm. mortars sited a short distance back from the beach.<sup>103</sup>

As already indicated, the defences were almost entirely without depth. They were a coastal ribbon; prepared defensible positions in general existed in rear only at battery sites or where headquarters or unit billets had been dug in. One inland position in the Canadian sector however requires notice. Just west of Douvres-la Delivrande the *Luftwaffe* had built and strongly fortified a radar station. Here there were two strongpoints surrounded by minefields and wire, guarded by weapons including six 50-mm. guns, 16 machine-guns and three heavy mortars, and garrisoned by "about 238" men of the German air force.<sup>104</sup> This fortress, some three miles inland from the beach, was to distinguish itself by resisting until eleven days after D Day.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PLAN OF ATTACK

(See Maps 1 and 2, and Sketches 4 and 5)

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THE Allied plan for the invasion of North-West Europe was probably the most complex ever made in the history of warfare. In fact there was not one plan but many, covering all phases of the vast enterprise. They defined and determined the contributions of many nations and the responsibilities of great formations on the sea, on land and in the air. They covered a wide range of detail, from tactical dispositions affecting hundreds of thousands of troops to the last small item of the individual soldier's equipment. From SHAEF downwards a great pyramid of headquarters and planning staffs completed preparations for the tremendous assault across the English Channel.

In the present chapter the overall plan for "Overlord" can be described only in very broad outline. There are many other books on the subject.<sup>1</sup> However, an effort will be made to present the Canadian role in somewhat greater detail.

#### The Overall Plan

We have traced in Chapter I the tortuous development of the invasion plan through the four long years which followed the evacuation of Dunkirk. In the summer of 1943 the COSSAC plan was produced. During the opening weeks of 1944 the Supreme Commander and his principal advisers reconsidered the whole problem; and on 1 February, as we have seen, there emerged a detailed "Initial Joint Plan" under the combined authority of the Allied Naval Commander Expeditionary Force (Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay), the Commander-in-Chief 21st Army Group (General Sir Bernard Montgomery) and the Air Commander-in-Chief Allied Expeditionary Air Force (Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory).

The "Initial Joint Plan" stated that the object of Operation "Neptune", the assault phase of "Overlord", was "to secure a Lodgement on the Continent from which further offensive operations can be developed". It emphasized that the operation was "part of a large strategic plan designed to bring about the total defeat of Germany by means of heavy and concerted assaults upon German-occupied Europe from the United Kingdom, the Mediterranean, and Russia".<sup>2</sup>

The sector of the French coast chosen for the assault had been exhaustively examined by earlier planners (above, pages 16-18). In Normandy, between the



Orne and Vire estuaries and along the eastern shore of the Cotentin peninsula, lay many fine beaches, sheltered in some degree from the prevailing westerly winds, suitable for the maintenance of an invading force and within the range of our fighter aircraft based in the United Kingdom. Here two armies were to attack under General Montgomery's direction. On the right or western flank the First United States Army, under Lieut.-General Omar N. Bradley, was to capture bridgeheads between the Drome and Vire Rivers and on the eastern shore of the Cotentin near Varreville. On the left or eastern flank the Second British Army, under Lieut.General M. C. Dempsey, was to seize a bridgehead enclosing Port-en-Bessin, Bayeux, the important communications centre of Caen, and Cabourg, at the mouth of the Dives River.

Within this framework four corps headquarters were responsible for seaborne divisional assaults. In the American sector, a single divisional attack on "Utah" Beach in the Cotentin and a similar assault against "Omaha" Beach, west of Port-en-Bessin, were directed respectively by the 7th and 5th United States Corps; in the British sector, the 30th Corps commanded a one-division attack against "Gold" Beach, on the right flank, while farther east the 1st Corps coordinated two divisions' assaults on "Juno" and "Sword" Beaches. The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was to make the "Juno" assault, in the centre of the British sector. As noted in Chapter I, the airborne portions of the plan occasioned much discussion, and only at a late stage were they firmly settled, on the basis of two U.S. airborne divisions dropping at the base of the Cotentin to assist the seaborne landings and help isolate Cherbourg, and one British airborne division (the 6th, in which the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion had been incorporated) dropping east of the Orne to seize crossings over the Caen Canal and protect the left flank. The Air Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Air Force (Air Chief Marshal LeighMallory) was pessimistic about the Cotentin airborne plan to the end, considering that it would result in extremely heavy losses. It was against his advice that General Eisenhower maintained this portion of the plan as finally written.<sup>3</sup> The seaborne attacks were to be assisted by specialized assault troops: American Ranger units and two British Commando brigades were to deal with certain key defences along the invasion coast, coordinating their action with the requirements of the Joint Fire Plan.

Immediately following the assault, the First U.S. Army was to capture the great port of Cherbourg "as quickly as possible" and then develop its operations southwards towards St. Lo, conforming to a British advance on its left. The parallel task for the Second British Army was to develop the bridgehead south of the line Caen-St. Lo and south-east of Caen, in order to gain airfield sites, and to protect the flank of the First United States Army while it was capturing Cherbourg.

Much would depend on the speed with which the forces first put ashore could be reinforced. It was vital that the Allies' strength in the bridgehead should be built up more rapidly than the Germans could build up theirs facing the bridgehead. The Initial Joint Plan as first issued calculated that by the evening of D Day the Allies would have (in addition to the three airborne divisions) two British, one Canadian, and two U.S. divisions effective ashore, with one-third of

a British and one-third of a U.S. division in craft off the Normandy beaches as follow-up. By the end of D plus 3 there would be seven Allied seaborne divisions effective ashore, and one and one-third more either just unloaded or about to land. By the end of D plus 6 there would be nine and two-thirds divisions effective, and three and one-third becoming available (in addition to five British and Canadian armoured brigades, and U.S. tank units in proportion). "Between twenty-three and twenty-four basic divisions were due in Normandy by D + 20."<sup>4</sup>

Most of the soldiers, and practically all the supplies to maintain them, would cross the Channel to France in ships. Getting them there was thus primarily a naval problem, and there has never been a naval problem of greater complexity. In the words of Admiral Ramsay's Order of the Day to the Allied naval forces issued on 31 May, "Our task, in conjunction with the Merchant Navies of the United Nations, and supported by the Allied Air Forces, is to carry the Allied Expeditionary Force to the Continent, to establish it there in a secure bridgehead and to build it up and maintain it at a rate which will outmatch that of the enemy." A "naval outline of the operation" was issued on 15 February 1944, a Naval Plan on 28 February, and very detailed provisional naval Operation Orders on 2 April. Ramsay's requirements in forces were enormous; he had difficulties both with the Admiralty and the U.S. naval authorities in obtaining all that he considered he needed, and reported subsequently that the very late assignment of forces by the U.S. Navy was an embarrassment in planning. But by 15 April he had got what he wanted: six battleships, two monitors, 22 cruisers, 93 destroyers, 15 sloops, 26 escort destroyers, 27 frigates, 71 corvettes, and a host of smaller naval craft.<sup>5</sup> To these must be added hundreds of landing ships and craft to carry the troops and their equipment. An Admiralty computation is that the total number of ships and vessels of all types finally involved in all phases of the operation (assault, follow-up, build-up, and administration) was 7016.<sup>6</sup>

The naval forces were organized for the assault into five Assault Forces and two Follow-up Forces. Assault Force "U" (from Tor Bay, Brixham, Dartmouth and Salcombe) carried the U.S. troops to attack "Utah" area in the Cotentin; Assault Force "O" (from Weymouth, Portland and Poole) carried those who were to land on "Omaha" area east of the Vire; and Follow-up Force "B", from Plymouth, Falmouth, Helford River and Fowey, carried the follow-up troops for the U.S. areas. The first build-up divisions for them would come from the Bristol Channel ports. These various forces for the U.S. area constituted the Western Task Force, commanded by Rear-Admiral Alan G. Kirk, U.S.N.

The Eastern Task Force, for the British assault area, was commanded by Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian, R.N. It comprised the remaining three Assault Forces: "G" for "Gold" area (50th British Division) (from Southampton, the Solent and Spithead); "J" for "Juno" area (3rd Canadian Division) from the same area; and "S" for "Sword" area (3rd British Division) from Portsmouth, Spithead, Newhaven and Shoreham. Follow-up Force "L" came from the Nore (Thames Estuary) and Harwich, and the first British build-up divisions would come from the Thames.<sup>7</sup>

The preliminary air operations which preceded the launching of "Neptune" have been described in Chapter I. This massive effort, the true measure of which

appeared in later stages of the campaign, inaugurated a vast programme of more direct action. The tasks of the Allied Air Forces were thus set out in an Overall Air Plan which was issued by Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory on 15 April 1944:

- "(a) To attain and maintain an air situation whereby the German Air Force is rendered incapable of effective interference with Allied operations.
- "(b) To provide continuous reconnaissance of the enemy's dispositions and movements.
- "(c) To disrupt enemy communications and channels of supply by air attack.
- "(d) To support the landing and subsequent advances of the Allied armies.
- "(e) To deliver offensive strikes against enemy naval forces.
- "(f) To provide air lift for airborne forces."<sup>8</sup>

The principal air tasks during "Neptune" itself were protection of the assault forces from naval and air attack while they were crossing the Channel; neutralization of coast and beach defences; protection of landing beaches and shipping; and dislocation of German communications and control arrangements. The magnitude of these operations may be gauged by the fact that 69 fighter squadrons were to provide beach and shipping cover, while 36 were allocated for direct support of ground forces in battle. Including reserves, a total of 171 squadrons of day fighters and fighter-bombers were to be available in Britain for employment against the harassed and weakened *Luftwaffe*.<sup>9</sup>

The air planners anticipated two crises during the early phases of the invasion: initially, at the time of the first landings, and later, when the enemy had concentrated sufficient armour for a large-scale counter-attack. In the former case, Leigh-Mallory visualized a big battle, similar to that over Dieppe in 1942, which might continue for more than a week.<sup>10</sup> But the overwhelming superiority of his forces was a virtual guarantee of victory in these phases of the invasion.

### The Joint Fire Plan

It was the job of the navies and the air forces, with some help from army artillery, to "shoot" the troops on to the beaches; and in Chapter I we have outlined the long process of experimentation that lay behind the "Joint Fire Plan" which was finally issued on 8 April 1944.<sup>11</sup> Disregarding the pre-D Day bombing already described, it may be said that the operation was actually to be opened by the heavy night bombers of the R.A.F. Bomber Command, including No. 6 (R.C.A.F.) Group. They were to attack ten selected batteries in the assault area during the period roughly between midnight and dawn on the night before the landings.

The other main portions of the Joint Fire Plan were to begin virtually simultaneously just after the Bomber Command programme ended, that is, at "civil twilight",\* 44 minutes before sunrise on 6 June.<sup>12</sup> In the air, the tale was now taken up by the U.S. bombers. The heavies of the Eighth Air Force were to assail the actual beach defences on "Omaha", "Gold", "Juno" and "Sword" Beaches, and the city of Caen (with a view to interfering with German movement through

\*Civil twilight begins and (in the evening) ends when the sun is 6 degrees below the horizon. Nautical twilight begins and ends when it is 12 degrees below the horizon.

it). The medium bombers of the Ninth Air Force were to attack the defences of "Utah" Beach as well as various batteries and "transportation targets".<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the light bombers and fighter-bombers of both the U.S.A.A.F. and the R.A.F. were to assail pre-arranged targets, batteries near the coast and transportation centres inland.<sup>14</sup>

The naval bombardment fell into two categories, both beginning about the same time. The Joint Fire Plan<sup>15</sup> listed 20 batteries for bombardment by heavy ships and cruisers from about 30 minutes before H Hour, "i.e. the time at which Naval [air] spotting can begin". The majority of the batteries attacked during the night by the R.A.F. Bomber Command were also on this list. The heaviest ships were allotted to the flanks, as the most formidable batteries were in these areas. In addition to this "Counter-Battery Fire", the smaller vessels—destroyers and support craft—were to engage in a programme of "Beach Drenching Fire". The destroyers were to open about 45 minutes before H Hour and continue until the leading wave of landing craft had actually touched down on the beaches. The Landing Craft Gun (Large)\* would open about 35 minutes before H Hour and would likewise fire until the touchdown. The smaller support craft would supplement this fire. About 30 minutes before H Hour the self-propelled army artillery would open "fire for effect" from their tank landing craft, each regiment firing on one of the main strongpoints ("resistance nests") in the beach defences until five minutes before H Hour. The Landing Craft Tank (Rocket) were to "fire their full pattern" at the same targets from about H-10 to H-5; and the Landing Craft Assault (Hedgerow) would fire immediately before the infantry went ashore.<sup>16</sup>

A comprehensive cover plan was designed to mislead the enemy as to our intentions. In general, the object was to conceal the readiness of the invasion forces in the south and west of England, while giving exaggerated emphasis to the strength of formations in the south-east and east and in Scotland. By these, and other, measures the enemy was encouraged to believe in the reality of Allied threats to Norway and the Pas de Calais.<sup>17</sup> As we have seen (above, page 60) he discounted the Norwegian menace, but not the other. Elaborate plans were also made to simulate the approach of invasion convoys to the Pas de Calais on the actual night before our landings in Normandy.<sup>18</sup>

From 24 April First Canadian Army took part in a wireless deception scheme (Exercise "Quicksilver"), sending out fictional messages designed to build up a picture of the Army, with one U.S. corps under command, and itself under the 1st U.S. Army Group, preparing to attack the Pas de Calais. The Third U.S. Army, which also figured in this scenario, was represented as being in East Anglia. "Quicksilver" went on until 14 June, eight days after D Day. How far this particular scheme was effective cannot be determined with certainty from the available German records. The Germans certainly knew that we were running such schemes, for one of their intelligence documents dated 9 June refers to "the radio games played with the enemy Intelligence Service". They seem to have placed their main intelligence reliance on agents.<sup>19</sup>

\*On the various support craft, see above, pages 7-8.

### The Role of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division

In the general area of the Second British Army assault the Normandy coast rises and falls, with stretches of cliffs, none very high, alternating with a low coastline bordered by long sandy beaches and occasional offshore rocks. Behind the coast lies cultivated country, a pleasantly pastoral scene, with many villages and small woods. Three considerable rivers, the Dives, the Orne and the Seulles, run across this part of Normandy to empty into the Channel.

We have already seen that the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, commanded by Major-General R. F. L. Keller, and with the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade under command, was to make its D Day assault against "Juno" Beach, in the centre of the sector allotted to the Second Army. Thus, the right (western) flank of the Canadian attack marked the boundary between the 1st British Corps (Lieut.General J. T. Crocker), which included the Canadian division, and the 30th Corps (Lieut.-General G. C. Bucknall). Immediately west of "Juno" the 50th (Northumbrian) Division would assault on "Gold" between Le Hamel and La Riviere and carve out a bridgehead including Bayeux. East of the Canadians the 3rd British Infantry Division, landing on "Sword" Beach between Lion-sur-Mer and Ouistreham, was to capture Caen and secure a bridgehead over the Orne. The seizure and retention of Caen was described by the Second Army as "vital to the Army plan".<sup>20</sup>

The Canadian attack was to be made on a two-brigade front, through sectors known as "Mike" (right) and "Nan" (left), including the villages of Courseullessur-Mer, Bernieres-sur-Mer and the western outskirts of St. Aubin-sur-Mer. The sea approach was complicated by a series of rocky ledges which, in the case of Les Iles de Bernieres, extended for more than a mile parallel to the shore. These rocks would be covered at high tide, but they were considered sufficiently dangerous to warrant a particularly close adjustment of H Hour for the Canadian attack.<sup>21</sup> West of Courseulles the beach was half a mile wide at low water, and was backed by sand dunes about 10 feet high. Our Intelligence reported that here infantry could "move directly inland anywhere" and there were two exits for vehicles.<sup>22</sup> To the east, between Courseulles and Bernieres, lay long stretches of sand and rocky outcrops, providing good landing places for infantry and suitable exits for vehicles. At some points the assault troops would require scaling apparatus to surmount sea-walls. Numerous roads led inland, chiefly towards Caen and Bayeux. The German defences have been described in Chapter III.\*

On D Day General Keller's troops were to seize an area extending some 10 miles inland to include high ground west of Caen, astride the main road to Bayeux. The landing was to be carried out with the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade Group, under Brigadier H. W. Foster, on the right and the 8th Brigade Group, commanded by Brigadier K. G. Blackader, on the left. In the first of four phases these brigades would land on both sides of the mouth of the Seulles, mop up the coastal region and capture a beachhead objective known as "Yew". The inter-

\*In general our knowledge of the beaches and defences was excellent. Air reconnaissance had been supplemented by the bold work of Combined Operations Pilotage Parties-swimmers who examined the British assault beaches in December 1943 and January 1944.

mediate divisional objective, "Elm", would be taken in the second phase. It included crossings over the Seulles and one of its tributaries, the Mue, as well as high ground on the eastern flank near the villages of Colomby-sur-Thaon, Anisy and Anguerny. Speed would be essential. Meanwhile, the reserve formation, the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade Group (Brigadier D. G. Cunningham) would be landing through either "Mike" or "Nan" sectors, as the situation dictated, and preparing to assist the 7th Brigade in the succeeding phase, the capture of the final objective west of Caen, called "Oak". The fourth and final stage of the assault would consist of reorganization on "Oak" to meet the anticipated counter-attack.<sup>23</sup>

Air and naval bombardment as already described would assist the Canadian assault. Light bombing of beach defences would begin 30 minutes before H Hour and continue for 15 minutes; heavy bombing would then begin on the flanks of the divisional attack, lasting until H Hour. Subsequently, heavy and medium day bombers would strike at the enemy's headquarters and communication centres farther inland. Naval support was equally comprehensive. Before H Hour two cruisers would bombard inland batteries. Meanwhile, destroyers would engage beach defences on the flanks of the assault. These considerable resources would be supplemented by a formidable array of support craft, armed with guns, rockets and smoke-laying equipment, which would deal at comparatively short range with gun emplacements and targets of opportunity, and would provide indispensable support during the final approach to the beaches.<sup>24</sup>

During the initial stages of the assault Royal Marine Commandos were to perform a vital service on the eastern flank of the division. The headquarters of the 4th Special Service Brigade, under Brigadier B. W. Leicester, together with one of its units, No. 48 (Royal Marine) Commando,\* were to come under General Keller's command for the "Neptune" operation. Landing in "Nan" sector, immediately behind the 8th Brigade Group, No. 48 Commando was given the task of capturing a built-up area, including Langrune-sur-Mer, as far east as the divisional boundary. Other Commandos would land on neighbouring beaches, in the sector allotted to the 3rd British Division, and would capture Lion-sur-Mer and also Luc-sur-Mer, immediately east of the inter-divisional boundary. In this Lion-Langrune area there were low cliffs fronting the sea, and it seemed best to take it from the flanks. Later on D Day these Commandos were to capture the big radar station near Douvres-la-Delivrande before moving west to hold crossings over the Seulles between Creully and Amblie.<sup>26</sup>

With the foregoing in mind, the D Day tasks of the Canadian battalions can be considered in greater detail. On the extreme right, in the 7th Brigade Group's sector, The Royal Winnipeg Rifles were to make the assault with three companies "up", including one under command from the 1st Battalion, The Canadian Scottish Regiment. In the first phase they were to overwhelm beach defences, including those on the inter-corps boundary, clear the hamlet of Vaux and its chateau, and seize both Graye-sur-Mer and a nearby "island" formed by locks at the mouth of

\*The battle strength of a Royal Marine Commando was approximately 400 all ranks. It comprised five fighting troops and a heavy weapons troop, with mortars and medium machineguns.<sup>25</sup>

the Seulles. Reserve companies of the Winnipegs would then advance and take the villages of Ste. Croix-sur-Mer and Banville, nearly two miles inland. Meanwhile, on the left flank of the 7th Brigade Group, The Regina Rifle Regiment was to land immediately east of the Seulles, clear Courseulles and seize crossings over the river at Reviere. The main body of the Canadian Scottish, the reserve battalion of the brigade group, were to land in "Mike" sector and prepare for the succeeding phase.

The next task, securing the intermediate objective, would be mainly the responsibility of the Canadian Scottish and the Winnipegs. The former, supported by armour and artillery, were to seize and hold crossings over the Seulles at Colombiers-sur-Seulles and Pont de Reviere and secure high ground south of the river between these crossings. In this area the twisting Seulles ran at right angles to the axis of advance. Consequently, the Scottish were directed to get the crossings "with the greatest possible speed". Meanwhile, the Winnipegs would seize and hold a third crossing and high ground about one mile west of Colombiers, and the Reginas would mop up Courseulles and secure further high ground south of Pont de Reviere.

As we have seen, the final objective ("Oak") was to be captured in the third phase. The 7th Brigade Group would continue its advance inland, securing control of an area some five miles west of Caen and astride the main road to Bayeux. On the right, the Winnipegs would capture Putot-en-Bessin; in the centre, the Canadian Scottish would occupy an area south of Secqueville-en-Bessin and, on the left, the Reginas would dominate Norrey-en-Bessin. The Brigade Group's final task on D Day was to reorganize on "Oak" in preparation for further advance and to repel enemy counter-attacks. Its Operation Order stated, "if the enemy delivers an armoured counter attack against the brigade fortress it is appreciated that the main thrust on the right will come on the line of the inter corps boundary". Our own counter-attacking force, in this sector, would consist of the Canadian Scottish and "C" Squadron of the 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars). With a foresight afterwards reinforced by hard experience, the order placed "digging" at the head of priority work on the final objective.<sup>27</sup>

The plan for the 8th Brigade Group, on the eastern flank, was parallel. At the outset, Brigadier Blackader's troops were to land in "Nan" sector and clear the coastal area east of Courseulles, including St. Aubin. On the right, The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada would capture beach defences and mop up Bernieres; on the left, The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment had similar tasks at St. Aubin. Both battalions would secure covering positions for beach exits to be developed by the engineers. The North Shore Regiment had two additional responsibilities: to form a "firm base" for the assault on Langrune by No. 48 (Royal Marine) Commando, and to capture the hamlet of Tailleville, nearly two miles inland.

In the second phase, the reserve battalion, Le Regiment de la Chaudiere, was to land and pass through the Queen's Own. The Chaudieres were "to avoid becoming involved in the mopping up of the beach defences", in order to carry out their proper role. Led by one company carried on tanks of the 10th Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse), they were to capture three battery positions about

three miles inland, in the vicinity of Beny-sur-Mer. The battalion would then move south-east to capture Basly, and a "firm base" south of it, in preparation for the succeeding phase.

The next stage of the 8th Brigade Group's operations was the seizure of its own final objective, the division's intermediate objective ("Elm"). The Queen's Own would advance through Le Regiment de la Chaudiere and capture Anisy—a village more than halfway from the coast to the Caen-Bayeux lateral road—before reorganizing north-east of Anguerny. At the same time the North Shore Regiment would press inland to capture the radar stations west of Douvres-la-Delivrande. Thereafter, Le Regiment de la Chaudiere was to reorganize on a spur west of Colomby-sur-Thaon. There would then be a pause, while the brigade consolidated on "Elm", preparing the way for the 9th Brigade Group to complete the operation. Finally, Brigadier Blackader's troops would move westwards across the Mue River to occupy the general area of Cainet—Camilly—Secqueville-en-Bessin—Cully, in rear of the 7th Brigade Group's final objectives. This movement would be carried out when ordered by the divisional commander, probably on D plus One. Thereafter the 8th Brigade Group would have a defensive role, guarding the approaches to the Canadian sector from the south and south-west, on the division's right flank.<sup>28</sup>

For the 9th Brigade Group's operations on D Day two alternative plans were prepared. As already mentioned, it was to land in either "Mike" or "Nan" sector, depending on the progress of the other brigades' assault waves. However, the primary intention (expressed in Plan "A") was that the Brigade Group would land through "Nan", on the left, and advance in cooperation with the 7th to seize "Oak". Under this plan The North Nova Scotia Highlanders would land on the right, at Bernieres, and The Highland Light Infantry of Canada and The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders on the beaches farther east. The first flight was to land approximately two and a half hours after H Hour; but the fourth and last was not expected to disembark until between seven and nine hours after H Hour.

After regrouping in an assembly area near Beny-sur-Mer, the 9th Brigade Group would again face alternative courses of action, depending on the enemy's reaction. Brigadier Cunningham's final objective was the high ground at Carpiquet, a village some two miles west of Caen. If no "serious opposition" developed from this quarter, the North Nova Scotias, with the 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment) under command, would drive south through Buron, Authie and Franqueville to capture this "feature". But if there was heavy opposition the North Nova Scotias were to consolidate on high ground between Buron and Authie as a base for a further attack against the objective. This attack would then be made by the Highland Light Infantry, the Glengarrians and the armoured regiment. In the final phase the Glengarrians and North Nova Scotias, with one squadron of tanks, were to hold the right and left flanks, respectively, of the objective, the Highland Light Infantry being in reserve. The orders emphasized that all units must "DIG IN and reorganise with greatest possible speed and be prepared for early enemy counter attack, armour and infantry".<sup>29</sup>



Thus, reviewing the divisional plan as a whole, by nightfall on D Day General Keller hoped to have the 7th and 9th Brigade Groups well forward, astride the Caen-Bayeux road. On his western flank, the 7th would hold the triangle formed by Putot-en-Bessin, Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse and Norrey-en-Bessin; to the east of the Mue River, the 9th would have control of the Carpiquet—Franqueville—Authie area, within a mile of the outskirts of Caen. Immediately behind these formations Brigadier R. A. Wyman's 2nd Armoured Brigade, consisting of the 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars), 10th Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse) and 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment), would be concentrated, under divisional command, ready to strike at any counter-attack, while the 8th Brigade Group was preparing to move westwards, behind the 7th. The Division would thus be firmly entrenched in positions of great tactical value, prepared for further offensive operations.\*

### The Supporting Arms

It remains to examine the roles of the supporting arms. We may conveniently begin with the artillery, whose contribution to the "Neptune" fire plan has already been mentioned. For the early stages of the invasion the divisional field artillery, consisting of the 12th, 13th and 14th Field Regiments R.C.A. (all self-propelled), under the Commander Royal Artillery (Brigadier P. A. S. Todd), was reinforced, we have seen, by the 19th Field Regiment (also self-propelled). These units were organized in two groups, the 12th and 13th Regiments supporting the 7th Brigade assault, the 14th and 19th the 8th Brigade's. Each group would have the assistance of one battery of the 2nd Royal Marine Armoured Support Regiment, as well as of various units of the Royal Artillery. The four Canadian field regiments, while still seaborne, were to fire heavy concentrations (high explosive and smoke) against the four main "resistance nests" in "Mike" and "Nan" sectors, beginning half an hour before H Hour. Forward Observation and Fire Control Officers, with the leading assault waves, were to make the necessary adjustments to this neutralizing fire during the assault.<sup>30</sup>

Immediately after landing, the artillery would occupy previously designated gun areas and give continuous support to the advancing infantry and armour. Each field regiment would have at least two of its three batteries deployed at all times. Other units of the divisional artillery had appropriate roles: the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment would help to neutralize strongpoints and deal with any armoured counter-attacks on the division's flanks, while the 4th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment protected shipping in "Mike" and "Nan" sectors, the Beach Maintenance and gun areas and key bridges from aerial attack.†

\*Heavy mortars of The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.) were allotted to both the 7th and 9th Brigade Groups, while their machine-guns would assist all divisional infantry battalions.

†The Royal Artillery would also be represented in the Division's operations by batteries or detachments of the following units: 62nd Anti-Tank Regiment, 93rd and 114th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments, 86th (Honourable Artillery Company) and 103rd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments and 9th Survey Regiment. In the last phase of the operation, the 6th and 191st Field Regiments and the 79th Medium Regiment would come under the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division.

Tanks of the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade would also make a powerful contribution to the fire supporting the division. The 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars) and the 10th Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse) were to support the 7th and 8th Brigade Groups respectively. Two squadrons of each of these regiments were, as already described (above, page 37), equipped with swimming tanks. Landing five minutes before H Hour, they would engage beach defences and assist the infantry and engineers during the most critical stage of the assault. The third unit of the Brigade, the 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment), would support the 9th Brigade Group with ordinary Shermans.

The armour had other tasks, equally significant, during the advance inland. While one squadron of the Hussars supported Brigadier Foster's infantry, the remainder of this unit was expected to occupy high ground of great tactical importance on the division's right flank, between Camilly and Secqueville-enBessin. Meanwhile, the Sherbrooke Fusiliers would be assisting the 9th Brigade in taking their final objective. Then, in the final phase, the armoured brigade would pass into divisional reserve, "prepared to meet the deliberate counter-attack". A feature of its plan was provision for the possibility that "serious enemy resistance" might not develop. In this case the brigade (as part of a special group including artillery, engineers and infantry) would drive far south of the Caen-Bayeux lateral to seize high ground between the Odon and Orne Rivers, near Evrecy.<sup>31</sup>

Two British armoured units had special tasks in the initial stages of the Canadian division's assault. In both "Mike" and "Nan" sectors "Crabs"\* of "B" Squadron, 22nd Dragoons, were to beat paths through the enemy's minefields; later, troops of this unit were to support the 9th Brigade Group and the 2nd Armoured Brigade. In addition, armoured cars of "C" Squadron, The Inns of Court Regiment, were to lunge forward, as soon as coastal defences were overcome, and destroy all bridges over the Orne along a 15-mile stretch between Thury-Harcourt and Etavaux. Thus, deep reconnaissance might be combined with the imposition of maximum delay on the enemy's operations.<sup>32</sup>

Because of the many technical difficulties of the assault, the engineers had a particularly vital role. On the Canadian front, their tasks were coordinated by the Division's Commanding Royal Engineer (Lt.-Col. R. J. Cassidy). Their primary initial responsibility was to clear under-water obstacles and prepare beach exits. While the Royal Navy would deal with all obstacles in more than three feet of water, the engineers were required to destroy or collect those in shallow water and either dump them on the beaches at high water or move them to the flanks. British sappers would assist, among them part of the 5th Assault Regiment, Royal Engineers, with 28 AVREs (above, page 10). The units had trained together for some weeks before D Day and they were equipped with many special devices to deal with known obstacles in their particular "lanes".<sup>33</sup>

As the "Neptune" attack progressed, so would the engineers' duties expand. They would develop beach maintenance areas; clear forward and lateral routes,

\*These were improved "Flail" tanks—that is, tanks with short lengths of chain attached to a revolving drum on the front of the vehicle which beat the ground and exploded mines.

destroying or removing mines and booby-traps and filling in craters; construct bridges (including two over the Seulles, at Pont de Reviere and Colombiers); and supervise and assist the infantry in laying and charting defensive minefields. They would also be responsible for a great many miscellaneous, but essential, duties, such as disposing of unexploded bombs and maintaining adequate water supplies.<sup>34</sup>

At least brief and general mention must be made of the essential work to be performed by the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. The task of the divisional signals, under Lt: Col. G. O. Gamble, was to provide General Keller and his staff, afloat and ashore, with the communications required to fight and maintain the division. On D Day and subsequently, eight wireless "nets" would be working from the Division, maintaining contact with subordinate formations and units, and with divisions on the flanks. As soon as a foothold had been secured on land, telephone lines would be laid and despatch riders would make regular runs throughout the divisional area.<sup>35</sup> In passing, it may be noted that these facilities were to be supplemented by those of the divisional reconnaissance regiment, the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars). It would supply mobile "contact detachments", equipped with wireless, "whose primary task would be to see that the Divisional commander was kept informed at all times as to just what his Battalions were doing".<sup>36</sup> The intricate network of rapid communications would be the basis of effective command in battle.

### Operations After "Neptune"

Beyond the "Neptune" phase, the Allied plan for the invasion was necessarily based on hypothesis. We could only estimate the direction and strength of the enemy's reaction. A cardinal factor was, however, our own overmastering need for adequate ports to build up and supply our force and thus maintain the momentum of the enterprise. The possible ports fell into three main groups: those in the Loire area (Nantes and St. Nazaire), those in Brittany (primarily Brest), and those on the Seine (Rouen and Le Havre). In addition, the Allied planners had produced the idea of utilizing Quiberon Bay by constructing large but simple port facilities at Locmariaquer, a few miles west of Vannes.<sup>37</sup>

As visualized by COSSAC, the assault would have been followed by a concentrated drive to capture the Brittany ports. This conception, like other parts of the scheme, was modified in later planning. A succinct statement of the development of the campaign as envisaged early in 1944 was included in the "Joint Outline Maintenance Project" issued by the administrative authorities of the three Allied services on 8 February.<sup>38</sup> It sketched the "Outline Plan" in these terms:

"(a) Initial Assault will be made by three RCTs [Regimental Combat Teams] of First US Army on the right, and five brigade groups of Second British Army on the left with supporting air forces.

"(b) Second British Army will secure Caen on the left flank and extend the perimeter of its sector to the south, while First US Army capture the Cotentin Peninsula.

"(c) US forces will open up Loire ports while British forces hold the left flank.

"(d) Second British Army will open up the Seine Ports."



#### COURSEULLES FROM THE AIR

Although this photograph was taken in 1948, the major German positions assaulted by the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade on 6 June 1944 still existed and are indicated on the face of the photograph.

*Courtesy U.S. Department of the Army*



CONGESTION ON "MIKE RED" BEACH, D DAY

These air photographs, taken at an unspecified time near high tide on the morning of 6 June, illustrate the congestion on the beach just west of the River Sculles which resulted from difficulties with the single exit over the flooded area beyond the beach.

On 7 May 1944, a month before the assault, the 21st Army Group produced an "Appreciation on Possible Development of Operations to secure a Lodgement Area". General Montgomery's headquarters sent this long document to First U.S. Army Group, First U. S. Army and Second British Army on 18 May, covered by a letter which observed, "With regard to the outline of action at Part N, this represents the Commander-in-Chief's intentions as far as they can be formulated at this stage. Whether operations will develop on these lines must of course depend on our own and the enemy situation, which cannot be predicted accurately at the present moment."<sup>39</sup> Part IV of the appreciation was relatively brief and can be reproduced here in full:

### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The type of country immediately South of the initial bridgehead does not favour a rapid advance. The Allied build-up relative to the estimated German build-up indicates that a period may supervene round about D + 14, when there will be a grave risk of operations stabilising on a line which gives the Germans advantages in defence. The greatest energy and initiative will be required at this period to ensure the enemy is not allowed to stabilise his defence.

Once through the difficult bocage country, greater possibilities for manoeuvre and for the use of armour begin to appear. Our aim during this period should be to contain the maximum enemy forces facing the Eastern flank of the bridgehead, and to thrust rapidly towards Rennes.

On reaching Rennes our main thrust should be towards Vannes; but diversionary thrusts with the maximum use of deception should be employed to persuade the enemy that our objective is Nantes.

If, at this time, the enemy weakens his Eastern force to oppose us North of Redon, a strong attack should be launched towards the Seine.

The Quiberon Bay project offers great scope for surprise. Once the bay is captured and provided constructional estimates are fulfilled, our build-up should be assured for some time to come, and our Southern flank can then be rested economically on the Loire.

For administrative reasons we should aim at securing the Seine ports as early as possible.\* By alternate thrusts towards the East and towards the South-West, we should be able to retain the initiative, reap the benefit of interior lines, and keep the enemy moving his reserves from one flank to the other.

The different supply systems of the British and American forces will restrict the flexibility of our plans. Re-allocation of air support, an alteration in the planned build-up and a move of the inter-Army boundary provide the most practical means of influencing the weight behind our alternate thrusts.

The influence of the Quiberon Bay project (Operation "Chastity") is written large in this appreciation. The actual development of the operations after D Day, as it turned out, threw this scheme into the discard. But other conceptions found in this document had great influence on events. The ideas of alternating blows on the eastern and western flanks, and of switching the weight of Allied air power accordingly, have prominent places in the history of the Normandy campaign. And the concept of containing "the maximum enemy forces facing the Eastern flank of the bridgehead" was to be the foundation of Montgomery's strategy in the critical weeks following the landings.

These conceptions were reflected in the detailed instructions issued to the land forces before D Day. Following the assault on the front of Second British

\*See above, pages 39-40, concerning Operation "Axehead".

Army, the 30th Corps was instructed to secure the communications centre of Villers-Bocage, astride the Caen-Avranches lateral, and gain contact with the 5th United States Corps at Caumont. Meanwhile, the 1st British Corps would pivot on Caen, maintaining contact with the 30th on the right. The 30th Corps would then continue its southerly advance to secure high ground, including the commanding feature of Mont Pincon. The 1st Corps would perform a similar task on the left (eastern) flank, a necessary prerequisite to the construction of airfields south-east of Caen, which was considered of great importance. During succeeding stages Second British Army would secure high ground running through St. Pierre d'Entremont, Mont de Cerisi, Conde-sur-Noireau and Falaise, over 30 miles inland from the beaches. In the course of these operations the 1st British Corps would pivot on Argences and capture the important terrain at Falaise. It was emphasized that the "ultimate object" of the Second Army was to protect the flank of the U.S. Armies while they captured Cherbourg, Angers, Nantes, and the Brittany ports: "There is no intention of carrying out a major advance until the Brittany ports have been captured."<sup>40</sup>

On the American front, while one of General Bradley's corps captured Cherbourg—which, it was calculated in the last stages of planning, would fall about D plus 15—two others were to begin a southerly drive towards St. L6. The First United States Army would then advance to a line running through Avranches and Domfront, at the junction of the Cotentin and Brittany peninsulas. It was expected that this line would be reached about D plus 20, at which time the Third U.S. Army would become operational and the 1st United States Army Group (afterwards the 12th, under Bradley) would assume command of all American ground forces in France.<sup>41</sup> After clearing the Brittany peninsula, the Americans would face east and "pivot on the British position like a windlass in the direction of Paris"<sup>42</sup> This great turning movement would bring the Allied line forward to the Seine on a 140-mile front. General Montgomery afterwards commented on the "academic" nature of forecasts in an operation of this magnitude. Nevertheless, the Allied planners had some hope, if not expectation, that their troops would reach the Seine and the Loire 90 days after the initial assault.<sup>43</sup> This tentative forecast was closely connected with the administrative aspects of the planning.

As for events further in the future, well before D Day the Supreme Commander and his staff had a plan for operations beyond the Seine, dated 3 May 1944 (below, page 307). Strategy in this phase was destined to produce a heated controversy between General Eisenhower and General Montgomery.

### The Administrative Plan

No aspect of the "Overlord" design was more intricate, or more important, than the administrative and maintenance plan. Indeed, the success or failure of the invasion entirely turned upon the adequacy of these arrangements. An army in 1944 required not only a vast daily input of supplies but also an enormous

\*The "phase lines" shown in Sketch 4 are as indicated in a "Planning forecast of development of operations" issued by H.Q. 21st Army Group on 26 February 1944.

administrative "tail" of services and base installations if it was to function with any efficiency. The complexity of the problem was greatly increased if its operations began with an assault across a turbulent body of water like the English Channel. In the case of the Allied Expeditionary Force, the administrative arrangements proved adequate to the enormous requirement. It need scarcely be added that, within the limitations of the present chapter, only the barest outline of the administrative plan can be sketched.

We have already seen that logistics had determined certain significant aspects of the "Neptune" plan. The urgent need for large port facilities and the availability of shipping and landing craft had imposed definite, limitations on the assault (above, pages 17, 22). There were, however, other equally grave complications, arising out of differences in British and American methods and even dissimilar British and American problems in the post-assault phases. For these reasons, the directive<sup>44</sup> issued to the Supreme Commander stated:

In the United Kingdom the responsibility for logistics organization, concentration, movement, and supply of forces to meet the requirements of your plan will rest with British Service Ministries so far as British Forces are concerned. So far as United States Forces are concerned, this responsibility will rest with the United States War and Navy Departments. You will be responsible for the coordination of logistical arrangements on the Continent. You will also be responsible for coordinating the requirements of British and United States forces under your command.

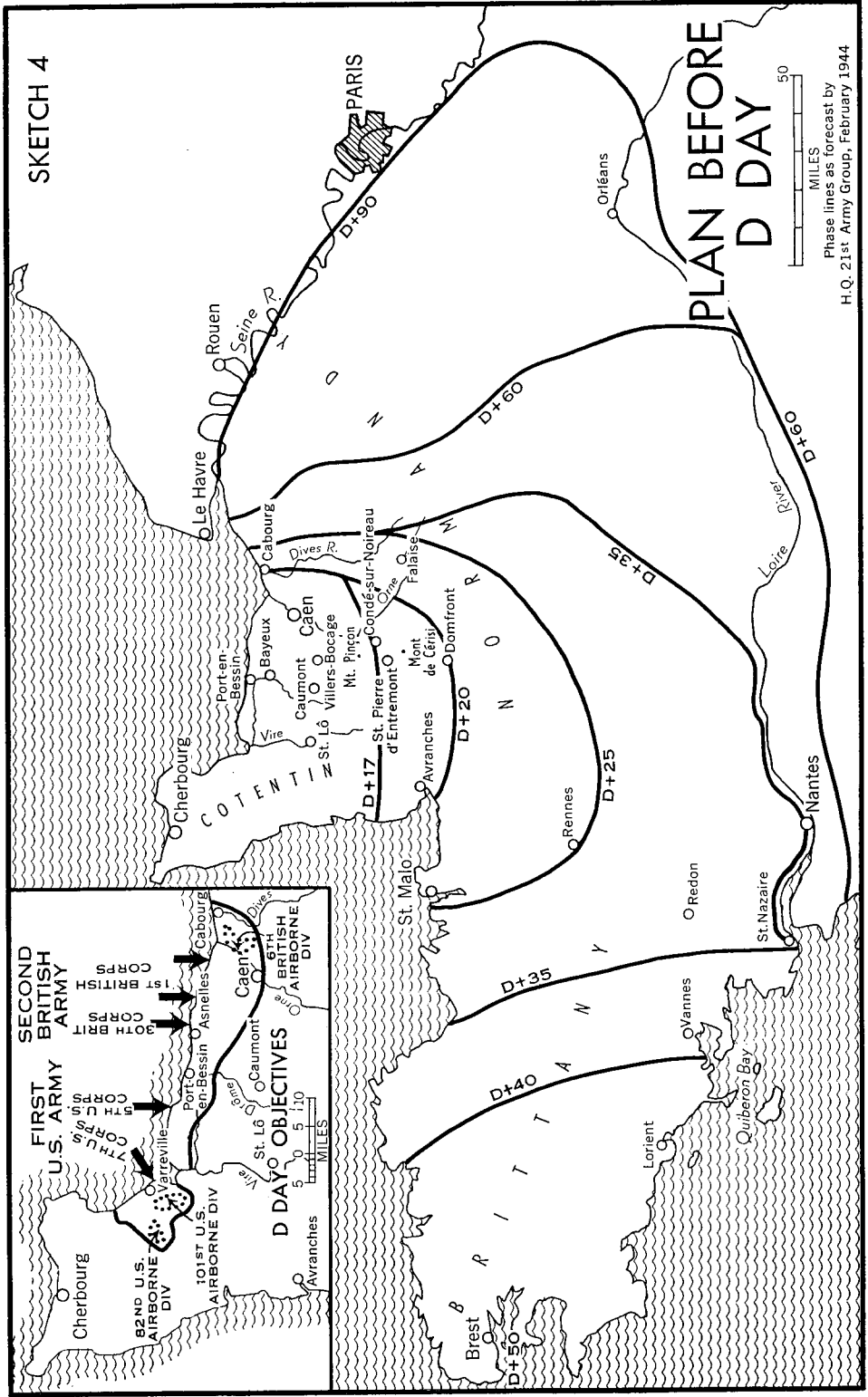
This was the foundation upon which the administrative edifice was erected.

The overall "Joint Outline Maintenance Project/Administrative Plan",<sup>45</sup> which, as we have seen, was issued on 8 February 1944 in conjunction with the "Initial Joint Plan" of 1 February, amplified the policy for "Neptune". The Commander-in-Chief 21st Army Group was to coordinate the "general administrative planning" of all services, American as well as British, for "the initial stages". Under his direction, Generals Dempsey and Bradley would determine the supplies required for the assault and build-up in their respective sectors. The invading force would be maintained "primarily over the beaches", through Beach Maintenance Areas, in the opening stages, that is until "sufficient ports" had been captured and developed. American forces, as already noted, were expected to capture Cherbourg, and subsequently the Loire ports, and the British in due course to open the Seine ports. With the opening of these last beach maintenance was expected to cease. We have seen (above, page 18) the emphasis which the COSSAC plan laid upon the necessity for "sheltered waters", and the intention of providing it by sinking blockships. Now, to "reduce dependence on maintenance over open beaches in the early stages", plans were made not merely to provide small-craft shelters ("Gooseberries") formed by blockships ("Corncobs"), but also to construct two much more elaborate artificial harbours ("Mulberries") whose complicated components were manufactured in Britain and towed across the Channel. "There were five Gooseberries, two of which grew into Mulberries—no mean horticultural feat."\* Time was to show that this provision against the

\*Rear-Admiral H. Hickling, "The Prefabricated Harbour" (*Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, August 1945), an informative illustrated article. It may be noted that the Joint Outline Maintenance Project as first issued assumed the existence of only one Mulberry, but it was shortly amended to provide two, one in the British zone at Arromanches, one in the U.S. zone at St. Laurent.



SKETCH 4



possibility of unseasonable bad weather in the Channel was more than justified. It should be observed that, although the Gooseberries were actually finished by D plus 5, the Mulberries were not planned to be working to full capacity until D plus 14, and they were not in fact quite completed when they were struck by the great gale of 19 June (D plus 13).

Only a few of the multifarious aspects of the overall administrative plan can even be mentioned. They included provision of ammunition of a great variety of types in enormous quantities; petrol and water supplies; priorities for road and airfield construction; hospitals and depots. A feature of long-term petrol supply arrangements was the famous "PLUTO" (Pipe Line Under The Ocean), designed to carry liquid fuels across the Channel in submarine pipe-lines. Food was, of course, a major item: to ease the problem in the first stage each British soldier, when landing, would carry an emergency ration (together with two days' additional rations), a "Tommy Cooker", 20 cigarettes and a water-sterilizing outfit. Special arrangements governed the provision of reinforcements to replace casualties, the evacuation of casualties, the landing of medical stores and the handling of prisoners of war. Repair and recovery services for vehicles and equipment; salvage; Pay and Postal services; and a score of other administrative matters of comparable importance, all required attention, and attention in great detail, for months before D Day dawned.<sup>46</sup>

Looking beyond the initial stages of the assault, the administrative planners anticipated that most of the American supplies would come directly from the United States, through the Brittany ports, while the British forces were maintained through the Channel ports and Antwerp. These facilities would be taxed to the utmost by the Allied build-up. General Eisenhower expected to have a total of 86 divisions (including 10 from the Mediterranean) in North-West Europe before the winter of 1944-45.<sup>47</sup> This great force would be supported by extensive rear echelons and base installations. Thus, for every British and Canadian division landed (some 16,000 men) an additional 24,000 soldiers—or a total "divisional slice" of 40,000—would be present in the theatre. The American figure was estimated to be slightly higher (45,000 men); but later investigation showed that it was almost identical with the British figure.<sup>48</sup> The corresponding number of vehicles in the "divisional slice" was estimated to be 8000; the maintenance requirement, for both personnel and vehicles, ran to approximately 700 tons per division per day. Any serious interruption in the delivery of these supplies, resulting from inadequate planning, hostile action or bad weather, would jeopardize the success of the invasion.

### The Decision to Launch the Operation

We have already noted some of the tactical factors affecting the precise moment at which Operation "Neptune" was to be launched (above, pages 10, 12). From the naval point of view, we saw, an assault in daylight, made not long after dawn, was preferable to a night attack. This would reduce the navigational difficulties connected with the control of thousands of ships and craft and landing the troops

with certainty at the proper points; it would also increase the accuracy of the naval bombardment. Daylight would also enable the air forces to bomb more accurately. Broadly speaking, the requirement for overwhelming fire support may be said to have dictated the decision to land in daylight. At the same time, tide conditions had to be taken into account; it was necessary that the first landing should be at a period of relatively low but rising tide, so that landing craft would not become stranded and adequate forces with supporting weapons could be landed on the first tide. Furthermore, bright moonlight was required for the airborne phase of the operation. The portion of the Initial Joint Plan dealing with H Hour ran thus:

58. H Hour, which is defined as the time at which the first wave of landing craft should hit the beach, will be about 1½ hours after nautical twilight,\* and approximately 3 hours before high water, so as to allow a minimum period of thirty minutes daylight for observed bombardment before H Hour and to enable the maximum number of vehicles to be landed on the first tide. Should the operation be postponed from D Day, the time of H Hour on successive days may be extended to about 2½ hours after nautical twilight.

59. As H Hour is related both to nautical twilight and high-water, D Day is therefore dependent on the phase of the moon. It is the present intention that D Day should be during the full moon period as opposed to the new moon period, which fixes D Day in first week of June. D Day and the time of H Hour for that day, and for successive days to which a postponement is possible, will be notified later.

The enemy now introduced a new complication. We have already seen that early in 1944 Field-Marshal Rommel gave fresh impetus to work on the much publicized "Atlantic Wall" (above, pages 54-56). The additional ingenious obstructions which he strewed along the beaches in the invasion sector forced the Allied planners to reconsider, since these could only be effectively dealt with when exposed by low tide. Furthermore, our Intelligence discovered that the obstacles in the American sector extended farther down the beaches than in the British sector. Consequently, as Admiral Ramsay afterwards recorded, "it was finally necessary to select five different H hours, ranging over a period of one hour and twentyfive minutes".<sup>49</sup> In the Canadian sector, where offshore rocks presented an additional problem, two H hours were chosen—7:35 a.m. for the western and 7:45 for the eastern assaulting brigade.

When was D Day to be? At a meeting at SHAEF on 8 May, Admiral Ramsay gave the decisive naval recommendation: 4 June was unacceptable, 5 and 6 June acceptable, 7 June "could be accepted in case of extreme necessity".<sup>50</sup> On 17 May the Supreme Commander informed the Combined Chiefs of Staff that he had designated 5 June as D Day.<sup>51</sup>

But there was still the dreadful question-mark—the weather.

On the basis of the records, the chances for pleasant days in the first week in June were good. Yet as that month began the weather deteriorated, and the Allied meteorological staffs, under Group Captain J. M. Stagg, R.A.F. (Chief

\*See above, page 74n.

†Both General Eisenhower and Admiral Ramsay state in their published reports that the decision was made on 17 May, but Dr. Pogue, the author of the U.S. official volume *The Supreme Command*, concludes that the decision was made on the 8th and merely reported on the 17th.

Meteorological Officer, SHAEF), became increasingly apprehensive over the prospects for the chosen day. Finally, at a meeting in the early hours of 4 June, with an actual gale imminent, they reported to General Eisenhower that on the 5th air support would be impossible. Even under these conditions, General Montgomery was prepared to go; but the air commanders were opposed to taking the risk, and according to Montgomery Ramsay was unwilling to commit himself. The Supreme Commander postponed the operation for one day.

At this moment all the vessels of Force "U" from Devonshire and part of Force "O" from Portland were already at sea. Signals were sent to recall them. One convoy (Force U2A), consisting of 138 vessels and craft, did not receive the signal and at nine in the morning it was 25 miles south of the Isle of Wight and still steering for Normandy. Two destroyers and an aircraft were sent at full speed to turn it back, and succeeded. "Had this not been done", Admiral Ramsay later reported, "it is possible that the Force would shortly have been detected by the enemy's radar and this would undoubtedly have resulted in his increased vigilance for the next few days."<sup>52</sup>

At 9:30 p.m. on Sunday 4 June Southwick House, Portsmouth, where General Eisenhower was again meeting with his chief subordinates to consider the weather forecast, was being lashed by wind and rain. But Stagg and his colleagues had noted a decided change in the prospect, indicating the likelihood of temporary "suitable conditions" on the 6th. They added that "it was quite impossible to forecast the weather to be expected on Thursday, 8th June". Naval considerations at this stage rendered it impossible to execute the operation on the 7th even if the weather were favourable. For one thing, the naval bombardment forces which had sailed from their northern bases on the 3rd would have to put back to port to refuel; for another, if the U.S. assault convoys were told to sail for Tuesday and were recalled, they could not be ready again for Wednesday morning.<sup>53</sup> And as we have already seen the Navy had indicated in the beginning that the 7th would be the last suitable day. Essentially, therefore, General Eisenhower was forced to choose between Tuesday the 6<sup>th</sup>—when the weather would at best be possible rather than ideal—and postponement for a fortnight until the next suitable moon and tide period (which, we now know, was precisely the period of the great gale). Such a postponement involved frightful administrative complications as well as great danger that the secrecy of the operation would be compromised.

The Supreme Commander polled his subordinates. Again Montgomery was for going. Ramsay seems to have concurred. Leigh-Mallory and Tedder were dubious. The painful decision was Eisenhower's. And the decision was to go on the 6th. Orders were immediately issued accordingly. The matter was reviewed at another conference at about 4:00 a.m. on 5 June; but since the forecast had not changed for the worse the decision and the orders stood.\* "Overlord" was going in.

\*There is a rather remarkable disparity between the various versions of these events given by different witnesses and different historians. The foregoing account is based mainly on the U.S. official volumes, Pogue's *The Supreme Command* and Harrison's *Cross-Channel Attack*, which in turn are based on a thorough examination of the contemporary evidence. See also the narrative in the late Chester Wilmot's *The Struggle for Europe*, which contains long quotations from Stagg's diary.<sup>54</sup>

## CHAPTER V

### THE LANDINGS IN NORMANDY 6 JUNE 1944

(See Maps 1 and 2 and Sketches 5 and 6)

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#### Forth to Normandy

THE high historic moment towards which so many months of effort had been directed was now at hand. On the morning of Monday the 5th the tremendous assembly of loaded craft in the ports on the south coast of England began moving towards France.

The first British groups sailed from the Portsmouth area about nine in the morning, and from then on ships were steadily passing out through the channels east and west of the Isle of Wight. Simultaneously the American assault forces were sailing from the ports farther west. During the afternoon the leading groups of Forces "G", "J" and "O" arrived in the assembly area known as Area "Z" ("Piccadilly Circus") south-east of the Isle of Wight, and began making their way through the pre-arranged channels provided for them in the barrier of German minefields which interposed between our forces and the Normandy beaches.<sup>1</sup>

The minesweepers whose task it was to breach this barrier had sailed earlier. Their job was ticklish and dangerous. One of the units allotted to it was the 31st Canadian Minesweeping Flotilla, and other Canadian minesweepers served in British flotillas; sixteen in all were taking part. Long before dusk on Monday evening the sweepers were within sight of the coast of France; before darkness fell, it is recorded, the crews of one of the British flotillas could distinguish individual houses on shore. It had been fully realized that the minesweeping operations might compromise the security of the operation, but this risk had had to be accepted. Whether or not the Germans failed to observe the minesweepers, the fact remains that they were not fired upon by shore batteries or attacked by aircraft. The flotillas duly completed their task, cutting a considerable number of mines and marking the ten swept channels with lighted buoys. Some of the Canadian sweepers were within a mile and a half of the French coast during the dark hours of the morning of 6 June.<sup>2</sup>

Since about midnight on the night of 4-5 June, two British midget submarines (X23 and X20) had been in assigned positions close to the enemy shore. They were to flash coloured lights to help guide the assault forces in, and in particular to mark the points where Forces "J" and "S" were to launch their D.D. tanks

They had duly received the signal announcing the postponement and spent Monday on the bottom. On the morning of D Day these two little craft, the first Allied vessels to arrive in the assault area, carried out their allotted task, except that the weather was too rough to permit them to launch the dinghies which were to have marked separate points, including the launching position for the D.D. tanks for the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade's beaches.<sup>3</sup>

Commodore Oliver, commanding Force "J", was flying his broad pendant in the headquarters ship *Hilary*, which had served the 1st Canadian Division in the same capacity for the assault on Sicily. Embarked with him were Generals Crocker and Keller, with the headquarters of the 1st British Corps and the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. H.M.S. *Hilary* passed out through Spithead Gate, between No Man's Land Fort and Horse Sand Fort, at 7:25 p.m. on 5 June.

The wind did not stand fair for France. The Channel was rough, with waves five to six feet high in the open sea; conditions "most severe for loaded landing craft". The improvement foretold by the meteorologists had not yet fully materialized. The landing ships and craft tossed and pitched; many soldiers and some sailors were miserably sick. But with only relatively minor exceptions the night's voyage proceeded according to plan. Certain groups of craft got into the wrong marked channels through the minefield; one of these was Group 312, carrying the engineer assault vehicles for the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade. Generally speaking, Oliver reported, "Owing to the weather landing craft groups had difficulty in maintaining their planned speeds of advance, low though these were." This was to have its due effect upon the assault. But one fact overshadowed all others. At the time it seemed hard to believe, but "No offensive action by enemy air or surface forces was encountered by Force 'J' during the passage."<sup>4</sup>

### Operation "Neptune" Begins

As we have already seen, the air forces' part in the great invasion had begun many months before D Day. However, in terms of the actual assault, "Neptune"—and "Overlord"—may be said to have commenced at 11:31 p.m. on 5 June, when the R.A.F. Bomber Command began its attack upon the ten selected coastal batteries. About three-quarters of an hour later the advanced guards of the Allied armies came into action, when the first men of the British and American airborne divisions came down on the soil of Normandy.

On the U.S. flank, the first soldiers in France appear to have been men of the Pathfinder Group of the 101st Airborne Division, who are reported to have come down at 15 minutes past midnight.' It seems likely, however, that the first Allied soldiers who actually fought in Normandy were six platoons of the 2nd Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry who landed in the first wave of the 6th Airborne Division on the British flank. These platoons, carried in gliders, constituted along with a party of Royal Engineers a "*coup de main* force" which had the vital task of capturing intact the two bridges over the Canal de Caen a la Mer and the Orne River near Benouville. The gliders were due to land



at 20 minutes past midnight, and they did so. With a single exception,\* they came down very close to the bridges. The men of the Oxford and Bucks-worthy successors of the famous 52nd of Wellington's army-immediately rushed and overpowered the German defenders. The bridges thus seized were to be important in a later stage of the campaign.<sup>6</sup>

Simultaneously with the *coup de main* party the first Canadian soldiers descended on French soil. They were "C" Company of Lt.-Col. G. F. P. Bradbrooke's 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, who jumped by parachute along with the advanced party of the 3rd Parachute Brigade. The company was to secure and protect the dropping zone near Varaville which was planned for the main body of the Brigade.<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, the tasks of the Canadian company and battalion, as of the Division at large, were in general carried out, but not strictly according to plan (below, pages 116-17).

Thus before the sixth of June was half an hour old the great operation had been launched and important progress had been made. And something we had scarcely ventured to hope for had happened. The Germans had been taken by surprise.

### Bombardment by Air and Sea

The attack on the chief coastal batteries which the R.A.F. Bomber Command launched half an hour before midnight on the night of 5-6 June was, in terms of weight of bombs, the heaviest blow the Command had ever struck. It went on until 5:15 a.m., and during this period 5268 tons of bombs were dropped and the Command made 1136 individual sorties. The targets, from west to east, were batteries at La Pernelle, Crisbecq, St. Martin de Varreville, Maisy, St. Pierre du Mont, Longues, Mont Fleury, Ouistreham, Merville/Franceville and Houlgate.<sup>8</sup>

In this bombardment No. 6 (R.C.A.F.) Bomber Group played an important part, sending out 230 aircraft and dropping 859 tons. Its targets were Merville/Franceville and Houlgate, which were exclusively attacked by the R.C.A.F. Group, and Longues, where about one-third of the attacking force was Canadian. In addition, 16 Canadian pathfinder aircraft went out. Only one Canadian aircraft was lost. The results of the attacks were spotty. At Merville the markers quickly disappeared in dense low clouds, and in fact the battery was not hit.<sup>9</sup> At Longues also the bombardment was considered ineffective; yet a naval report based on examination of it after its capture states that the bombing was "remarkably accurate".<sup>10</sup> At Houlgate the attack was considered precise and well-concentrated. Both these batteries seem to have fired on D Day, though ineffectively.<sup>11</sup>

As we have already noted, at dawn the Eighth U.S. Air Force took up the bombardment in its turn. In the thirty minutes immediately before H Hour, 1083 heavy American bombers (out of 1361 dispatched) attacked the coastal defences, dropping 2944 tons. Here, as at so many points in the operation, the weather made itself felt. It was necessary to bomb by instruments through the

\*One of the gliders intended for the Orne bridge landed seven miles away, beside a bridge over the Dives. This platoon rejoined its unit on 8 June.



overcast. There was natural anxiety to avoid hitting our landing craft as they closed the beaches. Accordingly, "in the interest of greater safety and with Eisenhower's approval, pathfinder bombardiers were ordered to delay up to thirty seconds after the release point showed on their scopes before dropping. The danger of shorts was stressed in all briefings." The result of this thoroughly laudable caution was that the Americans' main concentrations fell "from a few hundred yards up to three miles inland" and "the beachlines from Omaha east were left untouched".<sup>12</sup> The defences both on Omaha and on the British and Canadian beaches remained almost intact. This was unfortunate, but it would have been still more unfortunate had the bombs come down among our landing craft.

The heavy attacks on various selected targets delivered by the fighter-bombers and light and medium bombers of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force began about the same time as the U.S. heavy bomber operation and no doubt contributed very considerably to disorganizing and demoralizing the defenders. It is questionable however whether they did much actual damage to the beach defences, except possibly in the case of the medium attacks in the "Utah" area, made visually, which were much more accurate than those of the heavies. Precise assessment of the attacks' effectiveness seems impossible.<sup>13</sup>

The naval programme of Counter-Battery Fire began, as noted in describing the plan, about the same time as the U.S. heavy bomber attack. It was on a tremendous scale. The major bombardment ships in the Western Task Force (i.e., in the U.S. sector) amounted to three battleships, one monitor, and ten cruisers (of which two were in reserve). In the Eastern Task Force there were three battleships (of which one was in reserve), one monitor and 12 cruisers (including one in reserve). In addition one battleship (H.M.S. *Nelson*) was held back as a spare unit for either task force.

In the British sector the heavy bombarding ships for the counter-battery tasks were organized in three Bombarding Forces. Of these the largest was Bombarding Force "D", composed of the battleships *Warspite* and *Ramillies*, the monitor *Roberts* and five cruisers. This force was to deal with the formidable batteries on the eastern flank of the assault area and south of the Seine. (The heaviest batteries which could bear on the assault area were those at Le Havre, which included guns up to 15-inch. These batteries would, however, it was hoped, be neutralized by bombing before D Day, and in fact they do not appear to have interfered with the assault and no naval fire had to be directed at them.) Bombarding Force "K" was attached to Assault Force "G" and consisted of four British cruisers and a Dutch gunboat. The weakest of the three British Bombarding Forces, "E", was that attached to Force "J". It consisted of the cruisers *Belfast* and *Diadem*, which were (rightly, as it proved) considered sufficient to deal with the weak batteries in the Canadian divisional sector.<sup>14</sup> The only batteries actually scheduled for bombardment by Bombarding Force "E" before H Hour were those at Ver-sur-Mer and Beny-sur-Mer (see above, page 68), which were duly engaged by *Belfast* and *Diadem* respectively, beginning at 5:30 and 5:52 a.m.\* The

\*The voluminous naval reports appear to contain no list of the batteries actually engaged before H Hour, but references to individual batteries indicate that the programme actually carried

destroyer *Kempenfelt* fired at an inland battery midway between Courseulles and Bernieres at 6:19 a.m.<sup>15</sup>

The naval fire, carried out with the aid of spotting aircraft, was more effective than the heavy bomber attacks which, as we have seen, were seriously interfered with by the weather. On the whole there was surprisingly little opposition to the assault on the part of the German coastal batteries. The fact is that few of these positions had really been completed, either as to their protection or as to fire control and communication arrangements.<sup>16</sup> The battery at Longues gave some trouble but was silenced by H.M.S. *Ajax* which actually put 6-inch shells through the embrasures of two of the four casemates. The Mont Fleury battery was also silenced. The batteries at Benerville and Houlgate seem to have done some ineffective firing and were engaged by naval vessels a number of times during D Day and later; these batteries were outside the assault area and not exposed to early capture by the Army.<sup>17</sup> But it is a remarkable fact that the German coastal batteries apparently did not score a single hit against our shipping on D Day. Admiral Ramsay summed the matter up as follows in his report:<sup>18</sup>

Fire from enemy coast defence guns was never effective, and was directed initially against the bombarding ships. Prior to the bombardment of Cherbourg [on 25 June], none of the bombarding ships received even one hit from shore-based guns. This is considered to have been due to the combined effect of the bombing of certain batteries carried out during the three months prior to D Day; to the heavy air bombardment of the larger coast defence batteries on the night of D-1 day; to the effect of the naval bombardment itself, and to the measures taken to prevent the enemy from ranging and spotting his fall of shot, by the use of smoke screens and radar counter measures....

In general, indeed, the failure of the Germans to strike, or even to attempt, any effective blow against the tremendous target offered by our shipping on D Day appears extraordinary. There was only one small naval enterprise that day. "Unfavourable tide and weather conditions" and the fact that "there were no indications of an enemy landing" had kept the German naval forces in harbour on the fateful Monday night. But at 3:09 a.m. Naval Group West received radar reports of ten large vessels stopped about seven miles off Port-en-Bessin (these were doubtless the landing ships of Force "O", then engaged in lowering their landing craft). This in conjunction with the reports of airborne landings led Admiral Krancke to order his flotillas to sea. Three boats of the 5th Torpedo Boat Flotilla were sent out of Le Havre to reconnoitre the Port-en-BessinGrandcamp area (later altered to the Orne estuary); while the 15th Patrol Flotilla (six patrol vessels) likewise sortied from Le Havre to patrol off the port. About 5:15, according to British reports, or a little later according to the Germans, these two units encountered Bombarding Force "D". The small German vessels were indistinctly seen against the land, and were obscured by a pre-arranged smoke screen laid by aircraft to cover the landing ships of the 3rd British Division from shore batteries. The British heavy ships opened fire and reported having sunk one torpedo-boat and one trawler. The German reports, however, establish that only

out was very similar to that laid down in the Joint Fire Plan dated 8 April, which envisaged bombardment of 20 batteries from La Pernelle on the extreme right, far up the Cherbourg Peninsula, to Benerville on the extreme left, only a short distance west of Trouville.

one vessel was lost—the patrol vessel VP 1509. The Germans fired 15 torpedoes. The smoke prevented them from observing the result. But they had taken their toll; one torpedo struck and sank the Norwegian destroyer *Svenner*.<sup>19</sup> This ship and the U.S. destroyer *Corry*, which was mined (and possibly also struck by shellfire) in the "Utah" area,<sup>20</sup> were the only major Allied warships lost that day.

The German naval forces in the Channel area were very weak, and no great effort could have been expected of them. More surprising was the complete failure of the German Air Force even to put in an appearance in the first hours of the assault. Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory reported that the first enemy air reaction on D Day was a reconnaissance of the Channel areas. The powerful fighter force (continuous cover by nine squadrons) which he provided over the assault area from dawn onwards met no opposition for many hours. Not until about 3:00 p.m. did the first German fighters and fighter-bombers appear: "This was nine hours after the assault began and fifteen hours after the first of very large formations of airborne transports and of the air bombardment squadrons had arrived over enemy territory." The first real effort of the *Luftwaffe* was on the night following D Day, and it was weak. About 85 enemy aircraft were over the beaches and shipping lanes that night.<sup>21</sup>

Although the German Navy and the German Air Force made so little attempt to halt the advance of our ships and aircraft towards Normandy, the German Army did not fail to offer the resistance that had been expected of it. Our troops as they approached the beaches found the enemy ware and waking.

### "Drenching" the Beach Defences

At dawn on 6 June the weather off the assault beaches was unpleasant. Admiral Ramsay's report summarizes the conditions thus:<sup>22</sup>

Wind. — Westnorthwest - force 4.\*  
 Sea. — Moderate - waves 3/4 feet.  
 Sky. — Fair to cloudy with cloud increasing.

Of all the assault forces, only "U", landing on the eastern beaches of the Cotentin, had relatively sheltered water. "There was little to choose between conditions anywhere else along the coast."<sup>23</sup> The commander of Force "J" estimated the wind at first light as force 5, and remarked, "The weather conditions were hardly in accordance with the forecast."<sup>24</sup> Landing operations were possible, but the circumstances were still very nasty for small craft.

The assaulting infantry had crossed the Channel in infantry landing ships (L.S.I.) which carried assault landing craft (L.C.A.) swung from their davits. When they had reached the planned "lowering position" within striking distance of the French coast, these ships lowered the assault craft, and the latter carried the infantry in to the beaches. The American lowering positions designed to be out of range of shore batteries, were 10 to 11 miles from the beaches, whereas the

\*An appendix to the report, dealing specifically with the assaults, says, "Wind West—Force 15 knots".

Eastern Task Force positions were only seven to eight miles out. Thus the American assault craft had a longer run-in (which under existing conditions was bound to be uncomfortable); and since in addition the American assaults were to be about an hour earlier than the British, Forces "O" and "U" reached their lowering positions some three hours before the British assault forces. The flagships of the Naval Commanders of Forces "U" and "O" anchored at 2:29 and 2:51 a.m. respectively. H.M.S. *Hilary* did not anchor until 5:58 a.m.<sup>25</sup>

Among the infantry landing ships bearing the assault brigades of the 3rd Canadian Division to France there were three (*Invicta*, *Duke of Wellington* and *Queen Emma*) which had helped to carry the 2nd Canadian Division to the raid on Dieppe in 1942.<sup>26</sup> They were bound now on a mission that was to have a happier outcome.

Although as we have seen the roughness of the sea somewhat disorganized the various craft groups of Force "J", it had not interfered with the voyage of the infantry landing ships, nor was it allowed seriously to interfere with forming up the assault forces at the lowering position. "The L.S.I. groups arrived punctually", reported Commodore Oliver, "and despite the rough weather the ships deployed neatly and anchored in good station. No time was lost in lowering and forming up the L.C.A.s which proceeded to the assault in a resolute and seamanlike manner." It is true that the Commodore also wrote, "The final approach of the Assault to the beaches was far from the orderly sequence of groups and timing which had been the rule during exercises."<sup>27</sup> The weather had been bad, but not quite bad enough to jeopardize the success of the operation.

Since the heavy bomber attack had been so ineffective, the programme of Beach Drenching Fire (above, page 75) was of tremendous significance to the success of the assault. Fortunately, this phase of the fire plan was on the whole very efficiently carried out. The comparatively light weapons used in it could not, in the nature of things, be expected to destroy concrete defences. It was hoped, however, that they would exercise a "neutralizing" effect, destroying or damaging the lighter defences and discouraging the defenders and forcing them to keep their heads down.

In this phase of the fire plan destroyers were important. General Keller subsequently described their fire as "accurate and sustained".<sup>28</sup> Two Canadian fleet destroyers, *Algonquin* and *Sioux*, played a part in the Canadian area; all told, 11 destroyers fired on the beach defences on the Canadian front.<sup>29</sup> Their fire was supplemented by that of the 4.7-inch guns of the L.C.G.(L) (above, page 7), of which two were allotted to each assaulting battalion's area. They fired on the enemy strongpoints from the flanks until the assault craft actually touched down. The Allied Naval Commander singled out the L.C.G.(L) as being of special importance, on account of the fact that, being able to operate closer inshore than destroyers, they were particularly valuable against concrete defences. The lighter support craft—L.C.S.(L)—with their shallow draft, were able to work still closer to the shore, and their 6-pounders had considerable effect.<sup>30</sup>

The rocket craft—L.C.T.(R)—seem to have been, on the whole, very effective; Commodore Oliver reported that they fired their salvoes "accurately and a little

early". (The plan called for them to fire in two "waves", at H minus 8 and H minus 5 minutes.) Their targets on the Canadian front were the four main strongpoints, each of which was fired upon by two rocket craft and a regiment of self-propelled guns.<sup>31</sup> The Hedgerows (above, page 7) were less satisfactory. The little assault craft, L.C.A.(HR), in which they were mounted, had to be towed. On the 7th Brigade beach on the right only one of the nine allotted arrived. Commodore Oliver reported, "The remainder had foundered or had had to be cut adrift before entering the swept assault channels, apparently because they were being towed at excessive speed for the rough weather prevailing." On the 8th Brigade front, on the other hand, all nine reached their firing positions on time, "a fine performance".<sup>32</sup> Captain G. Otway-Ruthven, R.N., the commander of Assault Group J.2, stated that they "were able to fire their bombs to very good effect", four on Nan White beach (Bernieres) and five on Nan Red (St. Aubin).<sup>33</sup>

The Army's own contribution to the drenching fire, as already fully noted, was provided by four regiments of self-propelled artillery. On the 7th Brigade's front astride the mouth of the Seulles, the 12th Field Regiment fired on the strongpoint immediately west of the river, and the 13th on the similar one immediately east of it. On the 8th Brigade's front farther east the 14th Field Regiment fired on the Bernieres strongpoint and the 19th on that at St. Aubin. The two pairs of regiments were grouped as "12 Canadian Field Regiment Artillery Group" commanded by Lt.-Col. R. H. Webb of the 12th Field, and "14 Canadian Field Regiment Artillery Group" commanded by Lt.-Col. H. S. Griffin of the 14th Field. Each of the four regiments was armed with 24 105-mm. guns embarked in six tank landing craft.<sup>34</sup>

The field regiments did their job well. According to Captain Otway-Ruthven, on the 8th Brigade beach the 19th opened fire at 7:39 and the 14th at 7:44. On the 7th Brigade's front the 13th began ranging at 6:55 and all guns opened fire "soon after". Captain A. F. Pugsley, R.N., commanding Group G.J.1, which landed the 7th Brigade, wrote later, with respect to the regiments on his front, "It was reported that their fire was good and on the correct target." General Keller's own opinion was that the self-propelled guns in general "put on the best shoot that they ever did".<sup>35</sup>

As the assault craft moved towards the beaches, the artillery regiments fired steadily over the infantrymen's heads. The craft carrying the guns approached the beach at a constant speed of about six knots. The guns were kept on the proper line by simply pointing the craft at the target area; the gunners corrected the range by dropping the elevation as the distance lessened. In each regiment fire was controlled by a senior officer embarked in the navigational motor launch which accompanied the craft group. Another senior officer in a support craft acted as regimental Forward Observation Officer, noting the fall of shot and reporting necessary corrections to the Fire Control Officer by radio telephone. The calculation was that each of the 96 Priests in the 3rd Division would fire some 120 rounds during the run-in. The storm of shell continued to fall for 35 minutes. It had been planned that when it ended, at the moment when the infantry were due to land, the

craft carrying the guns would be only some 2000 yards offshore. They now turned aside to await their turn to land.<sup>36</sup>

We shall see that the assaulting units complained of the ineffectiveness of the preparatory fire, and undoubtedly the actual damage done to the concrete defences was slight. The Royal Navy, always a severe critic of its own performance, remarked in an analysis of "Normandy bombardment experience" prepared in 1945, "A considerable number of medium and light gun positions, pillboxes, Tobruk-type positions, etc., received direct hits, but at a generous estimate not more than 14 per cent of a total of about 106 can be said to have been put out of action by naval gunfire, mainly from destroyers, L.C.G.s and L.C. S(L)."<sup>37</sup>

The effect of the beach drenching programme was assessed in the report<sup>38</sup> of a Combined Operations Headquarters Special Observer Party which examined the beach defences shortly after the assault. This contained the following passage:

Except in a few isolated cases where weapons had been put out of action by direct hits through the embrasures (it is not possible to establish the actual time when these were made) the beach defences were unaffected by the fire preparation. Reports have been received from all except S Beach that the defences generally were still in action when the fire plan had been completed, and while troops were being landed. Any neutralisation during the run in may have been due either to the morale effect of the bombardment or to the fact that until the leading waves were close in shore the defences could not bear or had insufficient range. All evidence shows that the defences were NOT destroyed. The majority of the defences appear to have been overcome eventually by infantry infiltration from the rear assisted by A.V.R.E's. and tanks. The majority of guns destroyed were put out of action by direct hits from A.F.Vs. A number of guns were also destroyed by their crews by using special demolition charges.

The same report, however, testifies that there was a heavy concentration of fire along the sea front, even though the concrete defences were little damaged. With respect to St. Aubin-sur-Mer, for instance, the report runs, "In general the buildings along the sea front were 90% destroyed. By this is meant that the walls were breached and inner dividing walls and floor had collapsed. The destruction was such that the buildings were rendered untenable for snipers during the bombardment though they would have found suitable cover subsequently. The remainder of the town was estimated to be between 30% and 40% heavily damaged. The damage appeared to have been caused mainly by shell fire and was not due to fires." There are very similar accounts of the other sectors.

No. 2 Operational Research Section, which worked with the 21st Army Group, made a detailed study of the work of the self-propelled artillery in the assault on the Canadian sector, questioning officers concerned and examining the target areas. In all cases the investigators found that the "maximum crater density" was "plus of the target" by 100 to 200 yards; in other words, the main weight of shells fell slightly inland of the strongpoints. In the case of the 13th Field Regiment the fire was reported correct for line; in the 12th and 14th Regiments' sectors the main weight of fire was reported to have fallen slightly east of the target; the 19th Regiment's shells "fell over an extremely large area approximately 700 yards wide and 300 yards deep measured from the forward line of defences".

The effect of the rocket fire, which as we have noted was directed at the same targets as that of the army artillery, got some attention from the Combined Opera-

tions Headquarters observers. At St. Aubin rockets were reported to have fallen somewhat to the west of the town; at Bernieres, "in the area of defences" and along a belt approximately 300 feet back from the sea wall; at Courseulles East evidence of rocket fire was found distributed across the area with the main weight "well back from the beach". At Courseulles West, where there were few buildings and therefore less evidence of fire effect, no definite report is made.

From all this it is evident that the effect of the drenching fire was moral rather than material. This means that it is quite impossible to measure it with precision. Nevertheless it was probably very considerable. A very large weight of high explosive shell came down in the general area of the beach defences immediately before the assault, and this bombardment continued for over half an hour. On balance, it seems likely that its effect on the morale of the defenders considerably eased the task of the assaulting infantry. The general conclusion of the operational researchers was: "It is safe to say that a degree of neutralization was achieved, as there were several instances of weapons which had ample ammunition and had not been fired. No individual element of the fire plan can be said to have had a material effect, but the self-propelled artillery in contributing to the cumulative effort which did produce a degree of neutralization, performed a most useful role."

The actual value of the drenching fire is strongly suggested by what took place at one strongpoint which received none, Le Hamel in the 50th Division sector. In this case everything went wrong. The heavy bombers missed the strongpoint, as they did elsewhere, although there are some reports of bomb damage in the area. The regiment of self-propelled artillery which was to fire on this target was unable to do so since "both their Navigational M.L. and control L.C.T. fell astern due to weather"; this regiment therefore fired on the same target as the regiment on its left, one motor launch controlling both. Three destroyers fired on the strongpoint, but "the enemy positions were protected against low trajectory fire from seaward". The net result was that this strongpoint gave much trouble, and was not captured until 4:30 p.m. on D Day.<sup>39</sup> The episode suggests that the drenching programme was actually very valuable.\*

### The Assault on the Beaches

As has been explained, the times set for H Hour varied across the front of assault, those on the British beaches being later than in the American sector. The original H Hour on the Canadian front was 7:35 a.m. for the 7th Brigade and 7:45 a.m. for the 8th. However, the lateness of certain craft groups resulting from the weather caused the two Assault Group Commanders to defer H Hour ten minutes more in each case. Thus the final H Hour was 7:45 a.m. for the 7th Brigade and 7:55 a.m. for the 8th. This was unfortunate, in that the higher

\*It should be remarked that this account is based entirely on naval evidence, since the war diary of the artillery regiment concerned makes no reference to the pre-landing shoot, and that of the infantry battalion concerned is vague. The naval reports however are quite categorical. It is worth adding that the fierceness of the resistance here may have been due in part to the fact that Le Hamel was held by troops of the 352nd German Division, which at this point overlapped the British front of assault.

tide made it more difficult to deal with the beach obstacles; to quote Commodore Oliver, "craft beached amongst the obstacles instead of short of them, and clearance of the outer obstacles was not practicable until the tide had fallen". The obstructions, and the mines attached to them, were in fact to take a heavy toll of our craft.<sup>40</sup>

The combination of the rough sea, the obstacles and the enemy's fire made an unpleasant prospect for the crews of the landing craft; but they were not daunted. In the words of Admiral Vian, "Their spirit and seamanship alike rose to meet the greatness of the hour and they pressed forward and ashore, over or through mined obstacles in high heart and resolution; there was no faltering, and many of the smaller Landing Craft were driven on until they foundered."<sup>41</sup>

The fire that came down upon the leading craft as they ran in was actually much less than had been feared. As we have seen, there was not much firing by the heavy inland batteries, and of what there was little if any was directed at the ships of Force "J". Nor were any enemy aircraft to be seen. As for the artillery weapons mounted in the beach defences, as already noted, they were so emplaced as to enfilade the beaches, and in almost all cases could not bear upon craft any distance offshore. In consequence, it was in the main only small arms and mortars that fired upon the approaching craft. Admiral Vian reported that opposition began to manifest itself only when the leading craft were about 3000 yards from the beach; and even then the fire was "only desultory and inaccurate", except on "Sword" Beach, where craft were damaged by mortar fire until about two hours after H Hour. Heavy fire directed at the craft while still afloat was in fact the exception rather than the rule; Commodore Oliver wrote, "In general, apart from some inaccurate mortar fire, very little shooting was directed on craft before touch down."<sup>42</sup> It was after the actual landings that really fierce opposition began to manifest itself.

In these circumstances, it was during the landing craft's sojourn on the beach, and still more their withdrawal from it, that they suffered most of their casualties. The commander of Assault Group J.2 (8th Brigade) reported, "The L.C.As. had had to beach amongst the Hedgehogs. Although no difficulty was experienced in steering the craft in through them, going astern out of them proved more difficult. A high percentage of L.C.As. of all the three flights set off mines in this way, causing them to founder."<sup>43</sup> In Force "J" as a whole 36 L.C.As. (25 per cent of the whole number engaged) were lost or damaged in the assault. The Force's casualties in craft were thus reported by Commodore Oliver:

Sunk . . . . 3 L. C. T. (A).  
 Badly damaged . . . 2 L. C. T. (3),  
     7 L. C. T. (4), 7 L. C. T. (5),  
     5 L. C. I. (S), 2 L. C. S. (M),  
     14 L. C. A.  
 Damaged or disabled . . . 18 L. C. T. (4),  
     8 L. C. T. (5), 2 L. C. I. (S),  
     22 L. C. A.

In total craft lost or disabled, Force "J" 's casualties were by a small margin the heaviest in the Eastern Task Force, numbering 90 craft as against 89 for Force



"G" and 79 for Force "S". Force "G" however had heavier losses in L.C.As: 52—while Force "S" lost only 29.<sup>44</sup>

The orders for the operation conjure up a picture of groups of vehicles and craft going ashore in orderly planned succession. They called for the first landing to be made, five minutes before H Hour, by the two squadrons of D.D. tanks assigned to each brigade sector; these were to be launched from their tank landing craft well offshore and to swim in. At H Hour itself the plan called for two L.C.T. groups to land on each brigade front: one carried the AVREs of the 5th Assault Regiment Royal Engineers, the other the tanks of the 2nd Royal Marine Armoured Support Regiment and a proportion of armoured bulldozers manned by Royal Engineers. The Royal Marine Armoured Support Regiment was equipped with Centaur tanks armed with 95-mm. howitzers, plus one Sherman tank for each troop. These tanks were not intended to fire during the run-in unless self-defence required it; their role was to land and engage targets that had escaped the main bombardment with observed fire from hull-down positions in the water.<sup>45</sup>

The assault companies of the forward infantry battalions were to hit the beach in assault landing craft five minutes after H Hour, by which time, it was hoped, the tanks and the engineers would have made some progress in clearing the obstacles and in overcoming such opposition as had not been beaten down by the bombardment. The reserve companies of the assault battalions were to land 15 minutes later, namely at H plus 20.<sup>46</sup>

This neat pattern was largely spoiled by the roughness of the sea, which in particular almost completely disrupted the plan for launching the D.D. tanks. On the 8th Brigade front no real attempt was made to swim them in; they came off their L.C.Ts. close inshore behind the leading infantry. On the 7th Brigade front, the Senior Officer of Group 311, carrying the tanks, considered the weather too bad to launch them at 7000 yards from the beach as planned. However, when closer in he decided that launching was possible and the tanks were sent off. There was some confusion, and in the case of one squadron those tanks which reached the beach arrived after the assaulting infantry (see below). As for the AVREs, on the 8th Brigade front they were the first element to land, a little in advance of the infantry; but on the 7th Brigade beaches their L.C.Ts., which were "straggling somewhat in their efforts to make up lost time", were a few minutes behind the assault companies.<sup>47</sup>

### The 7th Brigade's Beach Battle

The 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, as we have seen, was to be landed by Captain Pugsley's assault group on the right or western sector of the Canadian front. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, with one company of the reserve battalion (the 1st Battalion Canadian Scottish Regiment) attached, landed on "Mike Red" and "Mike Green" Beaches, west of the river-mouth at Courseulles, while The Regina Rifle Regiment landed on "Nan Green" immediately east of the river. The D.D. tanks of "A" Squadron of the 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars) were to sup-

port the Winnipegs, while "B" Squadron performed the same service for the Reginas. The 6th Armoured Regiment was commanded by Lt.-Col. R. J. Colwell.

There was some disagreement as to precisely when the D.D. tanks landed. Admiral Vian asserted that in all cases they arrived after the first landing craft touched down; but the weight of evidence supports the statement of Commodore Oliver that on the 7th Brigade front the tanks touched down first, "20 minutes before the infantry", although it seems evident that this was the case on only one battalion sector.

What happened was this. After the decision not to launch the D.Ds. at 7000 yards the craft proceeded towards the beach, "wasting" time so as not to arrive before the moment planned. When at a distance from the beach which Major J. S. Duncan, commanding "B" Squadron of the 6th Armoured Regiment, estimated at 4000 yards, the Flotilla Officer of the L.C.T. flotilla, after consulting the squadron commander, decided to launch the tanks. All the 19 tanks of "B" Squadron left the craft; and when about 2000 yards from the beach the squadron commander gave the order to deploy into line. Fourteen of the tanks duly landed on the proper beach, in Duncan's words, "somewhat later than was intended but still well in advance of either AVREs or Inf". Another landed later some distance to the east.<sup>48</sup> There seems no doubt of the tanks' being the first element ashore, for at 7:58 a.m. The Regina Rifle Regiment's headquarters received and logged from its "B" Company the code word "Popcorn", meaning "D.D. tanks have touched down". "B" Company's message reporting its own touchdown was not logged until 8:15.<sup>49</sup>

"A" Squadron's experience was less fortunate. The order to launch was longer delayed than in the case of "B"; it was given, according to the senior officer of Group 311, when the craft were about 1500 yards from the beach. "The launching", he reported, "took too long, and the L.C.T's drifted down on the tide." Major W. D. Brooks, the squadron commander, wrote, "All craft at this point were not in the proper formation for launching and all were being subjected to mortar and other enemy fire." The chains holding the door of one L.C.T. were shot away after one tank had been launched. Another craft with five tanks aboard landed them directly on to the beach. Only 10 tanks of "A" Squadron swam off the L.C.Ts., and of these seven reached the beach. The commander of Group 311 states that they were six minutes after the assaulting companies.<sup>50</sup> The war diary of The Royal Winnipeg Rifles confirms that the tanks were late; but an extremely warm letter from the Winnipegs' Commanding Officer (Lt.-Col. J. M. Meldram) attests the value of the support they gave him in his beach battle.<sup>51</sup>

The two squadrons between them lost seven tanks during the run-in, the majority evidently as a result of the roughness of the sea. One was run down by a rocket craft, all but a single member of the crew being saved. One tank was sunk due to its canvas screen having been damaged by mortar fire. Most of the men in the sunken tanks were rescued, thanks to the tanks' rubber dinghies.<sup>52</sup>

It seems evident from the accounts written by members of the 1st Hussars that the procedure followed by the tanks in most cases after touching down was to stop in the water on the seaward side of the beach obstacles, deflate, and open fire on

the nearest pillbox. While thus engaged a number were flooded and immobilized by the rising tide.<sup>53</sup>

The infantry's experience on the right battalion front of the Canadian division was a mixture of good and bad. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles state that they touched down at 7:49 a.m., all three assault companies landing "within seven minutes of one another".<sup>54</sup> On the far right, "C" Company of the Canadian Scottish, which was prolonging the Rifles' front here, reported that it landed with slight opposition, and the platoon which had the job of knocking out the 75-mm. casemate north of Vaux (above, page 70) approached it "only to find—thanks to the Royal Navy—the pill-box was no more".<sup>55</sup>

Quite different was the experience of "B" and "D" Companies of The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, a short distance to the left, whose task it was to deal with the western portion of the Courseulles strongpoint. The battalion diary remarked grimly, "The bombardment having failed to kill a single German or silence one weapon, these companies had to storm their positions 'cold'-and did so without hesitation." "B" Company met heavy machine-gun, shell and mortar fire beginning when the L.C.As. were 700 yards from the beach. This continued until touchdown, and as the men leaped from the craft many were hit "while still chest high in water".<sup>56</sup> But the Little Black Devils were not to be denied. "B" Company, with the aid of the tanks, captured the pillboxes commanding the beach; it then forced its way across the Seulles bridge and cleared the enemy positions on the "island" between the river and the little harbour. The fierceness of the fight on the beach is attested by the report of the Special Observer Party which later examined the German positions: "Big guns in this area were probably all put out of action by close range tank fire, and the machine gun and mortar positions gave up when surrounded by infantry." When the strongpoint was clear "B" Company had been reduced to the company commander (Capt. P. E. Gower) and 26 men. Gower, who had set a powerful example of leadership and courage as he directed the clearing of the successive positions, received the Military Cross. An assault party of the 6th Field Company Royal Canadian Engineers, which landed with the infantry, had similar losses; the company had 26 casualties during the day.<sup>57</sup>

"D" Company met less fierce opposition when landing, since it was clear of the actual strongpoint area. It had relatively little difficulty in "gapping" a minefield at La Valette and clearing the village of Graye-sur-Mer beyond it. When the reserve companies landed the beach and dunes were still under heavy mortar and machine-gun fire. "A" pushed inland towards Ste. Croix-sur-Mer, starting at about 8:05 a.m., while "C" advanced on Banville. The latter place fell comparatively easily, but machine-gun fire held up the advance in front of Ste. Croix. Assistance was asked from the 6th Armoured Regiment, which with "cool disregard" of mines and anti-tank guns beat down the opposition and permitted the advance to continue. By 5:00 p.m. the battalion was consolidated in and around the village of Creully.<sup>58</sup>

In dealing with the other half of the Courseulles strongpoint, east of the river, The Regina Rifle Regiment, as we have seen, had the advantage of the fact that their D.D. tanks reached the beach ahead of the infantry and in larger numbers

than on the Winnipegs' front. Here as at most points, however, the results of the preliminary bombardment had been disappointing. During the planning the village of Courseulles had been partitioned into blocks numbered 1 to 12, each to be cleared by a designated company; at the same time, careful study of aerial photographs and maps had familiarized the troops with the ground to such an extent that, as the Commanding Officer (Lt.-Col. F. M. Matheson) said, "nearly every foot of the town was known long before it was ever entered".<sup>59</sup>

The two assault companies ("A" and "B") reported touching down at 8:09 and 8:15 a.m. respectively.<sup>60</sup> "A" Company, which was directly opposite the strongpoint, immediately met heavy resistance. The strongpoint gave it a hard struggle, and Matheson testified that the help of the tanks of "B" Squadron of the 6th Armoured Regiment was invaluable. This observation is supported by the later examination of the German positions by the Special Observer Party, which reported, with respect to the 75-mm. position at the east end of the strongpoint, "The gun had fired many rounds (estimated 200 empties) and was put out of action by a direct hit which penetrated the gun shield making a hole 3" x 6". . . . It is probable that the gun was put out by a direct shot from a DD tank." Similarly, the 88-mm. position by the riverside was reported as "probably silenced by direct hits with guns from DD tanks", although the concrete and gunshield were marked by shells probably fired by destroyers and L.C.Gs. The nearby 50-mm. gun's shield had been pierced by holes "probably caused by aimed fire from tank at short range". Of the strongpoint generally, the observers report, "The guns had fired a considerable quantity of ammunition and were put out of action by accurately placed fire from close range by tanks."

When at last "A" Company had cleared the strongpoint after breaking through by "a left flanking attack", its troubles were not over. It moved on to its next task without leaving any force in occupation, and the Germans promptly filtered back into the positions "by tunnels and trenches". The work of clearance began again, with the assistance after a time of an additional troop of tanks. In the meantime, "B" Company, landing on the left of the battalion front east of the strongpoint, had met only slight resistance and had cleared a succession of the assigned blocks in the village. The fortunes of the reserve companies were similarly mixed. "C" reported touching down at 8:35 and moved inland without difficulty. "D", on the other hand, met catastrophe. Coming in late (it reported touching down at 8:55), several of its craft were blown up on mined obstacles concealed by the rising tide. Only 49 survivors reached the beach. As the companies overcame resistance in their areas they pushed inland towards the village of Reviers, where the battalion gradually concentrated in the course of the afternoon; the last company to arrive was "A", which had finally overcome the stubborn resistance in Courseulles. About 5:00 p.m. the Reginas began to advance southward from Reviers. Before 8:00 p.m. both Fontaine-Henry and Le Fresne-Camilly were in their hands.<sup>61</sup>

The 7th Brigade's reserve battalion, the 1st Battalion of The Canadian Scottish Regiment, commanded by Lt.-Col. F. N. Cabeldu, found opposition still alive as

its three companies approached "Mike" Beach about 8:30. The leading companies came under mortar fire on the beach, and one of them was held up there for some time while waiting for an exit to be cleared of mines. Soon after 9:30 the battalion was able to start its advance across the grainfields towards Ste. Croix-sur-Mer. En route it picked up its "C" Company, which had landed in the assault wave. There were a considerable number of casualties from machine-gun fire during the advance, which was pushed with all possible speed. After dealing with snipers in Ste. Croix the battalion continued its movement through Colombiers-sur-Seulles, passing through The Royal Winnipeg Rifles. Little or no opposition was now being encountered, and the Scottish could have gone farther, but under orders from brigade headquarters they dug in for the night around Pierrepont, with patrols out well in front of Cainet and Le Fresne-Camilly. The latter village had been taken over from The Regina Rifle Regiment.<sup>62</sup>

Delay in opening exits from the beaches on the 7th Brigade front prevented the field artillery from moving inland as soon as had been planned. In these circumstances, Lt.-Col. Webb brought the guns of the 12th Field Regiment ashore about 9:00 a.m. and put them into action actually on the beach. Deployed side by side amid the confusion of men and vehicles, they opened fire in support of the advancing infantry. In the late afternoon the regiment was able to move to its planned gun area between Ste. Croix and Banville. The 13th Field Regiment had landed somewhat later. The first battery to land established itself south of Courseulles. By evening the whole unit was in its designated position adjacent to the 12th Field Regiment's.<sup>63</sup>

The Centaurs of the Royal Marine Armoured Support Regiment had comparatively little to do on the 7th Brigade's beaches. Some of the Centaurs were lost at sea, and others landed late. They received few calls for fire, though one troop, answering a request received through a 13th Field Regiment observation party, silenced a beach position which was harassing the Reginas.<sup>64</sup>

Because of the late landings and the state of the tide, which was higher than had been predicted, the arrangements made for clearing the beach obstacles were badly disrupted. This task was to be shared by army engineers and special naval parties. Little could be done, as it turned out, until the receding tide uncovered the obstacles, which as we have seen inflicted heavy damage on landing craft.<sup>65</sup>

The clearance of exits from the beach was the business primarily of the AVREs and bulldozers of the assault engineers (the 5th Assault Regiment R.E.) and "Crabs" of the 22nd Dragoons. As already indicated, there was great difficulty in opening exits on the 7th Brigade front. A line of low sand-dunes, and beyond it a flooded area, were the causes of the trouble. On "Mike Red" Beach, one exit was opened across the dunes just west of Courseulles and the flooded area behind them, a bridge being laid and a rough causeway built across an AVRE which had become submerged at a cratered culvert on the track which it was planned to use. Some tanks got across about 9:15, then the causeway failed and traffic had to be stopped. This exit was not working quite satisfactorily until noon or later. A second one, on "Mike Green" farther west, gave less trouble and was working

fairly well by about 9:30. In the meantime the assault infantry had made good progress inland, but very few tanks or other vehicles were available to support them, and the beach was extremely congested.<sup>66</sup>

On "Nan Green" Beach, on the left, there was rather less difficulty; the Crabs dealt with the mines, an anti-tank ditch was filled with fascines dropped by the AVREs, armoured bulldozers improved the lanes, and both planned exits (leading into the East Courseulles strongpoint) were working by about 9:00 a.m. All across the brigade front the Engineers and the 22nd Dragoons had done yeoman service, and the former in particular had had a considerable number of casualties.<sup>67</sup>

### The 8th Brigade Beaches

As has been explained above (page 78), the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade Group was to lead the assault on the eastern sector of the Canadian Division's front, with The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada (Lt.-Col. J. G. Spragge) landing on "Nan White" Beach, on the right, and capturing the resistance nest at Bernieres, while The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, under Lt.-Col. D. B. Buell, landed on "Nan Red" on the left and cleared the similar strongpoint at St. Aubin. The brigade's reserve battalion was Le Regiment de la Chaudiere (Lt.-Col. J. E. G. P. Mathieu). Armoured support in the assault phase would be provided by the D.D. tanks of the 10th Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse), commanded by Lt.-Col. R. E. A. Morton, with "B" Squadron supporting the Queen's Own and "C" Squadron the North Shore.

The D.D. tanks on the 8th Brigade front, as already indicated, had a quite different experience from those with the 7th; instead of swimming in, they left their craft close inshore and landed behind the infantry assault companies. The D.D. equipment was inflated, and the tanks used their propellers, but the operation was "really a wet wade".<sup>68</sup> Captain G. Otway-Ruthven, whose naval assault group landed the brigade, reported, "The L.C.Ts. with the D.D. Tanks touched down at 0810 and except for one craft which beached on LOVE Sector and was missed all the tanks got ashore and the L.C.Ts. got clear of the beach without much damage."<sup>69</sup> The war diary of the 10th Armoured Regiment implies, rather than states, that the tanks landed before the first infantry, but gives no time. All other evidence is that the infantry were earlier. The Queen's Own Rifles indicate that the tanks were behind the assault companies. Evidence from the North Shore Regiment is that neither tanks nor Centaurs were present at the moment of the first infantry landing, which the officer commanding one of the assault companies puts at 8:05,<sup>70</sup> but the battalion diary at 8:10. The 5th Assault Regiment records are similar. The 80th Assault Squadron indicates that on the right the infantry were first, followed by the AVREs and later by the tanks; on the left, it reports the D.D. tanks did not arrive until H plus 60.<sup>71</sup> It seems evident that on both battalion fronts the D.D. tanks were behind the leading infantry, but likely that most of them landed only a few minutes later.

On the right sector of the Brigade front, "B" Company of the Queen's Own ran into difficulty. Captain Otway-Ruthven reports that the assault companies "touched

down about 200 yards east of their correct position". "B" landed directly in front of the "resistance nest" at Bernieres. "Within the first few minutes there were 65 casualties." Then Lieut. W. G. Herbert, Lance-Corporal Rene Tessier and Rifleman William Chicoski dashed at the pillbox which was causing the losses, and put it out of action with grenades and Sten gun fire. This opened the way for clearing the rest of the strongpoint.\* In other respects the battalion's experience paralleled that farther west. The other assault company, "A", landing west of the strongpoint, had much less difficulty in getting off the beach, but shortly came under mortar fire and also suffered casualties. The reserve companies, like those on other sectors, suffered heavy casualties to their craft by mines as they came in, but fortunately losses among personnel were not numerous. By the time these companies arrived the Bernieres strongpoint was being mopped up, and they were able to get through to the southern edge of the village. During the afternoon they led the battalion's advance southward towards Anguerny, which was captured after some resistance had been overcome.<sup>72</sup>

This was the only Canadian assault battalion front where tank support was reported as ineffective. The 10th Armoured Regiment itself recorded that the Q.O.R. suffered severely "before B Squadron could support it". The Special Observer Party, which did not report any visible damage by tank fire, got the impression that it was possible that "very good tactical surprise was achieved here". But this was not in fact the case, and the troop of assault engineers working on the beach 500 yards east reported being heavily fired on by the two 50-mm. anti-tank guns in the Bernieres strongpoint, which, they said, were silenced only after some 15 minutes, when they were captured by the infantry. Men of the 5th Field Company R.C.E., labouring at removing charges from the beach obstacles, also had heavy casualties on both "Nan Red" and "Nan White".<sup>73</sup>

On the left sector, the North Shore Regiment found that the St. Aubin strongpoint "appeared not to have been touched" by the preparatory bombardment. "B" Company had the task of dealing with it, and this was done with the assistance of the tanks and later the AVREs, which used their petards with effect. "The co-operation of infantry and tanks was excellent and the strongpoint was gradually reduced." The battalion diary records that the area was cleared by 11:15, four hours and five minutes after landing. It appears, however, that there was still sniping going on after this time, and the O.C. "B" Company stated that the enemy in the strongpoint did not finally give in until 6:00 p.m.<sup>74</sup>

The 50-mm. anti-tank gun in the resistance nest here caused serious trouble in the early stages of the assault. "B" Company's commander recorded that it knocked out the first D.D. tanks to arrive; subsequently two other tanks and an AVRE dealt with it. The Special Observer Party reported that the concrete of the emplacement bore the mark of a 95-mm. shell, evidently fired by a Centaur. The gun had been put out of action by tank fire, but "about 70 empty shell cases" around the emplacement attested the resolution with which its crew had fought it.

The North Shore's "A" Company, landing to the west of "B",<sup>75</sup> suffered some casualties in booby-trapped houses but in general made good the beachhead objective without great difficulty. The reserve companies, "C" and "D", likewise

\*Herbert received the Military Cross, and Tessier and Chicoski the Military Medal.

had comparatively little trouble in the beginning. "D" carried out its task of securing the south end of St. Aubin, and "C", which was to seize the inland village of Tailleville, met no opposition until it reached the actual outskirts of that hamlet. Here the enemy, well dug in, fought long and hard; in spite of early optimistic reports, it was "nearing evening" before the company, with tank support, finally cleared the place, taking over 60 prisoners.<sup>76</sup> Divisional Headquarters logged the report of its capture at 8:10 p.m.

Le Regiment de la Chaudiere, the brigade's reserve unit, began to land at Bernieres about 8:30 a.m. Its craft had a difficult time with the beach obstacles. Captain Otway-Ruthven described "A" Company's experience: "The L.C.As. of the 529th Flotilla (H.M.C.S. *Prince David*) struck a very bad patch of obstacles and mortar fire on *Nan White* and all foundered before touching down. The troops, however, discarded their equipment and swam for the shore. They still had their knives and were quite willing to fight with this weapon." This was only a slight exaggeration; Canadian naval records indicate that just one of *Prince David's* five assault craft made the beach undamaged.<sup>77</sup> Luckily, most of the men reached it safely. The battalion, however, was held up along the sea-wall for some time while the Queen's Own Rifles finished dealing with the strongpoint. It then advanced through the village, meeting opposition, and assembled in the wooded area on its south edge.<sup>78</sup> The people of Bernieres were surprised and delighted to find themselves liberated by men who spoke their own tongue. The regiment's diarist wrote, "Les francais sont assez accueillants et beaucoup nous acclament au milieu des ruines de leurs maisons." Two years later the present writer, visiting Bernieres, found the recollection of Le Regiment de la Chaudiere still strong among the people of the village.

The battalion records that it spent two hours in the assembly area (it reported itself still there at 1:56 p.m.) and then pushed southward towards Beny-sur-Mer, supported by "A" Squadron of the 10th Armoured Regiment. Traffic congestion slowed the advance. "A" Company captured a battery, described, apparently inaccurately, as consisting of 88-mm. guns, and, evidently somewhat later, "B" took what may have been the position known as the Beny-sur-Mer battery (above, page 68).<sup>79</sup> Beny-sur-Mer itself was captured by "C" Company, apparently about mid-afternoon, though the actual time seems nowhere to have been recorded.\*

The two self-propelled artillery regiments employed on the 8th Brigade front, the 14th Field Regiment and the 19th Army Field Regiment, R.C.A., began to land at 9:25 and 9:10 a.m. respectively. They had no great difficulty in getting off the beach. The 14th had 18 guns in action near Bernieres by 11:30; the 19th had its first gun in action at 9:20. Both regiments had casualties in men and guns from enemy artillery fire. It appears that both spent most of the day in action in improvised gun areas close to Bernieres. In the evening the 14th, at least, moved forward to a planned area a mile or so north of Beny.<sup>81</sup>

\*Headquarters 8th Brigade signalled the Chaudiere at 3:35 p.m., "Understand you are in Aleppo [Beny] ", but there is no confirming reply in the log.<sup>80</sup>



On the 8th Brigade beaches, as on the 7th's, the Royal Marine Centaurs had not a very great deal to do. One troop came into action on the beach against targets in St. Aubin and subsequently gave assistance to No. 48 Commando in its struggle to clear the village of Langrune-sur-Mer just to the eastward. A number of Centaurs intended for these beaches did not arrive until D plus 1 or D plus 2.<sup>82</sup>

On clearance of obstacles, the story on the 8th Brigade beach was much the same as on the 7th's. By the time the engineers arrived the tide was too high to permit much work on them; "it was obvious from the outset", recorded No.80 Assault Squadron R.E., "that beach obstacles could not be cleared". Neither the sappers nor the naval Landing Craft Obstacle Clearing Units were able to make headway with the task until the tide fell.

Four beach exits were planned for the brigade front: two at the village at Bernieres and two between Bernieres and St. Aubin.<sup>83</sup> The set of the tide caused most of the engineers' craft to touch down some distance east of their planned positions. In the Bernieres area the high sea-wall caused some trouble, which was made worse by the effects of enemy fire. However, four exits were opened here by the 5th Assault Regiment R.E., one with the aid of a "small box girder" assault bridge placed over the wall by an AVRE, one at a point where the wall had been broken down, one by clearing an obstructed ramp, and one in a manner not described. On the beach east of Bernieres there was less trouble; with the assistance of Crabs which flailed lanes through the sand dunes at least two exits were shortly opened, one using a bridge over the wall, the other being a double lane passing over the dunes. In general the situation was less difficult than at Courseulles, and in consequence there was somewhat less congestion on the beaches.<sup>84</sup>

### The Reserve Brigade Lands

While the 7th and 8th Brigades were fighting their way forward, the craft carrying the reserve brigade, the 9th,\* were circling offshore waiting their turn to go in. At 10:50 a.m. Divisional Headquarters ordered the brigade to land.<sup>85</sup> As was natural in the state of the beaches, it was sent in through the 8th Brigade sector in accordance with the primary plan (above, page 79). However, it was considered necessary to land the entire brigade on Nan White beach.<sup>86</sup> (Craft had been diverted from Nan Red since about 10:30, since "the craft casualties were getting serious";<sup>87</sup> the opposition still being offered by the St. Aubin strongpoint may also have had some influence.) This meant that the whole brigade had to land through Bernieres and make its way southward over one road only, that leading to Beny-sur-Mer.

The battalions actually began to land about 11:40. At 12:05 Brigade Headquarters reported, "Beaches crowded, standing off waiting to land"; but fifteen minutes later it signalled that the brigade commander had landed and the units were moving to their assembly area near Beny.<sup>88</sup> However, the 8th Brigade's

\*This brigade crossed the Channel in the same craft-Landing Craft Infantry (Large)—which landed it on the beaches.

slow progress and the severe congestion around Bernieres retarded the movement. The battalions halted on the outskirts of the village, and The North Nova Scotia Highlanders (Lt.-Col. C. Petch), who were in the lead, did not move on towards Beny until 4:05 p.m. They were accompanied by the 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment), commanded by Lt.-Col. M. B. K. Gordon, and were followed by the other battalions of the brigade, The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders (Lt.-Col. G. H. Christiansen) and The Highland Light Infantry of Canada (Lt.-Col. F. M. Griffiths).<sup>89</sup>

At 6:20 p.m. the North Nova Scotias and the 27th Armoured Regiment, acting as the brigade's advanced guard, moved off from the assembly area to pass through the Queen's Own and the Chaudiere and carry the advance southward. Three companies of the Highlanders rode on the Sherbrookes' tanks. In the vicinity of Colomby-sur-Thaon "A" Company met opposition which, while not serious, caused some further delay. The vanguard in the meantime had run into other resistance at Villons-les-Buissons. It was now evident that the advanced guard units could not reach their objective in the Carpiquet area before dark. They were therefore ordered to dig in for the night in the area where they found themselves "and to, form a firm base while there was still light".<sup>90</sup> The infantry and tanks accordingly "formed a fortress" in the area Anisy-Villons-les-Buissons.<sup>91</sup> The brigade's other battalions were still in the assembly area at Beny.

General Keller had left H.M.S. *Hilary* with part of his staff at 11:45, and Divisional Headquarters was set up in a small orchard at Bernieres. Here at 2:35 p.m. Keller held a conference which was attended by the commanders of the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades and the 2nd Armoured Brigade. No changes of plan resulted. It was confirmed that the North Shore Regiment was having trouble in Tailleville and that the 8th Brigade would push on to take Beny-sur-Mer, while the 9th would pass through it on the G.O.C. giving the code word "Kingston".<sup>92</sup> These orders, we have already seen, were duly carried out.

At 9:15 p.m. the G.O.C. sent out his orders for the night by liaison officer. The 7th Brigade on the right was to occupy the area Le Fresne-Camilly—Cainet. The 8th was to hold the area Colomby-sur-Thaon-Anguerny and to contain La Delivrande and Douvres-la-Delivrande with a view to clearing them both at first light in the morning. The 9th Brigade was to occupy the area Villons-les-BuissonsLe Vey.\* This was generally equivalent to ordering the brigades to hold the ground on which they found themselves, namely, the intermediate objective known in the plan as "Elm" (above, page 77). The 10th Armoured Regiment, and the 6th less one squadron, were to revert to the command of the 2nd Armoured Brigade and harbour in the area Beny-sur-Mer-Basly. (In fact, the whole of the 6th Armoured Regiment harboured at Pierrepont in the 7th Brigade area.) Division ordered active patrolling and "utmost preparation" to meet a counter-attack at first light.<sup>93</sup>

The Division had made much less progress than the day's plans had called for. (As we shall see, its neighbours were in similar case.) The time-table had

\*There is no record of The North Nova Scotia Highlanders having occupied Le Vey during the night, but they may well have covered the area by patrols without recording the fact.

been in arrears from the beginning, when the state of the sea necessitated setting back the times of landing; and it had fallen steadily further behind as the hours passed. The lateness of the landing, and the consequent impossibility of clearing the beach obstacles, resulted in the beaches becoming clogged with damaged craft. And as so often in this war, the vehicles of a mechanized army, intended to facilitate rapid movement, had in fact become hindrances to advance. The difficulty in opening exits from the beaches had led to congestion, and the enemy's determined resistance at certain points, notably St. Aubin and Tailleville, had paid him considerable dividends. The accumulated difficulties, by forcing the reserve brigade to land on a narrow front where it had only one forward route available, prepared the way for further delays.

To the Division's failure to reach even its final D Day objectives there was one small exception, or rather near-exception. A troop of tanks of "C" Squadron of the 1st Hussars, commanded by Lieut. W. F. McCormick, which was supporting The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, helped them through Creully and then "just kept on going", pushing on through Camilly to the north edge of Secqueville-en-Bessin. En route they shot up a German scout car and inflicted casualties on parties of infantry; and Mr. McCormick was punctiliously saluted by a German soldier who evidently did not expect to meet the enemy so far inland.<sup>94</sup> The fact that these few tanks—which probably got closer to the final inland objective than any other element of the Allies' seaborne assault forces that day—were able to push so far and return is evidence of how slight the resistance on the 7th Brigade's 'front was during the afternoon.

The armoured cars of the Inns of Court Regiment had not been able to carry out their task (above, page 81) of destroying bridges over the Orne. Some of the squadron's vehicles were lost before landing or on the beaches. It landed at Courseulles, and was one of the victims of the slowness in opening beach exits there. An isolated message from it appears in the Division's log at 11:40 a.m.: "Left exit clear, priority to be given to anti-tank guns". It seems to have got off the beach about noon, and the greater part of it crossed the Seullles at 3:00 p.m., apparently at Creully. But the armoured cars did not get through to the Orne, or the nearer Odon, which the 1st Corps operation instruction had prescribed as an alternative objective.<sup>95</sup>

The casualties suffered by the 3rd Canadian Division on D Day, though heavy, were fewer than had been feared. For the whole day Canadian losses in the seaborne force amounted to 340 all ranks killed or died of wounds, 574 wounded and "battle injuries", and 47 taken prisoner. It is not possible to distinguish between casualties suffered on the beaches and those in the later stages. There was not much difference between the casualties of the two assault brigades.\* The Infantry unit that suffered most heavily was the Queen's Own Rifles of the 8th Brigade, which lost 143 men; this loss was presumably mainly caused by the strongpoint at Bernieres, captured without tank assistance. Next came The Royal

\*In *The Canadian Army 1939-1945* the writer made the statement that the beach battle was "somewhat fiercer" on the 7th Brigade's front than on the 8th's. More careful and leisured analysis leads him to the conclusion that there was little to choose between the two.

Winnipeg Rifles, which had 128 casualties. This reflects the bitter fight at Courseulles. The North Shore Regiment lost 125 men, chiefly undoubtedly in the prolonged fighting at St. Aubin and Tailleville.<sup>96</sup> A detailed tabulation of Canadian D Day casualties will be found at Appendix "B".

### The Situation at the End of D Day

At this point, let us lift our eyes from the situation on the Canadian sector and survey the general progress of the great Allied assault. Speaking broadly, the day had been extraordinarily successful; but, as was only to be expected, the degree of success varied considerably between different areas.

On the far right the two United States airborne divisions were greatly scattered during their drop.\* The operations of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions were far from going according to plan. Nevertheless, although casualties were heavy and there was some confusion, these operations were valuable. By the evening of D Day the airborne troops had captured Ste. Mere-Eglise and were in general control of a large area lying between that place and Carentan. They had certainly contributed materially to disordering the enemy and confounding his counter-measures.

Of all the seaborne assaults, that which met least resistance was the attack by the 7th U.S. Corps, with the 4th U.S. Infantry Division under its command, on "Utah" Beach in the lower part of the Cotentin peninsula. We have seen that the bombing of the beach defences was more effective here than elsewhere. Although the assault battalions were landed almost 2000 yards south of the planned positions, this was actually fortunate, since they struck areas which were less heavily defended. Success was complete and casualties "extraordinarily light". By evening a substantial bridgehead had been established.<sup>97</sup>

Very different was the story on "Omaha" Beach, east of the estuary of the Vire. Here the invading forces had more difficulty than at any other point; losses were extremely heavy, and for a time success seemed to hang in the balance. On this front the 5th United States Corps was assaulting with the 1st U.S. Infantry Division, reinforced by part of the 29th, under its command. At least some of the reasons for the trouble here are fairly obvious. For one thing, the military quality of the defenders (the 352nd German Division) was somewhat higher than elsewhere. As we have seen, this division had moved up to the beaches in March. (Information indicating this move had reached the Allies before the assault, though the 21st Army Group's weekly intelligence review issued on June 4 described the evidence for it as "slender indeed".) The terrain, moreover, favoured the defenders. The coast was steeper than on the British front farther east, the beaches being overlooked at short range by high ground. At the same time, the German defences on this sector were probably somewhat stronger than at any other point on the front, particularly in terms of the number of machine-guns bearing on the beaches. In addition, the assaulting infantry were less strongly

\*Their drop patterns are graphically shown by maps IX and X in Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack*.

supported than on the British sectors. A battalion of D.D. tanks was employed here, but of 32 of them launched on the eastern half of the sector only five reached the shore; while artillery being ferried ashore in DUKWs had even higher casualties from the heavy sea." The Americans had no engineer assault vehicles or flails. Those who have read the account of events on the Canadian beaches will realize that without the D.D. tanks, AVREs and Crabs Canadian casualties would certainly have been higher than they were.\*

The result of all these circumstances was that the Americans on "Omaha" had to fight desperately to gain and keep a foothold, and casualties here were heavier than anywhere else. On the evening of D Day the beachhead was still narrow and precarious, 2000 yards deep at best. Not until 8 June did the advance on this sector really get under way.<sup>99</sup>

On the front of the 30th British Corps ("Gold" sector), which was assaulting with the 50th British Infantry Division under command, the situation developed in a manner not unlike that on the Canadian front. The landing was carried out successfully, although, as already indicated, certain strongpoints on the coast offered prolonged resistance, and the final inland objectives were not reached. By the evening of D Day the 50th Division was firmly established ashore, had penetrated to within striking distance of Bayeux and the Bayeux-Caen road, and was in touch with the 3rd Canadian Division on its left (the 7th Green Howards and The Royal Winnipeg Rifles having made contact with each other at Creully during the afternoon).<sup>100</sup> The 50th Division beachhead and the Canadians' were thus firmly linked up, but the 50th was not yet in touch with the Americans on "Omaha".<sup>101</sup>

There had likewise been no contact as yet between the 3rd Canadian Division and the 3rd British Division on its left. When night fell on D Day the Germans were still resisting in a portion of the beach defences immediately east of the Canadian sector. As already explained, the task of clearing these had been allotted to Royal Marine Commandos of the 4th Special Service Brigade. 'They ran into serious trouble. No. 48 Commando, landing at 8:43 a.m. on D Day opposite and immediately east of the St. Aubin strongpoint, suffered very heavily from the strongpoint's fire and subsequently met resolute opposition in Langrune. A similar situation faced No. 41 Commando, which landed at Lion-sur-Mer with the mission of clearing that village and Petit Enfer to the west of it. The Lion strongpoints proved very difficult to deal with and on the afternoon of D Day the 8th British Infantry Brigade took over the direction of the fight there.† The last strongpoint in Lion was taken only on 8 June. It was necessary on the morning of the 7th to land No. 46 Commando to deal with Petit Enfer. The strongpoint here surrendered at 6:00 p.m. that day.<sup>102</sup>

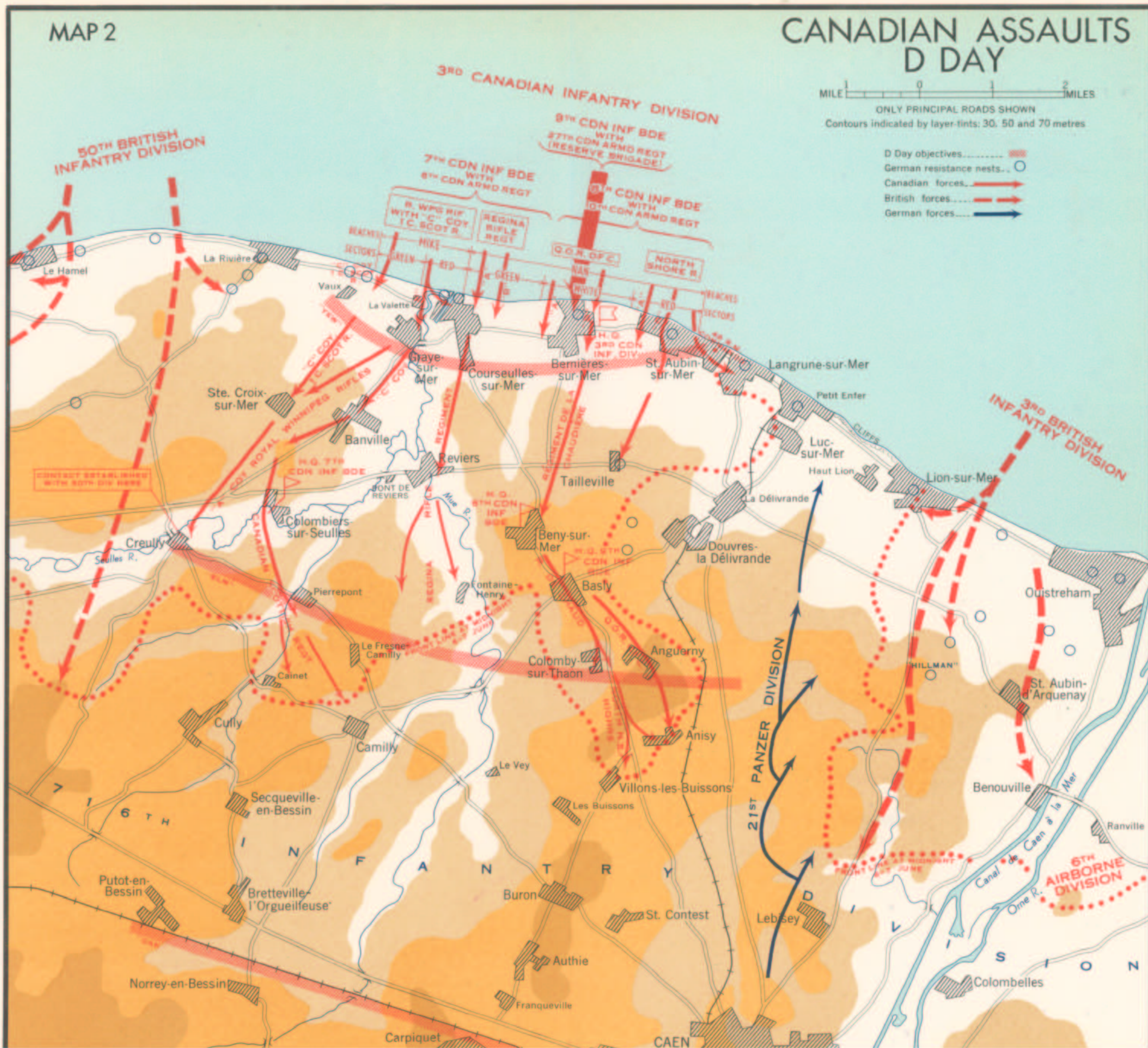
The 3rd British Division itself had met serious resistance north of Caen and had failed to seize the city. By the evening of D Day, however, it held a solid wedge of territory with its base on the coast between Lion and Ouistreham,

\*For a discussion of the Americans' refusal to avail themselves of the British "special armour", except the D.Ds., see Chester Wilmut, *The Struggle for Europe*, 264-6, 291.

†The diary of No. 41 Commando indicates that it came under the command of the 9th Brigade (evidently an error for the 8th) at 3:00 p.m.

MILE 1 0 1 2 MILES  
 ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS SHOWN  
 Contours indicated by layer-tints: 30, 50 and 70 metres

- D Day objectives.....
- German resistance nests.. O
- Canadian forces.....
- British forces.....
- German forces.....





#### STRONGPOINT AT ST. AUBIN-SUR-MER

The 50-mm. anti-tank gun in the "resistance nest" attacked by The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment on D Day. This gun was fought with determination and gave much trouble. From a water-colour by Capt. O. N. Fisher.



#### THE ABBEY OF ARDENNE

The lofty chapel served as an observation post for Kurt Meyer on 7 June (later General Crerar used it for the same purpose). The Abbey was the scene of fierce fighting on 8 July. Photograph taken in 1946.



DIVINE SERVICE ON BOARD H.M.C.S. *ALGONQUIN*, 18 JUNE 1944

A scene in the destroyer which carried General Crerar and members of his staff to Normandy. From left to right in the centre foreground, Brigadier A. E. Walford; Brigadier C. C. Mann; Captain F. L. Houghton, R.C.N.; General Stuart; Lt.-Cmdr. D. W. Piers, commanding H.M.C.S. *Algonquin*; General Crerar.



CANADIAN CONVOY IN CAEN

Vehicles of the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade Company, R.C.A.S.C., bringing up supplies to the brigade through the ruined city, July 1944. From a watercolour by Major W. A. Ogilvie.



and its point on the Lion-Caen road near Leбіsey. This division had had to deal with the first German armoured counter-attack, which developed late in the afternoon. According to the 3rd Division, some 40 tanks of the 21st Panzer Division came in on the western flank, only to meet effective opposition from the British tanks and anti-tank guns. The 3rd Division calculated that it knocked out 13 tanks.<sup>103</sup> General Feuchtinger of the 21st Panzer later said that one group of his tanks (probably additional to the 40 reported by the British) reached the sea "at Lion-sur-Mer". Evidence from our side does not support this, but the way was quite open to the coast around Luc-sur-Mer, farther west.<sup>104</sup>

The orders given to the 3rd British Division had specifically recognized the possibility that it might fail to take Caen on D Day. The Second Army outline plan as issued on 21 February (above, page 76) had continued the following passage:

1 Corps will assault with 3 Cdn Div right on a two brigade front and 3 Br Div left on a one brigade front and secure Caen 0368 by the evening of D Day. The capture and retention of Caen is vital to the Army Plan.

Second Army's Operation Order No. 1, dated 21 April, was firm in its terms:

On D Day 1 Corps will:

- (i) Assault the beaches between 940865 [just west of Vaux] (incl) - R Orne (incl).
- (ii) Capture Caen.
- (iii) Secure a firm base on the general line Putot-en-Bessin 9072 (incl) - Caen (incl) ...

The operation instruction issued by the 1st British Corps, however, somewhat weakened this. It is true that it repeated the statement about the capture and retention of Caen being vital to the Army plan, and defined the general role of the 3rd British Division as follows: "The task of 3 British Division is to capture Caen and secure a bridgehead over R Orne at that place." After defining the lines on which the enemy might develop his counter-attack, through or on either side of Caen, the order however proceeded:

(c) To counter these enemy measures 3 Brit Inf Div should, before dark on D Day have captured or effectively masked Caen and be disposed in depth with bde localities firmly established:—

(i) North West of Benouville, in support of 6 Airborne Division operating East of R Orne (having relieved the Airborne tps West of the Canal and taken over the defence of the Benouville—Ranville crossings).

(ii) North West of Caen, tied up with the left forward bde locality of 3 Cdn Inf Div.

(d) Should the enemy forestall us at Caen and the defences prove to be strongly organized thus causing us to fail to capture it on D day, further direct frontal assaults which may prove costly, will not be undertaken without reference to 1 Corps.

In such an event 3 Brit Inf Div will contain the enemy in Caen and retain the bulk of its forces disposed for mobile operations inside the covering position. Caen will be subjected to heavy air bombardment to limit its usefulness to the enemy and to make its retention a costly business.

It is quite possible that, however strongly the order had been phrased, Caen could not have been captured on D Day (after all, the same order firmly required the 3rd Canadian Division to establish itself on the general line Putot-en-Bessin—Carpiquet "as soon as possible on D Day", and the Canadians did not succeed

in effecting this). By prescribing an easier alternative, however, this order rendered the capture of the city less likely.

On the front of the 3rd British Division, as in the Canadian sector, the prolonged resistance of some of the beach defences yielded the Germans a considerable return. The planned role of the division's 9th Brigade had been to advance on the right of the divisional front, seizing the ground around St. Contest and making contact with the Canadian left. The divisional operation order provided that in the event of the 185th Brigade failing to get into Caen from the north, the 9th might attack the city from the west if this course appeared "to offer immediate prospects of success". In the afternoon however it was considered necessary to divert the 9th Brigade to other tasks, one battalion being used under the 8th British Infantry Brigade to support the Marines in the Lion area, where it had already become involved while attempting to advance to Cresserons, while two were moved over to support the airborne troops who were under pressure on the left flank.\* The division's southward thrust was thus seriously weakened. It was made on a one-brigade instead of a two-brigade front, the possibility of establishing contact with the Canadians went by the board, and the likelihood of capturing Caen was further reduced. Furthermore, the opposition offered by inland strongpoints, and the report of enemy tanks moving north from Caen, led the 185th Brigade's commander to switch one of the two battalions of his main body from the right flank over to the left, where it was ordered to advance on the canal road through Benouville. The actual attack towards Caen on the evening of D Day was made by one depleted infantry battalion (the 2nd King's Shropshire Light Infantry, who suffered heavily) supported by tanks of the Staffordshire Yeomanry and some self-propelled anti-tank guns.<sup>105</sup> The wide gap between the 3rd British and 3rd Canadian Divisions was a source of weakness to the former in thrusting for Caen and to the latter in its advance to the final D Day objective on 7 June.

Something has been said above concerning the 6th Airborne Division (which included the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion), on the extreme left of the Allied bridgehead. This division's general task was to secure the left flank. Apart from capturing the bridges across the Orne and the adjacent canal as already described (above, page 93), it was to destroy or neutralize a coastal battery at Merville which was believed to be formidable, to secure the area between the Rivers Orne and Dives, and to operate offensively to delay the movement of enemy reserves from the east or south-east. The battery was to be dealt with by the 9th Parachute Battalion, which together with the 8th and 1st Canadian Parachute Battalions formed the 3rd Parachute Brigade. The particular tasks of the Canadian battalion, apart from "C" Company which dropped in advance as has been mentioned, were to destroy a bridge over the Dives at Robehomme and cover the 9th Battalion's movement against the battery. Thereafter the Canadian battalion

\*The 9th British Infantry Brigade's headquarters had a disaster immediately after landing, the brigade commander and several other officers being badly wounded by a mortar bomb. This doubtless affected the brigade's operations. None of its battalions was heavily engaged on D Day. The brigade diary records that the order was received from the divisional commander; it is not clear whether he was acting on instructions from higher authority.

was to take up positions around the Le Mesnil crossroads as part of the 3rd Brigade's defence of the ridge running north from Troarn towards Sallenelles.\*

Like the American airborne divisions, the 6th was badly scattered in its drop. Darkness makes as many difficulties for an airborne as for an amphibious landing—and in June 1944 the airborne men had less experience to guide them than the sailors. The extraordinary dispersion of the Canadian battalion is illustrated in Sketch 6. Navigational difficulties, evasive action taken by the R.A.F. pilots to avoid anti-aircraft fire, and the absence of clearly distinguishable landmarks for the landing elements, are apparently the explanation of this misfortune. Most of the lighting and other equipment taken with the advance party to mark the dropping zone for the main body was lost in the boggy ground. One pathfinder aircraft dropped its stick of the advance party over the wrong zone, which they marked.<sup>106</sup> One consequence of the dispersion was the fact that the Canadian battalion lost 84 men taken prisoner on D Day. Needless to say, these inaccuracies, which in varying degrees were general throughout the division's two parachute brigades, greatly enhanced the difficulty of carrying out the prescribed tasks. They were carried out nevertheless. The successful capture of the vital bridges has been described. The Merville battery—which turned out to be armed only with 75-mm. Guns—was duly assaulted and taken by the 9th Parachute Battalion: this in spite of the fact that scattering in the drop had reduced the unit to a mere fragment.

The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion likewise performed its tasks successfully. "C" Company destroyed a bridge over the Divette east of Varaville and, after a prolonged fierce fight, captured a strongpoint west of the village which threatened the brigade dropping zone. "B" Company reached the Robehomme bridge without the engineers who were to demolish it, except apparently for one sergeant;<sup>107</sup> it was successfully blown all the same. The company held Robehomme hill overnight, and on 7 June withdrew to the battalion position at Le Mesnil. Three other bridges across the Dives had been destroyed by other units of the Division. The Canadian battalion's D Day casualties amounted to 113 all ranks—19 killed in action, 10 wounded and "battle injuries", and the 84 prisoners.

In the afternoon of D Day the commandos of the 1st Special Service Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Lord Lovat, which had landed over the Ouistreham beaches, arrived in the airborne troops' area and proceeded with their assigned task of mopping up the coast defences east of the Orne. Shortly afterwards the advanced troops of the 3rd British Division arrived, and in the evening the 6th Airborne Division's own 6th Airlanding Brigade began to come in in gliders,

which "landed safely on the correct landing zones".<sup>108</sup> The bridgehead east of the Orne was secure and was maintained. Of all the Allied divisions that fought in Normandy on D Day, Major-General R. N. Gale's 6th Airborne was the most successful in seizing and holding its prescribed ground. There was no important objective which it failed to take.

\*For more details than can be given here, see an article compiled under the direction of Lt.-Col. G. W. L. Nicholson, "The First Canadian Parachute Battalion in Normandy", *Canadian Army Journal*. November 1951.

## Insert picture

The British assault divisions were to be followed ashore in the 30th Corps area by the 7th Armoured Division and in the 1st Corps area by the 51st (Highland) Infantry Division. The plan called for landing, in the case of the former, a considerable part of the 22nd Armoured Brigade on D Day; but only very small elements of it actually got ashore. In the case of the 51st, only the G.O.C. and small reconnaissance parties were intended to land on the 6th. Actually, the G.O.C. did not get ashore until the following day, but three infantry battalions did land over Mike Red Beach in the evening and assembled in the Banville area.<sup>109</sup>

The D Day achievement was magnificent. In one morning's work, on most sections of the front, the Atlantic Wall was breached and the way opened for a final victorious campaign. Nevertheless, reviewing the day as a whole, fifteen years after, one may be permitted to inquire whether it is not conceivable that we could have accomplished even more on the 6th of June. Was it really impossible to reach the inland objectives? Could not a more sustained effort in the later phases have produced deeper penetration and the seizure of ground which we later had to purchase by many weeks of bloody fighting? It is worth noting that more than one reserve brigade did not come into full action on D Day. We shall see in this volume that the British and Canadian forces—and the same is probably true of those of the United States—were usually better at deceiving the enemy and achieving initial success in an assault than they were at exploiting

surprise and success once achieved. Perhaps they were rather too easily satisfied. "Well have we done, thrice-valiant countrymen": but King Harry added,

But all's not done; yet keep the French the field.

Lieut.-General Richter of the 716th German Infantry Division commented later on the "hesitant and careful attitude" of the Allied troops, particularly the infantry.<sup>110</sup> On the basis of a study of the Italian and North-West Europe campaigns, no aspect of tactics is more in need of study by our forces than the problem of maintaining the momentum of the attack. In this respect we could certainly learn something from the Germans. These things can be said without detracting from the credit so richly due to the men who fought and triumphed on D Day.

Much nonsense has been talked and written about the Normandy landings, and the most foolish story of all is the legend that the operation was easy and almost bloodless.\* Press reports at the time, reacting not unnaturally from the exaggerations of the enemy's strength that had circulated before the assault, gave, in the words of the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief, an impression of "easy and unopposed landings" which was the reverse of the true facts. In spite of the Allies' superiority in numbers and material, the assaulting forces' casualties were heavy at every point along the front except "Utah" Beach. The enemy beach position, though less formidable than our own organs of publicity had tended to represent it to be, was strong nevertheless; and most of the defences in it were held with determination. It could not have been broken by an attack less powerfully supported than the one directed against it on D Day; and the attackers paid no small price for the splendid success which they achieved.

It is out of the question to state with accuracy the losses suffered by the British, United States and Canadian divisions which made the attack; for of the three countries only Canada has prepared post-war casualty figures on the basis of individual records. It is worth while however to set down the best figures that can be found, if only to lay to rest the still persistent tale that Operation "Neptune" was not costly. The available statistics for the various sectors are analysed in Appendix "C". They suggest that the total loss of the Allied armies on D Day—including fatal casualties, wounded, and prisoners—may have been somewhere about 9000 men. Of this total the Canadian Army's share was 1074. These figures are conservative; and they do not include the losses of the supporting naval and air forces, which fortunately were relatively small.

It is happily true, however, that the casualties suffered on D Day were far fewer than had been expected before the assault. On 12 February Headquarters 21st Army Group had sent an estimate of British and Canadian D Day casualties to the War Office. It arrived at the grim conclusion that out of a landing force of 70,000 men there would be 9250 casualties, including 3000 men drowned. Assuming the strength of the Canadian landing force as 15,000 (which including

\*The limit of the grotesque is reached in a scholarly work dealing with U.S. Marine operations in the Pacific: ". . . lodgment on Normandy was relatively easy . . . the assault began, not along the coast, but after the beachhead had been secured, in the breakthrough at St. LS" (on 25 July).<sup>111</sup> The authors of course knew nothing about the Normandy operations.

the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion would be approximately the number planned),<sup>112</sup> the Canadian share of these 9250 would have been 1982 casualties. This was very nearly twice the number actually suffered. This fortunate result is doubtless largely responsible for the persistent legend that our losses were not heavy. They were not so heavy as the apprehensive planners had feared; they were painfully heavy nevertheless.

It is worth remembering that the men who stormed the Atlantic Wall surmounted, not only a terrible physical hazard, but a most formidable moral hazard as well. In Britain, for months before the assault, the coming operation had been the universal subject of conversation and speculation. It was the best-advertised enterprise in history; the all-important points of time and place were painfully guarded secrets, but no one doubted that an invasion of North-West Europe was imminent. The novel sight of great Allied air formations winging over London in the clear skies of early summer was an obvious sign; and such security precautions as the denial to foreign missions of the use of uncensored diplomatic bags (announced on 17 April 1944) merely publicized the project further, and further excited the public mind.\* In this feverish atmosphere the assault troops completed their preparations, constantly exposed to newspaper discussion of the strength of the defences which they had to assault. It followed that every man had to face and overcome deep unspoken fears within himself before he faced the German defenders of the beaches. These private terrors were, perhaps, even more formidable antagonists than Hitler's infantrymen. The soldiers who defeated both made the liberation of Europe possible. Free men everywhere should remember them.

In the history of the Second World War the Normandy D Day is notable for Canada, not merely as the date of a supreme military achievement, nor yet as marking the opening of a campaign in which the First Canadian Army was to fulfil its long-awaited destiny. The day was further brightened by an unusual conjunction. For once all three of the Canadian services fought together. The 3rd Division held the centre of the stage; but overhead the Canadian bombers of No. 6 Group and the fighter squadrons in No. 83 played their parts, as they had through the long months of preparation; while Canadian minesweepers helped to clear the way across the turbulent Channel, and Canadian naval guns helped to beat down the enemy's defences. To the Army it was a particular source of delight that part of the 3rd Division was landed by craft of the Royal Canadian Navy. In the Canadian calendar this Sixth of June, so full of consequences for the cause of freedom, deserves to be "marked evermore with white".

\*The present writer wrote in his diary in London at the end of May, "The anticipated 'Second Front' operation in Western Europe continued to be a matter of great public interest in the United Kingdom, and the 'war of nerves' conducted against the enemy in this connection appeared to be having some repercussions at home."

## CHAPTER VI

### **NORMANDY: THE BRIDGEHEAD BATTLE**

**7-30 JUNE 1944**

(See Maps 1 and 2, and Sketches 7, 8 and 9)

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#### The German Reaction to the Assault

**T**HE great Allied blow delivered in Normandy on the morning of 6 June 1944 took the Germans by surprise. That this was true on the "strategic" level has already been demonstrated.\* It was also true on the "tactical" level; that is to say, the troops actually holding the coast defences had no warning until we opened fire.

The R.A.F. attack on the ten coastal batteries- which began at 11:31 p.m. on 5 June does not seem to have been interpreted by the Germans as heralding an assault. Not until the landing of parachute troops in large numbers was reported did their higher headquarters order unusual precautions; and even then their reaction was belated. At 9:45 p.m. German radio interception reported to C.-in-C. West the transmission at 9:15 p.m. of code messages known to be warnings of imminent invasion to Resistance forces. Shortly afterwards all commands concerned were informed by telephone. At 10:33 p.m. the German Fifteenth Army warned its subordinate formations that one of the messages pointed to "invasion within 48 hours". At 1:20 a.m. a report of parachute landings in the area of the 711th Infantry Division was received from the Chief of Staff of the 81st Corps. This reflected the descent of the 6th Airborne Division, which as we have seen began as early as 12:20. At 1:45 a.m., after the commander of the 81st Corps had confirmed the descents in a telephone conversation with the Army Commander, "Alert II" (the highest degree of alert) was ordered for all Fifteenth Army corps and headquarters; naval and air commands and Military Governors were informed.<sup>1</sup> The Seventh Army, whose area was being more directly assailed, had issued the same order five minutes before, after receiving at 1:30 a.m. a report from the 84th Corps of "parachute descents since 0105 hrs in the areas east and northwest of Caen, St. Marcove [? St. Marcouf], Montebourg, on both sides of the river Vire and on the east coast of the Cotentin".<sup>2</sup>

Evidence as to the reception of the reports by the headquarters of Rommel's Army Group "B" and of the Commander-in-Chief West is somewhat contradictory, but it would seem that there was some initial reluctance to accept the

\*Chap. III.

Allied enterprise as a major undertaking.<sup>3</sup> The C.-in-C. West refrained from reporting the time at which he ordered Alert II. Headquarters Naval Group West, which had itself been unwilling, as recently as 1:30 a.m.,<sup>4</sup> to believe in the imminence of a large-scale landing, complained at 4:45 a.m. that the C.-in-C. West "is not yet convinced that invasion on a large scale has begun".<sup>5</sup> At that precise moment, however, the C.-in-C. West was requesting the release of the armoured divisions in Armed Forces High Command Reserve.<sup>6</sup> Within a few hours, of course, reports of major seaborne landings eliminated all doubts that a very large operation had begun; but the suspicion was still to linger long in German minds that the attack in Normandy was not the main effort.

A matter of vast importance to a successful German defence was obviously the rapid commitment at the decisive point of the armoured divisions in *O.K.W.* Reserve (above, page 58). As early as 4.45 a.m., as just indicated, Rundstedt's Chief of Staff, General Blumentritt, dispatched to General Jodl on behalf of the C.-in-C. West a request for the release to him of these armoured divisions. In anticipation of an affirmative reply, he reported, he had already issued warning orders to the 12th S.S. Panzer Division, Panzer Lehr and the 17th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Division, and had actually ordered the 12th S.S. to undertake a reconnaissance in force (*kampfkräftige Aufklärung*) into the area of the 711th Infantry Division.<sup>7</sup> Officers of O.B. West and Army Group "B" have asserted that Jodl not only refused to release the divisions but ordered all movement stopped.<sup>8</sup> It has been suggested<sup>9</sup> that the reason was that Jodl did not dare to waken Field-Marshal Keitel, and that when the latter did awake he in his turn declined to arouse Hitler in order to obtain from him the release of the divisions. Thus, it is said, Hitler learned of the landings only at his midday conference,\* and only in mid-afternoon were the divisions actually released. The last statement is certainly true. Decisions did not begin to reach the higher headquarters in the theatre of operations until about three in the afternoon. At that hour the Seventh Army heard that the 12th S.S. and Panzer Lehr Divisions were to come under its command for employment in the 716th Division sector. At 3:40 Army Group "B" informed the Seventh Army that the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps (whose headquarters was at Le Merlerault, south-east of Argentan) was to be placed under it. At 4:00 p.m. the Seventh Army told that Corps that it would have under its command the 21st Panzer Division, Panzer Lehr, the 12th S.S. and the 716th Division, to act in the right portion of the 84th Corps sector—in other words, the Caen area. At 4:55 p.m. the senior operations staff officer at Headquarters C.-in-C. West, in conversation with the Seventh Army's Chief of Staff, "referred to the wish of the Supreme Command that the enemy bridgehead be destroyed by the evening of 6 June because there was a danger of [further] strong airborne and sea landings". The Chief of Staff replied that this was impossible.<sup>11</sup>

The Caen area had already emerged as the main centre of German interest.

\*Hitler's valet, Heinz Linge, asserts that the Führer was in fact early astir on the morning of D Day, and received news of the landings from Keitel and Jodl in good time. However, according to the Chief of Army Operations at the Armed Forces Operations Staff, it was 10:00 a.m. before that office was in a position to form a considered opinion on the strength and extent of the landings.<sup>10</sup>



The Seventh Army's plan for 7 June, though it comprehended "continuance of the attack" against the American airborne landing about Ste. Mere Eglise, placed in the forefront the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps operation against the enemy between Bayeux and Caen. At 11:45 p.m. Army Headquarters heard through the 84th Corps some details of 1st S.S. Panzer's intended deployment for the following day. The 21st Panzer Division was to operate east of Caen. West of the city the 12th S.S. Panzer Division and Panzer Lehr were to sweep forward against the invaders.<sup>12</sup> It promised to be an interesting day.

It is time to turn to more local events in the Caen sector as seen by the Germans. Here, according to the operations report of the 716th Division dated 23 June 1944, no special alert had been ordered by the division in advance of the attack, though its troops were already in a high general state of preparedness, and the air activity during the night led to additional vigilance. Reports of parachute landings, it is stated, came into divisional headquarters between 12:40 and 1:05, and as a result of these the division, on its own responsibility, ordered Alert II at 1:10 a.m. The German commander in the Ouistreham area ("Strongpoint 'Riva Bella'") had already ordered Alert II for his own troops at 12:45. The 716th Division's immediate steps were limited to local action against the parachutists east of the Orne. One particular measure taken at 2:35 a.m. was placing the 192nd Panzer Grenadier Regiment's 2nd Battalion under the 736th Grenadier Regiment (see above, page 66) with orders to recover the Benouville bridges. Subsequently however the development of our seaborne landings forced the enemy to limit his commitments against the airborne bridgehead to "defensive measures".

A peculiar feature of the German story is a report recorded as made by the 736th Grenadier Regiment's 2nd Battalion at 5:10 a.m. of parachute landings having taken place between the battalion headquarters at Tailleville and Bernieres. It is stated that the battalion sent one company plus one platoon against these paratroopers, but that none of the troops committed returned. One may perhaps assume that the report originated in the presence of parachutists dropped in this area by mistake, and that the German troops dispatched to encounter them became involved in the fighting which followed the seaborne landings.

The 716th Division reported that little information concerning the beach battle was available, observation having been hindered by smoke screens and communications disrupted as a result of the bombardment, while few of the troops who held the beach defences ever returned to report. The inadequacy of communications is reflected in inaccurate accounts of the resistance offered by the coastal strongpoints. The 716th Division states that on the morning of 7 June the resistance nests in Luc-sur-Mer, Langrune, St. Aubin, Hill 61 (called by us "Hillman") and Douvres were still holding out. This statement, true enough in the other cases, was, we know from our own records, certainly not true of St. Aubin, while at Hill 61 the last Germans surrendered to the 3rd British Division very early on the 7th.

On the extreme right of the Canadian front, west of Courseulles, the 441st East Battalion is reported to have fled. The 2nd Battalion of the 726th Grenadier

Regiment recovered some lost ground, but was finally overrun by tanks near its command post on the north edge of Ste. Croix, and here the battalion commander, Major Lehmann, is said to have "died a hero's death". With respect to the situation around Tailleville, the division recorded that the command post of the 2nd Battalion of the 736th Grenadier Regiment in that village was several times surrounded during the day but disengaged itself. The last report from the battalion commander reached the division at 3:48 p.m., but the garrison, as we have seen, held out for some time longer (above, page 109).<sup>13</sup>

In the course of the day the 716th Division, having taken the main weight of the Anglo-Canadian assault, was reduced to a small fragment. The division's contemporary report contains no statement of casualties; but Lieut.-General Richter, in a narrative written after the end of hostilities, estimates that it lost four-fifths of its infantry strength on D Day. "Of four German and two Russian battalions there remained in the evening one German battalion which had had about 20 per cent casualties; otherwise only remnants." Eighty per cent of the artillery was gone; west of the Orne two batteries were left, each with three guns, and east of the Orne a battery and a half, with "five or six guns". A liaison officer from the headquarters of C.-in-C. West reported that early on 9 June, apart from elements still holding out in strongpoints, it had been possible to collect in a battle-group only 292 all ranks of the division.<sup>14</sup>

The background of the counter-attack which the 21st Panzer Division delivered in the late afternoon against the 3rd British Division (above, page 115) can be fairly briefly stated. When the operation began this division, we have seen, was under Army Group "B". It was released to the Seventh Army some time before 6:45 a.m., and thereafter placed under the 84th Corps. According to the 716th Division report, the 21st Panzer was placed under its command at 10:30 a.m. for action against the enemy west of the Orne. Earlier it had been ordered to act against the airborne landing zone "with main effort east of the Orne", but after the seaborne landings developed this order was changed and the division went in north of Caen.<sup>15</sup>

At 4:20 p.m. Seventh Army reported to Army Group "B" that the 21st Panzer Division had arrived in the 716th Division area and that its forward elements were already north of Caen. Its subsequent fortunes have already been mentioned (above, page 115). British sources indicate that the German tanks struck a glancing blow, sheering more and more to the west as they met opposition and suffered losses. The 716th Division, which by implication criticizes the 21st Panzer for being late in getting into action, says that this attack penetrated to "the Church of Lion", that is, to the centre of the town. But there is no British record of contact with German tanks in this particular area. The liaison officer above mentioned reported that General Marcks, commanding the 84th Corps, was very critical of the 21st Panzer. "The division's first attack was got rolling only by the commander of 84 Corps advancing ahead of our own tanks in an open armoured car until he himself was being fired upon from tanks."<sup>16</sup>

The contemporary report of the 716th Division supports General Feuchtinger's statement in his later interrogation that the retirement of the German armoured

spearhead from the Lion area was influenced by new airborne landings nearby, which threatened the tanks with encirclement.<sup>17</sup> It seems fairly evident that the airborne landings which the Germans found so alarming were in fact those of the 6th Airborne Division's glider-borne airlanding brigade, which arrived about an hour before this time to reinforce the eastern flank. One of the brigade's landing zones was between St. Aubin d'Arquenay and Benouville, west of the Caen Canal and some 6000 yards from Lion.<sup>18</sup> After the shattering events of the day this menace in the middle distance was enough to send 21st Panzer's surviving tanks rolling back southward.

At the end of the day "Foreign Armies West" at O.K.H. in Berlin drew up its usual "Brief Estimate of the Enemy Situation West" to be appended to the day's situation report for the western front.<sup>19</sup> This estimate, while recognizing the invasion in Normandy as a large-scale operation, emphasized that the forces so far engaged comprised "only a comparatively small portion of the available formations". It indicated that the Allied air forces had not yet attacked the important German headquarters in the west; that sabotage in France was still localized, wide areas being undisturbed; and that all the Allied formations so far identified came from a common area of departure. These points, the estimate observed, "seem to indicate that further operations are being planned and lend strength thereby to the statements of Churchill and Eisenhower of similar nature". Noting the large forces not yet committed, it added, "the thought thus lies to hand, that the enemy Command is planning a further large-scale enterprise within the Channel area, which might be directed against a coastal sector in the vicinity of the Channel narrows".

The Germans, who had been so fundamentally deceived on the time and place of the Normandy invasion, thus continued to be deceived. Anticipating a second invasion, probably to be directed against the Pas de Calais, they continued to retain very large forces idle in that area, waiting for an attack which never came. Had these forces been directed immediately against our bridgehead in Normandy, the outcome of the battle there might have been different.

### The 7th Brigade Advances to the Final Objectives

The night of 6-7 June was relatively quiet on the Canadian front; nor did dawn bring the anticipated counter-attack, for the Germans were not ready.

In the western sector, Brigadier Foster issued his orders for 7 June at an "orders group" held at 1:30 a.m. The advance was to be resumed at 6:00 a.m., with The Royal Winnipeg Rifles going forward on the right and The Regina Rifle Regiment on the left, the Canadian Scottish remaining temporarily in position to provide a firm base.<sup>20</sup>

During the rest of the night the only significant contact with the enemy on the 7th Brigade front was the capture of 19 men of an enemy patrol by the Winnipegs. The two leading battalions moved off at 6:15 and 7:15 a.m. respectively. The Winnipegs met only scattered and ineffective resistance, the Reginas hardly more.

At 8:50, when it was clear that there was nothing important immediately in front, Brigade ordered the Canadian Scottish forward, and five minutes later it told all three battalions "to go flat out for their final objectives". By about noon both leading units were on them, the Winnipegs in Putot-en-Bessin and the Reginas in Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse and Norrey-en-Bessin. It is impossible to say with certainty which battalion reached the objective first. An entry in the Brigade log to the effect that the Winnipegs were on "Oak" at 10:20 a.m. is not substantiated by the battalion's own diary, which is content to say that it was "consolidating" on the objectives by 4:00 p.m. Brigadier Foster credited the Winnipegs with being first, but the Reginas also claim to have been "the first battalion in 21 Army Group to reach final objective". Their log, which is unusually complete, records that their "C" Company reported "Oak Able" (i.e., the near side of the objective) at 10:30 and that the Winnipegs were heard to report "Oak Able minus 10" at 11: 50 (probably a clerical error for 10:50). On the other hand, the same log records that the Winnipegs reported "Oak Charlie" (the forward edge of the objective) at 12:05 and the Reginas "Oak Baker" at 12:15. (The Brigade log however records that the Reginas reported "Oak Charlie" at this time.)<sup>21</sup> The battalions seem to have been neck-and-neck. The most important point is that a few days later General Dempsey wrote to General Keller, "A battalion of 3 Canadian Division was the first unit in the Second Army to reach the final objective. That is something which you will always remember with pride."<sup>22</sup> By 12:25 p.m. the Brigade's third battalion, the 1st Battalion Canadian Scottish Regiment, had completed the seizure of "Oak", having moved into position between Secqueville-en-Bessin and Bretteville.<sup>23</sup>

The 1st Hussars' strength had been so reduced in the D Day fighting that two squadrons had had to be combined into one, and the regiment was not ready to give immediate support to the infantry when the advance began.<sup>24</sup> However, since it turned out that the only opposition offered was that of groups of snipers, tank support was not needed.

### The 9th Brigade Thrown Back

In the Canadians' eastern sector the night of 6-7 June was more disturbed than on the 7th Brigade front. Both The North Nova Scotia Highlanders and Le Regiment de la Chaudiere were attacked about 2:00 a.m. by infantry in half-tracked vehicles, apparently part of the 21st Panzer Division. The Germans lost several prisoners, and the Chaudieres a whole platoon, during this attack. It was probably a local enterprise on the part of the 192nd Panzer Grenadier Battalion, which was stationed in this area before the assault.<sup>25</sup>

At 7:45 a.m. the 9th Brigade's advanced guard, consisting of The North Nova Scotia Highlanders and the 27th Armoured Regiment, began to move southward, using the same tactical formation as on the previous day. The Stuart tanks of the armoured regiment's reconnaissance troop led. Behind them came "C" Company of the Highlanders, riding on the battalion's carriers. Next came a platoon of medium machine-guns from the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, a troop of tankdestroyers of the divisional anti-tank regiment, two assault sections of pioneers



and four battalion 6-pounders. Behind this vanguard, which was commanded by Major J. D. Learment of the North Nova Scotias, came the main body of the advanced guard, three infantry companies riding on Sherman tanks.<sup>26</sup>

At first opposition was slight, but it stiffened as the vanguard approached Buron. Two 88-mm. guns are said to have been knocked out before the village was in our hands. Buron was occupied by 11:50. Troublesome mortar fire was now coming from St. Contest on the left. While "C" Company was searching Buron, "B" arrived with its Shermans and began to advance upon the village of Authie beyond. The tanks deployed midway between the two villages and opened fire on targets in Authie. Shortly "C" passed two platoons in carriers through "B". After a sharp skirmish they took Authie and proceeded to dig in on the south edge of the village, which was under intense mortar and artillery fire.<sup>27</sup> At 1:00 p.m. the 9th Brigade logged a message from the North Nova Scotias to the effect that Authie was in our hands. Ten minutes later the brigade informed Division that there was enemy armour 800 yards east of Authie but that our footing there would hold.<sup>28</sup> The 27th Armoured Regiment's Stuarts had reported themselves in Franqueville, close to Carpiquet.<sup>29</sup> "A" Company of the Highlanders, having passed around the western side of Buron, was approaching Authie. Between the two villages the infantry dismounted from their tanks, which pushed on alone.<sup>30</sup>

Further advance had become impossible, for the whole area was being swept by extremely heavy fire from the east. And it appears that at this point artillery support was not available. The 14th Field Regiment was supporting the 9th Brigade (the 19th, the other unit of the field artillery group in the Canadian left sector, was supporting the North Shore Regiment all this day).<sup>31</sup> The 14th records that at noon it began to move from its old gun area north of Beny-sur-Mer to a new one south-east of Basly, the batteries "stepping up" in succession so as to ensure continuous support. Unfortunately, however, Authie was beyond effective range from the old position,\* and the Forward Observation *Officer* with the North Nova Scotias had to report that "artillery was out of range and it would be some time before it could be moved up". Moreover, the new gun area when occupied turned out to be under "continuous mortar fire" (perhaps from the Douvres radar stations?) which must certainly have interfered with support. Naval fire was temporarily unavailable because of a radio failure; but after communication was improvised big shells came down with great accuracy and effect.<sup>32</sup>

The advanced guard, with both flanks in the air and no support at hand, was seriously exposed. Lt.-Col. Petch therefore decided to withdraw the troops in Authie and form a battalion fortress on the rising ground north of the village. "A" Company accordingly dug in south-east of Gruchy. "B" Company was directed to join it but was pinned in Buron by the severity of the enemy's fire. And before the two platoons of "C" Company could withdraw from Authie they were struck by a fierce German counter-attack.<sup>33</sup> The 12th S.S. Panzer Division (*Hitlerjugend*) was coming into action.

\*The distance was close to 13,000 yards. The range of the 105-mm. "Priest" with which the 3rd Division's field regiments were equipped at this time was 10,500 yards, considerably less than that of the 25-pounder, whose official maximum was 13,400 yards.

This division was formed in Belgium in the summer of 1943 on cadres furnished by the 1st S.S. Panzer Division (*Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*). It had not fought before D Day, but it certainly contained a high proportion of battle-experienced officers and N.C.Os. The officers appear to have been either hardened Nazis who had distinguished themselves in Russia or professional soldiers sympathetic to the Nazi viewpoint. The N.C.Os. were in part at least selected young veterans of the Russian campaigns, which were waged on both sides virtually as a war of extermination. The rank and file were largely youngsters fresh from the military fitness camps of the Hitler Youth and full of the Nazi ideology.<sup>34</sup> A captured nominal roll of one panzer grenadier battalion of the division<sup>35</sup> shows their extreme youthfulness. No less than 65 per cent of the personnel were 18 years of age, and only three per cent (virtually all officers and N.C.Os.) were over 25. The division was to show in action the characteristics which its composition might lead one to expect: reckless courage and determination combined with a degree of barbarity found perhaps in no other formation.

At the beginning of June 1944 the division's strength was 20,540 all ranks; overall it was slightly above establishment, although it lacked 144 officers of its authorized total of 664. (This reinforces the impression that its cadre of fierce N.C.Os. was in great part responsible for setting the tone of the division and for its reputation for brutality.)\* It was not quite complete in tanks, having 150 on hand compared with its authorized total of 186. It was organized basically in one panzer regiment, composed of two tank battalions (one equipped with Panthers and one with Mark IV tanks) and an anti-tank battalion, and two panzer grenadier (lorried infantry) regiments, each of three battalions.<sup>36</sup>

On 5 June this very formidable German formation had its headquarters at Acon, west of Dreux. It will be remembered that before 4:45 a.m. on the 6th it had been ordered to move into the area of the parachute landings east of the Orne. It was on the road about 10:00 a.m. At 3:30 p.m. on 6 June the division reported that it was already in the area of Lisieux. The Seventh Army then ordered it to swing westward, passing south of Caen. Its arrival west of Caen was to be reported to the 84th Corps.<sup>37</sup>

With the best will in the world, the division was unable to come into action rapidly. After the end of hostilities General Richter of the 716th Division recalled that the commander of the 12th S.S. reached his headquarters during the night 6-7 June and was briefed by him on the situation.† The panzer officer said to him, "I have been on my way to you for about eight hours; I lay a good four hours in roadside ditches because of air attacks. The division's marching columns

\*In his final statement to the court which tried him, after he had been found guilty but before sentence, Kurt Meyer said, "I have here, during these proceedings, been given an insight into things which, in the aggregate, were unknown to me up to now. I wish to state to the court here that these deeds were not committed by the young soldiers. I am convinced of it, that in the division there were elements who, due to the year-long battles, due to five years of war, had in a certain respect become brutalized."

†The commander of the 12th S.S. was *Brigadeführer* (Major-General) Fritz Witt. Richter does not mention him by name, and it appears that the officer with whom he had this conversation was actually Kurt Meyer, the commander of Witt's leading regiment, who tells in his book *Grenadiere* of such a briefing at Richter's headquarters about midnight.

are suffering serious losses in men and material."<sup>38</sup> The attentions of the Allied air, forces evidently supply the chief reason why the *Hitlerjugend* was not able to reach the battlefield until the early afternoon of 7 June. Even then the whole division was not available; but the part that got into action that day struck a heavy and vicious blow.

The leading echelon was commanded by *Standartenfuhrer* (Colonel) Kurt Meyer, commander of the 25th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment (whose headquarters before the invasion was at La Trinite west of Laigle). It consisted of his own regiment plus the division's battalion of Mark IV tanks. According to Meyer, his group had reached St. Pierre-sur-Dives in its movement towards the airborne bridgehead when at 3:00 p.m. on 6 June he received the order to change direction westward. Travelling through the night by secondary roads, it crossed the Orne at St. Andre-sur-Orne and reached the western edge of Caen by a circuitous route.<sup>39</sup>

Meyer evidently arrived in the Caen area ahead of the main body of his troops; and about midnight, it would seem, there was a conference at the headquarters of the 716th Division, on the north edge of the city. Feuchtinger of the 21st Panzer Division, Richter and perhaps other senior officers were present.<sup>40</sup> A liaison detachment from the Panzer Lehr Division had arrived<sup>41</sup> and was doubtless represented. The discussion presumably dealt with the next day's counterattack by the three panzer divisions which had been ordered by higher authority (above, page 122). But as it turned out the only effective attack that day was to be delivered by Meyer's relatively small force. Our knowledge of the German side of the events that followed is based in part upon Meyer's own detailed evidence at his interrogations and subsequent trial,<sup>42</sup> and the interrogation of a soldier of the 3rd Battalion of the 25th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment who was captured early in July.<sup>43</sup> We also have the war diary of Meyer's 1st Battalion,\* and a post-war narrative by the senior staff officer of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division, Lt.-Col. Hubert Meyer, who was apparently no relation to the other officer of the same name. On the whole these independent accounts support each other.

The 12th S.S. Panzer Division's operation order issued early on 7 June from its command post south of Caen<sup>44</sup> was hopeful:

3. *The Division*, in conjunction with the 21st Panzer Division, will attack the landed enemy and throw him back into the sea. . . .
6. *Objective*: The beach. . . .

The boundary with the 21st Panzer was the railway line connecting Caen with Luc-sur-Mer, with the 12th S.S. operating to the west of it. The attack was to go in at noon.

On the morning of 7 June, Kurt Meyer stated, he issued his own orders at an improvised headquarters on the western edge of Caen. They were evidently more realistic than the division's. His plan, though he does not say so, seems to have been to take up a covering position protecting Caen pending the arrival of reinforcements. His 1st Battalion recorded that it was ordered to take up a line

\*This was captured in Normandy. It is one of very few German diaries on the unit level available for the campaign.



about Epron north of Caen: "This position to be held in all circumstances." He put all his three infantry battalions into the line: the 1st on his right., next to the 21st Panzer Division (the battalion records that there was a wide gap between the two formations); the 2nd in the centre, about St. Contest; and the 3rd on the left, towards the main road to Bayeux. He placed two companies of tanks behind the right and two behind the left, and disposed his artillery south of Caen in a position to give support. These positions were occupied by the afternoon. The soldier of the 3rd Battalion mentioned above stated that in the afternoon two of its companies dug in near St. Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe, on the main road some 3000 yards south-east of Authie, and were soon joined by the other two.<sup>45</sup>

It is thus evident that as the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade's advanced guard moved forward on the axis Buron-Carpique it found itself marching across the front of the 21st Panzer and of Meyer's force. The effect of the previous day's change in the orders issued to the 9th British Infantry Brigade (above, page 116) was now felt. There were no Allied troops on the Canadians' left, and the Germans in the line north and north-west of Caen were able to give them their undivided attention. In fact, the 9th British Brigade was ordered, in the morning of 7 June, to carry out the original plan, but this now involved moving across from one flank of the 3rd British Division to the other. By late afternoon, too late unfortunately to help the 9th Canadian Brigade's advance, its leading troops had reached the area of Cambes, north-east of St. Contest. Here they were checked by Kurt Meyer's 1st Battalion.<sup>46</sup>

Meyer had found an admirable observation post in the "tower" (presumably one of the corner turrets of the lofty chapel) of the medieval Abbey of Ardenne, in the fields north of St. Germain. From it, about noon, he looked towards the coast, and says he could see our troops moving forward. He then decided to deliver an immediate counter-attack without waiting for further reinforcements. His plan was to pivot on his right wing; the left (3rd) Battalion would attack first and subsequently the whole line would advance north in conjunction, he hoped, with the 21st Panzer Division on the right. He issued orders to this effect by radio from the tower (the 1st Battalion records that they were received at 3:00 p.m.), and from the same vantage-point he watched the attack go in.<sup>47</sup> It is evident that the first stage, at least, was delivered by the 3rd Battalion of the 25th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment supported by tanks of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division's Mark IV battalion. Meyer and the unnamed soldier agree that the infantry went in with two companies forward and one in reserve, and Meyer says that the leading companies bypassed Authie, leaving it to the third to take it, and pushed on towards Buron. The soldier, who was in one of the forward companies (the 10th), makes no mention of Authie and speaks of the attack as directed from Cussy upon Buron. The tanks apparently moved in front of the infantry.<sup>48</sup>

The platoons of The North Nova Scotia Highlanders in and around Authie, along with some men of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa and some tanks, fought hard but were overrun; only a few men got away. In the meantime the other German troops attacked "A" Company north of Authie. It held them off

for a considerable time, during which it was heavily shelled and mortared, but it too was finally overrun, the enemy infantry filtering forward into its positions through the standing grain. The 27th Armoured Regiment had a fierce engagement with the German tanks south of Buron with losses on both sides. The German attack was carried on to Buron, which was lost late in the afternoon, The North Nova Scotia Highlanders suffering further heavy casualties. Artillery support however was now available in full measure (a fact to which Meyer testifies), and a counter-attack supported by heavy shellfire and several surviving tanks of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers recovered the village. At dusk Brigadier Cunningham granted the remnants of the advanced guard permission to fall back to Les Buissons. The 9th Brigade's other units (The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders and the Highland Light Infantry) had moved up and dug in in this area. The remains of the North Nova Scotias and the Sherbrooke Fusiliers now joined with them in forming a brigade "fortress".<sup>49</sup>

Although Meyer claimed later that only shortage of petrol and ammunition prevented him from carrying the attack on towards the coast, this need not be taken seriously. Indeed, he himself testified that, seeing from his lofty perch "enemy movements deeper in that area"—doubtless the advance of the main body of the 9th Brigade—he came down and rode his motorcycle to the 3rd Battalion to order its C.O. "not to continue the attack north of Buron"<sup>50</sup> (And the Germans did not occupy the latter village that night, in spite of our withdrawal from it. They dug in on a line running south of Buron and through St. Contest. Only towards evening on 8 June did they again enter Buron.)<sup>51</sup> Meyer's 2nd Battalion had been drawn into the fight, north of St. Contest "in the direction of Galmanche". Fierce fighting was going on when Meyer visited the battalion in the early evening; just as he arrived the battalion commander's head was taken off by a tank shot. (He doubtless fell a victim to "C" Squadron of the Sherbrookes, which was engaged on this flank.) Meyer ordered both this battalion and the 1st (around Cambes) to go "over from attack to defence".<sup>52</sup>

The day's losses to the 9th Brigade's advanced guard had been painfully heavy. The North Nova Scotia Highlanders had had 242 casualties; of these 84 were fatal, while 128 men became prisoners.\* The 27th Armoured Regiment had lost 21 cruiser tanks knocked out and seven more damaged, while its personnel casualties amounted to 60, of which 26 were fatal.<sup>54</sup>

The German force undoubtedly lost heavily also. The 27th Armoured Regiment reported that night that it had destroyed 31 enemy tanks.† Meyer, who certainly would not exaggerate his own losses, stated his tank casualties from memory as approximately six.<sup>56</sup> No figures are available for the casualties of the German infantry, but they must have been very considerable. Meyer remembered seeing about 50 wounded at Ardenne, but some of these may have been prisoners. Anger at the losses may in part account for the grim fact that a number of Canadians

\*Three captured North Nova Scotia officers, Major J. D. Learment and Lieuts. J. L. Fairweather and J. M. Veness, escaped from a train carrying them to Germany, joined a unit of the French "Maquis", and eventually succeeded in getting to England and rejoining the Army.<sup>53</sup>

†This is from a detailed state furnished to H.Q. 2nd Armoured Brigade by a liaison officer at 2:00 a.m. on 8 June. The text of the unit diary claims 41 tanks; squadron claims attached to it appear to amount to 33 plus five probables.<sup>55</sup>

who had surrendered were murdered by the S.S. troops. One of the charges later preferred against Meyer specified 23 murders about Authie and Buron on 7 June.<sup>57</sup> He was acquitted on this particular charge.

The 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade Group had fought its first battle with courage and spirit, but somewhat clumsily. Encountering an unusually efficient German force of about its own strength, it had come off second-best. Its advanced guard had been caught off balance and defeated in detail. The German blow had been well coordinated; it seems evident that tanks, infantry and artillery all played their parts effectively in close cooperation with one another. This sort of cooperation was less evident on our side, at least until near the end of the day. For a time artillery support was lacking, and although both infantry and tanks fought hard and suffered heavily the liaison between the two evidently left something to be desired.

At the same time, if the division and brigade message logs are an accurate reflection of the facts—and this is not always the case—the Canadian units were not good at passing information from front to rear in a manner that would enable higher commanders to support them and control the battle. It is true that Lt.-Col. Gordon about 2:30 reported himself heavily engaged with enemy tanks and asked the 2nd Armoured Brigade for reinforcements. The Fort Garry Horse were ordered to stand by, and did move up some distance\* before the 2nd Armoured Brigade's commander decided after a personal reconnaissance that the situation was in hand.<sup>58</sup> But the reports from the 9th Brigade recorded at Headquarters 3rd Canadian Division are few and sketchy, although they do indicate that the advanced guard is in trouble. At 6:50 p.m. a message was logged to the effect that the forward troops were in Authie and Buron, that communications were poor to them and that the brigade commander had gone forward.<sup>59</sup> Brigade headquarters was near Basly.<sup>60</sup> Had more information been available the brigade's main body might have been more effectively committed. As it was, neither The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders nor the Highland Light Infantry really got into action, although the former were able to bring fire to bear in support of the North Nova Scotias.<sup>61</sup>

This German counter-attack was not made in sufficient strength to have much effect upon the bridgehead battle as a whole. Meyer's force was too small to achieve a great deal, particularly in the reduced state which it must have been in after the fierce fighting around Authie and Buron. He was in fact fought to a standstill; but before this took place he had inflicted a severe local reverse on the 9th Brigade. It was fortunate that the balance of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division, and the Panzer Lehr Division, were not yet on the ground and ready to follow up his stroke. At a time when the 9th Brigade's leading troops were in sight of its final objective, the Carpiquet airfield, they had been thrown back for over two miles, and the ground thus lost was not to be recovered for a full month. These events, following those on the 3rd British Division's front the day before, helped to ensure that Caen would remain in German hands and the eastern flank of the Allied bridgehead would be much more constricted than had been planned.

\*The diary of The Highland Light Infantry of Canada states that the unit was fired on by Fort Garry tanks *which* mistook it for Germans.

## The 8th Brigade on 7 June

For the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, which now had the 9th between it and the main enemy forces, 7 June was, relatively, a quiet day. While the 9th Brigade grappled with the 12th S.S. Panzer Division counter-attack, the units of the 8th were dealing with the considerable elements of the enemy which had been by-passed by the rapid advance on D Day and still remained behind the front line.<sup>62</sup>

Neither The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada nor Le Regiment de la Chaudiere had any heavy action. They spent the day dealing with snipers and isolated parties of the enemy in the area about Colomby-sur-Thaon and Anguerny, taking a good many prisoners and capturing some vehicles in the process.<sup>63</sup> A heavier task fell to The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, following its very costly engagements at St. Aubin and Tailleville the day before. The two fortified radar stations west of Douvres-la-Delivrande (above, page 70) were still in enemy hands, and the North Shore's mission was to take them. The battalion moved off at 7:00 a.m., but progress was slow from the beginning and time was lost in clearing a headquarters in the wood south-west of Tailleville, although there seems to have been little or no resistance here. When the unit made contact with the radar stations, their defences were found to be stronger than had been expected and neither the guns of the 19th Field Regiment nor the battalion's mortars made much impression<sup>64</sup> ("It was like blowing soap bubbles against Gibraltar", writes the battalion chaplain).<sup>65</sup>

At noon the brigade's information was that the North Shore was not yet operating against the radar stations but was busy mopping up its right flank. At 3:45 p.m., in answer to an inquiry from Brigade as to which of the two positions it was attacking, the North Shore replied that it was attacking the southerly one and would take on the other later. At 4:30 the brigade logged a message from the battalion to the effect that the positions were "more or less cleared up" except for snipers.<sup>66</sup> This was optimistic. The radar stations were a labyrinth of concrete works and tunnels and at the end of the day the North Shore had in fact made no headway. Permission was sought and obtained to abandon the attack. The first orders issued specified that the greater part of the battalion would remain on the ground and contain the radar stations. However, it appears that in due course the whole battalion was withdrawn to a position north of Anguerny. The task of containing the radar stations was transferred to the 51st (Highland) Division, which was now ashore.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, one unit of the 51st, the 5th Battalion Black Watch, was actually operating against one or both of them late on 7 June, without making any more impression than the North Shore.\* Two of three AVREs supporting the Black Watch were lost.<sup>68</sup>

\*The Black Watch war diary remarks bitterly that about 7:00 p.m., "Owing to misinformation, supplied by the Canadian Div. HQ, we found ourselves fighting a Bn of the North Shore Regt of Nova Scotia [sic] who had already occupied the wood [east of Beny-sur-Mer] and thought we were Boche." The North Shore diary makes no reference to the Black Watch or to any such incident. Although both the Black Watch diary and that of H.Q. 153rd Infantry Brigade under which the Black Watch were serving refer to visits to H.Q. 3rd Canadian Division by the commanders of the British brigade and battalion, the division's General Staff diary makes no mention of these. There

The Attacks on the 7th Brigade:  
Putot-en-Bessin and Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse

The 8th of June witnessed a series of violent local counter-attacks directed by the Germans against the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade in the Putot-en-Bessin—Norrey-en-Bessin area. It was a fierce and bloody business, but it yielded the Germans no such return as they had reaped in the Canadian left sector the previous day.

On the evening of 7 June, Brigadier Foster, noting the dangerous gap in the Cairon area that separated his brigade and the 9th, dispatched thither a company of the Canadian Scottish supported by a squadron of the 6th Armoured Regiment and a troop of anti-tank guns. Apart from this detachment, the brigade was disposed with The Royal Winnipeg Rifles (which, we have seen, had had exceptionally heavy casualties on D Day) in Putot-en-Bessin, The Regina Rifle Regiment in Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse and the 1st Battalion Canadian Scottish Regiment in reserve at Secqueville-en-Bessin. Brigade Headquarters was at Le Haut de Bretteville in the centre of the area.<sup>69</sup>

At 11:00 a.m. on 8 June General Keller held a conference at his headquarters and informed his brigade commanders that the 51st Division was now responsible for the area Douvres—St. Aubin—Tailleville and was soon to make an assault preceded by air attack on the troublesome radar stations. This was subsequently cancelled, as was another attack which Keller had intended that the 9th Brigade should deliver against Buron with the support of the full divisional artillery. The 7th and 8th Brigades were to hold their present positions.<sup>70</sup>

At this time the 7th Brigade was already under attack. The 1st Battalion of the 26th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment, which had been ordered to attack Norrey, got nowhere, but the 2nd Battalion, directed on Putot, had a temporary success. About 6:30 a.m. "A" Company of The Royal Winnipeg Rifles drove off a small enemy force which attempted to cross the railway into its position. This proved to be only the beginning. Assisted by numerous snipers in Putot, the enemy brought the Winnipegs under steadily increasing pressure, infiltrating between the company areas. At 2:20 p.m. the battalion still expected "to be able to handle situation", but later in the afternoon Division heard that it had "had its right half sliced off by enemy armour" (it is in fact doubtful whether tanks were involved).<sup>71</sup> "A", "B" and "C" Companies were completely encircled and ammunition was running low. Immediate tank support was not available. The three companies tried to withdraw under cover of smoke, but only a few men got back to battalion headquarters, just east of Putot, where "D" Company, which was almost intact, set up a defensive position.<sup>72</sup>

With Putot lost, Brigadier Foster set about organizing a counter-attack to get it back. As soon as it was clear that things were going badly with the Winnipegs, he apparently warned Lt.-Col. Cabeldu of the Canadian Scottish to be ready; and the brigade log records that at 5:00 p.m. the Commanding

is an untimed log entry in the afternoon recording an order to the 4th Special Service Brigade to send a liaison officer to give a situation report to the C.O. of the 5th Black Watch at Tailleville. It would seem that the North Shore's attack on the radar stations had ended before that of the Black Watch was launched.

Officers concerned were called to an orders group. The Scottish were given strong support: a squadron of the 6th Armoured Regiment; the 12th and 13th Field Regiments; and part of The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.). The Scottish company in the Cairon gap was withdrawn to take part. H Hour was 8:30 p.m.<sup>73</sup>

The attack went in behind a creeping barrage. The opposition was heavy, but it did not stop the Canadian Scottish. At 8:45 the attack was reported going well; at 9:00 the leftward company was reported on its objective; and at 9:30 the brigade indicated that the battalion was mopping up. Putot was in Canadian hands again, and the Scottish held it thereafter, although it was found necessary to give up the actual line of the railway. The remains of The Royal Winnipeg Rifles replaced the Canadian Scottish in brigade reserve.<sup>74</sup>

The 1st Battalion of The Canadian Scottish Regiment had distinguished itself; but the cost had been high. The Scottish casualties reported for 8 and 9 June numbered 125, of which 45 were fatal. (It is evident that most of the casualties suffered in the counter-attack on the evening of the 8th were recorded under the date of the 9th.) The Royal Winnipeg Rifles had lost still more heavily, having 256 casualties, of which 105 were fatal, on 8 June.<sup>75</sup> These included, unfortunately, a large number of men murdered after capture; for there was a repetition on this day of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division's brutal atrocities against prisoners which had stained Meyer's success at Authie the day before. Investigators later concluded that about 45 Canadian soldiers, chiefly of The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, were murdered on 8 June.<sup>76</sup> When General Crerar heard of these murders, he asked through the 21st Army Group for an investigation by a SHAEF court of inquiry; and this laid the basis for the prosecution later undertaken against Meyer.\*

The night of 8-9 June saw fierce fighting on the left sector of the 7th Brigade's front. Here The Regina Rifle Regiment was holding Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse with one company forward in Norrey-en-Bessin south of the railway. The German attack began just about the time when our own counter-attack was going in against Putot. *Standartenführer* Meyer explained that in the morning he had gradually come to the conclusion that we were unlikely to attack his own front in the Buron area and that he could afford to assist his division (the 26th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment having now come up on his left) by a thrust towards Bayeux. He concerted the plan with the commander of the 12th S.S. Panzer Regiment and informed the divisional commander. Just before dark the tanks of the Panzer Regiment's Panther battalion went boring forward along the general line of the Caen—Bayeux road, with the men of Meyer's reconnaissance company riding on them and Meyer himself—according to his own account—leading the advance on his motorcycle until the Rots area was reached.<sup>77</sup> Parts of the Reginas' position

\*It may be noted here that Kurt Meyer was tried by a Canadian military court at Aurich in December 1945, was found guilty on three of five charges and sentenced to be shot. However, General Vokes, with whom as G.O.C. Canadian Army Occupation Force the confirming power lay, was of opinion on reviewing the evidence that Meyer's responsibility for the murders was vicarious rather than direct. He wrote, "The finding and sentence of the Court were within the law, but the severity of the sentence was not in my opinion in keeping with Canadian justice, having regard to the degree of responsibility." He commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. Meyer was finally released in September 1954.

were overrun in the first shock, and some of the Panthers pushed on to within about 300 yards of battalion headquarters in Bretteville; here they halted and shelled and machine-gunned the village for a considerable time. About midnight two Panthers entered the village. One actually reached the headquarters and was there knocked out by three successive hits with PIAT\* bombs.

It was a wild night's work. Supported by 6-pounders of the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A., the Reginas stood off the attack. A passage from the account given by Lt.-Col. Matheson to the division's Historical Officer† is well worth quoting: "Altogether 22 Panthers circled about Battalion HQ and A Company's position during the night, and it is hard to picture the confusion which existed. Contact with all but D Company was lost. Fires and flares lit up the area, and the enemy several times appeared to be convinced that opposition had ceased. A foolhardy German despatch rider rode through Bretteville on a captured Canadian motorcycle, only to be brought down by the CO's Sten gun. Some time later a German officer drove his Volkswagen up before Battalion HQ, dismounted and gazed about for a few seconds, until an excited PIAT gunner let fly with a bomb, which hit him squarely." Both the 6-pounder, firing the new "discarding sabot" ammunition, and the PIAT showed themselves formidable opponents for the Panther. Lt.-Col. Matheson computed the night's score in enemy tanks at five Panthers and one Czech light tank knocked out. Two Panthers and the light tank fell victims to the PLAT. The Germans say they lost six Panthers.<sup>78</sup>

Shortly before first light on the morning of 9 June Meyer pulled his defeated Panthers back to the vicinity of Rots. He himself attributed the failure to the firm hold we had established on Norrey, which served to split the attack and prevent the cooperation between the tanks and the 26th Panzer Grenadier Regiment which had been planned.<sup>78</sup>

The German operations at this stage leave the impression of rather hasty and ineffective improvisation. The attacks were pressed with courage and determination but with no particular tactical skill. Brigadier Foster remarked that no use was made of the fact that the Reginas' flanks were exposed; instead, "the enemy flung himself straight against the strongest points and utterly failed to exploit the undoubted weakness of his opponent's position".<sup>80</sup> The operations seem to have been locally conceived and control even on the divisional level was ineffective. The two major enterprises of 8 June, the attacks against Putot and Bretteville, were apparently independent and uncoordinated. The Germans threw their troops in piecemeal as the battalions arrived on the ground.

During the next few days enemy activity on the Canadian front was limited to shelling, mortaring, sniping and aggressive patrolling. The Germans had had enough of major enterprises, and the 12th S.S. Panzer Division was content to hold the line which it had taken up. The fact that this crack armoured formation had to be used in a static defensive role is striking evidence of the dilemma in which the Germans found themselves. The large armoured counter-offensive planned on D Day (above, page 123) had never come to pass.

\*Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank, the light infantry anti-tank weapon of this period.

†Capt. J. R. Martin, who landed on D Day and subsequently collected a large number of most valuable accounts of the assault and consolidation phases.

Both sides probed the positions opposite them with patrols. The Canadian Scottish, for instance, sent out on the evening of 10 June a "reconnaissance in force", two platoons strong, directed at a wooded area south of Brunet. It ran into heavy opposition as soon as it approached the railway line west of Putot and one officer and 13 other ranks were reported killed in addition to four men missing.<sup>81</sup> On The Regina Rifle Regiment's front, the brigade commander more than once suggested that the advanced company in Norrey was too exposed and should be withdrawn. But both the company commander and Lt.-Col. Matheson argued vigorously that if Norrey were given up it would merely have to be recaptured later; and the company stayed where it was, holding out amid the stench of unburied German dead in the ruined village dominated by the tragic wreck of one of the finest Gothic churches in Normandy.<sup>82</sup>

In the 9th Infantry Brigade's sector, the project of an attack on Buron remained in the air but was never actually carried out. More than once The Highland Light Infantry of Canada prepared to make this attack, but it was always put off. On 9 June one such plan was cancelled because the brigade's left flank was considered too exposed. On the same day this situation was considerably improved when troops of the 3rd British Division captured Cambes. On 11 June a new plan was initiated, under which The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders would occupy the village of Vieux Cairon and the Highland Light Infantry would then go on to Buron. The Glengarrians duly occupied Vieux Cairon, almost without opposition; but when the H.L.I. were about to commence their attack orders were received to stay it, and Buron remained in German hands.<sup>83</sup>

There was still a gap between the 7th and 9th Brigades. The enemy was in the wooded valley of the little River Mue between Cairon and Rots; and our artillery in the vicinity of Bray felt themselves dangerously exposed. On 9 June The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada were placed under the 7th Brigade and moved to Bray to secure this area.<sup>84</sup> It remained to clear the Mue valley. On 10 June planning began for a proposed armoured advance designed to occupy high ground beyond Cheux, south of Norrey-en-Bessin. It was considered that clearing the banks of the Mue was a necessary preliminary to this.<sup>85</sup> However, it became necessary to advance the date of the Cheux operation (below, page 139), and both projects were carried out on the same day, 11 June.

The main task in the Mue valley fell to No. 46 Royal Marine Commando, under the command of the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade and supported by a squadron of the 10th Canadian Armoured Regiment. Le Regiment de la Chaudiere and the North Shore Regiment were to move into the valley villages as clearing proceeded.<sup>86</sup> The operation proved rather difficult. The Commando worked down the valley from the vicinity of Thaon, clearing in succession the villages of Cairon, Lasson and Rosel. The stiffest opposition was encountered in the last phase, when in the evening the force entered Le Hamel and Rots. Here S.S. troops supported by Panther tanks concealed in Rots fought hard, and Fort Garry tanks as well as a company of the Chaudieres were brought into action to assist the Marines. Only in the early hours of 12 June did the Commando finally report the area clear of the enemy. After a discussion between Headquarters 3<sup>rd</sup>



# Insert map

Canadian Division and the 8th Brigade as to whether it was desirable to hold it,<sup>87</sup> Rots was taken over by Le Regiment de la Chaudiere, who were reported to have buried 122 of the enemy. The Commando recorded its own casualties as 17 killed, 9 wounded and 35 missing.<sup>88</sup>

## The Failure at Le Mesnil-Patry

Planning begun on 10 June for an enterprise by the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade south of Norrey-en-Bessin was based on the assumption that the main attack was to be made on 12 June. In the early morning of the 11th, however, information was received that it had been advanced and was to take place as soon as possible. At 8:00 a.m. the 6th Armoured Regiment was told that it was to go in at 1:00 p.m. that day. At about 10:30 a.m. Brigadier Wyman of the 2nd Armoured Brigade held his "orders group", after which the commanding officers of the units held their own. The attack was thus put in at very short notice and with less careful preparation than would have been desirable, particularly in respect of artillery support.<sup>89</sup>

The reasons for advancing the time of the attack were not recorded; but it seems fairly clear that they must have been connected with an attack which the neighbouring formations of the 30th Corps were delivering (see below, page 142), and the decision was probably taken at a conference which General Dempsey held with his two Corps Commanders at 5:00 p.m. on 10 June. Headquarters 1st British Corps, under which the Canadian division was still operating, logged at noon on 11 June a message from the 30th Corps concerning an attack then being launched by the 69th British Infantry Brigade in the area about Bronay.

The log noted, "3 Cdn Div told to keep 50 Div fully informed about progress of 2 Cdn Arm'd Bde which will help 69 Bde."<sup>90</sup>

Under the plan adopted for the Canadian attack the 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars) and The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada were to attack through Norrey-en-Bessin with a view to seizing and holding the high ground south of Cheux. This was to be effected by a right flanking movement through Le Mesnil-Patry, Cheux itself being bypassed. The remainder of the armoured brigade would be prepared to join the 6th Armoured Regiment on the objective.<sup>91</sup>

The attack actually began shortly after 2:30 p.m. on 11 June. It was a complete and costly failure. "B" Squadron of the Hussars led the advance, with the men of "D" Company of the Queen's Own riding on its tanks. This force had not gone far across the level grainfields between Norrey and Le Mesnil-Patry when very heavy mortar and machine-gun fire came down. The infantry were forced to dismount from the tanks, which pushed on in an attempt to deal with the opposition. Both the tanks and a party of infantry fought their way into Le Mesnil-Patry. The situation grew worse as enemy armour (which was at first believed to be British) and anti-tank guns came into action. Lt.-Col. Colwell of the Hussars, who was commanding the advanced group, ordered his force to withdraw to the start-line. But "B" Squadron evidently did not receive the order, and was virtually annihilated. All its officers and all save three N.C.Os. were listed as missing, and only two of its tanks returned. As for "D" Company of the Queen's Own, it was found to have suffered 96 casualties, more than half of whom were missing. The total casualties for this day were 80 for the 6th Armoured Regiment and 99 for the Queen's Own Rifles, the fatal casualties being 59 and 55 respectively.<sup>92</sup>

During the first six hectic days of Operation "Overlord" Canadian battle casualties had totalled 196 officers and 2635 other ranks; 72 officers and 945 all ranks lost their lives.<sup>93</sup> All these losses had fallen upon the 3rd Division and attached troops. The other Canadian formations remained for the moment in England, awaiting in mingled eagerness and anxiety the opportunity to take their places in the battle line.

The costly affair at Le Mesnil-Patry was the last considerable Canadian operation during the month of June. The nature of Allied strategy resulted in the major action thereafter being concentrated elsewhere. On the night of 16-17 June Le Mesnil-Patry was occupied without opposition, thanks to progress by British troops on the right.<sup>94</sup> The most important development on the Canadian front during the latter part of the month was the relief of the 7th Brigade in the Putot-Bretteville-Norrey positions by the 8th. This was effected on the night of 17-18 June, one of the shortest of the year;\* the two brigades "exchanged areas in the face of the enemy, and without incident".<sup>95</sup>

The 11th of June marked the end of a phase not only for the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division but for the Allied operations at large. The Allied armies were

\*On 17 June Lt. Col. J. R. W. T. Bessonette, the 3rd Canadian Division's senior R.C.A.S.C. officer, was killed by a shell in his headquarters area north-east of Camilly, where divisional H.Q. was then located. He had arrived in Normandy only the previous day.

now firmly established ashore, and the separate bridgeheads of D Day were linked up into a continuous deep lodgement all along the front. The gap between the two American sectors had been bridged on 10 June. By the night of 11-12 June the first stage of Operation "Overlord" had thus been successfully completed. The Allies had 326,547 men, 54,186 vehicles and 104,428 tons of stores ashore on the Continent. The construction of their complicated artificial harbours, at Arromanches in the British sector and St. Laurent in the American sector, was well advanced, and at least two complete "Gooseberries" (craft shelters formed by sinking ships, above, page 85) were in operation. Moreover, Allied aircraft were now operating from airstrips in France. Two R.A.F. squadrons landed in France at noon 10 June; and that afternoon Nos. 441, 442, and 443 Squadrons R.C.A.F. were airborne for a sweep—"the first Allied squadrons to operate from French soil since the evacuation from Dunkirk".<sup>96</sup>

The Germans' plan of defence had failed. They had not succeeded in mounting the great armoured counter-offensive which was to drive the invaders into the sea. Even a more limited attack, in which General Geyr von Schweppenburg (whose Panzer Group West had now taken over the Caen sector) planned to use parts of the 21st and 12th S.S. Panzer Divisions under the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps against the Canadian front, had to be cancelled on 10 June; and immediately afterwards a devastating attack by aircraft of the 2nd Tactical Air Force which wiped out almost his whole staff put an end to such projects for the present, and the sector was returned to the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps' control.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, the Germans remained fully convinced that a second invasion, in the region of the Strait of Dover, was probable.\* They therefore continued to hold there the divisions that might have turned the scale in Normandy.

It is now time to depart once more from the local scene in the Caen area and attempt a brief analysis of Allied strategy in the early stages of the invasion.

### General Montgomery Directs the Battle

From the first stage of the invasion, General Montgomery, as commander of the Allied ground forces, exercised a firm and decisive control of the operations.

Early on 7 June Montgomery arrived off the Normandy beaches in H.M. flotilla leader *Faulknor*. During the morning he had contact with the two Army Commanders, Generals Bradley (shortly after 6 a.m.) and Dempsey.† At 11:30 a.m. he signalled his headquarters in England that he had instructed Bradley to secure his D Day objectives and in particular to capture Carentan and Isigny so as to link up his two bridgeheads; he was then to thrust towards La Haye du Puits and thus cut the Cherbourg peninsula. Afterwards, Cherbourg was to be captured. General Dempsey he had ordered "to proceed relentlessly with

\*The Supreme Command of the Armed Forces had believed that it had reliable information of such an assault planned for the morning of 10 June, and had issued orders accordingly.<sup>98</sup>

†Although General Bradley has a good many reservations about Montgomery, in his book *A Soldier's Story* he pays a warm tribute to the "wisdom, forbearance, and restraint" with which Montgomery exercised his authority as an Allied commander at this period.

original plan", holding a flank on the river Dives and capturing Caen and Bayeux. He was then to "pivot on Caen and swing his right forward". During this day the Supreme Commander was also off the beaches and Eisenhower and Montgomery were able to confer. General Eisenhower then returned to England; he did not establish himself permanently on the Continent until 7 August. Montgomery, however, went ashore on the morning of 8 June, when he joined his Tactical Headquarters at Ste. Croix-sur-Mer. Later in the day it moved to Creully.<sup>99</sup>

By 9 June the situation was beginning to clarify. The British had definitely failed to capture Caen in the first rush; the Americans were still striving to link up their two lodgement areas. That day General Montgomery conferred with Bradley and Dempsey at Port-en-Bessin,<sup>100</sup> and he sent to his Chief of Staff, who was still in England, a letter which defined his intentions. For the American front these remained much as before. On the eastern flank, however, he had now adopted a new plan, designed to take Caen by a "pincer movement". In the 30th Corps sector west of the city he proposed to launch the 7th Armoured Division through Bayeux and Villers-Bocage directed on Evrecy. On the part of the 1st Corps front east of Caen he intended to pass the 51st (Highland) Division across the Orne through the 6th Airborne Division to attack towards Cagny. Subsequently he planned to drop the 1st British Airborne Division "somewhere south of Caen as a big air lock and to link up with it from Evrecy and Cagny".

On these lines the battle was fought during the next few days. On 10 June the 7th Armoured Division went into action. The 51st Division began preliminary operations the following day. On both fronts opposition was heavy. On the morning of 11 June Montgomery, in a signal to his Chief of Staff, referred to a concept of the operations which, we have seen, had appeared in his appreciation dated 7 May (above, page 83): "My general object", he wrote, "is to pull the Germans on to 2nd Army so that 1st Army can extend and expand." From this time this idea dominates his directives.

By now a controversy was in progress with the Air Commander-in-Chief (Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory) concerning the proposed employment of the 1st Airborne Division. Leigh-Mallory did not consider it practicable. Discussion continued on the point, but within a couple of days circumstances so altered Montgomery's plans that the concept of the air drop south of Caen was abandoned. On 13 June Montgomery began to compose a letter to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke). In it he wrote, "my pincer movement to get Caen is taking good shape, and there are distant possibilities that the enemy divs may not find it too easy to escape; especially Pz Lehr". At this time the 7th Armoured Division was in Villers-Bocage, and the 51st on the other side of Caen was moving southwards slowly, "as just at present it cannot be given any tanks". Developments on the evening of 13 June, however, led General Montgomery to revise his plans. The 2nd Panzer Division, suddenly appearing on the 7th Armoured Division's front, counter-attacked the British formation and drove it out of Villers-Bocage. (The 2nd Panzer had come from north of the Seine, and, in the words of a 21st Army Group intelligence summary issued that day, had "arrived over quickly"; the summary of 15 June attributed this speed to the fact

that the weather on the day of its main move prevented air attack.)\* On the morning of 14 June Montgomery added to his letter additional paragraphs in which he observed that this event had put "a different complexion on the problem". He wished to be very certain of his position and "at all costs remain well balanced". Considering that he did not yet have sufficient strength to act offensively on both flanks of the Second Army, he had therefore decided "to be *defensive in the Caen sector* on the front of 1 Corps, but aggressively so". He proposed to put all his offensive power into the operation by the 30th Corps west of Caen. In other words, the idea of a pincer movement on both sides of Caen was abandoned for the moment in favour of a concentrated single blow west of the city, and the movement of the 51st Division on the east was "piped down".<sup>102</sup>

At this point controversy and criticism were beginning to develop concerning the operations in Normandy. There was disappointment over the failure to take Caen, and as time passed more and more comparisons were made between the relatively rapid progress on the American front and the situation on the British flank, where, it appeared, the Second Army was "bogged down". That these criticisms should appear in the press, whose editorial writers were unaware of the basic principle on which Montgomery was conducting the operations, was not surprising. The last thing the Allied command wanted was publicity for the fact that it was planning to attract enemy strength to the left flank to facilitate advances on the right. The criticisms, however, were also heard at SHAEF, among officers who presumably either did not fully understand Montgomery's policy or discounted it. In the controversies which took place, both personal incompatibility and international and inter-service rivalries doubtless played their parts; but it is worth noting that some of Montgomery's severest censors seem to have been British officers, and that although some of them came from the Royal Air Force other senior officers of that service supported Montgomery, while some British Army officers are reported to have opposed him. The Deputy Supreme Commander, Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder, is said to have been one of the most influential critics. Montgomery indicates in his *Memoirs* his own belief that Sir Frederick Morgan, the former COSSAC and now Deputy Chief of Staff at SHAEF, was another.

As early as 14 June Tedder is reported to have remarked at the daily conference of air commanders of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force that he felt that the situation in the eastern sector of the bridgehead might become critical at any moment, and that all air forces should be held in readiness to give assistance to the armies if this became necessary.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, he was apparently reluctant at this time to employ the strategic bombers to break the developing deadlock at Caen,

\*The 2nd Panzer Division, formerly stationed in the Somme valley, had been ordered south on 8 June, evidently in the hope that it could be employed in a major armoured thrust towards the mouth of the Vire to split the Allied bridgehead. But the continued Allied attacks both in the Carentan and Caumont—Villers-Bocage areas made it impossible to collect the required striking force, and the first elements of 2nd Panzer to arrive were hustled into action at Villers-Bocage to close a dangerous gap which had appeared here between the 1st S.S. Panzer and the 2nd Parachute Corps. It was only the infantry that fought here; the division's tanks did not arrive in the area for several days.<sup>101</sup>

and here he came into disagreement with the views of the Air Commander-in-Chief. On this same day Leigh-Mallory, accompanied by Montgomery's Chief of Staff and his own chief planner, flew to France to see Montgomery and to repeat his opposition to the plan for an airborne operation south of Caen. He suggested as an acceptable alternative that the stalemate there might be broken by an attack in which medium and heavy bombers would lay a barrage behind which the army might advance. Montgomery, we are told, closed with this proposal and suggested that it should be discussed in detail with General Dempsey and his staff.<sup>104</sup>

The further discussion accordingly took place on (it appears) 15 June at Creully. Although more than one officer apparently has "vivid recollections"<sup>105</sup> of the meeting, only one—Leigh-Mallory's chief planner, Air Vice-Marshal E. J. Kingston-McCloughry—has described it in detail in public print. It appears that Air Marshal Coningham, commanding the 2nd Tactical Air Force, was unfortunately absent from his headquarters on the 14th and was not informed of the meeting. When he did hear of it he complained to Tedder. As Kingston-McCloughry remembers it, in the middle of the meeting Tedder, Coningham and Air Vice-Marshal Broadhurst (commanding No. 83 Group R.A.F.) "burst into the' room". Tedder then "instructed all Air Force officers to leave the meeting and to gather next door, where Air Marshal Coningham addressed us. The Air Marshal stated that he had all the tactical air forces necessary to support the Army and that no heavy bombers were necessary."<sup>106</sup> Two witnesses agree that the Army's case for the use of heavy bombers, as presented before Tedder's intervention, had not been well prepared.<sup>107</sup> The result of the incident seems to have been that this use of the strategic air forces was postponed for three weeks.\*

On 17 June a long-standing sore in the British area was cleared up, when an attack by No. 41 Royal Marine Commando, directed by the 1st British Corps and strongly supported by artillery, naval fire and AVREs, captured the two radar stations near Douvres-la-Delivrande. British casualties in this final assault were very light; enemy prisoners numbered six officers and 214† other ranks.<sup>108</sup>

In the paragraphs added to his letter to Sir Alan Brooke on the morning of 14 June (above, page 143), General Montgomery had written:

33. My general policy remains unchanged. It is as follows:
- (a) To increase and improve our own build-up through the beaches.
  - (b) To do everything possible to hamper and delay the enemy build-up, by air action and other means.
  - (c) To pull the Germans on to Second British Army, and fight them there, so that First US Army can carry out its task the easier.

By 18 June, Montgomery felt that the situation permitted him to return to the policy of capturing Caen by encircling it from both flanks. On this day the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade was preparing actively for a new operation against the high ground south of Cheux, designed to cover the flank of an advance by the

\*For a general discussion of the criticisms of Montgomery, see Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, 183 ff. It is suggested that one reason for the feeling of the R.A.F. officers was the Army's failure to get the hoped-for airfield sites south-east of Caen (above, page 84).

†This is according to the Corps intelligence summary. The Commando diary says five officers and 222 other ranks; other intelligence summaries give other figures.

neighbouring 49th (West Riding) Division of the 30th Corps. The 8th Brigade attack, however, was cancelled on 19 June, clearly as the result of a new directive (the first formal written one he had issued on the Continent) which Montgomery had sent to his Army Commanders on the previous day.<sup>109</sup>

This instruction<sup>110</sup> emphasized the importance of capturing both Caen and Cherbourg. When this was accomplished, Montgomery wrote, the danger in Normandy would probably take precedence in the enemy's mind over other potential threats such as that in the Pas de Calais; and "It is then that we have a mighty chance—to make the German army come to our threat, and to defeat it between the Seine and the Loire." Caen, he said, "is really the key to Cherbourg; its capture will release forces which are now locked up in ensuring that our left flank holds secure." In these circumstances, the Second Army's task was to capture Caen "by means of a pincer movement from both flanks". The 8th British Corps was now assembling in the bridgehead, and Montgomery proposed to attack with a view to establishing it in the area immediately south-east of Caen. The Army's right wing, forming the western half of the pincers, was to "swing south-eastwards" through Aunay-sur-Odon and Evrecy towards the Orne bridges between ThuryHarcourt and Amaye-sur-Orne. These operations were to begin on 18 June and "work up to a crescendo" on 22 June, on which date the 8th Corps was to pass through the bridgehead east of the Orne to carry out its prescribed task. As for the First U.S. Army, its immediate task was to capture Cherbourg, the first stage being to isolate the Cherbourg peninsula by completing a westward thrust to the sea. The directive ended, "I shall hope to see both Caen and Cherbourg captured by 24 June."

This plan was short-lived. Montgomery, usually so decisive, was obviously finding the problem difficult. Another directive,<sup>111</sup> dated 19 June, stated that on further examination the difficulties of forming up the 8th Corps in the Orne bridgehead, and launching it thence, were very great. He had therefore decided that the left wing of the attack should be "scaled down" and be only of such a nature as could be carried out by the troops of the 1st Corps already on the ground. The 8th Corps would be switched to form part of the right or western wing of the pincer movement. It was to be "launched on its task" on the morning of 23 June.

At this point General Montgomery's intentions were further interfered with by developments beyond human control. On 19 June a summer gale of extraordinary force blew up in the Channel. Unloading ceased almost entirely for three and a half days. The American "Mulberry" was so badly damaged that work on it was abandoned, and that at Arromanches also suffered.<sup>112</sup> Rough weather earlier had already slowed the Allied "build-up" of troops and supplies. On the evening of 20 June Montgomery informed Eisenhower and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that the build-up was five days behind schedule. Important parts of the 8th Corps were still afloat and 25 June was now the earliest day for the "blitz attack" which he planned. Each further day of bad weather would postpone it one day more.<sup>113</sup> By 22 June, however, the gale was abating and the 8th Corps in fact launched its attack (Operation "Epsom") on the morning of 26 June.

In the meantime the Americans had been making progress. On the night of

17-18 June they cut the Cotentin peninsula at Barneville, thus isolating Cherbourg. Thereafter they drove towards the great port itself. There was fierce fighting, particularly around Montebourg, but the advance was inexorable. By 24 June the attackers were in touch with the defences of the city. On the 26th Cherbourg fell, and the last organized resistance in the peninsula ended on 1 July.<sup>114</sup>

The congestion on the constricted British flank of the bridgehead, combined with the delay in the build-up generally, had unfortunate consequences for the First Canadian Army. It was in fact to be a month and a half after D Day before the Army's headquarters assumed an operational role. General Crerar himself crossed the Channel in H.M.C.S. *Algonquin* on 18 June and set up his small tactical headquarters in Amblie, east of Creully.<sup>115</sup> On 22 June he attended a conference of Army, Corps and Divisional Commanders. On this occasion Montgomery reviewed past progress and stated his future intentions, along the lines already indicated, emphasizing the importance of bringing the enemy's main weight against the British Army. General Crerar's notes of the conference<sup>116</sup> concluded as follows:

From now on, most careful tactics must be employed and careful arrangements made for every operation. We were heading for a "show-down". The requirements, therefore, were carefully co-ordinated attacks and all 'steps taken to make sure that we held whatever ground we took. It was his hope to bring the Boche in to do battle around Caen. . . .

In conclusion, C-in-C 21 Army Gp stated that owing to the delay, caused by the weather, in the "build-up" and in the capture of Caen, and the securing of the line of the R Dives to the East, it was necessary to phase back the arrival of the Canadian Army until this situation had been attained. The first essential was the completion of the Second Brit Army to full strength and securing the necessary "elbow room" in which to concentrate another Army.

In view of existing circumstances, it might well be the middle of July before the phasing in of the Cdn Army was completed.

After the conference was concluded, I mentioned to General Montgomery my disappointment at this delay, although I recognized that his reasons were well founded. He remarked that he had reached this decision that morning because he considered it essential that one Army and one Army Comd should complete this first and essential phase of the expansion of the bridgehead before another higher formation was brought in.

On 24 June General Crerar had a personal conference with the Army Group Commander at his new tactical headquarters near Blay, west of Bayeux. During this interview Montgomery reiterated that until there had been a further advance there was not enough frontage or space for another Army. His senior administrative officer "had informed him that while another Corps could be brought in, he could not maintain another body of Army Troops in the existing area". Moreover, while Montgomery wanted more infantry, he did not need more armour at present. Therefore, the Guards Armoured Division and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division were to be "phased back" and come in at the end of the build-up. His immediate intention was to build up the 12th Corps by bringing in the 53rd and 59th Infantry Divisions, and thereafter to bring in the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division and the Headquarters and Corps Troops of the 2nd Canadian Corps. He had told General Dempsey to place the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division under the 2nd Canadian Corps as soon as the latter could take over operational responsibility, thus getting the two Canadian infantry divisions under Canadian command. There-





THE STEELWORKS AT COLOMBELLES, 19 JULY 1944

The scene of fierce fighting during Operation "Atlantic". The ruins of the steelworks were cleared on the evening of 18 July and during the night that followed.



FORWARD TO THE LAISON

Through the golden grain and the dust, vehicles of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division advance towards the start-line for Operation "Tractable", 14 August. In the foreground are 6-pounder anti-tank guns towed by carriers.



#### CLEARING OUT SNIPERS IN FALAISE

Men of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal follow a tank of the 27th Armoured Regiment (the Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment) through the town on 17 August.



*Courtesy Imperial War Museum, London*

#### THE FALAISE GAP

This painting by Frank Wootton represents R.A.F. Typhoons harrying the German retirement through the Gap, August 1944.

after, the Canadian Army Headquarters and Army Troops could be brought in; but until Caen and the line of the Dives had been secured, the commander of the Second Army would have to command five corps. As soon as possible thereafter the original plan was to be carried out, the 1st British and the 2nd Canadian Corps being grouped together under the Canadian Army Commander, who would be responsible for the left sector of the Army Group.<sup>117</sup>

### The Battle of the Odon

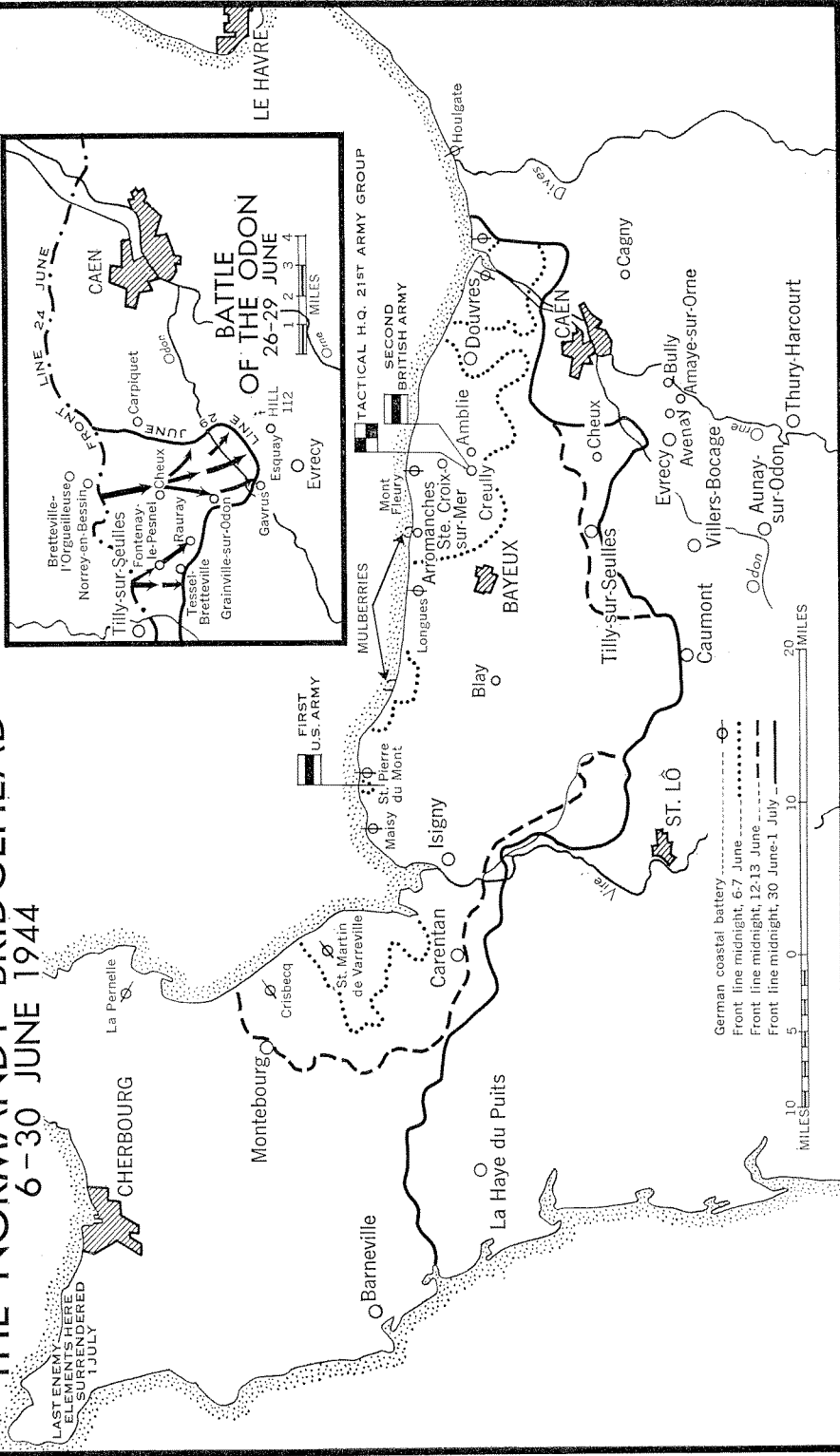
For several days before the beginning of Operation "Epsom", reconnaissance parties of the 15th (Scottish) Division of the 8th Corps were active in the 3rd Canadian Division's area; for the Scottish were to attack through the Canadians. Canadian patrols were also active, gaining information to help the offensive; and on 25 June Lieut.-General Sir Richard O'Connor, G.O.C. 8th Corps, wrote General Keller thanking him for their good work.<sup>118</sup>

On 26 June conditions were not favourable to the British enterprise. A preliminary attack by the 30th Corps the day before, directed on Rauray, and supported by artillery which included three of the Canadian field regiments, had met heavy opposition and made limited progress, so the 8th Corps' right flank would be exposed. Also, the weather being bad for flying, little air support was available. Nevertheless, the 8th Corps went forward early on the 26th, the 15th Division going in behind an artillery barrage to which the guns of the 3rd Canadian Division (the only portion of the division to take part) made a large contribution.<sup>119</sup> During the day the attack made progress, though less than had been hoped for. Cheux was captured, but the River Odon was not reached. On 27 June, however, the 15th Division established a shallow bridgehead across the Odon north-west of Esquay. The narrow wooded valley of this little stream was now to witness a fearful struggle. On the morning of the 28th an armoured brigade was put into the bridgehead. On this day however the Germans reacted violently, throwing in fierce counter-attacks on the flanks. With better weather, British fighter-bomber support was active and useful. It was clear however that the enemy was bringing up large and powerful reinforcements, and on the morning of 29 June the 8th Corps went over to the defensive, preparing to maintain its hard-won foothold.<sup>120</sup>

The Germans, alarmed by the serious threat to Caen which the offensive represented, were in fact straining every nerve to counter it. The 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps, with the 9th and 10th S.S. Panzer Divisions under command, had been sent to the Eastern Front in March (above, page 62). On 12 June it was ordered back to the west "at top speed",<sup>121</sup> and it was now arriving and was committed against the 8th Corps penetration. On the afternoon of 29 June it came into action, and succeeded in reducing the bridgehead to some extent. This was the nearest thing to a really large-scale armoured counter-offensive the Germans had yet contrived to mount. But their hopes were disappointed. The S.S. divisions found themselves smitten by a great weight of artillery fire, including naval fire—for the battlefield was still within reach of the Fleet—and fierce air attacks. The Commander-in-Chief West's situation report for 30 June<sup>122</sup> began:

# THE NORMANDY BRIDGEHEAD 6-30 JUNE 1944

SKETCH 9



After several hours of fluctuating fighting in the line north of Esquay-Gavrus Grainville the attack of 2 SS Pz Corps broke down. The enemy air force and naval artillery—reported by 2 [SS] Pz Corps to have reached a hitherto unprecedented strength—have inflicted particularly heavy damage on our assault formations. The attack was temporarily halted. Continuation is intended for the night of 30 Jun/1 Jul. High enemy losses in men and material can be balanced against own grievous losses....

Further desperate attempts at advance on the following day were failures. The British bridgehead held fast; but the 15th (Scottish) Division alone had had 2720 casualties in Operation "Epsom".<sup>123</sup>

The German military leaders in Normandy were now becoming despondent. On 17 June Hitler had come to France and conferred with Rundstedt and Rommel at Margival near Soissons. This meeting was inconclusive. It appears that Rommel counselled a counter-offensive to be preceded by a limited withdrawal to enable the battle to be fought outside the range of Allied naval guns; but there was no decision, except that Hitler authorized "small adjustments in the front line" of the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps.<sup>124</sup> Rommel's chief of staff, in his post-war reminiscences, suggests that the meeting greatly widened the gulf between Rommel and Hitler; however, if a letter which the Field Marshal wrote to his wife the following day is good evidence—and its limitations are obvious—the dictator was "very cordial and in a good humour" and Rommel was left hoping that Hitler now had a more realistic view of the situation as a result of his own frank exposition of it.<sup>125</sup>

On 29 June the two western Field Marshals again saw Hitler, this time at Berchtesgaden. During this conference Hitler reluctantly abandoned, in the light of their arguments, the cherished project of a major offensive directed on Cherbourg to recover the great port and split the Allied bridgehead;<sup>126</sup> but it is evident that he was unwilling to accept the generals' opinion that the existing line in Normandy had become untenable. It was at this period that, according to Rundstedt's account given to Canadian interrogators, the C.-in-C. had a telephone conversation with Field-Marshal Keitel in which, in answer to the latter's anguished inquiry, "What shall we do?" he replied, "Make peace, you idiots! What else can you do?"<sup>127</sup> It is not surprising that changes in the command followed. Making peace was not a practical policy for Hitler.

On 30 June General Geyr von Schweppenburg, commanding Panzer Group West, which was directing the operations against the British, forwarded to Headquarters Seventh Army a detailed recommendation<sup>128</sup> beginning "The situation at Caen and west of it demands basically new decisions." He proposed that the Germans should evacuate the part of Caen north and west of the Orne and withdraw to a new line following the Orne as far as Bully (some six miles south of Caen) and thence through Avenay and Villers-Bocage to the Caumont area; this would be followed by a "renewed transition to offensive thrusts beyond the most effective range of naval artillery". General Hausser (who had taken command of the Seventh Army after General Dollmann died of a heart attack on 28 June), Field-Marshal Rommel and Field-Marshal von Rundstedt all concurred in this recommendation. Rommel accepted it, even though in conversation with Geyr at noon on 1 July he questioned the desirability of yielding as much as Geyr proposed; he emphasized the importance of Caen as the anchor point against the expected Allied lunge

towards Paris and said it was important to concentrate more and more German forces in that area.<sup>129</sup> (Montgomery's strategy was working admirably.) At 3: 00 a.m. on 1 July Rundstedt asked the Supreme Command for a free hand to carry out the proposed withdrawals<sup>130</sup>

Hitler clearly had no intention of accepting any such policy. At 5:40 p.m. the Commander-in-Chief West received the following message<sup>131</sup> from O.K.W.:

The present positions are to be held. Any further enemy breakthrough must be prevented by obstinate defence or local counter-attacks.

The following day Field-Marshal von Rundstedt was told that he was being replaced by Field-Marshal Gunther von Kluge. On 3 July General Geyr von Schweppenburg was replaced by General Heinrich Eberbach.<sup>132</sup> Rommel broke the news to Geyr with the cheerful remark, "I'm the next on the list!"<sup>133</sup> But in fact Rommel was, for the moment, allowed to remain; and it was not Hitler but the Royal Air Force that removed him from the command of Army Group "B" on 17 July.

Had the 8th Corps gained more ground in "Epsom", the 3rd Canadian Division would have been called upon to attack on its left flank. Two separate operations were planned: "Aberlour", to be delivered by the 3rd British Division with the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade under command, against the enemy's salient north of Caen; and "Ottawa", to be put in by the 3rd Canadian Division and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade from the north against Carpiquet village. Detailed orders were prepared for these operations. But as the result of the events on the 8th Corps front, "Aberlour" was cancelled on 28 June, and the whole plan was revised. The 1st British Corps now produced a new plan for clearing the Caen area, part of which was a different scheme for an attack on Carpiquet, to be delivered by the 3rd Canadian Division from the west and known by the code name "Windsor". This was postponed on the 30th.<sup>134</sup>

### The Situation at the End of June

As the eventful month of June drew to a close, with sanguinary fighting in progress along the Odon, it was clear that Montgomery's policy of pulling the enemy's main strength on to the Second Army had been an almost embarrassingly complete success. A great concentration of German troops, and particularly of armour, now faced the eastern flank of the Normandy bridgehead.

The German order of battle on the evening of 29 June<sup>135</sup> shows the following formations confronting the First United States Army:

#### *Seventh Army*

2nd Parachute Corps

3rd Parachute Division  
352nd Infantry Division\*

84th Corps

17th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Division  
91st Airlanding Division\*  
353rd Infantry Division  
77th Infantry Division\*

\*Not a full division.

2nd S.S. Panzer Division\*  
 (battle group only, in Army  
 Group Reserve)<sup>136</sup>

In addition, remnants of the 243rd and 709th Infantry Divisions had been liquidated in the Cherbourg peninsula during the past few days.<sup>137</sup>

Generally facing the Second British Army were the following:<sup>138</sup>

Panzer Group West

86th Corps

711th Infantry Division  
 346th Infantry Division  
 21st Panzer Division  
 16th Air Force Division (moving up)  
 716th Infantry Division\*

1st S.S. Panzer Corps

1st S.S. Panzer Division  
 12th S.S. Panzer Division

2nd S.S. Panzer Corps

9th S.S. Panzer Division  
 10th S.S. Panzer Division  
 2nd S.S. Panzer Division\*  
 276th Infantry Division (moving up)  
 277th Infantry Division (moving up)

47th Panzer Corps

Panzer Lehr Division  
 2nd Panzer Division.

It is thus apparent that, at the end of June, of the eight panzer divisions in Normandy seven and a half were on the British front.† Of other divisions or remnants of divisions in all categories, there were six on the U.S. and six on the British front.

On 30 June General Montgomery issued another long formal directive<sup>139</sup> to Generals Bradley and Dempsey. It is reproduced as Appendix "D", and only the basic sentence describing Montgomery's "Plan in Outline" need be quoted here: "To hold the maximum number of enemy divisions on our eastern flank between Caen and Villers Bocage, and to swing the western or right flank of the Army Group southwards and eastwards in a wide sweep so as to threaten the line of withdrawal of such enemy divisions to the south of Paris."

On these lines the battle was duly fought during the next seven weeks. It was General Montgomery's hope, as we have seen, that the enemy would continue to fight strongly on his present line—as Montgomery put it on 18 June (above, page 145), "come to our threat" and expose himself to defeat between the Seine and the Loire. Hitler was enforcing precisely this policy, and refusing to allow his commanders on the ground to make politic withdrawals. The result of this obstinacy was to be a catastrophic German defeat; but there was much hard fighting before the rout began.

\*Not a full division.

†The 2nd Panzer Division, on Panzer Group West's extreme left flank, overlapped the American front after the 7th British Armoured Division's sector was taken over by the First U.S. Army at the end of the month.

## CHAPTER VII

### **NORMANDY: THE BATTLES OF CAEN AND BOURGUEBUS RIDGE, 1-23 JULY 1944**

(See Map 3 and Sketches 10 and 11)

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#### A Momentary Pause

**A**T the beginning of July 1944 there was a momentary pause in the operations in Normandy. On the British front the Battle of the Odon was dying down. On the American front to the west General Bradley's Army was preparing for the drive southward prescribed in General Montgomery's directive of 30 June. The Germans still held Caen, but they had been forced to abandon hope of mounting a major counter-offensive to destroy our bridgehead. Their operations were hamstrung by the apprehension of another Allied landing on the Strait of Dover; and Hitler was in the act of replacing his senior commander in the West and one of his chief subordinates.

As we have seen, Tactical Headquarters First Canadian Army was in France, but for the moment had no work to do; though General Crerar himself used the opportunity to make ground and air reconnaissances of his prospective theatre of operations. His Main and Rear Headquarters had also opened, theoretically, at Amblie in Normandy at midnight on 19-20 June; but their actual moves from England were postponed by the gale then in progress and by General Montgomery's subsequent decision not to make the Army operational at present (above, pages 146-7). Accordingly, they re-opened at their old station at Headley Court, near Leatherhead, Surrey, at midnight on 25-26 June. The Army's pre-D Day planning for this phase, based on the orderly principle of bringing in the Army Headquarters and administrative units first, so that they could supervise the subsequent arrival of the fighting formations, had turned out to be merely a waste of time. Fighting formations, to "stake out" more ground, were what were urgently needed under the now existing conditions.<sup>1</sup>

In accordance with Montgomery's original policy, however, Headquarters 2nd Canadian Corps was beginning to move to France. The Corps Commander, Lieut.-General Simonds, opened his Tactical Headquarters at Amblie on 29 June and his Main Headquarters at Camilly a week later. The 2nd Canadian Infantry Division was also on the move to France; its leading units disembarked on 7 July.<sup>2</sup> For the moment Simonds' corps had no operational responsibilities.



With the operations immediately in prospect, then, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade associated with it, were still the only Canadian formations directly concerned. The Division continued to hold the line which it had taken up and made good north-west of Caen, from La Villeneuve on the Bayeux road on the right to Villons-les-Buissons on the left, confronting Carpiquet, Authie and Buron. It was still under the 1st British Corps, which was about to carry out General Montgomery's direction to the Second Army to "develop operations for the capture of Caen as opportunity offers—and the sooner the better". The method now proposed was a frontal attack with the heaviest possible support.

### The Capture of Carpiquet

As a preliminary to attacking Caen itself, the 1st British Corps ordered the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division to capture Carpiquet village and the adjoining airfield. As we have seen (above, page 150) a plan had been prepared for this purpose but the operation ("Windsor") had been postponed on 30 June. It was now revived "in more virile form"<sup>3</sup> and the attack was delivered on the morning of 4 July. The task was difficult, for the objective was held by units of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division, now commanded by Kurt Meyer (who had succeeded General Witt when the latter was killed on 14 June),<sup>4</sup> and the defenders were well dug in. Accordingly, the plan provided for powerful support.

The attack was to be made by the 8th Infantry Brigade (Brigadier K. G. Blackader), with The Royal Winnipeg Rifles attached from the 7th Brigade. The 10th Armoured Regiment was to provide tank support, along with "special armour" from the 79th Armoured Division—a squadron each of Flails, Crocodiles and AVREs. Fire support was to be provided by bombarding ships of the Royal Navy and by 12 field, eight medium and one heavy regiments of artillery and three companies of The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.) with their medium machine-guns and mortars. There was a programme of air attacks on pre-arranged targets and in addition Blackader had two squadrons of Typhoon fighter-bombers on call. "Windsor" was to be carried out in two phases. The first was the capture of Carpiquet village and the adjacent hangars on the north side of the airfield, as well as the opposite group of hangars on the south edge of the field. The second phase was to see the capture of the control buildings and other structures at the east end of the field. In the first phase, the North Shore Regiment (left) and Le Regiment de la Chaudiere (right), each supported by a squadron of tanks from the 10th Armoured Regiment and a half-platoon of the 16th Field Company R.C.E., were to attack Carpiquet village from a start-line in front of La Villeneuve. Simultaneously The Royal Winnipeg Rifles would advance from Marcelet against the southern hangars. During this stage The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada were to be in reserve; subsequently they would pass through the village and carry out the second phase. The infantry were to cross the start-line at 5:00 a.m., following a creeping barrage fired by six field and two medium regiments.<sup>5</sup>

On 3 July the troops moved into the assembly areas in rear of the start-line

## Insert picture

(previously held by units of the 43rd Division). The enemy obviously observed the movement, and during that day and the night that followed the villages were heavily shelled and mortared.<sup>6</sup> When our barrage opened at 5:00 a.m. on the 4th the Germans immediately replied with a counter-barrage. It caught the leading companies as they moved across the start-line, and in their advance through the level fields of ripening wheat separating them from the objectives they suffered heavily. As men fell, their comrades marked their positions for the stretcherbearers by bayoneted rifles stuck upright among the grain, and then pushed on. By 6:32 the leading troops of the North Shore were on their objective. Le Regiment de la Chaudiere on their right also reached the village. The two battalions then proceeded to clear it. The garrison, reported in a post-war narrative by the 12th S.S. Panzer Division's senior staff officer to have consisted of only 50 men of the 25th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment, fought fiercely.<sup>7</sup>

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles' attack on the hangars ran into trouble from the beginning, the leading companies being heavily mortared from the moment they crossed the start-line and subsequently meeting heavy machine-gun fire from the hangars themselves. The tank squadron allotted to the Winnipegs had been held in reserve in the first instance, and was assisting merely by fire. After a request from the Rifles' commanding officer one troop of tanks now moved forward in direct support. Not until 9:00 a.m., however, did two of the Winnipeg companies reach the nearest hangar; and then they found the enemy so strongly posted that neither tanks nor Crocodiles could drive him from his pillboxes. The area, moreover, was swept by fire from the high ground just south of the control buildings. Unable to gain a foothold in the hangars, the Winnipegs withdrew to the sparse shelter of a

copse close to the start-line. About 4:00 p.m. the battalion again advanced but again met extremely stiff resistance. Enemy tanks approaching the airfield from the east were several times dispersed by artillery but rallied on each occasion; and this threat forced the forward companies, which had "again reached the first hangars", to retire. At 9:00 p.m. Brigade ordered the battalion back to the start-line and 44 rocket-firing aircraft were sent in to attack 17 enemy tanks or self-propelled guns which had been reported dug in around the airfield. The second phase was not carried out.<sup>8</sup>

During the early stages of the operation part of the 27th Armoured Regiment (Sherbrooke Fusiliers) had carried out a diversionary attack on the left towards the Chateau de St. Louet and Gruchy. This was successfully executed and a considerable number of casualties were inflicted on the enemy without our own force suffering any important losses.<sup>9</sup>

The day's work had thus been only a partial victory, in spite of the great weight of support employed. We now held Carpiquet village and the northern hangars; but the south hangars and the control buildings remained in enemy hands. Troops of the 43rd (Wessex) Division who had occupied Verson and Fontaine-Etoupefour on the right were withdrawn during the night as a result of the failure to complete the capture -of the airfield.<sup>10</sup> The 8th Brigade's units on the high ground at Carpiquet were in an exposed salient. Early on the morning of 5 July a series of enemy counter-attacks supported by artillery and Panthers were beaten off.<sup>11</sup> For the next few days Carpiquet was subjected to intermittent heavy shell and mortar fire. The 12th S.S., alarmed by the threat to Caen represented by our possession of Carpiquet, nevertheless lacked the infantry for further counter-attacks. But a regiment of the 7th Mortar Brigade (*Werferbrigade*), which had been placed under its command, set up numerous projectors which bombarded the village with 110-lb. high explosive and oil bombs and made it a very nasty place.<sup>12</sup>

The partial success of Operation "Windsor" had been dearly bought. On 4 July The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment had its heaviest casualties of the whole campaign, amounting to 132, of which 46 were fatal. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles also had 132 casualties, 40 being fatal. The other armoured and infantry units involved at Carpiquet suffered as follows:<sup>13</sup>

	Total Casualties	Fatal Casualties
10th Armoured Regiment	20	8
Queen's Own Rifles of Canada	26	4
Regiment de la Chaudiere	57	16

The 16th Field Company had 10 casualties, three men losing their lives.

### Theatre Strategy and the Use of Heavy Bombers

It is likely that the ten days following the conference on 15 June which is said to have been interrupted by Air Chief Marshal Tedder (above, page 144) witnessed discussions at high levels concerning the possibility of using the strategic air forces

in direct support of the armies; but no record of them seems to have come to light. It is possible that the Supreme Commander, who as we have seen had insisted upon having control of the strategic air (above, page 23), intervened to settle the argument in favour of the use of the heavy bombers. At any rate, on 25 June General Eisenhower telegraphed General Montgomery<sup>14</sup> wishing him luck in the Odon offensive and adding,

Please do not hesitate to make the maximum demands for any air assistance that can possibly be useful to you. Whenever there is any legitimate opportunity we must blast the enemy with everything we have. . . .

This has the appearance of an invitation to ask for the heavy bombers. And in fact the R.A.F. Bomber Command intervened in Normandy in daylight for the first time five days later, when it dropped 1100 tons of bombs on Villers-Bocage to interfere with the assembly of German armour for the Odon battle.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the officers about Eisenhower were still critical of Montgomery's failure to get forward on the eastern flank, and it would seem that they were urging him to bring pressure on the Army Group Commander. But it must have been clear to Eisenhower that he could scarcely urge Montgomery forward while at the same time refusing him the heavy bombers. About this time, on a date which is not given, the Supreme Commander instructed Tedder "to keep the closest touch with General Montgomery or his representatives in 21st Army Group, not merely to see that their requests are satisfied but to see that they have asked for every kind of support that is practicable and in maximum volume that can be delivered".<sup>16</sup> On 7 July Eisenhower wrote Montgomery a long letter<sup>17</sup> which, while tactfully phrased, was clearly intended to encourage him to push on. Referring to his own recent studies of the situation, "particularly in consultation with G-2 [Intelligence] and the Air Commanders", he proceeded to urge Montgomery to strike hard on his left:

I am familiar with your plan for generally holding firmly with your left, attracting thereto all of the enemy armour, while your right pushes down the Peninsula and threatens the rear and flank of the forces facing the Second British Army. However, the advance on the right has been slow and laborious. . . .

It appears to me that we must use all possible energy in a determined effort to prevent a stalemate or facing the necessity of fighting a major defensive battle with the slight depth we now have in the bridgehead.

We have not yet attempted a major full dress attack on the left flank supported by everything we could bring to bear. To do so would require some good weather, so that our air could give maximum assistance. Through Coningham and Broadhurst there is available all the air that that could be used, even if it were determined to be necessary to resort to area bombing in order to soften up the defense. . . .

. . . please be assured that I will produce everything that is humanly possible to assist you in any plan that promises to get us the elbow room we need. The air and everything else will be available. . . .

To this "friendly nudge" General Montgomery on 8 July made a firm and rather cool reply.<sup>18</sup> He wrote, "I am, myself, quite happy about the situation. I have been working throughout on a very definite plan, and I now begin to see daylight." He mentioned the attack on Caen which was then in progress and again referred to the importance of operations there assisting "our affairs on the western

flank". His letter concluded, "Of one thing you can be quite sure—there will be no stalemate.... I shall always ensure that I am well balanced; at present I have no fears of any offensive moves the enemy might make; I am concentrating on making the battle swing our way."

Although Eisenhower's reference to ample air support being available "through Coningham and Broadhurst" might have suggested a continued unwillingness to use the strategic bombers, this was not the case. At the time he wrote, the R.A.F. Bomber Command was already committed to direct support of the Second British Army at Caen. On the evening of 7 July it struck a great blow to clear the way for the capture of the city.

### The Action of the Orne: The Capture of Caen

Planning for the attack on Caen was well advanced before Operation "Windsor" went in. General Crocker, commanding the 1st British Corps, held his first conference about the operation on 2 July, and the Corps order for the operation ("Charnwood") was issued on 5 July.<sup>19</sup> It defined the intention as to clear Caen as far south as a line from the point where the Caen—Bayeux railway crossed the Orne along that river to its intersection with the Canal de Caen and thence along the Canal de Caen itself. Bridgeheads were to be secured across the Orne in the city area. The order, somewhat peculiarly phrased in this respect, defined the "Final Objective" as a general line running through the villages of Franqueville and Ardenne and onward north of Caen to a point about a mile north of the centre of the city. The more distant objectives defined in the intention were described as "objectives for exploitation". Three infantry divisions were to take part, advancing on Caen in a semi-circle: the 3rd Canadian Division on the right, the newly-arrived 59th (Staffordshire) Division in the centre and the 3rd British Division on the left. A great number of guns, including those of the 3rd and 4th Army Groups Royal Artillery, would support the attack. Heavy naval bombardment was also planned; the battleship *Rodney*, the monitor *Roberts* and the cruisers *Belfast* and *Emerald* took part.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, as already mentioned, the heavy bombers now appeared above the battle. The arrangements for air support were apparently completed only on 7 July,<sup>21</sup> and no information has been found concerning the precise manner in which they were arrived at. Field-Marshal Montgomery has written, "The plan involved an assault against well organized and mutually supporting positions based on a number of small villages which lay in an arc north and north-west of the city, and, in view of the strength of these defences, I decided to seek the assistance of Bomber Command RAF in a close support role on the battlefield.... The Supreme Commander supported my request for the assistance of Bomber Command, and the task was readily accepted by Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris."<sup>22</sup>

This part of the operation has proved to be controversial, both as to timing and targets. It was considered that the "bomblines" for the heavy bombers should be at least 6000 yards from our leading troops. This probably largely dictated the decision as to the target to be assigned to Bomber Command, which was defined

as four map squares on the northern outskirts of Caen, amounting in fact to a rectangle some 4000 yards long by 1500 wide.<sup>23</sup> This area did not include the fortified villages in the front line which our troops had to capture in the early stages of the operation; these were to be dealt with by the artillery. It appears that there were not actually a great many enemy defences in the area attacked by the heavy bombers; but in Lord Montgomery's words, "In addition to the material damage, much was hoped for from the effects of the percussion on the enemy defenders generally, and from the tremendous moral effect on our own troops." It would obviously have been desirable that the Bomber Command attack should take place immediately before the troops on the ground advanced; however, Lord Montgomery states that "owing to the weather forecast" it was necessary to carry out the bombing the previous evening.<sup>24</sup> This point has been disputed. The forecast issued in Normandy on the morning of the 7th was not unfavourable, and in fact large forces of Bomber Command operated over France during the following night.<sup>25</sup> Be this as it may, the heavy bombers attacked between 9:50 and 10:30 p.m. on 7 July, while the ground operation began only at 4:20 the following morning.

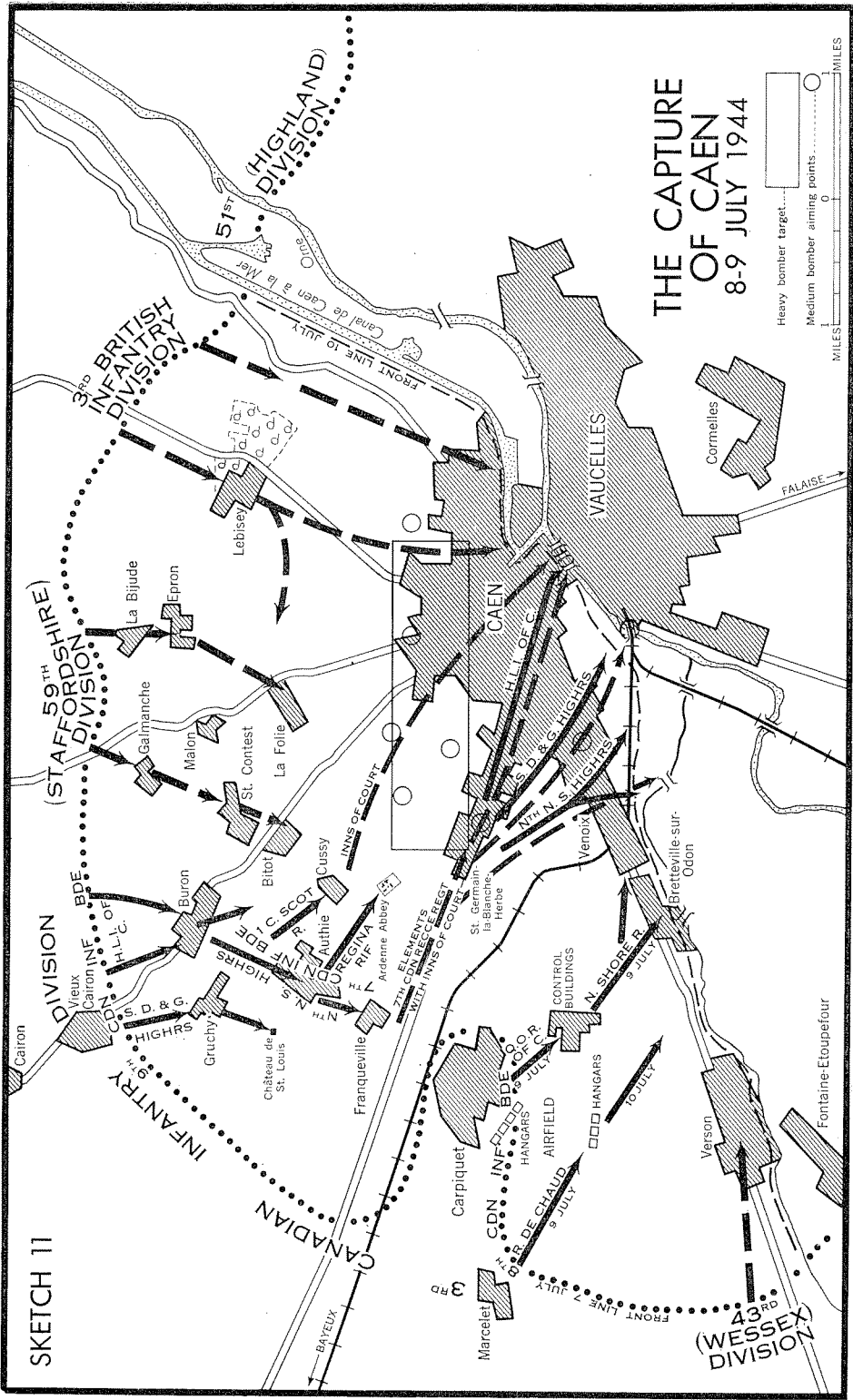
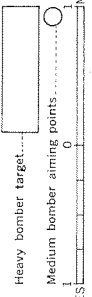
In the fading light of evening the air attack came in. Like all such operations, it was tremendously impressive. Bomber Command "employed 467 bombers to drop 2,562 tons of bombs".\* In reply to an urgent inquiry from the 1st British Corps as to the results, the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade replied, "Smoke and flame wonderful for morale", and a little later, "Everything to our front seems to be in flame. Cannot get anything more accurate." No bombs had fallen short.<sup>26</sup>

There was no doubt at all of the bombing's results among our own troops. A message from The Highland Light Infantry of Canada said, "The stuff going over now has really had an effect on the lads on the ground. It has improved their morale 500 per cent."<sup>27</sup> The effect on the enemy is more doubtful. The available contemporary German records (which do not include the diaries of the divisions and corps concerned) throw little direct light on the matter. The senior staff officer of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division states that his formation "suffered only negligible casualties despite the fact that numerous bombs fell in the assembly areas of the 2nd Panzer Battalion and the 3rd Battalion 26th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. Some tanks and armoured personnel carriers were toppled over or buried under debris from houses, but after a short while nearly all of them were again ready for action."<sup>28</sup> A 21st Army Group intelligence summary of 11 July, undoubtedly based upon the interrogation of prisoners, asserts, "The heavy bombing of Caen was decisive. 31 GAF [German Air Force] Regiment lost its headquarters and 16 GAF and 12 SS Panzer Divisions were deprived of rations and ammunition for the crucial morning which followed." The moral effect upon the German troops, and particularly upon the *Luftwaffe* division, was probably very considerable. But the matter had a tragic aspect—the lamentable damage done to the city of Caen, and the inevitable casualties among French civilians. The havoc was great, the city's university being among the buildings lost. Fortunately, the

\*These are the figures given in Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory's despatch, which however is in error in stating that the attack took place at 4:30 a.m. on 8 July.

SKETCH 11

# THE CAPTURE OF CAEN 8-9 JULY 1944



inhabitants had been partly evacuated from the areas most heavily struck. The number of French casualties was apparently between 300 and 400.<sup>29</sup>

Almost immediately after the end of the bombing attack the British artillery opened fire. The guns of the 8th Corps, on the right, were employed in long-range harassing fire against the roads leading into Caen from the south and south-west. An hour before midnight the artillery supporting the 1st Corps-656 guns were available-began firing on the villages behind the German front line. La Folie, St. Contest, St. Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe, Lebisey and Authie were pounded in turn through the night. Every known hostile battery was also fired on. Then, at 4:20 a.m. on 8 July, 93 minutes before sunrise, the planned barrage and concentrations came down across the fronts of the 59th and 3rd British Divisions as their infantry moved across the start-line into the assault.<sup>30</sup> Thus began a day of fierce and bloody fighting.

In the first phase the British divisions were to capture Galmanche, La Bijude and Lebisey Wood. The 3rd Canadian Division was not involved at this stage, but in Phase II, which was to be launched when ordered by Corps Headquarters after one hour's notice, the Canadians were to capture the Chateau de St. Louet, Authie, and a patch of high ground immediately south of Buron. In Phase III they were to push on to the general line Franqueville-Ardenne. During these two phases the two British divisions were to continue the advance on their fronts. Phase IV was to witness exploitation by all three divisions designed to secure and mop up Caen to the Orne and the Canal de Caen. Only now was the Canadian division to attack those parts of the Carpiquet airfield still in enemy hands. The fifth phase, for the Canadians, would consist of the completion of Phase IV; while the British divisions were to secure the required bridgeheads across the Orne, launching these thrusts at their own discretion as opportunity arose.<sup>31</sup>

The first reports from the British fronts indicated good progress, but in fact both divisions (and more especially the 59th) were meeting heavy opposition and continued to meet it until evening. However, the early reports were sufficiently encouraging to lead General Crocker at 6:30 a.m. to order Phase II to begin at 7:30.<sup>32</sup> At that time, accordingly, the 59th Division moved against St. Contest, Malon and Epron; and the 3rd Canadian Division launched its attack towards Gruchy and Buron. The task here fell to the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, which had met a stiff check in this same area on 7 June.

"Unbelievable"<sup>33</sup> artillery concentrations on the enemy positions in the villages and in front of them prepared the way for the brigade's advance. On the right, The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders had the mission of taking Gruchy. The place was reported in Canadian hands at 9:38.<sup>34</sup> Taking it had not been easy, but it was easier than the task in the adjoining sector on the left.

The forward companies of The Highland Light Infantry of Canada, advancing towards Buron, came under heavy artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire. They cleared the enemy's positions in front of the village, losing heavily in the process, and then fought their way across the built-up area, assisted by tanks of the 27th Armoured Regiment whose arrival had been delayed by mines. Although it was reported at 8:30 a.m. that the H.L.I.'s forward troops were in Buron, some



of the enemy fought on all day among the rubble, and in fact the last survivors were not rooted out until the following morning. In this area the 3rd Battalion, of the 25th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment was fighting with the bitterness expected of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division; and the Canadians got the impression that the garrison of Gruchy when evicted had retired into Buron to strengthen the defence there. The Highland Light Infantry were fighting their first real battle at Buron, and it proved to be, like the North Shore's at Carpiquet, their bloodiest of the campaign. The battalion's casualties on 8 July amounted to 262, of which 62 were fatal; its commander, Lt.-Col. F. M. Griffiths, was among the wounded, but the day also brought him the D.S.O. Not only was Buron taken, but a very formidable armoured counter-attack late in the morning was beaten off with the efficient assistance of two troops of the 245th Anti-Tank Battery Royal Artillery and the supporting squadron of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment. Fourteen German tanks were reported destroyed.<sup>35</sup>

At 9:55 a.m. General Keller ordered Brigadier Cunningham, commanding the 9th Brigade, to carry the operation on to the next stage, attacking south to envelop Authie and the Chateau de St. Louet.<sup>36</sup> This advance was slow in getting under way, probably because of the fierce resistance still being offered about Buron, and the G.O.C., who seems to have underestimated this resistance, was displeased; but during the early afternoon the Glengarrians captured the Chateau and The North Nova Scotia Highlanders avenged their grim experience of D plus 1 by taking Authie. Our troops at Carpiquet could now see enemy parties withdrawing southwards in disorder; the enemy, fiercely though he had fought, was showing signs of cracking.<sup>37</sup> The way was clear for the 7th Infantry Brigade to initiate its part of Phase III, passing through the 9th to assail Cussy and Ardenne. This attack began at 6:30 p.m. The Canadian Scottish had trouble at Cussy, which was covered by heavy fire from the Germans in Ardenne on one flank and Bitot (in the 59th Division's area) on the other; and when the enemy's infantry was driven out his tanks launched a determined counter-attack. But they failed to regain the village, and the Scottish claim to have knocked out six of them. In Cussy the battalion buried more than one German officer who had fought among his troops "to the bitter end".<sup>38</sup>

The Regina Rifle Regiment, attacking the Abbey of Ardenne, which was still the command post of the 25th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment, met perhaps even heavier opposition. When Kurt Meyer found that this position was threatened he hastened there himself to direct the defence. Under his leadership a company of Panther tanks and the remains of the 3rd Battalion of the 1st S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment (from the Adolf Hitler Division), which had been attached to Meyer's division, managed to bring our attack to a temporary standstill. At nightfall the ruined Abbey buildings, surrounded by luridly burning German and Canadian tanks, remained in the enemy's hands. He withdrew, however, during the night.<sup>39</sup>

While the 12th S.S. Panzer Division fought so desperately in the centre and on the west flank, the 16th *Luftwaffe* Field Division, a raw formation which had relieved the 21st Panzer Division north-east of Caen only three days before,<sup>40</sup>

was being badly mauled by the experienced 3rd British Division. By evening the latter had advanced through Lebisey and was threatening to cut off the S.S. units still resisting the 59th Division in the villages in the German centre.<sup>41</sup>

There was some hope that a spearhead might reach the Orne bridges at Caen before they could be destroyed, and in the evening General Keller directed a force of armoured cars from the Inns of Court Regiment, with part of the 7th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment\* under command, to push forward along the highway through St. Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe. It got into that suburb before enemy mines and snipers checked its progress in the gathering darkness. It seems evident that no Allied troops got close to the bridges until the following day.<sup>42</sup>

During the evening Field-Marshal Rommel arrived at the headquarters of Panzer Group West to consult with its commander, General Eberbach; and with his approval the Panzer Group ordered all heavy weapons withdrawn from Caen that night. "Strong infantry forces, supported by engineers" were to continue to resist in the line north and west of Caen, and "only in the event of an enemy attack with superior forces" were they to withdraw to the line defined as "east bank of the Orne—northern outskirts of Venoix—northern edge of Bretteville [sur-Odon]". This was not much more than a face-saving formula. About 3:00 a.m. on 9 July, it appears, the final evacuation of Caen as far as the Orne was ordered. The 3rd Battalion of the 26th Panzer Grenadier Regiment was to act as rearguard in the 12th S.S. Panzer Division's sector.<sup>43</sup>

In these circumstances, 9 July witnessed the British occupation of Caen. In the morning the 59th Division moved into the villages to the north, while the two flanking divisions, the 3rd British on the east and the 3rd Canadian on the west, "pinching out" the 59th, filtered into the city on their own fronts and joined hands. There was still opposition, but it was not heavy. The squadron of the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment working under command of the Inns of Court pushed towards the Orne bridges in the centre of the city and reached them in the course of the afternoon (it is difficult to establish the precise time, but it was probably around 5:00 p.m.). One of the bridges was found intact, but blocked by rubble and covered by enemy fire from the far bank.<sup>44</sup> The bridgeheads which the Corps order had required the British divisions to establish were not obtained.

The armoured cars had been little if at all in advance of the infantry. On the Canadian front The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders were the first battalion to enter the city; Sherbrooke Fusiliers tanks went with them. At 1:35 p.m. the 9th Brigade signalled, "My Sunray [commander] reports that he is in the centre of Caen with Sunray of S.D. & G. Highrs."<sup>45</sup> In the meantime, the units of the 8th Brigade, supported by the 10th Armoured Regiment, had completed the occupation of Carpiquet airfield;† there was little opposition and the troops were reported on their objectives at 11:15 a.m.<sup>47</sup>

Thus at long last, thirty-three days later than prescribed in the original plan, Caen was in Allied hands. The city was a painful spectacle. Virtually the whole

\*Part of this unit, including its headquarters, was still in England.

†The code name for this part of the operation was "Trousers". At 7:40 p.m. on 8 July Tactical H.Q. 3rd Canadian Division had signalled, "Trousers off until tomorrow."<sup>46</sup>

of the central area had been destroyed on 6 and 7 June by Allied bombing designed to interfere with German movements by road and rail; and, as we have seen, the northern areas suffered equally in the great attack on the evening of 7 July. Happily, however, one portion of the city had been little damaged. This was the "island of refuge" about the great church of St. Etienne (Abbaye-aux-Hommes) and the Hopital du Bon Sauveur. As early as 12 June, it appears, the Resistance forces and the French authorities in Caen contrived to send messengers through the lines to the British command, informing it that thousands of refugees were gathered in this area and begging that it should be protected. The French record that assurances were duly given, and in fact this part of the city went almost untouched during the struggle, and great numbers of lives were saved in consequence.<sup>48</sup>

In spite of their dreadful experience, the people of Caen greeted their liberators in a manner which our troops found very moving. And the Caennais were apparently particularly delighted to find their city freed in part by men from Canada. The historians of Caen during the siege thus describe the events of 9 July:<sup>49</sup>

At 2:30 p.m., at last, the first Canadians reached the Place Fontette, advancing as skirmishers, hugging the walls, rifles and tommy guns at the ready.

All Caen was in the streets to greet them. These are Canadians, of all the Allies the closest to us; many of them speak French. The joy is great and yet restrained. People—the sort of people who considered the battle of Normandy nothing but a military promenade—have reproached us for not having fallen on the necks of our liberators. Those people forget the Calvary that we had been undergoing since the 6th of June.

No Canadian unit recorded any complaint of the warmth of the welcome; and the 1st Corps situation report for the day remarked, "Inhabitants enthusiastic at Allied entry,"<sup>50</sup>

The people of Caen had suffered; the liberators had suffered too. The final phase of the battle for the city had been as bloody as its predecessors. The losses of The Highland Light Infantry of Canada on 8 July have already been noticed (above, page 161); no other unit lost so heavily, but the three battalions of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade together had 547 battle casualties on 8 July and 69 more on the 9th. Total Canadian casualties for the theatre on the two days were 1194, of which 330 were fatal.<sup>51</sup> This was heavier than the loss on D Day.

Although the greater part of Caen had been liberated, the enemy was still in the southern quarters of the city, across the Orne. The only foothold the Allies possessed beyond the river was that seized by the airborne troops on 6 June. The task of breaking out into the open country to the south-east, so long desired by the air forces for airfields, was still ahead.

The German divisions that had fought for the Caen bridgehead were mere shadows when they retired across the Orne. Panzer Group West reported on 8 July, before the evacuation, that the infantry of the 16th *Luftwaffe* Field Division west of the Orne had "suffered 75% casualties".<sup>52</sup> Army Group "D" recorded next day that every one of this division's battalion commanders in the bridgehead had been killed or wounded. As for the much more formidable 12th S.S. Panzer Division, it was in almost equally sad case. Army Group "D" set down on 9 July that the division's total infantry strength now equalled only that

of one battalion; most of the anti-tank guns had been destroyed by enemy fire, and on 8 July alone 20 of the division's tanks had become total losses. At the beginning of the invasion, as we have seen, the 12th S.S. Panzer Division had possessed 150 tanks (above, page 129). It had now lost 65 of them: 44 long-gun Mark IVs and 21 Panthers.<sup>53</sup> It was, in fact, little more than a remnant; yet the remnant was still to give us much trouble before the Normandy campaign was over. On 11 July it handed over the Caen sector to the 1st S.S. Panzer Division and was withdrawn to refit.<sup>54</sup>

### The Situation After the Capture of Caen

It is time to survey again the situation in the bridgehead as a whole.

On 3 July the First U.S. Army had duly launched the offensive on the western portion of its line which General Montgomery's directive of 30 June had ordered. The advance was hampered by bad weather and by difficult terrain—the *bocage* country, intersected by formidable hedgerows, being very unsuitable for armour and favourable to the defence. Nevertheless the American troops clawed their way forward, and after the first stage the Germans, realizing that this was a major offensive, began to move important formations westward to help stem the tide.<sup>55</sup>

On 8 July, the day on which the final British attack on Caen was launched, Hitler issued to the Commander-in-Chief West a new and comprehensive directive for the next phase of operations.<sup>56</sup> This observed that the enemy's next action would probably be "a thrust forward on both sides of the Seine to Paris". The Fuhrer proceeded, "Therefore, a second enemy landing in the sector of Fifteenth Army, despite all the risks this entails, is probable; all the more so, as public opinion will press for elimination of the positions for long-range fire on London."\* Attacks to gain an important harbour in Brittany, or on the Mediterranean coast, were also possible. Circumstances, the dictator went on, excluded for the present a major German attack intended to destroy the Allied bridgehead; but it was essential to prevent any substantial enlargement of it. Therefore the present front was to be held. However, "The mass of the mobile formations must be relieved by the infantry divisions which have arrived or are still arriving from time to time, and must thereafter be assembled in readiness for action as tactical reserves." Relief of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division was specified as particularly necessary in the near future. After the mobile formations had been thus relieved and reorganized, "an operation with limited objectives" was to be prepared by Panzer Group West, the aim being to drive a wedge into the bridgehead by a surprise thrust, to split it as far as possible, to inflict losses on the Allied forces and to create favourable conditions for further operations. Hitler ordered that the strong reserves behind the Fifteenth Army's coastal front were to remain there "until such time as it can be ascertained whether the American Army Group is

\*On the German V-weapons, see below, pages 354-5.

going to undertake another landing operation, or whether its forces will follow Montgomery's Army Group into the present beachhead".

Recent history now repeated itself. Throughout the campaign the Germans had been struggling to withdraw from the line enough armour to form a mobile reserve capable of a counter-offensive; but all such attempts had been frustrated by Allied thrusts which could only be countered by sending the tanks in again. Now part of the armour withdrawn from the British sector had to be committed on the American front in an attempt to stop General Bradley. On 7 July, after discussion between Kluge and Rommel, the Panzer Lehr Division was ordered west. It came into action against the Americans on 11 July. The greater part of the 2nd S.S. Panzer Division was already fighting them.<sup>57</sup>

This development, so inimical to his policy of pinning German strength on the eastern flank, naturally disturbed General Montgomery. On 8 July a 21st Army Group intelligence summary, reporting movements which it correctly interpreted as indicating the switch of Panzer Lehr, remarked: "Opposite the American Army is the equivalent of some seventy battalions of infantry supported by 250 tanks." This was a material change as compared with the situation little more than a week earlier (above, page 151). On 10 July Montgomery took note of it in a new directive to his Army Commanders.<sup>58</sup> His deduction was, "It is important to speed up our advance on the western flank; the operations of the Second Army must therefore be so staged that they will have a direct influence on the operations of the First Army, as well as holding enemy forces on the eastern flank." He proceeded to emphasize the importance of gaining possession of the Brittany peninsula, which was essential from an administrative point of view; of gaining "depth and space" on the eastern flank, "for manoeuvre, for administrative purposes, and for airfields"; and of engaging the enemy unceasingly to reduce his strength ("generally we must kill Germans").

On the Second British Army front Montgomery asked for a bridgehead opposite Caen but only if it could be gained "without undue losses". West of the Orne, on the other hand, the Army would "immediately operate strongly in a southerly direction, with its left flank on the Orne", its objective being the general line Thury Harcourt—Mont Pingon—Le Beny Bocage. During this advance southward it was to secure bridgeheads east of the Orne between Caen and Falaise; and it was to retain the ability to be able to operate with a strong armoured force east of the Orne in the general area between Caen and Falaise. "For this purpose a Corps of three armoured divisions will be held in reserve, ready to be employed when ordered by me."

This directive contained a number of points of particular Canadian interest. It placed the 2nd Canadian Corps under command of the Second Army. And it contained the following passage:

A study will be made as to when the northern portion of the eastward front, i.e., from the sea as far as Caen and possibly south of Caen, could profitably be transferred to First Canadian Army.

First Canadian Army will study to what extent command of this eastward front so transferred could be exercised at an early date with comparatively limited resources in Army troops.

The result of these studies will be reported verbally to me; meanwhile no action will be taken as to phasing forward units of First Canadian Army H.Q. or Army Troops until I have further considered the problem.

For the First U.S. Army Montgomery prescribed a continuance of operations along the same line indicated on 30 June (above, page 151). When its advance reached the base of the peninsula at Avranches, the right-hand Corps (the 8th), to consist of three infantry divisions and one armoured division, was to be turned westwards into Brittany. The directive repeated the intention of directing "a strong right wing" south of the *bocage* country towards the line Le Mans—Alençon. The headquarters of the Third U.S. Army was to be "stepped forward" in rear of the 8th Corps, "so that it can take direction and control of the operations on the extreme western flank when so ordered". This army would have the task of clearing the whole of the Brittany peninsula.

In accordance with these instructions the Second British Army now returned to the offensive west of the Orne. The first task (Operation "Jupiter") -was to break out of the tiny bridgehead across the Odon established in the last week of June. On 10 July the 43rd Division attacked out of the bridgehead and got a foothold on Hill 112, a height which had dominated it. The Germans, who had attached the greatest importance to the hill, counter-attacked fiercely with many tanks and succeeded in preventing the British from gaining full possession of it and from capturing the village of Maltot to the east. The 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade was under the 43rd Division for this operation but played only a secondary role. On 13 July Headquarters 8th British Corps handed the sector over to the 12th Corps, newly arrived from England, and withdrew into reserve to prepare for the operation east of the Orne with three armoured divisions, forecast in General Montgomery's directive.<sup>59</sup>

General Simonds' 2nd Canadian Corps had now entered the line. At 3:00 p.m. on 11 July it took over about 8000 yards of front in the Caen sector; with the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions, the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade and the 2nd Canadian Army Group Royal Artillery under command.<sup>60</sup>

### Operation "Goodwood": The Battle of Bourguebus Ridge

The succeeding phase, centring upon the great armoured operation by the 8th British Corps south-east of Caen on 18 July, has been prolific of discussion. Field-Marshal Montgomery has written that these operations "gave rise to a number of misunderstandings at the time", and various post-war publications have added fuel to the fire of the controversy. The aim of the present account is to summarize the essentials of the situation without going into great detail.

The issue turns upon Montgomery's intentions. General Eisenhower in his post-war report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff described the operation as "a drive across the Orne from Caen toward the south and southeast, exploiting in the direction of the Seine basin and Paris". This appears to be a misinterpretation of Montgomery's plans, although it was perhaps not difficult to read some of his communications to the Supreme Commander at the time in this sense. The Germans,

as we have seen (above, pages 150 and 164), assumed that the object of our strategy was a break-out on the eastern flank in the direction of Paris. It has already been amply demonstrated that this was never Montgomery's policy.

On 12 July Montgomery telegraphed to Eisenhower<sup>61</sup> stating that the operation by the three armoured divisions mentioned in his directive of the 10th would now take place on Monday the 17th. He wrote:

Grateful if you will issue orders that the whole weight of the air power is to be available on that day to support my land battle. We must have the air to ensure success so good weather is essential and we will wait for it if Monday is bad. My whole eastern flank will burst into flames on Saturday and the operation on Monday may have far reaching results. . . .

The following day the Army Group Commander sent a further personal message<sup>62</sup> to Eisenhower:

Am going to launch two very big attacks next week. Second Army begin at dawn on 16 July and work up to the big operation on Tuesday 18 July when 8 Corps with three armoured divisions will be launched to the country east of Orne. Note change of date from 17 to 18 July. First Army launch a heavy attack with six divisions about 5 miles west of St. Lo on Wednesday 19 July. The whole weight of air power will be required for Second Army on 18 July and First Army on 19 July....

It has been plausibly suggested<sup>63</sup> that these messages, whose main function, clearly, was to impress SHAEF with the importance of overwhelming air support, actually misled the Supreme Commander as to the aims of the operation. Other documents give a somewhat different impression of Montgomery's intentions.

On 14 July Montgomery wrote to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff<sup>64</sup> pointing out that while his infantry divisions had had heavy casualties and would be worse off "after the manpower situation begins to hit us", his three armoured divisions were "practically untouched". He proceeded:

And so I have decided that the time has come to have a real "show down" on the eastern flank, and to loose a corps of armoured divisions in to the open country about the Caen-Falaise road. We shall be operating from a very firm and secure base. The possibilities are immense; with 700 tanks loosed to the SE of Caen, and armoured cars operating far ahead, anything may happen. . . .

Later in the letter he again wrote, "Anything may happen", adding however that it was necessary to "be certain that we do nothing foolish, and so let ourselves open to a German comeback which might catch us off our balance and lead to a setback. The basic fundamentals of policy are as stated in paras 2, 3, 4, 5, of M 510,\* and the Brittany Peninsula is essential for us; but we may well get it by a victory on the eastern flank."

On the same day (14 July) General Montgomery sent his Military Assistant, Lt.-Col. C. P. Dawnay, to explain his plans at the War Office. A record of his

\*The directive of 10 July (above, page 165). Paragraph 2 reiterated the principle of drawing the main enemy forces into battle on the eastern flank "so that our affairs on the western flank may proceed the easier". Paragraphs 3 and 4 are quoted on page 165, beginning "it is important ..." Paragraph 5 emphasized the importance of both armies attacking the enemy "hard and continuously" and capturing or killing his troops in large numbers,

conversation with the Director of Military Operations<sup>65</sup> contains the following passage:

General Montgomery has to be very careful of what he does in his eastern flank because on that flank is the only British Army there is left in this part of the world. On the security and firmness of the eastern flank depends the security of the whole lodgement area. Therefore, having broken out in country southeast of Caen he has no intention of rushing madly eastwards, and getting Second Army on the eastern flank so extended that that flank might cease to be secure.

All the activities on the eastern flank are designed to help the forces in the west while insuring that a firm bastion is kept in the east.

At the same time all is ready to take advantage of any situation which gives reason to think that the enemy is disintegrating.

On 15 July General Montgomery gave General Dempsey a written memorandum on the operation, and Dempsey passed on a copy of it to General O'Connor, G.O.C. 8th Corps.<sup>66</sup> This specifically defined the object of the operations as follows:

To engage the German Armour in battle and 'write it down' to such an extent that it is of no further value to the Germans as a basis of the battle.

To gain a good bridgehead over the Orne through Caen, and thus to improve our positions on the eastern flank.

Generally to destroy German equipment and personnel, as a preliminary to a possible wide exploitation of success.\*

The initial operations of the 8th Corps were thus defined in the same document:

The three armoured divisions will be required to dominate the area Bourguebus-VimontBretteville [sur-Laize], and to fight and destroy the enemy.

But armoured cars should push far to the south towards Falaise, and spread alarm and despondency, and discover 'the form'.

Subsequently, but only after the Canadian Corps had established a "very firm" bridgehead on the general line Fleury—Cormelles—Mondeville, the 8th Corps might "'crack about' as the situation demands".

Finally, it is relevant to cite the intention of the operation as defined in the 2nd Canadian Corps' Operation Instruction No. 2, dated 16 July, which undoubtedly reflects the views of Headquarters Second Army:

*Army Plan*

To draw enemy formations away from First US Army front by attacking southwards with 1, 8, 12, 30 and 2 Canadian Corps.

These excerpts serve to establish Montgomery's aims. It is clear that he had not changed his basic policy of striking the main blow on the western flank, and the armoured operation east of the Orne was intended to assist the Americans.

Nevertheless, it is equally clear that he was prepared to exploit to the full any breakthrough which might occur east of the Orne, and it seems quite possible that in fact he hoped for a deeper penetration here than that which was finally achieved.

\*The last ten words are missing in two published versions; but they are present in a copy signed personally by Montgomery and passed to his Chief of Staff.



It is time to consider the plan in more detail. The attack east of the Orne was to be preceded by preliminary operations west of the river. On the night of the 15th-16th the 12th Corps, with the 15th Division, was to advance to take high ground south of Evrecy, south of the Odon bridgehead; and on the 16th the 30th Corps was to attack with the 59th Division to capture other heights about Noyers, west of the Odon. Thus the Second Army would work southward as already instructed with its left flank on the Orne, and would draw the enemy's attention, it was hoped, from the forthcoming operations east of the river. Then the main attack (Operation "Goodwood") would be let loose on the morning of 18 July. The 8th Corps, with the 7th, 11th and Guards Armoured Divisions under command, would cross the Orne through the "airborne bridgehead" and push forward towards the high ground to the south. On the left, the 1st British Corps was to establish a division in the Troarn area, and on the right the 2nd Canadian Corps would have the task of capturing the portions of Caen beyond the Orne and establishing a firm bridgehead in the country beyond. The Canadian portion of the operation was known by the code name "Atlantic".<sup>67</sup>

A very powerful blow by the heavy bombers was to clear the way for the armoured advance. The experience of "Charnwood" was reflected in this portion of the plan. This time the bombers—the actual number attacking was 1599 heavy plus many medium and light ones—were to attack at first light, immediately before the ground advance. The heavy night bombers, using delayed-action high-explosive bombs, struck at targets in the Colombelles and Touffreville—Emieville areas (along the flanks of the front of attack) and in the vicinity of Cagny. The heavy day bombers' targets, attacked with fragmentation bombs with instantaneous fuzes (to avoid cratering which might hinder our tanks) were more distant areas. The mediums, using fragmentation bombs, attacked the central area across which the 8th Corps was to move. No. 83 Group R.A.F. went for enemy defended localities and gun areas upon the flanks. To avoid the possibility of British troops being bombed in error, the forward positions were evacuated before the attack.<sup>68</sup>

The operations by the 12th and 30th Corps (respectively "Greenline" and "Pomegranate") duly went in on 15 and 16 July. Both met heavy opposition and made only limited progress. Neither Noyers nor Evrecy was actually taken. The most useful result of these operations was to pull back into or retain in the line much of the armour which the Germans had been striving to organize for a counter-offensive. The 9th and a great part of the 10th S.S. Panzer Divisions were heavily engaged. Nevertheless on the eve of "Goodwood" the Germans still had armoured reserves available to meet it. The decimated 12th S.S. Panzer and portions of the 21st Panzer and 10th S.S. Panzer were out of the line; and the 1st S.S. Panzer was in a position of readiness astride the Falaise road just south of Caen.<sup>69</sup>

The air attack preceding the 8th Corps advance on 18 July was described by Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory in his dispatch written in the following November as "the heaviest and most concentrated air attack in support of ground forces ever attempted". He added that "the total tonnage of bombs dropped reached 7,700 U.S. tons". The "counter-flak" fire of our artillery, hammering the

enemy's anti-aircraft positions while the bombing was in progress, doubtless contributed to keeping the air forces' losses down; but six R.A.F. bombers were lost. This fire merged into a counter-battery programme carried 'out by 15 field, 13 medium, three heavy and two heavy anti-aircraft regiments. Again the Royal Navy's big guns supported the army; the monitor *Roberts* and the cruisers *Enterprise* and *Mauritius* bombarded during 18 July and the next day.<sup>70</sup>

To avoid arousing the enemy's suspicions, only one armoured brigade (the 11th Armoured Division's) crossed into the bridgehead east of the Orne before H Hour. During the air programme this brigade began moving southward from the vicinity of Escoville, and the operation was on. In the first stage comparatively little opposition was met, and many of the enemy in the forward area were found to have been so dazed by the bombing as to be unable to resist. However, in the course of the morning, as the advance proceeded beyond the straight line of railway running from Caen to Vimont, losses began to mount. German tanks came into action, anti-tank guns were active and by midday the 11th Armoured Division's tanks, after advancing some 12,000 yards, were stopped. On the left, the Guards Armoured Division was meeting resistance on a similar scale; while the 7th Armoured Division, whose task it was to move up behind the 11th and operate in the centre, was moving forward slowly and had not really got into action. At the end of the day, on the 8th Corps front, the Germans still held the villages of Bras, Hubert-Folie and Soliers; the Guards Armoured Division had taken Cagny. On the 1st British Corps front, the 3rd British Division had captured Touffreville and Sannerville. During the day the 11th Armoured Division had lost 126 tanks damaged or destroyed and the Guards Armoured Division 60 tanks.

Before attempting an account of the Canadian part in the operation, it may be well to note the later developments on the 8th Corps front. During 19 July the three armoured divisions fought their way forward in the face of fierce opposition. On this day the 11th Armoured Division lost 65 more tanks. By evening the British had Bras, Hubert-Folie and Soliers; the Germans were still in Bourguebus, La Hogue and Frenouville. On the 1st Corps front, the 3rd British Division had been stopped just short of Troam. There was slight further progress on 20 July. No ground was gained on the 1st Corps front, but the 8th took Bourguebus and Frenouville. The Germans continued to hold La Hogue and positions in the woods and villages running thence north-east towards Troam. Here the 8th Corps operations came to a stand.<sup>71</sup>

### Operation "Atlantic": The Capture of Colombelles and Vaucelles

The 2nd Canadian Corps' operation instruction for Operation "Atlantic", issued on 16 July,<sup>72</sup> prescribed that the Corps would capture Faubourg de Vaucelles, bridge the Orne in the Caen area and "be prepared to exploit to capture, in succession" high ground north of St. Andre-sur-Orne and the commanding village of Verrieres, closely overlooking the main road to Falaise. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division was to pass two brigades across the river and attack

with them south-westwards from the Ranville area through Colombelles and Vaucelles. This' task fell to the 8th and 9th Brigades, while the 7th remained in reserve west of the Orne, ready to put a battalion across it through Caen. The 8th Brigade was to lead the advance east of the river, capturing Colombelles, Giberville and Mondeville; the 9th would then pass through to clear Vaucelles. The task of exploitation southward was to be carried out by the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, which proposed to use the 4th. Brigade to reconnoitre up to the Orne, and, if it proved practicable, to cross it and seize the high ground near St. Andre. The 5th Brigade was to cross at Caen and take the St. Andre feature if it had not already fallen to the 4th. The 4th had the particular task of capturing Louvigny, on the Orne near the mouth of the Odon, and preventing any interference from west of the Orne with the 5th Brigade's crossing. The subsequent advance southward would be the business of the 4th or the 6th Brigade as circumstances might dictate.<sup>73</sup>

On the evening of 17 July the 8th Brigade moved across the Orne to its assembly area near Le Bas de Ranville. At 7:45 a.m. the following morning it moved off, with Le Regiment de la Chaudiere on the right, nearer the river, and The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada on the left, astride the road into Colombelles. The two battalions crossed the start-line about eight o'clock, with The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment coming on in rear and the leading elements of the 9th Brigade, which had begun to cross the Orne bridges at H Hour, following in their turn. A barrage fired by four field regiments covered the advance.<sup>74</sup>

Trouble began shortly. At 10:40 the Chaudiere was reported held up by fire from the woods and chateau above the Orne at Colombelles. On the left the Queen's Own "lost the barrage" when the latter moved left on a new axis towards Giberville; for the battalion was held up by snipers and machine-guns in the vast steelworks of Colombelles to its right, whose tall chimneys had long been landmarks in the battle area and had undoubtedly afforded the Germans excellent observation. (Several of these chimneys, however, had lately been demolished by the enemy himself, probably in anticipation of losing the area.)<sup>75</sup> The steelworks had been one of the Bomber Command targets and were much battered; but the Germans were still firing from the ruins. Assisted by tanks of the 1st Hussars, the Queen's Own cleared the area of the cross-roads east of Colombelles; then tanks and infantry moved against Giberville. Here the battalion became involved in a slow and painful fight through the village, constantly hampered by continuing fire from the factory area. By late afternoon several hundred prisoners had been taken in and around Giberville.<sup>76</sup>

On the right the situation was still more difficult. The Chaudiere was held up in front of the chateau, and the North Shore Regiment and the units of the 9th Brigade, closing up behind it, produced much confusion. The North Shore Regiment tried to advance along the steep river bank north of the chateau but was again held up, as were The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders when they attempted to push through Le Regiment de la Chaudiere. Shortly after noon the Chaudiere was ordered to withdraw to permit bombardment of the chateau. At 1:30 it was reported that an air attack had been unsuccessful

("Bombs bounced over Chateau owing to hard ground").<sup>77</sup> At 2:40 p.m. the fire of all the guns supporting the division was brought down upon the place. Unfortunately some shells fell among our own troops and contributed to disorganizing further a situation which was already badly confused. However, at 3:18 the chateau was reported on fire, and thereafter the Chaudiere at last succeeded in breaking in.<sup>78</sup>

At 4:35 p.m. General Keller issued new orders.<sup>79</sup> The North Shore was to clear the steelworks. The 9th Brigade would by-pass this obstacle, The North Nova Scotia Highlanders moving along the river bank to Vaucelles and the Glengarrians moving on the southern flank against Mondeville. The attack now recovered its momentum. The North Shore Regiment launched its attack against the steelworks (necessarily an improvised effort) about 6:00 p.m. Fortunately a sudden rainstorm spoiled the visibility as the companies moved across open fields to close with the enemy ensconced among the huge shattered buildings. The Germans remaining were few in number, but some of them fought grimly through the night and were not finally eliminated until daylight. Off to the south-east, the Queen's Own completed the clearing of Giberville, defeated an evening counter-attack and pushed on to the railway line south of the village. By 9:30 p.m. the battalion was on all its objectives.<sup>80</sup>

Meanwhile the 9th Brigade's units forged slowly forward. The S.D. and Gs. were hung up overnight in Colombelles, but the North Nova Scotias entered the outskirts of Vaucelles shortly before midnight. The Highland Light Infantry of Canada, following on, had trouble getting past the factory area, where its temporary Commanding Officer, Major G. A. M. Edwards, was wounded. The two units consolidated for the night in the eastern part of Vaucelles.<sup>81</sup>

When in the course of the morning it had become evident that the 9th Brigade would be delayed in getting into the Faubourg de Vaucelles, General Simonds directed Brigadier Foster of the 7th Brigade, which was in readiness in Caen, to send a patrol across the river and follow up with a battalion if there was no opposition. The Regina Rifle Regiment's scout platoon crossed by way of partially destroyed bridges, and met only light resistance. About 5:15 p.m. the rest of the battalion began to cross, covered by artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire. The whole of it was well established in Vaucelles within a few hours.<sup>82</sup>

On the right of the 2nd Canadian Corps front, during 18 July, Major-General Foulkes' 2nd Canadian Infantry Division was having its first day in action since Dieppe. The attack by the 4th Infantry Brigade against Louvigny, west of the Orne, began early in the evening, and by nightfall The Royal Regiment of Canada had cleared the orchards immediately north of the village. During this fighting the brigade commander, Brigadier Sherwood Lett, who had been wounded at Dieppe, was again wounded. Lt.-Col. C. M. Drury took over temporarily, and Lt.-Col. F. A. Clift of The South Saskatchewan Regiment acted thereafter until 24 July, when Lt.-Col. J. E. Ganong took command of the brigade.<sup>83</sup> While the enemy was occupied with the 4th Brigade, the 5th (Brigadier W. J. Megill) came into action. At 10:15 p.m. The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment)

of Canada began crossing the Orne from Caen into the western end of Vaucelles against light opposition. During the night contact was established with The Regina Rifle Regiment.<sup>84</sup> The way was now clear for the engineers to begin bridging.

The Army plan required the 2nd Canadian Corps to bridge the canal and the Orne at Herouville, close to Colombelles, and subsequently the river at Caen itself. The enemy's tenacity at Colombelles frustrated an attempt at Herouville on the morning of the 18th, the 3rd Division's engineers being forced to give up after suffering numerous casualties. Another effort in the evening was ended by heavy mortar fire.<sup>85</sup> Shortly after midnight, however, the Corps and 2nd Division engineers began work at Caen. Within 12 hours they had completed one bridge (at the main road-crossing) capable of bearing tanks, a tank-carrying raft just above the city, a smaller bridge nearby, and another in the dock area.<sup>86</sup> This feat was very important in its bearing on the southward extension of the offensive. The bottleneck at Ranville, which inevitably had interfered to some extent with the deployment of the 8th Corps on the morning of 18 July, was no longer a menace.

### Canadian Operations on 19 July

On 19 July the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was able to complete its initial task without heavy fighting. Before dawn the 9th Brigade began the task of clearing Vaucelles of such enemy as remained, chiefly snipers. This was finished by midday.<sup>87</sup> The Corps Commander's intention for the next phase was that the 3rd Division should reorganize and should capture Cormelles, an industrial suburb east of the main road to Falaise (which was now the boundary between the 2nd and 3rd Divisions), while west of the road the 2nd Division was to take Fleury-sur-Orne, the high ground between it and St. Andre, and the village of Ifs.<sup>88</sup>

After a conference held by the Corps Commander about 11:00 a.m., the "7th Brigade, the balance of which was then crossing into Vaucelles, was directed to take Cormelles. However, since there was a report that the place might be unoccupied, and the opportunity might be fleeting, The Highland Light Infantry of the 9th Brigade was ordered to move into Cormelles at once. This led to some confusion between the two brigades, and in the course of the operation there were again complaints of our troops being shelled by our own artillery. The H.L.I. got two companies into Cormelles in the late afternoon, and in the evening the battalion was relieved there by the 1st Canadian Scottish Regiment and The Royal Winnipeg Rifles.<sup>89</sup>

West of the great road, in the 2nd Division sector, the 5th Brigade's attack on Fleury-sur-Orne began badly when Le Regiment de Maisonneuve's two leading companies formed up on the opening line for their supporting barrage instead of their assigned start-line. The result was that these companies took the full weight of our own shellfire and were disorganized. However, the Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. H. L. Bisailon, ordered the other two rifle companies forward and they seized the village with little opposition. In the next phase The Calgary Highlanders passed through the Maisonneuves late in the afternoon and, in spite of considerable

mortar fire, took and consolidated their objective on "Hill 67", the knoll looking down on St. Andre-sur-Orne from the north. That night The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada moved against Ifs. It had to deal with several counter-attacks before the village was finally secure the following morning. In the meantime, west of the Orne, The Royal Regiment of Canada had completed the capture of Louvigny on the morning of the 19th.<sup>90</sup>

### The Last Phase of "Atlantic"

By the evening of 19 July the 2nd Canadian Corps had almost completed its assigned task. Its responsibilities, however, were widened and increased as the 8th Corps armour began to withdraw following the check to its advance. Late in the afternoon of the 19th General Dempsey issued orders for the Canadian Corps to take over Bras from the armour "as soon as possible", and about 10:00 a.m. the following day he directed that the 8th Corps was not to continue the advance for the time being, except that the 7th Armoured Division was to complete the capture of Bourguebus. The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was to relieve the heavily-damaged 11th Armoured Division.<sup>91</sup> The 2nd Canadian Corps intention for the day, apart from carrying out this relief, was that the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division should carry the advance southward and establish itself on the "Verrieres feature". Brigadier H. A. Young's 6th Infantry Brigade, which had not yet been engaged, was brought forward for this phase, with the Essex Scottish from the 5th Brigade placed under its command.<sup>92</sup>

Three miles or so south of Caen the present-day tourist, driving down the arrow-straight road that leads to Falaise, sees immediately to his right a rounded bill crowned by farm buildings. If the traveller be Canadian, he would do well to stay the wheels at this point and cast his mind back to the events of 1944; for this apparently insignificant eminence is the Verrieres Ridge. Well may the wheat and sugar-beet grow green and lush upon its gentle slopes, for in that now half-forgotten summer the best blood of Canada was freely poured out upon them.

The ridge is kidney-shaped, with one end close to the road just north of the farm hamlet from which it takes its name, and the other descending towards the Orne above the village of May. It is an important tactical position, rising as it does to a height of 88 metres and dominating the lower ground to the north. On the morning of 20 July the 6th Brigade was moving south across the Orne preparatory to attacking this feature. Simultaneously, British troops of the 7th Armoured Division from east of the great road were already approaching it. Tanks of the 4th County of London Yeomanry and a company of the Rifle Brigade pushed across the road, supported by the 8th Corps artillery, but met heavy opposition and failed to take the ridge. Two different formations were now being directed upon the same objective. After consultation between the headquarters of the 8th and the 2nd Canadian Corps, it was arranged that the 6th Brigade would attack the position. The British tanks would withdraw east of the road and support the brigade's advance with fire.<sup>93</sup>

The units of the 6th Brigade crossed their start-lines, running from south of

Ips to Point 67, at 3:00 p.m., while British and Canadian artillery fired concentrations on targets in front and Typhoon squadrons also struck at the enemy as targets offered. The Cameron Highlanders of Canada were on the right, directed upon St. Andre-sur-Orne, The South Saskatchewan Regiment in the centre directed against the middle part of the ridge, and Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal on the left had as their objective Verrieres. Two squadrons of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment were available for counter-attack, one allotted to the Camerons and one to the Fusiliers. No tanks actually accompanied the attacking infantry.<sup>94</sup>

Although good progress was made in the initial stages, the day was not to end without a bloody reverse. The Camerons duly got a foothold in St. Andre and kept it, but were subjected to a series of strong counter-attacks as well as to very heavy fire from west of the Orne, where the enemy, with part of Hill 112 still in his hands, had excellent observation. Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal took Beauvoir and Troteval Farms, but thereafter came under a storm of fire and were unable to push on up the slope to Verrieres.<sup>95</sup>

It was in the centre that the 6th Brigade suffered its setback. The South Saskatchewan Regiment, after overcoming considerable opposition, reported two companies on their objectives, at 5:32 p.m. Half an hour or so before this time the weather had broken and a violent downpour of rain began, putting an end to all air support. The acting Commanding Officer, Major G. R. Matthews, ordered the battalion's anti-tank guns, and those of the 2nd Anti-Tank Regiment which were in support, to come forward and dig in. But the guns were intercepted during the forward move by a small group of enemy tanks which suddenly appeared through the mist and rain from the direction of Verrieres. The tanks then turned their machine-guns on the infantry. Attempts were made to use the PIAT, but the battalion, unsupported by heavy anti-tank weapons, was soon scattered and suffered very heavily. No message from it reached the 6th Brigade for more than two hours after 5:55 p.m., when it reported that it was being counter-attacked by tanks and asked for help. Many soldiers took refuge in the tall grain and made their way back during the night. None of our own tanks seems to have got into action. The South Saskatchewan had 208 casualties in this sad affair. Major Matthews was among the 66 officers and men who lost their lives.<sup>96</sup>

The Essex Scottish, who had had little sleep the night before and "little or no noon meal",<sup>97</sup> were ordered forward, at the moment when the leading elements of the South Saskatchewan were coming on to their objectives, to occupy the area between Beauvoir Farm and St. Andre. Before reaching it the battalion encountered men of the South Saskatchewan retreating. Enemy tanks and artillery fire now struck the Essex. Two of its companies are reported to have broken, it became disorganized and lost very heavily. But its main body hung on in the area north of its assigned objective, and in the early hours of 21 July the two companies that had withdrawn, after being reorganized by the brigadier, were sent forward to rejoin it. In the meantime General Simonds had taken steps to secure his right flank against further enemy counter-attacks. The Black Watch, still in Ips, were placed under Brigadier Young's command, and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade was assigned to the 2nd Division.<sup>98</sup>

The heavy rain which had begun to fall during the afternoon of the 20th continued through the night and the following day. On the morning of 21 July the reinforced enemy, who had been putting in counter-attacks during the hours of darkness, launched a larger effort with tanks and infantry against the 6th Brigade's shaken centre. The remnant of the South Saskatchewan had been withdrawn to reorganize. The enemy broke into the positions of the Essex Scottish, who suffered further heavy casualties, and a deep salient was created between the Camerons and Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal. The remnants of the Essex in the forward area were now ordered to withdraw, and at 6:00 p.m. the Canadian Black Watch, supported by tanks of the 6th and 27th Armoured Regiments and a formidable artillery programme, moved out from Ifs to counter-attack. The operation was successful, the lost ground was recovered, and the brigade front was stabilized roughly along the line of the lateral road connecting Troteval Farm and St. Andre. Troteval and Beauvoir Farms, however, were lost, and few men of the forward companies of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal came back. The Verrieres Ridge remained in enemy hands.<sup>99</sup> On the river flank this day saw further fierce counter-attacks against St. Andre by infantry and tanks. The Camerons and the Sherbrooke Fusiliers dealt with them successfully, but the Camerons had 81 casualties, 29 of them fatal.<sup>100</sup>

Operation "Atlantic" had been costly. The first day's fighting had brought heavy losses to the 3rd Division, and on the succeeding days the inexperienced 2nd Division had had a very nasty baptism of fire. During the whole four days the nine infantry battalions of the 3rd Division suffered a total of 386 casualties, of which 89 were fatal. For the 2nd Division the comparable figures were 1149 casualties, with 254 men losing their lives. The units suffering most were, we have seen, the Essex Scottish, with 244 casualties (37 being fatal) and the South Saskatchewan, with 215, of which 62 were fatal. The Essex Scottish got a new commanding officer after the battle. In the 3rd Division the heaviest toll had fallen upon The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada (23 fatal casualties, 77 non-fatal) and Le Regiment de la Chaudiere (20 fatal, 72 non-fatal), almost all suffered on 18 July. The total casualties of all the Canadian units in the theatre of operations, for the four days' fighting, were 1965 in all categories; 441 men were killed or died of wounds.<sup>101</sup>

### The Results of "Goodwood" and "Atlantic"

In the light of the heavy Canadian losses, an assessment of the value of the operations of 18-21 July east of the Orne is a matter of special interest.

Back at SHAEF in England the Supreme Commander found them disappointing. So did some of the officers around him, and not least Air Chief Marshal Tedder, who as we have seen had long been critical of Montgomery's direction of the campaign. Tedder's biographer quotes a letter<sup>102</sup> which the Deputy Supreme Commander wrote to Eisenhower on 20 July:

An overwhelming air bombardment opened the door, but there was no immediate determined deep penetration whilst the door remained open and we are now little beyond the farthest bomb craters. It is clear that there was no intention of making this operation the decisive one which you so clearly indicated.



This was based upon a misconception of the nature of Montgomery's plan. But we have seen that Montgomery's communications to Eisenhower before the battle could certainly be interpreted as indicating that "Goodwood" was a breakthrough operation; and he does not seem to have sent the Supreme Commander a copy of his explanatory memorandum to Dempsey, or offered him such an exposition of his intentions as he gave the War Office in London.

Thus one distinguished British officer, Tedder, was encouraging the American Supreme Commander to put pressure on another distinguished British officer, Montgomery. Indeed, Eisenhower's gossipy naval aide asserts that on the evening of 19 July Tedder told his chief that the British Chiefs of Staff "would support any recommendation" which the Supreme Commander might care to make with reference to Montgomery.<sup>103</sup> On such a point the aide is obviously a doubtful source. But Eisenhower did put strong pressure on Montgomery. On the 20th he flew to Normandy and visited him,<sup>104</sup> and on the 21st he sent him a letter, said to embody the substance of the previous day's conversation, which is decried as "the strongest he had yet written to him".<sup>105</sup> He wrote: "A few days ago, when armored divisions of Second Army, assisted by a tremendous air attack, broke through the enemy's forward lines, I was extremely hopeful and optimistic. I thought that at last we had him and were going to roll him up. That did not come about." Eisenhower demanded continuous strong attack by Dempsey's army to gain terrain for airfields and space on the eastern flank. He mentioned that he was aware of the serious reinforcement problem which faced the British; but he observed, "Eventually the American ground strength will necessarily be much greater than the British. But while we have equality in size we must go forward shoulder to shoulder with honors and sacrifices equally shared."<sup>106</sup> This seems close to a complaint that the Anglo-Canadian forces are not pulling their weight.

As we have already seen, the Supreme Commander had evidently misinterpreted Montgomery's policy, and this, basically, was the cause of the feeling so much in evidence at SHAEF at this moment. In the light of Montgomery's actual intentions, however, the operation's results were not unsatisfactory. Those results can only be properly evaluated on the basis of an examination of the German reaction to the British attack, and of this reaction's consequences for Montgomery's overall plans.

Eisenhower considered "Goodwood" essentially a failure. The Germans took a different view.

Although they had fully anticipated a heavy blow in the Caen area at about the moment when "Goodwood" fell upon them, it gave them a very bad fright and drove them to desperate expedients to meet it. As we have seen, when the operation began the 1st S.S. Panzer Division was in position astride the Falaise road south of Caen, ready to counter any British threat either east or west of the city. A good part of the 21st Panzer Division was also out of the line and directly east of Caen. The 12th S.S. Panzer Division was a little farther away, having just been moved (on Hitler's insistence) into the 86th Corps area west of Lisieux.<sup>107</sup> As soon as the 8th Corps' armoured thrust developed on the morning of 18 July,

the 21st Panzer (along with the 503rd G.H.Q. Heavy Tank Battalion, equipped with Tigers) began to counter-attack from the east, while the 1st S.S. Panzer came into action from the west. At 1:20 p.m. Army Group "B" urgently requested the release of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division to intervene. After repeated urgings, Supreme Headquarters granted permission at 3:20 p.m. That evening the 12th S.S. was again moving up into the battle.<sup>108</sup>

Soon after midnight of 18-19 July, the Commander-in-Chief West asked *O.K.W.'s* permission to bring in the 116th Panzer Division from the Fifteenth Army area north of the Seine. This also was granted.<sup>109</sup> Thanks to all these measures, and to very hard fighting, the Germans were able to maintain an unbroken front east of Caen. Yet the great majority of the infantry divisions of the Fifteenth Army still remained idle north of the Seine. It is true that *O.K.W.* had authorized the *C.-in-C.* West on 15 July to move the 326th and 363rd<sup>#</sup> Divisions south.<sup>110</sup> But the rest stood fast while the 16th *Luftwaffe* Field Division, which was standing directly in the path of the British onslaught, was being torn to pieces.

On 19 July the 12th S.S. came into action south of Cagny. That night General Eberbach ordered the 47th Panzer and 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps to send immediately various units (including a tank battalion in each case) to reinforce the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps. On the 20th the centre of German interest shifted to the Canadian sector west of the Falaise road, where the 2nd Canadian Division's advance caused alarm. To counteract it the Germans committed a tank battalion and a panzer grenadier battalion from the more easterly section of the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps front and, more strikingly, a group ("Battle Group Kohn") of similar composition from the 2nd Panzer Division, from the eastern section of the American front.\* It was evidently these troops that gave the 6th Brigade its severe check. Colonel Kohn, commander of the 2nd Panzer battle group, was killed in the St. Martin area that night.<sup>111</sup> On 21 July Eberbach ordered the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps to dispatch the 9th S.S. Panzer Division, then west of the Orne and south-west of Caen, to reinforce the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps sector east of the Orne; and a battle group "from the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps" was in action against the 2nd Division below the Verrieres Ridge that evening.<sup>112</sup>

On the very eve of "Goodwood" the Germans in the west had suffered a great loss. On the evening of 17 July aircraft, apparently British, flying over the Vimoutiers area attacked an escorted car near a village called Ste. Foy de Montgommery. Its occupant was Field-Marshal Rommel, who suffered a fractured skull, concussion of the brain and an injured eye.<sup>113</sup> He was thus snatched from the scene at a moment when a great Allied operation was about to begin and, perhaps more important, when senior officers of the German Army were about to attempt the removal of Hitler. Although it appears that Rommel was not privy to the assassination plot which nearly, but not quite, destroyed the dictator on 20 July, it is evident that he had himself been engaged in plotting. He may have hoped to engineer a separate peace between Germany and the Western Allies which would save the Reich from Russian occupation.<sup>114</sup>






On 15 July Rommel had sent to the Commander-in-Chief West a document,

\*The balance of the 2nd Panzer Division was ordered east on 22 July (below, page 183).

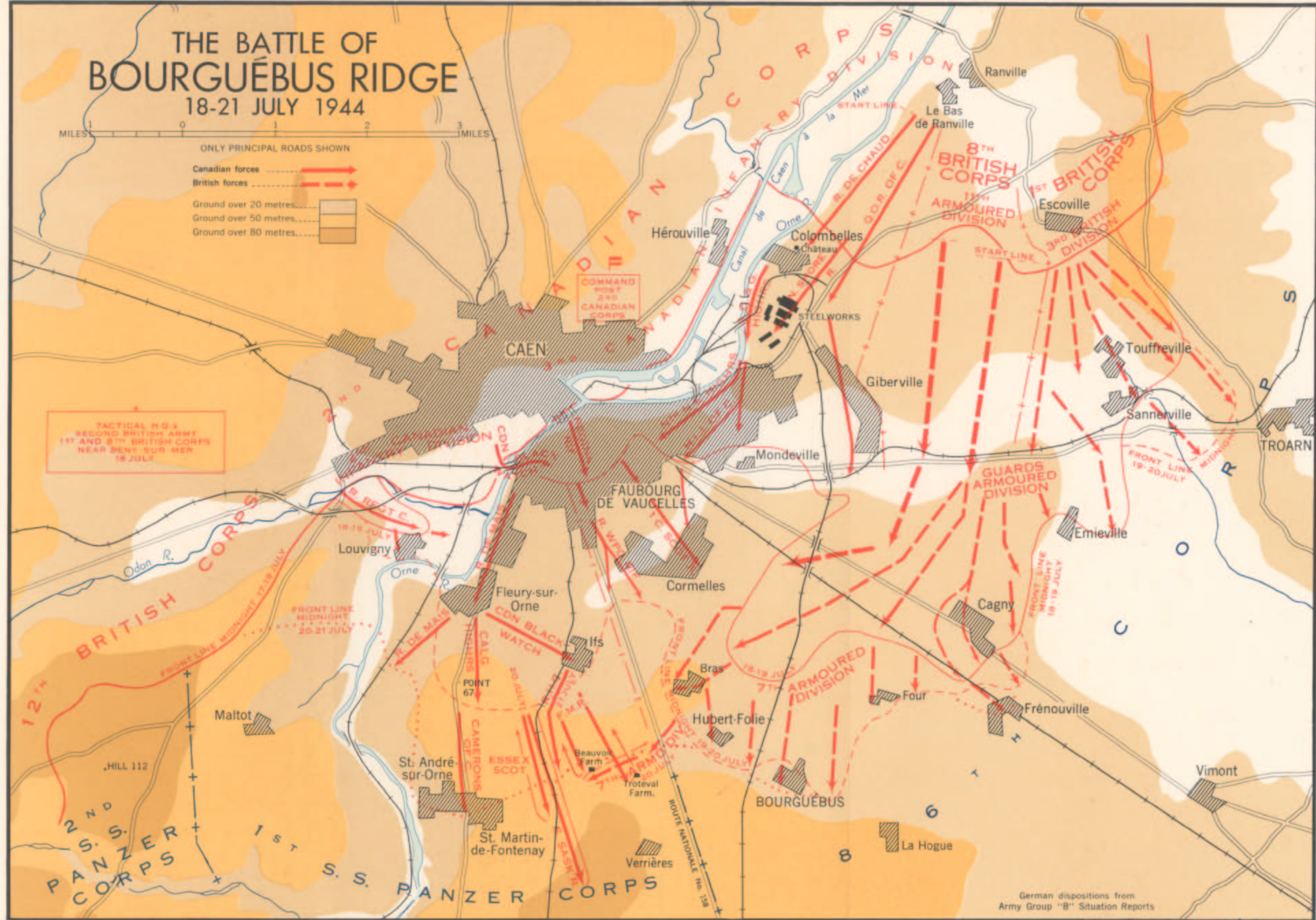
# THE BATTLE OF BOURGUÉBUS RIDGE 18-21 JULY 1944

MILES 1 0 1 2 3 MILES

ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS SHOWN

- Canadian forces 
- British forces 
- Ground over 20 metres 
- Ground over 50 metres 
- Ground over 80 metres 

TACTICAL HQ 2  
SECOND BRITISH ARMY  
1ST AND 8TH BRITISH CORPS  
NEAR BENT-SUR-MER  
18 JULY



German dispositions from Army Group "B" Situation Reports

undoubtedly intended for Hitler's eyes, which has been called an ultimatum. It began, "The situation on the Normandy front is growing worse every day and is now approaching a grave crisis." It ended, "The troops are everywhere fighting heroically, but the unequal struggle is approaching its end. It is urgently necessary for the proper conclusion to be drawn from this situation. As C.-in-C. of the Army Group I feel myself in duty bound to speak plainly on this point."<sup>115</sup>

With Rommel gone, the events of 20 July at Hitler's headquarters and in Berlin had no immediate effect upon the battle in the West. Immediately after Rommel was wounded von Kluge took over the command of Army Group "B" in addition to his other responsibilities. For nearly a week he "sat on" Rommel's letter, doubtless undergoing some mental struggle as to what to do about it; but on 21 July, after "Goodwood", he forwarded it to Hitler covered by a striking letter of his own which announced that he had come to the conclusion that Rommel was right. He had, he said, been brought to this opinion particularly by a conference which he had held the day before with the commanders at Caen. These officers had been especially impressed by the air attacks delivered in conjunction with "Goodwood". They, and von Kluge, were now in deep despair. The situation report of Army Group "B" for 20 July, it is worth recording, had made the following comment:

The extraordinary vigour (*ausserordentliche Harte*) and the colossal material superiority of the enemy in the fighting east of Caen on 18 and 19 July is indicated by the facts that he fired 103,000 artillery shells on the left flank of the 86th Corps and the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps alone, and according to his own reports dropped on our positions 7800 tons of bombs from 2200 two- and four-engined bombers.

The Field Marshal now wrote:<sup>116</sup>

The psychological effect on the fighting forces, especially the infantry, of such a mass of bombs, raining down upon them with all the force of elemental nature, is a factor which must be given serious consideration. . . .

I am able to report that the front has been held intact until now. . . .

However . . . the moment is fast approaching when this overtaxed front line is bound to break up. And when the enemy once reaches the open country a properly coordinated command will be almost impossible, because of the insufficient mobility of our troops. I consider it is my duty as the responsible commander on this front, to bring these developments to your notice in good time, my Fuhrer.

My last words at the Staff Conference south of Caen were: "We must hold our ground, or if nothing happens to improve conditions, then we must die an honourable death on the battlefield".

By the end of "Goodwood" and "Atlantic", then, the German commanders' confidence had been shattered. And what was more important, these operations had led them to do exactly what Montgomery had hoped and planned for: to concentrate a great force of armour east of the Orne. Still fearing a breakout on this flank in the direction of Paris, they had taken measures accordingly. The result was that the stage was set for the breakout on the opposite flank which was actually Montgomery's policy. What was most urgent now was to hold the enemy forces on the eastern flank until General Bradley could deliver the all-important blow in the west.

After overcoming many difficulties in the close hedgerow country of the Bocage, the First U.S. Army had captured St. Lo on 18 July. General, Montgomery's original intention had been to launch the basic breakout operation on this flank ("Cobra") on 19 July (above, page 167); but it had had to be postponed, and was further postponed by the break in the weather which made trouble for the 2nd Canadian Division on 20 and 21 July. The attack on which so much depended did not go in until the 25th.<sup>117</sup>

## CHAPTER VIII

### **NORMANDY: THE BREAKOUT BEGINS 24-31 JULY 1944**

(See Sketches 12 and 13)

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#### Montgomery's Orders for the Breakout

ON 21 July, after his interview with Eisenhower (above, page 177), General Montgomery issued a new directive to his four Army Commanders: Bradley, Dempsey, Patton (whose Third U.S. Army was preparing to go into action when the forthcoming operation had prepared the way) and Crerar (whose First Canadian Army was now at last to assume an operational role).<sup>1</sup>

Montgomery began by pointing out that the general position on the eastern flank had greatly improved since Second Army's attack on 18 July. With a firm bridgehead beyond the Orne at Caen, the Allies had the ability to operate strongly in that sector, when desired, in an easterly, south-easterly or southerly direction. The enemy had lost heavily in men and equipment. Operations were now to be "continued intensively" on the eastern flank until the British forces were on the general line of the River Dives from the sea southwards to Bures, thence along the River Muance to St. Sylvain, and thence across country to Evrecy and Noyers to Caumont. The directive proceeded:

4. It is now vital that the western flank should swing southwards and eastwards, and that we should gain possession of the whole of Cherbourg and Brittany peninsulas. The whole weight of the Army Group will therefore be directed to this task; we require the Brittany ports so that we can develop the full resources of the Allies in western Europe, and we must get them soon.

And while carrying out this task we must improve, and retain firmly, our present good position on the eastern flank, and be ready to take quick action on that flank... .

Within this framework, the First Canadian Army was to take over from the Second Army, at noon on 23 July, the sector held by the 1st British Corps. The boundary between the two armies would be the railway from Caen to Mezidon. All troops under the 1st Corps would pass under the command of the First Canadian Army, the British divisions to be transferred being the 3rd, 49th, 51st and 6th Airborne, the last-named having under it the 1st and 4th Special Service Brigades. General Crerar's task was thus defined:

9. The immediate task of First Canadian Army will be to advance its left flank eastwards so that Ouistreham will cease to be under close enemy observation and fire, and that use can then be made of the port of Caen. To achieve this it will be necessary to push the enemy back to the east side of the R. Dives, and to occupy such positions as will ensure that all territory to the west of the river is dominated by our troops.

For the Second British Army Montgomery prescribed the following programme:

13. The army will operate intensively so as to secure the general line defined in para 2,\* within the army boundaries, and to hold it firmly. Having gained this line, that part of the army front to the east of the R. Orne will be kept as active as is possible with the resources available; the enemy must be led to believe that we contemplate a major advance towards Falaise and Argentan, and he must be induced to build up his main strength to the east of the R. Orne so that our affairs on the western flank can proceed with greater speed.
14. The army will keep in reserve a Corps, containing at least two armoured divisions, which will be held ready to operate east of the R. Orne towards Falaise and Argentan when ordered by me.

The Second Army was to take over the First U.S. Army's left divisional Sector in the Caumont area, completing this relief by the early morning of 24 July.

The Americans' tasks were much as defined in earlier directives (above, pages 151 and 166). With respect to the First U.S. Army, Montgomery wrote:

16. The immediate task of this army is to secure the whole of the Cherbourg peninsula, up to the base of the peninsula in the Avranches area.
17. To achieve this task, the army will pivot on its left, and will swing its right flank southwards and eastwards on to the general line Vire-Mortain-Fougeres.
18. On reaching the base of the peninsula in the Avranches area, the right hand Corps (8 Corps) will be turned westwards into Brittany and directed on Rennes and St. Malo.
19. As regards the remainder of the army.  
Plans will be made to direct a strong right wing in a wide sweep, south of the bocage country, towards successive objectives as follows:
  - (a) Laval—Mayenne.
  - (b) Le Mans—Alencon.

The Third U.S. Army was to be prepared to "take direction and control of the operations on the extreme western flank when so ordered". Its task was still to clear the whole of the Brittany peninsula.

Future command relations as they affected the American forces were thus described:

#### *12 Army Group*

23. Under orders issued by General Eisenhower, this Army Group will be formed to take command of the American Armies in France. 12 Army Group is to be commanded by Lt-Gen. Bradley, and its operations will for the present be under the general direction and control of 21 Army Group.
24. Lt-Gen. Bradley will decide when the moment has come to form the Army Group, which will consist initially of First and Third US Armies.
25. General Eisenhower has commanded that, until the Army Group is formed, all operations in the American sector will be under the direction and control of Lt-Gen. Bradley.
26. The fact that the Third US Army, commanded by General Patton, is to form part of 12 Army Group for operations in Brittany is to be kept Top Secret and will not be disclosed below Army Commanders in the British and Canadian Armies.

\*The line from St. Sylvain to Caumont.





Montgomery stated that the Air Commander-in-Chief had been asked to "direct the weight of the available air power to further the operations on the western flank of the Army Group", as outlined in the passages already noted. Finally he wrote: "The policy on which we will now work, and to which all our efforts must be directed, is as laid down in para. 4."

On 22 July General Montgomery sent a copy of this directive to General Eisenhower, asking him to inform him if they did not now see eye to eye on operations. "The Supreme Commander replied that they were apparently in complete agreement that a vigorous and persistent offensive should be sustained by both First and Second Armies." He mentioned that his letter to Montgomery (above, page 177) had been written before he received the new directive.<sup>2</sup>

Montgomery's intentions are given in rather more detail in a letter<sup>3</sup> which he wrote the Supreme Commander on 24 July. This explained that his conception of the Second Army operations was, *first*, an attack by the 2nd Canadian Corps at dawn on 25 July to capture the area Fontenay le Marmion—Point 122 (a feature on the Falaise road also called the "Cramesnil spur")—Garcelles-Secqueville; *secondly*, an attack on 28 July by the 12th Corps west of the Orne to capture the area Evrecy—Amaye; *thirdly*, an operation by the 8th Corps east of the Orne and through the Canadian Corps down the Falaise road, to cover the capture by the Canadian Corps of a large wooded area east of Garcelles. *Finally*, all these operations were in Montgomery's mind "preliminary to a very large scale operation, by possibly three or four armoured divisions", which he proposed to launch towards Falaise. This was evidently to be another "Goodwood"; and again the Army Group Commander emphasized, as he had before that operation, that its results could not be foretold. If the operation did not go well, it would, he said, be possible to withdraw into the firm base formed by the Canadian Corps and repeat it a few days later. He hoped that this large armoured thrust could go in about 3 or 4 August.

While telling Eisenhower that General Bradley's offensive had been postponed on 24 July because of the weather, and might have to be postponed again for the same reason, Montgomery added that he was not going to "hold back or wait" on the eastern flank. He had ordered General Dempsey to go ahead on 25 July "anyhow", and the 2nd Canadian Corps was attacking at 3:30 a.m. In the event, both the American "Cobra" and the more limited Canadian operation ("Spring") went in on the morning of 25 July.

It is important to establish the enemy situation on the eve of these attacks on 25 July. It is clear from the Germans' records that they were expecting a further heavy attack on the Caen front. On 22 July the 47th Panzer Corps was ordered to dispatch the 2nd Panzer Division with the utmost speed to the area about Tournebu, north-west of Falaise, to be ready to deal with this.\* The 9th and 10th S.S. Panzer Divisions were to be assembled in the triangle between the Rivers Laize and Orne (but the 10th evidently could not be spared from the line in the

\*Strong elements of the 2nd Panzer had already been in action east of the Orne (above, page 178). On the other hand, it appears that the last substantial elements of the division (including divisional H.Q. and the 304th Panzer Grenadier Regiment) were relieved and sent east only on 24 July, and that they did not in fact reach the new divisional area until the night of the 25th-26th.<sup>4</sup>

area just west of the Orne, and did not move). On the eve of "Spring" and "Cobra", then, there were seven German armoured divisions facing the Second British Army: the 2nd, 21st and 116th Panzer Divisions, and the 1st, 9th, 10th and 12th S.S. Panzer Divisions. And of these all but the 10th S.S. and some parts of the 2nd Panzer and 9th S.S. were east of the Orne (see Sketch 12). On the American front there were two armoured divisions: the 2nd S.S. Panzer and Panzer Lehr.<sup>5</sup>

The 2nd Canadian Corps was confronted by a most formidable array. Under the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps, the 1st S.S. Panzer Division (*Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler*) held the line from the vicinity of Cagny to Verrieres. Thence to the Orne the 272nd Infantry Division was in the front positions, powerfully reinforced with a tank battalion and a panzer grenadier battalion each from the 2nd Panzer Division and the 9th S.S. Panzer Division, plus the reconnaissance battalion of the 10th S.S. Panzer Division. In close reserve north-west of Bretteville-sur-Laize was the balance of the 9th S.S., and more distant, north-west of Tournebu, the main body of the the 2nd Panzer. On the opposite flank of the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps the 116th Panzer Division was waiting in reserve east of St. Sylvain.<sup>6</sup> We did not know the full strength of these dispositions before the operation, and in particular did not know the 2nd Panzer had moved east from Caumont,<sup>7</sup> but it was clear, and is still clearer today, that "Spring" was a very difficult proposition.

The Germans were now for the first time, many weeks too late for their own good, beginning to assume that a second Allied landing, in the Pas de Calais area, was no longer probable. The weekly report of Army Group "B", issued on 24 July for the week ending the previous day, remarked that the Allies now had at least 40 divisions in the bridgehead, and that there were still in Great Britain 52 "large formations", of which 42 could be moved to the Continent. These figures were, as always, greatly exaggerated; there were actually 31 divisions (14 British and Canadian, 17 U.S.) on the order of battle of the 21st Army Group on 25 July.<sup>8</sup> The report, which was signed by General Speidel, the Army Group's Chief of Staff, proceeded:

The intentions of Army Group Montgomery seem to remain unchanged.

The 2nd British Army will try to obtain a breakthrough in the general direction of Falaise in order to create the conditions required for the thrust on Paris.

The 1st American Army will strive to attain its first operational goal: broadening the lodgement area as far as the line Domfront-Avranches.

There are no indications on hand regarding the date and target of the 1st American Army Group's attack.\* In view of the continuing movement of forces to the Normandy front [from England] a far distant landing operation is becoming less probable, but the 15th Army's Somme-Seine sector is still in special danger.

The more and faster Montgomery gains ground from the bridgehead towards the south, the less probable becomes a landing at a new point by the forces still in England... .

\*This has no connection with the plan for activating the 12th Army Group (above, page 182). There had been a 1st U.S. Army Group in England; its designation was changed to 12th when its headquarters moved to France, but a fictitious 1st Army Group was kept in England as part of the cover plan, to encourage the Germans to believe that it was being held back to command a new landing operation.<sup>9</sup>

### Operation "Spring": The Action of Verrieres Ridge— Tilly-la-Campagne

The planning of Operation "Spring" began on 21 July, when it had become apparent that if further progress was to be made in the direction of Falaise a deliberate attack would have to be mounted. On the morning of that day General Simonds held a preliminary orders group for the operation. On 23 July he briefed all commanders down to and including those of brigades; and at noon on the 24th he held a final conference which was attended by the commanders of the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions and the 7th and Guards Armoured Divisions. These two latter divisions had been under the 2nd Canadian Corps since 20 July.<sup>10</sup>

The Corps operation instruction for "Spring" was issued after this conference, and simultaneously D Day was confirmed as 25 July and H Hour as 3:30 a.m.<sup>11</sup> It is fair to assume (though it is not recorded) that by this time Montgomery's order had reached Simonds through Dempsey. The instruction defined the intention as the capture of the high ground around Point 122 (above, page 183); exploitation to widen the gap and clear the eastern flank by capturing the woods east of Garcelles; and further exploitation southwards to seize the high ground about Cintheaux on the Falaise road. This was to be carried out in three phases, the first being the capture of the line May-sur-Orne—Verrieres—Tilly la Campagne. The second would consist of the capture of the line Fontenay le Marmion—Rocquan-court (that is, the ground immediately south of the Verrieres Ridge) followed by that of Point 122. The third phase would be "exploitation as ordered by Commander 2 Cdn Corps".

This was generally in accord with General Montgomery's plan as described to the Supreme Commander (above, page 183). However, General Simonds has stated that in fact the attainment of these objectives was not considered likely. The opposing forces were known to be very formidable, and his understanding was that this was in fact to be simply a "holding attack" designed to occupy the enemy while the main assault was made on the American front.<sup>12</sup> But such conceptions could be given no currency, and however well understood this interpretation of the forthcoming operation may have been on higher levels, it was not confided to the divisional commanders.<sup>13</sup>

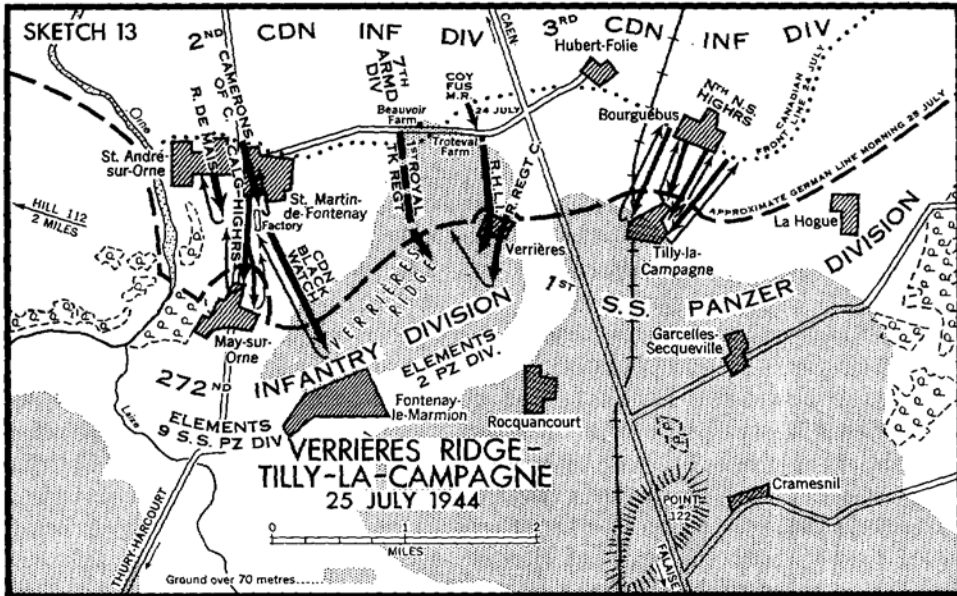
The first phase, on the right, would be the business of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, which was to attack May-sur-Ome and Verrieres, while on the left the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division would capture Tilly-la-Campagne. The armour would come in during the second phase; as the 2nd Division pressed on to take Fontenay-le-Marmion and Rocquancourt, the 7th Armoured Division would thrust through the centre to seize the Cramensnil spur. Thereafter the 3rd Division would take Garcelles-Secqueville. The two armoured divisions would be available for further exploitation, the intended task of the Guards Armoured Division being to capture the woods east of Garcelles. The attack, as already noted, was timed for 3:30 a.m. A degree of visibility over the battlefield was to be obtained by "artificial moonlight" provided by searchlight beams reflected on the low clouds.

The 3rd Canadian Division's attack was the responsibility of the 9th Infantry

Brigade, strongly supported by medium machine-guns, heavy mortars, anti-tank guns, artillery and armour. The North Nova Scotia Highlanders, advancing from Bourguebus covered by the divisional artillery, would assault Tilly-la-Campagne. Assuming the success of this thrust, and of the 7th Armoured Division's to the Cramesnill spur, The Highland Light Infantry of Canada were to go through and take Garcelles-Secqueville. The 7th Infantry Brigade was available for exploitation, and the 8th was in reserve. The division's objective in the exploitation phase was the village of La Hogue. The left flank was to be secured by the 27th Armoured Brigade of the 1st British Corps, which was to be placed behind the 3rd Canadian Division.<sup>14</sup>

The 2nd Canadian Division attack was somewhat more complicated. The road from St. Andre-sur-Orne to Hubert-Folie was to be the start line, but it still remained to be cleared. This task was allocated to the 6th Infantry Brigade, to be completed by midnight 24-25 July. To carry out this intention, Brigadier Young ordered the Camerons of Canada to expel the enemy from St. Andre and St. Martinde-Foutenay, and Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal to take Troteval Farm. The division's main attack was to be made on a two-brigade front, the 5th Infantry Brigade being on the right with the Camerons of Canada under command, and the 4th Infantry Brigade on the left with Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal under command. On the right The Calgary Highlanders were to advance from St. Andre to capture May-sur-Ome. Simultaneously The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry of the 4th Brigade would pass through Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal to take Verrieres. The units of all three brigades not involved in the main attack (The South Saskatchewan Regiment, The Essex Scottish Regiment and Le Regiment de Maisonneuve) were to be in reserve under the 6th Brigade. The 22nd Armoured Brigade of the 7th Armoured Division would move up from Ifs to guard against any armoured counter-attack while the 2nd Division was attacking Fontenay-le-Marmion and Rocquancourt, and to be in readiness to go forward against the Cramesnill spur. The second phase of the 2nd Division attack was to begin at 5:30 a.m., with the Canadian Black Watch, with a tank squadron from the 6th Armoured Regiment, attacking Fontenay on the Orne flank and The Royal Regiment of Canada pushing through Verrieres to take Rocquancourt.<sup>15</sup>

Artillery support took the form of a very large programme of harassing fire by the 2nd Canadian and 3rd and 8th British Army Groups Royal Artillery, in addition to concentrations by the field regiments of both Canadian divisions plus the 25th Field Regiment R.A. and the 19th Army Field Regiment R.C.A.<sup>16</sup> Since the operation was to go in whatever the state of the weather, air support was to be considered a "bonus". The heavy bombers were being employed on the American front to clear the way for "Cobra". The medium bombers available for "Spring" were to be shown their targets by red smoke shells fired by our artillery. They were to attack the woods east of Garcelles about 9:20 p.m. on 24 July (partly with delayed-action bombs set to detonate at 6:30 the following morning) and again at 7:30 a.m. on the 25th. The R.A.F. also undertook "armed reconnaissance" over the battle area from first light on the 25th; it was to be ready to attack enemy forces approaching the area or leaving the woods that were to be bombed.<sup>17</sup>



The preliminary air attack delivered on the evening of 24 July was largely ineffective because of heavy anti-aircraft fire; only 15 out of 60 aircraft sent out succeeded in bombing the target.<sup>18</sup> The same evening the 6th Brigade began the business of clearing the 2nd Division's start-line. On the left section of the front a company of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, assisted by Sherbrooke Fusiliers tanks and supported by artillery and heavy mortars, attacked and took Troteval Farm.<sup>19</sup>

On the western side of the 2nd Division front, the Cameron Highlanders of Canada, also supported by Sherbrooke tanks, had greater difficulty. Bitter and confused fighting went on in the dark among the buildings of St. André-sur-Orne and St. Martin-de-Fontenay. In this area there was a special problem. Its defensive strength was increased by the presence of iron mines and quarries, and it was subsequently found that a mine-shaft in a group of buildings usually called "the Factory" directly south of St. André was connected with extensive underground workings. These and other tunnels (including one leading from Rocquancourt to May-sur-Orne), along with air-shafts connecting with the surface, gave the enemy means of moving troops under cover from one section of his front to another, and of re-occupying positions after we had cleared them.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, although British troops had now taken the village of Maltot, the enemy still held Hill 112 and other lofty positions west of the Orne which enabled him to fire on our troops attacking the villages on the east bank from the flank and even from the rear.<sup>21</sup> In these circumstances the Camerons found it very hard to clear the start-line, and although the "partial capture" of St. Martin was reported shortly after midnight and the line is said to have been secure by 3:30 a.m., there was still resistance thereafter.<sup>22</sup>

## Operation "Spring": The 3rd Division Front

The medium bomber attack scheduled for the morning of 25 July was duly delivered against the woods near La Hogue between 6:12 and 8:30 a.m. by 46 Mitchells and 28 Bostons. Smoke, fires and an explosion suggested that damage had been done to the enemy forces believed to be sheltering there.<sup>23</sup> But this did little good to our ground attack, which was already held up.

It may be best to deal first with events on the front of the 3rd Canadian Division. Here The North Nova Scotia Highlanders attacked Tilly-la-Campagne with three companies forward, "B" and "D" advancing east of the track leading from Bourguebus to Tilly, and "C" to the west of it. The searchlights are reported not to have come on at H Hour, but they did come on during the advance; the Commanding Officer complains that they merely silhouetted the attacking troops and brought down intense machine-gun fire. (Reports from the 2nd Division's brigades were much more favourable to the artificial moonlight.) However, "C" Company reached a position just north of Tilly without suffering many casualties. "B" and "D", on the contrary, became fiercely engaged with enemy infantry whom our barrage had not subdued and who "shot and shouted and threw grenades like wild men".<sup>24</sup> Although the companies got a foothold in an orchard at the north-east corner of the village and in the village itself, they could not clear the place. "A" Company, the reserve, was now sent forward to reinforce "C" and attack the village from the western flank. The attempt, however, caused heavy casualties and this company itself was pinned down. Contact with the battalion command post near the start-line was almost entirely lost and effective control within the assaulting companies was virtually impossible.

For a time the C.O. believed that "B" and "D" Companies were on their objectives, and at 5:25 he reported this. As the situation became clearer, at 6:14 he asked brigade headquarters for help from the tank squadron of the 10th Canadian Armoured Regiment (Fort Garry Horse) which was waiting to support The Highland Light Infantry of Canada in the next phase. This was granted. In the meantime, Bren carriers and several self-propelled anti-tank guns were sent forward. They suffered heavy losses without improving the situation; and when "B" Squadron of the 10th Armoured Regiment moved up it met Panther tanks and anti-tank guns. It deployed to the west of the village and attempted to shoot the infantry into it. The squadron itself, however, was shortly cut to pieces, losing 11 tanks. In the afternoon the remnant was given permission to retire to Bourguebus, whence it continued to give what supporting fire it could.

The Highlanders' Commanding Officer had wireless contact with only one of his forward companies ("C"). By this means he ordered his men to dig in and hold on where they were. This order can actually have reached few of the soldiers scattered in the fire-swept fields in and around the outskirts of the village, but most of them acted independently along the same line. In the afternoon the C.O. passed the word for the men remaining in the Tilly area to make their way back to Bourguebus when darkness fell. Approximately 100 all ranks got back in this manner. In the early morning of the 26th the Officer Commanding "A" Company returned with

nine men. He reported that he thought small groups were still holding out in various parts of the village, but that the enemy had moved at least ten tanks and two infantry companies into the area, and that "it was very unlikely that any of the others would get out alive".<sup>25</sup>

Thus the 3rd Division attack had failed. In the course of the morning, apparently after consultation between the divisional and brigade commanders, The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders had been given a warning order to prepare to move up to support the North Nova Scotias,<sup>26</sup> but they were never sent in, presumably because it was felt that they would accomplish little.\* In this unsuccessful operation The North Nova Scotia Highlanders suffered 139 casualties: 61 killed, 46 wounded and 32 taken prisoner.<sup>27</sup> The *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler* had fought with genuinely fanatical determination and much skill; well dug in and well supported by armour, it had made Tilly too hard a nut for the attacking battalion to crack. Dissatisfaction of the Canadian higher command with the result was reflected in changes in the command of the 9th Brigade, The North Nova Scotia Highlanders and The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders.

### Operation "Spring": The 2nd Division Front

We have mentioned (above, page 188) the difficulties encountered in clearing the start-line on the right sector of the 2nd Division front, where the built-up areas of St. Andre and St. Martin, and the labyrinth of mine tunnels, complicated the situation. As was to be expected in these circumstances, the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade's attack on the left went better than the 5th Brigade's on the right.

There was some temporary difficulty at the outset when enemy tanks were reported on the west end of the start-line (though it had earlier been reported secure) ; at the request of the Commanding Officer of The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (Lt.-Col. J. M. Rockingham) the assault was postponed for half an hour while he mounted an attack with his reserve company to drive the tanks away. At 4:10 a.m. the battalion crossed the start-line, the delay having lost it the benefit of the timed barrage. The forward companies moving up the slope towards Verrieres came under heavy machine-gun fire, some of which later proved to have come from tanks. Four of these were destroyed by a 17-pounder detachment of the 2nd Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A. firing from Troteval Farm, and this, along with the aid of field and medium artillery concentrations, enabled the flank companies to get forward and support the centre company which had already broken into the village. A counter-attack by enemy tanks was driven off, mainly with the PIAT, after a fierce encounter; and at 7:50 a.m. the battalion reported that it was firmly in possession of Verrieres.<sup>28</sup>

The Royal Regiment of Canada and the leading tanks of the 7th Armoured Division now carried the attack onward towards Rocquancourt. By about 9:30 a.m. the Royals had got some 400 yards south of Verrieres, but they were checked at

\*A comment in the unit diary shows the effects of the 3rd Division's long period in the line: "We are ordered to be on notice to move to assist the NNS. This is indeed a mental blow and is felt by all ranks. We need a rest and refit, having been in the line since D day. . . . The men and officers are looking worn out. . . ."

this point by exceptionally fierce fire. The same fate met the British armour (1st Royal Tank Regiment), advancing on the Royals' right; it was stopped by anti-tank guns firing from north of Rocquancourt. "C" Company of the Canadian battalion, attempting to push on, was almost annihilated. The 7th Armoured Division reported that there were some 30 enemy tanks hull-down on the ridge between Fontenay and Rocquancourt and north-east of the latter place.<sup>29</sup>

The useful initial progress made on the left of the 2nd Division front had little parallel on the right. The Calgary Highlanders, attacking at H Hour in the hope of capturing May but finding the start-line not clear, had trouble from the beginning. It seems evident that elements of the battalion did fight their way into the northern outskirts of May twice during the morning, but were both times pushed out, retiring to the vicinity of St. Andre. The unit suffered heavily. Bad wireless communication prevented the Commanding Officer (Lt.-Col. D. G. MacLauchlan) from getting a clear picture of the positions of his companies or exercising effective control.<sup>30</sup> The failure to clear May, and the continued presence of enemy elements in and about St. Andre and St. Martin and beyond the Orne, meant that the right flank of the subsequent Black Watch attack against Fontenay would be badly exposed, while the left would be under fire from the ridge.

At 3:30 a.m. the Black Watch moved into a forward assembly area in St. Martin. They found that there were still enemy in the village, and time was lost in clearing it in the darkness. During this process the Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. S. S. T. Cantlie, was mortally wounded by machine-gun fire. The same burst wounded the senior company commander, and the command devolved upon Major F. P. Griffin. It was now too late to carry out the attack according to the original time-table, which called for artillery support at fixed times. Pending the making of a new plan coordinated with the artillery and tanks Major Griffin moved the battalion into St. Andre. He also sent a patrol to reconnoitre May. It entered the place and got the impression that it was not strongly held by the Germans. It appears, however, that the latter were merely reserving their fire for a better target.

Since it was considered essential to push the attack, Headquarters 5th Infantry Brigade at 6:47 a.m. ordered the Black Watch to do so. Major Griffin held an "orders group" to issue instructions for the attack, and arranged for assistance from the artillery and from the tank squadron of the 6th Armoured Regiment\* which was supporting the battalion. In accordance with the plan thus made, the Black Watch advanced at 9:30 from the so-called "Factory" south of St. Martin across the open fields and the west end of the ridge directly against Fontenay. It had already had a good many casualties and it is reported that one company was now commanded by a sergeant.

From the moment of crossing the start-line the battalion came under intense and accurate fire from the ridge, from May, and from the positions beyond the Orne; and men fell fast. The Black Watch nevertheless advanced with unwavering determination. Surviving officers believe that about 60 all ranks, led by Major Griffin, reached the flat top of the ridge. It appears that on or just beyond the

\*The squadron commander, Major W. E. Harris, M.P., was wounded in the course of the morning and Capt. J. W. Powell succeeded him.



crest they ran into a well-camouflaged enemy position strengthened with dug-in tanks. What remained of the battalion was now "pinned down" by intense closerange fire. Further advance being out of the question, Griffin ordered his men to make their way back individually as best they could; but very few succeeded in doing so. Officers of the battalion estimate that the four rifle companies committed to this attack numbered perhaps 300 officers and men, and that not more than 15 of them got back to our lines. The last survivors were probably overwhelmed early in the afternoon. When we later re-occupied the position, Major Griffin's body was found lying among those of his men.<sup>31</sup>

From the moment when the attack went in there had been no communication with the battalion. The one wireless set known to have been with Major Griffin was in a jeep which was later found knocked out not far from the start-line; and the intensity of the fire made contact by runner virtually impossible. Brigadier Megill accordingly remained uncertain as to the unit's fate; artillery tasks, including the laying of smoke, were fired in the hope of assisting it to withdraw; and about seven o'clock in the evening Le Regiment de Maisonneuve delivered a further attack against May-sur-Orne. This also failed; the battalion reported coming under fire from machine-gunners in its rear who may have infiltrated through the mine workings.<sup>32</sup>

Although Black Watch survivors had the impression that the tank and artillery support planned for their attack did not actually materialize, they seem to have been mistaken. The squadron of the 6th Armoured Regiment planned to enter May and support the infantry thence by fire from the flank. Two troops, and subsequently a third, did advance into May, and the acting squadron commander believes that they were in the village before the Black Watch reached the ridge. They were at once heavily engaged by anti-tank guns and Panther tanks. All three troop-leaders' tanks, and possibly another, were lost, and since nothing could be seen of any Canadian troops the surviving tanks in due course withdrew. During the day's operations every officer of the squadron but one became a casualty.<sup>33</sup> As for the planned artillery support, one of the regiments (the 5th Field Regiment R.C.A.) reported to brigade headquarters at 9:15 a.m. on the tasks which it intended to fire to assist the attack at 9:30; these consisted of concentrations on probable enemy positions, on the ridge east of May. The brigade commander was certain that the fire plan was carried out as arranged, but believed that the Black Watch advance was slowed by the enemy fire to the point where the battalion was unable to take full advantage of our own bombardment.<sup>34</sup>

### The Operation Is Suspended

The Corps Commander's control of the action was hampered by inadequate and inaccurate information. According to the headquarters war diary of the 22nd British Armoured Brigade, about 1:00 p.m. General Simonds visited the brigade and decided that Tilly and May-sur-Orne were to be held, "then armour passed through". But neither May nor Tilly was effectively occupied by our troops during the day, though as late as 4:25 p.m. Corps believed that they were holding the latter village against counter-attacks.<sup>35</sup> About the same time the 3rd Division

recorded that the 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment and a squadron of the 7th Armoured Division were to move to support the 9th Brigade, and particularly The North Nova Scotia Highlanders, forthwith: "NNS in NE half of Tilly to firm up there and reinforce tonight incl adequate A tk guns"; the 2nd Division was attacking May-sur-Orne and Rocquancourt that night.<sup>36</sup> At 5:30 p.m. the details of the Corps intention were notified: at 6:30 p.m. the 2nd Division was to attack Rocquancourt with the support of the whole Corps artillery; at 9:00 p.m. the attack was to go in on May, and at first light on 26 July Fontenay-le-Marmion would be assaulted in its turn. The 9th Brigade was to make Tilly-la-Campagne "firm" during the night.<sup>37</sup>

This programme was interfered with by a formidable counter-attack delivered against Verrieres by German armour about 6:00 p.m. Eight tanks penetrated the R.H.L.I.'s right forward positions.<sup>38</sup> There was a desperate struggle. The fighting Canadian infantry were backed by a squadron of the 1st Royal Tanks which had come up to their support, and by rocket-firing R.A.F. Typhoons.\* The combined effort saved the position. At last light The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, the only unit in the Corps to seize and hold its objective that day, retained its firm tenure of Verrieres. But it had paid a tragic price—including the next three days' lesser defensive fighting, exactly 200 casualties, of which 53 were fatal. The battalion recorded, "Not one of our men is in enemy hands and none are known to be missing." This proud declaration is confirmed by post-war study of its records.<sup>40</sup> The R.H.L.I. may well remember Verrieres.

At 6:00 p.m. General Foulkes was considering with his brigadiers the orders for that night and the next day. Brigadier Young (6th Brigade), after studying at his own headquarters the attack on Fontenay planned for the morning of the 26th, returned to Division and reported that in his opinion further operations on that front would not be successful until the enemy had been cleared from the positions west of the Orne from which he could bring down such heavy artillery and mortar fire. "The G.O.C. said he agreed with Brigadier Young and that he would make arrangements to meet the Corps Commander immediately."<sup>41</sup> He went to Corps, only to find that General Simonds had anticipated him. He had gone to see General Dempsey and represented to him that there was nothing to be gained by seeking to press the attack further; all that could usefully be done was to consolidate such ground as had been gained, without committing further forces. The Army Commander accepted this advice, and the continuation of the attack previously planned for the morning of 26 July was cancelled.<sup>42</sup>

The 25th had been a bloody day. It is impossible to give a precise total for the Canadian battle casualties of Operation "Spring". The official record for the date, for all Canadian Army units in North-West Europe, shows 1202, of which 362 were fatal. It is clear, however, that in this instance reporting channels became

\*What were probably the largest and most effective of the Typhoon attacks were delivered between 6:40 and 7:40 p.m. by 12 aircraft of Nos. 181 and 182 Squadrons R.A.F., which fired 96 rockets at tanks a few hundred yards south-east of Verrieres and believed they hit three.<sup>39</sup> Our artillery fired red smoke to indicate targets to the aircraft. At one stage, through some mistake, a round of red smoke fell on Lt.-Col. Rockingham's headquarters and led to a brief rocket attack being made upon it. Luckily, no casualties resulted.

clogged and many casualties actually suffered on 25 July were reported as of later dates. The most extreme case is that of the Canadian Black Watch, which suffered more heavily than any other unit. Its casualties recorded under 25 July numbered 167 (83 being fatal). Yet although the battalion was not in action on 26, 27 or 28 July, 140 additional casualties are recorded for it on those days. It thus seems evident that the Black Watch actually had 307 casualties on 25 July. Five officers and 118 other ranks were killed or died of wounds. Of the 83 all ranks who became prisoners, 21 were wounded. Except for the Dieppe operation, there is no other instance in the Second World War where a Canadian battalion had so many casualties in a single day.

For the infantry battalions of the 2nd Division, and The North Nova Scotia Highlanders, a total of 432 casualties are recorded for 26, 27 and 28 July, 113 being fatal. There were no major operations on these days, although there was some fighting (particularly in the Verrieres sector) and a good deal of mortaring and shelling. Most of these casualties were certainly actually suffered on the 25th. We should not be far wrong if we estimated the total battle casualties of Operation "Spring" at about 1500, and the fatal casualties at about 450.<sup>43</sup> Again excepting Dieppe, it was the Canadian Army's costliest day of operations in the Second World War. The 2nd Canadian Corps attack had struck a stone wall. The result is not surprising, in view of the strength of the German positions and the powerful force of high-category troops which was holding them.

As with "Goodwood", so in the case of "Spring" the most important matter, in evaluating the operation, is its effect upon the enemy. It was particularly vital, as we have seen, to prevent him from observing that the American attack launched west of St. Lo on this same day was in fact the main Allied effort. It appears that in this respect the operation was useful, although from the beginning the Germans recognized it as a limited attack. At 8:45 a.m. on 25 July the following entry was made in the war diary of Panzer Group West:

Field-Marshal von Kluge has the Chief of Staff orient him on the situation. Panzer Group takes the view that the attack begun this morning against the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps is not the anticipated major attack, as apart from other considerations the enemy air force has not yet appeared in considerable strength. C.-in-C. West shares this view.

In a second conversation, Field-Marshal von Kluge directs attention to ensuring the reserves' readiness for an immediate counter-attack as an absolute *sine qua non*....

The fierce enemy counter-attack early in the evening, which failed to recover Verrieres (the German reports, incidentally, do not admit the final loss of the village until the following day) was evidently delivered by elements of the 1st S.S. Panzer Division. As we have seen, this area was on the extreme left of that formidable division's line. German reports also refer to an evening advance by elements of the 9th S.S. Panzer Division astride the road Bretteville-sur-Laize-Fontenay-le-Marmion, which encountered a formidable anti-tank defence (Pakfront); whether these elements were the parts of the division that had been directly supporting the 272nd Infantry Division, or (as seems rather more likely) those from the reserve group farther south (above, page 185), seems impossible

to say. There is reference also to an earlier counter-attack by the 272nd in the Orne sector.<sup>44</sup> A 2nd Panzer Division tank was knocked out and examined during the day near St. Martin-de-Fontenay.<sup>45</sup> It is quite probable that it was tanks of this formation that the Black Watch ran into on the Verrieres Ridge.

In the evening von Kluge concurred in the recommendation that the 272nd Division, which had suffered very heavily, be withdrawn from the St. Andre sector and replaced by the 9th S.S. Panzer Division (the 272nd subsequently relieved the 21st Panzer Division on the quieter section of the front east of Caen). The reserve group of the 2nd Panzer moved up into the close-reserve position vacated by the 9th S.S. west of Bretteville-sur-Laize. Here it came under the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps and was in readiness for counter-attack.<sup>46</sup> The Germans believed that there were still large British armoured forces east of Caen, uncommitted and ready for action,<sup>47</sup> and so far there was no proposal to move German divisions from the British to the American front.

Thanks in part no doubt to the continued heavy fighting in the Caen sector, the German command was slow to appreciate the fundamental significance of the American attack in the west. Montgomery's fear<sup>48</sup> that the "false start" of Operation "Cobra" on 24 July, when bad weather caused action to be suspended after bombing had begun, would give his plan away, proved groundless; the Germans were infatuated enough to believe that the Americans had in fact attempted a major advance, and that their resistance had stopped it in its tracks.<sup>49</sup> When the 7th U.S. Corps launched the real attack, after a great blow by heavy bombers, on 25 July, a whole day passed before its seriousness began to be fully understood. Then, on the afternoon of the 26th, von Kluge asked urgently for an armoured division from *Armeegruppe "G"* in the south of France\* to help him stem the tide. Simultaneously he resolved to bring down additional infantry divisions from the Fifteenth Army, north of the Seine.<sup>51</sup> But both these areas were too distant to provide immediate aid; and only on the morning of the 27th did von Kluge authorize a movement of troops from the adjacent front of the Second British Army. He then directed that the 2nd Panzer Division, and the headquarters of the 47th Panzer Corps, should move to the area south of St. Lo with all speed. Later in the day the 116th Panzer Division was also ordered west.<sup>52</sup> But it was then too late to prevent an American break-through. On this same day "the decisive actions of the operation took place". That evening the 1st U.S. Infantry Division was on the outskirts of Coutances.<sup>53</sup>

This vital delay of forty-eight hours the blood shed in Operation "Spring" had helped to purchase; though that operation certainly did no more than reinforce the already powerful effect of Operations "Goodwood" and "Atlantic". "Spring" was merely the last and not the least costly incident of the long "holding attack" which the British and Canadian forces had conducted, in accordance with Montgomery's plan, to create the opportunity for a decisive blow on the opposite flank of the bridgehead. There had been an urgent strategical need for it; and the

\*The war diary of the Commander-in-Chief West refers to this as a repetition of an earlier request, which however does not seem to have been recorded. On 27 July von Kluge heard that Hitler had agreed to move the 9th Panzer Division in accordance with his request.<sup>50</sup>

urgency was strongly underlined in the Supreme Commander's communications to Montgomery. The opportunity had now been amply created, and the American columns, rolling southward from St. Lo, were grasping it to the full. But the heavy fighting on the Caen front was not yet over.

### First Canadian Army in the Line

As we have already seen, at noon on 23 July Headquarters First Canadian Army became operational, though as yet it had no Canadian divisions under its command. It took over at that moment the front held by Lieut.-General J. T. Crocker's 1st British Corps, between the Caen—Mezidon railway and the Channel. Its task had been defined in General Montgomery's directive of 21 July (above, page 182). In accordance with this directive, General Crerar on 22 July sent General Crocker a letter of instruction<sup>54</sup> covering these operations. It ran in part as follows:

3. The immediate task of First Cdn Army . . . is to advance its left flank Eastwards so that Ouistreham will cease to be under close enemy observation and fire, and so that use can then be made of the Port of Caen. This operation will be carried out by 1 Corps. . . .
5. A firm hold on the high ground within the triangle Bures-Troarn-Touffreville is a preliminary essential to any operations further North or NE. If Troarn itself can be seized without undue casualties, this should be done. In any event, it is essential to obtain and retain domination of the immediate approaches to Troarn and to deny their general use to the enemy.
6. I consider that, in order to secure the line of the R Dives, between Bures and the sea, it is necessary to go further, and to secure the high ground immediately East of that river. The resources now at disposal do not permit any such large scale operation, and in any event, the immediate task-to clear Ouistreham of close range observation and fire-does not call for this to be done.
7. This immediate task . . . will require 1 Corps to gain possession of the general line of the road which runs from Breville . . . through Le Marais . . . to the road junction Le Petit Homme. . . [map references omitted]. Consideration should be given to the assistance which may be rendered by Naval fire support, including use of LCT(R), as well as to the air requirements.

Mention has been made in the first volume of this history\* of the inherent difficulty of General Crerar's position at this time. Although he had seen much active service in the First World War, his battle experience in the Second, at the time when he took command of the Army, had been limited to a few weeks commanding the 1st Canadian Corps in Italy on a front which at that moment was quiet. Crocker, on the other hand, while he had not had very lengthy experience of high command in action, had commanded an armoured brigade in France in 1940 and the 9th Corps during a good part of the Tunisian campaign of 1942-43. These circumstances may have contributed to producing the incident which now took place.

On the morning of 24 July General Crerar, accompanied by his Chief of Staff (Brigadier C. C. Mann), visited the Headquarters of the 1st British Corps to discuss the forthcoming limited enterprise. To Crerar's considerable astonish-

\**Six Years of War*, 416.

ment, Crocker began by saying that, so far as he was concerned, the operation was "not on". He did not consider that relieving the Caen Canal from close observation and fire would accomplish anything, since most of the enemy's observation was from the high ground east of the Dives. A limited advance would be useless, and (as Crerar had remarked) no resources were available for a largescale operation. Crocker said that the attack he had been instructed to make would cause 500 or 600 casualties and achieve nothing of value. He did not propose to undertake any active operations beyond clearing up the situation around Troarn. He went on to describe the condition of his divisions, and said that apart from other factors he had no troops fit or available for the task he had been given. To state the matter succinctly, he declined to carry out the orders he had received. General Crerar asked him to put his views in writing so that they could be accurately represented to the Army Group Commander. Since there seemed to be no object in discussing the matter further, Crerar then ended the conversation.<sup>55</sup>

Later in the day the Army Commander duly received from Crocker the letter he had requested, and immediately sent a copy of it to General Montgomery, along with a memorandum of the morning's discussion. Crocker, he said, had given him the impression "that he resented being placed under my command and receiving any directive from me". Crerar proceeded, "I do not know whether this attitude is personal, or because of the fact that I am a Canadian-but it certainly showed itself." Convinced that Crocker would never "play up" as one of his subordinates, he asked Montgomery to transfer him to the 12th or the 30th British Corps and put one of the commanders of those corps (Generals Ritchie and Bucknall) in his place. Crerar knew both these officers and was certain that either would work well with him.<sup>56</sup>

The following day Montgomery invited Crerar to visit him and discuss the problem. He was "very friendly and helpful", but suggested that the situation had been caused by the manner in which Crerar had handled an operational requirement with "a somewhat difficult subordinate" who had just come under his command. Crocker was "the type of man who required to be induced to see your plan rather than ordered to carry it out". He felt that it was impossible to accede to Crerar's request to transfer Crocker, because not only would this mean in effect that two corps staffs would have to be interchanged at a difficult moment, but it was also probable that at some future time Crocker's corps would in any case have to be put under the First Canadian Army. Crerar said that, while still convinced that Crocker's temperament and outlook made him unsuitable to be one of his corps commanders, he was prepared to "go more than half way in order to make the present organization a going concern".

Montgomery then suggested that Crerar send for Crocker and go over the problem again. Crerar replied that while he did not intend to maintain his personal views to the extent of interfering with operations, "it was no use me talking to General Crocker unless he was prepared to accept me wholeheartedly, without any restriction, as his operational Army Commander". He asked Montgomery to see Crocker, straighten out the relationship in his mind, and confirm to him that what was wanted was the clearance of Ouistreham and the Caen Canal from

close observation and fire as stated in Montgomery's directive and in Crerar's based upon it. General Montgomery then said that he would have General Crocker report to him the following day at 9:00 a.m. and would make the situation clear to him. He suggested that Crerar and Crocker could get together later that day "with the air cleared and good prospects of mutual understanding".<sup>57</sup>

On these lines the matter was settled. General Crocker duly visited General Crerar at his headquarters the following evening and the proposed operations were discussed, evidently in a more amicable manner than before.<sup>58</sup> On 27 July Crocker's headquarters produced an outline<sup>59</sup> of the proposed operation. It was intended "to enlarge our present bridgehead East of the Orne sufficiently to enable some use to be made of the Canal Ouistreham—Caen and of the port of Ouistreham", and at the same time to achieve an economy in the number of troops required to secure the eastern flank of the Army. The operation, though essentially one, was in two parts described by separate code names: "Rawlinson", to be carried out by the 3rd British Division south of the Bois de Bavent, and "Byng", to be carried out by the 49th British Infantry Division (which was just arriving) north of the wood.\* The proposed target date was 8 August. The 1st Corps suggested, a trifle ambitiously perhaps, that the enterprise would require air support "on the Goodwood scale", Bomber Command being asked to "blot out the coastal strip" from Franceville to Cabourg. On the basis of this document planning proceeded during the few days before developments elsewhere put an end to the project<sup>60</sup> (below, page 201).

The relationship with General Crocker and his headquarters which seemed to have begun so badly developed in a much more satisfactory manner than might have been expected, and the 1st British Corps operated under the First Canadian Army through the weeks and months that followed without any serious friction and with, apparently, steadily increasing mutual regard. When the 1st Corps finally left First Canadian Army in March 1945 there was a warmly friendly exchange of letters between General Crocker and the Army Comander.

### Strategic Policy in the Last Days of July

It seems evident that the failure of the 2nd Canadian Corps to make more progress in Operation "Spring" led General Montgomery to modify the strategic policy for the British front which he had defined in his letter to General Eisenhower on 24 July (above, page 183). On 27 July he issued a new directive.<sup>61</sup> By that date the American operation in the west was becoming the break-through which his plans required. The directive, in these circumstances, contained no important change in the plans for the American front; but it altered those for the eastern flank considerably. On 24 July he had, as we have seen, looked forward to another "Goodwood" launched towards Falaise, which would have been the main blow

\*The 3rd Division was commanded by Major-General L. G. Whistler, the 49th by Major-General E. H. Barker.

on the British front. This was now abandoned in favour of an offensive west of the Orne. The opening portion of the directive should be quoted:

*The General Situation.*

1. As a result of our having got the bottleneck of Caen behind us and having gained a good bridgehead beyond it, the enemy has brought a very powerful force across to the east of the Orne to oppose our further advance southwards in the direction of Falaise.  
He is so strong there now that any large scale operations by us in that area are definitely unlikely to succeed; if we attempt them we would merely play into the enemy's hands, and we would not be helping on our operations on the western flank.
2. On the western flank the First U.S. Army has delivered the main blow of the whole Allied plan, and it is making excellent progress. Anything we do elsewhere must have the underlying object of furthering the operations of the American forces to the west of St. Lo, and thus speeding up the capture of the whole of the Cherbourg and Brittany peninsulas; it is ports that we require, and quickly.
3. By our operations on the eastern flank we have pulled the main enemy strength on that side in to the area east of the Orne and astride the Falaise road. The enemy has tried hard to relieve his armoured divisions with infantry divisions, and to hold his armour in reserve for the counter-attack. But he has failed in this; on the front of the Second British Army we now find that he has six Pz. and S.S. divisions holding the line, and all these are to the east of Noyers. We will now take advantage of this situation.  
There are no Pz or SS formations to the west of Noyers, and therefore the situation is favourable for a very heavy blow to be delivered by the right wing of the Second British Army in the Caumont area.  
While this blow is being organised and prepared, it will be necessary for the Second Army to do everything possible to keep the enemy forces pinned down in the general area to the east of Noyers, and especially in the area east of the Orne.
4. Along the whole front now held by the First Canadian and Second British Armies it is essential that the enemy be attacked to the greatest degree possible with the resources available. He must be worried, and shot up, and attacked, and raided, whenever and wherever possible; the object of such activity will be to improve our own positions, to gain ground, to keep the enemy from transferring forces across to the western flank to oppose the American advance. and generally to "write off" German personnel and equipment.  
The main blow on the eastern flank will be delivered in great strength by the right wing of the Second British Army.

Proceeding to detail, Montgomery observed with respect to the First Canadian Army, "It is realized that resources are limited, and this may prevent the full implementation of paras 9 and 10 of M 512 [above, page 1821 at the present time." This amounted to accepting postponement of the proposed operations east of the Caen Canal. He went on to note that the Belgian and Dutch contingents

\*Montgomery says in his *Memoirs* that he was disturbed by reports reaching him that in London on 26 and 27 July Eisenhower complained, in effect, to Mr. Churchill and others that the Second Army was not doing its fair share of the fighting. Montgomery felt that the moment when the breakout attack contemplated in his plan had just been launched was an unfortunate time for these complaints. The 1500 Canadian casualties of 25 July did not make them any more timely; but doubtless the Supreme Commander did not have full information concerning that day's events on the 2nd Canadian Corps front.



would shortly arrive from the United Kingdom and would be placed under the Canadian Army.

The Second British Army (under which at this moment the 2nd Canadian Corps was still serving) was now to regroup and deliver from the general area about Caumont a strong offensive with not less than six divisions. Montgomery wrote, "The sooner this offensive can be launched the better. The latest date, consistent with good weather, will be 2nd August." At the same time the Second Army was required to conduct operations on the left wing "so as to hold in the Caen sector the strong enemy forces now there". The directive closed with the following general statement:

18. The present period is a critical and important time. The summer is drawing on and we have not many more months of good campaigning weather; there is still much to be done; we must secure the Brittany ports before the winter is on us.
19. The armies have been fighting "for position" during the past weeks. We have come through that period successfully and have gained the positions we wanted. The main blow of the whole Allied plan has now been struck on the western flank; that blow is the foundation of all our operations, and it has been well and truly struck.  
The armies on the eastern flank must now keep up the pressure in the Caen area; and Second British Army must hurl itself into the fight in the Caumont area so as to make easier the task of the American armies fighting hard on the western flank.

On 28 July the Supreme Commander, who must have been reading with the greatest delight the reports from the west, signalled to Montgomery his comments on this directive, "with which", he wrote, "I entirely agree as being calculated to exploit the situation before the enemy can reinforce which he is trying desperately to do". Following the line of his earlier communications, however, he urged that the British and Canadian attacks be pushed: "I particularly agree your para 4 and beg of you to insist that the Canadians and Second British Army carry out their assignments with vigor and determination so that Bradley may bring your plan to full fruition. Moreover their efforts may well produce unforeseen opportunities. In addition I suggest to you the advisability of speeding up the main blow of Second Army in Caumont area. . . . The attack should be in just as quickly as Dempsey's assault units can be hurried into line. I feel very strongly that a three-division attack now on Second Army's right flank will be worth more than a six-division attack in five days time. . . . Never was time more vital to us and we should not repeat not wait on weather or on perfections in detail of preparation ...."<sup>62</sup>

Montgomery acted on the line indicated in this signal, though it is not entirely certain that he had received it before issuing his orders.\* On the evening of the 28th he told the War Office that the attack near Caumont would now go in on Sunday 30 July: "Gave orders to Dempsey this morning that attack is to be pressed with utmost vigour and all caution thrown to the winds and any casualties accepted

\*The available timing of the messages concerned makes this doubtful. See, however, MajorGeneral Sir Francis de Guingand's *Operation Victory* (London, 1947), 398, where Montgomery's Chief of Staff recalls how, on an otherwise unidentified occasion "in July", Eisenhower, in de Guingand's office at Portsmouth, expressed the desire that an attack by Second Army should be speeded up. He later signalled to this effect. De Guingand telephoned Montgomery, who promised to try to speed the attack. This may or may not be the occasion referred to.

and that he must step on gas for Vire. Americans are going great guns and with 2nd Army drive south from Caumont I think results may be good." A similar signal went to Eisenhower.<sup>63</sup> General Dempsey's Caumont operation ("Bluecoat"), prepared in the greatest haste, was duly launched early on 30 July.<sup>64</sup>

Arrangements were now going forward for the First Canadian Army to take under its command General Simonds' 2nd Canadian Corps and with it the front south of Caen. This finally happened at noon on 31 July.<sup>65</sup> By then work had already begun on plans for the Corps' first operations under the Canadian Army. On 29 July General Crerar visited General Montgomery and was briefed on "Bluecoat". The Army Group Commander emphasized the importance of holding in place, as far as possible, the strong enemy forces facing the First Canadian Army. "No large scale effort was immediately required", but short of this everything possible should be done to prevent the enemy from reinforcing opposite the Second Army or the First U.S. Army.<sup>66</sup> The same day Crerar issued to the 1st British Corps and (anticipating its coming under his command) the 2nd Canadian Corps, a directive<sup>67</sup> covering this point. It also required General Simonds "to draw up plans for an actual attack, axis Caen—Falaise, objective Falaise", to be carried out in great strength and with maximum air support. This attack would probably be required in the event of Second Army reaching the line Flers—Conde sur Noireau, or if the enemy in the Caen area showed signs of withdrawal. The 1st British Corps was also to plan a limited advance directed on Vimont, to protect the Canadian corps' left flank if the attack towards Falaise were made. If these larger operations took place, "Rawlinson" and "Byng" would be superseded.

On 30 July Montgomery asked Crerar whether he could hold the 1st British Corps front with the 6th Airborne Division and one other, and thus get two British infantry divisions into reserve in readiness either to reinforce Dempsey or to start an important attack on his own front. Crerar assented and acted accordingly.<sup>68</sup> On the evening of the 31st Montgomery telephoned him and said that the situation on the "Bluecoat" front was "good and promising better". He now required that the 1st British Corps should send the 3rd British Infantry Division and the 4th British Armoured Brigade (less one regiment) to the Second Army, to come under its command from 7:00 a.m. on 1 August. In reply to an inquiry from Crerar, he said he did not anticipate initiating any major operation on the Canadian Army front for at least a week.<sup>69</sup>

These developments of course put a stop to all action concerning Operations "Rawlinson" and "Byng", for the 49th Division had to take over the 3rd's sector and the best that General Crocker could be expected to do with his attenuated corps was to hold the line.<sup>70</sup> The month of July thus ended without any operation of importance having transpired on the First Canadian Army's front. The theme of the situation reports during the Army's first eight days in the line was uniformly "Nothing to report".

At this period, indeed, the Army was not yet in proper condition to undertake major operations. Many units of Army Troops were still in England or in transit; and those that had arrived were chiefly operating under the 2nd Canadian Corps in

Second Army. For instance, the headquarters and units of the 2nd Canadian Army Group Royal Artillery arrived in Normandy during the period 9-12 July and immediately went into action under the 2nd Corps, which they supported thereafter.<sup>71</sup> One essential unit, First Canadian Army Signals, General Crerar had had in France since June; pending the Army's becoming operational, its sub-units performed a variety of tasks for other formations.<sup>72</sup>

At least equally important, the Army's allotted air support was not available; Headquarters No. 84 Group R.A.F. (above, page 41) was still in the United Kingdom. While its arrival was awaited, its Group Captain Operations and Wing Commander Operations acted as Liaison Officers for General Crerar at H.Q. No. 83 Group; but this was only a stopgap arrangement, and on 29 July the G.O.C.-in-C. pointed out to General Montgomery its unsatisfactory aspects. Montgomery said that bringing in No. 84 Group completely was technically complicated, but he thought that its headquarters should now be brought forward, and promised to speak to SHAEF about it without delay. An advanced headquarters was on the Continent by 6 August, but the Group was not fully operational until the 12th.<sup>73</sup>

The whole of the available Canadian force was now in Normandy. Major-General Kitching's 4th Armoured Division, the last Canadian division from England to reach the theatre, entered the line under the 2nd Canadian Corps at the end of July. It relieved the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, which after 55 days in the face of the enemy now withdrew to the vicinity of Colomby-sur-Thaon for a short period of rest. The relief was completed at 4:30 a.m. on 31 July.<sup>74</sup> Lt.-Col. J. M. Rockingham was shortly promoted to command the 9th Infantry Brigade.

The 4th Division now confronted the enemy immediately east of the great road to Falaise, in the area Four—Bourguebus. Between the road and the Orne the 2nd Division held the line. Great events were impending on this front. By the end of the month the Americans had driven forward through Avranches, and troops of their First Army had already "rounded the comer" into Brittany. Dempsey was driving towards Vire in the face of heavy opposition. The Germans, trying desperately to cope with both these threats, had at last moved much of their armour away from the Caen front, and an opportunity for a further major advance was beginning to appear there.

## CHAPTER IX

### **NORMANDY: THE FALAISE ROAD** **1-12 AUGUST 1944** (See Map 4 and Sketches 13-15)

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#### The Situation at 1 August

**T**he month of August 1944 witnessed the climax of the campaign in Normandy, and an Allied victory which was one of the great military triumphs of modern times.

The situation at the beginning of the month can be rapidly recapitulated. The First U.S. Army, in a week of heavy fighting ("Cobra"), had broken clear through the German left wing and was beginning to exploit its success. On 1 August General Bradley took command of the 12th Army Group, handing the First Army over to Lieut.-General Courtney H. Hodges. Simultaneously the Third U.S. Army, under Lieut.-General George S. Patton, Jr., entered the battle on the right of the First and assumed responsibility for the main exploitation task. Meanwhile the Second British Army was fighting forward towards Vire "through difficult and close country".<sup>1</sup> On the left sector of the Army front, held by the 2nd Canadian Corps, there had been no major operations since the check on 25 July; and at noon on the 31st, we have seen, this sector, and the 2nd Corps, passed under General Crerar's First Canadian Army. Planning was in progress for a breakout operation by the 2nd Corps directed on Falaise, and a lesser advance by the 1st British Corps in the Canadian Army's eastern sector.

On the enemy side, we have noted already the beginning of the transfer of German formations from the Caen front. Two armoured divisions were ordered west on 27 July (above, page 195). The movement of German infantry divisions from north of the Seine, so long deferred, was now well under way; on 30 July the last belated elements of the 326th and 363rd Infantry Divisions (above, page 178) crossed the Seine, and the 84th Infantry Division was being ferried over. The following day the 84th, which had been intended for Panzer Group West opposite the British, was redirected to the Seventh Army; and the 89th Division, then in the Rouen—Le Havre sector, was ordered south to take its place.<sup>2</sup> On 1 August the Germans were disturbed by the situation south of Caumont, where there was imminent danger of the Seventh Army being completely

separated from Panzer Group West. The headquarters of the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps was accordingly ordered to move to this area with the 9th and 10th S.S. Panzer Divisions and corps troops to check the advance of the British armour and re-establish contact with the right flank of the Seventh Army.<sup>3</sup> The former great concentration of panzer divisions south of Caen was steadily draining away.

A word may be said on the nature of the Allied command structure at this point. It had been defined, as laid down by General Eisenhower, in General Montgomery's directive of 21 July (above, pages 181-3). This had provided that the 12th Army Group would shortly take command of the American armies in France; however, its operations would "for the present be under the general direction and control of 21 Army Group". Thus Montgomery remained *de facto* commander of the Allied ground forces; but his orders to the two American armies would be transmitted only through General Bradley. Two army groups stood side by side in the battle, but for the moment one was operationally subordinated to the other.

Eisenhower's own headquarters had so far remained in England, although the Supreme Commander made frequent visits to the Continent. Only on 7 August did he establish a small advanced headquarters in France, at Tournieres, near Bayeux.<sup>4</sup> Thereafter he was in a better position to keep in contact with the battle, and as was not surprising he maintained particularly close relations with General Bradley. (British and Canadian formations did not see him so often. The G.O.C. 2nd Canadian Corps does not recall seeing him at all in Normandy.)<sup>5</sup> In all the circumstances, the command relationship was not quite the same as it had been in June and July. In practice an element of the committee made its appearance, and there was consultation between Eisenhower, Montgomery and Bradley at various critical moments. In the words of an American official historian, "Throughout August, General Montgomery continued as before to issue operational instructions to the U.S. forces, but he consulted General Bradley increasingly as a partner instead of a subordinate and gave him great latitude in directing the U.S. forces."<sup>6</sup>

### "Prodding" South of Caen

At a conference at his headquarters on 30 July, General Simonds reviewed the recent past and looked into the future. He emphasized that the Caen sector was still the pivot of the enemy's whole position in Normandy. The immediate task was to continue a show of force indicating a threat to this pivot so serious that he would not dare reduce the forces now held there. Simonds proposed to ease the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, then just moving into the line, gradually into "the feel of things" by mounting a small-scale operation to take Tilly-la Campagne. By occupying the low rise on which this village stood we would minimize enemy observation of our own movements. As for the more distant future, if all continued to go well on the American front his divisional commanders could expect orders for a break-through operation directed on Falaise. In this there would be "no holding back whatever", and no division would stop until

every reserve had been exhausted. It would be necessary to accept casualties, but doing so would make it possible to finish the war quickly and thereby avoid the heavy losses to be expected from a struggle of attrition. He warned his armoured formations that he believed the best solution to the problem of breaking through the enemy positions would be to employ armour at night, though he knew they were reluctant to attempt this.<sup>7</sup>

Although the 4th Division did undertake such a minor operation as the Corps Commander had forecast, the first move against Tilly-la-Campagne was in fact made by a unit of the 2nd Division with one from the 4th in support. On 30 July The Calgary Highlanders of the 5th Infantry Brigade were told that they were to attack Tilly on the night of 31 July-1 August. The Essex Scottish had captured a group of farm buildings on the Falaise road north-west of Tilly in a fierce and costly little fight on the night of 29-30 July,<sup>8</sup> this position was now to be the jumping-off point for the Calgaries. They were supported by a squadron of tanks of the Royal Scots Greys as well as by the artillery of the 2nd and 4th Canadian Divisions and the 2nd Canadian Army Group Royal Artillery. The Lincoln and Welland Regiment (of Brigadier J. C. Jefferson's 10th Infantry Brigade of the 4th Division) was to assist with a feint from the direction of Bourguebus; it was also hoped that an attack which Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal were making that night against the church in St. Martin de Fontenay would divert the enemy's attention from our main purpose.<sup>9</sup>

Tilly-la-Campagne was still held by the redoubtable *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*, which was to prove just as formidable now as it had on 25 July. At 1:00 a.m. on 1 August "D" Company of the Lincoln and Welland launched the diversionary attack, only to come under fierce mortar fire which shortly obliged them to dig in. At 2:30, covered by heavy artillery bombardment, The Calgary Highlanders advanced astride the track leading into Tilly from the north-west. The enemy brought down violent shell and mortar fire. However, some troops got into Tilly and two enemy tanks are reported to have been knocked out with the PIAT. The leading troops had to dig in close to the railway track just west of the village. Lt.-Col. MacLauchlan ordered a second attack, supported by a troop of the Greys. Again the opposition was extremely heavy; two of the three tanks were lost and the troops withdrew to the original start-line. One company of The Royal Regiment of Canada was pushed forward to support the Calgaries but met them withdrawing and did not itself reach the village.<sup>10</sup>

Brigadier Megill, commanding the 5th Brigade, now came to The Calgary Highlanders' headquarters and ordered a further attempt. Supported by a squadron of the Fort Garry Horse, the battalion advanced for a third time about 2:30 p.m. The result was the same. The enemy reacted as he had before, and the village remained in his hands.<sup>11</sup>

The attack by Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal against the church in St. Martin de Fontenay (which was serving the Germans, who had recovered it after losing it on 25 July, both as a strongpoint and an observation post) was more successful. Brigadier Young of the 6th Brigade made a reconnaissance flight over the area on 31 July before issuing his orders. The operation, which was to profit by

diversionary artillery fire planned to assist the attack on Tilly, went in at 4:00 a.m. on 1 August. Machine-gun fire prevented the sappers of the 11th Field Company R.C.E. from placing charges to breach the church walls; but the infantry, led by Major J. A. Dextraze, pressed the attack home and were in possession of the building by 6:45. The dead defenders' bodies established that the area was still held by the 9th S.S. Panzer Division.<sup>12</sup>

At 9:50 a.m. on 1 August General Montgomery telephoned General Crerar to emphasize the importance of keeping the enemy "worried" on his front and inquire whether General Simonds could "put on further prods to continue to pin him down". Crerar spoke to Simonds, who felt that reliefs then planned would prevent action before the night of the 2nd. Subsequently, however, he evidently decided that it was practicable to renew the attack on Tilly on the night of the 1st-2nd.<sup>13</sup> This time The Lincoln and Welland Regiment (Lt.-Col. J. G. McQueen) was cast for the main role. A quarter of an hour before midnight it attacked from the direction of Bourguebus. It had been resolved to try a "silent" attack which might achieve surprise. But again the operation was a failure. Two companies detailed to advance and dig in with PIATS to prevent a tank counterattack from the direction of La Hogue (such as was believed to have frustrated the previous operation) were twice beaten back without establishing the planned position, and a direct attack on Tilly also failed.<sup>14</sup>

These minor operations had taken tolls. The Calgary Highlanders' casualties on 1 August totalled 178, of which 51 were fatal. The Lincoln and Welland Regiment had 58 casualties on 2 August; 12 men lost their lives.<sup>15</sup> In spite of these sacrifices, the enemy remained firmly in possession of Tilly-la-Campagne. The 1st S.S. Panzer Division had continued to show extraordinary tenacity; witness the comment of the Calgary Highlanders' diarist on the bombardment of Tilly on 2 August:

At 1800 hrs [6:00 p.m.] the Typhoons arrived and Tilly went up and then down in a mess of smoking rubble.... Shortly afterwards our arty played terrifically heavy fire into the rubble and many air bursts were fired directly over Tilly as well. It is a seemingly impossible thing for anyone to live under such fire. Snipers continue to be very active and the seemingly impossible has happened because we are once again receiving MG fire from the slits at Tilly. The Hun is like a rat and comes up for more no matter how hard we pound him.

On the 2nd Canadian Division front the mine directly south of St. Martin de Fontenay had been a thorn in the flesh, the lofty shaft-towers affording the Germans excellent observation while as we have seen the mine tunnels offered means of infiltrating the whole area. The capture of the church in St. Martin had been considered a prelude to a raid against the mine and the demolition of these structures.\* This was attempted on the night of 3-4 August by a company of The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada and a detachment of the 11th Field Company. The mine area was reached, but in order to demolish the shaft towers the sappers had to climb some 20 feet from the ground; and as soon as they began doing so in the bright moonlight they became targets for snipers.

\*The records speak of the demolition of the "mine shafts", but it seems evident that it was intended to wreck the lofty structures above ground, and thereby block the mine entrances.

After a number of men had been hit, it was decided that the demolition task could not be carried out, and the raiding party withdrew, having suffered some 39 casualties, nine of them among the sappers.<sup>16</sup>

On 5 August the villages in the enemy's front line were quieter than for many days. It appeared that he might be withdrawing, and accordingly on both Canadian divisional fronts probing attacks were made to discover the situation. Headquarters 2nd Division ordered the 5th Infantry Brigade to seize May-sur-Orne. Late in the afternoon The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada, its ranks now filled with reinforcements to replace the men lost on 25 July, advanced south from St. Andre-sur-Orne supported by a squadron of the Fort Garry Horse. The enemy was still in occupation. Waiting until the battalion reached the outskirts of the village, he then brought artillery, mortars and tanks into action and inflicted very heavy casualties.\* That evening Le Regiment de Maisonneuve passed through and attempted to continue the attack, but again the opposition was fierce and neither that day nor the following morning could any important progress be made. The Germans did not fire on patrols, but advance in strength produced violent reaction. The front was stabilized only a few hundred yards south of St. Andre.<sup>17</sup>

East of the highway, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division attempted similar advances. On the afternoon of 5 August patrols tried to enter Tilly and tested the defences of La Hogue. Although some prisoners were captured from the 1st S. S. Panzer Division, both efforts met heavy opposition. Larger enterprises in the evening had no better fortune. Two platoons of The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor), supported by a squadron of the 22nd Armoured Regiment (The Canadian Grenadier Guards) and artillery, attacked La Hogue from the direction of Bourguebus; and just after dark The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada and a tank squadron from the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment) tried to get into the ruins of Tilly-la-Campagne. Both attacks were costly and both failed, except in demonstrating that the enemy still held the area in strength.<sup>18</sup>

### Planning the Breakout Attack

We have seen (above, page 201) that as early as 29 July General Crerar had instructed General Simonds to plan a major operation on the axis Caen-Falaise to break through the German positions astride the main road. Even earlier, on 22 July, Crerar had sent his prospective Corps Commanders a tactical directive<sup>19</sup> which, looking to the likelihood of an early attack against well-prepared defences, recalled an address given by Crerar on 14 May. This had emphasized that in such a "break-in" attack "a matter of highest importance is to get the infantry over and through the enemy's pre-arranged zones of defensive fire in the shortest possible

\*As in the case of Operation "Spring", the unit's casualties for 5 August appear to have been reported piecemeal over the next three days, on none of which it was actively engaged. Its total casualties reported for the four days 5-8 August, which were all or nearly all suffered on the 5th, were 70 all ranks; 20 were fatal and 21 prisoners of war.



time after the intention to attack has been revealed". Simonds was now to produce an original and effective answer to this tactical problem. Planning began immediately after the issuance of the directive of 29 July, and was going on while the secondary operations just described were taking place.

On 30 July Simonds gave Crerar his preliminary comments on the task. His initial study indicated that the 2nd Canadian Corps would require another infantry division, another armoured division and also "total" air support for 48 hours. On that basis he was convinced that the problem, though "tough", could be "well tackled".<sup>20</sup> The required forces were made available in due course. As we have seen, the 2nd Canadian Corps already had under command the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division. At midnight of 3-4 August the 51st (Highland) Infantry Division and the 33rd British Armoured Brigade passed to its command from the 1st British Corps; and the 1st Polish Armoured Division, recently from England, also came under General Simonds at 6:00 a.m. on 5 August.<sup>21</sup> And the air support for "Totalize"—the code name assigned to the operation—was to be genuinely "total".

On 31 July General Simonds presented his appreciation and outline plan verbally to the Army Commander. Next day he put these on paper, and on 2 August he forwarded them to his divisional commanders.<sup>22</sup> The appreciation pointed out that the enemy had a forward position on the general line May-surOrne—Tilly-la-Campagne—La Hogue, and a rearward partially-prepared position on the general line Hautmesnil—St. Sylvain. The key to the first position was the high ground at Point 122 on the Falaise road (the "Cramesnil spur"); to the second, the area about Hautmesnil itself, where the road passed over another commanding knoll. Two "break-in" operations were necessary to penetrate the two lines. The Corps Commander noted that since the Canadians during the past few days had "attacked, and done everything possible to indicate that we intend to continue attacking" the positions, surprise in respect of objectives or direction was impossible. "Tactical surprise is still possible in respect to time and method, but very heavy fighting must be expected."

The most vital portions of the appreciation ran:

4. The ground is ideally suited to full exploitation by the enemy of the characteristics of his weapons. It is open, giving little cover to either infantry or tanks and the long range of his anti-tank guns and mortars, firing from carefully concealed positions, provides a very strong defence in depth. This defence will be most handicapped in bad visibility—smoke, fog or darkness, when the advantage of long range is minimized. The attack should, therefore, be made under such conditions....
6. If all available air support is used for the first "break in" there will be nothing for the second except diminished gun support, unless a long pause is made with resultant loss of speed. If on the other hand the first "break in" is based upon limited air support (heavy night bombers) all available gun support and novelty of method, the heavy day bombers and medium bombers will be available for the second "break in", at a time that gun support begins to decrease and it should be possible to maintain a high tempo to the operations.
7. In essence, the problem is how to get armour through the enemy gun screen to sufficient depth to disrupt the German anti-tank gun and mortar defence, in country highly suited to the tactics of the latter combination. It can be done

- (a) By overwhelming air support to destroy or neutralize enemy tanks, anti-tank guns and mortars.
- (b) By infiltrating through the screen in bad visibility to a sufficient depth to disrupt the anti-tank gun and mortar defence.

It requires practically the whole day bomber lift to effect (a) and if two defence zones are to be penetrated a pause with loss of speed and momentum must be accepted. It is considered that this may be avoided if the first zone is penetrated by infiltration at night but this can only be attempted with careful preparation by troops who are to do the operation.

8. The plan is submitted on the assumption that the right [left] wing of Second Army has secured, or imminently threatens to secure, a bridgehead east of the R Orne, thus loosening the enemy grip on his northern pivot.

The outline plan envisaged carrying out the operation in three phases. *The first* was designed to break through the Fontenay-le-Marmion—La Hogue position with two infantry divisions and two armoured brigades in a night attack with no preliminary bombardment. Heavy bombers were to obliterate the area May-sur-Orne—Fontenay-le-Marmion and the wooded area east of Secqueville-la-Campagne. Tanks and carrier-borne infantry were to advance, under cover of a quick medium artillery barrage opening at H Hour, straight to the first objectives. *The second phase* was designed to breach the Hautmesnil—St. Sylvain position by the use of one armoured and one fresh infantry division (the 4th Canadian Armoured Division and the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division). This phase was to have very heavy air support, including that of heavy day bombers (Fortresses) in addition to all available medium bombers and armed reconnaissance by fighter-bombers. A large force of artillery would be on call. *The third phase*, as Simonds saw it at this time, would be exploitation by two armoured divisions (one of which would be the 4th Canadian), with the object of seizing high ground at and west of Point 195 (west of the main road) and other high ground east of the road immediately dominating Falaise. Thereafter both armoured divisions would patrol to maintain or gain touch with the enemy on wide arcs in front of them.

In his covering letter to divisional commanders General Simonds wrote in part:

The infantry accompanying the armour to first objectives in Phase One must go straight through with the armour. Arrangements have been made for about 30 stripped Priests' chassis to be available to each of the infantry divisions operating in Phase One for this purpose. The balance of personnel required to be carried through to the first or any intermediate objectives must be mounted under divisional arrangements. The essentials are that the infantry shall be carried in bullet and splinter-proof vehicles to their actual objectives. It is suggested that sufficient can be made available by pooling half-tracks or White scout cars available within divisional establishments (recee regiments, Artillery, Engineers)... .

This plan contained two features of marked originality, both of which, in different ways, required considerable preparation. One was the intervention of heavy bombers in the ground battle during the hours of darkness. This, we shall see, involved negotiations with the R.A.F. Bomber Command and special procedure for marking targets. The other innovation was the use of what have since come to be called armoured personnel carriers, which made in "Totalize" what seems

to have been their first appearance on the battlefield.\* General Simonds asked the Army Commander to obtain American permission to utilize for the purpose the U.S. "Priest" self-propelled guns (above, page 37) which had just been withdrawn from the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, and General Crerar did so.<sup>24</sup>

The urgent task of converting the "equipments" in time for the operation was undertaken by an *ad hoc* Advanced Workshop Detachment, 250 strong, known by the code name "Kangaroo", the name subsequently applied to the armoured personnel carrier. The Officer Commanding, Major G. A. Wiggan, R.C.E.M.E., wrote, "There were 13 units represented in this AWD but in spite of long hours and exhausting work there was not only no friction but a wonderful spirit of co-operation from first to last."<sup>25</sup> The work began actively only on 3 August, the day on which the intention to undertake "Totalize" became firm, but by that evening a pilot model had been completed and sent to Simonds for inspection. The guns and mantlets were removed and armour-plate welded over the openings. When the supply of armour-plate gave out, two sheets of mild steel were substituted, with the space between them filled with sand. (General Mann recalls that the Navy complained at this time that Canadian soldiers were cutting pieces of plating out of craft stranded on the beaches.) Thanks to the "Kangaroo" men (among whom there were some British soldiers) the carriers were ready well ahead of the time for the operation. By the morning of Sunday 6 August, 76 Priests had been converted.<sup>26</sup>

On the evening of 3 August General Montgomery turned the tentative "Totalize" project into actuality, telephoning General Crerar<sup>27</sup> that plans for the operation "should go on actively" and giving for the first time a target date. On 4 August Montgomery issued to the 12th Army Group and the British and Canadian Army Commanders a brief directive<sup>29</sup> which began, "The general situation is very good." The enemy front was now "in such a state that it could be made to disintegrate completely"; and in order to achieve this very determined and energetic action was necessary. The Second Army, having broken through the German defences in the Caumont area, was swinging southward and eastward pivoting on its left Corps (the 12th). Its centre Corps (the 30th) had the task of securing and dominating the general area centring on Mont Pincon, and would then thrust towards Thury-Harcourt on the Orne. The right Corps (the 8th) was directed

\*The idea of using some form of armoured vehicle to carry assaulting infantry through the fire zone had long been in the air. The British Mark IX tank was designed in September 1917 "to meet a requirement for carrying infantry and stores over broken ground in an enclosed armoured vehicle". In the United Kingdom during 1942-43 there was discussion and demonstration of armoured infantry-carrying sleds, to be towed by tanks, which would have had much the same role as the armoured personnel carrier; and sleds were in fact used by U.S. troops in the Anzio bridgehead early in 1944. At the same period the 1st Canadian Corps in Italy suggested experiments which were made with gutted universal carriers (towed by tanks) in an infantry-carrying role. In 1947 an application was made to the United Kingdom authorities for an award to General Simonds as having suggested the introduction of the armoured personnel carrier. The Inter-Departmental Committee on Awards to Inventors did not recommend an award, since the idea was considered as being a valuable improvisation falling within General Simonds' normal duties as a commander.<sup>23</sup>

†General Crerar did not record this date in his diary, but it was evidently 8 August. Following the formal directive issued on 4 August, which asked for an attack on the 7th (see below), the army-air Morning Joint Conference at Army H.Q. on the 5th was told that the operation had been "stepped up" some 24 hours.<sup>28</sup>

on the area Conde—Vassy, and its subsequent operations were to be "in the direction of Argentan".

The 12th Army Group operations were envisaged on the lines already laid down, but with decreased emphasis now upon Brittany. The First U.S. Army was swinging eastward round the southern flank of the Second British Army, and its left was to operate on the general axis Domfront—Alencon. The Third U.S. Army had turned its 8th Corps westward and given it the task of clearing the Brittany peninsula. The remaining corps of the Third Army were "being directed towards Laval and, Angers". The portion of the directive dealing with General Crerar's front, and with future possibilities, should be quoted:

*Task of First Canadian Army.*

8. To launch a heavy attack from the Caen sector in the direction of Falaise.
9. *Object of the operation.*
  - (a) To break through the enemy positions to the south and south-east of Caen, and to gain such ground in the direction of Falaise as will cut off the enemy forces now facing Second Army and render their withdrawing eastwards difficult-if not impossible.
  - (b) Generally to destroy enemy equipment and personnel, as a preliminary to a possible wide exploitation of success.
10. The attack to be launched as early as possible and in any case not later than 8 August-dependent on good weather for air support. Every day counts, and speed in preparing and launching the attack is very necessary.  
Every endeavour will be made to attack on 7 August if this is in any way possible.
11. It is obvious that if the right wing of Second Army is established at Conde. . . , and the attack of Canadian Army . . . reaches Falaise, then the enemy in between will be in a very awkward situation.
12. In order to preserve balance and poise in our dispositions on the eastern flank, Canadian Army must ensure that the front from the Cagny area northwards to the sea is held securely.

*General Note.*

13. The broad strategy of the Allied Armies is to swing the right flank round towards Paris, and to force the enemy back against the Seine-over which river all the bridges have been destroyed between Paris and the sea.
14. Plans are being worked on to place a strong airborne, and air-portee, force in the Chartres area at a suitable moment-thus blocking the gap between the Seine at Paris and the Loire at Orleans.

On 5 August General Crerar addressed the senior officers of the Army on the forthcoming operation (below, page 215). At noon that day Headquarters 2nd Canadian Corps issued its formal operation instruction for "Totalize", describing it in the three phases already noted (above, page 209). D Day was to be Monday 7 August, and H Hour for Phase I, 11:00 p.m. on that day. H Hour for Phase II was defined at this stage as 2:00 p.m. on 8 August.<sup>30</sup>

### Air Support for "Totalize"

The plan for air support inevitably involved somewhat complicated negotiations. In the afternoon of 4 August an important conference on this aspect was held at Headquarters First Canadian Army. In addition to General Crerar and members of his staff, Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory was present, as were Air Marshal Coningham (A.O.C. 2nd Tactical Air Force), Air Vice-Marshal

Broadhurst (A.O.C. No. 83 Group R.A.F.), and Air Vice-Marshal L. O. Brown (A.O.C. No. 84 Group R.A.F., which was now gradually coming into operation). Generals Simonds and Crocker were also present for part of the meeting. The conference reviewed the plan and discussed special facets of it, including timings. It was arranged that Brigadier Mann, Crerar's Chief of Staff, with some assistants, should fly to England next day for a further meeting at Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Air Force.<sup>31</sup> This meeting was presided over by Air Chief Marshal LeighMallory. A representative of Bomber Command, its Senior Air Staff Officer (S.B.), was present; and Brigadier Mann assumed that he accepted the idea of night bombing as practicable. Having reported what he understood to be the agreed plan to Army Headquarters, Mann, at the request of the S.A.S.O., remained in England and on 6 August visited the headquarters of Bomber Command. Here, to his alarm, he found that there were objections to the night bombing programme. After preliminary discussion, the matter was taken up with the Commander-in-Chief Bomber Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris. Brigadier Mann thus described the conference:<sup>32</sup>

12. At approximately 1100 hours [11:00 a.m.] we gathered in the C in C's office. The C in C stated that he was not prepared to bomb at night as planned and agreed upon by the meeting of the night before, and that there was no question of deviating from this policy. He gave, briefly, the reasons and explained that bombing in close proximity to the troops was done by Oboe\* and markers dropped by pathfinders with a check of the position of the Pathfinder Oboe Marker by the "Master Bomber" who flies down sufficiently low to identify the target on the ground, drops another marker and orders 'bombs away'. The C in C explained that this could NOT be done at night.
13. The situation thus became extremely unsatisfactory! I stated that since orders were now being arranged on the basis of the agreements reached and notified last night that [sic] if the C in C was not prepared to support the arrangements made on his behalf by his SASO (SB) that [sic] it would be necessary for me to telephone this information to my Army Commander at once and that I considered it appropriate that the C. in C Bomber Command should telephone the C in C 21 Army Group and inform him of his decisions since the tactical and strategic situation in Normandy had reached the point where a delay in mounting this operation Totalize might have most regrettable consequences as it seemed we were on the threshold of a great strategic opportunity.
14. The C in C stated that he had no intention of phoning the C in C 21 Army Group. Silence reigned for approximately a minute, and we then got down to discussions as to what Bomber Command could do. From this point onward the matter proceeded in a very satisfactory way and with evident desire on the part of the C in C Bomber Command to assist with his resources in the Operation.

The later stages of the discussion are recorded in General Crerar's memorandum of a telephone conversation beginning at 12:13 p.m. between himself in Normandy and Mann in Air Chief Marshal Harris' office. Mann explained the difficulties of night bombing as the Air Chief Marshal had presented them, and pointed out that it was impossible for H Hour for Phase I to be 11:00 p.m. in these circumstances. On the other hand, if it could be proved to the satisfaction of the master bombers concerned that red or green concentrations of marker shells fired by 25-pounder guns could be clearly identified at night, then Bomber Command was prepared to carry out the task, using coloured concentrations as aiming marks.

\*A radar aid to navigation.

Brigadier C. L. Richardson of Headquarters 21st Army Group, who was with Mann, had already telephoned his headquarters asking that experiments with coloured marker shells should be made that night on the 1st British Corps front. Master bombers in their aircraft would be over the area and would report the results to Harris. If these were satisfactory, the bombing would be carried out at 11:00 p.m. as planned; but if they were not satisfactory, then Bomber Command would have to start its bombing at 9:30 p.m., while it was still light, and would end at 10:10 p.m. General Simonds was in General Crerar's office during this conversation. He stated that, while he very much hoped to retain 11:00 p.m. as H Hour, he would nevertheless, if necessary, "phase back" H Hour to 9:30.<sup>33</sup> Alternative orders were issued accordingly. However, the experiments on the night of 6-7 August were quite satisfactory to the master bombers, and it was therefore agreed that the bombing would begin at 11:00 p.m. the following night, the artillery firing coloured concentrations to indicate the targets.<sup>34</sup>

Later in the month Air Chief Marshal Harris wrote retrospectively of this occasion, "Knowing the limitations of the force I was originally horrified at this proposal."<sup>35</sup> He was being asked to employ his force on a task and in a manner for which it was not designed or trained. His objections, which were withdrawn as soon as a satisfactory answer to them was found, are entitled to every respect. They were based entirely on the importance of ensuring the safety of the troops whom he was supporting.

### The Führer Intervenes

Before the attack went in, important changes on the German side of the line south of Caen caused some modification of our plan.

Although we did not know it, Hitler had intervened. On the night of 2-3 August the Commander-in-Chief West received (through normal channels as well as by word of mouth from General Walter Warlimont, Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces Operations Staff, who had been sent by air to "explain" the dictator's intentions) the Führer's orders for a great armoured counter-offensive against the American line of communication running down the western coast of Normandy through Avranches.<sup>36</sup> This involved stripping the Caen sector of the armour still remaining there. The German commanders on the spot considered the plan absurd. We have the record<sup>37</sup> of a conversation on 3 August between Warlimont, Eberbach (commanding Panzer Group West, now about to be re-christened Fifth Panzer Army) and Sepp Dietrich, commanding the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps:

*Dietrich:* If the SS divisions are pulled out south of Caen the enemy will attack there and break through.

*Warlimont:* However, the SS divisions are not in their proper place there; they are employed in an immobile role and not at the focal point of the enemy's effort.

*Eberbach:* The infantry divisions now approaching will be committed there as soon as possible, but the SS divisions must be held ready in the rear 'to support the front. The main question remains how the front can be held in the long run against an enemy so far superior in materiel.

*Warlimont:* Two SS brigades can be moved in from Denmark; the homeland and occupied France are being combed through for all available materiel.

*Eberbach*: Moving in the SS brigades will take from eight to ten days; that is too long. Pulling out the SS divisions and launching them in the direction of Avranches takes at least three or four days. And we do not know what the situation will be there then...

As part of the regrouping necessitated by Hitler's plan, a limited withdrawal of the Panzer Group's forces west of the Orne was ordered for the nights 3-4 and 4-5 August. And a great part of the German armour still remaining south of Caen was ordered west. We have already noted that the 9th S.S. Panzer Division had been ordered out of this area on 1 August. On 3 August orders were issued that the 1st S.S. Panzer Division was to be relieved by the 89th Infantry Division and transferred to the Seventh Army. This relief began during the night 4-5 August.<sup>38</sup>

References in the Seventh Army's War diary indicate that the code name for Hitler's operation was "*Luttich*" (Liege); it was named, perhaps, with a sentimental eye upon Ludendorff's famous dash at the Belgian fortress in 1914. It was prepared in haste, and the arrangements were far from complete when Field-Marshal von Kluge ordered it in on 6 August. He felt that it was now or never:

Enemy signals dealing with our recognized intentions, discernible enemy regroupings and the pressure of superior forces on the critically extended front of Seventh Army forced the launching of the attack, which could no longer be postponed. At 2000 hrs [8:00 p.m.]\* 116 Pz Div, 2 Pz Div, 2 SS Pz Div and elements of 9 Pz Div [not 9 SS Pz Div] launched the thrust towards Avranches from the area east and north of Mortain. 1 SS Pz Div following up as quickly as possible.<sup>39</sup>

As we shall see (below, page 233), *Luttich* failed; and its failure was to have the gravest consequences for the Germans in Normandy.

After the withdrawal of the armour from south of Caen, the 89th Infantry Division held the whole front astride the Falaise Road and extending to the Orne formerly held by the 1st S.S. and 9th S.S. Panzer Divisions. Information of this important change was very swift in reaching the Canadians, for on the night of 5-6 August a Yugoslav deserter from the 89th Division arrived in their lines and an ambulance from the division drove into them by mistake. It was believed that the 1st S.S. might have merely withdrawn into reserve in the area of Brettevillesur-Laize, and would therefore be available to man the German second line.<sup>40</sup> This, combined with the evident weakening of the front line, led to adjustments in the 2nd Canadian Corps plan.

At 10:00 a.m. on 6 August General Simonds held a conference and informed his commanders of these changes, which were later confirmed by written notes.<sup>41</sup> Phase I remained as before except that the two armoured divisions were to move up during it so as to be in position on the Corps start-line by the morning of 8 August. During Phase II these two divisions were now to be launched "directly through" to the final objectives (in the case of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, the areas of Point 180, Point 195 and Point 206; for the Polish Armoured Division, those of Points 170 and 159). The two assaulting infantry divisions (the 2nd Canadian

\*The war diary of the Seventh Army indicates that the attack did not go in quite so soon. The actual time is not given, but it would seem to have been between eight o'clock and midnight. Since it is known that the 9th Panzer Division did not get into action this night, this Army Group "B" report was based on incomplete information.

and 51st) were to carry out during Phase II tasks previously allotted to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division—securing the right and left flanks by clearing, and forming a firm base about, Bretteville-sur-Laize on the right and wooded areas north of Cauvicourt on the left. The 3rd Division was to move forward from its position in reserve and be prepared when ordered to take over the areas of Hautmesnil, Bretteville-le-Rabet and Point 140 (dominating the Laison valley). This was the final form of the "Totalize" plan.

General Simonds' original appreciation had emphasized the need for a week of training for the two infantry divisions and two armoured brigades employed in Phase I to enable them to study the ground and obtain "special training in a deep advance at night". As it turned out, little more than one day (5-6 August) was actually available; but this time was turned to the best advantage. Through Sunday the 6th the troops practised with the new vehicles until last light, "embussing" and "debussing" and making trial runs. Nevertheless, all units found time for church parades.<sup>42</sup>

The administrative preparations for the operation were on a vast scale, and the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps and the other services had (in addition to the vehicle conversion job already described) a tremendous task, which was directed by the senior administrative officer at Army Headquarters (Brigadier A. E. Walford) and his opposite number at Headquarters 2nd Corps (Brigadier H. V. D. Laing). The Army Service Corps dumped 205,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, 152,000 gallons of petrol and 130,000 rations behind the forward positions; while in addition 1069 tons of ammunition and 672 tons of petrol were "carried on wheels". The task was completed within 36 hours, the drivers working day and night without rest.<sup>43</sup>

The 1st British Corps, now greatly reduced in strength (above, page 201), had only a subsidiary role in Operation "Totalize". A directive from General Crerar dated 6 August defined it as to protect its own front against possible enemy counterthrusts with infantry and armour, thereby protecting also the Canadian Corps' extending left flank. The 1st Corps was also to move up its right as the situation might require, and to establish an early and firm hold on St. Sylvain.<sup>44</sup>

Before "Totalize" went in the Second British Army on Crerar's right had done much to prepare the way for it. On 6-7 August the 43rd Division of the 30th Corps assaulted and cleared the dominant feature of Mont Pincon. And on the evening of the 6th the 59th Division of the 12th Corps attacked across the River Orne north of Thury-Harcourt and established a bridgehead.<sup>45</sup> This constituted a serious threat to the flank and rear of the strong German line which First Canadian Army was about to assail.

In his address on 5 August (above, page 211) General Crerar had emphasized the significance of the moment and the task.<sup>46</sup> Leaving the exposition of the detailed plan to General Simonds, upon whom, as he said, "the main responsibility for this very important operation of war falls", he described the basic plan and emphasized certain general considerations, notably the vital importance of keeping the initiative and maintaining the momentum of the attack. (The event showed that this comment could scarcely have been more apposite.) This, he told his hearers, was a moment



of opportunity: a great victory now might bring a quick end to the war. And he recalled that they were on the eve of the anniversary of the Battle of Amiens, a famous British and Canadian tactical triumph of the First World War. Their responsibility was "a proud as well as a great one":

and I have no doubt that we shall make the 8th of August 1944 an even blacker day for the German Armies than is recorded against that same date twenty-six years ago.

### The First Phase of "Totalize"

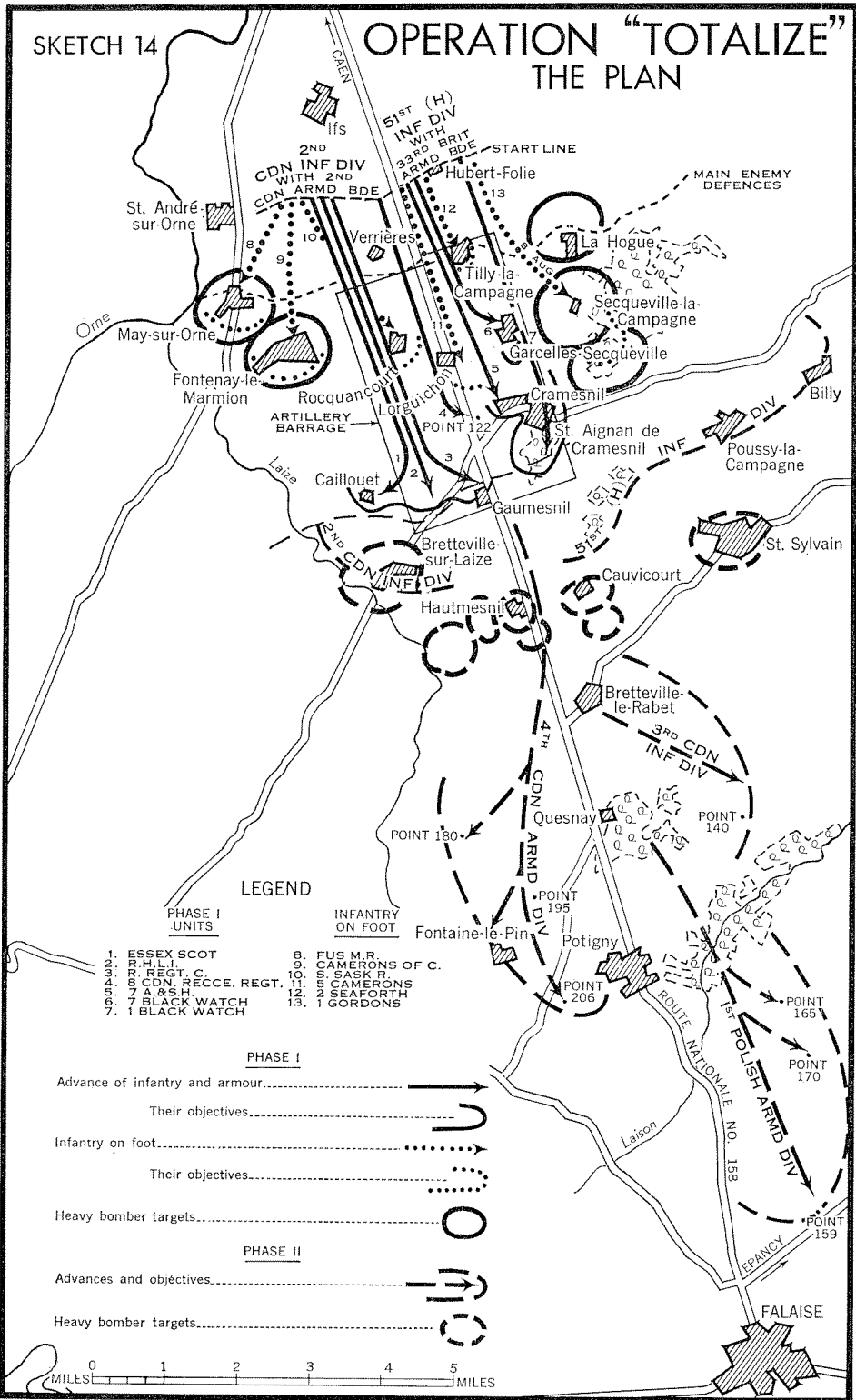
The actual tactical plan for "Totalize" must be briefly described. On the 2nd Canadian Division front the 4th Infantry Brigade had been relieved in the forward positions on the night of 4-5 August by the 6th Brigade, while the latter handed over the division's right sector to the 5th Brigade.<sup>47</sup> This enabled the 4th Brigade units to train and (in some degree) rest for the coming operation, in which they were to have the task of making the deep infantry advance west of the Falaise road.

General Foulkes had placed the assault force on his front under the command of Brigadier Wyman of the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade. It comprised Wyman's own brigade (less the 1st Hussars) with the 4th Infantry Brigade and the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment under command, plus strong elements of assault equipment from the 79th Armoured Division and medium machine-guns, self-propelled antitank artillery and engineers. The force was organized in four tight columns; three had for core in each case a battalion of the 4th Brigade, while the fourth was based upon the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment. The columns were formed with vehicles four abreast. Each was headed by a heavily armoured advanced guard or "gapping force"-two troops of Sherman tanks, two troops of "Flails" and a troop of the 79th Assault Squadron R.E., the latter having the task of marking the route with tapes and lights. Behind came the main body or "assault force", led by more tanks, with the infantry battalion riding in the armoured carriers and its supporting weapons in its own carriers. These forces also included machine-gunners of the Toronto Scottish, anti-tank guns and engineer bulldozers. And at the rear was a "fortress force" of tanks, serving all four columns, charged with making the dispersal area secure and providing a firm base from which the infantry could assault on foot.<sup>48</sup>

The details of the plan are best understood by reference to Sketch 14. The 2nd Division columns formed up south of Ifs. The three 4th Brigade columns were to advance "in one lane" close together, mounting the ridge west of Verrieres and passing west of Rocquancourt, to a dispersal area some 4000 yards south of that village. Here, far behind the enemy's front line, the infantry would dismount; the Essex Scottish would strike to the right against Caillouet, The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry go forward and seize a spur running north-east from Bretteville-sur-Laize; while The Royal Regiment of Canada would move left and possess itself of Gaumesnil on the Falaise road. The fourth column, that of the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment, was to advance on a separate axis close to the road and parallel to it and occupy the area of Point 122, a short distance north of the Royal Regiment's objective. While the battalions of the 4th Brigade were thus penetrating beyond

SKETCH 14

# OPERATION "TOTALIZE" THE PLAN



the German front line, those of the 6th were to attack the villages forming the front line itself; Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal moving against May-sur-Orne, The Cameron Highlanders of Canada against Fontenay-le-Marmion and The South Saskatchewan Regiment against Rocquancourt.<sup>49</sup>

In the 51st Division area east of the great road a generally similar plan was followed. Here the armoured force was organized in three battalion groups moving in two lanes, "by-passing Tilly la Campagne on either flank".<sup>50</sup> Two groups, moving down the westerly lane, were to attack respectively Cramenil and GarcellesSecqueville; the third was directed on St. Aignan de Cramenil. Tilly was left to be attacked by marching infantry, with another marching unit operating against the Lorguichon area on the Falaise road.

As we have seen, there was no preliminary artillery bombardment. Bomber Command was to begin its attack at 11:00 p.m. At 11:30 the armoured columns would cross their start-line. Only at 11:45 would the great force of supporting artillery open fire. Its first task was to lay in front of the armoured advance a barrage covering an area 4050 yards wide and 6000 deep astride the highway, moving at the rate of 100 yards per minute in lifts of 200 yards. This abnormally rapid rate of advance was occasioned by the entire assaulting force moving in tracked vehicles. A total of 360 guns would fire the barrage: for the whole artillery programme the number available was 720.<sup>51</sup>

Through the afternoon and evening of 7 August the columns of attack were forming, under great clouds of dust which observers feared would warn the Germans of the blow that was about to fall. To avoid danger from the bombing it was necessary to withdraw temporarily from our forward positions, and early in the evening Verrieres and St. Andre-sur-Orne were abandoned and the battalions of the 6th Brigade formed up behind the start-line, the lateral road running from Hubert Folie to St. Andre.<sup>52</sup>

To the soldiers waiting eagerly on the ground the beginning of "Totalize" was signalled just before 11:00 p.m. by the deep, all-pervading rumble of innumerable great aircraft in the sky.. Then came the thunder of the bombs as the Halifaxes and Lancasters began to unload over the targets illuminated by the artillery's marker shells. A total of 1020 bombers took part, and 3462 tons of bombs were dropped on the villages on the flanks of the attack. No bomb fell among our troops. The cost to Bomber Command was 10 aircraft.<sup>53</sup>

The attack had to be stopped before the programme was completed. That night General Crerar sent a signal to Air Chief Marshal Harris:<sup>54</sup>

Timing and accuracy of tonight's programme heavy bombers now in progress reported one hundred per cent. Greatly appreciate outstanding contribution your Command. We shall hope to continue and complete this battle as well as you have commenced it.

Sir Arthur Harris replied:<sup>55</sup>

Thanks for message. Regret lack of wind and accumulating smoke made it unsafe to put down last third of tonnage on each objective but hope two thirds did the trick. Don't be shy of asking. Good luck.

The ground advance began while the bombs were still coming down on the most distant target. The last was timed to fall not later than one minute before midnight.<sup>56</sup> At 11:30 the armoured columns and the marching infantry moved forward into the darkness.

The armour was guided through the night by a variety of expedients: radio beams; Bofors guns firing tracer along the axes of advance; and green marker shells fired on to the knoll at Point 122 to identify the boundary between the attacking divisions. "Artificial moonlight" from searchlights directed southward at a low angle would, it was hoped, assist the columns in finding their way. In spite of these "aids to navigation", mistakes were made. A low ground mist thickened the clouds of dust stirred up by the hundreds of vehicles; and the enemy is reported to have fired smoke shells to make the murk still worse.<sup>57</sup>

The result of these conditions was that the 4th Infantry Brigade columns strayed from their proper line of advance in the area about Rocquancourt. Instead of passing west of the village, The Royal Regiment of Canada went east of it and The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry actually drove through it. The Essex Scottish, though their column went west of the village as intended, completely lost their way. The Royal Regiment ended up some distance north-west of the high ground by Gaumesnil which was its objective; but a new plan of attack was made and, in spite of the fact that some elements of the battalion had gone completely astray, and the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment column had been held up short of Point 122, the objective was duly taken. The R.H.L.I. pushed south from Rocquancourt and secured the proper dispersal area, but found the enemy established in the quarry on their objective with tanks and a self-propelled gun. The battalion therefore dug in as close to the objective as possible. The Essex Scottish column, while lost and disorganized near Rocquancourt, came under fire and suffered a good many vehicle casualties; the Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. T. S. Jones, was wounded and for a time missing. The battalion was re-formed south-west of the village, but not until 8:45 a.m. It then advanced and about noon took Caillouet.<sup>58</sup>

In the meantime, the 6th Brigade battalions had been attacking the villages in the enemy's old front line. Their fortunes varied. The luckiest was The South Saskatchewan Regiment (Lt.-Col. F. A. Clift), which, following close behind the barrage through the blinding dust-clouds kicked up by the armour, found the Germans with their heads still down when it entered Rocquancourt. By 12:45 a.m. the village was ours. Farther to the right things did not go so well. Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal attacked May-sur-Orne, and the Cameron Highlanders of Canada Fontenay-le-Marmion, without artillery support, relying on the effect of the night bombing. This (perhaps because it had been only two-thirds completed) had not been sufficient to quell the defenders. The Fusiliers were pushed back from May by heavy fire; one company got into the village's outskirts only to be cut off. About four p.m. they finally captured the place with the help of flame-throwing "Crocodiles". At Fontenay-le-Marmion the Camerons fought their way into the village in spite of fierce opposition. The Commanding Officer (Lt.-Col. John Runcie) was wounded; Major C. W. Ferguson, the 6th Brigade's Brigade Major and a former second-in-command of the Camerons, took over. He was wounded—fatally—in

his turn, and Major J. J. D. Gagnon succeeded him.\* German tanks which had been bypassed counter-attacked from the north and the unit was temporarily surrounded. Lieut. R. R. Counsell, the carrier platoon commander, took his carriers out to Ifs, under very heavy fire, and returned with ammunition and "all available reinforcements, including shoemakers and other administrative personnel"; he received the Military Cross, which also went an unusual award-to a Warrant Officer of the Camerons, C.S.M. Abram Arbour, who took command of "B" Company when its commander was wounded. (C.S.M. Arbour was killed a few days later.) The situation was not cleared up until early afternoon, when two companies of The South Saskatchewan Regiment with a squadron of the 1st Hussars swept the ridge north of Fontenay, taking large numbers of prisoners.<sup>59</sup>

On the 51st (Highland) Division's front the battle went very similarly. Here too there was a certain amount of confusion. Nevertheless, the armoured columns captured Cramensnil, Garcelles-Secqueville and St. Aignan de Cramensnil. The woods immediately south of St. Aignan were cleared during the morning. Like the Canadians, the Scots had difficulty in the front line. Tilly-la-Campagne, now held by the 89th Infantry Division, was defended for a time in a manner reminiscent of the *Leibstandarte*. The first attack, by the 2nd Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders, was beaten off. Subsequently part of the 5th Seaforth also came into action. Resistance collapsed when a squadron of the 148th Regiment Royal Armoured Corps appeared about 7:00 a.m.; and the blood-stained stones of Tilly passed at last into British hands. The other main objective of the marching Scottish infantry, the Lorguichon area on the Falaise Road, was captured without very great difficulty by the 5th Battalion of The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders.<sup>60</sup>

Although the attack had not gone precisely as planned, the armoured infantry carriers and the tactics based upon them had been fully justified by the event. The Royal Regiment of Canada lost three killed and 25 wounded on 8 August, The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry only one killed and 14 wounded, the Essex Scottish three killed and 17 wounded. The marching infantry battalions suffered more heavily. The Cameron Highlanders of Canada lost 30 killed and 96 wounded in their fierce struggle at Fontenay. Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal had eight killed and 17 wounded. The South Saskatchewan Regiment's casualties were 16 killed and 42 wounded, The Calgary Highlanders' 14 killed and 37 wounded.<sup>61</sup>

The attack had not taken the Germans by surprise; as General Simonds had realized, this was impossible in the circumstances. At noon on 7 August Army Group "D" appreciated that the British Second Army (the Germans did not yet know that General Crerar had taken over the Caen front) would soon launch a thrust to Falaise, in conjunction with an American advance from Le Mans, in an attempt to encircle the two German armies. Nevertheless, on Hitler's insistence orders had been issued for moving the last German armoured division south of Caen away to the westward. On the evening of the 7th the 12th S.S. Panzer

\*Major Ferguson was promoted lieutenant colonel, and appointed to command the unit, on 9 August, the day he died. Lt.-Col. Runcie had taken command only on 22 July, when Lt.-Col. N. H. Ross was wounded.

Division was ordered to assemble north of Conde-sur-Noireau, some 18 miles west of Falaise. But the developments south of Caen that night prevented its departure.<sup>62</sup>

The forces available to the enemy to deal with "Totalize" were, on the face of it, very inadequate. The whole front of attack was held by the 89th Infantry Division. The only reserves immediately available were the battle groups of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division. These were now greatly reduced, but still capable of offering very serious resistance. At the moment when "Totalize" was launched, the division proper had, it appears, 48 tanks, of which 37 were Mark IVs with long 75-mm. guns, nine were Panthers and two are unidentified. It had under command, however, the 101st S.S. Heavy Tank Battalion, which had 19 Tigers (plus four under local repair), two flame-thrower Tigers and one recovery Panther. The 56-ton Tiger with its heavy armour and 88-mm. gun was an extremely formidable vehicle, wholly outclassing our lighter and more vulnerable Sherman. The Germans also had in the area an unusually large number of their dangerous dual-purpose 88-mm. antiaircraft and anti-tank guns, manned by Lieut.-General Wolfgang Pickert's 3rd Flak Corps.<sup>63</sup>

On 5 August the 12th S.S. Panzer Division had been relieved on the 1st British Corps front by the 272nd Infantry Division and assembled in reserve east of the Caen—Falaise road in the vicinity of the Laison River, with its headquarters near Vieux-Fume in the Laison valley. The 12th S.S. thus had a very brief rest before its final struggle. On 7 August one portion of the division (Battle Group *Krause*), with some tanks, had to be sent to assist the 271st Infantry Division against the bridgehead which the Second British Army had just established across the Orne in the Grimbosq area near Thury-Harcourt (above, page 215). Somewhat more distant from the battle area was the 85th Infantry Division, which was arriving from north of the Seine. By the night of 7-8 August elements of it had reached a position north of Trun.<sup>64</sup>

The commander of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division, *Standartenfuhrer* (S.S. Colonel) Kurt Meyer,\* explained later that he had taken the precaution of attaching liaison officers to the divisions holding the front line, to ensure early information of any attack. As soon as he heard of the beginning of "Totalize", he ordered Battle Group *Waldmuller*, with about 20 tanks, including some 8 or 10 Tigers from the 101st S.S. Heavy Tank Battalion, to move north and block the Falaise Road in the vicinity of Cintheaux. He also recalled Battle Group *Krause* from before the Second Army. Having issued these orders, Meyer himself drove north to consult the 89th Division and discover the situation. According to his own account, near Cintheaux he encountered a disorderly mob of fugitives of the 89<sup>th</sup>—the first German soldiers he had seen in flight during the war—halted them and disposed them in defensive positions to hold up our advance.

This intervention by the commander of the 12th S.S. now seems symbolic. This formation had been ordered to close the gap in the German line on the Falaise Road; and it was to be the backbone of the resistance which so seriously impeded our progress towards Falaise during the next few days. Soon after daylight on

\*According to Meyer's statement during his trial, he heard of his promotion to the rank of *Brigadefuhrer* (S.S. Major General) only after he became a prisoner of war.<sup>65</sup>

8 August our aerial reconnaissance saw tanks moving up the great road south of Quesnay. They must have been those accompanying Battle Group *Waldmuller*, which within a few hours was reinforced by *Krause*. They soon made their presence felt, fighting skilfully in small groups. But they themselves suffered. In an attack during the morning about St. Aignan, a famous German tank officer, Capt. Michel Wittmann, commander of the 101st S.S. Heavy Tank Battalion, was killed.<sup>66</sup> With their great offensive at Mortain in progress, the Germans' resources in Normandy were stretched to the breaking point and beyond it, and they could find no adequate forces to assist the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps (which was still in charge of the sector south of Caen) to deal with "Totalize". The only immediate measures that could be taken were to order to the point of danger the units of the 85th Division north of Trun (two infantry battalions and an artillery battalion), and the Panther battalion of the 9th S.S. Panzer Division.<sup>67</sup>

### The Second Phase of "Totalize"

Phase I of "Totalize" had been, on the whole, remarkably successful. Phase II was to be less satisfactory.

During the night and the early hours of the morning of 8 August, the two armoured divisions intended to crack the enemy's second line were moving forward and marshalling in the areas from which the infantry divisions had now advanced. By dawn the 4th Canadian Armoured Division was concentrated between Fleury-sur-Orne and the Falaise Road. The 10th Infantry Brigade was between Fleury and Ifs and the 4th Armoured Brigade between Ifs and the road, except for the 28th Armoured Regiment (British Columbia Regiment), which was east of the road. Simultaneously the 1st Polish Armoured Division was marshalling south-east of Cormelles.<sup>68</sup>

H Hour for Phase II, originally 2:00 p.m. on 8 August, was discussed up to the last moment. The first plan was that the bombing to clear the way for this phase should end at 1:45 p.m., but weather forecasts on the evening of 7 August indicated that visual bombing by Fortresses would probably have to take place by 1:00 p.m. The final arrangement was that the bombing should begin at 12:26 and end at 1:55. H Hour was thus 1:55. The start-line for this phase was the bomblines for it, that is, the line in rear of which no bombing was to take place and beyond which our troops would not advance until the bombing was completed. This line ran north of Robertmesnil and Gaumesnil and south of the quarry east of Caillouet.<sup>69</sup>

General Kitching's plan for the 4th Division was to advance with the infantry brigade on the right and the armoured brigade on the left. The 4th Armoured Brigade was to by-pass Cintheaux and Hautmesnil to the east, capture Bretteville-le-Rabet, and push on to capture the "Fontaine-le-Pin feature" (Points 195 and 206). The 10th Infantry Brigade was to capture Cintheaux and Hautmesnil, take over Bretteville and mop up that general area. The armoured brigade organized an advanced guard composed of the 22nd Armoured Regiment (Canadian Grenadier Guards) and The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor), and called "Halpenny Force"

after its commander, Lt.-Col. W. W. Halpenny of the Grenadiers. It was to drive through to Point 206.<sup>70</sup>

The 4th Division's advance towards the start-line was slow and painful. The day's difficulties were prefigured in the artillery regiments' troubles while attempting to move up early in the morning to support the next phase of the advance. The fighting still going on on the Verrieres Ridge (above, page 220) and continual sniping and shelling retarded the movement and rendered it perilous. The same conditions frustrated the infantry and armour. "Halpenny Force" was ordered forward as early as 8:45 a.m. from its positions north of Troteval Farm, but traffic congestion seems to have prevented any real movement until about noon, when the force rolled slowly southward.<sup>71</sup> The 4th Armoured Brigade's log for the day (unfortunately, the division's log for August was not preserved) is one long succession of exhortations to the units to speed the advance. It is clear that the divisional and corps commanders were exerting pressure; the latter's influence appears in a log entry at 10:14 a.m., "I want you to push on steadily regardless of people that are worrying you. My Grandfather very insistent."<sup>72</sup> It was all to little purpose.

The U.S. Eighth Air Force, whose attack prepared the way for Phase II, was shown at least some of its targets by the same device used the night before to assist the R.A.F. Bomber Command. The 23rd Field Regiment R.C.A. received only at 11:00 a.m. the red smoke shells which it duly fired at 12:55.<sup>73</sup> The Eighth's targets were Bretteville-sur-Laize on the right; St. Sylvain on the left; a group including Hautmesnil on the main road and Cauvicourt to the east of it; and Gouvix.<sup>74</sup>

The American bombers made their runs "through intense and accurate flak" which destroyed nine of them. Good concentrations were obtained on three of the four main areas attacked; the fourth, Gouvix, could not be positively identified and was bombed by only one Fortress. Of 678 bombers sent out, 492\* actually attacked, dropping 1487.8 tons.<sup>75</sup> That the bombing was valuable to the operation there is no doubt, but it was marred by what the U.S. air force historians term "gross errors on the part of two twelve-plane groups". The misfortune is thus explained: "In one case, faulty identification of target by the lead bombardier led him to drop near Caen, although fortunately some other bombardiers of the formation cautiously refrained from dropping with him. In the second instance, a badly hit lead bomber salvoed short and the rest of the formation followed in regular routine."<sup>76</sup> The areas struck, far behind the fighting line, were packed with Allied troops moving up or waiting to move up, many of them sitting in vehicles and of course expecting no danger. The divisions that suffered were the Polish Armoured Division in its assembly area near Cormelles and the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division which was coming forward.

The casualties caused by this bombing, including the Poles', were estimated three days later as about 65 killed and 250 wounded. Four medium or heavy guns, some 55 vehicles, and a considerable amount of ammunition were also lost.<sup>77</sup> The Canadian unit hardest hit was probably The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regi-

\*This is the figure given in the U.S. Army Air Force history. The Allied Expeditionary Air Force summary for the day gives 497.



ment, which was bombed as its convoy was moving through Faubourg de Vaucelles. It lost about 100 officers and men, and one company was wholly ineffective for the operations of two days later. Both the 2nd Canadian and 9th British Army Groups Royal Artillery suffered, as did the tactical headquarters of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. Major-General R. F. L. Keller, the divisional commander, was wounded and evacuated. Brigadier Blackader of the 8th Brigade took over the division temporarily.<sup>78</sup>

In the forward area the armour continued to make slow progress; however, Corps reported that both the 4th Canadian and Polish Armoured Divisions crossed the lateral road Bretteville-sur-Laize—St. Aignan de Cramensnil (close to the startline for Phase II) \* at 1:55 p.m., the proper time.<sup>79</sup> But resistance about Gaumesnil, just south of the startline, held up the advance until a 2nd Division infantry unit, The Royal Regiment of Canada, captured the village at 3:30 p.m. This eased the traffic situation and tanks were able to help the 10th Infantry Brigade get forward. About 6:00 p.m. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada and the South Alberta Regiment took Cintheaux. Two companies of the Argylls pushed on and captured the village of Hautmesnil, although the great quarry nearby could not be immediately mopped up.<sup>80</sup> This was the farthest limit of the 4th Division's penetration that day.

In the meantime, farther to the right, the 2nd Division attacked Bretteville-surLaize, as required by the orders for Phase II. The advance was postponed until 4:00 p.m. because the artillery was engaged in support of the 6th Brigade. The Calgary Highlanders and Le Regiment de Maisonneuve attacked supported by the 1st Hussars, and the village was duly taken. Late in the evening, by Brigade permission, The Calgary Highlanders withdrew with a view to dominating the place from the higher ground to the north instead of occupying the ruins. Unfortunately, they suffered heavy casualties from artillery fire during the withdrawal.<sup>81</sup> The 2nd Division reported that during the day it had encountered strong resistance from an "88-mm. gun screen manned by G.A.F. ground troops".<sup>82</sup> The 3rd Flak Corps was making itself felt. (The Fifth Panzer Army recorded in its war diary at 9:25 p.m., "General Pickert states that south of Langannerie an 8.8-cm. tank trap has been constructed. In addition he has also ordered forward a flak battle group from the Orne...." )

On the left of the Corps front the Polish Armoured Division, doubtless shaken by its experience with the misdirected bombing (as the chaplain of the North Shore Regiment wrote, "To be bombed by the enemy is bad, to be hit by your own bombers is worse"),<sup>83</sup> did not get far this day. At 4:10 p.m. Corps Headquarters logged a message from the Poles to the effect that 20 Tiger tanks were in the area south-east of St. Aignan de Cramensnil, "covering with fire all country immediately over" the lateral road through that village. The Polish Division reported, "Have had casualties and are regrouping."<sup>84</sup> The 12th S.S. had clearly checked their initial thrust.

Due to a combination of circumstances and in spite of all urgings, the two

\*It seems to have been considered the start-line for practical purposes, though it was somewhat north of the bomb-line (above, page 222).

armoured divisions had made nothing like the progress planned for Phase II. General Simonds now ordered them to press straight on through the night, with the aid of searchlights (though there was some doubt as to whether the latter could deploy in time),\* to prepare the way for further advances next day. The 4th Division was to extend its somewhat precarious salient down the Falaise Road; the Poles were to reconnoitre forward and be ready to seize Caucourt at first light.<sup>85</sup> However, it is evident that in fact operations were largely suspended during the hours of darkness, and the tanks withdrew to harbours in the manner to which armoured units had become accustomed in training. Thus, for instance, in the case of the Canadian Grenadier Guards one squadron harboured on the north edge of Cintheaux, while the other two retired to Gaumesnil. Towards morning the squadrons from Gaumesnil moved up again with a view to a dawn attack on Bretteville-le-Rabet.<sup>86</sup>

In order to carry out the Corps Commander's intention of completing Phase II as quickly as possible, the commander of the 4th Armoured Brigade (Brigadier E. L. Booth) ordered the 28th Armoured Regiment (The British Columbia Regiment), with which The Algonquin Regiment was now grouped, to advance to Point 195 and be on the objective by first light. "Halpenny Force", as we have seen, was to capture Bretteville-le-Rabet.<sup>87</sup>

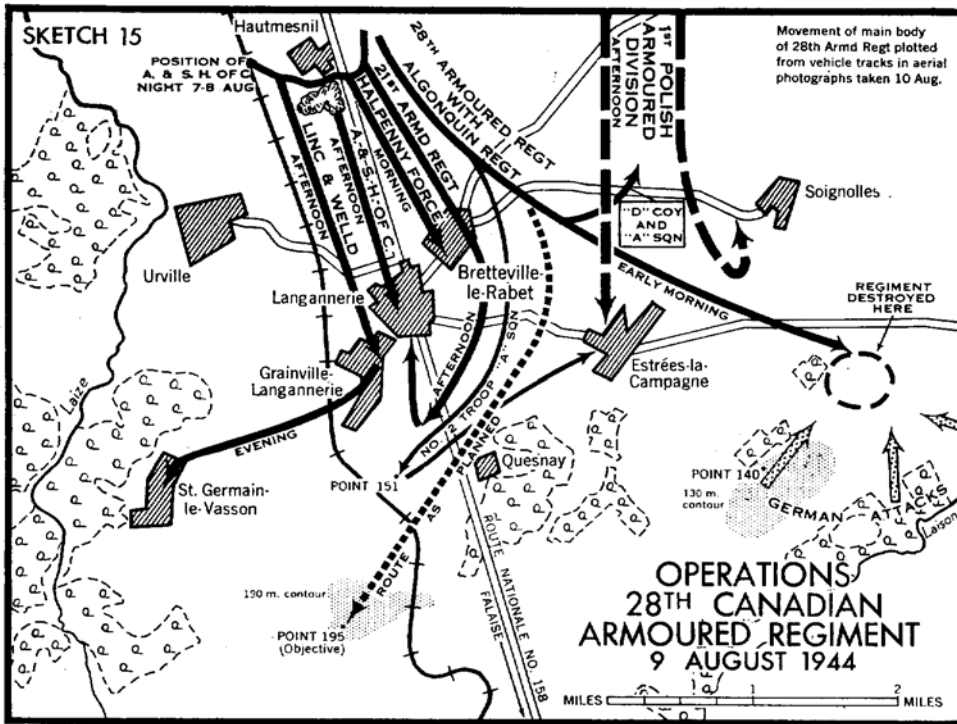
The attempt by the British Columbia-Algonquin group to carry out its orders produced a most costly action. Having got far off its proper axis during the advance, the force was almost annihilated in the course of the day.

The group moved off from the vicinity of Gaumesnil. After encountering minor resistance as it advanced east of the main road it found "Halpenny Force" preparing to attack Bretteville-le-Rabet. The officer commanding the group, Lt.-Col. D. G. Worthington of The British Columbia Regiment, decided to drive on "while we still have surprise".<sup>88</sup> His plan was evidently to by-pass the enemy resistance at Bretteville-le-Rabet. This involved circling to the left (that is, eastward), then swinging to the right across the main highway to reach Point 195 (see Sketch 15). "The light was very poor this early in the morning",<sup>89</sup> and it seems clear that the regiment, fighting its first battle, and advancing across country with few landmarks and dealing with scattered opposition as it did so, simply lost its way. A single troop of "B" Squadron kept to what was evidently the intended line of advance—the stretch of open country between the villages of Grainville-Langannerie and Quesnay—and reached Point 151, south of Grainville and fairly close to the objective, before finding itself hopelessly isolated and withdrawing.<sup>90</sup> But the main body went east of the village of Estrees-la-Campagne instead of west of it. Shortly, in the words of the British Columbia Regiment's diarist, "High ground was sighted and we headed for it."

The high ground now taken up—which was to be only too easily identified for the historian by the riddled hulls of the regiment's tanks†—was found in and around a

\*Evidently, however, they were successfully deployed. The war diary of No. 344 Independent Searchlight Battery R.A., the unit concerned, notes on 8 August, "Troops remained deployed but moved to positions approx 3 miles S.E. of existing ones. Movement Light again provided through out the night."

†They were still there when the present writer visited the spot in August 1946.



field surrounded by hedgerows and scrub some 2000 yards east of Estrees.<sup>91</sup> It was on the wrong side of the Falaise Road and about 6500 yards north-east of the objective. Nevertheless, the group believed itself on the objective (it seems possible that Lt.-Col. Worthington had mistaken the lateral road running east from Estrees for the Falaise Road) and it so informed Headquarters 4th Armoured Brigade. At 6:43 a.m. it reported, "Objective less 1800 metres ... forming up now to reach objective". At 6:55 a.m. the following message was entered in the brigade log:

Objective 0650 hrs. No evidence of enemy occupation—but recent signs. . . . We are holding until our friends come forward to consolidate.

At 7:55 a.m. the group, in answer to an inquiry, gave its position, as recorded in the log, as map reference 0964.<sup>92</sup> This position is actually close to Caen, and it seems clear that the person keeping the log intended to write 0946, the simple map reference for the square containing Point 195.

Having taken up its mistaken position, the group remained upon it, waiting for the reinforcements which-in the light of the reports it had made of its whereabouts-could never come. The troops present were "C" Squadron of the 28th Armoured Regiment, the greater part of "B", and two companies of the Algonquin Regiment. "A" Squadron and another Algonquin company had been coming on in rear as reserve. Only two tanks of "A" got through to join the main body.<sup>93</sup> The experienced German tank officers lost no time in assailing this strong enemy group which after approaching their positions had come, so inexplicably it must



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have seemed, to a halt. At a time not precisely specified, but between 8:08 and 8:41 a.m., the 28th Armoured Regiment reported to Brigade, "Have run into enemy and lost ten tanks" and inquired whether it was possible to have artillery support. At 8:49 Brigade Headquarters asked for the location of the "opposition", to which the 28th Armoured Regiment replied, "Same as 2 hrs ago. Approx 500 yds SE." Brigade evidently arranged for fire on this rather vaguely defined target, and at 9:07 asked, "Are you getting required support now?" No answer came; and thereafter there was only silence.<sup>94</sup>

According to postwar narratives written by officers of the 12th S.S. Panzer Division, the British Columbia tanks had been seen by Lieut. Bernhard-Georg Meitzel, an officer of the division's headquarters, who reported their presence to Battle Group *Wunsche*, the 12th S.S. armoured group.\* Part of the Battle Group was then sent against them, Tigers going in from the west, while Panthers circled round and attacked from the east.<sup>95</sup> This was the beginning of a long day of bitter fighting in which continued attacks by German tanks and infantry gradually wore down the isolated Canadian detachment.

The lack of information from Worthington's group, following the report that it was in trouble, deeply disturbed the divisional and brigade commanders. At 9:14 a.m. and more urgently at 10:00 a.m. the 4th Armoured Brigade ordered the 21st Armoured Regiment (The Governor General's Foot Guards) to concentrate at Gaumesnil, the intention being that it should move to support the 28th Armoured Regiment, still believed to be on Point 195. At 10:29 the Foot Guards' Commanding Officer was called to Brigade.<sup>96</sup> In the circumstances, the movement could do the B.C.R. no good, but in any case it was slow in getting under way. At 1:45 p.m. the following conversation took place between the Foot Guards and Brigade:<sup>97</sup>

*21st Armoured Regt.: No movement here until 1430 hrs [2:30 p.m.]. Control: Why?*

*21st Armoured Regt.: We could not prepare ourselves any earlier than that in order to tie up other groups [sic].*

The "other groups" were presumably the attached troops, which included a company of the Algonquins. At 4:05 p.m. the Foot Guards reported that they had reached the lateral road running through Bretteville-le-Rabet and Soignolles. In attempting to pass through the narrow defile of open country between Bretteville-le-Rabet and Langannerie the regiment met opposition, including anti-tank fire, and was ultimately stopped. Shortly before last light its tanks withdrew into a "laager" in the Langannerie area.<sup>98</sup> It reported having lost 14 tanks during the day.†

In the position held by the British Columbias and the Algonquins the situation went from bad to worse. Soon after the German attack began Lt.-Col. A. J. Hay

\*Lieut. Meitzel proceeded to reconnoitre the B.C.R. position in his scout car. It was shot up and he was injured and captured, along with two soldiers who were with him. One of the B.C.R.'s last messages recorded at Brigade (8:08 a.m.) reported the capture of an English-speaking German lieutenant who claimed to be from the 20th Panzer Division, though one of his companions, who said he was the officer's batman, wore 12th S.S. badges.

†This is the figure logged by Headquarters 4th Armoured Brigade at 12:50 a.m. on 10 August. The regimental history indicates that 26 tanks were lost, 14 of them from Nos. 2 and 3 Squadrons, The war diary gives no figure.

of the Algonquins was badly wounded (he never recovered, and died in hospital in 1949).<sup>99</sup> During the morning it was decided to try to evacuate the wounded in the half-tracked vehicles which were still serviceable, and the convoy was sent out under an officer of Headquarters 10th Infantry Brigade who was himself wounded. It made a successful run, but the hope that it would be able to make an accurate report of the group's position was not realized; in the words of one who was present, "the wild dash they had to make did not lend itself to calm ground appreciation".<sup>100</sup>

No ground help reached the group during the day. At one stage tanks, believed to be Polish, appeared in the distance; but they first fired upon our men, and when yellow recognition smoke stopped the firing they themselves came under German attack and were driven back, losing several tanks. The most encouraging support the group received was that of a brace of Typhoon fighter-bombers. They too fired on the position until warned with yellow smoke. Thereafter, "They returned at half-hour intervals all day long, rocketing and strafing the enemy around us. They were heartily cheered many times during the day."<sup>101</sup> Early in the afternoon Lt.-Col. Worthington, finding there were some eight tanks undamaged, ordered them to break out of the position and run for it. They got out safely, but although a report of their return was received by 4th Armoured Brigade at 3:00 p.m. through a liaison officer with the Poles, this does not seem to have produced any firm information of the group's position, at least immediately.<sup>102</sup>

The enemy continued to attack with both armour and infantry. A British officer who was in the position wrote later: "At 1830 hours [6:30 p.m.] a strong enemy counter-attack came in. It was met by the infantry and tank crews with small arms and grenades. Serious losses were inflicted on the enemy who then withdrew. At this stage of the battle I saw one soldier, shot through the thigh and with a broken leg, still throwing grenades. Every man who was still conscious was firing some type of weapon."<sup>103</sup> At about this time Lt.-Col. Worthington, who had directed the fight with cool courage throughout the day, was killed by a mortar bomb. At dusk, as a final German attack was coming in, the surviving Canadians who could do so slipped out of the position. Most of them succeeded in making their way into the Polish lines. Lieut. Meitzel, the German prisoner, says that he persuaded one group, after an initial refusal, to let him guide them to the German lines where they surrendered.<sup>104</sup>

This episode, with its tragic mixture of gallantry and ineptitude, had been appallingly costly. The British Columbia Regiment lost 47 tanks—almost its entire tank strength—in its first day's fighting, and its personnel casualties on 9 August totalled, as closely as they can be calculated, 112, of which 40 officers and men were killed or died of wounds and 34 became prisoners.<sup>105</sup> The Algonquin Regiment's total casualties as reported for 9 and 10 August came to 128, including 45 officers and men killed or died of wounds, and 45 taken prisoner.<sup>106</sup> The great majority were undoubtedly suffered on the 9th by the two companies that had been with the B.C.R. Such losses would have been deeply regrettable even had they been the price of success. Unfortunately, they were suffered in the course of a tactical reverse which did much to prevent us from seizing a strategical opportunity of the first magnitude.

On the 4th Division's left the Polish Armoured Division made some progress during 9 August, clearing the wooded areas north of Cauvicourt, taking that village and advancing south and east. At the end of the day it was fighting in St. Sylvain.<sup>107</sup> As we have seen, elements of it got close to the British Columbia position east of Estrees but were driven back. The Germans were still in Soignolles, which the Poles captured next day. Farther to our left the 51st (Highland) Division advanced in line with the Poles. At 1:00 p.m. the 51st reverted to the command of the 1st British Corps and the corps boundary was adjusted accordingly. Thus at the end of the day the 2nd Canadian Corps front ran from near St. Sylvain through Langannerie to St. Germain-le-Vasson and Urville. The 9th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Canadian Division had come into the last-named area towards the right flank and had relieved the 4th Division's 10th Brigade about Hautmesnil.<sup>108</sup> General Simonds' intention was still to drive on and secure the objectives originally planned for Phase II. He therefore ordered the 4th Armoured Division to renew its attempt to seize the high ground west of the main road as far as Point 206, just west of Potigny, and then exploit towards Falaise. East of the road the Poles were to capture Point 140, the higher ground overlooking the position where the British Columbia Regiment had been destroyed, and push on across the Laison to the hills directly north of Falaise.<sup>109</sup>

West of the road the first step was to get the infantry of the 4th Division on to Point 195, the objective of the B.C.R.'s ill-fated movement, so that the armour might push on from there to the next height, Point 206. This part of the operation was successfully carried out on the night of 9-10 August by the 10th Infantry Brigade. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada took Point 195 with a silent attack which had been carefully planned by their very competent C.O., Lt.-Col. J. D. Stewart. "Simply walking in single file to the hill, up its slopes to the top and digging in there",<sup>110</sup> they seized it without arousing the Germans. By first light on the 10th the battalion was consolidated. The enemy immediately opened fierce mortar fire and delivered a series of counter-attacks which (contrary to the report made by Fifth Panzer Army) were all beaten off. The Lincoln and Welland Regiment, in the meantime, had moved up on the Argylls' right flank and occupied the spur of the hill pointing towards St. Germain. In rear, two surviving companies of The Algonquin Regiment in St. Hilaire Farm, and the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment) south of Langannerie, provided depth for the 10th Brigade position. It had been an excellent night's work, and the enemy's alarm and disgust were reflected in the storm of shells and mortar bombs with which he plastered the brigade area.<sup>111</sup>

As a result of this success, early on the 10th the 22nd Armoured Regiment was ordered to Point 195, thence to advance to Point 206. While the C.O. was holding an orders group north of Point 195 a fierce German counter-attack came in, using "robot tanks" among other weapons,\* and though it was thrown back the Canadian Grenadier Guards lost several tanks. It was now clear that the Germans had

\*The Canadians first encountered these when they were used against the R.H.L.I. at Verrieres on 31 July. They were apparently considered an emergency expedient for use in recovering important lost positions, but they were not particularly formidable in practice. In the present case as many as 20 are said to have been in action.<sup>112</sup>



deployed a formidable screen of 88-mm. guns to cover Point 206. An artillery observer reported 24 of them in this area. The enemy strength was such that for the moment the attack on Point 206 was abandoned. The Canadian Grenadier Guards remained on Point 195 with the Argylls, and in the course of the day the 21st Armoured Regiment also moved up to reinforce the position.<sup>113</sup>

At 10:00 a.m. on the 10th General Simonds had a conference with all his divisional commanders and issued orders which would, he hoped, restore the lost momentum of the attack. The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, back in the line after its rest and not hitherto heavily engaged, would have the primary role. It was to attack at 4:00 p.m. with the 2nd Armoured Brigade under command and supported by two Army Groups Royal Artillery and its own and the Polish divisional artillery. Its first objectives were the Laison crossings east of Potigny; it was then to push on across the river and seize the commanding ridge west of Epancy. The Polish Division was subsequently to follow up by seizing Point 140, crossing the Laison and advancing on Sassy.<sup>114</sup>

The first obstacle confronting the 3rd Division was the large wood immediately east of the Falaise Road at Quesnay, from which anti-tank fire had been reported sweeping the country to east and west. Brigadier Blackader, the temporary divisional commander, allotted the task of clearing it to the 8th Infantry Brigade, which in his own absence was commanded by Lt.-Col. J. G. Spragge of the Queen's Own Rifles. Spragge's intention was to sweep the wood south-east from Quesnay village with The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment and The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, the latter on the right, and then to pass Le Regiment de la Chaudiere through the Queen's Own to clear the area immediately to the south, as far as the mine workings north-west of Potigny.<sup>115</sup>

Although the force attacking the wood was powerful, and much more numerous than the defenders, it faced a difficult proposition. Colonel Kurt Meyer had, according to his own later account, withdrawn one of his battle groups (*Krause*) into Quesnay Wood and had collected much of his artillery around Olendon beyond the Laison. Many of the 88-mm. Flak guns were also hereabouts.<sup>116</sup> The 8th Brigade was assailing part of the hard core of German resistance—experienced and fanatical young Nazis who were prepared to immolate themselves for Hitler and the Reich in the true spirit of Wagnerian tragedy. Meyer and his men well knew that the fate of the German army in Normandy depended upon their preventing a rapid thrust into Falaise.

The 8th Brigade attack began rather later than General Simonds had hoped; it went in shortly after 8:00 p.m. on 10 August. As so frequently, in the beginning progress was deceptively satisfactory. The brigade "reported artillery support excellent, no retaliation". Shortly the Queen's Own reported its leading troops on the objective in Quesnay Wood.<sup>117</sup> But the enemy had merely been holding his fire. German tanks came into action (we read of one tank that had been thought derelict suddenly coming to life). The darkness, and uncertainty concerning our troops' positions, made artillery support ineffective. The leading Q.O.R. company was cut off, and all the officers and senior N.C.Os. became casualties. A newly-promoted corporal (Corporal N. Zamaria, who received an immediate Military Medal) rallied

his comrades; and with the permission of Divisional Headquarters the battalion was withdrawn, having lost 22 killed and 63 wounded.<sup>118</sup>

In the meantime the North Shore Regiment (only three rifle companies strong as a result of the bombing accident on 8 August) had skirted the northern edge of the wood and, in spite of heavy mortar fire, made their way into it. Small groups actually got through to the southern edge but unfortunately came under our own artillery fire and were forced to withdraw. Communications within the battalion broke down and the C.O. (Lt.-Col. D. B. Buell) was wounded. The attack cost the North Shore almost the same number of casualties as the Queen's Own—22 killed and 58 wounded.<sup>119</sup>

Operation "Totalize" was now at an end. With the failure to take Quesnay Wood General Simonds' new plan had fallen to the ground. We had advanced some nine miles from our start line of 7 August; but the enemy, inferior though his forces were, had successfully stabilized the situation. To penetrate to Falaise First Canadian Army would need to mount another large-scale deliberate attack.

On the morning of 11 August Simonds cancelled all attacks and issued fresh orders. The infantry divisions were to relieve the armoured divisions in the line, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division on the right and the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division on the left. The 4th Armoured Division was to retire to the St. Sylvain area to prepare for a new effort. The Polish Armoured Division, though relieved in the front positions by the 3rd Division, was to send a force on the 12th to patrol forward to the Laison valley about Maizieres and try to obtain a crossing. If this failed, the 2nd Division would take over the 3rd's right forward positions, and during the night of 12-13 August, or later if necessary, the 3rd Division would force a crossing over the Laison River and make a gap through which the two armoured divisions would advance to exploit.<sup>120</sup>

During the day these orders were modified. A new directive reached General Crerar from General Montgomery (below, page 234), and General Simonds and his Chief of Staff (Brigadier N. E. Rodger) had a conference with the Army Commander during the afternoon.<sup>121</sup> Subsequently, patrols of the 18th Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons) having reported that the enemy appeared to be withdrawing on the 2nd Corps' right flank in front of Urville, the Corps Commander ordered the 2nd Division to send a brigade, supported by a regiment of the 2nd Armoured Brigade, across the Laize at Bretteville and on to the south. This nullified the intention he had entertained of having the 2nd Division relieve the 3rd in the Point 195 area on the night of the 12th-13th.<sup>122</sup> However, the 9th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Division duly relieved the 4th Division there on the night of the 11th-12th. It was a ticklish business (the German guns about Quesnay had taken toll of the tanks of the Canadian Grenadier Guards as they withdrew from Point 195 during the day); but the relief was complete by two in the morning of 12 August. The 7th Infantry Brigade relieved the Polish Armoured Division. On the morning of the 12th a Polish reconnaissance group moved forward towards Maizieres, only to meet severe opposition and be withdrawn.<sup>121</sup> By now, the planning of a new set-piece attack on different lines, more akin to those followed in "Totalize", was well advanced; but this could not be delivered until 14 August.

## CHAPTER X

### **NORMANDY: VICTORY AT FALAISE**

**12-23 AUGUST 1944**

(See Map 5 and Sketches 16-19)

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#### The German Counter-Offensive and the Allied Change of Plan

ON 6 August General Montgomery had issued another directive<sup>1</sup> covering the next phase of operations and reiterating the orders already given concerning the Canadian Army's attack towards Falaise.

It defined the intention for the future as "to destroy the enemy forces in that part of France" west of the Seine and north of the Loire. The plan was outlined as follows:

6. (a) To pivot on our left, or northern flank.
- (b) To swing hard with our right along the southern flank and in towards Paris. the gap between Paris and Orleans being closed ahead of our advance.
- (c) To drive the enemy up against the R. Seine, all bridges over which between Paris and the sea will be kept out of action.

The 12th Army Group was to clear Brittany, using no more troops than necessary, "as the main business lies to the east", and to push its main force eastward to the Seine on a broad front. Montgomery was still planning for an airborne operation to secure the Chartres area ahead of the main advance, so as to block the enemy's escape gap between Paris and Orleans. This was to be launched when the 12th Army Group had crossed the general line Le Mans—Alencon.

Immediately after this directive was issued, the picture was altered by the Germans' great counter-thrust towards Avranches (above, page 213), which opened the prospect of cutting off and destroying the most formidable portions of their army in the west long before the Seine was reached. During the next two days the Allied commanders modified their plans to exploit this new situation.

Operation "Luttich" went in on the night of 6-7 August (above, page 214). The divisions actively engaged were the 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions and the 1st and 2nd S.S. Panzer Divisions.<sup>2</sup> During the night and in the fog of early morning the Germans gained ground, capturing Mortain and some other places. But the First U.S. Army stood and fought with skill and resolution; and as the mists cleared the Allies' potent and flexible air weapon came flashing into action. Flying weather on that 7th of August was perfect. The fighter-bombers of the

R.A.F.'s 2nd Tactical Air Force were called into the battle on the American front to reinforce the Ninth Air Force. No. 83 Group (under which the squadrons of No. 84 were still operating) flew 1014 sorties, and reported happily, "First really large concentration of enemy tanks seen since D Day was found north of Mortain during afternoon. Approximately 250 tanks were seen here and claims are 89 tanks destroyed, 56 damaged, while 104 mechanical transport vehicles were destroyed and 128 damaged."<sup>3</sup> Examination on the ground later indicated that these claims, as was not surprising in all the circumstances, were exaggerated;\* but German testimony is unanimous that the air attacks were a major factor in stopping "*Luttich*" in its tracks. The headquarters of the Seventh Army recorded that by noon the attack "had been brought to a complete standstill by unusually strong fighter-bomber activity".<sup>5</sup>

On 8 August, with the Germans at Mortain contained and their great mass of armour there virtually immobilized for the moment, the Allied plan was changed. Until now, as we have seen, it had envisaged a large encirclement, driving the Germans back upon the Seine and cutting off their retreat by blocking the gap between the Seine at Paris and the Loire at Orleans. The high command now substituted a shorter encirclement designed to bring General Crerar's and General Patton's Armies together in the Argentan area south of Falaise, thus cutting off the German forces around Mortain.

The manner in which the new decision was reached and new orders issued can be pieced together from the accounts written by the senior commanders concerned, supplemented by certain available documents. On 8 August General Eisenhower was with General Bradley at the latter's headquarters.<sup>6</sup> According to the Supreme Commander, he assured Bradley that he could count upon an air transport service capable of delivering up to 2000 tons of supplies per day to any Allied force that might be temporarily cut off. This convinced Bradley that it was safe to retain only minimum forces at Mortain and concentrate upon driving his spearheads eastwards to carry out the envelopment which the situation promised. General Eisenhower writes: "I was in his [Bradley's] headquarters† when he called Montgomery on the telephone to explain his plan, and although the latter expressed a degree of concern about the Mortain position, he agreed that the prospective prize was great and left the entire responsibility for the matter in Bradley's hands."<sup>7</sup>

Bradley accordingly issued orders whose essence was found in the sentence, "12th Army Group will attack with least practicable delay in the direction of

\*A later figure for tanks destroyed is 84. The U.S. Ninth Air Force claimed 69, raising the total to 153. Operational research teams from the 21st Army Group and Second Tactical Air Force found in the area 78 armoured vehicles, of which 21 had been destroyed by air action, 29 by the U.S. ground forces, and 15 by unknown causes. Nine were abandoned intact and four destroyed by their crews.<sup>4</sup> It may be noted that the British and U.S. Tactical Air Force commanders had agreed that the R.A.F.'s rocket-firing Typhoons should take on the tanks while the Ninth Air Force warded off enemy aircraft and attacked transport moving to and from the battle zone.

†Eisenhower's diary gives a slightly different version: "On a visit to Bradley today I found that he had already acted on this idea and had secured Montgomery's agreement to a sharp change in direction toward the Northeast instead of continuing toward the East, as envisaged in M-517 [Montgomery's directive of 6 August]" (quoted in Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, 209).

Argentan to isolate and destroy the German forces on our front." In detail, General Patton's Third Army was ordered to "Advance on the axis Alencon-Sees to the line Sees . . . – Carrouges . . . prepared for further action against the enemy flank and rear in the direction of Argentan".<sup>8</sup> General Montgomery, according to Eisenhower, issued orders "requiring the whole force to conform to this plan", and then met with Bradley and General Dempsey to coordinate the details.<sup>9</sup> Montgomery confirms<sup>10</sup> that on 8 August he ordered the 12th U.S. Army Group to swing its right flank north on Alencon, while at the same time urging all possible speed on the first Canadian and Second British Armies in the movement towards Falaise. (He had a conference with Generals Crerar and Dempsey late in the afternoon of 8 August; but the nature of the orders he then gave is not recorded.)<sup>11</sup> The manner in which the new decisions were reached illustrates the statement previously made (above, page 204) that there was an element of the committee in the Allied system of command during this month of August.\*

On 9 August Patton's leading troops bridged the River Sarthe near Le Mans. They then pushed north towards Alencon, which was reached on the night of the 11th-12th.<sup>12</sup> The advance continued towards Argentan. On 11 August General Montgomery issued a new directive<sup>13</sup> which confirmed the orders issued less formally on the 8th. It emphasized the predicament of the enemy forces about Mortain and the importance of closing the narrowing gap in the Falaise—Alencon area through which they could be supplied or could escape. Montgomery wrote:

6. It is definitely beginning to look as if the main battle with the German forces in France is going to be fought between the Seine and the Loire. This will suit us very well.
7. The enemy force that will require to be watched carefully is the main concentration of armour now in the Mortain area; it is a formidable force, and must be well looked after.

The orders for the 12th Army Group were in the same terms as those issued by Bradley on the 8th, requiring the right flank to swing up from Alencon to the general line Sees—Carrouges. The Second Army was to "advance its left to Falaise" as "a first priority, and a vital one". The orders for the First Canadian Army ran:

10. Canadian Army will capture Falaise. This is a first priority, and it is vital it should be done quickly.
11. The Army will then operate with strong armoured and mobile forces to secure Argentan.
12. A secure front must be held between Falaise and the sea, facing eastwards.

While emphasizing the importance of making the "short hook" succeed, Montgomery still provided for executing the former plan in case the enemy should "escape us here". The 12th Army Group was to continue to plan for an airborne operation against the Chartres area, which might have to be carried out at very short notice.

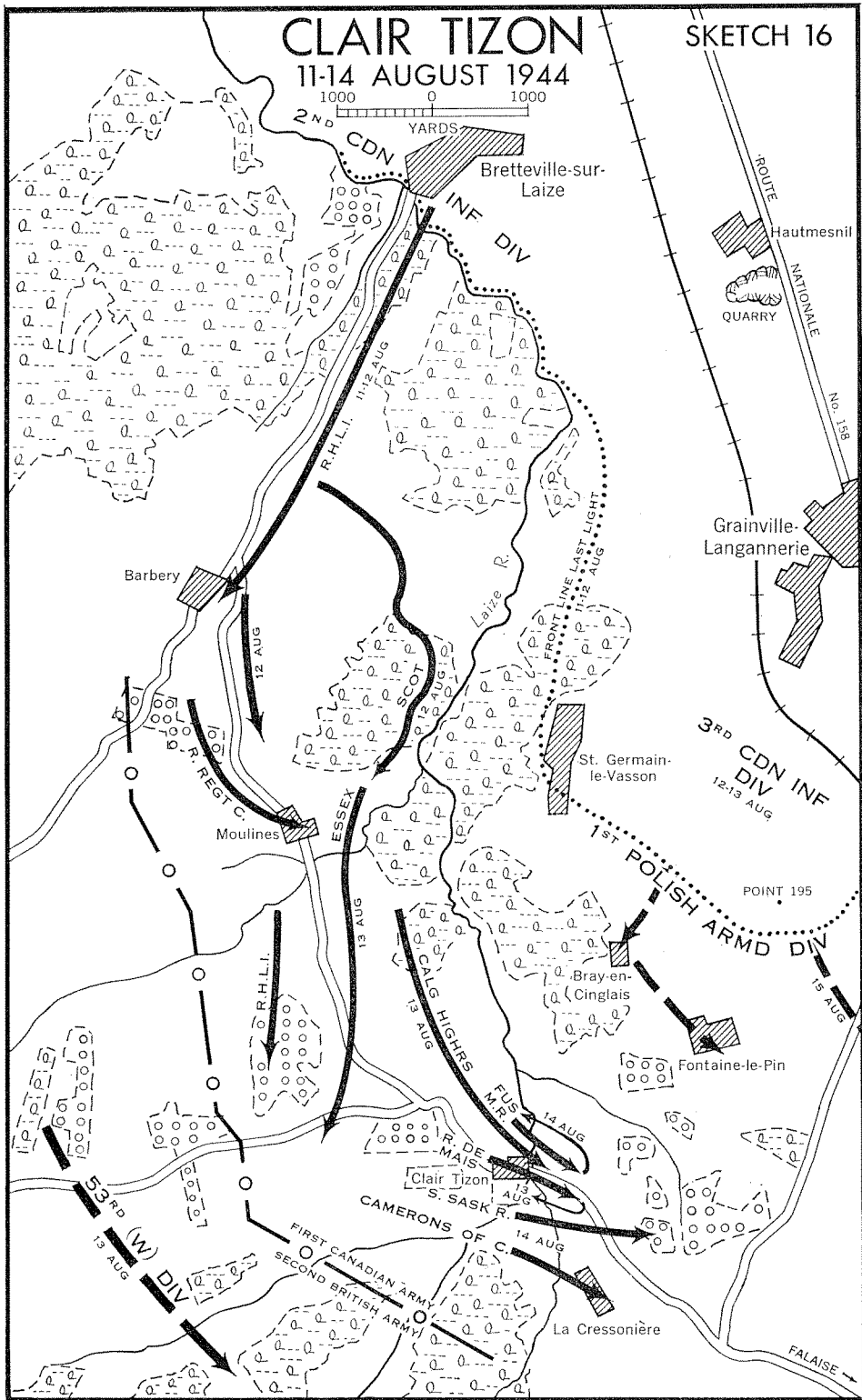
\*In *Normandy to the Baltic* General Montgomery does not mention any consultation with Bradley before these orders were issued. The episode is not referred to in his *Memoirs*. General Bradley in his book does not mention consulting either Eisenhower or Montgomery. But General Eisenhower's categorical accounts, quoted above, seem to be decisive unless some new evidence is produced

# CLAIR TIZON

11-14 AUGUST 1944

SKETCH 16

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2ND YARDS



## Preparations for Operation "Tractable"

Until 10 August the plan to which Headquarters First Canadian Army was working was that after capturing Falaise the Army would move east directed on Rouen and the Seine. That afternoon, however, General Montgomery instructed General Crerar to "swing to the east around Falaise and then south towards Argentan, at which point it is proposed to link up with the Third U.S. Army". During 11 and 12 August plans took shape for another great "set-piece" attack, with the heaviest scale of support, to break through towards Falaise. This operation, at first called "Tallulah", was redesignated "Tractable" on 13 August.<sup>14</sup>

While the planning and preparation were in progress, the 2nd Canadian Division was engaged in a subsidiary operation on First Canadian Army's western wing, undoubtedly intended to threaten the enemy's positions astride the Falaise road by a flank movement and thereby lead him to weaken them before our main operation went in. On 11 August, as already noted (above, page 231), General Simonds directed General Foulkes to undertake what was called a "reconnaissance in force"<sup>15</sup> southward from Bretteville-sur-Laize with one brigade, and the movement began that night. On the morning of the 12th, however, General Foulkes was told that his advance was to be, for the moment, the Corps' main effort, and he was given the support of two Army Groups Royal Artillery and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade less one regiment. The whole 2nd Division was now committed to the operation.<sup>16</sup>

The advance was led by the 4th Infantry Brigade with the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment and the 27th Armoured Regiment under command. Barbery was reached during the night 11-12 August and the following morning the forward troops were on the high ground overlooking Moulines. These advances had cost some casualties, and more were suffered before The Royal Regiment of Canada captured Moulines, which was accomplished by last light on the 12th. Further progress was made next day; the 5th Brigade passed through the 4th, and The Calgary Highlanders, supported by artillery, established a small bridgehead on the east bank of the Laize at Clair Tizon. This was a decided threat to the main German position on the Falaise road; but when Le Regiment de Maisonneuve attempted to expand it on the evening of 13 August it was driven back with heavy loss by the Germans holding the commanding heights east of the river.<sup>17</sup>

The 2nd Canadian Corps produced no written orders for Operation "Tractable". General Simonds had a conference with his divisional commanders on 12 August and on the 13th held his orders group for the operation; map-traces were issued confirming and illustrating the instructions then given.<sup>18</sup> After the group the Corps Commander spoke to the commanders of all armoured units in the Corps, demanding, in effect, more drive than had been shown in the recent operations:

He stressed the necessity for pushing armour to the very limits of its endurance and that any thought of the armour requiring infantry protection for harbouring at night or not being able to move by night was to be dismissed immediately. The tremendous importance of the operations now being undertaken could not be overlooked and although there would probably be cases of the mis-employment of armour this was to be no excuse for non-success.<sup>19</sup>

General Crerar issued on 13 August a directive to his Corps Commanders<sup>20</sup> which was mainly limited to advising them of adjustments made since General Montgomery's order of two days before. It was now intended that Second British rather than First Canadian Army would actually capture the town of Falaise, assisted by an adjustment of the inter-army boundary which would give the Second Army the road from Clair Tizon to Falaise. The object of "Tractable" was defined as to dominate Falaise "in order that no enemy may escape by the roads which pass through, or near, it". After the 2nd Canadian Corps had established itself on the high ground north and east of Falaise, and when the Second Army's operations to capture the town were well advanced, the 2nd Corps would exploit south-eastwards and capture or dominate Trun.

Faced with a problem basically the same as that which had confronted him in planning "Totalize", General Simonds decided to apply basically the same technique; but there were significant variations. Again the might of the strategic bomber forces was to be invoked in support of the attack. Again the armoured personnel carrier would be brought into use, and the main attack would be delivered by massed armoured columns including infantry carried in these vehicles. Again there would be no preliminary bombardment, for this would deprive us of any possibility of surprise. But this attack, unlike that a week earlier, was to be delivered in daylight. The protection from enemy fire which the night had given our columns in "Totalize" was to be provided in "Tractable" by smokescreens laid by the artillery along the front and flanks of the advance.

This heavy, highly-concentrated blow on a narrow front was to fall upon the German positions north of the Laison valley and east of the Falaise Road. It was to be struck by two columns, each comprising an armoured brigade followed by two infantry brigades. The forward infantry brigade would be borne in armoured carriers, the rearward one would march. The armoured brigades were to push straight across the Laison and on southwards to the high ground dominating Falaise. The infantry brigades carried in "Kangaroos" would have the task of mopping up the Laison valley; the marching brigades, on the other hand, would be in readiness to pass through and hold the ground to the southward seized by the tanks. The right or westward column consisted of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division less the 8th Infantry Brigade, but with the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade under command. The latter brigade was now commanded by Brigadier J. F. Bingham, Brigadier Wyman having been wounded on 8 August. The leftward column was the 4th Canadian Armoured Division plus the 8th Infantry Brigade.<sup>21</sup>

Preparing this attack was a very large task, particularly as it involved moving nearly every fighting formation in the 2nd Canadian Corps during the 24 hours preceding H Hour. On 12 August Simonds reported to Army Headquarters that he expected H Hour to be noon on the 14th; although Corps would be "pressed for time", it would be possible to put the operation in that day.<sup>22</sup> This forecast proved accurate.

With the "Totalize" precedent to help, the assistance of the R.A.F. Bomber Command was obtained without any of the uncertainties that had accompanied



the earlier operation.\* Sir Arthur Harris had said, "Don't be shy of asking", and the Canadians weren't. On 13 August Army Headquarters issued an instruction covering the air plan.<sup>24</sup> Immediately before H Hour medium bombers of No. 2 Group, 2nd Tactical Air Force, guided by red smoke fired by the artillery, would go for the German gun, mortar and tank positions in and around the Laison valley on the front of attack. Two hours after the advance began the heavies of Bomber Command would assail the positions astride the Falaise Road about Potigny and Quesnay Wood, which the ground attack was to bypass. This bombing was intended "to destroy or neutralize enemy guns, harbours, and defended localities on our right flank and to prevent any enemy movement from this area to the area of the attack".<sup>25</sup> The artillery would lay smoke screens on the flanks of the ground attack in Phase I, as already described, in addition to a barrage in front combining smoke shell and high explosive. Known enemy gun-positions would be bombarded from five minutes before H Hour, and the artillery regiments would be prepared to move forward to support the advance as it proceeded.<sup>26</sup>

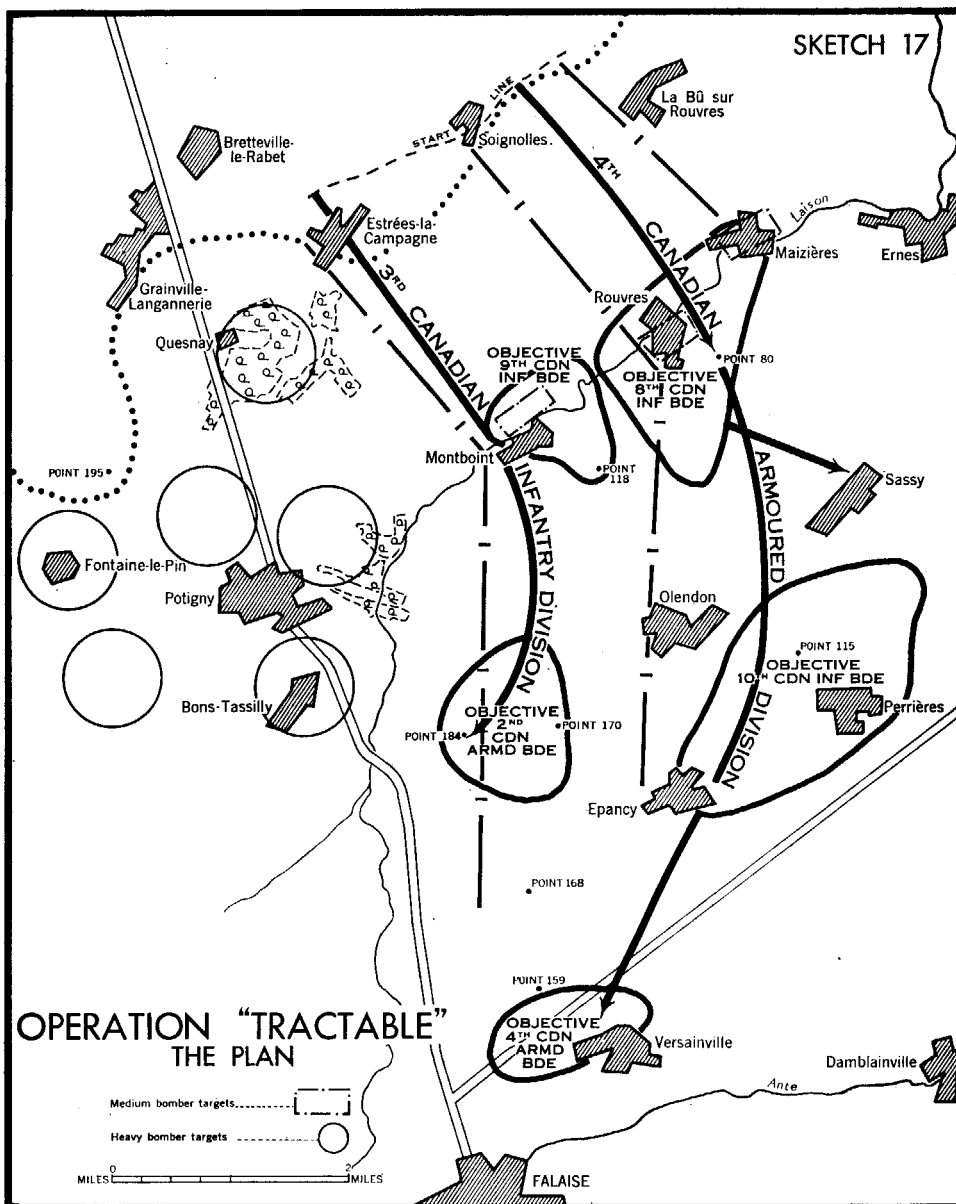
Although we did not know it until afterwards, a serious misfortune befell us before the attack. On the evening of 13 August an officer of the 2nd Canadian Division's 8th Reconnaissance Regiment, travelling in a scout car, lost his way and drove into the enemy's lines. He was killed and his driver taken prisoner. On the officer's body (we later learned from a prisoner) the Germans found a copy of a 2nd Division paper<sup>27</sup> containing the gist of General Simonds' orders as issued that day. It gave them full information concerning our plan of attack, and enabled them to make quick adjustments to deal with it. These included, apparently, disposing an additional anti-tank battery above the Laison on our line of advance. General Simonds expressed the opinion that these adjustments "undoubtedly resulted in casualties to our troops the following day, which otherwise would not have occurred, and delayed the capture of Falaise for over twenty-four hours".<sup>28</sup>

It is worth noting that during training every opportunity had been taken to warn officers against exposing themselves to precisely this sort of mischance. After Exercise "Bumper", the great manoeuvres held in the United Kingdom in the autumn of 1941, the Chief Umpire (who incidentally was Lieut.-General B. L. Montgomery) emphasized the dire results of a similar incident which had happened during the exercise, and the unfortunate British officer involved was one of the few individuals mentioned by name in his critique.<sup>29</sup>

### The Action of the Laison

The final regrouping for "Tractable" went forward during the night of 13th-14th August. The Polish Armoured Division relieved the 3rd Canadian

\*Army Headquarters, however, was decidedly dissatisfied at this time with the arrangements in effect for obtaining air support within the theatre, particularly when requests involved resources beyond those of the tactical group immediately supporting the Army. Brigadier Mann reported to General Crerar that existing practice "in effect results in the Senior Air Staff Officer 83 Group RAF becoming the adjudicator of the military necessity or desirability of a particular attack upon a particular target", no matter how strongly or urgently the Army had put the case; he particularly complained of the delays involved.<sup>23</sup>



Infantry Division, which moved into position for its battle task.<sup>30</sup> Special armour from the 79th Armoured Division arrived. During the morning of the 14th the columns formed up just over the horizon from the view of the enemy holding the positions north of the Laison.

The 3rd Division column, on the right, was headed by the tanks of the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, with British Flails in front. Then came the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment, then the 9th Infantry Brigade in armoured carriers,

The 7th Infantry Brigade on foot brought up the rear. Farther east the 4th Canadian Armoured Division was similarly formed up, with the 4th Armoured Brigade in front. In this case the 8th Infantry Brigade was the formation using the armoured carriers, and the 10th Infantry Brigade the one in rear. The 18th Canadian Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons) protected the Corps' left flank. The forming-up positions were on the road running from Bretteville-le-Rabet to St. Sylvain, and the start-line, to be crossed at H Hour, was a line running slightly north of Estrees-la-Campagne and through Soignolles.<sup>31</sup> In the midst of the final preparations, a message from General Crerar<sup>32</sup> to all commanders and commanding officers reminded the Army of the extreme importance of the present juncture and the present opportunity:

Hit him first, hit him hard and keep on hitting him. We can contribute in major degree to speedy Allied victory by our action today.

The 14th of August was a beautiful summer day. Those who saw it were to remember long the sight of the great columns of armour going forward "through fields of waving golden grain".<sup>33</sup> At 11:37 a.m. the artillery began to fire the marker shells for the benefit of the medium bombers; at 11:55 it commenced to lay the tremendous smoke-screens intended to shield our columns from enemy observation.<sup>34</sup> At 11:40 the medium bombers began bombing the enemy positions, hitting Montboint, Rouvres and Maizieres in that order. Sweeping in over the waiting tanks, they attacked the valley for a noisy quarter of an hour. Forty-five Mitchells and 28 Bostons actually bombed.<sup>35</sup> At 11:42 wireless silence was broken by the command "Move now"; and the armoured brigades began to roll towards the start line.<sup>36</sup>

The artillery smoke-screen was designed to be "impenetrable" on the flanks and of the density of thick mist on the front.<sup>37</sup> As soon as the armour moved, the smoke-clouds were supplemented by dust—"dust like I've never seen before!" was one unit commander's phrase.<sup>38</sup> The two things together made it extremely difficult for the drivers to keep direction, and there was little they could do except press on "into the sun".<sup>39</sup> The German gunners, fully alert and knowing in advance precisely the frontage on which we were going to attack, took their toll in spite of the smoke cover. One of their victims was the commander of the 4th Armoured Brigade, Brigadier E. L. Booth, who was mortally wounded when his tank was hit.\* There were other casualties to the brigade headquarters, and the resulting disorganization had an adverse effect on the 4th Division's subsequent operations.<sup>41</sup>

The armoured carriers bearing the infantry again showed themselves extremely valuable, boring straight through into the valley of the Laison where the riflemen jumped down and set to work clearing out the enemy. In general, the infantry task here was not formidable; large numbers of Germans surrendered after slight resistance or none. At one point, the Chateau at Montboint, a company of The

\*Lt.-Col. M. J. Scott of the Governor General's Foot Guards took over, evidently after some delay. When a wound forced Scott into hospital on 15 August, Lt.-Col. W. W. Halpenny of the Canadian Grenadier Guards succeeded him. Brigadier R. W. Moncel took command of the brigade on 19 August.<sup>40</sup> General Kitching states that he asked for Moncel (who had been previously earmarked as a replacement in case of the brigade commander becoming a casualty) as goon as Booth's death was reported.

Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders—who arrived in the valley before our tanks—were held up by machine-gun posts; these were rapidly dealt with with the aid of a new and terrible weapon here first used by Canadians, the "Wasp"—a flame—thrower mounted on a carrier. A Tiger tank (apparently one of two which were causing trouble hereabouts) was knocked out by an S.D. and G. 6-pounder detachment.<sup>42</sup>

The Laison valley, deep-cut and wooded, is a rather striking feature; but the "river" itself is little more than a ditch, six feet or so wide and a couple of feet deep.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, it proved itself a more considerable tank obstacle than had been expected. The provision made for crossings was "fascines", great bundles of brushwood carried by engineer assault vehicles. These were effective when once in place, but it was some time before the AVREs could reach the crossing-places, and meanwhile there was congestion and confusion along the little stream. Some tanks bogged down in attempting to ford it; other groups managed to improvise crossings from rubble and the remains of destroyed bridges. On the 3rd Division front on the right most of the tanks of two squadrons of the 1st Hussars suffered the former fate; the reserve squadron discovered a crossing at Rouvres, found itself leading the regiment's advance and pushed on to occupy the high ground west of Olendon.<sup>44</sup> The light vehicles of the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars) seem to have been first across the river, and this unit's squadrons advanced toward the high ground with a view to occupying it pending the arrival of heavier armour.<sup>45</sup>

On the 4th Division front, some tanks, seeking a crossing, got as far east as Ernes, where they found a practicable one; others waited until crossings were completed at Rouvres and Maizieres.<sup>46</sup> According to the Canadian Grenadier Guards' diarist, "the whole brigade was split up into small groups, each group containing representatives of all the units". Late in the afternoon the armoured advance on this front was proceeding beyond the Laison. Shortly before midnight the armoured regiments of the 4th Armoured Brigade were disposed about Olendon (which the 10th Infantry Brigade had captured in the evening) with the 21st Armoured Regiment, the farthest forward, immediately south of the village. The main body of the 10th Brigade was in the same area, and The Algonquin Regiment was about to carry the advance on towards Epancy.<sup>47</sup> In the 3rd Division's sector, the 2nd Armoured Brigade were on the north end of the high ridge between the Laison and Olendon, and the 7th Infantry Brigade were reinforcing them. The 8th Brigade, having cleared its portion of the valley, was now back under the 3rd Division, and the North Shore Regiment had occupied Sassy.<sup>48</sup>

The assault had been a complete success; the 4th Division reported that by 11:00 p.m. it had captured prisoners numbering 15 officers and 545 other ranks. But it also reported that progress south of the river was slow.<sup>49</sup> It seems evident that this was due not so much to enemy opposition as to the degree of disorganization, all across the front of attack, which resulted from the losses of direction during the advance to the Laison and the confusion in the valley while our units sought for crossings.



In the early morning of the 14th the 2nd Canadian Division, on the right of the Corps front, had attacked successfully to enlarge its Clair Tizon bridgehead. During the afternoon it beat off three counter-attacks delivered at La Cressonniere\* by troops identified as belonging to the 12th S.S. Panzer Division.<sup>50</sup> The Polish Armoured Division, now operating on this same flank west of the Falaise Road and having no major role in the day's offensive except to exploit the Bomber Command attack,<sup>51</sup> got patrols into Bray-en-Cinglais, north of Clair Tizon, but does not seem to have held the place.

The day's success had been marred by another incident, strikingly similar to that of 8 August, in which our troops were bombed by our own supporting aircraft. On the 8th the errant bombers had belonged to the U.S. Eighth Air Force. This time they were aircraft of the R.A.F. Bomber Command; and of the 77 planes that bombed short 44, by ill hap, belonged to No. 6 (R.C.A.F.) Bomber Group.<sup>52</sup>

As we have seen, beginning at 2:00 p.m. Bomber Command was to strike at six targets in the area Quesnay—Fontaine-le-Pin—Bons-Tassilly. The damage done the enemy may have been somewhat reduced by the warning given by the captured document above referred to. All told, 417 Lancasters, 352 Halifaxes and 42 Mosquitoes of Bomber Command took part and 3723 tons of bombs were dropped. Two aircraft were lost, one of them, it appears, unfortunately by our own anti-aircraft fire.<sup>53</sup>

The short bombing was chiefly in the area of St. Aignan and about the great quarry at Hautmesnil on the Falaise Road.<sup>54</sup> One senior R.A.F. officer experienced its effects, for Air Marshal Coningham was in General Simonds' armoured car near Hautmesnil at the time.<sup>55</sup> Though it is impossible to state precisely how many casualties it caused, it seems that the loss was somewhat heavier than that in the earlier incident (above, page 223). A return prepared at Headquarters First Canadian Army on 15 August showed totals of 65 killed, 241 wounded and 91 then missing. Many of the missing were certainly killed. Canadian artillery regiments east of Hautmesnil suffered heavily, the 12th Field Regiment R.C.A. having (as finally established) 21 killed or died of wounds and 46 wounded. The Royal Regiment of Canada was badly hit, its casualties this day being six killed and 34 wounded. The Poles again had serious losses, reporting 42 killed and 51 missing as of 15 August.<sup>56</sup>

The incident was fully investigated on the orders of Air Chief Marshal Harris. The technical reasons which led to it need not be explored here, but Bomber Command considered that a blameworthy aspect was the failure of the bomber crews to carry out orders which required them to make carefully timed runs from the moment of crossing the coast. This precaution would have prevented the errors. Disciplinary action was taken against individuals whose responsibility could be established. Two Pathfinder Force crews were re-posted to ordinary

\*The credit goes chiefly to The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, even though their war diary does not mention these attacks and dates the bombing attack accompanying "Tractable" as 15 August.

crew duties, squadron and flight commanders personally involved relinquished their commands and acting ranks and were re-posted to ordinary crew duty, and all crews implicated were "starred" so as not to be employed upon duties within 30 miles forward of the bomb line until reassessed after further experience.<sup>57</sup>

One particularly unfortunate aspect of the bombing was not the fault of the aircrews. Under orders issued by SHAEF,<sup>58</sup> one of the recognition signals to be used by Allied troops for identification by our own air forces was yellow smoke or flares. This was duly shown by our troops on 14 August. Unhappily, neither SHAEF nor Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Air Force had advised the R.A.F. Bomber Command of this procedure.\* Even worse, the target indicators used by Bomber Command on 14 August were of a yellow colour similar to the army recognition signals. Thus the yellow smoke burned by the units under attack had the reverse effect to that for which it was intended, merely attracting more bombs.<sup>59</sup> The Royal Regiment recorded that it was out of yellow smoke, took steps to get a supply when bombing began nearby, displayed it, and was immediately bombed.

Sir Arthur Harris complained, as well he might, of the failure to inform his Command in this matter. He asserted indeed that his Senior Air Staff Officer, who had arranged the operation with First Canadian Army, "had particularly sought information on the subject of possibly confusing pyrotechnics and been assured that none would be used".<sup>60</sup> It seems evident that it simply never occurred to General Crerar's staff that Bomber Command would not be fully conversant with a procedure laid down by SHAEF long before D Day and used universally throughout the campaign so far; and, most unfortunately, nobody thought of mentioning yellow smoke in the discussions with Harris's representative. It was certainly not the responsibility of an army headquarters to inform Bomber Command of such a matter, and it was undoubtedly assumed that higher authority had done it long before.

During the time when our troops were being bombed an attempt was made by the pilots of small Auster aircraft of Air Observation Post squadrons to warn the bombers off by going aloft and firing red Verey lights. Observers at Headquarters 4th Division felt sure that one such aircraft "was responsible for preventing the bombers from dropping more bombs on our own troops",<sup>61</sup> and there are other similar reports. Air Chief Marshal Harris, however, commented that this procedure was "likely to and did in fact, give a misleading imitation of target indicators". With the best intentions, he said, these Austers "succeeded only in making confusion worse confounded".<sup>62</sup>

There are many reports to indicate that this incident, following the similar one six days earlier, had momentarily a severely depressing effect on the morale of the units and formations that suffered.<sup>63</sup> Men naturally overlooked the fact that the vast majority of the bombs had gone down precisely where they were intended to. In his final communication to Harris about the affair, General Crerar expressed the opinion that the Bomber Command attack "contributed greatly to the great

\*This may have been the result of the strategic bomber forces coming under SHAEF at such a relatively late date (above, page 23).

success" of the day's operation, and said that he remained a very strong advocate of the use of heavy bombers in closely integrated support of the army when the latter was faced by strong defences. The letter ended with "sincere thanks for your co-operation in the past, and . . . great confidence in such mutual efforts as may be ours in the future".<sup>64</sup>

### The Drive Continues Towards Falaise

During 14 August General Montgomery again somewhat modified his instructions to General Crerar, who was now instructed that he, and not General Dempsey, was to take Falaise. This was to be done with the least possible delay, but was not to interfere with the larger and more important task of driving south-east to capture Trun and link up with General Patton's forces coming up from the south.<sup>65</sup> The Americans were now just south of Argentan, only some 15 miles south-east of Falaise. At this point their advance had been stayed, though not by the enemy. This incident requires some analysis.

The "boundary" between the 12th and the 21st Army Groups ran approximately eight miles south of Argentan. It had been established by a message from Headquarters 21st Army Group sent at 11:00 p.m. on 5 August,<sup>66</sup> well before the German counter-offensive was launched. On the evening of 12 August troops of the 15th U.S. Corps of General Patton's Third Army reached this boundary and in fact crossed it, coming within four kilometres of Argentan. Uncertain whether or not to push on farther with a view to closing the gap through which the Germans were now retiring, Major-General Wade H. Haislip, commanding the 15th Corps, told his divisions not to advance beyond Argentan and sought guidance from Patton. Shortly after midnight of the 12th-13th Patton ordered him to capture Argentan, "push on slowly in the direction of Falaise" and on reaching it "continue to push on slowly until you contact our Allies". Early in the afternoon of the 13th, however, Patton countermanded this very sensible order and instructed Haislip to halt in the vicinity of Argentan and assemble his units in preparation for further operations.<sup>67</sup> (According to the version that reached First Canadian Army, the phrase was operations "north, north-east or east".)<sup>68</sup>

It has been stated<sup>69</sup> that General Montgomery originated the countermanding order, but this was not the case. The responsibility for the decision not to cross the boundary rests with General Bradley, who has fully and frankly accepted it. The matter was never referred to Montgomery. Bradley has explained that he doubted Patton's ability to block the Gap, through which the great German force was "now stampeding to escape the trap". (The main movement however had not actually begun at this time.) But he also feared the consequence of "a head-on meeting between two converging Armies" with, perhaps, "a disastrous error in recognition".<sup>70</sup> Although Montgomery was not consulted, the Supreme Commander was. General Eisenhower himself has written, "I was in Bradley's headquarters when messages began to arrive from commanders of the advancing American columns, complaining that the limits placed upon them by their orders were allowing Germans to escape. I completely supported Bradley in his decision



that it was necessary to obey orders, prescribing the boundary between the army groups, exactly as written; otherwise a calamitous battle between friends could have resulted."<sup>71</sup> As a result of this, the formations of the 15th U.S. Corps remained relatively quiescent from the 13th through the 16th of August, holding road-blocks south and south-east of Argentan.<sup>72</sup>

General Patton raged against this decision at the time. We need not lose our tempers over his reported "crack" to Bradley, "Let me go on to Falaise and we'll drive the British back into the sea for another Dunkirk."<sup>73</sup> Patton no doubt had his failings, but he had the instincts of a great battlefield commander, and he knew an opportunity when he saw one. The situation south of Falaise on 13 August presented one of the greatest opportunities of the war. First Canadian Army failed to take full advantage of it on its side of the Gap; Bradley and Eisenhower refused to take full advantage of it on theirs. It is true that Patton might not have succeeded in closing the Gap; but the stakes were so high that it was well worth trying. It is true that an advance beyond the boundary might have resulted in fatal incidents between two Allied armies; but these would have been much more than compensated for by the damage which closing the Gap would have done the enemy. Ultimately the boundary had to be disregarded (below, page 251). It would have been good sense to disregard it on 13 August.

General Patton, in his posthumous book, said that the order forbidding him to advance was attributed to the fact that "the British had sown the area with a large number of time bombs".<sup>74</sup> Delayed-action bombs had in fact been dropped on the Argentan—Falaise road about 8:00 p.m. on 12 August, the maximum delay being 12 hours. These bombs were dropped by the U.S. Ninth Air Force, as were others put down on the 13th with a six-hour delay. None of them would have interfered with a northward drive by Patton's army.<sup>75</sup>

Turning to the German side, we find that by 9 August the Commander-in-Chief West had completely accepted the fact that the offensive at Mortain had failed: "Further successes are no longer to be expected from this attack group."<sup>76</sup> Hitler, however, disagreed. The attack, he said, had been launched prematurely; it was now to be resumed in the area of Domfront. General Eberbach was placed in charge of it; Sepp Dietrich was to command Fifth Panzer Army\* in his absence.<sup>77</sup>

On 11 August Field-Marshal von Kluge reported that his army commanders concurred in his view that the Domfront attack was no longer practicable. The situation was deteriorating from hour to hour; the only immediate action possible was an attack on Patton's army in the Alençon area. Hitler at once agreed that the 15th U.S. Corps thereabouts was to be "destroyed by concentric attack". In the meantime, however, strong resistance was to continue at Falaise and Mortain, and the intention of "carrying out attack towards the West" was to be maintained.<sup>78</sup> The German armoured formations which had lain about Mortain since 7 August now begun to move eastward. On 13 August von Kluge made a pessimistic report which resulted in Hitler reiterating his orders for the attack on the 15th Corps.<sup>79</sup>

\*On 27 July Panzer Group West had been given army status, and thereafter usually called itself "Panzer Army West". On 8 August it was officially redesignated Fifth Panzer Army.

Such an offensive, however, was now out of the question, and on the night of the 14th-15th. von Kluge reported that the Fuhrer's project simply could not be carried out. The only remaining possibility, it seemed, was to seek to break out of the narrowing pocket towards the north-east.<sup>80</sup>

On the Fifth Panzer Army front north of Falaise these days had seen desperate attempts to collect reinforcements to buttress the crumbling line. The German strength, small in the beginning, was steadily sapped by casualties. These were particularly heavy on 8 August. That evening Eberbach, reporting to von Kluge by telephone,<sup>81</sup> spoke of the "renewed Allied bombings" (those of the afternoon), which "crushed the 12th S.S. Panzer Division so that only individual tanks came back". Eberbach went on:

1 SS Pz Corps has built up a battle line with anti-tank and flak guns [see above, page 2241, which has held so far. Whether this line will hold out until tomorrow if the enemy attacks more energetically is questionable. Actually the new Infantry Division [the 89th] are 50% knocked out. I shall be lucky if by tonight I am able to round up 20 tanks, including Tigers.

The same evening Fifth Panzer Army ordered the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps (on the Army's left flank north of Flers) to send to the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps any Mark IV and Mark V tanks still remaining with the 9th S.S. Panzer Division. Soon it was reported that a number of tanks, and in addition the anti-aircraft battalion and anti-tank battalion of the 85th Division, which had been under the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps, were on the way. Later, however, word came that these tanks had been "built into the main line of resistance" and therefore in place of them the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps was sending its Tiger battalion, present strength 13 tanks.<sup>82</sup> This unit arrived on the 9th. But the Panther battalion of the 9th Panzer Division, which had also been promised, was sent instead to the Seventh Army.<sup>83</sup> On the evening of 9 August, Fifth Panzer Army reported that the tank strength of the 1st Panzer Corps—presumably including the newly arrived Tigers—was down to 35 (15 Mark IVs, five Panthers and 15 Tigers).<sup>\*</sup> By tomorrow, it said, it would be impossible to prevent a break-through to Falaise.<sup>84</sup>

The Canadian blow down the Falaise Road alarmed the Commander-in-Chief West so much on 8 August that it considerably affected his view of the situation at Mortain and contributed to leading him to defer ordering further action there (though it must be said that he probably considered such action hopeless anyway). At 6:45 p.m. he said to the commander of the Seventh Army,<sup>85</sup>

... there is an enemy penetration at Caen such as there has never been before. I come to the following conclusion: We must make preparations tomorrow for the reorganization of the attack. There will be no continuation of the attack tomorrow, but we will prepare to attack on the day following.

But by 3:20 p.m. on the 9th, when the Canadian thrust had been blunted by the disaster to the British Columbia Regiment near Estrees (above, pages 226-8), von Kluge was more confident. After a conversation with the Supreme Command he

<sup>\*</sup>The 4th Canadian Armoured Division alone still had a tank strength of 234 on the evening of 10 August. The strength of the 2nd Canadian Corps as a whole for this date cannot be found, but it must have been in the vicinity of 700 tanks.

told the Seventh Army's Chief of Staff,<sup>86</sup> "I have proposed that we hold to the plan for attack, inasmuch as the situation south of Caen is restabilized and has not had the effect feared. The attack must now be prepared and carried out according to plan, not rashly and hastily."

The units of the 85th Infantry Division continued to arrive in the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps area, and on 11 August this division took over the 12th S.S. Panzer Division's front, and part of the 89th Division's. It now held the right sector of the Corps front, along the Laison valley from Ernes to just east of the Falaise Road. Its main line of resistance was on the high ground immediately north of the Laison.<sup>87</sup> The much-reduced 89th Division continued to hold the centre sector, and the left portion of the Corps front was still confided to the 271st Infantry Division. The 12th S.S., it would seem, was no longer responsible for a specific sector, but was in reserve in rear ready to act at any threatened point. Part of it remained in the 89th Division's sector.<sup>88</sup> There is evidence that it was now acting also as "battle police" to hold the *Wehrmacht* infantry divisions in line.<sup>89</sup> There had been a slight increase in its tank strength, which on 10 August was up to 18 Mark IVs, nine Panthers, 17 Tigers and some others.<sup>90</sup>

In these circumstances, it was the 85th Infantry Division, supported and "encouraged" by the 12th S.S., that took the main brunt of our attack in Operation "Tractable". Some 1010 prisoners were taken from this division in the first phase of the operation.\* However, an important part of its infantry strength, the 85th Division Fusilier Battalion, had been stationed south of the Laison (though apparently with outposts north of it) on its right; and the divisional artillery had been sited south of the river "so as to destroy any tank attacks over the high ground north-west of the Laison sector by massed artillery fire over open sights".<sup>92</sup> These elements, at least, therefore, may not have been wholly overrun in the first rush; although the Fusilier Battalion lost as many as 171 prisoners, and the divisional artillery regiment 120, on 14 August.<sup>93</sup> The division had some fight left in it; and the remnant of the 12th S.S. was still showing determination—though by 15 August it was down to 15 tanks.<sup>94</sup> But it was the 88-mm. guns that were to give us most trouble in the next phase.

On the morning of the 15th our advance towards Falaise was resumed. The enemy had strong ground to aid him in delaying it, the dominant feature being the long ridge running directly north from Falaise just east of the main road. The 4th Armoured Brigade pushed west of Epancy, leaving The Lake Superior Regiment and a squadron of the Foot Guards to capture the village itself, in cooperation with The Algonquin Regiment which was to assault from the north. Epancy was fiercely defended; the Algonquins had a long hard fight before the place was finally made good.<sup>95</sup> The 4th Armoured Brigade's day, as reflected in the records, was marked by confusion and lack of coordination. Late in the afternoon two armoured regiments, the Canadian Grenadier Guards and the British

\*This is the number reported as having been received at the Corps cage and passed through the Army cage between 6:00 p.m. on 14 August and the same hour the following day. The grand total of prisoners on the Army front for this period was 1299.<sup>91</sup>

Columbia Regiment (the latter now composed mainly of reinforcement tanks and crews) reached, or were reported to have reached, Point 159, the southern butt of the ridge, immediately above Versainville; but here they ran into heavy anti-tank fire and were driven back.<sup>96</sup> The 4th Division diarist observed, ". . . it appeared that the enemy had once again established an anti-tank screen on the southern slopes of the high ground which the Armoured Brigade was unable to penetrate".<sup>97</sup> The brigade, it will be remembered, was still under interim command.

On the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division front to the west, there was fierce fighting in the afternoon. On the ridge immediately east of the Falaise Road the 1st Battalion Canadian Scottish Regiment, fighting under command of the 2nd Armoured Brigade, and supported by the 1st Hussars, met and beat down tenacious opposition on Point 168. The Hussars, as the result of an inopportune enemy counter-attack, had to go in with their ammunition "unreplenished and very low",<sup>98</sup> and they encountered nasty anti-tank fire. Unfortunately also the range in the beginning is reported to have been too long for artillery support, and when the field guns did come into action some shells dropped among our own troops. It was a grim affair. The Scottish went into the attack "tired, hungry and thirsty". Few prisoners were taken, the enemy, partly at least reported to be S.S. men, "preferring to die rather than give in".<sup>99</sup> The Germans seem to have had most of their surviving tanks in this area. "The infantry pushed forward to their objective, however, and the tanks were able to support them onto it but the heavy anti-tank fire made it impossible for the tanks to get onto the objective themselves."<sup>100</sup> C.S.M. J. S. Grimmond won the D.C.M. by leading his company headquarters party against two enemy tanks and a group of infantry and routing them. This was one of those fights where the job had to be done mainly by the men on foot, and as was too usual they paid a heavy price. The battalion's casualties, the heaviest it had yet suffered on a single day, were 37 killed or died of wounds and 93 wounded.<sup>101</sup> But late afternoon found the companies fully dug in on the objective, and all counter-attacks were repelled.<sup>102</sup> The enemy, however, had not entirely withdrawn from the area; in an evening attack on the village of Soulangy below the ridge the 2nd Armoured Brigade lost 10 tanks, and The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, after getting into the village, were forced out of it.<sup>103</sup>

During the morning the Polish Armoured Division had cleared the area about Potigny; it then handed it over to the 2nd Canadian Division and began to move eastward towards the River Dives. The 2nd Division itself found that, after his unsuccessful counter-attacks on the 14th, the enemy had retired on its front. The 4th Infantry Brigade, moving on Falaise from the west with the Essex Scottish leading, met no opposition and by nightfall was only a mile or so from the edge of the town.<sup>104</sup>

In accordance with General Montgomery's intentions (above, page 245), General Crerar on 15 August instructed General Simonds that as soon as Falaise had been taken and handed over to a Canadian infantry division, he would direct his two armoured divisions on Trun. The following day Simonds issued orders that the 2nd Division would clear Falaise and reorganize, while the two armoured divisions would be directed eastward on Trun.<sup>105</sup> The 4th Armoured Division,

which had been planning another attack on the high ground north of Falaise, was told on the morning of the 16th to move instead to seize a crossing over the Ante River in the Damblainville area and advance along the axis of the main highway running south-east to Trun to close the gap between the First Canadian and Third United States Armies.<sup>106</sup> In the meantime, the Poles, advancing farther north, were to cross the Dives at Jort (which they had reached on the 15th) and also move south-east, on a line parallel to the 4th Division's.<sup>107</sup> At 3:30 p.m. Montgomery spoke to Crerar and told him that a German force containing elements of five panzer divisions was reported to be counter-attacking the American salient stretching north to Argentan. The Commander-in-Chief appreciated that when the enemy discovered that his escape route was blocked by the American line between Argentan and Carrouges, he would try to force his way out through the gap remaining between Argentan and Falaise. The capture of Trun, in the middle of the gap, was thus vital. This requirement had been anticipated in essentials by General Simonds' earlier orders, but he now ordered the 4th Division to accelerate its move.<sup>108</sup> By midnight its leading troops were on the high ground immediately north of Damblainville. Meanwhile the 3rd Division had pushed south from Point 168 and the 7th Brigade occupied the high ground about Point 159.<sup>109</sup>

The task of taking the tragic ruins\* of Falaise thus fell to the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. Brigadier Young was ordered to clear the town with the 6th Brigade, and attacked at 3:00 p.m. with The South Saskatchewan Regiment on the left and The Cameron Highlanders of Canada on the right, each supported by a squadron of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment. The advance was handicapped by the huge craters caused by our bombing. Moreover, parties of the enemy were still fighting hard in the ruins. By the morning of 17 August, however, the South Saskatchewan had reached the railway east of the town. The Camerons had not got forward so rapidly, their tanks being hung up in craters; but they finished their task that day and then moved south across the River Train.<sup>112</sup>

The job of mopping up the last resistance in Falaise, one which was far from easy, was left to Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal. Fifty or sixty desperate men of the Hitler Youth Division had established themselves in the Ecole Superieure in the centre of the town. The building, surrounded by a heavy wall, commanded the southerly main east-west road through Falaise. Resistance here finally ended only about 2:00 a.m. on 18 August, when the Fusiliers assaulted in the midst of an enemy air attack which took toll of friend and foe alike. The building was fired. Four of the Germans were reported to have escaped. The others "fought to the end"; none surrendered.<sup>113</sup>

The destruction in Falaise had been appalling. In some parts of the town it was difficult even to tell where the streets had run, and our bulldozers had much difficulty in opening routes. The castle where William the Conqueror was born, on the high rock or falaise that gives the place its name, was little damaged, save

\*On the night of 12-13 August 144 aircraft of the R.A.F. Bomber Command attacked Falaise with a view to blocking the enemy's escape route through the town 110 which had also been subjected to harassing fire from our medium artillery.<sup>111</sup>

for the, marks of a few shots fired at it in the process of clearing out snipers; the Conqueror's statue in the square below was untouched; but as a whole the ancient town that had been our objective for so long was little more than a shambles.

The capture of Falaise had deprived the Germans of their best remaining eastwest road, but they still had at their disposal the one running north-east from Argentan to Trun, and various secondary routes. The action that might suitably have been taken on 13 August when Patton was prevented from crossing the army boundary south of Argentan, was taken now. Having ordered General Crerar to drive towards Trun on his side of the gap, General Montgomery directed General Bradley to push on from Argentan towards Trun and Chambois. The intention seems to have been simply to disregard the army group boundary, for there is no record of a change in it at this moment.\*

Action on the American side of the Gap was delayed by regroupings and misunderstandings concerning command. When General Patton was forbidden to cross the boundary at Argentan he had, in effect, lost interest in that area and had asked to be allowed to send two of the divisions there eastward towards the Seine. Without reference to Montgomery, Bradley authorized this; and Patton's spearheads were soon driving east, meeting little opposition. On 18-19 August the leading troops of the 15th Corps reached the Seine in the vicinity of MantesGassicourt.<sup>114</sup>

There were now three Allied divisions in the Argentan area (the 2nd French Armoured and the 80th and 90th U.S. Infantry Divisions). Headquarters 15th U.S. Corps having moved east towards the Seine, Bradley and Patton acted separately to provide local coordination for the attack towards Trun. Patton created a Provisional Corps under his chief of staff, Major-General Hugh J. Gaffey, to direct the advance. Gaffey arrived at Alencon on 16 August and that night issued an order for the 2nd French Armoured Division (left) and 90th Division (right) to attack next day and capture Trun and Chambois.<sup>115</sup> But before the attack could get under way a further regrouping was carried out on Bradley's orders. The Argentan front was transferred to the First U.S. Army, and Major-General L. T. Gerow with the headquarters of his 5th Corps (which had been "pinched out" farther west) arrived to take command of the divisions there. He made contact with Gaffey; the latter put off his attack; and both generals asked higher authority for a decision on who was in command in the area. Bradley having decided in favour of Gerow and the First Army, on the afternoon of 17 August Gaffey turned his divisions over to Gerow and disbanded the Provisional Corps. Gerow postponed the attack until 18 August, since his corps artillery was still moving up and he did not like Gaffey's plan. Gerow's own plan was to hold on the left with the

\*The precise time at which Montgomery issued this instruction to Bradley cannot be determined from the records available. General Bradley's account (*A Soldier's Story*, 378-9) might if taken literally indicate that the date was 14 August, but this is clearly impossible. The U.S. Army's official history (Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, draft) "infers" that the order was issued on 16 August, and this seems highly probable. It seems likely, in fact, that Montgomery telephoned Bradley about the same time at which he telephoned Crerar (above, page 250). This is rendered the more probable by the statement of General Patton (*War As I Knew It*, 109-10) that it was at 6:30 p.m. on the 16th that Bradley telephoned *him* and ordered him to attack towards Trun. Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, 214, states that Montgomery had in fact authorized on the 15th an attack across the boundary farther west to enable the First Army to take Putanges.

French division (less one combat command) between Ecouche and Argentan, while the 80th cut off Argentan with an attack east of it, and the 90th, with a French combat command to help it, drove forward from the line Le Bourg St. Leonard—Exmes towards Chambois. The 90th Division had already been in heavy action with the Germans at Le Bourg St. Leonard, north-east of Argentan; on the night of the 17th-18th it attacked again and secured the village as a line of departure for the main effort.<sup>116</sup> H Hour for the main attack, as prescribed in Gerow's field order,<sup>117</sup> was 6:30 a.m. on the 18th, at least a day and a half after Montgomery's order to attack towards Trun and four and a half days after Patton had been stopped at the boundary. During this period the Canadians had been fighting down from the north with painful slowness, and the Germans had been flooding out through the Gap in increasing numbers.

The 4th Canadian Armoured Division continued to encounter difficulties on 17 August. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders captured Damblainville with little trouble early in the morning, but The Algonquin Regiment could not secure the high ground south of the village which commanded the crossings of the Ante. From this ground the enemy brought down intense mortar and machine-gun fire, and when the armour began moving through to cross a bottleneck developed.<sup>118</sup> The old stone bridges in the village, and their approaches, were intact, but they were narrow and overgrown with scrub, grossly inadequate means for such a movement.<sup>119</sup> This, combined with the opposition the enemy was offering, led to an order from the Corps Commander to switch the 4th Division's effort to the left and cross the Dives at Couliboeuf (below its confluence with the Ante and the Traine), where two platoons of The Algonquin Regiment had gained a bridgehead on the 16th.<sup>120</sup> The 3rd Division was to take over the Damblainville area. The change of plan required a tremendous effort of traffic control, but was carried out successfully. During the afternoon the 4th Division's armour crossed the Dives at Couliboeuf and Morteaux-Couliboeuf, followed by the 10th Infantry Brigade.<sup>121</sup> Being now farther to the north than had been planned, and far off the line of the main Falaise—Trun highway, it had to advance towards Trun, so to speak, by the back door. Once across the river, good progress was made, and by evening the Canadian Grenadier Guards, meeting only light resistance, had reached Louvieres-en-Auge, a couple of miles north of Trun. Here they harboured, preparatory to attacking Trun in cooperation with the Lake Superior Regiment.<sup>122</sup> In the meantime the Polish Armoured Division, thrusting for Chambois, had got its leading troops into Neauphe-sur-Dives, directly east of Trun.<sup>123</sup>

The final tactical arrangements for closing the narrowing Gap had been telephoned to the Chief of Staff of First Canadian Army by General Montgomery at 2:45 p.m. on 17 August. Brigadier Mann recorded the order as follows:<sup>124</sup>

It is absolutely essential that both the Armd Divs of 2 Cdn Corps, i.e. 4 Cdn Armd Div and 1 Pol Armd Div, close the gap between First Cdn Army and Third U.S. Army. 1 Pol Armd Div must thrust on past Trun to Chambois 4051 at all costs, and as quickly as is possible.

During the next two days these orders were carried out in the face of frenzied German opposition which slowed progress both north and south of the Gap.

The Germans' situation had become steadily worse from the moment when





von Kluge first recommended withdrawal from the pocket. During 15 August von Kluge himself temporarily "went missing". He had set out, it seems, to visit his subordinate headquarters, but his car was shot up by Allied aircraft, his wireless transmitters destroyed and his party held up for hours in traffic jams. Hitler suspected—apparently quite baselessly—that the field marshal was negotiating with the Allies. In the course of the night of 15-16 August von Kluge finally reached General Eberbach's command post.<sup>125</sup>

Von Kluge was now on the verge of dismissal and, indeed, death. But before he left the scene he was able to give the vital order to retreat from the salient west of the Gap. Until now he and his subordinates had continued to urge such action without success. "It is five minutes to twelve", Blumentritt, his chief of staff, told *O.K.W.* on 15 August.<sup>126</sup> And at midday on the 16th von Kluge himself spoke to Jodl. Hitler had issued yet another counter-attack order the evening before. This, von Kluge said, was impossible to execute. "To cling to a hope that cannot be fulfilled by any power in the world . . . is a disastrous error. That is the situation!"<sup>127</sup> Later that day a Fuhrer order arrived authorizing withdrawal behind the Orne and then the Dives—though Falaise (which the Germans were finally losing at that moment) was to be held as a corner post.<sup>128</sup> Von Kluge proceeded—still on 16 August—to issue orders<sup>129</sup> for the retirement; it is possible that he acted before the Fuhrer's permission arrived, for the time of its receipt is not recorded, and the field marshal quite probably now considered himself a dead man. On the other hand, he may have relied on the fact that during their conversation Jodl had promised him "a degree of freedom of action" (*eine gewisse Handlungsfreiheit*). The movement was to begin that night. Fifth Panzer Army and Seventh Army were to "withdraw without delay to the sector of the Dives and the line Morteaux—Trun—Gace—Laigle". Hausser, the commander of the Seventh Army, was to direct the whole movement. Panzer Group Eberbach was to cover the withdrawal in the area Argentan—Gace and thereafter be disbanded, Eberbach resuming command of the Fifth Panzer Army.<sup>130</sup>

Issuing these orders was von Kluge's last significant act of command. On 1 July Field-Marshal von Rundstedt had suggested evacuating the Caen bridgehead, and two days later von Kluge had arrived at his headquarters as his successor. History now repeated itself. Von Kluge having recommended the abandonment of the Eberbach Group's attack and withdrawal from the pocket, in the evening of 17 August Field-Marshal Walter Model appeared at Headquarters Army Group "B", presented a letter from Hitler and relieved von Kluge.<sup>131</sup>

The next day the fallen Commander-in-Chief left his former headquarters for Germany. En route he committed suicide, apparently by taking poison. According to General Jodl's diary notes, he was dead when his aircraft reached Metz. But he had left behind him a letter to Hitler, dated 18 August,<sup>132</sup> in which he told the Fuhrer a number of things. One was that his order for the offensive directed on Avranches was in practice impossible to carry out; "on the contrary", he wrote, "the attacks ordered were bound to make the all-round position of the Army Group decisively worse, And that is what happened." Von Kluge recalled his earlier letter covering

Rommel's memorandum (above, page 179). These two documents, he said, had been prepared on "sober knowledge of the facts". The letter concluded:

I do not know whether Field-Marshal Model, who has been proved in every sphere, will still master the situation. From my heart I hope so. Should it not be so, however, and your new, greatly desired weapons, especially of the Air Force not

succeed, then, my Fuhrer, make up your mind to end the war. The German people have borne such untold suffering that it is time to put an end to this frightfulness.

... my Fuhrer, I have always admired your greatness, your conduct in the gigantic struggle and your iron will to maintain yourself and National Socialism. If fate is stronger than your will and your genius so is Providence. You have fought an honourable and great fight. History will prove that for you. Show yourself now also great enough to put an end to a hopeless struggle when necessary.

I depart from you, my Fuhrer, as one who stood nearer to you than you perhaps realized, in the consciousness that I did my duty to the utmost.

This document is the best testimony to the desperate situation of the German armies in the West. Model, however, proceeded to do his best, and his troops continued to fight fiercely. At a conference on the morning of 18 August Model gave instructions that the Seventh Army and Panzer Group Eberbach were to be extricated as quickly as possible, while the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps (with the 2nd, 9th and 12th S.S. Panzer Divisions and the 21st Panzer Division) held the north wall of the escape corridor, and the 47th Panzer Corps (with the 2nd and 116th Panzer Divisions) the south wall.<sup>133</sup> The same day Hausser issued a clear and sensible written order<sup>134</sup> along these lines. It emphasized the importance of our "deep penetration South-East of Morteaux-Couliboeuf into the area NorthWest of Trun", and proceeded:

For the success of the whole withdrawal behind the Dives it is of decisive importance both to recover the area Morteaux-Couliboeuf, as a corner-stone for the new front, and to establish a covering line on the South at and East of Argentan.

The intention is while holding firmly these corner-stones to withdraw the formations lying South-West of the Dives behind the river in two to three nights.

The attack to Morteaux-Couliboeuf was to be carried out by the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps, which had got out, or was then getting out, through the Gap and was concentrating at Vimoutiers. It was now to turn back into the cauldron. The establishment of the covering line on either side of Argentan was the business of Panzer Group Eberbach.

In the sector south-east of Falaise the Germans' position had been going from bad to worse. As early as 14 August, von Kluge, realizing that the 1st S.S. Panzer Corps could not possibly hold out longer without reinforcements, had ordered the 21st Panzer Division disengaged from its commitments farther west and moved to the Falaise area.<sup>135</sup> However, its commander did not reach the headquarters of the Fifth Panzer Army until the morning of the 16th. He was then ordered, on his own suggestion, to commit his division at Morteaux-Couliboeuf, which was already recognized as a point of danger.<sup>136</sup> It shortly began to come into action; but it was too late to reach Morteaux. It was identified south of Falaise on 17 August, and west of Trun the following day.<sup>137</sup>

By the 18th the German retreat through the Gap had reached full flood. Two nights had brought the Seventh Army across the Orne comparatively unscathed

in the crossing. (Unfortunately, the Allied air forces were giving their main attention to targets farther east, including the crossings of the Risle and the Seine.)<sup>138</sup> At 2:00 p.m. on the 18th the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief West recorded, "Withdrawals in pocket have been continuing. Bulk of forces [now] on east bank of Orne."<sup>139</sup>

### The Action of Chambois: The Closing of the Gap

The 2nd Canadian Corps "intention" for 18 August was simple: "To link up with U.S. forces and hold line of River Dives."<sup>140</sup> But carrying it out was not so simple.

The two armoured divisions continued to push south-eastward to close the Gap. The Canadian Grenadier Guards' intended attack on Trun was delayed by waiting for the company of the Lake Superior Regiment that was to cooperate. The enemy was apparently not attempting to hold the town, which was occupied by the 10th Infantry Brigade during the day; but he was on the hills east and south-west of it.<sup>141</sup> The 4th Armoured Division's morning situation report remarked, "Only slight resistance to forward movement our armour."<sup>142</sup> During the day the 4th Armoured Brigade pushed across the Trun—Vimoutiers road, and midnight found the Governor General's Foot Guards a couple of miles north of Neauphesur-Dives.<sup>143</sup> The direct drive from Trun towards Chambois was confided to the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment) less one squadron, and with an infantry company of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada attached.<sup>144</sup>

The Polish Armoured Division fought its way into the rugged area south of Les Champeaux, some six miles north of Chambois, and reported in the evening that one squadron of its reconnaissance regiment had been "observing Chambois for some time" but "could not get in owing to bombing"<sup>145</sup> (presumably our own). General Maczek wrote later that the commander of his 2nd Armoured Regiment, who had been ordered to make "an immediate stroke at Chambois" on the evening of the 17th, moved instead towards Les Champeaux, and not until 2:00 a.m. on the 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>146</sup> The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was moving up in rear through the Dives valley, and by the evening of 18 August the 7th Infantry Brigade, leading its advance, was in the area immediately north-west of Trun.<sup>147</sup>

With the Americans now beginning to push in from the south, the Gap had narrowed almost to nothing. The Germans continued to fight desperately to keep it open and escape. In the attempt they suffered terrific punishment at the hands of our tactical air forces.

The 17th of August, the day after von Kluge's order to withdraw, was the first of what an account by No. 35 Wing R.A.F., the reconnaissance wing which served the Intelligence needs of the First Canadian Army, calls "three days of the largest scale movement, presenting such targets to Allied air power as had hitherto only been dreamed of". Tactical reconnaissance aircraft reported during the day "a minimum of 2,200 vehicles of all types, including several concentrations so dense as to be uncountable". Late in the afternoon the flood was moving eastward into

the area covered by No. 84 Group, supporting First Canadian Army.<sup>148</sup> Under the stress of the emergency the Germans were attempting something they had not dared for many weeks: large-scale road movement in daylight. The weather was fairly good for flying, and our air forces made the most of it. During the twentyfour hours ending at 9:00 p.m. on 17 August the Allied Expeditionary Air Force flew 2029 sorties. The 2nd Tactical Air Force claimed for the day 13 tanks destroyed and 12 damaged, and 295 transport vehicles destroyed and 328 damaged.<sup>149</sup> On this day a Canadian "Canloan" officer passed through the Gap at Trun as a prisoner. He shortly escaped, and the scene as he "and other escapers" saw it was thus described a couple of days later:<sup>150</sup>

All roads, and particularly the byways, were crowded with transport two abreast, grinding forward. Everywhere there were vehicle trains, tanks and vehicles towing what they could. And everywhere there was the menace of the air. They reported the RAF dominated the movement. On many vehicles an air sentry rode on the mudguard. At the sound of a plane, every vehicle went into the side of the road and all personnel ran for their lives. The damage done was immense, and flaming transport and dead horses were left in the road while the occupants pressed on, afoot.

There were Red Cross signs everywhere-on staff cars, ammunition vehicles, in each convoy, even on ambulances. The bulk of the transport was of the "every man for himself" class. There were no complete ordered formations on the move. There was much horse drawn transport. . . .

On the 18th the weather was still clear; and Allied pilots, after an initial absence of traffic, reported that by 10:30 a.m. "the Bank Holiday rush" was on again west of Trun. It was a day of supreme disaster for the fleeing enemy. The Allied Expeditionary Air Force made 3057 sorties. The 2nd Tactical Air Force claimed 124 tanks destroyed and 96 damaged, and 1159 transport vehicles destroyed and 1724 damaged.<sup>151</sup> Such destruction had never fallen upon an enemy from the air.

In the circumstances of that moment, with thousands of aircraft aloft and the battle-lines on the ground in a very fluid state, it was probably inevitable that there should be some attacks on our troops by our own aeroplanes. In fact, reports of such attacks had been frequent for some days. The 51st (Highland) Division of the 1st British Corps made a particularly strong complaint on 19 August, specifying 40 individual incidents, resulting in 51 personnel casualties and 25 vehicle casualties, all of which had taken place the day before.<sup>152</sup> The Polish Armoured Division however, had suffered still more heavily; having had large losses at the hands of our heavy bombers on both 8 and 14 August, it now had an unfortunate experience with the tactical air forces. On the evening of the 18th it reported, "Units and brigade headquarters have been continually bombed by own forces. Half the petrol being sent to 2nd Armoured Regiment was destroyed through bombing just after 1700 hrs [5:00 p.m.]."<sup>153</sup> The Polish casualties from such attacks during the three days 16-18 August were computed as 72 killed and 191 wounded; those of the 2nd Canadian Corps as a whole totalled 77 killed and 209 wounded. Army Headquarters asked through Army Group for strong measures to prevent such incidents in future. It was able to report that of the many such attacks of recent days, only one had been traced to aircraft of its own supporting Group, No. 84. That Group, whose headquarters was located alongside the Army's, had taken

special pains in briefing its pilots.<sup>154</sup> On 18 August General Crerar sent a message to all Commanding Officers:<sup>155</sup>

It is necessary to stress the peculiar difficulties to the Allied air forces caused by the convergence of US, British and Canadian armies on a common objective, with air action against the enemy forces within that Allied circle most desirable up to the point of their surrender.

In order to judge the matter rationally and to avoid wrong or exaggerated conclusions as to what has been accomplished on behalf of the Army by the Tactical Air Force during their attacks today I give the scores, as yet incomplete and definitely conservative, compiled as at 2030 hours [8:30 p.m.]. Tanks flamers 77 smokers 42 damaged 55. Mechanical transport flamers 900 smokers 478 damaged 712.

If Canadian Army formations and units will compare their vehicle casualties proportionately to the above they will obtain some idea of the tremendous military balance in their favour.

As we have seen, U.S. commanders had been strongly impressed by the danger of accidental collisions between the Allied armies as they advanced from either side of the Gap, and this had been a major factor in General Bradley's decision to forbid Patton to cross the army group boundary. The same possibility was of course evident at Headquarters First Canadian Army, which saw the best means of avoiding such accidents in special liaison arrangements with the advancing Americans.

The first special measure in this respect had been taken on 12 August, when an artillery liaison officer was sent from Army Headquarters to the Third U.S. Army. By 14 August information was being received from him by wireless,<sup>156</sup> and a number of messages from him are preserved, addressed to the Commander Corps Royal Artillery, 2nd Canadian Corps, and repeated to the liaison section of the General Staff at Army Headquarters.<sup>157</sup> Some of these were greatly delayed in transmission, but this mission certainly somewhat improved the Canadian Army's knowledge of the American positions and plans.

On 16 August, with the armies drawing still closer together, General Crerar made an attempt at establishing more effective contact between their headquarters. He wrote a personal letter to General Patton informing him that he was sending a liaison officer to his headquarters to collect information on operations and pass it to First Canadian Army, and inviting him to send a liaison officer of his own to Crerar's headquarters.<sup>158</sup> The letter was sent by the liaison officer, Major A. M. Irvine, who set off that day by air. He never caught up with Patton, but after some difficulty reached Le Mans and found that Headquarters First U.S. Army was taking over the sector and was nearby. He accordingly very properly presented General Crerar's letter there.<sup>159</sup> A message sent by him to First Canadian Army thereafter is on record:<sup>160</sup>

Direct liaison not permitted. Liaison on army group level only except corps artillery. Awaiting arrival signal equipment before returning.

On 20 August Major Irvine returned to First Canadian Army "from his abortive attempt to liaise with First US Army".<sup>161</sup>

On 17 August Headquarters First Canadian Army began sending the Third U.S. Army hourly situation reports to keep it informed of the precise whereabouts

of the Canadian forward troops. Several urgent requests were included for similar information about U.S. troops. From the morning of the 18th, information having been received that the First U.S. Army was taking over the Argentan sector, the hourly situation reports were directed to that army as well as the Third.<sup>162</sup> It would seem that the artillery liaison officer had moved to the 5th Corps, for messages evidently sent by him continued to be received; some information about the U.S. front also came through Headquarters 21st Army Group and its servant "Phantom" (the G.H.Q. Liaison Regiment).<sup>163</sup>

While the Canadian Army drove south-east along the line of the Dives, the Second British Army was coming in below Falaise, pushing the Germans before it through the Gap. By the evening of 17 August the leading troops of the 53rd Division of the 12th Corps were directly south of Falaise; 24 hours later they were in the vicinity of Nécy, some five miles south-east of Falaise, and pressing on.<sup>164</sup> As for the First U.S. Army, it was meeting heavy opposition in its advance northwards. The 80th Infantry Division's attack immediately east of Argentan was stopped, and the 90th, though it made more progress, was held up short of Chambois by the 116th Panzer Division.<sup>165</sup>

On 19 August the German agony continued. Again the skies were clear, and again they were full of Allied aircraft ceaselessly harassing the packed columns of transport seeking escape on the by-roads about Chambois. On this day the Allied Expeditionary Air Force flew 2535 sorties. "Enormous claims were reported against military transport and tanks." The 2nd Tactical Air Force made 1321 sorties and claimed 52 tanks destroyed and 92 damaged as well as 617 other vehicles destroyed and 981 damaged.<sup>166</sup> The Germans' increasing disorganization at this stage is reflected both in the brevity of their records and their inaccuracy. By 19 August the war diary of Fifth Panzer Army was down to a single entry, a striking contrast with normal practice. On the 18th it had recorded that the Allied forces from north and south of the Gap had made contact and completed "a still loose encirclement of Seventh Army and Panzer Group Eberbach". This was premature; the event recorded did not actually come about until the following day.

On the afternoon of the 18th General Simonds had ordered the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division (which Major-General D. C. Spry had now taken over) to move up and hold the east bank of the Dives from Morteaux-Couliboeuf to Trun, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division to push on from Trun to Chambois, and the Polish Armoured Division to drive on Chambois from Les Champeaux and link up with the Americans; this plan to be put into effect as soon as the 4th Division had cleared the area north and north-west of Trun on the 19th.<sup>167</sup> At 11:00 a.m. on 19 August Simonds again conferred with his four divisional commanders at the 4th Division's main headquarters east of Morteaux-Couliboeuf. He emphasized that the encirclement must be complete; no Germans were to escape. The 2nd Canadian Division from Falaise was now to take over the northern portion of the 3rd Division's area along the Dives to enable the latter division to strengthen its line and close all escape routes. The 4th Armoured Division was to concentrate upon the area between Trun and a hamlet (unnamed on our maps but

actually called Moissy) on the Dives a mile or so east of St. Lambert; while the Poles would be responsible for the area from Moissy to Chambois and Hill 262, a commanding height north-east of Chambois,\* which was reported to be in American hands.<sup>168</sup>

The actual pattern of events turned out rather less neatly. During the 19th there was a desperate struggle at St. Lambert. In the morning "B" Company of The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada and "C" Squadron of The South Alberta Regiment, under the command of Major D. V. Currie of the South Albertas, attacked the village and after six hours -of fierce fighting got halfway through it. During the afternoon Currie was reinforced by "C" Company of the Argylls and "C" Company of The Lincoln and Welland Regiment (with a platoon of "D" Company under command). But in the face of the bitterest opposition from superior numbers, his force could make no further progress. It dug itself in and was soon battling furiously against one counter-attack after another, refusing to give ground and accounting for hundreds of the enemy.<sup>169</sup>

Simultaneously at Trun The Lincoln and Welland Regiment and the 10th Independent Machine Gun Company (The New Brunswick Rangers) were frustrating repeated violent German attempts to break out across the Dives, and inflicting dreadful losses. During the day the Lincoln and Welland picked up the commander of the 708th German Infantry Division, Colonel Bruno Gerloch. In the broken ground about Hordouseaux the 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade's units were preparing to drive north-east to Vimoutiers.<sup>170</sup> During the morning of the 19th the infantry and armour in all these areas were without artillery support, since the field regiments were moving up and were not within range. By the afternoon, however, the guns were again coming into action. Captain C. H. Clerkson of the 15th Field Regiment R.C.A. set up an observation post on Point 117 directly north of St. Lambert. "Below in the valley targets appeared one after another. It was an OP officer's dream. Roads and fields were full of Germans moving eastward seeking a way out of the trap. The resulting carnage was terrible . . ." Captain Clerkson received the Military Cross for the manner in which, under constant sniper fire, he directed the regiment's guns at this critical juncture.<sup>171</sup> The enemy . got no such support. Artillery fire from his side had virtually if not entirely ceased, and our counter-battery staffs were temporarily unemployed.<sup>172</sup>

Farther to the east the much-tried Poles were engaged in bloody fighting. About 11 o'clock in the morning, according to information reaching General Simonds, they were concentrated mainly in three battle groups, each comprising an armoured regiment and an infantry battalion: one immediately east of Coudehard and two between that place and St. Lambert. A reconnaissance squadron was reported in an area perhaps a mile and a half north-east of Chambois.<sup>173</sup> And south of Chambois, on the other side of a Gap now nearly non-existent, the battalions of the 359th U.S. Infantry Regiment (of the 90th Division) were fighting their way forward from the direction of Le Bourg St. Leonard.<sup>174</sup>

The evening of the 19th brought the long-awaited contact across the Gap.

\*Not to be confused with another Hill 262, overlooking Coudehard from the north, where the Poles were locked in a death-struggle with the enemy.

Both the Poles and the Americans claim to have captured Chambois. According to the Polish account, their 10th Dragoons (10th Polish Motor Battalion) came down from the north, joined up with their reconnaissance elements (10th Polish Mounted Rifle Regiment) outside the town, and proceeded to take the place.<sup>175</sup> The First Canadian Army situation report that night stated that these two units captured Chambois at 7:20 p.m. "and were joined by 90 US Inf Div forces".<sup>176</sup> The after-action report of the 359th U.S. Infantry gives a different account:

2nd Bn met stiff resistance on the edge of Chambois at 1900 [7:00 p.m.]. They pushed into Chambois and had it cleared of enemy at 2013 at which time they met elements of the Polish Army Reconnaissance Squadron which had been cut off from their unit. "L" Co of the 3d Bn was to push to cut the blacktop [road] leading Northwest out of Chambois. The objective was reached around 2030 [8:30 p.m.] and they met elements of the Canadians....

Some of the actual messages recorded at the time are relevant. A message to the 2nd Canadian Corps from the artillery liaison officer with the 5th U.S. Corps, intercepted at Headquarters First Canadian Army at 5:30 p.m., runs, "Area 4051 [Chambois] being shelled from NW. Suspect it friendly. If so stop as we are now moving into town." Another intercept from the same source timed 7:40 p.m. says, "Chambois now in our hands."<sup>177</sup> On the Polish side, a situation report received at Corps at 5:20 p.m. says, "10 Mtd Rifle Regt (Recce) is receeing in direction of Chambois (2 kms North of Chambois)", and a message to Corps from the Polish Division's main headquarters, originating at 7:20 p.m., adds, "LO [liaison officer] on way from Tac HQ Pol Armd Div with latest sit. Since his departure Pol Armd Div' has captured Chambois...."<sup>178</sup>

The impression one receives is that of Poles and Americans arriving in Chambois from opposite directions at about the same moment, though the Americans may have been in greater strength. Whatever the precise circumstances, contact was made between the First Canadian and First United States Armies at Chambois that evening. But this contact was very far from ending the story of the Falaise Gap. The encirclement, to borrow the word the Germans had used the day before, was "loose" in the extreme. The German records indicate that most of what was left of the Seventh Army was still inside the pocket; and the German command was still determined to make every effort to extricate it. On the 19th the headquarters of the Fifth Panzer Army moved from Fontaine l'Abbe, west of Bernay, to Canteleu, near Rouen.<sup>179</sup> The following day its diary recorded (it was the day's only entry) that the Seventh Army had been placed under its command. The reason was probably the fact that General Hausser, commanding the Seventh Army, had been reported missing in action. Actually Hausser had been severely wounded, but this became known only on the 21st, when he turned up with a battle group that had fought its way through the encirclement to the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps.<sup>180</sup>

The 20th of August was the fiercest day of the Gap battle. Early that morning the Seventh Army's formations made a furious effort to break out at St. Lambertsur-Dives and join hands with the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps, which was fighting westward from Camembert, heavily engaged with the 4th Armoured Division and the Poles. The story from the German side is told in the Army Group "B" situation report for the day:



In the early morning hours of 20 August, Seventh Army, with the 2nd Parachute Corps and Panzer Group Eberbach leading, and the ' 74th and 84th Corps following, embarked on the breakout towards the north-east and north. At first the attack failed to make headway, but after a dashing attack by the 3rd Parachute Division it was possible to break out at St. Lambert and south-east of Trun, advance along the enemy's front and enlarge the gap to an extent allowing one to count upon the extrication of the 74th and 84th Corps. Due to heavy air attacks and lack of fuel the bulk of the vehicles, guns and heavy weapons was lost... .

In bitter close fighting, about 40-50 per cent of the encircled forces managed to break out and join hands with the 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps. At St. Lambert-sur-Dives the battle for a breach lasted for five hours.

Losses in material were very high because during the last three days enemy fighterbombers had fired nearly all vehicles and fuel reserves, and the artillery guns had been destroyed by fire concentrations from the enemy's heavy artillery. Gradually the Army lost all its radio stations and thus became unable to carry out its command functions. The performance of the troops who broke out was of a high order... .

This account conveys something of the violence of the day; but the German formations at this stage were certainly less tidily organized than it tends to suggest.

What the day was like in the area about St. Lambert, where Major Currie's diminishing force and its neighbours were struggling to prevent the enemy from getting past, is suggested by the South Alberta Regiment's diary. The regimental headquarters troop was on and about Hill 117:

At about 0800 hrs [8:00 a.m.] waves of German Infantry began moving against the positions. It could hardly be called an attack as there was no covering fire plan, simply a mass movement of riflemen. RHQ tanks were moved to better fire positions and began to mow down the advancing Infantry.

Similar activity occurred on "B" and "C" Sqns' sectors, "B" Sqn finding themselves defending the axis of an enemy attack and "C" Sqn [in St. Lambert] sending back an additional 200 prisoners of war at 0930 hrs [9:30 a.m.]

A little later the situation at RHQ began to get out of hand as there were just too many infantry. The CO ordered "A" Sqn to move into the position to support RHQ and with this the enemy broke and fled....

West of Chambois the same mass movement struck the 359th U.S. Infantry, whose 3rd Battalion were temporarily "pushed back a little from their positions". The Americans recorded that it seemed that the Germans were "not attacking but merely trying to escape".<sup>181</sup>

Whatever else the German rush accomplished, it prevented the Poles and Americans in Chambois and the Canadians in St. Lambert from establishing contact with each other and closing the narrow gap between the two places. Through this considerable numbers of Germans continued to escape, often only to collide with the Polish battle-groups to the north-east. The Poles were now disposed in three main groups: the 2nd Armoured Regiment group at Hill 240, a mile east of Ecorches; a second group on the dominant feature above Coudehard formed by Hills 252 and 262, called by the Poles, from its shape on the map, "Maczuga" (mace); and a third at and north of Chambois.<sup>182</sup> Cut off from the rest of First Canadian Army; unable to evacuate their prisoners and their own wounded, and running short of ammunition, petrol and food; and, fighting desperately against Germans attacking both from inside and outside the pocket, the Poles had a hard and bitter day on the 20th. It was cheered however by the capture of Lieut.General Otto Elfeldt, commander of the 84th German Corps.<sup>183</sup>

The 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade was able to give the Poles little help. Early in the morning it was ordered to abandon its move upon Vimoutiers, which had already begun, and to assist in preventing the trapped enemy from breaking out. Attempts to assist the Poles were hampered by uncertainty as to their actual positions.<sup>184</sup> In the evening the Corps Commander ordered the brigade to attack south from the area Hordouseaux—Les Champeaux, directed upon the area Coudehard—Champosoult, to seal the escape route and succour the hard-pressed Polish troops. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division had now had both the 2nd Armoured Brigade and the 9th Infantry Brigade (from the 3rd Division) placed under its command to strengthen its positions. In anticipation of more efforts to break out, Lt.-Col. D. S. Harkness of the 5th Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A. was given the task of coordinating the anti-tank defence across the whole divisional front. The division's diarist remarked on the evening of the 20th that the picture was "very confusing". "Due to the heavy fighting, Germans attacking from both the East and the West and the numerous calls made on the div to seal off any German escape routes, the units are mixed up and it is difficult to define any particular bde areas."<sup>185</sup>

Although the 20th had seen the most critical phase of the battle, 21 August witnessed further fierce fighting along the Dives. Early in the morning there was a desperate German attack by infantry and tanks about the village of Magny, on the Dives south-east of Trun. Here The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders were dug in. With the assistance of very heavy artillery fire, they held their ground. An account<sup>186</sup> by an officer of The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.), who was in this area with two platoons of his battalion, describes the slaughter caused by the Camerons' Vickers guns. The German infantry were cut down by hundreds:

Caught on rising ground, there was no cover at hand for them. Those who were not hit ran towards the dead ground in the draw to their right, through which a stream runs. The attack was completely disrupted.

During that brief engagement the gun numbers had been presented with just such a target as they had often wished for. All available rifles and Brens had also been in use.

Until about 0800 hrs the machine-gunners fired at whatever they could see. During this time a host of white flags appeared and hundreds of the enemy crowded in to surrender. Many others were unable to give up, for every move towards our lines brought bursts of fire from certain SS troops patrolling the low ground behind them in an armoured half-track.

During this attack the commander of the German 84th Infantry Division, Lieut.-General Erwin Menny, became a prisoner.<sup>187</sup>

General Simonds, we have seen, had given orders on the 20th that every effort was to be made to push through and restore communications with the isolated Poles. Accordingly, on the morning of the 21st the 4th Armoured Brigade drove south-eastward. The 21st Armoured Regiment, holding its ground a couple of miles north of Coudehard to protect the left flank, beat off an attack by a German column from the north-east; and the 22nd Armoured Regiment struck southward towards "Maczuga". The 28th Armoured Regiment, following behind the 22nd,

passed through them to occupy the more southerly of the two Hills 262, north-east of Chambois.<sup>188</sup>

On the Canadian Grenadier Guards' advance to '\*Maczuga' the regiment's diary may be quoted:

The road, as were all the roads in the area, was lined and in places practically blocked by destroyed German vehicles of every description. Horses and men lay rotting in every ditch and hedge and the air was rank with the odour of putrefaction. Most of the destruction must have been caused by the air force, but the Poles had done their share. On the move up to Point 239 [the first phase of the advance] No. 1 Squadron lost three tanks and another was lost en route to 262\*. . . . The enemy's losses were however far greater being two Panthers and another probable, one Pz Kw 1V [a Mark IV tank], two self-propelled guns and probably 80 to 100 German infantry killed. . . .

No. 1 Squadron's co-axes [machine-guns mounted "co-axially" with the main armament of the tanks] fired almost continuously from leaving 239 until arriving at 262 and the results were devastating. All the Germans in the area were either killed or ran away and the line of communication was opened up. The picture at 262 was the grimmest the regiment has so far come up against. The Poles had had no supplies for three days; they had several hundred wounded who had not been evacuated, about 700 prisoners of war lay loosely guarded in a field, the road was blocked with burnedout vehicles both our own and enemy. Unburied dead and parts of them were strewn about by the score. . . . The Poles cried with joy when we arrived and from what they said I doubt if they will ever forget this day and the help we gave them.

The Polish group near Chambois was similarly relieved by a supply column escorted by The Highland Light Infantry of Canada and accompanied by Brigadier Rockingham. The Polish Armoured Division, indeed, had had a terrible experience. Forming the spearhead of First Canadian Army's advance, the greater part of it had been entirely cut off by the rush of Germans fighting their way out of the Pocket, and neither food nor ammunition could reach it. On the morning of the 21st, although the weather was bad for flying, ammunition was dropped to the Poles from the air, directed at Point 122, immediately east of Chambois.<sup>189</sup>

While the 4th Armoured Brigade came in north of Chambois, other troops of the 4th Division were fighting forward from about St. Lambert to make contact with the Poles. Early on the afternoon of the 21st, part of the South Alberta Regiment smashed its way through to Chambois, then fought its way back as The Highland Light Infantry of Canada and 1st Hussars attacked, heavily supported by artillery, from north-west of the town. As a result of the day's operations firm contact was made with the Poles and the Gap finally and completely closed. During the morning the leading troops of the 53rd British Division driving in from the west met the 9th Brigade about Trun. The ordeal of Major Currie's force at St. Lambert came at last to an end. In due course Currie himself received the Victoria Cross he had so fully earned.

The attacks on the morning of the 21st had been the last important effort of the Germans in and about the Pocket. That night, for the first time in weeks, the words "nothing to report" appeared prominently in a situation report prepared at Headquarters First Canadian Army.<sup>190</sup>

Just what proportion of the Germans who were still inside the Pocket on the evening of the 19th managed to break out there is no way of establishing; but the Army Group "B" estimate of 40 to 50 per cent (above, page 262) presumably would

\*The northerly Hill 262 ("Maczuga").

not err on the side of understatement. During the five days ending at 6:00 p.m. on 23 August, 208 officers and 13,475 other ranks passed through First Canadian Army's prisoner-of-war cage;<sup>191</sup> many more, of course, were picked up by the other converging Allied armies. As we shall see (below, page 271), the German armoured formations were mere shadows of themselves after the battle; and we have quoted ample evidence to show how terrible was the slaughter of the unfortunate German infantry. Across the whole region where the Gap had been, the green-uniformed corpses lay thick; at one place, just north-east of St. Lambert-surDives, an observer on 22 August saw "hundreds of dead, so close together that they were practically touching".<sup>192</sup> From this appalling charnel-house there rose to offend the heavens a stench that was strong in the nostrils even of people in light aircraft far above.<sup>193</sup> And every road and byway was blocked with ruined or abandoned German vehicles. In the Gap area, roughly designated as lying between Pierrefitte (on the Falaise—Argentan road), Argentan, Chambois, Vimoutiers and Trun, British investigators of No. 2 Operational Research Section found 187 tanks and self-propelled guns, 157 lightly armoured vehicles, 1778 lorries, 669 cars and 252 guns, a grand total of 3043 guns and vehicles.\* The heaviest concentration was south and south-west of St. Lambert. Much of the German transport had been horse-drawn; but no exact count was made of carts and waggons, for the investigators found that "the stench of dead horses was so overpowering that where there was any number of horse-drawn vehicles that area had to be passed with all speed".<sup>194</sup>

### The 1st British Corps Drives Eastward

While the 2nd Canadian Corps fought-its slow and bloody battle towards Falaise and Chambois, General Crocker's 1st British Corps on the seaward flank had had, in general, merely a holding assignment facing eastward; save that its right flank moved forward, attacking when necessary, in line with the Canadian Corps' left. Crocker's strength was too small to enable him to undertake major operations. As we have seen, he had the 49th and 51st Infantry Divisions, plus the 6th Airborne Division (still fighting in a ground role) to cover his very wide front. On 13 August the Netherlands and Belgian contingents, the Royal Netherlands Brigade (Princess Irene's) and the 1st Belgian Infantry Brigade,† both newly arrived from England, were taken under command of the 6th Airborne Division and deployed on the extreme left on the coast.<sup>195</sup>

The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion had continued in action under the 3rd Parachute Brigade. Like the rest of the 6th Airborne Division, it had had a difficult time, for it was not organized or equipped for the indefinite performance of infantry tasks. It was further embarrassed in the beginning by the loss of many of its Vickers guns and mortars in the flooded areas where the dispersed drop

\*This was in addition to 1270 vehicles (including 90 tanks, 31 self-propelled guns and 60 other guns) representing an admittedly incomplete count of those left in "the Pocket"-defined as the general area Falaise-Conde-sur-Noireau—Vassy—Tinchebray—Barenton—Domfront—La Ferté-Macé—Argentan.

†The Princess Irene Brigade was commanded by Lt.-Col. A. C. De Ruyter van Steveninck (who was promoted Colonel in November 1944), the Belgian Brigade by Colonel B. E. M. Piron.

had taken place (above, page 117). The parachute troops nevertheless gave an excellent account of themselves. On 8 June the Canadians beat off a fierce attack by units of the 346th German Infantry Division, supported by tanks and selfpropelled guns, on their position at the Le Mesnil crossroads. Another strong thrust was repulsed on 10 June. The 3rd Brigade had a week out of the line beginning on 17 June, and subsequently had two weeks in rest in mid-July. The airborne troops were still holding the left flank when the time came for the 1st British Corps to move forward.<sup>196</sup>

On 15 August, with General Simonds' Corps approaching Falaise, the moment had come. On that day, following a conference with General Montgomery, General Crerar instructed General Crocker to capture St. Pierre-sur-Dives without delay.<sup>197</sup> On the 16th the Army Commander, conferring with Simonds and Crocker, told the latter that he was required to press on along the axis St. Pierre-sur-Dives—Lisieux. To assist him the 7th British Armoured Division (now commanded by MajorGeneral G. L. Verney) had been transferred to the First Canadian Army and would be placed under Crocker's command forthwith.<sup>198</sup>

The advance began on a small scale on the 15th; that day, the 49th Division, in the centre, took Vimont. On the 16th the 51st Division, on the right, captured St. Pierre-sur-Dives, while the 49th got some troops across the Dives at Mezidon. On the left the 6th Airborne Division's movement began early on the 17th. -On the same day the 7th Armoured Division joined in the advance. During the next few days the 1st Corps pushed eastward against stiffening opposition. Livarot was taken on 20 August and by the 22nd the 7th Armoured Division was fighting in Lisieux, where the Germans resisted strongly. The town was not cleared until the 24th. In the meantime, the 6th Airborne Division was engaged in a similar contest farther down the River Touques at Pont l'Eveque.<sup>199</sup>

### Plans for the Advance to the Seine

On 20 August General Montgomery issued a further directive,<sup>200</sup> calling for energetic exploitation to complete the victory that had been won. "I must impress on all commanders", he wrote, "the need for speed in getting on with the .business":

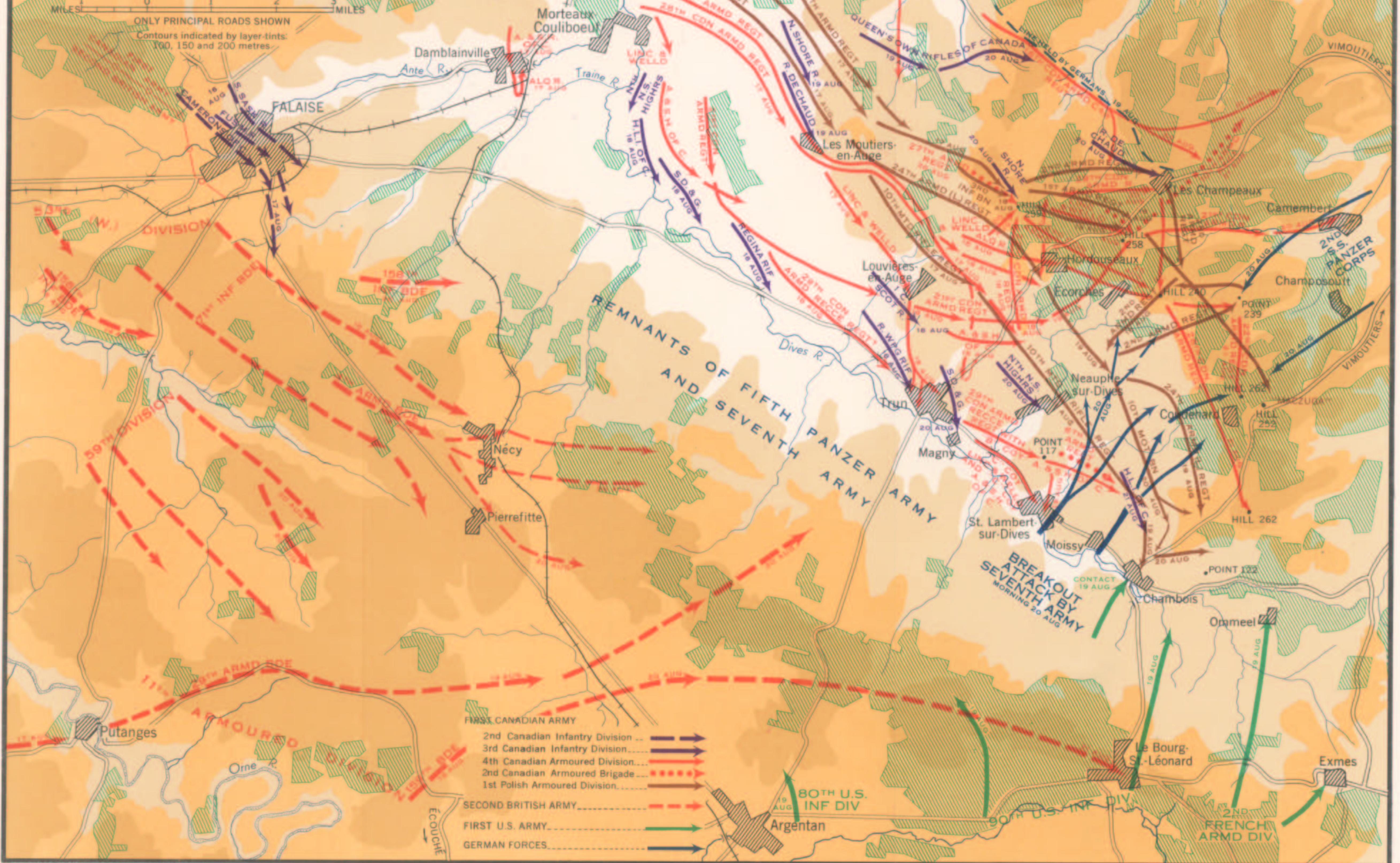
The Allied victory in N.W. Europe will have immense repercussions; it will lead to the end of the German military domination of France; it is the beginning of the end of the war.

But if these great events are to be brought about, we must hurl ourselves on the enemy while he is still reeling from the blow; we must deal him more blows and ever more blows; he must be allowed no time to recover.

This is no time to relax, or to sit back and congratulate ourselves. I call on all commanders for a great effort. Let us finish off the business in record time.

The intention was now defined as to complete the destruction of the enemy forces in north-west France, and thereafter to advance northward "with a view to the eventual destruction of all enemy forces in north-east France". Montgomery's instructions for clearing up the remains of the Falaise pocket ran thus:

# THE CLOSING OF THE FALAISE GAP 17-21 AUGUST 1944



Reproduced by Army Survey Establishment

*General Instructions for completing the destruction of the enemy in the Normandy "bottle"*

4. There are many large bodies of enemy still fighting hard inside the Normandy "bottle". The destruction or capture of these enemy parties is a first priority.
5. In order to surround the enemy, troops of 12 Army Group and of Canadian Army have crossed the Second Army boundaries. These troops must remain, holding firmly the northern and southern sides of the "bottle", and keeping the cork in position at the eastern end.
6. Second Army is moving eastwards up the "bottle". As the troops of Second Army make contact with the American and Canadian troops on the northern and southern flanks, so these troops will allow passage eastwards to Second Army and will themselves be withdrawn in due course inside their own Army boundaries.  
This withdrawal of troops of flank armies from the area of Second Army will take time; many problems will arise and these must be settled by direct contact between Army, Corps, and Divisional Commanders.
7. The bottleneck is the area Trun—Chambois. Canadian Army will be responsible for keeping this tightly corked; the cork will not be withdrawn without authority from me.
8. When the "bottle" has been finally ironed out, and all enemy troops in it destroyed or captured, then the cork will be withdrawn and 21 Army, Group will advance rapidly to the Seine.
9. 12 Army Group, meanwhile, will have driven northwards to Louviers and Elbeuf, and beyond. This movement has already begun, and its strength will be greatly increased tomorrow. The enemy will thus find his lines of withdrawal across the Seine in Allied hands, and his situation will then be very awkward.

The 12th Army group was to develop at once a strong thrust northwards, the movement's right flank being along the south bank of the Seine, while the left followed the road through Breteuil and Le Neubourg to Bourgheroulde. (General Bradley has described in *A Soldier's Story* how the arrangements for this advance across the British front were made at a conference with Montgomery on the morning of the 19th.) From Bourgheroulde light forces were to be "pushed forward towards the mouth of the Seine". The object of this was to destroy all enemy in the area and "cut off the retreat of any enemy forces that may be moving eastwards towards the Seine". Thus another encirclement was to be attempted. The 12th Army Group was to capture Paris when the Supreme Commander considered the suitable moment had arrived. General Eisenhower, Montgomery explained, did not propose to attempt to take the city "until it is a sound military proposition to do so".

The Second British Army, when the remaining enemy in Normandy had been destroyed, was to advance with all speed to the Seine, cross it, and push on to the Somme, being prepared thereafter to advance northward into the Pas de Calais and destroy all enemy forces in that area. This movement would be combined with "suitable airborne operations" in advance.

The particular tasks of General Crerar's Army were thus described:

22. The first task of Canadian Army is to keep the Normandy "bottle" securely corked, vide para. 7.
23. Simultaneously with carrying out this task, the Army will develop a strong thrust towards Lisieux, and eastwards towards Rouen.
24. When the cork is removed from the "bottle", vide para. 8, then Canadian Army will advance to the Seine, will cross the river, and will operate to clear the whole Havre peninsula to the west of the Army boundary.

It is important to secure the port of Havre very early; the railway communications from the port, eastwards and northwards, will be required for the maintenance of the armies and much time will be saved if these can be secured intact, together with all possible rolling stock.

25. All Scotland will be grateful if Comd. Canadian Army can arrange that the Highland Division should capture St. Valery.

I have no doubt that the 2nd Canadian Division will deal very suitably with Dieppe.

During 20 and much of 21 August, as we have seen, the First Canadian Army was more than busy with the last phase of the Gap battle; but by the 22nd that battle was essentially over. About noon Montgomery telephoned Headquarters First Canadian Army and asked the Chief of Staff, Brigadier Mann, whether it was now appropriate to "remove the cork". Mann called Headquarters 2nd Canadian Corps and was assured by Brigadier Rodger, the Chief of Staff there, that no organized resistance remained in the area Coudehard—St. Lambert-sur-Dives—Trun. At the time General Simonds was at a forward rendezvous giving orders to his divisional commanders in anticipation of a release to commence the advance to the Seine. At 12:45 Mann passed this information by telephone to Montgomery, and was instructed in reply to inform the Army Commander and the Commander of the 2nd Canadian Corps "that the restrictions were now removed and that as soon as possible, and as quickly as could be arranged, the advance was to be started to the river Seine". Mann was also told to inform the Second British Army's Chief of Staff that the restrictions were off and both armies were now to get on to the Seine as quickly as possible. He told Montgomery, to the latter's satisfaction, that the 2nd Corps could advance the following morning and was ready to start the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division and reconnaissance elements of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division at once.<sup>201</sup>

The 2nd Canadian Division had in fact begun moving eastward on the 21st, on which day the 5th Brigade occupied Vimoutiers (below, page 279). The following morning the division advanced to Orbec, encountering only minor resistance. On the 23rd both the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division began to move east. The Polish Armoured Division had passed for the moment into Corps reserve, and was resting and refitting after its herculean efforts in the Gap.<sup>202</sup> The battle of Falaise was over; a great victory had been won; and First Canadian Army was now pursuing the beaten enemy.

### The Landings in Southern France

Looking farther afield for a moment, it may be noted here that in the early morning of 15 August the Allies had opened a new front on the Mediterranean coast of France. The controversy over Operation "Anvil"—finally carried out as "Dragoon"—is summarized in another volume of this history\* and dealt with at length in many books; it need not detain us here. The landings in the south, originally planned to be simultaneous with those in Normandy, had been, embodied

\*Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy*, 387-8, 463-4.



in the agreements made with Russia at Teheran. They had been postponed, largely because of the shortage of assault shipping; and the British strategists would have preferred to retain the resources intended for this enterprise in Italy, envisaging their being used for operations directed into the Po Valley and perhaps by way of Istria "into the plains of Hungary". The Americans would have none of this, and argued strongly that Eisenhower needed Marseilles as a port of entry for new divisions from the United States. On 2 July the Combined Chiefs of Staff instructed the Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean to plan for an assault on 15 August. At the very last moment, on 4 August, Mr. Churchill sought to divert the landing to the Brittany area. Whatever may be thought of the merits of the earlier controversy, this piece of improvisation—for which no proper planning had been done—had little to commend it, and it seems surprising that the British Chiefs of Staff countenanced it.<sup>203</sup> The Americans stood by their guns, and the assault of General Patch's Seventh Army duly went in east of Toulon on 15 August.\*

Much of the German strength in the south had long since been drained away to Normandy, and the new attack met only limited resistance. Mr. Churchill, who watched the landings, wrote a trifle acidly to the King,<sup>204</sup>

There is no doubt that Eisenhower's operations made a great diversion. The fact that this is the precise opposite of what was intended need not be stressed at the present time.

The German Nineteenth Army succeeded in withdrawing in comparatively good order up the Rhone Valley. On 11 September Patch's troops met Patton's, and the two fronts were merged. On 15 September General Eisenhower took the force from the Mediterranean under his command, and the 6th Army Group (General Devers) became operational, taking over the southern front. General de Lattre de Tassigny's First French Army (so designated from 25 September) operated in this army group. On 15 September also the harbour of Marseilles was opened to large ships and became available for the function for which Eisenhower had required it.<sup>205</sup> But by that time his most urgent need was port facilities in the north.

\*The operations of the Canadian element of the First Special Service Force on the Riviera are described in Nicholson, 666-71.

## CHAPTER XI

### NORMANDY: THE BALANCE SHEET

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With the final closing of the Falaise Gap a definite and most significant phase of the campaign in North-West Europe came to an end. This is a good point, then, to pause and attempt a brief commentary upon the two and a half months of bloody fighting since D Day.

#### The German Losses and Our Own

The Germans had lost a great battle, and in losing it had suffered casualties in men and equipment on a tremendous scale. It is difficult to find absolutely precise figures. But the statement in General Eisenhower's report, covering the whole period since 6 June, is certainly generally accurate:

By 25 August the enemy had lost, in round numbers, 400,000 killed, wounded, or captured, of which total 200,000 were prisoners of war. One hundred and thirty-five thousand of these prisoners had been taken since the beginning of our breakthrough on 25 July. Thirteen hundred tanks, 20,000 vehicles, 500 assault guns, and 1500 field guns and heavier artillery pieces had been captured or destroyed, apart from the destruction inflicted upon the Normandy coast defenses.

Completely satisfactory statistics are not available from the German records. Army Group "B" reported that its casualties from 6 June until 13 August were 158,930 in all categories. The next weekly report, that for the week ending 20 August, remarks, not surprisingly, "Figures not yet computed"; and the reports for the succeeding period are not to be found. However, on 29 September the Commander-in-Chief West stated that army casualties for the period since 6 June had risen to 371,400, while naval and air force losses increased the grand total to 460,900.<sup>1</sup>

An indication of the desperate state to which the Germans in the west were reduced after Normandy is given by the fighting strength of the Fifth Panzer Army on 25 August. It then had under command all the fighting troops that remained in the theatre both of its formations and Seventh Army's, and the latter are probably, though not certainly, included. It reported its fighting strength as 17,980 infantry, 314 artillery pieces, and 42 tanks and assault guns.<sup>2</sup> On 22 and 23 August Army Group "B" reported<sup>3</sup> the state of its eight\* armoured divisions as follows:

\*The Panzer Lehr Division had been virtually destroyed in the St. Lo area at the end of July. The 9th Panzer Division had suffered a similar fate in the Mortain counter-offensive.

2nd Panzer Division—one infantry battalion, no tanks, no artillery;  
21st Panzer Division—four weak infantry battalions, 10 tanks, artillery unknown;  
116th Panzer Division—one infantry battalion, 12 tanks, approximately two batteries;  
1st S.S. Panzer Division—weak infantry elements, no tanks, no artillery;  
2nd S.S. Panzer Division—450 men, 15 tanks, six guns;  
9th S.S. Panzer Division—460 men, 20-25 tanks, 20 guns;  
10th S.S. Panzer Division—four weak infantry battalions, no tanks, no artillery;  
12th S.S. Panzer Division—300 men, 10 tanks, no artillery.

The scale of the German disaster can be judged by recalling that on D Day the 12th S.S. Panzer Division had had a strength of over 20,000 men and 150 tanks (above, page 129).

By comparison, the Allies' losses, though heavy, had been much less. As of the end of August,\* they had suffered 206,703 casualties, of which the United States forces had had 124,394 and the British and Canadians 82,309.<sup>4</sup>

Canadian losses had been large in proportion to the strength engaged. From D Day through 23 August the total casualties of the Canadian component of the 21st Army Group had been 18,444, of which 5021 were fatal. Field-Marshal Montgomery has published figures indicating that down to 1 October the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division had more casualties than any other division in the army group, and the 2nd Canadian Division was next.<sup>5</sup> From the morning of 1 August to the morning of 23 August the casualties of the whole of First Canadian Army, as reported at the time, were 826 officers and 11,833 men killed, wounded and missing. Of these 423 officers and 6992 men were Canadians, 276 officers and 3594 men were British, and 127 officers and 1247 men were Polish.<sup>6</sup> From the commencement of Operation "Totalize" (taken as 8 August) through 21 August, the last day of heavy fighting in the Gap, Canadian battle casualties in the theatre had numbered 1479 killed or died of wounds, 4023 wounded or injured and 177 taken prisoner.<sup>7</sup>

### The Rival Strategies

If one compares the German and Allied performances in Normandy, and attempts to estimate the reasons for the German defeat, certain fundamental facts immediately present themselves.

The Allies owed their victory in great part to numerical and material superiority. Above all, it is notable that the Germans had almost no naval support, and very little support in the air, whereas the Allied armies enjoyed the cooperation of very powerful naval forces (which not only carried them to Normandy and protected their supply lines, but also frequently intervened effectively in the land battle with their guns), and tremendous air forces which enjoyed almost entirely undisputed command of the air and were constantly brought into play against the enemy troops on the ground. Many German accounts, some of which are quoted in the foregoing narrative, testify to the paralyzing effects of Allied air power throughout the campaign.

Even on the ground, however, the Germans were, as time passed, considerably

\*The figures are for 30 August for the Americans, 31 August for the British and Canadians.

outnumbered. By 1 September the Allies had landed, according to contemporary records, 826,700 military personnel in the British area and 1,211,200 in the U.S. area of Normandy. This presumably includes air force personnel (though not those who intervened in the battle from bases in England). It does not include the large forces landed in Southern France since 15 August.<sup>8</sup> It is impossible to find a precisely comparable German figure, but it appears likely that the Germans deployed about 740,000 men of their army in Normandy south of the Seine.

Nevertheless, in addition to being outnumbered the Germans had also been decisively outgeneralled. "On the strategic level" the Allied conduct of the campaign was far superior to theirs. The weaknesses of their command organization have already been noted (above, page 57). Hitler's interference in the operations, and his refusal to accept the recommendations of the commanders on the spot, were undoubtedly a continual and a very serious hindrance to the German conduct of the campaign, although the post-war writings of German generals have somewhat exaggerated its importance by comparison with other factors. German Intelligence was also extraordinarily ineffective, as we have seen; one influence making for this result was doubtless the inadequacy of German air reconnaissance at this stage of the war, but as we have suggested the deficiencies of the intelligence provided on the higher levels were so serious that it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that there was deliberate sabotage within the organization.

Whatever the causes, the Germans were completely deceived as to Allied intentions both before the landings in Normandy and during the campaign there. Their continued expectation of a further assault in the Pas de Calais, and their consequent retention there, for six or seven weeks after the initial landing, of large forces which could probably have turned the scale in Normandy, were disastrous for their cause. But their generals also, as we have seen, failed to foresee the course of Allied operations within the Normandy theatre. They thought in terms of a thrust from the eastern flank of the bridgehead directed on Paris, and played into Montgomery's hands by concentrating the great bulk of their forces, and particularly of their armour, in the Caen sector; while he was planning to break out from the bridgehead, not on this flank where the Germans expected it, but on the western flank where they did not.

"Into Montgomery's hands". The phrase is appropriate, for the direction of the Normandy campaign was, essentially, the British general's. The matter has unfortunately become one of controversy, for national as well as personal susceptibilities are involved. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff wrote of Montgomery in his diary in June 1943, "It is most distressing that the Americans do not like him, and it will always be a difficult matter to have him fighting in close proximity to them."<sup>10</sup> Here Lord Alanbrooke was a true prophet. But the directives and other documents which have been quoted at length in this volume leave no doubt

<sup>8</sup>This is a very rough calculation on the basis of the "theatre slice"<sup>9</sup> for the 45 divisions known to have been deployed south of the Seine and north of the Loire (6 S.S. Panzer and Panzer Grenadier, 5 Panzer, 13 Infantry including 2 *Luftwaffe* field divisions, 15 Static, 4 Parachute, 1 Reserve Infantry, 1 Airlanding); it allows also for the 40,000 replacements known to have been received during the battle.

as to the credit for the Normandy victory. From the moment early on D plus 1 when he gave his first orders to Bradley and Dempsey (above, page 141), Montgomery's grip of the operations was firm and effective. As we have seen, he conducted them in accordance with a pattern laid down before the landings, for his forecast dated 7 May 1944 (above, page 83) contains a definite indication of the policy of attracting the enemy's strength to the British front in the Caen sector; and the same policy appears in his reports and directives written in France as early as 11 June (above, page 142). It is true that his own statement of 1947, "The outstanding point about the Battle of Normandy is that it was fought exactly as planned before the invasion",<sup>11</sup> is a considerable exaggeration. (For some reason, commanders seem to consider it the supreme form of military achievement to plan an operation in advance and subsequently carry it out precisely as planned; though surely it might be considered a higher attribute of generalship to maintain and profit by the degree of flexibility which enables the commander to adjust his operations to events and to alter his plans to take advantage of fleeting opportunities.) In fact, as the reader of the foregoing pages knows, there were constant adjustments in Normandy, one of the most important, the decision to undertake the "short hook" directed on Argentan instead of the long envelopment to the Seine, owing much to the initiative of General Bradley. Another was the abandonment, as the result of events at the same period, of the Quiberon Bay project that had bulked so large in Montgomery's early appreciation (above, page 83). Nevertheless, the broad conception of the campaign as fought certainly remained very much as forecast by him before D Day; as he says in his memoirs, "the fundamental design remained unchanged".

Montgomery's position as *de facto* ground commander under Eisenhower was temporary. The triumphant success of his operations in Normandy did not alter the command arrangements made before the landings, and on 1 September he relinquished his broader authority and became merely one of three army group commanders under General Eisenhower, with whom the coordination of ground operations thereafter rested. Before that date, however, and particularly during June and July, Montgomery was the person in effective control of the campaign. The role of Eisenhower at this stage was limited to support, encouragement and criticism. So far as he influenced the operations, he did it by commenting tactfully upon the directives issued by Montgomery to his army commanders. These comments were usually directed towards urging Montgomery to speed up the operations, and on at least one occasion (above, page 200) such a comment seems to have had a material and useful influence.

After 1 September, of course, the situation was changed. Montgomery no longer issued directives covering the whole theatre of operations. This was now Eisenhower's business. Montgomery was now the commentator, but his position was quite different from that of Eisenhower in the earlier months; for he was Eisenhower's subordinate, and the comments of a subordinate upon his superior's directives are not like a superior's remarks upon the conduct of operations by a subordinate. The new role was not one to which Montgomery readily adjusted himself.

## On the Battlefield in Normandy

Although there is no doubt that on the higher levels of command the Allies' operations in Normandy were far better conducted than the Germans', the same cannot be said with confidence about the operations on the actual battlefield. The German soldier and field commander showed themselves, as so often before, to be excellent practitioners of their trade. The German fighting soldier was courageous, tenacious and skilful. He was sometimes a fanatic, occasionally a brutal thug; but he was almost always a formidable fighting man who gave a good account of himself even under conditions as adverse as those in Normandy certainly were. German commanders and staff officers were in general highly competent. Man for man and unit for unit, it cannot be said that it was by tactical superiority that we won the Battle of Normandy.

The enemy's opinion of Allied tactics is always interesting and sometimes instructive. Not many contemporary critiques of this sort 'are available for Normandy, but we have a careful report by the 21st S.S. Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 10th S.S. Panzer Division "Fruntsberg", which that division's headquarters sent to all its units on 29 July.<sup>12</sup> It made no distinction between "English and American" fighting methods, and made no mention of Canadians; at this time, indeed, the 10th S.S. had had little if any contact with: Canadian troops. The report constantly emphasized the effects of the Allies' complete air superiority: it was now necessary, in planning a march, it said, to "figure at least three times the amount of time previously allowed", and it was essential to move in darkness and ensure that the main body reached its destination before daybreak. When enemy aircraft appeared, "All marching motion must cease completely." On the whole, the German commentator, rightly or wrongly, had no very lofty opinion of the Allied foot soldier:

The morale of the enemy infantry is not very high. It depends largely on artillery and air support. In case of a well placed concentration of fire from our own artillery the infantry will often leave its positions and retreat hastily. Whenever enemy is engaged with force, he usually retreats or surrenders.

He had a healthy respect for the Allies' artillery, "the main arm" of their "attrition and annihilation tactics". He remarked however that the guns did not fire deception shoots; the main artillery effort was always in "the area where the penetration is to take place". As for the Allied tanks, they showed "good combat spirit; together with artillery they form support for the infantry".

All the Allied armies committed to the battle had one thing in common: a high proportion of the formations used had never fought before—and those that had fought had operated under conditions very different from those of the NorthWest Europe theatre. It is probably true, in these circumstances, that all the Allied forces had very similar problems, and the comments upon Canadian formations which follow could doubtless be applied with little change to the British and American forces also.

The lack of battle experience undoubtedly had its due effect within the Canadian formations. They did well, but they would certainly have done better had they



ST. LAMBERT-SUR-DIVES, AUGUST 1944

Germans surrendering to Major D. V. Currie's force. Major Currie himself, tired and grimy, appears at the left, pistol in hand. This is as close as we are ever likely to come to a photograph of a man winning the Victoria Cross.



THE RAILWAY "Y" IN THE FORET DE LA LONDE

By the time this photograph was taken (1946), an additional railway line (curving into the woods in the background) had been built, evidently to by-pass the demolished bridge. The picture was taken looking west from the east side of the valley. The South Saskatchewan Regiment suffered heavily in fighting hereabouts on 28 August 1944.



#### THE FORET DE LA LONDE

This mosaic, composed of air photographs taken on 24 May 1944, illustrates the 2nd Canadian Division's battlefield of 27-29 August 1944. The railway lines running from top to bottom indicate the course of the valley which proved such a serious obstacle. See also Map 6.



not been learning the business as they fought. It is true that all had undergone exceptionally long and careful training; but no training is entirely a substitute for experience of battle, and no division has ever realized its full potentialities until it has actually fought and thereby acquired the "battle wisdom" and the confidence that can only be gained in action.

At the same time, we had probably not got as much out of our long training as we might have. In an earlier portion of this history,\* the writer ventured the opinion that the Canadian Army suffered "from possessing a proportion of regimental officers whose attitude towards training was casual and haphazard rather than urgent and scientific". Analysis of the operations in Normandy seems to support this opinion. Regimental officers of this type, where they existed, were probably the weakest element in the Army. At the top of the command pyramid, Canadian generalship in Normandy does not suffer by comparison with that of the other Allies engaged. At the bottom, the vast majority of the rank and file did their unpleasant and perilous jobs with initiative, high courage and steadily increasing skill, as their fathers had done in the First World War. As for their officers, the Canadian regimental officer at his best (and he was very frequently at his best) had no superior. He worked to make himself master of his craft, which usually was not his by profession; he watched over his men's welfare and led them bravely and intelligently in battle. There still remained, however, that proportion of officers who were not fully competent for their appointments, and whose inadequacy appeared in action and sometimes had serious consequences.

This situation was reflected in some degree in the many changes in command which took place within First Canadian Army in the course of the campaign. Thus, by the end of August 1944, among the nine infantry or armoured brigades in the 2nd Canadian Corps there had been eight changes in command, and only three brigades retained their original commanders. Four of the changes were due to battle casualties, a fact which reflects the extreme fierceness of the fighting. Two were the result of what higher authority considered unsuitability. Among the commanding officers of armoured regiments, two were changed as consequences of death or injury, and two for other reasons; seven commands remained unchanged. In the infantry and machine-gun battalions (24 in number) only seven commands had not changed by the end of August. No less than 14 battalion commanders had been changed as the result of battle casualty or sickness. Five commanding officers had been promoted, and five removed because considered unsuitable. A great deal had been done before D Day to weed out officers who were unlikely to succeed;§ but the final screening had to be the test of battle, and sometimes a man who appears to good advantage under training conditions turns out to be little use under fire.

It is not difficult to put one's finger upon occasions in the Normandy campaign

\**Six Years of War*, 253.

†The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada had five commanding officers in little more than five weeks, not counting Major Gagnon's temporary tenure during "Totalize" (above, pages 219-20); and every one of these changes was the result of a battle casualty.

‡See *Six Years of War*, 413-19.

when Canadian formations failed to make the most of their opportunities. In particular, the capture of Falaise was long delayed, and it was necessary to mount not one but two set-piece operations for the purpose at a time when an early closing of the Falaise Gap would have inflicted most grievous harm upon the enemy and might even, conceivably, have enabled us to end the war some months sooner than was actually the case. A German force far smaller than our own, taking advantage of strong ground and prepared positions, was able to slow our advance to the point where considerable German forces made their escape. That this was also due in part to errors of judgement south of the Gap should not blind us to our own shortcomings.

Had our troops been more experienced, the Germans would hardly have been able to escape a worse disaster. They were especially fortunate in that the two armoured divisions available to the First Canadian Army—the 4th Canadian Armoured Division and the 1st Polish Armoured Division—had never fought before they were committed to battle in Normandy at one of the highest and fiercest crises of the war. Less raw formations would probably have obtained larger and earlier results. In the case of the Canadian division, the results of inexperience were most evident in the operations of its armoured component, the 4th Armoured Brigade. The 4th Division was the youngest of the Canadian divisions, having been converted from infantry to armour during 1942 and arrived in England that autumn. It did not take part in Exercise "Spartan" in March 1943 because it had not reached the point of equipment and training where it could do so effectively. It was exercised for the first time as a formation only in the autumn of 1943, when it had two divisional exercises; at this time it still did not have all its battle equipment. The events in Normandy lead one to conclude that its armoured brigade had scarcely had sufficient training in crosscountry operational movement before it went into action. (It must be added that conditions in England, where such considerations as the desirability of not interfering with growing crops hampered movement, were not ideal for this training.) Dissatisfaction with the division's operations south of Caen was reflected, almost inevitably, in a change of command,<sup>13</sup> Brigadier H. W. Foster from the 7th Infantry Brigade being promoted to replace Major-General Kitching on 21 August.

The 2nd Canadian Infantry Division had also had its troubles, accompanied by very heavy casualties, in the bloody battles in the second half of July. It is in order to recall again here the frank opinion of its commander, General Foulkes: "When we went into battle at Falaise and Caen we found that when we bumped into battle-experienced German troops we were no match for them. We would not have been successful had it not been for our air and artillery support. We had had four years of real hard going and it took about two months to get that Division so shaken down that we were really a machine that could fight."<sup>15</sup> Nor

\*It may be noted that General Kitching took over the division only at the end of February 1944. He never had the opportunity of commanding it in a full-scale exercise before it went into action. During the spring months tank movement was kept to a minimum to conserve the tracks of the tanks that were to be used in operations.<sup>14</sup>

had the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, the first Canadian formation to meet the enemy in Normandy, been without its own reverses, which are described in the foregoing chapters along with its successes.

While it seems clear that lack of battle experience hampered our formations in Normandy, one must remark that, although some of the German divisions were subject to the same disability, it appears to have had a less serious effect on them. The 12th S.S. Panzer Division, which was responsible for many of our troubles, was formed only in 1943 and had never fought before 7 June 1944. (As we have seen, however, it did contain a high proportion of experienced officers and N.C.Os. It also had the advantage, after the first days of the campaign, of having a commander and a senior staff officer who had special knowledge of the theatre of operations, having exercised there with the 1st S.S. Panzer Division in 1942.)<sup>16</sup> There were other German divisions committed against us in Normandy which had not fought before and which nevertheless gave a very good account of themselves. This may have been due in part to the fact that the German formations were on the defensive while ours were attacking, a more difficult role. Nevertheless, one suspects that the Germans contrived to get more out of their training than we did. Perhaps their attitude towards such matters was less casual than ours.

### The Significance of Normandy

The victory in Normandy did not end the North-West Europe campaign. It continued for more than eight months after the German disaster about Falaise. The German army, as we shall see, showed extraordinary power of recovery. It stabilized the situation in the Netherlands and on the western frontiers of Germany, and we had to fight a succession of hard battles before Hitler's regime collapsed in the following spring. Nevertheless, in Normandy the most significant battle of the campaign had been won.

The successful landings on 6 June, followed by the consolidation of the lodgement area, were in themselves its most vital phase; for in the light of the superiority of Allied resources the successful establishment by the Allies of a fighting front in France was almost certain to prove fatal to the Germans in the end. However, Normandy meant more than this. There Hitler lost the armies that were his best hope of staving off ultimate disaster. The formations destroyed could never be adequately replaced; indeed, as we have seen, few men could be spared during the campaign to replace the Germans' vast number of casualties. The new divisions brought into existence by tremendous efforts in the autumn of 1944 were to be no substitute for the men who were now in Allied prison camps or in the cemeteries about Falaise.

At the same time, fatal damage had been done to the morale of the German army and in particular of its officer corps. Many senior officers had been deeply discouraged even before D Day. The success of the landing in Normandy completed their conviction that the war was lost, and a group of them tried to

kill Hitler on 20 July, and failed by the narrowest of margins. Every thinking German with knowledge of the facts must now have realized that his country's military situation was beyond saving, and the courage with which the German armies continued to fight until the final collapse was largely the courage of despair.

We must not, of course, fix our gaze exclusively upon the events in western Europe. In the summer of 1944, as in earlier periods, the largest portion of the German Army was engaged against Russia. Some 168 German and satellite divisions were in action there on 15 July 1944<sup>17</sup> as compared with the 45 that opposed the western Allies in Normandy,\* and the whole strategic situation depended upon the continuance of the campaign on the Eastern Front. But there was now no question, as there had been in 1942, of the possibility of Russian collapse. The Russians, like the Allies in the west, were advancing victoriously. After Normandy Hitler's position was hopeless. It was only a question of how long he could urge his courageous but disenchanted people to continue the struggle.

\*Divisions reduced to battle groups have been counted as half divisions, "name groups" in each case as one third of a division. The Germans suffered a catastrophic reverse in Russia as well as in the West in the summer of 1944. On the basis of computation used here, they had had 199 divisions on the Eastern Front on 15 June, and were down to 123 by 15 August. German medical records show that from 22 June 1941 (when the attack on Russia began) to 31 March 1945 (the last date for which figures are available) the German Army suffered 7,620,323 casualties. Of these, 1,364,198 were incurred in fighting against the Western Allies.<sup>18</sup>

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PURSUIT ACROSS THE SEINE

**23-30 AUGUST 1944**

(See Map 6, and Sketches 20-22)

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#### Advancing Towards the Seine

**W**E have already described General Montgomery's plan for the pursuit following the German defeat in the Falaise Gap (above, page 267). It was to get the Allied armies forward across the Seine with all speed, and in the process to effect if possible a second encirclement, pushing American spearheads in a great sweep up the left bank of the river to cut off the retreating enemy remnants before they could cross. The particular task of First Canadian Army was to cross the Seine, clear the Le Havre peninsula, and capture the port of Le Havre itself as soon as might be. By 23 August the Army was fully launched in this new direction.

On 19 August General Crerar had given his two Corps Commanders their orders for the advance.<sup>1</sup> The 1st British Corps was to continue its movement along the axis Lisieux—Pont Audemer. The 2nd Canadian Corps was to follow the general line Trun—Vimoutiers—Orbec—Bernay—Elbeuf (or possibly Louviers). Its advance was to commence only when ordered by the Army Commander, but in the meantime General Simonds was to "carry out active reconnaissance in the direction indicated". In fact, as has been seen (above, page 268), he started the 2nd Canadian Division off towards Vimoutiers on 21 August. The final paragraph of Crerar's directive ran as follows:

The basic tactical policy of the First Cdn Army, as previously explained, will be to advance to the R. Seine with "right leading" even though it may well be that 2 Cdn Corps will be temporarily prevented from commencing its part in this intended manoeuvre by its present commitments. . . . In the meantime, 1 Brit Corps will not hold back on that account, but will proceed as indicated. . . . Enemy garrisons in the coastal belt will be masked and contained by adequate forces. Their continued existence, however, will not be allowed to distract the main forces of 1 Brit Corps from their thrust along the axis given.

The 1st British Corps, as already noted, had some heavy fighting during its advance, particularly on the line of the River Touques. By 24 August, however, the Corps was across the Touques and advancing on Honfleur, on the south shore of the Seine Estuary opposite Le Havre. The 2nd Canadian Corps had reached the line of the River Risle east of Bernay, which was captured that day.<sup>2</sup> Under orders issued by General Simonds on 22 August,<sup>3</sup> the 2nd Canadian Infantry

Division was moving on the left, through Brionne, directed on Bourgtheroulde. The 3rd Division was in the centre, moving by way of Orbec upon the Elbeuf area. On the right the 4th Canadian Armoured Division was following the axis Broglie—Bernay—Le Neubourg, directed on the region about Pont de l'Arche. The advance was being led and covered by the 18th Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons) and the divisions' reconnaissance regiments.<sup>4</sup>

Resistance to the 2nd Corps had so far been insignificant; the enemy was chiefly intent on getting away, and such opposition as he offered was merely delaying actions by rearguards which withdrew as soon as strong pressure was applied. Indeed, the most memorable feature of these days was the tumultuous and heartfelt welcome which the liberated people gave our columns. The historian of the 10th Brigade wrote later, "Will Bernay ever be forgotten? Bernay where the people stood from morning till night, at times in the pouring rain, and at times in the August sun. Bernay where they never tired of waving, of throwing flowers or fruit, of giving their best wines and spirits to some halted column. . . ."<sup>5</sup> But in every town and hamlet the reception was much the same. It was an experience to move the toughest soldier.

It will be remembered (above, page 39) that before D Day the First Canadian Army had been directed to study the problem of an assault crossing of the lower Seine. As it turned out, no such operation was required. As early as 21 August, Army Headquarters informed General Simonds that "the Axehead operation as planned in England, in regard to the crossing of R. Seine is definitely off", adding that "an assault crossing in the Elbeuf bend seems indicated, if required at all, which seems to be somewhat unlikely".<sup>6</sup> On 25 August General Crerar issued a new directive.<sup>7</sup>

The Army Commander noted that the Second British Army was proceeding to take over the areas lately secured by American troops and those of First Canadian Army within the Second Army boundary. Thereafter, the 30th British Corps, on the British Army's right, was to exploit the bridgehead obtained by the Americans in the vicinity of Mantes-Gassicourt, while on the left the 12th British Corps was to take over and, after the elimination of an enemy pocket existing between the British and Canadian Armies, develop a bridgehead east of the Seine in the vicinity of Louviers. The 8th British Corps was to be held, for the moment, in Second Army reserve; it was in fact "grounded", its transport being used to get the rest of the Army forward.<sup>8</sup> This symbolizes the greatest Allied problem in the phase now beginning—that of getting sufficient supplies to the forward troops to maintain the advance. The Allies were outrunning their maintenance; they had no ports close to the area they were now entering, and as the armies rushed forward the lines of supply back to the Normandy beaches and ports were lengthening hourly.

The task now prescribed for the First Canadian Army was to "complete the destruction of enemy forces" within the Army boundaries west of the Seine and thereafter to cross the Seine and advance along the general axis Rouen—Neufchatel—Abbeville—Hesdin—St. Omer—Ypres. The boundary between the

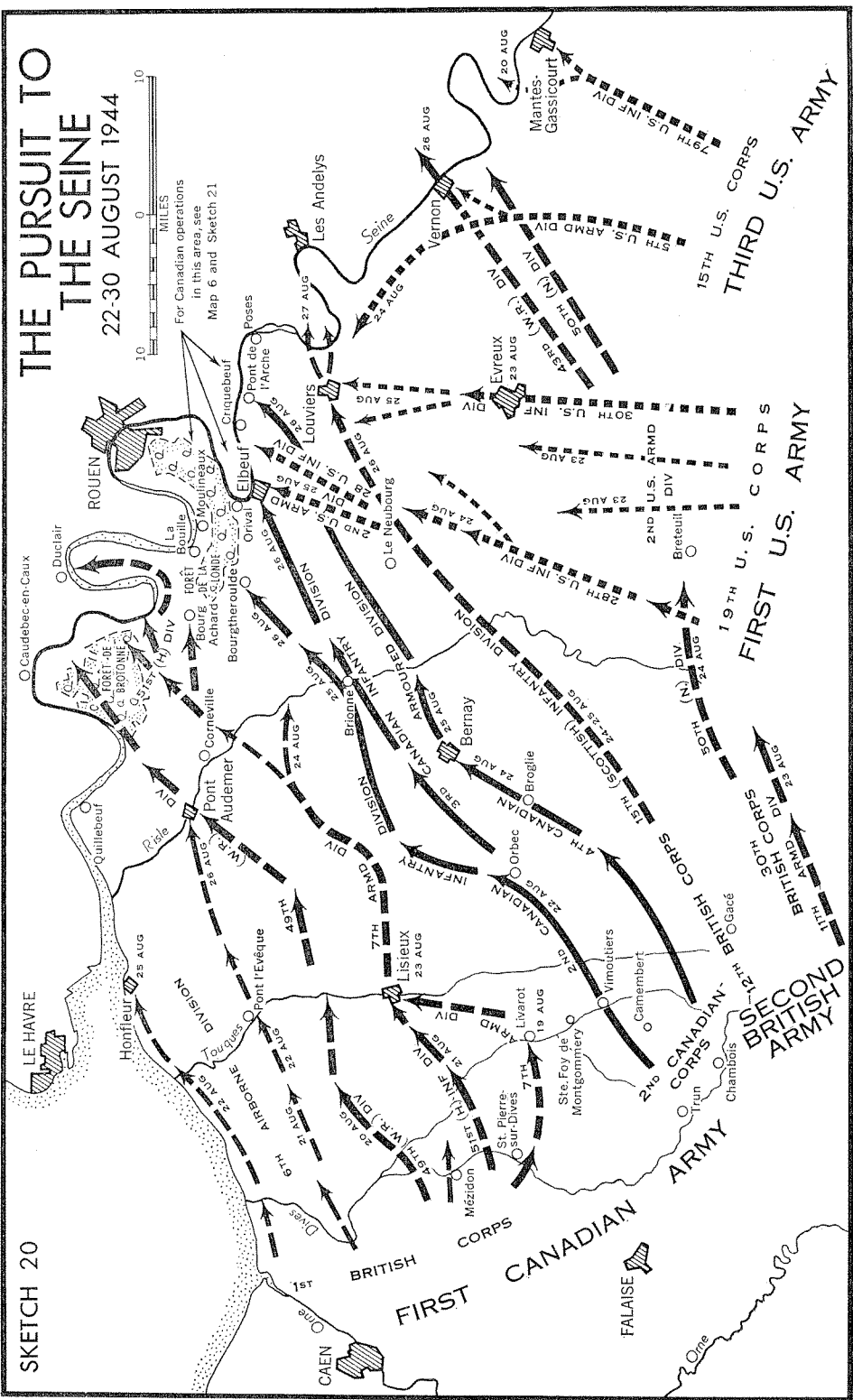
SKETCH 20

# THE PURSUIT TO THE SEINE

## 22-30 AUGUST 1944



For Canadian operations in this area, see Map 6 and Sketch 21



Canadian and British Armies would run through Le Neubourg, Louviers and Pont de l'Arche and on through Neufchatel to Hesdin.

The 2nd Canadian Corps was to plan and make initial preparations for an opposed crossing of the Seine between Pont de l'Arche and Elbeuf, and subsequently for securing additional bridgeheads both above and below Rouen as far west as Caudebec-en-Caux. The probability of one infantry division from the 1st British Corps being transferred temporarily to General Simonds for the purpose of securing the bridgehead east of the last-named place was forecast. The Seine once crossed, the 2nd Corps was to establish itself in the area north of Rouen, "pushing out strong reconnaissances, preparatory to further advance in the direction of Neufchatel and Dieppe", while the 1st British Corps would "proceed simultaneously with the rapid clearance of the Havre peninsula" west of a line running north-west from Rouen to Fontaine-le-Dun.

The day after Crerar sent out this directive, General Montgomery issued a new one to the 21st Army Group.<sup>9</sup> This was the first such order which did not have specific application to the U.S. forces. It noted the nature of the orders which had been issued to General Bradley's 12th Army Group, but was not a formal instruction to that formation. Its opening paragraphs, describing the "general situation", should perhaps be quoted:

1. The enemy has now been driven north of the Seine except in a few places, and our troops have entered Paris. The enemy forces are very stretched and disorganized; they are in no fit condition to stand and fight us.
2. This, then, is our opportunity to achieve our further objects quickly, and to deal the enemy further heavy blows which will cripple his power to continue in the war.
3. The tasks now confronting 21 Army Group are:
  - (a) To operate northwards and to destroy the enemy forces in N.E. France and Belgium.
  - (b) to secure the Pas de Calais area and the airfields in Belgium.
  - (c) to secure Antwerp as a base.
4. Having completed these tasks, the eventual mission of the Army Group will be to advance eastwards on the Ruhr.
5. Speed of action and of movement is now vital. I cannot emphasize this too strongly; what we have to do must be done quickly. Every officer and man must understand that by a stupendous effort now we shall not only hasten the end of the war; we shall also bring quick relief to our families and friends in England by over-running the flying bomb launching sites in the Pas de Calais.

*Intention*

6. To destroy all enemy forces in the Pas de Calais and Flanders, and to capture Antwerp.

The particular tasks of the First Canadian Army were thus described:

10. Having crossed the Seine the Army will operate northwards, will secure the port of Dieppe, and will proceed quickly with the destruction of all enemy forces in the coastal belt up to Bruges.
11. One Corps will be turned westwards into the Havre peninsula, to destroy the enemy forces in that area and to secure the port of Havre. No more forces will be employed in this task than are necessary to achieve the object. The main business lies to the north, and in the Pas de Calais.

The Canadian Army was directed to operate generally "with its main weight on its right flank", dealing with resistance by outflanking movements and "right



hooks". The 6th Airborne Division was to be withdrawn from operations in time to be returned to England by 6 September; the 7th Armoured Division was to be transferred to the Second Army at once.

The Second Army was to push across the Seine "with all speed", establish itself in the area Arras—Amiens—St. Pol and thence be prepared to drive on through the industrial area of north-eastern France into Belgium. Alternatively, part of the Army might be required to operate north-westwards in support of the Allied Airborne Army which at this time Montgomery was proposing to drop in the Pas de Calais ahead of the Canadian advance. It was important, immediately after the Seine crossing, to push a strong armoured force quickly ahead to seize Amiens. As for the 12th Army Group, the directive noted, "12 Army Group has been ordered to thrust forward on its left, its principal offensive mission being, for the present, to support 21 Army Group in the attainment of the objectives referred to in para 3 above." The First U.S. Army was being employed for this task, and was to advance north-east on the general axis Paris-Brussels and establish itself in the area Brussels—Maastricht—Liege—Namur—Charleroi. In conclusion, Montgomery wrote:

24. The enemy has not the troops to hold any strong position.  
The proper tactics now are for strong armoured and mobile columns to by-pass enemy centres of resistance and to push boldly ahead, creating alarm and despondency in enemy rear areas. Enemy centres of resistance thus by-passed should be dealt with by infantry columns coming on later.
25. I rely on commanders of every rank and grade to "drive" ahead with the utmost energy; any tendency to be "sticky" or cautious must be stamped on ruthlessly.

At the time when this directive was issued there seemed to be no limit to the possibilities of the situation. The only apparent cloud on the horizon was the supply problem. The news of the liberation of Paris had just electrified the world. A rising in the city forced the Supreme Commander's hand, and Allied troops, including General Leclerc's 2nd French Armoured Division, had entered the city early on 25 August, and that day the tactical headquarters of the 5th U.S. Corps of the First U.S. Army was established at the Gare Montparnasse.<sup>10</sup> The same day the Second British Army made contact south-west of Le Neubourg with the 19th U.S. Corps which had advanced across their front, and the 43rd (Wessex) Division reached the Seine at Vernon (where the Americans advancing along the left bank had arrived some days before) and established a small bridgehead in the face of resistance from the enemy on the north bank.<sup>11</sup> On 25 August also First Canadian Army made contact with the First U.S. Army at several points north and north-east of Le Neubourg, and subsequently reported, "By last light our forces were within striking distance of the Seine crossings and formations of the 2nd Canadian Corps were preparing their individual attacks."<sup>12</sup> At 5 p.m. on 26 August the scout platoon and "D" Company of The Lincoln and Welland Regiment, using shovels as paddles to propel a small, boat, crossed the Seine near Criquebeuf, above Elbeuf, and took up a position on the far shore.<sup>13</sup> They were the first Canadians across the river.

Nevertheless, an unpleasant check lay just ahead—a check which suggested that the optimistic forecasts of an early end of the war which were current at this moment might not be entirely well founded. At the same time a special Canadian administrative problem which was to have wide repercussions was beginning to emerge.

### The Infantry Reinforcement Problem Appears

Casualties in the infantry arm in Normandy had been heavier, and those in other arms lighter, than had been anticipated in Allied planning. This was a situation common to the British, American and Canadian armies.<sup>14</sup> All had grossly miscalculated. The Canadian Army Overseas had accepted as a basis for planning the "rates of wastage" used by the British War Office, which had much wider experience of operations than the Canadians. These rates however were undoubtedly based mainly on the fighting in North Africa, and they proved inapplicable to North-West Europe. To state the matter in its simplest and starkest terms, the War Office had predicted that in periods of "intense" activity 48 per cent of the casualties would be suffered by the infantry, 15 per cent by the armoured corps and 14 per cent by the artillery; in "normal" periods the parallel percentages would be 34, 11 and 16. But down to 17 August in Normandy the infantry had had 76 per cent of the Canadian casualties, the armoured corps only 7 per cent and the artillery 8 per cent. It may be noted that these figures were almost identical with those deriving from experience in the Italian theatre, where Canadian troops had been in action since July 1943. However, the actual force engaged there, and the losses, had been relatively small; Canadian armour had not fought on any considerable scale; and it was rightly felt that this limited experience was an insufficient basis for revision of the War Office rates.<sup>15</sup>

In the Canadian Army in Normandy the problem began to present itself even before the final attack to break out of the bridgehead. It first appeared in an urgent form in the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, which had had exceptionally heavy casualties in the July battles. On 7 August General Simonds had reported to Headquarters First Canadian Army that the 2nd Division was 1900 men short; he estimated that it might conceivably be 2500 short on the completion of Operation "Totalize", then about to be launched:

No definite information is available to this Headquarters concerning further arrivals of infantry general duty reinforcements and it is felt that, for one reason or another, the system for the supply of reinforcements to this theatre is not functioning satisfactorily and that reinforcements in sufficient quantities to take care of actual and probable losses are not immediately available.<sup>16</sup>

On 26 August, although considerable numbers of reinforcements had been received in the interval,<sup>17</sup> the field returns<sup>18</sup> show the nine infantry battalions of the 2nd Division as deficient a total of 1910 "other ranks". The two Frenchspeaking units were worst off, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal being 331 men short and Le Regiment de Maisonneuve 246; however, although these were the largest deficiencies, three other units were short more than 200 men each. An attempt had

already been made to improve the situation in the French battalions by "combing" Canadian units in the United Kingdom for French-speaking personnel.<sup>19</sup>

The situation concerning infantry reinforcements generally was to be a serious source of anxiety throughout the late summer and autumn, in the field and also in London and Ottawa. In the meantime, it is evident that the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division was considerably under strength as it approached the Seine, where it had a hard battle to fight. It is only fair to add that the German formations salvaged from Normandy were in much worse condition.

It is time to turn to the German side and note the plans and dispositions which the enemy had been able to make for withdrawing his forces and delaying our advance.

On 20 August Hitler had issued a directive<sup>20</sup> requiring the Commander-in-Chief West to hold the bridgehead west of Paris, prevent a break-through between the Seine and the Loire in the direction of Dijon, re-form the battered Fifth Panzer and Seventh Armies behind the Touques with the armour on the southern flank, and, finally, if the area forward of the Seine could not be held, to fall back to and defend the line River Seine—River Yonne—Canal de Bourgogne—Dijon—Dole to the Swiss border. (On a small-scale map, this appears as a pleasantly straight line across eastern France.) But the bridgehead south of the Seine at Paris was still to be held at all costs. Hitler wrote, "If necessary, the battle in and around Paris must be conducted regardless of the [possible] destruction of the city." As has already appeared, the shattered German armies were far from equal to making this directive good. Nevertheless, their performance in this phase commands respect. The German forces, from the coast to the boundary with the First Army at Poissy, just west of Paris, were under the Fifth Panzer Army commanded by Colonel-General Sepp Dietrich. As we have seen (above, page 270) this Army's formations had largely been reduced to mere shadows. It was now using in the line those divisions which had been least badly mauled. Three corps were under its command: the 86th nearest the coast, the 2nd S.S. Panzer in the centre and the 81st on the left.

On 24 August the Commander-in-Chief West (Field-Marshal Model) emphasized the importance of covering the lower Seine crossings to ensure that his retreating forces got across the river. His order for this date<sup>21</sup> specified operations as follows:

Withdrawal of the western wing in accordance with the situation. The eastern wing to stand fast under any circumstances and to be strengthened by all available forces in order to safeguard the crossings of the lower Seine. Elements of Seventh Army not needed and all vehicles to be ferried across the river forthwith at high pressure and without let-up.

The available armour was being concentrated during this day in the area northeast of Le Neubourg to prevent a break-through along the Seine, where the Americans had pushed the German covering group back from Vernon to the vicinity of Louviers.<sup>22</sup> And in fact the Germans succeeded in preventing their retiring forces being cut off and encircled in the manner planned by the Allied commanders. The American sweep penetrated to Louviers and Elbeuf—a fine

advance-but not "beyond" (above, page 267). The British and Canadians had now drawn level with the Americans; and the enemy's resistance had suddenly stiffened. On the threshold of his river crossings west of Elbeuf he fought a very effective rearguard action.

On 25 August, it appears, the 331st German Infantry Division was made responsible, under the 81st Corps, for covering the withdrawal across the Seine in the Rouen area.<sup>23</sup> This was a good division commanded by Colonel Walter Steinmuller. It had been under the Fifteenth Army north of the Seine until early August, when it was moved south. It did not become involved in the disaster of the Pocket, but took part in the general retreat to the Seine and in it lost one of its three grenadier regiments. It now found itself defending a line west of Bourgheroulde, while behind it a great mass of German armoured and other vehicles stood waiting to cross the river. Its task was to cover the crossings about Rouen and Duclair, at the tops of the two great loops of the Seine north and east of Bourgheroulde. It was very evident that Steinmuller's division would not in itself be equal to this. Accordingly, on the afternoon of the 25th Fifth Panzer Army directed Lieut.-General Graf von Schwerin, commanding the tank force that had been collected north-east of Le Neubourg, to form two armoured groups, one from the remnants of the 2nd and 9th S.S. Panzer Divisions, and the other from those of the 21st and 116th Panzer Divisions, to block the necks of the river loops south of Rouen and south of Duclair.<sup>24</sup>

On 25 August the 2nd U.S. Armoured Division, the First U.S. Army's spearhead, fought its way into Elbeuf and made contact with the 4th Canadian Armoured Division about Le Neubourg and also with elements of the 7th British Armoured Division west of the town.<sup>25</sup> The 4th Division recorded, "The fact that the Americans had beaten the Div to this area West of the Seine somewhat dampened the good spirits but they were indeed a welcome sight."<sup>26</sup> Arrangements were now made for the Americans to withdraw, and during the next couple of days the British and Canadian armies relieved them in their corridor along the south bank of the Seine.<sup>27</sup>

The 2nd Canadian Division captured Bourgheroulde on 26 August (the Canadian Black Watch overcoming determined if disorganized opposition from snipers and a troublesome anti-tank gun in the centre of the town)<sup>28</sup> and the 3rd took over Elbeuf.<sup>29</sup> The German ferrying operations went badly this day, few units getting across the river. The Fifth Panzer Army recorded that the 86th Corps, resisting the 1st British Corps, asked for permission to remain on the south bank for another night:

The Corps was therefore given orders to stand fast on 27 Aug in the line Risle Estuary-Corneville—Bourg Achard. 81 Corps was directed to fill the gap from Bourg Achard to Moulineaux with 331 Inf Div. Group Schwerin was instructed to seal off the Seine loop at Orival [just north of Elbeuf].<sup>30</sup>

On the 27th, then, the 81st Corps was standing fast on the line Bourg Achard—La Bouille—Orival. The armour was disposed with the remnants of the 9th and 10th S.S. Panzer and 21st Panzer Divisions between Bourg Achard and La Bouille,

and the 116th Panzer and 2nd S.S. Panzer Divisions between La Bouille and an area north of Orival.<sup>31</sup>

General Simonds on the morning of 25 August had issued verbal orders to his divisional commanders for the crossing of the Seine; these were confirmed in writing that evening.<sup>32</sup> They required the 4th Division to seize "by coup-de-main" a bridgehead beyond the Seine in the area of Pont de l'Arche and Criquebeuf and thereafter advance directed on Forges-les-Eaux. The 3rd Division would seize in the same manner a bridgehead including Elbeuf and the railway bridge at Port du Gravier to the north. It was—thereafter to advance on Neufchatel. As for the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, it was to "clear the meander" south of Rouen and, "by coup-de-main" as in the case of the other divisions, seize bridgeheads at the railway bridge at Oissel on the east side of this loop and at the bridges at and south of Rouen. As a result of the German plans and the determination with which they were carried out, the Corps Commander's orders proved difficult to execute.

On the morning of 27 August the infantry of the 4th Division began to cross the Seine, using stormboats, to develop the small bridgehead already held by The Lincoln and Welland Regiment opposite Criquebeuf (above, page 283). The 10th Infantry Brigade met heavy opposition and suffered severe casualties in attempting to enlarge this, and failed to capture the high ground north of Sottevillesous-le-Val and Igoville during the day.<sup>33</sup> It was evident that the Germans—here, the 17th *Luftwaffe* Field Division<sup>34</sup>—intended to do their utmost to block any advance on Rouen from this direction. The intention of putting the 4th Division's armoured brigade across the river in this area was abandoned, and on 28 August it crossed at Elbeuf, where there was a more secure bridgehead. The 3rd Division in fact had met little opposition in ferrying itself across the river here on the 27th,<sup>35</sup> the enemy evidently had no troops to spare to try to keep us out of the low-lying river loop opposite Elbeuf, but was content to concentrate on holding the high ground beginning some four miles east, which commanded both the approaches from Elbeuf and the 10th Brigade's bridgehead. The 9th Field Squadron R.C.E., working under shell and mortar fire, got two tank-carrying rafts into operation at Elbeuf before nightfall, and early the next morning the 8th G.H.Q. Troops Royal Engineers completed a Bailey pontoon bridge also capable of carrying tanks.<sup>36</sup>

### The Foret de la Londe

It was the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division that met the heaviest opposition in this phase, for it fell to it to attack the positions which the enemy now considered most important: those immediately covering the Rouen crossings and their approaches.

The Germans held exceptionally favourable ground. The open end of the sack-shaped loop at the top of which Rouen stands is an isthmus roughly three miles wide, covered by the eastern end of the rugged area of thick woodland known as the Foret de la Londe. Parts of this largely uninhabited region rise as high as

120 metres above the river. Just west of the narrowest point of the isthmus the forest is intersected by a valley similar to an old river-bed, running from near Moulineaux\* on the north to Port du Gravier on the south. This depression carries two railway lines which traverse it with the assistance of four tunnels. On the high ground immediately east of it the Germans had disposed their main forces.

If only because the enemy's operations were necessarily on a basis of shortterm improvisation, they presented a difficult problem to our Intelligence, which at first underestimated the German strength in the forest. A 2nd Canadian Corps intelligence summary issued on the night of 26-27 August described the enemy troops still "putting up stiff resistance" south of the Seine on our left flank as "nothing more than local rearguards".<sup>37</sup> A 2nd Division summary sent out in the afternoon of 25 August contained the statement, "Civilians report large concentration of tanks early today in Foret de la Londe", but this report was evidently considered to have been discredited, since a revised version issued five hours later omitted it. The division issued no more summaries until the night of 27-28 August. On the basis of the information available the G.O.C.'s appreciation early on the 27th was, "Boche has pulled out, and little opposition can be expected." The division's reconnaissance regiment was accordingly ordered to push forward to Rouen.<sup>38</sup> It was soon checked.

Incomplete records make it difficult to reconstruct the progress of planning, but at one stage the intention apparently was that the 6th Brigade should clear the Foret de la Londe of such enemy as might be present, while the 4th and 5th crossed the Seine at Elbeuf, alternating with the brigades of the 3rd Division. But the ultimate decision was to attack the forest on the morning of 27 August with the 4th Infantry Brigade on the right and the 6th on the left. The final plan settled upon for the 4th Brigade was that it would advance through Elbeuf with The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry leading, followed by the Essex Scottish; The Royal Regiment of Canada was in reserve. The two leading battalions were to seize the high ground overlooking the river north of the hamlet of Port du Gravier, and the Royal Regiment was to pass through and take up a position just south of Grand Essart.<sup>39</sup> In attempting to carry out this plan the brigade ran into the enemy's main positions and made little progress.

Leading the brigade's advance up the main road in the darkness, the R.H.L.I. by mistake took the left fork of the road at Port du Gravier instead of continuing on up the river. Some 500 yards north they found the road through the valley blocked. Machine-gun and mortar fire came down and the battalion was forced back to the high ground immediately west of Port du Gravier. It was clear that the enemy was strongly posted on the heights north of the valley, and the unit went on having casualties. The Essex Scottish, coming up in rear of the R.H.L.I., came under fire from Port du Gravier and took positions along the river bank.

\*The valley does not actually break through the Seine escarpment at Moulineaux, but opposite the village there is a gap or "col" in the line of hills. During the Franco-Prussian War, on 4 January 1871, the Germans, attacking from the direction of Rouen, defeated and scattered French levies attempting to hold the line La Bouille-Elbeuf. See Major-General Sir F. Maurice, ed., *The Franco-German War, 1870-71, by Generals and Other Officers Who took Part in the Campaign* (London, ed. 1914). 358-60.

The brigade commander, Brigadier J. E. Ganong, ordered the reserve battalion, the Royal Regiment, to make a wide flanking movement to the north-west, cross the Port du Gravier-Moulineaux road and get behind the enemy positions holding up the other battalions. This advance, beginning about 11:30 a.m. on the 27th, made slow progress through the woods. During the afternoon the Royals made contact with Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, who were advancing on the 6th Brigade's right; and a little later Divisional Headquarters placed the Fusiliers under command of the 4th Brigade. The Royal Regiment's attack across the road was cancelled, and it was ordered instead to move northward to a rendezvous in the woods where the Essex Scottish was to join it.<sup>40</sup> This junction however was never made, and the brigade commander was forced to report late that evening,<sup>41</sup>

Attack arranged for this afternoon bogged down entirely in thick wood. Have ordered units concerned back to South. As soon as location received from Essex I intend to put on attack on South Objective with Essex and on North Objective with Fus MR . . .

Shortly before midnight General Foulkes conferred with Brigadier Ganong<sup>42</sup> and plans were made for the next day. The Royal Regiment was to make a further attempt to out-flank the machine-gun positions dominating the line of advance, while the Essex tried again to punch through on the right. Les Fusiliers MontRoyal now reverted to the 6th Brigade.<sup>43</sup>

Early in the morning of the 28th the Royal Regiment, then in position near a flag station or "halt" in the middle of the isthmus on the more westerly of the two railway lines through the valley, began an attack intended to capture a dominant area of high ground designated "Maisie", whose western portion formed a salient angle in the eastern wall of the valley, through which the other railway line tunnelled. Just as the move was about to begin, rations and water arrived. The battalion diary indicates the conditions under which the troops were fighting:

As the men had, generally speaking, been without water for about 18 hours and without food, except for odd scraps which they had carried with them, for a longer period, the Acting CO [Major T. F. Whitley] took it upon himself to allow the troops to eat and fill their water-bottles before starting the move. This resulted in "C" Coy crossing the start line at first light instead of in darkness, but it is extremely doubtful whether the darkness would have assisted our troops in any way as enemy positions had not been pinpointed.

"C" Company's immediate objective was "Chalk Pits Hill", another but lower salient feature north-west of "Maisie". It failed to capture it, and suffered heavily in the attempt. Major Whitley now called for artillery concentrations to prepare the way for a battalion attack. This took time to arrange, and "permission could not be obtained to lay down a medium concentration on Chalk Pits Hill itself as the exact position of units of 6th Bde on our left was not known". At 11:30 a.m. the battalion attacked. On the left flank Chalk Pits Hill again resisted all efforts; on the right the line of the second railway was reached and since it seemed that progress was being made the company here was reinforced with a second. However, these two companies likewise met heavy opposition and became widely separated from the rest of the battalion; and the attack again came to a stop.<sup>44</sup>

On the right of the brigade front the Essex Scottish fared no better. Two companies went forward about 1:30 p.m. after heavy preparation by artillery and

medium machine-guns; but as they moved down the steep slope into the valley at Port du Gravier they met heavy fire and were forced to dig in along the road north of the village. They withdrew after night fell.<sup>45</sup>

It appears that in the morning of the 28th there was a momentary intention to abandon the attack in the forest and move the 2nd Division across the Seine through the Elbeuf bridgehead, but that subsequently it was decided to persist, due possibly to the heavy opposition being met in that bridgehead.<sup>46</sup> At 4:00 p.m. General Foulkes held an orders group and discussed with Brigadier Ganong and the three battalion commanders a plan to capture "Maisie" by passing one battalion by night through the positions of the two Royal Regiment companies on the right, followed by a swing south-east to take the position which was holding up the Essex. The Royal Regiment diarist recorded,

The COs of both the RHLI and the R Regt C were strongly of the opinion that this task was beyond the powers of a Battalion composed largely of reinforcement personnel with little training. It was suggested that the enemy was actually stronger than Intelligence reports had indicated, and that the ground was immensely favourable for defence.

However, the operation was considered necessary and the R.H.L.I. made the attempt. Major H. C. Arrell was in command, since the C.O., Lt.-Col. G. M. Maclachlan (who incidentally had been wounded on 12 August but returned to duty next day) had been taken ill during or just after the orders group.<sup>47</sup> The battalion got forward slowly, and dawn had broken on the morning of the 29th before it crossed the first railway. Heavy concentrations of artillery smoke were laid down to assist it, but machine-gun fire from the forest-clad heights stopped it.<sup>48</sup> At 1:26 p.m. it reported that its three forward companies had lost heavily. Two of them had been withdrawn some distance. Heavy machine-gun and mortar fire was still coming down. The Acting C.O. felt that it was "impossible to proceed with original plan and that position must be taken from another direction". The battalion held on for the rest of the day and then withdrew to the Royal Regiment area.<sup>49</sup>

During the morning of 29 August the Essex Scottish on the right of the brigade front discovered that the Germans appeared to have drawn back, and the battalion advanced some 800 yards beyond the railway at Port du Gravier.<sup>50</sup> In fact, this was the last day of resistance in the area; the enemy was beginning to pull out.

We must now go back some days and deal with the 6th Infantry Brigade's fight on the left sector of the 2nd Division front. This brigade was now commanded by Brigadier F. A. Clift, Brigadier Young having been promoted to Major General and appointed Quartermaster General in Ottawa.

On 26 August the 6th Brigade was ordered to pass through the 5th, then in the Bourgtheroulde area, and clear the Forêt de la Londe. The objectives prescribed were, for The South Saskatchewan Regiment, the area La Bouille-Le Buisson; for The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, the area La Chenaie—Moulineaux, farther east; and for Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal the portion of the isthmus directly east of the railway triangle or "Y" in the northern sector of the valley through the forest.<sup>51</sup> This had the effect, though we did not know it at the



MAP 6



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time, of directing the Fusiliers at the northern section of the enemy's main line of resistance.

On the morning of the 27th the brigade advanced along the road running north-east from Bourgtheroulde, except that Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal used the road running directly east. The South Saskatchewan Regiment, in the lead, soon found that the western portion of the brigade's objectives was clear of the enemy, but the Camerons, moving east through the forest in the direction of Moulineaux, ran into strong opposition including tanks and self-propelled guns and did not succeed in taking all their objectives. As for Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, they met the enemy at Le Buquet west of Elbeuf, and pushed him back towards his main line.<sup>52</sup>

Shortly after midnight of the 27th-28th Brigadier Clift issued orders for further advance. The objectives assigned were areas directly west of Oissel,<sup>53</sup> and it must be assumed that the Divisional Commander hoped that the 6th Brigade would be able to break through in the north and outflank the opposition which was holding up the 4th farther south. However, the 6th Brigade had no better fortune than the 4th. The South Saskatchewan Regiment had got as far as the area of the railway triangle south of La Chenaie when they came under sniper and machinegun fire from the high forested ridge to the left. The leading company lost very heavily and the battalion fell back to Le Buisson and reorganized. Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, coming back under the 6th Brigade (above, page 289), should have followed the South Saskatchewan, but machine-gun and mortar fire kept them virtually immobilized through 28 August in the southern area west of Port du Gravier.<sup>54</sup>

Another attempt was made in the evening, The South Saskatchewan Regiment again seeking to reach the high ground west of Oissel with the assistance of the Camerons, who had spent the day entrenched on their first objective west of Moulineaux and under heavy shell and mortar fire. An artillery barrage was provided, but the South Saskatchewan started late and did not get the full benefit of it. The battalion advanced east along the escarpment overlooking the Seine, past the castle of Robert the Devil on the col above Moulineaux (captured by the Germans in the 1871 battle, and called in the South Saskatchewan diary "the monastery"). It was again held up near the "Y". The Acting C.O., Major F. B. Courtney, was killed when his carrier struck a mine. Further efforts during the night and early morning had little better result; and at first light on the 29th an enemy counter-attack pushed the South Saskatchewan back to the col. They had suffered very heavily, and continued to suffer during the day. In the afternoon a newly-arrived reinforcement officer was killed by a sniper before he could join his company. The Camerons were nearby (their C.O., Lt.-Col. A. S. Gregory, was wounded and evacuated in the course of the day). Brigadier Clift planned to use them and the South Saskatchewan in a further attack. Before this could be done, however, the brigadier himself was wounded. Lt.-Col. J. G. Gauvreau of the Fusiliers took over. On the afternoon of the 29th General Foulkes cancelled the proposed attack and ordered the brigade merely to consolidate on the line of the valley. That evening the South Saskatchewan had another misfortune; deceived by what was apparently a fictitious message originated by the enemy, they fell back some

distance. Subsequently the remnants of the battalion\* moved forward once more, supported by tank and artillery fire, and re-established themselves around the castle. During the night the enemy withdrew.<sup>55</sup>

The 5th Brigade took only a limited part in the operations in and about the Forêt de la Londe. However, the brigade was moved up on 28 August to support the units fighting in the forest. The Calgary Highlanders, taking over the positions west of Moulineaux formerly occupied by the Camerons, were painfully pounded with shell and small arms fire throughout the 29th, and suffered very considerably.<sup>56</sup>

It is evident that in these three days of unpleasant fighting the 2nd Division failed to make any important impression upon the strong enemy positions east of the valley in the Forêt de la Londe. The hard-fighting Germans holding them carried out their task of covering the river crossings at Rouen, and withdrew only - when it had been completed.

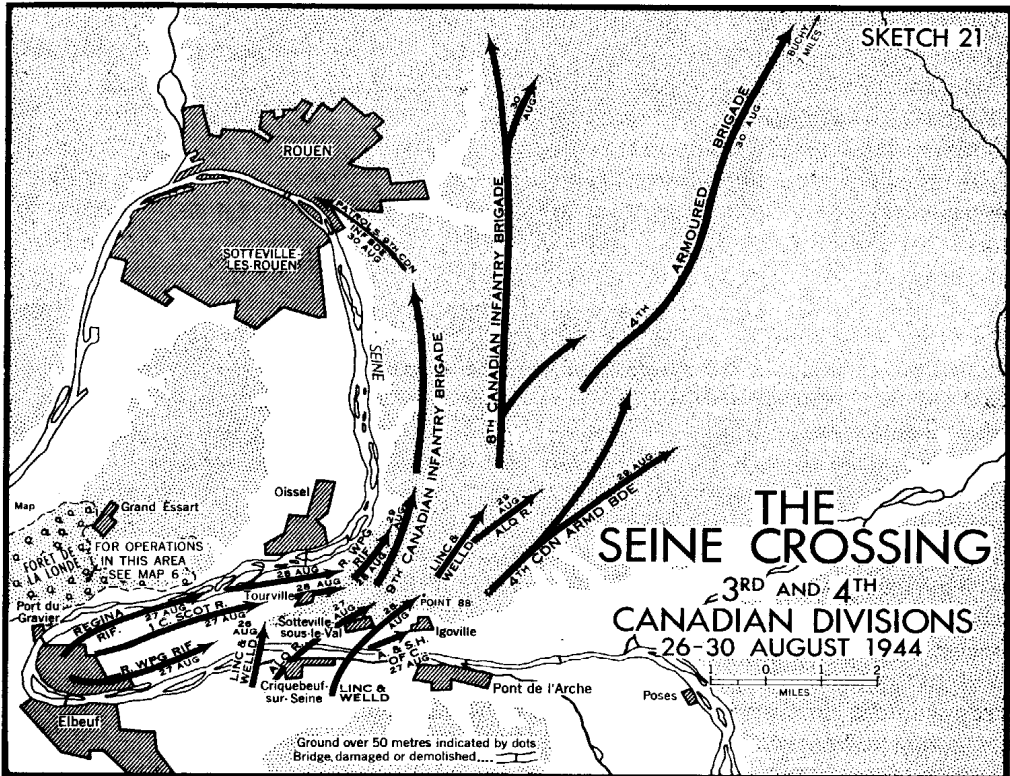
The difficulties of the division's task were very considerable. As the 4th Brigade reported,<sup>57</sup> the enemy fought skilfully from commanding positions, excellently camouflaged. His mortar fire was accurate and the positions of the weapons were frequently changed. The dense woods made it difficult to keep direction, and to make matters worse our maps were inaccurate.† The difficulty of pin-pointing the enemy's positions (and for that matter our own) rendered it impracticable to make full use of our artillery, and the same consideration, combined with the fact that the weather was rather poor for flying on 28 August and very poor on 29 August,<sup>58</sup> deprived our troops of any effective air support.

The 4th and 6th Brigades suffered very heavily in this business. Of the battalions, only Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal (which as we have seen went into the battle already very weak) got off lightly, with 20 casualties for the three days 27-29 August. The South Saskatchewan Regiment suffered 185 casualties, 44 of them being fatal. The Royal Regiment of Canada had 118 casualties, the Camerons 99, the Essex Scottish 96, and the R.H.L.I. 59, making a total for the six battalions of 577. Lt.-Col. F. N. Cabeldu of the Canadian Scottish Regiment took command of the 4th Brigade on 31 August.<sup>59</sup>

There had also been stiff fighting in the 3rd and 4th Divisions' areas above Elbeuf. The 3rd met opposition as it advanced eastward on the 27th. The Canadian Scottish Regiment had a hard fight for a foothold on the high ground at

\*The South Saskatchewan diarist writes: "At 1400 hrs [2:00 p.m.] the fighting strength of the bn [presumably the rifle companies] was approx 60 other ranks with Major E. W. Thomas as Commanding Officer, Capt. H. P. Williams in charge A Coy, Lt. N. A. Sharpe in charge B Coy, C.S.M. [J. A.] Smith in charge C Coy, Lt. F. Lee in charge D Coy and Sgt. Fisher S.E. acting as bn Intelligence Officer." C.S.M. Smith received the Military Medal for his work during the day.

†The Allies had very insufficient data on which to base operational maps of northern France and Belgium. No accurate edition of maps of France was available. To provide adequate maps modern methods utilizing aerial photography were used in conjunction with the best available French maps; but the lack of sufficient and accurate positional and height control, coupled with shortage of personnel experienced in special mapping techniques, resulted in errors. In the later stages of the campaign the situation was better, excellent Dutch and German large-scale maps being available to provide a basis for operational maps of the Netherlands and Germany. With special reference to the Forêt de la Londe, comparison with air photographs shows that neither the 1:25,000 scale maps nor the 1:50,000 maps used at the time were really adequate aids for fighting in such difficult country.



Tourville.<sup>60</sup> On the 28th this was developed and the 7th Infantry Brigade linked up with the 10th Brigade's bridgehead on the right. On this day the 10th fought its way on to the heights dominating Igoville, The Lincoln and Welland Regiment losing heavily in capturing Point 88.<sup>61</sup> On the 29th resistance lessened. The 4th Armoured Brigade, having come up from Elbeuf, advanced north-east, while the 3rd Division, with the 9th Infantry Brigade leading, moved north towards Rouen. The opposition was now "persistent but light". On the afternoon of 30 August the 9th Brigade pushed patrols into Rouen. Brigadier Rockingham himself was first into the main square, and exchanged shots from his armoured car with a German party which was then dealt with by a patrol of The Highland Light Infantry of Canada.<sup>62</sup>

On the First Canadian Army's left sector, that of the 1st British Corps, the story had been not dissimilar from that farther east, though the fighting was less fierce. The Germans offered opposition in the Forêt de Brotonne covering the crossings at Caudebec-en-Caux. The 49th Infantry Division took over here from the 7th Armoured Division. The 1st Corps reported on 29 August, "No organised defences but. going slow owing to density of forest."<sup>63</sup> Later that day it was reported that there was "no organized resistance" left in the area. On the afternoon of the 30th reconnaissance elements of the 1st Corps crossed the Seine at

Duclair, Caudebec-en-Caux and points below and discovered that the enemy had withdrawn.<sup>64</sup>

In spite of the check inflicted upon us in the Foret de la Londe, the enemy suffered tremendously in the attempt to withdraw across the Seine. For days, whenever the weather permitted, the Allied air forces struck at the concentrations of vehicles piled up south of the crossings. On 25 August the *Luftwaffe* made a serious attempt to cover these crossings, with the result that fighters of the U.S. Ninth Air Force claimed 77 enemy aircraft destroyed in combat and 49 more on the ground.<sup>65</sup> Artillery fire, including the Americans' after their advance into the Elbeuf area,<sup>66</sup> also inflicted great damage on these masses of men and vehicles. When our troops advanced to the river they found scenes comparable with those in the Falaise Gap. In the whole area of what British operational researchers called "the Chase", roughly the region from Lisieux and Vimoutiers eastward to the Seine from Louviers down to Quillebeuf, they counted a grand total of 3648 vehicles and guns, including 150 tanks and self-propelled guns, and this was certainly a very incomplete count. The greatest graveyard was on the south bank of the river at Rouen itself: "a mass of burnt vehicles and equipment" consisting of 20 armoured vehicles, 48 guns and 660 other vehicles.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, the Germans, by a great effort of improvisation, succeeded in getting large numbers of vehicles across the river. The Fifth Panzer Army recorded that between 20 August and the evening of the 24th approximately 25,000 vehicles of all types had been withdrawn over the Seine.<sup>68</sup> The reason for this success is fairly evident; on the four days 20-23 August the weather was bad and air operations were seriously curtailed.<sup>69</sup> On the 24th the weather was better, and during the next three days large-scale air operations were again possible. These were probably the days when the heaviest damage was inflicted and the Germans got fewest vehicles across the river.<sup>70</sup>

Most of the crossings had to be made by ferry, since few bridges were in operation. On 25 August Army Group "D" recorded that the completion of a floating bridge at Rouen had been made impossible by the destruction of three boats.<sup>71</sup> Many ferry craft were also destroyed. The British investigators, examining the river soon afterwards, came to the conclusion that the Germans had used 24 crossing-sites, from Petit Andelys (near Les Andelys) to Quillebeuf near the mouth of the river. Of all the crossings, it appears, the one which carried most traffic was that at Poses, about four miles east of Pont de l'Arche. This was actually the only point where the researchers considered the use of a bridge confirmed.\* It was a pontoon bridge, which is said to have been in use for five nights and three days; a local inhabitant claimed that he recorded 16,000 vehicles as passing over it. It appears that the Allied air forces made no heavy attacks here.<sup>73</sup> It is likely that the bridge was dismantled during daylight hours on days when the weather was

\*There were evidently others in at least partial use. On 30 August a Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders patrol crossed the partly-demolished railway bridge at Rouen. It reported the bridge impassable to vehicles, but also reported that civilians stated that "several thousand" horse-drawn vehicles and guns had crossed it during the past ten days. Air photographs taken on 26 August seem to indicate that motor vehicles were then using this bridge. On 25 August General Montgomery was told that the Germans were using three pontoon bridges-at Poses; a short distance upstream from Poses; and at Elbeuf.<sup>72</sup>

good for flying. No important road crossed the Seine at Poses and there was no peacetime bridge.

It is impossible to determine with precision either how many vehicles the Germans had in Normandy south of the Seine or how many survived the Seine crossing. But the Allied researchers came to the conclusion that over 12,000 motor vehicles of all sorts were destroyed or abandoned south of the river.<sup>74</sup> And the approximate figure of 25,000 given by Fifth Panzer Army as crossing successfully during the most favourable period (above, page 294) presumably includes horse-drawn transport.

During the last stages of the German resistance south of Rouen the 74th German Corps took over the Foret de la Londe area from the 81st, and the infantry was instructed to relieve the armour so the latter could withdraw.<sup>75</sup> Steinmuller states that the last elements of his 331st Division crossed the river in the early morning hours of 30 August, that it was the last German formation to cross, and that "no man and no vehicle fell into the hands of the enemy".<sup>76</sup>

The German withdrawal across the Seine provides a good example of the application of the related military principles of Concentration and Economy of Force. Carried out by an army which had just suffered a catastrophic defeat and enormous losses in personnel and material, it must be accounted a fine achievement. The forces available to the German command were small, but they were used where they could be employed to the best advantage. The most essential crossings were effectively covered, and by hard fighting and effective use of ground the Germans held up our advance until the great body of their surviving troops had got away. But what they had achieved was only a successful local delaying action. Their strength was quite unequal to the prolonged defence of the Seine line which Hitler had demanded. The next phase would see them retiring rapidly far to the north and east in search of a position where the situation could be stabilized.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ANTWERP, ARNHEM AND SOME CONTROVERSIES AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1944

(See Sketches 22-24)

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#### The Pursuit to the Somme and Antwerp

THE period following the crossing of the Seine witnessed the swiftest advances by British forces that took place during the entire campaign. No serious resistance was offered south of the River Somme, save at the fortress of Le Havre. The Allies' worst anxieties during this phase were not the result of enemy opposition but of the logistical difficulties caused by the steadily increasing length of their own lines of supply (above, page 280) in the absence of any large port close to the front.

The Germans' immediate problem was, first, to save their forces south of the Somme from encirclement and destruction, and, secondly, to stabilize the front, if possible, on that river (the first really considerable obstacle north of the Seine). In particular, they had to save the formations of the now attenuated Fifteenth Army, holding the coastal belt between the Seine and the East Scheldt, and commanded since 23 August by General Gustav von Zangen.<sup>1</sup> On 24 August Field-Marshal Model indicated pretty clearly that forces were not available to hold the Seine—Yonne—Dijon line indicated in Hitler's directive of 20 August (above, page 285) and suggested the preparation of successive positions in rear. The Somme—Marne line was mentioned, but since 30-35 first-line divisions were indicated as needed to hold it, this too was a battered hope.<sup>2</sup> On 27 August the High Command concurred in Model's policy in principle, while telling him to cling to the Seine—Yonne—Dijon line as long as possible to gain time.<sup>3</sup> A serious attempt was made to form a stop-line on the canalized River Somme. A Seventh Army order dated 29 August<sup>4</sup> contains detailed instructions for the preparation of a "Somme—Oise position"; the Seventh Army was to be responsible for the sector from Flixecourt (close to the Somme between Amiens and Abbeville) through La Fere to Guise on the upper Oise. On, probably, 28 August, the Fifteenth Army instructed the 67th Corps, then holding the coast south of the Somme, to withdraw its two divisions and one regiment and take up a line along the Somme from the sea to the boundary with Fifth Panzer Army,\* whose front was to be taken over by the Seventh Army on 31 August.<sup>5</sup> The movement of the

\*General von Zangen recalls his left boundary as being Picquigny, but the Seventh Army order fixes it at Flixecourt, some five miles north-west.



67th Corps seems to have been carried out much according to plan, but farther east things went wrong.

It is worth observing at this point that during the early days of September the Germans were still reaping dividends from the fierce resistance offered on the First Canadian Army front from Pont de l'Arche and Elbeuf to the sea on 25-29 August. Not only did this delay the beginning of the Army's drive to the north, but the heavy action along the Seine and the casualties suffered there meant that the Canadian formations (and particularly the 2nd Infantry Division and the infantry\* of the 4th Armoured Division) were tired and depleted when launched into the next stage of the pursuit. These things need to be borne in mind in assessing this phase.

We have seen (above, page 282) the orders issued by General Montgomery on 26 August for the advance north of the Seine, which prescribed the broad intention of the 21st Army Group as to destroy all enemy forces in the Pas de Calais and Flanders and capture Antwerp; the Canadian Army's particular tasks being to take Le Havre, secure the port of Dieppe and proceed to destroy all enemy forces in the coastal belt up to Bruges. On 29 August an amendment eliminated the portion of this directive which forecast that the Allied Airborne Army would be dropped to cooperate with the Canadian Army in the Pas de Calais. Instead, there was now to be an airborne landing in the Tournai area in advance of the Second Army. This project too was soon cancelled by events.

On 30 August General Crerar issued a new directive<sup>7</sup> to his corps commanders, giving the 2nd Canadian Corps the immediate task of capturing Dieppe, while such formations of the corps as were not required for this purpose were to continue to thrust along the main Army axis, Neufchatel—Abbeville, "as a preliminary to an early crossing of R. Somme". The 51st (Highland) Division of the 1st British Corps was to cross the Seine by the bridges at Elbeuf in the 2nd Corps area, and was then to revert to the command of the 1st British Corps for the operations in the Le Havre peninsula.

Rouen, we have seen, fell to the 2nd Canadian Corps on 30 August. On the morning of the 31st the corps advanced rapidly north and north-east. . The 4th Canadian Armoured Division occupied Buchy; the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars), leading the advance of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, got into St. Saens; and the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment (14th Canadian Hussars), performing the same function for the 2nd Division, reached Totes, halfway from Rouen to Dieppe. On the 1st British Corps front the leading troops of the 49th Division moved through Lillebonne towards Le Havre without encountering opposition. Main Headquarters First Canadian Army, having moved up from Amblie, † opened near Brionne at midnight of the 30th-31st.<sup>9</sup>

\*General Montgomery's liaison officer at H.Q. 2nd Canadian Corps reported on 28 August that the 10th Infantry Brigade was fighting three [rifle] companies to a battalion (i.e. three instead of four).

† This move was preceded, and delayed, by discussions with Headquarters No. 84 Group R.A.F., which felt in the first instance that it could not leave the complex of airfields adjacent to Amblie. While anxious to maintain the closest touch with the Group, Army H.Q. finally had to move to keep control of the battle. No. 84 Group followed it on 2 September, and the two headquarters remained cheek-by-jowl for the rest of the campaign.<sup>8</sup>

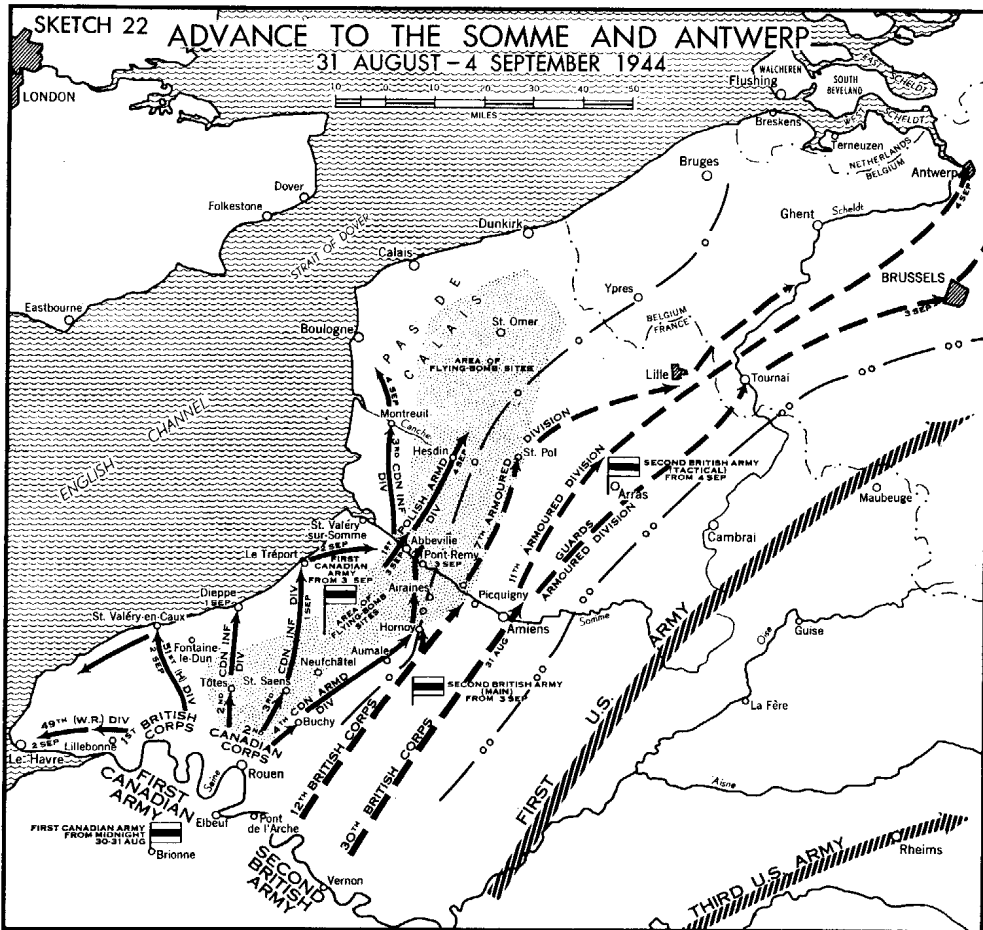
Again, as in the advance to the Seine, our columns were receiving a tremendous welcome from the French population. The heavy pounding from the air which Rouen had suffered did not prevent its people from greeting us with a warmth which was long remembered. When the commander of the 9th Infantry Brigade went into the city on 30 August (above, page 293), his scout car soon "became so bedecked with flowers that it resembled more closely a float in a May Day parade than a weapon of war".<sup>10</sup> In the smaller towns and the lovely countryside beyond Rouen the greeting was the same. Nor did it cease when the leading troops had passed. An officer who drove through Rouen and on to the north on 2 September tried to put something of the experience on paper for the benefit of his family in Canada:

I cannot possibly convey the cumulative effect of passing for hours through a liberated countryside, with the wreckage of the beaten enemy—his tanks and vehicles, his dead horses and the graves of his dead men—littering the roadside ditches, and the population, free once more, welcoming the oncoming troops with smiles and flowers and the V-sign. . . .

The scene in a liberated town is quite extraordinary. The place, of course, is festooned with flags. They always have plenty of tricolours; but the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes are in short supply, and had to be homemade for the occasion. (I even saw some versions of the Canadian Red Ensign, which would scarcely have pleased the College of Heralds but must have pleased a good many Canadians.) Everyone seems to be in the street, and no one ever seems to tire of waving to the troops passing in their vehicles, who likewise never tire of waving back (particularly at the female population). The young people wave and laugh and shout; the children yell and wave flags; the mothers hold up their babies to see the troops, and wave *their* little paws too; the old people stand by the roadside and look happy; and the Army rolls through. . . .

In the meantime great events had been taking place on the Second British Army front. The leading troops of the 30th Corps had sped northward from the bridgehead first opened at Vernon on 25 August; and early on the morning of the 31st the 11th Armoured Division burst into the Amiens area and disrupted the German plans for the defence of the line of the Somme.<sup>11</sup> At Saleux, a few miles south-west of Amiens, they overran the headquarters of the Fifth Panzer Army and captured our old friend General Heinrich Eberbach, who had been appointed to command the reconstituted Seventh Army and was to take over the sector from the Fifth Panzer Army at noon that day.<sup>12</sup> Valuable documents were taken at the same time. Even more useful, the bridges in Amiens itself were captured intact, although several had been prepared for demolition;<sup>13</sup> and the way was open for a further rush to the north.

On the afternoon of the 31st, General Montgomery conferred with his two army commanders and issued new orders in the light of the rapidly developing situation. General Dempsey was reported to be sending the 11th Armoured Division down the Somme to Pont Remy and Abbeville. The Commander-in-Chief desired General Crerar to drive on that night so as to take over these places early the following day, leaving the Second Army free to push on and secure Arras and St. Pol. General Crerar told Montgomery that he would order the 2nd Canadian Corps to do this, using the 4th Canadian Armoured Division and following it up with the Polish Armoured Division, which was now north of the Seine and again becoming available for action. Crerar immediately flew to General Simonds' head-



quarters and gave him instructions accordingly.<sup>14</sup> The main axis, he said, which should mark the left of the armoured movement, would be the Neufchatel—Abbeville road; the 4th Division would need to "feel out" well to its right to establish contact with the Second Army.<sup>15</sup>

The assumption till now had been that the 4th Canadian Armoured Division would have "about four days" to rest in the Buchy area.<sup>16</sup> The new orders changed all this, and in the small hours of 1 September the division moved on again, directed upon Abbeville. During the day difficulties arose when the 7th Armoured Division and the 53rd Division, in the words of the 4th Division's General Staff diarist, "began to filter onto our centre line from the south and south-west". The 4th Division had in fact "felt out" beyond the Army boundary.\* Moreover,

\*On 28 August H.Q. 21st Army Group laid down a boundary making Aumale inclusive to First Canadian Army but Dreuil Hamel (just west of Airaines) exclusive to it. This seems to imply a Canadian advance by secondary roads running west of Hornoy. However, on 31 August H.Q. 2nd Canadian Corps ordered the 4th Division to advance on an axis passing through Hornoy to Pont Remy.<sup>17</sup> The next day the Canadian and British formations collided in the Hornoy area.

a pocket of resistance was met at Airaines, an important road-centre, and there was uncertainty as to whether the Canadians or the 7th Armoured Division should deal with it. Finally the 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade by-passed Airaines to the west. Before the end of the day the 18th Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons) had reached the Somme east of Pont Remy and the 10th Infantry Brigade was coming up in rear with a view to establishing a bridgehead. In the early hours of 2 September the division reached the outskirts of Abbeville. The farther bank of the Seine was found to be held by the enemy.<sup>18</sup>

On 1 September the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division returned to Dieppe, where it had shed so much of its blood in the famous raid of 19 August 1942. It had been expected that the enemy would fight for the town, and a detailed plan had been made for an attack in which heavy bombardment by the navy and the R.A.F. Bomber Command would precede an assault from the land side. This (Operation "Fusilade") proved unnecessary. The leading vehicles of the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment reached the outskirts of Dieppe early in the morning of 1 September. They found that the German rear parties had departed the previous day. Hastily, this information was passed back to enable Bomber Command's attack to be cancelled, and this was done with just twenty minutes to spare. In the course of the day the main bodies of the 2nd Division reached the town, receiving a delirious welcome from the townspeople.<sup>19</sup> The Germans had not succeeded in destroying the port installations completely, and British engineers immediately set to work to prepare the harbour to receive shipping carrying the supplies so urgently needed by the advancing divisions. The first vessels entered on 7 September and by the end of the month the port's daily capacity was between 6000 and 7000 tons.<sup>20</sup>

The day after the 2nd Division liquidated its debt of 1942 at Dieppe, the 51st (Highland) Division took St. Valery-en-Caux, where the main body of this division had been encircled and captured in June 1940. There was no opposition. On the same day the 49th Division made contact with the German outposts on the outskirts of Le Havre, and it seemed apparent that the enemy, as had been expected, held the place in strength and was determined to defend it.<sup>21</sup>

The Allies' supply problems became steadily more difficult, as the lines of communication back to the original bridgehead lengthened. The fleets of trucks which had carried supplies to the front in the days of the bridgehead were grossly inadequate to carry them from the Rear Maintenance Area at Bayeux, from which the 21st Army Group was still being maintained, to a line north of the Somme. As Brigadier Walford, General Crerar's senior administrative officer, said on 7 September, a 10-ton truck was now worth more than a Sherman tank.<sup>22</sup> The seriousness of the problem was reflected in the fact that the 8th British Corps had to remain grounded in order that its transport might be used to maintain the other formations;<sup>23</sup> in other words, the Allies' administrative resources were now insufficient to keep all their forces fighting, and the question of priorities became urgent and, in view of its international aspects, extremely difficult. Only the possession of ports close to the battlefield could relieve the situation; and the port that could do most to support a final offensive against Germany was the great Belgian inland harbour of Antwerp, on the River Scheldt.

### The Germans Lose Antwerp But Save an Army

Hitler, it will be remembered (above, page 50), had long since designated certain French ports as "fortresses" to be especially protected and defended to the last. Far back in Brittany, his orders were now being carried out at Brest, where a large American force was besieging the city\* and did not finally capture it until 18 September.<sup>25</sup> On the Biscay coast, Lorient, St. Nazaire, La Rochelle and some other small areas were still in German hands, contained by limited Allied forces, and were to remain so until the end or nearly the end of hostilities—a useless waste of German troops, for these ports would have been of little military value to the Allies. The same was true of the Channel Islands, where a good German infantry division languished until the end of the war.<sup>26</sup> But in the area north of the Seine Hitler's fortress policy made sense at this moment, and it was a great embarrassment to the Allied operations. Le Havre, Boulogne and Dunkirk were all on Hitler's list of fortresses; and on 4 September he issued a new directive.<sup>27</sup>

Because of the breakthrough of enemy tank forces toward Antwerp, it has become very important for the further progress of the war to hold the fortresses of Boulogne and Dunkirk, the Calais defense area, Walcheren Island with Flushing harbor, the bridgehead at Antwerp, and the Albert Canal position as far as Maastricht.

a. For this purpose the 15th Army is to bring the garrisons of Boulogne and Dunkirk and the Calais defense area up to strength by means of full units.

The defensive strength of the fortresses is to be increased by means of additional ammunition supplies from the supplies of the 15th Army, especially anti-tank ammunition, by bringing up provisions of all kinds from the country, and by evacuating the entire population.

The commanders of the Calais defense area and of Walcheren Island receive the same authority as a fortress commander....

Had Hitler thought of this aspect of strategy a few days earlier, it is fair to assume that the port of Dieppe would not have been captured without a fight.

At the moment when Hitler issued this order, catastrophe was already overtaking the Germans at Antwerp. The British Second Army, meeting "negligible opposition",<sup>28</sup> had driven headlong northward from the Somme. On 3 September (the fifth anniversary of Britain's declaration of war) the Guards Armoured Division, in the van of the 30th Corps, entered and captured Brussels. Both the Guards and the 11th Armoured Divisions advanced some 60 miles this day. On the afternoon of 4 September the 11th Armoured Division reached Antwerp, and the greatest port in North-West Europe was in Allied hands. The most extraordinary feature of the situation, and one which reflected the German disorganization at this stage, was the fact that the dock installations were captured almost intact.<sup>29</sup>

Field-Marshal Model had, it is true, striven to prevent this disaster. On the evening of 30 August he demanded that the Commander Armed Forces in the

\*The justification advanced for this operation was, first, the fact that Brest was a threat to the sea communications with the proposed base in Quiberon Bay (above, pages 82, 83), and secondly, the fear that the large, well-commanded force in Brest would make serious trouble in the Allies' rear if not eliminated.<sup>24</sup>

Netherlands (above, page 58) should send south the 719th Infantry Division (a static coastal division) from about Dordrecht. On 2 September it slowly moved off, directed on an area east of Brussels. On the morning of the 4th, when it was still north of Antwerp, Army Group "B" gave orders to rush the bulk of it there to defend the city. At that moment important parts of the 347th Infantry Division were retiring from north of Brussels to Antwerp by rail, with a view to detraining there and assisting in the defence under the command of the 719th. But apparently the 719th had not yet arrived, and the trains carrying the 347th rolled on to Cappellen, seven miles north of Antwerp. An order from Army Group "B" at 9:15 a.m. to use civilian vehicles to rush all available naval and air force fighting men to hold the city was the last desperate, ineffective expedient. The Germans had acted too slowly and too late, and there was nobody to keep the British out of this all-important port.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it shortly became painfully apparent that though the Germans had lost Antwerp, the Allies had not gained the use of it. The city is some 50 miles from the sea; and both banks of the Scheldt below it remained in enemy hands. Fully realizing the vital importance of preventing us from using the port, the Germans now resolved to hold this area to the last extremity.

The capture of Antwerp gravely imperilled the German Fifteenth Army, which with its three corps (67th, 86th and 89th) was caught in a *cul-de-sac* west of the city and south of the Scheldt. On the day Antwerp fell the German C.-in-C. West's headquarters diary noted,<sup>31</sup>

This advance to Antwerp has closed the ring around Fifteenth Army. A thrust to Breda must be expected... .

A "thrust to Breda" would have cut the escape route across the Scheldt by way of Walcheren and the South Beveland isthmus. But the thrust was not made. The Fifteenth Army escaped, and its escape was a considerable Allied misfortune.

Just how this came about is not wholly clear. Intelligence summaries indicate that Allied headquarters saw what was happening.<sup>32</sup> At this period Field-Marshal Montgomery\* was deeply involved in strategic controversy with General Eisenhower (below, pages 306-10) and it may be that his eye, fixed on the distant scene, was not focussing so well on the immediate foreground. (He issued no formal directive to his armies between 3 and 14 September, though he did issue individual letters and orders.) Whatever the reason, no strong attempt was made to push north from Antwerp immediately after the city fell, when such an advance would probably have succeeded. Interference with the withdrawal was left to the air forces. The Germans on their side were feverishly active in extricating the threatened Army. Their first expedient, ordered by the C.-in-C. West on the evening of 4 September, was an attempt to break out eastward north of Brussels; but Hitler negated this, it appears, and the policy adopted was to hold a bridgehead south of the Scheldt estuary, organize a strong defence of Walcheren Island, and withdraw the balance of the Fifteenth Army by way of the South Beveland peninsula.<sup>33</sup> This was done. In constant fear that the British would drive forward from Antwerp and close the exit from South Beveland, the evacuation proceeded

\*He was promoted to this rank on 1 September.

under the direction of the 89th Corps. From Breskens and Terneuzen the troops were ferried across the West Scheldt to the port of Flushing and South Beveland. Our air forces harried the movement but could not stop it. By 23 September the operation was complete. In its final report the 89th Corps computed that from 4 September to that date 86,100 men, 616 guns, 6200 horses and 6200 vehicles had been moved across the Scheldt to fight again for Hitler.<sup>34</sup>

On the day on which Antwerp fell the German command in the west was reorganized. In this desperate hour Hitler turned again to the old field marshal whom he had dismissed in July, and von Rundstedt resumed the appointment of Commander-in-Chief West, with headquarters now at Coblenz, where he arrived on the evening of 5 September. Model remained in command of Army Group "B". Simultaneously the First Parachute Army, commanded by Colonel-General Kurt Student, which had been slated for the Nancy area, was ordered instead to take over the Antwerp-Albert Canal sector, with the Fifteenth Army on its right and the Seventh (commanding the forces formerly under the Fifth Panzer Army) on its left.<sup>35</sup>

#### A Difficulty with the C.-in-C.

At the beginning of September General Crerar had his only serious difficulty during the campaign with the Commander-in-Chief of the 21st Army Group. Apart from other circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that the trouble should have arisen at this particular moment. Field-Marshal Montgomery had just ceased to be the *de facto* ground commander of the Allied forces. He found himself in disagreement both with the new command organization set up by General Eisenhower and with Eisenhower's conception of the next phase of operations; and he was accordingly deeply involved in a controversy with the Supreme Commander which was to go on for several weeks.

The Crerar-Montgomery difficulties began on 2 September. On the morning of the 1st, presumably as a result of his consultation with General Crerar the previous day, General Simonds gave his divisional commanders a directive<sup>36</sup> for continuance of the pursuit on the axis Abbeville—St. Omer—Ypres. On reaching the line of the Somme, the Polish Armoured Division was to advance through Hesdin—St. Omer—Ypres, keeping in touch with the armoured formations of the Second British Army on its right. The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division on reaching Le Treport would destroy or capture all enemy in the triangle Le Treport—St. Valery-sur-Somme—Abbeville and continue to advance up the coast on the axis Abbeville—Montreuil—Boulogne—Calais—Dunkirk. The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division was to reorganize east of Abbeville, while the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division would reorganize in the Dieppe area "ready to pass through 3 Cdn Inf Div when ordered"; both these divisions were thus to have a period of rest.

This arrangement was not acceptable to Montgomery. On the evening of 2 September he signalled Crerar.<sup>37</sup>

## THE VICTORY CAMPAIGN

PERSONAL for ARMY COMMANDER from C in C.

Second Army are now positioned near the Belgian frontier and will go through towards Brussels tomorrow. IT IS VERY necessary that your two Armd Divs should push forward with all speed towards St Omer and beyond. NOT repeat NOT consider this the time for any div to halt for maintenance. Push on quickly.

General Crerar, evidently considering that a matter of some Canadian importance was at stake, and perhaps somewhat nettled by the fact that the arrangement by which the British armour was to move down the Somme to Abbeville (above, page 298) had not been carried out, replied:<sup>38</sup>

PERSONAL for C in C from CDN ARMY COMD.

... Delighted to learn that Second Army is now positioned near Belgian frontier but would advise you that until late this afternoon Second Army troops have not been within five miles Abbeville and that all bridges R Somme NE [?NW] Picquigny blown with enemy in considerable strength holding North bank. With assistance flank attack 4 Brit Armd Bde from direction Picquigny and Polish Armd Div attacking Abbeville across R Somme from South Simonds hoped secure crossing tonight.

NOT a case of more divs on line R Somme but of securing at least one main route crossing of river. In any event 2 Cdn Inf Div bns down to average strength 525 and in my opinion a forty-eight hour halt quite essential in order it can absorb approx one thousand reinforcements arriving today.

You can be assured that there is no lack of push or of rational speed Cdn Army. St Omer and beyond will be reached without any avoidable delay.

In these circumstances a relatively small matter the next day led to what may be called a tiff. It may be best to describe it in some detail.

On 3 September the 2nd Division held ceremonial observances at Dieppe, General Crerar being present on the invitation of the divisional commander. In the morning religious services were held in the cemetery where the Canadians who fell in the 1942 raid were buried; and early in the afternoon there was a formal march-past of most of the Division's formations and units. General Crerar took the salute. On the afternoon of 2 September Crerar had received a message from Montgomery instructing him to meet him at 1:00 p.m. the next day at the tactical headquarters of the Second Army. As its phrasing indicated a personal meeting rather than a formal conference, and as no new operational situation had arisen on the Canadian Army front since his last meeting with the C.-in-C. on the afternoon of the 1st, Crerar replied as follows:

Unless operational situation requires my arrival Tac Brit Army at 1300 hrs tomorrow would appreciate if meeting could take place later say 1700 hrs. Have arranged be present formal religious service and parade elements 2 Cdn Inf Div at Dieppe commencing about noon tomorrow and from Canadian point of view desirable I should do so. Will however conform your wishes. Advice required.

Early next morning Crerar left his headquarters to meet Simonds to discuss future operations. There had so far been no message from the C.-in-C. He therefore instructed his Chief of Staff to communicate to 2nd Corps headquarters by radio telephone, in clear, the gist of any reply which might be received. In the event of radio being unreliable, the message would be sent by an aircraft.

Up to the moment of his leaving 2nd Corps by air for Dieppe, Crerar had still received no reply. He therefore decided to go on with his own arrangements,



assuming that Montgomery had met his request for a change in the hour of the meeting. However, at approximately 2:40 p.m., when the troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division were about to commence their "march-past" in Dieppe, Crerar was handed a message from his Chief of Staff originating at 1:30 p.m. to the effect that the C.-in-C. had advised that it was essential he attend the meeting at 1:00 p.m. As it was no longer possible to comply, he completed his part in the Dieppe ceremonial and then flew to Tactical Headquarters Second Army. The meeting was long over. It turned out to have been a formal conference of the Commanders-in-Chief of the 21st and 12th Army Groups with the commanders of the First U.S. and Second British Armies, with himself supposed to be present. Crerar recorded next day that he had learned from General Dempsey that "apart from the breach in the formality, no operational disadvantages had resulted, as the discussion centered entirely on questions concerning actions and reactions of First U.S. Army and Second Brit Army in the immediate and longer-term future". Having seen Dempsey, he drove to Field-Marshal Montgomery's headquarters a couple of miles away and had an interview with Montgomery in his caravan, which Crerar recorded as follows:<sup>39</sup>

On reaching the caravan, the Field Marshal addressed me abruptly, asking me why I had not turned up at the meeting, in accordance with his instructions. I kept myself under control and briefly, with occasional interruptions, gave him the explanation which I have recorded in more detail above. The C-in-C intimated that he was not interested in my explanation-that the Canadian aspect of the Dieppe ceremonial was of no importance compared to getting on with the war, that he had checked through his signals and determined that my Tac HQ had received a message from him at 0615 hrs that morning, instructing me to keep the appointment and that, even if I had not received it, then in default of other agreed arrangements, I should have made it my business to be present.

I replied to the C-in-C that I could not accept this attitude and judgment on his part. I had carried out my responsibilities as one of his two Army Comds, and as the Cdn Army Comd, in what I considered to be a reasonable and intelligent way, in the light of the situation as I knew it, or appreciated it. I had found him, in the past, reasonable in his treatment of me and I had assumed that this situation would continue to prevail. The request in my message, for postponement of the hour of our meeting, had been fully explanatory and, I thought, tactful. I had thought it would have been acceptable to him. I had, as previously explained, a definite responsibility to my Government and country which, at times, might run counter to his own wishes. There was a powerful Canadian reason why I should have been present with 2 Cdn Inf Div at Dieppe that day. In fact, there were 800 reasons-the Canadian dead buried at Dieppe cemetery. I went on to say that he should realise, by our considerable association, that I was neither self-opinionated, nor unreasonable, but that, also, I would never consent to be "pushed about" by anyone, in a manner, or direction, which I knew to be wrong.

The Field Marshal reiterated that I had failed to comply with an instruction issued by him and that such situation could only result in his decision that our ways must part. I replied that I assumed he would at once take this up through higher channels and that, I, in turn, would at once report the situation to my Government.

At this point Montgomery, to Crerar's surprise, said that the incident was now closed. The Army Commander replied that he did not want it closed and "desired that it be properly ventilated through official channels". After some further discussion, Montgomery again said that he wished to consider the matter closed and proceeded to give Crerar the gist of what had happened at the

conference, none of which had any direct bearing on the operations previously assigned to the First Canadian Army. The final paragraph of General Crerar's memorandum of the affair runs as follows:

In conclusion, I must state that I received the impression, at the commencement of the interview, that the C-in-C was out to eliminate, forcefully, from my mind that I had any other responsibilities than to him. The Canadian ceremony at Dieppe was not of his ordering, nor to his liking. It had been the cause of an interference with an instruction which he had separately issued to me—to meet him at a certain time and place. As the interview proceeded, and he found that I would not retreat from the stand I had taken—that I had a responsibility to Canada as well as to the C-in-C—he decided to "consider the matter closed". It was not a willing decision, nor one that I can assume will be maintained. However, though our relations have obviously been strained, I trust that the situation is temporary and I shall do what I can to ease them, though without departing from what I consider it my duty to do, or not to do, in my capacity as a Canadian.

Montgomery's displeasure was doubtless reflected in a passage in his daily report to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff sent this day to the effect that the First Canadian Army's operations since crossing the Seine had been "badly handled and very slow".<sup>40</sup> However, a few days later, when Crerar sent him details of the handling of his message (indicating that it was not received at Tactical H.Q. First Canadian Army until 10:20 a.m. on the 3rd and was further delayed by deciphering and being passed on to Main H.Q. where the Chief of Staff dealt with it), Montgomery wrote him a conciliatory note.<sup>41</sup>

I am sorry I was a bit rude the other day, and somewhat out-spoken. I was annoyed that no one came to a very important conference.  
But forget about it—and let us get on with the war.  
It was my fault.

There the matter ended, though it seems likely that coolness persisted until General Crerar's departure for England for medical treatment towards the end of the month (below, page 373). There is some reason to believe that at this period Montgomery would have welcomed a permanent change in the command of the Army. However, when Crerar returned to his command the affair had apparently been forgotten. Relations between the two commanders were unruffled thereafter to the end of the campaign.

### The Debate on Strategy

It is now necessary to summarize the controversy between Eisenhower and Montgomery over strategic policy after the crossing of the Seine. This affected many aspects of the operations, including those of the First Canadian Army, during the autumn; and it is convenient, even at the expense of some trifling with chronology, to tell at this point the whole story of the discussions during August and September. Much has already been written about it;\* and an attempt will be made here merely to outline the essentials of the debate.

\*It is worth noting that the late Chester Wilmot, the author of *The Struggle for Europe* (London, 1952), had the advantage of some access to the papers of Field-Marshal Lord Montgomery. Large excerpts from them have since been published in the Field-Marshal's *Memoirs* (London, 1958). Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, contains large quotations from General Eisenhower's personal files.



LANCASTERS OVER MONT LAMBERT, 17 SEPTEMBER 1944

A glimpse from above of the heavy attack made by the R.A.F. Bomber Command to prepare the way for the assault by the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division on the defences of Boulogne.



GERMAN PRISONERS AT BOULOGNE

The 400 Germans captured in the underground passages of the Herquelingue hill (the "bargain basement") march into Boulogne, 21 September 1944.

PERSONAL and TOP SECRET.

THE HEADQUARTERS,  
21 ABNEY SQUARE,

21 A. B. 1004/11/44.

13 September, 1944.

Lt-Gen. H. D. G. OPERAR, G.C., D.S.O.,  
Commander,  
First Canadian Army.

My dear Harry

1. Since last meeting you, we have had a great victory with SHARP, and the main weight of maintenance is now to be diverted to the northward thrust against the hills.
2. I am delighted that you have captured MANS, and please give my congratulations to 1 Corps and the Divisions concerned.

3. The things that are now very important are :-
  - (a) Capture of BOULOUIS and DUNLOIS and CULAIS.
  - (b) The setting in motion of operations designed to enable us to use the port of ANTWERP.

4. Of these two things, (b) is probably the most important. We have captured a port which resembles ANTWERP in size, but we cannot use it; if we could use it, all our maintenance troubles would disappear. I am very anxious that (a) and (b) should both go on simultaneously if you can possibly arrange it, as time is of the utmost importance. I wonder whether you could possibly use one Corps to control the operations from BOULOUIS to DUNLOIS, and the other Corps to control the operations for the opening of ANTWERP, perhaps you would let me know what you think about this.

5. For the operations concerned with ANTWERP, you will need a great deal of air support. I have ordered that bombing to destroy the ports on ANTWERP Island is to begin at once. On the day concerned we can lay on for you the whole weight of the heavy bomber effort from MALDEN, both Bomber Command and Eighth Air Force. I would like you to take over the city of ANTWERP itself from Dempsey as soon as possible; you will want that place and certain ground east of it, so that you can develop operations to push the enemy northwards from the city. You may also possibly want to develop operations westwards along the back of the peninsula towards MALDEN.

6. Dempsey is launching Operation BASKET on Sunday 17th September. This is the operation designed to secure the crossings over the hills and the hills in the ANTWERP area, and three Airborne Divisions are being used.

7. I have arranged that Airborne Forces (para Troops) will be available for you to assist in the capture of MALDEN Island.

/ s. ....

A LETTER FROM THE C.-IN-C.

Field-Marshal Montgomery's letter to General Crerar referring to the forthcoming Arnhem operation and expressing the hope that First Canadian Army can open Antwerp and clear the Channel Ports simultaneously.

8. The really important thing is speed in setting in motion what we have to do. I hope very much that you will be able to tackle both your tasks simultaneously, i.e. the task of taking Ports and the Antwerp business.

Yrs. &c.  
B. L. Montgomery

Montgomery's conception of the operations north of the Seine took shape in his mind, it would seem, during the final stages of the Battle of Falaise. It is interesting that on 18 August, before broaching the matter to Eisenhower, he referred his ideas to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. His proposal was that after crossing the Seine, "12 and 21 Army Groups should keep together as a solid mass of some 40 divisions which would be so strong that it need fear nothing". (It is a fair assumption that Montgomery meant that it would "keep together" under his own command.) This force would move northwards with the 21st Army Group on the left flank, clear the Channel coast, the Pas de Calais and West Flanders and secure Antwerp. The American armies would move with their right flank on the Ardennes directed upon Brussels, Aachen and Cologne. The initial object, apart from destroying the German forces on the coast, would be to establish a powerful air force in Belgium, while the movement would also serve to get the enemy out of V-1 or V-2 range of England (see below, pages 354-5). Montgomery had already discussed this with General Bradley and believed he had his entire agreement. In his notes given to Bradley he emphasized the importance of being able to "seize the Ruhr quickly"; this objective does not seem to have been mentioned in the communication to Brooke. The latter concurred immediately. Montgomery accordingly proceeded to put his plans before Eisenhower.<sup>42</sup>

On 3 May, over a month before D Day, Eisenhower's planners at SHAEF had outlined a plan of operations for the phase which had now been reached.\* They recognized Berlin as the "ultimate goal", but considered it "too far East to be the objective of a campaign in the West". They set their eyes on the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany, which, as we shall see, Montgomery also considered the essential point. Fearing however that an advance by a single route would lead to "a head-on collision with the main enemy forces on a narrow, easily defended front with no room for manoeuvre and little opportunity for the use of our armour", they recommended "a broad front both North and South of the Ardennes", "on two mutually supporting axes". The main advance, they thought, should be along the line Amiens—Maubeuge—Liege—the Ruhr, with a subsidiary attack far south of the Ruhr on the line Verdun—Metz.<sup>43</sup>

In the contention that now took place Eisenhower in general adhered to this policy proposed by his planners before the invasion. Montgomery, on the other hand, argued that the circumstances which had now arisen—the Germans' disorganization resulting from their defeat in Normandy—offered an opportunity for a concentrated attack on a relatively narrow front. As we have already seen, the administrative situation made it impossible, at the beginning of September, to attack with all the available Allied forces simultaneously; there was simply not enough gasoline to be had at the front to move their vehicles. Under these conditions, Eisenhower was further embarrassed by demands from his American subordinates that the available resources should be allotted to *their* areas to enable them to carry the battle forward into Germany. At the same time, American

\*All the signatures on this paper are those of British officers: Captain P. N. Walter, R.N.; Brigadier K. G. McLean; and Group Captain H. P. Broad.

public opinion, as Eisenhower seems to have let Montgomery know, would have made it difficult for him either to disregard these American demands or to continue the subordination of Bradley to Montgomery.<sup>44</sup> Therefore the argument could scarcely be settled merely on the military merits of the case.

On 23 August, after the Gap battle ended, Montgomery and Eisenhower had a very long discussion. That morning, the former tells us, he had flown to Bradley's headquarters and had been shaken to find that Bradley had changed his mind and no longer supported his "single thrust" plan. (Bradley says nothing of this in his own book.) Montgomery, looking ahead to the Ruhr, argued to Eisenhower that in the present state of supply it was vital to concentrate upon one thrust, delivered by the main mass of the Allied armies, and put all available resources behind it. Eisenhower, while recognizing the importance of clearing the Channel coast, establishing air bases in Belgium and seizing the Ruhr, apparently showed some desire to split the force and attack the Saar also. Montgomery told him that to sweep through the Pas de Calais to Antwerp he would need an entire U.S. Army moving on his right flank, and Eisenhower reluctantly agreed. The question of command was also discussed at this meeting. Montgomery argued for a continuation of the arrangement by which he functioned as ground commander, and even offered to serve under Bradley if the Supreme Commander preferred to give the ground command to the latter. The furthest Eisenhower would go, however, was to agree that there must be one commander to coordinate and control the left flank operations into-Belgium. The arrangements previously made (above, page 20) would be carried out; on 1 September Eisenhower would take over direct control of the ground forces.<sup>45</sup>

On 24 August Eisenhower wrote Montgomery confirming the previous day's conversation. This forecast the issuance of a directive giving Montgomery's Army Group the task of operating north-east, seizing the Pas de Calais and airfields in Belgium, and "pushing forward to get a secure base at Antwerp"; its eventual mission would be "to advance eastward on the Ruhr". Bradley's Army Group was to thrust forward on its own left, its "principal offensive mission" for the moment being to support Montgomery in the attainment of his objectives. However, Bradley was also "to begin building up, out of the incoming forces, the necessary strength to advance eastward from Paris towards Metz". Montgomery was given authority to effect "the necessary operational co-ordination" between his forces and Bradley's left wing; the details were to be worked out between Montgomery and Bradley. Eisenhower ended by urging all possible "speed in execution".<sup>46</sup> This letter was the basis of Field-Marshal Montgomery's own directive of 26 August (above, page 282). On 24 August Eisenhower sent the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army a letter explaining what he was doing. He said he had temporarily changed his basic plan for attacking both north-east and east, to help Montgomery seize tremendously important objectives. He considered this necessary, even though it interfered with his desire to push eastward through Metz, because the 21st Army Group lacked the strength for the task.<sup>47</sup>

On the same day General Eisenhower issued his formal directive on command.<sup>48</sup> This stated that the 21st Army Group was to be redesignated "Northern Group

of Armies" and the 12th Army Group "Central Group of Armies". (It may be noted that Montgomery nevertheless continued to refer to his command as the 21st Army Group.) The essential paragraph was the following:

2. The Commanders-in-Chief, Northern and Central Groups of Armies, will come under the direct operational command of the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force effective 0200 hours 1 September 1944.

Eisenhower had made an important concession to Montgomery, though his basic policy was still that recommended by his planners in May, and he was under pressure from his American subordinates. By 2 September Patton's army was stopped on the Meuse for want of gasoline. On that day, at a conference with Generals Bradley, Hodges and Patton, Eisenhower was (according to Patton) "finally persuaded" to approve a plan for an advance by the Third Army and one corps of the First towards Mannheim, Frankfurt and Coblenz. He emphasized however that this drive would depend on the success of the northern thrust, which had priority on supplies.<sup>49</sup> Montgomery heard of the Frankfurt plan at the meeting on 3 September attended by Bradley, Dempsey and Hodges which Crerar missed (above, page 305); he disliked it intensely. On 4 September General Eisenhower issued a directive.<sup>50</sup> This defined the task of the Northern Group of Armies and that part of the Central Group operating north-west of the Ardennes as "to secure Antwerp, breach the sector of the Siegfried Line covering the Ruhr and then seize the Ruhr". The mission of the balance of the Central Group was, in part, "To occupy the sector of the Siegfried Line covering the Saar and then to seize Frankfurt". Eisenhower added, "It is important that this operation should start as soon as possible, in order to forestall the enemy in this sector, but troops of Central Group of Armies operating against the Ruhr north-west of the Ardennes must first be adequately supported."

This was the day Antwerp fell. At 8:55 p.m. that night, when he knew that Antwerp was in Allied hands\* but had not yet received the foregoing directive, Montgomery signed a strong telegram to the Supreme Commander. He wrote: "I consider we have now reached a stage where one really powerful and fullblooded thrust towards Berlin is likely to get there and thus end the German war." There were not enough maintenance resources for two strong thrusts; that selected must have all the resources it needed "without any qualification". The thrust likely to give the best and quickest results was the northern one via the Ruhr. To attempt a compromise solution would "prolong the war".<sup>51</sup>

On 5 September Eisenhower replied agreeing with the conception of a powerful drive towards Berlin, but not "at this moment to the exclusion of all other maneuver". No "reallocation of existing resources", he said, would be adequate to sustain a thrust to Berlin. He considered that the success so far gained should be exploited by crossing the Rhine on a wide front and seizing "the Saar and Ruhr". This he intended to do with all speed. In the meantime the Allies would be opening the ports of Le Havre and Antwerp, which were essential to sustain a powerful thrust deep into Germany, and would be available to support either

\*It cannot have been clear to Montgomery at this moment that we were likely to be denied the use of the port for a long period. But he was obviously not counting on it as an immediate resource.

a thrust at the Ruhr or one at the Saar. But he was still giving priority to the Ruhr and the northern line.<sup>52</sup>

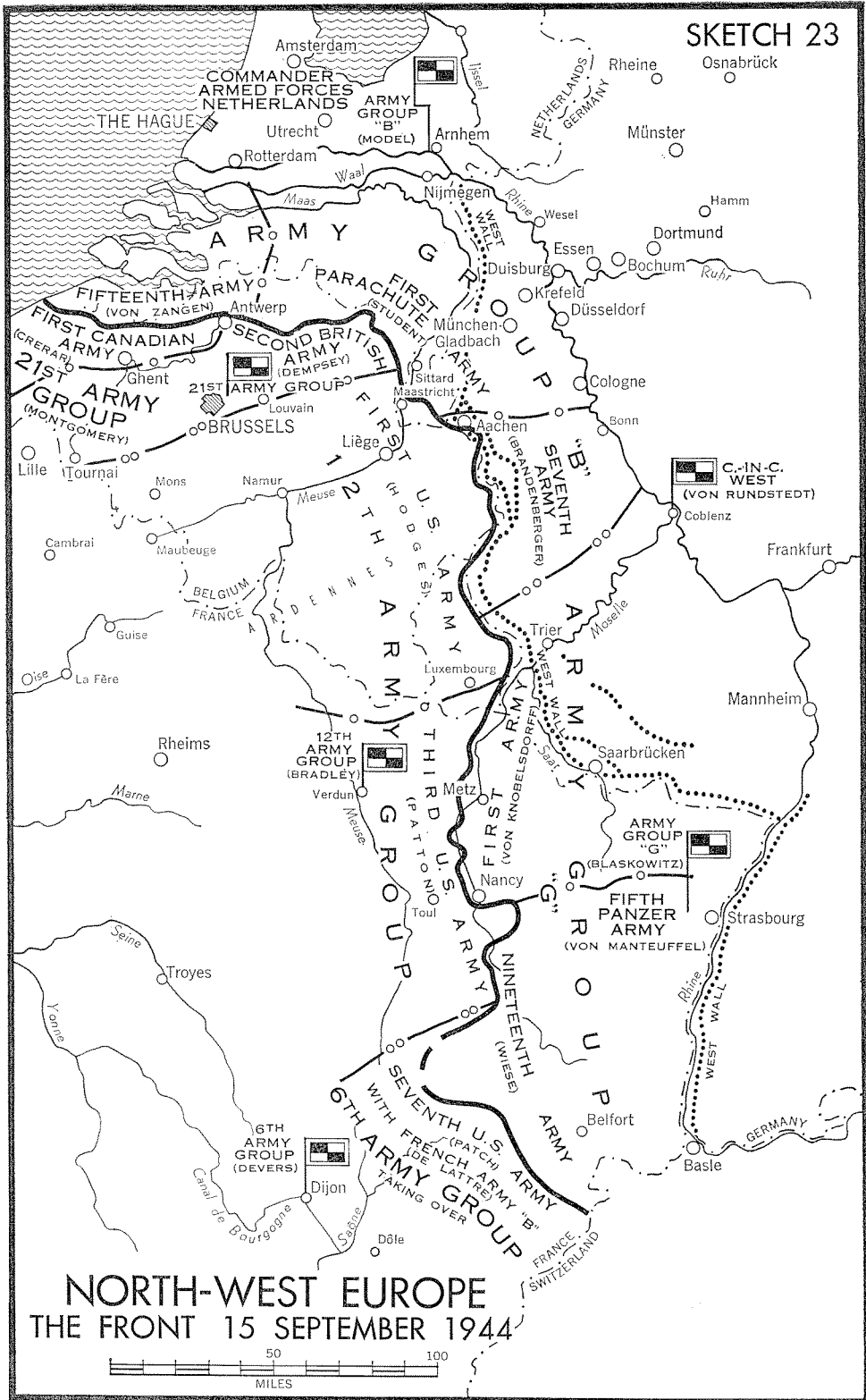
The lines were drawn; the controversy proceeded. Eisenhower still adhered, essentially, 'to his staff's "original conception", as indeed he wrote in a memorandum for record on 5 September. Montgomery complained on the 9th that he could not see that the northern route was getting priority in practice; the 19th U.S. Corps on the First U.S. Army's left flank, which was supposed to be cooperating with Montgomery, was in fact unable to advance properly through lack of petrol.<sup>53</sup> The administrative pinch was now being very seriously felt, and it was clear that the port of Antwerp was not going to be immediately available. On 6 September Montgomery's Chief of Staff pointed out to him that the Germans probably intended to hold the Channel ports as long as they could and added that the immediate opening of some port north of Dieppe, preferably Boulogne, was essential for the rapid development of Montgomery's plans, especially as this would permit of laying a cross-Channel petrol pipeline to the Pas de Calais. He added, "Hope Crerar realizes urgency of matter. Am taking up through staff channels." At this time General Dempsey estimated that the maximum force that could be maintained forward of the line Louvain—Brussels was only one corps of three divisions, plus the airborne forces, pending the opening of a good port in full working order.

After careful consideration, the British Commander-in-Chief came to the conclusion that it would be possible to advance to Berlin on the basis of the ports of Dieppe, Boulogne, Dunkirk and Calais, and in addition 3000 tons of cargo per day through Le Havre. With "one good Pas de Calais port", 1000 tons per day airlift, and an additional allotment of motor transport, he calculated that it would be possible to reach the "Munster triangle", meaning presumably the area Rheine—Osnabriick—Munster. This was on 9 September. It is evident that the Field Marshal now believed that he could support a thrust to the Ruhr, and even to Berlin, without the use of Antwerp; a note on his intentions set down this day by his Brigadier General Staff (Operations), which records the foregoing calculations, assigns to the reduction of the islands blocking the port "last priority" among the tasks of First Canadian Army.<sup>54</sup>

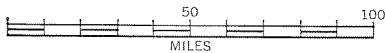
### The Failure at Arnhem

On 7 and 9 September, Montgomery reported to Eisenhower that even with a Pas de Calais port working he would be unable to get over the Rhine without additional administrative assistance. On the 8th, Eisenhower told him again, "we must push up as soon as possible all along the front".<sup>55</sup> On the 10th Eisenhower and Montgomery met for the first time since 26 August (the Supreme Commander had been immobilized for some days, at his headquarters back at Granville in Normandy, with a wrenched knee). In Eisenhower's plane at Brussels airfield the two men again went over the ground as before—single thrust in the north versus broad front. Accounts of this meeting vary somewhat. According to one version<sup>56</sup> it was somewhat acrimonious. Although Montgomery does not recall it, the Supreme Commander seems to





NORTH-WEST EUROPE  
THE FRONT 15 SEPTEMBER 1944



have emphasized the importance of opening Antwerp—a project which as we have seen had at this moment a low priority in Montgomery's mind. Nevertheless Eisenhower authorized him to defer this in favour of an immediate attempt to seize a bridgehead across the Rhine.<sup>57</sup> Operation "Comet", a plan to get crossings over the Lower Rhine by dropping an airborne force of one and a half divisions in the Arnhem—Nijmegen area, was revised and enlarged under the new name "Market-Garden". It was now proposed to use the bulk of the First Allied Airborne Army to lay a "carpet" across the rivers and canals in the southern Netherlands. Along this corridor the 30th Corps of the Second Army would advance to secure the crossings seized by the airborne troops, the most important being those across the Maas at Grave and the two main branches of the Rhine, the Waal at Nijmegen and the Neder Rijn at Arnhem. If the operation was successful, it would turn the Siegfried Line and place the Allies in an excellent position to attack the north side of the Ruhr and advance eastward across the North German Plain.

The target date for the operation was the night of 15-16 September. But on 11 September Montgomery told Eisenhower that, without the priority over other operations which he had been refused, "Market-Garden" could not take place before 23 September at the earliest and possibly the 26th. This had the desired effect. The Supreme Commander on 12 September sent his Chief of Staff to see Montgomery and promised him the priority which he had hitherto sought in vain. He was told that three newly-landed American divisions would be "grounded" to give extra maintenance to his Army Group; the main maintenance of the 12th Army Group was to be given to the First U.S. Army on Montgomery's right; this Army was to cooperate closely with him, and he was to be allowed to deal direct with General Hodges. Montgomery's elation at these events was reflected in a letter which he sent to General Crerar on 13 September:

Since last meeting you, we have had a great victory with SHAEF, and the main weight of maintenance is now to be diverted to the northward thrust against the Ruhr.<sup>58</sup>

"Market-Garden" was no doubt in some degree a compromise operation. The Supreme Commander wrote after the war that it was "merely an incident and extension of our eastward rush to the line we needed for temporary security". It met Montgomery's demand for a strong penetrating operation in the north without, presumably, too greatly arousing the ire of Bradley and Patton.\* But at the time Montgomery, as his letter to Crerar shows, expected great things from it. On the evening of 12 September he signalled the War Office that though he felt somewhat overcome by the long debate, he hoped that the war would now be won reasonably quickly. And Eisenhower's quick response to Montgomery's statement that the operation would have to be postponed unless more resources were made available suggests that the Supreme Commander himself may have had larger and higher hopes at that moment than he recalled when writing his reminiscences.<sup>59</sup>

\*Patton in his *War as I Knew It* states that, apparently on 17 September, Bradley telephoned him to say that Montgomery wanted the American troops stopped in order to favour his own advance. Patton writes, "In order to avoid such an eventuality, it was evident that the Third Army should get deeply involved at once, so I asked Bradley not to call me until after dark on the nineteenth." It was a peculiar procedure, involving, if Patton's account is accurate, disloyalty to the Supreme Commander's plans. But there is no evidence that it had any effect on the Arnhem operation.

Montgomery's directive of 14 September<sup>60</sup> gives the pattern of the operation as he conceived it. Having made good the corridor to Arnhem, the Second Army would establish itself in strength in the area between Arnhem and Zwolle, facing east, with bridgeheads on the east bank of the River IJssel. Thence it would be prepared to advance east to the area Rheine—Osnabriick—Hamm—Munster, and direct a strong thrust "southwards along the eastern face of the Ruhr". The plan envisaged an eastward advance upon Bonn and Cologne by the First U.S. Army, which would then establish a bridgehead across the Rhine and advance "eastwards round the south face of the Ruhr" to join hands with the Second Army

Leaving aside for the moment the further operations of First Canadian Army, we may briefly note here the course and fate of Operation "Market-Garden". It duly went in on 17 September, but the complete victory for which the Allied commanders were hoping did not materialize.

In the airborne ("Market") phase, the 1st British Airborne Corps, under Lieut.-General F. A. M. Browning, was to employ three divisions on 17 September to secure the vital bridges. The 101st U.S. Airborne Division would seize Eindhoven and canal crossings to the north; the 82nd U.S. Airborne Division would be directed upon the bridges across the Maas at Grave and the Waal at Nijmegen; while the 1st British Airborne Division (with the Polish Parachute Brigade under command) was to capture the most northerly bridges, those across the Neder Rijn at Arnhem. These operations were to be carried out under the overall command of Second British Army, which also supplied the 30th British Corps for the ground ("Garden") phase. Lieut.-General Horrocks' spearhead, the Guards Armoured Division, would lunge north from a small bridgehead over the Meuse—Escaut Canal which had been obtained on 8 September. It was to link up successively with the airborne formations along the road Eindhoven—Arnhem. Field-Marshal Montgomery's directive ordered that the ground operation would be "rapid and violent, and without regard to what is happening on the flanks".

The unfortunate result of the operation has led to stories that it was betrayed to the Germans. If it really was betrayed, the Germans apparently did not believe the traitor or act upon the information they received from him; for their records do not reflect any precautionary troop movements immediately before the operation.\* The situation is best summarized in the "experience report" on the operation issued by the German Army Group "B" on 1 October:<sup>62</sup>

\*Elements of the 2nd and 116th Panzer and the 9th and 10th S.S. Panzer Divisions no longer fit for action were ordered to the area Venlo—Arnhem—'s-Hertogenbosch, for rehabilitation, as early as 3 September, and H.Q. 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps to Eindhoven, to help supervise the rehabilitation operation, on 5 September.<sup>61</sup> According to Lt.-Col. Oreste Pinto (*Spycatcher*, ed. London, 1955) the operation was betrayed to the Germans on 15 September by the treacherous Resistance leader Christian Lindemans, known as "King Kong". There were no important changes in the German dispositions on or after 15 September, and none of the numerous Army Group "B" orders and Intelligence documents available contain even the remotest indication that an airborne landing was expected in the "Market-Garden" area. Incidentally, Pinto says that "the Canadians" sent Lindemans through the lines on the mission (to prepare the Resistance to cooperate in the coming operation) during which he supposedly warned the enemy. This is untrue. First Canadian Army had no responsibility for "Market-Garden" or (at this time) for the area where it took place. If anybody sent Lindemans through the lines, it was not "the Canadians".

The enemy achieved surprise. Preparatory action by the air forces began about three hours before the landing in the form of bombing attacks against flak positions. The attacks did not greatly exceed the normal volume of enemy air activity. Air attacks on flak at Arnhem were taken as attempts to destroy bridges. . . .

For airlandings the enemy selects sparsely held sectors. The 2nd S.S. Panzer Corps' being in process of rehabilitation [near Arnhem] was a bad surprise for him. Despite the best contacts with agents his intelligence service failed him in this case.

The Allied intelligence service seems in fact to have got the necessary information just too late. Keeping track of enemy formations out of the line was SHAEF's job. A SHAEF intelligence summary, itself undated but covering the week ending 16 September and therefore probably issued on the 17th, contains maps showing the 2nd S.S. Panzer and the 9th and 10th S.S. Panzer Divisions as "unlocated", but its text observes, "9 SS Panzer Division, and with it presumably 10, has been reported as withdrawing altogether to the Arnhem area of Holland: there they will probably both collect some new tanks from the depot reported in the area of Cleves".<sup>63</sup> Apparently this report did not reach the airborne formations before the drop.<sup>64</sup> Further pieces of good fortune for the Germans were the facts that Army Group "B" had its own headquarters on the western outskirts of Arnhem (which meant that the energetic Field-Marshal Model was on the spot to organize immediate counter-measures) and that General Student received a captured copy of an Allied operation order at a very early stage.<sup>65</sup>

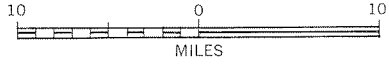
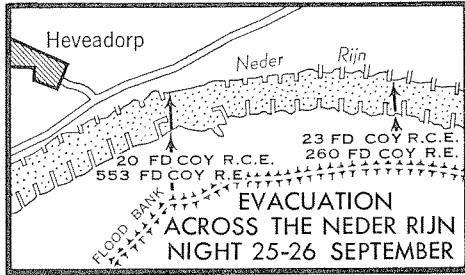
The first drops took place at 1:00 p.m. on the 17th; the Guards Armoured Division moved at 2:35 p.m. Almost from the beginning the 30th Corps advance was slower than had been hoped for. Eindhoven fell to the 101st Airborne Division on 18 September, and on the same day the Guards linked up with them and also with the men of the 82nd Division who had captured the Grave bridge intact; but the Nijmegen bridges were captured (likewise intact) by a dashing joint AngloAmerican attack only on the 20th. The Germans were soon attacking the flanks of the narrow corridor along which the 30th Corps was advancing, and cut it more than once for considerable periods; they also brought troops into the Nijmegen area to contest the advance to Arnhem. The Guards Armoured Division was stopped; the 43rd Infantry Division went in on 22 September and likewise made slow progress.

The epic nine-day struggle at Arnhem itself was watched by the free world in breathless anxiety. A detachment of the 1st Airborne Division seized the north end of the road bridge and held out there most gallantly until 21 September. The situation of the main body of the division west of Arnhem became steadily worse. Bad communications prevented its plight from being known for a considerable time; bad flying weather hampered the arrival of reinforcements and re-supply by air, while at the same time reducing the tactical air support that could be given the division. Most of the Polish Parachute Brigade was finally dropped on the 21st south of the Neder Rijn opposite the Airborne Division's position. A few Poles and some men of the 43rd Division crossed the river on the nights of the 23rd-24th and 24th-25th, but no effective contact was made between the 30th Corps and the airborne troops. On the morning of 25 September Field-Marshal Montgomery

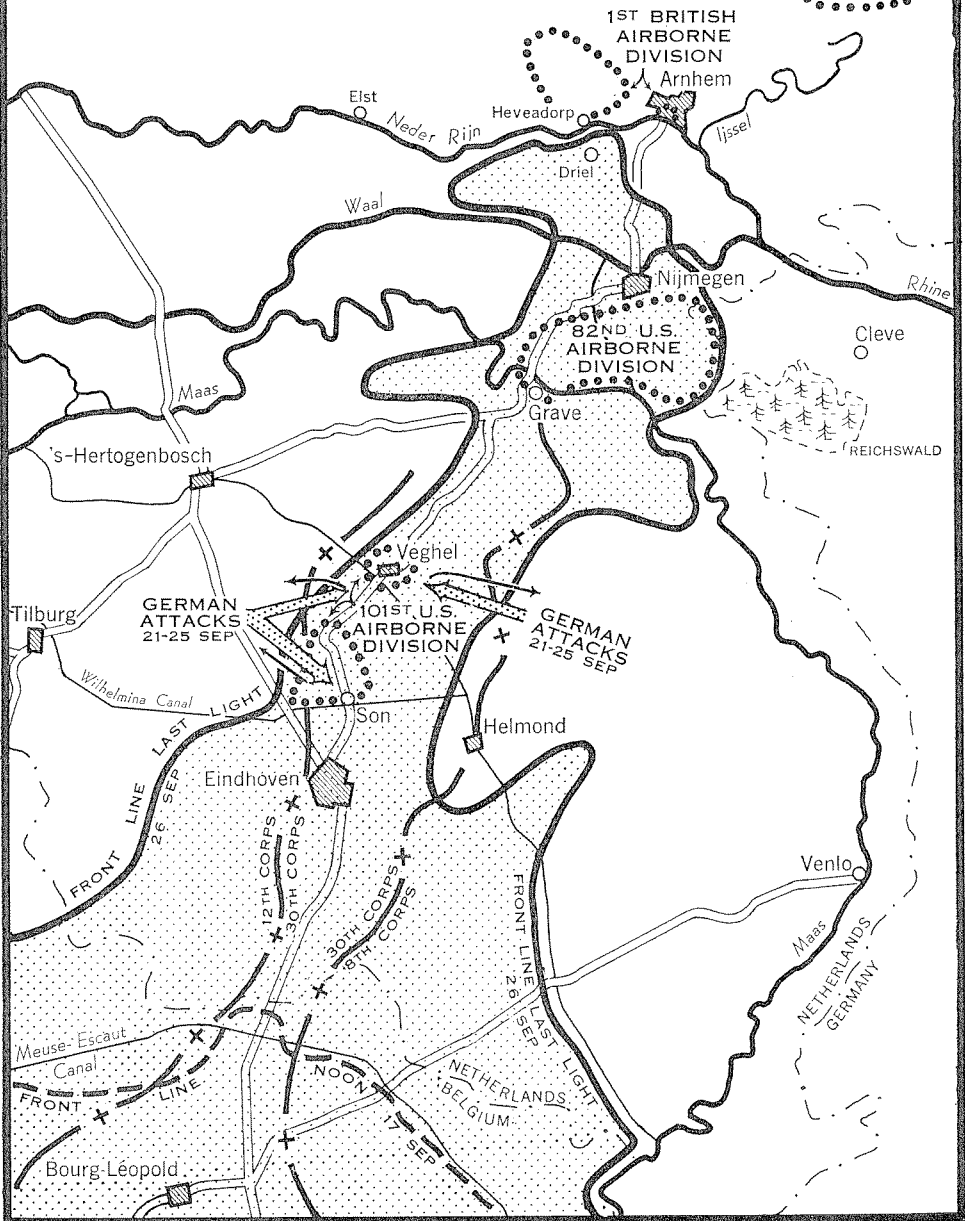
SKETCH 24

# OPERATION "MARKET-GARDEN"

17-26 SEPTEMBER 1944



Airborne forces, evening 17 September.....



decided to withdraw what was left of the 1st Airborne Division, and this was done that night under cover of a programme fired by the artillery of the 30th Corps.<sup>66</sup>

The only Canadian units involved in the Arnhem operation belonged to the First Canadian Army Troops Engineers. The 20th and 23rd Field Companies R.C.E. joined with the 260th and 553rd Field Companies R.E. in ferrying the airborne troops back across the Neder Rijn on the night of the 25th-26th. The Canadians used stormboats, the R.E., assault boats.\* In dismal weather (which nevertheless helped to conceal their movements) the sappers brought their craft forward over difficult routes to the river's edge opposite the British bridgehead. All through the night the boats shuttled back and forth across the wide stream in driving rain, bringing exhausted survivors to safety under constant machine-gun and mortar fire.

When daylight came the machine-guns up on the hill above the bridgehead rained a murderous hail of bullets on those craft which were still operating, but the downward angle of the fire was much less effective than it would have been had the guns been in position to make more horizontal sweeps. Mortar and 88 mm fire fell everywhere.<sup>67</sup>

The 23rd Field Company worked at a site north-east of the village of Driel. Very few soldiers came down to embark at the point farther west to which the 20th had been allotted. When the evacuation ended, about 2400 men had been ferried back, most of them apparently in the stormboats of the 23rd. This company had five killed and three wounded. Among the men it brought out was Major-General R. E. Urquhart, the G.O.C. 1st Airborne Division. The company commander, Major M. L. Tucker, subsequently received the D.S.O., mainly for this night's work on the Neder Rijn.<sup>68</sup>

Although the bridgehead across the Neder Rijn was not made good, "MarketGarden" secured objectives of considerable value to later operations. The crossings over the Maas and the Waal were firmly in our hands and, as the Supreme Commander afterwards observed, "the watershed between the two was to serve as a valuable corridor for a later advance to the Rhine". But, as it turned out, the only hope of capturing the Ruhr in 1944 was lost with the Arnhem bridgehead.

While the desperate struggle at Arnhem ran its course, Eisenhower and Montgomery were continuing their strategic debate. On 15 September the Supreme Commander wrote his three Army Group Commanders asking their views on the best route or routes to be pursued into Germany. He now designated Berlin as "the main prize". "There is no doubt whatsoever, in my mind", he wrote, "that we should concentrate all our energies and resources on a rapid thrust to Berlin." Montgomery made the reply which might have been expected: "I consider that the best objective is the Ruhr, and thence on to Berlin by the northern route." He believed that this advance could be carried out by the 21st Army Group plus the First U.S. Army of nine divisions; but such a force "must have *everything it needed in the maintenance line*; other Armies would do the best they could with what was left over". General Bradley, on the other hand, argued for the old SHAEF plan, with eastward drives on two axes. On 20 September General Eisenhower, while

\*Stormboats were wooden craft propelled by outboard motors; assault boats were smaller, had collapsible canvas sides, and were paddled.

accepting the Ruhr—Berlin axis for the main offensive into Germany, rejected Montgomery's proposal for stopping all troops except the 21st Army Group and the First U.S. Army to support, as he put it, "one single knife-like drive toward Berlin". He wrote: "What I do believe is that we must marshal our strength up along the western borders of Germany, to the Rhine if possible, ensure adequate maintenance by getting Antwerp to working at full blast at the earliest possible moment and then carry out the drive you suggest."

On 21 September Montgomery sent a very strong message again dissenting from this view:

I would say that the right flank of 12 Army Group should be given a very direct order to halt and if this order is not obeyed we shall get into greater difficulties. The net result of the matter in my opinion is that if you want to get the Ruhr you will have to put every single thing into the left hook and stop everything else. It is my opinion that if this is not done you will not get the Ruhr. Your very great friend,  
Monty.

On the 22nd Eisenhower replied that though he had not agreed with Montgomery's belief in the possibility of a single thrust straight through to Berlin, he fully agreed with him about the immediate objective, the Ruhr. He concluded:

No one is more anxious than I to get to the Ruhr quickly. It is for the campaign from there onward deep into the heart of Germany for which [*sic*] I insist all other troops must be in position to support the main drive. The main drive must logically go by the North. It is because I am anxious to organize that final drive quickly upon the capture of the Ruhr that I insist upon the importance of Antwerp. As I have told you I am prepared to give you everything for the capture of the approaches to Antwerp, including all the air forces and anything else you can support. Warm regard,  
Ike.

On 22 September, when there was still some hope of holding the Arnhem bridgehead, General Eisenhower held a conference of his chief subordinates at Versailles. Field-Marshal Montgomery was not present; he sent his Chief of Staff to represent him. During the conference Eisenhower asked that all concerned distinguish clearly between the logistical requirements for the immediate objectives, including seizing the Ruhr and breaching the Siegfried Line, and those for the final drive on Berlin. He said also that he required "general acceptance of the fact that the possession of an additional major deep-water port on our north flank was an indispensable prerequisite for a final drive deep into Germany". The conference agreed that the main effort of 'the present phase of operations was the envelopment of the Ruhr from the north, by the 21st Army Group supported by the First Army. The result was a halt on General Patton's front during October (below, page 386). General de Guingand considered these decisions completely satisfactory.<sup>69</sup> In fact, however, the debate was not yet over. The failure of the Arnhem operation inevitably involved a reconsideration of plans. The final phase of the controversy may best be considered in connection with the operations to open the port of Antwerp (below, pages 386-90); but at this point it is worth while to attempt some commentary upon the issues debated in August and September.

It is interesting to compare the methods followed by Montgomery and Eisenhower. They reflected differences in the two men as individuals and also differences in the approach of two national armies to problems of command.

Montgomery was a "lone wolf" and a thinking machine. He lived and worked

in isolation at a relatively small Tactical Headquarters with his personal staff, including the team of liaison officers who kept him in touch with the operations of the formations under his command. His Chief of Staff lived at Main Headquarters farther in rear. Montgomery considered, and in this he followed the best British pattern, that a commander should make his own plans. He himself wrote at the end of the campaign,<sup>70</sup>

No officer whose daily life is spent in considering details, or who has not time for quiet thought and reflection, can make a sound plan of battle on a high level or conduct large-scale operations efficiently. It is for this reason that the plan must always be made by the commander and NOT by his staff.

Thus in Montgomery's view it was the most essential function of a high commander to produce strategic ideas. It was the function of his staff to work out the details when he had provided them with the outline. He has recently confirmed, what every student of his methods of command had suspected, that the directives which are quoted in this book were all of his own writing.<sup>71</sup>

Eisenhower, it is evident, worked rather differently. He did not isolate himself as much as Montgomery; nor were his strategic plans personally his own in the same degree. He was primarily the leader of an efficient team. He appears to have depended on his staff more than Montgomery did. The manner in which, during the long controversy that has been described, he stood by a plan produced by the SHAEF planning staff months before, at a time when the course of the campaign could not be foreseen in detail, is in striking contrast with the British commander's procedure. Eisenhower once expressed his admiration for General George C. Marshall's capacity for weighing issues and arriving at a "rocklike decision"; he felt that in this respect Marshall was superior to his British "opposite number", Brooke.<sup>72</sup> The Americans seem to have felt, in general, that it was particularly necessary to be "rocklike" in strategic discussions with the British. Indeed, there is almost a note of apology in the Supreme Commander's letter to Marshall (above, page 308) explaining that he has temporarily changed his basic plan to serve Montgomery's needs. If the historian may express a humble personal view, the flexible and empiric approach favoured by the British seems rather more likely to produce good military results as a general rule. Yet it by no means follows from the mere fact that the SHAEF plan had been made so long before that it was necessarily wrong. The issue must be considered on its merits.

Montgomery's plans for action north of the Seine as he first formulated them, rather tentatively, in mid-August, would probably have produced victory in 1944 if it had been possible to put them literally into practice at that moment. He then envisaged, we have seen, a concentrated drive north-east by a body of some 40 divisions presumably commanded by himself. Such a force, directed by the victor of the Battle of Normandy, the ablest senior commander and—with the single possible exception of Patton—the most dynamic senior leader available to the Allies in the north-western theatre, the Germans could not have hoped to resist successfully with the forces they possessed at the end of August. But military economics, as represented in the formidable supply difficulties of this period, and



military politics, reflected in the demands of American public opinion and of Eisenhower's strong-minded American subordinates, both made this conception impracticable. It was out of the question to maintain 40 divisions simultaneously in action. In the American view it was equally out of the question to retain Montgomery in command of the ground forces; and the American view prevailed.

To assess the question of "broad front" versus "full-blooded thrust", in the actual logistical circumstances of the late summer of 1944, is less easy; and any too-ready tendency to accept Montgomery's point of view and dismiss Eisenhower's is discouraged by the fact that Montgomery's very competent Chief of Staff has in this matter espoused Eisenhower's cause as against his own commander's.<sup>73</sup> Obviously, no one can say what would have happened had certain things been done differently. But the factors involved may be briefly considered.

The force which Montgomery evidently envisaged as conducting the thrust into Germany which he advocated early in September was about 20 divisions,\* or considerably less than half of the total Allied force in the theatre. The fate of the enterprise would have depended upon this relatively small group, for the rest of the Allied Expeditionary Force would have been immobilized, or largely immobilized, by the diversion of administrative resources, particularly gasoline, to support the thrust.

As for the Germans, we have indicated (above, page 270) the desperate state of their forces in the West at the end of the Battle of Normandy. Just what were their capabilities at the time when Montgomery and the Supreme Commander were engaged in their debate? Eisenhower's own Intelligence staff thought them not formidable. The SHAEF intelligence summary for the week ending 9 September estimated the number of German divisions in the West at that time as, nominally, 48: 14 panzer or panzer grenadier and 34 infantry. These largely shattered formations were assessed in the portion of the summary dealing with "enemy dispositions" as equivalent in "true strength" to four panzer and 20 infantry divisions; and four of these 20 were isolated in the French coastal fortresses. Under "enemy capabilities" the German strength was set even lower: the Commander-in-Chief West might "expect not more than a dozen divisions within the next two months to come from outside to the rescue", and

To sum up, C-in-C West will soon have available the true equivalent of about fifteen divisions, including four panzer, for the defence of the West Wall. A further five or six may struggle up in the course of a month, making a total of about twenty.

The West Wall cannot be held with this amount, even when supplemented by many oddments and large amounts of flak.

Examination of the German documents now available<sup>74</sup> indicates that even the lower estimate erred if anything on the side of exaggerating the German strength. (However, so many of the formations were badly reduced, and the amount of debility they had suffered varied so widely, that it seems impossible to reduce the German situation to exact statistics.) One thing can be said with considerable

\*See above, page 308. In addition to the nine divisions of First U.S. Army, the Second British Army had eight, and there were three airborne divisions ready for action in England. At least part of the strength of First Canadian Army (six divisions at this time) could not have been spared from its commitments on the coast from Le Havre to the Scheldt.

confidence. The German forces had been almost entirely stripped of armour, and this was particularly true in the northern sector. The German situation map for 2 September<sup>75</sup> shows no armoured formation north of the line Mons—Namur—Liege. The only panzer division still in moderately good condition was the 11th, resisting the Allied advance near the Swiss border on the extreme southern flank. On 7 September, just after resuming command in the West, Rundstedt reported to Keitel on the Allies' superiority:<sup>76</sup>

In the face of all this Allied strength, all German forces are committed. They are badly depleted, in some cases crushed. Artillery and anti-tank weapons are lacking. Reserves worth much do not exist. Army Group B has about 100 tanks in working order. Considering Allied armoured strength the implications are clear.

Eight days later Rundstedt sent Jodl the following personal top-priority, top secret signal:<sup>77</sup>

During the past week the situation of Army Group B has further deteriorated. On a front of about 400 kilometres it fights with the strength of about twelve divisions and, at the moment, 84 tanks, assault guns and light anti-tank guns on Mark IV chassis, against a fully mobile enemy with at least 20 divisions and roughly 1700 tanks fit for commitment. The danger of new reverses in the area of Army Group B—with possibly grave consequences—can be removed only by speeding up the dispatch of the reinforcements that have repeatedly been requested.

I am aware of the reasons that hitherto have prevented a faster and more comprehensive strengthening of the western front. But I must to the full extent concur in the apprehensions of Field-Marshal Model to the effect that the forces slated for transfer might come too late.

I suggest therefore examining once more whether it is possible:

- (a) to advance the time of arrival of 246 and 363 VGD\* as well as of the Projector and GHQ Arty Bdes;
- (b) to withdraw from the eastern front for a short period individual panzer divisions or at least several assault gun brigades for transfer to the western front.

These presentations by the C.-in-C. West are probably the most authoritative statements available.

The most critical moment for the Germans was immediately after the fall of Antwerp on 4 September. At that moment they were badly off balance and had, as we have seen, virtually no armour in their northern sector and very little anywhere in the West. Had the Allies been able to cut off the Fifteenth Army by blocking the South Beveland isthmus while striking simultaneously a heavy blow elsewhere in the northern sector, it would very probably have been fatal to the Germans. Yet this was also the worst moment of the Allied supply famine. The lines of communication of the 21st Army Group had just lengthened enormously; no port was available closer than the original bridgehead except Dieppe, which was just being opened; and Dieppe was small and itself already far distant from the Antwerp front. In these circumstances it would certainly have been necessary to do precisely what Montgomery asked, completely immobilizing all Allied forces other than his own, in order to make effective action possible on his front. The

\*Volksgranadier Divisions. This designation ("People's Grenadier Division") was given in the autumn of 1944 to various divisions being re-formed after being destroyed or badly cut up in the summer battles. These should not be confused with the *Volkssturm*, an improvised militia of little military value.

risks would have been serious, for the Germans' performance at this period, notably in the Foret de la Londe and the "Market-Garden" operation, reflected a capacity to recover from disaster and a fierce resolution in action which would certainly have ensured a very hard battle, however favourable the circumstances were for the Allies.

The point is worth making that Montgomery's administrative calculations turned out to be unsound, in so far as they were based upon his having "one good Pas de Calais port" (above, page 310) actually working during the period of opportunity. We shall see that, thanks to the Germans' obstinate defence and the thoroughness of their demolitions, the first Pas de Calais port (Boulogne) was not opened until 12 October (below, page 344). By that date the crucial battle would presumably have been over.

By the time Operation "Market-Garden" was attempted on 17 September, the Germans had recovered to a slight extent. They had collected a small number of tanks in the north, and these had considerable influence on the outcome. German armour contributed to overwhelming the lightly-armed 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem, and after that division lost control of the road bridge there tanks, moving south across it, intervened north of Nijmegen with important effect. Nevertheless, German armoured strength was still small. In a protracted battle, the tanks that fought in "Market-Garden" would soon have been destroyed and could not have been rapidly replaced. A battle in which one side had a great force of armour and the other virtually none would have been very unequal-though it is worth remembering that in not wholly dissimilar circumstances north of Falaise the 2nd Canadian Corps had made slow progress. And the Germans would still have had little air support to counterbalance the Allies' great strength in this element; though autumn weather and inadequate forward airfields might have hampered our air forces. Finally, it may be assumed that Hitler would not have accepted defeat in the West without withdrawing troops from the Eastern Front in an attempt to stave it off. It would not have been easy to find the troops; but two or three panzer divisions from the East, if they arrived in time, might well have turned the scale against an ill-maintained and tired Allied army group in an autumn battle on the North German Plain. The available records<sup>78</sup> suggest that two panzer divisions might possibly have been found on the Eastern Front from the 3rd Panzer Corps of the Fourth Panzer Army. But we have strayed too far from history into the field of the might-have-been.

All in all, if a score of Allied divisions had been able to cross the Rhine in September 1944 they would certainly have had a lethal and uncertain battle to fight; and nobody can contemplate without some apprehension the thought of these troops, deprived of help from other Allied ground forces, "slugging it out" with the desperate and determined enemy. Eisenhower had strong arguments on his side in favouring the conservative and prudent line rather than the bold one. The "broad front" policy defeated the Germans in the spring of 1945. It is possible that the more daring plan advocated by Montgomery, had it been fully accepted by Eisenhower at an early date and persevered in, would have defeated them in

the autumn of 1944. But we must recall that in Operation "Market-Garden" the Supreme Commander went a long way towards Montgomery's policy, putting behind the thrust a degree of logistical support which the Field Marshal at the time thought "a great victory" and which gave him good hope of an early end to the war; and the operation failed. There is obviously no basis for a dogmatic statement.

## CHAPTER XIV

### **CLEARING THE COASTAL BELT AND THE PORTS SEPTEMBER 1944**

(See Map 7 and Sketches 25-27)

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**I**N the early autumn of 1944 several sequences of events important to this history were proceeding simultaneously in North-West Europe. In the preceding chapter we abandoned the course of events in the First Canadian Army sector to discuss the higher direction of the campaign and happenings elsewhere on the front. We must now return to First Canadian Army and deal with its operations during the month of September. Those operations themselves were widely dispersed, and it is difficult to describe them even summarily without occasionally taking some liberties with chronology.

#### The Advance Beyond the Somme

On 3 September, while the 2nd Canadian Corps was crossing the Somme, the 1st British Corps was closing in on Le Havre and the Second British Army was speeding through Brussels on its way to Antwerp, Field-Marshal Montgomery issued another directive.<sup>1</sup> It was brief and general, but it indicated the breadth of the possibilities of the situation at that moment. His intentions now were, first, "To advance eastwards and destroy all enemy forces encountered"; and secondly, "To occupy the Ruhr, and get astride the communications leading from it into Germany and to the sea ports." On 6 September the Second Army was to advance eastwards with its main bodies from the line Brussels—Antwerp, directed on the Rhine between Wesel and Arnhem. The Ruhr was to be "by-passed round its northern face, and cut off by a southward thrust through Hamm". The First U.S. Army, advancing with its two left corps directed successfully upon the lines Maastricht—Liege, Sittard—Aachen and Cologne—Bonn, would "assist in cutting off the Ruhr by operations against its south-eastern face, if such action is desired by Second Army". The Belgian and Dutch contingents, which had been serving under General Crerar since the moment when the initial advance from the old bridge-head was undertaken, were now transferred to the Second Army. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that that army was already operating in Belgium, and would shortly enter the Netherlands. As for First Canadian Army itself, its tasks

had already been defined. Now they were summarized in a single somewhat bleak sentence:

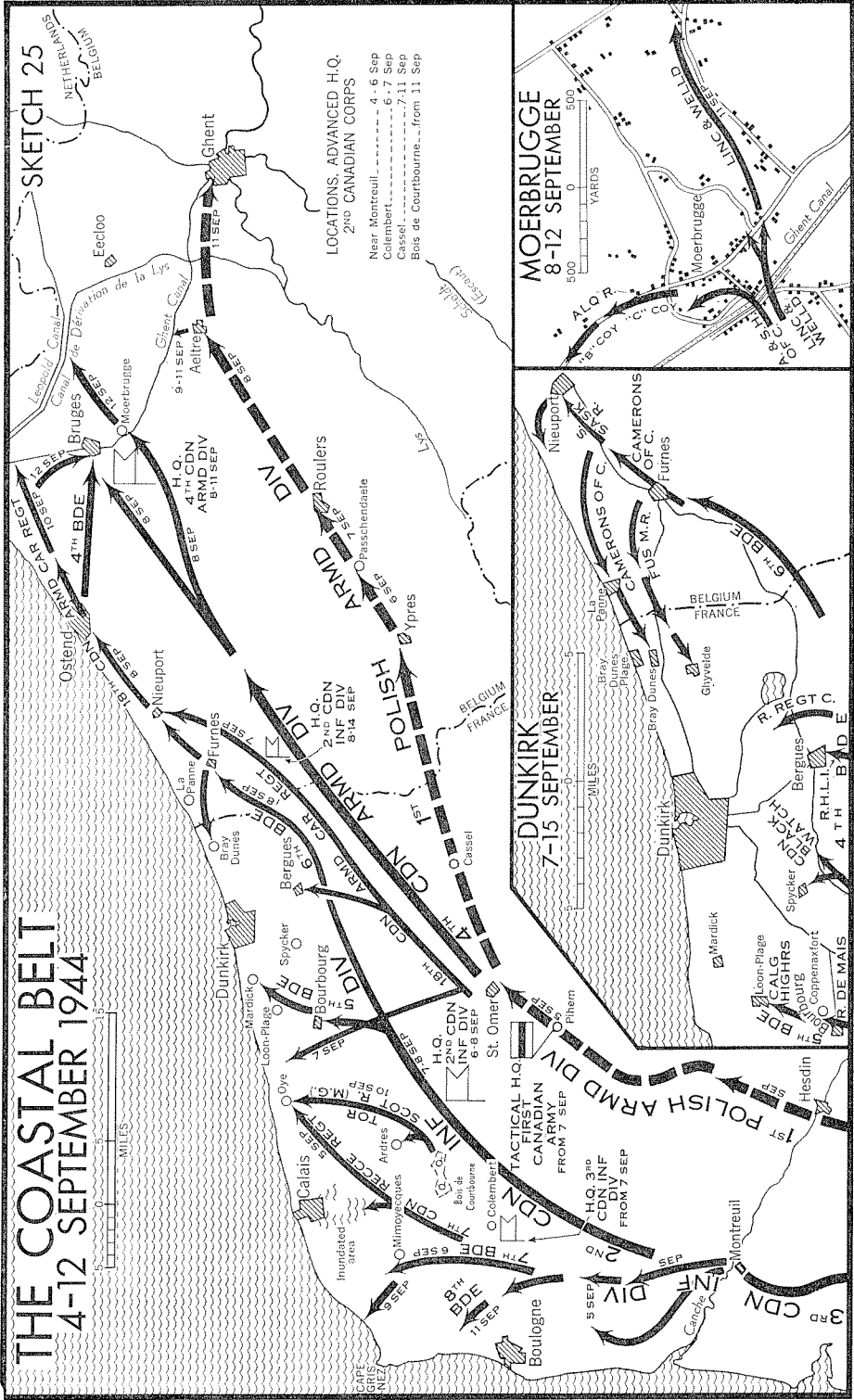
5. Canadian Army will clear the coastal belt, and will then remain in the general area Bruges-Calais until the maintenance situation allows of its employment further forward.

As we have seen, the Fifteenth Army had had time to occupy the line of the Somme in the Canadian sector and had destroyed the bridges. However, the rapid advance of the Second Army on its left imperilled and dismayed the German formation, and it withdrew from the Somme without offering serious resistance. The necessity of bridging the stream was the main difficulty encountered by First Canadian Army. Bridging began on the afternoon of 2 September, the 10th Infantry Brigade crossing the river in the area of Pont Remy to cover the operation. A "Class 40" bridge (capable of carrying tanks) was completed here during the morning of the 3rd and by noon the armour of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division had begun to cross. During the night the Polish Armoured Division had got part of its infantry across the Somme below Abbeville and repairs were undertaken to a bridge here to enable tanks to cross.<sup>2</sup>

The Poles now took the lead of the 2nd Canadian Corps advance and drove northward without meeting much opposition. By noon of 4 September they were reported in Hesdin. In accordance with the orders previously issued, the 4th Division concentrated immediately east of Abbeville to rest and reorganize. The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division followed the Poles across the Somme and pushed north parallel to the coast. On the morning of the 4th its 9th Brigade crossed the river Canche near Montreuil and moved on towards Boulogne.<sup>3</sup> Blown bridges on this river and the Authie were making trouble similar to that met with on the Somme. One of Field-Marshal Montgomery's liaison officers reported on this day, "The problem facing 2 Cdn Corps at the moment is not German soldiers but bridging difficulties."

In this phase, indeed, with the Army moving rapidly forward, the Engineers had constant bridging problems, especially as the First Canadian Army routes crossed the rivers flowing into the Channel near their mouths, where they were widest. There was a chronic shortage of bridging equipment during September. Simultaneously the construction or rehabilitation of airfields in the new areas for the wings of No. 84 Group was an equally important commitment of the R.C.E. and R.E. units working under the Army's Chief Engineer (Brigadier Geoffrey Walsh took over this appointment from Brigadier A. T. MacLean at the beginning of the month). This was likewise a very busy and exacting period for the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. By 2 September the Army's "main signals artery" was complete to Rouen; that day cables were successfully put across the Seine at Duclair (only to be broken two days later by a ferry dragging its anchor). On 9 September it was recorded that cable connection had been established with Headquarters 2nd Corps at Cassel; the Corps now had speech and teleprinter communication with Army "after being entirely on wireless for one week".<sup>4</sup> Mere distance was a serious problem for commanders and staffs, and particularly for Army Headquarters. General Crerar in the second week of September

# THE COASTAL BELT 4-12 SEPTEMBER 1944



was directing operations from Le Havre in the south to Bruges and Ghent in the north, a front of nearly 200 miles. Fortunately, his light Auster aircraft gave him the means of maintaining personal contact with his two corps commanders as well as with Field-Marshal Montgomery.

Early in September we had not yet appreciated that the Germans intended to fight for the Channel Ports; air reconnaissance had reported the Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk areas "deserted",<sup>5</sup> and indeed, as we have seen, it was only on 4 September that Hitler issued his order for defence (above, page 301). On the evening of the 4th General Simonds sent a directive<sup>6</sup> to his divisional commanders emphasizing the objects of pursuit to the Scheldt and destruction or capture of all enemy south of the river within the Army boundary. The 2nd Canadian Division when it moved forward was to clear the coastal strip from Dunkirk to the Dutch frontier. The 3rd Canadian Division, having been previously directed to push through to the Dunkirk area (above, page 303), was now merely ordered to ensure that the 2nd Division's route was clear and thereafter to reorganize about Calais. But by the night of the 5th-6th the 3rd Division had come up against the landward defences of Boulogne and established that the enemy was holding hard there. A momentary intention to contain Boulogne with one brigade while the balance of the division pushed on to Calais and Dunkirk<sup>7</sup> was quickly abandoned, and soon after midnight a divisional operation order<sup>8</sup> was issued: the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was now to "capture Boulogne and destroy its garrison". The 7th Brigade was pushed on to seize high ground south-west of Calais and cover the flank of the operation.

On 5 September the Polish Armoured Division occupied St. Omer; on the 6th it crossed the Franco-Belgian frontier and overcame enemy resistance at Ypres and Passchendaele—names famous in an earlier war; on the 7th it reached Roulers. In the meantime the refreshed 4th Canadian Armoured Division had resumed the advance early on the 6th and pushed forward from St. Omer on the Poles' left, directed on Bruges and Eecloo. Organized in two *ad hoc* battle groups named after Brigadier Moncel of the 4th Armoured Brigade and Lt.-Col. J. D. Stewart, who was commanding the 10th Infantry Brigade in Brigadier Jefferson's absence through illness, the division pushed forward rapidly. On 8 September it came up against the next German delaying position, the Ghent Canal, a meandering waterway connecting historic Ghent (which the Second British Army had reached but not cleared on 5 September) and the beautiful old city of Bruges.<sup>9</sup> The bridges were down, and the enemy intended to make full use of the obstacle to hold up our advance to the Scheldt.

On the evening of the 8th The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise's) launched the division's attack across the canal near Moerbrugge, some three miles south of Bruges. The unit diary remarks drily, "Apparently it was considered that the crossing would be a routine matter, since no boating material was brought up, and no serious artillery programme was laid on." The Argylls however found two large punts and used them for the crossing. Mortar and 88-mm. fire came down, and the battalion suffered severely.



Nevertheless, at midnight it was "still clinging, rather precariously" to its narrow bridgehead on the further side. Fortunately, the Canadian attack had been made at the junction between the 245th and 711th German Infantry Divisions' sectors,<sup>10</sup> which tended to delay the enemy's counter-measures. In the early hours of the 9th The Lincoln and Welland Regiment joined the Argylls in the bridgehead and the two units repulsed strenuous German efforts to dislodge them. During the day the sappers struggled to build a bridge; but in the words of the division's General Staff diarist, "For the first time since we left the Falaise area the enemy was able to put down a truly effective concentration of fire with the result that the engineers could not get the bridge across in daylight." However, it was duly completed during the night, and early on 10 September a squadron of the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment) crossed to support the infantry. During the day the bridgehead was gradually extended and large numbers of prisoners were taken; but the ground and the closeness of the country ("much closer than the map indicates") made progress slow.<sup>11</sup>

On 9 September, and again on the night of the 10th-11th, the Poles attempted to force the Ghent Canal on their own front in the area north-west of Aeltre, roughly halfway between Bruges and Ghent. Steep banks and deep water, combined with unfavourable conditions for artillery observation, lack of assault craft and heavy German opposition rendered the efforts fruitless. They were abandoned; and on the 11th, as the result of a decision by higher authority to regroup (below, page 330), the Poles moved to the Ghent area to relieve the 7th British Armoured Division.<sup>12</sup>

In the meantime, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, left behind at Dieppe to refit, had also begun to move forward again on 6 September. After concentrating west of St. Omer it began its task in the coastal area; since it was now clear that Calais as well as Boulogne was going to be defended, and the 3rd Division would have its hands full there, the whole coast from just east of Calais, including Dunkirk, now fell to the 2nd.<sup>13</sup> On 7-8 September Brigadier Megill's 5th Infantry Brigade captured Bourbourg, south-west of Dunkirk, and was then instructed to contain the Dunkirk garrison, estimated to be some 10,000 strong, which held a wide perimeter of outposts in the villages of Mardick, Loon-Plage, Spycker, Bergues and Bray Dunes.<sup>14</sup>

The Calgary Highlanders had begun operations against Loon-Plage—"a very slow, tedious and costly job"—on 7 September.<sup>15</sup> They ran into very heavy opposition and before long each of their forward companies was reduced to a strength of only 30. Their diary says on the 8th, "We must give great credit to the artillery and heavy mortars, plus our own mortars, for the very valuable support they gave us throughout the attack." Eventually the enemy withdrew and Loon-Plage was occupied on the morning of the 9th. Simultaneously, The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada occupied nearby Coppinaxfort with the help of the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment. The inhabitants' celebrations were, unfortunately, abruptly terminated by the enemy's mortars.<sup>16</sup> During the following week the 5th Brigade's activities were mainly limited

to probing the defences of Dunkirk and patrolling. Civilians contributed much useful information on the enemy's dispositions. The troops remained under fairly severe and consistent shellfire, some of which was believed to come from heavy guns in Dunkirk. This static phase soon became trying, and a disgruntled diarist remarked: "We are really getting fed up with the monotony of this job-a somewhat depressing business." The brigade learned on 15 September that the entire division would shortly move to the Antwerp sector. Its last operation before Dunkirk was the capture of Mardick on the 17th.<sup>17</sup>

In the meantime, east of Dunkirk, in the area of the Franco-Belgian border, the 6th Brigade, now commanded by Brigadier J. G. Gauvreau, occupied Fumes, Nieuport and La Panne. The South Saskatchewan Regiment at Nieuport received great assistance from the Belgian White Brigade, the national resistance movement, which furnished exact information concerning the enemy's strength, defences and minefields.<sup>18</sup>

West of La Panne The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada occupied German coast defences, gaining shelter from the enemy's artillery. On 12 September the 6th Brigade was directed against Bray Dunes and Bray Dunes Plage. During the next two days the Camerons made several unsuccessful attempts to capture this area. Aided by Typhoon aircraft and a supplementary operation by the South Saskatchewan, they finally cleared it on the 15th. Simultaneously, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, whose C.O. was now Lt.-Col. J. M. P. Sauve, took the nearby village of Ghyvelde, where they had been repulsed in earlier attempts.<sup>19</sup> But the enemy showed no sign of relaxing his grip on Dunkirk, and the place could have been taken only by a major attack with heavy support.

Brigadier Cabeldu's 4th Brigade, initially in reserve, had moved north on 9 September and occupied Ostend.\* This not inconsiderable port had not been mentioned in Hitler's directive of 4 September, and the Germans did not defend it, although the fortifications, including large concrete gun-positions with excellent fields of fire, impressed our troops as formidable. However, the harbour installations had been partly demolished, and the necessity of dealing with mines and sunken ships imposed delay on the use of the port. From 28 September, pending the opening of Antwerp, stores and bulk petrol flowed in through Ostend to alleviate the maintenance problem.<sup>20</sup>

Just east of Nieuport The Essex Scottish Regiment laid siege on 10 September to a coastal gun position of great strength. "What had appeared to be sand dunes were concrete dugouts and emplacements covered with sand. The position commanded all the surrounding country." But the Essex brought so hot a fire against it-with the help of mortars and anti-tank and Bofors guns, as well as other supporting artillery-that the garrison surrendered on the 12th. The Commanding Officer (Lt.-Col. P. W. Bennett) recorded that 316 prisoners had been taken, at a cost to the Essex of two killed and three wounded, and that "the booty was absolutely terrific".<sup>21</sup>

While the Essex were thus engaged, the remaining battalions of the 4<sup>th</sup>

\*The 18th Armoured Car Regiment had been in Ostend the day before. It had also anticipated the 6th Brigade in Nieuport.

Brigade moved to the southern outskirts of Bruges to assist the 4th Armoured Division in that sector. Fortunately, the enemy withdrew without contesting possession of the city, and on 12 September elements of the 4th Infantry Brigade entered it on the heels of the 18th Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons).<sup>\*</sup> The enthusiasm of the citizens knew no bounds; the diarist of The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry remarked, "the people on seeing the vehicles became delirious and literally thousands of people swarmed about and prevented the vehicles from moving for close to an hour". The brigade now turned south again to attack Bergues, a key feature of Dunkirk's outer defences. But the area was badly flooded and an attack on the 15th by the R.H.L.I. bogged down. Then, even as the brigade was preparing to move with the remainder of the 2nd Division to Antwerp, the enemy withdrew and the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment was able to occupy Bergues on the morning of 16 September.<sup>23</sup>

### The Need for the Channel Ports

Meanwhile, the changes in strategy described in the last chapter had begun to be reflected in the orders issued to the First Canadian Army. They appeared first in decreased emphasis upon the pursuit to the Scheldt and greater emphasis upon the capture of the Channel Ports. Subsequently the demand for the opening of Antwerp came to the fore.

We have seen Field-Marshal Montgomery's Chief of Staff, on 6 September, calling attention to the importance of getting the port of Boulogne (above, page 310). That evening the C.-in-C. duly signalled to General Crerar:<sup>24</sup>

Would be very grateful for your opinion on the likelihood of early capture of Boulogne. It looks as if port of Antwerp may be unusable for some time as Germans are holding islands at mouth of Scheldt. Immediate opening of some port north of Dieppe essential for rapid development of my plan and I want Boulogne badly. What do you think are the chances of getting it soon.

This was delayed in transmission, but Crerar was already working on the problem<sup>25</sup> and as we have seen the 3rd Canadian Division issued orders that same night for operations against Boulogne.

We have also seen (above, page 310) that on 9 September Montgomery calculated that, with the ports of Dieppe, Boulogne, Dunkirk and Calais and some help from Le Havre, he could go to Berlin; with one good Pas de Calais port plus airlift and extra motor transport, he could go to "the Munster triangle". At this time he saw the Canadian Army's tasks as, first priority, capture of Boulogne; second priority, capture of Dunkirk; take over the Ghent area and clear the enemy pocket north of Ghent; then, as "last priority", "examine and carry out the reduction of the islands guarding the entrance to Antwerp".<sup>26</sup> On the morning of the 9th General Crerar flew to the Field-Marshal's headquarters for a conference at which Generals Dempsey and Hodges were also present. Crerar's

<sup>\*</sup>The regiment, normally part of 2nd Canadian Corps Troops, had one squadron. under the command of the 4th Division during the pursuit. This hard-driving squadron reported that, at times, it was up to 40 miles ahead of the division.<sup>22</sup>

diary notes briefly, "Decisions affecting First Cdn Army were reached, i.e., speedy capture of Channel Ports within First Cdn Army boundary." Later in the day Crerar issued a directive to his corps commanders.<sup>27</sup> This underlined the maintenance difficulties which were being encountered and which rendered it impossible to press on as quickly and as powerfully "as the very favourable military situation urgently demands". Crerar proceeded:

3. It follows that a speedy and victorious conclusion to the war now depends, fundamentally, upon the capture by First Cdn Army of the Channel ports which have now become so essential, if the administrative problem is to be solved, i.e. Le Havre, Boulogne, Dunkirk, Calais and generally in that order of importance.
4. 1 Brit Corps will attack and capture Le Havre on 10/ 11 Sep—unless unfavourable weather entails a further delay. On the completion of this important operation 1 Brit Corps will re-organize and re-equip in the vicinity of Le Havre, pending an improvement in the administrative situation which will permit the movement of this formation to the Eastern sector of First Cdn Army area.
5. 2 Cdn Corps has already been directed to proceed, without delay, to capture Boulogne, Dunkirk and Calais, preferably in that order, but without prejudice to the earlier and easier capture of anyone of them. If no weakness in the defences of these ports is discovered, and decisively exploited, in the course of operational reconnaissance—then a deliberate attack, with full fire support, will require to be staged, in each case.
6. In view of the necessity to give first priority to the capture of the Channel ports, mentioned above, the capture, or destruction, of the enemy remaining North and East of the Ghent-Bruges Canal becomes secondary in importance. While constant pressure and close contact with the enemy, now withdrawing North of R Schelde, will be maintained, important forces will not be committed to offensive action.

During 10 September the 2nd Canadian Corps was to take over Ghent from the 12th British Corps. Thereafter the inter-Army boundary would be adjusted to give First Canadian Army the left bank of the Scheldt as far east as the Dutch border where it crossed the river north-west of Antwerp. The directive ended by stating that the responsibility of No. 84 Group R.A.F. was now extended to include the Dutch islands of South and North Beveland and Walcheren. "Every effort is to be made to interfere with, and destroy, the enemy now in process of ferrying himself across R Schelde to these islands."

The absence from this directive of any direct reference to the opening of Antwerp suggests that Field-Marshal Montgomery had mentioned it either not at all or merely as a task of the distant future. This situation, however, was soon to change. At their conference at Brussels on 10 September Eisenhower seems to have impressed upon Montgomery his desire for the opening of Antwerp, although he agreed to some delay for the sake of Operation "Market-Garden" (above, page 312). Thereafter Antwerp assumed a rather higher official priority, at least, in the planning of the 21st Army Group.<sup>28</sup> It is of interest also, and perhaps of some importance, that at this same moment the Combined Chiefs of Staff, meeting at Quebec, on the motion of Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke urged General Eisenhower to make energetic efforts to open Antwerp. Eisenhower had reported his immediate plans, which the conference record summarizes as follows: "The Supreme Commander's first operation will be one to break the Siegfried line and seize crossings over the Rhine ['Market-Garden']. In doing this his main effort will be on the left. He will then prepare logistically and otherwise

for a deep thrust into Germany." On 12 September the Combined Chiefs agreed to send Eisenhower a telegram, drafted by Brooke, which concurred in his plans but drew his attention

"(a) to the advantage of the northern line of approach into Germany, as opposed to the southern, and

"(b) to the necessity for the opening up of the north-west ports, particularly Antwerp and Rotterdam, before bad weather sets in."<sup>29</sup>

The changing emphasis was reflected in a signal from Montgomery to Crerar sent early on 12 September:<sup>30</sup>

Delighted to hear about good progress at Havre. When you have encircled [sic] concentrate everything on Boulogne. The early opening of the port of Antwerp is daily becoming of increasing importance and this cannot repeat cannot take place until Walcheren has been captured and the mouth of the river opened for navigation. Before you can do this you will obviously have to remove all enemy from the mainland in that part where they holding up [sic] north east of Bruges. Airborne army considers not possible use airborne troops in the business. Grateful for your views as to when you think you can tackle this problem....

The following day, in the same letter which informed Crerar of the "MarketGarden" plan (above, page 312) Montgomery raised the question of Antwerp in a more urgent form (below, page 336). The planning of the operations to open Antwerp can best be dealt with in the next chapter; at this point it is most appropriate to concentrate upon those directed against the Channel Ports. It should be emphasized, however, that from 12 September onward the planning for the Scheldt operations, representing a great enlargement of the tasks of First Canadian Army, complicated its operations. When on 13 September Montgomery asked Crerar whether he could capture Boulogne, Dunkirk and Calais, and simultaneously set in motion operations to open the port of Antwerp, he was in fact setting him, as is now obvious, a task far beyond the limited resources of his Army.

### Operation "Astonia": The Capture of Le Havre

The first of the Channel Ports to be captured by First Canadian Army was Le Havre, which was taken by Lieut.-General Sir John Crocker's 1st British Corps in a neat and expeditious three-day operation in the second week of September. As has been explained, the capture of Le Havre had been assigned to Crocker well before the end of August, and his leading troops came up against the city's outer defences on 2 September. It soon became evident that the place was garrisoned and that the Germans intended to offer a strong defence; but a heavy scale of support, by air and sea as well as by land, was clearly required, and obtaining and coordinating these various resources took time. The assault could not be undertaken for over a week.

Le Havre had long been a city of much- commercial and military significance and had figured prominently in the old Anglo-French wars. In modern times it had become a very important mercantile port and just before the Second World

War it ranked second only to Marseilles among French ports in terms of shipping handled. In the first week of September 1944 it was already far behind the new battlefield; nevertheless, if it could be captured quickly without serious damage to the harbour installations, the pressure on the Allied supply lines would be reduced and the momentum of the pursuit could be better maintained.






The place had considerable natural strength. It was surrounded by water on three sides: on the west by the Channel, on the east by the flooded valley of the Lezarde River, and on the south by the Seine estuary and the Canal de Tancarville. On the land side high ground at Octeville-sur-Mer overlooked the northern approaches, which were also protected by minefields and a deep anti-tank ditch. However, although the city was heavily fortified against naval attack, the landward defences were incomplete. A defensive line ran west of and roughly parallel to the Lezarde, turning west at Montivilliers to reach the coast by way of Doudeneville and Octeville; the Germans considered this latter sector the weakest part of the front. They had large artillery resources. Apart from the coastal guns, most of which could fire only to seaward, and which included one 380-mm. (14.8-inch) and two 170-mm. guns in the Grand Clos battery north of the city, there were 44 medium and field guns and 32 anti-aircraft guns. The fact that some of these were of French or Czech manufacture complicated the problem of ammunition supply.<sup>31</sup>

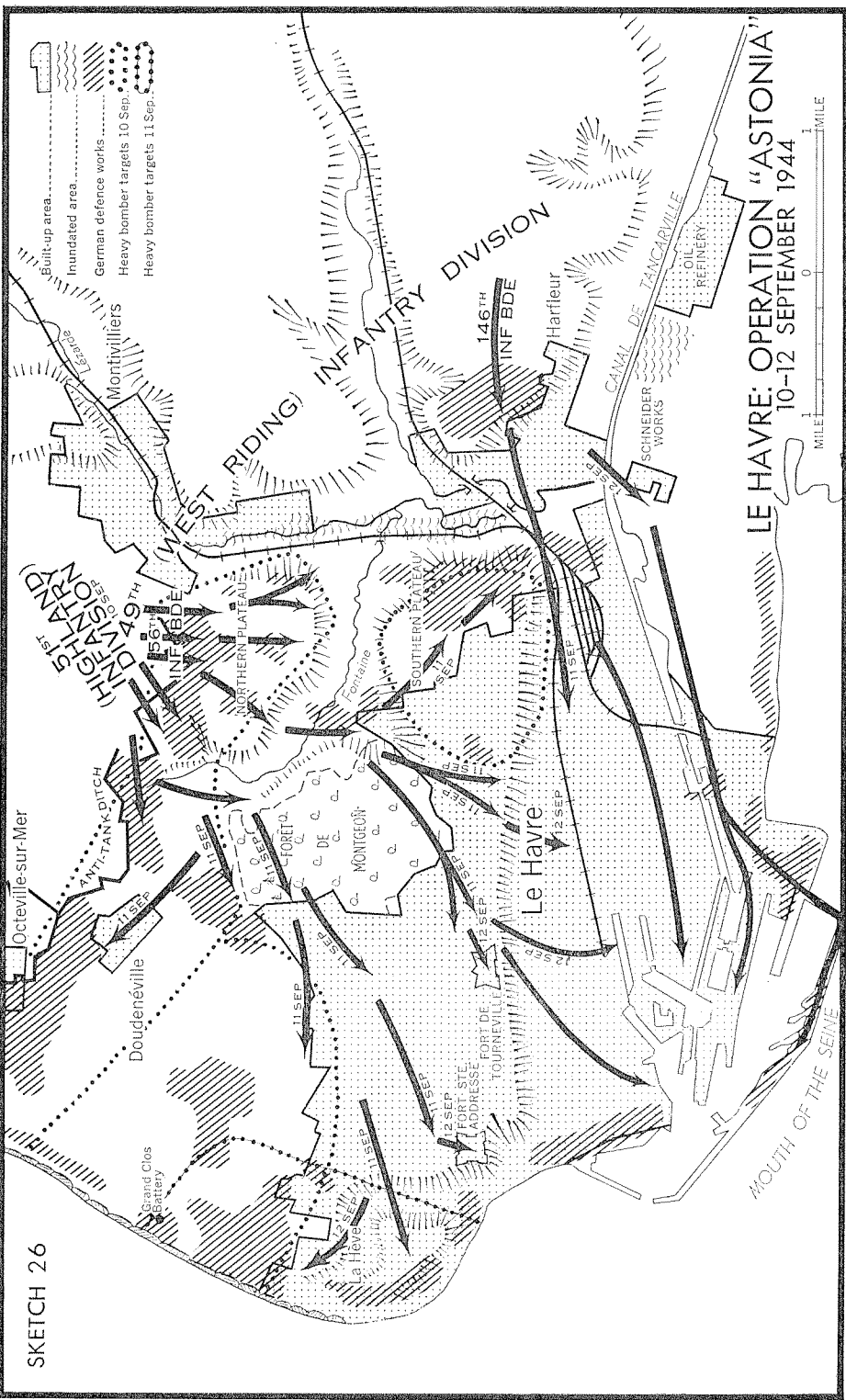
The fortress of Le Havre had been commanded since mid-August 1944 by Colonel Eberhard Wildermuth, not a regular soldier but an officer of wide experience. He later estimated the effective strength of his garrison as about 8000, although the total strength, as indicated by the number of prisoners finally taken, was well over 11,000. It comprised a fortress cadre unit (*Festungs Stamm Abteilung*); some units of the 226th and 245th Infantry Divisions; a battalion of the 5th Security Regiment; and naval elements. The defenders were hampered by the presence in the city of some 50,000 French civilians, the remnant of the peacetime population of over 160,000.<sup>32</sup>

Before the assault the defences were "softened" by a series of coordinated naval and air bombardments. The 1st Corps had been authorized to communicate directly with Bomber Command and the Navy. On 5 September H.M. Monitor *Erebus* engaged the defences with her two 15-inch guns, but the Grand Clos battery hit her and forced her to withdraw. She bombarded again on the 8th but was again hit.<sup>33</sup> The R.A.F Bomber Command also began its attacks on the 5th in daylight, when 348 aircraft dropped 1880 tons on the port area and gun positions. On the night of the 6th-7th there was another attack in roughly the same strength, and on the 8th a day attack during which 109 aircraft bombed. A considerable raid attempted the next day was frustrated by the weather. All told, before the day the ground assault began Bomber Command had put down some 4000 tons of explosive on Le Havre.<sup>34</sup>

Sir John Crocker decided to launch his Corps against the northern outskirts of Le Havre immediately after a large-scale attack by Bomber Command, with the 51st (Highland) Division on the right and the 49th (West Riding) Division on the left. In the opening phase the 49th Division, with the 34th Tank Brigade

SKETCH 26

-  Built-up area
-  Inundated area
-  German defence works
-  Heavy bomber targets 10 Sep.
-  Heavy bomber targets 11 Sep.



**LE HAVRE: OPERATION "ASTONIA"**  
 10-12 SEPTEMBER 1944



under command, would seize the northern plateau which lies west of the Lezarde River and south-west of Montivilliers. The 51st Division, with the 33rd Armoured Brigade, would then secure a base farther west, on the northern edge of the Forêt de Montgeon, while the 49th Division pushed on south to capture another plateau looking across the Lezarde towards Harfleur. In the final stages the 51st would deal with the defences near Octeville, obtaining control of dominating ground on the northern outskirts, and, together with the 49th, would crush any remaining resistance in the city.<sup>35</sup> "Astonia" was originally scheduled to begin on 9 September, but weather interference with the bombing programme necessitated a postponement of 24 hours on 7 September.<sup>36</sup>

Before the infantry assault the defences, particularly the battery positions, were heavily shelled. The divisional artilleries of the 1st Corps were supplemented by six medium and two heavy regiments of the 4th and 9th Army Groups, Royal Artillery. The artillery programme included counter-flak fire (known as "Apple Pie") during our bomber operations.<sup>37</sup>

The 10th of September, the Le Havre D Day, began with an attack by 65 aircraft of Bomber Command on the Grand Clos battery.<sup>38</sup> Then *Erebus* renewed the naval bombardment in partnership with the battleship *Warspite*, their targets being "casemated guns on perimeter defences of Havre". The Grand Clos battery came to life but this time scored no hits. "*Erebus* was particularly successful being awarded 30 hits out of about 130 rounds by the spotting aircraft."<sup>39</sup> *Warspite* fired 304 rounds and is reported to have finally silenced Grand Clos. Both ships received the warm thanks of General Crocker.<sup>40</sup>

At 4:15 p.m. the main Bomber Command attack began, the first wave of aircraft dropping its load on the western defence area of Le Havre, the second bombing the northern belt of defences running west from Montivilliers. Later in the day the southern plateau was bombed. All told, 932 aircraft took part in this terrifying demonstration of Allied air power, and 4719 tons of bombs were dropped.<sup>41</sup> Examination later indicated that the bombing had done considerable damage to batteries with open emplacements, much less to concrete positions. However, available evidence indicates that the German garrison (unlike the civilian population, unfortunately) suffered few casualties because of their deep underground shelters. Indeed, the Fortress Commandant afterwards claimed that the naval and air bombardment had "only a general destructive effect" and that the most damaging fire was the counter-battery activity of the Army artillery.<sup>42</sup>

At 5:45 p.m., immediately following the cessation of the bombing of the northern defences, the 49th Division began the ground assault. Preceded by "Flail" tanks of the 22nd Dragoons, which breached a minefield west of Montivilliers, the 56th Infantry Brigade captured the northern plateau and secured bridges over the Fontaine River (a tributary of the Lezarde) during the same night.<sup>43</sup> These operations were greatly assisted by other specialized assault equipment, in particular "Crocodiles", AVREs and "Kangaroos" from the 79th British Armoured Division. The "Kangaroos", first used in Operation "Totalize" (above, page 210), were manned at Le Havre by the 1st Canadian Armoured Personnel



Carrier Squadron.\* In the opening phase of "Astonia" they transported British infantry to the area of their objectives, thereafter assisting the troops in mopping up and exploitation. The Corps Commander later paid tribute to the "Kangaroos", observing that they "saved many casualties from small arms and especially enemy harassing fire".<sup>45</sup>

At midnight the 51st Division advanced on the 49th's right or western flank and, with the help of artificial moonlight, began clearing the area north of the Foret de Montgeon. The anti-tank ditch hampered progress forward and the evacuation of casualties to the rear.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the 51st made such good progress, reducing strongpoints and capturing prisoners, that on the morning of the 11th their divisional commander decided to carry out the third phase of "Astonia" at once, by eliminating the German gun areas west of the Foret de Montgeon. Meanwhile, the British counter-battery programme had greatly reduced the number of German field, medium and anti-aircraft guns still capable of firing.<sup>47</sup>

Early in the morning of 11 September Bomber Command made its final attack on Le Havre, 146 aircraft dropping 742 tons of bombs on the western part of the town. In the course of the day rocket-firing Typhoons made successful attacks on strongpoints in the south-eastern sector. General Crocker signalled to Air Chief Marshal Harris thanking Bomber Command for the "absolute accuracy of bombing and timing on every occasion".<sup>48</sup> On this day the 49th Division captured the southern plateau, on the eastern outskirts of Le Havre, as well as an area east of the Lezarde, near Harfleur. In this latter sector the 146th Infantry Brigade had to deal with several strongpoints covering the main road into Le Havre, all well protected by minefields. The infantry suffered severe casualties from mines when they attacked; later tanks and some "Flails" were brought forward to assist and the strongpoints were finally subdued on the afternoon of 11 September.<sup>49</sup>

The stage was now set for the final act. Advancing rapidly through the eastern parts of the city, the 49th Division reached the vicinity of the old fort of Sanvic (Fort de Tourneville) by nightfall on the 11th. From the northern outskirts the 51st also forced their way in, their route blocked in places by debris from the bombing, and by evening were on the high ground at La Heve overlooking the Channel. It was evident that the enemy's resistance was collapsing, for prisoners gave themselves up in large numbers. On the morning of the 12th Colonel Wildermuth lay wounded in the dugout of his battle headquarters. The garrison's situation was hopeless. The 49th Division took Fort de Tourneville. British infantry and armour were closing in, the terrible artillery fire continued, and there were no German anti-tank guns left. When a squadron of the 7th Royal Tank Regiment menaced his headquarters just before noon, Wildermuth surrendered. He afterwards complimented the British troops on their "correct and gentlemanly behaviour" towards the wounded and prisoners. Throughout the

\*This squadron had been organized on 28 August and was equipped with the "unfrocked Priests" used in the Falaise operations. In the following October the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment (two squadrons) was organized under the command of Lt.Col. G.M. Churchill. It was equipped with converted Canadian "Ram" tanks ("Kangaroos").<sup>44</sup> It operated as a unit of General Hobart's 79<sup>th</sup> British Armoured Division.

remainder of the 12th sporadic fighting continued. The 51st Division captured Fort Ste. Adresse and cleared the Doudeneville—Octeville area and La Heve; the 49th cleared the docks and the Schneider works. The last resistance was offered by a small party on one of the quays.<sup>50</sup>

Forty-eight hours had sufficed to reduce Le Havre. The number of prisoners was reported as 11,302,<sup>51</sup> while the casualties of the 1st British Corps for the period of the assault were (according to the best available figures) only 388.<sup>52</sup> Much of the success of "Astonia" was undoubtedly due to the bombardment of the defences by the Royal Artillery, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. The Germans had offered a respectable but not a fanatical defence; a British observer wrote, "Without ... a half-hearted garrison and a thorough subjugation of hostile artillery, success would have been less rapid and much more costly"<sup>53</sup>

The enemy had carried out systematic demolitions to delay Allied use of the harbour. The job was in fact so thoroughly done that shipping could not use it until 9 October.<sup>54</sup> SHAEF had allotted the port to the maintenance of the American armies, and this the British did not object to, since it was almost as far behind the front as the Rear Maintenance Area at Bayeux.<sup>55</sup> What FieldMarshal Montgomery now wanted was the Channel Ports, and particularly Boulogne (above, page 329). In his letter of 13 September to General Crerar,<sup>56</sup> he wrote,

3. The things that are now very important are:
  - (a) Capture of Boulogne and Dunkirk and Calais.
  - (b) The setting in motion of operations designed to enable us to use the port of Antwerp.
4. Of these two things, (b) is probably the most important....

The same evening, Montgomery signalled Crerar, "Early use of Antwerp so urgent that I am prepared to give up operations against Calais and Dunkirk and be content with Boulogne. If we do this will it enable you to speed up the Antwerp business?"<sup>57</sup> In his directive of 14 September (above, page 313) the Field Marshal prescribed the tasks of First Canadian Army as follows:

8. Complete the capture first of Boulogne, and then of Calais.
9. Dunkirk will be left to be dealt with later; for the present it will be merely masked.
10. The whole energies of the Army will be directed towards operations designed to enable full use to be made of the port of Antwerp....

Leaving the Antwerp operations aside for the moment, we must now deal with the Canadian operations against the northern Channel Ports.

### Operation "Wellhit": The Capture of Boulogne

General Spry's 3rd Canadian Infantry Division had come up against the defences of Boulogne on 5 September and that night issued a preliminary order concerning the capture of the place (above, page 326). But the town was far too strong to be taken without a deliberate attack and heavy support; and this meant delay. It is recorded that General Simonds considered "bombers, Priests [armoured personnel carriers] and medium artillery as vital to plan"; "other

gadgets" were desirable but not so much so as to necessitate postponing the attack to wait for them.<sup>58</sup> But Bomber Command, the armoured carriers and a great force of artillery\* were all committed to the attack on Le Havre; and Boulogne could not be attacked until Le Havre fell and these resources were freed. From one fortress to the other was roughly 135 miles by road.

Boulogne was ringed on the landward side by a series of high hills which dominated all approaches. Mont Lambert on the east, in particular, rose 550 feet; and farther south the Herquelingue "feature" was almost as high. These and other positions had been heavily fortified by a resourceful enemy, for Boulogne had been on Hitler's original list of "fortresses" (above, page 50). The garrison was under an able and experienced senior officer, Lieut.-General Ferdinand Heim, who had served in Poland as Chief of Staff to General Guderian and had risen to command a corps in Russia. Its strength (estimated by our local intelligence as between 5500 and 7000)† was actually about 10,000.<sup>59</sup> Its quality was not especially high, the 2000 infantry consisting of a fortress machine-gun battalion and two fortress infantry battalions, all made up of low-category men. A good part of the artillery and engineer personnel of the 64th Infantry Division were present.<sup>60</sup> As at Le Havre, the enemy was strong in artillery, the guns including coastdefence pieces up to 30.5-cm. (12-inch), of which however many could not fire landward, and at least 22 88-mm. guns, plus about nine 15-cm. howitzers belonging to the 64th Division. Apart from the dual-purpose 88s there were few anti-tank guns.<sup>61</sup> Under German orders some 8000 civilians left the city between 11 and 13 September—Canadian Civil Affairs officers making efficient arrangements for transporting, feeding and housing them.<sup>62</sup>

The attack on Boulogne, Operation "Wellhit", was to be executed in four phases. General Spry intended to launch his main assault from the east against the general area of Mont Lambert, using the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigade Groups, after a heavy preliminary bombardment by aircraft and artillery. In the second phase the two brigades would secure the centre of the built-up area and, it was hoped, seize a crossing over the Liane River before the bridges could be blown. The third phase would see the capture of outlying strongpoints at Fort de la Creche, Outreau and Herquelingue; the fourth, the capture of Nocquet on the coast and the heights of St. Etienne.<sup>63</sup>

The preparations for aerial bombardment reflected the views of the Army Commander, who on 13 September wrote to Field-Marshal Montgomery:<sup>64</sup>

While the rapid fall of Le Havre has favourable potential influences, it is most important that the effect so gained should not be more than lost by an unsuccessful attack on the next objective, Boulogne. I, therefore, want Simonds to button things up properly, taking a little more time, if necessary, in order to ensure a decisive assault.

\*Of the three Canadian medium regiments in the theatre, only one (the 7th) was immediately available to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. The 3rd, which had been refitting south of the Somme, arrived in the Boulogne area on 8 September. The 4th was supporting the Polish Armoured Division in Belgium.

†These are the figures given in a 3rd Division intelligence summary dated 13 September. On the same day, however, General Crerar, writing to Field-Marshal Montgomery, estimated the garrison more accurately at 10,000.

The bomber support was in fact the last part of the programme to be settled. A hoped-for meeting with a representative of the R.A.F. Bomber Command did not materialize on 14 September; H.Q. First Canadian Army complained, "Whole affair now held up awaiting his arrival."<sup>65</sup> But on the 15th General Simonds, his own Chief of Staff and General Crerar's, and the Senior Air Staff Officer of No. 84 Group, flew to Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Air Force at Versailles and duly "buttoned up" the question of air support at both Boulogne and Calais. The first discussions were not particularly satisfactory, it is true; two air vicemarschals, one of whom was from Bomber Command, were reluctant "to use more than 300-400 R.A.F. [heavy] Bombers for each port", counting on supplementing this effort with mediums. But when Air Chief Marshals Tedder, Harris and LeighMallory arrived "for another meeting" the Corps Commander seized the opportunity and put his case to them. All three "agreed with little hesitation that if Boulogne and Calais were to be captured forthwith and air support was necessary, then it should be given in full measure". The details were worked out at once.<sup>66</sup> Next day General Spry announced that the "Wellhit" D Day would be 17 September.<sup>67</sup> Thus the assault on Boulogne went in on the same day as the greater operation at Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Arnhem.

During the final stage of preparation, particularly after the fall of Le Havre, the tactical air forces were directed against Boulogne. All told, there were 49 attacks, before the assault, by mediums, fighter-bombers and rocket-firing Typhoons.<sup>68</sup> Their main targets were battery positions; these were also engaged by the gradually growing force of artillery deployed around Boulogne, but ammunition shortages prevented heavy counter-battery fire before the actual day of the assault.<sup>69</sup> Ultimately 328 guns were used against the fortress: those of five field, seven medium, three heavy and two heavy anti-aircraft regiments.\* The 9th British Army Group Royal Artillery and the divisional artillery of the 51st (Highland) Division, both of which had hurried up from Le Havre, joined with the Canadian gunners in this operation. Since this great force of artillery was supporting the 3rd Canadian Division, the responsibility for coordinating and directing the effort rested mainly upon the 3rd Division's artillery commander, Brigadier P. A. S. Todd.<sup>70</sup>

There was potent artillery help also from across the Channel. The Brigadier Royal Artillery, First Canadian Army (Brigadier H. O. N. Brownfield) flew to England and arranged for the mammoth guns on the South Foreland east of Dover to fire on the German cross-Channel batteries in the Calais-Cape Gris Nez area, to prevent them from interfering with the attack on Boulogne. Two 14-inch guns ("Winnie" and "Pooh") manned by the Royal Marine Siege Regiment, and two 15-inch manned by the 540th Coast Regiment R.A., came into action, firing with air observation; it may be noted at once that after some preliminary shooting on the 16th they fired actively and accurately on the 17th. The German battery positions were hit repeatedly; and one of the 15-inch guns scored a direct

\*The 12th Canadian Field and 3rd Canadian Medium Regiments were supporting the 7th Infantry Brigade in front of Calais, and did not fire on Boulogne. All three heavy, five of the medium and one of the H.A.A. regiments were British.

hit on one of the 16-inchers of the great German Noires Mottes battery near Sangatte, the range being about 42,000 yards, or over 23 miles. The 15-inch guns fired this day until their old barrels were so worn that they could no longer reach the French coast. The 14-inch were in action again on 19 and 20 September. Both the army and marine units cooperated with enthusiasm and shot with a skill that earned the Canadians' admiration.<sup>71</sup>

At 8:25 a.m. on 17 September the first aircraft from Bomber Command appeared over Boulogne. An officer who was watching from high ground south of the city\* described the scene:<sup>72</sup>

The bombers approached us head on: suddenly huge bursts of dust and smoke plumed out on the slopes of Mount Lambert . . . Over the peak of Mount Lambert appeared a tight concentration of low [artillery] air bursts, designed to keep the flak crews there below ground.... A later wave of bombers, directed on the peak of the mount was preceded by a Pathfinder which dropped a white smoke marker. The arty seemed also to lay smoke here. A swarm of planes then materialized out of the sky as before, and once again huge clouds of smoke blotted out the shape of the hill-top.

In this single attack Bomber Command dropped 3232 tons of bombs on Boulogne. Five hundred and forty Lancasters, 212 Halifaxes and 40 Mosquitoes took part; in spite of the artillery fire directed on the flak positions, two aircraft were lost. An R.A.F. group captain was with Brigadier Rockingham in his tactical headquarters dug in on his brigade's start-line. He was in radio communication with the masTer bomber overhead, and was able to pass to him the brigadier's confirmation that the markers put down by the pathfinder aircraft were on precisely the right points. This was "close cooperation" at its best.<sup>73</sup>

As at Le Havre, the precise results of this bombardment are a matter of discussion. General Heim claimed that "amongst personnel, casualties were almost negligible" and that there was little effect on permanent installations.<sup>74</sup> Again British operational researchers found that only a relatively small proportion of the enemy's guns had actually been destroyed or damaged. The extensive cratering impeded armoured vehicles supporting the ground attack.<sup>75</sup> There is, however, ample evidence that the bombing seriously disrupted the defenders' communications and shook their morale. (A German who had been in an underground bunker during the attacks remarked that it was "like being in the bottom of a cocktail shaker".)<sup>76</sup> The investigators noted that positions within the limits of the heavy bomber targets were captured much more rapidly than those outside. Moreover, the bombing certainly gave, as always, a fillip to the spirits of our own infantry which was no small factor in their success. Headquarters First Canadian Army, commenting on the researchers' report some months later, remarked, "Despite the proved lack of material effect of ground or air bombardment on the defences, it is considered that both the RAF and the artillery bombardment were extremely effective in neutralizing the enemy defences."<sup>77</sup>

\*The completeness of our command of the air was reflected in the fact that for this operation a lookout for "spectators" was arranged on a high hill—as if for an exercise in England. General Crerar watched the bombing from his own light aircraft.

The 8th Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Blackader) attacked on the right, the 9th (Brigadier Rockingham) on the left. H Hour was 9:55 a.m.—the moment when the last bomb fell on Target 1. However, it was considered important if possible to capture the extreme northern end of the German defended area before the main attack went in; for the strongpoints about La Tresorerie and Wimille appeared to be a menace to it. A coastal battery on the hill at La Tresorerie mounted three 30.5-cm. (12-inch) guns, and though these could not fire landward there were other weapons here and the position was commanding. Accordingly The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment was to attack it at 9:25 a.m. after half an hour's artillery preparation. The evident assumption that thirty minutes would suffice to clear the area turned out to be too optimistic. The attack was checked, after making slight progress, in minefields covered by airburst fire from light artillery. The North Shore in fact did not clear all its objectives until 19 September. Nevertheless it seems to have kept the Germans busy enough to prevent them from interfering with the main attack.<sup>78</sup>

The task of the 8th Brigade's main body was to deal with the enemy's defences between Mont Lambert and La Tresorerie, in the vicinity of Marlborough and St. Martin Boulogne. Immediately after the bombing Le Regiment de la Chaudiere advanced against Marlborough. En route they occupied an intact radar station in the hamlet of Rupembert; and by nightfall they were consolidating in Marlborough. On the Brigade's left (southern) flank The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada were directed against St. Martin Boulogne. By 11:00 a.m. they had captured the railway station there, and by evening they were close to the "citadel" of Boulogne. Throughout the brigade area, shellfire and minefields were the main hindrances to advance.<sup>79</sup>

While these operations were proceeding on the northern flank, the 9th Brigade assaulted the Mont Lambert feature, moving forward the moment the Bomber Command attack had ceased. Tanks of the 10th Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse) led; the infantry rode into battle in Kangaroos and half-tracks which were followed by AVREs of the 87th Assault Squadron R.E. Flails had also been provided to clear paths through minefields; but when the attack went in the enemy's artillery prevented this relatively vulnerable equipment from coming into action.<sup>80</sup>

On the right, along the main road from La Capelle, The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders led the assault in "galloping Kangaroos under a tremendous barrage of artillery".<sup>81</sup> (The artillery actually fired timed programmes, prolonging the neutralizing effect of the bombing and enabling the infantry to reach their first objectives with diminished opposition.)<sup>82</sup> When minefields stopped the Kangaroos, the Glengarrians continued on foot; they took only 45 minutes to capture their first objectives. By this time, however, the German batteries had recovered sufficiently to bring down hot fire from their commanding positions on the slopes of Mont Lambert and nearby hills. Although the shelling made movement almost impossible, men of the 18th Field Company R.C.E. performed an outstanding feat by clearing a vital route through the mines by hand.<sup>83</sup>

Meanwhile, The North Nova Scotia Highlanders ran into heavy opposition when they attacked the main fortifications of the Mont Lambert feature. Both sides

had appreciated the importance of this dominating ground; General Heim believed that penetration in that sector "would make defence of the port impossible". He claimed, however, that his defensive preparations here had not been completed when "Wellhit" began.<sup>84</sup> The North Nova Scotias were transported in Kangaroos as far as the minefields; thereafter their upward progress was delayed by machine gun fire from pillboxes which had survived the bombing. These were overcome with the help of AVREs and the hard ascent continued. "Towards night Crocodiles and Flails were able to come up and the area was steadily cleared."<sup>85</sup> By the day's end a great part of Mont Lambert was in our hands.

Arrangements had been made for three armoured assault teams of the 31<sup>st</sup> British Tank Brigade (each composed of one troop of Flails, two troops of Crocodiles and one half troop of AVREs, together with one platoon of Canadian infantry) to drive into Boulogne, at the end of the first phase, and seize the important bridges over the Liane River in the heart of the city. The Glengarrians provided the infantry component for two of the assault teams and these reached the Liane early on the 18th only to find the bridges blown. The third team, operating with the North Nova Scotias, had a similar experience.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, at the end of the first day, a considerable wedge had been driven into the enemy's fortifications in the Highland Brigade's sector, while in the 8th's good progress had been made. At the extreme north of the position the North Shore Regiment had a foothold in the La Tresorerie strongpoint. All along the line, however, the operation had gone more slowly than the forecast. A paper produced at Headquarters First Canadian Army on 15 September seems to have assumed that Boulogne would fall in one day; for it suggested that the same troops that attacked Boulogne on the 17th might be able to attack Calais on the 19th.<sup>87</sup> This, it now appeared, was wildly sanguine.

The 18th, however, saw further solid progress. The North Shore completed the capture of the gun positions at La Tresorerie; the Chaudiere pushed on to the vicinity of the Colonne de la Grande Armee (a monument to Napoleon's preparations to invade England in 1803-5) where there was hard fighting. The Queen's Own advanced through the northern outskirts of the city. In the 9th Brigade area the North Nova Scotias completed the capture of Mont Lambert.<sup>88</sup> The Glengarrians, accompanied by AVREs, reached the so-called citadel in the centre of Boulogne. This was actually the "upper town", perched on a limestone hill overlooking the port and surrounded by high walls. It soon succumbed to a combination of modern methods of assault and story-book stratagem. A civilian showed Major J. G. Stothart, one of the company commanders, a "secret tunnel" leading to the interior and Stothart soon had a platoon in the passage.

At the same time the Churchills wheeled up, raking the ramparts with Besa [machine-gun] fire, and prepared to place petards against the portcullis. The gate was effectively blown in. At once a host of white flags waved from the walls. To add to the confusion Maj Stothart had by now appeared in the midst of the besieged fort, utterly astonishing its 'defenders'.<sup>89</sup>

About 200 prisoners were taken, including 16 officers. The Highland Light Infantry of Canada, coming up from reserve, scrambled across the Liane in the evening by using the remains of a half-demolished bridge in the middle of the

city; the 18th Field Company then set to work to improvise repairs to the bridge with timber, and had it open for light vehicles by 4:30 a.m. on the 19th.<sup>90</sup>

The capture of the upper town and the crossing of the Liane marked the end of the second phase of "Wellhit". While the 8th Brigade continued its operations to subdue the German defences north of the port, the 9th turned south to deal with equally stubborn strongpoints in the Outreau peninsula. On 19 September the H.L.I. pressed forward here from its Liane bridgehead. The opposition was very heavy: "Murderous fire came from all directions which was heavier than the battalion has yet experienced." It had 64 casualties and four supporting Flails were knocked out.<sup>91</sup> The Glengarrians took up the struggle in the afternoon with the help of tanks, AVREs and Wasps. They seized the village of Outreau, after extricating themselves from a minefield, and captured many prisoners, "including perhaps thirty black Senegalese complete with fez".<sup>92</sup>

Between Outreau and the open Channel was a hill, about 250 feet high, capped with a German battery of six 88-mm. and four 20-mm. guns.\* This formidable position, known in the plan as "Buttercup", the Glengarrians assaulted on the 19th, aided by heavy artillery concentrations. "The infantry, following the fire closely, swarmed over the hill with bayonets and grenades before the last rounds had fallen." "Buttercup" contributed another 185 prisoners to the already bulging cages in the rear areas.<sup>94</sup>

The North Nova Scotia Highlanders completed the next phase in the Outreau peninsula with the assistance of the divisional support battalion, The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.). After containing the enemy on the southern flank during the initial operations, the Camerons had successfully assaulted the German position on top of the very high hill at Herquelingue on the night of 18-19 September. However, when the North Nova Scotias advanced on the 20th they came under fire from the lower slopes of the feature. About 400 German soldiers had remained hidden in the underground passages of Herquelingue while the Camerons occupied the casemates on the summit. Some tank fire from the Fort Garry Horse quelled the opposition and next day this large force came marching out to surrender (General Spry christened this "the bargain basement incident"). The North Nova Scotias had continued their advance to capture the village of St. Etienne, and subsequently turned north along the coast to deal with the remaining defences at Nocquet, Ningles and Le Portel.<sup>95</sup>

While the 9th Brigade was completing its tasks in the Outreau peninsula, the 8th was reducing the last German defences on the northern outskirts of Boulogne. In this area the focal points of resistance were Wimille, Fort de la Creche and Wimereux. On 19 September the North Shore moved against Wimille; they met stubborn resistance but captured the village, together with many prisoners, the following morning. From this time the momentum of the attack slowed as some of General Heim's best troops fought tenaciously for their last strongpoints.

Since Fort de la Creche was strongly held the 8th Brigade screened it with smoke and attacked the town of Wimereux on the 21st. Lt.-Col. J. E. Anderson

\*Examination afterwards established that one of the 88s and two of the 20s had been destroyed or damaged by the bombing; one 88 had been put out of action by our artillery.<sup>93</sup>



of the North Shore was reluctant to employ heavy bombardment against a target which he knew contained many civilians. Accordingly, only one field regiment and some captured light German guns engaged the defences while the infantry gradually penetrated the eastern portion of the town. Effective close support was given by a battery of the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A., which silenced machine-guns in the railway station. Fortunately, the town's main defences faced seawards and the North Shore were able to complete the capture of Wimereux on the 22nd, receiving a warm welcome from the population.<sup>96</sup>

By this time the formidable Fort de la Creche had also fallen. This "northern anchor of the main fortifications"<sup>97</sup> was an old French work which the Germans had modernized and greatly strengthened. When "Wellhit" began, its armament included six naval guns (two 210-mm. and four 105-mm.) \* as well as lighter field and flak pieces. The defenders' morale was noticeably higher than that of the remainder of the garrison. On 21 September patrols of the Queen's Own Rifles and the Chaudiere probed the outer works and obtained valuable information in spite of strong reaction. On the afternoon of the same day, some 78 medium bombers of No. 2 Group R.A.F. attacked the fort. These preliminaries proved their worth when the Queen's Own advanced on the following morning. With the assistance of a captured German gun they quickly subdued the now disheartened garrison; Fort de la Creche surrendered at 7:50 a.m. It was reported that some 500 prisoners were taken in this stronghold.<sup>99</sup>

Operation "Wellhit" ended on the afternoon of 22 September in the Outreau peninsula. Scout cars with loudspeakers impressed the futility of further resistance on the garrison at Le Portel. There were two strongpoints here. The northern one fell first; then, just as the 9th Brigade and a squadron of the 10th Armoured Regiment were about to assault the southerly position, the enemy hoisted the white flag. General Heim surrendered to Brigadier Rockingham at 4:30 p.m. and the last fighting ceased after the German commander sent a cease-fire order to a detachment isolated on the harbour mole, which had fought a single 88-mm. gun to the bitter end.<sup>100</sup>

Six days were consumed in the operations against Boulogne at a juncture when time was very important. Apart from this the results were gratifying. † We took 9517 prisoners, including 250 wounded.<sup>101</sup> Our own losses were calculated as 634 killed, wounded and missing.<sup>102</sup> Those of the six infantry battalions that bore the brunt amounted to 462, the 9th Brigade's (247) being very slightly higher than the 8th's (215). The heaviest loss fell upon The Highland Light Infantry of Canada (97 casualties, 18 of them fatal) and The North Nova Scotia Highlanders (96 casualties, 27 fatal).<sup>103</sup> The enemy force had been only a little smaller than that at Le Havre, and the two Canadian brigades engaged against it had lost more men than the two British divisions that took the larger city (above, page 336). In view of the strength of the ground and the defences, it was fortunate,

\*Of these, two 105s were put out of action by bombing and one by artillery fire.<sup>98</sup>

†The battle honour "Boulogne 1944" awarded to units concerned in this operation serves to distinguish it from "Boulogne 1544", carried by the Corps of Gentlemen-at-Arms, which was present at Henry VIII's siege.

as an observer said, that the enemy's will to fight was not stronger. His troops frequently went on firing until our infantry were close to their pillboxes and gun positions, and then gave themselves up, in many cases having their kit packed ready to surrender.<sup>104</sup>

It was the German artillery that caused most of our losses, and it is evident that the neutralization of enemy batteries was less effective than at Le Havre. The reason may lie in part in the smaller effort made by Bomber Command, in the absence of naval bombardment (the reason for which was presumably the presence of extremely powerful German coastal batteries in the Pas de Calais), and in the fact that ammunition stringency prevented a really heavy artillery counter-battery programme being undertaken before the actual day of the assault (above, page 338). A Canadian artillery commentary on the first day's fighting attributed the failure to silence some batteries partly to the lightness of the concentrations used, "seldom more than 2 [guns] to 1", and partly to the exceptionally strong construction of the enemy gun positions.<sup>105</sup> Operational researchers estimated in one case, that of a battery of six 88-mm. guns at Honrville south of the harbour, that our artillery put down 5700 rounds on it within a circle 300 yards in diameter, but the battery nevertheless continued in action and fired some 2000 rounds. The same investigators found deficiencies in our artillery Intelligence; our hostile battery lists before the operation contained some dummy positions, on which bombs and shells were wasted, while some actual batteries were omitted.<sup>106</sup> Eight previously unknown batteries were reported in action on 17 September.<sup>107</sup>

Boulogne had offered the hope of a considerable improvement in the Allies' administrative situation. Though not a major harbour, it had a total seaborne cargo movement, inward and outward, of over 1,000,000 tons in 1937 and was considered "the first fishing port of France". Unfortunately, however, the harbour installations had been extensively damaged by the enemy's demolitions and by bombing during the attack or earlier. Several ships had been sunk across the harbour mouth, most of the cranes had been destroyed and the locks damaged. Consequently, the port could not be used until 12 October, and there was no immediate alleviation of the Allied supply problem.<sup>108</sup>

### Operation "Undergo": The Capture of Calais

Calais was next. The port was smaller than Boulogne's and therefore less important in logistical potential. But the opinion of the Naval Liaison Officer at Army Headquarters (Commander R. M. Prior) was that if Boulogne was to be used with an acceptable degree of risk "the seven heavy Calais batteries must be captured as well as those at Gris Nez"; Captain A. F. Pugsley, R.N., who now took command of the offshore naval units operating in the area of First Canadian Army, concurred, and so apparently did Admiral Ramsay.<sup>109</sup> The situation was complicated by the preparations then being made to carry out First Canadian Army's great task of opening the Scheldt Estuary. On 15 September,

when giving preliminary consideration to that task, General Crerar had written to Field-Marshal Montgomery:<sup>110</sup>

If, subsequent to the capture of Boulogne, Simonds finds it possible quickly to exploit that success and to capture Calais, this will be done by 2 Cdn Corps. If, on the other hand, the Garrison of Calais shows indications of resisting anything but a heavy and prepared assault, then I shall move 1 Brit Corps, less 51 (H) Division to that area and Crocker will relieve Simonds of the responsibility for the capture of Calais and the containing of Dunkirk.

It was soon apparent that Calais could not be captured without a deliberate assault. However, the urgency of the forthcoming Scheldt operations dictated a change in General Crerar's arrangements; on the 19th the Army Commander directed the 1st Corps to take over the Antwerp sector while General Simonds prepared to deal with Calais and the batteries on Cape Gris Nez.<sup>111</sup>

General Spry's 3rd Canadian Division, already on the ground, naturally received these latter tasks, and its staff produced their first plan for the operation ("Undergo") the day before the attack began at Boulogne.<sup>112</sup> It was then thought, as we have noted, that "Undergo" might begin as early as 19 September; but the protracted fighting at Boulogne led to successive postponements, since the special armour, the artillery and even the infantry needed for Calais were engaged there. Furthermore, there was a possibility that the naval requirements at Boulogne, already mentioned, might be satisfied if the army captured the Cape Gris Nez guns and merely contained Calais. As late as 23 September, the Army Commander believed that a decision to contain might have to be made *after* the operation began. The argument in favour of merely masking the place was, of course, based on the urgent need to expedite the clearing of the Scheldt Estuary.<sup>113</sup>

While the remainder of the 3rd Division had been preparing for the siege of Boulogne, the 7th Infantry Brigade (Brigadier J. G. Spragge) and the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment invested Calais and Cape Gris Nez. Initially, the task was boldly performed by the reconnaissance regiment, which reached the Calais area on 5 September and proceeded to isolate the fortress, occupying a front of more than 20 miles to do so.<sup>114</sup> On the 10th The Toronto Scottish Regiment (M.G.) of the 2nd Division took over the south-eastern perimeter from Oye to Ardres. Meanwhile, the 7th Brigade, as already described, occupied high ground about seven miles south-west of Calais on 6 September, cutting off Boulogne from Calais and threatening the Gris Nez batteries. During the next ten days these troops gradually advanced their positions and partially cleared Cape Gris Nez.<sup>116</sup>

On the night of 16-17 September the 7th Brigade, less one battalion (for the 1st Canadian Scottish were in divisional reserve for the Boulogne operation) made an attempt to capture the three heavily fortified batteries on the Cape. The 6th Armoured Regiment, the 12th Field Regiment R.C.A. and a battery of the 3rd Medium Regiment R.C.A. were in support. The result was merely to demonstrate that heavier support was necessary to take these positions. The attack made no impression, and an attempt by The Royal Winnipeg Rifles to bluff the

\*This unit came under General Spry's command on 19 September, returning to the 2nd Division on the 23rd.<sup>115</sup>

commander of the Haringzelles battery into surrender by a threat to "blow him off the face of the earth" made no more. On the 18th the task of containing Cape Gris Nez was handed over to the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment, while the 7th Brigade prepared for its share in the attack on Calais.<sup>117</sup>

The defences of Calais were of some strength but, unlike those of Boulogne, they did not depend on a fringe of outlying hills. Canals surrounded the landward side of the city—described as "a series of islands culminating in the Citadel, the heart of the old city"<sup>118</sup>—with marshy ground and inundated areas forming further barriers to penetration from the south and east. To one observer the flooded ground looked like "a vast lake".<sup>119</sup> A firm ridge, almost like a causeway, carried the road and railway east to Gravelines; but this ridge had been fortified and could be easily defended by a resolute enemy.

The city retained much of its old fortifications, including a bastioned wall and a wet ditch covering most of the built-up area. Here again, however, the modern defences developed during more than four years of German occupation faced mainly seaward. According to Lt.-Col. Ludwig Schroeder, commandant of the garrison, no attempt had been made to deal with the problems of landward defence until about mid-August 1944.<sup>120</sup> Calais had only recently been designated by Hitler as the equivalent of one of his "fortresses" (above, page 301). Nevertheless, the enemy's works in the area were impressive. At and about Noires Mottes, some five miles south-west of Calais, a battery of three 406-mm. (15.8-inch) guns, a lesser cross-Channel battery and a system of concrete pillboxes blocked the coastal route to the city. Eastward from Noires Mottes, along the Belle Vue ridge, machine-gun positions and concrete shelters protected railway guns. Between these positions and the inundated area south of Calais the Germans had constructed a formidable strongpoint on higher ground north of Vieux Coquelles. Here a wide variety of weapons, amply protected by wire and mines, lay astride the main road from Boulogne to Calais. The eastern and south-eastern approaches were similarly defended by minefields and infantry positions supported by field, anti-aircraft and anti-tank artillery. Finally, in the Les Baraques area on the north-western outskirts of the port, coastal installations were shielded by still more minefields and an anti-tank ditch connecting the inundated areas to the sea.<sup>121</sup>

Our Intelligence originally estimated the strength of the garrison as between 4450 and 5550, later raising the figures to "six to eight thousand". The actual total was evidently somewhat over 7500.<sup>122</sup> These troops were a "mixed bag" of very indifferent quality—Schroeder described them, somewhat unkindly, as "mere rubbish"—and only 2500 were available as infantry. Nearly two-thirds of the remainder were needed to man the coastal guns and port installations. The garrison's morale, following the reduction of Le Havre and Boulogne, was under standably low. A report based on later interrogation of prisoners<sup>123</sup> noted that

Army personnel were old, ill, and lacked both the will to fight and to resist interrogation; naval personnel were old and were not adjusted to land warfare; only the air force A.A. gunners showed any sign of good morale—and were also the only youthful element of the whole garrison.



The plan for the capture of Calais followed the familiar pattern of preliminary bombardment by heavy bombers and artillery, followed by a heavily-supported infantry assault. At Versailles on 15 September General Simonds had obtained R.A.F. approval for the use of heavy bombers against Calais as well as Boulogne (above, page 338). Subsequently, Bomber Command agreed to attack five main areas, including the Sangatte—Belle Vue ridge positions, the Vieux Coquelles area and coastal fortifications as well as the north-western defences of the port proper, and the citadel.<sup>124</sup> The artillery bombardment was to be fired by the same units employed against Boulogne, including the field regiments of the 51st Division. Detailed preparations were made for counter-battery and counter-flak programmes in the preliminary phase; these were to be supplemented, when the ground assault went in, by heavy concentrations on local points of resistance.<sup>125</sup> A feature of the operation was the use of a smoke-screen, 3000 yards long, to hide a number of artillery units from observation from the German positions on Cape Gris Nez.<sup>126</sup>

General Spry planned to attack Calais with the 7th and 8th Infantry Brigades, assisted by the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade. Apart from the artillery, these formations would be supported by Flails, AVREs and Crocodiles of the 31st British Tank Brigade and Kangaroos of the 1st Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Squadron. The 7th Brigade's task was to "capture or destroy" the garrisons of Belle Vue, Coquelles and Calais itself, while the 8th Brigade dealt with the positions at Escalles, near Cape Blanc Nez, and Noires Mottes.\* (Meanwhile, the 9th Brigade would relieve the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment at Cape Gris Nez and prepare to capture the batteries there.) The infantry attack would begin when the last bomb fell on the targets nearest our troops. After successive postponements, D Day was finally set on 24 September as the following day.<sup>127</sup>

The air support programme produced one curious incident. Headquarters 2nd Canadian Corps, "cutting a corner" in a manner which disregarded both Army and R.A.F. "channels", made a direct request to Bomber Command for a heavy attack on the Escalles area. The helpful Harris agreed. Army Headquarters, when it heard of the proposal, was alarmed lest this should vitiate the goodwill which had been carefully built up with the air headquarters that had been by-passed—particularly H.Q. Allied Expeditionary Air Force and H.Q. 2nd Tactical Air Force. Accordingly it hastily made a request in proper form, through H.Q. No. 84 Group R.A.F., for the same attack on Escalles that Corps had asked for. A.E.A.F. nevertheless decided to cancel the attack. They did not succeed in doing so, but in the attempt (the 2nd T.A.F. later stated) they "made a mistake", with the result that an attack by mediums of No. 2 Group, planned to go in on Fort de la Creche at Boulogne on the evening of 20 September, was cancelled instead. This was done by a direct order to the Group from A.E.A.F., who thus cut a corner themselves. But the Bomber Command attack on Escalles was duly made that afternoon; 633 aircraft attacked, 3372 tons were dropped, and

\*The 3rd Division's operation order, issued on the evening of 22 September, assigns only Escalles to the 8th Brigade, but by the time the Brigade's own order was issued on the 23rd Noires Mottes had been added to its tasks.

the results were reported on all sides as excellent.<sup>128</sup> If this was impropriety, it was at least on a magnificent scale.

Bad weather prevented further attacks until the late afternoon of 24 September, when 188 aircraft of Bomber Command attacked targets in Calais. Unfortunately eight of them were lost.<sup>129</sup> According to the diarist of the 7th Infantry Brigade, this was caused by a report being received that the attack had been cancelled, which led to no artillery programme being in readiness to shell the enemy anti-aircraft positions.\* The entry is poignant:

We felt very helpless watching this attack—the casualties to aircraft could have been lowered if someone along the lines somewhere hadn't messed things up. However one has to expect this sort of thing in war. Patrols were sent out from battalions to try to pick up some of the bomber crews—those we did find were dead.<sup>131</sup>

The weather interfered with the main Bomber Command attack beginning at 8:15 a.m. on the Calais D Day itself. Nearly 900 bombers took to the air, but the majority of sorties "were abortive"; only 303 aircraft attacked, dropping 1321 tons.<sup>132</sup> Headquarters 2nd Corps signalled Bomber Command, "Bombs which were delivered were well timed and on targets."<sup>133</sup> But as usual many pillboxes and other defences survived the battering from the air (and the supporting artillery) and caused trouble during the assault. In general, the results of the preliminary bombardment at Calais were similar to those at Le Havre and Boulogne: damage was done to the enemy's defences and his morale suffered appreciably; but there was no overall smothering of resistance, and the attacking troops had heavy fighting before the port was captured.

At 10:15 a.m. on 25 September, immediately following the aerial bombardment, the 3rd Division's veterans advanced against the western defences of Calais.<sup>134</sup> On the left, the 8th Brigade assaulted the defences on Cape Blanc Nez and the battery at Noires Mottes. By the evening of the same day the Chaudiere had captured the German garrison at Blanc Nez, numbering nearly 200. (The regimental history records that most of them were found dead drunk.)<sup>135</sup> Meanwhile, the North Shore attacked "Battery Lindemann", the Noires Mottes battery. Flails beat lanes through minefields protecting the gun areas, and tanks of the 10th Armoured Regiment gave covering fire. By the end of the day the North Shore occupied positions overlooking one of the huge emplacements and, in spite of continuing fighting, "negotiations" went on throughout the night for the garrison's surrender. The German commander eventually gave in early on the 26th and at noon the enemy came filing out of their positions, the North Shore thus adding 285 prisoners to the brigade's total. This surrender seems to have covered both the Noires Mottes position with its three great guns, and the lesser coastal battery at Sangatte on the coast nearby.<sup>136</sup>

The good progress made by the 8th Brigade in the early stages on the high ground in the Escalles—Sangatte area greatly assisted the 7th in its attack on the Belle Vue and Coquelles defences, which this ground commanded. In this sector, the assaulting battalions reported that the preliminary heavy bombing had missed,

\*Other records throw no light on this incident, except that a situation report sent out by Headquarters 3rd Canadian Division at 12:45 p.m. states, "Air support for the day cancelled."<sup>130</sup>

or partly missed, their objectives<sup>137</sup> (no doubt the reduction of the weight of the attack by the weather supplies the explanation); but "artillery and light bombers subjected enemy positions to a terrific bombardment before and when called for during the attack".<sup>138</sup> The infantry were gallantly supported by a squadron of the 6th Armoured Regiment.

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles met stern resistance about Vieux Coquelles; "but after a bitter close quarter fight the resolute attackers finally drove the enemy from his bomb-proof concrete shelters". Pressing forward towards Calais, they encountered troublesome pockets of resistance, mines and snipers, while the enemy's artillery began to find the range. Another fierce struggle ensued at the village of Coquelles—"the determined enemy had to be driven back house by house"-but, with the "always ready and efficient" support of the artillery, the Winnipegs were able to consolidate on the objective late on the 25th.<sup>139</sup> In the meantime The Regina Rifle Regiment fought its way down the forward slope of the ridge west of Coquelles with the help of the 6th Armoured Regiment. The enemy resisted strongly and late in the afternoon Brigadier Spragge ordered the 1st Battalion, The Canadian Scottish Regiment, to assist the Reginas. The Scottish diarist recorded that they trod carefully, "as there were many minefields, and a man makes only *one* wrong step with them". By the following morning\* they were advancing along the coast road towards Fort Lapin and the north-western outskirts of Calais.<sup>141</sup>

The 3rd Division had successfully penetrated the outer western defences. On the morning of 26 September Bomber Command again attacked, 191 aircraft going for Calais. The 7th Brigade units clawed their way forward during the day and by the end of it were within striking distance of the inner line of fortifications.<sup>142</sup> This ran from Fort Lapin and the strongly-held area of Les Baraques, on the coast, south through Fort Nieulay to the extensive inundated area guarding the western and south-western approaches to the city. The defences in the coastal sector were particularly formidable: at Fort Lapin there was a heavy battery protected by anti-tank ditches and minefields, and both it and the nearby Bastion 11 were reported to be equipped with flame-throwers. The 8th Brigade, having completed its initial task, prepared to relieve the Camerons on the east side of the city while the 7th kept up the pressure from the west.

On 27 September the forward troops withdrew slightly, enabling Bomber Command to deliver another smashing attack; 342 Lancasters dropped 1718 tons.<sup>143</sup> Thereafter the 7th Brigade made steady progress. The Scottish had a hard fight before they subdued Fort Lapin; but with the help of tanks, Crocodiles and a covering smoke-screen they were able to capture the fort on the evening of the same day. Assisted by sappers of the 6th Field Company they immediately pressed forward, seeking crossings over the old water defences at the western edge of the port. During the night the battalion managed to get "D" Company and two platoons of "B" across south of Bastion 11. Then the Germans in the bastion and

\*As the Canadian Scottish were advancing during the morning they sent a party to investigate the now quiescent Noires Mottes battery, and apparently there was a surrender to them as well as to the North Shore Regiment.<sup>140</sup>



the citadel "opened up in earnest" and "It was suicide to put a head above ground." The troops across the water could neither be reinforced nor withdrawn; they remained cut off with no food or ammunition reaching them for 48 hours.<sup>144</sup>

Inland, on the right flank of the Scottish, the Winnipegs attacked Fort Nieulay, whose high walls "dominate the flat country to the south, the highway [to Boulogne], and the approaches to the west".<sup>145</sup> Shell-proof pillboxes had been built into the walls of the fort, which was surrounded by a wide ditch. At first the defences resisted strenuously; but, in the graphic language of the Winnipegs' account, "the attack was pushed near enough to the Fort to enable flamethrowers to be used and after warming the enemy up a little the white flag was seen hoisted and hundreds of Germans poured out through the open doors with hands up".<sup>146</sup> Meanwhile, on the brigade's right (southern) flank, the Reginas were crossing the flooded area to reach the factories in the southern outskirts of Calais.<sup>147</sup>

By 28 September Lt.-Col. Schroeder's situation was desperate. His troops' morale was low and desertions were numerous. Moreover, he was embarrassed by a large civilian population (some 20,000) which had refused to leave the city before operations began. And on the morning of the 28th Bomber Command attacked again, this time with 194 aircraft.<sup>148</sup> That afternoon a Civil Affairs officer at Ardres heard that the German commander was "about ready to consider surrendering". A message was sent to him on behalf of General Spry offering to meet him at Le Pont sans Pareil, north of Ardres, at 10 a.m. the next morning. The Germans accepted;<sup>149</sup> and in the evening the order went out to the Canadian units, "No further firing except on active enemy."<sup>150</sup> The meeting duly took place, but Schroeder did not come. His representatives made the surprising suggestion that Calais be declared an "open city". This Spry quickly refused since, as a 3rd Division diarist wrote, "the Boche were in the town and defending same". The Germans then asked for a 48-hour extension of the truce to permit of the evacuation of the civilian population. Spry granted 24 hours, until noon on 30 September. Later in the day the Senior Civil Affairs Officer, 2nd Canadian Corps (Colonel J. J. Hurley) attended a conference in Calais at which Schroeder was present. He gained the impression that the Germans would surrender "after a sufficient show of resistance has been made to make their surrender appear an honourable one".<sup>151</sup>

During the truce period, while the unfortunate people of Calais streamed out of the city by the eastern roads, to be received and looked after by our Civil Affairs staff, General Spry issued his orders for the final assault. Two hours after the expiration of the truce, the Queen's Own Rifles and the Camerons were to make a well-supported diversionary attack from the east, while the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment maintained strong fighting patrols on the city's southern perimeter. Then in the second phase the 7th Brigade would make the main effort from the west, opening the road from Coquelles and destroying or capturing the garrison.<sup>152</sup>

But the uneasy interlude had completed the demoralization of the garrison. When fighting began again at noon on the 30th the German opposition crumbled rapidly. Anticipating an early surrender, the Canadians cancelled a further visita-

tion by heavy bombers; but Typhoons and Spitfires of No. 84 Group were busily employed and the artillery gave effective support. At one p.m. the Camerons on the eastern side of the city reported, "Enemy pouring out." Asked whether this was a general surrender, they replied, "Don't know, but they are sure coming out."<sup>153</sup> In the western sector the Canadian Scottish now resumed their advance. Aided by Crocodiles they soon broke into Bastion 11 and the citadel and began clearing the northern section of the city proper. "Very little active resistance was encountered as the garrison simply waited to be taken prisoner."<sup>154</sup> The situation was much the same elsewhere on the 7th Brigade's front which, by nightfall, extended deep into the city.

At 7:00 p.m. Schroeder surrendered to the Camerons' commanding officer, Lt.-Col. P. C. Klaehn. "The ceremony was 'staged' as impressively as possible over a desk in a French farmhouse."<sup>155</sup> Scattered fighting continued through the night, but by nine o'clock on the morning of 1 October all resistance had ceased in Calais.<sup>156</sup> The total number of prisoners was about 7500.\* The attackers' losses had been surprisingly light. Overall, they were "under 300".<sup>159</sup> The 7th Brigade had borne the brunt; its three battalions had had 190 casualties, the heaviest weight falling on The Royal Winnipeg Rifles (77) and The Regina Rifle Regiment (71). The 8th Brigade units had only 29 casualties between them.<sup>160</sup>

The port installations of Calais had been painstakingly demolished by the enemy (air photographs dated 13 September show dozens of neat craters along the quays) and the harbour could not be opened until November. It was then used for personnel traffic and as a train ferry terminal.<sup>161</sup>

### The Cape Gris Nez Batteries

During the period of the truce at Calais, the 9th Brigade carried out a skilful and inexpensive operation to eliminate the enemy's cross-Channel batteries at Cape Gris Nez. These guns had interfered with use of the Dover Straits by our shipping and plagued the citizens of Dover with sporadic bombardment which had latterly grown heavier. But four years had passed since Mr. Churchill's observation, "We have to fight for the command of the Straits by artillery, to destroy the enemy's batteries, and to multiply and fortify our own";<sup>162</sup> and the great weapons were now exposed to attack from their comparatively vulnerable landward side.

The German positions at Cape Gris Nez were manned by the 242nd Naval Coastal Artillery Battalion. They comprised three main batteries: Battery Todt, at Haringzelles, with four 380-mm. guns; Battery Grosser Kurfurst, at Floringzelle, mounting four 280-mm., and Battery Gris Nez, near the western tip of the Cape itself, with three 170-mm. A fourth, Battery Wissant, at the village of that name, with four 150-mm. guns, had been overrun earlier by the 7th Brigade.<sup>163</sup> Both the Todt and Grosser Kurfurst guns had ranges of over 25 miles; the latter and Gris Nez could fire landward.<sup>164</sup> These massive installations were well protected against direct assault by a complex system of minefields, electrified fences, rein-

\*The final total of prisoners from Calais and Cape Gris Nez together was 9128.<sup>157</sup> Those from Cape Gris Nez numbered "about 1600".<sup>158</sup>

forced bunkers and anti-tank positions supported by numerous machine-guns and field pieces.

The R.A.F. Bomber Command made two heavy attacks on the batteries before the infantry went in. On 26 September 532 aircraft attacked; this raid and the simultaneous one on Calais (above, page 350) dropped 3648 tons of bombs between them. On 28 September, the day before the 9th Brigade operation, 302 aircraft dropped 855 tons on the Gris Nez positions.<sup>165</sup> No doubt these attentions contributed materially to the success of the assault on the 29th.

The operation was mainly the work of two battalions. On the right, The Highland Light Infantry of Canada advanced against the Grosser Kurfurst and Gris Nez batteries; on the left, The North Nova Scotia Highlanders took out Battery Todt. The infantry were supported by "B" Squadron of the 6th Armoured Regiment, together with Flails, Crocodiles and AVREs of the 79th British Armoured Division. Artillery support was provided by the 14th Field Regiment R.C.A. and mediums of the 9th Army Group, Royal Artillery.<sup>166</sup> The battalions had carefully examined the ground. Lt.-Col. D. F. Forbes of the North Nova Scotias, an almost legendary commanding officer, had led a reconnaissance whose boldness can be judged by the story, later apocryphally told, that it culminated in his knocking on the steel door of one of the casemates and inquiring the strength of the garrison.<sup>167</sup>

The supporting artillery opened fire at 6:35 a.m. on the 29th and ten minutes later the infantry and armour moved forward. Tanks were impeded by minefields and extensive craters resulting from the bombing;<sup>168</sup> but Flails cleared paths through the mines and AVREs filled anti-tank ditches with fascines. On the northern flank the H.L.I. met little opposition. "The barrage crept ahead of the troops and was very effective in keeping the enemy's heads down. As soon as our troops got into the enemy positions the white flags started popping up and a stream of prisoners of war started to flow back to the PW cage." By 10:30 a.m. the H.L.I. had captured all four guns of Grosser Kurfurst and, during the afternoon, they overran Battery Gris Nez.<sup>169</sup> The diarist of a squadron of the 141st Regiment Royal Armoured Corps (The Buffs), which supported the H.L.I. with Crocodiles, described what he called the "last writhings" of the guns of one battery. "One, the last to fire, with Canadian Infantry actually on the revolving turret fired one shell wildly out to sea, another in the direction of Dover and one more inland before sappers could put it out of action with hand-placed charges." This was presumably the very last shot fired at Dover.

Similar success attended the efforts of the North Nova Scotias against the southern defences. The Canadians were upon Battery Todt before the defenders realized what had happened. Afterwards the battalion commander described the technique employed against one of the formidable gun positions:

An AVRE was brought up near Number 3 gun and commenced to pound its concrete casemate with petards, while the infantry threw grenades into its open front. Against the solid walls the petards had little real effect, but they achieved penetration through the window slits, and in any event their shattering detonation produced a notable moral result.

By mid-morning the entire battery was in our hands. The North Nova Scotias completed their share of the operation, with notable assistance from Flails, when

they struggled through craters and minefields to the coast and captured the local German headquarters at Cran-aux-Oeufs.<sup>170</sup>

The two battalions suffered only 42 casualties between them, including eight killed, and took some 1600 prisoners.<sup>171</sup> That night, for the first time in four years, Dover was safe from the menace of the enemy's artillery. A flag which had flown over Battery Todt was sent by General Spry to the Mayor of Dover. Brigadier Rockingham, in the act of congratulating his men on their victory, was able to point out to sea, where minesweepers were already at work clearing a channel into Boulogne harbour.<sup>172</sup>

### Clearing the Flying-Bomb Sites

In clearing the Channel coast in September 1944 the Canadians eliminated the flying-bomb sites from which the enemy had maintained for three months a destructive bombardment of south-eastern England in general and London in particular.

We now know that early in the war German scientists at the Peenemunde Rocket Research Institute made great progress in developing flying bombs and long-range rockets. By March 1943 work was proceeding on launching installations along the Channel coast, and four months later Hitler gave Peenemunde the highest priority in the German armaments programme with the prophetic remark: "Europe and the whole world will be too small from now on to contain a war. With such weapons humanity will be unable to endure it."<sup>173</sup> Through the spring of 1944 the Allied air forces poured a great weight of bombs on the launching sites in a successful effort to delay the enemy's operations. The missile first used was the V-1 pilotless aircraft or flying bomb.\* British Intelligence had given warning of the new weapon, which had a simple jet propulsion motor operating on the "impulse duct" principle. It carried one ton of explosive at a speed of about 400 miles per hour and an altitude of around 3000 feet. It proved to have a very dangerous blast effect.<sup>174</sup>

When the German attacks finally began, on the night of 12-13 June, a week after D Day, the British people met them in a spirit worthy of the community that had stood up to the earlier *blitz*; but to London this new menace, coming at a moment of such high hopes, was a sore trial. The offensive was launched in earnest on the night of 15-16 June. On the 18th the British Government asked General Eisenhower to take "all possible measures to neutralize the supply and launching sites, subject to no interference with the essential requirements of the battle in France".<sup>175</sup> Heavy bombing of the V-1 bases accordingly continued through the summer; and skilful coordination of balloons, fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft guns (the latter now rendered vastly more effective by the use of the "proximity fuse") took an increasing toll of the missiles, until very few of those launched were reaching London.<sup>176</sup> But the menace could finally be ended only by driving

\*Designated V-1 as the first of the *Versuchsmuster* (experimental type), later *Vergeltungswaffen* (revenge weapons). In English-speaking countries the V-1 was commonly known as the "doodlebug" or "buzz-bomb", because of the characteristic sound of its engine.

the enemy from his positions along the Channel coast. This was one of the objects mentioned in General Montgomery's directive of 26 August (above, page 282). Just at that moment the German flying-bomb units began to withdraw from their firing area (which lay some miles back from the coast, roughly in a great crescent from south of Dieppe to south of Dunkirk) as First Canadian Army threatened them. Early on the morning of 1 September, when General Dempsey's men were across the Somme at Amiens and General Crerar's, having already overrun the southerly bomb-sites, were approaching Abbeville, the Germans fired their last bomb from this area.<sup>177</sup> Another phase of London's ordeal was over. However, the last page of the story had not been written. On 8 September the first V-2 rockets, fired from Holland, fell in the city's outskirts; and a certain number of flying bombs continued to be launched, from aircraft.\* Fortunately, however, these weapons, though responsible for much death and misery, killed considerably fewer people than the main flying-bomb campaign.

One other German "secret weapon" had been a failure. At Mimoyecques, near Marquise, between Boulogne and Calais, a 50-barrelled smoothbore gun installation was found with which it had been hoped to drop 6-inch shells on London at a rate of, perhaps, more than one a minute. Very fortunately, however, the projectiles when tested had proved unstable in flight.<sup>179</sup>

During their long stay in England the Canadians had formed many ties with the British people, received much kindness from them, and conceived the warmest regard for their indomitable courage in peril and cheerfulness in adversity. Thus it gave very special satisfaction to the men of the Canadian Army that their efforts were responsible for ending the bombardment of the United Kingdom by longrange artillery and virtually scotching the flying-bomb menace.

First Canadian Army's siege operations along the Channel coast during September had been useful as well as arduous. Le Havre, Boulogne, Cape Gris Nez and Calais had yielded a total of just under 30,000 prisoners, and in addition a fair number of Germans—we do not know precisely how many—had been killed. This however was not much more than an incidental benefit. What the Allies needed was working ports; and though the ports were now in our hands they were not yet working. On 1 October the only harbours north of the Seine receiving Allied shipping were Dieppe, its subsidiary Le Treport, and Ostend; all of which the Germans had abandoned without a fight. Le Havre, Boulogne and newly-captured Calais were still unusable; and the sea approaches to Antwerp were still in German hands.

More than one critic, wise after the event, has suggested that in the actual circumstances of the time the operations against the Channel Ports were a waste of time and of resources. And indeed it is easy to see now that those operations

\*Air launching had been in progress since July. On 4 September, evidently in an attempt to conceal and compensate for the effect of the over-running of the ground sites, the Armed Forces High Command ordered that the air unit concerned (No. 3 Group of *Kampfgeschwader 3*) would "be committed exclusively against London in greatest possible strength". Early the next morning 14 flying bombs were plotted in England. None reached London. There was then a complete lull for several days.<sup>178</sup> This was a weak substitute for the ground-based attack.

did not yield the dividends that were expected of them. Perhaps the most solid return from them was the terminals for cross-Channel pipelines (the "PLUTO" scheme). Gasoline began to be pumped from Dungeness to Boulogne on 26 October;<sup>180</sup> but this was too late to help win the war in 1944.\*

It would seem that on 4 September, when Antwerp fell to the Second Army, there were open to the Allied commanders two possible courses either of which, if at once adopted and ruthlessly persisted in, might possibly have led to the defeat of Germany before the winter. One was Field-Marshal Montgomery's plan for a concentrated drive into Germany on a relatively narrow front, supported by all the administrative resources then available to the Allies. This plan, as we have seen, was certainly risky, and the administrative calculations on which it was based, involving the use of at least "one good Pas de Calais port", proved to be optimistic (above, page 321).

The other possible course was to disregard the Channel Ports, merely masking them with minimum forces as was finally done at Dunkirk, and to concentrate every available resource upon opening Antwerp and incidentally destroying the endangered Fifteenth Army. Could we have struck while the Germans were still off balance, immediately after 4 September, we might have opened the Scheldt much more rapidly and cheaply than we were able to do in October; and it is possible (though scarcely probable) that we could have got the great port working in time to support an autumn campaign into Germany.

As it was, not for the only time in this war, and (in the light of the various political factors involved) perhaps inevitably, we fell between two stools. The Supreme Commander went a long way in the direction of concentrating resources to support Montgomery in the north, but never quite the whole hog. And although he was strongly seized of the vital importance of Antwerp, and put pressure on the commander of the 21st Army Group in this connection, at a moment when Montgomery had put the Antwerp matter at the bottom of his agenda (above, page 310), he compromised to the extent of allowing the Arnhem operation to be tried first. That operation failed, though only by a narrow margin; and we had then to undertake the task of clearing the Scheldt Estuary and opening Antwerp under conditions less favourable than would have obtained a few weeks earlier. That task we must now describe.

\*A longer PLUTO line had been laid earlier from the Isle of Wight to Cherbourg. Test pumping began on 13 August, but this line was not a success. The lines to Boulogne, known as DUMBO, were, on the other hand, extremely successful, providing, in General Eisenhower's words, "our main supplies of fuel during the winter and spring campaigns". At the peak they carried over one million gallons a day. They fed a pipeline network on the Continent which had originally connected with the points in Normandy where gasoline was landed from tankers. By 18 September, it may be noted, the land pipeline in the British area had reached Rouen.<sup>181</sup>

## CHAPTER XV

### THE BATTLE OF THE SCHELDT SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 1944

#### PART I: PLANNING, AND OPERATIONS NORTH OF ANTWERP

(See Map 8 and Sketches 28, 31 and 32)

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THE story of the opening of the Scheldt is long and unpleasant. It begins in mid-September when the task was allotted to General Crerar. It ends, so far as First Canadian Army was concerned, only on 8 November when organized resistance ceased on Walcheren Island. There was much difficult, nasty and costly fighting in the interim.

The stage has already been set, but we should recapitulate briefly. Antwerp was the greatest port in North-West Europe, capable of bringing in some 40,000 tons of cargo per day, and vital to the maintenance of the Allied armies. It was captured by General Dempsey's Second Army on 4 September, but both banks of the Scheldt below it remained in German hands. The Germans immediately adopted the policy of holding the mouth of the Scheldt and a bridgehead south of it to enable them to withdraw their all-but-encircled Fifteenth Army and deny us the use of the great harbour. On the Ghent Canal we came up against the forward line of this bridgehead on 8 September (above, page 326). The opposition encountered here was a foretaste of what lay ahead.

At this critical moment, we have seen, Field-Marshal Montgomery gave first priority to opening the Channel ports; and on the 9th, after receiving his instructions, General Crerar issued a directive noting that the destruction of the enemy north and east of the Ghent Canal was of secondary importance and that important forces were not to be committed to offensive action here. At the same time the responsibilities of the First Canadian Army were enlarged by taking over Ghent and the south shore of the Scheldt to a few miles below Antwerp from the Second British Army (above, page 330). However, on 12 September, after Montgomery had had further discussions with General Eisenhower, policy changed; and Crerar, while still required to capture Boulogne as soon as possible, was now told that it was vital to open Antwerp and asked when he could "tackle this problem" (above, page 331). From this moment Headquarters First Canadian Army was busy with planning for the Battle of the Scheldt.

### The Task Is Assigned

On 13 September the Army Group Commander, while engaged in getting the Arnhem operation under way on the Second Army front, wrote again to Crerar.<sup>1</sup> The letter has already been referred to in connection with the Channel Ports task:

3. The things that are now very important are:—
  - (a) Capture of Boulogne and Dunkirk and Calais.
  - (b) The setting in motion of operations designed to enable us to use the port of Antwerp.
4. Of these two things, (b) is probably the most important. We have captured a port which resembles Liverpool in size, but we cannot use it; if we could use it, all our maintenance troubles would disappear. I am very anxious that (a) and (b) should both go on simultaneously if you can possibly arrange it, as time is of the utmost importance. I wonder whether you could possibly use one Corps HQ to control the operations from Boulogne to Dunkirk, and the other Corps HQ to control the operations for the opening of Antwerp. Perhaps you would let me know what you think about this.
5. For the operations concerned with Antwerp, you will need a great deal of air support. I have ordered that bombing to destroy the forts on Walcheren Island is to begin at once. On the day concerned we can lay on for you the whole weight of the heavy bomber effort from England, both Bomber Command and Eighth Air Force. I would like you to take over the city of Antwerp itself from Dempsey as soon as possible; you will want that place and certain ground east of it, so that you can develop operations to push the enemy northwards from the city. You may also possibly want to develop operations westwards along the neck of the peninsula towards Walcheren....
7. I have arranged that Airborne Forces (Para Troops) will be available for you to assist in the capture of Walcheren Island.
8. The really important thing is speed in setting in motion what we have to do. I hope very much that you will be able to tackle both your tasks simultaneously, i.e. the Pas de Calais Ports and the Antwerp business.

Crerar referred this problem to his plans section, and the same day he gave Montgomery a preliminary reply on the basis of their suggestions.<sup>2</sup>

At this moment, of First Canadian Army's two corps, the 1st British Corps had just captured Le Havre, and it had been decided that its two divisions were now to be "grounded", and to refit, nearby, far from the main front, until the administrative situation improved.<sup>3</sup> The 2nd Canadian Corps, with the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions and the 4th Canadian and 1st Polish Armoured Divisions, was stretched along a front extending from Boulogne almost to Antwerp, besieging or containing the Channel Ports and maintaining pressure with a view to clearing the large enemy pocket remaining south of the West Scheldt. This latter task had been assigned to the two armoured divisions, with the Poles on the right.<sup>4</sup> In these circumstances, it is not surprising that Crerar and his staff, in the light of Montgomery's emphasis on speed, at once asked for more resources. The Army Commander estimated that it would take "ten days or two weeks" for General Simonds' corps to finish its allotted tasks and clear the coast up to the Scheldt; as for the 1st British Corps, it would take "at least ten days" to move it up to the Antwerp area, even with extra transport from Army Group resources and a clear route through Brussels. He wrote:<sup>5</sup>

I therefore come to the tentative conclusion, that, to meet the problem you have set, either 12 Brit Corps [in the Antwerp area] should come under my temporary command, or, alternatively, that HQ I Brit Corps (less an Adm HQ to look after 49 and 51 (H)



Divs, Corps Troops, etc.—for time being held in Le Havre-Dieppe area) should take over 53 Div from 12 Corps, with Antwerp. The development of operations along the axis Breda-Tilburg, would then become a Cdn Army responsibility, and the inter-Army boundaries would need to be adjusted accordingly....

The capture of Walcheren and Beveland islands look like very tough propositions, to me—at this stage—and to require a lot of "doing". I certainly will want to secure the mainland end of the peninsula leading from Zuid Beveland before launching a final assault, but my studies have not yet proceeded sufficiently to indicate how I would propose to conduct that operation as a whole. In any event, I feel certain that maximum heavy bomber effort on these islands should be carried out whenever Bomber Command is not required by me for specific support of attacks on Boulogne, Dunkirk and Calais.

In reply to this, Montgomery signalled to Crerar (still on 13 September).<sup>6</sup>

Bring up HQ 1st Corps and 49th Div to Antwerp area earliest possible. Ground 51st Div completely by dumping all loads from all vehicles and using all its transport to lift 49th Div to Antwerp where it will relieve 53 Div. 12 Corps and 53rd Div are both involved in Second Army plan ["Market-Garden"] and cannot go to you....

An hour and a half later Montgomery signalled again.<sup>7</sup>

Early use of Antwerp so urgent that I am prepared to give up operations against Calais and Dunkirk and be content with Boulogne. If we do this will it enable you to speed up the Antwerp business. Discuss this with me tomorrow when you come here for conference at 1600 hrs [4:00 p.m.].

The discussion at this afternoon conference on the 14th is presumably reflected in the directive issued by the Field Marshal on the same date.<sup>8</sup> We have noted (above, page 313) that this prescribed formally the great Second Army operation directed on Arnhem which was launched on 17 September. With respect to First Canadian Army it went into considerable detail.

The directive began with an account of the "general situation":

1. Now that Havre has been captured, we are in a better position to be able to proceed with operations designed to lead to the capture of the Ruhr.
2. We have captured the port of Antwerp, but cannot make use of it as the enemy controls the mouth of the Scheldt; operations to put this matter right will be a first priority for Canadian Army... .
4. Together with 12 Army Group, we will now begin operations designed to isolate and surround the Ruhr; we will occupy that area as we may desire.  
Our real objective, therefore, is the Ruhr. But on the way to it we want the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam, ' since the capture of the Ruhr is merely the first step on the northern route of advance into Germany.

The instructions for General Crerar began with paragraphs requiring him to capture Boulogne and Calais (above, page 336). Montgomery then proceeded:

10. The whole energies of the Army will be directed towards operations designed to enable full use to be made of the port of Antwerp.  
Airborne troops are available to co-operate.  
Air operations against the island of Walcheren have already commenced and these include:
  - (a) the isolation of the island by taking out road and rail bridges.
  - (b) attacks on coast defence guns.
  - (c) attacks on other artillery, including flak.
11. H.Q. I Corps, and 49 Div., will be brought up from the Havre area as early as possible, to the Antwerp area.  
51 Div. will be grounded completely in the Havre peninsula, and its transport used to

enable the above move to take place; the division will remain grounded as long as its transport is required by Canadian Army for maintenance or movement purposes.

12. Canadian Army will take over the Antwerp area from Second Army beginning on 17 September. The boundary between the two armies on completion of this relief will be as decided by Canadian Army; Second Army to conform.
13. Having completed the operation for the opening of Antwerp, vide para. 10, Canadian Army will operate northwards on the general axis Breda-Utrecht-Amsterdam. Inter-Army boundary, all inclusive Canadian Army:  
     Herenthals — Turnhout — Tilburg — Hertogenbosch — Zaltbommel — Utrecht — Hilversum.  
     Task: to destroy all enemy to the west of the Army boundary, and open up the port of Rotterdam.
14. Subsequently, Canadian Army will be brought up on the left (or northern flank) of Second Army, and will be directed on Bremen and Hamburg.

First Canadian Army was relieved of the task of capturing Dunkirk. This had the effect of freeing the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division to move to the Scheldt area at once; but since Boulogne and Calais were still to be taken the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division would not be available for the Scheldt battle for a considerable time.

On 15 September General Crerar issued his own directive to his corps commanders,<sup>9</sup> allotting the Scheldt operation to the 2nd Canadian Corps. He wrote:

7. 2 Cdn Corps will, forthwith, assume responsibility for developing operations to enable full use to be made of the port of Antwerp. As a first step, 2 Cdn Inf Div will take over the city of Antwerp from 53 Inf Div of 12 Corps, relief to be completed by 18 Sep. Detailed arrangements, including temporary inter-Corps and inter-Army boundaries and temporary retention by 2 Cdn Corps of one Armed Regt of 12 Corps, will be made by Corps Comds and notified to this HQ. The eventual forward boundary between Second Brit and First Cdn Armies will be, all incl First Cdn Army, Herenthals—Turnhout—Tilburg—Hertogenbosch—Utrecht, but the extension of Cdn Army responsibilities to the East of Antwerp, and to this boundary, will be gradual and timed to suit the developing situation. Moves of other formations 2 Cdn Corps from their present localities to other areas will be referred initially to this HQ before action is taken, owing to the important effect on the Army maintenance problem of any particular, or considerable, formation movement at this time.
8. For the operations to secure the West Scheldt, and the use of the port of Antwerp, 2 Cdn Corps will have at its disposal maximum air support, including Bomber Command, and the Paratroops of 17 US Airborne Div. Details to be arranged through this HQ.

For the 1st British Corps two alternative roles were envisaged at this time. As we have seen (above, page 345), Crerar took the view that if Calais could be captured quickly, this should be done by General Simonds' corps; but if a deliberate attack was necessary, this responsibility should be handed over to General Crocker. If Calais surrendered easily, then the 1st British Corps would take over the Canadian Army's right front and secure Simonds' right flank against interference while he set about the task of opening Antwerp.

The instructions relating to Dunkirk ran:

6. No deliberate assault on Dunkirk will be attempted. This port will however, be closely contained (4 SS Bde is being transferred to 2 Cdn Corps for this purpose) and the garrison will be influenced to surrender, by frequent bombardment, from the air and the ground, and by propaganda leaflets.

As noted in the previous chapter, on 19 September General Crerar altered his plan to the extent of leaving the deliberate attack on Calais to the 3rd Canadian Division under the 2nd Canadian Corps and ordering the 1st British Corps to take over the Antwerp sector from the 12th British Corps at once.<sup>10</sup> Although the reasons for the change do not seem to have been recorded, it seems likely that it stemmed from the difficulties Montgomery was encountering in "Market-Garden" and was an attempt to enable the 12th Corps to operate more effectively to relieve pressure on the 30th Corps corridor leading to Arnhem. The 1st Corps' headquarters opened south-east of Antwerp on 23 September and took over the front in the Turnhout area east of the city with the 49th Division. The 2nd Canadian Division had begun to move into Antwerp itself on 16 September, relieving the 53rd British Division. It remained for the moment under the 2nd Canadian Corps, whose responsibilities, already large, were thus still further extended.<sup>11</sup>

### Fighting on the Scheldt Outworks

While the discussions and movements just described were proceeding, the troops in the 2nd Corps' northern sector were fighting what may be called the preliminary skirmishes of the Scheldt battle. Some of these skirmishes were fierce and bloody actions, pre-figuring the nature of the main operation.

On 12 September General Simonds issued a directive to his divisional commanders.<sup>12</sup> This required the 1st Polish Armoured Division to clear the area up to the West Scheldt between the Ghent—Terneuzen Canal and the Dutch-Belgian border north-west of Antwerp, and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division to perform the same task in the area west of the canal, making its main thrust on the axis Moerbrugge—Maldegem—Breskens. Could these orders have been fully and speedily carried out as written, a good part of the Battle of the Scheldt would have been won. As it turned out, they could not; for in the 4th Division's sector they involved coming to grips with one of the Germans' main positions covering the Antwerp sea approaches.

General Foster's division, having advanced from its hard-won bridgehead over the Ghent Canal at Moerbrugge (above, page 326), now confronted another formidable obstacle. For more than a dozen miles inland from the sea, the Leopold Canal and the Canal de Derivation de la Lys run side by side, separated only by a narrow dyke. On 13 September the area south of the canals was reported clear, and it was decided to seize a bridgehead opposite the village of Moerkerke. The divisional commander's intention was thus reported:<sup>13</sup>

At zero hr 2200B [10:00 p.m.] tonight Alq R will force a crossing of the canal Derivation de la Lys and the canal Leopold in the area Moerkerke. . . This bridgehead will be exploited as far as possible to enable bridging to be carried out.... 4 Cdn Armd Div will then fan out in both directions to clear the North bank of the canal Leopold pushing on as fast as possible to Fort Frederik Hendrik....

A reconnaissance in Moerkerke is reported to have been hampered by snipers and poor visibility; but the disability was accepted, possibly because the opposition

to be expected was underestimated.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the enemy was strongly posted along the canal line and intended to hold it.

At this moment the Leopold, from the point where it crossed the Bruges-Sluis Canal to the main Knocke road, east of Moerkerke, was held by the 245th German Infantry Division, under Lieut.-General Erwin Sander. This formation is stated to have been reduced to approximately 5000 men and to have lost much equipment, including most of its anti-tank artillery. It nevertheless retained considerable fighting power and, as events were to prove, reserves were available. Sander's left (eastern) flank was protected by the 64th Infantry Division, which was soon to assume responsibility for the entire "pocket" south of the Scheldt.<sup>15</sup>

The Canadian plan was simple. The objectives were all in, or near, the hamlet of Molentje, on the northern bank of the Leopold. The four rifle companies of The Algonquin Regiment, each built up to a strength of 90 men, were to cross the canals in assault boats, supplemented by civilian craft, with the help of a ferrying party provided by The Lincoln and Welland Regiment. Special ladders with grappling hooks were provided to assist the troops in scaling the steep banks, and the entire divisional artillery, together with every mortar and machine-gun in the 10th Infantry Brigade, would support the operation.<sup>16</sup>

When the assault boats were launched (according to the Algonquin diary, about 11:30 p.m.) the enemy reacted with small arms, mortars and shellfire. All companies managed to cross the canals and dig in on the far bank, although there was trouble in the centre, where a 20-m . gun held us up until it was silenced by grenades. However, due to the difficulties of the original reconnaissance, there was some confusion over landmarks, with the result that the bridgehead was much smaller than originally planned. During the rest of the night the infantry repelled all attempts to dislodge them, while the engineers began the task of bridging.<sup>17</sup>

This early success was deceptive. Evidently fully alive to the grave threat which our bridgehead represented to his control of Antwerp and the Fifteenth Army's escape route through Breskens, the enemy took effective counter-measures. When news of the attack reached General Freiherr von und zu Gilsa, commanding the 89th German Corps, he immediately saw Sander, "giving him the strictest instructions that the bridgehead must at all costs be eliminated" and promising him the Corps reserve to help him.<sup>18</sup>

During the early hours of the 14th the opposition to our narrow bridgehead stiffened. The enemy's infantry infiltrated the Algonquins' lines; his mortars and artillery maintained a heavy fire not only on the forward troops but also on the bridge construction and the regimental headquarters. The latter was shelled accurately and repeatedly at successive locations; later the battalion heard that a German sympathizer, complete with wireless set, had acted as observer for the enemy's gunners.<sup>19</sup> By dawn, one of the Algonquin companies had had 75 per cent casualties. Many of the assault boats had been destroyed and shellfire compelled the engineers, after persistent efforts, to suspend work on the bridge. Worst of all, ammunition was running low in the bridgehead; and one attempt after another to ferry new supplies across the canals was frustrated by the storm of fire.<sup>20</sup>

The quality of the battalion's junior leadership during this trying period was

exemplified by Corporal Ernest Freve of "D" Company. In the van of the crossing, his section reached its objective under very heavy fire. As the night wore on the position became untenable and, together with the remainder of the company, the section retired to avoid being cut off. Even as they dug in at the new position a shell landed in their midst and the corporal was mortally wounded. Nevertheless, his main concern continued to be the welfare of his men. He shouted, "Never mind me, dig in and get under cover"; and "he sang and encouraged his men until he died."<sup>21</sup> He had already been recommended for the Military Medal for bravery at the Ghent Canal four days before, and in due course it was awarded.

The final phase of the operation may be described in the words of the 10th Infantry Brigade diary:

At approximately 1000 hrs [10:00 a.m.], a strong enemy counter-attack developed, estimated strength at least one fresh infantry battalion, and the situation on the North bank became quite acute. At 1100 hrs the order was given for Algonquin Regiment to withdraw which was carried out under cover of very heavy artillery and mortar programme. The remaining troops were out of the bridgehead at approx 1400 hrs [2:00 p.m.].

The withdrawal was ordered by the divisional commander.<sup>22</sup> The artillery who covered it had given prompt and efficient support to the infantry throughout the action; over a period of 24 hours, the gunners fired 11,000 rounds.<sup>23</sup> Some survivors in the bridgehead escaped only by swimming the canals. The Algonquins' total casualties on the 14th were 148: three officers and 32 other ranks killed, three officers and 50 other ranks wounded and 60 other ranks (of whom 12 were wounded) taken prisoner. Our troops were sure that the enemy had had even heavier losses, but the German documents available for this period give no figures.<sup>24</sup>

This struggle on the canals has been described in some detail because of the significance of this particular sector at this moment. We can now see, more clearly than at the time, the meaning of the enemy's evident determination to hold the line of the Leopold at all costs. Had the result at Moerkerke been favourable, the subsequent battle might have taken a quite different course. As it was, no further immediate attempt was made to assault across the canals. By the evening of the 14th the Corps Commander had laid down a new policy: "we will now maintain contact, and exert some pressure without sacrificing our forces in driving out an enemy who may be retreating".<sup>25</sup> In accordance with this plan, on the 15th the 4th Division, finding that the Germans were retiring from the area east of the Canal de Derivation beyond the point where it separated from the Leopold Canal, bridged the Derivation north-west of Eecloo and pressed on to clear the area south of the Leopold here; it met considerable opposition south-west of Terneuzen, where the Germans were presumably covering the final phase of the evacuation of the Fifteenth Army across the Scheldt from that port.<sup>26</sup>

The pattern of operations in the immediate future was outlined in the directive issued by General Crerar to his corps commanders on 19 September (above, page 345). After capturing Boulogne and Calais, he wrote,<sup>27</sup>

2 Cdn Corps will thrust northwards to Roosendaal—Bergen op Zoom, in order to establish a firm base on the mainland, to the east of Zuid Beveland, and from which a landward thrust along the island, from the east, can be developed.

After they had been relieved by the 3rd Infantry Division south of the Scheldt, the 4th Canadian and 1st Polish Armoured Divisions were to assist in General Simonds' northern drive. The 1st British Corps was ordered to take over the right (eastern) flank of First Canadian Army by the 24th. It was to "keep its main strength on its left, in order to assist the speedy northward thrust of 2 Cdn Corps"; on the right it would link up with the 12th British Corps of Second British Army. When these dispositions had been made the Canadian Army sector would extend from the Channel coast to a boundary, nearly 20 miles east of Antwerp, running through Herenthals, Turnhout and Tilburg.

### Polish Operations South of the Scheldt

While the Army Commander was issuing orders for this regrouping, the 1st Polish Armoured Division was clearing the 712th German Infantry Division out of the remainder of the pocket formed by the Scheldt and the Ghent-Terneuzen Canal. The terrain was very unsuitable for armour. The area south of the Scheldt, a large portion of which lay below sea level, was a maze of canals and rivers. Although existing roads were in good condition, they had been built on narrow embankments, bordered by trees, providing admirable defiles for defensive fire. The enemy's inundations and cleverly camouflaged defences, covering open spaces between obstacles, set a formidable task for the Polish troops.<sup>28</sup>

During 12-14 September General Maczek's men had cleared the suburbs of Ghent (above, page 327) and pushed north-east in the face of increasing resistance.<sup>29</sup> On the 15th the Poles concentrated at the village of St. Paul, a few miles north of St. Nicolas on the main Ghent—Antwerp lateral road, and prepared to force the Hulst Canal in the direction of Terneuzen. The latter was a port of some importance on the Scheldt, the northern terminus of the Ghent-Terneuzen Canal. Crossing the Dutch frontier, the 10th Dragoon Regiment captured a small bridgehead over the Hulst Canal, between Axel and Hulst, on the 16th. However, the Germans counter-attacked furiously with armoured support early on the 17th, and wiped out the bridgehead with heavy loss to the Poles. Next day, nevertheless, the Poles attacked again. Their 3rd Infantry Brigade established a strong position across the canal near Kijkuit. By dawn of the 19th their sappers had completed a bridge. The brigade then expanded its bridgehead rapidly and occupied the neighbouring town of Axel, only five miles from Terneuzen.<sup>30</sup>

The Poles were now poised for the final advance. On the morning of the 20th they reached the estuary at several points and sank or captured many craft that had been used by the Germans to evacuate their forces across it. Later in the day Terneuzen fell to the 3rd Brigade. By the 22nd the division had systematically mopped up all remaining resistance. Polish casualties during the period 10-22 September were reported as 75 killed, 191 wounded and 63 missing; German prisoners captured by the division totalled 1173.<sup>31</sup>

The situation now was that the enemy had been cleared from the south bank of the West Scheldt, but only as far as the inlet just west of Terneuzen called the

Braakman—and always miscalled at this time Savojaards Plaat.\* From there to Zeebrugge the enemy remained in possession, grimly awaiting our attack behind the Leopold Canal, which, except for a mile or so at the head of the Braakman, covered the whole of his bridgehead like a moat. Holding this pocket south of the Scheldt, and the heavily-fortified island of Walcheren north of it, he was still in full control of the approaches to Antwerp; and it was apparent that evicting him was going to be a bloody business.

### The 2nd Division in the Antwerp Sector

As First Canadian Army regrouped for the approaching Battle of the Scheldt, the 4th Special Service Brigade, as we have seen, assumed responsibility for containing Dunkirk and, beginning on 16 September, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division moved to the Antwerp area, where it relieved the 53rd (Welsh) Division.

When the 4th Infantry Brigade moved into Antwerp the enemy was still holding the northern outskirts of the port, and the main harbour locks were covered by German artillery fire. The tactical situation as recorded by the divisional headquarters had unusual complications:<sup>32</sup>

Merxem, a suburb of Antwerp, lies north of the Albert Canal and is in enemy hands, yet, civilians pass to and from Merxem via the tram line to the canal where they alight, cross the canal on foot and resume their journey in a tram operating on the other side of the canal. This is a field security problem....

By retaining possession of certain locks the enemy was able to flood extensive areas in the vicinity of the port. There were frequent skirmishes between patrols and the nearby villages of Wilmarsdonck and Oorderen changed hands several times. On the evening of 20 September the Germans launched a counter-attack in some force with the evident intention of blowing a railway bridge west of Merxem. Only after a sharp fight, in which the Essex Scottish were assisted by The Royal Regiment of Canada, was the situation restored.<sup>33</sup> The brigade maintained aggressive patrols in this sector, with valuable cooperation from the Belgian White Brigade, throughout the remainder of the month.

On 18 September the 5th Infantry Brigade occupied positions immediately east of Antwerp along the Albert Canal.† This great waterway, an integral part of Belgium's pre-war defences, links the port of Antwerp with the industrial centre of Liege over a distance of 80 miles. On the night of 20-21 September the Canadian Black Watch sent a strong patrol across it to establish a bridgehead. Their effort failed; but, on the following night, The Calgary Highlanders managed to secure a lodgement on the other side in the face of vigorous counter-attacks.<sup>34</sup> The opposition came from the 743rd Grenadier Regiment of the 719th German Infantry

\*The name "Savojaards Plaat" properly applied only to the shoal in the mouth of the inlet. See the letter in *The Times* (London), 24 October 1944, from Dr. G. J. Renier, who also begged English readers to pronounce the name of the Scheldt in the Dutch fashion ("Skelt") and abandon the German pronunciation "Shelt".

†For some distance east of Antwerp this canal runs beside the Meuse-Escaut Junction Canal, the old waterway between Antwerp and Liege.

Division, and the 5th Brigade's diarist noted, "this was the first time our troops had met the enemy using bayonets". The enemy's records show that a fog at this time reduced his artillery to "firing according to pre-arranged fire-plan". His defences lacked depth and, when Le Regiment de Maisonneuve crossed the canal and fanned out to the north, he was soon forced back over the next big obstacle, the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal.<sup>35</sup>

Holding the line of the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal for the Germans was the responsibility, under the Fifteenth Army, of General Otto Sponheimer's 67th Corps. By holding this sector north of Antwerp the enemy had achieved the purpose of holding open an escape route for the formations of the Fifteenth Army; now the same route served to maintain the divisions committed to the defence of the estuary. From about 23 September the 67th Corps was holding a sector extending from the Beveland isthmus to Turnhout with the 711th and 719th Divisions on the western and eastern flanks, respectively, and the 346th in the centre.\* The 346th, holding the canal in the vicinity of Lochtenberg, had been reinforced by remnants from other divisions and some artillery and according to its commander's later recollection mustered about 8000 men.<sup>36</sup>

The first Canadian attempt to force the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal was made on 24 September by the 6th Infantry Brigade. The divisional commander (General Foulkes), rightly fearing that the enemy was consolidating his strength north of the canal, had emphasized the need for speedy action. A sector opposite the village of Lochtenberg was chosen for the assault. Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal and The South Saskatchewan Regiment, each allotted six assault boats, were to attack on the right and left, respectively, with The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada in reserve. Each assaulting battalion would be supported by a regiment of field artillery and heavy mortars. The bridgehead once established, a squadron of the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment and the Camerons would cross the canal and drive north-west, along the main divisional axis, to Camp de Brasschaet.<sup>37</sup>

At 7:00 a.m. on a chilly morning the Fusiliers crossed the canal without difficulty and reached the crossroads in Lochtenberg, where they were held up by heavy machine-gun fire. On the left, however, the South Saskatchewan's initial attempts to cross the canal were frustrated by snipers and machine-guns. Although our artillery gave continuous support, the German positions could not be eliminated. Finally a new plan was made. The South Saskatchewan's were now to cross farther east, closer to the Fusiliers, aided by a smoke screen.

Shortly after 1:00 p.m. the mortars laid an effective screen along the north bank of the canal and the artillery brought down fire which caused "terrific damage to buildings in enemy territory and effectively silenced the majority of the enemy weapons".<sup>38</sup> Within an hour the South Saskatchewan's were across the canal, pressing on into Lochtenberg. Meanwhile, however, the Germans had infiltrated the Fusiliers' positions and at 5:00 p.m. these were attacked and overrun by half tracked vehicles, which caused heavy casualties. The bridgehead was too small,

\*The 711th and 346th had themselves escaped across the Scheldt and along the South Beveland isthmus.



the bridge site was under small arms fire, and it was impossible to get anti-tank guns forward to assist the infantry. Consequently, the Fusiliers were driven back across the canal and at 7:00 p.m. the South Saskatchewan were ordered to withdraw. The operation had cost the brigade 113 casualties, of which nearly two-thirds were suffered by Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal.<sup>39</sup>

The 6th Brigade made another attempt in the same sector on 28 September. During the previous two days rocket-firing Typhoons and Spitfires had harassed the enemy's positions and "the common expression among the troops was 'thank God they are on our side' ".<sup>40</sup> The engineers had estimated that a small bridge, capable of carrying anti-tank guns, could be put across the canal in 45 minutes if the sappers' work was not hindered by small arms fire. Accordingly, the South Saskatchewan attacked across the canal, aided by considerable resources of artillery and mortars. Again, however, the enemy was ready; his mortars and machineguns prevented construction of the bridge, and the attack was abandoned in order to avoid further casualties.<sup>41</sup>

As already described (above, page 361) on 23 September the 1st British Corps took over a sector of the front east of Antwerp, on the right of the 2nd Canadian Division, with the 49th British Infantry Division. The 49th immediately began pushing north through Herenthals and found that the enemy had withdrawn behind the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal. On the 24th the British troops crossed the canal and successfully bridged it some six miles west of Turnhout. During the next few days the bridgehead was gradually extended in the face of stiff opposition.<sup>42</sup>

On 22 September General Simonds had suggested to the Army Commander that it was difficult for a corps headquarters to control four divisions operating on diverse tasks from Boulogne to east of Antwerp. On the 26th the 2nd Canadian Corps' front was reduced by placing the 2nd Canadian Division temporarily under the 1st British Corps.<sup>43</sup> On the 28th the 1st Polish Armoured Division, having moved to the area south-east of Antwerp, also passed under General Crocker's command. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division had for the moment the task of patrolling the Leopold Canal, containing the enemy in what was coming to be known as the Breskens Pocket.<sup>44</sup>

The 2nd Canadian Division having failed to establish itself across the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal in the Lochtenberg area, the decision was taken to pass it through the bridgehead already established by the 49th Division. On 28 September the 5th Brigade went into action here, extending the bridgehead westward. That night The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada took St. Leonard. But even with the assistance of one battalion (the Camerons) of the 6th Brigade north of the canal, and the others south of it, the affair went slowly, and Brecht, less than two miles west of St. Leonard, did not fall until 1 October.\* The 4th Brigade continued to hold Antwerp, constantly patrolling to maintain pressure on the

\*It is appropriate to mention here the death of Capt. J. L. Engler, Historical Officer 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, who was killed on 1 October north of the canal, where he had gone to observe operations. He had made a valuable contribution to this history.

enemy.<sup>45</sup> As for the Polish Armoured Division, on 28 September General Crocker ordered it to break out of the bridgehead to the north-east and seize crossings over the Wilhelmina Canal north of Tilburg. It too met heavy resistance but made progress, taking Merxplas on 30 September. Thereafter its advance was slowed.<sup>46</sup>

Thus at the end of September the Germans had been forced back somewhat on the right sector of the 1st British Corps front, but they were still in the northern suburbs of Antwerp. Their 67th Corps was now deployed with the 719th Division resisting the Poles on its left, the 711th in the centre about Brecht and the 346th (officially regarded as a battle group) on the right north of Antwerp, with the remnants of the 344th under command. Sponheimer had in reserve, it appears, part of the 70th Division, the 280th Assault Gun Brigade and the 559th Heavy Anti-Tank Battalion. In the Breskens Pocket the 64th Infantry Division, commanded by Major-General Knut Eberding, stood ready. Walcheren was held by the greater part of the 70th Infantry Division, commanded by Lieut.-General Wilhelm Daser.<sup>47</sup> (The 70th was known as the "Stomach" or "White Bread" division; it was composed of men with stomach ulcers, who were collected in one formation so they could be given a special diet. It nevertheless fought hard, though not so hard as the 64th.) Formally, Eberding certainly, and Daser probably, were subordinated to Sponheimer from 26 September until 14 October, on which date they came directly under Fifteenth Army;<sup>48</sup> but in practice they must have been very much on their own.

Back at Calais the German garrison was at its last gasp (above, page 351) and the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division would soon be freed for another arduous task on the Scheldt. Dunkirk was still being merely contained, and was to be contained until the end of hostilities. On the night of the 26th-27th the 4th Special Service Brigade, being required for the assault on Walcheren then in prospect, was replaced here by the 154th Infantry Brigade of the 51st Division. Simultaneously the 2nd Canadian Corps was relieved of responsibility for Dunkirk, the containing force coming directly under Headquarters First Canadian Army.<sup>49</sup> On 3-6 October there was a truce at Dunkirk, during which 17,500 civilians were evacuated from the city.<sup>50</sup>

It may be noted here that on 9 October the 154th Brigade handed over the task at Dunkirk to the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Armoured Brigade Group, commanded by Major-General A. Liska. This change added one more nationality to General Crerar's international team in First Canadian Army—two nationalities, indeed, for the Dunkirk containing force included a French infantry battalion as well as units of the French Forces of the Interior.<sup>51</sup> The Czechs, carrying out their mission with spirit—they celebrated their country's Independence Day, 28 October, with a limited attack which netted over 300 prisoners<sup>52</sup>—remained under First Canadian Army until 27 November, when they passed under direct command of the 21st Army Group.<sup>53</sup> They stayed at Dunkirk until the end of the campaign, when General Liska received the garrison's surrender.<sup>54</sup> One Canadian unit, the 2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment R.C.A., took part in the containment operation until 6 February 1945.<sup>55</sup>

### Planning the Scheldt Battle

Enough has been said already to obviate any long discussion here of the terrain over which the Battle of the Scheldt was fought. It has been made quite evident that opening Antwerp involved clearing the Germans from the Breskens Pocket and from Walcheren. The Pocket was entirely low-lying land, much of it reclaimed from the sea and none of it more than a few feet above sea level; on a map where heights are shown by contours at 10-metre intervals, there are no contours whatever within the Pocket. Quite apart from the Leopold Canal along its front, the German position was protected by large areas of inundation on both its eastern and western flanks; and all the approaches, and the Pocket itself, were intersected by ditches and canals. The roads were almost all built on dykes, and the fields were saturated. Off the roads, movement even by infantry was difficult; movement by vehicles was impossible.

As for Walcheren, much of it was actually below sea level, the only areas of somewhat higher ground being on the northern, western and south-eastern rims of the island. Any attack from the sea would have to overcome a formidable array of coastal batteries along the western beaches; while the sole land approach to Walcheren was a narrow causeway connecting the island with the peninsula of South Beveland, which is itself connected to the mainland north of Antwerp by an isthmus. At the eastern end of this isthmus is the village of Woensdrecht, whose position was rendered the more important by the fact that it stands slightly higher than the surrounding country. South Beveland itself was intersected from north to south by a wide canal near its eastern end. It is evident that, even to an assailant possessing complete control of the sea and the air, an attack upon these areas was a formidable proposition.

On 19 September the Plans, Section at Headquarters First Canadian Army produced an elaborate appreciation of the problem of capturing Walcheren and South Beveland.<sup>56</sup> It was based on the assumption that the whole of the south shore of the West Scheldt from Antwerp to the sea had been cleared. This paper discarded at the outset the possibility of capturing Walcheren by a combined operation directed against its western beaches, "because this could only be done after considerable time spent on combined training and preparation". It also assumed that Walcheren would be too difficult to capture without securing beforehand the peninsula of South Beveland. To this in turn a necessary preliminary was the seizure of an area from which operations could be directed from the mainland along South Beveland from the east. The various combinations of courses open to us were considered in detail, and the appreciation concluded that if airborne forces were available the best plan would be to establish a firm base on the mainland, thrust along South Beveland from the east as far as the Beveland Canal, and then drop one parachute brigade beyond the canal to disorganize the enemy and secure the small harbour of Hoedekenskerke, through which the attack could be built up with waterborne forces. After winning control of South Beveland, this course involved a second airborne operation, again with one parachute brigade, designed to secure a bridgehead on Walcheren covering

the causeway from South Beveland. We would then build up through this bridgehead by using the causeway or ferrying craft or both. If airborne forces were *not* available, then the planners recommended, on balance, driving along South Beveland from the mainland with the assistance of waterborne operations to loosen the enemy's resistance. When South Beveland had been cleared, the next stage would be a frontal attack over the causeway to Walcheren "assisted by an assault crossing of the water-gap South of the causeway". The bridgehead thus gained would be enlarged by passing troops over the causeway and by the use of landing craft and amphibians.

The Army planners considered airborne forces "a most important adjunct to this operation" and urged that strong representations should be made to have them available. They also recommended that air attacks by Bomber Command and by the 2nd Tactical Air Force against the German batteries and defences should begin as soon as possible and "continue until the ground forces are able to complete the capture of the islands". All available artillery, apart from the guns of the division having the task of capturing South Beveland and Walcheren, should be brought up to the south shore of the West Scheldt as soon as it was cleared to commence neutralizing the enemy's batteries north of the river.

On 21 September Lieut.-General Simonds produced his own appreciation of the problem of opening the Scheldt.<sup>57</sup> It took the form of a commentary upon the Army planners' appreciation, with which he took issue on a number of points. It was now probable, he wrote, that the assumption that we should hold the whole south bank of the Scheldt before the operation would prove unsound, and in fact clearing the pocket south of the river might be a major enterprise. Ground saturation, permitting movement only on dyked roads, was likely to pose a serious problem here and elsewhere. In the light of this, General Simonds wrote,

I consider that the project of an assault across water cannot be ruled out if Walcheren Island must be taken. It may be the only way of taking it. Though, it would be a last resort and a most uninviting task, I consider it would be quite wrong to make no preparations for it, and to be faced at some later time with the necessity of having to improvise at very short notice. I am strongly of the opinion that the necessary military and naval forces should now be earmarked, married up and trained against the contingency that they might be required.

Simonds proceeded to urge that steps be taken to flood Walcheren. This, he remarked, would not increase the difficulties in the way of using airborne troops; thoroughly saturated ground was impassable to infantry, and therefore was "equivalent to flooding from the point of view of landing airborne infantry upon it". The Corps Commander went on:

6. I consider that the technique for the capture of Walcheren Island should be as follows:
  - (a) Bombing operations should be undertaken to break the dykes and completely flood all parts of the island below high water level.
  - (b) Those parts of the island which remain above water should then be systematically attacked by heavy air bombardment, day and night, to destroy defences and wear out the garrison by attrition. RDF\* stations should have an early priority as "point" targets.
  - (c) Whenever possible, heavy bombers proceeding to or from targets in Western Germany by day or night should be routed over Walcheren so that the garrison

\*Radio direction finding (radar).

can never tell whether the approach of large numbers of aircraft indicates attack or not. This combined with heavy bombing attacks will drive the enemy to cover on approach of large aircraft formations and will help to "cover" an eventual airborne landing.

- (d) When it is considered that the morale of the garrison has sufficiently deteriorated, waterborne patrols may be sent to determine the situation.
- (e) If found to be ripe, airborne, followed by waterborne, troops should be landed immediately following a bomber raid (when defenders have been driven to ground) and mop up and take the surrender.

On the operation at large, General Simonds put forward the following suggestions "for consideration as the basis for future planning":

- (a) 2 Cdn Inf Div to push Northward to cut off Suid Beveland and exploit the land approach along Suid Beveland as far as practicable.
- (b) 4 Cdn Armd Div to continue its operations to clear the area North of the Leopold Canal up to the West Scheldt until 3 Cdn Inf Div is available to relieve it. This is a highly unsuitable task for an armoured division but I have nothing else available within the present constitution and tasks of 2nd Cdn Corps.
- (c) As soon as 3 Cdn Inf Div can be released from Boulogne-Calais area, this division less one infantry brigade will relieve 4 Cdn Armd Div and complete the clearing of the area North of Leopold Canal if this has not been completed by that time.
- (d) One infantry brigade of 3 Cdn Inf Div to be earmarked with necessary Naval counterpart to train at Ostend for seaborne operations against Walcheren.
- (e) Airborne forces earmarked for this operation, to study and train for landings on those parts of Walcheren Island which cannot be "sunk" by flooding.
- (f) Bombing—
  - (i) To break dykes and flood Walcheren Island.
  - (ii) Destroy defences and break morale of defenders of "unsinkable" portions of the island, be instituted forthwith.

On the same day on which this paper was written General Crerar held a conference with the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief (Admiral Ramsay) and Field Marshal Montgomery's Chief of Staff (Major-General F. W. de Guingand).<sup>58</sup> The Army Commander at this time saw the operation as entailing a land advance westwards into South Beveland, probably coordinated with a waterborne assault on the peninsula to take Hoedekenskerke. A detailed plan, he said, could not be made until the left bank of the West Scheldt was wholly in our hands, the area Bergen op Zoom-Rosendaal, had been secured as a firm base for the westward thrust, and it was known whether or not airborne troops would be available. He said that the enterprise might involve a minor combined operation designed to land infantry only on the south-west coast of Walcheren; "from a purely military point of view, he considered it to be highly desirable, if possible, to flood Walcheren"; and he favoured "sustained and heavy bomber attacks" to deal with the Walcheren defences "on the basis of complete destruction".

Admiral Ramsay discussed a possible assault landing on Walcheren and said that the necessary landing craft were available. The best fire support would probably be that provided by artillery from the south bank of the West Scheldt, but two 15-inch-gun monitors and H.M.S. Warspite could be used if required. Captain Pugsley (whose group had landed the 7th Infantry Brigade on D Day) was to be the Naval Force Commander to work with the 2nd Canadian Corps; and it was agreed that Pugsley should now begin to study the possible assault landing, as

well as other naval aspects of the operations. General de Guingand said that he thought he could arrange for First Canadian Army to deal with Bomber Command, through Headquarters No. 84 Group, on the bombing programme for Walcheren; and he undertook to obtain "the views of higher authority" on the flooding of the island.

On 23 September the Army Commander held a large conference to discuss the plan generally. In addition to staff officers from Headquarters First Canadian Army, there were representatives from the 21st Army Group, the First Allied Airborne Army and the 2nd Canadian Corps, as well as from the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.<sup>59</sup>

General Crerar mentioned, as "some possibilities that appear favourable", the employment of airborne forces and the prospects of a land advance along the isthmus into South Beveland, a waterborne operation across the West Scheldt to South Beveland, and a seaborne landing on Walcheren. He indicated that although the Supreme Commander had decided against the employment of airborne forces, there was still a possibility that they might be available. He emphasized the importance of very heavy bomber support starting as soon as possible; and he said that the possibility of flooding Walcheren by bombing the dykes should be examined. Action on this possibility would be governed by the decision as to whether such an operation was feasible; it would also require the sanction of higher authority. General Crerar outlined the regrouping within First Canadian Army already described, mentioning that after the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division had completed its task at Calais it would relieve the 4th Canadian Armoured Division and complete clearing the mainland between the Leopold Canal and the West Scheldt. The 4th Division would then move to the area east of Antwerp. The 4th Special Service Brigade when relieved at Dunkirk was to commence training and preparation for a seaborne landing.

General Simonds presented his views in much the same form in which they are summarized above, emphasizing the desirability of flooding Walcheren and of heavy bombing on pre-arranged targets commencing as soon as possible. He said the 2nd Canadian Division would have the task of sealing off South Beveland; the Polish Armoured Division would be directed on Bergen op Zoom and Roosendaal. Air Vice-Marshal R. D. Oxland, who attended on behalf of Bomber Command, said that he could not say whether dykes could be breached by bombing. He was informed about discussions on targets and priorities on Walcheren that had taken place with the 21st Army Group and 2nd Tactical Air Force, and before he returned to England was given a list of targets. At this stage the highest priority was given to targets connected with the proposed flooding operation; the next to anti-aircraft batteries; the next to batteries affecting the deployment of naval bombardment ships; the next to batteries capable of firing on to the south bank of the West Scheldt; and the next to other batteries.<sup>60</sup>

The operation was taking shape; but uncertainties still remained, notably the questions of whether airborne troops would finally be available and of the bombing of the Walcheren dykes. Before these were finally resolved, illness obliged General Crerar to relinquish temporarily the command of the Army. He had suffered for

some time from persistent dysentery which did not respond to the usual medical treatment. On 25 September, following tests at No. 16 Canadian General Hospital at St. Omer, he was advised that it would be necessary for him to return to the United Kingdom for further diagnosis, tests and treatment. The next day he flew to Field-Marshal Montgomery's headquarters and nominated Lieut.-General Simonds to act as commander of the First Canadian Army in his absence. The Field Marshal concurred in the nomination and Crerar handed over the Army to Simonds and left for England on the morning of 27 September. He spent the next month at No. 11 Canadian General Hospital at Taplow.<sup>61</sup>

During the Scheldt operations, accordingly, General Simonds commanded First Canadian Army. Major-General Foulkes took his place at Headquarters 2nd Canadian Corps, and in General Foulkes' absence Brigadier R. H. Keebler commanded the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division.

### Special Problems of Planning

At this point, it is desirable to deal in greater detail with three special matters which we have noted as particularly important in the development of the plan for the Battle of the Scheldt: the decision not to use airborne troops; the question of the flooding of Walcheren; and the bombing of the defences.

The question of airborne troops, as we have seen, had been raised by Field-Marshal Montgomery at an early stage, but the First Allied Airborne Army had shown itself doubtful about the project from the beginning. On 17 September Brig.-Gen. Stuart Cutler of the Airborne Army visited General Crerar's headquarters and discussed the question.<sup>62</sup> He said that his Army Headquarters had rejected the Walcheren suggestion in the first instance because they were under the impression that it was to be entirely an airborne operation. The fact that it was to assist a ground operation rendered it more attractive and they were now prepared to re-open the question.\* General Cutler said that General Bradley was asking for airborne forces to use when his army group reached the Rhine; this might affect availability for "Infatuate". If priority was given to the Canadian operation, two parachute regiments (i.e. brigades) of the 17th U.S. Airborne Division would be available. This division had not been in action. After 1 October, the 6th British Airborne Division would again be ready for operations and would probably be better trained than the 17th. General Crerar explained the nature of the projects being considered for the use of airborne troops on South Beveland and Walcheren (above, page 369).

On 20 September Field-Marshal Montgomery asked the Supreme Commander

\*On 11 September Lieut.-General Lewis H. Brereton, commanding the Airborne Army, listed in his diary ten possible airborne operations which had been considered. He noted, "I refused Operation Infatuate because of intense flak on Walcheren, difficult terrain which would prevent glider landings, excessive losses likely because of drowning, non-availability of U.S. troops, and the fact that the operation is an improper employment of airborne forces." The final highly-generalized reason was perhaps meant to be a summary of the three first mentioned. What Brereton meant by "non-availability of U.S. troops" remains obscure.

for a "definite statement" as to whether the Airborne Army considered the use of airborne troops against Walcheren "suitable and recommended"; and also as to whether airborne troops were available for the purpose.<sup>63</sup> The following day Eisenhower called General Brereton to SHAEF to discuss the question. Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory supported Brereton in objecting to the project, and the Supreme Commander accordingly signalled to Montgomery that complete inquiry revealed that the airborne operation "would not be able to accomplish its mission because of terrain factors and types of targets". He wrote,<sup>64</sup>

. . . The question of losses does not arise because I had been prepared to accept a very high rate if I thought that it would contribute to the rapid conclusion of these vital operations. Again, an airborne operation would divert aircraft from the direct support of the Canadian assaulting forces.

My decision is therefore *not* to launch an airborne operation but to make a priority demand on Bomber Command, and Eighth Air Force for the complete saturation of the targets you select. All medium bombers will also be made available to assist.

Nevertheless, at General Eisenhower's conference on 22 September (above, page 317) the matter was raised again by General de Guingand, and Eisenhower directed that it be again examined and an officer of First Allied Airborne Army made available to Headquarters First Canadian Army for the task.<sup>65</sup> However, the decision was not changed. General Simonds' remarks at a conference on 29 September reflected his disappointment: ". . . it appeared to be very unlikely that Airborne Forces could be employed but . . . there was no task which could be stated to be 'impossible' and . . . since the task . . . had been assigned to us it was necessary for us to evolve the method which appeared to offer the best possibilities of success".<sup>66</sup>

As late as 21 October First Canadian Army made a last effort, signalling to First Allied Airborne Army and requesting consideration of a plan for dropping one parachute brigade at the west end of South Beveland with a target date of 29 October: "primary task to seize Eastern approach causeway and isolate Zuid Beveland from Walcheren". A visit by an F.A.A.A. representative was suggested. The reply next day was final.<sup>67</sup>

. . . SHAEF signal . . . dated 15 Oct rescinded previous directives placing FAAA in support of Northern Group of Armies and directed it to operate in support Central Group of Armies effective immediately. Commanding General Central Group of Armies now planning to use all available airborne troops unnecessary therefore to send representative.

The project of flooding Walcheren by bombing the dykes, which as we have seen originated with General Simonds, had to be examined from two points of view: its practical feasibility and its political desirability. In a report dated 16 September<sup>68</sup> Intelligence at Army Headquarters suggested that it was possible that the enemy might flood Walcheren by blowing the dykes, but expressed the opinion that he would be deterred from it by moral considerations:

At this stage of the war, and for purposes so fleeting, it is unlikely that even exponents of total war would bring down on their nearest neighbours a calamity equal to an earthquake or a volcanic eruption. It is possible but improbable.



Flooding would in fact have been against the Germans' military interests, and could only have been undertaken by them as a last-minute act of spite. It is ironical that we ourselves subsequently brought this calamity upon the Dutch. We did so, not for a fleeting purpose, but to accelerate an operation designed to shorten the war and, thereby, the ordeal of the Dutch themselves. Flooding Walcheren offered the prospect of an earlier opening of Antwerp and the saving of Allied soldiers' lives; these were decisive weights in the balance in favour of the admittedly terrible device of letting the salt sea into the island and thereby ruining its rich farmlands and orchards for years to come.

As for the feasibility of cutting the dykes by bombing, some experts considered that it could not be done. On 24 September the Chief Engineer, First Canadian Army (Brigadier Geoffrey Walsh) laid before the Army Commander a memorandum<sup>69</sup> which concluded that it was not practicable to flood Walcheren by breaching the Westkapelle dyke on the island's seaward side. It argued that even if the whole island was flooded, it would not be to a sufficient depth to permit of assault craft operating; and that it would not be practicable to pass amphibious vehicles through a breach in the dyke made by bombing. The Westkapelle dyke, it pointed out, was the largest on the island and one of the oldest and solidest in Holland, between 200 and 250 feet in width with very flat slopes. It seemed to the Army engineering staff "very improbable that even the most accurate bombing could produce a clear channel". Extraordinary luck would be necessary to achieve rapid and complete flooding by this means; and even if the island were flooded, variations in the ground level would mean that no continuous deep channels could be counted on.

This exposition convinced the Army Commander that flooding Walcheren was not "a practical proposition", and he referred the matter back to General Simonds. The latter, however, after giving it further consideration, maintained that the attempt should be made, arguing that there was, operationally, nothing to lose and much to gain by it.<sup>70</sup> On 26 September, accordingly, General Crerar sent a request for the bombing to Headquarters 21st Army Group, which in turn proceeded to ask Allied Expeditionary Air Force for permission for Bomber Command to deal direct with First Canadian Army in planning the attack on the dykes.<sup>71</sup> On 29 September Simonds, now Acting Army Commander, held an inter-service conference on the question of the dykes.<sup>72</sup> He gave these reasons for his advocacy of the plan:

- "(a) That information showed that a good deal of the island was below sea level.
- "(b) That if it could be flooded it would compel the enemy to concentrate his forces and thereby make it easier to attack them.
- "(c) That many administrative difficulties of serious nature would be imposed upon the enemy.
- "(d) That the enemy's reserves would be largely immobilized (or perhaps destroyed).
- "(e) That it might be possible to create an entry for amphibians at one or other of the points of breaching."

General Simonds summed up by saying that "so many military advantages to us would result if flooding could be achieved that it should be done if it is technically possible". Under his urging the air officers present consented to try Air Commodore L. W. Dickens of Bomber Command "emphasized that it was not

possible to guarantee that the attempt to breach the dyke would be successful". But the conference ended with a firm decision:

- "Bomber Command RAF will undertake a deliberate attempt to breach the dyke commencing as soon as:
- (i) authority is obtained from the Supreme Commander and notified to them through the normal channels.
  - (ii) weather and technical conditions permit."

The Navy explained that its most immediate need from the air forces was that the radar stations on the island should be put out of action; this was with a view to minimizing the batteries' interference with minesweepers working to clear channels leading to Walcheren.

The only remaining obstacle to the bombing of the dykes was the requirement for authority from the Supreme Commander, with whom the decision whether or not to impose this burden upon our allies inevitably and properly rested. It was not long delayed. On 1 October Headquarters 21st Army Group informed First Canadian Army,<sup>73</sup>

The Supreme Commander has approved the project to flood the island of Walcheren.

Already, on 27 September, Field-Marshal Montgomery's headquarters had requested SHAEF to drop leaflets warning the population of the Scheldt islands of the imminence of heavy air bombardment: "Leaflets should stress danger flooding and urge immediate evacuation of islands or if this is not possible of military objectives and low lying ground."<sup>74</sup>

On the afternoon of 3 October Bomber Command made the fateful experiment. The Westkapelle dyke was attacked by 243 heavy bombers, which dropped about 1263 tons of high explosive. The result showed that our engineers at Army Headquarters had underestimated the power of the Royal Air Force. This was, in Field-Marshal Montgomery's words, "an operation of truly magnificent accuracy". Aerial photographs taken that evening showed that the sea was flowing in through a 75-yard gap, which was soon larger. General Simonds' confidence had been fully justified. During the days that followed other attacks were made on dykes near Flushing and near Veere, and the Westkapelle dyke was again struck.\* The result was that by the end of October, when the actual assault on Walcheren was imminent, the island "resembled a saucer filled with water".<sup>75</sup>

It has been made clear that First Canadian Army argued from the beginning for the heaviest possible bomber effort against Walcheren. What was wanted was a series of heavy attacks continuing steadily until the seaborne assault went in (above, pages 359, 370, 372). And the Supreme Commander, in refusing the airborne operation, had promised in its place an exceptional effort by the strategic bomber forces: "complete saturation" (page 374). In the event, the actual effort made was much less than this suggested. Both the Navy and the Army were subse-

\*General Daser of the 70th German Division told interrogators later that the Westkapelle breach was not fatal; the Germans, with the aid of Dutch civilians, set to work to build a dam from Domburg to Zoutelande to contain the flooding. But the breaks at Veere and Flushing created a hopeless situation.

quently to complain that the weight of bombs directed upon Walcheren was inadequate. There is substance in the complaint, but the responsibility did not rest wholly with the air forces.

Bomber Command began the attack on Walcheren with a number of small enterprises during September. On the 17th a total of 96 aircraft attacked batteries near Flushing, Biggekerke, and Westkapelle. On the following day and the 19th attacks directed against another battery at Domburg were abortive owing to weather. On the 23rd, however, the Domburg battery was successfully attacked by 49 aircraft. The weight of high explosive dropped in these attacks amounted to 616 tons.<sup>76</sup> There were to be further attacks during October, as we shall see, in addition to those directed against the dykes; but none of them was on the scale of the great operations to which the Canadian Army had been so indebted in its operations in Normandy and against the Channel Ports.

Two factors operated to limit the bomber effort against Walcheren. One was bad weather during the period concerned. The other was the reluctance of senior officers of the Allied air forces to divert forces from the offensive against Germany, then actively under way, and their belief that attacks on concrete defences were not the most rewarding role for strategic air forces. The Combined Chiefs of Staff at the Second Quebec Conference in mid-September, acting on a British motion, had overridden Eisenhower's recommendation that the Strategic Air Forces in Europe should remain under his command (above, page 23) and had returned them to the control of the British Chief of the Air Staff and the Commanding General, U.S. Army Air Forces. They had, however, agreed upon a directive to the officers directly in control of those forces which stated,

The direct support of land and naval operations remains a continuing commitment upon your forces. Upon call from the supreme commanders concerned either for assistance in the battle or to take advantage of related opportunities, you will meet their requirements promptly.

Subsequently a list of targets in Germany approved by the air chiefs gave first priority to the petroleum industry with special emphasis on gasoline; second priority went jointly to transportation systems, tank production plants and depots, and motor transport production plants and depots.<sup>77</sup>

Though the new arrangement somewhat weakened Eisenhower's status in relation to the strategic bomber forces, he was clearly still in a position to obtain their support when he considered it important. With respect to Walcheren, the role of these forces was in large degree settled by an arrangement between two of his British subordinates, though not entirely without reference to him. On 28 September Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory, still commanding the Allied Expeditionary Air Force, wrote Field-Marshal Montgomery concerning First Canadian Army's proposals for "prolonged air preparation" at Walcheren. Mentioning how the Germans were building up their strength opposite the Allied front in the west, he observed, "If we have to concentrate what would amount to the major proportion of our bomber forces on Walcheren for so long a period, the enemy would be free to concentrate his fighter effort in the forward areas, his communications and military build up would progress to a large extent unimpeded, and he would be

given an opportunity to recuperate his oil and industrial resources which we know are now so seriously depleted. It is, therefore, most important that the maximum bombing effort should be directed against Germany at the present time." Leigh-Mallory proceeded to suggest that the preparation at Walcheren should "take the form of a limited number of attacks on specially selected objectives, to commence forthwith, followed by an intensive preparation by all bomber resources available during the 3 days prior to the assault, this to be followed by the maximum assistance to the assault itself". He said he had discussed the matter with the Supreme Commander, who was in "general agreement" with his proposals.

Montgomery was in a strong position to resist Leigh-Mallory's programme if he had wished to do so. A week before, Eisenhower had given him a written promise, in view of the refusal to use airborne troops, to provide an exceptional bomber effort by both the Eighth Air Force and the R.A.F. Bomber Command (above, page 374). But Leigh-Mallory's arguments had force, and were particularly likely to appeal to a commander whose eye was more on the Ruhr than on the Scheldt (below, page 390). Montgomery replied:

Your letter of today's date. I agree with you.

We should start in now at Walcheren by attacking gun positions, selected targets of other types, and generally disturb enemy morale.

I also want to flood the island so that the places to be bombed become more isolated.

Then 3 or 4 days before D day we should fairly let them have everything we have got.

I do not see how D day can be before about 15 October. Possibly later.<sup>78</sup>

Thus First Canadian Army, having already lost its fight for airborne troops, now lost its high priority on bomber support as well. The Eighth Air Force was not to be seen over Walcheren; the R.A.F. Bomber Command's attacks would be on a limited scale.

Another glimpse of policy at Leigh-Mallory's headquarters appears in the record of a conversation this same day when the Senior Air Staff Officer of No. 84 Group (Air Commodore T. N. McEvoy) called on the 2nd Canadian Corps' Chief of Staff, Brigadier Rodger, to explain "the reasons for their watch on our requests for heavy bomber support".<sup>79</sup>

A EAF have specified that heavy bomber support should be provided only when ground troops are going to assault the bombed positions immediately afterwards....

This principle was certainly sound with respect to operations in the open field. It was open to question, however, in a case like that of Walcheren, where the targets were permanent defences. Concrete positions could only be dealt with by an exceptional weight of bombs; and when hit they were not susceptible of rapid repair.

### The Final Plan for the Scheldt Battle

On 27 September, two days after the remnant of the 1st Airborne Division was withdrawn from Arnhem (above, page 316), Field-Marshal Montgomery issued another full-dress directive to his army commanders.<sup>80</sup> The general portion of this document spoke of two main objectives. One was the Ruhr: "Its capture will

mean the beginning of the end for Germany." The other was the port of Antwerp: "The opening of the port is absolutely essential before we can advance deep into Germany." Montgomery's intentions were thus stated:

"(a) To open up the port of Antwerp.

"(b) In conjunction with First US Army on the right, to destroy all enemy forces that are preventing us from capturing the Ruhr."

The operations to be carried out by his two armies were detailed as follows:

*First Canadian Army*

12. The left wing of the Canadian Army will complete the operations that are now in progress to enable us to use the ports of Boulogne and Calais. Dunkirk will be masked, and will be dealt with later.
13. The Canadian Army will at once develop operations designed to enable us to have the free use of the port of Antwerp. The early completion of these operations is vital. See para 7 [above, on the "opening of the port"].
14. The right wing of the Army will thrust strongly northwards on the general axis Tilburg-Hertogenbosch, and so free the Second Army from its present commitment of a long left flank facing west. This thrust should be on a comparatively narrow front and it is important it should reach Hertogenbosch as early as possible.

*Second British Army*

15. The line of supply running northwards through Eindhoven, and up to the Rhine at Nijmegen, must be maintained intact and free from enemy interference.
16. A firm bridgehead will be maintained over the Rhine at Nijmegen. The object of this bridgehead will be to create a constant threat to the enemy of our Allied advance northwards over the Neder Rijn; it must therefore be an offensive, and a "threatening" bridgehead. A movement northwards from this bridgehead might well be a suitable operation should the enemy withdraw troops from the Arnhem area because of our pressure elsewhere; reconnaissances will be carried out accordingly.
17. The major task of the Army will be to operate strongly with all available strength from the general area Nijmegen-Gennep against the N.W. corner of the Ruhr. The right flank of the movement will be directed on Krefeld. On the left flank, the Rhine will be crossed as and where opportunity offers, and in particular every endeavour will be made to get a bridgehead at Wesel. These operations will be begun as early as the maintenance situation will allow.

From the point of view of First Canadian Army, the basic point emerging from this directive is that the operations to open Antwerp were still getting a relatively low priority.\* Even the Army's own limited resources were not being wholly concentrated upon this enterprise; for General Simonds was directed to push one of his two corps off on a divergent axis to assist the Second Army's operations directed towards the Ruhr. His intention to use the Polish Armoured Division to help the 2nd Division by driving on Bergen op Zoom (above, page 372) had been negated. It was to appear in due course that the effort now authorized was far from adequate to achieve the opening of the Scheldt.

\*On 1 October the Allied Naval Commander ordered some tank landing craft withdrawn from the cross-Channel shuttle service to prepare for the Walcheren operation. The 21st Army Group objected, as this would interfere with operations having a higher priority. Ramsay replied that he knew of no operation with priority over "Infatuate" and that the Supreme Commander's Chief of Staff had confirmed this. On 3 October, when Ramsay visited H.Q. First Canadian Army, Field-Marshal Montgomery's Chief of Staff telephoned General Crerar's in advance; not wishing to have the admiral "become concerned as a result of the priorities being given to Second British Army ops within 21 Army Gp" he asked Brigadier Mann not to mention the matter.<sup>81</sup>

With this instruction before him, Simonds issued his own directive to his corps commanders on 2 October.<sup>82</sup> He began by noting the operations of the Second British Army directed on Krefeld and of the First U.S. Army directed on Cologne, and observed, "These operations have a prior call on administrative resources." At the same time, he wrote, "In conjunction with these thrusts on the Ruhr by First US and Second Brit Armies, the whole weight of the Strategic Air Forces is being thrown against Western and South Western Germany." The exception to this was the "all out attempt" to be made by Bomber Command to cut the Walcheren dykes. He was clearly well aware of the disadvantages under which his command was labouring.

The tasks of First Canadian Army were, with one corps, to clear the Second Army's western flank by a thrust on 's-Hertogenbosch, and with the other corps to clear the Scheldt Estuary. The Czech Armoured Brigade would continue to contain Dunkirk. The mission of the 1st British Corps was thus outlined:

- "(a) thrust North Eastwards on Hertogenbosch.
- "(b) direct 2 Cdn Inf Div to clear the area North of Antwerp and close the Eastern end of the Zuid Beveland Isthmus until this division reverts to operational command 2 Cdn Corps.
- "(c) Subsequently develop operations successively towards Breda and Roosendaal to cover the Eastern flank and rear of 2 Cdn Inf Div directed Westwards on Zuid Beveland."

As for the 2nd Canadian Corps, it was allotted the following tasks:

- "(a) attack and destroy, or capture, all 'enemy remaining in the area of Belgium and Holland, south of the West Schelde (Operation "Switchback").
- "(b) on conclusion of Operation "Switchback" develop operations with 2 Cdn Inf Div to clear Zuid Beveland.\*
- "(c) capture the Island of Walcheren (Operation "Infatuate")."

The complicated series of operations designed to open the port of Antwerp thus began in accordance with the general scheme recommended by General Simonds some weeks before. There were to be separate operations north and south of the West Scheldt. While the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division cleared the Breskens Pocket south of the river, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, operating in the first instance under the 1st British Corps, was to drive north from Antwerp, establish a firm base in the Woensdrecht area and thence push westward along the isthmus to occupy South Beveland. Finally, the fortress island of Walcheren would be captured by concentric attacks directed across the causeway from South Beveland, across the West Scheldt from the Breskens area, and from the sea.

It is out of the question to describe these operations in precise chronological order, for to a considerable extent they went forward simultaneously. It is therefore most convenient to deal with the business by phases, carrying each phase to its conclusion before attempting the next. If the reader will bear with us, then, we shall begin with the phase which began first, the drive north from Antwerp. We shall then describe the whole of the operation against the Breskens Pocket, thereafter returning to the 2nd Division and its advance across South Beveland against Walcheren. Finally we shall give an account of the various operations against Walcheren itself.

\*This operation was later given the name "Vitality".

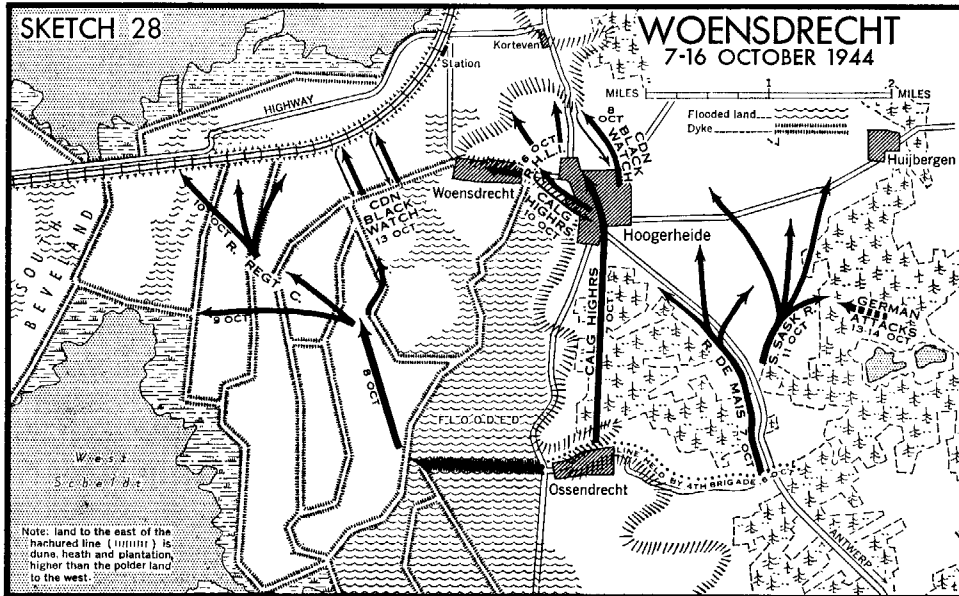
## Fighting North from Antwerp

The Battle of the Scheldt may be said to have begun in earnest on 2 October 1944, when the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division began its advance north from the Antwerp area with a view to closing the exit from South Beveland and advancing along the South Beveland isthmus.

As we have seen (above, pages 365-8) the division, on the eve of the battle, was holding Antwerp with the 4th Brigade while the 5th, slowly enlarging the bridgehead originally gained by the 49th Division over the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal, had just captured Brecht. Now, on the morning of 2 October, the division jumped off from these positions on both flanks, the 6th Brigade advancing southwest along the canal from the 5th's bridgehead while the 4th pushed north through Merxem. In spite of stubborn resistance progress was comparatively rapid. The South Saskatchewan Regiment occupied Lochtenberg, where it had been twice repulsed a few days before. On 3 October the 6th Brigade, pushing north-west, took the Camp de Brasschaet without loss, and next day it occupied Cappellen. Farther west the 4th Brigade advanced through Eeckeren on 4 October. On the 5th Putte fell to the Essex Scottish after stiff fighting and our troops crossed the Netherlands frontier. On the 6th Ossendrecht and Santvliet were taken, and with Woensdrecht less than three miles away the objective of the first phase of the operation seemed to be 'within our grasp'.<sup>83</sup> At this point, at midnight of 6-7 October, the 2nd Division passed from the 1st British to the 2nd Canadian Corps. At noon on the 7th the 51st (Highland) Division returned to First Canadian Army and was placed under General Crocker's command, as was also the 7th British Armoured Division. With them Crocker took over the front up to the River Maas formerly held by the 12th British Corps.<sup>84</sup>

The north-easterly thrust by the 1st British Corps which Field-Marshal Montgomery had ordered (above, page 379) had made progress, but had not reached 's-Hertogenbosch. The Polish Armoured Division, assisted by the 49th Division, met heavy opposition in its advance on Baarle Nassau, a tiny enclave of Belgian territory within the Netherlands, which it captured on 3 October. The following day it was checked by a strong counter-attack just north of the town. It took Alphen, south-west of Tilburg, on the 5th, but there for the moment it was halted.<sup>85</sup>

The Germans were fighting fiercely. On 3 October General Jodl had directed the attention of Field-Marshal von Rundstedt (who was certainly well aware of it already) to the overriding importance of preventing the enemy from opening Antwerp. The line Antwerp—Tilburg—'s-Hertogenbosch was to be defended to the last, with the left wing clinging to the River Waal.<sup>86</sup> At this point the Fifteenth Army ordered "Battle Group Chill"—also known as the 85th Infantry Division—then under the 88th Corps in the vicinity of 's-Hertogenbosch on the western flank of the Nijmegen salient, to the 67th Corps' area to check the Polish advance.<sup>87</sup> This formation, commanded by Lieut.-General Kurt Chill, an officer of great skill and uncommon energy, was composed of remnants of the 84th, 85th and 89th Infantry Divisions, part of the Hermann Goring Replacement Training Regiment and—most important of all—the crack 6th Parachute Regiment. It was the



German "fire brigade" for this sector, always found where the emergency was greatest. Its withdrawal from the 88th Corps put a stop to a project for an attack on the Nijmegen salient, but it was considered more important to head off the danger to Tilburg. It appears however that it was local reserves that put in the counter-attack which checked the Poles on 4 October; only on the 6th was the 85th Division heavily committed here to cover Tilburg.<sup>88</sup> Almost immediately, however, it was necessary to move it still farther west to deal with our thrust at the South Beveland isthmus.

The 2nd Canadian Division's plan for this thrust was to pass the 5th Brigade through the 4th (then deployed between Ossendrecht and the Antwerp—Bergen road to the east) and push it up the main road directed on Korteven, beyond Woensdrecht, on 7 October. Simultaneously a battle group of the 6th Brigade ("Saint Force") was to go forward to improve our position on the right.<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, however, a misunderstanding arose, the Essex Scottish failed to secure the start-line during the preceding night and the 6th Brigade operation made very little progress during the 7th.<sup>90</sup> The 5th Brigade operation was conducted with two battalions "up", The Calgary Highlanders on the left and Le Regiment de Maisonneuve on the right. The latter unit was stopped some distance southwest of Huijbergen (some three and a half miles east of Woensdrecht); the Calgarys, after stiff fighting, got into Hoogerheide, little more than a mile from Woensdrecht.<sup>91</sup>

On the morning of the 8th The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada passed through the Calgarys for the attack on Korteven. But they met extremely heavy resistance. On the 7th the Germans had pulled out part of Battle Group Chill from opposite the Poles and moved these troops to their right wing



to cover Woensdrecht. There was violent fighting in and around Hoogerheide, and the Black Watch were pushed back to their start-line.<sup>92</sup> At the end of the day aerial reconnaissance confirmed information from Dutch civilians that a large German force with guns and tanks was concentrated in the wooded country between Korteven and Bergen op Zoom. An attack by Typhoons was called down on the area, with largely undetermined results; and the battalions of the 5th Brigade were ordered to go over to the defensive to prepare for the counter-attack which was clearly on the way.<sup>93</sup>

The German stroke duly materialized that night, and further fierce counter-attacks came in next day, forcing our troops to make some local withdrawals. The Calgary Highlanders about Hoogerheide bore the main weight of a nasty day. Prisoners taken were young paratroopers, the vanguard of Chill's men.<sup>94</sup> For the moment the Germans had saved Woensdrecht and the vital isthmus.

In the meantime, the delayed thrust by the 6th Brigade on the right flank, executed on 8 October by "Saint" Force, comprising Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal and parts of the 10th Armoured Regiment and the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment, had also had only limited success. The idea was that the armour would make a wide sweep through the area of Wuestwezel (north-west of Brecht) in cooperation with an advance by the Fusiliers in the areas of Calmpthout and Kruisstraat to the west. Unfortunately, thick fog early on the 8th prevented the movement of armour during the morning, and the sweep by the tanks never materialized. Assisted by the armour, the Fusiliers advanced north and by the evening had captured the village of Dorp north of Calmpthout.<sup>95</sup> This was the only gain from the operation. The 2nd Division's right flank was still open in the area between Calmpthout and Brecht. On the 9th a detachment of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division—the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment and a company of The Algonquin Regiment—was moved in from west of Antwerp to assist the 2nd Division, coming under the 6th Brigade and relieving the South Saskatchewan Regiment at Brecht and the Cameron Highlanders of Canada in the Brasschaet area, thus allowing these units to move to strengthen the division's centre. This eased the acting divisional commander's anxieties for his exposed flank, some 20 miles long, which he had been covering with the help of his reconnaissance and light anti-aircraft regiments.<sup>96</sup>

It was now decided that the 5th Brigade would take over the attempt to cut the base of the South Beveland isthmus. It was to withdraw from the line about Hoogerheide, The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry coming in to hold there (this being facilitated by the relief of the 6th Brigade's units in the Brecht area by those from the 4th Division); the 5th Brigade would then be used for a concentrated blow. The relief was carried out during the afternoon and evening of 10 October.<sup>97</sup> While it was in progress, The Royal Regiment of Canada of the 4th Brigade had an important success on the left. It forced its way forward across the wet polder land south and west of Woensdrecht to reach the near side of the embankment carrying the railway across the isthmus close to the latter's narrowest point, between two and three miles west of Woensdrecht.<sup>98</sup> This "seriously restricted the main enemy route to the peninsula".<sup>99</sup> The German version is that contact was lost here on the 11th between the troops on the mainland and the 70th Divi-

sion in South Beveland, but was restored by an evening counter-attack by elements of the 346th Infantry Division from the direction of Woensdrecht, while the 70th Division itself fought slowly eastward.<sup>100</sup> Actually, the Royals held the positions they had taken, almost but not quite severing the isthmus; and they record that enemy counter-attacks were broken up by efficient work by our artillery. However, when the Royals themselves attacked on the afternoon of the 11th "to close the neck of the peninsula" they were beaten back with heavy loss, and a counter-attack which may be the one referred to by the Germans contributed to their discomfiture.<sup>101</sup>

The 4th Brigade now had both The South Saskatchewan Regiment (brought up from the eastern sector) and Le Regiment de Maisonneuve under command. The South Saskatchewan were committed east of Hoogerheide, where they had heavy fighting during the next few days. Attacks on 11 October by the other units of the brigade gained as little ground as that by the Royals.<sup>102</sup> On the 12th and 13th severe local counter-attacks came in, particularly in the vicinity of the isthmus on the former date and in the South Saskatchewan area on the latter.<sup>103</sup> On the 13th the 5th Brigade took over the offensive against the isthmus. In Operation "Angus" the Black Watch were put in through the sector held by the Royal Regiment to seize objectives along the railway embankment, the most distant being Woensdrecht Station, west of Korteven. It was a day of bloody fighting and failure. The Germans were securely dug in along and beyond the embankment. They met the first attack in the early morning with extremely heavy mortar, airburst and small arms fire. In spite of excellent support by our artillery, the two leading Black Watch companies were forced back to their start line, both company commanders having been wounded. Support by fighter aircraft was called for and received, and late in the afternoon another attempt was made backed by tanks and flamethrowers. But the enemy continued to fight savagely, many men were lost and the objectives were not reached. The commanders of the other two rifle companies both became casualties. At one in the morning Brigadier Megill ordered the battalion to withdraw. Its casualties in this episode totalled 145-56 killed or died of wounds, 62 wounded and 27 prisoners.<sup>104</sup>

Thus the enemy, battling with desperate determination, still held the commanding position at Woensdrecht and had not wholly lost his communications across the isthmus. Another effort was required. On 14 October the 2nd Division again regrouped. The 5th Brigade took over the left sector in the isthmus area, still held by the Royal Regiment (which was now relieved by The Calgary Highlanders); and the 4th Brigade moved into the right sector preparatory to an attack on Woensdrecht itself. But an enemy attack came in as The South Saskatchewan Regiment (who were remaining under the 4th Brigade) were shifting their ground to allow the Royals to come in on their right. Our own attack did not take place until 16 October.<sup>105</sup>

At 3:30 a.m. that day The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry put it in, advancing behind a heavy barrage with the assistance of tanks of the 10th Armoured Regiment. The whole divisional artillery, plus the 7th Medium Regiment R.C.A. and the 84th and 121st Medium and 115th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments R.A.,

supported the advance.<sup>106</sup> The R.H.L.I. fought their way into the straggling village and on to the low ridge above it; and there they stayed notwithstanding all the enemy could do. Before the morning was far advanced he was counter-attacking, supported by at least one self-propelled gun. The right-hand company of the R.H.L.I., north-east of the village, was overrun; but a company of the Essex Scottish and more tanks were brought forward and the position was held in spite of enemy infiltration and continued artillery and mortar fire. The battalion later reported, "It is close, hand to hand fighting—the enemy is not giving up here the way he has in the past." The Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. W. D. Whitaker, considered that the turning point came when our artillery—it was the 4th Field Regiment R.C.A.—brought down a heavy concentration on the counter-attacking Germans very close to our own positions. "The fire caught the enemy troops right out in the open whereas our own men were deep down in their slit trenches having been warned beforehand. Our troops cheered; the slaughter was terrific." There was also very effective support by fighter-bombers. But our own losses were painfully heavy; the R.H.L.I. had 161 casualties on 16 and 17 October, 21 of them fatal.<sup>107</sup>

### The Shortage of Trained Infantrymen

The difficulty of maintaining the strength of the Canadian infantry battalions with trained men has already been mentioned in connection with the fighting in the Foret de la Londe (above, pages 284-5). The heavy casualties at Woensdrecht brought the matter to the fore again, and shortage of trained infantrymen was one of the difficulties which slowed our progress in this fighting. The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry commented as follows on the fighting on 16-17 October:<sup>108</sup>

We did not have enough bodies on the ground to completely control the Woensdrecht Feature and it was possible for the enemy to infiltrate. The enemy appeared to suffer very heavy casualties from our artillery fire which was used unsparingly, but he continued to reinforce his positions. We were prevented from probing forward as the average company strength was forty-five and the casualties amongst our officers and NCOs and older men were very heavy. The bulk of the men in the battalion at the present time had not had very much infantry training, but had been remustered from other branches of the service.

At this time (17 October) two of the R.H.L.I.'s four rifle companies had only one officer each. The Canadian Black Watch on 19 October calculated that in the battalion's rifle companies, then 379 all ranks in strength, there were 159 men with three months or more of infantry training; 46 with two months or more; 131 with one month, 29 with less than one month and 14 with none. The Second-in-Command reported to the C.O., "It is unnecessary to point out to you, sir, that the previous training of a man listed as, for instance, 'one month', on paper, probably represents considerably less time actual training. This assumption is borne out by the fact that very few men arrive with knowledge of the PIAT, or elementary section and platoon tactics. Some reinforcements have never fired the Bren L.M.G. or handled grenades."<sup>109</sup>

The case of the Black Watch was, perhaps, extreme, for this unit had had unusually heavy casualties on several occasions; but it gives us a striking glimpse of the problem of infantry reinforcements as it presented itself in practical terms in the fighting battalions of First Canadian Army in the autumn of 1944. It is not irrelevant to add that the Germans were worse off. On 9 October the senior staff officer of their 245th Infantry Division, then in action in the Tilburg area, reported that 246 untrained recruits of the ages of 17 and 18 had arrived: "combat value zero". It was proposed to put these men into barracks at Vught where they could be given some training.<sup>110</sup>

As the echoes of the desperate fighting of the 16th died away, what might almost be called calm descended upon the blood-soaked fields and broken buildings of Woensdrecht. On both sides it was the peace of exhaustion—an unquiet peace, but at least not disturbed by major operations for some days to come.<sup>111</sup> The loss of the commanding position at Woensdrecht had impressed the Germans. The war diary of the Commander-in-Chief West for 16 October recorded,

In the area of the Scheldt Estuary a permanent recapture of the land connection with Walcheren can no longer be expected. C.-in-C. West, therefore, consents to the flooding of the area.

Within a few hours, we noted that flooding was extending in the eastern portion of South Beveland, east of the Beveland Canal.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, the enemy remained "in very close contact" with us about Woensdrecht village, and though in general he was quiet any forward move on our part at once met fierce resistance.<sup>113</sup> The situation for the moment was stalemated. Until we could establish a much firmer grip on the area about the eastern end of the isthmus it was useless to think of advancing into South Beveland.

### Strategic Discussion and a New Priority

Here we must turn for a moment from the struggle in the polders to survey the battlefield as a whole and to note the continuing strategic discussion between General Eisenhower and Field-Marshal Montgomery and its effect upon the Canadian operations.

Early in October, in the absence of any major port working close to the front, the administrative pinch was still being painfully felt all along the Allied battleline. From the Supreme Commander's conference at Versailles on 22 September (above, page 317), the decision had emerged that the right wing of the 12th Army Group—General Patton's Third U.S. Army, already famous for its offensive triumphs in August—would have to go over to the defensive. General Bradley broke this news to Patton with the statement, "It is apparent to everyone that no major offensive by American forces can be undertaken until the port of Antwerp is opened."<sup>114</sup> During October, in these circumstances, Patton's army was quiescent except for local advances; it held a line running west of Metz on a front roughly from Luneville to Luxembourg. In the light of the decision to direct the main

present effort against the Ruhr, priority on the American front was given to the northern sector, where General Hodges' First Army was struggling through the West Wall to capture Aachen.<sup>115</sup> It is not surprising that this offensive threatening the Ruhr impressed the Germans as the greatest single danger in the west. Field Marshal von Rundstedt expressed this opinion in an appreciation dated 9 October and marked "For submission to the Fuhrer".<sup>116</sup> He concentrated large forces here accordingly,<sup>117</sup> and Hodges did not take Aachen until 21 October. In the same appreciation of 9 October von Rundstedt noted the situation north of Antwerp as another point of special danger and observed that since the Allied strength in the Nijmegen—Arnhem area precluded any withdrawal of troops from there to deal with the threat on the Scheldt, it would be necessary to shorten the line in the Tilburg—'s-Hertogenbosch area (that is, by a retirement). This recommendation, however, was not carried out.

Soon after the 2nd Canadian Division began its drive north from Antwerp, Field Marshal Montgomery came to the conclusion that the attack towards the north-west corner of the Ruhr by the Second Army, envisaged in his directive of 27 September (above, page 379), was not practicable in existing circumstances. He told the Supreme Commander on 7 October that he found that he had to commit British forces to assist the First U.S. Army, which had been unable to clear the area west of the Meuse; and his strength was too low for the Ruhr attack too. He also suggested again that the existing system of command was unsatisfactory; he presumably wished to have the First Army placed directly under his own command. In reply, General Eisenhower suggested two possibilities: either the U.S. forces should extend their area to the north, thus shortening the British line, or two U.S. divisions should be transferred to Montgomery.<sup>118</sup> The second expedient was adopted,\* and on 9 October Montgomery issued to his army commanders a new directive based upon it.<sup>119</sup>

This postulated that before the Second Army could be launched towards Krefeld, it was necessary to make certain of the security of the bridgehead at Nijmegen and to drive the enemy back to the east side of the Meuse between Gennep and Roermond. To facilitate this, the 7th U.S. Armoured Division and the Belgian contingent were to come under the Second Army at once. The portion of the directive relating to General Simonds' command ran as follows:

*First Canadian Army*

12. Will concentrate all available resources on the operations designed to give us free use of the port of Antwerp.  
The opening of this port will take priority over all other offensive operations.
13. Will ensure that there is no interference by the enemy from the west with the Second Army main supply and communication route running northwards through Eindhoven and up to the Rhine at Nijmegen.

One U.S. infantry division was being moved up from Cherbourg into the Brussels area, where it would arrive next week. It would be held for employment by First

\*Since the 7th U.S. Armoured Division's sector of the line was taken over along with the division, the net gain was only one division.

Canadian Army as desired, in order to speed up the Antwerp operations. Moreover, the 52nd (Lowland) Division of the British Army was to begin to arrive through Ostend on 13 October. It would be available for the Scheldt task if required by the Canadian Army.

Thus the Scheldt operations had been given a considerably higher priority than before (see above, page 379). Except for the task of protecting the flank of the Nijmegen salient, Montgomery now accorded them absolute priority *within the Canadian Army*; and that Army was being given additional strength to carry them out.

On the same day on which this directive was issued a further exchange between Montgomery and Eisenhower began. The latter telegraphed mentioning a report just received from the Royal Navy (not from Admiral Ramsay) that First Canadian Army would be unable to move until 1 November unless promptly supplied with adequate ammunition. Eisenhower wrote, "You know best where emphasis lies within your Army Group but I must repeat that we are now squarely up against situation which has been anticipated for months and our intake into Continent will not support our battle. Unless we have Antwerp producing by middle of November entire operations will come to a standstill. I must emphasise that of all our operations on our entire front from Switzerland to the Channel, I consider Antwerp of first importance, and I believe operations designed to clear up entrance require your personal attention." Montgomery replied that the Navy's statements were "wild" and pointed out that First Canadian Army's attack was already under way and going well (it had begun on 2 October north of Antwerp and on 6 October on the Leopold Canal; but, although this was not yet clear, it was not in fact going particularly well). Montgomery at the same time reminded Eisenhower that at the conference of 22 September the attack on the Ruhr had been prescribed as the main effort of the current phase of operations,\* and that only the previous day the Supreme Commander had declared that the first mission of both the 21st and 12th Army Groups was to reach the Rhine north of Bonn.<sup>120</sup>

On the 10th Eisenhower came back with a very strong telegram. "In everything that we try to do or to plan", he wrote, "our intake of supplies into the Continent looms up as the limiting factor and it is for this reason that no matter how we adjust missions and objectives for both groups in their offensive action towards the east, the possession of the approaches to Antwerp remains with us an objective of vital importance. Let me assure you that nothing I may ever say or write with respect to future plans in our advance eastward is meant to indicate any lessening of the need for Antwerp which I have always held as vital, and which has grown more pressing as we enter the bad weather period."<sup>121</sup>

Field-Marshal Montgomery now sent to Eisenhower's Chief of Staff another communication suggesting changes in command arrangements. The result was a long letter from Eisenhower (the full text of which is not available); an American

\*This was entirely true. On the other hand, the record of the conference also says, "21st Army Group to open the port of Antwerp as a matter of urgency and to develop operations culminating in a strong attack on the Ruhr from the north."



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official historian calls it "one of his most explicit letters of the war".\* The question, he said, was not one of command but of taking Antwerp; and his views on the importance of getting the port opened were shared by General Marshall and Field Marshal Brooke, who had emphasized it on a recent visit to SHAEF. Eisenhower said that he was willing to make additional U.S. troops and supplies available to Montgomery to open the estuary. With respect to the question of command organization, he was not prepared to accept Montgomery's argument in favour of the appointment of a single ground commander (the system used in Normandy). The army group commanders had adequate powers for the control of operations on the battlefield, but the Supreme Commander had the tasks of adjusting larger boundaries, assigning support by air or by ground or airborne troops and shifting the emphasis in supply arrangements. Eisenhower went on to say that for the attack on the Ruhr he felt that one commander should be responsible; but he considered that the current commitments of the 21st Army Group would leave it with such depleted forces facing eastward that it could not carry the main weight. He proposed therefore to give the task of capturing the Ruhr to the 12th Army Group with the 21st in support.<sup>122</sup>

Montgomery, as already noted (above, page 387), had begun to have grave doubts about the practicability of the Ruhr operation a week before. The day before Eisenhower wrote this letter to him, he reported to the War Office that the ammunition situation in the First U.S. Army was so bad that he considered that army had not the slightest chance of reaching the Rhine. Now the Supreme Commander's orders finally wiped the Ruhr project off Montgomery's slate. He replied to Eisenhower's letter on 16 October.<sup>123</sup>

Dear Ike. I have received your letter of 13 October. You will hear no more on the subject of command from me. I have given you my views and you have given me your answer. That ends the matter and I and all of us up here will weigh in one hundred percent to do what you want and we will pull it through without a doubt. I have given Antwerp top priority in all operations in 21 Army Group and all energies and efforts will be now devoted towards opening up that place. Your very devoted and loyal subordinate, Monty.

On the same day Montgomery held a conference with his army commanders<sup>124</sup> and issued a new directive<sup>125</sup> which is printed in full in Appendix "E". This gave the operations to open Antwerp "complete priority over all other offensive operations in 21 Army Group, without any qualification whatsoever"; and it provided for bringing "the whole of the available offensive power of Second Army" to bear upon them.

What it amounted to was that whereas at the beginning of the Scheldt operations the right wing of First Canadian Army had been directed north-east on an axis divergent from the Scheldt to assist the Second British Army, now the Second British Army was to be directed on a north-westerly axis. General Dempsey was to take over the right sector of the Canadian Army's line and push westward;

\*Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, 297-8. Dr. Pogue summarizes the letter at length and quotes several passages. General Marshall, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, was on a visit to Eisenhower's headquarters at the time this letter was written. Lord Montgomery in his *Memoirs* summarizes the letter very briefly and without mentioning Antwerp or the Ruhr. In general, in this book the author has little to say about his dealings with Eisenhower concerning the Scheldt operations.

while the Canadian Army, with larger forces now available to it, was to clear the country north of the South Beveland isthmus to free the 2nd Division's flank. Until now Montgomery had chosen, within the framework of the Supreme Commander's instructions, to emphasize the portion relating to the Ruhr rather than the portion relating to opening Antwerp. He had now been given what ' amounted to a very direct order to give priority to Antwerp; and at the same time he had been deprived of the Ruhr operation.

As soon as the new orders took effect the situation north of Antwerp was transformed. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division, part of which, as we have seen, had already been brought over to the right flank of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, was now to pass under the 1st British Corps to be used as a hammer to loosen the German formations confronting the 2nd Division. On 17 October the 4th Division completed its concentration north-east of Antwerp. It came under the 1st Corps at midnight.<sup>126</sup>

General Crocker's headquarters issued its instruction for the operation designed to "prevent the enemy interfering with 2 Cdn Inf Div during its ops to capture South Beveland"<sup>127</sup> early on the 17th. Subsequently designated "Suitcase", it was to be carried out by four divisions, each from a different Allied country. On 20 October the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division would attack on the axis Brecht-Wuestwezel, and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division on its left directed on Esschen. The 1st Polish Armoured Division and the 104th U.S. Infantry Division would come into action later.

At 7:30 a.m. on the wet and chilly<sup>128</sup> morning of 20 October General Foster launched his division towards Esschen, with Bergen op Zoom as a further objective beyond. This advance would clear the flank of the 2nd Division and prepare the way for the Second Army's attack towards the Maas which was to go in shortly afterwards and which, it was hoped, would trap the German Fifteenth Army south of the wide river. It went well. Esschen fell to the 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the morning of 22 October.<sup>129</sup> Thereafter resistance stiffened as the Germans fought to keep open an escape route for their troops around Woensdrecht, and the 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade, pushing north-west from Esschen, was held up at Wouwsche Plantage and captured the place, with some assistance from the 10th Brigade, only on the morning of the 26th.<sup>130</sup> The following day the 10th, now advancing on the 4th Division's leftward axis, entered Bergen op Zoom after overcoming opposition from the 6th Parachute Regiment. To the east the 49th Division was approaching Roosendaal; and the 104th U.S. Infantry Division, the first American formation to fight under the First Canadian Army,\* had come in on the 49th's right and taken Zundert. Still farther east, on the extreme right flank of the 1st Corps, the Polish Armoured Division captured historic Breda on 29 October.<sup>131</sup>

In the meantime, on 22 October, the Second Army had launched its attack directed on 's-Hertogenbosch and Tilburg, and steady progress was made here too. The 12th Corps entered 's-Hertogenbosch on the 24th and cleared Tilburg

\*It was commanded by Major-General Terry Allen, who had commanded the 1st U.S. Infantry Division when it fought beside the 1st Canadian Division in Sicily.

on the 28th. Strong resistance dissipated the hope of trapping large numbers of the enemy south of the Lower Maas, but by the end of October Raamsdonk had been taken and the area below the river was largely clear.<sup>132</sup>

Anticipating relief from embarrassment on its right by the advance of the 1st Corps under Montgomery's new policy, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division was able on 23 October to begin the final clearing of the Woensdrecht area preparatory to operations against South Beveland. The attack was made with two brigades up, the 6th being directed from east of Woensdrecht upon the high ground south of Korteven, while on the left the 5th went forward in the area of the isthmus. Both brigades met fierce opposition and they made slow progress on the 23rd; on the left The Calgary Highlanders had to dig in along the railway embankment for the night.<sup>133</sup> But on the 24th things went much better. The enemy's line of retreat was menaced by the 4th Division's thrust directed on Wouwsche Plantage; his 67th Corps had sought and received permission to make a general withdrawal to avoid encirclement,<sup>134</sup> and the Germans in front of Woensdrecht now hurriedly retired beyond Korteven, pursued by the 5th Brigade. The same day the 4th Brigade began the advance across the isthmus into South Beveland.<sup>135</sup>

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE BATTLE OF THE SCHELDT SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 1944

#### PART II: BRESKENS, SOUTH BEVELAND, WALCHEREN (See Map 8 and Sketches 29-32)

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##### Operation "Switchback": Clearing the Breskens Pocket

WE must now revert to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division south of the Scheldt. The attack upon the Breskens Pocket, called by the Germans at the time "Scheldt Fortress South", produced fighting quite as fierce and costly as that around Woensdrecht, and this, as the reader knows, is saying a great deal.

It has already been made clear that the terrain was difficult. The only part of the 64th German Division's front where there was not a deep water barrier was in the vicinity of the Isabella Polder at the south-west angle of the Braakman Inlet; here there was a well-fortified gap between the eastern terminus of the Leopold Canal at the international boundary and the inlet. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division had been striving without success to get through it. The Algonquin Regiment made its first attempt on 22 September. It was repulsed, an entire platoon being lost. Further efforts thereafter had no better fortune. The enemy held this area in strength. On 5 October the Algonquins made a largescale attack which was beaten off "with heavy fire of all kinds". This was intended to divert the enemy's attention from the 3rd Division's attack across the Leopold Canal planned for the following morning; it may well have served a good purpose, though the available German records throw no light on the matter.<sup>1</sup>

The Leopold Canal front itself was unpromising. As we have seen, the entire western half of the Pocket was covered by the two canals, the Leopold and the Canal de Derivation de la Lys, running side by side, as well as by heavy inundations. It was very undesirable to attack here, the double canal obstacle in itself being extremely formidable. The operation therefore had to be launched east of the point where the canals separated, the area between them having been occupied by the 4th Division. But there too inundations almost all along the front made the problem extremely difficult. The best place available, and it was not a good one, seemed to be immediately east of the divergence of the two canals. Here there was a narrow strip of dry ground beyond the Leopold—a long triangle

with its base on the Aldegem—Aardenburg road and its apex near the village of Moershoofd some three miles east. It was only a few hundred yards broad even at its base. Its northern boundary coincided with the border between Belgium and the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup>

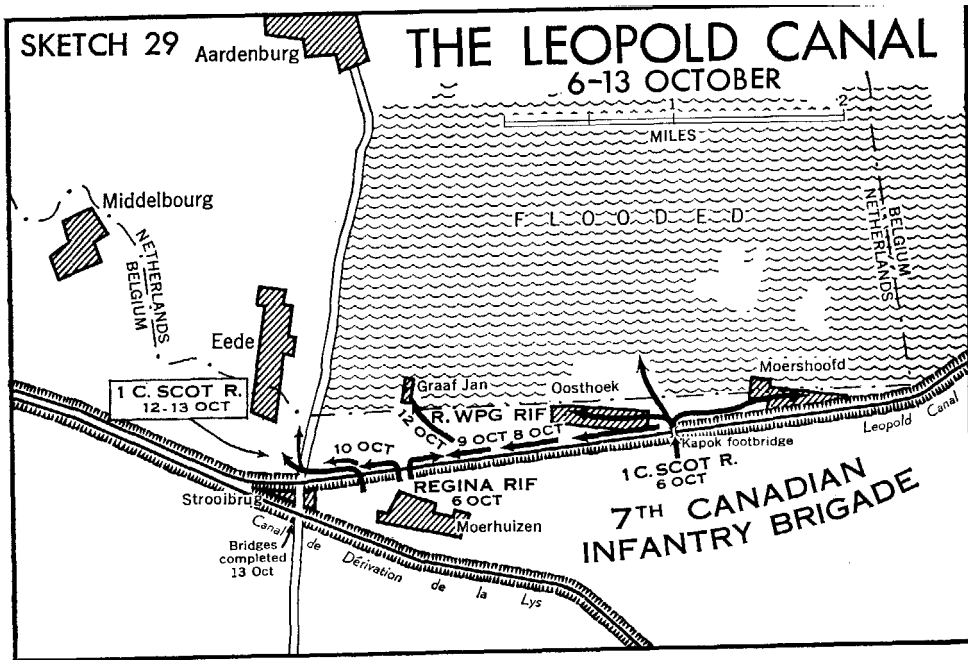
The 3rd Canadian Division had little time to prepare for this new operation. On 1 October the Canadian Scottish and The Regina Rifle Regiment finished mopping up the defenders of Calais. Early on 6 October, having moved up some 90 miles, they assaulted across the Leopold Canal.

The division's plan<sup>3</sup> proposed to combine an initial assault on the Leopold with a subsequent waterborne attack against the rear of the pocket from the vicinity of Terneuzen, in the area cleared earlier by the Polish armour. The intention was that the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade would assault here across the Braakman, in amphibious vehicles, two days after the frontal attack on the Leopold. The Leopold attack was to be carried out by the 7th Infantry Brigade with the North Shore Regiment (from the 8th) under command. The initial assault was to be made by two battalions, the 1st Canadian Scottish Regiment on the right and The Regina Rifle Regiment on the left, each with two companies up. The infantry were to cross the canal in assault boats (see above, page 316). Since very heavy opposition was to be expected, the expedient was adopted of massing "Wasp" flamethrowers to sear the north bank of the canal (which was somewhat less than 100 feet wide) immediately before the crossing. The attack was timed for first light on 6 October. The 8th Brigade was subsequently to pass through the 7th's bridgehead.

A large force of artillery, including the 2nd Canadian and 9th British Army Groups Royal Artillery and the guns of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division as well as the 3rd Division's own, was available to back the operation. Two Canadian field regiments (the 15th and 19th) and the 10th Medium Regiment R.A. were placed south-west of Terneuzen to support the 9th Brigade in its attack across the Braakman. The general principle was, "The maximum amount of artillery that can bear will support each operation in turn." Along the whole divisional front a total of 327 guns of all calibres would be deployed. The Commander Corps Royal Artillery, 2nd Canadian Corps (Brigadier A. B. Matthews) coordinated the fire requirements.<sup>4</sup> But in the hope of achieving surprise in the first attack preliminary bombardment was wisely omitted from the plan.

### The Attack Across the Leopold Canal

At about 5:30 on the cold morning of 6 October, 27 Wasps went into action along the 7th Brigade front east of Strooibrug. As the first bursts of flame shot across the water, the assault companies picked up the boats, clambered over the steep poplar-lined bank and launched them. The flame did its work, temporarily demoralizing those of the enemy whom it did not kill. On the right, both companies of the Canadian Scottish crossed successfully near Oosthoek without coming under



fire. To the west, north of Moerhuizen, the Reginas' left company likewise got across before the Germans recovered. This company was in fact the First Canadian Army Headquarters Defence Company (Royal Montreal Regiment), which had lately exchanged duties with "B" Company of the Reginas in order to gain battle experience. The right company of the Reginas, however, got into difficulties (one version is that it "hesitated" for a moment)<sup>5</sup> and the enemy had time to reoccupy his positions and bring down machine-gun fire which made the open strip of water quite impassable. Eventually this company, and the Reginas' other two rifle companies, had to be ferried over on the left.

We now had two separate narrow bridgeheads on the north bank. Though the enemy seems to have had no advance warning of the attack, his reaction was violent. He poured in mortar, machine-gun and small arms fire from the front and flanks, and immediately began to counter-attack. Rifleman S. J. Letendre of the Reginas took command of his section "without hesitation and without orders" when the section leader was killed in one of these attacks, reorganized it and set an example of initiative and fighting spirit that made an important contribution to preserving the position and won Letendre the D.C.M. By afternoon only a handful of the Royal Montreal Regiment company survived. It was impossible to link up the two precarious footholds. However, the Canadian Scottish on the right, where there was slightly more freedom of movement than on the left, established themselves in Moershoofd. A kapok foot-bridge had been put across the canal in their area by the 16th Field Company R.C.E., and after an initial failure another was made good on the Reginas' front that evening. The bridgeheads, though desperately constricted, held in spite of all the enemy

could do, and Brigadier Spragge decided to pass The Royal Winnipeg Rifles across on the Scottish front during the night of the 6th-7th. This was duly done.”

The situation in the bridgeheads almost defies description. In places they were little deeper than the canal bank. The ground was waterlogged; slit trenches rapidly filled with water, and except in the bank they could be only a foot or so in depth. With the whole area drenched with fire, which included heavy shells from coastal batteries in the Cadzand area far to the north,<sup>7</sup> coordinated action even on the platoon level was next to impossible. The counter-attacking enemy suffered numerous casualties, but so did our own troops.<sup>8</sup> Air and artillery support did not break the deadlock. On 12 October the Regina diarist wrote retrospectively,

Medical Officer advises us there have been between 250 and 300 casualties go through regimental aid post since 6 Oct, which is a grim reminder that this operation has been no push-over. It is the opinion that the past few days have seen some of the fiercest fighting since "D" Day. Lobbing grenades at enemy 10 yards away and continued attempts at infiltration have kept everyone on the jump. Ammunition has been used up in unbelievable quantities, men throwing as many as 25 grenades each a night. Artillery laid 2000 shells on our own front alone in 90 minutes on the evening of 10 Oct and our own Mortar Platoon expended 1064 rounds of HE in 3 hours. But we feel it has turned the trick. We have been able to cut enemy's ammunition route out of Eede and prisoners of war have that lean and hungry look.

Only in the early hours of 9 October did The Royal Winnipeg Rifles succeed in closing the gap between the two bridgeheads. Since the main road running north to Aardenburg was our obvious axis of advance, it was decided to push the entire brigade to the left, narrowing but deepening the bridgehead and providing cover for bridging operations on the line of the road. By early morning of 12 October, the Canadian Scottish had succeeded in pushing one company through the Reginas to a position astride the road. The Winnipegs had troops in the hamlet of Graaf Jan on the north edge of the dry area, and the Scottish on the 13th gained a foothold in the south end of Eede. That evening the 8th and 9th Field Squadrons R.C.E. (of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division) finished bridging the canals at Strooibrug. Next day the British Columbia Regiment had tanks in the bridgehead.<sup>9</sup> By this time the attack of the 9th Brigade against the rear of the German pocket was making its effect felt, and the worst was over. It had been an exhausting ordeal for the 7th Brigade. In seven days' fighting, through 12 October, the three battalions had had a total of 533 casualties. Of these 111 were fatal. The Regina Rifle Regiment had suffered by far the most heavily; including the company attached from the Royal Montreal Regiment, it had 280 casualties, 51 men losing their lives.<sup>10</sup>

### The Assault Across the Braakman

Operation "Switchback" took a course rather different from what had been expected. It seems evident that the 7th Brigade's effort was originally considered the main one, and we have seen that the 8th was to go in in support of it. But in the light of the opposition encountered on the Leopold Canal the attack by

Brigadier Rockingham's 9th Brigade from Terneuzen assumed a particular importance.

The 9th Brigade's amphibious operation was to be conducted with the aid of "Terrapins" and "Buffaloes" (Landing Vehicles, Tracked)—amphibious vehicles manned by the 5th Assault Regiment R.E., a unit of the endlessly useful 79th British Armoured Division. The plan was to "marry up" the infantry and the Buffaloes in the Ghent area, then swim the brigade in the vehicles up the Ghent-Terneuzen Canal to Terneuzen and thence on across the mouth of the Braakman inlet to land east of Hoofdplaat, in the rear of the German pocket, in the early morning of 8 October. But this was one of those cases where plans are defeated by circumstances. The battalions duly embarked near Ghent on the evening of 7 October, but unforeseen difficulties arose. Passing the Buffaloes through the locks at Sas van Gent proved arduous (they would not steer at slow speed), and then at Terneuzen itself it was found necessary to construct ramps and climb the Buffaloes out of the canal around damaged locks. This took time; some of the vehicles were injured; and there was no choice but to postpone the operation for 24 hours. This was unfortunate, both because of the strained situation on the Leopold Canal and the danger of loss of surprise; but the high canal banks shielded the Buffaloes from ground observation, all practicable security precautions were taken, and in the event no warning reached the Germans.<sup>11</sup>

The actual landing took place, then, in the early hours of 9 October. Soon after midnight the Buffaloes left the mouth of the canal at Terneuzen and sailed westward, led by a motorboat carrying Lieut.-Commander R. D. Franks, R.N., Naval Liaison Officer at H.Q. First Canadian Army, who had volunteered to act as navigator and guide. There were two columns, each of 48 vehicles, one carrying The North Nova Scotia Highlanders, who were to touch down on "Green Beach", a couple of miles east of Hoofdplaat, the other, carrying The Highland Light Infantry of Canada, being directed upon "Amber Beach", closer to the Braakman. The landing was set for 2:00 a.m. The beaches were marked, 15 minutes before this time, by coloured marker shells fired by our artillery, which then proceeded to fire other markers at other points to mislead the enemy. At five minutes to two the beaches were again marked. The leading craft actually touched down about five minutes late. The enemy had been taken by surprise. There was no opposition, except a few shots in the H.L.I. of C. area; and shelling from the German coastal batteries at Flushing, across the West Scheldt, did not begin till dawn.<sup>12</sup>

In these fortunate circumstances, the bridgehead was soon firm. A smokescreen was laid down with floats to protect the movement of craft from the German gunners, and by 9:30 a.m. the reserve battalion, The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, was ashore, accompanied by heavy mortars and machine-guns of The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.). The S.D. and G. directed their advance on Hoofdplaat, while the other battalions pressed southward.<sup>13</sup> The Germans were now recovering from their surprise and reacting with characteristic vigour, and shelling from Breskens and Flushing was troublesome. Opposition was heaviest on the front of the Highland Light Infantry, moving



against Biervliet. General Eberding had rapidly committed his divisional reserve against the new menace, and although he later described the reserve as composed of odds and ends<sup>14</sup> it fought well. It is of interest that "the prevailing mist" allowed the Germans to ferry two companies of the 70th Division across the Scheldt from Walcheren to reinforce the 64th in this crisis.<sup>15</sup> Our advance was slow. The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry captured Hoofdplaat on 10 October. Biervliet did not fall until the evening of the 11th, after the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment, the first reinforcement sent into the bridgehead, had relieved The Highland Infantry of Canada in the line and enabled it to mount an attack against the village.<sup>16</sup>

By now, General Spry had altered his basic plan as the result of the stalemate on the Leopold and the better progress made on the 9th Brigade's front. It had not been practicable to use the 8th Infantry Brigade on the Leopold as originally intended. On 9 October, orders were issued to this brigade to prepare for an attack by land through the Isabella area to link up with the 9th Brigade. On the 10th, however, the plan was changed again. Another attempt by The Algonquin Regiment to break through at Isabella, to open a route for the 8th Brigade, failed. The 9th Brigade's bridgehead was over-extended and there was a gap between the H.L.I. in Biervliet and The North Nova Scotia Highlanders on their right. The decision was now taken to land the 8th Brigade in the rear of the new bridge head.<sup>17</sup> Its leading battalion, The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, landed in the bridgehead on 11 October, coming under the 9th Brigade in the first instance. The following day the 8th Brigade was complete in the area and took over the left flank.<sup>18</sup>

The Germans were still battling fiercely, and their artillery fire was particularly effective. But the 64th Infantry Division was now under severe strain, and the break was about to come. On 14 October the 10th Infantry Brigade's long and unpleasant vigil along the Leopold Canal was finally rewarded. On 9-10 October patrols which The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada sent across the canal south of Watervliet had met as fierce opposition as the Algonquins encountered at Isabella. Now it was found that in both these areas the enemy was withdrawing, and the Algonquins and Argylls pushed forward accordingly. During the day Algonquin patrols made contact near the south-western angle of the Braakman with patrols of The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada coming down from the north.<sup>19</sup> The eastern end had been sliced off the German pocket, and it was now possible to open a land supply route through the Isabella sector and dispense with the ferry service that had been operating from Terneuzen.

The enemy was still holding hard in front of the 7th Brigade north of Strooibrug, and tough resistance was encountered here after Eede was found to be empty and was occupied on 16 October. But our troops' advance from the direction of the Braakman was bound to loosen the pressure on the Eede front. The 52nd (Lowland) Division (above, page 388) was now becoming available for action, and at last light on 18 October its 157th Infantry Brigade, having come under command of the 3rd Canadian Division, began to relieve the tired 7th

Brigade in the Leopold bridgehead.\* On 19 October the 157th occupied Aardenburg and Middelbourg without opposition. The same day the 7th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment made contact with troops of the British brigade at Aardenburg.<sup>20</sup> The enemy had now fallen back to a secondary defence line. With its left resting on Breskens, it ran thence through Schoondijke and Oostburg to Sluis, whence it followed the Sluis Canal to the Leopold. The 64th Division had lost many men—the 3rd Canadian Division had so far captured over 3000 prisoners<sup>21</sup>—but the Germans were now holding a shortened line and trouble was still to be expected.

General Spry's plan for breaking the new line<sup>22</sup> comprehended, first, the capture of Breskens and Schoondijke by the 9th Brigade. Thereafter the 7th Brigade, having had a short rest after its efforts on the Leopold, would pass through the 9th to clear the whole coastal area north-east of Cadzand. Simultaneously with this operation by the 7th Brigade, the 8th would capture Oostburg, Sluis and Cadzand and then clear up what remained of the German pocket between the Leopold Canal and the coast. The plan was to make considerable use of the special armour of the 79th Armoured Division, although it was realized that the terrain would interfere considerably with its employment. Unfortunately, however, the accidental explosion in Ijzendijke on 20 October of a vehicle carrying flamethrower fuel destroyed some ten armoured vehicles and caused 84 casualties.<sup>23</sup> Thus for the moment the role of the special armour was further curtailed.

On 21 October the assault on the new German line began when The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders attacked the defences of the little port town of Breskens. The weather was clear that morning, and air support was on a large scale. There was a heavy air blow at the Flushing batteries, and Typhoons "were used to good effect throughout the attack". By noon the town was clear, and patrols were pushing on in the direction of Fort Frederik Hendrik beyond. Next day The Highland Light Infantry of Canada attacked Schoondijke and met heavy opposition; the town was not finally cleared until the 24th.<sup>24</sup>

In the meantime preparations were made for the all-out assault on Fort Frederik Hendrik. Not much remained of this ancient work except its two lines of water defences, but inside them the Germans had built new concrete fortifications.<sup>25</sup> The position looked like a hard nut to crack; two companies of The North Nova Scotia Highlanders were beaten back from it on the 22nd, and plans were then made to attack it on 25 October after bombardment by artillery and medium bombers. But on the night of the 24th-25th a deserter from the fort reported that only 23 Germans remained there. He was sent back to threaten them with destruction if they did not come out, which they proceeded to do. The North Nova Scotias occupied the fort and took some additional prisoners. The 9th Brigade had now completed its share in the operation and was withdrawn to rest.<sup>26</sup> It was hoped that its temporary disappearance would trouble the enemy, who would be uncertain where it would appear next; and in fact it did have this effect.<sup>27</sup>

\*The 52nd Division was commanded by Major-General E. Hakewill Smith. It had been specially trained for mountain warfare, and was now to fight its first battle in terrain which was largely below sea level.

General Eberding had hoped to use Oostburg as a pivot on which to swing his left flank back to a system of concentric dykes centring on Cadzand; and General Spry had divined this intention. But Eberding's plan was disturbed by the speed with which the 7th Brigade now moved forward into the coastal area beyond Fort Frederik Hendrik.<sup>28</sup> On 24 October the Germans asked through one of their medical officers that Groede, which contained many civilians and a hospital full of wounded, should be treated as an open town; and since it did not appear to be defended this was agreed to. The 7th Brigade advanced on either side of Groede. We hoped to outflank Cadzand by a thrust along the coast, thereby capturing the enemy's divisional headquarters which was believed to be in the town. In attempting to effect this on 27 October the Canadian Scottish Regiment met a strong counter-attack which overran their leading company. The Germans reported that the main factor in this local success had been the accurate fire of the Walcheren batteries. But they then pulled out of Cadzand, which we occupied on the 29th.<sup>29</sup>

In the meantime the 8th Brigade had been pushing in on the left.\* The advance towards Oostburg was slow. "The ground throughout the area was saturated and movement restricted to roads on which the enemy had established numerous strong-points."<sup>31</sup> Oostburg was finally taken by the Queen's Own on 26 October. On the 29th enemy resistance lessened along the line in a manner suggesting another general withdrawal. Le Regiment de la Chaudiere captured Zuidzande that day.<sup>32</sup> The enemy was in fact pulling back over the Uitwaterings Canal, beyond the old fortified position of Retranchement. He was now penned in the last comer of his pocket.

On 30 October the 7th Brigade, advancing along the coast, found the enemy still in possession of well-fortified coastal batteries immediately north-west of Cadzand, and reducing these occupied it for the next three days. As late as the 27th, at least, the Germans had been supplying these positions with ammunition, and evacuating casualties from this area to Flushing, by sea; on that date 400 casualties reached Flushing safely.<sup>33</sup> But they were unable to evacuate their prisoners taken on the 27th; the Canadian Scottish got 35 of their missing comrades back on 2 November.<sup>34</sup> By the evening of 30 October the 8th Brigade had troops across the canal north of Sluis, and that night the 9th again moved into action. The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders and The Highland Light Infantry of Canada formed a bridgehead at Retranchement, and merely postponed their advance until the canal could be bridged behind them. As soon as this was accomplished the brigade pressed forward. On 1 November the H.L.I. of C. cleared "Little Tobruk", a formidable strongpoint just east of Knocke-sur-Mer. Corporal N. E. Tuttle worked under fire for twenty minutes or more, cutting a gap through the German wire; he then led his platoon through it to the assault, winning the D.C.M. The same day The North Nova Scotia Highlanders captured General

\*General brigade was now commanded temporarily by Lt.-Col. P.C. Klaehn of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. Brigadier Blackader had had to go into hospital in September. Lt.-Col. C. Lewis of the 17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars, who had been acting as Brigade Commander, was killed on 17 October while on his way to visit one of the battalions. On 29 October Lt. Col. J. A. Roberts, formerly commanding the 12th Manitoba Dragoons, took over the brigade and was subsequently promoted Brigadier.<sup>30</sup>

Eberding at Het Zoute nearby; the North Shore Regiment took Sluis, with its ancient fortifications; and the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A., fighting as infantry, crossed the Sluis Canal at its junction with the Leopold and cleared the north bank.<sup>35</sup>

Operation "Switchback" was virtually brought to completion on 2 November. The 9th Brigade had cleared the area of Knocke and Heyst; the 7th had ended the resistance in the coastal strongpoints near Cadzand; and the 8th had cleaned up the last enemy in the flooded area south of Knocke. The 7th Reconnaissance Regiment, which had latterly taken over the task of containing the enemy's western flank, found no enemy in Zeebrugge or between the Bruges Ship Canal and the Leopold on the morning of 3 November. At 9:50 a.m. that day the entry was made in the operations log at Headquarters 3rd Division, "Op Switchback now complete"; and somebody wrote beside it, "Thank God!"<sup>36</sup>

It had been, to put it mildly, an unusually demanding operation. The polder country where it took place is said to have been described by a Belgian military manual as "generalement impropre aux operations militaires".<sup>37</sup> In this opinion the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division would certainly have warmly concurred. The enemy had fought with determination and skill, making the most of the difficulties imposed upon us by the terrain; a First Canadian Army intelligence summary issued on 7 November called the 64th "the best infantry division we have met". The numerous heavy guns in the Atlantic Wall coast defences, particularly strong in this area, gave it powerful support. During the operation the 3rd Division captured 12,707 prisoners.<sup>38</sup> Many Germans had been killed, and as we have seen some hundreds of wounded had been evacuated from the Pocket. The 3rd Division's own casualties as computed at the time had numbered 2077, of which 314 were known to have been fatal. Of the 231 then "missing", most had certainly lost their lives.<sup>39</sup>

The battlefield had been very unsuitable for armour, and tanks had therefore played only a limited part, though when they could come into action they were most helpful. The artillery, on the other hand, had been constantly active and invaluable; linear and pinpoint concentrations, brought down on call, had been used to particular advantage.<sup>40</sup> Air support, when the weather permitted, was heavy and excellent; it was calculated that 1733 fighter sorties and 508 medium and heavy sorties were flown on behalf of the division during the operation.<sup>41</sup> The engineers, as we have seen, had played an important part. All arms and services, indeed, deserved large credit. But the circumstances of the battle had placed the main burden throughout upon the infantry soldier.

Before the Breskens pocket was finally liquidated, British forces were already ashore on Walcheren Island north of the West Scheldt. However, the capture of Breskens and Fort Frederik Hendrik on 21-5 October provided us with positions from which our artillery could be brought into action against Walcheren before the assault on that island. The withdrawal of guns for that task left the 3rd Division comparatively little artillery support in the final stages of "Switchback".<sup>42</sup> To the operations north of the Scheldt we must now return.

## Operation "Vitality": The Clearing of South Beveland

As we have noted (above, page 391), the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division began its operation against South Beveland on 24 October, when the division's right flank had been cleared by the operations of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division directed on Bergen op Zoom.\*

It was hoped to get forward rapidly, by-passing opposition, and seize crossings over the Beveland Canal. The Royal Regiment of Canada was to overcome the enemy's first line of defences; then two mixed columns of armour (from the 10th Armoured Regiment and 8th Reconnaissance Regiment) and infantry of the Essex Scottish in armoured 15-cwt. vehicles were to make the dash. After half an hour's bombardment by seven field and medium regiments, the attack went in at 4:30 a.m. on 24 October. The Royals rapidly overran the enemy's defences at the narrowest part of the isthmus, but thereafter met trouble. Mines and mud made a secondary road on the south side of the isthmus impassable, and Brigadier Cabeldu accordingly put in the Essex along the railway embankment in the north. But after several tanks and reconnaissance cars had been knocked out by a wellplaced anti-tank gun, the scheme of pushing through with the armoured columns was perforce abandoned. The operation again became one for the infantry. Real progress across the flat and flooded isthmus could not be made until after nightfall on the 24th. By evening on the 25th The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry had taken Rilland and advanced some distance beyond.<sup>44</sup> With its leading troops in the area of Krabbendijke, the 4th Brigade, its men "very tired as a result of the constant fighting and movement in the past 48 hours over difficult country", was halted on the 26th and the 6th Brigade passed through to continue the advance.<sup>45</sup>

The Canadians were now approaching the Beveland Canal, and the time had come for the amphibious attack across the West Scheldt by the 52nd (Lowland) Division to turn the Canal line. It was delivered in the early hours of 26 October. Again the flotilla (this time including some naval assault landing craft) set out from Terneuzen, and again Lieut.-Commander Franks acted as navigator. Our artillery fired heavily on the landing areas beginning at 4:30 a.m.; and at 4:50 the 156th Infantry Brigade landed successfully on two beaches in the Hoedekenskerke area. There was slight opposition on the north beach, none on the south; and although some resistance developed during the day the 156th enlarged its bridgehead successfully and captured Oudelande.<sup>46</sup> Thus the formidable Beveland Canal had been outflanked before the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade began the frontal attack towards it that afternoon.

The 6th Brigade attacked with all three battalions up, The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada on the right, The South Saskatchewan Regiment in the centre, directed on the main road and railway crossings over the canal, and Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal on the left pointing for the southern terminus of the canal at Hansweert. During the day the brigade lost its commander, Brigadier

\*On 25 October the 2nd Division's advance was designated "Vitality I" and the 52nd Division's operation across the Scheldt "Vitality II".<sup>43</sup>

Gauvreau, who was seriously hurt when his jeep struck a mine. Lt.-Col. E. P. Thompson of the Camerons took over. The Camerons made the fastest progress, reaching the canal during the night of the 26th-27th. The other units were hampered by mortar and small arms fire, mines and road blocks, but the South Saskatchewan got to the canal in the early morning of the 27th. The bridges had of course been blown; but fortunately the enemy's resistance was not well organized and was less of a handicap than the extensive flooding. By midnight of the 27th-28th the South Saskatchewan had crossed the canal, using assault boats, and in the early morning the Fusiliers also got over. Opposition was heaviest on the right, and the Camerons met fierce fire when they tried to cross; they were finally told to desist and concentrate upon preventing the enemy from damaging the important locks at the north end of the canal.<sup>47</sup> Early in the afternoon of the 28th the engineers finished bridging the canal on the main road, and about the same time the 4th Brigade again came forward to take over from the 6th. The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry led the new advance against only moderate opposition and on the morning of the 29th The Royal Regiment of Canada linked up with the 156th Brigade in the vicinity of Gravenpolder.<sup>48</sup>

With the canal line gone, the Germans were apparently now thinking mainly of getting out of South Beveland, and on the 29th both the 2nd Division and the 52nd made rapid progress. The 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade had come in on the right, and The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada took Goes, South Beveland's capital town, during the day ("The men had to kiss babies and sign autographs all the way through town").<sup>49</sup> The 2nd Division, which had thought its work would be done when South Beveland was clear, was now allotted the task of crossing the causeway to Walcheren, and by late afternoon of the 30th the Royal Regiment was within half a mile of its eastern end. Brigadier Keebler, the acting divisional commander, had told the 4th and 5th Brigades (to encourage rapid advance) that the brigade reaching the area first would hold the near end of the causeway; the other would then push across it and form a small bridgehead. Thereafter the 157th Brigade of the 52nd Division would relieve it for the further operations on Walcheren.<sup>50</sup> During the morning of 31 October, accordingly, the Royals, supported by heavy mortars and artillery, cleared the bunkers at the east end of the causeway, capturing 153 prisoners.<sup>51</sup> This completed the task of the 4th Brigade, and the 5th took over for the difficult job of obtaining a bridgehead on Walcheren.

On this same day on which the clearing of South Beveland was completed, a largely independent minor operation was launched against the neighbouring island of North Beveland, through which parts of the retreating enemy force were seeking to withdraw by sea. A squadron of the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment commanded by Major C. R. H. Porteous ferried itself over to the island across the channel called the Zandkreek, and with the support of heavy mortars and machine-guns of The Toronto Scottish Regiment (M.G.) rapidly overran it, completing the task by noon on 2 November. North Beveland yielded over 450 prisoners.<sup>52</sup>



THE LEOPOLD CANAL, LOOKING EAST, 1946

On this reach the units of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade made their assault crossing on the morning of 6 October 1944. The bridge in the background is near Oosthoek.



BIERVLIET FROM THE EAST, 1946

This is the area where the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade fought following its landing in the rear of the Breskens Pocket on 9 October 1944.



#### ATLANTIC WALL DEFENCES NEAR CADZAND

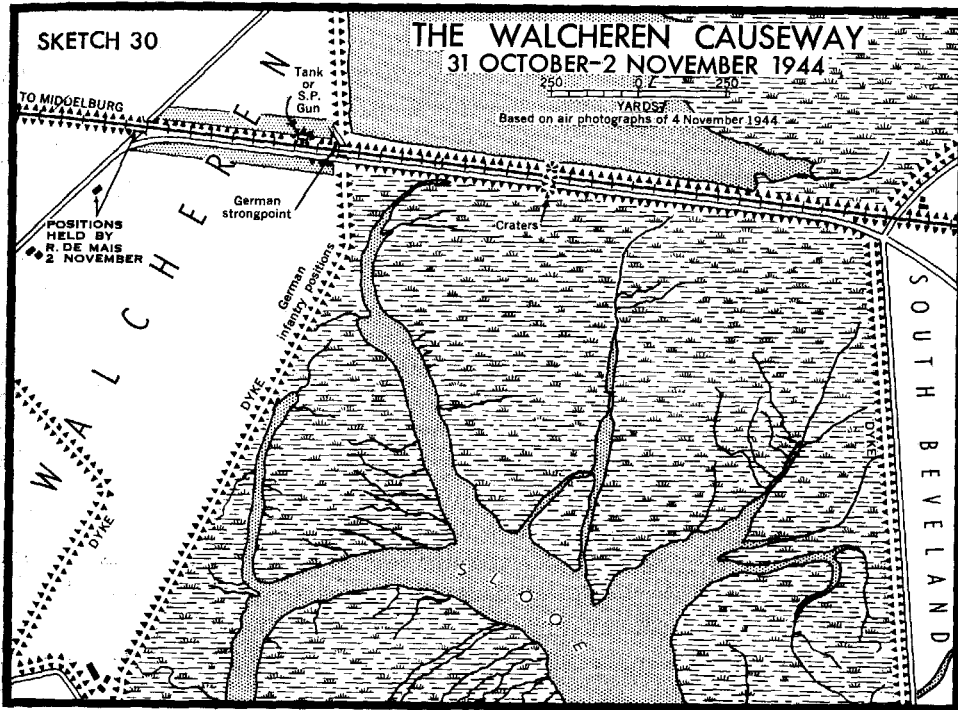
The gun at the right, capable of all-round traverse, could be used against Canadian troops on the Leopold Canal and elsewhere in the Breskens Pocket. The Walcheren coastline is on the horizon, across the mouth of the Scheldt. Photograph taken in 1946.



#### THE WALCHEREN CAUSEWAY, LOOKING EAST TOWARDS SOUTH BEVELAND

This picture was taken in the autumn of 1946 (at low tide). What appears to be a grassy field at the right is actually weed-grown mud.





The Fight for the Walcheren Causeway

The causeway leading from South Beveland to Walcheren was singularly uninviting. It was some 1200 yards long and only about 40 yards wide, with sodden reed-grown mud-flats on either side. It was as straight as a gun-barrel and offered no cover except bomb-craters and some roadside slit trenches dug by the Germans in accordance with their custom. The line of spindly trees fringing its southern edge had been badly blasted. The causeway carried the railway line (a single track, the second track having been removed) and the main road; also the characteristic Dutch bicycle-path. At its western end, although it abutted upon one of the few dry areas of Walcheren, there was a wide water-filled ditch on each side of the embankment. The German engineers had been unable to cut the causeway completely, but they had cratered it very heavily just west of its centre, creating a transverse "furrow" which filled with water arm-pit-deep. This made the causeway impassable to tanks or other vehicles. The Germans' artillery had certainly registered carefully upon it. They had infantry positions dug into the eastern dyke of Walcheren on either side of the causeway; the road at its western end was heavily blocked; there was a tank or possibly a self-propelled gun dug into the railway embankment just west of the block, and in addition there are reports of a high-velocity gun firing straight down the road.<sup>53</sup>

Although an assault along the causeway promised to be difficult and very costly, the headquarters of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade saw no alternative. The

possibility of using amphibious vehicles to cross the mud and water to the north or south was considered, but there was not enough water to enable them to swim more than a short part of the way, and it appeared that the mud-flats intervening between the open channel and the Walcheren shore were an impassable barrier to either wheels or tracks. Accordingly, it was decided that the infantry would have to attack across the causeway, and Brigadier Megill set up a tactical headquarters in a house about a mile south-east of its eastern end to control the operation.<sup>54</sup>

The first attempt was made early in the afternoon of 31 October by the Canadian Black Watch with one company. They met extremely heavy fire from artillery, mortars and machine-guns and suffered many casualties. "The enemy was firing at least one very heavy gun the shells of which raised plumes of water 200 feet high when they fell short. He was also ricocheting armour-piercing shells down the causeway, which was hard on the morale of the men."<sup>55</sup> At 3:35 in the afternoon it was reported that our leading troops were only 25 yards from the eastern dyke of Walcheren and "trying to inch forward". But the Black Watch made no further progress and were withdrawn that evening. Brigadier Megill now put in The Calgary Highlanders to renew the attack. The intention was that the Calgaries should advance across the causeway and move out to the right, with Le Regiment de Maisonneuve concentrated behind ready to move across and "fan out to the left".<sup>56</sup> The leading Calgary company, moving on to the causeway about 11:00 p.m., met the same sort of opposition and the Commanding Officer (Major R. L. Ellis) was given permission to withdraw. 'Brigadier Megill now arranged heavy artillery support for another attack by the battalion, first timed, it appears, for 5:15 a.m. on 1 November and twice postponed; it finally went in at 6:05.<sup>57</sup>

At 7:10 a.m. the leading company reported that it had met a "very extensive road block" at the end of the causeway, and was encountering much machine-gun fire and some sniping, as well as heavy-calibre shelling; it hoped however that "given some time" it could get through. Ten minutes later the company was reported through the block and less than 100 yards from the open, still moving forward in spite of machine-gun fire and shelling. At 8:00 a.m. it was held up at the extreme west end of the causeway, still not clear of it. During the morning progress was made and about noon all the platoons of the leading company were on the mainland of Walcheren, a second company had passed through them and the others were moving up.<sup>58</sup> One of the companies having lost its only two officers, the Brigade Major of the 5th Brigade, Major George Hees, obtained permission to go across and take command of it; an artillery Forward Observation Officer, Captain W. C. Newman, accompanied him.<sup>59</sup> It now seemed that the bridgehead on Walcheren was firm. An armoured bulldozer had a try at filling in the big crater; but "30 seconds later it was driven off by a short sharp burst of 5 88-mm. shells". The enemy had not loosed his grip. On the contrary, about 5:30 p.m. he put in "a determined counter-attack".<sup>60</sup> No one who was there set down any details, though the 1st Battalion of the Glasgow Highlanders (Highland Light Infantry), who were waiting to move across into Walcheren, recorded a

rumour that flame-throwers had been used.<sup>61</sup> At any rate, at 6:00 p.m. it was reported that the Calgary's leading troops were back on the causeway, 300 yards from the western end.<sup>62</sup> The battalion's two least tired companies took up a defensive position near the crater, the others being withdrawn.<sup>63</sup>

Brigadier Megill now put in his third and last battalion, Le Regiment de Maisonneuve.\* In consultation with the commander of the 157th Brigade of the Lowland Division, he arranged that the Maisonneuves should attack across the causeway with heavy artillery support at 4:00 a.m. on 2 November and re-establish the bridgehead on Walcheren. In accordance with orders from divisional headquarters, they would then be relieved at 5:00 a.m., before dawn, by the 157th Brigade's leading unit, the Glasgow Highlanders.<sup>64</sup>

The attack began on time, with three medium regiments firing counter-battery tasks and three field regiments firing a barrage. However, the same sort of opposition that had greeted the earlier advances came down to meet the Maisonneuves. "D" Company, which was leading, was 200 yards short of the west end of the causeway at 4:15. Thereafter it progressed slowly and at 6:30 was reported in positions on the mainland 200 yards north and the same distance south of the causeway.<sup>65</sup> The other companies did not cross, the foremost one getting no more than half-way;<sup>66</sup> and after five o'clock they were ordered out. It was now understood that the Glasgow Highlanders would commence to relieve "D" Company at 6:00 a.m.<sup>67</sup>

An advance across the causeway was still a very unpleasant prospect. At 5:20 the commander of the 157th Brigade told the Glasgow Highlanders' commanding officer that the relief was to go on, but that his battalion was not to put across any more troops than Le Regiment de Maisonneuve had, "after deducting casualties". The Glasgow C.O., having consulted Lt.-Col. J. Bibeau of the Maisonneuves, who told him that he believed he had not more than 40 men alive in the forward area, agreed to relieve the Maisonneuves with one platoon. Shortly afterwards Major Hees, who had been forward in the Maisonneuve bridgehead, came back across the causeway and reported the way clear and the Maisonneuves on their first objectives. At 6:10, accordingly, a single platoon of the 1st Battalion of the Glasgow Highlanders started across the causeway. Major Hees accompanied them and in so doing was wounded by a sniper.<sup>68</sup>

For the next seven or eight hours the small groups of Maisonneuves clung to the exiguous bridgehead. During this period Private J. C. Carriere won the Military Medal by crawling forward down a water-filled ditch and knocking out with a PIAT a 20-mm. gun which was harassing the position.<sup>69</sup> Relieving the Maisonneuve parties was "a matter of first importance"; Brigadier Megill pressed Brigadier J. D. Russell of the 157th Brigade on this point, and both brigadiers pressed the commanding officer of the Glasgow Highlanders. Since the enemy opposition was as fierce as ever, carrying out this relief was far from easy. But additional Glasgow men gradually followed the first platoon across, and at 11:55 a.m. another platoon

\*The best sources of information for the events of 2 November on and about the causeway are the log of the 5th Brigade's tactical headquarters and the very detailed diary kept by the 1st Glasgow Highlanders. The Maisonneuve diary gives very little detail.

joined the elements of the Maisonneuves who were holding a house and a railway underpass some 500 yards west of the end of the causeway. But the situation was too unpleasant to enable the Canadians to get out at once. About two hours later, under cover of smoke fired by the 5th Canadian Field Regiment,\* both the Glasgow platoon and the Maisonneuves withdrew; three Highlanders remained in the house with a wounded man.<sup>71</sup>

These soldiers of the Maisonneuve, and the gunners who covered their retirement, were the last troops of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division to be engaged in the Battle of the Scheldt, except for a platoon of the 7th Field Company R.C.E. who "corduroyed the crater" on the causeway on the morning of the 3rd.<sup>72</sup> The division, desperately tired, now withdrew to rest about Malines. Since the crossing of the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal late in September it had captured over 5200 Germans and killed an unknown number more. Its own casualties in all categories were computed at the time as 207 officers and 3443 other ranks. The 5th Brigade's battalions had had a total of 135 casualties in the three days' fighting at the causeway.<sup>73</sup>

Since the Glasgow Highlanders were having, for the moment, no better fortune than the Canadians in enlarging the tiny bridgehead at the west end of the causeway, other means of progress had to be found. The 52nd Division's C.R.A., Brigadier L. B. D. Burns, with an improvised headquarters known as "Burnfor", had taken charge of the Division's two infantry brigades attacking Walcheren from this direction. In addition, the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade and the 5th Field Regiment R.C.A. seem to have been briefly under Burnfor.<sup>74</sup> Attention now turned again to the possibility of an attack across the Slooe Channel south of the causeway. The use of amphibious vehicles, as the 5th Brigade had concluded, was out of the question. The only alternative was to use assault boats to cross the open channel and thereafter for the infantry to struggle on foot across and through 1500 yards of "soft wet sand" which was often unpleasantly like quicksand. Beginning at 3.30 a.m. in the morning of 3 November the 6th (Lanarkshire) Battalion of The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) got across in this manner from a little harbour two miles south of the causeway to the extreme south-eastern point of Walcheren. Fortunately the crossing was nearly unopposed, but resistance developed and stiffened after dawn. By noon the leading Cameronians were reported well inland from the point of landing. Yet the Germans continued to fight hard in this unflooded part of Walcheren, and the new bridgehead was not linked up with that at the end of the causeway until early on 4 November, by which time opposition on the island was beginning to collapse.<sup>75</sup>

### Preparations for the Landings on Walcheren

It is important to remember that while the operations just described were proceeding on the eastern shore of Walcheren, the island was being assailed from two other directions: by an amphibious attack on Flushing across the West Scheldt

\*This fire plan was "laid on" by Lieut. D. G. Inns of the 5th Field Regiment, working as a Forward Observation Officer with "D" Company of La Regiment de Maisonneuve, who remained at his post though wounded. He received the Military Cross.<sup>70</sup>

(Operation "Infatuate I") and by a seaborne assault at the western point of the island at Westkapelle ("Infatuate II"). The costly opposed landing at Westkapelle became the most controversial portion of the whole Scheldt battle. The preliminaries of the "Infatuate" operations must therefore be reviewed.

Walcheren was fortified with what Combined Operations Headquarters later called "some of the strongest defences in the world".<sup>76</sup> Heavy batteries were particularly numerous on its western beaches facing the North Sea. The guns ranged up to 22-cm. (8.7-inch) in the battery (W 17) just west of Domburg, but those which proved most formidable were W 15, immediately north of Westkapelle (mounting four 3.7-inch British anti-aircraft guns), W 13, on the dunes south-east of Westkapelle (four 15-cm. or 5.9-inch guns) and—less dangerous at Westkapelle because of its distance from the assault area—W 11, about two and a half miles west of Flushing (four 5.9-inch guns).<sup>\*</sup> There were numerous smaller guns and several heavy anti-aircraft batteries. The heavy coastal guns were all manned by the 202nd Naval Coast Artillery Battalion. The flooding resulting from our breaching of the dykes had put a number of batteries out of action. Unfortunately, however, most of the coastal batteries, including the four specifically mentioned above, were all on the perimeter dyke itself, and did not suffer directly from the flooding, except, as we shall see, for some important interference with ammunition supply. Our intelligence concerning the defences was in general excellent.<sup>77</sup>

There were three possible means of destroying or neutralizing these positions: naval bombardment, artillery fire from south of the Scheldt, and air action. The reasons which made naval bombardment impracticable before D Day are noted below (page 409).

The artillery programme was coordinated by the C.C.R.A. 2nd Canadian Corps, Brigadier A. Bruce Matthews. He had a great force of artillery at his disposal. But the effectiveness of his guns, though formidable in the Flushing area, was much reduced at Westkapelle, which is roughly nine miles from the northernmost point of the mainland. Only those heavy regiments armed with 155-mm. guns, and the single super-heavy regiment with its 240-mm. howitzers and 8-inch guns,<sup>†</sup> could reach the batteries north of Westkapelle.<sup>79</sup>

On 31 October Brigadier Matthews had available for the Walcheren operation the field artillery of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division (less the 5th Field Regiment, which, along with the artillery of the 52nd Division, was supporting the operations at the causeway) with the 61st and 110th Field Regiments R.A. under command; the 2nd Canadian Army Group Royal Artillery, consisting of the 3rd and 4th Medium Regiments R.C.A., the 15th Medium Regiment R.A., the 1st and 52nd Heavy Regiments R.A. (the latter less two 155-mm. batteries), and the 3rd Super-Heavy Regiment R.A.; the 9th Army Group Royal Artillery, having under its command the 9th, 10th, 11th and 107th Medium Regiments R.A., the

<sup>\*</sup>The numbers here applied to batteries are those that were used to designate them in Allied target lists. Our Intelligence before the assault credited W 15 with four 15-cm. guns. This had in fact been its armament in April 1944, but by June it had been altered. The 15-cm. guns seem to have been Moved to the Zoutelande battery (W 13).

<sup>†</sup>These three weapons (all of U.S. type) had maximum ranges, respectively, of 26,000, 25,000 and 35,000 yards. The 3rd Super-Heavy Regiment R.A. had two 8-inch guns and four 240-mm. Howitzers available for "Infatuate".<sup>78</sup>

51st Heavy Regiment R.A. and the 59th (Newfoundland) Heavy Regiment R.A. (less one 155-mm. battery); and the 76th Anti-Aircraft Brigade R.A. with the 112th and 113th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiments R.A. under command.<sup>80</sup> The total number of guns seems to have been 314 (a calculation of 338 made on 27 October assumed the presence of five field regiments, whereas only four were actually available).<sup>81</sup> The main gun group was in position to answer calls for fire either from the Flushing operation or the Westkapelle operation; the 2nd A.G.R.A. had its gun areas in the region roughly west of a line running south from Fort Frederik Hendrik, the 9th A.G.R.A. east of this line. Since the landings were not simultaneous, it was possible to bring the main weight of artillery to bear in support of the Flushing assault before the landing, and subsequently switch it to Westkapelle.<sup>82</sup> But the field regiments, armed with 25-pounders, were unable, for lack of range, to take part at Westkapelle.<sup>83</sup>

Although no detailed counter-battery programme was prepared to be fired before D Day, increasing fire was brought down on located hostile batteries and other targets during the days before the assault as guns became available. Since parts of the gun areas were not cleared until 29 October, some regiments got into position only in time to take part in the D Day shoot. One of the last heavy shoots before D Day was on the evening of 31 October, when enemy guns north-west of Flushing which had been shelling Breskens were engaged by three medium regiments.<sup>84</sup>

A detailed time programme was prepared for firing on D Day, with three alternative plans for "Infatuate I" which might be used as ordered, according as whether "Infatuate II" was carried out or cancelled.<sup>85</sup> For "Infatuate II" there was a timed programme beginning at 70 minutes before H Hour and continuing until 60 minutes past it. Battery W 11 was to be engaged throughout this period by 7.2-inch guns and for a time by mediums. W 13 was to be steadily engaged from H minus 70 until H minus 5 by the 3rd Super-Heavy Regiment. W 15 was to be bombarded by 155-mm. guns of the 1st and 59th Heavy Regiments from H minus 70 to H minus 20.

A new bombardment element was present on this occasion—an experimental rocket battery armed with 12 projectors developed in the United Kingdom as a Canadian project and known by the quaint code name "Land Mattresses". Manned for "Infatuate" by the 112th Battery of the 6th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment R.C.A., these weapons were fired for the first time on 1 November, their targets being enemy positions about Flushing. Although the results could not be observed, the experiment made a good impression, which was heightened when the unit supported the Poles near Moerdijk on 6-8 November. Accordingly, the "1st Canadian Rocket Battery" was formed and remained an active element of First Canadian Army until the end of hostilities.<sup>86</sup>

It was the air plan on which later controversy chiefly centred. We have seen that First Canadian Army asked in the very beginning for prolonged heavy bombing of the Walcheren positions, but that Field-Marshal Montgomery concurred in the opinion of Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory that this should not be done (above,

pages 359, 378). Although Leigh-Mallory had taken the precaution of obtaining General Eisenhower's concurrence in principle, it appears nevertheless that in the early days of October the Supreme Commander insisted, through his Deputy, that Walcheren should rank as first priority for the heavy bomber force. This was the period when the dykes were being breached. But many senior Allied air officers believed that it was now more important to strike heavy blows against German communications and industry than to afford direct support to the armies. Specifically, the Deputy Supreme Commander and members of the SHAEF air staff\* had evolved a plan known as Operation "Hurricane" involving particularly heavy Anglo-American bomber attacks against targets in the Ruhr. Though weather caused the cancellation of this particular plan, which had been due to be launched on 15 October, the general preoccupation with targets in Germany was not affected. The German petroleum industry, as already noted (above, page 377) was now the air forces' preferred first priority. On 24 October Air Chief Marshal Tedder, presumably acting with the authority of the Supreme Commander, forbade further heavy bomber attacks against the Walcheren dykes (which in any case had already been satisfactorily breached) and ordered a Joint Air Plan for "Infatuate" to be made by the 2nd Tactical Air Force and the First Canadian Army. On the same day No. 84 Group R.A.F. was instructed by the 2nd Tactical Air Force to take over from the heavy bombers the task of silencing a number of batteries.<sup>88</sup>

The Air Plan for Operation "Infatuate" was in fact made by No. 84 Group in consultation with H.Q. First Canadian Army and was dated 27 October.<sup>89</sup> This document's comment on the problem of the Walcheren defences may be quoted. After remarking, "The light scale of equipment of the [assaulting] forces used and their vulnerability to shore defences coupled with the need to capture the island quickly makes the thorough destruction of these defences a necessity", it proceeded:

5. There are three means by which the Walcheren defences might be put out of action before D Day
  - (i) air bombardment
  - (ii) naval bombardment
  - (iii) bombardment by artillery based in the Breskens area.Naval bombardment is being used to cover the Assault itself and all ammunition carried in the ships will be required for this purpose. If these ships were used for pre-D Day bombardment, they would have to return to U.K. to rearm before the Assault. Return and rearm takes three days. Their lack of effect (compared with air bombardment) and this gap of three days rules out naval bombardment as a preparatory measure.
6. Shore-based artillery is being moved up towards Breskens but cannot be mounted in any strength until the Breskens bridgehead has been cleared of the enemy. Moreover, ammunition supply difficulties for the heavy and super heavy guns limits their use before D Day.
7. We have to rely therefore on air bombardment for the necessary destruction of the defences before D Day. Some of this bombardment is being undertaken by aircraft of 84 Group. Many of the defences, however, are concrete gun emplacements and heavy pillboxes which cannot be put out of action by the weight of attack this Group is able to deliver. [These must therefore be attacked by Bomber Command.]....

\*It may be noted here that when Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Air Force was dissolved on 15 October (below, page 420) "Air Staff, SHAEF" took its place. To the disappointment of American airmen who hoped for the appointment of a U.S. officer, the new staff was headed by Air Marshal J. M. Robb, R.A.F.<sup>87</sup>

19. It can hardly be expected that all the defences attacked by Bomber Command will be completely destroyed and some may be effective or be repaired after bombardment but before the Assaults. Some of these defences that have come to life again may vitally jeopardize the Assault, particularly the guns near Flushing and near Westkapelle. Should this happen, it is most desirable that Bomber Command should be requested to attack these individual targets again when possible, up to the agreed times of last bombing for each Assault.

The Army and No. 84 Group had agreed upon schedules of targets on Walcheren within and outside the resources of No. 84 Group. The schedule of targets outside the Group's capacity was repeatedly amended, the latest complete version being prepared on 22 October. The 33 targets listed in it as amended comprised four batteries (W 11, W 13, W 17 and W 15) which were considered to affect minesweeping or the deployment of bombardment ships; seven batteries capable of firing on to the south bank of the West Scheldt (three of these were cancelled before D Day); seven anti-aircraft batteries affecting the operations of No. 84 Group (one of these was cancelled before D Day); six other batteries (of which all but two were cancelled before D Day); and nine strongpoints and concrete emplacements.\* (In addition, the "defended area" at Flushing was added as a "special target" after the main document was issued.)<sup>90</sup> The covering memorandum remarked, "Targets are not listed in a rigid order of priority but are listed in a general sequence which may be taken as a guide to what is operationally desirable." This appears to mean that the order in which the targets were listed (apart from the "special target", that just given), represented a general order of priority, with the four batteries capable of interfering with minesweeping or bombardment coming first. These four batteries were also those which represented the most serious menace to the actual infantry assault.

First Canadian Army and No. 84 Group asked that the targets listed might be "appropriately engaged on a programme of bombing to be completed by" midnight 31 October-1 November. They added, "Insofar as may be practicable, it would be desirable for this programme to be compressed into the period" between midnight 28-29 October and midnight 31 October-1 November. This amounted to a request that the R.A.F. Bomber Command should engage all the targets listed within the space of three days before the assault.<sup>91</sup> On the question of D Day air support, the Air Plan asked for "preliminary heavy bombardment of the defences and a small area in the town and waterfront" of Flushing as late as possible before the landing, weather permitting. At Westkapelle the air support was to come entirely from within the resources of No: 84 Group.<sup>92</sup> (A Commando conference on bombing on 21 October had agreed that it was undesirable that the heavy bombers should bomb Westkapelle, "as a bad shot might hit the dyke and so render it impossible for tanks to negotiate".<sup>93</sup> This evidently referred only to the village and not to the adjacent batteries.)

Bomber Command went a considerable distance towards meeting the Air Plan's request. Significant daylight attacks were delivered against Walcheren on 28, 29 and 30 October. On the first of these days, 261 heavy bombers attacked guns at Flushing and the dangerous batteries near Dishoek (W 11), Domburg (W 17),

\*The cancellations were chiefly due to flooding.



Westkapelle (W 15) and Oostkapelle (W 19). In all the attacks together, some 1189 tons of high explosive were dropped. The largest single attack ever delivered against Walcheren was that on 29 October, when 358 aircraft were sent out and 327 attacked, directed upon 11 aiming points. On this day 1562 tons of H.E. were dropped. On 30 October, a further attack was made, but by only 89 aircraft which dropped 555 tons.\* At this point the weather took a hand. Bomber Command could not operate over Holland during the day of the 31st, and the Flushing attack planned for the night before D Day also had to be cancelled. However, the attacks planned for the 31st were not heavy, and none of the intended targets was in the Westkapelle area: 25 Lancasters each were to attack W 1, W 3, W 6, and W 33—all near Flushing. Thus the cancellations had no effect on the Westkapelle assault. From 17 September through 30 October, Bomber Command had flown 2219 sorties against Walcheren and dropped 10,219 tons of bombs.<sup>94</sup>

While it is evident that considerable effort had been directed against Walcheren, the weight of bombs was much less than that dropped in support of the Army in the Normandy campaign or at the Channel Ports (one remembers the 3700 tons dropped in Operation "Tractable", the 3200 dropped in a single attack on Boulogne). The fact is that even in the final period before the assault Walcheren was not being given the highest priority among Bomber Command targets. During the night 30-31 October, for example, 984 aircraft of the Command attacked Cologne, dropping 4142 tons. On the following night 493 aircraft again attacked Cologne, dropping 2703 tons.† On 28 October, when as we have seen between 200 and 300 bombers attacked Walcheren, 734 hit Cologne in a day attack, dropping 2911 tons. During the whole month of October, Bomber Command made 1,106 sorties against factories and oil refineries, dropping 5306 U.S. tons, and 10,930 sorties against city areas (51,312 tons); but "army support and tactical targets" got only 1616 sorties and 9728 tons.<sup>95</sup>

At the headquarters of the 4th Special Service Brigade, which carried out the Flushing and Westkapelle assaults, there seems to have been a feeling after the operation that "there had not been sufficient insistence by First Cdn Army" on getting the weight of air support which the circumstances required.<sup>96</sup> Actually, the Air Plan represented everything that the naval and military Force Commanders for "Infatuate II" had asked for (below, page 412); though it is highly probable that a document prepared by Army Headquarters alone, and not requiring to be signed jointly with No. 84 Group, would have been more strongly phrased. The direct link to Bomber Command which Army Headquarters had asked for had been refused; negotiations had to be conducted through No. 84 Group.<sup>97</sup> Experience in Normandy and at the Channel Ports suggests that if it had been possible to deal direct with Air Chief Marshal Harris the bomber effort at Walcheren.. might have been heavier and lives might have been saved.

\*In all the attacks on Walcheren during October, including those directed against the dykes, Bomber Command lost six aircraft. Four were lost in a single attack, that on the Flushing batteries on 23 October'

†It would seem that, although the weather interfered with operations over Holland on the night of 31 October-1 November, it was better over Germany. Weather prevented any operations by the heavy day bombers of the U.S. Eighth Air Force on 31 October.

The work of Bomber Command was of course far from being the whole story of air action against Walcheren before D Day. A total of 646 sorties were flown against the island by the 2nd Tactical Air Force on the three days 28-30 October.<sup>98</sup>

### The Final Plan and the Decision to Assault

Walcheren was a name of ill omen, for the island had been the scene of a famous British fiasco during the wars with Napoleon. This time the result was to be happier; but the price of victory was high.

The landings on Walcheren were carried out by British troops. The 4th Special Service Brigade, commanded by Brigadier B. W. Leicester, made the assaults. At Westkapelle, where its main body went in, it operated directly under the 2nd Canadian Corps, which in turn was under First Canadian Army. Once well ashore, the brigade would come under the 52nd (Lowland) Division, which would then be in charge of all the military operations on Walcheren. At Flushing, one commando of the Special Service Brigade led the attack, followed by a brigade of the 52nd Division. While the final planning and preliminary operations were going on, Brigadier Leicester's brigade was training near Ostend.<sup>99</sup> It was to be landed at Westkapelle by the Royal Navy's Force "T", commanded by Captain Pugsley. The Acting Corps Commander (General Foulkes) exercised control of the operation from Ijzendijke, south-east of Breskens, where also his artillery commander set up his command post.<sup>100</sup>

Fixing the date of the assaults was itself difficult. The two earliest periods when tidal conditions would permit of landings were 1-4 November and 14-17 November.<sup>101</sup> At a conference on 20 October General Foulkes explained that the Buffaloes being used in the attack on South Beveland could not reach Ostend before the 30th and (having regard to the need for some training with them) this plus considerations of ammunition supply meant that the 14 November date would have to be accepted for the Westkapelle assault. This would permit of a rehearsal. At this time the Westkapelle and Flushing assaults were considered as alternatives to each other. The Corps Commander said that there would be an all-out bombing effort for 48 hours, but this he thought of as ending 48 hours before the day planned for the assault; reconnaissance parties would then inspect the state of the defences at both Flushing and Westkapelle as a basis for decision as to whether, and where, an assault was practicable. Further bombing would be asked for "to maintain the softness achieved"; but neither assault would be made "unless it was definitely established that defences were softened".<sup>102</sup>

During the next 24 hours the aspect of the plans changed. A report came in that Walcheren was now almost completely flooded; and on the basis of this (plus, perhaps, the obvious importance of attacking at the earliest possible moment) the commanders of the 4th S.S. Brigade and Force "T" proposed to Foulkes on 21 October that assaults be made at both Flushing and Westkapelle on 1 November "or as soon as weather permits". They did however prescribe certain "minimum requirements": that the flooding report should be accurate; that there should be a "heavy bombing attack for 48 hours, to be continued daily at sufficient scale until

weather allows of Operation taking place"; that the battleship *Warspite* and two monitors should be available; and that the reconnaissance party at Flushing and the naval support force at Westkapelle should find that the opposition was "*not more than very weak*".<sup>103</sup> On this basis the 4th S.S. Brigade produced a new provisional outline plan<sup>104</sup> the same day; and in essentials this was the plan actually put into effect on 1 November. On that day, however, as we shall see, the authors of these proposals did not act upon their declared intention of attacking only if the defences had been decidedly softened.

On 22 October General Simonds, the Acting Army Commander, was forcibly reminded of the extreme importance of avoiding further delay in opening Antwerp. The Navy had always laid particular emphasis upon this point, and now Admiral Ramsay, having heard of the already abandoned plan to postpone the Westkapelle assault to 14 November, signalled Simonds emphasizing that it was "absolutely vital" to open the Scheldt as soon as possible and requesting confirmation of the earliest practicable date for the assault. Simonds immediately replied giving the timings then envisaged, including "softening air action" against Walcheren on 29-31 October and the assault by the 4th Special Service Brigade on 1 November. He added that ammunition and amphibious vehicles would not be limiting factors and observed that he understood that the tidal conditions would be essentially the same on 1 November as on 14 November. He concluded:

I have ordered 2 Cdn Corps to work to above timings and though you will appreciate weather conditions may cause variations of two or three days in target dates I intend to take Walcheren and Zuid Beveland by 1 Nov.

To this Ramsay replied "Your [signal]. Red hot. Best of luck."<sup>105</sup>

The decision as to whether or not to attempt the assault on 1 November was likely to be difficult, in the light of probable weather conditions at that season and their effect on the air programme. But in view of the extreme urgency of opening Antwerp and the fact that postponement might mean that the landing could not be made until the 14th, it was evident that long chances might have to be taken. On 30 October Army Headquarters issued an elaborate instruction<sup>106</sup> defining the authorities authorized to confirm or postpone "Infatuate I" and "Infatuate II". For Westkapelle, the decision to embark or to postpone embarkation was the responsibility of the Army Commander jointly with the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief Expeditionary Force and on the advice of the commander of No. 84 Group; the decision to sail or to postpone sailing rested with the Army Commander jointly with A.N.C.X.F. Confirmation or postponement of the final decision, to assault, was for the commander of Force "T" jointly with the commander of the 4th Special Service Brigade.

On 31 October, with the weather going to pieces, the question of the decision to undertake the operation became increasingly difficult. Admiral Ramsay met with Generals Simonds and Foulkes at Bruges, and they decided that the 4th Special Service Brigade should embark and sail if the weather did not get worse.<sup>107</sup> Late that afternoon, on board the headquarters ship, H.M. Frigate *Kingsmill*, at Ostend, Simonds and Ramsay, in the presence of Brigadier Leicester and Captain Pugsley, amended the orders concerning a decision to postpone the assault. The original

instruction had provided that such a decision would be taken by the naval and military force commanders "only . . . on naval considerations related to weather which render the landing of the assault force impossible". The new one<sup>108</sup> empowered the naval and military force commanders afloat "to postpone the assault and return to port if in their opinion on all available information (with particular reference to the probabilities of air support, air smoke and spotting aircraft for bombardment ships) at the time of taking such decision the assault is unlikely to succeed". At 9:15 p.m. on the 31st General Simonds and Admiral Ramsay discussed the question by telephone and reaffirmed this direction extending the powers of the two commanders afloat. At the same time the joint decision was taken to order the force to sail.<sup>109</sup> It sailed accordingly.

In H.M.S. *Kingsmill* off the western point of Walcheren in the dawn of the 1st of November, with the Westkapelle lighthouse already in sight, Brigadier Leicester and Captain Pugsley faced the ultimate decision. They now knew the worst, for at 6:00 a.m. the Chief of Staff at Army Headquarters had sent a grim emergency signal<sup>110</sup> to his opposite number at 2nd Corps:

Pass following to Admiral Ramsay for transmission by him to Force T in clear.\* Quote extremely unlikely any air support air spotting or air smoke possible due to airfield conditions and forecast. Unquote.

In the light of their latest instructions, the men in *Kingsmill* would have been justified in regarding this as good reason for postponing the operation. On the other hand, they saw two encouraging aspects to the situation. The sea was calm -and it might not be calm if they waited another day. (In fact, as it turned out, sea conditions for several days to come were to be such as to make landings impossible.) Also, though the sky was overcast it appeared to be clearing, and it seemed possible that air support would be practicable later in the day.<sup>111</sup> The naval and military force commanders knew the importance of the operation. Nevertheless, they knew also that to put in the assault under the existing conditions was to pronounce sentence of death upon many fine men and vessels. They did not shrink from the responsibility.† The officers waiting anxiously at the 2nd Corps command post at Ijzendijke shortly received from the frigate a pre-arranged code word not inappropriate to the circumstances. It was "Nelson".<sup>113</sup> Leicester and Pugsley had decided to proceed.

### The Assault on Flushing

The attack on Flushing went in four hours before that at Westkapelle. It was delivered by the 155th Infantry Brigade of the 52nd (Lowland) Division, with No. 4 Commando‡ making the first landing. As we have seen, artillery support

\*The message was undoubtedly sent in clear to avoid the delay involved in enciphering and deciphering.

†There is some indication that they had indeed decided in advance that the previous plan to suspend the operation if opposition was heavy was impracticable, and that it would go in unless sea conditions were prohibitive. Admiral Pugsley, however, has written that the final decision to assault was taken only after the heavy ships opened fire at 8:20.<sup>112</sup>

‡This was an Army unit, whereas the other three units of the 4th Special Service Brigade, assaulting at Westkapelle, were Royal Marine Commandos.

SKETCH 31

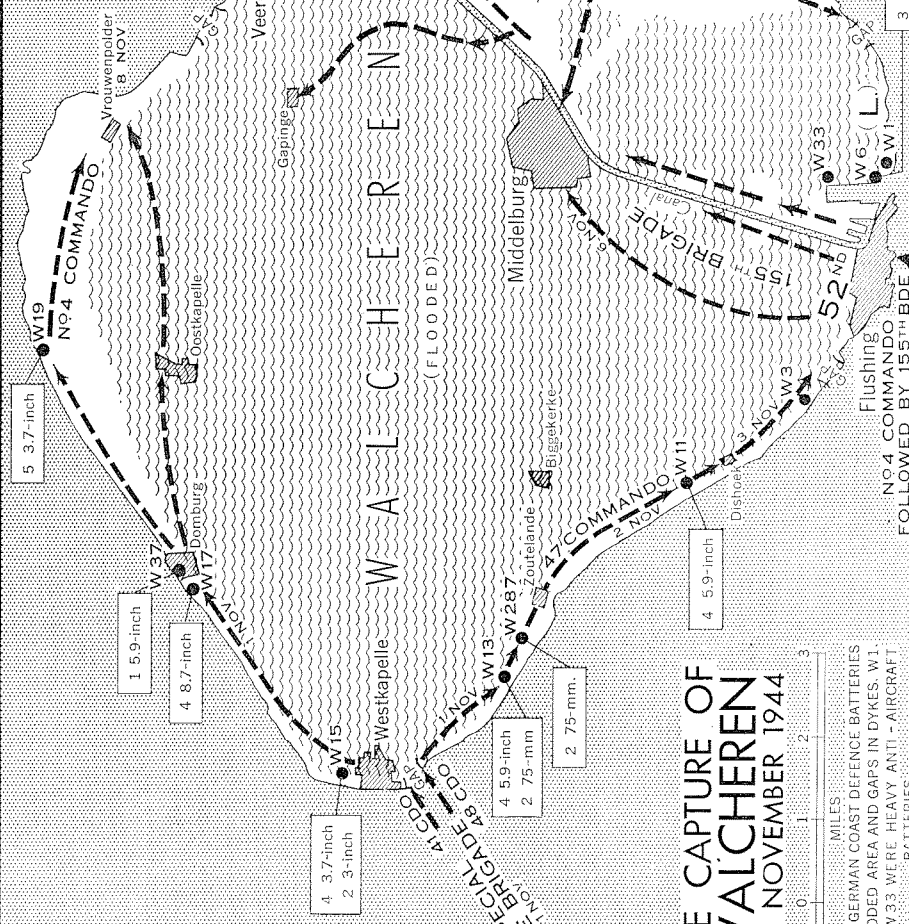
NORTH  
BEVELAND

5TH CDN 2ND CDN  
INF BDE INF DIV  
31 OCT.  
2 NOV

SOUTH  
BEVELAND  
156TH INF  
BDE

WALCHEREN  
(FLOODED)

5TH INF  
DIV  
Sluice Canal



THE CAPTURE OF  
WALCHEREN  
1-8 NOVEMBER 1944



SHOWING GERMAN COAST DEFENCE BATTERIES  
ALSO FLOODED AREA AND GAPS IN DYKES. W1,  
W3 AND W33 WERE HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT  
BATTERIES

Flushing  
No. 4 COMMANDO  
FOLLOWED BY 155TH BDE  
1 NOV

from the south shore of the river "was on a vast scale".<sup>114</sup> This was the more vital as the hoped-for bombardment by heavy bombers had proved impossible. There had been controversy with the Netherlands Government in London over the proposed bombing of Flushing. The Dutch very naturally thought of the possible casualties to the civilian population rather than those the attacking troops might suffer in an inadequately supported assault; and as a result of this opposition the British Government objected to any bombing of the city unless authorized by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. There was an exchange of signals on 31 October between the Supreme Commander and the British Chiefs of Staff. General Eisenhower, while expressing every desire to spare the city, felt that it would be a serious matter to withhold this aid from the Canadian Army and thereby help the enemy. The question seems to have been referred to Mr. Churchill, who took the view that, though every effort should be made to spare the civilians, the opinion of the Supreme Commander must prevail. In these circumstances, it was the weather and not Allied policy that prevented an attack by heavy bombers on Flushing on 1 November. Mediums of No. 2 Group R.A.F. did attack the beach defences during the night preceding D Day.<sup>115</sup>

At about 4:40 a.m. on 1 November the landing craft carrying No. 4 Commando slipped out of the harbour of Breskens. "At almost the same moment the artillery barrage commenced, and the mainland was from now on silhouetted against the flickering muzzle flashes of three hundred guns."<sup>116</sup> At 6:20 the Commando touched down at Flushing in the face of slight opposition. It was shortly followed by the 4th Battalion of the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the other units of the 155th Brigade. There was some fierce fighting on shore in Flushing, and the city with its shipbuilding yards (where snipers lurked in the gantries) and many old and new fortifications was not finally declared clear until the morning of 4 November.<sup>117</sup> The 52nd Division had used its 3.7-inch mountain guns in the course of this action. "On more than one occasion, a dismantled gun was taken up to one of the upper floors of a house, and re-assembled there. It then engaged suitable targets at point-blank range with surprising effect."<sup>118</sup>

### The Assault at Westkapelle

The Westkapelle plan of attack, as detailed in the 4th Special Service Brigade's operation order dated 24 October, provided for an assault at the gap in the dyke made by the R.A.F. The Commandos' first flight was to land from infantry landing craft (small), the remainder coming ashore in amphibious vehicles from tank landing craft. Covering parties were to seize the shoulders of the gap (No. 41 Commando on the left, No. 48 on the right) and the main bodies were then to pass through the gap in their amphibians. Thereafter No. 41 was to secure Westkapelle and destroy batteries in the area if active. Its probable subsequent task was to move north against the Domburg battery, leaving No. 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando\* to protect the brigade's left flank. No. 48 was to clear the area south-

\*The portion of this unit engaged included British, Norwegian, Belgian and Dutch troops. About 100 French soldiers were with No. 4 Commando at Flushing. First Canadian Army, always very much an international force, was more so than usual while these units were under its command.

ward at least as far as Zoutelande. No. 47 Commando was to go through the gap and clear the dune southward from Zoutelande, dealing if necessary with Battery W 11 and other positions in the area.

The heavy bombardment ships were the battleship *Warspite* and the monitors *Erebus* and *Roberts*, mounting between them ten 15-inch guns. (*Warspite's* main armament, originally eight guns, was now down to six as a result of battle damage sustained in the Mediterranean.) Close support for the landing was to be afforded by the unit known as "Support Squadron, Eastern Flank", under Commander K. A. Sellar. It consisted of 27 craft of various types,\* of which the most powerful were the large and medium Landing Craft Gun, mounting respectively 4.7-inch and 17-pounder guns.

For a time the troops in the landing craft wondered whether the German batteries had been knocked out or whether they would come into action. They did not have long to wait. "Pinpoints of light sparkled from the south batteries"<sup>119</sup> as the Germans opened up. The first fire, directed at a motor launch marking the position where the headquarters ship was to anchor, came at 8:09 a.m. from W 15 at Westkapelle. Shortly every German battery in the area was in action. *Warspite* and *Roberts* returned the fire, beginning at 8:20; a defect in the turret mechanism of *Erebus* prevented her from firing in the first phase. But without their spotting aircraft (which were fogged in on English airfields) the big ships were firing almost blindly. They had asked for army "air observation post" planes to replace these aircraft, but although the A.O.Ps. were duly provided they "proved ineffective due to poor communications".<sup>120</sup> The bombarding ships nevertheless knocked out two of the guns of Battery W 15.

Since the air attacks had not silenced any large proportion of the guns in the batteries, and since the heavy ships were unable to fire accurately until the afternoon, when their own spotting aircraft were able to act, the brunt of the action fell on the Support Squadron. These small vessels drove in without regard for their own peril, blazing away at the formidable concreted batteries with every gun. From about nine o'clock onwards they were fiercely engaged.

It is a tradition of the Royal Navy to sacrifice itself for its convoys when circumstances require it. The Support Squadron lived up to this tradition at Westkapelle. Sellar wrote later in his report:

It was early realised that we were up against formidable opposition and that losses and damage were to be expected in craft engaging shore batteries at close range. The test of whether the maintenance of close action was justified was considered to be the progress of the Commando landings. It was evident from signals received that progress of landing and unloading was continuing satisfactorily and it was known that casualties in what may be termed the "Trade" forces were light. I, therefore, considered that so long as the Germans made the mistake of concentrating their fire at the Support Squadron, close action was justified and losses acceptable. . . .

The losses accepted were very heavy. By 12:30 p.m. only seven of Sellar's craft were completely fit for action. Two large and two medium Landing Craft Gun had been sunk or were sinking, as were one Landing Craft Flak and three support

\*There are slight variations between the figures given in different official sources. That accepted -here is from an appendix to Commander Sellar's report. It includes one motor launch.

craft; while another Flak craft was on fire in the magazine and abandoned (it later sank). Seven more craft of various types were damaged and out of action; four were damaged but capable of further action. At this point Sellar, with every justification, decided that "further support must come from the heavy ships", and the battered remnants of his gallant squadron slowly withdrew, carrying with them 126 badly wounded officers and men, and those of their 172 dead who had not already found graves in the sea.<sup>121</sup>

British operational researchers later came to the conclusion, which seems well-founded, that the landing would have failed but for two fortunate circumstances. One was that the German batteries, as Sellar noted, directed their fire at the support craft, which were firing at them, and not at the craft carrying troops. The other was the fact that the four 5.9-inch guns of Battery W 13, south of the gap, providentially ran out of ammunition somewhere before 10:30 a.m., about the time when the first troop-carrying craft were touching down. It had then fired, apparently, some 200 rounds per gun.<sup>122</sup> The exhaustion of its ammunition was evidently due to heavy expenditures on Canadian targets south of the Scheldt during Operation "Switchback". The flooding prevented fresh supplies from reaching the battery.<sup>123</sup>

As it was, thanks to the Support Squadron's sacrifice, the Commandos got ashore with relatively little loss. To this result very opportune air action also made an important contribution. Although weather (particularly at the airfields) had prevented so many of the final air preparations for the operation, fighter-bomber attacks planned for the period between 20 and 40 minutes before H Hour were duly made. The R.A.F., determined to help to the utmost, had courageously put these aircraft up in spite of the fog. An improvement just before the landings allowed some of the rocket-firing aircraft of the "cab rank" (which could be directed by an Air Controller on the headquarters ship) to appear on schedule. They were 12 Typhoons of No. 183 Squadron R.A.F. The Controller held them back briefly until the rocket craft had fired; they then made a highly effective attack on the defences just as the tank landing craft were about to beach.<sup>124</sup> An air liaison officer in *Kingsmill* signalled that afternoon, "Timely and well instituted support by RP Typhoons undoubtedly vital factor in turning scale to our advantage at a time when 80% support craft out of action due to enemy fire."<sup>125</sup>

According to the diary of Headquarters 4th Special Service Brigade, the leading troops of No. 41 Commando touched down at 10:10 a.m. (this was 25 minutes late, the result of the opposition of the batteries), those of No. 48 two minutes later. No. 41 took Westkapelle village and, soon after midday, Battery W 15. On the south side of the gap, No. 48 Commando captured the adjacent radar station and then tackled Battery W 13. Although this position's main armament, as we have seen, was now silent for want of ammunition, the garrison fought fiercely and the battery was not taken until the evening. The armoured assault teams supporting the attack suffered heavily in the landing, but the few tanks that got ashore were very useful later.<sup>126</sup>

The fighting on shore belongs to the history of the Royal Marines rather than to that of the Canadian Army, and need scarcely be recounted here in detail. The Germans were very short of infantry, but their gunners and miscellaneous troops



continued to defend their dyke positions with much determination. Although No. 41 Commando overran Battery W 17 and reached the outskirts of Domburg on D Day, the village did not actually fall (to No. 10 Commando, supported by tanks) until 3 November. On the 2nd No. 47, after suffering many casualties, put W 11 out of action. Next day it occupied the position and advanced through it to the gap in the dyke west of Flushing.<sup>127</sup> Those parts of the island directly commanding the Scheldt Estuary were now clear.

Apart from the fight for the causeway which we have described, and the direction of the battle by higher headquarters, the Canadian share in the operations on Walcheren was limited to the work of medical units supporting the 4th Special Service Brigade, and of Brigadier Matthews' artillery firing from south of the Scheldt. No. 17 Canadian Light Field Ambulance, normally employed with the 2nd Armoured Brigade, was used in the Westkapelle assault, assisted by two field surgical units, a field transfusion unit and No. 10 Field Dressing Station. The conditions in the Commando bridgehead about Westkapelle taxed the doctors and their helpers severely, but they did excellent service.\* There were many wounded to deal with. The total casualties of the 4th S.S. Brigade and attached units for the two "Infatuate" operations, as known on 8 November, were 103 killed, 325 wounded and 68 missing.<sup>128</sup>

Some remarks on the artillery bombardment are in order. It has been made clear (above, page 407) that in the nature of things this would be much more formidable near the Flushing area than in the region about Westkapelle, simply because only the heavier guns could reach the latter. The bombardment of the Flushing area on and before D Day seems to have been very effective. General Daser of the 70th German Division told Canadian interrogators later that by 1 November all his coastal guns on the south shore had been destroyed by flooding, bombing or counter-battery fire.<sup>129</sup> This was probably an exaggeration, for the Canadian artillery headquarters recorded that the hostile batteries about Flushing were very active that day.<sup>130</sup> Their strength, nevertheless, must have been greatly reduced. On the 1st the German Commander-in-Chief West reported, "The three anti-aircraft batteries around Flushing have only one single barrel left ready for use, the port battery Flushing [W 6] one gun fit for action in some degree." This may represent the situation at the end of the day. However, the German Naval Operations Staff, in an estimate of the situation dated 6 November, stated "The battery Kernwerk [the port battery] and the anti-aircraft batteries Flushing had been destroyed for the most part by enemy action before the landing." The commander of the Flushing garrison called the artillery fire on the town "the immediate cause of the debacle".<sup>131</sup>

The artillery bombardment directed upon the western batteries had less effect, as was to be expected. Most of the German batteries were casemated, the guns

\*See Lt.-Col. W. R. Feasby (ed.), *Official History of the Canadian Medical Services, 1939-1945* (2 vols., Ottawa, 1953-6), I, 262-3; also Lt.-Col. J. B. Hillsman, *Eleven Men and a Scalpel* (Winnipeg, 1948), Chaps. XXIV-XXV. The 4th S.S. Brigade records mention the presence of some personnel from a field park company R.C.E.; these may have been from the 8th Field Park Company, which supplied some engineer stores for the operation but makes no reference to any of its personnel taking part.

being under very heavy concrete. (The Domburg battery, W 17, was an exception, its guns being in open emplacements.) Against such positions the gunfire from south of the Scheldt did not achieve temporary neutralization, much less destruction. As for accuracy, there is record of one medium regiment's shells falling 200 yards short. Its C.O. suggested that this might have been due to a wrong angle of sight: "The targets were all given as Angle of Sight zero, whereas several of them were some distance up the sand dunes." The 9th A.G.R.A. is reported to have ordered in the evening "Add 200" on all predicted (i.e. unobserved) targets. A forward observation officer from the same medium unit just mentioned reported that its fire had a good neutralizing effect at the time of No. 47 Commando's landing.<sup>132</sup> But the concrete positions suffered little. The only specific destruction on D Day or D plus 1 which the later investigators were able to ascribe to army artillery was one range-finder in Battery W 11. All four casemates in this battery were hit on top, but no damage was done.<sup>133</sup>

The Graham Committee in 1943 (above, page 13) had concluded that casemated batteries could not be neutralized by army artillery, and this conclusion was certainly confirmed by the experience at Westkapelle. The operational researchers observed, "In the assault phase of a landing, a casemated gun can be neutralized only by its destruction", and added "Guns of calibre less than those of the main armament of a battleship can be expected to have only a negligible effect on a casemated gun. Destruction can be ensured only by a direct hit from the main armament guns." The investigators also came to the following conclusion on bombing priorities: "Concentration of bombing effort on a very small number of the larger important batteries, rather than spreading over all batteries in an area, will knock out a larger total number of guns as well as ensure that those knocked out are the important guns".<sup>134</sup> As we have seen, the limited bombing that was done on Walcheren was distributed over a fairly large number of targets, and the army can be criticized for failing to give a more absolute priority to the batteries closest to the point of assault, which represented the most formidable and direct threat to the operation. Batteries W 13 and W 15 did far more damage than any others on D Day; it was calculated that they destroyed five craft each, and caused respectively 250 to 300 and 150 to 200 personnel casualties.<sup>135</sup>

A very heavy sacrifice was demanded of the naval Support Squadron as a result of the only slight impairment of the enemy batteries by the preparatory air bombardment. The operational researchers concluded that only two guns out of 26 bearing on the assault area—one in W 15, and one in W 17—were knocked out by the heavy bombers.<sup>136</sup> The conclusion seems indicated that the bomber effort planned was inadequate to the circumstances. One cannot but regret FieldMarshal Montgomery's easy acceptance of Leigh-Mallory's suggestions (above, page 378), and the relatively low priority assigned to Walcheren even in the final days for which Leigh-Mallory had suggested the use "of all bomber resources available". These resources were not used, and it should be noted in justice to Leigh-Mallory himself that by this period he had ceased to be Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force, his headquarters having been dissolved on

15 October. The Supreme Commander's original promise of an exceptional effort by both the Eighth Air Force and the R.A.F. Bomber Command (above, page 374) had been whittled down by the air commanders to "all bomber resources available" for three days; this was later further whittled down to the use during that period, not of the combined strength of the Eighth Air Force and Bomber Command, but of less than half the strength of the latter alone. The bad weather on the last day was a final blow; but as noted above it did not affect the situation at Westkapelle.

The air commanders apparently failed to appreciate fully the seriousness of the problem faced by the naval and military forces making the Westkapelle assault. The operation was parallel to that of the Normandy D Day. The forces attacking were much smaller and the front of attack much narrower; but the defences were far more formidable than in Normandy. The weaker coastal batteries there had been so demoralized by previous attack that on D Day they were in most cases unable to fire, and in no case able to interfere with us seriously (above, page 95). On Walcheren there were 26 guns of 75-mm. or larger calibre, most of them casemated, on a front of a dozen miles.<sup>137</sup> An enormous weight of bombs would have been required to ensure the destruction of a material proportion of these guns, or even of the two batteries which were in the best position to interfere with the assault;\* but it would surely have been proper to make every effort to avoid the sort of losses suffered by the Support Squadron on 1 November. There was an honest difference of opinion over priorities, the air officers believing that the heavy bombers could make their best contribution to winning the war by attacking targets in Germany. But most sailors and soldiers will probably continue to believe that the Westkapelle assault got less support than it was properly entitled to.

### The End of the Battle

With the 4th Special Service Brigade well established ashore at Westkapelle and advancing along the dykes north and south, the 155th Brigade in control of Flushing and extending its holdings, and an effective bridgehead at last established on the eastern side of the island. and likewise being extended, the fall of Walcheren was only a question of time, and not of a long time at that. On 6 November the 155th Brigade launched an amphibious attack on Middelburg, the island capital, in Buffaloes,† and General Daser surrendered to the 7th/9th Royal Scots. On the 7th the 155th and 157th Brigades linked up immediately south of Middelburg, and the 156th occupied Veere. That morning the headquarters of Burnfor (above,

\*The United Kingdom Army Operational Research Group calculated that if weather had been good instead of bad on D minus 1 and before H Hour on D Day, "in the short time available the whole resources of [the R.A.F.] Bomber Command concentrated on one six-gun battery would have had just over an even chance of destroying it, if the accuracy so far achieved could have been maintained". They added, "Such an attack does not seem to have been requested or planned." Even without such concentration, a higher rate of destruction would have been more probable if the attack had been on this scale.

†This enterprise was influenced by the good advice of a Dutch civilian who had rowed out from Middelburg in a small boat. He has been described as a *sergeant* of police in the city; but he was apparently a *surgeon* of Middelburg, Dr. E. L. Nauta.<sup>138</sup>

page 406) closed down. By evening the remaining resistance on Walcheren was confined to the coastal area north-west of Veere.<sup>139</sup> On the 8th Vrouwenpolder surrendered and later that day the 52nd Division (which had been directly under First Canadian Army since the previous midnight)<sup>140</sup> reported that "all organized enemy resistance on Walcheren Island" had ceased at noon, though a few isolated pockets remained. The very last report of action on the island came early on the 10th, when the division informed Army that a pocket at Gapinge, west of Veere, had been cleared up.<sup>141</sup>

Events had justified General Simonds' faith in the military efficacy of the admittedly terrible measure of flooding Walcheren.\* There is much German evidence of the extent to which this hampered the enemy. To give one example, Colonel Reinhardt, the commander of the 1019th Grenadier Regiment and the garrison of Flushing, told interrogators, "It was the flooding which rendered the problem ultimately insoluble for him."<sup>142</sup> Although most of the German guns were on high ground and were not flooded out, the batteries were isolated and communication with them was very difficult. Some ammunition was damaged.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, if the flooding had done nothing more than to cause Battery W 13 to run out of ammunition on the morning of 1 November, it could still be justified; for if this had not happened the Westkapelle assault might well have failed. The flooding had another valuable effect: it enabled us to use our amphibious vehicles. For this reason the operations on Walcheren went faster than those in the Breskens Pocket. There the ground, in most places, had been merely saturated; we could not use amphibians to carry our infantry, and they had to struggle through the sodden fields.

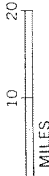
Before resistance ended on Walcheren the Royal Navy had already launched Operation "Calendar", the task of minesweeping in the Scheldt, which was the final phase of opening Antwerp. As early as 1 November an attempt had been made to pass minesweepers up to Breskens, but they were driven back by batteries near Zeebrugge. On 3 November, the 3rd Canadian Division having now occupied Zeebrugge, they reached Breskens and sweeping began on the 4th. On 26 November "Calendar" was completed, a total of 267 mines having been removed from the channel. That day the first three coasters reached Antwerp. On 28 November the first convoy entered the harbour. A Canadian officer who was among the spectators described the arrival of its leading ship.<sup>144</sup> There was some ceremony, and only one slight omission:

The band struck up with "Hearts of Oak". The ship made fast. The time was 2:30 p.m. The various national anthems were played. All stood at the salute. The photographers took their pictures. The correspondents made their notes. The rain poured off the canvas stand in a steady stream. Then the ship's master came ashore with his mate and both were introduced to Admiral Ramsay, Allied Naval Commander Expeditionary Force, who gave them welcome. Assembled with the Admiral were representatives from SHAEF, 21st Army Group, the British and American port authorities, the Belgian Government and Army, the Burgomaster of Antwerp and other officials, naval, military and civil. The

\*It is pleasant to be able to record that the Walcheren farmlands' productivity was restored after the war more rapidly than had been believed possible. Today the island is again a very prosperous place.

SKETCH 32

# THE NORTHERN FRONT 16 OCTOBER - 10 NOVEMBER 1944



Front line 16 October  
Front line 10 November

○ Hilversum

Amsterdam

The Hague

Utrecht

Rotterdam

First Army

Group "H"

Parachute Army

Netherlands

Germany

Rhine

Wesel

Cleve

Gennep

Nijmegen

Megen

Zaltbommel

Waal

Maas

's-Hertogenbosch

Moerdijk

Breda

Roosendaal

Bergen op Zoom

Flushing

Breskens

Westkapelle

WALCHEREN IS.

Wesel

Duisburg

Hamborn

Krefeld

Venlo

Roermond

Neas

Reer

Turnhout

Herenthals

Antwerp

Albert Canal

Malines

First U.S. Army

Group "B"

Fifth Panzer Army

Second Army

British Army

Group

21st SFT

First Canadian Army

Netherlands

Belgium

Scheldt

Ghent

Terneuzen

West-Scheldt

Flushing

Breskens

Zebrugge

Bruges

Ostend

Canal

21st SFT

NORTH SEA

Eleventh Army

First Army

Group "H"

Parachute Army

Group "B"

Fifth Panzer Army

Second Army

British Army

Group

21st SFT

First Canadian Army

Netherlands

Belgium

Scheldt

Ghent

Terneuzen

West-Scheldt

Flushing

Breskens

Zebrugge

Bruges

Ostend

Canal

21st SFT

Canadian Army was not represented.... Actually, the principal participant in the ceremony was a Canadian. I refer to the ship. She had been built in a Canadian yard and bore the local and historic name of *Fort Catarqui*....

On 1 December over 10,000 tons of stores were landed at Antwerp.<sup>145</sup> It now became the principal supply port for the Allied armies in North-West Europe. For the first time an unquestionably adequate administrative foundation existed for a major advance into Germany.

In the meantime, in First Canadian Army's right sector the 1st British Corps had completed the clearing of the country up to the Lower Maas, whose estuary is known as the *Hollandschdiep* (above, page 390). On 2 November the 49th British and 104th U.S. Divisions established firm bridgeheads across the River Mark. On the 6th, with the 1st Polish Armoured Division and the 104th closing in on *Moerdijk* from the south-west and south-east respectively, the Germans blew the great road and railway bridges across the estuary there. For a short time they held a perimeter covering the ruins, but the Poles finally liquidated all enemy south of the river on 9 November.<sup>146</sup>

Farther west the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, fighting north from *Bergen op Zoom*, met bitter opposition in the last comer of the mainland below the Maas. On the night of 31 October-1 November the 4th Armoured Brigade attacked towards *Steenbergen* with *The Algonquin Regiment* under command. But the Algonquins were sharply checked at the village of *Welberg*, having two companies partly overrun. The 10th Infantry Brigade took over the operation and launched another attack on the evening of 2 November with the Algonquin and *Lincoln and Welland Regiments*, and a "winkling" Typhoon attack to help clear the way. After a night of fighting *Welberg* was clear, and on 4 November the 10th Brigade occupied *Steenbergen*.<sup>147</sup> The final episode in this sector was almost comic. On 5-6 November elements of *The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor)* and the *British Columbia Regiment* had the satisfaction of fighting a "naval engagement", when their fire directed across the intervening channel sank three small German naval vessels and damaged a fourth in the harbour of *Zijpe* at the eastern end of the island of *Schouwen*.<sup>148</sup>

Thus, with the approaches to Antwerp free of the enemy and the country up to the Maas similarly cleared, the Battle of the *Scheldt* was over. It had been a hard and bloody business. From 1 October through 8 November the First Canadian Army on all its fronts had taken 41,043 prisoners. Its own casualties for the same period were computed as 703 officers and 12,170 other ranks, killed, wounded and missing. Of these, almost precisely half-355 officers and 6012 other ranks—were Canadians.<sup>149</sup>

The battle was fought under most unfavourable conditions of terrain and against a resolute enemy who fully understood the importance of the ground he was defending. In an order<sup>150</sup> addressed to his troops on 7 October, General von Zangen of the Fifteenth Army had written, "The defence of the approaches to Antwerp represents a task which is decisive for the further conduct of the war. . . .

# THE BATTLE OF THE SCHELDT

## OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1944



- Canadian forces ———→
- British or Polish forces ———→
- United States forces ———→
- Flooded areas ———→
- ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS SHOWN



After overrunning the Scheldt fortifications, the English would finally be in a position to land great masses of material in a large and completely protected harbour. With this material they might deliver a deathblow at the North German plateau and at Berlin before the onset of winter.... The German people is watching us.... Each additional day will be vital that you deny the port of Antwerp to the enemy and the resources he has at his disposal."

Moreover, the fight to open Antwerp had been a Cinderella operation, which for a long period had received from high Allied commanders more lip-service than practical priority. Only after the exchange of letters between the Supreme Commander and Field-Marshal Montgomery at the middle of October was the priority which the operation deserved and required actually accorded it; and when this had been conceded on the ground it was still denied in the air. Refused the use of airborne troops, First Canadian Army was also refused the great bomber effort required to overcome the Walcheren defences. The cumulative effect of these disadvantages was probably to postpone the opening of Antwerp and certainly to impose additional casualties upon the naval and military forces charged with the task.

On 3 November Field-Marshal Montgomery wrote to General Simonds, the Acting Army Commander:<sup>151</sup>

1. Now that the operations designed to give us the free use of the port of Antwerp are nearly completed, I want to express to you personally and to all commanders and troops in the Canadian Army, my admiration for the way in which you have all carried out the very difficult task given to you.
2. The operations were conducted under the most appalling conditions of ground-and water-and the advantage in these respects favoured the enemy. But in spite of great difficulties you slowly and relentlessly wore down the enemy resistance, drove him back, and captured great numbers of prisoners.  
It has been a fine performance, and one that could have been carried out only by first class troops.
3. The Canadian Army is composed of troops from many different nations and countries. But the way in which you have all pulled together, and operated as one fighting machine, has been an inspiration to us all.
4. I congratulate you personally.  
And I also congratulate all commanders and troops serving under your command. Please tell all your formations and units how very pleased I am with the splendid work they have done.

On 4 November General Crerar, now about to return to his command, sent a message to General Simonds:<sup>152</sup>

My sincere congratulations to you on the great ability and drive with which you have carried through your recent very difficult responsibilities to a most successful conclusion. As a result, the battle reputation of First Cdn Army has never stood higher.



## CHAPTER XVII

### **WINTER ON THE MAAS 9 NOVEMBER 1944 - 7 FEBRUARY 1945**

(See Map 9 and Sketches 33-35)

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**A**T the end of the Battle of the Scheldt the formations of the First Canadian Army, and its three Canadian divisions in particular, were thoroughly exhausted. It was fortunate, in the circumstances, that a static period now intervened. It was the Army's only such period during the campaign. For precisely three months, from the cessation of organized resistance on Walcheren on 8 November to the opening of the Battle of the Rhineland on 8 February, there were no major operations on General Crerar's front.

It was not a period of mere "inactivity". There was constant patrolling under difficult winter conditions, and some very nasty small-scale fighting. And there was much planning and preparation for the next offensive. The period of rest would in fact have been a great deal shorter if the enemy had not disrupted our arrangements by launching his last great offensive in mid-December. The fighting in the Ardennes did not directly affect First Canadian Army, but the apprehension that the German attack would extend to the Canadian front, and the precautions necessary to provide against this, were a complicating factor for a considerable time.

Lieut.-General Crerar, his health restored by the treatment received in England, returned to Headquarters First Canadian Army on 7 November and resumed command of the Army at noon on the 9th. Soon afterwards his distinguished services were recognized by his government by promotion to the rank of General, a rank never before held by an officer of the Canadian Army while in the field.\* Lieut.-General Simonds returned to his command at the 2nd Canadian Corps. Major-General Foulkes, who had commanded the Corps in an 'acting capacity during the Battle of the Scheldt, now left for Italy to take over the 1st Canadian Corps there. He was succeeded at the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division by Brigadier Bruce Matthews, formerly C.C.R.A. of the 2nd Corps; the latter appointment went to Brigadier P.A.S. Todd. Shortly Major-General H. W. Foster of the 4th Armoured Division exchanged commands with Major-General C. Yokes, commanding the 1st Infantry Division in Italy; Yokes took over the 4th Division on 1 December.

\*It may be noted that General Crerar already held the Companionship of the Bath, the highest rank in one of the orders of chivalry for which the government could recommend him within the limits of existing Canadian policy. The promotion was effective on 16 November.<sup>1</sup>

## Strategy for the Next Phase

On 18 October General Eisenhower had held a conference at Brussels with Field-Marshal Montgomery and General Bradley, and outlined his plans for the next stage of the campaign. The importance of the 21st Army Group concentrating fully, for the present, on the opening of Antwerp was again emphasized. As for the 12th Army Group, now charged with the capture of the Ruhr, its First Army was to attack from the Aachen area and establish a bridgehead across the Rhine south of Cologne, while the Ninth Army covered its left flank. The Third Army to the south was to advance in support, and farther south again General Devers' 6th Army Group was to cross the Rhine, if possible, in its own sector.

It was apparently hoped that the First U.S. Army would get its bridgehead early in November. Thereafter, probably not before the 10th of the month, the 21st Army Group would direct the Second British Army south-east between the Maas and the Rhine, while the Ninth Army, which would be under Montgomery's command in this second phase, would make a northerly converging thrust. These operations would clear the west bank of the Rhine opposite the Ruhr. Subsequently-before the middle of December, if all went well-the 12th Army Group would seize the Ruhr, the Ninth Army attacking eastward across the Rhine, the First moving north from the Cologne-Bonn area, the Third swinging up on the southerly flank. Simultaneously, it was hoped, with the Second Army's offensive between the rivers, the First Canadian Army would be directed northward into the Ijssel valley.<sup>2</sup>

Operations actually developed rather differently and less rapidly, due in great part to interference by the enemy. On 27 October the Germans launched an attack on the Second Army from their bridgehead west of the Maas in the Venlo area. Strong British reinforcements had to be put in before this thrust was held.<sup>3</sup> And in the first week of November the First U.S. Army suffered a small but unfortunate reverse at Schmidt, a town south-east of Aachen covering important dams on the upper reaches of the River Roer.<sup>4</sup>

After further consultation with the Supreme Commander, Montgomery issued a new directive to his Army Commanders on 2 November.<sup>5</sup> He wrote:

3. It is now clear that the next operation to be undertaken by Second Army must be the liquidation of the Meuse pocket west of Venlo, and the driving of the enemy back to the east side of the Meuse in that area.
4. It is also clear that the attack by the left wing of 12 Army Group towards Cologne, so as to secure a bridgehead over the Rhine, will not be so strong as is desired because 12 Army Group is holding a very long defensive front and also a number of its divisions are now serving in 21 Army Group.

To remedy this situation, Montgomery intended to release the American divisions, extend his southern flank to take over some of General Bradley's front and develop offensive operations on our right [southern] flank, in close co-operation with the left flank of 12 Army Group". But looking beyond his immediate commitments, he directed First Canadian Army to prepare plans for offensive operations

- "(a) south-eastwards from the Nijmegen area, between the Rhine and the Meuse;
- (b) northwards across the Neder Rijn, to secure the high ground between Arnhem and Apeldoorn with a bridgehead over the IJssel river."

It will be observed that he now proposed that First Canadian Army should undertake the offensive between the rivers at first intended for the Second Army. These plans were to set the pattern of Allied strategy in the north throughout succeeding months of the campaign.

Apart from this responsibility for future planning, First Canadian Army assumed new tasks immediately the Scheldt battle ended. Montgomery's directive of 16 October (Appendix "E") had indicated that, once the area south of the Maas from 's-Hertogenbosch westwards had been cleared, it would be possible to hold the line of the river with "about two divisions", thus gaining "about five" for operations elsewhere. The new directive instructed the commander of First Canadian Army to release the 104th Division to the 12th Army Group on 5 November, and the 49th (West Riding) Division to Second British Army after the enemy had been driven north of the Maas on the front west of a line through Geertruidenberg and Oosterhout. Thereafter, Sir John Crocker's 1st British Corps would hold the line of the lower Maas as far east as Maren, north-east of 's-Hertogenbosch, with "the minimum strength necessary, maintaining a reserve of mobile and armoured troops in suitable positions to deal with any enemy attempts to cross the river".

The 2nd Canadian Corps was directed to take over the Nijmegen sector from the 30th British Corps (of Second British Army) by 10 November. This would extend General Crerar's right (eastern) boundary along the Maas to "about Middelaar" (some eight miles south-east of Nijmegen). Initially, General Simonds' command would include the 82nd and 101st U.S. Airborne and the 50th (Northumbrian) Divisions. However, when General Dempsey's forces had eliminated the Maas pocket west of Venlo, the 49th and 51st (Highland) Divisions were to be transferred to the Nijmegen sector for the relief of the 50th and 101st, and one of the Canadian divisions would relieve the 82nd. The 2nd Corps was now taking over the "Nijmegen Salient", established by Operation "Market-Garden" in September. Simonds emphasized the significance of the new responsibilities in his directive of 6 November:<sup>6</sup>

The Nijmegen bridgehead is the most important bit of ground along the front of 21 Army Group. Here we hold the only bridge across the main course of the Rhine. If the Germans accept a decision west of the Rhine, the eastern face of the Nijmegen bridgehead between the Meuse and the Rhine forms a base through which an attack can be launched against the northern flank of the German battle line. If the Germans withdraw to the east bank of the Rhine, the Nijmegen bridgehead forms a base from which an assault across the Neder Rijn turns the main course of the Rhine itself.

Military bridging of the lower course of the Rhine is a doubtful possibility under winter conditions. Therefore, the Nijmegen bridge is of the greatest importance to us and must be protected against all forms of attack.

Control of the Nijmegen bridgehead actually passed to First Canadian Army at noon on 9 November, the front of the 30th British Corps from Cuijk (near

Middelaar, above referred to) to De Voorn (near Maren) being taken over by the 2nd Canadian Corps, which had pulled out from the Scheldt sector before the last shots were fired on Walcheren.<sup>7</sup> General Crerar's front now extended in a great curving arc of 140 miles from the tip of Walcheren along the lower Maas, the Waal and the Neder Rijn to Cuijk. Dunkirk was an additional responsibility.

Before describing developments in the Canadian sector it is well to outline briefly the course of operations on the rest of the front during the remainder of November and the early part of December. Already, on 8 November, the Third U.S. Army had launched its offensive in the direction of the Saar. General Patton afterwards explained that he had not advised General Bradley of the beginning of the attack "for fear I might get a stop order".<sup>8</sup> However, weather and the enemy proved more formidable obstacles than any reluctance of higher authority to Patton's plan for an all-out drive to the Rhine. After capturing Metz, he was still held back at the beginning of December by the Saar River and the Siegfried defences. Farther south the 6th Army Group (Seventh U.S. and First French Armies) made considerable progress. French troops fighting under the Seventh Army took Strasbourg late in November, and French and Americans together steadily compressed the Germans into the "Colmar Pocket" on the west bank of the Rhine.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Aachen sector, the First and Ninth United States Armies advanced slowly towards the Roer. Aided on 16 November by the largest aerial support operation yet staged—the Eighth Air Force and the R.A.F. Bomber Command together dropped some 10,000 tons of bombs<sup>10</sup>—the Americans developed powerful thrusts in the direction of Eschweiler and Geilenkirchen. But although 17 divisions were eventually committed to this battle (with 10 divisions on a 24-mile front)<sup>11</sup> progress was exceedingly difficult. The enemy made full use of his West Wall defences, and the Hurtgen Forest proved an effective barrier to armour. By 3 December the Ninth Army had managed to reach the Roer. Unfortunately, however, the Germans still controlled the Schmidt Dams, enabling them to flood the Roer Valley and trap any American forces which crossed the river. Consequently, in mid-December, General Bradley was still using his First Army to capture these dams as a preliminary to continuing the offensive.<sup>12</sup>

On the 21st Army Group front, on 14 November, General Dempsey duly delivered his attack against the German bridgehead west of Venlo. The 12th Corps advanced on the southern flank, between the Maas and the Noorder Canal, while farther north the 8th Corps seized the town of Meijel and crossed the Deurne Canal. Weather and marshy terrain combined to delay these operations. Conditions were, in fact, not unlike those experienced by Canadian troops during the Battle of the Scheldt. Nevertheless the advance went on, and when Blerick, opposite Venlo, fell to a set-piece attack on 3-4 December British formations had eliminated all enemy on the west bank of the Maas in their sector. Meanwhile, to the south the 30th Corps captured Geilenkirchen, between the Maas and the Roer, on 19 November with an American division;<sup>13</sup> but operations here were halted by rain which made the ground virtually impassable to vehicles.

## Schouwen and the Salient

Through this period First Canadian Army was not called upon for any largescale offensive operations. However, as General Crerar pointed out to his Corps Commanders in a directive of 13 November,<sup>14</sup> "...with an eye on possible future requirements, it is important that we should seize any opportunity to improve our present positions vis-a-vis the enemy, if such can be done without marked cost in casualties or materiel"; it was "also important to keep the enemy anxious, and guessing, concerning our immediate intentions in order that he will retain considerable forces facing the First Cdn Army". Therefore, patrolling along the Army's extended front was to be "active and aggressive"; the services of Dutch Resistance Groups would be utilized and the enemy would be encouraged to believe that we were reconnoitring "with a view to early offensive intentions".

Special responsibilities were allotted to each Corps of First Canadian Army. The 1st British Corps, holding the south bank of the lower Maas with the 4th Canadian and 1st Polish Armoured Divisions right and left respectively,\* was ordered to capture the large island of Schouwen north of the Bevelands, which our troops had visited but not occupied early in November. German occupation of this island, projecting into the North Sea, was regarded as a potential danger to our shipping using the Scheldt estuary. Consequently, the plan was to seize Schouwen (Operation "Sailmaker") and establish a radar station there which would give warning of German attacks. Although - much consideration was given to "Sailmaker", the planners ultimately concluded that the problems attending the enterprise were out of proportion to the results which might be achieved. There was a report that the German garrison on the island had been strengthened; thus at least one brigade would be required for the attack, and elaborate arrangements would be necessary for aerial bombardment and provision of assault shipping. Finally, there were even some doubts in naval minds about the necessity for the operation. Therefore, on 20 November, on the recommendation of First Canadian Army, "Sailmaker" was "postponed indefinitely".<sup>15</sup>

The 2nd Canadian Corps had assumed its new responsibilities in the Nijmegen bridgehead with four divisions in the line: from right to left, the 2nd Canadian opposite the Reichswald, between Cuijk and Groesbeek; the 3rd Canadian east of Nijmegen; and the 50th (Northumbrian) and 101st United States Airborne Divisions on the so-called "island" beyond the Waal south of Arnhem. The 50th was commanded by Major-General D.A.H. Graham, the 101st by Major-General Maxwell D. Taylor. The 82nd U.S. Airborne Division (Major-General James M. Gavin) was under the 2nd Corps very briefly, until midnight of 12-13 November, when it was relieved by the 3rd Canadian Division.<sup>16</sup> When the 50th and 101st Divisions were also withdrawn into reserve, at the end of November, their respective places were taken by the 49th (West Riding) and 51st (Highland) Divisions.<sup>17</sup> As we have seen, the Corps' most important task was the defence of the Nijmegen

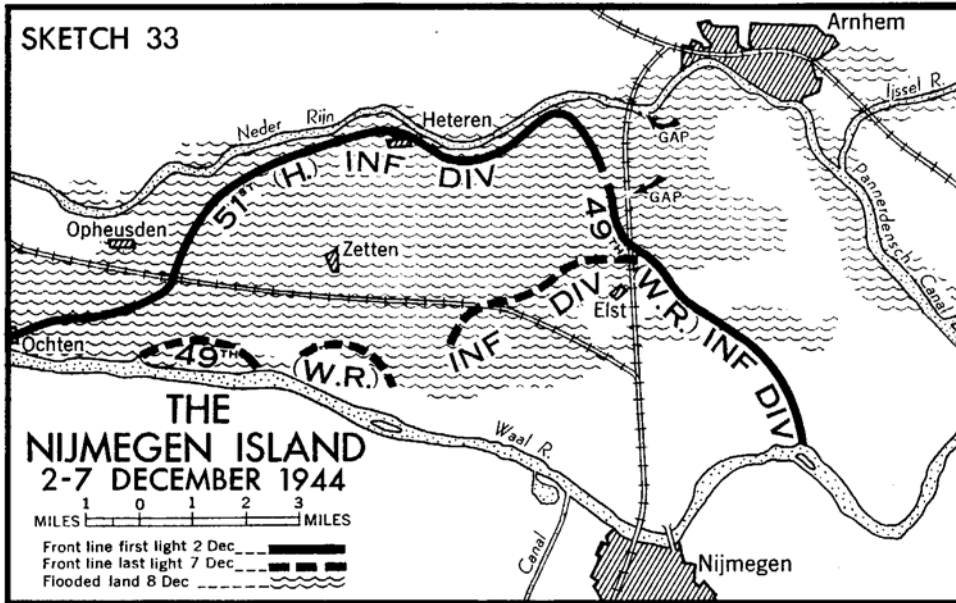
\*The 52nd (Lowland) Division continued to occupy Walcheren until it relieved the 4th Canadian Armoured Division at the end of November. The 4th Special Service Brigade then assumed responsibility for Walcheren and North and South Beveland.

bridgehead, and of the Nijmegen bridges themselves. However, General Simonds was instructed to carry out this task *offensively*, giving the enemy the impression that we intended to secure a bridgehead across the Neder Rijn between Arnhem SF and Wageningen. He was also given a special requirement in the north-eastern sector of the Salient, where the Pannerdensch Canal connects the main streams of the Waal and the Neder Rijn. If the Corps could secure the western bank of this Canal, between Pannerden and Huissen, General Crerar pointed out, our grip on the Nijmegen bridgehead would be strengthened and there would be better prospects of controlling floods in that vulnerable area.<sup>18</sup>

The enemy fully appreciated the significance of the Nijmegen bridgehead. During the concluding phase of the Scheldt operations Army Group "Student", commanded by Colonel-General Kurt Student (it was redesignated Army Group "H" on 10 November), had been formed to coordinate the German defences in this vital sector. Under it Fifteenth Army held the lower reaches of the Maas as far upstream as Ochten, some 13 miles west of Nijmegen, while Student's left flank, including Arnhem and the line of the Maas south to near Boxmeer, was the responsibility of the First Parachute Army.<sup>19</sup> At this stage of the campaign the Germans were quite unable to launch a large-scale offensive against the Allied positions north of Nijmegen; but, apart from local counter-attacks, they menaced the bridgehead with two dangerous weapons: persistent attempts to destroy the bridge at Nijmegen, and systematic flooding of the low-lying "island" between the Waal and the Neder Rijn.

Two permanent bridges, captured intact during the "Market-Garden" operation, spanned the swirling waters of the Waal at Nijmegen. One was a railway bridge, the other the tremendous road-bridge, beside which a barge bridge had since been built. Over the road-bridge passed troops and supplies to maintain our control of the "island"; and since the Waal is the main stream of the lower Rhine, it was a vital factor in our future offensive plans. Having failed either to prevent the bridge from falling into our hands or to recover it, the Germans during the autumn and winter of 1944 made a wide variety of attempts to destroy it. Of many air attacks, the heaviest was on 27 September, when the German 3rd Air Fleet sent out 73 aircraft against the bridges.<sup>20</sup> On 29 September the enemy dispatched 12 "frogmen" (specially trained and equipped swimmers) with mines. They did well: "A gap of 80 feet was made in the road bridge, and one span of the railway bridge was destroyed." But the road bridge was rapidly repaired.<sup>21</sup> In November and December mines floated down the Waal damaged the barge bridge and threatened the road bridge. Various types of nets and booms having been tried without complete success, the Canadian Forestry Corps were now called in; Lieut. J. Johnson designed a "finning boom" to protect the bridges, and it was built by a party from No. 30 Forestry Company.<sup>22</sup>

On 13 January the persistent and ingenious enemy tried another plan. He sent a flotilla of "Biber" one-man midget submarines down the Waal. The First Canadian Army situation report for the twelve hours ending at midnight of 13-14 January tells the story as we saw it:



Two midget submarines engaged by artillery area E 773636 [above the bridges] and one submarine destroyed. Mine attached to log floated down stream blew 150 ft gap in naval boom east of Nijmegen Bridge. Gap being repaired tonight.

The 12th and 14th Field Regiments R.C.A. and the anti-tank guns of The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders all seem to have been in action against the submarines, and one officer claimed to have seen three.<sup>23</sup> But in fact the Germans' operation had been on a larger scale than we suspected. On 15 January, by which time all the facts were available, their Naval Operations Staff made the following entry in its war diary:

According to the report of the leader, the operation against the Nijmegen Bridges has not succeeded. Numerous explosive means were employed, of which 19 mines being towed were lost due to a direct hit. [The previous day's diary attributes this to a mortar hit.] 54 floating mines had been released earlier, followed by 17 Biber, of which 8 reached the designated slip-point one kilometre in front of the first net. 7 Biber ran aground in the river during the trip; 2 had to be destroyed prematurely. 16 of the Biber Travellers [crews] returned and have stated that the bridge is undamaged. All told the undertaking has resulted in 8 casualties, mostly due to freezing in the water.

Though the Germans do not specifically say so, it would seem that the majority of the submarines, if not all of them, were lost. In spite of all these attempts, and a great deal of sporadic shelling and bombing, the great bridge continued to stand, and to give indispensable service to Allied operations throughout the remainder of the campaign.

The second danger to the Nijmegen bridgehead was the possibility that the enemy would flood the "island" between the Waal and the Neder Rijn. It was well known that, under certain conditions of high water in those rivers, he could swamp a large area by breaching dykes at the eastern end of the "island". "Such

flooding could cover the country to a depth of three feet, and under the worst conditions flood-water might reach Elst [halfway between Nijmegen and Arnhem] in about 12 hours."<sup>24</sup> This action could only be taken after some weeks of rain; but 1 November would mark the beginning of the period of greatest danger. In assessing the threat, our planning staffs did not overlook the possibility that the enemy would combine flooding with renewed efforts to destroy the Nijmegen bridge and trap our forces in the "island".

Detailed arrangements were made, under the appropriate code name "Noah", to meet the threat of inundation.<sup>25</sup> If flooding occurred the 2nd Corps was to evacuate the area, treating the operation as a normal withdrawal in the face of opposition. Careful consideration was given to the problems of traffic control, civilian refugees and livestock. On the evening of 1 December the Army Commander sent a senior staff officer to warn Corps Headquarters (where General Rennie of the 51st Division was temporarily in command in General Simonds' absence) of the importance of being ready for flooding by the enemy. The emergency came the very next day, when the 49th Division reported dykes blown north of Elst and west of Arnhem; and an orderly evacuation began.<sup>26</sup> On the 4th General Simonds' Chief of Staff (Brigadier N. E. Rodger) toured the "island", recording this description of the scene:<sup>27</sup>

The water was spreading slowly and rising into low corners of fields-and in places flowing across roads westward. Civilians (the few who were left) were collecting belongings in farm carts and were collecting herds of cattle and driving them north on small roads to the railway and then east to a collecting area near bridges. . . . Most of the marching troops came off by storm boat and thought *that* at least a good lark. Civilians also allowed to use storm-boats.

The flood spread westward towards Zetten and Heteren until, after three days, it reached approximate equilibrium with the northern three-quarters of the former "island" under water.<sup>28</sup> In conjunction with the flooding the enemy put in a local attack against the 49th Division on 4 December. It was sharply repulsed, and the situation gradually settled down, units of both the 49th and Highland Divisions retaining footholds on the "island" (all under Headquarters 49th Division from the morning of the 6th) with the Nijmegen bridge still well covered. Both divisions' headquarters had moved south of the Waal by noon of 7 December.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, General Simonds had studied the special requirements given to his Corps in the Army Commander's directive of 13 November and had issued detailed instructions to subordinate formations.<sup>30</sup> In his view the Corps might undertake any of three offensive operations: a limited attack to clear the eastern end of the "island"; a major assault against the Reichswald to break through the northern extremity of the Siegfried Line (this requiring the assistance of British and American Armies on our right flank); and, finally, another large-scale attack across the Neder Rijn to capture high ground north of Arnhem and bridgeheads over the Ijssel. It was clear that successful assaults against either the Reichswald or Ijssel positions would dislodge the northern anchor of the German line in the west.

The Corps Commander reiterated the intention to "hold and develop the Nijmegen salient as a base for offensive operations directed south-eastwards between



the Maas and Rhine or northwards across the Neder Rijn". Pending resumption of mobile operations, he stressed the need for aggressive patrolling and offensive use of centralized artillery to inflict casualties on the enemy and undermine his morale. His final injunction looked forward to the resumption of active operations:

Though weather and resources limit the scope of offensive operations for the present, it is vitally important that the offensive spirit should be maintained and enhanced. Full advantage must be taken of static conditions to have the maximum number of troops out on active training. Great opportunities are now open to properly absorb reinforcements and re-weld battle teams. Aggressive patrolling against the enemy is the best schooling in junior leadership.

The possibility of mounting an operation ("Siesta") to clear the "island" eastward to the Pannerdensch Canal was still under active consideration by Field Marshal Montgomery and General Crerar at the end of November. However, plans for this operation, which the Army Group Commander described as "important",<sup>31</sup> were complicated by the regrouping of formations within the 21st Army Group. Later, when the Germans flooded the "island", it speedily became apparent that for the moment, at least the operation was "off".<sup>32</sup> In any event, Canadian attention was soon focussed on other matters of greater importance.

### Life in the Line

While commanders and staffs planned future operations, the administrative services and the troops in the line were far from being inactive. Long before the Army took over the Salient, detailed consideration had been given to the special problems of winter conditions in the Netherlands, and provision had been made for special clothing and equipment to meet these conditions. Snowfalls and heavy frosts were anticipated; camouflage, accommodation and vehicle maintenance were recognized as major problems.<sup>33</sup> The measures taken bore fruit through the ensuing months.

On the Reichswald front the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions lost no time in demonstrating the "offensive spirit" enjoined by General Simonds. Each division generally had two brigades in the front line and one in reserve; reliefs were organized on a rotational basis, with brigades spending two weeks in the line and one in reserve.<sup>34</sup> Divisional instructions called for "aggressive local activity", with the object of creating and dominating a substantial no-man's-land.<sup>35</sup> Much of the terrain lent itself to this policy: open, undulating ground, strewn with the remains of gliders wrecked in the great airborne attack of the previous September. Some gliders were booby-trapped, and there were many mines (especially the troublesome Schu mines).<sup>\*</sup> Numerous rough roads and tracks, some hedge-lined, traversed the open ground, connecting hamlets and isolated farms. The opposing front (between the Maas and the Waal) was held by the 84th and 190th German Infantry Divisions of the First Parachute Army. Our Intelligence assessed each of these divisions as "the equivalent of three weak regimental [brigade] battle groups".<sup>36</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>Small, box-like anti-personnel mines, feared particularly because the few metal parts used in their construction made them difficult to detect.



#### THE SCENE OF THE WESTKAPELLE LANDING

The west point of Walcheren, photographed from the air on an unrecorded date. The gap in the dyke made by the R.A.F. Bomber Command appears clearly in the left foreground. The village is Westkapelle.



#### ON THE DYKE AT KAPELSCH VEER, JANUARY 1945

This sketch by Lieut. A. M. Damer was drawn in consultation with officers who manned the artillery observation posts on the dyke. It is reproduced by permission from Capt. R. A. Spencer's *History of the Fifteenth Canadian Field Regiment*.



#### THE SUPREME COMMANDER VISITS CANADIAN TROOPS

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, accompanied by General Crerar, inspects a guard of honour of the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment) at Best, near 's-Hertogenbosch, Holland, on 29 November 1944. The guard commander is Capt. K. E. Perrin, killed later in the Rhineland battle.



#### COMMANDERS IN OPERATION "VERITABLE", FEBRUARY 1945

The G.O.C.-in-C. First Canadian Army with corps and divisional commanders, near Cleve, 19 February. From left to right, Brigadier M. Elrington, Acting G.O.C. 53rd (Welsh) Division; Major-General G. Ivor Thomas, 43rd (Wessex) Division; Lieut.-General Sir Brian Horrocks, 30th Corps; Major-General C. M. Barber, 15th (Scottish) Division; General Crerar; Major-General D. C. Spry, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division; Lieut.-General G. G. Simonds, 2nd Canadian Corps; Major-General A. B. Matthews, 2nd Canadian Infantry Division.

"Both sides enjoyed good observation over the ground west of the Reichswald in daylight; both also made strenuous efforts to establish control over it during darkness. There were frequent clashes between German and Canadian patrols, especially in the Groesbeek sector. There were, in general, four types of patrols. *Reconnaissance* patrols were sent out to gain information without fighting for it; these included efforts "to capture a prisoner by stealth" in order to gain information. *Fighting* patrols were normally composed of ten or 12 men, although they might include up to a platoon, if their action was rehearsed; their object could be to obtain information or prisoners, or to destroy hostile positions. They were prepared to fight to accomplish their missions. Third were *contact patrols*, establishing communication with flanking units. Finally, *standing patrols*, not exceeding one platoon in strength, occupied protective positions forward of our main defences and gave early warning of impending attacks; such patrols were prepared to fight, but not to stand their ground at all costs.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from patrolling, raiding parties of greater strength than one platoon were invariably given well-defined objects and were carefully rehearsed in advance; they were generally supported by a prepared fire plan, utilizing artillery and other supporting weapons, including machine-guns, mortars and the divisional countermortar organization. Many such raids were launched, an example being the wellorganized organized Operation "Mickey Finn", carried out near Knapheide, south of Groesbeek, on 7 December by The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada. In this company raid it was estimated that the enemy lost about 25 killed, while one prisoner was taken. The Black Watch had nine fatal casualties.<sup>38</sup> No enemy records are available for the affair.

Somewhat similar conditions prevailed on the front of the 1st British Corps during November and early December. The 18th Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons), then on loan to Sir John Crocker from 2nd Canadian Corps Troops, patrolled a 25-mile stretch of the Maas from its mouth, opposite Schouwen, to near the Moerdijk bridges. It was perhaps symptomatic of the enemy's disorganized state in this sector that the Canadian troopers enjoyed telephonic communication with Dutch resistance groups on German-held Schouwen.<sup>39</sup> In the centre of the 1st Corps' sector the 1st Polish Armoured Division held the front between Moerdijk and Raamsdonk. General Maczek's men rested and re-equipped without relaxing their vigilance. "Until the middle of December conditions were relatively quiet, interrupted at times by an artillery fire duel, and mortar and machine-gun exchange of fire, combined with frequent sorties by enemy patrols."<sup>40</sup> On the right flank, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division held the south bank of the Maas as far east as Lith, east of Maren.\* The swampy nature of the ground confined all operations in the forward area to the roads.<sup>41</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the principal activity was patrolling and observation of the enemy; security regulations were also tightened as a precaution against infiltration of German agents. On 26 November the 52nd (Lowland) Division relieved the 4th Division, which then

\*The division's artillery commander, Brigadier J. N. Lane, was killed on 10 November when his jeep struck a mine during a reconnaissance.

passed into Army Reserve. When the 52nd left for the Second Army area on 5 December, the 4th resumed its operational role in the 's-Hertogenbosch sector of the Maas under the 1st Corps.<sup>42</sup>

### Planning the Rhineland Offensive

At the end of November Field-Marshal Montgomery was displeased with the state of things on the Allied front. Progress had been slow in recent weeks; and on the 30th the field marshal wrote a letter to General Eisenhower pointing out that the programme of the Brussels conference (above, page 427), which the Supreme Commander had recapitulated in a directive of 28 October, had not been carried out. Montgomery wrote, "We have therefore failed; and we have suffered a strategic reverse."<sup>43</sup> On 28 November General Crerar had written Montgomery commenting upon Operation "Valediction", the name then given to the proposed south-easterly advance between the Maas and the Rhine. Weather and ground conditions, he said, were unfavourable to the project at the present time, and he could not see it as practicable until after "Siesta" (above, page 434) had been completed. Montgomery replied on the same day on which he wrote Eisenhower.<sup>44</sup> The important thing, he said, was to get on with "Siesta"; as for "Valediction",

There is no intention of launching this operation now, and I have never expressed any wish to do so. All I want you to do is to examine it and put the planners on to thinking it out. It will NOT be launched till the spring, i.e., March or later.

This intention was radically altered shortly. There was a rather sharp exchange between Montgomery and Eisenhower. The former had suggested that since the Supreme Commander did not want a single land force commander, then there should be "one commander in full operational control north of the Ardennes, and one south"; this, he recalled, had been indicated as a possibility by Eisenhower himself. He proceeded:

I said that Bradley and I together are a good team. We worked together in Normandy, under you, and we won a great victory. Things have not been so good since you separated us. I believe to be certain of success you want to bring us together again; and one of us should have the full operational control north of the Ardennes; and if you decide that I should do that work-that is O.K. by me.

Montgomery also observed, "we must get away from the doctrine of attacking in so many places that nowhere are we strong enough to get decisive results"; what was necessary was to "concentrate such strength on the main selected thrust that success will be certain". It would seem that his views were communicated to Mr. Churchill, for on 6 December the British Prime Minister wrote President Roosevelt commenting on the failure "to achieve the strategic object which we gave to our armies five weeks ago" and "the serious and disappointing war situation which faces us at the close of the year". He suggested that the President might send his Chiefs of Staff overseas to effect more closely concerted action.<sup>45</sup>

The Americans declined to be worried or moved. Eisenhower showed himself quite unwilling to make the command reorganization suggested by Montgomery,

and wrote, "I have no intention of stopping Devers' and Patton's operations as long as they are cleaning up our right flank and giving us *capability of concentration*. On the other hand I do not intend to push these attacks senselessly." And Roosevelt's reply to Churchill on 10 December amounted to a declaration of unwillingness to interfere with the field commander.<sup>46</sup>

The strategic question was argued out on 7 December at a conference at Maastricht, attended by Eisenhower, Tedder, Montgomery and Bradley, which had been suggested by Montgomery.<sup>47</sup> It was agreed to keep up the pressure on the enemy through the winter. The main attack was to be north of the Ruhr. This was now again to be entrusted to the 21st Army Group, with an American army under command. A supporting attack was to be put in on the American front farther south, but the precise point was not settled. The Americans favoured a thrust on the line Frankfurt—Cassel (in Patton's area); but Montgomery, evidently feeling that this would involve rather too wide an encirclement of the Ruhr, much preferred an attack in the Bonn region. Montgomery's proposal to place all operations north of the Ardennes under one command was again rejected by the Supreme Commander; and the Field Marshal was left feeling that he had lost another round in his long fight for concentration of effort as against dispersion.<sup>48</sup>

With reference to this conference, an American official historian makes a pertinent comment on the unresolved issues between Montgomery and Eisenhower. "General Eisenhower, with control of the U.S. forces and supplies that Field Marshal Montgomery deemed essential to the all-out attack in the north, was in a position to make his view prevail."<sup>49</sup> The fact that the United Kingdom—and, indeed, the United Kingdom and Canada together—could not produce larger forces, was the fatal weakness of Montgomery's position in all these strategic controversies. On 1 December the Allied order of battle in the West showed 68 divisions; of these, 15 were British and Canadian, eight were French (and French African), one was Polish and 44 were American.<sup>50</sup>

It was about the moment of the Maastricht conference, and partly as a result of it, that the plan for the offensive between Maas and Rhine took, in essentials, its final shape. At Headquarters First Canadian Army, in the period of study following Montgomery's directive of 2 November (above, page 427), the tacit assumption was that the operation would be undertaken by the 2nd Canadian Corps.<sup>51</sup> The Canadian planners made use, in their study, of an outline plan for the operation (then known as "Wyvern") made in October by Lieut.-General Sir Brian Horrocks' 30th Corps, and handed over to the Canadians when they relieved that Corps in November.<sup>52</sup> On 6 December Field-Marshal Montgomery visited General Crerar and discussed his army's future operations.<sup>53</sup> There is no actual record of the discussion; but the following day General Crerar's plans section, in a "Note on Possible Developments" concerning Operation "Valediction", remarked that it was understood that the Army Group Commander desired that the attack south-easterly from the Nijmegen area should be "under the control of Second British Army", and that the Americans should take over from his army group the area south of Roermond (then held by the 30th Corps).<sup>54</sup> That was the

day of the Maastricht conference, and on that day,\* in the outskirts of Maastricht, before the conference, Montgomery met General Horrocks and discussed this operation with him. Horrocks said he would need five divisions—the number indicated in the "Wyvern" plan—if he was given the task; and after the conference, if Horrocks' recollection is accurate, Montgomery telephoned to say that he would get them and that he was to start thinking out the operation.<sup>55</sup>

At 6:20 p.m. on the 7<sup>th</sup>—this is definite—Montgomery telephoned Crerar and said he had had a talk with the Supreme Commander and that the Americans would take over the southern part of the British front. Having thought over the operation to break through the Reichswald position south-east of Nijmegen, Montgomery now considered that the Canadian Army should have the responsibility for it. The target date was 1 January. Crerar's memorandum of the conversation<sup>56</sup> proceeds:

3. I would need another Corps for this, and 30 Corps, including up to four Inf & one Armd Div would be at disposal. Whether I decided Cdn or 30 Corps to do [the operation], 30 Corps would require to be brought in on right of Cdn Army for future reasons.

Although Montgomery had courteously left the formal decision to Crerar, in the circumstances he had described logic demanded that the 30th Corps should conduct the offensive; and at a conference at Headquarters First Canadian Army later that evening it was explained, "First Cdn Army's offensive will, initially, be undertaken by 30 Brit Corps."<sup>57</sup> The code name "Valediction" was now changed to "Veritable".<sup>58</sup>

Detailed planning for "Veritable" continued through the second week of December, with close consultation between British and Canadian headquarters.<sup>59</sup> Following a conference with Montgomery on 9 December, Crerar issued a preliminary directive to Corps Commanders on the 10th. On the 14th he sent an amended directive.<sup>60</sup> It noted that the Commander-in-Chief's intention was "to continue operations throughout the winter, allowing the enemy no respite", and added,

The Winter campaign of 21 Army Group must be so designed that it leads into, and prepares the way for, the Spring offensive. The governing factors in reaching decisions concerning these operations are:—

- (a) The selected objectives must be of a decisive nature—this points to the Ruhr.
- (b) Our operations must force the enemy into engaging in mobile warfare, in which he will be at a disadvantage due to lack of petrol, mechanical transport and tanks.

The target date for "Veritable" was "1 Jan, or as soon thereafter as conditions permit". The initial phase was the business of the 30th Corps. Subsequently the 2nd Canadian Corps would come in on the left; "The second, and succeeding, phases will, therefore, be conducted on a two Corps front." In the beginning, the task of the 2nd Corps would be merely "to secure the left flank of 30 Brit Corps". However, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was to take part in Phase I under the 30th Corps. General Simonds would presumably have preferred to see his own corps rather than a British one cast for the leading role in "Veritable". General

\*General Horrocks, lecturing on the operations in 1947, placed this interview at "approximately 21 November". But he recalled that Montgomery was at Maastricht to attend a conference with Eisenhower and Bradley. This, combined with the course of events described in the text, seems to leave no doubt that the date was 7 December.

Crerar gave him an outline of the proposal on 8 December; and that afternoon Simonds wrote the Army Commander "drawing attention to the unfortunate situation which would develop" if no Canadian formations took part in this important battle.<sup>61</sup> This may have been the origin of the commitment of the 3rd Division.

As for the 1st British Corps, its chief role was to "implement and maintain" a cover plan indicating a prospective attack across the Waal and the Lek directed on Utrecht, designed to liberate the northern Netherlands. It was hoped that the movement of British units from Second Army into the Canadian Army area might be interpreted by the enemy as related to this project.

Field-Marshal Montgomery issued his own directive on "Veritable" on 16 December.<sup>62</sup> It dwelt again on the importance of the Ruhr, and of forcing mobile warfare on the Germans. The general concept was thus stated:

6. The future layout that we want to achieve is to face up to the Rhine from Orsoy northwards on a front of two armies, Second Army being on the right and Canadian Army on the left. American formations are then to be included in 21 Army Group and, with the co-operation of strong airborne forces, the Rhine will be crossed. Before we can begin to develop successfully large scale operations across the Rhine we must clear the enemy completely from the west of the river, and must join up with the American Ninth Army coming up from the south; we must in fact be in undisputed possession of all territory west of the Rhine from inclusive the general line Orsoy-Venlo northwards.

First Canadian Army was to launch its offensive south-eastward between Rhine and Maas as soon as possible after 1 January; "the date selected to be reported to me by Canadian Army by 22-12-44".

Montgomery's estimate of the Germans' capabilities has, not surprisingly in the circumstances, often been quoted:

3. The enemy is at present fighting a defensive campaign on all fronts; his situation is such that he cannot stage major offensive operations. Furthermore, at all costs he has to prevent the war from entering on a mobile phase; he has not the transport or the petrol that would be necessary for mobile operations, nor could his tanks compete with ours in the mobile battle.

This, it will be recalled, was issued on 16 December. On that same morning the enemy launched "major offensive operations", driving forward through the snowcovered Ardennes in a final great gamble for victory in the West.

The opinion expressed by Montgomery was merely that generally held at Allied headquarters. General Bradley has remarked that he would have said precisely the same thing at the time.<sup>63</sup> It is true that on 10 December the First U.S. Army (on which the blow was actually to fall) issued an intelligence summary<sup>64</sup> forecasting "an all-out counterattack with armor, between the Roer and the Erft, supported by every weapon he [the enemy] can bring to bear"; but the forecast lacked complete definition. Five days later the same intelligence staff described "a limited scale offensive" as a possibility; and when the attack actually began its chief was on leave in Paris.<sup>65</sup> As we have noted elsewhere, the German reserves not in the line were the intelligence responsibility of SHAEF; and the SHAEF intelligence staff certainly did not emphasize the enemy's offensive capabilities or intentions.



They observed that the Germans had built up a "panzer pool"<sup>66</sup> under the Sixth Panzer Army, and had no doubt that the situation had formidable possibilities; but they seem to have thought of it in terms of determined German defence rather than of fierce German attack. Their last weekly intelligence summary before the offensive<sup>67</sup> remarked,

In the West, the enemy still faces two major problems, the defence of the Saar and the Ruhr....

In the Cologne—Dusseldorf sector, Sixth SS [sic] Panzer Army has been cleverly husbanded and remains uncommitted. And until this army is committed, we cannot really feel satisfied. German losses have been very high and attrition is costing him dearly but so far the battle must have gone better for him than he had anticipated. This is his vital sector, and so we cannot expect anything else but continued reinforcement: hard and bloody fighting; every sort of defence, mines and booby traps. It will be a bitter and hard struggle to reach the Rhine.

Hitler appears to have been very nearly right when he said after the attack that the Allies "lived exclusively in the thought of their own offensive".<sup>68</sup>

### The Ardennes Offensive and Its Results

The German offensive had the effect of postponing Operation "Veritable" for some five weeks.

The failure of the Mortain enterprise in Normandy had not destroyed Hitler's confidence in German ability to strike a decisive blow in the west. There is evidence that as early as 19 August—the day the Falaise Gap was closed—he was thinking in terms of another counter-offensive, which he recognized could not take place before November.<sup>69</sup> On 13 September he ordered the formation of the Sixth Panzer Army for the purpose.<sup>70</sup> Not even the inexorable Russian advance in the east could turn him from his purpose of inflicting a severe reverse on the Western Allies. By the early days of October he and his advisers had selected the Ardennes—the scene of the successful German penetration in 1940—as the springboard for the venture.<sup>71</sup>

It is not necessary in this book to review in detail the background and development of the Ardennes offensive.\* One senior German participant has written, "Tactically speaking the Ardennes breakthrough was the last great achievement of the German General Staff, a stroke in the finest tradition of Gneisenau, Moltke and Schlieffen."<sup>72</sup> But the strategic conception seems to have been entirely Hitler's. He determined the objectives, the timing and all essential features of the plan, and even Rundstedt was not consulted until these were virtually settled. Hitler intended to use two Panzer Armies, the Fifth and Sixth, in twin drives directed on Brussels and Antwerp respectively. As the operation progressed, the Fifteenth Army would make a converging thrust towards Maastricht to assist the drive on Antwerp. "The primary aim of this operation", said General Hasso von Manteuffel, commander of the Fifth Panzer Army, "was the encirclement and destruction of 21st British Army Group."<sup>73</sup> However, there seems little doubt that Hitler's basic aim was to effect temporary stabilization on the Western Front and thereby win a breathing

\*The enterprise was first known by the code name "Wacht am Rhein" (obviously a cover name). Later it was redesignated "Herbstnebel" (Autumn Fog).

space in which to achieve a stalemate on the Russian front with forces transferred from the West.<sup>74</sup>

Rundstedt, Model and other commanders argued for a less ambitious and more practical plan with more limited objectives—a blow at the American salient east of Aachen, which might have inflicted most painful damage. But Hitler, as his fashion was, was adamant.<sup>75</sup> German armour lunged forward on 16 December from well-hidden harbours in the Eifel. A combination of skilful deceptive measures and dirty weather which prevented Allied aerial reconnaissance gained for the enemy complete strategic and tactical surprise.\* Nevertheless, obstinate defence by certain American units foiled his hopes of reaching the Meuse by the end of the second day. Thereafter, although German spearheads penetrated more than 50 miles from their start line, and actually got within a couple of miles of the river, the offensive gradually lost momentum. Tenacious American resistance at key points, notably Bastogne, the speed of Allied regrouping, and more favourable weather after Christmas which permitted Allied air power full play, were the main factors in the ultimate defeat of Hitler's ambitious design.<sup>76</sup>

Apart from several companies of No. 1 Canadian Forestry Group,† then working in the Ardennes Forest, and the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, brought from the United Kingdom with the rest of the 6th Airborne Division to assist in meeting the emergency, no Canadian units were directly involved in the battle. The Canadian loggers found themselves in close proximity to the enemy and had to take up defensive positions for a time before being evacuated from the Ardennes. The parachute battalion did not reach the front at Rochefort (only a few miles from the previous locations of the forestry companies) until 2 January, by which time the activity required of it was mainly confined to aggressive patrolling.<sup>78</sup> However, the German counter-offensive was significant for First Canadian Army: partly by its effect upon its future operational role and partly because of a subsidiary threat on General Crerar's front.

At 5:00 p.m. on 19 December Field-Marshal Montgomery telephoned General Crerar. The German penetration of the First United States Army's front, he said, was "deep and, potentially, serious". Consequently, he had decided "to make immediate re-dispositions in 21 Army Group, in order to secure its right flank". That same evening the 30th British Corps was to move from Boxtel to Hasselt, 15 miles west of the Meuse, and come under the command of Second British Army. The 51st (Highland) Division would remain under Crerar, but would be kept ready for speedy transfer to the Second Army. Ten minutes after this conversation Crerar issued the necessary instructions to carry out Montgomery's orders.<sup>79</sup> In effect, all plans for launching "Veritable" about 1 January were temporarily shelved.

\*Marshalling his forces with uncommon skill, choosing his weather and his sector with exemplary care, von Rundstedt has launched an operation on which he is prepared to "gamble everything" (21st Army Group Intelligence Review No. 169, 20 December 1944). In the opinion of R.A.F. historians, information provided by Allied air reconnaissance had not been properly assessed and disseminated.

†Nos. 1, 9, 14, 25 and 27 Companies had been operating sawmills south-east of Names, in the St. Hubert area; No. 16 Company had been employed at Spa, south-east of Liege.<sup>77</sup>

These arrangements were confirmed and extended on the following day, when the Supreme Commander placed the First U.S. Army as well as the Ninth under Montgomery's command and gave him control of all Allied ground operations on the northern flank of the German penetration. General Bradley had the responsibility for the southern flank.<sup>80</sup> At his tactical headquarters, on the morning of 20 December, the British Commander-in-Chief told Generals Dempsey and Crerar that steps had been taken to secure all crossings over the Meuse between Liege and Givet. "At all cost", he said, "the enemy must be prevented from crossing the River Meuse, in any strength, along this front." Responsibility for the defence of the river in this sector devolved mainly upon Second British Army, with the 30th Corps held in readiness for a counter-stroke. However, the Field Marshal was still thinking of what he considered this Corps' primary mission, in the north; if the Allied situation in the Ardennes improved materially he said, "it was quite probable that HQ 30 Corps and several Divisions [including the 51st, which had already moved south] would be returned to First Cdn Army, in order to proceed with speed on Operation 'Veritable'". Therefore the work of improving communications in the Canadian area, leading to the Nijmegen Salient, would be vigorously pressed.<sup>81</sup> However, it proved impossible to disengage the 30th Corps from the Ardennes until mid-January-when "the Black Boar\* returned to Boxtel to sharpen his tusks for the next affray".<sup>82</sup>

Apart from the delay imposed upon future operations, the enemy's offensive caused considerable anxiety concerning First Canadian Army's most important responsibility—the defence of the Nijmegen Salient. When the storm first broke in the Ardennes there were few immediate repercussions in the north. On 16 December General Crerar's intelligence staff correctly identified the German formations from Arnhem westward as the 6th Parachute and 712th, 711th and 346th Infantry Divisions.<sup>83</sup> On succeeding days the front remained quiet, except for "spirited" German patrolling in the Reichswald sector, where the enemy also serenaded our troops over a public address system with "I'm an Old Cow Hand from the Rio Grande". On 18 December there were indications that the 712th Division might be withdrawing some of its troops north of the Neder Rijn.<sup>84</sup>

However, by the 21st, Intelligence at Headquarters First Canadian Army had gathered "reasonably conclusive" evidence that the enemy was "preparing a large paratroop operation to take place very shortly, to disrupt the communications of the armies dependent on Antwerp and Brussels":

It is abundantly clear that there are paratroops in German Holland, and that their movements tie in to this design. It is equally clear that were the Ardennes plans to succeed to the extent that the enemy crossed the Meuse between Liege and Givet in force, a parachute landing behind our forces opposing him would assist him immeasurably and might, in the longer view, disorganize our offensive plans. Similarly such a landing in the rear areas of First Canadian Army and Second Army might reasonably be expected to delay the movement of reserves to the Ardennes battle. . . .

Information on the build-up of German parachute formations was based on numerous reports from hitherto reliable sources. These indicated that four parachute divisions were available, airfields had been improved and relocations of

\*The Black Boar (rampant) was the identifying sign of the 30th British Corps.



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airborne troops had occurred in the Amersfoort—Arnhem area. However, Intelligence emphasized the necessity of correlating the suspected northern threat with the drive towards Antwerp, pointing out that "without a land operation, reasonably likely to reach the area, it is only a possible and NOT a probable operation".<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, apprehension continued to mount on succeeding days, although there was a perceptible change in the degree and nature of the threat. German patrols were active across the entire Canadian front and at night the noise of tanks and other vehicles was heard, suggesting movement from north to south behind the enemy's lines. Civilian sources indicated that the enemy was concentrating in the area along the Maas between Geertruidenberg and Heusden with assault equipment such as rubber boats; numerous German anti-radar devices were reported in action. On 22 December, while 12 German divisions were exerting fierce pressure against the First United States Army in the Ardennes, Canadian Intelligence visualized the enemy making "a short term parachute raid across the Maas to distract attention and prevent [Allied] reserves moving south". Yet information the following day made the possibility of the use of airborne troops seem "more nebulous". Rumours circulated among civilians in Nijmegen that the enemy would attack in the early hours of Christmas Day with six divisions.<sup>86</sup>

On 23 December General Crerar issued to his Corps Commanders a cautionary directive pointing to the possibility of "a subsidiary operation, both water and airborne, directed against North Brabant and possibly on Antwerp".<sup>87</sup> While a southern drive along the Gorinchem—Breda—Antwerp axis appeared to offer the best results to the enemy, he noted that no sector of the Army's front could be excluded from the possibility of attack and emphasized the need for particular vigilance over the Christmas period:

Commanders will, therefore, be very much on the alert and the organization and disposition of forces under command will be made to suit the contingencies as described. Plans will be made to deal vigorously and decisively with any enemy penetration of outpost positions and Forward Defended Localities and, at the same time, to contain, localize and mop-up any landings of enemy paratroops in Divisional, Corps and Army rear areas.

General Vokes' 4th Armoured Division, which had been relieved by the Poles on the 21st, was placed in Army Reserve in the Boxtel area, on six hours' notice to move.\* On General Simonds' front the 2nd Canadian Division was brought into Corps Reserve on the 26th, the 3rd Division, with the 5th Brigade from the 2nd Division under command, extending its southern flank to cover the new dispositions. The 3rd British Infantry Division and its front along the Maas between Venlo and Boxmeer came under the 2nd Canadian Corps from Second Army on 29 December and remained under General Simonds until 19 January.<sup>89</sup> Special arrangements were made for the security of the Army Headquarters area, and plans were in readiness for withdrawing the headquarters to an alternative area in rear if this proved desirable.

As Christmas passed without any large-scale German demonstration tension

\*Subsequently, the division occupied positions farther west, in the Breda-Tilburg area, coming back under the 1st British Corps. The 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade Group (of the 2nd Division) took over the Boxtel area as Army Reserve on 29 December.<sup>88</sup>

relaxed to some extent.<sup>90</sup> In the Ardennes, Hitler ordered new attacks in a supreme effort to reach the Meuse; but Allied counter-measures, including very powerful blows from the air, exerted increasing influence on the battle. On 26 December the Third Army made contact with the 101st U.S. Airborne Division which had been fighting virtually surrounded in Bastogne.<sup>91</sup> In the north Field-Marshal Montgomery expected the enemy to make "nasty faces" and "diversionary 'jabs'" but did not anticipate serious attacks against the Canadian Army or the Second Army's left sector.<sup>92</sup> At the end of December, General Crerar issued further instructions to his Corps Commanders.<sup>93</sup> There was a possibility, he thought, that, even if the German offensive failed in the Ardennes, some desperate enterprise might be attempted on his Army's front.

It should now be assumed that the assembly and deployment of enemy forces, of approximate strength four to five Divisions, has been completed North of R Maas, between Hedel and Perenboom. The main thrust line for this enemy force, should a bridgehead be successfully established by it South of R Maas, would be Oosterhout—Breda—Antwerp. A secondary thrust, to secure 's-Hertogenbosch, should also be anticipated.

Crerar also mentioned the assembly of a German force, estimated at one brigade group, on the islands of Schouwen and Overflakkee—presumably intended for diversionary amphibious attacks against the mainland and the island of Tholen. Since the 21st Army Group's commitments in the Ardennes precluded any possibility of reinforcing First Canadian Army, the latter had to counter these threats with its own resources. Nevertheless, General Crerar emphasized that it was important to do this without "dangerously compromising" the ability to mount Operation "Veritable" later.

On New Year's Day the Germans launched another offensive, not in the north but in the south, in the region of Strasbourg. Their success here was less than in the Ardennes, though they gained considerable ground. Their last abortive thrust on 25 January was followed by a successful Allied counter-offensive.<sup>94</sup> The only major enemy enterprise in the north—also on New Year's Day—was mounted by the *Luftwaffe*. It took the form of what No. 83 Group R.A.F. called "an extremely well planned and, on the whole, well executed attack on a number of airfields in Holland and Eastern Belgium". The "Hangover Raid" further shook our complacency and cost us, by one computation, 156 aircraft, most of them destroyed on the ground. But the Germans lost even more heavily, their personnel casualties being crippling; according to the commander of their fighter force, they "had a total loss of nearly 300 fighter pilots, including fifty-nine leaders".<sup>95</sup>

### The Other Side of the Maas

How real was the German threat in the Netherlands during the Ardennes offensive? At the time, as was natural, there was some disagreement on our side. General Simonds in particular was critical of the conclusions of First Canadian Army Intelligence.<sup>96</sup> Today, with considerable German evidence available, it seems evident that the threat was real; but it was a relatively minor portion of the plans of the German high command.





No orders concerning the offensive were issued to General Student's Army Group "H" before it actually began on 16 December; Student however states\* that he was personally informed about the Ardennes project on the 8th.<sup>97</sup> Army Group "B" was the formation primarily concerned, and the local planning was concentrated at its headquarters. On 16 December the war diary of the Commander-in-Chief West<sup>98</sup> noted,

With the launching of the battle, Army Groups H and G are being notified of their own tasks in the frame of the entire operation.

Army Group H: To follow up as soon as retrograde movements by the enemy can be recognized. . .

Later the same day this was added:

If the operations of Army Group B continue to develop as successfully as they seem to promise up to now, and headway is quickly made in the direction of Antwerp, an advance by strong elements of the Twenty-Fifth Army across the lower Maas can contribute materially to the success [of the entire operation] by completing the large envelopment of the enemy forces in the area north of the front under attack.

The Twenty-Fifth Army, it should be noted, was Student's right-hand army, having under its command the 30th Corps (remnants of the 346th Infantry Division and odds and ends) in the area west of Dordrecht, and the 88th Corps (711th and 712th Infantry Divisions and 6th Parachute Division, with the 2nd Parachute Division slated to join it) between Dordrecht and Arnhem.<sup>99</sup>

By 18 December, though the German infantry divisions on the main front were moving well, the armour, particularly on the Sixth Panzer Army front on the right, was having trouble. On this day Hitler cancelled an intended attack by the Fifteenth Army (on the Sixth's right) so that some of its troops could be used on the Ardennes front. The Commander-in-Chief West's diarist recorded,

All the more important is the speedy completion of Army Group H's preparations for a thrust across the Waal and Maas, so that the [operation] can be carried out immediately if the situation so demands. C.-in-C. West gives orders to carry out the preparations in such a manner that, without any further warning orders, as of 22 Dec, the attack can be launched on 24 hours' notice....

No relevant contemporary German Army or Army Group records are available; but fortunately we have the war diary of the 88th Corps, which would have had the main responsibility for any thrust from north of the Maas directed towards Antwerp. This corps began planning on the 16th and next day gave the TwentyFifth Army its outline plan for an operation in which the 711th Division would cross the Maas and advance on Breda, the 6th Parachute Division would cross farther east directed on Tilburg, and two regimental groups of the 712th would cross west of Heusden to cover the left flank. On the evening of 21 December it issued a formal operation order; the 712th Division was now to operate in the centre and the 6th Parachute Division to cover the left, and no immediate objectives were prescribed farther south than the crossings of the Wilhelmina Canal at Oosterhout and Dongen.<sup>100</sup> These crossings would be the means of advancing on Breda

\*Conversations recorded in the war diary of H.Q. 88th Corps on the 12th suggest indirectly the possibility that Student may actually have got word on the 11th.

—and subsequently Antwerp—if the situation developed favourably; but these possibilities are not mentioned in the order.

To mislead us as to the point of attack, the 88th Corps on 18 December ordered special activity about Tiel, on the Waal well to the east of the intended crossings. We duly observed this and, the activity continuing, late in December a super-heavy battery was sent "to beat up Tiel".<sup>101</sup> However, as we have seen, First Canadian Army was not deceived as to the projected point of main effort.

According to Student, some 150 tanks were to be available to him (they never actually arrived) and would presumably have been used to exploit beyond the canal. He had a parachute battalion which he first thought of dropping on Headquarters First Canadian Army, which the Germans, apparently as a result of wireless interceptions, knew was then in Tilburg; later he decided to use it instead against our artillery positions north of Tilburg, from which the Maas crossings could be harassed. And simultaneously with the 88th Corps attack there was to be one in the 30th German Corps area by the 346th Division from Schouwen and Overflakkee, landing about Dinteloord; Student counted upon the 7th Parachute Division being available to exploit here.<sup>102</sup> This is confirmed by the war diary of the C.-in-C. West for 23 December, which notes that the division "has been earmarked by Army Group H for the latter's undertaking in preparation" but adds that it "is also counted upon by C.-in-C. West for new operations by Army Group G".

As the days passed it became apparent to the Germans, first, that the offensive in the Ardennes was not making the progress which would make Student's attack practicable and profitable; and secondly, that there was no sign of withdrawal or weakening on the First Canadian Army Front—on the contrary, it became evident that we had observed the enemy preparations and were acting to counter them. On 23-24 December the commander of the 88th Corps (General Hans Reinhard) was replaced by Lieut.-General Felix Schwalbe. Student states that he was responsible for the change, feeling that Reinhard was not the man for a difficult and dashing operation; he asked for General Eugen Meindl of the 2nd Parachute Corps, but got Schwalbe, who had had the task of controlling the withdrawal of the Fifteenth Army across the Scheldt.<sup>103</sup> On 26 December Schwalbe sent a signal to his divisions stating that intercepted Allied air force messages indicated that we had observed the German troop concentrations at Gorinchem and south of it; we were "now aware of the massing of troops north of the Maas".<sup>104</sup> He had already told them that "an order to launch the attack was not to be expected at the moment"; and a new operation order issued on the 25th noted that it would "presumably" not be launched before the 30th.<sup>105</sup>

With surprise lost, the operation must have looked much less attractive. On the 26th it received its death-blow. Already on the 23rd the C.-in-C. West had refused to allow the 7th Parachute Division to move from its position on the left flank of First Parachute Army, Student's left-hand army.<sup>106</sup> This seriously damaged his plan for the 30th Corps front outlined above. Now the needs of the Russian front supervened. General Heinz Guderian, Acting Chief of the General Staff at *O.K.H.*, came to Rundstedt's headquarters and represented the necessity of giving

up one infantry division to save the situation about Budapest.\* The C.-in-C. West ordered the immediate transfer of the 711th.<sup>107</sup> When Schwalbe heard of this he pointed out that his projected operation was now virtually impossible. He was told that the job would have to be done with the forces to hand; and on 30 December he issued a new operation order accordingly.<sup>108</sup> But from this time no one seems to have taken the idea seriously.

There is a possibility—though an inherently remote one—that the German command above Army Group level considered the whole project merely as a deception scheme, and sought to lend it greater realism by keeping the true facts from Student and his subordinates. Student himself referred to the operation as a "deception and holding attack".<sup>109</sup> There is an enigmatic passage in the diary of the C.-in-C. West for 27 December: "Characteristic of the situation at the other Army Groups [other than "B"] is the particularly close attention the enemy is paying to Army Group H—perhaps due to certain intelligence regarding an undertaking in preparation." This may—or may not—carry an undertone of satisfaction at the working of a deception plan. By this time, it must be noted, any real possibility of the attack being made was a thing of the past. The following day the same diary remarked that it was necessary to prevent the Allies from moving more forces from other fronts to the Ardennes:

For this reason C.-in-C. West is continuing with the preparations for the undertaking of Army Group H, even if for the time being in view of the situation it seems that its only purpose is to remain that of deceiving the enemy.

In the absence of any real evidence whatever to the contrary, we must assume that the records of the C.-in-C. West and the 88th Corps mean what they say; that a subsidiary attack across the Maas was planned, and would have taken place if the Ardennes offensive had made greater progress; and that when the situation in the Ardennes developed unfavourably the project was maintained as a deception scheme with the object of preventing us from withdrawing troops from the area.

Canadian Army Intelligence saw the menace in good time and assessed it fairly accurately, though the proportions of the airborne threat were much exaggerated. The forces actually available to Student were not equal to mounting more than a secondary operation, but the precautionary measures taken on our side were fully justified, particularly in view of the fact that the fighting value of the Polish Armoured Division, then holding the lower Maas, was at this time rated very low.<sup>110</sup> Bad flying weather for reconnaissance hampered our Intelligence staffs in discerning the subsidence of the threat after 26 December. The first evidence of abandonment of the operation was reported on New Year's Day; the next day we were still expecting an attack from Schouwen; and only on 4 January did Army Intelligence make the comment, "The evidence ... increases and continues to show that

\*Guderian in his book *Panzer Leader* (p. 385) says that he visited Rundstedt on 31 December and was promised three divisions from the West. But the diary of the C.-in-C. West mentions no visit on 31 December and in connection with that on the 26th speaks only of the 711th Division. It is of interest that the procedure was apparently objectionable to Hitler. On 2 January *O.K.W.* issued orders that transfers of formations and G.H.Q. units from one theatre to another could be authorized only by *O.K.W.* itself; direct arrangements between theatre commanders were forbidden.

the enemy has probably changed his mind about an offensive operation over the lower Maas."<sup>111</sup>

While the Canadians were narrowly watching the Germans on their front, other armies were taking measures to turn the Ardennes offensive to Allied advantage. General Eisenhower afterwards wrote:<sup>112</sup>

My plan was to hold firmly the shoulders of the penetration, particularly the Monschau area on the north and the Bastogne area on the south, prevent enemy penetration west of the Meuse or in the Liege—Namur area, and then to counterattack with General Patton's Army in the general direction Bastogne—Cologne. This counterattack was to be followed by an attack by the forces under Field-Marshal Montgomery, directed as the result and progress of General Patton's operations should indicate.

Accordingly, as we have seen, Field-Marshal Montgomery took over the direction of all Allied operations north of the line Givet—Prum on 20 December. Three days later, acting on the assumption that "it is better to attack with a small force at once, and attain surprise, than it is to wait and lose it",<sup>113</sup> General Patton drove three divisions towards Bastogne. Meanwhile, Montgomery regrouped and prepared to intervene on the northern flank of the German salient. With Allied air power again thrown into the scale, by the 26th the Supreme Commander was confident that the battle had been brought under control.

During the later stages of the battle in the Ardennes Montgomery renewed his proposal that the Allied forces engaged in the northern thrust towards the Ruhr (that is, the 21st and 12th Army Groups) be placed under a single commander (namely, himself). Eisenhower, strongly urged and supported by General Marshall, again rejected it; and according to the American official historian of SHAEF, a hint was passed through Montgomery's Chief of Staff "that in a showdown someone would have to go and it would not be the Supreme Commander". Montgomery withdrew his letter.<sup>114</sup> Preparations continued for an offensive against the northern flank of the German salient by the First U.S. Army and the 30th British Corps under the Field-Marshal's direction. The Allies were able to take the initiative on 13 January. Vigorous attacks on the enemy's exposed flanks then drove him back and, by the 28th, he had lost virtually all the ground he had gained in the early stage of the battle.<sup>115</sup> Both sides had suffered heavy casualties in men and equipment during the struggle—but on the German side these losses were largely irreplaceable. Thus, although the enemy had delayed the start of the northern Allied offensive, he had drastically weakened his own resources to meet it. Among the Allies the Ardennes episode unfortunately left some friction behind it. On 7 January Field-Marshal Montgomery held a press conference. In the course of it he had paid a warm and well-deserved tribute to the fighting qualities of the American soldier, who had beaten the Germans in the recent crisis; he paid 'tribute also to General Eisenhower ("I am absolutely devoted to Ike") and said it grieved him to see uncomplimentary articles about the Supreme Commander in the British press. But the tone of his remarks struck some American officers, already sensitive about the late temporary command reorganization, as claiming

\*Beginning on 20 January the Sixth Panzer Army, with four armoured divisions under command i was sent east on Hitler's orders to seek to restore the desperate situation on the Russian front.<sup>116</sup>

undue credit for the victory for the speaker himself ("The battle has been most interesting-I think possibly one of the most interesting and tricky battles I have ever handled....")<sup>117</sup> General Bradley was particularly angry. According to his own account, he told the Supreme Commander later that after what had happened he could never serve under Montgomery.<sup>118</sup> The American official writer cited above has suggested that the incident could not fail to influence Eisenhower in the strategic debates of the next phase, particularly with respect to placing additional U.S. forces under Montgomery's command.<sup>119</sup>

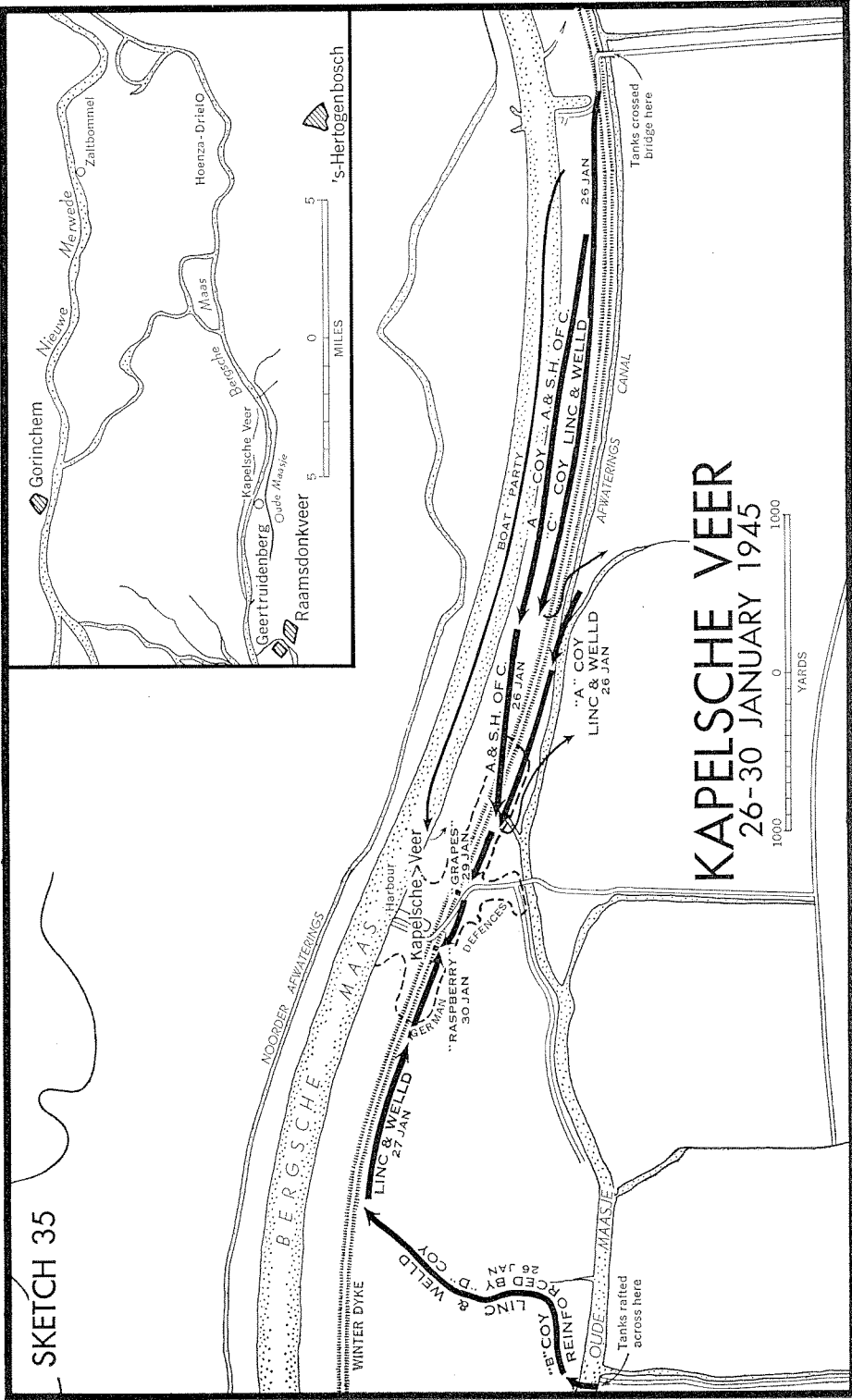
During the latter half of January, Montgomery took advantage of the renewed Allied initiative to clear the Roermond Triangle—a pocket of resistance, north of Aachen, between the Roer and the Meuse. This operation, "Blackcock", carried out by the 12th British Corps, had been completed by 26 January.<sup>120</sup> Canadian "Kangaroos" assisted the 43rd (Wessex) Division, earning a tribute in the divisional history.<sup>121</sup>

### The Fighting at Kapelsche Veer

Before returning to the main theme of Canadian planning in January 1945, we must consider an unusual series of small-scale operations which took place during this period on the lower Maas. Here, in a waterlogged area north-east of Geertruidenberg, the Oude Maasje (a secondary channel of the Maas) forms an island several miles long and up to a mile wide along the river's southern bank. The island is very flat and the whole area interlaced with hundreds of canals, ditches and embankments; it is "polder" country similar to that of the Scheldt Estuary. About half-way along the Maas side of the island, at a ferry crossing, was a tiny silted-up harbour called Kapelsche Veer. This desolate spot was the scene of a protracted struggle beginning at the end of December and lasting through January.

The origin of the fight for Kapelsche Veer may have been in part the enemy's desire to give battle experience to his formations, and in particular to the 6th Parachute Division. Student, the commander of *Army Group "H"* and chief of German paratroops, afterwards said that recruits from the *Luftwaffe a* were committed to "small offensive operations" for "battle inoculation during the expected lull of the winter months".<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, it seems clear that the Germans first occupied the place in strength in connection with their projected offensive across the Maas. Kapelsche Veer was one of the crossing areas prescribed in the 88th Corps order of 21 December (above, page 446); the 712th Division was to "thrust across the Maas on both sides of Kapelscheveer".<sup>123</sup> On the same day on which this instruction was issued the 711th Division, then holding the sector, reported to the 88th Corps, "Outposts at Kapelsche veer have been strengthened as ordered." Another message of the same date specifies that the outposts have been "increased to one company and one advanced observation post". The implication seems to be that the Germans had had a standing patrol at Kapelsche Veer

SKETCH 35



# KAPELSCHE VEER

26-30 JANUARY 1945

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's-Hertogenbosch

before this time. On 23 December an adjustment of boundaries brought the place within the area of the 712th Division; and on this day the commander of that division himself visited the bridgehead. A further boundary adjustment at the end of the month led to the 6th Parachute Division relieving the 712th.<sup>124</sup>

On the night of 30-31 December the 1st Polish Armoured Division made the first effort to capture Kapelsche Veer. Some prisoners were taken; but the Poles had 46 casualties and the attack failed, for the enemy was very well dug in with support from medium artillery, self-propelled guns and mortars north of the Maas<sup>125</sup> The diary of Rundstedt's headquarters commented:<sup>126</sup>

Worthy of note are the enemy assaults against our bridgehead at Kapelsche Veer, which he has been repeating time and again. It seems possible that being aware of our preparations he had the idea that the undertaking might be launched from this particular bridgehead.

During the following week the Germans ferried two self-propelled guns across the Maas\* and consolidated their "firm base". Then, early on 7 January, the Poles renewed their assault. The 9th Infantry Battalion cleared the harbour area by noon; but stubborn paratroops, dug in along the dyke nearby and aided by mortar fire, prevented further progress and again forced the Poles to retire.<sup>127</sup>

After another pause the 47th Royal Marine Commando took over the task of reducing the bridgehead. In Operation "Horse" on 13-14 January the Marines made a gallant but fruitless attack against the position from both flanks; the exposed nature of the approaches, together with exhaustion of ammunition and loss of control through casualties to leaders, resulted in a further repulse. The Commando suffered 49 casualties.<sup>128</sup>

It was now evident that only a deliberate operation on a larger scale, including a greater weight of supporting artillery, could dislodge the enemy from Kapelsche Veer. On 14 January, as soon as it was apparent that "Horse" had failed, Crocker's headquarters issued orders for a new operation, "Elephant". It was to be undertaken by the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, which would take over as much of the Polish Armoured Division's front as was required for the purpose. The orders emphasized that thorough preparation, rather than speed, should determine the date of the next assault. A request had been made for daily aerial bombing of Kapelsche Veer, and the entire Corps artillery was to support the attack. General Vokes ordered Brigadier J. C. Jefferson's 10th Infantry Brigade to carry out the operation, specifying that it was to make thrusts "from each flank onto the objective" while also putting in a waterborne assault against the enemy's rear.<sup>129</sup>

The Lincoln and Welland Regiment, whose acting commander at this time was Major J. F. Swayze, was given the leading role. It prepared the operation with care, producing the only detailed order on paper which it wrote during the campaign. In addition to the artillery of the 1st British Corps (including the guns of the 4th Canadian and 1st Polish Armoured Divisions and the 4th Army Group Royal Artillery) it had available in support the tanks of the 29th Armoured

\*Very categorical accounts of their presence and location were recorded in the intelligence log of H.Q. First Canadian Army for 2 January. But they must have been withdrawn before the Canadian attack on the 26th, for they are not mentioned in connection with it.

Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment) and a large number of heavy mortars—the heavy mortar company of the Toronto Scottish having been borrowed from the 2nd Canadian Division. Unfortunately, air support during the operation was frequently reduced to nil by bad weather. The main attack was to be put in by "A" Company, supported by "C", on the right, that is from the east; "B" would attack on the left; and a force in 15 canoes would paddle down the Maas from the east and land at the harbour. Elaborate arrangements were made for smoke cover and flame support.<sup>130</sup>

After a week's careful training "Elephant" was launched on the freezing morning of 26 January. That day's attack was a failure, and cost many men. Ice along the river bank hampered the canoe party in launching their craft and made them late; they then came under heavy fire from the north bank, had several canoes sunk and were forced to land east of their objective. With their weapons "frozen and useless" they had to withdraw. "A" Company were virtually on their objective, the enemy positions about the harbour, when the Germans, having held their fire until that moment, suddenly opened up and then counter-attacked fiercely. At 9:55 a.m. it was reported that all officers of both "A" and "C" were casualties. Both companies pulled back from the island. As for "B" on the other flank, it got to its objective half a mile west of the harbour only to be counter-attacked off it. Both the leading platoon commanders were killed, but Sergeant L. C. Stewart took charge of their platoons, and thanks to his exertions and those of the company commander, Major E. J. Brady, who came forward, the company held half a mile west of its objective and was reinforced by "D". Brady later received the D.S.O. and Stewart the M.M. The battalion's anti-tank platoon was put in on the right, where it was relieved after nightfall by "A" Company of The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada supported by two South Alberta reconnaissance tanks.<sup>131</sup>

The Germans were extraordinarily well dug in; and the only practicable approaches were those from east and west along the high "Winter Dyke" (some 300 yards inland from the actual edge of the river) on which stood the two houses near the harbour—known by the code names "Raspberry" and "Grapes"—that were the core of the enemy position. And the paratroopers fought with a determination that deserves the word fanatical. For five days—days of frigid misery for both sides—they resisted all the power we could bring to bear. But in the circumstances bringing power to bear was difficult. Sherman tanks were brought into action, across a rickety bridge at the east end of the island and by rafting over the Oude Maasje farther west; but at this season the tracks which passed for roads on the island were almost impassable for armour.

The infantry advanced slowly, digging in after each short forward movement. Among the infantrymen in the front positions on the dyke, Forward Observation Officers of the 15th Field Regiment R.C.A. directed the fire of the artillery; this regiment alone fired over 14,000 25-pounder rounds during the operation. (The Argylls recorded on the 29th that the shelling "had rid the island completely of the thin layer of snow that had covered it", and a platoon commander asked for reinforcements not wearing the white camouflage snowsuits that had been used so far.) The German positions were largely invulnerable to this fire, but the gunners



repeatedly broke up determined attempts to reinforce the German garrison by boat from the north shore of the Maas. On 29 January the Argylls finally took "Grapes", the easterly house, and a few men reached "Raspberry" but could not capture it. On the evening of the 30th they finished the job here. The enemy had had enough at last; that night, it appears, he evacuated his surviving men across the river, and the Commander-in-Chief West recorded, "Bridgehead N.E. of Oosterhout has been vacated." Early on the morning of the 31st the Lincoln and Welland coming in from the west made contact with the Argylls on "Raspberry". No Germans except prisoners remained alive south of the main stream of the Maas.<sup>132</sup>

As Rundstedt's situation report covering the events of 29 January said, this struggle by the frostbound Maas caused "many casualties on both sides". There are no actual German statistics, but First Canadian Army's final estimate of the enemy losses during "Elephant" was 145 killed and 64 wounded; we took only 34 prisoners. Plocher, the commander of the 6th Parachute Division, estimated afterwards that the whole bridgehead operation cost him 300 to 400 "serious casualties" plus 100 more men frost-bitten. The enemy had succeeded in putting fresh troops into the bridgehead from time to time during the fighting; it is doubtful whether he ever had much more than 150 fighting men there at any one moment.<sup>133</sup> As for our own losses, The Lincoln and Welland Regiment had 179 casualties, of which 50 were fatal; seven officers lost their lives. The vast majority of these losses were on the first day. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada had 48 casualties, 13 being fatal. The South Alberta Regiment had seven, including two officers killed by snipers.<sup>134</sup>

On a smaller scale, the fighting at Kapelsche Veer recalls that at Ortona in Italy thirteen months before.\* In both cases Canadian infantry and armour were locked with German paratroopers in protracted struggles which cost ourselves and the enemy losses larger than the immediate objective seemed, intrinsically, to be worth. In both the objective acquired a certain symbolic significance and was contested with fierce obstinacy; and in both the Germans ultimately gave up. At the time and later, many Canadian soldiers certainly thought that our costly victory at Kapelsche Veer gained only

... a little patch of ground  
That hath in it no profit but the name.

When the fighting on the island began the place had a special tactical importance as a jumping-off point for the anticipated German offensive across the Maas, which we did not yet know had been abandoned. By the time Operation "Elephant" was ordered and launched, this threat had evaporated, though there was always a possibility of its reviving. But while there is little or no written evidence, it seems fair to assume that General Crocker—and General Crerar—felt that to abandon the struggle after an initial reverse would be to concede to the enemy a moral superiority which might have very serious practical consequences. As noted above, we know that Sir John Crocker just at this time was painfully aware of the low battle-worthiness of the once-formidable Polish Armoured Division, whose ranks

\*See Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy*, Chap. XI.

were now full of inadequately trained reinforcements who only a few weeks or months before had been Polish soldiers serving under compulsion in the German Army. Crocker felt that the division needed to be taken out of the line and re-trained, but at that moment this was not practicable.<sup>135</sup> To have left an active German bridgehead on the front of this formation in such circumstances would have been foolish. On the German side, Plocher attributed the length of the resistance to the obstinacy of General Student. He said that he could not get authority to abandon the bridgehead until Student was replaced by General Johannes Blaskowitz as commander of Army Group "H".<sup>136</sup> As this change took place on 29 January, and the evacuation was on the night of the 30th, Plocher may well be right.

Although we did not emulate the Germans in seeking to establish a bridgehead on the farther bank of the Maas, we continued to be active there with a view to establishing and maintaining a moral superiority over the enemy and gaining information about his doings. In this latter connection the capture of prisoners was particularly important. Accordingly, small patrols regularly crossed the Maas at night by boat; sometimes a larger patrol was supported by artillery; and occasionally a raid in some strength was made. One such enterprise took place on 17 January 1945, when The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor), commanded by Lt.-Col. R. A. Keane, sent a company across in daylight to raid the village of Hoenza-Driel, on the north bank of the river north-east of 's-Hertogenbosch. The object of Operation "Schultz" was to establish the identity of the enemy holding this sector of the front by capturing two or more prisoners. The raid was very heavily supported: not only the tanks of the three armoured regiments of the 4th Armoured Brigade, but also two field regiments and one medium regiment of artillery fired, in addition to mortars and medium machine-guns. "Schultz" was completely successful; three prisoners were taken—though as it happened they were from an independent unit, "Battalion Koch", which did not help much in establishing the general situation—and the Lake Superior company returned across the river in good order, having suffered only four casualties,\* none of them serious.<sup>138</sup>

### Planning for "Veritable" is Resumed

Throughout the critical battle in the Ardennes the Supreme Commander's staff had "continued to work on plans for clearing the area west of the Rhine, for crossing the Rhine, and for advancing eastward into Germany".<sup>139</sup> Likewise, in spite of commitments in the Ardennes and the threat to the northern front, neither Field-Marshal Montgomery nor General Crerar had lost sight of the requirements of their Rhineland offensive. On 16 January, in conference with Crerar, Montgomery outlined his plan "to get Allied forces across the River Rhine, North of the Ruhr, in strength". This plan, presupposing clearance of the Rhineland, could

\*The company commander was wounded soon after landing. Lieut. H. K. Bird took command and directed the rest of the operation and the withdrawal. He was awarded the Military Cross.<sup>137</sup>

only be carried out with extensive American assistance and, at the time of the discussion, the question of whether the Ninth United States Army would be left under Montgomery's control had not been decided.<sup>140</sup> However, this difficulty had been resolved when, five days later, Montgomery issued a formal directive<sup>141</sup> announcing his intention of destroying "all enemy in the area west of the Rhine from the present forward positions south of Nijmegen as far south as the general line Julich—Dusseldorf, as a preliminary to crossing the Rhine and engaging the enemy in mobile war to the north of the Ruhr". The enemy's situation was described in precisely the words used in the earlier directive issued the day the battle began in the Ardennes (above, page 439). Following the pattern then outlined, Montgomery visualized converging attacks by the First Canadian and Ninth United States Armies. The target date for "Veritable", the Canadian operation, was 8 February; but that for "Grenade", the American one, could not yet be fixed.

Commencing on 18 January, the 30th British Corps, 51st and 53rd Divisions and ancillary formations had returned to General Crerar's command for "Veritable". When the Army Commander addressed his senior officers on the 22nd, he noted that the concentration of "most of the additional forces required for the operation" was well advanced. The overall plan for "Veritable", he pointed out, had not been materially changed during the month-long delay imposed by the emergency in the Ardennes, but remained as he had outlined it in December (above, page 438). He emphasized how vital it was to achieve surprise—chiefly by the elimination of "prolonged preliminary bombardment" and the substitution of "really overwhelming fire" from the air and the ground as the operation commenced, or was about to commence. He reminded his hearers—as he had before Operation "Totalize" (above, page 215)—of the consequence of "keeping the initiative, maintaining the momentum of the attack and of driving on, and through, the enemy without let-up". And finally he directed them to ensure that "all ranks taking an active part in the operation are adequately briefed and that all obtain a clear appreciation not only of what is expected of them, but of the importance of the contribution which each man can, and must, make".<sup>142</sup>

On 23 January Field-Marshal Montgomery indicated that preparations by the First U.S. Army for an offensive towards Bonn might have a delaying effect on "Veritable" and "Grenade", since the latter could not begin until the Ninth Army had been brought up to a strength of 12 divisions. However, he assured General Crerar that he would have six days' warning of any postponement of "Veritable". In the interests of surprise, "no forward assembly of formations concerned" would begin until 2 February. Lieut.-General W. H. Simpson, commanding the Ninth Army, was requested to make every possible effort to launch "Grenade" by the 15th.<sup>143</sup>

General Crerar issued his own directive on Operation "Veritable"<sup>144</sup> to the commanders of the 1st and 30th British and 2nd Canadian Corps on 25 January.\*

\*Details of the plan are given in the next chapter. It may, however, be noted that at this stage the 2nd Canadian Division was added to the formations under General Horrocks for the initial stage of the assault. Also, the number of supporting Army Groups Royal Artillery was increased from four to five.

One week later he was advised that D Day had been confirmed for 8 February. It would go in whatever the weather. "The C-in-C considered that the urgency was so great that it was undesirable to delay the operation, even by 24 hours, in order to obtain air support." This presumably reflected a SHAEF directive issued the same day which instructed Montgomery to mount "Veritable" "at the earliest date and not later than 8th February".<sup>145</sup>

At the Field-Marshal's final conference with his senior commanders on D minus four, he mentioned a ruling by SHAEF that, excepting only First United States Army's capture of the Roer dams, "Veritable" and "Grenade" were to be "carried out as first priority tasks". At this time General Simpson expected to be able to launch his attack on the 10th. Outlining the probable pattern of the later assaults across the Rhine, Montgomery said that, for administrative reasons, he intended "to keep Ninth US Army on the right, Second Brit Army in the centre and First Cdn Army on the left".<sup>146</sup> General Crerar gave a synopsis of Canadian preparations for "Veritable" in the course of which he said:

I have ... assumed that the operation, as a whole, will divide itself into several phases and, after each phase is completed; it may be necessary to move up our artillery and supporting weapons, regroup our assaulting formations, and commence the next phase with co-ordinated and heavy fire support and with controlled movement. It may be that with air and ground conditions in our favour, things will go very well, indeed, and a 'break-in' offer the possibility of becoming a real 'break-through'. In this much more desirable situation, 30 Corps and 2 Cdn Corps will lose no time in exploiting the possibilities to the full.<sup>147</sup>

### The Administrative Foundation

While senior commanders and their staffs hammered out final details of the operational plan, a great administrative "build-up" provided the sinews for "Veritable". The wide scope of these requirements can only be suggested here, but their importance to the success of the operation can scarcely be exaggerated. Basically, there were three essentials: rations for the troops, ammunition for their weapons and what military terminology described as "POL"—that is, petrol, oil and lubricants for their vehicles. Since the strength of First Canadian Army was to rise as high as 449,865 during the operations, with civilian labour, prisoners, etc., raising the total number of mouths to feed to 476,193 at its peak,<sup>148</sup> the problem of supplying rations alone was no small one.

From the outset a heavy burden fell upon the Royal Army Service Corps and Royal Canadian Army Service Corps for the actual movement of supplies, and on the Royal Engineers and Royal Canadian Engineers for the maintenance of routes "and bridges. But maintenance depended, in turn, on the weather, and this proved fickle. Although cold weather and firm ground persisted throughout most of January—the temperature sank to 5° Fahrenheit on the 26th<sup>149</sup>—a thaw set in at the end of the month, and routes soon deteriorated under the heavy traffic. By 5 February a section of the Turnhout—Eindhoven road was "impassable even to jeeps in four-wheel drive" and the Chief Engineer at Army Headquarters commented ruefully, "We have had every disadvantage possible in weather with the

highest flooding in fourteen years in November, the lowest water level ever recorded in January, a severe frost followed by very rapid thaw, bad icing conditions and now another flood."<sup>150</sup> For a time, nearly 50 companies of engineers, plus three road construction companies and 29 pioneer companies, were fully employed in maintaining the roads in the British-Canadian sector.<sup>151</sup> Among other commitments two road construction companies of the R.C.E., with pioneer labour and civilian assistance, maintained the Eindhoven—'s-Hertogenbosch route forward to the Maas, while sappers of First Canadian Army Troops constructed a permanent bridge across the river at Mook.<sup>152</sup>

Fortunately, the completion of a railway bridge over the Maas at Ravenstein on 4 February enabled trains to reach railheads around Nijmegen. This had the double effect of absorbing some of the strain of moving supplies by road and of enabling stone to be brought forward to help our engineers in maintaining the roads.<sup>153</sup> The R.C.A.S.C. also arranged for bulk shipments of petrol to be brought forward by rail in order to build up the reserves of fighting formations. Expressing available stocks in terms of operational mileage, the Deputy Director of Supply and Transport at Headquarters First Canadian Army noted on 7 February: "The target of 150 miles for 30 Corps in Army Depots was reached today and holdings include 200 miles for 1 Corps, 2 Corps and Army Troops and 153 miles for 30 Corps."<sup>154</sup> Meanwhile, a total of 2,318,222 rations for the troops had been accumulated.<sup>155</sup> Likewise, a vast quantity of ammunition had been collected in forward dumps. As the Army Commander put it,

If the ammunition allotment for the operation, which consists of 350 types, were stacked side by side and five feet high, it would line a road for 30 miles. The total ammunition tonnage, provided for the supporting artillery from D Day, to D plus 3, would be the equivalent in weight to the bomb-drop of 25,000 medium bombers.<sup>156</sup>

To mention one category alone, there were 1471 rounds of high explosive available for each 25-pounder, plus 206 rounds per gun normally carried in the regimental "first and second lines" (that is, with, or immediately available to, the guns).<sup>157</sup>

Apart from these essentials, the multifarious requirements of "Veritable" affected all branches and services of the army. The Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps produced detailed plans for the evacuation of wounded, casualties requiring specialist care, ambulance control, blood banks and medical stores.<sup>158</sup> With troops crammed into the limited assembly areas, accommodation was at a premium: in one instance Canadian engineers found a troop of heavy guns located in a bridging dump, using a shelter made of pontoons. ("It was arranged that the guns would cease fire when loading was in progress in the dump.")<sup>159</sup> Special arrangements were also necessary to control the flow of reinforcements. A particularly heavy burden fell on the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps; but with the single exception of spare parts for certain amphibious vehicles, all demands were met and the supplying of stores was "smooth and rapid".<sup>160</sup> The organization for the great offensive was the result of admirable teamwork—not only within the Army, but between the Army and other, Allied formations.

On the morning of 7 February General Crerar was preparing to move his

Tactical Headquarters from Tilburg to Uden, in readiness for battle on the following day. With all preparations completed, the Army Commander found time to address a gathering of war correspondents on the background of "Veritable". These were his concluding words: "This operation may be protracted and the fighting tough and trying. All ranks are quite confident, however, that we will carry through to a successful conclusion, the great task which we have been given the responsibility, and the honour, to fulfil."<sup>161</sup>

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE BATTLE OF THE RHINELAND

#### PART I: OPERATION "VERITABLE"

8-21 FEBRUARY 1945

(See Map 10 and Sketches 36 and 37)

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#### The Battle Area

As it made ready to launch its Rhineland offensive, the First Canadian Army, not for the first time, faced a difficult and disagreeable battlefield.

In the succession of directives and orders which were issued at all levels from army group down to battalion, the oft-repeated phrase "to destroy the enemy between the Maas and the Rhine" defined the battle area. At his final objective, the line Xanten—Geldern, General Crerar could contemplate a front of twenty miles between the two rivers. But 40 miles downstream, where the Army's present front line crossed them, Mook, on the Maas, was only six miles from Nijmegen, on the Waal. To reach their forward assembly areas in the restricted space about Nijmegen, all formations of the 30th Corps except the two Canadian divisions already in position had to cross the Maas, as well as the Maas-Waal Canal two miles west of Nijmegen. The movement would require a strict schedule of traffic control over the bridges at Mook, Grave and Ravenstein.

Within these natural boundaries General Crerar faced other limitations on manoeuvre. Although both river beds had been regulated into single, navigable channels, each was flanked by a wide flood plain in which backwaters, marsh and abandoned channels provided effective obstacles to movement. These flats were subject to inundation when excessive rainfall, such as had prevailed that winter, produced an unusually high water level in the rivers. Along the Maas, rising ground restricted the flooding to about 1000 yards on each side of the main stream; but in the Rhine and Waal flats the spread of the water was contained only by the winter dykes which stretched almost without interruption from the vicinity of Wesel down to Nijmegen, in general from one to three miles back from the river. Breaching these dykes would substantially increase the inundation; when this happened, as we shall see, the water in places encroached almost halfway to the Maas.

The greater part of the country between the rivers was open and gently undulating, largely arable, with a number of small woods. In general it was well suited

to armoured warfare. But just inside the German frontier the western end of this rolling plain was blocked by a large irregular forested area, some eight miles from west to east and four miles wide. This was the Reichswald. A dozen miles to the east the approach to Xanten was barred by the Hochwald and the Balberger Wald, which together formed a smaller belt of woods from one to three miles deep, extending six miles from north to south. The trees in these state forests were mostly young pines growing from four to seven feet apart. Each wooded area was divided into rectangular blocks by narrow rides, and there were occasional clearings where cutting had not been followed by replanting. Two paved roads crossed the Reichswald from north to south, converging on Hekkens, midway along the southern edge of the forest. None ran from west to east, so that military traffic in that direction would be dependent upon one-way tracks along the sandy rides, only some of which had been roughly metalled to make them passable for heavy timber trucks. Most of the Reichswald was level or gently rolling, but a curving ridge of high ground ran from Cleve through the northern and western portions, pivoting on the Branden Berg, a 300-foot hill in the north-west corner of the forest.

On either flank of the Reichswald topography again favoured a defending force. From the south-eastern angle of the forest the River Niers flowed westward across the rolling plain to enter the Maas below Gennep. Swollen by flooding and with its bridges blown, it formed a highly defensible obstacle. To the north a corridor of cultivated land about a mile wide ran between the edge of the woods and the Nijmegen—Cleve road (which marked the southern limit of the Waal flood plain). Towards Cleve this avenue narrowed considerably and was crossed by a number of low spurs which stepped up to the main Matterhorn ridge overlooking the city. Beyond Cleve the gap opened to give space to three roads which, diverging to the south-east and south through the widening plain, led to Calcar, Udem\* and Goch. Besides the Nijmegen—Cleve highway a second axis of advance was offered by the paved Mook—Goch road, which ran along the southern edge of the Reichswald, crossing the Niers at Kessel. At Gennep a road branched off to the south to follow the right bank of the Maas to Venlo.

### The Enemy's Defences

The Germans had laid out their defences in a businesslike manner, exploiting the advantages of terrain favourable to themselves, and concentrating their strength here the country seemed most inviting to an attacker. They depended on three main fortified zones, each extending southward from their secure Rhine flank. The foremost ran across the western face of the Reichswald from Wyler on the Cleve road to the Kiekberg woods east of Mook, turning thence south-eastward to pass through Gennep and continue along the east bank of the Maas. In the first Canadian Army's sector this formidable outpost to the main Siegfried defences as based on a double series of trenches, covered in front of the Reichswald by

\*Not to be confused with Uden in the Netherlands, where General Crerar's headquarters was located.



an anti-tank ditch. Villages and farmhouses had been converted into strongpoints, and connecting trenches from front to rear linked the whole into an elaborate defence system which extended in depth 2000 yards or more from the forward minefields to the rear field works along the edge of the forest. The strongest parts of the line were about Wyler and the Kiekberg woods, where the two main roads were defended in considerable depth with road-blocks, dug-in anti-tank guns and short stretches of anti-tank ditch. In the floodable area north of the Nijmegen—Cleve road the defences were relatively light.

About three miles to the rear of these positions the northern end of the Siegfried Line constituted the second defence. The main belt crossed the Reichswald just east of the lateral road from Kranenburg to Hekkens. It then skirted the southern edge of the forest to Goch, where it turned south again to cover the approaches to Weeze, Kevelaer and Geldern. North of the Reichswald the corridor leading to Cleve was guarded by a succession of trench systems which reached back to positions on the high ground about Materborn. These were extended to the north by a system of field works which had been constructed across the flood plain from Donsbruggen to Duffelward on the Alter Rhein. In addition a line recently developed about two miles east of the forest linked Cleve with Bedburg and Goch and completed the circle of all-round defence about the Reichswald area.

Work on this end of the West Wall (the actual German name for what we called the Siegfried Line) had never been completed, so that instead of the formidable concrete to be found farther south there were only field fortifications—described by the German commander in that sector as "a haphazard series of earthen dugouts".<sup>1</sup> The only concrete works were bunkers for sheltering personnel, and these were concentrated mainly in the Materborn area. The strongest parts of the line in the Canadian sector were to be found about Goch (which was protected on three sides by anti-tank ditches) and, as might be expected, in the defile north of the Reichswald. Here a concentration of fire positions which ran from the edge of the woods at Frasselt to the main Nijmegen—Cleve road was guarded by an anti-tank ditch which continued northward through Kranenburg and crossed the flood plain between Mehr and Niel to end at the Alter Rhein.

The enemy's third major barrier in the Canadian Army's path began at the Rhine\* opposite Rees and ran southward in front of the Hochwald and Balberger Wald to Geldern and beyond. This "Hochwald Layback" consisted of two and sometimes three lines of entrenchments, from 600 to 1000 yards apart. Between these lines (except west of the Hochwald) ran an anti-tank ditch; and each trench system was further protected by a continuous belt of wire.

In recent months the Germans had attempted to bind these various defence positions into a single network in which a penetration at any point could be effectively sealed off. This aim had been best achieved in the Reichswald area, which had been split into a series of self-contained boxes enclosed by stretches of trench, ditch or river. Farther east, the emphasis had been on transforming the towns and

\*The main stream of the Rhine retains this name to the area below Emmerich where it becomes the international boundary and is called the Bijlandsche Kanaal; below Millingen, where the Pannerdensche Kanaal (which shortly becomes the Neder Rijn) flows off to the north-west, the main stream is called the Waal.

villages between the West Wall and the Hochwald Layback into individual islands of resistance, each encircled by elaborate trenchworks and anti-tank ditches.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of February the Reichswald sector of the German front was held by Major-General Heinz Fiebig's 84th Infantry Division, which formed the right wing of the 86th Corps (under General of Infantry Erich Straube) and indeed of General Schlemm's First Parachute Army. Straube's left wing was the 180th Infantry Division which was deployed along the Maas. Across the Rhine was the 88th Corps, of the Twenty-Fifth Army, with the 2nd Parachute Division as Fiebig's immediate neighbour.<sup>3</sup>

The 84th Division brought no brilliant record with it into the Reichswald defences. Formed in Poland early in 1944 from the remnants of worn-out infantry divisions and large replacement units, it had been virtually destroyed in the Falaise Pocket. It was reconstructed in September, and at the beginning of February its strength was 10,000, the majority green troops inadequately armed and equipped.<sup>4</sup> This would have allowed Fiebig to man his forward line with seven battalions only, but on 6 February he was given the 2nd Parachute Regiment from the 2nd Parachute Division. This well-equipped formation of 2000 men recently drafted from the *Luftwaffe* he placed between the western tip of the Reichswald and the Maas. Next to them came the three regiments of the 84th Division: across the face of the forest the 1062nd Grenadier Regiment; the 1051st Grenadier Regiment covering the corridor to the north, and the 1052nd guarding the Rhine flats on the extreme right. Fiebig held in the rear area the *Sicherungs* Battalion Munster (a small unit of elderly men normally employed on guarding static installations), and the 276th *Magen* (Stomach) Battalion, composed of personnel whose chronic digestive ailments ill fitted them for any active part in the defence. (Fiebig told interrogators that he had chosen the *Magen* Battalion in preference to an *Ohren* (Ear) Battalion, who were too deaf to hear "even the opening barrage of an attack".) The only German armour in the Reichswald area was some 36 selfpropelled assault guns of the 655th Heavy Anti-Tank Battalion. Fiebig's total artillery resources numbered about 1.00 guns.<sup>5</sup>

Allied appreciations of these dispositions proved remarkably accurate. As to reserves available at short notice to the First Parachute Army, General Crerar's headquarters foresaw the possibility of the 7th Parachute Division being east of the Reichswald, and farther afield the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, or its equivalent, which might be on hand within six hours of the assault.<sup>6</sup> Actually part of the 7th Parachute Division was at Geldern, having been gradually edged that far north by General Schlemm, who claims to have vigorously opposed Army Group's view at the Allied attack would be made in the Venlo area. General Blaskowitz was holding his armoured reserve, the 47th Panzer Corps, at Dulken, a dozen miles south-east of Venlo. Its two divisions, the 116th Panzer and the 15th Panzer Grenadier, had been badly mauled in the Ardennes battle and according to the Corps Commander, General Heinrich Freiherr von Lutwitz, were at little better than 50 per cent strength and could jointly muster no more than 90 tanks.<sup>7</sup> As possible reinforcements for the whole front facing the three northern Allied armies,

Field-Marshal Montgomery's intelligence staff estimated on 4 February that von Rundstedt might be able to assemble up to eleven Panzer and Panzer Grenadier divisions. Most of these, however, he would be forced to retain in the south to meet the American threat between Roermond and the Ardennes, or to send eastward to the Russian front.<sup>8</sup>

### The Pattern of "Veritable"

As we have seen (above, page 457), the number and the expected strength of the enemy's lines of organized defences had led General Crerar to plan Operation "Veritable" in distinct phases, with intervening pauses to allow him to regroup his assault forces and move forward his supporting artillery. His instructions to his Corps Commanders on 25 January<sup>9</sup> confirmed that the operation would be carried out as originally outlined in his directive of 14 December. Naming the target date as 8 February, he laid down as a basis for planning the following principal phases and objectives:

*"Phase 1* The clearing of the Reichswald and the securing of the line Gennep-Asperden-Cleve.

*"Phase 2* The breaching of the enemy's second defensive system east and south-east of the Reichswald, the capture of the localities Weeze-Udem-Calcar-Emmerich and the securing of the communications between them.

*"Phase 3* The 'break-through' of the Hochwald 'lay-back' defence lines and the advance to secure the general line Geldern-Xanten."

The initial assault and the completion of the first phase would be the responsibility of Lieut.-General Horrocks' 30th British Corps; thereafter, at a time to be settled by the Army Commander in consultation with Generals Horrocks and Simonds, the 2nd Canadian Corps would be committed on the left. Lieut.-General Sir John Crocker's 1st British Corps, strung out along the lower Maas, had, we have seen, the task of keeping the enemy deluded into expecting an offensive against northern Holland.

Horrocks was faced with the necessity of blasting his way through three strong German defence lines. "There was", he said later, "no room for manoeuvre and no scope for cleverness." With the low-lying area on his left flank flooded by the Germans, and the Mook-Goch road on his right completely dominated from the southern edge of the Reichswald, his only promising axis of advance lay north of the forest, along the road through Kranenburg. The key to a successful breakthrough was the Materborn Gap—the narrow neck of high ground between the Reichswald and the town of Cleve. Given favourable going over frozen ground, the Corps Commander hoped to break through this gap before it could be closed by German reserves and to flood the plain east of the Reichswald with troops before enemy reinforcements arrived. It might even be possible "with any luck to seize the bridge over the Rhine at Wesel intact".<sup>10</sup> As we shall see, however, the Wesel bridges were among the targets of the Allied air forces.

The Corps plan provided for the initial assault to be delivered on the seven-mile front between the Maas and the Waal by five infantry divisions—from right

to left the 51st (Highland), the 53rd (Welsh), the 15th (Scottish) and the 2nd and 3rd Canadian. The first four would attack simultaneously at 10:30 a.m. on D Day; the 3rd Canadian Division's operations on the northern flank would not start before evening. When the Scottish Division in the centre had secured the Materborn feature it was Horrocks' intention to bring forward the 43rd (Wessex) Division and the Guards Armoured Division from corps reserve and pass them through the gap to debouch into the open country south of Cleve—the 43rd directed on Goch and the Guards on Udem.<sup>11</sup>

The assaulting formations would be supported by unusually large artillery resources, for the Corps Commander was determined to blast a way into the German defences with gunfire. However, the guns, in the interest of surprise, would not fire until the morning of the attack. The fire plan was required to provide for an immense though brief artillery preparation programme which would prevent any enemy interference with the initial assault; complete saturation of the German defences and the destruction or neutralization of their concrete emplacements; then immediate supporting fire for the attacking infantry and armour, and the employment of the medium and heavy guns in such a way as to cover the deep penetration to the Materborn feature without involving the batteries in any major moves.<sup>12</sup>

Weather permitting, "Veritable" was to benefit by air support on the maximum scale. Planning for the air operations was carried out by Headquarters No. 84 Group R.A.F. in conjunction with Army and Corps Headquarters. Because of the unreliability of the weather and the impossibility of forecasting conditions more than twenty-four hours ahead, it was originally agreed that D Day might be postponed one day to allow for the provision of air support.<sup>13</sup> On 1 February however, as we have seen, a decision of SHAEF that "Veritable" would definitely commence on the 8th (above, page 457) ended the possibility of waiting for good flying weather.<sup>14</sup>

The air forces assigned to the operation included heavy bombers of the R.A.F. Bomber Command and the United States Eighth Air Force, medium bombers of No. 2 Group of the 2nd Tactical Air Force, and fighter bombers of Nos. 83 and 84 Groups and the U.S. Ninth Air Force. To achieve the close coordination essential to the gigantic effort a representative authorized to make decisions on behalf of Bomber Command was attached to No. 84 Group during the planning and execution of the operation. Requests to SHAEF for the support of the Eighth Air Force were channelled through H.Q. 2nd Tactical Air Force.

The air plan provided for both pre-planned and impromptu air support. Before the "Veritable" D Day railways, bridges and ferries leading to the battle area and elected enemy supply dumps would be bombed, care being taken not to indicate the actual point of attack. Heavy bombers of the Eighth Air Force would attempt to put out of action the rail and road bridges across the Rhine at Wesel. On the Night of 7-8 February the towns of Cleve and Goch were to be completely destroyed by Bomber Command. Cratering in these cities was to be accepted as unavoidable; but this was not the case in a number of villages and small towns in forward areas which were selected for attack by night intruders using incendiary and anti-aircraft bombs.

On D Day itself the main air task was the destruction and demoralization of the enemy in the defences barring the northern corridor. The question of whether to accept cratering here posed a special problem. The military plan demanded that the bombing of these positions be followed by rapid exploitation by mechanized forces, but the R.A.F. warned that cratering was inevitable if a type of bomb was used sufficiently heavy to deal effectively with the concrete installations on the Materborn Ridge. Horrocks agreed to accept the possibility of shallow cratering on the Materborn feature, but not at Nutterden; there enemy troops in the open would be attacked with airburst bombs.<sup>15</sup> In submitting the air plan to the 2nd Tactical Air Force the commander of No. 84 Group, Air Vice-Marshal E. C. Hudleston, stressed the significance of the Nutterden and Materborn targets. He defended the apparently uneconomical employment of medium and heavy bombers against these defences, pointing out that fighter-bombers were heavily committed on other tasks, and that "any effort which demoralizes the enemy and at the same time raises the spirits of our own assaulting troops" would not be wasted.<sup>16</sup> As the battle developed it would be the task of No. 83 Group to deal with any counter-effort by the *Luftwaffe* and to isolate the battlefield by maintaining the programme of interdiction in the enemy's rear areas across the Rhine. No. 84 Group would operate over the battlefield itself, providing reconnaissance, close support, and "protection of ground forces", and striking pre-arranged targets—enemy headquarters, communications and ammunition reserves.<sup>17</sup>

Great care was taken to ensure the 30th Corps effective impromptu air support once the battle had begun. Since No. 84 Group was operating with General Horrocks' Corps for the first time, machinery had to be set up for submitting targets and obtaining prompt and appropriate action. Staffs of ground formations were briefed in the procedure for submitting targets by the wireless and line communications of the 1st Canadian Air Support Signal Unit. At Corps Headquarters a Forward Control Post would operate a "cab rank" of fighter-bombers overhead, sending these in succession against accepted targets. It would be supplemented by a Mobile Radar Control Post, to be used for directing aircraft in bad weather. Because of the large number of formations that would be participating in Operation "Veritable", arrangements were made for contact cars to be deployed to headquarters of divisions. These mobile wireless links would serve as visual control posts and might be allotted aircraft by the Forward Control Post against specific targets, and in special circumstances given a small cab rank of their own.<sup>18</sup>

Since "Veritable" had to be a frontal attack, it was imperative that every effort be made to gain surprise. The cover plan, as we have seen, was calculated to keep the enemy's eyes on the 1st British Corps over in the west. To be effective it required the most careful concealment on the real battlefield. Here security measures had been stringently enforced during the vast administrative build-up (above, page 458). No daylight movement was permitted east of the 's-Hertogenbosch—Helmond Canal except for reconnaissance parties, and these, with formation patches removed from battledress, had to cross the Maas in Canadian vehicles accompanied by Canadian liaison officers. As the assaulting formations moved from their places of concentration to the forward assembly



#### WARFARE IN THE FLOODS

Amphibious vehicles on the Kranenburg road during Operation "Veritable", February 1945. This photograph illustrates the conditions under which the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division fought in this operation.



#### THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER VISITS FIRST CANADIAN ARMY

In the front row of this photograph, taken at Headquarters 2nd Canadian Corps on 4 March 1945, are, from left to right, Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff; General Crerar; Mr. Churchill; Lieut.-General Simonds; and Field-Marshal Montgomery. In rear are staff officers and heads of services of the 2nd Corps. On the extreme left is Major-General T. G. Rennie, G.O.C. 51st (Highland) Division, who was killed three weeks later.



#### THE ALGONQUINS MOVING UP

Men of The Algonquin Regiment moving forward in the Hochwald area, 1 March 1945, in preparation for the fierce struggle in the Gap the following day.



#### THE HOCHWALD GAP

This drawing by Brigadier G. L. Cassidy, D.S.O., E.D., based on sketches made on the spot, represents the scene of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division's battle of February-March 1945 as seen from the west. It is reproduced by permission from *Warpath*, Brigadier Cassidy's history of The Algonquin Regiment.

area a Special Traffic Office employing 1600 men maintained rigid controls along all roads.<sup>19</sup> To keep the roads clear for the arriving formations, no 2nd Canadian Division vehicle was allowed to move during darkness without the signature of a brigadier.<sup>20</sup> An elaborate camouflage programme was devised to hide from hostile eyes the large concentration of artillery in the areas east and south of Nijmegen, and the huge quantities of stores, ammunition and petrol involved in the pre-battle dumping programme. Obviously dummy gun-positions were erected, the dummies being quietly replaced by real pieces as the build-up proceeded. A camouflage pool of specialist officers from Headquarters 21st Army Group directed the siting of ammunition in unrecognizable groupings which simulated hedgerows, kitchen garden plots and irregular patches of scrub. The Allied air forces were warned that the area about Arnhem and Nijmegen was closed to all aircraft up to 16,000 feet and that violations would draw intense anti-aircraft fire.<sup>21</sup>

Such were the infinite pains taken to deceive the enemy. "Odd though it may seem", remarked General Horrocks afterwards, "we did achieve surprise."<sup>22</sup>

### First Canadian Army Goes Into Germany

The offensive opened early on 8 February. Luckily, the weather was favourable to air support. During the night the waiting troops had heard up to 769 heavies of Bomber Command roaring overhead on their missions of destruction against Cleve and Goch.\* Then 95 Stirlings and Halifaxes from No. 38 Group R.A.F. unloaded more than 400 tons of bombs on Weeze, Udem and Calcar. The flashes of the explosions and the fires which they started could be plainly seen by the soldiers in their assembly areas west of the Reichswald.<sup>23</sup> At five in the morning the artillery preparation began.

As we have noted, the artillery support for Operation "Veritable" had been planned as a major battle-winning factor. The concentration of fire which fell on the German 84th Division that day was probably not equalled on a similar front during the entire war in the west. It was calculated that 1034 guns—one-third of them mediums, heavies and super-heavies—were engaged in the bombardment.<sup>24</sup> Seven divisional artilleries, five Army Groups Royal Artillery, and two anti-aircraft brigades struck this massive blow, which was designed to harass the enemy's headquarters and communications, silence his batteries and mortars and smash his troop positions, destroying his forces and demoralizing survivors. In five bombardments during the day an average weight of more than nine tons of shells was to burst on each of 268 targets. The cannonade was augmented by four divisional "Pepper Pot" groups, which swept the front continuously with the coordinated fire, at relatively short range, of all available tank guns, anti-tank guns, light anti-aircraft guns, medium machine-guns and heavy mortars.<sup>25</sup> Rocket salvos from the 12 projectors of the 1st Canadian Rocket Battery saturated thirteen targets in and about the German forward positions.<sup>26</sup>

\*Only 434 actually bombed, evidently as the result of weather. Goch was hit considerably less heavily than had been intended.



At 7:40 a.m., after a smoke-screen had been laid down across the whole front, there was a brief lull in the firing. As expected, these combined warnings lured the enemy into manning his guns and bringing down his defensive fire against an expected attack. The virtual silence that covered the battlefield for ten minutes enabled sound-rangers to locate one hostile battery and nineteen mortar areas.<sup>27</sup> Then the bombardment thundered out anew, and it seemed as though every hostile position must be completely smothered. "It was good to see and hear", wrote The Calgary Highlanders' diarist, "especially to any of the old timers, as so many times we have gone in and would like more support than we got." The preparatory programme reached its climax as the barrage opened, and new notes were added by the sounds of armour grinding forward and aircraft roaring overhead.<sup>28</sup> Afterwards dazed German prisoners told interrogators a grim story of disorganization—communications totally disrupted and gun-crews unable to man their guns until the barrage ceased. They said that the prolonged strain of the bombardment had created "an impression of overwhelming force opposed to them, which, in their isolated state, with no communications, it was useless to resist".<sup>29</sup>

H Hour was 10:30 a.m. The covering barrage was to begin slowly on the opening line at 9:20, thickening up to its full intensity from 10 o'clock onwards. At H Hour it would begin to move. Smoke-shells mixed with the high explosive built up a protective white screen which blanketed the north-western edge of the Reichswald and effectively concealed the assault battalions of four divisions as they emerged from the woods behind Groesbeek and advanced down the forward slopes to their start-lines. If the enemy took this smoke as prelude to an attack, after his earlier experience he was reluctant to retaliate. As a deception measure the start lines across the front were being held by all the battalions of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division except the two taking part in the attack. At 10:29, as a line of yellow smoke-shells indicated the final minute before the barrage lifted, infantry and tanks began passing through the 2nd Division's positions to advance into Germany.\* Except on the right flank (where the 51st Division was supported by prearranged concentrations on the estimated main enemy localities in that sector) the barrage, which was 500 yards in depth, advanced in blocks of 300 yards every twelve minutes. The same yellow smoke-signal one minute before the end of each block enabled the attacking troops to move with confidence immediately behind the curtain of fire and thereby reap the maximum advantage.<sup>31</sup>

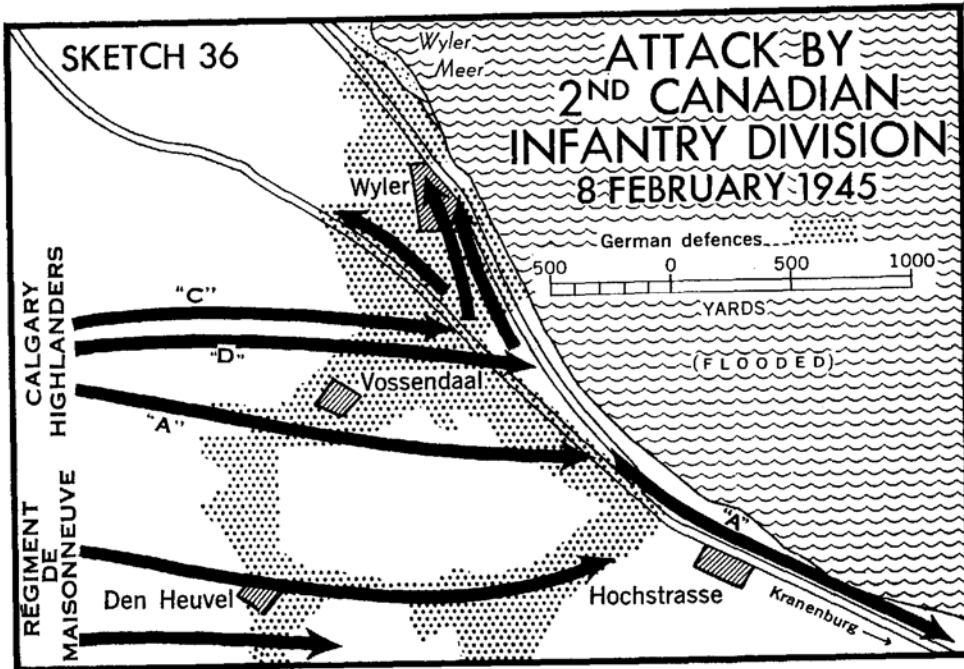
The guns had done their work so well, and so completely was the enemy surprised, that the initial attack met only light opposition. The stiffest resistance was on the right, where in the opening phase the 51st Highland Division (commanded by Major-General T. G. Rennie) had the mission of capturing the southwest corner of the Reichswald and opening the Mook-Goch road. The 154th Highland Brigade had varying success. On its left a Black Watch battalion had taken

\*Although it was at this moment that First Canadian Army made its first important move across the German frontier, some Canadians had been on German soil for some time past, in the little salient formed by the frontier between Nijmegen and Wyler. The 2nd Survey Regiment R.C.A. claims to have been the first Canadian unit to have men in Germany, a troop having crossed the border in this area on 8 November 1944; and The North Nova Scotia Highlanders took over positions on the German side here from U.S. troops on 11 November.<sup>30</sup>

its objective, the northern end of the Freuden Berg ridge, by two o'clock, but other troops were held up at Bruuk, 500 yards short of the frontier. The unexpected opposition came from a battalion of the 1222nd Grenadier Regiment (of the 180th Infantry Division), hurriedly thrown in on the previous evening.<sup>32</sup> The momentum of the advance was restored only when a battalion from the 153rd Brigade was passed through and drove forward into the forest. On the Division's right flank, the 153rd Brigade captured the Pyramide height and St. Jansberg at the edge of the Kiekberg woods. By four next morning, the whole of the Freuden Berg was secure, and Highland infantry had penetrated a further 200 yards south-eastward into the Reichswald.<sup>33</sup>

In the adjacent 53rd Division sector the mud which was hampering the advance across the entire corps front bogged at the start-line the Flails detailed to clear the mines ahead of the assaulting tanks and infantry. But the commander of the 34th Armoured Brigade had already resolved to expend up to a squadron of tanks, if necessary, in getting the infantry to the edge of the Reichswald; and fortunately the extent of the minefields proved to have been greatly overestimated. Churchill tanks mastered the heavy going where others with narrower tracks had failed, and supported the 71st Brigade's attack across the open valley in the face of virtually no opposition. The armour found the anti-tank ditch narrow enough in places to negotiate unaided, and by two o'clock the 1st Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry had seized the commanding Branden Berg and the 71st Brigade was in control of the north-west angle of the forest. From this base the 160th Brigade sent two battalions forward through soaking rain which emphasized the unreality of the artificial moonlight. With meagre support-for of all the supporting arms only one tank squadron had survived the sodden tracks forward-the infantry steadily worked through the northern edge of the woods. There were few enemy checks. By shortly after midnight both battalions had crossed the Kranenburg—Hekkens road and were astride the Siegfried defences.<sup>34</sup>

The 15th (Scottish) Division in the centre of the corps front was charged with breaching the Siegfried Line north of the Reichswald and capturing the high ground overlooking Cleve—the "Materborn feature". Assaulting side by side, each with one battalion up, the 46th and 227th Highland Brigades had trouble with mines; only one Flail reached the start line. Yet by keeping well up to the barrage, by 6:30 p.m. the infantry had taken their initial objectives—Kranenburg, on the Nijmegen—Cleve highway, and the Galgensteeg ridge, which projected from the north-west corner of the Reichswald and overlooked the main Siegfried defences. By this time the 46th Brigade's route forward from Groesbeek was all but impassable, for it had had to take the weight of both brigades when the 227th's axis farther north broke down completely early in the afternoon. Thus a special armoured breaching force from the 44th Lowland Brigade was delayed several hours, struggling in the darkness and rain with a miserable track jammed with traffic stranded along its entire length. The force was finally turned on to the main Nijmegen-Cleve road after a passage had been bulldozed through Kranenburg. The attack, which was to have started at 9:00 p.m., did not get under way until four next morning.<sup>35</sup>



On the Scottish Division's left the 2nd Canadian Division had the tasks of capturing Den Heuvel and Wylers and opening the Nijmegen—Cleve road to 'just short of Kranenburg. With the bulk of his forces spread across the Corps front to screen the impending attack from the enemy, General Matthews gave this assignment to two battalions of the 5th Brigade. A small triangular area south of the highway about Wylers was regarded as the northern anchor of the enemy's front line, and its early seizure was essential to the rapid advance of the 15th Division beyond Kranenburg. In order to surprise and seal off the force defending Wylers, Brigadier Megill avoided the direct approach from the northwest, and instead ordered his left battalion to by-pass the town and cut the highway beyond, thence attacking Wylers from the rear.<sup>36</sup>

So effective was the counter-battery and counter-mortar preparation on the 5th Brigade's front that there was virtually no reply from the enemy, and the two assaulting battalions formed up without a single casualty. Keeping well up to the barrage The Calgary Highlanders struck eastward through Vossendaal to the main highway, about half a mile beyond Wylers. Mines were the chief obstacle; the Highlanders suffered 24 casualties from Schu-mines, which the enemy had cunningly laid in visible rows on the ground interspersed with others hidden below the surface. "A" Company now advanced down the road and by midday had made contact with a battalion of the 15th Scottish Division on the outskirts of Kranenburg.<sup>37</sup> On The Calgary Highlanders' right Le Regiment de Maisonneuve found that the bombardment had greatly simplified their task. They occupied with little difficulty the shattered remains of Den Heuvel (where an officer counted 46 enemy dead

in a small area, "without examining slit-trenches ")<sup>38</sup> and cleared to the apex of the brigade's triangle at Hochstrasse.<sup>39</sup>

While sappers of the 7th Field Company R.C.E. began work on the highway west of Kranenburg, The Calgary Highlanders' "C" and "D" Companies turned back towards Wyler. The former, on the left of the road, ran into stiff fighting in which the company commander and a platoon commander were killed. To keep the operation moving the Commanding Officer committed "B" Company, and after supporting fire had been called down on the objective, "B" and "D" pressed on into Wyler, reporting it clear by 6:30 p.m. Early plans had called for the roads forward to be open for traffic by four o'clock, but with the delay in taking Wyler it was nine before the sappers could report all routes free of mines. The operation had cost the battalion 67 casualties, including 15 killed. The Maison neuves lost two killed and 20 wounded. The brigade had taken 322 prisoners, most of them having been trapped in Wyler.<sup>40</sup>

On the 30th Corps' watery northern flank the 3rd Canadian Division's part in "Veritable" did not begin until 6:00 p.m. General Spry's task was to secure the left flank of the 2nd Canadian and 15th Scottish Divisions and clear the area between the Nijmegen—Cleve road and the river. This would be done by the 7th Brigade on the right and the 8th on the left as far as the anti-tank ditch from Donsbruggen to Duffelward, at the edge of the main Siegfried Line. The 9th Brigade was then to break through these defences and advance east to the Spoy Canal, which led from Cleve to the Alter Rhein.<sup>41</sup>

The effects of the sudden thaw and the heavy rains were more apparent on the 3rd Division's low-lying sector, the Waal Flats, than anywhere else on the whole Corps front. Drainage ditches that would normally have carried off the excess water were too badly damaged by gunfire to function effectively. The Waal had been rising steadily since 3 February. Records covering 34 years showed that only six times in that period had the February peak level at Nijmegen exceeded twelve metres.\* Yet on D plus 1 of "Veritable" the river was to pass this height, and to continue to rise to a top of 12.69 metres on 17 February.<sup>42</sup> Earlier in the winter the Germans had breached the main dyke at Erlekom, four miles east of Nijmegen, and on the 6th water began pouring through this gap. Two days later the milelong Quer Damm just inside the German frontier, weakened by the enemy's digging of defence positions, collapsed before the pressure of the rising floods. Through the break water began pouring eastward towards the villages of Zyfflich and Niel.<sup>43</sup> By D Day most of the 3rd Division's area of operations was submerged. On 3 February "soft-going" plans had been substituted for those previously made. This meant principally that the infantry would ride to their objectives in amphibious vehicles (the 79th Armoured Division provided 114 Buffaloes), and would be largely deprived of armoured support.<sup>44</sup>

Only in the initial stages of the 7th Brigade's attack could the advance be made on dry ground. The Regina Rifle Regiment, attacking under artificial moon-

\*Water levels in Holland are measured in relationship to N.A.P. (Normaal Amsterdams Peil)—the mean level at Amsterdam.

light, and supported by tanks of the 13th/18th Royal Hussars (Queen Mary's Own), seized the south end of the Quer Damm, and by eight o'clock had cleared Zyfflich, a mile to the east, digging about 100 prisoners out of its cellars.<sup>45</sup> "B" Company of the Canadian Scottish, after two unsuccessful attempts to capture a strongpoint at the north end of the Quer Damm, finally took it at first light on the 9th. The battalion's remaining rifle companies, embarking in Buffaloes from the Wyler Meer, set course by compass through the darkness for Niel, two miles east of Zyfflich. Communications failed, and shortly after midnight the C.O., Lt.-Col. D. G. Crofton, headed towards the objective with his command group in two amphibians. But Niel was still in German hands, for the Scottish "A" and "D" Companies through faulty navigation had become engaged with a group of houses 1500 yards to the south-west. Crofton's party ran into point-blank fire from houses on the western outskirts. Two officers and two men were killed, and the C.O. and his Intelligence Officer were among the wounded. Day was breaking when "A" and "D" Companies arrived to clear the village.<sup>46</sup>

On the division's left flank two Buffalo-borne companies of the North Shore Regiment, leading the 8th Brigade's attack, quickly secured the main dyke west of Zandpol and by 9:00 p.m. had reported the village itself free of enemy. Farther south Le Regiment de la Chaudiere, forced at times to wade through three feet of water, occupied Leuth early on the 9th, opening the way for the brigade's next phase of operations.<sup>47</sup>

"Veritable" had made a good beginning. On the first day of the battle the 30th Corps had broken through the enemy's strong outpost screen and closed to the main Siegfried defences. It had inflicted severe losses upon the ill-fated 84th Infantry Division. Taking more than 1200 prisoners and killing a good many men besides, it had virtually destroyed six German battalions. There was encouraging news from prisoners who had helped to dig trenches in the Reichswald that the main defence line contained no concrete works. The problem now was how to exploit our gains before enemy reinforcements arrived in strength. The rapid deterioration of the maintenance routes forward was seriously impeding deployment of General Horrocks' formations. Particularly disturbing was the flood situation; between 1:00 p.m. and midnight of the 8th the water level north of the Nijmegen—Cleve road had risen eighteen inches.<sup>48</sup>

### The Siegfried Line is Breached

On 9 February low-hanging clouds and heavy rain which persisted well into the afternoon put a stop to our hitherto excellent air support\* and indicated still worse going across the waterlogged fields and along the churned-up tracks of the Reichswald. The 2nd Canadian Division, having completed its limited task, had been pinched out of the battle, leaving four divisions to continue the advance during the next 24 hours.

\*The Canadian Typhoon and Spitfire wings in No. 83 Group were actively employed on rail interdiction east of the battle zone and also flew armed reconnaissances over roads.

Pursuing its sweeping manoeuvres over the flooded Waal Flats, the 3rd Canadian Division, whose sector now covered more than half the Corps front, took its village objectives one by one. In the 8th Brigade's advance next to the river the North Shore Regiment found that enemy resistance lessened as the flood waters deepened. The New Brunswickers met little opposition in capturing Kekerdom, and from there Brigadier Roberts sent the previously uncommitted Queen's Own Rifles of Canada forward to establish themselves without difficulty in Millingen.<sup>49</sup>

The capture of Niel had given The Royal Winnipeg Rifles a base from which to extend the 7th Brigade's operations eastward. During the afternoon "A" and B Companies occupied Keeken and "C" pushed on to the Customs House on the Alter Rhein, an operation which the Brigade diary termed "quite sticky with a good bag of PWs". In Brigadier Spragge's right sector the Regina Rifles found Mehr free of enemy troops. Its capture ended the 7th and 8th Brigade's tasks. Indeed, the rising water virtually cut off the battalions on their objectives, where they had to exist as best they might until Buffaloes became available to evacuate them.<sup>50</sup> It remained for the 9th Brigade to complete the 3rd Division's role in the first phase of "Veritable".

But while the northern tip of the Siegfried Line had still to be overcome, before the second day of the battle ended the main defences had been penetrated by two of the divisions attacking south of the Nijmegen—Cleve road, and on the Corps' right flank the Highland Division's 153rd Brigade had cut the important Goch road at two points between Mook and Gennep. Units of the 6th Canadian Brigade could see the 1st Gordon Highlanders working southward across their front clearing out the area between the Kiekberg woods and the Maas, and on several occasions were able to assist with information about enemy movements.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile the 152nd Brigade, passing through the 154th, had fought forward through the southern half of the Reichswald as far as the Kranenburg—Hekkens road, just short of the main entrenchments.<sup>52</sup> Farther north the 53rd Division had measured off substantial gains. Attacking at 8:30 a.m. from the positions gained during the night, two Welsh battalions of the 160th Brigade, supported by the 9th Royal Tanks, pushed two miles eastward to the Stoppel-Berg, a circular mound 300 feet above sea-level and the highest point in the Reichswald. The 2nd Battalion The Monmouthshire Regiment\* captured the hill after sharp fighting. The stiffening enemy resistance was evidence of the arrival of strong reinforcements, as were the determined counter-attacks launched against the East Lancashires holding the Kranenburg equines road. These were beaten *off* with the aid of eight tanks of the 147th Regiment Royal Armoured Corps which had mastered the almost impossible roads forward.<sup>53</sup> Before the day ended the 6th Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers, exploit beyond the Stoppel-Berg, had reached the north-eastern edge of the Reichswald overlooking Materborn, whence supporting tanks found attractive targets in traffic on the Cleve—Hekkens road, now the enemy's main lateral communication through the forest.<sup>54</sup>

But it was in the corridor between the northern edge of the Reichswald and

\*A Territorial component of The South Wales Borderers.

the flooded Canadian sector that the most spectacular progress had been made. The 15th (Scottish) Division's original plan to advance by leapfrogging its brigades and battalions in successive phases was frustrated by the appalling conditions of mud and traffic congestion on the routes forward. Day had broken by the time the 44th Brigade's Special Breaching Force had bridged the anti-tank ditch at three of five planned crossing places east of Frasselt. At 6:15 the 6th Battalion The King's Own Scottish Borderers, borne in Kangaroos of the 1st Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment, began to cross. (Their eight-hour journey forward from Nijmegen was afterwards described by the K.O.S.B. battalion commander as "a remarkable display of skill and endurance by the drivers of the APCs".)<sup>55</sup> By eight o'clock the K.O.S.B. had cleared Schottheide, 500 yards to the east; shortly afterwards the 2nd Battalion The Gordon Highlanders, advancing along the main road from Kranenburg, were on the outskirts of Nutterden.<sup>56</sup> There was no sign of the battalion which had been detailed to exploit these gains. Accordingly, the Borderers went forward again in Kangaroos to capture the Wolfs-Berg and the Hingst-Berg—a pair of knolls between Nutterden and the forest. These were taken about mid-morning with the assistance of a squadron of Grenadier Guards tanks; and the clearing of Nutterden by the Gordons completed the second phase of the Division's attack. The operation was now eleven hours behind schedule and it was imperative to carry out the final phase—the capture of the Materborn heights overlooking Cleve—before the Germans further reinforced these key positions. Since there was no hope of bringing the 46th and 227th Brigades forward in time as planned, the G.O.C., Major-General C. M. Barber, was compelled to order the Lowland Brigade to push on still further.<sup>57</sup>

The 8th Battalion Royal Scots seized the Esperance hill, the nearer of the brigade objectives, with little difficulty. The K.O.S.B., climbing once more into their Kangaroos, headed along the muddy tracks for the Bresserberg feature, less than half a mile from the city. They reached their goal with a scant half-hour to spare; at 5:00 p.m. they had to fight off elements of the 7th Parachute Division moving up to occupy the position. In the evening the 15th Division's reconnaissance regiment reported that the Germans in Cleve seemed disorganized and unlikely to offer resistance. But south of Cleve its patrols seeking a route eastward found their way blocked by a coordinated defence in Materborn village.<sup>58</sup>

### Through the Materborn Gap

The 30th Corps had done well in taking virtually all its objectives for Phase One of "Veritable" in the first two days. The vaunted strength of the West Wall was found to have been much exaggerated, but this was discounted by the atrocious conditions of mud and flood with which the attackers had to contend. Yet they had struck the enemy a telling blow. It was estimated that the 84th Division had at best only six battalions left out of fourteen. By the second night the count of German prisoners stood at more than 2700.<sup>59</sup>

The tasks for Phase Two were to capture Goch, Udem and Calcar and open

the Mook—Gennep—Goch road. It was imperative that Goch and Cleve should be secured with the least possible delay, for both were vital to our communications, as the enemy must recognize. On the 9th our Intelligence forecast his intentions thus: Cleve being "all but lost", "If he has forces available either from the Hochwald or from across the Rhine, he will be tempted to try to regain Cleve or at least seal it off. If he cannot do so then he must hold Goch, and also cover the nearest crossings of the Rhine."<sup>60</sup>

It was an accurate appreciation. As late as 12:30 p.m. on 10 February General Blaskowitz received from the C.-in-C. West a signal emphasizing the incalculable consequences of a break-through to the Rhine and the necessity of holding Cleve at all costs.<sup>61</sup> For the first time the German High Command now appears to have recognized the First Canadian Army's offensive as a strategic move demanding the commitment of all available reserves of men and equipment. Our security measures had been effective. Von Rundstedt's Daily Intelligence Reports reveal that up to now the main Allied attack had been expected at the bend of the Maas north of Roermond,\* where the Second British and Ninth U.S. Armies were believed to be preparing a strong two-pronged offensive against the Duisburg—Dusseldorf sector.<sup>63</sup> Three days before "Veritable" was launched a memorandum from Rundstedt's Chief Intelligence Officer to key staff officers at Headquarters Army Group "H" (who had perhaps questioned this interpretation) suggested that Allied activities west of the Reichswald were intended "to deceive us regarding the real centre of gravity of the attack". A subsidiary offensive by Canadian formations in the Reichswald area might precede the main effort. With impressive assurance the memorandum concluded, "The appreciation that the main British attack will come from the big bend of the Maas is being maintained now as before."<sup>64</sup> In the German intelligence picture the 30th British Corps was labelled "whereabouts unknown".<sup>65</sup>

The opening of the offensive on 8 February brought no change of mind. It was thought that evening that the attack had probably been carried out by the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions, supported by the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade. The main blow was still expected to fall south of Venlo. Even when the 51st and 53rd Divisions were identified in the Reichswald on the 9th, German Intelligence clung to the belief that the bulk of the British forces was earmarked for the main assault from the Maas bend.<sup>66</sup> The enemy had already taken steps to delay the start of this operation, steps which in fact were to hamper us severely. On 9 February units of the First U.S. Army, having captured some of the Roer dams intact, reached the important Schwammenauel Dam to find that the Germans had jammed open a sluice gate.† There followed a rise of from three to four feet in the level of the Roer, which caused the river to overflow its banks across the

\*General Schlemm later claimed that he personally expected the big blow to come through the Reichswald, but was assured by his senior that there was no evidence of large Allied concentrations in the Nijmegen area.<sup>62</sup>

†The facts were thus reported on 11 February: "Situation at dam 3 [MR 085272]-inlet gate to tunnel (5 metres in diameter) destroyed and outlet gate completely jammed open through which water flows at maximum capacity—elsewhere no water passing through, over or under this dam." At this time the dam was still under German fire.<sup>67</sup>



whole of the Ninth U.S. Army's front and produced a lesser rise along the Maas in the First Canadian Army sector.<sup>68</sup>

The timing and scale of this action could not have been better from the enemy's point of view. Complete demolition of the dam would have released an uncontrollable, but brief-enduring, tide to sweep down the Roer valley. As it was, the flood level, which was high enough to stop the Ninth Army's assault, was to maintain itself for two weeks. Operation "Grenade", originally scheduled for 10 February, had to be repeatedly postponed, and von Rundstedt was free for the time being to concentrate upon the operations developing on his north-eastern flank. On the evening of the 8th Army Group had given Schlemm permission to commit the 7th Parachute Division. Arriving piecemeal by battalions it had taken up positions on the left of the 84th Division between Asperden and the Maas. Late on the 10th von Rundstedt decided to move up his armoured reserve and to place Headquarters 47th Panzer Corps in control of the battle.<sup>69</sup>

On our side divisional tasks for the third day of "Veritable" were as follows. While the 51st Division continued to mop up east of the Maas, and to free the southern route to Goch, in the north the 43rd Wessex Division would be brought forward to pass through the 15th Division and capture Goch, Udem and Weeze. The Scottish Division would then clear Cleve and push mobile columns eastward to Emmerich and Calcar.<sup>70</sup>

For the next forty-eight hours the focal point of the battle was to lie in the narrow Materborn Gap between the Reichswald and the heavily bombed city of Cleve. The 30th Corps plan had contemplated a quick breakout into the plain east of the forest by the 43rd Division. To this end Phase One of the Corps operation had included with the "capture of the Materborn feature" the opening of exits through which the 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment\* might pass. As we have seen, however, the 15th Scottish Reconnaissance Regiment had made little headway with this assignment. The Materborn Gap, in spite of the 44th Lowland Brigade's notable advance, was by no means under control. Yet the need of debouching quickly into the open country while the enemy was off balance was so pressing that when General Horrocks heard that the Materborn feature had been seized he at once ordered the 43rd Division into the battle. "In point of fact", he said afterwards, "this was a mistake on my part because 15 (S) Div had only just got their claws on to the Materborn feature and had not succeeded in dominating the complete gap. . . . It would have been much better if I had held back 43 (W) Div, but I did not want to lose the opportunity of breaking through the gap."<sup>72</sup>

Since the afternoon of the 8th the Wessex Division had been waiting in the southern outskirts of Nijmegen on one hour's notice to move, and at 6:00 p.m. on the 9th its 129th Brigade took the road to Kranenburg and Cleve. General Thomas' plan was to advance eastward from Nutterden through the neck of the Reichswald, bypassing Cleve and pushing forward to Hau and Bedburg in order

\*This armoured car regiment of the Guards Armoured Division would come temporarily under the command of the 15th Division.<sup>71</sup>

to secure the fork of the roads to Goch and Udem. The 214th Brigade followed the 129th, with instructions to pull off the main road at Nutterden between 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. on the 10th, to enable the 15th Division's 227th Brigade to move up and carry out its original task of securing the wooded area north-west of Cleve and clearing the city itself.<sup>73</sup> But events were to emphasize the impossibility of successfully operating two divisions on a single axis—particularly an axis which in places was under water. About daybreak the 129th Brigade, leaving the impassable Bresserberg route, swung north to the south-west edge of Cleve, where it became heavily involved with the 16th Parachute Regiment, newly arrived from the 6th Parachute Division's area west of Arnhem. Under pressure from three sides the brigade adopted a posture of all-round defence and fought on through the whole day and the following night.<sup>74</sup>

Meanwhile the inevitable traffic jam had occurred when the 227th Brigade attempted to pass through the 214th at Nutterden. The congestion lasted till dusk, so that once again the 44th Lowland Brigade was the Scottish Division's only formation in action that day. By capturing the prominent Clever Berg the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers extended the brigade's hold on the Materborn feature northward to the road from Nutterden; but a planned advance into Cleve was abandoned when the 129th Brigade's unexpected presence on part of the objective prevented the 15th Division's artillery from giving the necessary support.<sup>75</sup>

At the end of a frustrating day there was promise of confusion giving place to order on the morrow. Relieving the 129th Brigade, the Scottish Division would clear Cleve with two brigades, while the 43rd Division resumed its delayed advance to the south-east. Early on 11 February the Lowland Brigade took over the southern suburbs of Cleve from the 129th and began working northward through the rubble of the town, encountering determined opposition. By late evening the 227th Brigade had come in on the road from Kranenburg and was clearing the north-eastern half of Cleve.<sup>76</sup> The capture of Materborn village that afternoon by the 214th Brigade had finally opened the gap. Fighting forward against sternly resisting paratroopers, this brigade took Hau by daybreak on the 12th.<sup>77</sup>

Here however the advance was checked. To bar the way to the south the enemy had established a defensive line along the Esels-Berg ridge which linked the woods about Moyland with the detached Forest of Cleve, east of the Reichs wald. This was less than he had hoped to do. As the 47th Panzer Corps moved westward during the night of 11-12 February to its assembly area at Udem, its commander, General von Luttwitz, carried orders from General Schlemm to launch a counter-attack through the 84th Division to recover Cleve and the heights west of the city. But by the morning of the 12th, when the attack was to have been launched, British forces had advanced south-east from Cleve as far as Hau and in the eastern Reichswald were threatening the Cleve—Goch road. In these circumstances, and because of his shortage of tanks (not more than 50 actually on the ground) von Luttwitz decided to attack westward into the Reichswald, where the Allied superiority in armour and artillery would be less effective. The assault would be made with the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division on the left and the

116th Panzer Division on the right. Von Luttwitz planned that after reaching the Cleve—Hekkens road he would concentrate all his forces in a drive northward towards the Materborn heights.<sup>78</sup>

The effort had failed. Scheduled to begin at 6:00 a.m., the German attack did not get under way until half-past nine. By that time units of the 43rd Wessex Division were pushing south-eastward towards Bedburg and southward along the Goch road. The German blows could not halt the momentum of the British drive. The Wessex Division's historian reports three counter-attacks launched against the 7th Somerset Light Infantry, "only to wither away in the fire of the infantry, the tanks and the guns". By evening the 47th Panzer Corps counter-attack had collapsed. Both its divisions had suffered heavily, and of the 84th Infantry Division only the 1052nd Grenadier Regiment could now muster any appreciable strength. Striving to put together a defensive line which would halt us, von Luttwitz hurried in from across the Rhine a regiment of the 346th Infantry Division, committing it east of Bedburg under Fiebig. An operation order of the 116th Panzer Division dated 13 February reveals that this division now had the remnant of the 84th under command; and that it was to "break off the attack south of Cleve" and take up a defensive line running from Erfgen through Hasselt to the west edge of the Tannenbusch (the Forest of Cleve).<sup>79</sup> The assault on this new position by the 129th Brigade on 13 February was the beginning of a bitter five days' struggle by the Wessex Division to gain control of the relatively high ground overlooking Goch from the north-east.

While progress in the centre of the 30th Corps front was thus bitterly contested, things had been going better on the wings. The most significant advance was on the right, where the 51st Division was endeavouring to open up the Mook-Goch road, now to be the main Corps axis. On 10 February the 153rd Highland Brigade, clearing the widening triangle between the Reichswald and the Maas, entered Ottersum, and during the night sent the 5th Black Watch across the Niers River in assault boats to capture Gennep. The town was a valuable acquisition, for the Second British Army was now able to begin bridging the Maas here\* in order to relieve the traffic bottleneck downstream at Grave.<sup>80</sup> On the 11th Hekkens, the troublesome southern anchor of the main Reichswald defences, was taken in fierce fighting by the 154th Brigade, supported by the full Corps artillery.<sup>81</sup> Two nights later the same brigade, crossing the swollen Niers south of Hekkens in Buffaloes, established a bridgehead west of Kessel, capturing high ground from which the enemy had been directing fire upon the new Corps axis. On the night of the 14th-15th Kessel was taken.<sup>82</sup> In the Reichswald itself the 53rd Division continued mopping up pockets of resistance. The worst opposition came from German self-propelled guns firing down the open rides, for there was no way of approaching these with armour. On the 12th the Welshmen successfully fought off the vigorous counter-attacks launched against them by the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division as the main blow of the 47th Panzer Corps' mistimed effort.<sup>83</sup>

\*The flood from the Roer dams (above, p. 475) seriously delayed the work.

## Advance Through the Floods

On the inundated flats beside the Rhine preparations for the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade's attack on 10 February were prolonged into the afternoon as new transport difficulties arose hourly. Supporting artillery could not get forward, and at 4:30 the two assaulting battalions crossed the start-line in Buffaloes without the prearranged barrage. On the right The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders had slight opposition. In little more than an hour they were in Donsbruggen, where they met the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, who had had to force their way forward through barricades of tree-trunks which the enemy had skilfully felled across the main Cleve road. Pushing on towards the Spoy Canal, by midnight the S.D. & Gs. had a company in Rindern, where fighting continued until daylight. Farther north The Highland Light Infantry of Canada were stopped outside Duffelward by machine-gun fire from pillboxes which covered the only approach. Next morning they took the town without loss and headed for the Canal.<sup>84</sup> By mid-afternoon of the 11th the Glengarrians, having mopped up Rindern, had reached the west bank. At its northern end the Highland Light Infantry occupied Wardhausen in the early evening, and before midnight the two battalions held the whole line of the Canal.<sup>85</sup>

An early-morning message from the 3rd Canadian Division on 11 February reported that water was still the "greatest enemy".<sup>86</sup> The human antagonist here was the much-reduced 1052nd Grenadier Regiment, whose parent 84th Division could now muster fewer than 1000 fighting men.<sup>87</sup> With Cleve lost there was no great incentive for a sacrificial defence of the scattered "island" villages in the flooded river flats. There were withdrawals in the dark, and although General Fiebig's post-war recollections include the establishment of a temporary line through Griethausen and Kellen on the west bank of the Alter Rhein, both these places were in fact taken on the 12th without opposition—the former by The Highland Light Infantry of Canada and the latter by Brigadier Rockingham's reserve battalion, The North Nova Scotia Highlanders.<sup>88</sup>

The 9th Brigade was now the only formation of General Spry's "Water Rats" to remain fully committed in the flooded area. Because of the reduced enemy resistance and the increasing difficulties of maintenance the 7th Brigade had been withdrawn to Beek on the 11th, and the positions held by the 8th were being turned over to a single battalion.<sup>89</sup> On the afternoon of the 12th the 7th Brigade relieved the Scottish Division's 227th Brigade in Cleve, which was now free of any organized resistance. Although, in the words of one unit diarist, "Cleve had been 'Caenned' almost into oblivion", the deep cellars beneath nearly every house had survived the attentions of Bomber Command, and gave the Canadians comfortable billets adequate protection from the occasional shell which the enemy still dropped into the city.<sup>90</sup>

Now that General Crerar's left flank was pushed well ahead of the projected limit of "Veritable's" first phase, the 9th Brigade's activities were restricted to holding the line of the Alter Rhein and probing forward with not more than one company group from each battalion. During the night of the 12th-13th two Glengarry

platoons entered Warbeyen on the main Cleve—Emmerich road, and when they withdrew to Kellen carried 13 prisoners with them. Next day The Highland Light Infantry of Canada patrolled eastward from Griethausen along the Rhine bank to within 2500 yards of the Emmerich ferries.<sup>91</sup> At midday on the 14th, acting under revised instructions from Division to free the Cleve—Emmerich road and clear eastward to the Kalflach Canal, Brigadier Rockingham sent The North Nova Scotia Highlanders forward in Buffaloes. They had little trouble in clearing Warbeyen and Hurendeich in turn, but there was some stiff fighting before the Rhine bank was secured. The enemy's losses included a number who attempted to escape across the river.<sup>92</sup>

The entire area between the Rhine and the Cleve—Calcar railway was now under water, for on 11 February German engineers, acting on instructions from the First Parachute Army, had blown the sluice-gates of the Spoy Canal and breached the western dyke of the Kalflach Canal near Huisberden. This action nullified efforts by the engineers of the 3rd Canadian Division to reduce the flooding by piercing the main dyke at Nijmegen, where the level of the Waal was now below that of the water imprisoned within. On 12 February the 16th Field Company blasted a 100-foot gap which they subsequently enlarged to 300 yards.<sup>93</sup> The flow into the river began at a rate of some 13 knots, and on the 15th our engineers reported a general decrease in the flood level as far east as Kranenburg.<sup>94</sup> But there was to be no large-scale relief. The new breach east of Cleve was letting in as much water as was being drained off, and outside the dyke the river was rising towards its highest level of the winter (page 471, above). The Nijmegen—Cleve road was under water; but since the evening of 10 February four ferries, built by the 2nd Field Company R.C.E., had been carrying priority traffic around the flooded portion from Wyler to a point 300 yards east of Kranenburg. When Field-Marshal Montgomery visited the 3rd Canadian Division on the 15th, he toured the area in a convoy of amphibious vehicles.<sup>96</sup>

From the beginning of "Veritable" an unusual smoke-screen had concealed the operations of the 3rd Canadian Division from enemy watchers north of the Rhine. Potentially excellent observation posts provided by the tall chimneys of the numerous factories along the river bank and by the 270-foot Hoch Elten hill northwest of Emmerich were effectively blinded, so that not only the division's tactical movements but the heavy maintenance traffic along the road between Wyler and Kranenburg were hidden from enemy view. As the 3rd Division advanced, its left flank was masked by a curtain of dense smoke which extended from the river bend north-east of Nijmegen along the south bank to within 2000 yards of its successive forward positions. By early March this was to grow to an almost continuous screen 30,000 yards long.

Employed in these measures were four British smoke companies of the Pioneer Corps, totalling 1350 all ranks, under the direction of Headquarters Smoke I Control—an ad hoc headquarters, set up by First Canadian Army, comprising chemical warfare, meteorological and other technical personnel. The 3500 tons of smoke stores expended included 8500 No. 24 (zinc chloride) generators, and

about 450,000 gallons of fog oil. In the early stages the screen was built up from a line of smoke-points, from 100 to 300 yards apart, along roads and dykes paralleling the river. But flooding and demolitions made it impossible to maintain or extend this type of screen, even with the use of twelve Buffaloes allotted by the division. On 15 February, taking advantage of the constancy of the prevailing west and south-west winds in the battle area, Smoke Control began "beaming" smoke from two large point sources, each consisting of a battery of twelve fog oil generators—one north-east of Nijmegen and one near Wyler; a third and fourth were added later north and east of Cleve. The results were highly satisfactory. The smoke staff subsequently recorded, "Formations were more than pleased with the results and value of properly controlled and planned tactical screening."<sup>97</sup>

### The 2nd Canadian Corps Enters the Battle

By the end of the first week's fighting the gains south of the Reichswald made it possible for General Crerar to deploy First Canadian Army on a two-corps front. Until now the restricted lines of advance had limited the role of the 2nd Canadian Corps to protecting General Horrocks' left flank.<sup>98</sup> An appreciation by Crerar's headquarters on 1 February had foreseen the capture of Goch and the opening of adequate maintenance routes for the 30th Corps south of the Reichswald as "an essential prelude to any take over by 2 Cdn Corps". If there were a likelihood of the battle becoming "loose" at this stage, the appreciation went on, the 30th Corps should continue to drive from Cleve on Calcar and Udem until it was possible to switch the maintenance of the thrusting division (the Guards Armoured) from the northern to the southern axis. However, should things become "sticky", the route through Cleve and the responsibility for the advance to the south-east ought to be turned over to the 2nd Canadian Corps.<sup>99</sup>

As we have seen operations had definitely been "sticky", and so far there had been no opening for the armoured division, which was still in corps reserve at Nijmegen. Goch had not yet fallen, and the important bridge over the Maas at Gennep which was to provide General Horrocks with a new maintenance route was still under construction. (It was finally opened for traffic on the 20th.)<sup>100</sup> On 14 February the Army Commander lunched with Lieut.-General Simonds and instructed him to take over the 30th Corps' left sector at noon next day. He ruled out for the time being a proposal by Simonds that his Corps might be given the task of securing a crossing over the Neder Rijn just west of Arnhem and exploiting up the Rhine's right bank, judging such a project, attractive though it might seem, "of secondary importance to the immediate responsibility of completing what we have set out to do in Operation 'Veritable' ".<sup>101</sup> Thus maximum pressure upon the enemy would be maintained on a wide front by employing formations not hitherto committed in the battle. General Simonds was given as his main axis the road running south-eastward from Cleve to Udem, while the 30th Corps, shifting to its right, would operate along a centre line Cleve—Goch—Weeze—Kevelaer.<sup>102</sup>

General Horrocks now carried out some necessary regrouping. He was

reinforced on his southern flank by the 52nd (Lowland) Division, which arrived from the 8th British Corps in the Venlo area and took over the 51st Division's right front, leaving the 51st to concentrate on attacking Goch from the north-west.<sup>103</sup> Farther to the left the 43rd Division, in heavy fighting by each of its brigades in turn, broke through the German defences east and south of the Forest of Cleve, completely overrunning the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division. By the evening of 16 February an armoured column of the 214th Brigade had cut the Goch—Calcar road, and a brilliant night attack without reconnaissance by the 4th Somerset Light Infantry gained a 1000-yard front on the ridge overlooking Goch. When the drive ended the brigade had captured 1000 prisoners.<sup>104</sup> The advance had outflanked the Forest of Cleve, from which the enemy had been largely driven by a carefully coordinated fire-plan to which the 1st Canadian Rocket Battery contributed.<sup>105</sup> On the 17th the 130th Brigade cleared the forest without difficulty. The way was now open for the 15th Scottish Division to pass through the 43rd and assault Goch from the north-east.<sup>106</sup>

#### Clearing Moyland Wood

In the meantime, on the Wessex Division's left troops of the 15th (Scottish) Division had been meeting stubborn opposition in the woods west of Moyland. On the 13th the 46th Brigade, advancing along the Cleve—Calcar road, had reached Hasselt, a village north-east of Bedburg. Moyland, two miles to the southeast, was the objective for the 14th, but because the ground on either side of the highway was flooded, the brigade commander had shifted his axis 1000 yards to the right. He sent one battalion along a secondary road nearly a mile south of the highway, and another along the pine-covered ridge between.<sup>107</sup> This forested area, consisting mainly of small conifers which formed no real obstacle to armour, extended for three miles from Bedburg to a point south-east of Moyland, from which village the wood derived its name. After a promising beginning the brigade's attack slowed under heavy artillery and mortar fire, and the two battalions became involved in close and bitter fighting in the woods. By the morning of the 16th they were holding positions as far forward as the lateral road which crossed the ridge at a neck of the forest south-west of Moyland.<sup>108</sup> The brigade's bitter struggle for Moyland, which all were to agree (writes the divisional historian), "had been the worst experience they had endured since the campaign began", was to last for three more days.

On 15 February the 3rd Canadian Division took over the 15th Division's front, at the same time reverting under the command of the 2nd Canadian Corps. The 46th Brigade came under General Spry that evening as the rest of the Scottish Division went into 30th Corps reserve to prepare for the assault on Goch.<sup>109</sup> On the narrow front between the inter-corps boundary and the flooded Rhine flats, General Simonds had little room for deployment. Canadian formations could at first be fed in only one brigade at a time, and on the afternoon of 16 February the 7th Brigade entered the battle. Its task was to pass through the 46th Brigade and open the way to Calcar. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, supported by two

squadrons of the 3rd (Armoured) Battalion Scots Guards, was directed to seize hilly ground in the Louisendorf area three miles south of Moyland; while on its left The Regina Rifle Regiment, with one tank squadron, was to clear the woods closer to Moyland—those lying east of the lateral road, and forming a kind of peninsula to the main wooded area.<sup>101</sup>

The attack on the right went well. Kangaroos carried the Winnipeg Rifles through heavy shelling and rocket-fire to their objective, which they consolidated by five o'clock. Suffering remarkably few casualties, the battalion took 240 prisoners.<sup>111</sup> On the left, however, the Reginas quickly ran into difficulties. Close to their start-line they came under heavy flanking fire from the left, although that part of the forest had been reported cleared by the 46th Brigade. The Reginas spent the rest of the day securing the woods west of the lateral road, ousting members of the 346th Fusilier Battalion and of the 60th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 116th Panzer Division. These fell back to the "peninsula", whence their machine-gun fire effectively barred any crossing of the lateral road. As the Reginas "C" Company pushed forward along the southern fringe of the wood one of its platoons was counter-attacked and cut off.<sup>112</sup>

A renewal of the attack on the morning of the 17th achieved little. Heavy artillery and mortar fire disorganized the Regina companies at the edge of the wood. The enemy's shells were being detonated by the treetops, resulting in a particularly deadly airburst. During the day, however, the 7th Brigade's reserve battalion, the 1st Canadian Scottish, advanced under heavy fire across the open country on the right flank to capture high ground overlooking Heselerfeld and Roskamp—farmsteads about half a mile south of the Calcar end of Moyland Wood.<sup>113</sup> A junior N.C.O., Acting Corporal P. P. Katchanoski, took charge when his platoon *officer* and sergeant became casualties, and directed the platoon's defence against the many counter-attacks that developed in the next three days. His bold leadership won him the D.C.M.<sup>114</sup>

With the 7th Brigade's southern flank thus secured General Spry decided to seal off the eastern end of the woods and then clear north-westward to the Moyland lateral road. Brigadier Spragge ordered an attack from the south, and at 12:30 p.m. on the 18th The Regina Rifle Regiment moved northward across the Bedburg road. Using Wasp flame-throwers "B" Company gained a footing among the trees, throwing the enemy back 200 yards, but "D", trying to pass through, was halted by vigorous counter-attacks from the right flank. The Germans in the woods kept up a devastating machine-gun fire, and from across the Rhine their heavy artillery shelled the Canadian positions continuously. Nevertheless one of "D" Company's platoons, commanded by Lieut. W. L. Keating, seized the central crest, and "A" Company, working north-westward, reached its objective on the lateral road. There the attack stayed, for the Reginas were too exhausted to exploit in the face of the terrific enemy fire.<sup>115</sup> For five hours, until reinforced by the rest of "D" Company, Keating's handful fought off repeated counter-attacks in hand-to-hand combat. The successful defence of the company objective brought Keating a well-deserved M.C.<sup>116</sup> At the end of the third day of the battle for the woods the battalion's casualties totalled more than 100.



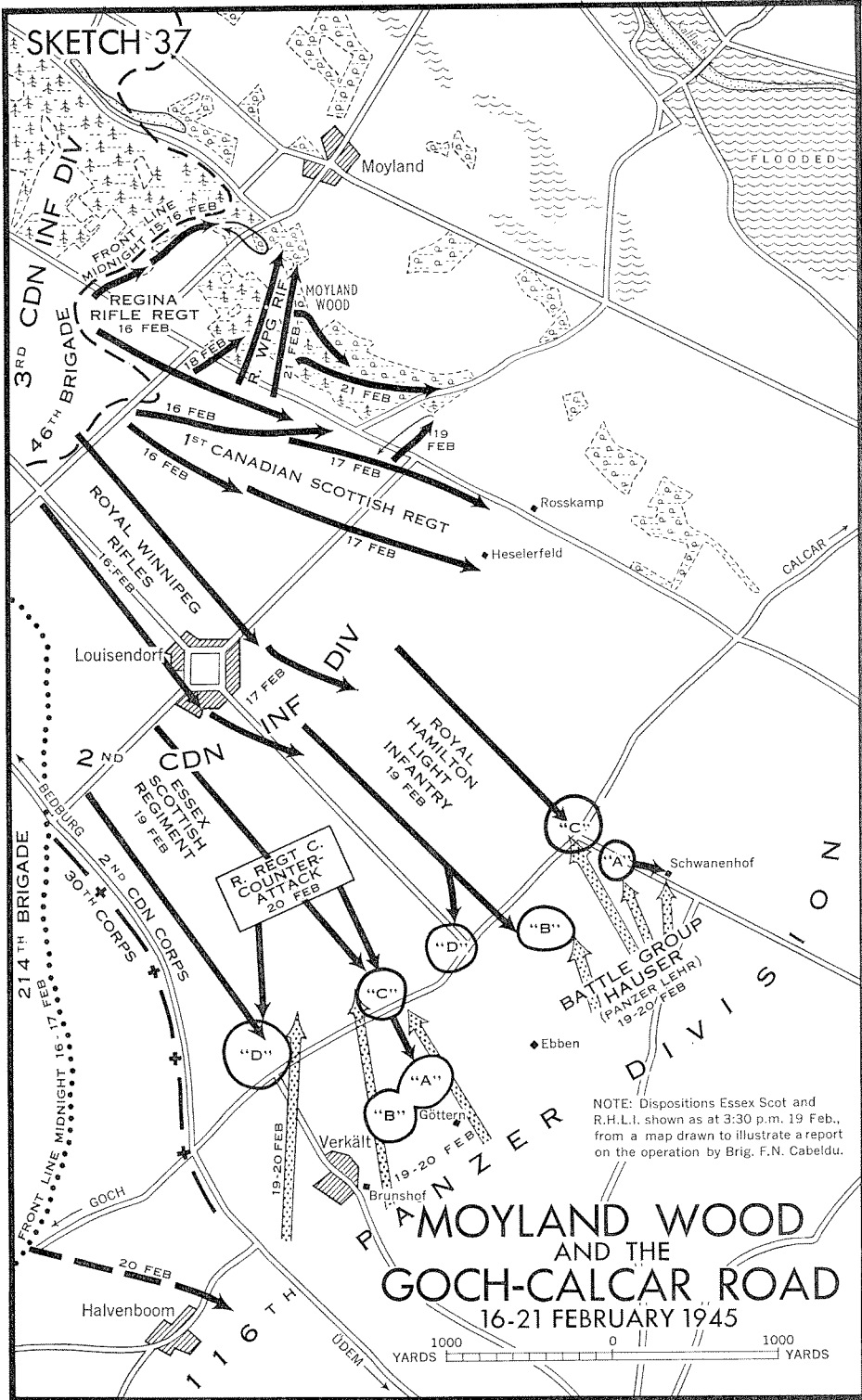
The Germans were continuing to move in fresh troops. The stern resistance encountered by the Regina Rifles came from a battalion of the 6th Parachute Division newly from North Holland. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division had had a sample of this, formation's quality at Kapelsche Veer. On 16 February Lieut.-General Hermann Plocher's divisional headquarters had relieved the 84th Infantry Division between the Cleve—Calcar road and the Rhine. At first Plocher had only the remnants of his 16th Parachute Regiment (which, we have noted, had been fighting hard since 10 February), elements of the 346th Infantry and some companies of the 7th Parachute Division; but he was temporarily reinforced shortly by the strong 19th and 21st Parachute Regiments of the last-named division. Then, on the night of 17-18 February, his own 18th Parachute Regiment began arriving at Calcar, to be followed shortly by the 17th.<sup>117</sup> On Plocher's left flank the 116th Panzer Division was being slowly pushed back, leaving the Moyland area as a stubborn salient on which for several more, days the waves of our attacks were to break in vain.

The failure to drive the enemy from Moyland Wood was seriously delaying the 2nd Canadian Corps' planned advance. The 2nd Canadian Division was still uncommitted; its 4th Brigade had been in the Cleve area since the evening of 16 February, waiting to relieve the 7th Brigade. Accordingly the Corps intentions for the 19th were for the 4th Brigade to pass through the 7th's battalions and seize objectives beyond the Goch—Calcar road, which, it will be recalled, the 43rd Division had cut near Goch on the 16th. While the 5th Brigade relieved the 46th Scottish Brigade in the western part of Moyland Wood, the 7th was to complete clearing the eastern end.<sup>118</sup>

The strength of the German defenders still holding the wood seems to have been seriously underestimated. The brigade commander gave the 7th Brigade's task to the Canadian Scottish, who were directed at the same time to improve their positions to the east and south by gaining more of the high ground overlooking Calcar. In these circumstances the attack against the wood was made by one weak company. Since its advance on the 17th the battalion had suffered heavily from the enemy's shelling and mortaring, and "C" Company attacked northward on the morning of the 19th with only 68 men. These crossed the Bedburg road and reached their objective near the wood's south-eastern tip with few casualties, but immediately came under a holocaust of fire followed by a counterattack which virtually wiped out the company. Only nine men escaped. The battalion's northern flank, left open by this disaster to "C" Company, was quickly sealed by the regimental carriers and a troop of tanks from the Fort Garry Horse. The remaining Canadian Scottish companies made little headway towards Calcar, and during the evening had to beat off six counter-attacks by Plocher's paratroopers. A Scottish outpost established south of Heselerfeld was overrun. The battalion's casualties for 18 and 19 February totalled 140, including 53 taken prisoner.<sup>119</sup>

Meanwhile the advance of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade on the right (below, page 487) had improved the 7th Brigade's chances against Moyland Wood, where the crust of the enemy's defences had so far shown no sign of cracking. There was a change in the command of the brigade on the 20th, Lt.-Col. A. S.

SKETCH 37



NOTE: Dispositions Essex Scot and R.H.L.I. shown as at 3:30 p.m. 19 Feb., from a map drawn to illustrate a report on the operation by Brig. F.N. Cabeldu.

**MOYLAND WOOD AND THE GOCH-CALCAR ROAD**  
16-21 FEBRUARY 1945

Gregory, the Reginas' C.O., taking it over temporarily. A very carefully coordinated attack by The Royal Winnipeg Rifles was planned for 21 February. The whole wooded area east of the Moyland lateral road was divided into belts 300 yards wide, each to be successively saturated from west to east by a timed programme of fire from divisional artillery and mortars, while from the southern flank the battalions' anti-tank guns and medium machine-guns of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa provided close support over open sights. At ten a.m., as fire over the first sector lifted, "A" and "C" Companies, each accompanied by two tanks of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment, moved through the Regina Rifles and entered the angle of the wood south-west of Moyland. The flame-throwers with the infantry (a well-planned system of refuelling kept three Wasps continually with each forward company) terrified the Germans and bolstered the morale of the attackers. In spite of mounting casualties, both from machine-gun fire and from the shells bursting among the treetops, the Winnipegs pressed forward, methodically clearing the woods sector by sector, aided by the tanks. In the final stage "C" Company had been reduced to a strength of 42, while "A" had no officers and only 25 men left. "D" Company, coming in with three tanks, completed the task, clearing the eastern end of the wood. This company's success owed much to the skill and inspiration of its commander, Major L. H. Denison, who went from one platoon to another, keeping his men moving in spite of increasing casualties, and led the assault on the final enemy position. Throughout the Winnipegs' advance low-flying rocket-firing Typhoons of No. 84 Group, taking advantage of the first good flying weather in five days, gave valuable aid by strafing enemy positions. Mines laid across the eastern exits from the wood prevented our tanks from supporting further infantry advance, but Denison, whose efforts were to win him the D.S.O., organized "D" Company's defences at the edge of the trees; they repelled two sharp counter-attacks during the night.<sup>120</sup>

Thus the obstacle of Moyland Wood had been overcome at last. The 3rd Division's fighting there recalls the 2nd Division's bitter battle in the *Forêt de la Londe*, and indicates once more what an unpleasant task the capture of a forest area held by a determined enemy can be. It had been very costly; the 7th Brigade's three battalions had suffered 485 casualties during the six days 16-21 February. The heaviest toll fell upon The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, with 183; of these, 105 (26 of them fatal) were in the final victorious attack of the 21st. The Canadian Scottish had 168 casualties, The Regina Rifle Regiment 134.<sup>121</sup> But the 6th Parachute Division had pulled its front back to the line Calcar—Honnepel. Early on the 22nd the 5th Brigade's Regiment de Maisonneuve entered Moyland village unopposed.<sup>122</sup> The road to Calcar was open.

### The Goch—Calcar Road

During the past three days Brigadier F. N. Cabeldu's 4th Brigade had also been engaged in one of the most bitterly fought actions of Operation "Veritable".

It had been intended that the brigade should launch the 2nd Division's re-entry into the battle with the capture of a prominent hill a mile south-east of Calcar,

but this target had been successively replaced by more limited objectives as the flanking threat from Moyland Wood persisted. Finally on 18 February (above, page 484) General Simonds ordered an attack for noon next day to seize a zone of high ground, 1000 yards deep, extending north-east along the Goch—Calcar road for 3000 yards from its intersection with the Bedburg—Udem road. The operation would be on a two-battalion front, Brigadier Cabeldu placing The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry on the left and The Essex Scottish Regiment on the right, with The Royal Regiment of Canada in reserve. Each assaulting unit would be supported by a squadron of the Fort Garry Horse, who thus established their claim of being the first Canadian armour to fight in Germany. Because the attack was to be made across open country, the 1st Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment provided enough Kangaroos to lift two rifle companies from each battalion.<sup>123</sup> The fire-plan included support by the machine-guns and mortars of the Toronto Scottish Regiment and by fourteen field and seven medium regiments, plus two heavy batteries.

Rain during the night of 18-19 February further softened the sodden fields over which the advance had to be made. By mid-morning the 4th Brigade units were forming up in The Royal Winnipeg Rifles' battalion area. The start-line was the road running north-east through the Louisedorf crossroads; the other axis of the crossroads formed the inter-battalion boundary.<sup>125</sup> Promptly at midday the guns opened fire, taking the enemy by surprise. The barrage rolled forward at armoured pace as the Kangaroos, led by the tanks, headed straight for their initial objectives, 2500 yards away. But the heavy going took its toll, and on each sector several personnel-carriers and Shermans bogged down close to the start-line, while on the left flank a number of tanks fell victims to mines. Heavy fire from a screen of 88-mm. guns along the Goch—Calcar road forced the Kangaroos to drop their troops short of their goal. The Carrier Regiment in all had seven vehicles knocked out, although three of these were later recovered.<sup>126</sup>

The leading R.H.L.I. companies, though suffering heavy casualties, managed to fight across the road to within 200 yards of their objectives—the Schwanenhof and Ebben farmsteads. On the right the Essex Scottish, whose targets were the buildings at Gottern and Brunshof, had some elements there at 1:45 p.m. But half an hour later they reported a counter-attack coming in.<sup>127</sup> It was the first of a series of heavy blows launched by infantry and armour against their front and southern flank. The Essex fought back grimly and by half-past four had put "A" and "D" Companies on their objectives. The Royal Regiment of Canada had now reached their reserve positions, 1500 yards to the rear of the main road. By six o'clock more than 100 prisoners had been sent back, most of them from the 12th Parachute Reconnaissance Battalion (an independent unit formed the previous October for duty with the 2nd Parachute Corps).<sup>128</sup>

Then the enemy's effort redoubled as the 47th Panzer Corps sent a fresh formation into the fight. Most opportunely for General von Luttwitz, the Panzer Lehr Division had arrived the previous evening at Marienbaum, midway between

\*These were from the divisional artilleries of the 2nd and 3rd Canadian, and the 15th, 43rd and 53rd Divisions, and the 5th Army Group Royal Artillery.<sup>124</sup>

Calcar and Xanten. Badly mauled in the Ardennes, its ranks had since been filled with young replacements of little training; nevertheless, as it was about to show, it was still capable of fierce fighting. It seems to have had only 22 tanks actually ready for action on 19 February. Higher authority had decreed that it might be used for short counter-attacks, but not for holding a line of defence. The situation seemed made to order, and about 8:00 p.m. on the 19th it was committed against the Canadians holding the farms along the Goch—Calcar road.<sup>129</sup> It appears that a battle-group of Lehr attacked on the R.H.L.I. sector, and 116th Panzer Division units against the Essex. Since the Fort Garry tanks had withdrawn at nightfall to re-arm and re-fuel, for the moment our infantry was without armoured support.

Throughout the night successive waves of Germans, supported by heavy artillery and mortar fire, drove against the 4th Brigade's positions, inflicting severe losses. Towards midnight the Essex C.O., Lt.-Col. J. E. C. Pangman, who had previously been out of communication for some time, reported that the situation around his tactical headquarters on the road north of Verkalt was "touch and go", with "enemy tanks and infantry all about".\* About the same time the R.H.L.I. reported, "Heavy infiltration of enemy infantry and tanks around 'B' and 'C' Companies."<sup>131</sup> At this critical juncture the G.O.C. 2nd Canadian Division, General Matthews, released the 6th Brigade's Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada to Brigadier Cabeldu, who was thus able to use the Royal Regiment, strengthened by one and later two companies of the Camerons, to maintain his forward line. Cabeldu ordered the Royals to reinforce the Essex Scottish. "D" Company went forward, but returned on finding the Essex headquarters "held by enemy tanks and infantry".<sup>132</sup> At 1:35 Lt.-Col. Whitaker of the R.H.L.I. sent word that his "C" Company had been overrun and that he was mounting a counter-attack.<sup>133</sup> All the men "left out of battle" were called forward to bolster the defences; and by morning the battalion's counter-effort had restored its positions. Aid came with the arrival of a company of the Camerons, and a troop of Fort Garry tanks moved up in time to help beat off a strong daylight counter-attack.<sup>134</sup>

Meanwhile Brigadier Cabeldu had been organizing an attempt by the Royal Regiment (Lt.-Col. R. M. Lendrum) to recover the lost positions of the Essex Scottish and rally "B" and "C" Companies' survivors, who were sheltering in scattered slit trenches. Preceded by heavy artillery fire, the attack went in at 9:30 a.m. After an hour's stiff fighting contact was established with Lt.-Col. Pangman, who was holding out with the remnant of his headquarters in a farmhouse cellar. But so deadly was the enemy fire that it was 2:00 p.m., after a second Royal attack had been mounted, before carriers could reach the spot to evacuate the wounded and the weary headquarters staff.<sup>135</sup> During the afternoon stragglers from the Essex trickled back; but it was not until next morning that "A" Company, which had been written off as lost, reappeared, having held its ground for 36 hours with

\*Among the Canadians captured here was the commander of "A" Squadron, Fort Garry Horse, Major B. F. Macdonald, who, though wounded, continued to assist the infantry when his tank was knocked out on the objective. Concealing his rank from his captors, he escaped some ten miles behind the enemy's lines, and the information he brought back was of great value in planning the Corps' subsequent advance. He was awarded the D.S.O.<sup>130</sup>

only 35 fit men and some wounded."° Altogether the two-day battle cost the Essex Scottish 51 killed, 99 wounded and 54 taken prisoner. The Royal Regiment had had 64 casualties.<sup>137</sup> Pangman won an immediate D.S.O., as did Major K. W. MacIntyre, commander of the "lost" "A" Company. Six other members of the Essex Scottish received awards for bravery. One of them was C.S.M. F. L. Dixon, who got a second bar to his Military Medal from Dieppe. He was the only Canadian soldier to win the decoration three times in this war.

Panzer Lehr's effort was almost spent. Shortly before 6:00 p.m. on the 20<sup>th</sup> a final attack came in on the R.H.L.I. from the north-east. Cabeldu at once sent forward the reserve Fort Garry squadron and previously uncommitted elements of the Cameron Highlanders, and within two hours the Germans were beaten back.<sup>138</sup> The important Goch—Calcar road was now secure, the 2nd Division had a firm base from which to mount further operations and, as we have seen, the success here helped the 7th Brigade to win Moyland Wood. In seizing their objective and then holding it so doggedly against the enemy's best efforts, The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry had suffered 125 casualties. With the aid of their supporting weapons they had accounted for a good share of the brigade's estimated toll of 11 German tanks and six 88-mm. S.P. guns.<sup>139</sup> (No less than seven tanks were credited to the 18th Canadian Anti-Tank Battery's "C" Troop, whose commander, Lieut. David Heaps, won the Military Cross.)<sup>140</sup> Recognition of the R.H.L.I.'s prowess came in the award of a bar to Lt.-Col. Whitaker's D.S.O. (won at Dieppe), and six decorations to other officers and men of his battalion. The Panzer Lehr Division, having lost 46 men captured and evidently a considerably larger number killed and wounded,<sup>141</sup> was withdrawn on the night of 21-22 February to the area west of Udem, and shortly sent to the Munchen-Gladbach sector to oppose the American Ninth Army.<sup>142</sup>

The 4th Brigade had had sad losses (the combined casualties of its own three battalions and The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada for 19 and 20 February numbered just 400),<sup>143</sup> but it was pleased with itself, and it had reason to be. The brigade diarist wrote:

All units have done an exceptionally fine job of fighting, and the RHLI "fortress" is an outstanding example of a well planned and executed operation and of the ability of our troops under good leadership and by sheer guts and determination to take and hold difficult ground against the enemy's best.

### The Capture of Goch

Operation "Veritable" was drawing to a close, although not more than half its second phase had been completed. A new offensive effort was now being organized. On the 30th Corps front the final act of "Veritable" had been the struggle for Goch, which, as we have seen, was a bulwark of the German defence system east of the Reichswald.

Divided in two by the River Niers, the town of 10,000 inhabitants was guarded on all sides except the south-east by an inner and an outer anti-tank ditch, about 1000 yards apart. By 17 February, as noted above (page 482) three divisions

were closing in on Goch—the 53rd Welsh and the 43rd Wessex from the north and north-east, and the 51st Highland from the north-west. General Horrocks planned a full corps operation to take the town. Using crossings over the outer ditch seized by the Wessex Division's 214th Brigade, the 44th Lowland Brigade (15th Division), moving up from Cleve by Kangaroo, was to assault on the 18th between the Goch—Cleve railway and the Calcar road, while the 51st Division cleared that part of Goch lying south of the Niers. West of the railway the 53rd Division would mark time on the high ground, ready to commit one or more brigades at short notice.<sup>144</sup>

The operation went on as planned. During the night of 17-18 February the 214th Brigade established nine crossings over the outer ditch, about 2500 yards from the heart of the town. The 44th Brigade's assault began early next afternoon with two battalions, aided by special equipment of the 79th Armoured Division, advancing on separate axes. They met heavy machine-gun fire, but by midnight both had consolidated bridgeheads over the inner ditch. On the other side of the Niers the Highland Division's 153rd Brigade, attacking as planned at 11:00 p.m. on the 18th, had entered the southern part of the town. Rubble from bombing having stopped the tanks, the infantry had close street-fighting all next day and the following night. By then the 44th Brigade had cleared its sector as far as the river and taken 600 prisoners; while the 71st Brigade (of the 53rd Division) had moved up to secure the factory area in the north-west corner of the town.<sup>145</sup>

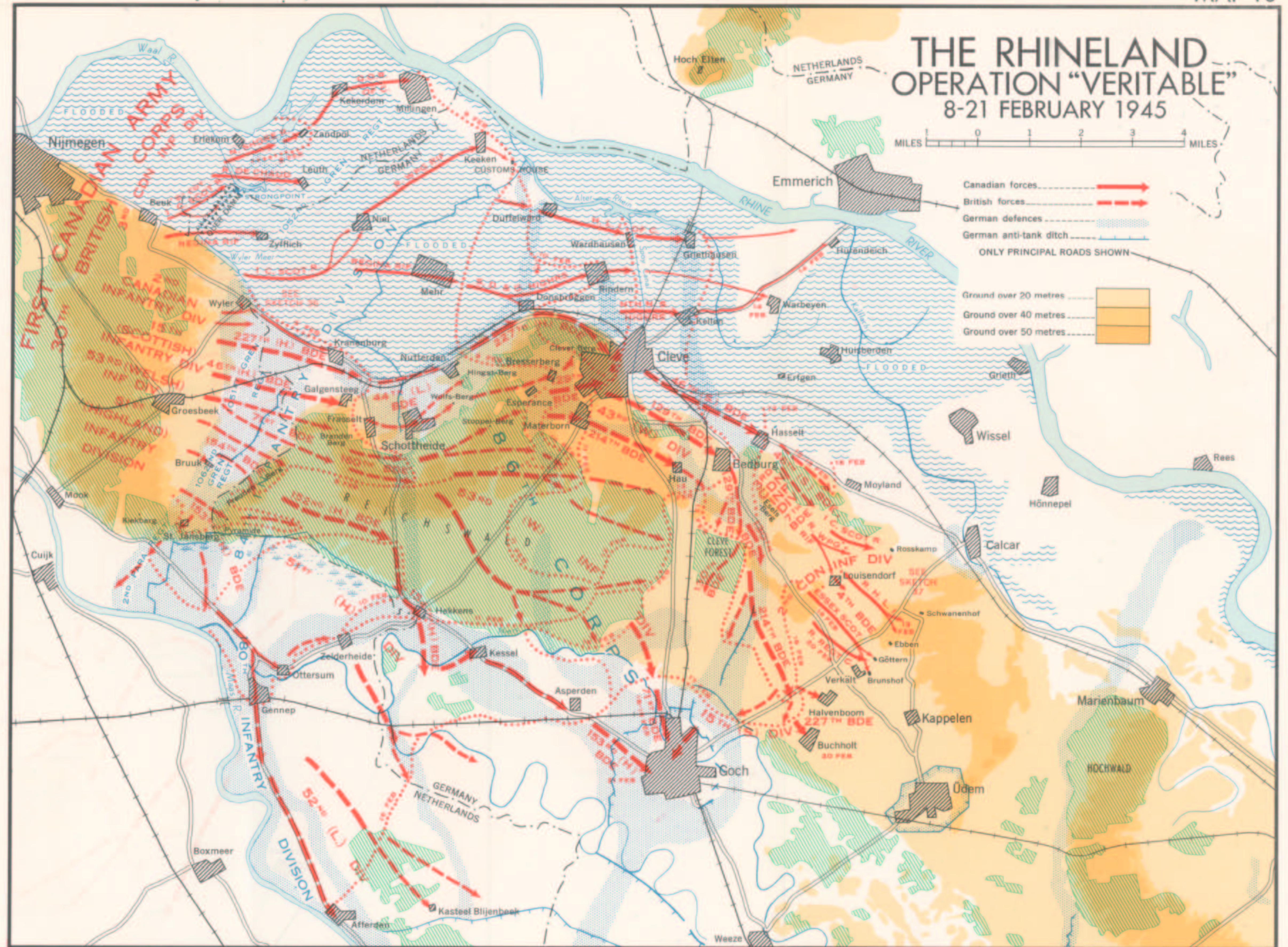
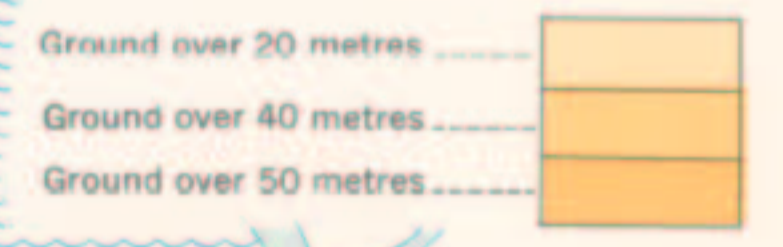
The garrison commander surrendered on the 19th, but confused fighting was to continue south of the Niers for another 48 hours. Early on the 19th, H.Q. 2nd Parachute Corps, commanded by General of Parachute Troops Eugen Meindl, had taken over the front on both sides of Goch, with the 7th Parachute Division and what was left of the 84th Infantry Division under command. But Meindl's attempts to strengthen the garrison by moving the 21st Parachute Regiment over from the Moyland sector to rejoin its parent formation south of Goch came too late to be effective. By the evening of 21 February the battered town was free of German troops.<sup>146</sup> East of Goch the Scottish Division's 227th Brigade had captured Buchholt on 20 February. Farther north, in the Wessex Division's sector, the 214th Brigade kept pace by seizing the village of Halvenboom, some 1000 yards south of the Calcar road, thereby helping to shield the right flank of the hardpressed 4th Canadian Brigade.<sup>147</sup>

The 30th Corps "intentions" for 21 February in general required formations only to "maintain present positions".<sup>148</sup> The 51st Highland Division was mopping up south-west of Goch to link up with the Afferden area, which the 52nd Lowland Division, moving along the right bank of the Maas from Gennep, had finished clearing on the 18th after some bloody fighting for the strong Kasteel Blijenbeek, ancient guardian of the frontier.<sup>149</sup> The weight of the First Canadian Army's effort was now to be shifted to the left, and the primary responsibility of General Horrocks' northern wing was to protect the flank of the 2nd Canadian Corps as it launched the offensive designed to complete the clearing of the Rhineland.<sup>150</sup>

# THE RHINELAND OPERATION "VERITABLE" 8-21 FEBRUARY 1945



- Canadian forces
  - British forces
  - German defences
  - German anti-tank ditch
- ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS SHOWN





## CHAPTER XIX

### THE BATTLE OF THE RHINELAND

#### PART II: OPERATION "BLOCKBUSTER"

22 FEBRUARY-10 MARCH 1945

(See Map 11 and Sketches 38-41)

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#### Plans for a Renewed Offensive

OPERATION "Veritable" had gone slowly. Ground conditions could scarcely have been worse; and the enemy, fighting on the soil of Germany and in the valley of the Fatherland's great river, had resisted with fierce determination. The Roer flooding had prevented the Ninth U.S. Army from launching the converging attack which had been planned, and the Germans had been able to concentrate their resources on the First Canadian Army's front. By 20 February we had clawed our way forward between 15 and 20 miles from our start-line; but the enemy still maintained an unbroken front, and the "Hochwald Layback" was still before us. It now seemed necessary to mount a new offensive with fresh troops to restore the momentum of the attack and break through to Xanten.

General Crerar had been holding daily conferences with his corps and divisional commanders to review progress and issue orders.<sup>1</sup> At the conference on the afternoon of 21 February, held at a convent near Materborn, the "plot" for the new offensive was given. On the 22nd the 15th (Scottish) Division was to attack a wooded area north-east of Weeze; on the 24th the 53rd (Welsh) Division was to drive south from Goch, take Weeze and exploit south-westward. On 26 February the 2nd Canadian Corps would launch the operation designed to capture the Hochwald position and exploit to Xanten. This was christened "Blockbuster" on 22 February. Arrangements were made for the 4th Canadian and 11th British Armoured Divisions to come forward to take part; their G.O.s.C. and brigadiers were to come at once to be "put in the picture" about the plan.<sup>2</sup>

On the 22nd General Simonds presented his plan to the divisional commanders (no written operation order was issued). He emphasized the opportunity presented by the availability of two fresh armoured divisions, and said that he proposed to strike hard at the enemy now in an all-out effort rather than "dribble in" these reserves.<sup>3</sup> The intention was to launch a deliberate assault across the ridge which curved south-westward from Calcar to beyond Udem, and having breached the

enemy's strong Hochwald defences to exploit towards Xanten and Wesel. The task was in effect the completion of the second and third phases of Operation "Veritable" (page 464 above). To maintain the maximum pressure on the enemy, every available division would be deployed, each on a narrow front, with the majority engaged simultaneously. The key to final success, in the Corps Commander's estimation, lay in the capture of the German positions at the southern end of the Hochwald, for it was from here that exploitation would achieve the best results. But first it was necessary to secure firmly the Calcar—Udem ridge, both to withstand counter-attacks from the east and to provide a base from which the armour could advance over the low-lying fields in front of the Hochwald.

The maintenance difficulties which had slowed the 30th Corps' advance in the early stages of "Veritable" emphasized the need for securing a route along which the momentum of the coming offensive could be sustained to a successful conclusion. Of three possible routes forward the northern Moyland—Calcar—Xanten axis would be the most obvious choice in the enemy's eyes.\* In addition to this disadvantage, air photographs showed the road to be badly cratered, and deployment, especially on the left, would be limited by flooding. A southern route through Goch, Kervenheim and Sonsbeck would have to serve the 30th Corps also, with resultant congestion. But in the centre the Goch—Xanten railway ran along a solid embankment which was reported to be free of mines and untouched by demolition. Most fortunately the line traversed the gap which separated the Hochwald from the smaller Balberger Wald. This axis was General Simonds' choice. His engineers would tear up the track and develop the roadbed for traffic as the battle moved forward.<sup>5</sup>

The initial blow would fall on the plateau immediately south of Calcar; for not only was this an important objective in itself, but an attack here might mislead the enemy into expecting a drive along the northern axis and conceivably cause him to draw his reserves in that direction, leaving the Udem end of the ridge more vulnerable to assault. The task was given to the 2nd Canadian Division. Striking at 4:30 a.m. on the 26th, General Matthews, with the support of two regiments of the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, was to put two brigades astride the road from Goch where it climbed over the ridge. At the same time on Matthews' right a battalion of the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade from the 3rd Canadian Division would secure high ground just north of Keppeln, a village which formed an intermediate strongpoint between Calcar and Udem where the enemy's flanks were anchored. Once the northern end of the ridge was secure, the second phase of "Blockbuster" would see General Spry capturing Keppeln with the balance of his 8th Brigade, while 2500 yards farther east a battle-group from the 4th Armoured Division would push southward between the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Divisions to extend our hold on the ridge as far as Todtenhugel. In Phase III (not to begin before midday) the Corps thrust would continue towards the south, with Spry passing the 9th Infantry Brigade through against Udem—which would also be

\*On 24 February an intelligence report from von Rundstedt's headquarters concluded that forces were "being assembled for an attack astride the road Cleve—Xanten. 2 Cdn Corps, held back up to now, may be committed there."<sup>4</sup>

threatened from the north-east by the 4th Armoured Brigade group. At the same time the 11th Armoured Division would pass south of Udem to seize the southernmost tip of the ridge where it petered out north-east of Kervenheim.

The final phase was to be the armoured break eastward. Crossing the ridge east of Udem the 4th Armoured Division's infantry brigade would head over the flats to seize positions astride the railway where it passed through the Hochwald gap. On the Corps right the 11th Armoured Division, continuing its advance southeastward, would capture Sonsbeck and put a brigade on the high ground to the north. It would be the task of the two Canadian infantry divisions to follow up and protect the armoured divisions' flanks. Exploitation would depend on developments, the armour probably being directed on Xanten and Wesel.

A gigantic artillery programme was to back the operation. The barrages for the first phase would come from twelve field, six medium and three heavy regiments in support of the 2nd Division, and seven field and two medium regiments on the 3rd Division's front. In subsequent phases the 3rd and 4th Divisions would be supported on a similar scale, and heavy concentrations would be available on call should the enemy's resistance prove unusually strong. During the final phase each armoured division would be supported by three field and five medium regiments.<sup>6</sup>

The air plan for "Blockbuster" utilized all available aircraft. Of 25 targets selected for attack, fighter-bombers would take on 18 covering all likely trouble spots in the path of the advance, extending from the Calcar—Udem ridge to the western fringe of the Hochwald and Balberger Wald. Medium bombers would attack targets north of Kervenheim and in the woods with anti-personnel bombs, and carry out interdiction bombing on Kehrum and Marienbaum on the northern flank and Sonsbeck on the south.<sup>7</sup>

During the four days preceding the launching of "Blockbuster" the First Canadian Army front was comparatively quiet, but there was local fighting on the 30th Corps sector. The 15th Division attack north-east of Weeze on the 22nd (above, page 491) gained ground in the face of heavy opposition; the 53rd's on the 24th met still fiercer resistance, and on the morning of the 25th, when it was apparent that Weeze was not to be easily cleared, a halt was called with the Welsh Division's foremost troops about a mile short of the town.<sup>8</sup>

This period brought very welcome news from the American front. On 23 February Operation "Grenade", so often put off because of the Roer flooding, was launched at last. At 3:30 that morning, after a brisk 45-minute bombardment, the Ninth U.S. Army began crossing the river on a two-corps front in the Julich sector. Simultaneously the First U.S. Army (Lieut.-General Courtney H. Hodges), charged with protecting General Simpson's right flank, assaulted astride Duren. Opposition was slight, for, as we have noted, the enemy had been forced to denude this part of his front to meet General Crerar's offensive farther north. By the end of the first day 28 infantry battalions were east of the Roer, and early on the 24th eleven traffic bridges and a number of ferries and footbridges were carrying troops and equipment across the swollen river. By 26 February the American bridge-

head was some twenty miles wide and ten miles deep. At a cost of very few casualties the Ninth Army had collected close to 6000 prisoners.<sup>9</sup>

By the evening of 25 February General Simonds had completed the considerable regrouping which the "Blockbuster" plan entailed. The 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions had changed places; the latter was now on his right. The 43rd (Wessex) Division, which had come under command on the 21st, was between Moyland and the Rhine; its task was to protect the left flank and take over captured ground. General Vokes' 4th Armoured Division had assembled in the Cleve area, ready to drive forward between the two Canadian infantry divisions; while the 11th Armoured Division (Major-General G. P. B. Roberts) was moving towards the north-eastern edge of the Reichswald, whence at the appropriate time it would be launched along the Corps' right flank.

Between the Canadian Corps and the Maas the 30th Corps, forming the First Canadian Army's right wing, stood ready to deal with any counter-attacks developing from the south. Next to the river, near Afferden, was the 52nd (Lowland) Division. The 51st (Highland) Division, south of Goch, was soon (27 February) to be squeezed into reserve and begin training for the Rhine crossing. Waiting to renew its attack on Weeze and advance south-eastward along the Goch—Geldern railway was the 53rd (Welsh) Division; while on its left the British 3rd Division, which had just relieved the 15th (Scottish) Division, was directed on Kervenheim and Winnekendonk.<sup>10</sup> When the time was ripe for exploitation General Horrocks would commit the Guards Armoured Division. This was the only armoured division assigned a role in the early stages of Operation "Veritable"; yet up to now ground conditions had been such that only its infantry formation, the 32nd Guards Brigade, had had active employment. Since 13 February it had been fighting with the 51st Division west of Goch.<sup>11</sup>

On 25 February, the day before "Blockbuster" was to open, General Crerar drew the attention of his corps commanders to the need for reconsidering the general plan because of the enemy's determined resistance in front of Weeze. He was concerned that the delay in clearing the lateral road from Weeze to the Maas River at Well would prevent early construction of the Wanssum—Well bridge, which was important for the 30th Corps' maintenance.\* If by D plus 1 it was apparent that extensive regrouping was needed for a further deliberate attack, he pointed to the possibility of accepting a "partial" operation, which would end with the securing of the Calcar—Udem ridge (i.e., Phase III of the original plan). In either event, whether "Blockbuster" was to be "partial" or "complete", the 30th Corps would continue to keep "its left shoulder well up and to exploit any favourable situations".<sup>14</sup>

### On the Enemy Side

The lull in the fighting had produced a new German estimate of the situation. At the end of the first week of "Veritable" von Rundstedt and Hitler had discussed

\*The eastern end of the bridge site was finally captured on the night 3-4 March by troops of the 52nd Division,<sup>12</sup> and by the 6th Second Army engineers had completed their bridge. By that date two bridges were operating at Venlo, and two more were under construction there.<sup>13</sup>

what to do in the event of a successful Allied thrust towards the Rhine. At that time the C.-in-C. West had correctly appraised the assault on the Reichswald as the first phase of a general offensive that would include a frontal attack between Venlo and Roermond, to be followed by strong thrusts to the Rhine by the American armies to the south. In facing all this it would be the task of the German command to maintain a cohesive front. Hitler instructed von Rundstedt to submit at the proper time his plans for the defence of the Rhine between Arnhem and Bonn, but to issue no precautionary directives to subordinates that would suggest any thought of falling back to the Rhine in a so-called "delaying action".<sup>15</sup>

Now, on 25 February, the High Command learned from the Field Marshal that he saw no immediate danger of an Allied break-through between the Rhine and the Maas. Although the Maas had been crossed in the Fifteenth Army's area, the expected big thrust towards Cologne had not materialized. Von Rundstedt was far more worried about the situation along the Moselle, where an American advance was threatening Trier. But the Fuhrer, regarding these operations in the south as mere holding attacks, saw the focal point of the Allied effort as being on the Maas—Roer front. In a personally signed message transmitted to the C.-in-C. West on the 27th he reiterated the need to prevent a break-through here, even if it meant moving in reserves from the Fifth Panzer Army (on the Fifteenth Army's left). Yet that very day von Rundstedt, reporting on the crisis arising from the Ninth Army's advance, asked for permission to pull back the southern wing of Army Group "H" to a line running from Kessel (on the Maas midway between Roermond and Venlo) to Nieder-Kruchten, ten miles east of Roermond. Only 24 hours earlier Hitler had refused to allow any withdrawal, but now "with a heavy heart" he gave his consent.<sup>16</sup>

General Schlemm had four corps with which to keep the Allies from reaching Wesel. On his right von Luttwitz's 47th Panzer Corps, in front of Marienbaum, and the 2nd Parachute Corps in the Weeze—Udem sector, would be the first to feel the weight of "Blockbuster". From Weeze south to Venlo was General Straube's weakened 86th Corps; while the army's left, to south of Roermond, was held by the 63rd Corps (General of Infantry Erich Abraham).<sup>17</sup>

Von Luttwitz was defending the Calcar sector with the 6th Parachute Division, whose 17th and 18th Parachute Regiments were both still fully fit for action. On its left, centred on Keppeln, was the 116th Panzer Division, strengthened in manpower, tanks and guns by the recent arrival of its rear elements from the Eifel. Udem was held by the 7th Parachute Regiment (2nd Parachute Division), whose commander was directly responsible to General von Luttwitz.<sup>18</sup> South of dem the commander of the 2nd Parachute Corps controlled a group of forces of varying equality, of which only the 7th Parachute Division was in good condition. Meindl 1" had half the 8th Parachute Division, mostly green troops, and the remnants of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division and the 84th Infantry Division—the latter now almost negligible. With the idea of employing these mixed resources to the best advantage in holding his position about dem, the Corps Commander repeated tactics which he had formerly used in Normandy. He strung weak outposts along his front line and held a strong reserve in the woods south-east of the town to counter-attack any Allied penetration.<sup>19</sup>

General Crerar's forces were now about to assail the First Parachute Army's last prepared position on the Rhine's left bank. These defences were called unromantically, as we have seen, the Hochwald Layback. The Germans indicated the importance they attached to them by naming them, after one of the most celebrated of German strategists,\* the Schlieffen Position.<sup>20</sup> The position had been built by local construction staffs to guard the Wesel bridgehead. Of three successive trench-lines (about 500 yards apart) the most easterly extended from the village of Kehrum directly along the western edge of the Hochwald and Balberger Wald to a wooded area a mile and a half west of Sonsbeck. Dug on a forward slope, the position had the best defensive possibilities at its northern end, where it dominated the outpost area which extended more than a mile to the west. Farther south, in the vicinity of the railway, woodlots east of dem limited the field of fire, which was further restricted by the intensive cultivation of the outpost area. This section of the line was also partly exposed to observation from the heights south-east of dem. The southern end of the position ran through low-lying ground, and in consequence did not present a very formidable defensive barrier. According to the Chief of Staff of the 47th Panzer Corps, belated attempts had been made with the new forces available to repair the partly-collapsed trenches and construct dugouts. Some wire entanglements had been erected, but when the time came to man the defences the work was far short of completion.<sup>21</sup>

Potentially the anti-tank defences formed the strongest element of the Schlieffen line. During the third week of February General Schlemm, acting without authority from Berlin, ordered the transfer to the Hochwald of some fifty 88-mm. guns from the West Wall defences between Geldern and Roermond. These were in their new sites before the offensive opened, but according to Schlemm the gunners manning them were inexperienced and poorly disciplined. They suffered heavy casualties from the opening artillery barrage on the 26th, and many deserted their weapons. There were claims that one 88 knocked out 20 Allied tanks; but the other 49 were said not to have accounted for a single tank between them.<sup>22</sup>

### "Blockbuster" Goes In

As soon as darkness fell on 25 February the troops of the 2nd Canadian Division who were to launch the assault began taking their positions in the muddy fields south-west of Calcar. The expectant enemy, knowing this was the only suitable forming-up area, kept it under fairly heavy shelling. The soft, wet ground hampered the supporting armour, but thanks to careful rehearsal and good infantry-tank liaison the movement was completed without major complication, and well ahead of schedule five infantry battalions were ranged along a 3000-yard front west of the Goch—Calcar road. On the extreme left, in the area of Heselerfeld, captured at such cost by the Canadian Scottish on the 17th (above, page 483), was Le Regiment de Maisonneuve of Brigadier Megill's 5th Brigade, with The Black

\*Alfred Count von Schlieffen, Chief of the Prussian General Staff 1891-1905; author of the plan of operations which was the basis of the German campaign in 1914.

Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada on its right. Forming the division's right flank were the battalions of the 6th Brigade (Brigadier Keebler)—from north to south, The South Saskatchewan Regiment, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal and The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada.<sup>23</sup>

In the early hours of the 26th German paratroopers, supported by an estimated six tanks, made a sudden attack against the right of the 2nd Division's front, which the 4th Brigade was holding as a base through which the main offensive would be launched. It was a critical moment, for this ground was needed as the start line for the 6th Brigade's assault. But "D" Company of The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, though heavily pressed, drove off the attackers with the aid of well-directed artillery fire and the support of a troop of the Fort Garry Horse which came up in time to knock out a Panther. Quiet fell again along the front just fifteen minutes before the artillery programme for "Blockbuster" was to open.<sup>24</sup>

At 3:45 a.m. the guns burst into action to clear the path for the assaulting forces. At half-past four the 6th Brigade's three battalions, all armour-borne, crossed the start-line, following a barrage which moved at tank pace. On the right the Cameron Highlanders and a squadron of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers advanced in three columns, the tanks leading, followed by the infantry in Kangaroos of the 1st Canadian Carrier Regiment. On the brigade left The South Saskatchewan Regiment, also in Kangaroos, and 'supported by a second Sherbrooke squadron, attacked in two columns. In the centre two squadrons of the Fort Garry Horse began ferrying forward Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, who were supported by the remaining Sherbrooke squadron. Searchlights playing on the low clouds provided artificial moonlight, while streams of Bofors tracer fired overhead on to the objectives kept the columns moving in the right direction.<sup>25</sup> The affinity with the plan for Operation "Totalize" in the old Normandy days is obvious (above, page 218).

The 6th Brigade's nearest objective was the Fusiliers', immediately east of the Calcar—Udem road. Although ten of the carrying tanks bogged down and one hit a mine, Lt.-Col. Dextraze's battalion had taken its ground by 5:10 a.m.<sup>26</sup> On the left The South Saskatchewan Regiment were transported safely through considerable machine-gun fire to their assigned positions on high ground near the Cleve—Xanten railway. The Camerons' objective lay on the Calcar ridge two miles east of the start-line, but soon after the attacking force crossed the line soft going and mines along the Calcar—Udem road compelled it to swing north and advance along the axis used by Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal. It was now seven o'clock. The barrage had been lost and the Cameron columns encountered heavy fire as they moved on. The Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. E'. P. Thompson, was killed by a sniper.<sup>27</sup> The capture and consolidation of the battalion's objectives, vital to the success of the brigade and indeed the whole corps operation, was due in great part to the gallantry of the commander of "A" Company, Major D. M. Rodgers, which won him the D.S.O. Single-handed he cleared two houses of enemy snipers who were blocking his company's advance, and taking over battalion headquarters he personally disposed of a third houseful of Germans whose fire was sweeping the headquarters area. Visiting each company in turn he ensured that all unit objectives were taken and held against counter-attack. By midday on the 26th the

6th Brigade's task in Phase One of "Blockbuster" had been successfully completed. It was an example of what detailed planning, a high standard of training and excellent morale can accomplish. At a cost of only 140 casualties (including those of the supporting armour) the brigade had taken between 400 and 500 prisoners and accounted for many enemy killed.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile the 5th Brigade on the division's left had made slower progress. Its task was to clear a fringe of woods a mile south-west of Calcar and secure the 6th Brigade's flank by capturing commanding positions astride the road to Goch. Le Regiment de Maisonneuve was able to occupy three of its company objectives before the battle began, but efforts to reach the most easterly one, a wooded area beside the junction of the Goch and Cleve roads, were halted by heavy fire. The only armour at first assigned to the brigade, one squadron of the 1st Hussars, was needed to support the Black Watch, which had the important role of maintaining contact with the 6th Brigade on the right. The trouble spot was contained by the Maisonneuves' "D" Company until mid-morning, when two troops of tanks became available. Thus supported and making effective use of Wasp flame-throwers, the battalion overcame the stubborn resistance of the Germans, some of whom fought to the death in their slit-trenches rather than surrender.<sup>29</sup>

Early that morning as they advanced on foot the Black Watch had found their right-hand objectives swept by the fast barrage laid down for the 6th Brigade's armour-borne battalions. The slow barrage farther north assisted them to gain the nearer of their company positions on the left, but the 6th Brigade's axis of advance made it impossible to advance this supporting fire to "B" Company's objective, a built-up road junction one mile south of Calcar. The C.O., Lt. Col. B. R. Ritchie, therefore concentrated for the moment on his nearer objectives, for it was apparent that the enemy still had troops in the western part of the Black Watch area. But by ten o'clock "B" Company, backed by the remaining Hussar tanks (half the squadron having bogged down before reaching the start line) had captured the crossroads, taking 50 prisoners.<sup>30</sup>

On the 3rd Division's front The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada were having a difficult time. The mile or so of open slope up which the battalion had to advance was dotted with several farmsteads whose buildings were fiercely defended by German paratroopers. At first the sodden ground ruled out direct tank support, and at 4:40 a.m. Lt.-Col. S. M. Lett sent his two assaulting companies across the start line alone. Hard fighting developed on the left, where "D" Company found the hamlet of Mooshof strongly held. The enemy had converted three farm buildings into strongpoints, and from these the leading platoon was twice driven back by sustained fire. A German counter-attack was beaten off in bitter, confused fighting at a cost of many casualties, including the platoon officer.<sup>31</sup>

In this emergency Sergeant Aubrey Cosens took command of the other survivors of his platoon, only four in number. Through the thick of the enemy fire which was sweeping the area from all sides he ran twenty-five yards across an open space to a tank of the 1st Hussars which had now come up in support. Seating





**"MELVILLE" BRIDGE CARRIES TRAFFIC ACROSS THE RHINE**

This bridge across the Rhine at Emmerich, completed on 1 April 1945 by the 2nd Canadian Army Troops Engineers, is here seen from the right bank of the river.



THE PATRICIAS CROSS THE IJSSEL

Men of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry landing from "Buffaloes" of the 79th Armoured Division in Operation "Cannonshot", 11 April 1945.



HOUSE-CLEARING IN GRONINGEN, 15 APRIL 1945

Men of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal flushing out Germans during the fighting in the city. The soldier wearing the beret carries a Bren gun. In the background a house burns furiously.

himself in front of the turret he calmly directed the gunner's fire against the German positions, and then broke up a second counter-attack by plunging the tank into the midst of the startled paratroopers. Next, taking the offensive, he reorganized his little group and, still crouched on top of the Sherman, ordered the driver to ram the first of the three buildings. While his men gave covering fire he went inside, killed several of the defenders and captured the rest. When he entered the second house he found that the occupants had not awaited his coming. Covered by the tank's fire he then crossed the road alone to clear the third strongpoint—a twostorey building held by several Germans. "We followed him from building to building gathering the prisoners", one of his comrades later reported. Having thus broken the hard core of resistance in Mooshof, Cosens gave orders for consolidating the position, and set off to report to his company commander. On the way he was killed by a sniper's bullet. This very gallant non-commissioned officer had himself killed at least twenty of the enemy and captured as many more, and had gained an objective vital to the success of the 8th Brigade's operations.<sup>32</sup> The Victoria Cross posthumously awarded to him was the first to come to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division.

From Mooshof the two reserve companies of the Queen's Own fought grimly forward towards the battalion's final objectives about Steeg and Wemmershof, north of Keppeln. Intervening strongpoints were reduced with the aid of Wasps. By the time they reached their final goals the armour of the 4th Division had passed through the two villages, but the stubborn enemy had still to be driven from the cellars. By five o'clock all was secure, and Phase One of "Blockbuster" was over. The day's fighting had cost the battalion 37 killed and 64 wounded.<sup>33</sup>

The 8th Brigade's assault on Keppeln—the 3rd Division's role in the second phase—had begun at 8:45 that morning when The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment and Le Regiment de la Chaudiere attacked south-eastward on either side of the Cleve—Udem road. The advance was across flat country devoid of cover, but no armour was available to carry the infantry. Indeed, so extensive were the demands on the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade that though the Chaudieres on the right had the support of the 1st Hussars' "B" Squadron, on the left the North Shore would be without tanks until the squadron with the Queen's Own Rifles could be released. The North Shore Regiment, led by Lt.-Col. J. W. H. Rowley, had to advance about 1500 yards to reach Keppeln, but before the leading companies had covered half this distance heavy mortar and machine-gun fire forced them to dig in. While our artillery held the enemy in check, the infantry awaited the arrival of the armour from the Queen's Own on their left.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile on the brigade's southern flank the Chaudiere C.O., Lt.-Col. G. O. Taschereau, had sent two companies forward, working closely with their tanks, against a series of strongpoints about Hollen, a smaller hamlet half a mile west of Keppeln on the dem road. By ten o'clock they had captured intermediate objectives on the right, but progress on the left was held up by flanking fire from in front of the North Shore Regiment. An attempt by "B" Company to exploit the success on the right ended in a costly lesson to the attackers. At the sight of what appeared to be a white flag in a German position the company relaxed its vigilance, whereupon three Panther tanks suddenly

appeared and machine-gunned the unbalanced troops, inflicting many casualties and forcing a withdrawal.<sup>35</sup>

By mid-afternoon a successful renewal of the North Shore Regiment's effort had eased the situation on the left, where a quick Chaudiere thrust now secured Hollen. Eighty-four prisoners were taken, together with three anti-tank guns and a store of ammunition. A well-coordinated tank-infantry attack, backed by heavy artillery concentrations, carried the Chaudieres to their remaining objectives, which fell without long resistance. The day's fighting impressed the battalion as being "as hard as any it had met to date". In fulfilling their role on the 3rd Division's right flank the Chaudieres had captured 224 prisoners, most of them from the 6th Parachute Division's reconnaissance regiment. Their own casualties were 16 killed and 46 wounded.<sup>36</sup>

The North Shore Regiment's renewed attack on Keppeln had been made possible by the arrival of the 13 surviving tanks of the 1st Hussars' "C" Squadron. In a hastily summoned "O" Group, Lt.-Col. Rowley set out a revised plan for an "armour-cum-infantry" attack. It worked admirably. The tanks picked up a platoon of "A" Company and at 2:12 p.m. dashed off towards Keppeln, followed by "B" and "C" Companies on foot and the battalion's Wasps and carriers, ready to engage any anti-tank weapons which disclosed themselves. Enemy tanks on the outskirts of the village knocked out three Shermans, but were in turn set on fire by the Wasps. In the face of heavy machine-gun fire the infantry platoon dismounted and made its way into Keppeln, soon to be joined by the rest of "A" Company, and by "D", brought up from reserve. The tanks moved in, and by five o'clock all objectives had been taken. An important factor in the success had been the accuracy of the supporting artillery fire. The North Shores had suffered 81 casualties, 28 of them fatal; in supporting the two infantry battalions the Hussar squadron had lost nine tanks to enemy action, besides four bogged down.<sup>37</sup> The 3rd Division's part in the second phase of the Corps operation was now completed, and the 9th Brigade was ready to pass through Brigadier Roberts' battalions in Phase Three—the capture of dem. At the 47th Panzer Corps Headquarters that evening von Luttwitz credited the 116th Panzer Division with having prevented a break-through towards Udem, and completed arrangements for that formation's relief on the 28th by the 180th Infantry Division from the 86th Corps to the south.<sup>38</sup>

While the 8th Brigade was engaged in the struggle for Keppeln, the 4th Armoured Division's battle group had successfully carried out its task of securing the northern half of the Calcar—Udem ridge. About mid-morning, even before the 2nd Division had taken all its objectives, "Tiger" Group, commanded by Brigadier R. W. Moncel, had begun its attack south-eastward along the 6th Brigade's right flank. It was composed of the armoured brigade's three armoured regiments and motor battalion, plus two battalions from the 10th Infantry Brigade, and was divided into five forces. The plan was to press home the attack on either flank with an armoured regiment (less one squadron) accompanied by two infantry companies borne in Crusader or Ram armoured gun tractors.\* The

\*These vehicles were furnished respectively by the 5th and 6th Anti-Tank Regiments R.C.A.<sup>39</sup>

force on the left was supplied by the British Columbia Regiment and The Lincoln and Welland Regiment, that on the right by the Canadian Grenadier Guards and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. In rear of each of these forces another, consisting of the balance of the infantry battalion and the remaining tank squadron, would mop up; while a fifth force, comprising the Governor General's Foot Guards and The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor), brought up the rear in readiness for action in the succeeding phase. Each of the two leading groups included a troop of Flail tanks to deal with mines, while the other three were each supported by a troop of Crocodile flame-throwers and a troop of self-propelled anti-tank guns.<sup>40</sup>

As with all armoured movement that day the tanks found the going heavy and slow, and in the first two hours the leading squadrons covered little more than 500 yards. On both axes of advance the enemy was fighting back with vigour and his *Panzerfaust* or bazooka men accounted for several Canadian tanks. Gradually however the armour overran the German positions, and the marching troops gathered in large batches of prisoners. By four o'clock the leading groups were firm on their objectives in the Todtenhugel area north-east of Keppeln and the infantry were beginning to reorganize as battalions.<sup>41</sup> With 350 prisoners in the 4th Division's cage and signs of lessening enemy resistance it remained for "Tiger" Group to capture the high ground north-east of Udem. This operation, coupled with the 9th Infantry Brigade's assault on dem, constituted the third phase of the Corps offensive. It was the task for which "Smith" Force (named for Lt.-Col. E. M. Smith, commander of the Governor General's Foot Guards) had been held in reserve. The objectives included the Pauls-Berg and the Katzen-Berg, the highest points of the Calcar—Udem ridge.

Shortly before six o'clock, as dusk was falling, the Foot Guards' No. 3 Squadron moved off towards the Pauls-Berg, Smith's first objective. "C" Company of the Lake Superior Regiment abandoned their half-tracks to ride on the armoured regiment's Shermans. The hill was taken without difficulty, but almost immediately a strong counter-attack developed. In the darkness the fighting was close and confused—a German despatch rider is reported to have stopped at No. 3 Squadron's command tank to ask directions!<sup>42</sup> This and a subsequent attack were beaten off, and the position was secure by 10:30 p.m. In the next two hours the remaining armoured squadrons, each carrying an infantry company, seized the Katzen-Berg and an unnamed hill midway between the main objectives.<sup>43</sup> The capture of this part of the Udem ridge by "Smith" Force—described by the Lake Superior diarist as "an armoured classic"—had been well planned and was executed on schedule. Casualties had been light—19 for each of the two participating units. Indeed the tire operation by "Tiger" Group had been carried out with remarkably few losses. The heaviest had fallen on the Argyll and Sutherland, with 53 killed and wounded; the Lincoln and Welland had lost 34. By daybreak on the 27th the important plateau was in Canadian hands from the outskirts of Calcar to east of dem, and the thrust to the Hochwald could now go forward.<sup>44</sup>

\*It may be noted that the armoured gun tractor, used mainly in the anti-tank regiments of armoured divisions, provided a means of towing anti-tank guns over fire-swept ground to selected positions.

### The Fighting for Udem

While the 4th Armoured Division was extending our hold southward along the ridge, it had been the 3rd Division's task to capture Udem and so pave the way for the 11th Armoured Division's advance eastward. From the Keppeln area, won by the 8th Brigade's hard fight during the day, Brigadier Rockingham planned that his 9th Brigade would attack southward with two battalions—The Highland Light Infantry of Canada on the left and The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders on the right. When these were firm in the north end of Udem, The North Nova Scotia Highlanders would pass through to complete clearing the town. Each battalion had been allotted a squadron of the Fort Garry Horse, but so extensive were the 2nd Armoured Brigade's commitments farther north that when the time came to launch the assault no tanks were available.<sup>45</sup>

At 9:00 p.m. the attack went in after thirty minutes of artillery preparation. The S.D. and G. Highlanders, moving down the main road from Cleve, had to clear Bomshof on their start line, but thereafter made good progress; on the left the Highland Light Infantry, advancing from Keppeln, lost several carriers on mines. The night was illumined by the searchlights and the glare from burning farmhouses. Both battalions crossed Udem's encircling anti-tank ditch without much difficulty, but as they entered the town's northern outskirts about midnight the 7th Parachute Regiment's opposition stiffened and tough fighting ensued. By 4:00 a.m. resistance had dwindled to occasional sniping, and The North Nova Scotia Highlanders pushed through into the centre of the town.<sup>46</sup> Through the early hours of the 27th snipers continued to give trouble, and Brigadier Rockingham ordered the Highland Light Infantry to clean these up before the North Novas went on to their final objectives. At daybreak one of their companies was on the move through the south-eastern fringe of the town, and by 9:30 it reported securing positions along the Goch—Xanten railway.<sup>47</sup> About mid-morning the Fort Garry tanks came to the aid of another company, which had been pinned down in the south-west corner of Udem. The end of the afternoon saw all battalions consolidated on the brigade objectives. The 3rd Division's situation report that night estimated that the brigade had taken 500 prisoners, most of them from the 116th Panzer Division.<sup>48</sup>

The occupation of Udem opened the way for the 11th Armoured Division to take on the German positions at the southern tip of the long ridge. During the night of 26-27 February a battle group of the 4th British Armoured Brigade had reached the railway at Stein, a village 2000 yards south-west of Udem. The brigade's objective was the Gochfortzberg feature a mile north-east of Kervenheim, but progress was halted by German tanks and anti-tank guns, which were still extremely active in the area south of the railway. General Roberts therefore ordered the 159th Infantry Brigade to pass through the 9th Canadian Brigade and take the height.<sup>49</sup> As the British brigade moved forward, the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade followed up and occupied positions south of the tracks astride the road from Udem to Kervenheim.<sup>50</sup>

## The Battle for the Hochwald

Thus far the "Blockbuster" offensive had lived up to the planners' intention that it should be carried out as a continuous operation, the difficulties of darkness being overcome by the use of "movement light". All across the battlefield piece after piece of the intricate puzzle fell into place as each formation, having completed its allotted task in a particular phase, moved on to a fresh assignment while a relieving force came up to take over the newly-won ground.

Around midnight of the 26th-27th units of the 4th Infantry Brigade had assumed control of the Todtenhugel area, freeing Brigadier Moncel's "Tiger" Group to reorganize for further operations.<sup>51</sup> On the far left the 129th Brigade of the 43rd (Wessex) Division had relieved the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade south of Calcar and was probing eastward in its role of protecting the Corps flank. During the afternoon of the 27th the 5th Battalion The Wiltshire Regiment (Duke of Edinburgh's) entered Calcar unopposed, to find all bridges destroyed, while farther south the 214th Brigade took over the ground gained by the 6th Canadian Brigade on the previous day. In contrast to these unspectacular tasks the 43rd Reconnaissance Regiment (The Gloucestershire Regiment) had made excellent progress in sweeping the river flats between the Cleve—Xanten railway and the Rhine. On the evening of 26 February one squadron had crossed the Kalflach Canal opposite Huisberden to occupy Wissel without meeting opposition. Two more villages, Grieth and Honnepel, were taken on the 27th as the enemy fell back eastward from Calcar. During the next three days the reconnaissance regiment, working in its proper role for a change, patrolled forward vigorously north of the railway towards Marienbaum.<sup>52</sup>

In the centre of the 2nd Canadian Corps front the force earmarked for the initial assault on the Schlieffen Position had been concentrating during the early hours of the 27th. The move forward through the darkness had been accompanied by much floundering on the ruined roads and in the muddy fields, but by half past four the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment) was formed up in a sunken road outside Kirsell, a hamlet 2000 yards north-east of Udem. Huddled beside the tanks which had brought them forward were the assaulting companies of The Algonquin Regiment—although one company and part of another were missing, apparently because the tanks carrying them had bogged down.<sup>53</sup> The two units, placed under the Algonquins' C.O., Lt.-Col. R. A. Bradburn, formed the spearhead of "Lion" Group, whose commander, Brigadier J. C. Jefferson (10th Canadian Infantry Brigade), was soon to be reinforced by the return of two of his infantry battalions from "Tiger".<sup>54</sup> A mile to the north, in the Todtenhugel area, units of the 5th Brigade were sorting themselves out for their advance on the left flank.<sup>55</sup>

The Algonquin objective was a rounded hill which filled the western end of the gap between the Hochwald and the Balberger Wald. This was Point 73, though it was seldom so called at the time.\* The plan was that when two companies had

\*On at least one map the height is erroneously given as 79 metres. On the German maps reproduced for the use of our forces it appears as 72.6 metres. The hill's code name for the operation "Albatross".

breached the defences along the edge of the forest, others would be leapfrogged through to secure the important crest. Each company would be supported by a troop of tanks from the South Albertas' "B" Squadron.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, in order to ensure the presence of armoured support in the gap should "B" Squadron fail to negotiate the muddy valley west of the Hochwald, "A" Squadron of the South Albertas, accompanied by the Algonquin carrier platoon, was to carry out a right hook, crossing the railway south-east of dem and striking eastward along the road to Udemerbruch, a small village close to the Algonquins' initial objective. This venture, which would take the small force well into enemy territory, did not greatly appeal to the people involved; the diarist of the South Alberta Regiment recorded, "This attack will be made in spite of our protestations-it is a Bde order."<sup>57</sup> "Lion" Group would have the support of a substantial artillery programme. After an initial two-hour bombardment by three field and five medium regiments, the 25-pounders would engage the enemy's western defence lines while the medium guns blasted the area of the gap.<sup>58</sup>

Because of the known strength of the enemy's defences, particularly in antitank guns, it was imperative to cross the open valley in darkness, maintaining direction with the aid of Bofors tracer and red marker shells fired on to the objective. But the non-arrival of the missing Algonquin sub-units delayed the start, and at five o'clock enemy shells began falling on the Kirsell area. Accordingly at 5:15, with daylight less than an hour away, Bradburn gave the order to advance. At first things went well. The Germans manning the outpost area were completely surprised, and as the two leading Algonquin companies supported by the South Alberta tanks moved down the eastern slope from the dem ridge they met little resistance from the occupants of farmhouses and slit trenches. By the time it was full daylight both companies had crossed anti-tank ditch, minefield, and knee-high wire (which the artillery had gapped in several places) and had driven the enemy from his forward line of trenches. As they consolidated on these objectives—"A" Company immediately north of the railway and about 500 yards in front of the gap, with "B" on the left "C" Company, which had been garnering a steady stream of prisoners behind the assaulting companies, passed between them to seize the final line of entrenchments and extend the battalion's right flank to the railway line.<sup>59</sup>

The Algonquin Regiment had breached the last German prepared positions before the Rhine, but the enemy was beginning to react strongly. Counter-attacks were beaten off with the help of "B" Squadron's tanks and solid defensive artillery fire which came down in response to the Algonquin call. The enemy was quick to recognize the need for eliminating this isolated Canadian spearhead; as yet the 2nd infantry Division's flanking attack to the north had not progressed far enough to affect the situation, and to the south the 3rd Division was still held up in dem. From south, east and north, German guns and mortars concentrated their fire upon the approaches to the gap, and even from north of the Rhine heavy-calibre pieces contributed to the weight of explosive falling upon the Canadian positions. Well dug in, the Algonquin companies hung on grimly, suffering casualties whose evacuation across the shell-swept valley became increasingly difficult as the day wore on.<sup>60</sup>

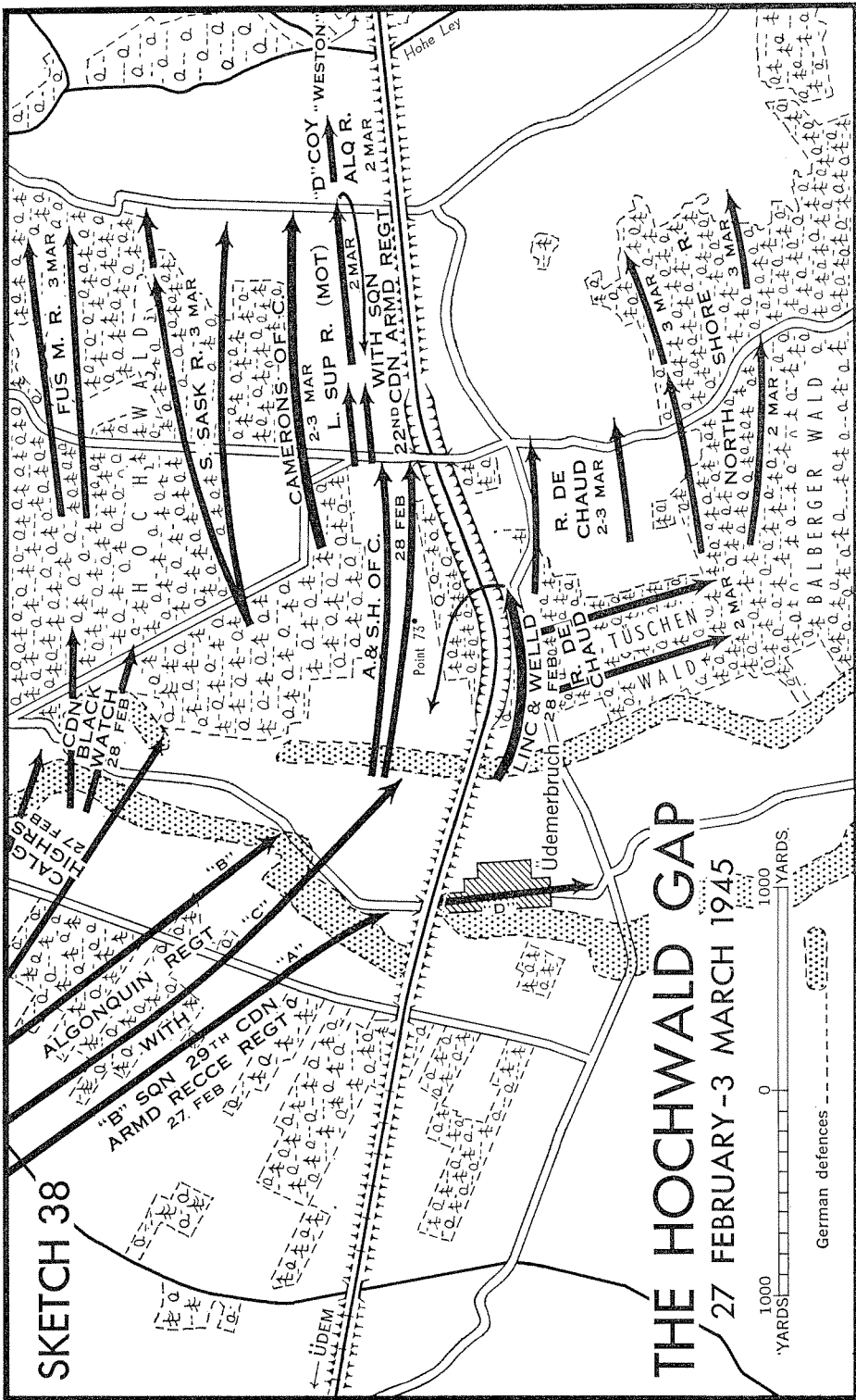


On the right the diversionary thrust had met disaster. It was six o'clock when the small column of tanks and carriers headed southward from Kirsell, and what was to have been a night attack was "swamped in daylight".<sup>61</sup> After skirting Udem the force missed its way in the network of roads and ditches and reached the railway by the main road to Kervenheim, some distance west of its intended crossing. This area had not yet been cleared by the 9th Brigade, and south of the tracks the high ground forming the tip of the Udem ridge, still uncaptured by the 11th Armoured Division (above, page 493), provided German anti-tank guns with excellent positions. As the leading Canadian tanks filed over the level crossing and through a narrow cutting beyond they ran into a deadly ambush. Three were instantly knocked out by 88-mm. fire. The remaining eight were trapped and had no room to turn. Soon these and all but one of the thirteen Algonquin carriers had fallen victims to anti-tank guns or *Panzerfaust* bombs delivered at close range by emboldened German infantrymen. Survivors of the crews gathered together as many of the wounded as they could and made their way back to the Kirsell area.<sup>62</sup> The debacle had been witnessed by troops of The North Nova Scotia Highlanders as they emerged from the southern outskirts of Odem,<sup>63</sup> and as news of it reached the headquarters of "Lion" Group every effort was made to bring aid to the Algonquins, whose right flank was now wide open.

On the left the 5th Brigade's thrust across the valley had started before daylight, and by ten o'clock The Calgary Highlanders, followed by Le Regiment de Maisonneuve, had mastered the German defences and reached Schmachdarm, a cluster of houses on the forest edge, 3000 yards north of the railway. Both battalions experienced the same heavy shelling and mortaring that was hitting the Algonquins, and a plan for the Black Watch to pass through and push south-eastward towards the gap had to be postponed until the next morning.<sup>64</sup>

With the battalions that had been employed with "Tiger" Group back under his command, Brigadier Jefferson ordered the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders to advance through the Algonquins and secure the eastern end of the disputed passage between the woods. As they closed up to the forest during the late afternoon of the 27th, however, the Argylls were stopped by the shelling and mortaring, and forced to dig in 500 yards west of the gap.<sup>65</sup> A more massive effort was needed, and at a conference that evening General Vokes issued his orders for restoring the momentum of the offensive. First of all, the 10th Infantry Brigade must capture the near half of the Hochwald gap and clear the north-western corner of the Balberger Wald (called the Tuschen Wald), at the same time securing the way from south of dem into the forest, in order that divisional engineers might develop this much-needed maintenance route. Through the area thus won the 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade would then pass a battle-group (consisting of the Canadian Grenadier Guards and the Lake Superior Regiment) to seize a small wooded area traversed by the railway a mile east of the gap.<sup>66</sup>

The 10th Brigade's new effort was to start at 2:00 a.m. on the 28th. After heavy artillery concentrations on the woods on both sides the Argylls would again reach objectives on the lateral road which crossed the gap about 1500 yards in its western end. The Lincoln and Welland Regiment would then go through



to capture the railway and clear the Tuschen Wald. The South Alberta Regiment's "C" Squadron, which having been held back on the dem ridge the previous day was in relatively good condition, would support the operation.<sup>67</sup>

During the night the Argyll and Sutherland C.O., Lt.-Col. F. E. Wiggle, reorganized his weakened companies and briefed them for the coming battle. Shortly before three o'clock the battalion advanced uphill into the gap behind a heavy artillery barrage fired into the darkness. By first light the leading companies had fought over Point 73 and on down the eastern slope to the lateral road, taking 70 prisoners. There they hung on, repelling repeated efforts by German infantry and armour to dislodge them. The opponents included a fresh battalion of the 24th Parachute Regiment which von Lutwitz, whose headquarters had "looked forward to this day with great anxiety", had brought in from the 8th Parachute Division to fight alongside the tanks of the 116th Panzer Division. Wigle's "B" Company, on the left, took the brunt of the enemy's pressure, and by night-fall had been reduced to 15 men, besides some wounded who could not be evacuated. Throughout the day "C" Squadron of the South Alberta Regiment, reinforced by "B" in the afternoon, gave valiant support, assisting the forward infantry with fire and helping further by bringing up ammunition and supplies and evacuating wounded. Terming the enemy shelling "the most concentrated that this Regt had ever sat under", their diarist elaborated: "That includes the Falaise show."<sup>68</sup>

The Lincoln and Welland Regiment's attack was timed for 12:30 p.m., but on the way to the start-line two companies were caught by mortar, artillery and rocket fire which, bursting in treetops, inflicted heavy casualties (the unit had 49 this day) and disrupted the advance. Virtually no contemporary German records are available for this phase; but it seems evident that the enemy had concentrated an unusually large force of artillery to help him hold the Schlieffen Position.\* (Field-Marshal Montgomery has written, "the volume of fire from enemy weapons was the heaviest which had been met so far by British troops in the campaign".) It was impossible to reorganize under the continued vicious shelling, and the Lincoln and Welland attack was abandoned. During the day an Algonquin company crossed the railway tracks and cleared Udemerbruch.<sup>70</sup> In the circumstances, the 4th Armoured Brigade's battle-group, though committed, did not get beyond the 10th Brigade's forward positions, and a plan to put in Brigadier Moncel's other armoured regiments was cancelled because of boggy approach routes and the heavy shelling of the forming-up places west of the forest.† As plans were made for relief by the 6th Infantry Brigade the word went to the sorely-tried units in the gap to hang on.<sup>72</sup>

While the situation in the gap remained unpromising, the picture was somewhat brighter on the Corps' flanks. In the 2nd Division's sector General Matthews

\*First Canadian Army Intelligence estimated that during the first week in March the First Parachute Army had available to it 717 mortars and 1054 guns; self-propelled guns were not included.<sup>69</sup>

†The Chief of Staff of the 47th Panzer Corps, writing retrospectively, felt that the Germans were so thin on the ground that a bold thrust would have reached the Wesel bridges on the evening of the 28th. He underestimated the difficulties caused by the concentration of German artillery and the state of the ground.

had directed the 4th Brigade against the northern part of the Hochwald, to the left of the 5th Brigade. The Royal Regiment of Canada spent most of two days clearing an area on the eastern slope of the Calcar ridge opposite Todtenhugel. The job was finished by nightfall on the 28th, and at 9:00 p.m. the Essex Scottish passed through to assault the German positions at the edge of the forest.<sup>73</sup> On General Simonds' other flank the 11th Armoured Division was moving. Units of the 159th Brigade supported by tanks of the 4th (British) Armoured Brigade successfully stormed the troublesome Gochfortzberg ridge on the afternoon of the 27th, and then struggled through boggy and treacherous terrain to reach the outlying Schlieffen defences.<sup>74</sup>

For the first time since "Blockbuster" started, there had been appreciable help from the air. Bad weather on 26 and 27 February had deprived the troops on the ground of close air support, but on the 28th conditions improved sufficiently for No. 84 Group to fly 602 sorties, of which 258 were in prearranged and 31 in immediate support. Sonsbeck was bombed and the village of Winnekendonk almost obliterated. Nearer the battle line attacks were made on gun and mortar positions, troop concentration areas and factory buildings.<sup>75</sup>

To the south the 30th Corps was maintaining the required pressure on the enemy. The Welsh Division had still to take Weeze, but on its left the 3rd British had relieved the 15th (above, page 494) and cut the Udem—Weeze road in the woods east of Goch. Between Goch and the Maas the 52nd Division had squeezed out the Highland Division about Siebengewald, and patrols of the 155th Brigade occupied Groote Horst on the 28th. With the 1st Commando Brigade coming under its command on the Maas flank the 52nd Division could use two axes for its exploitation to the south-west and a rendezvous with American forces.<sup>76</sup> This contact promised not to be long delayed, for the Ninth U.S. Army was driving relentlessly northward on a three-corps front.

The last six days of February had seen General Simpson's forces complete their tremendous build-up and begin steadily expanding their bridgehead between the Roer and the Erft, while General Hodges' First Army held the right flank. On the 25th the Ninth Army's armour began to roll—the 2nd Armoured Division in the 19th Corps on the Erft—Rhine flank, the 8th Armoured in the 16th Corps on the left beside the Roer and Maas, and in the centre the 5th Armoured Division of the 13th Corps. The direction of the offensive was gradually shifting from east to north, and there were several cases of enemy groups still facing west being caught in the rear by local thrusts. The big breakthrough started on the last day of February—the sixth of Operation "Grenade". By then the hard fighting which accompanied the reduction one by one of the towns dotting the plain between the Roer and the Erft had broken the back of the German resistance and opened the way to the Rhine and the Maas. Thereafter events moved rapidly. On 1 March the 19th Corps entered Neuss, at the junction of Erft and Rhine, and captured the big industrial city of Munchen-Gladbach after only weak opposition from the Panzer Lehr Division (above, page 489). The same day the 16th Corps occupied Roermond and put a motorized task force into Venlo—only 18 miles from the First Canadian Army's foremost positions.<sup>77</sup>

### The Enemy's Plight

The virtual destruction of the right flank of the Fifteenth Army on his left by the American thrust had put General Schlemm's First Parachute Army in deadly peril. In the opening days of "Blockbuster" Schlemm's main concern had been that the 47th Panzer and 2nd Parachute Corps should prevent a decisive breakthrough by the First Canadian Army. But now he was threatened with encirclement and must devise a safe means of withdrawal across the Rhine. "I was sure", he wrote later, "that after reaching the Rhine at Neuss and to the south, the U.S. forces would turn to the north in great strength and attack [my] Army in the rear." A powerful American thrust down the Rhine's left bank to Wesel would cut off his retreat.<sup>78</sup>

As soon as the American threat developed Schlemm informed Army Group "H" of his intention to establish a bridgehead in front of Wesel along the general line Marienbaum—Kevelaer—Geldern—Kempen—Krefeld, reducing it as the situation might require.<sup>79</sup> Although this was clearly the only logical course to follow, the C.-in-C. West in seeking the High Command's approval had to emphasize the importance of thus maintaining a continuous front rather than endangering it by holding fast to individual areas. "I repeat", he said in a teletype message to Hitler on 27 February, "that I am striving with all my strength to prevent a folding back of the front to the Rhine." This assurance must have convinced the Fuhrer, for on the 28th he expressed his confidence in von Rundstedt and gave the required permission.<sup>80</sup> The resulting orders to Schlemm "to hold the west bank of the Rhine at all costs" stressed the necessity for thus securing the passage of the coal boats from the Ruhr. This vital traffic for supplying German shipping came in from the Rhine-Herne Canal at Orsoy and left the river at Wesel to follow the Lippe and Dortmund-Ems Canals\* to the North Sea ports.<sup>81</sup>

Schlemm's first concern was to strengthen the southern end of the bridgehead perimeter, thinly held by the 63rd Corps. Drawing help from the Twenty-Fifth Army on his right, he moved elements of the 2nd Parachute Division south to plug the gap between Krefeld and the river and bolster the remnants of the 84th Infantry and 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions which had been put in to hold the line westward to Kempen. Whereas at an earlier stage divisions had been withdrawn from the Ninth Army front to oppose First Canadian Army, the process was now being reversed. At the same time Schlemm began preparing a second and shorter bridgehead line running from Xanten along the western edge of the Bonninghardt forest (south of Veen) to the Rhine at Mors (opposite Duisburg), manning this with supply troops and the rear elements of the formations engaged in the front line.<sup>82</sup>

This reduction in the perimeter permitted the evacuation across the Rhine of the headquarters staff of the 86th Corps under General Straube to organize defences on the east bank. To fill its place the 2nd Parachute Corps took over the 190th Division on 28 February and extended its responsibility southward to Kempen.<sup>83</sup>

As if the dilemma of having his isolated army caught between the closing jaws

\*This roundabout route may have been the result of bomb damage.

of "Blockbuster" and "Grenade" were not enough, Schlemm had to contend with a series of extraordinary orders from Berlin. He was made personally responsible for seeing that none of the nine Rhine bridges in his army sector fell into Allied hands. Should one be captured intact he would answer for it with his life. To make matters worse, he might not blow the bridges immediately; all must be kept standing to the last minute. Another order forbade him to send back to the east bank one man or a single piece of fighting equipment without special permission from Hitler himself. As a result the diminishing bridgehead became cluttered with damaged tanks, transport, artillery without ammunition and all the other debris of an army fighting a heavy losing action. The problem of accommodating Schlemm's own ineffectives was intensified by the presence of large numbers of administrative personnel from the broken supply-lines of Army Group "B" who had escaped northward into the First Parachute Army's area and were without weapons or equipment to enable them to be of any use. Through the intervention of General Blaskowitz this restriction was partly removed when Schlemm was supplied with a specific list of equipment which might be sent east of the Rhine. But men might be evacuated only on the certification of commanders that they were unfit for further fighting.<sup>84</sup>

### The Struggle in the Gap

Although the American threat forced Schlemm to strengthen his left at the expense of the forces facing First Canadian Army, he maintained a determined resistance on the Hochwald front. Here he put in what were probably his best reserve units: two strong independent parachute battalions,\* one of which was the Parachute Army Assault Battalion.<sup>85</sup> With this reinforcement and the great force of artillery they had concentrated, the Germans succeeded in holding us at the Hochwald barrier for three days more.

On 1 March the main Canadian effort was the infantry's, for until the enemy had been driven out of the woods and particularly from the commanding ground south of the railway there seemed little chance of our armour breaking through to the east. Changeable weather made air support spasmodic; No. 84 Group flew 246 sorties, including 100 against pre-planned targets and 20 in "immediate" support.<sup>87</sup> The 6th Brigade relieved the 10th's exhausted battalions in the area of the gap and before nightfall had established contact with patrols of the 5th Brigade working down through the forest from Schmachdarm.<sup>88</sup> The 2nd Division's heaviest action of the day took place on the left, where the 4th Infantry Brigade forced its way into the northern part of the forest.

The assault by the Essex Scottish went in at 7:45 a.m. supported by artillery and a troop of tanks of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers. The German positions at the edge of the woods were strong, and their paratroop defenders, reinforced, it seems probable, from the Calcar garrison, met the attack with savage determination. The fighting was fiercest on the left, where the Essex "C" Company, led by Major

\*Precisely when the two battalions were put in cannot be stated. The Army battalion was identified by us on 3 March,<sup>86</sup> but was probably in action earlier.

F. A. Tilston, had to cross 500 yards of open ground and ten feet of barbed wire to reach the foremost trenches. That they succeeded in their task was largely due to the inspired leadership of their commander. Although wounded in the head during the advance, Major Tilston was the first into the enemy trenches, silencing with a grenade a machine-gun post that was holding up one of his platoons. As he pressed on with his main force to the second line of defences he was again severely wounded in the thigh but remained in command. In vicious hand-to-hand fighting the Essex cleared the trenches; but before there was time to consolidate the Germans launched a counter-attack heavily supported by mortars and machine guns. Through this hail of fire Tilston calmly moved in the open among his depleted forces (now one-quarter of their original strength), organizing his defences platoon by platoon. Six times he crossed bullet-swept ground to the flanking Essex company to carry grenades and ammunition to his hard-pressed men. Though hit a third time he refused medical aid until, lying in a shell-hole, he had ordered his one remaining officer to take over and had briefed him concerning the plan of defence and the absolute necessity of holding the position.<sup>89</sup> Nightfall found the Essex Scottish clinging firmly to their hard-won gains. The day's fighting had cost the battalion 31 killed and 77 wounded.<sup>90</sup> But it had secured a solid base for the 4th Brigade's operations to clear the northern forest. Major Tilston's gallantry cost him both legs, but brought him the Victoria Cross.

South of the gap, where the 3rd Canadian Division was striving to help the 11th Armoured Division forward, an attempt by the 8th Brigade to clear the Tuschen Wald and the Balberger Wald accomplished little on 1 March. An evening attack southward by Le Regiment de la Chaudiere was thrown back by an overwhelming concentration of fire. However, a renewed effort by the Chaudieres next morning with tank support from the 1st Hussars reached the eastern edge of the wood, and at 2:30 p.m. the North Shore Regiment and the Queen's Own Rifles passed through to begin clearing the larger Balberger Wald. The 3rd Division had been assigned the task of widening the "present bottleneck approach to Xanten", but it was not easy.<sup>91</sup>

The early morning of the 2nd saw the entire Corps front flare up, with all five divisions surging forward. In the 2nd Division's sector the 4th Brigade's attack continued with renewed fury as the R.H.L.I. took over from the battered Essex Scottish and pushed 500 yards north-eastward along the road through the Hochwald towards Marienbaum.<sup>92</sup> Farther south in the vital gap one of the bitterest of the battle's many bitter struggles was being waged. In a determined endeavour to break through to the east Brigadier Moncel\* was given The Algonquin Regiment to employ with his motor battalion and his armour. His plan, a bold one, assumed that the enemy's resistance was at the breaking point, and that a determined effort, even though not in great strength, would turn the balance in our favour and open the path to the Rhine. From the foremost positions in the gap along the lateral road three companies of the Lake Superiors, carried in Kangaroos, and supported by a squadron of the Canadian Grenadier Guards, were to drive

\*Moncel himself fell ill and was evacuated to hospital during the morning. During his absence (until 13 March) the 4th Armoured Brigade was commanded first by Lt. Col. E. M. Smith and subsequently by Lt.-Col. G. D. de S. Wotherspoon.

forward 1000 yards to capture a group of farm buildings beside the road which ran down the east side of the forest from Marienbaum to Sonsbeck. Through these positions tanks of the Governor General's Foot Guards would carry an Algonquin company another 1000 yards eastward to seize a bridgehead over the Hohe Ley, a small stream which skirted the near edge of the woods ("Weston") which had been the 4th Armoured Brigade's objective on 28 February (see above, page 505).<sup>93</sup>

With the painful lessons of earlier armoured attempts in mind, every effort was made to advance in darkness. But the sodden ground, in many places now a mere quagmire, delayed the arrival of the Kangaroos, so that instead of 2:00 a.m. as planned it was after 4:30 and dawn was near when the attacking force drove down the slope out of the gap. The Lake Superior companies were by no means at full strength—the largest had only 44 all ranks. The unit had been fighting steadily since the opening of "Blockbuster", but because of their previous experience with the personnel-carriers, the tired troops were being sent back into action without rest.<sup>94</sup>

The impetus of the assault carried "A" and "B" Companies through heavy shelling to their first objective, some battered houses in a shallow gully midway between the two lateral roads. Here they came under vigorous anti-tank and machine-gun fire from all sides. Tanks went up in smoke as they were hit by 88-mm. shot from self-propelled guns and Tiger tanks south of the railway. "C" Company fought its way through to the regiment's final objective on the further road, where it was immediately pinned down among the ruins of farm buildings. It was growing light when two platoons of the Algonquins' "D" Company reached this position, and five of the eight tanks on which they started had been knocked out. All efforts to get forward to the Hohe Ley stream failed, and they were fain to dig in some 300 yards in front of the Lake Superiors and within plain sight of their objective. The deadly anti-tank fire forced the Canadian tanks to withdraw from their exposed position shortly before 8:00 a.m. Left without armoured support the Algonquins became the target of counter-attacks by infantry and tanks. In the fog of battle erroneous reports came back that "D" Company had reached the wood "Weston", and spurred by frequent urgings from Brigade Headquarters the remaining Algonquin companies strove desperately to get forward in relief." On the right "A" Company was disorganized by heavy smallarms fire coming from buildings south of the track; "C" was similarly held up at the north shoulder of the gap. In the late afternoon a survivor from "D" brought back word that the forward platoons had been encircled by German tanks and overrun. The Lake Superior Regiment's "C" Company suffered a like fate; only eight men got back to the smouldering rubble-heaps held by "A" Company.<sup>96</sup> They brought with them a story of magnificent courage in the face of odds. When their commander and all the company officers had become casualties, Sergeant C. H. Byce (who had won the Military Medal at the Maas in January) took charge. Single-handed he knocked out a tank with a PIAT, and with a companion cleared an enemy-held house with grenades. As more German tanks closed in, making "C" Company's positions untenable, he extricated the survivors and got them back to relative safety. Finally he took up a sniper's position and was reported



to have killed seven Germans and wounded eleven more as they attempted to come over the railway embankment. Byce's gallantry won him the Distinguished Conduct Medal.<sup>97</sup>

Once again an attempt to break through to the east had failed. Early on 3 March the two battle-worn units turned over custody of the devastated gap to the 5th Infantry Brigade. Since the morning of the 2nd the Algonquins had had 87 casualties, including 32 men taken prisoner; the Lake Superior Regiment had lost 53, including 16 captured. The credit for stopping the Canadian attack seems to belong to the 24th Parachute Regiment and the Parachute Army Assault Battalion, supported by tanks and artillery of the 116th Panzer Division.<sup>98</sup>

Reckless little of Allied progress on their southern flank, the Germans in the Hochwald area continued to fight fiercely. A plan by the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade to leapfrog its units along the north side of the gap had achieved little. During the morning of 2 March, while the Algonquins and Lake Superiors were waging their bitter battle in the open, The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada moved through Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal but were stopped 500 yards short of their objectives at the south-eastern edge of the forest. As a result neither The South Saskatchewan Regiment nor the Fusiliers were able to follow through to the north as planned. Not until the morning of the 3rd, after the 5th Brigade had taken over the gap, could Brigadier Keebler's units get forward. Keeping well within the cover of the woods, by nightfall they had cleared the eastern part of the Hochwald to a point 2000 yards north of the railway.<sup>99</sup> This progress was matched on the 2nd Division's left, where by the end of the day the 4th Infantry Brigade was in firm control of all the forest lying west of the Marienbaum road.<sup>100</sup>

In the 3rd Division's sector it took the 8th Brigade two more days to complete clearing the Balberger Wald after Le Regiment de la Chaudiere had secured the Tuschen Wald on 2 March. As they probed southward and then eastward through the woods, the Queen's Own Rifles and the North Shore Regiment encountered persistent resistance by small enemy bands; often a machine-gun position was manned by only two well-trained soldiers. Every advance was counter-attacked, and more than once companies found their positions infiltrated in the darkness. Thickly-sown Schu-mines beset the path of the infantry, and the 1st Hussars, held up by numerous anti-tank mines, could only give supporting fire through the trees from stationary positions. There were no large-scale engagements, but by the time the brigade reached the eastern edge of the woods on the afternoon of the 4th it had suffered more than 100 casualties.<sup>101</sup>

On the 3rd Division's right the first three days of March saw the 11th Armoured Division closing up to Sonsbeck. There was stiff fighting on the 2nd when its left column, having advanced on the 3rd Canadian Division's axis, breached the main Schlieffen defences at the south-west corner of the Balberger Wald, while farther south the crossing of the Kervenheim—Sonsbeck road over these defences was secured.<sup>102</sup> A frontal attack on Sonsbeck promised to be costly, for the western approaches were pitted with numerous craters and well guarded by strongpoints. Accordingly the armoured division now marked time while the 3rd Canadian

Division moved against the long Hammerbruch spur which extended south-eastward from the Balberger Wald behind Sonsbeck.<sup>103</sup>

Meanwhile the effect of the Ninth Army's drive northward was most notable on the 30th Corps' front, where the tempo of the advance by General Horrocks' divisions showed a quickening which increased from left to right. Next to the inter-corps boundary the 3rd (British) Division, pushing forward three miles a day, captured Kervenheim on 1 March, Winnekendonk on the 2nd and next day reached the deserted Schlieffen line in front of Kapellen.<sup>104</sup> Also on the 2nd the 53rd Division found Weeze free of the enemy and its advanced units exploited along the axis of road and railway to Kevelaer without establishing contact. The long-awaited junction between the First Canadian and Ninth U.S. Armies came on the afternoon of 3 March, when the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards, working ahead of the 53rd Division, encountered cavalry of the 16th U.S. Corps in the village of Berendonk, three miles north-west of Geldern.<sup>105</sup> On the extreme right flank fast-moving patrols of the 1st Commando Brigade, operating under the 52nd Division, entered Langstraat on the 2nd and Well on the 3rd, and next day made contact with the 17th U.S. Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron in Walbeck.<sup>106</sup> By the morning of the 4th there was no enemy west of Geldern, and as the 52nd Division's northern prong passed Wemb, south of Weeze, without regaining contact, orders came for the division to concentrate between Geldern and the Maas.<sup>107</sup>

### Eastward from the Hochwald

On the Hochwald front the first break in the German resistance came on the night of 3-4 March. Towards noon on the 3rd the 47th Panzer Corps received orders to pull the 116th Panzer Division back to Alpen, midway between Veen and Rheinberg. At midnight the 180th Infantry Division took over the sector thus vacated; on its right the 6th Parachute Division withdrew to a line about three kilometres east of the Hochwald. In the south-west corner of the shrinking bridgehead the 2nd Parachute Corps ordered the 190th Division back to the Alpen area, leaving the 7th Parachute Division, and what remained of the 8th, to face the increasing pressure from British and American forces.<sup>108</sup> Although the enemy continued to maintain heavy mortar and artillery fire, these adjustments enabled the 2nd Canadian Division to complete the occupation of the Hochwald on 4 March. The 5th Brigade, attacking out of the gap early that morning, found the enemy gone. Everywhere abandoned equipment and German dead told of the intensity of the past battle.<sup>109</sup> On the left the 214th Brigade, taking over from the Wessex Division's reconnaissance regiment, occupied Kehrum on the 3rd and Marienbaum the following morning. Before the day ended the brigade had troops in Vynen and a patrol on the outskirts of Wardt, less than two miles from Xanten.<sup>110</sup>

The pattern of the next phase was forecast in the First Canadian Army's intentions for 4 March.\* The 43rd Division was to push south-eastward astride

\*On Sunday, 4 March, the First Canadian Army was visited by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, who was accompanied by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke) and Field-Marshal Montgomery. After being briefed at General Crerar's tactical

the Calcar—Xanten road, while the 2nd Canadian Division regrouped for a converging attack towards Xanten from the west. As for the 3rd Canadian Division, with the clearing of the Balberger Wald completed the 9th Brigade would capture the Hammerbruch spur, while on its right the 7th Brigade opened a route southward through Sonsbeck. The 4th Armoured Division was to be prepared to advance through the 3rd Division towards Veen.<sup>112</sup>

As contacts between the 30th Corps and American troops continued to seal the inter-army boundary the direction of General Horrocks' drive was swinging to the north-east, with room now for only two divisions to advance. Having taken over Geldern from an American battalion early on the 4<sup>th</sup>,<sup>113</sup> the 53rd Division was given as its axis the main road to Wesel, through Issum and Alpen. On its left Major-General A. H. S. Adair's Guards Armoured Division was at last to get back into action. It was to pass through the 3rd Division at Kapellen and exploit eastward to Bonninghardt.<sup>114</sup> By midday on the 4th the Welsh Division had occupied Issum, but the parallel thrust by the Guards Armoured had run into trouble. Leaving Goch at half-past one that morning, the 5th Guards Armoured Brigade had successfully contended with traffic congestion and rubble-blocked roads until stopped by a blown bridge west of Kapellen. An alternative route through Winnekendonk brought a column into Kapellen in the late afternoon, and by nightfall the 2nd (Armoured) Battalion Irish Guards had taken Hamb, a small village one mile to the east.<sup>115</sup> To reach Bonninghardt it was necessary to clear a high wooded area about two miles square which was being held by strong infantry rearguards well supported by self-propelled anti-tank guns. Employing the same tactics as in the Balberger Wald, these held up the Guards' advance for two more days, forcing them to mount two set-piece attacks. On 5 March in bitter hand-to-hand fighting units of the Grenadier and Coldstream Guards secured the hamlet of Metzkeath in the heart of the Bonninghardt woods, and next day the 1st Welsh Guards captured Bonninghardt village, taking 200 prisoners from the 8th Parachute Division.<sup>116</sup> It was an important gain. Possession of the hills about Bonninghardt gave the Allies a full view of the remaining bridgehead and made it possible to direct observed fire on any movement in the area.<sup>117</sup> That same evening the 53rd Division, fighting in the Die Leucht forest south of Alpen, received word of its impending relief next morning by the Lowland Division.<sup>118</sup>

These successes reflected the continued rapid advance of the Ninth Army. By 5 March General Simpson's two right-hand corps, having reached and cleared the west bank of the Rhine—the 19th from Neuss to Uerdingen and the 13th as far north as Orsoy—had completed their role in Operation "Grenade". Only the 16th Corps on the left was still engaged; by the morning of the 6th it was fighting in Rheinberg, less than two miles from the Rhine.<sup>119</sup>

While General Crerar's right wing folded remorselessly inward upon the diminishing bridgehead, progress on the northern flank, though encouraging, had been much less rapid. The 3rd Canadian Division's thrust had achieved its objec-

headquarters, the Prime Minister drove with the Army Commander to the Reichswald and the Siegfried Line, and was dissuaded, on account of the danger of mines, from going further. The party lunched with General Simonds at his headquarters, and Mr. Churchill was then conducted by General Crerar on a visit to the 30th Corps area.<sup>111</sup>

tives. By the early morning of 6 March the 9th Brigade had cleared enough of the Hammerbruch feature for the Canadian Scottish to begin the 7th Brigade's attack on Sonsbeck. At the northern outskirts the Regina Rifles went through to take the town against only moderate resistance. From Sonsbeck the Reginas patrolled forward to meet the 3rd British Division, which after seeing the Guards Armoured on their way through Kapellen, had turned northward to clean out the Winkelscher Busch. This was easily done, and that evening patrols from the two 3rd Divisions met a mile south of Sonsbeck, the junction pinching out the 11th Armoured Division into Army Reserve.<sup>120</sup>

Bad flying conditions were still restricting air support. The best day was probably 2 March, when in spite of far from favourable weather No. 84 Group flew more than 300 sorties over the battle area, chasing off enemy aircraft and striking at known gun and mortar positions and at barges and ferry jetties along the Rhine. At night Mosquitoes attacked the river crossings and harassed movement in the German rear. As the German bridgehead continued to shrink our pilots found their difficulties increasing. Choice of targets west of the Rhine became very limited, and the converging Allied advance made it necessary to exercise extreme care in attacks. The enemy's anti-aircraft guns in the bridgehead, were now in an unpleasantly high concentration. Moreover, No. 84 Group had been suffering such heavy casualties that on 1 March it was decided to reduce the number of aircraft operating in close support of the ground forces. This situation, combined with persistent bad weather, resulted in no close air support being available to our troops during the final week of 'Blockbuster'.<sup>121</sup>

### The Capture of Xanten and Veen

The enemy's chief remaining lateral communication in front of Wesel was the highway which crossed the bridgehead in a south-easterly direction from Xanten to Ossenbergh and Rheinberg. To preserve this important route as long as possible Schlemm had to retain possession of Xanten, Veen, and Alpen. Xanten, in history a Roman town, in German legend the home of Siegfried, was a place of 5000 inhabitants at the north-west angle of the bridgehead. To capture it and Veen, a small village three and a half miles east of Sonsbeck, became the main tasks of the 2nd Canadian Corps. General Matthews' 2nd Division was given the northern assignment in collaboration with the Wessex Division; the 4th Armoured Division was to secure Veen.

By 5 March British and Canadian troops had closed to within two miles of Xanten. The 43rd Division held Wickermanshof, on the highway from Marienbaum, and Wardt, midway between the road and the Rhine. Within the fork of the railways two farmsteads marked the 2nd Division's forward positions. On the left, Roschhof, 2500 yards north-west of Xanten, was in the hands of the 6th Brigade; on the right the 5th Brigade, moving forward from an unopposed occupation of the "Weston" woods, had the Maisonneuves at Birkenkampshof.<sup>122</sup> Both formations were thus in position to carry out the Corps intentions for 6 March—the 6th Brigade (assisted by the 43rd Division) to capture Xanten, and the

5th Brigade the high ground south-east of the town.<sup>123</sup> Late on 5 March General Matthews, appreciating that a strong infiltration forward by the 6th Brigade might keep the enemy from stabilizing his position in front of Xanten, directed the 6th Brigade to put in a battalion attack next morning.<sup>124</sup> When the resulting attempt by the Camerons was forced back, General Simonds ordered a regrouping for a direct assault by the 4th and 5th Canadian Brigades and the 129th Brigade of the Wessex Division. The code name "Blockbuster II" suggested that the operation was to be a major affair.<sup>125</sup> Preparations were completed on 7 March as units of the 6th Brigade took over the forward holdings between the railways. The plan called for the 4th Brigade to capture the west side of Xanten, while the 129th moved in from the north-west to seize the main part of the town and the hamlet of Beek beyond. With this accomplished the 5th Brigade would move through on the right to secure the high ground between the railway and the sickle-shaped body of water called the Alter Rhein.<sup>126</sup>

The attack opened at 5:30 a.m. on the 8th with an artillery concentration by seven field and four medium regiments—"like all hell breaking loose", reported the Essex Scottish war diary. Fifteen minutes later the assaulting battalions of the 4th Brigade moved forward in driving rain—the Essex on the left through the South Saskatchewan's position at Roschhof and The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry on the right through Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal at Birkenkampshof. In support was the Sherbrooke Fusiliers' "B" Squadron together with an assortment of Flails and Crocodiles. Helped forward by the barrage the assaulting companies of both battalions at first made good progress. By seven o'clock the Essex Scottish had begun clearing farmhouses between the railways, though they were still west of the main road from Sonsbeck. This task went slowly until the Crocodiles came forward about mid-morning. Almost invariably their flame flushed the Germans out of their positions on the run; in one such attack a large moated house yielded 68 enemy.<sup>127</sup> By midday all Essex companies were reported secure on their objectives.<sup>128</sup>

As the day wore on, however, the situation on the 4th Brigade's right became obscure, for communication with some of the R.H.L.I. companies had failed. Attacking astride the secondary road just north of the east-west railway tracks, the battalion met fierce and crafty opposition. The enemy let the two leading companies pass through his forward position, then opened fire on them from the rear. Moreover, a road crater 55 feet wide held up all vehicles. A bulldozer went to work under extremely heavy fire but it was late afternoon before even light tracked vehicles could pass. The infantry were under constant mortaring and machine-gun fire from the defenders of Xanten and were being shelled by big guns on the far side of the Rhine.<sup>129</sup> Casualties mounted rapidly. The commanders of "A" and "B" Companies were killed. "D" Company was cut off and had its O.C. taken prisoner.<sup>130</sup>

Shortly after midday Brigadier Cabeldu launched The Royal Regiment of Canada into the battle, hoping thereby to assist the 129th Brigade's attack and at the same time ease the pressure on the R.H.L.I. Aided by Wasp flame-throwers, which came into the fight when the soft ground bogged the heavier Crocodiles, the



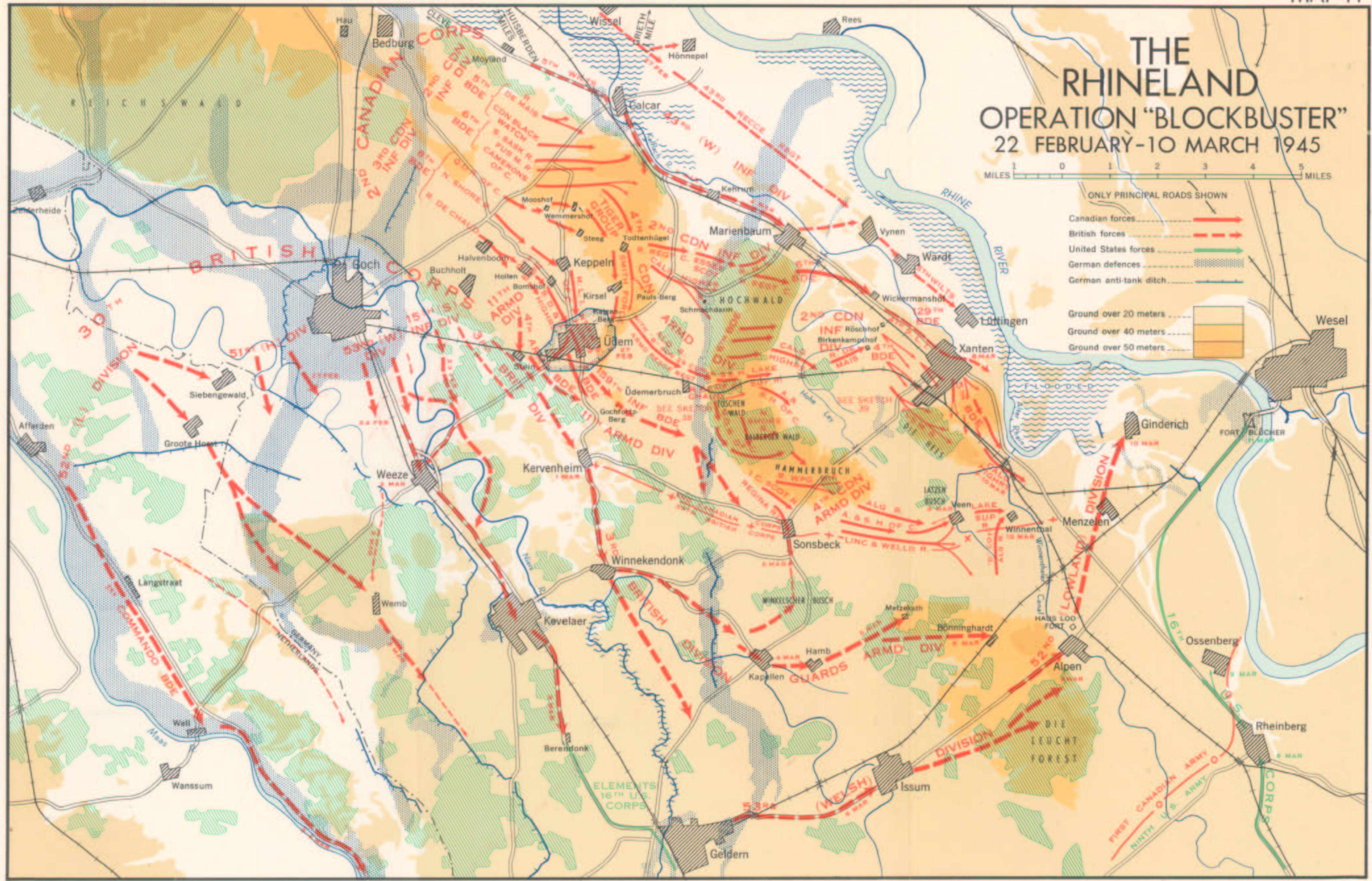
# THE RHINELAND OPERATION "BLOCKBUSTER" 22 FEBRUARY-10 MARCH 1945

1 0 1 2 3 4 5 MILES

ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS SHOWN

- Canadian forces ---
- British forces ---
- United States forces ---
- German defences
- German anti-tank ditch

- Ground over 20 meters
- Ground over 40 meters
- Ground over 50 meters



forced from the east, and the last resistance ended only next morning. The movements of the advancing Wessex battalions had been hidden from watchers across the Rhine by an extension of the dense screen of oil smoke that had been maintained since the opening of "Veritable" (above, page 480). From two emission points on the left bank north-west of Wardt generators beamed a curtain which a favourable north-west wind carried up the river as far as Xanten—a distance of nearly five miles.<sup>135</sup>

The second phase of "Blockbuster II" began at 10:45 p.m. on the 8th, when Le Regiment de Maisonneuve, carried in Kangaroos and supported by Sherbrooke tanks and Flails, advanced down the main Calcar—Xanten road. They drove through the ruins of Xanten without meeting any serious opposition, and within two hours were secure on the wooded hills immediately south of Beek, having collected more than 100 prisoners. The Canadian Black Watch, following through on foot, also gained their objectives without difficulty. To secure his right flank Brigadier Megill now ordered The South Saskatchewan Regiment (temporarily under his command) to block off the north-eastern edge of the high Die Hees forest, and when this was done The Calgary Highlanders pushed on to occupy positions between the north-eastern tip of the woods and the Alter Rhein.<sup>136</sup> It was now daylight, and to keep the advance moving Megill sent the Maisonneuves through the Black Watch with orders to gain crossings over the Winnenthaler Canal where it joined the south-west angle of the Alter Rhein. The move started at 9:00 a.m. on the 9th against stiffening resistance. An enemy pocket holding out in a small wood south of Birten was dealt with "in textbook style". Two troops of Sherbrooke Fusiliers tanks led a late afternoon attack across open fields to the edge of the wood. Crocodiles and Wasps then moved in to set buildings and trees on fire. Finally came the infantry, to receive their objectives (records the 2nd Armoured Brigade) "on a silver platter".<sup>137</sup> The Maisonneuves captured upwards of 200 paratroopers, including the commander of the 17th Parachute Regiment.<sup>138</sup> During their attack Sergeant Maurice Bosse won the D.C.M. by the determination with which he pushed his section of Wasp flame-throwers on in spite of having been three times wounded.<sup>139</sup> On the right The Calgary Highlanders had come forward early in the day, and that night they crossed the canal unopposed.<sup>140</sup>

The enemy's tenure of the Rhine's west bank was drawing to a close. On 6 March the German High Command had given permission for the bridgehead to be evacuated by the 10th; and it appears that by midnight on the 6th-7th three corps headquarters and the remnants of several divisions had already withdrawn across the river. From his forward command post, still on the left bank, General Schlemm was controlling the final operations with the 2nd Parachute Corps Headquarters. Under General Meindl were what was left of the 6th, 7th and 8th Parachute Divisions, the 116th Panzer Division, a battle-group of the 346th Infantry Division, and remnants of some anti-tank and flak units.<sup>141</sup> Events at Xanten had shown that these forces would not readily abandon their last holdings. In that bitter action units of the 6th Parachute Division had inflicted more than 400 casualties



on the 2nd Canadian Division. Hardest hit had been the 4th Brigade's R.H.L.I. and Essex Scottish, with losses respectively of 134 and 108.<sup>142</sup>

More evidence of the enemy's determination to resist to the last came from the Veen area. Here the 4th Armoured Division made an attempt at exploitation by using small battle-groups, each consisting of an infantry company with a squadron of tanks. Organized in this manner The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada and the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment) attacked on the 6th along the road from Sonsbeck towards Veen, where the enemy was not believed to be numerous. A 70-foot crater stopped the armour a mile west of Veen, and a little farther east heavy machine-gun fire pinned down the infantry.<sup>143</sup> Under cover of darkness one company pushed forward on foot and entered Veen, only to be cut off by the Germans holding the outskirts. The Argylls lost heavily; 32 were taken prisoner. Only a few survivors, guided by tracer from a South Alberta tank, succeeded in fighting their way out of the trap. The remaining companies dug in beside the road, whence they were not to get forward for two more days. Veen was in fact strongly held, in part at least by the fierce fighters of the Parachute Army Assault Battalion.<sup>144</sup> Realizing the immediate need for stronger measures Brigadier Jefferson ordered an attack by two regimental groups—the Algonquins with the South Alberta tanks north of the road, and the Lincoln and Welland with the British Columbia Regiment to the south.<sup>145</sup>

At four in the afternoon of the 7th each battalion sent two companies forward under smoke while the artillery blasted all objectives with high explosive. On the left the Algonquins were struck by shelling and mortaring almost at their startline, and from there on fought against the most stubborn opposition. Innocent-looking groups of farm buildings between them and Veen proved to be miniature forts, with brick walls of double thickness, in some cases reinforced by concrete. With three of its four supporting tanks knocked out "A" Company gained its first objective, a crossroads 1000 yards south-west of Veen, but was stopped there. Farther north "B" Company, having suffered 50 per cent casualties from the withering enemy fire, and "C" Company, sent forward in relief, were forced to dig in for the night with objectives untaken.<sup>146</sup> On the right of the main axis the Lincoln and Welland's frontal attack reached a point south of Veen; and a flanking company with a squadron of B.C. tanks swung out to capture a crossroads more than a mile south-east of the village. This threat to their rear, however, failed to concern Veen's defenders. Through the whole of the 8th, while four miles to the north Xanten was undergoing its final attack, they kept the Algonquins and Lincoln pinned down by their persistent fire, their anti-tank guns dealing deadly blows at our armour, whose manoeuvre was seriously hampered by mud and mine.\* Finally, during the night the enemy withdrew, and by mid-morning of 9 March the 10th Infantry Brigade was firm in Veen.<sup>148</sup>

A mile to the east fighting was still going on in the small village of Winnenthal.

\*For two days and nights the 10th Independent Machine Gun Company (The New Brunswick Rangers) had guarded the left flank with continuous fire on the Latzen Busch, a small wood north of the Algonquin positions. They fired 135,000 rounds of Vickers, and with 2720 mortar bombs reduced the wood to what their C.O. described as "a series of holes joined together by bits of mud"<sup>147</sup>

That morning a battle-group consisting of the Algonquins' fourth rifle company and a squadron of the Canadian Grenadier Guards had reached Winnenthal from the south after a detour by the Bonninghardt woods. While the tanks, kept by mines from entering the village, fired in support, the infantry fought their way in. Before nightfall a company of the Lake Superior Regiment with tanks and flame-throwers arrived in time to mount a quick attack against a strong force holding a monastery on the east side of Winnenthal—with "a bazooka in each window", according to one report. Early next morning some 200 paratroopers surrendered.<sup>149</sup> This ended the 4th Armoured Division's operations west of the Rhine. In the fighting for Veen and Winnenthal (6-10 March) the battalions of the 10th Infantry Brigade, with little time to recover from the losses of the Hochwald struggle, had again suffered heavily; Algonquin casualties numbered 141, those of the Lincoln and Welland 101, and of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders 69. The "Blockbuster" casualties were the heaviest the brigade ever had.<sup>150</sup>

### The Rhineland Victory

All along the bridgehead line, events had been moving steadily to a climax. On 5 March the Germans blew four Rhine bridges downstream from Duisburg, leaving only the rail and road bridges at Wesel.<sup>151</sup> These survived attacks on the area by the R.A.F., including particularly a heavy one by medium bombers of No. 2 Group in daylight on 5 March in which hits were claimed, and evidently made, on both bridges.<sup>152</sup> Along with ferries the bridges served for evacuating the troops and equipment which Schlemm was contriving to salvage. German officers later expressed surprise at our air forces' failure to harass this movement more effectively; one spoke particularly of the tempting target offered by the bridges on the afternoon of 6 March, when, the damage done by the bombing having been repaired, vehicles were steadily streaming across them in daylight.<sup>153</sup> But he forgot the weather: on that day it stopped flying by the tactical air forces almost entirely.<sup>154</sup>

The German withdrawal was well conducted. There was little sign of disorder as Schlemm's bridgehead slowly shrank. Stubborn rearguards fiercely disputed the possession of every town, and then withdrew by night. At the southern end of the lateral highway the 16th U.S. Corps captured Rheinberg on the 6th, but took two more days to secure Ossenberg, where the defenders "made a strong point of every house".<sup>155</sup> East of Bonninghardt the 52nd Division occupied Alpen on the 8th, going on next day to evict the enemy from the Haus Loo fort, one of his few remaining strongholds west of the Xanten—Rheinberg road.<sup>156</sup>

As the line shortened, control of all Anglo-Canadian operations against the bridgehead passed to General Simonds. At 6:00 p.m. on 8 March, 30th Corps Headquarters, transferring its divisions to the 2nd Canadian Corps, went under command of the Second British Army to plan future undertakings.<sup>157</sup> On the 9th, under arrangements made at a conference at Field-Marshal Montgomery's headquarters that morning, the 16th U.S. Corps came temporarily under General Crerar's operational command for the final stage.<sup>158</sup> One division received orders to "stand down". For 10 March the 2nd Corps intentions gave

further objectives to only the 3rd British and the Lowland Divisions.<sup>159</sup> By then enemy resistance was virtually at an end. At 10:40 that morning an air observation post reported both Wesel bridges demolished.<sup>160</sup> The daily intelligence report by the C.-in-C. West read: "Own troops withdrew from the Wesel bridgehead according to plan. Rearguards still on [west] bank."<sup>161</sup> These slim rearguards provided little opposition. By nightfall on the 10th the 52nd Division had occupied Menzelen and Ginderich, gathering in a few stragglers, and had linked up with the 2nd Canadian Division on its left and the 35th U.S. Infantry Division on its right. The end of the Rhineland battle came on the morning of 11 March when two American platoons took the surrender of a few tired Germans in old Fort Blucher, on the river bank opposite Wesel.<sup>162</sup> The 21st Army Group now lined the west bank of the Rhine from Dusseldorf to Nijmegen.

Thus ended more than a month of continuous bitter fighting by the First Canadian Army in which weather and ground had seemed almost invariably to side with the enemy. Day after day, clouded skies had robbed the Army of its air support; flood and mud had too frequently immobilized its armour. The enemy had concentrated an unusual amount of fire-power, which in General Crerar's phrase "had been more heavily and effectively applied than at any other time in the Army's fighting during the present campaign."<sup>163</sup> The German opposition had been formidable in both quantity and quality. The force facing First Canadian Army grew from one reinforced infantry division on 8 February to a peak of ten divisions as the battle proceeded.\* After the Ninth Army's attack was launched on 23 February this force was again reduced, but, consisting now mainly of skilful and hard-bitten parachute troops, it continued to offer the fiercest resistance. The, First Parachute Army was soundly beaten; but it was certainly not humiliated.

In these circumstances the victory, inevitably, was costly. The total casualties of First Canadian Army for the period beginning on 8 February and extending through 10 March were computed at 1049 officers and 14,585 other ranks; the majority of these were British soldiers, Canadian casualties numbering 379 officers and 4925 other ranks. The Canadian losses had of course been heaviest after Operation "Blockbuster" went in on 26 February; from that day through 10 March they were 243 officers and 3395 other ranks.<sup>165</sup> The Ninth U.S. Army's losses in the 17 days of Operation "Grenade" had been just under 7300.<sup>166</sup>

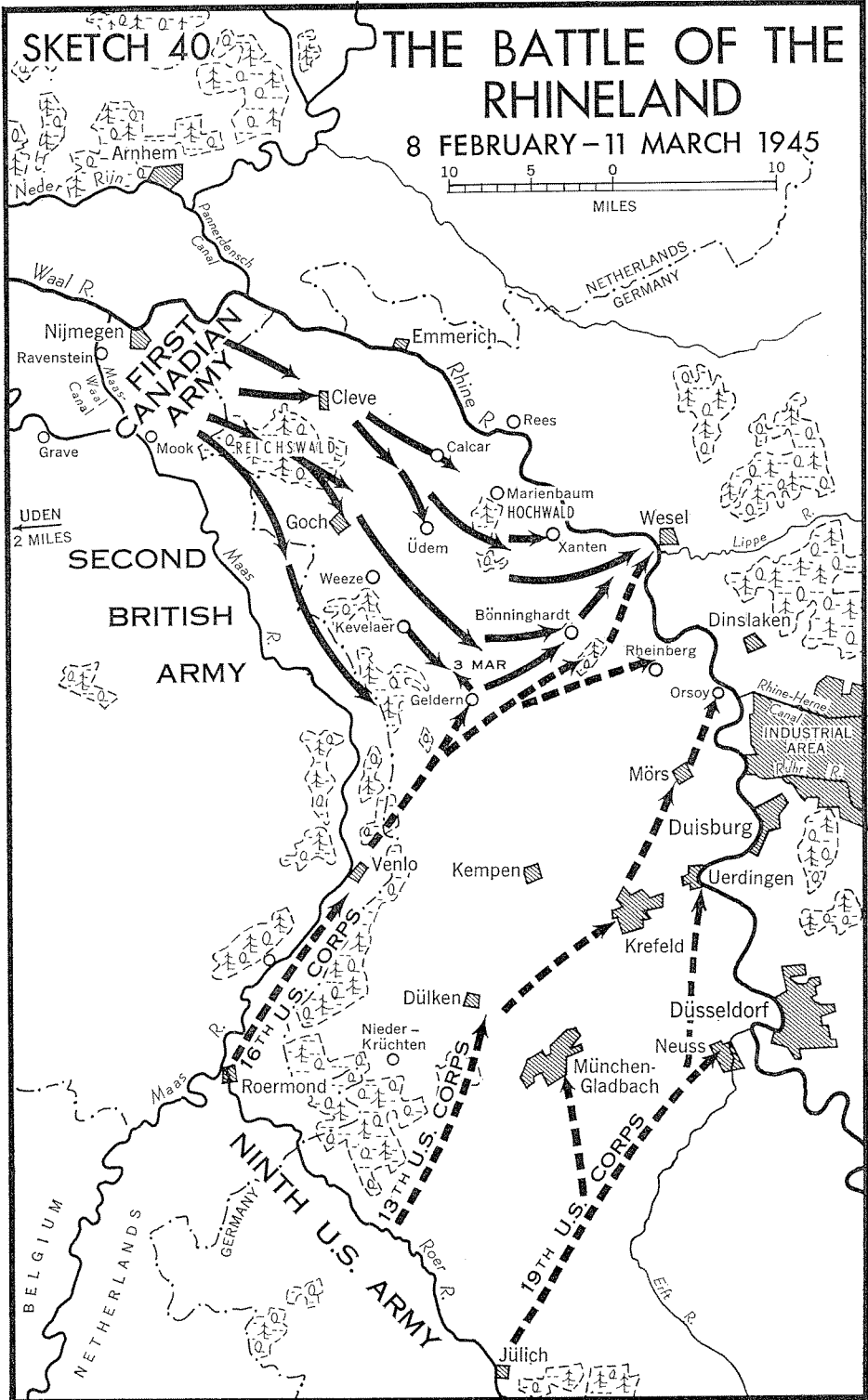
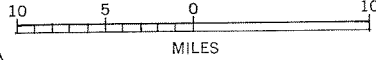
The loss inflicted on the enemy was much heavier. During the whole period from the beginning of "Veritable" until the German withdrawal east of the Rhine, First Canadian Army captured 22,239 prisoners, and our Intelligence estimated the enemy's loss in killed and "long-term wounded" at 22,000. On the Ninth U.S. Army's front the parallel figures were 29,739 prisoners and 16,000 other casualties. Thus the two armies' converging operations had cost the Germans, according to our best figures, approximately 90,000 men.<sup>167</sup> It is no disparagement of the splendid feat of General Simpson's soldiers to say that First Canadian Army had had somewhat the harder task of the two. During the period when the Roer flooding postponed the launching of the Ninth Army offensive the Germans were able

\*The 84th, 180th and 190th Infantry Divisions, the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, the 116th Panzer and Panzer Lehr Divisions, and the 2nd, 6th, 7th and 8th Parachute Divisions.<sup>164</sup>

SKETCH 40

# THE BATTLE OF THE RHINELAND

8 FEBRUARY - 11 MARCH 1945



to concentrate against General Crerar. It would seem also that Schlemm's paratroopers were rather more formidable antagonists than the divisions on the right wing of the Fifteenth Army which collapsed under the American blows. But as we have often seen there were few formations in the German Army that were not capable of determined resistance. The teamwork of the two Allied armies had produced an excellent result and a great contribution to the final victory, now not very far away.

On 26 March the Supreme Commander wrote a letter to the G.O.C.-in-C.

Dear Crerar,

I have previously sent out general messages of congratulation to the several parts of this Allied force, covering our more recent operations. The purpose of this note is to express to you personally my admiration for the way, you conducted the attack, by your Army, beginning February 8 and ending when the enemy had evacuated his last bridgehead at Wesel. Probably no assault in this war has been conducted under more appalling conditions of terrain than was that one. It speaks volumes for your skill and determination and the valor of your soldiers, that you carried it through to a successful conclusion.

With warm personal regard,

Sincerely,

Dwight D. Eisenhower.

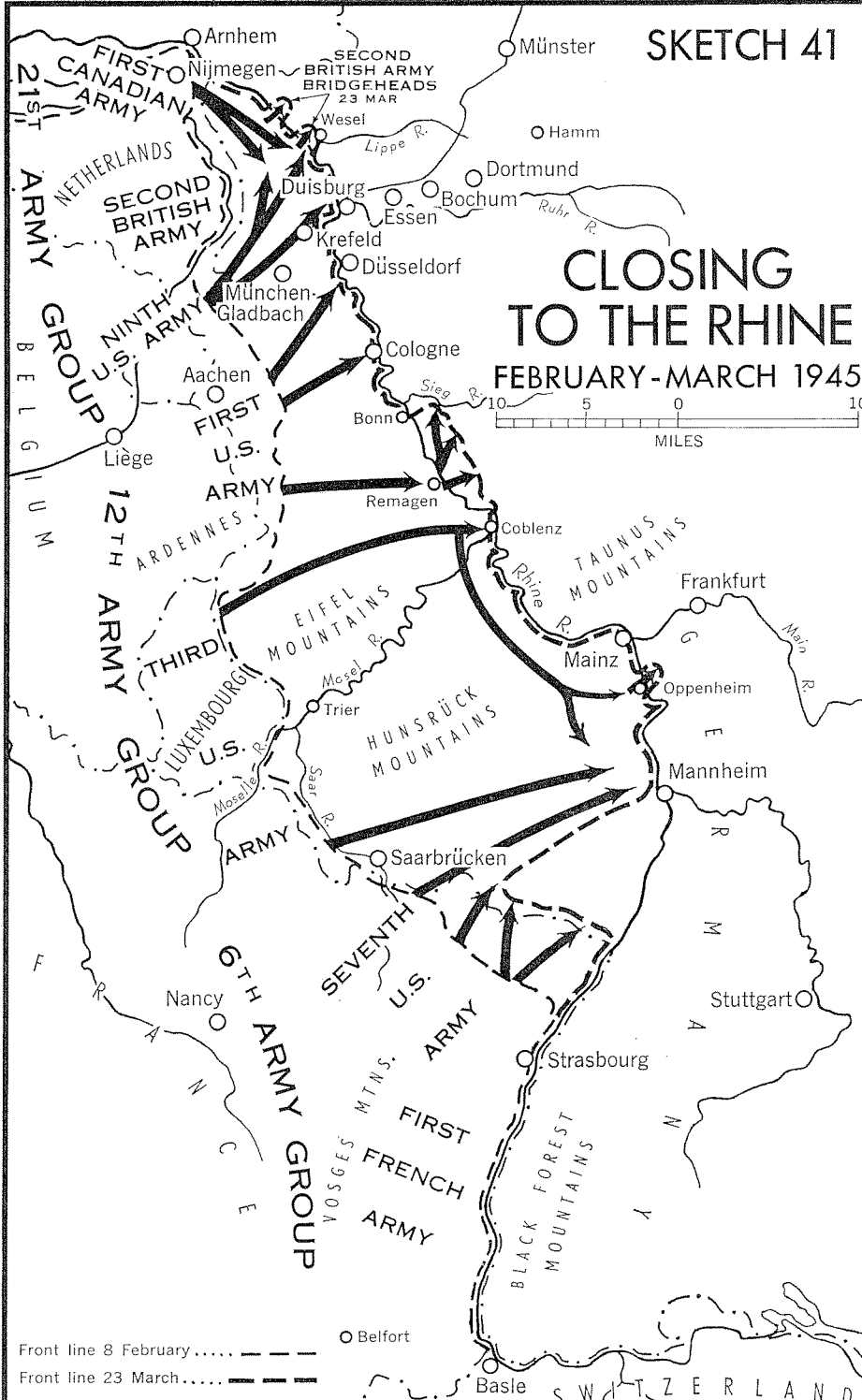
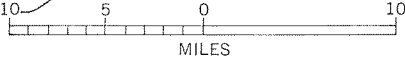
General Crerar replied on the 30th thanking General Eisenhower and adding,

I believe that no troops could have put up a finer exhibition of enduring gallantry and determination than was demonstrated during those weeks of bitter, bloody and muddy fighting. With such soldiers, British and Canadian, no Commander could ever fail in the tasks he had been set to accomplish.<sup>168</sup>

While the First Canadian and Ninth U.S. Armies fought their hard battle in the north, tremendous events had also been taking place elsewhere on the front. General Bradley's 12th Army Group (the First and Third U.S. Armies) lunged forward on 1 March in Operation "Lumberjack". Cologne fell a few days later, and on 7 March the First Army seized intact the Ludendorff Bridge across the Rhine at Remagen and, brilliantly exploiting this unexpected opportunity, began to build up beyond the river. On 15 March it was the turn of General Devers' 6th Army Group, which had cleared the "Colmar pocket" early in February and now launched Operation "Undertone" to clear to the Rhine in the area south of the Moselle. The Seventh U.S. Army, with a considerable French group under command, swept forward and, in conjunction with a devastating south-easterly thrust by the Third Army across the Moselle, soon completed its task. The German Army Group "G" suffered a great reverse. Coblenz and Mainz fell, and by 25 March all organized German resistance west of the Rhine had ended. By that date, indeed, we were across the river at two other points besides Remagen. General Patton's men had "bounced" a crossing on the night of 22-23 March near Oppenheim, south of Mainz; and the following day the main planned crossing took place in the north at Wesel.<sup>169</sup> The total of prisoners taken from the Germans in the West since 8 February now stood at over 230,000. SHAEF commented, "This, with killed and wounded, is equivalent to the destruction of divisional troops to the extent of 20 full divisions."<sup>170</sup>

# CLOSING TO THE RHINE

FEBRUARY-MARCH 1945



Front line 8 February ..... ○ Belfort  
Front line 23 March ..... — — — — —

The German plan of standing and fighting west of the Rhine, instead of retiring behind the river and forcing us to attack across that formidable obstacle, undoubtedly represented the only strategy that Hitler would have tolerated, and there is no evidence that a retirement was considered. In Field-Marshal Montgomery's view, this was the enemy's "third major blunder" of the campaign, the others being the decisions to fight south of the Seine in Normandy and to launch the Ardennes counter-offensive.<sup>171</sup> No doubt its origins were the desire to cover the Ruhr, and sentimental reluctance to yield any of the soil of the Fatherland until forced to do so. We have also noted (above, page 509) the German desire to protect the barge traffic, particularly the coal traffic, on the Rhine. But fighting west of the river was certainly a serious mistake. Germany had already lost the war; but she could still have lengthened it considerably by husbanding her military resources and using them to the best advantage. Instead, she fed those resources into the grinder in the Rhineland. She forced us to fight a costly battle there, but it was the last of the really great battles of the campaign. The Germans could not rebuild the *Wehrmacht* a second time as they had rebuilt it after Normandy.

The German armies in the West faced the coming struggle east of the Rhine not only with utterly inadequate forces but with a new Commander-in-Chief. Field-Marshal von Rundstedt, old and tired but still highly competent, received on 11 March his second *conge* from the Western command from Hitler, who probably had not forgiven him for criticizing his Ardennes plan. In his place, Field-Marshal Albert Kesselring was brought in from Italy to carry on a campaign which was now clearly hopeless.<sup>172</sup>

## CHAPTER XX

### **THE RHINE CROSSING AND THE 2nd CORPS' ADVANCE TO THE NORTH SEA 23 MARCH-22 APRIL 1945 (See Map 12 and Sketches 42-46)**

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#### Strategy: Malta and Yalta

**T**HE long road from the Normandy beaches had reached the banks of the swollen Rhine. Allied soldiers, peering eastward across the swiftly-flowing water, realized that this was the last major barrier before the heart of the enemy's homeland.

They faced the task of making an assault crossing of this formidable obstacle with confidence. Their victories in the Ardennes and in the savage battles west of the Rhine had demonstrated their superiority over a foe unquestionably skilful and courageous, but now exhausted and desperate. On the long eastern front the Russian tide was flowing across the Oder and menacing Vienna. An early junction between the Allied forces invading Germany from east and west appeared inevitable; further German resistance seemed futile. The end was in sight. The question uppermost in Allied minds was, how soon would it come?

In these buoyant circumstances any fundamental disagreement over the strategy to be employed in forcing the passage of the Rhine and compassing the final defeat of Germany might have appeared improbable. In practice, however, the issues were far from simple and the strategic problem provoked between British and American leaders one of the sharpest controversies of the entire war.

When the Combined Chiefs of Staff met at Malta (30 January-2 February), as a preliminary to the main "Argonaut" conference to be held with the Russians at Yalta, a warm argument soon developed over future strategy in North-West Europe.<sup>1</sup> The discussion hinged on the directive, if any, to be issued to General Eisenhower for the remainder of the campaign. In a sense this was a revival, on a higher level, of the "broad front" versus "single thrust" controversy between Eisenhower and Montgomery (above, pages 306-13 and 316-22). The Supreme Commander had prepared a tentative plan based on the possibility of seizing two bridgeheads across the Rhine—one, north of the Ruhr, between Emmerich and Wesel, and the other upstream, between Mainz and Karlsruhe. He realized that a heavy attack in the north offered the quickest means of eliminating the Ruhr industries and reaching the most favourable terrain for mobile operations. How



ever, suitable sites in the Emmerich—Wesel sector were restricted to a 20-mile frontage on which only three divisions could be initially employed, leaving an Allied attack vulnerable to a quick German concentration. On the other hand, between Mainz and Karlsruhe there were sites for at least five assaulting divisions, with less danger of effective opposition. Eisenhower therefore planned a secondary crossing here.

The British objection to these proposals, stated by Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, was based mainly on fear of dispersion. Just as in the dispute the year before over the invasion of southern France, the British argued for greater concentration of effort, while the Americans urged the advantages of a large-scale diversionary operation. Specifically, the British Chiefs of Staff felt that there was insufficient strength for two major operations across the Rhine. In their opinion the advantages of concentrating Allied effort in the northern sector—nearer the Antwerp base and in a better position to menace the Ruhr—far outweighed any benefits which might be expected from an attack in the south, unless the latter was clearly subsidiary to the main thrust. Brooke and his colleagues were also concerned about the Supreme Commander's evident intention to close up to the Rhine throughout its length before advancing into Germany. This, they felt, might result in undue delay. In the background of the strategic problem was a further complication—continuing controversy on the need or otherwise for a commander of all Allied ground operations, under the Supreme Commander, with powers similar to those exercised by Montgomery during the Battle of Normandy. The British were still convinced that such a commander was necessary; the Americans still rejected the suggestion, and when Mr. Churchill proposed, as he had lately done, that Field-Marshal Alexander should replace Air Chief Marshal Tedder as Deputy Supreme Commander, they saw in this, probably rightly, an attempt to achieve the desired change. The proposal, incidentally, was not supported by Field-Marshal Montgomery.<sup>2</sup>

After protracted discussion the Combined Chiefs of Staff disposed of the problem by somewhat amending General Eisenhower's draft plan of operations. The amendments were slight, but in accepting them General Eisenhower gave assurances intended to satisfy the British. He telegraphed from Versailles to his Chief of Staff (Lieut.-General W. Bedell Smith) at Malta:<sup>3</sup>

You may assure the Combined Chiefs of Staff in my name that I will seize the Rhine crossings in the north just as soon as this is a feasible operation and without waiting to close the Rhine throughout its length. Further, I will advance across the Rhine in the north with maximum strength and complete determination immediately the situation in the south allows me to collect necessary forces and do this without incurring unreasonable risks.

There remained the further problem of co-ordinating Allied plans for crossing the Rhine with Russian intentions on the eastern front. British and American leaders agreed that the Red Army's help was indispensable to quick progress in the west. At the Yalta Conference (4-10 February), Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin and their advisers explored means of achieving effective co-ordination, Stalin pointing out that, on previous occasions, synchronization of operations on the eastern and western fronts had seldom proved possible. It was, however, apparent that

none of the Allied leaders expected the German war to end before 1 July 1945,<sup>4</sup> and this may have been a factor in the failure to agree on detailed plans for co-ordinated offensives on both fronts during the spring.

The Western Allies described their plan for crossing the Rhine, and Stalin in reply commented on the need for overwhelming resources of tanks and artillery. But when Brooke pressed for details of Soviet intentions during the spring, General Antonov (Deputy Chief of Staff, Red Army) replied merely,<sup>5</sup>

The Soviet forces would press forward until hampered by weather. With regard to the summer offensive, it would be difficult to give exact data with regard to the interval between the end of winter and beginning of the summer attack. The most difficult season from the point of view of weather was the second part of March and the month of April. This period was that when the roads became impassable.

The Russians did, however, agree to take whatever action they could to assist Allied operations in the west. When Marshall pointed out that the critical period of the assaults across the Rhine would occur between the winter and summer offensives, Antonov assured him that the Soviets would do everything possible to prevent the Germans shifting troops from east to west at that time. The Russians also agreed to exchange information on river-crossing techniques and equipment. But agreement over other aspects of liaison, affecting operations on land and in the air, was more elusive.<sup>6</sup>

### The 1st Corps Arrives from Italy

The discussions at Malta had a very important consequence for the First Canadian Army: the withdrawal of the 1st Canadian Corps from Italy and its reunion with the main body of the Canadian field force in North-West Europe.

The story is told in an earlier volume of this series\* and need not be repeated at length here. The 1st Canadian Corps had been sent to the Mediterranean as the result of urgent representations by the Canadian Government; yet that government expressed a desire for its return in an instruction to General Crerar drafted even before it had fought its first battle, as a corps, in Italy (above, page 43, and Appendix "A"). Thereafter the matter was kept before the United Kingdom authorities. At Malta the required opportunity arose. The British Chiefs of Staff now took the view that "the right course of action was to reinforce the decisive western front at the expense of the Mediterranean Theatre",<sup>7</sup> and the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed to withdraw "up to five" Canadian and British divisions forthwith.<sup>8</sup> Arrangements were made to move the 1st Canadian Corps at once. The 5th Canadian Armoured Division began to arrive in Belgium in the last days of February; the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade was there by mid-March, and at noon on 3 April the 1st Canadian Infantry Division, concentrated in the Reichswald Forest, came under General Simonds' command. The great move, known as Operation "Goldflake", had involved a sea voyage from Leghorn to Marseilles and a long drive in mechanical transport up the Rhone valley. It had been carried out with admirable dispatch.<sup>9</sup>

\*Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy*, 656-66.

Thus an important milestone was passed. All the Canadians were to be together for the last few weeks' fighting. First Canadian Army, in which as we have seen Canadian formations had frequently been a minority, would now be more truly Canadian than ever before. The reunion was a source of satisfaction throughout the Army, and to no one more than the veterans from Italy.

### Planning Operation "Plunder"

While the First Canadian and Ninth United States Armies were heavily engaged in the Rhineland, the Second British Army was preparing for the northern crossing of the Rhine. Even before "Veritable" began, General Dempsey's Headquarters had produced a detailed study of the projected operation, which was known by the code name "Plunder". Its object was defined as "to isolate the northern and eastern faces of the Ruhr from the rest of Germany". The most suitable crossing areas were believed to be Rheinberg, Xanten, Rees and Emmerich—although the last-named might be "too hazardous owing to the difficulties of crossing the Alter Rhein (west of the River Rhine proper) under observation from enemy fire from the Hoch Elten high ground [north-west of Emmerich] and because of the wide flood plains and poor approaches in this area". If an amphibious attack could not be launched against Emmerich, it would be necessary to seize the town and the Hoch Elten feature from the landward side. Alternative groupings for the assault were considered: either two British corps; each with a single division "up", or one corps on a two-division front.<sup>10</sup> The target-date for "Plunder" remained uncertain at this stage, awaiting developments in the battle for the Rhineland.

In mid-February a directive issued by Headquarters 21st Army Group<sup>11</sup> set a provisional target-date of 31 March for "Plunder". Increased emphasis was laid on the necessity of capturing both the important communications centre of Wesel and industrial Emmerich during the early stages of the operation. The Ninth United States Army would be responsible for the Rheinberg crossing, while the Second British Army would control the crossings at Xanten and Rees. The instruction added, with respect to the proposed assault at Emmerich:

A raid may be mounted by [First] Canadian Army simultaneously with, and as a diversion for, the main crossing of the Rhine. Such a raid will only be executed if opposition is judged to be light and if equipment for it can be made available without prejudice to the main crossings further south.

First Canadian Army was also instructed to study the possibilities of a secondary operation across the Lek,\* taking advantage of any weakening of German forces in the Arnhem area, to assist in opening a route through Emmerich.

Early in March the target-date for "Plunder" was advanced to the 24th.<sup>12</sup> On the 9th Field-Marshal Montgomery held a conference with his army commanders in which he outlined the forthcoming operation;<sup>13</sup> and the same day he issued his detailed "Orders for the Battle of the Rhine".<sup>14</sup> The intention, he wrote, was "To cross the Rhine north of the Ruhr and secure a firm bridgehead, with a view to developing operations to isolate the Ruhr and to penetrate deeper into Germany".

\*The Lek is the Dutch name for the *lower* reaches of the Neder Rijn; presumably however the directive was intended to refer to the Neder Rijn proper.

Assaulting between Rheinberg and Rees (with the Ninth and Second Armies right and left, respectively), he planned to seize Wesel first, thereafter expanding the lodgement area northwards so the Rhine could be bridged at Emmerich. When First Canadian Army joined the remainder of his command east of the Rhine in the second phase Montgomery anticipated that "further operations deeper into Germany" could be "developed quickly in any direction as may be ordered by Supreme H.Q."

To First Canadian Army the Commander-in-Chief assigned limited tasks for the first phase of operations:

- "(a) to hold securely the line of the Rhine and the Meuse from Emmerich westwards to the sea.
- "(b) to ensure the absolute security of the bridgehead over the Rhine [Waal] at Nijmegen."

Special measures were also necessary to safeguard the port of Antwerp—"about the only place in which successful enemy operations could throw us off our balance"—with particular attention to the islands north of the Scheldt Estuary. During the initial phase, the Army was to prepare to bridge the Rhine at Emmerich and to take "command of the bridgehead to the north and northwest of that place" when ordered by Montgomery. In the second phase, while the Ninth and Second Armies drove on to seize the line Hamm—Munster—Hengelo, Canadian operations would be designed to

- "(a) attack the Ijssel defences from the rear, i.e. from the east.
- "(b) capture Deventer and Zutphen.
- "(c) cross the Ijssel and capture Apeldoorn and the high ground between that place and Arnhem.
- "(d) bridge the river [Neder Rijn] at Arnhem and open up a good communication and supply route from Nijmegen, northwards through Arnhem, and thence to the north-east."

General Crerar immediately issued instructions<sup>15</sup> for the 2nd Canadian Corps to plan (a), (b), and (c), while the 1st Canadian Corps prepared to secure a bridgehead across the Neder Rijn and capture Arnhem.

Although First Canadian Army as such was not directly concerned in the assault phase of "Plunder", Canada was to be represented in the Rhine crossing by the 9th Infantry Brigade—the "Highland Brigade"—of the 3rd Canadian Division. This brigade would be the spearhead of a rapid build-up of Canadian forces east of the river, initially under British command. Whereas in "Veritable" the 30th British Corps had played a leading part under First Canadian Army, in "Plunder" the 2nd Canadian Corps would have a role under Second Army. On 11 March, General Simonds' headquarters came under General Dempsey for planning purposes only; the 2nd Corps passed under the complete operational command of 'Second Army on the 20th.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, the 3rd Canadian Division was placed under Headquarters 30th British Corps.\* The 9th Brigade passed, appropriately,<sup>e</sup> to Major-General T. G. Rennie's 51st (Highland) Division.

\*On 22 March Major-General D. C. Spry relinquished command of the 3rd Division on being appointed to command the Canadian Reinforcement Units in England, an appointment for which General Crerar had recommended him on 6 March. Major-General R. H. Keener took over the vision.<sup>17</sup>

The Second Army was to cross the Rhine between Wesel and the western outskirts of Rees with the 12th Corps on the right and the 30th on the left. General Horrocks' Corps was to capture Rees and Haldern, and establish a lodgement deep enough to permit bridges to be built. This assault was to be carried out by the Highland Division on a two-brigade front, the 9th Canadian Brigade having a "follow-up" role immediately behind the 154th Brigade on the left. The Canadians' task would be to thrust towards Emmerich, securing control of the area Vrssett—Praest—Dornick, as a preliminary to further operations by the 3rd Canadian Division directed against Emmerich. Alternatively, the Canadian brigade might be required to capture Millingen.<sup>18</sup>

The Army plan included vital missions for specialized troops. The 1st Commando Brigade was to assault Wesel immediately after heavy bombing by the R.A.F.<sup>19</sup> Airborne forces were given their third important task of the campaign: under the code name "Varsity", the 18th United States Airborne Corps (comprising the 6th British and 17th U.S. Airborne Divisions) would drop on important ground east of the Rhine, help to disrupt the defence of the Wesel sector and assist General Dempsey's operations in the bridgehead. The 6th Airborne Division, which still included the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion as part of the 3rd Parachute Brigade, was to capture the village of Hamminkeln, the high ground at Schneppenbergh in the north-west corner of Diersfordt Wood and bridges over the Issel River nearby. This time the airborne attack was to follow, instead of preceding, the assault by ground forces. Moreover, profiting by the experience at Arnhem, the commanders decided to land smaller tactical groups on or near the objectives (rather than attempt massed landings at a distance) and to land formations complete in one operation.<sup>20</sup> Looking to the possibility of bad weather interfering with "Varsity", some consideration was given to alternative plans by which the airborne troops would be dropped farther east if it should be decided to proceed with the first assault without them.<sup>21</sup>

"Plunder" would be supported by extensive aerial and artillery bombardment. Only the main features of the air plan need be described here. Long before the amphibious assault took place Allied aircraft had been engaged in an interdiction programme designed to help seal off the Ruhr from the remainder of Germany. Sustained attacks against communications and transportation centres continued until the eve of the assault; during the first three weeks of March heavy and medium bombers of the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. dropped 31,635 tons of bombs on the transportation system within the Ruhr. Immediately before and during the "Plunder" D Day assault, Eighth Air Force bombers and Nos. 83 and 84 Groups R.A.F. and the Ninth Tactical Air Command U.S.A.A.F. combined to neutralize German airfields, anti-aircraft sites and other gun positions which might interfere with the crossing of the Rhine. In the British sector, particular attention was devoted to Wesel. These activities were supplemented on D Day by close support of the amphibious and airborne attacks.<sup>22</sup>

While the Air Forces pounded German installations, Allied gunners prepared to deliver a massive bombardment from the west bank of the Rhine. It is difficult to establish the total number of guns employed on the Army Group front; the Second

Army calculated that a grand total of 3411 (including 853 anti-tank guns and 1038 anti-aircraft guns and rocket projectors) supported its five corps, of which the 18th U.S. Airborne Corps was one.\* The resources directly under the artillery commander of the 30th Corps included the divisional artilleries of the Guards and 11th Armoured Divisions and the 3rd British, 3rd Canadian, 43rd (Wessex) and 51st (Highland) Infantry Divisions, as well as three Army Groups Royal Artillery (including the 2nd Canadian) and the 30th Corps Troops Royal Artillery. The fire plan included counter-battery preparation, to prevent the enemy shelling our forming-up areas and crossing places, counter-mortar tasks, a preliminary bombardment to lower the defenders' morale (in which the 4th Canadian Armoured Division's artillery took part), harassing fire and a smoke-screen. Artillery of the 2nd Canadian Corps, not otherwise allocated, participated in a diversionary fire plan.<sup>24</sup>

### The Watch on the Rhine

The fierce battles west of the Rhine, we have said, had virtually settled the result of "Plunder" in advance. German reserves of men and equipment had been exhausted and, in the words of British Intelligence, Kesselring, taking over Rundstedt's command, had "inherited a bankrupt estate".<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, as we have seen (above, page 509) the Germans had taken some steps at the end of February to organize defences east of the Rhine; and there were many signs that they had profited from the fortnight's interval between the end of fighting in the Rhineland and the beginning of "Plunder".

The First Parachute Army held the east bank of the Rhine from Emmerich on the right up to Krefeld on the left. On the 21st Army Group front the 2nd Parachute Corps occupied a sector between Emmerich and a point nearly opposite Xanten, with the 86th Corps on its left covering Wesel. In Army Group "H" Reserve, north-east of Emmerich, was the 47th Panzer Corps, with its headquarters at Silvolde and the 15th Panzer Grenadier and 116th Panzer Divisions still under command. If these formations had been up to strength, fully equipped and imbued with high morale, they would have been a formidable threat to "Plunder". But in actuality reinforcements, when available, were untrained; ammunition was desperately short; and troops and commanders alike lacked confidence. Exact figures are not available, but it appears that the total strength of the 2nd Parachute Corps was not much above 12,000—or less than the authorized strength (16,000) of a single parachute division. The Corps Commander (Meindl) afterwards estimated that he had only 80 field and medium guns and 12 assault guns to meet the Allied attack; but he had in addition some 60 88-millimetre anti-aircraft equipments which could be used in a ground role. General von Luttwitz claims that the two

\*By way of comparison, Montgomery used 980 guns at El Alamein; 1060 "of all kinds" supported the Eighth Army in the Liri Valley; and 1034 (excluding anti-tank and certain anti-aircraft guns) fired in "Veritable" (above, page 467). The Ninth U.S. Army history states that 2070 guns supported that Army in "plunder"; apparently this included tank, anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns. The 21st Army Group calculated that Ninth Army's assaulting corps was supported by 624 guns of 25-pounder or larger size.<sup>23</sup>

divisions of his 47th Panzer Corps had only 35 tanks between them.<sup>26</sup> Hitler's earlier refusal to permit the construction of defences on the east bank of the Rhine had merely served further to depress the morale of his troops in their most critical hour. Moreover, the Germans had had no time to organize their defences in depth; they were only able to build a narrow belt of rifle and machine-gun pits along the river, focussing their attention on probable crossing sites. This pattern had been anticipated by Allied planners.<sup>27</sup>

German commanders have maintained that they foresaw the course of Allied operations on the Lower Rhine. Kesselring writes: "The enemy's air operations in a clearly limited area, bombing raids on headquarters, and the smoke-screening and assembly of bridging material indicated the enemy's intention to attack between Emmerich and Dinslaken, with point of main effort on either side of Rees." However, General Schlemm, commanding the First Parachute Army, suggested that there was some lack of unanimity in the higher headquarters over the precise point of expected attack. Basing his opinion on the topography suitable for Allied airborne landings, Schlemm expected the main effort at Wesel, while some of his superiors evidently inclined to the view that the northern crossing would take place near Emmerich, or even at Arnhem.<sup>28</sup>

### The Crossing of the Rhine: The Assault

Before Montgomery's assault was launched, we have seen, the Allies had already crossed the Rhine elsewhere. The First United States Army was exploiting its Remagen bridgehead in the direction of the Sieg River. Farther south, above Mainz, General Patton beat Montgomery to the east bank by nearly a day (above, page 524). But Montgomery's bridgehead, in accordance with the decision of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, remained the point of main effort. There was also a significant difference between German opposition in the south and in the north; as the Supreme Commander afterwards observed, "the northern operation was made in the teeth of the greatest resistance the enemy could provide anywhere along the long river".<sup>29</sup>

The amphibious phase of "Plunder" began at 9:00 p.m. on 23 March after heavy bombardments by Allied aircraft and artillery. "Pepper Pots" similar to those used at the beginning of "Veritable" (above, page 467) helped to neutralize German defences. The expenditure of ammunition was enormous: in less than two hours, two batteries of the 4th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment R.C.A. fired 13,896 rounds on "Pepper Pot" tasks. (This unit also gave directional tracer fire with one Bofors to mark the left flank of the Highland Division's assault.) The 1st Rocket Battery R.C.A. supported the same division's attack. The preliminary bombardment undoubtedly softened the German resistance. The enemy's artillery could reply only sporadically, and retaliation from the Hoch Elten feature was described as "practically negligible", little more than "light harassing fire".<sup>30</sup>

As the assaulting troops moved forward to cross the 500 yards of swift water their movements were carefully controlled by a "Bank Group" organization. It ensured that crossings were made according to priorities and that undue congestion

was avoided at points of embarkation. From marshalling areas in the rear troops moved forward to the "Buffaloes", stormboats, DUKWs and ferries which carried them across the Rhine. Navigation was assisted by "Tabby" lights, invisible unless seen through special glasses. On the far bank of the river another headquarters directed the craft-loads of troops to forward assembly areas, where units rejoined their formations as required.<sup>31</sup> The work of the "Bank Group" organization was unquestionably a major factor in the success of the assault.

Two other aspects of the crossing deserve mention: the use of D.D. (amphibious) tanks, and the employment of Force "U" of the Royal Navy. The tanks followed the leading infantry, with a view to being available to give prompt support in the bridgehead.<sup>32</sup> No Canadian tanks swam the Rhine. Naval Force "U", under Captain P. H. G. James, R.N., was organized in three squadrons, each consisting of one flotilla of Landing Craft, Mechanized, and one flotilla of Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel. These craft, some of which were 50 feet long, were brought overland from Antwerp to Nijmegen with the intention of using them to ferry troops and vehicles across the Rhine. Twenty-four L.C.V.(P.) and 24 L.C.M. were allotted to Second British Army, while 12 of each came under the control of First Canadian Army for the use of the 2nd Corps during "Plunder".<sup>33</sup> However, other amphibious arrangements proved so successful that, during the initial attack, the craft were mainly used for patrolling and assisting in the erection of bridges.<sup>34</sup> As we shall see, the L.C.Ms. afterwards made an effective contribution to the capture of Arnhem by the 1st Canadian Corps.

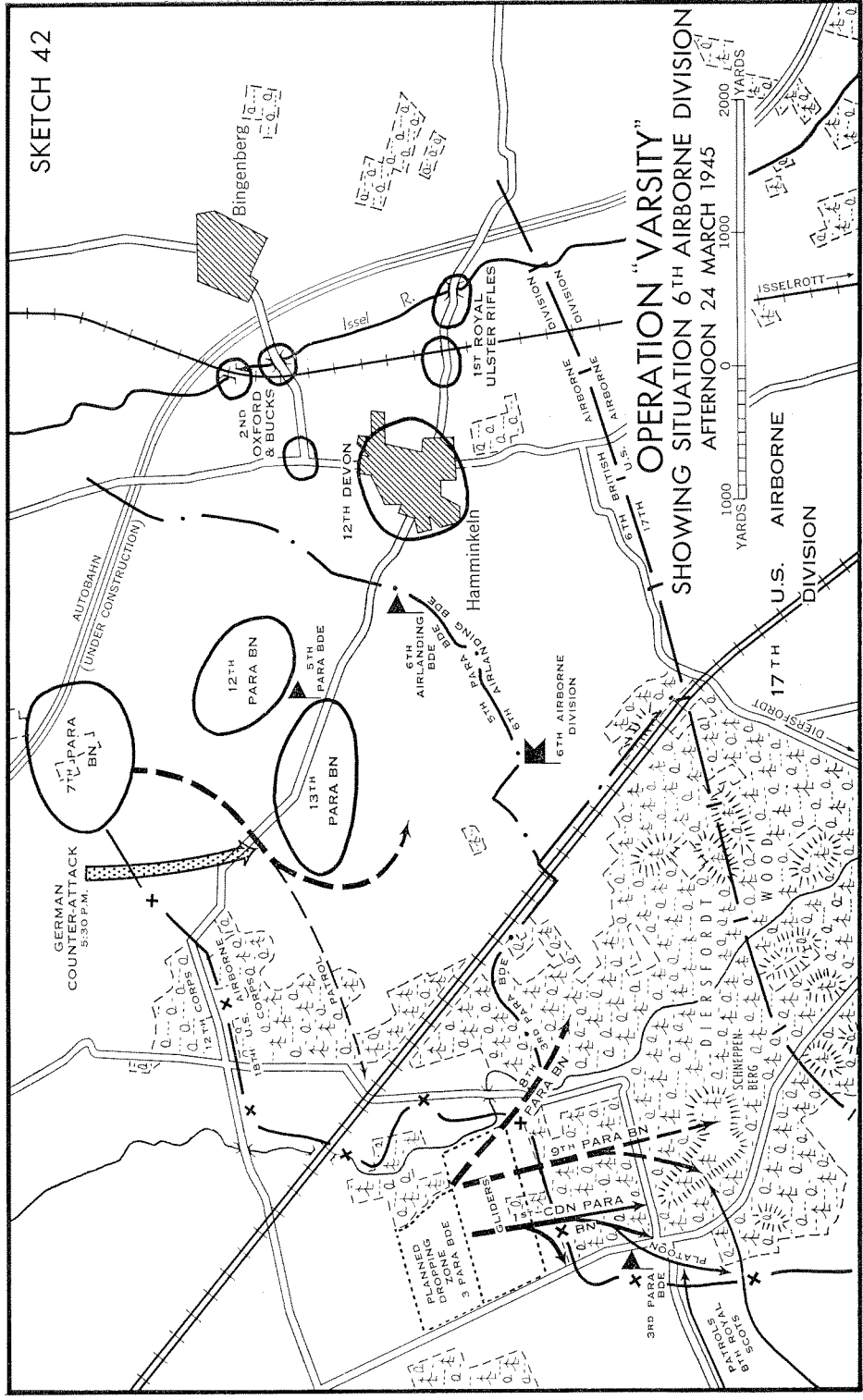
The attack across the great river could have been a very bloody operation. But in the actual circumstances existing on 23 March 1945 it was no such thing. Only six minutes after the Highland Division launched its attack west of Rees on the 30th Corps front, the leading wave reported its arrival on the far bank. The first really stiff opposition was met a mile and a half inland, at Speldrop. The Scots were supported by D.D. tanks of The Staffordshire Yeomanry (Queen's Own Royal Regiment), which had three tanks sunk during the crossing.<sup>35</sup> Rees was soon outflanked and the bridgehead rapidly expanded. Meanwhile, on the front of Lieut.-General N. M. Ritchie's 12th British Corps on the right, the 1st Commando Brigade established itself immediately west of Wesel, beginning its crossing at 10:00 p.m. At 10:30, 201 aircraft of the R.A.F. Bomber Command began a brief pulverizing assault on the town in which nearly 1100 tons of high explosive were dropped. The Commando Brigade then moved in. Even in these circumstances there was some fierce fighting before Wesel was clear.<sup>36</sup> In the early hours of 24 March the 15th (Scottish) Division attacked between Wesel and Rees and also secured its initial objectives, against spotty opposition.\* Simultaneously, formations of the Ninth United States Army crossed the Rhine south of Wesel and quickly overran the enemy's forward lines.<sup>37</sup>

The climax of these complicated operations occurred about ten o'clock on the morning of the 24th, when Allied airborne soldiers came down from clear skies

\*The able General Schlemm had been badly wounded when his headquarters was accurately hit by Allied aircraft on (he says) 21 March. General Gunther Blumentritt subsequently took over First Parachute Army.



SKETCH 42



**OPERATION "VARSITY"**  
**SHOWING SITUATION 6TH AIRBORNE DIVISION**  
**AFTERNOON 24 MARCH 1945**

2000 YARDS  
1000 YARDS  
0

upon the hazy battlefield east of the Rhine. "Varsity" drew together, with remarkable precision, parachutists and glider-borne troops from widely-separated bases in France and the United Kingdom. They were lifted by 1589 paratroop aircraft and 1337 gliders. A great force of British and American fighters provided escort and cover. There was virtually no enemy opposition in the air, but light antiaircraft guns made trouble, particularly about the British glider landing zones around Hamminkeln. Poor visibility at low altitudes made exact navigation difficult and hampered supporting fighter-bombers. Nevertheless, as early as noon, it was evident that "Varsity" was a success. The 17th United States Airborne Division then held positions east of Diersfordt and Isselrott, while farther north the 6th British Airborne Division was firmly established on its objectives.<sup>38</sup>

The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion landed with the rest of the 3rd Parachute Brigade just north of Diersfordt Wood. The unit's war diary complained that the men were "widely spread" due to the speed of the aircraft, adding, "Flak was fairly heavy over the Dropping Zone and several aircraft were seen to go down in flames." On landing, the Canadians met severe machine-gun and sniper fire; but they had cleared their objectives at the north end of the Schneppenberg "feature" by 11:30 a.m. Prisoners "constituted quite a problem because they numbered almost the strength of the battalion"; and "Germans were killed by the hundreds". The battalion's own casualties were 23 killed (including the Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. J. A. Nicklin, whose body was later found hanging from a tree in his parachute), 40 wounded and two prisoners of war.<sup>39</sup>

During this fighting one of the battalion's medical orderlies, Corporal F. G. Topham won the fourth Victoria Cross awarded to a Canadian during the campaign. As he treated casualties after the drop, Topham heard a cry for help from a wounded man in the open. The recommendation for the decoration continues:

Two medical orderlies from a field ambulance went out to this man in succession but both were killed as they knelt beside the casualty. Without hesitation and on his own initiative Corporal Topham went forward through intense fire to replace the orderlies who had been killed before his eyes. As he worked on the wounded man, he was himself shot through the nose. In spite of severe bleeding and intense pain he never faltered in his task. Having completed immediate first aid, he carried the wounded man steadily and slowly back through continuous fire to the shelter of the woods.

Refusing assistance for his own wound, he continued to perform his duties for two hours, until all casualties had been evacuated from the area. Then, having successfully fully resisted orders for his own removal, he rescued three men from a burning carrier at great risk from exploding ammunition. His heroic conduct serves to emphasize the great debt owed by the Army to its medical services.\*

### The 9th Brigade Beyond the Rhine

At 4:25 on the morning of 24 March the four rifle companies of The Highland Light Infantry of Canada (Lt.-Col. P. W. Strickland) began crossing the Rhine in Buffaloes under "sporadic shelling". The H.L.I., fighting in this phase under the

\*It may be noted that unit medical orderlies were not members of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps.

154th Brigade, was the first Canadian unit across. On the farther bank guides led it to an assembly area north-west of Rees. The 154th Brigade, we have seen, had met stiff resistance at Speldrop (the Highland Division's commander, General Rennie, was killed in the brigade area during the morning)\* and the Canadians were ordered to capture the village. Some parties of the Black Watch were still cut off and surrounded in Speldrop when, in the late afternoon, the Highland Light Infantry advanced against the outskirts. The defending paratroops fought fiercely, but the assault was pressed with determination over open ground, valuable supporting fire being provided by six field and two medium regiments and two 7.2-inch batteries.<sup>40</sup> Within the village the enemy held out desperately in fortified houses, which could only be reduced by "Wasp" flame-throwers and concentrations of artillery fire.

The battle continued well on into the morning [of the 25th]. Houses had to be cleared at the point of the bayonet and single Germans made suicidal attempts to break up our attacks.... It was necessary to push right through the town and drive the enemy out into fields where they could be dealt with.<sup>41</sup>

The H.L.I. relieved the trapped detachments of the Black Watch and put out the last embers of resistance. Their casualties during the two days' fighting were, for the circumstances, light: 33, including ten killed.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, on the afternoon of the 24th, the remainder of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade had joined their comrades east of the Rhine. The Highland Light Infantry of Canada came back under Brigadier Rockingham and that night his brigade, reinforced by the North Shore Regiment from the 8th, relieved the 154<sup>th</sup>.<sup>43</sup> During the next two days the 9th Brigade struggled to open an exit from the pocket formed by the Alter Rhein north-west of Rees. These operations centred about the villages of Grietherbusch, Bienen and Millingen. While they were in progress, on the afternoon of the 25th, the brigade came under the command of the 43rd (Wessex) Division which was moving into the bridgehead.<sup>44</sup> General Horrocks was thus gradually implementing his plan to develop the attack on a three-division front, with the 51st, 43rd and 3rd Canadian Divisions right, centre and left respectively.<sup>45</sup>

On the left of the whole Allied advance, The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders captured Grietherbusch without too much difficulty; but far heavier opposition was encountered at Bienen. There, on the 25th, The North Nova Scotia Highlanders attacked across open ground against very determined defenders. The Canadians had, in fact, drawn in the lottery the area on the British front where resistance was fiercest. The 15th Panzer Grenadier Division had been put in here from Army Group Reserve to hold the Alter Rhein bottleneck and the important road junction of Bienen.<sup>46</sup> Although artillery and medium machine-guns of The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.) lent support, the North Nova Scotias were soon pinned down by German automatic weapons and mortars. "The battalion had quite definitely lost the initiative and contact between platoons was next to impossible because of the murderous fire and heavy mortaring"<sup>47</sup> Early in the afternoon General Horrocks visited the Canadian sector

\*He was succeeded by Major-General G. H. A. MacMillan, who had previously commanded the 15th (Scottish) and 49th (West Riding) Divisions.

while, with the help of armour and Wasps, Lt.-Col. Forbes mounted a new attack against the village. By the end of the day his men had penetrated the southern portion; but their casualties had been very severe-114, of which 43 were fatal.<sup>48</sup> As the North Nova Scotias' diarist wrote, it had been "a long, hard, bitter fight against excellent troops who were determined to fight to the end". Helped by a troop of 17-pounder self-propelled guns of the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A., The Highland Light Infantry of Canada now took over the task of clearing the rest of Bienen. "Progress was very slow as the enemy fought like madmen."<sup>49</sup> But the H.L.I. were not to be discouraged, and during the morning of the 26th they mopped up the last resistance in the place.<sup>50</sup>

About a mile north-east of Bienen was Millingen, on the main railway line between Emmerich and Wesel. This village now became the target of The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment. It went in at noon on the 26th, with the support of artillery and armour, and was completely successful, all objectives being secured on the same afternoon; but the day cost the life of its commander, Lt.-Col. J. W. H. Rowley, who was killed by a shell early in the attack.<sup>51</sup> Simultaneously The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders cleared the villages to the west of Millingen. The Canadian build-up east of the Rhine continued with the arrival of the 1st Battalion, The Canadian Scottish Regiment, also under the command of the 9th Brigade.<sup>52</sup> As the bridgehead was steadily enlarged the remainder of the 3rd Division prepared to follow; on the 27th General Keefler established his tactical headquarters on the right bank while the balance of the 7th Brigade joined the 9th in the bridgehead; and at 5 p.m. he took over the left sector of the 30th Corps line. His last brigade, the 8th, crossed the river on 28 March. At noon that day the 2nd Canadian Corps (still under the Second Army) took the 3rd Canadian Division, and its sector of the bridgehead, under command.<sup>53</sup>

### Beginning the Northern Drive: Emmerich and Hoch Elten

"We have won the Battle of the Rhine", wrote Field-Marshal Montgomery in a new directive to his Army Commanders on 28 March.<sup>54</sup> He intended to exploit the favourable situation rapidly, driving hard for the line of the Elbe "so as to gain quick possession of the plains of northern Germany".

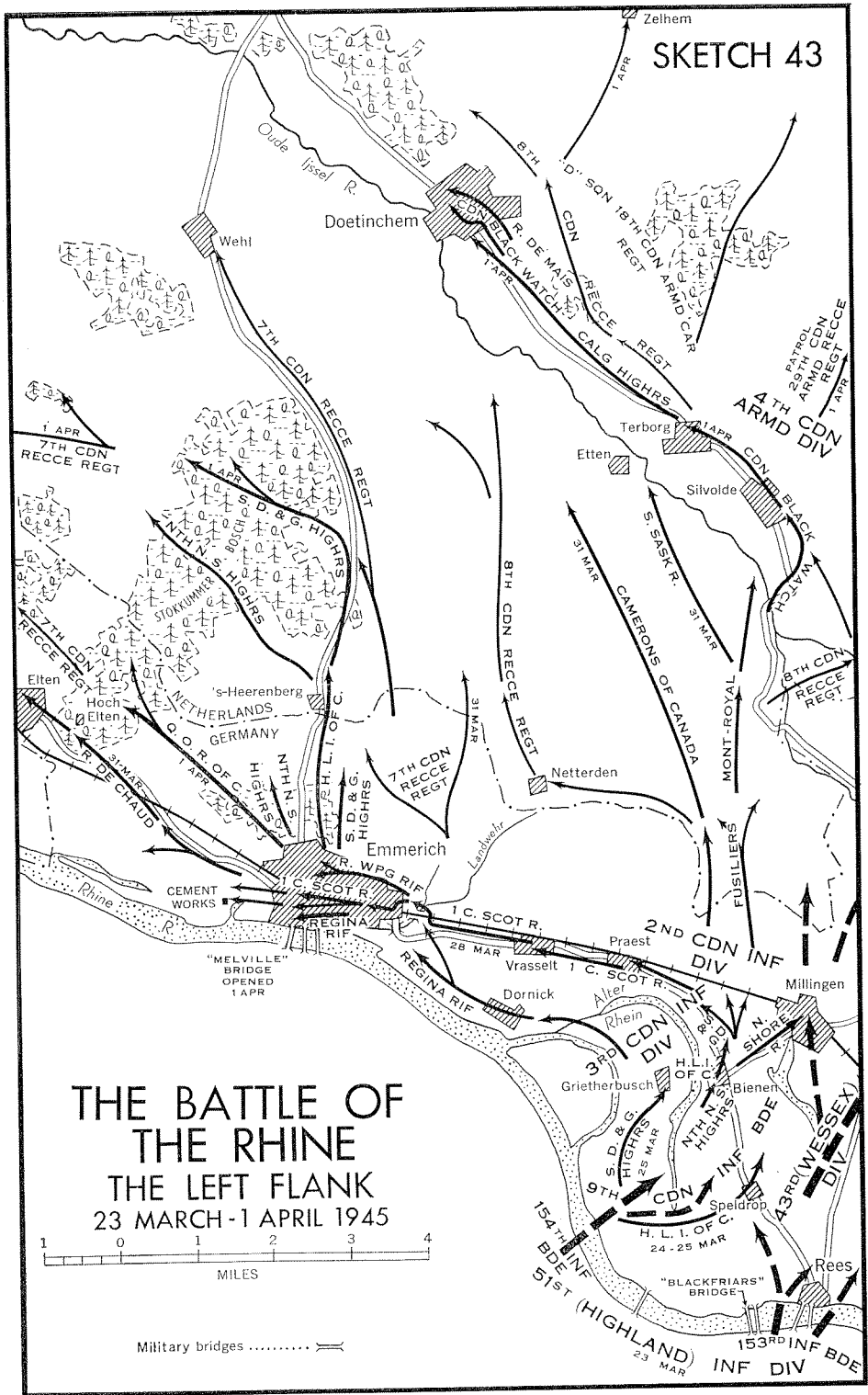
The Field-Marshal's "Plan in Outline" as he conceived it at this time may be quoted:

6. To advance to the line of the Elbe with Ninth Army and Second Army.
7. The right of Ninth Army to be directed on Magdeburg; the left of Second Army to be directed on Hamburg.
8. Canadian Army to open up the supply route to the north through Arnhem, and then to operate to clear Northeast Holland, the coastal belt eastwards to the Elbe, and West Holland.
9. Having reached the Elbe, Ninth and Second Armies will halt. Ninth Army will assist 12 Army Group in mopping up the Ruhr.

Second Army will assist Canadian Army in its task of clearing the coastal belt vide para 8.

The large area of Germany occupied by 21 Army Group will be brought under military government.

# SKETCH 43



## THE BATTLE OF THE RHINE THE LEFT FLANK 23 MARCH - 1 APRIL 1945



Military bridges ..... ≡

We shall see (below, page 543) that one assumption on which this programme was based was immediately voided by the Supreme Commander. Montgomery was disappointed in his expectation of retaining the Ninth Army.

As the Canadians moved in an eastward arc along the German coast, their right flank would be echeloned slightly behind the left of Second British Army. To cover the eastern flank of the 2nd Canadian Corps during its advance north of the Rhine Montgomery considered returning the 30th British Corps to General Crerar's command; but this proved unnecessary. The 1st Canadian Corps might be required to clear the north-western Netherlands; but the Commander-in-Chief hoped to avoid such a diversion from "the main object, which was the complete defeat of the German Armies in Northwest Europe".<sup>55</sup>

At the end of March careful consideration was also being given to the problem of an assault crossing of the River Ijssel from east to west—the task assigned to First Canadian Army in Montgomery's earlier directive. The object, we have seen, was to open a route through Arnhem and Zutphen to maintain forces east of the Rhine and the Ijssel. Although there was little likelihood that the enemy could offer effective opposition along the Ijssel, the river was itself a considerable obstacle, varying in width from 350 to 600 feet with high floodbanks. The problem was also complicated by a temporary shortage of engineering resources. A 21st Army Group proposal to carry out the plan with both Canadian Corps operating *east* of the Ijssel was considered impracticable by First Canadian Army because of limitations on crossings over the Rhine and routes east of the Ijssel.<sup>56</sup> As we shall see, the 2nd Corps actually made the Ijssel crossing in mid-April in conjunction with operations of the 1st Corps west of the river.

Meanwhile preparations for the northern drive continued. General Simonds established his command post near Bienen, where he could direct the 3rd Division during its advance on Emmerich while maintaining contact with the 30th Corps on his right flank.<sup>57</sup> The 2nd Canadian Division, which had been resting in the Reichswald, crossed the Rhine on 28-29 March, led by the 6th Brigade, now commanded by Brigadier J. V. Allard. It was to become the spearhead of the 2nd Corps' northern advance (Operation "Haymaker"), with the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions on its left and right respectively. At the end of the month the 4th Armoured Division joined the force in the bridgehead, the divisional staff being reminded of "the crowded sites of Normandy".<sup>58</sup>

Before General Crerar could take control of Canadian operations east of the Rhine it was essential to open a maintenance route across the river at Emmerich. This depended, in turn, on the progress of operations to capture the city and the nearby Hoch Elten ridge. This important job fell to the 3rd Canadian Division. On the night of 27-28 March Brigadier T. G. Gibson's 7th Infantry Brigade opened the attack on the eastern approaches to Emmerich. The Canadian Scottish quickly captured the village of Vrasselt and pressed on during the night; The Regina Rifle Regiment occupied Dornick the following morning. The units reached the city's outskirts before they met serious opposition, from units of the 6th Parachute and the 346th Infantry Divisions. General Keebler then ordered the 7th Brigade to continue its attacks to clear Emmerich and a wooded area north of the city while

the 8th Brigade prepared to pass through and attack the Hoch Elten feature. These operations were supported by tanks of the 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment) and "Crocodiles" of "C" Squadron, The Fife and Forfar Yeomanry.<sup>59</sup>

During the night of 28-29 March the Canadian Scottish experienced what they described as "probably the most vicious fighting of the battle for Emmerich"<sup>60</sup> in attempting to expand their bridgehead over the Landwehr Canal. A company of the Regina Rifles assisted in this difficult task and the stubborn enemy was gradually driven back into the city, while our engineers bridged the canal during the darkness. The way was then clear for concerted thrusts into the heart of the built-up area. Emmerich, which had a normal population of about 16,000, had been heavily bombed and was "completely devastated except for one street along which a few buildings were more or less intact"<sup>61</sup> (When the 1st Canadian Division passed through Emmerich nine days later it recorded that "only Cassino in Italy looks worse".)<sup>62</sup> On the morning of the 29th the Reginas, supported by tanks and Crocodiles, launched an attack to clear the southern portion of the city. Resistance stiffened as the operation progressed. "Enemy defences consisted mainly of fortified houses and tanks and as each house and building had to be searched progress was slow." When the troops forced their way into the central area of the city they faced a problem familiar from Normandy and the Channel Ports: "our tanks in support found it almost impossible to manoeuvre due to well-sited road blocks and rubble".<sup>63</sup> While the Reginas cleared the southern part of Emmerich, The Royal Winnipeg Rifles fought steadily through the northern section, beating back a fierce German counter-attack early on the 30th. On that day the Canadian Scottish again became the division's vanguard, capturing a large cement works on the western outskirts of the city as a start line for the 8th Brigade's operation. The 7th Brigade completed its task on the following morning. During the previous three days its infantry battalions had suffered 172 casualties, including 44 killed or died of wounds; the heaviest loss fell on the Canadian Scottish.<sup>64</sup>

The 8th Brigade was now to carry forward the attack and capture the Hoch Elten "feature". We have already noted the tactical importance of this high wooded ridge some three miles north-west of Emmerich. It dominated our engineers' Rhine bridging sites and German possession of it might thereby delay the full participation of First Canadian Army in the battle. For this reason the Hoch Elten area had been subjected to particularly severe artillery and air bombardment during the days preceding the attack. These measures had the effect of easing the task of the 8th Brigade when it advanced on the night of 30-31 March. The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada and Le Regiment de la Chaudiere led the way; the latter, with no doubt some pardonable exaggeration, describes the ground as "peut-etre le plus bombarde dans l'histoire de la guerre"<sup>65</sup> The enemy's surviving artillery and mortars fired on the axes of advance but, in general, there was little opposition. On the following night the Chaudiere entered the village of Elten, west of the ridge, while the Queen's Own and the North Shore completed the occupation of the wooded area. Meanwhile, on the 3rd Division's inland flank, the 9th Brigade had cleared the woods north of Emmerich and the nearby town of 's-Heerenberg.<sup>66</sup>

Elimination of the Germans' hold on Hoch Elten enabled the engineers to begin construction of a low-level Bailey pontoon bridge—a "Class 40" bridge capable of carrying tanks—across the Rhine at Emmerich. At noon on 31 March the 2nd Canadian Army Troops Engineers began work. They were assisted by various elements of British and Canadian services and a squadron of landing craft from Naval Force "U". Although the enemy could not interfere actively with the bridging operation, his minefields on the northern bank (the Rhine flows due west at Emmerich) had to be cleared, and a west wind impeded the manoeuvring of floating bays into position. Nevertheless, "Melville" Bridge, as it was named, in honour of Brigadier J. L. Melville, a former Chief Engineer of First Canadian Army, was opened to traffic at 8:00 p.m. the following day. Its length was 1373 feet, and from the moment it was opened "traffic went over it nose to tail night and day". Completion of two other bridges at Emmerich soon followed. One was a secondary (Class 15) bridge. The other, named for Brigadier A. T. MacLean, also a former Chief Engineer, was a high-level Bailey pontoon bridge (Class 40) which was built by the 1st Canadian Army Troops Engineers. It was given extended landing ramps in anticipation of further flooding.<sup>67</sup> Thus the way was clear for General Crerar to take control of Canadian operations east of the Rhine.\*

### Strategy for the Final Phase

While the Canadians were fighting down the right bank of the Rhine there was a significant development in Allied strategy.

General Eisenhower had had the considerable pleasure on 26 March of reporting to General Marshall that on the previous day Sir Alan Brooke, in conversation with him on the banks of the Rhine, had conceded that in the late controversy over strategy west of the river (above, pages 527-8) Eisenhower had been right.<sup>69</sup> The Supreme Commander now made a decision which had the effect of altering what the British considered to be the agreed strategy for the next phase—expressed in the words "I will advance across the Rhine in the north with maximum strength" in the Supreme Commander's message to the Combined Chiefs of Staff at Malta (above, page 528). On receiving a copy of Field-Marshal Montgomery's directive of 28 March (above, page 539), Eisenhower immediately told him that General Bradley's 12th Army Group was now to make the main offensive east of the Rhine; the Ninth U.S. Army would revert from Montgomery's command to Bradley's after the Ruhr was encircled. The strategic task given to Montgomery was reduced to that of protecting Bradley's left flank, though the Ninth Army was again to be available to him, if required, after the Elbe was reached.<sup>70</sup>

Eisenhower's motives at this point are to some extent conjectural. On 15 September 1944, we have seen, he had considered Berlin the great Allied objective, and had envisaged the main thrust as directed from the Ruhr upon the capital (above, page 316). But as early as 11 March the Russians were reported within

\*"Melville" was not the first Canadian bridge across the Rhine. On 26-28 March the 2nd Canadian Corps Troops R.C.E. built "Blackfriars" Bridge, a 1814-foot Class 40 low-level Bailey pontoon bridge, one of five bridges constructed across the river in the British area at Rees.<sup>68</sup>



30 miles of Berlin; and it appeared that they were likely to traverse this distance long before the Western Allies could cover 300 miles from the Rhine. Eisenhower explained later that he apprehended that a thrust to Berlin could only be supported by immobilizing formations along the rest of the front. He was anxious to join hands with the Russians as soon as possible and cut Germany in two. Moreover, there was anxiety (which proved to be groundless) over reports that the Germans intended to retreat into a "National Redoubt" in the Austrian Alps.<sup>71</sup> SHAEF Intelligence pointed out that these reports were unconfirmed. But far away in Washington General Marshall—to whose suggestions the Supreme Commander was always particularly attentive—urged him on 27 March to consider directing U.S. forces on Linz or Munich to guard against such a development.<sup>72</sup>

An American official writer has suggested that there may have been other factors, never made explicit. American public opinion could not be disregarded, and Bradley was known still to be fuming over Montgomery's press interview in January (above, page 450). This doubtless made it difficult for an American commander either to keep large U.S. forces under Montgomery or to give Bradley a role in the final phase subordinate to Montgomery's.<sup>73</sup> And as we have already noted the British position in these controversies was fatally weakened by the relative smallness of the British land forces. Without an American army Montgomery's army group could not play the leading part which the British Chiefs of Staff desired it to play.

Eisenhower made his offence, as it seemed to the British, still worse by communicating his new intentions direct to the head of the Soviet government and armed forces. He did this with great precipitation\* and without prior consultation with his British Deputy, the Combined Chiefs of Staff or his American and British political superiors. He told Stalin on 28 March that he intended to make his main thrust on the axis Erfurt—Leipzig—Dresden, and a secondary one on the axis Regensburg—Linz.<sup>75</sup> This led to strong protests from the British Prime Minister, who—though his sensitiveness to the possibility of post-war difficulties with Russia at earlier periods has been exaggerated—was now fully seized of the problem. He wrote to President Roosevelt on 1 April, "The Russian armies will no doubt overrun all Austria and enter Vienna. If they also take Berlin will not their impression that they have been the overwhelming contributor to our common victory be unduly imprinted in their minds, and may this not lead them into a mood which will raise grave and formidable difficulties in the future? I therefore consider that from a political standpoint we should march as far east into Germany as possible...."<sup>76</sup>

It appears now to be a general opinion—not least in the United States<sup>77</sup>—that this would have been the statesmanlike course. But at the time Mr. Churchill's representations met only stony refusals from the American leaders. President Roosevelt was already an ailing man (he was to die on 12 April) and General Marshall was apparently acting for him in military matters. Marshall's view of

\*The full text of the communications has not been published; but everything happened on 28 March, the day on which Montgomery issued his new directive. (He appears however to have given Eisenhower advance notice of it on the 27th.) A possible interpretation is that Montgomery's action nettled Eisenhower, that he immediately informed Montgomery of his decision, and that he simultaneously sent his telegram to Stalin—perhaps, an American author has plausibly suggested, with a view to making it impossible for the decision to be changed.<sup>74</sup>

such questions is reflected in a telegram he sent to Eisenhower on 28 April, in connection with a British suggestion that great political advantages would accrue to the Western powers if they, and not the Russians, liberated Prague: "Personally and aside from all logistic, tactical or strategical implications I would be loath to hazard American lives for purely political purposes."<sup>78</sup> It would almost seem that in the heat of argument some of the protagonists had temporarily lost sight of the fact that it is not for military objects that wars are fought.

At the end of March 1945 the war was virtually won, and a good peace and future international stability were far more important considerations than the immediate military situation. In these circumstances political leadership should have dictated their action to the military commanders. It was a singular misfortune that at this crisis there was virtually no political leadership in the United States. The policies of Eisenhower were fully sustained by Washington in spite of all British protests; his attitude that Berlin was "no longer a particularly important objective"<sup>79</sup> was accepted; and the Russians were allowed to capture the German capital, and occupy that of Czechoslovakia, without any Western attempt to anticipate them.

While this argument, so peculiar in retrospect, was going on between their chiefs, the soldiers on the Western Front achieved another great success. On 1 April the Ninth U.S. Army made contact with the First at Lippstadt, and the Ruhr was encircled. This meant more than the separation of Germany's greatest industrial area from the rest of the country: virtually the whole of Army Group "B", with the Fifth Panzer and Fifteenth Armies, was surrounded. The liquidation of the great pocket now proceeded in the face of only moderate resistance. It was cut in two on 8 April. On the 18th organized resistance here ended. Over 317,000 prisoners had then been taken in the pocket. Field-Marshal Model, the Army Group Commander, is believed to have committed suicide.<sup>80</sup> Nazi Germany was rapidly falling apart.

### The Re-Entry of First Canadian Army

At one minute before midnight of 1-2 April Headquarters First Canadian Army took control of the 2nd Canadian Corps' operations east of the Rhine. At noon that day General Crocker's 1st British Corps had returned to General Dempsey's command.<sup>81</sup> It had served continuously under General Crerar since the memorable days in Normandy, and the severance of this long and honourable association caused regret. On the other hand, it was a source of satisfaction to have General Foulkes' 1st Canadian Corps now under the Army in the Arnhem sector. The Corps Headquarters had arrived from Italy early in March, and had come under General Crerar at midday on the 15th of the month, in the first instance with only the 49th (West Riding) Division under command.<sup>82</sup> The new boundary between First Canadian and Second British Armies ran north from Terborg (some nine

\*It should be noted that, since zones of occupation had already been agreed upon, an advance to Berlin or Prague by the Western powers would have had to be followed by a withdrawal in due course.

miles north-east of Emmerich) to Zelhem and then swung through Ruurlo, Borculo, Neede and Delden to Borne.<sup>83</sup>

General Crerar issued a new directive to his Corps Commanders on 2 April.<sup>84</sup> General Simonds was to continue his northward advance with a view to forcing the Ijssel south of Deventer and making good the line Apeldoorn—Otterloo. Simultaneously, General Foulkes would enlarge the "island" south of the Neder Rijn, secure a bridgehead over that river west of Arnhem and proceed to capture Arnhem. In succeeding phases, Simonds, having secured the line Almelo—Deventer, would clear the north-eastern Netherlands, while Foulkes might be required to deal with the German forces in the western Netherlands. The Army Commander wrote:

Should it be decided that the clearing of West Holland by 1 Canadian Corps is not to be undertaken, then First Canadian Army will regroup on a two Corps front, and advance into Germany between the inter-Army boundary capturing, Right [with forces Second British Army], and the sea on its Left, destroying, or capturing, all enemy forces as it proceeds.

Throughout the operations outlined the 2nd Corps would have "a prior claim" upon the Army's resources and the support of No. 84 Group R.A.F.

The 2nd Corps' northern advance had already gathered momentum. After concentrating in the Bienen—Millingen area, the 2nd Division moved forward on the 3rd Division's right, recrossing the Dutch-German frontier and clearing Netterden on 30 March. In general, "scattered clusters" of opposition were reported, with only token resistance in certain sectors.<sup>85</sup> While the 3rd Division was capturing the Hoch Elten feature, General Matthews' troops thrust forward to Etten, seven miles north-east of Emmerich, with the Wessex Division temporarily on their right flank. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division moved in here on 1 April. General Vokes' immediate task was to occupy the Lochem—Ruurlo area and then press on across the Twente Canal to Delden and Borne.<sup>86</sup>

As our formations fanned out east of the Ijssel—Rhine junction, German disorganization facilitated rapid advance. It soon became apparent that apart from Zutphen, which was well protected by water lines connected with the Ijssel, the enemy's next natural defence line would be the Twente Canal. This ran eastward from the Ijssel north of Zutphen, past Lochem and through the southern outskirts of Hengelo to Enschede, roughly at right angles to the axes of the 2nd Corps. Defending the main portion of the Canal as far east as Hengelo was our old antagonist the 6th Parachute Division. East of the Rhine the division had been reinforced by replacement and training units, together with the 31st Reserve Parachute Regiment; the latter consisted of three battalions, one of which was an artillery unit armed with ordnance of various calibres. On the eve of the Canadian attack Plocher was also reinforced by a "Police Regiment" of doubtful quality.<sup>87</sup>

Pressing forward through Doetinchem and Vorden, the 2nd Canadian Division was first to cross the Twente Canal. On the night of 2-3 April the 4th Infantry Brigade made the assault near Almen, four miles east of Zutphen. The speed of the attack, following a rapid 20-mile advance, caught the enemy napping. Although the Germans had blown the bridges over the Canal, their defences were still dis-

organized. When The Royal Regiment of Canada crossed in assault boats, their first prisoners were mainly engineers, busy preparing positions for infantry who arrived too late to oppose the crossing. Our own engineers quickly began work on a ferry, while a company of The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry reinforced the bridgehead. About midnight the enemy reacted vigorously, beginning "a most intense mortaring and shelling of the proposed ferry site" and temporarily stopping the engineers' work.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, they soon had rafts operating across the Canal and, during the next day, these carried armoured cars of the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment (14th Canadian Hussars), self-propelled guns of the 2nd Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A., and tanks of the 10th Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse) to the infantry's support. The Germans mistakenly believed that the Canadians used amphibious tanks.<sup>89</sup> Although the enemy launched spasmodic counterattacks, and continued to interfere with bridging and rafting, the bridgehead was consolidated and expanded on 3 April. At the end of the day The Essex Scottish Regiment was preparing to join the remainder of the brigade north of the Canal and the way was clear for the 5th Brigade to continue the northern drive. The 4th Brigade's losses had been comparatively light.<sup>90</sup> Meanwhile, the 6th Brigade had eliminated resistance on the left flank, closer to the Ijssel River.

The casualties inflicted on the *Wehrmacht* in earlier battles were obviously having a significant effect. The 4th Brigade noted,<sup>91</sup>

The enemy tactics appear almost juvenile at times—he is doing everything the book says as usual, but his training here shows that the calibre of troops opposing us is not what it used to be. Each enemy attack suffered very heavy casualties and usually a number of PW [were] taken-grubby, dirty, slender youths, boys and old men.

Although further German resistance was rapidly becoming meaningless, fierce struggles would continue in isolated sectors until the disintegration was complete.

Just west of Delden, 20 miles east of the 2nd Division's crossing, the 4th Armoured Division carved out a second bridgehead across the Twente. On 2 April General Vokes' tanks and motorized infantry had reached the canal at Lochem, relieving a formation of the Wessex Division, but found no suitable crossing site.<sup>92</sup> The enemy held the far bank in some strength, inflicting casualties on our troops. Then, on the evening of the 3rd, Lt.-Col. R. C. Coleman's Lincoln and Welland Regiment (fighting under the 4th Armoured Brigade) threw two companies across the canal and a company of The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor) made a diversionary attack against lock-gates about 1000 yards west of the main crossing. After indulging in "scattered sniping and small arms fire" throughout the day, the enemy was able to direct only "moderate machine-gun and mortar fire"<sup>93</sup> against the assault. Counter-attacks were beaten off by our infantry with the help of the divisional artillery and the bridgehead was secured. Again the pressing problem was one of bridging: it was essential to construct quickly a bridge that would carry the heavy vehicles of the 4th Armoured Brigade. Fortunately, the Lake Superior Regiment discovered at the lock-gates a 30-foot gap which could be bridged. Initially there had been no intention of bridging there, but now the 9th Field Squadron R.C.E. was sent in and in two hours and a quarter the bridge was built and the brigade began to roll across. The brunt of the operations on 3-4 April

fell on The Lincoln and Welland Regiment, which suffered 67 casualties.<sup>94</sup>

Opposition now lessening, our troops occupied Delden and pushed on through Borne to the important communications centre of Almelo, eight miles north of the canal. On 4-5 April units of the 4th Armoured Brigade cleared snipers out of this town amid the rejoicings of its people. Other elements of the 4th Division were already beyond the town, driving on across the German frontier towards the Ems River at Meppen.<sup>95</sup>

### Zutphen and Deventer

On 5 April Field-Marshal Montgomery issued a new directive.<sup>96</sup> He noted that the Ninth U.S. Army had been withdrawn from his command at midnight on 3-4 April and had passed to the 12th Army Group; this had "definite repercussions" on the operations of his own army group, and his orders of 28 March (above, page 539) required modification accordingly.

The new instructions ordered the Second Army to "operate to secure the line of the Weser within the Army boundaries" and to capture Bremen. It was then to seize bridgeheads over the Weser, Aller and Leine and be prepared to advance to the Elbe and establish bridgeheads over it. As for First Canadian Army, it was to carry out the tasks prescribed for it on 9 March (above, page. 531):

11. One Corps, of at least two Divisions, will then operate westwards to clear up western Holland. This may take some time; it will proceed methodically until completed. See para 14.
12. Simultaneously with the clearing of western Holland, the remainder of Canadian Army will operate northwards to clear northeast Holland, and then eastwards to clear the coastal belt and all enemy naval establishments up to the line of the Weser. During these operations Canadian Army will operate with one armoured division on the axis Almelo—Neuenhaus—Meppen—Sogel—Friesoythe—Oldenburg, so as to afford a measure of security to the left flank of Second Army.
13. Having cleared Northeast Holland and the coastal belt, as outlined in para 12, Canadian Army will be prepared to take over Bremen from Second Army to operate eastwards on the Hamburg axis. It will have the task of protecting the left flank of Second Army in the advance to the Elbe, and of clearing the Cuxhaven peninsula.
14. In the operations of Canadian Army the available resources in engineers, bridging equipment, etc, may not be sufficient for all purposes. In this case the operations vide para 12 and 13 will take priority; the clearing of western Holland will take second priority.

While General Simonds' centre and right flank were making rapid progress north of the Twente Canal the 3rd Canadian Division, on his left sector, was preparing to capture Zutphen and Deventer. Advancing steadily northward from the Hoch Elten area, it had cleared the right bank of the Ijssel, meeting light opposition at Wehl on 2 April. Since, at this time, the flanking 2nd Division was in the lead, Simonds instructed that formation to "tap out and, if opposition not heavy, capture Zutphen".<sup>97</sup> But the enemy's evident intention to hold the town, and the 2nd Division's rapid progress north of the Twente Canal, soon made it necessary for the 3rd Division to take on Zutphen.

While the 8th Infantry Brigade contained Doesburg, and the 7th cleared the western end of the Twente on 5 April, the 9th Brigade closed in on the southern



and eastern approaches to Zutphen. This sector was defended by the 361st Infantry Division of the 88th Corps,\* with a parachute training battalion under command." These troops, many of them "teen-aged youngsters",<sup>99</sup> fought very fiercely. The 9th Brigade encountered stiff resistance at Baronsbergen and Warnsveld, on the outskirts of the town, which was covered by old water defences connected with the Ijssel. To pass one drainage ditch the pioneer platoon of The Highland Light Infantry of Canada built a bridge "with 4.2" mortar boxes, reinforced with timber and ballast"-and it proved strong enough to carry the supporting tanks of "A" Squadron of the 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment).<sup>100</sup>

Having secured the approaches to the town, the 9th Brigade was withdrawn on 7 April to add momentum to the drive north of the Twente and the 8th continued the operations to reduce Zutphen. It had launched its attack on the 6th, developing a two-pronged thrust into the town from the east with the North Shore Regiment on the right and Le Regiment de la Chaudiere on the left. The North Shore ran into heavy opposition, with hand-to-hand fighting, but the Chaudiere were able to make good progress. Accordingly, the plan was changed, the North Shore being withdrawn to pass through the right flank of the Chaudiere. Fighting continued on the 7th. Sometimes our infantry were pinned down by snipers and machine-gun fire. Nevertheless, as in the operations on the Twente Canal, "for the first time there was evidence that the enemy's attitude was gradually changing and although he fought well at times, the old tenacity was lacking".<sup>101</sup> The *coup de grace* was given on the morning of the 8th, when the brigade penetrated the factory area with the help of Crocodiles. By midday the historic old town had been completely cleared, some of the defenders escaping across the Ijssel in rubber boats.<sup>102</sup>

As the 8th Brigade was completing its work at Zutphen, the 9th was establishing a bridgehead across the Schipbeek Canal, some five miles north of the Twente, and the 7th was preparing to assault Deventer. The capture of this town was an essential preliminary to General Simonds' attack across the Ijssel in conjunction with General Foulkes' operations at Arnhem.

Deventer, like Zutphen, lay on the right bank of the Ijssel with its approaches well protected by a maze of waterways. Again it was necessary to attack from the east. After "a very hard struggle",<sup>103</sup> the 7th Brigade crossed the Zijkanaal, running north-east from the town's outskirts, on the evening of 9 April. The Canadian Scottish led the way, capturing the nearby village of Schalkhaar without difficulty. When three German tanks appeared on the morning of the 10th one was quickly destroyed and the others put to flight by "B" Squadron of the 27th Armoured Regiment. At midday Brigadier Gibson's main attack began, with the Canadian Scottish and The Royal Winnipeg Rifles right and left, respectively, and The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, temporarily under command, maintaining pressure against the town's south-eastern approaches. The enemy was forced back

\*As an illustration of the command arrangements in the German forces during this period, it may be noted that the 88th Corps passed from the control of the Twenty-Fifth Army to that of Army Group Student on 3 April and, three days later, returned to Twenty-Fifth Army. The 361st was a *Volksgrenadier* division.

to his last major defensive line—an anti-tank ditch surrounding the town—but this did not long delay our troops. Resistance crumbled as many Germans were captured and others attempted to escape across the Ijssel, a manoeuvre rendered hazardous by the cooperating artillery of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division.<sup>104</sup> By the evening of the 10th the brigade had occupied the main part of Deventer and, during the night, The Regina Rifle Regiment passed through the Winnipegs, clearing the south-eastern suburbs. Twenty-four hours after the main attack began Deventer was entirely in our hands, much of the credit for the speedy clearing of the town being due to "the extremely-well-organized Dutch Underground". The 7th Brigade's total infantry casualties (including those of the Queen's Own) were 126; the brigade reported capturing about 500 prisoners.<sup>105</sup>

### Operation "Cannonshot": Crossing the Ijssel

At the end of the first week of April General Crerar, in accordance with Montgomery's directive, still gave top priority to the task of opening a route from Arnhem to Zutphen. The reduction of Deventer and elimination of German resistance on the eastern bank of the Ijssel prepared the way for the decisive stage of these operations. Thus by 11 April the 2nd Corps was ready to carry out the initial phase of the Army Commander's instructions for Operation "Cannonshot"—"the crossing of the Ijssel from the East, and the capture of Apeldoorn and high ground between that place and Arnhem".<sup>106</sup> As will be seen in the next chapter, the 1st Canadian Corps was already in position to attack Arnhem, with both Corps planning converging operations, north of that city, between the Ijssel and the Neder Rijn. The formation selected to make the assault across the Ijssel was Major-General H. W. Foster's 1st Canadian Infantry Division, only recently arrived from Italy (above, page 529). Temporarily under General Simonds, it immediately began preparations for its first operation in North-West Europe.

"Cannonshot" was launched by the 2nd Infantry Brigade on the afternoon of the 11th, about midway between Zutphen and Deventer. The assault was delivered by Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada under cover of extensive artillery support, including smoke-screens on the flanks, concentrations of high explosive on known defensive positions and counterbattery and counter-mortar bombardments.<sup>107</sup> At 4:30 p.m. the two battalions began crossing the river in "Buffaloes" of the 79th Armoured Division; not having used these vehicles in Italy, they had trained carefully with them before the operation. Surprise was achieved and "the action went speedily and according to plan".<sup>108</sup> On the left the Seaforth reported no opposition and, 65 minutes after the assault began, all their companies had consolidated on objectives; on the right, the Patricias encountered stiffer resistance, but after knocking out a French tank used by the Germans they too secured their ground.<sup>109</sup> By six o'clock the first phase of "Cannonshot" had been successfully completed. Meanwhile, five companies of engineers had started bridging and rafting operations on the eastern bank of the Ijssel.\* The

\*The engineers under the Commanding Royal Engineer 1st Canadian Infantry Division had been increased for "Cannonshot" by the addition of the 32nd Field Company R.C.E. He also had under his command the 277th Company of the (British) Pioneer Corps.



enemy's artillery quickly registered this vital target and shellfire inflicted 17 casualties on the sappers. Nevertheless, by two o'clock on the following morning they had two rafts and a bridge ready to take wheeled and tracked vehicles across the river.<sup>110</sup>

On 12 April the 1st Brigade passed through the 2nd to expand the bridgehead westward towards Apeldoorn. In the course of the fighting the 48th Highlanders of Canada lost their Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. D. A. Mackenzie, who was killed by a shell. The German artillery was accurate and troublesome, and the 2nd Brigade noted that houses in this theatre, unlike those in Italy, "provided no shelter from shelling due to the fact that houses were made of brick and not stone or cement". The 3rd Brigade now crossed the Ijssel and the attack progressed rapidly on a wider frontage. By six o'clock on the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup>—at which time the division reverted to 1st Canadian Corps command—patrols had penetrated nearly halfway to Apeldoorn. General Foster's troops were then preparing for the final thrust into the town.<sup>111</sup> The concluding stages of "Cannonshot", an integral part of the 1st Corps' operations, will be described in the next chapter.

### On to the North Sea

While operations were in progress on General Simonds' left flank to open a maintenance route across the Ijssel, rapid advances were being made on the remainder of his front. We have seen that in the centre and on the right the 2nd and 4th Divisions had forced the Twente Canal at the beginning of April. The latter then veered north-east through Almelo, recrossing the Dutch-German frontier on 5 April, while the 2nd and 3rd Divisions continued their drive to clear the north-eastern Netherlands. In this task they were assisted by the 1st Polish Armoured Division, which rejoined the 2nd Corps on 8 April,<sup>112</sup> and later by the 5th Canadian Armoured Division. Before describing the armoured operations on the eastern flank, we may conveniently consider the striking developments in the centre, where the 2nd Division advanced more than 80 miles in a direct line, from the Twente to the North Sea, in less than a fortnight.

When the 2nd Division lunged forward from the Twente available intelligence indicated that there could not be more than three German divisions in the northern and eastern Netherlands. Headquarters 21st Army Group did not favour trapping these formations in the western portion of the country since this would side-track Allied forces needed elsewhere. Rather, the intention was to press the enemy north and east of his Ijssel defences, forcing him to escape from the northern end of the "bag",<sup>113</sup> On 6 April the 6th Infantry Brigade reached the Schipbeek Canal about eight miles east of Deventer. The enemy had blown the only bridge in the area, but The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada found that marching troops could still cross on the damaged structure and against light opposition they soon established a bridgehead on the northern bank. The following day the 2nd Division drove on in the direction of Holten. The divisional staff noted that the supporting R.A.F. were "howling for targets" but that "with this fast moving advance, enemy headquarters, gun positions and installations are almost impossible to pinpoint".<sup>114</sup>

Meanwhile, preparations had been concluded for using airborne troops to assist the advance to the North Sea. At the end of March Brigadier J. M. Calvert, who commanded the Special Air Service troops, had discussed plans for their employment with officers at General Crerar's headquarters. These troops were organized and trained to operate in small parties of about one officer and 10 to 15 men; they could be dropped in advance of our ground formations and, though only lightly armed, could cause confusion in German rear areas, help the Dutch Resistance and in other ways assist the progress of our divisions. Early in April it was agreed that two operations would be mounted: "Amherst", in the north-eastern Netherlands (with the cooperation, in a ground role, of the 1st Belgian Parachute Battalion) and "Keystone"\* west of the IJssel.<sup>116</sup> The airborne force selected for "Amherst" comprised French units, the 2nd and 3rd *Regiments de Chasseurs Parachutistes*, operating under British command, and amounting to about 700 men equipped with wireless sets and armoured "Jeeps". Their general task was the preservation of canal and river bridges on the 2nd Corps' axes of advance; their first-priority special task was the preservation of two airfields at Steenwijk. They were also expected to harass the Germans and provide guides and information for forward elements of First Canadian Army.<sup>117</sup>

The drop took place on the night of 7-8 April. Although the weather was barely acceptable, aircraft of No. 38 Group R.A.F. carried the S.A.S. troops from England, dropping them with varying degrees of accuracy in the triangle formed by the towns of Groningen, Coevorden and Zwolle. There was no German anti-aircraft fire, but due to certain deficiencies in training, it proved impossible to drop the units' jeeps.<sup>118</sup> Some were afterwards brought in overland and delivered to their owners. Contact was soon established at various points with the rapidly advancing divisions of the 2nd Corps. Early on the morning of 9 April the 18th Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons) met the French near Meppel, while at Coevorden a Polish motorized battalion joined hands with the Belgian component of the S.A.S.<sup>119</sup> During succeeding days isolated detachments of parachutists fought almost continuously, sustaining 91 casualties, but capturing many prisoners, destroying communications and generally dislocating the enemy's withdrawal. At Spier, halfway between Meppel and Assen, on the morning of the 11th, the C.O. of the 3rd R.C.P., having boldly captured the village with a small party, was rescued from imminent annihilation by far superior German forces by the timely arrival, in the best manner of the films, of vehicles of the 8th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment.<sup>120</sup>

The plan had been based upon the assumption that the S.A.S. troops would be "overrun" by our ground forces in not more than 72 hours, and it had been decided accordingly not to re-supply them by air from the United Kingdom.† In some areas, however, for various reasons, the ground troops did not effect the link-up so soon, and many S.A.S. detachments had to operate on their own for six or seven days. Brigadier Calvert, who was watching and superintending the operation from Head-

\*"Keystone" was intended to assist Operation "Cannonshot" (above, page 551). It was finally cancelled on 14 April on account of the unsuitability of the proposed dropping zone.<sup>115</sup>

†No. 84 Group, however, did drop some weapons and equipment on 8 and 12 April.

quarters First Canadian Army, asked General Crerar on 10 April to deflect part of the Polish Armoured Division west into the "Amherst" area. The Army Commander however decided that he would not be justified in diverting an important part of his force from its main object for the purpose of helping the S.A.S., particularly as food was reported to be plentiful where they were operating; and Calvert, in retrospect, agreed that his judgement had been sound.<sup>121</sup>

In the circumstances of that moment, with the Germans as disorganized as they were, it is difficult to make a precise assessment of Operation "Amherst". The headquarters of the 1st British Airborne Corps considered that the effect on enemy morale was "considerable"; "numerous troops who were badly needed for defence against advancing ground forces had to be deployed over a very wide area against these French regiments"<sup>122</sup> The reports make no mention of the Steenwijk airfields,<sup>123</sup> but the S.A.S. evidently did not succeed in carrying out their mission here, for on 12 April the 2nd Canadian Division reported the area still in enemy hands, "field lightly cratered".<sup>124</sup> The General Staff diarist of H.Q. 2nd Corps summed the matter up thus on 15 April: "These units captured two hundred and killed one hundred and fifty Germans, preventing destruction of numerous bridges and generally harassing the Germans. . . . The two battalions combined jumped 690. To date 492 recovered, 134 missing, 29 wounded and 24 killed."

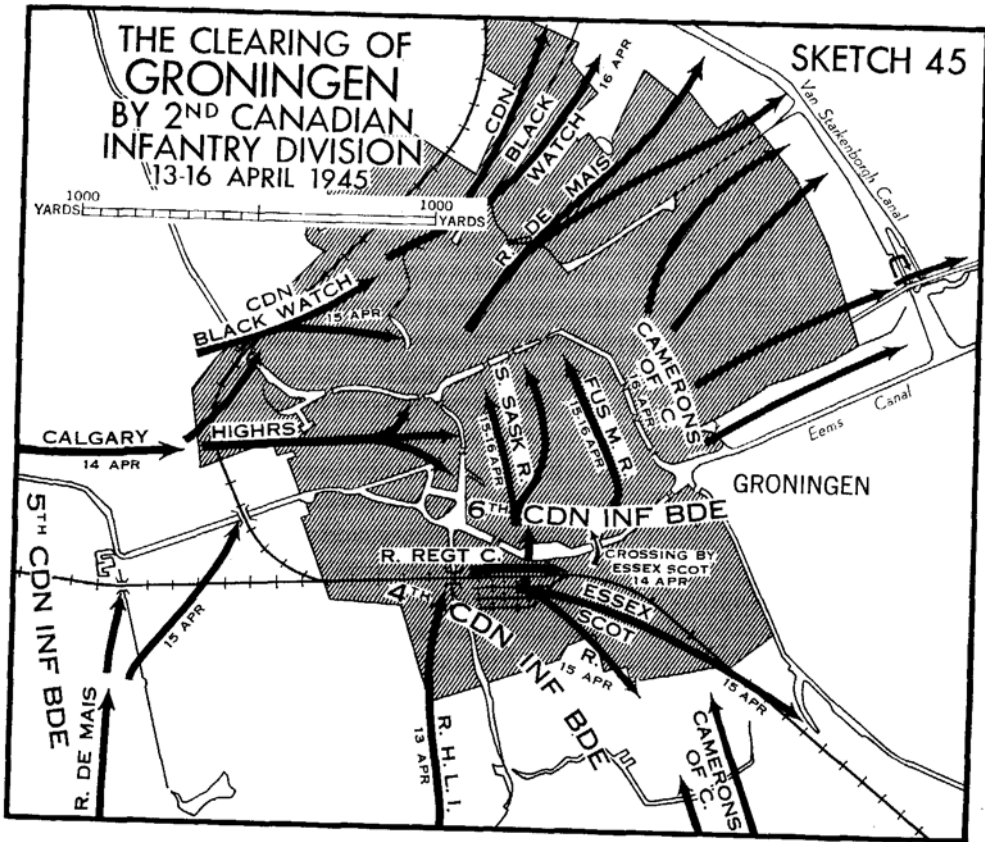
Assisted by "Amherst", the 2nd Division moved rapidly northward towards Groningen, advancing along one main axis, with the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment in front of the forward brigade.<sup>125</sup> The division's left flank was protected by the 1st Armoured Car Regiment (The Royal Canadian Dragoons), temporarily under General Matthews' command.

As the enemy was unable to muster any significant support from guns or mortars, the tactics employed consisted of holding important cross-roads, any nearby villages, and defending every water-line until breached—when a withdrawal took place, generally at night. However, during the last five days [12-16 April], co-ordinated direction disappeared and he seemed disposed to withdraw any hour of the day—generally leaving it too late to be successful.<sup>126</sup>

The 5th Brigade captured Holten on 8 April; three days later they were in Ommen. The 6th Brigade pushed forward to make contact with the S.A.S. On the night of the 11th-12th Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, finding a canal bridge intact west of Beilen, put in a surprise attack on the town from the rear and took it after two hours' fighting. The 4th Brigade now drove on through the 6th and early on 13 April it seized Assen. Here again the town was cut off from the rear and 600 surprised Germans were captured. Everywhere Dutch civilians danced in the streets and cheered their liberators.<sup>127</sup>

The climax to these operations occurred at Groningen, in the Middle Ages a member of the Hanseatic League, in modern times a provincial capital and the sixth city of the Netherlands. On the evening of 13 April the 4th Brigade penetrated the city's south-western outskirts; but miscellaneous German units, aided by Dutch S.S. troops, resisted strenuously.\* "The fighting continued on into the night—

\*The story of the battle has been told in Dutch by Dr. W. K. J. J. Van Ommen Kloeke in an illustrated monograph, *De Bevrijding van Groningen* (The Liberation of Groningen), published at Assen in 1947.



fierce hand-to-hand encounters—with our men having to clear every room of fourstorey apartments, and even then the snipers would come back again because our troops could not occupy so much space."<sup>128</sup> A characteristic of the defence was the siting of machine-guns in basements. S.S. troops were discovered sniping in civilian clothes, and orders were issued for these men to be shot on sight. On the evening of 14 April, the Essex Scottish found a bridge intact across a large canal in the southern portion of the city; "A" Company sped across it in "Kangaroos" and seized houses that dominated it.<sup>129</sup> The 6th Brigade then passed through simultaneously, the 5th moved into Groningen from the west. "In spite of the severe fighting ... great crowds of civilians thronged the streets—apparently more excited than frightened by the sound of nearby rifle and machine-gun fire."<sup>130</sup> Out of regard for these civilians, the Canadians did not bomb or shell the city, thereby accepting the possibility of delay and additional casualties.<sup>131</sup>

The German commander and his staff surrendered on the 16th, but stubborn remnants of the garrison held out a little longer. The last incident was the crossing on this day of the Van Starckenborgh Canal at the city's eastern edge. The Germans had raised a lift-bridge, and the mechanism to lower it was on the far side. Dutch civilians, one of whom was the bridge-tender, offered to help. These brave men,

accompanied by some of the Camerons, crossed the canal under fire on a ladder. The bridge-tender was wounded, but the bridge was duly lowered. German resistance then collapsed. The four-day battle cost the 2nd Division 209 infantry casualties; during the same period it captured approximately 2400 prisoners—described as "every kind of troops under the sun"<sup>132</sup> Meanwhile, on the 15th, the Royal Canadian Dragoons, still under the division's command, had entered Leeuwarden and reached the North Sea north of Dokkum and at Zoutkamp. Thus the 2nd Canadian Corps' drive from the Rhine attained its objective in the centre. In 16 days the 2nd Division had advanced 112 air miles, built bridges totalling 1140 feet in length and captured over 5000 prisoners.<sup>133</sup>

To the west of the 2nd Division the 3rd maintained an almost equally rapid advance. We have already seen that by 11 April it had cleared Deventer, and this proved to be "the last determined resistance offered by the enemy" during the division's northern drive.<sup>134</sup> The 9th Infantry Brigade became the vanguard in a dash for Leeuwarden, nearly 70 miles in a direct line north of Deventer and only ten miles from the coast. The infantry rode in borrowed "Rams" (armoured gun tractors) of the 6th Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A. and miscellaneous vehicles of the 14th Field Regiment R.C.A. and 27th Armoured Regiment.<sup>135</sup> Delayed only by demolitions, Brigadier Rockingham's men drove north to the Overijsselsch Canal, south-east of Zwolle, where the enemy made a futile show of resistance with some infantry and only three armoured vehicles. On 14 April the 9th Brigade pushed on through Meppel and Steenwijk, receiving a tumultuous welcome from overjoyed civilians in a countryside "blurred with orange flags, banners and designs". The 7th occupied Zwolle, assisted by a perilous reconnaissance by Private Leo Major of Le Regiment de la Chaudiere (temporarily under this brigade's command) which won him the D.C.M.<sup>136</sup>

The divisional reconnaissance unit, the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars), sped north along the main road from Steenwijk to Leeuwarden. Their path was barred by a blown bridge near Akkrum; but "With the aid of civilians a barge was towed into the gap and a rough bridge was constructed which would take tanks."<sup>137</sup> On the afternoon of the 15th the reconnaissance patrols reached Leeuwarden, only to find the Royal Canadian Dragoons already in the town. Organized resistance had virtually ended in Friesland. On the 16th The Highland Light Infantry of Canada dealt quickly with the German garrison at Harlingen, on the coast:

This was a 'rush order' attack. Preliminary reconnaissance, and plan of attack were, of necessity, done largely from the map while the Battalion rolled forward with all possible speed, towards their objective. The attack was entirely successful, over 400 PW were captured, many of them in a drunken condition. The Battalion suffered no casualties . . . .<sup>138</sup>

Meanwhile, the Queen's Own Rifles were clearing the eastern end of the great causeway dividing the Ijsselmeer (the sometime "Zuider Zee") from the sea. With the help of tanks and R.A.F. Typhoons they completed their task on 18 April, while the North Shore Regiment took nearby Makkum. The 3rd Division reported, "Whole div area now clear of enemy."<sup>139</sup> It was already preparing to assume a new

role on the border between the North-East Netherlands and North-West Germany. In the course of their advance from the Rhine to the North Sea, General Keefler's men had fought forward 115 miles in 26 days, built 36 bridges and captured 4600 prisoners.<sup>140</sup>

### The Advance to the Kusten Canal

We may now turn to the operations in the 2nd Corps' eastern sector, where the 4th Canadian and 1st Polish Armoured Divisions penetrated deeply into German territory in mid-April. Immediately after the 4th Division crossed the Twente Canal it was directed to seize Neuenhaus, Emlichheim and Coevorden as a base for an advance on two northern axes: one through Meppen and Papenburg to Leer, near the mouth of the Ems, the other from Emmen to Nieuwe-Schans, on the right flank of the 2nd Division.<sup>141</sup> However, after the Polish division came under General Simonds' command, on the 8th, it partially took over the second axis, west of the Ems, while the 4th Division made its main advance parallel to, and east of the river. It was already clear that, when the enemy had been driven out of this corner of the Netherlands, the 2nd Corps' next objective would be the city of Oldenburg, 40 miles east of the Dutch-German frontier.<sup>142</sup>

Since, during this period, General Simonds was concerned with preparations on his western flank for Operation "Cannonshot", Field-Marshal Montgomery suggested that the 4th Division should come temporarily under Headquarters 30th British Corps. General Crerar replied that he had already discussed this course with Simonds and did not favour it. He wrote, "Vokes' activities next few days laid down and understood and he is in quite adequate communication with Simonds. By 13th Apr Simonds should be able to hand over Foster and completion of Cannonshot operation to Foulkes and under present arrangements will then have dispositions Foster [? Vokes] Maczek Matthews Keefler as he wants them for subsequent operations." In these circumstances the command arrangements were left as they stood.<sup>143</sup> The episode illustrates the preference of Canadian commanders for keeping Canadian formations under Canadian higher control—when and if this could be done without prejudice to operations.

General Vokes' tanks and motorized infantry resumed their northward advance on 5 April, crossing the Overijsselsch Canal and sweeping on to Coevorden and across the border to the outskirts of Meppen. The following day the 4th Armoured Brigade occupied the suburbs of Meppen on the left bank of the Ems, while the 10th Infantry Brigade encountered somewhat stiffer resistance at Wierden, only a few miles west of Almelo. Evidently fearing a movement by our troops across his northward line of retreat to Groningen, the enemy was surprisingly active in this area, and Wierden was not finally cleared until the 9th. Meanwhile, on the 8th, The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise's), fighting under the 4th Armoured Brigade, made an assault crossing over the Ems at Meppen, suffering only one casualty and speedily overrunning the town. Among the numerous prisoners captured were 17-year-olds with six to eight weeks' military experience.<sup>144</sup>

After our armour crossed the Ems the German defence weakened perceptibly. A divisional staff officer explained, "The enemy was, perhaps, never entirely out of control, but he appeared to be seriously disorganized. For the first time we began to meet the passive opposition of demolitions and mines rather more often than the active opposition of ground troops."<sup>145</sup> The main problem during this phase of the advance was to maintain the momentum of the 4th Armoured Brigade over increasingly difficult terrain. The land was flat and boggy; tanks could not deploy, and as a rule no more than one squadron could be used effectively at any one time. The brunt of the fighting thus fell upon the infantry and the motor battalion (the Lake Superior Regiment).<sup>146</sup> The latter cleared Sogel on the 9th. German infantry counter-attacked several times on the 10th, on one occasion penetrating well within the town, but were driven off by the Lake Superior Regiment and The Lincoln and Welland Regiment. Investigation established that German civilians had taken part in this fighting and had been responsible for the loss of Canadian lives. Accordingly, as a reprisal and a warning, a number of houses in the centre of Sogel were ordered destroyed by the engineers to provide rubble.<sup>147</sup> In the meantime part of the Lake Superior Regiment had pressed on to Burger on the 9th; here three supporting tanks of the 22nd Armoured Regiment (The Canadian Grenadier Guards) were knocked out in a sharp little encounter.<sup>148</sup>

The division now brought up its rear echelons in preparation for another push, over somewhat firmer ground, to Friesoythe. This town, two-thirds of the way from Meppen to Oldenburg, fell to our troops on the 14th. In bitterly cold weather, the Argyll and Sutherlands skilfully outflanked the town from the east, while the motor battalion made a diversionary frontal attack. The operation was a complete success, but it cost the Argylls their exceptionally able and popular commanding officer, Lt.-Col. F. E. Wigle, who was killed when his tactical headquarters was attacked by German troops who had been unwittingly by-passed by the companies.<sup>149</sup> It appears that a false report gained currency that Colonel Wigle had been killed by a civilian sniper; as a result, the town of Friesoythe, or a great part of it, was set on fire in a mistaken reprisal. There is no record of how this came about.<sup>150</sup>

The city of Oldenburg, an important focus of road and rail communications, seemed likely to be a vital factor in the German defence of the line of the Kusten Canal covering the Emden—Wilhelmshaven peninsula. On 14 April General Simonds asked Army Headquarters to arrange an attack on Oldenburg by heavy bombers. This was discussed and "agreed in principle" at Army's joint conference with H.Q. No. 84 Group R.A.F. that evening, and the request was passed on, in accordance with established practice, through army channels to H.Q. 21st Army Group and through air force channels to the 2nd Tactical Air Force. Both higher headquarters accepted the request, though on the basis of an attack by medium rather than heavy bombers. On the 15th, however, the proposed attack was cancelled by agreement between the Group and 2nd T.A.F. without reference to Army. Army Headquarters protested. Further negotiations and considerable wrangling followed. According to the information reaching Army Headquarters, on the morning of 17 April Air Marshal Coningham, commanding 2nd T.A.F., cancelled

a medium attack on Oldenburg after the planes were actually in the air, the reason being his belief that SHAEF had forbidden attacks on barracks in Germany because they would be required for accommodation for Allied troops. This belief, when challenged by H.Q. 21st Army Group, turned out to be mistaken.\* Later in the day 60 Mitchells did attack barracks in Oldenburg with good results, and another attack on the same scale was made on 18 April, 118 tons being dropped. Staff officers at Headquarters First Canadian Army considered this incident evidence of the unsatisfactory nature of the existing machinery for obtaining air support, especially as three days elapsed between the request for the attack and the time when it was actually delivered.<sup>151</sup>

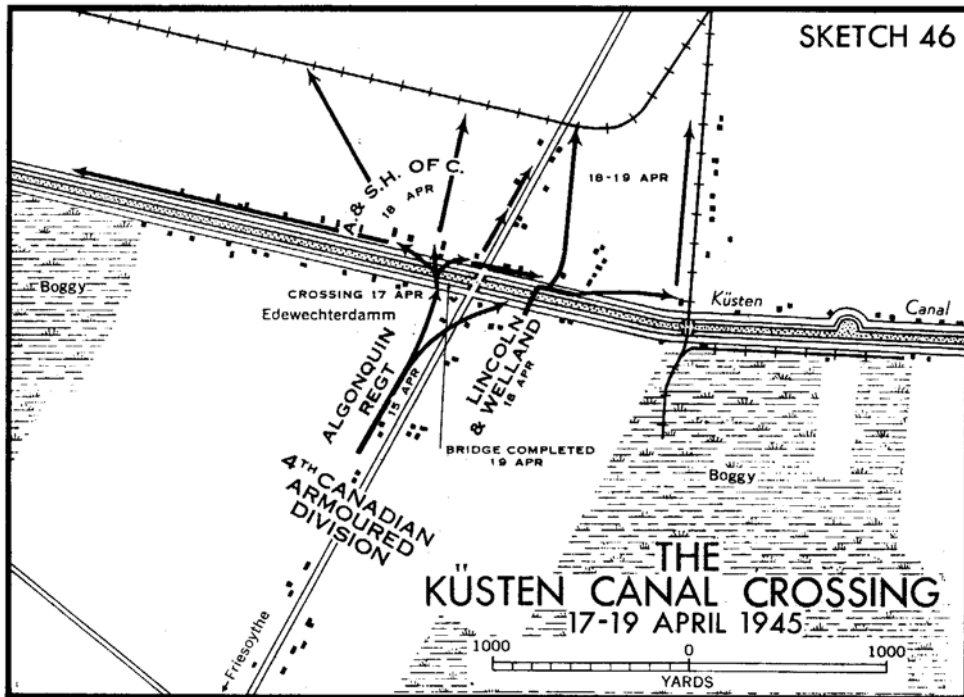
A formidable obstacle barred the way to Oldenburg: the Kasten Canal. Completed only in 1936, it linked the lower reaches of the Ems and the Weser. From bank to bank it was nearly 100 feet wide. The 10th Infantry Brigade had reached the canal, near its western end, on 10 April; but all bridges in the area had been blown and before an assault crossing could be attempted the brigade was ordered to move farther east. Thereafter, General Vokes decided that the best approach to Oldenburg would be along a south-easterly axis from Bad Zwischenahn. He felt that by throwing the full weight of his division across the Kusten Canal he would be able to break through, push on to the lake called the Zwischenahner Meer, and attack Oldenburg over better ground.<sup>152</sup> The 4th Armoured Brigade tried strenuously to reach and cross the Canal, north-east of Friesoythe, before the enemy recovered his balance; but demolitions and "perhaps the worst type of ground for military operations"<sup>153</sup> foiled the attempt.

The task of securing a crossing over the canal then became a problem for the infantry. Brigadier Jefferson's 10th Brigade assumed responsibility for the operation on 16 April. The point selected—really the only possible one in the light of the state of the ground—was Edewechterdamm, a hamlet surrounded by marshes and ditches on the Friesoythe—Bad Zwischenahn road about 11 miles south-west of Oldenburg. Intelligence indicated that remnants of the 7th Parachute Division had withdrawn to positions north of the canal (but subsequent identifications showed that a marine regiment, organized in two battalions, was the main force holding the north bank in the vicinity of Edewechterdamm). It was believed that the defenders had been weakened by desertions, lack of training and shortage of ammunition.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, these units, fighting under the 2nd Parachute Corps, were to give us serious trouble.

At one o'clock on the morning of the 17th The Algonquin Regiment made a boat attack across the Kasten Canal. They were supported by the divisional artillery, the 28th Armoured Regiment (The British Columbia Regiment) and the 10th Independent Machine Gun Company (The New Brunswick Rangers). The latter dug its Vickers guns into the south bank of the canal, giving very effective assistance from this forward position. The initial attack went well and before dawn the Algonquins were firmly established on their objectives. Thereafter, however,

\*The British Chiefs of Staff had ordered Bomber Command to discontinue area bombing on 6 April, recognizing however that area attacks might be justified in order "to assist the advance of the Allied armies into Germany or to have the most immediate effect on the enemy's ability to continue armed resistance".





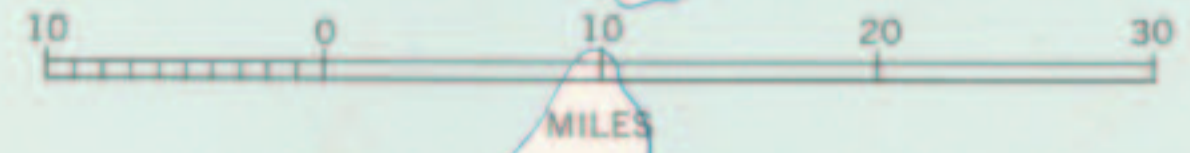
continuous shelling and mortaring hampered our engineers' bridging efforts, and the marines proved to be very persistent antagonists. During the -day our artillery and air support were most helpful. At dusk a crisis developed when a German force, supported by a self-propelled gun, counter-attacked strongly; the gun got close to the canal before being driven back. The bridgehead was in danger, but it held. Late in the day two companies of the Argyll and Sutherland joined the Algonquins in the bridgehead, then about 1500 yards wide and between 300 and 400 yards deep.<sup>155</sup>

On the 18th the enemy launched more counter-attacks against the bridgehead, mainly in the Argylls' sector, but all were repulsed. A company of The Lincoln and Welland Regiment was put in to strengthen the Algonquins' right flank. Meanwhile the engineers, "doing a marvellous job under appalling conditions",<sup>156</sup> worked steadily at bridging. In the evening a troop of the 8th Field Squadron R.C.E. got a raft working; and next morning the 9th Field Squadron completed "Algonquin Bridge". A squadron of the British Columbia Regiment crossed immediately. The tanks' arrival ended the first stage of this difficult engagement. By nightfall the enemy pressure began to lessen, and during the night our troops beyond the canal were reinforced.<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, the 4th Division was to find succeeding phases of the struggle scarcely less exacting.

While the Canadian armour had been driving forward from the Ems to the Kiisten Canal, the 1st Polish Armoured Division had done useful service on its left flank. We have already seen that the Poles had assumed responsibility for the

# ADVANCE ON THE NORTHERN FRONT

23 MARCH - 22 APRIL 1945



First Canadian Army  
Second British Army  
United States forces



4th Division's original objectives west of the Ems. On 8 April Headquarters 2nd Canadian Corps ordered General Maczek to take over the defence of Coevorden and thrust northwards through Dalen and Emmen; next day this commitment was extended to include bridging the Ems at Haren, six miles north of Meppen, "preparatory to advancing north astride [the] river".<sup>158</sup> These tasks were quickly performed. On the 10th, Polish reconnaissance troops established contact with French parachutists of the S.A.S. near Westerbork, while a motorized battalion occupied Emmen. The division then moved on Haren with the intention of developing parallel thrusts along both banks of the lower Ems towards Papenburg and Weener.<sup>159</sup>

The advance west of the Ems was delayed by German demolitions, chiefly blown bridges over the numerous canals; but by the evening of 13 April Maczek's men had reached Boertange, half way from Meppen to the Ems estuary. Farther west, the Polish vanguard occupied Blijham after fierce fighting, assisting the neighbouring operations of the 1st Belgian Parachute Battalion, S.A.S., then under the division's command. During the next two days the Poles continued their northward drive, capturing Winschoten and systematically clearing the left bank of the Ems north of Haren. Then, on the evening of the 15th, a patrol from the 3rd Polish Infantry Brigade reached the North Sea at the Dollart, some 20 miles due east of Groningen. Clearing operations continued in this region until the 21st, when the 3rd Canadian Division relieved the Polish Division of its commitment west of the Ems.<sup>160</sup>

Meanwhile, on the 14th, the 10th Polish Armoured Brigade had crossed the Ems at Haren, descended the right bank and struck the German defences along the Kusten Canal near its junction with the river. On this and the following day the brigade failed to secure a bridgehead over the canal, blaming its heavy casualties on the enemy's "well-organized positions".<sup>161</sup> Then, after a pause for regrouping and completion of the necessary arrangements, a deliberate and determined assault was made on the 19th. Following intensive artillery preparation\* and aerial bombardment, the 9th Infantry Battalion flung themselves across the water. "This operation was carried out successfully, although half of the boats assigned for forcing the canal, and concealed on the shore, were destroyed by the fire of the enemy's artillery and mortars." The engineers worked feverishly constructing a bridge and, on the same day, the 10th Brigade's vehicles began crossing the canal, helping to expand the bridgehead to the north. Thereafter the Poles drove north along the right bank of the Ems, in constant action with German rearguards, and captured Papenburg. By the evening of 22 April they had cleared most of the area south of the Leda.<sup>163</sup>

Relieving the Poles west of the Ems, the 3rd Division met opposition on the approaches to Delfzijl. The Canadian Scottish Regiment, assisted by Sherbrooke Fusiliers tanks, encountered a stubborn body of enemy at Wagenborgen. A company attack on 21 April was beaten off, and only after a larger operation was

\*The 4th Medium Regiment R.C.A., temporarily under Polish command, supported the attack; they reported that, on one occasion, they "were called to fire on a counter attack which ended right away with white flags waved all over the place".<sup>162</sup>

mounted next day did the village fall to us; an enemy counter-attack then had to be dealt with. The whole operation cost the Scottish 64 casualties.<sup>164</sup>

### Preparations for the Final Phase

Following its dramatic drive to the North Sea, the 2nd Canadian Corps paused to regroup and prepare for the final phase of the campaign. The probable nature of this had already been suggested when Field-Marshal Montgomery discussed the role of First Canadian Army with General Crerar on 12 April. At that time the Commander-in-Chief intended that the Army would complete the capture of Bremen if the 30th British Corps had not finished the task when the 2nd Corps' spearheads entered the area; this would permit the 30th Corps to continue its advance to the Elbe. Montgomery added.<sup>165</sup>

First Canadian Army will clean up North-Eastern Holland, and the Emden-Wilhelmshaven Peninsula. Between the Ems and Weser Canadian Army will advance with its weight on the right flank; it will not be necessary to await the capture of Emden and Wilhelmshaven before closing on Bremen. If necessary these fortresses will be masked until completion of the capture of Bremen.

It was, of course, clear that these responsibilities would devolve upon General Simonds, since the 1st Canadian Corps was fully occupied in the western Netherlands. However, two days later, Montgomery ordered the 30th Corps to complete the reduction of Bremen; he explained to Crerar that the Canadians would not be required to take over the port until it was captured, adding, "This will enable you to be less stretched and to get on quicker with the Emden and Wilhelmshaven areas. Please ensure that the right division of 2 Cdn Corps, at present 4 Armd Div, maintains good contact with the left of 30 Corps."<sup>166</sup>

Montgomery's concern for the Second British Army's left flank led to a further order on 16 April. By that date General Dempsey's operations against Bremen were hampered by a widening gulf between his 43rd Division, directed on Delmenhorst, and the 4th Canadian Division, driving north against Oldenburg. Accordingly, General Crerar was instructed to move an infantry division from the north-eastern Netherlands to his eastern flank, where it would operate with its weight on its right axis through Cloppenburg, Ahlhorn, Kirchhatten and Vegesack.<sup>167</sup> Arrangements were immediately made for the 2nd Canadian Division, then winding up the capture of Groningen, to take over this new commitment. General Matthews' troops began the move on 18 April; two days later they had completed the trek of 150 miles from Groningen to Grossenkneten and Sage, less than 15 miles south of Oldenburg.<sup>168</sup>

The 3rd Division relieved the 2nd Division at Groningen and prepared to eliminate all remaining German resistance west of the Ems.<sup>161</sup> In the course of this task, as already related, it took over from the Poles. Orders for further regrouping were issued on the 20th; in order to free the 3rd Division for operations farther east it was relieved, in turn, by the 5th Canadian Armoured Division, which had been helping to clear the western Netherlands. General Simonds ordered the Poles to "tap out the crossings over the Leda River into the estuarial port of Leer. If these were strongly held Maczek's troops were to strike out for Varel, north of Oldenburg, while the 3rd Division prepared one more amphibious assault to cap-

ture Leer as a prelude to an advance by way of Aurich to take Emden from the rear.<sup>170</sup> Meanwhile Field-Marshal Montgomery had further clarified the 2nd Corps' role in the final phase of the campaign. Originally he had anticipated that the Corps would have "four divisions available for operations beyond the Weser" and into the Cuxhaven peninsula.<sup>171</sup> But on the 19th he advised the Army Commander that an American corps (the 18th United States Airborne Corps) had been allotted to the 21st Army Group to assist its advance to the Baltic. This additional strength he said, would "enable all operations to be speeded up" and First Canadian Army would no longer be required to cross the Weser and clear the Cuxhaven peninsula.<sup>172</sup>

It was now apparent that General Simonds' final operations would be mainly confined to the Emden-Wilhelmshaven promontory. The ports themselves were naturally the principal objectives, and Headquarters First Canadian Army had already instructed the 2nd Corps to ensure that they were damaged as little as possible. Nevertheless, measures to safeguard them were to be taken "without prejudice to any operations in progress".<sup>173</sup> As Canadian formations approached Emden and Wilhelmshaven they would establish close liaison with control units of the Royal Navy. From the latter's point of view, the progress of Canadian operations to clear the north-western coast of Germany had a direct bearing on minesweeping to open the larger ports of Bremen and Hamburg.<sup>174</sup> It was also anticipated that the 2nd Corps would capture the East and West Frisian Islands, from Wangerooge to Texel, in cooperation with Naval Force "T". First Canadian Army requested that the 1st and 4th Commando Brigades be made available for these operations, but other commitments made this impossible.<sup>175</sup> On 22 April General Simonds again took over as Acting Army Commander (though without leaving his own headquarters) when General Crerar returned to the United Kingdom for a week's medical check-up and consultations at C.M.H.Q. concerning policy after the end of hostilities.<sup>176</sup>

Elsewhere Allied armies were rapidly battering down the last ramparts of Hitler's Reich. British troops had reached the Elbe and were about to capture Bremen and Hamburg. The Red Army was closing in on Berlin. The Supreme Commander had lately reaffirmed his fixed determination to make no attempt to forestall it there. On 6 April Montgomery made a last effort to prevail upon him to alter his strategy, asking for ten U.S. divisions to enable him to thrust towards Lubeck and Berlin. Eisenhower replied on the 8th, a trifle tartly: "You must not lose sight of the fact that during the advance to Leipzig you have the role of protecting Bradley's northern flank. It is not his role to protect your southern flank. My directive is quite clear on this point." A week later General Simpson, commanding the Ninth U.S. Army, having reached and crossed the Elbe, asked to be allowed to go for Berlin, now only some 50 miles away. The Supreme Commander forbade it, ordering General Bradley instead to turn his troops north towards Lubeck and south towards that persistent mirage, the "National Redoubt".<sup>177</sup>

By 20 April contact between American and Russian forces was imminent.<sup>178</sup> It was clear that the end was very close.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE 1st CORPS IN THE WESTERN NETHERLANDS

1-22 APRIL 1945

(See Map 13)

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WHILE the drive from the Rhine to the North Sea was gathering momentum, important operations were also taking place in the more westerly sectors of the Canadian Army front.

It will be recalled that early in November 1944, when First Canadian Army assumed responsibility for the Nijmegen salient, Field-Marshal Montgomery instructed it to plan offensive operations "northwards across the Neder Rijn, to secure the high ground between Arnhem and Apeldoorn with a bridgehead over the Ijssel river" (above, page 428). As we have also seen, consideration was then given to a preliminary operation, "Siesta", designed to clear the "island" between the Waal and the Neder Rijn. Powerful factors combined to postpone the carrying out of these plans: German action in partially flooding the "island", the Battle of the Ardennes and Allied preoccupation with preparations for Operation "Veritable" imposed fully five months' delay.

The actual launching of "Veritable" on 8 February did not, however, put an end to interest in operations north of the Neder Rijn. We have noted (above, page 481) General Simonds' proposal to the Army Commander on 14 February that his Corps could be most usefully employed during the next few weeks in securing the Arnhem crossing and then developing operations along the right bank of the Rhine. Simonds felt that a crossing at Arnhem was in many ways preferable to one at Emmerich. While ruling that for the moment the 2nd Corps must go through with the commitment in the Battle of the Rhineland already planned for it, General Crerar nevertheless saw attractive possibilities for the future in the Arnhem scheme, and instructed his Plans Section to make a study of the operation proposed by Simonds.<sup>1</sup> Only a couple of days later the 21st Army Group directed Crerar's headquarters to study a subsidiary operation across the Neder Rijn in conjunction with "Plunder", the object being to assist in opening up the Emmerich route (above, page 530).

#### Problems of an Assault Across the Neder Rijn

On 21 February Crerar's planners produced their study of Operation "Anger", which they defined as "the operation by First Canadian Army out of the Nijmegen

bridgehead across [the] River Neder Rijn to assist in opening the Emmerich crossing of [the] River Rhine".<sup>2</sup> This paper assumed that Lieut.-General Charles Foulkes' 1st Canadian Corps, then moving from the Mediterranean to North-West Europe, would plan the details and conduct "Anger". In accordance with the Army Group directive, the operation was subordinated to the larger requirements of the projected "Plunder" offensive across the Rhine.

Before the end of February, well in advance of assuming responsibility for the Nijmegen area, General Foulkes prepared his own appreciation for "Anger".<sup>3</sup> The objects were still the capture of Arnhem and the opening of a route to Emmerich; but he assumed that the operation would not take place until "Veritable" had been completed. His appreciation, based on a careful study of terrain, possibilities of further flooding (either by natural or artificial means), weather conditions and the enemy's defences, reached a cautious conclusion:

There are so many limiting factors to this operation during the months of March and April that quick decisive results cannot be expected. A careful examination of the enemy's preparations shows that he is fully aware of the dangers of such an operation and is preparing to counter such a thrust east of the Rhine. Even if the initial stages of the attack were highly successful the enemy has such counter measures prepared, i.e., flooding of the Ijssel, that an early thrust towards Emmerich is highly improbable if the enemy has any troops available to man the Doesburg—Zevenaar switch line. It is therefore my opinion that this operation should be considered only as a subsidiary operation to be undertaken only if conditions of weather and of the enemy prove advantageous.

Accordingly, "Anger" was shelved for the time being, General Crerar telling Montgomery that there was little prospect of launching it before the latter part of April.<sup>4</sup> Since, however, as part of its later role in "Plunder", the 2nd Corps was ordered to attack the Ijssel defences from the rear, with a view to capturing Apeldoorn and the high ground between that town and Arnhem (above, page 551), the Army Commander instructed Foulkes to coordinate his plans for "Anger" with Simonds' future progress.<sup>5</sup>

Although there was no immediate prospect of attacking across the Neder Rijn, the 1st Canadian Corps could undertake another important if disagreeable task during the interval. This was the business of clearing the enemy out of the remainder of the flooded "island" between the Waal and the Neder Rijn. When the Corps took over the Nijmegen sector on 15 March the Germans still controlled the northern portion of the "island" and a rectangular area west of the Pannerdensch Canal, connecting the two rivers. The southern portion of the "island" was held by the 49th (West Riding) Division, the only division as yet under General Foulkes' command, with the 18th Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons) along the lower Waal, north-east of 's-Hertogenbosch.

Two difficulties arose when the possibility of clearing the "island" was discussed in mid-March. First, the 49th Division was not considered sufficiently strong to hold the island and clear it at the same time; secondly, it was feared that any long pause between the elimination of German resistance on the island and the launching of "Anger" might result in heavy casualties to the troops holding the southern bank of the Neder Rijn. Consequently, Major-General G. H. A. MacMillan, then

commanding the West Riding Division,\* suggested that the operation be postponed until early in April. This was done, it being understood that the operation would only be undertaken if the opposition was weak and the weather favourable. Reports indicated, however, that German morale was particularly low in this sector.<sup>6</sup>

Problems of regrouping within the 1st Corps and coordination of its projected operations with those of the 2nd Corps in "Plunder" were under consideration throughout the rest of March. As General Foulkes saw the operation on the 17th, the 1st Canadian and 49th Divisions would clear the "island" and establish a bridgehead across the Neder Rijn at Oosterbeek, immediately west of Arnhem, with the 5th Armoured Division passing through to expand the holding to the north and west; however, if the ground on the island would not permit a direct assault across the Neder Rijn, he had an alternative plan under which the 1st and 5th Divisions would use the 2nd Corps' bridges at Emmerich and across the IJssel to attack Arnhem from the north and east.<sup>7</sup> Administrative considerations made this alternative difficult. Unless the proposed crossing facilities in the Emmerich area were expanded, not more than four divisions could be maintained over them. Since General Simonds required three divisions (the 2nd and 3rd Canadian and 1st Polish) for his responsibilities in Operation "Haymaker", it was evident that only one could be employed across the IJssel.<sup>8</sup>

On 24 March the Army Commander issued firm instructions<sup>9</sup> to coordinate the operations of the 1st and 2nd Corps:

When 2 Canadian Corps has captured the Stokkummer Bosch and Hoch Elten features and is proceeding to secure the objective Doetinchem—Pannerden, 1 Canadian Corps will clear the enemy from the south-eastern portion of the Nijmegen 'Island', and make contact with 2 Canadian Corps along the Pannerdensch Canal. As 2 Canadian Corps develops its operation northwards and secures its left flank to the line of the R. IJssel between Doesburg and Westervoort, 1 Canadian Corps will clear the enemy from the northern portion of the 'Island' and gain control of the left bank of the Neder Rijn as may be necessary to permit the subsequent launching of operations across the Neder Rijn....

After 2 Canadian Corps has secured the general line Delden—Holten—Deventer, its task will be to force the crossing of the R. IJssel at [a] selected sector, or sectors, between Deventer and Doesburg, both inclusive, and secure the general line Apeldoorn-Otterloo. 1 Canadian Corps will then be responsible for establishing a bridgehead north of the Neder Rijn, to the west of Arnhem, following which Arnhem will be captured. This assault crossing by 1 Canadian Corps will be planned to take place at the same time as, or slightly subsequent to, the crossing of R. IJssel by 2 Canadian Corps.

Three days later General Foulkes issued his own detailed directive.<sup>10</sup> His immediate responsibility, coinciding with the expansion of the "Plunder" bridgehead, was to hold securely his portion of the line along the Maas and the Neder Rijn. Thereafter, the 1st Corps would carry out active operations in three phases: first, the 49th Division would clear the south-eastern sector of the "island"; then the 49th, together with the 5th Canadian Division, would clear the remainder of the "island" and dominate the left bank of the Neder Rijn (these two phases would constitute Operation "Destroyer"); finally, either the 49th Division, with an additional infantry brigade under command, would make a "scramble crossing" of the

\*On 25 March he took command, as we have seen, of the 51st (Highland) Division; three days later Major-General S. B. Rawlins, previously Commander Corps Royal Artillery, 30th Corps, assumed command of the 49th Division.



Neder Rijn at Oosterbeek ("Quick Anger"), or—in the event of the Germans still holding the right bank of the Neder Rijn after the 2nd Corps had crossed the IJssel—the 1st Corps would force the river about five miles downstream, at Renkum ("Anger"). The target date for the initial stage of "Destroyer" was set for 2 April.

Considerable regrouping was necessary to implement these plans. On 21 March The Westminster Regiment (Motor), of the 5th Canadian Armoured Brigade, took over the sector previously held by the 18th Armoured Car Regiment, the Westminsters recording their astonishment, after their Italian experience, at finding "electric light, running water and radios in a forward area".<sup>11</sup> They were assisted by No. 12 Company of the Netherlands Forces of the Interior.\* Two days later the 11th Armoured Regiment (The Ontario Regiment), of the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade, came under the command of the West Riding Division and began moving its squadrons into the "island".<sup>13</sup> The build-up for "Destroyer" continued on 28 March when the 11th Infantry Brigade, under Brigadier I. S. Johnston, also joined the 49th Division, relieving its 56th Brigade in the vicinity of Oosterhout. Both the Westminsters and the 11th Brigade reverted under Major-General B. M. Hoffmeister's 5th Canadian Armoured Division on the 31st, when that division took over the western sector of the island from the 49th. The inter-divisional boundary ran from De Hulk, six miles west of the Nijmegen bridge, in a north-easterly curve towards Arnhem. Hoffmeister's responsibilities extended downstream, along the line of the Waal, to near Heerwaarden, north-east of 's-Hertogenbosch, where the 1st British Corps took over.<sup>14</sup>

### Operation "Destroyer": Clearing the "Island"

The 49th Division carried out its role in Operation "Destroyer" on 2-3 April, clearing the rectangular area held by the Germans at the eastern end of the "island". The timing of the attack (6:00 a.m. on the 2nd) was carefully synchronized with the 3rd Canadian Division's operations east of the Rhine (above, page 548); it was hoped that General Keefler's troops would clear the angle formed by the Neder Rijn and the IJssel as far as Westervoort while, simultaneously, the 49th occupied the opposite bank of the Neder Rijn.<sup>15</sup> Under General Rawlins' command for "Destroyer" were the Ontario Regiment and the 11th Army Field Regiment R.C.A. as well as "Crocodiles" and "Flails" of the 79th Armoured Division. The artillery support for the operation included the 1st Army Group R.C.A., under Brigadier L. G. Clarke,† and a troop of the 1st Rocket Battery R.C.A.<sup>16</sup>

"Destroyer" developed smoothly in two phases. First, the 147th Infantry Brigade rapidly cleared the south-eastern corner of the "island", advancing some three miles from Haalderen to Doornenburg, which was cleared in the early after-

\*These companies, organized from resistance troops after the liberation of Netherlands territory, formed part of the forces under Lieut.-General H. R. H. Prince Bernhard, who had been appointed Commander of the Netherlands Forces and Commander of the Netherlands Forces of the Interior as from 3 September 1944. The policy was to consolidate and reorganize them as soon as possible into Light Infantry Battalions of the Dutch Army.<sup>12</sup>

†On 4 April Brigadier Clarke exchanged commands with Brigadier E. R. Suttie, previously Commander, Royal Artillery, 3rd Canadian Division.

noon of the same day. The Ontarios' tanks gave good support, although they encountered many mines and road blocks.<sup>17</sup> The second phase began at 3:30 p.m. when the 146th Infantry Brigade turned north, clearing the left bank of the Neder Rijn, below the Pannerdensch Canal, in the direction of Angeren and Huissen. These objectives were secured with the assistance of fighter-bombers, and British troops entered Huissen before nightfall on the 2nd. On the following morning they crossed the river to Westervoort. Heavier German resistance east of the Rhine had prevented the 3rd Canadian Division from conforming to the British advance; General Keebler's main strength had to be directed north towards Zutphen. Accordingly, early on 3 April, General Rawlins sent reconnaissance elements through the Emmerich bridgehead to link up with his force in the Westervoort—Pannerden area.

By 5:00 p.m. on the 3rd the West Riding Division had eliminated all opposition in its area south of the Neder Rijn. The Ontarios continued to support it throughout this final phase. In general, resistance had been very light, although a *communiqué* issued by Hitler's headquarters referred to "fierce fighting" in the Arnhem sector.<sup>18</sup> With few casualties to themselves, Rawlins' troops had performed an essential preliminary task over difficult terrain, capturing nearly 200 prisoners.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, on the 5th Armoured Division front on the left, the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade had cleared the "island" westwards to near Randwijk, some eight miles downstream from Arnhem. At dusk on 2 April all three battalions, supported by tanks of the 3rd Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The Governor General's Horse Guards), advanced northwards along roughly parallel axes towards the Neder Rijn. There was very little opposition. On the brigade's left (western) flank, The Irish Regiment of Canada encountered many mines, but not much active resistance. By mid-morning on the 3rd they possessed Randwijk; their patrols then pushed forward to the river bank and established contact with The Cape Breton Highlanders on their right. The Highlanders also had trouble with mines and craters, but secured their objectives, including Heteren. On the right flank The Perth Regiment had a somewhat harder task. After clearing Driel they were counter-attacked twice on the afternoon of the 3rd, but "beat the enemy off without much trouble". Forced back to the northern bank of the Neder Rijn, the Germans remained active during succeeding days, employing artillery, mortars and machine-guns against movement in our lines.<sup>20</sup>

### Intermission: Preparations for Further Operations

With the completion of Operation "Destroyer" on the evening of 3 April General Foulkes' 1st Corps occupied a wide salient thrusting into the western Netherlands: a 20-mile stretch of the left bank of the Neder Rijn and the Pannerdensch Canal, from the latter's junction with the Waal to north-west of Randwijk. At the top of this arch, on the opposite side of the Neder Rijn, stood the battered city of Arnhem—the prize which had tragically eluded the grasp of British airborne troops nearly seven months before. A significant change had, however,

occurred during the interval: in September 1944 the *Wehrmacht* was still potentially dangerous, but in April 1945 Hitler's forces in the western Netherlands could have no policy except a hopeless improvised defence. That nine days elapsed between the clearing of the "island" and the final amphibious assault at Arnhem was due less to the enemy's strength than to the requirements of Allied strategy and tactics.

When "Destroyer" was launched there was still some uncertainty regarding the future tasks of the 1st Corps. We have already seen (above, page 541) that Montgomery was anxious to avoid any large-scale diversion of forces to clear the western Netherlands. Early in April the strategic object of operations along the Neder Rijn and the IJssel was to open a supply route through Arnhem and Zutphen to maintain the great Allied drive east of the Rhine. However, this strictly military aim was inevitably affected by political considerations of mounting urgency. The Supreme Commander afterwards referred to the "peculiar difficulty"<sup>21</sup> of the situation which arose in the western Netherlands due to steadily deteriorating civilian conditions under German occupation. The resulting uncertainty was clearly reflected in General Crerar's directive to his Corps Commanders of 2 April (above, page 546). It was dispelled, for the moment at least, at a conference in Crerar's caravan on 5 April, when Field-Marshal Montgomery announced that, following the completion of Operations "Cannonshot" (above, page 551) and "Quick Anger", the 1st Corps would "undertake a new task, namely, the clearing of West Holland".<sup>22</sup> Two days later Crerar sent out detailed instructions implementing the Field-Marshal's directive issued on the 5th (above, page 548).<sup>23</sup>

Tactically, the assault at Arnhem was delayed by the necessity of coordinating Foulkes' operations with those of Simonds east of the Rhine. We have already seen that Crerar's overall plan depended on the 2nd Corps' progress—in particular, its ability to launch an attack across the IJssel, taking the German defences in the rear, between Zutphen and Deventer. As described in the previous chapter, it was not until 11 April that the 1st Division, temporarily under the 2nd Corps, was able to launch this attack ("Cannonshot") and advance towards Apeldoorn. The Army Commander ruled that the operation against Arnhem would not begin until 24 hours after the launching of "Cannonshot".<sup>24</sup>

The 49th Division, we have noted, was to carry out "Quick Anger". In mid-February the divisional staff had prepared plans for an operation (then known as "Wallstreet") to cross the Neder Rijn and capture Arnhem.<sup>25</sup> But there were many changes before the operation was launched. We have seen that at the end of March the favoured site for the attack lay west of Arnhem, in the vicinity of either Oosterbeek or Renkum. Efforts were made to blind the enemy's observation in this sector with a 15-mile smoke-screen stretching from Huissen to Randwijk; but various difficulties, including lack of suitable generators and contrary winds, reduced its effectiveness.<sup>26</sup> Our reconnaissance and dumping activities near Driel were not completely shielded from the enemy, who was believed to be expecting the attack; moreover, ground conditions on the "island" deteriorated. Accordingly, on 7 April General Foulkes decided that Arnhem would have to be attacked from the east,

and the plans were then revised to provide for an assault across the Ijssel in the vicinity of Westervoort, this involving some delay.<sup>27</sup>

General Rawlins planned to force the Ijssel and capture Arnhem in three phases. First, the 56th Infantry Brigade Group (including a troop of Ontario Regiment tanks) was to cross the river, secure a limited bridgehead and clear the southern sector of Arnhem. The 146th Brigade Group, supported by the remainder of the Ontario Regiment, would then pass through to enlarge the bridgehead. In the final phase, the 147th Brigade Group would secure high ground west of Arnhem and be prepared to exploit west and north-west. The supporting guns included, in addition to the 49th Division's own artillery, the 1st Army Group R.C.A., the divisional artillery of the 5th Canadian Armoured Division, the 11th Army Field Regiment R.C.A. and the 1st Rocket Battery R.C.A.<sup>28</sup>

The 5th Division cooperated initially by holding the "island" and carrying out deceptive measures in the Driel area, aided by the continuing smoke-screen along the left bank of the Neder Rijn. However, to free it for active operations northwest of Arnhem, the 5th Division was relieved on the morning of 12 April by the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade, under Brigadier W. C. Murphy. The latter then became responsible for the entire "island" sector from the junction of the Ijssel and the Neder Rijn to the Corps' left boundary near Tiel. Murphy was given the 1st Belgian Infantry Brigade (two battalions), and a composite force under the 7th Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A., which had previously held the southern bank of the Neder Rijn east of Arnhem.<sup>29</sup> With these arrangements completed the 5th Division gradually withdrew from the "island", crossing the Rhine at Emmerich and concentrating in the Didam—Doetinchem area, where it was poised to pass through either the 1st Canadian Division's or the West Riding Division's bridgehead.<sup>30</sup>

### The Capture of Arnhem and a Revision of Strategy

With "Cannonshot" successfully launched, on the afternoon of 11 April, the way was clear for "Anger",\* which began late in the evening of the following day. Although the delay between the clearing of the "island" and the attack caused some apprehension at Rawlins' headquarters,<sup>31</sup> events soon proved that the enemy had profited little. Only a few days before the attack the area held by the TwentyFifth German Army had become Festung Holland; but the change in designation could not remedy the deficiencies of troops and equipment in the "Fortress. By this stage of the war German "divisions" were composed mainly of mere remnants of the original formations, reinforced by units of diverse origin and states of training. However, the senior commands and staff appointments remained in experienced hands. At this time the great right angle formed by the Ijssel and the Neder Rijn was defended by the depleted 30th German Corps, commanded by General Philipp Kleffel. While the 361st Volksgrenadier Division and miscellaneous formations were resisting the 1st Canadian Division's advance west of the Ijssel,

\*Both "Anger" and "Quick Anger" occur as code names in the records of the operation to capture Arnhem; but "Anger" was used in the 49th Division's operation order.

the 346th Infantry Division held the Arnhem sector with the 858th Grenadier Regiment, and miscellaneous units, including reinforcements and the divisional "Battle School".<sup>32</sup> The composition of this force remained something of a mystery to our Intelligence before the attack, especially as it was difficult to gauge the enemy's reaction to "Cannonsnot". Nevertheless, Arnhem's natural defences, the high ground on the right bank of the Neder Rijn, and the Neder Rijn itself, and the Ijssel, were formidable; and it was believed that the Germans held the city in some strength.<sup>33</sup>

R.A.F. Spitfires and Typhoons repeatedly attacked the Arnhem defences on the afternoon of the 12th; later in the day diversionary fire on the 1st Corps' left flank drew German retaliation on Driel. As the evening wore on, our main artillery bombardment began; it was to make the task of the assaulting infantry "considerably easier". Then, at 10:40 p.m., the 56th Infantry Brigade swam the Ijssel in "Buffaloes". German guns fired on the forward areas, but the attackers penetrated the south-eastern outskirts of Arnhem with little difficulty, repulsing a counter-attack on the morning of the 13th and establishing firm control over the initial bridgehead.<sup>34</sup>

Assistance in building up our forces in Arnhem was given by Force "U" of the Royal Navy and engineers of the 1st Canadian Corps. After participating in Operation "Plunder", Force "U" dispatched L.C.Ms. to help in "Anger". These craft helped to carry British troops across the Ijssel.<sup>35</sup> The Canadian sappers' contribution included the striking expedient of prefabricating a Bailey pontoon bridge near Doornenburg on the Pannerdensch Canal, floating it some five miles downstream with the help of No. 3 Inland Water Transport Group R.E., and placing it in position at Westervoort. This was successfully carried out, after careful trials, by the 12th Field Company R.C.E., under Major D. H. Evers. Some difficulty was experienced in handling the heavy landing bays (one piece was over 150 feet long), but the bridge was opened for traffic on the morning of the 13th, less than 11 hours after movement began from the construction site. Meanwhile, the 14th Field Company R.C.E. had constructed four Bailey pontoon rafts; two were used at Huissen and the others, towed into position with naval assistance, operated across the Ijssel at Westervoort.<sup>36</sup>

Thus aided, the 49th Division soon completed the capture of Arnhem. On the morning of 13 April the 146th Brigade crossed the Ijssel and began clearing a large factory in the eastern outskirts. The Ontario Regiment (whose leading tanks presumably crossed on one of the 14th Field Company's rafts which began work at 8:00 a.m., earlier than the bridge) assisted in dealing with snipers and machine-guns. In general, however, resistance was light, the Ontarios' diary recording that "the enemy nowhere showed much willingness to fight". By nightfall the main core of resistance was broken and the 147th Brigade was preparing to pass through the 56th. Although many mines and demolitions were encountered, Arnhem was completely cleared on the 14th. The West Riding Division captured 601 prisoners during the whole operation.<sup>37</sup>

On the 12th the Corps Commander had issued instructions for operations to "clear the Germans out of Western Holland".<sup>38</sup> While the strength of German

garrisons was "still a matter of considerable speculation", he believed that "at least one or two field formations" might be left to man defensive lines. After completing "Anger", the 49th Division was to advance from Arnhem and occupy the National Highway south of Utrecht. The 5th Armoured Division would advance west, bypass Amersfoort and secure the high ground west of that city. The 1st Division would take Amersfoort, relieve the 5th and capture Utrecht. The 5th Division would then mop up any enemy between the IJsselmeer and the IJssel River. In succeeding phases the 49th Division would advance through Gouda, capture The Hague and attack Rotterdam from the west, while the 1st Division advanced on Amsterdam by way of Leiden and Haarlem. Foulkes noted that his Corps was "responsible for setting up civil administration in Western Holland and for feeding the population as early as possible after liberation".

But on the same day on which General Foulkes issued these instructions a change occurred in Allied strategy. Field-Marshal Montgomery came to General Crerar's headquarters at Grave and outlined his plans for the advance to the Elbe and operations against Bremen and Hamburg. High Allied authorities, considering the situation in the western Netherlands, had, we shall see, decided against an immediate operation to liberate the area. Although its people were in desperate straits for food, there was hope of relieving them without exposing them to the dangers of battle (below, pages 584-5). Montgomery's policy with respect to the region was thus defined:<sup>39</sup>

Present operations in the Arnhem area will be designed with the object of securing and opening the Arnhem route to the North. Only two divisions are allocated for securing the flank South of the Zuider Zee [IJsselmeer]. If they can advance Westwards on their own resources they will do so, but no additional engineer units or transport are available until a later stage, and their advance must therefore stop when the limit of their own resources has been reached. After Canadian Army has completed its higher priority roles [clearing the north-eastern Netherlands and the Emden-Wilhelmshaven peninsula, and dominating the Weser below Bremen and the Elbe Estuary below Hamburg] . . . resources will be switched to Western Holland for the completion of the liberation of Holland.

General Crerar passed these instructions to his Corps Commanders verbally on the afternoon of the 12th, issuing a written confirmatory directive on the following day.<sup>40</sup>

On 14 April, accordingly, General Foulkes in his turn issued new verbal orders to his divisional commanders, confirming them in writing on the 15th.<sup>41</sup> The letter stated the Corps' new task briefly and baldly. For the "1 Cdn Corps will clear the Germans out of Western Holland" of three days earlier it substituted:

1 Cdn Corps will clear enemy from Western Holland between the IJssel and the Grebbe Line.

The Grebbe Line was a system of field fortifications between the IJsselmeer and the Neder Rijn, based on the Eem and Grebbe rivers, and pivoting on the Neder Rijn at the extremity of a ridge called the Grebbeberg, just east of Rhenen. It had been the scene of fighting in May 1940, when the Dutch Army sought to hold this line against the advancing Germans. The Germans, in preparing to defend the

Netherlands, had somewhat developed this line, but their defences mainly pointed west, towards the sea.<sup>42</sup>

The tactical situation in the area was changing. On the 13th the 1st Canadian Division had reverted to Foulkes' command from the 2nd Corps (above, page 552). This division was then encountering stiffened opposition east of Apeldoorn, whereas the 49th Division was making good progress in clearing Arnhem. In these circumstances Foulkes now ordered the 5th Division to pass through the 49th's bridgehead and drive north to the Ijsselmeer, a distance of some 30 miles, capturing Otterloo, Barneveld, Voorthuizen and Putten. At the conclusion of this operation (to be known as "Cleanser") the 5th Division would pass under the 2nd Corps for employment in the north-eastern Netherlands, leaving the 1st Corps only the 1st Canadian and 49th Divisions. Meanwhile, the 49th Division was to open up the road leading from Arnhem to Zutphen, thereafter turning westward to take Wageningen and Ede and clear the right bank of the Neder Rijn up to the Grebbe. The 1st Division would capture Apeldoorn and advance along a parallel axis towards Voorthuizen, relieving the 5th Division between that place and Barneveld. It will be seen that the effect of these instructions was to project the 5th Division at right angles to the other divisions' main lines of advance and in rear of the German defences based on Apeldoorn. Throughout these operations the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade with the Belgians under command would continue to hold the line of the Neder Rijn and the "western approaches".\* This directive set the pattern for the 1st Corps' final operations in North-West Europe.

### The Capture of Apeldoorn

We may now turn back to consider the course of operations on General Foulkes' north-eastern flank, where the 1st Canadian Division was steadily expanding its bridgehead over the Ijssel towards Apeldoorn. Initial resistance to "Cannonshot" had come from the 162nd Naval Infantry Regiment, an improvised formation which was easily swept aside. However, General Foster's veterans then encountered tougher opposition from the 361st *Volksgrenadier* Division-in particular from its 953rd Grenadier Regiment. Thus on 13 April the Canadians were still fighting east of Apeldoorn. On that date the 3rd Infantry Brigade, under Brigadier J. P. E. Bernatchez, joined the remainder of the division west of the Ijssel. While the 2nd Brigade continued clearing the general area of its original bridgehead, the 1st and 3rd advanced west towards Apeldoorn in the angle formed by the railways connecting that town with Zutphen and Deventer.<sup>43</sup>

On the right (northern) flank Brigadier J. D. B. Smith's 1st Brigade, supported by tanks of the 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars), which had come under the 1st Division on 6 April, moved steadily forward against moderate resistance, including artillery and mortar fire. At noon on 13 April The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment was approaching the village of Teuge, only three miles east of Apeldoorn, while The Royal Canadian Regiment kept pace on its left. By mid-

\*Much of the brigade's tank strength was in fact employed in the more active operations north of the Neder Rijn.

night the brigade was closing up to the Apeldoorn Canal, which runs north and south through the eastern part of the town, and the R.C.R. had patrols in the suburbs.<sup>44</sup>

During the night of 13-14 April a squadron of the 1st Hussars and a company of the R.C.R. attempted to secure a crossing over the canal. But the two tanks leading the attack were knocked out and the plan had to be abandoned. Meanwhile, on the southern flank of the main divisional thrust, the 3rd Brigade made progress against light opposition, although some strongpoints offered brief stubborn resistance. The German withdrawal was covered by snipers and self-propelled guns. Late on the 13th the brigade held an area in the vicinity of Achterhoek, some four miles east of Apeldoorn. Its front line was then about two and a half miles east of the Apeldoorn Canal.<sup>45</sup> On the morning of the 14th the boundary between the 1st and 49th Divisions ran west from the Ijssel, midway between Arnhem and Apeldoorn, and roughly parallel to the Neder Rijn. It seemed certain that the enemy intended to make a serious stand behind the canal, and the 1st Division's General Staff diarist noted gloomily, "It's the Lombardy Plains all over again." The German resistance was presumably connected with a harsh order, issued over Himmler's signature on the 12th, threatening battle commanders with death if they neglected to take adequate measures for the defence of towns and significant communication centers.<sup>46</sup>

General Foster's original intention was to use the 1st and 3rd Brigades against Apeldoorn, holding the 2nd in reserve. But as a result of the quick success attending the 49th Division's assault at Arnhem he was now ordered to link up with the 49th on the left and open the main road connecting Arnhem with Zutphen along the west bank of the Ijssel.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, at 6:25 p.m. on the 14th, Foster issued new orders to the 2nd Brigade, which had been clearing the Hoven bridgehead, opposite Zutphen. Brigadier M. P. Bogert was instructed to eliminate all enemy from the west bank of the Ijssel as far south as Dieren, where his brigade would establish contact with the 49th Division. The boundary between the two divisions in this area was now to be the Apeldoorn Canal. The remainder of the 1st Division would continue its operations against Apeldoorn.<sup>48</sup>

Leaving The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada in the Hoven bridgehead area as a protective force, the 2nd Brigade began its task on the morning of the 15th. Progress was rapid, for not only were the 49th and 1st Canadian Divisions exerting strong pressure against the enemy's ramshackle formations between Arnhem and Apeldoorn but, as we shall see, on this date the 5th Armoured Division began its drive for the Ijsselmeer, cutting directly behind the German forces facing Foster. The 2nd Brigade cleared the left bank of the Ijssel with The Loyal Edmonton Regiment and Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry on the eastern and western sides, respectively, of the railway joining Arnhem and Zutphen. During the afternoon of the 15th the Edmontons pushed south of the village of Brummen, "meeting only token resistance from small pockets of enemy", while the P.P.C.L.I. pressed forward through close country on the right flank.<sup>49</sup> Many prisoners were taken, and as the 5th Division's northern drive gathered momentum German opposition crumbled. On the morning of the 16th the Edmontons entered Dieren



unopposed, while the P.P.C.L.I. made contact with forward elements of the 49th Division near Eerbeek. "A" Squadron of the 12th Armoured Regiment (Three Rivers Regiment) supported the Canadian infantry during these operations.<sup>50</sup>

The rapid completion of the 2nd Brigade's task had an important influence on Foster's plan to capture Apeldoorn. He later explained,<sup>51</sup>

It had never been my intention to assault Apeldoorn frontally. It was a friendly city, filled with refugees, and I was not prepared to use artillery on it. The plot was to isolate the city, by having 1 Cdn Inf Bde face up to it and thus keep the enemy garrison there occupied, and by putting 3 Cdn Inf Bde across the canal south of Apeldoorn, thus coming in from the rear. This plan was modified because 2 Cdn Inf Bde' had as usual, done a fine job in the south, and were able to get across the canal at Dieren. Thus it was not necessary for 3 Cdn Inf Bde to do an opposed crossing farther north.

The engineers built a bridge over the canal at Dieren and the Edmontons then turned north to cover the construction of a second near Veldhuizen, some five miles south of Apeldoorn. Here the remainder of the 2nd Brigade began crossing in the late afternoon of the 16th, preparatory to expanding the bridgehead as a base for the 3rd Brigade's operation against Apeldoorn.<sup>52</sup>

Apeldoorn, with a population in 1939 of 72,600, is pleasantly situated in a fertile agricultural region at the foot of the ridge that runs north from Arnhem. Het Loo, the summer residence of the Dutch royal family, stands on the northern outskirts. Before the war the town was a prosperous manufacturing place. It is an important communication centre, connected by main roads and railways with Amersfoort, Arnhem, Zutphen and Deventer. On the evening of 16 April the 1st Division was ready for the decisive stroke against the town. By this time the 5th Division had cut the enemy's principal escape route from Apeldoorn to Amersfoort and the garrison's position was untenable. There was now a new urgency in the 1st Division's operations. Late on the 16th the Chief of Staff of the 1st Corps (Brigadier George Kitching) informed divisional commanders that the 5th Division would be required to concentrate about noon on the 18th in preparation for its new commitment in the north-eastern Netherlands. Consequently, it was imperative for the 1st and 49th Divisions to secure their objectives between the Neder Rijn and the IJsselmeer before last light on the 17th.<sup>53</sup>

German resistance in Apeldoorn disintegrated during the night of 16-17 April. On the 1st Brigade's front there were exchanges of small arms fire across the canal until three o'clock in the morning, when quiet suddenly descended on the German side. Members of the Dutch Resistance then advised the R.C.R. that the enemy had evacuated the town. Moving quickly, the battalion captured two German soldiers before they could demolish lock gates on the canal and, with this crossing in their hands, the R.C.R. had a firm hold on the eastern edge of the town by 4:30 a.m. The brigade commander at once ordered The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment and the 48th Highlanders of Canada to follow the R.C.R. at dawn. By mid-morning the Highlanders had secured the north-western section of Apeldoorn, the Hastings were in the palace grounds at Het Loo and the R.C.R. were established in the town square. At noon Brigadier Smith opened his headquarters in the building recently vacated by the German commander. Meanwhile, The West Nova Scotia Regiment of the 3rd Brigade moved against Apeldoorn

from the south and, before noon, occupied the south-western perimeter.<sup>54</sup> Wild rejoicing greeted our troops. "National colours of the Netherlands were flying in the brilliant sunlight from almost every house and shop." Mixed with the enthusiasm of the people who thronged the streets was profound relief that the operations had caused so little damage to the town.<sup>55</sup> Such scenes were repeated many times in these last days of the campaign.

The operations of the seven days 11-17 April cost the 1st Division's infantry battalions 506 casualties: units of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Brigades had 184, 183 and 125 respectively, while The Saskatoon Light Infantry (M.G.), which had effectively supported all the brigades, lost 14 men. During the same period 40 German officers and 2515 other ranks passed through the 1st Division's prisoner of war cages.<sup>56</sup>

There was no pause at Apeldoorn. On the morning of the 17th General Foster ordered his brigades to drive west as quickly as possible to relieve the 5th Division at Barneveld and Voorthuizen.<sup>57</sup>

### Operation "Cleanser": The Drive to the IJsselmeer

While the 1st Division was pressing towards Apeldoorn, the 5th Armoured Division was preparing the quick thrust north to the IJsselmeer, for which General Foulkes gave instructions to General Hoffmeister on the afternoon of 14 April.

By this date our Intelligence had a clear appreciation of the enemy's strength and dispositions in the area between Arnhem and the IJsselmeer. The 346th Division was being gradually expelled from the vicinity of Arnhem, though its flanks were still anchored to the IJssel in the east and the Neder Rijn in the west. The Germans were being forced to use gunners as infantry on the neighbouring front of the 361st *Volksgrenadier* Division opposing the 1st Division. The right (western) flank of the 346th Division was protected by the 34th S.S. Division (*Nederland*) which, however, held a long front. As General Hoffmeister looked north-west from his temporary headquarters at Didam, the only German troops capable of barring his way were a unit of the 858th Grenadier Regiment, a battalion of engineers (both were then holding the left flank of the 346th Division) and a construction battalion. Nor was there any effective armoured support for these; no tank formations or units were "known to exist in the country". But we might expect to encounter self-propelled guns, mines of all types and "delaying strongpoints" as the enemy withdrew to the shelter of the Grebbe Line.<sup>58</sup>

At noon on the 14th Hoffmeister issued his orders. The most direct route followed the road from Arnhem through Otterloo and Barneveld to Nijkerk. The divisional commander planned to advance on this axis, seizing the high ground north of Arnhem, crossing the main road from Apeldoorn to Amersfoort (thereby cutting the Apeldoorn garrison's escape route) and exploiting north-westerly to the coast. The leading role fell to the 5th Armoured Brigade Group, under Brigadier I. H. Cumberland, who was given for "Cleanser" the 8th Field Regiment R.C.A. (with one battery of the 3rd Medium Regiment R.A.) and special units from the 79th Armoured Division. The brigade group would be supported by the remainder

of the divisional artillery and the 3rd Medium Regiment R.A., and the divisional engineers. Although this was primarily an armoured thrust, the 11th Infantry Brigade was held in readiness to take over, if needed, at any stage. The move was to begin at first light on 15 April.<sup>59</sup> The armour commenced crossing the Ijssel on the afternoon of the 14th, completing its move into an assembly area on the northern outskirts of Arnhem in the early hours of the 15th. Convoys were compelled to travel slowly over constricted routes; indeed, the movement was only accomplished by giving the Canadians running rights over the bridges at Arnhem at the expense of the West Riding Division.<sup>60</sup>

Operation "Cleanser" began about 6:30 a.m. when the 5th Armoured Brigade Group lunged forward to take the high ground north of Arnhem. On the right, the 9th Armoured Regiment (The British Columbia Dragoons) advanced against the village of Terlet. "The route passed through densely wooded sandhills, making observation and mutual support extremely difficult and often impossible. Movement off roads around road-blocks was accomplished only by the sheer weight of the tanks forcing their way through the trees."<sup>61</sup> On the left the 5th Armoured Regiment (8th Princess Louise's (New Brunswick) Hussars) was directed on Deelen. Anti-tank fire cost the Hussars two tanks and the Dragoons one; but the speed of the advance caught the enemy off balance and both objectives were rapidly taken. At Deelen the headquarters staff of the 858th Grenadier Regiment was overrun, the commander conceding that he had been "taken completely by surprise when attacked by tanks and found his dispositions all wrong". Hoffmeister ordered the 11th Infantry Brigade to clear remnants of opposition from woods by-passed by the tanks; it completed this task during the evening.<sup>62</sup>

The second phase of "Cleanser", the capture of Otterloo and the high ground to the west, began immediately. At noon on the 15th the 2nd Armoured Regiment (Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians)) passed through the 8th Hussars, headed for Otterloo. Hampered by close country, but meeting only light opposition, the Strathconas reached a point 1500 yards east of the place by last light. During the night the supporting artillery brought harassing fire down on Otterloo. Meanwhile, on the left of the divisional front, the Hussars occupied high ground south-west of the village.<sup>63</sup>

On the following morning Strathcona's pushed through Otterloo. The next objective was Barneveld, some nine miles to the north-west. The Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. J. M. McAvity, ordered his leading squadron to "motor up the road at good speed". The first opposition was at a road junction less than a mile east of Barneveld. There two Shermans were lost before Strathcona's and a company of The Westminster Regiment (Motor) by-passed the town, reaching the road to Voorthuizen. Probing north on this road, the tanks met heavier resistance from an enemy evidently alarmed for the safety of his escape route, the highway from Apeldoorn to Amersfoort. At the end of the day Strathcona's were still about a mile short of Voorthuizen. On the 5th Division's left flank, the Princess Louise's and the 11th Infantry Brigade, assisted by a squadron of the 3rd Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The Governor General's Horse Guards), were now north-east of Lunteren.<sup>64</sup>

Meanwhile' on the right flank the British Columbia Dragoons, who had helped to clear Otterloo, drove directly for Voorthuizen. Everyone realized that speed was essential to cut off the retreat of the garrison opposing the 1st Division in Apeldoorn. The Dragoons made steady progress north-east of Barneveld, meeting little active opposition from the enemy, but impeded by swampy ground. Like Strathcona's, they encountered a harder crust of resistance as they approached the Apeldoorn—Amersfoort highway. On the evening of the 16th, they attacked Voorthuizen. Darkness and "deep water-filled ditches and low marshy ground" hampered clearing operations; but the Dragoons were able to cut the vital road, thus completing the third phase of Operation "Cleanser". During the early hours of the 17th elements of the 6th Parachute Division, from the German northern flank, tried to escape westward through Voorthuizen. They were beaten back with heavy casualties, our tanks being ably assisted by a "Badger"\* flame-thrower of the headquarters squadron of the 5th Armoured Brigade.<sup>65</sup>

By the night of 16-17 April time had assumed even greater importance in the minds of both Canadian and German commanders in the western Netherlands. As we have seen, General Foulkes had to give up the 5th Division on the 18th. It was therefore vital to complete "Cleanser" without delay. On the other hand, the Germans were impelled by the necessity of getting their forces from the Apeldoorn sector back to the temporary security of the Grebbe Line. This anxiety, together with our extended line of communication from Arnhem to Voorthuizen, produced early on the morning of the 17th the so-called "Battle of Otterloo". The German withdrawal, left too late, degenerated into a disorganized retreat along three principal axes: west through Voorthuizen (the movement blocked by the British Columbia Dragoons), north-west towards Nijkerk, Putten and Harderwijk (whence some sailed across the IJsselmeer to Amsterdam), and south-west towards Otterloo. This last group, estimated to be between 600 and 900 strong, was composed of remnants of a great variety of units, all under the commander of the 952nd *Volksgrenadier* Regiment.<sup>66</sup> Hoping to escape through Otterloo, it was quite unaware that Headquarters 5th Armoured Division was then in the village.

An intercepted wireless message had warned General Hoffmeister of the possibility of attack and he therefore retained The Irish Regiment of Canada to cover the road from Hoenderlo.<sup>67</sup> Also in the area, and participating in the subsequent melee, were the tanks of divisional headquarters,† the 17th Field Regiment R.C.A. and the 2nd/11th Battery of the 3rd Medium Regiment R.A. Shortly after midnight a German patrol "suddenly came racing into Otterloo, yelling like a gang of fanatics and firing their automatic weapons madly".<sup>68</sup> This incursion quickly developed into an assault supported by artillery and mortars. Although the Irish

\*The "Badger" consisted of a "Wasp" flame-thrower, Mark II, fitted to a "Ram" personnel carrier. This was a Canadian development, intended to provide better cross-country performance and manoeuvrability with more protection than the carrier-mounted "Wasp" possessed. "Badgers" used by the 5th Armoured Brigade were equipped with turrets and tops.

†Until early in 1943 Canadian armoured divisions had each possessed a "headquarters squadron". At that time the squadrons lost their independent existence and were merged into divisional headquarters. The term "headquarters squadron" was still used in the war establishment to denote all personnel of the headquarters except the staff and service officers; and the headquarters still possessed one troop of tanks (in addition to command tanks).

and the gunners of the 17th bore the main brunt, all headquarters personnel were soon involved. The guns fired over open sights (the mediums demolishing a nearby church-tower in their efforts to shorten the range) as the enemy infiltrated into our positions. However, at daybreak the headquarters tanks and the Irish counter-attacked, driving the invaders back, and "Wasps" completed the enemy's demoralization. By mid-morning the situation was under control. The Germans had suffered possibly 300 casualties, with between 75 and 100 killed. Our own losses were much lower. The Irish and the 17th Field Regiment had 22 and 25 casualties respectively; in addition, the artillery had three guns knocked out and several vehicles destroyed.<sup>69</sup>

While this fierce little skirmish was taking place at Otterloo The Cape Breton Highlanders occupied Barneveld unopposed. Thus by the morning of the 17th the 5th Division was ready for the final phase of "Cleanser"—a two-pronged drive to the IJsselmeer through Nijkerk and Putten. Again the armour led the way. The Strathconas, supported by "C" Company of the Westminsters, advanced along the road leading north-west from Barneveld to Nijkerk. Near its intersection with the Apeldoorn—Amersfoort highway they ran into opposition. German infantry with anti-tank weapons knocked out three tanks before being driven back. North of the intersection Strathcona's met more difficulty—dug-in infantry covering roadblocks. While trying to find a way round they were ordered to disengage and support the second armoured thrust, which appeared to be making better progress towards Putten.<sup>70</sup> The 8th Hussars, however, had had a hard battle for the approaches to this place. By-passing Voorthuizen, then being cleared by the British Columbia Dragoons and a Westminster company, they drove north on the afternoon of the 17th. They, too, soon found themselves on difficult terrain under sustained German fire. Anti-tank guns, self-propelled guns and the *Panzerfaust* took toll during the day and the evening. The Hussars laagered for the night less than a mile south of Putten. The day's operations had cost the regiment 14 tanks (of which two were recovered); personnel casualties amounted to one man killed and 17 wounded.<sup>71</sup>

This phase of operations was now almost over. While Hoffmeister's armour fought towards the IJsselmeer, Foster's infantry moved steadily westward from Apeldoorn. German and Dutch S.S. rearguards delayed their advance along the main road to Amersfoort; but the 3rd Brigade made contact with the 5th Division at Barneveld on the 17th. Fighting hard on the approaches to Nijkerk and Putten, the Germans had succeeded for a time in holding open a corridor along the IJsselmeer's southern shore, enabling much of the 6th Parachute Division to escape westward.<sup>72</sup> On the morning of the 18th this opposition ended. The 8th Hussars, assisted by the Westminsters and the Dutch Resistance, quickly penetrated to the centre of Putten, while their reconnaissance troop reached the IJsselmeer at 10:35 a.m. Meanwhile, Strathcona's struck out for the port of Harderwijk, which they occupied with the help of the British Columbia Dragoons, The Perth Regiment and the Dutch Resistance during the afternoon. The Dragoons recorded, "some range practice was carried out against small boats carrying enemy out to sea". In four days of very active operations Brigadier Cumberland's three armoured regi-

ments had performed their task with only 76 casualties; of these 40 fell upon Strathcona's.<sup>73</sup>

During "Cleanser" the 5th Armoured Division captured 34 German officers and 1755 other ranks. The division was glad to acknowledge the valuable cooperation of the Dutch Resistance, whose members "on more than one occasion, risked their lives by going into enemy-occupied territory with our patrols".<sup>74</sup> Its task in the western Netherlands finished, the 5th Division handed its sector over to the 1st Division on 19 April and prepared to assume new responsibilities in the north-east.<sup>75</sup>

### Operations on the Left Flank, 15-19 April

We may now glance briefly at developments on the 1st Corps' left flank during the period of the 1st and 5th Divisions' operations north of Arnhem. On 14 April, as already mentioned, the Corps Commander ordered the 49th (West Riding) Division to open the main route from Arnhem to Zutphen, after which the division was to advance westward through Wageningen and Ede and clear the north bank of the Neder Rijn. Meanwhile, the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade continued to hold the whole of the now enlarged "island" from the junction of the Ijssel and the Neder Rijn to the vicinity of Tiel. Thence westward the Netherlands District (below, page 585) held the line.

After a pause in Arnhem for reorganization, which permitted the 5th Division to pass through on its northern drive, the West Riding Division set about its next task on the 16th. The 56th Infantry Brigade cleared Velp and a cement factory on the eastern outskirts of Arnhem, and the 146th Brigade, assisted by the Ontario Regiment, advanced towards Dieren and a junction with the 1st Division. General Rawlins could now direct the 56th and 147th Brigades westward towards Wageningen and Ede respectively.<sup>76</sup> The movement began at 6:00 p.m. on the 16th, the 147th Brigade reaching a point midway between Arnhem and the Ede the same evening. The 14th Armoured Regiment (The Calgary Regiment) supported the brigade, losing one tank to the German rearguard. In general, however, the enemy could organize only "isolated strongpoints of resistance". At dawn on the 17th the advance continued. As it approached Ede it encountered a more tenacious defence from German snipers; but after a sharp artillery bombardment the Calgaries' tanks punched holes in the brick buildings and Wasps followed to sweep the interiors with flame. Shortly after noon Ede was in our hands.<sup>77</sup>

The 56th Brigade moved westward on two axes, against Wageningen and nearby Bennekom, early on the 17th. Rapid progress was made along the right bank of the Neder Rijn against light opposition. In some places the advance was hindered by mines and other obstacles; but the British troops frequently found diversions which the enemy had not had time to mine or block. By the end of the day the brigade had captured both Wageningen and Bennekom.<sup>78</sup>

At this point, with the 49th Division on the approaches to the Grebbe Line, the new strategy curtailed operations in this sector. On the evening of the 17th General Rawlins learned that, for the time being, the 1st Corps would advance

no farther "owing to political reasons-it was hoped to prevent the enemy from flooding the whole countryside West of Utrecht which had taken over 300 years to reclaim".<sup>79</sup> Civilian reports indicated that the Germans had in fact made an initial effort to flood the country by destroying sluices near Wijk-bij-Duurstede on the Neder Rijn and had failed. Headquarters 1st Corps ordered the West Riding Division to consolidate its existing positions and reorganize its front on a line through Lunteren, Ede, Bennekom and Wageningen.<sup>80</sup>

During the next two days (18-19 April) the 49th Division settled down to active patrolling, with battle-groups disposing of mobile pockets of enemy. Its units probed westward towards Veenendaal with the object of completely dominating the area east of the Grebbe Line.<sup>81</sup> The southern portion of this line was defended by the 34th S.S. Division (*Nederland*). This was a low-category formation recruited from Dutch collaborationists and brought partially up to strength by enrolling men anxious to avoid starvation or deportation to Germany.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, on the "island", Brigadier Murphy's front conformed to the British advance; Belgian infantry, supported by "B" Squadron of The Calgary Regiment, seized Opheusden on the 18th. The enemy then retired behind a canal linking the Neder Rijn with the Waal at Ochten; and efforts to improve our position further soon showed that "no mere infiltration would cause his next line to crumble". Here aggressive action was suspended on the 19th, as it had already been elsewhere on the 1st Corps' left flank, and the troops marked time, pending decisions by higher powers on the future of operations in the western Netherlands.<sup>83</sup>

### The Problem of Dutch Relief

The situation in the western Netherlands in April 1945, as we have already noted, presented a difficult problem in the reconciliation of military and political objects. Viewed in terms of the campaign as a whole, the German forces cut off in this area were not particularly important. What mattered most was to destroy the main German armies and end the war. All lands held by Hitler's forces, including "Fortress Holland", would thereby be liberated at once. But the fact that the Dutch people inside the fortress were in actual danger of starvation put a different face on the matter. It was vital to relieve them at the earliest practicable moment, and their government in London lost no opportunity of keeping this fact before its allies. And yet the problem was not merely a question of whether military resources could be spared from the main campaign for the liberation of the area between Den Helder and Schouwen. Liberation by force would involve fierce fighting, and this in turn would bring ruin to many Dutch towns and cities, and, as we have seen, might result in the Germans opening the dykes and ruining the low-lying countryside between Utrecht and the sea.

The background to this dilemma is a long and melancholy story. When the Germans first occupied the Netherlands they made some conciliatory gestures to the population; but these soon gave way to repressive measures as they failed to obtain the whole-hearted cooperation of the people. Early in 1941 the Reichskommissar, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, already knew that he could not count on a

submissive Dutch attitude. In London the Dutch Government, inspired by Queen Wilhelmina, fanned the spirit of revolt. As D Day approached, German fears of Allied landings led to a further hardening of policy which, however, completely failed to break the people's spirit. In September 1944, in conjunction with the Allied airborne operation directed upon Arnhem, the Dutch Resistance successfully called a general railway strike throughout the country.<sup>84</sup>

The problems of possible food shortage and disease in the Netherlands had not been overlooked by Allied planners. They were considered in connection with Civil Affairs questions generally, and in May 1944 the Combined Chiefs of Staff laid down broad policies covering distribution of relief supplies in liberated countries. In August Headquarters 21st Army Group took over the task of planning to relieve distress in all sections of Holland coming under Field-Marshal Montgomery's control. It was recognized that the main problem would exist in the western Netherlands, where nearly 40 per cent of the Dutch population was concentrated in large cities, notably Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague.<sup>85</sup> The situation began to become serious in the autumn of 1944. In retaliation for the railway strike, Seyss-Inquart imposed an embargo on food supplies for urban areas from eastern agricultural districts. Food stocks in the densely populated areas of the western Netherlands had already been reduced, by German order, and there were insufficient reserves to carry the country through the winter. The railway strike also contributed to a shortage of coal.<sup>86</sup> These developments occurred at a time when the Allies were making a supreme effort to reach and cross the Rhine, and win the war before the end of the year. There was hope therefore that German resistance would soon cease and the relief of Dutch distress would be a relatively simple problem thereafter. These hopes were disappointed.

The Dutch authorities in London observed with growing concern the worsening conditions in their country. On 8 October the Queen of the Netherlands appealed to President Roosevelt for assistance. On 26 October he replied that the U.S. and British military authorities had made provision for the introduction of food and medical supplies into Holland "after liberation". These would be provided to the fullest extent which the military and logistical situations would allow.<sup>87</sup> As the weeks passed Dutch pressure for a political solution to the growing crisis increased.

SHAEF had in fact prepared a relief plan in mid-October. This divided the Netherlands into three main areas: "A", the portion south of the Waal; "B", the area west of the IJssel, and "C", the remainder, east of the IJssel. Area "B" was subdivided into "B-1" and "B-2", east and west, respectively, of a line running from Hilversum through Utrecht to Tiel. As we have already seen, the "B-2" area constituted the chief problem. It was calculated that imports of over 2000 tons of food would be required daily to feed the 3,600,000 people in this area. To meet the expected emergency, SHAEF planned the creation of a large stockpile of food in a forward area, accumulation of a week's supply of coal at Antwerp, provision of vehicles from the United Kingdom and other measures. Headquarters 21st Army Group was instructed to establish a special staff to make detailed plans. The Army Group suggested that planning could best be done in London, and at General Eisenhower's request the War Office set up a committee accordingly. At



this time the assumption was that liberation would have to precede any active relief measures.<sup>88</sup>

By late autumn the possibility of transporting emergency supplies to the Netherlands by air as well as by sea was being studied. Of the many difficulties surrounding the whole question, the chief was uncertainty regarding German intentions; the enemy might continue to defend the western Netherlands, might carry out a complete evacuation or might leave static garrisons at certain points.<sup>89</sup> In mid-December it was considered that at least three or four weeks would be required to sweep mines out of channels along the Dutch coast; until this was done supplies could not be shipped directly from the United Kingdom to the Netherlands. However, in the interval, relief supplies could be brought forward by road or barge, and the 21st Army Group was establishing a stockpile of 30,000 tons at Oss. The Army Group now assumed responsibility for the planning and execution of relief.<sup>90</sup>

By 15 January 1945 the mounting crisis was such that Queen Wilhelmina, on the advice of her Ministers, addressed identical notes to King George VI, President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill. The Queen declared, "Conditions ... have at present become so desperate, that it is abundantly clear that, if a major catastrophe, the like of which has not been seen in Western Europe since the Middle Ages, is to be avoided in Holland, something drastic has to be done *now*, that is to say *before* and not *after* the liberation of the rest of the country."<sup>91</sup>

For months, efforts had been in progress to bring relief to occupied Holland through the Swedish and the International Red Cross. Although neither the Allies nor the Germans made any serious objection, much time elapsed before the plan produced actual results. At the end of January two small Swedish ships landed 3200 tons of supplies at Delfzijl; but it took nearly a fortnight for these shipments to reach Amsterdam. Another vessel, operated by the International Red Cross, eventually delivered additional supplies early in March. The Germans brought in 2600 tons of rye from Oldenburg province.<sup>92</sup> But these measures fell far short of requirements. At the end of March a Red Cross delegate, who had supervised the distribution of these supplies, reported:<sup>93</sup>

The physical situation of the western provinces having reduced the inhabitants almost to a primitive state, they are obliged, in the struggle for existence, to engage in the black market, in usury and even in theft; men even eat flower bulbs. The bombed houses are pillaged and looted of all combustible material. The trees in the gardens are cut and carried away by night. Horses killed in bombardments are immediately cut up by passers-by. The bread wagons in the cities can only circulate at 4:00 o'clock in the morning because if they go about in broad daylight crowds threaten to attack and plunder them.

Through the previous three months the daily caloric content of a Dutch workingman's rations had scarcely exceeded 500. In the larger cities the death-rate was nearly double that for equivalent periods in 1944.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, from the strictly operational point of view, there were strong arguments against immediate Allied military intervention to succour the stricken population. At the end of February the Germans began to undermine the dyke of the Wieringermeer, one of the newest polders reclaimed from the IJsselmeer;<sup>95</sup> there seemed good reason to believe that they would ruthlessly flood large sections

of the Netherlands if it suited their policy. The field commanders were painfully aware of this. On 14 March the Combined Chiefs of Staff, conscious of the desperate situation in Western Holland, instructed General Eisenhower to prepare an appreciation and plan for an operation "to liberate Holland as soon as practicable after your Rhine crossing has been secured", introducing food supplies "simultaneously with the arrival of the liberation forces".<sup>96</sup> Eisenhower and his advisers evidently did not greatly like this scheme. On 27 March the Supreme Commander, having consulted the 21st Army Group, informed the Combined Chiefs of Staff,

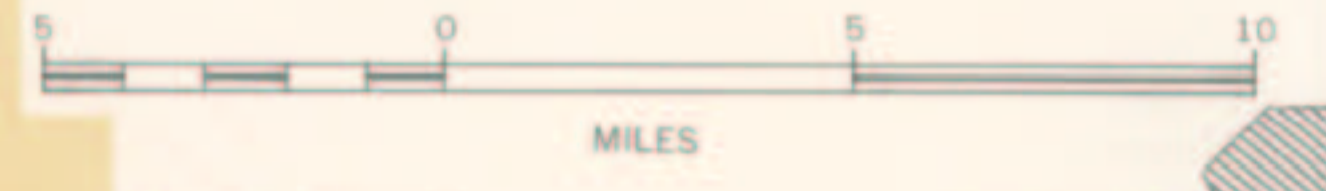
With the exception of the higher land East of Utrecht between the Rhine, the Ijssel and the Zuider Zee and excluding the sand dunes along the sea coast, the whole area is already flooded or liable to extensive flooding. Anticipate that the enemy will carry out demolitions and will breach dykes. This will call for a heavy engineer effort and will make it impossible for our Forces to deploy off the road. In addition, most large towns in Holland are prepared for all-round defence.

He emphasized that operations west of Utrecht "would inevitably involve very heavy casualties among Dutch civil population through bombing and shelling of towns and villages, as well as from starvation and flooding", and concluded that the quickest means of liberating and restoring the western Netherlands "may well be the rapid completion of our main operations". He considered it "militarily inadvisable to undertake operations west of Utrecht" as long as the Germans maintained cohesive resistance there, and added, "Suggest you should make quite clear to the Royal Netherlands Government the great cost of Dutch lives and property that any other course would necessitate."<sup>97</sup> This was also Montgomery's view.<sup>98</sup> The Combined Chiefs of Staff refrained from giving the Supreme Commander any directive in the matter,<sup>99</sup> and as we have seen the decision made in the theatre, 'which reached First Canadian Army through Montgomery on 12 April (above, page 572) was to stand fast before the Grebbe Line, a dozen miles east of Utrecht.

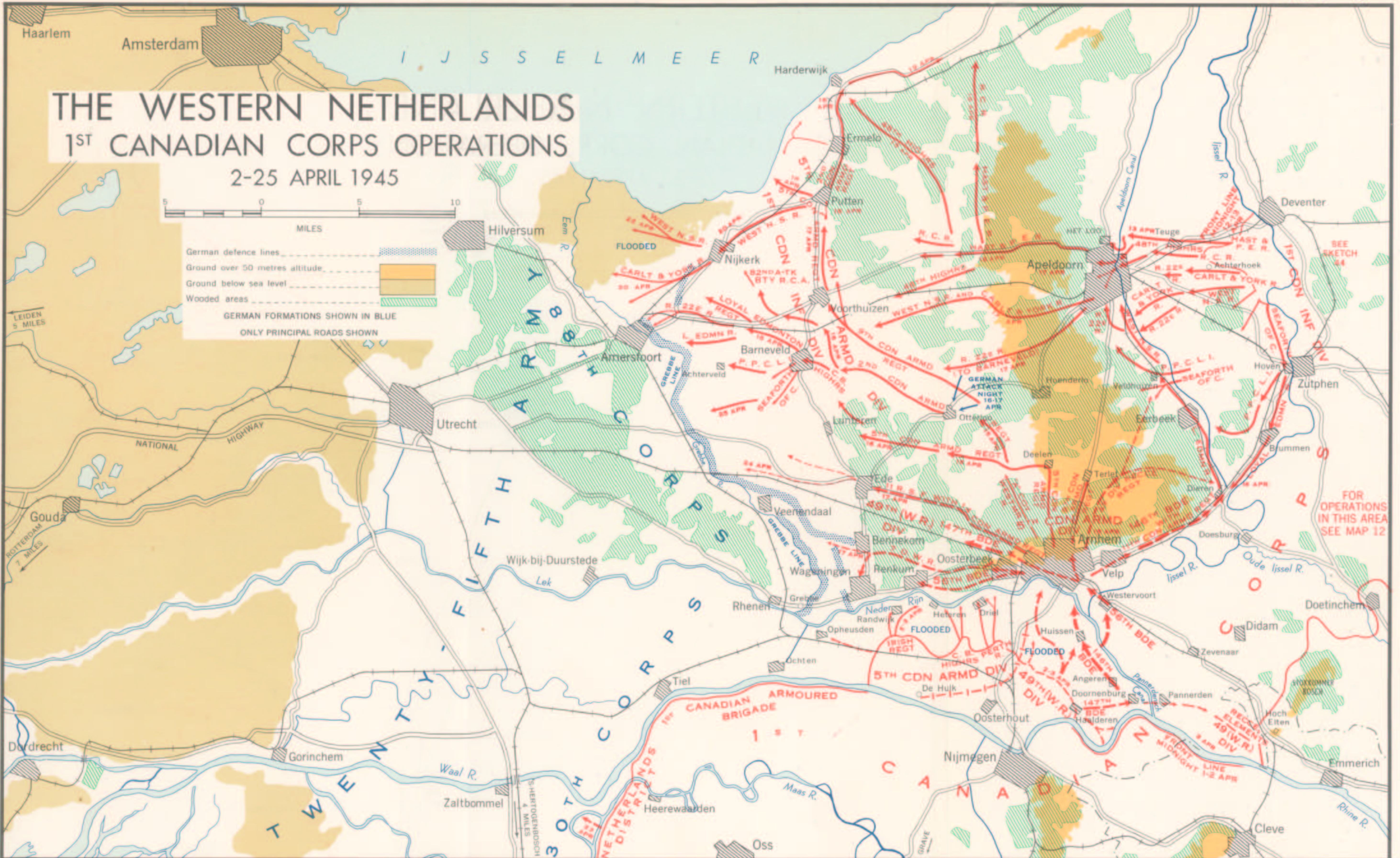
In the meantime the British Air Ministry, in consultation with SHAEF, prepared a plan to bring supplies into the Netherlands by air. It calculated that the Allied strategic bomber forces, assisted by No. 38 Group R.A.F., could without difficulty deliver 2200 tons daily. The plan was necessarily based on the assumption that no opposition would be encountered. By 15 April this plan was ready to go into operation at short notice.<sup>100</sup>

Two factors now operated to bring a solution to an intolerable situation: the Allied leaders' realization that further delay would be disastrous and the willingness of German authority, in the obnoxious person of Seyss-Inquart, to negotiate. On 10 April Mr. Churchill wrote to Mr. Roosevelt on the subject of Dutch relief. "I fear", he said, "we may soon be in the presence of a tragedy." Churchill suggested proposing to the Germans, through the Swiss government, an arrangement whereby supplies from Sweden could be increased and further supplies, "by sea or direct from areas under military control of the Allies", could be sent into the Netherlands.<sup>101</sup> While this proposal was under discussion the Reichskommissar revealed a disposition to discuss relief measures. There are different versions, not necessarily inconsistent, of how the contact was made. According to one, Dr. H. M. Hirschfeld, a senior Dutch civil servant at The Hague, discussed the matter with Seyss-Inquart; the latter confirmed this at his trial, giving the date as

# THE WESTERN NETHERLANDS 1<sup>ST</sup> CANADIAN CORPS OPERATIONS 2-25 APRIL 1945



German defence lines  
 Ground over 50 metres altitude  
 Ground below sea level  
 Wooded areas  
 GERMAN FORMATIONS SHOWN IN BLUE  
 ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS SHOWN



FOR OPERATIONS IN THIS AREA SEE MAP 12

SEE SKETCH 44

2 April.<sup>102</sup> On the other hand, information reaching First Canadian Army at the time was to the effect that the contact was through a representative of the Dutch Forces of the Interior.<sup>103</sup>

It was reported to First Canadian Army that Seyss-Inquart had stated that "he had been ordered to hold out under all circumstances, and to carry out the necessary demolitions and inundations for that purpose". However, he was prepared to facilitate the importation of Allied supplies of food and coal into the western Netherlands if his opponents would halt their forces east of the Grebbe Line. In effect a stalemate would descend on this front. The Germans would not surrender and would continue to occupy the provinces of North and South Holland and Utrecht, but fighting would end and the people of those provinces would be fed. According to the report, Seyss-Inquart said that he would surrender when resistance ceased in Germany.<sup>104</sup> But in subsequent conferences with Allied officers he refused to discuss surrender at all.<sup>105</sup>

The suggestions from Seyss-Inquart were the subject of a communication from Mr. Churchill to Washington and were discussed at the meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco. The American Chiefs of Staff doubted that the Germans would carry out further retaliatory measures against the Dutch; moreover, with the difficult Russian ally in mind, they were reluctant to give any appearance of compromising the "unconditional surrender" formula by treating with Seyss-Inquart. On the other hand, General Eisenhower was now convinced that "for sheer humanitarian reasons something must be done at once". The Seyss-Inquart formula offered the possibility of relieving the Dutch without interfering with operations. The Supreme Commander recommended on 23 April that, subject to Russian concurrence, direct negotiations be opened with the *Reichskommissar*. He also requested "as free a hand as possible" because of the urgency of the problem.<sup>106</sup> The Allied authorities approved his recommendation, and as we shall see in the next chapter the first meeting between Allied and German representatives took place on 28 April.

While these discussions were proceeding at higher levels, British and Canadian staffs were planning concrete steps to deal with the problem. Headquarters West Holland District had been established for this purpose to carry out the 21st Army Group's responsibilities and in February, under the new designation of Headquarters Netherlands District,\* this organization, commanded by Major-General A. Galloway, became responsible for bringing in and distributing relief supplies in the "B-2" area. Originally, Netherlands District depended upon First Canadian Army merely for administrative services north of the Maas; but on 13 April it came directly under General Crerar's operational command, while retaining direct access to Montgomery's staff on all matters pertaining to Dutch relief. It was responsible for defence of the islands at the mouth of the Scheldt, and had the 4th Commando Brigade and the 116th Royal Marine Infantry Brigade under

\*Not to be confused with the Netherlands Military Administration (which administered liberated areas of the Netherlands under instructions from the Dutch Government in London), or the SHAEF Mission to the Netherlands (which was the channel of communication between the 21st Army Group and the Dutch Government).

it for the purpose. Other troops, including the 33rd Armoured Brigade and Dutch and Belgian units, prolonged the line to the vicinity of Tiel. The District was under the 1st Canadian Corps from midnight 23-24 April.<sup>107</sup>

Awaiting the moment when action could begin, Headquarters Netherlands District made detailed plans for supplying essential relief to the "B-2" area. These covered four contingencies of supply: by river crossings from the south; by sea, through the ports of Scheveningen and IJmuiden; by air; and by road from the east. They were identified, respectively, as "Plackets" A, B, C and D, and detailed arrangements were made for each contingency. "Placket D" was to be carried out by a task force moving into the "B-2" area immediately behind the liberating troops. Particular attention was devoted to the problems of organizing the movement and distribution of supplies, building up reserves and opening ports.<sup>108</sup>

The relationship of Headquarters Netherlands District to Headquarters First Canadian Army was carefully defined. Responsibility for civil relief in the "B-2" area was to rest initially with the Army, passing to the District as soon as maintenance installations could be conveniently transferred. General Crerar's staff drew up an "order of battle" for "Placket D", and his Chief Engineer coordinated all route development; but the details of Canadian responsibility naturally fell on the 1st Corps, which was primarily concerned. Thus, General Foulkes' headquarters established a roadhead for the forward movement of relief stores and prepared to handle all initial problems of treating and evacuating sick and wounded.<sup>109</sup> Although the Netherlands District was under First Canadian Army, the latter had no responsibility for Plackets A, B and C. On these projected operations the District was authorized to deal directly with the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. Detailed arrangements had been made for the free dropping of supplies from aircraft over the "B-2" area ("Placket C"). Under "Placket D" the Netherlands District was to make available to the Army all Civil Affairs resources, including "transport, supplies and attached relief teams and their equipment for specific use in B-2 area". At General Crerar's headquarters the Deputy Director of Military Government (Brigadier W. B. Wedd) was responsible for liaison with the Civil Affairs staff at Headquarters Netherlands District to facilitate the latter's eventual assumption of responsibility for relief.<sup>110</sup>

While awaiting the opportunity to implement these plans, the Canadians came to grips with problems similar to those anticipated in the "B-2" area. At Ede our tank crews had seen civilian faces "stamped with the mark of malnutrition or downright starvation".<sup>111</sup> Elsewhere during the 1st Corps' advance such conditions multiplied. Many a Canadian ration was shared with these unfortunate people, especially with the young and aged. Although Apeldoorn had suffered less hardship than the bigger centres in the western Netherlands, its population had been swollen by 65,000 refugees, and large numbers required assistance when the town was liberated on 17 April. The following day a special detachment moved in and began distributing 40 tons (80,000 rations) to the inhabitants. The population remained orderly, and effective control was exercised over refugees. Relief measures were, quickly and efficiently organized.<sup>112</sup> Reporting on the week ending on the 21st, Brigadier Wedd noted, "the main problem in all centres has been that of

re-establishing the water supply, and this in turn depends on electric power and subsequently coal, and is being tackled as quickly as possible".<sup>113</sup> This experience with the immediate problems of a distressed urban area would be useful in dealing with the greater crisis in the regions farther west.

### The Halt in the Western Netherlands

As we have seen, offensive operations on the 1st Corps front had virtually ceased by 19 April. On General Foulkes' northern flank the 1st Division had relieved the 5th Division and the latter began to move out of the Corps area on the 21st. On General Foster's front operations continued momentarily, elements of the 3rd Brigade capturing Nijkerk and strong patrols reaching the Eem on the 20th. However, on the following day, the division recorded: "No change in the line of our forward troops and things are generally quiet." The troops settled down to the business of clearing the area east of the Eem, reaching a point little more than a mile from Amersfoort.<sup>114</sup>

On the 1st Corps' southern flank the 49th Division found time for reorganization, pending decisions on future operations. Since, however, the Germans had destroyed some villages where our patrols' approach had caused "premature joys of liberation" the division was ordered on 21 April to advance somewhat closer to the Grebbe Line, conforming to the front of the 1st Division. Next day its headquarters commented on current operations: "The infantry each day carried out patrols, on foot, in jeeps and in carriers, and it was found that the enemy had a habit of changing his positions very frequently although his main strong-points remained static."<sup>115</sup> A similar situation existed in the 1st Armoured Brigade sector, where there were spasmodic exchanges of machine-gun, mortar and artillery fire.<sup>116</sup> General Foulkes' headquarters moved forward to Harskamp, two miles north of Otterloo, on 22 April.<sup>117</sup>

On that day Field-Marshal Montgomery issued his last formal directive of the campaign.<sup>118</sup> The portion relating to the 1st Canadian Corps area ran:

15. In western Holland, the [Canadian] army will not for the present operate further westward than the general line now held east of Amersfoort. Further instructions will be issued if it should become necessary, later on, to attack the Germans in western Holland and to liberate that area.

As it turned out, the 1st Corps had completed its final offensive operation of the war. Not a particularly formidable task by the standards of the war in Italy from which the Corps had come, it had nevertheless not been simple. Since entering the new theatre the Corps had taken 8860 prisoners.<sup>119</sup> It was now to sit out the final fortnight of the war in front of the Grebbe Line.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE GERMAN SURRENDER

(See Map 14 and Sketches 47-49)

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**I**N the final days of April 1945 the military operations in Europe were approaching an inevitable end and the Allied leaders were concerned with international problems of the future.

There was growing difficulty between the Western powers and Russia over the future of Poland, and little unanimity between Britain and the United States on the political aspects of the campaign in Germany. Mr. Churchill was still anxious to carry the Allied advance as far, to the east as possible, thereby limiting the postwar influence of a suspicious and possibly hostile Russia. On the other hand President Truman, following the policies of his predecessor, was reluctant to take any action which might prejudice future relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> In the field, the Germans continued to fight obstinately, but the power of the *Wehrmacht* had been broken. Beleaguered in Berlin, Hitler was nearing the end of his extraordinary and malign career.

By 23 April converging Allied operations from east and west had compressed German-controlled Europe into the shape of a gigantic hour-glass. This was symbolic, for the sands were fast running out for the enemy. On the southern portion of General Eisenhower's front the First French Army had cleared Stuttgart; farther north the Seventh United States Army had captured Nurnberg, the shrine of Nazism, and reached the Danube. In the centre, the First U.S. Army had eliminated resistance in the Harz Mountains and occupied Leipzig, while the Third was rapidly approaching the Austrian border. The 12th Army Group held the general line of the Elbe River and was preparing to drive deep into the Danube basin and seize Salzburg. On 25 April the 69th United States Division was to meet the 58th Russian Guards Division near Torgau, on the upper Elbe. In the northern sector, the 21st Army Group had also reached the Elbe and liberated most of the north-eastern and part of the western Netherlands.

The Supreme Commander halted the main Allied forces on the lines of the Elbe and Mulde Rivers and the Erzgebirge. He later explained that logistical factors, and "the aim of concentrating forces now on the north and south flanks", were largely responsible for this decision. The rapidity and scale of the advance "had strained our supply organization to an unprecedented degree". A situation had developed which bore some resemblance to the problems of the pursuit during

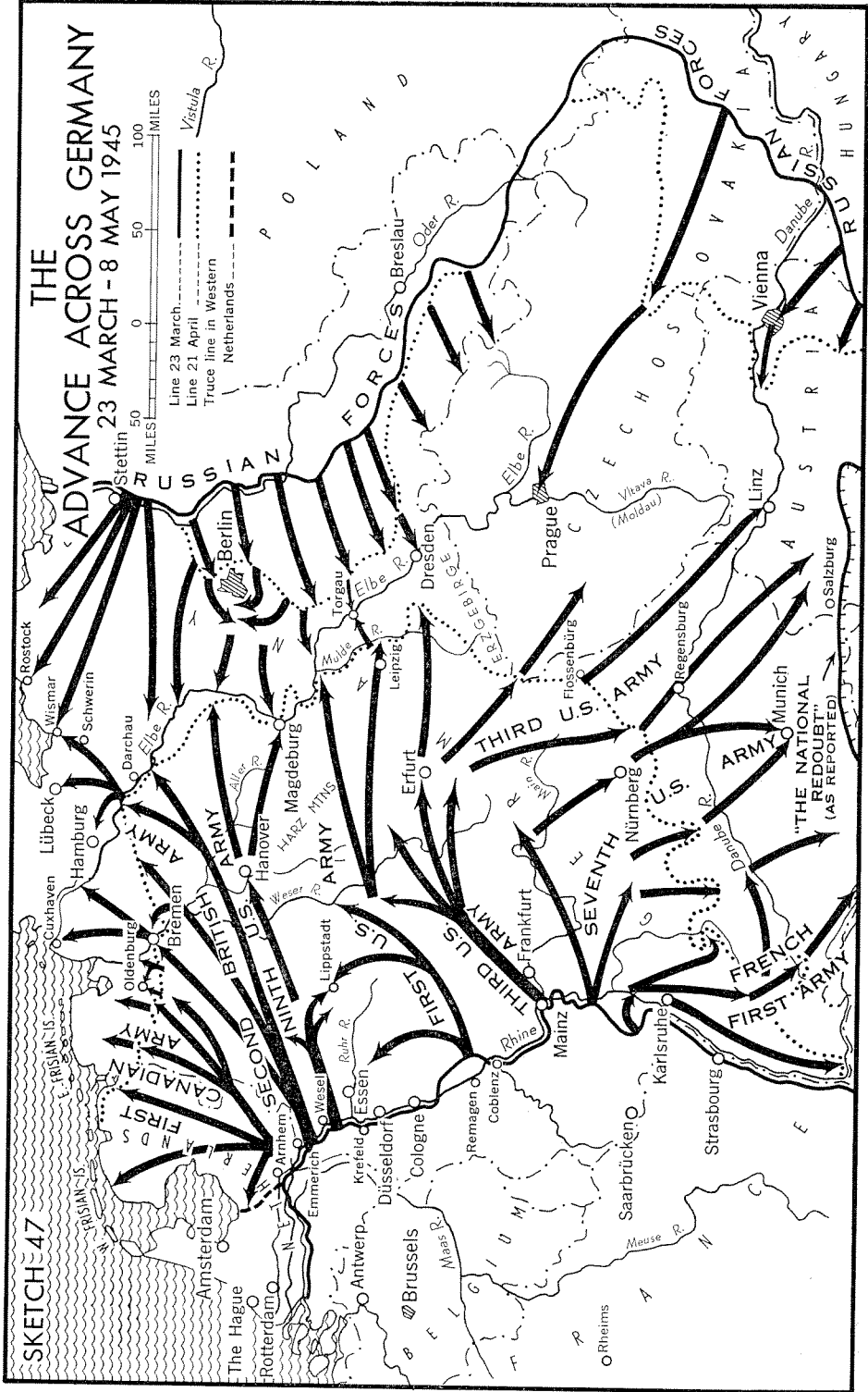
SKETCH 47

# THE ADVANCE ACROSS GERMANY

## 23 MARCH - 8 MAY 1945



Line 23 March  
 Line 21 April  
 Truce line in Western Netherlands





the previous autumn, and only the expedient of supplying armoured columns by air had maintained the momentum of the advance.<sup>2</sup>

### Canadian Tasks for the Final Phase

In his directive of 22 April<sup>3</sup> (above, page 587) Field-Marshal Montgomery had stated that it was his intention "to capture Emden, Bremen, Hamburg, and Lubeck, and to clean up all German territory north of this general line". General Dempsey's Second Army was instructed to capture Bremen, clear the Cuxhaven peninsula, secure a bridgehead over the lower Elbe and seize Lubeck and thereby "seal off the Schleswig peninsula as quickly as possible". A secure flank would be formed, north of the Elbe, on the general line Wismar—Schwerin—Darchau. This flank would be held by the 18th U.S. Airborne Corps, operating under Dempsey; the 6th British Airborne Division was to be added to this corps. In a later phase, the Second British Army would occupy Hamburg and Kiel and clear all German territory north to the frontier with Denmark.

Apart from the instructions relating to the suspension of offensive operations in Western Holland, quoted in the previous chapter, the directive prescribed the tasks of First Canadian Army as follows:

12. The right wing of Canadian Army will operate strongly against Oldenburg, and south of it, in close touch with the left wing of Second Army which is advancing on Bremen.
13. As soon as the portion of Bremen on the south bank of the Weser has been captured by Second Army, the right wing of Canadian Army will operate northwards to capture Emden and Wilhelmshaven and clear all enemy from the peninsula between the rivers Weser and Ems.
14. Canadian Army will study the problem of capturing those islands at the eastern end of the Frisian group from which the enemy could interfere with the free use of the Weser estuary e.g. Wangerooge, and possibly also Spiekeroog. . . .
16. Canadian Army will be prepared to release 49 Div to Second Army as soon as the operations referred to in 13 have been completed.

Responsibility for reduction of the Frisian Islands was delegated on 22 April to the G.O.C. 2nd Canadian Corps, General Simonds, who, as previously mentioned (above, page 563) on the same day again became Acting Army Commander, though without relinquishing command of his corps.\* He was to plan and execute the operation in conjunction with Captain A. F. Pugsley, Commander Naval Force "T". As originally assigned, the task included both the East and West Frisian Islands; Wangerooge, at the mouth of the Weser, was to receive first priority, followed by Borkum, Norderney and Juist.<sup>4</sup> However, on the 24th, Simonds obtained confirmation that the Army was concerned only with the islands at the eastern end of the Frisian group—in particular, Wangerooge, though Spiekeroog might also be a requirement. He reported that Field-Marshal Montgomery favoured reducing the islands by heavy bombing.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, on the 27th, Montgomery's headquarters issued another instruction ordering First Canadian Army to capture first Wangerooge and then Alte Mellum, a small sandy island in the mouth of the Weser. Although plans were drafted for these operations they were never required.<sup>6</sup>

\*General Crerar returned to his headquarters on 29 April.

Simonds and his staff were too heavily engaged with other commitments to be able to concentrate on the Frisians, and the termination of hostilities on 5 May disposed of the problem.

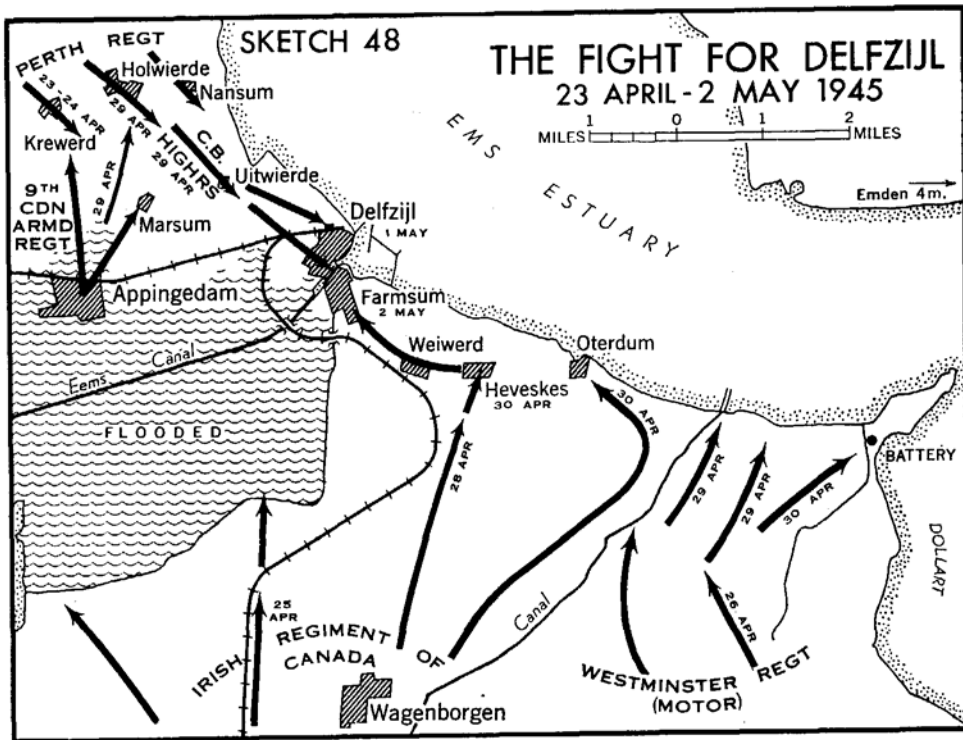
In telling the story of the final Canadian operations in the campaign it is best to begin by describing the action on the front of the 2nd Corps, then continuing with a brief account of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion's advance to the Baltic (as part of the 6th British Airborne Division, under the Second Army) and concluding with the continuation of efforts to bring relief to the Dutch on the front of the 1st Corps.

During this period the 2nd Canadian Corps' commitments extended from the north-eastern Netherlands to the left bank of the Weser, below Bremen. Across this wide front the Corps Commander employed four Canadian divisions (the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th), the 1st Polish Armoured Division and, from 28 April to 6 May, the 3rd British Infantry Division. Supporting formations under his control included the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade and the 2nd Canadian and 4th British Army Groups, Royal Artillery. The pattern of the final operations had been clarified on 20 April, when the Corps Commander held a conference with Generals Keebler and Hoffmeister and assigned divisional tasks. On the right, the 2nd Division was to protect the western flank of the 30th Corps and advance on Vegesack, on the Weser. The 4th Division would continue north and then turn east against Oldenburg; but if that city proved to be too strongly held for an armoured division to tackle, General Vokes would "capture and seal off" its northern exits and close up to the Weser. The 5th Division, then still in the western Netherlands, would relieve the 3rd Division, enabling it, in turn, to relieve the Poles. They would thus be free to seize Papenburg and test the crossings over the Leda at Leer; but if opposition appeared too heavy, they would strike north-east to Varel, leaving the amphibious assault to Keebler's infantry division. Following the capture of Leer, the 3rd Division would advance to Emden by way of Aurich.<sup>7</sup>

### The Fight for Delfzijl

The operations of the 2nd Corps may conveniently be described from left to right, beginning with the 5th Division in the north-eastern Netherlands.

On 21 April, as already mentioned, the division began moving from western Holland to assume its new responsibilities; it passed under the 2nd Canadian Corps on the same date.<sup>8</sup> Apart from relieving the 3rd Division, General Hoffmeister was given operational control over the provinces of Friesland, Groningen, Drenthe and the northern portion of Overijssel. (At a later stage these areas would pass to Headquarters Netherlands District and Lines of Communication.) His tasks were to clear the remaining Germans out of the area west of the junction of the Dutch-German frontier and the Ems estuary, to dominate the waters between the northern coast and the Frisian Islands, dealing with any raiding parties or patrols endeavouring to land, and to establish battle groups which could garrison the entire area effectively. In addition there was still a possibility that the divisional headquarters would be required to plan amphibious operations against Borkum and



Norderney. To assist Hoffmeister in his new role he was given eight Netherlands Independent Companies and anti-aircraft gunners for employment in ground roles and on occupation duties.

The 5th Division virtually completed its relief of the 3rd Division on 24 April.<sup>10</sup> Initially, the 5th Armoured Brigade held the area north and east of Groningen, exclusive of a German pocket centred on Delfzijl, and the 11th Infantry Brigade occupied the greater part of Friesland and north-western Overijssel, from the North Sea to Zwolle. However, Hoffmeister soon concluded that the reduction of the Delfzijl pocket was primarily a task for infantry. Therefore, on the morning of the 25th, Brigadier Johnston took over the division's right sector from Brigadier Cumberland and the 11th Brigade prepared to capture the port. Responsibility for the left sector was transferred to the 5th Brigade.<sup>11</sup>

Delfzijl, with a pre-war population of 10,000, is one of the largest of the secondary ports of the Netherlands. It is located on the left bank of the Ems estuary, some 20 miles from the river's mouth. Topography hampered operations in this area. The ground was flat with very little cover and "a complicated network of ditches and canals made cross-country movement impossible. The weather was wet and the whole area subject to flooding, which meant [that] all vehicles were confined to roads."<sup>12</sup> The German garrison was estimated at about 1500 fighting

troops, consisting of a battalion of marines\* and various battle-groups, together with an unknown number employed on maintenance. The Germans had batteries and concrete emplacements in and around Delfzijl and "an outer perimeter of wire and a continuous trench system" surrounded the port. Heavy naval guns near Emden and on the island of Borkum could also give defensive fire.<sup>14</sup>

The Corps Commander coordinated the 3rd Division's attack towards Emden with the 5th Division's assault at Delfzijl.<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of the latter operation Brigadier Johnston had under command, in addition to his own battalions, The Westminster Regiment (Motor), the 9th Armoured Regiment (The British Columbia Dragoons), a squadron (later two) of the New Brunswick Hussars, the 11th Independent Machine Gun Company (The Princess Louise Fusiliers), the 88th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery R.C.A. and the 16th and 82nd Anti-Tank Batteries R.C.A. The divisional field artillery was also actively engaged and later stages of the operation were supported by the 31st (British) Anti-Aircraft Brigade and the 3rd Battery of the 1st Heavy Regiment R.A., mainly in counter-battery roles.<sup>16</sup>

Brigadier Johnston's first step, beginning on 25 April, was to reduce the perimeter of the defence with steady pressure exerted by the Westminsters and The Irish Regiment of Canada from the south, the Dragoons from the west and The Perth Regiment from the north. This was not accomplished without difficulty. The Westminsters were heavily shelled and movement during daylight was exceedingly difficult; however, by the end of the month, they had cleared all of their area except a spit protruding deep into the Dollart, seven miles south-east of Delfzijl, where the Germans had a troublesome battery. Not until the port fell (1 May) did the enemy evacuate this position by sea. Meanwhile the Irish made steady progress from Wagenborgen to Oterdum and Heveskes (little more than a mile from the south-eastern outskirts of Delfzijl), which they had cleared by the 30th. "The going was slow as they had to deal with mines and road demolitions before they could get any supporting arms forward." They also endured much shelling, some coming across the estuary from the vicinity of Emden.<sup>17</sup> The British Columbia Dragoons held the northern portion of Appingedam. Partly dismounted, they were under constant fire, with forward movement impeded by demolitions and waterways; they recorded that "spasmodic shelling made life miserable for the forward squadrons as the slit trenches have become very muddy".<sup>18</sup> However, our own artillery, in particular the 8th Field Regiment (Self-Propelled) R.C.A., replied vigorously and on the 29th the Dragoons were able to advance, in conjunction with the Perths on their left, and occupy nearby Marsum. On the northern flank, the Perths encountered the heaviest opposition of the whole operation. Entering Krewerd on the night of 23-24 April, the battalion's main objective was a line through Nansum and Holwierde, about four miles north-west of Delfzijl. This was not secured until the 29th, after hard fighting in which the infantry were assisted by Spitfires, "A" Squadron of the New Brunswick Hussars and our artillery firing airbursts. The Perths suffered 78 casualties during the period 24-29 April.<sup>19</sup>

\*These were not marines as known in the British and American services; they were simply *ad hoc* organizations of ships' crews and personnel from bases and depots. Nevertheless they frequently fought well.<sup>13</sup>

The time had now come for the decisive assault on Delfzijl itself. This task was assigned to The Cape Breton Highlanders, who had relieved the Perth's on the evening of the 29th and then pushed forward to seize Uitwierde, mid-way between Marsum and the estuary. The main attack began at 10:00 p.m. on the 30th. Progress was delayed by wire and minefields covered by German positions dug in along the dykes. On the morning of 1 May the troops were temporarily pinned down by the enemy's fire. An officer who was there described "D" Company's difficulties in assaulting "four large enemy bunkers, each the size of a bungalow, and all constructed of 4-ft. thick reinforced concrete":<sup>20</sup>

One of these bunkers—the command post for the guns along the dykes—could raise its periscope and view our axis of advance over the flat Dutch farmland quite easily. Luckily for 'D' Coy, the gunners on top of the dyke could not depress their pieces sufficiently to fire directly at us coming along a road half-way up the landward side of the dyke. This was our company's axis, since the open fields around the strongpoint were heavily mined.

Meanwhile "B" Company, supported by a troop of the Hussars' tanks, captured the railway station on the northern outskirts of Delfzijl. Shortly thereafter opposition died down and German soldiers were seen "retreating over the dyke and pushing off in boats heading across the estuary towards Germany".<sup>21</sup> Our artillery rendered their passage extremely hazardous.

Delfzijl was completely cleared on the 1st, and on the following day the Irish extinguished the remaining embers of resistance in the pocket at Weiwerd and Farmsum, capturing 38 officers (including the garrison commander) and over 1300 other ranks. Fortunately, the lock gates and other installations at Delfzijl, although prepared for demolition, were preserved intact; also, the German commander and his staff cooperated in locating and dealing with numerous indiscriminately strewn minefields. Our own casualties were lighter than might have been anticipated. The Irish Regiment and The Cape Breton Highlanders had 67 and 68 respectively; the Westminsters, 23.<sup>22</sup> With these losses, in its last major operation, the 5th Canadian Armoured Division had successfully carried out a difficult task, capturing 109 German officers and 4034 other ranks.<sup>23</sup>

### Across the Ems and the Leda

While the 5th Division was dealing with the Delfzijl pocket, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and the 1st Polish Armoured Division were crossing the Ems and the Leda, loosening the German hold on the eastern bank of the Ems estuary and penetrating deep into the Emden—Wilhelmshaven peninsula. We have seen that General Simonds originally intended that the Poles would reconnoitre the crossings over the Leda at Leer; if these were too strongly held, the actual assault would be performed by Keefler's "Water Rats", while the Poles went for Varel, at the eastern base of the Emden—Wilhelmshaven peninsula. The latter alternative ultimately proved necessary. The problem was in fact settled by developments to the eastward, where the 4th Armoured Division's bridgehead north of the Kusten Canal was under heavy attack. Consequently, on the morning of the

22nd, the Polish Armoured Division was directed along a north-easterly axis to relieve the pressure here. The tasks of forcing the Ems and the Leda and capturing Leer fell to the 3rd Division.<sup>24</sup>

Leer is a small port for sea-going vessels at the junction of the Ems and the Leda. The town is an important communication centre, connected by good roads with Emden and Wilhelmshaven. Although the Polish advance east of the Ems had simplified the approach, an assault across the wide lower reaches of the Ems (where tidal action causes differences in width of up to 300 feet)<sup>25</sup> promised to be difficult. The Leda, though narrower than the Ems, is itself some 200 yards wide at Leer and is also subject to tidal variations. These rivers surrounded the port on three sides and the fourth was protected by marshy ground. All bridges had been demolished.

Before the attack General Keefler's Intelligence staff could provide little definite information on the Germans in Leer. It was thought, however, that they might have two battalions for the defence of the town and its immediate vicinity; reports also indicated that supporting arms were "not plentiful". Afterwards we learned that the defending force had consisted of a unit of marine replacements and some Flak troops, all under a lieutenant colonel. He had placed three companies on the western outskirts of Leer, to guard against attack across the Ems, and four on the southern perimeter, the Leda side. These marines were quite untrained—"for many it was the first experience in land battle"-and their morale was low.<sup>26</sup>

"Duck" was the appropriate code name given to the 3rd Division's amphibious operation to take Leer and nearby Loga. The assault was to be carried out in three phases: first, the 9th Infantry Brigade would attack across the two rivers and establish a bridgehead; then the 7th Brigade would pass through to capture Loga and an adjacent wood (Julianen Park); finally, the 9th Brigade would enlarge the bridgehead northwards as a base for exploitation towards Veenhusen and Terborg, in the direction of Emden.<sup>27</sup> In the initial phase, Brigadier Rockingham ordered The North Nova Scotia Highlanders to cross the Leda in stormboats, on the right of the brigade, secure the northern bank of the river and develop the main attack to capture Leer. In the centre, The Highland Light Infantry of Canada were to descend the Ems and land at a point named Leerort, where the Ems and the Leda meet. On the left, The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry High landers would attack directly across the Ems and seize the town's western edge. Rockingham reasoned that simultaneous attacks at three points would prevent the enemy from concentrating his defence. The timing of the assault required special consideration, not only because of tidal variations, but because H.Q. 2nd Corps had ordered that the planned bridgehead should be firm by nightfall, in order that engineers could start their operations under cover of darkness. Accordingly H Hour was set for three o'clock in the afternoon of 28 April.<sup>28</sup>

The 3rd Division's resources were considerably augmented to meet the special demands of "Duck". Under command for the operation were the 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment), two batteries of the 6th Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A. (from Corps Troops) and Headquarters 2nd Corps Troops R.C.E. with the 20th and 31st Field Companies R.C.E. The operation would also

be supported by "Crocodiles" of "A" Squadron of the 141st Regiment R.A.C., the 4th Army Group, R.A., the 16th/1st Heavy Battery R.A., the 11th Army Field Regiment R.C.A. (in addition to the divisional artillery) and a British smoke company of the Pioneer Corps. A "Pepper Pot", organized by the Commanding Officer of The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.), would also assist the 9th Brigade's assault.<sup>29</sup>

In the early afternoon of the 28th, Typhoons shot up targets in Leer and, 35 minutes before the stormboats were launched, the artillery opened a heavy bombardment. Brigadier Rockingham observed: "The shooting was for the greater part excellent, as burst after burst was seen along the dykes where the enemy was entrenched."<sup>30</sup> However, on the 9th Brigade's right flank, the German positions were too close to our assembly area for the artillery to give support and a contrary wind made a normal smoke-screen impracticable. Nevertheless, the North Nova Scotias employed their 2-inch mortars, firing smoke, to screen the attack and they were helped by weapons of the Camerons and the 1st Battalion, The Canadian Scottish Regiment. "'D' Company, carrying the assault boats, left the cover of the dykes, dashed to the river banks, boarded the boats and were soon on the other side." The Germans were completely surprised; they were found cowering in their trenches and "three machine-guns were captured, fully loaded, before firing a round".<sup>31</sup> The remainder of the North Nova Scotias followed "D" Company and in a short time had penetrated deeply into the southern portion of Leer. Meanwhile, two miles south of the town, The Highland Light Infantry of Canada launched their boats on the Ems, moving downstream to the point at Leerort. Although delayed en route, they received such excellent support from the artillery that their landing was virtually unopposed. The H.L.I. then pressed forward into the centre of Leer "against sniper and *Panzerfaust* fire".<sup>32</sup> On the left of the brigade The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders encountered the heaviest opposition. As their boats crossed the Ems, 400 yards wide at this point, they were engaged by machine-guns from both flanks. The leading companies reached the eastern bank at 3:08 p.m.; but sustained German fire sank two boats in a second wave and 15 men were believed drowned. (Brigadier Rockingham afterwards questioned "the suitability of the type of lifebelt" then used.) The battalion mopped up resistance along the adjacent dyke and proceeded methodically to clear the western part of Leer.<sup>33</sup>

There was fierce street fighting in the process. Germans infiltrated our positions and, at times, "fought with the greatest dash and bravery".<sup>34</sup> Great care was needed to avoid clashes between our own troops. Another difficulty arose in connection with the build-up: wind, tide and engine-trouble plagued the engineers' efforts to maintain ferry service across the rivers. Finally "Duck" was halted on the night of the 28th, to be resumed on the following morning. The operation then proceeded smoothly and by 6:50 p.m. on the 29th Brigadier Rockingham was able to report that his brigade had all its objectives—that is, as far as the railway running through the eastern section of Leer. The fighting on the 28th and 29th cost his three battalions 70 casualties in all.<sup>35</sup> This relatively light loss was cer-

tainly due to the soundness of the tactical plan as well as to the supporting arms' efficiency and the determination of the assaulting troops.

The 7th Infantry Brigade completed the capture of Leer and its vicinity. Late on the 29th The Regina Rifle Regiment moved eastward across the railway without serious opposition. Next morning it swung south to clear the right bank of the Leda, overcoming unexpected resistance in a German barracks. Meanwhile The Royal Winnipeg Rifles had cleared Julianen Park; the Canadian Scottish then took Loga with little difficulty, delayed only by the rubble in the streets.<sup>36</sup>

Late on 1 May the 3rd Division's headquarters issued instructions for the final phase of the campaign that had begun on the beaches of Normandy. While the 7th Brigade held the Leer bridgehead, the 8th was to drive on towards Aurich, seizing crossings over the Ems-Jade Canal. The 7th would then take over and capture Aurich, while the 9th Brigade, on the left, probed towards Emden. The 8th and 9th Brigades proceeded to advance steadily along their designated routes in the face of scattered resistance and extensive demolitions; but hostilities ceased before the objectives were reached. The 8th Brigade was on the outskirts of Aurich, and Brigadier Roberts was negotiating with the Germans for the surrender of the place, when operations were suspended on 4 May.<sup>37</sup>

### The Advance into the Emden-Wilhelmshaven Peninsula

In the centre of the 2nd Corps' active front, General Simonds' two armoured divisions drove well into the base of the Emden-Wilhelmshaven peninsula before the campaign ended. In this area the German order of battle underwent kaleidoscopic changes during the last days. Out of a mass of confusing and contradictory identification-including verification of a squadron of cavalry under command of a parachute regiment—our Intelligence could draw only tentative conclusions. (Even today, due to the absence of German records for the final phase, we can do little better.) However, at the end of April, it appeared that the front between the Weser and the Ems was divided into five "divisional" commands. In the west, we believed that the 2nd Parachute Corps controlled three: the 7th and 8th Parachute Divisions and Battle Group "Gericke"—a parachute formation including naval troops. The eastern flank was thought to be under the 86th Corps, with the 471st and 490th Infantry Divisions ("divisional staffs controlling a miscellany of battle groups") under command.<sup>38</sup>

Although the enemy entered the last round battered and disorganized, he still had one important factor in his favour—the difficult terrain north of the Kusten Canal. We have already seen (above pages 559-61) that both the 4th and the 1st Polish Armoured Divisions had fierce struggles for crossings over this obstacle. Fighting forward north of the canal, the armour found seemingly endless stretches of wet ground, interlaced with countless ditches and streams. The maps were full of treacherous bogs and ponds; movement—particularly armoured movement—was restricted to a few routes, and these were vulnerable to counter-attack. In this country even an inexperienced unit, if determined, could hold up an entire division. Yet, with infantry divisions fully engaged on either flank, Generals Vokes and



Maczek were compelled to commit their tanks, half-tracks and other heavy vehicles over this unsuitable battlefield.

On 22 April, as previously mentioned, the Corps Commander directed the 1st Polish Armoured Division towards Varel in order to relieve the pressure on Vokes' western flank. Soon, however, bad roads slowed the Poles' advance. By the 25th their 3rd Infantry Brigade Group had reached Potshausen, on the upper Leda; assisted by aerial and artillery bombardments, it obtained a foothold beyond the river here. But construction of a bridge was delayed by heavy German fire, and reconnaissance revealed that the road leading north to Stickhausen was obstructed by six craters, each between 40 and 60 feet wide, within a distance of 500 metres.<sup>39</sup> Not until 1 May did the Poles manage to cross the Jumme River, a tributary of the Leda, and occupy Stickhausen. Meanwhile, on 30 April, the 10th Polish Armoured Brigade struck out from the Canadian bridgehead at Leer in the direction of Hesel, about five miles distant, which they secured on the following day.<sup>40</sup>

The continuing Polish advance, although delayed by the roads, gave some help to the 4th Armoured Division's operations. The Poles met sporadic resistance to the end of the campaign. An attempt to seize a bridge near Moorburg, on the 2nd, cost them five tanks; but contact with General Vokes' troops was finally established at Westerstede on the 3rd<sup>41</sup> In the final stages, the Polish Division was directed towards Neuenburg, Jever and Wilhelmshaven. On the evening of the 4th, Maczek's infantry and armoured reconnaissance troops reached the hamlet of Astederfeld, only two miles south of Neuenburg. In action to the end, the Polish artillery pounded German positions until one minute before the "cease fire" on the morning of 5 May.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile the 4th Canadian Armoured Division was striving to expand its bridgehead beyond the Kusten Canal. On 20 April General Simonds had ordered it to advance on Oldenburg (above, page 591). On General Vokes' right flank, the boundary between the 2nd and 4th Divisions ran north-east just to the north of Sage and Huntlosen, along the River Hunte and the eastern section of Oldenburg to the Weser.<sup>43</sup>

The advance north of the Kusten Canal was a fitting sequel to the costly struggle for a bridgehead. Although the defenders consisted mainly of marines and remnants from the 7th Parachute Division, hastily organized and flung into battle, they fought hard. On 21 April the 10th Infantry Brigade forced these people back over the River Aue near Osterscheps, giving our bridgehead a depth of more than two miles. As The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise's) moved forward they observed the grim effect of our supporting aircraft and artillery: "The main road leading north from the canal was literally strewn on either side with German dead. The enemy had evidently not found time to bury them all, and there were disfigured bodies in or near every slit-trench. It proved once more how very effective close air and ground co-operation can be."<sup>44</sup> The 28th Armoured Regiment (The British Columbia Regiment) also supported the infantry; at one point their 30-ton Shermans successfully crossed a light Bailey bridge, designed to carry 12 tons, to assist The Algonquin Regiment.<sup>45</sup> Early on the 24th the

Algonquins captured an important road junction near Edewecht, and the village itself was in our hands on the following day. Meanwhile, The Lincoln and Welland Regiment took high ground on the south-eastern outskirts after persistent attacks. The severity of the fighting was reflected in our losses. During the period 17-25 April, the 10th Brigade's three battalions had a total of 402 casualties; the heaviest burden fell on the Argylls, who lost 146 men, including 41 killed.<sup>46</sup> On the 22nd this unit recorded that the fighting strength of its companies had been "reduced to about 55-60 each in A, B and C, with only 47 remaining in D". It received 90 reinforcements the following day-evidence that the reinforcement situation was well in hand.<sup>47</sup> The steady expansion of the bridgehead was not accomplished without severe strain on maintenance. A senior staff officer of the 4th Division described the difficulties:<sup>48</sup>

Not only had the roads leading up to the Canal deteriorated seriously, but there was only a single road north from Edewechterdamm across the Kusten swamps to Bad Zwischenahn, and that displayed an alarming tendency to 'disappear' under us altogether. Faced with this situation, the G.O.C. [General Vokes] decided to concentrate all available R.C.E. resources and all available vehicles to maintain these roads. They were, in fact, kept open, but only by dint of a tremendous effort on the part of the divisional engineers.

With the Argylls and the Lincoln and Welland under command, Brigadier Moncel's 4th Armoured Brigade took over on the morning of the 25th the task of expanding the bridgehead towards Bad Zwischenahn. The armour's right (eastern) flank was protected by the 10th Brigade, reinforced by the 27th Royal Marine Battalion, while the 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment) operated south of Oldenburg. On Moncel's left the 18th Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons) drove north-west towards Godensholt.<sup>49</sup> Commenting on the tactics employed along the main axis, the brigade commander observed that "the condition of the roads in the bridgehead was such that no more than two squadrons of armour could be deployed at any one time, and usually only one troop of each could be used for direct fire"; he therefore decided "to choose company objectives some 200 yards apart, to tee-up company attacks supported by a troop of tanks, and to drive straight ahead".<sup>50</sup> These tactics were supplemented by particularly efficient cooperation between ground and air forces. This was partly achieved by the use of a "contact tank",\* equipped with special wireless, in direct communication with close-support aircraft, and commanded by an officer of the Royal Air Force. Employed with the leading company of The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor), it brought rocket-firing aircraft into action within 300 yards of our forward troops.<sup>52</sup>

As the northward thrust continued the cages filled with German prisoners and deserters (during April the 4th Division captured over 3600 prisoners); but the enemy continued to resist strongly along the approaches to Bad Zwischenahn. Road-blocks, mines and craters, covered by the fire of self-propelled guns, mortars, machine-guns and other weapons, delayed the 4th Armoured Brigade's advance.<sup>53</sup> On the 26th the Lake Superior Regiment, supported by tanks of the 22nd Armoured

\*A similar, but less satisfactory, procedure had been employed during earlier phases of the campaign-for example, in support of the 7th Infantry Brigade on 21 February.<sup>51</sup>

Regiment (The Canadian Grenadier Guards), reached a bridge at Querenstede, some two miles south-west of Bad Zwischenahn, only to have it blown in their faces. On their right, The Lincoln and Welland Regiment also had difficulty; apart from dealing with continual obstacles, they had trouble maintaining communications between tanks and infantry platoons because of "thick hedges, resembling those found in the bocage country of Normandy". Nevertheless, on the 28th they captured Ekern and next morning seized high ground on the southern edge of Bad Zwischenahn under machine-gun and 88-mm. fire from the town.<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, steps had been taken on 27 April to strengthen General Vokes' left flank. For this purpose he took under command the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade\* (less the 10th and 27th Armoured Regiments, then supporting the 2nd and 3rd Divisions, respectively) with the 1st Armoured Car Regiment (The Royal Canadian Dragoons), and the 1st and Belgian Special Air Service Regiments. This force was instructed to capture Godensholt, Ocholt, Apen and Barssel, make contact with the Poles at Bollingen, and patrol north and east to Torsholt and Rostrup.<sup>55</sup> Brigadier Robinson accordingly dispatched "Frank Force", evidently named for Lt.-Col. F. E. White, commanding the 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars), and composed of elements of that regiment, the 18th Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons) and the Belgian S.A.S. Regiment, in the direction of Godensholt. With the help of armoured bulldozers and Bailey bridging equipment "Frank Force" had reached the village by 30 April. The Royal Canadian Dragoons then pushed on to Westerstede where, as we have seen, they met the Poles on 3 May. When the fighting ended the 2nd Armoured Brigade was advancing on a north-easterly axis, the armoured cars reaching Grabstede, 12<sup>1</sup> miles north of Bad Zwischenahn, on the 4th.<sup>56</sup>

While these developments were taking place on his left flank, General Vokes was dealing with Bad Zwischenahn. On 30 April The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, supported by a squadron of the Canadian Grenadier Guards, outflanked the town from the west and closed its northern exits by reaching the shore of the adjacent lake, the Zwischenahner Meer; simultaneously, The Lincoln and Welland Regiment fought its way into the eastern outskirts.<sup>57</sup> Further German resistance appeared hopeless and the divisional commander sent an ultimatum to the burgomaster offering a choice of "unconditional surrender" or "annihilation". The German military commander does not seem to have made a formal surrender, but he did evacuate Bad Zwischenahn, apparently reserving the right to shell the town if our troops moved in. These terms were, in effect if not in form, accepted. General Vokes placed the town "out of bounds" to all troops, save for "through" traffic.<sup>58</sup>

On the night of 30 April-1 May the enemy withdrew his heavy equipment on the 4th Armoured Brigade front. The following day, accordingly, resistance was light in this sector west of the Zwischenahner Meer. though it "remained tough" on the 10th Brigade's to the south-east. Meanwhile, the 2nd Division's easier progress on the right brought a change of plans; by 1 May that formation was preparing to take Oldenburg and the 4th Division was therefore redirected upon Varel.

\*Commanded since the previous December by Brigadier G. W. Robinson.

General Vokes planned to send the 10th Infantry Brigade through Bockhorn and Neuenburg, while the 4th Armoured Brigade cut the main highway running north from Oldenburg to Varel and Wilhelmshaven.<sup>59</sup>

With the Argylls and the Lincoln and Welland back under command, the 10th Brigade made steady progress against sporadic resistance. On the 4th, divisional headquarters recorded: "At a few points small groups of infantry knotted around a mortar or a self-propelled gun have fought well. More often, however, they have been very ready to surrender."<sup>60</sup> By evening that day the Argylls, supported by British Columbia Regiment tanks, were near Mollberg, seven miles north-east of Bad Zwischenahn. On the armoured brigade's front The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor), along with the Canadian Grenadier Guards, captured Rastede and reached the outskirts of Bekhausen, ten miles north of Oldenburg.<sup>61</sup>

### The Advance to Oldenburg

On General Crerar's far eastern flank the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division and, beginning on 28 April, the 3rd British Infantry Division had somewhat easier tasks than their neighbours. It will be recalled that General Matthews' division had been brought from the Groningen sector to operate between the 43rd (Wessex) Division, directed on Delmenhorst, and the 4th Armoured Division. The object of this regrouping was to assist the Second British Army's attack on Bremen. Initially, therefore, the 2nd Division was ordered to clear the left bank of the Weser opposite Vegesack, some ten miles below Bremen.<sup>62</sup>

On 19 April the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade relieved the 214th Brigade of the Wessex Division near Ahlhorn, about 15 miles south of Oldenburg. The 4th Brigade's patrols advanced along the railway leading towards Oldenburg without encountering serious resistance. On the 22nd the divisional axis swung eastward, aimed at Vegesack, and the 5th Brigade passed through the 4th to occupy the Huntlosen area. Its headquarters reported that "practically no opposition was met at all-a few stragglers and deserters, but no real contact with the enemy".<sup>63</sup> However, mines and felled trees imposed some delay. It was then the turn of the 6th Brigade, which had the task of capturing Kirchhatten, athwart the road connecting Wildeshausen with Oldenburg.

At Kirchhatten the enemy reacted vigorously but ineffectually. The place was defended by six companies of a "Battle Group Lier", formed from a noncommissioned officers' school near Hanover, under the nominal control of the 490th Division, a weak formation composed of miscellaneous elements including marines.<sup>64</sup> Brigadier Allard's attack was supported by "C" Squadron of the 10th Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse), two companies of the divisional support battalion, The Toronto Scottish Regiment (M.G.), and field, medium and anti-tank artillery. In the village and neighbouring woods The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada encountered stiff resistance. The enemy was well dug in, and counter-attacked in strength on the afternoon of the 23rd. He was, however, beaten back with the help of tanks and artillery. Another German effort next day failed to dislodge our troops and the 6th Brigade strengthened its hold.

In spite of this show of fight, the 2nd Division's Intelligence staff concluded that the enemy's attention was focussed on the defence of Wilhelmshaven, "leaving poorer troops for less important task our front".<sup>65</sup>

Meanwhile the 4th Brigade drove forward with Kirchkimmen and Falkenburg, on the main road between Oldenburg and Delmenhorst, as its objectives. On the left, The Royal Regiment of Canada was soon "heavily engaged with numerous enemy infantry";<sup>66</sup> while, on the right, The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry had an easier time taking Nuttel. The Essex Scottish Regiment then intervened to relieve the pressure on the Royals. On the 25th the brigade resumed its advance under heavy fire; but "with quick and efficient artillery support and the ready co-operation of the tanks [of the Fort Garry Horse] little delay was imposed". Typhoons also lent assistance, attacking positions shown on captured maps or located by prisoners. The latter were, in the Royals' words, "a motley collection of engineers, marines, paratroopers, etc." There were continual signs of enemy deterioration; one prisoner proved to be a technical officer of the *Luftwaffe* with two days' experience in the infantry. By the late afternoon of the 25th both the Royals and the R.H.L.I. had secured objectives astride the Oldenburg—Delmenhorst highway. That evening, thanks to the Y.M.C.A., the R.H.L.I. saw a movie in Falkenburg.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, 200 miles to the south-east, Russian and American troops had joined hands. On General Matthews' immediate right, the 30th Corps was operating against Bremen; by the afternoon of 25 April British troops had penetrated to the heart of the battered city.<sup>68</sup> Resistance was collapsing everywhere. Yet, as Delfzijl, Leer and the Kusten Canal bridgehead had shown, the enemy was still capable of lethal local opposition.

The 2nd Division now pivoted still farther north-east, cutting the railway between Oldenburg and Delmenhorst and clearing the low-lying area west of the Weser. Leaving the 3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment R.C.A. to hold the division's left flank, the 5th Brigade began this operation on the morning of 26 April. The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada advanced north-west from Delmenhorst, passing through units of the Highland Division, in the direction of Hude. Before long the old familiar pattern of shelling, rifle, machine-gun and mortar fire slowed its progress. "A" Squadron of the Fort Garry Horse lost one tank aiding the infantry, while a supporting Toronto Scottish platoon had 11 casualties from shellfire. Particularly stubborn opposition came from Germans sheltering behind the railway embankment, as they had at the South Beveland isthmus in the previous autumn, and although these men were less skilful than those met on the Scheldt, they could not be lightly dismissed. Nevertheless, by the end of the day our troops were firmly established some four miles north-west of Delmenhorst.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile Le Regiment de Maisonneuve captured its objectives under heavy shellfire and, in the late afternoon, The Calgary Highlanders moved north along the road between Bockhorn and Gruppenbuhren, reaching positions just short of the railway. These operations continued during the next three days, with the 5th Brigade gradually clearing west to Hude, less than 10 miles from Oldenburg. Even at this stage the enemy was not giving in easily; during

the period 26-29 April the brigade had 130 casualties, Le Regiment de Maison neuve, with 54, suffering most heavily.<sup>70</sup>

By 27 April the German forces on the 2nd Division front had been reduced to miscellaneous battle groups under the staffs of the 471st and 490th Infantry Divisions. On that day General Matthews ordered the 5th Brigade and the 8th Reconnaissance Regiment (14th Canadian Hussars), which had been operating on his right flank, to finish clearing the area south and west of the Weser while the rest of the division turned its attention to capturing that portion of Oldenburg lying south of the Kusten Canal and the Hunte River system. This was not, however, the immediate aim; "the intention was to secure limited objectives and to get into positions from which the momentum of the final phase could be maintained without interruption".<sup>71</sup>

Added impetus was given to the 2nd Division's operations against Oldenburg when the 3rd British Infantry Division (Major-General L. G. Whistler) came under the 2nd Canadian Corps on the 28th. Whistler was ordered to relieve the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade and continue clearing the area west of the Weser. The inter-divisional boundary ran north from Ganderkesee to Butzhausen and on to the left bank of the river.<sup>72</sup> There was, however, little for the 3rd Division to do; its historian observes that "though the Gunners had some excellent shooting at odd bands of soldiers fleeing from the Canadians across the coastal plain, there was no further fighting". After the cessation of hostilities the division returned to General Dempsey's command.<sup>73</sup>

Oldenburg, a pleasant town with a population (1939) of 79,000, dates from the 12th century. Fortunately, our expectation that it would be "defended as a bastion to the full extent of the resources available to the enemy"<sup>74</sup> was not fulfilled.

On 28 April General Matthews was instructed to advance towards Oldenburg with all three brigades.<sup>75</sup> While the 5th continued to exploit north of Hude, the 4th and 6th approached Oldenburg from the east and south respectively. The weather was cloudy and cool with much rain. Our troops advanced steadily against light opposition. Propaganda leaflets, printed in Delmenhorst, were fired into Oldenburg urging the futility of further resistance. The end came as something of an anti-climax. On 3 May the 4th and 6th Brigades entered the city only to find that the defenders had fled. On the following day firm contact was established with the 4th Canadian Armoured Division; and in the last hours of the campaign the 2nd Division pushed north of Oldenburg, prepared to clear the Butjadinger "thumb", between the mouths of the Jade and the Weser.<sup>76</sup>

### The Parachute Battalion Marches to Wismar

This account of the last phase of the fighting may appropriately conclude with the story of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion's advance to the Baltic Sea.

It will be recalled (above, pages 535-7) that on 24 March the battalion had dropped east of the Rhine to play its part in Operation "Varsity". This was its last parachute operation. The concluding weeks of the war found it, still serving in

the 3rd Parachute Brigade of the 6th British Airborne Division.\* in the van of the Second British Army's rapid advance across Germany. It was now commanded by Lt.-Col. G. F. Eadie.

In the first stage of the advance the 6th Airborne Division was still under the 18th U.S. Airborne Corps, but on 29 March it passed to the 8th British Corps. On the same day the 3rd Parachute Brigade cleared the town of Lembeck.<sup>77</sup> As the drive continued in the direction of Coesfeld, a potent alliance was formed between airborne and armoured troops: the 4th (Armoured) Battalion of the Grenadier Guards came in support of the 6th Airborne Division, No. 1 Squadron being allocated to the 3rd Parachute Brigade. The Canadian parachutists now enjoyed the—for them—novel experience of riding into action on tanks.<sup>78</sup> Crossing the Dortmund-Ems Canal by a partially demolished bridge on 1 April, they took Ladbergen in a stiff little fight and thereafter drove rapidly on, bypassing isolated groups of German soldiers. On 3 April they covered 40 miles and reached Minden, scene of a famous British victory of 1759, on the 4th.<sup>79</sup>

After receiving 100 reinforcements from England the battalion crossed the Weser and pushed north-eastwards accompanied by the Grenadiers. The Canadians were in a high state of training and fitness. Their brigade commander (Brigadier S. J. L. Hill) described an incident that occurred at Ricklingen on 8 April:<sup>80</sup>

Having marched 20 miles over very bad roads the day before, they marched a further 14 . . . and were then called on to put in an assault on a small village. This they successfully did. Meanwhile, an S.O.S. had been sent out for them to try and rescue a small reconnaissance detachment which was holding an important bridge just to the south [actually 10 miles west] of Hannover and in order to do this the leading company of the Battalion doubled pretty well non-stop for two miles with full equipment and stormed the bridge over an extremely open piece of ground under fire from three or four German S.P. guns [the Canadian diary mentioned only one] without turning a hair. They got the bridge intact, but the Reconnaissance Regiment had been unable to hold out.

It was during the fight that the guardsmen, not without surprise, overheard a Canadian sergeant giving his orders: "I guess we gotta get this bridge and if we hit anything, don't you guys sit around. Let's go."<sup>81</sup> They went, and the Germans retreated.

By the 14th the battalion was in Celle. Three days later it seized Riestedt, near Uelzen, with the support of tanks and artillery. The 6th Airborne Division was now rapidly approaching the Elbe; Dempsey's spearheads reached and crossed it on the 29th. On that day the Canadians, who had been resting since the 22nd at Kolkhagen, south of Luneburg, resumed their advance. On the 30th they crossed the Elbe, some 40 miles upstream from Hamburg. On 30 April also the 18th United States Airborne Corps came under Second Army and simultaneously secured a second bridgehead at Bleckede; and on 1 May the 6th Airborne Division passed to the command of the American corps. The remaining task now was to reach the Baltic shore and block the advancing Russians off from the Danish peninsula.<sup>82</sup>

In contrast with the situation on the 2nd Canadian Corps front, where there was fighting—in some places bitter fighting—up to the last moment, the Second British Army in these final days met virtually no opposition. The 2nd of May was the

\*The 6th Airborne Division was now commanded by Major-General E. L. Bols.



#### CONQUERORS MEET ON THE BALTIC

A soldier of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion shakes hands with a Russian officer at the barrier on the outskirts of Wismar, 4 May 1945. The Canadian's weapon is a Sten gun.



#### SURRENDER OF THE GERMAN TWENTY-FIFTH ARMY

At Wageningen on 5 May 1945 Lieut.-General Foulkes (left), G.O.C. 1st Canadian Corps, issues instructions to General Johannes Blaskowitz (second from right), commander of the German forces in the Netherlands. Left foreground, H.R.H. Prince Bernhard.





SENIOR COMMANDERS, FIRST CANADIAN ARMY, HILVERSUM, 20 MAY 1945

This photograph was taken on the occasion of the First Canadian Army Victory Parade. From left to right, front row, Major-General S. Maczek, 1st Polish Armoured Division; Lieut.-General G. G. Simonds, 2nd Canadian Corps; General Crerar; Lieut.-General C. Foulkes, 1st Canadian Corps; Major-General B. M. Hoffmeister, 5th Canadian Armoured Division. Back row, Major-General R. H. Keefer, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division; Major-General A. B. Matthews, 2nd Canadian Infantry Division; Major-General H. W. Foster, 1st Canadian Infantry Division; Brigadier R. W. Moncel, Acting G.O.C. 4th Canadian Armoured Division; Major-General S. B. Rawlins, 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division.



CANADIANS IN BERLIN

The pipes and drums of The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise's), which accompanied the Canadian Berlin Battalion, on parade before the Column of Victory, 25 July 1945.



1st Canadian Parachute Battalion's last day of active operations. It brought no action, but was not wanting in drama. It began with the establishment of liaison near the village of Bahlendorf with another famous British regiment, The Royal Scots Greys (2nd Dragoons). Mounting the battalion on its tanks, "C" Squadron of the Greys set off towards the north-east and the beckoning Baltic. There was nothing to stop the advance, and it was made at top speed, the Greys' longest charge. (One parachutist is reported to have remarked, "I never realized that a Sherman could do sixty miles an hour.") It had been "hoped that Wittenburg would be taken by the end of the day", but it was in fact reached in the morning and the force pushed on to Lutzow. Here the tanks refuelled and the dash continued. The Canadian battalion's diarist recorded, "All resistance had collapsed, because the Germans wanted us to go as far as possible. They reasoned that the more territory we occupied, the less the Russians could occupy. Thousands of German troops lined the roads and crowded the villages, some even cheering us on, though most were a despondent-looking mob." The Greys described the thousands of Germans who surrendered at Gadebusch. "From now onwards for the rest of the day prisoners of war continued to stream one way while we streamed the other. In many cases the Germans were in their own mechanical transport and in one case a Mark III [tank] was observed in the prisoner-of-war column."<sup>83</sup>

Wismar was the end of the road. At this picturesque medieval town, once a Hansa city, the Canadians and the Greys reached the shores of the Baltic and met the Russians. The place fell on the evening of the 2nd without resistance, though tanks did a very little firing at an aerodrome north of the town. That night a Soviet officer arrived "in a jeep, with his driver". He had no idea that Allied forces were in Wismar until he came to the Canadian barrier. "He had come far in advance of his own columns, and was quite put out to find us sitting on what was the Russians' ultimate objective." The next day there was "considerable visiting" between Canadian and Russian officers, and the latter, the Canadians recorded, "proved to be the most persistent and thirsty drinkers we had ever met". The "shooting war" was over for the 1st Parachute Battalion. It had had an excellent fighting record. During the advance from the Rhine to the Baltic, since the day of the "Varsity" drop, 24 March, it had suffered 61 casualties, 15 men losing their lives. Its casualties for the whole campaign numbered 496, of which 125 were fatal.<sup>84</sup>

It was fitting that the first Canadian unit to fight in Normandy should also be the Canadian unit to penetrate deepest into Germany. Wismar, taken by Lt.-Col. Eadie's men and the Royal Scots Greys, was in fact the most easterly point reached by any Commonwealth troops in this campaign, and the first point where any Commonwealth troops serving in it made contact with the Russian ally. It is satisfactory that a Canadian battalion was there.

### Help for the Western Netherlands

We may now return back to consider the steps taken on the 1st Corps' front to relieve Dutch distress at the end of hostilities. We have seen (above, pages

584-5) that the crisis in the western Netherlands led to unofficial negotiations with the *Reichskommissar*, Seyss-Inquart, and that these culminated in the Allied decision to treat with him more formally. Political and humanitarian factors had temporarily suspended military operations. Although no written order seems to have been issued (probably for fear of misinterpretation), verbal instructions were circulated on the evening of 27 April that from 8:00 a.m. the next morning the enemy would not be fired on unless he was taking offensive action.<sup>85</sup> This was in fact the end of active hostilities on the 1st Corps front.

The first official meeting between Allied and German authorities took place in a schoolhouse at Achterveld on 28 April. Major-General Sir Francis de Guingand, Chief of Staff 21st Army Group, represented the Supreme Commander; Lieut.-Gen. Foulkes, commanding the 1st Corps, and Brigadier C. C. Mann, Chief of Staff First Canadian Army, were present.\* A judicial official, *Reichsrichter* Ernst Schwebel, and Dr. Friedrich Plutzer were the *Reichskommissar's* delegates, and a senior Russian officer held a watching brief for his government. The Allied proposals for bringing relief supplies into the western Netherlands were explained to the Germans, but they lacked authority to make definite commitments. Accordingly, a second meeting was arranged for the 30th, to be attended by Seyss-Inquart in person.<sup>86</sup>

At the meeting on the 30th Lieut.-General W. Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, represented his principal. The *Reichskommissar*, who afterwards claimed that he had not requested authority from Berlin in order to avoid a refusal,<sup>87</sup> accepted the Allied proposals in outline and staff arrangements were then worked out in detail. It was agreed that food would be introduced into the "B-2" area (above, page 582) by air, sea, inland waterways and road. Special provision was made for Allied teams to assist the Dutch medical services and the enemy agreed that no further flooding would take place.<sup>88</sup> General Foulkes discussed with General Plocher of the 6th Parachute Division the terms under which convoys by land and water could enter the German lines. Plocher was, however, reluctant to conclude details without reference to higher authority.

At this point General Foulkes stated that he had had enough. What he wanted was a military commander who had authority to deal with him on his terms, not merely a divisional commander whose sector did not take in the whole front. A request was made that either General Plocher should be given the authority by General Blaskowitz [the military commander in the western Netherlands] or that the latter should come down and meet General Foulkes and thrash out the whole question. After some hesitation General Plocher agreed to this.<sup>89</sup>

On the following day these difficulties were resolved at a meeting between the Corps Commander and Lieut.-General Paul Reichelt, Chief of Staff to Blaskowitz. A corridor was created, extending south from the railway linking Arnhem and Utrecht to the Waal at Ochten, for the passage of supplies. "Within these bounds there would exist a temporary truce until such time as the feeding arrangements had been concluded."<sup>90</sup> Foulkes explored the possibility of extending the area of

\*The proceedings at this and subsequent conferences are described in some detail in General de Guingand's *Operation Victory*, 445-53. A representative of the 2nd Tactical Air Force was also present in connection with the dropping of food supplies.

the truce north to the Ijsselmeer; but Reichelt had no power in the matter and the subject was reserved for further consideration. The Corps Commander immediately issued a "stand fast" order to all troops on his front; patrolling would cease and only "local defensive measures" would be maintained. Particular care was taken to ensure that our troops thoroughly understood the "peculiar situation" on their front.<sup>91</sup> Pending the outcome of negotiations with the Germans, Canadian authorities had made further preparations to deal with the Dutch emergency. By 26 April First Canadian Army was ready to move a total of 1600 tons of food daily into the distressed area: 700 tons could be brought by road from 's-Hertogenbosch to Ede; 300 could be supplied by road and rail to the vicinity of Amersfoort and 600 could be moved by railway and barges from Nijmegen to Renkum, or downstream on the Neder Rijn. It was anticipated that the easiest method of transport would be by road, in spite of the bottleneck of the bridges at Arnhem.<sup>92</sup>

Meanwhile, the 21st Army Group had arranged for shipping various supplies by sea from Antwerp to Rotterdam.<sup>93</sup> One item to be provided in this manner was coal, which was urgently needed to provide both electrical and steam power. It was estimated that 300 tons would be required daily in the B-2 area during the first 10 days of relief, rising to 4000 tons per day at a later period.<sup>94</sup>

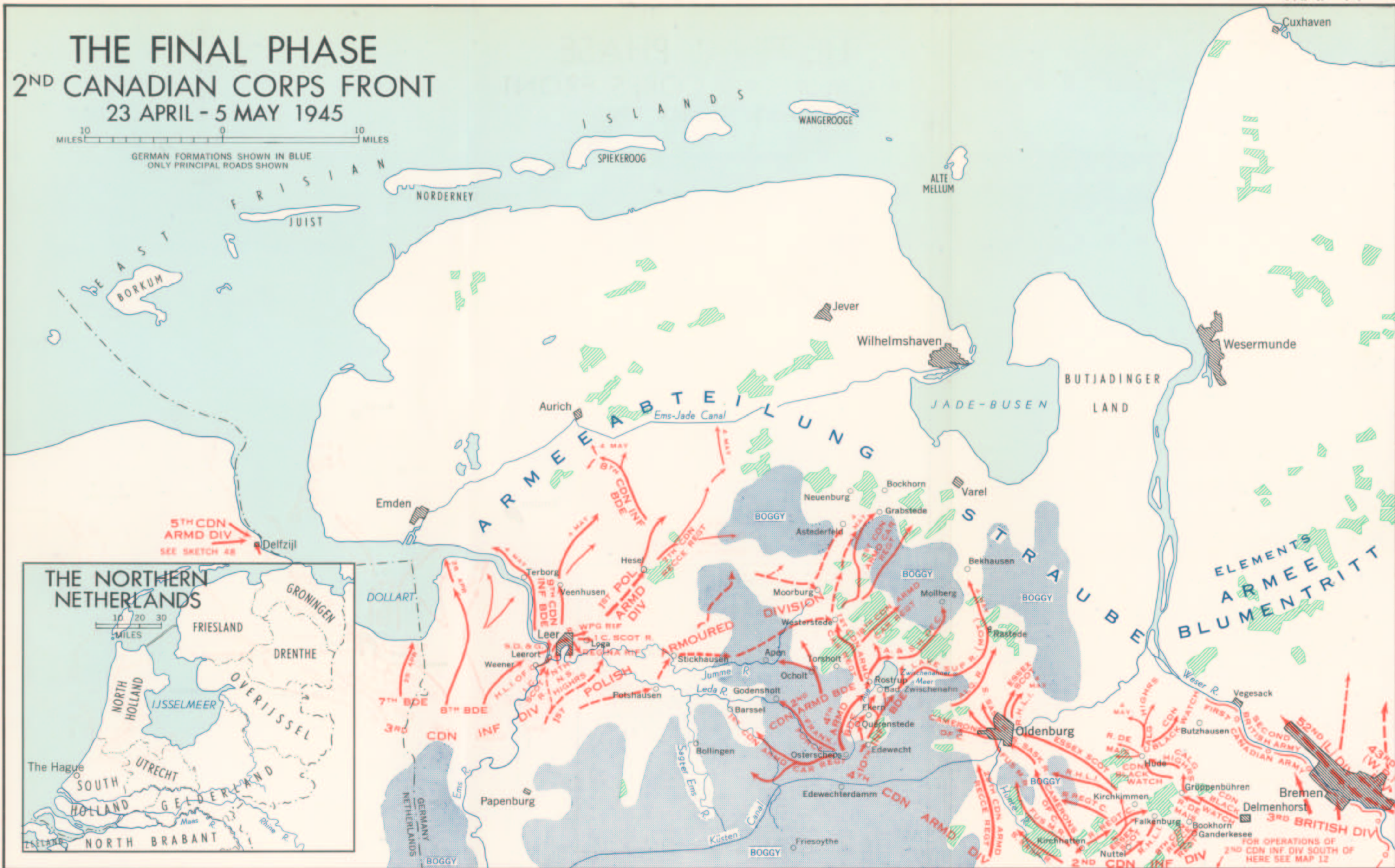
The immediate problem of getting food to the starving population was met by the free dropping of food packages from Allied aircraft. This began even before negotiations with Seyss-Inquart were completed. On 24 April the Combined Chiefs of Staff had approved plans for air supply, and SHAEF ordered the operation to begin on the 28th; but bad weather postponed the first flight until the following day, when 253 aircraft of the R.A.F. Bomber Command dropped over half a million rations close to Rotterdam and The Hague. Later the Eighth Air Force joined in the work. This relief continued on a rising scale and, during the period ending on 8 May, over eleven million British and American rations were dropped into the B-2 area. Due to the fact that the rations had been packed in bulk (most of them were originally intended for camps of Allied prisoners of war), some delay occurred before they could be distributed as individual civilian rations.<sup>95</sup>

Canadian arrangements for bringing supplies into the distressed area by land were coordinated by Colonel M. V. McQueen, Deputy Director of Supplies and Transport at Headquarters 1st Corps. The operation, known as "Faust", was carried out by a special organization of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps 1st Corps Troops (aided by units of the Royal Army Service Corps) under Lt.-Col. E. A. DeGeer. He set up his headquarters between the Canadian and German lines and at 7:30 a.m. on 2 May the first 3-ton trucks began deliveries to a depot at Rhenen, on the Neder Rijn. By the following day the operation was in full swing, with convoys of 30 vehicles crossing the truce line every 30 minutes.<sup>96</sup> Twelve transport platoons (eight Canadian and four British), comprising 360 vehicles, delivered approximately 1000 tons of supplies daily until the 10th, when the "Faust" organization was disbanded and responsibility for delivery passed to the 6th Lines of Communication, under the supervision of the 1st Canadian Corps.<sup>97</sup>

# THE FINAL PHASE 2<sup>ND</sup> CANADIAN CORPS FRONT 23 APRIL - 5 MAY 1945

10 0 10  
MILES MILES

GERMAN FORMATIONS SHOWN IN BLUE  
ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS SHOWN



FOR OPERATIONS OF  
2<sup>ND</sup> CDN INF DIV SOUTH OF  
HERE SEE MAP 12

As our Civil Affairs officers moved into the western Netherlands they found conditions, though deplorable, not quite so grave as had been feared. Brigadier Wedd reported:<sup>98</sup>

The picture appears to be that while a state of acute general starvation as feared had not been reached at the time of the entry of our troops, the state of food supplies would indicate that this catastrophe had only been avoided by a matter of two or three weeks.... It is probable that there are many cases of people suffering from starvation in their houses. Reports would indicate that death from starvation has been confined to the very old, the very young and the very poor. Conditions appear to vary in several cities with Rotterdam as probably the worst.

Subsequent reports indicated that there were between 100,000 and 150,000 cases of starvation oedema, with a death rate of ten per cent, in the larger centres of the B-2 area. Steps were immediately taken to supplement civilian rations with food from the agricultural areas of the north-eastern Netherlands. The lack of food had not resulted in any marked increase of disease; this was fortunate, since many centres were short of medical supplies. Again, water systems were intact in the "B-2" area, although the pressure was low in some localities; the main electrical generating plants were also found undamaged, but they required large quantities of coal to produce power.<sup>99</sup>

German action in flooding large sections of the country, before the truce, had seriously damaged the Dutch economy. The worst areas were in the Wieringermeerpolder and about Utrecht. It was anticipated that lowering the Ijsselmeer would assist drainage; but time was required, since the enemy had destroyed the raising gear for sluice gates weighing 12 tons each. Experts estimated that between three and four weeks would be required to drain the flooded areas in Utrecht province.<sup>100</sup>

Headquarters Netherlands District had gone back under Headquarters 21st Army Group on 1 May; but the Canadian authorities remained in charge of relief measures until the 12th, when the District assumed full responsibility for the relief and rehabilitation of the provinces of North and South Holland and Utrecht.<sup>101</sup> By that time the immediate crisis was over. The Canadians could, therefore, relinquish their task with the satisfaction of having made a significant contribution to the solution of one of the war's most difficult and tragic problems and to the relief of a friendly people who had suffered much.

### The German Surrender

At 12:55 p.m. on 4 May Brigadier Belchem of Field-Marshal Montgomery's headquarters telephoned General Crerar, advising him of negotiations then being conducted between the Field Marshal and representatives of Admiral Donitz, who had assumed Hitler's titular authority after the Fuhrer shot himself on 30 April. These negotiations were directed towards "the unconditional surrender of the remaining German forces in NW Europe".<sup>102</sup>

The overtures leading to this development are a relatively familiar story.<sup>103</sup> As early as March German feelers had been put out, through the British Embassy in Stockholm, in a futile effort to reach a separate agreement with the Western Powers excluding Russia. Later indications suggested that many senior commanders, includ-

ing Field-Marshal Ernst Busch (who on 6 April had been appointed Commander-in-Chief North-West, with authority which may be roughly defined as covering the troops opposing the 21st Army Group) were willing to talk terms. The final stages of the enemy's disintegration began with the formal capitulation of all German forces on the Italian front on 2 May. A German delegation arrived at Montgomery's headquarters on the morning of the 3rd.

Before Belchem's call, General Crerar was "already aware" of the negotiations, but had received no instructions or authority to suspend operations.\* Now Belchem explained that the German delegates had heard that the garrisons of Jever and Aurich had been summoned to surrender "with the alternative of immediate assault". They had asked that the assaults should not be made while the negotiations proceeded. Montgomery had agreed, and now asked Crerar "to withhold, until further word from him, direct assault on those places". Crerar's record proceeds, "In the meantime, reconnaissance and improvement of positions of troops under my command could go on."

The Army Commander immediately telephoned Brigadier Rodger, Chief of Staff of the 2nd Canadian Corps, and instructed the Corps "to call off any planned assaults on the towns of Jever and Aurich by 1 Pol Armd Div and 3 Cdn Inf Div pending further instruction". † Our troops' activities in the meantime were to be "limited to reconnaissance and the improvement of their dispositions". The General Staff diary of Headquarters 2nd Corps records the order thus: the negotiations would probably be concluded satisfactorily by evening; in the meantime, "our divisions were not to become involved in any assault against a German-held position". However, there is no record of any division other than the 3rd Canadian and the Poles receiving a cautionary order; and the former recorded, "we are not to assault Aurich. It is permissible to do anything else. Other plans will carry on as per schedule." General Crerar explained the latest developments to General Foulkes (whose operations had already been suspended) when the Army Commander flew to Apeldoorn in the afternoon.<sup>104</sup>

The long-awaited news of German capitulation eventually reached General Crerar at 8:35 p.m., first by announcement from the British Broadcasting Corporation and, immediately afterwards, by the official signal from Headquarters 21st Army Group.<sup>105</sup> Under the Instrument of Surrender signed at Montgomery's headquarters, the German Command agreed to "surrender of all German armed forces in Holland, in north-west Germany including the Frisian Islands and Heligoland and all other islands, in Schleswig-Holstein, and in Denmark, to the C.-in-C. 21 Army Group."<sup>106</sup> All hostilities were to cease at eight o'clock the following morning (5 May). In quick succession the German forces in southern Germany and Austria accepted the terms of capitulation, and at Rheims, in the early hours of 7 May, General Jodl surrendered all German forces to the Supreme Allied Com-

\*Field-Marshal Montgomery's memory has evidently deceived him when he writes in his *Memoirs* that, in order to avoid casualties, "I had ordered all offensive action to cease on the 3rd May when the Germans first came to see me." Actually, the firm order, "all offensive ops will cease from receipt this signal", was included in the same message that announced the cease fire for 8:00 a.m. on 5 May; this message was sent out from Montgomery's headquarters only at 8:50 p.m. on 4 May. It is reproduced in facsimile in the Field-Marshal's earlier book *Normandy to the Baltic*.

†The Poles were in fact some 14 miles south of Jever and meeting considerable resistance.



mander. Two days later the surrender was formally ratified at the Russian headquarters in Berlin. German garrisons in the Channel Islands and at Dunkirk gave themselves up on 9 May.<sup>107</sup>

It had of course been obvious for some time that the end was close. The 1st Corps had had no fighting since 28 April, except for an occasional shot; but on the 2nd Corps sector, and notably on the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions' fronts, as we have seen, the enemy at some points resisted fiercely to the end, and losses were suffered up to the moment of the order to cease offensive operations.\* One of the last Canadians to lose his life was the Protestant chaplain of the Canadian Grenadier Guards, Honorary Capt. A. E. McCreery. On the afternoon of 4 May he set off, accompanied by Lieut. N. A. Goldie, to bring in some wounded Germans whom prisoners had reported nearby. While engaged in this errand of mercy, both officers were killed, in circumstances which remain obscure.<sup>108</sup>

In general, the final news came to the fighting troops almost as an anti-climax. When the announcement was made on the evening of the 4th men at first found it hard to believe. When it became evident that it was really true, they felt not so much exultation as intense relief. The units' diaries make it clear that there were no cheers and few outward signs of emotion. The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, the Canadian unit that had paid the heaviest price on the Normandy D Day, which had fought with distinction throughout the campaign and on the last day was still fighting and suffering losses in front of Aurich, recorded simply, "There is no celebration but everybody is happy."

On the evening of the 4th General Crerar addressed a message to all ranks of the First Canadian Army:<sup>109</sup>

From Sicily to the river Senio, from the beaches of Dieppe to those of Normandy and from thence through northern France, Belgium, Holland and north-west Germany, the Canadians and their Allied comrades in this army have carried out their responsibilities in the high traditions which they inherited. The official order that offensive operations of all troops of First Cdn Army will cease forthwith and that all fire will cease from 0800 hrs tomorrow Saturday 5 May has been issued. Crushing and complete victory over the German enemy has been secured. In rejoicing at this supreme accomplishment we shall remember the friends who have paid the full price for the belief they also held that no sacrifice in the interests of the principles for which we fought could be too great.

Heavy indeed the cost had been. During the final phase, beginning with the crossing of the Rhine on 24 March and extending to the end of hostilities, Canadian Army casualties were 6298, of which 1482 were fatal. These losses, serious enough in all conscience, were nevertheless light by comparison with those of earlier periods. The Canadian Army's casualties for the entire North-West Europe campaign beginning on 6 June 1944 were 44,339; of these, 961 officers and 10,375 other ranks gave their lives.<sup>110</sup>

Others besides Canadians had fought in the First Canadian Army. It is fitting to set down here the best available record of the casualties suffered by British and

\*The record shows 60 Canadian Army casualties on 4 May (of which 20 were fatal) and 10 on 5 May, of which three were fatal. Some of those reported as of the 5th may actually have taken place on the 4th.

Allied formations while serving under its headquarters. The figures are chiefly as compiled in June 1945 and are approximate only. The United States figures cover only the 104th U.S. Infantry Division during its time in the Army in the autumn of 1944.<sup>111</sup>

	<i>Fatal</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Missing</i>	<i>Total</i>
United Kingdom	2,611	11,572	1,898	16,081
Polish	1,163	3,840	371	5,374
United States	179	856	356	1,391
Belgian*	73	253	35	361
Czechoslovak	17	105	2	124
Netherlands	25	91	1	117
Total	4,068	16,717	2,663	23,448

Messages poured in from all over the world congratulating the First Canadian Army on its contribution to the Allied victory. Field-Marshal Montgomery's letter to General Crerar deserves pride of place:<sup>112</sup>

Tac Headquarters:  
21 Army Group.  
8-5-45

My dear Harry

I feel that on this day I must write you a note of personal thanks for all that you have done for me since we first served together in this war.

No commander can ever have had a more loyal subordinate than I have had in you. And under your command the Canadian Army has covered itself with glory in the campaign in western Europe. I want you to know that I am deeply grateful for what you have done. If ever there is anything I can do for you, or for your magnificent Canadian Soldiers, you know that you have only to ask.

Yrs always

Monty.

There were also letters from humbler people. One came from Hatert, near Nijmegen:<sup>113</sup>

... As a young girl of 19 years, living in this powerful and big world, I wish to inform you about my happiness and to thank you. It was you, General Crerar, and your Canadian troops, who liberated the greater part of our country.

It was your boys who gave their lives and blood, and it was your people who had to accept, in the interest of our country, so many sad reports about sons being "Killed in Action".

We were very close spectators during your operations in this vicinity. So many times we saw you leaving in your plane, close to the front line, to carry out your hard and difficult task; accordingly, we are not surprised that all your soldiers give you their confidence and respect.

I would like to finish this letter in thanking you once more for our liberation, and may God bless you.

\*The Belgian figures appear to cover the entire campaign, although the Belgian brigade was not in First Canadian Army throughout.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE AFTERMATH OF THE GERMAN SURRENDER

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#### Implementing the Surrender

THE days following the cessation of hostilities on the 21st Army Group's front were not days of rest. The enemy's surrender immediately imposed a heavy task of administration on the formations of the First Canadian Army.

On the 2nd Canadian Corps front a meeting to implement details of the surrender was held in the burgomaster's office at Bad Zwischenahn on 5 May. General Erich Straube, who had commanded the hastily improvised *Armeeabteilung Straube* for only a few days, reported to General Simonds that there were approximately 30,000 German troops in this sector. Headquarters and communications were so disorganized that, although Straube could provide details of defences in the area of Wilhelmshaven, he required time to supply equivalent information for Emden.<sup>1</sup> The Germans were treated as "capitulated troops", without the status of "prisoners of war".<sup>2</sup> Arrangements were made for daily conferences between Straube's staff and Headquarters 2nd Corps; subordinate German formations received their orders direct from Straube, but attended meetings with appropriate Canadian divisional staffs to coordinate details in their sectors.<sup>3</sup>

In the 3rd Canadian Division's sector General Keebler escorted Straube to the conference with Simonds and, by the 6th, German troops in this area were being disarmed by their own authorities.<sup>4</sup> In the 4th Canadian Armoured Division sector the arrangements for carrying out the surrender were made by the headquarters of the 4th Armoured Brigade. Here as elsewhere there were initial clashes between Germans and foreign workers (displaced persons); but quick action by our authorities, including, when it was shown necessary, a severe reprimand to the senior German commander by General Vokes, soon disposed of the problem.<sup>5</sup> On the 2nd Corps' eastern flank the impressive *Staatsministerium* in Oldenburg was the scene of a conference on 7 May between the G.O.C. 2nd Canadian Division and senior German commanders. General Matthews gave instructions for the disarmament of the enemy, including the turning in of all technical stores. The Germans were forbidden to use the Nazi salute. While in this, as in other meetings, their officers exhibited a strictly "correct" attitude, they sometimes gave Canadians the impression of "a board of directors attending at the liquidation of their assets",<sup>6</sup> rather than of the representatives of a defeated army.

Meanwhile, General Crerar had issued a directive to Colonel-General Johannes

Blaskowitz informing him that he was responsible for, and that General Foulkes was authorized to accept, the surrender of all German forces in the area extending from "the Netherlands and that part of Germany lying west of the River Weser, including the Frisian Islands as far east as inclusive Alte Mellum and Wangerooge, and north of the general line Delmenhorst—Cloppenburg—Nordhorn—Lingen".<sup>7</sup> This area included the portion of Germany which Straube surrendered to General Simonds. The directive ended:

You may accept such orders as are received by you through German channels only from the Headquarters of Field-Marshal Busch, Commander-in-Chief North-West, and copies of such orders received by you will be passed at once to my Headquarters through Headquarters 1 Canadian Corps, until such time as your Headquarters are moved on my orders into North-West Germany, after which, copies of orders received by you from Field-Marshal Busch will be passed to me through Headquarters 2 Canadian Corps.

Before this instruction was issued, Blaskowitz had surrendered to General Foulkes in a battered hotel at Wageningen on the 5th. There was a noticeable difference between the enemy's attitude at this meeting and in the conferences of the previous week to arrange relief for the Dutch.

The terms of surrender were read over by General Foulkes, and Blaskowitz hardly answered a word. Occasionally he would interpose with a demand for more time to carry out the orders given to him, otherwise nothing was said from the German side. They looked like men in a dream, dazed, stupefied and unable to realize that for them their world was utterly finished.<sup>8</sup>

Our Intelligence had estimated that there were still about 150,000 German troops in the western Netherlands; the actual strength on 1 May, as supplied by the enemy, was 117,629.<sup>9</sup>

The sequel to the German surrender was the liberation of the remaining Dutch territory under German control and the movement of the enemy's troops back to their country. The 1st Corps entered the western Netherlands on 7 May, when the 49th (West Riding) Division took over the 88th German Corps' area about Utrecht, extending from the IJsselmeer to the Lek. On the 8th General Foster's 1st Canadian Division took control of the 30th German Corps' area in the remaining territory to the west. No man who wore the old red patch on that memorable day is likely to forget the scene. The route led through Amersfoort and Utrecht to Rotterdam.

Every village, street and house was bedecked with red, white and blue Dutch flags and orange streamers which in the brilliant sunlight made a gay scene. The Dutch people had had a rumour of our arrival, and were lining the roads, streets in thousands to give us a tumultuous welcome . . . When the convoy reached the outskirts of Rotterdam, it lost all semblance of a military convoy. The dense crowds cut it into packets; a vehicle would be unable to move because of civilians surrounding it, climbing on it, throwing flowers—bestowing handshakes, hugs and even kisses. One could not see the vehicle or trailer — for the legs, arms, heads and bodies draped all over it as it made its precarious way through the last few miles of Rotterdam streets. The enthusiasm of the crowds seemed to have infected German soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*, for in some cases they, going the opposite way in waggons or on foot—waved and grinned.<sup>10</sup>

The official climax to these celebrations came on 21 May, when the First Canadian Army Victory Parade was held at The Hague. The salute was taken by His Royal

Highness Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, in the presence of General Crerar and his Corps Commanders, as long columns of composite battalions from Canadian and British formations marched past. Sixteen pipe and five brass bands were present, and guns of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division fired a salute. Overhead flew aircraft of No. 84 Group Royal Air Force, which, in the words of General Crerar's final message to the Air Officer Commanding, had given the Army such "magnificent support" throughout the campaign.<sup>11</sup>

For the defeated enemy there was a different kind of march. Beginning on 25 May the Germans were moved from the Netherlands to a concentration area in the Wilhelmshaven—Emden peninsula. Blaskowitz was responsible for the details of the operation, but Crerar's administrative staff "carried out a general supervision, co-ordination and control of the evacuation, selected the route to be followed, chose sites for the transit camps along the way and provided certain stores".<sup>12</sup> Travelling for the most part on foot, in bodies some 10,000 strong, the Germans tramped homeward at the rate of about 15 miles each day.<sup>13</sup> Crossing the causeway at the northern end of the Ijsselmeer, they came under the control of the 5th Canadian Armoured Division, which supervised the march as far as the Dutch-German frontier, where Headquarters 2nd Corps assumed responsibility. As this involuntary *Drang nach Osten* continued, Blaskowitz moved his headquarters to north-west Germany, where Crerar's orders were transmitted to him through the G.O.C. 2nd Corps. These arrangements prevailed until General Simonds' headquarters was relieved on 15 June by Headquarters 30th British Corps District. By that time the German evacuation of the Netherlands was "practically complete".<sup>14</sup>

### Morale and Repatriation

Apart from supervising the surrender of enemy forces, arranging for their return to Germany and organizing the Canadian Army Occupation Force (below, pages 620-21), the Canadian military authorities' most important problems on the Continent during the period immediately following the end of hostilities were the maintenance of morale and the completion of arrangements for "reallocation" and repatriation.

Shortly after the "cease-fire" on the Canadian front, General Crerar issued farseeing instructions and advice on "man-management".<sup>15</sup> He drew on his experience following the First World War, pointing out, "commanders will need to spend much of their time, from now on, dealing with matters of administration". The termination of hostilities would inevitably lead to some slackening of discipline and loss of *esprit de corps*. To check this tendency, "training or recreational activities should be organized, whenever possible, on a sub-unit or unit basis" and "inter-unit, and sub-unit, competitions of all kinds should be strongly encouraged". The general principle should be to allot compulsory training to the mornings, leaving afternoons free for optional activities such as education and organized sports. Crerar concluded:

This closing chapter in the history of the First Canadian Army in this World War will provide a different test to Commanders and leaders to those met and overcome, in operations, but a very definite test of character will certainly be encountered. It is up to each one of us to surmount it.

Anticipating the need, his headquarters had prepared a special handbook on rehabilitation training and welfare before the campaign ended.<sup>16</sup>

The challenge was well met. Excellent accommodation for officers and men off duty was secured in many Dutch centres, such as Utrecht, Hilversum, Amersfoort, Apeldoorn and Groningen. In the 1st Corps area the entertainment programme for the middle of May covered a wide range of activities: at Apeldoorn officers could relax at the "Park Plaza Hotel" or the "Country Club", while warrant officers and sergeants had their "Park Lane Club" and the men enjoyed the facilities of the "Moonlight Gardens", the "Kit Kat Club" and the "Bluenose Swimming Pool". In Barneveld there was the "Red Patch Theatre", and similar establishments functioned at Arnhem and Hilversum. Regular programmes of sports were introduced and there were frequent competitions within and between Canadian formations during the summer.<sup>17</sup> When the Canadian Army Occupation Force took over its duties in Germany, the Canadian Auxiliary Services operated numerous clubs, theatres, swimming pools and sports fields at Aurich and Oldenburg; there was also fine sailing on the Zwischenahner Meer.<sup>18</sup> Canadian troops were entertained by concert parties, such as "Meet the Navy", which was presented by the Royal Canadian Navy in collaboration with the British Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA). At Amsterdam there was an exhibition of Canadian war artists' work, much appreciated by civilians and military alike, testifying to the skill of the group of painters who had recorded the Army's manifold activities.

The soldier was given ample opportunities of improving his education, and adjusting himself to the changed circumstances of peacetime, under the Rehabilitation Training Programme. The principal aims were:<sup>19</sup>

- "(a) to acquaint every soldier with the changes affecting him, his family, his community and Canada as a whole, which have occurred during his absence on service.
- "(b) to interpret and explain the differences between Canadian 'ways of life' and corresponding aspects of civilian life in the countries in which he has served.
- "(c) to raise the level of the occupational skill and/or education of the soldier to enable him to improve his status in civilian life.
- "(d) to explain the provisions for post-discharge training and education and advise regarding them.
- "(e) in general, to prepare the soldier for his return to civilian life."

Under unit chief instructors training was given in Canadian citizenship as well as in academic, vocational and technical subjects. This wide curriculum "attracted a very high voluntary attendance".<sup>20</sup>

The maintenance of morale was closely related to and affected by the official plans for repatriation and reallocation.\* These in turn were profoundly influenced by the formation of the Canadian Army Occupation Force and developments in the still-continuing war against Japan. Initially, the conflict on the other side of the globe led to the organization of the Canadian Army Pacific Force, with a

\*The overall problem of repatriating the overseas army is discussed in *Six Years of War*, 431-34.

demand for trained personnel of First Canadian Army. At the same time, the problem of obtaining shipping for repatriation purposes in Europe was greatly complicated by requirements in the Far East.

Within a few days of the "cease-fire" in Europe, Canadian servicemen were acquainted with the official plan for repatriation, reallocation and demobilization. Details of the plan, based, speaking very broadly, on the principle "first in, first out", were set out in a special pamphlet, *After Victory in Europe*, which was reprinted in *The Maple Leaf*.<sup>21</sup> Priorities for release depended on a carefully calculated point-score system. A questionnaire was distributed to ascertain each soldier's preference—that is, for service with either the Occupation Force or the Pacific Force, or discharge. Arrangements were then made to post personnel as far as possible in accordance with their wishes—subject to the inevitable requirements of the service. Approximately 10,000 soldiers volunteered for the Occupation Force (below, page 621); and by 21 July nearly 25,000 men in the theatre had volunteered for the Pacific Force. "Of these, about 18,500 were of the most suitable age, category and marital status."<sup>22</sup>

The process of repatriation and reallocation continued throughout the summer. Early in July the Army Commander became convinced that the principle of "first in, first out" had been carried "to the practicable limit" in First Canadian Army. Faced with shortages of qualified officers and essential tradesmen, Crerar observed, "should the present period of 'repatriation by disintegration' further continue, it will not be possible adequately to maintain and administer the troops yet remaining in this country". He also pointed to another difficulty:

The greatest number of 'Low Point' soldiers are in the ranks of the Infantry—for the very good reason that the Infantry arm has suffered by far the heaviest casualties in operations. Yet, from the point of view of orderly repatriation and demobilization, it is the 'combatant arm' rather than the 'administrative service' which should be the first to be released!

It was, therefore, apparent that the remainder of the Army on the Continent could only be repatriated "in a selected sequence of Divisional Groups, units and sub-units", instead of the drafts of long-service men so far the rule. This change at some stage had been contemplated in the original plan.<sup>23</sup>

The sudden ending of the Pacific war in August eased these problems in two ways. Not only did the allocation of key personnel to the Pacific Force cease to be a difficulty, but more shipping became available to transport the troops to Canada. These developments greatly assisted the army administrative staffs in the final stages of dealing with the pressing problems of this period. The efficiency of these staffs deserves recognition.

The disbandment of First Canadian Army was complicated by four basic factors: the dispatch of volunteers to the Pacific Force, the repatriation of longservice personnel, the reallocation of men and equipment for the Occupation Force and the necessity of releasing British and other Allied units from command. We have already seen, in outline, how some of these problems were tackled. During the first phase of the disbandment all British operational troops passed from General

Crerar's command and all Canadian troops, other than the 3rd Division, Canadian Army Occupation Force, were withdrawn from Germany and concentrated in the Netherlands. In succeeding stages certain units with territorial affiliations were dispatched to Canada as units, together with drafts of long-service personnel, and all units not forming part of divisional establishments were "phased out" in five divisional groups.<sup>24</sup>

During the early part of June 1945 preparations were made for the 1st Infantry Division to concentrate in the area about Utrecht and Hilversum, while the 3rd Infantry Division was regrouping in the vicinity of Amersfoort and Apeldoorn with the 3rd Division, C.A.O.F. By the middle of the month General Simonds' headquarters and the 2nd Corps Troops had moved to Enschede, in the eastern Netherlands, and on the 25th this headquarters was disbanded. Simultaneously, units were turning in guns, tanks and other vehicles. At the end of the month the 4th Armoured Division was completely "detanked"; and the headquarters of both the 1st and 2nd Armoured Brigades were disbanded by the beginning of July. The disposal of surplus stores and vehicles was a very large administrative task. Great quantities were handed over to liberated countries to assist in the work of rehabilitation.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile a continuous stream of personnel left First Canadian Army for the Pacific Force. By the end of June 807 officers and 15,170 other ranks had been dispatched; the final figures, a month later, were 1064 and 20,829. During the same period the Canadian Army Occupation Force was being built up towards its authorized strength of 25,000 men. Repatriation proceeded concurrently; by the middle of July the Army had sent off nearly 16,000 officers and men on the journey home.<sup>26</sup>

While this reallocation of personnel was in progress there was a further regrouping of formations and withdrawal of units from Germany. The 4th Armoured Division had concentrated near Almelo late in May. The 1st Polish Armoured Division left General Crerar's command in mid-June. Following its relief by the 3rd Division, C.A.O.F., the 2nd Infantry Division moved in July into a triangle formed by Amersfoort, Deventer and Zwolle. The 5th Armoured Division remained in the north-eastern Netherlands, with its headquarters at Groningen. The concentration in the Netherlands permitted a further reduction of staffs and on 17 July Headquarters 1st Corps was disbanded. At the end of the month Headquarters First Canadian Army ceased operations (although it was not officially disbanded until 15 February 1946). On 30 July General Crerar laid down the command which he had exercised with so much distinction. The following day General Simonds assumed command of "Canadian Forces in the Netherlands".<sup>27</sup>

Before leaving the Continent, General Crerar was invested by Prince Bernhard, on behalf of Queen Wilhelmina, with the Grand Cross of the Order of Orange Nassau with Swords. In his last message to the troops he had commanded, Crerar wrote:

... I felt the need to tell you that I have been deeply conscious of the loyalty and support which all of you have always given to me. *You* have never failed to fulfil your dangerous and difficult share of the operational tasks which, as Army Commander, *I* have been



charged to carry out. As the result, the record of the First Canadian Army, in its many battles from Normandy to North-West Germany, has been one of unbroken military success.<sup>28</sup>

On 30 July he sailed from the United Kingdom for Canada in the *Ile de France*, together with 7289 other happy Canadians.<sup>29</sup>

After Army Headquarters ceased to function there were two distinct Canadian military formations on the Continent, since the Canadian Forces in the Netherlands did not include the C.A.O.F. The "normal command channel" for Simonds' new headquarters was through Headquarters 21st Army Group (later the British Army of the Rhine) and the War Office to Canadian Military Headquarters, London; for the C.A.O.F. it was through Headquarters 30th Corps District, Headquarters 21st Army Group, as above, and the War Office to C.M.H.Q. But in "all matters of Canadian policy and administration" both Canadian formations were under the command of C.M.H.Q. and dealt with it direct.<sup>30</sup>

The repatriation of the Canadian Forces in the Netherlands continued throughout the autumn of 1945. By the end of August 58,750 officers and men (including those intended for the Pacific Force) had been dispatched to Canada; three months later the total had risen to 101,575. This led in turn to the successive disbandments of the headquarters of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Infantry Divisions on 15 September, 13 October and 23 November respectively; the headquarters of the 5th and 4th Armoured Divisions were disbanded on 12 and 27 December respectively.<sup>31</sup>

Repatriation continued until the latter part of 1946. The command and administrative sections of Headquarters Canadian Forces in the Netherlands were disbanded on 31 May. On the following day the Canadian Section, Headquarters, British Army of the Rhine (North West Europe) assumed command of the remaining elements on the Continent.<sup>32</sup> These were mainly concerned with movement control, transit camps, discipline, graves registration and construction, legal matters and the Canadian Wives Bureau (North West Europe).<sup>33</sup> Finally, all remaining Canadian headquarters, units and increments, with establishments totalling 55 officers and 436 other ranks, were disbanded on 30 November 1946. A rear party, consisting of one officer and three other ranks, still remained on the Continent to complete the last details of closing out accounts and handing over accommodation; but it was carried on the strength of C.M.H.Q. The Imperial War Graves Commission took over Canadian cemeteries, and Canadian embassies assumed responsibility for moving the remaining dependents of Canadian servicemen on the Continent.<sup>34</sup>

### *The Canadian Army Occupation Force*

Long before the war ended the Canadian authorities had considered the many problems attending participation in the Allied occupation of Germany. (Extensive preparations for the latter had been made under the appropriate code name "Eclipse".) From the Canadian point of view issues of considerable complexity were involved, including, on the military side, possible repercussions on the repatriation of overseas troops and the organization of the Canadian Army Pacific

Force.\* Here we can do no more than outline the main developments leading to the organization of the Canadian Army Occupation Force in the summer of 1945.

In December 1944 the Canadian Government approved the broad policy for the Army's participation in occupational duties during the transition period between the cessation of hostilities and the beginning of the occupation proper. The Canadian force was to be "one occupational group organized as an infantry formation of approximately 25,000 men",<sup>35</sup> closely resembling a self-administering infantry division. Personnel of the force would be found from volunteers in the overseas army who were willing to forgo their priority of demobilization; any deficiency in strength would be made up by detailing soldiers with low priority. The Canadian Government was, however, unwilling to accept a long-range commitment. Official policy favoured the rapid repatriation of Canadian troops in the European theatre, particularly in view of the fact that Canada would have no voice in the Allied control of Germany.<sup>36</sup>

General Crerar and Lieut.-General P. J. Montague (Chief of Staff, Canadian Military Headquarters) agreed that the crucial point in implementing this policy was the length of the time for which the occupation force was to be made available. The Army Commander observed that "a delay of even a year in return to Canada and civil opportunities" could be "a very serious handicap" for the average soldier; on the other hand, prospects of a career, with long-term service in the post-war Active Army, might attract many men to the occupation force. He considered that Headquarters First Canadian Army should continue to function until satisfactory arrangements for Canadian participation were complete, pointing out that these were "national problems and not matters which should be decided and arranged by British higher command or SHAEF".<sup>37</sup> The issue was complicated by the need for reconciling the requirements of the Canadian Army Pacific Force with those of the occupation force. "Inevitably these two matters are closely connected", Crerar wrote in March 1945, "as in order expeditiously to regroup units and reallocate personnel a considerable amount of preliminary work is required."<sup>38</sup>

Simultaneously another aspect of the problem came into view. During March Field-Marshal Montgomery's headquarters inquired whether the Canadians wished to be represented in the British portion of a proposed Allied garrison in Berlin. Again Crerar emphasized that this matter was "of political rather than of military significance". Lieut.-General J. C. Murchie, Chief of the General Staff in Ottawa, replied at once that the Army should participate in the occupation of Berlin, "both on national grounds and to give Canadian troops satisfaction of having token detachment present at entry of enemy capital." By the end of the campaign, Headquarters First Canadian Army had prepared a detailed order of battle for an infantry brigade group to represent Canada in the garrison.<sup>39</sup> This group, however, never reached Berlin. Protracted negotiations among the Allies, and the condition of the city, postponed the movement, and in mid-June the Canadian force was released from its assignment. A composite battalion was then formed from companies of representative units of the 1st, 2nd and 4th Canadian Divisions (The Loyal Edmonton Regiment, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal and The Argyll and

\*See *Six Years of War*, 512-19.

Sutherland Highlanders of Canada). This unit, commanded by Lt: Col. A. F. Coffin of the Argylls, finally entered Berlin on 4 July. Under the command of Headquarters British Troops Berlin, it remained there until 27 July.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, during May, General Crerar's headquarters organized the Canadian Army Occupation Force, consisting of a reconstituted "3rd Canadian Infantry Division, C.A.O.F." with incremental units at General Headquarters and in the Lines of Communication.<sup>41</sup> Nine "garrison battalions" and three "garrison brigade headquarters" were drawn in the first instance from reinforcement units in England to form the nucleus of the Force. They were concentrated near Amersfoort, in the vicinity of General Keebler's division,\* all levels of command being closely affiliated with the counterpart in the veteran formation. The garrison brigades and battalions were reorganized into formations and units paralleling those of the wartime division: thus the "2nd/7th Canadian Infantry Brigade" was composed at first of units designated as battalions of The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, The Regina Rifle Regiment and The Canadian Scottish Regiment (later the Queen's Own Rifles from the 2nd/8th Brigade exchanged with the Scottish). Although authorized from 1 June, Headquarters 3rd Division, C.A.O.F. did not take over control of its units until the 15th, when General Vokes assumed command.<sup>43</sup> At the end of June the division's total strength was 568 officers and 15,477 other ranks; a month later these figures had risen to 853 and 16,983.<sup>44</sup>

General Vokes reminded his troops that they were "ambassadors of Canada", adding: "As we appear, and as we conduct ourselves so will Canada be judged both in Germany or in any other country in Europe in which we may find ourselves whether on duty or on leave."<sup>45</sup> On 5 July the first units of the Force left the Netherlands for north-west Germany where, under Headquarters 30th Corps District, they commenced taking over the 2nd Infantry Division's sector. Six days later the relief was complete, with Vokes' headquarters established in Bad Zwischenahn. (As the 2nd Canadian Division had assumed responsibility for the 3rd's area when the latter moved to the western Netherlands, the 3rd Division, C.A.O.F. succeeded to a command comprising the Aurich district and most of the Land Oldenburg.) In its new location the divisional staff inaugurated a programme "to turn out, firstly well trained and disciplined soldiers; and secondly good citizens of Canada better equipped to earn a living when they leave the army than when they entered it".<sup>46</sup>

The 3rd Division, C.A.O.F. rapidly settled down to its new and varied responsibilities. These included looking after large numbers of displaced persons, regulating relations with and between Germans and, due to the shortage of coal, cutting wood for winter fuel. As time passed it became possible to relax certain restrictions on civilian activities in conformity with Montgomery's policy of giving the Germans greater freedom, "subject only to the provisions of military security and necessity".<sup>47</sup> Anyone who had assumed that the Force would be fully occupied in keeping the Germans in subjection was soon undeceived. In the early months the presence of the non-German displaced persons caused some trouble; but at no

\*The 3rd Division had been moved from the Aurich area to Utrecht, passing from the command of the 2nd to the 1st Corps on 16 May.<sup>42</sup>

time was there any serious difficulty with the German population, who indeed seemed glad of the support for law and order provided by the occupying troops.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, continuing uncertainty regarding the terms of service in the Occupation Force caused some disquietude to personnel compulsorily posted to the C.A.O.F. On 10 August the Department of National Defence announced:

Canadian Occupation Forces [including a component of the Royal Canadian Air Force] will serve for a limited period only and individual members of these Forces will not in any event be required to serve on such duty for longer than two years.

This statement, as General Vokes was quick to point out, immediately raised further questions in connection with the status of soldiers interested in the army as a career. The problem was complicated by the fact that only about 10,000 men had volunteered for service in the Canadian Army Occupation Force, the balance being found from personnel with low priority for repatriation. The sudden collapse of Japan, with the consequent disbandment of the Canadian Army Pacific Force, eased the situation to some extent. In September the Adjutant General (MajorGeneral A. E. Walford) stated that a secondary purpose of the "Interim Force", then being organized to bridge the gap between the cessation of all hostilities and the authorization of the post-war Regular Army, would be to provide replacements for the Occupation Force.<sup>49</sup>

A final decision on the future of the Occupation Force was not, however, taken until December 1945. The Canadian Government then advised the British authorities that "the serious administrative problems that are involved in maintaining comparatively small forces at so great a distance from Canada" necessitated an early termination of the commitment. Pending repatriation of the remainder of the Canadian Army Overseas, the Force would be retained at full strength; but, beginning in April 1946, it would be withdrawn "by stages with the object of completing movements from the Continent before the end of the next summer and repatriating all Canadian Army personnel now overseas by the autumn of 1946".<sup>50</sup> Although the British Government pressed strongly for retention of the Canadian troops on the Continent until the spring of 1947, the decision was maintained.<sup>51</sup>

Arrangements for the withdrawal were completed during the winter months. Delay in announcing the official policy on repatriation caused some unrest in the 3rd Division, C.A.O.F. in February 1946. On the 15th of the month the Prime Minister of Canada announced that the Canadian troops would be withdrawn from Germany beginning in April. It was expected that the entire Force would be back in Canada by September or October.<sup>52</sup> The first troops actually sailed from Cuxhaven to Tilbury at the end of March, and the bulk of the Force withdrew to England during the next three months for return to Canada. General Vokes' headquarters turned over its responsibilities to the British 52nd (Lowland) Division on 15 May and was officially disbanded on 20 June.<sup>53</sup>

## CHAPTER XXIV

### ADMINISTRATION, AND SOME SPECIAL ACTIVITIES AND PROBLEMS

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THE story of the campaign in North-West Europe has been told in this volume mainly in terms of what happened on the battlefield. But the events there were very largely controlled by administrative—"logistical"—considerations. In this chapter some brief and necessarily inadequate account is given of these matters. At the same time, mention must be made of a number of Canadians who were employed in North-West Europe on special tasks—some of them extremely hazardous—outside the Canadian field army.

#### Canadian Administration in North-West Europe

At times in the course of the narrative, the reader has been given at least a glimpse of the administrative foundations of victory. He has seen something of the logistical organization that supported the invasion of Normandy, the enormous supply and transport problem that complicated Allied strategy after our victory there, and the tremendous administrative "build-up" that prepared the way for the Battle of the Rhineland. Here something must be said in slightly more detail of the nature of the administrative machine.

In a theatre of war, military administration falls into two major categories, each of which, under the British-Canadian staff system, is the responsibility of a separate branch of the staff. The Adjutant-General's Branch deals with the so-called "A" problems, which concern personnel—medical, dental and pay services,\* postings, reinforcements, transfers, promotions, states and returns, welfare, decorations and awards, and other similar matters which affect the soldier as an individual. The Quartermaster-General's Branch deals with "Q" matters—basically, movement, and maintenance of material—which in turn are subdivided into those which pertain to the organization and efficiency of the various services and those which concern the movement of stores.<sup>1</sup> Although no detailed description of the work of the individual services can be undertaken here, "Q" matters will

\*The work of the medical service in this campaign is dealt with in detail in Lt. Col. W. R. Feasby, ed., *Official History of the Canadian Medical Services, 1939-1945, Vol. I, Organization and Campaigns* (Ottawa, 1956). For the dental service, see Lt.-Col. H. M. Jackson, *The Story of the Royal Canadian Dental Corps* (n.p., 1956). On pay services, see Capt. J. D. Londerville, *The Pay Services of the Canadian Army Overseas in the War of 1939-45* (Ottawa, 1950).

nevertheless be dealt with first—not because they were the more important, but because they lend themselves to a unity of treatment which will do much to explain the general administrative background of the campaign.

As early as the beginning of 1943, it was evident that any concept of a completely self-contained Canadian Army, with its own supply-line stretching from the manufacturer in Canada to the troops in the field, would have to be abandoned. For one thing, a separate Canadian base organization, which would have been necessary under such a system, would have been too costly in terms of manpower.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the exigencies of battle might make it necessary at any time for Canadian divisions to be placed under the command of a British corps or for British divisions to be placed under the command of a Canadian corps,<sup>3</sup> and under any such arrangement dual lines of supply would have been a vexatious complication. Thus, throughout the campaign in North-West Europe, there was virtually no separate Canadian supply organization other than what existed within First Canadian Army itself. The great majority of Canadian requirements, including ordnance stores, ammunition, petroleum products, most engineer, medical and dental stores, rations, office machinery and other supplies, were provided through British channels. Canadian units indented for warlike stores direct to their division's Ordnance Field Park, which carried stocks of spare parts for mechanical transport, small arms, armament, signal stores, and engineering equipment, as well as complete wireless sets and small arms. Bulk demands for artillery equipment, clothing and general stores were sent periodically by the formation's R.C.O.C. staff to a British Advanced Ordnance Depot.

Canadian troops did indeed continue to receive certain items which were peculiar to the Canadian forces,<sup>4</sup> but most of these went into British depots in the United Kingdom, whence they were sent forward against Canadian indents to be issued in the theatre to cover Canadian demands.<sup>5</sup> Canadian liaison officers in British depots in North-West Europe had the task of supervising the issue of these items of "continuing Canadian supply". "Soft-skinned", or "B" vehicles, and certain types of armoured, or "A" vehicles, probably the most important items of Canadian supply, were a partial exception to this in that they were held in the vehicle companies of the Canadian Base Ordnance Depot in the United Kingdom, but they nevertheless moved from there into the British "pipeline". Of course, Canadian vehicles in large numbers were also supplied to the British authorities for their own use, many of them under the terms of the War Appropriation (United Nations Mutual Aid) Act of May 1943. During the last two years of the war alone, Canada provided the British with more than 82,000 "B" vehicles and more than 3000 "A" vehicles under Mutual Aid. All the Canadian-made vehicles went into the British pipeline and the British authorities, after ensuring that Canadian formations were provided with Canadian types, issued the balance as they saw fit. Apart from vehicles, the major items of Canadian supply were clothing, various personal equipment, and some technical stores.<sup>6</sup>

It had been agreed that items of continuing Canadian supply, earmarked for Canadian formations, would not be issued to British units except in cases of operational emergency,<sup>7</sup> but naturally under such an arrangement as this there were

sometimes disagreements about the interpretation of the principle.<sup>8</sup> When in the autumn of 1944, for instance, an attempt was made to have the holdings of Canadian and British "B" vehicles within 21st Army Group pooled, this was resisted by the G.O.C.-in-C. First Canadian Army<sup>9</sup> since most Canadian vehicles had four-wheel drive while a preponderance of British vehicles were two-wheel drive types. Yet on the whole the system worked satisfactorily, and it certainly conferred a degree of administrative flexibility which would not otherwise have been possible. The proof of this is that during the campaign in North-West Europe administrative problems of unparalleled scope and complexity were encountered, not once but several times, and each time were successfully solved.

The first, and probably the most critical of such problems, was of course the maintenance and supply of the troops who landed on the Normandy beaches between D Day and the time when a normal system of military administration could be established. However, the very uniqueness of this task was an incentive to the administrative planners, and a detailed and comprehensive, yet imaginative, solution was evolved. Before the invasion, a system of movement control known as BUCO (Build-Up Control Organization) was set up in the United Kingdom to supervise the flow of personnel and vehicles from the concentration and marshalling areas and of ships and craft to the Continent,<sup>10</sup> and a representative of First Canadian Army was attached to this organization. From the outset administrative control was exercised at a high level. Initially the planning and administrative responsibility for the British invasion sector was delegated to Second British Army, but Headquarters 21st Army Group later assumed responsibility for ports, railways, and inland water transport, while Headquarters Lines of Communication controlled local administration and certain other installations.<sup>11</sup>

After D Day the entire invading force had to be supplied over the beaches until such time as sufficient ports were captured and developed. Initially formations were maintained from brigade and divisional beach maintenance "packs", which had been especially improvised for this occasion, but as stores and vehicles were landed by amphibious load-carriers and all types of landing craft, a great system of open-air dumps and depots began to be organized on shore.<sup>12</sup> In the British-Canadian sector, this beach maintenance was eventually supplemented by the four small ports of Courseulles, Port-en-Bessin, Caen, and Ouistreham, and by the artificial harbour, Mulberry "B", at Arromanches, plus the havens of sheltered water known as "Gooseberries" (above, page 85).

The three Beach Maintenance Areas on the British assault front corresponded to the "Gold", "Juno" and "Sword" assault areas. These maintenance areas, where supplies were first stored after landing, were sub-divided into Beach SubAreas and Beach Groups. Of these, No. 102 Beach Sub-Area, consisting of Nos. 7 and 8 Beach Groups with No. 4 Beach Group in reserve, was under command of the 3rd Canadian Division on D Day, but as our troops enlarged the bridgehead and as administrative headquarters were established on shore, operational formations progressively relinquished their additional responsibilities for administration. On 11 June Headquarters No. 11 Lines of Communication Area took over control of the Beach Sub-Areas, and by 14 June No. 1 and No. 2 Roadheads were estab-

lished in the vicinities of Douvres and Bayeux respectively. On 23 July, the day on which First Canadian Army became operational, the rear army boundaries of First Canadian Army and Second British Army became effective, and on this same day First Canadian Army took over the control of No. 1 Army Roadhead. The Canadian roadheads and railheads operated under the command of a headquarters known originally as H.Q. No. 1 Canadian L. of C. Terminal and later as H.Q. First Canadian Army Terminals.<sup>13</sup>

After H.Q. 21st Army Group assumed administrative control on the Continent on 20 July, a Rear Maintenance Area, which served virtually as an advanced base, was formed from Nos. 1 and 2 Army Roadheads, which were now called respectively "R.M.A. East" and "R.M.A. West". As the stores in R.M.A. East were gradually used up and not replaced, the Rear Maintenance Area came to centre exclusively about Bayeux. Here separate sections were allotted for reinforcements, ordnance stores, supplies, petroleum products, transport, prisoners of war, R.A.F. supplies, ammunition, salvage, R.E.M.E. and engineer stores, and medical stores. In general, the system of supply was that from these Rear Maintenance Areas the requirements were carried forward to the Army roadheads. Here allotments were made to the various corps and each corps' requirements were then transported forward to the corps area where delivery was made to divisional and corps troops' second line transport which carried their loads on to the divisional maintenance areas. Here bulk was broken and each unit's transport collected its own requirements which were then delivered forward to unit areas. In practice, however, this system was extremely flexible. No vehicle above the platoon level was ever earmarked for any particular load, and the pooling of all available vehicles was constantly practised in emergencies.<sup>14</sup>

Through the first weeks of the invasion virtually everything in the theatre was carried by truck, and indeed motor transport always remained the principal method of delivery. However, in due course a considerable amount of tonnage was moved by tugs and Rhino ferries along the inland waterways; urgently needed stores such as petrol and ammunition were frequently brought into the theatre by air; and railway lines were repaired and put into operation as soon as possible. (The first train ran in the Bayeux area on 4 July, but, owing largely to the destruction of bridges, it was well into August before any considerable volume of traffic could be carried by rail.)<sup>15</sup> No. 1 Railway Operating Group, R.C.E., under Lt.-Col. F. E. Wootton, operated a portion of the line between Caen and Rouen in September, and a good deal of the telegraph line reconstruction in this area was done by No. 1 Railway Telegraph Company, R.C. Signals.<sup>16</sup> Once the Rear Maintenance Areas were operating effectively, the Beach Maintenance Areas were either closed down or converted into Stores Transit Areas.

In spite of adverse factors such as the congestion in the beachhead (which made traffic control an important problem), the severe and unforeseen storm of 19-22 June, and the relative slowness of the breakout, the only serious maintenance difficulty experienced between 6 June and the end of July was in the supply of certain forms of ammunition. Because of the intensity of the fighting during this first phase of operations, ammunition supply was the major administrative problem;



but when the initial battles had been won and the enemy was in full retreat across the Seine, petrol at once became the critical item of supply, and the decisive administrative factor was availability of motor transport.

As the Germans retreated from Normandy the lines of communication began to lengthen rapidly and alarmingly (above, pages 280, 300). Indeed, when Brussels and Antwerp fell on 3 and 4 September respectively, the lines of communication had stretched until they were nearly 300 miles in length. Even before this, however, the maintenance of the 2nd Canadian Corps from its Forward Maintenance Centre south of Caen was providing a difficult transport problem, aggravated by the fact that for a considerable time only secondary roads could be used since the main road east from Caen was dominated by the enemy.<sup>17</sup> On 26 August, however, it was possible for First Canadian Army to open No. 3 Roadhead near Lisieux, and on 2 September No. 3A Roadhead, an advanced portion of No. 3, was opened at Elbeuf. On 3 September First Canadian Army established No. 5 Roadhead between Dieppe and Abbeville, and on 15 September No. 7\* was opened in the Bethune area.<sup>18</sup> Throughout August and September there were virtually no shortages in stocks held in the theatre, but the main depots were still in the Rear Maintenance Area nearly 300 miles back and there were no supplies on the ground between there and the Forward Maintenance Centres of the corps. Thus the real problem was to get supplies to the forward troops rapidly enough to keep pace with the advance.

Apart from stretching the lines of communication, the Allied successes gave rise to another, though relatively minor, administrative problem, for about this time the number of German prisoners suddenly began to increase. A special cage with a capacity of 10,000 had been built at Dieppe and placed under the command of H.Q. No. 1 Canadian L. of C. Terminal; after the surrender of Le Havre on 12 September this cage had to hold, for a short time, more than 17,000 prisoners.<sup>19</sup>

The capture and use of major ports nearer to the fighting front was obviously the only key to the problem of supply. On 1 September Dieppe had been taken and stores began to be landed there six days later (above, page 300). By 21 September the planned tonnage figures for the port were being exceeded, but Dieppe could not begin to handle sufficient tonnage to meet all requirements. Indeed, it was developed as a "feeder" port designed to handle only a limited number of commodities of basic importance. Nevertheless with its assistance First Canadian Army was able on 5 October to establish another roadhead, No. 9, near Termonde east of Ghent; and between 5 and 15 November No. 11 Roadhead was opened at Beersse near Turnhout. These roadheads, and the Army Troops organization generally, had grown much larger than had originally been anticipated. A little later the Canadian L. of C. Terminal organization was employing more than 20 officers and over 5000 other ranks, in addition to large drafts of civilian labour and prisoners of war.<sup>20</sup>

In the meantime the 1st British Corps, as we have seen, captured the badly damaged port of Le Havre, 225 miles in rear of Antwerp, but this port was handed

\*Other roadheads in the numerical series, e.g. Nos. 6 and 8, served the Second British Army.

over to the Americans for development (above, page 336). Antwerp itself was taken almost intact on 4 September, but readers of this book are well aware that it was not possible to use the port until the enemy had been cleared from the approaches. Thus it was not until nearly the end of November that the problem of the overlong lines of communication could at last be satisfactorily solved (above, page 422).

Once the port of Antwerp began functioning, however, it was decided to close down the Rear Maintenance Areas by 20 February 1945 and to transfer their stocks to an advanced base in the vicinity of Antwerp and Brussels.<sup>21</sup> Stocking the advanced base was a major administrative problem involving coordinating the import of stores from the United Kingdom with the shifting of stocks from the Rear Maintenance Areas. One difficulty at this time was a shortage of drivers for "B" vehicles which retarded clearing vehicle stocks from the Rear Maintenance Areas. The turn-around time for the trip from the R.M.A. to the advanced base was between six and seven days. Not until Canadian Military Headquarters, London loaned the British over 1500 men from the Canadian Central Ordnance Depot in the United Kingdom to ferry "B" vehicles from Bayeux to Brussels was the programme successfully completed.<sup>22</sup>

The next major administrative task was that of stockpiling for Operation "Veritable", scheduled to begin on 8 February, which had as its aim the clearing of the west bank of the Rhine (above, pages 457-8). Large stocks of all kinds were required, and during the month of February alone the First Canadian Army railheads handled 343,838 tons of supplies.<sup>23</sup> On 2 March, towards the end of Operation "Veritable", it was possible to begin stocking No. 13 Canadian Army Roadhead over the Maas in the Nijmegen area. After "Veritable" was completed, First Canadian Army was maintained over two lines of communication. As the 1st Canadian Corps advanced towards Utrecht it was supported by No. 13 Roadhead at Nijmegen which was being stocked by rail, and as the 2nd Corps moved towards Oldenburg it was maintained from No. 15 Roadhead which opened on 18 April in the Almelo area and was stocked by road from the railhead at Nijmegen.<sup>24</sup> No. 15 was the last roadhead opened by the Canadian Army, for the war ended before another major administrative move became necessary.

### The 1st and 2nd Echelons

In North-West Europe, as in Italy, a Canadian administrative headquarters was provided. All major Canadian decisions in the theatre rested with the Army Commander; but this administrative headquarters, known as the Canadian Section, G.H.Q. 1st Echelon Headquarters 21st Army Group (the letters "G.H.Q." were ultimately eliminated from the title), was designed to relieve Army Headquarters of all possible non-operational functions. It was charged with responsibility for liaison on Canadian administration between Headquarters First Canadian Army and Canadian Military Headquarters, London, on one hand, and Headquarters 21st Army Group on the other.<sup>25</sup> The Canadian 1st Echelon had been formed in England in March 1944 and on 1 April came under the command of 21st Army

Group. Brigadier A. W. Beament, who had been Officer-in-Charge Canadian Section, G.H.Q. 1st Echelon in Italy,<sup>26</sup> returned to be the Officer-in-Charge. He remained in this post until the end of 1944, when he was succeeded by Major-General E. L. M. Burns, who had recently relinquished the command of the 1st Canadian Corps in Italy.

It is worth noting that when General Burns was appointed the suggestion was made that he might be placed in command of Canadian units "back of Army" and given the title "G.O.C. Canadian Base and L. of C. Units". This was not well received at Headquarters 21st Army Group. Field-Marshal Montgomery's chief administrative officer, Major-General M. W. A. P. Graham, wrote to General Montague on 10 December, 1944,

... There can of course be only one GOC L of C and that is at present General Naylor.\* The C-in-C would not agree to a separate Canadian L of C nor does there seem to be any need for it. In consequence there could not be a GOC Cdn L of C. The whole of the L of C must be controlled by one HQ. A divided responsibility in my opinion is unsound and would not work....

This might have been considered merely a "standard reaction", but there was more to it than that. Canada had long since abandoned the idea of a really separate Canadian Line of Communication, since she could not find the manpower to organize one. And there were military reasons for not introducing an unnecessary complication into a machine which was not working badly, especially as the British were content in practice, as a general rule, to leave Canadian administration severely alone. Generals Montague and Crerar decided not to press the matter. General Burns' ultimate title was "General Officer in Charge, Canadian Section 1st Echelon Headquarters 21st Army Group".<sup>27</sup>

In establishing the Canadian Section, G.H.Q. 1st Echelon it was necessary to make provision for three Canadian spheres of influence: Canadian troops under command First Canadian Army; Canadian G.H.Q., Base, and Lines of Communication troops; and Canadian units serving under the command of a British formation.<sup>28</sup> The situation in North-West Europe differed somewhat from that in Italy since First Canadian Army was directly under the 21st Army Group.† The War Office in London had agreed that the officer in charge of the Canadian 1st Echelon should have direct access to the C.-in-C. 21st Army Group when he required it;<sup>29</sup> in practice, however, matters requiring discussion with Field-Marshal Montgomery were dealt with by General Crerar. But routine administrative matters of Canadian concern were handled by 1st Echelon, which dealt with the appropriate sections of Headquarters 21st Army Group.

Operating alongside Rear Headquarters 21st Army Group, the Canadian Section, G.H.Q. 1st Echelon crossed to Normandy in August 1944. In September it moved on to Brussels, where it remained until after the end of hostilities, when it went forward to Bad Salzflun in Germany. By the end of 1944 a total of 53 officers and 143 other ranks were being employed in this administrative headquarters.<sup>30</sup>

\*Major-General R. F. B. Naylor.

†Although in Italy the Canadian Section, G.H.Q. 1st Echelon operated on behalf of only a corps, it was accredited to Headquarters 15th Army Group.

Although the administration of personnel was at least as important as that of supplies and equipment, it presented, on the whole, fewer difficulties in North-West Europe. The "Canadian Section, G.H.Q. 2nd Echelon" which served with 21st Army Group was, under policy direction from 1st Echelon, mainly responsible for detailed Canadian "A" staff work in the theatre. The 2nd Echelon was defined in Field Service Regulations as "the Deputy Adjutant-General's Office at the Base". Essentially, it was a Canadian personnel records office for North-West Europe, whose most vital functions were the recording and reporting of casualties and the control of the provision of reinforcements (replacements). To facilitate this work the Officer-in-Charge was authorized to communicate directly with unit commanders. There was no need to create a new unit to perform these tasks on the Continent, since a Canadian 2nd Echelon had functioned in England since 1940. In North-West Europe the Officer-in-Charge was Colonel V. S. C. McClenaghan, who had gained experience in a similar capacity in the Mediterranean theatre.<sup>31</sup>

The Canadian Section, G.H.Q. 2nd Echelon crossed to Normandy in August 1944 and set up its offices in a tented camp at La Delivrande. Early in October it moved to Antwerp, where it narrowly escaped destruction by a V-2 rocket on 9 December. Later that month it moved again, to Alost, Belgium, where it remained until June 1945, when it went on to Lemgo in Germany.<sup>32</sup>

Like the echelons in Italy, the Canadian 1st and 2nd Echelons at 21st Army Group both had on their strength many personnel of the Canadian Women's Army Corps, chiefly employed as stenographers, typists, clerks or cypher operators. By 30 September 1944 five officers and 143 other ranks of the C.W.A.C. were serving with the two echelons on the Continent. The casualty roll for North-West Europe includes four C.W.A.C. "battle injuries"—all the result of the V-2 incident at Antwerp.<sup>33</sup>

### The Reinforcement Organization

By March 1944 C.M.H.Q. had decided that the Canadian base reinforcement organization in North-West Europe would not need to be so large as the one in Italy. Because the new theatre of war would be so close to the main base in the United Kingdom, replacement drafts could be sent to the Continent each week. Moreover, the fact that the training of reinforcement personnel would inevitably deteriorate the farther forward they were held was a powerful argument for keeping reinforcement holdings on the Continent to a minimum.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly it was decided to hold only enough reinforcements to replace two to three weeks' wastage at "intense" rates (about 7000 all ranks), instead of the two months' wastage which had been provided for in the Italian theatre,<sup>35</sup> and approval was given for the establishment of Headquarters No. 2 Base Reinforcement Group with only five reinforcement battalions under command rather than the eight provided in Italy.<sup>36</sup> On 1 April, in preparation for the invasion of the Continent, the Canadian reinforcement group came under the command of 21st Army Group.

On D Day the assault formations of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division were

followed ashore by the 10th Canadian Base Reinforcement Battalion, which landed one of its companies on each of the first three days of operations. All the 10th Battalion's reinforcements were ashore by 9 June, and when the 9th Battalion landed, on 13 June, the two units began to phase their reinforcements through "forward" companies attached to the British 1st Corps Reception Camp. When the last Canadian Base Reinforcement Battalion—the 13th—reached France on 3 August, it became a "forward" battalion, controlling from the army roadhead area reinforcement companies in corps and divisional areas. Headquarters No. 2 Canadian Base Reinforcement Group and the other four battalions remained in the base area where the training of reinforcements could continue. Reinforcements for the Armoured Corps, however, were phased forward from the base through the 25th Armoured Delivery Regiment (The Elgin Regiment), whose forward delivery squadrons moved both tanks and crews to units.<sup>37</sup>

Although General Crerar recognized the desirability of reinforcing units with personnel drawn from their home localities and of returning recovered battle casualties to their own units, and had issued an instruction that this should be done wherever possible,<sup>38</sup> once losses became heavy it was not always feasible to allot reinforcements on the basis of their territorial affiliation. Fortunately, we have seen, D Day casualties had been lower than the planners had feared, while losses for the entire month of June had amounted to only 301 officers and 3142 other ranks, as opposed to the planners' estimate made in May of 481 officers and 7092 other ranks for the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade for the first seventeen days' fighting.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless it was soon realized that by far the greatest proportion of total casualties were being suffered by general duty infantrymen from the rifle companies. Thus the provision of general-duty infantry reinforcements became a problem, while on the other hand there were surplus reinforcements for some other corps. Primarily, this situation developed because Canadian reinforcement policy had been founded upon forecasts of casualties, made by the British War Office on the basis of the best information available to it, which proved inaccurate in the circumstances of the new campaign (above, page 284). By 26 August the reinforcement situation had become so acute that General Stuart, the Chief of Staff at C.M.H.Q., decided that the policy of dispatching weekly reinforcement drafts from the United Kingdom should be relaxed temporarily and that general-duty infantrymen should be sent forward in lots of one hundred as soon as they could be collected.<sup>40</sup>

A combination of circumstances served to aggravate the reinforcement crisis. General service enlistments in Canada had begun to decline during 1943,\* with the result that the output of trained reinforcements was smaller than before just at the moment when battle casualties both in North-West Europe and in Italy were very heavy. Moreover, as the Germans retreated across France and Belgium, the period of time which reinforcements spent in transit gradually lengthened. In September it took three to four days for reinforcements to reach their units, and by October seven days were elapsing from the time reinforcements reached the

\*See *Six Years of War*, Appendix "B".

2nd Canadian Base Reinforcement Group until they were shown on a unit strength return.<sup>41</sup>

Beginning late in August and through the autumn the emergency was serious (see above, pages 284-5 and 385-6). To meet it C.M.H.Q. began both to remuster reinforcements from other corps for infantry training and also to use infantry tradesmen and specialists, of whom there was a surplus, for general duty. In addition, the Canadian Government on 23 November authorized sending overseas 16,000 soldiers who had been called up for compulsory service under the National Resources Mobilization Act. This was the first time the Government had used the power to do this which had been conferred upon it by an amendment to the N.R.M.A. passed following the national plebiscite held in April 1942.<sup>42</sup>

Even before this decision could become effective, however, the situation in the theatre had begun to improve. Once the port of Antwerp became available for Allied shipping, reinforcements could be landed there and the time spent in transit was much reduced. Moreover, after the first days of November First Canadian Army was employed in a relatively static role on the Maas (above, pages 426-55), and casualties decreased accordingly. These circumstances put an end to the immediate reinforcement crisis. It became possible in January 1945 to reorganize No. 2 Canadian Base Reinforcement Group. All reinforcements were now held in one large pool at Ghent, except those for the armoured corps, which continued to be "processed" through the 25th Armoured Delivery Regiment. This regrouping made it possible to disband all but one company of the 12th Canadian Base Reinforcement Battalion. Henceforth Nos. 10 and 11 Battalions held only infantry reinforcements and No. 9 held reinforcements for all other corps. The forward No. 13 Battalion was reorganized into four companies, one for each Canadian division and one for corps and army troops.<sup>43</sup>

When the 1st Canadian Corps moved from Italy to North-West Europe, the Headquarters of No. 1 Base Reinforcement Group remained behind to process recoverable casualties and round off its administrative functions. A further reorganization of the reinforcement system was therefore necessary in March 1945. Another Canadian Base Reinforcement Group (No. 3) was formed from the Headquarters of the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade from Italy, which was being disbanded to conform to the divisional organization within 21st Army Group. Thus for the last few weeks of the war First Canadian Army was served by two Base Reinforcement Groups, each of three reinforcement battalions.<sup>44</sup>

The general reinforcement situation in First Canadian Army in the winter of 1944-45 and the following spring was in marked contrast with that in the late summer and autumn. Statistically speaking, the low point had been reached on 31 August, when the Canadian infantry units in North-West Europe had an average deficiency in "other ranks" of 206 per battalion. Improvement was rapid thereafter, though it is evident (see above, page 385) that, as was inevitable in all the circumstances, the training of reinforcements provided by C.M.H.Q.'s emergency programme left a great deal to be desired. By 24 October the average battalion deficiency had fallen to 54 men, and though for the first five days of November

(at the end of the Battle of the Scheldt) it again rose above 100, it was down to 31 by the 13th of that month. Except for 21 and 22 December (when it was 34) it never rose above that figure again, and usually it was much lower. At the beginning of the Battle of the Rhineland in February it was *nil*.<sup>45</sup> The satisfactory situation in the final months was the result of the remustering programme and the decision to dispatch N.R.M.A. soldiers overseas, combined with the quiet period in November, December and January when casualties were relatively few.

It is also evident that, once the autumn crisis was past, the training of the reinforcements was satisfactory. No green man joining a unit is ever as useful as a man who has had battle experience, and few commanding officers have ever been known to admit that the replacements sent to their units were adequately trained. But the absence of serious complaints from the field in the final months of the campaign is itself eloquent. And occasionally there is a positive statement. One such appears in the war diary of The Algonquin Regiment for April 1945:

*Reinforcements.*

Coming as required. Only about 25% have had previous battle experience, but all appeared well trained and they stood up well under a tough initiation.

A word may be said here about the N.R.M.A. men overseas. The first of them sailed from Halifax for the United Kingdom on 3 January 1945; the first draft containing N.R.M.A. men left England for the Continent on 23 February.<sup>46</sup> All told, 12,908 N.R.M.A. soldiers went overseas from Canada, and by the end of hostilities 9677 had gone to the Continent and 2463 had actually been taken on the strength of field units.<sup>47</sup> N.R.M.A. soldiers suffered 313 battle casualties, 69 of them losing their lives.<sup>48</sup> They seem to have given a respectable account of themselves during the short period of their service. Steps had been taken to prevent their status being known in their units. Few war diaries take note of their presence. An exception is that of The Loyal Edmonton Regiment, which made this comment on 30 April:

... During the month our Battalion has taken on strength eight officers and 167 other ranks; among the latter are approximately 40 NRMA personnel. These men have in no way been treated differently than any other reinforcement, in fact the majority of the Battalion is not even aware of their presence here, and in the few small actions they have engaged in so far they have generally shown up as well as all new reinforcements do... .

### The "Canloan" Scheme

Of the fighting elements of the Canadian Army not the least important was the large group of junior officers who served in various British units in North West Europe under the so-called "Canloan" scheme.

The first initiative in this matter came from Canada. In September 1943 C.M.H.Q. was asked to ascertain whether the British authorities would be interested in absorbing a number of Canadian officers, particularly in ranks above captain, who had become surplus as a result of the disbandment of two home defence divisions. In the course of the subsequent discussions with the War Office it became clear that the latter had a requirement only for subaltern officers. In

November the Adjutant General of the Canadian Army, Major-General H. F. G. Letson, then in England, discussed the matter with the War Office and suggested that, in the light of the disbandment of the 7th and 8th Divisions and the fact that there appeared to be an overall surplus of junior officers undergoing training in Canada, it might be possible to lend the British Army a certain number of such officers. At this time it was considered that about 2000 might be available.<sup>49</sup>

On 5 January 1944 the War Committee of the Canadian Cabinet approved this loan, subject to the officers being available for immediate recall whenever the Canadian Army required their services. At a meeting in London on 4 February 1944 arrangements were made for 2000 Canadian officers to be attached to the British Army. In addition to infantry officers, the British now asked for some 50 urgently-needed Ordnance officers. The great majority of the Canadian officers were to be lieutenants, but some captains were to be included. Under this "Canloan" scheme, as it came to be called, the Canadian Government was to be responsible for the pay, allowances and pensions of the officers attached to the British, but promotions were to be made on British recommendation, subject to the approval of the appropriate Canadian authority. During their service with the British units, the officers were to wear the badges of the regiments to which they were attached, but they were given permission to wear "Canada" badges on their battledress and to wear Canadian service dress for "walking out".<sup>50</sup> A legal basis for the Canloan scheme was provided with the passage of Order-in-Council P.C. 3464 of 29 April 1944. At this time the maximum number of officers to be loaned was placed at 1500 instead of the 2000 originally mentioned.

The Canloan officers were thoroughly "screened" by selection boards in Canada, since the War Committee had expressed its anxiety that the Canadian officers loaned to the British should be most carefully selected and that those who volunteered should, in age, medical category and qualifications, be at least as well trained as reinforcement officers for Canadian units. To achieve this the Canloan officers were given a special four-week refresher course at Sussex, New Brunswick, designed to bring them up to the standard of officers leaving Canadian reinforcement units in the United Kingdom. The first group reached the United Kingdom on 7 April 1944.<sup>51</sup>

In the event, a total of 673 Canloan officers were sent to British units, 622 being infantry and 51 from the R.C.O.C. By the spring of 1944, however, the officer reinforcement situation in Canada was less promising than in the previous autumn. Accordingly N.D.H.Q. notified C.M.H.Q. that the supply of officers available for loan was coming to an end and that the infantry total was very unlikely to exceed 625.<sup>52</sup> So far as possible the Canadians were sent to units of the British regiments, if any, with which their Canadian regiments were allied. A considerable number found their way into airborne units; by 1 August 1944 approximately 90 had been so posted.<sup>53</sup>

The Canadian infantry officers soon found themselves very actively employed. A number of them landed in Normandy on D Day and others not long afterwards. Most were involved in very fierce fighting, often in command of forward platoons.<sup>54</sup> and the group as a whole suffered exceptionally heavy losses. Of the 673 officers



who were loaned to the British between 8 April 1944 and 27 July 1944, 465 became casualties, 127 being killed or dying of wounds.<sup>55</sup> Canloan officers won many awards for gallantry; 41 received the Military Cross.<sup>56</sup>

### Canadians and the European "Resistance"

The peculiar pattern of the Second World War, in which the first half of the conflict was marked by impressive successes for the Axis powers and the subjugation of nation after nation by Nazi Germany, accounts in large measure for the unusually prominent part played later by resistance movements, clandestine forces, the guerrilla, the spy and the saboteur. This was so because the very extent of the initial German triumph meant that the enemy soon found himself over-extended. Even by the end of 1940, the Nazis had discovered that it was beyond their power to maintain in complete subjection all the territory which they had conquered.

As a result, patriotic "undergrounds" sprang up in virtually all the nations of occupied Europe, and in the course of time the British Government established an organization to assist the oppressed peoples in their struggle for liberty. This, known as the Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.),\* was the responsibility of a specially nominated Cabinet Minister, but all its activities which were of a military nature or might have military repercussions were operationally under the Chiefs of Staff. When Supreme Commanders were appointed for various theatres of war, the control of S.O.E. operations was decentralized to them so that clandestine activities could be properly coordinated in each theatre. When COSSAC (above, page 14) was appointed in 1943, S.O.E. operations in North-West Europe came under his headquarters (and later under SHAEF), although in the case of activities in France the British Government retained a direct responsibility until the invasion of Normandy, when all clandestine forces in France were placed under General Koenig, commanding the French Forces of the Interior under SHAEF. Before the invasion, S.O.E. placed Special Force detachments at Army Group and Army Headquarters, so that the actions of resistance groups behind the enemy front could be correlated with the operations of the armies.<sup>57</sup>

From May 1941 onwards, British and Allied agents were sent into France,<sup>58</sup> initially with the intention merely of sabotaging the German war effort but more and more as time passed with the purpose of guiding and helping national resistance movements. Needless to say, this type of work was extremely dangerous and losses were heavy, for the German Gestapo were formidable opponents who combined an ultra-modern card-catalogue type of efficiency with a barbarism which made the fullest use of torture, the concentration camp, and the gallows.

Neither the Canadian Government nor any Canadian service was at any time directly concerned with the direction of these clandestine operations; but the Government did permit and encourage individual Canadians to volunteer their services for the secret war in North-West Europe. In France, Canadians engaged in two different types of clandestine tasks. The first of these, and by far the more exten-

\*The United States equivalent was the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.).

sive, had as its aim "to encourage and enable the peoples of the occupied countries to harass the German war effort at every possible point by sabotage, subversion, go-slow practices, *coup de main* raids, etc., and at the same time to build up secret forces therein, organized, armed and trained to take their part only when the final assault began".<sup>59</sup> As French resistance hardened and French hostility to the Nazi occupying power increased, the organizing of secret armies became more important than isolated acts of sabotage. Thus the agents sent to France, initially trained and employed as saboteurs, came increasingly to be used as liaison officers with patriotic resistance groups. The second clandestine role in which Canadians were employed, also under S.O.E., was organizing the escape of Allied air crews who had managed to make safe landings when forced down on the Continent and other Allied evaders and escapers such as prisoners of war.<sup>60</sup>

By the latter part of 1941 British secret organizations were becoming hardpressed to find sufficient suitable personnel. This was especially so in the case of operations in France since, by arrangement with Free French Headquarters, French citizens who escaped to the United Kingdom were automatically debarred from serving under S.O.E.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, expert linguists, always at a premium, were urgently required for duties in other fields, and it became extremely difficult to find enough men and women who possessed not only the courage and physical stamina demanded by an agent's life but also a sufficiently intimate acquaintance with the countries in which they would operate. Thus one reason why a number of Canadians found themselves drawn into this work was the fact that in Canada there were representatives of many races and languages who were nevertheless unquestionably loyal to the Allied cause. Naturally enough, a number of Frenchspeaking Canadians came to be employed as "agents" in France, since their knowledge of the language made them suitable for such a role. In fact, of the 28 Canadian soldiers so employed, 24 were French Canadians.

Although some individual Canadians were recruited by the Special Operations Executive as early as 1941, the Canadian Army became involved only in 1942. Of the Canadian Army personnel who operated in France as agents all except one were officers, many of them being commissioned from the ranks. One or two French-speaking Canadian officers were enrolled in the secret organization early in 1942, but later in the same year, when the need for trained wireless operators had become more urgent, a number of recruits were obtained from the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. In the end, this corps provided more men for clandestine operations than any other corps or unit of the Canadian Army.

The problem of administering the Canadians who volunteered for special service was complex. At an early stage it was presumed that the best plan would be to discharge any Canadian service personnel volunteering for special duties and re-enlist or re-employ them, as the case might be, in the appropriate British organization. This, however, did not prove to be a satisfactory solution, and by the end of 1942 it was evident that it would be better for all concerned if such volunteers were lent to the War Office. Pay arrangements continued to pose some difficulty until in May 1944 the Canadian Treasury accepted responsibility for the pay and

allowances at Canadian rates of all Canadian service personnel loaned to British service authorities whatever their duties.<sup>62</sup>

The first Canadian officer to serve with the Special Operations Executive in the field was recruited in April 1942, and, since it is obviously impossible to mention by name all the gallant Canadians who were engaged in clandestine operations, his record must serve as an example of all of them. He was Captain (later Major) G. D. A. Bieler, a Canadian of Swiss origin and French birth who had been serving with Le Regiment de Maisonneuve. When Major Bieler had completed his training, he was dropped into the Montargis area of France by parachute on 25 November 1942. As London was to learn later, Major Bieler struck a stone in landing and seriously injured his spine. In spite of this crippling disability, he made his way by slow stages, first to his accommodation address in Paris, and thence northwards to the area below the Belgian frontier which was to be the scene of his activities for many months. An offer to fly him out for hospital treatment was refused and Bieler continued to work most effectively with his "circuit" in northern France, doing considerable damage to German-operated transportation systems. His courage and achievement won him the D.S.O. and the M.B.E. On 14 January 1944, however, the Gestapo succeeded in arresting him, along with a large number of his colleagues, in St. Quentin. The Gestapo took Major Bieler to Paris where he was repeatedly tortured, but it is known that he revealed no information. Subsequently, he was incarcerated for a time in the prison at Fresnes, and then in April was moved to the concentration camp at Flossenburg in Germany. Here he was confined in a cell barely large enough to hold him, being kept in solitary confinement and denied exercise, writing materials or reading matter. On or about 5 September, according to information now available, he was executed by a firing squad.

Of the 28 Canadians who saw service as agents in France during the period 1942-1944, twenty-three were employed as liaison officers with resistance forces and the remaining five in the business of organizing escapes. These brave men contributed in no small measure to the ultimate defeat of the enemy, but their successes were paid for, especially in the early years, with heavy casualties. Of the ten Canadian officers dropped into France between late 1942 and March 1944, seven were either killed or disappeared without trace. In at least two cases in March 1944 Canadian agents died because they were parachuted straight into the arms of the Gestapo, who had succeeded in "controlling" a resistance circuit by arresting all its original members and continuing to send false messages back to London. Seven more Canadian agents were sent to France in the weeks immediately preceding and following D Day, and happily all of these returned safely. A further six, who had previously been in the Italian theatre, were dropped in southern France between June and August 1944, and these also survived.

Of the five Canadians who worked with the escape organization, three were French-speaking soldiers of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal who had themselves made daring escapes after being captured at Dieppe. These three, who were subsequently commissioned, and another French-Canadian officer, were in 1943 dropped separately in France, where they worked for long periods with considerable success.

All four survived, but unfortunately another Canadian volunteer for the escape organization, who was dropped in northern France in August 1943, was captured almost immediately. He died a few weeks after the end of the war from treatment received in a Nazi concentration camp.

### Civil Affairs and Military Government Officers

At the end of 1942, with planning already under way for an eventual Allied return to Europe, the British War Office suggested that Canada might be able to supply some service officers to assist in the administration of liberated Allied territory and occupied enemy territory.<sup>63</sup> Such personnel, when they operated in Allied territory, would be known as Civil Affairs Officers; when in enemy territory, they would form part of the Military Government. The aim of the Civil Affairs service would be to assist the progress of the fighting troops by maintaining settled conditions and meeting the urgent demands of the civil population.<sup>64</sup> Although Civil Affairs was not primarily a relief organization, its tasks would include local administration, aid, relief, and restoration. It was, however, definitely a part of the Army, "a service within the meaning of Field Service Regulations".<sup>65</sup> The detailed tasks of relief and rehabilitation in Allied territory Civil Affairs always relinquished to local authorities as soon as possible.

In February 1943, 14 Canadian officers were selected to attend the British Civil Affairs Staff Centre at Wimbledon. On 6 October 1943 the Cabinet War Committee approved the establishment of a Canadian Civil Affairs Staff Course, which opened at the Royal Military College, Kingston, in December. A total of 131 officers (not counting the directing staff of 10) were trained in the Canadian courses, while some Canadians received instruction at the American School of Military Government at Charlottesville, Virginia.<sup>66</sup>

In North-West Europe there were Civil Affairs and Military Government staffs at Headquarters First Canadian Army and at corps headquarters. The officers of these staffs moved with their formations and administered civil affairs in Army and Corps areas. In addition, SHAEF maintained a pool of Civil Affairs Officers who were employed in "spearhead detachments" working with fighting formations or *ad hoc* static detachments in specific towns or districts. Normally such a detachment consisted of approximately ten officers, forming a mixed British and American team and including as a rule officers with legal, engineering and medical experience. Many Canadians worked in such teams in areas remote from the operations of the Canadian field army. By November 1944 there were 279 Canadian Army officers in the Civil Affairs pool, where they were employed in such diverse specialized branches as the Administrative, Financial, Legal, Labour, Supply, Food and Engineering Services.<sup>67</sup> And we have caught in this volume some glimpses of the valuable work of the Civil Affairs staffs of the First Canadian Army, particularly in the western Netherlands where acute general starvation was narrowly averted (above, pages 586-7, 606-9).

### No. 1 Canadian Forestry Group

From 1940 onwards, units of the Canadian Forestry Corps had been at work in the United Kingdom.\* In March 1943, when considering the invasion of the Continent, the British War Office foresaw a need for timber operations in the liberated and occupied areas. Accordingly Canada was asked to allocate five forestry companies to the 21st Army Group for operations in North-West Europe, and on 11 October 1943 Ottawa approved this arrangement.<sup>68</sup> In January 1944 Headquarters No. 1 Canadian Forestry Group was mobilized to command these companies and was placed under Colonel C. E. F. Jones. In May 1944 assent was given to a further British proposal that the number of companies in No. 1 Canadian Forestry Group be increased from 5 to 10.<sup>69</sup> No. 1 Canadian Forestry Group remained under C.M.H.Q.'s administration and command until in July and August its various companies moved to the south of England preparatory to embarking for the Continent.

The Canadian Forestry Corps' first task in connection with the North-West Europe campaign was curiously reminiscent of an earlier day in Canada. Lumber would be required on the Continent for the use of the invading force, but shipping could not be spared to carry it. Lt.-Col. E. P. Burchett, Assistant Director of Timber Operations, C.F.C., affirmed his belief that it would be practicable to tow long timbers across the Channel in the form of rafts. The idea was approved, and in March 1944 No. 1 Special Forestry Section, C.F.C., began work on raft construction at Southampton and Barry (on the Bristol Channel). Before the project was wound up in August—by which time it was possible to cut timber on the Continent—the Canadians had built 77 square timber rafts and 54 of round timber. The project was a success. The rafts met some rough weather at sea, particularly those from Barry which had to round Land's End, but tugs were able to move them safely at speeds up to eight knots.<sup>70</sup>

During the last week in July and the first week in August, No. 1 Canadian Forestry Group and five companies moved to France, where a British pioneer company and two forestry companies of the Royal Engineers were placed under its command. The group at once began to cut timber in the Cerisy Forest between Bayeux and St. Lo. In late October and early November 1944 the Canadian Forestry Group moved into Belgium and commenced work in the Westerloo Forest near Brussels. Towards the end of October the other five Canadian forestry companies arrived on the Continent from the United Kingdom and went to the Ardennes Forest in the American sector where they found one Canadian company already at work. When in the middle of December the Germans launched their counteroffensive in the Ardennes the six Canadian forestry companies took up a posture of defence before being forced to make a hasty withdrawal (above, page 441). They all got safely back to Brussels, but although they were able to take considerable technical equipment with them 21 sawmills had to be abandoned in the Ardennes. These companies were then re-assigned to other areas in Belgium.<sup>71</sup>

\*See *Six Years of War*, 207-10,

In February 1945, almost as soon as the area came under Allied control, two Canadian forestry companies were sent to the Reichswald, later moving to the Hochwald, to produce in these bloodstained forests lumber and timber for the Rhine crossings. The Canadian Forestry Group continued operations for a time after the end of hostilities, all the companies being finally stationed in Germany; but in November 1945 Canadian lumbering on the Continent came to an end. During the time it had spent in North-West Europe the Group had produced approximately 47,700,000 F.B.M. of sawn lumber, in addition to large production in other categories; a valuable contribution to the success of the campaign.<sup>72</sup>

## CONCLUSION

THIS volume tells the story of 333 days of fighting by Canadian soldiers, from the Normandy beaches to the valley of the Weser and the shores of the Baltic.

During this period the First Canadian Army advanced some 450 miles in a direct line, and fought and won a series of battles as terrible as any in the history of the ancient and famous lands where the campaign took place. Reckoned in terms of numbers, the Army's contribution was small in proportion to the whole Allied force that fought under General Eisenhower; of the Supreme Commander's 90 divisions Canada produced but five, and the total personnel establishment of her field force at the end was about 170,000.<sup>1</sup> Some 237,000 men and women of the Canadian Army\* served in North-West Europe during the operations.<sup>2</sup> The defeat of Germany was effected only by a mighty effort by a coalition of great states, several of which were far stronger than Canada.

Nevertheless, it was given to the Canadians to stand in the forefront of perhaps the fiercest and the most significant encounters of this vast and fateful campaign. In his final report Eisenhower spoke of "three episodes as being the most decisive in insuring victory". They were the battle of the Normandy beaches; the battle of the Falaise pocket; and the battles west of the Rhine during February and March. In all three, as it happened, Canadian soldiers played important parts. Beside these three may stand, both for difficulty and for strategic significance, the Battle of the Scheldt, in which the First Canadian Army—and, primarily, the 2nd Canadian Corps—cleared the approaches from the sea to the port of Antwerp and thereby made it possible to maintain the Allied armies during the final advance into Germany. This record might command respect even by the standards of the greater powers.

At the end of the fighting, Intelligence computed that First Canadian Army had encountered during its ten months of operations 60 divisions of the German forces (the remains of one or two others which had fought against Canadians earlier in the campaign had vanished from the theatre before the Army took over a portion of the line). The comment was made, "These have ranged from the fanatical SS and tenacious parachutists to the mediocre training and GAF divisions. But throughout the campaign in the West, the High Command has paid First Canadian Army the compliment of consistently opposing our forces with some of the best troops available to them." In certain of the periods of hardest action, not a great number of prisoners fell into Canadian hands; many of these formidable fighters preferred death to surrender. Nevertheless, from 23 July, when First Canadian

\*The total of the personnel of the Army reported as serving in North-West Europe, 1940-45, is 257,978. Deducting those who went to Brittany in 1940 or to Dieppe on 19 August 1942, or who were dispatched to the Continent after 8 May 1945, the total arrived at for the campaign is 237,009.

Army became operational, through 4 May when the fighting ended, 192,000 prisoners\* were taken from the enemy on the Army front.<sup>3</sup>

As the reader is well aware, the Army that fought under General Crerar's command included large numbers of troops who were not Canadian. In this the First Canadian Army resembled the Eighth British Army that fought in North Africa and Italy, in which at times divisions from the United Kingdom were a decided minority. Canada contributed a corps to the Eighth Army, and until that corps returned from Italy late in the campaign its place in First Canadian Army had to be taken by other troops. At one point, indeed—the early stages of the Battle of the Rhineland in February 1945, when the 30th British Corps with a great part of the normal fighting strength of the Second British Army under its command fought under General Crerar—there were nine British divisions in the Army. General Crerar particularly asked the newspaper correspondents at his headquarters to give credit to the "English, Scottish and Welsh formations" engaged in this battle.<sup>4</sup> So they did; but that did not wholly prevent comments such as that of a London newspaper whose military correspondent remarked that the Army was "'Canadian' in name because its commander and staff are Canadian".<sup>5</sup> It was always difficult for some people to comprehend how fluid the composition of an Army in the field was; and contriving to give proper credit to the national components of an international force was a difficult public relations problem throughout the war.

Of all the Armies that fought in North-West Europe, the First Canadian Army was the most international, and tribute must be paid to the Commonwealth and Allied forces that fought under its headquarters. For several brief periods, United States divisions served in the Army, and the only Canadian regret was that these periods were not longer. The 1st Polish Armoured Division, on the other hand, was almost a permanent component of the Army; and its exploits in the Falaise Gap are still freshly remembered. The 1st Belgian Infantry Brigade and the Royal Netherlands Brigade (Princess Irene's) came under First Canadian Army when they entered the theatre in August 1944, and though they were not part of the Army throughout they were serving under it again when final victory came, and the association with them was a happy one. The 1st Czechoslovak Independent Armoured Brigade Group also served in the Army for several weeks in the autumn of 1944, investing the Germans in Dunkirk, a task in which, as we have seen, some French units likewise had a share. The friendly, smooth and effective cooperation of all these varied national elements under the operational direction of First Canadian Army was a special and inspiring aspect of the campaign.

It is of the British formations that one must speak most particularly, and not merely because they were the largest. The special links which the Canadians had established with the British people and the British Army during the long garrison years in the United Kingdom were strengthened during the campaign on the Continent. Much good British blood was shed in the battles of the First Canadian Army; and the association with the 1st and 30th British Corps, and the gallant

\*It is satisfactory to note here that only 2248 Canadian soldiers became prisoners of war during the entire campaign. The present writer's statement in *Six Years of War*, that the Army lost more prisoners in nine hours at Dieppe than in eleven months in North-West Europe in 1944-45, is wrong (the Dieppe prisoners numbered 1946); but it is not very far wrong.



divisions that composed them, is a part of Canadian history. The Canadians who served in North-West Europe have reason to remember and respect the military skill and the unostentatious, long-enduring valour of the British soldier.

The Canadian divisions, however, were always the core of the Army. The part they played in eleven months of desperate and bloody fighting finds its sad reflection in the fact that over 11,000 Canadian soldiers fell in action during the campaign. These men now rest in honoured graves in France, Belgium and the Netherlands; and their memory is kept green, not only by their comrades and their countrymen, but by the grateful people of the lands they helped to liberate.

Like other formations that went into the struggle without benefit of battle experience, the Canadian divisions in the beginning had, we have seen, a good deal still to learn; and some of it they learned hard. But this phase passed, and they moved on from Normandy a body of battle-hardened soldiers whose mastery of every aspect of their task was more and more strongly marked as the campaign proceeded. In the later months of it the Army was an exceptionally efficient fighting machine. Sound, sure and intelligent command at all levels; competent and painstaking staff work; expert and energetic support by the technical arms and the services; and, above all, consistently resolute and skilful fighting by the troops in contact with the formidable enemy—these were the characteristics of the First Canadian Army in its maturity. They made it a force to be feared and remembered.

## **APPENDICES**

*APPENDIX "A"*

DIRECTIVE TO G.O.C.-IN-C. FIRST CANADIAN ARMY

TOP SECRET  
H.Q.TS.8809 FD.24  
24 May 44\*

Lieut.-General H. D. G. Crerar, CB, DSO,  
General Officer Commanding in Chief,  
First Canadian Army.

1. You have been appointed to command the First Canadian Army with effect from the 20th day of March, 1944.
2. The Government of Canada has approved the detailing of First Canadian Army (less 1 Cdn Corps and ancillary troops now serving in the Mediterranean theatre) and the Canadian elements of Airborne, GHQ, L of C, Base or other troops now serving in the United Kingdom to act in combination with the Military Forces of His Majesty raised in the United Kingdom or any other part of the British Commonwealth now or hereafter serving under command of 21 Army Group.
3. Authority has been granted by Order in Council P.C. 3464 of 29 Apr 43 made under Section 6 (5) of the Visiting Forces (British Commonwealth) Act, Chapter 21 of the Statutes of Canada, 1933, and under the War Measures Act, Chapter 206 Revised Statutes of Canada, 1927, and by the Designations of the Minister of National Defence of Canada made under the said Order in Council on 29 Apr 43 and 23 Feb 44 respectively for the issue of the necessary Orders of Detail to place the said Forces in combination accordingly.
4. By letter dated 6 Jan 44 it has been further agreed in accordance with the terms of War Office letter 79/HD/2082 (S.D. 4) dated 4 Jan 44 that in the event of the said Forces being placed in combination with 21 Army Group the Commander in Chief, 21 Army Group, may carry out certain interchanges of formations between First Canadian Army and the British component of his Force and that in anticipation of this certain appointments of the staff of Headquarters, First Canadian Army, not to exceed 50 per cent, may be filled by British Officers by mutual agreement between the Commander in Chief, 21 Army Group, and the General Officer Commanding in Chief, First Canadian Army.
5. It is noted that action has already been taken to give effect to the approval and agreement referred to by the issuance of Orders of Detail No. 9 and No. 10 dated 7 Jan 44 and 20, Mar 44 respectively.
6. The Government of Canada has further approved the participation of the said Canadian Forces in the forthcoming invasion of enemy occupied Europe as contemplated by your reports transmitted in C.M.H.Q. telegrams COS 60 and COS 70 dated 25 Apr 44 and 1 May 44, respectively.

\*This directive was originally transmitted to General Crerar in draft under date 19 May 44. On 24 May 44 the War Committee of the Cabinet approved it, substituting however a new paragraph 11 for that in the draft. The date here given, accordingly, is that of the final approval and the text is as finally approved. The original paragraph 11 read as follows:

"11. At the request of the Government of Canada certain formations of the First Canadian Army were despatched to the Mediterranean theatre with the objects of increasing at that time the effectiveness of the Canadian participation in the war and obtaining battle experience. Now that these objects have been gained the Government of Canada regards it as highly desirable both from a national point of view and from the point of view of making in the present circumstances the most effective contribution and because of administrative advantages that, as soon as military considerations permit, such formations now serving in the Mediterranean theatre as well as field formations and units elsewhere, should be grouped under unified Canadian Command."

## 648 THE VICTORY CAMPAIGN

7. It has further approved the employment of a Canadian Division and a Canadian Armoured Brigade with the necessary ancillary troops as contemplated by your reports referred to in paragraph 6 hereof in operations which while under command of 21 Army Group will not be under your direct operational command. It will be a matter for you to issue to the officer or officers commanding such Forces appropriate instructions to enable such action to be taken as may be necessary in respect to such Forces when circumstances do not permit prior reference to you.

8. You and the Comd of any Canadian Force not operating under your command, either by reason of its being detached therefrom or otherwise, continue to enjoy the right to refer to the Government of Canada in respect to any matter in which the said Canadian Forces are, or are likely to be, involved or committed or in respect of any question of their administration. Unless you consider that the circumstances warrant otherwise, such reference will be made only when the remedial or other action deemed by you or by the Comd of such Canadian Force to be necessary has been represented to the Officer Commanding the Combined Force and he shall have failed to take appropriate action. Any such reference from any Canadian Commander in the Western European theatre will be made through you. Any such reference from G.O.C. 1 Cdn Corps in the Allied Armies in Italy will be made through the Chief of Staff, C.M.H.Q. In the case of references made to the Chief of Staff it will be his responsibility to obtain the views of the Army Commander for transmission to the Government of Canada in respect of such matters as have significance to the Canadian Field Army as a whole.

9. In deciding whether to exercise the authority to withdraw the Canadian Force, or any part thereof under your command from 'in combination' with which authority you are vested under the terms of the Designation of the Minister of National Defence dated 23 February 1944 authorized by Order in Council P.C. 3464 dated 29 April 1943, you will consider all the circumstances including, but not in any way to be restricted to, the following:

- (a) Whether in your opinion the orders and instructions issued to you by the Commander Combined Force represent in the circumstances a task for the Canadian Forces which is a practicable operation of war;
- (b) Whether in your opinion such task with the resources available is capable of being carried out with reasonable prospects of success;
- (c) Whether in your opinion such orders, instructions or task are at variance with the policy of the Canadian Government;
- (d) Your appraisal of the extent of prospective losses to the Canadian Force in relation to the importance of the results prospectively to be achieved;
- (e) The effect of such withdrawal in preventing the success of the operation as a whole;
- (f) All other factors which you may consider relevant. The authority to withdraw should normally be exercised by you only after reference to the Government of Canada but, where the exigencies of the moment do not permit such reference, you have, in deciding whether or not to exercise this authority, full discretion to take such action as you consider advisable after considering all the circumstances as above.

When a Canadian division or other junior formation not operating under your command is operating under the orders of the G.O.C. in C. 21 Army Group, or pursuant to orders issued under authority delegated by him the considerations set out above in this paragraph will apply equally with respect to the withdrawal of such division or junior formation from 'in combination'. The Officer Commanding such division or other junior formation has not in himself the power to withdraw and this, if necessary, can be effected only by you on reference to you by such Officer Commanding which reference the latter has power to make under paragraph 8 of these instructions.

10. As the Forces referred to in paragraph 7 are serving in the same theatre of operations as First Canadian Army the Government of Canada considers that only the urgent requirements of military operations should justify the continuance of detachment of such forces and the resultant loss of the obvious practical advantages resulting from unified Canadian control and administration.

11. At the request of the Government of Canada certain formations of the First Canadian Army were despatched to the Mediterranean Theatre with the objects at that time of increasing the effectiveness of the Canadian participation in the war and obtaining battle experience.

Now that those objects have been gained the Government of Canada regards it as highly desirable that, as soon as military considerations permit, such formations now serving in the Mediterranean theatre as well as field formations and units elsewhere, should be grouped under unified Canadian command.

12. Instructions with regard to the exercise of powers of discipline and on the subject of honours and awards have already been issued to Canadian Military Headquarters for transmission to you and you will act in accordance with such instructions subject to such amendments thereto as may from time to time be notified to you.

13. You will keep the Minister of National Defence constantly informed as to the foregoing matters.

14. Your channel of communication on all questions including matters of general policy will be to the Chief of the General Staff through the Chief of Staff at Canadian Military Headquarters, London.

J. C. Murchie  
Lieut.-General,  
Chief of the General Staff

**APPENDIX "B"**  
**CANADIAN ARMY CASUALTIES—NORMANDY—6 JUNE 1944<sup>1</sup>**

UNITS	FATAL CASUALTIES						NON-FATAL CASUALTIES						TOTAL FATAL AND NON-FATAL CASUALTIES						
	Killed in Action		Died of Wounds		TOTAL		Wounded <sup>2</sup>		Battle Injury		Prisoners of War		TOTAL		All Ranks				
	Off	ORs	Off	ORs	Off	ORs	Off	ORs	Off	ORs	Off	ORs	Off	ORs	Off	ORs	Ranks		
Headquarters of Formations <sup>3</sup>	1	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	1	2	1	3		
Royal Winnipeg Rifles	1	15	1	40	2	55	3	61	1	1	1	—	3	1	8	63	118		
Regina Rifle Regiment	3	41	—	1	3	42	2	59	—	2	—	—	—	—	2	61	103		
1st Bn Canadian Scottish Regiment	1	16	—	5	1	21	3	61	—	1	—	—	—	—	3	62	83		
Queen's Own Rifles of Canada	—	56	—	5	—	61	6	71	—	5	—	—	—	—	6	76	137		
Régiment de la Chaudière	2	15	—	1	2	16	1	36	1	7	—	1	1	40	3	84	100		
North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment	1	27	—	6	1	33	2	36	—	3	—	—	—	—	2	89	122		
Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry Highlanders	—	1	—	—	—	1	1	12	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	12	13		
North Nova Scotia Highlanders	—	3	—	1	—	4	—	5	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	6	10		
Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (MG)	—	1	—	—	—	1	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	3		
7th Reconnaissance Regiment (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars)	1	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	2		
6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars)	2	20	—	—	2	20	2	16	—	3	—	—	—	—	2	19	4		
10th Armoured Regiment (Fort Garry Horse)	1	13	—	—	1	13	2	8	—	1	—	—	—	—	2	9	3		
27th Armoured Regiment (Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment)	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1		
12th Field Regiment, RCA	—	1	—	—	—	1	4	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	4	3	4		
13th Field Regiment, RCA	3	2	—	1	3	3	3	1	—	—	—	—	—	3	1	6	4		
14th Field Regiment, RCA	2	8	—	—	2	8	2	10	1	1	—	—	—	3	11	5	19		
19th Army Field Regiment, RCA	—	3	—	—	—	3	2	16	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	16	2		
5th Field Company, RCE	1	5	—	—	1	6	—	17	—	—	—	—	—	—	17	1	23		
6th Field Company, RCE	—	9	—	2	—	11	—	15	—	—	—	—	—	—	15	—	26		
16th Field Company, RCE	—	2	—	—	—	2	2	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	8	2		
18th Field Company, RCE	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1		
RC Sigs detachments and personnel	1	3	—	—	—	3	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	4		
RCAMC detachments and personnel	—	5	—	1	—	6	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	9		
RCASC detachments and personnel	—	9	—	—	—	9	1	5	—	5	—	—	—	—	1	10	1		
RCEME detachments and personnel	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1		
<b>TOTAL—UNITS UNDER COMMAND OF 3RD CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>892</b>	<b>961</b>
1st Canadian Parachute Battalion (6th British Airborne Division)	3	16	—	—	—	3	—	6	1 <sup>4</sup>	3	—	6	—	78	1	93	4	109	113
<b>TOTAL—ALL CANADIAN ARMY UNITS</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>666</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>1001</b>	<b>1074</b>

NOTES: 1. Compiled from information supplied by the Department of Veterans Affairs (War Service Records) on 13 Feb 56. Units not listed had no recorded casualties.  
2. Includes 1 officer and 25 other ranks who died of wounds from 7 to 28 Jun 44.  
3. Chaplain serving with HQ 2nd Cdn Armd Bde killed; an officer of The Royal Winnipeg Rifles serving with HQ 7th Cdn Inf Bde wounded;  
4. RCE other rank attached to HQ 3rd Cdn Inf Div who suffered a battle injury.

*APPENDIX "C"*APPROXIMATE CASUALTIES OF THE ALLIED ARMIES  
BY SECTORS, NORMANDY, 6 JUNE 1944

The task of compiling accurate casualty figures for the landing in Normandy ought to be easy; but it is, in fact, impossible. Of the three countries involved in the operation, only Canada, it appears, has prepared post-war casualty statistics on the basis of the records of individual soldiers of the units concerned. The only figures available for the United Kingdom and United States forces are the rough and necessarily approximate ones set down at the time; and for some sectors there are really no figures at all. In these circumstances it might seem useless to attempt a compilation; but Operation "Neptune" was so significant an enterprise that an account of it without casualty figures would be an historical absurdity. Accordingly the attempt has been made, with the following results.

UNITED STATES AIRBORNE SECTOR  
(82ND AND 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISIONS)

Here specific contemporary figures are available. On the basis of the divisions' reports, Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington, Department of the Army, 1951), pp. 284 and 300, gives casualties of 1259 for the 82nd Division and 1240 for the 101st, or a total of 2499.

## "UTAH" SECTOR (4TH U.S. INFANTRY DIVISION)

Casualties here were extremely low. An official publication gives them as 197 (*Utah Beach to Cherbourg*, Washington, Department of the Army, 1947, p. 55).

"OMAHA" SECTOR (1ST U.S. INFANTRY DIVISION, WITH A REGIMENT OF  
29TH U.S. INFANTRY DIVISION ATTACHED)

Casualties here were extremely heavy, and there appear to be no really reliable figures. Harrison, p. 330, gives "about 2,000" as "frankly a guess"; and this official estimate has been accepted.

## "GOLD" SECTOR (50TH (NORTHUMBRIAN) INFANTRY DIVISION)

The only figure found for this division is in a compilation in a report of the (British) Army Operational Research Group, which concludes on the basis of examination of war diaries that there were 413 casualties *on the beaches*. The figure for the day as a whole would of course be somewhat higher. It is relevant that this compilation gives the casualties on the beaches for the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division's area as 805; we know that Canadian casualties here for the day as a whole were 961, and another Army Operational Research Group report calculates those of British units on the beaches in the Canadian sector (including No. 48 Royal Marine Commando) as 243.

## "JUNO" SECTOR (3RD CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION)

Canadian official figures for this sector are 961 casualties; it is impossible to distinguish between beach and inland casualties. Adding 243 on the beaches for the British units (see above under "Gold" Sector) the total for the day is 1204; it should be somewhat higher to allow for British casualties inland.

## "SWORD" SECTOR (3RD BRITISH INFANTRY DIVISION)

The only figure found is that of the Army Operational Research Group: 630 casualties on the beaches. The remarks above, under "Gold" Sector, also apply here.

## BRITISH AIRBORNE SECTOR (6TH AIRBORNE DIVISION)

The division's undated report states that the first *two days'* fighting "cost the division over 800 casualties in battle", while in addition "the missing from the drop still numbered approx 1000". A War Office analysis gives the final figures of missing for the two parachute brigades in the initial airborne operations as 658 all ranks. The glider units

would presumably raise it to at least 800; in addition, glider pilot casualties are given as 95. Since the fighting on 7 June was considerably less heavy than that on D Day, perhaps 600 of the 800 "battle" casualties might be assigned to 6 June. This would give a roughly estimated total of 1500 D Day casualties for the sector: a figure comparable with those for the U.S. airborne divisions.

#### *TOTALS*

The figures accepted above give a grand total of 8443 casualties. But this is probably low, because the figures for the 50th and 3rd British Divisions cover losses on the beaches only, and there are higher figures for "Omaha" than Harrison's conservative 2000. The unsatisfactory nature of the statistics is reflected in the fact that United Kingdom official historians make a considerably higher estimate-10,865. On the basis of the foregoing Canadian calculation, the total casualties of the Allied Armies on 6 June 1944 might be somewhat more than 9000 men. If we use the Canadian experience as a criterion, roughly one-third of these men must have lost their lives.



## APPENDIX "D"

GENERAL MONTGOMERY'S DIRECTIVE TO GENERALS BRADLEY  
AND DEMPSEY, 30 JUNE 1944  
(from General Crerar's file GOC-in-C 1-0)

TOP SECRET

Tac HQ 21 Army Group.

No. M 505

30th June, 1944.

Lt-Gen. O. N. Bradley, First US Army.

Lt-Gen. Sir Miles Dempsey, Second British Army.

*The General Situation*

1. My broad policy, once we had secured a firm lodgement area, has always been to draw the main enemy forces in to the battle on our eastern flank, and to fight them there, so that our affairs on the western flank could proceed the easier.
2. We have been very successful in this policy. Cherbourg has fallen without any interference from enemy reserves brought in from other areas; the First US Army is proceeding with its re-organization and re-grouping, undisturbed by the enemy; the western flank is quiet. All this is good; it is on the western flank that territorial gains are essential at this stage, as we require space on that side for the development of our administration. By forcing the enemy to place the bulk of his strength in front of the Second Army, we have made easier the acquisition of territory on the western flank.
3. Our policy has been so successful that the Second Army is now opposed by a formidable array of German Panzer Divisions-eight definitely identified, and possibly more to come. The more recent arrivals seem to have come from far afield. The Divisions identified between Caumont and Caen are as follows:

21 Pz  
2 Pz  
1 SS  
2 SS  
9 SS  
10 SS  
12 SS  
LEHR

21 Pz is on the Caen front; 2 Pz is on the Caumont front; the remaining six divisions are collected round the 8 Corps penetration in between.

4. It is not yet clear whether Hitler proposes to concentrate great strength in N.W. Europe so as to annihilate the Allied forces in Normandy. He may decide that this is a good proposition; and in order to achieve success he may be quite prepared to give ground gradually on the Russian front, and to accept reverse in that theatre. His policy in this respect will emerge in due course.
5. For the present it is quite clear that he has reinforced the Normandy front strongly, and that a full-blooded counter-attack seems imminent. We welcome such action.
6. Our tactics must remain unchanged. Briefly, they are as follows:

(a) *To retain the initiative.*

We shall do this only by offensive action. On no account must we remain inactive. Without the initiative we cannot win.

(b) *To have no set-backs.*

This is very important on the eastern flank; the enemy has concentrated great strength here and he must not be allowed to use it successfully. Any set-back on the eastern flank might have direct repercussions on the quick development of our plans for the western flank.

(c) *To proceed relentlessly with our plans.*

These will be based on the broad policy indicated in para 1 above.

We must retain such balance and poise in our dispositions that there is never any need to re-act to enemy moves or thrusts; the enemy can do what he likes; we will proceed with *our* plans.

*Plan in Outline*

7. To hold the maximum number of enemy divisions on our eastern flank between Caen and Villers Bocage, and too swing the western or right flank of the Army Group southwards and eastwards in a wide sweep so as to threaten the line of withdrawal of such enemy divisions to the south of Paris.  
The bridges over the Seine between Paris and the sea have been destroyed by the Allied air forces, and will be kept out of action; a strong Allied force established in the area Le Mans-Alencon would threaten seriously the enemy concentration in the Caen area and its "get-away" south of Paris.

*Second British Army*

8. Tasks as follows:
  - (a) To hold the main enemy forces in the area between Caen and Villers Bocage.
  - (b) To have no set-backs.
  - (c) To develop operations for the capture of Caen as opportunity offers--and the sooner the better.
9. A full-blooded enemy counter-attack seems likely, put in somewhere between Caen and Villers Bocage; the main axis of such an attack is not yet apparent. In order to provide a mobile reserve in the hands of the Army Commander, the 7 Armd Div, now holding the right divisional sector, will be relieved tomorrow by First Army and that divisional sector will be included in First Army area; the inter-army boundary to be adjusted accordingly.
10. The careful attention of the Army Commander is drawn to para 6.

*First US Army*

11. To develop an offensive southwards on the right flank, beginning on Monday 3 July.
12. The Army to pivot on its left in the Caumont area, and to swing southwards and eastwards on to the general line Caumont--Vire--Mortain--Fogeres.
13. A strong thrust to be made eastwards from Vire to secure the important intercommunication centre of Flers.
14. On reaching the base of the peninsula at Avranches, the right hand Corps (8 Corps) to be turned westwards into Brittany and directed on Rennes and St Malo. This Corps to consist of three infantry divisions and one armoured division.
15. As regards the remainder of the Army.  
Plans will be made to direct a strong right wing in a wide sweep, south of the Bocage country, towards successive objectives as follows:
  - (a) Laval--Mayenne.
  - (b) Le Mans--Alencon . . . .
16. It is highly important that when the above operations begin on 3 July, vide para 11, they should be carried out with the greatest drive and energy.  
There must be no pause until the Army has swung up on to the line Caumont--Fogeres, vide para 12; thereafter, the less delays the better.
17. The Army will extend its left flank tomorrow, 1 July, to include the sector now held by 7 Armd Div of Second Army--vide para 8.

B. L. Montgomery  
General,  
C-in-C,  
21 Army Group.

FIELD-MARSHAL MONTGOMERY'S DIRECTIVE, 16 OCTOBER 1944  
(from General Crerar's file GOC-in-C 1-0)

TOP SECRET  
M 532  
16—10—44  
Copy No. 3

21 ARMY GROUP  
GENERAL OPERATIONAL SITUATION AND DIRECTIVE

*General Situation*

1. The free use of the port of Antwerp is vital to the Allied cause, and we must be able to use the port soon.
2. Operations designed to open the port will therefore be given complete priority over all other offensive operations in 21 Army Group, without any qualification whatsoever.
3. The immediate task of opening up the approaches to the port of Antwerp is already being undertaken by Canadian Army and good progress has been made.  
The whole of the available offensive power of Second Army will now be brought to bear also.

*First Canadian Army*

4. Will concentrate all available resources on the operations designed to give us free use of the port of Antwerp.
5. The right wing of the Army will be pulled over towards Antwerp, so that its operations can exert a more direct influence on the battle for possession of the area Bergen op Zoom--Roosendaal--Antwerp. Possession of this area is necessary in order to enable us to operate freely westwards along the Beveland isthmus.
6. At 0100 hrs on Wednesday 18 October, Canadian Army will transfer to Second Army responsibility for that part of the front running from inclusive Hilvarenbeek eastwards to Best and thence northwards to the Meuse about Megen. The following formations and units will be transferred in situ to Second Army:

7 Armd Div  
51 Div  
34 Armd Bde  
One Med Regt  
Royals  
R Netherland Bde

7. On Thursday 19 October, Canadian Army will be relieved by Second Army on the front between Hilvarenbeek and incl the road Tilburg--Turnhout. The exact time of this relief will be settled and notified by Second Army. On conclusion of the relief the boundary between the Armies will be: Incl Second Army:-the road Tilburg--Turnhout.
8. The following incoming formations are allotted to Canadian Army:  
52 (Lowland) Division  
104 US Inf Division
9. Para 13 of M 530 dated 9-10-44 is cancelled.

*Second Army*

10. Will hold securely the ground already in possession.
11. The whole available offensive power of the Army will be employed in a strong thrust westwards on the general axis Hertogenbosch-Breda, with the right flank on the Meuse. The objective of this thrust will be the general line Moerdijk--Breda--Poppel, thus cutting the communication routes over the Meuse of all enemy troops south of that river.

12. The Army will take over from Canadian Army operational frontage, and troops, as laid down in paras 6 and 7 above.
13. The boundary between Second British and First U.S. Armies will remain as at present, vide para. 9 of M.530. Para. 10 of M.530 remains in force.
14. In order to allow of operations being developed quickly as in para. 11 above, all other large scale offensive operations in Second Army will be closed down. Every available resource will be put into the thrust westwards vide para. 11 above. Paras. 8 and 11 of M. 530 are therefore cancelled.

*General*

15. First Canadian Army and Second British Army will be re-grouped in accordance with the above instructions.
16. I must impress on Army Commanders that the early use of Antwerp is absolutely vital. The operations now ordered by me must be begun at the earliest possible moment; they must be pressed with the greatest energy and determination; and we must accept heavy casualties to get quick success.
17. It will be obvious that once we have cleared the enemy from the area south of the Meuse from Hertogenbosch westwards, we can hold the line of the Meuse with about two divisions and have gained about five for operations elsewhere.  
Therefore we must do this with all speed.
18. I hope that the Second Army attack vide para 11 above will begin on Friday 20 October. I shall myself move to my main H.Q. at Brussels on Sunday 22 October, so as to be nearer to the vital point of Antwerp.  
My Tac H.Q. will remain at Eindhoven, but I will exercise command from my Main H.Q. from 22 October until Antwerp is captured.

B. L. Montgomery  
Field-Marshal  
C-in-C 21 Army Group

*APPENDIX "F"*CANADIAN ARMY UNITS IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE  
(8 May 1945)

Formations and units are grouped by corps. Designations are those authorized by General Orders at the time (except for certain modifications made for the sake of brevity and consistency, or as concessions to current usage). The complete roll of units is too long to be printed here. Thus headquarters of formations and supporting arms and services, as well as such relatively small units as Field Dressing Stations, are not included; although all made important contributions. As a very rough general rule, units with strengths of less than 100 all ranks are usually omitted.

## CANADIAN ARMOURED CORPS

## 1ST ARMOURED BRIGADE:

- 11th Armoured Regiment (The Ontario Regiment)
- 12th Armoured Regiment (Three Rivers Regiment)
- 14th Armoured Regiment (The Calgary Regiment)

## 2ND ARMOURED BRIGADE:

- 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars)
- 10th Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse)
- 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment)

## 1ST CORPS TROOPS:

- 1st Armoured Car Regiment (The Royal Canadian Dragoons)

## 2ND CORPS TROOPS:

- 18th Armoured Car Regiment (12th Manitoba Dragoons)

## 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION:

- 4th Reconnaissance Regiment (4th Princess Louise Dragoon Guards)

## 2ND INFANTRY DIVISION:

- 8th Reconnaissance Regiment (14th Canadian Hussars)

## 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION:

- 7th Reconnaissance Regiment (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars)

## 4TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

- 29th Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment)

## 4th Armoured Brigade:

- 21st Armoured Regiment (The Governor General's Foot Guards)
- 22nd Armoured Regiment (The Canadian Grenadier Guards)
- 28th Armoured Regiment (The British Columbia Regiment)

## 5TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

- 3rd Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The Governor General's Horse Guards)
- 5th Armoured Brigade:
  - 2nd Armoured Regiment (Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians))
  - 5th Armoured Regiment (8th Princess Louise's (New Brunswick) Hussars)
  - 9th Armoured Regiment (The British Columbia Dragoons)

## FIRST CANADIAN ARMY TROOPS:

- 25th Armoured Delivery Regiment (The Elgin Regiment)
- 1st Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment\*

## ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY

## 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION:

- 1st Field Regiment, R.C.H.A.
- 2nd Field Regiment
- 3rd Field Regiment
- 1st Anti-Tank Regiment
- 2nd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## 2ND INFANTRY DIVISION:

- 4th Field Regiment
- 5th Field Regiment
- 6th Field Regiment
- 2nd Anti-Tank Regiment
- 3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

\* Operated under 79th British Armoured Division.

## 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION:

12th Field Regiment  
13th Field Regiment  
14th Field Regiment  
3rd Anti-Tank Regiment  
4th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## 4TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

15th Field Regiment  
23rd Field Regiment (Self-Propelled)  
5th Anti-Tank Regiment  
8th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## 5TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

17th Field Regiment  
8th Field Regiment (Self-Propelled)  
4th Anti-Tank Regiment  
5th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## 1ST CORPS TROOPS:

7th Anti-Tank Regiment  
1st Survey Regiment  
1st Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Lanark  
and Renfrew Scottish Regiment)

## 2ND CORPS TROOPS:

6th Anti-Tank Regiment  
2nd Survey Regiment  
6th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## FIRST CANADIAN ARMY TROOPS:

1st Army Group, Royal Canadian  
Artillery:  
11th Army Field Regiment  
1st Medium Regiment  
2nd Medium Regiment  
5th Medium Regiment  
2nd Army Group, Royal Canadian  
Artillery:  
19th Army Field Regiment  
3rd Medium Regiment  
4th Medium Regiment  
7th Medium Regiment  
2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment  
(Mobile)  
1st Rocket Battery  
1st Radar Battery

CORPS OF ROYAL CANADIAN  
ENGINEERS

## 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION:

2nd Field Park Company  
1st Field Company  
3rd Field Company  
4th Field Company

## 2ND INFANTRY DIVISION:

1st Field Park Company  
2nd Field Company  
7th Field Company  
11th Field Company

## 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION:

3rd Field Park Company  
6th Field Company  
16th Field Company  
18th Field Company

## 4TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

6th Field Park Squadron  
8th Field Squadron  
9th Field Squadron

## 5TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

4th Field Park Squadron  
1st Field Squadron  
10th Field Squadron

## 1ST CORPS TROOPS:

9th Field Park Company  
12th Field Company  
13th Field Company  
14th Field Company

## 2ND CORPS TROOPS:

8th Field Park Company  
29th Field Company  
30th Field Company  
31st Field Company

## FIRST CANADIAN ARMY TROOPS:

1st Canadian Army Troops Engineers:  
10th Field Park Company  
5th Field Company  
20th Field Company  
23rd Field Company  
2nd Canadian Army Troops Engineers:  
11th Field Park Company  
32nd Field Company  
33rd Field Company  
34th Field Company  
No. 1 Workshop and Park Company  
1st Field (Air) Survey Company  
2nd Field Survey Company  
3rd Field (Reproduction) Survey Company

## G.H.Q. AND L. OF C. TROOPS:

1st Mechanical Equipment Company  
1st Mechanical Equipment Park Company  
2nd Battalion, R.C.E.  
3rd Battalion, R.C.E.  
1st Road Construction Company  
2nd Road Construction Company  
1st Drilling Company 2nd Drilling Company  
No. 1 Railway Operating Company  
No. 2 Railway Operating Company  
No. 1 Railway Workshop Company

ROYAL CANADIAN CORPS OF  
SIGNALS

1st Armoured Brigade Signals  
2nd Armoured Brigade Signals

1st Infantry Divisional Signals  
 2nd Infantry Divisional Signals  
 3rd Infantry Divisional Signals  
 4th Armoured Divisional Signals  
 5th Armoured Divisional Signals  
 1st Corps Signals  
 2nd Corps Signals First Army Signals  
 L. of C. Signals  
 1st Air Support Signals Unit  
 No. 1 Special Wireless Section No.  
 2 Special Wireless Section  
 No. 3 Special Wireless Section

CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion\*  
 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION:

The Saskatoon Light Infantry  
 (M.G.)

1ST INFANTRY BRIGADE:

The Royal Canadian Regiment  
 The Hastings and Prince Edward  
 Regiment  
 48th Highlanders of Canada

2ND INFANTRY BRIGADE:

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light  
 Infantry  
 The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada  
 The Loyal Edmonton Regiment

3RD INFANTRY BRIGADE:

Royal 22e Regiment  
 The Carleton and York Regiment  
 The West Nova Scotia Regiment

2ND INFANTRY DIVISION:

The Toronto Scottish Regiment (M.G.)

4TH INFANTRY BRIGADE:

The Royal Regiment of Canada  
 The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry  
 The Essex Scottish Regiment

5TH INFANTRY BRIGADE:

The Black Watch (Royal Highland  
 Regiment) of Canada  
 Le Regiment de Maisonneuve  
 The Calgary Highlanders

6TH INFANTRY BRIGADE:

Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal  
 The Queen's Own Cameron High-  
 landers of Canada  
 The South Saskatchewan Regiment

3RD INFANTRY DIVISION:

The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa  
 (M.G.)

7TH INFANTRY BRIGADE:

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles  
 The Regina Rifle Regiment  
 1st Battalion, The Canadian Scottish  
 Regiment

8TH INFANTRY BRIGADE:

The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada  
 Le Regiment de la Chaudiere  
 The North Shore (New Brunswick)  
 Regiment

9TH INFANTRY BRIGADE:

The Highland Light Infantry of Canada  
 The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry  
 Highlanders  
 The North Nova Scotia Highlanders

4TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

10TH INFANTRY BRIGADE:

10th Independent Machine Gun Com-  
 pany (The New Brunswick Rangers)  
 The Lincoln and Welland Regiment  
 The Algonquin Regiment  
 The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders  
 of Canada (Princess Louise's)  
 The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor)†

5TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

11TH INFANTRY BRIGADE:

11th Independent Machine Gun Com-  
 pany (The Princess Louise Fusiliers)  
 The Perth Regiment  
 The Cape Breton Highlanders  
 The Irish Regiment of Canada  
 The Westminster Regiment (Motor)†

1ST CORPS TROOPS:

1st Corps Defence Company‡

2ND CORPS TROOPS:

2nd Corps Defence Company (The Prince Edward  
 Island Light Horse)

FIRST CANADIAN ARMY TROOPS:

First Canadian Army Headquarters Defence  
 Battalion (Royal Montreal Regiment)

ROYAL CANADIAN ARMY SERVICE  
 CORPS

1ST ARMOURED BRIGADE:

1st Armoured Brigade Company

\*Operated under 6th British Airborne Division.

†The motor battalion formed part of the armoured brigade of the armoured division.

‡Provided by The Lorne Scots (Peel, Dufferin and Halton Regiment), which also furnished platoons for defence and employment at divisional and brigade headquarters.

## 660 THE VICTORY CAMPAIGN

### 2ND ARMOURED BRIGADE:

2nd Armoured Brigade Company

### 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION:

1st Infantry Divisional Troops Company

1st Infantry Brigade Company

2nd Infantry Brigade Company

3rd Infantry Brigade Company

### 2ND INFANTRY DIVISION:

2nd Infantry Divisional Troops Company

4th Infantry Brigade Company

5th Infantry Brigade Company

6th Infantry Brigade Company

### 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION:

3rd Infantry Divisional Troops Company

7th Infantry Brigade Company

8th Infantry Brigade Company

9th Infantry Brigade Company

### 4TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

4th Armoured Divisional Troops Company

4th Armoured Divisional Transport Company

4th Armoured Brigade Company

10th Infantry Brigade Company

### 5TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

5th Armoured Divisional Troops Company

5th Armoured Divisional Transport Company

5th Armoured Brigade Company

11th Infantry Brigade Company

### 1ST CORPS TROOPS:

1st Headquarters Corps Car Company

1st Corps Transport Company

No. 31 Corps Troops Company

No. 32 Corps Troops Company

### 2ND CORPS TROOPS:

No. 2 Headquarters Corps Car Company

2nd Corps Transport Company

No. 33 Corps Troops Company

No. 34 Corps Troops Company

### FIRST CANADIAN ARMY TROOPS:

No. 1 Army Headquarters Car Company

No. 35 Army Troops Composite Company

No. 36 Army Troops Composite Company

No. 81 Artillery Company

No. 82 Artillery Company

No. 41 Army Transport Company

No. 45 Army Transport Company

No. 47 Army Transport Company

No. 63 Army Transport Company

No. 64 Army Transport Company

No. 1 Motor Ambulance Convoy

No. 2 Motor Ambulance Convoy

### G.H.Q., L. OF C. AND BASE TROOPS:

No. 66 General Transport Company

No. 69 General Transport Company

No. 1 Base Transport Company

No. 65 Tank Transporter Company

No. 85 Bridge Company

No. 86 Bridge Company

### ROYAL CANADIAN ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

### 1ST ARMOURED BRIGADE:

No. 2 Light Field Ambulance

### 2ND ARMOURED BRIGADE:

No. 17 Light Field Ambulance

### 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION:

No. 4 Field Ambulance

No. 5 Field Ambulance

No. 9 Field Ambulance

### 2ND INFANTRY DIVISION:

No. 10 Field Ambulance

No. 11 Field Ambulance

No. 18 Field Ambulance

### 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION:

No. 14 Field Ambulance

No. 22 Field Ambulance

No. 23 Field Ambulance

### 4TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

No. 12 Light Field Ambulance

No. 15 Field Ambulance

### 5TH ARMOURED DIVISION:

No. 7 Light Field Ambulance

No. 24 Field Ambulance

### FIRST CANADIAN ARMY TROOPS:

No. 2 Casualty Clearing Station

No. 3 Casualty Clearing Station

No. 4 Casualty Clearing Station

No. 5 Casualty Clearing Station

No. 6 Casualty Clearing Station

### G.H.Q. AND L. OF C. TROOPS:

No. 1 General Hospital

No. 2 General Hospital



No. 3 General Hospital  
 No. 5 General Hospital  
 No. 6 General Hospital  
 No. 7 General Hospital  
 No. 8 General Hospital  
 No. 10 General Hospital  
 No. 12 General Hospital  
 No. 16 General Hospital  
 No. 20 General Hospital  
 No. 21 General Hospital  
 No. 2 Convalescent Depot  
 No. 3 Convalescent Depot

## CANADIAN DENTAL CORPS

No. 1 Dental Company  
 No. 2 Dental Company  
 No. 3 Dental Company  
 No. 4 Dental Company  
 No. 5 Dental Company  
 No. 6 Dental Company  
 No. 8 Dental Company  
 No. 9 Dental Company  
 No. 11 Base Dental Company  
 No. 12 Base Dental Company

ROYAL CANADIAN ORDNANCE  
CORPS

No. 1 Armoured Brigade Ordnance Field  
 Park  
 No. 2 Armoured Brigade Ordnance Field  
 Park  
 No. 1 Infantry Divisional Ordnance Field  
 Park  
 No. 2 Infantry Divisional Ordnance Field  
 Park  
 No. 3 Infantry Divisional Ordnance Field  
 Park  
 No. 4 Armoured Divisional Ordnance  
 Field Park  
 No. 5 Armoured Divisional Ordnance  
 Field Park  
 No. 201 Infantry Ordnance Sub-Park  
 No. 202 Infantry Ordnance Sub-Park  
 No. 203 Infantry Ordnance Sub-Park  
 No. 204 Armoured Ordnance Sub-Park  
 No. 205 Armoured Ordnance Sub-Park  
 No. 1 Corps and Army Troops Sub-Park  
 No. 2 Corps and Army Troops Sub-Park

ROYAL CANADIAN ELECTRICAL AND  
MECHANICAL ENGINEERS

1st Armoured Brigade Workshop  
 2nd Armoured Brigade Workshop  
 1st Infantry Brigade Workshop  
 2nd Infantry Brigade Workshop  
 3rd Infantry Brigade Workshop

4th Infantry Brigade Workshop  
 5th Infantry Brigade Workshop  
 6th Infantry Brigade Workshop  
 7th Infantry Brigade Workshop  
 8th Infantry Brigade Workshop  
 9th Infantry Brigade Workshop

4th Armoured Brigade Workshop  
 10th Infantry Brigade Workshop  
 5th Armoured Brigade Workshop  
 11th Infantry Brigade Workshop  
 12th Infantry Brigade Workshop  
 1st Corps Troops Workshop  
 2nd Corps Troops Workshop  
 First Army Troops Workshop  
 1st General Troops Workshop  
 No. 1 Infantry Troops Workshop  
 No. 2 Infantry Troops Workshop  
 No. 3 Infantry Troops Workshop  
 No. 4 Armoured Troops Workshop  
 No. 5 Armoured Troops Workshop  
 No. 1 Tank Troops Workshop  
 No. 2 Tank Troops Workshop  
 No. 1 Recovery Company  
 No. 2 Recovery Company  
 No. 3 Recovery Company  
 No. 1 Advanced Base Workshop  
 No. 2 Advanced Base Workshop

## CANADIAN POSTAL CORPS

No. 1 Army Base Post Office

## CANADIAN PROVOST CORPS

No. 1 Provost Company (R.C.M.P.)  
 No. 2 Provost Company  
 No. 3 Provost Company  
 No. 4 Provost Company  
 No. 5 Provost Company  
 No. 7 Provost Company  
 No. 8 Provost Company  
 No. 11 Provost Company  
 No. 13 Provost Company  
 No. 15 Provost Company  
 No. 16 Provost Company  
 No. 1 L. of C. Provost Company  
 No. 2 L. of C. Provost Company

## CANADIAN FORESTRY CORPS

No. 1 Forestry Group:  
 No. 1 Company      No. 16 Company  
 No. 5 Company      No. 25 Company  
 No. 9 Company      No. 27 Company  
 No. 14 Company     No. 28 Company  
 No. 15 Company     No. 30 Company

## MISCELLANEOUS

Canadian Section, H.Q. 1st Echelon,  
21 Army Group  
Canadian Section, H.Q. 2nd Echelon,  
21 Army Group  
No. 2 Base Reinforcement Group

No. 3 Base Reinforcement Group  
Headquarters First Canadian Army  
Terminals  
Headquarters Army Troops Area  
First Canadian Army  
No. 3 Non-Effective Transit Depot  
No. 3 Public Relations Group

## APPENDIX "G"

OFFICERS HOLDING PRINCIPAL APPOINTMENTS  
IN THE CANADIAN ARMY IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE\*

(6 June 1944-8 May 1945)

## FIRST CANADIAN ARMY

<i>General Officer Commanding-in-Chief</i>	
Gen. H. D. G. Crerar, C.H., C.B., D.S.O .....	20 Mar. 44 — 30 Jul. 45
<i>Chief of Staff</i>	
Brig. C. C. Mann, C.B.E., D.S.O .....	28 Jan. 44 — 30 Jul. 45
<i>Brigadier, General Staff†</i>	
Brig. G. E. Beament, O.B.E., E.D .....	14 Nov. 43 — 30 Jun. 45
<i>Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General</i>	
Brig. A. E. Walford, C.B.E., M.M., E.D .....	8 Apr. 43 — 18 Sep. 44
Brig. J. F. A. Lister, O.B.E .....	19 Sep 44 — 16 Jul. 45
<i>Brigadier, Royal Armoured Corps</i>	
Brig. J. F. Bingham .....	9 Dec. 44 — 30 Jul. 45
<i>Brigadier, Royal Artillery</i>	
Brig. H. O. N. Brownfield, C.B.E., M.C .....	27 Dec. 43 — 18 Dec. 44
Brig. E. C. Plow, C.B.E., D.S.O .....	19 Dec. 44 — 11 Jun. 45
<i>Chief Engineer</i>	
Brig. A. T. MacLean, C.B.E., M.C., V.D .....	20 Oct. 43 — 1 Sep. 44
Brig. G. Walsh, C.B.E., D.S.O .....	2 Sep. 44 — 20 Jul. 45
<i>Chief Signal Officer</i>	
Brig. J. E. Genet, C.B.E., M.C .....	6 Apr. 42 — 30 Jul. 45
<i>Deputy Director of Supplies and Transport</i>	
Brig. G. E. R. Smith, C.B.E .....	15 Dec. 42 — 31 Jul. 45
<i>Deputy Director of Medical Services</i>	
Brig. C. P. Fenwick, C.B.E., M.C., E.D .....	26 May 43 — 17 Dec. 44
Brig. H. M. Elder, D.S.O., E.D .....	18 Dec. 44 — 14 Jul. 45
<i>Deputy Director of Ordnance Services</i>	
Brig. J. A. W. Bennett, C.B.E .....	20 Feb. 44 — 6 May 45
Brig. D. J. G. Farquharson, C.B.E .....	7 May 45 — 14 Dec. 45
<i>Deputy Director of Mechanical Engineering</i>	
Brig. G. M. Grant, C.B.E .....	23 Mar. 44 — 10 Aug. 45

\* Officers are shown with ranks and decorations as of the day on which they relinquished the appointments concerned. Names of officers who held acting appointments or were detailed temporarily to command are not shown unless they were subsequently confirmed in these appointments. No distinction is made between acting and confirmed ranks. Appointments in the formations of the 1st Canadian Corps previous to their arrival in North-West Europe are not shown; for these, see *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945, 690-92*.

† "Colonel General Staff" until 1 May 1945.

*Deputy Director of Civil Affairs/Military Government*

Brig. W. B. Wedd, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., E.D. .... 31 Jan. 44 — 30 Jul. 45

## 1ST CANADIAN CORPS

*General Officer Commanding*

Lt. Gen. C. Foulkes, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O. .... 10 Nov. 44 — 17 Jul. 45

*Chief of Staff*

Brig. G. Kitching, C.B.E., D.S.O. .... 12 Nov. 44 — 1 Jul. 45

*Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General*

Brig. W. P. Gilbride, C.B.E., D.S.O. .... 19 Sep. 44 — 8 Jul. 45

*Commander, Corps Royal Artillery*

Brig. H. A. Sparling, D.S.O. .... 19 Dec. 44 - 10 Jun. 45

*Chief Engineer*

Brig. C. A. Campbell, O.B.E. .... 27 Jul. 44 — 23 Apr. 45

Brig. J. D. Christian, O.B.E. .... 24 Apr. 45 — 17 Jul. 45

*Chief Signal Officer*

Brig. A. E. Wrinch ..... 12 Jan. 45 — 10 Jun. 45

## 2ND CANADIAN CORPS

*General Officer Commanding*

Lt.-Gen. G. G. Simonds, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O. .... 30 Jan. 44 — 25 Jun. 45

*Chief of Staff*

Brig. N. E. Rodger, C.B.E. .... 27 Feb. 44 — 25 Jun. 45

*Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General*

Brig. H. V. D. Laing, C.B.E., E.D. .... 15 Jan. 43 — 16 Jun. 45

*Commander, Corps Royal Artillery*

Brig. A. B. Matthews, D.S.O., E.D. .... 14 Mar. 44 — 10 Nov. 44

Brig. P. A. S. Todd, D.S.O., O.B.E., E.D. .... 10 Nov. 44 — 3 Jun. 45

*Chief Engineer*

Brig. G. Walsh, D.S.O. .... 13 Feb. 44 — 1 Sep. 44

Brig. D. K. Black, D.S.O. .... 2 Sep. 44 — 16 Jun. 45

*Chief Signal Officer*

Brig. S. F. Clark, C.B.E. .... 8 May 43 — 25 Jun. 45

## 1ST CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION

*General Officer Commanding*

Maj.-Gen. H. W. Foster, C.B.E., D.S.O. .... 1 Dec. 44 — 15 Sep. 45

*General Staff Officer, Grade 1*

Lt. Col. W. S. Murdoch, M.B.E. .... 9 Dec. 44 — 6 Jul. 45

*Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General*

Lt.-Col. H. Williamson, O.B.E. .... 23 Dec. 44 — 15 Sep. 45

*Commander, Royal Artillery*

Brig. W. S. Ziegler, D.S.O., E.D. .... 4 Mar. 44 — 23 Aug. 45

<i>Commander, Royal Engineers</i>	
Lt. Col. E. H. Webb, D.S.O. ....	28 May 44 — 9 Sep. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Signals</i>	
Lt. Col. B. W. G. Grover, O.B.E., E.D. ....	23 Dec. 43 — 12 Sep. 45
<i>Commander, 1st Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. J. D. B. Smith, C.B.E., D.S.O. ....	9 Dec. 44 — 2 Jun. 45
<i>Commander, 2nd Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. M. P. Bogert, D.S.O., O.B.E. ....	7 Oct. 44 — 4 Jun. 45
<i>Commander, 3rd Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. J. P. E. Bernatchez, D.S.O., O.B.E. ....	13 Apr. 44 — 2 Jun. 45

## 2ND CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION

<i>General Officer Commanding</i>	
Maj.-Gen. C. Foulkes, C.B.E. ....	11 Jan. 44 — 9 Nov. 44
Maj.-Gen. A. B. Matthews, C.B.E., D.S.O., E.D. ....	10 Nov. 44 — 6 Oct. 45
<i>General Stag Officer, Grade 1</i>	
Lt. Col. C. R. Archibald ....	22 Feb. 44 — 27 Jul. 44
Lt. Col. C. M. Drury, D.S.O., M.B.E. ....	28 Jul. 44 — 9 Nov. 44
Lt. Col. P. W. Bennett ....	22 Nov. 44 — 8 Jul. 45
<i>Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General</i>	
Lt. Col. L. A. Deziel, O.B.E. ....	17 Jan. 44 — 16 Mar. 45
Lt.-Col. J. M. Pocock, E.D. ....	16 Mar. 45 — 16 Jul. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Artillery</i>	
Brig. R. H. Keebler, E.D. ....	8 Nov. 43 — 9 Nov. 44
Brig. F. D. Lace, O.B.E. ....	10 Nov. 44 — 4 Oct. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Engineers</i>	
Lt.-Col. N. J. W. Smith ....	3 Aug. 43 — 1 Sep. 44
Lt.-Col. L. G. C. Lilley ....	2 Sep. 44 — 18 Apr. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Signals</i>	
Lt.-Col. J. W. Johanson, E.D. ....	22 Feb. 43 — 12 Feb. 45
Lt. Col. C. A. Peck, M.B.E. ....	14 Feb. 45 — 17 Jul. 45
<i>Commander, 4th Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. S. Lett, D.S.O., M.C., E.D. ....	27 Feb. 44 — 18 Jul. 44
Brig. J. E. Ganong, E.D. ....	3 Aug. 44 — 30 Aug. 44
Brig. F. N. Cabeldu, D.S.O., E.D. ....	31 Aug. 44 — 22 Sep. 45
<i>Commander, 5th Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. W. J. Megill, D.S.O. ....	27 Feb. 44 — 4 Jun. 45
<i>Commander, 6th Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. H. A. Young ....	27 Feb. 44 — 25 Aug. 44
Brig. F. A. Clift, E.D. ....	26 Aug. 44 — 29 Aug. 44
Brig. J. G. Gauvreau, D.S.O. ....	30 Aug. 44 — 26 Oct. 44
Brig. R. H. Keebler, C.B.E., D.S.O., E.D. ....	10 Nov. 44 — 22 Mar. 45
Brig. J. V. Allard, D.S.O. ....	24 Mar. 45 — 27 Sep. 45

## 3RD CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION

<i>General Officer Commanding</i>	
Maj.-Gen. R. F. L. Keller, C.B.E. ....	8 Sep. 42 — 8 Aug. 44

Maj.-Gen. D. C. Spry, D.S.O .....	18 Aug. 44 — 22 Mar. 45
Maj.-Gen. R. H. Keebler, C.B.E., D.S.O., E.D .....	23 Mar. 45 — 19 Nov. 45
<i>General Staff Officer, Grade 1</i>	
Lt.-Col. J. D. Mingay, M.B.E .....	7 Dec. 43 — 3 Nov. 44
Lt.-Col. N. L. C. Mather .....	4 Nov. 44 — 7 Apr. 45
Lt. Col. P. W. Strickland, D.S.O.....	8 Apr. 45 — 9 Jun. 45
<i>Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General</i>	
Lt.-Col. E. A. Cote, M.B.E .....	6 Aug. 43 — 24 Nov. 44
Lt.-Col. F. E. D. Wallace, O.B.E., E.D.....	19 Jan. 45 — 17 Nov. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Artillery</i>	
Brig. P. A. S. Todd, O.B.E., E.D .....	27 Dec. 43 — 9 Nov. 44
Brig. E. R. Suttie, D.S.O .....	10 Nov. 44 — 25 Feb. 45
	1 Mar. 45 — 3 Apr. 45
Brig. L. G. Clarke, O.B.E.....	4 Apr. 45 — 20 Nov. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Engineers</i>	
Lt. Col. R. J. Cassidy, O.B.E .....	18 Jan. 44 — 27 Sep. 44
Lt.-Col. F. A. McTavish, D.S.O.....	28 Sep. 44 — 16 Nov. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Signals</i>	
Lt.-Col. G. O. Gamble, E.D .....	26 Nov. 43 — 14 Jan. 45
Lt. Col. G. C. Leech .....	16 Jan. 45 — 23 Nov. 45
<i>Commander, 7th Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. H. W. Foster .....	28 Jan. 44 — 21 Aug. 44
Brig. J. G. Spragge, D.S.O., O.B.E., E.D .....	26 Aug. 44 — 20 Feb. 45
Brig. T. G. Gibson, D.S.O.....	24 Feb. 45 — 3 Jun. 45
<i>Commander, 8th Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. K. G. Blackader, D.S.O., M.C., E.D.....	20 Jan. 42 — 28 Sep. 44
Brig. J. A. Roberts, D.S.O.....	30 Oct. 44 — 14 Aug. 45
<i>Commander, 9th Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. D. G. Cunningham, D.S.O.....	25 Nov. 43 — 4 Aug. 44
Brig. J. M. Rockingham, D.S.O.....	8 Aug. 44 — 4 Jun. 45

## 4TH CANADIAN ARMoured DIVISION

<i>General Officer Commanding</i>	
Maj.-Gen. G. Kitching, D.S.O .....	1 Mar. 44 — 21 Aug. 44
Maj.-Gen. H. W. Foster .....	22 Aug. 44 — 30 Nov. 44
Maj.-Gen. C. Vokes, C.B.E., D.S.O .....	1 Dec. 44 — 5 Jun. 45
<i>General Staff Officer, Grade 1</i>	
Lt.-Col. J. E. Ganong, E.D.....	7 May 43 — 2 Aug. 44
Lt.-Col. F. E. Wigle, D.S.O., O.B.E., E.D.....	3 Aug. 44 — 29 Jan. 45
Lt.-Col. W. G. M. Robinson, O.B.E .....	1 Feb. 45 — 27 Dec. 45
<i>Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General</i>	
Lt.-Col. J. W. Proctor, O.B.E.....	27 Aug. 43 — 12 Mar. 45
Lt. Col. M. R. Dare, D.S.O .....	14 Mar. 45 — 27 Dec. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Artillery</i>	
Brig. J. N. Lane, D.S.O .....	1 Mar. 44 — 9 Nov. 44
Brig. C. M. Drury, D.S.O., M.B.E.....	10 Nov. 44 — 26 Jun. 45

<i>Commander, Royal Engineers</i>	
Lt.-Col. J. R. B. Jones, D.S.O., O.B.E.....	22 Feb. 44 — 5 Nov. 45
Lt.-Col. W. W. K. McConnell .....	6 Nov. 45 — 14 Dec. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Signals</i>	
Lt.-Col. W. P. Shirreff .....	12 Nov. 42 — 20 Jan. 45
Lt.-Col. R. L. Houston .....	21 Jan. 45 — 4 Jun. 45
<i>Commander, 10th Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. J. C. Jefferson, D.S.O., E.D .....	27 Feb. 44 — 5 May 45
<i>Commander, 4th Armoured Brigade</i>	
Brig. E. L. Booth, D.S.O.....	23 Feb. 44 — 14 Aug. 44
Brig. R. W. Moncel, D.S.O., O.B.E.....	19 Aug. 44 — 9 Jul. 45

## 5TH CANADIAN ARMOURED DIVISION

<i>General Officer Commanding</i>	
Maj.-Gen. B. M. Hoffmeister, C.B.E., D.S.O., E.D .....	20 Mar. 44 — 6 Jun. 45
<i>General Staff Officer, Grade 1</i>	
Lt.-Col. W. C. Dick, O.B.E.....	14 Sep. 44 — 6 Jun. 45
<i>Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General</i>	
Lt.-Col. C. H. Drury, O.B.E.....	23 Mar. 44 — 19 Jun. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Artillery</i>	
Brig. J. S. Ross, D.S.O .....	19 Dec. 44 — 19 Nov. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Engineers</i>	
Lt.-Col. J. D. Christian, O.B.E.....	21 Jul. 43 — 23 Apr. 45
Lt.-Col. M. C. S. Brown, D.S.O.....	24 Apr. 45 — 11 Jun. 45
<i>Commander, Royal Signals</i>	
Lt. Col. R. H. Widdifield, E.D .....	12 Jan. 45 — 29 Oct. 45
<i>Commander, 5th Armoured Brigade</i>	
Brig. I. H. Cumberland, D.S.O., O.B.E., E.D.....	7 Jun. 44 — 11 Nov. 45
<i>Commander, 11th Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. I. S. Johnston, D.S.O., E.D .....	24 Jun. 44 — 6 Jun. 45
<i>Commander, 12th Infantry Brigade</i>	
Brig. J. S. H. Lind, D.S.O .....	13 Aug. 44 — 12 Mar. 45

## OTHER FORMATIONS

<i>Commander, 1st Armoured Brigade</i>	
Brig. W. C. Murphy, D.S.O., E.D.....	27 Feb. 44 — 25 Jun. 45
<i>Commander, 2nd Armoured Brigade</i>	
Brig. R. A. Wyman, C.B.E., D.S.O., E.D.....	15 Apr. 44 — 8 Aug. 44
Brig. J. F. Bingham .....	9 Aug. 44 — 8 Dec. 44
Brig. G. W. Robinson .....	9 Dec. 44 — 25 Jun. 45
<i>Commander, No. 1 Army Group, Royal Canadian Artillery</i>	
Brig. L. G. Clarke, O.B.E.....	26 Dec. 44 — 3 Apr. 45
Brig. E. R. Suttie, D.S.O., E.D.....	4 Apr. 45 — 3 Jul. 45

*Commander, No. 2 Army Group, Royal Canadian Artillery*

Brig. E. R. Suttie .....	15 Feb. 44 — 9 Nov. 44
Brig. W. C. Leggat .....	10 Nov. 44 — 11 Jul. 45

*Commander, No. 1 Army Group, Royal Canadian Engineers*

Col. C. J. Bermingham .....	22 May 44 — 6 Jul. 45
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*Commander, Army Troops Area*

Brig. W. G. H. Roaf, O.B.E., E.D. ....	23 Mar. 44 — 30 Aug. 44
Brig. R. O. G. Morton .....	31 Aug. 44 — 18 Sep. 44
Brig. J. R. R. Gough, C.B.E. ....	19 Sep. 44 — 17 Jun. 45

*Commander, First Canadian Army Terminals*

Brig. W. P. Gilbride, D.S.O., O.B.E. ....	2 Jun. 44 — 30 Aug. 44
Brig. W. G. H. Roaf, O.B.E., E.D. ....	31 Aug. 44 — 13 Dec. 44
Col. A. F. B. Knight, O.B.E. ....	14 Dec. 44 — 10 Mar. 45
Col. J. W. Proctor, O.B.E. ....	13 Mar. 45 — 13 Jul. 45

*Canadian Section, General Headquarters, 1st Echelon**(21 Army Group)**General-Officer-in-Charge\**

Maj.-Gen. E. L. M. Burns, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C. ....	27 Feb. 45 — 5 Sep. 45
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*Officer-in-Charge*

Brig. A. W. Beament, C.B.E., V.D. ....	13 Feb. 44 — 4 Dec. 44
Maj.-Gen. E. L. M. Burns, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C. ....	5 Dec. 44 — 26 Feb. 45

*Canadian Section, General Headquarters, 2nd Echelon**(21 Army Group)**Officer-in-Charge*

Col. V. S. C. McClenaghan, O.B.E., M.C., E.D. ....	15 Apr. 44 — 21 Nov. 45
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*Commander, No. 2 Base Reinforcement Group*

Brig. G. Francoeur, O.B.E., V.D. ....	27 Mar. 44 — 1 Jan. 45
Brig. G. S. N. Gostling, E.D. ....	2 Jan. 45 — 30 Apr. 45
Brig. J. G. Spragge, D.S.O., O.B.E., E.D. ....	1 May 45 — 10 Oct. 45

*Commander, No. 3 Base Reinforcement Group†*

Brig. J. S. H. Lind, D.S.O., E.D. ....	13 Mar. 45 — 20 Jul. 45
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\* Appointment created 27 February, 1945.

† Formed 13 March, 1945.



**ABBREVIATIONS**

A/ (rank)	Acting
A.A.	Anti-aircraft
A. & S.H. of C.	The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada (Princess Louise's)
AB	Airborne
A.C.M.	Air Chief Marshal
A.C.V.	Armoured command vehicle
A.D.A.G.	Assistant Deputy Adjutant General
Adm.	Administration or Administrative
Adrep.	Administrative Report
A.E.A.F.	Allied Expeditionary Air Force
A.F.V.	Armoured fighting vehicle
A.G.	Adjutant General
A. Gp.	Army Group
A.G.R.A.	Army Group, Royal Artillery
A.G.R.E.	Army Group, Royal Engineers
A.H.Q.	Army Headquarters
Alq. R.	The Algonquin Regiment
A.N.C.X.F.	Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief, Expeditionary Force
A.P.C.	Armoured personnel carrier
Appx.	Appendix
Armd.	Armoured
Arty.	Artillery
A.S.S.U.	Air Support Signal Unit
A.tk.	Anti-Tank
A.V.R.E.	Assault Vehicle, Royal Engineers
B.A.O.R.	British Army of the Rhine
B.B.C.	British Broadcasting Corporation
Bde.	Brigade
B.G.S.	Brigadier, General Staff
Bn.	Battalion
Brig.	Brigadier
Brit. or Br.	British
Cameron's of C.	The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada
C.H. of O.	The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.)
C.A.O.F.	Canadian Army Occupation Force
C.A.O.R.O.	Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order
Capt.	Captain
Cas.	Casualties
C.B.	Companion of the Order of the Bath
C.B.E.	Commander of the Order of the British Empire
C.B. Highrs.	The Cape Breton Highlanders
C.C.R.A.	Commander, Corps Royal Artillery
C.C.S.	Combined Chiefs of Staff
C.D.	Canadian Forces Decoration
Cda., Cdn.	Canada, Canadian
Cdo.	Commando
C.E.	Chief Engineer
C.F.C.	Canadian Forestry Corps
C.F.N.	Canadian Forces in the Netherlands
C.H.	Companion of Honour
C.I.G.S.	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
C: in-C.	Commander-in-Chief

670 THE VICTORY CAMPAIGN

Civ. ....	Civil
cm. ....	centimetre
Cmdr. ....	Commander
C.M.H.Q. ....	Canadian Military Headquarters (London)
C.O.H.Q. ....	Combined Operations Headquarters
Col. ....	Colonel
Comd. ....	Commander
C.O. ....	Commanding Officer
C. of S. ....	Chief of Staff
C.O.S. ....	Chiefs of Staff
Cositrep. ....	Combined Situation Report
COSSAC. ....	Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (designate)
Coy. ....	Company
C.R.A. ....	Commander, Royal Artillery
C.R.E. ....	Commanding Royal Engineer
C.R.S. ....	Captured Records Section, Washington
C.S.M. ....	Company Sergeant Major (Warrant Officer, Class II)
C. Scot. R. ....	The Canadian Scottish Regiment
C.O. ....	Chief Signal Officer
C.W.A.C. ....	Canadian Women's Army Corps
D.A. & Q.M.G. ....	Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General
D.A.G. ....	Deputy Adjutant General
D.A.P.M. ....	Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal
D.C.C.A.O. ....	Deputy Chief Civil Affairs Officer
D.C.G.S. ....	Deputy Chief of the General Staff
D.C.M. ....	Distinguished Conduct Medal
D.D. (tanks) ....	Duplex Drive (amphibious)
D.D.O.S. ....	Deputy Director, Ordnance Services
Devon ....	Devonshire Regiment
Div. ....	Division
D.S.O. ....	Distinguished Service Order
D.V.A. ....	Department of Veterans Affairs
D.W.R. ....	Duke of Wellington's Regiment
E.D. ....	Canadian Efficiency Decoration
Engr. ....	Engineer
Fd. ....	Field
48th Highrs. ....	48th Highlanders of Canada
Fus. M.R. ....	Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal
G.A.F. ....	German Air Force
G/C. ....	Group Captain
gd. ....	ground
Gen. ....	General
G.H.Q. ....	General Headquarters
G.O.C. ....	General Officer Commanding
G.O.C.-in-C. ....	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
Gp. ....	Group
Gren. ....	Grenadier
G.S. ....	General Staff
G.S.O. 1 ....	General Staff Officer, Grade I
H.A.A. ....	Heavy Anti-aircraft
Hast. & P.E.R. ....	The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment
H.E. ....	High Explosive
Highrs. ....	Highlanders
Hist. ....	Historical

ABBREVIATIONS

H.L.I. of C. ....	The Highland Light Infantry of Canada
H.M.C.S. ....	His Majesty's Canadian Ship
H.M.S. ....	His Majesty's Ship
H.Q. ....	Headquarters
Incl. ....	including or inclusive
Inf. ....	Infantry
Instr. ....	Instruction
Int. ....	Intelligence
ISUM. ....	Intelligence Summary
K.G. ....	Knight of the Garter
Lake Sup. Regt. ....	The Lake Superior Regiment (Motor)
L.C.A. ....	Landing Craft, Assault
L.C.G. ....	Landing Craft, Gun
L.C.G.(L.) ....	Landing Craft, Gun (Large)
L.C.I.(S.) ....	Landing Craft, Infantry (Small)
L.C.M. ....	Landing Craft, Mechanized
L.C.S.(L.) ....	Landing Craft, Support (Large)
L.C.S.(M.) ....	Landing Craft, Support (Medium)
L.C.T. ....	Landing Craft, Tank
L.C.V.(P) ....	Landing Craft, Vehicle (Personnel)
L. Edmn. R. ....	The Loyal Edmonton Regiment
L.S.I. ....	Landing Ship, Infantry
Lieut. or Lt. ....	Lieutenant
Line. & Welld. ....	The Lincoln and Welland Regiment
L.M.G. ....	Light Machine-Gun
L.O. ....	Liaison Officer
L. of C. ....	Line(s) of Communication
L.S.T. ....	Landing Ship, Tank
Lt.-Col. ....	Lieutenant-Colonel
Maj. ....	Major
M.B.E. ....	Member of the Order of the British Empire
M.C. ....	Military Cross
Med. ....	Medium
M.G.A. ....	Major-General in Charge of Administration
M.I.R.S. ....	Military Intelligence Research Section
M.L. ....	Motor Launch
mm. ....	millimetre
M.M. ....	Military Medal
Mtd. ....	Mounted
N.C.O. ....	Non-commissioned officer
N.D.H.Q. ....	National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa
N.R.M.A. ....	National Resources Mobilization Act
N. Shore Regt. ....	The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment
Nth. N.S. Highrs. ....	The North Nova Scotia Highlanders
O.B. ....	<i>Oberbefehlshaber</i> . (Commander-in-Chief)
O.B.E. ....	Officer of the Order of the British Empire
O.C. ....	Officer Commanding
O.C.M.H. ....	Office of the Chief of Military History, Washington
Offr. ....	Officer
O.K.H. ....	<i>Oberkommando des Heeres</i> (Army High Command, Berlin)
O.K.W. ....	<i>Oberkommando der Wehrmacht</i> (Armed Forces High Command)

## 672 THE VICTORY CAMPAIGN

O.O.	Operation Order
O.P.	Observation Post
Op(s).	Operation(s)
Oxford & Bucks	Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry
Para.	Parachute
PIAT	Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank
Pol.	Polish
P.P.C.L.I.	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
P.W.	Prisoner(s) of War
Pz.	Panzer
Q.O.R. of C.	The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada
R.A.C.	Royal Armoured Corps
R.A.F.	Royal Air Force
R.C.A.	Royal Canadian Artillery
R.C.A.F.	Royal Canadian Air Force
R.C.A.S.C.	Royal Canadian Army Service Corps
R.C.E.	Royal Canadian Engineers
R.C.E.M.E.	Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
R.C.H.A.	Royal Canadian Horse Artillery
R.C.M.P.	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
R.C.O.C.	Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps
R.C.R.	The Royal Canadian Regiment
R. de Mais.	Le Regiment de Maisonneuve
R.E.	Royal Engineers
recce.	reconnaissance
R.E.M.E.	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
R.H.C.	The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada
R.H.Q.	Regimental Headquarters
R.H.L.I.	The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry
R.N.	Royal Navy
R.P.	Rocket Projector
R. Regt. C.	The Royal Regiment of Canada
R.S.F.	Royal Scots Fusiliers
R.U.R.	Royal Ulster Rifles
R. Wpg. Rif.	The Royal Winnipeg Rifles
S.A.S.	Special Air Service
S.A.S.O.	Senior Air Staff Officer
S.D. (German)	Sicherheitsdienst (Nazi party secret service abroad)
S.D. & G. Highrs.	The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders
Sec.	Section
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force
Sitrep.	Situation Report
S.O.E.	Special Operations Executive
S.P.	Self-Propelled
sp.	support
Sqn.	Squadron
S.S. (British)	Special Service
S.S. (German)	Schutzstaffel (Protective Unit) (Nazi party organizations, including military formations)
S. Sask. Regt.	The South Saskatchewan Regiment
Tac.	Tactical
T.A.F.	Tactical Air Force
Tel.	Telegram

## ABBREVIATIONS 673

T.O.O. ....	Time of Origin
tps. ....	troops
trans. ....	translation
trg. ....	training
U.K. ....	United Kingdom
U.S. ....	United States
U.S.A.A.F. ....	United States Army Air Forces
U.S.M.C. ....	United States Marine Corps
V.C. ....	Victoria Cross
V.D. ....	Colonial Auxiliary Forces Officers' Decoration
V.G. ....	Volksgrenadier (People's Grenadier)
W.D. ....	War Diary
West N.S. Regt. ....	The West Nova Scotia Regiment
W.F.St. ....	Wehrmachtführungsstab (Armed Forces Operations Staff)
W.O. ....	War Office
W.O.2. ....	Warrant Officer, Class IT

Y.M.C.A. Young Men's Christian Association

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CHAPTER VI  
Normandy: The Bridgehead Battle

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CHAPTER VII

Normandy: The Battles of Caen and Bourguebus Ridge, 1-23 July 1944

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CHAPTER VIII  
Normandy: The Breakout Begins  
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## CHAPTER IX

## Normandy: The Falaise Road 1-12 August 1944

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CHAPTER' XI

Normandy: The Balance Sheet

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CHAPTER XIV

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## CHAPTER XV

## The Battle of the Scheldt September-November 1944

## Part I: Planning, and Operations North of Antwerp

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CHAPTER XVI

The Battle of the Scheldt September-November 1944

Part II: Breskens, South Beveland, Walcheren

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### CHAPTER XVII

#### *Winter on the Maas*

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### CHAPTER XIX

#### *The Battle of the Rhineland*

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### CHAPTER XX

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